

## **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 baff 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**

