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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTENTS</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COMMENT</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE EFFICACY OF PRAYER <em>(Casey Motsisi)</em></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE SUIT <em>(Can Themba)</em></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEAR GOD <em>(Can Themba)</em></td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HE AND THE CAT <em>(Ezekiel Mphahlele)</em></td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE PROMISE <em>(Lewis Nkosi)</em></td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’M NOT A TRAMP <em>(Leslie Sehume)</em></td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A VERY IMPORTANT APPOINTMENT <em>(Casey Motsisi)</em></td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE BEGINNING OF A TRADITION <em>(Julian Beinart)</em></td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WRITING IN SOUTH AFRICA <em>(Nathaniel Nakasa)</em></td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THEATRE</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE KAROO <em>(J. M. Brander)</em></td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE PARTY <em>(Richard Rive)</em></td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEW DRAWINGS by <em>Andrew Motjuoadi</em></td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONTRIBUTORS</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MORE than ten months ago, in an article about African writing, the Times Literary Supplement made mention of The Classic, announcing its planned publication.

Following the announcement, I received numerous letters and telephone calls from people in Johannesburg, New York and London, enquiring after the magazine. Friends intensified their interest in the paper to a point where it became essential for me to prepare some sort of respectable explanation each time I set out to the city's numerous dinners and luncheons.

In addition to the local pressure, a friend in London maintained a steady flow of letters in which he groused about "your magazine whose publication date seems to be receding further and further into the remote, uncertain future."

Someone else, discouraged, no doubt, by the amount of time it took me to obtain one poem and two stories, advised that the magazine be turned into an annual instead of a quarterly.

The problems which beset most publications of this type are many and not easy to solve. Instead of listing them here, I wish to apologise to all those who have awaited The Classic faithfully. Everything possible will be done to avoid a similar delay in the appearance of the coming issues.

As this is our first number, and some people may wonder why the whole thing was ever started anyway, it is necessary to explain what The Classic is about.
It will be the job of The Classic to seek African writing of merit.

The Classic will publish short stories, poems, excerpts from plays, novels and other works. In addition there will be book reviews, music and theatre critiques and articles on current thoughts. All these in English.

Although an effort will be made to use mostly South African writing, The Classic will welcome and solicit contributions from writers in Africa and the rest of the world.

Particularly welcome will be the work of those writers with causes to fight for, committed men and women who look at human situations and see tragedy and love, bigotry and commonsense, for what they are.

The Classic is as non-political as the life of a domestic servant, the life of a Dutch Reformed Church predikant or that of an opulent Johannesburg business man.

If the daily lives of these people are not regulated by political decisions, that will be reflected in The Classic. If, however, the work they do, if their sexual lives and their search for God are governed by political decrees, then that will also be reflected in the material published by The Classic. After all, these stories and poems and drawings and sculpture will be about the lives of these people.

To those who find involvement old fashioned or unsophisticated, I have little to say. It is precisely because we are old fashioned and unsophisticated on this continent that writers must seek answers and solutions to the problems around them. All over Africa there is hunger and illiteracy; we see press censorship, public hangings, detention without trial, racialism and violence.

A few years ago, a young British writer complained that literature in the previous ten years (in England) had been conspicuous for its total lack of direction, purpose and power.

It would be unfortunate if, in years to come, this were to become a fitting description of our culture on any level—be it jazz, art, writing or the theatre.

THE EDITOR
They called him Dan the Drunk.
The old people refuse to say how old he was. Nobody knows where he came from—but they all called him Dan the Drunk.
He was a drunk, but perhaps his name was not really Dan. Who knows, he might have been Sam. But why bother, he’s dead, poor Dan. Gave him a pauper’s funeral, they did. Just dumped him into a hole to rest in eternal drunkenness. Somehow the old people are glad that Dan the Drunk is dead. Ghastly!
They say he was a bad influence on the children. But the kids are sad that Dan the Drunk is no more. No more will the kids frolic to the music that used to flow out of his battered concertina. Or listen to the tales he used to tell. All followed him into that pauper’s hole. How the kids used to worship Dan the Drunk! He was just one of them grown older too soon. “I’m going to be just like Dan the Drunk,” A little girl said to her parents of a night cold While they crowded around a sleepy brazier The parents looked at each other and their eyes prayed: “God Almighty, save our little Sally.” God heard their prayer. He saved their Sally. Prayer. It can work miracles. Sally grew up to become a nanny.

THE EFFICACY OF PRAYER

CASEY MOTSISI
FIVE-THIRTY in the morning, and the candlewick bedspread frowned as the man under it stirred. He did not like to wake his wife lying by his side — as yet; so he crawled up and out by careful peristalsis. But before he tip-toed out of his room with shoes and socks under his arm, he leaned over and peered at the sleeping serenity of his wife: to him a daily matutinal miracle.

He grinned and yawned simultaneously, offering his wordless Te Deum to whatever gods for the goodness of life; for the pure beauty of his wife; for the strength surging through his willing body; for the even, unperturbed rhythms of his passage through days and months and years — it must be — to heaven.

Then he slipped soundlessly into the kitchen. He flipped aside the curtain of the kitchen window, and saw outside a thin drizzle, the type that can soak one to the skin, and that could go on for
days and days. He wondered, head aslant, why the rain in Sophiatown always came in the morning when workers have to creep out of their burrows; and then blistering heat waves during the day when messengers have to run errands all over; and then at how even the rain came back when workers knock off and have to scurry home.

He smiled at the odd caprice of the heavens, and tossed his head at the naughty incongruence, as if: “Ai, but the gods!”

From behind the kitchen door, he removed an old rain cape, peeling off in places, and swung it over his head. He dashed for the lavatory, nearly slipping in a pool of muddy water, but he reached the door. Aw, blast, someone had made it before him. Well, that is the toll of staying in a yard where twenty ... thirty other people have to share the same lean-to. He was dancing and burning in that climactic moment when trouser-fly will not come wide soon enough. He stepped round the lavatory and watched the streamlets of rain-water quickly wash away the jet of tension that spouted from him. That infinite after-relief. Then he dashed back to his kitchen. He grabbed the old baby bath-tub hanging on a nail on the side of a wall under the slight shelter of the gutterless roof-edge. He opened a large wooden box and quickly filled the bath-tub with coal. Then he inched his way back to the kitchen door and inside.

He was huh-huh-huhing one of those fugitive tunes that cannot be bidden, but often just occur and linger, naggingly, in his head, and the fire he was making soon licked up cheerfully, in mood with his contentment.

He had a trick for these morning chores. While the fire in the old stove warmed up, the water kettle humming on it, he gathered and laid ready the things he would need for the day: brief case and the files that go with it; the book that he was reading currently; the letters of his lawyer of a boss which he usually posted before he reached the office; his wife’s and his own dry cleaning slips for the Sixty-Minutes; his lunch tin solicitously prepared the night before by his attentive wife. And, to-day, the battered rain cape. By the time the kettle on the stove sang (before it actually boiled), he poured water from it into a wash basin, refilled the kettle and replaced it on the stove. Then he washed himself carefully: across the eyes, along the nose bridge, up and down the cheeks, around the ears, under, in and out the armpits, down the torso and in-between the legs. This ritual was thorough, though no whiteman a-complaining of the smell of wogs knows anything about it. Then he dressed himself fastidiously. By this time he was ready to prepare breakfast.
Breakfast! How he enjoyed taking round a tray of warm breakfast to his wife, cuddled in bed. To appear there in his supremest immaculacy, tray in hand when his wife comes out of ether to behold him. These things we blacks want to do for our own... not fawningly for the whites for whom we bloody-well got to do it. He felt, he denied that he was one of those who believed in putting his wife in her place even if she was a good wife. Not he.

Matilda, too, appreciated her husband’s kindness, and only put her foot down when he offered to wash up also. “Off with you” she scolded him on his way.

At the bus-stop he was a little sorry to see that jovial old Maphikela was in a queue for a bus ahead of him. He would miss Maphikela’s raucous laughter and uninhibited, bawdy conversations in fortissimo. Maphikela hailed him nevertheless. He thought he noticed hesitation in the old man, and slight clouding of his countenance, but the old man shouted back at him, saying that he would wait for him at the terminus in town.

Philemon always considered this morning trip to town with garrulous old Maphikela as his daily bulletin. All the township news was generously reported by loud-mouthed heralds, and spiritedly discussed by the bus at large. Of course, “news” included views on bosses (scurrilous), the Government (rude), Ghana and Russia (idolatrous), America and the West (sympathetically ridiculing), Boxing (blood-thirsty). But it was always stimulating and surprisingly comprehensive for so short a trip. And there was no law of libel.

Maphikela was standing under one of those token bus-stop shelters that never keep out rain nor wind nor sunheat. Philemon easily located him by his noisy ribbing of some office boys in their khaki-green uniforms. They walked together into town, but from Maphikela’s suddenly subdued manner, Philemon gathered there was something serious coming up. Maybe a loan.

Eventually, Maphikela came out with it.

“Son”, he said sadly, “if I could’ve avoided this, believe you me I would. But my wife is nagging the spice out of my life for not talking to you about it.”

It just did not become blustering old Maphikela to sound so grave and Philemon took compassion upon him. “Go ahead, dad” he said generously, “you know you can talk to me about anything”
The old man gave a pathetic smile. "We-e-e-ll, it's not really any of our business . . . er . . . but my wife felt . . . you see. Damn it all! I wish these women would not snoop around so much." Then he rushed it. "Anyway, it seems there's a young man who's going to visit your wife every morning . . . ah . . . for these last bloomin' three months. And that wife of mine swears by her heathen gods you don't know a thing about it."

It was not quite like the explosion of a devastating bomb. It was more like the critical breakdown in an infinitely delicate piece of mechanism. From outside the machine just seemed to have gone dead. But deep in its innermost recesses, menacing electrical flashes were leaping from coil to coil, and hot, viscous molten metal was creeping upon the fuel tanks . . .

Philemon heard gears grinding and screaming into gears in his head . . .

"Dad", he said hoarsely, "I . . . I have to go back home."

He turned round and did not hear old Maphikela's anxious: "Steady, son. Steady, son."

The bus ride home was a torture of numb dread and suffocating despair. Though the bus was now emptier Philemon suffered crushing claustrophobia. There were immense washerwomen whose immense bundles of soiled laundry seemed to baulk and menace him. From those bundles crept miasmata of sweaty intimacies that sent nauseous waves up and down from his viscera. Then the wild swaying of the bus as it negotiated Mayfair Circle hurtled him sickeningly from side to side. Some of the younger women shrieked delightedly to the driver: Fuduga . . . Stir the pot! as he swung his steering-wheel this way and that. Normally, the crazy tilting of the bus gave him a prickling exhilaration. But now . . .

He felt like getting out of there, screamingly, elbowing everything out of his way. He wished this insane trip were over, and then again, he recoiled at the thought of getting home. He made a tremendous resolve to gather in all the torn, tingling threads of his nerves contorting in the raw. By merciless act of will, he kept them in subjugation as he stepped out of the bus back in the Victoria Road terminus, Sophiatown.

The calm he achieved was tense . . . but he could think now . . . he could take a decision . . .

With almost boyishly innocent urgency, he rushed through his kitchen into his bedroom. In the lightning flash that the eye can
whip, he saw it all . . . the man beside his wife . . . the chestnut arm around her neck . . . the ruffled candlewick bedspread . . . the suit across the chair. But he affected not to see.

He opened the wardrobe door, and as he dug into it, he cheerfully spoke to his wife: “Fancy, Tilly, I forgot to take my pass. I had already reached town, and was going to walk up to the office. If it hadn’t been for wonderful old Mr. Maphikela.”

A swooshing noise of violent retreat and the clap of his bedroom window stopped him. He came from behind the wardrobe door and looked out from the open window. A man clad only in vest and underpants was running down the street. Slowly, he turned round and contemplated . . . the suit.

Philemon lifted it gingerly under his arm and looked at the stark horror in Matilda’s eyes. She was now sitting up in bed. Her mouth twitched, but her throat raised no words.

“Ha”, he said, “I see we have a visitor,” indicating the blue suit. “We really must show some of our hospitality. But first, I must phone my boss that I can’t come to work to-day . . . mmmm-er, my wife’s not well. Be back in a moment, then we can make arrangements.” He took the suit along.

When he returned he found Matilda weeping on the bed. He dropped the suit beside her on the bed, pulled up the chair, turned it round so that its back came in front of him, sat down, brought his chin on his folded arms before him, and waited for her.

After a while the convulsions of her shoulders ceased. She saw a smug man with an odd smile and meaningless inscrutability in his eyes. He spoke to her with very little noticeable emotion in his voice; if anything, with a flutter of humour.

“We have a visitor, Tilly.” His mouth curved ever so slightly. “I’d like him to be treated with the greatest of consideration. He will eat every meal with us and share all we have. Since we have no spare room, he’d better sleep in here. But the point is, Tilly, that you will meticulously look after him . . .” A shaft of evil shot from his eye . . . “Matilda, I’ll kill you.”

He rose from the chair and looked with incongruous supplication at her. He told her to put the fellow in the wardrobe for the time being. As she passed him to get the suit, he turned to go. She ducked frantically, and he stopped.
"You don't seem to understand me, Matilda. There's to be no violence in this house if you and I can help it. So, just look after that suit." He went out.

He went out to the Sophiatown Post Office which is placed on the exact latitude between Sophiatown and the whiteman's surly Westdene. He posted his boss's letters, and walked to the beer-hall at the tail-end of Western Native Township. He had never been inside it before, but somehow the thundrous din laved his bruised spirit. He stayed there all day.

He returned home for supper... and surprise. His dingy, little home had been transformed, and the stern masculinity it had hitherto received had been wiped away, to be replaced by anxiously feminine touches here and there. There were even gay, colourful curtains swirling in the kitchen window. The old-fashioned coal stove gleamed in its blackness. A clean, chequered oil cloth on the table. Supper ready.

Then she appeared in the doorway of the bedroom. Heavens! here was the woman he had married; the young, fresh, cocoa-coloured maid who had sent rushes of emotion shuddering through him. And the dress she wore brought out all the girlishness of her, hidden so long beneath German print. But no hint of coquetry, although she stood in the doorway and slid her arm up the jamb, and shyly slanted her head to the other shoulder. She smiled weakly.

What makes a woman like this experiment with adultery? he wondered.

Philemon closed his eyes and gripped the seat of his chair on both sides as some overwhelming, undisciplined force sought to catapult him towards her. For a moment some essence glowed fiercely within him, then sank back into itself and died...

He sighed and smiled sadly back at her.

"I'm hungry, Tilly".

The spell snapped, and she was galvanised into action. She prepared his supper with dextrous hands that trembled a little only when they hesitated in mid-air. She took her seat opposite him, regarded him curiously, clasped her hands waiting for his prayer, but in her heart she murmured some other, much more urgent prayer of her own.
“Matilda!” he barked. “Our visitor!” The sheer savagery with which he cracked at her jerked her up, but only when she saw the brute cruelty in his face did she run out of the room, toppling the chair behind her.

She returned with the suit on a hanger, stood there quivering like a feather. She looked at him with helpless dismay. The demoniacal rage in his face was evaporating, but his heavy breathing still rocked his thorax above the table, to and fro.

“Put a chair, there.” He indicated with a languid gesture of his arm. She moved like a ghost as she drew a chair to the table.

“Now seat our friend at the table... no, no, not like that. Put him in front of the chair, and place him on the seat so that he becomes indeed the third person.”

Philemon went on relentlessly: “Dish up for him. Generously. I imagine he hasn’t had a morsel all day, the poor devil.”

Now, as consciousness and thought seeped back into her, her movements revolved so that always she faced this man who had changed so spectacularly. She started when he rose to open the window and let in some air.

She served the suit. The act was so ridiculous that she carried it out with a bitter sense of humiliation. He came back to sit down and plunge into his meal. No grace was said for the first time in this house. With his mouth full, he indicated by a toss of his head that she should sit down in her place. She did so, glanced at her plate, and the thought occurred to her that someone, after a long famine, was served a sumptuous supper, but as the food reached her mouth it turned to sawdust. Where had she heard it?

Matilda could not eat. She suddenly broke into tears.

Philemon took no notice of her weeping. After supper, he casually gathered the dishes and started washing up. He flung a dry cloth at her without saying a word. She rose and went to stand by his side drying up. But for their wordlessness, they seemed a very devoted couple.

After washing up, he took the suit and turned to her. “That’s how I want it every meal, every day.” Then he walked into the bedroom.

So it was. After that first breakdown, Matilda began to feel that her punishment was not too severe, considering the heinous-
ness of her crime. She tried to put a joke into it. But by slow, unconscious degrees, the strain nibbled at her. Philemon did not harass her much more, so long as the ritual with the confounded suit was conscientiously followed.

Only once, he got one of his malevolent brainwaves. He got it into his head that "our visitor" needed an outing. Accordingly the suit was taken to the dry cleaners during the week and, come Sunday, they had to take it out for a walk. Both Philemon and Matilda dressed for the occasion. Matilda had to carry the suit on its hanger over her back and the three of them strolled leisurely along Ray Street. They passed the church crowd in front of the famous Anglican Mission of Christ the King. Though the worshippers saw nothing unusual in them, Matilda felt, searing through her, red-hot needles of embarrassment, and every needlepoint was a public eye piercing into her degradation.

But Philemon walked casually on. He led her down Ray Street, turned into Main Road. He stopped often to look into shop windows or to greet a friend passing by. They went up Toby Street, turned into Edward Road, and back home. To Philemon the outing was free of incident, but to Matilda it was one long, excruciating incident.

At home he grabbed a book on Abnormal Psychology, flung himself into a chair and calmly said to her: "Give the old chap a rest, will you, Tilly?"

In the bedroom, Matilda said to herself that things could not go on like this. She thought of how she could bring the matter to a head with Philemon; have it out with him once and for all. But the memory of his face, that first day she had forgotten to entertain the suit, stayed her. She thought of running away. Where to? Home? What could she tell her old-fashioned mother had happened between Philemon and her? All right, run away clean then. She thought of many young married girls who were divorcees now, who had won their freedom.

What had happened to Staff Nurse Kakile? That woman drank heavily now, and when she got drunk, the boys of Sophiatown passed her around and called her the Cesspot.

Matilda shuddered.

An idea struck her. There were still decent, married women around Sophiatown. She remembered how after the schools had
been forced to close with the advent of Bantu Education. Father Harringay of the Anglican Mission had organised Cultural Clubs. One, she seemed to remember, was for married women. If only she could lose herself in some cultural activity, find ablution for her conscience in some doing good; that would blur her blasted home life, would restore her self-respect. After all, Philemon had not broadcast her disgrace abroad . . . nobody knew; not one of Sophiatown’s vicious slander-mongers suspected how vulnerable she was. She must go and see Mrs. Montjane about joining a Cultural Club. She must ask Philemon now if she might . . . she must ask him nicely.

She got up and walked into the other room where Philemon was reading quietly. She dreaded disturbing him, did not know how to begin talking to him . . . they had talked so little for so long. She went and stood in front of him, looking silently upon his deep concentration. Presently, he looked up with a frown on his face.

Then she dared: “Phil, I’d like to join one of those Cultural Clubs for married women. Would you mind?”

He wrinkled his nose and rubbed it between thumb and index finger as he considered the request. But he had caught the note of anxiety in her voice, and thought he knew what it meant.

“Mmmm,” he said, nodding, “I think that’s a good idea. You can’t be moping around here all day. Yes, you may, Tilly.” Then he returned to his book.

That Cultural Club idea was wonderful. She found women like herself, with time (if not with tragedy) on their hands, engaged in wholesome, refreshing activities. The atmosphere was cheerful and cathartic. They learned things and they did things. They organised fêtes, bazaars, youth activities, sport, music, self-help and community projects. She got involved in committees, meetings, debates, conferences. It was for her a whole new venture into humancraft, and her personality blossomed. Philemon gave her all the rein she wanted.

Now, abiding by that silly ritual at home seemed a little thing . . . a very little thing . . .

Then one day she decided to organise a little party for her friends and their husbands. Philemon was very decent about it. He said it was all right. He even gave her extra money for it. Of
course, she knew nothing of the strain he himself suffered from his mode of castigation.

There was a week of hectic preparation. Philemon stepped out of its cluttering way as best he could. So many things seemed to be taking place simultaneously. New dresses were made. Cakes were baked: three different orders of meat prepared: beef for the uninvited chances; mutton for the normal guests; turkey and chicken for the inner pith of the club’s core. To Philemon, it looked as if Matilda planned to feed the multitude on the mount with no aid of miracles.

On the Sunday of the party, Philemon saw Matilda’s guests. He was surprised by the handsome grace with which she received them. There was a long table with enticing foods and flowers and serviettes. Matilda placed all her guests round the table, and the party was ready to begin in the mock-formal township fashion. Outside a steady rumble of conversation went on where the human odds and ends of every Sophiatown party had their “share”.

Matilda caught the curious look on Philemon’s face. He tried to disguise his edict when he said: “Er . . . the guest of honour.” But Matilda took a chance. She begged: “Just this once, Phil”. He became livid. “Matilda!” he shouted, “get our visitor!” Then with incisive sarcasm: “Or are you ashamed of him?”

She went ash-grey; but there was nothing for it but to fetch her albatross. She came back and squeezed a chair into some corner, and placed the suit on it. Then she slowly placed a plate of food before it. For a while the guests were dumbfounded. Then curiosity flooded in. They talked at the same time. “What’s the idea, Philemon?” . . . “Why must she serve a suit?” . . . “What’s happening?” Some just giggled in a silly way. Philemon carelessly swung his head towards Matilda. “You better ask my wife. She knows the fellow best.”

All interest beamed upon poor Matilda. For a moment she could not speak, all enveloped in misery. Then she said, unconvincingly: “It’s just a game that my husband and I play at meal-time.” They roared with laughter. Philemon let her get away with it.

The party went on, and every time Philemon’s glare sent Matilda scurrying to serve the suit each course, the guests were no-end amused by the persistent mock-seriousness with which this husband and wife played out their little game. Only, to Matilda, it was no joke; it was a hot poker down her throat. After the
party, Philemon went off with one of the guests who had promised to show him a joint "that sells genuine stuff, boy, genuine stuff."

Reeling drunk, late that sabbath, he crashed through his kitchen door, onwards to his bedroom. Then he saw her.

They have a way of saying in the argot of Sophiatown: "Cook out of the head!" signifying that someone was impacted with such violent shock that whatever whiffs of alcohol still wandered through his head were instantaneously evaporated and the man stood sober before stark reality.

There she lay, curled as if just before she died she begged for a little love, implored some implacable lover to cuddle her a little... just this once... just this once more.

In screwish anguish, Philemon cried: "Tilly!"
DEAR GOD

God, you gave me colour,
Rich, sun-drenched, chocolate,
And you gave me valour,
Enough for Love, for Hate.

But, God, Understanding
And Patience, and gazelle
acceptance of Suffering . . . .
You rather gave me Hell.

It's in affectionate
Names that I daily curse
The modes how You create:
Of Love, Hate, so perverse

That but for the untold
Wisdom which, only Thine,
Silences my revolt,
A spark from Thy Divine

I'd be like Thee in wrath,
In Life's demolition
Or creation, and pronounce
Supreme imprecation . . . .

Dammit, God, I'm provoked
More than mortal or clod
Thy will at first evoked.
I'll thunder like you, God.

CAN THEMBA
TAKE it to a lawyer. That's what my friend told me to do. Now, I had never had occasion to have anything to do with lawyers. Mention of lawyers always brought to my mind pictures of courts, arrests, police — terrifying pictures.

Although I was in trouble, I wondered why it should be a lawyer who would help me. However, my friend gave me the address.

And from that moment my problem loomed larger. It turned in my mind. On the night before my visit to the solicitor, my heart was full of feelings of hurt. My soul fed on fire and scalding water.

I'd tell the lawyer; I'd tell him everything that had gnawed inside me for several days.

This story has already appeared in the KENYON REVIEW
I went up the stairs of the high building. Whenever I met a man I imagined that he was the lawyer and all but started to pour out my trouble.

On the landing I met a boy with a man's head and face and rather large ears and lips. I told him I had come to see Mr. B., the lawyer. Very gently, he told me to go into the waiting room and wait my turn with the others.

I was disappointed. I had wanted to see Mr. B., tell him everything, and get the lawyer's cure for it.

To be told to wait . . .

They were sitting in the waiting room, the clients, ranged round the walls — about twenty of them, like those dolls ready to be bowled over at a merry-go-round fair. It didn't seem that I'd get enough time to recite the whole thing — how it all started, grew into something big, and was threatening to crush me — with so many people waiting.

The boy with the man's head and face and large ears came in at intervals to call the next person. I knew what I'd do: I'd go over the whole problem in my mind, so that I could even say it backward. The lawyer must miss nothing, nothing whatever.

But in the course of it all my eyes wandered about the room: the people, the walls, the ceiling, the furniture. A bare, unattractive room: the arms of the chairs had scratches on them that might have been made with a pin by someone who was tired of waiting. Against the only stretch of wall that was free of chairs for clients, a man of about fifty sat at a table sealing envelopes.

From a picture on the wall behind him — the only picture in the room — a cat with green eyes looked down as if supervising his work. For some reason I couldn't fathom a small school globe stood on the table. It suggested that the man sealing the envelopes might start spinning the globe to show a class that the earth is round and turns on its axis.

Once you start to make an effort to think, a thousand-and-one things come into your head. You would think of the previous night's adventure, perhaps; and then your girl-friend might force herself into the front line; then you would begin on another trail.

You might come back, as I did now, and look at the cat in front of you or the man at the table or the clients, one by one.
For a fleeting moment the cat would seem to move. Then it would take up its former position, its whiskers aggressively telling you that you were a fool to have imagined it in motion.

You watched the frantic movements of a fly against the window-pane, fussing to get through at the top when the bottom was open. You looked beyond to the tall buildings of the city. The afternoon heat became so oppressive that your head was just a jumble box. You didn't even hear the boy with the man's face and large ears call "Next one!"

You seemed to float on the stagnant air in the room, and to be no more Sello or Temba in flesh, waiting in a room, but a creature in the no-time of feeling and thought.

The man at the table continued with his mechanical work. He, too, seemed to want to escape from drudgery, for he spoke to two or three clients near him. And he chuckled often, showing a benignly toothless mouth. He delighted in bringing out an aphorism or proverb after every four or five sentences.

"Our sages say that the only thing you have that's surely your own is what you've already eaten" (he chuckled): "a city is beautiful from afar, but approach it and it disappoints you" (he chuckled again).

The clients talked in groups, discussing various things. A man was found dead near Shanty Town, killed by a train, perhaps . . . "Now, look at me; I've three sons. Do you think any one of them cares to bring home a penny? They just feed and sleep and don't care where the food comes from."

The man at the table said, "What I always say is that as soon as you allow a child to go to a dance, you've lost her."

"Try to catch a passing wind — huh!"

"He cannot go far; they'll catch him."

"Imagine it — her husband not six months in his grave, poor man, and she takes off her mourning. That's the reward a good husband gets!"

"Our sages say a herd of cattle led by a cow always falls into the ditch . . . Listen to her always, as long as you know you have the last word."
"I once met a man . . . ."

"Potatoes? Everything is costly these days. Even a woman has gone up in price when you want to marry."

"Only God knows when we are ever to go where we want to at any time."

"Are we not here because of money? Do not we walk the streets and ride on trains and buses because of money? Is money not the thing that drives us in our wanderings?"

"Death is in the leg; we walk with it" (another chuckle).

"You have not been to Magaba, you say? Then you know nothing. Women selling fruit, everyone as red as the ground on which they stand; men and women just one with the red earth, salted meat roasting on the grid to be sold; red dust swirling above, people dashing this way and that like demons scorching in a fire — something like a dream."

The man at the table laughed again and said, "But horns that are put on you never stick on — so don't worry about gossip."

"We've fallen upon evil days when a girl can beat her mother-in-law."

"It's the first I've seen for many years. In my day a cow could give birth to a donkey if such a thing happened."

"Oh, everybody beats everybody these days; we've lost, lost."

"But we can't go back."

"I'll know a zebra when I see the stripes." This from the table.

"He reads too much; the white doctors say his brain is fermenting."

"Even the eagle comes down to earth." Another proverb.

"You and I have never had the chance to go to school, so we must send our children; they'll read and write for us."
“Didn’t you hear? They say the poor man was screaming and trying to run away before he died. He was crying and saying a mountain of sins was standing in his way.”

“Yes, his wife stood by his bed, and he said to her, he says, ‘Selope, take care of my son; now give me water to drink. This is the last time,’ he says, ‘I shall ever ask you to do anything for me’.”

The boy with the man’s face and large ears came to tell us that two white men had gone into Mr. B’s office. There was a moment’s silence. The man at the table nodded several times. The cat glowered at him with green eyes and almost live whiskers. The fly must have found its way out. The heat was becoming a problem to reckon with.

“How many times have I come here,” said an old woman to no one in particular. “In the meantime, my grandchildren are starving. Their good-for-nothing father has not sent them money since the law separated him from my daughter.” Deeper silence.

A few people frowned at the old woman as the birds are said to have done when they were about to attack the owl. A few others seemed to be telling themselves that they weren’t hearing what they were hearing.

“Where does the old mother come from?” It was someone next to her. Once he had started he went on with a string of questions to get her off the track.

And so the people went on patching up. During all this time I had got my facts straight in my head. Several times I had imagined myself in front of Mr. B.: a short man with tired eyes (I always envisioned the lawyer as small in stature). I had told him everything.

Now, as I sat here in the waiting room, I already knew I’d be relieved; the burden would fall off as soon as I should have seen and talked to Mr. B. I was so sure. It couldn’t be otherwise.

There was little talking now.

Fools! I thought. Their inner selves were smarting and curdling with past hurts (like mine); they were aching to see Mr. B., to tell him their troubles.
Yet here they were, pretending they had suspended their anxiety. Here they were, trying to rip this wave of heat and scatter it by so much gas talk, babbling away over things that didn’t concern them, to cover the whirlpool of their own troubles. What was beneath these eddies and bubbles dancing and bursting on a heat wave?—someone else’s possessions, flouting of the law, unfaithfulness, the forbidden tree?

And the man at the table: what right had he to pronounce those aphorisms and proverbs, old as the language of man, and bleached like a brown shirt that has become a dirty white? What right had he to chuckle like that, as though he regarded us as a shopkeeper does his customers?

Next one... the next one... Next!

I was left alone with the man and the cat. My heart gave a hard beat when my mind switched back to what had brought me to the lawyer. Give it to a lawyer, my friend had said confidently, as though I merely had to press an electric switch. He’ll help you out of the mud. A damned good solicitor. You give him the most difficult case and he’ll talk you free... Yes, I’d tell him everything: all that troubled my waking and sleeping hours. Then everything would be all right. I felt it would be so.

“The big man is very busy today, eh?” observed the man at the table.

“Yes,” I said mechanically.

My attention was drawn to the whole setting once more: a plain, unpretentious room with oldish chairs, the school globe; the pile of letters and envelopes; the man; and the picture of the cat.

An envelope fell to the floor. He bent down to take it up. I watched his large hands feel about for it, fumbling. Then the hand came upon the object, but with much more weight than a piece of paper warranted. Even before he came up straight on his chair I saw it clearly. The man at the table was blind, stone blind.

As my eyes were getting used to the details, after my mind had thus been jolted into confused activity, I understood. Here was a man sealing envelopes, looking like a drawing on a flat surface. Perhaps he was flat and without depth, like a gramophone disk: too flat even to be hindered by the heat, the boredom of sitting for hours doing the same work; by too many or too few people coming. An invincible pair, he and the cat glowering at him, scorning our shames and hurts and the heat, seeming to hold the key to the immediate imperceptible and most remote unforeseeable.

I went in to see Mr. B. A small man (as I had imagined) with tired eyes but an undaunted face. I told him everything from beginning to end.
George Lama was a young man who at the age of twenty-seven showed ample promise, although he could not, to tell the truth, say exactly what he promised. He had, with some application, passed his B.Sc., majoring in social psychology. He had become the first African in the city of Durban to land a job as the Director of the African section of the International Advertising Company. Now he was engaged in writing his thesis for an M.Sc. on the subject: “African responses to the mass media”. He was earning good money and vaguely promising.

There were those, of course, whose simple-mindedness led them to believe that the promise had already been fulfilled. For the black people in the township it was enough that he had acquired an unheard-of job, that he had his own office, and that he possessed an academic gown. The only complaint some of the neighbourhood women had against the academic gown was its colour. It
appeared that black was too funereal for them; they would have preferred a less sombre colour, like red or maroon. Still they thought that the promise had been fulfilled and they were prepared to forgive the colour.

George Lama, however, knew better. How could the people of his community have known about Miss Kipling, for instance, whose main occupation in the firm seemed to be to make up Mr. Hobson’s mind for him and to persecute African employees—especially George Lama, whom she described vaguely as that “kaffir upstairs with a B.Sc. degree”.

George Lama knew that the promise was hollow, shamefully false; besides it would have been so without Miss Kipling to render it even hollower. George Lama had long tried himself for a multitude of sins, including inducing moneyless Africans in the Durban slums to buy EUROPA face lotion, which, he claimed, would make their skins lighter; and selling girls nylon stockings to make their lives “a royal success”. However, he had found himself guilty with extenuating circumstances. He fully accepted the charge that he was prostituting his talent instead of turning it into a powerful weapon for advancing the cause of his people; but then he had no desire to advance any cause whatsoever except his own. He was in his job to make money, he pleaded with his conscience. Was it his fault that he had been born an African? That just because he had been to school he had found himself immediately thrust into a position of leadership?

Nevertheless, the feeling that he held a promise did not leave him. He paused briefly to light a cigarette before collecting his jacket and working papers, which he stuffed hastily into his “status briefcase”. He nodded at his face in the office mirror. It was a handsome face, always tending to assume a wry expression. Maybe this was because it had become a habit with him to think of himself as promising; in order to relieve the tragic weight of his role he had begun to wear a self-deprecating expression on his face.

Now he sat back in his chair, drumming his huge black hands on the top of the mahogany desk. He started to shift the papers from one side of the desk and dreamily shifted them back to the old place. Through the window of his top floor office he watched the steamers chugging out of the Durban docks. There was something incalculably, yet definably sad, about the liners steaming out of the docks to foreign shores. It was as though they carried something infinitely more precious than a beloved person.
“George, are you awake?”

It was Mr. Hobson’s voice, recognisably sardonic even though it was only filtering through the intercom system.

“Mr. Hobson, I wish there was something to keep me awake.”

A hoarse, taunting chuckle came through the intercom system. Then the voice said: “George, if you have nothing to do why don’t you call it a day; I’ll see you on Monday. Go to the beach or some place. Wipe the sweat off thy brow.” Another chuckle.

“Yes, Mr. Hobson.”

“Oh, George! Keep out of the police raids, will you! Have your identity papers about with you. We’ve got to work through that advertising deal on Monday. Have a good week-end.”

“Same to you, Mr. Hobson.” He began to gather his working papers. He put the grey hat far back on his head; and with the tie loosened around his neck, he walked out of his office to the lift, whistling a song. He was trying to recall who had started therumour that he was promising when the lift started to grind down to the ground floor.

Now he remembered! He had the whole thing foisted upon him at an early age because he had had the misfortune once, of topping a huge class of forty-six. From that day on, both his teachers and fellow pupils said or implied that he was promising. Sometimes they did not so much as put it into words, but the way they looked and acted toward him convinced him of the outrageous truth, that they believed he was promising. It did not help matters very much that he did not know what was expected of him. He himself began to live by a standard of which he did not approve nor could be said to have originated.

That he did not have a well developed instinct for gregariousness merely worsened rather than improved the situation. The very fact that he had set himself apart from the crowd confirmed what everybody had already suspected: that George Lama was a young man destined to shine like a star set apart from the rest of the constellation. For his own part, he was vaguely suspicious, not to say alarmed, by this conspiracy to induce in him an arrogance of ambition not supportable by his meagre talent, however excellent his capacity for work.
He was getting out of the lift when he suddenly bumped into Miss Kipling, who was rushing to get in.

"Mister Lama!" she said ferociously. "I wish you would look where you are going!"

George twitched his nose: "I beg your pardon, Miss Kipling."

Miss Kipling did not miss the twitch of George's nose. If there ever was anything Miss Kipling hated it was a native who twitched his nose at people. That was positively worse than a native who talked back. She started to walk away, but changed her mind.

"Are you leaving already?" she enquired from George before he could flee into the bustling sunlit street.

"I am, Miss Kipling."

She consulted her wrist watch.

"It strikes me as an awfully early hour to knock off. Doesn't it strike you as an early hour, Mr. Lama?"

"It was Mr. Hobson's suggestion. Entirely Mr. Hobson's choice."

"You shouldn't be so haughty, Mr. Lama," she said fiercely, her pale eyes flashing from their sunken sockets. "We all know that you hold an important position in this firm. A rare position for a native."

"I was not aware of being haughty."

"Just the way you use words like 'entirely'."

George was determined to get away; so instead of replying he turned to walk away.

"Good morning, Mister Lama," said Miss Kipling spiritedly and entered the waiting lift.

* * *

It was his teacher at High School, one of those bright young African women, inordinately thrilled by their emancipation from the backward role of the tribal woman, who eventually set the
pace for young George Lama. Miss Tula’s incandescence lit up something in him which it became his duty to preserve. To pursue a goal that would lead to success, honour and fame, and to use these as tools for advancing the cause of his people, became suddenly a clear and inescapable duty. So he began to walk with a springy step; even the way he shoved his hands into his pockets gave the impression of a boy who held vast promise.

He remember how Miss Tula had sat in front of the class one bright morning, wearing her mischievous “New African Woman” smile, and clearly relishing her position of dominance over the minds of boys, some of whom were, if not older, as old as she was. She had a way of sitting atop her table, dangling a provocatively long chocolate leg, sometimes casually scratching the smooth skin above her dark mahogany knee. If Miss Tula was aware of the stress under which she had put the boys of her class, she showed no sign of it. She continued to maintain a surface of a mocking unavailability.

She wore skirts which were so tight that it was impossible to conceal the shapeliness of her hip bone; and she had a way of leaving the two uppermost buttons of her man’s shirt undone. So quite early the boys had come by what appeared to them to be the most important knowledge, mainly that “the Mistress wears a black bra!”

The boys saw in this a gesture. They saw a vague promise, but the promise, George had later realised existed mainly in their squalid suffering little minds, for Miss Tula did not fulfill any such promise. She remained always tantalisingly unavailable, always provocatively there but completely inaccessible. Only to George did she make a minor concession during one moment of whimsy; but it was a concession that was sufficient to make him dizzy for the remainder of his high school days and was to change his life irrevocably forever.

Looking back on the incident now he could see it for the fraud it was. She had been utterly ruthless in her methods. She had quite plainly, it seemed to George, caused him to fall in love with her so that she could exercise greater influence upon him and induce in him a will to work even harder at his lessons. She had exploited her physical desirability to advantage, she had beat him into compliance, making him, willy-nilly, the best student of the class. Of course he liked to believe that Miss Tula had also liked him a little for his own sake, even if merely to amuse herself with his adolescent vulnerability. He reasoned that he must have had some individual
charm to cause Miss Tula to pick him out of a class of forty-six as an object of her amusement.

It started in class one Friday morning. “Well now,” said Miss Tula, smiling out of mocking eyes. From her dangling long fingers a pen cluttered to the floor; a boy and a girl in the front seat rushed almost at the same time to retrieve it, but the boy’s eager hands reached the pen first. The mocking smile widened on Miss Tula’s face. “I ought to tell you that your papers were distressing to read. Even assuming that most of you have better things to do than writing papers for me, since this is Spring, the results of your efforts were shocking beyond any telling.”

She paused and surveyed the sad-eyed faces which seemed to hide in vain behind a wall of shame and contrition. Somehow the smile on Miss Tula’s face seemed to impart a terrible trenchancy to her statements. It was as though, deciding that her pupils were beyond any academic redemption, she had finally abandoned them to the mercy of God.

“Perhaps,” she added as an afterthought, “I ought to mention the name of only one student whose paper was a rare pleasure to read. Mr. Lama, please stand up and let us have a look at you.”

He had stood up, shivering with fright and paralysed by an insupportable feeling of self-consciousness. He looked beyond Miss Tula’s brown eyes. When he finally stared into them he noticed a strange glow in them, a warmth the source of whose emotion remained painfully obscure to him. She seemed to be awfully young suddenly, to be terribly exposed and magnanimously available. Please, don’t rest on your laurels.”

“Mr. Lama here was the only one whose writing showed a great deal of care. And because this also shows a regard for the person who has to read his paper, I feel quite flattered and complimented. Moreover his paper was well-planned, well-reasoned, and well-sourced. Mr. Lama, I must tell you that you show great promise.

Later that afternoon, after everybody had left, he came back to the classroom to retrieve his umbrella from the rack; and sitting atop her table was Miss Tula, dangling her leg as usual, and looking, for the first time, extremely vulnerable. She looked as though for once she lacked a sense of direction. Her face bore an expression of sad regard as though its owner had just been struck, suddenly and paralyzingly, by the inadequacy of the world around
lier. She sat now wearily and resignedly, watching the soft rain streaking down the window panes of the classroom.

When she saw him enter something lit up her eyes. They appeared to have acquired suddenly, like objects at night, a strange quality of depth. He did not know how to respond to her. He was aware, with the certain kind of a sixteen year old intelligence, of his teacher's sudden lack, a want of spiritual plenitude. It was her self-exposure really, which gave her away, so that now the distance in age between them was swiftly abridged, and suddenly the room was only full of Miss Tula, her femininity, the smell of the soap she used, the soft quality of her smile.

"Ah, our genius!"

He smiled back at her, a dangerous conceit taking over where nerve seemed to fail. The way he looked at her reduced the sophisticated mockery in her voice to something less than dangerous; she began to pat a straying hair from her head in a self-conscious way she had never displayed before.

"I suppose," she said brutally, "you are walking on air because of what I said this morning?"

Instinctively he knew that she had said this as a way of protecting herself against him, although he could not see in what way he had threatened Miss Tula. She waited patiently for him to say something. She even seemed to be appealing to him to say something.

"I'm glad the Mistress liked my essay," he mumbled, "but I'm not walking on air."

The mocking smile was back: "Well, if I were you I would be walking on air. I wish, though, you would stop leaving pictures of nude girls in your exercise books."

She must have noticed the startled expression on his face because she laughed and said: "Don't mistake me. I'm no prude; but I think there are better places for such pictures."

She picked up her briefcase and began rumaging in it. Then to George's extreme embarrassment, she held the photograph of a nude torn out from some magazine.

"Here, keep it."

30
He approached her shyly, watching to see if the mocking expression left her face, but it did not. He reached out his hand to grasp the picture. Miss Tula’s hand closed suddenly upon his; he wanted to pull back; but something in her eyes held him in frozen immobility. He was surprised to feel how soft a Mistress’ hand was. Miss Tula moved the hand up to his face, his cheek, side of the neck and let it linger over his ear, caressing gently. The picture dropped to the floor. He bent to pick it up, but she stretched out her leg to bar his way.

“I’m tired, George,” she said finally. “I need to be provoked.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“I don’t suppose you know what I’m talking about.” Although she was mocking him, she sounded more bitter than he had ever known her to be.

“No, ma’am.”

He could only guess what she was talking about; and he could not believe Miss Tula was the same woman who taught him everyday. Panic engulfed him; but also, at the bottom of his panic, there was a growing need, urgent and all-consuming, to meet Miss Tula’s requirements, whatever they may be.

“Do you always stay behind after everybody has gone home?”

“No, ma’am.”

“What made you stay today? Did you know I was here?”

“No, ma’am.”

Quite accidentally he noticed that the third button in her shirt was undone. Her slim, very dark body seemed strangely infuriatingly adequate, confirming the wildest dreams of adolescence. George averted his eyes from her.

“Tell me something. Have you ever had a girl? I mean have you ever kissed a girl?”

He began to laugh but the look of utter sincerity in Miss Tula’s face quenched his mirth. She was not laughing. Even the mocking classroom smile had disappeared. Now her face seemed starved, very sad and terrifyingly lonely. He felt, without knowing the reason, that he could tell her the truth.
“Once I had this girl I was trying to kiss at the end-of-year school dance. It was at night. I didn’t like her very much so it was a bit messy.” Only then did Miss Tula smile.

“Would you like to kiss me, for instance?”

“You mean you?” he gasped.

“Yes, me,” she said irritably. “Am I that ugly?”

“Just so you can learn to do it more properly next time.” Her sarcasm was back. “After all it’s very important. You don’t want to know only how to write essays, do you now, and not how to handle women?” Even the mocking smile was back.

“George Lama,” she said sardonically. “I am entrusted with the job of imparting to you an education and I intend to see to it that you benefit fully from my instruction. Very soon grave and evil days shall befall you and I’ll never forgive myself for not having armed you with a proper education to meet them. Come close, George, very close.”

The kiss seemed the longest he had ever indulged in. Nor could he hide the panic which seem to arise out of strange and bewildering emotions. He hung on to her until Miss Tula pushed him gently away, smiling, and there was grace in her bottomless dark eyes. “My God, George!” she cried with delight. “I never knew how hungry a little boy could get. Take thy bed and walk. Thou art healed!” And she roared with mocking laughter.

He left the classroom very soon thereafter, abandoning both his umbrella, and, with a certain regret, Miss Tula, but not before Miss Tula had extracted the promise from him. He carried with him the fire of emotions which were quite unforgettable. He was naked and unprotected against the rain, but inside he was too warm and too defiant to care. Besides he was burdened with a knowledge which seemed, at that moment, too important and unspeakably ennobling to linger with in the streets. So he ran all the way home, leaving behind him an extracted promise to honour with his mind a gift whose value was the nobility of its intent.
THE hounds! They were a great distance away but in the icy morning air, too early for the sounds of civilisation to have started yet, he could hear them. Ow-ow-ow, ow-ow-oowoow! And though he could not see them he knew what they were doing. They were sniffing the long grass, the footprints he left behind him, the footprints that he could not hide. They would stop every so often, sniffing, sniffing. Then with a howl one of them would be off, the others after him.

And after me too, thought Joe. But they will never catch me, I swear it. I would rather die.

Joe was running at a steady pace now. He could not sprint any more. Each breath tore at his lungs and every footfall on the hard veld shot agonising pains up his legs. He came to a cluster of trees and burst into them. The branches, thick as your finger,
clawed at Joe's face and lashed at his shoulders—lashed like the
whip in the hands of that Meneer van Donkel's boss boys.

They'll never get me back to that farm. Joe gritted
his teeth. He thought of the searing whip, the foul muck they
served up for food. And a man was supposed to do a hard day's
work on that.

More than a day's work. From sunrise to sunset and never a
break inbetween. And always the whip and sometimes the boot.
And when Meneer van Donkel felt like a bit of fun he would bring
his own whip and add his own boot to the "fun".

The thought of it made Joe redouble his effort. He no longer
felt the branches lash his face. But the red hot irons chasing up
his legs were still there . . . and the pain in his chest. He had to
breathe. A man can't live without breathing. But when he lives
the way I've been made to live it may be just as well to stop
breathing for all time.

The hounds again! Closer now.

They want to hurl themselves at me. They want to sink their
teeth into my legs, into my throat. And I'm not even guilty.

I didn't steal the ring. They said I did. But I never stole any-
thing in my life, though God knows, there have been times when
I felt like it. Like the year Jeanette got pneumonia. She needed
good food and medicine and with £4 2s. 6d. a week how could I
pay for that?

Joe burst into a clearing and saw a river. It took a long curve
and cut off any further progress. Unless . . . I go along the river
—but that would bring me towards the hounds. The hounds!

He could hear them clearly and loud now. They were not very
far behind . . . some ten minutes walking distance!

I can't go on much longer.

Then he thought again of his daughter. He could see her
clearly . . . lying ill with pneumonia. She needed food, medicines,
doctor's attention! And he had not been able to buy them for her
. . . and she had died. Tears welled in his eyes.
Joe was crying now as he ran. Crying because he was not guilty and they had arrested him and jailed him for the theft of a diamond ring he never saw. They could not find a penny in his pocket but a witness said he had spent the money that he sold the ring for.

They believed that I stole and spent hundreds of pounds on myself. I, who refused even to steal a crust of bread when hungry. I, ... and I saw my daughter die.

Joe was angry now. Angry with the world that had robbed him of his daughter. Angry with Dame Justice who was cock-eyed. Angry with Creation. And then they took me out of jail to work on a farm. It was better in jail, Joe said bitterly.

The hounds were very close now. Joe thought quickly. The river flowed very fast. There must have been rain higher up because the river was swollen. He watched the eddying waters with fascination. The river, the river, the hounds, the hounds!

In a flash Joe had made up his mind. He chose the river and the risk of death in a muddy brown river rather than fall into the hands of those torturers and the jaws of the blood-thirsty hounds.

Joe leapt into the angry waters. As he hit the water he remembered he could have taken off his clothes. Too late now, his wet trousers and shirt were becoming heavy and dragging him under. He was going down and, as his head sank below the water he heard the crack-crack of rifle fire. Joe surfaced for a few seconds and looked back. The hounds were running along the bank following him. But they did not risk the water.

Brave dogs, said Joe to himself, as he went down again. Even under water Joe struggled with his trousers. He got off one leg and battled with the other. He came up for a second, just long enough to get a breath of beautiful, life-giving air. Ah, now the other leg was off.

Joe let his trousers float away from him. It was a relief. Then he started on his shirt. He found it easier to get rid of, quicker, by not struggling. He let himself go under and tugged desperately at his shirt. It ripped, and he was free of it.

Now Joe managed to swim quite easily. The rifle fire had stopped. He wondered why.

And the barking of the hounds, it sounded far away. And Joe saw why. The river had taken a sharp bend and gone through a
dense bush. The thick thorn bushes and needle-sharp wag-n-bietjies kept out his pursuers.

Joe laughed through the mists of weariness that crept over him.

I'm free. Free of Meneer van Donkel and his miserable dogs. Now for home, thought Joe. Home and a nice warm bed and coffee brewed over a bright fire of wood and mealie cobs.

Suddenly Joe was bitterly cold. The icy water had penetrated into the very marrow of his bones. It was stiffening his arms, his legs. He found it difficult to swim. I must get out, he thought.

There was a bright sun now. I must have been on the run for ten hours. He had left Meneer van Donkel's farm after midnight, when everybody was asleep, including his guard, the fat slob. He must have tired himself whipping the labourers.

And now it was ten o'clock.

I must get some of that sunshine on my skin or I'll freeze, Joe muttered, his teeth chattering.

With a supreme effort he paddled close to one of the banks. Then, suddenly, he stopped drifting. He wondered what had happened until he saw that a tree that had been struck by lightning was lying with its top branches in the river. He was caught up in the branches.

My lucky day, thought Joe.

Naked, Joe got out on to the bank and lay down to rest. He fell asleep, exhausted. But he did not sleep for long. He awoke to hear a bark right in his ear. He froze. They had caught him after all. He spun around.

It was a little white dog with floppy ears. And at the end of a long piece of frayed string stood a small girl.

She was a white girl.

She looked Joe right in the eye.

"Are you a tramp?" she asked.
Joe wondered what he could say. He wanted to run away, but was afraid he would run into them. The farmer or the police must be somewhere close. He ducked the other side of the fallen tree. He was shy of his nakedness.

"Are you a tramp?" asked the small girl again. Her voice was insistent. "Because if you are, my mummy's got an old suit of clothes in the cupboard in the outside room. She said daddy could not wear that old suit again because it is a disgrace to walk down town with a torn suit. She told daddy she would give it to the first tramp who came along. Are you a tramp?"

Joe smiled at the little girl. He liked her. Either he was a tramp, or he was just a man. He was not a "kaffir" or a "nigger." He was just like other men in her eyes. It was possible that he was a tramp, besides.

"I am a tramp," said Joe.

"You've got a nice voice for a tramp," said the little girl. "I always thought tramps had nasty voices. That's what it says in my story book. Tramps have nasty voices and they never bath. But you've got a nice voice. And you bath too. I saw you get out of the river."

The little girl stood there. She made no move to go away and Joe wondered what to do. He might be seen by some white people and that would be very bad. There was no knowing what things they might think of him.

"That suit of your father's..." Joe began.

"Oh, yes," said the little girl. "My name's Mary. But you can call me May. I don't know your name."

"My name is Joe. Look, Mary, I'm not a tramp." Joe was desperate now and decided to tell the truth. He had to get away. "I'm not a tramp. I'm a prisoner. I escaped from jail. A farm really, but I was serving a jail sentence."

"Oh, but that was naughty. What did you do? Why were you in jail?"

"You get the suit and I'll tell you."
The girl looked at him for a second, smiled and ran off, the little, white dog with the floppy ears yelping behind her. Joe stood there, his eyes narrowed and a wry grin etching the corners of his mouth.

The sudden snapping of a twig froze him where he stood. He wheeled round, blood rushing to his head. At the same time a shot rang out from the woods bordering the river. The weight of the slug catapulted him back and he crumpled forward clutching his chest. He fell on his face, fought to bring his legs up, and muttered, "No, no, Mary! I'm not a tramp, I'm . . . not . . ."
A VERY IMPORTANT APPOINTMENT

CASEY MOTSISI

There were three in the car. Bob was driving. Joseph, who was sitting dangerously close to him, was trying his best to keep awake. Nat and Daisy, Joseph's wife, were snoring in the back seat.

“What's the time?” Joseph asked.

“Strike a match, I can't see, man. I can't see.”

It was only then that Joseph realised Bob hadn't turned on the car lights.

“Hey, man, turn on the lights.”

“Fused.”

“Then how can you seeee, man?”

39