



CHANETTE PAUL

SACRIFICED

Sacrificed at birth, now she must learn
the dangerous truth about her past

Sacrificed

Chanette Paul

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Chanette Paul was born in Johannesburg but grew up all over South Africa. She attended nine schools, studied at five universities and has lived in seven of South Africa's nine provinces.

Chanette writes in Afrikaans, has published in various genres and received several awards.

Sacrificed is the English version of her book *Offerlam*. It is the first of her titles to be translated into English and has also been published in Dutch. *Sacrificed* is the first title in a two-part series.

Chanette lives in a lopsided cottage in the Overberg, on the bank of the Kleine River, where her partner operates a riverboat.

When she finds herself in the throes of a serious bout of writing, she goes to her retreat near the southernmost tip of Africa to wrestle with her characters and stories.

For more information about Chanette and her books, visit her website at www.chanettepaul.co.za, her blog at <http://chanettepaul.wordpress.com> or tweet her at <https://twitter.com/Chanettie>. She can also be found on Facebook, at <https://www.facebook.com/chanette.paul>.



Photo: Carine Du Prez

Main characters in *Sacrificed*

Ammie Pauwels: Caz's biological mother

Andries Maritz: Caz's ex-father-in-law

Annika: The publisher for whom Caz does translations

Aron: Tabia's nephew who helped Ammie flee the Congo

Arondji: Aron's son

Aubrey: Lilah's love interest

Babette: Shop owner

Cassandra (Caz) Colijn: Ammie's biological daughter/Lilah's mother

César Ronald Bruno Janssen: Ammie's first husband

De Brabander: Detective – Commissioner

Dlamini: Captain in the South African Police Service (SAPS)

Elijah: Ammie's beloved

Ellen: Caz's helper

Erdem: Guesthouse owner

Erevu Matari: Congolese man who follows Caz

Geert Grevers: Detective – Inspector

Gerda Verhoef: Detective – Agent

Hans Colijn: Caz's foster father

Hentie Maritz: Caz's ex-husband

Jacq DeReu: Ammie's second husband/Luc's father

Jan Kuyper: Tienieke and Fien's notary

Jela: Erevu's daughter

Josefien Colijn: Caz's foster mother/Tienieke's mother

Kembo: Ammie's son

Laura Lammens: Luc's colleague

Lieve Luykens: Ammie's carer

Lilah: Caz's daughter
Luc DeReu: Ammie's stepson/Jacq's son

Magdel Maritz: Caz's ex-mother-in-law

Njiwa/Dove: Erevu's grandson

Tabia: Tetela woman who saved Ammie's life

Tieneke Colijn: Caz's foster sister

Tobias: Ammie's third husband

Other characters

Alice Auma (Lakwena): A Ugandan psychic and the leader of the Holy Spirit Movement

Joseph Kony: Leader of the Lord's Resistance Army

Kabila: Current president of the DRC

Kamau and Obedele Kambon: Campaigners for reAfrikanization and dewhitenization, both from Ghana

Patrice Lumumba: Congolese independence leader and the first democratically elected prime minister of the Congo. Murdered 1961



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Oh, what a tangled web we weave,
when first we practice to deceive!

From *Marmion* by Sir Walter Scott

Prologue

*17 January 1961
Katanga, Congo*

The night air reeked of savanna dust, sweat and fear. Of betrayal, greed and the thirst for power. A stench Ammie knew well.

César's left hand gripped her arm. The right hand was clenched around her jaw.

"Watch, bitch," he hissed in her ear. "Watch!"

Elijah stood under an acacia, a hare in the headlights. It was new moon. At the fringes of the pale smudge between somewhere and nowhere loomed the vague shapes of more trees. Somewhere to the left something rustled in the tall grass. A jackal howled in the distance, its mate echoing the mournful cry.

A command rang out, followed by the distinct sound of four rifles being cocked. She wanted to close her eyes but she kept staring as if her eyelids were starched.

Elijah coughed and spat out a gob of bloody mucus. His

vest, once white, was smeared with soil, sweat, saliva, blood. One shoe was missing. He wasn't looking at the soldiers with their rifles. From behind the lopsided spectacles on his battered face his eyes searched out her own. The glare on the lenses made it impossible to read the expression in his eyes.

Another command. Rifles raised to shoulders.

Sweat rolled down Elijah's temples. He strained against the ropes, tried to find some slack around his wrists and ankles but finally gave up. His knees twitched. His calves trembled. His lips were fixed in a stiff grimace.

Everything seemed surreal—what she was witnessing now, as well as the events of earlier that evening.

On her way to Elijah's house to warn him, she had seen the column of smoke from a distance. When she arrived at what had been his house it was clear that nothing had escaped the inferno. Not his desk, with all his documents, nor the shelves with the books he valued so highly. Not the photograph, taken in better days, of Elijah and Patrice Lumumba laughing together. Not even his Immatriculation certificate, the one piece of paper that, only a year ago, had been worth more than gold to every *évolué*: the passport to a better life.

When a vehicle had pulled up beside her and she was dragged inside, none of the spectators feasting their eyes on the mayhem had lifted a finger to help her.

Now, in these moments before the inevitable took place, Elijah stopped being the eternal student, the teacher, the philosopher. He was no longer Patrice Lumumba's friend, mentor and critic. Or the man who had helped feed, clothe and educate so many orphaned children. No longer the optimist who would simply face the odds and keep going.

He was just a man in a soiled vest, his spectacles tilted at an odd angle. A man who knew too much. Who had too much influence on Lumumba. Who had become a complication.

But more than anything, he was the man who loved her.

Another command. The words failed to get through to her, but the intention behind them was unmistakable.

The vice-like grip around her arm and chin tightened.

Did Elijah, at that moment, still believe in God's will? The will of a God who had saved Abraham when he had been on the point of offering his son, but had not granted his own Son the same salvation? Nor Elijah today.

The sound of gunshots shattered the stillness of the night. Ammie screamed as if it were unexpected. And maybe it had been. Maybe she didn't really believe that these white savages, that César, could be so debased.

Elijah's body jerked, spun to the right, fell against a tree trunk and collapsed in a heap in the shallow grave he'd probably had to dig himself earlier that day. Flesh, sinew and bone serving no further purpose. Blood pumping through the heart one last time colored the vest crimson, hiding the smears of dust and saliva.

César shoved her aside. Pain shot through her knee and elbow as she fell on the gravelly earth, grass blades scratching her arms. César wiped his hands on his trousers as if they were contaminated. For a moment his pale blue eyes met hers before a stream of saliva shot from his mouth and splattered against her cheek.

Dimly she became aware of the sounds of Elijah's body being covered with clods and rocks and gravel.

For a brief moment her world tilted.

"Elijah!" More than a scream, it was a raw sound from a place she hadn't known existed.

The first boot struck her side. The second, her shoulder.

"Whore!"

Somewhere an owl was calling its mate.

The next kick exploded against her temple.

The pool of light grew dim, giving way to the mysterious sounds of nocturnal Africa.

One

Monday, September 1, Present day

Caz

Overberg, South Africa

Tieneke's voice was as clear as if she were calling from the neighboring smallholding, instead of six thousand kilometers away. The words got stuck somewhere in Caz's ear, their meaning distorted by some tube or bone or anvil. Tieneke? After so many years?

"I said: Mother is at her last gasp," her sister repeated when Caz failed to react. Tieneke was impatient, even in this situation.

Caz remembered that about her. Though she had actually forgotten.

"I didn't know Mother was still alive," she finally found her voice. "She must be well into her nineties."

"Ninety-eight. She's been relatively healthy and quite lucid for her age until just a few days ago, when she suddenly went downhill. But she won't hear of a nursing home. Not that I'd consider it. I've been taking care of her for most of her life,

after all. Why not see it through to the end?" Reproach lay like thick sediment in Tienieke's tone.

With unseeing eyes Caz stared at the splotch the Cape robin had left on the corner of the desk. Bloody cheek, eating Catya's pellets, and then shitting all over the house.

What could she say to Tienieke? I'm sorry to hear Mother is dying at the ripe old age of ninety-eight? I'm sorry you never got married—at sixty-five you're probably too old now? I'm sorry I didn't try to make contact again after being chased away like a mangy dog when I needed you most thirty-one years ago?

"Why are you telling me this, Tienieke?" The question sounded heartless. Would have been heartless in any other circumstances. Probably still was.

"Mother wants to see you before she dies."

Everything fell silent—the sound of the wind in the wild olive tree, the din of birds, the soft hum of the computer—as if she had been robbed of her hearing in one fell swoop.

"What?" The word flew from her mouth.

"We don't have much time. You'll have to get a Schengen. Go to the Belgian Consulate. I presume you have a passport. You have to buy your plane ticket before applying for the visa. You probably don't want to waste your time in Dubai or Istanbul, so forget about Emirates or the Turkish airline, even if they do fly to Brussels. KLM has a direct flight to Amsterdam and from there you can take the train to Ghent-Dampoort. It takes about three hours. You'll have to change trains at Antwerp Central. From Ghent-Dampoort you take bus number three. Get off at ..."

"Tienieke!" The sharpness in her voice stemmed the flood. Caz drew a deep breath, tried to calm down. "Why does Ma Fien want to see me?"

A deep sigh came down the line. It began in Ghent, traveled through Belgium, across half of Europe, down the length of Northern Africa, Central Africa, Southern Africa, and found its way to the cottage at the foot of the Kleineberg in the Overberg district.

"I don't know. She won't say. She gets terribly upset if I

mention the possibility that you might not come. Is that how you want Mother to meet her Maker? So unfulfilled?"

Why should I give a damn about Josefien Colijn's lack of fulfilment, Caz was tempted to ask. After all, Fien didn't give a damn three decades ago when she turned her back on her month-old granddaughter along with Caz and sent them out into the world to face scorn and humiliation. But this Tienieke knew. She had been there.

The jacarandas had been blossoming in Pretoria. Also the one in front of her childhood home, where she turned for one last beseeching look at the two women on the porch. Stunned that her mother and sister could send her away like that, refusing even to hear her side of the story. Not allowing her to cross the threshold of the house where she had grown up.

The two of them just stood there. Floral dresses stretched tight over plump figures. Tienieke with the first signs of gray in her wispy blonde hair. Fien's hair snowy white, stiffly permed. Longish faces, pale blue eyes, lips pursed over yellow teeth sprouting haphazardly from both sets of gums—a legacy of cruel genes.

Lilah had whimpered in her arms. And just then a jacaranda blossom had floated down and settled on the dark hair. That was how she got her new name: Lila, which later became Lilah when her modeling career took off. Hentie had wanted to call his daughter Johanna Jacomina, after his paternal grandmother, but Hentie's father had forbidden him to have the baby registered. Just as well.

"Cassie, please." These were possibly the hardest two words Tienieke had ever spoken in her life. The image of the women on the porch faded.

"Please what? Why now? Not once in the eleven years before you returned to Belgium did either of you call me or try to find out how I was doing. I had to learn from an attorney that you had gone back to Belgium and were living in Ghent. Not a single word after that either. And now you expect me to drop everything and fly over there?"

"I followed Lilah's career."

Anger robbed Caz of breath. For a moment everything grew dim. "Is that what this is about? Lilah's success? Are you after her money?"

"Don't be ridiculous. We live comfortably. You know we believe in sobriety."

Sobriety? Make that bloody stinginess. Caz had been eighteen before she could choose her own dress for the first time, a dress that wasn't a Tienieke hand-me-down. One that didn't have to be taken in and the hem let out to cater for the difference in weight and height. Caz had been a gangly giant in a family of chubby short-arses.

She took a deep breath. "Sorry, Tienieke, no go. Give Ma Fien my best, but I can't travel halfway around the world just because she's dying. I may be many things, but I'm not a hypocrite."

Silence hummed across thousands of kilometers before Tienieke cleared her throat. "I think she wants to tell you the truth."

"Truth?" The computer's screensaver began its little dance. Multicolored bubbles rolling across the freshly translated text added to the out-of-body feeling that took hold of her. "What do you mean?"

"Come over here and find out, Cassie. Before it's too late. I was only eleven when you were born. Only Mother can tell you."

"Tell me what?"

"Who your biological parents are."

"My *what*?"

"Your birth mother didn't want you, so Mother and Father took pity on you and offered to raise you. That's all Mother said at the time. It's all I know. You can contact us through the attorney to tell us when you'll be arriving. Mr. Moerdyk, in case you've forgotten. In Pretoria. Good day, Cassie."

The line went dead. The silence was pitch black. Like the spots dancing in front of Caz's eyes.

Ammie
Leuven, Belgium

Eighty isn't all that old, she wanted to say to Lieve, but what would be the use? For the past few years Lieve had been treating her as if her demise was nigh.

"You're eighty-two, Miss Ammie," Lieve reminded her.

Did she say it out loud? That eighty isn't old? Why did she say it anyway? Think it? Of course it's old.

Eighty-two? What had happened to the years between eighty and eighty-two? It had to be a conspiracy. Lieve was trying to confuse her.

"There you go." Lieve stood back. "Your hair is done."

Ammie gazed at her reflection in the mirror. She looked more dignified than she felt. Silver hair in a French roll. A spot of rouge on the cheeks. Pale pink lipstick. She bared her teeth to make sure they showed no lipstick smears. They were whiter than the pearls around her neck and perfectly even. The pearls were real, the teeth man-made.

Was that really her?

Lieve handed her a walking stick and helped her to her feet.

Through the window the day looked dreary. It had been a ghastly August. Not at all summery. And September had fared no better so far.

The rain had been so different in Elisabethville. Pouring from the warm sky and splashing on the warm earth. The weather steaming all through the wet season. The winters were a relief, not something to dread, like they were here in Leuven. Winters without snow, hardly cooler than summer.

Elisabethville. The name had changed. What was it now?

Only yesterday she had remembered it again. That day. She recalled it so clearly. As if it were happening all over again. But she couldn't remember what. What day was it?

"Let's settle you in the living room. I'll bring you a cup of tea before I start clearing up. Okay?" Lieve opened the door for her.

Ammie didn't protest. It was barely an hour since she had got out of bed and she was already tired.

Lieve made her comfortable in a chair before she began to bustle around the bedroom. Ammie closed her eyes.

January 18, 1961

Ammie

Katanga

When Ammie regained consciousness, the first person she saw was a Tetela woman. This was evident from the raised scar tissue decorating her pregnant belly in a complicated labyrinthine design. From this scarification the Tetela people would be able to construe her entire ancestry.

Strange to see a woman in traditional dress. Nowadays everyone wore Western clothing. The hand-woven skirt decorated with cowrie shells sat low on her hips to make room for the distended stomach. The colorful beads around her hips rattled when she moved. Her swollen breasts glistened, the areolas purplish black against the mahogany skin. Her eyes were the color of lychee pips, their expression inscrutable.

Ammie tried to move, groaned. Her entire body was a matrix of pain.

The woman held a tin mug to Ammie's swollen lips. She drank gratefully, but with effort. The goat's milk was cool, yet burned where it touched her cracked lips. It left an herbal aftertaste.

She was lying in a darkened room on a rug made of animal skins. A gap in the wall let in the sun. The filthy panes of the only window were cracked, one corner broken and missing.

Her nose was blocked, forcing her to breathe through her mouth. She could taste rather than smell the stench of sewage and rotting garbage outside. Her eyelids felt swollen and grainy.

"Elijah?" she muttered when the worst of her thirst had been quenched.

"Elijah is dead."

"César ..."

The woman's face contorted with hatred. "Your husband is gone. The dog ran!" Her Congo-French was terse and limited. She chased flies from Ammie's lips. "He thinks you dead. Leave you for tai and fisi."

Ammie recognized the Swahili words, though she didn't speak the language. In the Congo there was enough work for vultures and hyenas to hear them mentioned quite often. She didn't speak Lingala either, the Congo's other lingua franca.

There was a time when she had considered herself a loyal citizen of this country. She might not have been born here, but she had believed it was where her roots lay; it provided her with the only context in which to be herself.

Now she knew she had always been an incomer and would always remain one. She had been as blind as the rest, living in a dream world, where it was considered unnecessary to learn the indigenous languages, get to know the locals, try to understand them. No wonder the Congo had turned its back on them. They were no more than fleas on a dog's back that had to be brushed off.

"Where am I?"

"Elisabethville, but not the one you know. My kitongoji." Her voice rang with bitterness.

Ammie could see and smell the difference between her Elisabethville and this woman's neighborhood. She could hear it as well. Children shouting and laughing. Drums throbbing in the distance. Women's voices.

Cité indigène. A city on the outskirts of a city. A city where white people didn't go. A place to which the indigenous people had to return at night when they had finished their work in the houses and businesses of the whites because they were not welcome in white Elisabethville. At least, that was how it used to be.

"Why are you helping me?" Since Independence, white people were the enemy. Before Independence as well, of course, but now it was official.

"For Elijah. He was good to me. You must sleep now."

As if the words had magical powers her eyelids grew heavy. The herbs, Ammie realized, before she dozed off.

*Ammie
Leuven*

"Oh, Miss Ammie, your tea has gone cold." Lieve clicked her tongue.

Lubumbashi. That was the new name for Elisabethville.

Where was Elisabethville again?

Lieve put a crocheted blanket on her lap, tucking it around her knees. "I'll bring you a fresh pot."

"That's kind of you, Lieve. What time will Luc be home from school?" The wall clock was no longer where it used to be. The room looked strange. Whose house was this?

Lieve stroked her hair. "You haven't seen Luc in years. He's a professor now. Just like your first husband. You told me yourself."

No, my second husband. Luc's father was my second husband. Jacq DeReu. César was the first. And after Jacq came Tobias. Three husbands. One great love. The one I never married. Elijah.

This time she kept her thoughts to herself. The pious Lieve wouldn't understand. Jacq hadn't understood either.

"Luc is no longer in Leuven." Lieve's voice came from far away, as if she was coming to the end of a long tale.

"Who's this Luc again?" Ammie closed her eyes and heard Lieve give a deep sigh.

*Caz
Overberg*

Damn Tienieke! Spoiled her entire day with her lies. It couldn't be true, Caz had decided after the initial shock. Tienieke just wanted to trick her into making the journey. That was all it could be.

She was the late-born child of Josefien and Hans Colijn. Born in the H.F. Verwoerd Moedersbond Hospital on October 2, 1961. Registered as Cassandra Colijn. Raised in Pretoria. First in Rietfontein, as a baby, and later in Meyerspark, where she went to school and was confirmed in the Doppe-

Church. She had been Cassandra Colijn all her life, except for the eleven months her marriage lasted. How could it change now, after almost fifty-three years?

Caz shoved the wireless mouse aside and rolled her office chair away from her desk, annoyed. She had done hardly anything all morning. What was on the screen was pure drivel. She would have to re-do the lot.

The deadline for the translation was still some time away but it was a bloody brick of a novel. And translating from Afrikaans to English always took longer than the other way round. Moreover, the writer occasionally lapsed into the Cape dialect, which is nearly impossible to translate. Not to mention the many instances of humorous word play that made hardly any sense in English and wasn't even remotely funny in translation.

Correct language usage was the easy part. The challenges of translation lay elsewhere. How does one translate the voice of an author, for instance? Another person's take on life? The heart and soul of the disembodied author behind every book?

Word for word and sentence by sentence is how you initially translate. If that fails, you try to find the broader meaning, the author's intention. You try to get inside his mindset, to do justice to the meaning behind the words, the sentences, the story.

Her own present mindset wasn't exactly helping the process along.

Of course it wasn't the complexity of the translation that was paralyzing her brain.

Five words kept echoing through her mind, overriding all other words and their semantic and emotive value in any language. *Biological parents. Didn't want you.*

There was a mindset for you. Here, take this baby. I don't want her, for reasons a, b and c. Good luck with raising a child who doesn't share your gene pool.

Blue eyes. That's what Caz had in common with the rest of her family, though her eyes were a different blue. Darker, with light brown specks. Her hair was blonde like theirs but, while

her mother and sister—or whatever they were to her—had straight, thin hair, and her father had been bald for as long as she could remember, Caz had thick, tightly curled hair. She'd worn it long for most of her life in an attempt to make it more manageable. Now that the blonde had turned to gray it was easier, the curls slightly more relaxed. More corkscrew than frizz.

But what set her apart most from her sister and parents had always been her height. Where they were short and plump, she had shot up as if her shoes had been sprinkled with fertilizer. At thirteen she had already towered over her father. She had always been the tallest in her class, until some of the boys caught up with her in their last school year.

Finally at eye level with them, she still couldn't look them in the eye. Her awkwardness in male company was firmly rooted by then and the conviction that she was big and clumsy was an essential part of the way she viewed herself.

When she looked in the mirror she could see her face wasn't unattractive and her figure was well proportioned, despite her being so tall. Yet she felt unattractive. Undesirable. Different.

Not only was she too tall, she also lacked the right background. There was no Boer general in her family tree, no Afrikaner hero who was a distant relative's uncle or grandfather. No grandmother who had survived a Boer concentration camp.

Josefien and Hans Colijn had arrived in South Africa in 1951, when Tienieke was a year old. They knew little about the country's history. It was merely a place where the prospects were better. Where bakeries weren't as plentiful. Where the Second World War hadn't hit the population so hard. The same war that had made Hans leave the Netherlands to end up in Belgium, where he'd met Josefien.

To Josefien, South Africa was the back of beyond.

There were a number of Dutch people in Pretoria, Fien was Belgian—so they were different even in their otherness. On top of which they were Protestants, which distinguished her mother from the other Belgians.

Yet it was because of her distinctive looks that Hentie had noticed Caz, as unbelievable as she had found it at the time.

He had liked the fact that she was tall. "At least I can look you in the eye," he'd said the night they met at the agricultural students' barn dance in Potchefstroom. It wasn't completely true, of course, since he was still a good ten centimeters taller than Caz.

And Hentie was crazy about her hair. He had raked his fingers through her curls that first evening when he kissed her goodbye at her residence. Her very first breath-taking kiss.

He found her reticence endearing. Maybe because he mistook it for timidity and failed to perceive the ire it masked.

She, on the other hand, had been completely blind to the fact that he was simply searching for the best possible mother for his children. A woman with a strong body and a submissive spirit. One who would accept his father's whims and moods.

Physically she was indeed a strong young woman. About the rest, he had been sorely mistaken.

Not that he was the only one who had been mistaken. What she hadn't realized at first was that Hentie and Andries Maritz came as a package. Marry the son and you inherited the father. At Liefenleed, the Maritzes' farm on the far side of the Soutpansberg, they farmed together as the family had been doing for generations.

All she saw at that stage was a big, strong, handsome farmer. One who had fought in the Border War for what he believed in. A real man's man. A pure-bred Maritz.

That first evening, and in the months that followed, she would never have guessed that this "real man" was his father's lapdog. Just as she had never guessed there was a genetic explanation for the difference in appearance between herself and the rest of her family. If, of course, Tienieke wasn't lying simply to get her to go to Ghent.

Didn't want you. The words had such a bleak sound.

How could a mother put her child in the arms of another and walk away?

Or did she leave her baby in a cradle and hit the road? A

rubbish bin? On someone's doorstep? Did she turn for one last look?

Did she ever wonder about her daughter again? Remember birthdays? Think of her at Christmas? At her coming of age? Did she wonder about her daughter's wedding day? Whether she had grandchildren? Even great-grandchildren were a possibility, Caz thought, though Lilah had never mentioned such plans.

How could you leave a child and her entire progeny behind—blood of your blood?

She would have to find answers to all these questions, Caz realized. Or she would lose her mind.

She pressed her fingers to her temples. No, it just wasn't possible. Tienieke had to be lying.

Or did it explain everything? Tienieke's aversion to her for as long as she could remember. Ma Fien ... No, apparently not her mother after all. Fien. Fien's increasing aloofness until that moment when she finally chased Caz away. Her father's lack of interest in any of his youngest daughter's exploits. He had been kind, but not interested in his so-called late-born child.

And Lilah, of course. It could explain Lilah.

TWO

Tuesday, September 2

Caz

Overberg

The sleep Caz managed to get was fraught with nightmares. Strangely enough she didn't dream of Josefien or Tienieke. Not actually about Hentie either. Mainly about his father, though Hentie was there in the background—as had always been the case in the presence of his father.

Why Tienieke's shocking news had subconsciously reminded her of Andries Maritz, she couldn't fathom. The dream had been so real that for the first time in years she remembered again how she had felt in her father-in-law's proximity. Almost as if she were married to him, instead of his son.

Caz stepped out on the veranda with her coffee mug, drawing the fresh Overberg air deep into her lungs. There was no wind yet, as was usual before ten in the morning at this time of year. The birds fossicked in the trees. Catya was sitting on the lawn, licking herself as she always did after a

meal. A donkey brayed on a nearby smallholding and the neighbors' dog barked in reply.

Everything was exactly as it had been the day before. And yet so different.

Why she had been so desperate to belong in those by-gone days she could only ascribe to her feeling of inferiority and the naïveté of youth. It was that very need to belong that had blinded her to the obvious, though Hentie's guile had added insult to injury.

Hentie had been a coward, but no fool. Before the wedding he had made certain that Caz spent as little time as possible with Andries.

Andries was even taller and bigger than his son and an attractive man for his age when she had first met him. For his age? Hello, he was only about forty-seven. Five years younger than her present age. But at the time she had seen him as a much older man.

She'd suspected that with him it would be fit in or fuck off, but after he had given her the once-over, he had actually been quite friendly.

"Good child-bearing hips," he had apparently complimented Hentie with his choice that evening, though she would only find out about it later. After the wedding. Like so many things she would learn about and realize only after the wedding.

Andries was a hardworking farmer. The three farms were big and lay far apart—the main one at the foot of the Soutpansberg, the second near Tshipise and the other one closer to Pafuri.

Caz had had no reason to suspect that Hentie had bargained on her not coming into contact with his father too often during her visits. That was before the wedding. After the wedding it was a different matter. The Maritzes not only farmed together, they lived in the same house as well. She'd thought it would be temporary. It wasn't, and was never meant to be.

She got a foretaste of the implications of this arrangement shortly before the wedding.

After a few canceled appointments, the Colijns were

commandeered to the farm to meet and get to know their prospective in-laws. It was the day after a public holiday, the Day of the Covenant, and two weeks before the wedding, which had been set for New Year's Eve.

It was clear from the outset that the parents in the Colijn-Maritz alliance would not get along. Caz had suspected as much, and had delayed the meeting as long as possible. She had even deliberately sabotaged it during the ten months she and Hentie had been dating.

It hadn't been difficult. The bakery kept Hans busy and Josefien had no desire to meet a pair of backvelders from the wild north, whether her lastborn was set on marrying their son or not.

Finally the meeting couldn't be avoided any longer. Tienieke agreed to see to the bakery and Josefien could think of no further excuse not to meet her daughter's future in-laws.

It was a balls-up—even worse than Caz had feared.

Josefien kept whining about the heat, the dust, the creepy crawlies, and made no effort to hide her disapproval. If she did try to conceal her disdain of the big farmer with the sonorous voice and fearless gaze who was to be her daughter's father-in-law, she failed miserably.

A sweating Hans, on the other hand, tried to impress Andries in his genial baker's way, his apple cheeks bobbing up and down as he chuckled and chattered, running his hand over his ample girth. Andries, however, had no inclination to make small talk with a Dutchman who baked bread and made cakes for a living.

After they had been officially introduced, Andries steered the first conversation toward politics, but Hans admitted he had no interest in the subject. When Andries talked about rugby, Hans shook his head again. Instead, he volunteered a story about a birthday cake he had once made in the shape of a "football."

"I'm afraid you'll have to talk to the wife about that," Andries said bluntly when Hans wanted to explain the fine art of making choux pastries, for which he was renowned in Pretoria.

Maybe things would have been better if Andries had been a wheat farmer and Hans at least a consumer of his product, but Andries farmed with cattle and game. On the Tshipise farm he had a field of tomatoes and some alfalfa for private use, but that was it. His cattle were his passion and his pride, and the game a small goldmine. Perhaps Fien should not have volunteered that the Colijns preferred pork and chicken to beef and venison.

The next day Hans obliged by joining mother-in-law Magdel in the big kitchen. The two of them didn't exactly hit it off. Magdel was too reserved. Or perhaps she had taken offence the night before when Fien had looked down her nose at Magdel's cast-iron pots and declared that they couldn't possibly be hygienic.

Or perhaps Magdel didn't take kindly to Hans's lack of enthusiasm for her homemade bread. Or perhaps because Fien, not quite under her breath, had remarked to Hans, who was about to accept a second helping, that the food was too salty and greasy for his state of health.

Andries Maritz was a bastard and a chauvinist pig, but one thing Caz could vouch for: his loyalty toward his wife and son was indisputable. He could berate and belittle them as much as he liked himself, but no one else dared make a disparaging remark about them.

Magdel must have told Andries about the cast-iron cookware issue. Lord knows why. On the second night, as he lit his pipe after supper, Andries looked his son's future mother-in-law in the eye.

"Well, Josefien, it seems you've survived the unhygienic meals so far," he said.

Fien pursed her lips. "It's just that we do it differently at home. And I do the cleaning myself. Here a maid cleans the pots."

"That may be so, Josefien, but Magdel is an excellent cook and she keeps an eye on her maids. You can eat from the floor, never mind the pot, that's how clean it is. I'm telling you now, you will not insult my wife in her own kitchen. Is that clear?"

Josefien's eyes nearly popped out of her head. Her mouth went slack so the yellowish upper teeth with their overbite were visible.

"Now, now, Andries. Fieneker didn't mean anything by it," Hans tried to intervene.

"I have something to say to you too, brother-in-law," Andries cut him short. "Don't think because you allow your wife to wear the pants in your house she can do it in mine as well. All she has done since arriving here is to look down her nose at everything, and you don't say a word to stop her. Here at Liefenleed we have respect for the institution of holy matrimony as outlined in the Holy Scriptures. The man is the head of the household and his wife is subservient to his wishes. If you choose to play with dough and allow your wife to walk all over you, it's your business. But it won't happen here. That's why I took it on myself to set her straight."

Hans tried to say something, but Andries cut him short. "And just so we understand each other perfectly: your daughter will be well taken care of here. Sandra will want for nothing, as long as she knows her place."

He turned his gaze so suddenly to Caz she almost gasped for breath. "You seem a nice girl, Sandra, but let's get this straight. I don't want any friction under my roof."

He hadn't wanted outlandish names under his roof either, Caz had learned by then. On her first visit to the farm, Hentie had introduced her as Caz, the nickname her roommate at university had given her and which Caz felt fitted her like a glove. Andries asked what her real name was. Cassandra, she said, and since then she had been Sandra to him. It was as though he had stuck her into a box made to his own specifications, labeled it Sandra, and that was that.

Caz sighed and tossed the rest of her coffee over the railing into the shrubs below. Enough now. She had better things to do than obsess about the past. She had been Caz for the past thirty years and that was who she would remain. Whether she was a Colijn or not.

Turning to re-enter the house, she thought she noticed

a movement among the poplars. She scrutinized the area. Nothing moved. It must have been her imagination.

All the ghosts from the past must be playing tricks on her senses. Must be why she was covered in gooseflesh too.

Erevu
Antwerp

The Samsung tablet had only one purpose: Contact with Jela.

Yesterday there were two messages.

From: Erevu
To: Jela
Ghent connection: Finally phoned SA. After a two-year wait! Use code 4 to decode number:
O*#%><O*#%

From: Jela
To: Erevu
Excellent news. Dialing code for Overberg (Western Cape). I'll get on it immediately.

A few minutes ago another message came through.

From: Jela
To: Erevu
Address now known.
Dove flew to Cape Town last night. Just heard he found the place.

Erevu sighed with relief. At least they had finally found the woman. It was the beginning of their success story. He was convinced of it.

*Luc
Damme, Belgium*

"Luc DeReu, good day." His thoughts were still on the assignment he was grappling with as he answered his cellphone. The student's inability to structure his arguments logically exasperated him. And that at postgraduate level. The bloke seemed incapable of figuring out the bare basics of cause and effect. He obviously saw history as a bunch of dates and linear events and didn't understand that history is not subject to Newton's Law. For each action there are a myriad reactions—equal and unequal and not always opposite. Or sensible.

"Bingo! Would you believe it!" An unknown female voice rejoiced in his ear. The accent was Western Flemish.

"Pardon?"

"When Miss Ammie asked for you—for the first time in who knows how long, I must add—I guessed KU Leuven would know your present whereabouts. I must say, they weren't exactly forthcoming. They refused to give me your number. Just said their records showed you had left for the University of Maastricht. There they told me you currently have a post at the University of Ghent. I got your number from their administration. They were much friendlier, thank goodness."

"Who am I speaking to?" he asked, trying to stanch the confusing flow of info.

"You don't know me, but I've heard so much about you, it feels as if I know you. As a child, that is. It's how Miss Ammie remembers you. The name is Lieve Luykens, Professor. I've been taking care of your mother, Ammie Pauwels, for the past five years."

Suddenly Lieve Luykens had his undivided attention. Ammie Pauwels. He had been three when his father married Ammie, but she was the closest thing to a mother he had ever known. Yet one day she had just disappeared from their lives. His father was never the same again. Images of the defeated man flashed through his mind, brought back all the guilt feelings in a flash.

With an effort he brought himself back to the present. "I presume she's no longer living in Doel?" The tragic history of the polder village on the Scheldt was well known. When the residents were forced out of the town to make way for the expansion of the port of Antwerp, he had wondered what had become of Ammie and her new husband.

"No, Professor. It's been years since they lived there. Apparently she tried to hold out, even after 2000, but with her husband gone by then, she finally gave in and moved back to Leuven, where she ran into one of your father's colleagues and heard you had left the university."

Hopefully Ammie didn't find out why he had left.

"Is she still in Leuven?"

"Indeed, Professor, but I'm afraid she's not very well. Her memory increasingly comes and goes. The past she remembers well at times, but she can't always remember what she did yesterday or what she has just said. Her health is also unstable."

"I'm sorry to hear that." What else could one say? Old age spares no one.

"I wondered ... She's so lonely, trapped in her own thoughts ... I don't know why you are estranged, but she has always spoken highly of you. The way I understand it, the discord was between your father and herself. Would you consider paying her a visit? It might cheer her up. Give her some interest in the present."

Luc remained quiet for a long time. Thoughts and memories turned into a tangle of emotions. To see Ammie again would raise so many ghosts from the past.

"This morning she wanted to know what time Luc would be home from school." There was a plea behind the sad words.

"In that case, she won't recognize me, Mrs. Luykens. What's the point?"

"You never know, Professor. But if it doesn't work, if your visit doesn't do her any good, I won't bother you again. It's just, she's known such hard times in her life. I gathered there were other children as well, but you're the only one I know of for sure. An elderly person shouldn't die alone."

"Die?" Could he live with his conscience if the stepmother who raised him had to die in solitude?

"I don't suppose she's literally dying. It's not that she's actually ill. The problem is she has nothing to live for, Professor. I've been searching for months to find something to interest her. When she mentioned your name again ..." The woman gave a deep sigh. "Oh, well, I tried."

Luc had difficulty keeping up. "Mrs. Luykens, what did you mean by 'other children'?" In all the years Ammie was married to his father, there had never been any mention of it.

"That's the only conclusion I could come to. That there were other children too. You see, when she becomes muddled, she starts babbling about things she thinks I know about or she confuses me with other people."

"Will the weekend suit you? Sunday morning, perhaps?" Luc knew he was complicating his life and he hated complications. But how could he ignore Lieve Luykens's kind intentions? And maybe he could find answers to the questions that had been tormenting him for so long.

"You'll really come? Sunday would be wonderful. I'll get something nice for coffee. The baker around the corner ..."

"Please don't go to any trouble, Mrs. Luykens. I'll be there around eleven. Give me the address, please."

He wrote down Lieve's detailed directions, said goodbye, and gave a protracted sigh. What had he let himself in for now?

Ammie had left when he was twenty-one and no longer living at home. It was 1983, he recalled, just as he could recall the date of almost every major event in his life. It was the curse and blessing of his profession, but also his one extraordinary talent. He suspected he owed his academic achievements to an excellent memory, rather than brilliance.

That day, thirty-one years ago, his father had phoned him in a terrible state and told him Ammie had moved out. Two years later Luc had seen Ammie for the second-last time. It was just before she got married again.

They had met by chance in Antwerp. She told him of her

intended marriage and apologized for everything but explained nothing. Only mentioned she was living in Doel.

He wondered why she had chosen Doel. Ever since the sixties there had been rumors that the polder village would have to make way for the expansion of the port.

The last time he had seen her, or at least thought he had seen her, was at his father's funeral in 1997, but before he could reach her she had vanished into the crowd of university staff and ex-students attending the service.

And now this call.

Why the hell did he agree to go? What hope did a bachelor like him have of bringing any cheer to a senile woman in her eighties? The woman who had destroyed his father's life, besides.

For goodness' sake, he couldn't even cheer himself up.

It was in 2011 that he realized just how boring his life was. Exactly how dull he was as a person. It was the year he lectured in South Africa, a country burning at the hand of its own Nero. Just to step through one's own front door was risky in numerous neighborhoods—but the people carried on with their lives.

Only once had he come to life. Long ago. Before South Africa.

He should have known that a woman like Suri would have an agenda of her own. Why else would a gorgeous young student suddenly start flirting with a nerdy professor? Unfortunately, he never thought further than those ripe breasts, the welcoming hips and his fantasies about where those shapely legs ended.

He might be boring and unremarkable, but he was still a man. Alas, yes, even though he would never see fifty again.

*Caz
Overberg*

The translation just wouldn't flow. Her thoughts were all over the place. Tienieke's call. Its implications. Memories of what had been.

Of all things, she remembered again the house in Lillian Street, Meyerspark, where she had grown up.

There had been three terraces and a set of stone steps leading down to the Moreleta Spruit. White stinkwood trees edged the bilharzia-infected stream. Since Hans had spotted a leguan on the bank, nothing could get any of the others there.

To Caz it was a place to escape Tienieke's bullying and Mother Fien's never-ending orders and complaints. She would often climb as high as she could up a tree and sit there, dreaming about the day she would be grown-up.

Once she had been halfway up when she'd discovered the tree was covered in worms. She let go, skinning her knees and arms. She told Fien she had fallen on the steps. Tienieke had teased her for being clumsy.

She'd felt betrayed by her trees, but had learned patience had its own rewards. Weeks later the worms were gone and she could once again escape to her dreamworld.

At Liefenleed, though the farm was vast, there had been no escape. She was bound to a house that wasn't hers, among people she couldn't fathom.

It was in the early eighties. Anti-apartheid saboteurs were regularly crossing the Limpopo. The roads had to be swept for landmines. There was nowhere she could be alone. It was too dangerous.

She had learned about the danger the hard way that night Andries had so harshly reprimanded Fien and Hans.

December 1982

Caz

Soutpansberg

Caz sneaked out through the backdoor after everyone had gone to their rooms. Her emotions were too stirred up to remain inside, her bedroom too stuffy, even though the house was air-conditioned.

Too much was bottled up, too many warning lights were flickering, she had too many misgivings to even think about sleeping.

Outside the heat of the day still clung to the earth, but the fresh air was balm for her distress. She went down the veranda steps to escape from the light and kept walking blindly.

The moon was just a lemon rind in the star-scattered sky, but when her eyes got used to the dark, she could make out the road leading to the gate.

At last she could release her tears of frustration where no one could hear her.

She loved Hentie, but could she deal with his father? His mother, even? Magdel sometimes looked at Caz as if she pitied her, at other times as if Caz was an intruder.

Could she face a life regulated by her parents-in-law? By Hentie? She would have to dance to the tune of three other people. Each with his or her specific expectations. She could never be herself. Or find out who she actually was.

It wasn't the train of thought she should be harboring less than two weeks before her wedding, but she couldn't stop the feeling of dread.

A rustling in the mopane trees stopped her in her tracks. She hadn't realized she had walked so far. She was almost at the gate, a kilometer from the house. Was it her imagination or did she hear whispering voices? No, it wasn't her imagination. She smelled smoke as well. Tobacco of some kind. The workers' huts were far from there.

She whirled round, trying to move quietly but as swiftly as possible. As soon as she felt she could, she broke into a run. A few paces further, with her heart pounding in her ears, she looked over her shoulder. The next moment she was skimming over the uneven surface of the gravel road. Stifling a cry, she struggled to her feet. With her knees and elbows burning like hell, she limped on, a nameless fear propelling her forward.

She had almost reached the back veranda when Hentie came out, the keys to the pick-up in his hand. Seeing her, he hurried to meet her, gripped her arm and hastily led her to a shadowy spot, out of hearing distance.

"Damn it, Caz! Where the hell have you been? I was scared

shitless when I discovered you weren't in your room. I was just coming to look for you."

"I took a walk and went a bit too far."

"Why are you so out of breath? So frightened? And why are your jeans torn? And your shirt ripped?"

"I was just startled. I thought I heard something." With an effort, she got her breathing under control. "I fell when I was running home."

"Darling, you can't just go for a walk on the farm! Especially not at night. There are snakes and wild creatures in the bushes. Not to mention that there could be terrorists in the area! Promise me you'll never, ever do it again."

Terrorists? She hadn't even considered the possibility. Everyone spoke about it, but here, on the farm? If Hentie found out how far she had actually gone down the road, he would have a cadenza.

"Why did you go to my room?" she tried to change the subject.

"I wanted to talk to you. Tell you I don't think the way my father does." He seemed ill at ease. "And I wanted to hold you. Actually, I just missed you." He laid his hand against her cheek. "And now? Why the tears?" he asked when he felt the dampness.

"I don't know whether I'm cut out for this, Hentie. It's such a harsh place, and your father ..."

"Please, Caz, don't even think it. My parents have gone to so much trouble for the wedding ... And what about us? I love you, my darling. Everything will be all right once we're married."

At least she was still Caz to him, and his darling. It soothed her troubled mind. His kiss transported her far away from the farm and her reservations.

Hentie was right, she thought when she finally got into bed. Everything would be all right. Once they were married.

*Caz
Overberg*

Caz sighed. She had been so young. So bloody stupid.

Mother Fien and Father Hans had left early the next morning. Hans promised they would be at the wedding, but added that they could not possibly stay until then when it was so obvious they weren't welcome.

Andries and Magdel did not object.

Hentie dried Caz's tears with his handkerchief. Said his father's bark was worse than his bite. A hard landscape produces hard people, but his father was a good and reasonable man. Josefien had just upset him with her attitude.

Shortly afterwards, the Colijns were forgotten. One of the herdsmen had come across a butchered carcass near the gate. A cow in calf. The footprints in the sandy soil, not even a hundred meters from the two-track road, pointed at saboteurs.

Hentie took her aside and looked at her with worried eyes: "See the danger you put yourself in last night? For heaven's sake, Caz, if they had seen you, we would be making funeral arrangements today. You're never going anywhere on this farm again without me or someone who is armed by your side, understand?" He wiped the sweat from his brow. "You can thank your lucky stars my father is none the wiser and you'd better hope and pray he never finds out."

"For crying out loud, Hentie, I went for a walk, I didn't do anything wrong. I understand what you're saying, that it's dangerous, but I didn't commit a crime. I just didn't understand the danger. Now I do."

Two days after Hans and Josefien's departure Andries selected a calf for her and branded it with an S.

"Yours, Sandra, the first of your stud," he said and she realized she would never be Cassandra to him, let alone Caz. She knew he was trying to make up for the quarrel with her parents. Perhaps also for the fact that she had to make an isolated farm, with all kinds of dangers on it, her home simply because she had fallen in love with his son.

She appreciated it, but what she was supposed to do with a calf, never mind her own stud, she didn't have the foggiest.

After that, Hentie never called her Caz again in his father's presence. Both he and Magdel stuck to Sandra. A name that made her feel estranged from herself. As if she had been poured into a fresh mould. As if Andries had branded *her* as part of his domestic herd.

At the wedding, the two sets of parents ignored each other. As a final insult, Hans's towering choux artwork never made it to the dessert table.

That, Caz thought, had been the worst possible slap in the face for Hans and Josefien. Worse than the fact that their request that there should be no dancing at the reception was ignored by Andries. There were two bands, taking turns, and the guests made the most of the opportunity.

Caz sighed and got to her feet. Tienieke's call had opened up a tunnel to the past and she could not find a way to plug the bloody thing again.

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