

*Also by Gillian Slovo*

MORBID SYMPTOMS  
DEATH BY ANALYSIS  
DEATH COMES STACCATO  
TIES OF BLOOD  
THE BETRAYAL  
FAÇADE  
CATNAP  
CLOSE CALL  
RED DUST

# *Every Secret Thing*

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My Family, My Country

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ABACUS

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Ruth. Yet what was there to say? Ruth needed it that way. All that was left for us to do was bide our time and wait to see what would happen next.

## Chapter Twelve

On 7 December, the day Ruth came out of gaol, she wrote to Joe who had reached London by then:

It is over. At least so they say. They say no re-arrest. No charges. At last the nightmare begins to recede. Perhaps as time passes and there is a return to normality, which is as normal as things can be at home in our present circumstances, I will forget too much. Was ill at the end, but now all I need is a holiday and to learn how to sleep. Yes me! I can't sleep!

She desperately needed to get away from Johannesburg but, vindictive to the last, the police wouldn't give her permission to go beyond the city limits. So she sent us off instead. By Christmas, we were all dispersed. Shawn was with friends in a game reserve, Tilly back in her home, and Joe and Julius in London. Meanwhile Robyn and I and Ruth's Citroën were all holidaying with Hilda Bernstein, whose husband was one of the nine Rivonia Trialists, and her two children.

So my year was book-ended by two parentless holidays. We celebrated the new year in the resort town of Port Alfred in the Eastern Cape. A few miles down the road, in 1705, the white Afrikaner settlers first encountered the indigenous Xhosas. But by 1963 Port Alfred, and the Grand Hotel where we were staying, was a kind of Butlins, packed with nuclear families, all white, who rushed about by day, yodelling happily, and gathered by night in a huge, garishly decorated hall to play communal games. To us they seemed like aliens from outer space.

It was midsummer but it rained a lot. I remember grey skies when we wakened, which grew darker as we punted on a lake, getting ourselves wet enough to go home and change again. I

also remember loud fights between the kids and loud laughter, horse riding on the beach, fishing without success and an exhibition of heavily muscled life-savers hauling thick cables from the sea. On New Year's Eve, dressed as cavemen, our faces smeared with dirt and carrying lethal-looking clubs, Robyn and I won the hotel's fancy-dress competition. We all got sick drunk in our imaginations as we gazed admiringly at our prize of cheap South African champagne.

But more than anything I remember witnessing a conversation between Hilda's daughter, Frances, then twelve years old, and a hotel guest. The man, intrigued by our entourage of one anxious-looking woman and four sulky children, asked Frances where her father was. I knew immediately why Frances's face turned bright red, and why she mumbled something inaudible. I stood, close by, knowing also what was next. I was right. The man asked another question. 'What's your father's name?'

Frances's father was called Lionel but, because of his shock of red hair, everybody knew him by his nickname of Rusty. 'Lionel,' Frances said, as softly as she could.

The man had good hearing even if he did seem a trifle simple-minded. He frowned. 'Lionel?' I watched the monicker ringing a distant bell. 'Lionel? Lionel Bernstein?' Now he'd got it. An expression – embarrassment? distaste? admiration? something in between? – crossed his face. Whatever it was, he needed confirmation. 'Do you mean Rusty Bernstein?'

At which point, Frances turned and fled. I followed as she ran crying to her mother and asked whether it had been an act of betrayal to tell a stranger her father's name. I understood exactly what she was going through. I carried the same unbearable sense of responsibility and guilt with me.

But I could not deny that the sympathy I felt for her was only half of what I felt. The other part of me was possessed by an emotion which surged despite my attempt to elbow it away: jealousy. Jealousy at the way Hilda hugged Frances, and at the way Frances had her mother and all the attention too.

If I could not be carefree, I guess, I must at least be recognised.

The litany kept going round: 'Notice me, notice me, don't notice me', changing occasionally to: 'Notice my parents, don't notice them' and the one almost unthinkable addendum, 'Notice me for what I am, not for what my parents do'.

Many years later, I was to go to lunch with Mac Maharaj, an old friend of both my parents who was then in his first year as the new South Africa's minister of transport. We met in his fourteenth-floor suite in the building on Cape Town's Plein Street where, while Parliament is in session, all the ministers have their offices. With bodyguards massing, we took the lift down to the basement, got into his car – a standard ministerial Mercedes – and drove to the restaurant. The room was all rag-rolled walls and oversize white plates, a far cry from the tack of that old Port Alfred hotel. We sat down, ordered quickly, and got down to business. I had asked to see Mac because I wanted to talk to him about his work in the ANC underground with Joe. But before we got on to my father, Mac leaned across the table and told me something else.

He told me how, some years previously, he had watched, in the company of other ANC people, *A World Apart*, the film my sister, Shawn, wrote about Ruth's imprisonment. The film deals poignantly with our last year in South Africa, a wrenching account of the impact on a child of her mother's political involvement. Mac said he had enjoyed the film but then he added something different: some of his African comrades, he said, had decided that what the young girl in the film needed was 'a good slap'.

*A good slap* – it felt like that to me. I read behind the words and breathed in their implications. They conjured up a judgement I knew only too well, that we were white kids who indulged ourselves in whining. Legions of other renowned whiners, white South Africans all, who'd been brought up with black servants to wipe their noses, make their beds, tell them when to walk, massed behind us. They were still very much in evidence in 1995, those whites who stood about helplessly when there was something to be done. A nation of the over-indulged

having trouble growing up and we three white kids were being ranked amongst them.

Mac said quickly that of course he disagreed. Our childhoods were particularly difficult, he said, for the very reason that we were white and therefore isolated in our community. Not so the kids of African comrades, he continued. They all knew the score. 'Africans lived in a community that warned you,' he said, 'that was with you, even if only in spirit. You didn't.'

*A good slap* – it stayed with me long after the main course was cleared away and I was spooning through an extravagant chocolate dessert. It was part of my inheritance anyway, that inner voice that asked how I dare protest when so many Africans had suffered so much more. 'Mummy's gone to prison to help the black people,' the six-year-old Shawn had told the newsmen. It was second nature to us, this owning of black South Africa's pain. Even as children we carried internal scales of justice which we used to weigh up 'their' needs – the needs of the impoverished masses – against ours. How could we win? Compared to the poverty, degradation, discrimination they endured, our suffering was negligible. When it came down it, the scale was weighted permanently against us.

We were brought up in a political culture which used self-sacrifice as its fuel. It never went away, this conflict between the demands of 'one' and the needs of the 'whole'. Our parents were rebels, they saw a wrong and they fought to make it right. To do that they had to turn away from the subjective. Their eyes were on a greater prize than self – they were fighting for humanity.

But we were only children. We knew enough about what our parents were doing to realise that we couldn't ask them to make another choice. But could we also find a way to hush those inner voices which cried out for safety, security, normality – all those things our white school friends had?

Amongst the letters that my family kept was one written in 1964 by a great friend, Bram Fischer, to my grandparents. Bram was writing in response to a condolence letter that Tilly had sent on hearing of the death of Bram's wife, Molly. Bram wrote:

During the past twenty years, we have had to make many important decisions which might have had grave consequences for ourselves and our family. I know that there was no single occasion when Molly ever let herself be influenced in any way by possible personal consequences. She had the rare quality, supposed to belong to judges, of being able to exclude entirely from her mind what the consequences of a decision might be to her and – what was perhaps even more remarkable – what such consequences might be to her family.

There it is, that almost biblical conviction that what matters is not the person but the cause. And yet Bram was the least impersonal of men. I remember him with such affection. I remember his warm, unassuming presence by their swimming pool on Sundays and the brief squeeze of his hand that one time in London when, already suspect and threatened with imprisonment, he had been given permission by the South African government to go abroad on legal business after promising he would return. This was the last occasion I was to see him. He kept his promise and went back and was imprisoned.<sup>2</sup>

He was one of the most heroic of men and the kindest and here is his accolade for the dead wife he had adored: that she thought not of herself, or of her family, but of others, less well off than them. I read through the letter again and I think perhaps what Mac's comrades had said was true – perhaps a good slap would have sorted us out.

And then another, contradictory voice, rises up in protest. We

2. Bram Fischer, a member of one of South Africa's foremost Afrikaner families with the most dazzling of careers ahead of him, threw in his lot with the ANC. Heavily involved in all that was going on, he risked his own freedom to act as barrister for the Rivonia Trialists. After the trial was over, he went underground, determined to keep the resistance going. Shortly after Molly's death, he was caught and given a sentence of life imprisonment. It proved to be for life – in 1975 Bram died of cancer. He had been let out of gaol for the last few weeks of his life but, after he was cremated, the prison authorities insisted on reclaiming his ashes.

were not asking them to stay silent, that voice says, or to put our needs before the needs of the oppressed. All we wanted was a simple acknowledgement that no political movement can ever fight for justice without there being casualties.

Between these two polarities I am endlessly caught, swaying between my needs and theirs, between the self and the community to which, because I was a white child, I never fully belonged.

In Johannesburg Ruth was isolated. She had spent Christmas and New Year almost entirely on her own. When she spoke to Joe on the phone, she must have told him something of the way she felt. She must have told him, as she wrote eventually from England, to a nameless friend inside the country, 'I found myself very nervous when I came out about intruders and hearing walls . . . My spell [in gaol] brought all kinds of things closer to skin surface and some popped uncomfortably out.'

Still completely disoriented and unable to work out her next step, she worried about taking the exams in librarianship her incarceration had made her miss. 'You might think I am being bogged down in a trivial matter like exams,' she wrote to Joe. 'But I can't suspend myself here in limbo while you and I work out plans for a new life.'

There spoke that one Ruth, the independent woman who was busy bridging the chasm that had almost swallowed her. And yet immediately after that, she added, 'I need to talk to you. There are things I must tell you because you are you and I can tell no one else. And when will I see you to tell you?'

The strain was beginning to show. She was banned from meeting with most of the people who mattered to her and there is tension evident in her communications with Joe. 'You moan about Xmas,' she wrote to him. 'Mine has been hell. Empty, deserted house – no swimming . . . and anyway no one to swim with – no parties. You've forgotten what these bans can be like?'

Nobody, however, would accuse *Ruth* of ever needing a good slap. Stoical to the last she took away the sting of her complaint

by adding, 'Never mind, I'll survive.'

There it is again, the censorious voice, which elevates stoicism above private pain. And yet how useful this must have been in those days. There were big decisions to be made. The country was gripped by terror. Most of their friends were either banned, in gaol, or out of the country. 'God only knows how those left inside still cope,' Ruth wrote to Joe. 'Don't know how many there are, even, but pressure has been *tremendously* effective this time.'

Her Christmas had been miserable and, perhaps without us to keep her going, her collapse went further than she'd anticipated. And she had other problems: Joe's side of the correspondence did not survive, but from what she wrote, it's obvious that he was nursing his own insecurities, the most pointed of which was that she might not want to join him. On 30 December she, who had spent her working life shaping words, wrote,

. . . am afraid my letters haven't been good enough and may have given you the wrong impression and upset you. You must make allowances of difficulties in communication; some degree of disorientation (which crept in later rather than immediately after release, curiously) and acute difficulty of making decisions without you to help me. *I want to come very much*. I can't see this half-life for you and me going on much longer . . . I'm anxious about the future – I don't see how I can last even ticking over at one eighth of my former capacity for living and working for this former year. *But* I don't want to be indecently hasty for reasons you will understand. Rushing ahead oblivious to some local considerations will be sad and misunderstood. I feel so split and divided against myself . . . I think I must have an overdeveloped and oversize conscience. *And* I am also apprehensive about a new life in a huge unknown world.

They knew that Joe could never come back, not unless he was prepared to spend the rest of his life in gaol. If they were to be together, Ruth would have to join him. Yet still he felt she was holding back. She insisted she wasn't, breaking into capitals on

2 January to reassure him that '*THERE ARE NO FACTORS OF WHICH YOU ARE UNAWARE*'. 'Put all that out of your mind,' she continued. 'My ailment is overdevelopment of conscience ...' And of course being Ruth, she was honest enough to admit, as well, to her apprehension at having to live without a cook. Later she really got down to business, voicing her enduring concern by asking plaintively, 'Can they straighten hair in London?'

What the South African government did in 1963 was to be deadly effective. For more than a decade afterwards, the opposition in South Africa was completely quiescent. When the new generation rose up, it turned on those who had gone before accusing them of betrayal because they fled the country and left behind a vacuum. This is what tugged at Ruth's conscience: that she was somehow a deserter.

But there was no life remaining for her in South Africa. She had to go. She applied for a passport, which meant at least that she could come back. The police kept touring the block, sometimes hourly, checking on her movements but from the government administration offices in Pretoria where her passport request had gone, came only silence. While she waited she continued to see people, but 'not the right ones'. She went to the movies, 'five nights running' in one week. For her first movie after prison, she made Barney Simon go with her to see Cleopatra because she thought Elizabeth Taylor was so beautiful. She came out sorely disappointed though: Taylor had not lived up to expectations.

'For the rest,' she wrote, 'I lunch in town sometimes, sit about in cafés a bit, eat three meals a day, go to the hairdresser once a week and rejoice that I have decided not to swot.' The occasional piece of good news – like hearing that the black workers at Julius's old factory had cheered when they were told he had escaped – was overwhelmed by a sense of doom that she had barely escaped. 'A third suicide inside a cell,' she wrote to Joe in January, 'this one a 30-year-old African in Port Elizabeth. Horrible.'

The pressure was building. We returned from holiday and went back to school. Months passed and nothing was settled. She and Joe argued on the phone. On 3 March she wrote: 'Your call tonight made me sad. Jilly noticed it and remarked on it. We've been parted a long while and the sound of your voice made me feel sorry for myself and us.' Things got worse: Joe continued to press her until she gave vent to her irritation:

You seem to think I'm responsible for the delays in my getting papers [she wrote]. I ring the Pretoria passport office repeatedly – get nowhere. I've put in for an exit permit and expect the same cat's paw game on their part. And I don't have influence in those circles! ... Now you write and tell me how to persuade the Special Branch to give me an exit permit in my time, not theirs. Perhaps a letter from you to Colonel Van du Bergh will tip the scales. ha. ha. ha.

I can just see her, clicking her way to the post office, shoving the letter briskly into the post box. Soon afterwards, however, she regretted it:

Tonight of course [she wrote] I have remorse over the sore letter I wrote you yesterday ... I know there are difficulties and involvements your end ... but there are difficulties here too. We need to talk actually and be together and all will work out, I know. I really haven't been able to help the delay and if you discuss 'delaying tactics' they are not of my free choice. I'm not really frightened of us being together. Much more frightened that you'll be away from me ... miserable at the prospect.

We knew we were soon to be going to that mysterious overseas, that land we viewed through the old-world lens of Charles Dickens and Jane Austen. The signs of our imminent departure were all around. The house had been painted, its woodwork varnished and it was finally sold. The bird, the only one of our animals left alive, was given away. Shawn was booked to leave on

a boat with friends on 13 March and Tilly was to follow at the end of the month.

At the last moment Ruth's papers came through: not a passport but an exit permit, one way only. We were to leave on the 14th, the day before my twelfth birthday. In my school's back garden, a hurried party was convened. I came away with a gift of a tiny teddy bear and a feeling of things forever unfinished. And then we were off.

There was a car waiting in the road as we drove down the driveway. The faces of the two behatted men inside it didn't seem to register our going, but they fell in behind and followed us all the way out of Johannesburg. At Jan Smuts airport, Ruth's goodbye to cousins was made farcical by her attempt to avoid the policemen who planted themselves behind pillars, observing her. Our flight was called. We went outside.

As we began to climb up the steps, a news photographer shouted out. We turned, Ruth, Robyn and I, and were caught in the camera's eye on our way to the unknown. On Ruth's left is Robyn, grinning cheekily. Ruth is centre frame, not one hair out of place, her make-up immaculate. On her right, I stand, half-turned away, staring back – caught, carrying a Tintin book, between confusion and blank incomprehension.

## Chapter Thirteen

Heathrow airport: Ruth, Robyn, and I walked down the steps into the greyness of an unusually cold mid-March day and the glare of television lights. We were taken straight from customs to a TV studio where someone stuck a microphone in my face and asked how I liked England. What stayed with me afterwards was not the inanity of the question but the way I had stood, stranded with my mouth agape, no sound issuing out.

The interviewer turned to the real attraction, Ruth, and questioned her about her time in prison. As she answered, articulate and to the point, I counted the minutes until release. Finally, it was over and we were let loose on the scrum of people who'd been waiting for us, Joe amongst them. I remember not him particularly, but the clamouring of everybody for Ruth's attention. And I remember, also, the disappointing drive into London. Jane Austen had let me down: instead of beautifully cobbled streets leading on to quaint tea shops I saw endless rows of terraced red brick; instead of the luxuriant whiteness of satiny snow, dirty grey specks floated sporadically down from an unrelenting dull sky. There was one other sight to surprise – a woman on her hands and knees polishing at her doorstep's metal grating. Coming as we did from a world where manual labour was a blacks-only occupation, what amazed us was not the old-fashioned nature of the woman's task, but the fact that she was white.

A year later we were eating our first meal in the house that Ruth and Joe had bought in Camden Town. As supper neared its end, I leaned across the table, meaning to put my plate on the pile of others. An unfamiliar cracking sound startled me. Like the rest of the family, my eyes were drawn towards the uncurtained

## Chapter Twenty-One

I sat, with Andy and Cassie, on the hard, wooden airport bench, listening to the sound of a woman wiping a rag over the surface of her serving hatch. Apart from her, and the occasional blue overalled workman who would mop desultorily at a section of the grey tile floor before vanishing through an unmarked door, we were alone.

It hadn't been like this when we'd first arrived. We'd come out of customs to find the faded interior of Cape Town's international arrivals hall ringing with affectionate greetings and the sound of luggage being passed from trolleys into car boots. But soon afterwards our fellow passengers were all siphoned off and we were left alone. We sat, our garish suitcases piled precariously beside us, staring out at the unrelenting grey and at a line of taxis that, without an address to give them, we could not take.

There was no Joe, this time, to meet us. He'd said he wouldn't be there, but with Joe, you never could tell. In the years after Ruth's death, his movements had been unfathomable even, it appeared, to him. One minute he was coming to London, the next, the trip had been indefinitely put off. And it worked the other way as well. On our visits down south, all three sisters had become accustomed, after we'd made our travel plans, to have Joe tell us that he might not be able to fetch us from the airport. On every one of these occasions he had turned up – his early warning disclaimer produced, perhaps, to save us from possible disappointment.

Things had changed dramatically. Joe had made his final transformation, reaching the end of a career which had begun in what they called 'terrorism' and ended with Nelson Mandela proclaiming him the new South Africa's minister of housing. He

managed the change brilliantly, using that combination of careful planning and flamboyant inspiration with which he'd once blown up oil refineries to woo industry and bankers into the slow business of housing the poor. White South Africa lapped it up: they took him to their hearts, this genial communist. Once he'd been their arch-enemy, now he was, quite simply, theirs.

Shimmering moments of the days since I had last seen him, bitter-sweet in the variation of their texture, come back to me – a newsreader's description of Joe dancing on the night of the election victory, the sight of Joe on TV in an expensive charcoal-grey suit walking to his seat at Mandela's inauguration, his jolly voice retelling the Fidel Castro joke he had used to break the ice at his first meeting with his ministerial staff and . . . And the moment when he told me that what he had predicted had come true. A set of medical tests showed that his remission was over. Hearing that, my upset was tinged by a sense of relief that Andy and I had already decided on an extended stay in South Africa. At least this time I would not be observing Joe's deterioration long distance.

In August a mortally ill Joe, suffering badly from a new round of chemotherapy, had gone with Helena to Italy. He was due back the day after our arrival, 1,000 miles away in Johannesburg.

We were to camp out in his ministerial house in Cape Town while we looked for a place to rent. In the weeks that preceded our arrival, I'd been on drip fax to his office, working out how we could get access to the house inside the presidential compound, enclosed as it was by high fences and armed policemen. The driver will have to pass you through, Joe's secretary (the first in his long career) told me – which is why, that early morning, we sat waiting.

I looked at my watch. An hour and a half had passed since we had landed. It was eight, if I phoned the ministry now there might be someone in. I got up.

At that moment I saw a red three series BMW saloon pulling out outside. I watched as a lean man, his muscular body enclosed



in a fawn suit, stepped out of the car and, as if he had all the time in the world, ambled over. He was on a collision course with me but when he was a foot away, he stopped. 'Are you Gillian?' I said yes.

In the thick, accented English of a man who was only comfortable in his native tongue of Afrikaans, he proffered his name – Deon – and his job description, a member of the VIP protection squad who'd been allocated to Joe. He didn't smile. He said something, instead, about bad traffic that sounded more like an amateur radio report than an apology. 'I will drive you to the minister's house,' he said, making it sound like the stiffest of endurance tests.

We rolled our trolley out and heaved our suitcases into the boot, while he used distance to indicate that help was beneath his station. We managed without him, heaving what wouldn't go in the boot on the back seat. Then we were off.

The year before, I'd learned something about that peculiar mix of enforced intimacy and necessary distance that springs up between the guarded and the guards. But Joe's former companions had all been ANC members, friendly and relaxed, who moved in the same circles. This Deon was of an entirely different genre: a man whose working life had been spent deep in the old apartheid state, his job to defend his rulers from the likes of Joe. I sat up front, trying not to stare at him.

Half-way into Cape Town, as the startling outline of Table Mountain was given definition, I asked him about his family. It was a blind stab at breaking the awkward silence but it worked. Perhaps anything would have: perhaps all he needed was to know that we were not some spoilt ministerial brats who were going to take advantage. His sister, he told me, was also in the police – a member of the once notorious Internal Stability Unit. Both children had stepped into their father's shoes: it was an old-fashioned white South African police family.

We had left the flimsy, tin walls of the African squatter camps that line Cape Town's airport road behind. As the motorway forked left and we started gliding through white suburbia, I

asked Deon what he felt about his new bosses. 'They treat me well,' he said.

I wanted more than that. I asked what it was like to be guarding the life of a man who, a mere five years previously, he would have shot on sight. 'Ag,' he answered, shrugging manfully, 'it's not a problem. After all, I'm not the kind of man to carry a grudge.'

Startled, I glanced left. Deon's hands were relaxed as he spun the steering wheel: a man at ease in this powerful car. Looking at him, I knew his words had contained no irony. He had meant what he had said, he bore no grudges. Except I couldn't understand from what source his grudges could ever have sprung. He was a policeman, a representative of the old order. He was too young to have been involved in the killing of my mother, but his was the heritage of those who had sent the bomb to her. He might have met them, might have been trained by them, might even have looked up, in admiration, at their past deeds.

And yet I knew that I shouldn't have been surprised by what he'd said because I knew something of this topsy turvy world of South Africa. It was a place where legalised apartheid had held sway for almost half a century but where it was almost impossible to find anyone who'd admit to having supported it; where the losers of a democratic election acted as if they had somehow, magnanimously, made the miracle; and where the backbone of the old regime moved smoothly into the new. It was different, though, to hear it expressed so baldly: *I bear no grudges.*

If he didn't, I thought, what about me? Me with my murdered mother and my disrupted life?

We were moving slower now. As we passed a fenced enclosure, Deon turned into a small, private road at the end of which was a set of massive gates, a solid guardhouse and a knot of uniformed men. While Deon slowed down, I found myself wondering whether this was why I had come to South Africa – to face my grudges. The guards had recognised the car: they pushed the gate open. We moved through as another thought took the first one's place. Perhaps it wasn't good enough to face

my grudges, I thought, perhaps what I had come to do was to try and give them up.

★

In 1963, when I was eleven, a new member of staff had set our tiny Johannesburg school abuzz. While our teachers had previously been of one mould – greying matrons, secure in their years of past experience – the new arrival was completely different. She wore short skirts, had a beehive and long crimson nails and, most astonishing of all, she drove a red, two-seater convertible. We rich white girls, thirteen to a class, were entranced. We buzzed around her, breathing in the unfamiliar aroma of sex.

Although I can't remember her name I will never forget the way she made up for the unconventionality of her wardrobe by the orthodoxy of her teaching methods. We soon discovered that she took apartheid education to its narrow extreme: to her, history was a game of facts all marshalled together to build a picture of the way whites had 'civilised' South Africa.

We spent her lesson time copying down a set of questions which we were to answer – preferably in one word or one line – at home. They were the kind of questions that brooked no ambiguity, like the year in which Jan van Riebeeck rounded the Cape (1652), the name of the first Governor of Cape Province (Simon van der Stel) or the outcome of the 'kaffir' wars ('we' won). In case we didn't know them, the answers could be found in the only text book we were allowed. I remember that dry tome so clearly, the meticulous ordering of the facts of history and the illustrations which were, in the main, a set of gabled, Cape-Dutch houses so beloved of the first white settlers.

Joe's ministerial house was one of these come to life, but on a scale that made the pictures seem tawdry. Deon's BMW passed through the guarded barrier and crunched round the elegant oval driveway, purring to a stop in front of the huge oak door. The entrance hall was spacious enough to accommodate a formal dinner party; the sitting room had walls too vast to fit any but the most ambitious art; and through the door of glass,

beyond the patio, was the rolling green of an immaculately tended lawn. It stretched on one side to a rose garden that would not have embarrassed Regent's Park and on the other to a huge border in which rows of pansies were laid out in the military fashion so beloved of the government's gardeners. I dropped my suitcase and stood staring. This was the most tangible manifestation yet of the long, long way my father had travelled.

I walked over to the French doors and opened them. As I watched Cassie, her arms spread wide, running joyfully down the long grass slope, I realised that I had finally bridged the 6,000 miles between my two worlds.