

### **The Virus**

You ask how it was when this thing started? Well. Have you ever seen a late summer flock, before flight? I mean, yes, I was there. But what you're asking of this ou kerel is like naming the very Book of Names. It just always was. Unless you read Genesis. Then you know that in the beginning were the children of God. The serpent's seed spawned also from the beginning, but from disgrace, which still marks the bobbejaan making themselves Baas nowadays. And it's the same between the simple kaffirs out here and the big ones that speak with you only in English.

Do you know I once heard a man who'd gone out there on some line of business, way out there--to some bush country in Africa, where civilization never made it past the birth canal--anyway this man told me life was so cursed out there they even have a sort of rabid disease that attacks you merely by speaking its name. I mean, if that's not God having something to say, then I don't know what.

But back to your question. Yes. I remember. We were used to a certain kind of visitor then, after the fall of the Republiek. Americans mostly. Some Australians. They all came here looking for something, something snuffed out where ever was home. To tell you the truth, I think a lot of them came here to puff out their chests, to look at old verkrampste Boers like me and feel themselves a more upright man. The rooineks were the funniest. They would stand behind the

cameraman, stepping back there between takes, on the prowl for this thing they have in the head about the veld and the Boer: irreligious kaffir-enslavers that we are, ploughing an open sea of arid farmland, blowing our nose through thick skin on bare fingers.

Then would come the questions. Statements really, alluding to our dying language and hopeless cause.

--A stand-alone Boer Republic? They would repeat.

--In *South Africa*? They'd ask again.

No, jou dom donner! In the moist warm farts of your Royal Highness. Dries Van de Duidenstee got so uptight with a reporter like this once, he marched the Englishman and his crew to the border of our town without even a water bottle between them for the whole trek back to the nearest dorp, forget to back home. We didn't see a visitor like that again for another while. Not until the Steenkamps sent an emergency signal, calling in for help. They thought they were under attack.

You will laugh now when you see the man mistaken an attacker, but it was nothing to laugh about in those days. The bobbejaans were out to finish the last white indigenous tribe of Africa, farm by farm. And there was nothing to stop it. Nothing. So we armed ourselves. Just like the old days. And we learned our people who the enemy was. How to finish him. We weren't laughing when we heard the Steenkamp's signal, my friend. Not with that news about Bertie Bezuidenhout already. About how it went with his family.

Bertie Bezuidenhout's hands weren't wide enough to go around a sack of mielies, but believe you me when I say it--that little undertaking of a man had oxen blood sweating through his pores. The other boys used to tease him when they all started smelling themselves, but young Bezuidenhout was already the quiet sort. He would just lean against the wall, thin arms crossed over chest, saying less and less out his mouth as his opponents grew longer and boxier beside his frame. It took maybe three or four dom kops a good and wholesome donner before word spread wide among even the older ous: Bertie Bezuidenhout was nobody's eight-toed tortoise. He had pure unfiltered Afrikanerdom beating through his heart. He could take any man.

And unlike the others, Bertie came home. He found him a capable girl in Potchefstroom and fetched them here--on the same land the Bezuidenhouts have tilled since our grandfathers' fathers lost heart at the Slag van Skionskop. Bertie extended the old house to make room for his family. He even added a flushing outhouse for the competing rugby teams his farm hands seemed hell-bent brooding. That's just how Bertie Bezuidenhout was. A Christianly good man, as the Dominee would say.

He was only twenty nine when those bastards wasted him. Cowards, these assassins. Five men to one. Laying low in tall grass like dogs. Bertie on his knees in the Lord's House. Mouth open wide--receiving the Holy Body, while those dogs stole onto his farm. A growth on Bezuidenhout land. First they did to his earth what they later did with him. Tied down in the dirt we found him. Ploughed into soil. We found Bertie Bezuidenhout's panga standing right there,

next to him, feeling very sorry for what had been done with it. His garden boy ran out soon as he seen Bertie's truck back from Kerk, tried to warn Bertie, Turn around Baas, not safe here. Turn around. But the tsotsis were quick, the land already surrounded.

At least he didn't die on his knees, we said, seeing two of the dogs lying there, one which we finished ourselves. Lying, lifeless. In wait. Waiting for police who always come only after, to stand around.

--Ja, the policeman said, Almal dood.

--No, says Bezuidenhout's wife, Not Bertie.

But he was going home. Unsoiled in his spirit. We found him with the Holy Body still in his. On his tongue the Dominee had placed it. Bertie Bezuidenhout had swallowed the entire thing whole. Unbroken. His wife and klein kinders were with him to his end. Watching.

The man the Steenkamps mistook an attacker turned out the first cyvivor, as we call them now. We went from dismissing him a crazed American bloated on too many McBurgers, to something of a never-ending Vakansie Man. Then, eventually, after news reached us in the papers, we took a real interest in this Cyberwar Refugee. But the cyvivors always resisted that name. Sounds too much like Africa, I suppose, even though the government said Africa, having never really been inter-webbed, is the one true refuge. There are lots more safe towns they said, but without the creature comforts the cyvivors crave. And further, way out there. Up, past the hippos of Limpopo, past Zim, Vic Falls, the man-eating crocs of Mozambique, beyond all that. Real bushman country. And I

told you already what is what, in those deep jungles farted straight out a blind bat's bum.

Leon Steenkamp--who ran away from his land, leaving his poor vrou with a man then taken an attacker--later told us the story he got from this American. It went like so:

The man was from America. I already said. From one of its big cities where people live in skyscraper buildings so that your kitchen and toilet don't have any windows and your neighbor can be a man living with another man, as his wife. Leon Steenkamp didn't ask our American friend if he lived in such arrangements, had such neighbors. If he knew what filth they did. But we of course get a general sense from things the T.V. says, from similar nonsense on the radio. Steenkamp did ask him what kind of gun he favours, since we all know carrying is a natural fact of his culture. The American was a funny one though. Steenkamp told us how soft putty he got around a simple 9mm even a child knows to handle. Leon Steenkamp was so tickled he cocked the empty pistol to his own head--it was only in fun--but not before the American took off, into the dark, without even a proper Goeie Nag.

The thing Steenkamp asked when he started this story was how much we knew of viruses. Well, many of the kerels didn't like this at all. They took it as insult, asking a farmer who carried the tribal memory of rinderpest in his stoop, a man who nursed his kraal through bluetongue virus, lamsiekte, Rift Valley and everything else in between; asking such a man, What is the meaning of a virus? It was just the last of Steenkamp's nerve.

--What is a virus? Lennie Jaeger yelled. It's the three letter certificate your daughter brought home from her high living, my friend.

Of course, Steenkamp's face reddened, but he just tucked his warbling wattle into his chest, managing a slight flare of his nostrils. It was cruel, Jaeger dragging up the dead girl.

When she grew her womanhood, we all pretended a healthy boredom. But on Sundays during prayers or weekdays, watching girls' matches sully the rugby fields, we all wondered with our eyes how grazing the back cleavage of her knees would feel.

She returned home to die. Killed by ferocious gossip or the ugly and fleshly things they say she did in big towns. That shut Steenkamp right up. But you know how it is with a leopard and his spots. It wasn't long before he found something new to know about. That man just has a way with living skin--he always crawls under its weight. So you can understand Jaeger's callousness. Not undeserved. It just sped up the curdle in Steenkamp's story. He spoke simple and quick after that. But I read it in the papers what Steenkamp was trying to say:

American authorities have issued a statement urging the public not to panic. The situation is under control. The City of New York remains without water. The city's Department of Environmental Protection confirmed attackers gained root access to their computer systems and issued a series of commands, essentially shutting all water valve chambers throughout the metropolis. A spokesperson could not be reached for further comment or to provide an estimate of how soon New Yorkers can expect running water.

It was a regular shit show out there. I mean, you read these things wanting to shake your head and suck your teeth a bit, feel a decent level of sympathy for these sorry bastards, but instead you ended up with stiff laughter choking through your throat, imagining the world's so-called superpower being run by generals who considered a few weeks' toilet pile up a legitimate war attack. Imagine where we'd be if General de la Rey or Paul Kruger cried war against the Brits every time a few chamber pots overwhelmed our nostrils, or if the Brits orchestrated a giant enemy pile up so high even the Oranje Rivier refused to swallow.

Of course, cyvivors didn't like this kind of talk. No, my friend. Not one bit did they like it. To them it was full-on war, this thing. And it is true they were thirsty during these water holdouts. I heard a man say he paid a scary sum to a petty overlord for a few liters from the local park, when their money still meant something. His wife then boiled that pisswater for their baby, who couldn't do on strict rations.

Another early cyvivor looked like a tender little girl recalling how the cyber-drought shut his family restaurant down.

--Four generations, he whispered.

A great grandfather started the eatery in his great grandma's name, using this oumagrootjie's recipes. On the last day of service, the little water they had was knocked over accidentally.

--We cooked that shit in wine, he said, thumping the table with big, useless

hands. Bottles and bottles of fine Italian wine. Never tasted anything better. We

tried fighting back. But there is no fighting an enemy you cannot see. Nothing you

can do but walk away...We walked away. Four generations and just like that--he

snapped his fingers. We upped and walked away.

Into Africa.

They came almost by truckloads after that first Steenkamp American. Smuggling themselves into Mexico and highjacking docked cruise ships. Bribing pirate carriers, some UN flights even. The Italians and Spaniards, we hear, even reverse engineered the Mediterranean fucked-fish-in-a-rowboat routine. I mean, picture that on the high seas--a bunch of sunfried Diegos and Ave Marias sardined into a sinking raft, praying their way from Sicily to Libya. It really was as late summer flock--each one pecking about, as if forever--until every one seemed to understand through some giant cobwebbed birdbrain: winter is here, only flight will save us.

By then, nobody found these first world refugees in Africa queer. Especially not with all the bribecrack they'd brung--heirloom seeds sewn between hemlines, Cuban tobacco leaves and medicine packs glued under second shoe soles. Even rare carpets and diamonds stuffed into soft children's toys. That shameful spazashop, the one Coenie's widow barely propped up even while



sitting on all the money three husbands left behind, finally found some legs to stand on. The old maid was even talking about adding an addition to the place.

--An addition? I asked, What would you sell in an addition, Tannie?

A milky glare followed that question, so I knew to take my tobacco from the counter and head straight out the same door I came.

The next time I'm in the shop, the widow has lined the shelves with glass jam jars wearing silly hats when regular canned All Gold would do just fine. Black coffee can't be plain good brew anymore, it has to be God's own beans imported from the killing fields of Rwanda. I know better than ask the skelm old vrou, What is all this kak about? And is it just me wondering what is what with all this birdfood? With the cheeky prices?

That's how it was in the beginning. A temporary inconvenience, we told ourself. A now open and just now-now finish pitstop, while these First Worlds sorted theyself out. Or at least that's how we thought things were, until it came out, and I can't remember who pulled the snot out the rot, but it came out Steenkamp should have bliksemed that American with his kak-stories first chance he got.

Remember how Steenkamp found him farting around his plaas? How he spoeked the jiggle out Leon Steenkamp's arse so that Steenkamp hit the panic button and ran off for help, fat flying all over the place? Well, my friend, turns out that's all the time it took for the American to make his move on Steenkamp's wife. That old visvrou might as well've sprouted bird wings on her fishscales, so full she became of this American's nonsense--this and that he could do for they land,

stars and such he could grow with his hands. She was half near trading Steenkamp's farm for Mr. America's applesauce and pie in the sky. Of course, we didn't know this then, when we first showed up at Steenkamp's farm, guns at the ready.

You should have seen Steenkamp, still panting from the effort lugging hisself, now-now realizing the thing he just done to his wife: leaving her standing there with what very well could have been a blerry kaffir with a gun; now also catching the thing on her face that asked without speaking, What man are you, Leon Steenkamp? What manner of man fetches others to call man, to do for his wife what he can't hisself?

--There, Leon points, pointing out the foreigner. That's him. Shoot him!

We laugh seeing Leon's supposed attacker, hold our guns at ease. Steenkamp eventually shakes Mr. America's hand, orders his wife pour us a round of spoek and diesel.

Speaking of action, there was finally enough to this cyber thing to actually grow a hard-on. Our town was overrun with sissies, moegies that imagined living with a week's pile-up hardship. But suddenly, we started getting volk a man could understand. A power grid blew up, killing thousands of civilians within the hour. The big guns was beginning to doubt a bunch of ululating beards hiding under turbans could pull off a remote control war on the U.S. and her bedfellows from some cave in What-not-stan.

Fingers wagged. Korea? Syria? Khomeini? Who else counted for a Terminator? .China? Russia? I didn't know all the what is what, but I do know my

one plus one: youngsters in a pride take their chances when the alpha shows weakness. I never seen a musthing bull take kak from a dying olifant. Babylon was a plump worn whore, ripe for the taking.

Chinaman mastermind or not, real volk were dying real deaths in the cyberwars. Piet Niemand and his family took in a girl whose life dissolved in waters that drowned her house. A flood ran straight in from a dam enemy malware raped. The water swam off with her mother. And she was one of the better ones. The fog-heads that came after her were worser than anything I seen on the South West-Angola line. And those were some blerry bosbefok ous. Situation Normal All Fucked Up, we called it--SNAFU.

Back then, back in the 80s on the South West Africa border line, we had one ou couldn't get a word out of him that wasn't singing. And all kindergarten rhymes. Those of us felt sorry enough learned the funny nonsense he'd sing:

*Mary Had A Little Lamb*--Armed enemy approaching

*Humpty Dumpty Sat On A Wall*--Ambush ahead, landmine

*Two Little Birds Sitting On A Tree*--Civvie spies out sussing

*Old McDonald Had A Farm/And On That Farm He Had A...*Gook! Civvies

hiding gooks

I admit, there was something vroulike about him. Smith, they called him. Ian Smith. Always managed to eat from his dixies with both the fork and the knife. Patted his mouth clean with a small white square he hand-washed nights, even out in the bush. The desert dyed it that pus-rust colour which bled through

sunsets; sunsets that seemingly choked the sky they were so overwhelming. Like swallowing dust.

But you could always leave it to Smith, seeing something there was nothing to see. Saving a grace, where no man lived. I got into more than one fight with the thicker skulled parts of the platoon, defending Smith. The cheapest kak was the obvious--punishing him for his Rhodesian namesake's busted nuts. Crooning about the monkey parade Smith handed Rhodesia to. President Canaan Banana! That's who the kaffirs elected when Ian Smith cowered. I mean, what sort of illiterate half-bakes? You can't even cook up such kak. A President Canaan Banana? But that's what the kaffirs wanted. So our Ian Smith, poor ou, became the cow's arse in all these laughing farts about Ian Smith selling out old Rhodesia, Ian Smith bending over for a black banana.

--Raped by the Black Banana, they'd taunt a already bush-fucked Smith.

He'd try ignore. Was all he could do. But me, it bothered me. Stirred rattling dis-ease in me. It couldn't be because I was just. I'd be lying if I thought myself just. Plenty goodly Christian volk wouldn't speak to me still today, I suspect, accounting who and what I was, back at the border. And who could blame them? It wasn't that. More the madness of the thing. Posting a blerry stamping of manhood like Smith into the border, not barely a man-child. It bothered me in the strange way things come outside you and you don't have words for the things, just feel their rage in your fist, taste their thick thirst, seeing blood. They knew to leave Smith alone on my platoon, but I couldn't say what

happened after his callback to another unit. Couldn't say what Smith made of it all, if he made it out at all.

The bush fucked you. Made you FUBAR. Somehow, all of us--we was totally Fucked Up Beyond All Recognition. Did I dream, sleeping?

No sleep five days straight.

I'd lie under nights, closing my eyes that were theirs, but they refused closings. Stiff eyelids died unshut. I couldn't close them. Shut my ears, face in elbows. Heard strange cry. The bush enjoyed this. Making jackals laugh.

Vultures sing.

Breakfast was ostrich eggs. They threw in stale brake shoe biscuits that morning. Chomped down. Read Ma saying she'll write. Told Pa to say, to write, Bly Sterk My Seun, and to say also she'll write. The letter arrived 336 hours ago. Folded. Refold.

Read the familiar writing, dribbling yellow yolk on the same page Ma eyed over Pa's shoulder: Ma standing over Pa, tin-teacup in hand. In the kitchen. Wearing that pale green pinafore with frilly shoulders, deep pockets. Stroking Pa's neck. Trying not to worry. I'll write, she says. Tell him I'll write. Smell the cinnamon under her nails, lingering in her pores from the melkkos on the table. Pa spoons a mouthful. Plops the milky custard on this paper. Finger the stain where I fold it again. Place under my thoughts. Lying awake.

*--Whu-whu-whuuu...*

*--Whu-whu?*

*--Whu-whu-whuuu*

What is that? Ostriches deep gobbling out there?

A small nomadic herd used to circle our farm. Ma hated full moons. They'd come out, the ostriches, pecking about. Naturally, we kids wanted out too. Chasing wild ostrich. Have you ever done that? I catch one as I wake, grateful for first sleep.

You got used to it. To dust lining your gum. Elephant virgins on bread, no butter. You even got used to taking a shit in go-karts, the ou in the next bugging you for a fag. It was put to us that we were making advances on the rooi-gevaar, that twenty-man dugout pile ups and lust in our nuts was worth it. We were winning the war.

But Listen, Kommandant said. Luister. Rooi-gevaar is dangerous. It is a wild, unwieldy thing. You have to get it into your head. You *will* be fighting the enemy, but with good kaffirs on your side. You will be fighting with black South Wests on your side. They are natural trackers, natural bushfighters. Our blacks must help us track the enemy. The black man is not your enemy. I looked to my left then tried out for the right. We men from my unit stood listening, mealy-mouthed at Kommandant.

It was a first. And for me, the last. The quarters were small. Two open showers. Twenty four men. One mess hall. Twenty four men. Around the camp on quiet days. Keeping guard overnight. There was nowhere else to put them, so there we were: all twenty four bodies stripping naked. Soaping. Washing off soiled blood. Twenty four mouths moving, chasing down dog biscuits with the same disgust and relish. All our arses plastered to the go-karts when cooks

fucked an order, so we all, each of twenty four, suffered as a unit from leaky gypo-guts. It rocked us, understanding this thing. Who was us? Who was them? The terrorists was secreted in the land. A man could understand that. Our job was to finish them. Wipe the land clean. Of rooi gevaar--commie alert. Of swaart gevaar--black terrs. But. And nobody can stand there now, saying I got weak. But struzebob. God as my witness. My blacks--the blacks in our unit--it was because of them. Land and duty were no longer simple things.

I see now the 80s was simpler. Looking back I see black and white. Any blind fool could show you that. But this thing these First World know-alls have they dicks smothered in? Viral computer infections blowing up dams? Root commands raping entire intelligence systems? What does a soldier suppose, to fight such a thing? How is a man suppose to protect his property--vrou, farm and kinders--except to pack it all in and leave? You left no choice but you pull the plug. Literally. That's what people who know more than even the know-alls are now-now advising the States and the States' chommie-countries. But you know what houtkop is--hard headed. They still talking Situation Normal, Under Control; not from how we seen it. Everyday, the cyvivors. They keep coming. Doves of them--human droplings out Babylon's rear.

And what started small--the cheeky spazashop prices, the harmless halfway stop our town became, even our Samaritan welcome and goodly cheer--seems to me a growing cancer. Can't step out a day without hearing another story of cyvivors outsmarting a Boer his entire farm--flock, stock and bride. At first, a fur coat traded for a little patch of earth, then suddenly the kraal also for

some hardy heirloom seed the foreigner himself once tended, until entire farms switched hands for a few cases of rum, some rare ammunition and a kak promise, leaving Boere families squatters in their own fatherland. The situation is bad. Made worse by spineless Boers arse-creeping 'round the refugees.

Even Johannes Van de Merwe, I heard him say he don't mind them. But Johannes, I say. You mean to tell me you can't see what's really going on?

--Like what? Says Johannes.

So I drop it right there, counting him out of the laarge.

I know what's got the balls of good men like Johannes. It's not just the flash of fur and nifty little shiny things. The cyvivors came spinning all sorts of sugared smoke and technicolor dreams they'd build for the goodest Boers. Just lend us an ear, it started. Ok, now share us your wife. You're a good man, but if you want that pie in the sky we're baking, if you really want the kind of special kak only our glittered promises can afford, let's talk about this land. You know we may have lost everything, but these seeds we brung, they like magic beanstalk seeds. We can grow this thing together. In a single year, your yield could triple.

And the Johannes Van de Merwe's of this world--good, Christianly dense man that he is--it wouldn't occur to his likes to doubt. To read the signs. Van de Merwe I know for a fact signed papers making his land they silly experiment. Like the big-dicked manchild he is, he goes around believing these cyber fucked Americans want what's best for his land. That they share his dream. I even hear they promised him, if they can ever flush their shit again, a trip to the lights and lunacy of New York.



Van de Merwe thinks he's the only one heard of New York? The only one dreamed of another life? That's just the problem with the Van de Merwe's of this world. They never seen it coming when it comes. I knew a luckless bastard like this once. Left him right where I found him. At the border.

Enoch Omugulugwombashe could tell you feral stories buried in the bush. Secret things, laden in the land. Just looking at dirt, he could tell. Sifting sand between fingers, he'd point out evidence of a scorpion the night before, a wood-dove that dawn or where a pompilid wasp drugged and buried a dancing white lady spider after impregnating lady with wasp eggs. He once showed me fresh spoors on the track. Pointing, he detailed to a hair--the sex, size and weight of a kudu. Knew exactly what it was feeding on, how far to expect before reaching it. I wasn't surprised at the fat bok we braaiied that night, feasting for a change on sweeter meat than tin stuff and water-fed dog biscuits which swelled into porridge.

Enoch was our tracker. A natural tracker. Natural bushfighter. He told me he was a schoolteacher before the war came. Spoke clean Afrikaans, English and German even. Also his kaffir taals. I kept my distance at first. But in the bush, like I say, a man is only as strong as his unit. And Enoch grew on you.

Out on our jaunts tracking gooks, you couldn't even tell who was who. With my Black is Beautiful smeared on good and lekker, and Enoch already born in camouflage, all you seen is four eyes above, sixty and four teeth below. Even on days off sometimes I'd wear the black face, just for shits and giggles with the puzas at the local shebeen.

Once, we was driving supplies between camps. Me, another bloke and Enoch. The gooks planted landmines everywhere, so you drove off-road. I don't remember why, but we wasn't in a casspir that time. Anyways, there we is. Me and these two ous. We'd just flushed a Terr-stronghold out, so we expected the enemy about, on defense.

We come to a clearing with no shoulder. There's nowhere else to go but inside the road. So we steady the vehicle and drive. Slow. Kick up some dust. Enoch is our eyes and ears. A natural manhunter with a nose like a dog. Sniffs landmines out like a Soek-steek stok on steroids. More than once Enoch shifted my arse in gear, saving me from a blast even as I fingered that Soek-steek-stok into the ground. Anyways, we are going-going, nice and easy on the road when sudden as sin, Enoch calls for a piss parade. We tease him--the bladder of a knocked-up visvrou on this one--but come to a stop. He dismounts to let his leak. I light up and have a piss myself. Driver still at the wheel.

Without a word, Enoch walks back to me and motions I finish. Danger, he whispers, Make fast. Obvious, I cradle my gun. No, he shakes his head, Not Terrs. He waves me with his hand. I follow. Standing in our path--body lifted, head high to the heavens, all dressed in neck flap now spread wide--is a black mamba. Jirre-God! I bite my tongue. A foken blerry snake? Seeing the serpent, its black mouth hissing death, I know we could be done. Even if the Tampax Tiffies came quick with the meds, a man has under a hour before that venom expires him. Just my blerry luck, I think, reading the moggie epitaph:

Killed In Action. Fell To A Bush Snake.

Enoch motions again, Get in the vehicle. I hop in. Keeping himself facing the devil-snake, Enoch walks back. Painfully slow. I tell the driver by now, so he starts the engine. Still, the snake standing. Enoch turning. Finally inside.

What happens next is we drive forward, toward the snake. But instead of grinding the mamba, rubber to reptile, Enoch insists we curve around its path, a wide girth to the snake. The driver is reluctant, and I'm getting annoyed. But Enoch persists, We don't kill mamba, he says. Bad luck. Killing Mamba? Very bad luck. We hiss and we tease. Kaffirs and their witchcraft. Enoch laughs also. Strange, isn't it? How funny it was--just three of us in a bakkie, laughing stupid along the border.

Enoch had three little ones. Still remember their names. Helvi, Martta, Maria. His dream, he told me, was going home after the war, getting God to finally bless him with a son. I didn't have kinders. But I knew what it was for a man to bring his family to you out in the bush. So I told Enoch the one truth with any meaning for me. He is the only man I ever tell my dream.

I wasn't supposed to. Pa would have blixemed me if he found out. News they were coming spread mouth to mouth. Even Dominee seemed to know what day they would be in our town and the sordid things this promised for his flock. So we were warned. I snuck out only because the herd needed tending winter nights. I put on my stepping-out Sunday shirt and slacks underneath the weathered coat I always wore. Hoped nobody noticed instead of veldskoene, I'd repolished my school shoes all afternoon. I slipped out after dinner, as expected, but in place of the kraal, I headed for the big tent.

It was windy. And true to our town that time of year, a cold night. I gave the man all my money saved from odd-jobs and he handed me a ticket. Inside the tent the show was already on. The painted elephants and talking monkeys we had plenty of in those parts, I wasn't interested. The funny little dwarfs were so weird you had to laugh. You have to remember television wasn't a thing for us back then. All we knew was the radio and even that kept everything Dominee-dusted.

We didn't know exotic, nevermind you freakery. The bearded fat vrou so space-eating she had to be carted to stage enticed our wonder, her roly-poly arms and legs threatening to tip the wheelbarrow. The snake charmer with his strange song deserved our applause, we thought. And those mooilike girls with naked bellies, dancing like inside them lived a snakepit--they alone would have been worth my money. Except, I seen that night this man they call Ring Master.

He had on a tall impressive hat and those bowtie suits with a big smooth waistband. He held his stick very sure of hisself. Without him the whole thing would have crumbled. It was stupid, I knew it even then. As soon as I seen him, he was my dream. Pa would've moered me. But when I told Enoch my plan to head for die Kaap or Jo'Burg maybe, after we left the border--that I wanted to wear a tall hat and learn the circus--he didn't laugh at me. I was shy about it, he could see. But still. He made me feel the stupid thing I wanted was maybe not so stupid. Why not put the Kommandant and his snakes in your show, he teased?

Kommandant fetched live ones out in the bush every chance he got. Stuffed them in a plastic bag he hung in the sun. The writhing bastards were

kaput without fail by 1200 hours. From heat exhaustion or lack of hydration. I don't know. We clinked beer bottles, laughing to this. To life after war.

After the war, the fighting went on. We pulled out from the border, but you know how it is with kaffirs and their tribal wars--like a spineless beast chasing its tail.

Here, back home, things slowly grew stranger. Hairy. Fucked up, beyond any and all recognition. On the final end of the Republiek, in 1994, I remembered the thing the Kommandant had spoke: The black man is not your enemy. Nobody said this when we were discharged, unthanked for our service. Our leaders made their dealings with kaffir kings, while we were left standing under the flag, trying to fly marred colours. The black man is not your enemy. That's how the leaders justified handing our fatherland to the enemy they learned us, the same enemy they fetched us to the border to finish. None of it made any sense. And when you stood up to ask how this thing should be remembered--what were we doing at the border? That rainbow kak was forced down your throat. The same ubuntu gobbledygook these American cyvivors and related refugees are now-now singing to better pull the wool over our eyes.

Of course, everyone would rather deny it, pretending the likes of this old Boer a conspiracy theory, but the ordinary truth of the fact is that while this cyberwar goes on, confusing the world, American cyvivors and they friends is busy colonizing the last white indigenous tribe of Africa. Why you think these cyvivors is here, kidnapping our land? Why you think they fill the shelves in our

shops with food a Boer can't pronounce, and force Afrikaans out of our kinders' classrooms because there's so goddamn many of them, suddenly here to stay?

Yes, my friend. The Americans is here to wipe us. I wouldn't be surprised if the African National Cronies is behind the whole thing with them. Paying the Americans, even. People think I'm going foggy in the brain, pointing out the obvious. I hear they monkey chatter, whispered behind my back, but you mark my words. And I'll tell you another thing. There will be no cyvivor-style walking away from here. Our names is written in the ground. Like I said that day to Johannes Van de Merwe: We will be fossilized in this here earth. It dranked our fathers' blood. Our fate is this land.

Anyway that's not what you really want to know, asking all innocent and official how it all started. You're here arse-creeping for what happened that day. About what is its why.

Well, it was just another braai at the spazashop celebrating our tribelessness. Nobody marks Van Riebeck Founders' Day anymore. Or remembers how, on the Day of the Vow, the Lord made good His covenant with us, delivering the Zulus to our oupagrootjies' barrels. Instead, we are hostage to everything foreign-born, pulling out all stops for they blerry Bastille Days and heathen Halloweens. And since the new addition, and what with her enabling customers, the old widow feels herself way up in the sky--a fat kite, flying thin on they high life.

Everybody came from our town and beyond. The Big Five already sizzling on the grill: Boerewors. Porkchops. Chicken. Steak. Mutton cuts. Enough Castle

beer to row these blerry cyvivors back over the seas. Even some respectable and lethal mampoer--the widow still brews it on the sly. We make normal kak-talk, How's the wife? Which Springbok is gonna moer what's left of the All-Blacks? What new direction is the government pissing in these days?

Somebody taps my shoulder, like we did in Standard One. They duck their head when I pass a look back. Grown men playing games. I turn round. But it's a mooilike lady when I see who it is. Up from die Kaap, she says. Smiling. Real friendly. Welcoming tits in my face. I smile back. She's some Boere's daughter. I've seen her around. But they grown up so quick. Trying to remember, whose daughter is this? She's talking-talking:

--Brought somebody I want you to meet, Oom. She says.

*Wish now I'd said no.*

--This is Themba

*Or cleared my throat maybe, just walked away...*

--Themba Ngcobe.

I extend a hand. He's standing right beside her.

--He was there also, Oom.

--There?

*Where, I want to know?*

--Told him about you. How you were also at the border.

I feel the man's hand. It isn't hard like a soldier, like what you expect. Not smooth either. Deep ridges run there, like Kimberley's Groot Gat is carved in his palm. I let go his hand, but can't with his gaze. The girl keeps yakking, saying

things I know just undressing his eyes: Gook. They stare back at me. Gook. Her voice trails into wind, sweeping up around us.

Gook, The wind answers.

“Foken Terr.” I hear myself shouting, barking so loud dust bites down my tongue. The eyes stare back at me. Accusing eyes. Inside this Themba Ngcobe are Enoch’s eyes. I tell myself that’s kak talk, Enoch died many years ago at the border. But I keep seeing him--Enoch staring back at me with unbelieving eyes. Already dead eyes. Or deadened.

That day at the border, Enoch’s eyes begged for no plea. Prayed no mercy. Seemed only to mirror me my own unblinking fear. Staring through me. Kommandant stands akimbo, beside me. The entire platoon, twenty two men--a bosbefok laarge--stand around us.

Enoch had been a man of the Bible. Learned me verses he knew in German. During contact with the enemy, it calmed me, speaking them. Inside my head, I’d say them to myself. Hear Enoch correct me. Tea-re, he’d say, slow. Gurgling the *re*.

Und ich werde die bösen Tiere aus dem Lande vertilgen, und das Schwert wird nicht durch euer Land gehen. And I will give peace in the land, and ye shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid: and I will rid evil beasts out of the land, neither shall the sword go through your land.

When I asked Enoch, Why? Was what Kommandant said really true? How could he betray us to the Terrs? How could he betray even me? Enoch brung me his family again: Helvi, Martta, Maria. And his wife. He said he couldn’t watch



them bow they heads forever in they own land. Couldn't let us do with them and they children's children what we'd done with his father, his father's fathers. I listened because I thought he'd say I'm sorry. That Kommandant must be blerry bosbefok calling him a enemy spook. After all the times he saved me? The many mines he saved us? But Enoch spoke nothing of sorry. Denied niks nie. And when he brung up the wife and his daughters, that he couldn't be a man watching them bow they heads like his mother and his father, I feel my head fog up again. The bush fucked with you, made you feel you almost understand why Enoch made hissself a poison in your own platoon. Kommandant shouted the order. My hand shook. Enoch watching my eyes flood, blank, drown.

I didn't hear myself speak the German Bible. Enoch was so close he heard me. Before I pulled the trigger, I tripped on the same word I always did. Tea-re. Enoch corrected me. His eyes remained fixed on me, even after. They refused to close.

The man with Enoch's eyes, Kimberley's Groot Gat mined into his palms, says nothing when I walk away. The Boeremeisie he came with, the one with a healthy chest, she calls out. I walk past my car and the others' cars. Turn down old streets. Streets walked all my life--the known world I returned to after the border. I pass the same leafless kokeboom that surely witnessed my birth from this earth. Remembers the founding of our town, how naked bushmen received my ancestors underneath its shade. I pass the few houses. Lights on. Hear alien tongues spoken inside Cape-Dutch homes. I reach my house eventually, begin the effort of stilling myself. Kommandant used to say power is not aggression. It

is control inside calm. I sit. The television watching. Lights still off. Heat gathering in my palms. Before I finish reciting, remembering the verse, I wall my hand against my mouth, rushing for the toilet.