

**Goeie Maniere en Etiket**  
(Afrikaans thesis)

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## Referaatopsomming

Hierdie tweetalige versameling kortverhale kombineer sprokieselemente met die van die Bizarro-genre, om die waardesisteem wat van kleins af deur my konserwatiewe Afrikaanse opvoeding by my ingeprent is, te ondersoek. Die vier eienskappe van die sprokie word deur Kate Bernheimer in haar baanbrekende opstel *Fairy tale is form, Form is fairy tale* uitgelê as:

'n onbetrokke verteller, abstraksie, instinktiewe logika en genormaliseerde towerkuns. Na

my mening is dié vier eienskappe ook op die Bizarro-genre van toepassing. Hierdie oorvleuling is sigbaar in Bernheimer se fiksie en ook onder andere Lucy Corin en Aimee

Bender s'n – skrywers wat my werk beïnvloed het.



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## Erkenning

Die titel en alle aanhalings in skuinsdruk is uit *Goeie Maniere en Etiket* deur Emsie Schoeman (Human & Rousseau, 1981) geleen.

*Betoon liewer te veel respek as te min.*

## Pierewiet

Vir my negende verjaarsdag het ek 'n klein blou-en-grys budgie by my tannie gekry. Ma het gedink dat dit 'n baie goeie geskenk was want sy het in *Die Huisgenoot* geles dat troeteldiere kinders verantwoordelikheid leer. Ek was baie opgewonde oor my voëltjie vir wie ek woorde kon leer en wat op my skouer kon sit soos op 'n seerower s'n. Sy naam was Pierewiet en ek het vir hom 'n mooi hok met twee torings weerskante van 'n draad spitsdak uitgekies. Ek moes na Pierewiet kyk. Ek moes vir hom kos gee en sy hok oor die naweke skoonmaak. Dit was ook my werk om vir hom elke dag genoeg skoon water te gee.

'n Mens moet eers jou eie voëltjie hê voordat jy leer hoe dom hulle eintlik is. Ek het Pierewiet die woorde van Jan Pierewiet probeer leer, maar omdat hy so dom was het hy nooit verder as die eerste twee reëls gekom nie. Dag en nag het hy aangegaan *Jan Pierewiet, Jan Pierewiet*. Niks anders nie, net dit. Hy was 'n dom voël. Ek het hom ook van seerowers geleer, hoe hulle pappegaaie het wat op hulle skouers sit. Ek het vir hom prentjies van seerowers uit my groot storieboeke gewys en as ons saam televisie gekyk het, het ek hom van Sinbad en Kaptein Jack Sparrow vertel. Ek het Pierewiet gewys dat die pappegaaie van die seerowers op hulle skouers sit, maar elke keer as ek hom op my skouer gesit het, het hy weggevlieg. Maak nie saak hoeveel keer ek vir hom geskree het dat hy 'n slegte seerowerbudgie was nie, hy kon net nie leer om stil te sit nie.

Pa het my gewys hoe om sy vlerke te knip sodat hy nie meer kon wegvlieg nie. Daarna was dit my werk. Hy het my aangesê om versigtig te wees want as 'n mens die vlerkies te diep afsny, nie net die punte nie, sal dit bloei en die voëltjie seerkry. Elke keer as Pierewiet begin wegvlieg het, het ek sy vlerke vir hom geknip. Hy het baie gespartel en as ek sy vlerk wyd uitgetrek het, het hy my met sy bek geknyp. Ek het hom tussen my knieë vasgepen en met die kombuisskêr die punte afgesny. Die sagte grys vere het vloer toe geval en Pierewiet het vir dae daarna net in die hoek van sy hok gesit, vere opgepof, sy asemhaling aspris hard. As ek regtig kwaad was vir Pierewiet het ek per ongeluk sy vlerke dieper afgeknip. Hy het nie sy fluit gefluit nie en dan was hy weer seker wie die baas was. Selfs al het ek sy vlerke geknip, het hy nog steeds van my skouer afgeval en op die grond rondgefladder.

Party oggende het ek nie vir hom skoon water in sy hok gesit nie. Partykeer het ek ook nie vir hom skoon saad in sy hok gesit nie. Die leë doppies het 'n laag onder in die hok gemaak wat soos my oupa se koringlande geruik het. Stof en koring en suurstink. In die aande het ek 'n kombers oor sy hok gesit maar hy het net aangehou *Jan Pierewiet Jan Pierewiet*. Ek moes altyd dan eers sy hok met 'n stok slaan voordat hy sou stilbly. As ek onder die punt van die kombers ingekyk het, het hy in 'n hoekie gesit en hyg. Ek het nie daarvan gehou as

hy geraas het nie. Hoe meer ek vir hom ander woorde geskree het hoe meer het hy ge*Pierewiet Pierewiet*. Elke keer as ma my gevang het op hom skree of sy hok slaan het sy my die leviëte voorgelees. As sy my nie kon sien of hoor nie het ek hom 'n dom voël genoem.

Pierewiet het my elke keer geknyp as ek hom uit sy hok gehaal het, soms so hard dat ek gebloei het. Dan moes ek hom met my middelvinger op die bek skiet, herhaaldelik, tot hy skril geskree het. Ek het geweet as hy so skree, het hy geweet ek was sy baas. Ek het hom styf in my hand vasgehou, hom gedwing om my in die oë te kyk en hard in sy gesig geblaas. Hy het naderhand nie meer gespartel nie. Ek het hom terug in sy hok gesit as hy stil geraak het. Hy het altyd tog maar net weer in sy hoekie gaan sit en asemgehaal. Partykeer het hy homself so opgepof dat ek skaars sy bek of oë kon sien. Soms het hy ook net op sy een poot gestaan, asof hy my geterg het oor hy nie op my skouer wou sit nie. Ons het dan 'n speletjie gespeel waar ek hom bekruip het, hy het my nooit gesien kom nie. Ek het skielik sy hok geskud en hy het van sy stokkie afgeval. Dit was Pierewiet se gunsteling speletjie want hy het altyd maar weer later op sy stokkie gaan sit. Ma het altyd kom kyk hoe lekker ons twee saamspeel. Ek het mooi met Pierewiet gepraat en vir Ma 'n groot glimlag gegee. Ek het haar altyd vertel hoe lief ek vir Pierewiet was.

Saterdag moes ek sy hok skoonmaak en Sondag moes ek kerk toe gaan. Een Saterdagoggend moes ek weer Pierewiet se hok skoonmaak, ek was regtig nie baie lus nie. Dit was nie meer lekker om Pierewiet se baas te wees nie want ek moes alles vir hom doen maar hy het niks van die goed gedoen waarvoor ek gedroom het ons saam sou doen nie. Elke Saterdag was dit dieselfde. Ek het hom vloekend uit sy hok gehaal en hard op die tafel neergesit. Ma het nie van die saad in haar huis gehou nie, so ek moes die hok altyd buite skoonmaak. Ek het skoon koerantpapier onder in die hok gesit en die waterbak uitgegooi. Ek het die leë saaddoppies weggeblaas. 'n Bruin wolk van stof en voëlstront het opgestyg en verspreid oor die gras geval. Die nuwe saad het net na koring geruik, nog nie na Pierewiet nie.

Toe ek weer by die huis ingestap het, het ek Pierewiet op die grond gesien sit. Opgepof, kop diep in sy bors getrek. Toe ek my voet op hom neergesit het, was daar 'n sagte kraakgeluid. Daarna was dit vir 'n oomblik doodstil. Hy was so klein ek het hom amper nie eers onder my voet gevoel nie. Ek het op my knieë langs hom gaan sit. Hy het op sy sy gelê en daar was 'n dun straaltjie bloed wat by sy bek uitgeloop het. Sy bors was nog steeds opgepof maar dit het geklink asof sy neus toe was want hy het nie meer regtig asemgehaal nie. Dit het meer geklink of hy sy asem opgehou het. Sy kop het verwilderd rondgefladder. My ore het gesuis en ek kon voel hoe my hart in my keel sit. Ek het hom nie opgetel nie, ek het net

baie naby aan hom gegaan en hom met my duim en wysvinger gedwing om my weer in die oë te kyk. Ek het ma nie van buite af hoor inkom nie.

Ma het geselsend by die kombuis ingeloop. Sy het die ketel aangesit en toe ek nie dadelik antwoord toe sy my roep nie het sy my kom soek. Ek en Pierewiet was agter die kombuistafel en ma moes om die tafel loop om ons te sien. Toe sy Pierewiet daar sien lê het sy my verskrik gevra wat gebeur het. Sy het stadig langs my gaan sit en net aangehou praat. Sy het Pierewiet opgetel en liggies oor sy koppie gestreel, my belowe dat sy vir my 'n ander voëltjie sou gee. Sy het saggies met Pierewiet gepraat soos sy altyd met my gepraat het as ek siek was. Terwyl sy hom in haar hande gehou het, was dit asof ek 'n laaste sug gehoor het voordat sy bors glad nie weer geroer het nie. Pa het ook ingekom en vir ma aangesê om 'n ou skoenboks uit die kas te gaan haal.

Ek het gesê dit was 'n ongeluk, ek het hom nie gesien nie. Ek het hom op die tafel neergesit om die hok skoon te maak. Hy het afgeval, en ek het hom nie gesien nie. Ma het hom in die boks gesit en pa het vir ons begrafnis gehou. Ma het Psalm 23 gesing en my hand so styf vasgehou, die sweet het my laat jeuk. Pa het die skoon hokkie in die motorhuis gaan bêre.



## Grietjie en Hansie

Sy was skaars in die laerskool toe haar pa hulle in die stad gelos het. Hy het hulle in die middel van 'n besige straat laat stilstaan en hulle aangesê om daar te bly. Toe sy haar pa gevra het wanneer hy dan terug sou kom, het hy gemompel en sy hand in die lug gewaai. Sy het haar broertjie se hand styf vasgehou en gekyk hoe haar pa, strompelend tussend die mense verdwyn het. Haar broertjie het na haar opgekyk en sy het gevoel hoe daar trane agter haar oë brand. Hulle het eenkant toe gestaan want daar was orals mense wat in hulle vasgeloop het. Sy het geweet dat hulle in die pad was. Toe die mense minder begin word het en die son begin sak het, het sy besluit hulle moes maar loop. Sy het nie geweet waarnatoe hulle sou gaan nie en sy het nie geweet waar hulle huis was nie, maar sy het geweet dat hulle iewers moes soek om vir die aand te slaap. Haar pienk Barbie-prinses rugsakkie het haar skouers afgerem en haar broer se geneul het haar ore seergemaak. Eers nadat sy op hom geskree het, het hy saggies langs haar gesnik. Hulle het geloop en geloop tot sy seker was dat hulle net daar in die straat sou omkap. Die straatligte was reeds aan en die strate amper heeltemal leeg.

Vêr in die verte het sy helder ligte gesien. Die ligte het goud op die horison gebrand en sy het gehoop dat daar by die ligte vir hulle 'n plekkie sou wees om te slaap. Toe hulle uiteindelik voor die gebou met die helder ligte te staan gekom het, was daar 'n groot geel S bo die enorme glasdeure waaragter nog geel ligte gebrand het. Sy het gedink aan haar juffrou se plakkate met 'n slang om die letter S gekrul. Sy het ook die woord Hotel herken wat helder voorop die gebou gebrand het. Sy het geweet dat mense in hotelle slaap en het haar broertjie opgewonde aan sy arm by die marmertrappe opgesleep. Hy was baie moeg en het gesukkel om die groot trappe so vinnig soos sy uit te klim. Daar was 'n man wat die groot glasdeur vir hulle oopgemaak het. Sy klere was bloedrooi en hy het 'n snaakse ronde hoedjie op sy kop gehad. Hy het na hulle toe afgekyk maar daar was nie 'n glimlag op sy gesig nie.

Binne was daar 'n sagte mat en so baie liggies dat dit soos die vuurvliegies in haar feëtjieboek gelyk het. Daar was 'n groot ronde tafel met die mooiste blomme op en ook popspeel glasies waaruit mens water kon drink. Hulle was nog besig om te staar toe 'n groot man bulderend van agter 'n toonbank uitgestorm kom. Uit die hoek van haar oog kon sy die deurwag se rooi baadjie sien. Die kwaai man het nie 'n rooi baadjie en hoedjie gedra nie. Hy het 'n groot snor gehad wat sy lippe toegemaak het en sy baadjie was wit. Hy wou weet wat hulle in die hotel doen en sy het verduidelik dat hulle 'n plek nodig gehad het om te slaap. Sy het onthou dat mense in hotelle slaap. Die man het sy arms gevou en haar gevra hoe sy van plan was om vir die kamer te betaal. Sy het nie geweet dat geld nodig was

nie. Hulle het nie geld gehad nie. Die man het die rooi-baadjie-deurwag nader gewink en hom aanbeveel om hulle uit te gooi. Hy het nog steeds nie geglimlag nie en nog steeds na hulle toe afgekyk. Terwyl hy haar en haar broertjie elkeen aan 'n arm by die groot trappe afgesleep het, het hy nie 'n woord gesê nie, al het sy by hom gepleit. Hy het gekyk hoe hulle wegstap maar voor hulle by die hoek van die blok gekom het, het hy hulle vinnig ingehaal en haar 'n R10-noot in die hand gestop. Sy het die noot vir veiligheid in haar pantie gebêre.

Teen hierdie tyd van die nag was die maan al baie groot in die lug en dit het die strate in die mooiste silwer verander. Hulle het nog 'n hele ent verder gestap voordat hulle by 'n geroeste tuinhekkie gekom het. 'n Oranje hekkie wat half van sy skaniere af was, met 'n bordjie wat skeef gehang het. Die bordjie was in Engels en sy het nog nie Engels geles nie, maar daar was baie mense in die huis en daar was ligte en baie geraas. Sy het die hekkie versigtig oopgestoot en binne was die geraas so oorverdowend dat sy nie kon hoor wat die mense sê nie. Daar was mans met baarde wat hulle snaaks aangekyk het. Baie vrouens het met hulle probeer praat en na die deur gewys maar hulle het nie verstaan nie. Daar was een vrou in baie hoë skoene en 'n stywe rokkie en sy het hulle elkeen aan 'n arm weer buitentoe gesleep. Haar hare het baie woes om haar kop gestaan haar naels was baie lank en baie rooi. Sy het na rook geruik.

Buite het sy hulle gevra wat hulle daar gesoek het. Haar broertjie het deur trane gesmeek vir iets om te eet en 'n plek om te slaap. Die vrou het hulle op en af gekyk en aangesê om op die sypaadjie vir haar te wag. Hulle het op die sypaadjie gaan sit. Die straat was vuil en daar was baie stukkende glas en papiere en iets het na piepie geruik. Die vrou het teruggekom met 'n witbrood en 'n 2 liter Coke. Hulle wou dit dadelik verslind toe die vrou hulle beveel het om te voertsek, want dit was nie veilig vir kinders nie. Sy het met haar lang rooi naels deur haar hare gekam en hulle weer, skerper aangespreek. Sy het sigaratte voor by haar rok uitgehaal en ongeduldig een aangesteek. Haar stem het kwaaiër en kwaaiër geword en toe hulle nie na haar geluister het nie, het sy hulle weer van die sypaadjie af opgeruk en verder die straat af aangejaag. Elke keer as hulle na haar toe omgekyk het, het sy ongeduldig met haar hand beduie. Hulle het geloop en geloop totdat hulle nie meer die rooi-nael-vrou kon sien nie.

Haar broertjie het die koeldrank soos 'n klein katjie in sy arms geklem en sy het die witbrood gedra. Teen hierdie tyd was hulle so moeg hulle kon skaars hulle voete optel. Toe hulle regtig nie meer verder kon stap nie het hulle weer langs die pad gaan sit. Haar broertjie was teen hierdie tyd so moeg dat sy arms skaars die bottel kon vashou en hy het weer begin huil. Sy het ook nie verder geweet nie en moedeloos rondgekyk. Toe sien sy 'n uitweg: daar was 'n vrou in 'n kartonboks onder die brug. Sy het haar broertjie haastig

aangepor en hulle het na die vrou toe gestap. Die kartonboks-vrou het by 'n klein vuurtjie gesit. Sy het dadelik opgespring en hulle nadergewink. Hulle was te moeg om bang te wees en te honger om aan iets anders as hulle witbrood en coke te dink. Hulle het styf langs mekaar by die vuurtjie gaan sit. Die kartonboks-vrou het rustig met hulle gepraat en selfs vir hulle een van haar komberse gegee. Haar broertjie het vir die vrou van die koeldrank aangebied en alhoewel sy so honger was sy sou die hele brood alleen kon opeet, het sy geweet dat sy ook van die brood vir die vrou moes gee. Die vrou het vir hulle stories vertel en haar broertjie op haar skoot getel dat hy gemakliker kon slaap. Sy het onthou dat die man in die hotel gesê het dat mens moet betaal vir slaapplek en sy het die R10 uit haar pantie gehaal. Sy het dit vir die kartonboks-vrou gegee en met haar kop op haar rugsakkie gaan lê. Die kartonboks-vrou het rustig gesing terwyl hulle al hoe stadiger asemgehaal het.



## Om Bloubaard se vrou te wees

Die dag toe ek haar ontmoet het, het ek gedink dat ek nooit ooit weer na enigiets anders in my lewe sou smag nie. Sy was alles waaroor ek nog altyd gedroom het: sy was mooi, slim en passievol. Aan die begin het ek ure omgelê deur net na haar te staar terwyl sy geslaap het. Haar sagte asemhaling het my vlinders op my maag gegee en ek kon amper nie wag om haar my vrou te maak nie. Ek het haar na 'n warrelwindromanse om haar hand gevra en sy het deur 'n stroom trane en giggels vir my onmiddelik ja gesê. Ons het binne ses maande die troue gereël en daarna vir twee maande deur Europa getoer. Haar oë het net aangehou glinster en ek onthou nie 'n enkele dag wat sy nie gelag het nie. Ons het toeriste-foto's op al die belangrike plekke geneem en in die aande in ons hotel oor en oor man en vrou geword. Terug by die huis het ons 'n ou, afgeleefde huis gekoop. Ons sou stelselmatig self die plek regmaak. Sy het baie van selfdoenprojekte gehou en geleef vir houtwerk en binnehuiseversiering. In die aande as ek van die werk afgekome het, het ons saam op die stoep gesit en whiskey in die hand, het sy my met stories uit haar kinderdae vermaak. Die het gevoel asof ons vir die res van ons lewens op 'n wittebrood sou wees.

Maar die wittebrood eindig tog maar die een of ander tyd. Voor ons tweede huweliksherdenking al was sy nie meer genoeg nie. Haar stories het my begin irriteer want ek het hulle teen daardie tyd al almal gehoor. Haar asemhaling was oorverdowend hard en ek was moeg daarvoor om in 'n huis te bly wat net nooit klaargekom het nie. Nadat sy oor my laataande by die werk begin neul het, het ek my werk huistoe gebring en saam met haar voor die televisie gesit en werk. Maar dit was ook nie goed genoeg nie en sy het daarvoor ook gekla. As oplossing vir hierdie klag het ek maar in die aande gewerk as sy gaan slaap het. Teen hierdie tyd het ons amper nooit meer seks gehad nie en sy het net vetter en vetter geword. Ek was ook nie meer my gespierde self nie, maar dit was al asof sy opgegee het. In die stil oomblikke by die werk het ek aan haar gedink, my hande om haar nek en haar lyf rukkend onder myne. Ander kere was sy 'n lappop waarmee ek kon maak net wat ek wou.

Dit was haar idee om iemand te gaan sien en dié het vir ons kommunikasie-oefeninge gegee om te doen. Sy het weer haar hardloopskoene aangetrek en in die oggende natgesweet ontbyt gemaak. Ek het probeer om soveel moontlik van my werk deur die dag gedoen te kry sodat ons in die aande weer saam kon gaan slaap. Die eerste keer wat ons weer seks gehad het, was nie soos om fiets te ry nie. Die vuurwerke wat ons met die wittebrood ervaar het was weg. Haar tergerey het my net irriteer en ek kon nie help om haar na die tyd te kritiseer nie. Daarna het ek fout gevind met alles en haar gekweste uitdrukkings was so na aan my drome as wat ek kon kom. Sy het gedink kinders sou vir ons 'n tweede kans

bring, maar selfs na vrugbaarheidsklinieke en alternatiewe medisyne was sy nie swanger nie. Dit was net nog een van haar talle mislukkings. Sy het my met verwyte aangekyk elke keer as ek opmerkings oor ander kinders gemaak het. Sy het meer en meer in haarself getrek en teen hierdie tyd het ons glad nie meer aan mekaar gevat nie. Ek het haar skaars in die oggende gegroet voor ek werk toe gegaan het en as sy haarself kon verwerdig om op te staan het sy gebrande roosterbrood voor my neergegooi as ontbyt. Ek het altyd met 'n baie sarkastiese glimlag gemaak of dit die beste ontbyt in die wêreld was. Sy het selfs eenkeer haar koffie in my gesig gegooi. Ek het geweet sy wou hê ek moes reageer, maar 'n mens kan nie altyd kry wat jy wil hê nie.

Sy het in my studeerkamer begin rondkrap, beskuldigings van ander vrouens na my toe geslinger. Ons kommunikasie-oefeninge het in wedersydse skree-gevegte ontaard. My dagdrome het meer en meer intens geword, die verskeie maniere hoe ek haar sou kon stilmaak soos 'n lafenis. Sy het my by die huis aanhou uittart. Sy het my uitgelok om haar seer te maak, my met haar woorde gekoggel. Die stilte waarmee ek haar telkens teengestaan het, was vir haar die grootste frustrasie. Ek het geweet ons huwelik was verby, maar egskeiding is nooit 'n opsie nie.



*Dis lewensbelangrik om belang te stel in die welsyn van ander mense.*

## Gouelokkies word groot

Sy staan elke oggend voor sonsopkoms op. Terwyl sy in die skerp geel lig van die badkamer haar tande borsel, neem sy kennis van al die nuwe plooitjies en enkele grys hare tussen die goud. Sy trek stil-stil aan en kam haar lang, goue lokke tot dit blinkglad oor haar skouers val, voor sy dit bymekaar vat en in 'n hoë, stywe poniestert op haar kop vasbind. Daarna sit sy weer die badkamer lig af en loop kombuis toe. Die hele huis is stil, die oomblikke voor die son se strale die aarde begin verwarm, vir haar altyd die koudste en die lekkerste. 'n Haan kraai en die eerste motors jaag in die straat af, haastig om die werksdag agter die rug te kry om maar vanaand weer terug te kom en môre weer te jaag. Voordat sy die brood begin knie, sit sy solank die mieliepap op die stoof. Soos sy ritmies haar vuiste in die koue deeg laat sak, dink sy aan al die jare wat sy al in hierdie klein huisie bly. Al die jare wat sy in die geel lig van die badkamer opstaan en aantrek, in die vroeë oggendstilte die kombuis vir die dag regkry.

Die mieliepap prut verwoed en sy sit die stoofplaat laer. Sy maak die gekniede brooddeeg met 'n nat katoenlap toe. Die harde klik van die ketel se kragknoppie laat haar aan 'n gewerskoot dink. Sy drink haar koppie oggendtee. Terwyl sy vir die brood wag om te rys, vleg sy haar lang lokke en draai dit om en om in 'n bolla. Wanneer die lap bol begin staan, knie sy die deeg 'n laaste keer af. Die halfgemaakte bolla val los en haar vlegsels begin ontrafel. Die afgekniede brooddeeg is genoeg vir ses gebotterde broodpanne. Die oond stoot warm bolle stoom uit as sy die deur oopmaak om die brood in te sit. Die brood vat 45 minute om te bak en sy draai die tydhouer se knoppie met ge oefende akkuraatheid. Sy haal die gaar mieliepap van die stoof af en dek die tafel met drie papborde. Sy haal die aand se vleis, beesblad, uit die vrieskas en sit dit in 'n skottel in die wasbak. Daarna maak sy drie stomende bekers koffie en gaan maak hulle een vir een wakker. Terwyl hulle aantrek vir die dag skep sy die pap op, een teelepels botter en suiker en 'n klein bietjie melk in elkeen. Hulle eet hulle pap en sy pak hulle middagetes vir die dag in. Drie toebroodjies, drie appels en drie sjokoladestafies. Die brood kom warm en bruinegebak uit die oond.

Na ontbyt is die huis stil. Sy dek die tafel af, was die vuil borde en verpak die warm brode in waspapier. Een brood vir die huis en vyf vir die skool af in die pad. Sy stap elke oggend met haar mandjie vol brode tot by die skool, kyk hoe die kinders in rye klas toe stap en lewer dan haar brode aan die snoepie-tannie af. Dan stap sy hoekkafee toe en koop 'n twee liter melk. Terug by die huis stof sy af, dek die tafel vir aandete en sit 'n bondel wasgoed in die masjien. Na sy die beddens opgemaak het, die een te hard, die ander een te sag en die derde een net reg, maak sy eers vir haarself nog 'n koppie tee. Vir middagete eet sy twee gesondheidsbeskuitjies. Terwyl sy haar tee klaar drink luister sy na die straatgeluide. 'n Kar

wat verbyjaag, die kinders wat gillend in die straat af hardloop, 'n hadeda wat iewers skree. Sy blaai deur een van haar tydskrifte en verkyk haar aan die modelle se blonde lokke, nie so goud soos haar eie nie, meer wit. Nie grys nie, net sprokieswit asof hekse dit getoor het. As sy gaan piepie oefen sy haar modelgesig in die spieël.

Haar middagroetine bestaan uit wasgoed in die droër sit, dit maak die strykwerk minder, en groente kerf. As die kos in die oond is, beesblad in 'n erdepot met wortels, uie en aartappels, loop sy buitentoe. Sy trek haar plastiek tuinskoene aan en spuit die rose nat. Nadat sy die bossies uitgetrek en al die ryp suurlemoene gepluk het, gaan sit sy op die voorstoep en wag vir hulle om huis toe te kom. Sy speel met haar hare en probeer om die gesplete punte te tel. Partykeer sit sy die poniestert se punt in haar mond net om die chemiese smaak van nagmaakte aarbeie te proe. Hulle kom elke dag rondom dieselfde tyd by die huis. Gooi alles neer, gaan sit by die eetkamertafel. Hulle kyk afwagting na die leë borde voor hulle en die warm kospotte. Sy verdeel die kos eweredig. Almal vat hande en bid: *Seën Vader wat ons eet, die hande wat dit voorberei het en maak ons altyd opreg dankbaar. Amen.* Hulle smul en sy eet ritmiets saam met die kombuishorlosie se getik-tik. Terwyl sy die skottelgoed was en die kombuis skoonmaak vir die herhaal van môre, kyk hulle televisie.

Nadat elke oppervlak weer blink, pak sy die brood se bestanddele reg voor sy die kombuislig afsit, hulle groet en na haar kamer toe gaan. In die badkamer borsel sy haar tande en kyk weer vir haarself in die geel lig. Sy kam haar hare nadat sy haar slaapklere aangetrek het. As die hele huis donker en stil is, laat sy haar hande oor haar lyf speel. Voordat sy in ekstase sug, begin die skuldgevoelens wat haar vir dae lank dwing om die brood met meer drif te knie.

## Repelsteeltjie

Die volgende dag was Lentedag. Ek het weke lank gewag om my ma te vra, want sy was baie besig met rokke maak en huiswerk en kerk. Sy het elke aand moeg agter haar masjien gaan sit en my ongeduldig aangesê om bed toe te gaan. Ek het geweet dat sy nie vir my sou nee sê nie, ek het net nie daarvan gehou as sy haar oë, sugtend, met haar duim en middelvinger geknyp het nie. Dan het haar skouers vir my nog krommer gelyk en haar vel gryser in die sagte lig van die naaldwerkmasjien. Die aand voor Lentedag moes ek haar vir my nuwe rok vra maar ek het gewag tot na ek die skottelgoed gewas het en die kombuis skoongemaak het.

Lentedag was diè dag in die jaar waaroor almal maande voor die tyd begin praat het. Al die meisies het met notaboekies rondgeloop waarin hulle die beplanning vir hulle rokke gedoen het. Waarin hulle foto's uit tydskrifte geplak het met verskillende haarstyle en rokke. Daar was altyd 'n skoonheidskompetisie op Lentedag. Jy kon net deelneem as jou klasmaats gedink het jy was mooi genoeg en vir jou gestem het. Almal sou spog oor hoe hulle rokke die meeste aandag sou trek. Ek wou ook deel wees van die praatjies en spoggerij en het aan hulle almal vertel hoe my ma die mooiste klere in die land kon maak. My ma was so goed dat sy rokke kon maak uit regte goud of silwer. Almal het my net stil aangekyk en dan weggestap om iewers anders in mekaar se boekies te kyk. Ek het dan maar na 'n ander groepie gegaan en hulle van my ma se towerkuns vertel. Almal het vir my gelag en dan met opset na my huisklere verwys as gemors eerder as goud en silwer. My ma het altyd my klere gemaak. Ek het vir haar prentjies uit *Die Huisgenoot* gewys, dan het sy vir my dieselfde klere gemaak. Eenkeer het sy vir my 'n blommetjiesbroek gemaak en dit was mooier as die prentjie.

Ek wou graag 'n sneeurok vir die Lentedag hê. 'n Spierwit, sagte donsrok wat sou skitter as ek in die son staan. Ek het maande lank prentjies uit boeke van sprokieskastele omring deur sneeu bymekaar gemaak. Ek het vir almal my notaboekie probeer wys, maar hulle het gesê Suid-Afrika was te warm vir sneeu. Susan het elke jaar die kompetisie gewen want haar ma het net die beste materiaal gekoop en sy het iemand betaal om die rokke te maak. Die vorige jaar het sy met 'n rok opgedaag wat soos spookasem gelyk het. Die sagste lap wat in bondels om haar geval het. Mens kon nie haar voete sien nie en dit het gelyk of Susan op 'n wolk sweef. Susan was die mooiste meisie in die skool. Al die seuns wou haar tas vir haar dra en haar hand vashou. Sy was ryk genoeg om pienk lipstiffie te hê maar die juffrouens het haar altyd badkamer toe gestuur om dit af te was. Sy het maar net weer in pouse nog aangesit.

Ek het probeer om vir Susan van my rok te vertel, haar my prentjies te wys, maar sy het my net op die grond gestamp en gesê “Ek praat nie met weeskinders nie”. Toe ek aan haar verduidelik het dat ek nie 'n weeskind was nie en dat my ma vir my die mooiste sneeurok sou maak wat hulle nog ooit gesien het, het Susan hard gelag. Sy het my notaboekie uit my hande geruk en dit in die asblik gegooi. Ek moes die boekie versigtig uithaal want daar was piesangskille en ou brood in die asblik. Dit het vir my gevoel die hele skool was daar want van toe af het almal my weeskind genoem.

Daardie middag toe ek huistoe gestap het, het daar 'n klein mannetjie vir my in die pad gewag. Hy was korter as ek, maar baie ouer. Sy knobbelneus het 'n groot bruin moesie opgehad en sy skoene het gate in gehad, waardeur sy vuil bruin toonnaels vir my geloer het. Hy het nie baie lekker geruik nie. Hy het geweet dat ek 'n sneeurok wou hê, 'n sagte donsige rok om die kompetisie mee te wen. Hy het my hand in sy skurwes gevat en my belowe dat hy die rok vir my sou kon gee en dat dit die mooiste rok in die skool sou wees. Al wat ek vir hom moes doen was om aan hom my pantie te wys. Ek moes net my romp ophang, dit is regverdige betaling het hy gesê. Ek onthou die dag toe ma my 'n pakslae gegee het oor ek kaal in die tuin gespeel het. Sy was ook ongelukkig toe ek vir die mense by die kerk my nuwe pantie gewys het. Ek was bang om weer pakslae te kry en my ma het nie daarvan gehou as ek geskenke by vreemde mense gevat het nie, sy het altyd gesê dat al was ons arm, het sy darem nog haar trots gehad. Toe ek van hom weggehardloop het, het hy my belowe dat hy my weer sou sien. Ek het al die pad huistoe gehardloop.

Ek het aan my ma my notaboekie, wat nou na vrot piesang en suurbrood geruik het, gewys. Ek het haar opgewonde vertel van my idee vir 'n sneeurok wat sag en donsig om my sou val en as ek in die son sou staan, dan sou elke sneeuflakke soos 'n diamant blink. Ek het belowe om haar te help met enige iets wat sy wou hê. Ek het haar nie van die vreemde mannetjie vertel nie. My ma het die boekie in haar hande gehou en ek kon die tranes in haar oë sien. Sy het my belowe dat sy vir my 'n rok sou maak, maar sy kon nie 'n sneeurok maak nie. My stem het het skiller geword hoe meer ek aan haar verduidelik het dat ek aan die hele skool vertel het van my sneeurok, dat almal die volgende dag vir my sou lag en dat ek nie met 'n gewone rok die kompetisie teen Susan sou kon wen nie. Ek het teen hierdie tyd ook gehuil en ma het my ferm bed toe gestuur. My aangesê, vir die soveelste keer, om te bid vir al die stories wat ek so oor jou. Ek moes vra vir beskerming teen die duiwel, want die duiwel word uit stories gebore.

Ek het my deur aspris hard agter my toegeslaan. Ek het maar gaan slaap en geweet dat ek die volgende dag nie my sneeurok sou aantrek nie. Almal sou my weer weeskind noem en my rok sou die lelikste in die skool wees. Ek het nie gebid nie, want al die ander kere wat ek

vir iets gebid het, het dit nie gebeur nie. Ek het nooit gekry wat ek wou hê nie. Susan se kekkellag het in my nagmerries verander daardie aand. Haar pienk lipstiffie het my hele kamer oorgeneem.

Die volgende oggend het daar 'n spierwit katoenrokkie met 'n rooi strik teen my kas se deur gehang. My ma het afwagtend, moeg, in my kamer se deur gestaan. Dit was nie 'n sneeurok nie, net 'n gewone huisrok, soos al die ander in my kas. Ek het eerder met my skoolklere Lentedag toe gegaan. Ek het vir almal vertel dat die rok gesmelt het. Hulle het mos self geweet Suid-Afrika was te warm vir sneeu.

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Toe ek haar die eerste keer hoor lieg het, het ek geweet dat dit my kans sou wees. Hoe meer ek na haar geluister het, hoe meer ek geweet sy sou enige iets doen vir hierdie rok wat sy begeer het. Dit gee my groot plesier as mense so aanhou lieg en storietjies vertel en die waarheid aandik. Dan kan hulle nie anders as om my uitweg te volg as ek hulle die dag in 'n hoek druk nie. Sy het aangehou stories vertel oor haar ma wat kwansuis rokke uit goud, silwer en sneeu kon maak. Ek kon nie help om te glimlag elke keer as die net om haar stywer en stywer gespan het nie. Dae lank het ek haar agtervolg, haar gesprekke afgeluister, haar pogings om deel te wees van die ander se opgewondenheid was meer en meer pateties. Hulle het bo-oor haar geloop en sy het dit maar net gevat, in die grond vertrap gelê. Nie vir 'n oomblik het sy aan haar ma getwyfel nie. Teleurstelling bly maar my gunsteling wapen.

Die dag toe 'n ander kind haar gestamp het omdat die kind haar nie geglo het nie, het ek geweet sy was desperaat genoeg om nie van my af weg te hardloop nie. Sy het die heelyd met 'n klein swart notaboekie rondgeloop en nadat die ander kind dit in die asblik gegooi het, het sy, neus gekreukel, deur die gemors gesoek totdat sy dit tussen duim en voorvinger uitgehaal het. Ek het lekker gelag. Mense se desperaatheid vir aardse goed help my om aan die lewe te bly. Ek het geweet haar ma kon natuurlik nie 'n sneeurok sonder my hulp maak nie. Ek het onder 'n boom langs die pad wat sy moes huistoe loop vir haar gaan sit en wag.

Sy het nie eers geskrik toe ek haar voorgekeer het nie. Ek het haar belowe dat ek vir haar die sneeurok sou gee wat ek geweet het haar ma nie sou kon maak nie. En ek het haar maar 'n klein ou gunsie vir my dienste gevra. Ek is 'n regverdige mannetjie, ek vra net regverdige betaling vir 'n sneeurok. Sy het haar kop beslis gekud en my verseker haar ma sou vir haar die rok kon maak. Haar hand was pofferig gesweet in myne, die sagte

onskuldige vel soos 'n asem teen my eie. Ek het nie gedink sy sou weghardloop nie. Ek het maar agter haar aangeloop na haar huistoe en onder die sitkamervenster gaan wag tot sy later die aand haar ma vir die rok sou moes vra.

Ek het geweet die ma kon nie die rok sonder my maak nie en nadat sy die kind omtrent met die Bybel bed toe gejaag het, het ek bollemakiesie geslaan en voor haar deur gaan wag. Die ma was oud en nie regtig my gewone tipe nie, die kreukels in haar gesig en vlekke op haar hande het my effens afgesit, maar nou ja, hierdie keer het die jongetjie nie aan my aas gebyt nie. Ek moes nou maar die vis vat wat ek kon kry. Die aand was nog jonk en ek het my kans afgewag totdat ek kon sien die kind se kamerlig was af. Ek het saggies aan die deur geklop en die ou ma het dit versigtig oopgemaak.

Ek het sommer met die deur in die huis geval en haar dilemma dadelik vir haar duidelik uitgespel. Die ma het verskrik eenkant toe gestaan. Sy het my agterdogtig aangekyk. Ek is nie een vir doekies omdraai nie, so ek het haar keuses vir haar genoem. Sy kon aan my vereistes voldoen en seker maak haar kind het 'n sneurok die volgende dag, of sy kon nee sê. Ek het haar gewaarsku dat as sy nee sou sê, haar dogter haar uit teleurstelling die res van haar lewe sou verwyf. Kinders kan so wreed wees, het ek haar probeer oortuig. So al wat sy moes doen was net om daar te lê en in 'n japtrap het ek al haar probleme vir haar opgelos.

Sy het met haar hand voor haar mond gestaan. Sy het lank na my gestaar sonder om enige reaksie te toon. Ek was al besig om my broek af te trek toe staan sy nog steeds daar soos Lot se vrou. Sy het darem al 'n kind gehad, dit was nie asof dit 'n kwessie van lewe of dood was nie. Sy het haar kop geskud en saggies geprewel dat sy nie dit kon doen nie. Geen sneurok was die verlies van haar waardes werd nie. Hoe sou sy met 'n skoon gewete haar kind kon skool toe stuur as sy haarself so aan my verkoop? Ek het vir haar gelag en haar belowe dat sy dit sou berou. Haar dogter sou nooit verstaan en haar nooit vir die vernedering vergewe nie. Sy het erken dat dit 'n kans was wat sy sou moes waag, bloed is dikker as water en vir leuens is daar altyd nagevolge. So asof ek dit nie geweet het nie.

Sy het my broek om die enkels by die huis uitgegooi. Met die toeslaan van die voordeur het ek nog vir haar geskree dat haar dogter nooit weer lief sou wees vir haar nie. Ek ken teleurstelling, dit voel altyd soos verraad. Die volgende oggend het ek my verlustig toe ek sien hoe die kind, skoolklere en al, probeer om die ander te oorreed dat haar ma wel die rok gemaak het. Die ou preutse koek het dit verdien om haar kind te verloor. Ek het uit my maag gelag vir die dom vrou se jare van teenspoed wat nog sou kom. Laat sy maar snags met die Bybel gaan slaap, haar kind sou nie meer lank hare wees nie. Ek het die kraak in die

kind se stem gehoor, nog voor sy self bewus was van die swart gat wat besig was om in haar hart te groei.

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Hy het vir my gesê dat hy lief was vir my. Ons sou eendag trou en vir altyd en gelukkig saamleef. Toe my maag bult begin staan het, het almal agter hulle hande gefluister. Die dominee het vir my gebid. Alles het verkeerd geloop want ek het van die verbode vrugte buite die goedkeuring van 'n huwelik geniet. Dit was my eie skuld maar ek moes net om vergifnis vra dan sou God my vergewe. Ek het elke aand op my knieë gesmeek maar sy is later gebore en ek kon net 'n klein huisie by 'n gawe oom en tannie huur. Ek het haar alleen grootgemaak want hy het nooit ooit weer teruggekom nie. Elke aand het ek saam met haar voor haar bedjie gekniel en probeer om die waardes van God vir haar te leer.

Sy het van kleins af stories opgemaak. Niemand was bekommerd daarvoor nie, sy het 'n aktiewe verbeelding, het almal maar gesê. Ek het in kinderboeke en tydskrifte gelees dat kinders stories vertel as deel van hulle ontwikkeling. Ek het haar altyd gevra om my net die waarheid te vertel sonder al die stories, maar sy was liewer daarvoor om in haar droomwêreld as in hierdie wêreld te bly. Sy het aan feëties en kabouters wat onder die lemoenboom agter in die erf gebly het geglo eerder as om haar Sondagskool huiswerk te doen. Sy het aan die dominee verduidelik sy kan nie glo 'n vis kan 'n mens eet en dan nie glo dat haar wense alles waar sal word nie. Hy het vir haar gebid en my getug oor ek in my ouerskap gefaal het. Die Bybel verbied enige towerkragte want net die duivel kan verantwoordelik daarvoor wees. God verrig wonderwerke, nie towerkunsies nie.

Ek het nie met skool klaargemaak nie, maar ek kon myself onderhou deur die naaldwerk wat my ma my van kleins af geleer het. Party aande as ek voor die masjien gesit het, alleen met net die nagstilte vir geselskap, het ek aan hom gedink en die plekke wat sy hande ontdek het. In daai oomblikke kon ek amper weer sy lyf bo-op myne voel, het ek onthou hoe ek myself heeltemal in hom verloor het. Die duivel het my in die versoeking kom lei, dan moes ek maar weer bid vir my siel. Die verlange na hom kon ek nie wegbid nie. Op daardie aande kon ek soveel rokke maak as wat ek wou, die frustrasie het dae lank aan my bly knaag.

Sy het op 'n druppel water na haar pa gelyk. Die manier hoe sy gepraat het, haar stoute glimlag as sy 'n koekie agter my rug gevat het, haar uitbundige lag was daagliks 'n foltering. Ek sou alles gee vir haar en nog meer, maar haar versoeke het net meer en meer onmoontlik geword. Ek moes my sente vyf keer omdraai om haar skool toe te stuur en dan

nog kos ook op die tafel te hê. Haar sprokiesboeke was haar gunsteling en met elke verjaarsdag het ek toegegee en vir haar nog een gekoop. Sy het my gehelp om die klere vir my bestellings in die aande uit te sny, nadat haar huiswerk klaar was, en dan altyd met afwagting gewonder of die kabouters weer deur die nag al die rokke sou kom klaarmaak. Ek het elke keer aan haar verduidelik dat dit nie kabouters was nie, maar ek. Ek het deur die nag gewerk, sprokies is net vir haar boeke bedoel. Ek het haar van my moeë hande en af rug vertel. Sy het haar arms om my nek gegooi en met 'n soen my weer oorreed dat dit net towerkrag was wat al die klere so vinnig kon klaarmaak. Sy het nie regtig omgegee wie die towerkrag besit het nie.

Een middag toe ek van 'n aflewering af teruggekom het, het ek haar kaalgat agter in die tuin gekry. Ek kon haar skaterlag al die pad af in die straat hoor. Toe ek haar so sien, gelukkig en vry, het ek vir 'n oomblik vergeet hoe dit voel om soos 'n gevangene aan klere gekluister te wees. Ek het geglimlag en toe oorweldig al die skuldgevoelens my weer. Ek het haar dadelik aan haar arm teruggeruk huis toe. Sy het in een van haar boeke gesien dat feëtjies nie klere dra nie, sy wou net ook 'n feëtjie wees. Haar klein lyfie het geruk van verdriet oor ek so lelik met haar geraas het. Ek moes haar daardie dag leer van ordentlikheid en die verderf en die geveg om die behoud van 'n mens se siel. Ek moes op my kind se drome trap want sy kon nie 'n feëtjie wees nie. Sy kon ook nie dieselfde foute as ek maak nie. Van daardie dag af was sy skaam oor haar lyf, het sy selfbewus probeer om haar nuutgevormde borsies plat te druk en weg te steek. Sy wou nie weer saam my bid nie.

Die aand toe sy met haar sneeurok idee na my toegekom het, want sneeu is wit en wit is rein en goed en God sal ook daarvan hou, moes ek my kind weer aan die werklikheid van die lewe blootstel. Ek moes haar weer terugruk na hierdie wêreld toe, haar laat wakker skrik want dit is onmoontlik om sneeurokke te maak. Toe sy woedend weggestorm het, was daar 'n klop aan my deur. Die duiwel het buite gestaan en my weer probeer verlei. Hy sou vir my 'n sneeurok gee. Hoe meer hy gepraat het, hoe swakker het dit vir my gevoel my bene word. Hoe kon ek vir haar 'n sneeurok gee? Hoe kon ek weer my lyf verkoop vir die wêreldse plesiertjies wat ek haar teen probeer beskerm?

Toe ek die mannetjie by die deur uitgeboender het, het ek 'n spierwit stukkie lap uit die kas gehaal en dadelik begin. Ek het vir haar 'n rok tot op die grond gemaak met wit pofmoue en 'n wye uitskopromp. Ek het 'n breë rooi strik om die middellyf vasgewerk. Die volgende oggend toe ek die hane hoor kraai het, het ek die katoenrokkie teen haar kasdeur gaan hang.

## Kinders

Ek wou hulle nooit gehad het nie. Maar hy het vir jare aanhou neul, pleit en naderhand dreig tot ek hulle binne my kon voel woel. Daar was twee. Vir nege maande het hulle binne my gegroei, groter en groter. Ek het nagmerries gehad, amper elke aand van ysblou oë wat my orals volg. Aan die begin toe ek uitgevind het, het ek lank daaroor gedink om van hulle ontslae te raak. Maar jare se goeie maniere en die regte ding doen wat ingepreek, ingeslaan en ingewerk is deur bedopmaak en skottelgoed was, het my gekeer elke keer as ek die nommer vir 'n aborsiekliniek wou bel. Die Dominee wat oor my toring en “MOORD” op my afskree het my telkemale in 'n koue sweet laat wakker skrik. Ek het passiewelik aanhou om my wyn te drink en aspris vinniger geloop en redes gesoek om te val, maar hulle het vasgeklou, my binneste stukkie vir stukkie geannekseer. Teen die einde kon ek skaars loop. Hulle is op 'n Dinsdag gebore, tewel 'n aanslag van reën en bliksemstrale die aarde buite die hospitaalvenster verlig het.

Hulle was identies. Hande, voete, ore, neuse was presies dieselfde. Twee dogtertjies wat hy dadelik in sy arms geneem het. Hy het gehuil terwyl hy hulle die maan en sterre belowe het. Ek het omgedraai en geslaap, lewensmoeg van nege maande se dra en wat gevoel het soos dae se harde werk om hulle uit my te kry. Die verpleegster het hulle versorg en die bababed tot langs my bed gestoot. As ek na 'n droomlose slaap wakker geword het, het hulle twee oop oë vir my gelê en kyk. Die ysblou oë van my nagmerries was nou in die uitdrukkinglose gesigte van twee klein lywe wat nie babas was nie. Wanneer die verpleegster hulle in my arms gelê het, het dit vir my gevoel asof iemand van binne die asem uit my longe druk. Ek het hulle probeer borsvoed, maar elke keer as hulle aan my borste vasgesuig het, het ek gevoel hoe die lewe uit my dreineer, soos sandkorrels wat stadig deur 'n uurglas loop. Ek het hulle afgeruk en aan die verpleegster teruggegee. Hulle het nie gehuil nie, net uitdrukkingloos na my gestaar. Ek sou nie borsvoed nie.

Hy kon skaars sy opgewondenheid beheer toe hy gekom het om ons, sy drie prinsessies, huis toe te vat. Ek het dadelik kamer toe gegaan en gaan slaap. Hy het hulle gevoed en rustig aan die slaap gemaak. Daai aand toe hy agter my rug ingekruip het, het hy vir die duisendste keer dankie gesê vir die mooiste twee dogtertjies wat hy in sy lewe gesien het. Ek het gemaak of ek slaap en hard gekonsentreer om die gil wat besig was om in my keel vas te sit, nie uit te laat nie. Hy het vir drie dae by die huis gebly, ons al drie met soveel liefde versorg dat dit my naar gemaak het. Hy het gekoer, gekwetter en selfs gelag. In die aande het hy hulle soos 'n pampoenboer, een in elke arm rondgedra. Hulle het nooit gehuil nie, maar hy het hulle nogtans onophoudelik aandag gegee. Pappa se prinsessies, pappa se poppies, pappa se mooiste dogtertjies. Hy het hulle bottels gemaak en doeke omgeruil en

nie vir 'n oomblik stilgebly nie. Ek het stilletjies 'n gin en tonic geskink en kamer toe gegaan. Gelukkig het nie een van hulle agtergekom dat ek weggeraak het nie.

Na hy terug werk toe is, moes ek alleen met hulle in die huis agterbly. Maak nie saak waar ek gegaan het nie, daardie oë het my binne my eie huis gevange gehou. As ek 'n bietjie op die bank sou rus, het hulle weerskante van my opgeëindig, al kon ek sweer dat ek hulle in hulle kotte gesit het. As ek by die voordeur wou uitgaan, het hulle my weg versper met hulle klein lywe en blou oë. Ek het hulle nie vasgehou nie. Hulle was nog steeds besig om die asem uit my longe te druk. Mettertyd het hulle hulle stemme gekry en eers kruipend, toe waggelend, toe selfversekerd deur die huis begin beweeg. Evolusie in 'n jaar. Ek kon nie meer saam met hom in 'n kamer slaap nie en het sak en pak na die spaarkamer getrek waar ek rustig in die aand my gin kon drink om net 'n bietjie slaap te kry. Toe die gin klaar was het ek diep uit die vrieskas 'n bottel vodka gevis. Daar was later nie meer iets oor in die huis om te drink nie. Ek het die vrugtekoeke-brandewyn uit die koskas leeggedrink en toe selfs al die hoesstroop. Hy het nie vir my geld gelos nie en al die kruideniersware self gekoop. As ek vir geld gevra het, het hy geweier en weer om hulle gaan koer. Die aande wat ek nugter moes gaan slaap was die heel ergste. Ek het my deur van binne gesluit en selfs 'n skuifslot opgesit, maar elke keer as ek wakker geskrik het, het ek gevoel hoe hulle van agter die geslote deur vir my kyk.

Ek het in die oggende as hy werk toe is uitgesluit. Nadat ek seker gemaak het hulle was iewers anders in die huis, het ek vinnig op my tone voordeur toe geloop en eers buite weer 'n asemteug gevat. Ek het amper die heeldag buite in die tuin by die tortelduiwe gaan kuier. Die duiwe se koer-koer het my hipnoties laat vergeet van al die slapelose nagte en twee dogtertjie-lywe wat by my gespook het. Ek het met my rug na die huis toe gesit, en selfs dan het ek hulle in die vensters na my gesien staar. Die dae wat ek verder as die tuin probeer loop het, het dit vir my gevoel of hulle soos ysters om my enkels my voete weerhou het van vlug. Alhoewel daar niks was as ek afgekyk het nie, was my voete loodswaar. As ek rustig in die tuin sou sit, het hulle my uitgelos, my net strak deur die vensters dopgehou.

Net voordat hy huis toe gekom het, het ek weer ingesluit. Hulle was altyd iewers binne, op die bank, in hulle kotte of in die bad. Glimlaggend vir mekaar en nooit 'n nat wang nie. Ek kon voel hoe hulle my volg al het ek so stil soos die graf deur die huis beweeg. As ek klaar in die badkamer was het hulle daar gesit, hand-aan-hand, agter die toe deur. Die oomblik wat ek die deur oopgemaak het, het hulle sonder emosie op hulle gesigte daar vir my gesit en wag. Hulle het in die aande op hulle pa se knieë gesit terwyl hy hulle soos perde laat galop het. Dan het hulle geskaterlag en dan kon ek hulle hoor. Die hekse gekekkel wat uit hulle monde gekom het was dieselfde as die gekekkel wat my in die aande voor my kamervenster

kom koggel het. Die blou oë was nog steeds dieselfde, hulle gesigte uitdrukkingloos as hulle na my gekyk het.

Hulle het die ontwikkelingsfase van baba tot kleuter gemaak, en selfs 'n woordeskat aangeleer. Ek het gesmeek dat hy hulle in 'n kleuterskool of iets moes sit. Enige iets om hulle net uit die huis te kry, sodat ek net 'n bietjie asem kon kry. Hy het op my geskree, telkemale dat ek hulle ma was, dat ek na hulle moes kyk. Ek het nie die krag gehad om terug te skree nie en myself maar net weer in my kamer toegesluit. In my kamer het ek die duvet oor my kop getrek en oorpluisies in my ore gesit. Selfs dan het die oë my gevind, het die lag van binne af my ore gevul. Teen hierdie tyd was hulle al groot genoeg om my weg by die voordeur heeltemal te versper. Party oggende het hulle daar bly staan lank nadat hy werk toe is. Daardie dae was ek genoodsaak om op die rusbank te sit, uitgelewer aan hul genadelose kyke. Soos hulle ouer geword het, het die intensiteit van hul blou oë my banger en banger gemaak. Ek was oortuig dat daar iets fout was met hulle, maar hy wou nie luister nie, hy het hulle aanhou bederf en later my omtrent totaal geïgnoreer. Ek het van my eie ma en haar stories oor die bergvrou begin droom.

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Ek het weer, soos elke ander oggend met 'n skrik in my hart wakker geword, maar daardie oggend was ek seker dat daar vir my 'n uitkoms was. Ek het vir die eerste keer in jare weer onderklere en skoene aangetrek en my lang verlore handsak onder die bed uitgetrek. Lank gelede het my eie ma vir my stories vertel van die bergvrou wat in die toekoms kon kyk. Sy kon vir jou sê wat om te doen as jy eerder rooi as blonde hare wou hê. Ek het gehoop sy sou my kon help om weg te kom van sy kinders wat ek in die lewe moes bring. Omdat ek nie seker was of hulle voor die deur vir my gestaan en wag het nie, het ek die venster in my kamer met my stoel stukkend geslaan. Ek was so haastig om weg te kom dat die gebreekte glas my hand gesny het, maar ek het dit eers agtergekom toe ek halfpad op berg toe was en die taai bloederigheid my been warm gemaak het. Ek het elke tree of wat omgekyk net om seker te maak dat hulle nie agter my aangekom het nie, maar al kon ek hulle oë op my agterkop voel brand, was ek alleen.

Ek het probeer om met my hand teen my bors te loop om die bloed te stop, maar toe ek die kort entjie teen die berg moes uitklim het ek altwee my hande nodig gehad om teen die duiseligheid te baklei. Die bergvrou het in 'n klein grot gebly wat verbasend skoon was. Daar was 'n mooi tapyt op die vloer, 'n koperkatel en selfs 'n klein radio'tjie. Sy het vir ons 'n pot tee gemaak en die fynste porseleinkoppies op pierings gedek. Toe ek vir haar wou vra oor die kinders het sy my vrolik vertel dat sy reeds geweet het hoekom ek daar was. Ek was

verlig, want hulle oë het nog steeds agter op my nek gebrand. Ek was nie seker dat hulle my nie werklikwaar gevolg het nie. Die bergvrou het my met stories van die kiewiete en bergslange rustig gestel. Sy het my hande met koue water skoongemaak en die salf wat sy opgesmeer het, het gehelp om die brandpyn te verlig. Na ons derde koppie tee, kon ek amper nie eers meer my nagmerrie lewe onthou nie. Die bergvrou het my hande in hare gevat, sagte oumenshande met vlekke en knobbelvingers, en rustig met my gepraat.

Die kinders was my eie skuld. Ek het myself probeer verdedig, probeer verduidelik dat ek aan hom gesê het dat ek nie kinders wou hê nie, maar sy het my stilgemaak. Hulle was deel van my en besig om my siel stukkie vir stukkie te steel. Dit was my siel wat so ysblou vir my teruggestaar het.

Ek het die buitekant van die grot net betyds gehaal. Jare en jare se wrewel, haat, vrees en hardkoppigheid het giftig groen by my mond uitgestroom. Ek het net aangehou braak en braak tot al wat van my oorgebly het 'n groen moslagie teen die berghange was.



*Mense met goeie maniere kom maklik met ander oor die weg.*

## Gehoorsaamheid

Die Bybel beveel kinders om aan hulle ouers gehoorsaam te wees. Die vyfde gebod sê: *Eer jou Vader en jou Moeder*. Van die dag van sy geboorte af het sy ouers agtergekom dat daar fout was met hom. Hy was fisies gesond met al tien sy tone en vingers en hy het omtrent nooit gehuil as 'n baba nie. Maar hy was aspris en wat ookal sy ouers aan hom gesê het om te doen of in sy oortjies gefluister het, hy het altyd die teenoorgestelde gedoen.

Net na sy geboorte toe die dokters hom in sy moeder se arms gesit het, wou sy ma hom aan haar bors laat drink. Hy het sy klein mondjie se lippies styf op mekaar geklem en geweier om aan sy ma te drink. Die verpleegsters het bottels gemaak en vir haar aangegee maar hy het gewag totdat sy rustig weggedut het voordat hy hard aan die gil gegaan het en dan op sy bottel aangedring. Terug by die huis het sy ouers allerhande ander sulke klein dingetjies opgemerk. As sy vader weg was het hy geskree om in sy kot te slaap en as sy pa weer terug by die huis was het hy weer geskree om saam met sy ma en pa op die bed te slaap. Dan het hy seker gemaak hy gee sy ouers nie 'n minuut se rus nie. Maak nie saak wat sy ma probeer doen het nie, hy het gewag totdat sy sy doek afgehaal het voordat hy haar met 'n boog nat gepiepie het. Hy het dan altyd vir haar gelag.

Aan die begin het almal gedink dit was baie oulik, maar hoe ouer hy geword het, hoe minder oulik het mense dit gevind. Hoe meer hulle hom probeer dwing het om eers te kruip voor hy loop, hoe meer het hy geloop en toe eers gekruip. Uit radeloosheid het sy ouers ook begin om hom in die aande te ignoreer en elke boek oor ouerskap op die mark gekoop net om seker te maak dat hulle wel nie slegte ouers was. Hulle was bekommerd daarvoor om hom in die verderf te lei deur hom altyd sy sin te gee en het verskillende dissiplineerstegnieke probeer toepas. Die Bybel sê dat mens die moet tugtig vir wie jy lief is. En al was hy 'n baie moeilike kind was sy ouers nog steeds vir hom lief. Selfs as 'n pap-babatjie het hulle al vir hom uit sy Kinderbybel voorgelees.

Toe hy al self kon sit en sy boekies kon vashou, het hy die Kinder Bybel teen die muur of op die vloer gegooi. Sy ma het dan maar net vir hom gebid. 'n Kindersielkundige wat sy ma gaan raadpleeg het, het die voorstel gemaak dat 'n jonger boetie of sussie hom dalk rustiger sou maak of miskien ten minste aan die ouers afleiding sou kon bied. Toe hy twee jaar oud was, het sy ma se maag bult begin staan en elke keer as sy moeder hom voorgesê het oor hoe lief hy vir sy boetie is, het hy weggehardloop en geskree dat hy nie lief vir sy boetie was nie. Sy boetie is gebore en sy asprisgeid het net vererger. Sy boetie was in alle opsigte die teenoorgestelde. Hy het dadelik sy ma se bors, liefde en tug aanvaar.

Hy het gereeld 'n goeie pakslae gekry en toe dit nie meer gehelp het nie, het sy ouers hom begin toesluit in sy kamer en partykeer het hulle hom bed toegestuur sonder dat hy aandete gekry het. Maar niks kon sy wil breek nie. Sy ma het eendag uit pure radeloosheid haar hande in die lug gegooi hardop verklaar dat daar geen salf aan hom te smeer was nie. Sy het uit frustrasie haar hande voor hom in onskuld gewas en hy het haar net uitgelag en sy boetie weer teen die grond gestamp. Al was haar moederhart oor sy welbehae bekommerd, kon selfs die Bybel op hierdie stadium nie meer aan haar raad verskaf nie. Die Dominee het met huisbesoek vir sy siel gebid en onoortuigend sy ouers probeer troos dat dit sekerlik tog net 'n fase was wat hy sou ontgroeï. Sy ma het trane met 'n wit kantlappie weggevee en sy pa het met 'n diep frons die Dominee aangestaar. Hy het in die geheim in sy hart gehoop dat iemand eendag sy seun 'n les sou leer wat hom op die nou padjie sou dwing.

Met die oudste boetie se sewende verjaarsdag het sy ouers vir hom 'n swembadpartytjie gehou. Hy het nie baie maatjies by die skool gehad nie, want niemand het regtig van sy asprisgeïd gehou nie. Hy was nou ook by die skool elke dag in die moeilikheid. Hy het geweier om sy ma met enige iets te help. Daar was net 'n paar skoolmaatjies wat onder protes gekom het en sy gesin. Hy het aangehou sy kersies doodblaas terwyl sy ma dit probeer aansteek het en sy het op die ou einde opgegee en almal het maar vir hom gesing sonder kersies op sy koek.

Omdat sy ma uit tyd gehardloop het, kon sy nie vooraf die waatlemoen in stukke sny en die pitte uithaal nie. Die seuns se pa het besluit om die waatlemoen buite in stukke te sny en aan die seuns uit te deel. Voordat hulle begin eet het, het hy hulle gewaarsku om nie die pitte te eet nie, want dan sou daar 'n boom by hulle ore uitgroeï. Die oudste broer het oudergewoonte nie na sy vader geluister nie en sy stukke pitte en al ingeryg. Die jongste boetie het stil en geduldig die pitte uit sy stukke gepik en rustig gekou. Hy het sy jonger boetie aanhoudend geterg oor die pitte en hom selfs name genoem.

Na die partytjie het die jongste gehelp opruim en die oudste het in sy kamer gaan sit en strokiesboeke lees. Sy ouers het hom nie meer aangesê om sy tande te borsel nie want hy het in elk geval nie geluister nie. Die hele gesin het gaan slaap en die volgende oggend het die oudste broer met 'n erge hoofpyn wakker geword. Hy het 'n koors gehad en die dag in die bed gebly. Sy ma het medisyne langs sy bed neergesit want hy het geweier om die panado's wat sy ma hom aangebied het te drink. Maar toe hy die pyn nie meer kon uistaan nie het hy met bewende hande die pille tog wel gesluk. Hy het die hele dag geslaap en nie eers vir aandete wakker geword nie. Sy ma het net vir aandete 'n beker tee en roosterbrood langs sy bed gesit maar hy het vir haar van onder die kombes gegrom dat hy

nie honger was nie.

Toe hy die volgende dag wakker geword het, het hy sommer stukke beter gevoel. Maar tot sy grootste skok kon hy nie glo wat vir hom in die spieël gewag het nie. Daar was twee klein groen takkies wat weerskante van sy kop by sy ore uitgestaan het. Hy het dadelik 'n mus oor sy kop getrek en onder sy bed gaan wegkruip. Teen die einde van die tweede dag was die takke al so ver gegroei dat sy mus hulle nie meer toegemaak het nie. Hy het geweier om die deur vir sy ouers oop te maak. Hy het probeer om die jong takkies met sy skoolskêr af te sny, maar dit was die seerste pyn wat hy nog ooit gehad het. Hy kon niks anders doen as om deur sy kamervenster te klim en weg te hardloop nie.

Hy het aangehou loop totdat hy by 'n brug gekom het waar daar 'n groepie mense om 'n klein vuurtjie gesit het. Hulle het hom nader gewink en hy het hulle met stromende tranes tegemoet geloop. Iemand het 'n ou kombers om sy skouers gehang en hy het hulle alles vertel. Hulle het aan sy takke gevat en met verwondering na hom gestaar. Hulle kon hom nie verstaan nie, hy kon hulle nie verstaan nie, maar hy was moeg van die verloop en het die aand tussen hulle geslaap. Die volgende oggend het die takke nog 'n end verder by sy ore uitgestaan en hy het moedeloos verder gestap. Die mense het nog probeer om hom te oorreed om eerder by hulle te bly, maar ou gewoontes is moeilik om af te skud.

Hy het so ver geloop dat hy naderhand heeltemal verdwaald was. Die takke was teen hierdie tyd so swaar dat hy gesukkel het om sy kop regop te hou. Van die stremming op sy nek het hy naer geword het. Hy het aanhou loop totdat sy skoene se sole deurgetrap en bene styfgeloopt was. Hy het iewers in 'n veld gaan lê en met groot vrees agtergekom dat daar wortels by sy voete begin uitgroeit het. Na die eindeloos gestap was hy so moeg, honger en bang dat hy net kon huil. En hoe meer hy gehuil het, hoe vinniger het die takke en die wortels gegroei. Hy wou net vir sy ouers om verskoning vra, maar dit was te laat. Hy het wortel geskiet en as 'n jong boompie verder in die veld gebly.

Maar dit is nooit te laat om om vergifnis te smeek nie, want God se genade is groot. Die engele in die hemel het sy gepleit gehoor en namens hom by God om vergifnis gaan vra. God het die oudste boetie vergewe en aan hom Sy heil gebied. Toe die oudste boetie 'n groot genoeg boom was met sterk wortels en dik takke, het houtkappers gekom en hom afgekap. Uit sy hout uit het hulle die mooiste kruis gemaak. Hierdie kruis het hulle voor in die kerk gehang en sy gesin het elke Sondagoggend na hom gestaar terwyl die Dominee gepreek het.



## Die lelike eendjie

Die middag toe sy besig was om haar volkspele rok aan te trek het haar hart al in haar borskas rondgewals. Sy het 'n gevoel gehad dat sy nie net oppad was na 'n saamtrek toe nie, maar dat dit daardie aand anders sou wees, want sy het haar nuwe wynrooi volkspele rok aangehad en haar nuwe kalkoentjies was blinkswart gepoets. Sy het ook 'n gevoel in haar hart gehad dat hy sy belofte sou nakom en ook daar wees. Haar nekdoek en kantmoue het nog witter teen die rooi van die rok gelyk. Haar onderrokke was spierwit gebleik en haar wit sykouse het nie 'n enkele leer in gehad nie. Toe sy daardie middag in die kar klim het sy haar nuwe gehekelde moffies versigtig in haar handsak gebêre, want hulle was ook wit en sy was bang hulle sou vuil word nog voordat sy eers by die saamtrek aangekom het. Sy het al haar moffies self gehekel want haar ma het haar geleer dat dit is wat goeie vrouens doen. Haar ma het haar ook gewaarsku dat as haar sykouse verbleik was of gate in gehad het dan sou mense baie sleg van haar gedink het. Vrouens van die nag dra sykouse met gate in.

Dit was die eerste keer wat haar laer 'n saamtrek gehou het en sy het die minute na die eerste lied toe weggewens, want sy was so opgewonde om met haar nuwe rok in die kring in te gaan en ook om hom te sien. Hoe nader dit aan sewe-uur geword het, hoe meer het haar hande gesweet en dit gevoel of haar hart met elke asemhaling by haar keel gaan uitbons. Al die vorige kere wat sy saamtrekke toe gegaan het, moes sy as 'n nefie deelneem want daar was nie genoeg mans om die kring vol te maak nie. As iemand haar die kring binnegehoi het, was dit altyd 'n ou weduwee of grillerige man met sweterige hande. Die vorige week het sy egter 'n blondkop boer met regop skouers by 'n ander saamtrek ontmoet. Sy het hom van haar laer se saamtrek vertel en hy het belowe hy sou 'n plan maak om na haar saamtrek toe te kom.

Elke keer wat iemand by die stadsaal se deur ingestap het, het sy vir 'n oomblik ophou asemhaal in die afwagting om hom te sien, want sy het begin twyfel of hy regtig sou kom. Hy was 'n bietjie ouer as sy, maar haar ma het altyd gese dit is goed vir 'n vrou as haar man ouer is want dan kan die vrou haar deur haar man se wysheid laat lei. As mans jonger is as hulle vrouens, dan wil die vrou net pop-speel en nie regtig haar rol as volwaardige vrou aanvaar nie.

Kwart voor sewe het hy die saal binnegestap, haar gesien en vir haar gewaai. Hy het nie dadelik na haar toe aangestap gekom nie want hy het eers ander mense gegroet. Terwyl hy met mense aan die anderkant van die saal gestaan en gesels het, het sy hom onderlangs dopgehou. Haar ma het haar gewaarsku daarteen om nie eerste na mans toe te gaan nie, 'n

dame wag totdat die man na haar toe kom en haar groet want anders kan hy dalk 'n slegte indruk kry. Mans hou nie van vrouens met slegte reputasies nie.

Sy het getwyfel of hy haar in die kring sou nooi. Jong hubare meisies soos sy kan nie sommer net in die kring gaan nie, dit is ongehoord. Sy het die hele week gedroom oor hoe dit sou voel as hy voor al die mense haar hand sou vra want hy was baie mooi en sy het nog nooit 'n kêrel gehad nie. Sy het haar hart in haar ore hoor klop en haar stem het in haar keel vasgesit. Die sweet het koud teen haar rug afgerol en die nylon sykouse het haar tussen haar bene geskaaf want dit was warm. Paartjies het twee-twee 'n kring gevorm terwyl die eerste note van *Daar kom die wa* oor die luidspreker begin dreun het. Sy het gevoel hoe die trane agter haar oë brand toe sy teen die einde van die lied nog langs die kant gestaan het. Hy was aan die anderkant van die saal. Sy het hom uit die hoek van haar oog dopgehou want sy het die heelyd nog gewens dat hy na haar toe sou kom. Net voor die laaste note weggesteef het, het hy skielik flink na haar toe oorgestap. Vir haar het die hele wêreld ophou draai.

Sy kon net sy astrante kuif sien wip-wip op sy voorkop. Sy kon net sy mooi onderbaadjie en spierwit nekdoek raaksien. Sy swart langbroek was net die regte lengte vir hom en het nie soos baie ander jong mans s'n 'n ent bo sy skoene geëindig nie. Sy skoene het geblink en sy kon die geur van sy naskeermiddel omtrent in haar mond proe. Sy het nie gehoor wat hy vir haar sê nie want sy was te opgewonde. Sy het sy uitgesteekte hand gevat en dadelik gewens sy het haar katoenmoffies eerder aangetrek want haar hande het erg gesweet. In die eerste helfte van die aand het sy aanhou wens dat hulle by mekaar sou opeindig in die kring. Elke keer wat hulle gevleg het, het sy gebid dat hulle hande sou vat want dan kon sy weer aan hom raak. As hulle saam tiekiegedraai het, en hy het sy hande ferm om haar middel geklem, dan het sy gevoel hoe dit natter en natter tussen haar bene word. Sy was dronk van verliefdheid toe hulle met die laaste lied weer bymekaar gekom het, want hy moes haar dan weer uit die kring vat en sy kon 'n oomblik langer sy hand op haar lae rug voel.

Tydens pouse het hy langs haar kom sit en hulle het oor werk en kerk die volgende dag gesels. Hy het haar oor haar laer gevra en sy het amper glad nie haar kerrie en rys geëet nie, want sy was te verlief om honger ook te wees. Met die liedere het hulle weer bymekaar opgeëindig en hulle het ingehaak saamgesing en af en toe as hy vir haar gekyk het, het sy gesien hoe sy grysblou oë glinster. In die tweede helfte van die aand se volkspele het sy omtrent deur al die liedere gesweef want sy kon net die heelyd aan hom dink. Sy het met elke aanraking van hom gevoel hoe haar lyf ril en elke keer as hulle bymekaar verby moes speel, het sy gewens sy kon hom net eenkant toe trek want sy was baie nuuskierig om

meer as net sy hande te voel. Sy wou weet hoe dit voel om teen sy gespierde borskas aan te leun en sy hande styf om haar middellyf geklem. Sy het die klein druppels sweet op sy bolip gesien en gewonder hoe dit sou proe as hy haar sou soen. Hoe nader die aand aan die einde gekom het, hoe meer het sy gebid vir 'n laaste en nog 'n laaste kans vir hom om net weer aan haar hand te raak of haar in 'n tiekiedraai van haar voete af te lig want dit was vir haar lekker as hy aan haar gevat het.

Sy het geweet hulle sou mekaar weer die volgende oggend by die kerkdiens sien, maar sy kon nie help om aan te hou bid vir net vyf minute meer in sy geselskap nie. As haar ma haar nie gewaarsku het dat slegte meisies wat vir seuntjies sê hulle is lief vir hulle hel toe gaan nie, sou sy hom seker lankal gevra het om met haar te trou. Maar toe dit regtig tyd geword het om te gaan, het sy hom net beleefd gegroet want sy was baie bang vir die hel. Hy was 'n ordentlike boerseun wat haar 'n sagte drukkie gegee het. As haar vel deurskynend was sou almal seker die elektrisiteit van sy aanraking kon sien.

Sy het geweet sy sou nie daardie aand kon slaap nie want sy was te verlief en opgewonde. Sy kon ook nie haar Bybel lees nie en het die aand omgebied dat hy die een sou wees. *Liewe Jesus ek weet dat U in U wysheid 'n plan vir my lewe het. Here, hierdie man voel net reg. Ek sal met trots sy vrou kan wees en as U getroue dienaar die beginsels van die huwelik kan uitleef. Liewe Jesus, asseblief laat hy my net môre raaksien. Laat hy my asseblief net so lief hê soos wat ek reeds vir hom is. Alles volgens U plan. Asseblief Liewe Jesus. Amen.* Die volgende oggend het dit haar amper 'n uur gevat om reg te maak vir kerk want sy wou net op haar mooiste lyk. Sy het amper haar Bybel by die huis vergeet want sy kon net aan hom dink.

By die kerk kon sy nie help om elke vyf minute na die horlosie te kyk nie, want sy kon nie wag om hom te sien nie. Sy het spesiale parfuum aangesit vir die dag, maar was intens bewus van die sweetkolle onder haar arms. Sy het die tannies in die kombuis gehelp om die koppies reg te sit vir tee na die diens maar sy het so gebewe van opgewondenheid dat sy twee koppies laat val het. Sy was besig om die skerwe van die vloer af op te tel, toe sy hom uit die hoek van haar oog gesien het. Sy het gemaak of sy hom nie sien nie en probeer om ongemerk asem te haal, al het dit gevoel sy sou nooit ooit weer asem kry nie. Hand aan hand het hy daar gestaan met 'n pragtige blondine, 'n vreemdeling.

Sy het hom vriendelik gegroet en hard probeer om die trane te keer toe hy haar aan sy verloofde voorstel. Die blond het haar hand gevat en al die regte woorde gesê. Sy verloofde met haar lang blonde hare en pragtige naels hou nie van volkspele nie, sy gaan nooit saam met hom na saamtrekke toe nie. Toe hulle hande inmekaar gestrengel

weggestap het, het sy geweet sy was die lelike eendjie wat in 'n eend verander het want sy kon nooit 'n man se aandag trek nie. Sy sou nooit 'n swaan wees nie en daardie dag het sy nie haar oë toegemaak toe die dominee gebid het nie. Sy het die vuil kolle teen die mure vir die eerste keer regtig gesien. Sy kon kinders iewers hoor huil en 'n motorfiets se brom het 'n deel van die dominee se bid ingesluk. Sy het die houtkruis voor in die kerk opgemerk en die smal, koue kerkbankie het haar lae rug laat pyn.

## Spieëltjie, spieëltjie

Ek het nie baie herinneringe aan my kinderdae nie. Ek onthou spieëls in elke kamer in die huis. Spieëls in goue rame, houtrame, vergulde bronsrame. Party sonder enige rame. 'n Klein ovaal handspieëltjie met versiersels en 'n bypassende perdehaarborsel. Dit was my ma se waardevolste besitting en in die aande het ek haar hare rustig met die borsel gekam terwyl sy vir my in die handspieëltjie gekyk het. Sy het lang, sagte bruin hare gehad wat tot onder haar knieë gehang het. Sy het net in 'n wit katoen nagrok met 'n kantkragie geslaap. Sy was 'n koningin en ek 'n prinses.

Hulle het alweer vandag my kos op 'n gewone silwer skinkbord gebring. Hulle wit jasse het oorverdowend hard gegirts terwyl hulle in die kamer besig was. Waar was die tafel gedek met silwer en kristalkandelare? Hulle het net 'n snedige gebaar gemaak en die skinkbord rof op my bed neergesit. Die kos het op die staalbord rondgegly en hulle het arms gevou in die hoek gaan staan. Ek het die plastiek eetgerei tussen my duim en voorvinger vasgevat. Hulle dink ek weet nie dat hy my hier teen my sin hou nie. Hulle dink hulle kan my so afskuwelik behandel, dan vergeet ek dalk. Hulle het die staaldeur ongeërg agter hulle toegetrek. Ek sal nooit vergeet wie ek regtig is nie. Ek het die skinkbord van die bed af op die vloer gestamp en op regte eetgerei en 'n mooi gedekte tafel aangedring.

Ons lewens was in gevaar want die koning, haar man, het haar vir 'n ander vrou verruil. Nee, die ander vrou was net 'n gewone vrou, die koning het nie van koninginne gehou nie, hy het eerder sy gewone vrou verkies. Maar omdat sy as koningin geregtig was op die land wou die nuwe vrou van haar ontslae raak. Die nuwe vrou het die koning verlei en oorreed om soldate en ridders na die hekke toe gestuur. My ma het geweet hulle wou haar vermoor so sy het hulle nooit ingelaat nie. Ek moes altyd onder die bed gaan wegkruip het, want sy was bang as hulle dalk sou inkom dan sou hulle my wegvat na die koning toe. Ek het geweet dit is 'n baie slegte ding om by die koning en sy nuwe vrou op te eindig. My ma het vir ons lewens begin vrees, want sy kon ons nie alleen beskerm nie. Ons het uit ons ou koninkryk gevlug en begin om orals te bly. Nooit te lank op een plek nie.

Vandag het hulle my beddegoed kom wegvat. Ek het hulle hoeveel keer beveel om my goed uit te los maar hulle het selfs my boeke gevat. Ek weet die vrou het hulle opdrag gegee om my hier te hou en so te behandel. Hulle soek die spieëltjie en borsel. Hulle sal dit nooit kry nie.

Ons het ook 'n naamspelletjie gespeel. Sy het haar handspieëltjie na my toe gehou en gevra: "Spieëltjie spieëltjie aan die wand, wie het jou in die hand?" Die spieëltjie het elke aand vir

ons ander name gegee. Partykeer het ons sommer in die kar geslaap, want dan kon ons vinniger van die koning af vlug as ons sou moes. Die enigste ding wat die koningin ooit ingepak het was al haar spieëls, versigtig in komberse toegedraai op die agterste sitplek.

Hulle het my vandag iets laat eet en toe ek wakker word is ek nie meer in die grag onder in die koning se kasteel nie. Ek is hier in hierdie klein wit kamertjie met tralies voor die vensters en 'n deur wat ek nie kan oopmaak nie. Hulle het vir my ander klere aangetrek. 'n Ligblou stuk materiaal wat sakkerig om my hang. Hulle dink seker deur my in 'n ander kamer te sit sal ek hulle sê waar die spieëltjie is. Die koning kom nie meer self na my toe nie. Hy stuur een van sy onderdane wat die heelyd iets neerskryf. Die onderdaan sit, bene-gekruis-pen-in-die-hand en vra my onophoudend uit. Ek antwoord hom nie.

Ek kon nie veel van die koning onthou nie. Ek het party aande gedroom hy staan langs my bed, arms na my toe uitgestrek, glimlaggend. Dan het ek wakker geskrik van my eie skree. Ons het aangehou ry. Ek het nog steeds elke aand die koningin se hare gekam. Sy het na 'n ruk stil geword, sy wou nie meer die naamspeletjie speel nie en elke keer as ek haar hare gekam het, het daar stringe op die borsel agtergebly. Sy was baie maer en haar wit nagrok was nie meer wit nie. Die kragie was amper heeltemal losgetrek en daar was gate in die moue. Sy wou ook nie meer bad nie. Hoe ouer ek geword het, hoe meer het sy my begin haat.

Sy het nie daarvan gehou dat ek grootword nie. Sy het my die heelyd daarvan beskuldig dat ek probeer het om mooier as sy te wees, haar kroon by haar af te vat. Ek het nog steeds in die aand haar hare probeer kam maar sy het die borsel uit my hande geruk en my daarmee gegooi. Die kere wat ek in haar arms wou lê soos altyd en selfs op haar skoot wou klim, het sy my weggestamp en naderhand mag ek glad nie meer in haar handspieëltjie gekyk het nie. Sy wou nie meer hê dat ek ooit aan haar vat nie. Ek het my eie lang hare met 'n stomp skêr afgesaag en daarna was sy weer vir 'n kort rukkie gelukkig, sy het selfs weer die naamspeletjie saam met my gespeel. Ek wou teruggaan huistoe. Ek was nog steeds bang vir die koning en sy nuwe vrou, maar die koningin het elke dag swakker en swakker geword. Die oggend toe ek haar nie weer wakker kon maak nie, het ek nêrens anders gehad om heen te gaan nie. Ek het die spieëltjie tussen my klere weggesteek en duimgegooi totdat iemand my opgelaai het. Dit was 'n lang pad terug na die koninkryk van my kinderdae.

“Die spieëltjie is vir altyd weg,” dink ek terwyl die koning se onderdaan weer iets neerskryf. Daar is nou ander mense saam met my. Hulle slaap almal in dieselfde klein kamertjies as ek, maar hulle praat in deurmekaar woorde. Hulle is morsig en ongeskik, party van hulle

eet met hulle hande. Ek lyk elke dag meer en meer soos my ma, die staal verskoning vir 'n spieël in die waskamers 'n vae beeld, heupbene wat te ver uitsteek en oë wat te diep in hul kaste sit. My hare het in stringe begin uitval, elke oggend is daar nuwe klose op my kussing. Die koning en sy nuwe vrou sal my eerder hier laat doodgaan as om dit waarop ek geregtig is vir my te gee.

Die koning en sy nuwe vrou het vir my gewag, vals glimlagte van blydschap op hulle gesigte, stemme te ywerig om my welkom te heet. Ek het rustig my tyd afgewag, die handspieëltjie veilig weggebêre. My ma, die regte koningin het my gewaarsku om nooit ooit die spieëltjie aan enige iemand anders te wys nie. Sy het geweet dis al wat die koning vir sy nuwe vrou wou hê. 'n Vals koningin mag nooit die spieëltjie gebruik nie. Ek het elke aand gesit, my weerkaatsing die enigste herinnering wat van my ma oor was en my kans afgewag. Die koning het naderhand moeg geword van vriendelik wees, net soos die koningin gewaarsku het. Die nuwe vrou het skerp met my begin praat. Ek het geweet die koning se soldate sou vir my kom, dit was net 'n kwessie van tyd voor hulle my sou wegvat. Daar was net een ding wat ek kon doen. Ek moes die spieëltjie met alles in my beskerm. Ek het dit hard teen die muur gegooi en die duisende stukkie sorgvuldig geëet. Die spieëltjie het deel geword van my. Die nuwe vrou sou dit nooit gebruik nie.

Hulle praat alweer agter my rug. Hulle dink ek kan hulle nie hoor nie. Die koning is blykbaar besig om sy geduld te verloor. Ek grynsag vir myself in die staalspieël.

*Liefde en verliefdheid en liefkosings gaan saam. Moenie die liefde goedkoop maak deur 'n vertoon van openbare liefkosings nie.*

## Die begrafnisondernemer

Sy is 9 jaar oud en haar ma is 'n begrafnisondernemer. Dit beteken haar ma moet na die dooies kyk voordat hulle na God toe gaan. Die eerste keer toe sy in die lykshuis gekom het, was sy 'n bietjie bang. Dit was koud en grys, met lang staal tafels. Haar ma het afgesak en in haar oë gekyk: "My kind, die dooies kan jou niks maak nie. Dis die wat lewe waarvoor jy bang moet wees." Haar ma het geglimlag.

Sy loop elke middag direk na skool na die lykshuis in die hoofstraat toe. Dit is 'n ou gebou wat altyd verlate lyk. Sy stap deur die be-sig-ti-gings-ver-trek. 'n Baie groot woord vir 'n kamer waar mense staan en huil. Sy voel veiliger in die stilte van die kapel. Sy sukkel in die middag in die kapel met haar huiswerk, eet haar grondboontjebotterbroodjie, drink haar glas melk en oefen haar toonlere op die elektriese orrel. Die klanke is vals, nie soos die groot kerkorrel op Sondae nie. Haar ma kom partykeer na haar soek, dan hou sy haar eers styf vas en huil in haar nek. Sy kan dan maar gaan kyk, dit beteken klein kissies in die groot-woord-vertrek.

Vanaand gaan hulle nie huistoe nie, want haar ma moet laat werk. Sy wag vir 'n belangrike oom wat dood is hier, maar nie in ons grond hoort nie. Die oom het nie iemand wat hier vir hom kan huil nie, so nou moet haar ma eers na hom kyk, dan kan hy na sy eie land toe gaan. Haar ma het vir haar 'n bed agter die preekstoel gemaak. Partykeer speel sy dominee, maar sy kan nie die mense sien nie, want sy is nog te kort. Sy hou daarvan om hier te slaap want dan vergeet haar ma van tandeborsel.

Sy word in die middel van die nag wakker want sy moet gaan piepie. Sy weet waar die badkamer is, maar toe sy buite die kapel kom hoor sy haar ma se helder sing-stem. Sy vergeet van haar piepie. Sy stap tot aan die einde van die lang gang en maak die deur van die lykshuis op 'n skrefie oop. Haar ma staan langs 'n lang staal tafel waar 'n grys oom lê, sy weet dis 'n oom want hy het 'n baard. Haar ma sing terwyl die oom oopmond staar. Haar ma sing baie mooi. Haar ma skrop die oom soos sy haar altyd in die bad na atletiek was. Na die wassery droog haar ma die lyf af. Die ou handdoek is dieselfde kleur as die oom. Toe die oom droog is, sit haar ma twee wit doppies op die oom se oë en trek sy ooglede bo-oor. Sy vat 'n lang naald en gare en sit haar hand in die oom se mond. Sy trek die gare by sy neus uit en nou is die oom se mond ook toe. Nou lyk hy nie meer verbaas nie, nou slaap hy rustig. Haar ma sukkel om die oom se klere vir hom aan te trek en sy wil gaan help, maar sy wil nie hê haar ma moet ophou sing nie. Die oom lyk snaaks, want hy slaap nie in sy slaapklere nie. Haar ma kam sy hare mooi agtertoe en smeer 'n bietjie lipstiffie aan sy lippe. Haar ma sit poeier op die res van sy gesig en nou is hy nie meer grys nie. Hy is nou weer

regtig-egtig. Haar ma gaan sit langs die oom op 'n hoë, ronde stoeltjie. Sy praat glimlaggend in 'n fluisterstem.

Sy onthou skielik van haar piepie want haar bene begin nou lam voel van die knyp. Sy maak die deur agter haar saggies toe en hardloop-loop badkamer toe. Toe sy klaar gepiepie het was sy nie haar hande nie, sy sukkel om by die wasbak by te kom, sy sal môre twee keer was.

## Hoe om 'n prinses te word

Ek kon al lees en skryf toe ek die eerste keer my pa se kaal tannies in sy kas ontdek het. Ek het dit versigtig uitgehaal vanwaar dit weggesteek was onder ou kassette en plate. Daar was iets magies en geheimsinnig aan hierdie tydskrifte wat so weggesteek was, want al die ander tydskrifte in die huis het op die koffietafel voor die televisie gelê. Die eerste een se voorblad was van 'n tannie met die mooiste ronde borste wat ek nog ooit gesien het. Ek het in die aande partykeer saam met ma gebad en hare was langwerpig en het ondertoe gehang. Die tannie op die tydskrif s'n het soos ronde ballonne in die lug gesit. Die tannies het almal geglimlag, en party van hulle hare se hare was goud en golwerig. Ander se hare was pikswart en reguit. Hulle het ook bloedrooi lippe gehad. Daar was 'n foto van een tannie in 'n kasteel soos in my sprokiesboek met lang goue hare wat tot op die grond gehang het. Sy was Raponsie, maar sy het nie 'n mooi rok aangehad soos in my boek nie. Maar sy het baie gelukkiger gelyk.

Die tannies was soos ma, maar hulle het nie soos ma gelyk nie. Ma het hemde gedra wat tot onder haar nek toe was en haar hare was altyd in 'n bolla. Sy het dit net in die aande oor haar skouers los laat hang as sy dit gekam het. Dan het sy dit dadelik weer in 'n vlegsel vasgemaak. Ma het ook nooit soos die tannies in die tydskrifte gelag nie. Hulle tande was spierwit en hulle het rustig gelyk, so asof hulle tyd gehad het om na my stories te luister. Ma se tande was nie so wit nie en sy was altyd haastig. Ek was gewoonlik in haar pad.

Ek het my eie hemp opgetel en in die spieël na my plat bolyf gekyk. Dit was lekker om myself te verbeeld dat ek ook eendag soos een van die tannies sou lyk. Ek het ma by die agterdeur hoor inkom en dadelik al pa se tydskrifte weer in sy kas gebêre. Toe sy teen die tweede keer my naam geroep het, kon ek die kwaad in haar stem hoor. Ek het onder die bed ingekruip. Die mat het na stof geruik en my wang gekielie. Van onder die bed kon ek sien dat ek die kasdeur nie heeltemal toegemaak het nie. Maar voor ek weer onder die bed kon uit, het ek ma se huiskoene in die deur gesien. Ek het gemaak of ek wegkruipertjie speel maar toe sy my daar onder haar bed uitgevang het, het sy my aan my voet uitgetrek en met my geraas. Sy het nie tyd gehad vir speletjies nie en ek moes dadelik antwoord as sy my geroep het. Sy wou ook weet wat ek in haar kamer gedoen het. Toe ek gemompel het dat dit pa se kamer ook was, het sy my 'n baie kwaai kyk gegee. Ek het ma nie van die tannies vertel nie en sy het gelukkig nie die kas se deur gesien nie.

Vir weke daarna het ek elke oomblik wat ek kon vir die tannies gaan kuier. Ek het ander

tannies gekry soos Raponsie. Daar was 'n foto van Sneeuwitjie wat kaal in 'n glaskas gelê het en Rooikappie wat met haar rooi manteljie wydsbeen op die grond gesit het. Doringrosie het agteroor op 'n bed gelê met haar balon-borsies wat in die lug opgestyg het. Hulle was almal so mooi en ek wou ook soos hulle lyk. Ek het my klere in 'n hoop op die vloer gegooi en elke middag as ma besig was om die rose nat te spuit of die oprit te vee, het ek prinses-prinses gespeel. Maar ek het seker gemaak dat ek geluister het vir die toeslaan van die agterdeur. Ma het my een middag amper weer in haar kamer gevang maar ek kon gelukkig vinnig genoeg pa se tydskrifte bêre en my klere aantrek. Ek het in die gang gaan lê sodat ma nie moes weet dat ek weer in haar kamer gespeel het nie.

Een middag het ek ma egter nie by die agterdeur hoor inkom nie. Pa se tydskrif met Rooikappie was oop langs my en ek het Rooikappie gespeel toe ma se gil my laat skrik het. Sy het bo-op Rooikappie getrap toe sy gryswit-kwaad na my toe oorgestorm het. Ek het so geskrik dat ek nie dadelik gereageer het nie. Sy het my hard aan my arm opgeruk voordat sy my met haar plathand ingedraf het. Tussendeur het sy oor die sonde van kaalgeid geskree. Sy wou weet wat ek gedink het maar uit ander pakslae het ek geweet as ek haar sou antwoord dan sou sy net aangehou het. Ek het stilgebly tot die laaste hou my boud laat brand het. Na my pakslae het sy al pa se tydskrifte opgetel en my beveel om my klere aan te trek. Ek het deur my trane vir haar gesê dat dit nie hare was nie want ek het dit in pa se kas gekry en sy het nie die reg gehad om dit weg te vat nie maar sy het net skiller op my geskree. Ma kon nie luister as sy so kwaad was nie. Ek het maar deur my snikke weer my klere aangetrek en geweet ek sou my prinsesse nooit weer sien nie. Ma het in die sitkamer vir my gewag. Sy het uit die Bybel van Jesebel gelees, nog 'n kaal tannie wat sonde gepleeg het.

Ma het aan my verduidelik dat die prinsesse in pa se tydskrifte van die duiwel was. Hulle was anders as die prinsesse in my storieboeke want die prinsesse in my boeke het darem hulle klere aangehad so hulle was goeie tannies. Ek het probeer om aan haar te verduidelik dat die tannies in my boeke nie so gelukkig was soos in pa se tydskrifte nie, want my storieboek-prinsesse het nooit geglimlag soos die ander prinses-tannies nie. Sy het my net stilgemaak en my gedwing om saam met haar te bid oor ek ook kaal was. Ma het my oor en oor aangesê om Liewe Jesus om vergifnis te vra oor my sonde, maar ek het niks verkeerds gedoen nie. Ek wou net ook mooi met mooi hare en rooi lippe wees.

Na ma vir 'n baie lang tyd gebid het, het ek nog steeds gehuil en sy het my na my kamer toe gestuur. Ek het maar in my boeke na my prinsesse gaan soek maar hulle was lelik,

hulle goue hare het soos gras gelyk en hulle het net aan die einde van elke storie 'n bietjie geglimlag, so asof hulle nie regtig 'n prinses wou wees nie. Toe pa daardie middag van die werk afgekom het, het ma hom ingewag en hulle het dadelik op mekaar begin skree. Ek kon hoor hoe ma se stem hoër en hoër gegil het, terwyl pa sy vuiste op die tafel geslaan het. En toe was dit ewe skielik doodstil. Ek kon die voëltjies buite in die tuin hoor en ver weg het die trein se fluitjie my gesê dit was tyd vir aandete. Ek was nie honger nie.

Pa het na my kamer toe gekom en vir my jammer gesê. Hy het 'n baie lang tyd gepraat oor die Bybel en sonde en versoeking en die duiwel en ander vrouens. Ek het hom nie onderbreek nie, en net aan die einde vir hom gevra of ek die prinses-tannies weer sou sien. Hy het gesê dit was beter as ek nie weer aan hulle sou dink nie. Ek moes maar eerder net van my storieboek-prinsesse hou. Daar was nie aandete daardie aand nie en die volgende oggend het ek langs pa op die bank gaan lê. Ma was nog steeds gryswit-kwaad en het my skool-toebroodjies hard in my tas gegooi. Sy het nie 'n woord met pa gepraat nie en nie eers vir hom soos elke ander oggend koffie gemaak nie. Terwyl hy in die stort was het sy my hare gekam en elke keer as ek gekla het oor sy dit getrek het, het sy net die borsel nog harder teen my kopvel gedruk. Sy het vir my soos die heks gelyk wat vir Doringrosie getoor het. Sy het my by die skool gaan aflaai en my nie soos gewoonlik 'n nat soen gegee nie. Ek het by die skoolhek bly staan tot die klok gelui het.



## Die man en die maan

Hy wag elke aand tot hy die stadige asemhaling van sy slapende vrou langs hom hoor. Dan staan hy saggies op, sluip by die trap af. By die agterdeur haal hy die sleutel van bo van die kosyn af en sluit die deur met 'n stadige klik oop. Hy stoot dit versigtig na buite en loop dan vinnig deur die agterplaas tot by die klein swart houthekkie. Hy kyk op en glimlag vir haar bo in die lug. Hy is hopeloos op die maan verlief.

Toe hy deur die houthekkie glip, kyk hy op na sy donker huis en weet sy vrou het nie wakker geword nie. Hy haal skaars asem van opgewondenheid. Hy hardloop deur die veld wat aan sy agterplaas grens tot by die klein stroompie waar hy elke aand gaan lê om met haar te gesels. Sy omhels hom met haar liefde wat silwer op sy hande skyn en die wêreld om hom in 'n helder lig kleur. As sy so liggies oor sy arms streel, voel hy hoe sy slaapbroek al hoe stywer span. Dan is die afstand tussen hom en sy geliefde vir hom die ergste, maar nog steeds verklaar hy nog elke aand sy oneindige liefde aan haar. Met ywer deel hy dan sy dag se gebeure met staaltjies aan haar mee. Sy bly by hom en hy by haar tot sy stadig oor die horison verdywn. Hy stap langsamerhand in die vroeë oggendlig huistoe terwyl hy elke tree of wat eers omdraai en nog 'n soen vir haar blaas, nog 'n sekonde langer na haar kyk of hom verbeel dat sy agter hom aangekom het.

Party aande wag sy nie vir hom by die stroompie nie, dan moet hy haar net van 'n afstand af bewonder, want op daardie aande wat sy so ver van hom is weet hy dat sy tog maar net die kat-en-muis speletjie met hom speel. Die enkele aande wat sy glad nie opdaag nie of deur die wolke uit jaloesie weerhou word om na hom toe te kom, skree hy sy stem hees teen die onregverdigheid daarvan. Hy gil wanhopig tot die daglig hom huistoe stuur.

Vir maande lank sluip hy al elke oggend terug, sluit die deur weer saggies agter hom toe en loop dan versigtig by die trappe op. Hy lig stil-stil die deken aan sy kant van die bed en klim langs sy slapende vrou in, pynlik bewus van die stilte tussen hulle. Hy doen baie moeite om haar nie wakker te maak deur te hard aan die bed te stamp of per ongeluk aan haar te raak nie.

Maar omdat hy nooit meer behoorlik in die aande slaap nie, ly sy werk daaronder. Hy slaap voor sy rekenaar, hy kan skaars in vergaderings wakker bly en sy vrou het hom begin uitvra oor sy vuil nagklere. Sy kla as sy die wasgoed moet doen oor die grasvlekke op sy knieë en die modder aan sy broekspype. Maar nog steeds kan hy die maan nie ignoreer nie. Dis asof hy sy dae in 'n beswyming deurbring en eers deur haar

liefkosings werklik wakker gemaak word. Hy kry waarskuwings by die werk en sy vrou skree op hom. Sy huil in die bad as sy dink hy kan haar nie hoor nie.

Elke keer as hy na sy vrou toe wil gaan, as die skuldgevoel oor haar sy hart roer, sien hy sy maan teen die vensterruit blink. Sy wink hom elke aand buitentoe en hy staan magteloos teenoor haar bekoring. Sy vrou weet nie dat hy in die aande by die huis uitsluit om by sy geliefde te wees nie. Hy maak sy vrou wys dat hy slegs in die aande vry kan wees, sy ruk haar skouers op, tog pleit sy soms by hom om tot sy sinne te kom. Om in die aande langs haar te bly en te slaap. Hy bewaar sy geheim diep in sy hart want sy vrou verstaan nie hoe dit voel om vir iemand so onwrikbaar lief te wees nie.

Sy vrou kul hom in dokters en terapeute se spreekkamers in. Sy pleit voor hulle met trane en verduidelikings. Hulle gee haar hoop in die vorm van stapels pille wat sy in die aande in sy keelgat afdwing. Hy drink sy pille, ignoreer die dokters en terapeute met die vals glimlagte en wag tot hy sy vrou se reëlmatige asemhaling hoor voor hy weer by die trappe af uitsluit stroompie toe. Sy vrou smeek by die dokters om sy onthalwe vir briewe en verskonings en 'n uitweg. Maar sy base verstaan ook nie en na talle waarskuwings vra hulle hom maar om eerder te loop.

Hy sit nou sy dae om op die bank. Dit maak nie aan hom saak waar hy deur die dag is nie, elke oomblik wat hy vir haar wag is om met ewe. Sy vrou probeer hom deur die dag besig hou maar hy tel net die ure totdat die son sak. Sy spandeer ure op die foon en een dag is daar 'n span mense wat rondom hom besig is om te werkskaf. Sy vrou trippel ook in die huis rond. Sy het rolle en rolle materiaal wat sy rondra en sy skree ongeduldig bevele uit. Hulle maak soveel geraas dat hy buite onder die boom gaan lê en slaap.

Daardie aand word hy oudergewoonte wakker maar dit is pikdonker in die kamer. Hy merk op dat sy geliefde se lig glad nie meer in sy kamer skyn nie. Dit is so donker dat hy skaars sy hand voor sy oë kan sien. Hy sluit versigtiger as gewoonlik by die trappe af. Die sleutel vir die agterdeur is nog steeds bo-op die kosyn, maar dit sluit nie meer die deur oop nie. Die sleutel en die slot pas nie meer bymekaar nie. Hy hamer aan die deur en skree en skree. Sy vrou kom agter hom by die trappe af en lei hom weer na hul slaapkamer toe. Hy verbeel hom hoe sy geliefde agter die donkerte lyk, maar hy weet hy sal haar nie gou weer sien nie.

## Geldliefde

Hy was liewer vir geld as vir enige iets anders in die lewe. Hy het in die aand alleen by die huis gesit en sy geld getel. Na sy eenvoudige aandete: rys, vleis en aartappels, het hy die koffer met al sy geld onder sy bed uitgehaal. Dan het hy die geld noukeurig by die tafel gesit en tel met sy sakrekenaar en sy swart notaboekie wat hy in sy hemp se sak gedra het. Deur die dag het sy tone van die lekker omgekrul as hy in sy notaboekie van sy baie geld gelees het. Deur die dag het hy 'n maatskappy se geld getel maar dit was nie vir hom so lekker soos om sy eie geld te tel nie. As hy klaar sy geld getel het, het hy weer die koffer met die groot silwer slot toegesluit en gaan slaap. In sy drome was hy omring deur dit wat hom die gelukkigste in die lewe gemaak het.

En toe het hy een aand net daar aan tafel bly sit. Sy liggaam het van die ontbindingsgasse opgeswel en drie dae later toe daar brommers by sy huis se vensters begin uitpeul het, het sy bure en die mense in die straat die slegte reuk opgemerk. Toe die polisie sy voordeur oopgebreek het, het hulle hom daar by sy tafel aangetref, vooroor gebuk met sy stapels geld wat orals om hom gestrooi gelê het. Hulle was eerste om van die stapels kontant ongemerk in hulle sakke te steek.

Nuuskierige bure het ingeloer. Die bedelaars wat hom voorheen in die straat voorgekeer het, het ook opmerlik hoopvol ingesluip. Die man se fortuin het ongemerk so stuk-stuk sy huis verlaat. In sy testament het hy geskryf dat al sy geld saam met hom begrawe moes word, maar al wat sy prokureur van sy fortuin kon opspoor was 'n groen checkerssak met 'n handjievul vyfrande in.

**In Polite Society**

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## Abstract

This bilingual collection of short stories combines the fairy tale form and the Bizarro genre to explore the value system ingrained in me at a very early age via my conservative Afrikaans upbringing. To my mind the four characteristics of the fairy tale form as identified by Kate Bernheimer (in her path-breaking essay “Fairy Tale is form, Form is Fairy Tale”) namely flatness, abstraction, intuitive logic and normalized magic, also apply to the Bizarro genre. This intersection is exemplified by some of Bernheimer's own fiction, as well as the fiction of Aimee Bender and Lucy Corin, among others, all of whom have influenced my writing.



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## Acknowledgement

The quotes in italics were taken from *The Ladies's book of etiquette, and manual of politeness: A complete hand book for the use of the lady in polite society*, by Florence Hartley (Lee and Shepard, 1873).

*True Christian politeness will always be the result of an unselfish regard for the feelings of others, and though you may err in the ceremonious points of etiquette, you will never be impolite.*

## **Caveat Lector**

Problems come in all shapes and sizes and the first step to solving a problem is determining the shape and size of your particular problem. This is vital in applying the correct solution. Utilising the wrong solution can lead to regret.

Regret comes from not finding the correct solution to a problem. Consulting a witch, for example, is never a good solution. Witches trick and make deals with so much fine print that there has never been a reported case of a witch's solution arriving without a whole bunch of strings attached. A witch will provide the plaintiff with a solution in the moment, but without consideration for adverse, long term implications. For example, asking a witch for a pair of legs in return for your voice with the stipulation that you have to find true love, leads to death. Eating a witch's house is another example.

Consulting elders yields better results as older people are known to be wiser having lived a life-time already. Unfortunately elders have suffered, and through their experiences it is clear to them that there are never easy solutions to problems. Consulting an elder will lead to tedious tasks, hard work and years lost. However, these solutions will be worth it as they come with no strings attached. It is a certainty that the plaintiff will be guaranteed to live a long and happy life.

In some cases the church and clergymen give adequate solutions to problems by consulting the Bible, but the sacrifice is a lifetime of devotion, a solution not to be taken lightly. Clergymen have also been known to trick a plaintiff, and even a prominent religious figure like the mother of Jesus put forth impossible tasks. The plaintiff did not complete these tasks and as a result spent seven years locked up.

Wizards fall into a similar category as witches.

A potion is often used to deal with problems such as abortions, penis enlargements and the need for a kingdom. Potions, however, can be very dangerous. If the incorrect potion is administered it could pose as much of a danger to the giver as the receiver of said potion. Only use a potion if there is a one hundred percent success rate in the outcome of its use and also if, after painstaking research, it has been determined that there is no cure for the potion and that it can not be traced back to you.

Ignoring a problem is a solution that many have tried to implement with varying degrees of success. In some cases the problem does go away but in the main, ignoring a problem will lead to that problem growing in size.

It can thus be deduced that involving other people, witches, wizards and even the church in your problem will most definitely result in unwanted complications. Honesty and truth are two of the best solutions, but results can never be guaranteed. Relying on yourself will also provide varying degrees of success. In your particular case, to live happily ever after, murder may be the only viable solution.



*To be truly polite, remember you must be polite at all times and under all circumstances.*

## Grandmother's jam

Making jam and pickles is a very tedious process. It takes forever, burns easily, and if the bottles are not prepared properly you can die of food poisoning. There is very little reward for your efforts. You need just the right amount of sugar and water for jams, and sugar and vinegar for pickles. The ingredients have to cook for hours, but if you cook them for too long you get toffee, too little and you get a watery soup. You need to stir continuously and slowly. If you don't stir from the bottom of the pot the sugar burns a black sticky layer where the spoon can't reach and that will destroy the batch. Start over. After you've filled your glass bottles you need to seal them with grease-proof paper and melted candle wax. If the metal comes into contact with the jam or pickles it will rust and this too will contaminate the batch.

Now there was a young boy who made jams and pickles with his grandmother in the afternoons while his parents were at work. His grandmother was a sour old woman who wouldn't think twice about hitting him with whatever came to hand. She had a habit of giving him a slap before greeting him for the wrongs he was still to do. She had perfected her own version of the European kissing method with a slap on the one cheek and a kiss on the other. And when he complained he got another slap for good measure. He loved her because his parents told him that he did.

Making jams and pickles also involves some very crap jobs like peeling and slicing onions for onion marmalade. When making apricot jam, the apricots need to be washed, broken apart and the pip removed. Carrots need to be peeled and sliced into equal circles. But none of this can compare with the tedious task of stirring the pot. The boy had to stand on a chair in front of his grandmother's stove to do this. He was too short to reach all the way to the bottom and the batch was ruined more often than not. His grandmother would then shriek and toss the jam and him out the back door. He would be left scrubbing the pot and sticky porch for hours.

The following afternoon he would again be standing on his toes for maximum reach. His legs would cramp but this was better than scrubbing the pot and porch again. If the batch was a success his grandmother raised an eyebrow and told him to stop smiling, it was not burnt, but it was not perfect. After rinsing the bottles in boiling water, his grandmother would carefully spoon the jam into them. He had to cut circles of grease-proof paper to seal the bottles. Before his grandmother screwed the lids on, she watched as he dripped hot candle wax on top of the paper.

Several years went by. He perfected his stirring and outgrew the chair. His grandmother grew older and her slaps fewer. The boy, now a young man, learned to ignore her and while stirring mechanically, dreamt of afternoons not spent in front of the stove. When his grandmother passed away, he burst out laughing. Still he went through the ritual of mourning and funeral arrangements.

His grandmother was not a rich woman but she owned her little house and had had a savings account. The estate needed to be handled and the day the lawyer summoned them to the house, the young man walked through the front door for the first time without getting a slap. His parents tried to look respectful, dressed all in black, but the eagerness of anticipated wealth was written all over their faces. The lawyer read the will solemnly but rapidly and finally addressed the young man. She had left him her large jam pot and long wooden spoon as well as a special recipe. The lawyer put a glass bottle on the table and continued reading. The main ingredient for this special recipe was his grandmother's brain. His parents did not notice as they were sizing up the house, phoning contractors for an extension, and measuring windows. The lawyer made him sign a document, and left.

## A mother's love

There was once a little girl and her mother who lived by themselves in an ugly house with two rooms. The mother kept chickens at the back which the little girl hated. Her bedroom always smelled like chicken shit and she couldn't get the smell out of her hair. The mother walked the little girl to school every morning. In the afternoons she waited for her at the school's gate. If the little girl was a few moments too late, the mother went looking for her. That was infinitely worse. The little girl knew that they were poor because her mother showed it in the way she dressed. The mother wore the same two washed out dresses, one blue, one green. When the mother walked, the dresses made a plastic rustling sound around her calves. There were permanent yellow half-moons under the arms. She would scrub them with a green bar of Sunlight till her hands were red, but the sweat stains only faded.

The mother lectured the little girl on the evils of having friends. Friends would only corrupt her so she was better off playing by herself and listening to her mother. The mother also decided what she could wear. The same bottle green school uniform every morning, or in the afternoons, she was allowed to put on jeans and a t-shirt or a too-tight princess dress she'd outgrown years before. The little girl's mother decided which homework she had to work on first after school:

"I think today you should start on your manners."

"Today is such a beautiful sunny day, maybe Mathematics will be first."

Only after completing all her homework, the little girl was allowed to go outside to feed the chickens and play while the mother cooked dinner. In the evenings the mother read from the Bible and they held hands while the mother prayed for both their sins, the ones they had committed that day and the ones they would yet commit as woman in the future.

The little girl had never been invited to a birthday party before but when she was twelve, she got a purple envelope with gold stars and hearts on it from a rich girl in her class. The rich girl invited everybody to her birthday party. The little girl had never seen such a beautiful thing as that invitation. She carefully wrapped it in soft toilet paper from the bathroom and hid it in her school bag until later that evening. That day she finished her homework, she even helped her mother with dinner instead of playing outside, and after they had prayed she carefully unwrapped the invitation and showed it to her. The little girl's mother smirked as she looked at it, crumpled it into a ball and threw it into the fire. The little girl scrambled to pull it out and turned to face her

mother with the still smouldering ball in her hands.

Her fingers were burnt and when the mother tried to touch her, she said in a low, growling voice that everybody in her class was going, that everybody was going to be there. The mother asked: "If everybody in your class jumps into a fire, are you going to jump in too?" The little girl hated her mother from that day on. She didn't go to the party, and in the days before and after the party she avoided her classmates, not wanting to talk to anyone or even hear about the party. She hid in the bathroom during break. She threw the sandwiches that her mother had made for her in the dustbin and pushed her dinner around on the plate. For weeks the mother's prayers concerned the respect God commands from children for their parents.

The little girl grew older and boys started to notice her thick blonde ponytail, small ankles and breasts. One day a boy followed her home from school. He knocked on the front door of their little house. When her mother opened the door, she was surprised, and that was the only reason she invited him in. He introduced himself shyly, and said hello to the little girl who was now a young woman. He thought she was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen. He couldn't stop thinking about how it would feel to touch her. The mother led them into the kitchen, poured them some cooldrink and then she pulled up a chair and made herself comfortable with her needlework. The boy looked at the young woman, eyebrows raised. The mother said without looking up from her needlework: "Anything you have to say to her that can't be said in front of me, should not be said." The never-to-be-lovers, stared into each other's eyes, smiling and blushing for about an hour before the mother decided that it was time for the boy to go home. He asked for permission to return the next day.

The boy returned for three more afternoons of cooldrink, blushing and staring. He was clever though and gave her secret letters as they passed each other at the front door. But the boy soon grew tired of this game, he grew tired of having to put so much effort into his notes, for not even one kiss. He was a boy after all.

On the fifth day the boy did not return. The young woman waited and waited. She listened as the mother heaped scorn on her for "giving herself" to this boy, how only witches would parade themselves in such fashion. The young woman listened as her mother told her that she was better off without him. She realised that there was never going to be another boy in that house as long as the mother lived.



*And in all cases, however situated, every female ought to learn how all household affairs are managed, were it only for the purpose of being able to direct others. There cannot be any disgrace in learning how to make the bread we eat, to cook our dinners, to mend our clothes, or even to clean the house. Better to be found busily engaged in removing the dust from the furniture, than to let it accumulate there...*

## Mother's day

My name is Magriet. I first fantasized about having my own mother when I was seven years old. My father worked for Spoorinet in Warmbad. My grandmother always wanted him to be educated. Like a lawyer. She said he was handsome, he would have made a great lawyer. My father told me he didn't like school enough to be a lawyer so he became a train mechanic instead. It was better than being a car mechanic because trains were bigger. He also showed me his big hands, greased up, dirty from burnt up coal and said that if God gives a man such big hands, well then, that man was meant to work with them. My father had big hands, big feet, a big hairy chest and a big scruffy beard. When he kissed me goodnight his beard tickled my nose. There was a photo of me when I was a baby. His hands were so big he could hold me in them like a teacup. It was my favourite photo because it was the only one of me as a baby. My father was also the strongest man in town. Every Sunday after lunch he would break the big bone from the lamb roast in half so I could get to the treasure inside. He always gave me the whole bone. He never made me share it with him.

Other people had lots of photos and mothers. I didn't have a mother. My father told me that the ring-neck doves, nesting in the peach tree in the back yard, could make wishes come true. I was scared of their beady red eyes, their high pitched call that would wake me up in the morning. Father said before he had me, he caught one of them and the ring-neck had promised that if father let her go, she would grant him one wish. My father wished for me.

As I grew older I started wondering why all the friends I had had mothers who combed their hair and played dolls with them. My father combed my hair. He got better over the years, but it took a long time before my braid was as tightly made as my friends' braids. My father didn't like playing dolls but he showed me how to draw and paint and play the piano. He taught me to dance the waltz. He let me stand on his big feet and counted the steps: 1, 2, 3 – 1, 2, 3.

He walked me to school and made me apricot jam sandwiches for my lunch break. In winter, in the mornings, he brought me a big cup of tea in bed, but only in winter, as it was still dark when we had to get ready to go to school. When I was in grade two, I heard about mother and daughter days for the first time. Mothers and daughters would gather in the hall on a Saturday morning, dressed alike, and would drink tea from fancy little white cups and matching saucers. There would be melktert and

koeksisters and the best dressed pair would win a prize. I was sure the prize was something I couldn't live without. The day I learnt about mother and daughter days I didn't eat my sandwich at break, the jam smelled sour and the slices were too thick. All the girls were chattering on and the boys pretended that they thought it was silly but I could see in their eyes that like me, they really wanted to go too.

That night I didn't eat my dinner and I didn't want my father to pray with me before bed. I went up to my room alone. Before bed I stood at my window looking out onto the back garden. If I caught a ring-neck then I would also get one wish. I sneaked outside after I was sure father was already sleeping. I had to stand on a tamatiekissie to reach the nest. I picked one gently out of the nest and, holding it close to my chest, I wished for a mother. I even promised that if I got this one thing I would never ask for anything else ever again. I went to bed without brushing my teeth that night. When I woke up the next morning I was sick. I had a fever and father had to call the doctor. After the doctor left Father felt my forehead again and looked worried. I didn't tell him about my wish. Somehow I knew that the ring-neck would want me to keep it secret. I slept the whole day.

Saturday morning arrived at last and I got up and dressed in my most beautiful volkspele dress, made of little red and white blossoms. It was long and wide, and if you turned really fast the dress would float up and from the top I would turn into a mushroom. I also wore white stockings and beautiful black shoes. When father saw me downstairs, he looked puzzled. I told him I was going to the mother and daughter day at the school and that he shouldn't worry as I had asked the ring-neck to give me a mother and I was sure she would meet me at the school. I kissed him goodbye and left.

I arrived too early and the ladies setting the tables with white plates on white tablecloths and white napkins, were still busy so they chased me out of the hall. I went to play on the swings while I waited for my mother to arrive. While I was flying higher than I'd ever done before, as I was feeling very brave that day, I saw her! She came walking towards me, a beautiful volkspele tannie, with a crisp white kappie and tjalie around her shoulders. I knew it was her. I knew the ring-neck would come through for me. I jumped off the swing and almost broke my leg I was so excited, and ran towards her.

She was wearing my father's shoes, but her face was not my father's. She had

crocheted gloves on her large hands. She smiled, took my hand and we walked into the hall. We drank tea from little white cups, wiped our mouths with starched white napkins and ate melktert with little silver cake forks. There were three kinds of tea, and I could have as much as I wanted. On the tables were large glass jugs, ice cubes clinking every time you poured water from them. There were also tiny little fruit juice glasses just big enough for three little slurps of fruit juice. We sang songs, and then there were two ladies from the city who spoke about being a complete woman and the fifth commandment. The fifth commandment was meant for all the daughters. My mother didn't say much but it didn't bother me. All the mothers got a single white rose and mother gave me hers and kissed my forehead. She let me sit on her lap so that I could see the stage better. She tickled my neck and everybody looked at us when I laughed. Mother didn't tell me to shush or behave. She let me run around and play with her tjalie. We didn't win the prize for the best dressed mother and daughter but it was only a box of milk tray anyway.

I didn't want the day to end, but the koeksisters eventually disappeared and the last piece of melktert was soon gone. When people started leaving, mother gave me another smile, hugged me and walked away. Tears were rolling down her cheeks, but I didn't know if I could ask her to stay. I promised to never ask for anything else again. I stood watching her until I couldn't see her any more. Only then did I think about questions I could have asked her. I felt like a bad daughter as she had come all the way and I didn't even bring her a gift. I should have brought her one of my pictures, then she wouldn't have been so sad. She would have had something of me to take with her.

I ran home. I couldn't wait to tell father about mother. I was already calling to him from the small garden gate. He usually waited for me by the door and swooped me up as I walked in. But today I stayed on the ground. In the kitchen where my father was supposed to be, my mother sat, crying.



## Lessons learned from my father

Everything I know about interior decorating I learned from my father. The first thing he taught me was not to sleep with any cupboard doors open. Ghosts live in cupboards and at night if you leave the doors open, they can escape and bother you in your sleep. That's why you get nightmares. It is also important to go through the house and make sure that all the doors are closed before going to bed. If the doors are equipped with locks, it is always better to lock them. If all the doors are locked, you will sleep soundly in the knowledge that no spirits, ghosts or serial killers can get to you. My father also taught me about beds.

I learned from my father that beds should always be positioned against a wall and away from windows. Windows are very dangerous. If you leave them open at night, devils and ogres can climb through and carry you away in your sleep. If your bed is as far away from a window as possible, you will at least have a chance to pray when you hear them climbing in. That is why your bed should always be as far away from windows as possible. It is also better if the top part of your bed is moved against a wall, tightly, so that there is no gap between your head and the wall. If you move your bed into a corner, then you only have one side to worry about. You must also sleep with your back against the wall, so that you are able to see when the demons and ghosts approach your bed. If you sleep facing the wall, evil can sneak up on you and take you by surprise.

When I was younger, I didn't listen to my father, as so many young women are inclined to do. I was tired of checking cupboard doors, sweating at night and longing for a breath of fresh air. I saw all the beautiful interiors featured in magazines and I longed for one of my own. So I moved my bed to the middle of my room. I didn't lock my cupboard doors but I was cautious enough to at least make sure they were closed before I went to bed. I tried sleeping with my windows open, but struggled, so I closed them after a while. With the windows closed the familiar heat of the room was very relaxing but I couldn't decide which side to lie on. I couldn't face away from the wall, because with my bed in the middle of the room I had walls all around me, but very far away. There wasn't a concrete coolness against which I could rest. I tried lying on my back and stared at the ceiling in the darkness. And then I saw him.

He was standing at the bottom of my bed, hat in hand. His face without features pointed towards me. The ringing in my ears got worse. I stared at him, not moving,

not breathing. When I tried to scream a hand covered my mouth. The man walked slowly around the room. He was opening all my cupboard doors. When he returned to my bed he bent over me and nodded. From that night on, no matter how I arranged my room, he kept coming back.

## Fairy Godmother

He nodded slowly as she spoke. She was paying him per hour to fix her. He wasn't in a hurry to do that but she kept coming back week after week. She was living a decent life and she hated it. She spoke about work, what she did for the week and how she felt but kept thinking about going home to her empty flat every night. She was tired of going to the movies alone, or even worse, with her other spinster friends.

When she was in her twenties she told herself she enjoyed being alone. She didn't need a man to take care of her or her dreams. Year after year she turned into the third wheel as more and more of her previously single friends got married and stopped being available. She flirted, exercised until she was sick of it, and never ate carbs. When she turned thirty, few of her original friends remained in contact and she was forced to mingle with other singles. She started hiking and joined a social dance club. She went to church every Sunday and registered a profile on a dating site but she got almost no responses even after several edits.

He suggested in a previous session that she might be too serious and that her requirement for almost immediate commitment stemmed from abandonment issues which scared people away. She reminded him that she didn't need a man to fulfil her, that she was independent and that there was nothing wrong with being single in your thirties. The world was changing. She was seeing him for the stress caused by tight deadlines and lack of sleep. He raised an eyebrow. She raised one back at him.

She had been led to believe that if she learned to cook gourmet meals perfectly, iron clothes perfectly and present herself perfectly, she would be guaranteed a man to look after her. She was tired of having to get up every morning to go to work. She didn't want to change her own light bulbs any more. She wanted a man to take her car to the garage for servicing. She didn't want to worry about the future, think about insurance policies or pay her bond alone. She was independent but it was so much easier if you had somebody to share these costs with. He suggested a butler, she laughed, and he wrote a few more notes in his notepad. She wanted to say that she was feeling overwhelmed and all she needed was a repeat prescription of what he had given her before.

She paused for a moment and he looked at her. He asked her about her diary that she had to keep for the weeks in between their sessions. She shrugged and told him, not

for the first time, that she thought it was pointless. He put his pen down and looked steadily at her. He asked her what she wanted, what her wish was in life. Returning his gaze, she noticed that his white coat had a silvery sheen to it, and that two beautiful, transparent wings had sprouted from his back. His pen was now a pink magic wand with a silver star at the top with which he waved and made circles in the air.



*Avoid eccentricity either in dress, conversation, or manner. It is a form of vanity, as it will attract attention, and is therefore in bad taste.*

## Invisible

Even before she was born, her parents knew that there was something wrong with her. They went to all the appointments, holding hands in anticipation of seeing their baby on a black and white screen. But they never saw her. They thought it was an adventure decorating the baby room in neutral colours of teal and grey, each secretly hoping the baby would be the gender they wanted. They were not really bothered, as long as the baby was healthy and normal. When she was born the doctors were baffled. They could feel her, but as she was made of glass, they couldn't see her. She was a beautiful crystal blue that only became visible in moonlight. If the light refracted just right they could see her shimmering in her crib. During the day they saw her glinting in the sunlight on the front porch. Her father was worried about her future as an invisible girl, but after years of waiting, he was happy that they finally had another soul with them in the house, a happy little baby filling the silence in the late afternoons and early mornings.

The birth was hard on her mother and she struggled to accept her new invisible daughter. She dressed her with great difficulty and uncertainty. She spent nights imagining what her little daughter looked like. Despite her daughter's peculiar appearance, she was a healthy, happy baby who often gurgled and giggled in her crib. She learned to crawl and her mother was startled by the appearance of her baby everywhere, except it wasn't her baby as much as just her nappy floating around the house while she crawled to every corner. As she grew, she learned to talk, to dress herself and to kick a ball in the backyard with her father. She also learned very early on that if she got undressed completely then she could disappear and hide from her parents. She got really good at disappearing when she didn't feel like doing her chores. She learned that when she went outside at night, after her parents were asleep, she could run around naked without being reprimanded. In the moonlight she turned a beautiful silvery-blue. In the moon's company she became normal. She looked like all the other little girls she knew. She danced and just as the sun became visible on the horizon, she sneaked back into the house, crawled under her duvet and slept.

Her mother didn't like her walking around the house naked. She tried to teach her daughter the skills a woman should have. Making a bed neatly, cooking, making beautiful clothes and taking care of her dolls. But she preferred to visit the dove's nest in the big tree at the bottom of their yard. She climbed as high as she could, every time trying to go a bit higher and there she would sit the whole afternoon looking at

the top of the houses, different birds pecking at the grass below, listening to the doves cooing the afternoon away. She didn't like doing the dishes because she was clumsy and would drop all the plates and glasses, and then her mother would get angry and shout at her. Her mother would ask how she was ever going to have a household of her own if she couldn't do the dishes properly. She didn't know how to answer her mother and just stood quietly, wishing she had normal human hands and not cold glass slippery ones. She also tried to help her father in his workshop but eventually he'd get impatient with her and chase her out to go play in the garden.

She knew she wasn't allowed to eavesdrop on her parents when they were sitting on the front stoep, but she was curious and one day she heard them talking about her. The neighbours were complaining about her wandering around the neighborhood, her clothes floating in mid-air. They said that it made them feel like they were living with a ghost. This disturbed them a great deal. But she read in her books that ghosts were dead. She wasn't dead.

When she wanted to know why she looked so different to everybody else, her mother cried softly and her father just shook his head. She also wanted to have friends that could speak to her, that would not get upset when she spoke to them. But her parents had no answers for her. She climbed her tree and waited once more for the moon to make her normal. Her days became filled with sleep and her nights were spent outside, in the moon's company.

One night, with her parents asleep, she walked quietly through the house, noticing the shadows made by the furniture and the little porcelain dolls her mother collected. Her parents' breathing comforted her as she stood next to their bed. She heard the soft wheezing of her father's gentle snoring and she watched her mother's open mouth. After she got undressed, she blew them a kiss and sneaked out of the house, like she had done so many nights before. She climbed her tree, higher than before. If she could only reach the moon, she would be normal. When she could climb no further she stretched out her arms for the moon to take her.

## My brain

I sit at the kitchen counter and take my brain out. It's heavier than I expect, and a lot softer. Usually, when you are presented with a brain, it feels rubbery and the surface does not give under your fingers. Of course these are brains that have been prepared in formaldehyde for inspection and dissection. My brain has not been put into formaldehyde so as you can imagine, it's not the same. Brains prepared for scientific experiment have the pungent smell of chemicals. My science class always smelled like old perfume and cigarette smoke from the teacher who really didn't care about our learning. The smell of brains prepared in formaldehyde is a combination of Vim, the strongest bleach on the market, that my mother used to make her whites the whitest white, and the chicken you forgot at the back of the fridge. Or the smell of the rat that died behind the garage and is now biodegrading. It is not a smell one gets easily accustomed to.

Since I am not a science experiment, my brain smells nothing like this. My brain has the faint smell of burnt toast. It smells like salt and proteins, the way blood smells when you cut your finger and then first suck at it before you inspect the wound. Anyway, I put my brain next to me on the counter and it tries to make a joke: *You know, it's a pity a brain like me should rot in the ground one day.* I deliberately don't laugh because this is a serious matter. I tell it to sjut! *The faint burnt smell is because you've been working too hard and it's time to give heart a turn.* My brain tries to protest and I hold my index finger up to it.

My brain gets very agitated in the silence. Even when I sleep it goes on working. My brain is a workaholic. I think about moving it into another room. At least I won't have to look at the neurons firing with annoyance. I threaten it one last time to keep quiet when a slight fluttering, a grumbling, demands my attention. Yes, there it is again. It's not coming from my brain. It's coming from elsewhere in my body. I sit up, hopeful. My brain is getting very nervous at the thought of being retired. And there, again! I have to investigate where this is coming from. My heart then shies away as its attempt to speak is interrupted by my stomach.

I apologise and immediately take my stomach out and put it next to my brain. I reprimand my stomach and it just growls louder at me. I move it from the counter into the next room after my brain points out that if the stomach is growling that loudly, it might not hesitate to devour my brain. My brain is nothing but practical. I remind it to keep quiet again and we sit in silence as we wait for my heart to summon the courage to speak. We sit there for a very long time.



## Falling in love

She loved living in the townhouse complex. Her little house had white window frames and a red front door. She hung beautiful curtains and chose a Delft-blue pattern for her kitchen. She had words of inspiration on all of the walls: Love. Hope. Dream. For her bedroom and living room she made pink flowery curtains. For coasters she crocheted doilies and for winter she knitted her own jerseys. She had many friends and really enjoyed living her life. There was just one problem: she had a ghost living in her bathroom. It would blow in her ear whenever she went to the toilet or took a shower or brushed her teeth. Whenever her female friends came over it didn't resist blowing into their ears either, but their husbands never felt anything when they used the same bathroom. This proved to her that the ghost living in her bathroom was a man. He didn't really bother her, but she always got a fright if she had to use the toilet in the middle of the night. Her bathroom had a bath against the furthest wall from the door. The toilet was right next to the bath and the basin across from it. She never used to switch the light on when she got up to pee, but after her ghost arrived she took to switching the light on.

Eventually her friends started making excuses not to come over. She saw them less and less and although they were too well-mannered to complain about her ghost, she knew that he was the reason. She didn't know how to speak to ghosts. She had seen movies with boards and glass triangles but she didn't have anything like that so she stood in the middle of her bathroom and just started speaking to him out loud. She asked him if he would be so kind as to stop blowing in her friends' ears. She didn't mind him doing it to her, but her friends were sensitive and such audacity was making them nervous. Her ghost didn't respond. She thought she'd hurt his feelings but there wasn't much else she could do. She got ready for bed.

She woke up in the middle of the night as usual. When she switched the bathroom light on she was startled. There was a reflection next to hers in the bathroom mirror. He was handsome and smiling at her. She turned around to see if there was anybody behind or even next to her. She could see his lips move, but what she heard sounded as if he was speaking under water. She stopped him and told him that she couldn't understand. She asked him to nod yes if he could understand her. He nodded, still smiling. She asked him why he kept blowing in the women's ears and he shrugged. She thought to phrase her questions to fit yes and no answers. She asked if he did it because he was lonely. He shook his head, no. She asked if he liked doing it and he

nodded yes. She burst out laughing and he laughed too. They talked like this until the sun came up and she had to get ready for work. When she finished brushing her teeth he waved her goodbye.

At work she couldn't stop smiling. She kept thinking about her ghost and how nice it was to have somebody to talk to. She enjoyed talking to people but she wasn't always interested in what they had to say so this was the perfect arrangement. She wasn't sure why she could see his reflection but not his body standing next to her. She tried to Google reflections of ghosts but this didn't really yield any useful results. She accepted such was the way of ghosts and found herself counting the hours until it was time to go home.

That evening while getting ready for bed she had another conversation with her ghost as he smiled back at her from the mirror. She told him about her day at work, and he tried to communicate to her as in a game of charades. It was her favourite game to play with friends and she was really good at it. Her ghost signalled to her different words and phrases and when she asked him why he chose to haunt her bathroom he only winked at her. She smiled back at him. They continued their charade conversations for months on end. She arrived at work later and later in the mornings. She didn't mind the trouble this caused her as she was now living on love and the anticipation of seeing him in her mirror every night. Her friends started visiting again and she told them about her wonderful ghost. They looked at her with concerned smiles and politely declined using her bathroom.

One evening she couldn't resist asking him if he was haunting her bathroom because she was the most beautiful girl in the complex. He nodded his head and blew her a ghostly kiss. Her heart jumped the way it always did when a boy offered to carry her school bag home. She felt herself blushing from below her knees all the way to the top of her head. He made a heart against his chest with his ghostly fingers and clasped his hands together in front of him in a pleading manner. She knew he wanted her to join him but she couldn't live in a bathroom for the rest of her life. She was still young and definitely not ready to die. She shook her head, explaining to him that it was too much to ask of her. Although she cared for him deeply, she couldn't see how they would ever be together in any other way than what they had at that moment. His face became more and more urgent. Because she was becoming very self-conscious, she switched the light off and his grey sheen illuminated the bathroom.

When she got up the following morning and used the toilet she didn't feel the familiar flutter in her ear that had become as familiar to her as the cold tiles beneath her feet. She brushed her teeth and stared blankly at herself. She didn't know what to do without him. She agonised about it at work and caught herself staring at her watch every five minutes. She couldn't concentrate and kept checking her phone, for what, she wasn't sure. She walked to the kitchen at work and made herself 8 cups of tea. She drank 2 litres of water and still it wasn't even lunchtime. She googled YouTube videos about DIY projects and people's cats. When the time came for her to go home, she stayed an hour longer. She didn't want to be at work, but she also didn't want to go home to an empty bathroom mirror either. She reasoned to herself that she was being unreasonable, she couldn't be in love, she couldn't even like him, he wasn't real. But every time she thought this she saw his ghostly smile, she saw him waving goodbye to her every morning, felt his breath in her ear and the beat her heart skipped every time he did this. When she finally got home she forced herself to make dinner first, and then to watch television until as late as possible.

The next morning he looked at her remorsefully from the mirror. She was so happy to see him but he held up his hand and shook his head no. He indicated that he was only there to say goodbye. He wasn't going to live in her bathroom anymore. She cried and wanted to tell him that she was sorry but the words got stuck in her throat and he disappeared. When she put her hand on the mirror it left a faint imprint.

Many months passed and her friends started using her bathroom again. She was slowly getting back to her normal routine before her ghost. She met new people and experienced great evenings where she wouldn't once look for his reflection in the bathroom mirror. Then the rumour started. One of the houses in the complex was haunted. She wasted no time in finding out which house it was, and that evening she set out to visit them, melkert in hand.



## The singing mermaid

I went to the witch because I wanted to sing. All I ever wanted was to sing with the humans. I sat on the beach, just out of view, and watched them night after night as they sang at the little karaoke bar. I learned at school that humans don't sing made up songs like us, they have words on lighted boxes and they sing what the words say. Ever since we learned about it at school I have been dreaming of standing behind such a box and singing. All the other humans watch and cheer and clap hands and I wanted them to do the same for me. Singing under water is very difficult and it is never as loud as humans singing on land. I couldn't just belt out my feelings because you can't really hear a difference under water. I also couldn't go to the bar as a mermaid, so I had to go to the witch to ask for legs. Witches always ask a very high price for helping you be with your true love, but I didn't want true love so I only had to give the witch my beautiful, long blue curls. And then she gave me this warning: If the humans did not cheer for me, I would be doomed to stay on land, a failed star for the rest of my days. The witch gave me legs and loaned me a dress for the evening.

As I emerged from the water and started walking on the beach, I stumbled. The legs the witch had given me were heavy and I really struggled to walk with them. It took me a long time to reach the bar as the silky sand dragged me down with every step. When I eventually got there the humans looked at me curiously. I smiled at them and tried to imitate their movements with my own. There was laughter all around, but when I laughed with them they would walk away or just stare at me. When one spoke to me I spoke back in my sweetest voice, but their brows would always furrow in response. They didn't seem to like me much, but I was determined to win them over with my singing. The singing was happening at the far end of the bar and as I made my way there people bumped into me and I fell down several times. I was not getting this walking thing right. I scraped my elbow, bumped my head and hurt one of my new ankles.

When I got to the end of the bar I saw that they held a stick in front of them and this made their voices louder. So I rushed up and grabbed it, knowing that this was my chance. The human that held the stick previously waved his arms at me and then walked away. The music started up again, and symbols appeared on the box in front of me. I didn't know what the symbols meant, and decided to make up my own song. As I opened my mouth, a screeching, piercing sound filled the bar. I dropped the stick and covered my ears. Everyone was staring at me but no one clapped hands, cheered or

laughed. Someone helped me up and led me by the shoulders outside. He gave me a sad smile, turned and went back inside the bar. When I tried to follow, the others would not let me back in.



*The way to make yourself pleasing to others, is to show that you care for them.*

## Being a princess

He was an only child for most his life. He remembers watching TV shows with both his parents before his sister was born. He looked forward to the moments after dinner and before bedtime when he sat in-between his parents, watching their favourite shows with them. His father's strong legs were always warm against his own and his mother's silky nightgown always cool. He was only allowed to talk when the ads were playing. Ads for Joshua Doore, *your uncle in the furniture business* and Avbob. His mom always told him that Avbob was where dead people went, so he assumed it was like heaven. He thought of the pictures in his children's Bible showing him what heaven looked like. Whenever he tried to ask his parents if he was right about Avbob and heaven, they shouted at him for asking too many questions. He also wanted a cat, but his parents said no to his birthday wish year after year.

He grew out of his batman pyjamas and his father stopped watching TV with them. He sat in his father's place with his mother and they watched *Murder She Wrote* and the *A-team*. His father worked later and later and his mother slept on the couch once he had gone to bed. In the mornings his parents ignored each other and made a point of only being friendly to him. One day after school he came home to find his parents shouting at each other. His father was hitting the table with his fist and his mother was crying. He stayed outside until they were done shouting and his father had driven off in his car. That evening he watched TV alone.

By the time he was in high school his father was watching TV with them again. He was too big to fit between his parents on their old couch now and so he lay on the floor instead. His parents began holding hands again, talking to each other at breakfast and his mother became pregnant. After they sat him down in the living room to tell him, he studied the human reproductive system illustrated in his Biology textbook and imagined a little person growing inside his mother. She called him big brother now. When he looked at his mother these days all he could see were the illustrations in his textbook of the little human growing inside her stomach. Whenever the thought of his parents having sex entered his mind while he was masturbating he felt like vomiting. He stopped watching TV with them and instead stayed in his room playing on his PlayStation or listening to his *devil's music*, as his mother called it. He hated his life and the fact that his body had, as if overnight, turned him into a stranger, uncomfortable and shy. He wanted to be invisible at school and at home. His friends mocked him because of the baby his parents were about to have. He started spending his breaks

hiding away in the library.

Finally she was born one Thursday afternoon in October. His parents left for the hospital in such a hurry that he was left standing alone at the window, watching as they sped off. He had the entire house to himself so he spread out on the couch and switched the TV on. He watched the moving images with disinterest as he waited for the hours to pass. His father returned later the same day, exhausted but excited. He was now the older brother of a beautiful little girl. Then his father scolded him for not going to school. He made a point of showing his father that he wasn't a baby anymore by shouting back. His father shrugged and went to the kitchen. He went to his room and before slamming the door, shouted that he would appreciate it if his father would stop ruining his life. Only after he heard the car pull out of the driveway, did he leave his room.

His sister replaced him on the couch by the time he was almost finished with school. She was pretty despite her big nose, her red hair and awful freckles. Her green eyes added to her charm. He tried hard to hate her as a baby but the more she grew into a thing almost human, the more they got along. She had a sweet laugh and was always the happiest to see him when he came back from school. She held his index finger in her tiny hand and his heart softened. He admitted to himself that he loved her more than anything else, but to the world he proclaimed how much he loathed her. To anyone willing to listen he complained about the inconvenience of trying to do homework with a crying baby in the house. In truth she very rarely cried. Because of his indifference act, he sneaked into her bedroom to check on her in her crib at night. She was inevitably all gummy smile and high pitched gurgles. She would fall asleep holding his finger and only once her little chest had fallen into a slow rhythm, would he sneak out of her room again.

After finishing school he went to work at the local supermarket. He got a staff discount and spent all his extra money spoiling his sister with toys and sweets. His mother didn't like him giving her sweets but he just couldn't help himself. She sometimes sat on his bed when he got home after his shifts and jumped into his arms when she saw him. He went with the family when they took her to her first day of school. He was inexplicably proud of her and the girlfriends he brought home from time to time also loved her. He sometimes played princess dress-up with her on weekends and complained about how terrible it was over a cigarette on his lunch break at work. To himself he admitted that he really looked forward to his occasional Saturday off.

He started noticing the small things that reminded him of his own childhood. His father was working late nights again. He came home from work to find his mother and sister sitting on the couch in front of the TV. His mother started sleeping on the couch again. When he left for work in the mornings his mother and father had their pretend conversations and his little sister was caught in the middle answering the same questions he had to. He watched as his sister tried to make herself smaller, disappearing more often to the comfort of the space under her bed. He crawled under the bed with her and watched as she cried and refused to come out.

He noticed that his mother stopped brushing his sister's hair in the mornings. Her school uniform was almost always dirty and she smelled faintly rancid. She reminded him of the old beggar woman living near the railway tracks who shouted at passers-by. He felt embarrassed for her and started to take care of her. After his shifts at the supermarket he would wash her uniform for the next day, and in the mornings he made sure her hair was combed, her lunch made, and that she ate her breakfast. At this point his mother didn't come out of her room at all and his father had moved out again.

One afternoon, coming home from work, he found his sister in the backyard burning all her princess dresses. Her hair was chopped short and standing out in jagged edges. She had cut it herself with the blunt kitchen scissors. From the fire she had a black coal streak on her cheek and the mucus from her nose mixed with her tears was glinting on her top lip. He went to stand next to her and as he put his arm around her shoulders he felt that old familiar feeling of disappointment and hopelessness. The gift he got her was still on the back seat of his car. He had wrapped it with pink princess paper and a beautiful golden bow. It was her birthday but there were not to be any friends or singing, and she wouldn't get a wish from blowing out her birthday candles. He knew that on her princess day she felt more like a witch, and he also knew that she was never going to wear princess dresses ever again. He would have to take her gift back the next day. Together they watched as everything turned to ash.

*Manner may be, and, in most cases, probably is, the cloak of the heart; this cloak may be used to cover defects, but is it not better so to conceal these defects, than to flaunt and parade them in the eyes of all whom we may meet?*

## Keeping busy

He listens in darkness to the morning music for a few minutes before getting up. He remembers her slapping him in the mornings to switch the radio off because she wanted to get a bit more sleep. She groaned and pulled the blanket over her head as he got dressed in silence before making her morning tea. He brought her tea in bed every morning since the day they got married. Out of habit he doesn't switch the light on, but leaves the radio playing. He walks down the hallway to the bathroom. The jug she made him pee into is still standing on the edge of the bath, but he hasn't used it in a while, now being free to pee straight into the toilet bowl, he still feels it accusing him of his bad aim. He washes his hands with a lavender scented Palmolive beauty bar, one of a whole cupboard-full, because she only bought in bulk. After his morning bathroom routine he has his breakfast and takes note that the way he makes his oats in the morning just never tastes like hers. It doesn't matter how precisely he follows her recipe, the way he makes it tastes different.

Habit causes him to take out two cups. His big blue coffee mug and her special bone china flowered teacup. He puts her cup back into the cupboard before making himself a steaming mug of coffee that he slurps while staring out the kitchen window, into the back yard. She hated him slurping anything, and he only ever stopped after she lost her temper and shouted at him. Slurping your coffee is a sign of bad manners and she hated him showing his low breeding.

He slurps his coffee till it's cold enough and then drinks it all in one gulp. One day she brought him coffee while he was working in his workshop, and his mug was balanced on a saucer. From that day she insisted on him using a saucer because she hated the coffee-mug rings on the furniture. He remembers the smell of ginger biscuits coming from the kitchen and the sound the back screen made when she kicked it open and it slapped against the wall. He still hears her shouting to the dogs to *skoert* from under her feet.

After breakfast he rinses his mug and bowl before making up the bed and getting dressed. He opens all the curtains in the house before switching the radio off and doing his morning Bible study. His thoughts trail off while he prays and sometimes he completely forgets what he is praying so he just ends up reciting *Our Father Who art in Heaven...* She used to lead their morning and evening prayers. He goes outside to his workshop every day. The house was never really his and even with her gone, he still

feels like he is intruding if he stays too long. He unlocks the heavy steel roller garage door. All his woodwork tools are neatly packed away on shelves stacked against the back wall, ready and waiting to welcome him back for another day.

His big steel table stands in the middle of the floor, brown with the wood dust from the previous day's work. He switches the radio on, and while he listens to the news he sweeps the floor. Afterwards he can't recall what he heard. He looks at the worn-out broom and hears her nagging him to buy a new one because this one can't possibly sweep any more. He smiles and puts it back in the corner where he always keeps it. His workshop is neat, and he takes great pride in the shelves he built for his tools. He looks at his nuts, bolts and nails in old Ricoffy tins, labelled and arranged according to size. He chooses a recording of the Lydenburg Boere Orkes, inserts the cassette and presses play. She hated boeremusiek and once he had transferred his vinyl collection to cassette, she forbid him from playing *that noise* as she called it, in her house. The first song is a polka and he remembers swinging her in her Volkspele dress around the town hall when they were younger. She was only truly happy whenever they danced together.

He hums to the tunes softly while looking over his designs for miniature chairs, tables, cupboards and sideboards. He chooses a design for a dining chair with a straight back, and no armrests. The legs of the chair curve slightly near the seat before extending straight down. He chooses two 5mm Teak off cut planks from the piles of different off-cuts he keeps under a plastic sheet against the outside wall. People bring him off-cuts at church or sometimes he gets lucky and one of his old buddies brings him a bakkie load of decommissioned office chairs or even wood panelling from outdated government buildings. He keeps the good wood, like Imbuia, for special projects.

He traces enough parts to make six chairs and starts cutting them with meticulous care. After assembling all the parts, first fixing them together with glue, he carefully hammers small silver nails into the joints. He carries the chairs on a tray to an outside table to dry properly in the sun. Inside, he traces the parts for a rectangular table, legs in an identical design to the chairs from another plank. After assembling the table in the same manner he carries it to join the chairs on the outside table. It will take the glue a day to dry properly and he has to wait for that before he can varnish the set. He already has enough furniture to decorate three doll's houses.

## Forgiveness

The first thing that went wrong was when I was not chosen as the winner of a beauty contest. I waited, softly praying to hear my name. My name was never called out loud. I wasn't first prize ever. I read all the knight books from the library, dreaming about living in castles and having my own chain mail, and still I didn't get the wrapped gift for the most books read. I remember slapping my brother, my hand imprinted on his thigh, my mother screaming at me, my brother screaming and crying, me trying to explain. He called me fat, said I was ugly. I cried too when mother dragged me to my room, throwing me to my knees. I had to pray, I had to ask for forgiveness. My brother didn't say sorry. I told God it was unfair.

I lost my new school shoes and I couldn't find them. I looked for them all over the school grounds, in my classroom, under the bridge at the back of the school where I secretly went during break time, but they were gone. I didn't go home, afraid to tell mother who had promised me in the shop that I would be sorry if I lost a pair again. I hated her treating me like that and I stuck my tongue out at her. I didn't think she saw me. When mother eventually came to find me at school I confessed to sticking out my tongue at her, with tears streaming and stomach growling I apologised. I bargained for forgiveness, promising to pay for them with my own pocket money. Mother didn't say anything, she just drove us home in silence. Once home, she didn't look at me and she didn't shout at me. The next day we went back to the store. She still didn't shout.

I couldn't tell mother that the teacher was mean to me. I couldn't tell her that I deserved it, the teacher told me I was horrible and because of my lies I had to stand in the corner most of the day. I didn't lie. But she told me it was impossible to have a fairy for a friend because they didn't exist. I was late for class because my friend just wanted to play for a little bit more. We played hide and seek under the bridge, but the teacher called me horrible and I had to write fifty times that lies will be punished by God. I refused and told her I wasn't lying. Back-chatting is a sin I learned about that day. I didn't go to school the following day or the day after. When I got home one evening the teacher was waiting with mother in the living room. They made me sit down and I had to confess. When I tried to tell mother I didn't know playing with fairies was a sin, she dragged me to my room again. I didn't want to talk to God. I told God I hated him and my teacher and my brother and my mother.

Then my grandmother died.

*A well-bred woman will not demand as a right what she may have a claim to expect from the politeness of the other sex, nor show dissatisfaction and resentment if she fancies herself neglected. For want of good breeding some females are exorbitant in their expectations, and appear unthankful even when everything is done which true politeness demands. Young woman should guard against this unamiable defect.*

## The youngest daughter

She was unlucky enough to be born the youngest of two daughters. Her destiny was to be her sister's helper for the rest of her life while her sister was the one that got the happily ever after. She was born with the purpose of helping her sister find true love and after the successful completion of a wedding, she was to be the housekeeper for the happy couple. Like all the other youngest daughters it was her job from the age that her sister was ready for marriage to spend her days at the factory gates talking to potential husbands. The eldest daughters were exempted from any household chores or work. It was their responsibility to sit all day working on their list of characteristics that the youngest had to look for in a husband. She resented her sister for not being allowed to have a husband and a household of her own. With her sister's latest wish list in hand, she had to go to the factory gates the next day. The factory workers always worked in shifts. The morning shift ended before sunrise and the next shift ended after sunset. She lay in her bed, angry because she had to get up the following day in the cold and dark morning air.

She got dressed, deliberately trying not to be quiet and as she took the basket with treats for the workers she cursed at her sister and mother, still warm in their beds. She walked the dirt path through the forest to get to the furthest edge, the factory smoke a beacon that helped to show her the way. As she walked through the forest she noticed the early morning sunshine colour everything in a misty pink. The forest was coming alive with youngest daughters carrying baskets and factory workers making the trek for the first shift of the day. She was starving and took some of the bread that was not meant for her. The wine left a sour aftertaste that she didn't like but there was nothing else in the basket for her to drink. The birds were waking up with shrill tweets and fluttering, and as she got closer to the forest's edge, she heard human chattering. Other girls passed her by and proudly waved their baskets in front of the workers, parading themselves to catch the best candidates' eyes. She really didn't feel like talking to anybody and stayed at the edge of the forest, just out of view, watching as the blushing girls made fools of themselves. As the sun started to set, the second shift for the day began. She was still hiding in the forest, watching through the green foliage as workers headed home and clean workers arrived to take their place. When the first girls started to go home, she finished the last of the bread and headed home as well.

The closer she got to her house, the more she panicked. She hadn't spoken to a single worker but if she admitted that to her mother and sister, they would beat her with the

stick that hung behind the door. She read the little paper with her sister's requirements on it and deliberately walked a little slower. In her panic, the familiar feeling of the stick hitting her back and arms made her throw up. She recalled the previous times she had dealings with it, when she refused to make the beds, do the dishes or didn't say her evening prayers. Her body would ache all over while the bruises turned first from blue-black to purple and then finally, when they were yellow, she didn't feel them anymore. As she entered the house her mother and sister's faces, beaming with anticipation, waited for her at the dining room table. When she put the basket on the table, her mother remarked happily that all the food was eaten and she took that as a good sign. Her sister clapped her hands and almost jumped from her chair. They beckoned for her to sit and mother made a gesture indicating that she was only entitled to dinner if she had good news.

Her voice trembled as she recalled the things her sister had written on her list. She started describing a man exactly as she knew her sister saw in her imagination. He was tall and had dark hair. He wasn't too tall, just half a head taller than her sister so at least her sister would still be able to wear high heels. He was handsome, kind, friendly and funny. He was also good with money. He had big hands and he was very strong so he would be able to carry her sister over the threshold. Her sister giggled every time she mentioned the handsome worker and she had to keep describing him for over an hour. When she was finally allowed to eat, her dinner was cold and tasted sour. The fat from the meat drifted yellow in the brown murkiness of the stew and stuck to her palate. She wasn't allowed any dessert. In their excitement her mother and sister almost forgot to read the Bible or say their evening prayers that night. Before going to bed her mother packed another basket. The youngest daughter was left in silence to wash the dishes and clean the kitchen.

She went to the forest on two more occasions, eating her fill from the baskets and then drifting aimlessly until it was time to go home. Two more evenings were spent talking about her sister's made-believe future husband and eating cold dinners. On the third evening her sister made the announcement that she agreed with the judgement that this man was perfect. She demanded to meet him the following evening. Listening to her sister, the youngest daughter felt herself turning ashen grey, a projection of the corpse she knew she would be when she showed up alone the next night. She couldn't finish her dinner. After her mother and sister went to bed she prayed in earnest for the first time in her life. She whispered her desperation to God, hoping, wishing this man from her stories into reality. She knew that crying was not going to fix anything but

still, she couldn't help herself from sobbing into her pillow that night.

She woke the following morning, her stomach churning and her head spinning. She picked up the basket from the table as usual, but it felt heavier. Like the stick behind the door it seemed to be accusing her. She forced herself to walk through the forest briskly, determined to at least leave the forest that morning and invite the first worker she met for dinner that evening. A beating because the prospective husband wasn't as she described him was better than the death that would surely be hers for not showing up with a worker at all. Her knees buckled and her hands trembled, so that she struggled to keep the basket from dropping. Other girls walked past her, chirping excitedly, sharing stories of all the workers they had spoken to. She ignored them and walked straight ahead, all the while praying silently: *Please please please.*

As she walked out of the forest into the clearing that led to the factory gates, tears rolled down her cheeks. She tried to make herself stop but the stick, an ever-present torment, tormented her. She looked around for a worker, tall but not too tall, with dark hair and kind eyes, whatever the hell that was. She was still scanning the faces of workers through her tears when he approached her. He offered her a hanky, smeared with dirt. She took his offering with a shy thank you and then the flood gates opened and with her small body shaking she told him everything. He told her he understood and that he was there to console her. He asked her to wait for him while he went home to clean up and make himself more presentable. He wiped her cheeks a last time and told her to cheer up. She went back to the safety of her forest and waited for him under one of the big Yellow wood trees.

He returned just as the sun was setting, in his arms a bunch of flowers, and sticking out of his pocket, a bar of chocolate for her sister. In his clean clothes he was indeed even more handsome than she imagined him to be. His wavy dark hair glistened in the sunshine. His nails were no longer black but beautifully white and clean. He smelled faintly sweaty but also of strength and kindness, the way she always imagined a man to smell. He took the basket from her and they walked to her house in silence. Whenever she looked at him nervously, he smiled. Every time he did that her resentment grew. He was the man that she had imagined, her dream man that came to life and now she was forced to hand him over to her sister.

As they walked through the front door, her house transformed from an ever grey to a bright yellow. The dinner table was made up with what seemed to her a hundred

candles. There were the most delicate crystal wine glasses and white porcelain plates. Her mother and sister made enough food for the whole factory and the table looked like it would break at any minute from the weight of the three meats, vegetables and baked potatoes. She could smell the malva pudding baking in the oven and saw the caramel sauce bubbling on the stove. They didn't greet her, but immediately overwhelmed the worker with sweet greetings and overly animated compliments. Her sister made a high pitched sound she thought was polite laughter. Her mother kept encouraging the worker to eat and to help himself to more food. She sneered and every time she wanted to take another baked potato her mother smacked her hand away. When the worker finally sat back in his chair, his mouth shining with the grease from roast pork, stuffed leg of lamb and Rosemary chicken, he got a chance to speak. He thanked her mother and sister for the wonderful dinner, and then he also thanked her. He looked at her and said thank you for making all of this possible. She felt herself blushing and her tongue got stuck in her mouth. She only managed to whisper a thank you before her mother changed the subject and insisted that it was time for coffee and pudding.

While her mother was dishing up dessert, he insisted on helping the youngest daughter clear the table. This was something that she had never experienced before, her mother and sister never offered to help her with her chores. She felt the crimson embarrassment rise from her chest to her cheeks. After they cleared the table he made her sit at the table with them to first enjoy the caramel goodness with some coffee before they would do the dishes together. She could see her mother and sister's eyes narrowing at her stealing her sister's moment. At that point she didn't care. This man was truly kind and she knew that she would love him for the rest of her life. Later, she couldn't stop herself from staring at his hands as he dried the dishes and delicately packed them away, asking her where everything's place was. She hated herself for blushing whenever he looked at her or smiled at her, but the longer they stood in front of the sink, the more her heart felt too big for her chest. He greeted them all with the grace of a prince and left. It was agreed that he join them for dinner the following evening again.

The next day she struggled to concentrate on her chores and kept staring involuntarily at the path she knew he would emerge on later that day. She felt restless as she made the beds and ironed her sister's dress. He was standing next to her as she swept the floor. He helped her dust, and then in the late afternoon she danced with him in secret behind the house. And while she was doing this she prayed again. Although she knew,

very deep down, that it was not her destiny or purpose to have this man for herself, she prayed that God would have mercy and answer her again. She took extra care with her own hair that day, washing it twice and combing it till it sparkled in the sun. She didn't tie it up in her usual style but left it falling over her shoulders, the way little streams cascade over brown, smooth river rocks. Her mother reprimanded her foolishness and made a point of highlighting her sister's beautiful hair, blue eyes and perfect body. She was no competition for her sister and the worker was going to be her sister's husband whether she dollied herself up or not. She didn't let her mom see her tears as she set the table.

The dinner that evening was as successful as the previous evening. When he complimented her sister on her beautiful dress, her heart almost shattered. But then he also complimented her hair and said that he preferred it hanging loose. She was happier in that moment than she had ever been. After dinner he presented her sister with a gold ring and asked her to be his wife. Her mother cried fake tears and her sister acted completely surprised. The wedding was to be held with the next full moon, as was the custom, and that meant it would be the following weekend. Her sister fluttered nervously exclaiming every five minutes that she didn't know how she was going to finish everything. He helped her with the dishes again while her sister and mother discussed the wedding. Her mother praised her sister for keeping a very neat book on what she wanted to do for her wedding. Her sister faked humility and kept asking the worker every five minutes what he thought about this or that from her book. He laughed at her sister, exclaiming that it was her wedding and he was happy with whatever made her sister happy. She angrily threw the dishcloth into the sink of water but nobody noticed, and long after she went to bed, the three of them were still chattering, giggling and discussing the future. She had to put her pillow over her head to fall asleep.

The week leading up to the wedding was filled with cleaning, cooking, sowing and packing. He started moving his few earthly possessions into the house and her sister squealed every time he unpacked something and showed it to her. She pretended a wooden goblet or an old hunting knife were the biggest treasures she had ever seen. Her sister's pretend interest made her blood boil. This was a kind man and he was too good for a spoiled princess like her sister. He was courteous to everyone, he helped her mother with things that she needed carried and he helped her with dishes after dinner. Whenever she saw his smile, she prayed that instead of her sister, she would be the one on Saturday afternoon to be given to him. To become his. On the morning

of the wedding her mother noticed that the sun was shining extra brightly and that the air smelled fresher than it had in years. She wished for the sun to fall from the sky and as it became brighter and brighter, hurling towards them, they would all turn to ash before they noticed that they hadn't had cake yet. With all her might she summoned rain and thunder but the sky stayed light blue without a speck of white anywhere. She spent most of the wedding sitting by herself, sulking. He asked her to dance with him once but she refused telling him she had chores to do. She didn't feel the scolding dishwasher as she started on the dishes later that afternoon.

## Leaving home

Her father's heart longed for a girl to call his little princess. After some time her mother gave birth to her and her father welcomed her with tears in his eyes. She was beautiful with black ebony curls and sweet rosy lips. From the day she was born her father spoiled her. She could do nothing wrong and her brothers got the blame for everything. She always got the best presents, the moistest piece of cake, the crispiest bacon and the sweetest tea. Whenever her mother tried to force her to do chores, her father told her it was not necessary for her to work, her brothers could do it as they were stronger. Her mother stormed off and then ignored her father for days thereafter.

The only thing she enjoyed doing was knitting. Her grandmother taught her to knit and she enjoyed the rhythmic clicking of the steel needles. She loved learning new stitches and knitting with different colour wools to make rainbows. Her father bought her all the colours she wanted. Because she didn't like the knots two strands would make when she tied them together, she would weave the two colours into one using a long, silver needle. When she was finished the colours flowed seamlessly into each other. She started with little blankets for her dolls, and then small jerseys and as her knitting improved, she started knitting jerseys for her family. Every year she knitted a jersey for her father's birthday and he wore it almost every day till his next birthday.

Her brothers hated her and she didn't love them either, except for her eldest brother. He remembered the day she was born and cherished memories of her as a baby in her crib and how she held his finger in her tiny hands. He thought she was the most beautiful little girl in the world. He pushed her around the yard in her stroller and would sit with her when she cried at night. He held her by her foot and arm and spun her around the garden. He taught her to climb trees with him and he never minded doing her chores. He sat with her for hours when she was knitting. When her other brothers bullied her, he defended her. Whenever her father worried about her out loud, her eldest brother promised that he would take care of her for the rest of his life. His father smiled at him then and patted his back. His sister was spoiled but he knew he loved her too much to care.

One day her father died. From then on her mother shouted at her and never took her side against her brothers. She learnt how it felt to be truly unhappy for the first time in her life. She stopped eating and locked herself in her bedroom and pouted for days.

One night her eldest brother woke her up. He said that he would look after her and that they were going to live in a little house far away. He took her hand and when she got tired he carried her. When they finally got to the little house, she was so tired she fell asleep immediately. The next morning he was awake before her.

Her brother planted vegetables in the garden and she knitted jerseys for him to sell at the market. He cooked dinner for them at night and made her sweet tea before breakfast every morning. Her brother made her a beautiful wooden rocking chair that she put in front of the fire. She would knit and knit and every night her eyes would sparkle as he praised her good work, her perfectly spaced stitches, and how well rounded-off and neat her edges were.

Over the years her brother got tired of having to do everything all day but never said anything to her. She in turn thought all he wanted was for her to do her knitting. Because she loved her brother, she wanted every jersey to be more perfect than the previous one. He grew less and less enthusiastic about her jerseys, and retired earlier and earlier in the evenings. He became impatient with her and stopped bringing her tea in the mornings. His boyish features started changing and he looked more and more like her father except he didn't smile as much. Soon he no longer noticed his sister sitting in her rocking chair or the needles clicking away.

One evening as she waited for her brother to return, she noticed how the day starting in bright yellow, faded through orange-red into black. She heard the crickets start their singing with the frogs as the stars appeared, first one by one, and then, all at once. She kept on knitting, the needles moving so fast, they seemed to click away by themselves. She knitted until her hands bled.

## Being Bluebeard's lover

She leans in closer to the mirror as she brushes her teeth. She looks at herself this way and that, she has tiny goosebumps on her arms, her silky pyjamas sway as she spits her toothpaste and spit mix into the sink. I stand watching her as she gets dressed, same thing every day: first the matching bra and panty, something modest, usually white black or beige. She has only one set with purple lace and not a full panty on normal days, but a purple and black g-string with a small bow on the front. She only wears that set when she goes out. She pulls her black pants up, high waste, unflattering cut. Her uniform chequered blue shirt, the one she has three of, goes on last and with practised fingers, she swiftly buttons up. She runs her fingers through her hair and tries to put her shoes on while also looking for her bag. It's next to the couch, like every morning, except on weekends. She grabs it, and slams the door behind her as she leaves. From where I'm standing, I can't see her running down the stairs, but I know she is because when she reaches the street, she is panting. She stops for a second to catch her breath and then disappears around the corner. She has four blocks to run before she gets to the Spur, where she works the afternoon and evening shift.

I turn around, I arrange all the ingredients for my morning omelette meticulously on the counter. One tomato, insides removed, cut into equal squares, 100 grams of cheese grated into a small glass bowl, and half an onion, diced into the same sized squares as the tomato. Perfect red and white partners. I break two eggs, always organic, bought at Woolworths, and add 100 mills of milk. I whisk the mixture for two minutes. As I throw it into the hot pan it sizzles and the sound reminds me of mother. Always making an omelette, her medicine against the world and also the only thing she could cook on a gin ride. She didn't eat much, food was poison she said. The government put poison in all the food so they could get rid of the unwanted people. Mother had her own chickens, vegetable patch and a farmer friend she knew brought her milk every so often. I notice the dusty windows as I settle in to have my breakfast.

The lady at Woolworths assured me that the eggs and vegetables were poison free. She laughed a little at me when I asked. When I moved to the city, people seemed to be constantly making a noise around me. With mother the silence sometimes became unbearable and I would stand outside and scream at the doves, the little ring-necks and turtle doves. I lay the table, white plate, red paper napkin, glass of orange juice and stainless steel knife and fork. As I slide my breakfast onto the white plate I take care not to make a mess, I can't eat it if it messes or touches the side of the plate. The

devil's helpers are waiting for dirty dishes and messy eaters to take back to hell with them. Heaven is where clean people go. I was not going to hell.

After breakfast I clean a little. She usually only comes back much later at night and I fill my time waiting for her. Sometimes I read, sometimes I cook a little, but mostly I sit by the window watching for her return. I watch the people in the street turning from day people, rushing to get to work, to afternoon people. In the mornings they walk upright. In the evenings they are slumped forward. Some young ones with energy still, are running up and down, shouting or kicking or both. As the sun sets I boil a pot of coffee and wait. When she slugs home with the afternoon people I have to endure her putting on her purple underwear. I hate having to wait up for her. Tonight she gets home late. Not the next day late, but she just makes it safely home before the witches' hour. If you are caught outside after the clock strikes twelve, evil follows.

She falls through the front door, kicks her shoes off as she steps inside and then throws everything else on the couch. She always switches on the kettle before she takes her shirt off and then her pants. Her modest bra, white tonight, gets snapped off and dropped on the floor. She doesn't put on a clean panty, instead she just slips her silky nightgown over her head. She hasn't taken her socks off yet and she almost falls when she gets back to the kettle. She makes a cup of tea, dipping the teabag while staring at the wall, her face revealing no thought. She dips the teabag one last time before she takes a sip. Sometimes at night she feels the human urge for company and pleasure, lacking both, she takes out her pink vibrator. Tonight she just gets into bed, the dirty teacup left on the counter.

This morning she gets up late again, matching black set today, and then she rushes down the stairs and into the street. I wait for her. She bursts through the front door, so unexpectedly I almost don't see her. She is talking into her phone, her face all pearly white teeth and as she hurriedly puts on the purple set, I know she is going out. She puts on an all too tight black mini dress, silver straps, lipstick, one spray from a bottle in the fridge. A fancy car is waiting for her in the street, black as the tar itself. The man who opens the door for her is always the same man, his black beard neatly styled, almost blueish in the dusk. I don't like black cars.

It is well after twelve when she stumbles through the front door, with him behind her. They don't turn any lights on, and the following morning he takes a shower before making her a cup of coffee. They lie in bed. She never drinks her coffee in bed. When

he finally leaves, she doesn't get dressed in a hurry like every other morning. She takes her time, she doesn't put matching underwear on and almost forgets to comb her hair before she leaves for work. They go out almost every night now, weeks of him waiting in his car. Opening the door for her before she gets in, always the perfect gentleman. She even has another colour set now – blue with polka dots and lace, a black g-string to match. I don't like blue.

They leave earlier tonight again, she's wearing her new set, tight jeans and matching top. Heels. Her light flickers on and I see her storming through the front door. He follows, waving his arms, his face red, contorting from the effort of shouting. He throws his keys at her. She retaliates by throwing her shoe at him. He ducks and the shoe hits the front door. He lunges for her. She staggers back, slips and falls. She tries to crawl away but he grabs her and forces her onto her back. As his hands clench around her throat, his mouth closes in a tight line. She claws at his hands and arms as she struggles to breathe. I particularly enjoy it when they fight back. Her fight is leaving her slowly and as the last twitches of life leave her body, he is still clutching her neck between his two hands. When she hasn't moved for a few minutes he releases her from his grip and her head lolls to the side, her eyes staring blankly through the window directly at me. He picks up his keys and leaves.

Once outside he calmly walks to his car, gets in, and drives off. The police will come, always the same blue and white cars with a little yellow too. They will walk around her body, take notes and close the door behind them. After some time has passed, not long, somebody will arrive to clean everything, pack her belongings into boxes and have them hauled off in a removal van.