

Tea With Tigers

A Full Length Play in One Act

Synopsis: In 1995, South African President Nelson Mandela visited Betsie Verwoerd, the widow of the “Architect of Apartheid”, at her home in an all-white desert enclave. This play is not about that visit. It is, however, a fanciful, magical, non-linear musing on what might have happened that day.

Characters

PIET, a middle-aged white Afrikaner man

BETSIE, an old white Afrikaner woman

NELSON, an old African man, who also appears as a ZULU WARRIOR

Setting

Mrs. Betsie Verwoerd’s home in Orania, South Africa, and the minds and memories of each of the three characters

Time

August 15, 1995

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Tea with Tigers

Lights reveal BETSIE, an old white woman, embroidering a very, very large cloth. She wears a conservative dress. Above her, all throughout the space, hang letters of different sizes, but we may not be aware that they are letters. At first she is singing or humming an Afrikaner song “Oranje, blanje, blou” (“Orange, White, and Blue”).

Then we hear a tea kettle whistle. The whistling gets really, really loud. Why isn’t anyone attending to this tea kettle? Finally, someone does, and the sound stops. PIET is there, with a tea kettle in hand.

PIET

I am so sorry.

BETSIE

Poopsquirt.

PIET

You remind me of someone I used to know. Awfully loud, wasn’t it? You could have offturned it. You’re not caged. If you must know, I was teablending you. Piet’s Perfect Rooibos, I call it. Rooibos leaves, black currants, hibiscus flowers, a sugartouch. Rooibos purports assistance with nervous tension, allergies, and digestive problems!

BETSIE belches.

PIET

Exactly.

When I freshstart in Johannesburg I will open my own teashop – NO! My TEA EMPORIUM!!! With Piet’s Perfect Rooibos PINK CHALK BOARD BLASTED! 18 Rand – Grande. 12 Rand – Petite. Koeksisters gratis. Cinnamon and Coconut. Piet’s Perfect Rooibos!!!!

PIET, in his enthusiasm, spills the water for the tea.

BETSIE

Have you fucked up the tea again, Mimis?

PIET

I am NOT Mimis!

BETSIE

How hard can it be to teapot?

PIET

I will kettlestart anew.

PIET is gone to put more water on a stove.

BETSIE

Don't be long gone.

PIET

(off) I shall be back before you can namesay your embroidery. If you can remember it.

BETSIE

HA! "A History of the Great Trek of the Boer People from Capetown to the Transvaal, from 1834 to The Battle of Blood River in 1838, Whereby God and the Afrikaner People Tamed and Civilized South Africa from the Bantu Kaffirs."

PIET

(off) No wonder God's lived you to ninety-four. You've needed decades just to title embroider.

BETSIE

Poopsquirt! Just a titbit on the Battle of Blood River and I am stitchfinished. Almost twenty-eight workyears! And you know what that means. When I laststitch, my final thimblepush shall be the moment that // I shall

PIET is there again, looking at the embroidery.

PIET

I did not know our forebears took pigs on the Great Trek.

BETSIE

That is a dog. You are the pig. Who cannot even teapot.

PIET

It does liken me. Stitch my eyes a little bluer if you would.

BETSIE

It's a good dog likeness. I swear I stitchfinished this dog months ago. The fabric shows stitchrip here, as if preembroidered.

PIET

Today I shall brew you the most galubrious Rooibos! The soothebest I have ever made! So calming!

BETSIE

So unexpected! So rare! So invisible!

PIET

You old Tonguegrappler! I have made you countless teapots!

BETSIE

What's that smell?

PIET

Not again.

BETSIE

WHAT'S THAT SMELL??!!

PIET

I smell only the galubrious Rooibos leaves.

BETSIE

Momma's Throatfinger! It poopsmells! Did you poop in here again, Poopsquirt?

PIET

I have not done that even once.

BETSIE

You baffed then! Every day for the last week! Daily Momma's Throatfinger!

PIET

Blame your angry nose, Mohini, not me!

BETSIE

That is not my name!

PIET

That is who you are! Here. Whiff the Rooibos. Cleanse your olfactory bulbs!! Smell the lekker homeland leaves!!

Better?

BETSIE

A bit. The smell grandens and grossens.

PIET

The rooibos?

BETSIE

No, the poop. Every day a stenchcreep closer to my brainstem. You know what it is, Mimis? It's the deathstink. Closer with every thimblepush. Mimis, what if death comes before the last stitch? Embroidery contributes to the refinement and the beautification of the domestic atmosphere. Such an atmosphere distinguishes the culturally aware nation from the uncivilized. And if I do not finish my embroidery, then what??!!

PIET

Shh. Shh. It's all right, sweetprickle. You will stitchfinish. That I know. So anxious. You remind me of someone I used to know.

PIET comforts her by singing "Oranje, blanje, blou". Maybe she feels better and starts to sing along. At the end BETSIE kisses PIET passionately.

BETSIE

Oh, Hendrik!

PIET

Oh God.

BETSIE

Hendrik, my parents are expecting me at home in less than forty minutes!

PIET

I am not Hendrik, either, you crazy old dung beetle!

BETSIE

Oh, Hendrik! Even though you will laten me, I do think my parents will bestthink you. "Good for you, Betsie!" they will say. "He's Dutch by birth, but Boer by conviction! The very besthope ever!" You are the very besthope ever, Hendrik.

PIET

Hendrik is dead.

BETSIE

Not dead! It is only now speechtime, Hendrik. Ten past two.

PIET

You doffie!! I'm not your husband!

BETSIE

What a speech it will be! Once and for all the Bantus will be // relegated to the place that God has chosen for them

PIET

Mohini! Mrs. Betsie Verwoerd! I am not your dead husband! Nor am I your husbandkiller. I am Piet.

BETSIE

Piet.

PIET

Piet, your caretaker.

BETSIE

HA! A good try, Mimis. Reminding me of Hendrik so you could graunch me. If I told the children...

PIET

Their laughter would be heard in Johannesburg. Now I am going to teapot you. And then we need to prepare.

BETSIE

For what?

PIET

A visit.

BETSIE

What visit?

PIET

A helpvisit from someone.

BETSIE

I'll see no doctors.

PIET

This is no doctor. But it is one who can heal.

BETSIE

I am not in healingneed.

PIET

Look at me. Who am I?

BETSIE

Mimis the fat Greek poopsquirt.

PIET

Wrong. Do you recall this nice note?

PIET reaches up for one of the letters that is suspended above and reads.

“My Dear Mrs. Verwoerd, I do hope you will be able to join me for a luncheon in Capetown on 2 August 1995 to honor the widows of the great leaders of South Africa during the past fifty years of our nation’s history.”

BETSIE

I recall it. So what?

PIET

Do you recall what you wrote back?

BETSIE

I nixed.

PIET reaches for another letter from above.

PIET

“Dear Mr. President. I do so appreciate your kind invitation to luncheon on 2 August 1995. I do regret that, because of my advanced age, I shall be unable to attend. If you are ever in the area of Orania, I do hope you will stop and pay a call.”

Well...

BETSIE

No.

PIET

Yes.

BETSIE

No!

PIET

Yes!

PIET reaches for another letter.

PIET

“My Dear Mrs. Verwoerd. I shall be traveling in the area of Orania on the afternoon of 15 August and should be delighted to accept your kind invitation to visit if it is still convenient.”

When did this come?
BETSIE

A week ago.
PIET

That's the kak stench I've smelt! Rid me it now!
BETSIE

How can you even think that?
PIET

If it's from him, no wonder it stinks!
BETSIE

He is visiting and you will see him.
PIET

He is unwelcome here.
BETSIE

"If you are ever in the area of Orania, I do hope you will stop and pay a call."
PIET

I didn't mean it!
BETSIE

You will welcome him.
PIET

He's a Kaffir!
BETSIE

That term is no longer acceptable.
PIET

All right then. He's a Jim Fish.
BETSIE

Neither is that one!!
PIET

Kaffirs are not welcome in Orania.
BETSIE

PIET

He is the President!

BETSIE

No Kaffirs allowed! Whites only. Our town. Our rules.

PIET

He wants a race reconciliation!

BETSIE

HA!

PIET

Why “Ha!”?

BETSIE

He reigns supreme. For now. A kaffir living in Groote Schuur. Dining where Hendrik and I dined. Tub bathing, bed sleeping where Hendrik and I...

PIET

He doesn't live in Groote Schuur.

BETSIE

He might as well. Because of him I now filth live in Orania.

PIET

Orania is not so bad.

BETSIE

If you lust dust and dragonflies.

PIET

You're embarrassed to self show here.

BETSIE

I will not self show because he will not come. I will write him. Dear Mr. President. It is with great regret that I must inform you that I am unavailable to welcome you to my home in Orania on...what was the day he said?

PIET

The fifteenth of August.

BETSIE

What is the daydate?

PIET

The fifteenth of August.

BETSIE

Then you must fastphone him!

PIET

I have no idea how to –

BETSIE

Then figure it out!

PIET

He's on his way. He'll be here in a few moments.

BETSIE

WHAT?? Why didn't you tell me when his letter came? That Momma's Throatfinger letter that's been home-stinking // for a whole week

PIET

Because you would have written him back and told him not to come. Which is not what you wrote back.

BETSIE

What do you mean "which is not what you wrote back"?

PIET takes another letter.

PIET

"Dear Mr. President. It shall be my pleasure to take tea with you at my home in Orania –

BETSIE

Forgery! I should have you fired! I'll tell the children!

PIET

If you had carechildren they wouldn't have hired me.

BETSIE

Poopsquirt. Worse than poopsquirt! Sengi! Aardvark! Dunglicker! Assassin!

The tea kettle starts to whistle again.

Oh, now I clearsee!!! Torture me through co-conspirator invitation to teapot!!

PIET

Speaking of tea...I shall return with your rooibos. It will all be very brief. Tea, koeksisters, a quick photograph or two –

BETSIE

Photograph? HA!

PIET

My little instamatic.

BETSIE

Will disappear up your ass! What other forgeries are there? What else?

BETSIE pulls down a letter.

PIET

That is mineprivate!

YOUNG WOMAN's VOICE

Dear Piet,

Thursday at Boulder's Beach. We can hide behind the rocks from the dwankie Inspectors trying to get under my cozzie. Burn this note when you get it.

Love,

PIET

That is not your business!

BETSIE

Who's Piet?

PIET

I have to teapot!

BETSIE

Assassins, both!

PIET is gone to turn off the tea kettle, which ceases whistling.

BETSIE

At ten past two shall Hendrik give his speech.
The nation sits enthralled and so will I
While watching from the gallery high above.
My savior, our Protector, lays the law.

Then we'll ride home in comfort to Groote Schuur.
Get ready, Hendrik! Give the folks the words
They need to hang our people's hopes upon.
There's Hendrik. Striding proudly to the floor
A Parliament's parliamentarian
If ever such a statesman did exist.
I love to watch him stride up to the bench.
No greater force for good than...who's that man?
Is that the hairy messenger from Greece?
I don't know why you let him work for you.
There ought to be a law against fat Greeks.
What's that he's taking from his jacket. No!
A knife! No, stop him! Stop him! NOOOO!!!!!!!! Oh, no.

PIET is there, with the tea.

Why did you husbandkill me, Mimis?

PIET

Your tea is almost ready.

BETSIE

How did Hendrik ever hurt you, you fat Greek?

PIET

I am not fat or Greek or Mimis.

BETSIE

Four chest knife thrusts. God does not make mistakes, so why? WHY? Four thrusts. Was it a White one and a Black one and a Coloured one and an Indian one?

BETSIE keeps pounding on PIET's chest until the tea is spilled.

A White one and a Black one and a Coloured one and an Indian one!

A White one and a Black one and a Coloured one and an Indian one!

PIET

Stop it you crazy dung beetle! Stop it! I am not your dead husband or the man who deadhusbanded your dead husband. I am Piet. Piet the Poopsquirt who loves you and is bound and determined to soulsave you by teapotting to you and He Who Can Heal Us! He is coming today! And you will teapot with him!!

BETSIE

You love me?

PIET

And I am going to photograph you with my instamatic, which you will not ass stick me! So do a hairfix for Jesus' sake. You may be ninety-four but at least you can do a hairfix! Your hair...you remind me of someone // I used to know...

BETSIE

I can do a hairfix. Yes. My hair.

PIET

Now I shall teapot. Again!

The power goes off.

PIET

As soon as the electricity comes back on.

BETSIE

Sabotage! The spear terrorist again! Now we'll jailtight him! Another twenty-seven years!

PIET

It is not sabotage!

BETSIE

Once a terrorist, always a terrorist!

PIET

Probably two lilac-breasted rollers linelanded at once! God, get me out of Orania!! Or get me a gas stove!!

PIET is gone.

BETSIE

Hendrik! Hendrik!!

*Video of Hendrik F. Verwoerd appears.
Maybe BETSIE gathers the embroidery and
hangs it so that it forms a screen?*

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vPCln9czoys>

“Our policy is one which is called by an Afrikaans word “apartheid”. And I’m afraid that has been misunderstood so often. It could just as easily, and perhaps much better, be described as a policy of good-neighborliness. Accepting that there are differences between people, and that while these differences exist, and you have to acknowledge them, at the same time you can live together, aid one another, and that can best be done as you act as good neighbors always do.”

PIET is there, pretending to be HENDRIK.

PIET

Good-neighborliness, sweetprickle. Teapot with the man.

BETSIE

He stabkilled you!

PIET

He was jailtight then. Mimis stabkilled me.

BETSIE

Mimis was assassin by proxy! That man may not have stabkilled you, but the knife Mimis wielded was sharpened on his tongue!

PIET

Welcome the man.

BETSIE

The man who tramps daily across a carpet still bloodstained with you? The bushborn man who rises to Capetown while I born in Capetown prepare to bushdie?

PIET

Teapot with the man, and then...

BETSIE

Poison it!

PIET

Ask for the referendum we seek. Afrikaner self-determination. A people's state. The Volkstaat. Where Afrikaners can freedomlive. Here in Orania.

PIET begins again singing Oranje, blanje, blou.

BETSIE

This messplace. Lights out again.

The lights come on again.

PIET

God has brought him to Orania. Ask him to consider the Volkstaat with sympathy, to wisdom dispose the Afrikaner peoplefate. And pose for a nice photograph.

BETSIE

No photographs!!

PIET finishes the song. Then he is gone.

BETSIE

(noticing the embroidery) I know I stitchfinished that lilac-breasted roller! It was just to the left of Andries Praetorius's backsides!

PIET is there.

PIET

All fixed! Tea boils again. His helicopter lands in minutes...and you still haven't done a hairfix! You remind me // of someone

BETSIE

Do you know his Volkstaat thoughts?

PIET

No, but you can ask him yourself.

BETSIE

Yes, I will. He comes in. "What are your Volkstaat thoughts?"

PIET

But not right away.

BETSIE

Why not?

PIET

It would be rude.

BETSIE

He's busy. I'm busy.

PIET

You're not busy.

BETSIE indicates the embroidery.

PIET

Bosh! You can't politics right away. Here, let's chatpractice. I'll be He Who Can Heal Us. And you be...you. *(as Nelson)* Good afternoon, Mrs. Verwoerd.

BETSIE

Good afternoon, John.

PIET

You can't call him John!

We've always called kaffirs "John".

BETSIE

Call him Mr. President.

PIET

Oh, I couldn't do that to his face.

BETSIE

It's his title.

PIET

He husbandkilled me.

BETSIE

He did NOT –

PIET

Through you, poopsquirt. His fat Greek vehicle!

BETSIE

Oh, for dog's sake. Then just say, "Good afternoon."

PIET

Good afternoon.

BETSIE

(as Nelson) It is a great pleasure to finally meet you.

PIET

You're a fucking liar.

BETSIE

Mohini!

PIET

He hates me.

BETSIE

He hates no one.

PIET

You don't know him.

BETSIE

PIET

I have heard him.

BETSIE

So you have heard politicianspeak?!

PIET

Says a politicianwidow?

BETSIE

Hendrik understood struggle.

PIET

(as Nelson) It is a great pleasure to finally meet you. *(as Piet)* And if you call him a fucking liar, will he give you the Volkstaat?

BETSIE

And you, likewise.

PIET

(as Nelson) You have a lovely home.

BETSIE

My little kraal? It pales in comparison to Groote Schuur, where Hendrik and I used to –

PIET

He does not live in Groote Schuur! *(as Nelson)* You have a lovely home.

BETSIE

Again, fucking liar.

PIET

He will be here in less than ten minutes! Now watch and memorycommit this!

Good afternoon, Mrs. Verwoerd.

Good afternoon, Mr. President.

It is a great pleasure to finally meet you.

It is a great pleasure to meet you as well.

You have a lovely home.

That's very kind of you. May I teapot you?

I would love some tea.

My assistant, Piet, brews a delicious rooibos. He handblends.

I am very fond of rooibos tea. And blended by hand. Your assistant sounds like a remarkable man.

Oh, he is, he is. I would be lost without him.

HA!

BETSIE

Then I go get the tea.

PIET

Then what?

BETSIE

Then you just keep talking. Politely.

PIET

You can't leave the room.

BETSIE

The tea needs potting.

PIET

Pot it before he arrives.

BETSIE

It will colden.

PIET

Americans colddrink it.

BETSIE

We are not Americans and it is midwinter. Talk about gardening. He loves gardening. Tell him the terrible turniptrouble we've had and see if he has any advice. I will photograph the two of you turniptalking.

PIET

You will photograph your descending colon!!

BETSIE

It will still be prettier than your hair!! Turnips! Turnips!!

PIET

If we turniptalk how do I turn it to the Volkstaat? Well, Poopsquirt?

BETSIE

Turniptalk and then...an embroidery showing.

PIET

BETSIE

It is called “A History of the Great Trek of the Boer People from Capetown to the Transvaal, from 1834 to The Battle of Blood River in 1838, Whereby God and the Afrikaner People Tamed and Civilized South Africa from the Bantu Kaffirs.”

PIET

But not the title.

BETSIE

I am almost stitchfinished. See my wagons mountaincross, led by Andries Praetorius, my great-grandfather. See them approach the Buffalo River, a wagoncircle forming a laager.

Sunday, December 16, 1838. Like being newly born. Sky clear, weather fine and bright. Distantly, the Zulus approach.

We hear a Zulu war chant.

PIET is now a Boer soldier.

PIET

Commandant! Kaffirs on the horizon!

BETSIE

All patrols back to the laager! The kaffirs are coming!

A ZULU WARRIOR is there, with a shield and spear, chanting.

PIET

Commandant! Regiment after regiment surrounding us! Thirty thousand strong!

BETSIE

Fire the cannons!

Sound of cannons. Smoke, as well? The ZULU WARRIOR falls and gets up repeatedly.

The tea kettle starts to whistle again.

BETSIE

Keep firing! Zulus fall. Zulus retreat.

PIET

Zulus return!

BETSIE

Keep firing! Zulus fall. Zulus retreat.

PIET

Zulus return!

BETSIE

Open the gates! Attack! Attack!

PIET

The ammunition will run out!

BETSIE

Mounted men with muskets and godspeed will stomp spears and savages!

PIET “rides off to fight” and is gone. The tea whistle gets louder and louder, and becomes more prominent over the noises of rifles and the Zulu chants.

Zulus attack. Zulus repulsed. Ammunition stocks lower.
Zulus attack. Zulus repulsed. Ammunition stocks lower.
Zulus attack. Zulus repulsed. Ammunition stocks...gone.

Zulus...

Zulus...

The ZULU WARRIOR falls one last time.

The tea whistle is turned off.

Zulus beaten back, crossing the river, now red with the blood of three thousand.

The ZULU WARRIOR is gone.

The Battle of Blood River. Not one Boer killed!! God does not make mistakes.

PIET is there, with the teapot.

PIET

I suggest showing him your birds instead. Or the pig that likens me. I'd avoid the bloody Zulus.

BETSIE

He's a Xhosa. He's not a Zulu.

PIET

I know that. But still. And don't tell him you're almost stitchfinished.

BETSIE

I am almost stitchfinished. And, at my last thimblepush, // I shall

PIET

What's with that sparse area over there? By the Vaal River?

BETSIE

It was...I had baobabs and bushwillows all throughout this area. And lilac-breasted rollers flying above them. There was jackalberry here, and weeping Boer bean there.

Sound of a helicopter.

PIET

You're not close to being finished at all! But the tea is! And listen! He Who Can Heal Us has arrived!

BETSIE

Look at this! You can see that there were stitches there, all through this area.

PIET

Isn't this exciting? Look, there he is! There he is!!

BETSIE

Stitchrips! Embroidery sabotage! Hendrik! Hendrik!!

PIET

Don't Hendrikholler! He Who Can Heal Us is here!

BETSIE

It's you, Mimis! You stitchripped me!

PIET

I'm not Mimis! Now pullgather yourself! The President is homecoming you in twenty seconds!

BETSIE

Someone did it. Someone stitchripped me. A saboteur. Someone who can't stand Zulu bloodwitness in the river. Someone who wants to fabricdestroy South Africa.

NELSON is there. He wears a colorful, patterned silk shirt and dark green trousers. He carries a large box. He looks a lot like the ZULU WARRIOR.

BETSIE

(to NELSON) You StitchSabotaged me!

BETSIE, in her rage, runs into PIET, and PIET drops the teapot.

And YOU fucked up the tea again!

BETSIE is gone.

PIET

This is not how we planned it.

NELSON

I'm afraid I may have come at a bad time.

PIET

She's ninety-four. There really are no good times. It's me she maddens at, not you. Please don't go!

NELSON

I am happy to stay, but if she is upset –

PIET

She's always upset. Once a day she bedroomsulks to pace. Back and forth. Back and forth! Figure eights, really. An infinity sign, that's her tracepattern. She's carpetworn an infinity sign. I warn her, "I have half a mind to ink your shoebottoms so you see your tracks, your ridiculous figure eight, day in day out, cagestuck. If I soleinked your shoes you'd pacequit quick enough, you old dung beetle!" I call her an old dung beetle but I'm very ladyfond. It's my dual nature. I hate her but I'd be lost without her, or I'd be jaitight without her, but in reality SHE's the jaitight one and you would know all about that -

Sorry. I am hypertalking.

NELSON

It's all quite instructive.

PIET

I should get her to politegreet you. Where are my manners? Shall I teapot you? I brew galubrious tea.

NELSON

Since you ask, I would prefer coffee.

PIET

Coffee! Of course, coffee. Do homemake yourself. I shall teapot you...coffeepot you. I promise you, I will do everything in my power so that you leave with what you came for.

NELSON

You know what I have come for?

PIET

I know.

NELSON

How do you know?

PIET

I don't liken like I know but I have a dual nature and I visitprayed you. If all goes well, the three of us shall leave this tea...coffee...changed forever. Three battered tattered shattered lives in tact once more. And it shall go well.

BETSIE (*off stage*)

That Kaffir is a Stitchripper!!

PIET

No, really, it shall. It starts with tea...coffee. And cageextracting Mohini.

PIET is gone.

NELSON notices the letters that are hanging from the ceiling. He thinks about looking at some of them. No, they are private. He looks at the embroidery. Is that private, too? No, so he looks at it. We hear the Zulu war chant and the sound of cannons and gunfire once more. Suddenly, PIET is there with BETSIE. PIET carries a tray of koeksisters (cookies).

BETSIE

I told you he was a Stitchripper!

PIET

Mohini! No!!

BETSIE is gone.

PIET

Oh, here, have a koeksister!

PIET follows after her.

NELSON does not eat a koeksister. Instead, he gets closer to looking at one of the letters. As he gets closer to one, he hears the song “Amajoni”, a song he and fellow prisoners would sing. He is greatly tempted to take down and read the letter, but then PIET and BETSIE are there. PIET now has a camera – his instamatic!

PIET

Here we are!

NELSON

Mrs. Verwoerd, it is lovely to meet you.

BETSIE

You’re a fucking –

PIET

WHAT DID I SAY??

BETSIE

The pleasure is mine.

NELSON

I have brought you a small remembrance as thanks for your kind hospitality.

PIET

How kind of you. Isn’t that kind of him, Mrs. Verwoerd?

NELSON

It is something I think you do not have much of here in Orania.

BETSIE

We have self-sufficiency in Orania. We need no else.

BETSIE opens the box. It contains a bird cage with two lilac-breasted rollers inside.

PIET

Isn’t that nice! You’re right, we certainly don’t see these beautiful birds much anymore! What a timeful then-back-then reminder. Sing, little wingthings! Sing! Oh, well. At least let me photograph you two...

BETSIE

Momma's Throatfinger!

BETSIE, overcome with stench, screams in horror and anger at the cage, throwing it with more force than might be expected from a ninety-four year old. She is gone. PIET retrieves the cage.

PIET

Oh dear. I will shoeink you, Mohini! (to NELSON) Tea's almost potted.

NELSON

Coffee.

PIET

Coffee! Yes, coffee.

PIET is gone, along with the cage. NELSON is desperately curious about the letters. He feels he should not peek. He peeks at the lowest hanging one anyway. It seems to be playing one of the Afrikaner tunes from earlier.

YOUNG WOMAN's VOICE

Dear Piet,

No inspectors at Scarborough Beach on Fridays. I've told my ouballie I'm off with my chommies for the day. Burn this note when you get it.

Love,

Helena.

NELSON looks at another letter. A British woman's voice is heard.

OLDER WOMAN's VOICE

To the Honorable Hendrik F. Verwoerd
From Barbara Castle, MP
Mister Prime Minister

It is with great regret and consternation that I learned today of the conviction of the seven Rivonia co-defendants on charges of high treason against your government. Stop. As a longstanding member of the British Parliament I urge you to do all in your power to see that clemency is extended towards those only wishing to express their political opinions in your nation. Stop.

PIET is there, as a prison warden, with a gun.

PIET

Stop!

You are hereby charged with crimes against the state. You have looked at Prime Minister Verwoerd's personal correspondence. The sentence? Twenty-seven years in prison.

Strip.

NELSON takes off his shirt, trousers, socks and shoes. PIET throws him a thin jersey, khaki shorts and canvas jacket, which he puts on.

Move!

PIET orders NELSON around the stage, using his gun to indicate where NELSON should march.

Halt!

PIET throws NELSON a thin blanket. PIET is gone.

NELSON paces the dimensions of his cell: six feet by six feet. The cell has a one square foot window with bars. He lies down.

PIET is there with a fourteen pound hammer.

Wake up!!

PIET hands NELSON the hammer. NELSON breaks stones.

A voice cries out, "Amandla!" (Power!)

NELSON

Ngawethu! (*To us!*)

VOICES

Amandla! Ngawethu! Amandla! Ngawethu!

THE VOICES turn into Amajoni, the song we heard before. NELSON continues to break the rocks and sing.

PIET is there.

PIET

Silence!! We have received a letter for you. But we cannot give it to you.

PIET is gone.

NELSON reaches up for a letter in an envelope. It is an enormous struggle. He opens it. Whole sections have been razored out of it.

NELSON

(reading) Dear Nelson, I hope you are well. I am...Zini is growing...Zindzi is now in school in...I am applying for a permit to visit you on...I have bought a new dress for my next visit...

PIET is there.

PIET

Time up!!

The letter disappears.

The tea kettle starts to whistle.

NELSON

I demand that I be allowed to wear long trousers.

PIET

Die kaffir op sy plek! *(The N*** in his place!)*

NELSON

I am a grown man! Grown men wear long trousers.

*PIET reluctantly tosses him a pair of long trousers.
NELSON puts them on.*

The tea kettle is louder.

NELSON

Do the others also have long trousers?

PIET

Kaffir, you will shit today!

NELSON

If all African prisoners do not have long trousers, then take these back!

NELSON takes off the trousers.

PIET

You say you want long pants and then you don't want them when we give them to you.

NELSON

Take them back.

PIET balks at touching trousers worn by a black man.

The tea kettle is really, really loud.

NELSON

If you are willing to give me long trousers, why not give them to everyone else?

PIET

Very well.

The tea kettle stops.

PIET is gone. NELSON puts on the trousers. PIET is there with a coffee mug.

Just to show there are no hard feelings, here is your coffee.

PIET places the coffee mug on the ground. He drops his pants and appears to urinate near the coffee mug. He finishes, picks up the coffee mug, and he's now the "real-time" PIET, not the prison guard.

I forgot. Do you coffeetake anything?

NELSON

Black.

PIET

I hope you don't mind instant. Will this mug do?

NELSON

You remind me of someone I used to know.

PIET

You remind me of someone I used to know. Your coffee will soon be potted.

PIET is gone. NELSON dresses as he was before. NELSON looks closely at more of the hanging letters. He wants to open another, but he thinks better of it. What might the next one bring?

We hear a crash and a loud scream from PIET. Then PIET is there.

PIET

Minicrash!

NELSON

If coffee is too much trouble...

PIET

No, no. It will just take a moment. I do have to tell you I teapot better than I coffeepot.

NELSON

Your dual nature?

PIET

Precisely. When I freshstart in Jo'burg I will open my very own Tea Emporium. Perhaps you will honor me in being my customer?

NELSON

How is Mrs. Verwoerd?

PIET

Ah, Mrs. Verwoerd...

NELSON

Why did the birds upset her?

PIET

With Mohini you never know.

NELSON

Why do you call her "Mohini"?

PIET

I will later tell you. Mrs. Verwoerd's situation is highly complicated. I must coffeepot you.

NELSON

I would rather hear about Mrs. Verwoerd's highly complicated situation.

PIET

Coffeepotting would be so much easier.

NELSON

Given the apparent complexity of the coffee situation, that suggests that Mrs. Verwoerd's situation is highly complicated indeed.

PIET

It is. And you need Mrs. Verwoerd more than you need coffee.

NELSON

I do. As do you it seems. Why do you stay here in Orania, in the middle of nowhere, when you could easily leave tomorrow for Johannesburg?

PIET

I can't just job-land in Johannesburg tomorrow.

NELSON

With a letter of recommendation from Mrs. Betsie Verwoerd, how could you not?

PIET

Do you think she would write me a recommendation letter?

NELSON

You could forge it. Like the letter you wrote from her to me.

PIET

How did you know?

NELSON

"If you are ever in the area of Orania, I do hope you will stop and pay a call."

PIET

She really did write that!

NELSON

I know. And I called her bluff when I wrote back. "My Dear Mrs. Verwoerd. I shall be traveling in the area of Orania on the afternoon of 15 August and should be delighted to accept your kind invitation to visit if it is still convenient." But I knew she would not say yes.

PIET

Then why bluffcall her?

NELSON

There is always hope for a miracle.

PIET

Happy to provide one.

NELSON

You say you know why I need to be here.

PIET

Your life is at stake.

NELSON

You are observant. Are you sure we have never met?

PIET

Perhaps in another life.

NELSON

Your dual nature again.

PIET

You remind me of someone I used to know.

NELSON

How is my life at stake?

PIET

Reconcile with her and you forgive yourself for missing your mother's funeral.

We hear "Amajoni". PIET is the prison guard again. He takes another letter from above.

A letter for you, prisoner! No need for you to read it. I'll tell you. Your mother is dead. And you cannot leave to bury her.

NELSON

Not just my mother.

PIET takes other letters as he torments NELSON.

PIET

Your daughter is to marry. You cannot go.

Your grandchild is born. You cannot see him.

Your son is dead. You cannot go to his funeral.

It's not that we don't trust you. Others might help you escape.

NELSON

A Xhosa man attends to his family.

PIET

Surely a Xhosa man can be forgiven if he sacrifices his family for something so much greater. What is it you Kaffirs call it? Ubuntu? Your "community spirit"?

NELSON

Have I made the right choice in putting the people's welfare even before that of my own family?

PIET returns the letters and is no longer the prison guard; he returns to being PIET. We no longer hear "Amajoni".

PIET

You have, if the people truly benefit. You have, if you can end this racemadness. Your mother, your children, your grandchildren...they forgive you if you can nationheal. If you can nationheal, you forgive yourself.

And the healing begins with this.

PIET indicates his camera.

President He Who Can Heal Us, handholding a smiling Betsie Verwoerd. Teapotting, at her home in the all-white enclave of Orania.

(as Nelson) It was a delicious rooibos.

(as Betsie) My assistant handblends the most wonderful rooibos.

Two fierce warriors now at peace.

A smile that will start to soothe three and a half madness centuries. Hands to heal us all.

Did I get that right?

NELSON

I am having coffee, not tea.

PIET

Other than that?

Yes, I letterforged to bring you here, Madiba. May I call you that?

NELSON

You may. You remind me // of someone

PIET

I letterforged so I could take the photograph that starts to soothe three and a half madness centuries.

NELSON

That is very noble of you. I cannot thank you enough. I shall be a frequent customer in Johannesburg.

PIET

I have a dual nature. It is not purely noble.

NELSON

Ah. Your life is at stake then, too.

PIET

Indeed.

NELSON

Tell me why your life is at stake in this moment.

PIET

You notice she does not love me one hundred percent.

NELSON

I picked up on that, yes.

PIET

I did not come to Orania happily. I had trouble finding work. Legitimate work. I have...

NELSON

A dual nature?

PIET

A criminal record. I headstruck an Officer at the Internal Affairs Department. Do you care why?

NELSON

No.

PIET

I will later tell you. In any case, when Mrs. Verwoerd's son-in-law founds Orania a few years ago, I realize they'll need workers. White workers. And they can't afford to be choosy. Who wants to move to the Karoo, right? I come here, willing to landclear, bricklay, vegetable-grow.

But I'm terrible with turnips and I wallbuild at unimaginable angles, positively Pisa-like. They're about to boot me, but her children need someone to tend to her. And so...

NELSON

I hope it pays you well.

PIET

Enough. She's not immortal.

NELSON

She throws a bird cage with great force for ninety-four.

PIET

She's smelled Death approaching for weeks. "Momma's Throatfinger!"

NELSON

Perhaps the finger was for me. Don't look shocked. Mrs. Verwoerd's advice to Afrikaner mothers: "If white children of working mothers are cared for by blacks, it is natural that the white child will develop an attachment for his black 'mother'. Even the characteristic smell which is normally repulsive to a white person will become associated in the child's mind with the person with which he spends most of his time. Can this later repel him when he is grown-up?"

PIET

And yet you come to teapot with her.

NELSON

Coffeepot.

PIET

Coffeepot.

NELSON

My hatred is for the system, not people. She is as imprisoned as was I.

PIET

Exactly. Haunted by the memory of the memory of her husbandkilling. For which she blames you, by the way. And me.

NELSON

You?

PIET

She thinks I am Mimis.

Mimis? **NELSON**

Demetrios Tsafendas. **PIET**

Ah. Her husband's assassin. **NELSON**

His nickname was Mimis. **PIET**

At least she feels familiar enough to use a nickname. **NELSON**

Sometimes she thinks I'm Hendrik. But mostly just Mimis. Each day she replays Mimis' knife, Hendrik's blood, her pain. Twenty – eight years. **PIET**

Poor sparrow. I was only in prison for twenty-seven years. **NELSON**

BETSIE is there, embroidering and singing Oranje, Blanje Blou.

Mohini is jailtight from her own devising. **PIET**

Why do you call her Mohini? **NELSON**

I will later tell you. **PIET**

You had better tell me now why your life is at stake. **NELSON**

All patrols back to the laager! The kaffirs are coming! **BETSIE**

Stitch after stitch after thimblepush after thimblepush. Thirty thousand strong. **PIET**

More thread, Poopsquirt! Before the stench stanches me! Did you baffle in here again? **BETSIE**

Sound of cannons. Smoke, as well?

PIET

Three years we battle. She stitches by day...

BETSIE

I am coming, Hendrik! As soon as I am finished!

PIET

...And I rip out her stitches by night.

BETSIE

I know I finished that springbok!

PIET

But when she nightlocks the embroidery I cannot stitchrip, and she comes closer to stitchfinishing.

PIET and BETSIE may fight over the cloth.

Mrs. Verwoerd embroiders an hour. I disembroider a moment. Closer to Hendrik.
Mrs. Verwoerd embroiders a caravan. I disembroider a wagon wheel. Closer to Death.
Mrs. Verwoerd embroiders a battle. I disembroider a Zulu. Closer to Stench.

Stench...

Stench...

Zulus embroidered, slaughtered on linen, her fingers now red with the blood of three decades.

BETSIE is gone.

Her own Battle of Blood River.

NELSON

I should think you'd be happy to let her go, Stitchripper.

PIET

I cannot stand to see her die in torment, in agony from the twenty-eight year ravage of the Mimisdemon. I need to see her die in peace. I love her. I hate her! But I love her.

NELSON

Why do you love her? She abuses you mercilessly. Stop! Move! Halt! Wake up! Teapot! Poopsquirt!

PIET

My hatred is for the system, not people. Her prison has no bars. But if I can somehow get her to look at me and see Piet, not Mimis, but Piet, then I will know she is free. And then I will cease my stitchripping and let her embroidery finish. I miraclepray. And your letter arrives. And I forge a reply. So you could come and heal her!! And only you can heal her.

The tea kettle starts to whistle.

NELSON

I just came for a photograph.

PIET

You will have it!

NELSON

It does not seem likely at this point.

PIET

I have no doubt we can do it.

NELSON

And then I show you my gratitude by healing the mental illness of a ninety-four year-old woman who has been living with hallucinatory delusions for the past twenty-eight years?

PIET

In the next thirty minutes. She naps at half-past two.

NELSON

I'll need that coffee.

PIET

Coffee! Coming up! Are you sure you wouldn't like tea?

NELSON's face indicates his answer.

Coffee it is!

PIET is gone. The tea kettle ceases. NELSON looks up at the letters once more. He notices that another one of them seems to be playing one of the Afrikaner tunes from earlier. NELSON's curiosity gets the better of him and he looks at the letter with the Afrikaner anthem playing.

YOUNG WOMAN's VOICE

Dear Piet,

There's an old ginkgo tree near the top end of Zoo Lake Park. We can meet there at sunset. The tree is wide enough for you to put your arms around me and no one can see us graunch. Not even my ouballie and his three kilometer stare. Burn this note when you get it.

Love,

Helena.

PIET is there with BETSIE.

PIET

Here we are! All rested better.

NELSON

I do apologize for the –

PIET

Don't mention it. Mrs. Verwoerd will be happy if you don't mention it again.

NELSON

You are looking well, Mrs. Verwoerd.

BETSIE

You're // a -

PIET

Now, tea! And coffee! ReKettleing! Again.

BETSIE

Bring me some Simba chips.

PIET

What flavor?

BETSIE

The chutney ones.

PIET

We may be out.

BETSIE

Anything but the smoked beef!

PIET

Would you care for potato chips, Mr. President?

NELSON

Not with...yes. That would be lovely. The chutney are my favorite as well.

PIET

Tea, coffee, chutney chips. Tea, coffee, chutney chips.

BETSIE

Don't leave, poopsquirt!

PIET

The Volkstaat, Mohini. The Volkstaat!

PIET is gone.

There is a very long pause. BETSIE takes up her embroidery again. She sings another Afrikaner tune.

BETSIE

(singing) Die Transvalers is plesierig
Dit kan jy my glo
Hulle hou graag partytjies
En dan mak hulle so:

Eers draai nou die vrou tjie
End an draai haar ou man
Hy vat haar om die lyfie
En draai hul mooi saam

(The Transvalers are happy,
You can believe that.
They like to have parties,
And then they act like this.

First turns the girl
Then her partner turns
Then he puts his arm around her middle
And then they turn together.)

NELSON

(singing) Die Transvalers is plesierig
Dit kan jy my glo
Hulle hou graag partytjies
En dan mak hulle so:

NELSON takes BETSIE and tries to dance with her. She goes along with it until the third line, when he puts his arm around her waist, and she then breaks away.

Eers draai nou die vroutjie
End an draai haar ou man
Hy vat haar om die lyfie -

BETSIE returns to her embroidery. NELSON looks at it for a time.

NELSON

Those are lovely springboks.

They are springboks, are they not?

BETSIE

Of course they are springboks.

NELSON

Do you see many springboks in Orania?

BETSIE's expression says, "Of course, you idiot." There is a long, awkward pause.

NELSON

Do you believe the tiger is native to Africa, Mrs. Verwoerd?

BETSIE

I see he has taught you to mock me.

BETSIE is ready to leave with her embroidery.

NELSON

Mrs. Verwoerd, I do beg your pardon.

BETSIE

It's not enough that you birdtorment me.

NELSON

For that I do apologize.

BETSIE

Now you nerveslap me just like the poopsquirt does.

NELSON

I assure you –

BETSIE

Is that why you have come? To make fun of an old woman by talking of tigers?

NELSON

I was simply hoping to continue our conversation.

BETSIE

Then why debate tiger origins? What a stupid // topic of

NELSON

It was a subject that occupied our time while in prison.

BETSIE

It is not something I wish to consider while serving in mine.

NELSON

Your prison?

BETSIE

Perhaps our one commonthing. You do know what he's done, don't you?

NELSON

The poopsquirt?

BETSIE

HA! You are indeed as charming as they say.

NELSON

Perhaps if you could refresh my memory.

BETSIE

He husbandkilled me!

NELSON

For that I am sorry.

BETSIE

Claimed he had a talking tapeworm who told him to, the poopsquirt.

There's Hendrik. Striding proudly to the floor

A Parliament's parliamentarian

If ever such a statesman did exist.

I love to watch him stride up to the bench.
No greater force for good than...who's that man?
Is that the hairy messenger from Greece?
I don't know why you let him work for you.
There ought to be a law against fat Greeks
What's that he's taking from his jacket. No!
A knife! No, stop him! Stop him! NOOOO!!!!!!!! Oh, no.

How did you feel? You must have rejoiced.

A White one and a Black one and a Coloured one and an Indian one!
A White one and a Black one and a Coloured one and an Indian one!

*BETSIE continues her chant under the next section.
We hear "Amajoni". NELSON resumes breaking
stones. PIET is there, as the prison guard.*

PIET

Kaffirs, you rejoice to day but you will weep tonight! And what does your talk of tiger origins
get you? A charge of malingering. And the privilege of isolation!

*The music stops. NELSON is handcuffed, in
isolation. Letters from above dangle towards him.
Handcuffed, he cannot reach any of them.*

NELSON

Assassination is a primitive way of contending with an opponent.

*BETSIE stops her chant and there is complete
silence. NELSON and BETSIE are both frozen, in
grief, in isolation. We see the video of Hendrik once
again saying:*

*"Our policy is one which is called by an Afrikaans word "apartheid". And I'm afraid that has
been misunderstood so often. It could just as easily, and perhaps much better, be described as a
policy of good-neighborliness.*

Good-neighborliness.

Good-neighborliness.

(overlapping) Good-neighborliness.

Good-neighborliness.

Good-neighborliness.

Good-neighborliness.

PIET is there as PIET, with two packages of chips.

PIET

Could we be so lucky! Exactly two packages left of Simba Chips with Mrs. H.S. Ball's Chutney flavor! Don't worry, Mohini! I shall tell Henny to trucksend an extra carton.

BETSIE

Where is the damn tea?

PIET

Soon! Soon! Tea! Coffee!! (*whispering to BETSIE*) Volkstaat!

PIET is gone.

NELSON

When I was a boy in school, I thought that tigers were native to Africa. Why else would there be a Xhosa word for tiger? And to impress my friends I said that I had indeed seen a tiger in the bush not far from our village.

PIET is there, as a childhood friend.

PIET

There are no tigers in Africa.

NELSON

I tell you there are, David, and I can show you!

PIET

Very well then. Show me.

NELSON

And I led David Nkwonotho on a long hike through the bush.

PIET

We've been walking for hours, Nelson! Where's your tiger?

NELSON

Soon, David. Very soon.

PIET

You're a fool.

NELSON

Then if I am such a fool, why do you follow me?

PIET

I follow you because I very much wish for it to be true.

PIET is gone.

BETSIE

So there are no African tigers.

NELSON

They remain to be discovered.

BETSIE

Like Mimis' tea.

I have a request. Before I do...what do I call you?

NELSON

You may certainly call me Nelson.

BETSIE

No, I couldn't do that.

NELSON

An English teacher at my school when I was young assigned me that name.

BETSIE

Pappa insisted I proper name things. What were you birthnamed?

NELSON

My father named me Rohilala. It means "troublemaker".

BETSIE

I can't possibly pronounce that.

NELSON

My nickname as a child was Tatomkhulu. Grandpa. Because I was very serious. And now I am a tatomkhulu.

BETSIE

I couldn't possibly pronounce that either.

NELSON

At my manhood ceremony I was given the name Dalibunga, a more traditional Xhosa name.

PIET is there with a tray with tea and coffee.

BETSIE

These names! It was so much easier when we just called all you kaffirs “John”.

PIET drops the tray. He picks up the mess and is gone.

NELSON

Names are indeed strange things. I am told that when “Free Mandela” posters went up in London, most young people thought my Christian name was Free. And now they call me “Mdala”. Old man.

BETSIE

Those are not proper names.

NELSON

Then there is one other. It is proper to call me Madiba, the name of my clan.

BETSIE

Madiba.

NELSON

Do you have other names?

BETSIE

No. I am Elizabeth Schoombie Verwoerd. But you may namecall me Mrs. Verwoerd.

NELSON

You grandchildren...do they call you Ouma?

BETSIE

You may namecall me Mrs. Verwoerd.

NELSON

May I ask you a favor, Mrs. Verwoerd?

BETSIE

Of course.

NELSON

I would be so honored if I could sit with you for a photograph.

BETSIE

I don't photograph sit.

NELSON

I think the people would like to see it.

BETSIE

I need to do a hairfix.

NELSON

I think it would calm their fears.

BETSIE

The people have fears?

NELSON

That the Battle of Blood River shall be run in reverse.

We hear the ZULU war chant again.

Cannons fire.

PIET is now a modern Boer farmer.

PIET

All patrols back to the laager! The kaffirs are coming!

NELSON

There is anger and deep resentment in our land.

PIET

Locked and loaded!

Sound of gunfire. Smoke, as well. PIET falls and gets up repeatedly. All the while he is singing one of the Afrikaner anthems as the Zulu chant plays.

The tea kettle starts to whistle again.

NELSON

Years of fierce battle. Whites will fall. Blacks will fall.

PIET

Open the gates! Machine guns and machine gods will stomp savages! Will the ammunition hold out?

The tea whistle gets louder and louder, and becomes more prominent over the noises of rifles and the Zulu chants. PIET rises and falls as NELSON narrates.

NELSON

Blacks attack. Whites attack. Ammunition stocks higher. Understanding stocks lower.
Blacks attack. Whites attack. Ammunition stocks higher. Hope stocks lower.
Blacks attack. Whites attack. Hope and Understanding gone.

Understanding...

Hope...

PIET falls one last time and is gone.

The tea whistle is turned off.

Peace beaten back, crossing the river, now red with the blood of three million.

BETSIE

Oh, that. That won't happen, will it?

NELSON

Not if they see a picture of us.

BETSIE

Then we shall photograph sit.

PIET is there, with the teapot and the instamatic.

NELSON

A photograph of Madiba and Mrs. Verwoerd.

PIET prepares to take the photograph. As they are just about ready...

NELSON

May I ask why he calls you Mohini?

BETSIE

How dare you! HOW DARE YOU!

BETSIE is overcome by a smell. As she storms off, she, of course, upsets the teapot, again.

NELSON

At this point you really must explain why you call her Mohini.

PIET

Mohini was a white tiger. She lived for years in a twelve by twelve iron bar cement floor cage, daypacing. One day her zookeepers decided to build Mohini a beautiful new natural habitat – grass acres, tree hills, a drinkpond. They brought Mohini to the new habitat and released her. She corner retreated, jailtight, and spent the rest of her life daypacing, no hills, no trees, no drinkpond, just daypacing the same figure eight, barewearing infinity within a twelve by twelve square.

NELSON

I cannot free her. Only she can free herself.

BETSIE is there.

BETSIE

I am locking myself in my room.
I will finish the stitching tonight.
And no one will rip out my stitches.
Tomorrow I'll be with my Hendrik.
You will never torment me again.
And goodbye, man with so many names.
I do think that the number of deaths
Will be counted in thousands, not millions.

PIET

You did not Volkstaat ask him!

BETSIE is gone.

I will start your teapotting again. Coffeepotting.

PIET is gone.

NELSON looks up at the letters once more. He notices again that one of them seems to be playing one of the Afrikaner tunes from earlier. NELSON's curiosity once again gets the better of him and he opens the letter with the Afrikaner anthem playing.

YOUNG WOMAN's VOICE

Dear Piet,

My ouballie says he'll call the kerels if he finds out we're still jolling. He says if he calls them then they'll only send you to prison and not me. I don't care. It's worth the risk to me. Burn this note when you get it.

Love,

Helena.

PIET is there.

NELSON

You always bring her back.

PIET

She's jaitighted herself. With a thimblebox and threadskeins and the will of a droughtstricken baobab root. She will stitchfinish now, she will cross over to join Hendrik and that will be that.

NELSON

You went to prison for Helena.

PIET

Do you have a pencil?

*NELSON hands PIET a pencil from his pocket.
PIET places the pencil in his hair and it falls out.*

White.

PIET places the pencil in Nelson's hair. It stays.

Black.

NELSON

As if you needed the Pencil Test for that.

PIET

Helena.

*PIET places the pencil in one of HELENA's letters.
It stays.*

PIET

Coloured.

PIET takes down a different letter.

To the Department of Internal Affairs. I hereby wish to have my race classification on my racial identity card changed from White to Coloured. Sincerely, Pieter De Kuyper.

PIET takes down another letter.

Dear Mr. De Kuyper, we have reviewed your petition for race re-classification and regretfully deny your request.

PIET takes down another letter.

To the Department of Internal Affairs, I insist that you reclassify me as Coloured immediately as I have at least one Coloured ancestor on my mother's side.

BETSIE is there, as Helena, in a swimsuit.

BETSIE

I smaak you stukkend, Piet! You like my lekker cozzie, ja nee? Yoh, there's the dwankie Inspector!

NELSON is the Inspector.

NELSON

Lekker stukkie, bra! Let's do a little check of the cozzie.

PIET takes down another letter. NELSON tries to peek under Helena's swimsuit as the following letter is read. The tea kettle starts to whistle.

PIET

Dear Mr. De Kuyper, everyone in South Africa has at least one Coloured ancestor on their mother's side. That's not the point. You pass the pencil test and that is all that matters. Dr. Hendrik Verwoerd knew what he was doing when he drafted the Sexual Offences Act of 1957 and you are as white as the snow on Table Mountain in August and Helena is Coloured and unless you wish seven years in prison you will refrain from your immoral and indecent acts with her -

NELSON

Here, let's have a look. Oh, I don't give rocks about your poes, stukkie. Just need to see your skin. Have you caught a good tan, or are you passing? Just a little look under the cozzie is all I need. Give us a little look here. Are you passing? Are you passing? Are you passing? Are you passing? (*etc.*)

PIET punches the letter with great force. It falls to the ground. NELSON falls to the ground, then is gone. BETSIE is gone. The tea kettle whistle stops.

PIET takes down another letter.

PIET

Pieter De Kuyper, you are hereby convicted of assault and sentenced to 18 months in Johannesburg Prison.

A video of Hendrik Verwoerd appears.

Video 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xHgU1Jw6oyw>

"What is our future? Now I want to make quite sure, that I will not be misunderstood. I am not using this occasion as a platform for putting forward ideas other than those which I hope will help to bring unity, prosperity and happiness to South Africa. I see our Republic, the Republic of the English and the Afrikaans-speaking alike, governing what is the heritage of white South Africa joined together as one by the very vast system at this time, through this unity, cooperating in solving its special problem of race relations, so totally different from problems anywhere else in the world."

BETSIE is there, as herself, with the embroidery.

BETSIE

I turned off your tea, Mimis.

PIET

Are you close to stitchfinishing?

BETSIE

I used the water to birdboil.

PIET

Dung beetle!

BETSIE

I'm joking. I only said that to see if it would whiten him.

I am almost stitchfinished. Sunday, December 16, 1838. Like being newly born. Sky clear, weather fine and bright. And in the distance, the Zulus approach.

We hear the Zulu war chant. PIET is now a Boer soldier.

PIET

Commandant! Kaffirs on the horizon!

BETSIE

All patrols back to the laager! The kaffirs are coming!

The ZULU WARRIOR is there, with a shield and spear, chanting. He sings Tshotsholoza, another freedom song.

PIET

Commandant! Regiment after regiment surrounding us! Thirty thousand strong!

BETSIE

Fire the cannons!

I said, Fire the cannons!

PIET

No, Commandant.

BETSIE

Fire the cannons, poopsquirt!

PIET

No cannons! No muskets! No machine guns!

BETSIE

Cannons then muskets then blood then gold mines then homelands and good-neighborliness then “Die Transvaalers is plesierig, dit kan jy my glo”.

PIET

(overlapping) Section 16. It shall be a criminal offense for sexual relations to occur between any white and non-white persons with a penalty of up to seven years in prison.

BETSIE

Fire the cannons! Open the gates! Attack the kaffirs!

PIET

Fire on me!

BETSIE

Open the gates! Attack! Attack!

PIET

No attack!

PIET starts ripping stitches out of the embroidery.

BETSIE

Attack! So there can be kaffirs and coloureds and Groote Schuur and goodneighborliness and John and Jim Fish and “Oranje, Blanje, Blou” and koeksisters for tea and Simba chips with Mrs. H.S. Ball’s chutney flavor and Hendrik and the Sexual Offences Act of 1957 and my embroidery! My embroidery!

PIET

(repeating and overlapping) No attack! No attack! No attack!

The ZULU WARRIOR is gone.

BETSIE

Embroidery contributes to the refinement and the beautification of the domestic atmosphere!
Such an atmosphere distinguishes the culturally aware nation from the uncivilized!

PIET

There's your legacy! But let's restart it! This time, title it:" A History of the Great Trek of the Boer People from Capetown to the Transvaal, from 1834 to The Battle of Blood River in 1838, Whereby The World's Most Heinous System of Institutionalized Oppression Was Justified Under The Guise of The Divine Will of God."

NELSON is there.

NELSON

I took the liberty of starting to brew the tea. And the coffee.

BETSIE

You are the President! Arrest him and throw him in jail!

PIET

Stitchripping is not a criminal offense!

BETSIE

He belongs jailtight for husbandkilling me!

PIET

I've already been jailtight because of your dead husband. And so has he!

NELSON

Give me the stitching.

I spent twenty-seven years in prison. Towards the end, they provided me with my own cottage, a cook and housekeeper, Officer Swart.

PIET is Officer Swart.

PIET

How many times have I told you, you are not to do the dishes or make your own bed? That is my responsibility.

NELSON

I have been making my own bed for so long it has become a reflex.

PIET

Today you walk out a free man.

NELSON

Officer Swart, I thank you for your companionship.

Photographers...television cameras...what is that dark, furry object? Some newfangled weapon developed while I have been in prison?

PIET

It's a microphone.

NELSON raises his right fist. There is a roar.

NELSON

And as I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew if I didn't leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I'd still be in prison.

A long pause.

PIET

Thank you for starting the teapotting. And coffeepotting.

PIET is gone.

NELSON

Have you a thimble, Mrs. Verwoerd? I still have a few minutes before I need to depart, and I can help you get started on repairing your embroidery.

BETSIE

You embroider?

NELSON

I sewed in prison. I am a thimblepusher.

BETSIE

Here.

BETSIE supplies NELSON with a thimble, needle and thread.

We will start here.

NELSON

Are you sure?

BETSIE

I am sure.

NELSON

This will not upset you?

BETSIE

Why would stitching a flock of lilac-breasted rollers upset me?

NELSON

Because the live ones I brought you as a gift seemed to upset you greatly.

BETSIE

Just sew.

NELSON and BETSIE embroider together.

NELSON

When I was a child we called them rainbow birds.

BETSIE

I was allowed only to proper name things.

NELSON

In my opinion, it is our nation's most beautiful bird. So many colors.

BETSIE

So many workhours.

NELSON

But worth it. They are increasingly rare.

BETSIE

They are humanshy. I saw one as a child. With Pappa, driving up north one day, not far from Orania, I think. He stops the car; we see one treeperched. "Take my binoculars," he says. And there it is. Like a rainbow. Lilac-breast, just as advertised. Blue tail. Green head. And doing this strange branchtop dance. Its head standing absolutely stationary. And its body just gyrating around and around and around. "It's matelooking," Pappa says.

BETSIE does the lilac-breasted roller's dance, as described. This could be uncomfortable.

NELSON

Does it find one?

BETSIE

I don't know. It flew away. I never saw one again. Until today.

NELSON

Were you really going to boil them?

BETSIE

No! I like to shock Mimis. He thinks I'm mad. HA!

NELSON

I am assured they are a mating pair. Shall we have a look at them? To help with the accuracy of the stitching.

BETSIE

I know well how they liken. But if *you* need to...

NELSON

Piet? Piet, can you bring in the birds?

PIET is there with the bird cage. Then he's gone.

NELSON

Thank you, Piet. They are not doing that interesting dance. They remind me of //someone

BETSIE

Of course not! They dance when matelooking, not when they're near one.

NELSON

This might make a lovely photograph.

BETSIE

It might at that.

NELSON

Shall I call Piet?

BETSIE

Piet?

NELSON

The man who takes care of you.

BETSIE

The Poopsquirt? He reminds me // of someone

NELSON

(calling off) Piet?

PIET (*offstage*)

I AM TEAPOTTING!!

NELSON

Might we trouble you to bring your Instamatic camera?

BETSIE

Oh no...the stench! Not the stench!!

NELSON

Quickly, Piet!

BETSIE

UGGGGGGGh. Momma's Throatfinger!!!!!!

NELSON

Please, Mrs. Verwoerd, do not run off! We are so close!

BETSIE

So far!

NELSON

Here, smell...your cloth! Breathe through it. Use it as a filter. It should remind you.

*NELSON helps BETSIE breathe through the cloth.
As he does, he comforts her with singing:*

(singing) Die Transvalers is plesierig
Dit kan jy my glo
Hulle hou graag partytjies
En dan mak hulle so...

Better?

BETSIE

For now.

NELSON

Tell me, all this time...what have you been smelling?

BETSIE

My foul legacy stench. When you are gone, what will stay? Renown as the twentieth century's greatest leader! A nation savior a world light! And what is my legacy? Children, grand-children, yes, but what erected monuments? Just one.

The Betsie Verwoerd Sewage Pumping Station, Smartt Road, Goodwood, Cape Town, South Africa, 7640.

It smells awful. Momma's...

NELSON

I will urge that a school be named for you as well.

BETSIE

Perhaps the embroidery shall be legacy enough. WHERE IS THE FUCKING TEA???

NELSON

When he comes in with the tea, tell him you forgive him.

BETSIE

He has been cruel to me.

NELSON

Kindness to a cruel enemy is an act of moral supremacy.

BETSIE

He was this fat Greek. Claimed he had a talking tapeworm that made him do it.

NELSON

It must be very difficult to live with a talking tapeworm.

BETSIE

He was mad.

NELSON

The power of madness –

PIET is there, with the tea and coffee and camera.

PIET

Attempting to overcome the madness of power.

NELSON

There is nothing more powerful and self-serving than forgiveness.

*PIET serves the tea and coffee. It is galubrious.
Maybe the birds sing?*

*BETSIE takes out paper and pen and writes a short
letter.*

It's for Mimis.

BETSIE

PIET approaches BETSIE. BETSIE refuses him the letter.

It's for Mimis.

BETSIE

Poor Mimis.

BETSIE places the letter in the air above her with the other letters above the space.

This tea is very good, Piet. You make a galubrious cup of tea. On occasion.

PIET

My dual nature.

BETSIE

I am to ask you for the Volkstaat for the Afrikaners.

NELSON

It is something I will consider, Mrs. Verwoerd. I have but a few minutes. May I help you finish your rainbow birds?

BETSIE

They are called lilac-breasted rollers, but yes. You remind me....never mind.

NELSON and BETSIE embroider.

NELSON

May I ask once again for a photograph?

BETSIE

I would say yes, but I need to do a hairfix.

PIET

Your hair looks beautiful, Mrs. Verwoerd.

BETSIE

Piet. You're a fucking liar. But go ahead.

PIET takes the photograph.

NELSON

Are you a better photographer than a teapotter?

PIET takes several more photographs, just in case.

The sound of a helicopter.

NELSON

I'm afraid I must return to Cape Town.

BETSIE

You must leave us your address. I am told you do not reside at Groote Schuur.

NELSON writes his address on a piece of paper and places the paper in the air above him with the other letters above the space.

PIET

You haven't finished your coffee!

NELSON

Then I will have to visit you at your shop in Johannesburg. Galubrious. You remind me....

Thank you for a lovely visit, Mrs. Verwoerd. I will consider the Volkstaat with sympathy towards the Afrikaner people. Good luck with your embroidery. I hope you will send me a photograph of that as well.

NELSON is gone.

PIET pulls down a letter.

PIET

To whom it may concern. Mr. Pieter De Kuyper has been my dedicated assistant for the past three years. He's a perfect gentleman and makes galubrious pots of tea. Hire him at once.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Betsie Verwoerd.

PIET hands the letter to BETSIE for her signature. She signs it. He rehangs it. Maybe it flies away?

BETSIE

Do you believe the tiger is native to Africa, Piet? Perhaps I shall put a tiger in my embroidery.

*PIET hangs the cage of lilac-breasted rollers above
the space, with the letters, as Betsie embroiders.
The birds sing.*

END OF PLAY

