

Murder Montage

(Stories based on media coverage of actual murders)

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Honeymoon

*a bollywood king
with his bollywood bride
flew into Cape Town
and went for a ride
in the middle of the night
to find Ristorante Exotica
somewhere in Khayalitsha.*

*but the taxi-man
and one of his clan
following the plan
threw the king out on the street
drove off with his lovely queen
and made his majesty
widower of the century.*

*It is well known
that hit-men abound
@ shacktown.com
in the new freedom
where life
is a dime a dozen.*

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I

And then put out the light

Kneeling beside him, Latifa puts her arm around his shoulders and begins to stroke his cheek. She feels the incipient beard lurking beneath the pores. He doesn't have to shave every day. He hasn't today. She gazes into his eyes, two dark islands in wide wastes of whiteness, staring intently at her. When he sings and dances, his eyes sparkle with the light that shines through his whole being and shoots through her body, driving her wild with desire. But there is no light in them now. She will bring it back. She leans forward to kiss the dear orbs and her lips meet shutters that come down over darkness. She cannot kiss his taped lips the tape so she draws his head onto her breast and begins to stroke and kiss the thick dark waves.

She is back in the audience, back before their marriage, being pulled into him by the magic of haunches riding high, sinuous shoulders thrusting back and forth, legs strutting cheeky and joyful. In every teasing gesture, in his rhythmic bopping, in every melodious sound, Latifa sees and hears the world in which he had lived as a child, the houses with stoeps, the little tearooms, the vendors at their stalls, the streets rolling up inclines, the carefree gaiety of people in shiny, colourful outfits, dancing and parading under a rainbow of bright parasols. What joy as he sings and dances: the faces all around are suffused with the brightness that emanates from his being. He is here for everyone in the audience – she, just one of many. That is painful.

Standing next to Gadija, his wife, Latifa sees the tiredness in the woman's eyes. He has grown, become a giant; he bestrides more than the narrow world of The District, the womb of his inspiration. The umbilical cord cut, he has floated free; has grown into a global entity, a Colossus with feet planted on Broadway and in London's West End. Left behind in the closed circuit of her consciousness, Gadija's searching fingers constantly reaching for the familiar, find only a void where her husband used to be. Standing solid in her abaya, her lips moving silently, she prays for Allah's guidance, mercy and blessing. Still a beautiful woman, the lines around her eyes and mouth,

drawn in graceful, artistic strokes, serve to enhance her dignity and charm. Latifa, ten years younger, in the full bloom of her beauty, understands it is only age that gives her the advantage; she cannot compare with Gadija. But she knows she can have him because she is not of the zenana; she is engaged in the wide, limitless world that encompasses his being. He has looked in Latifa's eyes, has seen her power, is tantalised. Gadija can no longer hold him. But she is not the real threat. It is that performer on the stage glowing with a lustre that nothing else can match.

Kneeling next to him, Latifa searches his eyes for the old desire and admiration. But she is seeking in a void; her gaze elicits only questioning – the estranged alertness of the hunted. Oh God, she has become Gadija.

The first bail application fails.

Cindi Smith's murderer, who beat her up more than ten times, threatened to kill her several times and eventually shot her, got R2000 bail. Stephan Komane who shot and killed his girlfriend and her cousin was given bail. Fred van der Vyver charged with bludgeoning his girlfriend with a hammer and stabbing her to death is out on bail. What makes Latifa so much more dangerous? If it were only a matter of the kill, she would

probably get bail but they fear that she will flee the country. And justice must be served.

Silent. The hijab over her hair forms a frame around a mature face, still beautiful; but dark glasses turn it into a mask, expressionless, impassive. Latifa presents a picture of vulnerability and weakness, a woman whose mental state is precarious, has always been. Her enemies say this is a lie. Latifa is a performer, better even than her husband. True, she has become a celebrity overnight, known to the whole nation not just to crowds in a theatre. She has appeared on every TV in every home, is on the Internet, the radio and in newspapers. People scour the media looking for that face, trying to get behind that mask. And just this one event, not a series of shows, has rocketed her to stardom. Now her name, eclipsing his, is on everyone's lips. People, who had never heard of either, now know her, not him.

But this is not what she wants.

She has become a storyteller like her husband; his stories for the stage, hers for the courtroom. It remains to be seen which of them has created a story that will outlast the other's. His metaphors for a better life; her metaphor, packaged as a serial, each episode slotted in with other heinous tales in the media. Her

story, not always in the top five, is holding steady. Because he was an icon? Because she is a woman? The traditional witch of the fairy tale? Does her story have the potential for a best seller? Perhaps.

The second bail application, another show.

After the first, at which pleas of her children's needs, of her fragile psychological condition, and the fear of suicide in detention did not prevail, she fired her legal team and the advocate now representing her, has brought in her son, Nawaal, to plead on behalf of his mother. At the arraignment, he had collapsed in tears and was escorted out of the courtroom. Now Nawaal, the son of her first marriage, tells of the great love between his mother and his stepfather – he calls him Uncle – a joyous ecstatic connection. Nawaal's account of money laundering, illicit diamond trading, and involvement in underworld activities, implies a gangland strike. Millions of US dollars, so he says, were stolen from the scene of the crime. He offers this evidence in protest against his mother's detention.

Her financial manager confirms that she and her husband always made joint decisions. To obviate noxious assignment of motive, he assures the court that together they had taken out insurance policies on their children from their previous marriages, on their six-year old daughter and on their own lives.

The advocate reminds the court that under South African law, a defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty; being held without recourse to bail is presumption of guilt and unconstitutional. Unjust. This woman loved her husband passionately.

But the face is a mask. She is a reluctant performer.

He was the performer; she, a businesswoman. Performing artists make money, more in Hollywood and Bollywood than on Broadway and the West End. But, creating and being their own commodity, they cannot compare with people whose commodity is money itself. He cannot compare with her. Latifa is an expert. From the early days of watching fahfee runners at the family shops and then her marriage to the son of a prominent businessman who knew how to make money multiply itself, she learned, and eventually became an entrepreneur extraordinaire. Her ability to negotiate in the business world, in unofficial stock exchanges, in underworld markets, enabled her to amass wealth and remain independent. Once upon a time that power had filled him with admiration and had allowed her, queen of the Valkyries, to eclipse Gadija and carry him off.

Her energy, her initiative, her power – the aphrodisiac that kept him addicted, had had him pining when he was on tour in Europe and America. But that had waned. It couldn't

compare with the magic of coupling with an audience through his own power as performer. And he moved on, leaving her to bloat on desire.

Latifa, standing before the mirror, cannot see herself. Where is the beautiful, slender body, where the shapely hips, the silky smooth, flat abdomen? Who is the monster staring back at her out of distraught, desperate eyes? This is jadoo; someone has tricked her; found a witch doctor to provide the muti that shows her an inflated abdomen, pushed out in folds, like bags of garbage, hips and buttocks merged into a globe and thighs blown into elephantine cylinders. She stares at this reflection, eyes full of loathing, and as the surgeon maps out areas on the abdomen, *he* appears behind the monster, and stares, eyes full of loathing. Fascinated by the abomination, *his* incredulous eyes cannot turn away; they search for the sylph swallowed up inside the mound of lard. She wants to shatter the glass, blind those eyes and block out that alienated gaze, the look in his eyes before he left for New York. But it will be different when he comes back. After all the procedures, she will be an alluring leading lady. And forgetting the audience, he will dance, dance, dance all night with her – her King of Siam.

When the surgeon suggests before and after photos of the abdomen, she bursts out in horror. ‘Before’ is to be wiped out of

memory forever; the monster that has ensconced itself in her body has to vanish without a trace, instantaneously, not in the surreptitious way it had appeared. Only gradually had she become aware of it, growing in his eyes each time he returned from abroad, increasing in size after each absence, obscuring, until it obliterated completely, the excitement in his look as it lighted on her. Those absences! Abandoned for such long periods! Allowing the monster to ingest her. And each time he came back, there was less and less of the Amazon and more and more of the monster. Betadine is applied to the mapped out areas and she is given a local anaesthetic and sedative. She knows that small incisions will be made through which a saline solution will be infused into the deep fat areas, and a cannula inserted to break down and vacuum out the fat.

When she began her search on the Internet, she had been surprised to find that South Africa, highly regarded for liposuction, brings many people from abroad to this specific city for body contouring. She has also read that surgeons do not remove more than five kilograms of fat; that won't be enough for her. She has argued with her surgeon but he is adamant, will cancel if she insists and she has been forced to concede. Her husband will be back soon. She has to be ready for him when he returns. The King must find his Anna.

After the initial surgery, Latifa has been back several times to work on different areas and the monster has been partially aspirated. She is now a chubby, pleasantly rounded person. When he comes back, this time from London, and encounters yet another of her selves, the disgust, though suctioned out of his look, is not replaced by an infusion of desire. Instead his pupils reflect images of Gadija, the comfortable, nurturing ex-wife, tall beautiful Gadija, well preserved in the zenana. If it were some blonde, blue-eyed floozy from New York or Paris or London, Latifa would understand though not forgive. But Gadija? She can feel the pressure building up at the top of her head. Why Gadija?

Then she hears him on the phone telling his sister that he plans to move out.

The bail hearing, part 2. A repeat performance. The magistrate puts two and two together, gets four and is not inclined to let the little girl have her mother. The magistrate, a do-gooder, is trying to protect Ruwaida and can't see that two and two don't make four for her. 'Why did Ghatoen-ma say bad things about my Mummy? I want my Mummy. Why have they taken her away from me?' Ruwaida, Latifa's little daughter, is attached to her aunt, his sister, Ghatoen, who saw to all her needs while Latifa ran her businesses. But now the child will have nothing to do

with Ghatoen-ma. She is angry with her aunt who has spread lies about her mother. That's why they took Mummy away from her. Now she doesn't have a father or a mother anymore. Ruwaida is not an actress, she needs her Mummy but the judge cannot be swayed on that account.

What about on medical grounds? Latifa's psychiatrist's evidence is set out on the table – bipolar mood disorder, large amounts of medication, electric shock therapy, psychotic relapse, anti-psychotic and anti-depressant medication, sleeping tablets, tranquilisers, a parasuicide attempt, an urgent medical appointment for the next week.

The prosecutor lifts up the last item, finds under it an appointment for liposuction treatment, and gleefully upstages the defence's assumptions with his own. Drama queen, actress, making herself beautiful. What for? Her husband is dead. He does not see that he is giving credence to the defence's pleas of mental instability. He concludes that she is a normal person and therefore has criminal responsibility.

The police investigator, his next witness, declares Latifa a definite flight risk. Give her bail and you will never see her again.

At that, the court transforms into Shakespeare's Globe Theatre. The groundlings in the gallery clap and boo, 'Give her bail and we'll take care of her,' raucous laughter, the flash of a

cellphone camera, confiscated immediately, but the drama is not over. Outside the courtroom, Capulets and Montagues, freed from propriety, go at one another with pickets and insults: ‘He drove her insane, like he did his first wife.’ ‘She killed him.’ ‘She is not to blame.’ ‘Bring back the death penalty.’

Latifa under the mask, is estranged from the fallout of her marriage. Happily ever after is where fairy tales end but driven by passion, she had believed. She should have known better. He had been married before; she had been married before and they had bonded again only to discover again that bonding is bondage.

Her daughter is suffering but she cannot help her and Ruwaida walks around the house with large frightened eyes; she cannot forget the night they came. Those men in balaclavas. She can see their big eyes and thick lips through the holes. She doesn’t want them to touch her; she screams when they grab her, rush into Nawaal’s bedroom, grab Nafisa, Nawaal’s wife, and Nawaal who is carrying the baby, and push them all into the bathroom. They shove them against the washstand, search Nawaal and his wife roughly, take away Nawaal’s cellphone and watch, pull the necklace off Nafisa’s neck, and pull off Ruwaida’s bangles. Then they lock them in and leave.

The same horrible men had tried to kill Mummy a few weeks before. They caught Mummy just outside the house,

pointed a gun, pulled her out of the car and told her they would kill her if Daddy stayed in show business.

For Ruwaida none of this is an act.

Now they are back. They have come to kill Mummy. Ruwaida tries to scream but the terror in that bathroom is so thick, it slides down her throat and forms a tight noose around her vocal chords. She huddles together with the others, frozen, waiting, waiting, waiting – what are they waiting for? Then suddenly, a loud explosion. Ruwaida screams. ‘They’ve killed her. They’ve killed my mummy.’

This is not an act; Ruwaida is too young to pretend.

Back in court again, the same bail hearing, part 3 of a four-part show.

The defence: Latifa wasn’t even present when it happened. She had been locked in her bedroom. Why is she being held?

The prosecutor brings in his sister, Asma. Latifa listens silently as Asma describes her brother’s unfortunate liaisons, first with Gadija, then her. Two marriages, two disasters. The first insidiously abusive, the second openly vicious, a nightmare in which an enraged woman constantly threatens her husband, once with a knife; a nightmare in which strangers living under the same roof do not share the same bed, do not pray together.

The defence decries Asma's evidence. Lies, lies, all lies. Latifa was under continuous medical supervision, receiving electric shock therapy, anti-psychotic and anti-depressant medication, sleeping tablets, tranquilisers. And he, the loving husband, had carefully administered medications to a beloved wife and noted the doses in a diary.

But the state psychiatrist continues to pour scorn on such evidence, declaring Latifa's mental state part of a well-rehearsed scenario. She knew exactly what she was doing; she has criminal responsibility.

But that has still has to be proven.

And we wait again – for part 4. Of a bail hearing!

But waiting for bail is like waiting for Godot. It doesn't come. Proceed to trial.

Behind those dark glasses, no one can see that Latifa has left the courtroom. She is at Salma's twenty-first birthday party. Salma, his daughter by Gadija. The music is loud and lively. Latifa sees Gadija smile as she meets her ex-husband's eyes, as he reaches forward to pull Salma out to dance lang-arm. As they glide over the floor, other couples join them and soon there are swirling forms all around the hall. Then the band segues into the familiar, the local vastrap and all the spaces disappear, displaced by rolling shoulders, shuffling feet and swaying hips. He doesn't

even see his daughter's boyfriend until the lad cuts in and spirits her away.

As he turns to move off the floor, he suddenly finds himself being spun around. Latifa, of the time of romance, is in front of him. She has abandoned hijab and abaya. Her brown hair cascades in waves to her shoulders. Shimmering in her blue evening gown, she flings her arms around his neck and suddenly they are jiving together, with energy, complementing each other in every movement, perfect harmony, happily ever after, but the eyes are at war. His – wary, alert; hers – fixed and compelling: their embrace a trap that holds a prey. There is no magic. The music ends; she disappears like Cinderella but her shoes are intact. He escapes to the band, takes the microphone and sings to dispel the alarming tattoo in his chest.

When she eventually returns to sit with her son and his wife, they are not, have not been aware of the woman in the blue gown, now under the abaya and hijab a heart turned to stone.

Kneeling beside him, Latifa puts her arm around his shoulders and begins to stroke his cheek. She feels the incipient beard lurking beneath the pores. He doesn't have to shave every day. He hasn't today. She gazes into his eyes, two dark islands in wide wastes of whiteness, staring intently at her. When he sings and dances, his eyes sparkle with a light that transforms his

whole being and shoots through her body, driving her wild with desire. But there is no light in them now. She will bring it back. She leans forward to kiss the dear orbs and her lips meet shutters that come down over darkness. She cannot kiss his taped lips so she draws his head onto her breast and begins to stroke and kiss the thick dark waves.

Soon after they had arrived home from the twenty-first birthday party, there were people outside, seeking entrance. He had answered on the intercom, relatives, and went to open. Men wearing balaclavas had rushed in, grabbed him, dragged him to the upstairs lounge, tied his hands behind his back, tied his feet, taped his mouth and pushed him onto his knees. One had stood over him with a gun while the others charged into the bedrooms. Only after all the other occupants of the house were safely locked in their bedrooms, had she come into the lounge.

She kisses him for the last time, then stands behind and shoots into the back of the head. The adrenalin rush through her body is exhilarating. She pulls one of her hirelings into a frenzied dance around the limp and bleeding form.

II

Till death do us part

Lilian and her sister, Tsakani, hiding at the side of the house, watch Magezi, his father and uncle, make their way up the garden path to their home. His father and uncle have come to make the proposal and negotiate the conditions for marriage. Tsakani is giggling; Magezi, a jeans and T-shirt kind of guy, looks trapped in his stiff, formal suit, but still very handsome. Tsakani's father comes to the door and leads them into the lounge where her grandmother, mother, uncle and aunts sit waiting. Lilian and Tsakani, on the front veranda, hidden by the curtains of the lounge window, listen eagerly. Grandmother, the senior member of the family, begins the formal procedure. She inquires who the visitors are and asks why they have come. They explain that they are here to ask for the hand of the daughter, Tsakani, in marriage and wish to know the bride price. They are informed that the family is not selling its daughter

(Lilian shudders) and lobola is simply a guarantee that she will be treated with care. They set lobola at R5000. As Magezi has brought R3000, it is agreed that the balance be paid on the day of the wedding. Tsakani's father and uncles are each to receive a staff, a jacket and a bottle of liquor. Her granny, who brought her up, will receive five large beautiful blankets, other women in the family will each be given a smaller blanket and Tsakani, one large one. Then they set the date.

Two weeks before the wedding, Tsakani, who lives in the city, comes back to to the family home; Magezi must receive her from the family, from the place of their origin where the Swikwembu, the ancestors, abide. On the wedding day, Tsakani, Lilian and two cousins, wearing xibelanis, traditional skirts, cover themselves from head to toe in blankets, so nothing of their bodies can be seen. When Magezi and his family, also in traditional dress, arrive, Magezi is put through a test: he has to pick out his bride from among the shrouded figures. If he chooses the wrong one, he will have to pay a fine, as he will have demonstrated that he does not know Tsakani well enough. But Magezi sees Tsakani right away, hidden as she is under her thick blanket.

The formalities begin with Tsakani's grandmother speech of welcome. One of her uncles thanks the visitors and Tsakani's family for all the preparations they have made for the wedding.

Then Magezi and Tsakani lead a procession of family and relatives up and down the street and are greeted by excited, ululating neighbours who dance and sing for joy as they bless the bridal pair. Seeing Magezi in his zobo – traditional loincloth, his shield and spear, Tsakani can't stop giggling. Lilian catches herself enjoying the occasion and pulls herself together.

When they return to Tsakani's parents' home, they perform kohlabisa – the sacrifice of a goat to the Swikwembu, the old ones – the ancestors. Then Tsakani and Magezi are one. Tsakani's husband is introduced to the old ones and the couple kneel on the earth to ask for their blessings. The newly-weds promise the ancestors that they will live together, take care of each other and perform their duties as husband and wife. After they sign the marriage certificate, the celebrations begin – feasting, drinking and dancing that continue late into the night.

The traditional wedding usually precedes the white wedding, the Christian wedding, in which a couple is bound together again but in different cultural trappings. The double wedding became the convention in the days when the traditional ceremony was not officially recognised. That changed after 1994, but the practice still persists. Tsakani, however, has postponed the white wedding. When she found she was pregnant, she had to get married. Though she consciously regards the white wedding as

the more prestigious event, it is the traditional marriage that is essential to legitimate the birth of her baby. As Tsakani is a good Christian, she may at some future date, have a white wedding. It remains an option.

For Lilian, there will be only a white wedding. No traditional wedding. The white wedding represents entry into mainstream culture and will be her declaration that she is more than her African roots. For the rich and sophisticated, the white wedding receives priority. The wedding in church or at a country club or some such upmarket venue, out of reach of the old ones, the ancestors, makes the news: the haute couture wedding gown, the bridesmaids' outfits, the superb decorations, exclusive venue and splendid menu. That is what Lilian plans for herself.

When she marries, she is going to skip the traditional wedding altogether. She knows that her parents will be shocked but they are wary of her and will not insist.

Lilian will have, a one hundred per cent Christian wedding, not cluttered with traditional requirements like her sister's or the wedding of her best friend, Nyeleti, at which she had been maid of honour. What a trial that had been! She had resented the traditional rites, but Nyeleti had revelled in all of it. At the reception to welcome the groom into Nyeleti's family, his mother, as custom demanded, had not been present. And the next day, Nyeleti's mother was not at the reception at the

groom's parents' home. Though Lilian was not at all close to her mother, she would have both mother and mother-in-law at her reception when she married. She didn't believe in superstitious notions of bad luck.

She definitely didn't see herself in traditional roles. She was a policewoman; she served the community as an officer of the law. Women had more to offer the world than simply bearing children. She was affronted by the emphasis placed on breeding. On Sunday morning, they put on their wedding outfits again and went off to the second reception at the groom's parents' home. There his granny set out the protocol for the new bride. Nyeleti had to be strong so she could produce lots of children. That was what was wanted from her – many children. She had to accept her husband as he was. If he cheated on her, she was not to complain. She was not to listen to her friends and not to wear trousers, only long skirts and a duku, scarf, on her head. Lilian stood there silently rejecting everything she heard.

After the feasting and dancing, it was time for bed, and Lilian, as the maid of honour, was required to stay with the bride – as it turned out, a further humiliation for her. She had to get up early the following morning, sweep the yard and cook for the bride. Lilian kept asking herself, 'What kind of honour is this?' That morning, Nyeleti's mother-in-law spoke to her daughter-in-law for the first time. She welcomed her, called her Makoti,

daughter-in-law, and told her that she was expected to do her duty, that is, fall pregnant before the year was out. The groom's family took Nyeleti to the home of their ancestors and performed umkomboti, the ceremony in which beer and snuff are poured into the ground as offerings to the ancestors for their blessings on Nyeleti and her husband. Then Nyeleti was introduced to the Swikwembu, the old ones, as the new daughter in the home. Before Nyeleti and her husband could leave for their home in the city, they had to remain in his parents' home for two weeks so that Nyeleti could demonstrate that she was a real woman – ko-koroka – by sweeping, cleaning and cooking.

Poor Nyeleti – reduced in every way to basic functions. Lilian shook her head. No ko-koroka for her. She would go off on a honeymoon to some place in Europe or America. She wouldn't be caught dead in these old customs. She was planning to leave all this behind her forever. It bothered her, though, to hear people calling for a return to the old ways, for an African Renaissance. All that had been knocked out of them before 1994; they had learned to adapt or die. Now this call for a return to the old ways! It isn't what she plans for herself. She knows exactly what she wants. Riches and renown! Traditions are for the poor.

As a policewoman, Lilian has worked hard and has not missed a single opportunity to further her career. She came to Johannesburg, rose through the ranks and is now working in the Police Commissioner's office. And she watches and waits; she knows exactly what she wants.

The first time she sets eyes on him, the marathon man, she knows he is the one.

It is a cold, biting morning in Pietermaritzburg. The sun isn't up yet. Lilian, a keen runner, is waiting at the start of the race with her friend and colleague, Lufuno. They are amid thousands of runners, waiting for the cannon that will send them off on the 90km down-run to Durban. This is her fourth Comrades Marathon and she is hoping to beat her previous time of eight hours and forty-seven minutes. She is aiming for gold, she always aims for gold, but she hasn't made silver yet. One of these days! She and Lufuno have trained hard, grown in strength and endurance and believe that they can make seven-and-a-half hours and silver medals this time. The goal for today.

And they wait in the dusk before dawn, full of hope for what the day will bring. Lilian shivers with excitement as the countdown begins to the accompaniment of the theme from 'Chariots of Fire' and the screeching of mynah birds. Then the huge city hall clock rings out the hour from its tower. Six-o-

clock! The cannon booms, followed by the Trimborn cockcrow. Flares go off and the mass begins to surge forward under the glare of television camera lights. It will take some minutes before Lilian and Lufuno cross the starting line so they run on the spot to warm up and are eventually carried along in the huge swell, surging along the streets leading to the highway.

Running at a calm, moderate pace, Lilian and Lufuno settle comfortably into the stream making its way towards Polly Shorts. They are dedicated runners. They run every day, early in the morning before they report for duty at the police station and again after work, and are at the gym several times a week for regular weight-training sessions, they have planned their strategy carefully. Six weeks ago, following the recommendations in Bruce Fordyce's book, they had embarked on an intensive programme, to build up stamina, speed and strength in their legs. As they knew they would be running down steep gradients with challenging camber – Polly Shorts, Inchanga, Fields Hill, Bothas Hill, and Cowies Hill, they had worked on strengthening calf, back and stomach muscles. A week ago, they tapered off training and began carbo-loading.

On her first Comrades, an up-run, Lilian 'hit the wall' just before Polly Shorts, and had to force herself up the rise on leaden legs. Having made a painful descent on the other side, she continued on in fitful jog-walk mode. She was absolutely

determined to get a medal, any medal. When she reached Pietermaritzburg, cheering crowds, lining the streets, gave her a big boost and she forgot her pain. She made a staggering dash for the stadium, shuffled in, crossed the finishing line just before the last person home at 16:30, the official cut-off time for medals, and collapsed. The searing pain from damaged muscles made her realise that she hadn't prepared adequately. That is when she acquired Fordyce's book, discovered the reason her legs had given out and adopted the recommendation in the book of carbo-loading during the race, that is, taking water for the first hour only, perhaps longer for her – she couldn't match Fordyce's time of five and a half hours – followed by sweet drinks for the rest of the course. In the next two marathons, she did not experience 'the plods'.

Now, running in her fourth Comrades, she feels strong and confident. After the descent down Polly Shorts, negotiated with care to keep leg muscles and knees intact, Lilian and Lufuno pull off the extra T-shirts that had kept them warm at the start of the race. As they fling them away, they see the picnicking spectators on either side of the road. So far things are going according to plan; they are pacing themselves well. In a tight batch that has pulled away from the main body of runners, they are making good time along this fairly level section. This is a group of serious runners whose minds are firmly on the race; not

like the runners in the big group behind, for whom completion of the race is sufficient. They chat, laugh and take in the beauty of their surroundings; they alternate running with walking, perform for the television cameras and are quite content to clock in after 16:30.

Lilian is glad to be running with competitive men and women who want more than personal gratification; men and women who want fame, glory and the acknowledgment that they are stars. In this pack, she is running with some of the top women competitors. They will make it in six hours and if she can keep up with them, she has a good chance – maybe even gold rather than silver.

She glances in their direction, is startled, loses her rhythm, and almost stumbles. When she sees Lufuno's anxious eye, she quickly pulls herself together and gives a small nod to show that she is okay. But her thoughts are in disarray. That tall, lithe figure striding confidently alongside the leaders: she cannot take her eyes off him, off that man running like a pro at the head of the pack. To force her attention back to the race, she changes places with Lufuno to block that tall runner out of her line of vision. *My God, we are passing Radnor, heading for Inchanga!* She has to stay focused for the steep, demanding descent after the climb. She grabs a bottle from a hand stretched out to passing runners, takes a swig, throws away the bottle and

spurts forward. Lufuno speeds up beside her. His frown tells her that she is deviating from the plan and she falls in step with him.

They take Inchanga easily and descend without mishap. Then their tightly knit pack begins to string out. The women who are going for gold have increased their speed and with a few others have moved ahead and *he* is rapidly fading from sight. It is still too early for Lilian and Lufuno to make their break and Lufuno cannot understand Lilian's impatience. Bothas Hill and the excruciating Fields Hill lie ahead; they have to negotiate these formidable descents with care. Lilian tries to control her feelings, tries to wipe the image of that tall figure off her retina but she cannot. Then she decides not to suppress it. Instead she pulls the truth out of her subconscious and when she admits what she instinctively felt the moment she set eyes on him, she begins to see him in her silver medal and runs the rest of the race completely inspired. When she and Lufuno cross the finishing line minutes before the deadline, *he* is waiting to congratulate them.

Her instinct was right. This is the son of a wealthy, prominent, influential citizen. Well educated, climbing the corporate ladder and with an eye for business – has seen good entrepreneurial potential in the surrounding poverty and has begun with a moonlighting cell phone business. A modern man, freed from the traditional. Just the man for her!

A year later, a celebration in a private club in Sandton, perfect venue for the event: Lilian's engagement. The dining hall, arranged for a dinner dance, is magnificently decorated, everything colour coordinated. The parents wait at the entrance to welcome people as they arrive. Guests enter and mingle to the soft sounds of the band creating a mood of informal joyousness in the background. People meet, greet, engage in small talk and fill the hall with laughter and gaiety. The sisters and brothers circulate, engage with guests, and make sure that the waiters with trays of drinks don't miss anyone. At the appointed time, the Master of Ceremonies asks them all to be seated for the usual speeches and toasts.

His father, a prominent man in the community, the real draw card for the occasion, expresses in a light-hearted speech, his love and appreciation of his son and his delight at his having found his soul mate. The couple is standing beside him and everyone turns to look at Lilian, magnificent in a special designer gown. After he has blessed them, his son puts a ring on Lilian's finger, a huge diamond that she chose.

Then it is dinnertime and people settle down to good cheer. After dinner, the band takes over, and music holds sway. Lights are dimmed and the dance floor is soon filled with hip swinging, bopping silhouettes intertwining and having a good

time. Lilian is most satisfied with her organisation; the whole function is going off smoothly and with style. Just as she had planned it.

Except for his mother from the village. That was a huge shock. Lilian feels she has been swindled.

Right after the wedding, the white wedding, that is, not the traditional one that she had not foreseen, Lilian gets in touch with an estate agency and begins a dedicated search for a new home. And before long, she is mistress in a mansion with a high-powered security system and CCTV. What a house! A palatial structure, rambling, spacious and royally appointed; the kind of house that you see on TV magazine programmes, with a large patio, swimming pool, solarium, terraced gardens with contained and open spaces, arbors, spreading trees and a garden with lush lawn and topiaries. Her home! She has graduated from policewoman to Queen. She made the right marriage.

She blocks from her mind the shock, the humiliation of the traditional ceremony that she had been forced to endure.

Lilian calls her insurance broker from her office in the Police Commissioner's Building. She has been married five months and is planning a surprise for her husband so she doesn't want the agent to visit her at home with papers she has to sign, a

policy on her husband's life. Lilian is making this beneficent gesture despite having been forced to endure a traditional wedding. Not all wives are as forgiving or as concerned for a husband's welfare.

A little later than usual, Lilian and her husband are out on their evening run. It is dark as they make their way through the surrounding hills and dales. Suddenly, a blinding flare shoots up through the trees in the distance and creates an island of light in the darkness. They wonder what it is and, as they draw nearer, find themselves in an area that is as light as day. Being a policewoman, Lilian cannot ignore it. They turn into the obscure farm road where the huge fire is blazing. As they approach, they see that firemen and police are already on the scene so they continue on their way. That night, they hear on the news that the fire was the scene of a murder. A police captain and his car had been doused with petrol and set alight. Though he was dying, the man, who had somehow managed to crawl away from his burning vehicle, had named his assassin.

As a member of the police department, Lilian has been involved in investigating many murders. Those unable to commit the deed themselves, especially women, go out to find men who will do it for them. And young men, some even teenagers – the poor

from townships and informal settlements – are turned into cold-blooded killers.

It is seven months after she and her husband moved into their new palatial residence. He drives off in the little hatchback that he uses for his cell phone business. He is going out to meet a client in the neighbouring suburb. As he drives along a quiet street, he becomes aware of a tailgating Corolla. He tries to speed up but the car in front is going at a snail's pace. When he tries to overtake the car moves over to the right with him. The car behind is still on his rear bumper and the car in front won't let him pass. They have him trapped between them and when he looks for their number plates, there are none. A chilling realisation – he is being hijacked! He fumbles for his cell phone and calls Lilian. He barks out what is happening. She works for the Police Commissioner; she will know what to do. Then he begins to lurch the car from one side of the road to the other, trying to break free but the vehicles in front and behind keep him hemmed in.

When he sees the car in front begin to turn onto a dirt road in a wooded area, he thinks he has a chance. As soon as he can get clear, he will speed off straight down the road. Just as he begins to pull away, the other car dashes forward and screeches to a halt right against his front bumper. The man in the

passenger seat jumps out, runs around, smashes a window, jumps in behind him, presses a revolver to his head and motions him to turn and follow the first car. He has no choice, but he keeps alert, looking for a way to escape, listening for police sirens, expecting Lilian. She is a policewoman; she will know how to deal with the hijackers.

They stop at a secluded spot on the road and he is ordered out. Four men surround the car. It doesn't matter; he is going to make a run for it. He is confident he can outrun them. He opens the door, slams it hard into the stomach of one of them, smashes his briefcase into the next person's head, jumps clear, and takes off. But he is brought down by shots in the back and the head. The leader yells out that they have no time to waste. He has received a call that the cops are on the way. The men grab their victim, spray him with petrol and shove him into the boot. They empty a couple of cans of petrol over the car, set it alight and disappear.

Flames engulf the car and climb high turning night into day. The fury of the blaze attracts attention in the area and someone calls the fire station. People who come to investigate, can't get near the fiercely burning vehicle. Then the fire brigade arrives. As the blaze is being brought under control, a car speeds onto the scene. Lilian's brother, Risimati, jumps out. He and Lilian have been looking for her husband. Lilian had called the

police who had not responded, had called the tracking company who had informed her that the tracking device in her husband's car was not working so Lilian, with Risimati, had dashed out to search for him along the route they knew he had taken. They would not have stopped here but when they recognised the make of the burning car, they decided to investigate.

Risimati, horrified to see that it is indeed his brother-in-law's car, is thankful that he cannot see anyone in it and immediately starts a frantic search. He is hoping to find his brother-in-law lying somewhere in the surrounding bush. Nothing. When the fire is out, he approaches the car and through the shattered rear window makes out the blackened remnants of a body in the boot. He collapses and terrible sobs wrack his body. Eventually he staggers over to Lilian's car and breaks the news to her. 'Why did they have to do such a terrible thing?' he gasps, 'Why didn't they just take the car?'

After they investigate, the police declare that this was not a hijacking; nothing was stolen and the car was burnt. This is murder parading as hijacking.

Four weeks later, Lilian is placed under arrest and imprisoned. In her cell, all she sees before her eyes is her mother-in-law's determined dedication to tribal customs and she

relives, over and over, every humiliating step of the traditional marriage that she had fought against with all her might.

III

Suffer the Children

“This one, in my arms, Judy, six months old, look how she curls her little toes, gurgles and reaches out her tiny hands to me. They say babies at six months can tell friends from enemies. But Judy is smiling at me. Like my baby sister at home. Cootchie-cootchie-coo, cootchie-cootchie-coo. Judy baby, you’re a real cutie. Anyone can see that your Mama loves you.

“Hey Judy baby, you’re holding onto my thumb, like I’m your Daddy. You feel safe with me. I’m going to become an advocate you know. You’re laughing, baby. You know it too. I am doing well at school and my soccer coach thinks I’ll be playing in the premier league soon. I am not like Gift and them. It doesn’t matter that I’m from a poor home. I have brains; I’ll make it.

“I’m not like my classmates. Kids want everything for nothing these days. What were those students shouting on that

big march through the city? Thousands of them marching, demanding their rights? Oh yes, ‘Pass one, pass all.’ Afterwards they ran down streets, smashing and destroying everything in sight and looting. With their sjamboks and sticks, they even went after vendors. Imagine that, attacking and stealing from our mothers and fathers right there on the street.

“You won’t see any of that, Judy baby. You won’t learn any of it. That’s not for you. Cootchie-cootchie-coo. No school for you. She has it all planned.”

The judge declares that the desire to protect the young is a reflex action ingrained in the human psyche. He is appalled at the thought of thrusting a knife into a baby’s neck with such force that it scars the spine, then twisting it to ensure death. “The degree of evil to combat the natural intrinsic human impulse to protect the young, particularly a young child, and to cause her death, reflects a callousness of mind and spirit that can engender little sympathy.”

It was after that great night of celebrations on her birthday. They were all together, the whole gang including Neville, the current boyfriend. She had also invited Anton, her former boyfriend. Though he had wanted to, he couldn’t be there because of his present girlfriend. But she was very happy, in a good mood and

glowing. They were at her favourite restaurant selecting from the smorgasbord. She was moving among the gang recommending this dish and that. There was a lot of kissing and fondling.

They were a group who mixed and matched freely. Among her closest friends were those who had been intimate with Neville. They were all cool with it.

It was only when she heard about the baby! It was then that urges, suppressed under a libertine facade, began to erupt. At first, she didn't know what to do. At first, all she could think of was dumping Neville and going back to Anton. Why hadn't Neville told her? Why had Nadia? Was Nadia, who had had a fling with Neville, being spiteful because she was jealous or was her best friend just glad he hadn't put a bun in her oven? Apparently Neville considered the whole thing an accident and didn't see why he should feel responsible for Sylvia's carelessness. Sylvia had tried to pass the baby off as the child of the boyfriend at the time, but when he found out he wasn't the father, he dumped her. Now Sylvia was demanding maintenance from Neville.

So this birthday celebration was meant to strangle all dark inclinations; return her to her carefree life of casual intimacy. Everyone was having fun and nobody talked about the baby. Neville's gifts of perfume and sexy lingerie set everyone

laughing and joking. After the feast, they jumped into their cars and sped off to a nightclub where they proceeded to dance the night away. It was such a happy-go-lucky, joyous evening. Then *she* walked in, the baby's mother, and the lights went out in the birthday girl's eyes. Sylvia's unexpected appearance deposited the unspeakable in the midst of their merriment. It expanded like a gigantic balloon, filling out the entire space, suffocating her and pushing her out of her celebration into a dark night.

And she made up her mind. The next day, she made her way to the taxi rank.

Gift, the father of two children, an enterprising man with three occupations, taxi-driver, shebeen owner and television repairman, watched as she approached. When he was sixteen Gift's father had run off with another woman and his mother had brought him and his brother to live in this area. At school here, he had often been picked on because he wasn't a local. He never fought back; he dropped out instead. His mother, a domestic worker, found him employment as a gardener at the homes where she worked. But he wanted something better, more lucrative.

His father had taught him to drive when he was fourteen and he found work in the taxi industry. After he had saved enough money, he became a taxi owner. His taxi, which cruised

without the ticket that restricted him to a particular route, went chasing after passengers all over town and built up a stack of unpaid traffic fines.

In his spare time, Gift became a television repairman. He had natural ability. Just by looking, he could tell what was wrong and how to fix it. With the extra money that he made, he established his shebeen – a shack of uneven wooden planks with a door spray-painted white. And he was doing well.

Gift was a hardworking man who supported his mother, his brother and his two children. He had even sent for his niece so she could go to school in this big city. He was ambitious and determined to make enough to move out of this shack town and build a decent life somewhere else. He had got where he was because he wasn't afraid to take risks. Living on the edge put zest into his existence.

Idly watching, as she asked around in the taxi rank, Gift saw someone pointing him out. As she made her way towards him, his heart skipped a beat. What did this hot chick want with him?

That evening at his shebeen he joined three young guys playing pool. He knew them all quite well.

The oldest, Gezi, twenty-four, worked in a tiny barbershop, a shack with a swivel chair and mirror. His father

had abandoned the family when he was still a child. His mother had died soon after and his uncle and aunt had taken him and his brothers into their home. His uncle, a vendor at the taxi rank, had sent the boys to school and brought them up as Christians. They had been initiated into the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God that had been set up with rows of black plastic chairs in a disused warehouse. They became a happy family, living a simple life. But after his aunt died, Gezi changed. He left the church, began to hang out at the shebeen and got a girl pregnant. His uncle, who spent long hours away at work, felt he could not question his nephews, and, as he put it, ‘they just lived together.’

The other two guys at the pool table, regulars at the shebeen, Nkosi, sixteen, and Jabulani, eighteen, were good friends. Jabulani, a primary school dropout, wanted to be a DJ. Nkosi, still at school, was an articulate, talented young man, with big dreams. His mother was extremely proud of him; he was doing well at school and was an outstanding member of the school soccer team. At home, he conscientiously helped his siblings with their schoolwork.

Gift leaned over the pool table. As he fired a ball into a side pocket, he knew that he could count on these youngsters. They had agreed without the slightest hesitation. They all wanted the same thing – to be rich. This job would be a

stepping-stone. They weren't thinking of the job, only the money, ten thousand rand split four ways.

The public gallery of the courtroom is packed. Like fans waiting to be admitted to a rock concert, they have waited for two hours in a long queue that cascaded down the steps of the courthouse and snaked along the pavement outside. But this is better than a rock concert. This is about people they know, people from their community. This is about them. Intoxicating! Not often do they receive such affirmation of their existence, of their place in the city, in the country. But she has done it; she has put them on the map; no, not the accused – the mother of the baby, Sylvia, who is one of them, though you would never say it to look at her. They are here for justice for Sylvia, and through her, for themselves. Years of pent-up rage, at being designated second-class, has led them to believe that this is a racially motivated act and therefore impacts on each one of them. They see in it the accused's attempt to sever what she regards as a degrading connection. Her man went beneath the stairs and contributed one more to a bastard race. And Sylvia, in producing the offspring of his loins, has dealt her a devastating blow. Sylvia has left her feeling barren and worthless; has turned her into a boervrou back on the plaas, watching her husband gratifying himself in the servants' quarters.

And the spectators in the public gallery, mostly women, jeer and cheer, daring the judge to throw them all out of the courtroom. When Neville, the father of the baby testifies, they see that he is struggling to enter the idea of fatherhood. He contradicts testimony that he shed tears at having to pay maintenance for a child that should never have been. He claims that maintenance would not have been a problem. He declares he could have lived happily ever after as the father of that child. But it is apparent to those in the gallery that he is squirming like an animal in a trap. His declaration of love for the woman in the dock is testimony against her – she did not have a reason to order the contract. And the judge affirms his testimony. “He tried to protect her (the accused) as much as he could at first but realised that he had no choice but to reveal what he knew. He was consistent in what he said she had told him and the only inference that can be drawn is that she was party to the murder.” And Neville is out of the mesh. She is not. Their retinas, clogged with the horrible image of a baby lying on a blood soaked bed, a pillow over her face, a gaping knife wound in her neck, the spectators, horrified, seek vengeance

On the Sunday after she approached him in the taxi rank, Gift, with Gezi, Jabulani and Nkosi, drove to the address that she had given them. On the pretext that they were delivering telephone

directories, they were to gain entry and stage a robbery. The murder had to appear to be the usual by-product of the gratuitous brutality that accompanies break-ins. But they could not get in; the family already had directories and would not open the door to them.

It was back to square one.

She devised a new plan – delivery of a parcel to someone in the family. That would let them in – a waybill to be signed.

Nkosi is a crowd pleaser. They laugh at his cheeky replies in court. When he is asked about his family circumstances, he tells the prosecutor to mind his own business, private matters are private. But he is quite forthcoming about his ambitions. He sees himself as an advocate, or a professional football player, or a great benefactor to society who will build a crime prevention centre where children can learn to make proper choices and live upstanding lives. And he is writing his autobiography. They snigger in the public gallery; they smile wryly on the press bench and even at the defence and prosecution tables. Such extravagant dreams for a kid from a squatter camp, from family circumstances that he is ashamed to disclose! Absurd! He has thrown away whatever small chance he may have had; he is going to prison.

She was waiting for them in a parking lot. Nkosi suppressed a wolf whistle. She was very beautiful but she was the boss. She gave them the parcel and waybill. She would telephone to inform the family of a delivery to be made.

They were paid the next day.

Not ten thousand, as agreed, but five. She had swindled them. One thousand went for expenses and a celebration, the rest split four ways, a thousand rand each, spent on clothes and shoes.

R5000! a paltry sum. Booze, clothes and shoes? That wasn't why Jabulani had knocked on the door, holding a parcel. That wasn't why Gift, Gezi and Nkosi had rushed in behind him with knives as soon as Sylvia's teenage brother had opened the door. That wasn't why Gift had grabbed the baby from the nanny, given her to Nkosi and sent him to another room to do the job while they tied up the boy and the woman, shoved them into the bathroom and looked around for things to take to give credence to robbery as the motive.

When Gezi, Gift and Jabulani went to see if Nkosi was done, they walked in on the teenager playing with the baby, talking to her and laughing. He looked up and they could see that he had crashed while they were still high. He was back in the social cage. When he saw them, he began to talk nonsense: the baby reminded him of his baby sister. What would his

mother say? He didn't want anything to do with this. But the others, out of the cage, exulting in being out, were focused on the prey. They sent Nkosi to wait in the taxi.

As they were driving off, Gezi showed him the bloody knife, and he threw up. When he got home, he couldn't look in the mirror. But he couldn't escape his parents' eyes; he threw his hands up in horror at what he saw in them. His mother cried; she no longer recognised him. His father took one look, suffered a stroke and died.

Though Nkosi confesses to having colluded in the crime and begs forgiveness, the law takes its course. He must go to prison. He will never be the handsome hero, the advocate, the professional football player, the benefactor of mankind. All of that is – was? – a fairy tale.

He let little Judy die.