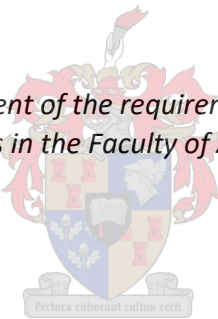


# **Diamonds Are Forever: (Re)Building the Archive of a Prototypical Mining Town**

by  
Joha van Dyk

*Thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Masters of English Studies in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences  
at Stellenbosch University*



Dr. Daniel Roux

March 2021

## **Declaration**

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the sole author thereof (save to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), that reproduction and publication thereof by Stellenbosch University will not infringe any third party rights and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

March 2021

Copyright © 2021 Stellenbosch University

All rights reserved

## **Abstract:**

The town or “village” of Kleinzee is known as a prototypical town, constructed for the use of De Beers Consolidated Mines’ mining needs. A prolific diamond mining company town in its prime, it was considered a little utopia by its inhabitants. However, since De Beers’ withdrawal from Kleinzee in the early 2000s, residents have had to move away for work opportunities, the town has been neglected and is now a shadow of its original pristine state.

Little to no research exists on Kleinzee and its history. Thus, the eventual downfall of the town, following the withdrawal of De Beers’ mining efforts, and its ongoing survival as a tourist-centred town has yet to be addressed. Additionally, there are a few general historical accounts that mention Kleinzee, but nothing detailing the texture and intricacies of day-to-day life within the town.

This thesis addresses the complex social and historical realities that gave rise to Kleinzee and resulted in its ultimate demise by means of a short story cycle which spans the pre-history of the town to the present day, utilising different perspectives to capture something of the social diversity and specificity of this curious coastal town.

## **Opsomming:**

Die “dorpie” Kleinsee is ’n prototipiese dorp wat gebou is vir die gebruik van De Beers Consolidated Mines se mynbehoefte. Gedurende die vooruitstrewende jare van die myn, was die dorp produktief en is dit deur inwoners as ’n tipe utopie beskou.

Nadat De Beers in die vroeë 2000’s hul mynbedrywighede begin onttrek het aan die omgewing, het inwoners verhuis op soek na nuwe werksgeleenthede. Die dorp het begin verwaarloos raak en is tans net ’n vervalde skaduwee van die oorspronklike glorieryke toestand.

Daar is min navorsing tans beskikbaar oor Kleinsee en sy geskiedenis. Die impak van die onttrekking van De Beers aan die dorp en die voortbestaan daarvan, wat hoofsaaklik spruit uit toerisme geleenthede, bied die potensiaal vir verdere navorsing. Veral, aangesien daar slegs ’n paar historiese verslae is wat Kleinsee noem, maar geen literatuur wat die ingewikkelhede van die dag tot dag bestaan in die dorp ondersoek nie.

Hierdie proefskrif behandel die ingewikkelde sosiale en historiese werklikhede wat aanleiding gegee het tot die ontstaan van Kleinsee en uiteindelik die verval daarvan, deur middel van ’n kortverhaalsiklus. Dit strek van die voorgeskiedenis van die dorp tot die huidige fase tans en poog om deur verskillende perspektiewe iets van die sosiale diversiteit en spesifisiteit van die dorp vas te vang.

## **Acknowledgements:**

During the process of researching and writing my thesis, I have received a great deal of support and assistance.

Firstly, I want to thank my supervisor, Dr. Daniel Roux. Without his guidance and expertise this project would not be what it is today. Your honest feedback and motivation concerning my thesis topic allowed me to pursue a project which I am truly passionate about.

I would like to thank my family for their infinite patience, the hours they spent listening to me relay stories from Jack Carstens' memoir and the memories of Namaqualand they shared with me. Thank you for raising me in such a culturally, environmentally rich space – a place which undoubtedly can be traced in everything I have written, a place where stories and storytellers are born.

“In contemplation of ruins, one contemplates one’s future, the fragility of the present, and the futility of the past.” – Alexander Creswell

## Contents

Introduction.....	8
Context.....	9
Fortuneteller.....	15
Strandloper.....	27
War.....	30
Gun Club.....	40
!ouboe.....	51
Noot vir Noot.....	59
The Veld Girl.....	75
The Gatekeeper.....	85
Fired.....	98
The Cat Lady.....	115
The Boy on the Wall.....	124
Smuggler.....	138
Lover.....	150
A Memory.....	163
A Quiet Place.....	175
Epilogue: A Pioneer.....	188

## Introduction

Witnessing the slow decomposition of your place of belonging evokes not only a nostalgic melancholy, but also curiosity about how it is possible for such a thriving town to unravel the way it did. As a young child, I was witness to the slow decline of Kleinzee's infrastructure as a mining town and, today, when I walk the streets of the town, I am at odds with my position within its remnants. Though there is an influx of tourists during the December and Easter Holiday seasons, I am unable to separate Kleinzee in its present state from the hauntological quality of its ruins: the "failure of the future" is never clearer than when one drives past old De Beers offices with their furniture and moth-eaten drapes still haunting the windows (Fisher 16). Realizing that there is barely any information available on this prototypical town and how it came to (not) be, I became determined to generate information, to capture everything that I could remember in order for Kleinzee to be a *place* once again – not a place forgotten or abandoned. I therefore explore my personal archive of memories of the place in which I spent my formative years, and attempt to create a stable portrait – as much as possible – of what Kleinzee once was. This is in some respects an auto-ethnographical research project, which is realized in a short story cycle that aims to confront the elements and technicalities of a prototypical town, analyze the ghosts of expectations that still haunt the town, and consider the environmental violence which is continuously committed by large corporations.



## Context

The town or “village” of Kleinzee is known as a prototypical town, constructed for the use of De Beers Consolidated Mines’ mining needs. On the Internet, it is defined by its location and its relation to other places, creating the illusion of insignificance when, in reality, it was essential to the success of the mining company’s flourishing business. As a “company town”, its residents were all employees of De Beers, it was enclosed with fences, its entrances were protected with security measures and for all intents and purposes it could be considered a “closed communit[y]”, since the residents’ connection to the world beyond Kleinzee was structured and somewhat restricted (Peter Carstens 5). These towns existed as “company state[s]” which exist as small colonies, ruled over by “colonial powers” (Peter Carstens 188, 15). The company involved is responsible for the infrastructure and development of the town. Company towns have been significant methods of ensuring “production and profit” during the era of industrialisation (Peter Carstens 3). Often, in South Africa, towns in “remote, underpopulated” areas originated and continue to exist as company towns. Although company towns have proven to be advantageous for their “gigantic industrial value”, the “moral and aesthetic” characteristics of such settlements have been brought into question time and time again (Peter Carstens 3). Kleinzee is a prime example of the questionable nature of company towns and the motivations and morality of the major companies who are responsible for such settlements.

When driving through Kleinzee today, it is apparent that the area has experienced an age of *abbau*, an “unbuilding” which has left the environment unfamiliar to many Namaqualanders (Adam Konopka 313). In the mining industry, the plunder and pollution of the environment is unavoidable to an extent, and can usually be only partly remedied by rehabilitation. The strip mining practised on the coast stretching from Port Nolloth to Hondeklip Bay provides a striking

example of the impact of mining on the natural environment, with “[m]ile upon mile of veld [being] bulldozed and removed to expose the diamondiferous gravel deposits at bedrock level” (Peter Carstens 189). This is similar to the methods employed in the Kleinzee area. In Kleinzee, the environment’s destruction is not the only noticeable feature. Since De Beers’ withdrawal from Kleinzee, the town has been neglected and is but a shadow of its original pristine state. When Peter Carstens published *In the Company of Diamonds* in 2001, he noted that the town had “four thousand or so inhabitants” and was hopeful that De Beers would be able to turn the situation around (6). The reason why, nineteen years later, Kleinzee, a former company town, has been reduced to at best a remote tourist destination is because the mining company left no alternative for the town to survive beyond the mine’s activities. No one could truly predict the dystopic results De Beers’ involvement would have in the surrounding communities and environment.

By the 1980s, Kleinzee was like a little utopia. It was surrounded by fences which ensured the safety not only of the diamonds, but of the people. By 2001, “the main checkpoint” or security gate controlled “the movement of people in and out of the town” via “an elaborate, computerized system” and the security guards employed by the company (Peter Carstens 49). The security gate ensured that no one could enter without having organized it with De Beers first, keeping outsiders from entering without approval and ensuring the safety of both the residents and the diamonds.

There was a wide variety of clubs, ranging from sport to art to music. Dances were held at the Recreational Club, Angling competitions at the Angling Club and tournaments at the pristine Golf Club. Churches were readily available for a range of denominations, and by the late 1980s Kleinzee’s primary school was one of the first in the country to be desegregated and bilingual.

Eventually, in the late 2000s, De Beers was given a choice – either continue mining at their current speed for a few more years, or slow their mining process and thus extend production years and ensure that employees have employment for longer. Financially, it didn't make sense to continue mining operations in Kleinsee beyond these two options. There were still diamonds: they would just be more laborious and expensive to unearth.

They were provided with options – allow the town to remain as it was, or demolish it entirely. They were approached about a possible prison being built close by, which would have provided a steady income to some residents, but this fell through, and De Beers decided to leave the town as it was. The town was proclaimed and fell under the jurisdiction of the local municipality, Nama Khoi.

Shortly after De Beers withdrew from Kleinsee, members of the community continued to survive as long as they could, migrating toward more lucrative opportunities as time wore on. Loyal residents included individuals who owned their own businesses and saw opportunities to create new businesses for the tourists who pass through the town. Others were farmers of mostly sheep, goats and abalones. Animals of migraters were left behind and soon the town was overrun with stray cats and dogs, pets abandoned as readily as the people of Kleinsee were abandoned by the chief employers of the town. Odd patrons attempted to 'make something' of the town, promising jobs and financial security, but these dreams were never realised. Other visitors, passers-by and eventual inhabitants of the town flocked to the town. They made the ghost of Kleinsee their home, hardly knowing what the vacant buildings and old street names meant to those who once called it home.

What was left of the natural environment after the mine tore through the vegetation, was half-heartedly rehabilitated with the use of 'green nets' to shield stray seeds from the wind as De

Beers desperately tried to make it look as if its rehabilitation efforts were calculated and planned. Ultimately, most of the environment remained struggling, and the harsh winds and steadfast drought did little to help. Years later, illegal diggers were drawn to the area from across the country, seeking their own fortunes and opening a ‘diamond run’ characterised by crime, environmental destruction and desperation. This is a clear reflection of the “regard and disregard”, “civilization and barbarism” of “diamond-seekers” who aim to claim ownership over diamonds which accumulates value “elsewhere than in the postcolony” – the disregard for a South African environment and people in favour of the desire and status of the elite (Louise Green 88).

The diggers were finally removed, and by December 2019 there was hardly a digger ‘bakkie’ in sight. Of course, the diamond price plummeted with the influx of gems contributing to its fall, essentially rendering the whole ordeal, the exploitation, the environmental violence meaningless.

Kleinzee is ripe with history, folktales, integrated communities and a people who have found refuge in the most remote of spaces. It is a sanctuary for those seeking quiet and simplicity, boasting with proud villagers who have either remained all these years or who have scratched out a life for themselves from what they found when they first arrived. Currently it is predominantly known as a tourist destination – tours of the shipwrecks along the Skeleton Coast, sand-dune exploration and recreational fishing opportunities make it a lovely destination for any who seek to escape life in the city.

However, when tourists drive by, there is always reason to pause, to slow down at the broken down security gate which used to keep everyone out and *everything* in, to stare at the sparse bushes and withering veld, to ask about the torn green nets towering over the houses, meant to shield them from the winds but torn asunder by diggers, eager to build huts in their pursuit of

prospecting. When walking in the same town I was born in, was schooled in, had to be checked and prodded for identification every time I entered from the farm outside the security gates, it is impossible not to notice the ghosts who walk among us, among the strangers who gawk and ask questions – welcome questions – since without these questions we might never know, never realise what has been done.

# Genesis

## Fortuneteller

Jack Carstens had, quite frankly, been to hell and back when he returned to South Africa to fulfill a fortune teller's prediction. And fulfill it he did. If only his trust in men and their intentions had been tempered, his future might have looked far different. But that is the trouble with predictions – once you begin to trust them, you allow them to influence your every act until, eventually, they prove to be worthless: reminders of what could have been.

Jack Carstens was born in 1882, in Port Nolloth. Port Nolloth is a small fishing village on the West Coast of South Africa. Jack's grandfather had been the Port Superintendent before Jack's father opened a trading store there. Jack's mother was a Welshwoman who'd come down to South Africa on a boat – why exactly we may never know, but she married Bill Carstens and started a lively family of nine. Jack's family eventually relocated to Cape Town, though his father returned to Port Nolloth to work. Jack occasionally commuted to Port Nolloth on ships that were making their way from Cape Town's harbour to Port Nolloth, but remained, for the most part, in Cape Town where he went to high school, became an enthusiastic cricket player, and eventually worked as a junior clerk before taking part in the compulsory training of the Cape Peninsula Rifles. World War I was fast approaching.

Jack and his friends joined the 1st South African Infantry. However, the day they were supposed to leave for Potchefstroom, his friends arrived without their uniforms – their parents had intervened and prevented them from joining, so Jack had to leave his friends and familiar environment behind. The regiment sailed for England in 1915 and were sent to Egypt on a mission, before sailing for France in 1916. Jack and his newfound friends in the regiment had agreed that they would remain

privates in the war but when his friends perished at the battle at Delville Wood and Jack found himself alone, he began to accept the promotions they had forsworn. When Jack was wounded at Messines village, he was sent to Richmond Hospital and eventually Shoreham-on-Sea to recuperate. Once he was healed, he believed he would be sent back to Hell – as many men referred to France at that time.

However, the India Office inquired whether he'd be interested in a position they had open in the India Army. Jack went through the interview and application process, and became an Indian Army officer. It was here, in India, where Jack was approached by the soothsayer who would deliver him his fortune. The officers stationed in India were no strangers to fortune tellers, but this soothsayer was anything but subtle. Bareilly, that day, was hot and Jack's departure to the North West Frontier, where many hardships awaited him, was imminent. He'd travelled to the plains to bid Captain West, an old friend, farewell before Jack embarked on his temporary assignment.

Jack was reading *The Pioneer* on the mess' verandah when he first detected footsteps in the garden. When he finally lowered *The Pioneer*, the soothsayer stood before him in billowing white robes, a beard to match, declaring that he'd seen his fortune and would like to share it with him. Jack was reluctant but the aged man persisted that he wanted to tell Sahib's fortune, that he had something of interest to say. First, he studied Jack's palm, predicting his travel, thereafter he handed Jack a piece of tangled rope, stating that he should find its two ends and pull to loosen it – if there were no knots he would suffer illness during his travels. Jack's thread held no knots, but the soothsayer predicted that though he would suffer illness, he was meant for greater things. In his vision, he'd seen Jack digging in the ground and holding shiny rocks in his hands.



“You are going to leave the army and sail away to a far-off country. There you are going to dig in the ground and find many shiny stones. You are going to become a very rich man.”<sup>1</sup>

Shortly after this incident, Jack told his colleague about the soothsayer. His friend decided to have his fortune told as well and returned from the meeting with the soothsayer looking very pale and quiet. He never told Jack what the soothsayer had predicted, but Captain West perished in action soon after.

Jack did, indeed, become very ill after his job description changed – he was made to work very hard under very difficult circumstances – the weather was severe, ranging from brutal heat to bitter cold; the work ranged from hard labour to fighting as they were often attacked by local tribesmen. Finally, Jack realized that, besides a short visit home, he hadn’t stopped moving since he left South Africa for World War I. The years, filled with uncertainty and turmoil, had begun to take their toll and Jack was granted six months leave to recover. He returned to Port Nolloth to recover and was offered another promotion. Two weeks before he had to return to India, he wired them and declined the promotion, informing them of his resignation.

There was little in the line of job opportunities in Port Nolloth, and Jack set his sights on Cape Town. He was roped into a partnership for an estate agency, signed documents to become a partner, and paid a fee in advance – only to be hoodwinked into mountains of debt as clients called him to inform him that his partner’s cheques had bounced. His encounters in wartime had led Jack to believe in the forthright nature of men, making him an easy target for manipulative villains. His other business ventures – an estate agency and a mica mining venture in Namaqualand – both failed, and he returned to Port Nolloth, cursing his decision to resign from the Indian Army.

---

<sup>1</sup> Jack Carstens 9

At home, the soothsayer's words kept echoing in his mind. His father, who'd been somewhat of a failed prospector when Jack was a boy, confided in him that he'd found a gravel patch near Port Nolloth in 1913, and had sent samples to a geologist in Cape Town. The geologist had concluded that the sample was diamondiferous. However, just as they were about to apply for a prospecting license, the war had broken out and all talk of diamonds were forgotten. But Jack couldn't forget.

Along the coast of Namaqualand there were no roads and the area consisted of thick sand, inhabited by steenbok, snakes and pauw. Jack embarked on a harrowing journey to locate the spot his father only vaguely remembered, but was unable to find it. There was nothing to be done but track down the man who'd first helped his father find his way to the patch, a Coloured man called Van Reenen.

Van Reenen would guide him along the riverbed which his father had mentioned. A boulder, in the center of the dried riverbed, marked the spot. The riverbed ticked one of the boxes his father's prospector book described. "Alluvial diamonds are usually found in old river beds, among water-worn pebbles and large boulders."<sup>2</sup>

Jack acquired his Precious Stones License in Springbok and employed a few men to start digging. He travelled into Port Nolloth by foot to bathe and look for sieves, but was turned away at every shop with laughter at his request for sieves for diamond mining. One clerk went as far as to discourage him profusely, telling him that he could see Jack was heading the way of his father, about to waste copious amounts of money on nothing more than a pipedream, reminding him that countless geologists had come round to give their expert opinion, and all concluded there could be no diamonds south of the Orange River. He begged Jack – don't do it.

Jack's mother eventually gave him her flour sieves; with which he began sifting gravel in 1925.

---

<sup>2</sup> Jack Carstens 49

The men Jack employed were called “Vuil Koring”<sup>3</sup>, impoverished white Namaqualanders, closely associated with the Coloured community. The third was a Coloured man who claimed to be related to very important English men who’d returned to England years ago. As they travelled to the spot Jack had pegged, the sand continued to infiltrate their shoes, weighing them down until it was time to periodically pause and lighten the load. Trudging through thick sand, they were attacked by insects, muggies and locusts<sup>4</sup> and in this moment it was impossible for Jack not to remember the campaign he spent in Egypt, the bullets now replaced with pesky insects. Jack and the men spent many a night in the freezing cold chill of the Southern gale, against the coast. They were bare but for a bush skerm and whatever blankets they’d brought with them, the milky night sky stretched over them before they awoke, drenched with icy morning dew. Living off porridge and coffee, they continued digging through sand, limestone and rock, hard labour in the blazing sun.

The prospector’s book, which had originally belonged to his father, proved vital. With it, Jack compared the rocks and gems they found among the gravel and discovered that the diamond’s “friends”<sup>5</sup> were present – garnets, tigers eyes, jaspers, epidote. When Jack, at last, found a stone he believed may just be a diamond, he returned home to do the diamond test – letting it lie in acid for the night. Unlike other stones, a diamond wouldn’t wither away.

There was no stone left in the acid the next morning.

Jack Carstens didn’t stop prospecting, despite the fact that the whole enterprise felt hopeless and he was becoming the town’s laughing stock. At that time, his cousin Percy Hughes came to Port Nolloth on holiday from his school in Cape Town, and asked to accompany Jack to the site. Percy

---

<sup>3</sup> Jack Carstens 51

<sup>4</sup> Jack Carstens 51

<sup>5</sup> Jack Carstens 53

watched Jack fill his sieve with the gravel his men had dug loose, lifting it up and down through the water before starting with the next lot. Jack told Percy to have a look through the stones and to show it to him if he saw anything shiny.

Percy Hughes found a diamond that day. Not just any diamond, but the diamond that would make his cousin, Jack Carstens, famous.

He picked it up, remarked on its shine and handed it over to Jack who, eagerly, exclaimed that it was a diamond. A few days later they trekked back to Port Nolloth, and Jack and his father put the stone to the test. After an evening left in the acid, Jack rose at half-past-two in the morning and found the diamond, as whole as ever, in the acid. On August 15, 1925, Jack Carstens had his confirmation.

He left the next day for Springbok and registered the first diamond found on the Namaqualand coast.

Many people in Port Nolloth heard about this diamond as the news spread from Springbok, but most of them speculated that it was a diamond Jack had snuck back from India. Jack continued digging quietly, unearthing more diamonds. One evening he decided to head back to Port Nolloth, but darkness quickly settled in – along with the famed fog – and soon he was all but lost. When he eventually found himself on the outskirts of town, he reached for a cigarette. Realizing he had none, he stopped by an old friend who had a store and begged cigarettes off him. When this friend asked after diamonds, Jack felt so thankful for the cigarettes he decided to indulge his friend by showing him the four perfect diamonds he'd brought home to test. It was obvious to even an amateur's eyes that they were true gems.

The next day, Jack's secret was out, and people began trickling into Port Nolloth to try their luck. When Jack returned to his digging site, the spaces around him had been pegged off as belonging to many familiar names – one of which was the friend he'd shown the diamonds to. Many of these men didn't come digging, they were merely staking their claim in order to sell once more prospectors arrived. Jack wasn't deterred. He was approached by many a man who wanted to form a partnership with him, but he turned each of them down kindly – most notably rejecting the digging possibilities of Alexander Bay. He urged his possible partner, Cullis Relly, to take options on the farms and plots down the coast, to Hondeklip Bay – Jack *knew* there were diamonds, but he'd exhausted his capital. The Relly party refused and Jack set his sights higher – to Sir Ernest Oppenheimer.

No doubt if Jack had been able to reach Sir Ernest Oppenheimer, he would have been a very rich man for the rest of his life. Kleinzee might have looked very different, and operations might have run a lot smoother. But just as Jack was about to ask for his assistance, he was approached by Mr. Harry Saunders. A Kimberley man, and thus a man of diamonds himself, Saunders invited Jack to speak to his associates in Cape Town and was duly introduced to Mr. Truro who Saunders claimed was just the man to partner with. En route to Cape Town, Jack encountered his friend Kennedy, who wanted him to partner with him for Alexander Bay once again, warning him that he would lose everything he had with Saunders and his men. Unfortunately, Jack did not listen to Kennedy. He was set to meet Mr. Truro when he arrived in Cape Town, instead of Sir Ernest Oppenheimer, on the word Harry Saunders. Mr. Truro was described as the Whitest Man in Africa – Saunders claimed that Jack would never meet a more trustworthy man. In Cape Town, over a glass of whiskey, Truro offered a partnership to Jack and, when prompted for official papers, simply said his word was his bond and could be trusted as much as papers.

Jack believed him.

It was settled. Jack would return to Kleinzee and would be operational in Namaqualand, while Mr. Truro would handle the business and financial side. Jack returned to his diggings, occasionally joined by new men from Kimberley. Men who sang:

*Kimberley, Kimberley, Kimberley,*

*That diamond digging land,*

*I'm going back to Kimberley if I can.*

*You may think that I am lousy*

*But you've never seen me scratch*

*Because I am a blue-eyed Kimberley boy.<sup>6</sup>*

The O'beep farm was of interest to Jack and Truro's business, and held promise for diamonds, but the owner of the farm refused to sell to anyone but Jack's father. Jack tried convincing his father to put the farm over in Jack's name so that it could be used for their business, but his father refused, stating that as soon as Truro drew up papers and they signed, he would give the farm over to them. Truro somehow convinced them that they should transfer the option of the farm to Truro's name in the spirit of comradery, still refusing to draw up papers. The farm's option was transferred to Truro.

---

<sup>6</sup> Jack Carstens 69

When it became known that diamonds had been found on the Grootmist farm, Jack urged Truro to consider expanding to Kleinzee since, Jack felt, if Grootmist had diamonds, so would Kleinzee. His Kimberley associate packed up and headed back to Kimberley, while Jack packed up and headed to Kleinzee, the Port Nolloth site temporarily closed down.

In 1926, Jack met with a farmer, Jan Kotze, and pitched his tent on his farm. As it was dry and hard times had struck the farmers. Many young men arrived in search of work, having heard rumours of Jack's prospecting. Many of these young men would eventually work for De Beers for decades of their lives, after being taken on by Jack. Jack inspected the farm but found no diamonds, not even a hint of them. He was ready to pack up and head back to Port Nolloth when Jan Kotze urged him to have a look at the salt pan patch on the corner of his farm; a patch that was all but useless to him as nothing would grow there and his sheep couldn't graze there. It seemed Jan Kotze was desperate, like many others, for the opportunities diamonds would provide for the area.

Jack found a two and a half carat white-blue diamond in that salt pan, leading not only to Jan Kotze's immense surprise and awe, but also to regret, since he and many other farmers had sold the options to their farms for a measly £250 – quick and necessary cash which they hadn't expected would turn out to be miniscule compared to the amount syndicates would make from their farms.

Jack and the young farmers continued to dig, unearthing more and more diamonds, when a geologist approached them one day. Dr. Reuning was not the first geologist to tell Jack and the Namaqualanders that diamonds were a hopeless case in this area. Dr. Reuning told Jack he would find no diamonds where he was digging, only to be gobsmacked when Jack revealed a five and seven carat stone he'd excavated. Dr. Reuning would not be the last to be astonished.

Nonetheless, Jack enlisted local “Coloured” boys looking for work, to dig in the spots Dr. Reuning had suggested. One day one of the young men ran up to him, hands cupped and filled with gravel – gravel from which Jack drew out six diamonds. He was shown the spot, also called a “pothole”,<sup>7</sup> and began digging. By simply digging with his bare hands in this pothole for half an hour, he managed to uncover a hundred diamonds of about 75 and a half carats. This prompted him to set up a rotary pan and draw a dozen of the farmers closer to help dig in this particular spot.

On that day, three thousand carats of diamonds were unearthed. Within the first month, November 1927, Kleinzee farm had produced 30 000 carats of diamonds, worth £400 000.

Jack had hit the literal diamond mine.

The soothsayer’s prediction had come true. “You are going to leave the army and sail away to a far-off country. There you are going to dig in the ground and find many shiny stones. You are going to become a very rich man.”<sup>8</sup>

Around this time, communicating with Truro had become a secondary affair – Jack communicated with Adamson, Truro’s acquaintance, and Adamson, in turn, communicated with Truro. Jack was informed that all correspondence had to be directed to the Cape Coast Exploration Company Limited from now on. Since business at Kleinzee seemed to be turning into a more permanent affair, Jack and the diggers decided to create more sturdy lodgings than the tents they had been living in. They began setting up corrugated iron huts, which didn’t quite manage to keep the cold out, and a mess hall. Jack continued to commute to Port Nolloth to see his wife on weekends, until she and his son later moved to Kleinzee, where they lived in a house.

---

<sup>7</sup>Jack Carstens 79

<sup>8</sup> Jack Carstens 8



During these initial prospecting days of Kleinzee, a team of prospectors and geologists were sent down to inspect Jack's progress. This group soon became fast friends with Jack. However, their arrival arose Jack's suspicion of Truro. Jack's thoughts were often of his father, who'd put so much money and labour into prospecting, and how Jack's find of 30 000 carats would benefit his father, who should in fact have been commended for his determination all those years ago, and for telling Jack of his find in the first place.

Truro instructed Jack to send the large packet of diamonds to the Cape Coast Exploration Limited company, despite Jack's uneasiness about sending so many diamonds through the post. There were so many diamonds, Jack had to send them in two parcels. Little did he know that as he handed those parcels over to the postal service, his fortune was slipping through his fingers.

Jack had a feeling something was amiss and wrote Truro, demanding more information on their business' progress. That letter was never answered. He asked his new friends, who informed him that Kleinzee had been bought by the Selection Trust. They were surprised Jack was not aware of this development. The party was ordered to leave a few days later, which surprised them, since they had not yet inspected everything that they had been instructed to.

With his friends gone and communication from Kleinzee all but impossible, Jack was left to wonder what was happening in the outside world. That was, until he was informed that Truro had sold Kleinzee and all the other farms they had secured options to buy – for £30 000.

This must have happened before Jack discovered £400 000 worth of diamonds, meaning Truro's sly dealings had made him some quick money – which was never shared with the Carstens, despite his solemn 'word' – quick money which was measly in comparison to what they would have had.

Truro had deceived the Carstens and Jack had trusted him. There were no papers, no way to plead their case in court – Jack’s finances were exhausted and there was no way to repay his father for everything that they had lost. Jack remained in Kleinzee, hopeful for a job with Cape Coast Exploration Limited – a job which they were all too happy to offer him, but he’d lost the real prize.

Truro had a nervous breakdown and returned to England for a while, no doubt precipitated by Jack informing him of the 30 000 carats. Jack never heard from Truro again.

Jack Carstens was a pioneer. He would continue to leave his mark on the West Coast, specifically in Kleinzee, which later became a true mining town as it was passed into the hands of Cape Coast Exploration in 1928, which was eventually incorporated into De Beers in the early 1940s. Sir Ernest Oppenheimer was the Chairman of Cape Coast Exploration when they became involved with Kleinzee.

Sir Ernest Oppenheimer finally heard of Kleinzee.

If only Jack had been the first to tell him.

## Strandloper

My bones remember.

They have watched the sun rise and fall to the moon, have seen the coming of the rain and felt the cracks of the earth when the water is gone. They have heard the whistling of wings above and felt the incessant pecks of animals. I have fed them as they have fed me. As they will feed my people.

If my people still walk this earth.

But I know they do. I feel it in my bones – each step they take across the earth reverberates through my place of rest, across the gravel and sand. Between the grasses and !unube bush, through the daisies and the gousblomme. Each step tickles the trails we walked all those years ago. Each footstep is so painfully familiar. I strain to sense them, to find a difference in their treads. To find you, Sister.

One day, while I am looking, I sense *them*. The *them* I never saw once with my own eyes but heard many tales about. They ride the waters, their ships breaking against the rocks. Some come from the North, searching but not moving like us. They have a place and they speak of it often, of a *kraal*. They move away from it but they will go back. Then there are others who keep animals. The ones on their ships have not left. There are whispers of them, but they do not come here. Today there are two of them. Of those others.

They come in the day, but their soles are thick, thicker than mine once were. They must have been walking across the desert for many days. Their voices are young and hopeful. Eager. For what, I do not know. It has not rained for a while and the steenbok have not bred.

I feel the earth move around me. The sand press against me as they walk, as they pause and survey and finally – drive a spike through the ground. If I could twist and turn and run – I would have been gone already. For I feel every blow to the earth knocking me back and I feel, more than ever, the violent death I did not succumb to.

I remember lying down and letting the spirits take me, staring up at the sun and feeling my skin melt down into the earth. The grass sprouted from my eyes and the rain drenched what was left of my soul, clinging to this land. The shiny pebbles my sister had left me with, which had reminded her so much of the waters she did not want to leave again, have fallen between my fingers, where my fingers had been and shine even now. As I watch them I think only of my sister and her fast moving tongue and her feet which she balanced on her toes, and the shiny rocks she leapt to scoop up in childish hands.

Oh Sister, can you hear my bones scream? Can you hear my soul cry out when they rip through me with their metal spikes? Oh, the sun. The sun blinds all that is left of me and I feel the cool air of the ocean you so loved, my sister. I can hear your waves calling for you and your shiny rocks and your hands. Where are you, Sister? Where are you?

Their voices so loud in their strange language, words twisting their tongues as they speak faster and faster. All around us is quiet. My legs feel the first breath of the ocean, and then a fraction of my knee and I feel the still earth spiraling beyond us and into the ocean, into the mountains where you must be, Sister. Where you and our family will hide until it is safe to return to the coast, until the wolves and spotted cats have gone. My chest is filled with blue sky and then my jaw and my back and –

The men scream. One loses his breath, choking on the words only they can understand.

My fingers reach for the earth. Swallow me again. Bury me. Keep me safe from their eyes.

They duck closer and fingers drag across my bones, measuring, testing. One lifts my arm and holds it against his own. His head shakes and my arm falls. Not where my arm was. The other kneels beside me with steel and fleshy hands. He pays me no mind. My bones are brushed to the side and he digs. His fingers tear through the dirt. I reach for your rocks, Sister. I see your eyes. Shining in those pebbles.

They see them too.

They make noises like the jackal when he runs at night. Leaping to their feet, they move quickly. Not soft and graceful like you, Sister. No, they are harsh and heavy, they move as if they do not know this land. They move like strangers.

More metal slices through me until my bones are gathered and piled into a metal container. The cold runs through the stained remnants of what I was. The cold steals the sun's heat. My bones lie there and strain. My bones want to remember but they feel only cold. Steel. Nothing that should belong in the hands of men. My bones are carried away. Through the air. Away from you and the path we tread. How will you ever find me again?

I feel the earth everywhere around me.

They missed the edge of my finger. And touching it...is your pebble.

## War

In 1939, Anja had everything she'd hoped for.

She'd married her brother's best friend years before, a high school sweetheart who had dimples even when he pursed his lips, even when he was angry. But best of all when he smiled. He worked alongside Jack Carstens, for De Beers, mining in Kleinzee. Anja's Gert was good with his hands, he played handyman to many folks in town when he wasn't at work, overseeing the digging. His position meant they had a lovely home in which she could raise their lovely son, surrounded by kind neighbours and the environment she'd known all her life.

Gert admired Mr. Carstens and they quickly became fast friends. Gert's friendship and admiration for Mr. Carstens meant that it was inevitable that Anja would spend much of her time with Mrs. Carstens, an intelligent woman who carried herself very well – especially when talk of the school came about. It was Mrs. Carstens who eventually suggested that Anja should apply to teach alongside her, at the school Mrs. Carsten founded. “A bilingual school,” Mrs. Carstens remarked. “Why shouldn't they speak both languages?”

Of course, Anja's Afrikaans was far better, having grown up in the area. Often, when the Namaqualand dialect became too difficult for Mrs. Carstens to decode, Anja would be called to decipher what a child was saying. Constantly called into one another's company, it was inevitable that Anja, too, would find herself a close companion to a Carstens family member. Just as Gert and Anja's son, Benjamin, followed Peter around whenever he had him in his sights.

In 1939 the world beyond Kleinzee was a bit chaotic, rife with uncertainties which Anja refused to bother herself about. For her, it seemed more rational to worry about the rain keeping the food delivery trucks and postal service trucks from reaching Kleinzee, particularly since every

second week she'd receive a letter from her younger sister and parents. She worried whether there would be fresh vegetables or meat, whether her garden would last another sandstorm. She worried about the wireless's battery running out before Gert received his pay, and whether Benjamin was truly passing on his own merits, or on his talent for mimicking the other students. She worried whether or not Gert would catch a crayfish or if he and Mr. Carstens would encounter another puffadder while playing cricket. These things weren't necessarily out of Anja's control. They were small things, but important to her and uncertain enough to distract her from whatever the world beyond Kleinzee, beyond Namaqualand, beyond even South Africa, was up to.

After a particularly good rain season, word spread that the August flowers were gorgeous. Anja had seen it many times before, the waves of orange, white, yellow and pink. Blue if the sporrie were sprouting. If you're lucky there would be a slight breeze and it seemed the blooms were waving to you, shifting as the ocean's ripple. Each time the pattern shifted, it would be a new sight. Anja could spend years just staring at the flowers.

On this weekend, however, Gert wanted to try his luck with crayfish at the bay, and Anja had thought to let Benjamin splash in the small waves of the surf. The Carstens, however were eager to get away for a bit and, being among the few who had access to a vehicle, they could easily do this on weekends. Mr. Carstens wanted to have a normal outing before the Kimberly employees began arriving: an inevitability, as he'd described it, since the company became involved. On Sunday, Anja and Gert and Benjamin lined up in front of their house with their picnic basket in tow, ready for the trek to the ocean, but leaning to peer around the street corner for the Carstens' car. As soon as they heard its rumble, their hands shot up. They waved goodbye to the Carstens family as they headed off to Klipfontein to look at the flowers, and turned right around to set off to the beach.

Everything was suffused with blue that day.

The sky was that painful shade of blue that seemed to hover between and light and painstaking, depending on how you tilted your head. Not a cloud in sight. The wireless was playing an easy song with an accordion and guitar strumming in the background. When she set the wireless down, she noticed the strip of blue paint Benjamin must have spilled against the side of the wireless when he was helping his father paint in the garage. Gert, despite never needing a jacket, shook when his head broke the surface of the water. Because Anja and Benjamin were so close to the rocks he was diving under, she could clearly see the blue tinge of his lips as his teeth chattered before he sank back down. Anja peeled the peaches they had left over, slicing them onto a paper plate for whenever the boys decided to leave the water. Where she sat, on the sand, she had a clear view of Benjamin, his knees almost knocking together, skinny legs daring one step every few minutes, one step deeper, the navy swimming trunks deeper than the tropical colour of the bay today. As Anja leaned back on her elbows, she watched the sand flies jump across the beach, her legs deeply tanned except for a bruise running up her shin where she'd knocked into a chair the other day.

It was in this moment, with Anja deeply invested in studying the bruise, how its colours blended from green to purple to blue, that the wireless crackled and the outside world intruded.

Mr. Neville Chamberlain interrupted the sad, sad songs of that Sunday morning and announced, in a very straightforward tone: "We are now at war with Germany."

As Anja watched her husband dive below water again, the seaweed closing in on the spot he'd just raised his head from. Her son finally waded into the water, mid-thigh, and suddenly



Anja's family was obscured by the cool blue of the bay. She could only look back at the bruise on her shin and wonder how such a small sentence could really presage such a large and horrific thing.

From that moment on, Lord Haw Haw and Holm chattered periodically with news of the war. An incessant chatter, of the kind that Anja would grow to hate. So much so that she'd order Benjamin to listen to the wireless outside. It became a habit of the men to sit outside the garage, close to the cars, smoking their tobacco, drinking their coffees and listening to war announcements.

When the Carstens came round to Gert and Anja's home late afternoon, that same Sunday Chamberlain's voice had been broadcasted from London, Anja could tell something was different about Mr. Carstens. He seemed to be withdrawn, even as he sat in his seat beside Gert at the kitchen table and started splitting the card deck.

"Do you suppose we'll reopen again, Sir?" Gert asked, stuffing his pipe. This was another thing he could do quite well – well enough for no tobacco to be swept up afterward, the level precisely even, his lit match steady whenever he had to light. Anja watched him go through these motions quietly as Mr. Carstens started dealing the cards. He glanced out the back door to the yard where Benjamin and Peter were tossing a cricket ball around.

Mr. Carstens shrugged lightly when he'd finished dealing. "We can only hope. There are so many men dependent on our work here. War can't last forever. Though it may feel that way."

They'd only just hit their stride, reopening after closing, after the market became so weak. Just then the kettle whistled for her and Anja returned to making the tea. Mrs. Carstens joined her when she returned from the lavatory, hands gripping her elbows as she watched Anja stir copious amounts of sugar into both her and Gert's tea.

"Gert was too young for the previous one, wasn't he?" Mrs. Carstens finally asked.

Anja tapped the spoon lightly against the cup's edge. Wedding gifts. Two perfectly porcelain teacups, periwinkle patterns swirling across their bellies.

"Yes. Gert was only born in 1905," Anja replied, quietly, shooting a look over her shoulder at the men. "Mr. Carstens, though...he was there, wasn't he?"

She'd only heard bits and pieces of Mr. Carstens' time in World War I, but from what she had heard, it sounded like hell on earth. Her parents had been on the farm with little to no news about the outside world reaching them beyond the letters the postal service would drop every other month. But Gert told her that Mr. Carstens was a boy when he signed up, went to war in England, and fought in both Egypt and France.

"France," Gert had shaken his head. "France seems to be like walking into dark tunnel. No one can really tell you what happened there. Only that it was dark."

Only now could Anja understand what Gert had meant. Even imagining what this war could mean – to all those people in the thick of it –

What would the war mean for South Africa?

Mrs. Carstens shakes her head slowly before reaching for her tea and taking the tiniest sip from the steaming cup.

"Not something he readily discusses," she whispers. "He lost many of his friends, his South African friends, mind you. Imagine that in your early twenties, watching men blow up before your eyes."

Anja moves her own cup until it's separate from the others, lowering her eyes to the milk swirling into the red pool. Gert told her of when Mr. Carstens was promoted in the army. It was

now his duty to lead men, not be led. Gert disclosed to Anya that Mr. Carstens had confessed to feeling anxious but determined not to reveal it to his men. His first mission was to lead a patrol into the no-man's land. By that time, Gert had said, the no-man's land was nothing more than a hole as a result of the artillery's work. It was so incredibly dark that night, they had to wait for the flare of enemy fire before tracing their steps over the shell shocked earth. It was inevitable that they would lose one another in this darkness, a darkness marked with the danger of German troops. Jack had no way of calling out to his troops or locating them in the pitch black. Suddenly he'd been caught in the barbed wires of the enemy trench. It was his patrol suit that had gotten him caught. The Germans heard the sound of fabric hitching on wire and fired – bullets, bombs, shots of all kind. Thank God Jack's position allowed him to remain unseen and he eventually managed to rip himself loose – the commotion luring his patrol party to him – but in that dreadful moment he'd heard the Germans right above him, speaking in that language he couldn't understand, terribly alone. An experience that must change a man, Anja thinks, and yet this was only one of the many stories of Mr. Jack Carstens. Anja suppresses a shiver and finally forces a smile for Mrs. Carstens.

“How were the flowers?”

A sad look crosses her face, and for the first time Mrs. Carstens seems to Anja to have aged, the smile wrinkles by her eyes seeming deeper than they were before.

“They were quite wonderful,” Mrs. Carstens finally said. “Like God had dropped the last shred of beauty right in front of us. Just before mankind ripped it all away.”

Anja prided herself on her eyesight.

It had always been an indisputable fact in Anja's family that if a neighbour had a jackal problem, Anja would be the one called over to stand on the back of the bakkie with the hunting dogs, peering into the veld like a hawk. Ninety percent of the time it was Anja's eyes that spotted the predators targeting the farms. On this day, when Mrs. Carstens and Peter had come over for lunch, Anja's eyes seemed about as capable as they always did. Peter and Benjamin dipped their bread into their tea behind their mothers, while the two women stared into the distance.

"We're going to need those binos of yours, Anja," Mrs. Carstens breathed. Anja quietly rushed to her and Gert's room, reaching into his bedside table's drawer for the binoculars. They'd learned to be quiet in the past months, quieter than Anja had ever been while hunting. There was something natural and unsuspecting to human noise. Not when it was humans hunting other humans though. Beside Mrs. Carstens, Anja carefully unwraps the binos from the suede covering Gert had bought over from his cousin.

Mrs. Carstens waits, but her left foot taps as she scans the distance. Finally, Anja handed over the binoculars and she pressed them tightly to her eyes. Anja waits, breathless. She'd spotted the shapes in passing, but now her palm was pressed to her heart, its beat roaring in her ears as she waited for confirmation.

"I – I think you're right, Anja. It – it looks like...tankers. Trucks."

"Japanese?" Anja whispered. The town had been in a buzz for weeks when Old Oom Jan Goosen found those tracks on the beach. He'd reportedly seen a submarine sinking under the waves across from his trail, while he'd been on patrol. When he spotted the gunmetal grey ship submerging, he'd ducked down, waiting before creeping through the brush and eventually spotting the footsteps. Oom Jan arrived back in town, red-faced and sweating as he panted, "Snapsnees."

He is a renowned tracker among the Namaqualanders so who were they to deny it? Management ordered a blackout of Kleinzee and, Mr. Carstens assured Gert, they had it all under control. That evening Anja had clutched her son close to her chest as Gert pulled curtains closed and doused candles, turning the wireless' dial until it clicked off. And then they waited. It was only by the grace of God that no enemies were spotted, no Japanese soldiers were seen trekking over the beaches and, though everyone watched the stretch of blue ocean with a great deal of paranoia, no submarine was spotted again. Of course, the men talked a big game, their rifles polished and resting beside their beds whenever they lied down to sleep. Anja only hoped they hadn't been restored to their cases, behind locks and steel doors.

Mrs. Carstens' forehead wrinkled as she lowered the binoculars and raised them to her eyes again.

"There's no way to know...Oh Lord. We must contact Jack. We must phone him immediately."

As Mrs. Carstens rushed to put a call in to her husband, Anja remained frozen in position as, it felt to her, she'd been ever since Chamberlain made that announcement. They were cut off from so very much, isolated in a big way, with only the radio, letters and nearby towns available to provide news. The men kept their excavation going for a while, but a stoppage occurred during the war. It was inevitable. And in that idleness, with no work to distract, no work to create the fantasy of normality, Anja was more often than not left paralyzed with fear of what was to come. No one, of course, could say what that would be. Even Mr. Carstens had seemed shaken after spotting a convoy of ships passing so close to the treacherous rocks of the Skeleton Coast, he'd had to order the searchlight – which was used to ward off possible crooks and catch them in the act – to be doused. These blackouts are no doubt different to those in cities, especially in great cities

such as London, but even the South African Air Force was considering establishing an air force camp at Sandkop, perhaps constructing an aerodome for larger planes. After Oom Jan's spotting of the submarine and Mr. Carstens reporting that convoy, Anja didn't blame them all for fearing for the worst.

She did.

It was in this same position, hand on her heart, staring so hard at the veld she thought the sky might crack open, that Mrs. Carstens found her. She urged the boys to play inside, in Benjamin's room, and took her place beside Anja, staring just as hard. As if, if they both looked hard enough, the oncoming black and grey shapes would cease existing. Eventually, as the minutes wore on and the tea cooled, Anja's hand slipped from her heart and she grabbed onto her elbows to keep herself steady. She leaned closer to the window. Then she exited into the backyard to stand closer to the fence.

"Anja," Mrs. Carstens hissed. "Come inside."

But Anja was fixated on the dunes. The shapes ploughing through everything as they approached. She was waiting for the noise of them, something like a diesel bakkie at least, but they were still too far away. Then she focused on the bushes in front of the shapes, bushes which should be torn asunder soon. Lord, if these really were the Japanese... Benjamin was safe, she reminded herself, and Gert was on patrol with Mr. Carstens. It would all be –

"Mrs. Carstens?"

"Yes?" Mrs. Carstens moved to the backdoor hesitantly.

“I think – do they look...” Anja squinted. She had the best eyesight of them all, she reminded herself. She didn’t need the binoculars, they were a gift to Gert who couldn’t see five feet before him. Finally, Anja bit her lip and said, “They’re moving rather jumpy. Are they –”

Ostriches.

Mr. Carstens later confirmed. A herd of ostriches, running down the dunes, through the brush. Just running, as ostriches do. When one starts running, they all think it’s a race and join in, until their long grey legs are blurred and their bodies bounce over the veld – until they move so fast, as one, that they blur into one large shape. Into something unidentifiable. Something that could be terrifying to anyone who was not used to seeing such a majestic sight.

Anja was wearing her blue dress that day. The bruise on her shin had been replaced by a new one and the sky was cloudless, the mist hovering over the sea. She knew, of course, what had happened. While the boys were playing in Benjamin’s room and Mrs. Carstens was waiting for Anja to come back inside, and the men were out looking for danger, Anja realized. From the moment the war had been mentioned, she’d been fearing it like a very large beast that was steadily running toward them. But it wasn’t a beast at all. It was metal and guns, bullets and submarines. It was one man with many smaller men, marching in a distant country that somehow made them all scurry like chickens when coming face to face with something as normal as an ostrich run.

They’d been so afraid to see anything approach the safety of Kleinzee, they’d feared everything close enough to see.

## Gun Club

Mister Coetzee liked many things. He liked the morning sun burning through the green veld of Namaqualand, testing its limits to the fullest. The succulents which lived beyond the sparse rainfall. He liked the wildly colourful flowers attracting the attention of passing people. He liked the cold bite of the morning mist dragging its fingers through the town of Kleinzee. He liked being recognized by anyone whose shoulders are thrown back. He liked being seen – just like the wildflowers and the mist and the shiny, shiny rocks scattered across the expanse of the West Coast.

Above all else, Mister Coetzee liked guns.

The steel, impersonal in his palm. The gleaming medals awarded when your shot is perfect. The uniforms associated with holsters. The smooth length of the barrel stretching away from him, demanding attention from whatever he was facing. His finger, gingerly pressed against the trigger but ready all the same. Perched on the edge of a bullet wound and a ceasefire, Mister Coetzee moved into the town of Kleinzee with discretion.

He'd started his career in security in a neighborhood in Cape Town, but detested the blue mountain looming over his head and the number of shadowy figures he was always fooled into following. He hated his boss with his wraparound sunglasses and the shoddy white sign he haphazardly pasted onto his bakkie whenever his shift rolled around. Mister Coetzee never liked shoddy. He liked organized, new and improved; he liked everyone to be in their place.

When an opportunity arose, through a mutual friend of a friend, to apply to De Beers – an esteemed company, known for its exemplary treatment of its employees – how could Mister Coetzee not shake his hand, gratefully?



Kleinzee was nothing like Cape Town. It was nothing like Belville either. It was, in actuality, quite the opposite of anything Mister Coetzee had known. Instead of answering to the state, he now answered to the GM who flew to Kimberly every other week, but always called Mister Coetzee back as soon as he landed. Instead of perusing dark neighborhoods, he knew every member of the town by name, could identify them by their lawn ornaments and guess the state of their home affairs by the contents of their shopping carts. He drove to and from a security gate most days and sat in pristine offices on the others and on these days there was nothing stopping him from having his lunch in the garden which was tended to daily by gardeners in khaki uniforms. He watched the mining vehicles drive in and out of the town and visited the museum often, familiarizing himself with information until he felt he could absolutely describe the benefits of De Beers' reign during dinner parties, when everyone would politely forget he was only a C3 class worker while they were settled in the D-band. The Patterson Grading Scale was another thing Mister Coetzee was fond of, despite the strict regulations concerning his rank.

You see, when Mister Coetzee enters a new place, he always does his research and God forbid he doesn't do it well. His mutual friend of a friend was called on numerous occasions to provide him with details concerning the town and how it's run. If anything, the Patterson Scale was the underlying factor of his desire to apply. It was no use, Mister Coetzee thought, going through life without a proper system. De Beers afforded their positions based on, not race, but qualifications. No discrimination involved. An 'evolved society in the Dark Days of South Africa', or so Mister Coetzee mused to his brother-in-law who still puttered around in Belville shouting at the boy who tended his garden. Each position is somewhere on the Patterson Scale, easily identified by a letter. A is lower-caste mine workers, B requires some sort of certificate, C demands you to be qualified and D was management. Moreover, numbers were used to distinguish you

within your letter. Your letter and number not only identified the level of your profession or the direction in which your career was heading, it also determined your benefits – salary, quality of living, house or hostel. It even influenced your social activities.

It was fascinating at first, but became invaluable to Mister Coetzee's sense of self up until his death in 2015.

His wife couldn't understand his obsession, or else she understood and ignored it. Being a C2 herself, a secretary at the school, she didn't care much for the Patterson grading. As long as she had a C-banded house, she didn't care on whose account it was earned. He'd only met a few ladies who outranked their husbands on the Scale, but from what he remembers from these vague encounters, they were not to his taste.

The beauty of the Band – as he'd later gotten around to calling it, as you would an old friend or admirable storybook character – was that you could move along it. Most importantly, you could move *up*. It became Mister Coetzee's driving force to continue studying, continue with coursework for certificates he neatly framed after each cycle, a bottle of champagne on ice for the moment he was promoted – to a new position and a new letter grade.

As time wore on, unfortunately, the restrictions became too lax for Mister Coetzee's taste. D-banders still avoided A's and B's, but now lower C's were becoming chums with mid-D's and the like. But this was much later, when Mister Coetzee was past his prime.

When Mister Coetzee was finally promoted, he and his wife were required to move. It would not be the last time they moved, but it was the most important move, since the stone houses were worth far more than the other houses. Only the executives had homes in stone houses. And every time another person gets a house it is more than just a house. It is a symbol. Development.

Growth in the company. Power. That is all there is. He'd been favoured by the D-banders for the sake of his mutual friend of a friend and, by attending every social gathering with them he could possibly manage, began forming relationships with acquaintances who'd previously looked at him somewhat warily – as if gazing at him for too long would rub his status off on them. Mister Coetzee did not blame them. He couldn't wait to do the same. Because of these relationships, he was praised immensely and guided into choosing the best possible C-band and eventually D-band home. He lived in the home of the one and only Jack Carstens for a few months, imagining the prospector sitting at the dinner table, counting diamonds in his palm. It was from this house that Mister Coetzee and his wife departed in their evening dress – children left in the capable hands of one of the C-banders' daughters. The dinner was a proper affair – thick steaks from local butchery, roasting potatoes peppered with rosemary and garlic, thick cream from the dairy on the outskirts of town – all rounded off with a fire crackling at the edge of the porch. Mister Coetzee had to remind himself, constantly, not to sniff his jacket to ensure he was keeping a proper distance from the smoke.

“Nicolas, good to see you.” Mister van Wyk grins easily, Mister Coetzee realized upon meeting him in person. As a lower D-bander, he was the cream of the crop, regardless of his number. The men shake hands and exchange pleasantries, Mister van Wyk coolly asking about the business of security in and around town – a business that is surprisingly, and mercifully, mostly unchanged. His wife joins the conversation but somehow holds her own, evoking boisterous laughter from her husband and mild chuckles from Mister Coetzee. Somehow, she turns the conversation towards a topic Mister Coetzee is wholly prepared to engage in.

“Oh, Julia loves their little club.”

“It’s not a *little* club. It’s a gun club,” she says, straightening her back and tossing her reddish curls with abandon. “We’re quite serious about the club, you know. Don’t listen to my husband, Nicolas, he’s a strong supporter of the golf club and unnecessarily exclusive when it comes to the rest.”

“Well, I would be a little more supportive if I were *allowed* to partake,” Mister van Wyk mutters before gesturing to Mister Coetzee with his tumbler of whiskey. “It’s an all-girls club.”

“A women’s only gun club?” Mister Coetzee asked before hesitantly taking a sip of his beer.

“Do you shoot, Nicolas?”

“Oh, yes, Nicky always went shooting at the club in Belville,” Mister Coetzee’s wife chirped. He blanched, unable to give her the warning look he usually would, nodding at Mister van Wyk.

“Well, you should come. We could watch the spectacle together.” Mister van Wyk ignores his wife’s look. “They’re shooting tomorrow, it’s bound to be interesting.”

And that’s how Mr. van Wyk found himself in barren strip of yard with five women chirping about their week’s trials and tribulations. Mister Van Wyk handed him his beer with a weary shake of his head, and they stood back to watch the women aim at their targets, one at a time, mark their positions with their initials, and occasionally emit a squeal.

At least, that’s how Mister Coetzee remembers it. He remembers thanking God his wife didn’t take part in this tomfoolery and then reflecting on what a sensible man he was for not forcing her to witness this. She was bound to detest the whole spectacle as thoroughly as he was. He

remembers a particular woman screeching with laughter when it was her turn to take a shot and, somehow, the bullet landed – scorching hot – on her chest. Her shouts of pain sounded much like her laughter. Mister Coetzee looked away quickly, but not before spotting the angry red flesh of a fresh burn. He remembers Mister Van Wyk introducing him to a Mister Cilliers who gave him a steady handshake and a firm look. He wore a golf shirt embroidered with ‘DB’ and a diamond, and Mister Coetzee wondered how many years you had to work to earn this particular company gift, or whom you had to speak to. He’d already collected the tie and tie clip.

Mister Coetzee remembers snorting as one of the ladies finally shot a bullseye and by some horrendous moment of chance – he forgot his next words.

But once he’d said them he realized that Mister van Wyk was nodding, a careful smile pursing his lips. And Mister Cilliers was squinting, asking in matter-of-fact voice:

“You would?”

Mister Coetzee searched frantically for a reply, only to find his faultless memory to be horrendously at fault. He opened his mouth but by some miracle, Mister van Wyk’s wife had appeared once more.

“Oh yes, Nicolas is very well versed in these matters, Bill. He shoots too.”

“He does.” Mister Cilliers nods.

“You could ask him to prove it like you did me. Oh, you should have seen it Nicolas. Before we could even start the club we had to go through all these tests. Eye testing and hearing and what not and finally we had to shoot for Bill. Well, I was the best shot that day, wasn’t I, Bill?”

Mister Cilliers simply inclines his head.

“Of course, he didn’t realize my shots become awfully spontaneous once I’ve had a drink,” she laughed and the sound of it ran across the entire yard.

“Nicolas is apparently a good shot,” Mister van Wyk adds. Mister Coetzee says nothing to this. He never told them he was a good shot, though he is a fair shooter, he didn’t like being blindly bolstered to a man who has yet to divulge anything concrete about himself.

“Ah.” Mister Cilliers gave a last shake of his cranium before departing with little else than a friendly wave.

Two days later, on the Monday which would thenceforth be known in the Coetzee household as the Game-changer, Mister Coetzee received a call from Mister Cilliers, telling him to meet him outside his office during lunch. From there he was ushered into a company bakkie and driven right through town. At the security gate he waved to one of his colleagues before turning to Mister Cilliers with an eyebrow raised in curiosity.

“Sir, where exactly are we headed?” To Mister Coetzee’s mind, nothing much lay beyond Kleinzee but Koingnaas, their partner mine town, a few farms and a guesthouse-farm.

“Saturday you mentioned you would start the first co-ed gun club.” Mister Cilliers glanced at him and Mister Coetzee nodded hurriedly, though he had no recollection of saying any such thing. God, had he really? No wonder Mister Cilliers looked at him that way! The gall he had to say that in front of a manager while only being a C-bander himself –

“I’m taking you to the site of this gun club you proposed.”

“Sir?”

“It’s a good plan. Charge a fee, of course. Do testing. Can’t let anyone into an exclusive club. They need to have some skill at least. The clubhouse will, of course, need to be kitted with a bar and an alcohol license but Herbert can handle all that – he’s my administration whiz.”

Mister Coetzee went on to list all the ways in which the club would be run and how, pausing only to wait for Mister Coetzee as he opened and closed the wire-frame gate they passed through. A short distance into the veld, visible from the road, stood a white building – not especially unique, nor comely. All of the houses in Kleinzee were built exactly the same – the same amount of material was used for each, their measurements all the same – identical but for their different sections and grading. Which is why it was so bizarre to see a perfectly fine C-house in the middle of a field. Mister Cilliers stopped the car and got out, leaning against his car door – an action that Mister Coetzee tried to ignore as it wasn’t the sort of thing a man like Mister Cilliers could do without seeming out of place.

“It’s a fixer-upper of course. One of the men thought they would live out here, be another outlook. Perhaps be the first point of contact with strangers, but that idea was abandoned. Obviously.”

Again, Mister Coetzee couldn’t quite understand why the man kept on talking. He didn’t need to explain himself, he thought. But then he realized. It wasn’t because Mister Cilliers was talking to fill the air, to banish discomfort, to speak just for the sake of speaking – it’s because he could speak. He could afford to speak without worrying what and how much and why things were being said. Words could flow, just as they did from Mrs. Van Wyk simply because they were in the position to have words.

Mister Cilliers pointed out to the field where a few white objects blurred, a blue thing moving behind them.

“That’ll be the Bezuidenhout’s shepherd.”

“Ah, it’s their ground, is it?”

Mister Cilliers shrugged. “No matter. I’ll just tell Bezuidenhout to move his sheep. We’ll have to set up a proper fence to keep the club exclusive. What do you think?” he asked, finally turning. With Mister Cilliers watching Mister Coetzee, who was watching the shepherd, the sheep grazing the beautiful veld that would otherwise serve no purpose to the club apart from providing space for shooting, Mister Coetzee had a moment of doubt. But only a moment.

He met Mister Cilliers’ smile with his own and said:

“I suppose she’ll do just fine for the Gun Club.”

In that moment, Mister Coetzee couldn’t help but feel as all these men must have felt since landing on the plane from Kimberley – like they were walking on a child’s play carpet with its green, green fields filled with possibility and the makings of a town all in one pile in the corner, ready to be stacked and ordered and shaped to create something different than before. Mister Coetzee would from that moment on be conversing not only with C-banders, but everyone else in the town of Kleinzee. Not because he wasn’t worthy to converse with others, but because he was worthy to converse with *anyone* without it affecting his status. He was the founder of the Gun Club after all.

Absentmindedly, as they drove back to the office, Mister Coetzee wondered about the farmer Bezuidenhout and whether or not he would be shattered about losing more grazing. Of



course, De Beers would section off the veld, but the farmer wouldn't have to pay for the fence at least. Perhaps, Mister Coetzee thought, he should invite him to join the Club.

Soon, that thought was forgotten as Mister Coetzee began wondering whether his gun was up to standard with that of Mister Cilliers and Van Wyk's.

Regretfully, beyond the confines of the Gun Club, there was never a valid reason for Mister Coetzee to carry a gun. Many nights there were rumours of scoundrels breaching the perimeter of the mine, and Mister Coetzee would rally his on-call colleagues to hunt for baklava'd runners, thieves fleeing with diamonds clutched in their fists. Mister Coetzee never did catch a thief. He did see the shoes of thieves with their trick heels, hollowed out to hide diamonds. But these shoes were quickly shipped off to museums far away from Kleinzee and the life the Coetzee's had built for themselves. He did hear stories from the policemen with their proper uniforms, German Shepherd and polished holsters, of potential smugglers and the like, but Mister Coetzee usually lost interest in those stories quite fast as they were centered on other towns, and soon his eyes would drift to the guns at their sides and he would wonder wistfully why he never became a policeman.

# More Than A Diamond

## !ouboe

“This is ridiculous,” she mutters, prodding the green floral foam with lavender stems. The tiny room in Hannah’s backyard is filled to the brim with their arrangements for the night’s event. It’s their first official opportunity in the town, not that Lisa didn’t have to make arrangements for herself to remain in the town. It was a toss-up between having Hannah organize Lisa’s presence in town as her ‘guest’ or simply approaching HR directly. In the end Lisa had scheduled a meeting, for various reasons, with HR and had gained permission to enter Kleinzee based on her partnership with Hannah in their flower arrangement business. One of the many business ventures Lisa’s approached to keep the family afloat in the midst of a drought.

Hannah had offered for her to spend the night, after the event’s flowers were sorted, but she needed to get home with Johan.

Hannah shakes her head, kneeling by the buckets as she strips stems of their thorns. She swears under her breath when another thorn catches her thumb, and wrenches the bouquet from the water and lays the flowers delicately on Lisa’s pile for her to arrange. She shakes her hands out, leaning against the doorframe. The sun bathes her in that familiar gold that seems to touch anyone but Lisa today. From outside, they can hear Johan and Tommie shriek every time they run beneath the sprayer’s cool droplets. Lisa leans back, closing her eyes. The garden centre’s greenhouse is probably cooler than this room.

“You explained that you live right outside?”

“I explained that we’ve *been* living outside for years. Pieter’s *grandfather* lived there before us. Isn’t Johan’s surname Bezuidenhout? Doesn’t he deserve some of the ‘good nature’ the Corporation had when they wanted to trick his grandfather out of the farm?”

Hannah purses her lips as she always does whenever Lisa starts up about the farm and their history with the Corporation. She would never truly understand, Lisa thought bitterly. She sees a woman who is reluctant to let her little boy stay in a hostel in the week and only be home on weekends. She doesn't have to endure the painstaking wait each time she needs to enter the town. She doesn't feel the sharp gaze of security, listen to the biting laughter of the executives' wives when they pass one another in the shop. She *belongs*. It's not fair, Lisa thinks again.

The Bezuidenhouts have been here longer than the Corporation cares to remember. Unlike the other farmers, they were more reluctant to indulge the miners. This was a simple life they chose – one where a dry salt pan could just be a dry salt pan, of no use to sheep – not a potential diamond mine which would strip the entire area of its veld.

Lisa opens her eyes to see Johan throwing his arms up in the air as the water falls across his skin. Whenever she sees him she thinks of time. How much time until he grows another centimeter? How much time until he starts running faster? Stops reaching for her hand?

She knows the answer – as soon as she sends him to boarding school in Springbok.

“God, who could look at that boy and want to send him away?” she mutters. When Hannah doesn't answer, Lisa looks away, back to the stripped stalk. *I'm going to make something of myself. By God, I'm going to be someone and they'll be sorry. One day they'll pay for this mess.* Merciless, she gathers her chosen blooms and begins arranging.

“Get the fan, I think, Hannah. We need to keep them a bit cooler.”

When Hannah leaves the room there is nothing keeping the light from streaming inside, Hannah's shadow following her as she walks. The other day they'd had an event at the yacht club, building floats out of shoddy planks and tires. Lisa and Hannah had laughed too much, drinking

too much wine – like the rest of the crowd – it had been a sunny, light-hearted headache of a weekend. Johan loved it so much to have a friend to play with. He was getting older – so quick Lisa wouldn't be able to keep teaching him the basics for longer. He needed to get out, have friends, a school. Perhaps the boarding school would be the right thing to do. Perhaps that's what he needs.

Her fingers slow as the centerpiece comes together. The sun beats down on her leg and she wishes for Hannah's shadow again.

“Issie!”

“Is!”

“Issie!” Johan's voice rings out. A bead of sweat trails its way down Lisa's temple, dripping on the foam when she leans closer to watch. Tommie laughs with his haasbek that Hannah fawned over after shoving chocolates in her son's face. Compared to Tommie, Johan seemed taller, older with scratches criss-crossing up his legs. Perhaps it only feels that way because Lisa knows how few sweets Johan gets, how much he loves the outdoors and rushes to join his father when checking up on their shepherd.

“Boys, what is it now?” Hannah beams at their sons, ruffling Tommie's hair. The screen door swings shut and Lisa closes her eyes. She hears the door of the office when she slams it shut, the doorframe practically vibrating, the HR Rep's calm, all-knowing, ignorant face pulling into shock as she stormed out. She's cursed them. She has, hasn't she? They won't ever let her back here. They won't let Johan –

Hannah's laughter echoes toward her as she walks. The boys pout, each playing on their own. They sit like sad flowers under the sprayer, funeral flowers waiting to be plucked.

“What is it now?”

“Tommie was a bit nasty, called Johan a bad word.” Hannah shrugs, settling the fan on the flowers.

“What kind of bad word?” Lisa snorted. Compared to her friend, Lisa would be labelled far too lax with what clarifies as an objectively bad word.

“Nothing.”

“What was it about, Hannah?” Lisa sighs, blowing a curl off her forehead.

“Something along the line of...he insinuated that Johan wouldn't be coming to school because he's too... because he's not as smart as the other children. Because he – because he talks...flat and uses made up words.”

Lisa's heart stutters. She's feared this. She's sat with him for hours and hours, poring over books. She's sat with him for hours each day to teach him, to help him reach the level of the Grade Ones in Springbok, so afraid he'd need to be on their level, praying that the Corporation would let Johan join Grade One in Kleinzee. But, as expressly explained today, no exceptions. If you don't live inside, you live outside – and you stay there. She bites her lip, wiping her forehead with the back of her hand. Johan is not stupid. He's bright and smart and – It's not for lack of intelligence that he's not being accepted. She can't unpack this with Hannah again.

Lisa sits up, straightening her back. “Flat? Made up words?”

Hannah shakes her head, hand on her hip. “He clicked his tongue when he said. !ou - !ai – something.”

Lisa stares at Hannah as she, aimlessly, attempts to make the clicking sounds that she'd learned as soon as she entered the area.

“Those *made up words* are Nama.” He heard them from the farm workers, no doubt. He follows them to their homes on Sundays, drinks tea and plays cards to spend time with Frida and Piet. Hell, she uses them too. Sometimes things really are !gouboe. Like right now. “And his *flat* accent is a Namaqualand accent. We are *in Namaqualand*.” Lisa stands, slowly. He's a child, yes, but where is he hearing that having the accent is kommin? Where is Tommie getting the idea that *Nama* is made up? That it's not the same as English? Without meaning to, Lisa feels a bitterness toward Hannah and her English roots, raising her English son, sitting in the separate English class of the dual language school, hating the Afrikaners and everyone else who isn't like them. Suddenly she wants to shout.

*WE WERE HERE FIRST.*

But she bites her tongue and turns away from Hannah who doesn't seem phased at all.

“They're just kids, Lisa. He'll get over it.”

“Mm-hm.” Lisa nods.

She waits but she doesn't hear Johan's screeching laughter for the rest of the day. Hannah chatters with her about everything and anything as they finish the arrangements, load them into Lisa's bakkie, drive and set them up at the event. They make idle chit-chat with the servers setting the tables around their flowers, Lisa's eyes devouring every detail of the room, the long bar, the light wood, the deep blue tablecloths and matching curtains tied back with gold ropes. When they escape in the back, through the kitchen and leave the premises, the voices of the managers and their wives are already weaving through the air. When they drive away, Lisa catches a look of

them, in their formal garb – suits, De Beers logo ties – ladies with hairs in chignons and elegant dresses. When she narrows her eyes she notices the HR Rep isn't present and her stomach rolls, anger biting into her fingers as she tightens her hands on the steering wheel.

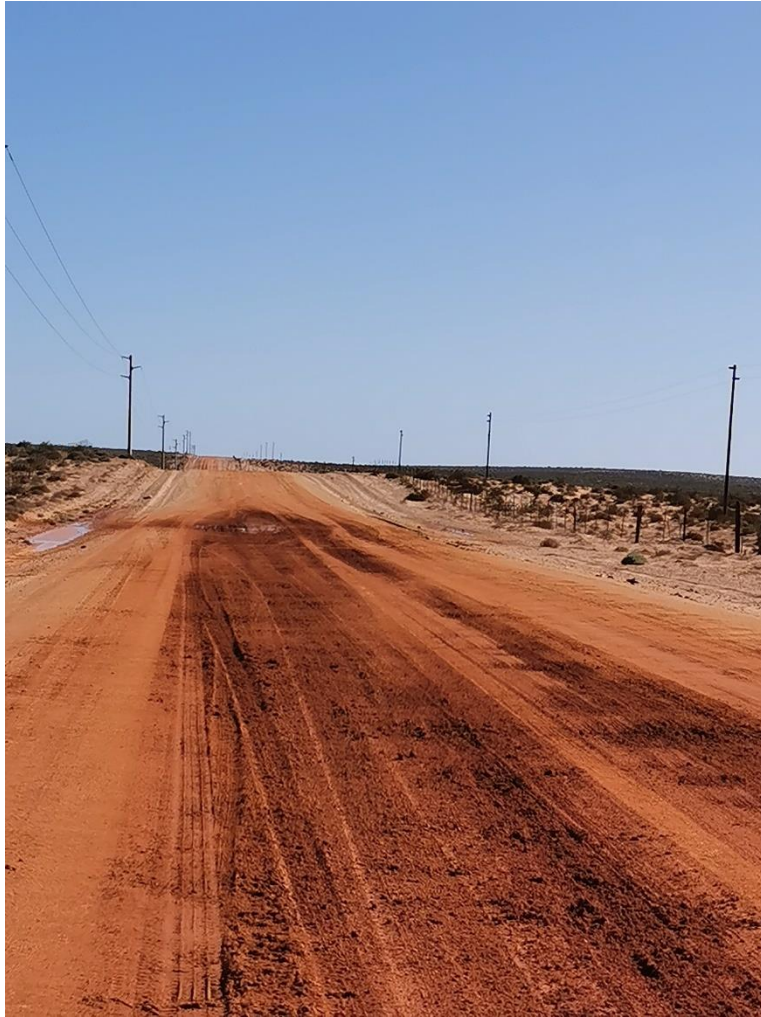
She drives home with Johan sleeping on the back seat. The security guard is kind, recognizes her face and lets her drive without slowing down. As she drives, their faces all mill through her mind. The managers, the HR Rep, Hannah, Tommie even. She thinks of how the HR Rep and his secretary, nowhere to be seen, her rank on the Patterson scale too low for her sympathetic smile to matter. She thinks of the managers eating their lamb shank and sherry in their fancy clothes, accents overburdened with arrogance, unaware of anything beyond their small little world of diamonds and drinks at the Rendezvous. She thinks of Hannah who refuses to see what is right in front of her, who doesn't correct her son about Afrikaners, who cannot fathom what Lisa is going through as a mother. More than anything, Lisa thinks of Johan. How his tiny hand makes a dent in his cheek where he cushions his head. How his 'r's' roll whenever he speaks Afrikaans and disappears perfectly when slipping into English. How he swears playfully in Nama, never realizing what the words mean. How his lips pout as he dreams and his little body is riddled with skinned knees, slight scars already whitening and new wounds that he'd built up during the week playing.

Lisa thinks of how she must apply to Springbok Primary and enroll her son. She thinks of how he was refused kindergarten, how she is trying to teach him so he isn't too behind, how he will have to sleep in a cold room in a hostel with other little boys whose parents are just trying their best. How she will have to stay for six months in Springbok during the week to help him adjust. How she will have to hug him goodbye. How he will leave her arms, and their home, for good once he walks through that school's doors. How fast he will grow up.



Lisa thinks of all this as she drives home. Lastly, she remembers her earlier words.

*I will make something of myself. And I will make them pay.*



“The Rooipad/Red Road”

## Noot vir Noot

“You should hear them sing, Frida. It makes me giddy just remembering! Everyone is running around like headless chickens trying to fix up the town for Mister Stemmet and the kiddies are in the saal singing. Like a Christmas song, you know? All in their uniforms, their voices not really knowing what they’re saying. You know?”

Frida listens carefully to Sussie’s gushing as they walk, kicking up red dust, chewing on the grass she’d plucked from the veld. They both know there’s nothing wrong with the town, though Frida only sees it on Dorps-days when the farm workers can make the trip with Nooi Lisa to buy groceries. Sussie used to go on and on about it often when she first started working there. Frida’s niece has been with the Van Wyk’s in Hospital Street for two years now, after she fell pregnant and dropped out of school. Johnny helps his aunt, Sussie’s mother, watch his cousin when he gets back from school, telling the little troublemaker all about what he had learned, but the babe is only two now, fourteen years younger than his mum. It’s Sussie that tells Frida these stories of Johnny – the stories Frida contemplates whenever she walks down to the farmhouse and starts her shift.

“Kommagas will have to pick up all that trash, don’t you think? Can’t have Mister Stemmet driving through that gemors.” Sussie’s lips twist and she switches her handbag to her other shoulder. “I’ll have to mention it to Johnny’s teacher when she comes round. Did I tell you Maria comes round? Like a Marrem, waltzes into our house, sits at our table, tells *me* I need to get my act together. And Ma *agrees*.” Her eyes roll again.

She is meant to go home but sometimes she begs the bus driver that carts them to and fro between Kleinzee and Kommagas, to stop by the Bezuidenhout farm on the Rooipad. She has her

own room at the Van Wyk's house – a room outside the house where she lives most of the time. Unless, like tonight, she's been asked to come help at the Bezuidenhouts for the weekend.

Piet usually sits outside at night and always on the weekends, smoking by the fire when he finally spots Sussie wandering down the road, between veld fields, toward their quarters – just a kilo up from the farmhouse. When Piet calls Frida out of her room, she knows it is Sussie he sees, who often pretends it is to get away from home and have a break from the children and her mother. But Frida knows it is because this is easier than getting up at 5 o'clock in the morning and that Piet makes cheeky eyes at her whenever she joins them at the fire.

No wonder Frida's sister agrees with Maria. Sussie needs to get her act together. If it wasn't for Frida's recommending Sussie to Missus Bezuidenhout, she wouldn't have a job with the Van Wyk's. If that missus knew half of the stories about Sussie, she may not have employed her in the first place. However, most of those stories came from Maria anyways.

Frida spits out the grass and watches the first star blink slowly into the darkening sky. Sussie stops a second to look up as well before she starts moving again.

“Mr. Stemmet is gonna come round to my Missus' house as well, you know. Mr. van Wyk and him go way back. They were here in school together. And now his son is in the same school they were in. They're going to sing the school song that Mr. Stemmet wrote. To think a celebrity in Kleinzee.” Sussie laughs, a barking sound in the quiet twilight of the field where the birdsong is just softening and the fire's crackle is getting louder.

“Hm.” Frida's seen this Mr. Stemmet on the television in the house, only a few times when she stays late enough to finish up the washing and put Johan to bed when his parents have guests. Tonight, she saw his face again on the television, waiting for Nooi Lisa to come back from

Springbok after fetching Johan. Mr. Bezuidenhout dismissed her when he came from hunting jackal, saying Nooi Lisa and Johan will be sleeping over in Springbok for the night, their business ran too late. Frida had switched off the television, watching Johan Stemmet's face disappear from the screen, the last notes of his theme song fading in a sharp flash of white noise.

Piet's fire flickers in front of them and Frida starts walking faster, eager for a bit of warmth. There is something in the air. It's familiar but it doesn't bode well for visitors.

"At least Ounooi is distracted."

"Missus van Wyk?"

Sussie nods, suddenly melancholy. She wraps her arms tighter around her chest, hugging the threadbare poncho her mother stitched together from the threads Missus van Wyk gave to Sussie one day. Sussie stopped by the next day, boasting about the bag and how happy Frida's sister was to have sewing material. Frida had said nothing, only drawn her own second-hand jacket over her shoulders and put on the tea.

"Why does she need distraction?" Frida asks incredulously. They've arrived at the fire and she takes her seat on an overturned paint tin. Sussie falls onto a rickety chair, her bag dropping at her feet. Her hands immediately shoot out to the fire. Piet greets Sussie with a lewd joke that Frida ignores as they laugh. Soon, he returns to his room to get more tobacco, leaving Sussie to rip pieces of newspaper for their cigarettes and Frida repeats her question.

"Why does Missus van Wyk need distraction?"

Sussie's smile melts away. "Ah, Ounooi really is alone."

Frida tilts her head, leaning forward to catch some of the flames' heat. "In that nice house? How can you feel alone?"

"She calls to me, Antie." Sussie meets her eyes, flames flickering light and shadow across her face. "She calls to me and I listen. Did you know my name sounds different in English?"

Frida scowls, "Stront, man. It sounds the same any way you say it. Sussie isn't English enough to sound English when you say it."

"It's true," she insists. Sussie cracks her knuckles one by one before she starts pulling at her fingers. "She calls my name in English. Not that low English you're thinking of. No, it's such a...high English. You know that English?"

"Sure." Frida sighs for Sussie's sake. Let her think her name can be English. Why take away that bit of joy?

"She calls my name and I listen. Then I make sure to go running. Oe! She can get angry, you know? Mad, mad, mad. But then, Antie, sometimes at night, when the men are out at the clubs. They go drinking a lot, you know?" Sussie glances toward Piet's figure at his room's door. All the workers' rooms are together, on the road to the main road, in view of the farmhouse's lights. Piet's is closest to the kraal for in case the animals are in trouble, and Frida sleeps away from the light so she can look out at the stars at night. Piet struggles with his door before he bangs it open.

Sussie shakes her head, looking away from Piet and back to Frida. "Not rooirop like our men, like Piet, but different stuff. Strong. Horrible. Just as bad as rooirop. Baas comes home and I hear him yelling. He yells and yells and he never uses his fists." Sussie pauses to lick her lips. "Funny, né. When the shouting is done, you hear the Missus. She comes outside and knocks on my door. *My door*, Antie. And she sits on my bed and I hold her. She cries a lot then. My whole

shoulder is wet when she leaves.” Sussie pauses again, studying the words peppered across *Die Son*’s paper. Piet has closed the door and is shuffling back toward them. He doesn’t close his door. Tonight, Frida knows, he will be cursing when he realizes there are haarskeeders running across his floor. Sussie lays out the newspaper strips on the ground beside Piet’s seat and grabs one of the sticks of the woodpile and starts breaking it into smaller pieces before tossing it on the hungry embers.

“But she does leave,” Frida adds. “And then? The next day?”

“Then it is all the same. It’s not every week, Antie. It’s just every now and then.”

“Nooi Lisa isn’t like that.” Nooi Lisa drives hours to see her son in a koshuis and then she sleeps over if they’re too late to drive safely on that pitch dark mountain road. She makes coffee for Mr. Bezuidenhout when he comes back from hunting and chides him for leaving his dirty shoes on Frida’s clean floor. She helps Frida bottle guavas and peaches from the trees she’d plucked clean and always gives her a bottle. Sometimes she yells. But she also listens when Frida says to coat Johan’s wheezing chest with Puma Balm and Zambuk and gives her a pot of each for Johnny for Christmas.

Sussie’s nose wrinkles when she pulls her face and her snorting noise makes Frida look back to her niece.

“You can’t compare them,” Sussie insists. “Missus Nina is *English* and she knows things. She’s been schooled. *Farmers* aren’t the same thing.”

“No,” Frida breathes, “they are not.”

Piet sit on the overturned crate beside Sussie and shoots her a smile before he gathers a strip of newspaper between his fingers, pinching it, smooths it out and fills it with tobacco before rolling it, licking the edge and propping the end between his lips. He leans into the fire and the make-shift cigarette lights, newspaper headlines burning inch for inch as he breathes in.

Somewhere in the veld, a jackal calls.

The Boere-vereniging is usually held at a different farm each time but this is the second time in a row they've held it at the Bezuidenhouts where the wood skerm is as tall as most of the farmers' heads and the braais have been made larger for the small guesthouse Nooi Lisa started for extra income. Frida's potato salad stands within the house by the beetroot and carrot salad and cabbage salad. After the meeting in the skuur concludes, all the farmers and their wives will head toward the skerm where Nooi Lisa has started to braai sausage alongside Piet. Frida wipes her hands on her apron and sets the matches beside the candles to light them later for the few who would rather eat inside than around the skerm. Finally, she stands still, cocking her head to listen.

"Johan?" she calls. Nooi Lisa drove in early this morning, early enough for Sussie to complain when the bakkie drove by. Sussie may have many faults but she gets up almost as early as Frida herself. Johan was playing outside all day, terrorizing Piet as he worked, looking at his father with those determined, eager eyes, winking at his mother whenever his father grumbled about the caracals and jackals and traps. Small as he is, he's too clever for his own good most days. He'd come running to the washing room with roltoetjies in his hands. The millipedes were all wrapped into their tight balls, but Johan was grinning from ear to ear.



“What are you doing? Go put them back, silly boy!” Frida called, feigning distress to amuse him. Predictably he started laughing, but obediently ran out to replace them. Frida grew up surrounded by veld, much like Johan and his father and the Bezuidenhouts who came before them. She has no fear of millipedes or any other insects. If anything, she was excited.

Frida knew it would rain, even before the farmers did.

When she walked to the farmhouse late afternoon, she saw the ants scurry in angry lines across the pale sand. The roltoetjies were leaving their thousand-footed tracks and the goats, as she passed them in the field, swung their heads wildly as they began to dance. The animals knew it first and that is how the farmers usually could tell as well. But all the farmers were in their bakkies, on their way to Manelsvlei, to the Bezuidenhouts. They would not be able to tell yet.

Frida peers out the large window of the dining room, squinting at the horizon where a pale line of deep grey hovers. The sound of the ocean is clear as day here, even though they are twenty kilometers away. Even from here, that ocean sounds angry.

Good, Frida thinks, eyes grazing the dried-out veld surrounding them. It’s time for a good rainfall.

She turns away from the window, starting toward the hallway where the family’s rooms are located, but Sussie rushes past her with a few tongs and steel braaibak.

“Did you hear what Nooi Melanie said?” Many of the wives of the farmers drink coffee and tea on the stoep, outside the house, in sight of the skerm but not joining Nooi Lisa and the other wives and children who came along for the food and the company. Sussie worked for Miss Melanie’s mother once, before she got chased away, accused of stealing a broach or something

like that. A few weeks later, Frida heard from the new maid that she'd found the broach in Miss Melanie's cupboard.

The new maid slipped it into her pocket without qualms.

"What did she say?" Frida sighs, tugging at Sussie's sleeves until they were properly rolled up. It's warm outside, the air basically crackling with anticipation.

"She says Mr. Stemmet is coming *tomorrow* and not Monday like the town was told. He wants to look around the town before the big events at the school."

"Maybe he just doesn't want to drive from Springbok and arrive smelling like sweat," Frida muses. "What's it matter, Sussie? It's not like he's coming here for us."

"Why can't you be excited for once?" Sussie huffs, stalking from the room. The front door slams shut behind her. When she's gone, Frida listens to her footsteps and the dull chatter of the ladies on the stoep.

The town will be dubbed 'The Greatest Town Johan Stemmet Has Ever Seen', according to the Van Wyk's and Sussie cannot stop talking about it. She's started to work weekends for the Bezuidenhouts, when there are more guests and more washing than Frida is capable of handling. She took the job too eagerly, Frida had thought bitterly, giving up that time with her son. But then Frida had felt guilty because wasn't she doing the same thing? Besides, catering for the entire Boere-vereniging is too big a job for Frida alone.

Little Johan was so excited about Johan Stemmet visiting before he left for his first week of boarding school in Springbok. That Saturday before they made the drive, he'd been dancing in front of the television each time Noot Vir Noot led off with a Gé Korsten tune. Now Stemmet

would come and Johan would be in Springbok, unable to take part in the festivities at the primary school on Monday. Sussie has been bragging about it relentlessly – that the Van Wyk’s were going to meet him, that she would be able to hear the school singing the school anthem to its writer.

Poor little Johan, Frida thinks, weaving her way from room to room toward the hallway. She pushes the blue door of Johan’s room open and peers inside at the tiny figure huddled on the carpet, an island in a sea of toys. Her eyes land on the superman bedsheets, the few action figures of Spiderman and Captain America that Johan had started to tell her about last year. They lie to one side, discarded in favour of his building blocks. The door gives way beneath Frida’s hand and creaks open. Johan starts but doesn’t look up.

Frida clucks her tongue and starts picking up the toys, tossing them into the chest in the corner. “It looks like a tornado hit this place. Now, why are you inside, Johan? Shouldn’t you be outside? Playing with the other kids?”

The boy seems pale in the dim light streaming between the wood slats of the blinds. Johan pushes out his lower lip, dragging his plastic car through the Lego racetrack. Frida doesn’t understand how he thinks to build these things – the other day he built a pirate ship and she helped him dress like one, complete with eye-patch and a bent fork as a hook. She sighs and slowly lowers herself into a crouch beside the boy. Her back’s been aching since last week, but she presses her fingers on the carpet to keep her balanced and tilts her head.

“Now, what’s wrong my boy?”

“I have to go back to the koshuis,” he mumbles. Frida purses her lips and leans back until she’s sitting, cross-legged across from him. She taps his cheek with her index finger but the dimple sinks into his cheek only slightly.

“Come now, seun. It’s still a while. You don’t want to be sad while you’re here.”

“They don’t want me here.”

“What!”

He grins only slightly for her shrill voice. Frida pushes the hair off his forehead, “Ag, don’t be silly. We all want you here.”

“Then why can’t I go to school here?” Johan looks down at his Lego’s, pulling them apart piece by piece before he starts making something again. Frida adds a random block here and there, usually the brighter yellow and blue while Johan chooses green and red.

“Ag, seun, it’s not your Mamma’s fault. It isn’t anyone’s fault. It’s just the rules of the town. Your parents have to work for the mine for you to go to school there.”

“But they don’t.”

“Do you want them to? Do you want to leave the farm and live in Kleinzee?”

Johan shakes his head quietly. He complains about never seeing his friends, yes, but when push comes to shove, what little boy wouldn’t want all this space? All these animals? This wild youth that Johan had until now. Still has, Frida chides. He’s only in Springbok in the weekdays.

“It will change. You see, your Mamma is looking for a loophole.”

“What’s that?”

“It’s like...a way for you to go there even though they don’t work for the mine. But it takes time.”

Johan suddenly looks up at the window with its strips of dark sky. “Frida. It’s going to rain.”

Frida smiles, ruffling his hair, the blond strands slipping through her fingers like silk.

“Good job, my seun.”

The meeting isn’t finished when the phone starts to ring.

Nooi Lisa had come in, scurrying with more of the chairs that they’d had to carry inside after the clouds broke. Frida and Johan joined Piet, covering the food, running plates, knives and forks inside which Frida and Sussie had laid out so nicely in the skerm, on tableclothed tables earlier. Sussie was shouting about her hair mincing, covering it with a vadoek as she ran to and fro between the skerm and the house. The other children ran with Johan and a few wives helped as well, their voices squealing as fat, freezing droplets pelted the ground. The other wives and children were holed up in the living room and dining room, witnessing the chaos, chirping about the rain as it began thundering on the tin roof, skel-ing the children for running outside and getting sick. Frida could only imagine the farmers in the skuur, probably praying by now to end off the meeting, each of them secretly jumping for joy in their hearts for the rain.

When the telephone began its shrill song, Nooi Lisa answered, out of breath, swiping the wet hair from her cheeks.

“Yes?” Frida pauses outside the office with new, dry plates in her hand, listening for her voice. She speaks fast, muffling her words slightly until she calls, in a clear voice:

“Frida, go call Meneer, will you? Tell him there’s a car stuck on the road; he needs to tow them out.”

Frida moves quicker than she’s moved this whole week. She runs out the door, still open and waiting for Piet to run back inside with tablecloths, rushing past the farmers jogging toward the house from the skuur. When she crosses the threshold of the skuur, she’s out of breath, searching in the darkness for Meneer. She shuffles toward the small gathering of farmers, laughing, watching the rain drip from the glass of the windows. Meneer has a cigarette between his lips and turns his head to glance at the window behind them, the one near the roof, a perfectly dark grey rectangle. Lightning flashes across the glass and the whole room lights up for a split-second. Frida yelps and the plates shake in her hands, a few of the farmers chuckle but go on talking about the East Wind and how fast the weather might dissipate. Meneer turns to her and leans forward.

“Frida, what is it?”

“A car, Meneer, stuck on the Rooipad.”

One of the farmers has a roaring laugh that shakes his potbelly when he looks at Meneer. “Ah, your turn to tow the townspeople out, né?”

“Ja, ja, Frink,” Meneer grumbles, starting outside, toward the bakkie. In any other circumstance, Meneer would have shooed the other farmers toward the food and parked his bakkie inside the skuur again but he gets into the bakkie and starts it, calling to the farmers through the open window, “Which one of you –”

He barely got the words out when three of the farmers were loaded into the bakkie, ready for the action. Excited even. Frida shakes her head and nods slightly to the remaining men before scurrying back into the rain. It may be freezing but the air is still buzzing, thunder crackling above.

Despite the fear she feels each time the noise rips at the sky, Frida tilts her head back slightly, relishing the water running down her hair, down her neck, onto her back, waking her up like she knows the veld will wake up too.

The man in the car is famous.

That is what Sussie said to Frida when Piet returned from the towing. Meneer caught him just before he ran back inside the house and beckoned for him to get on the bakkie. In the washing room where the workers drink their coffee between the sweet-smelling detergents and the heat of the iron, Piet trudged in, coated in red mud up to his knees. Frida soaked his trousers that night, scrubbing to get the clay out but more importantly, the car did bring someone famous to Manelsvlei.

Mister Johan Stemmet walked into the dining room, apologetic and smiling with his teeth shining, bright white just like on the television. He was embarrassed, though Frida saw his driver was the one who was red in the face and, like Piet, red in the trousers too. Nooi Lisa and Frida jumped to get a room ready for Mister Stemmet and the driver and the farmers either ate very quickly or took their food to-go before the road became unbearable. Little Johan was beside himself. He introduced himself like a little Meneer, hand stuck out to the shining Mister Stemmet. He appeared so very calm despite having jumped up and down moments before when Frida fetched him from his room. He continued to be so calm and composed. Until Frida tucked him, which is when his smile stretched all the way across his cheeks and his dimples buried themselves beside his mouth. Even Frida felt a hint of excitement at the celebrity in the dining room. More importantly, it went on raining the next day.

Mister Stemmet couldn't be in Kleinzee on Monday.

And little Johan couldn't leave for Springbok that week. He spent the week speaking to Mister Stemmet who decided to stay at Manelsvlei for the quiet and just drive in each day, Meneer's number ready on his phone. While Mister Stemmet was away, Johan trailed his father and made mischief on the farm – as if he'd never left. The best news for Frida came on that Thursday when she heard that Mister Stemmet was leaving on Friday and had space for one more – Frida, Nooi Lisa informed her, could go on naweek.

In the car, sitting behind Mister Stemmet with his dull gold watch and the winning smile he continuously flashed, the deep voice he spoke with as he asked her questions, Frida thought of Sussie's gushing and the Van Wyk's and the superhero action figure Johan had slipped into her hand to give to Johnny when she saw him. Mister Stemmet is just a normal man, she thought and she said this to Johnny eventually. A normal man who made many people very happy this week.

If it hadn't been for the rain, life would have been different this week. The rain wouldn't have brought a normal man to the farm and changed the course of the week for everyone. Nooi Lisa wouldn't have had that grin when she spoke to her friend, Missus Hannah, on the phone. Johan wouldn't have been chattering all day and night about all the things Mister Stemmet told him about being on television. Meneer wouldn't have had that peaceful look when he found the jackal gone and the veld green. Sussie wouldn't have shut up, in awe and also deflated that the Van Wyk's weren't involve in this extraordinary event.

And Frida wouldn't have seen Johnny for another few weeks.

That is the trick of this town, Frida had said to Johnny that weekend. De Beers keeps everyone out, but don't underestimate nature. This Namaqualand nature doesn't care about men



and their fences. When the rains come those roads that they love to drive on, love to make red and white clouds on in the distance, those roads become deathtraps. When it rains the roads become slick clay, cutting off the town from Springbok on the Komaggas road. When the Buffels River floods it washes away the bridge for the cars and then the town is completely isolated. Not the lovely isolation men had in mind when they put up fences, no, this is a stranded isolation, she explained to Johnny. The security gates are useless then. Johnny doesn't see the harm in keeping people out of town. He thinks it's keeping everyone safe, which is fair to his youthful mind, but to Frida it looks a lot like locking up doves in a cage with food and water and shutting out the mossies. Of course, that's why nature disturbs their peace. When the Here sends His rain, He not only reminds everyone about how beautiful the veld is, He also reminds them that He is in control. Build all the roads, all the bridges you want, He says, but when you get too cocky, I'll leave you stranded for a week. After that week, Frida returned to work, Johnny returned to school, carrying his action figure in his pockets, Johan went back to boarding school but Sussie's words rang true. It was official.

Kleinsee was dubbed *The Greenest Town Johan Stemmet Has Ever Seen*.

Secretly, Frida thinks it was the veld of Manelsvlei he was referring to.



Top of the page: “‘Rehabilitated’ field on the perimeter of Kleinzee”

Bottom of the page: “‘Rehabilitated’ field seen from inside Kleinzee”

## The Veld Girl

“People don’t understand when you talk about nature here. Everything looks dead to them. And...granted, right now it does look worse for wear but that’s the magic of this place, of Namaqualand. Give it a few drops of rain and all that *dead*? It comes back to life. Skipping and singing.” – Karla Wiese, farmer outside Kleinzee, *The Way of Survivors*.

Karla waits with bated breath for her grandmother, her arms curled backwards at her sides, ready for the weight of the wood. When the weight comes, she does not tremble, ignoring the sharp branches in her back. She thinks of all those women carrying before her, their bodies boughed and curled.

They walked all day and found stinkvy-wood, dried and ready to be broken and loaded onto their backs with ‘rogsakke’, to be carried back to the gleaming white house in the veld. Karla ignores the sharp branches poking her spine all the way home, chattering about nonsense with her grandmother who laughed at every peculiar thought her grandchild came up with. At home, they unload the wood in the skerm and Karla crouches by the tiny tee-pee of sticks and newspaper. This is her favourite part, sitting in the skerm – a wood shelter curved into a haphazard half-moon – and building a tiny fire with kindling she collected while her grandfather replenished the skerm.

The fire starts out small but grows hungry too soon and they load a few branches onto it. Karla’s toes curl into the sand, breathing in the sweet scent of the veld, of platdoring bushes and suring and salie bush in the night. Somewhere the lone najar that lost its way to the edge of the Northern Cape, calls out again before flitting around the tall bloekom family by the ruins of Karla’s father’s childhood home. When he was just a few years older than her, they moved from this –

their winter house deep in the veld – to the summer house, closer to the main road where they live now. Her mother’s parents had built this pale house after Karla was born. It’s always been the one with life inside, while she’s watched her father’s home like a little ruin of an ancient people who’ve come and gone.

Her hands dig into the sand now and she peers into the twilight sky, pretending to see as well as a jackal.

She knows, if she walks into the veld now, she would be able to survive. She would find a taaibos, its lower branches hollowed out by the coarse wool of a dorper sheep and she’d curl up there, the remnants of wool on the branches brushing against her arms and thighs. She’d dig out platdoring roots and suuring to chew on, suck on the salie bush flower for sweetness. She would find a bokhoringbush and eat its tart stalks, maybe the flowers if they’re in season. She’d find the bright red !unnube berries and, though they’d dry out her mouth, she’d enjoy them while she could. They’d have to be rationed of course, until the morning when she could find dew drops on spiderwebs, or in donkie-oor leaves. Then of course the soutslaai would provide her bitter hydration if she were ever desperate enough.

But she wouldn’t be because she knew exactly where the windmills are and the dams and the troughs.

Her grandfather showed her how to make a fire and she knows where to find firestarter rocks – it’s all dependent on luck really and she’s never lucky.

Except here.

Here she’s the luckiest person alive.

Her eyes catch on her father's childhood home, glowing ominously in the looming darkness. Within there are old bibles and beds, farming implements and grain – it had been a museum briefly and she'd often walked around it, wondering how her grandfather had fit five children in the two-bedroom home. She studied the strange chimney and found the shards of porcelain of her grandmother's old plates and cups – her father told her that his sister would grab these shards from their mother and play with them while the boys went into the veld to work. Finding her aunt's 'toys' felt to Karla like finding fossils, artifacts left behind by her ancestors, holding some kind of meaning to who exactly she should be. What her roots would have her be.

The quiet of the night settles around them – her grandparents and herself. They'd turned on the radio for the rugby when the fire began to burn and now it seemed that the whole veld was leaning in to hear. There is no noise beyond us, Karla thinks. Everything else around them lives and breathes, goes about their way and here they are – not belonging but surely belonging here more than anywhere else in the world. Karla sits in the sand seat she's made for herself, organizing shells and twigs into little villages, creating stories for each as Oupa starts to lay meat on the braai and Ouma cheers for the try scored. When Karla's chin touches the sand, face pressed up against her makeshift puppets, she breathes in again and she feels it – that feeling of home.

Third generation, she thinks. She is the third generation to live and breathe on this sand. Her other grandmother walked here, learned how to be a mother here. Her other grandfather farmed here, herded his sheep, taught her father how to catch a sheep, how to heal them, how to run and race and –

Ouma prays over the food as they hold hands and, afterward, she sets out left over peels and crumbs for the duiker who circles the wire fence surrounding their home. They sit by the oil lamp, paging through the newspapers and Vrouekeur while Karla studies her AnimalTalk. They

drink the tea Ouma makes for them and light candles to find their way to the rooms. Eventually when Karla crawls into the mattress bed's cover, at the foot of her grandparents' bed, she relishes the scent of her Ouma's laundry detergent and listens to the sounds. The flutter of a bat's wing. The najar, still persistent. The owl which perches on the roof to hunt.

This is her lullaby as she drifts to sleep and there is warmth in her heart, and she fears for nothing.

Pa drives slowly but they leave home early. He knows Karla is afraid to be late. She is afraid of the eyes sticking to her. The veld girl. The farm girl. The girl who stayed away from school when it rained and the rooipad turned back to klei.

They stop at the security gate and the familiar tense turn of her stomach does not disappoint. Pa shows them his ID – it's Johnny this morning. He is nice and barely looks at it, recognizing her pa and recognizing her and waving them goodbye as he opens the gate. The person that stops behind them is appraised with eyes that do not belong to the Johnny Karla knows – his eyes are distrustful and suspicious and eager to do his job well now. As they approach the town, Karla's eyes are drawn to the veld and the sea peeking out behind it.

“Are they going to rip this up too?”

Her pa doesn't look, he nods. “They're mining. It's what they do.”

“What about the tortoises? And the nests? What about the birds and the graatjies?”

“They'll...they have people who are supposed to look at these things. Conserve what's existing there.”

“What about the bushes, the plants...they’re going to rip it all up, aren’t they?”

Her pa sighs. “Yes. They probably will. But hopefully it’s not for a while. They’re supposed to rehabilitate, help it grow back.”

Karla pouts against the window, staring at the gousblomme sprouting by the side of the road after the rain. “It won’t be the same.”

“It never is,” her pa breathes so soft she thought she imagined it.

At school, she gets in trouble again. Not with teachers. Always with children.

She holds a book firmly before her face and avoids looking at everyone, eyes sometimes flitting down to see where she’s walking. When one of the boys try to trip her she stands stock still, listening to the other kids tease him and laugh while she pictures what The Secret Garden must have looked like if it were in Namakwaland. She imagines taaibosse having grown into thickets over the walls and she’d have to cut through them properly with those big garden sheers Marlin uses on her mother’s kameeldorings. Inside there would be daisies growing wildly between those red March flowers that shoot up from the ground like they’ve been drawn in a kid’s picture.

She waits until they are done laughing, but they take long enough for her to slip around the boy who’d tried to trip her, the book at her side as she hurries around the corner of the classroom. She hates when the teacher locks the doors during breaktime. When she’d asked him to leave it open, he simply shrugged and said that it would be good for her to be outside during breaktime. She settles on the steps of the library, stretching her legs out for them be warmed by the sun. When they dressed for P.T. the other day, Nicky had remarked on how smooth her legs were, how she’d

been shaving for a year now, glancing at Karla's legs. Karla's cheeks turned red in the moment. She hadn't realized they were meant to shave the fine hairs of their legs yet. How did the other girls know when to do what? Karla told her mother about it that same day.

"No one tells you. How are you supposed to know?"

"You don't have to do everything at the same time as everyone else," her mother had remarked.

"But then I'm different," Karla protested. "People notice when you're different. They – they pick on you, they don't like –" She pursed her lips and refused to talk about it anymore.

Here, feeling the sun warming her skin, her stomach flips at the memory.

"Karla! Why are you sitting over here?" Miné approaches her from the soccer field, school shoes hanging from her fingers.

Karla lifts a shoulder, looking down at her book. Miné settles beside her on the step, tugging her white school socks on. She's the best soccer player here – far better than the boys – but soccer isn't a main sport in Kleinzee Primary. Her eyes fall on the book.

"You finished the one from yesterday already?" Miné whistles low.

"Yeah, it didn't end like I thought it would. Kind of disappointing," Karla shrugs.

"That's a shame," Miné tuts. She speaks with her hands when she talks and they flutter now. "I hate it when that happens, y'know? I get into the story and then the ending just isn't !na. Y'know?"

Karla nods and starts asking about her books. During second break she and Miné work in the tuckshop and she usually plays soccer all first break.



“Did you hear about the river?”

Karla shakes her head. The Buffelsriver came down when it rained on Monday. Being able to sleep in after returning from the veld-house was a bonus. The rooipad was too wet to drive on and with the recent drought, they hadn't had rained that strong for a long time. Her pa thought it was a special enough occasion to skip a day of school.

“It's still running strong.” Miné starts wiping the dirt from her shoes. “Some of us walked down to watch it yesterday. Is the road still bad?”

Karla shrugs. “Good enough to come to school.”

Miné grins. She always teases that she's jealous of the farm, though her father is a police officer in town and they live in a nice, big house. “Man, I'd give up the house for the skipping-school part,” she used to say.

“Are you going to the library today?” Miné stretches her strong arms out in front of her, her skin a few shades darker than Karla's – her netball skills guaranteed her a place in the A-team last year. Now there is only one team after many of their friends' had to move away, after work.

“Can't. I have to go to Aunt Susan's place. She's watching me 'till my mom can come.”

Miné wrinkles her nose. “Shame.”

Karla would've been happier in the library, but she knows visiting Aunt Susan is the right thing to do. Aunt Susan gets lonely living alone, in the houses by the pastorie.

The bell rings shrilly and Miné jumps to her feet, reaching out a hand.

Karla lets her pull her up, holding her finger between the pages of her book.

Aunt Susan likes to mutter about anything and everything. When she starts muttering Karla usually nods quietly and whispers in agreement when her milky eyes stick to her too long. Nothing like her grandmother's eyes – deep brown like the steenbokkie she'd raised when its mother was strangled on the wired fences. No, Aunt Susan has river water eyes – like when the Buffels River listened to the Rooipad and became slick once more, growing and expanding until it was called a flood. This flood was years ago. The Buffels River carried the bridge and road to Grootmist away with it, into the ocean. The school warned them in Saal, reminding them that it was not a place for children – the river.

“Why would you go to the river?” Karla whispered to Miné – one of the few girls who speaks to her without teasing her. She shrugged her shoulder, glistening curls bouncing when she turned her head to Karla.

“Many people from the dorp does it. We go and watch the water. Sometimes you can see it running out,” Miné raised her eyebrows.

“But...we're not allowed to go to the river.”

A smirk pulled at Miné's lips. “Have you never been naughty? You sneak away obviously. Well, not sneak, everyone's at work so you just walk over to the river. It's !na. And we're at least five,” she defended half-heartedly.

Karla couldn't understand this.

When her mother finally arrives, Karla sighs with relief. They sit at the kitchen table, fingers wrapped around dainty teacups when Aunt Susan asks Karla to explain something. Karla's

thoughts are still on her books and how easy the words seem to flow on pages and she's not thinking when suddenly the word slips out –

“T’houboe.”

Aunt Susan’s eyes bug out. “What did you say?”

Blush streaks through Karla, burning through her cheeks. The Nama word slipped out easily. A part of her is affronted. Why can’t she use it? Why can’t she say !na and !ouboe and –

“You’re talking like a farmworker. Did you hear what your daughter said? She’s talking like a coloured,” Aunt Susan laughs. Karla breathes deeply, clenching the edge of her shirt, teeth grinding as she tries not to cry. Her mother laughs as well but lighter, not like Aunt Susan who is so shocked it seems she’s forgotten how to form a proper sentence.

Suddenly Karla wished she could just start speaking English to her. Speak very high English just like in her book, just like she gets praised for by the teacher. She wants to speak English and watch Aunt Susan not understand and struggle and fumble and have *her* cheeks burn. Immediately she looks down. She can’t do that. Can’t think that. She can’t be rude. She looks down for the rest of the visit until they sit in the car.

Karla turns to her mother with the golden hair and harsh green eyes and worrying mouth.

“Why is she like that? Why can’t I speak how I want?”

“She just finds it funny, is all.”

“I don’t understand the joke,” Karla mutters and watches the veld flit by until they reach the new site where they are digging all the plants out by their roots.



“Remnants of security boom leading into Kleinzee”

## The Gatekeeper

Johnny Pieterse had only wanted to be one thing when he was young.

A hero.

Specifically, a superhero – which one didn't really matter. On his childhood bed the faces of Ironman, Thor and Captain America stared up at him when he returned from school, their voices action-packed, fists setting off a chain reaction of sound effects.

Kapow! Pew! Kaboom!

His dreams were filled with flying and battles and cheering crowds – all born out of the stories his mother told. It was only later he'd realized that she'd had to ask the family for which she cleaned for sheets – that they were a charity gift – frayed and washed out for a different boy. She must have asked the same boy to tell her stories while she mopped or dusted or looked after that boy. She always said the Ounooi doesn't have time for her boys – not when she's trying to keep everyone fed while the sheep's not on market.

Frayed or not, borrowed or not – the sheets and the stories were all it took to convince Johnny. That's the type of life that's worth living, isn't it? A heroic life.

Fog parts like clouds as Johnny walks. From above it looks like God's tossed a white sheet over the town, like he's been on holiday and needs to keep the dust off his furniture until his untimely return. Tourists find it odd. Johnny finds it significant somehow as he walks down main street and out of the town, to the outskirts where his little office waits, watching for his old friend. This stretch of road is perfectly smooth, the fences running beside it sporting dew drops on their wires. Beyond that, the veld teases shy flowers – daisies and gousflowers Johnny collected for the

farmer's daughter whenever he visited the farm and they played 'wedding'. The bright orange petals mimicked her hair and made the toilet paper brighter in the shade of the kameeldoring trees.

It's a shame the Corporation might be moving operations to these camps. Johnny's semi-decent view (not including the gravel heap they've already started creating) would be lost.

He glances at the two large gates for the tipper trucks, set on the white gravel road the tar crosses over. He wonders if they'll be driving here, if he should have the keys ready or rather wait. Suddenly, the quiet shatters and black smoke churns as the car reverses. The Tazz growls insistently as Ernst rolls down his window, coming to a stop beside Johnny who'd already paused beside the one tall gate.

"You ready?" Ernst's foul morning breath assaults the sea-tinged air. Johnny ignores this and nods, leaning his forearm against the frame of the car, rust fluttering around his sleeve.

"Any trouble?"

Ernst loved the night shift. It's most quiet, he believes, but in fact he's simply been lucky. Sasha had a potential smuggler the other night. Captain Roast had to get out the radar car with its large spotlights which cut right through the evening fog and blind any man – or steenbok – unfortunate enough to be caught close to the perimeter.

"You know how it is. Farmers came through at two."

"Angling club?"

"Yeah. Came from the side."

The other white gravel road, lacking a gate, leads to the famed club with its blue and red tracksuits and the big-boned, bolstered community that wears them.

“A few tourists’ll be coming through.”

Johnny nods again, leaning back. It’s been a lonely shift for Ernst but he needs to sleep it off. Besides, Johnny wanted to get started. Ernst catches the hint and falls back into his seat, scratching around for a different cassette.

“See you around, Johnny.”

“Yeah.” *At ten we’ll pass by each other on the way home.* Ernst will head to the Golf Club where he’ll join the mining crew for their customary drinks. Johnny doesn’t drink. Johnny’s brother drinks. They don’t speak anymore.

The first thing he does is tidy up. Ernst is messy and he does not mind leaving his Bar One wrappers and Powerade bottles for Johnny to find. Soon enough the alarm goes off, alerting him to an approaching car as the sensors pick up the bakkie approaching.

Johnny nods a hello to the man behind the wheel, asking for ID before pulling out his scanner and scanning the booklet. The light blinks green and he makes his way to the metal pole which swings up easily with a press of Johnny’s palm. He waves as the man passes by.

This happens a few times in the morning, but today the afternoon seems destined to be the busiest time of the day. He calls his wife from the office phone and reminds her that the school is coming out earlier today because it’s civvie-day. She asks him what he’d like to eat. They’ve recently moved up to C-band and his wife cannot stop fawning about the kitchen and the garden.

When he got home he’d ask his daughter about school, about what that posh English teacher taught her to say. Bilingual schools have been here since the very beginning, before it was done anywhere else probably, Johnny thinks. And it works. Zandra can speak Afrikaans and English



equally well and does so eagerly, even when she switches her blue school uniform and slicked back hair for wild curls, shorts and sloffies. When Johnny was younger, he'd listen to English radio stations to improve his English, but when he eventually went to school, it was in Kommagas. If Zandra had been born back then, she would have had to go to Zonderberg (Coloured) School. Kleinzee was one of the first to desegregate schools too – combining Zonderberg and Kleinzee Private School, along with the bilingual thing. If only they'd lived there, he used to think.

And now Zandra doesn't have to think that.

Johnny settles back in his seat and pulls up the blinds of the window beside his to give himself a long view of the pale strip of blue. Johnny knows kids who've never seen the ocean in their lives – and here he looks at it every day. Zandra's been badgering him to go to the beach all week, maybe this weekend –

Johnny leans forward, grabbing his temples with his fore-and middle fingers. Pain shoots through his skull. It's been happening since he was a teenager, these migraines that pelt him in small bursts throughout the day. He blinks hard when the alarm goes off again and pushes his chair back to stand, but as he gets to his feet, suddenly vibrations ripple through the room. Dust cascades from the roof as the brackets and nails start to pop. A moment later the floor lurches, cracking beneath his feet. Johnny stays absolutely still as the tiles crack and snap into splinters. The ocean is blurred behind the window, which sports tiny lines as the pressure builds and the room slips from Johnny's reach, crumbling below his feet until he loses his balance and –

Johnny lifts his head, palms pressed on the floor, intact. No cracks. No tear in the earth. No chaos. Instead, Johnny scowls at the Powerade bottle, leaking poisonous looking blue liquid on the floor under the desk. He pushes himself to his feet when a car horn honks, the alarm still



squealing. He runs outside with his scanner and smiles absentmindedly at the couple in the front seat, visitors who'd organized the customary two months beforehand to be here for the sister/sister-in-law's birth-date. He wishes them good luck and waves them through.

It's not about luck at all, Johnny thinks as he lowers the metal pole again. The medical care in Kleinzee rivals Springbok's. In some respects. A few weeks ago, a family had come along in the middle of the night, during one of the few stormy nights he'd seen in this town. Their car was streaked with red clay, the girl in the front seat bleeding from her chest, the father's face scratched to pieces. They'd been in a car accident, left his son to watch over the mother, who was still immobile after falling from the open window. It was a major accident. Kleinzee's emergency services were sent out and everyone except the mother was saved. There's only so much they could do.

Secretly, Johnny had wanted to shake his head at the father. Why would you be driving on that road while it was raining? At night? Why drive *fast*? They weren't locals, not completely. The mother was from Okiep but the father hailed from Cape Town and clearly didn't expect the mother's warnings to mean anything.

In the end it meant her life.

And his. He lost his kids to the in-laws. Unfit apparently. That's the word around town anyways.

The alarm screeches again and he turns to face the red bakkie approaching. He squints, the air shimmering before his eyes, and suddenly a blast of heat strikes him. Johnny stumbles back, hitting his thigh against the pole, the heel of his hand pressing against his left temple where the pain once again ricocheted. The heat intensified as the bakkie approached until, finally, the air

melted around him and gave way to a wall of flames, red and orange and yellow licking at the sky, the office crackling as the flames ate away at the wood. The explosion as the electric lines were engulfed. Johnny's skin bubbled on his hand, the scanner melting into his palm when his knees finally hit the tar, the legs of his pants set alight as – suddenly – he looked up and saw the last of the blue sky disappear.

“Hey! Johnny, you daydreaming again?”

Johnny blinks.

Johan Bezuidenhout grins from behind the wheel of the bakkie when Johnny finally realizes that the sky is still blue, that there isn't even a cloud in the sky. He rushes forward, momentarily smiling as he scans Johan's card.

“You alright, Johnny?” Johan asks, voice hinting at concern. It's true, Johnny's mother saw Johan more than she ever saw Johnny, but whenever Johnny visited on the farm, Johan always shared, always played with him and made him join in on whatever flight of fancy his imagination was taking him on. Now, burly and suntanned, scars running up and down his arms from farm work, you'd hardly say Johan used to make up fantasy stories.

“Ja, alright. Just, uh, long day.”

“You should stay out of this sun, hey? Don't want to burn. It's going to be a scorcher today, that's what the radio said.” Johan peers up, out of his window, narrowing his eyes at the sun.

But they both knew he wouldn't be able to control the weather like he pretended to when they were children.

“I’m going to head in now,” Johnny chuckled, good-natured, before turning toward the gate. When Johan was on the other side and the boom lowered, the bakkie stopped and Johan leaned out again as Johnny was walking to the office.

“Hey, Johnny! How’s Frida?”

“Alright, still recovering,” Johnny called. She’d been sick for a few weeks now, coughing incessantly. Johan and his wife had sent her to the hospital in Springbok to get answers and they were still waiting for tests.

“Tell her she’s welcome back as soon as she’s feeling well again, hey?”

Johnny nods and holds up his hand in a wave as Johan drives away. He’d see him this weekend again for a game of cricket. Another thing he’d always admired about Kleinzee – clubs. For every sport imaginable. His wife was even taking pottery with Zandra who had to do it for a class project. She’s thinking about art classes too. Zandra is struggling to decide between music classes – piano – or ballet. Johnny would have done karate if he’d had the time.

After the cricket there’ll be a dance no doubt, but Zandra could stay home alone for Saturday night. Maybe invite a schoolfriend. It’s safe enough. Johnny holds onto the rail as he carefully climbs the steps to the office. He pushes the door open and...

Exactly as he left it.

He wonders if his wife will want to go to church this weekend. They have a choice of over seven, last time he counted. Churches for most every religion. In addition to karate, he could try out any faith he’d like. He smiles to himself as he switches on the kettle and leans his hands against the desk to watch the ocean again.

That's the thing about these towns. They want you as happy as possible, as comfortable as possible. After all, living in the middle of nowhere for someone from Johannesburg must be a big sacrifice. Might as well make a mug, catch a fish and do some pirouettes while you're at it.

At least they've got equal opportunity this time around.

He closes his eyes, remembering the flames from outside. The temperature in the office isn't too kind either. With the back of hand he wipes at the sweat running down his temple.

The first time he had these episodes, he blacked out each time. He writhed on the floor. He foamed at the mouth. His mother was beside herself. She thought it was drugs, that her sweet boy had grown up to be a teenager who made bad decisions. But Johnny was clean, much to her relief and frustration. Drugs would have been *an* explanation whereas now, they had none.

They never got one either.

Psychiatrists are far and few in-between here, not to mention expensive. "Besides", Frida Pieterse had said, "you don't want the whole Namaqualand to know your business." It ended up being only Johnny's business as he started to control it. At fourteen he wasn't the little boy who made up stories for his bedsheets' characters anymore. But he couldn't help remembering that boy when the world kept ending for him while he was left helpless.

Superheroes can always do inhuman things. They call down thunder or break the earth into pieces. They fly. They breathe underwater. When Johnny had his migraines, he was even more convinced that's what he was meant to be. Since he fell off the roof when he was seven, he knew his powers wouldn't be the conventional kind. He definitely didn't expect them to be revealed during homeroom in grade eight. He also had hoped they would be a little more straightforward.

Johnny taught himself to minimize the effects of his powers, limiting them to scalding pain and freakishly real ‘dreams’ while he was wide-awake. Sometimes he remained standing, and sometimes he got carried away with it all. Once, his wife found him in the kitchen, fighting off a ‘rabid dog’ with a butcher’s knife. The rabid dogs tended to be thin air.

Pew-wew-wew-wew-wew. The siren screeches again.

Johnny drags himself from the office, only jogging once he spots the cars – one leaving Kleinzee, the other entering. He stops at the leaving side first, opening the boom without hesitation. Anyone can leave. Not anyone can enter.

When he reaches the other car and checks their ID, he knows the scanner’s light will be red. He doesn’t recognize the name or ID number from the computer’s scheduled lists.

“Sorry, Sir, you can’t enter. Did you organize with the office?”

The gentleman scowls. A city man. It’s plain from the car model, the shiny cellphone in the cupholder. The techno-music from the stereo. The sunglasses he still hasn’t removed.

The city man shakes his arm to check his wrist for the time. The watch’s gold flashes in Johnny’s eyes but he keeps his stare directly on the man.

“I didn’t know I had to organize. Can’t I just drive through?”

“Unfortunately not, Sir.”

“This is rubbish, man. I just need to get to the other side.”

“You’ll have to go around, Sir. Or call Security and organize it with them.”

The man swears and shakes his head. His window shuts while he's still in the process of turning around. The car shines in the distance before, in a blink, it disappears.

The heat beats into Johnny, sweat dripping from his upper lip to his lower. He licks the droplet away, the salt of it making his eyes rise back to the pale white streaks dancing on the blue horizon. Yes, Zandra would get the beach on Sunday.

Johnny rubs the back of his neck and approaches the steps again, freezing when a cool breeze suddenly tickles the back of his head. He turns around, squinting at the ocean before heading back into the office to pour the, now boiling, water into his pre-prepared coffee mug.

His mother used to remind him that they were of this place. When you're of a place, there's a different connection, she used to say. You know this place. It will speak to you. If you listen.

These days, every time there's an episode all he can think about is warnings. The world is ending, he used to scream when it first happened, but it never really ended, did it? And here, in Kleinzee, the episodes are just getting more frequent as time wears on, but always with the same message. The world ends for him and him alone.

And there is a silent shouting.

johnny, johnny wake up. something is changing and you don't want to be here when it does.

When the waves come, they press against the window and for less than five seconds Johnny watches the water curl against the glass. Then it shatters and the room fills up. For Johnny it feels

slow. He sees the waves knock over his cup, the dark coffee being swallowed up by saltwater. He sees the wires spark and die when they're wrenched apart. He sees the waves all at once, a beast foaming at the mouth as it bucks Johnny on its back, pushing him against the roof until the whole office explodes into splinters dancing in a deluge and Johnny himself is nothing but a thing floating.

And finally sinking.

Until he is on the floor where he forces his eyes open to the stinging salt water.

The Powerade bottle is still in place. The blue liquid a tiny spill. Johnny forces himself to blink and gasps for breath, coughing until he feels this morning's Jungle Bar burning the back of his throat. He pulls the dustbin closer and retches, fist supporting his forehead lest he knock into the sharp edge of the bin. When the last of his breakfast leaves him, Johnny spits, lifting his head slowly. Tears itch on his cheeks when he reaches up for a tissue, wiping it over his mouth, forehead, even against his neck.

Suddenly a horn honk, a deep honking that can only be from the De Beers trucks. A moment before he gets to his feet, he grabs the Powerade bottle and stuffs it into the bin, leaving it to drift in his sick as he heads out to the gates within the fence. He opens them, suddenly fatigued, and waves the driver through. As the truck passes, trickles of gravel and rock fall from the bed of the truck, leaving white streaks across the tar.

Johnny stands by the open gate, watching the truck enter the veld and maneuvering to dump the excess gravel on the growing heap. As rock hits rock and a cloud of dust lifts into the air like a mushroom cloud, Johnny feels a sharp pain in his temple again, but he does not reach for the pain again. He feels the twist of his stomach that comes with an episode – his curse as a hero to-

be. But as Johnny waits for the next vision to commence, and the time passes, and no vision comes...He keeps watching the sand lift and expand in an explosion before drifting down, onto the green, green plants of the veld.

Only when the dust settles, does Johnny realize.

This time, the disaster was quiet.





*KLEIN ZEE. Excavating Eastern Face Haulage*  
17-4-30

“KLEINZEE. Excavating Eastern Face Haulage 17-4-30”

## Fired

“We can’t keep doing this.”

There it is. The words he’s been dreading most of his life. The words signaling the end – the end of everything he’s held dear for the past thirty years.

You’d think their effect would have worn off after hearing his ex-wife scream them from across the room.

“There must be something we can do.”

His manager, and arguably his oldest friend, shakes his head wearily.

“They’ve run the numbers, Tom. It’s just not profitable to keep going in this area.”

His mind scrambles. Sure, a renowned family like the Oppenheimers didn’t just wake up, rich and ready to waste money. But he can’t help but think of Johnny and his wife, the teller at the grocery store, the electricians and boilermakers, the secretaries, mechanics – the miners.

What about them? What will they do?

‘Hell, what will *I* do?’

“But there are still diamonds?” Tom finally asks. The sun has started to go down, making the beams of light criss-cross through the blinds and right into his eyes. He narrows them to make out the pursed lines of Hein’s lips before he shrugs.

“There will always be diamonds, Tom. But we’re not picking them up off the ground.”

Tom shakes his head. They haven't for years – those were mere folklore tales of prospecting now – back when Jack stumbled upon a shiny pebble and Merensky was babbling about oysters.

“So, that's it? It's all over?” Tom sinks into the chair across from Hein's desk, rubbing the scruff on his jaw. Marlene would have nagged him to shave but he liked that he was the only member of his team letting his beard grow out. “What about us?”

“Well, it's not happening right now, we just...we realized these lay-offs are going to be on a larger scale if we want to – You'll get a good severance. Eventually. But, like I said, not right now. Don't go...screaming it from the Rec Club's roof or anything.”

He shakes his head. Of course, they would. De Beers takes care of its people. His dad still lives off his pension alone. After Marlene left, his dad moved into the two-bedroom place – to give him some semblance of company. For *my* benefit, Tom thinks. But now –

“Well, what about the town?”

“We're considering demolition.”

“Of the town?” he gasped.

“Considering. Either demolish the entire landscape and let nature take its course or...leave it here.”

*Like a relic. Like the village of Pripyat. Like the fences of a concentration camp. Like the obelisks in Europe.*

“If you demolish,” Tom starts. “...it's not for certain that nature will take *any* course. There could be...nothing here for years. Erosion and the ecological –”

“Yes, yes. Didn’t you hear me? I said ‘considering’.” Hein leans back in his chair, tapping his pen against the desktop. How many times has Tom walked in here to drink coffee, discuss renovations, expansions, unhappiness among the workers? Hein has always had the answers. Now, all he has was a tired warning.

Tom shakes his head again.

“Well, there is talk. We’re thinking...there’s potential for a prison here. We’re negotiating a deal but...who knows if it’ll work? They’d have to tar the roads and...but we’re willing to do it. If it means the town can still...exist.”

He wonders if it has anything to do with the town or if it’s more about the legacy they were leaving behind.

“Alright then. That’s...an option. Will the town...is there enough here to sustain people? If they were to stay behind?”

“Depends, Tom. There’s a lot up in the air right now. I just thought I’d give you the courtesy of a, ah, fair shot. Start saving up. For in case. Maybe...scale down on those cigarettes.”

“My father’s pension –”

“Oh, no, he’s fine.” Hein waves a non-committal hand. “Worked the hours, gets the pay and all that.” Hein looks from the papers on his desk back to Tom. “It’s that time. Are you going home for lunch?”

“Yeah.” Tom hesitates. “I think I should.”

At the door he pauses, taking one last look at the office, the photos lining the wall in their pretty dark, wood frames, the blinds freshly dusted, carpet still holding the prints of Tom's shoes as he got up to leave. As he exits the building, he is still thinking about those footprints.

Marlene took just about everything.

Well, not everything really. She took the small things Tom never really thought about. She took those curtains that filled up all their windows, the same ones he got so annoyed with whenever he tried to wrench them closed in the mornings. She took all her gardening crap. She loved gardening. You could barely walk in their garden without stepping on one of Jason's plastic action figures, Allison's tennis balls or Marlene's crap. Spades and shovels, tiny spades and tiny shovels, pots, clay pots, vases, seed packets – forgotten after she ran inside to answer a ringing phone. She took the phone calls too. Turns out, they were always for her. No one really called for Tom. So, the shrill scream of the telephone stayed away too, choosing Marlene in the divorce, only visiting once and again for Tom's father or the children when he took them for a weekend.

Tom stands outside the house, peering up at the steps, the door, freshly painted. In fact, he'd had the whole house repainted inside. Thought it would look better – new start. No stray crayon lines where Jason had discovered his sister's stationary and decided to brighten up Marlene's eggshell walls. No smear of sneaker soles where someone had leaned back, one foot propped up against the wall after netball practice. No red stains of dye when Marlene had tried getting her flowers to take to a different colour. An experiment which turned out to leave their flowerbed pink, dotted with blue-looking bruises in places hard to explain to visitors without Marlene's garden-chatter to back him up.

It looks as good as new now. Unlived in, really. Without Marlene's flowers – she'd taken a good amount of them with her to the new place a few blocks over, and Tom didn't have the heart to keep the rest alive – the garden seemed bare, but the grass was green and trimmed. The house gleamed a brilliant, clean white, the door calling out for someone to knock on it. Or did the paint still look a bit wet? Oh dear, Tom thought.

The only thing that really bothered Tom were those windows. Lonely windows, really. He'd have to ask his father about those old curtains he had boxed up. Curtains he hadn't liked to look at since Tom's mother passed away.

Finally, the sun beating down on his back, the breeze from the sea cutting at his arms, he walks up and enters his home, heading immediately to the kitchen. He'd left his lunch, ready in the fridge – but, pausing before the humming beast, his eyes catch the photographs.

While Marlene took most everything, his father brought everything with him. Things that fill the space physically, yet somehow still left it wanting. For example, the photographs from 19- whatever, miners bareback in trenches, a man looking out over them in sepia-toned approval.

*'We were pioneers, son.'*

That's what his father told him when he talked about starting out at De Beers. All those old stories about landing somewhere, bursting with potential and going at the land with all you've got – the raw pursuit of a better life.

Was it worth it? He wonders. The colonialists did the same, didn't they? Landed some place, took what they needed, made something, built something and...left.

What am I leaving behind? He wonders, glancing at the notices and newspaper clippings and reminders dotting the fridge with pale grey magnets. Dentist appointments. Prostate checks. The day the department won the cricket match. An invitation to a colleague's wedding. A drawing and photograph of his children.

His father's picture of the miners who started it all. Men whose names he doesn't know and probably never will.

*Who would even know I was here?*

Tom sighs, rubbing his forehead with a closed fist before pulling open the fridge. On top of his lunch, neatly wrapped, a note has been taped.

*Went for cigarettes.*

Tom suddenly realizes that if anyone can understand his emotions about the mine closing, losing the town, possibly having to move and start over somewhere – it is going to be his father. The very man whose legacy he was so eager to follow up at De Beers.

The fridge door is barely shut on the note when Tom is out the front door.

Music is always cheerful in the Spar.

It's one of the largest shops in the area, complete with a clothes and fabric section, enormous bakery, and finally the butchery with its fresh meats and biltong racks. Tom enters the Spar, the breadcutter's whirring suddenly cut off before starting back up again, the thick, warm scent of bread enveloping him. Tom barely glances at the tills before powering toward the counter where the cigarettes are sold, alongside brightly coloured ice-creams in their display case. Jason

always whined about getting a blue ice-cream, every time he came along to Spar. When Tom thinks of all the solo trips Marlene had to do with children when shopping, dragging Jason past these ice-creams...

Or maybe she bought him one every time. He never thought to ask, really.

Tom waits patiently for the clerk to come back around from the staff section at the back, having just seen him move through the door, leaving it open. The tobacco smells sweet from where Tom is standing. He checks the clock above the counter, but the longer he looks, he realizes it's frozen at 12:30. Tom looks over his shoulder at the shoppers, loading and unloading their trolleys, chattering with the clerks – each station busy. He sighs audibly. His father might have bought cigarettes only to be lured to the cold meats section – Tom did use the last of the ham on his lunch – but he could be anywhere and the store is so large... Best to wait for him here, Tom thinks. He'll have to come out sometime, and he'll spot Tom immediately with the orange-lined jacket he'd pulled on before leaving. Another ten minutes go past before Tom becomes fidgety. He's missing lunch entirely. He needs to get home, eat, talk to his father tonight. But something in his gut tells him to stay put. He'll be right out.

The song changes four times, each time a happier end to the melody before the next one starts up. Finally, Tom shakes his arm to get his watch to slide down to his wrist. He holds it up to check the time, inadvertently flashing its polished silver for any of the passing shoppers to see.

“That's odd,” he mutters, tapping the glass with his finger. He looks up to the clock behind the counter again. 12:30. He strains to hear, to listen past the chatter and music, the roll of the trolley's wheels, the rustle of plastic bags.

All the clocks are quiet.



It's a funny thing, noticing something that isn't supposed to be noticeable. Seeing a clock, unmoving, it's always a surprise. But for Tom, hearing no ticking or tocking, he couldn't deny an unfathomable fear suddenly taking over his entire body. He freezes, a lump building in his throat, and remembers this feeling as clearly as if it were yesterday.

He'd been in this same Spar, this same spot, looking for his mother among the shoppers paying for their groceries, eyes boring into each of them so hard, willing them to be her. He'd checked outside and hadn't seen her car. He was sure she'd left him behind, finally. Left him for someone else to take home. Left him all alone –

Someone clears their throat. Tom spins around to see –

Well, nothing. The tellers and their tills, their counters are all gone. The quiet of the clocks has extended to the whole world, apparently. No chatter. No tills dinging. No trolley wheels or bread cutting or plastic bags. The wood pillars still support the roof but between them a few tables are set out with salt and pepper and small sugar packets. His father sits at one of these tables, tapping his sugar into a take-away cup.

*Kleinzee doesn't have take-away coffee.*

It's the first thing that comes to mind, but not nearly the most important. He whips around to call for the clerk –

But there is no movement from the staff entrance. The door is shut, the ice-cream display case empty. The cigarettes have disappeared.

“They're bad for us, y'know?”

“You’re the one that keeps buying them,” Tom snaps, turning around to his father. He seems younger, his wrinkles less pronounced. But he has the same smile as always when he beckons for him to take the seat beside him. In his family, most men liked to sit across from one another, but Tom’s father always wanted him right by his side. As close as possible. Like he was afraid Tom would slip away if he sat a meter away.

“They’re closing shop,” Tom finally sighs, unable to take the weight of the silence between them. His father nods slowly, bottom lip pushed out, stirring the coffee slowly with a plastic stick.

“I know, son. I’m aware.”

“How?” Tom leans back in his seat. “How would you know? Hein just told me and they haven’t disclosed –”

“I know.” His father raises his brows pointedly before taking a small sip from the steaming cup.

“Well.” Tom checks his watch again but its arms are still immobile. Tapping the glass, he pulls out his phone from his pocket, but the screen remains black even after he presses the buttons. “Dad, they’re thinking of scrapping the town. Bulldozing. Breaking it all down.”

His father seems unfazed when he places the cup back on the table. “Oh, they won’t do that. Then there will be nothing left of them.”

“There won’t be anything anyways. Not if they withdraw.”

“Not true.” His father wags his finger before waving it at the interior of the Spar. “This will all still be here. People will come here. Enjoy Decembers close to the ocean. Small town

hospitality. They will drive through sometimes, wonder what happened here. De Beers won't scrap it all, son. No one wants to leave nothing behind."

Tom thinks back to the house, the lonely windows and the garden, devoid of Marlene's flowers and the children's toys. They left barely anything behind – drawings on the fridge, a vase, a clay flowerpot created in pottery class – and yet, Tom cannot help but think of them.

They're always there.

Suddenly, a high-pitched yell echoes across the empty Spar. Tom peers between the wood pillars. The place is hardly recognizable without all the shelves stocked, the tellers, the cold-section, the butchery –

A trolley whizzes by them. Then suddenly another one... this time, a little girl stands on the edge below the handle, riding the trolley just as Tom used to – right before his mother smacked him and ordered him out the store. The little girl's hair streams behind her, strawberry blonde just like –

"Alison!" Tom jumps to his feet but his father grabs his shoulder.

"Sit down, Tommy, let her have her fun."

Tom watches, stupefied, as his daughter glides across the Spar on the back of the trolley, towards the empty butchery where she always grabbed multiple Dirkies, displayed beside the cheese and biltong. A little boy runs after her, the mother following. Marlene. Tom leans over the table, trying to catch her eye, but she's studying her grocery list, making notes with a pen when a man approaches her, leaving the cold meats section, bumping into her. He smiles, tilting his head before sticking out his hand.

“Bastard,” Tom mutters when he leans back in the chair. Marlene’s blush runs from her cheeks down to her neck, down to the tiny diamond in the silver rose he got her for Alison’s birth.

His father reaches into his pocket and unfolds a neat rectangle of paper, eventually shaking out his De Beers-paper, navy blue striking against the white, smiling faces of his colleagues on the front page. His colleagues. *His*, Tom realizes. His father’s colleagues. How old was this paper? –

“You did try to work it out as best you could, son,” his father shrugs, studying the page. “No use pondering on things you can’t change.”

“Were you rummaging through your old things, Dad?”

His father doesn’t look up from his paper, “Hm?”

Tom taps his fingers on the tabletop. “Did you get the cigarettes?”

His hand feels around in the inside pocket of his jacket, pulling out the pack of cigs. He drops it on the table but besides the thunk of cardboard, a few small plinks seem to echo across the room. Tommy stares at the diamonds, dropped like beads beside the cigarettes.

“Cancerous, son. That’s what it is.”

*I am hallucinating*, Tom reminds himself. *This will be over soon. It’s a mental break. Slight one. Must be.* He reaches for the cigarettes, pulling out one before replacing it back in the box.

“What now?”

“Can’t smoke inside. Can I?”

His father doesn’t answer the question at first. Instead, he scowls at the paper, snorting before folding it up and sticking it back in his pocket.

“I don’t know, Tommy. Can you? Big man with the big watch.”

Tom follows his father’s gaze to his watch, engraved his name and the symbol of a diamond below. A gift. Twenty years at a company will get you that. The arms are still not moving.

“Time is broken. Something you need to learn sooner rather than later.” His father glances at the spot where Marlene was standing earlier. “It’s all broken here, Tommy. We’re walking around in history, pretending it’s the present and not the future.”

“Not if they bulldoze the town. Or build that prison. It’ll probably change then.”

“Nah.” His father folds his arms on the table, leaning toward Tom. “Too expensive to pave that road of yours.”

“We were going to pave it. Years ago, but –”

“But if you did, your miners would have had to get their own transport. Right?” His father raises a brow and Tom has to stop himself from shrinking. “With the road still red, they get picked up by your company buses. Who wouldn’t choose that?”

“It means nothing now. If we’d paved it, maybe...maybe they’d all keep their jobs or get new jobs or...”

“No use. No use worrying about ‘ifs’, Tommy.”

Tom picks up his father’s coffee cup but it’s empty, not a drop left. He taps his fingers against the soft cardboard exterior, the silence overwhelming in this place that used to be so loud.

“How are you so sure that they won’t build the prison? What if we pave the road?”

“Well, that was all just an excuse, wasn’t it?” His father waves an unworried hand. “See how desperate you all are. And you are, right? But they’re the ones holding the cards. If they don’t want to do it here,” he lifts a shoulder. “They want it in the Western Cape. Everything is easy there, shiny and bright. Here...” His father picks up his diamonds, one by one, holding them in his palm.

“Pioneers,” Tom murmurs, watching them catch the light like stars. Stars in the palm of his father’s hand.

“All good and well, Tommy. The question is...once all that pioneering is done and the world is a different place...who is going to fix what we left broke? It’s all changed and different but nothing’s ever good enough. Not for long.” He closes his fist on the diamonds.

Suddenly his father perks up, a smile stretching his cheeks.

“Hannah!” His father rises, starting toward the exit where the light is burning so bright that Tommy is afraid his retinas will give out.

“Mother?” Tommy asks, turning to stand as well, but there’s no-one behind him, only the light and his father moving toward it like a bullet train, confident and sure. “Dad, wait!” Tommy calls, jogging behind him. In the last meter his father turns around, grabbing Tom by the shoulders.

“You can’t come with me, Tommy. Sometimes you’ve got to do it alone. Sometimes you’re the only one. Alright?”

“The only one to what? What are you talking about?” Tom splutters, the light seemingly burning through his father.

“You know what’s about to happen, son. You’re a pioneer too. Right? There’s a club of us in the next life and we’re all going to be talking about what we did. Make sure you have a good story. Alright?” His father grabs his hand and presses his own palm against it.

Tom only barely feels the diamonds grace his palm, the base of his fingers, his wrist, when he blinks.

And it’s all over.

The fridge is beeping. It’s been open too long.

Tom stares at his lunch, wrapped in plastic. No note, no tape holding it all together. He shuts the fridge, shivering when the cold air is gone and looks for the photo on the belly of the fridge. With one finger, he touches the sepia miners, all in a row, lifting picks, digging picks into the ground, reaching a hand up to wipe their brows. He touches the manager in his worn shirt and wrinkled forehead. Pioneers, he thinks again.

“Dad?” he calls. No answer. He walks, slowly this time, searching for his father in each of these rooms. When he finally finds him, he walks to the phone, dials the number and listens to the dial-tone. Strange, he thinks as he waits for an answer.

Somewhere else a phone is calling out for an answer, but this time it is not for Marlene. Not for Tom. Or his father. The phone is smooth and cold against his hand. The smell of paint stings his nose when he breathes, but Tom continues breathing this way. The phone keeps ringing, and in that ringing, Tom hears all the words shared about coming and leaving, marriage and divorce, about birth and legacy. He stares at the photo of the miners pioneering their way through

bedrock. Suddenly he feels like that manager, a part of something while being apart. Watching as things happened around him.

This time Tom does not have to wonder who will answer.



# A Diamond is Forever



“A foggy afternoon in Kleinzee”

## The Cat Lady

“You can’t sit in the dark all day. It’s not good for you.”

“Yeah, Mum, it’s going to kill you – all this darkness.”

Her daughter wrenches at the drapes, squinting at the window. Dust floats in air currents around her, as if she too has been untouched for months, barely stirring from her office in Jo’burg until now. Until today. Her scowl deepens.

“Doesn’t help much, does it? Honestly, how do you live in this place, Mother? It looks like a ghost town.”

Her son plops into the chair beside her, arm stretching at the back of the couch. “Come now, Sussie. Just because you scare easily doesn’t mean a bit of fog calls for paranoia.” His eyes scan the haphazardly piled books strewn across the room. “Besides, you don’t have to look outside for a ghost story. Miss Havisham has a nice collection.” His hand waves at the collections of books stacked in the room and smiles teasingly at his mother, who keeps her eyes forward.

He waits for his mother’s sharp response. Her usual counter-examples and defence of the mad hag in her mansion. But these are not his mother’s after-school education sessions, this is not a quick weekend visit before returning to university on the Intercap, reading his prescribed literature on a tiny seat. No, this is the home in which he grew up, the room where his father took his last breath. And it seems his mother is refusing to speak, refusing to risk breathing the old air tinged with death and currently escaping by his sister’s meddling hands.

Truthfully, he barely hid his horror when stepping across the threshold. When he'd spent the last months of the previous year here, cracking jokes for his father and running out to buy bread and milk whenever the Muse abandoned him, his mother had been cleaning. Scrubbing, dusting, organizing and re-organizing the books into piles meant for shelves her husband had yet to build. His father, in turn, would quietly take his medication, slipping white pills over cracked lips, watching the relentless monotony of tennis balls being smacked to and fro on television screen. When Zander could persuade his father to indulge in a BBC program, they would laugh together, commenting on the Brits' strange ways, his father recounting their time as caretakers in London, before they thought to settle down somewhere quiet and resort to a mundane life – resembling what they've read about in so many novels. When it seemed South Africa was starting to calm down, they'd returned, excited for what the transition might bring. The Corporation afforded their mother with a post and, naturally, a home. Mother took up her job in the private school and Father began creating furniture for all likes of GMs and labourers, according to strict requirements – nothing that couldn't be X-rayed, nothing that could hide a shiny rock perchance.

Since coming back here, all his mother had done was clean.

It had made Zander sick at some point, the stench of bleach biting even into his dreams. The only escape lay outside, where freshly-mown grass and the scent of the ocean mingled in the late night mist that shrouded the town in one swift breeze.

Caren cracks open the window, wincing for the squeal of its old joints. She ties back the drapes with a faded gold cord, fraying at the edges, and peers outside, trying once again to see through the mist. What a miserable place to find yourself in, she thought. What a miserable place

to die in. Immediately guilt creeps back into her mind but she smacks it back with determined clench of her jaw and turns to survey the rest of the room.

Books. Bloody books all over the damned place.

No wonder Zander crept home to hide in this forsaken hole. He'd disguised it as 'writer's block' and 'an irrevocable need to see his father' and to 'experience the nostalgic call of home' –

Really, it was an excuse to single out the books he'd be poaching from Father's collection, most likely to sell to buyers. Collecting had become compulsive for Father after the first few months here. He blamed it on addiction, but Caren had her own theory. Sitting here, surrounded by security posts and fences, how could you not seek out the outside world?

What would Zander use the money for? Probably those expensive filter cigarettes he waves around when he's not in their parents' presence. Couldn't let them see him smoking – oh no – then his precious reputation would be tarnished. Not that it's had any effect on him before. On the dining table a puzzle is laid out, half-finished like everything else in this place. It's of some grand, English scene with carriages and meadows and families picnicking – probably discussing the weather and marriage proposals under their parasols. Caren had tried to pack it away but Zander had caught her hands, nodding to Mother before shaking his head. They'd started it while he'd come to visit, while she was overseas for her interviews. Apparently that means it was not to be removed for the foreseeable future.

Luckily there's so much more than a puzzle to address.

Caren rushes through the house, picking up fabric as she goes, ignoring scuttling spiders between book stacks. The first load of laundry barely starts turning when she grabs the Handy Andy from under the cupboard and the stained remnants of a dishcloth. In the living room her

brother jabbers, as he does, speaking of nonsense only to fill the air with anything other than quiet. Caren sets to work on the kitchen, peeling grime back from the counters, re-washing dishes, removing sun-stained curtains and pushing open windows. In the corner, by the door, bowls are littered – filled with pellets and water, dried milk.

Caren stops in her tracks. Last she'd heard, from Zander no less, their father's beloved cat had died, following his master into the grave.

Caren had never much liked cats. She'd had a dog when she was little but it had been run over by a car while she was at school. Every other pet seemed to want to get away from her. Fish died in droves. Guinea pigs ran for the yard. Parakeets fled into the clouds. Father's cat moved in before Caren went to varsity, just as Zander started his private school education in Mother's primary school. He'd insisted on being a housecat, squeezing himself through the most impossible of spaces for a lick of warmth, a hope of milk, a moment of shredding toilet paper. Not that their father minded. He cherished that cat for twenty-three years, far beyond a normal cat's lifespan. Like everything here, he lasted far too long.

"Mom!" she yells. Zander's laughter is warm in the other room but, surrounded by the dense, cloying whiteness that crowds the windows, it almost sounds callous. She tosses the rag in the gurgling basin, replacing the bleach before approaching the dust room.

"Mom."

Eleanor does not move. Once again.

"Are you feeding strays? Mom? You can't just –"

"Let her feed the strays, Care. It's not like –"

“She’s living off a pension, Zander.”

“A good pension –”

“Enough to feed a menagerie of cats?”

“Clowder.”

Caren’s eyebrows shoot up, fists clenched at her sides. “What?”

“It’s a clowder of cats –”

“Zander, you entitled, little –”

“Caren. Let her have the bloody cats.”

“They’ll eat her out of her house!”

“It’s her house.”

Silence reigns instantaneously. Even their mother’s lips purse. It was their father who first made mention of the Corporation’s withdrawal from the town. They waited to hear what exactly would become of them – their mother still had her position in the school, but the houses, the town – everything – belonged to the Corporation. Their father wanted nothing more than to remain in the scenic safety offered here. When the town was stripped of security guards and executives, when the mining vehicles were bid on and sold – that’s when the town was declared open game. Their father didn’t hesitate when buying the house, finally, after living in it for over twenty years.

The house was here, theirs, their mother’s.

And they were in it. Stuck. Trapped. Home.

Her children glance between her and each other, begging for support in their feat. They'd barely been here for an entire day and she was already eager for them to get out. Her daughter, with her fine nose and fiery eyes is first to chew over Zander's words.

"For now," she bites.

Zander, her sweet boy, opens his mouth with ready words and more anger than she ever wanted for him.

"Bitch."

"Coward."

She doesn't listen to the strings of outrage spanning between them. She turned her head to the window, light glinting on her thriving garden, kept alive merely by her hands, carrying buckets of water to and fro. It was she who cradled Herman's gleaming rock collection – the pebbles he'd never gotten around to displaying – and decorated Fatty's grave in the corner of the yard. Zander would have fussed and done it for her, would have helped her – she knows this – but he's been gone for so long. Caren would have chattered about her back and her health and the fact that there are no hospitals, no clinics. She would have, no doubt, tossed the rocks into the garbage can.

Suddenly, a white paw taps against the glass.

Finally. Her shoulders sag and for the first time today she knows exactly what to do. She wants them to get out. So, that is exactly what she says.

"Get out."

Caren swings fastest but Zander's surprised expression almost stops her. Almost.

"Mother?"



“Mum, you can’t just –”

“It’s *my* house. Get out.”

Zander is the first to move. He doesn’t look at her again, just turns and shuffles past the books, disturbing the stagnant dust until it’s all that’s left of him. The door locks behind him. Just like his father, she thinks.

Caren is more hesitant, staring at her like she’s searching – as she’s always been. She, unlike her brother, does not venture into the town. She stalks down the hall to her brother’s childhood room. She’d promptly declared the guestroom unhospitable and banished Zander from his own. Caren shuts the door and it is quiet once again.

She rises from her seat and chooses the path between Dickens and Deon Meyer, picking her way over faded covers. Herman would roll over in his grave had he been here. Of course, he is no longer here. She ignores the dull ache that’s been following her like a shadow. She closes the door between the kitchen and the living room, tugging to open the adjoining kitchen door. At once, they call out for her and the shadow is no longer alone.

Feline faces stare up at her with human eyes, the looks of their owners reflected in their ragged colours and shedding fur. They jowl and hiss, desperately lapping up the cooled milk she hurries to pour. She remembers when milk was deposited along with their daily bread, into the wood hatches at their front doors. Herman would shuffle out in his old blue robe and reading glasses to gather their groceries and set to work feeding Fatty. His whistle would run through the house and her paws would follow suit, eager for her owner.

The kitchen fills with them, from all over the town, and the sound of pellets being devoured by the clowder.

“All of us here,” she sighs, stroking the arching back of a ginger tabby. “Left behind, my loveys. It’s alright.” She draws out a chair and lowers into it, achingly slow. A grey-coated cat with a scraggly tail settles on the table beside her, an earthy scent eradicating her daughter’s lemon-scented frenzy. The tabby curls around her leg, vibrating as she purrs.

“Alone again.”

Another cat rushes through the door.



Top of the page: “Office building of De Beers”. Bottom of page: “Office windows of De Beers”

## The Boy on the Wall

Zander leaves Caren to her frenzy, thankful to be turning away from her and the rooms where his father stands, watching their shameless squabbles. Down the road a dog barks at passing children, who simply continue giggling in their sneakers and cut-offs, heading to the informal café where they'd probably buy loose sweets, slipping the teller a R10 for a few loose cigarettes or even just tobacco. Tobacco and newspaper is all the rage here. He wonders if they even know that the café used to be a seamstress and fabric store back when he grew up here.

Huh. Listen to him. Being old and reminiscent.

He shoves his hands into his jean pockets, glancing down at the sudden influx of cats skirting past him and into the yard. Maybe Caren is right, maybe this is a bit much. But then his eyes fall back on the tiny cross in the corner of the yard, paint peeling back and wood sun-stained, and Zander turns away and starts down the street.

Where to go?

Odd places still exist here, as if God had leaned over and pressed his fingers haphazardly on certain buildings, allowing the rest to fade away into anonymity. The Spar has been painted blue, a little coffee shop now existing inside this 'mall' – but it's hardly what it used to be. In any case, Zander wanted to remember the wall-length bakery with their freshly baked breads and the whirring machines that cut into the hot loaves, spreading the homely scent through the entire building. He wanted to remember losing Mum in the fabric section where she searched for knitting patterns and sweaters and jeans for Father. He wanted to remember wandering away and greeting the bakers and the butchers and the tellers and escaping into the aisle-long toy paradise that existed purely to house the children while their parents went about their way.

No, the Spar wouldn't do.

He turned right and headed past the museum, towards the school. The museum was a tourist hub once, people milling in and out whenever little schoolboy Zander passed it on the way home. On Sundays, after sitting in the conservative NG Church Father so enjoyed, Zander and his friends played pretend on the neatly trimmed grass, climbing into the towering train wagon and imagined the train tracks that must have existed beneath them a century ago.

Somehow it feels bigger now. It's strange how people do that, make a space seem smaller and familiar and kind. As he makes his way down the street there is an air of abandonment lingering. Homes he used to spend Saturday afternoons in, locked up and dark. Yards are drying out and dead. Others have been bought by tourists who throw themselves into remodeling and changing what was left by those ghosts so long ago. Some yards flourish, new fruit trees freshly planted – the scent of limes and lemons drifting on the breeze where gardening patrons have trimmed and treated. New gates have been put up; numbers painted brightly on fresh coats of painted walls. Some built tall fences with security spikes and electric wires, unable to rewire themselves into believing in safety. Others opted to tear down entire homes to build from the ground up. Zander can barely look at those without remembering, without seeing specters outside, watching the doors and the strange beach-front architecture, trying to find their place in this new place. Even haunting has become difficult.

Last night he peeked through the gossamer curtains, left behind after Caren ripped off every paisley pattern she could find. There'd been a figure in the yard of the house across the street. First, he'd imagined a burglar, but then he remembered where they were, and that no one thought there was anything left here to steal. The figure had stood still, simply staring up, fog twisting around

her as the sharp scent of lemon cut through the night. The fog closed in and Zander had turned away.

Zander crosses the street, passing the Rendezvous's backdoor where farmers used to pick up leftovers for their pigs' feed, barrels and barrels of stinking, wasted food that was repurposed after the elite shrugged their shoulders. Zander had only been in the Rendezvous once, when his parents' anniversary came around and no babysitter was available. It was a magic place, created for the Corporation's suits and up-do's and sleek cigars. Deep blue velvet and maroon everywhere. Were there booths? Or classic black chairs? Zander strains to remember anything, even the waiters, but they're all faceless now. He knows they must have been there but, like so much else, they have faded from existence – surviving somewhere else entirely with memories of serving a middle-aged couple with a freckled face boy who probably spent most of the night staring at himself in the silverware when he wasn't glancing at the well-dressed gentlemen and ladies laughing softly into their napkins. Where was the rest of South Africa while he was sitting in that restaurant, listening to a piano player and chatter concerning shiny pebbles which hung abundantly from the ladies' necks?

In Grade Four he'd spent his afternoons in the rooms adjacent to the Rendezvous – being friends with the caterer's daughter had been a major advantage. She was one of the few girls who remained until Grade Seven, but besides that she was destined for greatness. Sitting at the working-class booths (reserved for pizza parties and casual occasions), she'd designed her ideal future – filled with travel and museums, galleries and art. Zander listened keenly, always finding a reason for them to rush to the forbidden events room with its stage, thick curtains and piano. She set the stage with amateur melodies while Zander paraded across the stage with battered copies of Shakespeare plays, mispronouncing most of the words in an attempt to impress her.

As soon as she walked off the stage at the last prize giving of Kleinzee Primary School, her family took their chance and fled.

His feet take him to the small church, practically attached to the school. Instead of white, its tower rises, yellow against the pale blue sky. He tries the door but it sticks, locked as it's never been before.

“Trying to rob a church?”

Zander swings around. He can't keep from grinning when he sees the familiar scarred nose and hollow cheeks of Hugo Jordaan.

He walks quick to grab Hugo's hand, slapping his back in a loose hug.

“Man,” Zander laughs. “What the hell are you doing here?”

“You still eat Chappies here,” Zander smirks, chewing the familiar hard gum. The synthetic banana flavour immediately dominates the aftertaste of the cigarette.

“What world do you live in where you don't get Chappies?”

Zander stares down at his hands, folding and refolding the yellow wrapper with its faded red facts. Apparently, camels can close their nostrils during a sandstorm. Glancing around at the torrents of sand blowing through the schoolyard, it's a trick that could come in handy.

As kids, Zander and Hugo picked up every loose cent at the Spar, wandering after school on the grass by the snoepie for discarded change. Checked under sofas and under the cushions, fibbing about how much change was left over on Sundays after a Huisgenoot and ice-cream purchase. All for a few dozen Chappies at break. After watching the other kids compete in soccer

during second break, they had Computer class right after, sneaking into the seats in the back of the class to play computer games, chewing Chappies while the teacher taught them to use Microsoft Word.

It's not that you don't *get* Chappies in Stellenbosch. It's just that he's usually buying them with loose change after being tossed out of Catwalk. Used to. Used to buy them.

"What did you do after school?" Zander finally asks, ignoring his question.

Hugo shrugs. "UCT. Majored in History and Anthropology."

"Now you're here?"

"PGCE."

"Yeah, but..." Zander's eyebrows pull together. "Kleinzee. Why come back?"

"My parents still have their house and a position opened up, so..."

"You're not answering my question," Zander chuckles.

"It's quiet here, what's not to like?"

Zander watches Hugo scratch his neck, barely able to look at him. When their eyes finally do meet, Zander begins to doubt himself. Hugo's gaze is unwavering, eyebrow cocked, lip dragging into a crooked smile. There's no look of shame, no doubt. *He's stuck here. Again. Why isn't he* –

"Why stay away, Zee?" Hugo crosses his arms. "You know the town's different. Hell, you can see it. There's no security anymore, no –"



“Nothing. There’s nothing left here. The clubs are gone – have you seen the state of the golf course? I drove past it yesterday and...God, Hugo, why would you stay here?”

“It’s still home. We’re living practically *on* the ocean. I have a good job, I work with good kids. Kids who need me. I have nice colleagues. The pay’s not too shit and it’s quiet. Have you ever heard this kind of quiet?” Hugo purses his lips for effect and, of course, Zander can’t argue. Beyond the laughter of the school children and the thuds of feet hitting a soccer ball, all you hear is the dull whoosh of the ocean. When is it ever quiet enough in Cape Town to *hear* the noise?

“But everyone’s gone.”

“That’s life,” Hugo snorts. “No one just stays in the same place for the rest of their lives. You move, doesn’t matter if you move back to a place, just matters if you grow.”

“Damn, when did you become a motivational speaker?”

“Why are you back then? If you don’t want to be here.”

“My mum. She’s going through...a rough time.”

“I know, I’ve visited a few times.” Hugo shoves his hands into his pockets. “She helps sometimes, gives me some tips, material to work with.”

“So, what? The kids here, they’re...” Zander makes a circling motion with his index finger perpendicular to his temple.

“No.” Hugo scowls. “They’re kids who need a little more time, attention. They’re practical, more than theoretical. Some have FAS, some were abused. Some just... really come from difficult circumstances. We’ve got a few from Komaggas, Steinkopf, Okiep.”

Zander squints at the dried soccer field behind the old snoepie – now kept firmly locked while the kids roam around. Some give him quizzical looks; others glare as if *he's* the stranger. Perhaps he is a stranger now, in this town where everyone who saw him grow up have disappeared.

“You just sold out the famed KPS to become a practical school?”

“It’s not selling out,” Hugo insists, the scar on his nose wrinkling when he frowns. “We’re doing good work, Zee. Giving kids a chance when they may as well have stood no chance at all. Wake up. De Beers isn’t here anymore, this wasn’t the school it used to be when we were kids. So, we’re making it something different. Something better.”

Zander blows a small yellow bubble before popping it with his teeth and gesturing to Hugo. “Like I said, motivational speaker.”

“Oh, yeah? What are you doing?”

What was he doing? Having an argument with an old school friend he hasn’t seen for ten years? Wandering around a ghost town? Looking at the relics of his childhood? Wondering where the heck De Beers went and how they managed to make everyone believe that their lives were so permanent until they weren’t?

“I’m a writer.”

“Oh. What have you written?”

Zander gives him a sidelong look. “A ghost story,” he shrugs. Hugo’s face immediately lights up, the old twinkle back in his eye.

When they were young and small enough to slip between the adults without being seen, they’d make plans before each street braai. When neighbours started dragging out their braais into

the street, pulled out their lawn chairs and makeshift tables, food, drinks and music, when adults started mingling and teenagers slipped away to play tok-tokkie, Hugo and Zander would slip from house to house and spin ghost stories about each house. They were simple really. Each chose a person, a pet and a thing – there was an entire story locked up in those three things. They'd run from one group of kids to the next, telling ghost stories with flashlights held up to their faces. Later they took part in the Eisteddfod, but never won gold for poetry – they weren't so much for the delivery. If it didn't come from their own twisted minds, it wasn't something they really *wanted* to say out loud.

“Can I read it? Was it published?”

“It was.” Zander doesn't mention that it was only a small university magazine, that barely anyone he knew was aware of it, that barely anyone would read it at all. Probably. It just sounds so much better, doesn't it? *Was it published? It was.*

It feels natural when he says, “I'll get you a copy” and Hugo nods, eager and a little withdrawn, eyes skimming the students in their blue and grey uniforms, no doubt remembering when it was them taking in the sunshine on these fields, indulging in the gentle monotony of primary school. Zander unwraps another Chappie, popping into his mouth, cheek bulging. They watch the kids until the bell rings, shrill and higher-pitched than Zander remembers.

Zander passes the office building, slowing before halting completely on the coarse, dry grass. Once, their class had gone on a fieldtrip to the office. De Beers thought it very important that all the children knew why their town was special and what exactly happened there. They were taught about diamonds, taken to the abalone farm, seal island and the farthest edges of the mine

where the dragline towered over them like a giant's toy. The office was the least exciting. Zander's forehead wrinkles as he strains to remember. It was...green. There were sprinklers going, seemingly around the clock and those delicate little flowers with the yellow and purple faces always smiled up to any passersby. The gardeners in matching khaki overalls always toiled. There was never anyone straggling or taking a break that Zander can remember. Everything inside the office was clean. Shiny. The wood was polished, the computers whirring, still very state-of-the-art and *new* in those years. Certificates lined the walls in neat little wood frames.

The grass crunches under Zander's sneakers when he steps closer. Then he turns and walks around the building, passing a strangely vocal gaggle of geese perched in the wild grass that's taken hold of the garden. Everything had been white in those days. Now the doors' paint was chipping, peeling off in long flakes. The building's coat seems much the same, perhaps worn down after the sun, wind and salt had been beating down on it for the past ten years with no new paint job to bring some relief.

Zander steps back, scowling before moving to turn around and pass the auto-repair shop that used to be reserved for the De Beers vehicles, now catering to boats and cars and trucks of all sorts, its yard haphazardly organized in a way that only the mechanics could comprehend.

For a last moment, he glances up, turns away and then stops.

His head whips up, peering up at the windows – the offices the children were never allowed to see, the hidden places within the hidden place.

Something moved.

Squinting, he holds a hand up to his brow like a visor. The windows are all dirty, flecked with dust and water streaks from rain since long before now since Namaqualand's been in a

drought for years now. Dust coats the windowpane, drifting on the slow sea breeze every now and then. But beyond that. Beyond the dirt and raindrop smudges and old glass –

There are blinds hung up – old fashioned white ones that you have to pull a wire for to move, with the material that always looks worse for wear. Some of the vertical panes are skew, some unravelling, falling apart as if rotting. A desk looms behind them. Chairs. Shadows upon shadows.

Imagine that. An office with all its chairs and desks, blinds pulled back. Abandoned. Empty.

For a moment Zander wonders if the pictures are still hanging. The photographs of the company and the staff, the managers. Important people that have graced the streets of Kleinzee. All at once he remembers his own photo, tacked against his mother's wall still, set up in the school secretary's office for the Language Award in Grade 7 – a specter of himself, a reflection of all his hopes just as he was ready to leave this place behind for good.

Some people put up pictures because they want to look at them. Others choose photos to boast, as conversation starters. In some places, heroes are immortalized on walls to honour them. To remind those who are left behind of their legacy.

Zander wonders if those photographs are hanging there, watching the office, wondering where all their diamonds have gone.

A shadow flits over the glass but it's just a dove, swooping past before flapping its wings furiously. Zander shoves his hands in his coat pockets. His father loved disasters. Besides tennis, it was his favourite pastime, flipping through magazines peppered with the details concerning Hiroshima, hurricanes, earthquakes, the Garbage Patch, oil spills and Chernobyl. The man-made

disasters were always more intriguing – reading about other humans screwing up is far more gratifying than watching your parents watch you like a gigantic screw up.

This photographer went to Chernobyl for the first time and then ten years later again to see how it'd changed. Really, he'd gone to document the slow decay of man in an abandoned space like Pripyat. Zander always thought it would be nice to go there himself, see the paint chipping and the ferris-wheel, lonely and far too yellow for an abandoned thing. The schools, classrooms layered with dust and old drawings, the Soviet flag hanging stubbornly, decaying against the wall.

But then he'd come here and it's about the same isn't it? Sans the nuclear disaster part. Instead of a ferris-wheel Kleinzee has the old Spar, painted a brash, bright turquoise, feigning the existence of life inside it while, really, most of the time it was still empty. Instead of a Soviet flag, De Beers' signage is peppered, on the roads, some rusting, some sun-damaged, some chipping away at the letters of the words 'diamond' and 'company'. Yet, like the flag, they still announce something. Don't they? Something happened here. This was a different place, once, long ago.

Staring at that lonely window with the blinds looking like they want to move but will unequivocally *not*, it's hard not to imagine this same window in a place like Pripyat. Abandoned in a rush, its furniture waiting for everyone – anyone that might have a key to the office; window staring out at the world like an unwavering eye. Daring anyone to question how it came to this. When a cat skirts around the corner of the building, Zander can't help but wonder who it belonged to.

A clanging noise resounds from the mechanic's yard, an aged car groaning in protest when its driver gets in. Zander steps away from the offices, biting his lips before turning away. Just as he crosses the street, he peers over his shoulder.

*Something definitely moved.*

Walking into his mother's house, he fingers the Chappie wrappers still in his jean pockets, tugging the door closed behind him. Before he can leave it that way – unlocked as it's been for years – he turns around and flips the lock. After he'd left the door unlocked the first time, his mother gave him an earful about the new 'tenants' in town – illegal diggers. Informal miners who have nothing to lose and apparently don't mind breaking locks much less opening doors. In a way he'd been shocked that she'd accepted this breach of safety, of security, so easily. Zander certainly struggled to wrap his head around it. But a different part of him was grateful she'd raised her voice at all.

“Meow.”

“Sorry?”

Zander jumps as a cat circles his shoes, turning its head up before hissing, dissatisfied. It ambles toward the sitting room/dining room, jumping on his father's chair and starts licking itself.

Caren's nowhere to be seen (or heard). His mother must be sleeping. For all intents and purposes, he's alone. Weaving between book stacks and piled up magazines, he slips into head chair of the dining table, grabbing the pens Caren had left lined up in a row. “To be tested,” she'd snapped, unclicking each. He scratched two on the edge of a *You* before finding one that hadn't dried out and drew one of the stray papers on the table closer, tapping the tip of the pen on the wood. He glances up at the photographs on his mother's wall. Birthdays. Wedding days. The first day of school. His father smiling with men at the Fish Club, his mother peering over the edge of a book. Caren holding her diploma. Zander on a stage with a trophy.

The cat hisses again, its eyes yellow, tail flicking impatiently.

“You’re right,” Zander mutters. He presses the tip of the pen onto the paper and holds his breath, the ticking of a discarded watch echoing through the room when he finally starts writing.

*Once there was a boy of Kleinzee who lived in a home, filled with ghosts shaped like cats.  
But the biggest ghost of all, was the town itself.*





“The Golf Club”

## Smuggler

Caren was a hunter of stories. She'd been that way since her brief childhood, up until her relationship with her brother started to fall apart.

It was easy enough. Men liked to titillate, enjoyed seeing the expressions you make when they twist the story this way or that. The best story she managed to wrangle from the golf club came from an older gentleman, a crop of pale hair swept elegantly across the bald patch on his forehead. She was freshly graduated from UCT, her degree placed in a delicate frame by her father in the small-town house her little brother calls home. She'd been living in the house for only a few months, since December. She'd walked right off the graduation stage and into a small-town street where Christmas joy was preceded by the anticipation of crayfish season.

Five months and the discovery of a shellfish allergy later, Caren had spent the day taking part in the boeresport at the Angling Club, the potjiekos competition, the crayfish weigh-ins and measuring – the Kleinzee Classic was the main event of the year for most Namaqualanders in close proximity to Kleinzee. The clubs were filled with both strange and familiar faces, all polished with the usual euphoria of Easter long-weekend. Twenty-one, unemployed and somewhat lost concerning her future, she'd left Zander with her parents at the Angling Club, trading stories with their friends, her brother running barefoot over the shells barring the beach. Even here, at the Golf Club, the Atlantic chill that wrapped around the Angling Club, was biting. Caren crossed her arms over her chest before sipping at the bitter gin and tonic Freddie had poured readily for her. He wasn't as pleasant as the bartender at the Angling Club – or the Fish Club, as her father fondly called it – but he was quick with change and generous with the gin.

Behind her, some sporting event flashed across the television and a group of men roared either in extreme disappointment or delight – Caren couldn't yet tell which. When she turned her head to observe the crowd – all somehow related to mining and diamonds, their ancestors binding them to this town with its security gates and fences – she noted, immediately, the gentleman to her left's elaborate attempt to hide his receding hairline. Before she could look away, the gentleman met her eyes and smiled pleasantly, bringing his brandy and coke back to his lips before clearing his throat. Caren sensed his expectation. This was a man who wanted to talk, who was used to talking.

*Oh, what the hell?* she thought.

Noting the logo on his tie, she asked the question she already knew the answer to.

“Do you work for De Beers, Oom?”

His eyes lit up and he turned fully to her. “I do, I do. I work in security.”

“Oh, that's nice. My mother's a teacher,” she added, feeling as if she owed him an explanation for her presence, an affirmation that she, too, belonged here.

“Wonderful. Wonderful.” He nodded, eyes appraising her. He wasn't interested in her, she knew. Her stories would be meaningless to him, he needed a listener. Caren, in a state of limbo in her life, and a state of unsurety concerning the future, thought, once again, *What the hell?*

“How is it, working in security?”

Licking his lips, he leaned toward her. “It's exciting business, I tell you. You have your slow days but sometimes...sometimes it's like living in a crime novel.”

Caren nodded, finger tapping against her glass. “I heard there were a few illegal hunters in the game-reserve the other night. Did you deal with the hunters?”

He deflated. “Oh, no. No, I wasn’t involved there. But I doubt it happened. I would have heard of it. I’ve been retired for a few years now but I... I still have my contacts. They want my input most of the time. They would have told me, I’m sure.”

“Ah,” Caren nodded. She didn’t mention their neighbor, a police officer, had enlightened her about the excitement while she was looking for Fatty the Cat late one evening in the past week. “Well, what about smugglers? Do you have any smuggling stories? Did you ever catch one in the act?”

“Hm.” The corners of his mouth lifted secretively. “I’ve been working here almost forty years.”

Caren didn’t miss the lack of past tense.

“And I’ve seen my fair share. Mind you, never caught a smuggler with my own hands but there were many, many stories. Now,” he leaned close enough for Caren to smell the pungent scent of brandy and eucalyptus. “I was friends with the GM and he had quite an ear. He told me a particular story about a man we knew, years ago, when there was a different manager in charge. I don’t suppose you know a William Hendricks?”

Caren shook her head. He knew she wouldn’t, she thought.

“Here’s the story then.” He took another sip of the brandy and rubbed his hands together. “In my youth, things were much stricter here. When you came in or out of the security checkpoint

you were made to go through a gate. This gate would detect whether or not you had any suspect packages.”

“Diamonds.”

“Exactly. So, there was a smart system in place. You know, for years, X-rays were done on workers when they came out of the mines and the sorting rooms, to make sure they hadn’t nicked any shiny rocks.”

“What about the radiation?”

“But see, that was the problem. What about the radiation? You can’t bloody well X-ray everyone all the time. So, the company got smarter and they continued ‘X-raying’,” he made the quotation marks in the air with one hand’s index and middle finger, “however, they didn’t tell you whether they were X-raying or not. It was a...honour system of sorts. You never knew if they were switching it on or not, so if you were hoping they wouldn’t and had a rock in your pocket or your shoe –”

“Your shoe?”

“Yes, yes, many hollowed out their heel, stored the diamond in there and patched up the insole again. But this is all very much public knowledge. But if you were lax this one day, and that’s the day they decided to switch on the machine...” He snapped his fingers. “Then you were caught.”

Besides that, Caren thought, you were outrightly exposing people to radiation for the sake of a few rocks. “What about pregnant women? And children?” she asked. “What if they had to enter the town or –”

“Well, I doubt they would have switched on for a pregnant woman.”

“But they wouldn’t know that, would they?”

The gentleman waved his hand dismissively. “X-raying is a complex business any way you look at it. When it first came into being here it was only the white contract workers who had to go through the process, did you know? The company thought Coloured workers were inexplicably honest by nature and wouldn’t dare carry a diamond out,” he laughed. “They weren’t happy when they had to start being X-rayed during the war too, thought it was a public statement of the company’s opinion of them.”

“Oom, how – how do you know all of this?” Caren sipped her gin, wondering why on earth he’d retain all this information.

“Research. Reading. The museum is a good place to start, young lady. By the by, you may want to visit it. You’ll see the diamond sorting case beside the entrance. Very clever contraption. At first the diamonds were sorted freely on tables but they realized diamonds were disappearing so they instated new sorting methods. The cases were key.”

“Why is that?”

“The cases are glass.” He holds out his hands, demonstrating. “With a woodframe, so you can see the diamonds from the top and there are holes in the front panel where you could stick your hands in – into gloves.”

Caren nods slowly. “No way to slip diamonds into your pocket.”

“That was the idea. But the sorters were smarter than that.” He laughed, dropping his hands. The bartender wipes the counter, sneaking a look at Caren – a look she dutifully ignores in favour of the old man’s attention.

“How were they smarter?”

“They wore a hole into one glove’s thumb. Slipped diamonds through the hole.”

“Clever,” Caren mumbled. Her thumbnail slips between her teeth. “Did they figure it out?”

“They did. That’s why the sorting case in the museum is so remarkable. The rest of the sorting cases became one-handed. They removed a glove to make sure there would be no foul play.”

For a moment it’s quiet between them, only the chatter of the bar rising and falling.

“The story, Oom?” Caren finally prompts.

“No one was exempt from X-rays, not even the diamonds. That’s how we sorted them from the gravel – they glowed under the X-ray and when it picked up on the screen, they were separated from the rest of the gravel. Even the diamonds went under the X-ray,” he chuckled again. “This all happened in the – you know the building, don’t you? The tall one? You can’t miss it.” His expression softens teasingly as if she were a little girl instead of a woman with an education.

She knew the building exactly. It was a stretch of grey brick, rising into the air atop a hill like a corporate prison. In fact, Caren had often asked her father, when she was a teenager, whether or not the building was a prison. Throughout the years, the question had persisted as if her memory couldn’t come to grips with the fact that it was a place in which diamonds were kept, sorted through and discussed. Its oppressive, monotone grey cement against the pale blue of the Kleinzee skyline



was so closely related to the Hollywood films she'd seen of escaping convicts, it never made sense. Only later did Caren realize the resemblance to prisons was no coincidence. De Beers, after all, used convicts for mining in the 1880s, building branch prisons as well. Caren had always researched beyond her History class in university.

No one ever really spoke about the grey building, no one spoke about what happened there – no myths, no fairytale – it was Zander who started making up legends about the building when he was younger, spinning stories about mystique and prisoners and knights. Caren didn't argue or correct her brother, it was up to him, as it was up to her, to make his own conclusions and realize the truth.

But the gentleman didn't know this and he continued eagerly after holding a finger up to the bartender.

“The only individuals who were exempt from the X-ray, were the senior staff – the manager. And that's where it gets interesting, m'dear.”

The bartender places a new gin and tonic beside her nursed one and a new brandy and coke beside the gentleman's empty glass.

“Oh, but you must keep this very hush-hush, it's on a need-to-know basis.” He held a withering finger before his lips with that small smile that Caren's come to know hides secrets. “William Hendricks, the manager, occasionally visited Kleinzee, doing his regular inspections. Some days he'd head out to Port Nolloth for an afternoon, catch a few fish, eat at the restaurants, take a turn on a boat –”

“Yes?” Caren prodded.



“It was well-known that he took these trips. Now we come to the other character. His name...well, I forget his name. Let’s call him Andrew, shall we? Andrew was famous for his...less-than honourable activities. He was known for sneaking contraband in and out of...certain places and in Port Nolloth he had a few people waiting on him for a delivery. Of a sensitive nature.” His eyebrow arched.

“Diamonds,” Caren nodded.

“And somehow he’d gotten his hands-on diamonds. But in Kleinzee this whole business of his would be more difficult since he couldn’t leave with diamonds in hand. So, he plotted. Andrew had a few friends in high places, one of them being friends with the manager and they met each other at a braai. When Andrew found out about the manager’s penchant for Port Nolloth trips, he tucked that information away. He sent a letter out, telling his buyers to wait for a week and bided his time in Kleinzee, visiting the mine’s shop. The manager had a very nice, black suit jacket he liked to wear and Andrew made note of it. He went out to the store to purchase the exact same jacket the day after the braai.” He sips his drink again, scowling before tugging at his own jacket to reveal the inner pocket.

“Now, Andrew was a bit of a whizz with a needle. He made himself a sneaky pocket, right here where he knew no one would bother to check and he convinced his friend to have another braai that Saturday and to invite the manager. Predictably, Andrew found himself in conversation with the manager. He started going on and on about how he had to get to Port Nolloth to visit an ill family member but that he had no means to get there. The manager offered him a lift seconds later.”

The crowd roared as something went right on the television but Caren only tilted her head, waiting for the rest of the story, eyes never straying from the storyteller's dark eyes and unruly eyebrows.

“Sunday morning, he met the manager at his house and they drove down to the checkpoint together. He'd worn the jacket and, lucky for him, when he settled his bag on the backseat, he marked the manager's identical jacket spread out over the seat. He laid his own beside the manager's jacket and got in the front seat. When they arrived at the checkpoint, he retrieved his bag and reached for the manager's jacket, tugging it on. The manager carried Andrew's jacket over his arm as they strolled into the building, chattering about the weekend, never once suspecting what was hidden within the jacket.” He heaved a breath. “Andrew went under the machines and was cleared. The manager, of course, just walked on through. They drove to Port Nolloth and Andrew just switched out the jackets when he was dropped off.”

“Just like that?” Caren prodded. It seemed such a lackluster ending to something that's made to sound so...glamorous. Smuggling brought to mind crawling through tunnels and sneaking diamonds into pockets with sly smiles, secrets and risks and –

“Well, that's it, m'dear. He could rip open the pocket and deliver the diamonds right into the buyer's hand. No questions asked.”

“Was he ever caught?”

He shrugged one shoulder, leaning his elbow on the counter. “How else would we know the story?”

“He could've bragged about it. There wouldn't have been evidence to incriminate him.”

“Oh, no doubt he bragged. Andrew was *known* for his smuggling. He’d been caught many times throughout the years. That, however, was one of his best tricks to date.” When he sipped his brandy he seemed almost appreciative. *He was a security employee, right?*

“Did you ever meet him, Oom?”

“Once. A very long time ago. Before I knew this story, of course.” His eyebrows raise momentarily before his eyes concentrate on something over Caren’s shoulder. “He was such a charming man. You would have thought he was of the highest quality. If I met him now...”

“Yes, Oom?”

A thin smile pulled at his lips. “I’d ask him how he snuck the rest of them out.”

That night Caren had her last nightmare in Kleinzee.

Everything was drowning in shadow where she walked through the veld, the low bushes grabbing the cuffs of her jeans. There were no thorns where she stepped but neither were there stars, only the lone, pale moon – like a lonely eye surveying the world.

She found the corpse before she could reach the tar road, gleaming like a river in the light. At first she didn’t recognize it but then deeper shadows moved, crawling over one another, desperate jaws snapping.

Cats swarmed the body, moving against one another like a large malformed creature, tearing at the grey flesh.

Caren felt her mouth open and heard the scream but she couldn't remember doing it. When a few of the felines moved, she spotted the curl of white hair, the tie choking the corpse's neck.

The De Beers logo.

His jacket was tattered. Torn to shreds by cat claws.

Diamonds glittered against the fabric, peeling from the pockets.



Top of page: “Kleinzee swimming pool”

Bottom of page: “Green nets on Kleinzee’s perimeter”

## Lover

His lover never put much stock into fantasies surrounding hometowns. The ‘Returning Hero’ idea never appealed to him. He’d moved around so much he felt he didn’t belong anywhere. When Max pointed this out, his lover raised his eyebrows.

“I belong with you,” he’d stated plainly.

It was the kind of thing that made Max fall in love with him in the first place but now, where they stood in front of the museum after having wandered through its ill-lit halls, Max oohing and ahing at exhibits he could recite the information on, Max couldn’t remember exactly why he’d found the phrase so alluring.

Something about wanting to belong and someone belonging with you surely meant you belonged somewhere as well.

Now Lover huffed, drawing his cap lower to shield his eyes from the glare. Max had hoped for a soft blue sky with those clouds that seemed like they could, at any moment, fall from the sky and blanket Kleinzee in snow.

Instead it was East weather. The kind that rendered the sky pale, as if the colour had been seeped away. The kind that sent hot winds to consistently tear through the farmers’ fields as they drove to their windmills to feed sheep with store bought corn. The kind that bred flies and gnats flying through open windows, into living rooms with slow fans and figures draped on furniture. The kind that made the ocean angry and the tar roads boil. A lazy heat.

Max had hoped.

“Where to now?” Lover asked sarcastically.

“We can head over to the grocer.” Max winced, wanting to take back the words immediately. In what world did the shop count as a tourist destination? “For some drinks,” he added.

They started trekking down Main Street, Lover staring straight ahead at the destination, past the makeshift garage with colourful tires piled up like a children’s toy, toward the parking lot. Max glanced at the Spar-turned-centre-for-shops, the empty parking lot beside it, the new bakery where the laundromat used to be. The myriad of police bakkies parked outside the new station. The library, though he’s unable to tell whether it’s open or closed now that they kept the doors and windows closed.

At the grocery store, diggers milled between cars, killing time before they could head into their digfield to risk their lives for less than they deserved. Lover moved closer to Max’s side, even though they were in range of the police station.

Max had explained it as best he could, but Lover didn’t understand, he could tell.

“They dig at night mostly. Or they used to.” At that time they’d set up their informal settlements – huts and shacks put together by green nets that were supposed to keep the wind from tearing through the town and which were meant to rehabilitate the fields. Of course, the field that had just started to grow back was torn asunder by the diggers, plants ripped out for shelter and fire. When Max first passed them, on his way to the Fish Club, he remembered how violent it seemed – hands which disembarked from Limpopo and Mpumalanga and GP cars, wrenching roots from the soil, soil that was foreign to them. Soil he’d watched and known for all his life – green after rain, blooming in August, churned by De Beers, left bare and barren until rehabilitated, struggling thereafter between their green nets and finally, rebirthed – until the diggers arrived.



And who was supposed to fix it now that they'd been all but driven away? Who was going to rehabilitate now?

When they'd driven into town today, Max imagined he could still catch a faint whiff of the acrid smoke of burning plastic and trash, the stink of feces as they started digging on the town's property where no public toilet or water facilities were available. After all, this wasn't an informal digging site. This was *Kleinzee*. He'd thanked God his parents had converted his old room into an office, forcing him and Lover to stay on a guest farm outside town. Whether it be because his father really needed an office space for his work or his mother was still coming to the grips with his coming out, Max didn't want Lover to experience the town like this, to be afraid.

Max was never afraid in Kleinzee. Not until they came.

Marcha, an old school friend, had reported their home was broken into while they were gone for a weekend. She'd mentioned this casually at their braai last night and Max could see Lover's smile tighten, his shoulders stiff when he brought his drink to his lips. Wherever Lover had moved when he was younger, his parents always made sure they were in the safest parts of town. Max had loved that about him – the way he expected everything to be just so, to be safe and pleasant. Last night, he was annoyed. *Can't he see that just because there's a few break-ins, it doesn't mean the whole town is worthless and terrifying and unsafe?*

It hadn't helped when Max asked about gossip in town, to lighten the mood, and Marcha went on a tangent about the other holiday homes which had been squatted in, their yards and water used to sieve for diamonds.

"Is it even worth it? I thought there were no diamonds left," Lover had exclaimed.



“There are. They’re just too deep. It’s too expensive to get them out,” Marcha repeated mechanically. It’s a phrase they’d had to memorize to explain Kleinzee, just as they’d been taught to say ‘*A Diamond is Forever*’ when they were pre-primary.

“So, why do they think they can get them out?” Lover persisted.

*Just drop it*, Max thought but said, instead: “Desperation.”

Marcha had gone into specifics. She told him about how a few struggling individuals caught wind, after years of inactivity in Kleinzee, that there might still be diamonds. How they came in the night and found a few shiny pebbles in an old digfield, the one you saw to your right when you drove into town. How the word spread and fanatics invited the whole world to come dig in Kleinzee. How they ignored the law and came in droves in little beat-up bakkies, they’re bosses in Hiluxes. How the diggers were paid a few rand for every diamond but because they were doing it illegally they couldn’t get a fair price. How tunnels fell in and two miners died but nobody could do anything about it or help the families since they were trespassing, breaking the law and not contractually working for someone. How the school was broken into. How the diggers’ bosses, who paid them peanuts, sold to dealers who frequented the town in the Golf Club, negotiating and slipping money from hand to hand over a brandy and coke. How the diamond price plummeted with the influx of gems.

“If it’s illegal, why didn’t the police do something earlier?”

Marcha shrugged. “There weren’t enough of them. There’s one cell and there were thousands of them. They got reinforcement from Springbok but when the Hawks came in, they were able to flush most of them out.”

“After two years,” Max had muttered, drawing Lover’s eye.

Now, Lover wrinkled his nose when they passed the bottle-store where a few of the straggling diggers who escaped the wrath of the Hawks were trying their luck. They bought booze, side-by-side with the police. Lover, wisely, said nothing about what he saw in the bottle-store, nor about the grocer itself with its sparse produce.

If Max wanted, he could explain about the big Spar and the mine store and all the small knick-knack shops that used to surround the ABSA and FNB and Post Office. Instead, he paid for the Cokes and drew Lover out by the hand, his bottle sweating in his left hand. They walked across the old plaza where the playground used to keep children entertained while their parents did business. Max remembered the steel dragon, paint chipping when they removed it a few years ago, and pulled Lover into the informal store with its loose sweets for twenty cents.

When they emerged from the warm store, escaping the cloying scent of spices, a bag filled with candy hanging between them, Max led him toward the Post Office and through the parking lot. His flip-flops slapped the tar, almost sticking as they walked down the street toward one of the two Primary schools.

“So, I was here from Grade 1 to Grade 3 and then you get moved to the ‘Big School’, close to the museum.”

“The one with the church,” Lover nodded. “Seems like big schools.”

“We had English and Afrikaans classes. Afrikaans was larger; I think we had to split the class occasionally.” Max frowned at the school entrance with its own church at its side, the plants withering in the heat. It used to seem so much bigger.

He turned away, toward the rugby field, which had also seen better days, and strayed toward the old pool, a dark plastic strip stretching halfway from the netball courts to the swimming pool. As they walked on it, Max felt a rush of nostalgia.

He was nine again, a big kid in little school, his towel tucked under his elbow, goggles dangling from his fingers, swimsuit on the verge of being too small and the smell of sunblock surrounding him. His age group walked in a steady line toward the pool, chattering about Lord knows what children talk about, the plastic burning his bare feet. He'd forgotten to bring his flip-flops and thorns lined the side of the plastic so it was burn or bleed.

Finally, the familiar, amateurly painted cartoon characters come into view, lining the wood fence surrounding the pool. It was tall, too tall for them to ever be able to see over but the biting scent of chlorine filled the air. They took turns naming the bright characters, Max screaming out, "Lady and the Tramp!" since it was his favourite movie when he was little, or littler.

Lover's fingers grazed the cartoon noses of the dogs, sharing their spaghetti, before he gripped the top of the fence and peered over.

"Can we go in?"

Max put down the candy, half-empty, and the Coke, reaching for the fence. He clambered over, rather ungracefully, but when his feet landed on the other side he wished he hadn't moved at all. No scent of chlorine. No bright towels laid out on the grass, kids scrambling to claim the shady spots under the sparse trees. No clear, astonishingly blue water with white lanes, diving boards freshly painted, teacher blowing a whistle. No sting of a swimming cap over his ears. No burn of sunblock in his eyes. No pressure of water in his nose as he dove in. No gasping breath as he tried to stay afloat while the other kids could swim backstroke.

Lover landed beside him, still chewing on a watermelon chappie. He squinted at the water.

“Is that...are those fish?”

Someone, the new owners, had drained the pool of chlorine and made a gigantic fish dam of it. The water is green, algae growing like nightmarish mush. Every now and then a dark scaled fish skimmed the surface.

“Let’s get out of here,” Max muttered and turned away.

Lover used to play tennis at school.

It’s one of the first things, Michael learned when he cyber-stalked him before their first date. He wore white shorts – not too short – and a smile like he’d been afforded the chance to play Wimbledon, a racket swung over his shoulder.

Michael thought he was so clever when he gave Lover openings during dinner to discuss his athleticism. He made innuendos which Lover always laughed at, but seemed slightly puzzled about and talked about the *Thirty Top Topics to Entertain Tennis Nuts* he’d combed through prior to meeting Lover at Bossa. Half-way through the date, he realized he was doing something wrong. Lover had excused himself twice already and was on his fourth drink. When Lover returned, yet again, Michael took the leap.

“You played tennis in school, right?”

Lover cringed for a split-second but Michael saw it for what it was. He’d overplayed the tennis-angle to give him a gap and lead the conversation. Instead, he’d dominated the conversation with something Lover *obviously* didn’t want to talk about.

*Why not, though? Was he involved in an injury? Were there traumatic memories? There was nothing on social media –*

“I played casually a few times,” Lover shrugged. “But I was just a practice player. My friends were at high school on a bursary so I made a fool of myself every week trying to keep them in practice.”

Michael’s mouth must have popped open because Lover raised his eyebrows, tease tugging at his lips.

“You thought I was a hardcore player, didn’t you?”

Michael gave the tiniest nod and, to his surprise, Lover burst out laughing. The girl at the table beside theirs, glanced at them ruefully – they must have seemed like an old, happy couple. *If only she’d seen me blunder through tennis topics ten minutes earlier.*

“Well, that explains all that tennis crap.” Lover sipped his drink and smiled good-naturedly when he looked up again. “You don’t need to play games, Michael. This is a give and take thing – ask and be answered. No need to plan ahead. Those plans fall apart most of the time anyway.”

It was a cruel irony that they found themselves on Kleinzee’s tennis courts, more so that the courts seemed to be one of the few places that were still discernibly recognizable to Lover. His lips curled into a smile before he popped an apricot sweet into his mouth. Sugar lined his lips when he finally spoke.

“It looks more or less the same here, at least.”

Michael glanced at the chipping white paint, the red steps that made up the audience stand where two pale tennis chairs still remained, undisturbed.

“Really?” he drawled. To his dismay, Lover’s smile fell ever so slightly as he turned, surveying the courts. The green tarmac was cracking, tumbleweeds and dried bushes littering the area.

“Well. There was less foliage,” Lover admitted.

“So, this is where you learned to play,” Michael fixed his expression to look appreciative. He had to save this excursion somehow. “Just think, if you’d have practised more you may have been some hotshot that totally fell for my tennis openers.”

Lover rolled his eyes and leaned against the wiry net. “I’d have had a better shot at greatness if I played cricket. De Beers’ Kimberley crew used to play cricket against my father. One of the Oppenheimer’s himself. They loved sport. Rugby and cricket especially.” He crossed his arms. “We had great sport programs.”

Michael nodded like this was no surprise to him. Lover had many facts about his hometown, like it was some gem he couldn’t help holding up to the light. No, not gem – diamond. Everything here is about diamonds it seems. And water, as the guesthouse’s owner’s attested when explaining about the drought.

But Lover wanted to talk about these things. He wanted to tell because it was all like a grand secret, wasn’t it? Who else knew about all of this? About where the town came from and how it stuck around and how people keep showing up to breathe new life into it. He’d already met a single mother with an apocalyptic bunker in her backyard, stocked with canned goods and toilet paper and batteries, a wrung out publicist who needed to take a three-month hiatus, a family from Gauteng staying in their holiday home, aiming to get as far away from reality as possible, it seemed. Lover’s friend had told him, at her braai, about a certain wanderer who had come through

town with nothing but a backpack and his hands, which could make anything out of nothing. He survived on the meagre pay of a local pub and, in his free time, carved and sculpted and earned a living through art, built himself a house and filled it with treasures which tourists loved to gawk at. One day, he was gone.

The house stayed behind, everything just as he left it – to be bought and sold by his employers, who asked him to fix up the building in the first place. But his kindness wasn't what shocked Michael. What shocked him was his readiness to leave everything behind, to just get up and go. He'd done it before, the friend explained, running from one small town to the next, becoming a true fixture in communities before deserting.

Thinking about that house, filled with everything that the wanderer had made, everything he'd found here in Kleinzee, all to be left behind and never be seen by its creator again.

The wanderer never came back.

Looking at Lover, Michael remembered why he fell in love with him in the first place.

The boy who'd left home only to come back, again and again, until he came back a man. Lover never left it all behind. He came back and he carried everything from this place with him. For a moment, Michael was envious. Where would he come back to one day but this place? With Lover at his side. Or would he be the wanderer? Making something beautiful here until it was, inevitably, time to move on and find a new place. As his parents had when he was a child.

Lover reached for another apricot sweet and grabbed Michael's hand, sticky. And drew him away from the tennis courts and the memories he must have about a knobby-kneed Lover with too big teeth and bright eyes, clutching a tennis racket, unaware that he'd never become a true tennis player but, above all else, wouldn't mind it in the slightest.

When they were back in the streets, Michael didn't get that queasy feeling he sometimes had in other small towns. He couldn't imagine people would be watching them from their windows, curious. It seemed...open. Everyone's minding their own business, uninterested in the two gay boys swinging their hands as they walk close.

Or maybe Michael's naïve and he's never been in a place with so few people before.

"It's like walking through a museum. Kind of."

Lover glanced up, surprised. Michael was surprised too. He was looking at the post office as he said it, but he was thinking of the yellow barrel advertising *The Sunflower Resort*, now closed down, and the swimming pool and tennis courts and the schools all unchanged by the years. Besides the chipping paint.

"You're serious?" Lover prodded, stopping on the sidewalk. He let go of Michael's hand and Michael shifted one foot off the sidewalk, onto the street, keeping himself as off-kilter as Lover made him feel.

"What?" Michael shrugged. "It's like it's stuck you know? Like an exhibit. Whatever it was before and whatever it could have been or will be – this is that moment in-between, you know?" He frowned worriedly at Lover. Was he ruining this again?

"I mean. That's it, right? Why you, like, want to show it to me? You're probably seeing it differently 'cause you knew it as it *was*. And we both saw what it was *before* that. And I'm seeing it as it *is*." He scowled; his head turned up to the sun. He was definitely ruining things again. "The point is...It's still here."



After a beat, Max nodded. His sticky fingers tangled in Michael's.

“That's exactly it.”

And before Michael could say something stupid, Max said, “Come on. Let's get out of this heat.”

# Reflection Chapters

## A Memory

Kleinzee was a complex subject for me to write about, partly because of my personal affiliation to Kleinzee and because the aftermath of De Beers so often overshadows my faded memories of the utopia Kleinzee used to represent to me. This project demanded that I revisit my past and revive the memories I have of Kleinzee, many of them coloured with the rose-tinted glasses of early childhood. While writing, I revisited memories, hoping to see beyond the rose-tinted glasses, to discover the underlying truth of the past and access significant meanings, often “unavailable” in “the immediacy of the moment” (Freeman 276). However, it was also imperative to consider that memories are but “records of how we have experienced events, not replicas of the events themselves”, as Daniel L. Schacter proposed (Smith & Watson 16). Just as Jack Carstens’ life narrative was a subjective portrayal of Kleinzee’s history, my own experience of Kleinzee is, in a way, an “interpretation of a past that can never be fully recovered” (Smith & Watson 16). Though this project seemed, at times, impossible, it was important for me to pursue it. Freeman argues that, like poetry, our memories have veiled meaning and have the potential to provide us with “insight and rescue, recollection and recovery” (Freeman 276).

Similarly, I felt compelled to revisit the history of Kleinzee, the past which most often remains unspoken and unrealised by those who pass through the remnants of the town, to find the significance in moments that we, as inhabitants of Kleinzee’s space, took for granted. I aimed to “rescue”, “[recover]” and “[recollect]” moments which may be lost, forgotten or untouched even by visitors and current patrons, in order to articulate the truth of what happened to Kleinzee and to assess the actions of those responsible by focusing on the reactions of those affected by large companies’ decisions (Freeman 276). The creation of ‘desire-advertisement’, the establishment of

the diamond as valuable, the tactics of acquiring land and churning through it in search of diamonds, the building of a town, the status of the town and the quality provided for its inhabitants and, finally, the abandonment of such a space once the company has withdrawn, the barrenness of the fields where veld once grew.

Discovering Kleinzee's history through memory, meant, to me, confronting what it means to remember. Most of the stories I wrote are based or drawn from memory – whether it be mine, Jack Carstens or others'. I had to read about Kleinzee as it was experienced, which was based partially, if not wholly, on memory. I was faced with the complication of memory's stability and reliability. Freeman's question: "Where does "my" memory begin and end?" (265) circled my thoughts as I attempted to unravel Kleinzee's timeline and find my place within it. I needed to situate myself within history in order to understand my place in the events which followed and resulted in Kleinzee's current state. The stories are thus written at the point of contact, or even friction, of history and memory.

Namaqualand's currency is stories. Anecdotes make up half of a Namaqualander's personality and are customarily shared whenever human contact is made. A significant characteristic of Namaqualanders is probably their expansive memories, the capacity to remember as they do, and their ability to relay what they remember with as much showmanship as an actor would on a stage. It's important to keep this regional characteristic in mind when reflecting on what happened in Kleinzee. Reading and hearing about noteworthy events in the Namaqualand area led me to the realisation that there is a vacuum as there are few narratives concerning Namaqualand published, many of them self-published. It didn't take long to realise why this was

the case. Namaqualand is severely underdeveloped in comparison to areas such as the Western Cape. The Northern Cape is the largest province, filled with winding dirt roads, small, neglected towns and overburdened municipalities. Signal is unstable and, in many areas, a non-existent luxury. Namaqualanders don't read or write articles to share information – we tell stories.

In his article *Writing Place*, Abdulrazak Gurnah notes: “Traveling away from home provides distance and perspective, and a degree of amplitude and liberation. It intensifies recollection, which is the writer's hinterland” (27). In my case, it seemed the opposite was true. I'd been in Stellenbosch, so far removed from my home and the memories that lie in the town beside our farm, for so long that I found myself severely disconnected and desensitised. It was necessary for me to return and, like Zander in *The Boy on the Wall* and Max in *Lover*, to walk through the town which had been so influential during my formative years.

I felt myself a ghost, wandering through a space which appears to have been frozen in time and simultaneously aged, capturing traces of the old and new. Somehow it felt as though if I had not re-entered it with an analysing eye, it may have remained just so – simply a town. Unaffected by memories to those who are new to the area and too slick to have haunted places stick to them.

Kleinzee is suspended in time. It is impossible to walk through it and not see the ‘West Coast Shopping Centre’ as the Spar. To not walk through the school and imagine all the doors, buildings and rails newly painted, the secret garden which had been broken down now, still luring children to its quiet confines with a book. The library's doors, I imagine to be open, the old librarian waiting patiently for me to enter after school and sneak me an extra book over my limit. It is impossible not to drive down main street and remember the towering trees tossing shadows

over the car, trees that have seen it all but have now been cut down. Streets tarred and maintained, not potholed and patched with loose sand. The grass outside the De Beers offices, alive and bright beside the flowerbeds the gardeners tend to. The Rendezvous, Desert Rose and Prospector milling with people. I experienced a “double view” of the town, a “spectral” experience which allowed for this ‘double view’ to “[recede] and [step] forward at the same time” (Malcomess & Kreutzfeldt 14). The space of Kleinzee appears haunted and, at times, abandoned. When driving toward Kleinzee, this spectral element of the town is prefaced by ominous remains of its former utopic state – barbed wire fences, remnants of De Beers signage and security booms, gravel fields where the veld has been inextricably damaged and the signature green net fence which once served as protection from the area’s characteristic gales.

A utopia is defined, in Greek, as ‘No Place’, indirectly affirming that utopias do not exist or, at the very least, are not impenetrable or flawless. Kleinzee’s status metamorphosis leads me to consider the “non-place” and whether this term can be wholly applied to Kleinzee as well (Fisher 19). In his article, “What is Hauntology?”, Mark Fisher discusses the “disappearance of space” which accompanies the “disappearance of time” – as there are “non-place” there are also “non times” (Fisher 19). It is possible to think of Kleinzee as captured as a ‘non place’, undefined in its present ‘non time’ as it remains in a precarious position, its purpose having changed, becoming a placeholder for many other needs – a space to retire, to live quietly, to remain close to family, to visit as a holiday-space. Mark Fisher describes the “postmodern impasse” of time as well, which Alan Garner captures in the phrase “the time is out of joint”, inspired by the graffiti: “Not really now not any more.” (22). This concept within hauntology points to the disjointedness of time, the “disappearance of the present” and simultaneously “the possibility of representing the present” (Fisher 22). Within Kleinzee, which has outlived its purpose of a company town, time seems

disjointed as the town remains practically unchanged to its once utopic state, save for the obvious signs of neglect, such as overgrown grass, tree stumps, potholes and chipping paint. The present seems to morph into to the past while inexplicably representing the future as there is no indication that Kleinzee's infrastructure will improve. When moving in the town, as a previous resident or visitor, it becomes apparent that there have been attempts to evoke development. The Spar is an example of this, having been the main shopping centre in Kleinzee and, by far, the largest in the area beside Port Nolloth and Springbok. In the last decade it has been repainted and renamed, repurposed as a 'shopping centre' with individual, small stores which can be rented and a café area where the original till area once existed. Essentially, being stripped of its name and history, the West Coast Shopping Centre, a bright beacon in the town, may be considered a symbol of ambition, hope, or a fool's errand in a place with so little foot traffic. It also distinctly contrasts the rest of the town, not quite fitting in and emphasizing the state and character of the town itself. Perhaps this adds an element of confusion to the tourists who pass through Kleinzee but perhaps it serves a larger purpose, of indirectly accentuating the town as it once was, of stressing the possibility which still lies within the settlement.

Freeman draws on Ernest Schachtel's essay "On Memory and Infantile Amnesia" in his article "Telling Stories: Memory and Narrative". The fallibility of memory is brought to the forefront when memory is utilised as a source for narratives. It requires the writer to question, not only him/herself, but others who can substantiate the writer's memories, to consult sources and ultimately trace the memories to certain points in time and history. Schachtel utilizes signposts as symbols or markers within one's life. He states: "What is remembered is usually, more or less, only the fact that such an event took place. The signpost is remembered, not the place, the thing,

the situation to which it points.” (Schachtel 130). He elaborates that these signposts usually indicate the conventionally approved memories which society expects us to retain, “stereotyped answers to a questionnaire in which life consists of time and place of birth, religious denomination, residence, educational degrees, job, marriage, number and birthdates of children, income, sickness and death” (Schachtel 130)<sup>9</sup>. With this project, I was compelled to look beyond the signpost and to the site itself, to recall the sensory experiences of Kleinzee which may have been lost or suppressed among the ‘milestone memories’. It was vital to recapture individualistic characteristics and experiences of the town and its various events, which would add authenticity and eventually allow me to locate myself within Kleinzee’s history. I was able to achieve this and capture the experience of retracing my steps by way of *The Boy on the Wall* and *Lover*. Both stories concern ‘returners’, boys who’d been students in the Kleinzee Primary School and eventually left, only to return – Zander, reluctant and skeptical, and Max, willing and nostalgic.

Zander’s reflection on Kleinzee as he wanders through town aimlessly, emphasises the subjectivity and fallibility of memory. To some extent Zander represents myself as the writer, remembering and misremembering artifacts and events with as much clarity and accuracy as I can muster but even then, these recollections may be subject to fault lines.

---

<sup>9</sup> Based on Schachtel’s argument we can consider how an advertising business might utilise the theory of ‘signposts’. “[The advertising business] does not have to promise a good book, a well-written and well-performed play, an entertaining or amusing movie. It suffices to say that the book, the play, the movie will be the talk of the won, of the next party, of one’s friends. To have been there, to be able to say that one has been present at the performance, to have read the book even when one is unable to have the slightest personal reaction to it, is quite sufficient,” Schachtel states (131). De Beers established desire advertising, associating diamonds with the notion of ‘forever’, of immortality, and ultimately created an inseparable tie between diamonds and romance and marriage. Diamonds were thus firmly associated with romance and the milestones or ‘signposts’ which concerned romantic relationship – first dates, marriage proposals, weddings, anniversaries. By establishing this connection, diamonds became a necessity, an undisputable expectation related to romantic milestones, thereby establishing a concurrent desire and need for diamonds.



For example, Zander refers to the train wagons as one artifact rife in his memory, one which they utilised for fantasies of prospecting as they played on these wagons on Sunday afternoons, as mentioned in *The Boy on the Wall*. Zander and his childhood friends had fantasies of where the tracks may have been in Kleinzee and were either never corrected or never searched for the truth of the train wagons. However, no train tracks ever ran through Kleinzee, only from Port Nolloth to Springbok. The wagons were purchased from a company and settled outside the museum as a historical artifact not directly related to the geography of Kleinzee but to the geography of the mining industry and Namaqualand as a whole. They aimed to provide a historical air to the museum. Our memories are warped by our beliefs, by what we are told, our experiences and by the information we received in that moment and then retained in the moment of remembrance. But even if faulty, it is important to acknowledge these memories as they are rooted in truth. The wagons *were* there and Zander's assumptions about the wagons were perhaps the intention behind their acquisition. They provided a sense of the typical idea of prospecting, much like the train wagon rollercoasters in Gold Reef City did. Information wasn't provided on the wagons' origins – they were left up to assumption unless queried about, and therein lies the truth. So often, what we experience or what we accept as true is based on assumption instead of fact and without anyone to correct these assumptions, our memories will remain the same. Unless we reflect and look deeper, beyond the signpost and at the place itself.

Zander's encounter with his old school friend, who had returned to teach in Kleinzee's school, also emphasises the subjectivity of memory and experience as his friend considers Kleinzee to be a safe space while Zander had been eager to leave it, prove himself, to prevent himself from being stuck in a small town. The hauntological elements of *The Boy on the Wall* also brings to the forefront the spectral characteristic of Kleinzee. Zander's interest in ghost stories, in

the duality of Kleinzee's present and past, and his experience at the De Beers office only solidified this as he imagined a phantom, watching him through the window as he was staring up at the, seemingly abandoned, building.

Max, in *Lover*, represents a protective returner, bringing his partner to his hometown to share his origins with his significant other. When bringing Michael to Kleinzee, he wanted him to understand, to be as impressed as Max once was, but it is difficult to present an empty plate to a hungry diner and convince them that it once held a very satisfying meal. Here the present and the past are also interwoven. In *Lover* this hybrid element of the town is exposed as Michael is told of the town's present – illegal diggers – while Max is interested in the past. Max is persistently nostalgic within Kleinzee, his idyllic memories repeatedly contrasted with the dystopic present as they revisit landmarks of Max's childhood. Both Max and Zander experiences the spectrality of the town all by reliving and visualizing their childhood memories, simultaneously contrasting their past, their memories, with reality.

Reading *Chernobyl Prayer: A Chronicle of the Future* (2013), it was impossible for me to not notice correlations to Kleinzee's circumstances and history though they are simultaneously vastly different. One interviewee attested of listening to the speech, delivered by the Provincial Party Committee's secretary, stating that they would "create a heaven on earth for [the cleanup laborers]. Just stay here and work" and "[t]he attitude towards ordinary people is: keep them happy with vodka and sausage" (Alexievich 138, 139). This manner of persuasion evokes De Beers' methods – by creating a utopic space for those who migrated to Kleinzee and were essentially tasked with slowly wearing down and destroying the environment. I find Alexievich's statement: "It takes at least fifty years for an event to become history, but here we have to follow the trail

while it is still fresh” reminiscent of my own thoughts before I began this project (33). The concept of memory and history disappearing is a threat to the collective archive of Kleinzee as its residents and patrons fall, one by one, without having recorded their experiences. “One utopia collapses and another comes to take its place”, supporting the concept of the ‘No Place’ as being unable to survive and prevail but we must preserve the memories and accounts of the utopia in order to correct our mistakes and behaviour for the future, in order to remember what was and improve what will be (Alexievich 212).

Another story which intimately confronts the overlapping and fragility of time, is *Fired*. With *Fired* I wanted to explore the notion of ‘legacy’ and, inevitably, this involved studying that which is left behind, that which remains to indicate history and the legacy of those who came before. Currently the archive of Kleinzee is incomplete – there are only a few records of life in Kleinzee and none concern the recent history of the town, post 2001. Jacques Derrida discusses the archive in *Archive Fever* (1998), stating that “the archive should *call into question* the coming of the future” (33). *Fired* takes place in the early 2000s when De Beers is faced with decisions concerning the longevity of Kleinzee and their mining business in the area. Tom, a fiercely loyal employee to De Beers, was born, grew up and continued to live in Kleinzee well into his adulthood, having experienced most of his significant milestones in the small, company town.

What lingers most in my memory of Chernobyl is life afterwards: the possessions without owners, the landscapes without people. The roads going nowhere, the cables leading nowhere. You find yourself wondering just what this

is: the past or the future. It sometimes felt to me as if I was recording the future.

(Alexievich 33)

In *Lover*, *The Cat Lady* and *The Boy on the Wall*, the reader will recognise a similar sentiment. While Tom is in the warped space of the Spar, experiencing the past, future and present simultaneously, Max and Zander wander through the remains of their, once utopic, hometown. In *The Cat Lady*, the reader is confronted with the abandoned pets wandering through the town, beings which haunt the town and simultaneously are haunted by the loss of their owners, similar to the pets of Pripjat who were abandoned during the evacuation. However, while Pripjat's disaster occurred and escalated within days, its buildings, homes and pets abandoned almost instantly, Kleinzee's 'evacuation' occurred slowly, ex-employees of De Beers trickling out one by one until the town's numbers steadily declined. One day it became noticeable, in passing, that many – if not most – of the houses are empty, that the school requires less teachers, that the main Spar is too large to be profitable and that there are not enough patients for the hospital.

It is hard to write about the gradual – that which happens slowly. Often you do not realize it is even happening before you are looking back, walking through a place you have known your whole life and only recognizing it for what it once was. While this experience is explicitly portrayed in *Lover*, *The Cat Lady* and *The Boy on the Wall*, *Fired* approaches the future and past in a subtle manner as Tom haphazardly finds himself in a space where time has overlapped where he is confronted with a familiar space being changed or transformed into a space of the future, thereby walking through or calling forth the future itself.

In *Fired*, Tom searches for his father in the Spar, seeking comfort from him as he had just been informed of Kleinzee's fate. His reasoning for his decision in life was based on his father's life and the legacy he was meant to live up to. Realizing time had gone quiet, that all the watches and clocks had ceased moving their hands, Tom turns around to find his father sitting at, what looks to be a café table, where the tellers would have been. In this time vacuum, Tom and his father have a conversation in the Spar as it appears in 2020, starkly compared to the Spar which Tom experienced when walking in 'earlier', in the mid-2000s. As they speak, he is able to view the moment his wife met a man who she would later move in with – after divorcing Tom. In this space where time is woven together – past, present and future – Tom confronts his father somewhat concerning the legacy of the town and Tom's own legacy. When Tom exits this illusion, he is back at home, having never left the Spar, still staring at the photograph of the miners – pioneers, as Tom and his father call them – he leaves the photograph to find his father, who, Tom realizes, has passed away while Tom was at work. There are many themes of leaving and being left behind in this narrative – what De Beers 'leaves behind' (a town or a bare strip of land, rehabilitation or barren earth) is contrasted with what Tom's family left behind when they moved, which is again contrasted with what Tom's father leaves behind in the form of a legacy.

Time, as with many other stories, such as *Lover*, *The Cat Lady* and *The Boy on the Wall*, is an important theme within *Fired*. Kleinzee itself is defined by time and memory and this is reflected in *Fired* as the Spar which acts, somewhat, as the yellow Ferris wheel of Pripjat. The Kleinzee Spar is a large building which is clearly visible when entering the town as it has been painted turquoise in recent years by newcomers to the area who hoped to create an immersive shopping center of, what could be defined as a relic of Kleinzee and De Beers' success. Tourists often remark, 'Why would such a place need a Spar or shopping center as large as that?'. It is

arduous to explain to them exactly how it came to be that the town and the company running was lucrative enough to afford such a building – lucrative in a monetary and social sense, since Kleinzee was filled to the brim with people and acted as a small business ‘hub’ for those who could enter its premises.

Within the Spar, Tom experiences his reality, the human noise of a thriving space, which Kleinzee was at the time. The scene then shifts to reflect the future, within the same building, a makeshift café where his ‘then-deceased’ father interacts in the quiet, almost haunted space which had, moments before, been filled with life. He is able to witness the moment his wife’s leaving began. He is able to pinpoint the exact moment his personal life began to change, the moment the leaving-of-Tom was set in motion. The story does not specify whether this is a memory or whether this is a fabricated memory Tom was able to create based on information he later received – e.g. that his wife is leaving him for said person, that they walked into each other at Spar, that the children accompanied him. These different timelines intersecting reflects the conflicting visions of Kleinzee which any individual would experience, revisiting Kleinzee after having seen it flourish decades before.

## A Quiet Place

Namaqualand is essentially a very quiet space – likely due to the distance between settlements, dirt roads and size of the province itself. There is more space here than people, which makes it a very unassuming environment to enter. One could easily pass through this part of the Northern Cape and not think very much of it or the small towns which seem either underdeveloped or severely neglected. Appearances are not often what they seem. I know this first-hand, coming from a farm outside Kleinsee and having witnessed a moment of its prime and its slow decline.

Kleinsee is very much an anonymous town, a passing-through town to most tourists. A quiet place with a quiet history which most people neglect to consider because even the locals are quiet until prompted with questions about what happened here. Rob Nixon wrote, “structural violence is silent, it does not show – it is essentially static, it *is* the tranquil waters.” (11). Kleinsee and the surrounding towns, such as Koiingnaas, Kommaggas and Port Nolloth, are effectively static in comparison with the broader scope of South African settlements but are crucial to the larger economic narrative of South Africa, having been major diamond mining hubs during the 1900s. Beyond the ‘tranquil waters’ of ‘simple living’ which we engage in in the Northern Cape, far from traffic, whining sirens and towering skyscrapers, exists the quiet, unseen violence inflicted upon the area during the industrial age.

Once, I drove with a friend’s family who’d come to visit us on our farm, outside Kleinsee. They were interested in seeing Koiingnaas and potentially Hondeklip Bay. We drove about halfway when her mother exclaimed that we had to turn around. She couldn’t take it anymore,

she'd said. The road was too long, too straight, and she could see exactly where we were going. Because of that, she felt there was no end in sight. And nothing that could be done except turn around.

Somehow this memory led me to think of Kleinzee. While I researched Kleinzee's history, I read about its hopeful beginnings, the twists and turns, swindling and heroics, community and sport which all made up a quaint, beautiful seaside town. While reading, all I felt was despair and regret at what the future held for these hopeful Kleinzee inhabitants, for the buildings, roads, schools and trees which would all fall prey to the future. I was looking at a long, straightforward road, its timeline inevitably set in stone, with no true, hopeful ending in sight. What only contributed to this was my previous failings to see Kleinzee for what it is – a space of possibility.

There are many tales concerning the value of diamonds and how they came to be precious in society. In Namaqualand, there were tales of diamonds lying on the ground in plain sight – without value they just like any other “worthless stone”. There are tales of farmers who were shocked at the amounts they were offered for the mining rights to their farms, tales of the Strandloper whose skeleton was found, surrounded by diamonds, deceased long before diamond mining was established in South Africa, long before diamonds were considered valuable (Green 86). Green notes that a diamond seems to “[accumulate] value as it travels away from its point of origin”, and then draws on Edward Jay Epstein's *The Rise and Fall of Diamonds* (1982) to describe the way in which De Beers and Anglo-American eventually “took possession of the diamond industry by creating a structure for maintaining the illusion of diamond scarcity” (Green 88). By upholding the perception that diamonds were rare, the value of the diamond increased. Their promotion of the diamond also contributed to the commodity's value. “Diamonds Are Forever” is



the slogan most commonly associated with the stone, as De Beers' monopoly on the diamond industry motivated them to promote the product, rather than their company (Green 93, 94). The influence of "royal couple[s]", Hollywood stars and the portrayal of the diamond on film as the ultimate signifier of "love" and "commitment" inspired the "tradition of the diamond engagement ring" for the "desiring public" – thus establishing the concept of 'Desire Advertising' which has been "widely imitated ever since" (Green 95, 94). "Diamonds Are Forever" was also meant to contribute not only to the desire for the commodity, but also to the illusion of scarcity and sanctity, as they attempted to "discourage the resale of diamonds" – it would be more acceptable, following a failed marriage or relationship, to acquire a new diamond for a new partner or spouse than to 're-use' the previous jewel (Green 95). The stockpiling and selective trading of diamonds in order to influence the value of an otherwise 'worthless stone' led to a myriad of company practices, such as the "development of highly policed forbidden zones surrounded by barbed-wire fences", and closed communities or company towns, which allowed De Beers to gain a monopoly and exploit the diamond industry and environment.

In August, 1925, Jack Carstens successfully registered the "first diamond to be found on the Namaqualand coast of South Africa", according to Jack Carstens' memoir, *A Fortune Through My Fingers* (1962) (58). This discovery of diamonds led to a "diamond rush" as diggers from all over South Africa staked their claims and pegged out their areas around Jack's prospecting site. Few were truly successful. Jack was approached by many men who wanted to enter into partnerships with him, with bright ideas of where the next treasure trove might be found. "Sonnie" Kennedy of Kimberly and Mr. Solomon Rabinowitz ("King Solomon") were two notable figures who approached Jack with possible partnerships concerning Alexander Bay and Buchuberg respectively but ultimately Jack decided to approach Sir Ernest Oppenheimer (Jack Carstens 62).

En route to Oppenheimer in Cape Town, Jack was intercepted by a Mr. Harry Saunders who introduced him to Mr. Truro – the man who would one day swindle Jack of all his fortune. They entered into a verbal contract, Mr. Truro would handle the business side while Jack prospected and acquired the options to the coastal farms in the area of Kleinzee. The farm O’Beep proved difficult to obtain and, after some investigation it became clear that the owner was only willing to offer the option to Jack’s father. Through manipulation Truro convinced Jack, who convinced his father, to sign over O’Beep to Truro under the pretense of “we are all in this venture together” (Jack Carstens 70). Having acquired the options, Jack ended up on Jan Kotze’s farm and, in November 1927, discovered 30 000 carats worth £400 000. Jack was instructed by Truro to mail the diamonds to offices of the Cape Coast Exploration company, which Jack did without question. After mailing the diamonds, he wired Truro, informing him of the amount of diamonds and requesting an update on the status of their business. He received no answer. Jack received word from the specialists who were sent to the area, that Truro had sold all their options to Cape Coast Exploration and essentially conned Jack out of a fortune as neither his, nor his father’s name, appeared on any documents. He’d sold their shares for a measly £30 000. Truro returned to the United Kingdom and reportedly had a nervous breakdown – in *A Fortune Through My Fingers*, Jack believed that this breakdown was a result of Jack’s wire about the £400 000 worth of diamonds as Truro must have realized he’d lost a fortune in his con as well (88).

Cape Coastal Exploration Company Limited took over the mining operation and soon after Jack realized his misfortune, he was informed that he would be employed as second-in-command at Kleinzee which would eventually become a well-known “compound” in Namaqualand, a “material structure” which can be considered the materialization of the “anxieties of ownership” concerning the highly sought after diamonds (Green 89). Jack remained a valuable asset to De

Beers for decades and his determination is commendable as, even before Cape Coastal Exploration became involved, Jack's initial discovery of diamonds had already been vital to De Beers' success. In 1951, Sir Ernest Oppenheimer made an opening speech at the Oppenheimer Bridge's opening. In this speech he emphasized the value of Annex Kleinzee. The Precious Stones Act of 1927 detailed that the Government was "not entitled to the lease share" of the profits made of diamonds discovered before the Act was instated in 1927, only to diamond mining tax (Jack Carstens 102). Thus, because Jack Carstens discovered his diamond in 1925, De Beers saved millions of pounds for the company.

At first Kleinzee was utilized as living quarters for the diggers, however Jack describes their trappings as simple – when they'd discovered the fortune of 30 000 carats they slept in tents and corrugated iron huts, which did little more than protect them from the unpredictable gales that characterize the area. Their small mining camp was to be expanded by machinery and a myriad of staff. A fence was constructed around the main mining area and access was restricted to employees. Later, an X-ray machine was also used to X-ray anyone exiting the premises. A vast range of security measures were used and later discarded in favour of more convenient measures. At a time, when you were to enter Kleinzee, you had to leave your vehicle outside at the security office and only use the vehicle assigned to you inside the fenced area. The "natural abundance of diamonds" initiated an "ever-greater need for security" with regards to the compounds or company towns, however these "intensive security procedures" only "limit[ed]" the trade of "illicit diamonds" (Green 92). In an effort to avoid smuggling and theft, no possessions were to leave the Kleinzee without being thoroughly searched. The process to enter and exit the mining area was also a timely affair:

The protection measures for those labourers involved a change house routine which never varied. Each morning they entered the change house from the compound, stripped, left their own clothes behind and passed to another room to don work clothes provided by the mine. Followed by the supervisors, they passed along a barbed-wire alleyway to the mining area and at the end of the shift, they reversed the process taking a shower during the change of clothes. Dressed again in their own belongings they were escorted back to the compound by the compound manager. The key of the change house was in charge of the Security Officer whose duty it was to lock up and keep the key in his possession. (Jack Carstens 118)

As Peter Carstens remarks, “[m]any company towns are never planned; they grow haphazardly as the extractive enterprises linked with them expand” and Kleinzee is no exception (4). As Kleinzee switched hands and managers, it was expanded appropriately, going as far as to change its location for the sake of practicality. Eventually Kleinzee was altered until the living quarters of Kleinzee and the mine itself were separated, leading to the inevitable relaxation of some of the stricter rules concerning security in the town. For example, if you’d driven to Kleinzee in the early 2000s you would no longer have to exchange your vehicle for a company-approved vehicle.

When houses were eventually built, families were allowed to move into Kleinzee. This led to the small mining store being expanded to contain more goods and the town itself expanding with more businesses, amenities, social and sporting clubs and religious facilities. However, “[a]ll forms of private enterprise [were] prohibited, which place[d] yet another restriction on employees while they [were] working for a particular company”, thus all enterprises were initially founded and approved by De Beers (Peter Carstens 4).

Like other company towns, Kleinzee was not built for the people who lived in it. It was a rational result of the decision by a board of directors whose chief, while obeying basic rules that had been laid down by the state, was unhindered production at the lowest cost. The people were as much part of the machinery as were the washing plant, the haulage system, and the fences. The system was expected to operate smoothly and, as far as the company was concerned, harmony could be achieved only if there was loyalty to Cape Coast and obedience to the system. It was logical, therefore, that town could have no outsiders. Everyone worked for the company, either directly or, in the case of the women, indirectly. (Jack Carstens 45)

Kleinzee was designed to be somewhat of a utopia to the employees of De Beers. The *Context* chapter explains the concept of company towns being created and controlled to a degree as ‘colonies’. Colonies, when established, were created with “utopianism” in mind, in order to create the ideal in a ‘new world’ (Clayes 215). Utopias, like dystopias, “seek to alter the social order on a fundamental, systemic level” and Kleinzee, especially in the late 1900s, was a prime example of a utopic space – while adhering to the laws of Apartheid state South Africa, Kleinzee was also one of the first to encourage desegregation and apply this to their schools (Gordin et al 2). Distinctions can be made concerning the validity of the ‘utopia’ as your ideal and mine most likely differs. Kleinzee is also representative of the utopia’s decline into a dystopic state. Dystopia can generally be defined as “a utopia that has gone wrong” or “a utopia that functions only for a particular segment of society” (Gordin et al 1). While Kleinzee was viewed as a utopia by most residents, in retrospect, as social politics increased within the town, tensions rose, and experiences

of the utopic settlement morphed, straying from the ideal. Eventually outsiders were witnessing the slow unraveling of a ‘utopia’ into a dystopic space as the environmental violence increased, social distinctions solidified and the ‘provider’ for the utopic elements of Kleinzee withdrew from the settlement.

Often, we are confronted with texts detailing the design and existence of utopias which, ultimately, unravels and morphs into a dystopia to the protagonist and audience. This phenomenon, however, is not one which is necessarily directly representative of reality to the extent that we see on our screens or in pages. The disaster of Chernobyl, for example, was one which shocked the world but, after a few years, the area in and around Pripyat was all but forgotten until it was once again sensationalised by HBO’s eponymous Chernobyl series. It is easy for us to overlook or even ignore events which happened in close proximity to us in the broader scheme of things. For the longest time I was content at separating myself from what was happening in the town 15 kilometers from our farm as I was only affected as a third party and a juvenile at that.

When you’ve lived long enough within a certain reality, it no longer seems strange or foreign and in many ways you become desensitized to the violence surrounding you. The 2000s marked the “Anthropocene Age” – a time during which human action has begun to impact the environment in irreversible ways, a time during which humans have essentially begun to self-destruct the only habitable planet for the sake of economic and industrial advantage, contributing to an inevitable, larger environmental crisis (Nixon 12). During the early to late 2000s, De Beers withdrew their mining endeavours from Kleinzee but, by then, the damage had already been done. The damage of the age of the Anthropocene did not begin in the 2000s, the environment had simply reached a tipping point. Similarly, Kleinzee’s natural environment had been violated and barely

rehabilitated when De Beers ceased their mining operations. It was no longer financially viable to continue mining in the area, and thus the discarding of Kleinsee as a company town is indicative of the mining industry's preoccupation with profit and time which are key characteristics of the industrial age as "the temporal contests over how to sustain, regenerate, exhaust, or obliterate the landscape as resource [became] critical." (Nixon 17).

*The Gatekeeper* was a story I struggled to formulate for a long time, but which ultimately confronts environmental 'violence' and the catalyst for the slow degradation of Kleinsee as a utopia. I wrote the first page and left it to stew, unable to grasp where exactly it was headed, what it was concerned with, why it was important enough to write. When I began reading *Slow Violence* (2013), eventually the pieces fell into place. "Slow violence" is defined as "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" and, once I started to think of slow violence in direct relation to Namaqualand and Kleinsee, it became easier to identify the slow violence in my area (Nixon 2). It was just a matter of finding an effective way to incorporate it into a narrative. One night, as I was about to drift off to sleep, I began visualising Johnny's path from his home to the security gate and envisioned the crux of the story – the natural disasters that plague his mind. Johnny's ability to see and experience natural disasters as 'episodes' or moments of collapse, was a direct result of reading Nixon's work concerning slow violence and sensationalism. Nixon proposes that we "complicate conventional assumptions about violence as a highly visible act that is newsworthy because it is event focused, time bound, and body bound" and that we innovate methods to "devise arresting stories, images and symbols adequate to the pervasive but elusive violence of delayed effects" (3). Johnny's episodes occur sporadically

throughout his life, but are a constant within his life since he was a teenager. This undisclosed time represents the moment the state of the environment reached a moment of no return, a moment indicating that irreparable damage had been done and the hypothetical ‘disaster’ status could be assigned to Kleinsee and its surrounding area. The thought process behind this is that sensationalized disasters are typically assigned timestamps – fires are discovered at a certain time; floods, hurricanes and typhoons are predicted and recorded as beginning and ending within a specific time frame. The difficulty with slow violence disasters is that a commencement date is most often undetermined. There are not necessarily spectators for the initiation of slow violence. These ‘slow disasters’ are “calamities that patiently dispense their devastation while remaining outside our flickering attention spans – and outside the purview of a spectacle-driven corporate media” (Nixon 6). Typically, they occur and escalate gradually until, one day, revealed to be a matter of concern. As Nixon notes with the example of tsunamis, “tsunamis have a visceral, eye-catching and page-turning power that tales of slow violence, unfolding over years, decades, even centuries, cannot match” (3). Instead of a mass of spectators reacting and witnessing natural disasters, compared to spectators faced with a slow violence instance, Johnny represents the spectator. He is physically influenced by episodic disasters before opening his eyes to his personal reality once more.

To effectively reflect slow violence I utilised time, “redefining speed” by playing with it using Johnny’s short, episodic bursts of disaster which undoubtedly left Johnny psychologically shaken, and then contrasting the fast-paced episodes with the final episode, which happens deliberately slowly and demands Johnny’s attention – with this use manipulation of time I aimed to accentuate the “multiple speeds of environmental terror” which influences the attention span of the viewer of the disaster (Nixon 13, 61). With the final disaster, the slow environmental disaster



of Kleinzee, he is faced with the fact that this disaster directly impacts him and essentially has the same physical effect on him as the other episodes, it just takes a while longer to recognize the disaster in front of him because mining and the dumping of excess gravel is a regular occurrence in his life. This phenomenon plays on Nixon's statement about the "unequal attention given to spectacular and unspectacular time" which influences the significance of varying disasters (Nixon 6).

Johnny's episodes are contrasted by his everyday life, by the visitors of Kleinzee, the toxic blue Powerade spilled on the floor, messes he refuses to clean up to prove a point – a compulsion which could reflect the basic human impulse to avoid responsibility for matters which they did not cause. The same way you would walk through a city and complain about the trash on the sidewalk without stopping to pick it up and toss it in a trash can, Johnny refuses to clean the Powerade spillage. This plays into his obsession with superheroes as well. He identifies his 'superpower' as his episodes and his ability to experience these disasters but does not understand what his power truly means in the grand scheme of things. Within this narrative Johnny realises he has afforded sense of foreboding, which he considers his 'superpower', though he is unsure what exactly this 'superpower' means. From the moment the environmental 'disaster' surrounding Kleinzee became irreversible and devastating, Johnny experienced his episodes as a manner of warning. He was the 'chosen one' but the concept of slow violence is not widely known or understood in wider society, and Johnny's understanding of it is still not completely solidified by the end of the narrative. The contrast of the sensational disasters and the 'slow' realistic disaster, which is relevant to Johnny and Kleinzee's residents, emphasises that both forms of violence are equally damaging. The difference between these disasters lie in the time passing, the ability to influence and deter the

disaster – in the case of environmental slow violence, there is often still an opportunity to influence the damage which, with other natural disasters, might be inevitable.

The crux of *The Gatekeeper* is the final episode, during which Johnny experiences all the relevant symptoms, such as the piercing headache, but waits, anticlimactically for the disaster to hit him. In that moment he's watching the field, which was remarked in *The Veld Child* as well, as being one of the few fields which bloomed wonderfully and still contained natural plant growth before De Beers began mining there as well. Johnny witnesses the mining truck dump excess gravel on a growing heap of gravel, the dust rising like a mushroom cloud, confirming Johnny's final suspicion that he was witnessing another disaster, albeit slower and less spectacularly destructive.

The story ends with Johnny witnessing the 'final disaster' but it is an open ending. There is no definite "victory" or "defeat", "eluding the tidy closure" as the environmental crisis in Kleinzee also has no end yet (Nixon 6). Readers may be aware of what the state of Kleinzee's environment is currently, but the violence has not ended as mining continues to plague the veld. The specific field mentioned in *The Veld Girl* and again in *The Gatekeeper*, recovered to an extent, resembling its original state for the first time in a decade during 2018. However, when the illegal miners were drawn to Kleinzee, they ripped the rehabilitated plants from the earth once more, to make fires and create 'skerms'. They created a squatter camp at the edge of the town, in this field, and spent their days 'mining' the fields in dangerous circumstances for the promise of diamonds and the 'riches' a few diamonds might provide. After the illegal miners, called 'diggers', were removed there was no one to hold responsible for the environmental harm caused by their hands. They were forcibly removed and, now, there is no rehabilitation plans in place to correct the damage and restore the environment to a stable state. Kleinzee's ongoing conflict with mining has not ended, as Johnny's story is open-ended, so is Kleinzee's because the violence has not ended and is unpredictable, as

proven in recent years. “[O]ngoing intergenerational slow violence” continues – mining companies have long since ceased mining but the environment remains ruined, a state which my generation and the next must live with and navigate – just as Zandra, Johnny’s daughter, would have navigated her part in the environmental crisis of her hometown as an inheritor of environmental hostility (Nixon 8).

The fact remains that, by way of reviewing our history and the mistakes which were made, we can hopefully attempt to restore that which we have neglected to defend and thus address the slow violence we may have disregarded or been oblivious to.

## Epilogue: A Pioneer

I thought of the fortune I had lost and how different life could have been.

(Jack Carstens 182)

My abrupt decision to pursue a creative research project left me at a loss. I had free rein to write: moreover, to write about a space I'd occupied my whole life. My immediate impulse was research, reading, poring over work I had no chance of finishing within the year I had allowed myself. I was overthinking, as I tend to do. I was thinking about all the different possible perspectives and the detailed history of the place, while also struggling with my own memories and the possibility that whatever I wrote would be deemed too personal, too sentimental or irrelevant. I was spiraling downwards.

When Covid-19 and the South African Lockdown struck, I conveniently found myself home, on the farm I grew up on outside Kleinsee, Die Houthoop. As the lockdown continued, I was forced to overcome my fear of driving and compelled to re-enter the space of Kleinsee, not as an onlooker, but as a patron. I had to walk through the town, tick off the items on my very mundane to-do list, and take in the new residents, the new site while simultaneously remembering the place as used to be during a time when it felt like my own life was stalling somewhat.

I am, in a way, grateful to have been confined to the farm and Kleinsee during the Lockdown, since this forced me to finally pick up *A Fortune Through My Fingers* by Jack Carstens, a book that proved to be the most valuable source material for structuring and contextualising my short stories.

From the research I'd done on Kleinzee before Lockdown, it was evident that there is not much information available on the town itself. Peter Carstens' book *In the Company of Diamonds* proved essential in detailing Kleinzee's history and origins, but didn't account for the latest developments in Kleinzee during the early- and late 2000s. Realising there is no literature available on the 'future'/present of Kleinzee, I decided to delve deeper into the past, to locate the origins of the town before attempting to unravel the present. This led me to Peter Carstens' father – Jack Carstens. The pioneer of Namaqualand. The founder of the first registered diamond on the Namaqualand West Coast. Jack Carstens' memoir challenged the myths concerning diamonds, diamond mining and the mining industry, which I'd been exposed to since my childhood in Kleinzee. Carstens' narrative ultimately exposed how complex the history of diamond mining truly was in Namaqualand and allowed me to entertain various theories and realities concerning the economic peak and eventual decline of the area I'd grown up in.

When reading *A Fortune Through My Fingers*, I was reminded of every tale I'd ever heard told of legendary, adventurous, swashbuckling figures – though Jack was considerably tamer, there is no denying the echo of a figure such as Charles Marlow, traversing through continents, discovering that which is shrouded in disbelief and mystery, experiencing history as it was being made and simultaneously being the catalyst for Namaqualand's development and the diamond industry along the Western Coast of South Africa. Though the book does not devote much attention to the history of the diamond itself – the evolution of a “worthless stone” to “an object with potential” and then, finally, a valuable commodity – it does explore the history of a man whose involvement with diamonds has allowed him an obscure place in history – his historic value closely tied to that of a diamond (Green 86). It immediately struck me as a book that my father would adore, a book that the people of Namaqualand and South Africans in general *should* read, since

Jack Carstens seems to have been a very prolific, distinctly South African character in our complex and often violent history. Beyond his status as a pioneer, he represents a spirit of perseverance and innovation which was missing from his area, Port Nolloth. While there were many opportunistic characters moving through these areas then, and even still today, Jack's refusal to abandon his belief in the resources of Namaqualand set him apart. Everyone had all but given up on the fantasy of diamonds in Namaqualand when Jack made his discovery. He was able to use his father's information, drawing from his father's history and contributing to his legacy, utilising the knowledge of native Namaqualanders and what he knew of the environment itself to aid him in his quest for diamonds. He also provides a first-hand account and experience of the "extension of corporate power into [the] public space" as diamonds were established as "commodities", allowing company towns such as Kleinsee to be established for the purpose of mining diamonds (Green 87). Though he contributed to the infrastructure of the area by enabling large mining corporations to mine in the area, he also contributed to the extraction of existing cultural and natural resources. Ultimately he was complicit in the displacement of local inhabitants and the destruction of life characteristic of the early mining economy. This legacy ultimately results in an ambiguous view of the pioneer, Jack Carstens as he offers a complex portrait of early pioneers and the creation of diamonds as a form of wealth, offering an alternative to De Beers' narrative and demonstrating how multifaceted the early history of diamond prospecting is.

*A Fortune Through my Fingers* is Jack Carsten's life narrative, recounting his early life and, in essence, his time in Kleinsee until the day he relocated to Cape Town. Carstens draws from his "personal memories" as an "archival source", also including newspaper clippings and photographs to supplement his accounts, as a life writer (Smith & Watson 6). The reader experiences Jack Carstens' life from his first person perspective, as he very personally explains

himself and his journey, both “the observing subject” and the “object of investigation, remembrance and contemplation”, as he relays his life narrative to the reader (Smith & Watson 1). Essentially Carstens is affording the reader an opportunity to be confronted with his ‘two lives’ – one being the life which the public is familiar, the “social, historical person, with achievements, personal appearance, social relationships”; the other being the “self experienced only by that person, the self felt from the inside” by the life writer – the emotions and personal experiences which Carstens can never escape but that is less renowned (Smith & Watson 5). Carstens’ writing style is significant to me, as a Namaqualander, since Namaqualand is characterised by its unique relationship to storytelling, and Carstens seems to echo the styles of storytelling he most likely grew up with. This storytelling style contributes to his ability to “anchor” the “[narrative] in [Carstens’] own temporal, geographical, and cultural milieu” as life narrators tend to do (Smith & Watson 9). Jack belongs to a particularly South African genre, characterized by this technique, since other South African writers, such as Herman Charles Bosman, also draw on the unique vernacular oral modes of their regions in order to authentically relay their narratives. Essentially, Carstens is speaking to the reader, rather than writing his narrative to be read, mirroring the characteristic Namaqualand tradition of oral storytelling, infusing his narrative with regional characters he encountered, such as Jan Kotze, who is still immortalised in many Namaqualanders’ stories. Carstens’ tone is conversational as he begins to tell his story and is quickly led off topic by another anecdote relating to his initial tale, for example when he relays his family history, describing his grandfather’s position as the Port Superintendent of Port Nolloth, he indulges the reader in a tale of his grandfather’s old sea stories, picked up when he was a sea captain. This charming tale of “*The Clipper*” and the “*Alabama*” is not essential to Carstens’ narrative as a whole but rather an anecdote which reveals a dominant characteristic of the Namaqualand nature – to

share, to tell stories, be they relevant or not (Jack Carstens 11). This style of storytelling makes his account more personable, evoking a sense of the reader as a living, breathing presence while Jack is sharing his story, or as an active participant in Jack's conversation. This, in turn, makes it difficult for readers to distance themselves emotionally from the material. By the end of the memoir, the reader cares for the spaces and characters Jack has introduced them to. However, it is also important to consider Jack Carstens' position as a life narrator. Though he is one of few sources concerning Kleinzee's history, we must also keep in mind that his is a "subjective 'truth'", his account a chronicle of a "certain time period", "[enshrining] a community" and documenting "history" from his perspective, as he experienced it (Smith & Watson 10). Unlike historians, Carstens – as a life narrator – situates himself in the center of the history he is encapsulating in his work, writing his "*own* [story]" as an autobiographical narrator, within the larger historical account of Kleinzee (Smith & Watson 11).

Beyond his writing style and storytelling technique, Jack Carstens lived a very interesting life. His decisions set him firmly on a path to discovering the first diamond along the Western Coast of South Africa, and distinguished him as a historical figure. Just as diamonds "[accumulated] value as [they] move[d] through social and geographical space", Jack's value as a pioneer was gradually exposed by means of his travels and experiences (Green 86). He experienced World War I and fought in France, and lost his friends to battles in foreign countries for causes that didn't impact him personally. His experience of sailing to Europe, training, and being shipped to Egypt and France, offers a bizarre story of a normal, South African boy from a very small, somewhat anonymous fishing town in the Northern Cape, travelling to fight in a war so far removed from his place of origin.



In Chapter III, he begins recounting his experience with the military, somberly ending Chapter II with: “I often think back on my youth and the fun we used to have. Perhaps it was the war that changed it all. Perhaps, too, it was the artificial things that come with the advance of science. But sure it is that the fun we had would never satisfy the youth of today.” (Jack Carstens 15). Jack goes on to mention his “compulsory training”, in 1914, alongside the Cape Peninsula Rifles and eventually the sinking of the *Lusitania* by a German submarine which claimed “hundreds of women”, the razing of buildings by enemies and the vigils held by the C.P.R. in an effort to protect citizens (Jack Carstens 16, 17). These moments were tame compared to what he would later come to experience and he notes, describing the bugle band playing while the C.P.R. marched to Simonstown, “What a lovely war it seemed at the time.” (Jack Carstens 17).

These moments are sharply contrasted by his experiences in the First South African Infantry. His first experience of a casualty in war was in Mersa Matruh. Jack explains that it was a daunting operation for a young, inexperienced soldier.

As we advanced the enemy bullets pinged past our heads. It was our baptism of fire and it was impressive to find no signs of panic or wavering. Suddenly there was a cry from Sergeant Horwood and he dropped like a stone. He had been shot in the throat.

“Give me a cigarette,” he said. I lit one. He inhaled, gave a sigh and rolled over dead.

Still the bullets whistled past until the final charge of the Dorset Yeomanry and the battle was over. (Jack Carstens 19)

The loss of an experienced soldier, a sergeant no less, could not have done much to ease a young man, or boy's, fears. On April 15, 1916, they set sail for France to engage in trench warfare. "Every morning and evening the shells would come screaming over – a terrifying experience for young soldiers who could do nothing but flatten themselves and hope for the best," Jack stated, comparing it later with the front line where bullets and shells were usually predictable concerning the time of day (Jack Carstens 20). Jack would, inevitably, be confronted with death and mutilation during World War I.

On one occasion we were passing through a wrecked garden with a small gate at its end. One at a time we had to pass through and make a bolt across the road for the comparative safety of a ruined building. We had to wait for the officer's order: "Run!" and then each made his dash. The fellow in front of me was unlucky. He was killed in mid-flight.

It was now my turn. I opened the gate and was about to run when an explosion occurred uncomfortably close to my ear. A piece of the gate had been shot away and I turned to see "Moeg" Carey immediately behind clutching his face in pain.

Taking his hands away I could see that his lower jaw had been blown to pieces. As he moved away to find a stretcher bearer I had time to tap him on the shoulder and wish him luck before the officer called my run. In a second or two I was safely over. (Jack Carstens 21)

Similar to this experience, Jack relays the death of Bill Carlsson in Longueval Village.

Our little party were sheltering behind that ruin across the road and awaiting further orders from the officer, who so far had not appeared. We spotted the enemy in a trench not fifty yards down the road. For a handful of men, without an officer or even an N.C.O., to attack and possibly fall into a trap seemed out of the question. But not for Bill; and he could not resist the temptation of pitching into the enemy forthwith. I'm perfectly certain that he imagined himself back on the rugged battlefield of Newlands and he had to cross that line.

I can see him now with a Mills bomb in his hand careering down the main street of Longueval. None of our shouts would stop him. On he went. On – until a machine-gunner from the top of one of the ruined buildings let fly. He was riddled with bullets and never moved again. (Jack Carstens 21-22)

Reading of his experience, the casual nature with which soldiers eventually acted when confronted with death and gore as their view of reality was warped to suit their new circumstances, the reader will eventually be struck by the phenomenon of the soldier returning to his home country. Once again, Jack's reality will be changed irrevocably as he is demanded to set aside these, somewhat otherworldly, experiences of war and function within society. The war offered men like Carstens an international, global perspective, while also exposing them to unimaginable

trauma and cruelty. His understanding of Namaqualand therefore stems from a perspective which is both very local and, inter of the new modern international global era, heralded by the war.

After Delville Wood, Carstens' loss of his friends, experienced during his early twenties, in France, prompts him to accept promotions in his military endeavors and eventually leads to him encountering a boy who has also enlisted, who reminds him distinctly of himself as a young soldier.

When Jack was a new recruit, he was stationed as a lookout one. One of his tasks was to notify the O.C. if the wind changed direction as this could create the possibility of a gas attack from the enemy. This particular evening he'd had no sleep for "ten days" and unfortunately he fell asleep at his post. Their superior officer, a major, was known for being extremely strict and violent when orders were not followed to the letter, but despite Jack's obvious fear for his life concerning this superior, fatigue took over as his fellow troops slept. By some miracle, Jack woke up, blinking, just as his superior arrived with a "Everything all right, sentry? Don't forget to wake me if the wind changes." (Jack Carstens 20). Jack escaped unscathed. Later, during the battle at Delville Wood, the major was killed.

It's not clear how much time passed between that instance and Jack's promotion following the death of his fellow South African recruits, but as the superior officer, he'd been doing his rounds one evening when he came across a similar scene. The soldier, meant to be standing lookout, asleep.

I made as much clatter as I could to wake him before I reached him but all to no avail. There he was as I stood over him, his rifle clutched to his side and his head unconscious on the bayonet. For at least a minute we stayed thus and then, as

I took the rifle away, he woke up. Fully realizing the gravity of the situation, he burst into tears. He could have been not more than eighteen years old. (Jack Carstens 26)

Jack describes the fear of the young soldier and remarks that if he hadn't experienced this fear himself, this fatigue and horror of war, the soldier might have met a very different man. Jack didn't punish the young soldier, having met his 'shadow-self', his doppelganger, but gave him a lecture and imparted to him the immense responsibility that he had as his sleeping comrades trusted him to keep lookout. Jack never told anyone of this encounter, acknowledging that if his lenience were to reach the Colonel's ears, he'd be in serious trouble but also remarking that he remembered his own experience very distinctly, his own fear as a private soldier.

This was an anecdote I found particularly interesting – the anonymity and synonymy of soldiers, the kindness of Jack in a moment of recognition and the moment of recognition itself indicating Jack's sense of self, his ability to reflect. Reading about this, it is evident that he was a thoughtful character, one who spent a considerable amount of time considering his life and the moments which led to his inevitable triumph and loss. This ability to reflect and ultimately ponder the events of his life allows for a stream of conscious analysis of Jack's journey in the diamond mining industry, closely involving the reader in his examination of the prominent figures, conmen and establishment of diamond mines and company towns.

Many narratives are written about war, but few detail the aftermath of war, specifically the aftermath for the figure of the soldier. As if unable to part from the tumultuous events of war, Jack

applied for a position in the Indian military and would go on to spend years in India before encountering the soothsayer, taking ill and returning to his homeland.

The soothsayer introduces a bizarre element in this otherwise very realistic, straightforward tale. There is a magical-realist element to the first chapter, as Jack opens his narrative with the soothsayer encounter and, for a moment, the reader is left to wonder if this is a fantasy novel or a true-life narrative. The Indian fortuneteller with his white beard and white robes, pursuing Jack with a fortune he was determined to tell, characterises Jack as the protagonist and sets him apart as a mythical figure himself – one which has a destiny, a fortune to fulfill. The reader is swept into the second chapter, eager to know how Jack found the “many shiny stones” and what obstacles he may have encountered along the way (Jack Carstens 9).

Jack’s return to South Africa, after having spent time in the Indian military, seems peculiar when contrasted with his experiences overseas. Somehow, when he was a young man, he’d been written into the chronicle of a daring protagonist, off to fight in a war, the only survivor amongst his South African peers, the triumphant, grieving military captain. Now, he’d been plucked out of his adventure, out of the narrative which seemed to prescribe him the role of the hero, and he was expected to return to the mundane life of those who’d remained behind in South Africa. Above and beyond this element, he was also to learn valuable lessons concerning deceit and distrust. The war had made him too trusting of others as most had meant him no ill will – after all, he’d been the protagonist. Now, as a minor character, he was being swindled left and right until he had to return home, tail tucked between his legs in search of a new venture.

Having taken part and failed in a real estate business, been swindled by a businessman in Cape Town and having embarked on a mica mining venture in the Northern Cape with his father

only to, once again, fail<sup>10</sup>, Jack returned to Port Nolloth in 1925, describing Port Nolloth as “as dead a little dorp as one could imagine” (Jack Carstens 47). “[H]ere I was back in a dying seaside town”, Jack laments, “There were no prospects for the future. At last I began to regret my leaving the Indian Army.” (Jack Carstens 47). The pitfalls of returning home, to South Africa, seemed to overwhelm him at this stage of his life. It’s interesting that the seaside town of Port Nolloth, his hometown, seemed ‘dead’ to him while, until recently, he’d been surrounded by death and bloodshed brought about by international conflicts. He was a young man and his time in the army had made him accustomed to action, to constant movement and orders which had to be carried out. Here, in Port Nolloth, business had slowed down considerably and Jack, now unemployed and uncertain of his place in this post-military reality, was restless in this idle space. The very first night, Jack describes himself tossing around in bed before finally falling asleep to experience a “vivid dream” of the “fortune-teller of Bareilly” saying “You will dig in the ground, Sahib, and find many shiny stones. Go to it, Sahib. You are very near the place I told you of.” (Jack Carstens 47)

What is often left out of Jack Carstens’ tale, is his father’s hand.

Bill Carstens was a pioneer himself. Without him, Jack might have never found the diamonds as it was his documents, his books, his findings, which prompted Jack to look in the right places.

That morning, after dreaming of the soothsayer, he recounted the dream to his father and Bill revealed to Jack his own experience with diamonds.

---

<sup>10</sup> The mica of Namaqualand was found to be of a lower quality than their international competitors and thus not a financially viable risk.

He said: “I spent last night looking for a report from Dr. Marloth on some gravels I sent him in 1913. Unfortunately I could not find it but it read something like this:

‘The gravels you sent me I found most interesting and they are without doubt diamondiferous. You tell me they have come from six miles south of Port Nolloth but I can hardly credit it. You no doubt know that some very prominent geologists have made many trips to Namaqualand and they have all reported that the chances of finding diamonds south of the Orange River are very remote. But I must repeat again that I like the look of the sample...’ (Jack Carstens 47-48)

Whether it was a coincidence that his father had been looking for these papers on Jack’s first night home, or whether he’d looked for the papers intentionally, to spark Jack’s interest, we will never be sure of. The result would have been the same either way. The war had been the reason for Bill’s venture never being followed through.

I went to Cape Town to see my old friend, Sir David Graaff, who was immediately interested. It was agreed that a syndicate should be formed to test the gravels. For some reason this took longer than anticipated and before we could come to some arrangement war broke out and the whole matter was forgotten. (Jack Carstens 48)



Similarly, the war was the reason Jack did follow through and fully follow in his father's footsteps and honour his legacy.

Another similarity between Bill and Jack is that Bill's grvels of 1913 was not his first encounter with the idea of minerals. Jack discovered papers of his father, detailing his encounters with "Native[s]" who'd informed him of possible gold discoveries in Namaqualand and his journeys to these caches at "Kaboos" (Jack Carstens 183). Like many other would-be prospectors, finances ran out before any real discoveries could be made. Bill, of course, also dabbled in diamonds, which led to his son, Jack's, discovery. Before the discovery of diamonds in South West Africa in 1908, Lessgang, a German mining employee at O'Kiep Copper Mines, wrote to Bill Carstens, enquiring whether he was interested in diamonds (Jack Carstens 182). Lessgang predicted that Kolmanskop was rich with diamonds, but Bill did not believe him and turned down Lessgang's offer of a partnership. Lessgang returned to England, hoping to find someone to finance him and rather disappointed in Bill's lack of belief. A year later, Bill received word from one of the German steamer's, *Eduard Bohlen*, which had docked at Port Nolloth, that "diamonds had been discovered at Kolmanskop" (Jack Carstens 183). There seemed to be a pattern of trial and error which is echoed in Jack's life as well, as he continuously risked his life, his finances, his reputation on the idea of trust, curiosity and optimism. Jack's perseverance sets him apart from many other prospectors but his father was essential to Jack's success. Thus, legacy, as in many other tales of pioneering, prospecting and discovery, is typically a deciding factor in watershed moments – such as the point Jack's life reached in 1925.

Much of Jack's life, concerning diamonds, is framed by the prediction of Jack's fortune – of how the shiny stones he'd find would make him very rich. Jack's memoir concludes with him revisiting Kleinzee after having moved, and characterises the entire narrative as a reflection on the riches of his life. The adventure story the reader had been engaged in for a hundred and eighty-five pages comes to a close as the weathered hero finally realises the journey had come to an end, that he had fulfilled his part as a pioneer in a barren, mineral-rich 'land' and is now able to retire. After leaving Kleinzee, the Carstens moved to Kenilworth, to a new home with a grand view of Table Mountain. Soon after moving, they visited Kleinzee, as Jack had organized a cricket challenge between the Olympic Sports Club in Rondebosch and that of Kleinzee. Their visit went splendidly and all too soon it was, once again, time to leave. As Jack Carstens drives out of Kleinzee, he reflects on the fortuneteller of so many years ago and realises he did turn out to be a very rich man – rich not in the monetary sense but rich in life.

At six o'clock on Monday morning we left Kleinzee for return to Cape Town – home. I doubt whether I shall ever see Namaqualand again. But I shall always cherish memories of that land of sunshine and of the people who live there. I did dig in the ground. I did find many shiny stones. I did become...very happy.  
(Jack Carstens 185)

It's odd to write in the absence of these fairytales De Beers had told us.

I remember sitting in the De Beers office beside the library, watching a PowerPoint presentation of diamonds and rocky plains and green nets spanned across barren-looking sand. Of advertisements with slender fingers and clean cut, blue and white stones. I vaguely remember the stories that were told and, oddly enough, what I remember of the ‘first diamond’ is that a man stumbled across it in the riverbed of the Buffelsriver during a drought. I cannot remember what they told us of the town but, through research, I realised that I never truly had an inkling of how timely and arduous Kleinsee’s establishment was. I was confronted with my own warped fantasies by the truth, told by the man who was the catalyst of progress and development. I cannot fathom that I ever believed a fairytale of a man stumbling across diamonds in the riverbed and a town starting overnight.

Now, as I write, I imagine the miners’ backaches, their euphoria one moment and claustrophobia the next. I imagine the builders, contract workers and living conditions – watching one another from their separate huts or hostels, dependent on their skin colour, dependent on their class, cooking over a communal fire, telling stories of hauntings or adventurers, stories they’d picked up while conversing with local farmers.

These were not fairytales, the only fantastical element, perhaps, the glossy women decorated with jewels, strewn in papers these mining men would most likely never see.

Where have the diamonds we wear, been? Who held them? Who dug them out and sorted them? Who looked at the rock around your neck with admiration and awe after toiling in the sun and dust for hours?

Where did the diamonds come from and who’s hands did they pass through?

The Kleinzee I know and have experienced is vastly different than Peter Carstens' experience. And Peter Carstens' experience is vastly different from his father, Jack Carstens' experience. That is why it is vital to document and recount the origin stories of small towns such as Kleinzee, in order to understand the present and perhaps influence its future.

The greatest tragedy of Jack Carstens' book is not his lost fortune; it is that it has been out of print for decades. Not only is it out of print and now classified as a rare book, it was also never translated into Afrikaans – arguably the first and only language of most Namaqualanders. A rare and invaluable part of Namaqualand's history, I wish every Namaqualander one day has the privilege of reading Jack Carstens' *A Fortune Through My Fingers*, so that they may understand the hard work, dedication, optimism and perseverance which hides in each and every one of us, can be used to develop Namaqualand and preserve the heritage of our desert sand, our veld, our long winding, dirt roads, our minerals, ocean and flowers – moreover, to preserve the stories of our people.

# Sources

Alexievich, Svetlana. *Chernobyl Prayer: A Chronicle of the Future*. Translated by Anna Gunin and Arch Tait, Penguin Random House, 1988.

Carstens, Jack. *A Fortune Through My Fingers*. Cape Town: Howard Timmins. 1962.

Carstens, Peter. *In the Company of Diamonds: De Beers, Kleinzee, and the Control of a Town*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001.

Clayes, Gregory (Ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2010.

Derrida, Jacques. *Archive Fever*. Translated by Eric Prenowitz. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998.

Fisher, Mark. "What Is Hauntology?" *Film Quarterly*. 66. 1 (2012): 16-24.

Freeman, Mark. "Telling Stories: Memory and Narrative". *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*. Ed. Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz. New York: Fordham University, 2010. 263-277.

Gordin, Michael D., et al., editors. *Utopia/Dystopia: Conditions of Historical Possibility*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010.

Green, Louise. *Fragments From the History of Loss: The Nature Industry and the Postcolony*. State College: Penn State University Press. 2020.

Gurnah, Abdulrazak. "Writing Place." *World Literature Today*. 78. 2 (2004): 26-28.

"KLEINZEE. Excavating Eastern Face Haulage 17-4-30." 1930. Photograph. Author's Personal Collection.

Konopka, Adam. "The Role of Umwelt in Husserl's Aufbau and Abbau of the Natur/Geist Distinction." *Human Studies*. 32. 3 (2009): 313-333.

Malcomess, Bettina and Kreutzfeldt Dorothee. *Not No Place: Johannesburg: Fragments of Time and Space*. Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2013.

Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press. 2013.

Schachtel, Ernest G. "On Memory and Childhood Amnesia." *Psychiatry*. 10. 1 (1947): 1-26.

Smith, Sidonie & Watson, Julia. *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 2001.

Van Dyk, Joha. "A foggy afternoon in Kleinzee." 2020. JPG.

Van Dyk, Joha. "Green nets on Kleinzee's perimeter." 2020. JPG.

Van Dyk, Joha. "Kleinzee swimming pool." 2020. JPG.

Van Dyk, Joha. "Office Building of De Beers". 2020. JPG.

Van Dyk, Joha. "Office Windows of De Beers". 2020. JPG.

Van Dyk, Joha. "Rehabilitated' field on the perimeter of Kleinzee". 2020. JPG.

Van Dyk, Joha. "Rehabilitated' field seen from inside Kleinzee". 2020. JPG.

Van Dyk, Joha. “Remnants of security boom leading into Kleinzee”. 2020. JPG.

Van Dyk, Joha. “The Golf Club.” 2020. JPG.

Van Dyk, Joha. “The Rooipad/Red Road”. 2020. JPG.