

Anna's song

The music of stories

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Dissertation for the fulfilment of: Masters Degree in Creative Writing

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It is evening. Anna and her Großmutter are watching the first star rise over the Wortmanns' sugarcane fields. They sit on the stoep of the house Anna and her daughter share with her grandparents. The house is on the same property as their family business, the Wartburger Hotel. There is a comfortable silence between Anna and her Großmutter, suspended in the evening air, along with black ash and the smell of smoke. The Wortmanns have been burning their fields today. Anna looks towards the Wortmanns' farm. She scans the fields from the road separating the hotel property and the Wortmanns' farm, to the Blinkwater mountains on the horizon. There is no sign of a motorbike, or of a streak of dust twisting through the fields. She's longing for a glimpse of Michael Wortmann on his motorbike, but she knows her search is pointless. Michael is far away, in Germany. At the horizon, the evening air is red and heavy with the dying light. Anna blinks away the sadness welling up in her eyes. She tries to focus on the blanket over Großmutter's knees instead. Großmutter loves that blanket. Her mother knitted it for her, many years ago. Großmutter says that the blanket makes her feel homesick for her childhood. There is something in Großmutter's eyes that makes it easy for Anna to imagine her as a little girl, climbing the highest tree on the hotel's property, and feeling the freedom of being higher than everyone else in Wartburg. Almost like flying.

The church bells strike six. Großmutter taps her walking stick against the stoep's tiles. Großmutter doesn't need a walking stick, actually, but she likes to use one – mainly in moments like these, to draw attention to herself.

"Isn't there anybody to serve me here?" Großmutter calls, loudly. Großmutter never says anything softly.

"No," Anna says, her voice heavy. She gets up.

"Oh good, we aren't having a drought after all!" Großmutter coughs, and catches Anna's eye, finally managing to force a smile from her.

Anna returns to the stoep, carrying a tray of drinks. Cane and Coke for her grandmother, who loyally supports the sugar farmers. Großmutter's family used to own three of the biggest sugar farms in the area – but Großmutter's Onkel Hermann had been more interested in drinking away his money than in farming, which meant that most of the land now belonged to other families. Luckily, the hotel was still in the family, Großmutter often said. Anna put two glasses of Wartburger Hotel home-brewed beers for Großvater and herself on the stoep table, and a cup of Großmutter's special lemon juice for Emma, Anna's daughter.

"Großvater and Emma are on their way," Anna explains. "Großvater's speaking to Philani, you know, the painter – Philani's saying something about Großvater not paying him, but Großvater says he did."

“He did pay him, I was there,” Großmutter says.

“Philani seemed quite angry, but Großvater managed to get rid of him in the end,” Anna says, yawning.

“Are you tired, Schatzi?” Großmutter asks. “You’ve been rushing around all day.”

“So have you. A 76 year-old should be sitting around resting more. Like this.”

“It’s rude to talk about someone’s age. Guck lieber den schönen Stern an,” Großmutter retorts, pointing at the evening star.

The star is directly above what Großmutter calls her tree – just to the right of the stoep, an old jacaranda in full bloom. Anna hardly notices the star. She hopes Großmutter won’t realize she’s not paying attention. All she can think of is the news she heard that morning.

Anna and Michael are sitting underneath the jacaranda tree, eating red grape ice lollies. They are five years old, and they’ve just met. Anna’s parents have sent her to Wartburg to spend the summer holidays with her grandparents.

“I think we should get married,” Michael says, taking Anna’s sticky ice lolly hand into his, which is equally sticky.

“Now?”

“No, I think we can wait a while.”

“Ok,” Anna says, giggling. She pulls her hand away. She drops her ice-lolly’s wooden stick, and starts running.

“Hey, Michael, bet you can’t catch me!”

Großmutter is already halfway through her Cane and Coke, and Anna hasn’t touched her beer yet.

“You’re thinking of him, aren’t you? I heard the news, too.”

Anna ignores her. But Großmutter never lets herself be ignored.

“Don’t dwell on it, Schatz. First boyfriends normally don’t work out. And you’ve been coping without him for years now.”

Anna looks away. Großmutter moves closer to Anna.

“My first boyfriend,” Großmutter whispers dramatically, “was the Swiss poet.”

“I know, Großmutter. I’ve met him. Christian. Wasn’t his poetry quite bad? Großvater says so.”

“He’s just jealous. Ok, I admit there was a bit too much about the mountains and birds and how he feels when he looks at them in his poems. But I liked them.”

This is one of Großmutter's favourite stories. Anna has already heard it, more than once. Großmutter's favourite part of the story is the beginning part, where she speaks at length about her looks. Großmutter likes to exaggerate. But Anna knows that when it comes to speaking about her looks, Großmutter is telling the truth. Anna has seen photos, and her grandmother had really been beautiful as a young woman. "Sie hat die Schönheit in die Familie gebracht," Großvater likes to say. Anna just hopes Großmutter hadn't spent so much time speaking about her looks back then. Vanity is easier to handle in an old person. In fact, Großmutter's vanity is quite charming.

"You know, mein Schatz, I was also beautiful once. I looked a bit like you—just prettier. Same blue eyes, dark hair, and good figure. My complexion, people used to say, was the best in the whole of Wartburg. And the men ... they were just crazy about me. As I've noticed they are about you, too. Ja, die Männer!" At this she giggles, and blushes, and puts a stray strand of hair behind her ears. Anna knows exactly what Großmutter is going to say next.

"The first time the Swiss poet kissed me was right there under that tree."

"Does Großvater know this story? I've noticed you never tell it when he's around. He'll be here any second ..."

"You know, I was still getting to the point of the story. But you young people... you just don't have any patience. When you're 80 years old, like me, you won't like to be interrupted either," Großmutter twirls her walking stick around, as if to emphasize her age. Anna wants to mention that she's heard this story, many times, and that actually, Großmutter is only turning 76 this year.

"What I want to tell you, Anna, if you let me finish my story, is what the Swiss poet taught me..."

"Großmutter, I don't really want to talk about Christian."

"You just don't want to talk about his grandson. What's the grandson's name again..."

"It's such a beautiful evening, isn't it?" Anna says, pointing at the sky full of streaks of evening-red light.

"What's his name again?" Großmutter persists. "You see, I really am getting old... I never used to forget things."

"His name's Luka. And another thing you keep 'forgetting' is that I really don't want you to even mention him."

"I told you to be careful of Luka, didn't I?"

Anna blushes and looks away.

"What do you want to tell me about then, Großmutter? Do you want to tell me that Christian taught you how to kiss? Because you've explained that to me before, in detail,

and it's not the sort of thing one wants to hear from one's grandmother ..." Anna mumbles, holding her beer mug too tightly.

"Yes, yes, Schätzchen, I know that, but your mother is very far away, and your sister, too. So some things I have to..."

Anna points at her daughter's cup of juice.

"Oh, all right," Großmutter says. "I see that I don't need to explain. You found out for yourself. But now, let me finish. That was only part of the story, in any case. And listen properly now."

Anna looks up. She has only ever heard the kissing part.

"Christian was standing under that tree, the jacaranda. I could see by the look on his face that he was missing home. He came from a small village near Zürich. I'd heard so much about his village that it felt like part of me. Christian asked me if I liked music, and I said I didn't mind our church's brass band as long as Onkel Willi Engelbrecht didn't play because he played too loudly, and always finished a few bars before everyone else. But he said that he wasn't speaking about that sort of music. And he told me all about the music of the wind in the fir trees outside his parents' home. He was a bad poet, as I said. He used to talk too much of the wind, and not enough about life. If he had actually gotten around to asking me to marry him, maybe I would have made a plan."

"You would've married him instead of Großvater?"

"That's not what I said. I loved him, Anna, but he was too much of a dreamer."

"I wish he'd stayed in Switzerland with his dreams and his grandson and never come to visit us."

"Schatz, you can't wish that something didn't happen, you can't change the past. Why are you so kratzig today?"

Großmutter squeezes Anna's hand and carries on talking.

"Anyway, that day was different. He stopped talking about the flowers and the mountains and the wind for a while and told me something I've remembered all my life."

"Did he propose to you?"

"Are you paying attention, Anna? I've just told you he never did. Listen, mein Schatz. Life is all about music, Christian told me, and about opening your ears to it. Again, I thought that when Willi Engelbrecht plays his tuba, I'd rather close my ears. But Christian meant something else, so I tried to understand. I've spent a lot of time since, trying to work out what exactly Christian meant that day by music. That was more than fifty years ago. Only now that I'm older, I've begun to understand. Some people are deaf to life's music, like Markus Hillermann – he poured cement over his wife's first husband's grave yesterday because he was tired of her planting flowers on it."

And some only hear noise. That is their choice. But I hope that you won't choose noise. And then, you will realise that not only is there music all around you, there is music inside you, too. The music has been there – inside you, around you, since before you were born. You just need to learn to listen, mein Schatz – listen before you sing.”

Anna looks towards the mountains at the horizon, and tries to listen. All she can hear is the sound of night settling over Wartburg, and she wishes that there were a moon tonight.

CHAPTER ONE

“Anna ...” Tante Stefanie said, trying to sound cross, but not managing. She pointed at the rows of champagne bottles and glasses.

“What?” Anna asked, innocently. “Aren’t there enough glasses? I can put a few more out.”

“Michael’s fiancée doesn’t drink. And don’t even pretend you don’t know. I was there when she told you. At Marlene Wortmann’s birthday braai, remember?”

Anna looked out of the window of the Wartburger Hotel’s buffet room. It was starting to rain. Not to pour, but the misty kind of drizzle typical of KwaZulu-Natal summers. Anna was glad it wasn’t sunny, because a clear summer sky was like an obligation to be happy.

“I love this weather,” Anna whispered, realizing that before, she’d never liked the rain. She whistled a tune that Großmutter had taught her, long ago.

Lieber Gott, lass die Sonne wieder scheinen

Für Mama und Papa und für mich

Wenn die Wolke immer immer weinet

Dann weine ja auch ich.

“Anna ... are you even listening to what I’m saying?”

“Her name is Laura...Michael’s Verlobte.”

“Thanks! I somehow can never remember her name.”

“She never remembers our names either...”

“Anna ... nicht hässlich sein. You’ll at least have to put out some teacups. It’s a kitchen *tea*. There’s a reason it’s called that. Milk jugs and sugar might be nice, too...Teelöffel, maybe...”

“I know, I know,” Anna said.

Tante Stefanie called Mbali, and asked her to organize tea and coffee for forty people. Mbali was officially a cook at the hotel, but she also thought of herself as the person in charge of hotel decor, general management, and Emma’s upbringing as well as Anna’s. Mbali thought that Emma was almost perfect, but that Anna was far from it. Most of Mbali’s daily lectures were delivered to Anna. But Anna knew better than to argue with her. Recently, they’d had a fight, and Mbali had taken a week’s leave. It had been one of the most stressful weeks of Anna’s life.

“You’re lucky she listens to you,” Anna whispered when Mbali had left the room.

“Mbali really loves me but I think she still thinks of me as a five year old, the way she looks at me sometimes. And she normally does the opposite of what I say, just whatever she thinks is right.”

“Anna, stop philosophizing about Mbali – the guests are coming in fifteen minutes. Here, help me pack away some of these glasses.”

Mbali came back surprisingly quickly, carrying trays of teacups, milk jugs and tea spoons that Anna was sure she must have prepared already before Tante Stefanie had asked her to. Anna didn't say anything. She knew better than to criticize Mbali.

“Did Tante Minna bake this for you?” Tante Stefanie asked, pointing at the Butterkuchen.

“No,” Anna said, smiling. “I got the recipe out of her...”

“You didn't...”

“I did ... And I haven't heard you complimenting my baking skills yet. I was slaving away in the kitchen all of last night. Didn't you notice all of the delicious cakes?”

“Anna, Schatz,” Tante Stefanie gave her a hug. “Of course I noticed. And I know how hard this is for you!”

Tante Stefanie was fat, and her hugs were the hard, rib-crushing kind. Anna, built on smaller lines, always tried to avoid the Tante Stefanie comforting hug, but this time she hadn't been quick enough. She emerged from the hug, trying her best not to be too obviously gasping for breath.

“How on earth did you get that recipe out of Tante Minna?” Tante Stefanie asked. “I've been trying for *years*. And so has Großmutter.”

Anna winked.

“I played the sympathy card. I know it's terrible. Mentioned how much I'm missing my grandparents and so on. She melted like... butter.”

Laura, her mother and her sister arrived five minutes early. They were all wearing coats. People from Europe always seemed to feel the cold more than South Africans did. Anna and Tante Stefanie weren't even wearing jerseys. It was strange, Anna thought, when it got so much colder there. They should be sweating, and peeling their layers off. Laura's sister even pulled the glass sliding door closed. Anna had left it open for fresh air.

“Da ist so ein kalter Zug,” Laura's sister said. Anna tried her best not to roll her eyes. She was very surprised that they had already come. Anna had explained to Laura's sister and her mother that the kitchen tea was traditionally a surprise for the bride, but clearly they hadn't understood. Or maybe they hadn't been paying attention. Instead of coming later, like Anna had requested, and not saying anything to Laura about the function, they were the first people there, and Laura didn't look at all surprised. In fact, she looked put out, as though being there was an inconvenience.

“Welcome to the bride!” Tante Stefanie shrieked, a little out-of-breath after running from the kitchen to say hello. Anna smirked as Tante Stefanie graced Laura with one of her hugs. Laura and her entourage continued to stand very decorously in the corner next to the flower arrangement while Anna and Tante Stefanie raced from the kitchen to the lounge to sort out last minute things.

“You’d think this wasn’t even their function,” Tante Stefanie snapped, when they were out of earshot. Anna shook her head.

“Marlene is covering the catering costs. And I am Laura’s bridesmaid, after all.”

“But so is Laura’s sister. Do you think the effort of carrying a milk jug would be too much for her?”

“I don’t know, Tante Stefanie, maybe we should ask her?” Anna winked.

The girls from Anna, Michael and the twins’ group of friends arrived more-or-less on time, a few moments after Anna and Tante Stefanie had finished setting up the tea things. Nicky, one of Anna’s best friends, was there first. She greeted the Laura trio, and then went to say Hallo to Anna.

“Is Laura going to a function in Iceland?” Nicky whispered into Anna’s ear. Anna giggled. “Hey, look, Julia-the-Righteous is super-friendly with Laura,” Nicky continued. Julia, one of their school friends, was trying to chat to the Laura trio about politics in Germany, which she didn’t actually have much of a clue about.

“Big mistake,” Anna said, softly to Nicky. “Never get a German-German started on politics.”

“Never,” Nicky mouthed, as Laura’s mother started speaking about the rising unemployment rate in Germany. Theresa, Michael’s sister, joined Anna and Nicky.

“Why is Laura already here?” she asked. “Germans,” Anna said. “Maybe it’s my Wartburg accent, but they somehow didn’t understand the meaning of “Es ist ein Geheimnis, please don’t tell Laura, and make sure you come late.”

Tante Stefanie opened the sliding door again. She was pink in the face from running back and forth. Some of the others were now trying to greet Laura, who was looking very uninterested in everything and everyone. Julia was freed from the discussion of the German unemployment rate. She walked over to Anna, Nicky, and Theresa, balancing her tea-cup carefully.

“I’m so glad Michael’s found someone so beautiful and nice,” she said, looking at Anna. “After how he’s been treated by you, he really deserves something special. I’m glad he’s finally over you ...”

“I heard you’re pregnant, Anna,” Julia says.

“Hasn’t everyone?”

“Yes, but I didn’t believe it, I mean everyone always thought you were so wonderful. And look what you’ve done with your life.”

“I’m pregnant, Julia, I haven’t killed someone.”

“Leave Anna alone,” Nicky hissed at Julia. “She’s just jealous,” she said to Anna, pulling Anna away from Julia, but speaking loudly enough so that Julia could hear. “She’s jealous that everyone still loves you, even though you’re a ‘whore’.”

Anna, Nicky, and Theresa laughed loudly, and Julia walked away. Nicky and Theresa started a wild game of catchers with Emma.

“Nicky! Theresa! You should teach my daughter good manners! Not how to behave like a banshee!” Anna yelled. Laura’s mom frowned at the noise, and Laura and her sister continued looking uninterested.

“Help yourselves to some cake, please,” Anna offered. “You should try the Butterkuchen, it’s an old family recipe.” Laura took a tiny piece of fruit cake, and the sister didn’t have anything – she mumbled something about her schlanke Linie. Anna wondered if Laura didn’t know the difference between Butterkuchen and fruit cake, or if she was trying to spite her. Laura’s mom kept looking at the cuckoo clock that Christian and Luka had brought from Switzerland. The cuckoo had chimed about a quarter of an hour ago, the time the kitchen tea was supposed to have started. Anna wasn’t surprised. Michael’s family on the Wortmann side was renowned throughout Wartburg for their lack of punctuality. His relatives from his mother’s side had obviously all agreed to come later, too, because they knew that any function involving the Wortmanns always started late.

Michael’s family started trickling into the lounge about half an hour after the arranged time. There were many of them– Michael’s father had been one of eight children. Michael’s mother also came from a big family.

“I should have remembered...” Anna whispered to Tante Stefanie.

“What?”

“To tell them a different time. All of the Wortmanns except Theresa. Half an hour earlier.”

Tante Stefanie chuckled.

“An hour earlier in Großmama Wortmann’s case.”

“Marlene is getting worse now, too. It must be contagious, since she’s just married into that family. But she’ll still arrive before her mother-in-law.”

Suddenly Anna heard a distinctive voice from the other side of the room.

“Some people think that two o’ clock means half past.”

Anna and Tante Stefanie exchanged meaningful glances.

“Who invited Tante Minna?” Anna whispered. Tante Minna was Großvater’s sister, and unlike Großvater, who had been gentle and quiet, she had an impossible streak. And a loud voice.

“No, don’t look at me like that. It’s not my fault. And she’s related to you as well.”

“Not as closely. She’s your aunt. And my great-aunt. There’s a lot more distance between us.”

“Not so much more distance.”

“Enough.”

“As I said, it’s really not my fault.”

“Why did she come then?”

“She actually invited herself, can you believe it.”

“Impossible.”

“Really, she did. She asked Marlene if she could come. To the wedding, too.”

“No, I mean she’s impossible. Even though she does have the best intentions. But without Großmutter around, she’s just impossible.”

“Ja, I agree that my mother used to control her. Tante Minna did give you her Butterkuchenrezept, though. Remember that before you get angry with her.”

Anna wished she could tell Tante Minna to go home, but there were already too many people there. She didn’t want a scene. She wouldn’t have had the heart to tell Tante Minna to leave in any case. At least Tante Minna had remembered to bring a present, Anna thought to herself, seeing Tante Minna put her gift on the present table. Tante Minna helped herself to a cup of tea, while chatting away to Laura’s mother. Anna saw Laura’s mom’s eyes grow bigger and bigger as Tante Minna helped herself to teaspoonful after teaspoonful of sugar. Four or five teaspoons, Anna always forgot exactly how many, but Tante Minna always noticed if someone else put too much or too little sugar in her tea. Even if it was only out by half a spoon, and she hadn’t seen them put the sugar in. Tante Minna spotted Anna and waved.

“Ännchen! Komm grüß mal!”

Laura’s mother took the opportunity to move away.

“She says she doesn’t understand my German,” Tante Minna whispered, very loudly. “Apparently I have an *accent*. But she hasn’t heard herself speak yet. She uses such big words, I forget what she’s talking about by the time she gets to the end of the sentence. Oh and she’s from North Germany, but she can’t speak *platt*.”

“Shhhhhh... not so loud, Tante Minna. Not everyone from North Germany speaks Plattdeutsch.”

“All the proper North Germans do,” Tante Minna insisted.

Laura's mother hadn't moved very far away at all. And she was clearly listening.

"I heard that sister of Laura's, Wie heißt sie..."

"Leonie."

"Leonie? What a silly name," Tante Minna chuckled. "Anyway, I heard that Leonie girl tell Laura that she wonders why we don't just speak English. Apparently our German is *that* bad. Well, I want to ask her how many languages she can speak? All of us here know English, Afrikaans, Zulu *and* German *and* Plattdeutsch – or at least some of us know Plattdeutsch ..."

"Tante Minna, shhhhhhhhhh," Anna said, desperately.

"You organised this yourself, Liebling?" Tante Minna asked. Anna nodded.

"Doesn't she have any friends to do this for her?"

"I'm a bridesmaid, remember?" Anna said hastily. Tante Stefanie, fortunately, was now busy trying to distract Laura's mother from overhearing any more. Anna tried her hardest not to get annoyed with Tante Minna. Tante Minna, however, had a type of voice and level of decibels that made it very difficult not to get annoyed.

"You know, Annali, I bet that Laura can't organize anything like this! Probably never done a stitch of cooking either in her life- she's so pale and skinny. This cake tastes great!" Tante Minna took an enormous bite of her Butterkuchen. "Now, that you have my Butterkuchen recipe, I might as well retire from baking!" Tante Minna took another bite of cake. Anna took advantage of the gap in Tante Minna's stream of conversation, and pulled her to a chair in the far corner of the room, where some of Michael's great-aunts were sitting.

"By the way, Anna," Tante Minna said, after she had greeted Michael's Tante Waltraud, Tante Klärchen, and Tante Helga. "That new boyfriend of yours almost came here. I saw him at the door. I told him this was a ladies-only function. He said that the twins told him to come. That's what happens when you fall in love with a Catholic. If he was Lutheran, he'd know his place."

"He isn't Catholic. And the twins are *terrible*."

"That's what *you think*, love. He looks Catholic. You know, your great-grandfather (my Papa) used to shoot rabbits in the Catholic church's garden during their service times. To make a bit of a noise. And look at you now. *Vrying* a Catholic Engländer..."

Anna walked away, not because she was annoyed, but because she really had to laugh. Tante Minna assumed that anyone who wasn't in the one true Lutheran church was either Catholic or, even worse, what she called a "happy-clappy". "Happy-clappies", in Tante Minna's opinion, were all Christians who didn't have an organ in their church, or at least two members of the congregation who could play a brass instrument.

Anna hoped Tante Minna wouldn't spot Michael's varsity friend, Zinhle, who was busy helping herself to some cake. Tante Minna would be sure to have something to say about a black person attending a Wortmann kitchen tea, never mind that Zinhle had actually been invited. Anna surveyed the room. Nicky was chatting to Zinhle, Michael's little cousins and Emma were prodding Laura's gifts and trying to figure out what was inside, and the others were finding seats and getting themselves ready for proceedings to begin. Anna had realized long ago that people in Wartburg really did not like waiting, and preferred to have functions finish as quickly as possible. If they didn't finish quickly, people would start packing the chairs and dishes away to make sure that they did. Anna looked around – but she could not have gotten things started because Michael's Wortmann Großmama had not arrived yet. Großmama Wortmann would never have forgiven anyone if she was not waited for. She was a feisty woman. Although her husband had died of cancer a few years back, she still lived in the huge old Wortmann farmhouse with her three Alsatians. When people asked if she wasn't scared to live alone, she told them that she slept with a gun underneath her pillow. Once, she had been held up at knifepoint by one of the farm's seasonal labourers. She had given him such a stern lecture, and had yelled at him so loudly that he had dropped his knife and had run away. The other day, Anna's Großonkel Hans had told her please to move into the old-age home because there were so many people on his prayer list that he could not afford to pray for any more. There was even a cottage open next to his. Its previous owner, Otilie Habermann, had just passed away. Großmama Wortmann had explained that while she had her gun and her dogs, he could just as well spend his time praying for the others.

Anna spotted Michael's mom and Laura talking. The conversation looked very uncomfortable, and Anna was glad about it. Michael's mom, Marlene seemed to be asking a lot of questions, but getting very little response. Anna wondered if Laura was a snob or just terribly shy, with her one-word answers and apparent lack of interest in the conversation. Anna had only met Laura a few times. She'd noticed, however, that when the topic of conversation was Laura, Laura was suddenly remarkably talkative. What did Michael and Laura talk about, Anna wondered, trying not to think of how much she'd missed talking to Michael about everything in the past few years. But Michael was a man, it was probably enough for him just to look. Anna, feeling suddenly very conscious of the fact that she was wearing sneakers, tried not to compare her shoes with Laura's designer heels. Anna consoled herself with the thought that Laura had the kind of face that definitely wouldn't age well. And how ever would she cope with being a farmer's wife in those high heels? Anna had heard recently of two farmers' wives in Vryheid insisting on moving out of their farmhouses into town. Their husbands had had to build them

mansions in Vryheid. Anna's cousin Kirsty had told her about it, she lived in that area. Anna could just imagine Laura demanding a mansion in Hilton, so that she could be closer to the Spas on the Midlands Meander. Suddenly Anna noticed that Laura was looking over Marlene's shoulder, straight at her. Anna quickly looked away, hoping Laura hadn't noticed her staring. She walked over to Laura and Marlene, and gave Marlene a hug from behind. The Wortmanns loved Anna, and Anna didn't feel above using her position as a favourite in the family to let Laura feel uncomfortable.

"Anna!" Marlene shrieked. "It's so lovely to see you! And just look at all of this! It's all so beautiful. The flower arrangements, the food, alles! I'm so proud of you, Schatz!"

"Vielen Dank," Laura added, stiffly.

"It's my first function since I've re-opened the hotel," Anna explained to Laura. Marlene asked Anna about the Butterkuchen. Anna was busy explaining that it was Tante Minna's recipe that she had promised to keep a secret when she saw Laura pull a rocking chair out from behind one of the little coffee tables.

Anna jumped.

"Nein, Laura, please don't touch that chair!"

"I'm sorry," Laura said, shrugging her shoulders

"It was her grandmother's," Marlene whispered, squeezing Anna's shoulders.

"Anna, mein Schatzili, could you please move my rocking chair to the reception for me? I'm on reception duty tonight, and my back is hurting again. That chair is just so much more comfortable." Großmutter has finished her last sip of Cane and Coke, the usual sign that the family sundowner time was over. The evening star has been joined by thousands of others. Because it's new moon, the stars are particularly bright.

"Großmutter, I can do reception duty for you if you've got a sore back. Really. Rather go to sleep and rest."

"Schatzi, you and Günther are sorting out next's week's menu tonight. You need to give Emma her dinner, and put her to bed. And you have to cook 4kgs of Spaetzle as well before you go to sleep, remember? For the Küsel wedding ... Don't worry, I'll sit there with my hot water bottle. I'll be fine."

"What are you doing tonight, Großvater?"

"Managing the restaurant. And I'll probably help Großmutter with some accounts later."

Anna and Knowledge carry the chair together. It is heavy, and Anna almost drops it on the hotel's tiled floor. Anna wonders what Großmutter would have done to her had she broken the chair. Emma is still trying to convince Großmutter that she'll do her

reception duty, then Großmutter can go to sleep at seven instead of her. Emma hates sleeping, and her seven-o'clock bedtime is the bane of her life.

“Can we get started now?” Laura asked. She sounded impatient.

“I’m not sure if Großmama’s arrived...”

“She has,” Großmama’s voice came from the entrance of the buffet room. “Better late than never!”

“Better ten minutes late than a whole hour, Mama,” Marlene said.

“She’s so cheeky!” Großmama said, giving each of them a hug and a kiss smack on the lips. “And I’m sure she was more than ten minutes late, wasn’t she, Annalein?”

“Maybe,” Anna winked.

“What happens now?” Laura asked.

“You have to guess who gave you each present. And then what’s inside.”

Laura’s eyes widened.

“There are so many people here!”

Anna wanted to slap her. She’d never been overly endowed with patience, and Laura’s way of opening her eyes widely and batting her eyelashes really irritated her. You’ve been here for a month, she wanted to say. That’s more than enough time to get to know everyone. Instead she smiled, sweetly, and fluttered her eyelashes in what she hoped wasn’t too much of an obvious imitation of Laura.

“I’ll help you,” she lied. She knew that she wouldn’t be able to get Laura out of this particular predicament. Michael’s close family at least would expect Laura to know them. Laura sat down on the chair Emma showed her, next to the present table. Michael’s little cousins and Emma saw it as their duty to present Laura with her gifts. The chattering in the hotel’s buffet room quietened down. Michael’s smallest cousin, Clara, gave her the first present.

“That’s from Tante Stefanie,” Anna whispered. Surely she must remember her, she thought to herself, they’ve only just been introduced. She can’t be that useless.

“Danke, Tante Stefanie,” Laura said, sweetly smiling at Anna’s aunt. Laura might even be able to pull this off after all, Anna thought, grumpily. She even managed to guess the present right. Inside was a tin mixing bowl. Anna wondered if Laura knew what a mixing bowl was for. The next present was passed by Clara again, much to the irritation of Emma, who also wanted a turn to choose a present and pass it to Laura. Anna looked at the card, and saw that it was one of Michael’s Großmama’s homemade cards.

“It’s from Großmama,” Anna whispered, too softly, and Laura didn’t hear her. Laura looked around the room helplessly, from face to face. It might help if she actually mentioned some names, instead of just staring, Anna thought.

“It’s from me,” Großmama said loudly.

“Oh!” Laura said, and opened the gift hastily, without guessing. It was a beautiful handmade tablecloth. Anna could not stop looking at the intricately stitched detail on the tablecloth. It must have taken Großmama weeks to finish. Laura was already opening the next present, without paying any attention to Großmama’s handiwork. Emma had passed it to her. Oh no, Anna thought, when she recognized the bright wrapping, and the handwriting on the card.

“Tante Christine,” she whispered to Laura, trying to whisper a bit louder, as inconspicuously as possible. Laura looked at Tante Luisa, Michael’s dad’s sister, while saying loudly,

“This must be from you, Tante Christine?” She wasn’t even looking at the right part of the room.

“Yes, it is, well guessed, Anna,” came Tante Christine’s voice from the other side. “Now read us the clue!”

“After dinner...” Laura read. Anna swore under breath. Tante Christine was the youngest of Marlene’s sisters; she was only ten years older than Anna. Tante Christine was bright and giggly, and had a fabulous sense of humour. Anna knew her sense of humour well enough to guess what was inside the package.

“It’s a... dish cloth?” Laura asked, opening the wrapping. Into her lap fell a bright red bra. Everyone in the room started shrieking with laughter. Laura blushed, dropped the bra, and ran outside. Laura’s mother and sister ran after her, but nobody else seemed very disturbed by her departure.

“Has she never seen a bra before?” Tante Minna asked.

“Thank goodness I gave her one, then!” Tante Christine said.

Emma and the junior cousins continued arranging the presents into piles. Carla even opened one or two, but stopped when Emma gave her a lecture. Michael’s Wortmann aunts were drinking their tea and tucking into third helpings of the cake. Marlene’s sisters had started opening the champagne, and a lot of giggling was coming from their part of the room. Marlene, who had pursued Laura half-heartedly, had returned (without Laura).

“No, that’s only half-full,” she said to Tante Christine, who was pouring her a glass of champagne. “Fill it up please.” Then she mumbled something under her breath about needing some alcohol to be able to deal with a drama-queen daughter-in-law. Mbali was soon pouring champagne for the great-aunts and the Wortmann aunts as well. Tante Minna’s voice piped up very loudly,

“I knew we shouldn’t trust a bride from Germany!”

It was enough of a comment to quieten the whole room, and Tante Minna felt flattered enough by the silence to tell a story. Anna had heard the story before, from Großmutter ...

Theo Bielefeldt was a man who took his time with everything. He used to plant his fields a few weeks after everyone else, and he was always the last person at the front of the church on communion Sunday. Theo also spoke really la a a a a a a a a angsam. It was very frustrating. And it was terrible to have a conversation with him. I just used to finish his sentences, because I'd get so tired of waiting for him. The conversation would normally not reach past the Wie geht es dir stage, anyway. And it never ever passed the oh what lovely weather we've been having stage. Because of Theo's slow way of talking, he never managed to get a wife. I suppose that by the time he got to the "Will you ..." of "Will you marry me?" the woman had always lost interest already. A terrible burden, that. Theo was in his thirties when the Second World War ended. It was common knowledge amongst us Germans in South Africa that there were many war widows available for marriage from Germany. Us South African Germans like to help people in need, so several desperate bachelors decided to help the needy by marrying German widows. Theo also felt like being charitable, and ordered himself a wife from Braunschweig in Germany. A "glove" wedding was held in Germany – which meant that Theo sent one of his gloves by mail to represent him. I don't know where he found a glove. We don't wear gloves here. But that's an old German tradition, it seems. His new wife arrived by ship a few months later. She came on the Susanna, on the same ship as my second cousin, Wolfgang. After arriving in Durban, she came to Wartburg by train. A big crowd of us waited for her train because we were so curious to see her, and because, in those days, there wasn't much other entertainment in Wartburg. Theo's bride was pretty, and small, with long blonde hair. Her name was Charlotte. And when I first saw her, I immediately knew that she was far too sharp-witted for Theo. Although I never knew if it was his brain or his tongue that was slow, or both.

I fell in love with your Großvater at the Bielefeldt's wedding, Anna. It was on the evening of Charlotte's arrival. I'd obviously known your Großvater all my life. He'd always been crazy about me, but I had only had eyes for Christian. I noticed Leo for the first time then, and spent most of the evening dancing with him. I don't remember much more about the wedding, but I remember the faraway look in Charlotte's eyes. Something about her eyes reminded me of how I suddenly felt about your Großvater. I wondered if she was thinking about her dead husband, killed in Russia or France in some horribly bloody battle. That look in her eyes couldn't be meant for Theo Bielefeldt. The wedding was in December, it was hot. While my feet were busy dancing, I was

thinking of the snow falling on Charlotte's dead husband's grave. And wondering if he had even had a grave.

The next morning, I slept longer than usual, my mother didn't wake me up as she normally did to bake bread for the day. And when I went downstairs, my Tante Margarethe was having tea with my mother, in the hotel's kitchen. She told us that she'd heard from Rahel Engelbrecht that Charlotte had disappeared without a trace. Theo had woken up that morning, and Charlotte was gone. Theo must've been slow in other ways too, if he spent his wedding night fast asleep. Charlotte's disappearance was spoken of for a few weeks in Wartburg, in Comondale, and even further north in Wittenberg and Lüneburg. But nobody ever saw her again. Nobody knew where she went.

CHAPTER TWO

Anna liked to swim on her back, that way she could see the sky. She never swam with her face to the floor of the pool, because when Anna looked at the sky, it felt like her world was whole. Anna had spent a month in Germany on an exchange programme while she was still at school. It was winter, and it had rained almost the entire month. At some stage, Anna had stopped believing that the sky existed. She had felt claustrophobic, fenced in, and miserable. When she came back, she walked looking at the sky until Großmutter reminded her of Hans-Guck-In-Die-Luft who fell into the river because he was always looking up.

When the Wartburg people saw her at the Spar, or at Piggly-Wiggly Farm Store, and they asked her why she was spending so much time swimming lengths in the school pool, Anna could never quite explain. She'd never liked swimming when she was at school.

"No, I am not training for the Olympic Games, Onkel Otto, and no, it's not to lose weight so that I can impress the men and finally get married either."

Anna didn't really know why. Somehow, it didn't seem like enough of a reason to say she liked looking at the sky. Today, there were clouds, but Anna could still see some patches of blue. She was thinking about nothing in particular, just swimming, length after length. She saw it happen, but she didn't notice until the clouds had completely covered the sky. Anna stood up in the shallow end, and suddenly she heard it, too. The rumbling of thunder – not in the distance, but very close. The sky was dark now, dark with the threat of a summer storm. Anna jumped out of the pool, dried herself as quickly as she could, and wrapped herself in her towel. She hadn't brought a jersey, it had been so hot when she'd left home. Anna shivered. She looked up. The sky had that strange brightness that always announces a storm.

Anna looks out of the classroom window, it is almost two, and she can see Großvater waiting for her at the school gate. Anna can't wait for the bell to ring, so that she can run and say hello to him. He's got her new puppy, Castor, on his leash, and Anna wants to show Castor off. Castor is a collie, brown and white – and Anna thinks he's the most beautiful dog she's ever seen. Anna's Onkel Martin doesn't think so, she heard him telling Großvater yesterday that they didn't choose Castor for his looks, and that he has some beautiful Jack Russell puppies if Großvater changes his mind. Anna is glad Großvater hasn't. The bell rings, and Anna throws her books and pens into her school bag as quickly as she can. Later Großmutter will shout at her for being messy, Anna knows. She runs, and Michael and her twin cousins, Mark and Andreas, follow her closely. Mark

tries to trip Andreas up, but Andreas is too fast for him. Michael is allowed to hold Castor first. The twins, Anna and Michael run on the school field with Castor on his leash until Großvater tells them it's time to go home. They always walk home together, Anna and the twins both live on the hotel property, and Michael cycles home from the hotel to the farm. Anna realizes suddenly that she is cold. She looks up at the sky. The clouds have pulled over, they are strangling the sun. The sky is dark, but somehow bright at the same time. Castor shivers in Anna's arms.

"There's a storm coming," Großvater says. "We have to walk fast."

Anna carries the puppy, and they all walk as fast as their short legs can. They walk quickly past the Spar, without stopping for a guava juice or a packet of Niknaks like they sometimes do if one of them has pocket money. The last stretch, they run, even Großvater. They arrive at the hotel gates just as the first drops begin to fall. Knowledge, the gardener at the hotel, opens the gate for them quickly, and they run inside. Castor doesn't like the thunder, Anna has to hold him tightly and explain to him that he doesn't have to be scared. The thunder is just talking to the lightning, and the thunder has a very loud voice, but you don't need to be afraid of it. Großvater and the boys make a fire in the hotel's fireplace. Michael and the twins will go home later, when the storm has passed. Now, they sit around the fire, eating waffles with powdery white icing sugar, and Großmutter tells them a story.

I also used to walk home from Schule when I was young, with my brother Hans. We were walking home the one day, when we heard thunder. We walked until we reached what was then Reiche's Store, when we felt the first drops of rain. Onkel Hans wanted to carry on walking, but I reminded him of Onkel Anton Lauterbach, who was struck dead by lightning standing on his own verandah. No, don't worry Anna, you won't be struck by lightning inside the house. The thunder was getting louder and louder, and we still had far to go. While we were standing there outside the store, discussing if we should carry on or wait, my Onkel Hermann arrived in his yellow Ford.

"Jump in, junger Herr und junges Fräulein," he said. Onkel Hermann was one of the only people in Wartburg with a car, can you imagine that? He owned a yellow Ford, while everyone was still walking everywhere, and taking the horse and cart to church. He was extremely proud of that car. Some people said that he loved it even more than his own wife. But Onkel Herman drove that car like a Verrückter, and when we heard his car coming, we would jump off the road. He only drove 70km/h. But in those days that was extremely fast. And the dust from the road just flew up as he sped by. That day, we'd been so busy discussing, that we hadn't even heard him arrive. Onkel Hans and I

felt like the luckiest children in the world, being offered a lift in a car. Until we saw the bag at our feet. It was the kind of bag they used to sell flour in, but from the smell coming from that bag, I guessed that there definitely wasn't any flour inside. I looked. It was filled with dead rats. But I said nothing about the rats. Neither did Hans. We were too much in awe of Onkel Hermann. He sped off through Wartburg town, driving towards Bruyn's Hill. He stopped every now and then, and at each farm's entrance, he dropped a few dead rats: at the Wortmanns, the Eggers, the Kochs. After that, he turned around and dropped us off at home. The next day, I saw Onkel Hermann at Reiche's Store. It used to be there where the Spar is now. He was trying to convince Johannes Wortmann that a plague had hit Wartburg, and had killed the rats. And that it wouldn't be too long before we were all dead. The funniest thing is, that the whole of Wartburg believed him for a few days.

Anna swore. She should have come in her car. She put her shorts and top on over her swimming costume. She looked at her feet. She was probably too old to go everywhere barefoot. Anna ran out of the swimming pool gate, slamming it shut behind her. Luckily the school pool was closer to the hotel than Wartburg-Kirchdorf School itself. It was next to the Georgenau school – known locally as the Black School, terminology Anna preferred not to use. The Georgenau school was missing windows, and roots were pulling up the cement everywhere. Anna wished she had enough money to give it a revamp, or that somebody would do something, just to stem the local opinion that “they” had been given a perfectly functional building (in fact, the Germans themselves had built it, it was the original site of Wartburg school), but that “they” were just incapable of maintaining order.

The first drops of rain started slapping her face hard, big and round. Anna ran faster. She thought of Emma, home alone with Mbali. Emma had always been afraid of storms. The only thing Emma was more scared of than a storm was night.

“Emma, you're big enough to sleep alone now. Mbali will be right here with you in the lounge.”

“But I want to sit with you and Günther at the hotel, please, please. I can help you cook the Spätzle ...”

“Emma, Schatz, it's past your bed-time. And when you're at the hotel you never sleep. Because Fräulein Emma is always too busy showing off for all the guests to sleep.”

“I can put my mattress at reception with Großmutter's chair.”

Anna thins out her lips, and frowns. Emma knows that that is it and it is final.

Anna kisses her goodnight.

“What are you dreaming about tonight, Mama?”

“I don’t know, Liebling, why?”

“I just want to make sure I see you in Dreamland.”

Anna ran faster, and wished Großmutter hadn’t told her about Anton Lauterbach. She heard the thunder getting closer and closer. She counted the seconds between lightning and thunder. There were hardly any seconds left. Anna ran past the Spar, and wondered if she should wait there. But it was payday, and there was chaos outside. Crowds of farm labourers who had come to spend their salary at the Spar were trying to get inside to keep dry. Informal sellers on the verge were struggling to pack up their things, their potje pots and straw baskets, green mealies and big packets of bright orange chips. Anna thought she’d caught a glimpse of Philani the painter, standing under the outside roof of the Spar. She sped up a bit, she was almost home. Anna had just stepped into a huge puddle of mud and almost tripped, when a car stopped next to her. It was Friederike Peters.

“Jump in, I’ll drive you home,” she said. Friederike was Anna’s mother’s age, and married to Wartburg’s most prominent architect. He was also Wartburg’s only architect, which meant that many of the houses in Wartburg looked the same. Wolfgang Peters had designed the new classrooms at the school, and all of the buildings in Wartburg less than thirty years old.

“Funny weather to go swimming in,” Friederike said. Tact had never been her strength. And she had a way of always getting directly to the point.

“It wasn’t bad when I started swimming,” Anna said.

“Why didn’t you wait at the pool change rooms for the storm to pass?”

Anna didn’t have an answer. Lately, she didn’t have many answers. The happy face she put on every morning took all of her effort, and she didn’t have energy spare to think logically.

“Und ... wie geht’s deinen Eltern denn?” Friederike asked, after a while, when she realised that there wasn’t an answer forthcoming.

“Es geht ihnen sehr gut.” Anna’s teeth were clenched ever so slightly. Her fingernails were digging into her hands. She had on the mechanical smile she always wore when she spoke about her parents. Anna liked to be honest about her feelings. But there were times when concealment was imperative, and behind Anna’s smile was that crumpled up piece of paper. That morning, she’d printed the email out specifically so that she could experience squashing it into a ball, throwing it against the wall and into Großmutter’s tin rubbish bin.

Our darling daughter,

(Had they forgotten how to speak German? Did they no longer say Segnevaterdiesespeiseunszurkraftunddirzumpreise as grace before meals, fast and mumbly, no breathing or breaks, and Gesundheit when someone sneezed? Schlaf gut, träum süß, Liebling before bed?)

Join us in Sydney! We are loving it here, people are so friendly. South Africa is going to the dogs. We read Media-24 reports every day, we are shocked. Do you want your daughter to have a future? Think of what happened to your grandparents. You aren't safe there. Emma shouldn't have to grow up in such a god-forsaken land. You both don't have to live lives plagued by crime. Be sensible! Well, I must go! We are having a barbeque with our neighbours in a bit.

Miss and love you,

Mom and Dad

(Mama und Papa?)

PS Your sister says hello. It would have been your grandmother's birthday today, did you remember?

Yes. Anna had already put jacaranda blossoms from the hotel's tree onto her Großmutter's grave. She'd had to use a ladder to pick the blossoms from the tree's lowest branches. And had almost fallen off. Emma had shrieked with laughter, and hadn't understood why her mother wasn't joining in - as she usually would. But Anna had regained her balance calmly, ignored Emma, and stretched out for the blossoms. It was no longer spring, and the purple blossoms were starting to look tired. But she knew Großmutter would love these flowers best. And Anna knew also what Großmutter would have said to that email. Plagued by crime. She'd have said that a plague is only a plague if you let yourself believe in it. Like in the story Großmutter had told her.

He was trying to convince Johannes Wortmann that a plague had hit Wartburg, and had killed the rats. And that it wouldn't be too long before we were all dead. The funniest thing is, that the whole of Wartburg believed him for a few days.

Anna kept her mechanical smile and thought about her Großmutter as she explained to Friederike how her dad's job in Sydney was going. Yes, he had found work as a doctor, he'd had to write an exam though. Anna's mother had met many other South Africans

there. Yes, her sister still played tennis. She was going to university there, studying a B.A. or a B.Com or something. No, Anna wasn't sure how the tertiary education system worked over there.

"And Anna, who is looking after Emma now? That new boyfriend of yours?"

Anna still hadn't felt like telling anybody that Ian was no longer her boyfriend.

"No, actually not. He's in Cape Town. Mbali is, she's great with Em."

"You're so lucky to have a reliable help. I can't trust my girl with anything."

Anna gritted her teeth. Friederike's "girl" was at least twenty years older than she was.

Anna was glad they'd reached the hotel, and that she could now be finished with talking.

She said Dankeschön and Tschüss to Friederike Peters, and tried not to slam the car door shut.

It's the evening of Laura's kitchen tea. Ian has been helping Anna tidy up, and all the time the words Anna wants to say are a barrier between them.

It's still drizzling outside, but it's misty now, too. Misty and dark. Anna and Ian are standing at the edge of the hotel's stoep, smoking.

"Ian, we need to talk," Anna says, but her voice is so soft that Ian doesn't hear her.

"Anna, I've decided I'm going back to England," Ian says, and Anna wonders why he is smiling.

"Oh, really?" Anna ashes her cigarette violently, and it falls out of her hand, onto the ground. She picks it up, clumsily. It burns her hand, and she drops it again. It's not as though she expected this to end any differently. But Anna is tired of being alone, and she wants to hold on, if only for that reason.

"Anna, I want you to come with me."

"To England? No, thanks. Haven't you heard that it rains all the time there?"

Anna puts some ice from her gin and tonic onto her hand.

"It's raining here, too," Ian says.

"Hardly."

"At least you can walk around at night without being raped or killed there."

"I don't want to walk around at night."

"This country is falling apart, you need to leave."

"Ian, even if I'm the last person here ... I'm not leaving."

"I love you. I can't live without you."

"I'm not coming to England," and Anna suddenly realizes that Ian is surprised, as though he expected her to answer differently. "I don't love you, Ian. And if you really

loved me, you wouldn't ask me to leave. I'll never leave. And you wouldn't say those things about South Africa either."

"What about what happened to your grandparents? Are you just going to forget that?"

"Don't bring my grandparents into this. Don't you even dare."

Emma was sitting at the glass sliding door of Tante Stefanie's house, looking outside. She asked Anna every day if they could move back to "their" house, where all their things were, where Emma had a big bedroom and a playroom. But Anna always said no, they'd be staying at Tante Stefanie's place a little longer. It wasn't so much that Anna was scared of living alone. It was just that the memories inside her grandparents' house were suffocating, and that when she was there, in her grandparents' space, the grief felt like it was too much to bear. Emma ran to open the door for Anna. The lightning had stopped as quickly as it had started. Its voice, the thunder, had also stopped, but the rain was still falling hard. Anna shook the rain out of her hair, and bent down to give Emma a kiss. Mbali, standing next to Emma, was shaking her head at Anna.

"You shouldn't go swimming in the storm, Mama," Emma said, sternly. "Did Großmutter not tell you about Anton Lauterbach?"

CHAPTER THREE

Anna had walked past the phone a couple of times that morning, but had managed to distract herself by other things that she'd convinced herself were more important than the phone call. She'd suddenly remembered that she needed to write the day's specials on the black chalkboard in the restaurant. She'd spent longer writing than usual, putting special flourishes onto the words Röstli and Geschnetzeltes. Then, Anna had tidied up the hotel buffet room – although it was already tidy. After tidying the buffet room, Anna had decided to go down to check how things were going at the pub. She knew that there, she could avoid the sight of the phone altogether. At the pub, Anna ended up speaking to a businessman from Pietermaritzburg for a long time. He wanted to know why they weren't brewing beer any more at the hotel. He had come all the way from Maritzburg for an afternoon Wartburg Lager. Hadn't her grandparents left a few barrels of it in cold storage? No, Anna had explained, her grandparents had only brewed 200l a week, to make sure it was fresh, and they didn't use any preservatives. Beer would be brewed again soon, Anna had promised. Her cousin Andreas was on his way home from Germany, where he had completed a Braumeister course. He had gone to a brewing academy just outside München. Anna's Großvater had been on the same course, even though their family was actually from Northern Germany. The Bavarians make the best beer, Großvater had always said. And Günther, the hotel's Bavarian chef had always agreed whole-heartedly. Anna had taken the man's card and had promised to call him when they started brewing again. He offered his condolences for Anna's grandparents. He missed his chats in the pub with Anna's Großvater. But Anna was pretty, looking at her almost made up for it. Anna wouldn't have minded a Wartburg Lager herself after all that talk of beer. It would definitely make the phone call a bit easier.

“Großvater,” Anna says, climbing onto her grandfather's lap. “Can I drink the foam off your beer?”

“Natürlich, Schatz.”

Anna takes the big beer mug from Großvater, and carefully sips all the white froth off the top.

“Mmmmm...” she says, “Wartburg Lager is the best.”

“How many other kinds of beer do you know?” Großvater asks her, seriously.

“None. But I know this is the best.”

Anna passes Großvater his beer mug too hastily. It slips out of her hand, and Großvater and Anna are both drenched in beer. First Anna is shocked, and then she sees Großvater is smiling. Anna bursts out laughing.

It was already late afternoon when Anna walked up the driveway from the bar, a few hours before dinnertime. Anna picked up the phone's receiver and held it, staring ahead at the painting of the original 1890 hotel building, without really noticing the details that normally fascinated her. The old entrance where Onkel Hermann used to ride his horse into the pub. The well, which was now closed up, and the trees, so much smaller then. But now, the painting just appeared as a vague blur somewhere in her field of vision. The receiver seemed to be getting heavier and heavier. Finally, Anna managed to dial the number. She hoped there wouldn't be an answer. The phone rang three times, and Anna started to feel relieved. But, just before the fourth ring, somebody picked up.

"Hallo, Marlene Wortmannn spricht."

"Hi, Marlene, it's Anna here."

"Hallo, mein Schatz! How are you today?"

"Fine, thanks!"

"What's wrong? You don't sound as happy as usual..."

"Nothing much. Listen, Marlene, Emma and I won't be joining you this evening. I'm really sorry I didn't let you know earlier..."

"Why not? Is something wrong?"

"It's just... it's just... I think Laura should be given a chance to settle in to your family, and with me around, it's probably more difficult for her."

"Anna – you are part of the family."

Anna paused.

"Not really. It's just for a few weeks... until things settle down. Ok?"

"I've already bought Em's Zoo biscuits."

"I'm sorry. But the kitchen tea was a disaster. And I feel like it was my fault. "

"I'm sure it'll be ok. Just bring Ian along."

"Ian's in Cape Town. I really can't come."

Anna sat on the cane chair next to the hotel reception's phone for a while. She'd hoped Marlene would have convinced her otherwise. But it was Tuesday in Wartburg, and she wouldn't be spending the evening at the Wortmanns. She stared at the phone. She wished she could cry, but she hadn't been able to since her grandparents' funeral. Anna heard the front door open. Emma had arrived, home from pre-school. She skipped into the entrance hall.

“Mama, can I wear my yellow dress to Tuesday Wortmann Night?”

“We’re not going.”

“Why not? I’m hot, I want to swim. I really want to go, Bitte, Bitte.”

Anna pressed her lips together, and didn’t answer. She had come up with the term “Tuesday Wortmann Night” years ago as a child – she had been going to the Wortmanns for dinner every Tuesday for as long as she could remember.

“You can swim in the pool here,” Anna said.

“But we don’t have a window-sill!”

“Em, we’re not going, ok. Finish and *klaar*. Tante Stefanie said she’ll make pancakes with you. And I’ve invited Tante Ruth and Maike and Kerstin. So that’ll be fun. You like Maike and Kerstin, don’t you?”

Ruth was Anna’s cousin, the child of Tante Stefanie’s and Anna’s father’s brother, Karl.

“But I see them every day at school. I’ll go to the Wortmanns’, and you can stay here with them.”

Anna knew Emma would be happy to continue arguing all evening if she just got the chance. Anna wasn’t going to let things go that way. She just wore the determined expression that Emma knew meant “absolutely not”.

Anna is happy. It’s Tuesday. She’s already packed her swimming things. If Großvater drops her off early, there will be time for a quick swim before dinner. The Wortmann’s house is built right next to their pool. Michael’s room, on the second floor, has a window sill from which they can jump into the pool. Anna can’t wait. She loves dinner at the Wortmanns – their long table, and the many voices talking at once. And today it’s Michael’s sister Theresa’s birthday, so Großvater and Großmutter, Onkel Martin and Tante Stefanie and their children are coming, too.

Anna’s hair is still wet from the swim before dinner, and she can feel her shirt pressed sticky against her back. They are having a fondue to celebrate Thezi’s birthday. Michael’s dad, Dieter, says grace. Dieter says grace faster than anyone else Anna knows. Michael tells Anna that Dieter made the cheese sauce, and that there is wine inside. Anna has had a sip of wine from Großmutter before and it tasted terrible. She avoids the cheese sauce, until Dieter makes her have some. He tells her that the recipe is from Switzerland, where Michael’s great-grandfather came from, and that she has to taste it. Anna tells Dieter that one of Großmutter’s boyfriends came from there, too. Großmutter lifts up her eyebrows and frowns. The sauce is delicious. Anna can’t taste the

wine at all. Michael also tells her that later there will be chocolate sauce with strawberries.

“How cool is this burning thingy?” Tante Stefanie’s son Andreas asks his twin brother, Mark, and pulls the little burner under the fondue pot closer. The methylated spirits spill onto a paper serviette lying nearby and soon the twins’ part of the table is burning. Andreas pours his glass of coke onto the flames. Michael’s parents give the twins a lecture on playing with fire, but very soon everyone is laughing again.

“That was your birthday candle, Thezi,” Andreas says. The twins are always trying to impress her. Anna pulls a face at them. Großvater, Dieter and Onkel Martin are having a loud argument about whether or not last weekend’s rugby test match was lost because of bad refereeing. Michael’s Großmama is discussing this year’s sugarcane harvest with Anna’s Großmutter, and Tante Stefanie has just finished telling Marlene a funny joke – they are shrieking with laughter. Soon, jokes are flying around the room. Dieter and Onkel Martin try to outdo each other with the funniest story. The children are all in hysterics. When Dieter and Onkel Martin’s supply is exhausted, the children all look at Großmutter.

“Tell the story about Peter Lauterbach, Großmutter, please!” Mark asks. Großmutter has told them the story so often, that they all know it off by heart. Anna isn’t even sure why she finds it so funny every time. Probably because she used to know Peter Lauterbach, before he died.

“Peter Lauterbach used to say that when he went for a drive on a windy night, the wind would bend his car’s lights around the corner.”

“Not that part,” Andreas says. “The part where he goes hunting.”

“One day, Peter Lauterbach came to the hotel’s pub to celebrate a successful hunt. He told everyone in the pub about his hunting trip. He went hunting at the waterfall on the Koch’s farm. He spotted a duiker on the other side of the waterfall. Peter aimed, and shot. At that moment, a fish happened to jump out of the water. The bullet went through the fish, and struck the duiker. The bullet struck the duiker in its heart. The duiker fell immediately, and landed on a rabbit. So Peter Lauterbach managed to kill three animals with one bullet.”

“Wow,” Mark says. “That’s pretty cool.”

“Why does Großvater have a bullet stuck in his leg?” Anna asks. “Was he also standing in the way?”

When Anna and her grandparents had flown to Cape Town last year to see the real Table Mountain, not the one close to Wartburg, Großvater’s leg had made the metal detector at the airport beep.

“No,” Großvater said. “That was another story. My brother and I went pigeon-hunting, and somehow my leg got in the way of my brother’s pigeon.”

“And that’s why Mama won’t let us have a pellet gun,” Andreas adds. “She’s scared Mark will shoot me.”

Anna sent Emma over to Tante Stefanie’s house to get started with the pancakes, telling her she’d come later. She had some emails to write. A large touring group from Germany had planned to stay at the hotel in a few weeks time. They had booked before Anna’s grandparents’ death, and had since read the news reports. Anna was trying to smooth over the concerns the group had about coming. She knew that this was a task that would command her complete attention, and she was grateful for it. Anna twisted her ponytail around her little finger, something she always did when she was concentrating. Großmutter’s cat, Victoria, was curled up in her lap. Anna looked at her watch. She wondered if the Wortmanns had already started dinner.

Anna looks at the silver watch Michael gave her for her 21st. Suddenly she remembers she was supposed to meet him at five for a motorbike ride. She’d promised him yesterday. It’s already half past, Anna notices. Michael is probably really angry. He’s been upset the last few days, anyway, because Anna has been spending so much time with Luka.

“Großmutter asked me to show Luka around,” Anna explained to him, a few times, but she knows that that’s no excuse for the fact that her and Luka get along really well, and that she didn’t invite Michael to come horse-riding with them, or water-skiing at Albert Falls Dam. Since two weeks ago, she’s been giving Michael excuses, Anna realizes. And Großmutter has also already told her off about her private outings with Luka.

“That’s not what I meant by ‘showing someone around’,” she’d said. Michael is leaving in a few weeks time for Germany, he’s won a big scholarship to study engineering there. He’s asked Anna a few times to come with him, but she doesn’t know if she should, and she’s been avoiding him. Luka takes her hand, and Anna is so distracted thinking of Michael that she doesn’t shake him off immediately. At that moment, Anna lifts her head and sees Michael walking towards them. Anna quickly pulls her hand away from Luka.

"I'm sorry, Michael, I forgot the time.

"I can see that, looks like you've been busy."

Anna wants to say that nothing happened. They've just been on a walk. She knows Michael won't believe her, though.

"My family's going away tomorrow," Michael tells her. "To the Drakensberg. For a few weeks."

I'm invited, Anna wants to say, your mom even invited me, I'm your girlfriend. But Michael has already walked away. She looks back at Luka. He's smiling, and it's a cocky, arrogant smile. Anna wonders why she didn't notice his arrogance before. She wishes she could kick him back to Switzerland like a rugby ball. Maybe when Michael comes back from Nottingham Road he'll speak to her again. By that time, at least, Luka will be gone.

"Anna..."

Anna jumped up in fright, and Victoria went flying.

"Look what you've done, Michael, the poor cat is terrified."

"I wish you wouldn't sit here alone like this, Anna Banana", Michael said, pulling Anna's pony-tail and kissing her hello on the cheek. "Wasn't this where Großmutter was sitting when..."

"Don't call me that."

"What?"

"Anna Banana. You know I don't like it."

"Well, you know I don't like it that you pretend you're all tough."

"Knowledge is at the gate. There's always a security guard at the gate now. I'm fine."

"But I still worry about you."

"Don't."

"Please come for dinner."

"Your wife won't like it."

"We're not married yet. And she told me to tell you to come this evening."

"I know she didn't say that. You're not as good at bending the truth as Peter Lauterbach, Michael, so don't even try. I know you too well."

"Will you join us if I ask you to?"

"No," Anna said, looking down.

CHAPTER FOUR

Süßer die Glocken nie klingen

Als zu der Weihnachtszeit:

S'ists, als ob Engelein singen

Wieder von Frieden und Freud'.

/: Wie sie gesungen in seliger Nacht, :/

Glocken, mit heiligem Klang

Klingt doch die Erde entlang!

O, wenn die Glocken erklingen,

Schnell sie das Christkindlein hört.

Tut sich vom Himmel dann schwingen

Eilet hernieder zur Erd'.

/: Segnet den Vater, die Mutter, das Kind; :/

Glocken mit heiligem Klang,

Klingt doch die Erde entlang!

Klinget mit lieblichem Schalle

Über die Meere noch weit,

Daß sich erfreuen doch alle

Seliger Weihnachtszeit.

/: Alle aufjauchzen mit Einem Gesang; :/

Glocken mit heiligem Klang,

Klingt doch die Erde entlang!

Anna sat on the floor in the hotel's kitchen. The floor's tiles were cold, a welcome respite from the hot air, that, although it was night-time, didn't lift its sweltering presence. The frogs were singing; a sign that summer had really arrived. Anna liked the frogs' songs. Her Großvater, who normally didn't hold any strong opinions, hated them. Every year, when the frogs started singing, Großvater would go outside with his swimming pool net to catch them at the hotel's pond. He was too gentle to kill the frogs, like Dieter Wortmann or Onkel Martin would. Instead, he put them in a bag, drove with them to the golf course, and dropped them in the pond there. Then Großvater would have a few evenings of peace, but somehow, the frogs always found their way back.

Anna was whistling her favourite Christmas carol, "Süßer die Glocken nie klingen". She could hardly hear herself above the frogs, but the song's nostalgic melody matched her mood. Anna was always whistling. Tunes she heard on the radio, songs from

Emma's sing-along CDs, hymns she'd heard in church. She did it automatically, without noticing, and it drove everyone who knew her mad. Michael, especially, had always hated her whistling. Anna couldn't believe it was Christmastime already. She didn't want to believe it either. Christmastime at the Wartburger Hotel meant more work, later hours, and almost no sleep. Anna remembered that she'd have to organise Emma's angel outfit for her school nativity play before Friday. Anna sighed. She would have to ask Tante Stefanie to sew it. Anna hardly knew which end of the needle was which. Anna wondered where her parents would be spending Christmas. They hadn't spent Christmas with the family in Wartburg in ages. A few years ago, Anna had gone to Germany with her parents and her sister to spend Christmas there. Anna had been so excited about the trip, about seeing her father for two whole weeks, without his doctor's bag, or patient files. But Anna hadn't been stupid enough to think that things could always go back to how they used to be. She'd known that if she let herself hope, she'd only be disappointed again.

"Anna, I'd love to come to your school play, but I've got a heart surgery scheduled."

"Your father really wanted to come to your hockey match, Schatz, but he's at a conference in Italy."

"Hi Anna," Papa says, and he sounds far away.

Anna doesn't say anything. He'd promised he'd be there. She looks at the eight candles, burning on her cake, and her father's empty chair.

"Happy Birthday, Schatz."

Anna puts the phone down.

Anna had enjoyed the German Christmas markets, the snow on Christmas Eve. Singing "Leise rieselt der Schnee", and it actually being true. But it wasn't Christmas. Not how Christmas should be, anyway, in Anna's opinion.

It's raining outside, but it's warm South African summer rain. Anna and Großmutter are getting ready for the Christmas Eve service. Anna is wearing her white dress, because she has to sing "Ihr Kinderlein Kommet" with the childrens' choir at the front of the church. Großvater has been ready for ages, he's always ready first. Anna brushes her hair, and wonders if her parents and sister will arrive on time. They are coming later,

from Durban, for the church service. Anna loves this day, when she finally reaches the number 24 on her Advent Calendar. She's glad she's not English, because English children have to wait a whole day longer.

Anna peeps through the passage, at the lounge door. It's been locked all day. Anna is bursting with excitement. She can't wait for the moment when church is over, and she gets to see what's behind that locked door. Although the Christmas Eve service always seems like an endless wait, Anna loves it. She loves singing Weihnachtslieder, and looking at the enormous Christmas tree in the church. This year, it's from the Wortmann farm. Dieter cut it down a few days ago. Anna and Michael watched him from the back of the Wortmann's bakkie. Anna had chosen the tree. After Dieter Wortmann had brought the tree to the church, the Kirchdorf youth had decorated it, with straw stars, red glass balls, and candles. Anna's Onkel Martin lit the candles just before the service, together with the other Kirchenvorsteher, Deon Habermann. They had used a long pole with a candle attached to the end. When Anna arrives at the church, Andreas and Mark tell her and Michael all about it. Andreas says that he lit the candle closest to the top of the tree, but Anna doesn't believe everything Andreas says. The bell starts to ring while Anna and Andreas are still arguing. The children walk to the front, singing "Thr Kinderlein kommet", and Anna pinches Andreas because he is singing too loudly next to her. Then she remembers that only children who don't fight get Christmas presents, and she quickly smiles at Andreas. When she gets to the front of the church she looks at the Krippe underneath the tree. It's very beautiful. Großvater's father ordered it for the Kirchdorf congregation from Germany, many years ago.

After singing, Anna sits with her grandparents again. Her parents are sitting further back in the church. Anna's head is on Großmutter's shoulder during the sermon, but she isn't sleepy, not even for a second. She is so excited about what awaits her behind the locked doors at home. Anna can imagine the Christmas tree lighting up the whole lounge. She's glad it's raining, because last year the candles on the tree were bending over from the heat. Anna wonders where Großvater has hidden the little basket this year. Every year he hides a little basket somewhere on the tree, with a special surprise inside. When everyone has opened their presents, Großvater will take out his Mundharmonika, and play Christmas carols, while the others hum along. And Großmutter will watch the candles burning, until the last one has burnt out.

Sitting cross-legged on the hotel floor, Anna was paging through Großmutter's old recipe books by candle-light. There had been another power-failure, they were becoming more and more frequent lately. Anna wondered when Eskom would finally get its act together, but she kept these thoughts inside her own head, because she didn't like to complain all

the time. In any case, Anna liked candlelight, its gently flickering peace. There were two piles of recipe books on the floor on either side of Anna. One pile of books she had looked through already, and one pile she hadn't looked through yet. Großmutter used to collect recipes, and copy them all neatly in the black hardcover notebooks one used to be able to buy at Reiche's Store when everything was still for sale behind a counter, and you could buy four *Chappies* for a cent. Anna's father had told her that. Anna wondered if you could still buy *Chappies*, with the *Did-you-know* wrappers at the old Reiche's, now the Wartburg Spar. Großmutter's uncle used to work there, at Reiche's, and they said he could add the pounds, shillings, and pence columns just by running his fingers down the page. Anna ran her fingers down the pages of Großmutter's cursive, her carefully negotiated flourishes in blue ink. But there was no magic inside Anna's hands, and Großmutter's voice remained still, locked inside the notebooks. It was getting late, and Anna's eyes were aching. Suddenly, the electric lights turned back on again. Anna blew her candle out.

"Why on earth did Großmutter have so many recipe books?" she said to Emma's chocolate-coloured sausage dog, Sebastian, who was sitting on the floor next to her. "And these are only the handwritten recipe books. There's another whole shelf-full at home." Anna stood up, and stretched. Sebastian yawned. "The first sign of madness. I'm actually starting to speak to myself. Maybe in twenty years time, I'll be a properly mad old spinster like Tante Rosa Hinze."

Tante Rosa was Anna's dad's second cousin. She was more eccentric than mad, but eccentricity in a town like Wartburg tended to stand out. Tante Rosa never ever mowed her lawn, because she preferred her garden to look "natural". Her wild garden looked very out-of-place amongst Wartburg's manicured lawns. Tante Rosa had an unfriendly Great Dane called Killer. Tante Rosa could never quite understand why people didn't seem to like Killer much, and she normally left her gate open, because her "harmless sweetpea" wouldn't hurt anyone. For this reason, people never walked past her house. Killer mostly sat inside with Tante Rosa, but came outdoors with her at her specific cigarette times. When Tante Rosa and Killer were sitting on the stoep, it was most definitely not a good idea to walk past her house. Tante Rosa lived just off Ridge Road, close to the Schülerheim. When Anna was still at school, the hostel kids used to have dares who could get closest to Tante Rosa's house without running away. None of them were ever eaten by Killer, so he probably wasn't as dangerous as everyone thought.

"You definitely take after Tante Rosa," came a voice from the window. "And I've always been a bit scared of you."

"Andreas!" Anna shrieked. "You're back!"

She leaped up to open the door for him.

"I'm so happy to see you! Our new Braumeister!"

"You take after my mom, I can't breathe," Andreas complained when Anna had finished squeezing him. "If you're so excited to see me, why didn't you come to the airport? Not even Mark was there!"

"We told you on the phone that we can't come cause of work!"

"Ok, ok. But Michael could've come."

"He's getting married on Saturday, give him a break. How was your flight?"

"Ha ha, a bit dodgy, I flew Egypt Air. Had to spend a few hours at Cairo International. I also had a long wait at O.R. Tambo, so I'm buggered now! Listen, why aren't you at the Wortmanns'? I went straight there, to say hi to you, didn't even go home. It's Tuesday, isn't it?"

"Long story. But I did tell your dad I wasn't going."

"Oh, he must have forgotten. Anyway, Laura's a bitch!"

"It's not her fault."

"What's not her fault, that she's a bitch?"

"No ... it's just not fair on her. No-one in Micha's family likes her."

"That's not surprising, is it?"

"Give her a chance!"

"No thanks. And anyway, I met her a couple of times in Germany. Didn't like her there either."

"I just feel bad for her, ok. She hasn't even had a chance to settle in properly."

"Don't speak rubbish, Anna, she's been around for ages, hasn't she?"

"Yes, but...it's very different here, she hardly has any relatives in Germany. It was probably a huge shock to meet Michael's family."

"No but. Just don't let her ruin your friendship with the Wortmanns, ok."

"I've been up to more than enough shit myself to ruin our friendship in any case."

"You're always up to shit, Anna," Andreas said, punching her on the arm.

"Thanks. I've missed you so much," Anna said, almost bursting into tears.

"It hasn't been so long."

"Six months! That's ages!" Anna sniffed.

"What are you doing anyway?" Andreas said, trying to change the subject.

Emotional outbursts made him embarrassed.

"It's Christmastime soon... first of Advent on Sunday."

"And?"

"I need to bake Großmutter's Pfefferkuchen for the Weihnachtsmarkt. And I can't find the recipe."

"Oh ya, baking day. Listen, I don't think it's here. I think it's over in their house."

“Really?”

“Ya. I’m pretty sure she would have kept it there. I really have to go say hello to Emma ...”

“Emma’s asleep.”

“Can I wake her, please, please?”

“If you can get her to fall asleep again.”

“Is she still battling to fall asleep?”

“Ya...even more, since...”

“Mama! Wait!” Anna is already halfway out of the front door.

“Ja, Schatz?” Anna walks back up the stairs to Emma’s room.

“It’s new moon today, right, Mama? I heard Großmutter say so.”

“Yes...”

“Well, what happens to the man-in-the-moon when it’s new moon? Where does he sleep?”

“He moves to the evening star for the night.”

“Isn’t the star a bit small for him?”

“No. And anyway, it’s just for the night.”

“Please sing the Sternlein song for me.”

“Weißt du, wieviel Sternlein stehen an dem blauen Himmelszelt ?

Weißt du, wieviel Wolken gehen weit hinüber alle Welt ?

*Gott, der Herr, hat sie gezählet, daß ihm auch nicht eines fehlet
an der ganzen großen Zahl, an der ganzen großen Zahl.”*

Emma’s eyes are falling closed, but she tries to keep them open.

“I’m really good at helping with Spätzle, Mama.”

“I know, Schatz, but now you need to try to be good at sleeping tight, ok?”

Anna blew her daughter a kiss.

Anna packed the books away, and breathed in and out deeply. She hadn’t said anything to Andreas about how much she hated going to her grandparents’ house now. The memories were too many, they seemed to surround her from all sides when she went there. Anna didn’t want to say anything to Andreas either. She had already almost cried that evening, and that had been bad enough for her. Anna looked out of the kitchen window. Anna knew it was almost full-moon, but all she saw was its brightness behind the clouds.

Großmutter, although she had been a devout Lutheran, had had some strange superstitions regarding moon phases. Anna had never quite understood them. Flowers would never be planted when the moon was waning. A hair cut would also be disastrous at waning moon. She once tried to convince Anna to wash her hands in the moonlight to get rid of a wart. But that night, the night Anna would never be able to forget, there had been no moon at all.

Anna suddenly saw more than the moon's brightness. The car park was flooded with brightness as Mark's car's headlights lit up the car park. Anna went closer to the window to wave to him. He parked his car right next to the window and hooted.

"Mark, you idiot!" Anna yelled. "You're waking up the guests!"

"Your voice is much louder than my hooter!" Mark yelled back, his window rolled down. He parked his car, and joined Anna in the kitchen.

"Andreas phoned me to leave the Wortmanns *urgently*. What's up?"

"I can't find Großmutter's Pfefferkuchen recipe. And baking day's coming up."

"I came all the way home for a recipe? I nearly ran over a rabbit I was driving so fast!"

"Shhhhhhhhhhh!"

"What?"

"Can you hear the night-jar?"

"Sometimes, Anna my dearest cousin, I really think you're mental."

"I love night-jars. That's nothing to do with mentalness."

"Ok, Anna, Süße, we'll pretend you're completely sane. But I'm glad you're not. Isn't it in one of her recipe books?"

"I thought it might be. But you know recipes are State Secrets in Wartburg. And Großmutter definitely had the winner Pfefferkuchen one. She wasn't going to hide it in an easy place like a recipe book."

"Yes, totally. People from Wittenberg and Lüneburg came all the way to our Weihnachtsmarkt to buy them."

"That's why it's urgent, Markie, I want people to remember Großmutter."

It's the Wednesday before the first Advent. Baking day. It never falls in the school holidays, so they always bake in the afternoon. Somehow it's always an extremely hot day. Onkel Martin has to put the electric Christmas lights up in the hotel's fir tree on the same day and he always grumbles terribly about it.

"That grumbling is typically Koch", Großmutter always says. "The Kochs are all known to complain."

“If you talk like that about the Kochs,” Tante Stefanie says, “He won’t put the lights up for you next year.”

Tante Stefanie, Großmutter and Tante Minna are in charge of putting the biscuit trays into the oven and taking them out again, drinking a lot of tea, and gossiping about everyone in Wartburg. Anna, Michael and the twins roll out the dough, and cut out the shapes. The dough has to be paper-thin, otherwise Großmutter makes them do it again.

“I don’t want to lose my reputation as the best Pfefferkuchen baker in KZN”, she says. They all want to use the pig-shaped cookie cutter, and there’s always a fight over who gets it. Andreas wins, as usual. Anna and Mark sulk for a moment because they are certain Tante Stefanie favours Andreas. Großmutter tells them that sulking never got anyone anywhere.

“Rather be properly angry for a few moments, then let go.” She tells them about Pastor Lanzendörfer, the first Kirchdorf pastor. He was a man with a temper. Once, a horse had bitten him in the behind. He’d been so angry, that he’d bitten the horse right back. Anna and Mark laugh, and they forget about the pig. Anna cuts dough stars and moons. Big stars, and little stars. Michael likes the Christmas tree and the bell. Michael has always been fascinated by the Kirchdorf church bell. He asked his father once if he could ring it, and his father said no, the bell’s too heavy. Michael would disappear into the bell tower with the bell’s rope if he tried to ring it.

“That would be almost like flying, Anna,” he tells her. “But when I’m big and allowed to ring the bell, I’ll be so heavy that I’ll stay on the ground.” Anna smiles at Michael, happy that they’re still children, because everyone knows that adults are too serious and heavy to fly. Anna is so busy listening to Michael that she somehow manages to get herself totally covered in flour. Even though she’s the only girl, she’s the messiest. The twins laugh at her.

“Flour monster!” they say, and Anna almost bursts into tears.

“She’s a flour angel,” Großmutter says, and from then on, Anna cuts out angel Pfefferkuchen.

“So, how was dinner at the Wortmanns?” Anna asks, trying not to sound self-conscious.

“It was much quieter without you,” Mark said.

“Are you calling me noisy?”

“Yes. But in a good way! I had to sit next to the dear sweet Laura, and listen to her “Micki-love” and “Michael-mein-Süßer” all evening. I nearly had to throw up on the table

cloth. And then she started talking about the wedding plans. Apparently Andreas and I have to wear luminous pink ties.”

“Yes, wait until you see my bridesmaid’s dress!”

“Also lumo pink?”

“That’s putting it mildly. Very mildly.”

“Anyway, the B.F.H says ...”

“B.F.H.?”

“Andreas and my name for her. Bitch from Hell.”

“Mark!”

“What, I’m just being honest! The B.F.H. thinks that the church hall cutlery is *really* not nice enough, and Micki has to hire silver knives and forks in Maritzburg.”

“You’re kidding?”

“No, really. Marlene and Dieter didn’t know what to say. The Kirchdorf cutlery has been good enough for all their parties so far. And Michael’s spent all of his money building a house for Laura. I could see Marlene and Dieter getting angry, so I tried to change the subject. But dear Lorli and I don’t have much in common. I just ended up making her cry.”

“She cried again?” Anna asked, with interest.

“Well, the Wortmanns were having a braai, and they used *my* meat so I told her all about how I’ve just opened the butchery here at the hotel and so on. Turns out she’s a...”

“Vegetarian. Come on, Mark, everyone knows that!”

“I didn’t. And it’s because she feels sorry for the animals. So I thought I’d tell a little joke to light up the mood...”

“You didn’t tell that story, you didn’t?”

“What story?”

“Oh, stop bull-shitting, I know exactly which story you told her.”

“Oh, come on, Anna, that story’s hilarious. And everyone else laughed!”

Anna, Michael and the twins are camping at a backpackers near Coffee Bay. They’ve been surfing all day, and Anna’s busy rubbing after-sun onto Michael’s back at the camp-fire near the bar. The twins have been sweet-talking the barman in Zulu, even though he’s a Xhosa, and because the barman is so amazed at the white boys’ proficiency in Zulu, he donates them a free round of beers. Mark asks Michael if he should pour some beer on his back to cool down his sunburn.

"I can rub your shoulders, too, if you want, Mike?" he says, winking at Andreas. Andreas wonders if he should ask the group of Aussies sitting on the deckchairs for a joint.

"We're in the Transkei, we have to smoke some pot," Mark agrees. He heads for the female part of the Aussie group, and returns with a joint. One of the Aussie girls has followed him, and she joins Michael, Anna and the twins' group. Anna sees Andreas's look of disappointment when he realizes it's not the pretty girl he's been eyeing all evening, but her plainer-looking friend with dreadlocks. Dreadlock girl proceeds to launch straight into telling them her entire life-story, which involves several love affairs with backpackers' owners. Currently, she's with the owner of the hostel next-door, but they're busy fighting, so she's hanging out with her fellow Aussies here for a while. She tells them that she's a Buddhist and a Hindu, she really just believes in peace and love. And her dream is to become a physio for dogs. She starts massaging the barman's dog, who's been sitting at Anna's feet all evening.

"Look, he's really enjoying it," she says. The dog yelps and growls, and finally runs away, while she tells them how much she loves animals, and that she's a vegetarian. Mark, who she's been flashing flirty looks and batting her eyelashes at, has clearly had enough.

"I was once driving through Zululand," he says, "and I saw people trying to slaughter a cow. But the blades were blunt. So the cow just stood there going Meuuuh-Meuuuh while they were hacking away at its neck."
Mark slapped his neck with his hand and went "Meeeeuh-meeeeuh!"
The girl burst into tears and walked away. Anna, Andreas and Michael almost choked laughing at Mark's imitation of the Zulu slaughtering method.

"Mark, I know you're a butcher. But that doesn't mean you have to convert every vegetarian you meet!" Anna said, giggling.

"Every vegetarian I meat?" Mark asked.

"Your puns are worse than Großmutti's were!"

"Ok, Anna-liebchen, Anna-mein-Herzilein, let's go find the recipe. Andreas is probably waiting."

Anna and Mark walked over to their grandparents' house in the bright moonlight.

"You know what Großvater would say," Mark said. "He'd tell everyone that the moon's so bright tonight that he could read the newspaper by moonlight if he wanted to."
Anna laughed.

“I’ve never seen him try it, though!” she said. “But I’m sure Dieter and Michael will be out hunting that porcupine that’s been destroying their crop...”

Anna’s voice trailed off, and Mark knew Anna well enough not to answer just then. Anna had always joined Dieter and Michael on their moonlit hunting trips.

Andreas was sitting in their grandparents’ house when Anna and Mark arrived. Anna expected the familiar suffocating feeling when she walked into the front door, but looking at Andreas made her laugh. He had bowl of biltong in his lap, and a bottle of whisky and three glasses on the table next to him. He was stuffing more biltong into his mouth than he could chew.

“Mark, this biltong is amazing! Red meat in Germany’s disgusting.”

Anna and Mark searched the whole house, while Andreas sat on the couch, chewing biltong and shouting directions. The house was still exactly as Anna’s grandparents had left it. Anna’s uncles and aunts were waiting for Anna’s dad to come from Australia before they tidied it.

“Is your dad ever going to come?” Mark said.

“He’s always very busy,” Anna replied, her voice trailing off.

They searched Großmutter’s Indian letter-writing desk, her wooden chest, and her present cupboard.

“Hey!” Andreas yelled, “The present cupboard is out of bounds!”

Anna and the twins had never been allowed to come close to the present cupboard. Großmutter used to keep their Christmas and Birthday presents there, and the anticipation she used to generate around the present cupboard was usually even better than the present itself.

“It’s an emergency,” Anna said, pushing the door open. Something fell onto her head.

“Ouch!” Anna yelled. It was a small package, with her name on it. “Hey, look, a present for me!” Anna said, but she put it into her handbag to open later. Mark was a bit taller than Anna. He could reach all of the things inside. They unpacked and re-packed the cupboard, still not finding anything.

“No presents for me,” Mark said, looking a bit disappointed.

“I don’t know,” Andreas said, after a while, “I really don’t know where else to look. Maybe we should ask Tante Minna.”

“Tante Minna definitely doesn’t know”, Anna said. “She had the Butterkuchen recipe, and Großmutter had the Pfefferkuchen one. And they never ever spoke of sharing them.”

“We can look again tomorrow?” Andreas asked.

“You haven’t been looking at all,” Mark said. “Maybe if you’d helped, we would have found it.”

“Wait,” Anna mumbled. “Großmutter always named her recipes after people. Tante Heidi’s Zimtsterne. Onkel Hermann’s American wife’s nutty biscuits...Who were the Pfefferkuchen named after again?”

“Paula,” Mark said. “Großmutter’s grandmother’s sister-in-law. They came out to SA together, but Paula died in childbirth on the ship. I remember Großmutter telling us the story.” Anna nodded. Großmutter had liked that story. She’d always enjoyed a bit of drama and tragedy.

My grandmother was a baroness. That means that you all, meine Kinder und Großkinder wenigstens, have blaues Blut. But it runs the strongest through my veins. Yours is a bit diluted. That doesn’t mean if we cut ourselves open, our blood will be blue. It just means we’re different- we’re nobility. But nobility, actually, doesn’t exist anymore. Or so they say. My grandmother came from a castle in what is now Poland but used to be Germany. Her family lived in a big manor house. We have a picture of it somewhere. My Großmutter had to learn how to look pretty when she went horse-riding, to play the piano and sing, and to speak French. Her parents wanted her to attract an equally wealthy and noble husband. They didn’t notice though, that while the Baroness von und zu St Ilea was practising looking elegant and graceful on horseback, she was flirting with the head stable-master, who always went riding with her. The stable-master was what the Baroness’s parents called a commoner. He had no blue blood, and I doubt they even knew his name. Imagine their surprise when my grandmother the Baroness told them she was in love with him. They told her to forget about it, that love was an illusion anyway, a flame that never lasted long. All that mattered to them was the standing of the family. She had to marry someone of nobility, and love would follow. They threatened to lock her up for a few weeks, and they dismissed the stable master. He was never to set foot on their property again. They would make sure that he couldn’t find work anywhere in Germany.

But my grandmother was determined, and in love. She ran away with the stable-master. They didn’t know where to run. They heard that the Baroness’s family had banished her, and that she would never be allowed to return to her home. The stable-master used all of his savings to pay for a double fare on the next ship from Hamburg to South Africa. Why he chose South Africa, nobody knows. But I think he wanted to get as far away from the St Ilea castle as he could. His sister, Paula, and her husband came over with them on the ship. She was pregnant, and died in childbirth on the ship. My grandparents were devastated. My grandmother got her things, and amongst them was Paula’s family’s special Pfefferkuchen recipe. My grandmother the baroness had

never cooked or baked or sewed a stitch in her life. She had to learn everything the hard way. I wonder sometimes ... if she ever regretted coming here. It must have been hard for her, coming here, having nothing. But my grandmother was always so happy, that I never wonder about that much. Every Christmas, she baked Paula's Pfefferkuchen for us, until she died.

“The story's great”, Anna said. “I love it. It doesn't really help us, though.” Anna twisted her dark ponytail. She was sitting cross-legged in her grandparents' lounge. The house still smelt like her grandparents, a combination of freshly baked bread, the potpourri Großmutti used to make from Großvater's roses, and Großvater's pipe tobacco. And then Anna remembered.

Dearest Anna,

I don't know if she told you, but Großmutti promised your father and me that we would inherit her mirror. You know, the beautiful oak mirror and dressing table she inherited from her Polish grandmother. If you could, find out how much it would cost to send them to us. We might need a container or something?

Hope you're keeping well.

Your loving mother.

Anna would never send them the mirror. But now she knew where the recipe was. When Anna was little, she had never understood why Großmutti's grandmother would have taken a mirror and dressing table with her while fleeing from her parents. But she knew why now. That a small part of her probably wanted to stay there, in the castle where she'd grown up, and because she couldn't, she had to take a part of her old life with her.

“I know where it is”, Anna said. The twins followed her to their grandparents' bedroom. The oak dressing table faced Anna when she walked into the room. Something about seeing the oak drawers of Großmutti's dressing table stirred something inside Anna, and she felt like a child again, looking for entertainment on a rainy day.

“I'm so bored, Großmutti.”

It was raining, and Anna couldn't go outside. Michael was away at the Kruger Park with his parents. The twins were at a Koch family reunion near Paulpietersburg. Anna didn't know what to do with herself.

“Shame. Didn’t you know?”

“What?”

“That there’s no such thing as bored. And if I ever hear you say that again ...”

Großmutter mimed waving a wooden spoon around, and Anna laughed, because Großmutter often threatened with the spoon, but had never hit Anna before.

“Can I look in your Oma’s cupboard drawers, please?”

There was a magic in those drawers, in the old books Großmutter and her brother used to read. Anna liked holding the pearl necklace Großmutter’s Oma used to wear, and that Großmutter wore sometimes. There was a letter in there that Großmutter’s Oma had written to her parents, and had never sent off, but Anna was never allowed to read that.

In the oak dressing table’s mirror, Anna could see her old bedroom door. It was slightly open, and there was light coming from inside her room. Suddenly she wished she could be child-Anna again. Child-Anna, when she was sad, would run to her room, bang the door closed, and cry until Großmutter heard her. Then, Großmutter would come, sit next to her on the bed, and stroke her back, until Anna’s world felt straightened out. But Anna knew that her world was damaged beyond such simple straightening, that she had outgrown child solutions.

Anna asked Mark to turn the mirror around, it was too heavy for her. And there, attached to the back of the mirror with a pin, was the recipe. She’d seen Großmutter pin it there, many years ago, but she hadn’t known what it was then.

CHAPTER FIVE

The sugar cane fields looked like the ocean on a stormy day, making waves now in this direction, then in that. Anna had tied her hair back tightly. She hated it when the wind blew wisps of hair into her face. She hated everything about wind, it made her feel uncomfortable, on edge. The wind had kept Anna awake the whole night. The wind, and the memories of her grandparents that had followed Anna from their house to Tante Stefanie's, where she and Emma were staying at the moment. Emma had also struggled to sleep. When Anna had finally managed to drift off, Emma had woken her up again. Tired of tossing and turning in her bed, Anna had got up as soon as the sun had, and had gone outside for a walk. Despite the wind, it was a beautiful day. The sun was already bright, and the wind had blown away the dust in the air. Anna squinted at the sun. She should have brought her sunglasses along. She felt as though the black circles under her eyes were becoming a permanent feature in her face, and she pressed against her cheekbones, trying to make the dark rings disappear. Standing in the pine forest, Anna kicked her sandals off. The feeling of pine needles sharp under her toes belonged to child Anna, she was little again, and she'd run into the forest to hide from her parents who had come to fetch her at the end of the holidays.

"Anna, wo bist du?"

Anna pretends that she is someone else. Someone who lives in the pine forest and who talks to the trees. She knows that trees are more than just plants because of the story Großmutter told her once.

You know the fig trees on the church property, Anna? They were planted by the first class to matriculate from Wartburg-Kirchdorf High School. There were only four in the class. They planted four trees, one for each of them. Onkel Simon Misselhorn was in that class. About ten years later, he got very sick and died.

Then, something strange happened. The fig tree Onkel Simon Misselhorn had planted started losing all its leaves. And it died too, a few weeks after he had.

Anna lives in the pine forest, in the little pine needle cave that she built with Michael. Her parents aren't calling her.

"Where's that bloody child hiding again?" It's her father's voice, and it's loud and böse. Does that voice really belong to Papa? She isn't Anna, she thinks and she crawls

inside the cave. She's lying on her stomach, and she's a bit too tall for the cave. Her nose sticks out the front. She whispers to the tree closest to her.

"Have you seen Anna anywhere?" And the tree's branches shake softly in the wind, no. She lies there for a while. Maybe they'll forget about her, and come back next week. Her father probably has to get back to work anyway, that's why his voice sounds so worried. He's probably late, and he needs to be at the hospital for an important meeting.

The cave reminds her of the reading tents Papa used to build when she was smaller, before her sister was born, with pillows and chairs and blankets. They'd crawl into the tent, lie inside with a torch and a Petzi book, and Papa would read to her. The funny parts twice, and they would laugh so loudly that Mama would come. And then Papa would have to read the funny bit again. Anna also had an orange Kinderlieder book, with pictures in it. She would choose a song, and then they would sing it together, Papa's voice deep and rumbly and Anna's like a little bird. Anna only knows the first verse, but Papa knows all three, so he carries on singing when Anna stops.

*Aba haidtschi bumbaidtschi schlaf lange,
es ist ja dei Muetter ausgange,
sie ist ja ausgange und kommt lang net hoam,
und läßt dös kloa Büable alloa net dahoam.*

It's a sleepy song, so Papa sings it softly and slowly until Anna's eyelids start sinking. They are so heavy that she almost can't lift them, but she wants to hear so she asks Papa,

"Why do you call Tante Stefanie Heidschi?" She asks him even though she knows the answer. Papa pushes a strand of hair behind Anna's ear and whispers the story to her. Anna is glad that he doesn't speak loudly. She's almost asleep.

"Your Tante Stefanie had the most beautiful voice in the whole of Wartburg Junior School. She inherited it from Großmutter. So she always sang a solo every year at the Christmas concert. The one year she sang Aba Heidschi Bumbaidtschi. She sang it so beautifully that Tante Karin Oellermann cried. You know Tante Karin, she works at Piggly Wiggly Farm Stall. She loves those Christmas Concerts, still does. She always laughs the loudest, even when the joke in the play isn't funny. She sits in the front row, in the same seat every year, since we were children. But that evening she didn't laugh or clap because she was crying so much at Tante Stefanie's singing. Tante Karin's father used to sing that song to her. Her mother died young. The tears were just rolling down Tante Karin's face. Since that day, Tante Karin called Tante Stefanie Haidtschi. And soon, everyone else caught on. Now the whole Wartburg calls her that. "

Anna fell asleep in the middle of the story, but it doesn't matter, because she knew how it ended. When Anna fell asleep in her tent, her father would carry her through to her bedroom, and kiss her softly on the forehead.

"Schlaf süß kleine Mücke," he would whisper.

But then Carla was born and everything changed. Carla was born far too early. They said that she almost died, and now she was very weak, and always sick. Papa and Mama often had to rush her to hospital. They always looked worried now, and Anna often had to stay home alone with Sibongile, their domestic worker. Anna loved Sibongile, but she didn't tell her stories and she didn't know the songs in Anna's orange book. One day, Anna heard her father call Carla "kleine Mücke", and it felt like her warm tent torchlight world had crashed down. Then, Carla got so sick that she had to spend a few weeks in hospital.

They sent Anna to Wartburg, to her grandparents. Onkel Kurt Rabe fetched her, he worked in Durban, and drove home to Wartburg every evening. Anna didn't want to leave, but Mama said she had to, and when Anna started crying she threatened her with the wooden spoon. Großmutter gave her a huge hug when Anna arrived. She had cooked pancakes for Anna. The pancakes somehow made Anna's world feel less torn apart. But that evening, Anna couldn't sleep. She woke up her grandparents, and they let her sleep in the middle of their bed. It felt warm and safe there. But Anna still missed her Papa and her tent. Carla got better, but then Anna's Papa got a new job. It was a better job, Mama said, he was now chief surgeon at the hospital. But Anna didn't understand how it could be better if Papa was never home anymore. He often had to spend the whole night at the hospital, and the next day too. When he came home, he was always tired. Mama also started to work again, and Anna and Carla spent their days and afternoons at pre-school and at aftercare. From then on, Anna felt as though holidays in Wartburg were the only times when she was really properly alive. Carla never liked Wartburg though, and for some reason Mama never threatened her with the wooden spoon to make her come.

Anna's father's voice gets softer and softer. Soon all she hears is the wind, and her own breathing. Anna doesn't want to move from her hiding place. It's comfortable. And she doesn't want to go back to Durban, to that awful all-girls' school where she has to listen to little girls whining all day. She'd rather go horse riding with Michael every day, help her Großvater brew beer, and run around in the forest barefoot. Anna manages to turn around onto her back without kicking the hut's branches loose. She wriggles a bit so that her head sticks out completely. The afternoon sun is getting older, but she can still watch it make patterns in the pine branches.

Anna lies like that for a long while. The breeze on her cheeks is so soft, that she doesn't feel her tears fall or dry again.

She doesn't notice either, that the light gradually slips away. Anna sees the first star, and suddenly realizes it's almost night. The wind has died down, and now Anna hears all sorts of other noises come alive in the forest. She wonders if her parents have left yet. Surely the night shift at her dad's hospital has already started. She looks at the star, and realizes it's not alone in the sky any more. She knows that now it's sundowner and story time at the hotel, and she wonders if her grandfather is drinking his own froth off his beer if she isn't there to help him with that. And she shivers because it's cold without the sun. Anna wriggles out of the cave, she wants to go back. But then she hears footsteps. The soft creaking of pinecones being squashed, and Anna freezes. She's scared now, and she wonders if she should scream. Her grandparents' veranda faces the forest, they would hear her, she's sure. Or should she run away? Hiding in the hut would be far too obvious, that would be like the time Michael hid underneath his desk when they were playing Hide and Seek in The Dark. Anna had found him immediately. Michael. He'd told her just yesterday that there were ghosts in the forest. She had laughed at him then, but now she was sure she could hear her own laughter echoing through the trees. It couldn't be her laughter, though. Her laughter was far away, deep inside her stomach and hiding.

"Ntombenhle," a voice says suddenly, and Anna knows it's ok- that's Knowledge's voice, and Ntombenhle is her Zulu name, "Beautiful Girl". He puts out a hand and picks Anna up. Knowledge is so strong and warm and safe, Anna thinks of her tent. And when they walk into the driveway, she sees her parents' BMW is still there. Mama stands next to it, holding Papa's hand. Anna realizes they've been crying.

Anna opened her handbag, and pulled out the small, gift-wrapped package she found the day before. She squeezed it, trying to figure out what's inside. It was a thin box, and it rattled. Anna tore the card open, not slowly and carefully, like Großmutter would have liked her too, but roughly. Her hands were shaking.

Liebe Anna,

I always wanted you to have this, one day. I hope it reminds you of me.

Love you always,

Großmutter

Anna stood in the forest for a while, the unopened present in her hand, and the pine needles tickling her feet. Finally, she opened the wrapping. She knew what was inside. Großmutter had always told her it would be hers, and one day she'd suddenly stopped wearing it.

“It doesn't feel comfortable around my neck anymore,” she'd told Anna.

CHAPTER SIX

“Hurry up, Anna! We’re going to be late!” Mark yelled.

“I’m coming! Just getting dressed!”

“It’s a rugby match, not a fashion parade!”

“Yes, but I’m still in my baking clothes. I’m hopping into the shower quick-quick!”

“You’ve got ten minutes!” Andreas bellowed.

“And I’m watching the clock,” Emma added.

The Dalton Rugby Club was already warming up when Anna, Emma and the twins arrived. Mark flashed Anna a dark look for making them late. Emma skipped over to the team to say hello to everyone. She was wearing her miniature Dalton Rugby Club jersey that Großmutter had sewed for her last year. The warm-up stopped immediately, and all the rugby players took turns in swinging Emma around. Anna noticed Michael standing back and looking a little awkward, like he always did when Emma was around. Anna waved to the rugby players, and found a seat on the old and rusty stand. When Anna looked back at the team, she noticed Michael had been watching her. Or was she maybe imagining things? Anna was exhausted. Baking day had felt longer than usual, without Großmutter. A few batches of Pfefferkuchen had even gotten burnt. Anna hadn’t had time to wash her hair, and she was sure she smelt like a bakery. Laura suddenly appeared from the clubhouse, and joined Anna on the stand. She looked like someone on a shampoo advert, Anna noticed grumpily.

“I can’t believe Micki’s playing today,” Laura said.

“Why?” Anna asked.

“It’s three days before the wedding. He could get a black eye or something. Or even worse, he could lose his ring.” Anna lifted her eyebrows.

“Why don’t you just offer to hold it for him while he plays?”

Laura nodded in agreement, and walked off to the side-field, where the team was warming up. Anna watched Laura walking towards Michael. Laura’s heels kept sinking into the soggy field, which made Anna giggle. It had been raining all day, not like usual baking day weather. The rain had just stopped, but the field was muddy and wet. Großmutter used to measure the millimetres of rain. Anna was sure she would have had something to say like “It hasn’t rained this much since 1982”.

Laura had now reached the team. They were all standing in a huddle, discussing their game plan. Laura tapped Michael on the shoulder. The huddle broke up, and everyone looked at Laura. Michael blushed, and Andreas and Mark glared at her.

Großmutti is busy pruning her roses one winter afternoon. There is a huge rose bed at the back of the hotel's garden. It's Großmutti's pride and joy. Most of the rose bushes are gifts from people in Wartburg, and she still knows exactly who gave her which rose.

"The yellow 'Joey' is from Magdalena Klintworth," she would tell Anna. "She gave it to me for catering so well for her fiftieth birthday." Großmutti is never embarrassed about repeating compliments.

She's wearing her favourite straw gardening hat, even though the winter sun isn't powerful. Anna, who is lying reading in her hammock nearby, suddenly hears Großmutti swearing. Her expletives include her own signature expression, "Dash-it-all", which Anna finds hilarious.

"What's wrong?" Anna asks, jumping out of her hammock.

"I've lost my engagement ring. In the rose-bed somewhere. And it's only four years till our golden wedding anniversary." Großvater has also heard the swearing. He comes from the brewery with a worried expression on his face.

"My ring is gone," Großmutti tells him. Großvater takes his ring off his finger, slowly, and throws into the rose bed. Großmutti is busy yelling at him, but Anna knows he has a plan. Großvater always does. He watches the ring, until it falls. Then he bends down. He points. Großmutti and Anna look, too. Großvater's ring has fallen on the outside of the rose-bed, and right next to it is Großmutti's ring.

"See! What belongs together, belongs together," Großvater says, squeezing Großmutti's hand.

Laura settled down next to Anna again. Anna noticed she was wearing Michael's ring on her thumb. The game had started in the meantime, and Anna was watching with great concentration. Mark and Andreas were already covered in mud. Andreas hadn't played in a while, he'd only just come back from Germany. But he looked as though he was enjoying himself thoroughly. The Greytown Rugby Club players all seemed to be a lot bigger than the players from Dalton. Anna was just about to comment on the size of the Dalton players, when Laura pointed at Emma. Emma was wearing her gumboots and splashing around in a puddle with Michael's sister Theresa's son, Simon.

"Your daughter's playing in the mud. Is that ok?" Anna lifted her eyebrows, but didn't look away from the match.

"She's got her gum-boots on. And your fiancé is playing in the mud, too," Anna added, pointing at Michael, who had just made a brilliant tackle, and was now lying on his stomach in the mud, holding onto the biggest Greytown Rugby Club player's legs.

Anna clapped and yelled, "Great tackle, Micha!"

Anna has just been chosen for Wartburg Primary's first hockey team. Großmutter has told everyone in the whole of Wartburg, because she is so proud.

"My Anna is such a star hockey player. She's only in Grade 4, and already in the first side."

Anna always blushes when Großmutter boasts like that.

"It's embarrassing," she tells Großmutter. "Please stop."

But Großmutter has no intention of giving up boasting about her grandchildren.

"Boasting about your own children ist nicht erlaubt," she always says. "But everyone is allowed to boast about their grandchildren."

Großmutter stands at the sideline of every one of Anna's hockey matches, and screams until she is hoarse. If it is an afternoon game, she brings a beer along. But she only opens the beer if the Wartburg team scores.

"How's the menu planning going?" Laura asked. Anna realized she was determined to keep a conversation going. Anna wondered when she'd become so talkative. At the kitchen tea, she'd hardly said anything at all.

"Fine," Anna said, keeping her eyes on the line-out. Mark had just thrown the ball in. It wasn't entirely straight, but the referee hadn't noticed. "We've done so many weddings, it's not really a problem," she added.

"But I heard your head-chef left you?" Laura asked. "Are you managing without him?" Anna bit her tongue.

"Mbali and Luise are doing fine," she said.

"But they haven't trained as chefs, have they? Will you hire a new head chef?" Laura asked.

"Actually, we're all hoping Günther will come back."

"But Michael says you haven't heard from him in months."

"Listen, Laura, I appreciate your concern, but how I run my hotel is my business. Not yours and Michael's." She said it smiling, so that Laura wouldn't know just how mad she was. But she hoped the ice was apparent in her voice.

Anna walks back to the hotel. It's dark, and she's glad there are lamps in the garden. There are no clouds, and she can hear a nightjar singing. She looks up at the stars. They

are always particularly beautiful when the moon isn't out. The only constellation she knows is the Southern Cross, and she remembers her shock when she found out that there isn't a Southern Cross in Germany. There's a loud rustle in the bushes. Anna jumps and walks faster. It's probably just Sebastian, she thinks. Günther is waiting for her in the kitchen. He has made a few lists for the new menu but instead of talking about those, he bursts into another concern of his.

"I brought a Bavarian flag from Germany," he says in his musical Bavarian accent. "But your grandmother doesn't want it to fly next to the South African flag and the German flag. She says the owners of the hotel have always been proudly North German! But do you know what I say to that? Scheißpreißen!" and his mouth crinkles into a huge smile. When Günther isn't flirting with Großmutter, he's arguing with her, but everyone on the hotel staff knows that he worships the ground she walks on, and that if any of them say anything against Anna's grandmother he will deal with them personally. Günther angry is not a pleasant sight (or sound). The knuckles of his huge hands go snow-white, his forehead ripples with frowns, and he has the loudest angry voice Anna has ever heard.

"Just ignore Großmutter," Anna says, "she's just grumpy because she's got a sore back." Günther looks concerned. He finds his bottle of Schwedenbitter on the shelf, and takes it to Großmutter, who's sitting on her comfortable chair at reception.

"You should rub it on your back," Günther tells her.

"You bloody Bavarians!" Großmutter chuckles, "you think Schwedenbitter cures everything!"

Anna turned her face to the game.

"Go, Andreaaaaaaaaaaas!" she yelled. Andreas had sidestepped three of the Greytown players, only to be tackled by the fourth, and largest of the team.

Anna swore under her breath.

"Pardon me?" Laura said.

"Maaaaaaaaaaaaaarkie-boy!" Anna yelled, ignoring Laura. Mark picked the ball up, and passed it to another player, and to another, and then to Michael. Michael dodged the last defender, and scored. Anna jumped up and down on the stand, shrieking. Laura clapped elegantly. Marlene and Theresa arrived at the stand at that moment.

"What a beautiful try!" Anna shouted, and Marlene smiled.

"First try beer time," Theresa said.

"If you watch Em I'll go get our beers," Anna said.

“Sure thing!” Theresa said. “Check Em and Simon in the mud! They’re having a fantastic time!”

“Can I get you something, Laura?” Anna asked.

“No thanks.”

“Windhoek Lager for me,” Marlene said.

“I know,” Anna winked. She walks to the clubhouse, slowly.

“Three Windhoek Lagers, please, Steve,” she asks the barman.

Anna, the twins, and Michael are on what seems to be the eternal bus-trip. They are on their way back from the Wartburg-Kirchdorf High School sports’ tour to Windhoek. Anna is in the first hockey team, the boys are in the first rugby team.

It is dark, and already six hours into their bus-trip. Everyone on the bus is sleeping. Anna can hear Andreas and Mark snoring on the seat behind her and Michael. She thinks Michael is asleep, too, and turns her head to look at him. She catches his eye in the dim overhead bus light, he has been looking at her, too. He smiles at her. They are sharing her blanket. She puts her head on his shoulder, softly, and he edges closer and closer to Anna, until there is no space left between them. Michael puts his hand underneath Anna’s chin, pulls her face towards him, gently, and kisses her.

“I’ve wanted to do that for years,” he whispers.

“I know,” Anna whispers back.

Suddenly Anna feels a tug at her jeans. It’s Emma. She’s covered in mud.

“Simon and I are thirsty,” she says, and then she sees Anna’s eyes. “Why are you crying, Mama?”

“I’m not. The wind is making my eyes water.”

“But it’s not windy today, Mama.”

CHAPTER SEVEN

“I’ll take Emma home with Simon and me,” Theresa said to Anna after the match.

“You go out for the after-game drinks with the boys and Laura.”

“I can also take Em home, I’m sure Tante Stefanie will look after her? Em’s been having problems falling asleep, since...”

“No, please let me take her, Anna,” Theresa said, “If she’s unhappy, I’ll phone you.” Theresa looked around to see if anyone is listening.

“Anna,” she whispered. “This is a stupid question, cause I know you’re not ok, not after what happened to your grandparents, not after what my brother’s doing. I don’t want to impose, really I don’t. But I’m always there if you need to talk to someone, ok?” Anna squeezed Theresa’s hand.

“It’s not stupid,” she said, but she couldn’t get any more words out. “It’s not Michael’s fault,” she wanted to say.

“Anna ...” Großmutter says, in her strict voice, that she always reserves for lectures. Anna has been trying to avoid that voice for weeks now, but Großmutter has chosen the moment to bring out the voice carefully and well. She and Anna are both covered in flour, and spattered in Spätzle dough. Anna will have to listen to her, because she won’t be able to make a run for it in this state. Victoria, curled up on the kitchen bench, watches Anna and Großmutter with lazy eyes. Anna knows what Großmutter is going to say, and she tries to look calm while she frantically thinks of answers.

“I haven’t been angry at you once for falling pregnant, Anna, you know that ...”

“I don’t want to talk about this.”

“In fact, I’ve been understanding, and I’ve been leaving you alone...”

“I really don’t want to talk about this.”

“But I do. I know what you’re doing.”

“Wirklich?”

“Ja, wirklich. You’re trying to protect Michael.”

Anna wonders what she’s trying to protect Michael from. Everyone’s talking about the big engineering bursary he won, to continue his Postgraduate Studies in Germany. The whole of Wartburg is proud of him – and if she told him, he probably wouldn’t go. But Anna knows that Michael doesn’t want to be an engineer, not really. That all he’s ever wanted is to be on the farm. But Michael doesn’t know that. Not yet. Right now, he

wants to be a high-flyer. And Anna knows that if she stops him now, he'll never find that out.

"You should tell him."

"Tell him what?"

"If you don't tell him, you'll regret it."

Anna is tempted to give in to Großmutter, to promise to tell Michael the truth. But she has a stubborn nature that Großmutter says is definitely inherited from Großvater's side of the family. She doesn't say anything, but presses her lips together into a thin line.

"I know it's his baby, Anna. I'm not stupid. I know there was nothing going on with Luka, you can't fool me so easily. And if Michael's made a baby it's his responsibility to stick around, whatever you may think."

"No. You can't make me tell him."

"I'm not going to make you do anything. You should do what's right yourself."

I'm not only protecting him, Anna wants to say. I won't be able to bear the "if only's". A relationship based on "if only this had never happened", "if only I could have gone to Germany". More than anything, Anna is protecting herself.

"I've got to go, Thezi!" Anna said. "The twins are waiting for me."

"Am I going to Simon's house, Mama?" Emma asked. "

Yes, Em, I'll come pick you up in the morning ok?" Anna gave her a hug. "I'll miss you, Liebling."

"Me too, but we'll see each other in Dreamland."

"I don't want to go back to Durban, Großmutter," Anna sobs. "I want to stay with Großvater and you."

"I've been speaking to your parents," Großmutter whispers softly into Anna's ear. "I asked them if you can go to school here in Wartburg with the twins and Michael. They think it's a good idea, but I still have some convincing to do. So you just be a good girl, and don't fuss too much, ok, Liebling. Leave the fussing to me. And when you miss me, remember that I'll always be there for you in Dreamland."

Michael and Laura were already at the bar when Anna and the twins arrived. Laura was talking a lot. Michael sat drinking his beer very quickly.

“Hey, Anna,” Christopher, the barman said. He was Michael’s second cousin, and one of Anna’s favourite people on the hotel staff. Anna had cried on his shoulder before, when a big hotel booking had been cancelled. Christopher knew almost as much about the hotel as Mbali. He probably knew more about the people of Wartburg, at least about those who came to the bar and to the hotel restaurant, than anyone else, except maybe Tante Sarah. Tante Sarah was also there, sitting in the corner with her sherry. She waved to Anna, and Anna waved back and smiled. Anna sat down next to Laura. There was already a drink there for her, her favourite after-rugby drink – whisky and ice, and beers for the twins.

“Thanks, Mike,” Anna said, taking a big sip. “Great game, by the way!”

“Who’s that lady over there?” Laura whispered loudly. Anna saw Tante Sarah lift her head, and she knew she was listening. Tante Sarah was always listening. Listening was what she did. The twins, Michael, and Anna all knew that, and they ignored Laura’s question. It would be rude to talk about Tante Sarah right in front of her. Anna also felt, at that moment, strangely possessive over Tante Sarah’s story. She didn’t want to share it with Laura, who made no effort to understand anything about anyone in Wartburg.

“Why is Tante Sarah always drinking in the bar?” Anna asks.

“Because she’s sad,” Großmutter says. “The drinking helps her forget.”

“I’m also sad sometimes,” Anna says.

“Why?” Großmutter asks, bending down so that she’s Anna’s height.

“I miss Mama and Papa. But I know they never have time for me anyway.”

“Well, Tante Sarah misses someone, too.”

“Who? Her Mama and Papa?”

“No, Liebling. Sarah was at school with me, a few years above me. She was the daughter of our Pastor. Sarah was the first girl from Wartburg-Kirchdorf High School to finish her Matric. They said she was very clever. She finished her teaching studies at university, and then she went to be a governess in an English family just outside Durban for a year.”

“What’s a governess, Großmutter?”

“It’s a teacher, but a teacher who lives in your house with you.”

“Oh.”

“Anyway, Sarah fell in love with one of the boys from the family where she was staying. They were engaged. But then Sarah’s parents said she can’t marry an English boy...”

“I wouldn’t marry an English boy, either. I’m going to marry Michael.”

“Yes, but Sarah was very much in love with her English boy.”

“And they said she can’t marry him?”

“Yes. I think she should have married him anyway. She came back to Wartburg, and she taught at the High School here for a long, long time. Until five years ago. She taught my brother Hans, and all of my children. But Sarah never got married. And because she never had a family of her own to worry about, she knows more about people in Wartburg than anyone else. People love Sarah, she laughs a lot, but I always notice her sad eyes. Besides, Anna, she doesn’t really drink that much. It’s more for company that she comes to the bar. She’s got no one to talk to at home.”

Anna glared at Laura, and almost said something sharp and cutting when Nicky came in. She carried another bar stool over to where they were sitting. Andreas moved over for her.

“Oh my goodness, what a day,” she said, rolling her eyes and sighing dramatically. “I had my five worst piano students all in a row this afternoon. Number one is that child that comes all the way from Pietermaritzburg, his mother hasn’t paid me for the last two terms, but I hate to ask for money, and anyway, he’s really useless...” Nicky paused to take a breath.

“So you’re a piano teacher?” Laura asked. She had an expression on her face as though she didn’t really think it was a worthwhile profession.

“She’s *the* piano teacher,” Andreas said dramatically, and Mark did a dramatic drum-roll on the table with his empty beer-bottle.

“She’s the only piano teacher in Wartburg,” Michael explained.

“Anyways, number two always forgets his book, number three always forgets what I teach him, and number 4 and 5 are just stupid...”

“I’m sure one of my grand-nieces has piano lessons on a Thursday,” Tante Sarah said, from her corner. Nicky blushed.

“Don’t worry, Nicky, we all know she’s not the brightest crayon in the box,” Tante Sarah continued.

“Hey, Nicky, what happened to the piano lessons you promised me?” Michael asked. Laura gave him a surprised look.

“I wouldn’t start before the wedding,” Nicky said, giggling. She tugged Anna’s arm, and pulled her up from her chair. “Come, Ann, let’s go for a ciggie outside! I’m dying for one after my afternoon of stress.” Nicky was the most energetic person Anna knew. She literally bounced. Anna had to run to keep up with her.

Soon, Anna's and Nicky's cigarettes were glowing pinpricks in the hotel's car park. Anna's pinprick glow was calm, but Nicky's bounced like a yo-yo. Anna was always worried Nicky would set something alight with her wild gestures.

"How was your day, Ann?"

"It was ok. We're slowly getting more bookings, but it's taking a while. Rugby was great, though."

"I'm so upset I missed it. I would have given anything to swap those last silly students for the game."

Anna giggled. "Which one is Tante Sarah's grandniece?"

"Katrin Reusch. She really is a bit stupid. But I guess I shouldn't have said it." Nicky took a deep drag from her ciggie. "You know what, Ann, I really get the feeling Laura doesn't like me. And I really want to like her, you know, she's getting married to Michael and everything. But I think she thinks I'm either stupid or irritating. And she has that, you know ... sophisticated way of looking at me, as though I'm really silly and insignificant ..."

"Don't worry. I don't think she likes me either," Anna said.

Anna's parents finally agree to let her go to school in Wartburg. To compensate for their feelings of guilt, they buy her a horse. Anna's horse, Pepper, has stayed at the Wortmanns' stables for as long as Anna has owned him. Anna rides him as often as she can. One afternoon, Anna parks her black Golf outside the Wortmanns' stables, and gets her riding crop from the boot. She always hides the crop in the boot, because Emma doesn't like seeing it. Emma hates the thought of Pepper being hit. Anna has tried to explain to her that it's only a friendly tap, and that Pepper needs it because he's sometimes lazy. Hiding the riding crop is easier, though, than constantly explaining. Anna opens the stable door, and says hi to the black and white cat who has lived there for years and is sometimes friendly and sometimes not. Today she is friendly, she purrs and snakes herself around Anna's leg. Suddenly Anna has the feeling of not being alone, which is odd, because the farm workers always come to the stable before they do their other work, early in the morning. And the Wortmanns only ever ride in the evenings.

Anna walks towards Pepper's box, ignoring the feeling, and calls out to him,

"Hello my darling, I've missed you!"

He neighs back. Anna still can't shake off the feeling of not being alone. It makes her nervous, skittish. Pepper's box is the third from the door. He lives next to Marlene's horse, Winston. When Anna reaches Pepper's box, she can hardly believe her eyes.

"What on earth," Anna says, "are you doing?"

Laura is standing in Pepper's box. She has put a saddle on Pepper's back, one of those big, uncomfortably heavy saddles that Pepper doesn't like.

"Oh, Hallo meine Liebe," Laura says, in that extremely German-German accent of hers. She is wearing very elegant jodhpurs, shiny riding boots and a black satin riding hat. Anna looks down at her jeans and dusty riding boots, and feels very uncomfortable.

"I'm about to go on a ride," Laura adds.

"Not," Anna replies, "on my horse."

"Ya, but that's normal," Nicky winked. "How would you like it if your husband-to-be had a beautiful best friend?"

"I'd get on *her* best side."

"Not so easy. And it doesn't make it any better that everyone in Wartburg just loves you."

"It's not like that, Nicky, really ... there are some people who still haven't forgiven me for Emma, and for breaking Michael's heart ... you know that."

"Not many."

"More than enough ..."

"But Anna, please tell me you didn't ... I really hope you didn't tell Laura that you and Michael used to be more than friends." Anna looked down.

"Anna, you didn't tell her?"

"I just thought she'd feel less threatened, you know, if I told her the truth up front. That there used to be something, but that now, it's over."

"Anna, Anna, Anna," Nicky said. "Sometimes it's not necessary to tell the whole truth." And Anna wondered if anyone knew how much she was hiding.

"Hey, Nicky, do you have a gwaai for me, too?" Andreas crept up on them quietly, and Anna jumped when she heard his voice.

"Nein, I'm smoking Anna's. Did you have to give us such a fright?"

"Don't be such a *woes*. Ok, Anna, chuck me one then."

"I thought you've quit."

"Just one."

"Ok, catch." Anna tossed him the cigarette. "How's it going in there?" she asked.

"I can't believe," Andreas said, "that one person can spend so much time talking about draping."

"Just wait till she gets started on her dress! The other day, she came over for coffee to discuss catering details with me and I think she must've spent a whole hour talking about the dress..."

“She’ll be a stunning bride!” Nicky said. Anna tried not to look annoyed. She continued,

“Anyway, so Laura told me about the lace on the bottom hem of the dress. It’s somehow different to the lace on the top. And the silk is actually imported from India, so if the dressmaker dares to make a mistake ...”

“She’ll actually shoot her,” Andreas interrupted, “I heard this all last week. Mike made me give Laura a lift to the florist because she is too scared to drive to Pietermaritzburg alone. And then I heard the *whole story*. I don’t even really know the difference between lace and silk. No, please don’t explain, Nicky, I’m really not interested. And then she sat in the front seat when we drove through town, with that huge Gucci handbag of hers on her lap. Can you imagine? I only saw it at the fourth traffic light we stopped at. But please! How stupid can you be? Her window was open as well.”

“Typical German! Scared of dangerous South Africa where you can be hijacked at every corner and then does something like that.”

“You’ve got to love the Germans,” Andreas laughed. “Remember Großmutti’s cousin Wilko?”

Großmutti’s cousin Wilko from Germany has sent her his yearly update letter. Großvater has just read it to Großmutti, Anna, and the twins with an exaggerated German accent. They are in hysterics. Cousin Wilko had come to visit last year, and his visit had been the funniest thing in the world. He had insisted on speaking English to them, because their German (Springbok Deutsch) included too many English and Zulu expressions, and was thus not understandable. His face when Großmutti had told Anna, “Hör auf zu ganga’n, du bist richtig naughty heute”, had been priceless. From then on, he’d spoken only English, and his English was terrible. Anna could hardly look at him without laughing. Anna wouldn’t have laughed, normally at someone’s bad English, but his arrogance made it ok to laugh, she thought. Großmutti laughed at him, too, but he was too full of himself to notice. Now, instead of getting the yearly newsletter from cousin Wilko in German, like in the years before his visit, Wilko had sent them an English translation, so that they could all understand.

To my dear Familie in the far South-Afrika,

Wishing that you are celebrating a happy Christmas and New Year. We hope that everything goes well in the Hotel? I am busy preparing plans for construction rim walk around our house, and my wife is taking a Kur near Marburg. Here, the Temperatur is

in the moment under zero degree celsius, and we are thinking oft of the warm South-Afrika...

Anna smiled at Andreas. "Yes, that was hilarious."

"I don't see you laughing, Ann," Nicky said, "I miss that crazy laugh of yours!" Anna extinguished her cigarette.

"I'm going back inside."

"Can I buy you a drink, Tante Sarah?"

"No, I've had my three, Anna."

"I hope Christopher remembers that the third is always on the house?"

"When he doesn't, I remind him, dear." Tante Sarah winked.

"That's good. I heard you've been having some problems with your heart?"

"Yes, Anna, but nothing the doctor can't fix. Apparently, I need a pace-maker."

"Oh, I'm sorry about that."

"It's no problem. I need an operation, but I'm tough. I guess your heart is also worrying you, but in a different way?" Tante Sarah said, looking over at Michael and Laura. Anna just nodded.

"Anna," Tante Sarah said, "I've always wanted to ask you something."

Anna, Michael, and the twins are busy writing their Matric Trial Exams. It's Saturday night, and Oktoberfest at the Dalton Town Hall. Because they're writing their Maths paper on Monday, they're all not allowed to go. Even Großmutter, who never says no when Anna wants to party, has put her foot down. Anna sits at her desk, trying to solve a Trigonometry problem. Victoria is curled up on Anna's bed, sleeping. Outside, the crickets are singing. Anna's head gets droopier and droopier, until it sinks down onto her Maths book. Suddenly, a knock at her window wakes Anna. It's Michael. He's motioning to her to keep quiet. Anna opens the window and climbs out. She waits until they've walked a good distance from the house.

"What's up?" Anna asks. "And why are you being so quiet? My grandparents are both out jolling."

"Oh ... I didn't know. Anyway, we're going to Oktoberfest."

"But everyone's there, do you really think we're going to get away with that?"

"We're not going to the party," Michael says. "Remember the plan?"

And then Anna understands. The twins are already waiting in Michael's old blue Landrover, Lucy. There are some jacks in the boot, and a huge toolbox. Michael drives them to the Dalton Town Hall.

"Is there a car guard?" Andreas whispers.

"Nope," Anna says, straining her eyes to see.

They drive into the car park, and Michael stops Lucy right next to Herr Gevers' red Mercedes. Herr Gevers is their principal at school. He's extremely strict, and if he has a kind side or a sense of humour, he's never let it on before.

"How did you know he was coming?" Anna asks.

"We have our sources," Michael whispers.

"Ok, Anna, you're the watch, check that no-one's coming. Mark, Andreas, man the jack, I'll do the rest." They all hop out of the car. Michael has left it running. The boys work fast, taking the tyres off the Mercedes, and putting bricks underneath.

"Someone's coming," Anna hisses. She can't believe her eyes. It's Herr Gevers. He's obviously had one too many. He stumbles out of the doorway with one of the other teachers, Herr Misselhorn. They stand in the doorway chatting, and Anna races back to Lucy and the boys. Luckily, Herr Gevers parked his car behind a bush, so they are hidden. Anna, Michael, and the twins throw the tools into the Landrover. They leave the tyres lying next to the Mercedes. Michael accelerates out of the car park, out of the back exit. "Thank goodness for that bush!" Anna yells. "I thought I was going to die when I saw him."

"Wonder what he'll do when he realizes his tyres are off?" Michael asks.

"Was it you? You, Michael and the twins? The tyres at Oktoberfest?" Tante Sarah had a naughty expression in her eyes.

"What?" Anna pretended she didn't know what Tante Sarah was talking about.

"I always knew it was you!" Tante Sarah exclaimed. "Listen, Herr Gevers was such a pain, the whole WKHS staff was grateful to you." Anna suddenly exploded into loud, uncontrolled laughter.

"I knew that famous laugh would come out again," Tante Sarah smiled.

Großmutter takes the Schwedenbitter from Günther, and laughs loudly, with her head back. She has a very distinctive, happy laugh. When Anna laughs, people always say,

"You laugh exactly like your grandmother."

"You two should be working, Großmutter says, when she's finally finished laughing,

“Instead of hannah-hannahring about Schwedenbitter.”

“I didn’t say anything about Schwedenbitter.”

“Well, hurry up and finish that menu, Anna-Schatz, you really look as though you could do with some sleep.”

CHAPTER EIGHT

“It can’t be time yet,” Anna groaned. Her alarm clock was ringing shrilly.

Anna turned the alarm off, and rolled over onto the other side. She was exhausted. Last night had turned very late, and she had only fallen asleep a few hours ago. She vaguely remembered Nicky having tried to out drink Andreas, and that Michael and Laura had left early because today was going to be a long day ...

Suddenly Anna leaped out of bed, and started throwing on some clothes as quickly as she could. She was supposed to be at a hair trial. She’d set her alarm clock an hour too late, for some reason, half past seven instead of half past six. And Emma, who normally woke her up, was at Theresa’s house. Anna wondered if she’d woken Thezi up in the night with her nightmares. Anna hoped she didn’t smell too much like smoke, and she slipped her sandals on. She was already half an hour late. There was no time for a shower.

“Why on earth does she need a hair trial for her bridesmaids?” Anna mumbled to herself. But Laura was a perfectionist, one of the first things Anna had noticed about her. Anna ran to the kitchen, took a banana from the fruit basket, and poured herself a glass of orange juice. There wasn’t really any time to eat, but Anna had never been able to function without food. Anna had tried going without breakfast, at Primary school, and she’d fainted in assembly. Even though she was feeling incredibly nauseous from the previous night’s drinking, she forced the banana down. Anna, chewing banana, suddenly noticed that Andreas was lying passed out on the adjoining TV Room’s couch. She took the banana peel, and put it on his forehead. He was snoring loudly, his mouth open, and he didn’t even notice. Anna giggled, gulped down her orange juice, and started running for the hotel’s hair-dressing studio.

To get to the studio, she had to run past the kitchen. Anna heard loud voices coming from the kitchen. She recognised Mbali’s voice, and one of the junior chef’s. Anna sighed. She didn’t feel like dealing with any extra issues or problems today. Her head was pounding from last night’s whisky. Mbali’s voice was loud and harsh, and Anna wondered if she shouldn’t intervene. There hadn’t been peace in the kitchen since Günther had left. Nobody had ever dared to argue with him. The junior chef, Luise, had probably done something silly by accident - perhaps she hadn’t closed the door of the walk-in fridge properly. There was a special trick to that, which no one besides Mbali seemed to get. Anna herself left the door open sometimes and Mbali had often lectured her about it, too. Günther had been the only person at the hotel able to tell Mbali what to do, but now that he had left, she bossed everyone around to her heart’s content. Anna wished, more than anything, that Günther would come back, that one day she would wake up to see his white Nissan bakkie parked in his “Reserved Head Chef” parking bay, and hear him whistling

Ein Prosit from the kitchen, or shouting du Scheißkatzenviech at Victoria, who always got tangled between his feet. He had disappeared the day after Anna's grandparents had died. Anna had thought she'd seen him at the funeral, standing near the back of the church. Perhaps she had been mistaken, but in Anna's mind there was no mistaking a person like Günther – he was taller than anybody else she knew, with an impressive stomach, red complexion, and a shiny bald head. Since the funeral though, there had been no sight of Günther. Anna thought that Knowledge knew where Günther was, they'd always had a sort of an understanding, and she'd asked him, a few times. But always the answer was the same, *Hawu, Anna, Angazi*. The other day, Tante Elke Hillermann, the queen of Wartburg gossip, had asked Anna did Günther have something to do with her grandparents' death, why else did he disappear like that. Anna had lied, even though she knew that Günther had been responsible for hiring Philani the painter. She said that Günther had gone home to Oberammergau to visit his family. He had been planning the trip for a long time. It was their golden wedding anniversary. Tante Elke had lapped the story up, and Anna had breathed a sigh of relief. She was surprised at how easily lying was coming to her lately. Now, even laughing seemed to be a lie. Anna didn't blame Günther, didn't find his behaviour at all strange. He'd just done what Anna had been wanting to do for a while now: run away from the memory of that moonless night.

"Spätzle," Anna says to Günther, "must be the messiest thing in the whole world to make."

"Only if you're Anna," Günther replies. Anna's covered in flour and splatterings of Spätzle dough. "I don't know why you don't wear an apron? Like the one I gave you?"

"Günther! The apron that says 'sexy chick' on it?"

"It was a compliment." Günther looks down, and Anna really hopes he didn't fancy her. When she'd told Großmutter what she thought that, Großmutter had been annoyed.

"Mein Schatz, you can't go through life thinking that every man you meet is undyingly in love with you," she'd said.

"I don't think that!" Anna had said.

"If you didn't think that way, you wouldn't have lost Michael. You always thought he'd come running back to you, and now you've lost him."

Anna stood outside the kitchen, listening. It seemed as though the argument had died down. Anna pushed a strand of hair behind her ears. She had tied her hair back, and she knew that the hotel's hairdresser, Caroline, would definitely comment on her tight

ponytail. Just the previous week, Caroline had done a protein treatment on Anna's dark curls, and shown her precisely at what angle to blow-dry her hair.

"Loose curls, sweetheart, look stunning on you. Divine. Tying them back like you always do is such a waste ..." Caroline had even managed to sell Anna a fancy brush. Anna, however, had been far too busy the entire past week to spend a long time on her hair every morning.

Anna glanced at her watch. It was a pretty watch, a silver strap, and an elegant face. Michael had given it to her last year on her birthday. She smiled dreamily, and then caught her smile again. It was twenty to eight already, and Laura was probably frantic. Anna ran a bit faster, she was feeling last night's cigarettes in her chest. She burst into the studio, coughing.

"Oh, it's you Anna, honey. Good morning, so nice to see you!"

"Hi Caroline," Anna gasped. "Sorry I'm late. Where are Laura and Leonie?"

"You're not late," Caroline said. "Your appointment's only at eight."

"Oh," Anna said. She'd been certain Laura had told her seven.

"So you're actually early, honey. How are you, Anna? And how's that gorgeous boyfriend of yours?"

"I'm fine. Ian's in Cape Town," Anna lied. Yesterday, a post-card had arrived for her, with a picture of the Big Ben on it:

My dearest Anna,

Let me know at once if you change your mind.

I'm waiting for you.

All my love,

Ian.

"Oh, he's still on holiday there then? You going to join him after the wedding?"

"Probably, depends how things go at the hotel."

"Guess what, I've just heard the craziest story, you won't believe it, but you know Mia? She had her hair done yesterday, pretty little thing, you know who I'm talking about. The intern from Durban."

"She should go back to Durban," Anna muttered, but Caroline didn't hear her.

"You know, the blonde girl – I still can't believe you're German and not blonde! Are you sure your parents didn't change you at birth? You really shouldn't tie your hair up, it's not flattering. Anyway, Mia's been telling me some things."

"I hope you didn't pay any attention to her, Caroline, I think I know what she told you about."

“Well, it’s a scary story, that’s for sure.”

Anna is crying so loudly that it feels like she can’t breathe. Her face is wet from her tears, and her nose is running.

“What’s wrong, mein Schatz?” Großmutter says, looking up from the hotel reception desk. Anna is crying so much that she can’t speak. She puts her face into Großmutter’s lap, and Großmutter pats her back until her heaving sobs become less.

“I don’t want to go,” Anna finally manages to choke out, muffled into Großmutter’s lap.

“Go where, Anna?”

“To Kinderlager.”

“But why not? You’ve been so excited that you’re big enough at last. Your bag’s been packed for weeks.”

“Yes, but Großmutter ... I didn’t know.”

“Didn’t know what, Liebling? Come on, Anna, sit up and speak to me properly.” Anna lifts her head.

“I didn’t know Wittenberg Schülerheim is haunted. Andreas told me. The graveyard is right there, and the ghosts walk around in the Schülerheim.”

She puts her head back into Großmutter’s lap, and carries on crying. Suddenly Anna hears a noise. She lifts her head again. Anna can’t believe it. Großmutter is actually laughing ... at her!

“Anna, Schatz,” Großmutter kisses Anna’s forehead that’s crinkled into an offended frown. “Don’t believe it, that’s Quatsch!”

“She’s talking Quatsch,” Anna said, pressing her lips together, until they almost disappeared. She breathed in through her nose sharply, and glared at the plant to the right of Caroline’s studio door. It was a Delicious Monster, or that was at least what Großmutter had called it. It was growing out of control, like so many things at the hotel, Anna thought, and then turned her glare back to Caroline.

“She says,” and Caroline lowered her voice to a whisper, “she says she’s seen your grandparents’ ghosts.”

“And you believed her?” said Anna, with a voice that was thin and cold like her pressed-together lips.

“Of course, she described, them to me perfectly. And she only came to work here after they died.”

“Have you never noticed,” said Anna, speaking very softly, “that Tante Stefanie framed an enormous picture of Großvater and Großmutter? It’s hanging in the reception. Perhaps her perfect description of them is based on that photograph?”

“Nonsense. She even described their *mannerisms*. She says they sit in the reception, at night, going through the hotel’s books. She saw them one evening when she walked downstairs. She woke up one night - and couldn’t sleep. She wanted to read a little, but she’d left her glasses downstairs at the reception desk. And there Herr and Frau Meyer were, sitting at the desk. Obviously, after that sight, she didn’t sleep anymore. I told her to phone those TV ghost people, apparently they can take pictures of ghosts. And record what they’re saying.”

“If she phones those people,” snapped Anna, her voice rising with every word, “I will fire her. What the hell are you thinking, anyway, speaking about my grandparents like this, to me?” Anna slammed the door of the studio shut, and ran away in a blind rage, hardly noticing that her cheeks were wet with tears.

CHAPTER NINE

Andreas revved the car and hooted. Anna ran as fast as she could, carrying her fishing rod, and Emma's. Her day had been hectic. She'd been so angry with Caroline that she had completely forgotten about the hair trial. Later on, she saw that Laura had tried to phone her numerous times. She still hadn't phoned Laura back to apologize, because she didn't know exactly what she was going to say. Anna had spent the morning rushing about to make sure she could afford to take the afternoon off. And everything had gone wrong. Luise had burnt the Brötchen for the evening's fish braai, and a water pipe had burst in one of the bathrooms. She'd just finished sorting out the disasters, when she remembered that they were going fishing. She left Christopher to continue overseeing the setting up of the braai area. Anna ran to the car panting, and wondering where Emma was.

"I can't wait for your car to come back from the service!" Andreas yelled, "We're always waiting for you!"

Anna put the fishing rods into the boot, and smiled when she realized Emma was already in the car.

"I was looking for Emma," she said, apologetically, even though it had been a hundred other things that had made her late. "I had no idea she was already waiting here."

They were going fishing at the dam on Onkel Karl Meyer's farm. Onkel Karl was Großmutter's oldest son, Tante Stefanie's and Anna's dad's brother. It was a family tradition – every year, after baking day, they spent an afternoon at the dam, fishing together. When they arrived at the dam, Tante Stefanie and Onkel Karl's wife, Tante Linda, had already set up a Klapptisch full of beers, coke, fruit juice, and sandwiches.

"Where do you find time to do this, mother?" Mark asked. "Haven't you been teaching all morning?"

Tante Stefanie taught Maths at the High School.

"I'm superwoman!" Tante Stefanie said, laughing, but Anna really believed that she was. She was the kind of person who could fit a thousand things into twenty-four hours. She'd inherited that from Großmutter, along with her singing voice.

Even though no one said anything about it, Großvater and Großmutter's absence was almost as tangible as the people who were there. Großvater used to hand out bait, and give advice to the fly-fishers which flies to use. Großmutter always sat on her garden chair with her big straw hat on, commenting on proceedings. Anna had wondered earlier if there was any point having fishing day without them. But then she realized that they would have wanted the family to continue doing things together.

Onkel Hans and Tante Minna were also there already, sitting next to each other on a rock. Since a month after Onkel Hans's wife's death, the two had been inseparable. They always used to fancy each other at school, Großmutter had told Anna. Tante Minna had never married, because she had always still had her eye out for Onkel Hans. Recently, Tante Stefanie had seen Onkel Hans leave Tante Minna's cottage at the Altersheim with his pants on inside-out. Anna wondered what Großmutter would've thought of the whole thing. She probably would have schimpfed Onkel Hans but been secretly delighted that her brother was in love with Großvater's sister.

"Have you caught anything yet, Onkel Hans?" Mark yelled.

"Don't shout so loudly," Onkel Hans said, "You're scaring my fish away."

Mark, Andreas and Anna took some beers, and found themselves a spot close to Tante Minna and Onkel Hans.

"To spy on you," Anna said to Onkel Hans. Tante Stefanie, Anna's cousin Ruth, and Tante Linda were sitting on their fold-up chairs in the shade, gossiping. Tante Minna got up to join them, despite Onkel Hans's demands that she should stay there next to him. Tante Minna had overheard the other ladies start gossiping, and gossip was something she had never been able to resist. There seemed to be much to gossip about Wartburg that day. Anna, while watching the water lap against the dam's shore, heard snatches of it. Onkel Alwin Johannes's farm was under a landclaim, but he'd somehow managed to buy it back from the district's chief. Tante Martina Engelbrecht was starting a home industry, although everyone knew she couldn't really cook or bake. Annette Paul was finally engaged, to an Afrikaans dentist she'd met in Pietermaritzburg. Everyone had thought she'd never get married, because she was almost thirty. Anna wondered if people would start speaking like that about her soon, too. She was twenty-four already. To her, it felt as though she was getting closer to thirty every day.

Onkel Hans lifted his hat that had fallen over his eyes.

"Andreas," he called, "Bring einem alten durstigen Mann another beer."

"What happened to speaking softly so that the fish aren't chased away?" Andreas asked.

Andreas brought him a Windhoek Lager, and sat down next to him. Onkel Hans told a story that Anna had heard before from Großmutter, a few years ago on fishing day.

My brother Hans went on a fishing trip recently, with his best friend Heinrich. Both of them are equally full of shit. No that's not swearing, Anna. You know how Hans is, always up to some sort of nonsense. Anyway, Hans and Heinrich went to Kosi Bay.

They left their wives behind, and took a two-man tent, their fishing rods, and lots of beer. The beer was going to be their vegetables, and they would eat the fish they caught.

One morning, Hans stole Heinrich's false teeth. Heinrich was grumpy all morning without his teeth. They went fishing on their boat, and Hans caught an enormous grunter. He pulled it into the boat, and when Heinrich wasn't looking, he put the false teeth into the grunter's mouth.

"Look, the fish found your teeth, Heinrich," Hans said.

Heinrich tried the teeth on, and took them out again.

"Not mine," he said, and threw them into the water.

Andreas and Mark laughed loudly, they hadn't heard the story before. Onkel Hans's youngest son Karl, the Pastor in Wartburg arrived. He wanted to know why Andreas and Mark were laughing, so Onkel Hans told the story again. Anna looked to where Emma and the children of Anna's cousins were also fishing, on the other side of the dam. Maike, Kerstin, and Peter had caught some live worms, and Emma was trying to convince them to let the worms go, and to use plastic worms as bait. Some of Anna's other cousins were busy fishing for yellowfish in the nearby river.

"Anna, have you put fish on the hotel menu for tonight?" one of her cousins, Stefan, yelled.

"Of course!" Part of the tradition was that the whole family came to eat at the hotel on fishing day. Anna hoped that they'd catch more yellowfish than bass this fishing day, it was tastier. Großmutter used to fry some of the fish in her big pan from Germany with loads of oil and batter, and Großvater grilled the rest on the fire. They always set up the outside braai area for the hotel guests to eat in, and lots of Wartburg people came, too. Anna hoped that they'd catch enough fish for everyone, but Mark had supplied ample braai meat in case they didn't. About fifty people had booked for tonight, Anna was delighted about it, it was the biggest evening booking she'd had since her grandparents' death. But she couldn't believe this function had fallen in the same week as Michael's wedding. It was all a bit much. She tried to breathe deeply and relax. Großmutter had once told her that stress was just a figment of the imagination, but Anna wasn't sure how to believe her. It was a beautiful afternoon, and she was lucky to be outdoors. The air was clear and fresh after the rain the day before. The weaver birds were chirruping in the bush nearby, and the sky was so blue that Anna felt she could forget her stress in it.

"Looks like Onkel Hans is asleep," Mark whispered into Anna's ear, pointing. He tiptoed over to the cooler-box. The fish that had already been caught were inside there. Andreas took Onkel Hans's rod from him, and reeled in his line. He had made a

hole in his empty beer can, at the other end, and he put the can through the hole. Then, he attached the fish to the line by its tail. Andreas sat down next to Mark again, still holding the fish. Then he threw the fish into the water.

“Wake up, Onkel Hans, I think you’ve caught something!” he bellowed. Onkel Hans woke up with a start.

“I think it’s a biggie,” Onkel Hans yelped excitedly. He started reeling in fast. The first thing to come out of the water was the beer can, and the tail of the fish followed, shortly behind. Mark and Andreas laughed so much, they almost fell into the water, and Onkel Hans looked sheepish for a few seconds, but he was soon laughing, too.

CHAPTER TEN

“I heard you didn’t go to the hair trial,” Michael said, catching Anna’s arm. Anna was busy counting the bottles of wine in the walk-in fridge at the church hall. She shook him off.

“Ach, Michael, I’ve lost count now!”

“Sorry.”

“Hey, you’re getting married tomorrow, Michael, what does it feel like?” Anna said, trying to make her voice bright. Michael didn’t answer.

At that moment, Emma ran into the kitchen, jumped, and threw her arms around Anna’s neck. She was sobbing. Anna patted Emma’s back, stroked her hair, but Emma was so upset that Anna couldn’t understand a word she was saying.

Michael caught Anna’s eye, and lifted his eyebrows. Anna shrugged her shoulders. Finally she caught the word “Sebastian”.

“What happened to Sebastian, Liebling?” Anna asked her.

“He’s ... lost!”

After a while, Anna managed to get the story out of Emma. Earlier on, Anna had asked Onkel Hans to take Emma and Sebastian on a walk, more to get Onkel Hans out of the way than to entertain Emma. He had been busy trying to help some of the ladies arrange flowers, probably to impress Tante Minna. He started off with cutting the stems off some of the long-stemmed pink roses, which was when Anna had stepped in and told him to take Emma on a walk. They had gone walking on the Wortmanns’ farm, and Sebastian had run off into the sugarcane, barking. He was probably chasing a cane rat, but he hadn’t come back again, even though Emma and Onkel Hans had called and called.

“Don’t worry, Schatz, he’ll be somewhere,” Anna said, more confidently than she felt. She remembered her little sausage dog had been run over one year, by her mother. Anna’s mother had felt terrible about it, but that hadn’t brought Anna’s dog back.

“You can borrow my motor-bike,” Michael said, looking at Anna, but patting Emma’s head a little awkwardly. “To look for Sebastian, I mean.”

“Thanks, Mike,” Anna said, “I’m not sure I can leave here now, though.”

“Looks like everything is under control,” Michael said.

“Everything except ...” and Anna lowered her voice. “Everything except the congregation’s Catering Committee – they’ve been spying on me all morning. You’d think I was from the other church or something. I wonder if they’re scared I’m going to use the broom for outside inside the kitchen. I wish I could just be cooking at the hotel.”

“Ha ha, can you imagine my whole family trying to fit into the buffet room in the hotel?”

“No.”

“I guess the Catering Committee is just nervous that you’re stealing their thunder for this wedding.”

“I guess. But they’re driving me insane.”

“I’m sorry I’m doing this to you,” Michael said, and Anna wondered if he was implying more than just being sorry about the Kirchdorf Catering Committee.

“Can you go find Sebastian now?” Emma sniffed.

“Go,” Michael said. “I’m sure Tante Stefanie can handle the Catering Committee while you’re gone. And she’s in this with you anyway, isn’t she?”

“Yes, ok,” Anna said.

“What car are you taking?” Michael asked, smiling at her.

“Mi... oh damn, I forgot, my car’s in for a service.”

Michael passed her his keys. “Take Lucy. My bike’s parked at home,” he said. Laura appeared from the hall, holding the table seating chart. Anna waved, and ran off. She didn’t want to get drawn into complex seating problems. She needed to find Sebastian as quickly as possible. She walked quickly to the car park, past the multitudes of Michael’s family members folding serviettes, sorting out cutlery, and arranging flowers. She’d overheard some of them skindering earlier about the fact that not even Laura’s sister was helping, while Michael’s entire family seemed to be involved in one way or other. Lucy struggled to start. She coughed a few times before the engine finally started running.

Anna hoped Michael wouldn’t be taking Lucy on his honeymoon. But knowing Michael, he would probably want to. He had the newest Toyota Landcruiser, but he never drove it, because he loved his old Lucy so much.

Anna, Michael and the twins are on their way back from Pietermaritzburg, they’ve been out partying. All of them are quite drunk, but Michael decides he’s had the least to drink, and he’ll drive.

“Hey, Mike!” Mark yells from the back of Lucy. “Did you know that your dad once went to the Wartburg Hotel, and drove all the way back home in Reverse?”

“No, I didn’t know the story!” Michael yells loudly, but he’s being sarcastic, they’ve all heard it, many times. Dieter had lost the key to his gear-lock. So the only gear that had worked on Dieter Wortmann’s car that night had been the reverse. He’d been too scared of Marlene to sleep in his car outside the pub, so he’d decided to reverse home instead.

Michael turns right at the Table Mountain T-junction towards Wartburg. He swerves to miss a cat that's just run into the road. Suddenly, Lucy gets slower and slower, and the engine dies.

"Shit!" Michael yells. "Diesel's run out!"

Lucy's diesel needle didn't work, and Michael just had to guess from the Speedometer when to fill up. This time, he'd obviously miscalculated.

"Your hazards!" Anna hisses, and Michael puts the hazard lights on. Luckily, he'd managed to steer Lucy to the side of the road, out of the way. Mark and Andreas phone one of their older cousins, Helmut, who's had his driver's for a year or so. Helmut says he'll bring them some diesel. Anna falls asleep on Andreas's lap waiting for him. She wakes up when Helmut comes, but stays inside the car while the boys sort out the fuel. When Lucy finally starts again, Andreas and Mark sing to her, at the tops of their voices,

*"We love you, Lucy,
And if it's quite alright,
We need you, Lucy,
To drive us out at night.
We love you, Lucy.
Our pret – ty Lucy ..."*

Anna had to smile. Even if Michael was offered a Porsche, he'd probably still prefer Lucy. It didn't take Anna long to get to the Wortmanns' farmhouse. It was only a few minutes' drive from the church. Anna needed to get the motorbike's key from inside the house. She hoped it would be unlocked. She knew all the Wortmanns were at the church hall, so she didn't bother to knock. She opened the kitchen door, and walked towards the row of hooks where the Wortmanns kept their keys. Bongiwe, who had been working for the Wortmanns for as long as Anna could remember, was standing in the kitchen washing dishes.

"Sawubona Ntombenhle," she said.

"Yebo, Sawubona," Anna replied, and she asked in Zulu about Bongiwe's children. Anna's Zulu had been fluent since she was little. They were all doing fine, Bongiwe's oldest had just passed matric, and the youngest was the fastest runner in his class at school. Anna told her about Sebastian being missing, and Bongiwe said that she hadn't seen him.

“Hawu,” Bongiwe added. “This wedding tomorrow is bad news. I always said to Madam Wortmann that Michael must marry you. And now, he’s taking a wife from overseas. Bad news.” Bongiwe shook her head, and Anna looked down.

“I’m just looking for Michael’s motorbike key,” Anna said, trying to change the subject.

“Here,” Bongiwe said, passing her the key, which had been lying on the kitchen table.

“Do you know if the brakes are working again?” Anna asked.

“Yebo. Michael was fixing the motorbike yesterday.”

Anna’s curls are streaming behind her. She’s behind Michael on the motorbike, holding onto him tightly. The burnt sugarcane fields speed past them on the sides. They’re moving faster and faster, and Anna laughs, because it’s such an exhilarating feeling. Suddenly they’re driving uphill, and Michael shouts.

“Hey, Ann, did I mention the brakes aren’t working?”

“No! How the hell are we going to stop?” Anna shrieks.

Michael doesn’t reply. They’re climbing the hill slower now, and by the time they reach the top they’re almost not moving.

“Like this!” he shouts. “Jump off, now!”

Anna jumps off onto the side of the road. She somehow manages to land on her feet, but Michael jumping off just after her, knocks her over, and she lands on her back.

“Get off me!” she yells, but she’s laughing hard. She’s got dirt and ash from the field in her face, and her hair is wild.

“Anna,” Michael says, helping her up. “Did I ever tell you that you’re beautiful?”

The motorbike was leaning against the garage, and Anna hopped onto the seat. She was happy that it started straight away, and she drove slowly towards the gate. The Wortmanns’ two Jack Russells ran after her, yapping. She accelerated out of the gate, and as she sped up, it felt as though memories of Michael were speeding past her, like the scenery, faster, and faster. She couldn’t hold onto them, even though she wanted to, and she knew she shouldn’t hold onto them either, because they were no longer hers.

Michael and Anna, sitting on the cement posts on either side of the gate, eating Großmama’s grapes with the huge pips in them. They have a pip-spitting contest. Anna

can spit the furthest, halfway to the road. Michael's dad takes them to the Eggers's farm to choose a Jack Russell puppy, but Anna and Michael like two different puppies, so Dieter buys them both. Dieter grades part of the farm's dirt road for them, so that Anna and Michael can practise their sprints for athletics season. Dieter stands on the side of the road with his whistle and his stopwatch. Anna falls into the dirt, and grazes her knee, but Michael helps her up, and makes her laugh again. Michael teaches Anna how to drive a tractor, and she's annoyed because it can't drive any faster.

Anna realized she was driving too fast, but it felt good. The sugarcane was a blur next to her, and every now and then, there was still a puddle from Wednesday's rain that she drove through just to feel the water splashing up against her legs. Suddenly, she remembered Sebastian. She drove to where Emma had told her Sebastian had gone missing. She slowed down and stopped, every few hundred metres, and yelled Sebastian's name as loudly as she could into the sugarcane fields. She got off the motorbike, and walked in some of the little paths, through the fields, looking, and calling until her voice was hoarse. There wasn't any sign of her daughter's dog. After a long while of searching, Anna parked the motorbike next to the dirt road, and sat down on the ground next to it.

Anna sat like that for a while, in the dirt, holding her head, which felt like it would burst. The afternoon sun was burning her, but she didn't move. She suddenly didn't care about anything anymore, and she didn't even really notice the sun. It wasn't so much that Sebastian was lost, although she was desperate to find him, of course. Michael was getting married tomorrow.

Michael is obsessed with the idea of flying, and his enthusiasm infects Anna, too. They are six years old, still young enough to believe in all of the things that matter. They can fly, definitely, they just have to figure out how. Anna suggests making wings from hadedah feathers, like Icarus in her Children's Book of Greek Myths, but they can't seem to collect enough. Then Michael finally comes up with another idea. There is a path leading down to a small flight of steps at the hotel. If they accelerate fast enough towards that path on their black plastic motorbikes, they should lift off from the top step.

"One, two, three, go!" Michael screams. Anna is a little bit faster, she gets to the step before Michael does. And for a moment in the air with her arms stretched wide, she can fly. And somehow that moment feels long – longer than normal time.

A shot fills the night air. Großmutti screams, and Anna hears the sound of a bottle breaking. Another shot. The moment freezes Anna, ties her to her chair. Anna fights wildly against time slowing down. She manages to break loose. She starts to run.

There are two crashes. Anna lands first, then Michael, half on top of her. There is so much blood, and Anna doesn't know if it's hers or Michael's. Michael's eyes are closed, and Anna wonders if he's still alive. He opens his eyes, slowly.

"We can't fly," he whispers.

Anna held her head in her hands. Her shoulders were shaking, but she wasn't crying. It felt like those gunshots were echoing inside her. After a long time, Anna heard the sound of a car somewhere in the distance. She turned her head. The car was still far away, but it looked like one of the Wortmann's farm bakkies. It was probably one of the farm workers, checking up on things. But when the bakkie reached Anna, it slowed down. It was Dieter Wortmann.

"Hi Anna," he said. "Aren't you supposed to be cooking for my son's wedding?"

"Sebastian's gone," Anna whispered.

"I know," Dieter said. "Michael told me. He told me to come look for you, apparently you left ages ago. Not like you to leave other people to do the work... we've been worried about you. Don't look so sad, though, he'll turn up again, though, don't worry. Dogs are clever."

He gave Anna a hand, and pulled her up. Dieter looked at her, and saw what was in her eyes.

"It's not the dog you're distraught about, is it?" he asked. Anna didn't answer.

"My son's making a big mistake," he mumbled, but Anna wasn't sure if that was what he'd said, he'd spoken so softly.

"Things will be fine," he said loudly, sounding as though he needed some convincing himself. "Didn't your Großmutti ever tell you the Gypsy Hound story?"

And Anna nodded.

My oldest uncle on my mother's side, Onkel Hermann, was a free spirit, he never married, and he liked to travel around. The rest of his family lived in Wartburg, on the hotel plot, and he would live there from time to time, when he wasn't on one of his trips.

He was the only person in Wartburg who had seen the goldmines in Johannesburg, and some say that he made his fortune there, selling gum tree wood to the miners. He also told us stories of Mozambique, of the beautiful clear blue sea that stretched for miles. And I remember him saying that you must be careful of the Portuguese, weil sie werden dich übers Ohr hauen wenn du nicht vorsichtig bist. And I wondered what sort of person hits others over the ear, but my mother told me later it was a proverb, and that it meant something else. He never told us exactly what he did in Mozambique. I can't imagine that he went there just to look at the sea.

When the Boer War began, before I was born, he enlisted in the Boer army, to fight for the friends he had met in Johannesburg, at the mines. Onkel Hermann had a dog, a reddish skinny thing he called "My Gypsy Hound". He left the dog with his mother before he went to fight. He valued that dog more than anything else. He said that he didn't need to go to church because he had that dog. He thought more highly of that dog than of church, his bible and his catechism, because his Gypsy Hound explained faith better than those books did. He had some interesting ideas, Onkel Hermann did, and whenever he came home he would discuss them with his best friend, Pastor Otto.

The year of the war, Gypsy Hound sat in the same place for months, waiting for Onkel Hermann to come back. He didn't chase my grandmother's chickens like he used to. They thought that he was going to die any day, because he was hardly moving around or eating. Then, one afternoon, he got up and shook himself, and ran towards where the sun was setting. A week later, Onkel Hermann came home with Gypsy Hound.

"You can drive back to the house in front of me," he continued. "I'll tell my workers to keep an eye out for Sebastian, ok?"

Anna drove in front of Dieter, even faster than before, the dust blew up all around her. She slowed down when she drove into the Wortmanns' driveway. And suddenly Anna heard a little yelp. Sebastian was sitting on the step in front of the kitchen, waiting. Anna couldn't believe it, it was a small miracle, and she half-expected Großmutter and Großvater to step out of the Wortmann's front door to make the miracle complete.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The road was muddy from last night's rain, and Anna's stilettos were sinking into the dirt. She had a feeling that she looked a little ridiculous in the shoes, which she'd borrowed from Nicky. Nicky was known for her good taste, and the shoes were beautiful. But Anna was not used to walking in high heels, never mind walking in the mud in high heels. She would never be able to walk all the way to the church in these shoes, she thought, and took them off. She thought of walking down the aisle, and wondered if she should go back for other shoes. But Nicky had made her promise to wear these. Anna and Emma had to walk because Anna's car was still not back. Probably, Anna thought, she should have asked Tante Stefanie for a lift, but it wasn't far to the church, a mere Katzensprung and she'd be there, and she was tired of everyone waiting for her. Anna thought of Großmutter, who had always insisted that everyone walk to church. Only on days when it was raining hard had they taken the car.

"Emma, please tell Sebastian to go home! He can't come to the wedding!"

"Oh please, Mama, please let him come, he's never been to a wedding before and I won't be so scared of all those people if Sebastian is there."

"You look so beautiful, Liebling, you are the prettiest flower girl in the whole world. And I'll be there, you don't need to be scared. Sebastian has to stay home. Do you want him to get lost again?"

Emma told Sebastian very softly to Geh nach Hause. Sebastian trotted home slowly, tail between his legs. Emma did look lovely in her white organza dress, with the first of Großmutter's pink roses in her dark hair. Emma loved dressing up, she had been excited about having been chosen as a flower girl for weeks.

"Anna Banana is wearing a dress!" Michael almost chokes with laughter.

"You're a girly girl!"

Anna is furious. Her mother had forced her to wear a pink dress for her cousin Elisabeth's christening. (Elisabeth was Onkel Karl's third child.) It wasn't enough that it was a dress. It also had to be pink!

"I'll show you!" Anna says, clenching her teeth together and flashing an angry look at Michael. Before Michael knows what's happened, Anna is at the very top of one of the big fig trees outside the church hall. She throws one of the figs down at him, and her aim is deadly accurate. The fig lands on his head.

“Beat that!” she yells down at him.

“They’re going inside,” Michael yells back, he knows he’s no match for Anna at climbing. “Come down, Anna!”

Anna climbs down as quickly as a cat, luckily none of the grown ups have seen her trick. But her dress is very dirty on one side, and torn on the other. The children’s choir has to sing ‘Weil ich Jesu Schäflein bin’ at the beginning of the service, so she asks Michael to stand very close to her torn side, and hopes that nobody will notice the dirt. Großmutter notices, of course, smiles and pinches Anna’s cheek. Anna’s mother, as usual, has other things on her mind.

Anna pulled at one of the straps of the pink bridesmaid’s dress, wondering if its low cut at the front was not perhaps a little too risqué for Kirchdorf. “Nicht vorteilhaft,” Großmutter would have said. But she would have liked how Caroline had done Anna’s hair – in loosely falling ringlets. Anna had looked at herself in her hotel room’s full-length mirror earlier, and had approved whole-heartedly. Even the bright pink suited her complexion well.

“It’s really not too low-cut,” both Nicky and Caroline had said, “and in any case, your figure is flawless.”

There was a screeching noise as Bruno Hillermann stopped his yellow Audi TT next to Anna and Emma. Tante Elke, Bruno’s mother was almost falling out of the window of the passenger seat waving and shouting hello at Anna and Emma. She was wearing a very orange dress, and Anna tried to decide which was louder, the dress or the voice. Anna had a suspicion that was not sneaking but wearing heavy boots that Tante Elke wanted her to marry Bruno and produce many little Hillermanns. Anna looked at Bruno again, at his wrought iron eyebrows, and the lack of energy in his eyes. They would have to find another future Frau Hillermann. Anna had thought that the fact that she’d fallen pregnant in her last year of university would have dampened her prospects in Tante Elke’s books. But judging by the energy of Tante Elke’s wave she realized that she’d had no such luck. And anyway, Emma was almost five. It was several years now since Anna’s fall from Wartburg grace. Emma’s happy smile had redeemed Anna from most people’s bad opinions.

“Hallo Anna, und Emmilein,” Tante Elke said, in her sing-song tone. Who calls their child Bruno? Anna thought. But for that car I might actually be tempted to marry him. Thank goodness it’s yellow. Else the temptation would actually be too much to overcome.

“Where is Onkel Bodo?” Anna enquired, and Tante Elke explained, with all the details Anna didn’t want to hear, that her husband had the stomach bug.

“Why are you walking?” Bruno asked, only just waking up to the fact that a conversation had been happening for the last few minutes.

“Yes, my dear,” his mother added, “you shouldn’t walk. Especially after what happened to your grandparents. Wartburg isn’t as safe as it used to be anymore. And it was payday Tuesday so all the blacks are chock-a-block full of alcohol. Hop inside, both of you.”

Anna’s back hairs bristled.

“We are enjoying the walk, actually,” she retorted, wondering if she should draw attention to the fact that it wasn’t only black people who drank; the whole of Wartburg knew about Tante Elke’s brother’s drinking problem.

“We’ll see you at the church. It’s not far, and it’s lovely to be outside.”

Tante Elke almost looked like she wanted to insist, but Anna had a firmness about her mouth that people tended not to argue with.

“I don’t,” Emma said, as Bruno pulled off, “like that woman.”

It’s Michael’s bachelor’s, and Anna and Michael are, as usual, the ‘last men standing’. They are drinking whisky, and Anna is, also as usual, out-drinking Michael.

“I know you don’t like her, I know you don’t,” Michael keeps saying.

“I like her for your sake, Michael,” and Anna wonders exactly what she means by that, and if lying is sometimes excusable.

Anna arrived at the church just after Bruno’s car slid between the gates. The gates were still open, so she didn’t have to punch the code into the intercom. 1950 was the code, the year Kirchdorf church was built, and the year her grandparents were married. Although she was very early, Anna expected everyone to be gathered outside the church building on the grass, greeting their friends, looking at what the others were wearing, gossiping about the poor unsuspecting English guests who weren’t wearing ties and blazers, and waiting for ten minutes before the wedding service to go inside and choose their places.

“Where is everybody?” Emma asked, a little frown line appearing between her eyebrows. Anna looked at her watch. They were forty-five minutes early, maybe people hadn’t started arriving yet.

Suddenly, Anna noticed a cluster of people gathered under the trees where the cars were parked. They were all speaking at the same time. Tante Stefanie burst out of the cluster, and ran towards Anna and Emma. She gripped Anna’s arm.

“Wedding’s been cancelled.”

Anna dropped the stilettos she was still holding.

“You’re joking.”

“Nein, ich bin ernst. Laura cancelled it half an hour ago.”

“Why?”

“I’m not sure. I didn’t want to ask Marlene. But Christine said it’s something about him not wanting to take that job offer in Germany.”

“He never said he wanted to take that job.”

“Well, it seems Laura thought he did.”

“I have to go,” Anna whispered.

“I know, Liebling – but take my car. You can leave Em with me. And don’t worry about all the food – the guests still need to eat, I suppose – and I’ll take care of it.”

Anna sprinted to Tante Stefanie’s car, she didn’t say anything to her aunt or to Emma. Bloody Laura she thought, I’ll kill her for doing this to Michael. But the emotion flooding through her veins was more relief than anger. Anna hardly knew how she started the car, or managed to drive to the Wortmanns’ farm. She had to find Michael, but she knew she wouldn’t even have to look for him – she knew exactly where he’d be. She parked behind the Wortmanns’ stables, ran inside. Michael’s horse, Rhapsody, wasn’t there. Anna didn’t even bother to saddle up her horse. She had to pull her dress up when she climbed onto Pepper’s back. Anna hoped no-one would see her. She rode bareback and barefoot, as fast as she could, down the dirt road to the gate of the Wortmanns’ little game farm.

“Don’t you think,” Michael says to Anna, “that this is the perfect spot for a game farm?”

Michael has always dreamed of being a game ranger, of wearing khaki clothes, and hacking around in the bush all day.

“But,” says Anna, “I heard that your Onkel Matthias wants to cut down that forest and plant sugar cane here. Your father is thinking of selling this part of the farm to him. He says that he doesn’t really use this land, that it’s a waste.”

“No,” Michael said in a voice so determined that Anna knew that the little forest would never be cut down while Michael was still around.

Perhaps game farm was a bit of an exaggeration, it was really just a smallish plot adjoining the sugar farm. The plot looked onto the Valley of a Thousand Hills, and the smoke and lights of Cool-Air were not far away. Anna loved the fact that there was a village close to Wartburg called Cool-Air. As a child, if it was a particularly hot day, she used to ask her Großmutter if they could drive there. Michael had been given the farm as a 21st birthday present. He had fenced the plot in with an enormous electric fence, and Anna had teased him and asked him if he was thinking of buying an elephant. Michael didn’t like being teased, he showed her an article in the Farmer’s Weekly about fencing in

antelope and the fence-height requirements. Anna had just smiled and pointed out the 'Boer soek 'n vrou' advert alongside the article, which hadn't improved Michael's mood. After the fence was in place, Michael started buying his animals – slowly, and after a few years he had an impressive collection: two warthogs, a family of waterbuck, several nyala, a herd of oribi, and the elusive antbear. Michael hadn't actually bought the antbear, but Anna and Michael had seen traces of him all over the farm.

It is full moon. Michael is having a braai at his house, and Anna and all of their friends are there. Martin and Julia, Kirsten, Peter, Mark and Andreas. They've all been drinking a lot of beer, so nobody notices Anna and Michael slip out. Michael starts the four-wheeler, and Anna jumps on the back. Michael drives too fast for someone who's had a lot of beer Anna thinks, she's almost scared although she's usually fearless, so she holds on to him more tightly than she wants to. But the wind on her cheeks and the moon are intoxicating, so she throws back her head and laughs. He drives too fast over the little drift, and the water splashes up against her legs.

"Do you have the spotlight?" Michael yells, and Anna pushes the point of the spotlight hard into his ribcage as an answer. Michael unlocks the gate of the game farm,

"Don't forget to shut it!" Anna yells, and they drive to where they last saw an antbear hole. Michael stops the four-wheeler just before, and he pulls Anna's hand as they tiptoe closer. Anna shines the spotlight straight at the hole, and the antbear looks out at them, startled, his eyes reflecting the moon and the beam of the spotlight. Anna laughs again, they've been wanting to see him for so many years, and before she knows it she's dropped the spotlight, it's rolling down the dirt track, and Michael is kissing her.

Anna made sure the gate was closed behind her. She jumped onto Pepper's back again, and galloped towards the forest near the electric fence separating the Wortmanns' land from the adjoining farm. Rhapsody was tied to a fever tree behind the forest. Pepper didn't have reins on, but she knew he'd wait for her there. She climbed down the rocks into the forest softly, almost tripping over a root that got in her way. The forest was muddy from the rain, and Anna's feet were soon covered in dirt. Her hair got caught in some low branches. She walked as quickly as she could, until she reached the clearing.

"I need to show you something, Anna," Michael says. Anna follows him into the little forest. It is dark inside, and musty. She keeps on walking, and some low branches scratch her face. She's about to complain, when suddenly they arrive at a clearing. Light floods in through the gaps between the trees, and there is a little stream trickling past.

"It's beautiful," Anna breathes.

Michael was sitting next to the stream with his head cradled in his hands. Anna watched him for a long while. Suddenly he looked up. For a moment, Anna thought he was happy to see her.

“So you don’t want to move away, Michael?” Anna asked, softly.

“I never said I wanted to,” Michael replied, anger flashing in his eyes.

“I knew you wouldn’t.”

“You think you know everything.”

“Maybe I do. I know you didn’t love her. Not really.”

“She said it’s because I’m still in love with you, Anna,” he said. “When will you stop ruining my life?”

“Well, are you?”

“Just go away, Anna,” he shouted. “Go, just leave me alone!”

CHAPTER TWELVE

“To tell you the truth,” Marlene Wortmann told Anna the following morning at church, “Dieter and I are quite relieved.” She didn’t sound angry with Anna – clearly Michael hadn’t tried to convince her yet that everything was actually Anna’s fault.

It was the short break between the two Sunday morning services, and Anna and Marlene were drinking their tea in the sun. Anna would have preferred coffee, but she felt that drinking the Ricoffee provided by the congregation went against her principles. The first service had been a little longer than usual. Pastor Wichmann was probably catching up for the week before, which had had to be short, because it had taken place outdoors at the graveyard, the tradition for Ewigkeitssontag. This week, he’d warmed up to the text – “Prepare for the coming of our Lord!” he’d bellowed from the pulpit, after a long introduction. That was the only part Anna had paid any attention to, the rest of the time she’d sat visualizing Michael’s face when he’d told her to go away. Anna stood sipping her tea, wondering why the brass band was sounding so dreadful. Then she remembered that the ten members of the Stallmann family who normally kept things together in the brass band were at the Stallmann family reunion up in Elandskraal. Anna remembered Großmutter, who used to block her ears when the brass band wasn’t performing to her satisfaction. She smiled at the memory.

“What are you smiling at?” said Marlene, and Anna didn’t answer. Anna was surprised Marlene had even come to church. If it had been Anna, she would have stayed at home. People were always curious. And when they said they were sorry your grandparents died, and sorry your son’s wedding was cancelled, it seemed to Anna that there was always an unsaid “can’t you tell me exactly what happened” attached to the sorry. Marlene was holding Anna’s arm and whispering, because Elke Hillermann was standing quite close to them, and it was not the sort of conversation one wanted Elke to overhear. Elke was always listening out for gossip, and she liked spreading information all over Wartburg. Anna and Marlene walked a few steps away from Elke, subtly, in the pretence of wanting to stand in the shade of the fig tree- although they had both been enjoying the warmth of the sun. Michael was devastated, Marlene told Anna. Laura had left on the private game reserve honeymoon with her sister. Anna frowned. Michael had been looking forward to visiting that particular game reserve for months, and he’d saved up for ages. Anna wondered if Laura would even appreciate the game-viewing, or whether she’d spend the whole week at the lodge’s beauty salon. Michael had gone to the Wortmann’s cottage up in the foothills of the Drakensberg, just outside Nottingham Road. Marlene wondered if it would help him to recover from his shock to go away alone. Anna

said that she was sure it would, that being alone in nature was the best possible cure for his heartache.

“I’m sure Michael will be ok by the time he gets back,” said Anna, although she wasn’t.

“I don’t know,” Marlene said, frankly. “It’s taken him years to get over you.”

Anna looked away. She was glad there wasn’t any bitterness left in Marlene’s voice, although at the beginning, after Luka, there had been. Everyone had just assumed that Anna was pregnant with Luka’s baby. Michael was Wartburg’s golden boy. Michael wouldn’t have fooled around before getting married. Anna had always been a bit more of an outsider, because her mother wasn’t from Wartburg, and it had been easier for people to believe such things of her. Anna had moved back to Durban for those nine months, she’d worked at a hotel there until she couldn’t anymore. She just couldn’t face people in Wartburg. But living with her parents had been too much for Anna, too, and she’d moved back to her grandparents shortly after Emma’s birth. She’d realized then, that most people were less judgmental than she thought they would be. There were some exceptions, of course, but Anna had always tried to ignore them and their perceptions, and to get on with things.

“I’m sure he’ll figure out that he never really loved her in the first place. You know, Dieter and I tried to be happy when they got engaged. And she was a sweet girl and all that. Stunning too, she’d have produced beautiful grandchildren. But she had no personality, really. All of our conversations seemed to revolve around clothes, shopping and Laura. Sometimes about how Michael would make so much money if he took that job offer in Germany. So actually I’m relieved.”

“Where is she at the moment?” Anna said, desperately trying to shift the conversation from where she knew it was heading.

“Poor girl, she’s also upset. She’s at the private game reserve.

“Oh, yes, you’ve told me already ...”

“Her family’s at Michael’s place. Sorting out her things...packing them back into boxes. They’ll need many boxes for all of her clothes and shoes and hand-bags.”

“Couldn’t she have decided she didn’t love Michael enough before he built a house for her?” Anna asked.

Marlene coughed.

“You’re telling me. Anyway, she’s flying back to Germany in a week. It seems that part of the problem was the living in South Africa part. She thought she’d be able to convince Michael that he wants to emigrate, to take that job. And he was still saying no to that on the morning of the wedding.”

“Ha ha! Michael will be the last to leave. He’ll stay on in this country even if things become dreadful. She should have known that.”

“Laura thinks things already are dreadful here.”

“Well, then she must bloody go back to Germany.”

Anna said that a little too loudly, she saw Elke’s ears prick up.

“Oops, I forgot we’re on holy ground,” Anna said. And Marlene giggled. Elke lifted her eyebrows almost to the sky. She was pretending to be speaking to Tante Dorothea Ringelmann, but it was clear that her attention was very much with Anna and Marlene.

“Anna,” said Marlene, loudly and distinctly, “why don’t we go visit your grandparents’ graves?” Anna was startled at the sudden mention of her grandparents. It had been bad enough having the service at the graveyard last week, with their still-fresh graves. The pastor had said a prayer of thanks for her grandparents’ lives, and they’d sung one of her Großmutter’s favourite hymns. Everyone had looked at Anna, as though they expected her to weep. But the tears hadn’t come, and Anna had felt almost guilty. She looked at Marlene, questioningly, but then she saw a smile in her eyes. Anna followed her, wondering what exactly Marlene had up her sleeve. When they were far enough out of earshot of the tea- and Ricoffee-drinking congregation members, Marlene said, giggling like a child in high school,

“I really need a smoke. Haven’t smoked in years. But right now, today, I need a cigarette. Planning an entire damn wedding that never happened! And putting up with Elke’s rubbish!”

“I’d also love a smoke,” Anna replied, “Elke is just too much. I don’t have any cigarettes with me, though. Do you?”

“No. But you forget I went to school with Pastor Wichmann. I know his tricks.” Anna and Marlene walked through the neatly kept paths of the graveyard, and Anna tried not to look at Großmutter’s and Großvater’s new grave next to Großmutter’s mother’s.

“Get some water, Schatz,” Großmutter says. “My mother’s rose is thirsty, and she wouldn’t like that at all.”

Anna likes to come to the graveyard with her grandmother, it is quiet there, and peaceful. They come every Sunday afternoon, or Monday afternoon if Sunday is too busy. Anna has to pull out the weeds and fetch water. Sometimes, they plant new roses or daisies. And then they sit a while next to the graves. Anna and Großmutter always visit two graves, Großmutter’s parents’, and the little grave of Großmutter’s stillborn son. If there is no one else at the graveyard, Großmutter sings to her baby boy. Although she knows he’s already grown-up. She says that she sings to him so that he’ll recognise her voice in heaven one day.

“Will you still have your voice there, Großmutter?” Anna asks her, and Großmutter always says yes, that she can’t imagine God would give her such a gift and take it from her again. Großmutter has a beautiful singing voice, low and rich. She often used to sing solos in church, but she says she’s too old for that now. Although she likes to say that thank goodness her voice hasn’t aged quite as much as the skin on her face. When she sings at the graveyard to her son, her voice cracks and Anna tries not to look at her eyes full of tears. Anna wonders why she’s still sad about her baby, when it happened so many years ago.

“Did you manage to clear everything up from yesterday? How much food is left over?” Marlene said, as they walked past a grave where bright flowers were competing with huge cement angels for space.

“Not much,” Anna said, “Tante Stefanie still made sure everyone came to the reception, even if there was no wedding. She stood at the gate of the church, and made sure everyone knew to come to the hotel. I’m glad. Otherwise Em and I would be eating Rouladen and Rotkohl for weeks. And Emma doesn’t eat Rotkohl, we found out yesterday.”

“Such a beautiful child,” said Marlene, smiling, “reminds me of you at that age.”

Marlene was leading them to the forgotten corner of the graveyard, to the tiny graves where time and weather had erased names and dates from the gravestones. And suddenly Anna spotted Pastor Wichmann, perched behind one of the gravestones in his robe. He was sitting in the dust, holding a mug of coffee in one hand, and a cigarette in the other. It was real coffee, Anna could smell. Pastor Karl Wichmann was Anna’s mother’s cousin, Onkel Hans’s youngest son. Pastor Wichmann put his mug down on the grave he was sitting next to, and held out his hand to Marlene.

“I don’t know what to say in a case like yours,” he said, “I wanted to offer condolences, but you and Anna are laughing so much that it doesn’t seem necessary.”

“You could always offer us some cigarettes,” said Marlene, “Because that’s why we came.”

“Oh really?” replied Pastor Wichmann, pulling out a box of Camels from his shirt pocket. “And I thought my graveside smoking was a secret?”

“I’ve known you since we were both babies. So don’t think you can have secrets from me.”

“You know,” said Anna, “that my Großmutter used to say she doesn’t understand how you and Onkel Hans could be father and son? ‘Because Karli is such a gentleman’... Well, I wish she could see this!”

“She probably can, she probably can,” and Pastor Wichmann passed them each a cigarette. He held out his lighter first for Marlene, and then for Anna. Marlene inhaled very deeply, then burst out coughing.

“It’s been a while,” she spluttered. Pastor Wichmann looked at Anna, whose thoughts were clearly elsewhere. He squeezed her hand.

“Let me know if you are ever in need of ‘spiritual guidance,’” he said, softly. “You’ve been unhappy lately. And I’m more than happy to chat to you over some whisky.” Anna tried to smile, and pinched his arm, “Spiritual guidance? You’re supposed to be more serious when you’re dressed like that.”

“Supposed to is over-rated.”

“Come over Tuesday night,” Anna said. “And bring your wife and kids to the restaurant before you guide me spiritually at the bar.”

Marlene frowned.

“The restaurant still struggling?”

Anna nodded, looked away quickly. She had been joking just before, but she was worried. Since her grandparents’ death, people had been avoiding the restaurant. If the restaurant’s profits didn’t pick up again soon, Anna would be in trouble financially. She would have to dismiss some of her staff, and Anna shuddered at the thought. They’d all worked for her family for so long.

“Things are getting better slowly,” she said. “But they need to get better a bit more quickly.”

“Your Großmutter would’ve told you to have patience,” Pastor Wichmann said. “And I respect what you’re doing, keeping the place going. So does everyone.”

Pastor Wichmann stamped his cigarette out, and buried it deep underneath the gravel.

“I wish I could join you for another. But I hear our brass band has stopped playing. Best I head back to prepare for the second service!” He lit them another cigarette each, and walked off, crunching the gravel under his shoes. Anna looked towards the gum trees.

“I hope Emma is ok, she was dragged off by little Karl-Heinz to go play. I think they’ve gone to the forest.” Emma was only four, but she was so independent that it felt as though she was growing up too fast. Anna knew that she would have to let go at some stage, but right now she just felt like holding on tighter. Emma was the only thing that gave her life shape and substance.

“She will be ok, Anna. Don’t stress.”

“I better go back, though, she’s probably looking for me. I said we’d go home before the second service.”

Anna put her cigarette out, even though it was only half-smoked.

“I shouldn’t say this, probably,” Marlene said, twirling her still-burning cigarette between her fingers. There was no wind, so the smoke rose very slowly. “But when I woke up this morning I decided I’d tell you.”

“What?” Anna looked towards the big fig trees to see if she could spot Emma. Marlene pulled Anna’s arm to make sure she was looking at her. When Anna saw the expression in Marlene’s eyes, she already knew what she wanted to say.

“I know,” Marlene said, very softly, as though it was a battle to get the words out.

Anna looked away again, she wondered if she should deny it, or argue, but she was tired of fighting, tired of hiding. She’d always been scared of this, scared of hurting the people who had done so much for her, who loved her so much. But more than not wanting to hurt Marlene, she didn’t think she could face her anger, either.

“I wanted to protect Michael ...” Anna whispered. “From ... from me. I always thought he deserved better. I was trying to protect him. Honestly.”

Anna still has the key Michael gave her a few years ago. She opens the padlocked gate to his small game reserve. Michael left for Germany yesterday. Michael would probably not want her on his farm, but it was the only place where she could still be with him although he was gone. His goodbye had been stilted, and awkward. Anna wished she could cry, so that he could see how she felt, but the tears only came much later. Too late. Anna looks down. The earth is dusty and dry. It’s late in winter, and it hasn’t rained since April. Anna hears a rustle in the bush, and she stops dead. A nyala walks out into the path in front of her. He stands in the path, looking at her, and Anna holds her breath because she is so close to him. He is beautiful, with his twisted horns. Anna wonders if she should have told Michael the truth.

Anna looked straight into Marlene’s eyes, but what she saw there wasn’t anger or hurt.

“I’m not blaming you, Anna,” Marlene said. “My son should have fought for you. But when you told him you were pregnant with that Swiss boy’s baby, his heart broke. He just gave up.”

Anna’s knees buckled. She fell down in the gravel, and started crying, harder than she had in years. Marlene sat down next to her, held Anna tight, stroked her hair out of her face like Großmutter used to.

“It’s Emma’s eyes,” Marlene whispered. “They’re Wortmann eyes, same as Michael’s.”

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Anna felt like she'd never be able to sleep again. Since her grandparents' funeral, she'd been controlling her thoughts and emotions strictly, forcing them into boxes, and not letting them out. But the conversation with Marlene had woken up those images and thoughts, and they spun around inside her head, out of control.

It's a beautiful day. The sky is as blue as Großmutter's eyes were, before they closed forever. She would have approved whole-heartedly of the weather God had sent for her funeral.

"Funerals are happy occasions, actually, Anna," she'd told her once, but Anna still didn't believe her. Anna walked to the graveyard, holding Emma's hand. Emma had kept asking Anna for the past three days where Großvater and Großmutter were. And Anna was just grateful her daughter hadn't heard or seen anything. The shots and Großmutter's scream echoed inside Anna's head, until she wanted to scream, too. Just ahead of them, Michael, the twins, Anna's uncles, and her father were carrying the coffins. Anna had never seen her Papa cry until today. He'd tried to hug her earlier, but Anna had stiffened. She heard the congregation singing Großmutter's favourite hymn at the grave.

*Befiehl du deine Wege,
und was dein Herze kränkt,
der allertreusten Pflege,
des der den Himmel lenkt,
der Wolken, Luft und Winden,
gibt Wege, Lauf, und Bahn,
der wird auch Wege finden,
die dein Fuß gehen kann.*

It feels like the hymn was coming from somewhere distant. Anna looks down at her feet, and wonders if God would really find a path for them, like in the hymn. But God seems distant too, like the music. The two shots have blasted Anna's belief in Him. And she wonders if she will ever be able to believe again.

Anna's face was flushed against her pillow, she breathed in starts. She could hear Andreas's snoring from next-door, and she wondered if she should wake him up. But she didn't know what she would say to him.

"Andreas, I've been lying to you all for years about Emma. Michael's her dad, it wasn't Luka."

But, probably, Anna thought bitterly, they all knew. Anna got up and tiptoed to Emma's room. Emma was lying with one hand underneath her cheek. Her dark hair was spread out over her pillow, and she was breathing deeply. Anna stood there for a long time, listening to Emma's breaths, until her own slowed down. Watching Emma made Anna force her mind into a decision. Emma was what made her life worth living. She shouldn't keep her from Michael. She'd have to tell him. Anna breathed a small prayer, her first genuine one in months,

"God, please keep my daughter safe." She kissed Emma on the forehead, and left the room quietly.

"Are we there yet?" Andreas yells.

"Shut up!" Mark leans over Emma and punches him.

"Oy! I'm trying to drive! Stop it!"

Anna was driving the twins and Emma to Durban International Airport (no longer Louis Botha, as she keeps telling Großvater) to meet Michael, who had finished his PHD in Germany, and was coming back home. Michael's parents, Tante Stefanie, two of his aunts, and four cousins are all driving to the airport in Michael's dad's Kombi.

"Drive faster, man! Dieter Wortmann overtook us ages ago."

"He drives like a maniac, Andi! Anyways, I've only got a 1.2-litre engine."

"We should've taken Lucy! I still can't believe Michael's arriving at the same bloody time as the Springbok- All Blacks match! Couldn't he have arrived a bit later? Just a few hours? He fucks off for two whole years and then he has to come back NOW."

"Andi! My daughter's sitting next to you. Shut your filthy mouth, man!"

"It's actually starting in a few minutes, put the radio on, won't you, Banana?"

Mark asked.

"Only if Andreas stops swearing!"

She grips her steering wheel, as a massive black BMW with a GP number plate zooms past her.

"Idiot!" she yells.

"What did you say about swearing, Miss Anna? Can you put the radio on now?"

"I have to concentrate on the road! Wait two seconds!"

“Please ...”

“I really can’t fiddle with the radio right now. Maybe one of you two heroes should have sat in the front with me, instead of both insisting to sit next to Em!”

Andreas leans over to the front, and presses a few buttons. They arrive at the airport when South Africa scores the first try of the match. The twins yell and scream with excitement. Emma has fallen asleep, and Anna is surprised that she doesn’t wake up with all the noise the twins are making.

Anna is glad Emma is asleep. At least Michael won’t notice her big green Wortmann eyes immediately.

“Hurry, up and park, Ann, maybe there’s a big screen inside!”

Andreas lifts the pram out of the boot, as soon as Anna has parked. Mark picks Emma up, and tightens the pram’s belt around her little body. Andreas and Mark fight about who gets to push Emma. Anna makes them flip a coin, Mark wins. Mark pushes the pram, with Anna and Andreas running just behind.

“Be careful, Markie!” Anna yells, and her voice and her whole body are shaking. She’s nervous, she shouldn’t have come. She remembers the last time she saw Michael, and she wants to throw up.

She’s never seen Michael cry before. He spent a year in Germany before she heard from him. A postcard, telling her he’d met someone. There are two birds on it, soaring in a blue sky.

Mark runs faster and faster, they are dodging tourists and baggage trolleys. They are almost at the automatic glass doors, when Michael steps out. The rest of the welcoming committee is behind him. Dieter Wortmann in his Springbok jersey, Marlene walking close behind. Mark is running too fast. He can’t stop, and he collides with Michael. Michael falls hard. Emma wakes up. She looks at Michael sprawled on the floor. And laughs.

Anna looked at her watch. It was four thirty AM, and if she moved quickly, she wouldn’t have to explain to anybody. She packed a small bag, and got dressed, as quietly as she could. She put on the first shoes she could find, the red leather ones Tante Stefanie had bought for her in Cape Town. Anna wondered if her car would start, but then she remembered that Lucy was parked at the hotel car park because Andreas had asked if he could borrow her for some deliveries. The Landrover’s keys were in Onkel Martin and Tante Stefanie’s key cupboard. Anna pulled it slowly off its hook so that it wouldn’t jingle. Anna wrote Tante Stefanie a note.

Liebe Tante Stefanie,

I am going to see Michael. He's at Nottingham Road. Please make up a story for me, I don't want the whole of Wartburg to gossip about me. There aren't many guests at the moment, Mbali, Christopher and Andreas should be able to cope. Tell them I'm sorry. Emma is invited to Theresa's place, they're fetching her at 8, she's sleeping over, and I've packed her bag. You can tell Theresa where I've gone.

Ich lieb dich, Dankeschön für alles.

Anna

Anna stood at the front door, looking out. The sun still hadn't risen, but there was murky light coming from the horizon. Anna took a deep breath before stepping out of the front door into the darkness. Since she was very young, the dark had scared Anna. When she was older she had almost overcome that fear, but her grandparents' death now seemed to lurk in every shadow, and being alone in the dark made her want to scream.

Between the house and the hotel there is a dark, scary part. Where you can hear Großvater's bamboo bush creaking in the wind.

"I dare you to walk to the house and back alone," Michael whispers.

It is Großmutter's birthday party, she is sixty today, and Anna's grandparents have invited almost the whole of Wartburg. The adults are still laughing and drinking wine in the buffet room. Anna and Michael tried some wine, but it tasted horrible. They try to play a game of catchers on the hotel verandah, but it is boring with only two people. The twins have already gone home, and Andrea Oellermann is the only other child still there, but Anna refuses to ask her to play. She irritates Anna, with her whiny voice and perfect little pink dress. Anna and Michael sit out-of-breath on the deck chairs next to the hotel pool, wondering what to do next, when Michael whispers his dare. Anna frowns. She is very scared of the bamboo bush, but Michael dared her, so she has to. Anna is the fastest runner in her class, and tonight she runs faster than ever before. It is a windy night, and it seems darker than usual. Even the stars are hiding behind the clouds. Twice Anna almost trips, but the wind is chasing her, and she stays on her feet. Her fear chases her, too. Michael told her once that a ghost lives in that bush, and now Anna sees a dark shape behind every tree. She returns to the hotel, breathless.

"I dare you," she gasps, "I dare you to kiss Andrea Oellermann."

But the revenge wasn't as sweet as Anna expected. Andrea didn't slap Michael when he kissed her on the cheek. In fact, she looked as pleased as Victoria had that morning, when she caught a Natal Robin and showed it to Anna.

Anna knew she was too old to be scared, but she broke into a run. The shadows were all around her, suffocating her. Anna could hear the gun-shots perfectly at first, inside her mind, but the faster she ran, the quieter they became, until all Anna could hear were her feet slapping against the ground. Although the gunshots in her mind were quiet, the pictures became clear. She saw them again, for the first time.

Anna sees the door slam. Günther runs to the door. He's not fast enough. Anna hears a car accelerate out of the hotel's driveway, and she hears Günther scream. Anna smells Schwedenbitter. The bottle is smashed on the floor, tiny shards of glass floating in pools of blood. Großmutter is still sitting in her rocking chair. And Großvater is slumped over the accounts on the desk. Anna holds Großmutter's face, Großvater's hands.

"Wach auf!" she screams at them, at God who's taken them from her.

Anna unlocked Lucy, and sat in the front seat until her breaths stopped coming out in gasps. She tried to block the pictures out, to make them less vivid. She closed her eyes, and she felt the images drift from her – not completely away, but to a place where they hurt her less.

Anna got out of the car again, softly, and put her bag into the boot. She hoped Knowledge hadn't heard her. She didn't feel like explaining, or speaking even. And Knowledge, more than anyone else, would manage to extract the whole story from her. Uyaphi? He would ask her, with his eyebrows lifted slightly. And then she would tell him vaguely. He would guess the rest, and maybe even offer to buy her Muti to make Michael want to marry her. He'd offered that before, when he'd heard that Anna was pregnant. Anna was about to start Lucy, when Knowledge's clear voice drifted over from the guard hut.

"Sawubona, Ntombenhle."

"Sawubona, Knowledge."

Knowledge opened the creaky door of his little hut and walked over to Anna.

"It's very early to go on a drive, Ntombenhle."

"Yes."

"You are going to make things right with Michael?"

Anna didn't reply. She looked at the light that was still murky and brown in the distance. And she listened – to the gathering light, and to the bright morning star. After a long while, she nodded.

It's morning. Night is slipping away somewhere to the middle of the sky, and Anna wonders where it goes. The moon is full and round, it doesn't leave with the rest of the night. Anna and Großmutter are both awake, and, like so often, they decide to take an early morning walk.

"Why on earth don't you two just sleep in?" Tante Stefanie will ask, later, when they come back. And Großmutter will wonder how any child of hers can sleep the morning away like Tante Stefanie does in the holidays. Anna and Großmutter both know that the morning is the best part of the day.

Anna slips her hand into Großmutter's. All around them, the birds are waking up. Anna points at a spider web full of dewdrops. The dew shines in the new morning sun. Anna is barefoot, and the grass is prickly and wet between her toes. Anna and Großmutter walk to the gate of the hotel property, and cross the road. They push the creaky gate open, and step onto the Wortmann's farm road. Anna has to look out that she doesn't stand on one of the sharp stones. She walks on the side of the road, where the dirt is soft. Dieter Wortmann bought some Nguni cows yesterday, and Anna points at the pasture just to the left of the farmhouse. The new Ngunis are grazing there.

"My cousin Heinz in Lüneburg is a cattle farmer," Großmutter says. "Or was, I should say, his sons do all of the work now. Anyway, my cousin Heinz really likes music. One Sunday morning before church, he was listening to the Halleluja chorus, you know that music Großvater likes? Heinz was playing it really loudly, and singing the bass part. He's a good singer. It runs in the family, you know. While he was singing and listening, Heinz looked out of the window of his farmhouse. His herd of cows grazing near the farmhouse were all standing at the barbed wire fence, in a row. The cows were looking towards the house. Listening to the music."

"Oh," Anna says, she doesn't want to say anymore.

The quiet spreads around them like the morning light. Anna knows that if she listens to the quiet long enough, she'll hear it. Her music.

Reflective Essay – On the process of writing a novel

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1. Introduction

Writing a book is something I have always wanted to do. Those three words, “writing a book”, however, seemed daunting – almost like an impossibly steep hill. I was not sure exactly how to begin climbing the hill that represented my writing process. I started off simply wanting to write a book of short stories taken from my extended family’s history. But, somehow, while climbing the “writing hill”, these stories developed a voice of their own, and formed a new story – that of my novel, *Anna’s Song*.

2. Starting the writing process

Why do writers write? This is one of the first questions I asked myself when beginning my novel. I still have not come up with an exact answer, and I do not think there is one. Writers write because that is what they do. Writers write, because when they were “young and impressionable”, they “fell in love with language” – and this particular attraction is irreversible (Alvarez 2004: 11).

I remember someone asking me, when I was little, what I wanted to be when I grew up, a standard question adults ask children. “I want to be a writer,” I replied, and this is a compulsion that has followed me ever since. Since I was very young, I was fascinated by words and by books. I learnt to read early, because I wanted to know the mystery behind the black squiggles on paper. It is a mystery I still have not quite solved – how seemingly simple black symbols can mean so many different things at the same time.

Ernest Hemingway said that we “write our sicknesses into books” (in Gordimer 1983: 2). This statement may be true for Hemingway, but it does not describe what and why I write, or the motivation behind my work. As a writer, I do not want to write sickness and death “into [my] books”, but life. In my writing, I want to capture the joys, the sorrows, the pain, the fear, and the love that being alive incorporates. Like the writer Angelina Sithebe, I

write to tell stories, to prod and provoke, to think and to ponder, to cry and to love, to dream, to heal, to soothe, and to entertain (Sithebe 2009: 48).

More than speaking, I have always loved listening. I listen to people's stories – the told and untold ones. I have learnt to listen to silence, and to the expressions on people's faces. I like to listen to the tension and calm in different relationships. I have noticed that the atmosphere in a room can have a rhythm, and a sound. And it is this listening that I want my writing to find a voice for.

One of the most difficult aspects of starting the writing process was finding a writing voice to express my listening. I wanted to find a voice that was both my own, and the voice of the stories, rhythms and sounds I have listened to.

Finding a voice is a process that is essential for any writer. It is what writing begins and ends in, and what the writing is defined by. Writing without a voice is like a person without a soul. According to Al Alvarez, "a writer doesn't properly begin until he has a voice of his own". This voice must, however young the writer, have the "full force of life behind it" (Alvarez 2004: 9).

Although finding a voice is such an essential aspect of writing, it is also a process that is difficult to understand. Finding a writing voice involves the difficult process of merging several different voices into one. There are no "hard-and-fast" rules that to follow. Instead, it is a slippery process that sometimes feels like a journey in the darkness. There is no sudden moment or realization of "I think I've found my voice now". The light that finding your writing voice represents is a gradual dawn. A writing voice is not only slippery, it is elusive, too. One moment you think you have your voice under control, and the next you are writing in darkness again. For some reason, I found my voice more naturally in the passages describing my novel's main character Anna's childhood, but grappled with my voice in the passages where she is an

adult. I spent a lot of time re-reading Anna's "childhood" passages, to try to capture the essence of Anna's voice for the passages describing her adult life.

Paul Mills suggests that one way of finding your writing voice is by listening to the voices of the characters of the story you are telling (Mills 2006: 14). I found this technique to be very useful – it was in dialogue that my voice really seemed to come alive, and where I found that I could establish my own "presence on the page" (Alvarez 2004: 3). One such dialogue occurs at the end of Chapter Three of my novel, between Anna and Michael:

"Don't call me that."

"What?"

"Anna Banana. You know I don't like it."

"Well, you know I don't like it that you pretend you're all tough."

"Knowledge is at the gate. There's always a security guard at the gate now. I'm fine."

"But I still worry about you."

"Don't."

"Please come for dinner."

"Your wife won't like it."

"We're not married yet. And she told me to tell you to come this evening."

"I know she didn't say that. You're not as good at bending the truth as Peter Lauterbach, Michael, so don't even try. I know you too well."

"Will you join us if I ask you to?"

"No," Anna said, looking down. (Böhmer: *unpublished*).

To write, I had to overcome the challenge of creating a new, fictional world from my own stories, and the stories that surround me. I wanted to do more than merely show a reflection of these stories. The narrative I aimed to produce should do more than reflect life like a mirror. Gordimer explains the aims of a writer of fiction as follows: As a writer, you do not represent reality

like a normal mirror, but as a “metaphysical mirror”. This metaphysical mirror does not

obey the law of optics, but reproduces your image as it is seen by the person who stands before you. The writer is that person who stands before you. (Gordimer 1995: 5).

John Berger explains that the reader of a story “inhabits it”. He compares the covers of a book to “a roof and four walls” (in Mills 2006: 10). The writer must thus make the fictional place completely real to the reader. In the case of my novel, the place I am writing about already exists. Yet, I must still create a new place – the fictional Wartburg. The borders between fiction and reality may be distant from the real world, or right next to it. My fictional Wartburg and the authentic Wartburg are obviously close together. The distance between the fictional world and the authentic world is not as relevant as

the convincing representation of this space as authentic, consistent, believable, so that [the reader] feels [their] interest will be rewarded. (Mills 2006: 10).

To a reader, the science fiction world created by Terry Pratchett, which is

flat and supported on the back of four elephants, who themselves stand on the back of a giant turtle (Pratchett 1999: 1),

should be no less real than a fictional world like the one I have created, which lies closer to reality. Whether or not the fictional world is believable all depends on the skill with which the writer goes about creating “a moment of life itself” (Alvarez 2006: 12).

At first, I did not know how to begin creating a fictional world. I wondered if I should start out by drawing maps of who lives where in my fictional Wartburg. I quickly abandoned this approach, because I realized that the representation of Wartburg as a fictional place would grow and develop together with my story and its characters. This did occur, naturally, in scenes like the following:

Anna swore. She should have come in her car. She put her shorts and top on over her swimming costume. She ran out of the swimming pool gate, slamming it shut behind her. Luckily the school pool was closer to the hotel than Wartburg-Kirchdorf School itself. It was next to the

Georgenau school – known locally as the Black School, terminology Anna preferred not to use. (Böhmer: *unpublished*).

These are in fact the authentic positions of the hotel and the two schools. But the fact that they are written about in connection with my fictional character, Anna, places the schools and the hotel on my fictional map of Wartburg – Wartburg as it is seen through my imagination, and Gordimer’s “metaphysical mirror”.

“What is writing,” Joseph Conrad asks, “if not a conviction of our fellow men’s existence strong enough to take upon itself a form of imagined life clearer than reality?” (in Gordimer 1995: 8). Imagined reality, according to Conrad, is thus a more concentrated form of reality. It is not separate from reality. The characters, and the world I have created in my novel are therefore not just simply “imagined”. They are the concentration of how I view reality.

Gordimer, in her work *Writing and Being*, speaks about the duality of the term “fictional”. She describes her fiction as both “imagined” and “taken from life”. According to Gordimer,

It is beyond dispute that no character in fiction, even if conceived as an ape, a beetle, a phantasm, is without connection with real persons experienced by the writer within contact of sight, sound and touch, or second-hand through experience recorded by others in one medium or another, and whether or not the writer is always aware of this (Gordimer 1995: 8).

In my writing process, I explored the boundaries between fiction and reality. The real owners of the Wartburger Hof were called Siggie and Ingrid Schaedle. I have tried to capture the essence of the Schaedles, the beauty of their hospitality, their energy and vitality, in my new characters – Großvater and Großmutter. Großvater and Großmutter are not the Schaedles, but at the same time, they are. This duality, the relation of “fiction to reality” is part of the “mystery” of writing, and it cannot be simply explained (Gordimer 1995: 3).

In her book, *Reading for Writers*, Francine Prose asks the following question, “Can Creative Writing be taught?” Prose elucidates this question further: “Can

a love for language be taught?” and “Can a gift for story-telling be taught?” Prose, a teacher of Creative Writing, answers “no” to all of these questions. (Prose 2006:1). Her sentiments made me wonder why I was studying Creative Writing if I wouldn’t be able to learn anything in any case. Prose advises that learning writing is only possible through learning by example – through reading books.

I do not disagree with her statements. There are some aspects of writing that cannot be taught. The “Creativity” part, for example. People are either creative, or they are not. Not every person has the ability or capacity to be the “metaphysical mirror” described earlier.

While wondering if my study of Creative Writing was an endeavour with or without a purpose, I compared the study of writing to a study of my other (also creative) passion, music. Music and writing are both art forms. And music can definitely be both learnt and taught. A person who is absolutely tone-deaf will never be able to play the violin very well, and they should probably not waste their time studying music. But a gifted, musical student will definitely benefit by being taught. A music teacher transmits centuries of concentrated musical and practical knowledge to students, and this is a much more time-effective method of gaining knowledge for the student than to spend hours and hours observing and listening to other musicians. Obviously, a musician needs to spend a considerable amount of time listening to other musicians in order to learn. But both are important – the knowledge of a teacher, and the time spent observing.

In the same way, I was happy to conclude, Creative Writing can be learnt and taught. The work of other writers should form a base for the study. A student of Creative Writing should spend a large proportion of their time reading other authors. But, as I also experienced first-hand in the Creative Writing course, aspects like controlling tone, diction and dialogue can definitely be taught and learnt, or fine-tuned through careful discussion.

3. Research

The history that my novel deals with is the “story” part of history. Facts, figures and dates were not as important to my project as the stories different people have told me over the years about Wartburg. The aim of my novel was to record the past as it is “told orally” – a mode that, if we “are not vigilant, may become extinct” (Sithebe 2009: 48).

Because I planned for my project to be based and to be rooted in the oral history of the Wartburg area, extensive research into written records was not applicable or necessary for my purpose. In fact, such research might have detracted from the nature of my novel. Oral history and recollections have a vagueness and subjectivity that I aimed to capture in my novel.

My family is from Wartburg, and the area’s oral history is therefore my own history. My research was thus a more abstract process. It began a long time before I decided on this project. My research consists mainly of the hours I have spent with my relatives (mainly of the older generation), listening to their stories. These are stories that have shaped me, as they shape my novel’s main character, Anna. Another manner in which I researched the area’s oral history was by reading anthologies put together by South African German families. These anthologies include pictures, anecdotes, and short pieces written by members of the families. An anthology that was particularly useful was that of the Stielau family. Pastor Stielau was the first pastor of the Kirchdorf congregation. Not only was he the pastor, he was also the area’s school teacher, as well as the dentist. Tante Sarah of my novel is based on one of Pastor Stielau’s daughters, who fell in love with an Englishman, but was not allowed to marry him. (Stielau 1990: 20). The following story about Großvater’s and Großmutter’s engagement rings is said to have happened to Pastor Stielau and his wife:

“My ring is gone,” Großmutter tells him. Großvater takes his ring off his finger, slowly, and throws into the rose bed. Großmutter is busy yelling at him, but Anna knows he has a plan. Großvater always does. He watches the ring, until it falls. Then he bends down. He points. Großmutter and Anna look, too. Großvater’s ring has fallen on the outside of the rose-bed, and right next to it is Großmutter’s ring.

“See! What belongs together, belongs together,” Großvater says, squeezing Großmutti’s hand. (Böhmer: *unpublished*).

An important part of my research was to read other writers with similar aims or concerns as mine. One such writer is Alan Paton. I was influenced mainly by Paton’s descriptions of landscape. Paton lends the landscape an extraordinarily emotional voice. This is especially evident in Paton’s most famous novel, *Cry, the Beloved Country*, in passages such as the following,

Now God be thanked that the name of a hill is such music, that the name of a river can heal (Paton 2000 : 65).

I was recently asked by an American if Paton’s South Africa is in reality so beautiful. He had read most of Paton’s books, and wanted to visit the country because of the strength of Paton’s descriptions. Paton captures the emotional aspect of landscape – of places that are diseased, but at the same time beautiful. His landscape speaks in a voice with a simple power that is more poignant than the voices of his characters. In *Cry the Beloved Country*, the landscape Paton describes is close to that of the Wartburg I am describing. I have, in my writing, attempted to describe Wartburg’s landscape with a similar emotional aspect. In the opening of my novel’s introduction, the landscape and Anna’s emotions are intertwined. Anna, in her contemplation of the landscape, works through her emotions:

It is evening. Anna and her Großmutti are watching the first star rise over the Wortmanns’ sugarcane fields. They sit on the stoep of the house Anna and her daughter share with her grandparents. The house is on the same property as their family business, the Wartburger Hotel. There is a comfortable silence between Anna and her Großmutti, suspended in the evening air, along with black ash and the smell of smoke. The Wortmanns have been burning their fields today. Anna looks towards the Wortmanns’ farm. She scans the fields from the road separating the hotel property and the Wortmanns’ farm, to the Blinkwater mountains at the horizon. There is no sign of a motorbike, or of a streak of dust twisting through the fields. She’s longing for a glimpse of Michael Wortmann on his motorbike, but she knows her search is futile. Michael is far away, in Germany. At the horizon, the evening air is red and heavy with the dying light. Anna tries to blink away the sadness welling up in her eyes. (Böhmer: *unpublished*).

I have for a long time admired Herman Charles Bosman's capacity for creating magic and mystery from the ordinary. Bosman's writing turns "stock South African situations to surprisingly ambiguous purposes" (Chapman 2003: 191). The "romance of life [is] inseparable in Bosman from its colloquial ironies" (Chapman 2003: 190).

Bosman thus uses humour to show that magic and mystery are never far from ordinary life, as he does in the following passage:

After all, a horse is sensitive about things like ghosts and witches, and it was my duty to see my horse was not frightened unnecessarily. Especially as a cold wind suddenly sprang up through the poort, and once or twice it sounded as though an evil voice was calling my name. I started riding fast then. But a few moments later I looked round and realised the position. It was Fritz Pretorious galloping along behind me. (Bosman 1947: 14).

The following passage from my novel shows the influence of this aspect of Bosman's writing:

Theo must've been slow in other ways too, if he spent his wedding night fast asleep. Charlotte's disappearance was spoken of for a few weeks in Wartburg, in Comondale, and even further north in Wittenberg and Lüneburg. But nobody ever saw her again. Nobody knew where she went. (Böhmer: *unpublished*).

Like Bosman, I have tried to exploit "colloquial ironies", but without straying from the "romance" and mystery of ordinary life.

Reading Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* was of value for its descriptions of scenes from South African agricultural life, and values and the sentiments of the Afrikaner farmers – probably very close to those of the German South Africans. One such scene was "A Boer Wedding in the Sixties". (Schreiner 1992: 84). Although this wedding took place about a generation earlier than the wedding Großmutti describes in Chapter One, this scene helped me in creating the atmosphere of Theo Bielefeldt's wedding.

Something I found difficult to justify was the writing of an entire novel based on events that seemed so common and everyday to me. Surely, I thought, my

characters must do and see “great” things. I did not know if I was justified in trying to create literature from these everyday events. I grappled with this reservation for a while. But, I then looked again at the works of Shakespeare, who is considered to be among the “greatest” writers. Of Shakespeare, Herman Charles Bosman says the following:

There is nobody in literature that can do just this – out of everyday emotions, out of the commonplaces of life, the old and worn truths of existence and the most familiar human experiences to create the deathless spirit of romance, the dark and sudden loveliness of poesy’s enchantments (Bosman 2003: 188).

Of course, I don’t consider my work to be comparable with that of Shakespeare. Shakespeare is a

great writer, the kind T.S. Eliot said you can never hope to emulate, who is simply there to set the standards to which you inadequately aspire (Alvarez 2006: 25).

But, I did find comfort in the proof that the everyday can be the base for great art, and that Shakespeare’s work is evidence of this. One of Shakespeare’s dramas that deals with everyday concerns is *The Taming of the Shrew*. The concerns presented in this drama include marriage, and conflict between genders. The drama deals with Petruchio’s attempts to tame the sharp-tongued Katherina. Shakespeare deals with these concerns in a humorous manner, as I have aimed to in my novel. An example of Shakespeare’s humorous treatment of gender concerns is Petruchio’s statement that

women are so simple, to offer war where they should kneel for peace (V: ii).

4. Background: Setting and Landscape

My novel is set in Wartburg, a small town in the KZN Midlands, about 20km from Pietermaritzburg. Wartburg was named by German missionaries and missionary-colonists after the fortress where Martin Luther was exiled near Eisenach. The town’s name shows its inhabitants’ strong grounding in the

Lutheran faith. The town has two schools (Wartburg-Kirchdorf Primary and High School, and the Georgenau School), two churches, a few shops, an agricultural hall, an old railway station, and a hotel. Most people living in Wartburg are either German-speaking or of German descent. Some German families have been living in South Africa for more than six generations. Germans in Wartburg belong to one of the two Lutheran churches – the FELSISA (Freie Evangelisch-Lutherische Synode in Süd-Afrika) church, “Kirchdorf”, or the “Wartburg” church, which is related to the German “Landeskirche” or state church. The characters of my novel belong to the “Kirchdorf” church. The two churches are next to each other in the town. The conflict between the two groups used to be more intense, but has subsided somewhat over the past few years. Although the two churches are still separate, the schools of both churches united in the 1930s to form the combined “Wartburg-Kirchdorf” school. The “other” school, the Georgenau school, was the original Wartburg-Kirchdorf Primary school. Most of the farms in the area are sugar farms, and for this reason the Wartburg farmers form a relatively wealthy proponent of the South African German community.

The Wartburger Hof, Wartburg’s hotel, for many years represented the centre of Wartburg culture. A large proportion of the people living in Wartburg have celebrated either a birthday, or a wedding anniversary, or a wedding, or all of the above there, as well as countless family Sunday lunches. The hotel was not only popular amongst Wartburg people – it was known throughout KwaZulu-Natal for its old-fashioned grace, and for the charm of its owners, Siggi and Ingrid Schaedle. The hotel was a symbol for many things – for the sense of pride the Wartburg community feels regarding its German roots, for the spirit of the community, and for the history of its people. Although the hotel has been renovated and parts of it rebuilt, it still features in some way in the history of any longstanding Wartburg family. In my family, the story that is most often told in reference to the hotel is that of my grandfather’s uncle, who used to ride his horse into the hotel’s bar for a “take-away” beer. When the owners of the hotel were murdered on the premises in 2007, it affected the whole town deeply, as well as many people outside the community who had come to appreciate the Schaedle’s hospitality, and the Hof’s historic appeal.

The town literally reeled from the shock of this event. A big hotel group, Orion hotels, took over the Wartburger Hof, and the hotel lost its character and personality.

My novel is, in a way, an elegy to the Wartburger Hof and its owners. The fact that the hotel in my novel is not sold, but remains in the family is an expression of how “fiction is a way of exploring possibilities” that cannot exist in real life (Gordimer 1983: 12). I mourn a loss in the Wartburg community of two people as well as that of an institution, and in my novel I have used fiction in an attempt to keep the spirit of the old Wartburger Hof alive. In my novel, I have renamed the Wartbuger Hof the Wartburger Hotel.

As aforementioned, my family is from Wartburg. But before they came to Wartburg, my ancestors were European – they came from the North of Germany, from what is now Poland, and Switzerland. The “Polish” grandmother in my novel really existed, she was my grandmother’s grandmother. My grandfather’s father came from Switzerland. Most of the Germans living in Wartburg, however, are descendants of missionaries who came to South Africa in the 1800s –mainly followers of the North German missionary Louis Harms. These missionaries and missionary-colonists arrived in Durban on the 2.8.1854. Originally, they had planned to start a mission in Ethiopia, but they were not granted permission to land their ship there. Their ship, the “Kandaze” continued sailing South, and landed in Durban. (Hillermann 1983: 11). Because the Germans in Wartburg largely originated in Northern Germany, or Niedersachsen, the Northern dialect “Plattdeutsch” is still spoken by some Wartburg Germans, as Tante Minna expresses in the following passage:

“She says she doesn’t understand my German,” Tante Minna whispered, very loudly.

“Apparently I have an *accent*. But she hasn’t heard herself speak yet. She uses such big words, I forget what she’s talking about by the time she gets to the end of the sentence. Oh and she’s from North Germany, but she can’t speak *platt*.”

“Shhhhhh... not so loud, Tante Minna. Not everyone from North Germany speaks Plattdeutsch.”

“All the proper North Germans do,” Tante Minna insisted. (Böhmer: *unpublished*).

Although the Wartburg community calls itself German, there is a significant difference between European Germans, and Germans living in South Africa. South African Germans did not experience the horror of the World Wars, or the subsequent national shame of the Germans in Europe. The most significant difference, therefore, is that South African Germans are still proud to be called German, whereas Germans in Germany have lost their national pride. German traditions, such as Volkslieder and Volkstänze, were tainted by their association with Nazism in Germany. In South Africa, these traditions continue to play a large role in country German communities. I express this pride in the German heritage in my use of quotations from German folk songs and hymns throughout the novel.

South African Germans have also developed their own German dialect, which mixes the German language with English grammatical constructions, as well as words borrowed from English, Afrikaans, and Zulu. The pronunciation is also different – it is a German with a distinctive South African accent. In Northern Natal (Wittenberg and Lüneburg), the German sounds almost like Afrikaans, whereas in the Wartburg area the South African German accent shows the influence of both English and Afrikaans. South African German is affectionately referred to as “Springbok Deutsch”. A short list of South African German words, and their “German-German” and English counterparts follows:

South African German	German	English
Melis	Mais	Maize
im dritten Rad	Im dritten Gang	in the third gear
Feuer bula'n	Feuer löschen	extinguish a fire

Germans are often shocked to hear their language spoken in this way. Some have even said South African Germans should rather stick to Afrikaans or English. I consider South African German a dialect with as much right to exist as, for example Bavarian, Austrian-German, or Platt-Deutsch.

My maternal grandfather's father came from Switzerland, and taught his children Swiss-German. When my grandfather visited Switzerland for the first time in his thirties, the Swiss were surprised to hear his Swiss-German – their Swiss-German had developed and changed, and my grandfather still spoke and “old” version, that my grandfather's contemporaries remembered from their grandparents.

South African Germans, with their culture and their language, thus tread a fine line between Europe and South Africa. The traditions and language of South African Germans have adapted themselves to South African conditions – but in South Africa, South African Germans are very much a minority group that has to fight to remain alive. For this reason, South African Germans can become defensive of their culture and their language. In my novel, I try to express both the struggle of a minority culture, as well as the struggle of individuals to find their identity from the fragments of this culture.

Although I have never personally lived in Wartburg, both of my parents have, and many members of my family still do. I am thus very familiar with its landscape. Although I have kept most of the important landmarks of Wartburg in my story – i.e. the church, the Spar, the school, the hotel, and the surrounding areas, Dalton and Cool-Air – I have also created a fictional Wartburg. The hotel property of my novel, for example, is not exactly like the original it is based on. I have placed two fictional houses on the hotel's property – in reality there is only one.

Physical landmarks are not the only aspect of landscape. Landscape is everything to do with place – and also includes weather, and seasons, as well the “silent rhythms” of a place (Haarhof 1998: 120). Landscape can also take on a more abstract role, as a voice in the story, as it does in the following extract from Herman Charles Bosman:

It was a cold night (Oom Schalk Lourens said), the stars shone with that frosty sort of light that you see on the wet grass some mornings, when you forget that it is winter, and you get up early, by mistake. The wind was like a girl sobbing out her story of betrayal to the stars. (Bosman 1947: 7).

I have used landscape in a similar way in my novel. Descriptions of the landscape are a type of commentary on the action of the novel, as is evident in the following passage from Chapter Five of my novel:

The sugar cane fields looked like the ocean on a stormy day, making waves now in this direction, then in that. Anna had tied her hair back tightly. She hated it when the wind blew wisps of hair into her face. She hated everything about wind, it made her feel uncomfortable, on edge. (Böhmer: *unpublished*).

The redness and heaviness of the evening light in the opening scene introduce an ominous note into the landscape:

At the horizon, the evening air is red and heavy with the dying light. Anna tries to blink away the sadness welling up in her eyes. (Böhmer: *unpublished*).

In the passages dealing with the murder of Anna's grandparents, the moon is a recurring figure, as it is in Olive Schreiner's *Story of an African Farm*:

The full, African moon poured down its light from the blue sky into the wide, lonely plain (Schreiner 1992: 29).

My novel opens with the landscape described in the "new moon" phase of the moon cycle. By the end of the novel, it is full moon – in the passages in the present and in the past. This is to show that development has taken place, and that Anna has moved towards healing and truth – but also that Anna, as a part of her community and her family, is part of a cycle on a larger scale than just her individual life and suffering.

The descriptions of landscape in my novel also have another purpose – to explore ideas of ownership of a specific place. J.M. Coetzee argues that in order for a landscape not to remain

alien and impenetrable, a language [must be] found in which to win it, speak it, represent it (Coetzee 1988:7).

My novel is a quest to find a language for the landscape of Wartburg. The characters of my novel exert only a tenuous hold over their place. This hold is threatened by land claims, and by crime. Crime, through the fear that it generates, reduces a person's spiritual connection with their land.

Chamberlin writes about a Canadian court case in the 1980s, regarding an aboriginal group's rights to their ancestral territory. The aboriginal group's leader asked the state, "If this is your land, where are your stories?" (in Brown 2006: 13). It is the same ideology that enables Anna to reclaim her landscape in the course of the novel. She works through her fears and heartache through stories; and these stories enable her to cement as well as reinforce her identity as one of connection to her landscape. Anna knows that her identity is, in essence, connected to her landscape, and for this reason she refuses to leave Wartburg, despite her parents' and Ian's insistence that she does. For this reason, also, Laura remains an outsider. She doesn't know Wartburg's stories, and makes no effort to get to know them, as is evident in the following passage:

"Who's that lady over there?" Laura whispered loudly. Anna saw Tante Sarah lift her head, and she knew she was listening. Tante Sarah was always listening. Listening was what she did. Michel and Anna both knew that, and they ignored Laura's question. It would be rude to talk about Tante Sarah right in front of her. Anna also felt, at that moment, strangely possessive over Tante Sarah's story. She didn't want to share it with Laura, who made no effort to understand anything about anyone in Wartburg. (Böhmer: *unpublished*).

5. Ideas that influenced my writing

In my family, stories have always been an important part of life. I believe, as Paul Mills does, that

story is better than pronouncement, enactment more vivid to us than statement. Story has a better chance of making things matter to us. (Mills 206: 24).

Through the anecdotes told to me by my parents and grandparents, it feels as though I have always known even the members of my family who died before I was born. This novel seeks to emphasize the importance of stories and story-telling, in the face of the fact that oral culture seems to be dying out in the modern world. In the same way as this novel is an elegy to the Wartburger Hof and its owners, it is also an elegy to the art of story-telling in our modern existence. If these stories are not recorded, it will “deprive future generations of our complete experience” (Sithebe 2009: 49).

Großmutter is the novel’s main transmitter of oral culture. When she dies, however, her stories still remain, guiding Anna’s actions. Although stories still have relevance and power in my novel, this is often not the case in reality. Again, this is an expression of how fiction often represents possibility as opposed to the truth.

Barry Lopez, in his *Crow and Weasel*, speaks about stories as follows, a view that my novel also adopts:

The stories people tell have a way of taking care of them. If stories come to you, you care for them. And learn to give them away when they are needed. Sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay alive. (in Haarhoff 1998: 124).

Anna, my novel’s main character, needs stories from her past to trace her own identity, and to find some sort of meaning in her confusion and pain.

Through writing my novel, I have also created a written record of my family’s oral traditions. These stories, so much a part of my identity, will only continue to exist as long as they are told. Writing them down cements them, and gives them life in a different form, which will extend their existence.

I have not only tried to record the stories of my family’s history, but also to capture an essence of my family’s contemporary life – of the relationships between different people, between the young and the old. Here, my intention overlaps that of the author Angelina Sithebe, who sees it as her mission to

record contemporary life in order to comprehend the “Now” and leave a legacy of strength, sorrow, love and existence (Sithebe 2009: 48).

In my novel, I have not simply created a fictional family. I have tried to capture the texture of my own. It has been difficult to achieve this, but my novel is a much about my family as it is about Anna's – and to me, somehow, the sound of Anna's Großvater's voice echoes with that of my grandfather's, and the laughter around the table at the Wortmann's house is laughter I have experienced at one of my family's functions.

Memory is probably the most important theme of my novel. The stories Großmutti tells function not only as an accumulation of an oral tradition, but also as a communal memory. Memory is not regarded as passive, but rather as an active, living dimension that influences events and situations in the present. Obviously, memory cannot directly change the course of events. But memories of past situations, as well as stories from the past influence how people feel about similar situations in the present. In my novel, for example, Tante Minna does not trust Laura, because she has experienced a German bride's escape on her wedding night. Anna treats Tante Sarah with more respect than Laura does, because she knows her past.

André Brink quotes a child's description of the duality of memory as follows: "My memory is the thing I forget with" (Brink 1998: 4).

The duality of the function of memory is important in the action of the novel. Anna uses her memories of the past to "forget" or to cope with her painful present. This duality between memory and the past, and events of the present is expressed by the fact that all memories and events in the past are retold in the present tense. In my writing, I remained conscious of Friedrich Nietzsche's words, "The future influences the present just as much as the past" (in Sithebe 2009: 48). Nietzsche's statement shows that all times or "tenses" co-exist, and live off each other. This is most evident in one of the pivotal moments of my novel – where Anna relives two memories of the past simultaneously. It is this present "reliving" of past memories that enables Anna to find healing in the future:

And for a moment in the air with her arms stretched wide, she can fly.
And somehow that moment feels long – longer than normal time.

A shot fills the night air. Großmutti screams, and Anna hears the
sound of a bottle breaking. Another shot. The moment freezes Anna,

ties her to her chair. Anna fights wildly against time slowing down. She manages to break loose. She starts to run.

There are two crashes. Anna lands first, then Michael, half on top of her.

There is so much blood, and Anna doesn't know if it's hers or Michael's. Michael's eyes are closed, and Anna wonders if he's still alive. He opens his eyes, slowly.

"We can't fly," he whispers. (Böhmer: *unpublished*).

Not only is memory used as a theme in the novel, my own memory is used as a tool. Memory is the "primary source" of the "imaginative experience" in writing a novel (Mills 2006: 14). The imagination selects images and scenes from the author's memory, and stitches them together into the narrative.

6. Writing

It was difficult to begin writing, because I didn't know exactly where my story was going. I had outlined a basic plot, of course, but the substance of my story was still a mystery to me. I spent a while working on different plans for my plot, which stunted my creativity, and removed the actual story even further from my grasp. I was then guided by my supervisor simply to start writing. "The story will tell itself", he said, and I found this advice to be most useful. In simply writing instead of laboriously planning a plot, I found myself listening to the story and to its characters. The story woke up gradually, and slowly, and through the process of writing I felt it acquire shape and colour, as well as a definite direction.

Finding a structure was a major difficulty in getting the writing process underway. I knew that I wanted to use real short stories from Wartburg's past as part of my narrative, but I didn't know what structure to use in order to incorporate them. I experimented with the use of a diary form, as well as the use of letters. I was not comfortable with any of these methods. After several structural experiments, I recalled a device used by Vikram Seth, in his novel

An Equal Music. The whole novel is written in the present tense. I have read the novel several times, and have always been struck by the extraordinary power of a narrative in the present. (Seth 2000). Using the present tense lends a text the kind of emotional lucidity I required in my novel. I thus decided to use the present tense, as well as an italicized font, throughout the novel for episodes drawn from the memory of my main character, Anna, as well as for stories told from Wartburg's collective memory, through Anna's grandmother. Memory expressed in the present tense thus became the propelling structural device of my novel.

In finding a narrative style, I was also influenced by Markus Zusak's novel, *The Book Thief*. In this novel, Death is a character with a voice that speaks in first person narration. Death's voice alternates with scenes seen from the point of view of the main character, Liesel Meminger. The narration from Liesel's point of view is in a limited omniscient narrative voice. I used a similar approach in my novel. Anna's narration is in the limited omniscient narrative voice, whereas Großmutter, like Death in Zusak's novel, speaks in first person narration. (Zusak 2007). I have used this technique because Großmutter is the voice of wisdom in the novel. Her voice thus has to be clear and direct. The reader, on the other hand, cannot be exposed to Anna's voice in the first person. Anna is on the journey to self-truth, and this journey can be observed best from a slightly detached place as a reader.

Another difficulty I encountered early on in my writing process was language. My memories of Wartburg, and of stories told to me about Wartburg all featured in my mind in German – and it was incredibly difficult to separate these memories and stories from the language that they originated in. According to Wittgenstein,

reality itself, and our whole experience of it, is shaped and determined by the language in which we conceive it ... That the world is my world, shows itself in the fact that the limits of the language ... mean the limits of my world (In Brink 1998: 11).

Writing these memories and stories was, therefore a translation; and I had to take constant care that it was not an "inadequate translation" – a mere

reproduction of the “surface reality of the original” (Bond 1995: 28). I had to make sure that I translated not only words, but the whole experience, or the whole South African German reality into English.

Herman Charles Bosman managed to translate Afrikaner reality into English by creating an English that borrowed from Afrikaans grammatical constructions and idioms as an answer to his question, “Are we going to write English or South African?” (Bosman 1981: 87). I could not do this with South African German. It would have been too complicated, because South African German borrows so much from both English and Afrikaans.

While I was asking myself these questions regarding language, I read the novel *Maha* by the South African author Sumayya Lee. Lee writes about the Indian community in Durban. In her novel, the characteristically Durban Indian dialect is captured in dialogue such as the following:

“Eh! Maha! What you naaching and koodhing outside like boy! Like jungle you? Gor and help your naani in kitchen like good girl!” (Lee 2008: 34).

The fact that some of the words are not English gives the dialogue an authenticity and an energy. In my novel, I have adapted a similar technique, colouring my dialogue and narrative with German words and phrases, as well as untranslated verses from German songs and hymns. These German words and phrases are used mainly in dialogue, as in the following example:

“Maybe it’s my Wartburg accent, but they somehow didn’t understand the meaning of “Es ist ein Geheimnis, please don’t tell Laura, and make sure you come late”. (Böhmer: *unpublished*).

This technique draws to the attention of the reader the fact that the characters are not speaking English.

My novel is an exploration of a community and its relationships. Dialogue is thus vital in the development of the story and its characters. Most of my novel’s meat lies in its dialogue. Fortunately, once I had solved my problem of language, writing authentic dialogue was relatively simple. Writing dialogue was where I discovered the essence of my characters. While writing, I found

the technique of reading my dialogues aloud very valuable in correcting awkward constructions, and in improving the flow of my dialogue.

I found dialogue to be a very useful tool in a novel like mine. According to the Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin, “Diversity of speech is the ground of style” (in Mills 2006: 3). Because the novel’s action is seen entirely from its main character, Anna’s point of view, dialogue is particularly important, in that it juxtaposes the opinions of other characters against hers – grounding the novel in the diversity of conversations Anna has with others.

The local Wartburg humour, and the flavour it gives the novel is also mainly evident in its dialogue, in exchanges such as the following:

Onkel Hans lifted his hat that had fallen over his eyes.

“Andreas,” he called, “Bring einem alten durstigen Mann another beer.”

“What happened to speaking softly so that the fish aren’t chased away?” Andreas asked. (Böhmer: *unpublished*).

The action of the novel is expressed through my main character, Anna. The narrative device used to depict Anna’s thoughts and opinions is the limited omniscient narrative voice. All of the action in the novel is seen through Anna, or through her memories of the past. The story of the novel is essentially Anna’s journey to finding her own truth. Through the stories her grandmother tells, Anna is able to make this journey through her grief and fragmented sense of identity. At the end of this journey, she is ready to meet Michael with the truth.

Anna’s grandparents are also pivotal characters in the novel. Anna’s Großmutter is the main source of the area’s oral history. The stories Anna remembers are all told through Großmutter. Anna uses Großmutter’s past, and the communal past of Wartburg to journey through her grief towards truth. Großvater is also an important character, although he does not feature as much as Großmutter. He represents an attitude, or a way of viewing the world – a kind of strength, a sense of inner peace, and a quiet humour. It is this

attitude that, from stories I have heard about them, I have come to associate with my ancestors.

Throughout my writing process, one of my aims has been to fine-tune my humour. A controlled use of humour was particularly important in this project. South African Germans are a group defined by their sense of humour, and writing about them without the use of humour would be missing the mark badly. The humour I tried to portray is gentle when laughing at others. My characters, and my narrative voice, avoid sarcastic or cynical comments. Yet, it is a humour that can laugh at itself, too. It is this sense of humour that is missing in the only other published novel about the Wartburg area, Gertrude Strauss's *Chapters of Childhood*. Her characters are portrayed with an austerity that, to me, is simply not authentic.

Much of the humour of my novel is generated by characters like Anna's twin cousins, and her great-uncle Hans. These characters are a representation of the typical South African German sense of humour. Although I have created South African German humorous characters, their treatment was inspired by a British author – Jane Austen. I have created my humorous characters according to the model of Jane Austen's humorous characters – for example Miss Bates and Mr Woodhouse in Austen's novel, *Emma*. Jane Austen's humorous characters bring the energy to her social commentary. A description of Mr Woodhouse which displays Austen's light touch is the following:

Mr Woodhouse was rather agitated by such harsh reflections on his friend Perry, to who he had, in fact, though unconsciously, been attributing many of his feelings and expressions. (Austen 2000: 67)

Austen never overexploits her humorous characters, however. She walks the fine line between making her characters humorous and making them into stock characters. She achieves this balance through her sense of humorous timing.

In my early drafts, my humour was not raw enough. It missed an edge – it was “glib”. The humour I wanted to develop was what Herman Charles Bosman calls laughter “trembling on the verge of something much deeper than laughter” (Bosman 2003: 175). Bosman describes the humour of one of his contemporaries, Blignaut as follows:

In a few whimsical flashes he reveals the sycophancies and frailties underlying the characters of the people with who he comes into contact... and through it all these words remain untinged with bitterness or venom. Perhaps their most striking feature is their humour... This is genuine humour. It is great humour. It is that humour that lies so very close to tears (in Rosenberg 1976: 75).

Although Bosman is describing another author’s humour here, it is, to me, a description of his own – and it is this “genuine humour” I have striven for in my novel.

Throughout my novel, I have tried to achieve the above, for my moments of humour to tremble with something deeper. An author who achieves humour that is on “the verge of something deeper” is Gaile Parkin, in her first novel, *Baking Cakes in Kigali*.

Parkin’s novel is set in Kigali, Rwanda in the aftermath of the terrible events that tore apart the Rwandan nation in 1994. Parkin describes her characters and the challenges they face with a gentle smile in her writing. The above-mentioned terrible events, however, always lie just below the surface of this “smile”. The main character, Angel, makes the following comment, “Is not laughter the roof of a house?” (Parkin 2009:36). It is this comment that forms the backbone of Parkin’s writing – and also describes aptly the intentions behind her humour and behind my own: the use of humour is as essential as a roof, and its function of protecting from life’s blows is the “something deeper” that this kind of humour “trembles” with.

Because my novel is a love story, I had to guard myself against clichés, and overly sentimental moments. Here, I took Jane Austen as my model. Austen never stoops to sentimentality, yet her moments of romance are powerful and believable. She describes these moments in few words, but creates a build-up to them that is balanced and controlled. This is especially evident in *Emma*, where the whole novel builds dramatic tension towards the romantic scene

between Emma and Mr Knightley. When this scene is reached, however, Austen handles it with very few deft and controlled writing strokes – the sign of a true master of balance.

The final major issue I encountered when writing my novel was writing about race and racial issues. I did not want to write a novel motivated by political concerns. It is not that political issues do not concern or bother me. I did not want to write a political novel because of the fact that in “countries of southern Africa, the texts of politics have wanted to overwhelm the texts of art” (Chapman 2003: 1). I did not want write another “text of politics”. Of course, the two are not mutually exclusive. In fact, it is almost impossible to write a South African story without mentioning racial issues in some way. I will not claim, like Bosman, that I am “essentially apolitical” (Gray 2003: 9). I do not think that an “essentially apolitical” person exists. Contemporary life in South Africa is shaped and defined by racial disputes and struggles, as well as by the victories over these conflicts. Therefore, my novel is, because it is written with a particular time and place in mind, a “text of politics”. But I want it to remain a “text of politics” only for the above reason, because of its context. Although Anna’s grandparents’ murderers are from the black community, I have not made this a focus of the novel. I have merely hinted at this. My novel’s aim is not to explore racial conflict in Wartburg – although this is a pertinent issue. I have made other themes more pertinent in my work. Thus, the novel is more a story of Anna’s personal struggle to overcome her grief than one of a struggle between different racial groups.

My novel does, however, have a few scenes that explore racial attitudes in Wartburg. The point I am trying to make is that these scenes are in no way given a central sense of importance. Yet, in some of Anna’s exchanges with members of her community, the racial prejudices that still exist in Wartburg are explored. One such exchange is between Anna and Friederike Peters in Chapter Two, where Friederike refers to her domestic worker as “my girl”, even though she is considerably older than Friederike. (Böhmer: *unpublished*).

Although Anna's grandparents' murderers are black, they are balanced out by other black characters such as Knowledge, who as his name suggests, is a voice of wisdom and calm in the novel. His prominent voice is counterpoised against the voices that are never heard in the novel – the voices of the murderers of Anna's grandparents.

7. Conclusion

Writing my novel has, like my story of Anna, been a journey. On this journey, I have explored and grappled with issues all writers face. These issues include finding a voice, finding a story, and a structure for my story. On this journey I have learnt to come to terms with the solitude of the writer's way. Writing is a process that has to be followed alone, and because I am naturally a social person, this was sometimes difficult. I am not sure where I have journeyed to, but I know what I have discovered and explored along the way. I have found out that it is sometimes "easier to write than to say" (Gordimer 1995: 11). But I have also discovered that this does not necessarily mean that writing is easy. My most profound discovery I made together with my main character. Like Anna, I have learnt that

without the real world, there would be no story, but without the story there would be no real world (Bond 1997: 1).

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