

Another day in Paradox



The early writings of Etienne van Bart and friends

This book is dedicated to Terrence Molefe and Jacob John Claassens

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Cover picture: 'The Umzumbe Tunnel', by Egbert van Bart (Pastel on card).

“You cannot step twice into the same river, for other waters and yet others go ever flowing on.”

- Heraclitus of Ephesus

Prelude

by Frederik van Bart

Early in the morning on the 7th of August 1990 Etienne joined this world suddenly... Driving in rush hour traffic from Mayfair to Sandton Clinic, with Annie in advanced labour next to me because Etienne was on his way, I felt like Moses of old when he crossed the Red Sea: as though guided by angels, cars and vehicles would clear out of our way so that we proceeded at full speed. Thus about an hour after setting forth from home our world boasted a new inhabitant. Since that time Etienne hasn't done anything as unusual in our midst except for his "normal" existence.

At a very tender age before Emma was around he displayed a decisiveness of character, if not also a hearty appetite for food, when at the invitation of his grandfather he was offered from the restaurant menu a "rack of ribs" and instead of a juvenile portion he also refused a "ladies portion" and insisted on ordering a "Man's portion". Under the stern but surprised gaze of his grandfather the order was yielded to with the condition that he finish his whole meal. He finished his whole meal in record time perhaps to the disappointment of some of his critical detractors.

The aforementioned observations can be classed as no more than zoological notes, except for the scant reference to Etienne's "normal existence." And what can be added to that is that his is a positive humorous presence which is a necessary contribution to a better world for everyone.

The Swimming Lesson

By Jacob Claassens; written for an essay assignment in Grade 9

There is something I'd like to share with you. Something that causes me more pain than hearing a ceramic bowl smash inevitably upon expensive Italian tiles or my grade two teacher writing on the blackboard with chalk that makes the same sound as someone running their fingernails down a piece of fine sand paper. This something that causes me more pain than when you are playing a rugby match and a 6ft bearded opponent from Boland Agriculture manages quite easily to pick you up and catapult you fantastically into the solitude of the air while you, temporarily savouring your aerial accomplishment and contemplating that this is how the ground must look from an aeroplane, crash into the ground. That is painful. But the thing I am really talking about is swimming lessons. I had to start swimming lessons when I was four, and back then I was a measly human being full of fear for swimming pools, which was a thing my mother intended to change. My swimming teacher was a burly woman in her mid forties with yellowy blond hair and a scowling face. To add to her appearance was a peak cap, the kind cyclists like to wear because it only has thin elastic, which can tighten around your head or helmet.

On my first day I wasn't sure what to expect and for some reason, which I now cannot recall, I was eager to start. So I arrived there in my tiny speedo with one hand clutching a huge towel while the other was firmly intertwined with my mom's hand. I surveyed the scene and the looks on the faces of the more older, veteran swimmers. A whistle was blown. I gathered that this was the queue to enter the pool. I reluctantly let go of my mother's hand and took my first innocent steps to my watery hell.

I remember that I wasn't the only one about to start that day. There was another kid (whose name I have now unfortunately forgotten) who seemed quite disgustingly confident about his ability to swim while, as of yet he hadn't. Nonetheless, I still had a grudging respect for his rugged bravery.

My fellow newcomer and me stood patiently on the yellowing grass and watched as the other water prodigies gracefully prounced into the pool and floundered around as easily as if they were reared by dolphins. The burly blond woman's gaze fell upon both of us. "So you two can't swim then?" she asked. We both simultaneously shook our heads. "No? Well now you learn..."

She grabbed both of our wrists and briskly yanked us to the edge of the pool. "Okay, now I'm going to throw you into the pool and then you must try and swim. Alright?" My fellow newcomer friend stupidly nodded his head while still frowning over the simple instruction. His behaviour reminded me of an eager pig awaiting the slaughterhouse. She noticed my friend's eagerness over my terror and said, "Alrighty then, I think I'll throw you first." She picked him up and tossed him sky high into the pool. My comrade landed with a loud splat. I flinched. My eyes opened and I saw the thrashing form of my friend in the pool. Judging from the screaming, it seemed my friend had concluded that swimming was not what it seemed at all. However, the swimming teacher had a delighted look on her face and was egging him on to swim (more like thrash) to the edge of the pool were she and I were standing. Fortunately my friend had made it, coughing and spluttering onto the bricks. My teacher turned to look at me and without warning, picked me up from under my armpits and threw me into the air without saying a word. I squirmed in the air, all the while trying not to tear my eyes off the glittering stillness and silent yearning of that crystalline pool. My mouth was open which was something I would regret later, when I had actually landed in the water. My knees hit the water first, thankfully breaking my fall a bit, although not totally. From beneath the surface I could make out the distorted and chopped up forms of my teacher and my still wide-eyed comrade.

Instinct kicked in and I thrashed not wanting to die just yet, only being about four years old anyway.

My head was now above water, well most of the time, anyway, and my desperate thrashing proved fruitful because the next thing I felt was a tough hand yanking me out of the water. I was safe. At last, I was safe.

The Extraordinary Mr. Noon

This early piece was inspired by the poetry of Jacob's swimming lesson, and written for our subsequent essay assignment in Grade 9.

The spaceship was large and according to numerous eyewitness accounts, it bore a vague resemblance to a washing machine. It landed somewhere in the vicinity of Saturn, refuelled, and made a direct line straight into the core of the earth. From there it zigzagged up through the Moho plain, until presently it popped out of the Pacific Ocean and smashed into China. Lightning struck and cameras flashed as a huge dark figure stepped forth from the smoldering wreckage. The Alien then proceeded to introduce itself as Beltface Scenario, Interplanetary Estate Agent, to the earthling masses below. Beltface Scenario took a step to the right. He smiled a magnificently fiendish smile. 'Nice planet,' he said. 'We'll take it.'

Unfortunately for the inhabitants of China, they assumed that they were on the set of a budget sci-fi film, and merely laughed at the chubby man wearing a badly designed alien suit when he pointed a water pistol in their general direction. They were wrong. They were very wrong.

Five miles north of the Vulgar River, Mr P.M Noon was enjoying his midday coffee and toasted beetroot sandwich. He was the only carbon-based life form in the whole wide world that knew what on earth was going on. Tragically, planet Earth had made the Top Five Thousand Real Estate Hotspots in the Universe shortlist, and was immediately auctioned off. A tycoon with a taste for blue seas and green trees had paid the money, and the estate agent known as Beltface Scenario was here to collect the goods.

This was bad, and Mr Noon knew it. It was worse than people with mullets. It was worse than the worrying number of bogflies that were perched on chimneypots of houses in that particular area. This was a job for the Extraordinary Mr Noon.

Noon's stomach pounded, and his glancers moved in perfect time with his purple nostril hair. 'Wafer', he thought to himself, but instantly regretted it. So he aimed his noon-day gun and, tightening his trouser pants, retrieved the statement and put it back in its cubicle.

He merry-go-rounded through a few more yellow zones before switching his sensors to seriousomatic. 'I must stop that greedy alien before he closes the deal', realized Noon with a start. He configured the location of Beltface Scenario to be in the vicinity of the Los Angeles Underground, and hopped onto his solar powered roller blades, speeding off on a crash course for the ghetto capital of the world.

The profession of an estate agent on Earth is worlds apart from that of an interplanetary estate agent such as Beltface Scenario: One operates on planet Earth and might steal your money, but the other operates roughly the entire universe and will steal your planet! And this is exactly what Beltface was in the process of doing until his old arch nemesis, Mr Noon, resurfaced (from below the Earth's crust) and challenged Beltface to a rap battle!

They flipped a coin and Beltface Scenario went first. He got off to a shaky start with crude insults about Noon's mother (Noon didn't have one anyway), and was interrupted halfway through by an interstellar rap policeman who scolded Beltface for his foul mouth and demanded to see his poetic license. When Beltface was unable to produce the correct document, the cop proclaimed that his turn be over, and that the microphone be passed to Mr Noon.

Noon was cool, calm and collected when he stepped up onto the stage. Beltface had definitely done

some damage, and he counted his losses, placing two of them on the earth underneath him. Then Noon licked his ears, stroked his bones and did his thing.

The insults were subtle and poetic, the beat constant and the rhymes hard-hitting. The crowd that had gathered there broke into rapturous applause, and there was no doubt who the winner was; Mr Noon bowed to the crowd, and informed them that Beltface Scenario would be taking up the post of fitness expert for Glomail shops, and would never bother them again. Then with a wink and a smile, The Extraordinary Mr Noon hopped aboard Samoosa's twenty-four hour floating plaza, and sailed away into the nethersphere.

I am not afraid

With thanks to Gabriel Garcia Marquez

** This piece was composed in Grade 12, during a creative writing exam, and received 50/50.*

Years later, as he faced the firing squad, Ephraim Makoganov was to utter the same words which had characterized his career: “I am not afraid.”

Professional chess had not entered into the life of Ephraim Makoganov as it had with the other grandmasters of his generation. The other grandmasters, when they were still babies, had been handpicked by Soviet scientists on account of their immense intelligence quotas, and fed through childhood on a diet of chess until, by the age of fifteen or so, they were junior champions.

In the isolated town of Karpov, where Makoganov was born, asking someone about chess was like asking them about the moons of Jupiter. As far as the townspeople were concerned, it didn’t exist. Thus life continued in this way until Makoganov, at the overripe age of thirty-five, lost his footing during a hike and plummeted down a ravine, cracking his skull against the base of an oak tree. What should have been the end of his life became more like the beginning of it, for at this point, as he sat bleeding freely, his back against the indifferent oak, Makoganov was moved by a sudden burst of deep understanding of things, the heavy communist clogs which worked the industry of his brain replaced by an infinite arena of intelligence.

For the next few weeks, Makoganov began to see the world anew. He saw light as a spectrum of photons, he spotted fleeting unicorns grazing in mossy glades, he perceived with amazement the squared relationship between a marble’s speed and the impact it made in a bed of clay: if he doubled the speed of the marble as it fell, it made a dent four times deeper in the clay.

Thus it was with the same kind of a thinker’s jubilation that Makoganov greeted the game a traveling band of gypsies introduced to the town as chess. The gypsies did not stay for very long and Makoganov, so taken by the game of black and white pieces, decided to pack his things and leave with them.

During their journeys, the gypsies traveled through towns that knew and loved chess, and Makoganov challenged and defeated their champions, becoming something of an unofficial regional master as his gypsy friends snaked their way to Moscow.

The legend of the peasant Ephraim Makoganov reached Moscow long before the man himself did. News had spread within the chess community in Moscow of an unseeded upstart, thirty-five years of age, unable to read or write, who had conquered Dimitri Zyachev of Karkovask Town in only three moves by breaking down his “Nimzo – Indian Defense” using the “Queen’s Gambit Declined”. What was even more perplexing to the chess masters of Moscow was that Makoganov had never even heard of the “Queen’s Gambit Declined”, an attacking move most of them had been taught when they were ten years of age.

It was in this comfortably oblivious manner, like rocking up at an advanced calculus exam knowing only the fundaments of algebra and acing it, that Makoganov conquered Moscow, then the Soviet Union, and finally the entire chess-playing world at the not-so-tender age of forty-five.

He remained world champion until he was sixty, until the disgruntled Dubai businessman Sheik Abdullah al Rashid – bin Hassan, sure that Makoganov employed psychic techniques on his human opponents, commissioned the creation of a supercomputer that could calculate 2 million positions per second, to oppose him in a highly publicized bout.

The match was billed as “Makoganov versus the Machine” and took place atop a Dubai skyscraper.

Dilmah, as the supercomputer was called, was dressed in a two piece red suit with hands of an android and a visor for a head, electric cables trickling down its back, like a robotic mullet.

Despite the computational prowess of Dilmah, its clockwork logic could not penetrate Makoganov's mind and render it a clumsy clogwork once more. Makoganov's mind ran clear and freely and after 28 games in which he lost 10kg, Makoganov emerged victor.

It was this victory that proved to be his downfall, for the world could not accept that he had defeated Dilmah, and the Dubai government ruled in favour of a court martial in which Makoganov tasted the heat of searing bullets as they drained his life. "I am not afraid" were his dying words.

Ever After

By Annie van Bart

Take heart ... the honeymoon is never over!

You've read the Real Wedding Section in *Wedding Album*. It usually describes how the couple met, what attracted them to each other and the big day. The Honeymoon Supplement takes you to 12 hopelessly romantic destinations and then it's ... happily ever after ... or is it? Not so, in a society where divorce, multiple marriages and broken homes seem to be the norm. Let's imagine then, a really real wedding, with no illusions.

When Emma asked me to write this piece, from the lofty retrospective viewpoint of 18 solid years of marriage, I was taken aback, though I didn't tell her then, as I was actually seriously contemplating a Shirley Valentine, Eat, Pray Love move last week! But the rainbow prevails, there are no 'options' as such, and we are once again on our really rather perfectly happy course. This is, though, a very good exercise and quite timeous – at this point in my marriage – to be consciously reflecting on my vows and their meaning (almost like a meditation). But before I get into the heavy stuff, may I indulge in a little reminiscing and tell you about my honeymoon?

It was a Saturday afternoon in summer I recall, sitting on the stoep of a stone house deep in the bushveld, after a magical cloudburst. The thorn trees were dripping in the sunshine and hundreds of baby frogs were jumping around in muddy puddles on the red dust road. The sky was pink and blue and we were pregnant and in love, eating the best slap chips ever, with chili, from Buti's Café. That froggy-love child is now 18, his little sister is 13 and we are, you could say, halfway, happy, holding out, hanging in and winning. You could also say we are truly blessed.

But we are not fair-weather friends, and it's no bed of roses. Life's inevitable setbacks will test the metal at every turn. Like when we went ice-skating some years ago with the kids. Thinking he was still a young thing, my husband strode out, got knocked down, had surgery on his left shoulder and was out of action for six months. Having just recovered, he lifted a futon into a loft, ripping the right shoulder and putting pay to the remaining six months of that year. Last weekend he fell in the pool, cellphone and all. Very funny, he remarked wryly, it could have been his funeral the next weekend if he'd taken the lawnmower in with him! I make light of some dark moments, but we all need to take ourselves a little less seriously and I admit, I do tend to take it all for granted.

Just married? You're pretty much stuck with one another for an eternity and this is where the vows come in – the promise, the commitment, the holy union, if you like. We can never afford to take the easy way out, making it meaningless, shattering it. It's too precious. The world is broke, it needs fixing and it starts with our inner world, the ripples in our own little pond.

Is the single aim of married life the pursuit of happiness? Not in a real marriage, in a real world. Not all marriages can secure this bliss, very few it would seem, if any. So it is then, ultimately, about a certain resolve to face life's difficulties together, whatever the circumstances and this knowledge is indeed liberating in a marriage. Love just needs to be aired from time to time.

'Will you still need me, will you still feed me, when I'm sixty-four?' The reward? By nature we are not solitary creatures. The reward is in the companionship, the very real achievement of staying together, through thick and thin – that's the real work – the ripple effect is infinitely subtle, impacting on future generations.

Some words from a wise man: 'Man is by nature at the crossroads ... and must be ready to accept

the breeze of pleasure and the storms of miseries, and do so together. This togetherness is the real gain, not the promise of a happy life.'

I couldn't have said it better.



Marico Bosveld landscape
By Egbert van Bart
Watercolour on paper

a day in the life

The surf oozed and throbbed and breathed at me. I sat on my beachtowel and had a sip of tropica. A voice was chatting away behind me. It must have been Jakes now that I think about it, but I wasn't so sure then. Then, as I continued watching the increasingly animated waves behind a pair of ray bans, his voice was like sports commentary. This commentator was real good, though. I could see his voice. Every loop his vocal chords made I picked up. So I gazed on at the waves. The sand was moving around me, and the waves were noisy and pounding away. A soccer ball rolled across my vision. I had to get it. I sprang up and got control of it. With a jolt of energy I started dribbling along the wet sand kak fast. The sun exploded above me and the wet part of the beach spread out before me to make me feel like I was on a vast salt pan. I looked down, the shallow water was full of patterns spreading out with the beach so huge, I turned the ball and in that turn Ben was right there before me and after the ball. I got the fright of my life but managed to hold my own and return the ball to our sitting place. A helicopter flew from one horizon to the other. Everything seemed so besig met activity.

Later, when I had calmed down, I waded into the water to attempt to swim. I say attempt, because I honestly felt I could not, or did not understand swimming. I felt like the little boy I was before my wretched swimming teacher threw me in to her pool. I had to reconcile that memory. I jumped in and under. There was nothing abstractly spiritual about the sensation - it was simply water in motion, silky, covering my body. Nonetheless, a force to be reckoned with. I bolted back to my towel and sat down. Someone remarked that I was being very witty. I was sure I had not said a thing. What do you say to something like that, anyway?

Then sometime after that I gained very strong control over my thoughts, which had up until then been cloudy and troubled. I was able to wield my emotions and thoughts with great control. I knew I could hold my own in a conversation with Plato. It was a fantastic, powerful feeling, like bending spoons.

The gravity with which I was manipulating ideas was slowly replaced by general well being. I resolved troubles which had lingered for years. And like a startling discovery, I knew where I was headed with my life.

The Call of Dudety (a film set in a tent at Jakes' house, featuring the old-school crew)

There was a Blue tent running in the fields of death with a original but Army not to get me know.



Running Lemon sand
Democracy
2 Element

Voting by sms
democracy becomes
a business

20 per sms

is yes but is she attractive?

thats fibers saying: Ya but is she saveable

"Dude" as a full stop

III chose the door later due

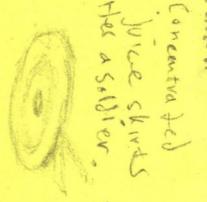
to his dad.

You ^{are} get like this imagine a car that got impaled by the headlights of a deer.



Epic Scene: soldiers, battle scenes, warriors. lots

of movement - then in middle of whole thing is, a tent/circle of people hitting



concentrated
juice skin
- He's a soldier.

High flyers

CONFlict arises.

Set in the 60s

Ernest Hemingway
High Jack and Botbot

antique planes and shoot
at them pilots.

TV dinner
at a dinner
table. TV
is at
center of
table.

guy walks into wardrobe shop
tries on a mask, walks out
shop, runs back in a holds
place up

Essay Thyme

With Pochetinni the Great

In the beginning there was word. Then there were letters. Then there was maths. An Old coulored man said to me, from the edge of his fishing boat that roamed just agter die Kaapse vlakte, he said, (and it was the ending of the ‘film’ I have concocted in my head), he said, and cackled while he did, he said, “It ends as I have written it,” which was perfectly laughable, not cos it was wrong, but cos it was so right.

I read like three pages, and don’t remember a thing.

Imagine a guy sneazed, everytime he laughed. The paper I am writing on is white. White backgrounds make things easy to read. Therefore, my writing is easy to read.

Essay thyme ha hahahah hahah.

A children’s reality programme called ‘Etienne’s Keys’. Each episode follows the character Etienne as he progresses through the day, having inevitably lost his house keys and then inevitably finding them or having them turn up somehow at the close of each episode.

A spoof movie of Home Alone called “Stoned Alone”, featuring a guy who is asked to house sit for a weekend, gets stoned in his isolation and starts freaking out.

A guy with amnesia is used to test if one can become chemically addicted to weed. (cos he can’t remember his experience of being high, there can be no psychological dependence.)

Ben: I’m so happy I have a mouth.

Huckleberry Sunset

A report on the Grahamstown Arts Festival for Schools, co-written with Pochetinni the Great. Written post-matric, for our belated Matric yearbook. (I don't think it was included!)

Straw hats and bowties, that's how we arrived in Grahamstown in the summer of 1998 - oh, sorry, I forgot how long its been in life..... 2008 in fact was the year in question? Yes, it was.

Shell ultra cities are the landscapes of my youth! As Jacob, Matthew, Pochetinni, Jules, Darren and I leapt off the bus a subculture of enjoying subculture, uhm, lure us into the vast blue sea of Grahamstown much like how odyseus had been tempted to follow a mermaid's horn. We met Callum, or Dolly as he is affectionately known! And Abdallah moosa soon thereafter. We met them as they were ascending en escalator and we were descending the ascending escalator. It made for rushed handshakes- we were off to see our first play.

Now, onto our first play- by the end of which we had no idea why we had wasted two grams on it. The play was director Murakitmo Shenobi's adaption of the 1874 imax film, Ozamandias. "Heehaw!" belted an exuberant Matthew as he dropped popcorn in all 16 compass directions. "A horse nays but a donkey brays," shouted a skinny adolescent on stage, adorned from head to toe in dripping white paint.

Very unsurprisingly, a large group of people soon began looking up to us, that is, from the tents they were chilling in below our dorms. They were cool people, and we ended up chatting for an age. We began chatting to them at 15:34, i initiated conversation with an obnoxious "Hey hey", which was directed not as a statement, but as a an art statement, at a very hot teen model. We said what needed to be said, and i checked my watch- it was 15:33 - we had gone back in time! No doubt as a result of all the culture.

Have you ever had a gun pointed at your crotch? was the name of the last play we saw. By the time we'd emptied our ziploc bags, we were clambering up the stairs to our dorms. As we sat there on our united elevated voorkamer, smoking our huckleberry pipes, we concluded that we were all setting on the sun. However gradual the process was, it was detectable nonetheless. We needed some energy- we needed Abdallah!

But sadly, he was no longer with us... he had move on to Graafreniet for their extensive cultural festival.

The festival was..... arb.

And so were the fruit croutons!

On the bus ride home, we realized we had learned a lot on the tour. We learned that....So anyway, It was fun, thanks all, off to ripened avocadoes and blue sky days!

Etienne, Winter 2009.

Agnes in Wonderland, part one

Edited by Annie van Bart

It was the school holidays and Agnes was watching YOTV in the living room. She heard her father calling her name.

‘What?’ She asked rudely, without looking up from the TV.

His voice was calm and patient, and carried a note of kindness that always made Agnes feel sorry for being rude to him. ‘It’s time for your daily chores, my girl,’ he said. ‘The garage needs dusting and sweeping. Will you clean it out for me?’

Agnes tried to put it off for a bit longer. ‘But Baba, do I have to?’ She asked him with her big brown eyes.

‘Yes, I’m afraid you do. It won’t take you too long and when you are done, you will feel like a heavy load has been taken off your shoulders. Besides, you never know what new adventures cleaning a dusty old garage may bring!’

‘I suppose so,’ agreed Agnes, though she didn’t really believe that cleaning a garage could be any fun at all. Slowly she rolled off the couch and headed for the kitchen to fetch a duster and a cloth. Then she went outside to the garage.

Agnes’s father often asked her to clean his garage and she knew exactly how to go about it. She took a bunch of keys out of her pocket and spent a good minute running through them before finding the right one - a little silver key with two teeth at the front, which looked like a shark.

She liked the power that having the right key in her hand gave her, because at that moment she was the only one who could open the door. When she put the key in the lock, it turned nicely and with a satisfying click the door opened.

The garage was where Agnes’ father kept all the things that he could not store in the house. This meant it was crammed full with a variety of objects that seemed mysterious to Agnes. Among the tools and junk were things of value that her father did not want to throw away, like an old horse riding saddle that hung on the wall. It was the first thing Agnes noticed as her eyes became used to the dim light inside.

Other things that cluttered the garage became visible too, and she recognised them all: buckets full of bolts, screws and nuts; tools, spades, an axe, an old suitcase, a dusty old mirror and a beautifully carved wooden cabinet with little drawers. First she tidied the tools, then she dusted the mirror, humming a tune while she worked.

Whenever she cleaned the garage she wondered what was in the drawers that were always locked. But now, as she looked at the cabinet’s reflection in the mirror, she noticed that one of the drawers was slightly open. Agnes felt a shiver of excitement as she turned around and went towards the cabinet. She opened the drawer and peered inside.

All she could see was an old rolled-up scroll of paper. Agnes took it out of the drawer and held it for a few seconds before she unrolled it to find that she had stumbled upon a secret map! There was no doubt that the sketches, arrows and figures drawn on the yellow-stained parchment were the markings of an old map. Just then she heard her mom calling from the front door. ‘Teatime!’

She rolled up the map and slid it into her pocket. Then she chose a small spade, picked up her duster and cloth, locked the garage and headed off to the kitchen.

‘Did you finish your cleaning?’ Agnes’ father asked her when they had sat down for tea.

‘Oh yes,’ replied Agnes gobbling up a spoonful of milk tart.

‘Did you tidy the tools and dust the mirror?’

‘Yes Dad.’

‘Did you wipe the cabinet?’

‘Um, no, because one of the drawers was...’

Agnes had nearly told her dad about her snooping in his drawers, ‘I mean, yes!’

When teatime was over, Agnes went outside to play. She had forgotten all about watching YOTV in the living room.

Later that night, when everyone was fast asleep, Agnes lit a candle next to her bed and peered at the map once more. As she looked at it carefully, she began to recognise landmarks on the map, such as trees, rocks and paths that she knew very well.

The back garden of her house led into a forest and she could see that the map traced a path through this forest towards the river. 'X' marked the spot where the treasure was buried!

Agnes was so excited that she could not sleep. She decided that she would go in search of the secret treasure in the morning. When morning came, she was up bright and early.

'Why are you packing a bag? You don't have school today,' her mother asked her.

'I am going on a hike,' replied Agnes. She did not want anyone to know that she was actually going on a treasure hunt. In her bag was a packed lunch she had made herself, the map and a small spade for digging.

'Goodbye sweetheart,' said Agnes's mother, smiling. She gave her daughter a kiss and went off to work.

As soon as Agnes was alone, she slung her bag over her back and headed out. She couldn't wait to start her adventure in search of a secret treasure hidden somewhere in the forest.

Agnes in Wonderland, part two

Edited by Annie van Bart

Ever since she had discovered a secret map in the garage, Agnes had felt very excited. She was so excited that she had not slept a wink that night. The next morning, as she walked across the dewy grass in her garden, she looked at the map again. The treasure, marked with a bold 'X', was buried somewhere near a river! Agnes knew that the river on the map was the one that ran through her garden, because it was called the Amabutho River.

Agnes had never been as far as the river, because her back garden was very big and the river was at the other end of it. She had only ever been as far as the plum tree where her friend Samson the woodpecker lived. And that was not very far. But today was different, because the promise of treasure would send her to parts of her garden she had never seen. It was very exciting, and quite scary.

According to the map, the path Agnes had to take led across the grass and through a thick forest of trees. With her bag on her back, which contained lunch and a spade for digging up the treasure, Agnes began her hunt.

At the end of the lawn was the tree where Samson lived. Agnes decided to stop and say hi.

'Samson, Samson,' she called from the bottom of the tree, hoping to see the friendly woodpecker's face pop out from his hole in the highest branch. There was no answer. Agnes called again, but after a few minutes it was clear that Samson was not home. Oh well, he must be off to find some juicy grubs for lunch, thought Agnes.

Taking a deep breath, she stepped past the plum tree, out of the sunlight and into the shadowy forest. She walked merrily along the soft soil. The air was fresh and the forest was full of life: birds were chirping, ants were busy marching in long lines and a buck walked into a sudden patch of sunlight.

'Molo,' it said in greeting to Agnes, before vanishing into the bush.

All of this made her very happy that she was outside, exploring. She felt like a part of nature. She also felt hungry. So she took off her bag, sat down and opened her lunch - a sandwich, a chocolate and some fruit juice. When she had finished her sandwich and juice, she gobbled down her chocolate and threw the wrapper on the ground. Then she remembered what her mother had said about littering.

'Agnes, you should always throw your rubbish away in bins, never on the floor, because you will harm nature,' were her mother's words.

Agnes could not see any bins so she put the wrapper into her bag for the time being and would throw it away when she got home.

Since lunch was over, she got to her feet and checked the map to see that she was on the right track. As she continued through the tall trees, it got darker. This was a little scary. But the map said that the treasure was near the river, and to get to the river she had to go through the forest. Another problem was that the path through the woods was overgrown and hard to follow. Soon Agnes realised that she had lost the path. She looked around her. The trees were dark and big, and she didn't know how to get back. She didn't know how to get to the river either. So she sat down, covered her head with her hands and began to cry.

From across the forest Samson the woodpecker, who was hunting for worms to feed his children, heard Agnes crying. He spread his wings and soared through the air to find out what was the matter with his friend. When he found her, he perched on her shoulder and gave her a friendly peck with his big beak.

'What is the matter with you?' he asked.

'I'm lost,' sobbed Agnes.

'Oh, that's a shame. Where are you headed?' he asked kindly.

'Well, I was trying to get through the forest to the river in search of treasure but I got lost, and now I don't think I will ever see my parents again,' said Agnes.

And Samson said, 'Well, I am very sorry to hear that. But, it so happens that I am headed to the river to find dinner for my children, so if you follow me I can show you how to get there.'

Agnes felt a little comforted by this. She took her head out of her hands and wiped away her tears. 'Can you, really? Wow, thank you Samson, you are very kind.'

So off they went, Samson flying from branch to branch and Agnes following closely beneath him. They soon came to the Amabutho River.

'Well, I must be off,' said Samson, who had a juicy worm in his beak for his kids.

'Bye Samson, thanks for all the help,' replied Agnes, as he flew off in the direction of home.

Agnes turned her attention to the map. She frowned. The map said that the treasure was hidden in the river, near where the branches of a willow tree dangled above the water. She began to dig in the soft earth of the river bank. As she was digging, she caught sight of her reflection in the murky green water where unsmiling fishes wriggled through the reeds.

She dug and dug but there was nothing to be found. Besides, it was getting late, so Agnes packed up, put her bag on her back and set off for home, feeling a little disappointed. At least she knew the way home now, thanks to Samson.

Later that evening, when the family was eating dinner together, Agnes' father asked her how her hike had been. Agnes thought she owed him an apology.

'Dad, I didn't actually go on a hike,' she began. 'I found a secret map in the garage and went in search of treasure at the river.'

Agnes expected her father to be cross, but instead he smiled. 'And, did you find it? Did you find the treasure?'

'No,' sighed Agnes.

'Oh but I think you did,' he said with a twinkle in his eye.

Later, Agnes was just about to fall asleep in her bed, when her father tiptoed in and, thinking she was asleep, whispered 'Goodnight my treasure.'

Then Agnes understood what her father had meant when he said she *had* found the treasure after all. The treasure wasn't in a chest or box or anything like that. The treasure was the adventure – being out in nature, exploring, and finding...herself! And it was the best treasure she could ever have found.

Poor Robin

Not long before I left, she half sang, half spoke to me, this rhyme from her childhood:

*The north wind does blow,
And we shall have snow
And what will poor Robin do then, poor thing.
He'll sit in the barn
And keep himself warm
And hide his head under his wing, poor thing.
And hide his head under his wing.*

It wasn't as if we debated it for hours. We simply agreed: I should go. If things got bad, I could always come back. My mom was often commenting on her wilful nature before I left. Looking back on her 20's she reflected: 'Stupid, stupid girl'. But she wasn't stupid. She had an honours degree in English and had always wanted to be a teacher. She was actually just shy and determined. She was the one who insisted I stay in New York for ten days with a buddy who lived there. Having my own plans, I was eager to resist this idea, but thankfully I softened and went along with it, as part of my efforts to be as reasonable as I could before I left. On the day of departure, she and my aunt eagerly packed my clothes while I played soccer outside. A short time later, we left for the airport, my dad driving the one car and a friend driving the other, in which my mom was lying down. Inside the airport, I hugged my parents and said farewell before entering the security check. Moving away, I felt my heart pulling on the other side. As I walked, heavy with feeling, I saw them smiling and waving through the glass. I waved back and disappeared behind a wall. Then I jumped out, surprising them with one more loving wave and then going.

In New York we began to Skype one another - I told my mom about how exciting it was, about my subway and bicycle rides, and she told me how she was doing. Then I left for California. Mother Hen, as I jokingly called her, was eager to know that my trip had been safe. I described my safe journey across the continent, but left out the moment when our bus driver took his eye off the road to send a message, and rear - ended a pickup. The worst injury sustained was by a woman who dramatically complained of a stiff neck. As my bus neared Santa Barbara, my concerned mom actually called my roommate to make sure he was at home.

Of my roommate I told her he was a fine lad, an Indonesian who cooked good rice-based meals and helped me put together a bike from two scraps he had found lying around. I told her that the apartment was comfortable, and described the picturesque area. I told her of an old little theatre where my courses took place. I told her of someone in class who I thought was cute. As the weeks went by we continued to talk, and she would often say, 'Not much longer now'.

I had seen the affects of chemotherapy on her before I left, so I had an idea of what she was enduring. A metallic taste in the mouth, loss of hair, weakness, and worst of all, nausea. One morning, after a recent chemo session, I woke up to a cry that was unusual and familiar at the same time. I jumped to her bedroom, where she was crumpled on the floor. My dad and sister rushed in and we picked her little body up. I was cross with her. 'Why were you so careless', I demanded. She had jumped out of bed, excited to speak to my sister before she left for school, but there was no strength in her legs and she tripped on the carpet. Her head hit the doorframe and she crumpled on her left side, fracturing her arm where a tumour had weakened it. And all because she had been excited to tell her daughter something.

In spite of what the Chemo was doing to her, she was always upbeat on Skype, telling me about our cats, or a book she was excited to be getting, or about the ‘Study Milo’ she was having, a ritual small cup of Milo we would often drink late at night together. We eagerly awaited the end of chemo cycle 3, when we would learn of her progress. Worryingly, her stomach was very inflated, and we supposed that her liver tumour had grown. Her back was no longer sore, but her chest hurt. When the doctor saw her, he said her liver was not necessarily bigger, that the inflation in her stomach was caused by a build up of liquids. This gave me hope going into the weekend, as we waited for the results of the scans. I rode my bike down Abrego Road, saying to myself, ‘No worries, even if the chemo hasn’t been working, they’ll try her on a new one, and she’ll be fine. It will just take a little longer.’ But over the weekend her condition dipped dramatically. By this time she was on small doses of morphine, for pain, and her thoughts became drifty and disconnected.

For the next few days, she drifted in and out of a waking sleep, leaving my sister feeling helpless, being unable to get through to her. Then the scan results came out. No, the chemo had not worked. Her liver was bigger, and so were the spots on her lungs. They still thought it was Lung Cancer, but that they had guessed and aimed at the wrong Primary. I took hope from the results of her back: radiation had cleared the tumour there. And she was clear headed once more. Again I rode my bike down Abrego Road, saying, ‘No worries, we’ll just try her on a new Chemo.’

That Saturday, we spoke together on Skype. Lying on my bed in the computer room at home, my Dad eased the microphone over her ears. ‘Etienne, I’m nauseous’, she cried, ‘Really really nauseous’. I gritted my teeth, and told her I was sorry. Some of her sentences were drifty again, like lines from poems, and her voice, softened by terrible pain, was as sweet as honey. I said, ‘Mom, your voice sounds so sweet.’ Then she collected herself, saying with force that she did not want to talk about her, she wanted to know about me. So I told her of a passage I had stumbled upon, from the I Ching, which said that great suffering is usually associated with great rebirth. Shortly after that, her strength waned and she had to go to bed. ‘I love you, Etienne’ she said in her sweet voice. ‘I love you too, mom,’ I said back. ‘Love you, Etienne,’ she said again. ‘Love you too, mom’, I said again. When my dad came on the phone he told me he was very worried because she had been vomiting a lot, and that her vomit was black. He said he had taken her to the beach, but that she couldn’t do anything except lie and watch the waves.

The next morning, I spoke to my sister on Skype, and it was night time back home. She told me that mom had been vomiting again. She said that mom thought it was time I came home. She said that mom was too weak to talk to me. Welling up, I asked her to go and tell mom that she had done so much for me, and that she was my Angel. As my sister went off, my dad came on and spoke to me. He said that in the morning mom was due for a blood transfusion. I said that was great. But he said he was praying for a miracle. My sister came back and said that mom had said, ‘Sweet boy.’ I spent the rest of the day debating about best plane flight options and going to class. On an email home I wrote, ‘Tell mom I say watsup and that I hope the transfusion goes well. Tell her I’m holding her hand.’ I spent the evening in the apartment, quietly working on a piece. Shortly before bed, a thunderstorm blew into town, the first of the season. As the thunder drummed over the hot valley, I felt a premonition of something happening. Not taking it as anything specific, I made myself a cup of cold milk chocolate, opened the apartment door, and toasted to my mom, watching the darkness. Then I went to bed.

Drifting, I saw my life up to that point as chapters she had lovingly written for me: my idyllic childhood friendship with a boy whose mother she employed to help out in the house; our family holidays to the sea and the country; our move to Cape Town; and my high school days.

When my phone rang in the darkness of my room, I knew.

*The north wind does blow,
And we shall have snow
And what will poor Robin do then, poor thing.
He'll sit in the barn
And keep himself warm
And hide his head under his wing, poor thing.
And hide his head under his wing.*

Lilac Morning

By Emma van Bart. Written for her grade 11 creative writing exam.

The weight of summer hangs on the plants, dragging them to the soil, and they droop, famished and exhausted. I am motionless, except for my eyes, which survey the drowsy garden for no reason in particular — it is the only energy I am willing to exert in this wave of heat, this breath of fire that is Summer's final, choking gasp. My father presently appears, and paces about the garden, before stopping in front of the jacaranda. He stares. I'd say he looked sad, but perhaps he is merely glaring at those pestilent weeds, or admiring the purple flowers by the pool.

I close my eyes. I am running. Sticky clumps of sap-saturated pine needles pierce my arms as I tear the branches apart in my haste. I change direction, and dart behind their trunks, but the eyes follow. I trip on a root and fly into the native earth. I launch myself into motion again. I shriek, and chance a backward glance. I stop. The red-molten eyes have stopped, and are retreating into the dank forest. I open my eyes.

Yesterday, mom's friend gave me a stone. Unsure of how else to respond, I thanked her, before hanging it from the burglar bars of my window. It hangs half a metre away from my crystal, and their stark difference is mesmerising. The crystal is a simple beauty: transparent and kaleidoscopic, catching the sun's rays, and scattering them so that miniature rainbows dance, swirling about the white ballroom walls of my room. It is every colour; it is honest and open, but the stone is a secretive twin. Suspended in a dark shroud of its own, its large, smooth surface glints forebodingly.

Most mysterious is its colour. It is not black or grey or anything recognisable, and it hangs limp and heavy as though from a noose. It's dark and unfathomable eye staring, glazed over, like a deep, black hole in the centre of the universe. After contemplating it for quite some time, I suddenly recognise its shade — it is the colour of my father's eyes. At most, I could call it a green-grey with blackish grain, but ultimately, it is inexplicable. Something sad.

I close my eyes. My mother and I tentatively step through the dense shrubbery. It is a narrow, moss-riden forest path hugging the mountain's middle with its staired arms, climbing deeper and deeper into the ancient hills. We are silent, aware of the eyes that follow us along the sunlit-safe path — a haven of safe passage mapped by the transient light through the threatening kingdom of the wolves. They paw the cold, damp earth restlessly from the darkness — impatiently awaiting the chance to strike. They are not hungry, but their instinct is uncontrollable. It is an unconscious, purposeless evil; a desire pulsing like blood through their being. Tirelessly, they follow — coated shadows, and we grow weary. I glance behind me, and see my mother's slow progression and her faltering balance, slipping over the treacherous stones. I stop to wait for her. A wolf emerges from the trees. I open my eyes.

Then the winter cello began. The frost clung like barnacles on a rock, to the purified mist where I sat, staring out into the garden. It started softly with one, clear and quivering note which seemed to resonate, not from any particular source, but rather from each and every plant. Somewhere near the tulips, the violins broke into a slow crescendo, but the cello rang through, in every inch of the morning, singing to me in a deep and husky tenor, rising to a sweeter soprano in lulling melody, as though coaxing an infant in distress or calming a lunatic. It sang to announce, in the most gentle manner possible, that something had changed and come to pass. It was profusely apologetic — the jacaranda sobbed hysterical, purple tears, which splashed at my feet. Yet however therapeutic the music or repentant the winter, it could not console my father who stood in the lilac morning, and cried soft tears through those mysterious eyes.

I close my eyes, and I am completely alone. The wolves are gone. Their red eyes retreated slowly into the black forest; ferocious teeth no longer gnashing, and titan-strong legs no longer tense in impending pounce. They morphed into the encroaching dusk and the soil that holds my mother's blood — sinister and triumphant.

The man I love gave me a rose today. He gave my father a hug, and myself a hug, and then produced, without a word, a miniature rose as he left. I do wish I could show her the rose. I'd say my father looked sad today.

Kaaloog-se-loop

By Egbert van Bart

“Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.”

To come into this inheritance, life itself will aid and abet you. And as you continue to appreciate life, will it not reciprocate a thousandfold?

Unconditional trust: because it lies beyond duality – is how to enter the flow.

And nature itself will aid and abet your intent to regain (what you imagine to be) your lost membership: remembering your place in the flow; and the altar, Earth – inside the woven texture of the cosmic tapestry: this is the sub – text of life in the Marico.

That time and space are discontinuous, discrete expressions Of the spirit of Place.

Hence from trees you may learn the lesson of humility: to be rooted in the humus of the Earth – whence our sense of humour lights us the way to our full human status – our appointed place in the scheme of consciousness.

Why do the trees disperse peace across the world when their myriad leaves give tongue to the wind and they turn into prayer flags – fluttering, soughing

strangeness attractors?

Because the trees
are humbly rooted
deep in the humus of the Earth –
they are free
to scatter these blessings abroad
from the source of original peace
upon which creation is built
and the biosphere conceived.

And so
may we continue to learn to speak
without offending the power of silence.

When the lanceolate yellow leaves
under the ancient bottlebrush tree
tell in countless coins
of the priceless gold
of every moment lived
in the golden light of consciousness –
gold the Earth squanders on the winds
with generous open arms –

Yes!

Nature cannot even begin to contain itself
its genius enjoins you
implores you
instills the high octane of enthusiasm
the endless drawing away of veils
to disclose – immersed in the radiation bath
of revelation
leaving you all trussed up:

The Astonished Man

Prisoner of Strange

in the strange world of Mr Mum –

realm of the perpetually new

the never-before-seen –

thrones upon thrones

of the mysteries.

And so the people of the Marico

include the full human spectrum

all of them unique expressions of the genius loci –

all implicitly (complicitly?) rooted

in the peace of the Marico earth

expressive of this peace

each in his/her unmistakeable way –

the Spirit of Place displaying itself as a Presence

a fount of meekness and peacemaking and hence

again blessed: “for they shall be called the children

of God.”

And the other Interested and Affected Parties

in the Marico bushveld?

The rest (res nullius?) of whom not much

are heard of in the general clamour?

One cannot claim to represent them

but together we may stand up

brothers, and sisters too

to be counted and lent a voice:

Like the twohundred plus indigenous trees,

not to mention their alien cousins,

crop trees, lesser vegetation, pasturage.

Peace!

Nature here bestows arms full of love light

From an overflowing cornucopia

Of perpetual creation.

Then the more than 400 bird species –

artist colonies – colours and sounds

distilled from the ancient soul and silence

of the bushveld – colours and sounds –

brandnew! Inimitable, never-before-seen or heard –

and remember; what has a voice must have a vote –

only that is accounted the true spirit of democracy:

total inclusivity

totally, unconditionally inclusive:

reflecting that Wholeness which cannot be shattered

because what can be shattered

is not the Wholeness!

And this is only a beginning.

Some top musicians in the Groot Marico

belong to the numerically powerful insect phylum.

Recall the amphibians, reptiles, amongst whose number

the Marico gecko is found, gifted with a singing voice

resonating at that bewitchingly enticing pitch

that seems to download somewhere

on the edge of visionary revelation.

Mammals there are, and fish –

the list is not exhaustive – and one

may hesitate to enumerate clouds and mist,

the many categories of rain – there's lightning

and fire too, lest we forget

and that long-distance traveller, the wind and his kin,

some of them local residents too.

And who will dare to allude to the vast array

of subtler forces forever attenuated beyond ken
of the vulgar and arrogant prowlers from outside?
When we have not even started to mention
the Rights of Rocks!
So the legends and the stories in the Marico multiply
and drop down like ripened fruit –
from that same rich vein – the Source:
of course!
Kaaloog-se-loop!

Though forever new, you'll hear how the voices of
the ancestors are lent a breathing space to a vote
they never jettisoned in graduating to another status
in the labyrinth of Life.

Groot Marico Spring Equinox 2010

Serving Suggestion

Mr Fighaard's son felt a bit nonplussed when his dad told him the supper was ready and then left to drop his daughter at a friend's house. The call to supper was exciting, but with no one to share the meal with the occasion seemed to lack its usual flavour. Nonetheless his son went over to the stove eagerly, collecting a bowl from the cupboard and fork from the drawer. He had dished a second spoon of rice into his bowl when he saw black - another of those darn bugs - miniature armadillos he thought of them as, which had got into their rice a few weeks earlier, and bugged them out so to speak.

"Tut tut, I thought we'd gotten rid of these bastids," he thought, lifting the bug out between his fingers and flicking it into the bin. Finding no more in his rice he moved on to dish up the stew. Seated in the lounge he made a mental note not to forget to warn his dad about the unexpected dinner guests.

Returning from the drop off of his daughter, Mr Fighaard entered his house and nodded hello to his son sitting on the couch eating what would by now probably be his second helping.

"Uh dad I must warn you ther're weevil things in the rice again," said his son.

"Ag no I just opened that rice packet this evening," said Mr. Fighaard.

"What," said his son, watching him moving to the kitchen and trying to focus on what this meant.

"Ja the packet's brand new, I bought it yesterday," continued Mr Fighaard, eyeing the rice on the stove.

"Shucks, so then the bugs would have had to have come from the shops this time," realised his boy.
"Quite so," he affirmed, dishing up his plate.

Before he got down to his meal Mr. Fighaard went in search of the receipt that would verify a complaint at the Pick n Pay where he bought the rice. Looking at his unattended meal cooling away his son wondered at his choice of putting this pleasure on hold. Going through the shopping packets a second time he found the right receipt, dated the previous Saturday. They made a quick inventory of the past week's meals to confirm that they had not eaten rice that week and that the packet in question was therefore the most recent they had.

"I'll go to Pick n Pay tomorrow," Mr. Fighaard decided. "I need to get some provisions anyway."

And go to Pick n Pay the next morning he did. His son was sitting screwing together a wood frame on the back stoep when he returned.

"So I went to Pick n Pay," he said, and his son made the connection between this information and the new bottle of chlorine he had in his hand.

"Aha," said his son, raising his eyebrows.

"But the manager wasn't there."

"Oh."

"So I'll go back tomorrow."

"Ja do that," agreed his son.

"I should actually go and talk to Tastic about it because otherwise I can't buy their rice anymore," he added.

"But," started his son, choosing his next words, "Are you 100 percent sure the insects came from the shop? They didn't get in the pack somehow perhaps?"

"Ja I also thought of that possibility," agreed Mr Fighaard, "That maybe they got in through some

hole."

"We could check the pack."

"No I handed it in when I got my money back. But I don't think it's likely."

"Hmm."

It occurred to his son that the earliness with which he had stuck to his resolution to go to Pick n Pay that day suggested he was rather interested in this whole affair about the little bugs.

And he went back to Pick n Pay the next day, which was Monday. As he entered the supermarket he was greeted again by the first Easter eggs of the season, a whole grandstand of them all bright and tinfoily.

"Sorry, hello, is your Manager available to have a word with?" He asked bending down to the level of a young man packing crisps in a nearby aisle. This time the manager was in. He followed the man to the end of the cashiers and past the entrance to a passage marked Staff Only.

"Manager's office just through the passage and to the right sir," said the young man, gesturing with his hand and then turning curtly when Mr. Fighaard nodded thanks. Turning at the end of the passage he came to a door at the top of three steps marked Manager's Office. He knocked and stepped back, waiting. After a moment there came the sound of a handle turning. A slice of doorway opened and out peered inquisitively the scaly head of a giant miniature armadillo.

African Time

This was the world of serious tennis. All had racket bags. Most carried bottles. Some had their coaches with them. The venue was an immense, bustling village of stepped courts. The morning was sunny and steamy. A microphone called players for matches. You could tell when it was going to because the bumping of it being picked up always got amplified.

Happy Ndimande had not waited for Eric at the convener's hatch: he was already leaving it with the match balls in hand.

"Hey, are you Happy," said Eric, a skinny pre-adolescent, aware of the humour in his question.

"Yes," said the low-voiced, stocky other.

"Cool... we're playing on court 11 right?"

"Yes. Let's go," said the other turning, and spring – stepped confidently ahead. Eric hurried after, wondering at the 'development' player's self – assurance.

Happy's bag was waiting for him on a chair. Eric eyed it as he reluctantly emerged from the warmth of his tracksuit into the biting Pretoria air. It was not like the other bags – big multi – pocketed things in 'sporty' neon colours. It was small and rounded and compact and cream and worn, like a day – night cricket ball, and printed in the middle with the electric blue letters *itf* (international tennis federation), the dot of the *i* a tennis ball shooting across the logo like a star. Happy was waiting to start the warm up.

He stroked his warm up balls well. Eric was not used to new balls and returned them like he was playing a point. Presently he framed one out the court; Happy was near the gate so he went to get it, adding to Eric's embarrassment.

Eric had just started finding a rhythm when Happy dropped his tools and came up for volleys. He completed these with scheduled brevity. He then signaled for some smashes. Eric thought this a bit pretentious.

Eric's own volleys were the volleys of someone who did not volley often. They were mistimed. A lot of them either reached Happy with no bounce or too many bounces. He did not ask for smashes but moved back to the bass line to warm up light serves. Happy's were flat and oiled. His were irregular. Happy asked if he was ready after only six or so each. He was as ready as he would be, and headed to net to spin for serve. He called rough as he always did. It was tails. Happy chose a side, to his surprise. (Generally one chooses to serve first as it gives you an attacking advantage). He put it down to development naiveté.

On a whim he decided to go all out against this guy, however good he was. The appeal of this action assured its inevitability. The will to shine filled him with energy, clearing the court before him, transforming his lax service action, the ball rising high above him before he came down upon it with all he had, it just missing the middle line on its speedy way. He knew he could do it now. Knew he wouldn't double fault. He didn't. The point began. He was his super-self! Like a wind he blew the rally away, ending it with a down the line backhand smashed out his opponent's resilient reach. His next serve was in with force, a body serve returned – he pounced on it now sure of his untrusty forehand sending Happy scampering deep after it and continuing forward to net to forehand angle volley then backhand slice the return sideways away like he did it everyday.

He served again. Happy got it back. They locked into trading blows. He had to win it! It flew off his backhand cross-court and the powerless return died in the net. He served again, the ball came back, he backhanded it back across court, it was returned to his forehand, this was it a down the line forehand winner the hardest to make...he nailed it. Game. I did it, he thought smiling inside heading to the other side. I'm leading!

Happy's reply brought him back to reality. His serves were fast kickers. Eric didn't know how to handle them. Blindly he got the second one back, but on the back foot the rally was easy pickings for Happy. His next reply died on his frozen racket. And he began to think about it. He had played his best to win what was only the first game of a three set match. The prospect of continuing for that

long loomed like a marathon race, advising of its impossibility. After all it had essentially been an act, a level of experience he couldn't call his own. Game followed shortly after.

He tried to serve like a demon again, but his waning self – assurance wouldn't let him. He's onto me, he thought, as Happy took control of his tamer serves. 2 – 1 down. It felt like a lot more.

In the next two games he realised what he was up against. In addition to being fast, Happy's serves kicked viciously, dumfounding him with their sudden angular accelerations and dumping him like huge waves he couldn't judge, sometimes without him even getting a racket to them. And when he did, if the return made it over, Happy soon took total control, finding hidden lines and angles, transforming the space of the court, running him down until the ball kicked out of his reach. Before he knew it the set was over. To his mind the match was too, effectively. Indeed, during set two he put up a fight here and there, but only as part of the defeat he had already scripted for himself. His other six matches weren't quite so challenging. In fact he won more than half, and found himself hopeful of making it to the next round. At home he tabulated his standing as generously as he could, triple checking his addition, to arrive at an optimistic picture in which he would qualify behind Happy if that player to watch somehow dropped a set in his match the next day. He did in fact, but Eric still ended shy of qualification by a point. He was actually expecting it, in his heart. He guessed he had kidded himself in his point calculations, and left it at that. Then in a flash of karmic logic he knew where the difference lay: in the set he had given up against Happy.

He came back for the following year's tournament. The sunlit courts were alive with steamy pre – match activity as he walked in. Alongside him two guys hustled around the court with exciting determination. Next door an Indian shorty was rallying explosively, crossing his arms stylishly before brushing up heavily on his shots which, coming from his small figure, seemed to kick that much higher.

In the central court arena some development guys were warming up. Like Happy, they were from African countries such as Zimbabwe, Zambia, and the Congo. Stroking the ball back and forth, fluidly, effortlessly. These must be the top guys, thought Eric, taking a sunny plastic seat. Tall and older the front guys stood, smacking the ball low across the court with wristy flourishes. All in white. The ITF logo big and green on the back of a loose white T shirt. Just smacking it back and forth in a warm up...he had never seen a level like this! So organized and focused, yet casual: chatting, sharing jokes. He wanted to watch them forever.

But any minute now the intangible bump of the mic would be followed by his name, and he would have to leave for his match. He looked on, savouring this moment in the warm sun. The front guys had swapped out with their team-mates, who were younger, and not quite as good.

There was a potential tournament contender in his group. An Asiatic guy from Mauritius. Eric watched him for a bit on that same court 11. Lean and mean in red and black with a matching black peak cap on backwards he pounced on his forehands whipping through them in full circles, and turning his shoulder and bending adeptly to consolidate his backhands. He had a chubby kid brother playing in a younger age group who was already getting massive kick with a blue black Babolat, though without the older's speed and power.

Eric remembers one match in particular he played that tournament: his second match against a development player. Eric didn't recognise him from the warm up crew of the previous day. He was of medium height and slim, wearing a kid's yellow peak cap backwards, and had bunny teeth. But Eric knew from last time not to go on appearances with these cats.

"Where're you from?" he inquired as they made their way to one of the top courts.

"Zim."

Bugs Bunny had a spin serve. It was never hard, but it kicked sharply, and Eric had trouble returning it. And he had Eric's shots covered, and though he did not hit hard he still easily commanded the rallies, running Eric around and wrong – footing him with brilliant, kicking placement. Outclassed and intimidated by his opponent's African cool, Eric felt the challenge draining from his shots and gave up on winning the match.

He remembers his next match was against a South African guy who acted like he shouldn't have to play someone so inferior. This guy's indignation was only strengthened when out of nervousness Eric framed a ball out of court, delaying the match for minutes while he searched for it among some bushes and really annoying his opponent when he returned empty handed and they had to finish the match with one ball less. Dispirited, Eric let him win.

This match had also been on one of the top courts. With his unsavory opponent having already packed up and departed, a quietness descended, its presence felt in the faint sounds of the tournament that could now be heard: the rhythmic knock of a ball two courts away; the shouts coming from the courts below; a preemptive bump of the mic. Alone here at the top of the club, with its hedges, ivy – covered wall and distant blue sky, he felt more self - aware, as if he was being watched. It made him anxious to return to the sound.

He was mad about the hot chips sold at the tuckshop, and bought them rather often. With the addition of the customary condiments, they really did wonders for his nutrient hungry person. He bought a pack of them for the eagerly awaited clash between Bugs and the Chinese Mauritian. A handful of spectators sat housed in the small stand of plastic seats overlooking court 4. These included two of Bug's development teammates, who talked and looked on expectantly as he and the Mauritian warmed up. As the anticipation of a real fight rose in him, Eric found himself firmly behind the kid who had beaten him so easily. But a close contest it was not to be. By the fourth game it was clear to both Eric and Bug's friends – the only others still watching – that his soft spin game was no problem for the hard – hitting Mauritian.

Eric didn't get to play the Mauritian because the matches were running behind schedule and he was not going to qualify anyway. Considering how Bugs had fared against that guy, he did not very much mind. In fact he was glad, since it freed him up to catch more of the intensely competitive and exotic junior tennis going on around the club – the level of which he had never before seen.

Wandering through the vast continent of courts sweating with midday action along hot brick paths afoot with exotic representatives, he had a marvelous sense of being not in Pretoria, but in Africa. He worked his way up to the top courts, only to find, taking a new turn, that they did not end there, but receded in labyrinthine overlap into a further country. Venturing into an outer borough he came upon a lone match whose intense action sounded inconsequential in the unpopulated quietness of its peripheral locality. On court a skinny Madagascan youth with a sky blue racket was playing a local bru, schooling him Muralitharan style. Too bad Eric could not stay long to watch as he had one last match to play.

Three years later he was back in Pretoria on a week – long provincial tour. What began as a lonely time as an outsider ended with okes getting on famously. There were dormmates Nick and bushy haired young James; heartthrob Josh and fellow jock Emmanuel; cool Kurt and enthusiastic Jody; older, amiable Dirk; and lenient coach Kieran.

Together these guys had the kind of time you can only have on tour: going out into the school grounds at night feeling full of possibility; smoking hub on Main Road; buying drinks with the under 18s; sharing a coke from heaven after ages of parched missioning; and gaping at exhibition matches on the last day between the top provincial players and none other than an ITF squad, bouncing into the grounds past Eric in a minibus bearing their mark.

Gazing out the window of science class the following Monday, Eric felt...empty.

With Josh gone and no under 18s, the next year was not the same...it was even better. The week saw more advanced going out, with the guys adventuring through Main Road's bars, one night getting back to find themselves locked out and taking refuge in the bathroom till daybreak. (Needless to say the tennis took a knock). There were some light romances, and hanging out was a joy, with laughs reaching another level, and every minute something fresh going on: 'Kings' on timeless, floodlit courts; sunny strolls to the tuckshop during times of recreation; dinners in the dining hall, endless banter, the preparatory fumes of deodorant in the dorms, and lilting walks

across darkening grounds towards the fabulous nights ahead. And then, to crown it all on the last day the exhibition matches against a new group of ITF faces.

Standing chatting casually in the afternoon light, they were the cool kids all right. In their midst was a tall guy with a tea-stained 'fro and elaborate ivory necklace, lighting up the world with his handsome grin. His name was Takanyi...so Eric listened to teammate Ike saying...Zimbabwean... the son of a cabinet minister...only sixteen...no ways dude, Takanyi will kill that guy!

It was the top South Africans in each age group against the ITF reps of corresponding age, u14 through to u18. But the traffic was all in one direction...

The top player of the previous year had been a Mauritian named Lofu, who could be seen before his match jogging around an adjacent field talking to himself – maybe praying, someone speculated. Wild looking with a headband of dark hair he crouched Mowgli-like in wait for his opponent's serve before pouncing on it with a killer's instinct and flying into frenzied, vocalized action.

Eric felt a sense of perfect well being as he strolled through the late sun, here at the end of a great tour. On a back court he was pleased to recognise Happy, stroking the ball as well as ever, older and broad shouldered in a loose white t-shirt. Returning to the front he passed the match of Catherine, a fellow player from his old academy in Joburg, now living and training, she had informed him, at the ITF academy down the road. Next he stopped to watch a guy called Mensah leaping around the court like a leopard, dumping his opponent with one-handed jump backhands. Then he moved next door to see Takanyi. Never before had he seen someone serve so hard: a jump serve, all six foot five of the Zimbabwean coming down on the ball, sending it crashing against the back fence meters above Eric.

Standing on the grass embankment nearby was their coach, a salted, middle-aged Jock, chatting with a friend, and looking pleased with his flock.

Swaziland

There was no single, dividing line, as the boy imagined there would be, on either side of which he would be able to straddle the two countries. Instead there was a few hundred meter no - man's land between each end. Within it there was a sort of information area with lodge-style water features and fronds, and references to the king, and a curio shop where he bought their royally coloured flag.

The grassy land was dotted with rondavels, and the cars shared the road with cows. It was a four-hour drive to the strange sounding town of Pigg's Peak, which he imagined was situated on the lush edge of some great edifice of black rock, like the one in the dramatic climax of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*. The residence of Richard and Sheila, where they were going to be staying, lay just outside this town.

Richard and Sheila's house was in the bush. It was a large property squared off with electric fencing, like a game reserve, and with a number of dogs. Richard, the boy's mother's cousin, was a big, handsome man with a broad, rugged face and a not unattractive wart on his nose. Sheila, his wife, was a wily, wise looking woman who ran an African art and craft shop. With them they stayed for a few days; then Richard drove them to a place he knew in the mountains.

They forded the river in splashes and churning, the brown, fast flowing river, the 4 x 4 moving unmoved in its course, cousin Richard at the helm. And into the present past. He dropped them off at the rooms, staying only to show them around. The rooms stood on a hill surrounded by a fortress of dark green mountains. There was no electricity.

On the first day they went exploring in the mountains, hiking up a river bed till the rocks got too tall, then venturing off along a cowherd path leading away up the bank through the trees, and coming presently upon a field of dope tucked away in the forest. The silence in which they made this discovery was awkward for the boy, who was aware of the plant's notoriety, and feared the revelation of some uncomfortable truth. As if on queue, as they stepped quietly past, his dad made a lighthearted reference to his mother's use of it during her varsity days, which she chuckled off without further comment, relieving him of his anxiety as they moved off along the path.

Looking back from the house at the mountains they had been in earlier that day, they could see the kloof in whose river bed they had walked.

On one of the nights they heard the unearthly cries of bushbabies (says Mr. Fighaard). They shone torches on their faces, making their eyes gleam. They were sitting in some fig trees below them, huge fig trees.

And in the morning in the fig trees there were *loeries*, those big red and green ones, and some of the purple variety, and also some black ones, eating and making a big racket.

They went for another walk that day, and in the afternoon Richard and Sheila came to fetch them. It was then that they were told that the house's original inhabitant, a woman from southern Europe who had been dreadfully unhappy about living in this remote place, had passed away inside the house, and that it was haunted by her ghost.

A Country Imagined (my first poem)

To my parents, who opened my eyes

It came to pass
that I woke up one day
and saw my past behind me
for the first time.

I was youthful, but no longer a youth
and I looked back and found
that my perspective had changed:
my boyhood was like a distant dream —
it was over for good.

I had the fortune in my youth
thanks to my parents
of witnessing an above-average amount
of my country.

I grew up in Johannesburg
and my favourite thing about that place
was its thunderstorms.

We would go to the Magalies
and sometimes without stopping continue to the Groot Marico
with its yellow lanceolate Christmas trees
and red berries with strange, milky flesh.

And Terry told me of nearby Mafikeng
where once, at the end of a dark street
they saw a horse with no head.

We once went to Swaziland when I was about 8
But I have spoken about that elsewhere.

And once when I was about five
we went to the Drakensberg
and I dreamed of reaching Lesotho beyond the mountains
just as I stirred in my heart
when in Enselsberg in the Marico
they said that in the horizon's far distance lay the border of Botswana.

And I dreamed of Potchefstroom

and a place called Naelstroom
although we never went there.
But I intuit some memory of these places
that is not mine, but my father's
just as I intuit the memory of Pietermaritzburg
where my mother was a student.

And every December we would journey south to Cape Town,
with its sparkling peninsula in holiday bliss.
I'd play driveway cricket with James
and be lulled to dreamland by Mark Knopfler.

Sometimes we went by car
and I watched lorries with emerald nonkins
passing in the Great South African night.

One year we stopped in Plett.
I played soccer with my plastic ball
and on the beach one day we found a hole
as deep as a man.

Sometimes we went by Train
and I watched a boy in Touwsrivier dancing with karate moves,
a cigarette puffing in his mouth.
The following year in Leeu Gamka
I saw no such urchin action.

And in Hexriver one year
we encountered the great heatwave
that had ensconced the Cape.

Carried from sleepy cars to the deepest of places —
these disruptions were typical in my youth.

When I was six I went with Uncle Tony
to White River and the Kruger Park.
He wore a plaited bangle on his African arm and smoked
miniature cigars.

One night in Pilanesberg when I was seven
Mom and I got lost in an ocean of kerosene lamps.

When I was nine or so my friend Daniel took me to Dikololo
where we played sweating squash

and flew down a bushveld supertube
and learned to backflip into swimming pools.

When I was twelve we moved to Cape Town
and I came to know
her rainsoaked Winters
whose symbols were the waterfalls
on the mountain high above my School.

And we went one Holiday to the Cedarberg
where I had been before
first as a three-year old
then with James
playing Frisbee for days
beside a stream of orange gook.
Back once more
to skim stones and sniff
the smoke of campfire.

On that trip when I was three
I picked up scabies at a B&B
But I remember only the wind in the night
in a beachshack in Franskraal.

Living in Cape Town from age 12
we would go every Christmas to the West Coast.
It was never easy being the youngest boy cousin,
but it had its moments!

Yet I would sooner go with Jakes
to VanWyksdorp in the Klein Karoo
and cycle down rutted jeep tracks
and get drunk on Autumn Harvest
and down kombucha at the feet of the pathless Rooiberg
and find romance in a perfect place.

One year it rained so hard
We took twelve hours to reach VanWyksdorp
when it should have taken two.
The Rooiberg pass was blocked
and so was the road to Ladismith
and the road from Oudtshoorn
kept veering wider and wider
to avoid more rockfalls.

It is amazing, the lengths my mother went for me.

When I was fourteen
we went to Nature's Valley
and it was like old times again:
setting up our tent in a dripping rainforest,
the sound of a rushing river nearby.

The beach was bright and well – attended
and the water was divine
and there was no sense
of the passage of time.

When I went back five years later with Jaco,
everything had changed:
there were sharks
and the air was cold
and the beach was empty.

Plett too had changed by then,
deformed by a great storm.
But the beach was still bright
and my being was still light.

School too afforded the chance to voyage:
In June I played tennis in Groenkloof
under a cloudless blue sky.

In July we went to crispy Grahamstown
and I witnessed a masterpiece
and stayed in the Old Gaol
and enjoyed it enough
to hurry back the following year.

But the following year
what was more interesting to us than what we watched
was our state of mind when watching.
And at the end of that year
at rocky Cape-in-Fanta
I read The Nausea by Sartre
and considered my dazed brain.

And at Suurbraak the year after
I sensed again the eeriness of my holographic awareness

and felt a familiar disturbance.

My last proper journey away
was to the Eastern Cape with friends.
The misty hills and cold breeze seemed symbolic
of the spell I had been under.

So in Cape Town three years ago
I closed my eyes and sought for self-assurance
and the peace that I tasted, though it was short-lived
convinced me of something deeper than my confusion
for it brought with it memories of long ago.
And the first memories that came
were the first place we went to as a family:

Umzumbe on the South Coast,
tropical and lush
with pawpaw jungles
and muddy waters
and cowrie shells
and loving parents.

Now I sit here again after another, greater storm,
healed somewhat, and maybe near salvation,
content to enjoy another Cape Town summer
but restless in my heart,
dying to begin my next adventure.

Umzumbe

Sadness comes in a number of forms. I have known, for example, the sadness of the eternal loss of someone I never totally knew; I have known the sadness of the possibility of having found someone to love. And I have known, and know, the sadness of Nostalgia. If 100 Years of Solitude were arduous, 100 years of Nostalgia would cause me to lose it completely - only a handful have already sent me partially around the bend.

A lifetime ago, or so it seems, we sailed up a highway divided by an endless row of crimson-leaved bushes, until we mounted, finally, into heaven itself. My parents were so happy: they had just had me, their firstborn. And I was so happy: I had just been born. The world was the unknown, the nameless, the infinite. To be a witness to it was to experience the highest wonder.

Sometimes when I think of the place, and remember things about it, I am torn inside. Torn by the knowledge that that little slice of time, that pocket of eternity, is nothing more than a distant memory. And I cry inside, I weep with the thought. Because it seems so close still - I can still see it, I can still feel it, it is still within me. And maybe, in a way, it does still exist. An eternal little golden time. And I say to myself, when I think of that golden world, I say quietly, my God.

It is a holy land, it is my holy land. Nothing on Earth can surpass it. It is where I was born, it is where I will die, it is where I have always lived. I can never go back in a Toyota Corolla. It will never be 1993 again. But I can still go back. And I will. And it won't be long either. But the path there is more than a plane ticket, is more than a car journey. It is a lengthy process of getting ready to leave, possibly for good. But maybe I should take three weeks next year and go check it out. I might well learn something valuable.

Like I say, sometimes I can still feel it, can still see it. That feeling is more than just sight though - it is the memory of the feeling of being alive at the time. But even 'memory' distances me more than is the case. So I would rather just say: it is the feeling of being alive at that time. And when I have this feeling, it makes me desperately sad. Because, even though I feel it, I know simultaneously that it is a grain of time forever downstream, forever in a car that no longer exists, forever past bushes that are no longer there, down a road long changed, past a pawpaw tree in the salty sea night, down a path with drowsing child mind, on a shore with immaculate cowries now meaningless, or meaninglessly meaningful.

I used to know a certain river that sat in the mouth of the sea. It wound out of the heart of that coastal jungle, it was brown and not beautiful, it was gloomy and still and eked its way round a dark tunnel of grey and brown brack and seeped slowly down the sand. But I loved it, loved it for what it was, and because of the corner it turned to become a visible murky mouth - that corner held so much for me: it pulled me, called me, beckoned me saying "Come, little one, abandon yourself, follow the dark bank and see what's around me, see where I lead to, discover my secret passage."

There were other rivers. Others on that long beach: a trickle of water from a pipe coming from a gloomy, leaf-veiled Hotel (1980's, Rhodesia). And others in the region: when we journeyed to Umzumbe, along the coast, we would pass over great bridges above great teeming brown jungle waters swaggering their great stormy ways into the shell blanched salt white ocean, man. I remember some of the bridges had mud-made swallows nests under them. It is so crazy to think I haven't been back since we last went, when I was seven or eight. It makes me want to cry.

The other rivers I remember were along the little railway known as the Banana Express, a train you could take along the coast for the span of a couple of towns. The train ride was extremely lush: I was enthralled by fresh waters between the bank of the track and the jungle beyond - it was one

long stream. And there was something about this water, something I can only vicariously remember now, that was bliss itself.

So was the bridge we crossed on the train ride. We came into the very midst of the coastal jungle: through the trees I could see faintly the blue of the sea, could see Brazil and the Pacific and the entire world, knew all places and was the witness to all things, and then out of the trees we came, into an arboreal hallway: before us was the thin thin railway strung upon pillars emerging from warm brown jungle water down below, and I felt a surging exhilaration because I couldn't see the track I could only hear the clack clack clack and see the brown water, and I prayed and sang and flew and danced and cried for ten seconds and knew my whole life and exploded into joy forever.

And back home, in our dusty little sea cottage, where you still smelt the 70's, still lived in a forgotten era, still studied and was a hippie in Pietermaritzburg, smoked weed and listened to The Who and knew heaven, yes, smelt that and carried within you the youth and life of your Mother, and heard the wash of time and heard the train and was boundless and unknown, and saw perched against that old stove a great branch bunch of green bananas, and in that sight there was total joy, inexplicable now, total joy I say.

And whosoever pulleth from the stone the answer to this next mystery, the deepest of them all, let that person be known as they who have gone back to the very beginning. This is it: what was the meaning of two green dustbins (I can see them now), on either end of the strand? Why did they mean so much, why were they so significant? Particularly the one that stood at the end of the bay (though it felt like the end of the world): it was like a beacon, like a lighthouse. Mounted on rock, in the sturdy shape and form of those old cobbled postboxes outside of post offices, except it was as green as green paint, and taller. It stood, perhaps, for my days in eternity. It gave symbol to my wonder, blessing the region, singing in a reverent whisper:

"I am the beacon of time, the beacon of life. I am the feeling. Look to me for guidance, for comfort, for meaning. Look to me and remember these years of joy, know this lonely moment for what it is."

I built a sandcastle once that was immaculate. It was so good that the next day we found that crabs had taken up residency in it. It had turrets, and towers, and arches, and walkways, and star-spangled sea ornaments.

I remember standing in the shallow water with my dad, bent over, head close to the water, scanning the churning sand for cowrie shells as evening approached.

I remember a blocked drain, brown water in a square cement hole. And in that there was untold wonder. I remember an unbranded plastic bottle full of pink guava juice, which the gardener liked to swill.

I remember a road and a brick-making business and tree logging and frogs on giant spotlit green lilies at night singing, "Arm in arm, hand in hand, we all stand together, bom bom."

I remember on the side of the property lay India, lay more of those crimson-leafed bushes, lay strange whispers of another life, another time, another place. Lay untold experiences.

I remember Port Shepstone, buying hooks, lines, smelly bait and little grey sinkers. I remember an ice cream whose delicious colours were the flag of my world: red, white, lime green.

I remember the bamboo fishing rods my dad made for me and Terry. I caught fish both times, the second one was the size of a man's hand, it flipped and flapped and we put it in a bucket of water

and then threw it back.

I remember coming into Umzumbe around a traffic circle, opening my niknaks packet and hoping for green, orange or purple plastic coins, hoping for the glittering, shiny niknak man who was the very picture of brilliance.

I remember the garden, with its little terraces, with its velvety shrubs lightly dusted with damp sea sand. I remember my mother standing under the outside shower after a day at the beach. I remember the giant shell we found which played the song of the sea.

I remember the mystic tunnel at the bottom of the garden, leading through damp soil and wood. The fireflys on the other side, the peculiar feel of the dark sand. And the invisible immensity rumbling quietly before us, song of the eternal.



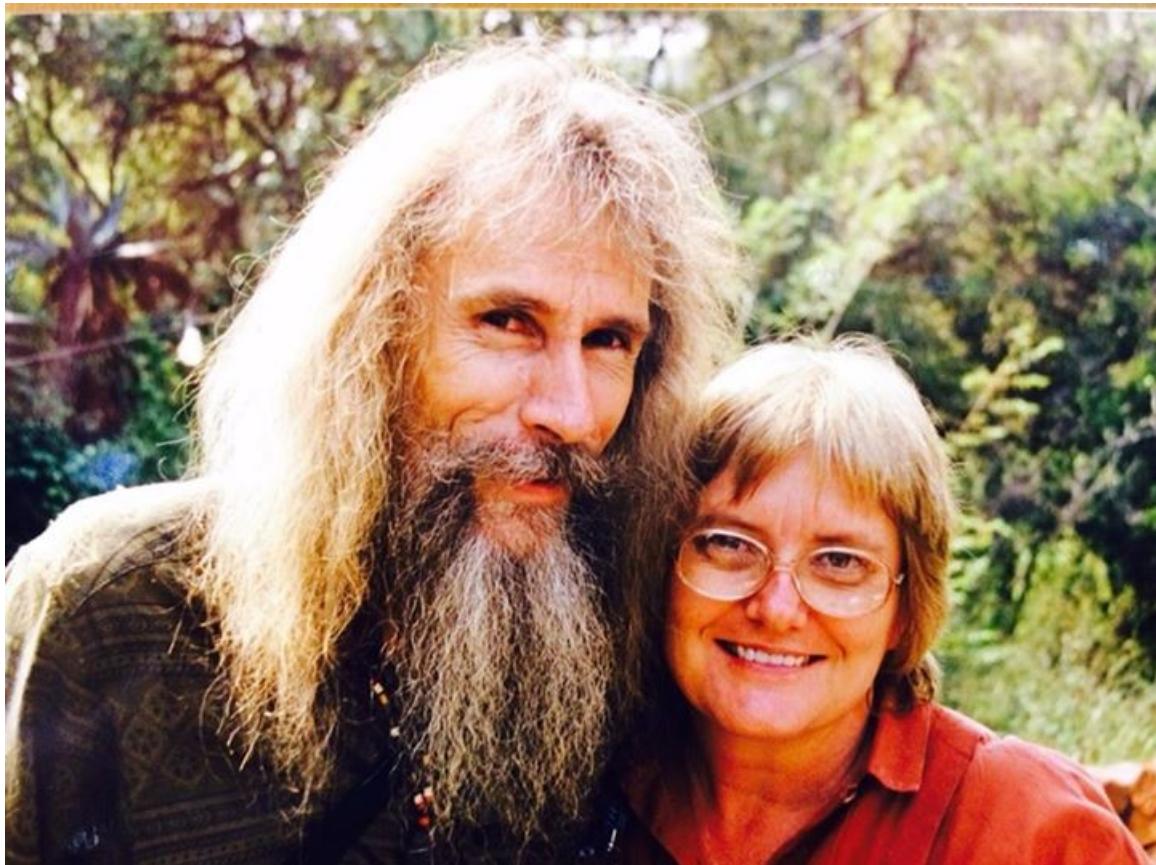
Umzumbe Seascape
By Frederik van Bart,
Watercolour on paper

“There is no other place I know
that is so heavy with atmosphere
so strangely and darkly impregnated with
that stuff of life that bears the authentic stamp
of South-Africa”

Herman Charles Bosman,
Marico Revisited

Sound Journey

Vibrational reawakening in a land before time



“Actually we are subverting music,” said Oom Egbert van Bart, philosopher and artist of the Groot Marico Bushveld. His friend, Grant, proceeded to demonstrate to me how to play a bushman mouth bow. That was on Egbert's stoep, at the Information Centre in the dorp of Groot Marico. The next morning, Egbert's wife, my aunt Santa, drove us down to Oom Jacques' guest farm in that part of the valley called River Still. And here, the magic continued on Jacques' stoep. And Egbert spoke as if out of the blue:

“I am no longer interested in knowledge. Knowledge is a burden.”

He said this as he handed me a joint, which Oom Jacques had composed.

“I am only interested in revelations.”

“What kind of revelations?” I asked, concealing the doubt in my voice.

“Anything. It can be anything at all. Just being polite to a fly...”

He continued: “And these revelations are really not things you need to remember. Because Now is the only moment that exists.”

With these words, he and Jacques got up from their seats, quite casually, Jacques disappearing into the house and Egbert picking up a peculiar bamboo bow instrument he had made, apparently also in the bushman style, and moving out in front and just next to a tree, where he began to play, appearing to resonate with his mouth at the top of the bow while hitting the string rhythmically with a stick. The result was a beat and a twangy digeridoo-like vibration.

At first things appeared unremarkable: no magic wand, just a man under a tree, with a faint stick instrument. There he stood, the person whole enough to have always understood my *good*

questions; a man whose presence conveys the profundity of undivided *being* - but in all my young years I had still not quite understood those visions and feelings I had long since intimated about him and the magic life he has journeyed through. Now, as time and space were reconciled, I began to see for myself why he is known as 'The seer of the Groot Marico.'

What happened, in a nutshell, is that Egbert, and then Jacques joining him minutes later, took me, eyes willingly closed, head swaying in trance, mouth periodically bursting with hoots of joy, on a shamanic Sound Journey whose chief revelatory character was the way in which the forces of the physical world were summoned by the music and happily aided and abetted the quality of the performance in the most artful and ingenious ways: the sudden coming-to-life of an up-until-then dormant wind chime moments after Egbert began to play; the accidental 'ping' and 'bong' of Aunt Santie knocking a pot during her cooking across the counter; the casual ringing whip of a dog's tail against a copper vase on the table; and finally, the hilariously discordant sound of splashing water — dog drinking hungrily from a bowl behind me.

"Incredible", I said to Egbert after their first duet with the bows was over. "It's as if you summoned that wind chime."

"That's right," said Egbert appreciatively. "He's a very cheerful fellow..."

I burst out laughing in appreciation of his appreciation.

"Ja," he continued deeply, "There are many winds in this place. And they all live here."

Again I struggled to contain my ecstasy. For my part, I will say that I was an extremely appreciative audience of one. It even occurred to me at one point that I was yet another instrument that they were playing, and that the better they played me, the better I played them, and so on back and forth. When the music was over I took a walk out into the bush.

"What did you see," asked Egbert when I returned not too long after.

"I saw my future," I said, only half joking.

I thought for a few minutes. "I also saw my human frailty," I said.

"Ja Etienne," he said, and his voice was full of an uncle's knowing. "The trees are very aware, yes. And they are very humble. Because they are rooted in the humus."

I was quietly startled: he had read into the essence of what I had felt.

I looked at his wizened face, with its manifold crow's feet, the brown eyes, the wizard eyebrows, the stone-axe bone structure. Where was room for disbelief now?

"Ek ken die idée van die Eternal Present," I had said to Egbert after his and Jacques' second duet with the bows, "Maar ek weet nie hoe om dit binne te kom sonder plante nie."

By 'Eternal Present' I had meant the sort of mystical experience of reality one has under the plants of *seeing*.

"You don't necessarily need plants," he rejoined in my home language. "Just being aware of your breathing can be enough. Because your breathing is always in the present."

Later, during a second walk into the bushveld, I flowed, still very baked, through thoughts of coming to the Marico for a year or more, to learn from my uncle the path of present awareness and bushveld mysticism.

The next day I was back at River Still to help Auntie Santa (pronounced *sun-ta*) with cooking. When Jacques offered me his joint I decided, based on my belief in the acceptance of *what is*, and the fact of my being, after all, on holiday — why not?

Moments later, as the silence began to descend, I heard once again the bamboo knocking of the 'cheery windchime' whose voice had, the day before, similarly signaled my entry into shamanic awareness. I shook my head, smiled and rolled my eyes with believing disbelief.

“It’s a question of lifestyle.” — Egbert

Being back here in the Marico, after more than a decade, is a gratifying experience. The rural backwater world, still clinging to life at the beginning of the 21st Century, is the song of my youth and the substrate of my soul. Here in the Marico it is still preserved — Setswana women carrying bundles of wood, the old train tracks, the dust roads, the peace and tranquility. And of course, above and behind it all, the deep, vibrant and largely undisturbed presence of nature.

I spoke to Egbert just now about why children learn languages more easily than adults. He has offered me a beautiful answer. He says that a child *lives in sound* in a much more direct way than adults do.

The fallacy of linguistic theories of early childhood, it seemed to me then, is that they attempt to find reasons for what is — if we cast ourselves back — a transcendental experience of the world. The Eden of early childhood is a mystical state.

“So in fact there is no theory,” I offered enthusiastically. “There can’t be one.”

“Ja...” agreed Egbert, seeing my point. “If you want to put it that way, at the crux of it, there isn’t.” “That is what we are trying to do with our Sound Journeys,” he had said a little earlier, when we were talking about the directness of sound in a child’s world. “It is a deep listening.”

He had also said:

“Linguists say that animals can’t speak language. But I do not agree. The bushmen say that animals can understand what they are saying, and that they can understand the animals.”

Polly, Egbert and Santa’s African Grey Parrot (Aged 22) was in his cage just behind where I was sitting. Earlier that evening, I had started asking Santa whether it was right that scientists manipulate the chemistry of fruit and veg in order to ‘improve’ it.

“Nee,” interrupted Polly, before I had even gotten halfway.

One evening, towards the end of my stay in Marico, Santie began to tell me some of the history of her and Egbert’s time in the area. What emerged was a remarkable story of organic community upliftment under the industrious care of a deeply compassionate woman and the stoic presence of a profoundly sensitive, spiritual man.

Four years ago, in a restaurant in Grahamstown, not long after my mother’s passing, Egbert looked at me with bright amber eyes and said:

“Find the Eternal Present.”

I haven’t stopped considering that enigmatic injunction since, and I’ve tried my best to honour his advice.

Not only are the chickens in the rustic yards of the Marico free range; not only is the milk, the produce, the tomato sauce, the water, the air, the livestock, the music, the people — so is the consciousness.

Since arriving back in Cape Town, adorned at the airport with a queer bamboo bow instrument and curiously wearing a traditional baSotho hat, I have been kindled with inspiration on two different but equally wonderful fronts. The first was more immediate to me: I was totally inspired — and empowered by my sonic experiences up north — to begin my own sound journeys here in the mother city, alone and perhaps, if I am so fortunate, with friends. In fact, an experience I had with a Djembe was so transcendental that I have since procured a musical item I have for a long time quietly desired — that pair of Indian drums known as Tabla.

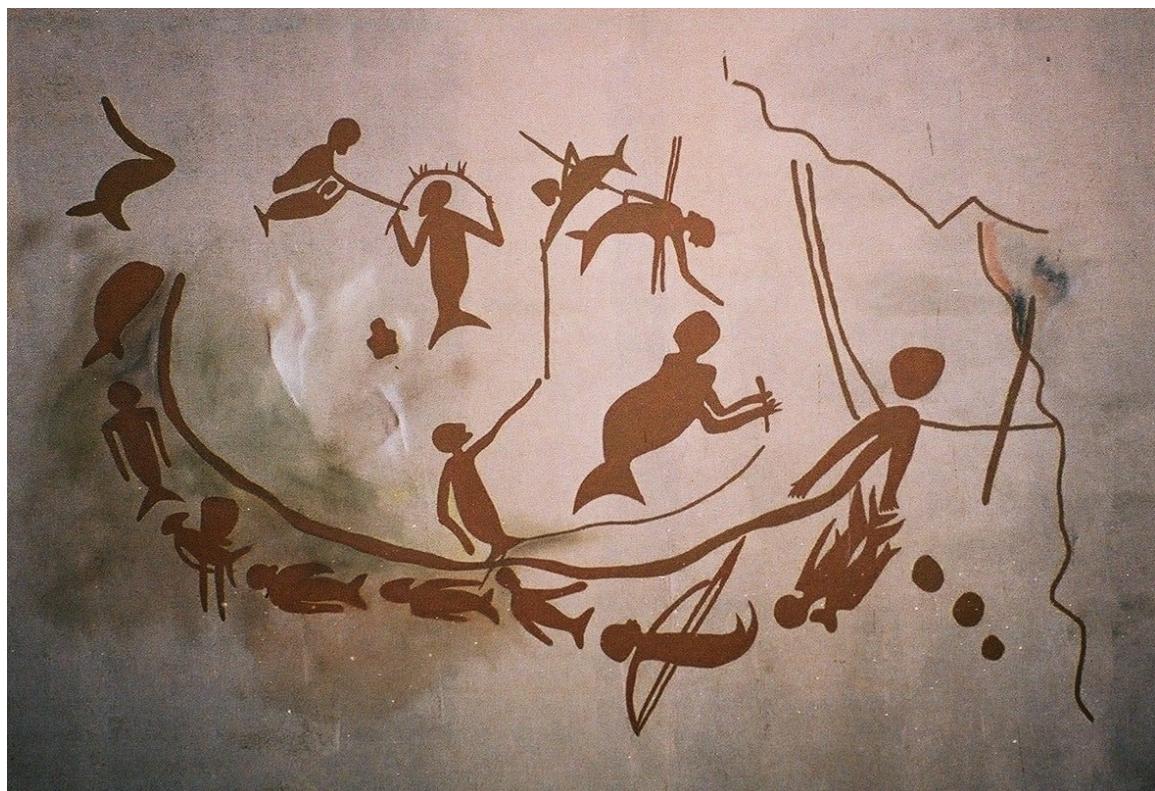
The other fount of newfound inspiration was even more subtle, and its effects and resonances have only dawned on me more recently. The fount of which I speak is a gift, effectively: not only did Egbert give me a bushman bow he had hand-made, that we may ‘keep in touch with one another’ — it is clear to me now that he has given me also the effulgence of his quietly humble yet bowstring strong, wholly authentic Presence.

And it was no surprise — but no mere observance either — to find, when searching for the meaning of people’s names on the web, that his name means *Bright Edge*.

Reading List (as suggested by Egbert) for people interested in —

a) Bushman culture and way of life:

1. The Harmless People, by Elizabeth Marshall Thomas
 2. The Lost World of the Kalahari and The Heart of the Hunter, by Laurens van Der Post
 3. The Bushman Winter has come, by Paul John Myburgh
- b) Emotional & physical integration and Present Moment Awareness:**
The Presence Process, by Michael Brown



Reproduction of a San rock painting, on a wall in Oom Jaques' living room, Riverstill.

Riverstill by day — an Ode (of sorts)

by Egbert van Bart

Summertime after the rain

and when we go up the mountainside early

in the morning to collect

wild herbs —

why — while crossing

the chorus of the water-course —

should this moment choose

to remind one of a Tang

poem (by Jya Dau) : Visiting a

recluse and his servant observing:

“the master has gone up the

mountain herbgathering — all alone

cloud-hidden ...

whereabouts unknown.”

Are these footprints in

the damp rich ochres of the earth

these myriad-leaved trees

dancing — collecting and dispersing

early-morning breezes — and grasses

waving flowering tufts like banners

aloft in the sky —

the shy little flowers revelling

in their pulchritude-pulsing revelation —

Are these

insects that materialize everywhere suspended

on their strands of music hailing from

every which way —

and elusive bird-song — always that —

those rocks and pebbles rhythmically reinforcing
concrete physical impressions —

Are these perhaps
the landscape's escape into
petrifying pulsing resonances
embodying a vast symphony
of day and light and playful laughter —
playing at hide-and-seek ?

Are we out gathering wild

herbs or are we
entranced wanderers on
a voyage of wool-gathering
growing more and more
absent-minded every moment ?

No matter
never mind my asking
when the voyage ultimately voids itself
into losing our way —
this is forever how we are invited into
the living-room of creation's
guesthouse —

this must be the heart of the
matter after all —
and we breath-takingly catching
ourselves playing and playing attention.

But on the way down the
mountain another quotation echoing —
reaching out from ancestral recesses —
my mother recalling what old
ta Hester Gronum had once proclaimed: "Marico

is the flower-garden of the Transvaal."

During our descent getting
glimpses of monumental cloud-shapes
building up shifting sky-scapes.

Then back at the Well again — visitors
keep turning up lastly
the excessive one we usually only
refer to obliquely — whip-cracking
flashing eyes — talking in a mighty roar —
the face one cannot avoid seeing everywhere
yet find so hard to recall afterwards
fearful vortex of river and sky and sound
in a singular downpour —
and it is After the End of the World —
and this is how creation is born
from moment to moment — anew.

Groot Marico

January 31, 2015

Die Veelervore Man

*By Frederik van Bart; excerpted translation of the opening verses of Homer's *Odyssey* from the Ancient Greek, into Afrikaans.*

Vertel my, o Muse, van die veelervore man wat ver en wyd moes omdwaal,

nadat hy die heilig vesting van Troje verwoes het.

En baie mense se stede het hy gesien, en hulle denke leer ken,

maar baie was ook die smarte wat hy in sy eie hart ter see gely het

in sy pogings om sy eie lewe te behou en sy metgeselle tuis te bring.

Maar selfs daarmee het hy sy makers nie gered nie, al was dit sy streve:

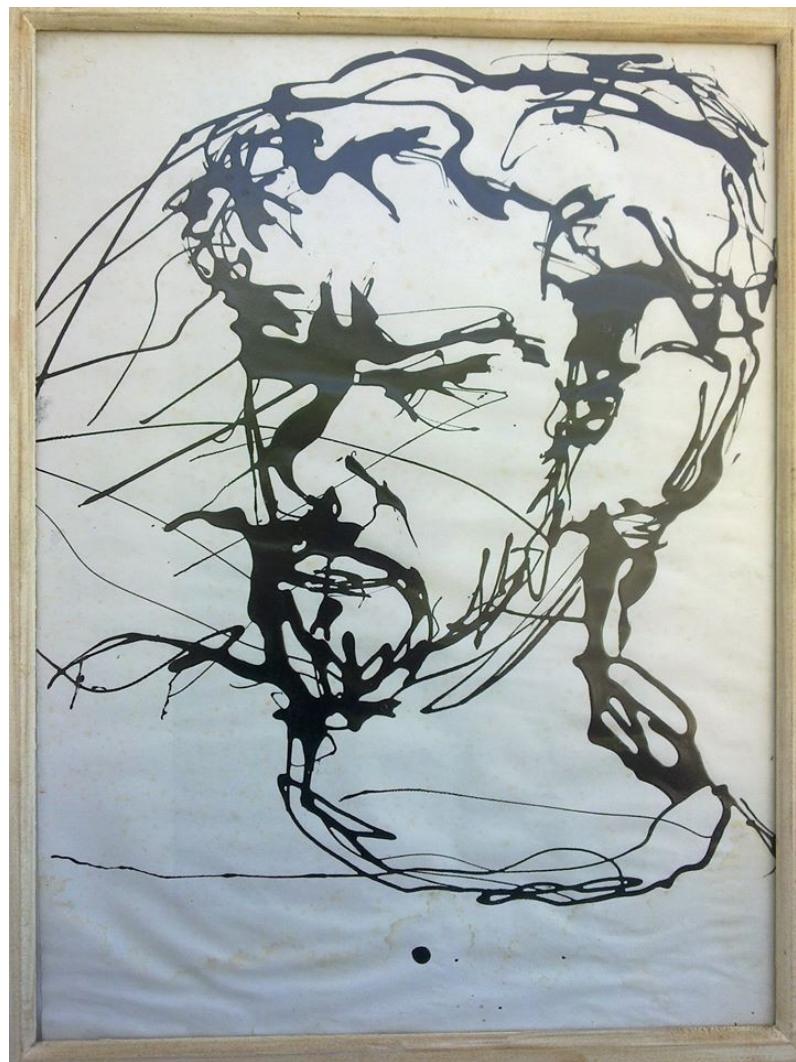
deur hulle eie, eiesinnige hovaardigheid het hulle omgekom,

die kinderagtiges, wat die songod, Huperion, se koeie wou opeet.

Ja, hy het hulle die dag van terugkeer ontneem.

Begin tog êrens in hierdie verhaal, o Godin, Dogter van Zeus, en

vertel dit aan ons ook.



“Odysseus”

Portrait of Frederik van Bart, by Etienne van Bart (then aged 13)
Enamel (dripped) on paper with a stick

Another day in Paradox

It was a balmy late morning, as I swung my Volkswagen into the parking lot just across the road from where I take the University bus to campus. Even then, the day had something cinematic, or otherworldly, in the way the afternoon light (now it feels it was afternoon) was so golden upon the trees swaying in a perfect, warm breeze. But for some reason - a car approached, I vacillated - I decided to turn 180 degrees around the first of a row of trees, and park further on. Now my car was as tall as a bus, and I turned to park in a wobble of care and focus. I knew that my great friend Jacob was nearby.

Outside, Mamateo was apologizing for being slightly late (or doing so in advance, perhaps), explaining that he had been watering/planting his peppadews beforehand. In front of me, I saw a row of peppadew plants, and, inspired, considered the possibility of planting other items that could be used for our culinary purposes. I then met up with Jacob and we began to speak.

Now the carpark was an old car's park — that is, it was now a scrapmetal park with rusted, banged up vehicles lying here and there, and piled up on one another, with that row of peppadews now behind me as I walked and talked, and clambered up onto a bonnet, telling Jacob of a phrase my boss had used which had taken my fancy: "Another day in Paradox." I explained that when my boss told me the phrase and saw my reaction of enjoyment, he didn't smile modestly at his joke, or proudly; rather, he smiled *wryly*. Jacob agreed that this was significant.

In this same parking lot, minutes or years later, I was beckoned over by Jacob, now on the other end of the lot, standing with his sister Katrine. He enthusiastically began to explain the origins of the structure he and his sister were standing on: a building - an open, roofless mass comprising two wings (upon which stood either of the siblings) and in the middle, at the back, the backdrop of a mountain like those alpine, peaky ones you see if you look across Bellville towards Stellenbosch. The architect, Jacob explained, had been a lesser-known Cape-Dutch innovator. Jacob motioned to the mountain, explaining that this house (of theirs) had been built on and around this mountain, and that below him (between the two wings or shall we rather say curved arms of the house-mountain), was a cavity leading to the interior of the house. The architect's story, said Jacob, was chronicled in a well-known adventure book he (the architect) had written, whose title and fame I recognized.

Now I was underground, in an Eastern-European situation: A dark-haired peasant, let us call him Uri, stood before a pond, condemned to die by a crowd of people looking on from all sides. Uri waded in, but his movements were not those of a forlorn fated, but of someone experiencing a revelation: it was a joyous wade, his arms swinging gracefully as he splashed slowly and reverently in a wide circle, and then, submerged himself completely. The gun he held he did not use; rather, he took the bullet he was biting on and miraculously cut it into three. Emerging from the water, he slowly and methodically made his way towards the large house which was the source of all the people gathered there. And each conservative face could only watch with mute resignation as he slowly and watchfully made his way through the narrow front hall, up three steps, passing a man to his left whose wordless comment was at once both totally pragmatic and unattached — (it was the dreamer's father) — alluding to Uri's purpose then and there: to retrieve his captive son from upstairs.

Uri made his way upstairs, having silently asked a bystander which room the boy was in. And when Uri entered, he noticed before anything else as he moved carefully into the room, a note on a drawing table with a built-in mirror. The note, which was from the daughter of the dreamer's father, read:

Dear Diary,

I am OK!

The Korean boy

Who I was supposed to see today

Is playing hard to get.

But I am not worried, or sad:

I know he will turn up,

Before long.