

2002

World Cup

Kevin Parry

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi>

Recommended Citation

Parry, Kevin, World Cup, *Kunapipi*, 24(1), 2002.
Available at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol24/iss1/7>

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library:
research-pubs@uow.edu.au

World Cup

Abstract

She stands in the doorway of the lounge, watching him. 'Going where?' she says. In the brutal smudges of mascara her dark eyes brim with tears. He snorts, raising the glass to his mouth. 'Ask an Afrikaner where he's going? Stupid bitch.' He tosses back the last of his drink. 'Where the fuck is there to go? Huh?' He wrenches the door of the cabinet open, the family photos and ornaments trembling, and grabs a new bottle of Oudemeester.

KEVIN PARRY

World Cup

She stands in the doorway of the lounge, watching him. 'Going where?' she says. In the brutal smudges of mascara her dark eyes brim with tears.

He snorts, raising the glass to his mouth. 'Ask an Afrikaner where he's *going*? Stupid bitch.' He tosses back the last of his drink. 'Where the fuck *is* there to go? Huh?' He wrenches the door of the cabinet open, the family photos and ornaments trembling, and grabs a new bottle of Oudemeester.

'Well then where...?' She stops, flinches, as he turns and lurches across the room towards her.

'Out!' He pushes his face into hers. 'Out! You got me?' And he shoves past her into the kitchen.

She remains standing there, her shadow broken across the doorway, the reek of his brandied breath in her nostrils. Her arms are held loosely over her stomach, slender arms, thin-boned as a bird's.

He comes back into the lounge with three cans of Coke. He tucks the Oudemeester under one arm, bends to pick his empty glass up off the table.

'Hannes ...' her voice a tentative whine. 'You can't *drive* like this. Where you think you going...?'

'Jusus, don't you understand plain Afrikaans? I told you: Out! I dunno where. Anywhere. Nowhere. Jus' don't keep asking, Ryna, hey.' In picking up the glass one of the cans slips. He grabs at it, misses. As it hits the floor he kicks out at it, connects. '*Paale toe!*' he shouts.

'Hannes, no, man...!' The can thuds into the wall next to her head then spins away under the coffee table.

He laughs, a whooping drunken falsetto. 'Heeeeeey, jus' like that boot of Stransky's. Unbelievable, man: last minute of the game, 12-all, an' bang! straight between the posts! Beautifullest drop you ever see in your life. An' that's it, ou pal, over: 15-12! End of story. All Blacks didn't know what hit 'em. Whole blerrie *world* didn't know what hit 'em. Jaaaaa, treating us like dog shit all these years, boycotts, isolation, all that kak ... we showed 'em, man, we showed 'em: World Cup! ... you *hear* what I'm saying? *World Cup!* Best rugby nation in the world! Best blerrie *nation* in the ...'

He's on his knees on the floor, scrabbling for the can, bottle under one arm and clutching the glass and other cans to his chest.

'Ag, please, Hannes, listen ... don't go out ...'

He stands up. 'Jus' shut up, Ryna ... I'm going, I told you ... !'

'What for, man, you too drunk ...'

'What for! What for's for to celebrate, baby, what you think.' He heads for the door. 'I'm going out to celebrate ... greatest rugby ...'

'D'you know what *time* it is? You can't just go out there, on your own, like ...'

'Can't! It's my country this, hey ... I go where I like ... any time I like ...'

'... don't be crazy now ...'

'... *nobody* tells me where I go or where I don't go in my own country, pal ... that's for blerrie sure ...'

'... please ... it's not *safe*, Hannes ... you get ...'

He slams the door on her voice, negotiates the front steps in the orange verandah light ... ja, ja, ja, you get what? ... opens the car door, lays glass, bottle, cans on the passenger seat, starts the car ... you get mugged, robbed, shot ... waits as the security gates swing open, waits, pressing his inner bicep against the revolver ... knifed, carjacked, throat slit, all the usual stuff ... and he accelerates, burning his tyres down the road through the high-walled, razor-wired, guard-dogged, alarmed, utterly still suburb.

Going where? Ja, same place he always goes. Across Beach Road, through the suburbs, Nahoon, Stirling ... everywhere deserted, you'd think there'd be people about, celebrating, dancing in the streets, man ... but no, nobody, just a few blacks hanging round on corners. Ha! Mandela on TV wearing the Bok jersey, what a joke ... only know blerrie soccer, the blacks. Going, without conscious thought, over Bunker's, winding down into the valley, then turning off onto the lonely loop of road that detours through the Glen. Pitch dark through the low enclosing trees, trunks and branches looming in the headlights, shadows circling, and the image of her face, as always, that schoolgirl, just fourteen years old, long blonde hair tendrilled out amongst the fallen leaves where he used to picnic with his parents as a child, her throat cut so deeply that her head was almost completely off. *Fourteen*, man. Ag ja, and so? ... what's a fourteen year old white schoolgirl in this country these days? Bugger all. Rubbish. Raped, slaughtered like a goat ... just par for the course.

Finally he's out into the open and he slows, following the road round to the right, his lights raking the low cement wall that edges the esplanade. He cranes forward, slowing right down, squinting at the wall, looking for the spot ... round about here ... He pulls in, diagonal to the pavement, looks about, turns off the engine. The lights expire on the wall.

Darkness. Stillness. Just the low boom through his open window of the ocean, breakers rolling in, rolling in, the warm air heavy with salt. Jesus, such a night, these sounds, these smells ... of the ocean, of this place. A place to die for, to fucken kill for: *his* place. He sits there, looking about. The silhouette of the wall against the night sky, the black hulk of the Glen trees behind him. He waits. Listens. Looks about. The road is empty except for one other car parked up there, a bit further along. An old white Valiant. Nobody in it. Fisherman, most likely.

He unscrews the bottle of brandy, half fills the glass, tops it with Coke. He draws a long slow mouthful, swallows, O Jesus ja, this stuff ... sits a while longer, absorbing the air, breathing the ocean. Then he gets out and begins to make his way across the pavement, unsteadily ... chuckling whooa boys, more pissed than he thought ... glass out in front of him, trying not to slop. He reaches the wall, leans down, resting his arms on its navel-high coping. The rough friendly still-warm grain of the cement under his hand ... the fingers, the skin of the child he was, stroking it. This place ...

From where he stands he can see, to the right, the long arc of the seafront road curving its two or three kilometres round the bay toward the main city beach, the amusement arcades, coloured lights, hotels, clubs, bars, all that racket, rubbish, menace, everywhere shadowy, quick, angular with blacks. But in the darkness, here, the furthest reach of this deserted little road that circles always back on itself, there's just the stillness, breakers falling unseen into the night. To his left the pavement continues just a short way then peters out under the endless empty beauty of sand and dunes and rocks that stretch away northwards. He takes another long draught ... Cape brandy, sweet and mellow as this salt-laden darkness. Ja, this place: all of him ... everything there *is* of him ... His hand moves along the wall, searching, searching below the coping for the spot ...

Suddenly, behind him, out of the Glen, the roar of acceleration and tyres and he pivots, hand to holster, braced as the crazy headlights swing round the corner, towards, across him, blindingly, engine howling in a too-low gear, hooter rhythmically blasting. Then, the car charging by him, he relaxes, grins: kids, three white kids, hanging out of the windows, shouting, singing, whooping, one of them waving a huge flag, ja the old orange, white and blue. 'Heeey!' he laughs, shouts, 'Heeeeeeey!' raising his glass toward them, 'Stransky! Stransky!' ... executes a few crazy dance steps, drink slopping down his arm ... 'Suid Afrika!' ... and them yelling back, cheering, hooting, flag slapping behind as they tear on down the road, heading for the city, the lights, all that. Ja, the kids are OK still, they're alright, man ... *someone* celebrating, at least, Jesus ... Ja, could be him what, twenty, twenty-five years ago ... him and the boys. Hooooo, those days, man...!

He watches the car till it vanishes, the ocean reclaiming the stillness all about him. He turns back, leans on the wall again, looks out to sea. Stars here and there, he notices, quite bright; and he can just make out the breakers now too, the ghostly white motion of their toppling. The ocean, here, all that remains ... the rest fucked up, all fucked up ...

But no: even here it's not the same. Like, take those kids: where are *they* going? Not here, is for sure. So many people murdered down here ... knifed, cars stolen, women raped, all the usual. That girl back there in the Glen ... Christ, man, fourteen years old. Blonde hair spread in the dirt. Animals. Whole place's

just deserted now. Picnic's over. Just fishermen that come here these days. And him.

But oh man, those days ... all the cars that used to come and park down here at night back then. Bring a chick down, sit in the car and try your luck, like; go down onto the beach if you maybe get lucky. That Meisie Prinsloo ... jusus, tits for Africa, the gorgeous weight of them in his hands. Do with a bit of that right now, in fact. Ja, and then everyone'd end up at the old Windmill roadhouse ... sit in the car, radio blasting, toasted sandwiches and coffee, vodka ... all the ouens: Naude, van Heerden, Beyers, and whichever chicks were around at the time. Meisie. Married, who was it? ... bloke from the Transvaal, policeman. Lost track of them all now; moved, mostly ... Cape Town, Free State, overseas too, a couple of them ... Australia. Geel even went to blerrie England. Just him left here now. Him and poor Naude ... old mate, brother. Ja, Windmill's gone, too. Up to shit, the whole place. But still, no way: he could never go, never leave this place. *Fought* for it, pal, like every generation of his ancestors've had to do. Those barren borders, South West, the endless red dirt of Angola. No, your own country, man, you can't leave it. You can't leave it because it *is you* ...

He's inching along the wall, fingers tracing the edge of the coping again, and there, he's found it, the clod of iron, the little protruding knuckle of the wall's skeleton, swollen and jagged with rust: the exact spot. Ja, your past, your memories and everything, they're what you *are* ... He steadies his glass, eases one leg, then the other, over the wall, sits facing seaward. As he settles there is a sudden startling luminescence, the moon emerging full and silver, heavy clouds around it, a path of light across the ocean and up the gleaming foreshore. And away down there, now, he can make out something, down there to the left where the moonlight catches the waves as they break against the rocky headland ... the fisherman, it must be, a lonely silhouette, knee-deep in the surf, still and concentrated, the arc of his rod taut against the current's tug. Ja, that old snap of his Pa out on the rocks there, a granite statue against the skyline, rod braced, fishing for shark. The memory of him, striding up out of the heavy surf, like the legendary old saviour, Wolraad Woltemade. You learn to know yourself through fishing, through the sea, Pa used to say, you against it ... the line cast into your own soul, you pull up things you maybe never expected to find down there. Old Pa ... strong, handsome, proud Afrikaner. And so long gone, old hero. Loved his country so fiercely, his nation, this place. No: it's better he's not here now, that's for sure. But still, he'd have loved to see one thing, man: the Bokke this day! World Cup, Pa! ... World Cup!

He drains his glass, clambers off the wall, heads for the car to refill ... Stransky! ... dancing, stumbling ... Suid Afrika! He flops into the front seat, gets the bottle. Hey, last one now, jong, getting too smashed ... He pours half a glass, sits there with the door open. Last dop then he'll maybe go and find some action, go cruising, like he and Naude used to do ... The Drosdty, man: that was the place to pick up skirt. Friday nights, Saturdays, the bar packed, you couldn't move. Go in and

down a few Lions, him and Naude, wait for the chicks to come over from the nurses' training college. Whoooo, fast, some of those nurses ... seen it all, man, know what it's all for. Had to be quick though, beat the other buggers into the lounge to chat 'em up ... mini skirts and boots, jesus ... big blonde Meisie leaning against the wall there, and the tall redhead Naude got, that song by the Flames playing, yo-our precious loo-ooove ... Her heavy, soft tits ...

No, jusus, go find some skirt, ouens ... he gulps back the neat brandy he's just poured ... ja ou Naude, that's the way we used to sink 'em, remember? Hey? OK, here we go boys, here we go again! Stransky... !

Up the road past the Valiant, onto the long curving bay road. Coloured lights along the esplanade, like when he was a kid. Aquarium, Pa taking him there ... seals, that huge turtle. Quanza pool. He unscrews the bottle between his legs as he drives, takes a swig. The Weavers, there. Esplanade. Orient ... ja, and look at 'em milling round there, all blacks ... those *there*, man: the clothes, takkies, the blerrie hair, all trying to look like American rapper hip-hop arseholes, baseball caps on backwards, jesus. And hey, the old Bowl! ... no, what they call it now? ... *Puma's*. Ag, change a place's name but you'll never change what a place was. Swaggering about like they own the place ... know fuck all, wouldn't've lasted two minutes in the old Bowl. Hell, those fights! Old Potgieter hitting that rooinek right over the table for asking his chick for a dance while he was at the bar. And the cops trying to chuck Pottie into the back of the van with some blacks they'd picked up with no passes and Pottie telling the cop to fuck off and jumping up into the front of the van. Cops just laughed, told him to go. Old cinemas gone too ... 20th, Colo. And Oxford Street ... blacks dossing in the doorways. Can't even walk there in the daytime now, pavements so packed with hawkers and stalls. Eh-eh-eeeh, and here the street girls start. Ja, ja, swing 'em mama, very nice, but no, this pale male's not quite so desperate yet. Fucken AIDS depots.

He turns off into Kimberley Road, pulls in, mounting the kerb. Familiar old run-down street, the columns of the Drosdty's portico at the end there ... jusus, he hasn't been here since ... *when* was he last here? No, can't remember. He swigs from the bottle, looks around. Couple of young black street girls in tight minis across the road, arm-in-arm, laughing. Down the far end of the street a few figures, standing, sitting on the pavement, he can't see very well. Checks his holster. Takes another swig ... lips feel numb.

As he gets out one of the girls from across the street calls out, 'Hullo! Hullo! Over here!' He ignores her, begins to stroll down towards the Drosdty, trying to walk straight. Her high heels clip across the road, follow behind him. He walks on.

'Hullo!' Her voice beside him is soft, a child's. Under the streetlight her broad face is violet, her lips dayglo orange; straightened hair like a helmet.

'Hullo. Sir? Are you wanting something?'

'Go, get away from me.'

She tries to speak in Afrikaans. 'Jy like vir me, baas?'

'No I don't blerrie like you.'

'Awu, I be very nice for you, my baas?'

'Leave me alone, jong'

'You going to like me, baas.'

'Jus' get away here, before I blerrie *kick* you...!'

She continues alongside him a little way, then she slows, stops, leans back against a wall, watches him.

He ambles on toward the columns. Three black men are sitting on the kerb sharing a bottle, talking, laughing. Behind them, on the unlit steps of the portico, five or six others stand, sit. They stop talking, watch as he approaches. He holds his left arm out slightly, away from his holster, begins to mount the steps.

'What you want?' The man is on the top step above him.

'What? I'm going to have a drink, what the hell you think?'

They stare at him, begin to talk in Xhosa.

He continues up the steps, 'Excuse!' But the men do not move. 'I said, excuse me.' They're all silent now. He stares up at the man in front of him. 'You *hear* me, hey?'

'What you want here?' the man says.

'I wanna fucken drink, I told you.'

'There's no drink here.'

'Why there's no drink?' He sways, staring up into the man's eyes. 'This's the Drosdty, nê?'

""Drosdty"? They talk Xhosa again, begin laughing. A tall thin man with a cigarette stuck on his lip steps up to him, talks straight into his face: 'Hey: no more Drosdty, you hear: this is where we live.'

He stands there, unsteady, numb, face to face with the man. They all watch him, silent. And everything has lapsed, time, place, darkness, all a monotone droning in his brain, his consciousness held only by the thin gash of streetlight ticking in the man's black eyes. Then, slowly, he detaches, turns, begins to trudge back down the steps. He reaches the bottom, walks a few heavy paces along the pavement, stops, turns to face them again. He stands there, swaying, staring at them. Then suddenly, hands out in front of him, he takes one ... two ... three measured steps toward them and executes, in exaggerated slow-motion, a gigantic drop-kick, staggers backwards off-balance, recovers, peers up into the night sky. Quite still, they all watch him. He totters a little, pointing at the ball sailing up, up, up and over, a distant speck spinning above the towering uprights of the posts. It is every Springbok ball he's ever seen soaring over the crossbar, from the grainy newsreels of early legends, to Visagie and Botha, to the digital magnificence of Stransky, and there in the vast roaring arena he stands, pointing up, following the trajectory of the ball's slow fabulous flight until eventually it slackens, falters and fails, falling, falling, finally to earth. All about him is absolute stillness. He

stands there a minute, then looks up from the dark pavement, faces the silent semi-circle of men, looks at each one of them in turn, nodding his head slowly: 'You see that?' he slurs. 'You ... see ... that?' Then he turns his back on them and begins to make his way crookedly back up the road. He is a long way off before he hears their guffawing and whooping.

She is waiting at the car for him. He doesn't look at her.

'You want I come with you, baas?'

He fumbles with his keys, unlocks the door.

'Very very nice, baas. Only fifty rand.'

He slumps back into the seat, shuts the door. He reaches over for the bottle. Her face is at the window, her thin fingers with their bright orange nails tapping, tapping. 'Fifty rand, sir?'

He takes a long swig. Another. He leans back against the headrest, wipes the back of his hand several times across his eyes, his nose.

The tap-tapping of her nails. 'Twenty rand, oh please my baas ... only twenty ...'

* * *

Moon gone now, ocean dark. But still a few stars. He squints ... ja, can just about discern the form of the fisherman ... there, against the white of the breakers as they tumble. Noble curve of the rod. Exact same spot, still ... must've been there hours. He drains his glass, peers at his watch. No, can't make it out. His head swirls, tongue's thick. The air absorbing the ocean's coldness now. His eyes droop, head nods, sinks, the short shoves of his breath louder in his ears than the surf. Must go ... must go ... sit in the car for a bit ...

He falls into the seat, pulling the door shut, slumps back, his brain humming, car beginning to whirl, whirl him, whirling, whirling him faster and wider hang on hang on hang on hang ...

Panic like a blow to the skull snaps him up in the seat staring wildly around him, about him, ahead, through the windscreen, and there in the darkness, there it is, there, right there: the tall figure, in front of the car, quite still, standing, watching him. He jerks forward, fumbling at his holster, hand clasping the butt. The figure doesn't move, remains standing there in the dark, watching him through the glass. Gun's in his hand now, below the dashboard, safety catch off, his brain reeling.

Then through the open window he hears the quiet, quizzical voice: 'Gooienaand'; sees the fishing rod over one shoulder, canvas knapsack over the other. 'O jusus,' he mouths through parched lips, relaxes fractionally back into his seat, panting ' ... O jusus ... jusus ... '

The fisherman moves slowly round to the open window. 'You OK there?'

'God you give me such a fucken fright, hey ... I nearly ... '

'It's OK, man, take it easy, I just come up off the beach ... '

' ... nee god, ou ... I jus' looked up and there you standing, hey ... '

The man's chuckle is silky, 'Sorry, sorry ... relax. I saw you sitting in there ... I's just checking you're OK, like.'

He's out of the seat now, Beretta still in his hand. 'Ready to fucken shoot you here, ou ...!' he coughs a laugh.

'Whoa, jong: Afrikaners can't afford to shoot each other! We gotta stick together, man!'

'Ja, ja ... jesus ...' He clicks the safety catch on, returns the gun to holster, his heart still pounding. 'But hey, man,' talking slower now, mouth parched, trying to master his heavy slurring ' ... how you get up here so quick? I jus' looked and seen you fishing, right down there by the rocks ... '

'No, I been over the other side, toward the Quanza. I haven't seen anybody else down here tonight.'

'Ja, man, down by the *rocks* there's a guy, he's been there forever.'

'Well, no, I dunno. Like I say, I didn't see anybody.'

'Is't *your* Valiant parked along there then?'

'No, I walked down. I live here in the Quigney, just up the road.'

'God, I mus' grab another drink ... calm my nerves, like! You frightened me nearly blerrie sober, man!' He reaches in, gets the glass and bottle, pours. 'So anyways, you have any bites ... bites down there?'

'Ag, nothing much.' The fisherman taps his rucksack: 'Couple of small ones, only ... blacktail.'

'Eeeey, blacktail! Blacktail's lovely in the pan, ou ... bit of butter ... jusus!'

'For sure, for sure. You fish here then?'

'No, not for ... how many years? *Used* to, me and my ol' Pa, back in the '60s, '70s. Good stuff out here then, hey ... best rock fishing in the world, this coast: kob, grunter, steenbras ... '

'Ha, steenbras! I never heard of a steenbras landed round here for must be ten years, man. Whole place's fished out, polluted, I dunno what. Fished out, I reckon. I mean, you come down here in the early morning, like any time between four o'clock and sun-up, and it's just jam-packed, hey ... blacks, of course ... fished the whole place empty.'

'Heeeeh man, they got all the jobs ... they got all the fish ... hey...?'

'For sure, for sure, those old days are gone.'

'Ja well fuck it, man, only thing matters ... only thing matters is, we won the rugby today. D'you see it, hey? That Stransky? D'you *see* it...?'

'Ja, I heard ... '

' ... *Stransky*, man ... drop in the final minute, you never seen anything like it ... ja, World Cup, ou maat ... 15-12!' He tosses back a mouthful of brandy, some spilling down his neck. 'Hey, here: come on: take a dop ... celebrate, man,' wiping his chin. 'Come on: best in the whole fucken world!'

The angler leans his rod against the car. 'OK: Vrystaat! Ai, good stuff, dankie.' He hands the glass back. 'So anyway, what you do down here?'

'Me? Ag, man, I jus' come and sit. Watch the ocean. You know...?'

'Ja? So, what ... are you looking for something, like...?'

'No, I just, *like* it down here. This's my *spot* here, man. You know...?'

'Uhuh. But perhaps maybe you waiting for somebody?'

'Hey? No, no, I come here a lot, just me on my own ... I comes and sits, on the wall there. Always to this place ... exact same spot on the wall, here ... come look, I show you ... over here ... ' He stumbles over to the wall, glass in hand, peers down into the darkness, feeling under the coping, ' ... just about ... along here ... '

The fisherman follows behind him. 'What is it there?'

'Wait, it's just ... ja, here's it, come feel ... right here, you feel it? You feel that...?'

'Ja ... ? So, what is it...?'

'Man, it's jus' a bit of iron, like, is all. Mad, hey? But listen, you see, I got this old photo, that my Ma took of me when I was, what, maybe three years old ... just three, hey ... short pants and everything, just a little outjie, sitting here, on this wall, eating a sandwich ... and I mean *sitting right here*, OK, 'cause in the photo, you can see this exact same bit of iron, sticking out. And there's the bay, aaaaall behind me back there, in the picture ... and ... well, that little outjie ... me, you know ... Ag, man, how can I explain...?'

The angler's voice is gentle: 'You lonely, I think. Hey? Am I right?'

'Man, I just, I like to just ... come and sit here, on my own, you know? ... think how things used to be, when I was a kid and stuff, my Ma and Pa, how everything was ... Ag well, you know how it's ... everything so changed now, everything, fucked up ... '

'Ja, I know, I know, for sure ... '

' ... and, that photo ... well I jus' fucken *love* this place, man. You can understand that, hey? I mean, this place's the first place I can remember, ever seeing in my life, and ... well jusus I dunno ... that little kid in the photo, that kid that was me ... that *is* me, *still* ... you jus' gotta hold on to something, you know? ... gotta have something that's still true, to believe in ... 'cause what else is there, man ... what else...? Ag jusus I'm sorry ... '

'Hey, it's OK,' the fisherman puts his arm around him, grips his shoulder, 'it's OK, it's OK ... '

'Sorry ... god ... ' He coughs, sniffs, turns away from the fisherman, leans on the wall.

'No, I understand. I do. I'm sensitive that way too, you know.'

' ... dunno what's wrong with me ... so blerrie, pissed ... ' He drains what's left in the glass.

'No, it's OK. Really. I mean, I get lonely also, things changing and ... well, we all need someone ... '

‘What I need, man, ’s another drop. Come on, bugger this all, let’s get a doppie, jong ... ’ He lurches toward the car, drops heavily into the front seat, gets the bottle.

The fisherman follows, leans on the door. ‘Hey, listen, you mustn’t feel embarrassed, you know. It’s good to talk about things ... I can maybe help.’

‘No, here, man ... ’ he swallows a mouthful, passes the glass. ‘Grab some. Good Kaapse brandewyn! Then tell you what, I tell you what: we go hit the Drosdty, hey ... ’ He flops his head back against the headrest. ‘No, man, I mean ... not the Drosdty ... where...? Drosdty’s gone, ou ... ’

The angler squats down, hands the glass back. ‘Listen, why don’t we just go back to my place, just up the road here, a few minutes. We can ... ’

‘No, no, no, man, the Drosdty ... me and old Naude, man ... at the Drostdy ... chicks, hey, chicks up there to make your balls ache, pal ... did you never been to...?’

‘Hey come on,’ the fisherman’s voice is soft and lingering, his hand on the other’s leg, ‘come back to my place ... ’

‘Hey ... ’

‘... come on, we can talk,’ his hand moving up the thigh, slowly, caressing, ‘... get to know each other...?’

‘Hey, man, listen here ... ’

‘Let me comfort you ... ’ Hand on the crutch now, kneading, his voice an urgent whisper, ‘ja, come on, we can comfort each other ... ’

Striking out, smashing the glass into the fisherman’s face, ‘*You blerrie moer ...!*’ kicking at him as he reels away onto the pavement. ‘*What you take me for a fucken tail-gunner, hey! Hey?*’ Clambering out of the car, fumbling his gun out of its holster. The fisherman grabbing his rod and bag, stumbling backwards across the road, toward the Glen.

‘Ok, take it easy, I’m sorry, hey, I’m sorry ... I just ... ’

‘Fucken shoot you, hey ... I fucken shoot you here and now you blerrie scum shit ... ’

The fisherman on the other side of the road, backing off, still facing him through the darkness, ‘I’m sorry ... sorry ... ’ Backing into the blackness of the trees, ‘I’m sorry ... ’

‘Blerrie rubbish, just keep going, just keep going the fuck outta here, you trash ... you blerrie ... Go on, voetsek! *Voetsek!*’

A scrambling through undergrowth, receding footfalls snapping twigs, then the weight of the darkness and silence sinking down like lead on his reeling senses. He stands there in the middle of the road, swaying, breath rasping in his throat, gun pointing unsteadily into the black formlessness of the Glen. Behind him the boom of breakers, the thin hiss of the surf, reach him slow and waveringly from a distant universe. He waits, listening, panting hard, trash, fucken trash, an Afrikaner ... Listens. Stillness. He staggers slowly backwards, eyes still on the

Glen, shoes crunching over the broken glass, trash, trash ... He turns, stumbles into the kerb, goes sprawling across the pavement. He raises himself a little, manoeuvres back, sits propped against the wall, gun in hand. Afrikaner. Trash ... trash ... Closes his eyes, spinning, spinning into blackness ...

* * *

This door? He limps up the steps. There is no light, he can't make it out. He tries the handle, pushes. It opens. A single lamp in the corner of the dark lounge. Beneath it sits Ryna. He stares at her. Her eyes are black lagoons in the unearthly whiteness of her face. 'Do you know what *time* it is?' she says. He looks at his watch. The glass is shattered, the face crushed. His hand, he sees, is lacerated, thickly matted with blood. He stares at it. Then he begins to weep, seeing again Naude lying there beside the mortar crater, smiling, his guts slopped out into the red dirt. 'Naude ...' he says, 'Naude's dead ...' She stares at him. 'I know,' she says, 'but me, what about me?' He cannot stop weeping. 'Well how can we bury him now? There's no flag to bury him in now.' Her eyes are cavernous. 'D'you know what *time* it is?' she says. 'Jesus,' he cries and staggers out of the room, sobbing, through the kitchen, into the garden. After a moment he can make out in the darkness a figure, standing there in the middle of the lawn. He approaches, slowly, amazed. 'Is it *you*, Pa? Is it *you*?' The man turns slowly to look at him. 'Ja, it's me, boet.' How old he looks, how frail. 'Pa,' he says, still weeping, 'Pa, what will we *do*? ... there's no flag to bury him in, there's no earth to bury him in.' 'Ag, my boy, my boy,' the lost familiar old voice so comforting, 'we will find them, you know; we have always found what is needed.' He points ahead into the darkness, 'There, now, you see: look!' 'Where, Pa? Where?' But his father is gone. He looks around. Then he sees it, the dark ocean that stretches away before him. And suddenly there is a long blade of light across the water and a figure walking, a man, wading through the waves towards him, a fisherman, striding through the heavy surf, up the shore, onto the lawn. And in his powerful arms he cradles something, something that gleams in the strange light, a fish, it looks like, a huge silver steenbras. The fisherman bends, lays it on the grass, then is suddenly gone. He is alone. Everything is still. He looks down. On the grass at his feet lies a swaddled drenched form. He kneels down, begins, layer by sopping layer, to unravel, unwrap the sheet until she is there, entirely revealed. Her naked young body is immaculate, seeming to glow from within, the smooth golden skin, legs, arms, cheeks tinged with finest down; her eyes, open, are an intense cobalt blue; a faint seraphic smile lingers on her perfect child's lips. He touches her. Cold, she is. Cold as the sea. And he begins to sob again, slipping one hand carefully under her slender thighs, the other under her back, gently begins to lift her in his arms, watching how the tiny drops of water tremble on her fine eyelashes, how her blonde hair haloes behind the sudden ferocious sunset of her throat as her head topples back.

* * *

He struggles, lifts himself up onto one elbow. Retching grips him like a vice, holds him till he's breathless, releases him to choke up a thin gob of bile. Trembling shakes every limb, he cannot think how to control it. Slowly, painfully, he lifts himself a little further, props himself up. Dehydration rages in him like a madness. He retches again, long and exhausting. Nothing. And again. Nothing. Sits back, soaked in cold sweat, trembling. Hollow scouring of his breath; and behind it another rhythm, the long slow throb and crawl of the ocean.

He opens his eyes. Misty grey of early dawn through his tears. Blur of trees. Road. His car, door open, cab light on. Pavement. Beside him his Beretta, a puddle of vomit, its stench mingling with the heavy rolling smell of the sea. Up the road, the vague white form of the Valiant in the mist, still there.

He pushes against the wall, slowly hauls himself up. Fog heavy on the water, but an ambience of dawn seeping through, beginning to tint the dark ochre of the sand, the grey-green and cream of the surf. He looks out toward the rocks on the left, looks for the fisherman. No one. No sign.

He walks slowly, painfully, hand trailing along the top of the wall, to the end of the pavement and down onto the sand, takes off his shoes, socks. The sand crisp, cold, under soles, between his toes. He walks on down to the water's edge. The long strand is deserted and still. He takes off his shirt, empty holster, trousers, underpants, drops them at the tide line and walks into the icy water, up to his ankles, his shins, a little deeper. Then he sinks down onto his knees, puts his hands together and cups water over his face, his head, rinses his mouth, drinks two, three mouthfuls of the heavy, cleansing water. Then he sits back on his haunches, facing out to sea, and watches the small green swells, one after another, topple and fizz forward, leaping up his chest, frothing around him. He remains kneeling there a long time, quite still, until he is numb with cold, remains until he can feel almost nothing. Then he rises, walks slowly back to where his clothes are and sits down.

The fog has begun to lift. Threads of orange along the horizon, across the bay. To the left the mist has gone from the rocks, which gleam a sleek wet black. Still no sign of the fisherman. He waits, watches the swells roll in, build, suddenly collapse and sheet up over the sand towards him. He watches for a long time, without focus, without thought. Then, against the gathering light, as the water washes back, he is suddenly aware of them: the little sharp green turret shells of the snails, furrowing the water as they cling against the backwash, little craters forming around them in the sand. Then, in the glistening stillness before the next wave's sweep, on they forge, up over the wet mirror of the shore. He sits there and watches them, wave after wave, thinks how primitive they are, how immensely old; thinks of the millions upon millions of years they must have been here, almost since these shores were formed, clinging on against the tides of this ocean, scavenging for whatever morsels the next wave might bring.