

# CONSTABLE VILJOEN

*Present Day  
South Africa*

In a moment of carelessness, Thursday brushed within striking distance of a white and chestnut patchwork beagle on Arnold Street. He was close enough for the dog to tear a hole in his trousers and it jammed its wet nose through the fence.

Too late, he thought, it has me.

But it didn't yip at him. Instead it panted a few times and sniffed at the blue orb on the lamp in his palm. Then it cocked its head back and howled the call of canines past and to come, of wolves and strays and jackals it had never met, but whose presence the beagle could feel quickening in the glow of lamp. The other dogs of Obz gave a few barks before curling back down to sleep.

It had been a strange evening. Returning to find a young man breaking into Thursday's apartment, making what he thought, or hoped, might have been an ally and then seeing him yanked across the room. In the light of the lamp, the form that had attacked had seemed spectral and malevolent. And that voice. That roaring baritone: "Dayo! Dayo! What are you doing here!"

Thursday had run. He'd run from fear and then slowed on Irwell Street, trying not to attract attention from the bicycle patrols that followed him as a matter of course. He was not successful. The patrol pedaled behind him all the way to Lower Main.

He paced to Rodney's Chinese Restaurant feeling lucky to be unbiten and alive. After consideration, he tucked the lamp into the pocket of his tracksuit, hesitating at the door to tousle his hair. He'd gotten a mop cut the other day, with his receding black bangs hovering over his flared nostrils, that the stylist had insisted showed off his eyes. It had to be ruffled, like an unmade but inviting bed, but not sloppy. Just the bed, the stylist said, no jeans or socks splayed all over it. That was the look.

In Rodney's restaurant there was a silver-haired couple, a family, and then two men, a black and a coloured guy, greedily enjoying a plate of fried rice, egg rolls, and flash-fried julienned vegetables. Music trickled through on the stereo, the same pentatonic tune of Chinese music that Rodney always played. Rodney's wife was speaking to the two men and she let out a laugh that reminded Thursday of her husband.

When she saw Thursday, she stopped laughing to approach his table. "He's not here," she hissed, somewhat rudely.

"Rodney?"

She shook her head. He pursed his lips to say "Ip?" but she interrupted him. "He's not here."

He hadn't quite expected Ip to be there, but he knew that showing up would send the signal that he wanted to meet.

"What can I get you, sir?" she asked, again he thought loudly. Formally, too.

"A Coke."

She scratched some letters on her order sheet. "Chicken lo mein and a Coke."

"No," Thursday said. "Just a—"

"Be right out."

She disappeared into the kitchen.

Thursday had resolved never to eat food in Rodney's restaurant after the sword incident but he was slightly afraid of Rodney's wife, so he leafed through a copy of *The Tatler*. There was an article entitled *Melle Brightens the Heart of Darkness*. It explained that this year's fashion season would be eclipsed by a visit from the sensation Melle, who would be introducing her new line of niqab-inspired clothing called *Antumbra*. Melle had never before come to the continent and she was rumored to be visiting several charities. A local man quipped that they should wire her to the grid, so that she could stop the rolling blackouts.

Rodney's wife dropped the noodles in front of him in record time. There was a fortune cookie plain in the middle of the noodles. He picked up a fork and twirled on some noodles but when he brought them to his lips they were stone cold. When he raised his hand to call

Rodney's wife back, she scowled at him. Sipping his drink, he broke the fortune cookie. Inside it read: Convention is therefore a reason. On the reverse, a handwritten note: Get out of here. Cops. Swallow.

Thursday scanned the room. There, the table with the two men scooping up noodles by the packet full. Not talking to each other, but eating. The ones that Rodney's wife was dotting over.

Look normal, he thought. Act normal. Drink your Coke. Eat your fortune cookie. Then get out. Get out and go.

He ate the cookie whole and the paper got lodged in the back of his throat. He swallowed some Coke and it went down the wrong hole, so he coughed violently. He dropped the lamp, and the globe of water dislodged from the base and rolled across the floor. Right under the table of the cops.

The coloured guy picked up the globe and inspected it curiously, leaving Thursday no choice but to walk over.

"A cat?" the cop said. "Never seen a cat before."

"It's new," Thursday said. He reached to grab it back.

The man was turning it over. "There a light inside?" Then he was shaking it.

"Sure."

"How does it work?"

The snow was eddying over the cat's ears.

"I don't know. I just bought it."

"How much was it?"

"Seventy bucks," Thursday said.

"That's it?"

"I mean a hundred. A hundred and seventy."

"A hundred or a hundred and seventy?"

Take it, Thursday thought. Take it and run.

The man showed the water-filled globe to his black colleague, who put his egg roll down and examined it with intensity, turning it over and over again before handing it back. Then Thursday was headed back to the table. He put a fifty rand note on his plate, picked up his coat, and walked out the door.

They arrested him at the corner. He heard the ring of the bells on the door and turned around. The coloured guy began calling for him. Thursday pretended not to hear him and kept going, but the black cop had gone around the block and cut him off.

"Come with us, Hampton," the coloured guy said.

Thursday didn't think to ask for his rights. He didn't think to do anything.

The Woodstock police station had a tiny red stone entrance, with a couple of steps and a sign the size of a shoe box. There weren't any police cars out front and the only person Thursday saw come out was an old woman carrying a satchel of tea towels. Inside it was equally calm. No one screaming, no bergies or wounded men, a long desk with four uniformed clerks answering phone calls. He was taken to a small room with an ash desk, a lamp, and three chairs. They hadn't cuffed him.

"Please have a seat while we get our papers together," the coloured guy said, almost apologetically.

One of the clerks brought him some tea with too much sugar, and a biscuit with a dollop of crystallized jelly in the middle. It was all very civilized.

The two cops were still wearing plain clothes when they entered the room. He had, for some reason, expected them to change into uniforms. The black man had thick blue plastic glasses and a shaved head, with a lazy eye and a birthmark on his temple and a conciliatory manner that seemed to want to make up for these deficiencies. The coloured man was bigger, with a barrel chest and a goatee that was blending into his five o'clock shadow. He moved like a man who in his home would sneeze loudly, laugh loudly, and tear down the walls to get his way.

"Hampton," the coloured guy began. "I'm Constable Viljoen, Senior Detective for the Environmental Crimes Division of Operation Trident. Have you enjoyed your tea?"

"My name's Thursday."

"Our witnesses say it's Hampton."

"Check my ID."  
 "I did. But the pass-laws are over. We know that what's printed in there doesn't have anything to do with who you really are. That's what we learned in the Struggle."

"My name's Thursday Malaysius."  
 At this Constable Viljoen glanced over at his partner. "What do you think, Mush?"

Mush shrugged. He got up and walked around the ash desk to Thursday's side. He pulled open a drawer, and to Thursday's surprise, pulled the globe from his moonlight lamp out of it. He began tossing it back and forth from hand to hand. His grip didn't look very steady. Not a cricketer: soccer.

"I don't believe," Constable Viljoen continued, "in beating about the bush, Hampton. Save yourself some trouble. We know more about you than you do at the end of the day. All I need you to do is one simple thing. Identify Timothy Ip in court. That's it. Will you do that for us? Then you can walk free and forget the whole thing. It's on the twenty-third of this month. An expedited hearing. We'll give you full witness protection and then you're out. If you don't do it, you're going to prison." He leaned his heavy frame back as his partner, Mush, began tossing the snowglobe higher up into the air.

Thursday was feeling meek, but he wasn't going to agree until he knew what they had. If he was going down, he wanted the fall to be informed.

"I don't know what you're talking about."

Viljoen grunted. "Is that right? You don't know? You've never heard of Timothy Ip?"

"No."

"How about Leon Vermeulen?"

It was all Thursday could do to cough. If his eyes hadn't been focused on the snowglobe then he would have given himself away at Ip's name too. Ip he could deny, Leon never.

"Leon and I went to school together."

"Where was that, Hampton?"

"Hermanus."

"Would it be fair to say you were mates?"

Blindly: "We were bras."

"But you're not anymore?"

"No."

"What happened, would you say, Hampton? Did Leon take your girl? He had that reputation, we know. We've done our homework. Which girl was it? Fadanaz?"

Fuck, Thursday thought. Fuck it all.

And the globe was being tossed high now. Up. Down. Sloshing and snowy. It occurred to him that snowmen were conceived of their own blood. That a snowman was blood peeking back at itself. What did that make him? What were criminals?

"I agree with you, Hampton. You're no longer bras. He's dead."

"Kak."

"Oh, no, not kak. He's dead. He's been dead for weeks."

"But he's in Pollsmoor."

"He was in Pollsmoor. Just like Mandela was in Pollsmoor. But we needed Mandela at the end of the day, didn't we, Mush?"

Mush didn't toss the snowglobe up this time. He blinked. Maybe an old argument. Maybe a new one.

"The strange thing is, Hampton, we wanted Leon, too. But we didn't need him to take down Ip. Because we've got you."

Thursday tried to soak it in. Viljoen had to be bluffing. Because if Leon ever died, God would be bluffing. He would pop out of his grave without a care for the hierarchy of things.

"What happened to Leon?" he said skeptically.

"What do you think?"

"AIDS?"

Viljoen leaned back his head and let out a rolling laugh from his barrel chest. "AIDS!" He nudged Mush in the arm. "He says AIDS! In three weeks!" He nudged his partner again, this time while the globe was in mid-throw and the globe flew back over Mush's shoulder and smashed in a shower of glass and water on the floor. Mush looked even

more disappointed than Thursday. The little black cat had survived the fall intact with its whiskers aimed at the door.

"Sorry about that, Hampton. I know that was, what, Mush, seventy bucks?"

"One hundred and seventy," Mush replied angrily.

"We'll get you a new one." He let out another chuckle. "AIDS. Mush, we'll have to get Hampton one of our outreach pamphlets about HIV. Must not have reached Hermanus."

"Tell me what happened," Thursday snapped.

Viljoen described, in detail, the weapon that had killed Leon, a thin plastic blade that was a signature for hits arranged by the smuggler Ip. Ip had contacts inside and was known, crudely, as the Swordmaster. It was that word—sword—that rattled Thursday. Viljoen might have been a bully but he wasn't creative enough to have invented the story. He remembered how deftly Chung had chopped at that guy's belly, how routinized the entire slaughter had been. Dead! Here he'd been living his life in Observatory, getting dragged through Leon's garbage and he'd been dead all along. He could have skipped town. He could be back in Joburg, or in Norway with his backpacker, free as a bird.

But beyond that it was worse. Beyond that was the fact that he missed Leon and wanted someone to take his place. Leon had bullied him into blindness and he didn't know which way to go.

Viljoen was saying that Leon had been found dead, as all victims in prison are found, in the morning, with everyone looking innocent.

"But why?" Thursday breathed. "What did Leon do?"

Viljoen glanced at his partner. "Sounds pretty concerned for an old bra, don't you think? I thought they weren't friends anymore. Did I hear him say that, Mush?"

"He did. He said 'we were friends.'"

"Thanks, Mush." To Thursday: "Doesn't say much, Mush. But he remembers. He remembers everything. Down to the letter. It's a matter of time before he takes my job. Let's end this, Hampton. Have you heard enough? Will you appear in court? It's free. I'll throw in a new lamp. No? Is that a no? That's your decision, Hampton. Then I'll keep talking. When you say 'yes' I stop."

He cracked his knuckles. Leon had been arrested for shooting the dog, as Chung had said, and had been implicated in a large shipment of fresh abalone to Ip. The abalone had been stolen from a farm and had been traced back to Observatory from Hong Kong. Viljoen gave no indication he'd made the connection that Thursday was with Leon on the day Leon was arrested. Mush was harder to read, impassable. He could have been lamenting about the lamp; he could have been replaying a soccer game in his head.

"I can't help you," Thursday said.

Thursday nearly missed it, but Mush gave the tiniest squint in Viljoen's direction. Viljoen stood up instantly. "Your tea's getting cold. Want a refill?"

Thursday hadn't had a sip. Viljoen picked up the cup and saucer and could be heard telling a clerk to microwave it. Mush's fist shot out across the desk and clocked Thursday in the jaw. Another jab came out of nowhere and Thursday fell over the chair to the ground.

"You're lying," Mush said, straightening his collar.

Viljoen returned, seemingly unaware, and bent down to help Thursday off the floor. "Lose your balance, Hampton? Must be thirsty. Not to worry, your tea will be right along."

Thursday rubbed his jaw, feeling it swell up. Now Mush, who was as reserved as ever, circled around the desk. Thursday flinched in anticipation of another punch, but Mush pulled open a drawer and took out a packet of paperclips. Viljoen eagerly snatched the packet, emptying it onto the desk. "You've got to understand that about the Triads. We've had a devil of a time trying to break up these smugglers because they're not organized. Being a Triad is usually nothing more than saying you're a fruit seller at the market." He started moving the paperclips around

to demonstrate his point. "You're selling fruit and the guy next to you's selling fruit. Every once in a while you get together to make a big purchase of bananas"—he piled some paperclips together—"to lower costs. But once that's over you're back on your own. The advantage is that if the stall next to you runs out of fruit, you're fine. Take one out and there are three more where they came from. These guys are not Godfathers. They're more like entrepreneurs in the gray and black markets. Sometimes above the line."

The clerk arrived with the tea. There was another cookie on the saucer. Chocolate, which Thursday could never bite through after that shot to his jaw. He couldn't imagine chewing. There was the scent of bergamot.

"Earl Grey," Viljoen observed. "Froofy for my tastes, but one shouldn't complain." He shoved the paperclips together. "When Ip came along, everything changed. All the bananas in a bunch. We don't need much. A witness against him, a witness for just about anything. Could be murder, could be petty theft, and we'll let you go, Hampton. Simple."

A witness. Thursday thought of the smuggler Ip had butchered. The memory of the man clutching his stomach, hands full of his own insides, was more real than any other he had. It was why he couldn't eat Chinese anymore. It was why he was starting to think, with Mush about to launch another punch at him, that he might turn Ip in. Still, he needed time to think it through and denied it, causing Mush to squint, and they went through the whole routine again, this time with a crippling punch to his abdomen.

"Sit up straight, Hampton, it helps," Viljoen said, tossing him a handkerchief when he returned. "We've got two guys who say they gave you a ride to Observatory with a cooler full of abalone. We know you have a connection with Leon and, now, with Ip," he added. "We're going to put you away for—how much is it Mush at the end of the day?"

At the end of what day, Thursday thought. My day? Why did Viljoen make it sound like the day was always in danger of ending?

"Five."

"Five," Viljoen repeated, somewhat disappointed. "I thought it was ten."

"Five under the terms of the statute."

"You heard him, Hampton. Five. If we get DNA from the perlies, that doubles, right, Mush?"

"Right."

"Kak," Thursday groaned.

"Not very creative is he, Mush? Kak, this. Kak, that. All we need is one, Hampton. One chip of shell and you're in for ten. Any shell in that apartment of yours? Any sand get stuck between your toes? I'll tell you what. We won't look for those shells if you work with us. You're small, Hampton. You're not even a fruit seller. We want Ip, not you. Let's help each other. As far as I can tell, these men have used you. You're nothing to them. Why are they anything to you?"

Two other men were in the holding cell and they had both been beaten badly. They were sitting in the corner, facing the wall, staring at a crack where a rat poked its head out when one of them snored. Upon close inspection, Thursday realized they were the Rastas who had given him a ride from Observatory all those months back. One of them suddenly turned to face him when he approached. His lip was swollen and he had a shiner with dried blood at the rim of his eye socket.

"How was that clam suppa, Hampton?" he asked. Thursday found himself backing away. "Don't be 'fraid, Hampton. Georgie miss you."

So these were the witnesses Viljoen had against him, the ones who had turned him in. Strange that Viljoen would put him in a cell with them. However irrational it was, Thursday was also bothered that he had looked after their stinky dog Georgie at the beach and now they were going to testify against him. It seemed ungrateful. But that might have been the pain in his jaw doing the thinking.

Deciding he could offer a deal to the Rastas, Thursday mustered the courage to approach them until Mush appeared at the cell gate with a key. The Rastas immediately protected their heads with their arms. Mush drew a black sjambok and hit one in the side a few times. Then he kicked the other one until he began to cough blood on the floor and shout in Xhosa. When Mush finished with them he took a long, blank look at Thursday before exiting the cell, and blinked both eyes. He'd had no expression when he was beating the men, nor had he said anything. There'd been nothing at all, and that was what terrified Thursday the most, for what if that nothingness came after him? He didn't sleep a wink that night and his jaw hurt so much he couldn't put any food down.

Viljoen was appealing to his reason and self-interest, to the fact that the people Thursday trusted had betrayed him again and again. There was every reason to turn Ip in. The police were probably finding the abalone in his apartment as he sat there in the cell. If Leon hadn't survived Pollsmoor, there was no way Thursday could survive it. Leon was a man who drove things, who made things happen. If Pollsmoor could chop Leon up then it would do much worse to Thursday. He didn't know what that death would be, but he had the feeling that someone inside the mang would have the patience to think of it.

For a fleeting moment he thought that Ip would protect him if he kept quiet. But then he remembered that Ip had killed Leon. And even though Leon had ratted on Thursday and threatened him and manipulated him, he knew that if he went under Ip's wing any longer he would be through and through a coward. If he came out of Pollsmoor he'd have nothing. He needed other people—he understood that—but he would be no good to anyone if he was owned. Leon was gone. It was only him now. Only him.

The rat skittered back into its crack when a guard came and called his name. His real name.

"Thursday Malaysius."

"Yeah." Thursday walked over to the gate, expecting to see Mush with his sleeves rolled up, ready to swing. Maybe this was beating time. Maybe it was his time to moan in the corner.

"Sign here."

The officer passed a sheet towards Thursday covered with fine print. He was too tired to read it. "What is it?"

"Release form. Just sign it."

Thursday signed and the officer unlocked the bars of the cell while Thursday composed his answer to Viljoen in his head. He would turn Ip in with conditions. Protections and such, and money to survive. He wanted those things.

He was marched out of the cell block, past the front desk, and right onto the bright morning street bustling with traffic. There were no cops there. Viljoen was nowhere to be seen. Instead, he saw an assured young black woman wearing a suit. She had finely braided black hair and a nose as wide as Thursdays with a stud in it. Her lashes were very long, very curled.

"I'd like to see the release form," she said.

The cop produced it. She read through it and crossed out two lines with a pen. "This is old language. It shouldn't be on here. Initial, please, Thursday." Thursday initialed next to the crossed-out lines. "Thank you."

Then she heeled across Main Road, Thursday keeping up, and stopped in front of a gunmetal hatchback. "Get in. I'll explain on the way." The doors locked on their own once he was inside. His eyes were still adjusting to the brightness of the day and he half-expected that rat from the cell to peer out of the air vents and gnaw on him. "I'm Constance Makeka. I'm an advocate and I paid your bail. I was hired by someone you will meet shortly. It's best to keep quiet until we get there."

By this, Thursday understood he shouldn't ask if Ip had paid for her.

"You're not free at the moment, so don't think about running away. That'll make things worse. I rifled a habeas corpus demand through

while Mush was gone, but once he gets in he'll be sorting through the paperwork and he'll try to call you in on a twenty-four-three." Anticipating his next question, she added: "That'll be in about a week."

They got onto the M5 and exited at the Kenilworth race track, then they drove until they arrived at a small shopping center near a railway line. There was a stationery store, an art shop, and a bar called Pineapple Jam. They went inside and there was the smell of stale beer and sour tequila. On top of this scent a deep fryer was sending out the aroma of fries. The tables were brightly painted and there were fake vines and birds, with a crude cabana thatch over the bar. They were the only ones in the bar besides the mopey waiter, which was probably for the best at eight-thirty in the morning. If you were drinking at that time, the rest of the day would be nothing but a struggle.

"We're early," the lawyer said. "My client will be here in fifteen minutes." She got up and ordered some things from the waiter. Thursday was so ravenous that he hoped she had ordered for him, too. With freedom the pain in his jaw was already melting away.

It dawned on him that he was about to see Ip, so he began reformulating the demands he had intended for Constable Viljoen so that he could use them on Ip. It was easier because he could use out-and-out blackmail. If Ip touched him, he'd tell Viljoen about the sword killing. Simple.

Ip wasn't the next person that opened the door, though. It was a teenage girl. He heard the growl of a motorcycle as it downshifted and the engine cut. She was about Thursday's height, wearing takkies and a pair of stretch jeans that showed long legs, and a flat, small bottom. Her chest was pert, not big but blessed, would likely remain that way her whole life. Her face confused him. He wanted her to be Chinese but she was not; her hair was thick and smooth like Ip's, but her skin was darker, her lips fuller, and her eyes were either gold or brown. In the sunlight maybe he could see them better. In the sunlight he would understand why he was breathing so fast.

"I ordered you some flatbread and a coffee," Constance said to the girl, suddenly matronly. "Did you want sour cream?"

"Extra."

The lawyer called the waiter over and ordered the extra sour cream. Finally the girl turned to look at Thursday. Gold in the eyes, he was sure of it. "My dad told me about you, Thursday. That you were good."

This was the girl, he thought, the girl that Chung was in love with! Never had he considered that she might be half-coloured or half-black, that she'd be like him. He felt a rush of flirtation, and he made his posture more confident. Her accent wasn't coloured, though. She used the word *mos* so many times that he had to filter them out as he listened.

"Go ahead, Constance," the girl said to her attorney.

The coffee arrived and all three of them sipped at it. The lawyer asked Thursday if he'd been abused in any way, psychologically or physically. Then she asked about Viljoen's line of questioning and the Rastas. He summarized what he could remember, but left out the part about Leon's death. He made it sound as if he was just a clueless man who didn't have the power to do anything. Neither of the women reacted to any of the charges, seemingly having heard them before. Rather, Constance grilled him again and again about the exact words he'd used.

"I can get the Rastas tossed out as witnesses on credibility alone—they're drug dealers. I'm guessing that's how they were brought in. But knowing Viljoen I also suspect that's not his line. Be precise, Thursday. In court these words will make a difference. Trident is as discretionary as can be. Any tidbit will be used. You told him you knew Leon but you never admitted to working with him?"

"Right."

"And Mr. Ip? You're sure you never said his name."

"I don't remember."

"What do you mean you don't remember?"

"I may have repeated his name after they asked me. Or something."

"That's it?" she asked. Thursday nodded. "I must be prepared for that. The conversation was probably taped. We must request the tapes to make sure they're not spliced. They're a vicious team. I'm lucky I got to you when I did. Mush has more complaints at the ICD than any other cop. Most of the guys don't survive the night."

So that was why Viljoen kept saying the day was in danger of ending, Thursday thought.

"That's all I said," he insisted.

"Okay. I'm finished, Seneca."

"Thank you, Constance. We'll be right out."

The attorney downed her coffee and left the restaurant. Then it was Thursday and a girl in a room with paintings of waves on a beach on the walls. In her presence, he wouldn't have been surprised if one of the waves had lapped off the wall around their ankles. He could see why the goon Chung had fallen in love with the girl.

"Thursday, I'm running things now. Dad's out of the picture for the moment. Constance thinks she can get him out in two, maybe three years. So I'm running things."

"But you're only sixteen!"

"I'm nineteen. Like, I just look young. And I don't share his name. As far as we know, Viljoen doesn't know I exist. He knows you exist." She sipped her coffee, keeping her eyes on him as she lifted the rim to her lips. "I've had your apartment cleared out and cleaned."

"The perlies?"

"Dried." That meant the Rastas couldn't turn him in for smuggling. And that made Thursday feel free and, oddly, even more hungry. Seneca said Ip wanted him to go with him inside Pollsmoor unless Thursday convinced her. Rodney and his wife had also agreed to keep quiet. "They've got nothing hard to connect you to Dad now. Tell me why I should keep you. Dad said he'd rather have you go inside with him, but he said if you can convince me then he'll let you stay out."

Thursday tried to keep his wits about him. He made an effort to think of her lips as speaking words and not as blowing kisses. As he gathered himself, with two sips of coffee and a generous tear of the flat bread—which she glowered at—he remembered that he had more information than she did. She didn't know about Adrian. He would hold this close to himself. She was a geitjie, a girl who was bad news, and he would treat

her like a geitjie. He fixed an image of the shriveling perlies in his mind to stoke his anger.

He thought of how Leon would handle a girl like this, how he'd trip up her words and make her doubt. Leon would make her unsure whether she could see him again, and in so doing make her want to.

"You're saying he'll drag me in?"

She nodded.

"Okay. I reckon I'll go inside with your Dad."

She hesitated. "You want to go to jail?"

"Yeah," he said. "I don't want to run. We'll spend a few years together and then we can work outside again."

"Are you mad?"

"What?" he said, really acting now, getting into the role. "You said he could protect me!"

"But it's prison! There's violence. There's rape!"

"Your dad's not afraid, is he?"

"No! But Dad's not afraid of anything. He's powerful. You're not."

"First you said he could protect me. Now you say—"

Her lips swelled in her frustration and her eyes widened. She ordered more coffee, realizing that she'd given away the bluff. "Listen, Thursday. Let's not argue. All I want to know is what you can do for us." She looked like she was going to add more, and stopped.

"I can increase your profits."

"By inspecting a few shells?" she laughed. "I don't think so."

"No, not with shells. I found something that can make them grow faster."

"We're not farmers. We're distributors."

"Your dad liked the idea. You can ask him. We can take the small wild ones and grow them larger in a matter of a month. I found a special lamp that works like the moon. I think it will work."

She skeptically asked for a demonstration, and he explained that he couldn't because the cops had broken it while he was in custody.

She looked towards the door, where her attorney was presumably waiting. "Did they know what it was for?"

"No, they thought the lamp was a toy. I need to get more. And for that I need ten thousand rand."

"Nooitie. No ways."

"And," he added, "I need a share of the profits. That's full service I'm talking about. I check them out. I keep them alive. And I grow them bigger." He stuck his finger in the sour cream and licked it. "Mmm, this is good. Me and your dad partners."

She was laughing now. "He doesn't need you, Thursday. That's the whole point. He's not going to make you a partner. Bloody hell, you don't own a thing. You don't know any of the routes."

"You're right," Thursday agreed. "I don't have much. I'm a—" he tried to remember Constable Viljoen's metaphor—"a fruit guy. Might as well go inside with your dad. We'll be two peas in a pod." He paused. "That is, unless I don't go in."

She glared at him suspiciously. "What do you mean?"

"Maybe I know something. Maybe I know something about a guy called Adrian." He leaned back and looked at his empty plate. "I'm still hungry. What is this, Mexican food?"

"Cuban."

"Can you get the waitron to come over here? I love this stuff. I love Cuban food." She stared at him in disbelief, so he went to the bar to order some more flat bread and a steak assado. When he sat down, he said: "Why don't you ask your dad about Adrian? Why don't you tell him that this fellow called Adrian is enough to put him away for his life? Oh, yeah. And Chung, too. Do you know Chung?"

"Leave Chung alone!"

"Well, I know Chung. It'll put Chung away too. Ask your dad."

She folded her arms. "Blackmail."

"Colouredmail," he smiled.

"You're cruel!"

No, Thursday thought, cruel is what your dad did to Leon. Cruel is what you did to the perlies.

"All I want is ten thousand rand to buy some lamps and some profits. That's it."

"No ways," Seneca huffed. She slid out her chair and dropped a hundred rand note on the table.

"Wait," Thursday added. "Tell your dad that I've got friends who also know this broer Adrian. Anything happens to me, you know what friends do. They gossip. Plenty of gossip all around town about Adrian." He watched her go. He hadn't wanted to bully her, but he wasn't going to take orders from a nineteen-year-old geitjie either. He'd had enough. And part of him felt weak for picking on a girl and not saying the same thing to Ip's face when he'd had the chance, but if Ip was using her as a messenger then he'd use her right back. She may have been smart, but she wasn't smart enough—or cruel enough—to run things. Ip would pull the strings from the inside the mang just like he had in Observatory. Not a very considerate father.

The food arrived and Thursday requested a full steak knife. He felt serene for a moment, until he remembered Mush blinking at him back in the cell. It was as if Mush's blinking and squinting had crossed the natural distance that separates normal people. He could have walked out from the bathroom right then, opened a drawer behind the bar, and pulled out a moonlight lamp. Then Thursday would have covered his hands with his head like the Rastas.

Rubbing his jaw, Thursday cut at his assado and speared some rice on the fork. Then he stuffed his cheeks with the flatbread. The food warmed him and restored him, temporarily, to peace. How amazing, he thought, not to have tried the flatbread before. On the wall there was a photo of Che Guevarra, whom he'd seen a movie about on a motorcycle, and, munching on flatbread in a Cuban restaurant, he felt solidarity with the man, for he was charging into the face of power, liberating the abalone with dignity, keeping them out of the dryer. Flatbread like Che: unleavened, miraculous.

## NOTES ON THE STORY

The bulk of this novel was written while I was living in South Africa. As such, there are certain assumptions about a reader's knowledge of South African and Nigerian culture. Rather than use footnotes, which change the nature of the format, I decided to add this section to make it easier to understand the story.

South Africa contains a variety of ethnic groups and the constitution endorses eleven official languages. The Coloured community that lives around Cape Town, on the Western Coast of South Africa, is descended from a mix of Malaysian slaves, indigenous groups such as the Khoi Khoi, Khoi San, and Xhosa, and Europeans. They speak a rich dialect of Afrikaans—a language which is itself comprised of eighty percent Dutch and twenty percent indigenous and other languages. Today most youth also speak English, mixing the two languages in clever ways as the conversation demands. Apartheid, the national legislated program of minority white domination, officially began in 1948 and ended in 1994 with the election of the African National Congress. The anti-apartheid struggle included surrounding—or 'frontline'—nations and involved everything from peaceful protest, to economic boycotts, to violent sabotage. The suburb of Observatory may be found in Cape Town.

Nigeria is situated in the bend of West Africa. The country has over two hundred and fifty ethnic groups and many distinct languages. The main character of this book is from the Yoruba tribe, which is primarily situated in the Lagos region, but historically extended deep into the country and thrived across colonial boundaries into French-speaking Benin. The Yoruba religion contains many gods and spirits, but some Yoruba people are also Christian or Muslim. The variety of proverbs in this novel are generally Yoruba with certain proverbs borrowed from

other ethnic groups. Nigeria was once a British colony like South Africa. The majority of the population speaks English or pidgin, a fiery hodge-podge of indigenous languages and English. Part of this story is set between 1992 and 1993, when Nigeria experimented with democracy after decades of military rule. The country experienced a democratic election in 1998 and held its third election in 2011. At the time of this writing, ninety-eight percent of Nigeria's economy is fueled by exports of high-quality crude oil.

The last manned trip to the moon was the American National Aeronautics and Space Administration's Apollo 17 mission in 1975. Nigeria launched its first satellite, NigeriaSat-1, in 2003. A seventeen-year-old girl from Ebonyi state participated in Nigeria's first parabolic weightlessness flight in 2006 in a jetplane. She was called an astronaut.

The phrase "Bitter and black, halfway down, in the darkness" comes from Virginia Woolf in her stunningly beautiful 1927 novel *To the Lighthouse*. I had written a chapter around this passage, but it got cut because it wasn't any good. But the line lives on.

This is a work of fiction. It reflects reality inasmuch as it has to. Everything else is made up.