MAHALA BY CHRIS BARNARD,
TRANSLATED FROM
THE AFRIKAANS

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
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Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

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Afrikaans, the world's youngest language, is not known to many outside South Africa. Mahala, a novel in that language by a major writer, has been translated as an example of South African literary resources yet to be made accessible to English readers.

Chapter One (the Foreword) contains historical notes on the Afrikaans language and on Barnard's biography, including his publications and literary awards.

Chapter Two is a complete translation (currently the only one) of Chris Barnard's Mahala.

Analysis of and comment on Mahala are reserved for Chapter Three (the Afterword), wherein the structure of the novel is discussed, selected characteristics of the book compared with those of recognized English writers, and commentary upon translation supplied.

The Bibliography contains reviews of Mahala, backgrounds of South African literature, the history of Afrikaans, aspects of translation, and dictionaries.
Wilhelmina de Kock provided invaluable help and encouragement. She made available a substantial quantity of data and information from the South African Department of Information offices in New York and in South Africa.

Berta Smit, editor-in-chief of Tafelberg Publishers in Cape Town, kindly contributed several Afrikaans publications from which the one translated was selected. She also granted the permission to translate Mahala.

I am deeply grateful to them.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. FOREWORD</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. <strong>MAHALA</strong> BY <strong>CHRIS BARNARD</strong>, TRANSLATED FROM THE <strong>AFRIKAANS</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. AFTERWORD</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

FOREWORD

A thesis for the master's degree in English--referring particularly to English literature--is usually the study of a specific work or selection of works, a collation of views in existing studies, or perhaps, an original work. This thesis does not fit any of these categories precisely. Rather, its contribution is to provide access to a publication otherwise remote from most English readers because it is in a foreign language. This thesis presents a translation from the Afrikaans of the novel *Mahala* by Chris Barnard.

Afrikaans is one of the two official languages of the Republic of South Africa. It is unfortunate that Afrikaans is not as widely known outside of South Africa as is, say, French outside of France, for Afrikaans has distinct beauty in its descriptive and idiomatic features. The language has literally grown out of the country; its genesis was the speech of the settlers who worked the land. Nature, isolation and loneliness, and the country itself worked their way into this language, which allowed the vivid, uninhibited expression of the feelings of those who formulated Afrikaans.

One of the strongest features of identity of a distinctive group of people is often its language. Generally, if a
community loses its language, it loses identity. The settlers of the Cape of Good Hope struggled hard for their identity. Even after Afrikaans was widely current, the Cape community had still to present fervent resistance to being overwhelmed, first by Dutch, then by English nationalism. Each of these imperials would have imposed its own language on all within earshot. However, before the defense of identity came an identity offensive by the colonists.

The original Cape settlement of 1652 was funded and controlled by the Dutch East India Company. The government of the South African community was rigidly regulated by the owning company, so that the residents had little, if any, share in their legislation or administration. Gradually, the need for an identity asserted itself among those who had emigrated to the new land for a new life. They had been drawn from various areas of the Low Countries, so spoke several Dutch dialects. Among the early Cape immigrants were people of German extraction, and later, a few Huguenot refugees. The Flemish influence was substantial, but the Dutch dominated. A hybrid communication medium was derived from several of the then well established languages know by the settlers—though with selected simplifications in grammar and syntax. The informal dialect gained popularity among the settlers, but it was not given official status by the Dutch, nor by the English who followed them.

Near the beginning of the Nineteenth Century, the Cape passed into British hands. The governors tried to anglicize the colony totally. Afrikaans had been only a spoken medium
until then and little had been published in the language. Most early writers in Afrikaans, and they were few, had used it as an interesting phenomenon, for local color, or for comical effect. Their motivations did not include an urge to express themselves in their own native language, distinct from traditional and official Dutch, and later English. Afrikaans was sustained only by the growing determination of the Cape residents to resist being stripped of their identity. At a meeting on August 14, 1875, the Genootskap van Regte Afrikaners (Society of True Afrikaners) was formed. The Society decided to publish a newspaper called Die Afrikaanse Patriot (The Afrikaans Patriot) to voice its ideals—primarily "to honor our language, our nation, our country." The movement intensified the promotion and propagation of Afrikaans.

The English press instigated legal suppression of the movement, but with little effect. The settlers' determination to establish an identity was too powerful by then, and the Afrikaans persisted with the publication of their organ. The next ploy, ridicule, was also unsuccessful. Subsequently, greater support for and confidence in Afrikaans led to the formulation of a grammar by the Society in 1876, and later (1902), to the preparation of the Patriot Dictionary, which listed Afrikaans words and their English equivalents. At intervals, then, books of the Bible (1893 to 1933) and the books of Psalms (1907) and hymns (1923) were published in the new language.

Finally, in 1925, Afrikaans became a recognized language when it replaced Dutch as one of the official tongues of the
South African Parliament, to stand alongside English. Thus, the government, following the schools and the church, awarded full status to Afrikaans as a medium of communication, and what was once a dialect became the world's youngest national language.

From the turn of this century, poetry has received the greatest recognition among Afrikaans literary works. This poetry, descriptive, didactic, epic, lyrical, and political, is considered of literary value everywhere that Afrikaans is understood. Drama, the novel, short stories, and works of non-fiction in Afrikaans are, nevertheless, gaining in literary sophistication, and sufficiently so that a number of such works have been translated into other languages.

An important writer of Afrikaans fiction is Christian Johan Barnard, or Chris Barnard. Born in 1939, he grew up on an orange farm in the Transvaal Lowveld, South Africa. After graduating from the University of Pretoria, he followed a longstanding desire and became a city dweller. Nevertheless, he did purchase land near Brits, a country town, and he and his family still travel there often. Since 1967, Barnard has served on the editorial board of Die Huisgenoot, one of the first, and most respected Afrikaans magazines, established in 1915. Though a young writer, Barnard has a number of publications and literary awards to his credit.

Two stories, "Muurspieël" (Wall Mirror) and "Naalstring" (Umbilical Cord), in his debut collection were awarded the CNA (Central News Agency) Literary Prize in 1961. He won
the Afrikaans Press Youth Literary Award for his short story "Boela van die Blouwater" (Boela of the Blue Water) the following year. In 1968, Barnard was again awarded the CNA Literary Prize, this time for "Duiwel-in-die-Bos" (Demon in the Bush), a short story. In 1970, his entry in the radio play competition in Brussels was selected as the best over eighty-six other entries. This work, Die Rebellie van Lafras Verwey (The Rebellion of Lafras Verwey) was chosen by the Afrikaans branch of the South African Broadcasting Corporation for the SAUK Academy Award for 1973.

Mahala was awarded the Hertzog Prize in 1973. The Hertzog Prize is awarded annually by the South African Academy for the best work in Afrikaans literature. In 1974, this book won the esteemed Hofmeyr Prize. Each year, the Hofmeyr Prize is awarded to an Afrikaans literary genre rotationally, in the sequence of drama, prose, and poetry. This prize was created in memory of the late Dr. W. Hofmeyr, once Chairman of the Board of National Press.

Mahala, which is the name of the riverboat in the following translation, can be a girl's name, and means to receive something for nothing. Mahala is a noteworthy Afrikaans novel; with this work, Barnard has clearly stepped forward from among his contemporaries.
CHAPTER II

MAHALA BY CHRIS BARNARD,

TRANSLATED FROM

THE AFRIKAANS
ONE

Fear was so much part of him that he no longer recognized it as fear. It was in his cautious, almost slinking way of walking; in his restless, suspicious eyes, in his unusually soft voice; in his almost faltering manner of speech.

He rarely had to remind himself that he must be careful, that he must keep his eyes open. It seemed quite normal to him that he should have no desire to meet strangers, that he would go to Caipemba only when it was necessary. The noise and levity of the bars irritated him. Strangers bored him. People exhausted him. But he no longer connected any of these sensations with fear.

Therefore he did not think of Ritter that afternoon when the girl suddenly spoke to him. He just knew he wanted to get rid of her; after all, a person, he thought—any person—must be careful of a girl who stops him in the street. Though she looked barely sixteen. Though she looked harmless and very unsure of herself.

He was hurrying on his way back to the river. The boat would leave in a quarter of an hour. The afternoon was hot and oppressive and his shirt clung damply to his back. Then he saw her jump from a shop verandah and walk from among the flies and the blacks' fruit baskets to stop in front of him. She was thin and a little short, looking somewhat bewildered in her sweaty dress. Her bare shoulders were brown from the sun and her closely cut hair tied with a ribbon behind her head.

"Senhor," she said, "do you know when the boat leaves?"

"The mail boat?" he asked as he paused.

"Faz favor."

"In a quarter hour."

For a moment both of them looked towards the boat where it lay, a hundred yards away, behind the green, swaying creepers, at the river bank. Then, without looking at him, she asked, "Do you know how much it costs?"

"To where?"

"To the third stop."
Only then did he start. And the shock made him irritatedly aware of the flies around his hot face and of the penetrating sun. He wanted to get rid of her and climb aboard the boat, and somewhere, behind the fly screen around the lower deck, find a seat in the cool.

"Twenty-four escudos," he said and began to walk.

"Senhor," she said urgently behind him, "Faz favor..."

He stood still, but did not look at her.

The third stop was his stop. And only he ever got off there. Just he and sometimes, but very seldom, someone from the coffee plantation. But she was a stranger.

She stood next to him again and he saw her take a handkerchief from the front of her dress and hold it out to him. "My money was in here. I lost it."

He was tired and there were flies in the sunlight near her face. There were flies all around. The afternoon was a sluggish, monotonous whirr of flies and bees and the air smelled of brown mango blossoms and the sweet stench of fermenting palm leaves.

She had a black leather bag with her. It hung at her hip from a strap across her shoulder. The strap made an indentation from left to right between her small, round breasts. She thrust her hand into the bag and felt around in it for a moment. "I do not have much here, senhor," she said, "but if you help me, you can have the bag. It's a new bag. I will empty it.

Rodrigue stood in the cool of the gangplank, busily poking between his dark-stained teeth with a match. He nodded when he saw them approach, but his eyes wandered to the girl and remained there.

"I'm paying for both of us, Rodrigue," Delport said.

The girl swung her bag a little self-consciously across her knees as he counted out the money.

He hoped she would go and sit somewhere else, but she followed him back into the corner and sat down next to him, against the wire screen, her bag on her lap. She was wet with perspiration and there were big stains under her arms.

The coolness was comfortable. But outside the ilala palms quivered in the grey light and Delport closed his eyes and listened to the noise of the ducks on the upper deck and
to the blacks who talked boisterously outside in the white heat and to Rodrigue who stood lazily and counted out change. On the screened deck it was cooler and he could barely feel the boat rocking in the current, and somewhere the anchor chain rattled, and he was pleased to know the day had passed. He would sit and sleep to the third stop--by then the sun would have already set--and he would walk up the sloping path to the house, between the mango and banana trees, and, outside on the porch, he would drink his whisky and smell the night.

After such a day it was always good to be back on the boat and to listen to Rodrigue and to cast off into the river in the afternoon, to pass between the green bushes, to go out and meet the night, with the blacks on the upper deck talking and laughing and sometimes, one-by-one, singing, with the smell of goat droppings and coconuts and garlic, and Rodrigue who picked his teeth and sat peacefully talking and sipping brandy. And now and then a goat on the upper deck would bleat, and the engine would chug monotonously, sometimes double-beating as the river bank came nearer with the sound echoing across the green water.

All of this would be good after such a day, for it would be cool and the sun would be gone, and all the things, all the smells and sounds, would mean that he would not see Caipemba again for at least four weeks.

The girl next to him stirred and he opened his eyes a crack in the hope he would see her leave, but vaguely he could see her two brown knees and he knew she was still sitting beside him. And she must have noticed his eyes open, for she spoke.

"Do you get off before the third stop?" she asked.

He shook his head.

"Where do you get off?"

He opened his eyes completely and looked up, but not at her, and said, "At the third stop."

He closed his eyes again, and with his head leaning back against the screen he smelled the dust on the wharf. He wanted to forget about the girl, and her to understand this, but at the same time he knew he would not be able to forget her before he found out where she was going. It would be dark when they disembarked and the nearest shelter, other than that which he could offer, was twelve kilometers from the river.

Then the boat bell sounded outside.
He could hear the blacks begin to talk more vehemently, and someone was busy dragging a white goat up the gangplank with a halter. The goat's hooves tore rebelliously at the wood.

"How long does it take to reach the third stop," she asked.

He looked at her this time. "Three hours."

He saw her face properly for the first time then. There were tiny drops of perspiration on her forehead and under her nose, and her eyes were a little too large. "It will be dark," she said.

He nodded.

The bell rang again and Rodrigue pulled up the gangplank. Then suddenly the boat began to vibrate and a moment later the engine stuttered to life, coughed a couple of times, then caught its beat.

His mind was on the quay. He saw a row of black children standing and waving, and on the upper deck some people called out their last messages to the wharf. Pio was busy loosening the mooring line and the river began to take hold. Then, very slowly the corrugated-iron shacks slid away and the row of black children's faces became smaller and swung away.

Then they were free, in the river, powered and on course, and the engine beat was deeper and suddenly regular.

Good-bye, Caipemba, he thought, and wondered when Rodrigue would come. But Rodrigue was busy somewhere. He could hear him talking to the pilot and the air was sweet with mango blossoms and dried fish and again he thought: good-bye.

The child would play; somewhere under the shadows of the mango trees he would slide on drums and cans along the paths he had scraped in the sand with a small piece of wood, on one of the many paths which lay across the back yard, from coolness to coolness, winding paths weaving left and right over the wide yard, and turning, would come back and always end up at the same place.

The child would play and An would sleep under her protective mosquito net in her musty room with the paneled walls—walls from which the whitewash was flaking, walls with splits and cracks and the fine, brown specks of cockroach droppings. Walls of puzzles and silences and ecstasy.

An would sleep, or lie and look at the roof where geckoes slept, motionless along the beading.
They would not miss him.

Behind the boat the churned water formed a fluted fin and now he could see just the tops of Caipemba's palm trees and a line of white tick birds which came over the brush and flew by noiselessly.

Then he heard Rodrigue coming down the stairs.

There was a match between his teeth and his hands were black with dried grease. "Good day," he said and introduced himself to the girl. "I am Rodrigue. Captain Rodrigue Pereira." She did not respond to his dirty hand of friendship; she was obviously relieved to have someone who would converse with her.

"Mália Domingo," she said.

"Where are you going?" He sat down on the other side of her.

"I'm going to the third stop."

"Oh yes, you and Max are together." When she did not immediately respond he nodded toward Delport.

She shook her head. "No. I am in a hunting camp next to the Doisspruit. My father and a friend of his came to hunt and I'm looking after the camp."

"Big game?"

"They're looking for elephant and buffalo. But they've already been away a week. They should've been back by now."

Rodrigue spat out the match and pulled a new one from his match box. "How did you get to Caipemba? You weren't on the boat yesterday on the way down."

She hesitated a moment. But just a moment. And in that moment she looked at Delport. They looked each other straight in the eye and he could see her uncertainty; then she turned her head away and looked at Rodrigue again. "Someone took me. One of the people from the coffee plantation."

"Do you know the people there?" Rodrigue wanted to know.

"No." She drew her leather bag closer to her breast. "We don't know anybody."

"Wish more people would come hunting here," the captain said and laughed in Delport's direction. Then he looked
again at the girl, the smile still on his lips, but his eyes searching uncertainly for Mália Domingo's reaction. "There are, as you may know, no women here. Two or three wives, of course, in Caipemba. And two or three at CCG. And Max's wife. Max is one of the lucky ones."

Delport waited for the next sentence, but it did not come. He expected the captain to say, "I've never been married." He said it inevitably. Delport had been present a hundred times when he had said it. And it was with precisely the same intonation and the same expression in his eyes each time. He always said it as one would say, "I have cancer."

That first night, nine years ago, he had heard it for the first time. The night when he had met Rodrigue Pereira. They had waited the whole afternoon in Caipemba, he and An, for the boat's departure. But they could not leave until ten o'clock, for someone still had to come. It was ten o'clock that night and it was sultry and they were on their way--without the one who should have arrived. And Rodrigue had come over and sat down by them, and talked about the stars as an old friend would about meaningful topics. Rodrigue was a little drunk that night and he told them his whole life story. But what Delport remembered best of all was the way Rodrigue had quickly said, "I've never been married."

"Are you from Beira?" the captain asked and the girl nodded. He removed a half-smoked cigar from the upper pocket of his uniform and lit it thoughtfully. "Nice place. Beira. I was there for a while. In the docks. That was before I became captain here."

The rank existed only in his imagination. And perhaps for that reason, precisely, he was very sensitive about it. He always added the rank when he introduced himself to a stranger. And the threadbare uniform was absolutely weighed down with medals from who knows where--perhaps from pawnshops in Beira and Porto Amélia.

Delport sat and listened. He knew all the stories already--the tales of Rodrigue's days in Beira, and of the girl friend he had had there, and how tragically she had died in an accident one Sunday afternoon in November. But it was always reassuring to hear him tell the story again, those stories: with suitable quotations from Gibran and the Rig Veda and the Book of Proverbs.

He sat and listened to Rodrigue and thought of An, legally his wife, and of the child who played in the yard alone and could not sleep at night.
"You're always a guest here." he heard Rodrigue say. "You're always a guest. As soon as you land here, it's all over for you. It's Africa, this, and Africa is without mercy. Africa has no sympathy for anyone. Portugal was different."

Pio called from the engine room, but Rodrigue finished his cigar before he took notice of Pio. He sucked the cigar till it burned his thumb nail, then stamped it out under his heel and stood up. "The blacks," he said, "can't do a thing unless you supervise them. I expect the diesel is leaking again."

Then they were alone once again. Delport and the girl. All that remained of the captain was a trace of his cigar smoke. But Delport was already relaxed, less wary, and he waited for her to speak. He suddenly wanted her to speak.

But she did not. Not right away.

The stroke of the engine was a background but restful noise, somewhere under the surface of the water. He could feel the sound under the soles of his shoes. The sun was setting and behind them on the horizon the sky was grey and violet as if rain would likely come that night.

On the upper deck one of the black children cried and a woman's voice reprimanded the child sleepily. The goats and the poultry were quieter than usual, but now and then a piece of white or grey down drifted by Delport's face, sinking towards the water, and was left behind in the river.

When he looked again, the girl was busy emptying her leather bag. Already in front of her at her feet stood a bag of sugar, a cake of soap, a tube of toothpaste, a new bottle of cologne, a package of salt. He sat and watched her unpack the rest: a magazine, two paperbacks, and something wrapped in a newspaper which sounded wooden as she set it down.

When the bag was empty she placed it next to Delport. "The bag, senhor."

"Why did you empty it?" he wanted to know.

"The bag is for you. For the fare."

"Keep the bag," he said. "I don't want it."

"I will feel better if you'd take it."

"Keep it," he said. "Put your things back. How can you carry them about without a bag?"
She began to slide the items on the floor to one side. "I'll be fine."

He squatted on his knees, pulled the bag nearer, and began to pack up the goods, not saying a word. She wanted to stop him. "Senhor," she said, but he went on packing. When he picked up the item in the newspaper, the paper tore and a piece of wood fell between them. It was oval and hollowed out like a dish. He wanted to pick it up, but she was quicker than he. She picked it up carefully and turned it over.

"Was it damaged?" he wanted to know.

"No," she said after a moment. "Fortunately not." And then laughing lightly she turned it towards him. "It's attractive, don't you think? I bought it for eighty escudos."

He looked up into the two hollow eyes. It was a mask made of wild olive wood, the sort sold by Indians in Caipemba. He looked fixedly into the hollow eyes for a second, and then he saw the nose, and then the wide cheekbones, and then the mouth, drooping slightly at the corners. And something looked vaguely familiar. He looked again at the eyes under the heavy eyebrows, and for a moment he felt he could not breathe, but then the sensation was gone and a cold shiver ran down his neck, over his shoulders and stomach, down to his legs.

"Don't you like it?" the girl asked. "I think it's wonderful. It's carved with a penknife and it cost only eighty escudos."

He nodded and looked away. Some white down again drifted outside the screen past his face. And the child did not cry any more. It was dead quiet and the stroke of the engine carved the silence into precise intervals.

The girl was still holding the mask in front of him, but he did not look anymore. For the face was Ritter's and he did not wish to look at Ritter.

Ritter stood in the doorway and his eyes were as inanimate as the wood in Màlia Domingo's hands. He stood in the doorway, one hand on the screen, the other in a pocket of his bush jacket. The scene smelled of the sweet curing of the thatch and of An who was still lying on the bed. He did not want to do it. He had not planned to do it, but when he remembered the glass in his hand, he swung his arm round and the glass flew through the air, shattering in Ritter's face, and the next moment he was in the kitchen beside the cold stove and then outside in the rain.
That was the second time he had run like a coward, and the last time he had seen Ritter.

"What's the matter?" the girl asked. "Are you not feeling well?"

That night they had slept in Empangeni with strangers. And the whole night he had waited in vain for Ritter.

Nine years is a long time if you must while away the time from day to day. Nine years is a long time if you wait, and even longer if you wait in the wilderness. But if you look back, it is a fleeting moment—a moment in which you blink your eyes.

Somewhere, in the distance, the girl spoke of the sun. But her voice drifted away and he brought his hands up to his face and pressed them tightly to his temples. And her voice came back and he heard her ask if she could get him some water.

He shook his head and said, "No thanks."

It's not the mask, he suddenly thought. Perhaps the likeness is not so great. It was just the vivid moment in which he suddenly remembered Ritter's face again. Ritter stood in the doorway and it was his eyes and he remembered everything again and he felt everything again and he became freshly aware that he still expected Ritter. And that was it—the knowledge. For he was sometimes convinced that he had outgrown the fear; that he no longer waited; that he had freed himself. But at that moment he knew more clearly than ever that it was not so. And this made him dizzy.

He could smell the girl's hair and it was the first time in a long while that he had smelled a woman—a woman's hair and a woman's skin. And the girl was in the dim light in front of him again and he saw her brown shoulders and remembered her name.

The sun had set.

Left and right the water lay green and dark and there were no more tick birds, but somewhere a mosquito whined monotonously against the netting and left and returned to whine around his face, then flew away.

"I like the mask," he said eventually. "Did you buy it in Caipemba?"

"Yes."

"Where?"
"On a back street. A blind Indian was sitting there
and he had baskets full of woodcarvings—masks and animals
carved out of wood, and wooden beads, and things made of
ivory."

"Why did you buy the mask?" he asked.

"I liked it. It was different from all the other faces.
It was a European face."

"I like it," he said. "I would like to buy it from
you. I'll give you one hundred escudos for it—then you'll
make a profit."

She did not answer.

"I collect masks," he said. "I already have twenty.
This one is somewhat different."

She was not very willing, that he could see. She
laughed uncertainly, picked up the mask and looked at it.
"You make it difficult, senhor," she said. "I already owe
you money. I really should give it to you as a present,
but..." She laughed shyly and briefly and stroked the
wooden face. "It's so beautiful. I so much want to keep
it."

"It is somewhat different," he said again. "It would
fit in well with the others I have." He looked at her. "One
hundred and fifty escudos, senhora."

"Please," she said, and it was almost as if she were
pleading. "I so much want to keep it."

It was that time between afternoon and evening when
the dark grows almost perceptibly. He could no longer see
her face clearly, he could just make out the shadows of her
eyes and her nose and mouth. They sat together in the dark
and stared.

"You make me feel guilty," she said, "but you can have
the leather bag. It's new and it's worth more than the
mask."

Then suddenly, out of the silence, the boat horn began
to blow breathlessly and it was a lonely sound on the open
water. And on the upper deck the hens began cackling and a
rooster crowed in surprise.

"I do not want something for nothing," he said. "I
wish to buy the mask."

To their right was the dock, close now, and he stood
up.
"Why did the whistle blow?" she asked.

And he looked through the screen till he could see the lanterns and then he turned to her where she still sat holding the mask tightly. He knew already where he would hang it: on the inner wall right under the buffalo head. And he smiled and said: "We have come to the first stop."

Pio came shuffling in and lit the oil lamp and it was immediately completely dark outside. Some of the blacks were climbing off. Some had nothing with them; others balanced baskets of fruit and groceries and dried fish on their heads; others struggled to move cages of hens, ducks and other poultry down the gangplank. As soon as all who wanted to get off had done so, Rodrigue took up his position on the quay and collected money from the new passengers. A lantern burned next to his head and he was wet with sweat in his heavy, well-worn uniform. Suddenly, he slapped a wandering beetle or moth away from his face and then moved a little farther away from the lantern.

Delport found himself talking to the girl. She had asked him something about Rodrigue and he was telling her all he knew about the captain. And it suddenly gave him a feeling of excitement which he could not quite grasp. Here he was, sitting, talking to a stranger in the dark, and he could not remember when that had last happened. And as he talked, he thought: it's strange that I should do it now, just after I have been reminded of him. And something told him that he was perhaps over the fear; that he was no longer frightened; that Ritter was someone in another world. That Ritter was dead.

And he thought of Rodrigue's words of a few months before. They had been sitting on the bridge that morning, making for Caipemba, and Rodrigue was drunk and talkative. And Rodrigue, cleaning his nails with a matchstick, had said, "The river is the safest place in Africa, friend. It is without rhyme or reason. It is just between two shores." He flicked the broken matchstick away from him and sniffed and picked up his brandy. "While you are on the river, you are nowhere in particular. You drift in nothingness, as Nietzsche or someone said. You're just a thought."

And as he thought of that, he told it to the girl, without knowing whether she understood, and not concerning himself about it. "He's strange," she said. "He questioned me so thoroughly."

"He probes everybody just like that. He knows everything about each white passenger on his boat. He considers it part
of his work to know everything about everyone." Then, using Joao's words, he said, "He lives through other people. Perhaps because he has never lived himself."

"It must surely be monotonous work," she said, "to keep riding up and down. The same river. Every day."

And somewhere out of the past he heard Rodrigue confirm this. "You're right. I'm in transit. Always. You understand what I mean? Every day is yesterday in reverse. And the day after tomorrow is like today." Up and down, four times a week, between Caipemba and Schwulst's small, thatch-roofed hotel at Lotsumo—the fifth stop.

On the upper deck someone was hesitantly plucking the strings on a sensa. It was a small, delicate sound in the oppressive darkness, but it was sweet and filled with refrains and everyone up there except the goat listened. The goat bleated now and then.

And it reminded Delport of the wattle trees at Mkuze, and the man with ulcers at Catuane who had given An his dead wife's clothes, and the hunger at Moamba, where An could not go any farther, and the sensa, that afternoon at Joao Belo, playing under their green bedroom window as the sun sank and set on a forsaken world.

He longed for An, for she was no longer with him. The bleak face under the mosquito net was a dead person.

Joao had run away too. Rodrigue, too. Joao had left for a wife who wanted to love him and Rodrigue for a futile purpose. But Joao and Rodrigue were satisfied with their lots—they had said so themselves. He could have been too, if An had just stayed the same.

The girl was leaning her head against the screen and he looked at her and asked, "Are you tired?" And thought: how unaccustomed I really am to ask such a question!

"It's so sultry," she said. "Can't we go upstairs?"

"No one will stop you," he replied.

He did not want to go, but when she paused, he stood up and followed her. They climbed the wooden stairway to the upper deck and he moved alongside her. There was a wooden railing around the edge of the deck, and some people were leaning against the rail, looking out across the river. Others sat together in groups, in a circle around their baskets and poultry. The goat strayed to the end of its rope, and stared out into the darkness.
"It's cooler here," she said.

They walked between those sitting, climbing over the baskets and packages and chicken coops. The beat of the engine was clearer now and Delport could see the funnel against the stars and the lazy smoke drifting back into the night.

"This is the first time I've been on a river boat like this," she said. "It's just as I had imagined it."

The sensa was still being strummed somewhere in the darkness, and here and there a voice spoke softly. The day had taken its toll.

"You are married?" she asked.

He could smell pineapples and chicken droppings and garlic.

"Yes," he said, and nodded.

An should surely be asleep by now. Or lying reading.

"Children?"

They moved to the front railing and, leaning over, saw how the prow churned up the stream. "One," he said.

"How old?"

They had not yet reached the island. That would take another quarter hour. Then the second stop. He wondered what had become of his porter. He could not see him in the dark.

"Nine," he said, "nearly," not liking her inquisitiveness. He would much rather have sat and talked to Rodrique.

"Is it a boy?"

He gave a nod without looking to be sure she would see it.

"That must surely be lonesome," she said, "for a child to be like that."

"For everyone."

The darkness was sticky and clinging, and even the forward movement of the boat did not bring any coolness. The two words hung in the air and he could not grasp what had made him say them. It was, surely, his own problem.
"I've been here only two weeks," she said, "and the loneliness is killing me. I sometimes feel I can't breathe. This was why I went to Caipemba yesterday. I just wanted to see people again."

His eyes searched the figures in the dark for his porter. But he could not see him.

"You told Rodrigue you'd been here a week," he said softly.

She looked up from the water to him, then turned away, and, like him, leaned her back against the rail. "A week in camp. We are actually two weeks out of Beira."

Could Gonçalo have missed the boat? It had happened before. But never to that one. Gonçalo was always the most reliable on the dock.

"You are not allowed to hunt here," he said.

"My father and his friend have permits."

"I did not sign them."

She looked up at him a little reluctantly. "Are you the game warden?"

He nodded. "Actually fire warden. But I must keep an eye on everything. They should have brought their permits to me first."

"They did not know that."

"The permit office in Beira would have told them. And it is printed on the back of the permit."

"I will tell them," she said, a trace of anxiety in her voice, "when they return—if they return. I'll tell them they must come directly to you. They will certainly not want to cause trouble."

For a moment there was a pact, the possibility of a union, the vague promise of kinship: the way in which she said: if they return.

Someone else, he wondered, who stood on the brink of being left in the lurch? Someone else, he almost hoped, who had lost their security? He looked directly into her face for the second time that day, and asked, "Are they possibly not going to come back?"

"They've already been away for a week," she said. "They should have been away only four days."
Delport thought of An for a moment, seemingly defenseless in her crumpled petticoat, as she stood by the stove and watched Fernando fry two eggs—her thin and sagging body looking ten years older than her years.

Someone emerged from the stairway and Delport looked up and saw Rodrigue's shining cap and then his rounded shoulders. His heavy figure rolled out of the stairwell and came to a standstill at the top. He did not see them immediately so took out his pipe, pushed it slowly into his mouth, and felt around in his pockets for matches. His head did not move, but Delport imagined he could see Rodrigue's eyes rolling in their sockets as he searched for them.

"Here we are!" the girl said, and Rodrigue looked in their direction. A yellow flame sprang out from between his hands and he meticulously lit his pipe, flicked the match into the water, sucked hard and then moved closer.

"Didn't know you were here," he said, but convinced no one; evidently he realized this, so he said, "There's some weather coming."

In the east a little light flashed far behind the clouds; briefly, then all was dark again.

"I was looking down below for you just now," the captain said. "But you weren't there."

"We came to find some fresh air."

Rodrigue sucked laboriously and vainly on his pipe, then looked again for his matches, found them—and apparently forgot why he had wanted them.

"I saw the mask lying with your belongings," he said to Delport. "Did you buy it from Rajput?"

Delport shook his head then nodded towards the girl. "It's hers."

"Bloody attractive." He turned himself towards her. "Bloody attractive, you hear. Strange sort of face. It makes me think of Siva."

Neither had the courage to ask who Siva was.

"And of Janus also, you know. Now that I think of it." Rodrigue mulled the matter over. "There is something of Janus in the face. It's both his faces together." He waited for someone to react, but neither knew who Janus was. And neither wanted to ask.
"Did my porter come aboard this afternoon?" Delport asked.

The captain nodded. "He was on before you."

He stood uncomfortably out of place with them. There was nothing more to say and yet there was much. There would be plenty if Delport and Rodrigue were alone, or Rodrigue and the girl, or the girl and Delport. But the three together were awkward and a little restless. There was a tension which, earlier in the evening, had once been broken.

Rodrigue lit his pipe a second time and his face looked brown behind the flame, his cheeks shiny with beard stubble and sweat. "What a night!" he said and flicked his match away. A ray of light shone out from the underdeck between the stairs and the blue smoke from his pipe drifted through the beam of light. "What a night!"

It was just like any night on the river. But Rodrigue always tried to escape a situation with words.

"Will it rain?" the girl asked.

The lightning suddenly flashed in the west also, quickly, like a blink of an eye, and Rodrigue saw it and nodded. "It looks like it. *Umlenzengamunye* walks on the world."

"Who?" The girl looked from the captain to Delport.

And quickly Rodrigue moved a little closer. It was the moment for which he had waited. "*Umlenze-nga-munye,*" he articulated pedantically.

"Who is that?"

And Delport knew: until the second stop Rodrigue would tediously while away the silence with stories about an imaginary world which he, on so many thousand lonely river trips, had come to know.

"*Umlenzengamunye* is the blacks' word for One-Leg."

Delport tried to slip away unnoticed.

"It's the lightning which jumps over the earth with one leg of fire," Rodrigue related. "And One-Leg is the Greatest One's accomplice, his messenger."

Delport knew the story inside-out.

"Sometimes *Umlenzengamunye* comes to earth in the form of lightning. Then everyone can see him and be warned."
And sometimes he comes in the guise of a man, an old man—but then he appears in the mist and the rain and only women and children can see him."

In Rodrigue's small and jumbled cabin there was a bookshelf; books with oil-smeared pages and dogeared and pencil lines under every second sentence; pages with illegible notes in the margins. In the cramped and overflowing cabin, among brandy bottles and books, he had collected trivial information, only to relay it later to the uninformed who would be too polite not to listen.

Delport climbed between wire cages and boxes and baskets and searched in the darkness. "Gonçalo!" he called once in a muffled voice. And again, after a while, "Gonçalo!" Then someone came up alongside the stairway and lifted his white, short-brimmed hat respectfully, and Delport recognized his porter.

He went past the funnel and climbed down the stairs to the lower deck. His skin itched with mosquito bites and the day's sweat and it was suddenly humid again among the lanterns. Pio stood at the helm picking his nose, and Delport walked past him to the bench at the stern where he and Mália Domingo had sat earlier. The leather bag was still on the floor and on the seat lay the mask, on its face.

For a moment he hesitated, but then stooped and picked the mask up, turning the face upwards. The wood was solid and shiny and dark like Rodrigue's face when he lit his pipe. But it was Ritter who looked up at him, and he closed his eyes and saw Ritter at the screen door, standing with one hand in his bush jacket pocket. His hair was wet from the rain and his eyes deep in their sockets and he wanted to say: it's not my fault, in God's name, it's no one's fault—but the room was still sweet with An's body, and the splinters of the glass shone in the light as it broke on Ritter's forehead.

He would put Rodrigue to the test. He would drill a hole through the forehead and hang the mask under the buffalo head and tell Rodrigue about it. He set the mask down and took out his wallet, poured the money into his hand, and counted it: two hundred and fifteen escudos. He would offer her two hundred.

The girl's handkerchief lay on the bench, the one from which her money was lost. He picked it up and immediately could smell her again. It was an odor to which he was no longer accustomed. He unfolded the handkerchief and in one corner he saw embroidered letters. A. DOM.

Amália Domingo.
He did not feel guilty that he had done it; for one reason or another he felt that she would not mind his folding her handkerchief and placing it in his pocket. He wanted to take her smell home with him.

The first island came by. The bare branches were speckled white with sleeping tick birds and somewhere behind the beat of the engine Delport could hear frogs croaking.

He stood at the netting and looked at the beetles and moths and gnats which clung to the outside, arrested in their blind quest for light. Some sat motionless, others' wings vibrated as they crawled up the screen searching for passage.

Then he sat on the bench, reached out his hand in the dark for the mask, found it, began stroking it with the tips of his fingers: the heavy, drooping mouth, the wide cheekbones, the strong eyebrows above the openings for the eyes. Ritter stood in the witness stand and he sat and watched how the muscles on his jawbones twitched as he stood unfeelingly and looked at the judge--and he hated Ritter because he was afraid of him. Yet he had loved him. As they came down the stairs he could hear the rasp of Rodrigue's voice; he took his hand from the mask and waited until their faces were visible in the lamp light.

"Max," Rodrigue called, suddenly jovial. "A shot?" Delport did not want Rodrigue's shot, but he nodded.

They climbed through a small hatch into Rodrigue's stuffy sleeping quarters. It was dark and the captain looked for his matches. The air was stale and it felt as if the dark clung tenaciously to their bodies; the dark gave Delport the feeling of breathlessness and he was impatient for Rodrigue to light the lamp. But he was clumsy and all the time he kept growling under his breath and his breathing rasped, and Delport smelled tobacco and the unfamiliar, sweet odor of Mália Domingo's stale perfume.

The light did not bring relief. When, at last, the lamp was lit, it was more humid than before. The girl sat on the bed and started to look at the surroundings, and Delport's eyes followed her searching gaze: over the writing table with loose papers and ink pots and the tattered Rig Veda, over the shelf of neglected books, over the half open wardrobe and the dirty underwear--and eventually to the wall right before her: it was plastered up to the low ceiling with pornographic photos and magazine cuttings of pin-ups.

"How about a game of chess?" the captain asked. "While we have a shot."
Delport shook his head. "It will take too long."

"The rogue plays a good game of chess," Rodrigue said to the girl. "When we play, we always play as if our lives depended on it. We always say that the one who loses will be executed at dawn. But Max always wins—and here I am still."

Rodrigue sank to one knee and pulled a bag from under the bed to remove a full bottle of brandy. "KWV from the Cabo de Boa Esperança," he announced. "A drink of the gods from the land of the gods!"

Then he saw where the girl was looking. He pushed the case back under the bed and rose groaning. "You don't mind, do you?" he asked, gesturing towards the wall with his thumb. She shook her head. Then he placed the bottle on the table between the ink pots, drew two glasses and a cup closer, and beginning with the cup poured out some water from a clay pot on the floor. "You mustn't think badly of me," he said lamely. "Allow me a few pictures." He looked around at her. "They're weak substitutes for the real thing, senhora, but if the real thing is remote from you..." He poured brandy on top of the water and gave the girl her glass, Delport his, and took the cup for himself, and, sighing as he sat down, he said, "I was never married."

The brandy was weak and tasteless and Delport knew he would not be able to drink it all.

Rodrigue suddenly became quiet, so all three were silent. There was nothing but the regular beat of the engine, and at the open porthole above the bed, a wandering reed moth rapidly fluttered its green wings.

The boat rocked a little, very little, and it rocked Delport slowly in his chair as he looked at the girls on the wall and thought of An, and of Mália Domingo. He thought of them and heard the lamp hiss and sat and looked at his big, lopsided shadow opposite him on the wall; and the shadow nodded its head with his, raised its glass and lowered it, and then, like him, sat motionless and waited for the third stop.

Each was wrapped in his own weighty thoughts. And so they sat, sweating, and sipping their weak brandy, and listening to the beat of the engine.

Rodrigue's cup was empty first and he poured himself another. And when the second cup was nearly empty, he stood up and fetched something from the wardrobe. It was what Delport had expected, the large biscuit tin containing photos from a disintegrated, god-forsaken past.
The photos, like everything of Rodrigue's, smelled of tobacco. There was a thin child looking into the sun with its arms held stiffly at its sides, bravely laughing at the camera, Lisbon's streets full of cars in the thirties, a young boy waving from a train window, a man in a sailor's uniform, a sailor standing with his arm round the waist of a thin girl in old-fashioned clothes, a gravestone in Beira, a riverboat.

There were few. There were scarcely enough to cover the bottom of the tin. And it was unlikely that they would ever increase. In his wardrobe, between the tobacco and underclothes, a box camera lay, but as Rodrigue himself once explained, "It has lain there nearly twenty years, and I never use it. There is nothing more to photograph."

Rodrigue showed the photos to the girl, put them back in the tin, picked up the tin--then he looked at Delport, self-conscious, not sure what he could do to entertain the girl. "You're sure you won't play chess?" But before Delport could reply, the captain had turned his attention to the girl. "Do you play chess? Would you, perhaps, care for a game."

The girl shook her head and suddenly appeared tired. "I can't," she said.

Rodrigue took the playing board out of the cupboard, and placed it on the table in front of her, opened it, and began tediously unpacking the pieces.

"Max, here, got it from Rajput," he said. "The same man from whom you bought that mask. Strange individual, that one, Rajput. He let me look at his Rig Veda, and at his Tarot cards. He leaned over toward the girl, asthmatic and fanatical. "They are different from ordinary chess pieces." The girl took a pawn from him, then a king.

The pieces were made of ivory and of wild olive wood. Each pawn was a little mask standing on two thin legs, clutching a sword. The ivory king was a crowned lion's head, but the mane stood up, looking like wavy sunbeams. The black, wild olive wood king had the head of a bull with a five-sided crown between his crescent-shaped horns. "Max always plays with the black pieces," the captain said. "I with the white."

The girl looked at each piece, one by one, as they were passed to her, and placed them, one by one, in a row in front of her, and then pushed them away from her and looked up at Delport.

"Max, here, and I play all the time," Rodrigue said. "But he always wins. He's good. You cannot catch him easily."
The reed moth vibrated its wings again and suddenly tried to fly, but crashed into the ceiling, fell to the floor and lay still.

Delport's hands were sticky around his glass and he felt the sweat on his face bead and run from his temples. He thought of the mask, lying in the dark on the screen deck, and decided he would offer the girl two hundred and fifteen escudos for it.

And, rocking restlessly, he sat and waited for the second whistle and the second stop.
TWO

The house was dark. He went inside through the screen door and it closed quietly behind him. The verandah smelled dead and everything was silent except for the chirping of crickets outside in the yard.

He sat down in the big chair under the buffalo head and after a while closed his eyes. Everything was familiar to him again: the sweet smell of mango blossoms and frangipanis, the slightly mildewy smell of the house, the crickets—even the crickets, here, made a different noise from those in Caipemba. In his imagination he could hear again the regular beat of the boat's engine and the sensa and it felt as though the chair rocked a little under him.

He was tired.

Gonçalo and the girl would certainly be past the hippo pool by now. It would take at least an hour to get to her camp; perhaps a little more than an hour. At the earliest it would be ten o'clock when they reached the camp.

Again he could see the lantern disappearing behind the trees. Gonçalo had at first walked behind, and the light had fallen on her red dress and on her calves, then Gonçalo passed her and he could see just her silhouette as they vanished behind the banana trees.

One of the screen doors on the verandah rattled gently. Delport wanted to stand up and see who it was, but he could not stir up enough enthusiasm; he was fatigued and he wanted to sit. He opened his eyes and looked towards the front door, listened, but just at that instant a cricket in the roof began screeching and he could hear nothing else.

The screen door disappeared and he saw the girl again, walking away, down the dark path, her shadow a pendulum in front of her in the light of Gonçalo's swaying lantern. And it reminded him of the handkerchief and he took it from his pocket and smelled it.

This did more to him than Rodrigue's pin-ups.

You live just once, he thought. Even though one of Rodrigue's books advised otherwise. He had taken the book from Rodrigue's bookshelf one morning on the way to Caipemba,
and read the introduction: you live but twice: your own life and the life of which you dream. The second half of the sentence was underlined in pencil.

Allow me a few pictures, Rodrigue had said. If the real things elude you...

But Rodrigue had chosen the pictures over the real thing. The pictures were always available, would never leave him in the lurch, would not, on a good day in November, suddenly die. Rodrigue had chosen the pictures because he no longer had faith in the real thing. He was afraid of the real thing.

Rather João then. He stood up without thinking, poured a whiskey in the dark, fetched water from the refrigerator, and thought: rather, then, like João.

He stood on the shore in the light of a lantern and waited as they drew in for the second stop. That was the same João as always—the João of the week before and of the year before: a middle-aged man with short pants and gaiters, short pants which, like his bush jacket and his white helmet and his false teeth and his gaiters were at least three sizes too large. Only the boots fitted, more or less.

He stood quite still until the gangplank was on the ground. Only then did he take out his wire-rimmed glasses and put them on and move nearer. Without his glasses he could see barely ten yards, but he wore them only when he found himself in strange surroundings. In his yard and his house they were unnecessary.

"Delport!" he called when the first passengers began disembarking. "Are you there?"

Delport came ashore and greeted him.

Behind the shelter of palm branches he could see João's Harley-Davidson standing, at the edge of the lamp light, the sidecar glimmered in the shadows. João saw him look at the motorcycle and said, "Ride with me. I've come just to get my salt."

"I can't," Delport said, but by then João was at the pier talking to Rodrigue. A black porter came down the gangplank bent under a large bag of salt, carried it past Delport and tipped it into the sidecar of the motorcycle. João received salt regularly from Caipemba for the curing
of animal skins. He could not order more than one bag at a time because the motorcycle was his only means of transport.

"Max is riding on with me," he heard João say to Rodrigue. "Don't wait for him."

"I can't." Delport walked up to João. "I cannot ride with you. There is someone I have to..." He suddenly did not know what to say, for the girl appeared at the railing at that moment.

"You have to what?" João wanted to know. Delport didn't answer.

"I must talk with you, amigo." João took him by the arm and led him to the shelter.

"What is it?"

João took off his glasses, looked him over, and hooked them back over his ears. "I don't know," he said. "I wanted..." He hesitated a moment; then he asked, "Is everything all right?"

"What do you mean?"

"No, I'm just asking."

Delport could only stand and look at him. He didn't know what to say.

"Are you coming?" Rodrigue called from the boat.

"Go on." João was almost speechless. "Just go," he said. "We can talk later." And he turned, climbed on his motorcycle and kicked it into life.

Delport returned to the boat.

They pulled up the gangplank behind him and he could still hear the sound of the motorcycle, but he didn't look around—not before the boat was already some distance from the bank. And only then did João put his motorcycle in gear and leave the small area of lamp light.

A door outside closed again. Delport finished his whiskey and stood up. He could see the front porch through the screen door and there was no one. He went to the child's room. And the child was not in his bed. The rooms of An and the child both led out onto the front porch and the doors were close together, the child's on the edge of the verandah and An's right next to the corner. Delport looked
into An's room. After a moment he made out the pale mosquito net and a little later he saw the child standing beside the bed, motionless. And the child stood looking at the mosquito net. Delport was not certain if the child was aware of him, and he waited, and the child did nothing, just stood without moving, staring at the bed in front of him, as if he were waiting, as if he were listening for something Delport could not hear.

The crickets were noisy. A monotonous choir, with the croak of a frog now and then from somewhere out in the dark.

But then, as he listened, as he waited for the child to do something, there came another sound.

Somewhere in the yard there was a footstep. Delport turned his head and looked outside. But it was quiet. He went down the steps and went and stood under the mango trees and when he stood still he could hear the footsteps coming nearer, from the direction of the river. And when he turned he was aware of the figure near him—he recognized the helmet, and the large bush jacket. It was Joao Albassini.

Delport breathed deeply and said nothing. It was Joao who spoke first. He pushed his helmet back and came right up to Delport and asked, "How goes it, amigo?"

"I didn't hear your engine."

"I was already here before you came. I left the bike up at the native huts; I was afraid I would wake your family."

There was another fleeting lightning flash and in that moment Delport saw the path and Joao's glasses.

"Is she here?" Joao asked.

"Who?"

"The girl."

"No," Delport said, and suddenly understood. And smiled.

"Do you know her?" Joao wanted to know.

"I met her this afternoon for the first time."

Albassini took his glasses off and put them in his pocket and said, "I don't like her."

"You know her, then."

"No."
Delport could see him better now. João was standing and looking towards the house and Delport was sure he could not see the house.

"What did you want to talk to me about tonight?"

"You're afraid," João said. "Why?"

Delport just shook his head.

"When I approached, just now, you were afraid."

"That's not what you wanted to talk to me about."

João was still looking in the direction of the house. And Delport turned round to be sure there was no one, and at the same time there was lightning again somewhere, brighter than before, and he glimpsed the violet bougainvillaea flowers under the eaves and against the water tank, and beside the water tank the child was standing, wearing his pajama pants.

João was not satisfied. He was like an animal that had scented something. But he tried to hide it.

"Are you worried about something, João?" Delport asked.

And João shook his head and said, "No. Why?"

"You wanted to talk with me."

"Nothing specific," he said. "It's some time since I last saw you."

Delport knew this was not true.

"Walk with me to my bike."

"Why?"

"We must talk."

"Rather come into the house?"

"No." João shook his head. "It's going to rain soon."

And this, too, was a lie, for the rain was still far off, and João put his glasses on and they began to walk, around the house, across the back yard. The lightning flashed two, three times in quick succession and in the light Delport could see the child's footprints in the soft sand--winding tracks which crossed and forked and were lost in the shadows.

They walked together, swaying, João's steps long and lithe, like a lion's. There was nothing to be said.
This moment always came to Delport, as it did when in the company of the two or three persons whom he had known well: a moment in which he realized that the talking was done though much remained to be said.

He wanted to talk with Albassini about the girl, but he did not know how. For really there was nothing to tell—except about the mask. Even so, he wanted to talk about her.

But they had reached the motorcycle before he could utter a word. João hesitated a moment, as if he also still wanted to get something off his chest, but he grabbed the handle bar grips, swung a long leg over the saddle, and adjusted his spectacles.

"What do you want to talk about?"

"Since last week there has been a camp up there beside the Doispruit."

"I know," Delport said.

"The female who was on the boat tonight—"

"I know."

"Did they come to you?"

Delport shook his head.

"You must do something about it."

"Yes."

"I wondered if you knew." Albassini kicked the starter, revved the engine. "Boa noite."

"Is that all you came to say?"

"I just wondered how it was going. Boa noite." He turned the motorcycle, then called over his shoulder a third time "Boa noite!" and rode away.

Delport did not wait. He walked back to the yard, listening to the motorcycle's noise fading into the night.

Near the house he stopped. He was sure he had heard a door close. He stood perfectly still and waited, and after a moment he could make out the large figure of Fernando. The servant was moving towards him diagonally, completely unaware of him, and stopped when Delport spoke.
"Where are you coming from?" he asked.

Fernando stood a moment without replying. "I finished up," he said eventually.

"You weren't in the kitchen."

"I took the doña her water."

"You must finish up earlier, man," Delport said, and his voice betrayed him. "This dawdling around the house until so late in the evening isn't necessary."

The servant did not reply—just stood still for a moment and looked at Delport, then walked on without saying good-night.

Delport walked back to the house.

On the back porch he hesitated a moment, then went into his room and stood before the window. An insect fluttered against the roof. He could hear the soft, probing sounds of the wings. And the room smelled musty and the smell was familiar and comforting.

He waited for the lightning to flash again, his eyes on the tank where the child had stood earlier. And when, after a minute or two, the light came, he saw the child: he was still standing in the exact same place, but now facing the opposite direction.

And he leaned out of the window and quietly called in the dark. Two, three times. But there was no reply.

Then when the lightning flashed again, the child was gone.

He lay down on the bed, seeing the girl in front of him walking down the gangplank, her leather bag swinging next to her body. He was right behind her and Gonçalo already stood before them on the bamboo pier waiting, the two large bags of supplies on either side of him.

"Adeus!" Rodrigue called from behind them, his face surrounded by blue clouds of smoke. "Good night!"

They waved over their shoulders and moved to the end of the pier before they stopped. The gangplank was already raised and the boat began to shift, slowly edging its keel into the stream, drifting away. And they stood together and watched the boat move forward, with Rodrigue, abandoned, on the upper deck, until both his silhouette and the outline
of the boat sank into the dark, and only the light patch of the lower deck drifted ghostlike through the night.

Then, only, were they aware of each other. The beat of the boat was a vague sound behind the choir of frogs and crickets and the rustle of reeds in the water.

"I'll walk with you," he said. "Gonçalo will bring a lantern shortly."

"It's not necessary," she said.

"You can't walk alone."

"I'll be all right."

"It's a long way," he said. "I'll walk with you."

"You've already done enough for me today, senhor." She sounded firm. "I'm not afraid of the dark. If you'll just lend me a lantern. I'll bring it back."

"I'll be worried," he said. "The world's wild, here. Besides, you don't know the way."

"I know it," she said. "I've already come here on the footpath."

He looked up at the dark patch of her face. "When?"

For a moment, she hesitated. Or was it longer than just a moment? Then she said, "I was bored."

The light of the Mahala had disappeared and Delport looked towards the house. There was still no sign of Gonçalo. "We can wait up ahead," he said. "I'll walk in front. I know the path."

"If you'll just lend me a lantern."

"I'll send Gonçalo with you. He's very trustworthy."

She did not reply.

Somewhere in the dark, not too far from them, there was a brief whistle. And then again. She must have heard it too, for she stopped.

"It's a reedbuck," he said.

"Do they call so?"

"They whistle just like a human."
She followed him up the steep incline to the level ground where the path forked.

She stood close to him and her breath was a little short from the climb.

"Will it be all right if Gonçalo goes with you?"

"If it is so important, then," she said and nodded. "But I really would be fine alone."

"Perhaps so. And perhaps not."

"I had expected to do that. To walk alone."

The small, yellow glow of the lantern suddenly appeared far behind the trees, and drifted nearer.

"Senhora," Delport said, "That mask... "

He could hear the humor in her voice when she asked, "Do you like it a lot?"

"I'll give you two hundred and fifteen escudos for it. It's all I have with me," He did not want to look at her, his eyes were fixed on the approaching lantern.

"I can't sell it to you," she said.

Gonçalo trotted up. He was one of the few blacks on the lot who could force himself to move swiftly.

"Are the folks already asleep?" Delport asked when Gonçalo stood five yards away from them.

"The house is dark, amo."

"Will you go with the doña? Her camp is an hour from here."

Gonçalo nodded.

"Pick up your feet. And come and tell me when you're back. I won't sleep."

"Obrigado," the girl said, and when he looked at her he saw she was holding something out to him. It was the mask.

"Think it over first," he said. "You don't have to decide immediately. I'll certainly see you again."

"I have decided."
He did not know what he should do. His hand was already half extended to take it from her, but the fact that she had given in made him feel guilty. Eventually he took it, nevertheless, and thrust his hand into his pocket to find his wallet.

"It's for helping me," she said.

"I'll give you two hundred and fifteen escudos."

But she shook her head, turned and walked away. And Gonçalo fell in behind her.

"Senhora!" Delport said. "Wait a moment..."

They kept walking, she and the servant, and after a time Gonçalo went past her. And Delport stood and watched as they vanished behind the sweet mango trees.

He was wakened by the noise.

And as soon as he heard it a second time he realized it was An screaming. But he did not jump out of bed; he hoped she would go back to sleep. Her bedroom window was angled across the whole back porch, ten yards from his door, and he could hear her softly murmuring, and suddenly there was a third scream.

He was still in his clothes and he stood up and went to her room. He rarely went into her room; only at night if she became restless.

The mosquito net was half open and he lifted it and sat on the edge of the bed, looking at her. She lay on her back and it was as if she was dozing off again, but her mouth was partly open and her fingers clutched at the bed post.

There was only a sheet over her lower body and the buttons of her nightdress were undone; he could see one of her breasts and the dark patch of the nipple. She let go of the bed post and sat up half erect, sank back again and turned on her side, curled up, groaned, and began mumbling again.

"You must sleep, An," he said.

Through the open window he could see the child approaching across the back yard. The moon must have partly broken
through the clouds, for the porch was lighter than before. The child came up to the window and pressed his face against the glass, his hands cupped to his temples.

"Hold me tight," she muttered and Delport knew she was not speaking to him.

"An," he said, "you must sleep."

She kicked her legs out and yelled again, and, crossed her arms. She placed her hands under her armpits as if she were cuddling herself. He shook her shoulder and talked to her softly, and felt her gradually relax.

"Don't go away," she said, this time distinctly.

"I won't," he said, though the words had no meaning for her. He just wanted to say something to calm her.

And she sighed and said, "He forgot that I existed," and she slept.

When he stood up, the child was no longer at the window. He pulled the sheet over her, adjusted the mosquito net and went outside. Somewhere in the yard he could hear the child making the sound of a car, steadily receding, until he was out of earshot.

The lightning flashed no more and the moon was a faint image behind the clouds. But as he looked at it, the image darkened till nothing remained of it. And it was suddenly so dark that he had to grope his way to the living room.

He did not want to see himself in this perspective, but João's visit had perturbed him. João had observed the house as if there was something about it he mistrusted, and there had been something evasive in all that he had said and done: his thoughts had been elsewhere. But he had been frightened to speak; he had been reluctant to voice his thoughts.

Perhaps he had expected the girl to be there. Perhaps he had wanted to spy on them. Why else had he stopped so far from the yard, waited for them at the river, and not emerged as soon as they had climbed off the boat.

Where, precisely, had he been when they had come ashore? He must have hidden somewhere.

Delport sat down under the buffalo head. The mask was beside the chair on the floor and he picked it up, removed it from the paper, and ran his fingers over it.
João was never inquisitive, he thought; he had never put himself out that much to find out something about anyone before. He had always gone his own way, had not been involved in any situation, had raised his animals, had sold his hides, had remained undisturbed by the deeds and actions of other people.

Delport suddenly believed it beyond all doubt: João knew the girl; but something deterred him from proving it.

Outside, the yard lay unperceived and brooding; the air was heavy and sweet and soundless—even the frogs were quiet. The faint whine of a mosquito was all that remained. It was as if the suffocating air and the darkness had smothered everything with isolating silence.

He saw An gripping the bedpost in pain again. Her hair was soaked in sweat and the candle flame beside her bed was white and motionless. And when she screamed, the door opened and the woman came in and asked if she was still bleeding. An nodded and the woman said it was good—the more she bled, the better. She must bleed thoroughly. And when the woman left, he stood upright alongside the bed and took her hand. She said, "Don't leave, Max." And he nodded his head and said nothing.

The room smelled of disinfectant and in the corner on a white table lay pieces of red-stained cotton wool and a pair of scissors and a syringe and a washbowl of light red water in which the girl had washed her hands.

"He will not come back, will he?" she asked, and he knew what she meant and told her no, he would not, he was gone for good. He was a chapter of the past.

"Ritter," she said and he released her hand and sat down and thought: Ritter is far away, her fear is groundless—he's with her and he'll help her.

He wanted to help her. He loved her. Therefore he lied and denounced and humiliated himself to help and to retain her. He would not leave her in the lurch. That summer had been enough of a betrayal.

Ritter was shut away and powerless and it was possible to be brave again.

But she bled more than looked safe to him and her face was whiter than chalk; he could not help feeling afraid—the uncertainty overwhelmed him and became a form of reproach and by daybreak that morning his bravery was not even worth considering. Ritter wanted an eye for an eye, though he was locked away.
The woman did not return. At sunup someone looked in through the window, their hands against their temples, and Delport snuffed the candle, tucked the blankets under her body and carried her from the house with the curse of Ritter's name ringing like a clapper in his hollow rib cage.

They burnt sugar on the hills above Tongaat and the sun emerged blood-red from behind the clouds of smoke. But that one time Ritter was defeated.

Delport removed the Nativity mask from its hanging hook under the buffalo head and replaced it with Ritter. The sensa was tied to the same nail by a cord and while he struggled to hang the mask in the dark, he struck against one string and the sound echoed for some time afterwards, vibrating through the room.

As soon as it was quiet he went to his bedroom.

He undressed and threw his pajama pants over his shoulder. In the bathroom he emptied a bucket of water into the cast iron tank and stood under the tepid shower and washed himself. Then he drew his pajama pants over his wet body.

Apparently An was sleeping.

He wanted to go and look for him. Somewhere among the day's purchases there was a blue, windup car. But that would have to wait for the following day, since calling for him would be a hopeless task; he would not answer—and to look for him in the dark would do little good. Despite repeated threats and persuasions, he would often wander away from the yard at night.

In his room, he stored the girl's handkerchief in his wardrobe and lay on the bed with no thoughts of sleep. Before midnight, drowsiness was seldom victorious in this battle.

Sometimes it seemed the right time of the night for music on the radio and he would look for a station. By day the green tuning indicator light would flicker vainly as it was switched on; static and almost inaudible voices were all the loudspeaker could produce.

There was only one station that could always be heard without interference—completely to the left on the tuning dial. He always found it easily, because it was the only place the green eye stopped flickering. But the station was not operating—all that could be heard was a short code message repeated over and over again: a signal with eleven notes, played on an ordinary sensa; four measures, of which
the first three were identical, three notes each, and the fourth, two notes. It was much like the call of a bush lourie, just as monotonous, just as somber and lonely.

Delport swung the tuner back and forth, from left to right and back, again over to the right, still searching, and back again. There were voices, almost inaudibly faint, and now and then snippets of music, interrupted by annoying noises, as if a veldt fire raged in the depths of the loudspeaker.

He must have dozed off, for again he stood looking at the small hole in the screen at An's bedroom door. And in his dream he knew he slept; he knew he dreamed he was standing looking, captured by the perfectly round hole—the blackened edges of the screen evenly bent inwards—a hundred almost invisible little fingers which pointed directly towards her. He stood so for a long time, then turned and went out into the quiet yard leaving tracks across the damp earth, over the child's zigzag paths, and followed one which suddenly stopped dead—just anywhere—where the child lay sleeping, the scraping board still in his hand.

He must have fallen asleep, for when he again became aware of the radio, it was raining outside. There was wind in the trees and the curtains flapped in his face. He did not close the window promptly; the bed was already wet. He breathed deeply and felt the warm rain drizzle over him and listened to the rain on the roof and the sensa's gloomy chords beside him in the dark.

It was like this every summer: the first rain came at night, as in the autumn, unexpectedly. For weeks lightning would flash at night; by day the flies would rest lazily against the screen, there would be more mosquitos, centipedes would begin walking, the doves would call till after sunset, the air would become sultry and sticky like steam. But the rain would stay away—long enough to let you relax and to let you forget these preliminary signs. And then one night it would come, without further warning, quietly over the plains, accompanied by the wind.

João was right. He had predicted rain.

He had a flair for predicting things. And it was a little ironic. He concerned himself little with the future, even less than with the past. The present moment was enough for him.

Delport closed the window and went to stand at the screen door. He could not see the rain, but it was enough to smell it and to listen to it.
Somewhere in the house a window shutter banged back and forth in the wind and he went from room to room, closing the windows, fetching cans to set down under leaks.

The child lay across his bed on his back, sleeping with his mouth open. He stood next to the bed, took the matches beside the lamp and struck one: the eyelids were paler than the rest of the face, and thin--almost transparent; his ears were two white daisies on his temples; his mouth was soft and defenseless, as only a child's can be; his hands were open and relaxed.

Only as he slept could Delport approach him so closely. And he stood and looked at him until the match burned his fingers, then in the dark he ran his hand through the child's hair, quickly and unobtrusively. And the child turned over and slept again, on his stomach, his head at an angle, his arms under him, and one leg somehow drawn up as if he were protecting something.

He remembered the toy, windup car, fetched it, and set it down next to the bed, in a place where the child would see it when he awoke.

And it was still raining, harder then a few minutes before. There was no more lightning, but now and then he could hear the thunder rolling distantly, behind the patter of the rain on the roof.

On the front porch Delport suddenly stopped dead. He wanted to see his watch but it was too dark. In the child's room, where there was no wind, he struck another match and held it near his wrist.

It was a quarter-to-twelve and Gonçalo was not back yet!

They had left at nine o'clock. The camp was near the joining of the Doisspruit and CCG's irrigation overflow--an hour on foot. He should have been back by eleven o'clock. He would have jogged back along the path, for it was late and he would have wanted to be home before the rain. Even if the rain had caught him he would not have sought shelter along the way. Goncalo knew the first rains; he would have known it would not stop before daybreak. Besides, no servant ever hid from the rain; to be drenched by rain meant they were in the good graces of Umlenzengamunya.

Delport dressed and went out across the dark yard in the rain, between the trees, to the native huts. The stream was quiet, there was not even an audible sound of flow--but the ground was soaked and ankle-deep in water in places.

It was good to hear, now, after all the sunny months: the patter of the drops on his helmet and on the leaves,
the wet swish of the trees in the wind. He kept to the path, through, between the bananas, his shoes dragging in the clinging mud, his trouser legs clammy and cold around his calves, till near the spring where the grass opened into the bareness of the yard around the native huts.

Gonçalo's hut was the nearest, and at the door, with cold drops striking his cheeks, he crouched and called out. He could feel large drops from the edge of the roof falling down his neck and he listened to hear if anyone replied, but all there was was the rain and the water flowing in the stream.

He called again and again for Gonçalo and at last the door opened, just a little, but he could not see anyone. "Gonçalo?"

"He is not back yet," someone said. It was a child's voice.

Delport found Kiya's hut and hammered on the door. "Are you there, Kiya?" There was movement within--a soft tap against the reed wall. "Get dressed!" he said when the door opened. "Hurry."

He stood to one side and waited, and in a while Kiya came out from between the huts wearing a coat, his service gun in a canvas holster over his shoulder. "I'm ready, amo," he said.

They walked in single file; Delport in front.

And when they were one kilometer away, Kiya said, "I didn't hear anything."

He was seldom wakened at night. It only happened when shots were heard and they had to hunt down the poachers.

"I didn't hear anything either." Delport's pace was rapid, but he was accustomed to it and far from tired.

Kiya mulled the matter over lengthily. "Where are we going then, amo?" he asked eventually.

Delport told him. And the purpose, when he fully grasped it, suddenly confronted him, completely, unexpectedly. Gonçalo was not yet back; he was late--an hour late but in the bush no one knew time. There was just day and night; there were no hours. Nothing happened too early, and what seemed to happen too late, always happened in good time.

But this time it was different. Delport knew it without analysis. At night no one walked down unnecessary paths, particularly if it was raining and somewhere a wife and a
warm skin-rug lay waiting. And although Gonçalo did not say it, he was far from being eager to set out so late at night.

They passed the hippo pool and the water looked higher than usual. The bulrushes and reeds on the island in the middle of the pool, which usually stood high and dry, were now half covered with water.

By stages, the sky gradually opened up and revealed trees outlined against the horizon. Then the rain sprinkled finely and with scarcely a sound. But not long after that, the darkness settled again and the rain fell more steadily, an opaque wall of water without wind or lightning.

On the other side of the hippo hole Kiya passed Delport and walked in front. He and Delport knew the surroundings equally well, but in the dark and the rain the white man sometimes lost his sense of direction and Kiya could see better in the dark.

They never talked while they were in the bush. Words were, for the most part, redundant. They spent nearly every day together in the veldt and understood each other perfectly. Besides, that night there was almost nothing to be said; for Delport it was enough to see the black's silhouette in front of him with the gun across his shoulder.

Delport kept expecting to hear someone coming towards them, to see Gonçalo appear out of the dark, his lantern a patch of misty light in the rain. But the farther they progressed, the less he expected it. The only signs of life were a hyena calling now and then in front of them beside the footpath, an owl fluttering up among the wet leaves, and once, a chameleon, on a stalk of grass, opened its yellow mouth in the lamplight as Delport passed.

It reminded him of the mask and he remembered Ritter, but they were vague thoughts which could not take precise form. Everything was reduced to a blind stare into the dark rain and a straining forward along the narrow path into the wet night. Even thoughts of the girl were fleeting. Perhaps he did not wish to think of her.

At the stepping stones where the path crossed the river, Kiya stopped and waited. The dark water rushed by and the stones were covered. Neither of them commented. They stood and looked at the river and after a time Kiya entered the water, but it was too strong and he was scarcely in it up to his knees when he turned and struggled back, one foot at a time.

They chose a well-covered tree and sat down and waited. The rain eventually subsided and, in the south, the light
crept into view. And with the passing of the rain, the cold came.

Delport was more tired than he thought; he leaned his back against the tree trunk and, against his will, fell asleep. Perhaps it was in his sleep or perhaps he was actually awake, but again and again he asked himself why he had followed Goncalo in such haste.

Much had happened to him since the sun had set. The previous afternoon he had not even known Mália Domingo. He was on his way home, as on previous occasions. He was tired and he wanted to get home to pour himself a whiskey and to listen to the night and the quiet.

And the girl had jumped from a shop front and had made her way among the flies and between the baskets of fruit and had spoken to him. That was the beginning of it all. And he could not have known that that would send him out into the rain before daybreak after the lost Goncalo. That had brought him to the cold and lonely moment where he sat with Kiya in the dark and waited for the Doisspruit to drop.

It was nearly daybreak when his servant woke him.

"We can cross, amo," he said.

Delport stood up and his body felt sore and stiff when they reached and entered the water. Slowly, but surely, they fought their way across the stream, for the water was still up to their hips. But they could see what they were doing, and it was not too difficult.

The trees looked gray in the light and, when they passed the second hippopotamus hole, they could already see the glitter of drops on the stalks of grass, and there were bluejays in the trees.

There was still no sign of Goncalo.

The camp could not be much farther; at most another quarter hour's walk. Something was wrong and Delport told himself he would punish Goncalo for the inconvenience. His instruction to him was clear and nothing could be excuse enough to disregard his order.

The second time Kiya stopped was at a sharp turn in the path. Delport came up behind him then turned from the footpath and stopped.

There was a patch of burnt grass a few yards wide. Apparently the rain had extinguished the fire. Goncalo's
lamp lay beside the footpath, on the patch of black tufted grass. The glass was smoked black and partly covered with chaff, but it was whole.

And Gonçalo was also there. He lay in the path on his stomach, hands to his sides, like one asleep. He lay completely relaxed.

Kiya stood to one side and took the gun from his shoulder and rested the butt on the ground. And Delport approached Gonçalo and rolled him over gently and there was nothing about him that seemed amiss. But he was completely stiff, and above his right eye there was a small, round bullet hole.
THREE

That first summer beside the river it rained nearly every day, but it made little impression on the intense heat. By seven o'clock in the morning, even, the earth steamed under a sultry, malicious sun and by eleven o'clock one's ears were ringing with the cicadas. In the afternoons the sky closed over and by four everything was purple and grey and the perspiration poured from one's body. At five o'clock the lightning would shoot blue, forked lines across the plains and the rain would break out of the sky and fall in heavy, grey sheets.

But nothing mattered. The heat was tolerable, and the rain was good, and the loneliness was no burden; even the mosquitoes and the leaking house and the puff adders in the drinking water were bearable. Because An was with him and Ritter was but a vague memory. An laughed and she did not have a care.

She was still sick, occasionally; she was thin and had blue rings under her eyes and slept most of the time. But in the afternoons she would wait for him and they would walk to the river and evenings, after dinner, they would feed geckoes on the window sills of the living room.

That first month passed and it was comfort enough. The month of flight and begging and finally that single room in Beira harbor with him coming home night after night without hope of relief—it was, indeed, a thing of the past.

He never spoke of himself. Nightly as he lay listening for footsteps on the verandah, nightly as he lay wondering if Ritter was looking for him, he pretended to be asleep. He even pretended to snore whenever he knew she was awake. He had paid dearly for what he had and he did not intend to lose it.

He did not let her go to Caipemba alone, ever. He made sure that he stayed near her. He was wary and on his guard. He was watchful. As a child he had heard the blacks say: beware if you see an earthworm moving above the ground; tread softly if a chameleon or a lizard looks you in the eye, or an umber bird flies up in front of you; be warned if an hyena leads or follows you all day, or if an owl hoots all night on your roof. They are all signs. Delport did not believe in these things, but he was prepared, every day, every night, even in the most unlikely places, he was completely prepared
to see a door suddenly swing open, to see a shrub quiver, to see a swarm of locusts take off—to see that tall, lithe man appear from out of the sun, at his ease, as always, relaxed, and smiling, that man with the abundance of yellow hair and the morbid mouth, his right hand in the pocket of his bush jacket, his eyes cold and sympathetic and fatherly and small under the firm eyebrows.

He had loved him, once. He had loved Ritter as a person loves a father. Ritter was so much better than he. He knew and understood everything; he had advice about everything. He could talk of the world as if it were the palm of his hand. He was hopeful about everything and nothing was too difficult for him. He always, always won.

Only once had he misjudged him: that night at Ballito. Everyone who was familiar with the situation agreed that he had misjudged him, although no one could be certain. They could only speculate, because Ritter would not explain anything to anyone. And that ill-fated blunder had changed everything.

Delport thought of that night at Ballito as he sat on his haunches and looked at Gonçalo. For it was the first time since that night that he again saw a corpse. And when he rolled the stiff cadaver back on its face it was as it had been. Except: the first time the body was still warm.

He moved the body into the shade and Kiya stayed behind. He was alone, farther on.

He did not walk quickly. He was tired and Gonçalo's death had taken him off guard and made him feel even more tired. He walked and thought: whatever had happened, it was unnecessary; it was totally unnecessary and Gonçalo had not deserved it. And there was something else: a vague uneasiness over the girl. He did not want to think of it, but something told him persistently that Gonçalo had not been alone when he had been shot. He was scared of reaching the camp; he was frightened he would not find her there, and he could not see a reason for it. Two, three dead already was enough. He could not face the likelihood of a fourth.

He rested twice in the last kilometer.

He saw the truck first; a pale 1948 Chevy. It stood between a clump of acacia bushes beside an nkuhla tree and there was a tarpaulin over the frame at the rear. The river bank was not twenty yards from the vehicle's front wheels.

That's much too close, Delport thought, but the thought was not important at that time. There was no smoke—that was more to the point.
He turned off the footpath and, passing through the tall grass, came right up to the camp, his shadow drawn out long behind him, and then he saw the tarpaulin shelter on the other side of the truck. He walked until he was five yards from the right rear wheel and then stopped and listened.

All was quiet.

It was only when the bluejay stopped calling that he noticed that the bird was sitting in the nkuhla. And this was a conclusive sign to him that there was no one in the camp.

He walked around the back of the vehicle and went into the shelter. There were two deck chairs, a folding table loaded with cooking utensils, a paraffin tin with a Primus stove on it, and a folded camp bed. There was a tin mug on the table, but the coffee dregs in it were days old and full of ants. The Primus was cold.

He went round to the front of the truck and looked at the registration number. It had come from Beira. The window on the driver's side was rolled down and the seat on that side was soaking wet. He returned to the back and started to enter the shelter but when he lifted the tarpaulin, the girl inside asked, "Quem é?" Delport stepped back.

"Roberto?" the girl asked.

"It's me."

"Quem?" she asked again.

"Delport."

She was quiet for a long time and he waited and nothing happened.

"I came to see if you were here," he said.

She stirred somewhere inside and was quiet again, and when she spoke, at last, her voice was closer to him. "Quê horas sao?" she asked.

"Five thirty."

"E cedo," she said lazily. "I'm dressing."

He sat under the shelter and waited for her. But she emerged only a quarter of an hour later—in a khaki shirt and a tight skirt. Her hair was not combed and her eyes were heavy with sleep, but she smiled.
"Did you arrive here safely last night?" he asked and placed his helmet on the table beside him.

She nodded.

"How far did Gonçalo accompany you?"

"To here," she said. "He lit a lantern for me and waited until I was in the shelter."

Delport looked around him again. His tracks were the only ones in the wet earth. The rain had washed all signs away.

The girl sat and rubbed her eyes and yawned behind a raised hand. "You're up and about early," she said.

"Are you alone here?"

"Until the others return."

"Aren't you afraid?"

"No."

"Who is Roberto?"

She smiled. "My father."

"Do you always go hunting with him?"

"This is the third time."

"Do you keep a weapon near you?"

"Yes. A revolver." She tried to smile again. "I can shoot well. Better than you."

"Gonçalo is dead," he said.

She did not immediately grasp what he had said. The smile vanished from her face, but only a little later did the shock display itself in her eyes. "The black?"

He nodded.

"Did he drown?"

"Why would you think he'd drowned?" Delport wanted to know.
"The creek came up suddenly last night. Look," she said, and pointed to the flattened grass only yards from the shelter. "I wondered if he would be able to cross the stream."

"Didn't you hear shots after he left?"

"No," she said. "Was he shot?"

He could have imagined it, but it was as though the color had suddenly drained from her face.

"Are you certain you heard nothing?" he asked.

"It began to rain," she said. "Just as we arrived here. Where did it happen?"

"One kilometer from here."

The bluejay called from a little farther away now, and the sound was as clear as glass on that fresh morning.

When he looked at her again her eyes were fixed on him. "You suspect me," she said softly.

He shook his head.

"Then why do you cross-examine me?"

"I just want to find out what you know."

"Is that why you came?"

"I wanted to come and make sure you were safe. And I wanted to give you the money for the mask."

She looked away. "You must go. Please."

"You are not safe here," he said.

"I have a revolver. I can shoot." Then she looked at him again. "Apparently you want to see it. To compare the bullets."

"I wanted to come to see if you were safe. That's all."

"I'll be safe. Just go."

"I'll send someone to stay with you."

"They'll be back." She shook her head and then pressed one hand to her temple and looked down at the ground, and
there was suddenly a peculiar expression on her face, almost as though she had pain somewhere. "We talked the whole way..."

"Gonçalo?"

She did not answer.

"He was the best of his kind," he said, just to say something.

It was already hot again. The sun was barely up and the ground was already nearly dry, and Delport felt himself begin to sweat.

"It will be better if you go," she said and looked up at him, and suddenly he realized she was afraid.

He remained seated a moment longer, not knowing what he should think. Then he stood up. "I'll send somebody. My ranger, perhaps. He is very trustworthy. Kiya. I'll send him with a tent."

She shook her head. "I don't want anyone here."

He had on the same clothes as the previous day and the two hundred and fifteen escudos were still in his pocket. He took them out and put them on the table.

"I'll come later and see how things are. If anything happens you can send Kiya to fetch me."

He looked at her and saw she had not listened to him: her attention was focussed on something on the other side of the creek. He looked in that direction but could not see anything.

The bluejay was quiet, but in the thorny patches below the camp a flock of thrushes were squawking.

"You must go," she said. "Please. I don't want to have any more trouble."

They cut a pole with Kiya's hunting knife and tied the body to it and carried it over their shoulders. And he and Kiya said nothing to each other all the way back. Delport was frightened and he didn't know why. He wanted to turn round and go back to Mália Domingo but didn't know why.

Rodrigue Pereira said it often. When they were playing chess or sitting on the screendeck having a drink. Africa
is a god-forsaken place. And with that he said more than just the words themselves. Delport knew that because he could remember a conversation lasting the entire first night that he had come to know Rodrigue.

An slept en route from Caipemba; she was indisposed for days. And the captain was drunk and very sympathetic and he threw especially clean sheets on his bed and invited her to go there and sleep. He removed a bottle of brandy from under his bed and they sat talking in the steering cabin. And Rodrigue talked about a variety of subjects. He told Delport about Africa like a person who is talking to a new resident in his village.

Delport knew Africa much better than the captain, for he had grown up in Africa. But he said nothing. He was grateful for the companionship and he listened to Rodrigue as if every word was news to him.

Quickly he realized: to Rodrigue, Africa was a jungle with a river. To Rodrigue, Africa was a small trading store with mango trees and palms and flies and black faces and a small handful of strayed whites. Africa was banishment and loneliness and a perpetual peace to him. "Africa," he said that night, "is a waiting room full of strangers at a strange railway station. And everyone waits and everyone longs for home and the bloody train won't come."

And every time after that when Rodrigue spoke of that god-forsaken place Delport knew why he referred to it thus. And Rodrigue was right. He talked about himself and about the Mahala and about the view from his small porthole, and he called that Africa, and he was not aware it had many other names besides.

That afternoon on his way to João Albassini on his bicycle with the sun on the spokes and sweat pouring from his body, Delport knew he would never again be off his guard. His fear had another name, but it was not the same one as Rodrigue's.

He rode in the right-hand track. The grass on the median was pressed flat and here and there were black stripes in the dry tufts of tambookie grass—João's Harley-Davidson leaked oil.

The sun fell in patches over the two sand tracks and through the thick trees growing on either side of the path. Here and there, in the shadows, were still puddles of last night's rain, but he could not avoid them and had to lift his feet to avoid the splashed mud.

He thought of himself and of the world, and the world was a musty house with green screens over the windows, buck
heads and geckoes on the walls, pawpaw trees in the back yard, a house with spiders and green mold; a house with a crack in the roof and the odor of frangipanis in every corner; a house in which you slept and supervised Fernando and thought but did not speak and waited for tomorrow while you tried to remember yesterday. The world is an isolated place, he thought, and smiled and thought: a god-forsaken place.

He remembered so many painful nights; between dusk and dawn so many thousand mosquitoes buzzing, and drums pulsing, almost inaudibly, far away in the dark, and a green light flickering with strange languages and sounds from an unknown country. So many thousand days' suns and problems seethed in his body as he waited, sometimes afraid, sometimes braver--waited for a door to open, a bush which would suddenly move aside, and reveal the face of a man whom he still somehow wanted to love.

The house was hidden behind trees. It was part of the bush, part of the sun and shadows. It was a toadstool which stopped growing a long time ago, and now looked a sickly greenish-white, wilting in the clammy shade.

The house stood square, under a flat roof, without a drain pipe and without gutters. In front and behind was a porch with wire screen from floor to roof. There was no garden--just a bareness with sickly, little lemon trees which docilely stood and sprouted.

In the back yard a group of yellow-brown children played with mud and took turns to cough asthmatically. They did not see Delport arrive.

He leaned his bicycle against the screen and knocked. He could hear one of the women talking in the back yard, but no one came to open the door. He knocked again and a child among the children playing began to cry, but the house was silent. Then he walked around the back.

A woman sat on a chair in a shadow beside the back door, a child on her lap being fed by her. The child was five or six years old and Delport could not remember if he had seen him before. He also could not decide which of the two women it was--he had not seen much of them, and they both looked alike to him.

"Afternoon," he said. "Is João here?"

The child released her breast and looked around at him, then found the nipple again and continued drinking.
"He's at the paddock," she said and gestured lazily with her head. She was barefooted and was wearing a long blue dress which obviously would hang down to her ankles if she stood up. Her black frizzled hair was combed out and plaited in strands which hung out here and there from under her red headdress.

The other children came nearer then. There were six or seven of them.

Delport nodded and walked between the chicken coops and along the path towards where, a little further on, he could hear João calling commands. The nearest folds were a hundred yards from the house, but all along the path were small wire cages of wildcats and monkeys and genets and mongooses.

The children followed, a safe distance behind, and paid no attention to the woman who tried to call them back.

Later, one found enough courage to run in a wide arc past Delport to his father. "Ubaba," he called from afar, "Inkunzinyati is here!"

João was busy trying to approach a zebra with a noose, but the animal was wild and burst past the noisy servants each time, seeking an exit along the fence. Its nostrils were wide, and each time it came to this side it ran to a stop against the wire fence, its eyes rolled up into its sockets showing its white eyeballs.

The animal's flanks shone with sweat and the muscles twitched under the shiny, striped skin. He charged directly at the blacks and scattered them and João swore, hitting at them with the noose. "What's the matter, you wretched, black scoundrels!" And the hands roused the animal, turned it around and drove it back towards the fence again. They feared João; that was no secret; they were afraid of him because he often had no scruples about falling on them with the horsewhip--and although he was thin, he was strong and still very fast for his sixty years. And there was the story that he was the umloyi. That he kept two of their women with him in the house and was the father of at least ten illegitimate children, did not make him popular, but did raise him in their eyes.

The animal went into the corner again and, seeing it was going to trap itself, broke away, past João and in front of him, and João sank down to the ground like a leopard ready to spring, and swept the noose through the air catching it fast about the zebra's neck. It was suddenly animal against animal. The zebra's front legs collapsed
under it and it ploughed nose first into the ground as João fell half backwards and pulled the noose tight.

But the sudden stranglehold jerked the animal upright again and it kicked backwards and turned around to point its rump at João. Then it reared with its forequarters in the air and kicked its feet. But João moved like lightning. He clung on and was dragged along, his heels digging two deep furrows in the damp ground. It was as if he challenged the animal.

Delport stood motionless and watched. It was as though the scene hypnotized him. He wanted the struggle to continue thus, forever, and at the same time he wanted to look away, for he was on the animal's side, but not completely—he was also on that of the straining João; he wanted to see the animal tamed and he wanted to see the animal break away and escape. He wanted to close his eyes and stop watching, but he could not—he could not even blink his eyes; he continued watching.

There was foam at the zebra's mouth, and the white stripes on its body began to darken with the sweat until it stood, legs splayed, swaying and afraid, and waited for the servants to approach and tie its back legs. Then it struggled and fell, and lay there gasping.

"That one was a pain," João said when he approached, smiling. "I had the urge to let it go again."

Delport did not answer. He stood and watched the hands struggling to load it on a sled to drag it away.

"It's been in the camp for a year," João said, "I didn't think it would still be so wild. It was already being hand fed."

"What'll you do with it?" Delport asked at last.

"It's going to Beira. We got six ready today. They'll be put on the train tomorrow." The children began coming inquisitively closer, but scattered again when João suddenly turned on them. There was no need for him to say anything.

The woman was still sitting in the shade when they came to the yard.

"Bring another chair, Tanda," João ordered, and the woman took the child from her lap and went into the house, returning soon with a chair. She set the chair down next to the other one and vanished again, and João indicated to Delport he should sit down.
"How goes it?" he asked, his voice changing, his eyes two searching cracks.

"So-so." Delport's thoughts were on the zebra. "And with you?" he asked, and again he saw the tired animal standing and waiting for the harness—conquered and frightened, but surviving.

"So-so."

"When did you last have poachers?"

João shook his head. "They keep away these days."

"You must keep your eyes open. Especially now."

João looked up. "Were you there this morning? At the camp?"

Delport found himself nodding his head. Then he asked, "Do you know how many there are?"

"Two, I believe. Three with the female."

They sat near the kitchen door and Delport could hear cups rattling, and then a lazy wisp of smoke rose from the black chimney.

"I'll keep track of them."

There were some hens loose, scratching near them, and a little farther away a turkey wandered around with a flock of clucking chickens. The child Tanda had fed stood on the kitchen doorstep picking his nose, watching Delport inquisitively. His fuzzy hair was so sparse that one could clearly see his scalp. He was just as thin as his father, but also just as sinewy.

Delport looked for a way to tell João of Gonçalo, but he could not decide where to begin. João was one of the few whom he trusted, but still he hesitated to bring Mália Domingo into the affair; he wanted to avoid her name.

A woman in a brown dress brought coffee. It must have been Tombi. He stood up and greeted her, but João restrained him when he made a move to take the tray from her. "She'll manage by herself," João said, and his words reminded Delport of the girl.

They drank their coffee in silence, and when the cups were empty João said they should go and sit on the front verandah. They walked through the kitchen (a dark, little
room with a coal stove, a shelf of plates, and a table with only one chair) and through the even darker living room (four padded chairs, a zebra skin on the floor and a carved, wooden chest from Portugal.) The verandah was cool. There were two canvas chairs, a pair of grass mats on the floor and three or four pairs of buck horns mounted on the wall.

This was the first time in the nine years Delport had known João that he had been in his kitchen and the second time he had seen the inside of his living room. The single chair in the kitchen typified Albassini's household to him. There were only two bedrooms, one on each side of the living room, and the servants said that João slept in one and the two wives and eleven children together in the other. He sat completely alone at the table when they ate; apparently, the women and children sat on the floor, or the women on the floor and the children outside.

And as he walked through the house again--as on the first occasion--he thought of Rodrigue's cabin. The cabin was smaller than João's kitchen, but in those few cubic meters more worldly possessions were collected than in all four rooms of the Albassini household.

"You have something on your mind," João said after a time, and chewed his loose denture.

And Delport started from his thoughts, and smiled, and nodded. "Gonçalo is dead."

"Your porter?"

"He was shot through the head last night."

João said nothing. "I found his body this morning, about eight kilometers from my place, on the path to the Doisspruit."

"Near the hunting camp?"

Delport hesitated and then nodded.

João removed his helmet and hung it on his knee. "The servant left with the woman," he said suddenly.

Delport realized he could hide nothing from João and nodded again.

"But you haven't been to the camp?"

Delport nodded a third time. "I have. Just the girl was there."
"And what did she say?"

"She didn't know anything. It wasn't her." Delport looked away through the screen, between the trees which stood before the house resounding with the noise of cicadas. He wondered why he was so eager to assure João of her innocence.

"Why did you come to see me yesterday?" he asked.

João did not answer—not promptly; only when Delport looked at him a little later did he sniff and wipe his nose with a finger. "I wanted to come and talk."

"What about?"

Delport should have known better. He should have known João would not say anything. The question would just embarrass him.

In all the years they had known each other, he had not talked of that once; not of that or of anything else concerning himself. He would talk about the weather, about his animals, sometimes about women, but about nothing else. And yet he did reveal himself now and then. Sometimes he was restless, as on the previous night, and there was the night he had come and wakened Delport with one or another of his incomprehensible stories of the weather which had killed An and the child. And Delport thought he was drunk, but he did not smell of alcohol. And João would not relent before seeing An alive and the child lying peacefully asleep. He did not ever refer to that night again after that, nor did Delport. Perhaps he did not even think of it again.

Therefore it was strange, that afternoon, when they were already outside and Delport was on his bike ready to go, that he suddenly asked, "Who's staying with you?"

"No one," Delport said. "Why do you ask?"

And João began to walk with him, very slowly, while Delport rode beside him, balancing himself with the front wheel, from the yard to the pathway. Then, farther on, a hundred yards from the house, João stopped, and, looking back over his shoulder at Delport, said, "Someone came to see you this afternoon."

Delport did not look surprised; he acted as if João had stated a fact, and thought: it must be the girl—for he believed João. But he said, "I doubt if anybody's there."

"The hunters, perhaps."
"It's possible."

"You must go back," João said, "but you must be careful." And then he looked away, and his eyes were narrow cracks again--those black eagle eyes, small and hard from Africa's sun, suddenly smaller than usual. And he said, "He's standing in your living room and I can see what he can." Delport said nothing, asked nothing, just realized he should press on.

"Or perhaps," João said next, "he is standing in your bedroom. He is looking through a window pane with a green fleck, and he can see your water tank and he is looking to the left, past the water tank, under the discharge pipe. He can see your child playing under the pawpaw trees, and to the right of the pawpaws someone is standing in the door of the meal storeroom.

Sometimes he was aware, sometimes not, on the way back: there were three noises, all three persistent--the cicadas, invisible, somewhere in the sunlight, like light transformed to sound; the swish of the thick bicycle tires in the path, louder on firm ground, soft in the sand; and in between, with monotonous regularity, the whirr-click of the dry chain-drive.

When he was aware of his surroundings he listened to them, and under their hypnosis the three separate sounds blended into one. Then again he would catch himself hearing no more, nothing other than João's voice, saying: he is standing in your living room and I can see what he sees...

It could be the girl. But to João it was a man. It could be the two hunters who had eventually come, or someone else bringing their hunting permit for authorization--but this was summer. They never came in the summer, except those who wanted elephant, and they were few.

It could be someone from CCG, but that was just as unlikely: through all the years no one from the coffee plantation had ever come to see him.

He was tired and vaguely confused. And he looked for the reasons for these feelings in the puddles of rainwater which frequently sprayed up from under his front wheel and dirtied his clothes, and in the humid air; the squeaking of the bicycle chain irritated him. But he knew these things were side issues: he was disgusted about Gonçalo, about the camp at the Doisspruit and about the fact that there was probably someone at home waiting for him; someone whom he did not know.
Or perhaps--who knows--perhaps it was Mália Domingo.

Delport smiled as he thought of it: the girl who arrived from out of the blue, in his yard to find him. Would it surprise An? Out of the bush from somewhere, after nine years of nothing, a girl of nineteen looking for him. Would it make An remember, perhaps?

No, he thought. Between the whirr and the click of the chain--no--under the hiss of the tires--nothing will bring her back.

When the sensa played outside their green window that afternoon in João Belo, the girl was ten; when they were on their way to Inhambane, while An was hungry and bleeding, the girl was a child playing with dolls; when they arrived at the deserted yard that night, threw the house open, explored the musty rooms with a torch and thought: this is where we'll live, make a new life here, no one will ever reach us here--that night Mália Domingo was a child of ten.

What hadn't happened since then! So much, and so little.

In the north the sky lay heavy and dark on the horizon. And after a while the sun went down and the shadows of the trees deepened and lay brooding, waiting for the approaching night. It was the quietest time of the afternoon, with the first brown ibises and rows of white tick birds passing silently to the river. The air was sticky and clammy, and the rain would come with the night.

But Delport was not in a hurry. He rode slowly. His shadow which, out of the corner of his eye, he could see flying, jumped over the bushes and grass and tree trunks. Wherever there was too much water in the pathway he climbed off and pushed the bicycle along the raised median. The last place he had to climb off was four hundred meters from the house. He pushed the bicycle through the water and did not climb on again; he walked beside the bicycle, one hand on the saddle, the other on the handle bar.

The house was a pale patch in the shadows. It was not yet completely dark, but fires were already burning at the huts. The house windows were still dark and he could see the child standing near the kitchen, motionless, as if he kept watch on someone among the bananas.

As he approached, the child heard him and looked in his direction.

"Hello," Delport said. "What can you see?" The child looked back in the direction of the bananas and shrugged his shoulders.
Delport stopped and looked as well, but there was nothing to catch his attention. He pushed the bicycle to the kitchen and rested it against the wall, then looked towards the banana trees again. There was still nothing, and the child was gone.

He could hear voices on the front porch. It was An and Fernando talking and it sounded to him as though they were arguing over something. He went quietly through the screen door and stood and listened on the back porch. But he could not make out what they were saying; just once he fancied he heard An mention the child's name. Then the door to the front verandah opened, and slammed.

An was busy watering the group of succulents in the iron pots when he came on to the porch. She was wearing just her petticoat and was barefooted. The servant had left. He looked towards the meal storeroom and the door was closed.

"Evening," he said.

She looked up. "Evening."

He walked up to her, took her by the upper arm, and kissed her on her forehead. She stood motionless, close beside him. He noticed she was paler than usual. He wanted to draw her closer to him but she was resistant; he could feel her draw back.

"What's the matter." he asked.

"It's so humid."

She watered the last of the three succulents.

"You should put them outside," he said. "It's going to rain again tonight."

She looked at him. "Where were you all day?"

"I was here at twelve o'clock. You were in your room."

"I did not feel well."

She placed the tin can on the shelf beside the succulents and he waited for her to speak further, but she said nothing. A bat emerged from the edge of the roof and disappeared, peep-peeping into the dusk.

"How's it been, here?" Delport asked.

For a moment she did not react, then made a gesture with her shoulder which could have meant anything.
"I was with Albassini," he said.

She went to the verandah screen and looked out over the yard without response.

"Is everything here still...in order?"

She nodded. Then a second later, looked at him, as if she wondered why he had asked.

"Were you in the house all day?" he asked.

"Yes. I did not feel well."

He wondered if she knew of Gonçalo. The servants must surely have told her—or had they, perhaps, known better? Perhaps they had not wished to unsettle her. He would ask Fernando.

Her body was weary, in the crumpled petticoat, and there were red sleep wrinkles on one side of her face. He could scarcely believe that that was the same throat which he had discovered against his trembling, admiring lips long before.

"When will you stop walking around the house so?" he asked.

"How?"

"You know what I mean. The servant was with you here on the verandah."

She looked up at him. "I am dressed," she said and turned away. "Do you spy on me too?"

He did not want to say it. It was not his intention. It would not help, in any case, to say it. It was probably more than should be said. But it was out before he could reconsider it. "I wish I could take you away from here," he said.

And her reply was the same echo as before. "To where?"

"Any other place in the world."

She turned away from the screen. She was on her way to her room. He stopped her. But when she looked up and waited for him to explain, there was nothing more to be said. He released her arm and watched her open the screen door and enter her room, walk to her dressing table, and sit down in front of it on the only chair in the room. He could see her
back, and in the mirror, her indistinct face, and deeper in
the mirror, his own hazy profile at the door.

When he spoke it was as if he spoke to her from the
mirror. "What good does it do to stay here?" he heard him-
self ask.

"What good will it do to leave here?"

He could hear the child riding his bicycle outside.

"Maybe there's a place somewhere..."

She did not answer and he smelt the dust in the screen
in front of his face and the sweet smell of mango blossoms.

"You're always sick here."

Somewhere in the room a cricket began to chirp, hesi-
tatingly, softly. And their voices became even softer, even
more hesitating.

"I can't help it."

He nodded. "I know."

"It's better here."

He stood and looked at her, and she at his reflection.
And they said nothing for a long time. They listened to
the cricket. Until he asked, "Was no one here? Today?"

"No," she said. "Whom did you expect?"

The cricket became silent.

"No one," he said.

And he turned and went out onto the porch. He went to
the meal storeroom and heard the child ride past behind him
on his bicycle.

The door was closed, but he could see An's footprints
in front of the door—the only ones left after last night's
rain. She must have stood around in front of the door for
some time.

He went back to the house, to his room. The storeroom
key was not on its hook. He looked towards the window and
saw the water tank, and the pawpaw trees, and the door of
the storeroom. But the house was to the left of the pawpaw
trees, and not to the right as João had said.
If he had stood in the living room and looked through the window, the pawpaws would be further left and the door would be clearly to the right of them.

An had said there had not been anyone.

He sat on the bed and, in the half light, began pulling burs out of his damp socks. João must have imagined it. The one time he had tried so hard to speak to him, and he had evidently been wrong.

Or had he?

An had probably slept. Or perhaps she had just been to the meal storeroom.

He looked up, out of the window, and weighed the possibility a moment longer.

He switched the radio on, then off again quickly, stood up, and went out to the kitchen. The kitchen was dark but he could smell fat burning and could hear Fernando shuffling in front of the stove.

"Fernando," he said. The shuffling stopped and a moment later the servant answered from beside him in the dark room.

"Amo..."

"Was anyone here today?"

"Nao."

"No one?"

"No one."

He turned to leave, but halted and spoke again. "Does the doña know about Gonçalo?"

"Sim, amo," the servant mumbled. "We told her."

He could feel it again, as always: the servant's firm manner of speech, his stiff back, his hesitation—everything revealed it: his declared animosity.

Delport left.

He could not remember a green fleck on a window pane, but when he entered the room he saw it right away. It was on the middle pane just above the window ledge.
He looked to the left, past the water tank, under the discharge line, past the pawpaw trees on the right. He could make out the storeroom door way back in the dusk.

But he could not look through the flecked pane because it was too low. Delport sank lower. Even lower. He went to his knees—but it was still too low.

The person must have been sitting.

He sat in the unfolded chair. But it was also too low, and too far to the left.

The room was just as always, undisturbed disorder. The Makonde statuette with the thin legs and large fingers, and the sensa leaning askew under the balled-fistlike hunched back, blindly staring into the dusk.

Delport raised himself up a little and leaned over to the right—and suddenly everything was neatly in the square of the green pane: part of the water tank, the place under the pawpaw trees where the child usually played, the door of the storeroom.

And as he looked at that, he suddenly understood.

It was terribly simple, and it was incomprehensible.

Behind him, against the wall, right behind his head, a half meter from him, was the new mask.
FOUR

They did not know what to expect that night. That was why they had not said anything to each other. An was actually too sick to wonder about such matters or to listen to his speculations. And Rodrigue Pereira was there and he was a little drunk; he kept talking insistently and gave no one else a chance to say anything or to question the future privately.

He tried to talk them into going on to Lotsumo because it would be dark when they came to the third stop. "Lotsumo is not just any place," he advised, "but old Schwulst is there and old Schwulst has a hotel--a sort of hotel--rooms. On the way back I pass the third stop in daylight; then I can let you off--then you won't get there in the bloody dark. Among all that khaki bush, you'll certainly not find the house in the dark."

But Delport would rather get off. He was keen to get An resting properly.

"For all you know the house may not be there any more," the captain said with a chuckle, and crouched over his brandy. "You don't know this bloody world. It's Dark Africa."

Delport simply let him talk.

It was already dark when they disembarked at the third stop--Delport with the two trunks, An with some loose items. She wore the sickly green dress which the crippled inn-keeper had given her that night in Catuane. His dead wife's dress.

The officials in Beira assured them there would be a servant at their stop, waiting to help them and show them to the house. But there was no one.

Rodrigue hung over the boat railing and over and over again asked if they would be all right alone, and Delport assured him everything was in order. And when Rodrigue was quite sure everything was in order, he leaned over the rail even further, vomited into the reeds, blew his nose, waved, and shouted to Pio to leave.

They remained behind in the dark alone and stood and watched Mahala's lanterns drift away over the dark water. And An said they must go and find that house, for she was finished.
They climbed out from among the reeds, up the slope, to an overgrown footpath, and before them were mango trees and darkness. Delport walked in front and stopped where the path forked. He looked for a light somewhere or a sign which would indicate on which side the house lay. But there was nothing except darkness and silence, and through the silence a nightowl called like a frightened child, a little uncertainly, a little questioningly.

He chose the righthand pathway and behind him An said nothing, just followed as if confident that he knew where he was going. The path wandered back and forth among the trees, and after a while began to widen, and then suddenly it was a yard—or something which had once been a yard. No one had lived in the house for nearly a year—the khaki bush and cosmos and Bermuda grass had grown over the yard in uneven patches. A short distance from the front door he stopped and put the trunks down. An came and stood beside him and looked at the dark house and then at him. They said nothing, and he looked for the key in his pocket and walked up to the house, climbed the three steps and silenced a cricket with his footsteps.

The screen door was open, but when he entered, his face broke spider webs in the dark. He unlocked the door to the entrance hall and when he pushed the door open, he could smell the excrement of bats and the mustiness of a sultry place which had long been closed.

He brought the trunks on to the stoop and examined the rest of the house with a flashlight.

The previous resident—a bachelor, according to the official in Beira—had died of malaria while on vacation in Porto Amelia and they could find no one to take over his work. Everyone shrank from the loneliness, and they had to wait for someone like Delport, someone who was looking for loneliness, someone who would be fit for nothing but the bush.

The official in Beira assured them that the house was just as the previous resident had left it when he went on his vacation: fully furnished.

There was furniture. But the back door was broken open and some of the rooms were empty. The remaining furniture was broken, and everything was under a thick layer of dust. The floors were black with bat excrement and there were wasps' nests on the walls.

They moved from room to room, behind the searching beam of the flashlight which reconnoitered diligently, really, but which did turn away from scurrying cockroaches and fleeing
mice bashfully—a beam of light which became more reluctant to fall on the naked desolation.

They went out on the back verandah and An waited there; Delport had to go across the overgrown courtyard to the detached kitchen alone. This door was also broken open and he went in and smelled rancid cooking fat. A mouse sat on the stove, trembling with fright, its white nose and round eyes motionless in the light. And in the wash basin there was the small skeleton of a lizard.

Perhaps, he thought, he really should have listened to the drunk Rodrigue.

They did not sleep that night, and at daybreak he stood on the porch and rusted fish tins and weeds reminded him of another night, another daybreak.

That night in Ritter's bungalow when everything had started...

Delport's life had consisted of such nights. There was the night with An in Ritter's bungalow and the night in Balitó on the beach when he rolled the warm body over in the sand with Ritter standing by in the dark, watching, and the night with the strange woman when An would not stop bleeding, and every night after that until their first night beside the river in the delapidated house, and the night when he moved into the back room, and every lonely night after that.

And there was the night after Gonçalo's death.

On the surface everything was the same. The dark lay over the yard and brooded, over the sweet-smelling trees and the storeroom and the house. And there were tom-toms somewhere, and crickets, there were insects against the verandah screen, and outside in the shadows the child was building paths by feeling like a blind man, talking to himself and with imaginary friends, imaginary enemies. He waged war against wandering centipedes and invisible animals and strayed away and whistled for reedbuck among the bananas.

An slept under her mosquito net and spoke now and then.

The noises of the night were familiar, and its silences, and its instructions. But behind all this, the mask hung silently, motionless like a dead face, staring from empty eye sockets at the water tank and the pawpaws and the closed door of the meal storeroom.

The rain Delport had expected stayed away. He waited for it as a person would wait for someone who does not arrive, and later he was not precisely certain as to what he had waited for. Perhaps it was not for the rain—for something else, less visible, less definitive than rain.
There was no lightning either. Umlenzengamunye slept, or hid somewhere behind the mountains.

Delport lay in his room on the bed and thought of two things: that he was now afraid of the mask for which he would have paid his last escudo the previous day, and that he thought of the girl in a way he did not want to--the dark smelled of her and he was with her in the trailer of the faded Chevy and he was afraid of the dark.

Both thoughts were equally disconcerting, equally disillusioning. Something told him he was losing touch with reality, he was giving up. Nine years was, perhaps, too long.

He turned the radio on and the green light was there with the music from Portugal. He caused the light to fade and increase with different transmissions, with the monotonous code signal, with distant voices from Brazzaville, Johannesburg, Lusaka, Dar-es-Salaam, back to music from Portugal: a woman singing of love and the sea.

He stood on the porch of the bungalow in Tongaat. There was music in the living room and Ritter was laughing uproariously. He was drunk. They could see, he and An, how the six danced in the lounge--three couples, swaying shadows beyond the curtain's edge. And the light came through the opening: he could see An's eyes and knew it was time for him to go. They said nothing, did nothing, just stood together and looked, and he knew it was time to leave. An apparently thought so too. Ritter was, indeed, his best friend.

But just then, Ritter came out onto the porch. He seldom drank, but that night he was completely overboard. He clung tightly to the door and with his other hand at his side, he stood and looked at them; his face was red and wet with sweat and he swayed slowly to and fro.

"What are you doing?" he wanted to know.

Delport fetched his jacket from the back of a cane chair and put it on. "I'm tired," he said, "I'm going to bed."

"Rubbish!" Ritter said. "We're driving to Ballito and you're going too. First come and have one for the road."

All eight of them were in one car and Ritter drove. It was four in the morning. It was not far to Ballito, but the trip was a nightmare of screaming voices and tires which were tested to the utmost on every corner. They sat on each others laps and everyone smelled of cane spirits; everyone was tired and a little drunk; no one really wanted to go to Ballito, but Ritter was the host, and he gave the orders. He had had
to drive them into the car by force. He was irritated about that and accused everyone of not enjoying his party, and he wanted revenge.

Delport sat in the back of the car and, through the window, saw telephone poles and stop signs flash by. It was a gloomy hour of the night and he thought of An's mouth, and Ritter sitting and cursing, and thought: if you kill me tonight in an accident, I will never forgive you. But thought did not help at all; Ritter sang behind the wheel while the car weaved recklessly back and forth behind the yellow beams of the headlights.

They hurried through Ballitio and swung off the road to the beach, and the car spun about in the sand, coming to a halt under a dune.

Ritter went for a swim, but the others had no enthusiasm for swimming; one by one they disappeared into the dark towards the village to look for taxis. Just An remained sitting in the car.

Delport was afraid to stay with her and went and stood near the water and watched Ritter frolicking in the waves. His clothes lay in a bundle a little higher up on the sand.

Delport lay and listened to the song from Portugal, to the girl singing of love and the sea, and he remembered An, again, as she was that night as he stood on the beach and watched Ritter playing in the waves, his body like a seal in the dark water.

An lay and slept in the car and knew nothing of what followed. Only when Ritter loaded the body in the rumble seat did she awaken. Or was it earlier? Or later, when they were already on their way to Tongaat?

The radio played behind him. He entered the living room and heard the music in the distance. He stood near the mask and heard Rodrigue say: The servants believe a man has three souls; one in the genus, one in the heart, one in the head. The soul in the head is the spirit which leads one to good fortune—it leads one to everything sought.

He stood and looked at the mask without seeing it; it was dark. And he thought: it's your problem, Delport, you were confused by Rodrigue Pereira too long. Ritter is not your worst enemy; you carry your worst enemy in yourself: your second soul, for of the three he is the coward, the skeptic. You are too much like Rodrigue, too little like João.

And yet—it was João who had wanted to warn him. It was João who had sowed the doubt again.
He put his hands out in front of him and in the dark felt around on the wall for the mask. His right hand struck the strings of the sensa and a thin note carried through the room. He stood and listened to it, afraid that someone else would hear it before the sound had completely died away. Then he took the mask down and pushed it far under the nearest chair cushion.

Outside there was a stirring of the air. One could not feel it, but the leaves on the trees rustled just audibly. And the lightning did not rest: from behind a mound it showed itself briefly, once, and then sank back again.

He did not see the child before he was upon him. There was no moon and everything in the yard was in stages of darkness. The child lay in the shadow of the house, near the water tank. His game must have fatigued him, because he lay asleep on the soft Bermuda grass, on his stomach, the scraping board still in his hand, his arms under him, his head tilted, his one leg slightly drawn up as if he wished to stave something off from his tender body.

For a while he sat on his haunches beside the child and watched his sleeping face and wondered if the day had been long for him. Then he picked him up carefully to take him to the house, but the child woke up and would not be carried; he began to squirm and Delport set him down resignedly and stood and watched as he ran sleepily a few steps away and stopped in confusion.

"Come," Delport said, "you must go to bed."

But the child remained standing with his back to him and did not reply.

"Listen, now," Delport said and walked towards him, but the child moved away, farther into the dark. He was still not completely awake.

He walked behind the child and the child led him even deeper into the dark, even farther from the house, near the river, groggily and uncertainly on the narrow shoulder of the pathway. And near the reeds he suddenly vanished and Delport called after him but there was no reply. There was no sign of him; he was gone.

Lower down beside the stream something walked in the reeds, but it couldn't be he. Delport listened to the sound and decided it was a hippopotamus.

If An was still awake he would send her to fetch the child. He would always come if she called. She was the only person who could understand him, perhaps because he could never understand her.
Delport walked along the path back to the yard. And behind him, without his really noticing it, far, far behind him, behind a horizon visible only for an instant, the lightning shot out and disappeared. The lightning was careful that night; it stayed far away, it hid, it lay like an adder coiled around the earth, tail in mouth, satisfied and all-knowing.

And near the yard, somewhere, a reedbuck whistled.

He did not wish to enter through the verandah door again. The hinges were dry and he was afraid of waking An. She must have struggled to go to sleep and it was just possible she was still asleep; he did not wish to disturb her. He was on his way to the back, for the back door was quieter.

The radio still made a noise, drawing static and voices and snatches of music together out of the atmosphere into the small, weak loudspeaker.

He was passing the living room window when he saw the light inside. It was a pale patch on the wall, an oval patch of light which fell only on the wall, on the place where the mask no longer was. He stopped, saw how the oval patch moved gradually across the wall, as if looking for something—then he followed the light beam back to the top of the flashlight, and behind the glowing bulb it was dark; he could not see who held it.

He stood and waited, watching the light patch explore the wall, upwards to the buffalo head, and back, over the sensa, farther away, back again. The light jumped to the side wall, and looked over the other masks; and under the inquisitive light he recognized each one: the Bajaka mask from Kinshasha, the helmet and mask from Bobo Djulasso, the water spirit from Nigeria, the Baule queen, the death mask from Dahome, and on the table, the Makonde statuette which stumbled under its heavy load.

The light suddenly swung back to the rear wall to the sensa, where, earlier, the new mask had hung. And the light remained there, shaking a little, as if the hand holding the flashlight had begun to waver, begun to tire.

Then it was dark.

Delport crouched beside the wall, and remained so, crouching and listening. He could not hear anything. And it was a moment of loneliness as he turned and went to stand by the water tank. He waited for the front door to open—he would hear the hinges. He stood and waited for that and was no longer afraid. He just felt a little alone and remembered
the night at the beach when Ritter came out of the water. He was alone, because An was asleep again and the child was somewhere in the reeds by the river.

But no one opened the verandah door. It was dead quiet and everything was forsaken and he felt as if he were the only living thing in a forsaken night.

Had there been someone behind that light? he wondered. Is there someone on the verandah? And if there is, what is he doing? Is he standing listening; is he standing waiting?

Delport looked towards the river, afraid he would see the child coming. But he could not see anything.

Then he went to the back door, quietly, and stood under the pawpaw trees next to the kitchen, and listened again. He went in through the back porch to the door of the living room. The room was dark and very quiet and very musty, and he could hear the sensa playing again in his imagination.

He walked through the room, quietly, to the door which led out on to the porch. And something was burning above his right eye, a 'small pain, as when a person pricks his skin with a needle. And the pain became a hot patch, just above the eye, at the place where the small hole was in Gonçalo's head.

He expected to see someone move in the dark, a long shadow. The shadow would swing upright and he would see a blue flash, like lightning, leaping out of the darkness towards his head.

But nothing happened. There was no one. There was no movement. No sound. No light. All he could hear was his own breathing in the dark.

He waited.

And on the other side of him were the three succulents in their pots, on the shelf against the wall, small and shrunken in the dark.

His legs were a little weary and he smiled, not knowing why. He smiled and it made him feel better. It let him move forward softly to An's door. He could hear her sigh in the dark. He opened her door very quietly and went in, and he was suddenly very pleased to be near her. He could hear her breathing and she stirred a little and the sound was a comfort. He felt at once that all was well because she was near him, and sooner or later everything would be the same as it had been at the beginning; she would come to him one night and he would hold her close to him and talk to her, and perhaps she would
laugh or cry or perhaps do nothing but look for him between the sheets, and he would sail into her body like wildfire, elevating her to feelings of lightness, and she would fan his flames and not rest until all the uncertainty and longing had been quelled, and the unfamiliar had been left behind.

He heard her groan and he moved nearer, up to her bed, and he could see her hip as she lay in the darkness under the net, and her white back. He stood and looked at her through the black circle where the net was burned, and saw her snuggled against the pillows, a body struggling slowly with another imaginary body, sighing and resigned, shivering and alone, her hands tucked away between her thighs.

"An," he said and moved the net aside.

She tensed and lay quite still.

"An." his voice was almost apologetic.

She did not answer.

He looked at the table beside her bed and saw the flashlight lying there.

"What do you want?" she asked.

"Why aren't you asleep?"

"Leave me alone," she said.

"What are you doing, An?"

Her voice was hoarse. "I don't disturb you when you're asleep."

Mice ran on the roof, then were quiet, then ran again. He could hear one squeak near his head.

"I couldn't sleep either."

"That's not my fault," she said.

He sat on the bed, drew the mosquito net back and rested his hand on her warm hip. And when she did not turn he lay down next to her and felt her back wet with perspiration like his face. Somewhere the mice ran again.

"Can I stay here?" he asked and smelled the musty atmosphere.

In his room the radio crackled monotonously from dead transmitters.
"Go away," she said.

"No..." He did not want to obey. He wanted to explain. "An."

"Go away!" she said again. And a third time, more softly, "Go away!" in a voice suddenly breaking. Then he could feel from her back that she was crying.

He lay like that for a moment, her body near him and naked, and felt the bed move with her sobs—and he stood up and walked out on the verandah.

There the lightning was for an instant, unexpectedly conspicuous.

The day was near but not yet visible. He could see the footpath vaguely and the trees were large grey birds which slept, squatting under a grey sky. The stream was to the right of him and inaudible, but now and then he could see pools of water between the reeds and trees, like mirrors somewhere in the dark, which reflected hidden light. And there were crickets along the footpath which grew quiet when he approached, and began to call hesitantly again when he was a short distance past.

He was alone in the slumbering dawn, but he walked as time had taught him to walk: like someone who did not wish to attract attention—supple and yet hesitant, the shoulders a little stooped, the eyes, under the eyebrows, distrustfully searching for something in front in the footpath, the head cautiously turned perhaps a little to the left for a moment, perhaps to the right, the arms almost motionless at the sides. That was why the blacks called him Inkunzinyati.

He crossed the river even before the sun rose, and when the first rays of light broke through the trees, he was above Mália Domingo's camp. He sat down under a clump of trees on an abandoned ant hill, and kept watch on the footpath and the stream and the pale Chevy, and then, after a while, walked a little farther, between the acacia thorn trees, around the camp, so that he could look in under the tarpaulin shelter. There was no sign of anyone outside.

He waited, and saw the sun rise.

The night had passed and with it all the strange things he had brooded over. The morning was clear and he saw birds flying, wings shining in the early sun, and he heard a partridge trumpet somewhere in the damp grass on the other side of the stream.
He must have been daydreaming a while. Or not thinking. But his attention was not on the truck. He realized it when he noticed that the rear flap of the tent was open; the lacing was loose and the flap hung open. But there was no one in sight. He waited a while and then saw the smoke—it rose lazily into the air on the other side of the truck; so lazily that at first he thought it was his imagination. But after a while he was sure.

He stood up, went in among the trees and veered right, then in a wide turn walked until he was near the river, then went straight towards the smoke until he could see the camp again.

She stood beside the fire. She was wearing a nightgown and was barefooted. There was a kettle on the stove and she held a washbasin tightly in one hand. She was not aware of anything other than the kettle; she stood and looked at it with head bent down for at least five minutes, and then suddenly, without making sure the water was hot enough, picked the kettle up and carried it under the shelter.

He could still see her. She poured the water into the basin and washed her face, dried it, washed and dried her arms, pulled the nightgown from her shoulders so that it slid over her hips and fell to the ground around her feet. She lifted the garment with a foot, tossing it over the deck chair behind her, and with slow, comfortable motions washed the rest of her body.

Delport watched.

She was skinny, dark-skinned and small. Her hair was so short a person could easily have taken her for a boy. Only her hips and the small sculptured breasts which he could see occasionally betrayed her femininity. She was completely at ease and once he thought he heard her hum.

He remembered her as he saw her two days ago: tired and perspiring in her red dress; how she approached diagonally in front of him, her eyes hesitatively fixed on him as if she were uncertain whether she was doing the right thing—almost afraid, like one accustomed to being rebuffed. She was like a child at that moment. He could see the child in her eyes and wary shoulders. And still he was afraid of her.

He remembered her as she was on the boat, later—how, still timid, still fearful of his morbid detachment, she had, unprompted and innocent, tried to soothe him by talking, tried to laugh, even going so far as making a spontaneous gesture to provoke a comment, all to reassure herself.
He remembered her as she was the following day in the
camp, still sleepy and off guard, her debt paid with the
mask which she had given him, and she, therefore, justified
in showing her mistrust.

He stood and watched her drying off and humming, happy
with the day and in no hurry. And her nakedness made him
smile and feel guilty. But he continued to watch. And as
soon as she had wrapped the hand towel around her brown hips
and disappeared behind the truck, he turned and moved in
among the umbrella thorn trees.

The thought of An and her white hip displaced his friv-
olous thoughts. "Go away!" she said. "Go away!" And her
voice was bitter with humiliation and repugnance and the bed
cradled them while she sobbed. He saw again the patch of
light on the wall looking for the mask with the familiar face.

She had bought it from an Indian in Caipemba, she said.
And he knew which Indian. There was just one who sold wood
carvings in Caipemba—a thin, dark man with brooding, blind
eyes who laid out his wares under a bamboo shelter. The
blacks were afraid of him because they thought he was a sor-
cerer. He often stood and talked to himself and a stick of
incense was always burning on his counter. It was Rajput
who had carved the chess set.

Delport walked some distance beside the stream, right
up to the stretch of flattened grass where the truck had
passed. Already the grass was old and brittle, and where
it had been flattened under the wheels, it would never stand
up straight again. Somewhere, he knew, the trail would swing
to the right and over the stream, for the nearest road was
that of the Colonial Coffee Growers to the railway station
at Dembe.

He passed a number of places where the truck could eas-
ily have gone across; the stream was not sandy and the banks
were almost level with the river bed. After half an hour
he turned around and followed his tracks back to about five
hundred yards from the camp, where he swung left and walked
around the camp to the footpath by which he had come that
morning. The sun was high then, and it was hot, and there
were already clouds above the mountains in the south. He
could see the heat drifting above the trees and where he
could not look directly, the sun hung in the sky like a
huge wheel.

A little in front of him was the place where Gonçalo's
body had lain. He could see the patch of burned black grass.
An umber bird flew up from there screeching, and disappeared
over the thorn trees.
Delport stood in the footpath, then took his revolver out and fired a shot into the air. The sound of it vanished into the plains and there was dead silence for a time. The cicadas no longer screeched nor did the birds. Then he walked towards the camp.

He had not yet emerged from among the trees when he heard the truck's horn blowing--two, three times. He stopped. Waited. But it was quiet, and after a while the cicadas began hesitantly to screech again.

When he moved out from between the trees to the open veldt above the camp, he could see her standing a short distance from the truck. She looked into the trees, then stepped forward a couple of steps, suddenly caught sight of him and came to a dead stop.

"Bom dia," he said as he approached her. "Esta bom?"

She nodded.

And he could see it right away: she was disappointed; she expected someone else.

"Why did you blow the horn?" he asked.

"I thought it was my father and them. You fired."

"I am sorry," he said. "I just wanted to warn you."

She was still wearing the canvas shirt and skirt and was barefooted, and her hair was not yet combed.

"Just got up?" he asked.

"Just now."

It did not look as if she planned to invite him nearer—in fact, when he started to move nearer, she stood firm and looked down the footpath along which he had come.

"They aren't coming," she said.

"They'll come."

She looked at him and there was a strange, uneasy crease between her eyes which he had not seen before. "I don't know, any more," she said quite simply.

"They'll come," he repeated, flatly, unconcerned about her great doubt. A moment before, even, she was remote from him and inscrutable, and now it was otherwise—totally. He
supposed she regretted it, regretted the moment of weakness, but it was too late. They stood together and looked at the flickering light, and Delport could feel the perspiration tickle his eyebrows, and it was as if he heard her say again, "I don't know, any more." But the worry crease between her eyes was gone and she was now aware of him.

I saw you. That's what he wanted to say. Perhaps they won't come any more, but I've come and I've seen you as you were at your blue washbasin and I saw your brown body and last night you were in the wind around the house and I could smell your shoulders in the dark. He wanted to say it, but he could not, because he, himself, still could not believe it. There was no reason for him to believe it. He had given everything in exchange for An, and although An had not cooperated, it still had not changed matters. A person has just so much to give, then there is nothing left.

This woman had landed here by chance; therefore, to her he was just an accident. They were that to each other. That they were both waiting for someone who failed to turn up, was just chance and not important nor permanent enough to mean anything. But he had not sought anything permanent—he knew that, also. He was not in search of something meaningful. He wanted only to forget An's horror. As it was, he had had enough experiences to have reason for doubt.

His eyes searched for the basin under the shelter. It stood on the collapsible table. The nightgown was not on the chair where she had thrown it. The face cloth hung on a nail against the truck body and it was damp.

She asked him to sit down and began to clear the table, but her attention was elsewhere. She picked up a cup, then put it down; she picked up the washbasin and looked for a place to put it, then set it back on the table, and neatly stacked the paper packets of sugar and tea and flour and salt which lay among the cups and spoons and tin plates in a row at the back of the table. Then she picked up the washbasin again and balanced it on the running board of the truck. He kept watching her as she did all this, and he could see she was working with divided attention. Now and then, she looked outside, and a few times she stood there for a long while. Her movements were sluggish and uncertain and she was soon scarcely aware of him.

"Have you eaten yet, senhor?" she asked after a while.

He shook his head and then noticed that she was not looking at him and said, "No."

"I haven't, either." Then she sat down and looked towards the stream and forgot him again.
"My name is Max," he said.

She nodded. "I know." But she did not look at him, just remained staring thoughtfully in front of her.

"What do you do during the day to pass the time?" he asked later.

"Nothing," she said. "I wait."

"You must, surely, do something. Do you read?"

She shook her head, and then, after a time, said, "I walk. Sometimes." And then again; "There are many chameleons here, about the camp; I play with them. But I never can find a lizard; I like lizards." She suddenly resumed talking, but he could see it was just for the sake of talking. "Yesterday I found an umbrette nest up here in one of the acacias. It's wonderful how strongly they build their nests. It must take months of work."

"What else do you do?"

"I dance."

When he did not respond, she smiled and pointed to an upright thorn tree near the stream. "Do you see that sapling. It's my clock. Its shadow tells the exact time. Sometimes, if I'm bored, I dance all around it. Right-about, right-about, right-about."

He did not respond to that--just asked, after a time, "Have you everything you need? Do you have meat?"

"I've enough for two weeks," she said. "And if it runs out, I can go to Caipemba again for supplies."

"But you've no more meat?"

She shook her head.

"I'll see if I can shoot something. There are many impala around here."

"There's no need," she said.

"I'll go and see."

"How will a person know if something has happened to them?" she asked, and immediately he knew it was the question she had held back all that time.

"Something isn't going to happen to both at once. There will always be one left to come and tell about it."
"It's the first time they've hunted here. Perhaps they're lost."

He thought: that's very likely, and said, "I don't think so."

"Do you think a person could go and look for them?" And then, for the first time, she looked directly at him.

"Where?" he asked. "The world is wide."

"A person could try."

"We'll wait a few days more," he said. "I'll tell my rangers to keep their eyes open. I have a group who patrol."

"You're the game warden here?" she asked.

He nodded, and then smiled and added, "Fire is my real specialty. I cut fire breaks. I extinguish fires. I attend to poachers. I perform game counts. I do everything."

"That's certainly nice."

He nodded. "It is."

"You're a South African?"

"Yes."

"How long have you been here?"

"Nine years. Approximately."

"Does your wife like it?"

He looked up at her, straight in her eyes. There was nothing. "No," he said and looked at the nails on one of his hands: five eyes looking back. "She hates it."

"Why do you stay, then?"

"Because I like it." He looked at her until she turned her face away, and then asked, "Did you come by way of Dembe?"

"Yes."

"Where did you cross the stream?"

She hesitated a while and then shrugged her shoulders. "I don't know. Somewhere." She tried to swat a fly on her knee. "I was too tired to notice."
"Did the people of CCG allow you to pass through?"

"CCG?"

"The coffee plantation. Usually they stop anyone who tries to ride through their property."

"Nobody stopped us," she said and stood up. "I'm going to make coffee."

He helped her start the fire, fetched water from the stream, and put it on the fire. She washed two cups and unpacked some cookies. He stayed at the fire until the kettle boiled and then carried it to the shelter.

Under the truck, against a rear wheel, two rolls of blankets lay. He could not remember having seen them there the previous day. The short grass under the truck was laid flat and he deduced that the two men had slept there before going into the bush. In the one roll was a red and a brown blanket and in the other a green and a blue.

Would they have taken other blankets? he wondered.

Without looking at her he asked, "The shot just now--could you hear it clearly?"

She looked at him questioningly and then nodded.

The coffee was too hot and he put it down on the ground in front of him. "I stood about thirty yards beyond the place where Gonçalo was shot."

"Why don't you hand me over to the police?" she asked after a time.

Delport smiled. "You'd no reason to shoot him," he said. "I don't suspect you." He picked up his coffee again. "It just seems strange to me that you heard nothing."

"It was raining."

With the rain on the tarpaulin roof, and with the rumbling weather--perhaps she was right. She could have thought it was the storm that made a bang. He was honest when he said he did not suspect her--but somewhere in him there was a slender hope that she really knew more than she would admit and that she was afraid to talk about it. But he did not know how to say it to her--he would have to offer reasons why he thought she was afraid to talk, and he could not think of any reasons which would not cast a suspicious light on her father. If he had to say what he thought, he would have to imply that she wanted to protect her father.
She moved a little, and when he looked up her eyes were fixed on him. "How does a person get so?" she asked.

"How?"

"I knew it the first time I saw you, even. In Caipemba. And on the boat. And yesterday when you were here. And again now. You're suspicious of everyone you see. You trust no one."

"You think so?" he asked without taking his eyes from her.

"Sometimes I think you're afraid. Of me, too."

Again there was a fly on her face, as on the first afternoon he had seen her. The fly moved around her face and sat on her forehead and flew up and lighted again. She did nothing to disturb the fly, she just continued looking at Delport as if she wanted to force him to react. The fly walked over her temple, across her cheek and only when it came over her mouth did she lift her hand to chase it away.

"Is that why you stay here against your wife's will? Because you are afraid of people?"

"Perhaps I am," he said. "Sometimes. But not of you."

"Are you sure?"

"I have no reason, have I?"

"Do you have reason to be afraid of anyone else--to be suspicious of other people?"

"People are deceptive," he said. "You ought to know that from experience. Even your best friend may stab you in the back. Even your own child."

"Haven't you ever stabbed anyone in the back?"

"No," he said.

"Are you sure? Quite sure?"

He continued to look at her. He did not like the way she asked the question and wanted to find a reason for the quizzical expression on her face. But he could not find one.

"I can't remember," he said, and immediately felt unhappy about the lie.

"Why do you make an exception of me?" she asked. "If anyone can stab you in the back--even your own child--why not me?"
He did not answer her.

A starling came and sat on the hood of the Chevy and its violet body shone like metal in the sun. The bird hopped forwards onto the mudguard of the truck and its feet slipped on the smooth metal, and this set it to fluttering and it flew off. Delport sat looking at the faded mudguard, at his shadow on the ground beside him, and sought a way to start the conversation again, to follow a new tack, away from himself. But he could not think of anything. The things she wanted to know about him were things about which even he, himself, had never thought. How does a person become like this? she wanted to know. Haven't you ever stabbed anyone in the back? And: if anyone can stab you in the back—why make an exception of me?

The questions were well chosen. Almost too well. She asked them without emphasis, almost with divided attention—but there was a connection between the questions which implied hidden knowledge. For all three questions had the same answer.

Was it simply coincidence?

He looked at her again and found that she was watching him, and even when he noticed it, she continued looking.

It was she who spoke first. "I wish I could know what you are thinking," she said.

"I was thinking," he said, "I was thinking that I wish I could know what you are thinking. What you know. What you want to find out."

She smiled. "That's exactly what I want to know. What you know. What you want to find out."

"Then there really is something I could want to know? Could want to find out?"

"Not about Gonçalo," she said.

"Something else, then?"

She leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes. Her hand moved to her face—an uncertain gesture—and fell back to her lap, and he suddenly noticed that she was trembling. Her hand trembled, and her lips.

"Is something the matter?" he asked after a moment, uncertain, for whatever had suddenly upset her, it was something for which he could not have been responsible, and yet he felt guilty.

"You mustn't come again," she said.
For a long while he sat and looked at her, a little stupidly—then put his cup down and stood up and went and stood near her. "Why not?" he asked. She opened her eyes and saw him standing near her and, closing her eyes again, shook her head. He sank to his knees and took hold of her shoulders and shook her gently, because he, too, was suddenly, inexplicably, frightened. "Why not?" he asked. "Why not?"

She opened her eyes and looked at him. Her face was near his and he could smell the woman in her as he had smelled it in her handkerchief.

"I don't want trouble," she said.

"What do you mean, trouble?"

He could see every detail of her face. It was as if he were looking through a telescope at something which he had always had to observe from afar, and he was surprised at every small detail. There were small freckles under her eyes and brown flecks in her dark eyes and fine hairs under the red form of her lower lip.

"You must go," she said and the corners of her mouth curled like those of a child about to cry. But she was no child. She was a woman and the second who did not want him near her. But her eyes were different from An's—her eyes were those of a trapped animal. Her eyes were the zebra's of the day before, dark and confused and frightened. And it was as if he suddenly awoke on his knees before her and, for the first time, knew without a doubt that it was more than the smell of a handkerchief, more than a cherished thought.

That afternoon when he finally found the herd of impala and took aim with dead rest at a fat ewe at the head of the herd, he still did not fully understand it. Over the trembling sights he wondered how a person could explain something such as this. Something inside him warned him that morning that he did not suit her—and he was still not completely certain of the contrary. The feeling was still there, after all, that she looked down on him and just used him. That last moment as he kneeled and looked at her, he suspected it, and yet could not control himself. She was afraid of him and he did not know that anyone could be afraid of him. And when he realized it, in spite of her aloofness, he did the last inevitable thing left to him. He pulled her, chair and all, to the ground, and she fell on top of him, her face against his throat, her half cup of coffee along with her. He waited for the moment when she would begin to offer resistance, for he knew she would, and at the same time he also
knew if she did, it would be for the sake of appearance, because she was only aloof and afraid of him since she was so young and had, perhaps, never been kissed. He waited for the moment when she would struggle. Her hair was in his face and his mouth sought her face, and he knew that it was time to assert himself when he felt the pain of her nails greedily cutting into his back, and they rolled over into the flattened grass under the Chevy.
There's a time in the late summer when the bush looks new. It's the time just before summer becomes autumn. A color hovers in every leaf, in every stalk of grass, later to become yellow, but it hasn't yet; it's a ripe color which draws you on into the bush; it's a color that implies lushness and growth where no more growth is possible. There's something young and defiant in an overripe fruit—and in a woman just before she really ages. This is the bush just before autumn arrives.

Delport noted the weather that afternoon when he returned to the camp with the impala ewe over his shoulder. Blood dripped from the animal's nose as he walked, and the drops fell on his trouser legs and on the grass. And the red flecks against the grass emphasized the color of the grass to him.

It was the time for rain.

It was the same time of the year that An came to him. After the trial he avoided her because he was not sure how she felt about the outcome of everything. The three of them were friends and although he maintained that which he held to be the truth, somewhere in him there was still the gnawing reproach that he had let someone down. Ritter or An or both. And nothing could reassure him that he had no need to bear the blame.

That afternoon he sat in the bungalow and played solitaire with the rain persisting, stormy against the panes and over the mounds of sugar cane. It was Wednesday afternoon, his free afternoon, and usually they played tennis on Wednesday afternoons. It was not only the rain that kept him in the bungalow this afternoon. After all that had happened, he was distant with people; he avoided others' eyes—even those of his best friends, because he could not help seeing the questions in everyone's eyes. There was, as always, the saying: where there's smoke... Therefore, the sugar plantation's clubhouse and tennis courts became unappealing to him.

An did not ring. Delport heard someone running outside and when he looked up to the door, through the screen he saw her approaching. She opened the door and, breathless, stopped dead on the threshold.

He hung up her raincoat behind the door and gave her his towel to dry her head and then his comb to comb her hair. He
gave her a stiff shot of brandy and, as she drank it, they talked above the rain.

Then she said, "Max, I need someone to help me."

"What with?" he asked.

And she said, "I don't quite know. Everything's so confused." She looked at him as if she wanted him to catch what she could not say. And when she realized he would not be able to catch it, she stood up and went and stood at the window and, like her, he looked at how the rain hung grey and oblique and motionless over the sugar. "Ritter and I were to get married," she said after a while, and the rain fell so hard that he had to strain his ears to hear what she said. Or perhaps it was just that she spoke very softly. She turned to him with arms folded, her hair all mussed up and still damp.

He looked away and picked up the cards, shuffled them, and said, "I know. I'm sorry."

"That's not what I'm talking about," she said.

"I hoped you wouldn't blame me for that. It was either Ritter or me and I felt---" Words like that sounded hopeless.

"I don't blame you, Max," she said.

"You must say what you think. It's your right. No matter what I may feel or even hope. The fact remains: you wanted to marry."

"It's just that I expect his child," she said.

The rain sang in the gutter and the wind blew outside; it plucked at the screen door and tore at the frangipanis on the bungalow's outer wall. And then for the first time the truth of it all sank in. Before, it was the night at Ballito, and all that happened afterwards was little more than a nightmare. The news of the child shook him to wakefulness and made him realize, finally made him aware, that it was not a dream.

"Does he know?" he asked.

She nodded.

"That will make everything even more difficult for him," he said after a while.

She turned again to look out at the rain. "That's why we wished to marry," she said. "We had no choice."
He put the cards down. "Ritter wanted to marry," he observed, half to himself. "He would have wanted to, even if this hadn't happened."

"Yes, he wanted to." She nodded. "And because he wanted to, we certainly would have--at some time or other. You know him."

"And you?"

"I don't know. Perhaps I wanted to. Perhaps I was afraid. I've never known. But then it happened..."

He could not make out if "it" referred to her pregnancy or to the night at Ballito. And he did not want to ask. Or perhaps it was just that he did not get the chance to ask. For, suddenly, she said, "You must help me, Max!"

That was where it had all begun. At that moment.

Often, after that, he wondered what exactly had been the first, the very first, provocation for all that had followed. Sometimes he thought it was that night at Ballito. But he wanted to trace it back even further. It was the day on which Ritter introduced An to him, for before the night at Ballito there was already provocation for what was to follow.

It could have begun the day he had met Ritter. If he had never met him...

But he would not have met him had he not gone to Tongaat to look for work. And even that had a cause. If he had not been suspended from the university, Tongaat would not have seen him.

One of Delport's earliest memories was that of a sunrise over a sugar plantation. He could not have been more than three years old. They were on vacation on a sugar farm in Natal. They stayed with people who had met his father at the deathbed of a mutual friend years before. The memory of that sunrise over the blue sugar plantations remained with him throughout his youth. He treasured the memory; it became synonymous with carefree, uninhibited youth and freedom to him and he often promised himself that he would certainly go back there.

That afternoon when, suitcase in hand, he went to say goodbye to his hostel companions, a pamphlet on farming in Natal lay in the room of one of them. Right on top of it was a color photo of the sun setting over the sugar fields of Tongaat. And when someone in the room asked what his plans were, he picked the pamphlet up and asked if he could have it. That night he bought a train ticket to Natal, and arrived in Tongaat two days later.
Often when he wanted to determine where it had all begun, he thought: on a day sometime before his birth when someone he had never known had made preparations to die. But even that distant beginning was not without cause. He did not ever want to think about that, but somewhere in him he knew: there was no beginning, just effects. There was never an option, there were just effects. He was never cause, he was, of every occurrence, just the effect. And, in part, it was a comforting thought, for it relieved him of all blame. But it was also a hopeless thought, because it made him captive of that which he did not want to be, the passive sacrifice to forces which he had never known and would never know.

He wondered, that afternoon on the way back to the camp, if everything that happened could be predestined. How could a person sometimes know something in advance if it were not predestined?

Perhaps Rodrigue would know something about that.

That last afternoon before they left Beira on the riverboat—they were like children that afternoon: he could still remember how they had tried to catch a butterfly on the quay—that afternoon they had come upon the red tin shack behind the docks and a wrinkled woman without teeth had, first in Portuguese and then in halting English, invited them inside. There were two chairs and a small table, and cardboard boxes lining the walls. She took An's hand, studied it for a long time, then released it without saying anything. She took Delport's hand, studied it and said eventually, "You have strong hands, senhor. I like your hands. I like your fingers. Look at the nails. But your hands are strangers to each other. The sun shines from your right hand and the moon from your left hand. You must be careful. You must remember: they're hands of the same body."

He asked, "Do you know in advance what will happen to people? Is it written in their hands?"

And she nodded.

"Will good or bad things happen to me?" he asked in a moment of recklessness.

And she laughed and said, "What is good, senhor, and what is bad? It's the same thing."

Delport came to the camp at a quarter to three and Malìa did not greet him. She also did not offer any comment on the impala, but came and stood next to him where he skinned the animal in the cool of the nkuhla. She watched how he cut the skin along the breast and stomach then stripped it from the ribs with his hands until the carcass was a blood-red
thing with fine veins and fatty membranes. He worked without speaking, cutting open the abdomen and removing the warm innards, and thought all the time of a few hours before in the trailer of the pale Chevy with her body so whole and inviolate, the blood, near and invisible and painless, present under the soft skin. Malia shuddered when he removed the tepid inards with his hand and they squirted bloodily over his knees, and he saw her turn around and walk back under the shelter.

He cut the meat into pieces, salted it, and packed it into the damp charcoal cooling chest under the truck. Then, for the first time since he had left her dozing in the dark trailer to go and hunt, there was nothing with which to occupy himself. She sat near him in the deck chair where everything had begun that morning, and she looked at him as preoccupied as a person observing an ant walking across his hand. Her hair was combed and her face, for the first time that day, made-up. She wore the same clothes as she had in the morning. And she was again a child, as chaste and detached as in the morning.

And, on the way back, alone on the footpath, gun over his shoulder, on his way to the void and quiet of his yard, enveloped in his base recollections, he remembered her so. He remembered her eyes which still barely knew him, and her relief when he said goodbye.

Something grew inside him, the nearer he came to the house. The feeling of freedom was gone, and with every step he had more doubts about everything, except the one thing growing inside him. Disbelief.

He knew where he would find her. The door of her room was open, but when he knocked there was no reply. With his hands cupped around his eyes he peered through the moldy green screen and did not see her. The bed was there and the mosquito net hung like a tent over the crumpled sheets. But the tent was empty. The tent hung askew from the thin cord from the roof and looked at Delport with its black eye.

He stood a little way back and then saw the hole which was torn inwards in the screen. The points of the screen wire right around the edge of the little hole were neatly bent inwards. He retreated another pace and then another. He wanted to see the little black hole in the net directly in line with the small hole in the screen. But suddenly, the little hole in the net was not there any more. One could only see both little holes at a certain time of the day, since, for the rest of the day, the light fell wrongly into the room and one's face had to be flat against the
screen before the interior could be seen. The sun had to be below the edge of the roof of the verandah, but yet above the horizon: about five o'clock in the afternoon. If one stood on the verandah then, one could look through the little hole in the screen and see the small hole in the net, and if the net was hanging in the right way, one could see the pillow—or a portion of it.

It was too early yet. It would happen within a half hour. At exactly five o'clock. Then the sun would set and the twilight would enclose the house and the child outside in front of the open door of the storeroom and every tree and bush in the silent yard.

He heard her footstep in the house and saw her, a moment later, standing in the living room doorway with an earthenware mug of water in her hand. She started when she saw him and stopped still. A loose strand of hair hung over her face and she brushed it away and stood and looked at him, her face pale and still creased from sleep—but already the face of a martyr again.

For him it was as if he saw her again for the first time after many years. He remembered her, yes. He recognized her as the An he had known; the shape of the face was still the same. But she was much older and she looked much taller, perhaps because she was so much thinner than the times in Tongaat. Again she wore just a petticoat and her two breasts scarcely made use of the space provided for them in the cut of the petticoat. He could no longer remember how they looked, but he told himself they were tired and morbid and worn out like the rest of her body.

That afternoon he said nothing about her being improperly dressed, for he remembered the red nipples of Mália's firm breasts and the mouth which so persistently had sought his mouth.

He saw her bending over the washbasin, and An hesitating in the doorway. She stood and washed her light brown body in the morning sun, and the strand of hair slipped across An's forehead again. Quietly and ecstatically she sniffed in the stifling darkness and her face was wet and salty and her lips were everywhere that his mouth sought her body, and An swept the string of hair from her face a second time.

"Did you sleep?" he asked.

She nodded.

"Pain?"

"The heat," she said. "It makes it worse."
He stepped nearer to her. He wanted to pass her to go to his bedroom. He did not want to see her any more and the abhorrence in him was strange, for it was an abhorrence in which he was included. He moved until he was in front of her, but she did not stir from the doorway to get out of his way.

"I want to get past," he said.

She hesitated a moment longer and then moved out of the doorway allowing him to pass. But she did not go to the three succulents where she originally intended. She turned to him and immediately he suspected that something was wrong. He stopped and, without looking at her, said, "You must leave here."

"To go where?"
"Just for a while."
"To go where?"
"Wherever you like."
"I never want to leave here."
"And you also don't want to stay."

She did not answer, just stood and looked at him, the mug of water still in her hand. He could not understand it--there was nothing of her usual somnambulistic lack of interest; all her attention was focussed on him; she was totally aware of him.

He looked away from her, into the living room--and saw the mask lying on the floor in front of the chair where he had hidden it. And then, suddenly, he knew.

"Water your succulents." he said a moment later. But she did not react. And when he looked at her, he knew he had not been mistaken about the mask that first day on the boat. She recognized him also.

He remembered the green fleck on the pane and, for a second, tried to convince himself that it was not there, but when he looked, he saw the curved outline of the watertank behind the fleck.

"What's that doing there?" he asked.
"What?"
"The mask."
"I looked at it."

"Why?" he asked. "You never looked at the others."

"Where did you get it?"

"Bought it." He looked at her. "I bought it."

Then, after just enough silence, she asked, "Why?" And with that she finally betrayed herself. Was it not just like Ritter; was it not an absurd question to ask. He had often, indeed, come home with new masks. That she had found it necessary to question him about this particular mask, removed his last doubt. But this forced him to offer the opposite of the truth.

"I liked it," he said.

"Why, then, did you take it down again?"

"I wanted to look at it."

"You hid it away."

He knew: they hid away from each other, they each talked from behind their mask of innocence. But they talked of the same anguish, the same problem.

"I put it away," he said. "And you looked for it. Until you found it." She looked at him without replying. And he could see how the glaze again moved across her eyes; how she turned and began watering the three flower pots. He wanted to say: I saw you searching with the flashlight last night. And I heard how you dropped the mask as you heard me come in just now. But he was afraid to say it. He would rather remain quiet and hide away behind his silence and observe her like that while she, for her part, remained unsuspecting.

But, suddenly, as he was watching her, she said, "You didn't buy it--someone made it for you."

He did not understand what she meant.

"Deny it," she said. "You had it made."

"Why do you say that?"

Her back was still towards him when she said, "It's your face."

"My face?"

He looked away at the mask, then at her back, and again at the mask.
"Did you think I wouldn't spot it?"

"It's not my face," he said.

"It's your mouth. It's your eyebrows. It's your forehead. Everything."

That's strange, he thought. She wanted to play the fool with him, or to test him, for the mask and Ritter's face were as alike as two peas—especially the mouth, especially the eyebrows, the high forehead.

He wanted to pick up the mask and hang it on the wall where it had been before and go to his bedroom, but again she spoke unexpectedly. "Do you want me to go away?" she asked.

He stood and looked at her back, weighing the question, and, almost contentedly, wondered: was it not good luck that it should have happened yesterday? She had probably not intended it to be his good luck; she had probably not even realized it would be his good luck—he had even suggested that she should leave, even though it would be just temporarily. Before this, when they could still talk, they had often examined and weighed the possibility of her going away for a while, for the sake of her health, for several valid reasons. But then there were excuses, endless strings of them. Excuses which both contributed. Some were valid, but, as if those valid were not sufficient, they also fabricated others. The actual reason—Ritter—neither one mentioned.

But when the bats began to return, and the brooding mold, and the silence, the nocturnal conversations became less frequent, or meaningful. Until, eventually, there were no more of those conversations. She would remain, to confirm her absence.

"I don't know anyone there, any more," she said.

Is there anywhere where she still knows someone? he wondered. Which "there" was in her thoughts? She referred to "there" as if she had forgotten the existence of all other places except the one unidentified place where she was.

"You can go if you wish," he said.

He looked at the furniture in front of him, the two easy chairs, the table, the straight-backed chair, the Makonde statuette with the hunch back and the sensa, and wondered: why does she ask that—why is she suddenly talking about that again? Did something happen? Does she know something? Had someone been here? Had someone, perhaps yesterday, today, just now, sat in one of these chairs and talked to her?
Then he picked up the mask and hung it on the wall where it had been, but without looking at the face. He opened a bottle of whiskey and poured himself a shot, went out on the back porch to his room, and saw a thousand things which had not been there before—the khaki bush against the outside wall, the broken panes in the kitchen window, the torn screen of the porch. In his room was a familiar smell which he immediately disliked. Was it bat excrement?

Delport lay on the bed and felt the sweat run off his face. He shuddered slightly and he could feel the blood pulsing in his temples. He remembered the warm innards of the impala and Malia's body. Somewhere in his head he heard An say she was lonely. "Don't you realize it, Max?" she said. "Don't you understand it?"

Ritter stood in the doorway of his bungalow, one hand in his bush jacket pocket, and he said something.

He ran out into the rain with the sound of splintering glass in his ears and the rain warm on his face and he could not decide where he was. He went on thinking: that will go on eternally; this is but the beginning; that will go on and on until Ritter comes close enough to shoot. He knew Ritter; he knew him better than anyone else did; better than An did. He knew Ritter would not relent.

Ritter hated easily. He enjoyed hating. And everyone knew it and everyone feared him—even those who had no reason to. He was always cordial. He was polite. He did everything with a smile. He always smiled. That night at Ballito, too. But everyone knew that a fire burned behind that smile.

They played darts at the club that night. Shanghai. He was a newcomer there. It was the first time he had been to the club. He was good at darts and he showed it again that night. He beat everyone, and they said, oh well, our champion isn't here tonight—wait till he comes. And at ten o'clock he arrived and everyone gathered round him like mongrels, licking him and wagging their tails and begging him to come and show the newcomer how. He was a tall man, lean and upright, with a square face and heavy eyebrows; he took no notice of anyone and drank his beer. Then, later, he stood up and came over and they introduced him as Ritter.

"I hear you're good," the tall man said and took the darts out of Delport's hand and threw all three into the bull's eye and turned around and said, "Three-nil."

Everyone stopped talking and went and stood behind him. Delport knew what was happening. He could see them creep to the tall fellow, and something warned him that he should
hold him closer than just a friend. They applauded when Ritter threw a good dart and were silent when Delport followed suit.

But Delport threw a Shanghai on a five. He was one ahead.

"We'll put a beer on the second game," Ritter said.

Delport nodded. "But we'll drink only when we're finished playing," he said. "I get tight fast."

He won the second game too.

"Two beers on the third game," Ritter said, and took the darts and threw a single and two triples in his first turn.

Ritter won that game.

They were neck and neck after that, but Ritter stayed just one behind all the time. Later there were eighteen beers on the game. Then, eventually, they were even.

"Last game," Ritter said. "Forget the beers. We'll put up fifty rand."

"I don't have fifty rand."


"I'll put up a hundred rand," Ritter said and took the darts. "A hundred against your fifty."

Delport heard himself breathing it was so quiet. Everyone stood and looked at him. Only Ritter didn't. He went his own way calmly. But Delport knew there was more than just money on the game; he could see it in everyone's eyes except Ritter's. After the first round Ritter was two ahead. After the second they were even. After the third Ritter was three behind. After the fourth Ritter was seven behind. Delport could feel the eyes. But it did not worry him. After the fifth he was twelve ahead. After the sixth he led by eighteen points. Ritter's first two darts in the seventh were in the bull's eye, his third one in the triple; Ritter suddenly led by seventeen. But Delport had still his last turn to come.

Then, for the first time, he saw Ritter's eyes. Ritter smiled but his eyes were expressionless. Delport's first dart was in the nineteen. He looked at Ritter and Ritter still
stood motionless, indeed, and watched him, still smiling, indeed, his eyes still expressionless, indeed. Delport's second was again in the nineteen. He would need a triple-seven to win. He threw and the dart lodged on the edge of the triple-seven.

No one stirred.

"Is it in, Delport?" Ritter asked.

"I don't know."

"Go and look."

He walked to the board and looked. It was a triple-seven. The dart was a good millimeter or so inside the black area. He turned and everyone's eyes were on him. Ritter's too.

"Is it in?" Ritter asked. "Did you win?"

He did not have fifty rand to his name. He would have to borrow it. But the dart was in the triple. Ritter had bet a hundred rand.

"Is it in, Delport?" Ritter asked again. "Tell us."

"No," Delport said.

"You owe me fifty rand."

Ritter bought him three beers and they sat together without even talking. After that they were friends. He gained respect for the tall man with the square face and the mouth which sometimes drooped. He learned to like him. He learned to worship him. And for ten months long, he paid him five rand per month. Afterwards, he often thought about that night again—and wondered: what made me say no when I knew I had the dart in? Was it really cowardice? Was it really so simple? Because afterwards more than once, he saw how braver men than he would crumble before the strange man's calm resolution.

And at the end of that year when the sugar mills closed after the season, Ritter, one evening at the club, said, "Do you people remember that first big Shanghai game between Delport and me?" And everyone laughed and nodded. And he said, "He's paid off his fifty rand. On Friday night we'll have a party at my place. I've decided it's all our money—I've simply been saving it for a few drinks."

They were all at Ritter's party that Friday night. And the last toast that night before they went to Ballito, they drank to him and Ritter tried drunkenly to sing, "He's a jolly good fellow."
Ritter had introduced An to him shortly after he had arrived at Tongaat; An was twenty-three years old and shy and sometimes a little absent-minded, but she could laugh, and when she did laugh he knew he liked her. Sometimes, when Ritter processed sugar at night, they read a book together, for his bungalow was near the cafeteria. Ritter was aware of it and did not mind. He was sure of An, and there was talk several times that they would marry.

Among the people of the sugar plantation, superficial property counted far more than intrinsic things. Tennis counted, and how well one could dance, how many acres of sugar one's team of workers could cut in a week, and how many pieces of women's underclothing one could collect in one's bungalow. Integrity was of no consequence; a man had to be able to drink a shot. A sense of justice was a sign of weakness. Ritter could drink and he was a champion tennis player, he was a works' foreman because he knew how to drive people. The girls thought him wonderful. And with all these things, he had common sense—if this was what it was; it could also have been instinct. He did not know who was the president of America or how one filled out one's income tax form, but he knew how to use the intelligence of others. And he was a philosopher. He could talk of life and death in a way that led one to suppose that he lay awake nights thinking about them.

Delport felt he was Ritter's intellectual superior and so he sometimes risked challenging Ritter in other fields, fields which bore no relation to intellect. And because Delport dared risk it, he was the only person Ritter wished to befriend. And because he was Ritter's only friend, he also had the respect of all the others—even though he could not drink, even though his tennis was poor, even though he seldom took girls out.

But precisely these things made him acceptable to An also, and because he was acceptable to An, and later even more than acceptable, she chose him as her companion that summer when Ritter was sentenced.

That afternoon while it was raining outside, while he sat and played solitaire, that Wednesday afternoon, she came and told him everything. And because the rain did not stop, she stayed till late. They talked and played bridge until it was too dark to see the cards. The cafeteria dinner bell rang, later, but she made no preparation to leave, and he was pleased without wanting to acknowledge it. They sat close together in the dark and listened to the rain. She said nothing more, and later, when he wanted to light a lamp, she asked him not to, and he guessed why not. She had cried and she did not want him to see it. He was pleased with her request, because tears made him feel helpless, and like her tears, his self-consciousness could be hidden in the dark.

He spoke again only much later.
He got up from the bed and looked for his lamp in the dark, then for his matches. But before he could strike a match, he became aware of An in the doorway.

It was she who said, "I want to try and forget him. Completely. I want to marry and try and forget that I ever knew him."

She was over her tears.

He pushed the matches back in his pocket. "How long have you been here?" he asked. She had the dead woman's dress on and did not reply.

"Did you ever love him?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"How long have you known this?" He sat down on the bed. "How long?"

"For some time," she said. Her voice was weary and the words were scarcely audible. Somewhere between them a mosquito whined softly. He listened carefully after that, afraid she would speak again. He was afraid she would say something which would make him doubt again, something which would wake him up. He was tired and he wanted to sleep. He wanted a moment, just a brief moment, in which to forget her.

He said to her, that night: "Why don't you come away with me, An? I've decided to leave."

Or had he not said it? It was she who spoke of leaving first.

"Do you really want me to leave?" she asked, and it was the same voice again, the same weariness.

He heard the mosquito but tried to concentrate on what she said.

"There's enough trouble already," he said.

"How will leaving help?"

"As long as we're here we will not be able to forget him."

"Wherever I go I will take him with me. Something of him remains within me."

"A person can surely begin from scratch."

"There is nowhere," she said, "to go from here."
"The world is wide."

She shook her head. "Very small," she said. "It is small. It is very small." It looked as if she were going to cry again.

"We are young," he said.

"What do I do with the child when he comes?"

The child. Was there really a child? The mosquito whined around his head, all around his head, and he wondered about the child. What would they do with the child when he came?

"Max!" It was the first time in a long while that she called him by name. "I'm talking to you."

He stood up and went to the window and looked outside. He wondered what would become of the child and he closed his eyes and looked at the dark.

"I know," he said.

They stood five yards from each other, he with his back to her. He could feel himself sweating, he could feel it bursting out of his skin, and, in the heat, the mosquito whined.

"I'm talking and you're not listening."

"You imagine you're talking."

"It's not my fault."

The child slipped by the window, stooping, whispering. He went on until he was under the thorny hedge and stopped, stood upright suddenly, giggling.

"I don't want to leave," she said.

"You have already left."

"I'm lonely here."

"Last night when I--" He did not want to talk about that.

"You've waited too long."

He fancied he smelled rain. But there was no lightning, no wind, just the dark and the child at the thorny hedge.

"I wanted to ask you..." she said.
"Did I wait?"

"I've forgotten, really."

He could hear the river more clearly than usual. The drums too. Perhaps there was rain somewhere.

"I could have forgotten," she said.

"You have never forgotten."

"I wanted to."

That he wanted to believe. But he was not sure that they were talking about the same thing. All he knew was that she was talking with him again, and that was almost enough to make him believe.

"I could have," she said.

"So you say."

"If we could go away together..."

"Where to?"

Very small, he heard her saying. It is small. It is very small.

"Away."

"Away is a place."

Her words became even less distinct. Perhaps she was crying. He was pleased. She said, "We can take him with us."

He nodded.

"Away."

There was a small human frame at the washbasin.

"Where is he?"

"Somewhere nearby."

"I don't know if I will be able to."

Mália Domingo was alone somewhere in the night. She was somewhere in the dark and humid night. Perhaps she was asleep. In the trailer of the pale Chevy. Perhaps the smell of the rain was the smell of her body.
"I want to ask you why you brought me here," she said.

There were, indeed, some drops. He could hear them falling outside, now and then.

"Have you forgotten?"

"Perhaps I remember incorrectly." She did cry.

When he looked around she was no longer there.

The rain fell quickly. There was no wind, no lightning, but the night was suddenly grey outside with the rain, the night swirled in it. It wanted it all to fall at once.

He saw the child standing under the thorny hedge, against the thick part. He held on to the hedge with one hand and looked in the direction of the meal storeroom.

Delport saw the pale Chevy standing in the rain. She slept, small and naked, her face near the exposed, dark armpit of her outstretched left arm. He sat down on the bed and wondered if she had remembered to take the two rolls of blankets from under the engine. Then he lay back, his head against the cracking whitewash on the wall. He could not hear the mosquito any more, and the screen door near him closed quietly.
It rained just before daybreak. And when it stopped, there was still a time of water draining from the corroded gutters, of dripping from the trees onto the roof and from the edge of the roof into small puddles around the house. But when it stopped, the last hour of darkness was dead quiet.

Delport stood on the front verandah and looked through the screen at how the trees freed themselves from the darkness and drifted in the dismal shafts of light. Invisible birds called miserably through the wet silence and there was mist under the farthest mango trees where the river supposedly was. The leaves of the pawpaw tree were clean and almost translucent, and there were big drops of light on the half-ripe fruit. The birds began to answer each other and a last bat fell peep-peeping out of the sky and disappeared under the eaves. Then the sun came up red, and the first cicada discovered the daylight.

Delport went out to the yard and found his bicycle against the kitchen wall. The saddle was wet and there were raindrops on the spokes and bell. He took the bicycle and pushed it past the house and as he was passing he saw An as she stood at her bedroom window. She had on nothing but her petticoat and she turned away when she saw him. He pushed the wet bicycle towards the path, but before he came to the banana trees, he stopped. From somewhere out of the river mist he heard the hoarse honk of the Mahala, and a second honk, and a third. He looked down the footpath to where the first smoke oozed from the damp straw huts, but there was no one visible outside. Then he leaned the bicycle against the nearest tree trunk and made his way through the bananas to the river.

It could mean anything. It could mean there was news. Mail it would not be, for Rodrigue would have had it on the previous run. Most likely, Rodrigue felt bored and wanted to talk.

When he came to the reeds he could already hear the beat of the boat's engine somewhere behind the grey wall over the water. But the mist was disappearing, and as he stood and waited, he would see islands of bulrushes appearing, one after another. His eyes waited for the stumpy bow, but he knew it would not come before the beat stopped. There was a moment when he thought the boat had gone past, because
the noise was very close and yet the diesel had not been turned off. But then he saw the boat loom up out of the white vapor and it was still a long way off; it was the night's rain which carried the sound so well.

When the beat stilled, the sun suddenly broke out and threw pale patches onto the river and Delport, in amazement, realized that he was seeing everything, that he was aware of every moment. He remembered the khaki bush against the kitchen wall and the broken pieces of window pane, the first birds of the morning, the bat, the sun rising red: something in him was different from before. But directly after that he knew he was wrong. He had seen it before then, but differently; prior to this, only his eyes had seen it--now his whole being was aware of it.

He stood and watched as the boat drifted over the lazy water towards the pier and then came to rest against the cracked bamboo railings. The six white-painted letters on the bow drifted upside down in the water. What use is it, he thought, to see and to know, to be aware? To replace a window pane and to plough a field--what good does it do in the long run?

The reflected letters hung rippling under the water and he heard Rodrigue say again, "It's an incomprehensible word. It's like life. It's like a whole world. To want to go beyond the horizon--to wish to escape to the sun on foot--to want to do good, and bad too...It's like that."

There were voices on the deck above him and a bustle, and once he could hear Rodrigue mumble an order. Then the gangplank was lowered and the captain stood there, stout and relaxed against the morning light, the day's first hesitant bit of sun on his threadbare uniform and his faded, haughty symbols of rank. There were three days of beard on his chin and a pipe in his mouth and a little blue smoke and a smile.

"You're early," Delport said, and it was the first time since the previous night that he heard his own voice.

"Had no need to stop," Rodrigue said, and his voice was also thick with sleep. "I am empty." He always spoke of the boat as if it were himself, in the first person. And Delport understood thoroughly, for nine years beside the river had taught him to identify Rodrigue with the boat. Rodrigue's ailments were also the boat's; the boat's victories, Rodrigue's. On one occasion, three years before, when Rodrigue caught malaria, Pio--when his captain was no longer able--moored at the second stop and six days long the boat lay feverish and brooding on the deserted river. Pio could easily have stepped into his captain's shoes and taken over, but for one or another reason the possibility was never even considered.
Delport climbed aboard by the gangplank and again caught the fishy smell and the odor of Rodrigue's dry pipe tobacco. There certainly were passengers, a group of six blacks who sat on blanket rolls and stared out over the railings at the shadowy river bank. But they were not enough to remind him of his duty.

"I came across a new move last night," he said. "Bloody dead simple, but no one will see it coming. Do you have time?"

"Will you show me?" Delport asked.

"I want to beat you with it." Rodrigue laughed and pushed his pipe into his pocket, and for a moment Delport stood and watched as the smoke curled up out of Rodrigue's pocket and blew away.

"Now?" Delport looked up and then towards the six passengers.

"Pio has to clean the diesel, anyway."

They went downstairs to Rodrigue's cabin and the captain took out the chess board and began to unpack the pieces. The engine was quiet already, but the boat drifted up and down regularly in the stream and Delport could smell moldy cookies and Rodrigue's tobacco as he sat restfully filling his pipe.

Delport had the first move.

Rodrigue watched him and, when he hesitated, asked, "How goes it with the girl?" There was a cloud of blue smoke around the captain's face.

Delport decided to move his King-Bishop. "I don't know," he said and moved, and sat and waited for the captain to move. A sun ray reflected from the porthole's window pane, thin and bright, like a new sword, and searching, found the arched horns of the king's crown. "Why do you ask?"

Then Rodrigue moved one of his key pawns and said, "I met her people."

"Her people?" Delport did not look up.

"The two hunters. Last night at the hotel at Lotsumo. Two good guys." He snorted. "But, Lord, what can she see in them. She could just as well take me."

Delport moved again--this time his exposed bishop. It was not exactly what he had wanted to do.

"What's wrong with them?" he asked.
"The one is her father, or something. Looks like a bloody hunter. And the other has a lame leg. He said a buffalo gored him. Or a rhinoceros, I can't remember which. How he can hunt like that..." Rodrigue pushed two fat fingers in behind a pawn and moved. "But he must be her lover or something, because when he got drunk, he talked about how hot she was in bed." The captain sighed exactly as one who has let a golden opportunity slip through his fingers. "But I wonder--she didn't look like that to me."

The sun shone briefly on the ring on the captain's finger, on his shiny medals and the threadbare parts of his uniform. By turns, they moved--Delport inattentively, the captain enthusiastically, panting for breath, smiling.

"Are you sure it's the girl's people?"

The captain snorted loudly and nodded. "Their camp is there above the Doisspruit.

Delport moved, totally without interest, and Rodrigue laughed softly and took his pipe from his mouth and laid it down ceremoniously. "Mate," he said and set his bishop down in front of the king.

He entered the house and everything was the same--so exactly the same that he did not notice anything, really. He stopped in the sitting room, wondering where he was going, and remembered his wet bicycle still standing near the bananas where he had left it. Again, then, he thought of the green fleck on the pane and how he had seen the first daylight in the young pawpaw tree. And he tried to remember where he had experienced that moment before--it was an unsettling thought, for he still felt his reaction to it. He looked away from the meal storeroom around the room, and to his right he could see the mask hanging. And the mask was askew on its hook. Then he remembered: Mália's two friends in the hotel at Lotsumo.

To hell with Rodrigue, he thought. It's a typical Rodrigue story: all the women he had known of or heard of were hot in bed. An too, probably.

He straightened the mask and looked at it once more, wondering how it had moved askew. And again remembered his bicycle with the raindrop on the bell.

At the next moment Fernando was at the front door. They saw each other simultaneously and both started. Neither
had expected to see the other. But Fernando was off balance for only a second, then he walked past Delport to the back.

Something seemed amiss and Delport walked to the front door and stopped. An was at the door of her room, still in her petticoat, and when she saw him she looked away.

This only flashed through his thoughts: how long had he been in the living room, and where had Fernando been, and where had An been? And why were they so quiet? Why had neither said anything while he was in the living room?

Again he had the feeling which had so sluggishly returned to his memory while he was in the living room. And, somewhere in the distance, he heard his voice asking, "What were you people doing?"

An continued to look away.

"You are not dressed yet," and his voice was nearer this time. He moved a yard nearer to the verandah and saw An turn her face towards him. "What were you people doing?" he asked.

"You're sick."

Her mouth and eyes made it look as if she screamed the words, but she spoke so softly that he could barely hear her. And she said something else, and this time he could not hear it at all.

The child rode past the verandah on his bicycle, his brown knees pushing firmly, the bicycle crooked to balance his tilted body as he balanced on the crossbar, pedaling so that the fine sand spattered.

"Why don't you let him go?" An said, and it was as though her voice, something in her voice, teased him, challenged him. "If you suspect him."

"That doesn't change anything," he said.

She looked away again. "I don't understand you anymore," she said. "Nothing about you. Except that I know you must be extremely sick. Extremely sick." She turned and it looked as though she were going to retreat into her bedroom, and somewhere he heard her muffled voice repeat, "Extremely sick."

Her room was a jumble, the bed still unmade, the mosquito net thrown open over the head of the bed. She stood with her face against the wardrobe door, her lips flat
against the wood, and he could see her whole body shaking. He stood in the doorway and he wanted to speak, but there was a footstep somewhere, and when he turned Fernando sank to his knees behind him, a yard away, a polishing rag in one hand. His other hand began to swish back and forth over the floor with a brush under his black fingers. And Delport kicked at the brush and struck Fernando on the wrist.

Delport had his helmet in his hand; he saw the black scuttle away on his knees and get to his feet to stand against the screen wall and look at him in fear. He flung the helmet at the black and the helmet struck the screen and fell on the floor and wobbled back towards him over the broken cement, and lay still.

"What is it, amo?" the servant asked.

Delport wanted to be angry; he knew he was supposed to have been angry. But where the rage should have been, there was nothing. There was absolutely nothing. There had been something like rage when he had kicked, when he had thrown the helmet, but it was gone immediately, and he stood and waited for it to return. He did not want to speak before it returned. But there was nothing more.

There was only silence, suddenly. Great silence.

And into the silence he said, "Get out of here, Fernando. Go to blazes!" He said it as one who was angry. "And I don't want to see you again. There's the door next to you. You're fired!" And he shouted it, hoping that the rage would come.

The servant looked at him for another moment, then he turned, his black face grey at the cheekbones, and went out. The door banged behind him and Delport stood and waited as the banging sound echoed somewhere in the distance, somewhere in his head: everything was empty, suddenly—the yard and the trees, the porch screen: everything was grey, like Fernando's cheeks, and hot and, suddenly, extremely unimportant.

He turned quickly towards An, and saw her standing looking at him, motionless and lifeless and rigid, as a chair, and he walked over to his helmet and picked it up, went on past things, past doors which closed behind him, to his bicycle which lay on the ground with the wheels slowly turning and the sun flashing on the spokes.

He rode up to the nkulhas along the firebreak, west along the game path, carried his bicycle across the Dois-spruit, forgetting to drink any water, entered the veldt at the hippopotamus trail, on, to the third firebreak, up along that, further north, up to the railway line, then
rode east next to the railway line, here and there going up to the boundary fence, occasionally stopping to examine spoors, to observe ants moving in the hot sun, then rode down below past João Albassini's paddocks, watched thrushes, drank the night's rainwater from a stagnant pool in a rock ledge, pushed his bicycle up to João's two-wheel track, and rode again, into the bush and through open patches of sunlight.

Near the hippo pools he found a herd of buffalo. He stood and watched them for a long time—and they him. Every one was a horned shadow, under its heavy hump a cud chewing creature which blindly stared and saw nothing, which suspected danger and sniffed the air, afraid to be the first to move. They were a thousand eyes looking into the sun.

Only when he was past them and some distance away did he hear them breaking through the undergrowth alongside the stream.

There were images in his head, flashes of things, but nothing stayed. The morning was there and he knew about the morning, and about everything he saw, but each thing he perceived moved away from his understanding the moment he left it behind. An was there, once or twice, and Rodrigue's bishop, and Mália standing washing in the sun, and Fernando's "What is it, amo?", but a hornbill, a tussock of grass, a couple of grazing impala, were each more significant than the images of memory.

As soon as the heat became too much and he began wearily to push his bicycle, a complete thought came to him. It's not just the humiliation, he thought. There's something else, besides. And for a moment he wondered: what?

And, as he rode again, he somehow remembered: I couldn't be angry.

Then there was nothing again. Until he noticed that he was standing in the yard beside his bicycle, and he was looking at An's bedroom window.

He remembered later how deserted the yard was. The kitchen was silent and the curtains of her room were drawn. He had not seen the child, but there was a new path between the frangipanis, and the blue, windup car without its wheels lay in the sun. It was strange to him that he noticed and remembered that precisely. Because that was unimportant; it was an insignificantly small item beside the hopeless ideas that had come that afternoon.
He stood in the yard, a few yards from the back door, both his hands on the bicycle saddle, and tried to remember when he had last done something with which he had been not at all satisfied. When had he last really done anything? When had he last done something more than the usual routine things which a person did without thinking, without resolution, without needing to? Perhaps there was something occasionally, yes, something which he could still remember two days later because it was unusual, but it was, each time, an action of which the cause, the effect, the motive, all lay beyond him; every time it was something that he had to do without an option.

There were just two things—of what he could remember, just two things for which he could be held responsible: his molesting Mália Domingo was the first, and his dismissing Fernando was the second. And he wasn't even sure about either of these.

He began to remember it all: that he had become afraid to do the most ordinary thing, because each action required a decision of him, and each decision made him answerable for something. And he was afraid of that. And not just afraid: it began to look pointless to him to decide on anything, on anything—even the most ordinary thing—to try and choose an approach.

What good was it, he thought, for a glove to have a will while the hand in it makes and breaks the world?

As for Mália Domingo and Fernando—even those two: how much of what he saw as his share, was his share? Right or wrong. He had dismissed Fernando because that was all that was left for him to do. Only if Fernando was innocent: only then could he call the servant's dismissal entirely his own deed. And Mália Domingo—how much of what had happened between them was due to his, and only his, agency?

There was the one big option; the last one he could remember. In the small, hot, court room, with the intoxicating sweetness of frangipani blossoms here and there. Or was it even before that? When had he decided he was innocent? Then the voice asked: did you see when it happened? He shook his head. And he looked up and saw Ritter's square face, and the face smiled, but the eyes were expressionless.

He could have said, yes, I was present. But that would have been just as much a lie. He had shaken his head and looked at Ritter's square face. And that was the last time that a decision had been completely his. To take An to the Indian woman, that had not been his decision. To run away, it was not he who had decided to run away. The morning
they had read of Ritter's escape, it was An who had said, "I won't stay here, Max. I won't stay here. Take me away."
And he had said, "Where to? It won't help to run away." And she had said, "Take me away. God, please. Any place, it doesn't matter." And they had packed two trunks and it had begun to rain outside. And then Ritter had stood at the screen door with his hand in his bush jacket.

After that--what had been left after that?

Just finish up, all the time; try to finish up, try to settle what had been started against his will. Just run without stopping, for eternity.

He shook his head and thought he was innocent, he was free.

Perhaps, he thought, perhaps that was what freedom meant in the long run: to have a free path.

Then there was a shallow decline. It was too slight to be detected visually, but he felt it on the bicycle--it ran without his pedaling. And he passed by the clump of burned grass and felt that he was going past himself. It was the clearest that he had felt it since he had been in that state; the previous time it was almost too vague to be perceived. This time it was too clear to be denied; he felt that he was riding past himself.

But later the pale Chevy was in front of him in the sun, and he rang the bell, and twenty yards from the truck he swung his leg over the crossbar and rode the final stretch standing on the left pedal. He leaned the bicycle against the body of the truck and stood and listened for a moment.

"Quem?" he heard her ask.

"It's me. Delport."

She did not reply and he walked around the truck and under the shelter. And she was not there. There was a camp bed which he had not seen before standing beside the table. Or had it always been there?

He could hear her in the trailer. He removed his helmet, sat down and asked, "Were you still asleep?"

Again she did not answer, just kept on putting.

There was smoke from the fireplace and he thought: she must have been up all day. He wanted to stand up and go and see how old the fire was, but then he heard her open the flap and he remained seated and looked across, under the trailer,
as she climbed down the small ladder—first one bare foot, then the other, and then her knees and her light brown torso. She came around the trailer and her face was red and sweaty, her hair a bit untidy. She was busy buttoning her red blouse.

"Your people still not back?"

She shook her head.

"Did you sleep?"

"Tried." She picked up a towel and wiped the sweat from her face, threw the towel on the camp bed and said, "This place! How do you get relief here?"

She drank water and gave him some too. The water was lukewarm and slightly sour.

"Have you ever heard," he asked as he set the cup down, "Of a place called Lotsumo?"

"No," she said, "Where is it?"

"Up the river. About ten kilometers from here."

She picked up a tin lid and began to fan her face with it. "What about it?"

"Just wondered."

"They told me that Caipemba was the nearest place."

"Who were they?"

"My father and them."

"That's right. Lotsumo is not really a place. It's a--I think you could say it's a hotel."

She frowned.

The boat runs as far as there. There are a good many hunters there in the winter. In the summer there's almost no one. There was a general store too, but it closed. I bet the day Schwulst goes, the hotel will close too.

She put the lid down. "So what about the place?"

"I just thought your father must know about Lotsumo. He must know Schwulst. Everyone who is a hunter knows him."

She shook her head. "I never listen when they talk."
The middle button of her blouse was missing, and there was a curve in the material, and he could see she had nothing on under the blouse.

He looked away and asked, "The man who's with your father--is he a friend of his?"

"Enemies do not hunt together," she said and frowned again. It was an effortless frown; her face was behind it; it appeared and vanished like a fleeting shadow.

"How long have they known each other?"

Mália looked away and smiled. "I'm back in court again."

"I'm just asking."

"I met him first. He and Roberto went hunting together later. It's certainly a long time ago."

"Years ago?"

"Yes, years."

"What's his name?"

"Bvekenya," she said, and then repeated, "Why do you ask?"

He smiled blankly and rested his helmet on his knee. "It's not really strange that I should want to ask you about yourself and your people. I'm interested."

"I don't want to think about them. Every time you come here you talk about them. I want to forget them. I want to..." She looked down, frowning.

"That's peculiar," he said. "You are here together."

"We are? Doesn't look as though we are any more."

"You're cross because they stay away. I can understand that."

"No, you can't. You understand nothing. The one wants to be a worse pest than the other and I hope they stay away." She stood up and began to tidy the table as if the matter were concluded.

"Roberto is really your father?"

"Stepfather. Unfortunately. Or fortunately; I don't know which."

"And Bvekenya?"
"What about Bvekenya? He's an animal. That's all."

"Is that what the name Bvekenya means?"

"You're a game warden and you've never yet heard of Bvekenya?"

"No."

She stopped tidying and looked at him. "He's the greatest hunter in Africa. The only problem is: he says so himself."

"It's an unusual name. Is it a surname?"

"It's a nickname. It means 'the one who limps' though he denies it. He tells everyone it means god of the sun. He thinks he's God himself and I hate him."

"Not really."

She remained silent.

"Bvekenya," he said and tried to think. "I've never heard of him before."

The girl smiled and looked away.

"What's his real name?"

"He has many names. Calvados. Jones. Witlinger. I think he's mad."

A grey lourie called nearby and on the horizon there was a slight flicker of light. And Mália Domingo stood near him and looked at him. The rest was unimportant.


"I don't want to talk about him any more," she said. "He's Portuguese, yes. And if you've ever seen him you won't forget him."

"Why not?"

"He's a greedy pig and he dominates everyone."

Delport stood up and went over to her. But she turned around, away from him. "Why do you stay, then—if they are so... Why, then, do you wait for them?"

"What should I do?"

"Why don't you leave?"
At first he thought she would not reply. Then, after a while, she just shook her head.

"Why not?" He stood next to her.

"You wouldn't understand, Delport."

It was the first time she had addressed him so. And his own name was strange to him on her tongue.

"If anyone heard you," he said, "he would think I didn't understand anything."

She smiled a little. "Perhaps you don't."

He drew her to him, her back close against him, and his face pressed into her short, black hair. But she pulled herself loose from him, and there was anger in her eyes as she said, "You must not do that!" He saw her eyes and they were dark and moist and the anger of her voice was there, too.

He said, "Yesterday..." And let his arms drop. Just looked at her.

"Yesterday was yesterday. I detest myself for yesterday."

"I'm sorry," he said.

"You mustn't come again. God, Delport." She sighed and let her head sink. "Leave me alone and don't come here again."

The grey lourie was somewhere again, farther off than before. And light still flickered. He turned and stood there for a moment. And then saw the blankets. They lay in another place under the truck—nearer the front wheels. And they were rolled up differently. Last time the green and blue blankets had been together and in the other roll the red and the brown. The brown was now rolled up with the green.

He went and stood at the corner of the truck's body. There was a flat, round impression in the ground in front of him, and further to the right, another. Then, as he looked carefully, there was a third, and a fourth one. It was like the trail of a very thick walking stick. And the tracks were no more than twelve hours old; all were made since last night's rain.

He did not turn back towards her; he just said, "Bvekenya was here last night, you know?"

He could hear her turn to him.
"He and your stepfather were in Schwulst's hotel at Lotsumo the night before. But they slept here last night."

When he looked around at her, her eyes were fixed directly on him. They stood and looked at each other like that for some time, without a word.

The grey lourie was still calling. The light shimmered greyish behind her and above the trees. And he could hear cicadas now.

He walked to his bicycle.

Climbed on.

Rode off.

He wanted to stop at the place where Gonçalo had been shot, but something made him ride on.

It was late afternoon and the shadows of his bicycle wheels were oval and fleeing over the grass to the right of the footpath. He kept on riding, even where it was stony and the footpath's turns were very sharp.

Delport continued wondering: am I relieved? disappointed? Something in him was relieved that the matter with Mália Domingo was concluded. It had been good in a way, perhaps, while it still had been a vague possibility for the future; for then--he still did not know why--it was cause for him to have hope. But before he could have hope, even before he could understand why it would bring hope, it was suddenly over and a section of the past. Like all the other things which could have given him hope before.

He would have to decide it for himself: how a person could be relieved because he loses someone who could have brought hope. But at the Doisspruit, as he was carrying his bicycle across the water, it suddenly became apparent: because he'd been too afraid to hope. Hope is good, until you learn it's self-deceit; and he'd had enough of that.

Disappointed; he was certainly that, also. But was it for any reason other than losing her young body? Perhaps so. Because when you think you have given up hope, hope is reborn; and the second hope is more dangerous than the first--perhaps because it is more blind.

And the night came in between the trees, very quietly, like a large bird; first only the trees revealed it, then the thicker shrubs, later the grass; and then even the footpath was barely visible. And between the dusk and the dark there was but a moment.
He rode quickly, because he knew the footpath. He rode faster than usual.

Perhaps, he thought, she's lighting a lamp now. Or perhaps she is sitting in the dark and waiting.

She had lied to him. That was the only sure thing. She had wanted to use him.

He rode faster along the dark footpath.

There was light in the kitchen. When he leaned his bicycle against the wall, he saw An through the window, busy cutting bread. She was wearing the sickly, green dress. The one she had got in Catuana.

He went into the house and ladled out some water to wash his hands and face. He lit a lantern in his room and took it with him to the living room. He picked up a glass, fetched some ice and poured himself a whiskey, and sat down in the chair under the buffalo head.

There was something in the room which disturbed him.

He tasted his whiskey and thought of Mália but pushed away his thoughts of her. But before he could, he heard her repeat, "You must not do that."

The masks were in their places—the Baule queen, the death mask from Dahome, the Bajaka, the water spirit, as well as, when he looked over his shoulder, the one he had bought from Mália.

"Yesterday was yesterday," she said.

How does one accept it so, without being more than one is, with the past as the past; if everything one did were already concluded somewhere; if even one's future were so complete, one could, just before one went to sleep, lie and look back at it?

Each chair was in its place. The small table. The sensa was still there where he had hung it. There was nothing wrong.

He thought: you're getting old, you're hiding away too deeply in yourself, you're beginning to confuse the inside with the outside. And then again: but there is no more outside; what is left.
The lantern's flame began to waver a little, then flared up again. He could see a cockroach walking up the side of the whiskey bottle, very slowly, with feelers twitching in the dimming light. The cockroach turned, and then fell and disappeared. Delport continued looking at the place where it was a moment before: it was directly above the whiskey label. Only then did he realize—the bottle was almost empty, and it had been a new bottle; he had opened it only the night before.

Then the lantern's flame turned blue and disappeared, and it was dark. And in the dark he knew: someone had drunk the whiskey, and it had not been either An or Fernando, for neither of them drank.

Somewhere outside, far off, a reedbuck whistled. Once. And after a while, again.

There was someone in the yard. A noise. Movement. Then the wind rose and pulled at the curtains on their rings.

He closed his eyes and smelled the rain. And heard it come. From between the trees, in the whirling wind, across the yard and over the house. Until everything, then, was part of it. He stood up and closed the window, and standing at it, looked at the drops striking, with the quiet lightning bluely opening the darkness with every flash.

For a moment, Delport forgot about the nearly empty bottle, and thought: first there is hope and then mistrust of the hope; then an existence without hope—and that is terrible: it's life without breath. And, eventually, the hope rises anew, like a second mistake: then one hopes in spite of everything.

And that's even more terrible. God knows. It's submission.
SEVEN

He saw her as she approached from the outside kitchen in the rain, a lantern in her hand, passing behind the banana trees and entering through the screen door. He saw her put the lantern down on the table in its own weak patch of light. There was bread and butter, a small bowl of jam, a plate and a knife, a small stew pot.

When she saw him standing at the inside door she said, "I made dinner for you."

He went to the table and sat down.

She and the child never ate with him and there were times when he wondered if they ever ate. Dirty dishes on the table, sometimes, when he came home at midday reassured him.

He expected that she would leave, but she remained standing at the opposite corner of the table, watching him as he opened the stew pot and ladled out his food. It was boiled neck and salad beans.

She made it, he thought.

"Is the child in the house?" he asked, and when she did not answer, he looked up at her and saw her nod. The lamp-light caught but half her face and shone on three or four raindrops in her hair and on her eyebrows.

Again he had the feeling: something was wrong. Was it Fernando's absence? For of that he was completely aware. He could feel Fernando was not in the house, nor in the yard. There was no one still sneaking behind him and then suddenly talking next to him, no one smelling of wild orange and sweat and moving like a shadow and slamming the door.

But there was something else as well, something which was more vague than Fernando's absence. An had prepared the food and stood by as he ate; this was unusual. And there was the almost empty whiskey bottle. But he looked beyond these for something else.

There was a brief shower of rain--there was too much wind. Everywhere in the house--in the living room, in his room, on the verandah--he could hear drops tapping into the tins on the floor, and at the fall of each drop he could hear how full was the tin into which it dropped.
Then An said, "You must get someone for the kitchen."

"I will," he said. "I'll send Kiya."

"Anyone."

He wondered where the child was, but did not ask again. The wind plucked at the trees, now and then blowing a pocket of dampness through the screen. The lantern smelled as it was blown, and the blue lightning made the flame look foolish.

"Why do you still wear that dress?" he asked, "Surely you've got other clothes."

"It's cool," she said.

He did not know why she remained standing at the table and he wished she would speak or leave. To him there was something wrong with the fact that he sat and ate the food she had made, and that he felt her standing and watching how he ate it made it that much worse. The fork went ever more difficultly to his mouth, became ever heavier, the food became ever thicker in his mouth—until at last, half finished, he suddenly put the fork down and pushed the plate away from him.

When he looked up at her there was no reaction on her face, no sign that she noticed that he ate no more.

And he could no longer avoid it. He spoke of it. He said, "What was going on between you?"

The rain fell terribly hard and he spoke loudly to be sure she heard him. Perhaps he spoke too loudly.

"Between me and who?" she asked.

"God, An." He looked for words. "At Tongaat," he said, eventually, "I could not have thought... If they had told me you would..." What he wanted to say was hopeless. Speech itself was hopeless. It was so repulsive to him that he was no longer sure if he could believe it. When he spoke again, he took no notice of the rain—perhaps it was mainly himself he asked, "If you say I am sick, what then are you?"

But she did hear him. She said, "I'm bored. That's all. Is that a sickness?"

"So bored?" he asked.

She said, "I'm lonely here."

The child appeared at the inside door and stopped still when he saw them. But soon his attention drifted from them;
he turned his head at a slight angle as if he saw someone out in the rain or was listening for something behind him in the dark.

"Just you?" he asked.

"Then what are we doing here?"

He sat for a moment, then, barely noticeably, shrugged his shoulders.

"He was in the house," she said.

"He was company?"

"We talked a few times."

"Did he understand you?"

"I don't know. He didn't ever answer."

There was a mosquito near his face. Her voice and the mosquito's were very similar. The mosquito was near his ear; he could hear it whining above the rain.

"What happened then?" he asked and looked towards the door--but the child was gone.

"He just kept on with his work. Swept. Polished floors. Cooked food."

"What did you say to him?" All the time he spoke he looked away--at an ant on the table, at an earwig on the wall trying to crawl under a loose piece of whitewash. He could not look at her.

"I don't know."

"And he listened."

"I think he did. I don't know if he understood."  

"And then?"

"Then you chased him away."

It began to get cooler. The wind suddenly dropped and it rained quietly; he felt the air was cooler on his wet, sweaty body.

"Nothing else?" he asked.

"What else," she asked, "could there be?"
"Something. Perhaps. How should I know?"

She looked at him, and he had the feeling, for an instant, that she was looking at something she was seeing for the first time and did not know, and which would, in a moment, make her tremble.

"I felt it," he said as one on the defensive. "His eyes. And you always did..."

It rained quietly, then, lightly and quietly on the galvanized iron, with a murmur from somewhere in the gutters.

"There was something," he said.

He sat and looked at his plate, at the gravy between the pieces of meat and bone which was cooling under a dull brown film. But from under his eyelids he could see her retreat from him, even further away from the little light around him.

"I thought you wouldn't be able to stand it." Her voice was distant. "I thought so."

The rain was barely audible in the dark behind the screen. It was no more than barely audible.

"What are you talking about?"

"He killed you by staying away."

"Who are you talking about?"

Her voice came from even farther out of the dark. "It would have been easier if we hadn't left."

And as he understood, he lifted his head and looked for her in the dark, for it was the first time, after many years, that she spoke of Ritter.

But she was gone, and the rain was gone and there was just running water in the yard and in the gutters. The earwig was behind his flake of whitewash and the mosquito had gone.

Delport remained sitting for a little while by the light next to his plate of food, and listened to the weather rolling far away into the dark plains.

Perhaps, if they had talked about it from the outset, it would not have become as impossible in later years. But
at the outset it was something to be forgotten as soon as possible. And because he could not forget, the longer it was, the more he had to think of it, the less he had the desire to talk of it. And because she remained silent, he left it there. But that silence was the beginning of distrust—that he understood only much later.

It was like a series of cyphers which he wished to remember, but was too frightened to write down. The more he recited them mentally, the more uncertain he became of whether he really still had them correctly. He had begun to arrange them alternatively to see if they could be grouped in more recognizable combinations. Until finally, he no longer knew what their original arrangement was.

There was the celebration at Ritter's bungalow. Then the hellish ride to Ballito. And Ritter went to swim. He stood watching Ritter frolicking in the black waves and splashing small phosphorus drops out of the water. And later he came to the car and there were no others—just An was still there, and she lay asleep on the back seat. He began to wander about, looking for the others. He found one of them in the road and he said his companion had gone to the village to find a taxi. And when he returned to the beach, Ritter was standing and arguing with someone. He tried to listen, but he could not recognize the newcomer's voice.

The rest he remembered even less in later years.

Did the man try to assault Ritter? And when did An awaken—before it happened or after? How much did she see, herself, and how much did she have to accept his word only? At the trial she said she woke up only on the way back to Tongaat. But Delport remembered it otherwise: somewhere in the confusion he remembered her plaintive voice asking persistently what was happening. But Ritter supported her testimony.

She was only a child, then. She understood less than he did. She was barely twenty. He would never forget that: her defenseless youthfulness, then. There were nights, even to the end, that he sometimes felt that should he just lift his hand, her incredible throat would again tremble a little under his fingertips, like the first time he had kissed her.

An was a child when it all happened. She was not prepared for anything like that. Ritter was everyone's hero, and hers too, and she thought she loved him.

What was wrong with that?

Ritter was his hero, too. They were bosom friends, he and Ritter. And there was very little wrong with that.
He liked An and sometimes he even coveted her a little. And at times he envied Ritter. It was no mortal sin, though.

But one night in November of that strange year, the sun set on Tongaat's boiling sugar cane. And no one saw it really precisely. Some of them sat drinking beer in the mess until each independently felt an inclination to clean up and dress. Ritter was one of the first to leave, and, at the door, he stopped and said, "See you soon at my place."

Delport walked to Ritter's bungalow at eight o'clock. The night smelled sweet and there was music behind the lighted curtains. He always remembered that: when he opened the screen door and mounted the porch, he saw Ritter's big head laughing, tossed back a little, and he held a glass of wine high in his hand, and An stood laughing in front of him, one arm stretched high above her, trying to reach the glass. But she was much too short and Ritter kept on laughing, sweeping her hair into confusion with his other hand.

When the sun rose, An was sitting in Ritter's car, crying—and he and Ritter stood at a counter. Ritter was busy making a statement. Delport stood at his shoulder and looked out to where the first light shone on the blue roof of Ritter's car and he could see An's head bent forward. He could hear Ritter's restless voice dictating, next to him, and he could hear a pen struggling over paper.

Perhaps not one of them, not even Ritter, completely understood what was happening, either on that unpleasant morning in Tongaat, or anytime afterwards.

How long afterwards was it—nearly six months?—when he suddenly awoke from the daze which had begun in Ballito: that night in Catuane, in the cold inn, when An was sick in the bathroom, her hands white on the edge of the enamel bathtub as she stood crouching, waiting for the next convulsive twitch of her body, and the lame owner, with the sores on his hands and lips, who came in and concernedly questioned and continued to question; took them up to his room later and looked for pills and in broken English told of his wife's death the previous week, and began to unpack dresses bought in Lisbon, kissing them one by one and laying them down beside An as gifts of comfort because he could not find his pills anywhere. He gave up his room for them, and later when he left, An lay pale and sleeping, and crying in her sleep. Then Delport went out and in the dark garden, with dogs barking in the distance and servants sitting talking in the hot night on the sidewalk under mothly streetlights, he vomited everything, and he continued to be sick, until later he felt he would bring up his intestines—his intestines, and with them, his whole self; that night in Catuane he wanted to discharge his very self and everything he knew onto the dusty, Bermuda grass.
By the little light of his lantern, with the plate of game meat and bean salad in front of him and the rain, monotonous, outside, he remembered it all again, and again, as it had been then, he felt the nausea well up inside him. But he remained seated with his eyes closed, and waited for the feeling to pass, then took the lantern and went to his room, afraid to move too quickly, afraid that the feeling would return.

He set the lantern down on the floor beside his bed, and lay down; but as he lay, it was as if he drifted on water; he knew it was the food which had to come up. He stood up and went out into the rain, away from his body that smelled of sweat, and stood in the rain. He felt the rain penetrate his clothes to his skin. He stood and waited patiently and he felt as though he was swaying a little on his feet; he closed his eyes and felt how it rained and wondered if Mália Domingo slept. He wondered what Albassini was doing, what An was doing, what the threadbare captain was doing. He wondered what had become of Ritter.

Then his skin became tense and his stomach heaved inside him and everything burst out his nose and his mouth. He stood with legs apart, hands on knees, and did not feel the rain any more, just kept on heaving, kept on, until his mouth was as bitter as gall, until he had to gasp for breath. Then he stood upright, his head at an angle, and let his face be washed clean by the rain.

He undressed in his room and sat down on the bed, naked, turned the lantern down, and switched the radio on. There was nothing. Just a fire that burned in the depths of the tuning indicator cavity. At first he was not aware of it, did not hear it, but later he began to look for a station, found a voice here and there talking from afar in Swahili, in French, then, again, just the fire--then, at last, something like music: a drum, strings being plucked, a voice singing hoarsely and off key from Zanzibar.

He sat and looked at his arms, his sinewy legs. His skin was hard and brown and here and there, hairy, and he was thin. He had not noticed how thin he was until now. All of his body looked strange; it was slender and hard like dried meat. He could see his kneecaps through the skin, his shin-bones, the slender bones of his hands. It was as if he sat and observed his own skeleton. And he thought: it's me.

It was quiet. The rain had passed. He sat and listened to the silence, and he could hear it settling. And through the silence, as though through something tangible, now and then, outside in the yard, he could hear a drop of water fall from a leaf to the ground, interspersed with the insignificant, rhythmic sound of his own breathing, in and out, monotonously.
Later, he stood up and dressed in dry clothes and walked through the silence to the child's room. The child was sitting in a small heap against the head of the bed asleep, still in his clothes, with a small piece of dirty line and the small board with which he made paths beside him on the bed.

Delport layed the child out flat, threw a thin blanket over him, and stood and looked at him without seeing him. He was not sure if the child was really there.

How long had it been his and An's little game--to have a child of their own! They had imagined him: gave him a room and a bed, covered him up in their thoughts at night, took him for walks, taught him to talk, played with him. It was as if they would refuse to accept any child other than their imaginary child. But theirs did not become real.

Delport left the room and, for the first time in a very long while, knew again how empty the room was when he left it. He stood in front of An's door, just for a moment, and again saw the little round hole in the screen, and her room was just as empty as the child's: there was a shiny strand of gossamer slanting from the small hole in the screen to the window sash.

Then he put the catch on the outside door of the verandah. At the back door he hesitated for a moment--then put the catch on that also. And it was the first time in six, seven years that he had done that. He did not want to think why he did it: something in him said it was not important, it just happened. But when he lay back on the bed, blew out the lantern on the floor next to him, he could still see his hand pushing the catch. His body was tired and he felt his head singing a little. Then he turned onto his side and closed his eyes. In his imagination he could hear the lonely transmitter's code signal: four measures, three notes in each measure, except the last one.

Later, when he was almost asleep, he heard someone walking barefooted in the house. He recognized An's way of moving. And now and then he was aware of the weather which rumbled far away in the distance. But eventually there was nothing--just a soft wriggling of mice in the roof and, from near and far, bats peep-peeping outside in the wet trees.

First he dreamed he heard someone call. Then he was awake and he heard the call again and thought it was An dreaming. But as he was about to doze off, his bicycle
fell over against the outside wall. He lay and listened, and after a short while there were footsteps, but it was so dark that he could not make out anything other than the curve of the mango tree which stood out rather bleakly against the sky.

Someone picked up the bicycle; he could hear the handlebar scraping against the wall. Delport swung his feet from the bed and sat upright, listened again, stood up, and went to the window. He began to slide the screen slowly, very carefully, upwards—but before the frame could hook onto the uppermost catch he stopped pushing. He could see the mango tree more clearly now, and the frangipani. And between the mango tree and the frangipani, six yards from the window, someone stood and looked at him.

His face was against the screen, and the uppermost catch of the window sash was directly in front of his face—so that he had to lower his head a little to be able to look under the frame. He remained standing stock-still for some time, his fingers still under the frame, and waited for the person outside to do something. But when nothing happened, he released the frame and retreated a short way. The person must have noticed it, and came nearer—one, two, three yards, and stopped again.

It was a woman. Delport saw her legs and the silhouette of her dress. He stretched out his hands and pushed the frame to the top.

"An?" he said.

"Max..."

Quickly, she came closer, up to the window.

"Sou eu," she said. "Mália."

His eyes were not yet accustomed to the dark and for a short time he stood looking at her, then said, "What's the matter?"

"I'm sorry," she said, "You must help me, please."

Those were An's words.

"What is it?"

"Come with me," she said and came and leaned against the window ledge. "You must hurry."

"Where to?" And again when she did not answer right away, "Where to?"

"I don't know," she said. "Are you dressed?"
He still had his clothes on, but he was barefooted. He looked for his shoes and put them on, then opened the screen and climbed through the window next to her, and felt her hand clench tightly around his upper arm.

"What's the matter?" he asked again. "It's late."

"It's four o'clock. If we hurry, we can..." She whispered so quietly all the time that he had to strain to hear what she said. "Do you have a car?"

"What would I do with a car? Here?" Then he asked quickly, louder than before, "What's the matter, Mália?"

"Here, we can't..." She looked over her shoulder, into the dark, released his arm and moved away from him, quickly. A moment later he could no longer see her, but he heard her say, somewhere, "Come!"

He caught up with her near the pawpaw trees and heard her say, "I can't start the truck. We must have the truck. I think the battery is dead."

"But what's happening?"

"I must escape." She clutched at his shirt and drew him towards her. "They mustn't get the truck."

It felt to him as if he were asleep; he was not awake. And he wanted to waken.

"Who are they?" he asked.

She moved around him, back towards the house, and after a short time reappeared out of the dark, his bicycle with her.

"Byekenya," she said. "Can we both get on the bicycle?"

She took the handlebar and lifted herself on to the crossbar and he put his arms either side of her, clutched the handlebar and pushed the bicycle quickly for the first few yards, then threw his leg over the saddle and began pedaling clumsily into the dark, the bicycle suddenly heavy and wavering.

Her back was warm against his chest and her head was in his way; he could feel her hair against his cheek. He gained his balance and it was easier when the bicycle began to get up speed.

"What the hell happened?" he asked again. He could not decide if he was angry.

"Roberto was there tonight," she said. Can you see where you're riding?"
"I know the path."

"Roberto and Bvekenya were there."

"They've been there every night," he said. "They slept there."

"They haven't been," she said.

"You're lying."

She was quiet.

"What happened tonight?"

"They're looking for you," was all she said.

He felt shivers down his spine. His back turned cold and he continued to pedal and to aim the front wheel, in the dark, in the valley between the grass slopes, where the footpath must have been. Because he knew every turn in the path it was not too difficult to keep a course; he just had to get used to her weight. She was small and crouching in front of him, but he was not accustomed to having someone ride with him.

"Why?" he asked.

At first she did not answer, but he knew she would, sooner or later.

"They know about us," she said at last.

"What do they know?"

"I don't know..."

They rode in silence for a while. The bicycle chain creaked each time he pedaled and he could hear the saddle squeaking monotonously. Here and there, where the trees opened, he could see the bush, low and dark against the sky. There were heavy clouds on the horizon and nowhere was there a star. But to their right, over the fever trees, there was a grey glimmer. The sun was an hour away.

"They were there tonight and we had words," she said. "I told them you would not come again."

He waited for her to continue.

"I didn't want to begin it, even. I didn't want to come with them. But Bvenkenya made me..."

"You're afraid," Delport said after a short time. "Of him."
"Yes." He could feel her nod her head. And then, later, "He was at your house today."

"Bvenkenya?"

"Yes."

"Was he looking for me?"

"No," she said. "He knew you were away."

"What did he want there, then?"

"I don't know."

The grass was still wet and he could feel his trouser legs becoming cold and heavy down their length. And there were places where the water lay in puddles across the footpath; there the water splashed up, even over his hands.

"I think it was the second time he'd been there," she said.

"But he didn't want to see me?"

"He said he didn't want to see you."

"I must sign their permits."

"I told him so."

"But he's looking for me now? About you?"

"No," she said. "It's because I said I don't want to do his dirty work any longer."

A bird started up in the trees to the right of them and fluttered out between the leaves. The bird swept by over their heads, so close that Delport could feel the wind of the bird's heavy wings.

"What dirty work?"

"I was always just a servant to them."

"Now they want my blood for that?"

"I..."

"You what?"

"I told them. What happened--between us."

"Why did you do that. You'd already said I must not come again." Because she did not reply to that, he added, "Isn't
the affair over?" She still remained silent, and he heard himself ask, "Isn't it?"

"Certainly."

"Why, then, did you tell them?"

"Meu Deus," she said, "can't you stop asking questions?"

They rode on in silence, then, and all the time he thought: what's going on? He still tried to grasp how he had arrived just where he was at that moment. He tried to think about where he was going, and why. But there was no sense in it—only one thing was sure: that he shrank from the rest of the way, that he really did not want to go to the pale truck and struggle to get it going, that Mália Domingo was not in as much trouble as he had, at first, so readily believed. The hollow feeling he had had in his stomach the previous evening, the sour taste on his tongue, returned, and he continued to pedal along the dark footpath, going on until his legs were hot and would no longer pedal.

At the Doisspruit he stopped the bicycle and let Mália climb off. He stood and leaned against the bicycle for a while, looking at the water, at the little bit of light in it. It was not completely dark, any longer. A person could begin to distinguish the branches of the nearest tree, already, and the reeds in the water. The girl stood still beside him and he could hear his own breathing, the murmur of the water, and a distant jackal in the wattle trees behind them.

Then he said, "I know Bvekenya."

She turned around to him, but he could not make out her face. "You know him?"

"His real name is Ritter."

She stood near him and her face was turned up towards his. He had the feeling she was waiting for him to go on.

"He has a scar on his forehead," he said. "I threw a glass in his face, once."

"Bvekenya?"

"Yes."

She shook her head. "He hasn't a scar on his forehead."

"Then it has healed."

"What makes you think so," she asked. "What makes you think you know him? Have you seen him?"
"No." He shook his head. "Not really."

"How can you claim that then?" She was visibly flabbergasted.

"Perhaps I'm mistaken."

Then he layed the bicycle down beside him and sat down to take off his shoes. She followed his example, and they entered the water and it was not as cold as he had expected. On the other side they put their shoes on, he helped her onto the bicycle, and they rode off.

The day was breaking and he could see the footpath clearly, now. When they passed the place where Gonçalo had been shot there was a reddish light already. But the sun still stayed away.

They spoke again only when they saw the camp.

Mália asked him to stop and she climbed off and stood and looked at the camp for a considerable time. There was no sign of life. Everything was quiet.

Then she said, "Stay here--I'll go and look."

And he did not reply. But when she started to walk, he pushed his bicycle along behind her.
EIGHT

Everything happened of its own accord after that. And, as before, everything happened without his being able to grasp where it had begun or where it was leading. He was in the middle of it; everything carried him, as if on an axle without his knowing where the wheels were taking him-- without even the wheels knowing the destination. He was just there, the pivot, and without his asking to be implicated.

That, at least he knew, all the more clearly, in the midst of all the nothingness, in the midst of the similar coming and going of days: that he had no real desire for nor influence over anything any more, that nothing's presence or absence was of enough importance to really make any difference to him any longer. What he did, from day to day, were the things which half a lifetime's momentum still made him do; it was a matter of reflexes. It was like ducking if anyone struck at you. He did it without deciding whether he wanted to, or not. It was just, simply, done.

And there were moments, just moments, as he awoke in the morning, as he dozed off at night, that he moved far enough along to wonder: how did I become so; when did it begin?

But that was all. He wondered, and left it there. He could see no reason why anything should be changed. To put it honestly, it was not important; unusual enough in comparison with what had happened earlier, but not really important.

Simply: it was often inconvenient. Like the night, for example, when Mália came. He was tired and he would gladly have slept if he could have. And when she came, he knew: in what would follow, he would have no real interest, no matter what it might be. But to withdraw himself from it would be of even less benefit: something in him so much wanted to grasp the events, something wanted to go on believing that Mália, herself, was a matter of importance. Therefore, when she came to fetch him, he went; against his will, against his better judgement, he went when Mália came to fetch him.

Even later, near the first light, when he began to understand, began to suspect where everything was headed, even in that one wild moment when he remembered Ritter, he did not think of turning back. He continued to pedal along the dark footpath, not knowing why, but pedaled, even farther from the one thing that he desired that night: a little sleep.
And when, following the girl, he pushed his bicycle into the camp, he knew again for a moment: it was of himself that he was most afraid—not of Bvenkenya or the girl, not of Fernando or of An or Ritter. But of himself.

Malia was five yards in front of him, but he caught up with her as she reached the truck. They stopped together, listened for a moment, looked at each other. Behind her he could see the edge of the sun emerging from the horizon.

Then he pushed his bicycle farther around the body of the Chevy. There was no one under the shelter.

"Come on, then," he said after a short while, and leaned his bicycle against the table. The blankets were no longer under the truck body. He went out from under the shelter again and examined the ground—the only tracks made after the rain were his and the girl's.

"They haven't been back again," she said.

"What time did they leave here?"

"About nine o'clock."

"And you?"

"I left only after twelve. When the hardest rain had passed."

The truck's back flap was closed but not fixed with clips, and Delport moved nearer and flung it open. It was shadowy inside, but he could see the two rolls of blankets lying on her bedclothes.

"Did you put the blankets here?" he asked.

"Yes." She nodded. "Long before they left. Before the rain."

"But where did they sleep last night, then?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "Surely wherever they've slept every night before."

"Lotsumo's a long way away." He surveyed the veldt in a wide circle about him. "Two hours walk. Perhaps longer."

Some of her clothes hung from the shelter roof and she began to take them down. "We must get the truck going," she said.

"And then?"
She came to a stop and turned to him. "We must get away from here."

"They won't do anything to you."

"Please!"

Her voice was deceptively calm, but her eyes betrayed a fear which he had not noticed before.

"Where do you want to go?" he asked.

"I don't know."

"Can you drive?"

She stood and looked at him for a moment. "Aren't you coming too?"

"How can I come with you?" I can't just run away."

The girl approached him, her eyes on his all the time, the clothes still in the crook of her left arm, and stopped in front of him, two feet away. He could see the lower edge of one eye twitch slightly. "They want you, Delport," she said softly. But this time her voice also betrayed concern.

"Why? I've done nothing to them."

She swallowed and looked away. "I'll tell you." She swallowed again—he could see the tiny Adam's apple jump in her soft throat. "If you just get us away from here."

Delport stood and looked at her for another moment, then asked, "Do you have tools?"

"In the front," she said. "Under the seat."

The steering wheel was broken and where the gauges should have been, there was only a round hole in the dashboard. The key was not there, but she came and stood at the open door and withdrew the key from the front of her shirt. He turned the truck's ignition and pulled the starter; it turned lazily once or twice, and then just made a clicking sound. The battery was too weak to turn the starter.

"We'll have to push," he said, and climbed out.

The sun was a half meter above the plains, then, but the veldt was peculiarly quiet; there were no birds, and when he shut the door with a click, it was as if the noise went across the plains like a gun shot.
He detached the sheltering sail from the truck.

"There is some stuff I want to take," she said.

"Leave it. First we have to see if we can start the thing."

He did not have much hope. There was only a slight slope down to the stream—for about twenty yards. If the thing wouldn't catch in that twenty yards, they'd be sitting. A second possibility was to turn the truck's nose to the right and to push it between the acacias—from there they'd have a good slope for about two hundred yards, all along the stream.

But how to get the truck to the acacias. It was flat land in that direction and the thing was heavy.

He thought it all over for a time and then said, "We won't get this thing moving. We'll just have to take the bicycle."

"We must try," she said. "I'll push."

Delport wanted to smile.

"Six like you won't move this truck," he said.

"But come on, let's try!" And the concern was back in her voice, so clearly that he lost his smile.

He walked to the door and opened it. "I'll push here," he said, "then I can jump in when we have a little speed. You work at the back. He switched the truck on, waited until she was ready at the back, and said, "Now!"

The truck did move. At first, just a few centimeters. He could hear how her shoes slipped on the grass. Then he pushed again, he felt it move, and he kept on pushing and the truck, kept on moving, faster and faster, until he estimated they were half way to the stream. They were still not moving fast enough in his opinion, but he jumped in and threw the truck into gear. And the bank and first bulrushes were seven or eight yards from him. He hesitated another second and then pressed the accelerator, released the clutch, felt the Chevy pull under him, and again applied and released the clutch. And for a moment there was nothing except for the second pull of the engine; then it felt as though the whole truck shook and the next moment the engine caught. He pumped the accelerator, quickly and continuously, and heard the engine gasp and then take hold. He threw it out of gear and kicked hard on the brake, pulled the hand-brake, still pumping the accelerator with his foot. The front wheels were in the bulrushes and the engine continued to gasp and it sounded
as if it would die. Out of the corner of his eye he saw
the girl appear next to the window. He half released the
accelerator and held his foot there, then looked for the
reverse gear and carefully released the clutch, and felt
the truck moving backwards slowly. He reversed it some
distance, always gassing, pushing, the engine, then again he
found first gear, and, turning the nose right, he began,
slowly, to make headway in the direction of the acacias,
all the time thinking: if I could just get the thing to
that slope.

But thirty yards from the acacias, the engine jerked and
died. He continued to pump the accelerator but there was
nothing--just the sharp smell of hot fuel.

The silence after that made him feel silly.

Máìia did not appear at the window again, and he sat and
listened to the silence and immediately knew that for the
entire time since he had recognized her in front of his bed-
room window he had lied to himself. He was afraid.

For a moment he wanted to think of the child and of An. Fernando was no longer in the yard; they were there
alone. And he could see his helmet, again, rocking across
the uneven floor of the verandah.

Delport climbed out and saw the girl standing behind
the truck. She said nothing, just looked at him.

He listened for a moment. And everything was dead quiet.
Utterly. There wasn't even a bird calling, anywhere. And
he had the feeling that every clump of grass, every bush and
tree, like Máìia, stood watching. And waiting, for him to
do something.

Pushing would not help any more. He realized this, and
knew the girl realized it, too. He suspected that she blamed
him for letting the engine die, and he thought: to hell with
her. But it didn't make him feel better. He, was disgusted
with himself over what had happened; he cursed the Chevy
because it was suddenly just as important for him to get away
from the camp. And the bicycle did not look good enough any
more.

He opened the hood and examined the battery. The ground
lead was covered with corrosion. He dug out some tools from
under the seat: a wrench, a hammer, a screwdriver--and a crank.

Delport swore as he took out the crank.

"What is it?" the girl asked, from somewhere.
"Why didn't you tell me there was a..." He couldn't think of the Portuguese word for a crank. "This thing," he said. "I'd forgotten you could start an engine that way."

"Will it help?"

He began to loosen the battery leads without answering, scraped the ground terminal clean with the screwdriver and connected it again.

"Switch on," he said and pushed the crank into the bumper, struggling to find the hole through the radiator. He began to crank. It turned stiffly and at first he could barely move it. He took a grip again. "Pump a little fuel," he said and began to crank again, felt the engine pull and stutter, then it coughed as though it wanted to catch. But when he stopped, everything was quiet and he could smell fuel again.

"Don't pump any more," he said. "Only when the engine catches." He pulled on the crank again, keeping on until his arm could do no more. His body was damp with sweat, then, and later, big drops fell from his nose and ran over the bumper. The engine had coughed now and then, pulled, swallowed, caught once, and stuttered and died.

He pulled the spark plugs, one by one, and examined them. They were not very dirty. He looked at the carburetor--there was fuel.

And the girl sat behind the steering wheel all the time, watching him. Each time he looked up he caught her eyes and they were questioning and restless. But he remained silent.

He cranked again, at least a minute at a time, until his arm sockets were hot and pained and he could do it no more. Then he removed the crank and, standing stiffly erect, let it fall to the ground next to him.

"We can forget it," he said.

She climbed out.

"Get your things," he said. "Not too much. I'll take you on the bicycle."

"Where to?"

"Albassini."

She did not ask who Albassini was.

Delport was tired. He wiped the sweat from his face with an arm, then climbed over the mudguard, took firm
hold of the ignition wire and tore it loose, undid the distributor cap and put it in his pocket. He left the key in the ignition.

When he came to the shelter the girl was trying to strap a bundle of clothes to his bicycle carrier with a belt.

"They took the revolver," she said. It was still under that basin, yesterday afternoon.

He pushed the bicycle from under the shelter, and walked to where the slope began at the wattle trees; then she slid over the crossbar and he climbed on, and the bicycle could freewheel the first stretch.

Then, on the plains, with the sun in their eyes, with the saddle creaking often under their weight, the wheels skirting the short grass, he began to pedal.

They reached the footpath and stayed on it as far as the stream. They went across the stream without removing their shoes. It was already hot and they did not want to waste time.

Then he turned off the footpath. And they rode across the veldt, directly eastwards into the sun, in the direction of Albassini's homestead.

Delport found him where he cured skins. He kept on at his work, even when Delport went and stood next to him. Neither greeted the other. Only when Albassini had finished spraying the skin on which he was working and nodded to the servant with him to take it, did he stand upright with a creak of his joints and look at Delport. And they stood so for a short time, facing each other, and Delport was suddenly no longer afraid of what he had to say.

They walked back to the yard together, and Mália still stood in the shade beside his bicycle, a few inquisitive children with her; but when they saw João, they disappeared around the house.

Delport introduced the two of them and still did not say anything by way of explanation.

Albassini brought the couple of chairs standing in front of the backdoor into the cool, but only the girl sat down. She looked at Delport all the time as if expecting his eyes to tell her something.
Albassini took his pipe and scraped it out, looked at the girl and asked, "Are your people back?"

She looked up at Delport and said, "Yes."

"They've not shot anything except for food since they've been here," he said. "I'll guess they're looking for elephant."

"That's what they said," she said.

Albassini put his pipe in his mouth and chewed his loose denture. Delport did not ask him how he knew that.

The light was sharp, as was the smell of unslaked lime. Delport sat down on the chair nearest to him and asked, "Do you have a place for her to stay, João? For a few days."

"We can put a cot up in the lounge," Albassini said candidly, the pipe still in his mouth. "What about you?"

"I'll go home."

"How long will she stay?"

"A day or so. Until the Mahala passes again."

Delport could see the man was not at ease. He chewed on his pipe stem and looked for his tobacco with his free hand, continuously.

He wondered how much Albassini knew.

Perhaps enough, he thought, and was relieved. He had decided he would not say any more than he was asked. It wasn't necessary. Anyway, he was not sure of anything, himself; everything was vague and uncertain to him, a little incomprehensible. He chose to try not to explain anything.

"I'll have tea made for us," Albassini said and walked to the house.

"You musn't leave me here alone," the girl said.

Delport shook his head. "I can't stay here."

"Then I'm going with you."

"Well then, I'm going back to the camp."

"Aren't you afraid any more, then?"

She wanted to say something else, but João was on his way back to them. He sat down next to Delport and began to fill his pipe.
"Have they already come to you for their permits?" João asked.

Delport shook his head.

"They don't have permits."

Delport looked up at the girl and saw her turn her head away.

"There was a falling out between her and the other two," Delport said, and thought: that's where I stop. "She wants to get away from it."

João nodded.

"You were the only one I could think of."

"She can stay here." João lit his pipe and between the clouds of smoke he said, "If she wants to."

"I'll go home this afternoon. I'll come and see you again tomorrow."

"Perhaps it would be better if you stayed here, too," Albassini said.

Delport wanted to reply, but Albassini interrupted him. "I'll go to your house tonight and say you're here. I don't believe that you have to go home." Delport looked up at João, but all he could see was a blue cloud around the man's shoulders.

"Stay," was all the girl said.

And then no one spoke until the tea came. Tombi brought it, and put the tray down on the ground next to João without greeting them, and then departed silently.

Delport thought: I don't want to stay here, I must go home. But he said nothing, just drank his tea, waiting. He was restless. He kept watch on the yard, on the trees around the house. He thought: I'm not afraid--why should I be afraid? I've nothing to do with this. This isn't my affair. I don't know the people. It's their problem. Why should I be afraid?

Albassini drank his tea slowly and this made Delport impatient. He watched Albassini, and looked at the lazy chickens in the yard which walked in the bright light and pecked at the ground, listened to the children talking behind the house. But he avoided Mália Domingo's eyes. He felt he had fulfilled his obligation towards her, he was finished with her--she must be responsible for the rest herself. But,
nevertheless, he was afraid to see her eyes, afraid that
could change his decision, because he could still feel her
back against his chest and her hair against his chin as they
swayed and struggled through the yellow tambookie grass, with-
out talking, with the bicycle saddle and the dry chain protest-
ing, and the sun even more heavily upon them and on the lonely
veldt, and all the time, the silence hanging like a question
mark between them. He remembered the hot back and how defense-
lessly she had washed her body in the first light, that morning.

He wondered how it must feel to hold a gun tightly in
your hands and to really care, to hold a gun tightly--perhaps
a machine gun: that would be so much easier, a machine gun--
and to stand upright, to know it's important enough, it carries
real weight, and to pull the trigger, to feel the trigger vi-
brate against your thumb, and to rattattattattattattattattat
over the section of clear yard and into the pale Chevy and
into the tent, and the Mahala's stern and to tear the six
white letters and the meal storeroom, the pane with the green
fleck, every pane, every door, the rats in the roof, the
Makonda statuette with the hunched back and the sensa, the lan-
terns and the half empty, whiskey bottle, to rattattattattat,
everyone who advanced, everything, the khaki bush, the child's
paths, the damned sun itself, and the cicadas, Fernando, the
bicycle saddle, Mália, the scratching hens and the tray,
Albassini, to rattattattattat, to rattattattattat, for their
sake, for everyone's sake, until you are clean. Completely
clean.

And then to sleep. Just to sleep. To sleep.

But he knew he wouldn't get that far. He would never
have the courage; he would never dare. He would just stay
standing, and waiting, watching what happened, watching
what happened to him. He would not lift a finger; everything
had been activated, everything had been begun, and he could
see no other opening. Thus: doing nothing, he thought,
could also become an opening. Doing nothing could make
him more guilty than would a machine gun.

He looked at Albassini and wondered what Albassini was
thinking. Then he lifted his hands to look at his nails and
the movement frightened him. He sat quite still and looked
beyond his nails at the edge of the yard, at the house, and
listened to the children's talk and laughter somewhere. He
looked at his fingernails without moving his hands or head.
The ten fingernails looked back at him like blind eyes;
each had transformed and become ten eyes which looked and
listened together.

Then Albassini set his cup down and called over his
shoulder to Tombi. Delport did not hear her approach, but
she was beside him in a short time and Albassini said:
"This's doña Domingo. She'll be sleeping here tonight. You
must make a bed for her in the living room." Tombi nodded and Delport saw the black woman look stiffly at Mália and bend and pick up the tray. "She'll come with you," Albassini said. "Show her the house and bring her water; she'll want to wash."

Only then did Delport look at the girl for a moment, and her eyes appeared uncertain to him, and he looked away.

Tombi hesitated and Delport could feel the immediate tension between the two women. The black woman had waited for the white to stand up, she would not invite her.

"Go with her," João said to the girl and Tombi turned around and went, and Mália stood up and quickly followed, but only a few moments later.

"You must stay here tonight," João said.
And Delport asked, "Why?"
"It's safer here, amigo."
"What do you know about them, then?" Delport asked.
And Albassini shook his head.
"You know something," Delport said.

"I know nothing." Then Albassini stood up and gave Delport a beckoning wink. They walked around to the back of the house, beside the shriveled, little lemon tree with the faded, sweet blossoms. There was a rusty car body on blocks in the farthest corner of the yard and the mudguards and roof were white with dry hen droppings. They leaned against the body and Albassini said, "You must go with her when the Mahala leaves."

"And what about An and the child?" Delport asked.
"You must decide about them yourself."
Delport watched Albassini when he said, "I don't trust the girl, João."

But the older man just blew a cloud of smoke into the air as if to discard the distrust with it and said, "Just stay here."

"Why are you worried about me?"
And Albassini looked at him and asked, "Why are you worried about An and the child?"
"He is believed to have been at the house. Twice. While I was in the veldt."

"He was looking for you, possibly."

"He knew I wasn't there."

Albassini turned around and started to walk away slowly; Delport followed him. They walked in among the tall trees and Delport looked up at the yellow, pulpy branches and heard the sound of blowflies somewhere among the sickly blossoms. Then he heard João ask, "Who is he, anyway?"

Delport looked across the yard and could not see anyone. The yard was bare, quiet; it lay harsh and hot in the sun and baked, and the pair of poinsettias and the wild pawpaws stood tiredly in the sharp midday waiting for the night.

"I don't know," Delport said and stopped.

"Are you sure?"

"No."

Then Albassini pushed his pipe into his pocket and walked away between the trees, suddenly rapidly, in the direction of the huts.

Delport did not follow him. He looked towards the house as if expecting to see the girl somewhere, and after a while he saw her standing at a window. She stood and looked at him, and made him hope she would stay where she was. He went into the shadows of the trees and listened to the blowflies. There was a large chameleon on one trunk, yellowy-green and motionless, almost completely camouflaged, slowly moving its beady eyes, watching the yard, and Delport.

When Delport looked back between the stripped tree trunks at the window, the girl was no longer there. She was standing in front of the house uncertainly, looking in the direction where he had stood a minute before.

He went farther in among the trees and heard the blowflies among the sticky blossoms sounding like a wind blowing in the distance. And he went still farther into the trees, stopping once to listen, and after a while he saw the girl standing, not far from him, at the place where the chameleon was. But she was looking in another direction.

He did not want to go any farther, so he moved just a couple of yards to the right, underneath an umbrella thorn tree, and stopped, certain that she could not see him, and
wishing he could reach his bicycle to leave without anyone seeing him. He wanted to go home. He was tired of concerning himself with matters that did not involve him. He was tired of dancing to someone else's tune. He was tired of looking at nothing. He was deathly tired. He wanted to get to his bicycle and ride off. But there were footsteps somewhere and the girl appeared between the branches and came and stood next to him.

"Don't be afraid," she said.

"I'm not afraid."

"You must trust me." The tone of her voice reminded him of the afternoon in Caipemba when she had come to him among the flies. He heard her ask, again, self-conscious in her shyness, "Do you know how much it costs? To the third stop?"

"I trust you," he said.

She stood and looked at him, but he was sure she did not see him, she saw something behind him. He heard her say, "I want to help you."

"How?" he asked.

"Do you know who Bvekenya is?"

He shook his head. "Who is he?"

"I don't know."

And she came right up to him and began unbuttoning his shirt. He could smell her: she smelled like the red handkerchief in his room. She carefully undid the buttons on his shirt, very carefully, looking at him the whole time, then rubbed her hands across his chest, slowly, and pressed her cheek to his body. "I can hear your heart," she said. She put her hands under his shirt and stroked his back.

He wanted to push her away from him, but his hands lay large and lifeless on her body and there were too many cicadas and he remembered the beady eyes of the chameleon. Then her hands were somewhere between them and he saw her undoing the buttons of her dress, one by one, quickly, so that her breasts were naked against his sweating body, and her nipples hard against his skin.

"You can have me," she said, her voice anxious again, like that morning. "Take me, please take me, and forget about him, he hasn't a name."
Her lips were wet against his skin, and slightly open; he could feel every word against his body. He could feel her teeth; she bit him gently and held him tightly and he knew she was afraid. But he turned around, away from her, and heard a honey sucker call somewhere in the trees.

There was a small, round hole in the screen. He could see it clearly.

"I'm going now," he said.

"Where to?"

"I'm going home."

He walked back to the yard, past the stripped car, and passed by the shriveled lemon tree. He heard a child crying in the house, and when he went past a window Tombi and Tanda were talking lazily and muffled behind the hot window panes.

Delport took his bicycle and began to push it to the footpath. But João Albassini called from afar. He could not see him—it was just his voice from somewhere among the trees, behind the cicadas. He did not know whether he should direct himself towards Albassini, but after a period of pushing his bicycle backwards, his front wheel turned no more, his bicycle leaned motionless against him. He stood and waited and knew Mālia Domingue was hesitating three yards away from him, behind him, afraid and near him.

Everything felt very familiar to him. As the afternoon passed, every event, every gesture, every sentence said, every turn, seemed like a memory. And everything was just as far away from him as a memory, and everything he wanted to prevent or change, went unchanged on its way like something already past.

Albassini came and stood next to him and asked, "What are you doing now, amigo?"

"I'm going."

"Where to?"

"Does it matter?"

"You can use my motorbike," Albassini said, after a while.
"I don't want your motorbike."

"Take the motorbike."

Then the girl appeared on his other side. "Take the motorbike," she said. "I'll go with you."

"The bicycle is good enough." Delport still wanted to leave.

"You can get there quicker on the motorbike."

"Who says I want to get there quicker?"

Albassini swept his big helmet back on his head, chewed his loose denture, and stood and looked at Delport a while.

"I know where you're going," the girl said. Delport did not answer, and the girl said, "You're going back to the camp."

Delport did not answer. He was suddenly no longer sure and he was not in a hurry to decide. He would certainly decide along the way, he thought.

Then he heard Albassini say, "Look at the weather!"

There was weather coming. It would rain that night, probably before dark. A cloud bank hung in the east and the atmosphere was still and sticky.

Delport thought: perhaps she's right: perhaps I'll go back to the camp.

Then he began to push the bicycle, quickly, and, swinging his leg over the saddle, he rode off across the yard to the path, and along the path.

"Amigo!" he heard João call to him from behind. "Amigo--you mustn't!" He rode and heard João calling from even farther behind him, and did not look around or listen. It was two o'clock in the afternoon and too early for rain, but the rain was nearby. The air was as heavy as lead and completely still; he could feel how he rode against the air.

And he was in a hurry to get home.
The yard and the house had been abandoned. He called their names through the screen, through the windows. But there was nothing. No one. And when the rain broke on the roof, he sat in the living room, under the buffalo head, with the gun next to him, and drank the last of the whiskey.

It was six o'clock.

Later it was dark and, over the rush of the rainwater, he imagined he heard someone outside. He wanted to look out of the window, but could not see anything—except, briefly, the ripples in the tank, the pawpaw tree, the meal store-room's sickly-green door as the lightning flashed over the yard. Then he turned and the lightning was there again, and in that split second he saw Ritter's face against the wall, under the buffalo head. The empty glass was in his hand, and a moment later, he could hear it break against the man's forehead, and how the mask fell.

Then he was outside in the tepid rain and the lightning going on about him, dancing across the yard, and, with the gun in his hand, he ran in the blue light and could see the child's paths around the bougainvillaeas and between the wild bananas.

His bicycle was against the kitchen wall. He hung the gun over his shoulder and took hold of his bicycle, only then noticing the girl's clothes were still on the carrier. He pushed the bicycle along and climbed on, riding from the yard towards the footpath and past the huts into the darkness. His clothes were sopping wet. He could feel the water running down his cheeks and back, but the rain was hot and there was not much wind. It felt to him like sweat running off him.

At the Doisspruit the rain held up a little, and only as he pushed his bicycle through the water, did he really become aware that he had the gun with him, and wondered why he had brought it. There was no explanation.

If it were Ritter, he thought, if Ritter was waiting for him at the camp, if he leaned his bicycle against the trunk of the nkulu tree and turned to see Ritter standing against the truck or in the entrance to the tent—what would he do with the gun? Would he shoot? Or would he wait until Ritter withdrew his hand from his bush jacket pocket?
He took the gun from his shoulder, removed the magazine, and extracted the cartridges, and threw them, one by one, into the darkness, afraid that he would, perhaps, change his mind later. Then he put the gun down in the grass and pushed the bicycle away from the smooth dam wall onto the plain. And rode.

There certainly had been a moment of hesitation. He rode past the place where he had found Gonçalo. He remembered again the small hole above his servant's eye and he was regretful about the gun. In front of him an umber bird flew up out of the thick grass into the rain and disappeared into the darkness. He rode more slowly and there was a moment when he wanted to stop—but he was afraid to stop; he was afraid he would turn around. He knew: as soon as he brought the bicycle to a standstill he would turn around, although he knew, also, that he never would forgive himself for it.

He wanted to see Ritter. He wanted to see those eyes that stared at him, and to say, "Evening, Ritter. I've come. I wasn't afraid." He would rest his bicycle against a tree. Perhaps it would rain again. It would be dark. He would turn from his bicycle and perhaps there would be a little lightning. Then he would know: it's the moment for which he's waited almost a lifetime: he would see Ritter standing near him in the blue light. And he would say, "Evening, Ritter."

He said it out loud as he rode. While the rain began to fall again, softly and tepid on his face, from high, out of the darkness, he said it out loud, just to feel the words, just to know how they would lie in his mouth, "Evening, Ritter. I've come."

It did not rain hard. Perhaps it was just that he was so accustomed to the rain. He was barely aware of it. He listened to the whirr-click of the dry chain, to the creaking saddle, and tried to forget the strange silence of the yard and the child's paths and An's bed. The rain on the dark veldt was a soft, monotonous sound, like a continuous whisper.

After a while he entered the Karoo thorn trees and here and there he had to watch out for low, rain laden branches. Later he had to dismount from the bicycle and push it. But when the trees became sparser and the footpath opened, he still did not ride. He pushed the bicycle. He was tired.

Then the pale truck was in front of him in the grass.
He went on, thirty yards past the truck to the sail, and rested his bicycle against the wet trunk of the nkuhla tree and turned around. He could hear the rain running down the sail, but he could scarcely see the shelter. He stood and waited for the lightning or for a voice, for a movement, for a footstep somewhere in the grass. But there was nothing, absolutely nothing other than the lonely sound of the rain.

He walked around the shelter, stopped again and listened and then walked through the grass to the truck. The trailer flap was closed and he tapped it gently with his hand a few times. There was no response. "Is anyone here?" he asked and knocked again against the roof. Then he walked around to the cabin. The seat was askew, as he had left it, and the door on the driver's side still partly open.

There were plovers on the plains; he could hear them calling restlessly and it was an unpleasant and lonely sound. He looked towards the plains and their persistent calling, and later he could see them whirling up from the pale grass near the stream and sweep away over the crouching trees.

He went back to the shelter and looked for a place at one corner to open it up, but quickly let his hand drop. A cup, or something, fell from the table inside.

"Roberto?" he could hear the girl ask softly from the shelter. He could hear she was afraid.

He waited.

"Roberto, is it you?" And then, after a while, more softly, less certainly, "Delport?"

"Yes."

A few moments passed before she said, "Entre!"

He looked for the loose side of the tarpaulin, again, opened it and entered.

It was dark inside. He could not see her and he did not move, his fingers still on the flap, and said, "Evening."

"Evening."

He could hear from her voice she was near him, to his right.

"Why is there no light?"

"I was frightened."
"Do you have matches?"

"I've just a blanket on," she said. "My clothes are wet."

He did not move.

"You took my dry clothes away with you. On the back of your bicycle."

"They're also wet."

"Why did you come back?" she asked. "You shouldn't have."

"I didn't know you'd be here."

"I couldn't stay there. I didn't want to."

He sighed and moved forwards, struck a chair, felt for it and turned it around, and sat down.

"Was there nobody here?" he asked, eventually.

"No."

"Did you walk here?"

"No. He brought me."

"João?"

"Yes."

He heard her behind him, felt her touch him. And he was afraid. He was suddenly no longer sure if it was she who had touched him. But when he felt her hand on his head, he was sure it was she. She took him by the shoulder and said, "You're wet."

"I'm tired," he said.

"Where were you?"

"I think I was at home."

"Why did you come back?"

"There's no one at the house any more."

"Have they gone?"

He could see An lying under the mosquito net.
Then, when she spoke again, her face was near his head. He could feel her breath on his cheek. "Are you afraid?" she asked.

"Yes."

"But you came back?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I wanted to come and make sure."

"Of what?"

He thought for a while, tried to think, and then said, "I can't believe I really have anything to do with all of this business."

"Perhaps you have."

"But I haven't done anything."

"That doesn't matter."

"Really?"

"I don't know."

It rained hard, but while they spoke he tried to hear if he could, perhaps, hear something outside above the rush of the water.

"I talk," he said. "All the time I try to explain why I did this or that and all the time I know I am only trying to explain because I--because it is I who did it. A person must be sure why he does certain things. But I..."

"You don't really know."

"No."

The rain came in waves; sometimes it was overpowering and sometimes it was but a fine trickle on the shelter. When it rained hard, they did not speak, just listened to the noise.

"I really don't understand it," he said once.

"What?"

"You must explain it all to me. Right from the beginning."

"About me?"
"About us both. And about Bvekenya. About everything. Tell me everything, again, right from the beginning."

"Why?" she asked.

"I've managed to confuse something."

She did not answer, but after a moment he could hear her shuffle in the dark. He could hear matches and then there was a yellow flame in the darkness; he could see her hand, the edge of the blanket, her eyes as she pulled the lantern closer and lifted the chimney to light the wick. The light grew soft and brown around them, and she drew the blanket tightly about her and went and sat at the corner of the table on the other chair. The table was next to him and he rested his arm on it.

She did not look at him.

His hand was brown and lifeless in the little bit of light and his nails were dull.

"Let's pretend," she said.

"What?"

"Let's pretend there's no one else."

"How do you pretend that?"

"Just as you pretend anything else," she said. "It's easy to pretend."

"I've already seen," he said, "Just how easy it is for you."

She looked at him and her face was soft in the light. He could see the lantern reflected in her eyes.

"You pretended that you were innocent and lonely and left in the lurch."

"I pretended that at first and then stopped. I was frightened."

"And now you want to pretend that again?"

"No."

"You want to pretend there is no one else."

She remained silent and said nothing.

"Tell me about him," he said. "About Bvekenya."
"What should I tell?"

"Is he old?"

She looked away and said, "I don't know how old he is."

"He must be nearly fifty."

"He's older," she said, her face still turned away. "You wouldn't know him. He's lost one leg and he has trouble walking, and he doesn't see well any more."

"Ritter?"

"I don't know who Ritter is," she said and looked at him again quickly. "I'm talking about Bvekenya."

"He has long, fair hair which sometimes hangs over his eyes..."

She shook her head.

"No?"

"He has almost no hair at all." She swept her hand over the back of her head. "Just a little grey hair here."

They remained silent and listened to the rain, sitting together and staring. Later she stood up; a tarpaulin lay on the ground and she sat down on it, the blankets drawn tightly about her.

Moths collected around the lantern's hot glass; they came out of the tarpaulin folds, from under the table, and fluttered around the light, around the kettle burned black and the dirty cups on the table, about their faces.

"There's another blanket on my chair," she said, "if you get cold."

He pushed both his arms across the leaf of the table. There were still a few loose, shiny drops in the hair around his wrists. "Do you think they'll still come?" he asked.

"I don't know."

Then he turned the lantern lower and let his head sink onto his arms. And listened to the rain.

He dreamed he saw the yard and the house. The pawpaw tree was quite still in the rain and the bougainvillaeas' loose shoots hung down low under the heavy drops. The radio repeated the code signal over and over again--he could hear it from the storeroom and from the back, in the kitchen:
monotonous, like the cry of a bush lourie from somewhere out of the wilds of Africa. He listened to the code signal and saw the green fleck on the window and the Makonde statuette which staggered under the balled-fistlike hunched back, straddling the eleven carved Swahili words, so carefully translated by Rodrigue. "We are two. I and I. We wrestle each other. Even to the death." Four Swahili sentences: the first three a little longer: three words each, and the fourth, two words. He sat at the table on the back porch and watched the earwig which was sitting on top of the door frame, a few centimeters from the small piece of loose whitewash. An came from the dark living room and appeared in the doorway with blood on her crumpled petticoat. She wanted to talk to him, but she could not.

Then he was inside the shelter and he lay with the girl, both of them naked. And someone pulled the tent flap open. It was light outside and he could see Ritter in the opening. He looked completely different. He struggled to stand on his wooden leg; his skin was as brown and hard as leather and his face was covered with small creases. He was a small person and thin, and his long hair was thin and grey.

He wanted to talk to Ritter but he could not. He saw Ritter draw a sword from his belt and the sun flashed momentarily, from the shiny blade--only briefly, like lightning. He began to throw cartridges at Ritter, slinging them one at a time at his forehead. They bounced off his forehead, and Ritter did not blink his eyes once.

Later when he awoke, there was just a small blue flame left at the lamp's wick. When he tried to turn it higher it just flickered a while, and died.

He looked for matches, but heard her somewhere in the darkness say, "The oil is used up."

"Aren't you asleep?"

"No."

"Is there any more oil?"

"In the truck."

He listened and it was still raining.

"Why aren't you asleep," he asked.

"You're not asleep either."

He stood up and stretched himself. The tent flap was closed and it was stuffy. But his body was stiff and his clothes hung clammy against his back and around his legs.
The plovers were still somewhere out in the rain nearby, and he wondered what made them so restless. When he opened the flap and looked out, later, part of the sky had cleared and it was cooler outside; the night was fresh and he could feel a little wind blowing from between the trees.

He remained standing in the opening and listened to the stream, to the plovers, and thought of An, of the child, of the girl trying to go to sleep on the ground behind him. The roof of the pale truck shone a little in the rain with some light reflected from the night.

It would come to nothing, he thought. The night would pass and the sun would rise. It would be a clear day and the birds would sing and perhaps impala would graze on the plains in the early morning and later they'd drink water below the rock ledges and he wouldn't understand why he'd expected anything.

The rain was lighter, and after a while he went outside and stood in the dark and listened. He could hear the stream. He thought: the water would be in the river by sunup; in a week it would enter the sea and vanish, be lost—no one would know of it again. It would follow the same route by which he had come there; it would be taken into that large womb from which Ritter had emerged dripping that night at Ballito.

Delport walked away from the tent and stood in the shadows and listened to the drops dripping from the leaves. He remembered An lying under the mosquito net, soaked in sweat, her hands clamped between her knees. And the child who looked at him distrustfully, turned, disappeared into the darkness, and laughed softly from far off. The child was standing in the dark by the mosquito net staring at the pale, convulsive body between the sheets which shrieked and clutched her shoulders.

He stood outside for a long time, until the leaves scarcely dripped any more, and there was nothing to be seen—where the sky in the north had been clearing, earlier, the night began to sink into it and the few stars showing began to disappear, one by one. Then it was completely dark and he had to look hard for the shelter. He walked into a chair and stopped still. Then she lifted the flap and asked, "Que horas sao?"

"I don't know," he said.

He bent down and felt around in the dark, and touched her face.

"You must sleep," she said.

He sat on his haunches beside her.
"Will they come?" he asked.

"I don't know."

He lay on the tarpaulin, on his stomach, his chin on his arms, and looked out beyond the flap into the darkness. And she moaned softly and rolled over on her back up against him, her head on his elbow.

Then he said, "Mália."

He could feel her slowly turning her head towards him.

"What'll we do if they don't come?"

"They'll come."

"When?"

"I don't know."

He closed his eyes and felt the ground swaying very slowly under him.

Later she stood up and he could hear her pour water and drink it. Then she came and lay near him again.

They lay like that for a long time and listened to the night grow quiet, and still quieter, until there was no sound other than their breathing. He still felt that the ground was swaying a little under him; it was as if the ground and the dark swayed together. He put his hand under the blanket and stroked her, over her hip and her shoulder, over her arm, across the soft rise of her breast, and felt himself drifting on something, he drifted away from her, away from his own body, until he was somewhere against the roof of the shelter and he could look down on himself and on her as they lay together in the dark.

She said, "Try to love me."

And he waited for something in him to answer, but his hands were heavy and he could not think.

"There's nothing else," she said.

His lips were in her hair and he could feel the shape of her skull with his lips. "Why did you come here?" his lips asked her. "In the first place."

"Try to hold me tightly," she said. "Hold me tightly and don't ask questions, please. Don't think. Don't be afraid."
"I don't really know why you came."

"It's not important."

"I want to tell you about Ritter," he said. "Have I ever told you about him?"

"Tell me about yourself."

"It's exactly the same."

"Tell me then. Just talk. I don't want to sleep. I just want to listen to you. I want to hear what you say."

"I want to tell you about Ritter."

"Tell me about him."

"I used to love her."

There was still no sign of light. The day looked a long way off and there was nothing to tell.

"I thought it would be very easy. I didn't know anything about love."

"Hold me tightly," she said.

"Many times we lay, so, at night, and talked and sometimes stayed silent and waited, and we didn't know what we were waiting for. I didn't want to leave that time. I didn't want to let the child be taken away. I didn't know why I should run away from someone. I didn't want to. I didn't want to be here tonight. I don't know why I am here."

She lay perfectly still, a while, and then said, "You're not talking."

"What could have happened to him, do you think?" he asked.

She did not answer.

The child lay outside on the patch of Bermuda grass and there was a small, round hole in the screen of An's door. She lay on her back with the sheet thrown aside from her body. He could see the dark spot on her breast and her arm hanging from the bed.

"Are you asleep?" he asked.

She did not answer. She lay perfectly still and her body was cold.
"The wind's beginning to blow outside," he said. "Aren't you cold?"

The rain had stopped completely, and he could hear her breathing, softly, like the movement of a moth's wing. The stream was a monotonous noise and now and then a drop fell onto the shelter from a heavy leaf outside.

He lay and waited and saw the light systematically draw lines across the treetops; only vaguely at first—later much more vividly. And eventually he could make out the patchwork in the shelter. And the girl sighed, occasionally, moved a little occasionally, and then slept some more.

Then, with the sky somewhat grey, he too dozed off and heard a reedbuck whistle in his sleep, the wind moving in the grass outside. And when he awoke it was quite light, but there was mist around the trees and he could see the back wheel of his bicycle.

The child lay on the patch of Bermuda grass where he was busy making a path. The little wooden board was still in his hand and his one leg was somehow drawn back to his body as though defensively. There was a small, round hole in the screen of An's door, one meter above the floor, and a small hole in the crooked mosquito net, and in line with the two holes, a red spot on her breast, on top, the stained sheet. Her hand hung from the bed.

She was still sleeping when he stood up. It was cold and his body was stiff in his damp clothes. He stretched himself, sank on his haunches at the opening of the shelter and looked down at the shiny trail of an earthworm which patiently, slimily, crept over the ground.

He thought: that's the third sign.

The mist was white over the plains and the trees drifted heavily and lazily in it, like dead birds. He went down to the stream and washed his face and hands, thinking: there was the chameleon in the trees—that was the first sign; then the umber bird flew out of the grass; the earthworm was the third sign.

Then he walked back, past the shelter, in between the trees. His eyes felt gritty from too little sleep, and where there was no more mist, he turned and waited to watch the sun rise.
CHAPTER III

AFTERWORD

Impressionistic fiction is one of the several categories of fiction into which Mahala could be fitted. This novel is certainly noteworthy, in any event, as a work of modern Afrikaans literature. Because of the combination of unusual features in its composition, some of which are discussed below, Mahala may prove to be a novel which can stand alone on its own merits, not just as a work of the South African culture in translation.

The first aspect of the novel to be considered is its solitariness. Delport, the protagonist of Mahala, subsists in a barely populated tract of Africa, with few acquaintances and without true friends or a morale-sustaining family. Delport lacks the companionship essential to living in Africa's solitude which is harshly accentuated by his environment. With his nine years of seclusion, Delport is totally introverted and even paranoiac.

Mahala bears similarity to Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness, in the protagonist's probing into the "darkness of self," and in his exploring that self in the wilds of Africa. Another similarity is to be found in Mahala and Conrad's An Outcast of the Islands. Peter Willems, Conrad's protagonist,
has been unbalanced by loneliness and self-recrimination, despite his being in contact with people who could provide company and distraction. The same can be said of Delport. A particular aspect of Conrad's writing is his brilliant diction, his turn of phrase. Barnard also displays comparable descriptive skill, though perhaps not with the consistency of Conrad. Barnard's references to nature, to the elements, and to the scenery are graphic, as in, say, the opening of Chapter Five of Mahala. Elsewhere, his drawn out sentences and repetitive use of words emphasize the monotony, the loneliness, and the emptiness of the regular way of life in his story in a way that is similar to Conrad's style.

The mentioned emotions lead to consideration of whether there be a purpose to life. Samuel Beckett painfully depicts the futility of life in Waiting for Godot. Mahala has elements of this futility, but with the addition of a strong theme of predestination. Delport feels he can have no free will, but is subject to cause and effect, which form a chain for him, that is continuous as well as binding.

Another powerful aspect of Mahala is Barnard's use of the stream of consciousness. James Joyce, one of the first to present the stream of consciousness technique, demonstrates it in his A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. But unlike Joyce, Barnard does not present his protagonist's thoughts of an event at the time of the event's being described. Barnard relapses into times immediately or remotely preceding the time of the thoughts' occurrences. Further, Joyce's scenes often
have distinct time discontinuities between them. Barnard's protagonist, however, is almost invariably brought back to his present events after a thought lapse, so the story moves forward again without gaps in its time frame. Some of Delport's streams of consciousness flow in times of the near past, several days before, and some in the relatively remote past, nine years, and more, before. Barnard's stream of consciousness differs substantially from Joyce's application of it, then, particularly in the continuity and discontinuity of the stories' present tense, and in the actual tenses of the streams themselves.

An ingenious manipulation of time to form a component of structure is presented in *Mahala*. The past is exposed, a piece at a time, and in no way sequentially. This use of time can create some difficulty for a reader, for reference points and linkages are often widely separated. A reader can, in fact, become confused about a past time-period. The distant past is not distinct from the immediate past--the streams of consciousness are not easily distinguished from the past tense used for the story itself. The two levels of past tense are synchronized by thought association in a number of important episodes, so that only by careful deliberation can the real past tense be correctly discerned by a reader.

The stream of consciousness does closely connect the several stages of past tense, however. Cause and effect are revealed gradually and steadily, but with planned randomness, so that they develop a framework for Delport's then current situation and outlook. The events of the book's present--
five days that are critical to Delport, but trivial to a disinterested party—are stretched on this time framework as a study in human action and reaction. There is no natural ornamentation; there are lonely, unspoiled expanses coupled with an oppressive, unrelenting climate.

Various duels are fought against this backdrop. The protagonist, Delport, struggles with Ritter, his alter ego, whom he injures and from whom he then flees. That Ritter is Delport's other self emerges from Barnard's manipulation of the curious Janus-like mask, which makes clear that it is the double image of Delport. Ritter is the name of the other side of Delport; pursuer and pursued are identical, outer and inner selves are metaphysical twins.

The persecution mania which has caused the victim to seek relief in exile draws attention to a duel other than man versus self, namely man in conflict with destiny. The perspective of the irrevocability of the past, both in the events actually completed and in the future ones they spawned, is imposed on Delport. Briefly, now and then, he attributes his helplessness to predestination. In his squirming attempts to analyze his path, and in his backtracking efforts to find a clue to the cause-and-effect sequence of his life, Delport exhibits the futility of his resisting what he believes is already set down. Thus, Barnard's use of predestination forces his protagonist into a succession of attempts to evade his fate.

Delport does have one specious freedom—his thought. Here is another area of conflict continuing in, over, and
throughout the book: reality versus illusion. In varying degrees of reality, the past floats through Delport's mind, increasing the confusion between truths and hallucinations. Throughout the story hope is nurtured, in the reader as well as in Delport, that the main character will survive all that has happened. To achieve this end, Delport's real self would have to conquer his imagined existence, resolutely and finally. Even this hope is made to appear questionable at the end, as Delport is left with, perhaps, greater self-delusion than before. However, in the closing passages, two extremes of Delport's time frame, his present and his past, are brought together. The book ends with time spiralling centripetally, like a gyre. Delport may be said to be shaking off illusion and waking to reality. All these conflicts, together with the several other aspects of style mentioned, may be distinguishable separately, but they are all closely intermeshed and interdependent and mutually reinforcing.

Also contributing to the literary strength of Mahala is its imagery. First to be noted is the riverboat of the book's title. The Mahala is the lifeline between Caipemba and Lotsumo, and all intermediate points along the river joining them, in the Southern African country of Mozambique, apparently. The Mahala is the real link between Delport, in his "sanctuary" from reality, and the outside world. Little about the Mahala, its captain, Rodrigue, or the center of activity of the area, Caipemba, is attractive to Delport. Yet the craft, floating mystically out of the river haze, reflected intangibly in the
water, is his real and symbolic link with actuality. Delport cannot sever himself from the real world. Periodically he needs supplies from the trading center; occasionally he needs the company of Rodrigue. He reacts immediately when he hears the Mahala's horn through the morning mists; he hurries from the forest, wrapped in his imagination, to meet his contact with reality. The escapist is not really free.

Barnard has written of a fugitive, held prisoner by fate. In his servitude, the captive reaches for the how and the wherefore of being. With his thoughts he is confined, enfolded in the deafening silences of forest and plain. The unrelenting, impersonal expanses of wild country are the prisoner's enclosure and feelingless keeper. At the end of the story, it can, perhaps, be concluded that Delport glimpses a better future, that hope should never be completely relinquished.

The damp, oppressive atmosphere of the jungle captures something of the brooding spirit of the continent itself. Added to this are descriptions of the relentless climate and of the vast, untamed spaces. Africa is depicted as being so expansive and powerful a wilderness that human incursions are neither substantial nor durable in consequence. Barnard offers Africa as resolute, independent, perhaps mysterious, but permanent, each quality antithetical to a mere man— and to mere Man.

Mahala provides substantial material for papers on imagery and symbolism. Allegory is probably most clearly evident. In its allegorical and literal aspects, the imagery, the
style, the tone, the story itself, were not difficult to translate. This English version of *Mahala* is, as any translation should be, a close and faithful rendering of the original. Though equivalent words are listed in a bilingual dictionary, it is usually impossible to make sense merely by providing tabulations of corresponding words. Thus, literal word for word translation is seldom desirable. The full feeling and implication are indigenous to the words of a specific language; only approximations of emotions, and these to varying degrees of precision, are possible.

A translator must make a choice, then. On the one hand, the depth and content of the material to be translated must be revealed, assuming the translator can grasp it fully, by using the facilities and qualities of the second, the "target" language, assuming that the translator has full command of this language also. If this approach is to be adopted, the translated work can differ to an appreciable extent from a literal translation.

The other choice open to a translator is a strict adherence to the factual material of the original with little regard for the abstract, for the presentation of feeling or mood, or for searching for similar idiom in the target language. Obviously both modes of translation deviate from the original work: more evidently, the degree of deviation of either will vary according to the competence or, perhaps, motivation of the translator. As examples of the two approaches, the following works, both translations from
Russian to English, for a sound basis of comparison, are offered. First, a translation with as full a transmission of the abstract, the moods and emotions, and of the style in the original as possible, would be exemplified by Sidney Monas's translation of Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. The other category, by contrast, would include the Max Hayward and Mouya Harari translation of Boris Pasternak's *Dr. Zhivago*. The former is an example of meaningful translation; the latter of overly literal translation.

Descriptions of the country and nature of Africa, however, do require careful diction. Afrikaans words and phrases can often inherently convey the flavor of the country and the prevailing atmosphere with more startling clarity than would the precise English equivalent. The versatility and scope of the English language, however, usually permits an appropriate parallel to be found.

If a translator gains by being very conversant with the original and the target languages, he gains even more by having both languages as his native tongues. Full benefits of the first mode of translation mentioned above are enhanced by this intimacy with both languages. In South Africa, Afrikaans and English are both official national languages. A South African probably experiences less difficulty translating from one to the other of these languages accurately than any other national translating most other pairs of languages. It is felt that *Mahala* has been accurately translated in both the active and abstract senses.
Thus rendered, the many facets and attributes of Barnard's *Mahala* should enable it to stand proudly in the ranks of works translated into English.
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