
**No Space on Long Street
Marshrose**

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NO SPACE ON LONG STREET | MARSHROSE

two plays by
Pieter-Dirk
U Y S

comPress
cape town

No Space on Long Street

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PRESS COMMENTS AFTER THE SOUTH AFRICAN PREMIERE, 18 MARCH 1997

Hilariously funny and brilliantly observed ...

—CAPE TIMES

A superb performance like this underlines [Uys's] position as a unique contributor to the South African theatre.

—DIE BURGER

No Space on Long Street

No Space on Long Street was written and performed by Uys as a tribute to the Space Theatre's 25th anniversary. It was first presented at the Baxter Theatre in March 1997, directed by Lynne Maree.

No Space on Long Street

[On a bare stage stands a theatrical skip. We see the words “THE SPACE/DIE RUIMTE/INDAWO”. In the skip are costumes. The skip is also used as a dressing table. On either side of the stage roadsigns: Bloem Street, Buiten Street. Along the front of the stage: Long Street.

Areas indicated by light and sound.

SPIDER appears with today’s newspaper in hand. He is a vagrant but in 90s terms, looks respectable. Could be one of us. A pigeon shits on his head]

SPIDER

Hey man, jisis! Even these Long Street pigeons have changed. Not just everything else in Long Street, but even the fucking pigeons! They used to sit up there on the roof and shit in the gutter. Decent, polite. For years, controlled kakking: the 70s, the 80s. Then the gutter fell down in 1994, the day right after the Election. So full of dove shit it couldn’t hold. Crash! But do the pigeons find another gutter? Like over there at the flats? Or over the bookshop? No. They sit just here, where there is no gutter. Where it’s not even safe, or comfortable for a dove to sit, because of the sloping roof. Here they now sit, uncomfortably, and shit. On me! *[Shouts up]* I was here first! You festering flying farting feathered fuckers! It’s good their lifespan is short. A normal dove maybe lives for a time. But a Cape Town dove? Just a few months and it’s dead. Too much eating. Gobble fart gobble splat! No decent exercise. Not even some flying. Just sitting and shitting on me!

But I was here first. Since nineteen ... ? Hang on now. *[He counts]* It was seventy-something ... 72? 1972. There used to be two palms at the Two Palms Mosque in ’72. Now there’s just one palm. People laugh at the name and say: “Where is the second palm?” They should have been here in 1972. It was there. Just fell over in the South Easter one night.

Now that doesn’t change. That fucking South Easter. Just seems to get worse. When that wind comes down Long Street? It’s like a funnel, a wind tunnel. It grabs everything and throws it in my face like I was a dirtbin! Papers.

No Space on Long Street

Cartons. Plastic bags. Even used condoms from the sexshop up there. Sis. That's changed, hey? Live sex supermarkets in Long Street? It's now like buying ... ag ... a cigarette or a beer! Except you buy tits. Strip shows. Live sex! No, it's true! Up there. I hear it at night. All that "I'm coming, I'm coming."

Like ou Gracie used to shout in the old days. "Hey Spider man, let me come before you go!" Gracie would laugh. [*Looks up*] Hey Gracie? Stop blowing the angels for a moment and look down! Freedom has hit Long Street! Officially too. It's protected by the Constitution! If not a condom ...

Unconstitutionally in the 70s we were free to do what we wanted, man, in spite of the *boere* and the laws. And we did! Listen, we had nice sex here in Long Street, but it was always illegal in those days. Ja, breaking the law gives you a good horn, hey? You *pomped* up against a parked Cortina. No damn alarms that go off like today when you just breathe on a car. In the seventies no one stole cars. We couldn't drive!

We also used to *pomp* under cardboard boxes in that alley over there, before it was bricked up after that crazy Italian was murdered. We had some of that too. Murders. But it was called that. It was the death of a person, not just a statistic. [*Looks at the paper*] Now it's all just violence. Words that mean nothing. Massacres. Hijackings. Muggings. Rape. Democracy. Another useless 90s word with no beginning, no middle and no end ... I suppose it was my "democratic right" in the 70s to say: "Let me off the bus of life ..."
Mmmm.

So the fucking doves shit on me. And the fucking people shit on me. And fucking life shits on me. But this is now a fucking democracy, so sometimes I can shit back! I just got to be quick enough to catch one of those doves. He'll be fucking sorry.

"Hey, Spider? Bergie!" That's what Gracie would call me. Well, I'm not a bergie anymore. I'm a "potential voter"! I am now "disadvantaged". I am one of the "Victims of the System". What shit! I left the System to avoid being a

No Space on Long Street

victim. I'm a chooser, not a loser!

Now I can choose democratically: a) Do I keep an eye on your car when you park? Or b) Do I feed your meter? Or c) Do I demand to get paid? Or d) Do I bum a beer and a smoke? Whatever, I'm self-employed. So, dove? Go shit on a victim of the system! Not a managing director of his own business!

[Gets to the arts pages]

Twenty-five years? It must be. When I came here to Long, this theatre they're talking about in the paper, The Space, had just opened its doors. I remember that Space. Never went there. "Full of hippies," that's what Gracie said. "Druggies. Queers. White Kaffirs." Now they say in the paper, it was a place where people could be normal, like sit together, black and white.

Normal? We been doing that here in The Street for years. No one ever said to me: "Spider, you can't sit here on this kerb. It's for whites only!" I think Gracie was coloured. Not that it bothers me! I never thought about it then. I would fuck her here and ... well, she never asked: was I white? Maybe she thought I was also coloured. I wasn't very clean. No, just sunburnt.

Anyway I knew more things than a coloured. I did my school and knew ... things. But ... I don't know. When the army chucked me out in '71, then all that surfing at Long Beach. After my accident ... One day I was going that way with the bus, and the next day I was here sitting on the kerb with a smoke and a beer in my hand. I just sat for a bit, resting. I thought I was going to go back to over There. But I just stayed, over Here! It was lekker in those days. There by Carnival Court, all the girlies that stayed there. Nice Afrikaans girlies. Sexy. Rude. The one fancied me. Called me a wild man! It's not Carnival Court any more. Now it's a youth hostel. 'The Lion's Den'! The Blue Lodge up there was blue, man, blue. Now it's just a B&B, shame.

There by the junk shop, there was the keffie. Run by this mad deaf Italian fucker. We called him Mario, like in Lanza. Shouted at everyone. Hated everything except his Italian

No Space on Long Street

opera. I laughed man, I laughed. Me and Gracie would sit and pee in his doorway and then wait for him to scream: “Fuck off, you rubbish!” In Italian, but we understood ...

[Back to the paper]

The Space/*Die Ruimte*. Maybe I should have gone in there and just looked. Gracie said they would’ve chucked us out, but I don’t know. Maybe I could’ve been an actor there? No, they wouldn’t have wanted me. But listen, I am an actor. This is my stage. That Space closed down after 10 years, but we’re still open.

[He watches someone walk past]

Hey, but I know that person. Some actor? I saw him on the TV in Morkel’s shop window. He’s the one who dresses up like that Afrikaans woman! I remember him from those days. He was also there at The Space! Doesn’t look the same, that’s for sure. Twenty-five years ago he had more hair. Thinner. A fat cat, shame.

I remember him coming down here, 1973, in purple and yellow bellbottoms and those clumpy platform shoes. Bloody fool! These “artists”. Think they can get away with anything. They paint, they act, they write. They have opinions, about everything! They scheme they have style. To us in The Street they just look like arseholes. And that one was a hell of an arsehole in his bell-bottoms in 1973!

[LIGHTCHANGE to PIETER-DIRK UYS in the present in basic black t-shirt, pants and shoes. During this link get GRACIE costume out of skip and prepare]

PIETER-DIRK UYS

Where did it begin?

Ironically, with CAPAB’s experimental production of *Orestes*. Brian Astbury shared the process of the creation of this work with Athol Fugard and Yvonne Bryceland in 1971.

Then a night at the Open Space Theatre in London. Leading to chats and plans. What-ifs and why-nots.

To cut a long story short.

The Space/*Die Ruimte* opened round the 27th March 1972

No Space on Long Street

with a new play by Athol Fugard: *Statements after an arrest under the Immorality Act*.

The Space's colours were nailed to the mast.

The impossible was probable.

It was the beginning of freedom of expression in the theatre. Then came *People are Living There*. *Gilgamesh*. *Othello Slegs Blankes*, because in those days a black Othello would not be allowed to appear on stage with a white Desdemona. So he didn't turn up!

Donald Howarth's *Scarborough* introduced nudity. A plain-clothes cop watched the third performance with a hard-on. The next day it was banned.

Sizwe Bansi is Dead was born. John Kani and Winston Ntshona stepped out of the shadows of apartheid and started leading the way. It led to more police harassment. It also led to Tony Awards in New York.

The Space became the conscience of a generation.

I was in London being Peter A-C-E, fourth-year at the London Film School. Someone sent me a tape of Mimi Coertse singing 'O Boereplaas' as a joke. I cried all day and got on the next boat home. The *SA Vaal*.

I knew about The Space.

I also had a first play written.

When I popped into the theatre on my first day in Cape Town, just to say hi to Brian and maybe drop a few hints, they were all waiting for me, including Lynne Maree who, I think, should have been at school!

Lovey? Darling? Pieter? Pietie! Poepie! Lovely long hair!

"What's happening?" I asked.

"Nothing!" they lied in unison.

"What's opening?" I asked.

"*Skyvers/Jollers*," they said. A localised British play about schooling.

"Oh?" I said. "When?"

"In three days," they said. Robin Malan directing and playing the teacher. Starring Bill Flynn, Paul Slab, Peter Piccolo, Lynne, Dawie Malan.

"Nice," I said.

No Space on Long Street

“Well, no, Robin Malan had to leave. The teacher is still uncast.”

Opening in three days? Uncast? Teacher? About my age?

“Is that your play, *Faces in the Wall*?” said Brian. “Just what we might need for our upstairs venue.”

“When?” I said.

“After *Skyvers*. If it works. In about 6 weeks. So what are your plans now, Poepie?”

“Don’t I open in three days as the teacher in *Skyvers/Jollers*?” It was not the first time affirmative blackmail was used!

After that I did *Faces in the Wall* in the Upstairs Theatre. At the same time helping out by directing *We Bombed in New Haven* in the Main Theatre, when director Mavis Taylor contracted jaundice. No, Mavis Taylor didn’t just contract jaundice. She rehearsed it, moved it, designed it, produced it and directed it!

I started learning how to burn the candle at both ends and save wax!

Then came Yvonne and Percy Sieff in Bill Tanner’s production of Eugene O’Neill’s *Long Day’s Journey into Night*. It was the first birthday of The Space.

Many strange people suffered through that long day’s journey into night!

[LIGHTCHANGE into GRACIE. GRACIE, *a vagrant of undetermined age and sex, is making her bed in Bloem Street, in the doorway of The Space’s fire exit. It is night. Sound of car stopping, door slams. GRACIE stumbles into view. Muttering and wiping herself clean after being mauled*]

GRACIE

Gracie? You gotta stay clean. No excuse, lying in the gutter like a piece of rubbish? So if you’re not rubbish, stay clean., Gracie!

[*She wraps herself in a blanket and lies down painfully*]

But no wonder I can’t sleep. This pavement is hard. Just here, specially hard, with a bump. When I lie down here I

No Space on Long Street

can also hear water underground. The pipes. Maybe a river? Spider said he learn at school there was a river under Long Street. Let me move before I drown ... [*She moves her position*]

That doorway there, it's softer. It looks like some sort of fancy marble? It's really just old Cape granite! Here's that nice little hollow for my hip. [*She lies down painfully, but can't settle for the pain*]

So damn sore, man. First it's the traffic cop.

"Hey Gracie Goffel? Get off the streets."

"*Gaan kak!*"

Gwa! With the back of the hand. On the ear. Now I hear the sound of running water, even when I'm lying down! They make something go loose in my head.

They klap me *tien, twaalf*, twenty times. "*Meid!* Goffel!
Hoer!"

Then it's the police in the green Ford Fairlane.

Boere out of uniform. Young boys, smelling of beer and *poes*. Disappointed because they didn't have a lekker time with the fancy *hoere*. Makes my stomach turn. How can a *hoer* kiss a drunk who pays for *poes*. It's bad enough having to be *pomped*. The mouth should be private property! My mouth is my secret. No one goes in there. I wash it out every day. Purple mouthwash? Meths.

[*Gargles and swallows*]

Sometimes it slips past and just goes down. *Hier af tot onder in my maag*. Hot. Soft. Bit sore. Maar okay.

"Just don't light up a *skyf*, Gracie! With all the meths in the *maag*, you'll go up like a Guy Fawkes."

"Spider, as true's God, man, mind your own bleddie business, okay? Look after your own problems! And God knows, you have problems: a) You too young to look so old. b) You got education. You know better. How can you live like me? I who know nothing? Just how to keep myself clean. And c) You are white, under all that shit and dirt and *vuilus*. And you break the law of the land, because you *pomp* me *en ek is 'n meid!*"

And who was here first? Me. Already so long, ou Mario Lanza puts food here for me under his *Cape Times*. 'n *Bakkie*

No Space on Long Street

vol wurms bolognaise! Even when I'm not home. He knows.
This is Gracie's place. But now?

[*She points upstairs to the theatre as we hear applause*]

My dear, the Culture Vultures has come to Long Street.
God help us all! Every night the noise! Just when you settle
down, the sore hip in the dent in the stone, cover your face
with your dress, wind the *doeke* round your ankles, so no
fokker can force open your legs and rape you when you sleep.
Then it starts from up there. Always big words. In that
unnatural voice. [*She intones grandly*] Theatre? *Kak man*, it's
unnatural. Who talks like this? [*Again*] I have to lie here and
listen to all this? The mother says to the son: "Why you do
this?"

The father begs the mother: "Stop doing that!"

The son to the brother: "You did this! You did this to Ma!"

"No, I didn't!"

"Yes, you did. Forsooth!"

Watse kak woord is dit: "forsooth"?

Acting, acting, acting! So it goes on till eleven o'clock at
night! I just stand up in my bed and scream: "*Ag jou ma se
poes!*" No, they hear me. They all stop acting and laugh!
Mario Lanza says even he hears me down in his keffie
without his hearing aid.

Then Sunday comes and we all say, thank God, Long
Street is dead. No one walks here. Even the birds sit like
stale loafs of tired old bread. The day of rest? Not up in this
windgat place.

[*Intones sarcastically*]

"What are they doing up there?" I ask Mario Lanza.

"The Space," he says.

"No, my space!" I say. "I was here first."

"They practise acting on Sunday," he says.

"Ja, well, I sleep on Sunday," I say.

They build things and make clothes, he says.

I wish they would just go away. Make some space!

[*She touches her mouth carefully*]

Shit man, I'm worried about my teeth. Still feel loose after
they kicked my face. I don't want to loose my teeth, man. I

No Space on Long Street

never forget that drunk lying in the gutter by the old Cape Town Station. Before all this; before I was here. I looked at her for a long time. She lay there with a open pink wet mouth.

No teeth. God man, it looked so horrible. Like her smile had been ripped out of her face. At least with teeth you could say, shame, she's sick. But with no teeth? Like a terrible black hole. No lips. Just a hole ...

When Spider buggers me up, I make him promise: not the mouth. Leave the teeth. He pretends to be tough, showing off, like he was once somebody. I say: "You don't have to try. You're here. Where you were, is nothing. Where you go to, is nothing."

He must keep himself clean, that Spider. He gets so drunk and comes and tears at my clothes. Hurts me.

Except sometimes. He holds me and cries. Like he was my child. My child would not be so dirty. No, not my child.

[She looks up again]

It's quiet up there. For a change! Maybe the police closed them down again, for mixing the races. Sis!

Disgusting to see who wants to sit next to blacks!

That Alex says it's all political. Just to be *hardegat!*

[More applause and laughter from above; shouts]

And meanwhile decent people can't sleep!

[She settles down. Then:]

Oh shit, I forgot to get some dagga for that Alex.

I don't trust him. Last week, early one morning, I see him get out of the green Ford Fairlane. He doesn't know I'm under my blanket. I see it all.

What's he doing with them? He knows the cops? But he asks me for dagga? Maybe he's a cop? Maybe I should warn The Space people?

No man, I was here first. Let them all go to jail.

But then maybe I get taken for the dagga? Maybe if I tell Mario Lanza? He's got the right words to talk to them with. He's from overseas. Like he said again last week: "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark!"

Hey Mario Lanza? *Jou ma se poes!*

No Space on Long Street

[LIGHTCHANGE]

PIETER-DIRK UYS

Fugard's *Boesman and Lena* was never done at The Space, but Ross Devenish's film was shown. *Boesman and Lena* happened outside The Space in the streets: Spider and Gracie!

His name wasn't Alex. Sometimes stage managers were also women. Not all of them were spies for the Security Police. But on occasion, usually when Brian and I would be sitting at the Stuttafords First Floor restaurant and have tea and cheese toast and HP sauce, and plan the next 24 minutes, we'd remark how lucky The Space was to get, say, Alex as a stage manager. Committed, interested. On time. On the ball.

And then inevitably, two days before opening, Alex would resign.

We pleaded! "Stay. You'll get a raise of 50c!"

But Alex would go. Frustrated by the lack of secrets. There was nothing to spy on. Whatever we did at The Space we did on stage.

We acted and directed, sometimes for the first time.

We wrote and rewrote and world-premiered something every week.

We found begged costumes, borrowed props and usually stole furniture from our parents' homes. My father would come to opening nights and as he walked into the theatre explode with: "*My magtig, daar is al my goed!*"

There was the art gallery displaying art and nuovo-art and not-much-art, and even the famous fried eggs that were all supposed to be Art, but as the days went by, smelt more like fart!

To get money from your budget, you had to go to Brian's mother, Mrs A. Oh God, Mrs A! If only Trevor Manuel had a Mrs A!

"Your budget is spent dear. What do you want it for, dear? Why, dear? Is it necessary, dear? Can't you do without it,

No Space on Long Street

dear? Fine, dear, but this is the last money you get.” And she'd peel off ten one-rand notes! And you'd sign the ten receipts!

The magnificent Moira Fina of The Space Club wafted around in a cloud of Gucci and Chanel, sometimes helping to wash the paint brushes without removing her elegant rings. We worked like slaves, but felt like kings.

We were all paid the same: R22.50. From the assistant stage manager to Yvonne Bryceland, who was sometimes also the assistant stage manager ...

We had rooms just round the corner. Across in Bloem Street on the first floor. Over in the alley off Long Street in the cottages. On the corner of Long and Bloem above the fish shop.

On R22.50 we even saved for a rainy day. And ate well at the Isola Verde!

[LIGHTCHANGE into MARIO. *Mario Lanza sings. MARIO is in his restaurant in Long Street, folding a table cloth. He sees the stain*]

MARIO

Madonna mia! These actors! They are pigs. And I am not even a Chinese restaurant. There you are expected to leave half your chow mein on the table cloth. But this is Italian. Fingers full of sauce, yes. Your silk shirt, your cufflinks, your tie? Okay. Your plate? Licked clean with a piece of bread. But the table cloth? No! Not like this.

The big fat actor come in for breakfast. He eat six eggs, four sausage. Lunch the same. Supper still more. I say: “Your heart will stop!”

He just laugh and his body go wobble wobble! He has great deep voice. My God, what a singer he would have been in Italy. He could have stood on any stage without moving and sung the greatest arias!

I said to him: “Why you not sing opera?”

He with mouth full: “Why you not act Shakespeare?”

The pretty girls come and smoke, drink strong black coffee and talk about important things: Brecht and Stanislavski

No Space on Long Street

and I don't know what also. Then come that irritating Afrikaans boy with blonde hair and bell-bottom and fat shoe and say: "Mario? Where is the picture of Sophia Loren?" The ring, the bracelet. I look for the make-up, but no, just bag under eye.

"Too much rehearsal!" they say.

Ha ha, too much sex and drug, I say. I know that bag under eye. When you do too much wanky wanky, bag under eye. Look, no bag. I not wank. I have beautiful girlfriend across at the Carnival Court. Rita with red hair. She call me her wild man. I love women. I am Italian.

Just I draw the stripe with this dirty coloured bitch who pisses in my doorway. I call the police and I complain. I say: "I pay the taxes, but why she piss in my door?" They laugh and say: "It's just Gracie. We all know Gracie."

I say: "I don't want to know Gracie! Come and take her away. You can keep her!"

But she come back.

I learn my lesson here in Long Street. No more bleeding heart. I was here first! Start this restaurant before the theatre, before the actors come and expect me to feed them for discount, because one day they will be a star! [*He is proud of his place*]

Isola Verde. Mean "Green Island", where I come from. Good name? The decoration I do myself. Paint the ceiling. In all Italians lives a small Michelangelo. The smoke from Vesuvius over the top, the lava over the people of Pompeii. They scream: *Mama mia!*

There in the corner, the pictures of Caruso, Maria Callas, Renata Tebaldi, Moffo, Di Stefano. Here, Mario Lanza.

They call me Mario Lanza. My name is Mario. Not Lanza, but what the hell. I say: "Okay," when they call Mario Lanza? Okay!

It's all rubbish in this street with the whores and the bergies and the actors learning always new words. And the old Auntie Dora who pretends to be Sylvana Mangano. Very Frederico Fellini. Maybe it needs a bit of Puccini, Verdi, Rossini!

No Space on Long Street

Yes, why not put Long Street to music. Make an opera!

Sing a quartet about the crazy South Easter. Then a duet – soprano/tenor? – with a pretty young girl and the charming restaurant owner. Then the old lady come and pretend to be a Contessa, but we know she is a mezzo soprano and comes from nowhere. Then the actors come and do some *comedia del'arte* and soon the whole street is decorated like a Neapolitan Festival and singing and dancing and eat my spaghetti and I get rich ...

Sometime I've told them at The Space. If you want some Italian opera, I can make together a lunchtime. I even close the shop for the hour. The Space say: "Maybe ... don't call us, we call you!"

They not too bad. Don't wash, don't pay, eat what is soft, and what is hard they can take. Spoons and forks. I must go and check that canteen. But I like it, that theatre. It is like old Europe when there was no opinion. I take Dora to see a Feydeau farce. She pee in her pants, she laugh so much. Poor old Dora.

Si, I shout at them, but I like it very much. It is good for the street. There is no money for costume. So every now and then I see my tablecloth as dress or shirt. No money for big sets, like at Nico Malan where they spend hundreds of thousands! Where audience then applaud the set, and sleep when Tosca sing.

Who can sleep when Tosca sing!

I never forget where I meet Tosca. On the island of Ischia in the Bay of Naples. Isola Verde. I come from there. Forio, a small village by the sea. One day the opera company come from Naples with *Tosca*. Make stage on the soccer field between the poles on the edge of the cliff.

We all sit, small boys in the front and watch. *Tosca* Act One. *Bravo!*

Tosca Act Two? *Bravissimo!*

Then a tragedy. One cloud come over from Africa and sit over the island. Then a drop of rain fall on the electricity. Or God see us and laugh and shed a tear?

The lights go dead. Blackout! No Act 3 of *Tosca*?

No Space on Long Street

People want to fight. Knife is flashing.

Then Eduardo Chellini, the Mayor of Forio, stand on the stage. He has a torch because there is no light, just the gold of the sunset far at the back. He hold the torch here, under his chin. He look like Bela Lugosi. He say: “*Signora e Signori*, Ischia has no more light because etc., etc. There can be no more opera because etc., etc. But I will tell you story of Act 3!”

Now you know Act 3 of *Tosca* already before you can say “Mama”! Your eye is cried out because it is so tragic. Tosca run up on the wall of the castello and throw herself off to die!

This is what we all want to see, here on the soccer field on the cliff ... Will the Tosca, a fat girl from Sicily with the voice of a fat girl from Sicily, jump off the wall into the sea? Or will she find the trampoline and bounce back into the sky?

But Mayor Chellini tell his own version of Tosca Act 3. He says: “Tosca made a mistake with putting the knife in Scarpia and she is sorry. She was peeling an orange and the knife slipped.”

Scarpia says: “*Va bene*, Tosca, it’s okay!” Then she put all her children in a horse and cart and they go off to seaside and have a picnic!

Ma! It was okay. We all know the story of *Tosca*. It was good to hear a new Act 3. Sometimes I say to The Space actors: “You are always so obvious. You always give the same Act 3. Apartheid. Black and white. OK, *basta!* We know. It stink. So, surprise a bit with a new Act 3? A happy dream? No apartheid? Black and white become green. No problem!” Except then, it become light green and dark green!

This is a good street. A good time to be young and full of hope. Hope is crazy. But you got to be crazy to hope. I hope for a long life in Isola Verde, here with my spaghetti and cannelloni and a few tablecloth left?

And maybe one day they come and say: “Mario? You come and sing at The Space?” And I will say: “Basta! Speak to my agent!”

[*He laughs*]

No Space on Long Street

[LIGHTCHANGE *after which* PIETER-DIRK UYS *adds* DORA's long dressing gown, her grey hair. *Unpack her props from the basket and close lid. Use it as a dressing table*]

PIETER-DIRK UYS

It was a hot summer night in the City Bowl. Very Tennessee Williams. Steamy, smelly, quiet. Hooded eyes watching you. Everywhere.

Someone came rushing in from outside. There was a drama in Long Street! We all ran out, actors and Cathy and Mrs A and audience and the plain-clothes man with the hard-on.

In the middle of The Street, just in front of Carnival Court, stood a man, a young man maybe. After life in the Mountainview Bar, not so young anymore. His eyes were wild. His face snarling. In his hands he had two huge butchers knives. He pointed them at us, the appalled delighted watching crowd.

“Don't come near me,” he snarled. “Stay away!”

Of course none of us rushed him. We stood entranced. This was better than theatre.

The man wheeled round and thrust his knives into all directions.

“Leave me. Stay away,” he cried.

Then we saw a small figure come out of the shadows. She was crying, her arms outstretched.

“Johnny?” she sobbed. “Please Johnny, put them down.”

“Leave me Ma! I'm going to die now. It's enough! Leave me, Ma!”

“No Johnny, you can't die. What about me? And Kittie? And the others? Please Johnny ...

She shuffled towards him. He wheeled round and the knives nearly touched her tearstained wrinkled face.

“Leave me Ma ...” He started to cry. Sobs tore his pose to shreds. The knives lowered. She stood up against him and put her thin arms around him. She didn't even reach his shoulders. He cried against her tiny head. She slowly shuffled him towards the kerb and the dark door of Carnival

No Space on Long Street

Court, muttering motherly things to this large hunk of unhappiness she called son. Then she turned to us and gave a small smile: “Good night, the show’s over ...”

The show was never over in Long Street. Sitting in our kaftans on our verandah and looking over at the balconies of Carnival Court and the activity there among the girlies and their friends, and Auntie Dora, inspired my play *Karnaval*. I didn’t have to use my imagination; just look through the window.

I invited the inmates of Carnival Court to come to a preview. We had built a set that reflected their home outside, balconies, broekielace, washing line, Springbok Radio, the works. I didn’t want them to hear from others and think that we were making fun of them. I was quite prepared for their anger and hurt. They came out of the play in tears. “Ag dearie me,” wept Auntie Dora, “those poor girls? *Haai*, so tragic, *maar ag*, so brave! There, by the grace of God, go we!”

And they went back to their Long Street lives not having seen the similarities at all. So much for theatre being the mirror of life! Maybe it is just a window...

Karnaval was banned after ten performances. The Censor Board must’ve been right: “*Ons mense is nie so nie!*”

[LIGHTCHANGE into DORA. AUNTIE DORA, a nondescript middle-aged woman, arthritic hands. Sentimental with a will of iron. Sickly. Brave. She has a small bag and she is packing things. There is a large brown envelope with X-Rays]

DORA

“Feydeau!” Not Faydow or Vydou. “Feydeau!” That’s the name. It’s been at the back of my mind ever since Mario took me to see it. A French name, “Feydeau”.

Haai, maar ek het gelag! I never knew it could be so much fun. And not even in French! In English. And one of the actors even had a way of saying the words in English that made it sound Afrikaans.

Young actors. *Baie slim, die kinders. Al die jong mense, tot hier*

No Space on Long Street

by my in die boarding house. Like *rooikop* Rita. Oh dearie me, the day she arrived here, *kon jy van haar lyf afgeeeet het. Oulike kind. Niks Engels geken nie. Ons het hier vir ure op my verandah gesit en praat.* I thought she was a friend. *En toe vreet die Stad haar op.*

“*Hoe lank sit jy al hier, Antie Dora?*”

Oh me oh my, I remember sitting here with my packet of Cavallas listening to Springbok Radio on 6th April 1652, when old Jan van Riebeeck came up Long Street looking for nice accommodation? If it wasn't for old Maria van Riebeeck at his side, Stadsvader Jan and me would have been married and run away to Batavia.

“Feydeau!” Mario made me say it over and over. In his funny accent? Italian? I never understood a thing he said! But oh, how that man could sing! He would sit here with me after he closed his place, come and bring me some nice canelloni and spaghetti and some Italian wine. Then sing to me from the operas. Very softly, because he was scared the girlies would laugh at him. *Haai foeitog raai*, Mario didn't feel happy here when the girlies had all those sailors from the Docks.

He said: “It's wrong for girlies so young!”

I said: “Mario, it's okay. The sailors are not black. They are Javanese. Honorary whites! It's okay darling!” But sometimes, looking at Mario? The sailors were whiter than he was, *en ek weet hulle was almal net hotnots! 'n Klomp skollies* disguised as foreign trade. *Maar ek sê niks.* The less I said, the less they know. Someone had to walk this narrow path and make it wide enough for the girlies to run along, if you get my drift.

[*Looks at the X-ray*]

Haai, I can't believe that's me. And I smiled when they took the photo, but you can't see me smile. Just horrible big teeth, like a dead person's mouth. How can the X-ray camera see death, while I'm still alive and smiling? I wished Mario was still alive, so I could go and show him this. Find out what this really means, this ... whatever they say I've got wrong with me. Mario Lanza would make a joke and call it a picture

No Space on Long Street

of a beauty queen and sing a song from one of his operas.

Poor Mario. Just a week after they found him stabbed in the alley ... and I swear I can't think who would do that to one of us who live here? Maybe some *skollie* from the Cape Flats? Ag, Mario, Mario, Mario! No more singing? No more spaghetti!

That Sunday after his funeral they had a classical piano concert at The Space. I didn't know, but it was only after I walked past Sunday morning to church and heard the piano playing. I went up the red steps, but it was still closed to people. The cleaning lady, ou Cathy, said there was a classical concert in the afternoon.

I said: "Oh?"

She said: "Why don't I come also?"

I said: "No man, I'm alone."

She said: "No, it's fine." She would keep me a ticket and I can pay when I come. *Haai*, and I was still so very sad about Mario and I prayed for him in church.

Dit was baie hartseer. And I put on my green hat and went over to hear that classical concert. But there was too many smart people. So I just watched and listened from the doorway there on the corner of Long and Buiten. Me and old Gracie. I think she was asleep, bottle in hand, empty. Again.

That music. Took me so back to when I came to Cape Town from Philadelphia. I went to the City Hall to hear the concert. It was ... *haai dearie me, daai soort musiek? Ek het so opgewonde geraak, ek het somaar hard gepraat. Haai Dora? Really dearie ... mense het omgedraai en vir my gekyk – "Shush" – en gelag vir my pers rok en groen jas. My scent het skielik in my neus gestink.*

I was ashamed for being so alive. No man, all those fancy people sat like the dead, listening like the dead. I wanted to get up and dance and sing. *Skreeu, jubel, spring! Here, jou musiek was so mooi, so puur ... Ek het daar my God herken. Maar ek was skaam. Drab. Ou verlepte uit die backstreets. Wat weet sy van musiek? Niks.* True. But even in Buiten Street that Sunday, listening from afar, classical music sounded just like the angels talking.

No Space on Long Street

Do I need to take my dressing gown? Or do you get a gown when they book you in? Doctor Steyn says it will only be for a few days. Just a check up. [*Looks at X-ray*] Check up for what? Signs of life? Play me nice music and let me listen. Ja, that's what I should ask for.

I'm sorry to miss the new play that starts at The Space next Wednesday. *Haai*, I now just can't stop myself going. So exciting, much better than the films.

Cathy and old Mrs A at the box office let me slip in. There's a seat at the back they keep open for a doctor. I sit there through all the acting. "Luv"! A play called *Luv* about a woman and two men on a bridge. Then a *grillerige ding* about Dracula. *Bar and Ger* – about a brother and a sister. That Yvonne Bryceland and Billy Flynn. They don't know me, but I know them. I know them all now. [*As she packs her bag*] *Hulle's nog so jonk. Hulle't die lewe voor hulle uitgestrek soos die see. Ek wens ek kon vir hulle my memories wys soos photos ... my wonderlike lewe! Nie X-rays van die dood nie, maar lewe! O, nog vandag ook so. Bietjie stiller; ek dink meer, onthou meer. Toe was dit vol wonderlike mallighede. Is maar goed ek het nooit getrou nie. Sou man en kinders onder my voete platgetrap het. Gedans ... Nuwe Jaar in Gordonsbaai. Kerk toe en dan wegsluit agter Henderson se Slagtery waar ons gedans het. Trek-klavier gedjol. New Year Resolution: Dora, moenie drink nie, moenie vloek nie, moenie ophou lag nie ...*
[*Loss of breath, she must sit*]

I see in *The Argus* yesterday Jan Venter is dead. I knew a Jan Venter in Gordons Bay. I wonder if it's my ou Jan Venter. Dead? My Jan Venter wanted to be a missionary; this Jan Venter died a rich man. Probably the same Jan Venter. *Ai, dit gaan so gou verby. Gister gebore, môre weg ... die son sak al op my.*

"Feydeau"! Not Faydow. Feydeau! I must just think about that funny play when I lie in hospital. Oh dearie me, it was so funny. Funny ...

[LIGHTCHANGE]

No Space on Long Street

PIETER-DIRK UYS

Long Street has always been special. Even today, take a trip up and enjoy the nightlife. Even the streetpoles have coloured lights wound round them. High voltage. When a bergie touches the poles ... zhssts! One man one volt! But in the 70s Long Street led the way in so many areas.

The bookshops. From those old days, only Clarkes is left, Cranfords came and went. The others disappeared; new ones appeared. Second Time Around is still there. How blonde British spikeyhaired Brenda would dress so many of our shows out of her magic wardrobe of tat.

The late and lamented Mountainview Bar on the corner was the legend in many lunchtimes: Gracie and Spider, even Athol Fugard when his lunch was still liquid. He would sit and listen and learn.

Billy Monk made sandles downstairs in his little shop, chased girls around Town and took extraordinary photos of life in Cape Town in the 60s, great images that remain, even after Billy Monk was killed and buried at sea.

And the fish shop above which we lived? Remember the one that used to gas us out with fish pongs and frighten us to death with huge cockroaches all with snoek on their breath? It's a nice little coffee shop now.

Long Street is still charming and quaint. Property developers have always been poised to rip out its heart. But thanks to architects like Revel Fox and others, Long Street hasn't yet become another Voortrekker Rd. It nearly did ...

[LIGHTCHANGE into JACOBY. MR JACOBY is small, round, bald. A piggy-looking businessman. Fidgety, humourless. A bully. He is holding his hat against the South Easter wind]

JACOBY

Damn wind! Comes from nothing; goes to nowhere.

[Looks at the buildings around him and notes in a small book]

For Sale, To Let, For Sale ...

People are starting to leave South Africa, like rats leaving

No Space on Long Street

a sinking ship! This I could have predicted ten years ago. Even though, those days, no matter where you went in the world, no one knew where South Africa was. And when you try to explain, they stared at you because you were not black! They knew from nothing! As always from nothing, Today they know from more than nothing! One or two might say: “What is this apartheid business?”

Then I say: “It’s not business. It’s politics.”

My friend, never the two shall meet! You asking for trouble. For what should I get involved with politics? I had politics up to here, when politics swallowed up the world. Enough is enough. So, when the black people complain? And I have some very good people working for me. I never even know they’re black, they’re so honest, Clean. Reliable, Everyone’s got a son, who knows a friend who starts with all this political bullshit.

“What we are going through! What we have to suffer through!”

“Yes,” I say, “I’m sorry for you. You can’t go to see opera at the Opera House on the Foreshore? Who gives a fuck about opera anyway! You can only see films in your own cinema in your own area. Be grateful you don’t have to bother about parking in town! You have to live in a shit neighbourhood?”

Believe me, Sea Point’s not Hollywood! You have to carry passbooks? Big deal. How do you think I get to draw money from banks? A passbook. My ID book. My passport! Stop the complaining already. You coloured people don’t know what suffering is! You people don’t know the sound of broken glass over a country when thugs crack open windows and heads and lives, because it’s legal to hate the fucking Jews!”

This no one can understand until you’ve been there. I’ve been there. The ghetto. The yellow star. The hopelessness. I was here as a young man. Now I’m here, not so young, but doing what I do well. I understand property. I can see what happens when property falls into the wrong hands, or in no hands at all!

[Looks at the street]

Look, all these buildings in Long Street. Prime property in

No Space on Long Street

the heart of a city. It's crap! Shit.

Horrible Victorian Hollywood gingerbread buildings with broekielace and rats and rust and rubbish. Prostitutes loiter in the doorways. Vagrants piss in the gutters. It needs vision. This I got.

But you think someone on the Council will listen?

Arseholes all. Some even Jews. Just because you got no foreskin, doesn't mean you got sense! Afrikaners with arrogance. That I remember from the old days. The man with the power, is the man with the power.

Not with the imagination, or the good idea, or the vision. Just the power! Every time they laugh at me when I try and speak their language ...

"Middag Meneer, ek kom oor die permit." Ha ha ha!

Funny accent, funny old corn, funny fucking Jewboy! I look at that power and I know, like you know, God doesn't sleep. Power comes and power goes. Like old age and youth ...

I never forget the pictures of Mussolini hanging from a meat-hook. That John Vorster? A prime minister made for the meat-hook. All those racist pigs? Meat-hook material! I know what happens when you sweep people under the carpet. They use the same carpet to suffocate you. Maybe not this week, not this year; but next year?

So I tell them when they say: No, they don't want to sell to a Jew. I say: "What you think will happen to you when the black man has had enough? Is he going to hold out his hand and say thanks for nothing? Is he going to give you a chance to say: 'I was on your side'? He'll cut you to pieces and get a medal from the United Nations!"

At first, they don't want to sell. It's nice here in Long Street. South Easter wind is a pain, but the rentals are low and the life is slow. But a few whispered words about revenge, a few casual mentions of what the blacks do to each other in the location on a weekend?

I tell them: "Look up the road. That Space Theatre? The communists are here already. They are making subversion like in the old days. The burning of the Reichstag. They say it was Hitler? It was a communist."

No Space on Long Street

And that building is worth a fortune.

These drama people can't pay a rental.

"Never mind," says Rabkin, "it's all for Art."

Rabkin is a foolish landlord! Bad for business. "There's the law, Rabkin," I say, "Group Areas Act makes it illegal to mix races, like at The Space in your building! Keep them apart, I say. It's the law! I don't like it, but I'm not BJ Vorster. I have to keep my nose clean. Already in District Six I see my arse, buying up what I can! And then they tell me to break it down and they move out everyone to the sanddunes? Now I sit with useless real estate against Devil's Peak that looks like the Sinai Desert?"

My friend, you don't need laws to keep them out.

Just the rent! Let them pay for the privilege of being treated like a person. And then if they want to behave like an animal. Okay, get back into the ghetto! It's not like they have to wear a yellow star. They got a black skin.

This is a potential slum. This must all be flattened for skyscrapers; parking garage. Break down that Carnival Court, the Blue Lodge! And that Space must go! Brings in all those drama theatre-people who now take these rooms and bring back trouble into Long Street. Drugs. Queers. Once that starts, it's the beginning of the end. I know. Look at Loader Street?

And that Italian waiter with his loud mouth? Murdered! Good riddance! I'm sorry he's dead. I don't miss him! I bought his café. I remember I say: "Get into opera if that's what you want. But get out of my street! Too many restaurants already in this street! Move!"

Then he say to me: "Mr Jacoby, for a Jew to leave Adolf Hitler and to come and sit on John Vorster's park benches with a Whites Only sign?"

I laugh at him. Idiot. I should sit on a bench! Failures and fools sit on a bench! I'm a success!

I make the bench!

[LIGHTCHANGE *after which* PIETER-DIRK UYS *into* ELSABE LATEGAN: *poncho, high heels, lipstick, beret*]

No Space on Long Street

PIETER-DIRK UYS

We did a season of my plays: *Selle Ou Storie* – they'd banned the script but you could see the play; *Karnaval* – they banned the play but you could read the script; and *God's Forgotten* the play that should have been banned but wasn't.

The pressures of three productions, no money, censorship and fear, exhaustion and the silly feeling of not being loved. Doesn't it happen in the best of marriages? There was a bust-up, a walk-out. Me and my actors that way, The Space that way. It took some time to heal, but it did heal – like in all good marriages.

It was during those last weeks as a Space creature that a new style found its alphabet in me. Maralin Vanrenen directed Jean Genet's *The Maids* with our coloured actors Bill Curry and Vincent Ebrahim as the maids, and me as Madame. It was the beginnings of another monstrous madam.

Then a one-man, multi-woman lunchtime show followed called *Just Hilda*. Various ladies: a Marlene, a *meisie van die plaas*, a Lily Tomlin one-ringadingie rip-off. And finally in her *rooi rok* and blonde hair, Tannie Hermien. It should've been so easy doing that *tannie*, because there were so many of them around ...

[LIGHTCHANGE into ELSABE LATEGAN. DR ELSABE LATEGAN, *elegant*, koud. Ongemaklik. Kom staan by die Langstraat paal. Skouersak. *Programme in hand of the play Selle Ou Storie*]

[*An English version of this scene follows at the end of the play*]

ELSABE

Nou gaan hulle te ver!

Ek sê dit nie dikwels nie, maar ek is bly my man was nie vanaand hier saam met my nie! Herman sou die stuipe gekry het! Hy verwalg hom in vroue wat vloek; ek praat nie eers van Afrikaanse vroue wat sulke woorde gebruik nie! Nie dat Herman ooit met my na die teater sou kom nie. Praat nie

No Space on Long Street

eers van hierdie eksperimentele soort teater nie!

Die Ruimte. Ja-nee, een ding is seker; g'n van my vriende sal ek hier raakloop nie. Dankie Vader! Daar was net een aand verlede Mei toe iemand my herken het. Tydens die opvoering van Tennessee Williams se wonderlike *Glass Menagerie*. My gunsteling drama uit daardie tyd. Pragtige regie deur Bill Tanner. Die Veiligheidspolisie het die teater "besoek". Net toe Yvonne Bryceland onvergeetlike hoogtes bereik het, skielik, soos die Gestapo, storm hierdie barbare die teater binne. En hoekom? Iemand het anoniem gebel. Iemand het gefluister: daar sit swart en wit saam in Die Ruimte! Iemand het geweet dis teen die wet van die land. Dit moet gestop word! Swape!

Die ligte is aangeskakel, die magic, soos hulle sê, was weg. Yvonne was skielik maar net Yvonne. Die twee jong spelers Dunster en Flynn het opsygestaan, verward en gekok.

Ek het die mannetjie in beheer van die klomp buffels geken. In sy nuwe safaripak. Ben Engelbrecht. Ambisieus, jonk, gevaarlik, gevoelloos, oorgewig, arrogant. Iemand om dop te hou, het Herman gesê. Kabinetminister-materiaal? Beslis Minister van Polisie!

Hy't na my gekyk. Gestaar. Ek't gemaak of ek van niks bewus is nie, maar kon voel hoe sy ysblou oë tot in my siel, deur my vermomming gluur. O ja, ek was so aangetrek. "Disguised"? Ja. Asseblief, Dr Mev Elsabe Lategan dra nie gewoonlik sulke liberale gemaklike klere nie. Daar onder by die Nico Malan, sorg ek dat ek versigtig saamsmelt met die ander tannies in hulle aaklige Tini Vorster velveteen! Maar as ek elke nou en dan uit die werklikheid kan ontsnap en my toegooi met kamouflase, dan kom ek hier na Die Ruimte. En ja, ek voel soos hulle sê: "liberated". Miskien omdat ek weer kan dink!

Ek't Engelbrecht 'n paar maande later weer raakgeloop. Hy was aan die sy van die Eerste Minister. Die Groot Baas se lyfwag. Nuwe safaripak. Alreeds halfpad op die leer na die hel. Hy't weer na my gestaar, maar dié keer het ek teruggegluur, vol vertroue in my krimpeliën.

John Vorster was heelwat geanimeer die aand. Nare ding

No Space on Long Street

om te aanskou. Hy't skielik na my verwys.

“Elsabe?” Hoe hy my naam so tussen daardie blou dun lippe kan kneus! “Elsabe? Wat hoor jy van daardie teaterplek in Breestraat?”

“Die Ruimte?” Ek was kasueel. “Dis net duskant Langstraat. En nee, ons stel nie juis belang in wat agter die skerms aangaan nie, John. Dis wat op die Ruimte se verhoog gebeur wat die probleem is ...” Maar Vorster was êrens anders betrokke. Sy konsentrasie in sake van kultuur was baie kort. Natuurlik, as so 'n vooraanstaande lid van die Sensuur-raad betrokke met teater in die Kaap is dit nie net my plig om ingelig te by nie; maar ook my geluk. Ek het dit nog vir niemand gesê nie, maar in my geval het hulle die sjokoholiek in beheer van die sjokoladefabriek geplaas!

Ek is waarlik bevoorreg om so veel keer na Die Ruimte te kan kom. Ek het die wonderlikste teater ondervind. Tennessee Williams en O’Niell en tot Joe Orton! Die beste van Engelse en Amerikaanse dramas. Dikwels moet ek myself die volgende oggend inhou. Om nie vir Brian Astbury te bel nie. Om nie te “gush” nie.

“Dankie Brian, dankie vir jou wonderlik teater. Ek is verryk. Die naamlose tjek wat jy verlede maand ontvang het was van my. Maar oppas, jy gaan te vinning. Te veel politiek. Ons wil nie geforseer word na daardie entpunt van vrye spraak en assosiasie nie. Oppas. Ek waarsku as 'n vriend, 'n *fan*. Ons sal jou teater nie 'n politieke slagoffer maak nie. Ons sal julle net verban vir godslasterlikheid en obseniteit. Ons sal jou bankrot maak. Ons ken ons werk!”

My opdrag was baie eenvoudig. Vorster het dit persoonlik uiteengelê: “Vernietig hulle in enige moontlik manier. Plant dagga, luister na hulle fone, lees briewe. Ondermyn die personeel. Versprei leuens en stories. ‘Frighten them to death.’” En toe “frighten” hy vir my “to death”: hy knipoog vir my! “Elsabe, sien? Ons in bewind kan ook kunstenaars wees in wat ons doen!”

En hy groet met Tini en gaan terug na die Parlement.

Ek was die hele dag yskoud.

En hier is ek weer terug by Die Ruimte. Maar die keer het

No Space on Long Street

hulle te ver gegaan. Nee wat, toe hulle subversief was in Engels, toe hulle vir ons kaalvuus in Engels gekritiseer het, toe hulle ons Afrikaners belaglik gemaak het in Engels, was dit hanteerbaar. Ons kon dit ignoreer.

Maar nou vertel hulle die waarheid in Afrikaans! 'n Rou, skokkende Afrikaans. En nie eers 'n goeie toneelstuk nie! "Selle ou storie"! Niks wat ons nie al oor en oor in Engels gehoor het nie! Maar om te sit en luister na godslasterlike humour, vieslike taal. Om te kyk hoe 'n middeljarige Afrikaanse vrou met rou emosies en maniere liefde probeer vind ten koste van haar selfrespek. Ons selfrespek?

Jong Afrikaner boerseuns verlief op mekaar?
Verteenwoordig hulle nou my seuns? Is ek veronderstel om te leer uit haar pyn?

Nee nee nee, dit mag nie voortgaan nie!

Ek sal my voorlegging vanaand voorberei en môre voorlê. Ek sal aandring dat hierdie vieslike drama verbied word. Ek sal sorg dat alle toekomstige werke uit hierdie skrywer se pen verban word. Ek sal hom vernietig. Soos ek al so baie jong, oorspronklike, hartstogtelike talente vernietig het.

Vermoor en gesmoor in die naam van Ons Kultuur!

Kak!

[*Musiek: Die Stem van Suid-Afrika*]

[*LIGHTCHANGE after which PIETER-DIRK UYS into himself. As the anthem ends, he closes the skip*]

PIETER-DIRK UYS

Long Street 1997.

I remember tottering up here in my bell-bottoms and platform shoes. Very fashionable then. Very fashionable now! Hell on the ankles, but boy can you walk tall.

[*He sees SPIDER across the street*]

I don't believe it. He's still here? After all those years? What the hell was his name? Bird? Snake? Spider! Hey Spider, remember me? Probably not. It's been a lifetime ...

Twenty-five years ago. Before sanctions, before the Mandela t-shirts, before it was fashionable and right to be

No Space on Long Street

anti-apartheid, there was a dream that came true. It was called The Space Theatre and it started its journey in a sprawling warehouse off Long Street, between Bloem and Buiten.

It was the place where the alphabet of South African Theatre was reinvented.

It was poor and yet gave great riches to the community. It was one of the beginnings of freedom of expression. It was the end of apartheid in the arts.

Twenty-five years later it is no longer there. But we who were privileged enough to sweep and paint and act and sing and direct and question; we who thanks to The Space now have language to communicate in a mute modern world; we who have lost our hair and our figures and sometimes, sadly, our hard-on for Theatre? We are here to remember and remind those who think we are crazy, that to be crazy in the theatre is to be sane.

The Space was crazy.

Oh yeah!

BLACKOUT

[ENGLISH VERSION of ELSABE LATEGAN *scene*]

[DR ELSABE LATEGAN *walks out of the theatre looking at the programme of the play she'd just seen, Selle Ou Storie. She stands at the lamp post under the street name*]

ELSABE

This time they've gone too far! I don't often say this, but I'm glad my husband wasn't here with me tonight! Herman would've been hysterical, to put it mildly. He can't bear to hear women using profane language. Let alone Afrikaans women! Not that he would think of coming to the theatre, let alone this type of alternative theatre.

I'm glad I didn't recognise any of our friends here tonight! Not very likely. I don't expect to, thank heavens. The only

No Space on Long Street

time someone seemed to know me was last May, when the Security Police raided the theatre. It was during a performance of Tennessee Williams's *Glass Menagerie*. One of my favourite plays. A wonderful production by Bill Tanner. I could've killed them! With Yvonne Bryceland at her most moving moment, suddenly like the Gestapo, these barbarians storm in. And why? Because some fool phoned them that there are blacks in the theatre and that it is against the law!

Dear God! If I had some boot polish I would've smeared it over my face and dared them to arrest me.

The lights went on, the magic was gone. Poor Yvonne became Yvonne and stood to one side. The young actors Dunster and Flynn stared.

I recognised the plainclothes man in charge. Ben Engelbrecht. Ambitious. Young. Ruthless. A killer. Someone my husband said one should watch. Cabinet Minister material, he said. Minister of Police, no doubt?

He stared at me for a long time. I pretended not to notice, but I could feel his eyes bore right through my disguise. I was dressed like this. Please, Mev Dr Elsabe Lategan does not usually dress like this.

Oh, yes, at the Nico Malan I merge carefully with the other tasteless matrons in their hideous Tini Vorster velveteens. But when I slip away from real life and get into my camouflage and come to The Space Theatre, I am ... is the word "liberated"? I can think again.

I saw Engelbrecht again with Vorster some months later. He was in charge of the PM's security. On the ladder up to hell. He stared at me again. This time I stared back, secure in my crimplene. John Vorster was quite animated that evening. Strange to hear him talk about the theatre. Not the Nico Malan type of theatre, but this Space Theatre.

"Elsabe?" he said, rasping my name between those thin blue lips, "what have you heard about this new theatre in Bree Street?"

I said: "John, I have been well informed about what happens at The Space. And it's off Long Street. It's what

No Space on Long Street

they do on stage that's the problem ...” But Vorster had lost interest. His attention span with regard to culture was very small.

Of course, as such a prominent member of the Censor Board associated with live theatre in the Cape, it is not only my job to be informed; it is my delight. I didn't say this to the Prime Minister, but in my case they had put the chocoholic in charge of the chocolate factory!

I am truly privileged to be able to go to The Space as often as I do. Of course, the next morning I want to ring up Astbury and his people and say: “Brian, thank you for the wonderful plays I can see. Tennessee Williams, O'Neill, Orton ... I love your theatre deeply and the anonymous cheque you received in May was from me. But you are going too fast and we don't want to get to that destination of free speech and association. Be careful, Brian. We will not make a political martyr out of your theatre. We will just ban you for ‘obscenity’ and ‘blasphemy’ and bankrupt you! We know how to do our job.” My brief is clear. John Vorster gave it to me personally: “We must destroy them in any way we can. Plant drugs. Tap phones, intercept mail. Harrass the staff. Spread rumours. Frighten them to death.” And then he frightened me to death by winking at me. “You see, Elsabe, we in power are also artists in what we do,” he said, and left with Tini to go to Parliament. I was ice cold for hours afterwards.

And here I am, back at the shrine. But this time I can assure you they've gone too far. When they subverted in English; when they criticised us in English; when they made us ridiculous in English, it was manageable. It could be ignored. But this time they are telling the truth in Afrikaans!

But no means even a good play. Certainly nothing we haven't heard in English. But to have to listen to obscenity and blasphemy in Afrikaans? To see an Afrikaans woman my age claw her way to so-called love at the expense of her decency and self-respect? To watch pretty *boereseuns* naked in bed with other *boereseuns*?

Are they supposed to represent my sons? Is she supposed

No Space on Long Street

to be me? No! It cannot be allowed. I will write my report tonight and submit it tomorrow. I will insist that this filthy play is banned! I will demand that any new writing by this so-called writer be closely monitored and banned.

I will see to it that he is destroyed. As I have seen other young passionate talents destroyed.

Killed in the name of *Kultuur*. [*And she laughs bitterly*]
Kak!

[*Music: Die Stem Van Suid-Afrika*]

Marshrose

Marshrose

PRESS COMMENTS AFTER SOUTH AFRICAN PREMIERE, JULY 1992

This play proves that Uys is one of our top dramatists.

—BEELD

One of the best things he has done ... meticulously observed, warmly empathic, touching and frequently amusing.

—SUNDAY TIMES

It's quite a different Pieter-Dirk Uys one gets to know ... This time it is an Uys who speaks from the heart with a different sort of piety and compassion about ageing, about values, about friendship, about nature, about how man and his planet are being dismantled ... and yet the humour and lightness is not left out. The script leaves a deep impression.

—RAPPORT

It is a charming, intelligent, compassionate and tender play ... a moving and delightful triumph for Uys.

—NATAL DAILY NEWS

Marshrose

CHARACTERS

FERDINAND BARNARD

NEDDA BARNARD

Ferdinand's mother

LIZZIE

Nedda's former servant, now companion

SOFIE CLARENS

Die Vleiroos is Uys's first 'post-apartheid' play. It was performed for the first time at the Nico Arena in Cape Town, June 1992 and was directed by Uys himself. It saw seasons at the Grahamstown Festival, the Civic Theatre Johannesburg and the Oudtshoorn Klein Karoo Fees directed by Lynne Maree. The play is published here for the first time in English as *Marshrose*.

Marshrose

The play takes place in the South African seaside resort of Avon Beach, where the Barnard family spent their annual holidays. The time is both now, and in the past.

There are seven scenes.

Orothamnus zeyheri (The Marshrose)

An exceptionally beautiful protea, the famous marshrose is the only species in this genus. It is extremely rare and in danger of becoming extinct as there are a few plants only in almost inaccessible spots high in the mountains above Hermanus and Betty's Bay in the Western Cape. Attempts to cultivate it have not been successful.

The plant grows in marshy soil and consists of one or more erect branches as much as three metres tall. The flowerheads are of exquisite shape and beauty. Although the pomegranate-red branches have a covering of fine hairs on their outsides, they are at the same time smooth and shiny, and have a delicate, wax-like translucency. They over-lap and are curled back at their edges in the fashion of a rose. It flowers in early summer.

The generic name, a Greek word meaning 'mountain branch' was given by Carl Pappe in the mid-1850s after becoming the first colonial botanist at the Cape. He also gave the protea its specific name – *zeyheri* – to commemorate his friend and fellow botanist, Karl Zeyheri.

Marshrose [Scene 1]

Scene I

[A dark room. Coloured slides of Cape flora, one after another flashed onto the wall. NEDDA's voice explains each image]

NEDDA *[Voice]*

[Slide One]

Disa uniflora! This is also the emblem of our Cape Province, also known as the Pride of Table Mountain ...

[Slide Two]

... *Erica patersonia* ... those yellow clusters make it look like corn on the cob ...

[Slide Three]

... my beloved *Mimetes hirtus* ... makes autumn, winter and spring such a joy ... *Mimetes* ...

[Slide Four]

... ah ... the Giant Protea. Do you know, here and on Table Mountain they're round; along the coast in Knysna long and narrow. Wonder what's wrong in Knysna ... *[Laughs]* We have three big ones down here, our Three Kings of Avon Beach.

[Slide Five]

Orothamnus zeyheri ... the marshrose ...

[FERDINAND switches on the light. SOFIE has also been watching, holding a box in her arms. She exits. It is raining outside. The slide image fades in the light. There is a projector on the table. He switches it off. He picks up binoculars and looks out of the window]

FERDIE

There is only one reality, Ferdinand ...

[He replaces the binoculars and walks round the room looking at the things in it, the detail. NEDDA's voice heard again]

NEDDA *[Voice]*

There is only one reality! Among all the billions of us, only one reality. Yours. Or mine.

FERDIE

That's two realities, Mother!

Marshrose [Scene 2]

Scene 2

[Flashback. LIZZIE and NEDDA enter. The bright sunlight warms the room during these flashbacks. They go to the window. LIZZIE looks out with the binoculars, which she then shares with NEDDA. They look out to sea]

NEDDA

It's crude oil.

LIZZIE

Yes, poo.

NEDDA

Just look at it seep out on the swell.

LIZZIE

Like tar. Chocolate. Pitch black sticky toffee.

NEDDA

Think of the poor fish ... the baby seals ...

LIZZIE

The fat aunties on the beach with tar joining their knobbly toes ... goosefeet ... shame ...

NEDDA

Seagulls suffocating in oil.

LIZZIE

White aunties on the sand with pitch black feet!

NEDDA

What is that monster trapped on?

LIZZIE

Rock ridge just under the surface.

NEDDA

No rock ridge there.

LIZZIE

Doctor H often pointed there and said, 'That ridge will one day catch itself a very big fish.'

NEDDA

Can't remember.

LIZZIE

I remember.

NEDDA

I don't remember. Doctor H was my husband. I don't

Marshrose [Scene 2]

remember.

LIZZIE

Your husband, yes.

NEDDA

Yes.

LIZZIE

That you remember?

NEDDA

Yes. That I could never forget.

[FERDINAND *is still there and listens. NEDDA looks around uncomfortably*]

LIZZIE

What is it, Miss Nedda?

[NEDDA *looks straight at FERDINAND*]

NEDDA

Nothing.

LIZZIE

Tell me. Maybe this time it's someone I know.

NEDDA

There's no one.

[FERDIE *smiles and exits. LIZZIE and NEDDA look out again. Pause*]

LIZZIE

And that ship's captain? When on a dark night you go and park your tanker on a non-existent rock ridge, what happens to such idiots?

NEDDA

Sell their tales to the Sundays and make a fortune.

LIZZIE

To be able to afford expensive oil-stained seal gloves for the little wifey at home.

NEDDA

Their sort should be hanged high. Wished I was the Big Boss, just for a day. Get all those drunken drivers, rude shop assistants, arrogant clerks, wifebeaters ...

LIZZIE

Hang them all?

Marshrose [Scene 2]

NEDDA

Shoot 'em in the knees first, then acid in the eyes.

LIZZIE

And that captain?

NEDDA

Off with the gonads, then hang the bastard!

LIZZIE

What nads?

NEDDA

Testicles, Lizzie. Balls.

LIZZIE

Oh. But it's only oil, Miss Nedda.

NEDDA [*Sarcastic*]

It's only nature.

LIZZIE

Bit radical.

NEDDA

Naturephelia is a crime against God!

LIZZIE

Things somehow always come right in nature, Doctor always said.

NEDDA

Till that last non-biodegradable tin breaks the ancient old camel's back. Is its back broken yet?

[*They look out again*]

LIZZIE

Her back. Men always name ships after women.

NEDDA

Oh yes?

LIZZIE

Yes, then no one feels bad when the poor things end up on the rocks.

NEDDA

If that oil goes up in flames, could it set our veld on fire? I wonder ...

LIZZIE

Sparks in the sea?

Marshrose [Scene 2]

NEDDA

Oil makes flames on the waves.

LIZZIE

My pa once had a small boat called *Tess*.

NEDDA

Was Tess your mother's name?

LIZZIE

My ma was Gertrude.

NEDDA

My mother was Gertrude!

LIZZIE

Your ma was Mary.

NEDDA

Whose ma was my ma?

LIZZIE

Your ma was Mary.

NEDDA

Her sister was Gertrude.

LIZZIE

Yes.

NEDDA

See. I remember. [*She sees the projector on the table*] Why is that thing there?

LIZZIE

To remind you.

NEDDA

What must I remember?

LIZZIE

Just think how convenient it would be to show Doctor's slides against the wall, rather than to stumble around the bushes out there looking for dying ferns.

NEDDA

This thing won't work.

LIZZIE

This thing needs a plug in the wall.

NEDDA

The man in the shop promised this machine also worked with batteries ...

Marshrose [Scene 2]

LIZZIE

This has always been an electrical machine.

NEDDA

Then it's a complete anachronism in this house.

LIZZIE

One of many.

NEDDA

I told him we don't have electricity in Avon Beach.

LIZZIE

People with generators ...

NEDDA

Pollution. Noise contamination.

LIZZIE

With electricity, we would show our slides.

NEDDA

What for? I'd rather go out there for the originals.

LIZZIE

The new tarred road has chased all the flowers up into the mountain.

NEDDA

We have exquisite specimens right here in our veld.

LIZZIE

Could be as exquisite on the wall, and more comfortable than crawling around the brambles in search of ...

NEDDA

You're right, but sadly, we have no electricity!

LIZZIE

Just think, I could watch all my soaps on TV.

NEDDA

You smashed your radio, not I.

LIZZIE

I want to see pictures!

NEDDA

You've got money. Go and buy what you want.

LIZZIE

A TV?

NEDDA

Sorry, no electricity.

Marshrose [Scene 2]

LIZZIE

Portables have batteries.

NEDDA

No TV!

LIZZIE

And this is a democratic household?

NEDDA

Of course.

LIZZIE

I vote in favour of a TV.

NEDDA

And I vote against. My majority carries the day. [*She looks outside again*] What's going on out there?

LIZZIE

Such lovely nature programmes on TV ...

NEDDA

Don't tell me that's a tanker on the rocks!

LIZZIE

Fish and bugs, and slimy things with those Latin names, all having babies under water, and it's all on TV!

NEDDA

How terrible! We must telephone someone at once!

LIZZIE

We also don't have a phone.

NEDDA

Why didn't you tell me!

LIZZIE

We've never had a phone here. Doctor H wouldn't allow it. No phones, no decent fridge, no mixer and blender, no TV ...

NEDDA

Now I'm ready for those sweets.

LIZZIE

... no sweets.

NEDDA

Oh yes, there are. Where did you hide them? [*NEDDA exits*]

LIZZIE

When we still lived in town during Doctor's illness, I had

Marshrose [Scene 2]

my own TV. But now, basking here in Nature's smile, I sit with nothing.

NEDDA [*Off*]

Am I warm?

LIZZIE

You're cold ... very cold. The big cables have already been laid underground ...

NEDDA [*Off*]

And now?

LIZZIE

Cold ... all we have to do is say: thank you.

NEDDA [*Off*]

How much colder ...

LIZZIE

Icy in the winter without heaters ...

[*NEDDA enters and searches the room*]

NEDDA

And now?

LIZZIE

Icier. Say yes, and they will bring a nice wire to the house, and we can spend all our time switching things on and off.

NEDDA

Now?

LIZZIE

Frozen stiff as iron. Oh yes, we could also afford one of those steam-iron jobs!

NEDDA

Where did I hide them?

[*She looks panicky. LIZZIE comforts her gently*]

LIZZIE

Think nicely, Miss Nedda ...

NEDDA

'Think'? You are telling me to think? I have a brilliant brain. I have also written books about our veld and flora. And you? You can't even address a Christmas card without your tongue hanging out of the side of your mouth like a simpleton. And you are asking me to 'think nicely'?

Marshrose [Scene 2]

LIZZIE

Where did you hide the chocolates?

NEDDA

I must. You steal all my things.

LIZZIE

Why should I steal? You give me all I need. Except maybe a plug in my room.

NEDDA

You know I'm not well, and so you play on my insecurities.

LIZZIE

Yes never mind, I also searched for the chocolates all night.

NEDDA

See! And you couldn't find them?

LIZZIE

No. Someone hid them away too well.

NEDDA

Of course. In the bedroom. [*She remembers*] My bedroom!
[*She exits to the bedroom. Off*] How close am I now? Hot or cold?

LIZZIE

Warmer Miss Nedda. And when are we going to town to buy the new magazines?

NEDDA [*Off*]

I'm opening the cupboard!

LIZZIE

Still warmer ... I've suffered for weeks without my magazines ...

NEDDA [*Off*]

The drawer ...

LIZZIE

Which drawer?

NEDDA [*Off*]

Underclothes ...

LIZZIE

Cool.

NEDDA [*Off*]

The scarf drawer?

Marshrose [Scene 2]

LIZZIE

Freezing! How am I to know what is happening in the world without my magazines and TV?

[NEDDA *appears*]

NEDDA

We get the paper delivered every morning. We know exactly what's happening in the world.

LIZZIE

Only what I decide to read to you.

NEDDA

What?

LIZZIE

Try the sockdrawer.

NEDDA

The sockdrawer? [*She goes back*] Oh! Sockdrawer! Hot or cold?

LIZZIE

Fires of hell!

NEDDA [*Off*]

I have them! [*Enters with a handful of chocolate bars*]

LIZZIE

Don't eat too many before lunch.

NEDDA

But these are the white chocolates.

LIZZIE

Chocolate is chocolate....

NEDDA

I wanted the bitter chocolate.

LIZZIE

The bitter is finished.

NEDDA

Oh? But we only bought it this morning.

LIZZIE

This morning three weeks ago.

NEDDA

The bitter chocolate?

LIZZIE

And ate it all last week.

Marshrose [Scene 2]

NEDDA

You?

LIZZIE

You.

NEDDA

I don't want to eat this white chocolate. It looks old.

LIZZIE

Last magazines bought was three weeks ago ...

NEDDA

Pale little white squares. Here, you can have them.

LIZZIE

I'm not allowed to.

NEDDA

I know. But I'm giving you permission. [*She presses them on her*]

LIZZIE

I'm not allowed to eat chocolates.

NEDDA

Oh really? Why?

LIZZIE

Sugar in my blood. One bite of that and my heart will stop.

NEDDA

Oh nonsense. Stop trying so hard to acquire white middle-class ailments.

LIZZIE

It's in my family. Far too sweet for your world.

NEDDA

Well, give the chocolate back to the shop. Say it's old. Full of worms.

LIZZIE

It's not old.

NEDDA

It was once nicely bitter and black. Now it's horridly white and old.

LIZZIE

Some of us are, yes. Okay, just put it with the others.
[*Among the others NEDDA finds the bitter*]

Marshrose [Scene 2]

NEDDA

Here's the bitter!

LIZZIE

Give it. You said it was old.

NEDDA

When?

LIZZIE

Few minutes ago.

NEDDA

Never. I was searching all over for it.

LIZZIE

And my magazines?

NEDDA

I promise. Tomorrow.

LIZZIE

And a TV?

NEDDA

Of course.

LIZZIE

You promised.

NEDDA

On my word. Magazines and a TV.

[She gets the chocolates]

LIZZIE

Just remember, it's nearly lunch-time.

NEDDA *[Teases]*

Want a piece? It's so delicious ... mmm ...

LIZZIE

No thanks.

NEDDA

Why? Aren't you allowed to? Hey Lizzie? Watch it go into my mouth. Mmmm. Are you scared you'll pick up weight? Get fatter; no one here will care. And when the season starts and the dusty beach houses will swarm and teem with the rich city folk, burnt red, peeling and hungover, you can just put on one of your old pink nanny overalls and waddle around happily as an old maid. No one will say: There goes Miss Lizzie Smith, Aunt Nedda's friend, look how fat she's

Marshrose [Scene 2]

become in spite of her diabetes. [LIZZIE *looks out unconcerned*]
They will whisper: It's that old coloured derelict who steals
Nedda Barnard's chocolates!

LIZZIE

What's happening out there?

NEDDA

Are you cross? Lizzie?

LIZZIE

Looks like a Taiwanese tanker.

NEDDA

Get angry!

LIZZIE

From another world.

NEDDA

I know you hurt under all that stupidity!

LIZZIE

My heard is breaking like imported glass. Miss Nedda,
you're missing all the fun. Come and look.

[NEDDA *looks out*]

NEDDA

I'd swear that ship was on the rocks!

LIZZIE

Impossible. Your imagination.

NEDDA

Look!

[*They look*]

LIZZIE

But there are no submerged rocks there.

NEDDA

What do you know? My husband always said one day that
ridge would catch itself a good victim.

[LIZZIE *looks up*]

LIZZIE [*Sighs*]

Where are you now, Doctor H?

NEDDA

My husband?

LIZZIE

'Look after the madam, Lizzie ...'

Marshrose [Scene 2]

NEDDA

My husband is dead.

LIZZIE

'Yes Doctor.'

NEDDA

You know he's dead!

LIZZIE

I miss him.

[*Pause*]

NEDDA

Well, you're not under contract. You can always go back to your own family, now no longer cramped together in the slums of yesterday's politics.

LIZZIE

My middle-class family who say this Avon Beach and its candle-lit shacks are just a waste of time?

NEDDA

With them you'd have your own little room behind the new double garage.

LIZZIE

With electricity, yes.

NEDDA

I'd just advertise for another one.

LIZZIE

Another what?

[*NEDDA looks out*]

NEDDA

It's bleeding! That monster is vomiting black gall.

LIZZIE

My children's houses are full of their children.

NEDDA

Like toffee ...

LIZZIE

Doctor actually promised me a pension when I came back to look after him.

NEDDA

Think of the fish and seagulls ...

Marshrose [Scene 2]

LIZZIE

Is this my reward, or his idea of a joke?

NEDDA

The faces of the baby seals with their big eyes will let the people weep comfortably and forget the proud oak trees dying of the plague ...

LIZZIE

He never really liked me, even at the end when he preferred my care to that of his own family.

NEDDA

Poor nature.

LIZZIE

A TV and magazines would help.

NEDDA

The veld and flora ...

LIZZIE

And fewer flora.

NEDDA

What are you moaning about Lizzie?

LIZZIE

It'll all come right, Miss Nedda.

NEDDA

Who always said that?

LIZZIE

'Don't panic; everything will be OK?'

NEDDA

Yes, it's so familiar.

LIZZIE

Every politician.

NEDDA

My son Ferdinand?

LIZZIE

Doctor H.

NEDDA

My Husband?

LIZZIE

'Don't panic, old Lizzie, everything will be okay.' And then he died.

Marshrose [Scene 2]

NEDDA

He only lied to you, because he loved us.

[*She is upset. Lizzie picks up the brush and starts on NEDDA's hair*] How can it all be okay? There was the veld fire and now the terrible new road; the squatters on the beach. The missiles being secretly tested up there, and now that bleeding poison pod on the rocks. How can that ever be okay? [*She strokes her hair*] How old am I?

LIZZIE

How old do you feel?

NEDDA

Fifty. [*LIZZIE grunts*] No?

LIZZIE

Mmmmm.

NEDDA

Warm?

LIZZIE

Cold.

NEDDA

60? 65?

LIZZIE

Bit warmer.

NEDDA

It'll all be okay. [*Then abruptly*] Leave me. My insects and animals out there take me as I am. [*NEDDA exits*] Waterbuck? Come talk to me ...

LIZZIE

Here are your pills ... Miss Nedda? [*She counts out pills and leaves them on table. Picks up a letter*] Yes Doctor, and what do I do about this? Hey? Are you listening up there on your ever-thinning ozone cloud? If you biologists were as good at your jobs as you said you were, how come Mother Nature's frilly pants fall off after every little bump in the road? [*Calls*] Miss Nedda? Leave the creepy-crawlies! [*Speaks to Doctor*] I could've gone and stayed with my kids in the city. Watched TV. Read magazines. We have lovely plastic flowers in our house there!

[*NEDDA comes in quickly*]

Marshrose [Scene 2]

NEDDA

They're here again.

LIZZIE

Who's it this time? Anyone I know?

NEDDA

Tell them no. I'm not home.

LIZZIE

I told those electrical people last week ...

[There is a knock at the door]

NEDDA

Just remember, I'm not here.

LIZZIE

And me?

NEDDA

Say you're the ... what are you?

LIZZIE

I live here.

NEDDA

You must be something.

LIZZIE

Housekeeper?

[NEDDA sarcastically shows around the room]

NEDDA

Do you want to so readily admit guilt?

LIZZIE

Nurse?

NEDDA

Who's sick?

LIZZIE

Secretary?

NEDDA

Yes, I like that. I'll listen in there. *[Sees the chocolate bars as for the first time]* Where did these come from?

LIZZIE

Bought.

NEDDA

Bitter chocolate? I hate it! But it's all that remains for me.
You steal all my favourite white chocolate bars and eat them,

Marshrose [Scene 2]

don't you! [*A knock. She calls loudly*] Yes, hang on, she's coming!

[*NEDDA exits. LIZZIE opens the door. SOFIE enters*]

SOFIE

Morning.

LIZZIE

Morning, Miss.

SOFIE

Eh ... Lizzie?

LIZZIE

Yes.

SOFIE

Dr Barnard?

LIZZIE

No, Lizzie Smith.

SOFIE

No, we're here to see Nedda Barnard.

LIZZIE

Yes, she's not here.

SOFIE

I'm Sofie Clarens.

[*LIZZIE talks loudly for NEDDA to hear off*]

LIZZIE

No, we don't want electricity, really.

SOFIE

Well, I'm sure candle-light is very romantic.

LIZZIE

No, we only use them when we must. We have oil lamps. At night I can read my magazines without bifocals, because the light is so good. Better than electricity.

SOFIE

Sounds romantic. What's happening out there?

LIZZIE

Just a tanker on the rocks.

[*FERDINAND enters*]

SOFIE

Ferdie, it looks better from here ...

Marshrose [Scene 2]

FERDIE

Where is my video camera now ... hello Lizzie?

LIZZIE

Hello, Master Ferdie.

SOFIE

Just use your eyes, Ferdie, and you'll remember what you see.

FERDIE

My dad always said it would happen one day.

SOFIE

Yes. I'm glad he's not here to say 'I told you so.'

FERDIE

I wonder how many millions of rand is being wasted out there. Heads will roll.

LIZZIE

Your mother thinks you're from the council.

FERDIE [*Sighs*]

I don't have the energy for any of Mother's little games.

SOFIE

She's expecting us.

FERDIE

I did write.

LIZZIE

Yes, there's the letter.

SOFIE

Can't she remember anything? What's wrong with her? Alzheimers?

LIZZIE [*Loudly*]

Dr Nedda Barnard is not here.

FERDIE [*Calls*]

We come with good news, Mother!

LIZZIE

Rather tell me first.

SOFIE

It's more than just news. It's business. [*Calls*] Aunt Nedda?

LIZZIE

No, it's not Alzheimers. Alzheimers is incurable.

SOFIE

Is that what the doctors say?

Marshrose [Scene 2]

LIZZIE

I read that in a magazine, plus pictures.

FERDIE

Lizzie lives here as well.

LIZZIE

I'm her companion, you know, we share.

SOFIE

Companion ... I see.

FERDIE [*Calls*]

Mother, it's today. I'm here.

LIZZIE

I did promise Doctor H before he went.

SOFIE

But if she doesn't remember anything ...

LIZZIE

Never mind, when she forgets, I'm here to remember for her. It's just when she panics that things get out of hand. You know, Master Ferdie, sometimes she remembers everything back to front, and most of the time it's much more interesting than the facts.

FERDIE

You gave me your word. If it got really bad, you'd let me know and we'd get her proper professional help!

LIZZIE

I'm here. I look after your mother.

FERDIE

In the land of the blind, the white stick leads.

SOFIE

But how is your health these days, Lizzie?

LIZZIE

Your ma is not worse, Master Ferdie. I always remember everything she tries to forget.

SOFIE

Except me?

LIZZIE

No, Miss Sofie. You were always in the old magazines. They said there that you were from overseas, but I remembered you were one of us.

Marshrose [Scene 2]

SOFIE

Not bad for a cross-eyed local lass from the village green.

LIZZIE

Cross-eyed? Never! Just a charming squint!

[They laugh]

FERDIE *[Calls]*

Mother!

LIZZIE

She's not here ...

[NEDDA enters, not really clear on who they are]

FERDIE

So I see.

SOFIE

Morning, Aunt Nedda.

NEDDA

Aunt?

FERDIE

Mother, is the camera still working? We should take some photos of that tanker ...

LIZZIE

I'll go fetch your father's camera ...

[She exits]

SOFIE

Aunt Nedda, you remember me, don't you?

NEDDA

Of course.

[She doesn't]

SOFIE

Mum and Dad send their love.

NEDDA

Oh yes?

FERDIE

We're a bit late. Sorry.

NEDDA

You are?

FERDIE

The boys wouldn't leave their sport and fly down with me ... even though I hired a 4 x 4 specially for them ... But I

Marshrose [Scene 2]

suppose you're pleased ...

NEDDA

No ...

FERDIE

Sofie is here on holiday from the States.

SOFIE

I still have plans to travel this country a bit more and see our old world before ...

NEDDA

Before it's something of the past?

SOFIE

... before I go back to America.

NEDDA

Your dad and mum?

SOFIE

Well.

NEDDA

I am pleased.

SOFIE

And how is Auntie managing, after Doctor H's death and all?

NEDDA

I think she's also fine.

FREDDIE

She means you, Mother.

NEDDA

Me?

SOFIE

Aunt Nedda.

NEDDA

I'm Aunt Nedda?

FERDIE

Yes.

NEDDA

No.

[LIZZIE enters with the camera]

LIZZIE

Come, Miss Nedda, time for the pills!

Marshrose [Scene 2]

NEDDA

I am not 'Aunt' Nedda, or 'Miss' Nedda ...

LIZZIE

Here's the thing; it's loaded.

NEDDA

Who are you? Family of mine?

SOFIE

Sofie Clarens.

NEDDA

I don't have any family called Clarens. So you can't claim me as Aunt. I am Nedda Barnard. Call me that, or Nedda, or Doctor. But please spare me the 'Auntie'! And you with your 'Mother'? Who said I'm your Mother!

LIZZIE

Miss Nedda?

NEDDA

Lizzie, I'm not your Miss either ...

NEDDA/LIZZIE

... I'm your madam!

[An old joke between them. FERDIE and SOFIE smile politely]

NEDDA

Go and make tea for these children.

FERDIE

We can drive to the hotel for a quick lunch.

NEDDA

I first want to hear how her mum and dad are.

LIZZIE

Want any clues?

NEDDA

Not yet ... *[She thinks carefully]* Clarens?

[She can't remember, searches for clues]

Eh ... farmers?

LIZZIE

Cold.

SOFIE

No ... what?

NEDDA

Clarens ... veld?

Marshrose [Scene 2]

LIZZIE

Warm.

SOFIE

Is this some kind of game?

NEDDA

Flowers?

LIZZIE

Hot, hot hot!

NEDDA

The marshrose!

LIZZIE

Glory be!

NEDDA [*Remembers*]

Ben and Sally! Where are they? Ben's daughter Sofie
Clarens! Of course. Who's this?

FERDIE

Ferdinand ...

NEDDA [*Teases*]

Do I know you?

SOFIE [*Shocked*]

Your son ...

LIZZIE

Stop teasing, Miss Nedda ...

NEDDA [*Laughs*]

You two should've got married then, know that Ferdie?
Sofie? Yesterday you were only that high, cross-eyed with
pigtails. Ben and Sally's pride ... [*Then sudden realisation*]
Oh God, is it bad news?

SOFIE

No. Not really bad, no.

NEDDA

No one dead?

SOFIE

No, Mum and Dad send love.

LIZZIE

Don't panic ...

NEDDA

Sofie, your family's piece of veld is still the greatest heritage.

Marshrose [Scene 2]

FERDIE

Mother, that's the problem. That piece of veld ...

[LIZZIE *chips in to stall him*]

LIZZIE

Yes, I remember when I started working for Miss Nedda and the Doctor. Oh yes, Miss Sofie, how you and Master Ferdie and Miss Blanche often came visiting from your boarding school and how I had to look after you lot on the beach. Too lazy to go mountain climbing with the big people.

FERDIE

When I looked out of my window, the mountain rose up from under my feet like a wall.

SOFIE

And I just wanted to pick everything pretty and wear it in my hair, but picking was always the greatest sin!

NEDDA

Every spring and autumn we would scramble up behind the house. Then we only had that old gravel road, quite in order, nothing uncalled for or offensive, like today's four lane gash. Up there in Hectormans Kloof ...

SOFIE

Near the spring, with its ginger-ale water?

LIZZIE

It's now a popular camp for religious groups.

SOFIE

Oh no!

NEDDA

Oh yes! Then behind the Lion's Ear and the old Rhinohead Rock, to eventually reach the soft marshland on top, between those slabs of bleached stones ...

FERDIE

Sometimes it was nearly freezing up there...

NEDDA

We had to search with care. She was never a very hospitable madam in her own territory. She was never in the same place twice. Your father always found her first ...

LIZZIE

Such an expert, that Mr Ben Clarens, I remember ...

Marshrose [Scene 2]

FERDIE

They could've named her after Father ...

LIZZIE

Goodness me Orotamnus Barnard?

NEDDA

Nonsense, he didn't find her first; she found us. Soon the marshrose made her home with us, safe and loved. And then, like all perfect fairy tales, who should come along, as subtle as a runny tummy? The wicked witch of progress! Ferdinand's beloved modern world, with its wide roads and spilt oil. Hairdryers. Thank God, Ben Clarens was sent by nature to protect the last hideaway of the *Orothamnus zeyheri*. Your dad was the rottweiler at the gates, Sofie. And here you are. Lovely. Why?

FERDIE

Damn it, we'll have to start from scratch. Sofie, now I have to tell the whole story. Mother, we have to ... [*He can't find words*]

SOFIE

No, it's really my problem. Aunt Nedda, I had ... [*She stops. Pause*]

NEDDA

Funny, you kids were always so crazy about the veld. Not Ferdinand's lot. His tribe can't function here without their computers and TVs and hairdryers and plugs round every corner. Oh dear me, the tears when they come here, scared of spiders and 'creepy-crawlies' and fresh air and stars. Your little urban gnomes.

SOFIE

Zeyheri, how can I forget her? Does she still reside up there in her mountain penthouse? Aunt Nedda?

NEDDA

Lizzie!

LIZZIE

What's wrong!

NEDDA

I remembered ...

Marshrose [Scene 2]

SOFIE

‘Zeyheri’s sister’ is what Dad called me.

NEDDA

... I remembered without pills!

LIZZIE

See, I told you not all is gone!

NEDDA

But I also remember that I remembered!

SOFIE

Dad always said, other than his piece of paradise, his great love was for your mountain back there. Your marshrose homeland.

FERDIE

Ben was very ill, Mother.

NEDDA

I didn’t know. Or did I know ...

FERDIE

Yes Mother, we were there! In the hospital!

LIZZIE

Don’t panic ...

NEDDA

When?

SOFIE

After Dad’s stroke ...

NEDDA

Recently?

SOFIE

No ...

FERDIE

Last year ...

NEDDA

I didn’t know.

LIZZIE

Milk everyone?

FERDIE

Three white, one black, or have you forgotten?

LIZZIE

Miss Nedda saw both your parents in hospital, Miss Sofie.

Marshrose [Scene 2]

NEDDA

I wasn't there. I swear I'd remember!

LIZZIE

Never mind, I remember.

NEDDA

Don't anyone listen to her! Lizzie twists everything around. We were never in a hospital. Ever since my husband had to die in one, I swore never again. I'd rather stay here and disappear like mist in the dawn. Like water in the soil.

FERDIE

We were planning to come last week in time for your birthday, Mother ...

NEDDA

My birthday?

FERDIE

... but Sofie had to finish some or other project in Los Angeles.

SOFIE

New York ...

NEDDA

What is your work, or should I know?

SOFIE

I run a modelling agency now.

NEDDA

Oh.

LIZZIE

I see you in all my magazines.

SOFIE

Old snaps.

LIZZIE

I thought so.

NEDDA

I don't read magazines.

LIZZIE

That's true.

FERDIE

We stopped along the road and walked up against the mountain.

Marshrose [Scene 2]

SOFIE

Wonderful view. So unspoilt.

NEDDA

Too many houses.

FERDIE

I hadn't realised how much damage the fire had done.

LIZZIE

Never mind, Master Ferdie, the veld's coming on fine.

SOFIE

The whole mountain was ravaged?

NEDDA

And thanks to that, new plants are popping up in the most unexpected places!

SOFIE

It was a good thing?

LIZZIE

Oh yes, a good roaring bushfire is the best broom.

NEDDA

Out here a new life demands the warm ashes of the old.

SOFIE

Like in New York, life thrives on death.

NEDDA

We were so bone dry after summer.

LIZZIE

The lightning struck somewhere in the mountain.

NEDDA

We really thought this time the house would go.

LIZZIE

We fought so hard to keep the flames away from the roof!

NEDDA

Lizzie was black from the smoke and so was I. Sisters! Then there was no more water ...

LIZZIE

The pipes had melted.

NEDDA

We had to wash off in the sea.

LIZZIE

Palmolive in the salt water!

Marshrose [Scene 2]

NEDDA

Lux in the sea sand!

LIZZIE

Oh, we did laugh!

NEDDA

And we stank of the smoke!

LIZZIE

Thanks to that awful new road, the fire couldn't jump across and burn down the houses.

NEDDA

That disgraceful new road! Like an open wound across the face of the veld. And for what?

SOFIE

Drives well.

FERDIE

Mother, it's now only a ten minute drive, while in the past it took an hour.

NEDDA

A four-lane hardtop, here in the middle of nowhere and nothing? Why?

FERDIE

Progress?

NEDDA

Military. Everything is military.

FERDIE

No, Mother. Development.

NEDDA

Because they're testing unmentionable things up in our mountain.

FERDIE

No Mother!

NEDDA

Yes, Mother!

SOFIE

Aunt Nedda, what are you saying?

NEDDA

Weapons against whom? Me? Against the little waterbuck? Out there is the target! They should blow up that damn

Marshrose [Scene 2]

thing out there!

[She refers to the tanker]

LIZZIE

It's doing a good job all by itself.

FERDIE

Thanks to the new road, this house survived the fire. Yes or no?

NEDDA

Ferdinand, they stole some of my property to build that road. Just came and took.

SOFIE

Do they owe you money?

FERDIE

Who are 'they'?

NEDDA

Didn't even build us a ramp down to our garage.

LIZZIE

The wheels of the car keep sliding on the wet grass.

FERDIE

Thanks to 'them', at least you're now part of civilization.

NEDDA

Glory be!

LIZZIE

Without TV or magazines ...

NEDDA

And then there's also the electricity ...

FERDIE

A nice tarred road to the front door, not a smashed axle on the old corrugations ...

NEDDA

Even if you don't want it, you must pay.

FERDIE

Car? Who drives the car?

NEDDA

I do.

FERDIE

How can you, Mother? Your licence was declared invalid when you ...

Marshrose [Scene 2]

NEDDA

... drove into something big, yes. It wasn't meant to be there.

FERDIE

A police van, yes, yes.

NEDDA

Alright, I lie. Lizzie drives.

LIZZIE

I do?

FERDIE

Lizzie drives?

LIZZIE

Easy. Learnt it from the TV. *LA Law* and *Dallas*. They just jump in, switch on and wham – gone!

FERDIE

Lizzie drives???????

LIZZIE

It's just, our car's steering wheel is on the wrong side.

NEDDA

Because it's not an American car on *LA Law*!

LIZZIE

That's not my fault.

FERDIE

Where did you learn to drive Lizzie?

NEDDA

She told you. The TV.

FERDIE

Mother!

NEDDA

Never mind Ferdinand, we don't have a TV.

FERDIE

I'll have the car towed in and sold! You don't need a car!

LIZZIE

In case of emergency?

FERDIE

Like what?

LIZZIE

All the time. Having to drive into town for ... well ... you know ...

Marshrose [Scene 2]

NEDDA

Lizzie's magazines.

FERDIE

What?!

NEDDA

You'd leave two old ladies alone in the veld?

LIZZIE

What if one falls over?

NEDDA

We don't even have a phone.

LIZZIE

No electricity.

NEDDA

No loving young people to help us ...

[*Pause*]

FERDIE

You want me to come here and look after you? I have my job, my commitments ...

NEDDA

Take away our transport, and we'll hitch-hike!

LIZZIE

And then we'll get raped!

NEDDA

And murdered!

LIZZIE

And whose fault will that be?

NEDDA

You decide our fate, my son. [*Pause. He is stunned. Then she laughs*] A joke, Ferdinand.

FERDIE

Appalling!

NEDDA

Mother's pulling your leg.

FERDIE

That's unfair.

NEDDA

It's a joke!

[*He sulks*]

Marshrose [Scene 2]

LIZZIE

Why are you driving a tractor!

SOFIE

4 x 4. He hired it, thinking his boys would be tempted to come along for the ride.

LIZZIE

Oh yes?

SOFIE

It's very fashionable. Especially in urban areas.

NEDDA

Very outlandish.

LIZZIE

Oh. 4 x 4 hey? Looks easy to drive ...

FERDIE

No!

NEDDA

Oh, leave the children, Lizzie. They're so bland!

FERDIE

Thanks.

NEDDA

Bland, Ferdinand, bland!

FERDIE

The boys are actually with their mother till next week. Her new friend has a powerboat on the Vaal.

[*Pause*]

LIZZIE

So, Master Ferdie, how is she?

FERDIE

Getting married again next month.

NEDDA

Do I know about this?

FERDIE

No. I only found out recently. In the magazines!

NEDDA

But you get to keep the children?

FERDIE

The boys are big enough to look after themselves. They're nearly twenty, Mother! [*Pause*]

Marshrose [Scene 2]

SOFIE

Maybe we should've got married to each other way back when, Ferdie?

FERDIE

Maybe, yes.

SOFIE

You gave me a little tin ring, remember? I even said 'I do'.

FERDIE

Oh?

SOFIE

You've probably forgotten.

NEDDA

Forgetfulness is a family disease.

SOFIE

Then, once we got divorced, I would keep the kids, and you could be free.

FERDIE

I am free.

NEDDA

You young things get married far too soon. Your little milk teeth are still waiting for the tooth fairy's ten cents, and already you're veterans of the divorce courts. But why are you still single, Sofie? Is there something wrong with you?

FERDIE

Mother!

NEDDA

Let me put that differently: in your United States of America, is there anyone left with whom there is nothing wrong?

SOFIE

Who is alone with friends?

LIZZIE

The magazine article says Miss Sofie has a younger man in New York.

FERDIE

Toyboy?

SOFIE

Neither, just a friend.

Marshrose [Scene 2]

NEDDA

What do Ben and Sally say when they read all that?

SOFIE

‘My child, is he black?’

NEDDA

Is he?

SOFIE

No, but you know Mum and Dad. Always expecting the worst.

LIZZIE

And that’s the worst?

SOFIE

Wasn’t it till recently? [*Pause*] Ferdie?

FERDIE

Yes. Mother, what do you want to do? We can talk here, or go to the hotel. [*She shrugs either way*] We must talk.

NEDDA

What do we want in that awful noisy hotel? We can talk here.

FERDIE

Lunch, Lizzie!

LIZZIE

We’ve some chicken left-overs. Don’t tell me you’re vegetarian.

NEDDA

We stay right here in our ringside seats and watch how Ferdinand’s modern reality can destroy a million years’ evolution in a day. [*She refers to the ship. Whispers to LIZZIE*]

What was that he said about my birthday?

LIZZIE

Sorry, I must have also forgotten.

[*They giggle. FERDIE looks round the room*]

FERDIE

Who mucked up the painting job?

NEDDA

Very good people.

FERDIE

Oh really?

Marshrose [Scene 2]

NEDDA

Who were they, Lizzie?

LIZZIE

You and me.

NEDDA

Really?

LIZZIE

Yes, me up the ladder, you on the floor.

NEDDA

Not bad for two old ladies.

SOFIE

I think it's just perfect. You don't have to change anything to the house. Mum and Dad will probably want it just as it is.

[Pause]

NEDDA

Oh?

FERDIE

You've forgotten again, Mother?

NEDDA

I hope so.

FERDIE

My letter explained everything in detail!

NEDDA

There it is.

LIZZIE

We were busy reading it ...

FERDIE

Can't my mother even read her own private letters?

NEDDA

Was there something in that letter, Lizzie?

LIZZIE

No, Miss Nedda. Just news about his divorce, about your grandchildren's love for you; how they all so desperately miss Avon Beach ...

FERDIE

Must you always interfere, Lizzie? My father didn't throw you out all those years ago for no reason.

Marshrose [Scene 2]

LIZZIE

In those days I had my own family problems. I was never
'thrown out' as you say.

FERDIE

Father wouldn't take cheek out of the mouth of a

LIZZIE

Go on, say it: 'a maid'?

FERDIE

Yes. A cheeky servant!

LIZZIE

And your father, bless him, was a typical ...

NEDDA

Say it ...

LIZZIE

Racist?

NEDDA

... tell me what you wrote in that letter!

LIZZIE

No, now now.

[NEDDA *panics*]

NEDDA

What is it? What is being hatched behind my back? Have
you all decided to have me committed somewhere?

[*Pause. LIZZIE quickly changes the subject*]

LIZZIE

And Miss Sofie? When last were you at the plot by the sea?

SOFIE

Ferdie, you said ...

FERDIE

Nothing about the plot in the letter!

SOFIE

Aunt Nedda, you remember our plot?

NEDDA

Plot ...

LIZZIE

Miss Nedda always says you make it sound like a parking
place. The most beautiful unspoilt veld in the country. Yes,
she remembers it well, this 'plot'.

Marshrose [Scene 2]

SOFIE

Well, you see, that's the story. After Dad's stroke they couldn't get to the plot ... to the veld for months. Eventually my brother and his wife collected them and drove them across the mountains to the sea ...

NEDDA

The second turning left after the garage, just beyond the old Strendel farm. The road was always dusty in summer, or muddy in the winter rain. You drive down to the sea, until those gray and orange rockslabs crunch under the wheels, then you swing to the right. Drive to the sand dunes, where one year after a sudden shower, a whole regiment of field mice danced under a rainbow. We laughed till we cried. Then you just look across at paradise. Like as it was after creation. Proteas and painted ladies, ferns and heather ...

SOFIE

The old milkbush with its gnarled caverns?

NEDDA

Yes ... [*Thinks hard*] ... *Sideroxylan inerme!*

LIZZIE

The guarri tree?

NEDDA

Eh ...yes ... it's on the tip of my tongue ... *Euclea racemosa!*

LIZZIE

And the beach olive?

NEDDA

Do you remember the name of the beach olive, Ferdinand?

FERDIE

No, Mother, I never could.

SOFIE

I do! *Olea exasperata?*

NEDDA

Glory be! Then there was ...

LIZZIE

Disa?

SOFIE

Elegia?

Marshrose [Scene 2]

NEDDA

Thyrsifera!

LIZZIE

Erica?

NEDDA

Patersonia!

LIZZIE

Gladiolus?

NEDDA

Carneus! And my beloved *Mimetes hirtus!*

LIZZIE [*Whispers*]

Glory be!

NEDDA

Nowhere a sign of man, no broken leaf or city-shoe footprint in the sand. And so it stayed for all those years, and for the rest of time too, God willing, even long after we've gone.

FERDIE

No.

NEDDA

Yes. Without your damn electricity, or military roads!

FERDIE

No, Mother.

SOFIE

Yes well you see, Aunt Nedda, when they got to the plot, there was a house. [*Pause*] In the veld ...

NEDDA

They built a house in the veld?

SOFIE

An enormous suburban castle, bathrooms and bedrooms and patio and pool and a tennis court in the making.

NEDDA

I don't believe it! Ben and Sally?

FERDIE

No, someone in Pretoria. They'd bought a plot further up the coast. Chose a matching mansion out of the catalogue and built it!

SOFIE

But on the wrong plot.

Marshrose [Scene 2]

NEDDA

The wrong plot?

FERDIE

On a desk in Pretoria, all plots at the sea look more or less the same.

NEDDA

A house on the wrong plot? It's criminal!

FERDIE

If you want to put it so bluntly.

SOFIE

It's a beautiful house ...

NEDDA

Everything they treasured is gone?

FERDIE

Mother, not everyone in the world has your obsession about a few plants ... it was a terrible financial loss for them. Luckily I still have a few contacts in Pretoria and we could negotiate with the people who have to pay for the house ... now they are getting their home built on the right plot and everyone is happy.

NEDDA

Everyone is happy?

FERDIE

I think it's very decent of the builders to present Ben and Sally with the house. Naturally it was 'in lieu of' etc. etc.

SOFIE

Ferdie did so much to help. We are all so grateful.

NEDDA

And what does she say?

SOFIE

Mum thinks ...

NEDDA

That pretty sister of yours? She must be delighted by all the apologies and thank you's – lying there crushed, suffocated by concrete and gravel?

[Pause]

SOFIE

Well you see, Aunt Nedda, there's more to the story ...

Marshrose [Scene 2]

FERDIE

Ben and Sally said no.

NEDDA

Glory be!

SOFIE

They refused to accept the house. They said they'd go to the highest court in the land ...

NEDDA

I'll serve the cake and coffee ...

SOFIE

So then the builders said, if they – that's Mum and Dad – if they had their eye on any other piece of similar land along the coast, no matter what the cost, they'd buy it for them.

NEDDA

Who'd buy what for whom?

FERDIE

The builders ... my contacts ...

LIZZIE

Warm ... warmer ... warmest ...

NEDDA

Go on ... what a terrible story ...

[SOFIE and FERDIE confer softly]

SOFIE

You said this had all been discussed!

FERDIE

It was!

SOFIE

But she doesn't remember anything!

NEDDA

No, I remember nothing!

[Pause]

LIZZIE

And where does the marshrose still grow, other than in the new wine cellar of the house that Ben and Sally didn't build?

NEDDA

Above us in the mountain ... [Pause] Oh ... no...

FERDIE

Yes, Mother. Right up there.

Marshrose [Scene 2]

NEDDA

Not any more. Actually never ever.

FERDIE

Forever here! That little pink shrub was always of greater importance than me with measles, or Blanche with a broken leg.

NEDDA

You never had measles.

SOFIE

Just above here you always told us, Aunt Nedda.

NEDDA

Auntie lied.

SOFIE

You wrote about it in your books.

NEDDA

The marshrose is not for sale.

SOFIE

This was the only veld mum and dad could think of. Here, with their best friend at Avon Beach.

NEDDA

No, no, no, no, no ...

FERDIE

Mother, the builders will buy this ground at any price, after which it can be transferred to the ownership of Sofie's parents.

NEDDA

No, no, no no ...

FERDIE

We're talking millions of rands!

NEDDA

We're talking about one plant! No!

FERDIE

Mother ...

NEDDA

Our veld is not for sale!

FERDIE

It won't be a sale. It's between friends.

NEDDA

Suddenly you're my best friend?

Marshrose [Scene 2]

FERDIE

Ben and Sally.

NEDDA

I cannot believe they'd let it happen!

SOFIE

Can't we just discuss some ideas I have?

NEDDA

This is my veld ...

FERDIE

Oh, some now, Mother. There's lots of nice comfortable space with us in Pretoria. There's also a modern granny flat at Blanche's.

NEDDA

Goodness *cherie*, I seem to have forgotten all my French!

FERDIE

Even your Avon Beach will have to move into the twentieth century soon. It's on the cards!

NEDDA

Not my cards. No no no!

FERDIE

Then there is talk of a planned nuclear power plant ...

NEDDA

No. Ferdinand, read my lips if you are deaf. Mother says no! [*She puts on a scarf*] Lizzie? I'm going out to the real creepy-crawlies. [*She exits*]

SOFIE

Damn it man, you said it was all arranged!

FERDIE

You read the letter?

LIZZIE

Yes, the few letters she still gets, I read her. Most of them just tell of the death of another friend. Then I lie and say someone's become a granny again and not to panic because everything will be okay. Then she laughs and we can manage another day. Miss Nedda's world must stay full of good news.

FERDIE

You're making her ill!

Marshrose [Scene 2]

LIZZIE

Sick and tired of this new world and its lies? Oh yes.

FERDIE

You know what I'm referring to! All this was in my letter to my mother!

LIZZIE

Oh, I don't just lie, I also censor. But the best of all was on page 3. This big stick of a 'nuclear reactor on your proteas, Mother.' I nearly laughed out loud. Shame on you, Ferdinand, she's not a dumb animal that you're trying to frighten away; she's your ma!

FERDIE

We need the money, Lizzie.

LIZZIE

Why? Two old ladies eat less than one of your man-eating rottweilers up there in the north.

FERDIE

Alright then, it's me. I need the money!

LIZZIE

Your business?

FERDIE

Yes.

LIZZIE

What is it called? Rat Race?

FERDIE

It's bad times for everyone.

LIZZIE

Yes, the waterbuck comes down and drinks from our dripping tap, because the mountain water is sick. The ginger-ale brown in it is nearly bleached a dead white, like poison jelly.

FERDIE

The military involvement up in the mountain promised a clean environment.

LIZZIE

So thanks to your contacts, the little meerkat and all our pals will die?

FERDIE

You realise we don't need her permission.

Marshrose [Scene 2]

LIZZIE

She's the head of the house.

FERDIE

Never mind, Blanche and I are in agreement about this ...

Mother must decide ... either she agrees, or we agree for her.

It will just look better if it came from her.

SOFIE

See, Mum and Dad will only accept this if the offer came from Aunt Nedda herself.

FERDIE [*Calls*]

Mother? Where is she ...

LIZZIE

Measuring the foundations for your nuclear reactor.

[*FERDIE looks out*]

FERDIE

No wonder everyone thinks she's nuts. She's talking to the plants!

LIZZIE

Possible.

FERDIE

Do they talk back, I wonder?

LIZZIE

Sometimes. [*She also looks*] You don't really see anything, do you. Look, there's a red-chested cuckoo in the bush; a small tortoise we call Joan under the reeds. Nothing exceptional.

Just old friends.

SOFIE

Go to her, someone ...

LIZZIE

No, wait. Halftime for pills. Mine for blood and hers for courage. [*She counts out pills on a plank with a glass of water*] Remember, Master Ferdinand, when you were still a weedy child, and your father was so upset that you might stay smaller than the rugby ball? I had to feed you a soup spoon of codliver oil every night after supper.

FERDIE

Yes, but I spat it out into the veld.

Marshrose [Scene 2]

LIZZIE

So look at those giant proteas. See how strong and confident they are now. [*She exits to NEDDA with the pills*]

FERDIE

I must've been 10, 11, 12 ... in the bath, old Lizzie with the facecloth and soap, scrubbing my back, washing my ears, rinsing my hair. My eyes were always full of suds ... then she laughed loudly ... I asked 'What's so funny, Lizzie?' More laughter as she pointed with her finger ... 'Look!' she said. 'Look, Master Ferdinand Barnard!' I looked ... saw nothing ... hell, I was 10, 11, 12! 'What is it?' 'Look man! Your little dove's getting feathers!' [*Pause. SOFIE tries not to laugh*] She was the last woman I allowed into my bathroom.

SOFIE

I'll remember that.

FERDIE

At first I could never understand why Father couldn't stand the sight of her. But I suppose it was as clear as daylight Father didn't take shit from a coloured servant, and this particular servant wouldn't take shit from a white!

SOFIE

She probably meant well ... [*She laughs*] Your what? 'Little dove'?

FERDIE

I was 14, when one morning ... after an argument in the kitchen ... she left without farewell. We were hysterical ... Blanche and I somehow kept contact with her through the years, even though Father had forbidden her the house ... she'd come and have tea ... Saturdays, while Mother and Father were here playing with the plants. Blanche and I and Lizzie, standing around ... uncomfortable ... stuttering ... at first through habit, she would sip weak tea out of her old cracked mug ... then after a few years, suddenly one Christmas, there was Earl Grey tea in Mother's nice cups. Then one May, we were sitting round the dining table eating home-made cakes she'd brought and having a deep conversation ... like big people.

Marshrose [Scene 2]

SOFIE

Deep conversation?

FERDIE

Politics; unheard of. Next year in the sitting room, quite normal ... just the maid we had at the time, stormed out ... she refused pointblank to 'serve coloureds!' she said. [*They laugh*] And then one day Father joined us.

SOFIE

Had your 'little dove' left the nest already?

FERDIE

Yes, I was married by then ... our first baby was lying in Lizzie's arms ... in comes the new proud Grandpa ... very formal and aloof, but still he sat there with us. 'How are things at home now Lizzie?' 'Fine Doctor.' 'Children growing up?' 'All of them are grown up now, Doctor.'

SOFIE

Wonderful!

FERDIE

Yes, that ... cheeky old Lizzie. It was the first time someone not white had sat in our sitting room, drinking from our cups. Lizzie just let our ... our prejudice crumble ... all through old habits.

SOFIE

She's wonderful to your mother.

FERDIE

Mother's always been at her best when starting things: us as babies, their marriage, this house. It was Blanche's idea to find Lizzie in her retirement ... and bring her back to look after Father in his last year. And when he died, Lizzie was at the funeral, very subdued to one side with her three sons. Blanche asked her to stay on. At first Mother was not mad about the idea of a servant back as companion, but just look around.

SOFIE

Lizzie's house? [*She's upset*] What about Lizzie?

FERDIE

Never mind, she gets paid well. She can always find other work.

Marshrose [Scene 2]

SOFIE

Is this her work, or her life? Her love!

FERDIE

She has her own family. [*He takes her hand*] Did you really say 'I do'?

SOFIE

'Yes, Ferdinand Barnard, I will marry you.'

FERDIE

So why didn't I hear it?

SOFIE

Oh you did. You waited with your reply till we were down on the beach, all the kids, even those common Hendricks-twins with their redheaded ma, and you said 'Sofie Clarens wants to marry me!' And then you said to me: 'I don't marry a squatter.'

FERDIE

Never!

SOFIE

My parents were always on that plot in a leaking tent. In your eyes we were squatters.

FERDIE

I don't remember.

SOFIE

'Stick insect. Ragdoll ...' What else did you call me in front of the other kids. 'Sofie Bandyleg. Clarens the Cross-Eyed Giraffe!'

FERDIE

You were!

SOFIE

I only had a small operation.

FERDIE

You do look very different.

SOFIE

Another small one on my nose. My boobs.

FERDIE

I thought something was different!

SOFIE

Oh really? Well, as a child you were, as we fondly say in the

Marshrose [Scene 2]

States one real true son of a bitch.

[NEDDA and LIZZIE enter]

NEDDA

Don't put the blame on Mother. Ferdinand, I had a long chat to the creepy-crawlies about giving up their homes and they also think you can go and jump in the lake.

SOFIE

What are we going to do?

NEDDA

I'm sorry about your parents, Sofie. Deeply and honestly upset about their loss. I wished there was something I could do, maybe go up to the top of the mountain and find *zeyheri* to photograph, and give them to with my love?

SOFIE

Dad is paralysed and in a wheelchair. Mum's eyes aren't yet healed, in spite of the operation.

NEDDA

And you live far enough away from the problem, but well off enough to post a solution?

SOFIE

That's unfair.

NEDDA

I was talking about Ferdinand. And if they came to live here? Without electricity or telephone? A paralysed old biologist and his blind ladylove? [*Pause*] Come now, children! There is not enough thought going into all this! Think!

SOFIE

I scarcely sleep at night!

NEDDA

And you look great! Lizzie, where are my boots?

LIZZIE

In their usual place.

NEDDA

Moscow? Cape Point? Under the bed?

LIZZIE

Behind the kitchen door, on the piece of newspaper where they always are.

Marshrose [Scene 2]

[NEDDA to door, stops and turns]

NEDDA

What did you call it earlier, Ferdinand? So surprisingly deeply poetic? In the land of the blind, the white stick is God?

FERDIE

Not quite, Mother, but close ...

[*She exits*]

LIZZIE

Boots? That's all we need now. Miss Nedda, it's too warm to go walking around outside!

FERDIE

Lizzie, what am I going to do?

LIZZIE

Nothing. Get into the tractor and go back to civilisation. Tell your boys their granny misses them. Lie a bit. It keeps the air clean.

FERDIE

She must just sign the papers.

LIZZIE

But she's nuts. Her signature means nothing!

[*NEDDA enters ready to climb*]

NEDDA

My boy, your nice expensive handmade imported shoes look strong enough to clamber across rocks and gullies. Lizzie, bring the flask of cooldrink for the pills. Bring the pills.

LIZZIE

And who are we trying to impress with this Great Trek, Miss Nedda? The businessman, or the beauty queen?

[*An explosion outside*]

SOFIE

What's that!

FERDIE

The tanker!

LIZZIE

How long with that burn ...

NEDDA

Days, weeks. Pitch black clouds. Day for night.

Marshrose [Scene 2]

LIZZIE

Our poor creepy-crawlies, won't know when it's time to chirp, or to snore! [*They look*] So? Practically speaking, what happens now?

NEDDA

Practically speaking?

LIZZIE

If we're going out, I must lock up. Those squatters eat anything that's soft, and use everything else to build their shacks.

NEDDA

We're going mountain climbing.

LIZZIE

A joke?

NEDDA

No. Go put on your takkies.

LIZZIE

On one condition.

NEDDA

One.

LIZZIE

I get my TV?

NEDDA

Alright.

LIZZIE

Magazines delivered at the door?

NEDDA

That's two.

LIZZIE

Remember, we have witnesses. [*As she exits*] Remember what you've witnessed!

FERDIE

What was that about?

NEDDA [*Smiles*]

Can't remember.

FERDIE

Mother, we don't have time for a long walk.

Marshrose [Scene 2]

NEDDA

We'll take the old road, like in the happy days when your father was here, when Ben could walk and Sally would laugh, and when you children were young enough to demand dreams, and old Lizzie would swear like a trooper. Those good old days when we were the unchallenged gods and nature just our lackey. [FERDIE *grumbles and exits*] Ferdinand, you're such an old man!

SOFIE

What are we going to do up there?

NEDDA [*Whispers*]

She's waiting for us in her rock palace. The sun will shine an unnatural gold through this burning oil, but it will look soft on her pink cheek.

[LIZZIE *enters ready*]

LIZZIE

I took an extra blood pill, just in case.

NEDDA

I feel like a young waterbuck.

LIZZIE

You'll just have a stroke up there, Miss Nedda.

NEDDA

Then you're on your own, Lizzie. You'd better come and have a stroke with me?

LIZZIE

It's very warm.

NEDDA

Warm? Warmer?

LIZZIE

Hellfire hot!

[*They laugh.* FERDIE *enters with a photo album*]

FERDIE

Where's this been for all these years? [*Sees all are ready*] Do I have to come?

NEDDA

You're the man. We might be attacked.

LIZZIE

Anything is possible nowadays.

Marshrose [Scene 3]

FERDIE

Where are we going?

NEDDA

To ask the prettier one if she wants to go back to Mum and Dad.

SOFIE

Zeyheri?

[As NEDDA and LIZZIE exit]

NEDDA

Now, see that you're not right behind me when we climb, Lizzie.

LIZZIE

Don't be bossy, Miss Nedda.

NEDDA

The loose stones, remember?

LIZZIE

God, Miss Nedda, do you take me for a bloody fool?

Scene 3

[The sunlight of the flashback ends. Now it rains outside]

FERDIE

Do you know these ugly children?

[He gives her the album]

SOFIE

Where did you find this?

FERDIE

I don't know where to start.

SOFIE

It doesn't feel right ...

FERDIE

Someone must do it.

SOFIE

Ferdinand, I hope heaven is far away from us today.

Marshrose [Scene 3]

FERDIE

Even if it was above us, Sofie, no one without their bifocal glasses could see through the cloud.

SOFIE

Far, far away so that no one we loved could see what we 'have' to do here. Some things should stay private.

FERDIE

Leave the ghost stories. If it makes you that uncomfortable, we don't have to do anything. We can go back and do something else.

SOFIE [*Sighs*]

We are here.

FERDIE

It was your idea to come back together.

SOFIE

I'm glad I'm here.

FERDIE

My hayfever's starting again.

SOFIE

I just miss the sun.

FERDIE

It's the flowers ...

SOFIE

It's all like an old black and white photo ...

FERDIE

Well, I can assure you ...

SOFIE

It doesn't feel right.

FERDIE

Someone's got to do it. [*She looks at him*] Someone must do it!

[*Blackout*]

optional INTERVAL here

[*The action of Scene 3 carries on*]

Marshrose [Scene 3]

[SOFIE *pages through the album*]

SOFIE

They kept everything. Even my sketchbooks ... [*She looks at one*] Here are my working sketches of *zeyheri*. Dad always hoped I'd become an illustrator. He'd write the texts and I'd immortalise his damn flowers and leaves.

FERDIE

This place always depresses me in the rain ...

SOFIE

Oh look, a truly original Clarens.

FERDIE

Who's that supposed to be?

SOFIE

Ferdinand Barnard.

FERDIE

My nose is smaller ...

SOFIE

Your head's bigger ...

FERDIE [*He sighs and sits. Eats some chocolate*]

Want some? [*She shakes her head*] The sockdrawer is full of bars of bitter chocolate. The scarfdrawer filled with sweets. Pills everywhere. Dried flowers squashed between the pages of books.

SOFIE

And piles of magazines in Lizzie's holding up her battered old TV set. I even found an old *Cosmopolitan* with me on the cover.

FERDIE

Look here. The book of old remedies. [*Hands it to her*] Take it back to America and all your sick friends.

SOFIE

They're not just in America ...

FERDIE

What?

[*She looks at him, wants to answer, then shakes her head*]

SOFIE [*Reads*]

'Mix manure with milk and place on wound. It will heal overnight.' [*She laughs*] A manure milkshake!

Marshrose [Scene 4]

Scene 4

[The sunlight streams us back into the flashback. LIZZIE enters with a basin of water. SOFIE has the book]

SOFIE

... This is ridiculous!

LIZZIE

Take off the shoe.

[FERDIE limps to the chair]

FERDIE

Can't ... too sore.

[NEDDA enters with medicine]

NEDDA

Delicate lad! You sprained your ankle, my boy, not broke your back! Rub this on it!

[She gives him ointment]

SOFIE

Aunt Nedda? Listen to this. *[Reads]* 'Mix manure with milk and place on wound. It will heal overnight.'

NEDDA

Let me see? 'Remedy for body pains: drink a bottle of brandy quickly. Pain will vanish.'

FERDIE

That's what I need right now!

NEDDA

I've seen it even work among disbelievers.

LIZZIE

Put your foot in the water, Master!

SOFIE

'Remedy for the Simple Man'? Where did you get hold of this book?

NEDDA

I don't know. No, I mean I really can't remember. If you had to ask me now about all my little things – the books, the candles, the playing cards, the puzzles, the silly pointless

Marshrose [Scene 4]

clutter from far and away, from whom and where – what could I tell you? [*Shrugs*] Yes, well, here they are. Hitched a lift on my wagon of life and came along for the ride. [*Reads from the book*] Here's just the thing for Ferdinand's ankle. [*Reads*] 'Painfully sprained ankle, that occurs when city boys with fancy city boots climb mountains carelessly, without taking heed of their mother's good advice. Wash child's ears out properly and stand him in a draughty corner for an hour without chocolate and cream!'

LIZZIE

With foot in water!

FERDIE

Very funny. Look ... I'm not going to be forced to cut open my expensive shoe ...

NEDDA

Good old remedy for the simple man ... Oh hell ...

LIZZIE

You okay?

NEDDA

Keep talking nonsense ...

[*She looks tired. Waves LIZZIE's attention away*]

LIZZIE

Just don't use my best peeling knife, hey Miss Nedda? Like the old days when he scratched around my kitchen to find something he wanted for the garden.

SOFIE

And what was he doing?

LIZZIE

Cutting a rod from a branch!

FERDIE

A rod for Lizzie.

LIZZIE

Learn beating women at an early age?

FERDIE

What do you mean by that?

LIZZIE

If the shoe fits, cut it open, Master Ferdie.

[*He glares at her*]

Marshrose [Scene 4]

SOFIE [*Quickly*]

And why a rod?

FERDIE

We'd wait for you to come round the corner ...

LIZZIE

Usually carrying a full tray ...

FERDIE

... and then whack! On your fat bum!

SOFIE

Ferdie no, shame on you!

LIZZIE

Oh yes, damn hard!

FERDIE

But you never once dropped the tray.

LIZZIE

Or caught up with you, you little beast.

FERDIE

Once you chased us and grabbed hold of Blanche by the
plaits.

LIZZIE [*Mimics*]

'Lizzie, if you hit me, I'll tell Papa!!!'

FERDIE

You gave her the hiding of her life.

LIZZIE

Just ... what did you call it ... 'in low of' etc.?

FERDIE

In lieu of ...

NEDDA

You beat the children?

LIZZIE

Of course. They put insects in my bed.

NEDDA

Thank goodness I never knew this then.

LIZZIE

Someone had to tame these wild animals and teach them.
With respect, Madam Doctor Barnard, you and your
husband just didn't spend that much time with us.

Marshrose [Scene 4]

NEDDA

Ours was always a family united!

LIZZIE

Not in the normal sense of the word, no. You two always preferred to be behind closed doors, with your eyes pressed up against those periscopes.

NEDDA

Microscopes.

LIZZIE

Amoebas and Latin things that made my stomach turn.

NEDDA

Wonders of life.

LIZZIE

Maybe, except that the two little wonders of your lives you left lying about for a rainy day.

NEDDA

I loved my children!

LIZZIE

While I brought up your two brats.

[*Clearly a touchy argument. NEDDA sulks*]

FERDIE

Yes, and just look at them now.

LIZZIE

All my sons have good families. They all have their own homes, fully paid off; good jobs and no debts!

NEDDA

No divorces.

FERDIE

I meant your white kids, me and Blanche.

LIZZIE

I know what you mean.

SOFIE

Don't you miss your family, Lizzie?

LIZZIE

What for, they're all here. I'm going to see to lunch. Miss Sofie, want some tips on how to cut onions without crying?

[*She exits followed by SOFIE. NEDDA sits and stares at FERDINAND till he feels uncomfortable*]

Marshrose [Scene 4]

NEDDA

You look just like your father.

FERDIE

I don't.

NEDDA

You don't look like me. You don't behave like me.

FERDIE

No, thank heavens.

NEDDA

No, you're pigheaded, you're insensitive, you're old before your time.

FERDIE

I'm just not used to climbing mountains in my city shoes.

NEDDA

You're sour, Ferdinand. That you didn't get from me, or from your father.

FERDIE

If my ankle didn't decide to stop us in our tracks today, you would've had a heart attack and died among the proteas. I saved your life.

NEDDA

Don't flatter yourself! I would've been up and down already, if it hadn't been for you, Ferdinand.

FERDIE

Ah, so now it's all my fault?

NEDDA

It was like climbing with an old man.

FERDIE

I was climbing with two old women!

NEDDA

Sour, Ferdinand. We've all had our disappointments in life, but it didn't make us sour.

FERDIE

And when last did you climb that mountain?

NEDDA

Oh dear. Sour!

FERDIE

Or can you conveniently not remember.

Marshrose [Scene 4]

NEDDA

Last week!

FERDIE

Years ago!

NEDDA

Sour!

FERDIE

When your friends still could climb.

NEDDA

We did it every week.

FERDIE

Oh? And who comes here now?

NEDDA

Everyone!

FERDIE

Every week?

NEDDA

We just don't have time.

FERDIE

None of you have gone up that rockface in years, Mother.
And as far as you know, even the marshrose might have
kicked the bucket by now too.

NEDDA

Oh no no, she's there.

FERDIE

How do you know?

NEDDA

Like I know that my children are still there, having not
heard a word from them for months, or seen them for longer.
And you do look just like your father! Except you're sour.
[*She pages through the remedy book*] Funny, no instant remedy
for madness.

FERDIE

You're not mad.

NEDDA

Then the world is mad, but one of us needs urgent help.
[*Pages on*] Don't panic, Ferdinand, everything will be okay.
I'm much better, really. Since your father died, there have

Marshrose [Scene 4]

been some moments of being alone that were ... difficult to handle on my own. We were together for so long, as one energy, one reality, and when he suddenly went on without me, how can I put it? I found myself standing in the rush-hour traffic of life, without the strength or the guile to dodge the monstrous fears that bore down on me. Like those huge trucks on the freeway. I suppose being alone means one just gets more easily scared of silly things.

FERDIE

What things?

NEDDA

Oh, I don't know. Getting old silently. Going mad silently. Becoming ill silently. Dying silently. [*Puts book down*] No, sorry, there is also no remedy for being sour. [*Looks at him again for a time*] Why are you here, Ferdinand? You never come here, unless there is something you want. What is it you want this time?

FERDIE

I'm a business man: I work. I don't want.

NEDDA

Ah, so this is a business visit. Going to put up a nice supermarket around here for the meerkat? Or a sportsfield where the fieldmice can play rugby?

FERDIE

A nuclear power station.

NEDDA [*Laughs*]

It wouldn't surprise me, if the whole thing wasn't so totally absurd. [*She looks out at the ship*] Flames on water. Oil belongs in the ground, like military roads in a military camp and plugs and switches in a dreary suburb. Not here! [*Stares out at the ship*] Does the Simple Man have no remedy for pollution? Something to tame progress? 'Close the eyes and the ears tightly and don't panic, because everything will be okay.' [*Pause*] So my boy, what are we to do now?

FERDIE

You must decide.

NEDDA

Let me think 'nicely', as Lizzie suggests. I'm not young ...

Marshrose [Scene 4]

FERDIE

That's not true.

NEDDA

Stay out of my thoughts. I'm not healthy anymore. I can't do my work any longer. Only sometimes I can recall and repeat things worth hearing, but then there is no one here to listen.

FERDIE

You have Lizzie ...

NEDDA

Actually she bores me.

FERDIE

She lives for you!

NEDDA

I'm sick of her goodness, her eternal patience. Her maddening sufferance! I find I go out of my way to make her madder, but she never even gets cross. She is so ... patient!

FERDIE

It's her job.

NEDDA

What do you know? My children are so busy with their careers and besides, they don't like the veld.

FERDIE

Not true ...

NEDDA

Reality. Here you must just be you. No façade. No guile. No intrigue.

FERDIE

That's right, Mother, I'm home.

NEDDA

And aren't I lucky! Now I've been given the chance to sell everything, before it is commandeered and pulled out from under my feet.

FERDIE

Life goes on.

NEDDA

Yes, and my life I can hand over into the loving custody of those who will at least respect and nurture my passion. [*She throws some dried flowers at him*] I am blessed.

Marshrose [Scene 4]

FERDIE

Yes, Mother, you are blessed.

NEDDA

And if I vote against this blessing, I will be the one who looks like an old fool.

FERDIE

If you want to put it so brutally? Yes.

NEDDA

How is it possible that I can so easily be painted into a corner with my own brush?

[LIZZIE enters with SOFIE. They carry trays]

LIZZIE

I thought we'd have it on our laps.

[NEDDA gets up]

NEDDA

Don't think for me.

LIZZIE

You can have it at the table if you like.

NEDDA

I don't like being treated like an invalid.

LIZZIE

Miss Nedda, this is only having lunch!

NEDDA

Give me mine. [LIZZIE hands her a plate] I don't want to eat among strangers. [She exits]

LIZZIE [Calls]

And don't give it all to the skunk! He's already too fat. His wife complains. [SOFIE looks amazed] Oh yes, the skunk is her friend.

FERDIE

What's he got that I lack?

SOFIE

A sense of humour? [Holds the plate in front of him] Must I chop it up in little bitty pieces for him to eat with his sore footie?

FERDIE

Yes, Ma.

Marshrose [Scene 4]

LIZZIE

Excuse me while you two play housie-housie. I'm going to sit out there with my old pals. And in the meantime, as you Americans always say on TV 'Get your god-damned act together'!

FERDIE

Lizzie ...
[*She exits. Pause*]

SOFIE

She tells me there are days when your mother can't remember anything.

FERDIE

Not today.

SOFIE

How can you let her live here alone, without a phone, without help, without a brain ...

FERDIE

She has a brilliant brain!

SOFIE

Had. The British had an Empire; Greta Garbo had a career; Dr Nedda Barnard had a brilliant brain.

FERDIE

It comes and goes. After Father's death it seemed as if she wanted to neutralise the past ...wished I could. Sometimes I wonder if all this isn't just Mother's way of evading responsibility. It is very convenient.

SOFIE

And how's the foot?
[*He shows that there is nothing wrong with the foot*]

FERDIE

I had to do something to stop them. [*He looks out*] You see, they both talk to each other at the same time and no one listens.

SOFIE

I think someone hears.

FERDIE

No, I was wrong. They eat and talk at the same time. Amazing ...

Marshrose [Scene 4]

SOFIE

Well, Ferdie, you can't leave her here among these desolate beach houses.

FERDIE

It's a full-time job ...

SOFIE

You've now at last got the time to think of someone else.

FERDIE

Oh yes? And what's that supposed to mean?

SOFIE

You said it. Your wife's found another man. She's okay. Your sons will soon be married and, like their parents, will happily divorce.

FERDIE

Not all marriages go on for as long as those of my parents and yours.

SOFIE

Ferdie, this is today, not last year! Life is on fast forward. What you fuck up in your bedroom, echoes within minutes across the media from east to west. Even my half-blind mother sent me the front-page report.

FERDIE

All just blah blah blah.

SOFIE

'Top businessman beats up society wife?'

FERDIE

Yes, and Miss Piggy's pregnant.

SOFIE

Ferdie, you pulled my hair, you forced sand down my throat, but you never never hit me! Where did you acquire the taste?

FERDIE

I never laid a finger on my wife!

SOFIE

The army?

FERDIE

After eighteen years of marriage there was nothing left between us.

Marshrose [Scene 4]

SOFIE

The stock market?

FERDIE

It just happened, Sofie.

SOFIE

You don't just do that to someone you love!

FERDIE

We didn't like one another.

SOFIE

I don't like most people I have to work with, but I don't beat them up!

FERDIE

I didn't beat her up; I loved her!

SOFIE

Then spare me your love.

FERDIE

We fell in love, we married, we had the boys. We started looking at each other only with ... dislike ... with irritation ... Her way of eating put me off, her perfume ... her laugh! She accused me in front of our friends and I started drinking too much, and then ...

SOFIE

Sounds very American.

FERDIE

We also suffer from that.

SOFIE

And the boys?

FERDIE

They went wild ... I think they smoke grass.

SOFIE [*Mocks*]

Smoke grass! God help us!

FERDIE

We never smoked grass!

SOFIE

Believe me, if I knew something would help, I would've smoked sheepturds! And you too! [*Pause*]

FERDIE

I can't talk to my boys.

Marshrose [Scene 4]

SOFIE

Why don't you still come here as a family?

FERDIE

I don't think my boys like me.

SOFIE

This was our bond, Ferdie. We were joined by a chain of fresh flowers, till drought us did part.

FERDIE

That felt so normal. Every end of year, after boarding school ... into Father's big car and be here in the veld barefeet within hours.

SOFIE

You were always too scared of thorns to go barefeet!

FERDIE

I ran on the thorns without flinching!

SOFIE

You ran, but you flinched! I saw you flinch!

FERDIE

Our parents were happy, we were happy, the country was happy, and there wasn't a problem.

SOFIE

For cross-eyed flat-chested gangly skinny virgins like me, Christmas holidays were a nightmare.

FERDIE

But we always had such fun. What was the problem?

SOFIE

How do I put it in a few words?

FERDIE

Try.

SOFIE

God, please let someone fuck me!

FERDIE

What?

SOFIE

You mean I've been saying it wrong all these years?

[They laugh]

FERDIE

We didn't do that then, Sofie. That was a sin.

Marshrose [Scene 4]

SOFIE

I was prepared to burn in hell. I prayed: 'Dear Jesus, forgive me, but let me be laid before the New Year, and I promise I'll be good, and I'll help the poor, and the sick, and the ancient in years, and yes damn it, I'll even become a nun!'

FERDIE

The Calvinist God was then heard to shout 'Glory Be?'

SOFIE

I even stopped laughing. A child without fun? I was scared I'd suddenly start crying terribly.

FERDIE

I never knew.

SOFIE

I was so scared of feeling sorry for myself.

FERDIE

You never were.

SOFIE

I was, I was. I even wanted to commit suicide.

FERDIE

Here at Avon Beach?

SOFIE

Well, I usually put it off till later, as I didn't want to miss the next day's great adventure.

FERDIE

It being?

SOFIE

A fuck. With the Lord's help.

[They laugh]

FERDIE

Remember the Hendricks-twins?

SOFIE

Yes. With that redhead ma. She could never wear her false teeth because their mongrel dog wanted to bite her!

FERDIE

She had to chew her picnic with her dress over her head. I you-know-whatted with them.

SOFIE

I-don't-know-whatted.

Marshrose [Scene 4]

FERDIE

You know? It!

SOFIE

It?

FERDIE

Fucked.

SOFIE

With her dress over her head?

FERDIE

No, man, the twins.

SOFIE

Both, or one by one?

FERDIE

Both.

SOFIE

Special offer.

FERDIE

One next to the other.

SOFIE

You poor thing.

FERDIE

They asked me to!

SOFIE

Of course. They were hideous!

FERDIE

Big boobs.

SOFIE

Yes, but God, what are big boobs, when your brainbox plays host to a whirl of hot air?

FERDIE

In those years, everything.

SOFIE

Okay Ferdie, I didn't have big boobs.

FERDIE

You had no boobs.

SOFIE

You couldn't have looked properly.

Marshrose [Scene 4]

FERDIE

No, I probably didn't.

SOFIE

My IQ was my weapon against life.

FERDIE

You can't clamp your palms around an IQ ...

SOFIE

Big talker!

FERDIE

What were their names?

SOFIE

Common girls. Memory fails.

FERDIE

Mara?

SOFIE

And Sara, or something.

FERDIE

They both stood with their bare backs against the rocks,
down there on the beach where the brown water bubbled out
of the big stone.

SOFIE

You mean, exactly where I once dedicated my Special
Rockgarden to God?

FERDIE

Exactly there.

SOFIE

Satan!

FERDIE

Sara and Mara, both with their eyes tightly shut, each with
their shorts down to their knees ... T-shirts pulled up above
their ... what?

SOFIE

What?

FERDIE

Above their what? You're not listening!

SOFIE

Above their tits, man, their enormous twelve-year-old tits,
boobs, dairies!

Marshrose [Scene 4]

FERDIE

With my knees I had to force their ... eh ... drawbridges down ... I nearly exploded ... heard about bells that rang, but didn't know where they kept the gongs.

SOFIE

Oh, the disgrace ...

FERDIE

Didn't even know where to drive, but my sports car flashed its lights to bright and put the engine into top gear.

SOFIE

I'm not interested in mechanical details ...

FERDIE

Sara and Mara didn't make a sound, just a gurgle in one or the others' throats, or both.

SOFIE

Probably laughing at you.

FERDIE

Oh no, I knew passion when I heard it.

SOFIE

Passion? A guttural gurgle of passion?!

[She demonstrates]

FERDIE

Sex man, sex! So I parked my E-type at Mara's gate and clamped my hands on Sara's boobs!

SOFIE;

Yawn.

FERDIE

Then vice versa.

SOFIE

Dare I ask: and?

FERDIE

So it went on – in, grab boob, out, stroke boob, french kiss ...

SOFIE

French kiss! You go too far!

FERDIE

... till their redheaded toothless ma called them to supper.

SOFIE

Coitus interruptus! All for a hot dog!

Marshrose [Scene 4]

FERDIE

Then I had to reverse the Ferrari ...

SOFIE

E-type bust by now?

FERDIE

... my sports car back into its khaki garage.

SOFIE

So soon? You disappoint me.

FERDIE

Finished with the you-know-whatting.

SOFIE

Is that all there is to doing it for the first time?

FERDIE

I thought it was rather special.

SOFIE

Pathetic.

FERDIE

Jealous.

SOFIE

What? Of that Mara and Sara with their ...

FERDIE

Just jealous!

SOFIE

Please! I would've said wake me when it's over.

FERDIE

It's your own fault.

SOFIE

I didn't want to go with you.

FERDIE

You could've just asked.

SOFIE

Me? Ask you?

FERDIE

Nicely ... maybe bought me a cooldrink ... slipped me a few
rand.

[She throws something at him playfully. Pause]

SOFIE

Was it nice?

Marshrose [Scene 4]

FERDIE

Was what nice, Sofie?

SOFIE

The two-in-one you-know-what?

FERDIE

Well ... thinking back now ... not necessarily to their boob-tit-dairies ... but to the other ... things we did together against the rocks, with our feet in your Garden to Jesus, I can really say ... I can't remember a thing. [*They laugh. Hold hands*] One so seldom laughs about innocent things.

SOFIE

Like old sex as safe as old values?

FERDIE

It was all so inevitable then.

SOFIE

We were lucky to be friends.

FERDIE

Yes.

SOFIE

Even though you treated me worse than your labrador.

FERDIE

I didn't!

SOFIE

You kissed the labrador.

FERDIE

I did.

SOFIE

What happened to Honey?

FERDIE

Dogbox in the sky.

SOFIE

How could you kiss a dog!

FERDIE

You should meet my wife ...

SOFIE

You bastard ... [*They embrace*]

FERDIE

Suddenly it feels like yesterday. [*He kisses her*]

Marshrose [Scene 4]

SOFIE

Did you do that because you feel sorry for me, after all these years?

FERDIE

No. Because I feel sorry for me.

[He kisses her again]

SOFIE

Who would've thought we'd be sitting here like this, me with my multi-dollar magazine cover pout and you with your million-rand *Sunday Times* scandal, and tell rude tales about Mrs Hendricks' girls' boobs?

FERDIE

Six million rand debt.

SOFIE

How is that possible, Ferdie? I thought you knew what you were doing?

FERDIE

It's today ... win some, lose some.

SOFIE

Your partners are now safely in Geneva?

FERDIE

Hong Kong.

SOFIE

So a man comes of age, when he realises that not all with their shorts round the knees are necessarily named Mara or Sara.

FERDIE

If you'd given me that advice some years ago, I would've known what to do. As I said, some of us get caught with our E-types in the garage, others not.

SOFIE

Win some, lose some?

FERDIE

Win some, lose everything.

SOFIE

How much will they pay for this land?

FERDIE

Three million plus.

Marshrose [Scene 4]

SOFIE

They're mad!

FERDIE

That's our price for the last resort of the Princess Zeyheri.

SOFIE

My expensive kept sister.

FERDIE

You said your parents want this more than life. The company must pay up, or end up in court.

SOFIE

How deeply are you involved in this mess?

FERDIE

How do you mean?

SOFIE

The house on the wrong plot; the rape of Avon Beach ... Mum and dad will never take this place out from under Aunt Nedda.

FERDIE

They don't have to know about the deal.

SOFIE

They're not senile. Old people talk to each other. They originated the concept of deals.

FERDIE

We just need their signatures. Then we can move amounts around.

SOFIE

Millions?

FERDIE

Billions! Everyone's doing it.

SOFIE

But it can't be that simple? That painless?

FERDIE

I said I'd compensate for the fuck up. Besides we're doing the oldies a favour.

SOFIE

I could do with a few million rand, even though it's only 150 dollars!

[*NEDDA enters from outside with box. LIZZIE also enters with one*]

Marshrose [Scene 4]

NEDDA

These were in the garage, at the back.

FERDIE

We must talk about that car ...

NEDDA

Help me with this box, girlie ... there. Now this is everything I promised to give you. Father?

FERDIE

What?

NEDDA

Father, will you be able to get rid of all these toys at the Church bazaar? Are people still that generous? It's so long since I've been to a local fundraiser. I must come this time; it always has such a wonderful feeling of timelessness. Like the old days with its soft pain and silent screams. [*She is aware of their stares*] What's wrong? Is this junk useless?

LIZZIE

'Father John' is stunned by your generosity.

FERDIE

Lizzie ...

LIZZIE

Miss Nedda's decided to clean things out, 'Father'! Look what heaps up through the years?

[*FERDIE looks in the box*]

FERDIE

My old toys?

LIZZIE

Take them.

FERDIE

I don't want them.

LIZZIE

Take them and go! It's time to leave now.

NEDDA

These things once belonged to my children.

SOFIE

Oh really?

NEDDA

Yes. I had two children, didn't I, Lizzie?

Marshrose [Scene 4]

LIZZIE

You did, Miss Nedda. Two lovely children.

NEDDA

The girl and the boy.

SOFIE

Where are they now?

FERDIE

I'd also like to know.

[NEDDA *scratches in the boxes*]

NEDDA

Look, Father, a beautiful book about our Cape flora. With illustrations. By H and N Barnard.

FERDIE [*Reads*]

'To Ferdie, from Mother and Father Xmas 1956.'

NEDDA

Still smells new. He just unwrapped it, sighed and left it under the tree. Never looked at it again.

FERDIE

I know the book well ...

NEDDA

Ah, but Father is different. God and Nature have become co-refugees along Life's freeway. But the children so often would forget about the tiny plants under their feet, as they'd run to be first at the barbecue, or to fight about who got the biggest icecream cone.

FERDIE

Just took a shortcut through the veld ...

NEDDA

What is this?

[*She holds up a piece of meccano set*]

FERDIE

Part of a meccano set.

SOFIE

What a wonderful thing to have!

NEDDA

With the little screws and funny wheels, yes. He so passionately asked for this, even prayed to God at night, and then when he got it, just let it lie around the house,

Marshrose [Scene 4]

like everything else.

FERDIE

Oh no, I didn't.

LIZZIE

Oh yes, you did. All over the house.

NEDDA

And this? [*She holds up a toy banjo*]

FERDIE

You can't give that away. It's the banjo ...

NEDDA

It's a broken banjo ...

FERDIE

It just needs proper strings.

NEDDA

Strings?

FERDIE

To make it play.

NEDDA

My son wouldn't sleep till he got that, but then as always he was just too lazy to learn how to help it make music. So, he just let it lie around the house and here it is.

FERDIE

No.

LIZZIE

Yes.

FERDIE

I want to have it fixed.

NEDDA

Can you play this thing, Father John?

FERDIE

I never learnt ...

LIZZIE

Wait now, Miss Nedda, why don't you send it to your son's children maybe?

NEDDA

I don't know what they want. I watched them grow up like any other children, but they gave me no clues. Money. That's what they ask for.

Marshrose [Scene 4]

FERDIE

What?

LIZZIE

Yes. Little begging notes for money.

FERDIE

What!

NEDDA

They don't want to ask their father. They're scared of him.

FERDIE

What ...

LIZZIE

Then Miss Nedda sends a postal order.

FERDIE

What!

NEDDA

My grandchildren are also scared of the veld. Keep seeing snakes everywhere.

LIZZIE [*Whispers*]

There are snakes everywhere ...

NEDDA

My grandchildren seem to be even scared of their granny.

Me. Why me?

[SOFIE *plays with the banjo*]

SOFIE

Maybe they're too grown up for this now.

NEDDA

I can't remember ... do they make their own music? These sons of my son?

FERDIE

No, they each have CD Walkmans.

NEDDA

So they like walking?

FERDIE

No, they sit and listen to CDs on their Walkmans. [*Mutters*]

Lizzie, this is ridiculous ...

SOFIE

Are you going to give all this to the Church? This is your son's precious childhood.

Marshrose [Scene 4]

NEDDA

Lizzie and I must start cleaning out the house, girlie. Clear out cupboards and give things away. Everything is so cluttered with bits and pieces. Like this. [*She holds up a bottle of shells*]

SOFIE

I filled this with those pink shell pieces when I was 9. Look, the colour hasn't even faded after all these years.

NEDDA

Pink like the marshrose.

SOFIE

How long has it been here?

NEDDA

Orothamnus zeyheri has been here since the beginning of beauty. Long before we came to spoil. Long before ships on rocks.

[*FERDIE gets up; forgets to act a painful foot*]

FERDIE

I want to take these toys back with me.

NEDDA

A miracle! The parson's foot is healed!

FERDIE

You don't give away anything that's mine!

NEDDA

Father, look around and take what you want. Everything must go. [*Whispers*] What shall I take to the sanatorium, Father? Maybe a book or two?

LIZZIE

You can take what you like, not so Father?

FERDIE

Sanatorium?

NEDDA

It'll be an institution. I'll have to share a room with another pathetic old mad lady, someone's cackling auntie who stinks of lavender water, and talks in her sleep, telling all her sad important secrets that sound so stupidly familiar.

FERDIE

What are you talking about, Mother! No one said anything

Marshrose [Scene 4]

about a sanatorium! All Blanche and I want to do, is move a sum of money from one account to another.

SOFIE

‘Blanche and I?’

NEDDA

You sound just like my son. He’s a nice man, but is so obsessed by money. But as a man of God, you must be practical and beg without shame. The Church has good reasons. My son only has debts. [*Explosion outside*] Look what’s happening in the sea!

FERDIE

Mother! In God’s Name ... Mother! That’s a tanker on the rocks ... you’ve seen it! I am your son ... you’ve already greeted me. This is Sofie Clarens who grew up in front of you. This is the reality. I ... I know you’re ... playing hide and seek somewhere in your brilliant brain, but for God’s sake ... just come out for ten minutes and sign the documents, and then ... you can go out and chew the rare flowers and shrubs for all I care!

SOFIE

It’s unnecessary to shout at the old woman.

FERDIE

Then fuck off!

LIZZIE

Bully!

FERDIE

You too!

NEDDA

I thought I was doing the right thing ...

LIZZIE

You were. Master Ferdinand always gets sulky and mean when he doesn’t get his way.

NEDDA

Am I hiding?

LIZZIE

No, he’s just saying things to hurt you. Look at him. The man is disappointed by life.

Marshrose [Scene 4]

NEDDA

Reality.

FERDIE

No, the reality is this, Mother. I am in deep financial trouble. You can help me out of it.

LIZZIE

Or he helps himself.

FERDIE

It's only a clump of bushes, Mother. Flowers get picked and wither and die! The Taiwanese make prettier blooms out of silk and they last forever!

NEDDA

'Only a clump of bushes'? We were so often criticised by people who knew even less for making it a respected career. 'Just flowers', they'd sneer. Well, it was more than a career, it became our lives. Sour old losers always find stale icy water to spray across one's warm excitement. But Doctor H always just laughed and said 'Yes, they are only plants, but that's a matter of their small opinion. We know what we are doing. We can see the reality.' [*She picks up a pressed flower*] I suppose some invest money, and collect fine belongings, but we saved the greatest treasure for our children. Natural jewels. The opening of a small flower is so much finer than the opening of large bank account. [*She picks off petals as she speaks*] At first I also strained to hear what other people were saying about the politics that seethed in the world across the mountain, but my husband shook his head and confirmed it: 'Nature is the Truth. Man is the question mark.'

FERDIE

Nuts.

NEDDA

But you're right, Ferdinand. There is just one reality in the world. Your own. Your opinion is all that counts. For you. And then there is the only other reality: mine. Because that is what I see and understand. Or just your reality, dear Lizzie, because it's through your eyes that you observe, and give truth to what you see.

Marshrose [Scene 4]

LIZZIE

Am I being blamed for something, or thanked?

FERDIE

Well, Mother, I think you've fallen off the trolley!

NEDDA

And you also look quaint.

LIZZIE

You're all getting too deep for me ...

SOFIE

When I was little, I didn't believe I was one with my body; I thought I was sitting inside my head, and looking out of the windows of my eyes towards the outside. Like a ... like a driver!

NEDDA

Sofie, yes! Me too! My body was just my means of transport. I was inside, safe and secret.

SOFIE

Because if you closed your eyes, everything would go away?

NEDDA

Gone! And you become invisible. [*She closes her eyes and holds out her hands. SOFIE takes them in hers*]

SOFIE

Just one reality.

NEDDA

Of course. If you don't like it, it's up to you to adapt your alphabet so that the reality suits you, and no one else.

FERDIE

Like you keep doing?

NEDDA

No, Ferdinand, according to you, I've fallen off the trolley. Like an old shopping bag.

SOFIE

Walking is often much more fun than a trolley ride.

NEDDA

But he's right, this sour son of mine. I do often hide somewhere in here ... [*Points to her head*] ... and go through all the papers of the past, trying to find my spelling mistakes. And sadly they're all still there for the world to

Marshrose [Scene 4]

see, careless mistakes in the chapters called 'Blanche' and 'Ferdinand'.

FERDIE

No one is pointing fingers here.

NEDDA

I'm not guilty of anything, just aware of the consequence of too little done, too late.

FERDIE

It's too late for many things, Mother ...

NEDDA

I am not your mother. [*She points at LIZZIE*] There's your mother. She bathed you, washed you, chose your clothes, dressed you. Taught you to speak, sometimes in words that your father and I couldn't even risk in thought. Her opinions became your answers and her questions your problem.

FERDIE

Little dove's feathers are moulding, Lizzie?

LIZZIE

What's going on here?

NEDDA

Just a pity you didn't inherit the most important gift. She carries it on her sleeve.

LIZZIE

You've all fallen off the trolley!

NEDDA

Her sense of humour. Sadly, that's not catching. My children are both so bland, so dry. In nature, at least one day the rain can come. What can be done to bring a bit of moist to the barren hearts of my babies?

SOFIE

Sign the papers, Aunt Nedda.

NEDDA

That's a torrent of need. Where is the drizzle of pleasure?
[*She strokes his head gently and exits. The light changes from flashback to present*]

Marshrose [Scene 5]

Scene 5

[It rains outside. SOFIE sits and stares out. She holds the banjo. LIZZIE stands to one side]

FERDIE

What are you thinking about?

[She shakes her head. Pause. He kisses her. She pulls away]

SOFIE

What are you doing?

FERDIE

Last time we were here together, you didn't seem to mind.

SOFIE

That's because I hadn't seen you for ages. We talked of the old days. Our youth.

FERDIE

And now, are those feelings of youth gone?

SOFIE

Ferdinand, there were no feelings.

FERDIE

You kissed me.

SOFIE

You kissed me.

FERDIE

You kissed back.

SOFIE

I don't remember.

FERDIE

Right there. Mother and Lizzie were out there chasing butterflies ...

SOFIE

I feel Lizzie so strongly here today ...

[LIZZIE exits]

FERDIE

After that we went out together a few times, or is that also too far in the past to recall?

Marshrose [Scene 5]

SOFIE

No, it was great. That liquid lunch that went on for so long.

FERDIE

You also kissed me at the airport.

SOFIE

I felt sorry for you. If I recall correctly, you were in the first year of your divorce?

FERDIE

Yes.

SOFIE

You owed money all over the place?

FERDIE

Yes.

SOFIE

You were pathetic.

FERDIE

Do you sleep with everyone you feel sorry for?

SOFIE

Not everyone, Ferdinand. The beggar in the street will rather get a few dollars in his hand. [*She picks up the banjo*]
You never took this?

FERDIE

You must've learnt those tricks somewhere.

SOFIE

Are you tactlessly talking out of the boudoir?

FERDIE

You sound just like my mother.

SOFIE

I sound more like my mum. No one ever taught me what to do in bed, other than lie on my back with tightly closed eyes. This I do when I sleep. [*Pause*] You make me feel like a whore. Look away!

FERDIE

No, I mean it all with great compliments.

SOFIE

It wasn't meant to have a future.

FERDIE

Oh. [*Plays with the banjo. Pause*] Well I'm sorry, I never

Marshrose [Scene 5]

meant to ... invade your privacy like that. I thought ... wrongly perhaps ... that there was at least a feeling of ... warmth towards me. I didn't expect our business around this house to ... force us into a relationship ... I apologise I kissed you. I take it back.

[He kisses her again. She pushes him away annoyed]

SOFIE

What is it with you men? Either you're unmarried or married or divorced or separating, but in spite of how we feel, you're always entitled to just help yourself and take what and when you want!

FERDIE

I kissed, I didn't take.

SOFIE

But I'm not sorry for you anymore.

FERDIE

But our roots are in the same piece of veld, Sofie.

SOFIE

Between the dead lilies and the poisoned roses.

FERDIE

Is that what New York taught you?

SOFIE *[Sighs]*

You're like a 12-year-old obsessed with sex! New York taught me to believe in myself. There I owe no one an apology, or an explanation. No one gives a fuck for a pretty face. There are no aunts with a plate of cookies round each corner. Baby Jesus doesn't make a habit of sitting on your shoulder and hitching a ride.

FERDIE

Still waters run deep?

SOFIE

My parents were always so open with everything at home. We could talk and question God and Baby Jesus. Even politics, the Holy Ghost. And the Angel of Nature. Even question their decisions on right and wrong.

FERDIE

'Remember Ferdinand, there is only one reality.'

Marshrose [Scene 5]

SOFIE

For so long parents are the only reality. And then when they suddenly go on without you, the feeling of being abandoned is ... too terrible. I was ... I am still so stupidly jealous of those brittle streetkids without background, with their quick defences and smart-arse opinions. [*Holds up photo*] Look.

FERDIE

Mother and Lizzie and your parents.

SOFIE

With the new car. The hearse.

FERDIE

We said we wouldn't ...

SOFIE

Sorry. [*She looks at another picture*] Mum and Dad, Ben and Sally. He looks like a rumpled ragdoll in his wheelchair, and she's laughing as if she can see through her blindness. God, they were amazing. [*FERDIE looks too*] They were happy together, always. So one in their friendly openness. I just knew they never made mistakes. Never told lies. Never cried. Never felt pain. Never gave pain. Whatever happened to them was all my fault.

FERDIE

Often I wanted to swap parents with you.

SOFIE

You're joking?

FERDIE

Often wished Ben and Sally were my mum and dad.

SOFIE

And I wanted yours! At least I knew your mother would tell me some of the secrets.

FERDIE

My mother was the last person in the world I'd have gone to.

SOFIE

Your ma was always half-naughty about 'those things'.

FERDIE

Sex?

SOFIE

I felt safe with your mother.

Marshrose [Scene 5]

FERDIE

But if your parents were so open about everything ...

SOFIE

All except. Never mention the you-know-whating. Oh yes, the cross-fertilisation of *proteacea*, and the meerkat's clitoris ... I wonder now if Mum and Dad ever had you-know-what.

FERDIE

You're here.

SOFIE

And you. Probably just found abandoned under the same bush out there. *[Pause]*

FERDIE

Sofie?

SOFIE

What do you want, Ferdie?

FERDIE

Nothing really, just wanted to know ...

SOFIE

Yes? *[Pause]*

FERDIE

I need to ask. You don't have to say yes.

SOFIE

I see.

FERDIE

I didn't hurt you, did I? You know ...

SOFIE

You once set my plaits on fire.

FERDIE

Those three times in the hotel in Johannesburg?

SOFIE

Hurt? No. Twice, not three times ...

FERDIE

I'm glad. I tried so hard ...

SOFIE

Ferdie, you were good.

FERDIE

... tried so hard not to ... to hurt you. I always thought it was just ... love-with-feeling, but that ... that feeling became

Marshrose [Scene 6]

so violent. I didn't think I could ever be so gentle ... be normal with love anymore. [*Pause*]

SOFIE

You were fine, Ferdie.

FERDIE

What I really want to ask is ...

SOFIE

Ferdinand, I know the question, but I'm very happy on my own.

FERDIE

Oh.

SOFIE

Thanks for the offer. If I'd been looking for a permanent relationship, I would've said, 'Yes, thank you, Ferdinand Barnard, I'd love to marry you.'

FERDIE

But you won't.

SOFIE

No.

FERDIE

Okay. [*Pause*] Okay.
[*He exits. Light brighter as we leave the flashback*]

Scene 6

[*We go into flashback. Bright and sunshine. NEDDA and LIZZIE enter*]

SOFIE

Aunt Nedda, where is Ferdie?

NEDDA

Don't ask me. When he was a boy, I could say: 'Down on the beach with you.' Then as you all got bigger and braver, I lost

Marshrose [Scene 6]

my assurance about your whereabouts. Are they here, or there? That Ferdinand. Funny boy. When he became moody and didn't get his way, he'd always lash out at the giant protea bushes, or even small trees with such violence.

LIZZIE

There he is, in the little pathway to the beach.

NEDDA

Lashing away at the giants? [*Sighs*] Go to him, girlie. You really bring out the best in the boy. He finds it so hard to communicate what he really feels. The older he gets, the further he seems to run from me. And now this divorce? Yes, pity you two didn't marry as we'd planned. Is it too late for dreams?

SOFIE

No. Not unless you have to get up early.

[*She exits*]

NEDDA

And they say I'm nuts! What are you grinning about?

LIZZIE

Stop weaving a nest for your boy. And you are nuts!

NEDDA

The marshrose is also laughing at me, sitting up there in her tower and sticking out her little pink tongue. She knows I'll never see her again.

LIZZIE

We'll scale those rocks once more, watch what I say.

NEDDA

You believe that? So often I think, yes, maybe, but then I don't know. Why do I feel so ancient today! My son is bad for me. If only he was just a name on my birthday calendar behind the loo door, or a familiar little sour face in the photo album, then I could be as energetic and full of adventure as always, in spite of it all. But, oh catastrophe, when I see the suspicion gang up round his eyes, and have to hear the weariness in his soul, I find myself crawling around the floor in search of a stick and a grave.

LIZZIE

His cloud just doesn't have the silver bouquet that you

Marshrose [Scene 6]

expect round every corner.

NEDDA

But it's only money! If it was memory or the loss of talent or limbs, yes, but money? Everyone's got money. I have money.

LIZZIE

So do I.

NEDDA

I have more than you.

LIZZIE

Only because you've had slaves who slaved for you.

[Pause. NEDDA has an idea]

NEDDA

Let's spend our money!

LIZZIE

On what?

NEDDA

Tomorrow we'll take the car and go to town.

LIZZIE

You're not allowed to drive!

NEDDA

You drive. Then we'll buy ... make a list.

LIZZIE

What on?

NEDDA

This letter. What is it?

[Picks up FERDINAND's letter]

LIZZIE

Church circular.

NEDDA

Looks like Ferdinand's writing.

LIZZIE

Father John and Master Ferdie have many things in common. So what do we buy?

NEDDA

Dozens of jigsaw puzzles, difficult ones with lots of blue sky and tiny flowers in a big field.

LIZZIE

Our Scrabble has lost some letters.

Marshrose [Scene 6]

NEDDA

Just the rude ones.

LIZZIE

You can't play Scrabble without Fs and Bs.

NEDDA

Then we'll buy a new set.

LIZZIE

Monopoly?

NEDDA

That too. What else?

LIZZIE

TV.

NEDDA

I mean, serious things.

LIZZIE

It's important for me.

NEDDA

I say no.

LIZZIE

And I say yes. My majority wins today!

NEDDA

I don't want that sort of thing in my house. First the portable, then come the wires, then the hotel and casino and bars; then the end of everything!

LIZZIE

And after loading my nice TV, all my magazines and ...

NEDDA

Forget it. The idea was ridiculous ...

LIZZIE

... then we buy us a new car.

NEDDA

We have a car.

LIZZIE

We buy a 747.

NEDDA

That's a plane.

LIZZIE

What is Ferdinand driving out there?

Marshrose [Scene 6]

NEDDA

A tractor.

LIZZIE

4 x 4.

NEDDA

A tractor like that? For us?

LIZZIE

Then we buy four new beds.

NEDDA

We're only two.

LIZZIE

Those Japanese mattresses that straighten out old bent backs.

NEDDA

Futons.

LIZZIE

Like in my magazines!

NEDDA

Yes?

LIZZIE

And then we go visiting Doctor Ben and Miss Sally.

NEDDA

In a tractor? With four beds?

LIZZIE

And then you can invite them to come and live here with us.

[*Pause*]

NEDDA

Yes?

LIZZIE

Yes. [*Pause*]

NEDDA

Yes ...

LIZZIE

You know you'll eventually sign that paper?

NEDDA

Yes ...

LIZZIE

It's all a fraud.

Marshrose [Scene 6]

NEDDA

Yes.

LIZZIE

You love your son too much.

NEDDA

Yes ...

LIZZIE

Good, he'll get what he wants. But this way we make the first move.

NEDDA

Yes ...

LIZZIE

We'll all be together.

NEDDA

Ben and Sally and you and I ...

LIZZIE

All the rooms still waiting for children and grandchildren that never come, can now make space for drips and bedpans.

NEDDA

Don't Ben and Sally need medical help?

LIZZIE

We have enough goodies here to heal any disorder.

NEDDA

And if it can't heal, at least let it taste good!

[She has some chocolate triumphantly]

LIZZIE

Doctor Ben can bring some of his red wine ...

NEDDA

... and with Sally's recipes, you can conjure up heaven in there over the old gas stove.

LIZZIE

Everything we aren't allowed to eat.

NEDDA

Or drink.

LIZZIE

So what do you think?

NEDDA

Can you handle three old crocks?

Marshrose [Scene 6]

LIZZIE

I'm still young. I'm willing to learn.

[*They laugh. FERDIE and SOFIE enter*]

FERDIE

What's the joke?

LIZZIE

We can't remember!

[*More laughter*]

FERDIE

We'd better start moving to get back ...

NEDDA

Can we all four fit into your tractor? I want to see what this machine can do.

FERDIE

Why do I think this is not a good idea?

LIZZIE

We want to go and say hello to the marshrose, isn't that right, Miss Nedda?

NEDDA

Warm, warmer, warmest!

FERDIE

Impossible.

NEDDA

But it is possible. Isn't this tractor like the things the military people use up in the mountain?

FERDIE

Yes.

NEDDA

So, thanks to the Department of Defence, we now have a hideous road that should take us up to an old friend.

FERDIE

And when we get up there?

NEDDA

If the marshrose is blooming, Ferdinand, I'll sign your papers.

SOFIE

And if not?

Marshrose [Scene 6]

NEDDA

Then we'll wait till she does.

FERDIE

But what if the marshrose doesn't exist?

LIZZIE

Impossible.

NEDDA

She's there.

FERDIE

Mother, what if she's not there?

NEDDA

The I see no reason in signing papers at all.

FERDIE

Oh, Mother ...

NEDDA

I think Ferdinand is really looking forward to finding a rare flower today. Glory be, there's a first time for anything!

FERDIE

Oh, Mother ...

NEDDA

Lizzie? Bring Doctor's camera. We can also take some snaps.

LIZZIE

I can't remember how it works.

NEDDA

I remember. I remember everything.

[She exits. LIZZIE follows, then turns to FERDIE]

LIZZIE

I wish you hadn't come, Master Ferdinand. You destroy her flora and veld, it'll kill her.

FERDIE

Someone will have to do it.

LIZZIE

I'll help you on one condition: that you wait till she's gone ...

FERDIE

That could mean years.

LIZZIE

... and Ben and Sally also.

Marshrose [Scene 7]

SOFIE

Thank you, Lizzie.

LIZZIE

Then you can do what you like with this Avon Beach. I've always preferred plastic flowers anyway.

FERDIE

I already see you in the veld with your placard: 'We Say No To Nuclear!'

SOFIE

Faithful to the end.

FERDIE

As always, dear old Lizzie.

LIZZIE

Master Ferdinand, you forget so soon. I was always just your maid, never your best friend.

[She exits. The flashback ends]

Scene 7

[We are in the present. FERDIE picks up the slides and replaces them in their box. The lights indicate an end to the flashback]

FERDIE

There is only one reality, Ferdinand ... *[He looks out. SOFIE enters with a box]* It must've been a day like this when they decided to go up and say goodbye to *zeyheri*.

SOFIE

I wonder whose idea it was?

FERDIE

I think it was truly democratic. Mother and Lizzie and Ben and Sally sat here and decided.

SOFIE

Landslide in favour; four old dinosaurs in a 4 x 4.

Marshrose [Scene 7]

FERDIE

They knew exactly what they were doing. There were enough of Ben's best bottles in the wreck to prove they'd had a party ... They drank to the marshrose ... plodded back to their tractor ..told jokes like in the old days ... held hands ... closed their eyes ... threw their pills out over the cliff, and then Lizzie ... that cheeky old Lizzie, changed her 4x4 into a 747 and like ... like an arrow from the bow, soared into the sky. *[Pause]* Glory be. *[Pause]*

SOFIE

There aren't many of Mum and Dad's things that I can use. Besides, I'm not a hoarder.

FERDIE

No, sentimentality isn't your strong point.

SOFIE

Oh, but I am sentimental. Achingly so ...

FERDIE

I'm not ... *[He looks around]* ... but maybe I'll keep the colour slides. Do you mind?

SOFIE

No, please do. *[She points at the projector. He shakes his head]*
So, thanks to the inevitable electrical reality, the oldies could revive their beloved flowers against the wall.

FERDIE

Yes, they're extraordinary.

SOFIE

Yes, they were.

FERDIE

I mean the flowers.

SOFIE

So do I. *[Pause]* Ferdinand, I'm staying.

FERDIE

I thought we might ...

SOFIE

Ferdie ...

FERDIE

... without any you-know-whating.

Marshrose [Scene 7]

SOFIE

Rather not.

[Pause]

FERDIE

What about your commitments in the States?

SOFIE

I want to find out if I can still look at the world through my little windows. Tell me, if I close my eyes tightly, am I invisible?

FERDIE

Yes, quite invisible.

SOFIE

I have an appointment with a princess who lives up in the mountain. I want to find that one reality.

FERDIE

Keep a little for me. *[They look out at the sea]* Isn't that where the tanker went on the rocks?

SOFIE

Oh? I thought it was over on that side?

FERDIE

I don't think so.

SOFIE

I really can't remember ...

FERDIE

I'm sorry about the little Rock Garden you dedicated to God.

SOFIE

But then you're building him a nuclear cathedral! *[He exits. She has put on NEDDA's hat and shawl. She closes her eyes. We hear the voices of NEDDA and LIZZIE]*

NEDDA *[Voice]*

Tell me where she's hidden herself!

LIZZIE *[Voice]*

Search, Miss Nedda. Look!

NEDDA *[Voice]*

Is she here?

LIZZIE *[Voice]*

Cold.

Marshrose [Scene 7]

NEDDA [*Voice*]

What about here?

LIZZIE [*Voice*]

Cold colder coldest ...

NEDDA [*Voice*]

And here?

LIZZIE [*Voice*]

Warmer ...

NEDDA [*Voice*]

And now?

LIZZIE [*Voice*]

Warmer!

NEDDA [*Voice*]

I have her!

LIZZIE [*Voice*]

Hellfire hot!

[They laugh. It gets fainter]

SOFIE

Glory be!

THE END