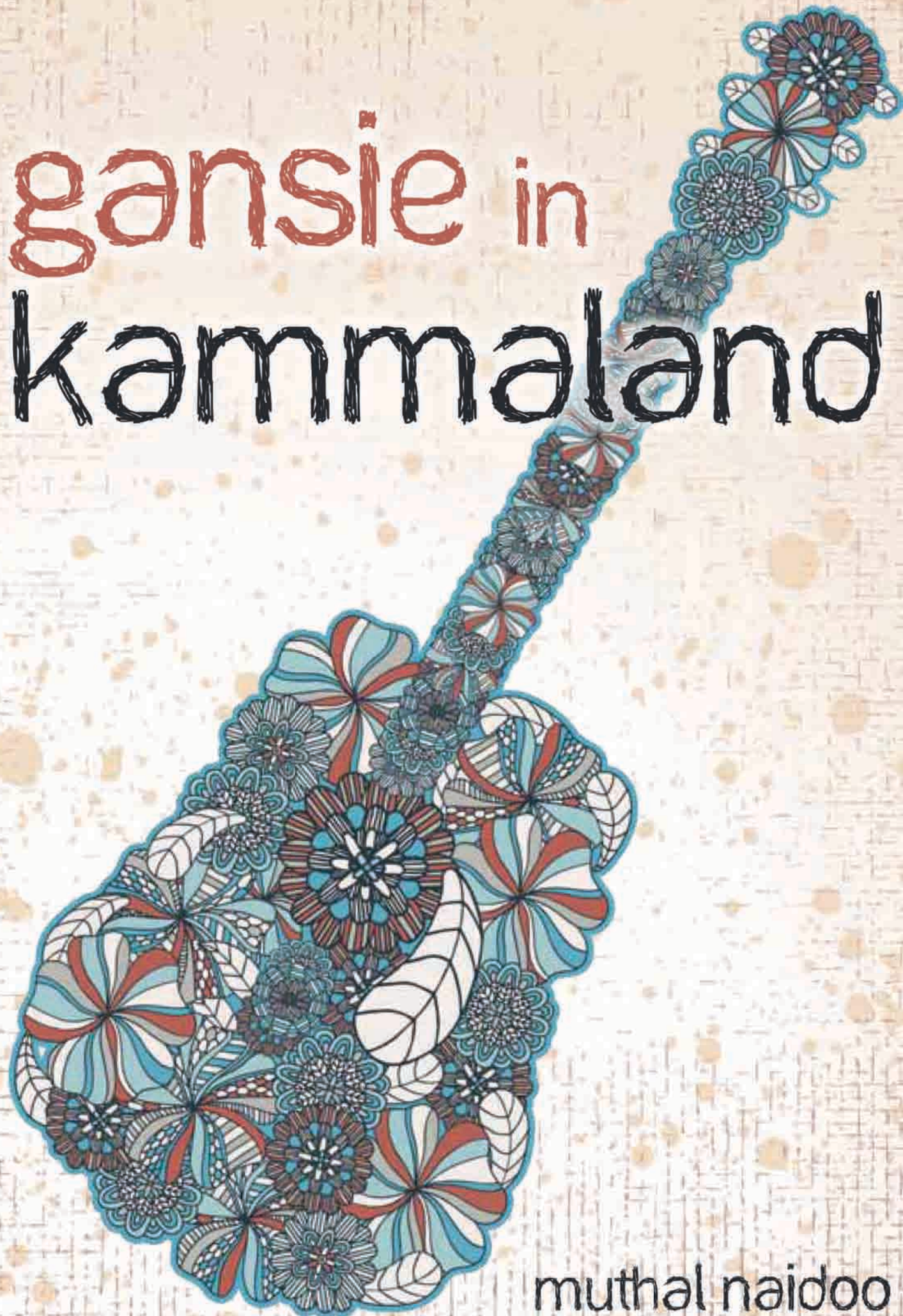


gansie in kammaland



muthal naidoo

Gansie in Kammaland

Muthal Naidoo

(36925 WORDS)

*A tale is a story
a story, fiction
not true;
but stories are keys to truths,
truths we impose
to reduce the randomness of the random
but imposition is denial
so our truth is fiction,
a story, a tale
of
order, consistency, logic,
perhaps*

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Stone Walls

Standing in the tree position, Mynah Bird feels her left foot begin to wobble; she can't keep her balance and is forced to put her right foot down. She tries again but every time she gets her right foot to her left knee, her left foot begins to wobble and she has to give up.

And the little bird, knitting away on her shoulder, won't shut up. *I know why you can't do it today.*

Mynah wants to throttle the bird. Instead she shoves the sole of her left foot over her right knee – balance on her right foot is always better – draws her hands, palms together, straight up over her head and into the tree position. She grins. Then she falls right over.

The little bird, who takes off just in time, shrieks with laughter. *Break a leg. Break a leg.*

Mynah gives up on the tree *asana* and bends over into the triangle. The little bird perches on her hip. *You know what you must do.*

What do you mean 'must'? I have a choice. Mynah baulks at the thought of any kind of coercion.

Oh yeah? At this rate you're going to need a good orthopaedic surgeon.

Mynah rubbing her hip is forced to agree. *Okay, okay, okay.*

You have to put your money where your mouth is.

Mynah is cursing. *My foot more likely. Why can't I just keep my damned eyes shut when I drive past all those guys on the corner looking up hopefully, asking for jobs? Damn them. They're the ones pushing me into this situation. I can't save the world. I'm a pensioner.*

Back on her shoulder perch, the little bird is looking for a new ball of wool to attach to her knitting. *Excuses. Excuses.*

Mynah snaps back. *Mind your own damn business.*

That's what I'm doing. I wish you wouldn't swear so much.

And that prompts more swearing. *You're just a bloody convention from the Middle Ages.*

That's nonsense. In those days, both shoulders were occupied: there was a good guy, the one with wings, that's me, and a bad guy, the one with horns. We've done away with the bad guy. There was never a need for one. In this case, you're it.

Mynah isn't interested in this pseudo-religious mumbo-jumbo. She has lived alone for forty years and can't stand the bird's constant chirping. So someone else in her house would drive her crazy and turn her into more of a boor than she already is.

But the bird is going on. You're selfish; that's your trouble. You never wanted a relationship because you can't compromise.

Oh shut up. Don't give me that TV psycho-babble. Mynah is always irritated with the way conventional notions of women interfere with choices that professional women in TV dramas make.

You're such a hypocrite, pretending you care about the guys on street corners, but you always look away. You don't really want to know about their suffering. And all your guff about prisons! The little bird screeches with laughter. *What extraordinary rubbish!*

Mynah, a Senior Citizen, prides herself on not being one who sits around waiting for others to organise her fun and cheer. Only old people want that. She is still full of beans and has chosen a project for herself: she is going to tear down prisons. They are quite useless institutions. They don't eliminate crime; they only increase it. And she, Jeanne d' Arc of the twenty-first century, is going to get rid of them. But where to begin? Hoping to find an angle, she has taken to visiting a couple of women in the prison in town. Now one of them, Gansie, is out on parole. And Gansie is like the men on the street corners, only worse off; she's lost her home, her family, her children and her community; they want nothing to do with her. When she came out, she was accommodated at a church-run women's shelter. That's where she remained for about a month until she found a job and moved out. She has changed jobs a few times and has now landed a job with the IRO (Institute for the Reintegration of Offenders) not far from where Mynah lives.

The bird stops knitting to yell in her ear. *You could help this unfortunate woman but you don't! Jeanne d' Arc indeed!*

When Mynah visits Gansie at work, she complains about her situation. She lives in the northeast, has to take four buses a day to and from work in Mynah's area in the west, and still has long distances to walk. And she is scared; a tall, disreputable-looking man is stalking her. The week before, she had been so busy

looking out for danger from behind, she hadn't seen it coming smack in front. A couple of men hanging out on the corner suddenly made a grab for her. She screamed, lashed out wildly, charged off, missed her footing where the pavement ended and fell into the street. Luckily, there were many people about; someone helped her up and others turned to deal with the miscreants but they had fled. Since then, she has walked to and from bus stops in a permanent state of fear.

The bird on Mynah's shoulder begins squawking long and loud into her ear about Gansie's dreadful situation and when Mynah tries to grab her and twist her ethereal neck, she goes into hysterical fits of laughter. *You can't get rid of me and until you do the right thing, you'll never be rid of me.*

But Mynah has lived alone for so long, she has become completely anti-social. *Would it be fair to offer her my spare room? Living here would be torture for her.*

The bird, who always takes her stand on the moral high ground, just sniffs. *Excuses! Excuses! It's time you lived like a normal person. Who gave you the right to so much freedom?*

Oh shut up. Shut up. Okay, I'll do it. Anything to keep you quiet! But the step she is contemplating, terrifies Mynah.

The bird knows it only too well. *Are you really going to let Gansie have your spare room?*

Drat the bird. Mynah tries to pull her off her shoulder but her fingers can never find anything substantial there. *I said I'd do it, didn't I? So I'll do it. I'll do it. And heaven help us all!*

You shouldn't expect help from upstairs. You don't believe. A perplexed frown suddenly appears over Birdie's eyes. *So what am I doing here?* She quickly dismisses the thought.

A few days later, when Mynah visits Gansie, she broaches the subject. She can see that Gansie is only too glad to accept her offer of accommodation. Mynah looks around Gansie quarters. Completely makeshift; a tarded-up garage divided into a tiny bedroom leading into a space in which the toilet-shower is curtained off from the kitchen-dining room. *I can't believe that white people would offer such awful lodgings to anyone, let alone another white person! And at a R1000 a month! Half her salary!*

The little bird looks up annoyed. She is working on a complicated cable pattern and Mynah's shock has made her drop a stitch. *Don't be naive. Everyone exploits poor people? Even the poor exploit the poor. Look at what goes on in all townships.*

Gansie moves in at the beginning of December. On her first night, a desperate banging on the front door wakes Mynah up. She looks at her clock – one in the morning! She goes to the front room and finds Gansie struggling to unlock the door.

„What's wrong?"

„I can't breathe. I have to get out. I suffer from claustrophobia."

„The key is in the door, just open it." But Gansie turns helpless blue eyes on her so Mynah opens the door and the security gate and Gansie flies out. *Claustrophobia? After eight years in prison?*

The little bird is adjusting her nightcap, which had fallen off in the rush. *That's probably where she developed it.*

So why have a panic attack here where the keys are always in the doors? This is not a prison.

Birdie yawns. *Really? With security gates all over the place?*

That should make her feel at home. Birdie doesn't think that's funny but Mynah has her theory. *I don't care what you think; I say this is nostalgia for the real thing.*

The next afternoon, Gansie is attacking the door again. "I have to get out. I can't sit in here. Can I go and sit outside?"

Why is she asking my permission? I have already shown her around the house so she knows she has free run of it.

Birdie snaps impatiently. *But it's not her house, is it?*

Gansie takes a book and sits on the patio. When it begins to get dark, Mynah switches on the outside light. But then all the insects come out – this is their exercise yard – and in their exuberance, they zoom and dive-bomb Gansie and soon chase her in. As she pulls the sliding door closed, she points to the bushes along the fence. "Those bushes are full of spider webs. You should see them."

„I know," the old witch replies.

„I hate spiders."

After supper and TV, Gansie locks herself in her room.

Okay, so what's happened to the claustrophobia?

The bird is casting off stitches for a wing hole. *Give the woman a break. She's only been out a couple of months.*

Gansie works for IRO (Institute for the Reintegration of Offenders), which has created a position in the office especially for parolees to help them get back on their feet. She is on a six-month contract.

One afternoon, she comes back from work, collapses on the couch in front of the TV, and cries and cries and cries. „What am I going to do? In five months I'll be out of work.' Mynah brings her a toilet roll. She wipes her eyes and blows her nose long and loud and is soon hidden behind a mound of toilet tissue. Mynah waits for the sobbing to stop so they can talk. But when it ends, Gansie reaches for the remote and turns to *The Bold and the Beautiful*.

So Mynah goes off to her room with the little bird protesting loudly. *If you're going to try to stand on your head again, I'll go on boycott.* Mynah, who has been trying to master the headstand for years, smiles sweetly, kneels down, puts her forehead on the mat and clasps her hands over her head. The little bird is livid. *I hope you break your neck.*

The next day, Gansie comes home and cries her heart out again. „How will I ever become independent, with my own home, my own car?' Mynah waits and again is pre-empted by Ridge and the gang so she goes off to her room and has birdie hanging on for dear life as she lifts her feet in the air and then comes down with a crash. Things go on like this for a week. Gansie cries about getting a job, a job in the office, a job overseas, and lots of money so she can get her children back, her car, her house, the book she wants to write and many other things that Mynah can't remember.

Saturday, no episodes of *The Bold and the Beautiful* and other soap operas. But Gansie's TV viewing begins early so Mynah has to get in before.

“The thing to do is to start applying for jobs.”

„Yes, I'll check the want ads, get my CV together and send it around.’

„Good idea.’

After that Gansie comes home and cries about the fact that there are no responses to her faxes. When she gets responses and goes for interviews, she cries

about unfairness, she is too old, has a record, no car. The world is against her. Mynah, who gave up crying after the age of ten, isn't at all sympathetic. *Snot and trane all over the place.*

The little bird tosses her head. *A lot better than farting all over the place. Luckily I don't have a great sense of smell. What would you do if you didn't have your pension, eh? You'd be just as desperate.*

Not really. Mynah prides herself on her independence. *I've always had to fend for myself. She never had to. She went from her father's care, to her husband's care, to the State's care.*

Birdie harrumphs. *So it's worse for her. She's forty and has to learn to take care of herself for the first time.*

Then one day the crying stops.

When Gansie comes home from work, Mynah sees her walking around the house examining all the keys. "Is something wrong?"

„Some of these keys don't work right. I can't open that security gate.' She points to the sliding gate that protects the patio doors.

„I guess the lock needs oiling.' So Mynah gets out her little can, oils the lock, then tries the key. „Okay, it works fine now.'

„The front door, that's a problem too.'

„But you lock it everyday. Are you having a problem with it even when you pull it up and turn the key? You know it's not properly aligned.' When Gansie first arrived three months ago, Mynah had demonstrated and thought that Gansie had got the hang of it.

„Hmm! I wonder how big a key ring is needed for all the keys in the house.'

Mynah raises her eyebrows, then laughs, „Why? The keys are fine where they are.' Mynah takes in Gansie's odd look. „Do you feel it's not safe with the keys in the doors?'

„Isn't it better to have them on a ring. That's the way it always is.'

„Well, not in this house. I like the keys in the doors.' *What's this obsession with keys?*

The little bird is giggling. She sets her knitting down on the end of Mynah's shoulder. *She's like the thieving magpie, obsessed with bright and shiny things. It's a good thing you don't wear jewellery.*

Gansie is walking from keyhole to keyhole, examining each key. Mynah raises her eyebrows. *What is she doing now? Does she think I'm going to lock her in ... or out?*

The little bird flies to Gansie, perches on her head and informs Mynah, *She's making a note of the numbers of all the keys.*

„Why do you need the numbers of the keys?’

Gansie is writing down the number of Mynah's bedroom door key. „You know how hard it is when you lose a key.’

„Well, I have spare keys. So I don't really worry about it.’

Gansie spins around, quite shocked. „Spare keys!’

Mynah laughs. „Yes. Everybody keeps spare keys.’

„Where? Where are they?’

„In a drawer in the kitchen.’

Gansie marches back into the kitchen and pulls open all the drawers until she locates the keys.

The little bird is hopping around on Mynah's shoulder. *This is hilarious! Life has become much more interesting now that she's here. You're such a bore!*

Gansie turns sternly to Mynah. “You've just muddled all the keys in here. How will you know which is which? The keys need to be labelled and on a ring.”

Ha! Ha! Ha! You've been caught out! Such a careless, untidy, disorganised old witch!

Oh shut up! Mynah turns to Gansie, „I really don't care. If you want to make the keys your project, go ahead.’ Then she heads for her room.

Oh no! Don't go to your room. Stay here. Let's see what Gansie gets up to. The little bird is squawking and jumping from shoulder to shoulder. *Give up on the headstand! You'll never get it right!* Birdie will be glad when this assignment is over.

A week or so later, Mynah finds all the keys clearly labelled and on a large ring. Birdie chortles. *Now you should get her to work on your files. You have papers lying all over the place. Instead of trying all these ridiculous asanas, get your papers in order.*

As the weeks go by, Mynah begins to notice that she is always missing keys. When the key to her bedroom disappears, she doesn't think much of it. She looks about on the floor thinking it may have fallen out but she doesn't see it. She doesn't really bother about it. The door to her room always stays wide open. She only began closing it for her exercises after Gansie arrived. One morning, after several attempts at the headstand and as many tumbles, she gives up to go and have a cup of tea but finds her door locked. *My door's locked. I didn't lock the door, did I?*

The little bird shrugs. *It's all that standing on your head. Your brain is becoming addled. You don't know what you're doing.*

But I lost the key days ago.

You don't keep this place ship-shape. You never know where anything is.

Mynah knows she has several spares on the bookshelf near the bed. She got them the last time she thought she lost the key. She opens her door and goes into the kitchen.

Gansie, at the counter drinking coffee, looks up with a start, "What are you doing out of your room?" She lets out a sudden burst of laughter. "I thought you were sleeping."

"Oh no, I was exercising."

Exercising! The little bird shrieks with laughter.

"You thought I was sleeping because my door was locked. I am just as surprised as you. I actually locked myself in my room. I never lock my door. I don't know what made me do it; I don't even remember doing it." Mynah laughs, "Maybe I should go for an Alzheimer's test."

Gansie laughs, "Oh, I don't think so. We all do funny things now and again."

Then Mynah loses the key again.

Tsss! Tsss! Tsss! Well you have to admit it now. You've got to give up all that standing on your head. Birdie is only thinking of herself; life on Mynah's shoulders is extremely turbulent.

The next day, Mynah wants to water the garden but she can't find the key to the sliding gate. *I wonder where I put it.* She looks but can't find it. She can't open the front door either because the key isn't in it so she goes out the back and after speaking sternly to her petunias which are not growing, and scolding the marigolds which are resurfacing even after she has pulled them out, she goes back in. She writes

on her kitchen notice board, „Keys – security gate and front door,’ to remind her to look for them later, then goes into her room.

Oh no, I’ve just preened my feathers. The little bird is dreading the next half-hour.

Mynah is not a fastidious housekeeper and when she can’t find keys, she just says to herself, *They’ll turn up. As long as Gansie’s not upset, not having panic attacks and feeling claustrophobic, it’s fine.* She knows Gansie is preoccupied with trying to find a job. Her contract with IRO ends soon.

And, of course, you don’t see how distraught she is because you won’t allow her to show any sign of weakness. The bird is moving stitches from the back to the front with her cable needle.

But Mynah is adamant. *She’s got to learn to be patient. She’s like a child – wants everything to happen right away. It’s hard to get jobs these days.*

One afternoon the little bird, trying to pull her feathers into place after tumbling about, the headstand again, hears the key in the kitchen security gate and sees Gansie entering with a few parcels.

Mynah is sipping tea. „Oh, you’ve been shopping.’

„Yes, I bought some boots and a leather belt.’ She takes her purchases into her room and then comes back into the kitchen to make a cup of coffee. „You know my contract at IRO ends in a couple of weeks and I have to get another job.’

‘So how’s the job hunting going?’

„I’ve sent my CV out everyday. I’ve had a few responses. But no offers as yet.’

„You’ve been trying so very hard. I’m sure you’ll find something.’

Suddenly the coffee cup flies into the air and comes crashing to the ground and Gansie is dancing around the kitchen, stamping her feet. „Everybody keeps saying that. But when I go for interviews, I’m too old, or I don’t have a car, or they want me to work from dawn to midnight for a pittance. How will I ever get on my feet again? How will I ever get my own place, my own car and a life? Will I ever get my children back?’ She stomps off to her room and locks the door.

Birdie turns on Mynah. *You see! The poor woman is really suffering and you’re not helping her. All you do is stand on your head or try to wrap your feet*

around it. You don't listen and you're not helping. You give her a room in your house and you think you've done something great. You are the biggest hypocrite in the universe!

Shut up! Shut up! Shut up!

She needs someone who will show her some sympathy and affection. But you can't do that, can you? You dried up old spinster. Then as the bird gathers the wool that has fallen during her tirade and begins to untangle it, she sees Gansie coming back into the kitchen. Mynah, who is cleaning up the mess with the coffee, looks up. "I'm sorry. I didn't realise you were so upset about your job."

Gansie smiles expansively. "Oh, don't worry. I've got a plan. I know exactly what I am going to do when my contract ends."

"You do? I am so glad. What are you going to do?"

"You'll see." Gansie smiles again, makes another cup of coffee, goes back to her room and locks the door.

Mynah feels vindicated. *Now what do you have to say, eh? You see, she's developed backbone. I didn't let her sit around crying and feeling sorry for herself. Now she's found a way out.*

But birdie is jumping up and down on her shoulder. *She let you off the hook! She let you off the hook! You can't take credit for anything she does. You cold, desiccated excuse for a human being!*

Mynah sniffs. *You don't understand tough love. And you're just mad because she's making something of herself.*

The bird lets out loud cynical screeches. *Tough love! Love! Don't make me laugh!*

On the day that Gansie's contract ends, Mynah is expecting her to come home full of tears and self-pity. But she doesn't. She comes home with big parcels. For a moment Mynah thinks that they have given her huge presents at work.

The little bird is irate. *You really are obtuse. Haven't you been listening? Didn't she tell you how those people at the office exploited her – got her to provide tea and coffee without reimbursing her, to shop and cook for their office parties without lending a hand? One even expected her to cook his breakfast and lunch everyday and made her vacuum his office and buff the plastic mat under his desk.*

They secretly despised her because she's an ex-con. Are they the kind to give presents?

But aren't they supposed to be helping parolees reintegrate into society?

The little bird sneers. *They gave her a six-month job and thought they had done enough. Just like you; you give her a room and you think that is enough.*

Mynah turns to Gansie, "I know you feel terrible now that you are out of work, but ..."

"Out of work? No, I'm not out of work. I told you I had a plan."

"You have a job?"

"Of course."

"And you begin tomorrow?" Gansie's smile fills Mynah with relief. "Well, that's wonderful. I am so glad for you. So what are the parcels?"

"Oh, the uniform for my new job."

"A uniform?"

"Yes, let me show you." She pulls out khaki trousers and shirt.

Mynah looks confused. "Are you joining Correctional Services?" Gansie bursts out laughing.

The little bird stares in disgust. *Correctional Services! Really!*

Well that's what they wear. And she got the boots and belt as well some time ago. Don't you remember? ... Some time ago? Mynah is confused „So how long have you known about this job?"

„Oh, I've been planning it for quite some time.'

„But you were so upset when they didn't renew your contract. You cried for two days!'

„I was frightened and depressed. You know how it is.'

„This new job? When do you start?"

„Right away.'

„That's wonderful. What time will you be off in the morning?"

„Moming? No, I start right way. Right now.' Gansie goes off to her room and when she comes out is dressed in her uniform. She is wearing a police cap, swinging a club and on her belt is a huge key ring with all the house keys.

„You look very smart.'

Gansie just glowers. „Shut up.' Mynah is confused. „Move!' Gansie shoves Mynah in the direction of her room. „Lock up time.'

This must be a joke. Mynah looks into Gansie's eyes. It isn't.

„Gansie ...’

„Shut up. Get in there.’ She shoves Mynah into her room and locks the door.

Mynah bangs on the door, „Gansie, what's going on? Unlock the door.’

There's no answer. „What's wrong with you? Come on now, unlock the door.’

„Shut up! If you don't stop that racket, I'll come in there and deal with you.’

„Gansie, I don't understand.’

Gansie laughs, „No, you don't, do you? You're inside now. And don't let me hear you snivelling. No bloody snot and *trane*. No feeling sorry for yourself. You deserve everything you get.’ Gansie laughs. „I don't know why I was so worried. It was quite easy really. I thought it would be hard. But I have it all now, a job, a home, a car. And you're bloody lucky you're inside; you don't need a job and your meals and accommodation are provided. Lights out now! I'll bring you breakfast in the morning.’ She goes off to watch *The Bold and the Beautiful*.

Mynah Bird stands staring at the door. *Good Heavens! Trying to get back into the cocoon, she's turned my house into a prison! Didn't I tell you ...?* Mynah looks around for the little bird but she has gone.

Mynah sighs, *Imprisoned in a relationship; something I have carefully avoided all my life.*

Flowers that Bloom...Tra la.

„Look there. What’s that?’

Mynah Bird turns to see the crown of a soft garden hat push its way up over the edge of her garden wall like a tendril unfurling in slow motion. It burgeons into a floppy brim over a face with eyes scrupulously fixed on the ground below. This is the second time that this exotic bloom has attached itself to that very spot on the wall, a vantage point from which her entire little lounge can easily be scrutinised through the patio doors. The day before, while seated at lunch with Gansie and an ex-student, Thabo, she had become aware of this strange outgrowth on the wall. What was it doing there? She had dismissed the thought. It had been a momentary distraction. But she recalls the first sighting now that Gansie has drawn her attention to its reappearance.

Gansie finds the blooming phenomenon titillating. Mynah is prompted to ask, „Is he looking at you?’

„He’s staring straight at me.’ Gansie, pleased and flattered, is staring right back.

Flabbergasted, Mynah immediately jumps to a whole lot of fanciful conclusions. Such blatant prying – 007, in the guise of shrubbery! Why? Because Correctional Services vehicles pull up daily in front of her house since Gansie arrived? On the afternoon that she had brought Gansie in, Bond’s mother, M, had been right behind her in her Mercedes. Residents, who are aware that the mynah visited women in prison, have humoured her as a simple-minded bleeding heart but now that she has taken one of them in, the whole complex is palpitating. Being a mynah giving shelter to a gansie is bad enough, but an ex-con gansie! This is a

symptom of dementia. They have been very tolerant but she's gone too far. The old bird has created a situation!

Hence the appearances of the surveillance flower.

Gansie, who is enjoying the attention, suggests that a reconnaissance will follow. And a few days later, it happens just so. Having fetched Gansie from work, Mynah, sitting in the lounge, looks up to see a smiling M at the open front door. Mynah smiles back and M walks in; this is the first time that a resident has visited the old bird. M comes into the lounge where she finds Gansie perched on the sofa.

„Oh, I didn't know you had company.' M smiles and greets Gansie as Mynah introduces her. Then Mynah invites her to sit down which she does, trying to hide her nausea at the pensioner's furnishings.

„We're having tea. Will you join us?'

„No thanks, I just popped in for a moment.'

„Are you on holiday now?' Mynah is aware that businesses are closing for the Christmas holidays. 007 runs a construction company and his mother is his accountant.

„Yes, thank goodness! We've shut up shop for the year. I can relax at last.'

„Going away for Christmas?'

„Yes. Looking forward to a marvellous vacation at the coast.' M turns to Gansie. „And where are you from?'

A question like this, a perfectly normal question, has been expected. Still, there is hesitation and embarrassment as Gansie replies that she is from the city. So Mynah explains, „Gansie is lodging with me for a while.'

Realising that they are not going to volunteer information, M changes the subject. „Actually, I'm here because the Executive' (of the Body Corporate) „is organising a *braai* – a get-together of all the people in the complex.'

„Oh, what a novel idea! We've never had a get-together before. What a nice way to round off the year.'

„Well. It's not actually an end of year party, rather a beginning of the New Year party.'

„Oh, so when will it be?'

„About the beginning of February. Gives everyone a chance to get the kids settled in school. I'll let you know.'

„Well, it will be a good way to start the year. Getting to know one another.'

M stands up and Mynah walks with her to the door, where M collects her umbrella – much needed showers have been falling since the beginning of the week – and leaves.

When Mynah sits down again, Gansie is laughing. „Well, now she knows what a serial killer looks like.’ Gansie sees the umbrella bobbing along the spy wall, and when it disappears, says, „So you’ve been invited to a party. You had better mark it down in your diary or you’ll forget. It’s next year ... or is it the year after?’ She laughs again. „I wonder if I’m invited.’ Then she frowns. „They won’t make trouble for you, will they?’

„Just let them try!’

„Maybe I shouldn’t have come.’

„Rubbish! They don’t scare me. They’re just inquisitive that’s all. M is just reassuring herself.’

„About what?’

Mynah laughs. „Well, that you are not a serial killer.’

Despite her air of bravado, Mynah tosses and turns in bed that night and has one of her nightmares. She sees secret meetings at which alarming drops in property values and strange old Indian biddies are the main topics. Sersant Sarie and Konstabel Katrina haul her before the Body Corporate. They tie a sari to the rafters to make a noose. Before they can put it over her head, her broom zooms into place and she is flying around trying to find the Human Rights Commissioner to demand justice. But he is running and hiding under bridges and in culverts. His mother comes after Mynah with an AK47. Suddenly the broom disintegrates and she is plunging downwards at breakneck speed. Just as she is about to be impaled on a mountain peak, she wakes up, looks at her clock and sees that it is time to get up.

While in the shower, she decides on discretion. Before Gansie leaves for work she asks, „Do you think you could get Correctional Services to wait at the entrance gate when they come? You could go out to sign. ... It’s not that I am afraid but there’s no need to attract attention.’ Gansie agrees. From then on, Correctional Services vehicles do not enter the complex.

Still, interest in the lodger does not abate; it takes a new turn. A few days later, Gansie tells Mynah that a couple of men walking past the house, suddenly

turned their heads, like soldiers at the „eyes right’ command, to stare at her sitting in her usual place on the sofa. Mynah, who never pays attention to a person’s appearance, suddenly realises that Gansie is quite attractive; blonde, with blue eyes and at forty, her good looks have reached full maturity. Her warm, bright, breezy, friendliness attracts men to her. She is always telling Mynah, „They all love me at work. I’m the only woman there and they love me. Bafana is crazy about me; wants to marry me.’

Mynah is not happy that her home has suddenly become the talking point and focus of interest in the complex. It’s bad enough that she practically lives in a glasshouse, people can look right into every room, but now with Gansie, curiosity has been aroused and eyes are continuously to be encountered! How simple-minded not to realise that it would be so.

The next morning, before Gansie leaves for work, she tells Mynah that she was awakened by women talking loudly outside her window; she didn’t catch what they were saying except when one of them exclaimed, „So, this is the new South Africa!’ Amazed, Mynah lets her imagination jump into overdrive. *It’s only in soap operas that discrimination has disappeared altogether and there its demise has a mostly prurient value. Maybe that applies here as well. I have lived all alone in the complex for at least six years with hardly any visitors. People often think that single women are closet gays.* Mynah chuckles quietly to herself. People always speculate about recluses. Perhaps she is acquiring a far more interesting persona.

Gansie, who sees herself in her own private soap opera, is flourishing under all the attention. She takes to playing her guitar and singing romantic songs in the garden, and the wall behind her begins to sprout. After that first single flower, several more blossoms appear every afternoon, then in the weeks that follow there are bunches of flowers and finally the most elaborate bouquets. Gansie’s evening recitals are followed in the morning by choruses from the other side of the wall. At first it is just a *belle canto* duet, then a day later another voice is added, and then the trio of divas becomes a quartet and eventually a full-blown chorus with contraltos, sopranos and mezzos in recitative. The morning after the appearance of the bouquets at Gansie’s evening concert, the dawn chorus rises to a crescendo as all the voices blend into a momentous resolve.

That evening after work, Gansie, picking up her guitar, goes out into the garden as usual. As she begins to strum, white blossoms surface along the wall, their anthers sticky and dropping pollen. As her voice rises in full-throated richness, a male humming chorus spontaneously provides the harmony. But the mellifluous sunset serenade, flowing over every unit, lulling every willing ear into quiet repose is suddenly drowned out by strident Valkyrie voices descending on the wall. Mynah, nose in book as usual, jumps up in shock and runs to her bedroom window to find she is looking out on a wild, furious battle scene. Clutching at her heart, which is providing an asynchronous tattoo, she watches as the radiant blossoms, plucked from their perches, are sent scuttling off, raucous laughter whipping them from behind. As the thunder fades into the distance, Mynah hopes it is all over now that her wall has been deflowered.

But within seconds, the clarion call announcing the beginning of the major skirmish shakes the skies. She sees the troops mustering to begin the descent upon her garden. She runs out to warn Gansie, who is still calmly seated on the patio trying out new melodies, but she is too late. The women pour into her garden like a flood, sweep her aside plummeting her into her plumbago bush, and haul Gansie out of her chair. To the accompaniment of triumphant niebelungen chords crashing all about, they frogmarch her out of the garden, down the pathway to the entrance gate and out into the street. Dusting their hands off, they watch till she disappears from view. Mynah keeps calling from above, „She has nowhere to go,’ but of course they cannot hear her even though she is hovering right over them.

Mynah watches M lead the troops back into the complex. As they disperse to their various homes, she skims over the entrance gate and zooms after Gansie who is marching down the road. Mynah calls out to her but Gansie simply turns the corner, walks round the block, comes back to the complex, opens the gate with her remote control and enters the house through the garage. Mynah hovering above her, tries to make contact but Gansie who is searching the house, can’t hear or see. When she eventually goes into the garden, Mynah follows her out and perches on the patio roof.

Taking one look below, Mynah sees her body, covered with blue flowers, lying in the plumbago bush. *Oh for goodness sakes, I’d better get back in there.* She slips in just as Gansie turns to her in the bush. Mynah puts out a hand. „Help me up. Thank goodness, that’s all over. Now that they’ve got it out of their systems, they’ll relax and won’t bother about you any more.’

Gingerbread House

Mynah, bent over in the plough position, regards her knobbly knees and stringy thighs with disgust. In her mind's eye, she can see this woman in her eighties on *Oprah*, showing off her beautifully rounded, muscular thighs; she started weight training at a gym at the age of seventy-two. Mynah isn't quite seventy-two but she knows that working out at a gym is not for her. *Hmm... I wonder whether going back to eating meat will put muscle on my thighs. Don't be ridiculous, what about your cholesterol? Okay, then I'll just have to keep my eyes shut when I go into the shoulder stand.* In the shower she looks down at her thighs again. *Not too bad when they're hanging down, not up.*

In the kitchen, the eggs, bought for her helper, cradled in a row in the fridge door, make her wonder. *Hmm. Okay, no meat. How about eggs? Oh no! Even worse for cholesterol.* But seeing the eggs, she thinks of baking. Gansie's brother and his wife will be stopping by tomorrow afternoon to see Gansie so a cake for tea would be nice. She looks through a flip file and finds a recipe for an eggless carrot cake. *Right, I'll bake this.* So she gets busy. When Gansie comes into the kitchen to make her breakfast, the cake is in the oven.

„What are you baking?’

„A carrot cake for your brother's visit tomorrow. Just getting started on the icing – cream cheese.’

„That house across the road is going up very fast.’ Gansie, at the front door, is making her daily inspection of the building site. She and her husband, Riaan, had apparently been involved in building projects so she is familiar with the process and quite impressed by what she sees, though, of course, the materials are not of the tip-top quality that she would have used. „We got only the best. It's wonderful to see a building that you have designed going up. It's so exciting.’

Mynah, who is taking the cake out of the oven, doesn't know anything about such things. She is just glad she has a roof over her head. When the cake has cooled and the icing is ready to go on, Gansie asks if she can ice the cake. As she topples out all the icing, spreading it thickly over the top, she looks very pleased with herself. When she is done, Mynah puts the cake under a pastry umbrella and leaves it ready for the visit.

The next day, Mynah tells Gansie she will clear out to give her privacy with her visitors. She knows that Gansie's people are ashamed to be associated with a parolee, and worse, one lodging with a mynah bird. At about two, Mynah jumps into her car and is on her way to the movies. At the mall, she passes a video shop advertising an Eddie Murphy film in which he plays all the roles in all different shapes and sizes. *I wonder if it shows how to fatten thighs.* But she doesn't get it. Instead she goes into a bookshop to look through yoga and aerobics books. She sighs. *If I went up Jack's beanstalk, the old ogre would sing out 'Fee fi fo fum, I smell the blood of a bird with no drumsticks' and I'd get kicked right out.*

She buys one of the books and takes it into the Ladies to try out some of the exercises. She sets herself up next to the washbasins, her makeshift ballet bar. When she is about to swing a leg up, someone comes in. She waits but each time she gets herself into position, the door opens. There is a fairly steady stream into the restroom so she goes into one of the cubicles, puts the book on the cistern and begins again. But somebody, using the cubicle next to hers, lets off a bomb – the fall-out captures every oxygen molecule in the restroom. Mynah, holding her nose, picks up her book, runs out into one of the arcades and gets on the escalator going down – she knows that warm air rises. She finds an outdoor coffee shop where she sits down at one of the tables to study her book.

At about half past five, she makes for home. If a strange vehicle is parked in the garage or outside the house, she will drive away and return later. When she arrives, however, it is all clear, so she parks and goes in. She finds Gansie sitting at the counter, organising blocks of cake.

„Hi, how was the visit?“

„They didn't come.“ Gansie doesn't give Mynah a chance to say anything. „I'm building a house. What do you think? I have the foundation and a couple of

walls but there isn't enough cake here to finish the job. Can you see the shape I'm aiming for?' When the slice she is trying to place, slips down, she shakes her head. „This cake is not suitable for construction work.'

„Are you building a house like the witch's house in the woods?' Gansie frowns and Mynah smiles. „You know, in the Hansel and Gretel story.'

„Oh yes. I remember.'

„I think the witch made it out of gingerbread.'

„Right! I can't use this cake.' She pulls together the ends of the wax wrap on which she has laid out her house, squashes it all together and throws the whole mess into the bin. Then she goes off to her room and locks herself in.

Mynah sighs. *It's too bad her brother and his wife didn't pitch. They could at least have called.*

The next day, Gansie, home from work, knocks on Mynah's bedroom door. Mynah is working on her thighs.

„Can I do some baking?'

Mynah shouts through the door. „You don't have to ask permission. I am not a warder.'

Gansie goes back into the kitchen, switches on the oven, pulls out ingredients and baking equipment and gets busy. When Mynah comes to the kitchen, Gansie is a vague shape in the midst of a flour storm. Mynah goes back to her room to read. When she returns to the kitchen later, she finds layers of ginger bread neatly laid out on the counter.

„That's a lot of gingerbread. Is there some kind of do at the office?'

Gansie, watching *The Bold and the Beautiful*, calls out, „Oh no, this is not for the office.'

Mynah waits but no explanation follows. *Okay, I'll find out after The Bold and the Beautiful.* But as *Sewende Laan* follows *The Bold*, Mynah goes back to her book and forgets all about the loads of gingerbread.

For the next few days, when Gansie comes home from work she gets busy baking. By the end of the week there are heaps of gingerbread on the counter. Mynah, who feels she is being crowded out of her kitchen, is forced to interrupt Gansie's favourite programme, „What's all the gingerbread for?'

Gansie is annoyed. It is a crucial moment in the soapie; Ridge, who has been abducted on another of his honeymoons, is about to be murdered. Gansie makes Mynah wait till there is a commercial break. „I told you the other day. I’m constructing a house. I’m going to build one similar to the one that’s going up across the way. But mine will be better. That’s not a bad design but I know exactly how to improve it.’

„What are you going to do with it when you’ve finished? Is it for some kind of exhibition? Is there a competition or something?’

„What a crazy idea!’ Laughing, Gansie turns back to the TV.

Once the gingerbread building materials have been baked, Gansie starts to plan the construction. She wants a sketchbook and a pencil, which she takes outside to sketch the house that is going up around the corner. Then she needs a ruler but Mynah has only a tape measure. Then she asks for toothpicks, icing sugar and all the various food colourings.

„You should buy stuff you need. Your work place is right next to the shopping mall.’ Mynah, who is very careful with her money, doesn’t see why she has to finance the project.

On Saturday, when Mynah comes home from work – she is a volunteer at a charity shop that raises funds for a home for mentally challenged women – she reaches in to open the security gate but the key, which is always in the door on the inside, has been removed. When she peers through the screen, she sees that all the counter space in the kitchen is taken up with blocks of gingerbread. The middle of the kitchen floor is occupied by a huge piece of cardboard covered with wax wrap. Busy in the midst of it all, fixing gingerbread walls to gingerbread foundation and gluing sections together with icing, is Gansie who looks up, sees Mynah at the door and motions impatiently, „Go round to the front. You can’t come in here. You’ll upset my construction site.’ Mynah enters through the front door and is about to step into the kitchen, but is stopped by Gansie’s irritated yell, „No, no. Stay out there.’

„But I want my lunch.’

„Why don’t you go out and buy yourself something?’

Mynah, a vegetarian, never buys food from anywhere. „How long are you going to be?’

„I don’t know. A few days.’

A few days! The woman’s gone mad. She can’t keep me out of my kitchen.

Mynah makes her way to the fridge.

„Be careful. I told you not to come in.’

„Yes, I heard.’ Mynah pulls out a head of lettuce and other vegetables. Gansie gives her a tearful, angry look, marches off to her room and locks the door.

After Mynah has eaten, she goes to read in her room. A little later, she hears Gansie’s door open and by the sound of her steps, Mynah can tell that she is full of resentment.

Later that afternoon, she finds Gansie busy plastering the walls of her gingerbread house with icing. She has created a double storey structure similar to the one going up outside, the windows and doors are in position and she has laid out cheese stick rafters. Mynah is impressed.

„I can see now how the witch lured Hansel and Gretel into her house.’

„Yes. When she got them inside, she fattened them up for the oven.’

„Fattened them up. Oh goodness, I forgot my exercises for my thighs – better do them, otherwise I’m going to have to keep my eyes shut every time I raise my legs in the air.’ She disappears into her room.

Two days later the house is complete. Like the neighbour’s house, it has a ski slope of a roof, covered with green cake tiles. Now Gansie is providing furniture for it. She cuts out chairs and tables from cardboard and makes a stove with a big oven. After she builds cupboards, she finds some netting to cover the openings.

„Why are you doing that? Aren’t you going to make dishes to put in the cupboards?’

„These aren’t cupboards. They’re cages.’

„Cages?’

„Don’t tell me you’ve forgotten the story. That’s what the witch had in her kitchen.’

„Are you making the witch’s house? I thought you were making a model of the house outside.’

„I simply used it for inspiration.’

„Your model is really quite a stunning piece of work. What are you going to do with it?’

„It still needs a lot of work.’

„Can I help? Is there anything I can do?’

Gansie snaps, „No, no, no! You don’t know what I am trying to do. Why don’t you go and read?’

With eyebrows flying into her hairline, Mynah leaves. Nevertheless, she is glad that Gansie has found something with which to occupy her time, even if she has made a mess of the kitchen and it is almost impossible to prepare meals or wash dishes. Mynah has even given her helper time off while the construction is going on. She is quite surprised at Gansie’s mature attitude; she has turned her disappointment over her brother’s visit into a creative venture giving her many hours of pleasure and allowing her to relive that time when she and her husband planned and built houses. *Now if she could put her painful past to work for her like this, maybe she’ll even get to write her story as she tells everyone she plans to do. I wish I knew what she intends with the house. It’s been here for over a week and I need my kitchen back. I wonder if she’d be willing to donate it to the charity shop for a raffle.*

When Mynah comes back to the kitchen, Gansie is busy making baking trays out of tinfoil for the gingerbread house that now stands on one of the counters; the floor and all the other counters have been cleared and cleaned. Mynah makes a cup of tea and comes to inspect the house. It is such a cheery looking place, with its lavender walls, yellow doors and red windows. Mynah peeps inside the kitchen, sees that the stove has a little fire of chopped glacé cherries going in it while the oven door stands wide open, waiting for the trays.

„If you don’t have any plans for the house when you’ve finished it, you could donate it to ...’

„I built this especially for my brother. It’s a present for him.’

Mynah covers up her amazement. That is really magnanimous considering the way he treated her. *I could never be that generous.*

When Gansie has completed the trays, she puts them into the oven and closes the door of her gingerbread house.

„That’s a very large oven, isn’t it?’

„I didn't write the story you know.' She suddenly shuts up shop, goes into the lounge, and switches on the TV to watch a movie starring Jean Claude van Damme, one of her matinee idols.

In the next week, Gansie spends all her spare time looking for the tiniest little figurines. She works for hours, painstakingly correcting their postures and carefully mixing paints to get the right colours.

Mynah has a tiny Halloween Little 'Itch on her bookcase which she offers to Gansie. „Would you like to put this in your house? Look she even has a broomstick.'

„No thanks. I don't need a witch. I'm putting in a warlock.'

Mynah's eyebrows shoot up. *A warlock!* Unusual; she thinks of Gansie as rather conventional. „I thought you wanted to be faithful to the story.'

„I'm bringing it up to date. What did the brothers Grimm know about child abuse?' Mynah's eyes widen. „You look surprised. Haven't you read the story? Fairy tales are full of nonsense about witches, step-mothers and abuse.'

„But this is such a cheerful, happy looking house. What's it got to do with child abuse?'

„You really don't know anything, do you?' Gansie goes on with her work, getting her figurines into the right postures and positioning them inside.

„Why are you putting all the figurines in the kitchen? You have such sweet little bedrooms upstairs.'

Gansie pulls out a book of fairy tales. „I brought this especially for you. Why don't you read the story? It will answer all your questions.'

„But you aren't sticking strictly to the story. I mean you have a warlock, not a witch...'

„Don't tell me what to do. What do you know about anything? When did you become an expert on child abuse? I learned all about it when they arrested me; when they began to make all their nonsensical theories fit me so they could accuse me of murder.' She picks up the little figurine of a warlock with black frowning eyebrows, snarling mouth and glaring eyes. „This expert on child abuse; he's the one; he turned it into murder. I know exactly what I am doing. You know nothing about it. Go fatten up your thighs and leave me alone.'

Mynah sits in her room trying to understand. *I thought this was a happy project but it's made her relive a sordid past – a past that goes beyond my understanding.*

The next morning after Gansie leaves for work, Mynah comes into the kitchen to find the Gingerbread House complete and ready to be packaged. Gansie is going to bring home a big box for the cake. A card lying next to the model reads, *To my dearest brother, Pierre, and his compassionate wife, Clarice.*

It is a beautiful little house.

It inspires a vision of Hansel and Gretel, sad, tearful little babes abandoned in the woods, wandering around hungry and cold, looking for shelter and Mynah feels their delight on encountering this delicious looking house. Sadly, they will meet the old witch, waiting to fatten them up, bake them and devour them. Mynah looks inside for the witch, – no, no, the warlock! – and the two little children.

But she is startled by what she sees: fairy tale fantasy dissected and laid bare. At first, as in the story, cages full of little boys and girls and on a tray inside the oven, a little girl, trussed up like a chicken, ready to be roasted. Then the grim reality! Separate pairs of figurines around the kitchen; each pair – a little girl and a warlock; each pair in different attitudes and configurations. In one, the little girl lying supine on the floor, her legs spread wide with a warlock between them; another, a little girl on her hands and knees, her dress up over her hips and a warlock behind; the third, a little girl kneeling in front of a warlock; the fourth in the clutches of a warlock choking the life out of her with both hands. All the little girls are identical. They look exactly like the little girl in the oven and each one has Gansie's golden brown hair and blue eyes.

Gingerbread Boy

A long, loud howl detonates the peace of the afternoon; even hard-of-hearing Mynah jumps. Gasping and choking, eyes overflowing with tears, Gansie hurtles down the passage into the kitchen, plunges at the security gate, bangs and kicks at it to open it. Hastily setting down the electric hand mixer, Mynah rushes to the gate, „Wait, I'll open it for you.'

The minute the gate is open, Gansie pushes past Mynah, flies across the road to the house opposite and begins banging on the door. „Open up! Open up! Jacques! Jacques! Dis Ma. Ek het jou kom haal!'

Mynah runs up behind, „What's the matter? What's going on?'

„It's Jacques. They've got him inside. They won't let me see him. They're beating him! Didn't you hear him scream?'

Mynah takes her by the arm and pulls her towards the house. „Calm down. Come back and tell me about it.'

„No, no! Get away from me! They've got my boy in there.'

„No, they haven't. There's no one there. They're out for the afternoon. I saw them driving off a few minutes ago.'

„But Jacques! Didn't you hear him screaming?'

„That was just Vusi. You know how he always screams and cries. He was putting on a big performance just before they left.'

„But I had a vision. I saw Jacques. He was crying and calling out to me. Mammie, Mammie, don't leave me. Don't leave me.'

„Must have been a bad dream – triggered by Vusi's yelling.'

„No, I have visions. I see things and they come true.'

„But how could the Luthulis have your son? They don't even know him.'

Gansie stares at the house, then turns, goes right back to her room and locks herself in. Mynah shrugs. *Her demons do come and go.*

Later that afternoon, Mynah examines the Madeira slab she has just removed from the oven. *Well, there's no valley in the middle this time because I left it in long enough but now it's dry.* As she pulls out her recipe book to look for the cause, she hears the Luthulis pulling in opposite; next, a loud screaming and crying – Vusi, refusing to get out of the car. Gansie's door flies open and she comes running into the kitchen.

Mynah instinctively backs up to the security gate. „It's only Vusi as usual. Just relax.’

Gansie turns scornful eyes on Mynah. „I know it's Vusi.’ She goes into the lounge and switches on the TV. After a few minutes she rushes into the kitchen. „There's some one creeping about outside.’

„What?’

„I saw him. He was peeping through the window. I think I recognised him.’

„What!’

„He went round that way. I saw his shadow on the blinds of the front window, then a shape against the patio doors. He must be moving towards the bedrooms.’

„Are you sure?’

„Positive. I think I know who it is.’

They go into the bedrooms. Mynah looks out the window of the first bedroom – her study – sees nothing, then into Gansie's room, nothing, finally into her own room. „I don't see anyone.’

„He must be in the backyard.’ Gansie rushes back to the kitchen, through the garage and into the laundry that looks out onto the back yard. When Mynah comes in and sees her peeping through the window, she reaches for the key in the door. Gansie's loud whisper stops her for a moment. „No, no! Don't open the door. He'll get me.’

Mynah unlocks the door, throws it open and looks through the security gate. „I don't see anyone.’

„Maybe he jumped over the wall. Or maybe he ran round to the front gate.’

„I think you imagined it. Must have been a cat.’

„No, no! I tell you I saw him. It was Dr Hengelaar.’ Mynah's eyes are questioning. „He's the one who had my children taken away from me.’

„So what is he doing here? How does he know where you live?’

„You don't know that man. He is evil. He goes round spying on people, on parents actually. If you are a parent, he preys on you. He hangs about, waiting for the smallest sign of impatience or act of discipline. He knows it will happen; he believes every parent is a child abuser. Parents don't know it, but he is shadowing them; he parks outside their homes with his binoculars and cameras.’

„But there are no children here, why?’

„He's after me. He knows I am going to get my boy back.’

„Oh, I didn't know that. When are you getting him back? He's not coming here, is he?’ Mynah has offered her a room in her house; the offer does not extend to her children.

Gansie turns pleading eyes on Mynah. „I don't have anywhere else.’

Mynah, about to remonstrate, changes her mind. *Why am I getting worked up? This is just another of her fantasies.*

When they go back into the lounge, Gansie turns to her TV programme again, a courtroom scene in which Mynah sees a cold, haughty doctor on the stand looking contemptuously at the accused, the mother of a dead baby; it's the Dingo dog murder trial.

Gansie points at him. „You see! His reputation depends on turning parents into child abusers!’

The next afternoon, Mynah, talking to her plants in the garden, is boring them to death as usual. Being an ex-teacher, obsessed with order and discipline, she looks with annoyance at the little tendrils of marigolds pushing their way up and encroaching on the petunia patch. She threatens them with expulsion if they don't stay in their own group area. Then she lays down the law to the petunias. If they don't show any progress, they will be sent down. She picks up the hose and sternly waters the plants. While she is busy, Vusi comes out onto the road. He doesn't look at Mynah or wave as usual. Today as he walks about, banging an iron rod on the ground, he is an intrepid hunter on the look out for prey. Suddenly, spying his quarry, he streaks off down the road towards 007's house. Afraid of what he is going to do, Mynah drops the hose and runs to the fence. As Vusi doesn't understand the world like other little boys of his age, everyone in his household keeps a careful watch on him at all times. Today he is on his own but not for long. Sonto, his caregiver, who has run out to look for him, sees him heading for 007's garden and dashes after him.

Just as he is about to strike the barking dog through the fence, she catches him and drags him kicking and screaming back to the house. Dogs seem to bring out the killer instinct in Vusi. On one occasion, Mynah saw him trying to throttle a little Chihuahua that passes the house with its owner everyday. Keeping a firm hold on Vusi, who is struggling to free himself, Sonto reaches out to open the security gate just as Gansie, returning from work, comes around the corner. Pushing Sonto off, Vusi springs at Gansie, throws his arms around her and begins sobbing loudly.

Gansie reaches down to him. „Ag, my liewe kind. My liewe kind. Wat makeer, kleintjie? Jy kan Mammie alles vertel,’ and the two of them cling to each other crying. Sonto, temporarily thrown off her stride, pulls herself together and yanks Vusi away. Screaming and kicking again, he turns big, anguished eyes on Gansie and reaches out to her with both arms. Gansie, dropping everything, puts out her arms to go after him. But Sonto hauls Vusi into the house and closes the security gate. In complete disarray, Gansie rushes through the garage, into the house and collapses on the sofa. Mynah, who has picked up her things, brings them to her.

Gansie, drying her eyes and blowing her nose, turns accusing eyes on Mynah. „You see, I told you, didn’t I? I told you that they don’t know how to take care of a child like that. That’s abuse! That’s abuse! I am going to do something about it. They can’t treat my child like that.’

„That’s not your child.’

Gansie jumps up, sending Mynah stumbling backwards. „Yes, that’s what every one keeps telling me. But those people are adoptive parents. I am the biological mother. He is my flesh and blood. If they hadn’t lied in court, they never would have got my children. But that devil of a doctor poisoned their minds, calling me a monster and a murderer. And that’s what they think I am – a monster and a murderer. So they took my children away from me.’ She dashes to the front door and shouts at the house opposite. „My poor Jacques, I am going to save you.’

Mynah reminds her again, „But that’s not Jacques.’

„What do you know? You aren’t a mother. You don’t understand.’ Gansie turns again to the Luthuli house. „They are abusing my boy. I know it. They can’t stand the fact that he still loves me; that he still wants his Mammie.’

„But that’s Vusi.’

„My poor boy. They get angry because he cries for me. And they beat him. How can they beat him for that? He is so unhappy and they beat him. He’s not a

normal, healthy child; he was born with a dead kidney and a malfunctioning heart valve.’ She calls out to the house opposite. „Jacques, my liefing, ek sal jou kom haal. Ek belowe jou. Jy’s Mammie se klein engeltjie. Ek sal jou red.’ She picks up her cellphone. „I am going to call the social worker. I am going to demand visitation rights.’ She goes out into the garden and hard-of-hearing Mynah can hear her speaking very animatedly into her phone.

After a while, she bursts into the lounge. „The whole world is against me!’ She collapses on the sofa again and cries. „She says I can’t have visitation rights because the adoptive parents won’t allow it. The Church Welfare Council has advised against it. She says I should speak to my lawyer. Doesn’t she know that lawyers cost money?’

Mynah hands her the TV remote control. „There’s nothing much you can do right now. Just take your mind off it. Relax.’

Gansie switches on the television but for once Ridge and the gang lose out. She sits there, ostensibly watching, but she is thinking.

On Saturday afternoon, Mynah, having lectured her plants into comatose states, is sitting on the patio reading. Gansie, inspecting the spider webs that are turning the bushes into candyfloss, sees Vusi on his little go-cart. As she watches him ride up and down and up and down and up and down the road, she smiles and waves. He stops when he sees a cat under the bushes and points, „Cat!’ jumps off his go-cart and runs to grab it but it scampers off. He picks up a stone and throws it after the animal. Horrified, Gansie runs out to stop him.

„Leave him alone.’ Mynah knows that somebody is watching the boy.

But Gansie is standing at the go-cart. „You want to play a game. I have a nice game for us.’

He looks up uncertainly.

„See, I have this whistle.’ When she blows it, he becomes excited and tries to grab it out of her hands. „No, wait, that’s not the game. You close your eyes and I hide. Then I blow this whistle and you try to find me. Okay?’

He grabs at the whistle again but when she runs and hides, he gets on his go-cart again. He has no idea what she wants him to do. Then he hears the whistle again, louder. So he runs to find it. Gansie runs off and has him chasing after her. Eventually, she allows him to catch her, lets him blow the whistle and he is delighted.

He jumps on his go-cart, whistle in mouth, and blows and blows and blows as he rides up and down, up and down, up and down.

When Gansie comes back, Mynah laughs. „That was nice of you to distract him from the cat but I’m afraid you’ve lost your whistle.’

„Oh it doesn’t matter. I can always get another one.’

The next day, Nomsa, Vusi’s mother, brings Vusi to the door. She is looking for Gansie. When Gansie comes to the door, Nomsa tells her son to give back the whistle.

Gansie laughs. „Oh, you didn’t have to worry about that. We were playing a little game yesterday. He seems to like the whistle. He can keep it.’

„That’s very kind. But he has to learn not to take things.’

„Come we play.’ Vusi is pulling Gansie’s hand. „Come!’

His mother is firm. „No, Vusi. Don’t be naughty.’

„I don’t mind playing with him for a little while. If that’s okay?’ Gansie volunteers quickly.

Nomsa smiles. Vusi and Gansie run off down the road, laughing and chasing each other. When the game is over, Gansie comes in through the kitchen door. A few moments later, there is a knock. Vusi is standing there with the whistle in his hand but his face is turned to his mother, gesticulating from across the way.

„Oh, you brought back the whistle. What a good boy!’ Gansie kisses his cheek. Then he purses his lips for a kiss. When he has gone, she turns tearfully, „How I miss my little Jacques.’

Some days later, Gansie doesn’t go to work. She stays in her room the whole morning. When she finally emerges, she tells Mynah that she is going away for a while.

„Going away? This is very sudden!’

„I need a suitcase. Do you have one?’

„Do you have permission? I thought you had to be here, at this address.’

„Don’t worry. I have made all the arrangements.’

„That mean parole officer gave you permission? I thought she was very nasty and unsympathetic. How did you get her to agree?’

„What’s the matter with you? I told you she’s given me permission. If you don’t want to lend me a suitcase just say so.’ Marching into the kitchen, she begins scratching through the plastic bags under one of the counters.

Mynah follows behind. „Where are you going?’ No answer. „How long are you going to be away?’

Having found some large bags, one from a furniture store, another from Woolworths, Gansie marches off to her room, bangs the door in Mynah’s face and locks herself in.

Mynah is confused. From everything she has been told, Bulala, Gansie’s parole officer, is a beady-eyed vulture. Parolees are her prey and she parades her authority over them in every which way. When they come to report to her once a month, she keeps them waiting. When she finally deigns to see them, she scrutinises the monitoring log looking for problems. She is always threatening to send them back to prison. She never grants any requests for permission to attend special functions outside curfew hours and she evades upgrading parole for as long as she can. She has shouted at, scolded and humiliated Gansie countless times. *Now suddenly she grants permission for her to go away? I can’t believe it.*

Then the phone rings. Gansie comes dashing out of her room to answer. Mynah can hear that it is the monitoring team from DCS. The next thing, the garage door is rumbling open and Gansie is dashing down to the gate to sign the log.

When she comes back, Mynah asks, „Do they know that you are going away?’

„I told you everything was arranged,’ she snaps and goes into the lounge to switch on the TV.

Okay, I’ll go. The TV always chases Mynah away. In her room, she makes herself comfortable on the bed with her crossword. Soon she is banging herself on the head because she can’t figure out the words. *I have become so incredibly dumb; I’m losing my vocabulary. I must be developing Alzheimer’s.* While she sits there, trying to squeeze words out of her brain, she hears the swish of plastic and Gansie wandering about. *I suppose she’s packing. I wonder if she’s going to that crazy cousin of hers, who blows hot and cold all the time. If it’s him, he’ll probably call in the morning cancelling the visit.*

Then she hears the garage door opening. She frowns. *DCS have already been so what’s going on?* She gets out of bed, throws on some clothes and goes to see. When she gets to the kitchen, she sees Gansie in the garage, reaching for the small

ladder hanging against the wall. She pulls it off the strut, puts it over her shoulder and marches out. When the garage door starts to rumble down, Mynah runs to the wall switch, stops the door and sends it back up. Then she runs inside for shoes so she can follow Gansie.

Hurriedly pulling on a pair of old moccasins, she dashes back to the garage, jumps onto her broom and speeds out into the night. She is heading for the gate but is stopped short at the sound of a whistle at the boundary wall of the Luthuli property. Gansie is standing there, helping Vusi who is climbing up the ladder that she has set down for him on the inside. As she helps him over the wall, he gives her a big hug, then purses his lips for a kiss. She hugs and kisses him, then takes his hand and begins to lead him to the gate. Mynah opening her mouth to shout, hears a loud yell. *Did I do that?* She touches her throat. *I didn't know I could do that.* But the yell is repeated, with more following. It's Vusi.

Mynah, hovering overhead, looks down to see Gansie trying to drag Vusi to the gate. He is screaming, „I want to ride in the car? I want to ride in the car?’

„Ag nee, Jacques. Vannag loop ons. Kom nou, liefie.’

„I want to ride in the car. I want to ride in the car.’

Taking his wrist very firmly, Gansie begins to drag him forward. Screaming and struggling, his knees scraping against the brick road, he grabs hold of a bush at the side and won't let go.

As she is trying to pull his hands loose, Gansie shouts, „Jacques, jou stoute kind, los die boom. Los dit nou! Nou! Ek gaan nie weer vra nie.’ When she raises her arm, Mynah brings her broom down swiftly and grabs Gansie's wrist just as her fist is about to slam into Vusi's face. Vusi realising that reinforcements have arrived heaves a hefty kick at Gansie's shin and runs towards his father's garage. Mynah jumps off her broom to help Gansie but she just pushes the old bird aside, speeds after Vusi and begins to blow her whistle frantically. Vusi stops. He is undecided. She calls out, „Here, you want the whistle?’

„You take me in the car?’

„No, no car.’ She proffers the whistle.

„Take me in the car.’ Vusi's frustrated screams, which disappear around the corner, give way to loud banging on his father's garage door. „Open the door. I want to go in the car.’

„Jacques, Jacques, ons moet wegkom. Hulle sal jou weer opsluit. Jacques, Jacques kom t’rug. Nou, nou, nou!’ Then Gansie’s pleas disappear around the corner.

As Mynah turns the corner, she sees Vusi banging on the garage door and yelling, „I want to go in the car.’ She sees the lights come on in the Luthuli house and in the house opposite. Then Sam Luthuli and his son, Thami, dash out and grab hold of Vusi to stop him drumming on the garage door. The husband from opposite comes up to his garden fence. When Sam sees the gun in his hand, he runs over to apologise. While he is doing his best to pacify his irate neighbour, Nomsa and their daughter, Lindiwe, also spill out into the moonlight. Sam, extremely embarrassed, is explaining that they always keep a close watch on Vusi; he doesn’t know how he got out. The neighbour, throwing annoyed glances over his shoulder and uttering rude, insulting remarks, goes back to his wife on the porch and they disappear inside.

Sam orders Thami to take Vusi in.

„Nee, nee! Jacques, kom hi’so.’ Gansie grabs Vusi, pulls him up around her waist and holds him so tightly that he can’t get free. He begins to kick and scream, then punches Gansie hard on the side of her head. She lets go; he drops to the ground and runs to hide behind his mother. Gansie turns on Mynah. „You see! You see! They’ve turned him against me. My own boy! They’ve turned him against me.’ She lunges at Nomsa. „You’ve stolen my son from me. You’ve poisoned him against me with all your lies. Now he thinks I’m a monster.’ She turns to Vusi who is staring at her with big eyes. „Kom. Jy’s *my* kind. Kom nou, Mama wag.’ She reaches out to him again. Vusi, holding onto his mother’s waist, shoots his foot straight into Gansie’s knee and she collapses. Thami grabs hold of Vusi whose cries hurtle through the door after him, „She said she’ll take me in the car. She doesn’t want to give me a ride; I want to go in the car.’

Mynah apologises to Sam and Nomsa but they are very angry. Putting his arms around Nomsa and Lindiwe, Sam asks indignantly, „Why did you bring this woman here? You are irresponsible. It’s time the Board took this matter up.’ They turn, sweeping their indignation and humiliation into the house before them.

Mynah picks up the shuddering shambles left on the paving and helps her back to her room.

Fee fi fo fum

Gansie, cowering inside the cupboard, repeats the dreaded name, *that woman's* name, over and over, like a spell, hoping that the chanting will diminish her to the size of a thumbelina and by the time *her men* get here they won't find her. But that doesn't happen and being full-size she is stuck here quite uncomfortably against reams of paper and other stationery. She came into the storeroom when no one was looking and hid in this cupboard. In her first week of work at this office, when the office manager had borne down on her, eyebrows curved in a tidal wave, roaring like the surf because he had not received a fax in time and had missed an important meeting, she had shrunk to half her size. But when he discovered that it was not her fault and came to apologise, she had shot back to almost full size. Today, just before taking refuge in the cupboard, she had peeped into his office hoping that the sight of him would reduce her to a midget, but it hadn't worked.

She is certain, however, that she will shrink when *her men* come.

The first time she experienced this kind of diminution was on the day she was taken to meet *her* six months before. The day she got out and her counsellor, Dominee Engela, took her to the Head Office in town. Climbing the stairs to *her* office at Correctional Services that day was like struggling up a beanstalk. When she eventually got to the top, knocked on *her* office door and stepped across the threshold, she felt herself beginning to shrivel. She reached up with both hands to try to keep from telescoping; tried to hold on to things but her hands just slid down along surfaces. With each step she got shorter and shorter. When she finally reached the desk, she could only see under it through the space between its base and the floor and she found herself looking at huge black rocks. It took her some moments to realise that those were *her* shoes.

When she saw that she had shrunk to a mouse, she started jumping up and down, thinking she would revert to normal but it didn't work. She became terrified; if *she* couldn't see Gansie, *she* would think she was being defiant. *Her* reputation preceded *her* and Gansie knew she would be made to pay for the slightest sign of disrespect. So Gansie moved quickly to the side where she could be seen and found

herself staring at a black cliff rising to a dusty plateau. A shiny film covered the cliff. She reached out to touch it – nylon – a stocking. Suddenly she realised that this was an enormous leg. She was Alice in Wonderland! But she hadn't taken any pills or drunk anything so she had no idea how she had become this tiny creature at the bottom of a ravine. When she bent back to scan the summit, she saw a huge arm arching over the desk like a bridge. Suddenly a thunderous voice knocked her flat on the floor, „How dare you? What are you doing here? Get back to the front of the desk.’

She scrambled to the front but the sheer wooden wall face of the desk rose stark above her. As she stood there wondering how to surmount it, a meteor appeared overhead. She fell to her knees anticipating instant annihilation but the object did not come hurtling down; it remained suspended above her. She raised her head and found she was looking up into two huge caverns over which a ridge stretched back between two large white lakes surrounding black islands. It took a few seconds before she made out the gigantic nose and two eyes. She couldn't read the expression; the features were so huge they simply looked like an alien landscape. Her heart froze. She held her breath, waited a moment for the giant to begin chanting, „Fee fi fo fum, I smell the blood of an abusive mum,’ then panicked and ran screaming towards the door. But the giant reached out, caught hold of her and set her down like a tiny ceramic doll on her desk.

„I have you now.’ The black, murky, opaque pools fixed the doll with a malicious glare. „So you are Gansie? Don't think for one moment that you are free now you are out. No! You are chained to me. You will do exactly as I say or you will find yourself right back inside where you will stay until you have finished your sentence. I will have my watchdogs on you day and night. If you put one foot wrong, if you are not at your place of abode by the curfew hour, if you do not report to me as scheduled every month, you will be back so fast, you won't even remember that you came out.’ Lips stretched taut across guillotine teeth, *she* snarled, „You don't deserve to be out. It will give me great pleasure to throw you back in. I will do my utmost to see that you pay the full price for your crime. You monster! Only a monster would have done what you did.’ Slumped there against the paperweight, her legs stretched out in front of her on the desk pad, her eyes staring at the date, big tears rolling down to blotch the numbers, Gansie stayed silent as the grave. „Remember, I am an officer

of the law. I have complete control over your life.' Then she picked Gansie up between her forefinger and thumb and flung her to the door.

As soon as Gansie hit the threshold, she shot up to normal height so fast that she became dizzy. Dominee Engela, who was waiting outside for her, had to catch hold of her to steady her. Engela shook her head, „So, you have met Zodwa Bulala. I've heard about her. Do you remember Vinkie du Plooy? She came out six weeks ago. This woman has been giving her hell. Come, let me get you to the shelter. We'll have a big cup of coffee and forget about her.'

Determined never to put a foot wrong after that first encounter, Gansie hasn't taken any chances. In the six months that she has been out, she has been a model parolee. She is obedient and adheres strictly to the regulations because she can still see those huge feet under the desk and doesn't want them following her down the corridors of time. Other DCS officials, not Bulala, have praised her for her conscientiousness. As far as they are concerned her good behaviour is proof that she has been fully rehabilitated. Bulala, however, is not impressed. Every time she goes in to report, which is once a month, Gansie immediately becomes an ant as she enters Bulala's office and watches with terror those big feet, fearing for every moment that she is there, that they will come smashing down on her head. If she dares to ask when she will be off maximum parole, she is treated to close inspection of Bulala's tonsils as she yells at her. She knows that her record is good enough for her to be upgraded; that a parolee is normally upgraded after six months but nothing can be taken for granted with this parole officer.

Take yesterday, Sunday. Engela had asked her to attend a service at a church where she occasionally preaches. After church, Gansie went with Engela to see Vinkie du Plooy, who was in a state of extreme distress. Engela felt that Gansie would be better able to comfort her because they shared similar experiences. When they arrived at the room Vinkie had rented from her sister, they found her in a panic, speaking frantically on the phone. She let Engela and Gansie in and motioned to them to sit. Engela settled on a slatted wooden chair while Gansie lowered herself on to the bed. As Gansie looked around, she saw that this was worse than the place in which she had first stayed: a makeshift kitchen in one corner with a hotplate, kettle, a few dishes and ramshackle furniture. As soon as Vinkie got off the phone, she collapsed in tears next to Gansie who put her arms around her and began to stroke her gently.

After Vinkie had calmed down, she told Engela and Gansie that she was in terrible trouble. She was to have moved to better accommodation the day before, Saturday, but had lost her job on Thursday; someone at work had informed the boss that she was a parolee. Fired on the spot, without full pay, she could no longer afford the move but she had already given Bulala her new address and DCS had approved the new premises. The officers would be monitoring her there from this very day. She had been calling Bulala's office since Thursday. No answer. Left messages. No response. She had no idea whether the parole officer had received her messages or not. She was terrified; she knew Bulala was just looking for an excuse to send her back to prison.

Vinkie turned to Dominee Engela, „Dominee, please help me. Speak to DCS! Speak to Bulala! Tell her I am not trying to run away. I can't move to the new place. They must continue to monitor me here at this address. I can't move now. I don't have the money. I need to find another job. I've paid my rent here so my sister is willing to let me stay on for the rest of the month but what am I to do about the monitoring. I rang and rang and rang Bulala to tell her.' Engela didn't know what to do and quickly decided that they should pray to the Lord for guidance. The three of them knelt down. As Engela began to pray, a sudden loud tramping of feet outside shattered the peace.

„Bulala!' Shuddering with horror, Vinkie dived under the bed. A thunderous knocking on the door shook the walls.

Braced against the bed, wide-eyed with fear, Gansie stared at the dominee. Feeling the pressure on her, Engela stood up hesitantly, went to the door, turned the handle and stumbled back as it was pushed wide open from outside. „Korrektief,' the officers barked. Looking through the door, Gansie could see nebulous black shoes towering behind them. Engela tried to explain the situation but the officers, sensing her ambivalence, shook their heads. They were very sorry but they had received orders from the parole officer. Vinkie had to be taken in. They marched in, hauled her out from under the bed and dragged her to the door. Screaming, she reached wildly for Gansie, who ran forward to pull her away from the men. Grabbing hold of Gansie, Vinkie clung to her. The officers ordered Gansie to move aside. When she turned appealing blue eyes on them, they informed her that they would take her in as well. Vinkie had to go back to prison to finish her sentence; she had violated her parole.

Gansie remonstrated loudly. „But she hasn't run away. She is still here. She hasn't violated her parole.'

„She is not at the address for monitoring. We have to take her in.'

Gansie was furious. „That's ridiculous. She lost her job. She couldn't pay the deposit on the new accommodation. It's not her fault. She would have been at the new address and she has informed them at DCS about the situation. You can't take her in for this. It's not right. She is trying her best but nobody helps a parolee, not the people outside and not you from DCS.'

„I'm sorry but we have a job to do. Please get out of the way.' One of the officers pushed Gansie aside while the other two took hold of a screaming Vinkie who resisted so vigorously that the men became quite rough. Eventually they dragged her out and pushed her into their car. Running up to the car window, Gansie saw Vinkie, hunched over, beginning to wither. As they drove off, misty outlines of enormous shoes evaporated over the horizon accompanied by a clap of laughing thunder. Tears pouring down her cheeks, Gansie insisted that Dominee Engela follow Vinkie and speak to the Head of the Female Prison to explain Vinkie's circumstances. They would listen to her there because Dominee was a VIP Visitor at the prison.. Engela, who didn't think that this would help, reluctantly agreed. It was the only way she could get Gansie to calm down.

When they got to the prison, the Head of the Female Section, Colonel Suikerbek, smiling sweetly, explained that this was a matter beyond his jurisdiction. He dealt with the prison, inmates, admissions and release of prisoners. He was inside and did not interfere with matters outside; there were parole officers for that.

„It seems you people only know how to punish. Why do you call yourselves correctional services if you can't even look into a situation and see that it doesn't warrant punishment? You are bullies, abusers. You make it impossible for people to start again ...' Gansie didn't finish. The sound of tramping feet somewhere in the vicinity throttled the words in her throat.

Putting her arms around her to lead her out, Engela looked apologetically at Suikerbek, „Please forgive her; she is really distraught. She doesn't know what she is saying.' Suikerbek continued to smile benignly. As Gansie was no longer under his supervision, her tears and anguish were outside of his jurisdiction.

Engela then took Gansie to the mall for a cup of coffee. By the time she stopped sobbing and calmed down, it was well past her curfew. When she looked at her watch, she jumped up in alarm.

„Take me home! Take me home!’ She charged out of the restaurant into the parking lot. When Engela, who had been settling the bill, arrived at the car, Gansie yelled at her. „Hurry up! Hurry up! Where have you been? My God, don’t you see what these people are like? They could arrest me too and take me back just because I wasn’t at home when they came.’ She jumped into the car as soon as Engela opened up. „Let’s go! Let’s go! What are you waiting for?’

When they arrived home, the house was in darkness. „Mynah’s not here. Oh God, now I won’t know whether they came for me or not.’ She burst into tears. „They are going to take me away like Vinkie.’

„No, they won’t.’

„You saw what they did to Vinkie. That Bulala woman is just waiting for the smallest mistake; she wants us to fail; she wants to send us back. She has no heart.’ When Engela, who was struggling to calm her down, tried to get Gansie to pray with her, Gansie went into a frenzy. „No! No! No! You saw what happened when we knelt down at Vinkie’s place. No!’ Eventually when there were no more tears, she went in to lie down and Engela drove off. In bed, tossing and turning on her sea of apprehensions – big shoes, hideous laughter, dirty prison cells – she eventually sank to the very bottom of her murky misgivings and lay there, a derelict vessel.

All that had happened yesterday.

This morning, up early she had left for work as usual but had spent all her time in tense anticipation of the worst. About an hour ago, she had squeezed into the cupboard and tried to disappear. Stuffed in with the stationery, she became dreadfully uncomfortable so she got out and went back to her desk. Nobody had noticed her absence. *I don’t know why I hid in the cupboard. They won’t come here. They’ll come this evening when I am supposed to be at home.*

And so they do. Not to arrest her, just to monitor as usual. Very casually she asks about the day before and is told that they had not come by. As she walks back from the gate, she smiles with relief, *Thank God. I will never let that happen again.*

A month later, Gansie goes in to DCS Head Office to report, hoping she will be upgraded from maximum to medium parole. With medium parole, she will not be monitored everyday of the week and her curfew will be later. She has spent hours pondering how to broach the subject of upgrading. She knows it is her right especially as she has such a good parole record, but every time she thinks about it, all she sees are those vicious teeth and large tonsils.

As soon as she crosses the threshold of Bulala's office, Gansie, as usual, becomes miniscule but this time she is suddenly scooped up in a butterfly net and sent tumbling down inside it. Swinging the net about, Bulala bursts into loud raucous laughter that makes Gansie clutch her ears in pain. The sound vibrates like a thousand cockroaches in her ears and she thinks she will go mad. Holding the net up high, Bulala contemplates the little insect squirming inside. „So you think you're very charming, eh? Got all my boys slobbering after you? Don't think I haven't noticed how lax they are about monitoring you. Why? What you giving them on the side?' She laughs again. Gansie, wriggling hard, feels her arm go through the net and screams in fear. „All that will come to an end now. I'm putting a new team on you. You have the others eating out of your hand so they are of no use to me. The new lot know that their promotions depend on me.' She laughs again. „I got your friend, Vinkie; now I am waiting for you. I always get my woman. You think you won't make a mistake but you will. Then I will snap you up like this,' she reaches into the net, „and throw you back in like this.' She flings Gansie to the door.

Engela, who is waiting outside, helps her as usual. „Did she upgrade your parole?' Gansie gives her a despairing look.

And so it goes on. Gansie now sees that she will have to wait till she has completed a year on parole before Bulala will allow an upgrade. Gansie must continue to suffer the strict monitoring that makes it impossible to pursue interesting job opportunities and severely restricts any kind of social life. She is confined to occasional cups of coffee with friends who take pity on her. And she can't leave the magisterial district to visit family or friends outside it. Bulala has only one perspective on life – her own. Her big black brogues are so large that she can't possibly put herself in other people's shoes.

Then Gansie begins to hear them, the shoes, tramping behind her as she walks home from work. She turns often to look back but sees nothing; still the feeling gets worse. One day as she is trudging up the steep incline of the street leading home, she suddenly notices that the shadow of her head is dropping lower and lower along the wall as she makes her way forward. When she looks down, she finds that the pavement blocks have stretched out into huge concrete floors. When she looks up, she is amid a forest of legs, youngsters straddling along overhead. She has to get out of the way; these are blind legs; she is in danger of being crushed underfoot. She makes for the boundary wall of the housing complex that runs along the pavement, but it is such a long way away that when she finally reaches it, all she can do is slump against it exhausted and out of breath. As she stands there gasping, she hears words exploding above. At first she can't make them out but when the sounds become intelligible, she hears Bulala's voice: „You won't get away from me. I'll be back for you.' As the words fly off receding into the distance, Gansie returns to her normal size and height.

This goes on all week. Gansie is going out of her mind.

The following week, after Gansie starts a new job at a shoe shop in a shopping centre, the monitoring intensifies. This is a permanent job, a chance to re-establish herself in society. But she is afraid of her boss, a very demanding, rude man, who barks at her when she makes a mistake. Though she applies herself diligently to her work, he is always on the prowl looking for faults. It makes no difference to him that she is new and still learning. He expects perfection from the word go and each time he comes near her, she feels herself diminishing. To make the situation worse, the long working hours make it impossible to be monitored at home and being monitored at work is a dodgy business; she can't let her boss find out that she has a record.

She can hear Bulala gloating. She has already admonished Gansie for taking a job that requires her to be out after curfew hours and interferes with monitoring and parole regulations. *Why did I take a job in a shoe shop? Bulala must have organised it somehow? Shoes will be my undoing.* Gansie anticipates some dreadful retributive act such as Vinkie has suffered.

And it happens the next day! A Correctional Services' vehicle draws up outside the shop. When she sees it she freezes. If she goes out to sign the log, she will be seen; everyone will know that she is on parole. What is she to do? The DCS

officers are waiting. She goes out, walks past the car, signalling surreptitiously to the officers to move off to a discreet distance. After she signs the log, she runs back, her heart throbbing. She gets a shock when a half-hour later, her cellphone rings again to say that they are back for a second logging in. She waits for the boss to go into his office behind the storeroom, runs out, pulse racing, signs and runs back to her post. She is shivering with anger and fear; Bulala is trying to get her fired. Unemployed parolees are easy prey. Without money, without accommodation they are worse off than homeless people who don't have DCS breathing down their necks.

Bulala keeps up the pressure on her for the rest of the week. Monitoring is now happening two or three times a day. Gansie, extremely tense and nervous, can't work properly and has the boss on her back the whole time. She is beginning to look and feel ill but she perseveres, determined to hold on to this job no matter what. Her independence, however tenuous, hinges on it. On the fifth day, her phone, which begins ringing in the morning, continues ringing throughout the day and she is running in and out of the shop. Bulala's vindictive smile is constantly before her eyes. Returning to the shop after the fifth time, she dashes smack into her boss who has followed her out. Her constant forays into the parking lot have not gone unnoticed and she loses her job.

The next day, she takes the bus to town and goes to find Bulala at Head Office. As she speeds up the stairs, she is so angry that she forgets to be afraid of the monster. When she sees her office door open, she doesn't wait. She steps over the threshold without losing any height and confronts Bulala. The parole officer, seeing Gansie, growls and reaches out to catch her but her hand is not big enough now. She glares and bellows at Gansie who doesn't flinch. Standing firm, Gansie, who has never done so before, looks her straight in the eye. Bulala roars again but Gansie does not shrink. Since Gansie will not revert to the correct proportions, Bulala resorts to another way to restore the established ratio. She begins to huff, puff and blow herself up into the ogress that she is and always will be to parolees. She grows and grows until she almost touches the ceiling. When she has reduced Gansie to tiny insignificance, she reaches forward to catch her by the throat. But she snags her finger on Gansie's sharp earring, and is instantly spluttering about the room like a swiftly deflating balloon. Her normal size re-established, she falls into her chair – a spent force.

When Gansie leaves the office that day, she has obtained a hearing with the Parole Board at which she will be able to present her case for upgrading. If successful, she will win the right to fewer monitoring visits and a later curfew over weekends.

She is out of a job now and desperate but her desperation drives her, as it always does. Now that she knows that she can deal with Bulala, she will survive. Her tears dry up.

Fairy Godmother

Idly tearing bits off the gingerbread windowsill and stuffing them into her mouth, Gansie suddenly catches her reflection in the window. *My God, I look like a giant potato. The bloody witch is fattening me up like Hansel and Gretel. O Here God, red my van hierdie ou heks.* When she goes into the kitchen for a bit of the Madeira cake counter, Mynah, stingy old pensioner, is at the oven as usual, baking cakes and cookies for more household repairs. A clockwork old bird; out she comes to do her baking, in she goes to do her crossword puzzles, out she comes to eat her dinner, in she goes to read her book. A mechanical excuse for a human being. Cold as an iceberg. *I'm living in a freezer. This is worse than prison. At least there I had friends. I am still young and attractive. I need a life.* Suddenly, her mobile rings. When she shouts out in glee, „Flamingo!’ she sees, out of the corner of her eye, Mynah scuttling out of the kitchen.

„Flamingo, where are you? I miss you so much.’... „Where?’ ... „But why are you still in there? I have been out for six months and I need you!’ Gansie goes into the lounge, collapses in her usual spot opposite the TV and bursts into tears. „Oh, Flamingo, it’s so wonderful to hear your voice.’ Gansie’s tears travelling down the line, pour out onto Flamingo’s shoulder as she complains and complains and complains about being scared, lonely and living with a witch. While she is sobbing out the long narrative of her suffering, she hears Mynah venturing down the passage, so she raises her voice to send the old bird back to her room and clings to Flamingo, her warm, loving friend.

And Flamingo is so sympathetic. „My darling girl, I want to come to you right now but unfortunately my right wing is sopping wet. I won’t be able to take off for a couple of hours. But listen, sweetheart, you know you can depend on me. I am going to get you out of your terrible situation. Please come and see me so we can discuss it.’

„Where? Where will you be?’ Gansie can hardly restrain herself.

„I’ll wait for you right here.’

Gansie’s face falls. „But why there? I hate that place. I don’t ever want to go back to it.’

„Listen, my dear, I have to be here. There are others who need my help as much as you. You understand, don’t you? Oh, and by the way, when you come, bring me some pyjamas, a dressing gown, slippers and a tracksuit, will you? You know my favourite colours – pink and white. I didn’t expect to stay but so many of the girls need my help. You don’t mind, do you?’

„Of course not! I love you so much. You have made my day.’ Gansie rushes up the passage and finds Mynah reading in bed. „That was Flamingo, my Fairy Godmother.’

Mynah’s eyes, yellow saucers, suddenly assume an intricate pattern of black question marks. Then she laughs. „Oh, who is this very good friend?’

„No, not friend! Fairy Godmother! Don’t you know about fairy godmothers? Haven’t you read Cinderella?’ The old bird’s glazed look infuriates Gansie.

„A fairy godmother? Hmm. That’s very nice. She phoned you?’ Mynah is humouring her.

She answers curtly. „Yes. She wants me to come and see her.’

Mynah, an amused glint in her eye, „Oh, and where does she live?’

‘She’s in prison.’

„A fairy godmother in prison?’ Mynah’s beak forms a rictus that makes Gansie want to puke. „What’s she in for?’

Gansie’s lips curve contemptuously. „They don’t know she’s a fairy godmother. In fact nobody knows. Only I do. I only told you so you’d realise that I have a protector. When she arrived in prison, she invited me to her cell and told me confidentially that she was my Fairy Godmother. She knew the others would scoff. What do they know about the spirit world? See, here’s a picture of her. Isn’t she beautiful?’ Mynah sees a slim, attractive woman with auburn hair and large green eyes smiling out of an oval face. In the photograph, Flamingo, stretched out on a lawn, is leaning back against a tall, athletic looking young man.

Seeing Gansie staring wistfully at him, Mynah is puzzled. „Is this her husband?’

„Husband! She’s a fairy godmother. They don’t have husbands. No, he’s just a good friend – Marius. He’s very handsome, isn’t he?’ She dabs her eyes discreetly. „He reminds me so much of Riaan. Flamingo gave me this photograph when I told her that.’

„Riaan?’

„My husband. Marius looks just like him. Flamingo has been telling him about me. Now he wants to meet me.’

„Ah, Prince Charming.’

Gansie shrugs. „Yes, I think she’s match making. She says she’ll make sure I have a social life.’ *Not like here with nothing to do but eat and watch TV.* „She has such a wonderful sense of humour. Always telling jokes. The girls love it when she’s there. I used to sit in her cell for hours and she kept me in stitches the whole time. I don’t know how I would have survived without her. She gave me the courage to go on. I am so glad I have a fairy godmother. Not everyone has, you know.’

„If she’s your fairy godmother, why is she still in prison? Why isn’t she with you?’

„I told you. They don’t know who she really is? The justice system is so unfair, locking away good people, leaving the bad ones outside. *Like you, you old witch.* You know how fairy godmothers just wave their wands to make wonderful things happen? Well, they couldn’t believe the good work she was doing and they pulled her in for fraud. Can you believe it? Thank God, she will be coming out next week.’

Gansie phones her brother to make arrangements to visit Flamingo. Waiting for him to answer, she unconsciously breaks off a corner of the chocolate cake phone table and begins munching.

When she comes home from work the next day, Gansie sneaks her shopping into her room. The old witch, forever preaching about saving money, mustn’t see. *She can live like a miser. I won’t. Besides Flamingo is going to do so much for me I have to make sure she knows how much I love her.* Pulling out the photograph of Flamingo with Marius, she puts it next to a photograph of Riaan in her album. *Oh Riaan, have you come back to me?*

On Sunday, while Gansie is waiting for her brother to fetch her, she shows Mynah the things she has bought for Flamingo: pretty slippers, a white gown, pink pyjamas and a beautiful red and white tracksuit.

„How much did all that set you back?’

That’s all the old witch can think of. How much? How much? Anyway let her see that when people treat me right, I will treat them right. At that moment, Gansie’s cell phone rings. „That’s my brother at the gate. I must go.’ Picking up all her parcels, she breezes out of the kitchen.

Pierre, Gansie’s brother, has on a face so she knows he won’t be very communicative but she is cheerful enough for the two of them. She tells him one of Flamingo’s jokes. „You know Flamingo is such a funny woman. She’s always telling jokes. Here’s one you’ll love. There was this little boy, Bosie, who went for a holiday to the seaside with his parents. One day, while he was walking on the beach, he saw a man lying on the sand, completely naked, with a hat covering his private parts. Bosie stood there a few moments wondering before he asked, „Oom, what’s under the hat?’ „There’s a bird under the hat.’ „What’s he doing there?’ „He’s sitting on the nest. He has two eggs there.’ Then the man fell asleep. When he woke up, he found himself in hospital. And there was little Bosie next to him. „What happened?’ the man asked. „Oom, I pulled off the hat, twisted the bird’s neck, kicked the eggs to pieces and burnt the nest.’

Pierre frowns. „What kind of fairy godmother tells jokes like that? And why are you taking her all this stuff? Why doesn’t she just wave her wand to get them?’

„You know fairy godmothers can’t do that. They’re not allowed to get things for themselves.’

„Why? Will they kick her out of the Union?’ Gansie laughs but Pierre is irritable. „So who’s the fairy godmother here? You or her?’

Gansie laughs again, „I suppose I am today.’

After Pierre drops Gansie off at the entrance to the prison complex, she finds her way to the Female Prison where she is told to wait; Flamingo already has a visitor but she will cut the visit short so she can see Gansie. When Flamingo’s visitor comes out, Gansie almost faints. She is looking straight into Riaan’s eyes. She stands transfixed, as he comes forward smiling. „You must be Gansie.’ He catches her in

his strong arms, swings her round and sets her down in front of the steel door. „I am Marius. Flamingo has told me about you.’ Then he picks up the shoe that has fallen off her foot and slips it back on. „They’ve called you. You’d better go in.’ He turns, disappears into the minibus waiting to take visitors back to the entrance gate and leaves Gansie, heart galloping, cheeks flushed, staring after the van. Those strong arms, that manly scent; she feels faint but the warder’s shout restores reality. „Are you coming in?’ Gansie turns quickly and passes through the steel door.

„So, you met Marius?’ Startled to hear Flamingo right behind her in the little enclosure where she has to leave her things, Gansie drops her parcels. But Flamingo pulls her into her arms to hug and kiss her. As they pick up the parcels, Flamingo smiles, „He’s perfect, isn’t he? Your Prince Charming! I know. I’m supposed to know these things.’

Gansie blurts out, „My shoe fell off.’

„He put it back on your foot? If that isn’t a sign, I don’t know what is.’ As she leads Gansie into the visitor’s lounge, Flamingo laughs. Sitting down together, they cry about the terrible things that have happened to Gansie and her need for a loving, nurturing home. „Listen, my dear girl, now that you have met Marius, everything will fall into place.’ Gansie smiles uncertainly but Flamingo presses her hand reassuringly. „You deserve to be happy, my dear. After all you’ve been through, you are owed a whole lot of happiness. And I am giving you Marius.’

„How can you do that? He doesn’t know me.’

„O yes he does.’ She pulls out a picture of Gansie. „When I showed him this, I swear he fell in love at first sight. But first things first. I will be out of here next week. As soon as I leave, I am going to make all the arrangements for you to come and live with me. You are a warm, caring human being; it will be wonderful to have you with me. Besides, as your Fairy Godmother, it’s my duty to rescue you from that old witch. Do you know she is the same one who lured Hansel and Gretel to her house?’

„But she’s a mynah bird?’

„Well we live in a democracy now. Affirmative action.’

At the end of the visit, Gansie takes the little bus back to the entrance, finds her brother in the parking lot and tells him that she is going to move in with Flamingo when she is released. Pierre isn’t impressed.

„I hope you know what you’re doing. How do you know you can trust this woman?’

‘She’s my Fairy Godmother.’

„So what’s she doing in prison?’

‘She’s like Florence Nightingale. She brings comfort and good cheer to all the inmates.’

„Why doesn’t she just use her magic wand to set them free?’

„Oh I don’t know why you’re so grumpy.’ She sinks back in her seat. She can’t tell him about Marius who is even more like Riaan than she had thought. Her brother, her whole family, had hated Riaan. But Riaan is coming back into her life. She smiles contentedly.

That evening when Gansie sees Ridge in *The Bold and the Beautiful*, she gasps; that’s Marius. She feels those arms around her again and smells that scent. She almost faints. *I can’t believe it. Flamingo says he is mine. I passed the shoe test.* When she closes her eyes, Marius creeps in under her eyelids. *Oh God, he is far more handsome than Ridge. I have seen him, felt his arms around me. And he wants me. Oh, I can’t believe it.* Flamingo has really worked a magic spell and all for me!

Just then Mynah comes into the lounge to draw the curtains and lock the doors. *Let me tell her now. Let her know she’s fattening me up for nothing.* „I’m going to live with Flamingo, my Fairy Godmother, when she gets out.’

Mynah’s rictus sends a cold shiver up Gansie’s spine. „That’s excellent. When will that be?’

That’s a false smile if ever I saw one. Poor Hansel and Gretel didn’t have a fairy godmother. Luckily I do. „Flamingo is coming out next week. We’ll arrange it then.’

After Mynah trudges off to her room with that horrible smirk still on her face, Gansie begins to dream about Marius. So tall, so strong, that broad smile, those mischievous eyes! Looking back at the TV, she finds no one there to compare to Marius. Then her eye catches a subtle movement on the floor in front of the TV just where Mynah had been standing before she went off to bed; she looks closely, sees a dark patch and gets the fright of her life – a snake! She jumps up onto the sofa and is about to call for Mynah but stops. *That old witch! That snake is right where she was standing. She sent that snake here! She’s trying to kill me.* She jumps off the sofa,

gets a broom, then bracing herself, pushes at the snake, which turns and rears its little Mozambican hood at her. Fortunately, it is just a baby, about ten centimetres long, but she has to get it out. With a determined effort, she sweeps it out of the lounge and onto the patio. *My God, that awful witch; she doesn't want me to get away. No wonder she was grinning like that.*

She puts in an urgent call to Flamingo. It is after hours but Flamingo's magic makes it possible for her to receive calls without the authorities finding out. „You won't believe it. I was watching TV and suddenly there was a snake coiled up in front of it. Imagine! A snake! In this part of the world! It's the old witch. It was right where she was standing a minute before. She doesn't want me to escape from here. I know it. I know it.'

It takes a sleepy Flamingo some time to calm Gansie. Then she tells her to come back so that she can give Gansie a feather from her wing that will protect her against all evil.

In the next week, the phone calls to Flamingo are fast and furious. Gansie learns that she has left the prison, is now staying with Marius and helping him to get a farm.

Flamingo laughs, „He's always wanted to be a farmer. Now that he has met the right woman, he can't wait to have his own *plaas* with his own diva to sing him to sleep every night.'

„And who is that?'

„Oh, don't pretend. You know exactly who that is. After he met you, he can't get you out of his mind. I think he is going crazy. He's making big plans. He wants to know whether you want a big double storey house or a rambling ranch style home.'

„We had a double storey before, when we lived in town; but on a farm, a ranch house would be wonderful. I wish I could be there so I could help to plan and build it.'

„We have to get you away from the witch first. That's going to take some time.'

Gansie moans, „Oh not too long, please not too long.'

Flamingo laughs, „It will all be done within a week. Don't worry, we're working on it.'

„The old witch has bought a large roasting pan. I mean it's really large, big enough for an ox. I hear her cackling away in the kitchen everyday. She keeps looking at me. The other day she said, You're putting on a lot of weight, aren't you? You're beginning to look like a real boervrou. For a moment I thought she was going to jab me, like you jab a chicken to see if the flesh is firm? I don't want to end up on her table.'

„You won't. Correctional Services know you're there. As long as they keep coming, there's nothing she can do.'

„But I want to get out of here. How do I get out?

„Don't worry; I've got it all organised. Listen, I want to get you a car for a wedding present.'

„Oh, my God, that's unbelievable. That's exactly what I need. You are such a wonderful person. I am so lucky to have a fairy godmother.'

„Yes. You are among the chosen few. Now listen, liefie, I am putting the car in your name. That means you have to sign the registration papers and pay the insurance premium. It's just a matter of eight hundred; you can manage that can't you?'

Gansie is taken aback; that's quite a slice out of her meagre salary especially after she has spent almost as much on clothes for Flamingo. But she agrees. After all Flamingo is doing so much for her; she should be glad to make a contribution, even if it is hard. It makes her part of the team.

„Just deposit the money in Marius' account. Do it tomorrow, okay?'

Gansie agrees. Oh to be mobile and independent again. As she switches off her phone, the old witch comes into the lounge. As Mynah's eyes take in her potato posture, Gansie feels her flesh crawl. „So when's the big day?'

„It's not exactly settled yet. Flamingo has such a lot to do to get it all organised. Permission to move and all that.'

„That shouldn't be difficult if you really are getting married? It's quite amazing – this love at first sight business; like a fairy tale.'

„Well, perhaps now you will believe that Flamingo is a fairy godmother.'

Mynah shrugs. „I'd better get on with my baking.' The old witch hobbles off into the kitchen to switch on the oven. Gansie, who has followed to see what she is doing, stands there nibbling away nervously at the Madeira counter. When Mynah puts out the flour, butter and eggs, she relaxes. It isn't the roasting pan.

But the next day, the roasting pan is on the counter. Gansie runs to her room to call Flamingo. „Have you made the arrangements for my transfer?’

„Not to worry. Everything is going according to plan.’

„But how much longer do I have stay here? I am in terrible danger. Mynah is getting ready to attack. I have to get out right away. I’m scared to death.’ Pulling off a large piece of the pastry nightstand, she chews so fast that she begins to choke.

„What’s the matter?’ Flamingo’s voice, exploding with panic, almost shatters her eardrum. „What’s happening? If it’s the old witch, use the feather. Use the feather! She won’t be able to harm you if you have that.’

„No, no, I just choked on a piece of pastry. Oh please, Flamingo, get me out of here now, today. I can’t stay here. I’m terribly afraid.’

„That will be hard. You know how it is once DCS gets control of your life. But there is a way. You could ... Oh no! I can’t ask you to do that.’

„What? What? Tell me! Whatever it is, I’ll do it. I’ll do it.’

„Well, it means money. I know how to get you out of there but it will cost. Your parole officer is mean to you because you haven’t slipped her anything ... you know, under the table. Now if you have a thousand, we could give that to her and the whole problem will be solved.’

Gansie wailed, „A thousand! I don’t have any more money. After the eight hundred for the car and the seven fifty for the clothes...’

„Yes. Yes. I understand. Can’t you borrow it from someone? Pierre?’

„I don’t know...’

„It’s the only way. If you can deposit a thousand in Marius’ account by this afternoon, we can get you out tomorrow.’

„I’ll try.’ Gansie is uncertain but when she hears the old witch shuffling about outside her door, she knows she must do something. *I can’t stay here any longer. She’s getting ready to slaughter me. I know it. I know it.* She calls Pierre who barks at her, „I won’t give you any money. Tell your fairy godmother to wave her wand and make magic.’

When Gansie reports to her, Flamingo sounds peeved, „Oh well, I’ll see what I can do. But that means, I can’t get you out of there right away.’

„How much longer will it be? I can’t stand it here.’

„I'll do my best. But you know how it is once you're in the hands of DCS; it will take a phenomenal effort to get out. Don't worry though; everything will be organised by next Monday.

„At the latest?’

„At the latest.’

„You promise?’

„I promise.’

During the week, Gansie, who calls her fairy godmother many times, hears about all kinds of obstacles that Flamingo is working on. She is getting the farm for Marius; making arrangements to have Gansie's car delivered; trying to raise money to pay off Bulala, Gansie's parole officer. Even though she is so busy, she has found time to order Gansie's wedding dress.

„My wedding dress! I can't believe it. What is it like?’

„It's not white. I thought you would prefer a soft lime green with a three quarter length skirt and lace sleeves.’

„That sounds wonderful. White would be inappropriate. I was married before and have children. But will it fit? I have put on a bit of weight.’

„I am your Fairy Godmother. I know everything. You can trust me.’

But Gansie is very nervous. Will Bulala make the transfer promptly? Will she be able to get away from Mynah in time? Flamingo goes on reassuring her. „I have a friend, an official high up in DCS, who will go with us to see Bulala. You will be out of there on Monday, I promise.’

On Sunday, when Gansie calls Flamingo, she is delighted to hear that everything is on schedule. Tomorrow Flamingo and Marius will fetch her; they will see Bulala, then head for the church in Marius' hometown. „The wedding, I hope you don't mind, will be a small affair; just Marius' parents, his sister and a few friends.’

„It sounds wonderful.’

„After the wedding you will ride away in your new car for a week in the Kruger National Park. How does that strike you for your honeymoon?’

„I can't believe it. It sounds too good to be true.’

„Being a fairy godmother, I have heard that so often.’

This is a dream. But Gansie is very nervous. She doesn't trust Bulala, fears Mynah and worries that things will go wrong. She is afraid to be happy but the old bat looks ecstatic. Why? She's put away the roaster and is hopping about with that horrible gaping beak, singing, mounting a monstrous assault on Gansie's sensitive ears. What's up with the old witch?

That night Gansie dreams of Riaan, no Marius, and dares to be happy. She is dancing with Ridge in a posh *Bold and Beautiful* nightclub when Marius walks in. She is mesmerised. Seeing her rapture, Ridge is enraged. He draws his rapier and challenges Marius to a duel. Marius, looking deep in her eyes, pulls out his pistol and shoots Ridge dead. He then sweeps Gansie into his arms and they ride off on a white stallion into a glorious sunset.

She wakes up and can't go back to sleep. She goes into the lounge and switches on the TV in search of tall, dashing Lotharios. The old witch hasn't installed MNET or DSTV so all she has is SABC and E-TV. Eventually she lights on Jean Claude van Damme and swoons with pleasure. While she is sitting there, daydreaming, Mynah suddenly zooms past her on her broom. Trembling, she pulls out the feather Flamingo has given her, holds it out before her to ward off evil but Mynah has whizzed through the patio doors, over the trees, and into the stars. What is the witch doing up at this time of night? Why can't *she* sleep? She's not getting married in the morning. Gansie runs out onto the patio, sees Mynah climbing vertically and after reaching sufficient height going into a nosedive, then rolling over to loop the loop and finally whirl around like a Catherine wheel, sparks flying in all directions. Through it all, her cachinnations are loud and triumphant. Gansie cannot understand it; Mynah looks jubilant. *Oh God, she's planning something really terrible. I won't be able to get away. I know it. I know it.* Gansie turns, flies into her room and locks the door.

She puts in an urgent call to Flamingo. „The witch has gone bananas. She's riding the night sky like a fighter jet, doing somersaults and what not. She's planning something awful. I know it! I know it! I'm terrified. What if she kills me tonight?’

„Don't worry, you've got the feather; nothing will happen to you.’

„But I want to get out of this place now, right now. Can't we find Bulala and arrange the transfer now?’

„In the middle of the night? Be patient. Lock yourself in your room. Witches like to work at night so you'll be safe if you don't come out until morning.’

„I am so afraid. Things are going too well. Maybe it's not meant to be.’

„Don't be superstitious. Everything will be fine. You'll see.’

„What time will you and Riaan come for me?’

„Marius, my dear, Marius. We'll be there early – by ten o' clock. Now stop worrying. I can hear you stressing. You can't be ill on your wedding day. Just remember, I am taking care of you.’

„Thank you, Fairy Godmother.’

„Flamingo, my dear, Flamingo. Bye, bye. Sleep tight. Don't let the bed bugs bite.’

Gansie keeps her feather in front of her all night but it's no help against nightmares. Suddenly, she is a turkey trussed up on a roasting pan, surrounded by potatoes, carrots, onions and peas. She yells, „Why onions? I hate onions.’ Mynah grinning, picks up a huge onion, takes a big bite out of it, stuffs the rest of it into Gansie's mouth and pushes the roaster into the oven but it won't go in. The old witch gives up struggling with it, fetches her kitchen chopper, raises it over Gansie's head, and as she is about to bring it down, Gansie wakes up screaming. Fortunately the deaf old bird doesn't hear a thing. There is no use staying in bed so Gansie gets up and starts packing all her belongings into plastic bags. At about seven, she hears the old witch stirring. A couple of hours later, she hears the car and knows that Mynah has gone out.

Emerging cautiously from her room, she makes absolutely sure she is alone before venturing into the kitchen for breakfast. When she goes for her mug, she is surprised to find all her crockery packed in a box, ready to go. After she has eaten, she fetches the other empty boxes that Mynah had brought for her on Saturday and begins packing her groceries. When that is done, she waits for Flamingo and Marius who should be there in the next ten minutes. But it's a decade before the clock shows ten. On tenterhooks, she goes into her room several times to check that she has taken everything, then turns on the TV to take her mind off the waiting. Thank goodness, Mynah isn't around; the old witch might try something. She sits there willing the phone to ring, willing Marius and Flamingo at the gate. But nothing. She jumps up, walks to the door, looks at the neighbour's house, going up at such a phenomenal rate, that they will soon be into the middle of June while she is still waiting for the last day of May.

Mynah returns just before eleven. Gansie jumps up against the marble-cake wall to defend herself. Mynah surprised to see Gansie still there, squawks, „Your friends are running late.’ Gansie picks up her phone, goes outside and calls Flamingo.

„What’s happening? It’s nearly eleven o’ clock.’

„Just be patient, my dear, I am waiting for Marius. He’s held up at work. I expect him back soon. Then we’ll come for you.’

„But it’s his wedding day! What’s he doing at work?’

„A sudden emergency. You know how it is.’

Gansie comes in and when Mynah looks up, mumbles, „There’s been a delay.’

„Well relax. I’m sure they’ll be here soon.’

Gansie bursts out furiously, „They haven’t left yet. We won’t be able to get the transfer done today. Bulala won’t be there after 3:30.’ Pulling off a huge chunk of the partition wall, she attacks the fruitcake like an enemy. One look at the gap, and Mynah, sighing, puts out the flour, cake mix, eggs and nuts that she has bought. Seeing her embarking on her baking repairs again, Gansie wants to scream but goes into the lounge instead and drops down in front of the TV.

At one o’ clock, Gansie calls Flamingo again; they still haven’t left.

At three o’ clock, she calls again. Flamingo is trying to book the church and the minister for an evening wedding. She doesn’t know whether she will manage it. She will call back.

Gansie can feel the tears at the back of her eyes. *This is supposed to be my wedding day. O Riaan is this really happening to us?*

Mynah’s horrible voice breaks into her thoughts. „She’s not coming. You had better forget the whole thing.’ Looking very weary and most disappointed, Mynah puts her broomstick in the corner and slumps off to her room.

She’s just cursing me, the jealous old witch. Gansie sits in front of the TV and waits for the phone to ring; and waits, and waits, and waits.

The next morning she’s off to work as usual.

When she comes back in the evening, she is quite relaxed and gives Mynah a confident smile. „Flamingo phoned me at work. Told me not to worry; there have been a few problems but she’s sorted them all out.’ Gansie is glad to be able to contradict Mynah. „So you see, everything is on track.’

„Did she ask you for more money?’

The old bird has a one-track mind. „No, she did not.’

„If she does, don’t give her any.’

Gansie tosses her head and switches on the TV. *Thank goodness I won’t have to put up with this kind of thing much longer.* „Riaan, I mean Marius, phoned me this afternoon. He was waiting outside the bank for Flamingo. She was organising our car. As soon as that’s done, they will come for me – tomorrow morning. Flamingo went into the bank long before it closed. Marius doesn’t know what’s taking her so long. But I know Flamingo. She loves talking, just goes on and on. So she’s in there and doesn’t even realise how late it’s getting.’ Then, knowing her troubles are over, Gansie turns to the trials of Ridge & Co in *The Bold and the Beautiful*. Before the episode ends, her phone rings. After a few moments, a long, loud scream reverberates through the house.

Dashing into the lounge, Mynah finds Gansie sobbing wildly. ‘She’s gone. Flamingo’s gone.’

„She died?’

„You fool! Don’t you understand? She’s gone! Disappeared!’ She can see that Mynah is still puzzled. „That was Marius. He took Flamingo to the bank. She said she was going to pay a thirty thousand rand deposit on the farm. She asked him to wait outside because the manager was giving her a special deal. So he waited outside the bank. Even after it closed. He waited for three hours. For three hours! Then when the bank staff was leaving, he went to find Flamingo only to learn that she had left the bank hours before. He tried to phone her but couldn’t get through to her. He called all over but couldn’t locate her. He didn’t want to believe it but he knew she was gone. Do you understand? Disappeared! Absconded!’

„My God! And you’re not going!’

„Marius phoned to find out if I knew where she was. She’s gone with all his money, thirty thousand, his salary and his bonus. He thinks I must be in cahoots with her because I was also in prison.’

„But the wedding?’

„What wedding? There was no wedding. Marius didn’t know anything about a wedding. She was buying him a farm.’

„But she’s your fairy godmother.’

„Fairy godmother! Fairy godmother! Where do get such nonsense? That woman was in for fraud. She’s a con artist. Grow up, Mynah. Fairy godmothers

belong in fairy tales.’ Gansie flopping against the phone table, her mouth full of chocolate cake, splutters, ‘I could kill her. I could kill her. The witch!’

Mynah droops. ‘I really hoped she was a fairy godmother. I desperately wanted her to be. Well, there go all my dreams.’ Hobbling off to the kitchen she sighs, ‘Oh me, I have to go on with the baking.’

All her dreams? What does she mean all her dreams? What did she lose? I lost my Riaan ... again.

Gansie of Shallott

First one ear, the left – she is sitting on his right. The pinna extends out, begins to move backward and forward as he keeps his eyes fixed on Gansie who, when she becomes aware of the wiggling, presses her lips together to stop herself from laughing and choking on her coffee. Eyes shining with merriment, she turns to Dominee Engela, her counsellor, and is shocked into silence. Engela, completely mesmerised, is staring fixedly at the wiggling ear and running her tongue over her lip. When the movement transfers to the other ear, she lets out a little gasp that makes Gansie turn – full into the right ear, pointedly flapping at her. She doesn't know what to make of it. As she watches, both ears take off together beating swiftly like bird wings. Gansie stifles her desire to giggle. *If they were bigger and longer, Hanekom would lift off into the wild blue yonder.* Turning to Engela again, she finds the counsellor in a kind of frenzy; eyes glazed and mouth wide-open. Gansie gapes at her in amazement, Engela gapes at Hanekom in ecstasy and he gapes lasciviously at Gansie. The trio sit there in a hell-is-other-people vicious cycle until the waiter arrives with menus to break the spell.

Engela shoots upright like an airplane seat and Hanekom's ears, red from their exertion, calm into stasis. When Gansie opens her menu, Hanekom pulls it out of her hands, places his in front of her and as he points to it, brushes his arm over her breast. Attractive, blue-eyed, honey blonde and a widow to boot, Gansie is fair game. Hanekom takes her hand, prizes her forefinger out of her fist and uses it to point at the items.

Leering at her, „You have to try the oysters. I highly recommend them – stimulating, like an aphrodisiac.’ She leans away from him, trying to remove her hand, but he holds on and begins extending her fingers one by one. *Is he going to suck them? Ugh?* „Such beautiful fingers. I find a woman's fingers very sexy.’ Gansie turns to Engela who, having extended her own fingers, is examining them carefully. As politely as she is able, Gansie extricates her hand, picks up her menu and begins studying it. The first item that catches her eye – oysters –nauseating.

„So you are a widow?’ Hanekom’s eyes are roving over her torso. Gansie has that vulnerable quality that turns men into predators. „It must be hell for you. I can help you out, you know.’

Gansie looks at Engela again but the dominee has her head in her menu so she is forced to respond to the man. Pasting on a smile, she begins in a soft, almost childlike voice, „Mr Hanekom ...’

„O Klasie, please! You must call me Klasie. That’s what I am – the Sinter Klaas of women. Engela tells me you’ve been inside for eight years. That’s a long time ... without a man.’ He leans forward confidentially. „You must have such intense needs.’ He leers again. „The kind I specialise in. I see why Engela wanted me to meet you.’

The waiter comes to take their orders. Hanekom smiles. „Oysters for me and the little lady here.’

Gansie cuts in quickly, „O not for me. I’ll have the salad platter.’

Hanekom turns to Engela. „She doesn’t know what she’s missing. You’ll have oysters, won’t you Dominee.’ Engela smiles and nods.

*What’s wrong with Engela? If this is her boyfriend, why did she invite me along? Why is she letting him behave like this? Gansie has come only to escape the utter boredom and loneliness of living with Mynah. Now that the old bird has commandeered the TV to watch cricket of all things, Gansie is missing her soap operas. She has gone without for a whole week now. Ridge, in the *Bold and the Beautiful* has died and she has no idea what is happening. He has to come back; she wants him back. But Mynah is watching cricket. Damn her. It’s worse than prison; living with a dull old bag, who hardly communicates. Today I get out of the house and what happens? I have to put up with this. I feel I’m in a tower on an island in the middle of a river and a witch has cast a spell on me.*

When the waiter brings their order, Hanekom pressing his shoulder against hers, leans over to dangle his fingers over her plate. He giggles, „Salad, I see. Keeps your instincts under control.’ Gansie can’t work up an appetite and stabs idly at the lettuce. Hanekom, enjoying his oysters and telling seedy jokes, stops eating and turns to her, „That stuff isn’t fit for human consumption. You need something sensuous. Here.’ He spoons an oyster off his plate onto hers.

Gansie splutters, „I’m not really hungry.’ Lifting two small potatoes from his plate, Hanekom puts them next to the oyster. Staring at these intimate offerings, Gansie sees them developing a life of their own. Slowly, assuming lewd shapes, they swell, filling her plate, pushing her salad over the sides.

„Gansie, what are you doing?’ Engela’s voice suddenly exploding in her ears, calls Gansie back to the mess she is making on the table. Turning helpless blue eyes on Engela, she puts down her fork and pushes her plate away. „I’m not hungry.’

Hanekom laughs. „Next time, take the oysters. Don’t worry I won’t let you starve. I have a treat in store for you. When we get to Wilgervlei, I’m taking you to a little place I know for some really delicious ice cream with thick, gooey, nutty, chocolate sauce.’

„Wilgervlei?’

„That’s where we’re going after lunch.’

Gansie turns to Engela. „You didn’t tell me we were going to Wilgervlei.’

„Oh, I’m not going. Klasie is taking you. He has some special places he wants you to see.’

„What!’ Gansie’s alarm is obvious. „No, I can’t.’

„Oh, nonsense. Just go with him. You’ll have fun.’

„I can’t.’ *How to get out of this?* She looks at her watch. *Oh thank God!* „I have a curfew.’ For once she is grateful for it. „I have to be in by three o’ clock over weekends. It’s already half-past two.’ Pulling her things together, she jumps up. „Please take me home, right now Engela. I’ll be in big trouble if I’m not there when Correctional Services come.’

„Nonsense. It can’t be as bad as all that.’

„Yes it is. You know it is. You saw what happened to Vinkie du Plooy.’ Gansie’s voice high, strained, „They could end my parole and send me back to prison.’

Engela sighs, „Sorry Klasie, but I have to take her back.’

As they walk to the parking lot, Gansie shivering with disgust exclaims, „What a horrible man! Why did you bring him? I thought this was my counselling session.’

Engela frowns, „What’s the matter with you? Klasie is just being kind.’

„Is he your boyfriend?’

„He’s been hanging around. I’m trying to get rid of him. I knew he’d go for you; you seem so lonely and desperate ...’

„Not that desperate! Why did you tell him I’m a parolee?’

Engela shrugs.

When Gansie tells Mynah about the incident, the old bird shakes her head. „That’s not very nice – your dominee dumping her reject on you.’

„I hate men. I will never get married again. First the men at the office, treating me like a slave, then phone calls from a stalker and now this. I hate men. I absolutely hate them. I don’t want them touching me. I need to talk to Engela about this.’

„You want *her* to counsel you?’ Mynah’s eyebrows almost disappear into her hairline.

„Well, she is my counsellor. I need to understand why I feel this way. The idea of them touching me, uggh! I have to talk to her.’

Mynah looks as though she is going to say something but just turns back to the cricket. „South Africa is in trouble. This is the last test. We must get this game to draw the series.’

Gansie is fuming. *I’ve got a problem and all she can think about is the stupid cricket. I wish I could get out of this dead place.* As she turns contemptuous eyes on the TV, she is struck dumb. She stares and stares. Gasps. She drops her bag, she leaves the gloom, she makes three paces through the room and looks right into the cricket. In front of the set, her hands shaking, her lips quivering; she can hardly speak. Mynah is craning her head round Gansie and cheering; Nel has just clean-bowled one of the English batsmen.

„Who is that?’ Gansie forces the words out as she watches members of the South African team hugging Nel and slapping him on the back.

„The bowler? That’s Lance Nel. He’s just bowled out the ...’

Transfixed, Gansie doesn’t hear. . *Lance Nel. Lance Nel. Lance Nel, knight in shining armour, on a TV screen; so near and yet so far. So tall, so athletic, so handsome and that smile, oh that smile ... he’s gorgeous.* As Nel throws his arms about Arthur, the captain, Gansie almost faints. Those strong arms, she feels them crushing her to his chest and relishes the smell and warmth of his body. *He’s my chance to leave the tower. But how to find him?*

Mynah's words come to her from beyond the boundary, „Well, that's the end of the day's play.'

„No! What do you mean? The cricket is over?' Mynah nods. „Oh no! I want to watch.' She is almost tearful.

„You'll have to wait until tomorrow. I didn't know you were interested in cricket.'

„What time tomorrow? Who will be playing?'

Mynah's look is quizzical. „South Africa and England.'

„No, no. That one, the one with the big smile. Will he be playing?'

„Nel? He'll be on the field.' Gansie looks confused. „Do you understand the game? If you're going to watch, I'll explain what's happening during play.'

I don't want to know about the game. I want to know about him.

The next morning it is raining hard. When Gansie goes into the lounge, she sees that the TV is off. Mynah is in the kitchen, baking. „What's happening? Why aren't you watching cricket?' Mynah jerks her head towards the window but the gesture is meaningless to Gansie who, pretending she understands, begins churning through the Sunday paper on the counter. She flops it over and gasps. There he is, striding across the back page, almost the full length of it. Her hero! Smiling! She presses the paper to her breast, dashes over to the TV, switches it on and waits. All she sees are the covers over the pitch. „What's wrong? Why aren't they playing?'

„Look at the rain. I doubt if there'll be any cricket today. The weatherman must be English. He's not giving us a chance to catch up.'

„You mean they're playing here, at Camelot Stadium?' Mynah nods. Gansie slumps onto the couch. *He's here. He's here. I must see him. I must see him.*

Just then her cellphone rings. She cannot believe it. *It's him! It has to be! Lance, Lance, my darling. I'm coming. I'm coming.* Running to her room to pick up her mobile, she is quite breathless as she answers. The lecherous voice in her ear smirks, „Panting for me, are you?'

Hanekom! Her eyes and voice die. „How did you get my number?' She cannot believe it: Engela!

„I'm coming your way today. Have lunch with me.'

„I can't. I'm working today.'

„Let me give you a lift to work. It's raining. You can't walk all that way.'

„I have a lift. My friend at work is fetching me. In fact, I can hear her hooting outside. I have to go.’

„They don’t know, do they? At work, I mean. That you’re an ex-con?’

Gansie freezes. It’s subtle but she can hear the menace in his voice. „I have to run. Goodbye.’ As she puts the phone down, her eye falls on the paper lying on the bed. Picking it up, she clutches it to her bosom. *Save me! O save me, my shining knight.* She has to find him. Forcing herself to walk calmly to the kitchen, she finds Mynah in front of the oven, switching on the timer for the tray of muffins she has just put in.

„What happens when it rains? What do the cricketers do?’

„When it’s just drizzling, they wait at the stadium and play whenever they get a chance. But when it’s raining like this, I don’t know. Perhaps they go back to the hotel.’

„Hotel? The Lake Inn?’

Mynah shrugs. „Could be.’

Gansie, back in her room, phones the hotel. *I have to talk to him.* But reception doesn’t know anything about the cricketers, doesn’t know where they are staying, somewhere in Johannesburg, they believe. They are lying. He’s here. He has to be. It’s meant to be. Why else did she connect like that the moment she saw him? He will free her from the curse. *Just one kiss and I wake up to a beautiful life again.* No monitoring, no hateful parole officer, no Mynah Bird.

Her cellphone again. This time it has to be him. *He knows instinctively that I am here, that I need him.* She freezes when she hears the lecherous laugh once more, „Admit it. You really want me. Stop playing hard to get.’

„I can’t talk now. We’re very busy. The boss is watching me.’ She hangs up, curls up on her bed, and falls asleep to dream of Lance.

The phone ringing in her ear wakes her. „You lied to me.’ No attempt at sensuality, the voice is plainly threatening. „I phoned the restaurant. They said it was your day off. They don’t know about you do they? Well, they will find out, if you keep playing your little games. I got your address from Engela; I will be there shortly. Don’t try anything funny or you will be sorry.’ He rings off. Lance is smiling at her from the foot of the bed. She picks up the paper and strokes his face. His eyes are looking right into hers. Behind the smile, she sees the concern, the care,

the love and she knows what he is saying to her, „Come to me, my dear one. Come to me. Come to me.’ She kisses him over and over and over.

Resolutely, she pulls her raincoat out of the closet, peers out of the door to determine where Mynah is – in her room trying to stand on her head again – and quietly slips out of the house. It is dark and raining hard. She pulls the hood close around her face and walks down the road, making her way to the Lake Hotel. She feels the runnels flowing from the brim of her hood and off the hem of her coat. Her face, wet, cold, dripping, she moves quickly along the pavement. As she makes her way down the hill towards the traffic lights, she sees, Oh no, no! Hanekom’s car at the intersection, waiting for the green light! Pulling the hood even closer, she turns into a side street, backs up against a hedge, watching, wondering if he has spotted her. When the lights change, he moves on. Thank God! He can’t have seen her. It’s too dark. Gasping with relief, laughing a little hysterically as she makes her way to the lake, she thinks of him making his way to the house, encountering Mynah. What a shock! He isn’t expecting an old brown bird. *Why didn’t I think of that? I should have invited him to the house; one glimpse of Mynah Bird and he would have run like a chicken with its head cut off.* A shuddering laugh fills her throat.

As she hurries down the street, she sees the lake up ahead, brown and choppy with rain and wind and along its eastern shore, the hotel, festooned with lights, warm and welcoming. *I’m here at last.* She runs to the end of the little jetty but there are no boats. She scans the edges of the lake. Down on the right, she sees a little rowboat pulled up along the shore. Running back over the wooden boards, down the bank to the boat, she drags it into the water, jumps in and pushes off towards the hotel, a beacon in the black night. Vaguely aware of a voice shouting from the little jetty, she pulls strongly; all she cares about are the lights ahead, beckoning to her. But the rain and wind are too much for her and the boat makes little headway against the current. As the hotel begins to recede in the distance, she screams and cries out in frustration. Then, of their own volition, her arms slide down to her sides as her body slips to the bottom of the boat. She lies there corpse-like in a coffin, drifting aimlessly over the surface.

The next morning, in the bright, clear light, a little boat can be seen banging against the wooden pier of the jetty near the Lake Inn. The cricket is back on track and as the cricketers emerge from the hotel entrance and make their way to the

waiting bus, they hear the commotion at the lake's edge and some of them run to see what is happening. Play won't begin on time; the rollers are still busy dredging up moisture from the field. When they come to the jetty, the crowd recognising the champions, move aside for them. Seeing the boat with the woman lying in it, the cricketers are strangely moved. Lance Nel, golden locks tumbling from beneath his cap, clambers down the bank followed by a couple of his teammates. As the fearful crowd watch in hushed silence, they pull the boat ashore.

„What happened here?’ Captain Arthur King's eyes fill with sympathy.

Gawani, the fast bowler, peers into the boat. „Poor woman, she looks forlorn.’

Lance, kneeling next to the boat, shakes his head sadly, „She has a lovely face.’

Soon after the cricketers return to the bus and head for Camelot Stadium, a car screeches up to the landing stage. Hanekom and Engela jump out, run to where Gansie lies on the sand, and drop down next to her. Engela begins to sob loudly. Hanekom, grabbing hold of the dominee, dumps her to one side, kneels over Gansie and administers the kiss of life. Suddenly she begins to choke and splutter. When she opens her eyes to see Hanekom's mouth hovering over hers, she falls into a dead swoon and doesn't recover.

In Never Land

Gansie, floating on a cloud, is trying to adjust her wings. Having just developed them, she has been trying to shrug them off all morning – day? night? – she can't tell. She seems to have fallen out of time. When she shakes the wings, she gets the fright of her life as she shoots up two or three feet. So she has stopped that and is trying to find a way to fold them up to get them out of her way. What a nuisance they are. Why does she have to have them? Why can't she simply raise her hands, get into the flying position and take off like Superman. He doesn't have wings; he just points. She can see the value of being able to fly up here though; no cars, buses, trains and planes. Okay that's good. No pollution. But the wing thing! Too cumbersome. No wonder so many angels are going on strike and throwing themselves back into the human condition. *I have a good mind to do so myself but what would I do down there without a job, a home – same as here.* Only here no one is hounding her. But it's boring. Just like in prison, nothing to do. So she settles herself in the downy cloud to nap yet again – the seven hundredth time? ... since, since, since ... whenever.

Diabolical shouting rudely awakens her. She sits up and rubs her eyes. A quarrel up here! They won't believe that down on earth. Well, things are looking up – a bit of excitement at last. The shouting grows louder. Suddenly a figure in red jumps onto her cloud and stands pointing at her. Gansie gasps in disbelief. Jean Claude van Damn in a dashing Versace outfit, tight fitting dark red leather pants flared at the ankle with a rhinestone studded black velvet cord spiralling down the left leg to provide a striking, contrasting accent. His scarlet leather jerkin open down to the waist reveals a powerful, muscular chest. The high collar of a pink shirt, hidden under the jerkin, spreads over his broad shoulders and silky pink sleeves flow down to cuffs at his wrists. A smart red Robin Hood hat highlighted by the sensuous black horns rising through the brim is perched at a provocative angle over his coal black curls. Gansie, aroused, confused, looks again. *O Hene, he actually does wear a red suit but so sexy; not like those red long johns that you see in comic strips.* When he

reaches down to grab her by the wrist, her body goes into seismic convulsions. Obviously used to this reaction, he simply yells into outer space, „I’m taking her with me; she belongs down there. Stop trying to nick the ones that are rightly mine.’ About to leap off with Gansie in tow, something – a sound? – stops him. Despite her extremely acute hearing, she doesn’t hear a thing.

He appears to be listening to someone above. Nobody she can see or hear, like someone on the other side of a telephone line. Then he yells, „I don’t care if we are overcrowded. If you didn’t have such tough rules, more people would be able to get into your place. Though I don’t know why anyone would want to; there’s nothing to do up here.’ As he listens again, he becomes redder and redder and begins yelling again. „What do you mean, mistake? You know perfectly well what she did. She belongs with me. I’m taking her. You have no right to stop me.’ He points his trident at Gansie who feel herself beginning to plunge but, as suddenly, is swooped up and set back on the cloud, the heat drained from her body. An angel is hovering next to her. Looks a lot like John Travolta.

Then begins a battle, a battle of good over evil – thunderbolts versus flames. Gansie sits down to watch: better than actuality TV. This is real and the fight is over her. Overtly she is rooting for the Travolta look-alike, she can see that is the right side to be on, but Jean Claude van Damn is churning her insides; secretly, she hopes he will win. The combat begins. As in one of those science fiction movies, the weapons of one side fly at the weapons of the other, and the whole competition is a matter of weapons against weapons. The outcome depends on who has the better weapons. She had hoped for a WWE Raw kind of whole body contact fight but technology is the real hero here. Gansie begins to yawn. Just as Van Damn and Travolta are about to unleash their most powerful weapons, a huge parchment unscrolling from above falls between them to stop the encounter. A decree granting a retrial! As a dispute has now been declared about Gansie’s status, her innocence has to be finally demonstrated.

JC (Van Damn) is livid. „There are no grounds for a retrial. Tell Peter to go back to fishing and leave the law alone.’ He mutters, „The guy’s suffering from Alzheimer’s.’ He looks up, pulling a face. „Okay. You heard that. Don’t expect me to apologise. I’m telling you, there isn’t a shred of evidence to exonerate her. She belongs down there with her husband. They have already paid for their accommodation. You are interfering with their rights.’ After listening for a moment,

he turns flabbergasted to the Travolta look-alike. „Is he threatening me with a deluge?’ The look-alike nods. JC goes berserk. Shaking his trident, he jumps from cloud to cloud, reducing each one to searing steam.

The look-alike reminds him, „We’re not on earth you know. No simple minded humans to impress up here.’

Smoke streams out of Van Damn’s mouth and nostrils until he has calmed down enough to issue his demands. „If I agree to this retrial, it will be on my terms. We can’t have it up here. We’ll never get a fair hearing with angels who don’t know the first thing about the law and all that seraphic music undermining my legal team.’ He listens again. „What do you mean – this is not about law, this is about justice? That’s an old TV cliché! We either have it at my place or you can sit here forever with a moral dilemma – did you do the right thing?’

So it is agreed. The appeal will be in the court of the nether regions. Gansie is excited. She will be with Van Damn and her flesh begins to magnetize. She wants him to win the appeal; she wants to stay down there with him forever. He has mentioned Riaan who was sent down there because of his suicide but she doesn’t know him anymore. It will be strange to see him after she has thought of him as dead for so long. What will she do with him? She wants to be near JC.

When they take their places in the courtroom, Gansie notices that her wings have disappeared. All the prosecution lawyers have little horns sticking up from their heads so does everyone in the courtroom and gallery, except of course for the defence team of angels. When someone calls out to her, she turns to see Flamingo smiling, waving and blowing kisses. She can’t believe her eyes. She becomes so angry, she shakes her wings to fly over and throttle the woman. But only after she has shaken her shoulders a couple of times, does she remember that the wings have gone. Then such evil thoughts fill her mind that JC (Van Damn), seated at the prosecution table, applauds. Stretching his neck right across the aisle to the defence table, he whispers in her ear, „That’s it girly; keep that up and this appeal will soon be over.’ Gansie almost swoons as his breath flows into her ear. Then he turns to summon Flamingo. An angelic smile playing over her lips, she strolls up to him in body hugging pink and white tights and jacket, with matching pink and white floral circlets at the base of each horn on her head. JC sends her over to Gansie who jumps up to choke the life out of the so-called Fairy Godmother. But when she puts her hands around her neck,

Flamingo becomes a wisp that flows right through them. Gansie flings herself into her chair in a rage, her mind filling with positively demonic invective and abuse. JC laughs, „Flamingo, *ma Cherie*, you are magnificent as always. With your help this is going to be a very short appeal. Sit right there behind her.’

Flamingo sits down and begins to stroke Gansie’s arm. Gansie pushes her off violently. „Don’t touch me. I hate you for what you did to me.’

„But I paid for that. What d’you think I’m doing here? Marius came after me with a shotgun. Didn’t you read about it; it was in all the papers. Poor man, now he’s inside. Anyway, you don’t need him anymore; darling Riaan is here.’

A guilty blush spreads over Gansie’s cheeks. „Where? Where is he? I don’t see him.’ Despite her obsession with JC, she turns jealously on Flamingo, „How do you know Riaan?’ Flamingo shrugs. Gansie explodes, „First Marius, now Riaan. Well, I don’t want anything to do with the likes of you.’

„Really?’ Flamingo laughs heartily as she watches Gansie continuing to scan the crowd. „You won’t see him now. He’s the witness. He’ll come in when the prosecution calls him.’

„Prosecution! He’s a witness for the prosecution?’ Flamingo nods. Gansie drops her face into her hands. *What’s going on? He’s supposed to be on my side.* Gansie cannot believe that Riaan is testifying against her. Then she smiles. *How stupid I am! I should be glad. If he testifies against me JC will win. I don’t care if his evidence is a bunch of lies, I will be here with JC.*

A woman clutching a Bible shouts from across the room. „You see, she doesn’t deserve a hearing. She wants her husband to lie for her.’ Gansie gasps. *Oh man, that woman is telepathic.* She turns to see who it is. Leba! Leba – her cellmate in prison. Gansie can’t believe it. Leba down here! Impossible! Leba, HolierThanThou Leba, who always walked around reading and quoting from the Holy Book, and laying down the law to the rest of the inmates.

Flamingo laughs in Gansie’s ear. ‘She’s been watching you ever since you came in. Poor Leba, she just can’t reconcile herself to this place. Always appears at these trials trying to get the Judge to reconsider her case. Do you see what she’s done with her horns? Bent them in a circle like a halo. Thinks she belongs,’ Flamingo jerks her finger upwards. Gansie sees Leba impatiently remonstrating with people around her who are motioning to her to sit down and keep quiet. Eventually, she flops

into her seat and broods over her Bible. As Gansie turns away, she notices that every one of these horned people is carrying a Bible.

She whispers to the Travolta look-alike, „Why are these people carrying Bibles? Surely they don't need them here.'

He smiles. „They all protest their innocence, claim wrongful conviction based on circumstantial evidence. They keep making applications for appeals and want to impress ... ' he looks up reverently.

„Bibles down here! That's ridiculous!'

Flamingo's laugh tinkles in her ear. „You think only devil worshippers come here. There are hardly any of those. The majority are good God-fearing folk.' Gansie glances at JC van Damn. Flamingo laughs again, „Oh, it doesn't upset him in the least. As a matter of fact he's very proud to have so many believers here. He's the one who supplies them with Bibles. He uses it as proof of the ineffectiveness of the administration upstairs. As their numbers have fallen abysmally, they are desperate to get all the newcomers. There was even a half-hearted attempt to get me. Of course, I told them I was innocent but I didn't realise that thoughts are not private down here. They were reading my mind and could see that I'd do it all over again if I had half a chance. But there was a huge tug-o-war over Leba. She kept them going with all her quotations from the Bible, falling on her knees, praying and saying she repented but then they found her pockets full of the gold bars that they use for paving up there, and that was the end of that.'

The Travolta look-alike, who has been trying to shut out Flamingo's voice, is relieved when the bailiff announces the „All Rise' for the Judge, a very old man, with a flowing white beard and dispassionate brown eyes. Gansie takes one look at him and shrieks, „No, no, no!' Everyone bursts out laughing. They have been waiting for this. „I won't have that man sitting in judgement of me. He is a vindictive scoundrel. It's because of him that I am in this predicament. Get him out! Get him out!' She runs forward, grabs one of the rotten tomatoes that have been placed in a row at the front of his desk and flings it straight into his face. But Pontius Pilate, the bailiff, waiting with a butterfly net, whips it out of the air and goes off with it to huge applause.

The judge just gives a bored shrug. „Well, now that that's over, let's get down to business.'

But Gansie stands with her back to the bench facing the court. „This man lied at my trial. He said I drowned my little boy. That’s a lie. I wasn’t even there.’

The judge yawns, „I’m sorry my dear but the hearing hasn’t begun yet. You’ll have to wait your turn to state your case.’

„Listen to me. I don’t want you here.’ She turns to Pontius Pilate who is back in his place. „Get him out of here.’ But Pilate simply makes a washing-of-the-hands motion. „This is Dr Hengelaar, the chief witness at my trial. He lied about me.’ She picks up four tomatoes, aiming them in swift succession at the judge but Pontius looking very bored simply snaps them up as swiftly as she hurls them. Then, with a slight nod to the applauding spectators, he walks out to dispose of them. Gansie bursts into tears. Someone in the gallery shouts to her, „Gansie, you still have a couple of tomatoes left. Get him now while Pontius is out.’

But Gansie turns to the Travolta look-alike. „Why these games? Can’t you get Dr Hengelaar out of here?’ The angel smiles sadly.

Then the Judge addresses her. „Gansie, look at me. I am not this Hengelaar/Mengelaar person. I am The Judge, the most famous judge who ever lived. Hengelaar/Mengelaar is not a judge. I look like him to you because he is the one who had the most profound influence on your verdict. All defendants see their accusers in my face.’

Flamingo comes forward to help her to her seat but Gansie turns again to the Judge. „You *are* Dr Hengelaar. Deny it all you want. You wouldn’t be here in *this* place if you weren’t?’ Everyone in the courtroom, bar the judge and defence team, falls over laughing and there isn’t a dry eye among the spectators.

The judge bangs his gavel for order. „Gansie, I am Solomon. Do you read the Bible? Do you know Solomon, the wise king who identified the real mother of a baby by offering to cut it in two? I am that Solomon.’

The whole assembly sings out, „Yes he is. That’s Solomon. Wise King Solomon.’ Even though she can only see Hengelaar in his face, Gansie, feeling isolated, gives up and sits down.

Solomon stands up. „Let us pray.’ He opens his Bible to read the following passage from Judges, Chapter 14, verses 8 and 9¹

And after a time he returned to take her, and he turned aside

¹ All biblical quotes from The Gideons Bible

*to see the carcase of the lion: and, behold, there was a swarm
of bees and honey in the carcase of the lion.
And he took thereof in his hands, and went on eating.*

Then Solomon, skipping the next verses, goes on to 12 and 14

*And Samson said unto them (thirty companions he had
invited to his marriage feast)
I will now put forth a riddle unto you:
out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came
forth sweetness. And they could not in three days expound the
riddle.*

Solomon asks the court: „Can you?’

Everyone turns and grins at Leba who stands up and condescendingly replies,
„What is sweeter than honey? And what is stronger than a lion?’

Solomon, smiling, asks them to sing from psalm 58:

*Do you indeed speak righteousness,
O congregation? Do ye judge up-
rightly, O ye sons of men?
Yea, in heart ye work wickedness;
ye weigh the violence of your hands
in the earth.
The wicked are estranged from the
womb: they go astray as soon as they
be born, speaking lies.
Their poison is like the poison of a
serpent: they are like the deaf adder
that stoppeth her ear;
Which will not hearken to the voice of
charmings, charming never so wisely.*

During all of this Gansie is totally confused. „Is this an appeal court or a church?’ The Travolta look-alike smiles in sympathy, „We have to go through this rigmarole every time we come down here for a trial. They think they will make a good impression with,’ he raises his eyes upward. „It’s just a con. They don’t really want to change their ways.’

After the hymn, the court is subjected to another wild remonstrance as Leba rushing forward, grabs Gansie by the shoulders, drags her in front of the judge and demands, „How can you grant this woman an appeal? She is a murderess. She killed her own child, her baby, her flesh and blood. There is nothing worse than that. You know better than anyone. Yet you give her a hearing. And you refuse me. What did I do? Unwittingly, do you understand, *unwittingly*, committed fraud! I should never have been found guilty. But she is a murderess! How can you grant her an appeal and deny me? This is not justice. This is discrimination.’ The courtroom explodes with laughter.

The Judge looks at Van Damn who immediately stands up to apologise. „Forgive me your lordship but this woman won’t accept that her case is closed.’ He whistles to two of his henchmen who remove her. „She will spend a couple of days in the fire chamber but it won’t make much difference I’m afraid.’

After Leba has been dragged out, Van Damn calls his witness – Riaan. When the tall, muscular, handsome man clad in another Versace creation, a black leather body suit, takes the stand, Gansie’s heart stops beating. She sees Ridge, no Marius, no Lance Nel. No, no, no, no, no! Riaan van Damn, my husband, my dear, dear husband. She flies to him and they hold each other close in that witness box. „Oh my darling, I want so much to be with you. Why did you kill yourself? Why? Why? I missed you so much. I want to be with you.’

He smiles, „Don’t worry. We will be together. My evidence will make it clear that you belong down here.’

Gansie is startled, „Why, what are you going to tell them?’

„This is a court of law; I have to tell the truth.’ She stares. „It’s the only way we can be together; the only way that you can remain here.’

„But Riaan ...’ She knows it’s the only way but unshed tears scorch her eyes as she whimpers, „I understand,’ and stumbles out of the witness box, back to her place next to the Travolta look-alike.

He puts out a hand to steady her, „What’s wrong? What did your husband say?’

„He is going to tell the truth.’ Travolta raises his eyebrows.

Gansie sits back and waits, tense with uncertainty. When JC stands up to question Riaan, Gansie’s head droops, *How many more times do I have to listen to this terrible slander?*

But she is jerked upright as she hears Riaan say, „There was no abuse; there was never any abuse.’ As the one questions, and the other responds, Gansie stares wide-eyed at Riaan and JC, they could be brothers. „Hengelaar never saw the children; he simply assumed that they had been beaten. It is true that little Pieter had a fractured thigh, the result of a car accident when I swerved to avoid a minibus taxi that suddenly veered in front of me. But Gansie and I were never abusive. True we were nervous parents – the smallest symptom, the slightest injury to any of the children and we were at the hospital, over and over and over again. They accused Gansie of Munchausen syndrome. That was simply one of Hengelaar’s theories; the psychologist had a whole lot of theories with nowhere to go. Pieter’s death was opportune so he simply dumped them all on Gansie and me.’

The Travolta look-alike turns to Gansie, sighs and shrugs. „Well, you can cross-question now. But the drift is clear. There can only be one verdict.’

„What do you mean?’ The angel shrugs, pulls out a Su Doku puzzle and becomes absorbed in it.

„Gansie are you ready to cross examine the witness.’

„I have only one question. Do you swear that all the evidence you have given thus far is the truth and nothing but the truth, so help you....’

Van Damn jumps up in a rage, „Objection!’

„Sustained. Please rephrase the question.’

„Is the evidence that you have given here today the truth?’

„Absolutely. This is a court of law. How can there be justice without truth?’

JC rests his case and Riaan leaves the stand.

Gansie collapses in her chair. *What am I going to do? I want to stay here with Riaan.*

Flamingo pats her shoulder. „What’s the matter? Things are going very well. Riaan’s testimony was brilliant. You don’t have to present your case. You’ve won.’

Oh Riaan, Riaan, Riaan! She looks up at Solomon, still the spitting image of Hengelaar. *My God! That's it!* She jumps up in excitement! *That's it! That's what I have to do!*

She turns to the judge, „I would like to call Dr Hengelaar to the stand.’

A sharp intake of breath across the entire courtroom.

Solomon turns to Gansie in astonishment, „Your enemy? Are you sure? Are you feeling well? What about a recess?’ The judge calls out to the angels. „Gabriel, Michael do you wish to consult with your client?’ The angels simply shake their heads, shrug and go back to their Su Doku and crossword puzzles. Solomon looks forlornly at Gansie, „Do you really want to call Hengelaar?’

„Yes.’ And suddenly Gansie is looking at an old man with a long white beard and concerned brown eyes.

Flamingo whispers, „Are you mad? Why are you doing this? You’ve won. You’ve won.’

As Hengelaar enters, Gansie turns a hostile gaze on him. She takes in the wavy brown hair, flowing elegantly round the horns and into nape of his neck, the finely sculpted nose, strong mouth and chin, the air of aristocratic refinement and she is disgusted. She detests having to use him but he is the only one who can refute Riaan’s testimony. And she has to do that if she wants to be reunited with her husband. She hates this doctor, this child psychologist with academic credentials proclaiming years of study and research into child abuse in Canada and New Zealand, this doctor who sent her to prison for murder. She forces herself to look at him and asks him to present his analysis of the evidence in the state’s case against her and Riaan.

Regarding her languidly, Hengelaar speaks with a quiet air of confidence and authority. „After carefully studying the evidence gathered by medical doctors and social workers in the case against Gansie and Riaan, I came to the following conclusion: Riaan and Gansie were unjustly accused of negligence, abuse and murder.’

Gansie explodes in horror. „Liar! Liar! That’s not what you told the court.’

JC objects. „Evidence presented on earth has no relevance here. We are not dependent on partial and selective understandings. Here we view things holistically. There would be no need for these hearings without new perspectives.’

„Objection sustained. Please continue Dr Hengelaar.’

In distinguished accents, Hengelaar continues to unfold an unfortunate tale of victimisation. „Gansie, a wonderful mother, who took exceptional care of her children, was always there for their every need. The children were happy, healthy and well adjusted. Gansie and Riaan, perfect parents, who always put their children's needs before their own, were particularly conscientious with regard to their children's health, never allowing the slightest symptom of illness to go untreated.’

As Gansie listens she becomes completely distraught. She didn't think it was possible to hate Dr Hengelaar more than she already did, but her repugnance grows as she listens to that refined voice droning on and on.

„It is unfortunate that ambitious doctors, to whom Gansie and Riaan brought their children, exploited the misfortunes of the family, to further their careers.’ Gansie wants to scream. *That's what you did!* „They intentionally misrepresented Gansie's scrupulous concern for her children's welfare as Munchhausen-by-proxy and convinced the judge that injuries sustained in accidents were the result of abuse. This detrimental testimony led to Riaan's conviction for murder and his subsequent suicide. Gansie, found guilty of complicity, received a heavy sentence and spent her first two years in prison under heavy sedation to prevent her from also committing suicide.’

Gansie shouts out, „And you're to blame. You! No one else!’

„No, I was deeply distressed at the time as I was unable to controvert the testimony of my colleagues.’ He pauses and looks deeply into Gansie's eyes. „I am so grateful for this the opportunity to express my sorrow and regret and to beg forgiveness.’

Gansie collapses in tears. She cannot bear to listen to this man, the monster who accused her of being a monster all those years ago. He pushed her husband to suicide and is now robbing her of her Riaan for the second time. Flamingo nudges her. „Oh Gansie, what a terrible thing to have happened to you. But Hengelaar has made it right now. His testimony is even more brilliant than Riaan's. You have more than won. You don't have to go on.’

I have to go on. I can't go back up there. I can't. I won't. So it's up to me. I have avoided this all along but now I must – if I want to be happy!

Solomon bangs his gavel. „If that concludes the case for the defence...’

„No, it does not! I wish testify.’ A tangible gasp goes up from the gallery. Even the angels look up from their puzzles.

JC dashes forward, „Gansie, you’ve won. You don’t have to say anything.’ His closeness makes her realise how much she will lose if she goes back up there. She steps firmly onto the witness stand. The angels are amazed. This is an unexpected turn of events. They abandon their puzzles.

Gansie repudiates everything that Riaan and Dr Hengelaar have said, confesses to neglect and abuse of her children and exonerates Riaan of murder. „It was I, not Riaan, who threw little Pieter into the empty swimming pool.’ The courtroom is stunned! Sirens go off setting up a deafening clamour; blue lights flash all over the room blinding all the occupants. At the back of the room, Flamingo and Riaan clutch each other, gazing at her in horror. JC grabs hold of Gansie, „What have you done? Why did you change your story? You’ve thrown away the case!’ Gansie doesn’t understand. Everyone is looking at her. Her heart is pounding. *What is going on?*

The Judge turns to Van Damn. „Bad luck, JC, my boy.

JC can’t accept losing. „But she’s admitted it now, hasn’t she? So there’s no question; she belongs down here!’

„That’s not the point, is it? These hearings are not about guilt or innocence. You know that.’ Solomon turns to Gansie, „Why did you change your story? Nobody here tells the truth.’ As the noise is deafening, he shouts, „Where’s the bailiff? Can’t he shut that alarm off?’ Suddenly the blue lights vanish and the wailing stops. Solomon heaves a sigh of relief, „Yes, that’s better.’ He turns to Gansie. „Did you hear what I said? The facts have no place in my courtroom. Do you understand? The room is rigged with the Solomon alarm. The minute a fact is given, the sensors go off and you have just had a demonstration of what happens.’ He turns to JC again. „Sorry lad, she is not ready.’

JC is upset. „Why? She admitted it! She admitted it! She belongs here.’

„You know perfectly well, she is not ready. I don’t have to explain it, not to you.’ But JC is seething. He turns a livid look on Gansie and marches out snarling, smoke issuing from his nostrils. Gansie sees the black velvet rhinestone studded cord, the highlight of his left trouser leg, uncoil and lash out behind him. Solomon turns to the smiling angels, „Well, lads, we haven’t had this in a long time. How did she get through?’ They shrug. He turns to Gansie. „You are going back. Since you didn’t lie, you’ve earned a chance for redemption. The truth has no place here.’

Gansie suddenly understands. „But I lied. I didn't tell the truth. I am not a monster. Do you think I would have killed my own child? I loved my baby.'

Solomon shakes his head. „You should have lied before. It's too late now.'

„I'm not lying now. I lied earlier so I could be with Riaan. I tell you I am innocent.'

„Yes, yes. In this place no one is guilty; everyone is innocent. You should have lied like that before.'

„But I am not lying.' She turns to her husband, who, with Flamingo, is watching intently. „Tell them Riaan.'

„No, Riaan can't help you. People incarcerated here no longer have the capacity for truth. He lied, as did Hengelaar. You told the truth so you don't belong here. If you wanted to stay here, you should not have told the truth. Your fate was in your own hands.'

Gansie is mad with frustration. „But I lied. I lied. I tell you I'm innocent.'

Solomon shakes his head. „Save it for the next time. For now, you must go back. You have a second chance to find out where you really belong.' He turns to the angels again. „Send her back immediately.'

The last thing Gansie sees, as the angels spread their wings over her, are Riaan and Flamingo glowering at her.

When she opens her eyes, she is lying on the lakeshore with Engela keening over her, „She was doing so well. Why did she kill herself? Why? Why? Why?' As she bends forward to kiss her friend, she starts in amazement, 'She's not dead! She's not dead! Look, she's opened her eyes!'

Gansie smiling weakly, takes Engela's fingers in her hand and mouths more than speaks, „Hello, Engela, what am I doing here?'

Tears glistening in her eyes, Engela kisses her. „We thought you were gone; there were no vital signs. But you're back now. Thank God, you're back. Thank God! Thank God!'

„And JC too.'

Engela, a little nonplussed, nods, „Of course, of course.'

The Haven

Gansie can't believe she is reading Dominee Engela's research paper. The lurid descriptions of the sexual acts of women prisoners and the prurient language in which she describes them eventually send her running out of the lounge and into the bathroom where her retching is so violent that when she eventually emerges, she finds Mynah Bird hovering in the passage. The old bat has a morbid fear of illness. Whenever Gansie coughs or sneezes, which is very often, very explosively, Mynah runs around with a disinfectant spray creating conditions conducive for more vigorous coughing and sneezing. She is more concerned for herself than she is for Gansie. Now she stands at a distance from the bathroom door, eyes wide with alarm.

„What's wrong? What's the matter?'

„Oh, it's nothing. I just felt nauseous. Must have been something I ate.' Gansie can't tell the old girl about Engela's research. She feels ashamed to be reading it but Engela had insisted, „You were there. You know what it was like. I need you to verify the accuracy of what I have written.'

So Gansie brought it home.

When Gansie goes for her next counselling session with the Dominee, Engela first asks for comments on her paper. Gansie tells her she disapproves of Engela's writing style. „Do you have to use such crude language?'

A lubricious smile plays over Engela's lips as she reads an explicit description of lesbian sex from an interview with Meisie, one of the inmates at the Female Prison. „What do you object to? The way Meisie expresses herself?' While Engela's eyes linger over Meisie's words, Gansie is remembering how Meisie came into her cell one time, grabbed her, pushed her onto her bed, and was intimate with her. Gansie had remained stiff and silent – scared someone would come and find them.

Engela's guttural laugh, which breaks into her recollection, seems to catch her in the act and Gansie turns scarlet. Gansie can't tell the Dominee about that and other similar incidents with Meisie. She is too ashamed. How can Engela refer to Meisie

as a good Christian woman? Just because she attended all Engela's prison services and her hallelujahs were the loudest? Engela believes she has „saved' Meisie but she knows nothing about her. All these church people who exult in their authority over their captive congregations, pride themselves on their compassion because they minister to people behind bars. Though they have a pious belief in their own charitable goodness, in actual fact, they need the caged inmates more than the inmates need them; their *raison d'être* emanates from the fact of captivity. So it doesn't occur to them that some inmates, among them the most pious at their services, laugh behind their backs and indulge in mock prayer meetings with the most obscene sermons.

Now Engela is looking down her superior academic nose at Gansie. „Your trouble is you want to use „proper' language. But this is how the inmates express themselves. This is authentic.'

Gansie can't understand Engela's interest in writing about sex. What has that to do with religion but Engela is patronising, „I am for women's rights. They ignore women's needs in prison. These poor women who are starved of sex want the blessing of the church on their lesbian activities. We are way behind other countries in this regard. As a minister, it is my duty to understand people's needs and guide them in the ways of God.'

Engela has no idea how Meisie jokes about her. „That one, she just wants to find out how we do it; then she's going to try it out on one of her friends.'

Gansie, however, is grateful to Engela who has taken a special interest in her, is writing her life story and exposing the terrible miscarriage of justice that has wrongfully convicted her and her husband of murdering their baby. She wants the truth to be told, wants her innocence proclaimed. She clings to Engela for this reason but doesn't want to be reminded of shameful aspects of her incarceration.

„But why are you acting so coy? You were in prison for eight years; you must have had needs. You couldn't have been celibate all that time.'

„But I was! I was!' *Why is Engela dragging me back into that desperate, degrading situation? I am not a lesbian!*

„Oh come on. Eight years in prison and you, sexually very active before you went in, three babies in three years!' Engela's low laugh is mocking. „Now you say you can't stand men. You keep telling me how much you hate them. That you will never marry again. What changed you?' Sly insinuation colours the tone of her question.

„I haven't changed. I am the same as I was. I was celibate in prison. I just don't like that dirty old man, that Klasie Hanekom. Why do you have a friend like that?’

„See. You hate men. My friend is harmless. You mistake his kindness and concern for – I don't know what.’ Engela, taking a sip of her coffee, contemplates Gansie for a moment. „Do you know what this dirty old man, as you call him, is doing?’ Gansie doesn't want anymore dirty talk but Engela drones on. „Klasie, the man you treat with such scorn, that same man is helping me set up a halfway house for women released from prison. Now what do you think of that?’

„A halfway house! Why didn't you tell me? My God, that would be just wonderful. I have so many ideas for what can be done.’ Suddenly she feels ashamed of her suspicions; Engela probably wanted her to meet Klasie because they have her in mind to run the facility. Instantly she forgives Klasie and begs Engela to let her be involved in the project. „I know I can manage a halfway house. All the social workers and psychologists in prison say that I am a very caring person, that I know how to help people. I am not put off by illness; I know how to care for the sick. And as I was inside, I understand what people need when they come out.’

Engela guffaws with delight. „Gansie, you're reading my mind. That's exactly what Klasie and I want.’

From then on, Gansie begins to work closely with Engela and Klasie to establish the halfway house. She gives up her job at the pharmacy to take up her duties in a small office on the property that they have purchased with funds provided by a private women's consortium, the sponsors of the project. They give the place the provisional name of „The Haven.’ From her office at The Haven, Gansie gets busy organising builders and decorators and supervising the renovation of the building. To begin with, The Haven will accommodate six long-term prisoners, who are about to be released, and Gansie, who sees herself as the housemother.

She watches with amazement and pleasure, the great pains being taken to make sure the women will be comfortable and proud of their surroundings. The *en suite* rooms are large with bow windows and fireplaces, as well as all the mod cons. Gansie can't believe her eyes when she sees the furnishings. In some rooms, antique furniture, plush carpets, velvet and satin draperies; in others everything modern, clean lines, fresh colours, abstract designs. Her suggestions: niches for statues on the

landing and in the vestibule and a fountain in the garden are taken up with an alacrity that makes her feel proud and fills her with confidence. Her own room downstairs, with high ceilings and curtained walls, opens onto a patio and garden. Gansie revels in the luxury of it all. It is what she had been used to before she went to prison; it is what she deserves. *I was really mistaken about Engela. I thought she was using us for her research but now I see she really cares. We are not just being made comfortable here, we are being pampered and I love it. No more hardship.*

Gansie can't wait to move in but it will take a few more weeks before everything is ready. Inside, she suffered as an inmate. Outside, as a parolee, she lived under surveillance, suspicion, fear of exposure, and in financial dependence with no personal accommodation or transport. All that will soon be in the past. She is collecting her new car in the next week, not a second hand croc like Mynah's, but a brand new BMW sports car. Then she will move into The Haven where she will be quite independent. Laughing and happy, she walks around inspecting the renovations and gets to know all the workmen who love this attractive, friendly, amenable custodian.

When Engela gives her the list of women who will be taking up residence in the house, she is disturbed to see Meisie's name among them. When she raises the question of Meisie's suitability, the dominee, who has pledged herself to the welfare of these women, dismisses her concerns. Meisie needs help. That's what matters. Gansie, however, feels distinctly uncomfortable. How is she going to handle Meisie, or rather, will she be able to handle her? Gansie knows she has changed since her release; her life having been hard, she has toughened up and won't be the pushover she had been in prison but still she is uneasy. When she thinks of Flamingo, she knows how manipulative these women can be. The first lot of inmates to The Haven won't be parolees like her. Having served their full sentences, they are being discharged.

A couple of weekends before release, they are allowed out to acclimate to the real world. Usually this is with families, but Engela, who has commandeered these weekend visits, puts Gansie in charge of arrangements with boutiques for new clothes, with salons for facial and hair makeovers, with studios for photographic sessions. Gansie also organises transport to and from the prison. On a few of these occasions, she has caught glimpses of Meisie but has kept her distance; she is relieved to find that Meisie is too excited about the new project to notice her. Gansie herself, busy

arranging everything, has no time to mingle with former cellmates. She works long hours, gets home late at night, has no time to watch TV or worry about her children, goes straight to bed and doesn't wake up until it is time to get ready for the office the next day.

Once the website for The Haven is up and running – Klasie has put that together – Engela gives Gansie a list of sponsors to whom a brochure is to be forwarded. When Gansie notices that all the sponsors are women, she is delighted. The whole thing is an initiative of and for women – Klasie's contribution slips her mind. She attributes the whole enterprise to Engela whose commitment to empowerment of women has been the driving force.

All the sponsors are to receive the new website address with special passwords to give them access to video information about the rooms, how they are appointed and who will be occupying them. Gansie is pleased that they want to know how their money is being used. She herself hasn't yet visited the website; she will do that once all the work of setting up The Haven is done. But her heart is bursting with pride and gratitude that so many rich, powerful women care enough about the less fortunate to give them this second chance in life.

When the clothes purchased for the inmates begin arriving at The Haven, Gansie and the maids have to sort them out and put them in the appropriate closets and drawers. But when Gansie sees the choice of apparel, mostly evening wear – designer fashions, fabrics of the finest quality and very chic – she frowns. *There must be some mistake. The inmates have to find work. This attire isn't suitable for job interviews and slogging up and down streets.* The women need sensible clothes and shoes. Gansie decides to speak to Engela about it. *They can't present themselves in this kind of finery. No one will believe that they are poor and need employment.* So she stops the unpacking and sends the maids to finish cleaning and polishing; she is quite sure the clothes will have to be sent back. She laughs to herself. The women must have chosen these things themselves. After so many years in prison, they probably went crazy when they saw all the nice things in the boutiques and didn't for a moment remember their circumstances.

Gansie goes downstairs to check on the equipment in the kitchen but the task is beyond her: it is like being in the kitchen of a most exclusive restaurant. She has no idea what is needed and what is not. Gansie feels that Engela is overdoing it. That

afternoon Engela will be interviewing staff for the kitchen – a head chef and at least four other specialist chefs! For seven people, all ex-cons at that! Why? Gansie can't help laughing. *We don't need cordon bleu chefs preparing gourmet meals. It's crazy.* The girls can cook for themselves. When she asks Engela about it that afternoon, the dominee answers that they have to be prepared for the sponsors at all times. They can't serve them just any old slop. Gansie hadn't thought of that. She doesn't have experience in running a halfway house, but she had been in one for a short while when she first came out. It was nothing like this. But that was run by the church; this is being set up under the sponsorship of wealthy corporate women. What a difference money makes.

After the interviews for the kitchen staff, Gansie brings up the matter of the clothes but Dominee Engela is amused. „You've been inside for nine years; you've lost touch with the way things work. Klasie and I personally saw to it that the women got the appropriate clothing. Don't worry your little head about these things. Now go upstairs and get those clothes unpacked.' Gansie nods and smiles. As she makes her way upstairs, she is still trying to work it out.

A few days later, Gansie is to pick up her car. After questioning Engela about the clothes and the kitchen, she wonders whether the Dominee will have changed her mind and now see a BMW sports car as an unnecessary extravagance. Then her phone rings. It's Engela; she hasn't changed her mind! Gansie grabs her bag, dashes out and is off to collect her car. As they drive to the dealership, she keeps up a patter of praises for Engela and the great work she is doing. Engela smiling benignly simply pats her hand. „We couldn't do this without you. You have taken charge of the Haven, dealt with all the practical details and created a wonderful atmosphere there.'

After all the paperwork, all the signing, her car is brought round and she is handed the keys. She gets in, puts the key in the ignition and bursts into tears. She is crying so hysterically that Engela gets in beside her and takes her in her arms. „There, there, my darling. It's all right. This is your car and you deserve it. God knows you've suffered enough. Now you have your reward.' They sit there together until Gansie has calmed down. „Are you all right? Will you be able to drive?' Gansie nods. Engela gets out and watches while she puts the car into gear and drives off.

When she pulls into the driveway of The Haven, the workmen and gardeners, who are putting finishing touches to the parking lot and the grounds, cheer and wave excitedly. When she stops, they surround the car, examine everything, make admiring

noises and shake her hand. Then they stand in a guard of honour as she drives into her parking garage over which is a sign with her name emblazoned in gold. She is so happy; at last things are going right for her.

But that isn't all.

Later that day, Engela, who arrives with loads of boxes and parcels, calls Gansie and takes her to her room. „From now on, you'll be staying here.’

„Oh my God! ... When do you want me to move in?

„You have moved in. This is where you live from now on. From this minute.’

„But my things ... I have to fetch them ...’

„Forget all that stuff. It won't do here. Everything you need is in these boxes. You are running The Haven so you have to be on the premises now. The girls will be arriving in two days. You have to orientate them, show them their rooms and organise meals for them. The official opening of The Haven will be at the gala dinner for the patrons next week. You have to be here 24/7 to get everything ready. This is your home now. Put the past behind you and concentrate on building your future.’

Gansie feels a little odd about the sudden move but Engela is right; she has at last come into her own. When Engela leaves, Gansie turns excitedly to the boxes, begins to unpack and organise her living arrangements. She is busy for hours, storing away toiletries and clothes in the spacious plush bathroom and the dressing room with its long mirrors and make-up mirrors fitted with bulbs along the frames. She pulls the boxes and packages of clothes into the walk-in closets, and begins hanging up outfits and stacking shoes on shelves. Once again she is puzzled by the kind of clothes she is handling. They are beautiful. She loves them but how can she sit in an office wearing ankle-length evening gowns and stiletto-heeled shoes? *Engela, a dominee, always wears staid and sober outfits. So why this extravagance? Oh, why am I fussing? She loves us, she just loves us and I love her too.* Gansie laughs softly. *But this is crazy. When I get paid at the end of the month, I will go out and buy some sensible clothes – but only at the best boutiques; I can see that Engela doesn't approve of my budget store clothing.*

While she is still busy, her phone rings. It is the kitchen informing her that a maid will be bringing a menu from which she is to order her dinner. Would she be taking her meal in the dining room or would she prefer to be served in her room? Gansie falls back into a chair. *I feel like Cinderella at the ball. I hope I don't turn*

into a pumpkin at midnight. After she has ordered her meal and put away all her new possessions, she draws a bath and luxuriates in bubbles for an hour before dinner. Then she puts on the least ostentatious of the garments she has received and goes to the dining room, which is divided into sections for complete privacy. The cuisine is first class and with courteous, pleasant waiters ever alert to her needs, the service beyond expectation.

Dominee Engela has put all this together for six, seven including herself, ex-convicts who have never lived in this style, not even before they were incarcerated. Why such extravagance? *But I must stop asking these stupid questions. I just don't understand her ministry.* When Gansie looks back at how she suffered after being released, the misery of her first places of residence, the loneliness at Mynah's, she realises that Engela is giving inmates a decent chance to make something of their lives. She is lucky to be included in it all. After dinner, she goes up to her sumptuous bed and, for the first time in months, falls asleep as soon as her head touches the pillow.

The next day, she is very busy, getting everything ready for the arrival of the inmates, planning the daily menus and organising the patron's banquet for the opening. She floats through it all effortlessly, executing her duties with graciousness and aplomb; she is after all in charge of this centre so she adds the touches that give it class and style. Engela and Klasie stop in several times a day making sure there will be no glitches when The Haven opens. While Klasie is busy getting computers installed and hooking up CCTV cameras to cover the premises, Engela checks Gansie's arrangements for the banquet: the menu, the wines, the seating, the decorations, and the outfits of the girls.

The hustle, bustle and excitement mounts and reaches fever pitch when the girls arrive. They are shown up to their rooms, are delighted with everything and are very happy to cooperate with Gansie. There is only one moment of apprehension for Gansie. When she goes to check on the girls to make sure they are comfortable and to inform them that they have to dress for dinner, as Klasie wants to inspect them all, Meisie grabs her by the wrist as she enters her room. Gansie closes her eyes in fear expecting the worst. But Meisie simply laughs and says, „Didn't I tell you?' At Gansie's puzzled look, she jerks her thumb in the direction of Engela. „I told you about her, didn't I?' As Gansie still looks confused, she sneers, „Okay, play innocent

but you don't fool me. You never fooled me.' She lets go of Gansie and goes into her closet to pick out an outfit. Gansie, shakes her head as she makes her way to the restaurant. *She's not going to work out. I did try to warn Engela.*

At the staircase, she sees a camera crew busy setting up. Klasie hopping about organising things, spots her at the top of the stairs and calls out to her to change right away. They are making a film to advertise The Haven and the opening sequence will show her introducing the public to the facility. Klasie rushes her off to her room where she finds Engela waiting to help her into an outfit she has picked out. When Gansie goes back into the lobby, she is told to stand at the foot of the stairs and to read out the words on the autocue. „I am Gansie du Toit, the hostess here at the Haven. I am delighted to have this opportunity to show you around our beautiful home.' Gansie looks up „That's not right, is it? I am not the hostess, I am the housemother.'

Klasie turns to Engela who calls out, „It's just for the promo. Besides, the viewers are your guests; you're showing them around. You're not their housemother.'

When they are ready for a take, Gansie smiles, reads the words and walks up a few steps. The camera following her, takes her gaze to the top of the stairs, and another catches the girls cascaded along the balustrade; they are gorgeous. When she sees them, Gansie realises it would have been silly to call herself housemother – these are not handicapped or downtrodden women. Once again, she is overwhelmed by Engela's great goodness of heart. When the camera crew, moving past her up the stairs, follows the girls into their various rooms, Gansie goes down to the kitchen and restaurant to make the final check before dinner.

On the night of the banquet, the official opening of the Haven, Engela rushes in just before the patrons arrive to check on the seating and is aghast. „This isn't right!' Gansie has seated the girls between patrons exactly as she has been instructed so this is not her mistake but she is terrified. In the past two days, Engela has been in and out, in and out, checking and re-checking all the arrangements. Now seeing her consulting a list and changing place names, Gansie becomes extremely nervous, almost distraught.

„Julia goes next to the CEO of Mediacorp, Meisie next to The President of *Metier*.' And while Engela goes on muttering as she switches names, Gansie is ready

to burst into tears; the tension of the last few days suddenly overwhelms her. But Engela turns suddenly, „There, it’s all done. These requests came in late this afternoon. Thank goodness there won’t be any more. Let’s go. Our patrons are due to arrive at any moment. Come on, where’s that charming smile.’ Engela slips her arm into Gansie’s and Gansie pulls herself together.

The patrons arrive. Tall, elegant women, in diamonds and furs, survey the scene with heavy-lidded authoritative eyes, carelessly conscious that Engela’s and Gansie’s solicitous attention and excessive gaiety are covert pleas for approval. After Engela and Gansie have welcomed them, the girls come forward to be introduced. The scrutiny, seemingly casual, is in reality very intense, but the girls, smiling expansively are relaxed and offer to escort the patrons into the cocktail lounge. Soon there is a cheerful buzz interspersed with laughter and the tinkling of glasses. When one of the waiters comes to inform Gansie that they are ready to serve, she makes the announcement and the girls lead their distinguished and powerful companions into the dining room. Some of the women cast their eyes over Gansie as they pass and bend to Engela who shakes her head. Gansie’s anxiety, which is just below the surface, threatens to break out but Engela turns to her and smiles. Gansie sighs with relief; she must have passed the test. She wonders why Klasie isn’t here but is glad he isn’t.

During dinner, the women at last condescend to compliment Engela on the rich elegance of The Haven, the exquisite garden, the sumptuous cuisine, the efficient, courteous service and the excellent choice of hostess. Gansie blushes and smiles broadly. She has worked hard and is so glad that they are pleased. Then the patrons turn to the girls and, giving them approving looks, with one accord, raise their glasses to toast them. The girls laugh, raise their glasses too and one of them calls out, „And here’s to a jolly good night.’ A burst of gusty laughter breaks from the patrons. In that moment, Meisie catching Gansie’s eye, winks. It is all Gansie can do to keep from shuddering.

Then the whole gathering makes its way into the lounge for coffee. Gansie is so glad the evening is coming to an end. Completely exhausted, she can’t wait to kick off her shoes and stretch out on her bed. She is glad nothing has been planned for the next day so she can sleep in. Each time one of the patrons approaches her to chat and make the usual frivolous inquiries, Engela sidles up and leads the conversation and patrons away from Gansie. When she gets a chance, Engela explains that she has

noticed that Gansie is looking drained, so she has been trying to relieve her of the strain of having to entertain the guests. Gansie eyes shine with gratitude and love, *Is there no bottom to dear Engela's kindness?*

After a while Gansie notices that as a patron stands up, the girl who has attended on her, escorts her out. Gansie is pleased that the girls are seeing the patrons to the door; she is too tired to make the effort. The first few times that she had stood up, Engela had shaken her head and smiled and she had simply flopped back into her seat. When all the women have gone, Gansie congratulates Engela on a splendid opening of The Haven, gives her a warm hug and says she will go up to make sure all is well with the girls before she turns in. Engela quickly pulls her down next to her, „There's no need for that.' Realising that Gansie is looking questioningly at her, Engela laughs, „Oh come on now, they aren't children. You don't have to tuck them in.' Gansie smiles, says goodnight and goes off to bed.

But she can't fall asleep. She can hear things; the whole house seems alive with all kinds of sounds and movements. She sits up to listen but the noises are muffled. She becomes alarmed; what if there are intruders. Trembling, she pulls the blanket over her head and lies very still; but she is in charge – this is her responsibility. She forces herself out of bed, moves stealthily to her door but too frightened to open it, just presses her ear against it. The sounds seem to be coming from upstairs. The girls! Meisie's face flashes before her eyes. *Oh God what are they up to?* She slumps onto the floor. *I can't go up there. I don't want to see what they're doing. Why should I interfere? They are adults. Engela said so.*

She stands up unsteadily and begins to drag herself towards her bed when she hears the door opening. She freezes on the spot. Suddenly, she is being lifted up and carried between two persons. She is pushed down on her bed, her clothes are pulled off and the two get in on either side of her. She feels their nakedness as they begin fondling, kissing, exploring, probing until she screams with pleasure and frustration, begging to be entered, frantically thrusting against hardness and drawing it into herself, deeper and deeper, until she finally arrives. Then spent and exhausted, she falls into a deep sleep.

In the morning, she wakes up between Engela and Klasie.

She gets out of bed, pulls on a gown and stumbles out into the lobby. And there is Meisie, smiling mockingly. „So, did you have a good night?' Gansie stares

glassy-eyed. „Was she as good as me?’ Gansie suddenly subsides on a step. Meisie comes to sit next to her. „I warned you about that woman.’

„I don’t understand.’

„Oh stop lying.’ She pulls Gansie up, takes her to a special CCTV monitor in the room alongside reception. When she clicks on the mouse, the monitor shows Gansie in her room. Then Meisie switches from room to room, showing each inmate in bed – with a patron. Finally, the camera zooms in on Gansie’s bed, on three people in a tangle of legs, arms, breasts and tongues. Meisie laughs, „The management of The Haven showing the way.’ She shakes her head. „Tsk! Tsk! Klasie’s breaking the rules. If the patrons see this ...? But they won’t; Klasie will see to that. Anyway, the whole enterprise was his idea.’ Meisie frowns. „Stop putting on the innocent act.’ She laughs. „But I suppose it’s what makes you the perfect hostess – adds a touch of genteel refinement. Congratulations, Madam Gansie! Oh, I know you’re only fronting for the real one but only we know that. You should be proud. This is a very high-class establishment. And quite unique. For women only.’

gansie in kammaland

These tales are about Gansie, a parolee who spent eight years in prison. They are written in the style of magical realism that combines fantasy, reality and humour, and like fairy tales, comics and science fiction, require suspension of disbelief. The combination of fantasy, reality and humour seeks to estrange conventional and normal perceptions and provides a new angle on human behaviour. There is no dichotomy of good and evil; there are no villains and heroes as in fairy tales, etc. - only human beings with both social and anti-social impulses.

Gansie, an Afrikaner woman in her late thirties, is offered accommodation by an old Indian recluse who has no understanding of her needs; both feel trapped by the strangeness of their circumstances. The initial benevolence that led to the arrangement soon turns sour and Gansie begins to look for escape. She eventually finds a haven that offers her a new illusion of reality.

Underlying the stories are themes of child abuse and the plight of prisoners who are returned to society and have to make it on their own without the support of their families and communities.