

The Obverse Side of Ubuntu

Muthal Naidoo

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Maxwell Hartzenberg

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*Stories based on media coverage of actual happenings in the
last years of the first decade of the Twenty-first Century*

*separation
good from evil
Jekyll from Hyde
denial
of reality
ambivalence
of
human existence*

*Community,
equal opportunity provider,
gives rise to malefactors
alongside benefactors.*

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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 fleet
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 still is
a dime a dozen.

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 a 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 must bring it back. She leans forward to kiss the dear orbs and her lips meet shutters that come down into darkness. She cannot kiss his lips – the tape over his mouth – so she draws his head onto her breast and begins to stroke and kiss the thick dark waves.

She closes her eyes and is 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. Latifa sees in his every teasing gesture, in his rhythmic bopping, hears in every melodious sound, the world of his inspiration – the houses with stoops, 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. She sees again the faces all around her suffused with the brightness emanating from his being. What joy as he sings and dances! Musician singer, dancer, creator of musical theatre – he is there for everyone in the audience – she, just one of many... that hurts.

And in Gadija, his wife, Latifa sees again the tiredness. in the woman's eyes as she watches him performing. He has grown, become a giant; he bestrides more than the narrow world of The District, the womb of his creativity.

The umbilical cord being cut, he floats free; 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, reaching constantly for the familiar, find only a void where her husband used to be. Solid in her abaya, lips moving silently, Gadija prays for guidance, mercy and blessing as she watches him on the stage. Still a beautiful woman, the lines around her eyes and mouth, drawn in graceful, artistic strokes, serve only to enhance her dignity and charm, but she holds him no longer.

Latifa, ten years younger, in the full bloom of her beauty, sees it is only age that gives her the advantage; she cannot compare with Gadija. But she knows she can have him as she is not of the *zenana*; she is engaged in the wide, limitless world that encompasses his being. He has looked into Latifa's eyes, has seen her power, and is tantalised. Gadija no longer holds him.

Now, kneeling next to him, Latifa searches his eyes for the old desire and admiration. She is seeking in a void; her gaze elicits only questioning – the estranged alertness of the hunted, She has come to realise that Gadija was never the real threat. It is that performer on the stage who glows with a lustre that nothing else can match.

The first bail application will fail.

Cindi Smith's murderer, who beat her up more than ten times, threatened to kill her several times and eventually shot her, will get R2000 bail. Stephan Komane who shot and killed his girlfriend and her cousin will be given bail. Fred van der Vyver charged with bludgeoning his girlfriend with a hammer and stabbing her to death will be out on bail. Why will Latifa, a woman, be considered so much

more dangerous? If it were only a matter of killing again, she probably would get bail – but the fear that she will flee the country will prevail. And justice has to be served.

Silent. In court, the hijab over her hair, a frame around a mature face, still beautiful, but dark glasses turn it into a mask, expressionless, impassive. The defence will present a picture of vulnerability and weakness – a woman whose mental state is precarious, has always been. Her enemies will say this is a lie – “Latifa is a performer, better even than her husband.” And she too will become a celebrity; an overnight sensation, known to the whole nation not just to crowds in a theatre.

She will appear on every TV in every home, on the Internet, the radio and in newspapers. People will scour the media looking for that face, trying to get behind that mask. And just one event – not a series of shows – will have rocketed her to stardom.

Her name, eclipsing his, will be on everyone’s lips. People, who have never heard of either, will know her, not him.

But hers will be a different show.

Performing artists make money; more in Hollywood and Bollywood than on Broadway and in the West End. But, creating and being their own commodity, their earnings cannot compare with those of people whose commodity is money itself.

He could not compare with her.

Latifa was 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, she had learned and had eventually become an entrepreneur in her own right. Her ability to negotiate in the business world, in unofficial stock

exchanges, in underworld markets, had enabled her to amass wealth and become independent.

Once upon a time that power had filled him with admiration, 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 held him fast when he was on tour in Europe and America.

But it had waned.

It could not compare with the magic of coupling with an audience through his own power as performer.

The second bail application will also fail. After the first, at which pleas of her children's needs, of her fragile psychological condition, and the fear of suicide in detention will not prevail, she will fire her legal team and the new advocate representing her, will bring in her son, Nawaal, the son of her first marriage, to plead on behalf of his mother.

Nawaal will tell of the great love between his mother and his stepfather – whom he calls Uncle – a joyous ecstatic connection. And in his account of money laundering, illicit diamond trading, and involvement in underworld activities, he will imply a gangland strike. US dollars, millions, will apparently have been stolen from the scene of the crime. He will offer this new evidence in protest against his mother's detention.

Her financial manager will confirm that she and her husband always made joint decisions. To obviate noxious assignment of financial motive, he will assure the court that they had taken out insurance policies *together* on the children from their previous marriages, on their six-year old daughter and on their own lives. The advocate will remind the court, "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.”

Lying and storytelling, often used synonymously, are both forms of fiction. Storytellers, aware of the laws of libel, tell us that their characters are fictitious. Liars, however, embroil us in stories that we take for fact about themselves and the people they encounter. Always the main actors in their stories, liars present themselves as innocent victims of cruel, vindictive villains who cause them great suffering and leave them bereft of worldly possessions. They perform with such sincerity and emotion that they easily elicit audience participation and people pour out their sympathy in the form of goods and money. And with an air of sincere humility, the liar accepts his/her takings – box office remuneration for an entertaining performance.

When we eventually discover that it has all been an act, instead of becoming delirious with excitement as when we attend a rock concert, we are filled with shame and embarrassment because we believed. We didn't know it was a performance; we were duped and we revile the liar.

Storytellers, unlike liars, state outright that they create fiction; any resemblance to living persons is purely coincidental, quite unintentional. But it is uncanny how their characters and situations resemble real people, real happenings. Though they claim it is all fertile imagining, we can see that their fiction has its basis in fact.

So what makes a story fiction? Place and name changes? No.

James Bond's fantastic exploits, though they emanate from the real world in which his author operated, carry us beyond, into the realm of fantasy in which the impossible is made possible. Fiction is revealed as the ability to break out of narrow bounds and boldly go where no man, or woman, has been before.

That's the thing, you see. Writers do exactly what liars do. They take reality and turn it into fiction. The liar will not admit to it as that would rob him of his earnings so his tale, limited to those around him, keeps us earthbound. But the storyteller launches us into outer space. And that is what we applaud, that ability to lift us out of the mundane.

Latifa and her husband, in their individual ways, are both storytellers: his stories for the stage; hers for the courtroom.

Standing before the mirror, Latifa cannot see herself. Where is the beautiful, slender body, where the shapely hips, the silky smooth, flat abdomen? Who is that monster staring back at her out of distraught, desperate eyes? This is *jadoo*, black magic; someone has *tricked* her; found a witch doctor to provide the *muti* that shows her an inflated abdomen, pushed out like a bag of garbage, hips and buttocks merged into a globe and thighs blown into elephantine cylinders. She stares at this reflection, eyes full of loathing.

As the plastic surgeon maps out areas on the abdomen, *he* appears in the mirror behind the monster, and stares, eyes full of loathing. Fascinated by the abomination, *he* cannot turn his eyes away; they search for the sylph swallowed up inside the mound of lard. She wants to shatter the glass, blind those eyes, block out that alienated gaze, the look in his eyes before he left for New York. But it will change. After all the procedures, she will again be an alluring leading lady. And when he returns, the King will find his Anna, will forget the audience and dance with her, dance, dance, dance all night with her.

But when he comes back to encounter 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 could understand though not forgive. But Gadija? Why Gadija?

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

Part 3 of the bail hearing: further grounds for bail.

One: Her daughter needs her.

But the Judge, will put two and two together, and not let the little girl have her mother. Acting on the belief that he is protecting Ruwaida, the Judge will not see that two and two do not make four for the child. "I want Ma. Why have they taken her away from me?" Though Ruwaida is attached to her aunt, his sister, Ghatoen, who saw to all her needs while Latifa ran her businesses, the child will reject Ghatoen-ma, whom she will accuse of spreading lies about her mother. "That's why they took Ma away from me. I don't have a mother or a father anymore." Ruwaida, not an actress, will cry for her Ma, but the Judge will not be swayed.

Two: bail on medical grounds.

Latifa's psychiatrist will set out before the court – bipolar mood disorder, electric shock therapy, psychotic relapse, parasuicide, anti-psychotic and anti-depressant medication, sleeping tablets, tranquilisers, and an urgent medical appointment for the next week.

The Prosecutor will lift up the last item, find under it an appointment for liposuction treatment, and will gleefully upstage the Defence's assumptions with his own. "Drama queen, actress, making herself beautiful – what for? Her husband is dead." The Prosecutor will not see that he is possibly giving credence to the Defence's pleas of mental

instability. He will conclude that as a normal person, she has criminal responsibility.

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

At that, the court will transform into Shakespeare's Globe Theatre. The groundlings will clap and boo: "Give her bail and we'll take care of her," raucous laughter, the flash of a cell phone camera, confiscated immediately, but audience participation will not be over. Outside the courtroom, Capulets and Montagues, freed from propriety, will go at one another with pickets and insults:

'He drove her insane!'

'She was mad with jealousy!'

'He neglected her!'

'Bring back the death penalty!'

From marriage has come insanity, parasuicide, murder and feuding. Happily ever after is where fairy tales end. Romeo and Juliet driven by passion and too young to know, had clung to fairy tales. But he and Latifa? He had been married before; she had been married before, yet they still clung to the fairy tale ending. So they had bonded again, with each other, only to discover again that bonding is bondage.

These men in balaclavas – this is a nightmare – Ruwaida is terrified. She sees their big eyes and lips through the holes; doesn't want them to touch her. 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 Nawaal's cell phone and watch, pull the necklace off Nafisa's neck, and pull off Ruwaida's bangles. Then they lock them in

and go off.

The same horrible men had tried to kill Ma a few weeks before. They had caught Ma just outside the house, pointed a gun, pulled her out of the car and told her they would kill her if Papa stayed in show business.

For Ruwaida this had not been an act.

Now they are back. They have come to kill Ma. 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 Ma.”

Part 3 of the bail hearing, a four-part show, will continue with the Defence protesting: “Latifa wasn’t even present when it happened. She had been locked in her bedroom. Why is she being held?”

The Prosecution will bring in her sister-in-law, Asma, who will describe her brother’s unfortunate liaisons, first with Gadija, then the accused. Two marriages, two disasters: the first, insidiously abusive; the second, openly vicious – a nightmare in which an enraged woman constantly threatens her husband – once, even with a knife. “They were strangers living under the same roof – they did not share the same bed; they did not pray together.”

The Defence will decry Asma’s evidence. “Latifa’s is a bipolar disorder; she has suffered a psychotic relapse and has attempted suicide. She is under continuous medical supervision; receives electric shock therapy, takes antipsychotic and anti-depressant medication, tranquilisers, sleeping tablets. And he, the loving husband, administering these medications to a beloved wife, had carefully noted

dates, times, doses in a diary.”

The state psychiatrist will 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, as criminals don’t take responsibility, there will be another demand for bail.

And waiting for bail is like waiting for Godot.

Behind those dark glasses, Latifa is watching. The music is loud and lively. It is Salma’s, twenty-first birthday party; Salma, his daughter by Gadija. Latifa sees Gadija smile as she meets her ex-husband’s eyes, as he reaches forward to pull Salma out to dance *langarm*. 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 abaya and hijab. Her brown hair cascades in waves to her shoulders. Shimmering in a 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, completely in sync, but the eyes are at war. His, wary, alert – hers, fixed and compelling, there is no magic; their embrace – a trap that holds a prey.

The music ends and she disappears like Cinderella, but with shoes 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. They see only the woman under the abaya and hijab, the woman whose heart has turned to stone.

Soon after they arrive home from the twenty-first birthday party, there are people outside, seeking entrance. He answers on the intercom – relatives – and goes to open. Men wearing balaclavas rush in, grab him, drag him up the stairs to the family lounge, tie his hands behind his back, tie his feet, tape his mouth and push him onto his knees. One stands over him with a gun while the others charge into the bedrooms.

After all the other occupants of the house are safely locked up, she comes into the lounge.

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 into darkness. She cannot kiss his lips – the tape over his mouth – so she draws his head onto her breast and begins to stroke and kiss the thick dark waves.

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

'Til Death
Do Us Part

Lerato and her sister, Zodwa, hiding at the side of the house, watch as Jabulani, his father and uncle, make their way up the garden path. They have come to make the proposal and negotiate the conditions for marriage. Zodwa giggles; Jabulani, a jeans and T-shirt kind of guy looks trapped in his stiff, formal suit, but still very handsome.

Zodwa's father comes to the door and leads them into the lounge where her grandmother, mother, uncle and aunts sit waiting. Lerato and Zodwa, on the front veranda, hidden by the curtains, listen eagerly. In accordance with custom, Grandmother, the senior member of the family, 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, Zodwa, in marriage and wish to know the bride price – *lobola*. They are informed that the family is not selling its daughter (Lerato shudders) and *lobola* is simply a guarantee that Zodwa will be treated with care. They set *lobola* at R5000. As Jabulani has brought R3000, it is agreed that the balance be paid on the day of the wedding.

In addition, Zodwa'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 – blankets to wear. Other women in the family will each be given a smaller blanket and Zodwa, one large one.

Then they set the date.

Two weeks before the wedding, Zodwa, who works and lives in Pietersburg, comes home to Giyani. Jabulani has to receive her from her family, from the place of her origin, where the *Swikwembu*, the ancestors, abide.

On the day of the wedding, Zodwa, Lerato and two cousins, wearing *xibelanis* (traditional skirts), cover themselves from head to toe in blankets, so nothing of their bodies can be seen. When Jabulani and his family, also in

traditional dress, arrive, Jabulani 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. But Jabulani spots Zodwa right away, hidden as she is under her thick blanket.

Then Zodwa's grandmother makes a speech of welcome, and an uncle thanks the visitors and Zodwa's family for all the preparations they have made for the wedding. Next, Jabulani and Zodwa lead a procession of family and relatives up and down the street and are greeted by excited, ululating neighbours who dance and sing as they bless the bridal pair. Seeing Jabulani in his *zobo*, (traditional loincloth) with shield and spear, has Zodwa giggling all the way.

Lerato catches herself enjoying the occasion and pulls herself together.

When they return to Zodwa's parents' home, they perform *kohlabis*a—the sacrifice of a goat to the *Swikwembu*, the old ones, to make Zodwa and Jabulani one. The couple kneel on the earth and Jabulani is introduced to the old ones. Zodwa and Jabulani ask the ancestors for their blessings and promise to live together, take care of each other and perform their duties as husband and wife.

The wedding ritual concluded, they sign the marriage certificate and 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 a convention in the days when the traditional ceremony was not officially recognised. Though that changed after 1994, the practice still persists.

But Zodwa has postponed the white wedding. When

she found she was pregnant and had to get married, though the white wedding is the prestigious event, it is the traditional marriage that is essential to legitimate the birth of a baby. As a good Christian, Zodwa could, at a later date, have a white wedding. It remains an option.

The white wedding represents entry into mainstream culture and in a country where Ubuntu rests on race consciousness, it is a declaration that one is more than one's African roots. That is what Lerato will demonstrate when she marries. She will skip the traditional wedding altogether. She knows that her parents will be shocked but they are wary of her and will not insist.

Lerato aspires to wealth and status. She knows that for the rich and sophisticated, it is the white wedding that receives priority and if there is a traditional wedding, it is not publicised. But a wedding in church or at a country club or some other upmarket venue, out of reach of the old ones, the ancestors, the white wedding is what makes the news: the haute couture wedding gown, the bridesmaids' outfits, the superb decorations, exclusive venue and splendid menu.

That is what Lerato has promised herself; a one hundred per cent Christian wedding, not cluttered with traditional requirements; not like Zodwa's wedding or the wedding of her best friend, Nyeleti, at which she had been maid of honour.

She couldn't see herself going through the processes to which Nyeleti had submitted.

On the Friday evening before her wedding, Nyeleti, the bride, Lerato, the maid of honour, and the bridesmaids had assembled at Nyeleti's grandmother's home, their accommodation for the three days of the ceremony. That night, the bridesmaids went through incessant

recapitulation of the roles they would play in the ceremony and their places in church the next day. Their endless practice to synchronise their steps and movements almost drove Lerato crazy. Thank goodness she would walk alone in the procession.

Of course, there was a good deal of joking, laughter and fun, but through it all Lerato was making mental notes.

Her wedding wouldn't be, couldn't be, like this one. She would marry a real somebody who would sweep her away from this confined rural setting into posh suburban sophistication where she would gravitate in distinguished circles and her qualities as a brilliant professional would be recognised and properly appreciated. And she would shine; a polished diamond among polished diamonds. Her wedding would be on the front pages and she would be in all the social columns. It would be nothing like this one; she was here only for her friend's sake.

Though they had hardly had any sleep, Nyeleti and her entourage were up early on Saturday morning, donning their outfits, applying their make-up and making themselves alluringly beautiful for the ceremony. Then they rode to church in open convertibles so that all the people in the township could see, admire and cheer them on their way.

Lerato observed it all with condescension: how quaint.

At the church, the bridal party had to wait a few minutes in the vestibule. When they were summoned, Lerato led the way into the church. She walked down the aisle holding a flower in her hand, a signal to the congregation that the bridal procession was about to enter. She knew she looked stunning as she made her way toward the altar. Gasps of admiration told her that Nyeleti would not compare but would be honoured as the bride. Lerato took her place and the bridesmaids entered. Then the organ rang out

the wedding march and Nyeleti's father brought the bride down the aisle.

After the church ceremony, they left for Tzaneen, the nearest town, where they spent an hour or two in the park, posing for photographs.

After the photo session, they returned to the township and the bride's party was dropped off at her granny's house to change into traditional dress for the first reception at the bride's parents' home. Lerato found it irksome to have to put on a *xibelani*, the traditional skirt. When they were ready, they drove off to the reception.

A little distance from the house, they got out of the cars and, in a crowd of neighbours and friends, danced the rest of the way. Vibrating hips kept *xibelanis* quivering and layers of skirts flipping up in waves on either side of hips. Lerato enjoyed dancing and in this environment, she let herself go. Spectators cheered and several ran up to put money on her head – acknowledgment of her superlative ability.

Once inside, Nyeleti's father welcomed the bridegroom's family. "Son, this is my daughter, I'm not selling her to you" – Lerato cringed at the crass reminder of *lobola* – "I'm lending her to you but her head remains at home. Take care of my baby; teach her all our good ways." Transferring responsibility for the daughter to the groom was the traditional way to pay respect to him. Then they feasted, drank, sang and danced in customary style.

Though she was enjoying herself, Lerato made a mental note: no traditional dancing at her wedding. *Of course not! It will not be a traditional wedding.*

At this reception to welcome the groom into Nyeleti's family, his mother, in accordance with custom, had not been present. And the next day, Nyeleti's mother would not be at

the reception in the groom's parents' home. Though Lerato 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.

After the reception, Nyeleti and her entourage returned to her granny's home for the night. Lerato could see that Nyeleti was happy to be involved in all these tribal rites but they didn't fit with her understanding of pomp and circumstance.

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. She had to be strong so she could produce lots of children. That was what was wanted of her – many children. Furthermore, 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.

Lerato stood there silently rejecting everything she heard. She swore to herself that her wedding would be nothing like this.

After the feasting and dancing, it was time for bed, and Lerato, as the maid of honour, was required to stay with the bride. The next morning, she had to get up early, sweep the whole yard and cook for the bride. Lerato 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 place of their ancestors and performed *umkomboti*, the ceremony in which beer and snuff are poured into the ground as offerings

to the ancestors in return for their blessings. Nyeleti was then introduced to the *Swikwembu*, the old ones, as the new daughter in the home.

Nyeleti and her husband had to remain in his parents' home for the following two weeks so that Nyeleti could perform *ko koroka* – that is, sweep, clean and cook, to demonstrate that she was a real woman. Poor Nyeleti – reduced in every way to basic functions.

Lerato shook her head. No *ko koroka* for her. After her wedding, she would be off on a honeymoon to some place in Europe or America. She wouldn't be caught dead in these old customs. She was going to leave all this behind her forever. And it bothered her that people were calling for an African Renaissance, a return to the old ways. All that had been knocked out of them; they had learned to adapt or die. Now a return to the old ways was being advocated. It wasn't what she planned for herself. She knew exactly what she wanted. Riches and renown! Traditions were for the poor.

Though nobody wants to be poor, society needs poor people; they are absolutely necessary to our existence. But poverty should not be a racial allocation; no entire group should be levelled by it. For progress, every group needs the diversity of the class system, sellers and buyers, the perfect complement – the real social contract. The lower classes do the menial, mindless jobs that the upper classes hate. That gives the upper classes freedom to get ahead, become wealthy and powerful. The class system makes possible their travel, luxury accommodation, wining and dining.

And government is there to ensure the proper functioning of the class system. Unspent budget allocations for education, health and social welfare – so easy to divert

– keep the balance of rich and poor. As long as they have their daily bread, the poor are happy. The rich are even happier to supply it, after fixing prices.

Gogos (grannies), mothers, domestic and other workers fit neatly into the social equation of rich and poor. Poor people don't realise it, but they are blessed. They are the really lucky ones. *They* can fit through the eye of the needle. Yes, they are lucky. But their attitude of ingratitude continuously rears its ugly head. All the hijackings and robberies with rape and murder that force us into the expense of high security systems for our homes, cars, offices, businesses and banks, indicate that they do not fully understand their role in the scheme of things.

Most disturbing is the indiscriminate nature of their reprisals. Take that incident when the mother of the nation was robbed. Unbelievable! How could they do that? Her own relatives! Steal millions worth of jewellery? How could they commit such an atrocious crime against one who has made huge sacrifices in the struggle for their freedom?

The majority of the country's population had been forced into inferior status in accordance with race, decades before Mandela walked out of prison in 1990. With freedom had come the expectation that mantles of racial inferiority and superiority would drop to reveal whole, self-respecting human beings. But there were no mantles. What we had assumed were mantles, external coverings that could be discarded, were actually poisons that had seeped into the soul.

People in South Africa have lived long under the legacy of "I am superior; you are inferior," a legacy that has never been deconstructed. If your worth is dependent on my lack of worth, there is no worth in the equation. Nevertheless,

as people believe there is, they try hard to acquire it. But it is nowhere to be found, so those regarded as inferior, resort to mimicry. And, in recent South African history, when power passed to those who had been dominated, despite affirmative action or perhaps because of it, the subliminal drive was – to become the oppressor.

It had happened before with the Afrikaners who had been oppressed by the British. When they came into power, they became thoroughly bilingual and despite making Afrikaans an official language, mastered the English language and made themselves completely at home in it. That is when it became necessary to set up a language and culture association to protect Afrikaans from extinction. And now, even after 1994, it is still the English language and culture that confer a sense of superiority. So it has become necessary to talk of an African Renaissance.

But it is only talk.

We are still looking for our identities, and even ethnic Africans find it necessary to declare, “*I am an African.*” With freedom, it was expected that Africans would have the confidence to be themselves. It did not happen. They could not affirm themselves as they did not recognise the great complexity of their identities and were still stuck with racial identification. So we carry on in the mode of mimicry rather than admit to a blending of cultures. And as we cannot, we continue to create categories of superiority and inferiority based on race – white weddings versus traditional.

Take, for instance, the wedding of Sibongile and Siyabonga – a grand, festive occasion. Living in the new democracy in which all the privileges previously denied them, were now spread out for all to enjoy – no longer were they servants kowtowing before masters; *they* were the new royalty and would celebrate as royalty. They would spare no expense.

Sibongile chose an elite venue; a hotel and country club with a floating restaurant on the Vaal River – a magnificent setting for the pageant, ceremony and reception. She made arrangements for a four-horse carriage for the bridal couple and luxury cars for the retinue and family members. As the guests of honour would be high officials from the Office of the President, where Sibongile had been employed, stringent security precautions would be in effect and the venue would be closed to all but the wedding party and guests.

On the day, guests arriving for the ceremony at the floating restaurant, delighted in the beauty of their surroundings, absorbed it as acknowledgment of their newfound status, and revelled in their prestige. The sense of well-being that emanated from them filled the restaurant with an ambience of joyful pomp and circumstance. As they waited for the VIPs from the President's Office to arrive and put the seal of royalty on the gathering, they moved about laughing and talking, reflecting back to one another their pre-eminence. Engaged in this way five hours of waiting sped by like nothing and before they knew it, the cavalcade of cars was making its way along the road, followed by the stately carriage and four bringing the bride and groom. The bridal procession made its grand entrance into the restaurant and the wedding was underway.

It was a traditional Christian wedding, beautiful, dignified, with the old vows: to love and obey, for better, for worse, in sickness and in health, till death do us part. No new-fangled improvised nonsense. Sibongile's sister sang a moving song of enduring love and after Siyabonga kissed the bride, it was time for photographs, in the restaurant, on the riverbank, in the carriage and four and at various scenic spots.

Sibongile was radiant. The event was every woman's dream. She had personally organised the whole affair. Her high connections in government had won her preferential treatment and she had been welcomed with open arms by all the service providers.

The VIPs' failure to arrive did not in the least diminish the lustre of the occasion and the reception at the hotel continued late into the night with much merriment, feasting and dancing. After the celebrations, the happy couple retired to the honeymoon suite, which they would occupy for three blissful days.

It was happily ever after – for a month.

Then the dream was shattered.

On presenting their bills to the highest office in the land, which, ostensibly, had approved the expenditure, the providers of the horse and carriage, the car rental company, and the hotel management discovered that no one in the President's Office knew anything of the wedding. When the hotel management and the other suppliers demanded payment from Sibongile, she made threats of legal action and took out restraining orders.

But the suppliers prevailed and Sibongile and Siyabonga were arrested. It was discovered that Sibongile had been dismissed from her post more than a month before the wedding and when she left, had lifted the laptop and official letterheads, and had used them to send off letters of authorisation.

When all of this was exposed, Siyabonga suddenly saw the marriage bond as a noose. Though they still appeared as a happy couple on their first appearance in court, at the second, some months later, it was clear that the bond had been severed. She sat with her family, he with his, apart from each other; they did not communicate.

Siyabonga claimed that he had been under the spell of a dominant woman; she had been the driving force in the relationship; her energy had swept him along. He now realised that he had never really loved her. His lawyer argued that he had had no involvement in or knowledge of the fraud.

At the end of the session, Siyabonga was dismissed with a warning. Sibongile would stand trial. As Siyabonga had not invested any emotion in the relationship, he had lost nothing.

The marriage had been a complete sham.

Lerato's marriage will be genuine. Watching and waiting, she knows exactly what she wants.

And the first time she sets eyes on him, her marathon man, she knows he is the one. He shines as the son of a wealthy, prominent, influential citizen. He is well educated, has begun his ascent up the corporate ladder, has seen in the surrounding poverty its potential for thriving entrepreneurship, and has begun a moonlighting cell phone operation. She can see that he is a modern man who has cut traditional ties.

But she is not aware of her prospective mother-in-law, a woman from a village in the north; she has seen only the modern, sophisticated step-mother.

His mother, a traditional woman, regards arranged marriages as social contracts that strengthen families and clans. She declares in Tsonga, "I prefer the old ways. People may try to forego them, but our customs are powerful. Even those who have adopted western ways always return to their roots for important events like marriage. Though they choose their partners themselves, they still observe customary pre-wedding procedures: family negotiations,

consent – and *lobola*.”

For his mother, the old way is better. With families and clans negotiating the contract, marriage is sanctified within the community and will be nurtured by it. She insists that when marriages are arranged, they last because the bride and groom are strangers to each other. That is good; it means that they place their trust in their families and recognise that the welfare of the clan is as important as their own, so they will never bring disgrace upon their families.

But for Lerato, marriage is a personal contract between a woman and a man rather than a contract of families and clans. Still, she has to admit that with more personal freedom, bonds have become tenuous and with divorce, marriage is now part of a throwaway culture.

When, in a police delegation, she went to arrest officials at the Home Affairs Department, she was surprised to find that they too believe in arranged marriages.

One official at Home Affairs, working with registration of births, deaths and marriages, justified her actions as contributing to the African Renaissance.

“I am reinstating traditional customs,” she said. “I have become a matchmaker. It makes me so happy to be of help to the many poor women who are unmarried because we are losing our culture. I find husbands for them. No woman can claim to be a woman unless she has given birth to a child – not that these women are childless.

Through the marriages that I arrange, they get a small payment. I bring together men and women who do not know each other, just as in the good old days. The men, mostly foreigners – Pakistanis, Zimbabweans, Malawians, etc. – pay *lobola* to me. It’s a real honour to be acting as a family elder negotiating the bride price.”

And there was no shortage of brides.

“I was surprised to find that women from all groups are readily available. I pay them a small amount from the lobola, 200 for an African bride, 400 for Indian or Coloured, 600 for White. All I need are their identity numbers. I provide the marriage certificate, conduct a short ceremony, put the marriage on file and they go their separate ways. She goes back to her family; he goes off with a residence permit and becomes a legal citizen.

Cynics believe it was his only interest. Reluctantly, I have to admit that may be true because he is back soon afterwards for an annulment. That’s no problem. As it was only a marriage in cyberspace, it is easy to delete. I am trying to find a way to make couples understand the true significance of marriage but, unfortunately, I am snowed under with requests to find brides and cannot give the matter much attention.

The huge demand from immigrants flooding into the country now that we no longer have apartheid to keep them out, keeps me hopping. It is so unfair to call them illegal immigrants and see them as opportunists. These are our brothers; it is not the African way to label people and turn our backs on them.

There is such a great demand that I have had to adopt a shortcut that allows me to provide brides and permanent residence in a much shorter time. I no longer look for brides in the community; I find them on the computer. I have a list of unmarried women from our files and now I marry them to my clients without even informing them of their happy circumstances. There is a gratuitous benefit to the arrangement. I can dispense with payment to the bride. There wasn’t any in the old tradition so that makes it quite authentic.

But the arrangement isn't fool proof. Sometimes these women that I marry off, come to apply for new ID books, birth certificates and even marriage certificates and that is when they discover that they are already married. If only I had time to work out how to get the couples to understand that theirs is a life-long commitment. That's where cyberspace has failed me.

If I could just stay here long enough, I could figure it out but now the cops are here and I have to go with them. They don't understand the service that I am providing. Like the elders of old, I am making sure of compatibility. These cops don't understand – one has to be very careful when choosing a partner.”

On a cold, biting morning, the sun not up yet, Lerato, 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 boom 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 twenty-four 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, have grown in strength and endurance and believe they can make seven-and-a-half hours this time. That would mean silver medals – their immediate goal.

Now here, in Pietermaritzburg, waiting in the dusk before dawn, full of hope for what the day will bring, Lerato shivers with excitement as the count-down begins to the accompaniment of the theme from 'Chariots of Fire' and the screeching of myna birds. When the huge city hall clock rings out the hour from its tower – six-o'clock – the cannon booms, the *Trimbora cockcrow* rings out, flares pierce the darkness and the mass begins to surge forward

under the glare of television camera lights. It will take some minutes before Lerato 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, Lerato and Lufuno settle comfortably into the stream making its way towards Polly Shorts. Being dedicated runners, who 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. Following the recommendations in Bruce Fordyce's book, six weeks before the race, they went on an intensive training 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, Botha's Hill, and Cowie's Hill – they worked on strengthening calf, back and stomach muscles. A week before the race, they tapered off training and began carbo-loading.

On her first Comrades, an up-run, Lerato '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, absolutely determined to get a medal, any medal. On reaching Pietermaritzburg, cheering crowds, lining the streets, gave her a big boost and forgetting her pain, she made a staggering dash for the stadium, shuffled in and crossed the finishing line just before the last person home at 16.30, the official cut-off time for medals – and then collapsed.

The searing pain from damaged muscles made her realise that she had not prepared adequately. That

was when she acquired Fordyce's book, discovered the reason her legs had given out and decided to adopt his recommendation of carbo-loading during the race, i.e., taking water for the first hour only, 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, Lerato and Lufuno pull off the extra T-shirts they had donned for warmth at the start of the race. As they fling them away, they see the usual 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.

They are in a group of serious runners whose minds are firmly fixed on the race; not like the runners in the big group behind, who are there just to be part of a great occasion and limit the race simply to finishing and having fun at the same time. They chat, laugh, take in the beauty of their surroundings, alternate running with walking, perform for television cameras and are quite content to clock in after 16:30.

Lerato is glad to be running with competitive men and women who want more than personal satisfaction; who want fame, glory and the acknowledgment that they are stars. She is gratified to find some of the top women competitors in this pack. They will make it in six hours. If she can keep up with them for the next hour or two, she has a good chance of achieving her goal. 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.

Who is 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 on the race, she changes places with Lufuno to block the 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 the bottle away and spurts forward. Lufuno speeds up beside her. His frown tells her that she is deviating from the plan and she falls into step with him.

They take Inchanga easily and descend without mishap. Then, what has been a 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, that man, is rapidly fading from her sight. It is still too early for Lerato and Lufuno to make their break and Lufuno cannot understand Lerato's impatience. Botha's Hill and the excruciating Fields Hill lie ahead; they will have to negotiate those formidable descents with care.

Lerato tries to control her feelings, wipe out the image of that tall figure but she cannot. So she decides not to suppress it. Instead she pulls the truth out of her subconscious and when she admits what she instinctively felt from the moment she set eyes on him, she begins to see him in her silver medal and she runs the rest of the race completely inspired. When she and Lufuno cross the finishing line minutes before the deadline for silver, he is waiting to congratulate them.

People enter into marriage too easily; they believe in the fairy tale ending. After the hero slays the dragon or the witch to prove his manhood, he claims the beautiful maiden as his reward, and the story ends with the wedding.

That's it! No more!

Marriage and family life are relegated to the dream world suggested by 'happily ever after.'

Driven by their impulses, young people rush in, consummate and expect to realise the dream. Instead they see each other for the first time and then may find themselves staring at a dragon or a witch.

And marriage is a contract, binding, till death do us part. Set out in small print, terms and conditions apply – to protect you from me. We don't *really* trust. Not ourselves, not others. We know instinctively that underneath the human façade lurks the self-indulgent, primitive being waiting to spring, the being that does not respect contracts – marriage, trade, work – all contracts, big and small, even the constitution, even the biggest one of all, Ubuntu.

Sociopaths and psychopaths cannot honour contracts because they do not honour themselves. Their low self esteem leads them into horrendous acts of rape and murder – their means of asserting their worth. Their violent crimes are intoxicating, daring, ecstatic expressions of self-empowerment – but, like drugs, they bring only momentary satisfaction of the craving for supremacy and fame. Consequently, the need for repetition – serial activity – that earns them top billing in the media.

Serial killings are considered major crimes but – they are not as far reaching as the crimes of those who really undermine society as a whole – fraudsters – at all levels. Fraud, deliberate deception involving abuse, manipulation and embezzlement, is committed by individuals, groups,

companies, governments – people in whom you put your trust.

It is more easily detected at grassroots than at higher echelons of society where it is elusive and becomes a devil-may-care adventure that decimates whole communities without obvious bloodletting. For the rich and powerful, human beings at grassroots are pawns in their intoxicating games of risk, daring and high reward.

Take the clandestine wedding of our Tigers. Here is Ismail – an all-year bread and milk Santa Claus, busy providing daily bread, supplying corner cafés and *spaza* shops, making the staff of life available to people in informal settlements. And it bothers him to see the price of bread rising steadily. At first he puts it down to increased petrol prices, but when he receives notification of a hike in price just before Christmas and finds it to be uniform across *all* brands, he smells the collusion of big companies and decides to expose their covert marriage.

Ismail doesn't believe in the unwritten law that the season of goodwill and peace means exorbitant charges for goods. How can increased prices be a celebration of Isa's birth?

And in the price of *bread*, a staple food! Ismail knows that Isa wouldn't approve. If only Isa would come down and replicate the miracle of the loaves and fishes – that would deal the Tigers a blow. But Ismail knows he cannot get help that way. Expelled from Xmas, Isa has long been replaced by anonymous Tigers; he had once whipped them outside the temple, but that hadn't stopped them.

Ismail decides to tackle the Tigers himself. He sends them a warning. It is ignored, but he persists, and the Tigers sharpen their claws and bare their teeth. Ismail then seeks protection from the competition authorities which attempt

to put a leash on the Tigers, who immediately blame their playful cubs, admit to their mischievous behaviour and agree to discipline them. But prices don't go down.

And Ismail isn't forgotten.

He no longer receives enough bread to supply cafés and *spazas* in the township and informal settlements.

Merry Xmas everyone.

A celebration in a private club in Sandton, the perfect venue for the event:

Lerato's engagement!

The dining hall, arranged for a dinner-dance, is magnificently decorated, everything colour coordinated. The parents wait at the entrance to welcome guests as they arrive. People enter and mingle. Moving about to the soft sounds of the band in the background, they meet, greet, engage in small talk and fill the hall with laughter and gaiety. The couple's sisters and brothers circulate, engaging with guests, making 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 delight at his having found his soul mate. The couple is standing beside him and everyone turns to look at Lerato, magnificent in a special designer gown. After his father blesses them, his son puts a ring on Lerato's finger, a huge diamond that she has chosen.

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 crowded

with hip swinging, bopping silhouettes, intertwining and having a good time.

Lerato is most satisfied with her organisation; the whole function is going off smoothly and with style.

But the mother from the village is a huge contradiction. Lerato feels she has been swindled.

Fraud is a crime of exploitation – as familiar as the air we breathe. Though it is sociopathic – a characteristic not recognised as it involves inconspicuous genocide – it does not compare, in terms of public interest, with violent crime – the real box-office hit. When we hear of fraud, we merely shrug. Who gets excited at the thought of oxygen? And fraud committed by social welfare officials is so common and on such a large scale that it is taken for granted, like the air we breathe. Furthermore, bureaucrats being faceless and nondescript do not arouse excitement. So we do not give such fraudsters proper credit for their ingenuity.

And they are ingenious! Look how smoothly they have separated ‘social’ from ‘welfare’ and replaced it with ‘personal.’ Sheer virtuosity! But we don’t appreciate it because the stereotype of the civil servant blinds us. We see her/him as traditional, conservative, dull. That is why we are unable to recognise her/his artful promotion of the African Renaissance. Civil servants have found new ways of showing profound respect for the *Mazlozi* – the ancestors. They create files for them that allow them to receive regular monetary grants in the other world.

Cynics refer to the old ones created by welfare officials as ‘ghosts’. Though ghosts, by their spectral nature, usually add spice to situations, these ‘spooks’ remain inconspicuous in the background and we only

become aware of them when we examine the books or someone complains. Then we discover statistics such as the following:

2003

Case 1: Two Gauteng Social Services Department employees pay scam syndicates R2.5m per month. [Even ghosts form syndicates.]

Case 2: Fifty government officials in Bisho receive grants, totalling R12m for pensioners who have already joined the ancestors.

Case 3: A Social Welfare Department employee in Kwa-Zulu Natal presents birth and death certificates for the old ones and receives over R100 000 in maintenance grants.

2004

Case 5: In White River, ten people pay disability grants amounting to R300 000 to children waiting to be born.

Case 6: On the south coast of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Social Welfare Department staff and agents, doctors and officials from Home Affairs, make up grant claims for ancestral clients, issue medical certificates and identity documents and receive R1.8bn. A very successful year, the previous year had netted only R840m.

Case 7: In Cape Town, welfare grants amounting to R200m are diverted from designated beneficiaries to the old ones. Over the past ten years, an amount of R15bn for needy children, the elderly and the disabled has been reallocated in this way. [The needs of ‘ancestors’ are much greater.]

2004

Case 8: 70 000 children in the Eastern Cape do not appear to claim their grants, or do not have birth certificates. [R23m 'saved' – for the old ones.]

Case 9: In Kwa-Zulu Natal, despite registration of an additional 16 000 children, R23m is not paid out for 'administrative reasons.' [More children who did not appear.]

Case 10: The Western Cape 'saves' R13m on children without birth certificates.

2006

Case 11: The SIU (Special Investigating Unit) investigating government employees, finds that of 4000 government employees, 2158 have received grants on behalf of the old ones.

2007

Case 12: 34 public servants in Witbank – officials from Education, Health and Welfare, Police, Printing Works, Justice, Water Affairs, Road and Transport – receive disability and care dependency grants for children in the spirit world. This is one of 43 000 cases of ghostly social grants that have been identified throughout the country. In Mpumalanga, 2324 cases of such payments amount to R2 314 028.

Case 13: In Durban, a social welfare department employee collected R14m over more than a decade for her ghostly clientele.

Case 14: Three officials of Social Services and Population Development create files for 'ghost' pensioners and collect R17m.

Officials in government departments, servicing Ghosts, are prudent. They know they have to provide for rainy days so they do not empty coffers in one go; they do it in instalments.

If you didn't skip over the above list, you will have noticed that money is diverted from the living – children, the disabled, pensioners – to 'ancestors' in the other world who need constant appeasement. It may be worth your while to befriend someone in social services; s/he could put *your* 'ancestors' on line.

The cases above are just a minute sampling. You can find pages and pages on the Internet, but you're probably bored to death already. You're probably saying, "So what's new? Fraud – ho hum! – such boring stuff! Just a load of statistics!"

But murder – now that's riveting – even an obscure local event like the following.

Ian's wife didn't know when last she had seen her husband. When the police came to speak to her, they discovered that she had not even reported him missing. And when they informed her that her husband's body had been found in the boot of a car parked for several days at a shopping centre, she became totally incommunicado.

Violent crime, such as murder, engages our interest immediately. Fraud does not – no blood, no body. Fraud is invisible; a lack lustre crime. You don't see the thousands and millions disappearing. It is the marriage to murder that gives fraud colour.

Lerato is glad that her new house has a high-powered security system and CCTV. And what a house! A palatial structure, rambling, spacious and royally appointed; the kind of house you see on TV magazine programmes, with

a large patio, swimming pool, solarium, terraced garden with contained and open spaces, arbours, spreading trees and a lawn with topiarized hedges and shrubs. Her home! She has graduated from police-woman to Queen. She made the right marriage.

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

Lerato 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 does not want the agent to visit her at home. He is bringing papers for her to sign, a policy on her husband's life. Lerato is making this beneficent gesture despite having been forced to endure a traditional wedding.

But family is important.

Ma had just received a call from her daughter to say that her son, Wynand, had made an Internet transfer of money into his parents' account and Pa had to go to the bank right away to check that it had come through all right. Ma praised the Lord. What a wonderful son! Thoughtful, caring and generous; so protective of his retired parents, making sure they had enough for their needs! Ma told Pa and he set off for the bank right away.

Filled with gratitude and thoughts of her son's virtues, Ma began to sing as she went about her household chores – Wynand really valued his family, his Ma, his Pa and his wives. He had married, divorced, and married again. Ma was very proud of him and always spoke of his endeavours in glowing terms. Her neighbours had heard over and over that Wynand was a financial genius with dealings in all parts of the world. He had money rolling in from places like Monaco, London and New York.

Though he was exceptional in Ma's mind, Ma's neighbours didn't seem impressed. Ma smiled; they couldn't really appreciate him. They had met him only briefly on his visits to Cape Town. What did they know? She was his mother.

As a pensioner with an ailing husband, Ma's life had fallen into a daily routine of the commonplace and it was wonderful to be able to contemplate her son's entrepreneurial adventures. That was the gratifying thing about being a mother; you had a second chance to live again, through your children. Though she didn't really know much about his business enterprises, except that they involved hundreds of thousands of rands, his successes were her successes. They hadn't spoiled him, only her; she sang his praises *ad nauseam*.

She couldn't help herself; she was so proud of him. Despite his great achievements, he was still grounded in community: a major in the Commando up north and a deacon in his church. He was the one who gave her the strength to go on as she watched her husband declining before her eyes. Poor old Pa! He didn't have many years left, but he wouldn't give in to his illness, wouldn't be reduced to dependency. Like this morning, he had insisted on going to the bank alone. He was strong in spirit; that's where Wynand got it – like father, like son.

Ma, like all proud mothers, took her relationship with her son for granted.

And he took her and Pa for granted.

A knock at the back door and Ma found a stranger, a traveller, asking to use the toilet. She showed him in.

In the past year, Wynand had made three visits to his parents in the Cape. On each visit, he had tried to find someone there to undertake a job for him. He had not been successful. Eventually, he found someone in his hometown,

an employee, Dawie, and sent him off to the Cape with his assistant-manager and friend, Jan. But when they got there, Dawie told Jan that he couldn't be involved in the scheme, and refused to carry it out. They went back, mission unaccomplished.

Then Wynand found Dirk, for whom two hundred thousand rand was a fortune. Jan took Dirk down to the Cape, but when they got there, Dirk also refused. Jan called Wynand on his cell, then handed the phone to Dirk who listened as Wynand threatened to wipe out his family, his pregnant wife and his children.

Dirk felt he had no choice.

Jan also reported to Wynand that his Pa's car was standing in the driveway. So Wynand called his sister and told her to call her father right away and tell him to go to the bank immediately to check on a deposit that he had made into Pa's account. As soon as Pa pulled out of the driveway, Dirk ran over to the house, knocked on the back door and Ma opened.

After Pa returned from the bank, his neighbour saw him stopped on the lawn like a statue. She became alarmed. The old man's face had taken on a strange hue and he was staring fixedly. She thought he might be having one of his seizures so she ran over. But when she went round to the back to call Ma, the colour drained from her face as well. She ran off to call the police.

When they arrived, she took them to the backdoor and showed them the bloody footprints leading away from the house. They went in and found Ma on the floor of the lounge in a pool of blood. She had been stabbed twice in the shoulder and her throat had been cut.

Ma had been unaware that Wynand was in terrible debt; that his business transactions had gone awry; that his

creditors were breathing down his neck and he was facing prosecution for fraud. He desperately needed funds. Ma didn't know that he had tried to take out insurance on his father's life. After he was refused, because the old man was too ill, he had taken out a policy on Ma for nearly four million, an amount that would rescue him from financial ruin. Ma and Pa knew nothing of all this. Despite his debts, once he had the policy, Wynand scrupulously kept up payment of the premiums and was ready to put his plan into action.

Relationships depend on trust; without trust there can be no abuse.

A little later than usual, Lerato and her husband are out on their evening run. The sun is going down as they make their way through a wooded area.

As they run through the trees, instead of increasing darkness, they find themselves approaching an island of daylight in the dusk. They wonder what it is; as a policewoman, Lerato cannot ignore it. They turn into an obscure little road where a huge fire is ablaze. As they approach, they see that firemen and police are already at 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 best friend and colleague as his assassin.

The violence and inhumanity of his death deflects all interest from his investigations into a syndicate involved in drug trafficking, a variety of scams and all kinds of fraud. It focuses exclusively on the heinous act, murder most foul, akin to fratricide.

When combined with murder, fraud is often eclipsed. And with gender equity, fraud is knocked out altogether. A woman who commits murder explodes the foundations of our beliefs and we erupt like volcanoes. Not in outrage; it is euphoria. Secretly, women killers are our heroines, and we revel in reviling them. With gender equity, there should be no difference between murderers and murderesses, but murderesses excite us far more because women are the traditionally designated vessels of Ubuntu so their strikes against the civilized values that keep us on a leash, represent the ultimate in anarchic freedom.

And gender equity has given murder even greater audience participation than cricket, rugby or soccer. At a stadium, it is the wild waving and cavorting of spectators performing for the camera. In the courtroom, it is our unrestrained expressions of outrage and howls for retribution. We are on the scent of a kill and ready to stone the execrable betrayer of human values.

If we had to give awards to criminal activity for its box office impact, fraudsters would receive nominations, rapists and murderers would get the Golden Globe, but the Oscar would go to women who kill.

As a member of the police department, Lerato, often involved in investigation of homicides, has come in contact with many assassins, among them women, who, unable to commit the deed themselves, find those who will do it for them. It angers Lerato to think of young men, some even teenagers, being corrupted, exploited and turned into hired hitmen. She hates people who prey on vulnerable men and boys from townships and informal settlements, turning them into cold-blooded killers – such contempt for black people. It is clear they regard Blacks as savages who think nothing of killing other human beings.

Nowadays, contractors include women – women who don't put up with infidelity. In the old days, women married because they were dependent; they moved from dependency on the father to dependency on the husband. And they simply did what was expected of them: stayed home, looked after children and turned a blind eye to their spouses' little affairs.

Women, independent now, have power and ways to deal with infidelity; but they are still stuck in the old paradigm – the wife and mother syndrome.

What is actually needed now is a new set-up. Gender equity is only a first step. The next step is to turn wifehood and motherhood into legitimate careers, with proper education and training, certificates, diplomas and degrees. Qualified women could then apply to prospective husbands, negotiate salary, conditions of work and benefits and find the best deal for themselves. As a professional and qualified housewife and mother, a woman's place would be official in the home where she would hang up her certificates and receive a salary.

Marriage would then be a proper business transaction. There would be no hang-ups about fidelity and a man could legitimately set up several family businesses and a professional wife could always be on the lookout for better job opportunities. Marriage would then function as it ought to in a capitalist society – without the unnecessary baggage of fidelity, forsaking all others, to love and to hold, 'til death do us part.

But, most young women, indoctrinated by custom, novels, TV, movies and soap operas, are still hung up on romantic love. In the old days of arranged marriages, the question of romantic love didn't arise; it shouldn't now either. It revives all the old taken-for-granted notions that reduce women to unequal partners; that tie them to the

home without their willing consent.

Romantic love only befuddles the understanding that marriage is a contract. What is romantic love anyway? Merely sexual attraction and infatuation, passing fancies that cannot carry the weight of 'till natural death do us part'. Romance is not to be taken seriously and should be regarded as a leisure time activity – not clandestine – holiday fun, open to all. When we take it seriously and try to prolong it through marriage, it mutates into abuse.

Right after the wedding, the white wedding, that is, not the traditional one that she had not foreseen, Lerato gets in touch with an estate agency and begins the search for a new home. Seven months later, she and her husband move into their new palatial residence.

And the next week, he is dead.

He had taken the little hatchback and gone out to meet with a business associate in a neighbouring suburb. Driving along, he became irritated by a tailgating Corolla. He tried to speed up but the car in front was going at a snail's pace. When he tried to overtake, the car moved over to the right with him. The car behind was still on his rear bumper and the car in front wouldn't let him pass. They had him trapped between them and when he looked for their number plates, he saw there were none.

He went cold. He was being hijacked.

He fumbled for his cell phone and called Lerato. She worked for the Police Commissioner; she would know what to do. When she answered, he gasped out what was happening and wanted help. Then he began to lurch the car from one side of the road to the other, trying to break free but the drivers in front and behind kept him hemmed in.

When he saw the car in front begin to turn onto a dirt road in a wooded area, he thought he had a chance. As soon as he could get clear, he would speed off straight down the road. Just as he began to pull away, the other car sped forward and screeched to a halt right against his front bumper. The man in the passenger seat jumped out, ran up, smashed a window, jumped in behind him, pressed a revolver to his head and motioned him to turn and follow the first car. He had no choice, but he kept alert, looking for a way to escape, listening for police sirens, hoping to see Lerato. She was a policewoman; she knew how to deal with hijackers.

They stopped at a secluded spot on the road and he was ordered out. He saw that there were four men surrounding the car. It didn't matter; he was going to make a run for it. He was confident he could outrun them. As he opened the door, he slammed it hard into the stomach of one of them, grabbed his briefcase, smashed it into the next person's head, jumped clear, and took off. A shot rang out and he was brought down. Then one of them, the leader, yelled out that they had no time to waste. He had received a call – the cops were on their way. They grabbed their victim, sprayed him with petrol, shoved him in the boot, emptied a couple of cans of petrol over the car, set it alight and disappeared.

Flames engulfed the car and climbing high, turned night into day. The fury of the blaze attracted attention in the area and someone called the fire station. People who came to investigate couldn't get near the fiercely burning vehicle.

The fire brigade arrived and as the blaze was being brought under control, a car sped onto the scene and Lerato's brother, Rhulani, jumped out. He and Lerato were out looking for her husband. Lerato had called the police,

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

Horrified to see that it indeed was his brother-in-law's car, Rhulani was thankful that he couldn't see anyone in it and immediately started a frantic search. He was hoping to find his brother-in-law lying somewhere in the surrounding bush. He found nothing and when the fire was extinguished, approached the car and through the shattered rear window made out the blackened remnants of a body in the boot. He collapsed and terrible sobs wracked his body.

He eventually rose, staggered over to Lerato, in her car, and broke the news to her. "Why did they have to do such a terrible thing?" he gasped, "Why didn't they just take the car?"

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

Four weeks later, Lerato is arrested. 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.

Suffer
The
Children

“This one, out of the womb, six months old, bright smiling eyes – look how it curls its little toes, gurgles and reaches out its tiny hands to me. It’s out in the world. Has a name – Judy.”

Research at Yale University has found that a baby at six months can tell friends from enemies, a biological adaptation that evolved in primeval times when we were struggling for survival.

But what is it inside the womb? After women’s liberation, after legalised abortion, after our government became pro-choice? Is it human? Pro-lifers believe life begins at the moment of conception, but our constitution has freed women from biological slavery and given them the right to regard a foetus as a growth in the womb without human status. Women now have choice, are free, free at last, free to explore their own thrilling potential.

Nevertheless, they still get terribly excited when the pregnancy test shows positive, and forgetting that legally it is only a growth inside them, they call it a baby. They sing to it, play Mozart to it, find names for it and then the joy, oh the joy of feeling it kick that they share with their partners, with anyone who wants the thrill of feeling the lump inside them moving. It does not occur to them that as a foetus, it is not yet legally human.

Cathy was so happy when she went for her check-up. She was doing well, the baby was doing well; it would not be long now before she was holding little Elaine – yes, she had named it – in her arms. When Cathy looked up at Ron, he smiled. The umbilical cord is a maternal attachment but Ron could feel it inside himself, could feel the foetus firmly fixed to him. Hand in hand, he and Cathy descended the steps of the hospital entrance and made their way to the car in the parking lot. Ron settled Cathy in the passenger

seat and fastened the seat belt, not too tight, didn't want little Elaine to feel any discomfort, then got in and drove off.

Suddenly, the muzzle of a revolver was between them and a rough voice was barking instructions. They were being hijacked. In the seat behind, a man with dreadlocks forced them onto a lonely dirt road leading to the township. He made Ron drive onto the strip at the side of the road and stop. Then he demanded Ron's watch and cell phone and ordered him out. Terrified, Cathy gasped and reached for the door handle. The hijacker barked. "You stay there!"

Oh God, what was going to happen to her, to her baby?

Then the hijacker shot Ron. Cathy screamed. Ron lay limp on the ground. The hijacker, moving like an automaton, came round to Cathy.

"Don't hurt me. I'm pregnant. My baby! My baby!" He pulled open the passenger door. "Don't hurt my baby." He put the muzzle of his revolver against her stomach, shot twice and ran off.

Miraculously, Ron was back in the car! Dazed, bleeding, driving back to the hospital, trusting to instinct to get them there, he barely made it. When they arrived, they were taken off to operating rooms. Ron's condition was more serious. Later the doctors told them that the bullet had missed his heart by a millimetre. Cathy underwent an emergency caesarean section. The shattered foetus was removed. Cathy was devastated. Thank the Lord Ron had survived. As no organ had been damaged, he was recovering well and as soon as he was able to walk, he spent all his time with Cathy, trying to comfort her. She was glad to have his strong support. My God, if she had lost him as well!

Investigations began. There were many puzzling factors. If it was a hijacking, why wasn't the car taken? How did the

hijacker get into the back of the car? How did he know the when and where? After they caught the hijacker, these and other anomalies were cleared up.

Pregnancy is always thought of as a mother to child bond because the foetus is in her body. Consequently, abortion is a woman's choice. But a woman doesn't get pregnant by herself. So what about the man involved? What about his biological freedom? If he feels trapped, doesn't want the responsibility of a child, he can't choose abortion. Should he deny paternity; abandon the woman and her baby? Perhaps the constitution should be amended to accord rights of abortion to men in the same way as they have been saddled with custody. But as that is unlikely, a man must find his own way.

It is so easy to hire a killer in South Africa. Poverty lives in shacks in townships and squatter camps. A promise of money, and hitmen rise in regiments, and, like good soldiers, follow instructions to the letter.

Ron had constructed the blueprint and his hitman, like a smart bomb, had followed it without deviating one iota from course. And Ron got his abortion. As a foetus is not an independent being, Ron was found guilty of the attempted murder of Cathy. But, not being up-to-date on legal abortion, Cathy did not think of the crime as an attempt on her life. After the trial, the headline over her picture in a newspaper read: "I forgive you for killing my baby."

She was still calling the growth, a baby.

The phrase 'murder of the innocents' comes to mind. That's from the Bible. King Herod, a paranoid schizophrenic, suspicious of everyone, did in family members by the dozen. No wonder Matthew, Mark, Luke and John pinned the murder of the innocents on him. Now that his grave has been dug up, it seems he died four years before the birth

of Christ. So how could he have been responsible? Ag, history from that far back is not accurate; no doubts about it, he did it, definitely. What a coincidence, hey? Little baby Jesus persecuted.

“Hey, baby, you are smiling at me.” Look how she curls her little toes, gurgles and reaches out her tiny hands to me. “Cootchie-cootchie-coo, cootchie-cootchie-coo. Judy baby, you’re a real cutie. Anyone can see your Mama loves you.”

Not like those new-borns that we find daily in black plastic bags in garbage bins or on rubbish dumps. What’s the statistic? Whatever it is, it is too high, making us a nation returned to pre-history, pre-Ubuntu.

Even though Fiona spent five days in a black plastic bag on a pile of garbage at the Athlone refuse transfer station to make us all aware of dead new-borns and mangled fetuses lying scattered all over the land, her protest was simply treated as a news item. Just a bit of sensation – like the undertaking of Phillip and Pat, who turned their home into a hospital for abandoned children. Just people we read about, maybe even admire, but dismiss from our consciousness while we do our Christmas shopping.

Those who have to deal with aborted fetuses every day, police, social workers, feel helpless. Nobody cares, and since 1994, the problem has grown, doubled, trebled, quadrupled, has gone off the charts. According to some, the Mandela myth – ‘Free South Africa is now a great country’ – keeps it hidden from view.

Some, those who have problems with the new democracy, repudiate the notion that apartheid gave rise to and fed our baser instincts; they say that white supremacy kept our natural tendency to violence under control. They say that liberation has freed us to express our innate

tendency to violence. They don't see that violence begets violence; that our natural inclination to violence was boosted under apartheid violence. They say that the sixteen days of activism against violence that we have now instituted, is just a respite to give us strength for the other three hundred and forty nine days; Steven Spielberg should come here; this is Jurassic Park.

I am T-Rex. You should have seen me on top of the baby. My girlfriend did. She saw me with my pants down thrusting into the back of the nine-month old. I heard the screams, saw the blood and wanted more. You should have heard the guy who prosecuted the six raptors they picked up instead of me: "I saw photos," he said, his voice strained. "It is a shocking, absolutely horrible thing that happened. It wasn't even as if you were looking at a human being; it was horrible."

I was sitting at the back of the courtroom, laughing to myself. After the six were acquitted, my girlfriend, the baby's mother, squealed on me. But she says she still loves me. A week after they sent me to prison, another case was reported in Kwa-Zulu Natal. I have to admit it, that guy topped me; he did it to a week-old baby. Never mind, I'm the one who – now how did that reporter put it – I'm the one who "pushed out a new frontier of depravity."

"Don't cry, Judy baby, you're with me; you're safe."

This is my website. I have additional pictures to post on it. She's a growing girl, developing all the time. In earlier pictures of her, she was flat chested, but the ones I have now, the ones I took with my cell phone camera yesterday, show her as a woman though she's only fifteen. I'll bet the customers will be clamouring to get on top of her. She takes

after my side of the family. She has my mother's red hair and green eyes. Mind you, if she had taken after the wife, blonde, blue-eyed, she would still have been a hit. I see my mother in her. I am glad I never saw my mother like this though – with firm, perky breasts, slim waist, flat stomach and succulent hips. Man, she's making me hard. Dammit, I can't have her now; she's out with a client.

This cyberspace trade is better than the brothel that the wife and I ran before. After they busted us, we put on strip shows for university students; the wife and a couple of her friends were the act. But we were busted again. If I hadn't found that website from Indonesia or Singapore or the Philippines, well somewhere in that area, I don't know what I would have done? It showed me that there is a huge market in tourism and the kids that they advertise are really little and bringing in tourists by the hundreds.

If only my girl were younger!

What the heck, I decided to give it a go anyway – open my business and at the same time do my bit for the country. Haven't we been shouting about tourism? Conventional wisdom advertises lions, elephants, rhinos, hippos, leopards and beautiful landscapes, but the real attraction is sex. Doing it with kids in another country far from home, wow! And it is safe: negotiate on the Internet and drop the kid off. No business address for the operation; no place for the cops to raid.

I have a connection in the Tourism Industry and together we're giving the trade a boost. Boy, I can't wait for 2010, the FIFA World Cup. With the kid, the wife and a couple of five- or six-year olds, I'll probably end up a millionaire!

“Hey Judy baby, you're holding onto my thumb, like I'm your Daddy. But you're safe with me. I'm going to become an advocate you know.”

Today there is a protest outside the houses of parliament – women in pink tops and jeans carrying pickets, ‘Stop Child Murder.’ The latest murder victim, a little girl, was wearing a pink top and jeans when she was snatched. Her body was found in a culvert several days after she had disappeared.

Who did it? Her mother’s boyfriend! Mother’s boyfriends are a problem; they can’t keep their eyes off Mother’s children.

These protesters are wasting their time. Don’t they know what parliaments do? They sit. They sit and think up laws to keep us under control. They don’t move. When we uncover loopholes, that’s when they move – then they run to close them. It’s not their job to act on our behalf.

In any case, we are free now. Everyone has rights. There are no laws that forbid mothers from having boyfriends; that outlaw teenage sex, parties, raves and drug abuse. But what do we do about dead new-borns found in bins; about baby rapes; so many youngsters turned rapist?

To control wayward children that parents cannot, that working mothers cannot, this is what they are doing in Russia. There is a new order now, which is really a return to the old order – no freedom of speech. In the Gorbachev-Yeltsin era, Russians found out that democracy did not work; it simply brought in the mafia. So now a movement has begun that encourages parents to send troublesome young men to monasteries where they study the Bible, keep their mouths shut and work.

That’s what we should do too; go back to apartheid. Ubuntu doesn’t work; we like to kid ourselves that we are better than our instincts. But we revel in our instincts, are happy in the ambiguity of democracy that protects individual rights and lets us get away with murder. Hindus call such ambiguity, *maya*, and spend their whole lives trying to find

unambiguous ultimate reality.

What a waste of time, searching for the hereafter. This is our one shot. Let's live it up!

"I work hard, am doing well at school. I am going to be a professional soccer player. You're laughing, Judy baby, but I'm going to be rich and I will take care of my mother and my brothers and sisters.

I am not like other kids who want everything handed to them on a platter. What were those students shouting on that big march through the city the other day? Thousands of them marching, demanding their rights? Oh yes, 'Pass one, pass all.' After they delivered their memorandums, they demonstrated their understanding of their rights; they ran down streets, smashing and destroying everything in sight and looting. With their sjamboks and sticks, they even went after hawkers. Imagine that, attacking and stealing from our mothers and fathers right there on the street.

No, Judy baby, I am not like them. I have brains; I'll make it. It doesn't matter that I am from a poor home. Being rich doesn't mean you'll succeed."

Yusuf, the good doctor's son, was from a very wealthy family. He had everything; designer label clothing, four cars in four years, money, money, money. He enrolled at university and dropped out. His dad had given him total freedom in the blind belief that pampering equals love. All he did was turn Yusuf into T-Rex, all appetite. So what did the boy do? Surrendering to the inordinate pleasure of the act, he shot his father eight times, and his mother in the abdomen and face.

But it didn't last – the high – it needed to be fed. That's why they put the handcuffs on him and took him away.

In court, he entertained everyone with fantastic versions

of what had happened. First he said his mother had planned to scare his father with a pistol and had shot him. Then he said that Afrikaans-speaking intruders had killed them. He was counting on racism but this didn't fit the scenario that he was developing of a philandering husband and a jealous, vengeful wife. So he adopted the stance of the heroic son who shot his father after his father had shot his mother. Finally he claimed that his mother, unable to contain her anger at her husband's infidelity, shot him and then turned the gun on herself.

But with a picture in his mind of a devout woman in hijab and abaya, the judge, seeing the sister applauding, was horrified. Rather than delight at Yusuf's skill as a raconteur, he was filled with outrage. When the sister realised that she was looking at a prison sentence, she gave up being the clique and testified against her brother. This brother and sister had never been humanised. The doctor and his wife had simply left their children in the state of original sin.

And they are typical of parents today. So much so that our schools have had to be declared gun-free zones with a ban on explosives, firearms, weapons, and any other objects that could cause bodily harm.

In one school, a teacher was bludgeoned to death with a hammer in front of the other pupils in the classroom. The boy who attacked her had made notes of how he planned to kill her, had made up a death certificate for her and had drawn a picture of her house, showing blood flowing from under the front door. But for the school governing body, comprised of parents, these were just schoolboy pranks. Parents cannot acknowledge what they have made of their children.

Like prisons, with their 26 and 28 gangs, inmates now run schools. The beleaguered Minister of Education wants

parents and communities to teach children discipline and manners. It's too late for that; we let them be and ensured their development into raptors. What they require is 'habilitation', impossible at this age. Rehabilitation, which presumes prior humanisation, has no foundation on which to build; look at the rate of recidivism in prisons.

Before teachers lost their third arm, the cane, they tamed and held at bay the predators they now fear. Now unarmed, incarcerated along with the raptors behind locked school gates, teachers watch, from the safety of staff rooms, the contests in the playgrounds, contests of bulls for control of herds and the right to mount all cows. But they close their eyes to aborted litters in the garbage and behind toilet blocks.

"Hey Judy baby, when you go to school, be like me; work hard and stay out of trouble. Ag, you don't have to worry – you will probably go to a private school. Cootchie-cootchie-coo. You won't experience school as a nightmare."

The judge declares that protection of the young is instinctual, 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. He states, "The degree of evil required 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."

"Natural intrinsic human impulse" is a contradiction in terms. Being human is a cover over the natural, the intrinsic and the impulsive; a cover, like the earth's crust, over roiling, seething magma, over intrinsic impulse searching for cracks and holes to burst through and surge.

Being human means exerting control over natural, intrinsic impulse. And there is no such thing as 'evil'. Loss of control is what we term 'evil.' We have made the word 'Evil' a thing-in-itself, an external entity with independent existence. That allows us to dissociate ourselves from it, from our innate antisocial impulses; allows us to blame metaphysical forces – witches and demons – for *our* actions.

Buti wishes he had some glue. Bishop had made him stop sniffing but it's the only way he can forget. The *muti* that Bishop had given him had made him mad. Why did Gogo send him to Bishop? All Buti wanted was some glue. Bishop was the one who wanted a baby. It's his fault that Buti is sitting here.

Why did Gogo send him to Bishop? Bishop beat him and locked him in the toilet. When he cried and said he wanted to go home, Bishop promised to let him go if he did what Bishop wanted. If he refused, witches would find him and kill him. Gogo had told him about witches. They do horrible things.

Bishop looked like a witch and Buti was scared. When Bishop asked if he was ready to do what he wanted, Buti, locked in the toilet, thought of his home, the friends with whom he played soccer in the street, with whom he sniffed glue in the bushes behind the houses, and he wanted to go home. So he agreed and Bishop unlocked the door. Bishop told him to behave himself when he got home and not give Gogo any trouble – witches would be watching. Then he told Buti *exactly* what he had to do and gave him *muti* to drink to make him strong before he did it. He gave him a cell phone and his number and told him to call him when it was done.

When he went home, Buti could hear Bishop's voice in his head so he didn't join his friends. He listened to Gogo,

cleaned the room and looked after his baby brother and sister. After a few days, Gogo, so pleased to see how quiet and well behaved he was, decided on a party for his twelfth birthday. She went shopping and left him to look after the little ones. She was glad she had sent him to Bishop. As he watched them playing outside, Buti wanted to cry: this was his little sister; this was his little brother.

Then one of his friends, Nhlanhla, came to visit. When he saw that Gogo was not around, he pulled out cigarettes and they sat down on the bed to smoke. Nhlanhla could see how worried Buti was and asked him what was wrong. Bishop had told Buti not to tell anyone but he couldn't help it; it all just came tumbling out. Nhlanhla laughed. "Why you so worried; it's nothing. I'll help you. Come on, man, which one will it be; your sister or your brother?"

They went outside to where the children were playing and when Buti saw the baby from next door with them, he felt relieved. He picked up the baby and they went into the shack. Buti locked the door and Nhlanhla put a blanket over the window. Then Buti drank Bishop's *muti* to make him strong so he could carry out Bishop's instructions.

The first thing he had to do was to put pills in the baby's mouth so he wouldn't scream. Next, he boiled water on the primus stove and poured it over the baby's face. Then he took chillies and put it up his bum. After that he put oil on the primus to boil and looked for a black plastic rubbish bag in which to wrap the baby afterwards. While the oil was heating up on the primus, he phoned Bishop to tell him he would meet him at the station bridge.

Suddenly, a knock on the door! That sent his heart leapfrogging in his chest. It was Gogo; she was calling to him to open up. Nhlanhla and Buti quickly grabbed the bag, wrapped the baby in it and pushed it under the bed. Then they put knives around the bag; that's what they had

to do so no one would be able to see the baby. Gogo was yelling and banging at the door but they didn't open. They just stood there. They didn't know what to do. Then they heard someone pushing in through the window.

Now Buti is locked up here in this place; Nhlanhla is here too. They keep asking Buti for Bishop's name but he only knows he's Bishop and he collects body parts.

Killers and rapists, once babies and children, become the people they are through other people; the dark side of Ubuntu.

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 happy, in a good mood, 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 that the carefree façade crumbled and urges, suppressed under norms of a traditional Christian upbringing, suddenly erupted. At first, she didn't know what to do; 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 she 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 he dumped her when he found out he wasn't the father. Now, with a new boyfriend, Sylvia still wanted maintenance from Neville.

But this was a party to strangle all dark inclinations, to return the birthday girl to her carefree life of casual intimacy. And Neville's gifts of perfume and sexy lingerie had 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. Everyone was having fun and nobody talked about Sylvia and the baby.

Then *she* walked in, Sylvia, mother of Neville's baby, and the lights went out in the birthday girl's eyes.

Though in a separate party, Sylvia's unexpected appearance deposited the unspeakable in the midst of their merriment. It loomed like a gigantic balloon, filling out the entire space, suffocating her and pushing her out into dark night.

And she made up her mind.

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

Gift, father of two children, was an enterprising person with three occupations, taxi-driver, shebeen owner and television repairman. When he was sixteen, his 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 was often picked on because he wasn't a local, but he never fought back. When he dropped out, his mother, a domestic worker, found him employment as a gardener at homes where she worked.

But he was looking for something better, more lucrative. He knew how to drive; his father had taught him when he was fourteen.

After he had saved enough money, he went into the

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

A hardworking man, Gift supported his mother, his brother and two children. He had even sent for his niece so she could go to school here in the mother city. He was ambitious; determined to make enough to move out of this shack town and build a decent life for the family. And 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. Was this hot white chick here to see 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, had sent the boys to school and brought them up as Christians. They belonged to the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God that had been set up with rows of black plastic chairs in a disused warehouse. They were 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, a vendor at the taxi rank, who spent long hours away at work, did 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 Themba, eighteen, were good friends. Themba, 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 his 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.

They weren’t thinking of the job, only the money, ten thousand rand split four ways.

The public benches of the courtroom are packed with blood-lusting raptors. Like fans waiting to be admitted to a rock concert, they had waited for two hours in a long queue that cascaded down the steps of the courthouse and snaked along the pavement outside. They had not minded; this would be better than a rock concert. This trial is about someone they know, someone 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. Now she has done it; she has put them on the map.

Not the accused! No – the mother of the baby, Sylvia, who is of their community, though you would never say it to look at her; she looks white. They are here for justice for Sylvia, and through her, for themselves. Years of pentup rage at being designated second-class citizens has led

them to believe that this is a racially motivated act and therefore impacts on each one of them. They see in the accused, a white woman, someone who despises them and has tried to wipe out a degrading connection. Her man had gone beneath the stairs and contributed one more to the bastard race that had been generated beneath the stairs. In producing the offspring of his loins, Sylvia had dealt this woman a devastating blow; had left her feeling barren and worthless; had turned her into a *boer-vrou* back on the *plaas*, watching her husband gratifying himself in the servants' quarters.

Now, as spectators at her trial, they jeer and cheer, daring the judge to throw them all out of the courtroom. When Neville, the father of the baby, testifies, they see him struggling to enter the idea of fatherhood. He contradicts testimony that he had 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 creates the vague notion of some future time in which he could have lived happily ever after as the father of that child of mixed race. To the spectators, he seems to be squirming like an animal in a trap; they regard his declaration of love for the woman in the dock as testimony against her; as motive, belief in her guilt – and his complicity.

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, they see Neville as a coconspirator and find him guilty.

But the judge affirms him, "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 acted on her own."

And Neville is out of the mesh.

On the Sunday after she had approached him in the taxi rank, Gift, with Gezi, Themba 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 the usual by-product of the gratuitous brutality that goes with 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. This time they would have a way in, a courier's waybill to be signed.

Nkosi is a crowd pleaser. They laugh at his cheeky replies. When 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, 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 on the public benches; 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 his chances; he is going to prison.

In his autobiography, Malcolm X writes of a teacher who sniggered when he told of his determination to become a lawyer. He, too, went to prison, but there he met Elijah Muhammad.

Will Nkosi be so lucky?

On the day, she was waiting for them in a parking lot. When he saw her, 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 the next day. They would be paid afterwards.

And they were.

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

A paltry sum.

But they will be paid in full, so will she. Having gleefully cast off the bondage of being human, they will spend the rest of their lives as raptors among raptors. Free, free at last. Free forever – from liability and responsibility.

A thousand rands – for booze, clothes and shoes? That wasn't why Themba 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 motive.

When Gezi, Gift and Themba 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 cage of Ubuntu. When he saw them, he began to talk nonsense: the baby reminded him of his baby brother; 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 out to wait in the taxi.

When they were driving off, Gezi showed him the bloody knife, and he threw up. He was young and confused, still tied to fairy tales in which witches, wizards, giants, ogres, evil beings were ugly and you hated them. They weren't your friends; you didn't identify with them; you identified with the handsome hero who saved the little baby and cut its predators to pieces.

When he got home, he didn't want to look in the mirror; he was afraid of what he would see. But he couldn't escape his parents' eyes and he threw his hands up in horror at what he saw in them. A *tikolosh!* His mother cried; she no longer recognised him. His father took one look and suffered a stroke.

Though Nkosi confesses to having colluded in the crime and begs forgiveness, the law requires justice. And justice means retribution. He must go to prison – banished to the dark side of Ubuntu. He will never be the handsome hero, the advocate, the professional football player, the benefactor of mankind. He has turned all that into a fairy tale.

He let little Judy die.

Glossary

- p. 10 Abaya – Full-length gown of Muslims
- p. 10 Zenana – Muslim women’s quarters
- p. 11 Hijab – head scarf
- p. 12 Fahfee –The numbers racket
- p. 15 Muti – evil potion
- p. 15 Tricked – local expression for casting an evil spell
- p. 17 Parasuicide – a suicidal gesture in which the aim is not death
- p. 20 Langarm (long arm) -- local version of ballroom
- p. 20 Vastrap – Quickstep
- p. 34 Afrikaner – Descendant of the Dutch who emigrated to South Africa in the 17th Century
- p. 34 Afrikaans – The South African form of the Dutch language
- p. 42 Trimborn In 1948, on the morning of his 8th Comrades, local runner Max Trimborn, one of 44 entrants that year, couldn’t contain his nervous energy on the starting line. He needed to do something ...anything. So he cupped his hands, filled his lungs, and issued a lusty rooster crow. The other

runners so enjoyed this homey touch that they demanded repeat performances in subsequent years. Trimborn obliged for the next 32, sometimes adorning himself with feathers and a rooster vest. By the time of his death in 1985, Trimborn's crowing had been preserved on tape. These days, greatly amplified, it still starts the Comrades Marathon: "Cock-A-Doodle... Go!" (Amby Burfoot: www.runnersworld.com/races/thefamous-comrades-marathon)

- p. 48 Spaza – tiny, informal trading shop
- p. 70 Ag – (pronunciation similar to ach in achtung) Afrikaans expression of dismay, surprise, compassion – similar to oh
- p. 75 Maya – the world is an illusion, a projection of things and forms that are temporarily phenomenal and sustain the illusion of oneness and permanence.
- p. 77 Sjambok – heavy leather whip
- p. 85 Shebeen – a tavern or house where liquor is sold illegally
- p. 87 Boervrou – Afrikaner farmer's wife
- p. 87 Plaas – farm
- p. 91 Tikolosh – evil spirit

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UBUNTU

Motho ke Motho

ka Batho

a person is a person
through other persons

I am and you are
because we are

keeper of your rights

I am

responsible for you;

keeper of my rights

you are

responsible for me;

my rights in your hands

your rights in my hands

held in trust

we are

You and I

human-humane