

The Game of the Heart



A play by Milton Schorr

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Milton Schorr

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THE GAME OF THE HEART

by Milton Schorr

CHARACTERS:

CLOVIS CRABLY: An ancient hunchbacked Alchemist and Butler.

JAPIE GREYLING: A nineteen year old boy who has run away from his home.

MASKED FIGURE: Clovis' demon companion.

WRITER'S NOTE

The action of the play takes place over one weekend,
beginning on a Friday evening and ending on a Sunday morning.





Lights up to reveal a kitchen table and two chairs. The table is draped with a table cloth that reaches all the way to the ground. SR of the table there is a small kitchen cabinet, that is two cupboards and two drawers. SL of the table there is a staircase ending abruptly on the fourth step. The set is the interior of a Karoo farm house, and needs to be styled as such.

The growing light reveals CLOVIS standing behind the kitchen table. He has thick white foundation make-up on, crossed with dark black lines around the mouth and eyes. His make-up is in the style of grave make-up as worn by Nordic Black Metal bands. He is dressed in a suit and tails. He is a Butler. H, his coat and shirt are tailored to allow for a huge hump on his back, as if he is a hunchback.

He has a large tree branch in his hands. He places the branch on the table and then dips his fingers in a small potjiekos pot filled with a thick red potion. He begins to paint markings on the branch with his fingers. As he does he chants, it sounds like a spell in an ancient language.

When he is satisfied he reaches down beneath the table and pulls out a chainsaw. He holds it aloft for a moment, seeming to relish his powerful position over the branch. He takes a hold of the ignition cord of the chainsaw, just about to start it, when JAPIE appears at his window.

JAPIE is a nineteen year old boy who has run away from his home in the Parow. He is very bedraggled. His clothes are ripped and he is smeared in dirt. JAPIE is extremely tired and hungry. He has been lost in the Karoo for many days and has begun to hallucinate, believing the moon to be stalking him.

CLOVIS quickly hides behind the table as JAPIE enters by climbing through the window.

JAPIE walks backward into the house, watching the moon out of the window. CLOVIS watches him coming, till he jumps up screaming. JAPIE screams in return.

JAPIE:

Ek wil jou nie seermaak nie! I don't want to hurt you! I was running away from the moon. Ek is jammer om so in jou huis in te kom. I will go menheer.

JAPIE begins to leave. Clovis pulls at the cord of the chainsaw, turning the motor over.

JAPIE stops dead.

JAPIE:

I've been wandering through the veld. I got lost. I didn't mean to. I'm sorry menheer.

CLOVIS remains silent.

JAPIE: I, I come from the stad.

CLOVIS: The what?

CLOVIS turns the motor over again.

JAPIE: The stad, the City, from Parow.

Silence.

CLOVIS: Why are you here?

JAPIE: Desperate) I am but a lonely wanderer, I —

CLOVIS: Turn around.

JAPIE turns in a circle, showing CLOVIS that he is unarmed.

CLOVIS: What did you think of all the bushes outside?

JAPIE: I don't know Menheer. They're prickly, a bit dry...

CLOVIS: But you don't think they're wrong?

JAPIE: No.

Pause.

CLOVIS: Can I ask you a question?

JAPIE: Um, yes?

CLOVIS: If you were me, what would you do with you?

JAPIE:

I would stop playing around and drink wine, treat me like a human being and tell me what's on your mind, or at least have a drink for warmth.

Pause.

CLOVIS:

Forgive me, I am a lonely servant. Of course, let us drink wine.

CLOVIS bows down to JAPIE. He then straightens and stares at JAPIE, causing JAPIE to get an eerie feeling.

JAPIE: I think that I should go.

CLOVIS:

No, no, I'm sorry. Please. Stay. We can drink wine and talk about this phobia of yours.

JAPIE: I don't know

CLOVIS:

Please, I insist. Pour some wine. (CLOVIS puts the chainsaw away). Oh my heart, I was so afraid. Pour, pour more, for me and for yourself. Clovis Crably is the name. (He offers his hand). You are?

JAPIE: Japie Greyling.

CLOVIS: Welcome to my home. Rest easy, you're safe here.

They toast each other, then watch each other intently. CLOVIS takes a sip, then JAPIE takes a sip, then CLOVIS has more, until together they down their glasses. CLOVIS pours them each another. They drink in silence for a moment.

JAPIE: I really wasn't joking about the moon.

CLOVIS: Uh?

JAPIE:

Yes. Something vreemd happened when I was wandering outside.

CLOVIS: What?

JAPIE:

I saw die maan, the moon come up, huge, like a blinding eye, it felt like it would burn or crash into the earth, so bright -

CLOVIS: Oh yes, the veld is so open. Illusions. Fears.

JAPIE:

Yes, but, I was alone and I thought that the moon was watching me.

CLOVIS: The fear!

JAPIE:

But then suddenly, it was like time stood still, everything seemed to click, and then the ground was full of wit ligte. White lights. I reached down and picked up a piece of bone, the tiny skull of an animal.

CLOVIS:

Yes! I have seen it too. It is a moment of denflerity, when the angles align so that the beams of the moon fill the earth with light.

JAPIE: Its weird!

CLOVIS:

Yes, but it's not bones. Of course you may have seen a bone, nature is savage, but mainly it's seashells.

JAPIE: Seashells?

CLOVIS:

This land was once a great sea, where we stand huge pleceosaurs would swim in the inky gloom, their teeth mad, billions of shell creatures clicking on this very bottom.

JAPIE:

And the tjanking of the dog? I heard a dog, it was almost screaming.

CLOVIS: Merely the wind. I assure you. I own no dog.

JAPIE:

Ek sien menheer. This land used to be covered by a vast sea.

Pause

CLOVIS: Are you a farm killer?

JAPIE: Wat?

CLOVIS: Why have you come here?

CLOVIS moves towards him, clutching at JAPIE's clothes as if terribly afraid.

JAPIE: Luister -

JAPIE tries to leave.

CLOVIS: Please!

JAPIE stops.

CLOVIS:

I am sorry. I am an old man. I've never been to the city, to the Parow. I'm sorry. I am not a well educated man.

JAPIE: School intelligence is not the only kind of intelligence.

CLOVIS:

Yes, perhaps that is true. I remember the day that I had to leave my school in order to take up my vocation, my job. Later I would go and watch them learning about the wide world beyond the town. The young teacher would cause visions in their heads, making them to laugh and clutch pencils, carving the wood of their desks, as my little face, also young, mind, watched them through their window.

Their teacher did see me watching them once. A woman like Spring. She was feeling for something on her table when suddenly she focused on me.

It must have been like all of a sudden seeing a chameleon in a tree, I did change colour let me tell you! She smiled at me, like to say that she would make a special effort, because I knew all the town had heard of the story of the little boy who was to become the butler up at the big house. Then the children saw me and they began to laugh, screaming from their sweet faces, snarling and yapping like dogs. Again I see the young teacher, I see her eye, looking at me, wince, it is wet. She begins to hit the nearest child with a heavy ruler. I ran away and held to a tree while I did cry and cry, rubbing my swollen face against its bark, grit coming into my eyes, the skin becoming sc-r-a-t-ch-d. The tree was huge, alive and silent, it was sharing my pain with me. I peeled away a piece of its bark, and there I found a small white gecko, a tiny thing.

CLOVIS begins to sing in a high, sweet voice.

Teacher teacher bright and sweet,

Please for me a thing to eat?

Pictures papers words and deeds,

Flowers, criminals painted away

JAPIE: That is unlucky.

CLOVIS: Yes. Friend.

JAPIE is now quite drunk.

JAPIE:

This house is very large. It must have at least thirteen rooms upstairs and down.

CLOVIS:

That is right. There is also a greenhouse, attic, and basement. As well as the servants' quarters.

JAPIE:

That is impressive. Are you alone here? I did not notice any other occupants.

CLOVIS:

(smiles) Japie. At first when I saw you I wanted to kill you. I was angry and upset and perhaps I would have acted a little rashly. Now that we have spoken a little I find that I like you.

JAPIE:

I am glad that you have said what you did say Clovis because I also feel like that. After you told me the story about the woman at the school and how you sensed in the tree 'n taai en simpatieke gees I felt as if there was a bond between us. A warm feeling between men that is not homosexual.

CLOVIS: It is late Japie. I have made up a bed for you.

CLOVIS unfolds a sleeping bag. He then goes over to JAPIE and picks him up, taking him to bed. He is mumbling as CLOVIS places him gently down.

CLOVIS:

I trust you will sleep sound and may the fairies of the night bring only sweetness to your brow. Sleeptight. Goodnight.

JAPIE: Goodnight Clovis.

CLOVIS speaks to JAPIE's sleeping form.

CLOVIS:

So, finally you have come, Greyling. It is as the prophecy foretold. I wish you chuckling squirrels who chew on fat nuts with bulging cheeks and tiny perfect hands that have no wrists. (Has a sip of wine) Hmm... delicious.

CLOVIS arranges JAPIE's sleeping limbs, feels his gentle breath upon his hand.

CLOVIS:

Sleep tender, young Japie, sleep still and cuddly safe in the womb of this house of the country that is our home. Shall I tell you a story? Once upon a —

A blast of music, a slow deep note. Clovis reacts as if there is someone else in the room with him. He interacts with the person that isn't there. The words of MASKED FIGURE can't be heard, Clovis hears them in his mind.

CLOVIS: If only death would come.

MASKED FIGURE: It's getting late.

CLOVIS: That boy just wouldn't leave it alone.

MASKED FIGURE: The moon will soon rise.

CLOVIS: 50 years it's been.

MASKED FIGURE: The plants grow always.

CLOVIS: And where is he now?

MASKED FIGURE: Sailing the seven seas I expect.

CLOVIS: Burning in hell more likely.

MASKED FIGURE: Shattered back.

CLOVIS: We have to pay the bills.

MASKED FIGURE: Its not right.

CLOVIS: He just wouldn't leave it alone. 50 years it's been.

MASKED FIGURE: What do you think?

CLOVIS: I miss him.

MASKED FIGURE: I remember a story about a dove.

CLOVIS: What kind of dove?

MASKED FIGURE: A beautiful dove.

CLOVIS:

I knew that dove. I tried to catch it with some bread crumbs, an empty ice-cream bakkie, a stick and some string. That is where it started. It ended when I aimed at a seagull. The bird merely crumpled and lay there screaming while all the rest flew away. I ran to get a knife to cut its throat because I couldn't stand that the bird felt pain. My guilt was intense. But I was also a little glad that the only knife that I could find was a blunt one.

Steam begins to rise from behind the table.

MASKED FIGURE:

The stomach of the dog was panting. Its tongue was hanging fat and wet from its blackened mouth.

CLOVIS: I want to know what is going on here.

MASKED FIGURE: You know full well. He got away.

CLOVIS:

It almost felt like the trust never died. It was wavering. It was decreasing. But there was always some hope.

The MASKED FIGURE arises from beneath and behind the table carrying two cups of steaming coffee. It gives them to CLOVIS, when doing so it can be seen to whisper something in his ear. It then retreats to back beneath the table.

CLOVIS stands still and alone as light strengthens, with it can be heard the sounds of birds.

CLOVIS:

(Whispers, checking to see if JAPIE is awake) Japie! Japie! (He walks over to the window next to JAPIE) A snake is basically one long spine.

The world is filled with wonder Japie, if you look you will find. Perhaps I will tell you more tomorrow. Perhaps tomorrow we will discover many things, perhaps you will stay with me this weekend.

JAPIE screams in his sleep. He is having a terrible nightmare.

CLOVIS: Shhhh. Shhhh.

CLOVIS soothes Japie without touching him. He makes a gesture in the air which instantly calms him, as well as brings him slowly and gently to wakefulness.

CLOVIS: Ah! You're up. Did you sleep well?

CLOVIS hands JAPIE one of the steaming cups.

JAPIE: Ja meneer. And thank you.

CLOVIS: Did you dream of far off places?

JAPIE:

Actually no. I slept soundly but strangely, as if I truly was taking a ruskansie from the world.

CLOVIS: That is wonderful.

JAPIE:

Yes. And strange. I do not often feel so rested. Ah the drink tastes of beauty!

CLOVIS: Yes, this house is full of therapy.

JAPIE:

Just look outside, it is the moment before we see the sun. I remember that time from my bedroom in The Parow.

CLOVIS:

Yes, their evening stains our sky. Nothing is certain. We're on our own for now.

JAPIE:

Sometimes I open my eyes and wonder what new thing I will see. What unknown thing the day will bring.

CLOVIS: Watse avonture 'n man sal ontmoet.

JAPIE:

Watse sensasies en illuminasies jy sal kry as jy net jou oe oopmaak en die arms en bene uitsteek asof jy net nie vokken genoeg kon kry nie!

CLOVIS:

Sometimes I'm so excited that I just move because I enjoy to do it. It is great and nice and fuckin cool. Could I show you one of my most special treasures?

JAPIE: I would feel honoured Mr. Crably.

CLOVIS: Just wait here while I retrieve it.

JAPIE: Ja menheer!

CLOVIS picks up the dead match of the candle lighting, and shows it to JAPIE.

CLOVIS: This is almost, but not quite, my most perfect joy.

JAPIE: It is lovely.

CLOVIS: Isn't it?

JAPIE: I like the way it moves.

CLOVIS: Yes. The best things in life are simple.

JAPIE: Could I hold it?

CLOVIS: Ooh, be very careful.

(CLOVIS gives it to him)

JAPIE: Wow. That is special. Mr Crably?

Japie speaks as if he is in a trance, simply at peace, not possessed.

CLOVIS: Yes Mr Greyling?

JAPIE:

It almost felt like the trust never died, it was wavering, it was decreasing, but there was always some hope.

CLOVIS:

What was that?

During the following CLOVIS is trying to take his treasure back, but JAPIE, seemingly not noticing, keeps it from him, creating a dance of desperation.

JAPIE:

Nou onthou ek! Jirre! I just remembered. Last night I dreamed of a girl who was caught in some family drama. Stabbed by her sister. Again and again. But I could feel that the trust never died. And somehow also there was a baby swimming in a pond. The crawl and borsstroke. It was strange. Vreemed. Vreemd. The baby seemed to be happy. Laughing and smiling but slowly the water turned to black. It was like many layers of horror.

JAPIE gives him his treasure.

CLOVIS: And you're certain it was a dream?

JAPIE: Blatjang!

CLOVIS:

Japie, last night you asked me if I am alone here. I would like to answer your question, but know this: There are many things here of which you do not know. Suffice to say that there is a strangeness that holds us tightly.

One day perhaps very soon you shall know the truth but for now you must trust me. All will be revealed in good time. Perhaps even sooner than we both think. But we shall not speak of these things now. We cannot. The chirping of the morning does not permit it. But before we leave this train for the hilarity of the day let me ask you this. What do you know of trees?

CLOVIS takes a mini Hi-Fi from beneath the table and turns it on. Modern, hard, dark club music begins to play. CLOVIS begins to dance, JAPIE is flabbergasted.

CLOVIS:

Have you ever seen a movie called The Cell? With Jennifer Lopez and the other guy.

JAPIE: The killer or the cop?

CLOVIS: The killer, he was the fat one in full metal jacket.

JAPIE:

Oh ja ja. (JAPIE begins to dance) I never remember his name but I always wanted to because he's so foking good.

CLOVIS: Precisely.

JAPIE: I can't believe that you have this music!

CLOVIS:

It's an old friends, but I like it. (They go into a routine) It is always so surprising how these things happen.

JAPIE: Ja! It is like wow!

CLOVIS:

Do you remember those times when it was different? I mean times when you could actually say 'yes I remember those times'?

JAPIE:

Yes. What I like about that is that you can have fun again and again.

CLOVIS: (Laughs). I like you Japie!

JAPIE breaks into a dance solo, becoming more and more frenzied until he is writhing on the floor. CLOVIS too gets completely carried away and begins to tickle him with his cane.

CLOVIS: Go Japie!

They both take a moment to calm down.

CLOVIS:

My, I am hungry. I just realised! (Switches off tape recorder) You must be starving. I'll wager that all you've had to eat in the past days is some herbs, a stick or two. Am I right? Eh?

JAPIE: Yes well...

CLOVIS: Say no more my skinny friend!

JAPIE: Ja, I mean -

CLOVIS:

I apologise Mr Greyling, I see a stranger and I just want to drink, you know? You should have said something! (smiles beautifully)

JAPIE: Its okay, really, I don't eat much.

CLOVIS: Well now we shall feast! Have you seen Hook?

JAPIE: With Robin Williams?

CLOVIS: Ja.

JAPIE: Yes.

CLOVIS: Do you remember when they pretended that there was food to try and stimulate the imagination of Pan?

JAPIE: Ja. There was rough bowls and clouds of steam.

CLOVIS: How did those little wankers know how to cook?

JAPIE:

Presies! And the way their fet little sweaty hands scrabbled at the bowls like terrible bugs.

CLOVIS:

It was so sick I got completely into it. When that fat black child ate the big sandwich.

JAPIE:

It was like in the escape from absolom when the fat man got left behind by the chopper and you fuckin know that now the cannibals are gonna vreet him. I so badly wanted them to slit his fat double chin open.

CLOVIS:

It was so white pink and wobbly that you could just feel the cut and his fat dripping out and his beady little pig eyes darting all over the show. I really badly wanted that to happen.

JAPIE:

I wanted to do it myself.

CLOVIS begins to pretend to eat from a feast at the table. JAPIE looks on at him uncertainly, but finally, encouraged by CLOVIS' enjoyment of the food, JAPIE begins to eat imaginary food too. They eat as they talk.

CLOVIS:

The sins of the fathers will be visited upon the sons in bright flashing colours of black and grey. In lines upon the face and in expensive suits which buckle a man till he creeps along the floor like a spider. Like a bent and buckled spider.

JAPIE:

That is perhaps a little excessive meneer. It is my experience that it is not the suit but rather the actual material that causes the bones and joints to deform.

CLOVIS:

Fine. Fine. But what about the height of the ceilings in here? What do you make of that? The distance. It's obscene.

JAPIE:

Nou daar moet ek saamstem meneer. Veral as alles splinternuut is.

CLOVIS: Presies.

JAPIE:

Ja Nee. Maar meneer, wat ek in die bos geleer het is man kan net nie so aangaan nie. One dag I was walking then I came upon a tshongolola.

CLOVIS: What is a tshongolola?

JAPIE:

It is a great fat black worm with many legs. Its skin is hard and gesegmenteer so that it is like some kind of nightmare. But I is big even then I felt a shiver because of so many legs moving from one brain only. I sit on a klip and hold the tshongolola on my plat hand. For a long time we sit and then I hear and see many things. Bugs crawling through leafy litter. A snake asleep upon a sun baked rock. Dit was mooi and then a buck did walk along in die middel van die dag! I sat for long and when I looked again at my hand the tshongolola was gone.

CLOVIS:

Japie. That was absolutely beautiful. I can't tell you how much the thing of which you just spoke touched me.

(pause)

JAPIE: Pass the gravy!

CLOVIS: And perhaps its time for some wine!

JAPIE: Nee Dankie. The kos is good.

CLOVIS: I'm glad you're enjoying it.

JAPIE:

Ja. In the stad the bread was thin and butter called margarine. Not like here.

CLOVIS:

Yes Japie. Here in the heart of the land we have made a better life for ourselves. We country folk are stout of heart and thick of limb. We don't take shit Japster. It's not our style.

JAPIE:

I like the way you talk. You have confidence ek kan sien. It is like you know who you are and are prepared to die for what you believe in.

CLOVIS:

Yes. (CLOVIS pulls out a mimed cigar box, they smoke in rhythm, their cigars huge) The country is full of surprises. Here we look after our own. Its called heritage. There is great tradition here. A certain depth. Observe. The twisted mountains Japie, the shrubbery bursting like semen from the earth! Ha! Ha! Ha! The land is rich Japie, the land is peppered with boones.

JAPIE: I like it.

CLOVIS: Yes Japie. Good boy.

JAPIE:

But where are the peoples Mr Clovis? I could hear no one coughing in the night.

CLOVIS:

The people have gone on vacation. Taking all their personal belongings with them so as not to feel homesick. Things like toothbrushes underpants and nail clippers. One day they will come back but that is in the future and has nothing to do with our cosy little time. However the fact remains that this house is their house and it would be rude to look at the things in their drawers. Because then you know something and you have to pretend that you don't know it. So sometime in the future you will have to lie. And why lie when you don't have to?

JAPIE:

(Thinks on that a moment) That is true and that way you can live cleanly everyday. With no muck to be clugging the system! Oh how sweet. Crably ek se dank. Vir n uitmuntende ontbyt en prikulerende geselskap.

They shake hands, JAPIE shaking as a City teenager, a convoluted style, which causes CLOVIS to chuckle. JAPIE then sits in CLOVIS' chair, settling in, as if it is his right.

CLOVIS: It was an honour. Now Japie —

JAPIE doesn't see that CLOVIS means him to get out of the chair. He is momentarily confused.

JAPIE:

(Finally) Aah! I understand perfectly you old skirminkel. I must stay here precisely because of the reasons that you so clearly underlined just a moment ago. That is perfectly happy.

CLOVIS: Eh?

JAPIE: Ja. I will stay here and think on the wonder of the veld.

And before you know it you will be back.

CLOVIS: (confused) I'm going somewhere?

JAPIE: Yes. Isn't that is what you said earlier?

CLOVIS:

No, I...ah...Oh. Alright. See you later. I'm going to have a lie down.

CLOVIS turns to walk up the stairs of the house, but suddenly pauses then turns back to JAPIE.

CLOVIS:

I live alone Japie. All I need is the breath of the country to sustain me. The heart of the land.

CLOVIS goes up the stairs into his house. He stands up on his stairs, looking down on JAPIE.

During CLOVIS' speech the following action happens with JAPIE:

JAPIE is seated in his chair at the table, trying to think on the veld but actually feeling quite restless. After a short time he stands up, looking for something to do. His eyes alight on the chest of drawers SR. He goes to it and opens the door. Inside he finds a musical box, one of those that when opened a ballerina pops up and a tune is played. He opens it and sits with it, mesmerised by the tune. The MASKED FIGURE appears from beneath the table bearing a long knife. It walks up to behind JAPIE, clearly set to slit his throat.

CLOVIS:

Oh Japie. How little you know of the humours that rise from this country and creep casually into the crevices of my heart. Sometimes I would go back to watch for the children, through their window, and to watch for their teacher, but now I would make doubly sure that none of them could see me, the sun painting the walls in stripes of morning. I watched that teacher careful like. Her skin was the colour of light honey. Her arms when she raised them like the gentle flesh of the necks of swans, their white wings furled, strange emotions blooming, unfolding and snapping to action in my chest. My young face nestled in the window. I watched her careful, and I saw that she was hiding a cut, she had been hurt, suddenly she looked up at me and smiled. Her wet eyes! I ran away. I ran to my tree, where I cried. My gecko was waiting for me, a little thing.

At this point the MASKED FIGURE is directly behind JAPIE, his knife rising into the air.

CLOVIS sings his song, using the singing to encourage the MASKED FIGURE to strike.

CLOVIS:

Teacher teacher warm and gay,
Please for me some love today,
Apples, morning, chalk dust swirling,
A desk of my very ...

Suddenly JAPIE gets up, completely catching the masked figure off guard. Both the MASKED FIGURE and CLOVIS watch JAPIE, quite surprised that he was able to resist the mesmerising effect of the music. JAPIE walks over to the chainsaw, picks it up, and then fires it up, causing both CLOVIS and the MASKED FIGURE to start in alarm.

JAPIE goes towards the musical box, clearly intent on chopping it up. CLOVIS screams and runs down as fast as he can, stopping JAPIE just in time. The MASKED FIGURE disappears underneath the table.

CLOVIS: What do you think you are doing!

JAPIE: What?

CLOVIS: I said, what do you think you are doing?

JAPIE: I... (He looks down at the chainsaw in his hand) ..Huh?

Clovis snatches the chainsaw from him.

CLOVIS: What are you doing!

JAPIE: Ek weet nie. I was just playing. I'm sorry.

Pause.

JAPIE: I too have a treasure that I would like to show you.

CLOVIS: What is it?

JAPIE: I am a little geniepsig to speak so openly.

CLOVIS:

Do not feel that way. Rather talk as if we have known each other for ages.

JAPIE pulls an old tennis ball from his crotch and offers it to CLOVIS.

JAPIE:

It was my muvers.

CLOVIS:

(CLOVIS takes the treasure) Your treasure is beautiful. (Now he threatens the treasure) But not so beautiful as mine. So it must be a lie, embezzler! Now. Tell me what you were doing!

JAPIE:

I was just looking at the things Clovis! I was bored and my little cute fingers were sticky!

CLOVIS slaps him hard, causing JAPIE's mouth to bleed and him to roll.

CLOVIS: We come closer to the truth wife licker.

JAPIE: I am sorry Mr Crably.

CLOVIS:

That is not nearly enough Manheer Greyling. But I must admit that I am getting a little emotional. I well understand the need to look through other people's personal things.

CLOVIS looks at JAPIE standing alone and dejected. He attempts to cheer him.

CLOVIS:

But I just now thought something. You have been remarkably quiet. Tell me about yourself, tell me about this, Parow.

JAPIE:

Okay, well, Parow is a beautiful place. It is very well organised. Around each house there is a beautiful vibocrete fence.

CLOVIS: A fence you say?

JAPIE:

There are the most beautiful views. Once, god ja, let me tell you about a special time. I was five, maybe ten, I was sitting in our back garden and I saw a plane high above, it was flying through the sky that was the palest blue. I began to imagine that I was in the plane.

CLOVIS: That's pretty cool.

JAPIE:

Yes, but I do have a goddamn point. (Aggressively, a gangster) Because the Parow is also about broken moments. Like once I found myself looking in the mirror, the bathroom door was closed but outside I could hear my sister screaming, then I saw the handle go down and there is my mom. It sounds like there must be a bose gees. If you watch the mirror for long it is like your face begins to change, your features darken and you become something else.

CLOVIS takes JAPIE's treasure to him.

CLOVIS: What is a bose gees?

JAPIE:

It is an evil spirit. That is what it sounds like. They put her in a soft room in Tygerberg hospital and then I would watch her through the small round window. Sometimes she would come right up to the glass. Most of the time she knew who I was.

CLOVIS:

That was touching my little friend. While you were speaking I had such a powerful sense of a real person. Someone driven by love and passion and wonder at the things that they see. But then I sensed someone that may one day forget the wonder the wonder. Don't forget the wonder.

JAPIE: Dankie Menheer Crabletster. Hmm. Ek voel sommer skaam.

CLOVIS:

Do not. The world is infectious. (pause) Now that it is late afternoon and the mood of the country deepens a little, I think it is safe to speak of things that are weighing on our minds. What do you say?

CLOVIS suddenly grabs JAPIE's arm, pulling him close, and stage whispers to him.

CLOVIS: Japie, I too know about the mirror.

JAPIE: Do you know about rape and that?

CLOVIS: It's just colours, I don't recognise myself.

Pause

CLOVIS: (Normal volume again) Can I ask you some questions?

JAPIE: I am gereed.

CLOVIS:

Good Japie. At times the questioning may become tender but remember that there is something brooding here that must be flushed out. But be careful to not speak too openly. These dark forces may latch onto the slightest hint. We must fight their intelligence with our own. Keep your eyes peeled Japie.

JAPIE: I am ready Menheer. My dapperheid is strong and manly.

CLOVIS:

Good boy. Remember. Honesty is our only weapon. Why have you come here?

JAPIE:

(carefully) I already told you. I was out in the darkness of the sprawling veld when I saw this house like a dog in the dark. Then the next that I knew I was slowly walking towards this very house. As if I needed to be here. It is because of this veld and the strange mist that hung over the place at the time. It was like a cloak or even a duvet.

CLOVIS:

Hmm. I see. Did you speak to anyone in the town before this feeling came over you? Did anyone speak to you of this place? A woman?

JAPIE:

Nee. I was running from the stad. In search of the goodness of the countryside. When a mist came over me and I began to act strangely.

CLOVIS: I see. So no woman and no man spoke to you.

JAPIE: No.

CLOVIS: Do you promise?

JAPIE: No

CLOVIS: Do you promise?

JAPIE: Yes. I mean yes. Who are the man and woman?

CLOVIS:

Old acquaintances Japie. Old acquaintances. But they are gone now.

JAPIE:

Yes. I know of the past. The stad is in the past. I am now a country man.

CLOVIS: That is good. That is good.

JAPIE: What do you do Clovis Crably?

CLOVIS: I am a butler. As my father and his father before him.

JAPIE: And before that?

CLOVIS:

There is a blank there. The pictures do not extend further. Legend and lore mix to form a thick mist through which I cannot see.

JAPIE: Ek sien.

CLOVIS pauses for a moment, thinking quite deeply on what he will say next, whether he should say it.

CLOVIS: Japie...What do you know of the petrification of trees?

JAPIE: Niks. I don't even know what it means.

CLOVIS: You've never heard that word before?

JAPIE: Never.

CLOVIS:

Hmm...Well then pay attention. Often in the olden days trees would fall over due to some catastrophe or another, whether earthquake or volcano. The trees would fall and become covered by substances. Later the trees would become sodden and completely unable to resist certain chemicals which are present in the very earth. These chemicals would slowly invade the tree cell by cell fighting great battles until all the wood of the tree has been slaughtered. For the chemicals had caused the flesh of the tree to turn to stone. Far fetched and unrealistic I know. But that is because it is the truth Japie.

JAPIE: Jislaaik.

CLOVIS:

Yes. A tree that was living Japie. A tree that is now turned to solid stone.

JAPIE: A tree that was petrified.

CLOVIS: Presies. Now...

Again CLOVIS thinks, he is taking a risk trusting JAPIE.

CLOVIS:

I have been conducting certain experiments. And these experiments have led me to certain conclusions.

JAPIE: Jislaaik.

CLOVIS:

You see...I have found that if a certain type of tree is...injected, with a certain substance, in a certain area, over a certain period of time, a certain process of petrification can be stimulated under certain scientific conditions. I have been able to turn wood to rock!

JAPIE: Like cement?

CLOVIS: What?

JAPIE: Like cement?

CLOVIS: No, no, no Japie. Like rock.

JAPIE: Ja, like cement.

CLOVIS: No Japie, you see cement is not real. I have been able to turn wood to rock.

JAPIE: Ja, ja, but they both hard.

Pause.

CLOVIS:

Hmm. The darkness of the night is coming. We must take precautions.

JAPIE: Ja. It sinks fast out here. I noticed that in the veld.

CLOVIS:

Lets drink away this madness as if we were the best of friends. We drink at the same time and you must tell me when you feel it. You must tell me. Do you understand? Do you?

JAPIE: Yes.

CLOVIS: Do you promise?

JAPIE: Yes.

CLOVIS: Kay go.

Pause

JAPIE: I feel it.

CLOVIS: Me too.

JAPIE: This is going to be a long night so lets relax.

JAPIE sits at the table and pours more wine for them both. Lights darken, it is moving towards night.

CLOVIS:

Good my little one. For the longest time I have had a relationship with trees. I am, shall we say, intimate with them. I have studied their habits and I can predict their movements. Some, like K. Sello Duiker (spits), would say that trees are like slow dancers. Others view them as sacred guardians of the earth, gentle beings filled with a slightly quirky sense of humour, constantly playing jokes that take years to fulfill, mischievous oafs. Well fuck them. I prefer to take a darker view. As I said, I know them intimately. I have explored their flesh and I say that they are in fact a metaphor for a horrible virus that stalks the land, marching to the twistings of time.

(He begins to play with a torch, casting shadows on the wall.)

It all comes down to your point of view really. You see for me a shadow contains the greatest evil, a shadow cuts the world of light with a laugh of darkness, it takes all that is good and insists on the foul trickery of the consequent. Are you with me?

JAPIE: Ja...

CLOVIS:

What is it that causes the shadow son? Is it the skyscraper building, the geometry of the thing? Maybe, but the building has no mind of its own, it is innocent. The tree on the other hand, the tree begins its journey with a specific purpose in mind, to provide shade. The tree and the sun have created some kind of sick relationship have they not? The tree breaks from the skin of its seed, like a worm, just bear that in mind, knowing all the while that the sun will appear like the eye of God in the sky, causing shadows to march like soldiers across the land. Filthy cunt. Do you see Japie? (Clovie sees that Japie is not with him at all.) Perhaps you think it is a bucket of shit? Well what about the way that I feel? What about my problems you fuckin shit eating motherfucker? Go fuck yourself.

JAPIE jumps up, stunned that CLOVIS has spoken to him like that.

JAPIE: Ek skies Crably maar...

CLOVIS:

Let us take a moment to think of the twisted shapes of trees.

JAPIE: Ek skies Crably!

CLOVIS: I can see that you doubt me...

JAPIE: Ek se ek skies Crably! Dit was heeltemal onnodig!

During the following JAPIE and CLOVIS each try to shout over the other. JAPIE simply repeating 'Clovis! Clovis!'

CLOVIS:

It's obvious that your city upbringing has warped your mind so that your smile is deformed and you have no respect for country folk. Careful before I spit on you, friend.

Japie finally comes all the way over to CLOVIS ready to hit him with his hand raised.

JAPIE: Ek sal jou vokkin donder!

CLOVIS:

(Said quickly, a complete turnaround and apology) Japie, I'm sorry. I was trying to tell you something that is incredibly important and personal to me and it seemed like you didn't care. I spoke in anger, I over-reacted, I'm sorry, it will never happen again. I'm sorry.

JAPIE: Okay. Okay. Just don't swear me. Moet my net nie vloek nie.

CLOVIS: I'm sorry. I humbly apologise. It will never happen again.

JAPIE: Nou maar okay.

CLOVIS: Friends?

JAPIE: Ja.

CLOVIS:

Good. Now. I know this must all sound a little strange to you, but I really do have something very interesting to show you. Can I?

JAPIE: Yes.

CLOVIS:

Good. Now. Stand over there. (He indicates the staircase). Here. Take the classic stance of the tree. (CLOVIS spreads JAPIE's arms out wide) Yes! Now how do you feel in this position of treehood? How do you feel? You must concentrate. Imagine that you are a young tree.

(Clovis pulls out his mini Hi-Fi again.)

You have been planted in the pavement somewhere by some well-meaning town planners in their suits. Perhaps you are in the Parow? Yes use a tree from memory, I can see by your face that you have one.

Clovis presses play on the mini Hi-Fi, slow haunting music begins to play.

CLOVIS:

You are growing there in the pavement, in your neat little box, as the cars go whizzing past. You are comfy, everyone seems to appreciate you. Around you the city grows and slowly you grow too, clothes change colour and the cars carry on whizzing past, some newer, some older. Everyone doing their daily business, the sun is flashing by, your shadow making many lines.

The MASKED FIGURE emerges from beneath the table. It carries a pot, inside of which there is a thick red potion.

CLOVIS:

You get bigger and bigger, now you see that you do not really have so much space to yourself. But still the world is great, it is like some god-damn cartoon, the colours, they're cinematic. Those well-meaning town planners. They are long gone but here you are, still growing, your roots reaching further and further for moisture, now beginning to brush against the underside of the tar, cracking the road slowly. What are we talking about? Now you are a big tree, not young, you have little space to move, you are no longer (pause) dynamic. You stand here on the pavement with your roots bruised and battered. Strange marks appearing on your skin, as if you are growing old. You cannot stop you see, your arms are crawling towards the sky. Slowly.

(Japie has entered into a trance. He starts to moan and writhe, slowly, as if he is being crucified.)

CLOVIS:

Your body aches, the sun flashes by, blinding you, fumes rise, Voortrekker road, Brrooom!Brrrooom! As they flash by you see your reflection, massive and brown stained, surly like an old man, and still you grow! You Mr Tree standing on the sidewalk of the Parow, sucking in their pollution and hate and breathing out fresh air,

with your brown stained leaves. It is impossible. And yet, what can you do? Nothing. Merely wait until you have stretched so far, until you have become so unimaginable, that your soul explodes. And you vanish. All that is left is an offensive husk. So how do you feel? Like an idiot precisely. You have no idea what is going on.

(CLOVIS dips his fingers in the concoction in the pot.)

But this is serious Japie, serious. So just one more little imagining. (To the Masked Figure) I almost have him. Look at him squirm and sweat.

CLOVIS now walks over to Japie, his fingers coated in the red substance.

CLOVIS:

(To Japie) So you are the tree just before the explosion. Right here on your side (CLOVIS dabs the red substance on JAPIE's side), close to your thigh (dabs it on the thigh), bordering on the crotch (dabs on the crotch), you one day developed a little mark which slowly, over time you understand, turned to a pimple (he dabs a dot on his face), which turned to a spot (another dot), which turned to a thing that seemed to boil (he smears the red across JAPIE's forehead) out of your face, right there on your thigh close to your crotch.

CLOVIS walks away from him again.

CLOVIS:

But slowly it boiled, slowly, so that passer-byers could touch it and marvel at your ugliness and laugh, yes laugh at the way you stand with wide retard eyes till your mind just vanishes! Gone. (CLOVIS cackles uproariously). See what I mean Japie? Trees should not be allowed to live naturally. No. Rather they should be tiny and small so that I can experiment on them. Don't you think?

JAPIE opens his eyes and stares at CLOVIS blearily. He is deep in a trance. JAPIE watches CLOVIS' face, and then smacks it quite hard, simply to see what it feels like.

CLOVIS: Why did you do that!

JAPIE:

I am not sure Mr Crably. I wanted to make sure that you were real and all is not some terrifying. I wanted to get away when I was stuck in that body. I in fact wanted to go to the seaside and wear a speedo and float on salty water.

CLOVIS grabs JAPIE in a terrifying show of strength and throws him

to the ground.

CLOVIS:

The sea's mother's poes! (CLOVIS feeds JAPIE a pill, and then takes one himself for good measure.) The sea is my mortal enemy. Do you know how many mountains are under the sea Japie? How many valleys and dales? The sea would pretend that everything is smooth and glittery in the sunset, meanwhile beneath there is a whole countryside that is denied us. Do you see Japie? We are being fucked with.

JAPIE is away in his own world.

JAPIE: I had no idea.

CLOVIS: No you didn't.

CLOVIS walks over to the MASKED FIGURE, who is holding latex gloves and surgical instruments. As CLOVIS speaks he puts them on.

CLOVIS:

It is all slowly beginning to fall into place isn't it Japie? There is a war going on Japie. A war. And I am the general. Would you like to know how I feel Japie? Like my back is arched up into a hump on my shoulders. I can touch the shoulder blades and spine inside the hump so I know it is more than just a fleshwound. It is the way my back is formed.

JAPIE: I had no idea.

CLOVIS:

Oh yes. The war is everywhere. The war is in this room. I wage the war on the bodies of my little trees. Have you been following me Japie? All I have told you about trees. Your little experience with the exploding soul. It all leads to something. Something sinister. (He holds up his scalpel.) What do you feel Japie?

JAPIE: A hectic soort van what the fuck.

CLOVIS:

Ja-ja! It is nighttime and we can act how we want. Now I will reveal secrets. The true purpose of my work.

The MASKED FIGURE brings a Bonzai tree from beneath the table, setting it on top of the table. It becomes apparent that CLOVIS and the figure are setting up for some kind of operation.

CLOVIS takes JAPIE by the hand, laying him gently on the table.

JAPIE: But what of the veld?

CLOVIS: Man fuck the veld Listen to me.

JAPIE: Yes.

CLOVIS:

The true purpose is to observe the moment when the flesh turns from wood to stone. The final moment Japie. When the last cell turns from wood to stone. Are you with me?

JAPIE: Jaa...

During the following CLOVIS is preparing Japie's body for surgery. It seems that he is going to somehow graft JAPIE's heart into the Bonzai tree, or vice versa.

CLOVIS:

When the little trees' eyes stretch wide at the moment. The precise moment when life is snuffed and gone. I have been careful grooming certain trees for that moment. I have been shaping and moulding them. I have been planning for years Japie. Ever since I can remember. For that specific day Japie. That day that is today. Do you realise the significance Japie? I would draw the line, Japie. I would pinpoint it. I would observe, and understand, life's final moment. I would win Japie.

CLOVIS raises his scalpel, poised to incise the chest.

JAPIE:

Its like my eyes are hollow black balls. My pupil is the back of my eye.

CLOVIS:

Japie you fucking cocksukquer you must concentrate. Im not fucking around. Japie. Look at me.

JAPIE:

I am and I was just thinking how your face is actually small and inside my eye.

CLOVIS: Shut up and focus.

JAPIE: Ja man, whatever.

CLOVIS looks at JAPIE, reverently, he strokes his limbs, the scalpel still poised to cut.

CLOVIS:

He is overtaken by some kind of fever. Boiling in his blood. He cannot tell right from wrong. Oh my god. My god.

CLOVIS makes the first incision. A split second after he does JAPIE screams in pain. His scream pulls him straight out of his trance.

JAPIE:

Clovis! I have been to the frontiers and back. I have seen many things.

CLOVIS:

(Desperately trying to appear as if nothing untoward was going on.) What sorts of things Japie? Happy things?

JAPIE:

No. Terrible things. I have seen you. It must be this house. I saw you as a child. Fuck Clovis. I have seen you doing your experiments.

CLOVIS: I take it you don't approve?

JAPIE:

It's sick. And it won't work. The trees will rebel against you. They will rise up and slaughter you if you apply just a gevritseltjie of pressure. It is finished.

JAPIE darts forward and picks up the Bonzai on the table.

CLOVIS:

Wrong raper of grannies the trees are mine. They are weak and ready for harvest. I won their screams through careful study and the bareing of my own pain they are mine!

CLOVIS rushes JAPIE, who screams and runs away, both circling around the table. JAPIE manages to pick up the chainsaw. He turns and halts, switches it on.

JAPIE: Ha! Wat gaan jy nou maak? Hah? Huh? (JAPIE lunges at him with the chainsaw, toying with him.)

JAPIE:

Jy wil mos vir my sny, hah?! Ek gaan jou nou vokken moer jou lelike naai. Dink jy jy kan vir Japie sny? Huh? Huh?! Vok jou! Jy is gahalt! I have stopped you! I, Japie Greyling, have saved the trees!

CLOVIS watches Japie, menaced and wary, when his spirit suddenly crumples.

CLOVIS:

No! But the war. The war. I was a general. Mr Greyling please. I feel that my chin and cheeks are fat and that there is no fun in them. My face feels broken. My eyes feel dull and the skin where my brows sprout feels swollen and heavy. My shell has been cracked by someone that did not notice.

Japie steps back, CLOVIS' sudden breaking has deflated him completely

JAPIE: Fuck.

CLOVIS:

My shell has been broken and now my fear leaks into the air. It pours into the air and people turn to look at me. I am beaten from toes to face.

My arms are broken and my voice is cracked in my throat. The person that accidentally broke my shell begins to sing. Her voice is beautiful but soon they will smell the thing that leaks from the shell. That black thing. That black mass smoking from the rubble of my insides, clawing for air and for sky. There was an earthquake and many people are dead. Surprised faces. blooming from the concrete rubble. Hands like flowers the meat stripped a knuckle winks at the beaming sun. My fear was so deep that it simmered just here below the surface my skin a smooth covering. I am hurt. My shell has been slashed open and my fear is billowing from that hole. I need someone to take my hand today. My fingers are calloused. Some would say my life was still born. And they would be right. In a way. Because I lived my life in the moment between expecting new life and being shown a little dead baby. These people who say these things about me have not ever thought of the moment of service. My life is still born. Lived in silence. Covered with a hasty cloth and spirited away when it is over. Can you hear the silence? All I can do is tell you the sounds of the whispers that you cant hear. I'll never make you understand. You can't hear it. Can you hear it? I become silly. I see that now. Perhaps I should remain calm. But you can't do that if you see it. Its face staring and you find yourself possessing tongue. To keep quiet would be to retain dignity but it would also mean giving up. I am scared to give up. But if I am scared then that means that that there should be the way. The power of the silence is not the lack of the sound but the force of the stare. I am separate from the rabble. Godly am I for a moment but then it is gone what do I do? Please I must rest. I listened to the silence. I did it. Fuck you all. You can't take it away.

CLOVIS and JAPIE are now seated at the table. Both are quiet.

JAPIE looks at CLOVIS for a moment, then leans over and gives him a hard smack across the face. CLOVIS shakes his head after the smack, bemused he looks at JAPIE, then down at his lap again.

CLOVIS: (After a moment) Good point.

Both sit in silence for a little longer.

CLOVIS:

There are times Japie when I find that I have lost the passion for life. Times when I know and recognize beauty. These are times when the sky is a blue that is so deep and pure that I know that words or thoughts or feelings or opinions or hurt or loss or loneliness, loneliness Japie, are unnecessary. Because that sky is it. It tells no lies. When I feel this mood upon me Japie I want to die. That is all. What do you make of that Greyling?

JAPIE:

Well Clovis, I know exactly how you feel. When I was out in the veld it was like that. I was alone. And when I was in the Parow it was the same. It is as you say. There is nothing. Only the deep deep blue sky.

JAPIE pulls out the imaginary box of cigars, lights himself one and puffs contentedly.

CLOVIS:

Who sent you Mr Greyling. Was it the woman? Was it she who sent you? Do not lie.

JAPIE:

No Clovis. It was not the woman. She is gone. Long gone. She is unable to send me.

CLOVIS:

Then it was the man. I knew it would be him. It must be him. There can be no error. It was him wasn't it?

JAPIE:

No. It was not the man. The man is grown old. His view also is verduister by a mist. He is old now and sits creaking in a lonely wooden chair.

CLOVIS: So. The Spanish dancer is no more.

JAPIE: He is gone Clovis. You have no one to blame.

CLOVIS:

Then I must look to myself. I, Clovis Crably, the Butler, and Generaal.

CLOVIS takes a cigar for himself, lights it.

CLOVIS:

What will you do Japie? Where will you go now that your work here is done?

JAPIE: I will go back to the veld I think.

CLOVIS: But the god-damn loneliness.

JAPIE:

Ag ja but what the fuck jy weet. My tekkies is my vriende en die see van bos my speletjie grond. En ek weet waar daar 'n lekker vet tshongoloa vir my wag.

JAPIE stands, ready to depart.

JAPIE:

I have enjoyed meeting you Clovis. You are good man. I will remember you.

CLOVIS looks at JAPIE and then stands and shakes JAPIE's hand.

CLOVIS: Thank you Japie. A safe journey for you.

JAPIE: Good-bye.

CLOVIS: Good-bye.

JAPIE exits through the window. CLOVIS sits alone at the table in the fading light, smoking his cigar. Lights fade till only the Bonsai tree is illuminated.

End.