

"A tremendous book about candor, honor, and race, a witness-bearing act of the rarest courage. No one who reads it could ever forget it."—MICHAEL HERR

# TOMY TRAITOR'S HEART

A SOUTH AFRICAN  
EXILE RETURNS TO  
FACE HIS COUNTRY  
HIS TRIBE, AND  
HIS CONSCIENCE

RIAN MALAN

“A scorching exposé . . . Malan has taken truth-telling to the most grueling degree imaginable.”—*San Francisco Chronicle*

“This book grabs you by the throat and will not let go. It is mesmerizing. It will profoundly alter whatever you have felt about South Africa—and mankind.”—Peter Maas

“One of the most exhilarating books to come along in years. . . . Malan’s overview is so thorough and compelling that you can hardly bear the pain of it. But his writing is so awesome you wish it would never end.”—*Details*

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“A beautifully written book . . . Malan makes us better understand what has happened and what needs to be done.”—*Houston Chronicle*

“A book that speaks with eloquence . . . It condemns with uncompromising moral persistence the racism underpinning white South African society, but never resorts to simple stereotyping, naïveté, or liberal cant, or easy outs. It is an honest book by an honest man.”—*Chicago Sun-Times*

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—William Finnegan, *The New York Times*

“Eloquent, sometimes almost shrill, but never glib . . . Malan loves his country even as he mourns its history, loves his family even as he deplores the society they helped create.”—*Newsweek*

“*MY Traitor’s Heart* is a book with many things to teach us. . . . A seeker of the truth, [Malan] takes us along in this excellent book as he discovers the complexities of his troubled land.”—*USA Today*

“A parable of terror and beauty . . . the stuff of tragedy, acted out in blood.”

—James Dick

“An honest and complicated contribution to a centuries-old discourse on colonialism.”—*The Village Voice*

“Malan proves himself a masterful writer, perhaps because he is so obviously honest and writing from the heart.”—*The Oregonian*

“One of the most coldly realistic yet compassionate accounts of contemporary South Africa. . . . Malan’s colloquial tone gives this heartfelt confession of his fears, contradictions, hopes, and love a compelling immediacy.”

—*Kirkus Review*

“Malan is singularly well placed to tell the tale of how his country closed its eyes to the march of history.”—*New York*

“This is not just another book about South Africa. It is the corrosive, self-doubting, anguished and courageously brash testimony of a young Afrikaner appalled by the intellectual and emotional dishonesty involved in taking on the stance of liberal or radical white freedom fighter.”

—*The Christian Science Monitor*

“Malan’s book raises hard questions about race that most white leftists both in and outside of South Africa have preferred not to face.”—*The Nation*

“Although Mr. Malan’s true-life tales are as ironic and uncanny as Isak Dinesen’s stories, his voice ultimately offers no distractions and almost no consolation, and this book becomes an act of human patriotism in the face of evil choices.”—*The New Yorker*

“*My Traitor’s Heart* is the thoughtful and thought-provoking account of a man who has come to terms with his country. It is not merely a parable of terror; it is a candle that has been lit to light the obliterating darkness.”

—*The Star* (Minneapolis)

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HIS COUNTRY, HIS TRIBE, AND HIS  
CONSCIENCE

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RIAN MALAN



GROVE PRESS  
*New York*

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For the forgotten legions of the South African center, for my parents, and for Creina, who took the enormous risk of trusting me.

# **BOOK I**

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## **LIFE IN THIS STRANGE PLACE**



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*How do I live in this strange place?*

—BERNOLDUS NIEMAND, from the  
Boer reggae song “Reggae Vibes Is Cool”

going to lay this all upon you and trust that you're a visionary reader, because the grand design, such as it is, is going to be hard for you to see. I know you're interested in my ancestors, so I guess I should begin at the very beginning. I am a Malan, descendant of Jacques Malan, a Huguenot who fled the France of Louis XIV to escape being put to the sword for his Protestant faith. He sought refuge among the Dutch, only to be put aboard ship in 1688 and sent to the Dark Continent, to the rude Dutch colony at the Cape of Good Hope. Jacques the Huguenot was the first Malan in Africa. In the centuries since, a Malan has been present at all the great dramas and turning points in the history of the Afrikaner tribe.

Jacques tamed the Cape and planted vineyards. His sons built gracious gabled homesteads in the lee of Table Mountain. His grandson Dawid the Younger ran off to the wild frontier in 1788, where he fought the savage Xhosa and took part in Slagtersnek, the first Afrikaner rebellion against the British.

Hercules, son of Dawid the Younger, led the third wave of Voortrekkers into the heart of Africa. In February 1838 he sat in the kraal of the great king Dingaan, watching a huge Zulu army wheeling back and forth on the plain. The sun glinted off thousands of spears. Feet thundered in unison. Clouds of dust rose into the sky. And then Dingaan cried, "Kill the wizards," and Hercules and his seven companions were murdered—stakes driven up their anuses, skulls smashed with stones, and the bodies left on a hill for the vultures.

Once the killing was done, King Dingaan pointed, and his army set off for the north at a run. They ran all day and most of the night, and it was still dark when they fell on the main Trekker party. The attack was unexpected. Men were disemboweled, women mutilated, and the brains of small children dashed out on wagon wheels. In all, 530 Trekkers died that dawn, in a place we still call Weenen—the Place of Weeping.

In the aftermath, the survivors drew their wagons into a circle on the bank of a nameless river and made ready for the final battle. On its eve, they laid hands on the Bible and swore a covenant with Jehovah: If he granted them victory over the heathen, they would hold true to his ways forever. A Malan was there—Jacob Jacobus Malan, brother of the fallen Hercules. As the sun rose on December 16, he saw something amazing: rank upon rank of Zulu warriors sitting silently on their haunches, waiting for the mist to rise. Two hours later, the river was red with black blood, and it was no longer nameless: It was Blood River. Mountains of Zulus lay dead on the battlefield, but not a single Boer was slain. It was surely a miracle, a sign that God's will was ours.

So we remember Jacob Jacobus Malan and still honor his solemn covenant. We also remember his sons Jacobus and Hercules, who survived the Zulu wars, dragged their covered wagons over the mountains, and smashed the black tribes on the high plain. There, on conquered land, they established Boer republics, where white men were free to rule blacks in accord with their stern Jehovist covenant.

In 1881, Hercules Malan the second sat on an African hilltop watching another seminal event in the white tribe's bloody saga—the Battle of Majuba, turning point in our first war against the British. Kommandant Malan's soldiers were an undisciplined rabble of farm boys and graybeards, but they could drop a buck at a thousand yards, and every bullet counted. The redcoats were annihilated, and the British retired to lick their wounds. A few years later, however, gold was discovered on our land, and they came after us in earnest. In that next war—the Second War of Freedom—our forces were outnumbered nine to one. The largest army yet assembled on the planet rolled across our frontiers and occupied our towns. We fought on, though. A Malan was there, too: General Wynand Malan, the

bravest of the brave, leader of a guerrilla band that ranged deep into enemy territory. To crush our resistance, the British scorched the earth and put Afrikaner women and children in concentration camps, but General Malan fought on to the bittersweet end, taking a bullet on the war's very last day.

In the aftermath, we became a backward peasantry, despised by our British bosses and betters. But we rose again, with yet another Malan at the fore—Daniel François Malan. His Afrikaner National Party came to power in 1948, vowing to throw off the imperial British yoke and devise a final solution for the “native question.” This final solution was apartheid, a gridlock of more than a hundred laws designed to keep blacks and whites forever separate and to ensure, not at all coincidentally, that blacks remained in their God-ordained place, hewers of wood and drawers of water, forever and ever.

This fate was unacceptable to blacks, so they rose against us in earnest in 1976, in a rebellion that has never really ceased since. In this era, too, the destiny of the tribe is in the hands of a Malan—General Magnus Malan, minister of defense. There are those who say it is he who truly controls the country, through the awesome power of the white military, and through a network of secretive paramilitary entities called Joint Management Centers. In these troubled times, the name Malan is often heard on the lips of black comrades, in the chanted litany of those who will die when the day comes. I see them at the township rallies, thousands upon thousands of them, running to and fro in tight formation. Their feet thunder in unison. Their faces glisten with sweat and excitement. Dust rises. They cradle imaginary AK-47s in their arms, and chant, “Voetsek, Malan!” Fuck off, Malan! Fuck off! Fuck off! And then they wheel in formation and thunder away to the far side of some dusty township stadium, leaving me poised on a cusp of history.

There is only one war here, you see, the war that was and is and yet will be. I don't know how it will end, but I can tell you where it began. It began in the 1780s, on the eastern frontier of the old Cape Colony, and a Malan, inevitably, was there.

I found him in the national archives in Cape Town, buried in the index underneath a cryptic “M.” The entry referred to a trial held in 1788, but the felon's name was not revealed. He was just M. It was the only entry of its kind. I thought, here lies some secret, some truth long obscured, so I asked to see the records of this two-hundred-year-old trial. The story they revealed was myth made flesh, the destiny of a nation embodied in the fate of a single man.

On the outskirts of Cape Town, beside a four-lane freeway, stands a pair of whitewashed pillars and an imposing wrought-iron gate. Behind the gate, in a grove of oak and chestnut trees, lies the homestead Vergelegen, one of the finest remaining examples of an architectural style called Cape Dutch. The house is achingly lovely to the eye, a symphony of whitewashed walls, flowing gables, dark thatched wooden shutters and huge yellowwood doors that open on the cool gloom of tiled interiors. Two centuries ago, it was the home of one Dawid Malan, the man behind the M.

Dawid Malan was born in 1750, son of Dawid the Elder and grandson of Jacques the Patriarch. At the age of twenty-four, and by virtue of a shrewd marriage to his cousin Elizabeth, he became master of Vergelegen, then the finest estate in the entire Cape Colony. Vergelegen stood at the foot of the Hottentot's Holland Mountains, a day's horseride from the shores of Table Bay.

In Dawid's time, the Cape was already a tame, orderly place. Lions and elephants were a fading memory, and the yellow-skinned Hottentot tribes living there when whites first came had long since been driven off or turned into servants and herders. From his rooftop, Dawid would have looked out upon a breathtaking tableau of vineyards, golden wheat fields, whitewashed farmhouses, and purple mountains. In the distance, at the foot of Table Mountain, stood a great stone castle flying the flag

the mighty Dutch East India Company. Under its ramparts lay a bustling wharf where merchantmen bound for the Spice Islands of the Orient took on fresh food, water, and wine.

Above the castle, on the slopes of the mountain, stood a city of great beauty. Cape Town struck an early visitor as a place of “elegant and capacious dwellings,” inhabited by people of “general intelligence and cultured politeness.” Travelers were invariably astonished to discover so charming and civilized a settlement in such an unlikely place. In Cape Town, the gentry sported powdered wigs and danced the minuet in the castle’s ballroom. They built schools and churches, employed learned pastors and pedagogues. They had heard of Rousseau and Voltaire, and there were even some French Thinkers among them. Cape Town was a tiny outpost of Europe, an enclave of the Enlightenment on the foot of the Dark Continent.

In this community, in the year 1788, Dawid the Younger was a citizen of great substance. As master of Vergelegen, he was a rich man, owner of a score of slaves, twice that many horses, and more than fifty thousand vinestocks. His father was a candidate for a seat on the citizen’s council that advised the Dutch governor on matters of policy; his uncle, an elder of the Dutch Reformed Church. Dawid himself was a colonel in the Burger Dragoons, the citizens’ militia. He had an upstanding wife, four young children, and a neighbor named Jurgen Radijn.

Radijn was a German, a mercenary who had recently retired from the service of the Dutch East India Company and settled on an estate called Harmonie. Among Radijn’s many possessions was a slave girl named Sara, who gave birth that year to a son. Her master would normally have taken pleasure in this increase in his human flock, but this child was a half-breed, and that meant money out of his pocket: The children of slave and Christian had to be baptized, educated, and eventually freed. And Sara’s child, by the look of it, had surely been fathered by a Christian. Radijn was incensed. Someone had been tampering with his brood stock, so to speak. He demanded the man’s name, but Sara refused to answer. She swore to don a man’s clothing and run away if a hand was laid upon her. He then turned her face to the wall. Under the circumstances, there was little Radijn could do but keep a close watch on the errant girl and make sure that she remained henceforth chaste.

Late one night, Radijn’s wife was awakened by the barking of dogs. She looked outside and saw a shadow stealing across the courtyard below her window. She waited. A while later, two shadowy figures came out of the dark and disappeared into the door of the slave quarters. This was the moment Mother Radijn was waiting for. She gathered up her nightdress and tiptoed after them. In the slave quarters, she lit a taper and held it aloft. Sara was lying in her cot, feigning sleep. Mother Radijn was not fooled. She summoned the intruder forth. At that, a white man crawled out from under Sara’s bed and stood up, naked save for his stockings. It was Dawid Malan, master of Vergelegen. “Mother Radijn,” he said lamely, “this is not what you think it to be.”

For masters to sleep with slaves was not unheard-of, but it was done discreetly, furtively. It was a breaking of caste and, worse yet, a violation of Calvinist piety. So there was a minor scandal when Malan’s philandering first came to light, but it was nothing compared with what was to come. Dawid seemed obsessed with the slave girl, and refused to give her up. He took to lurking around Harmonie’s homestead, trying to catch a glimpse of her. He waylaid Radijn’s slaves in the fields and begged them to carry secret messages to her. It was outrageous. In the court case in which these doings were subsequently aired, witness after witness stepped forward to tell of their shock at Malan’s behavior and of the dire warnings of God’s punishment they had issued to him. Dawid scorned their advice, and his conduct became the talk of the colony. His wife kicked him out of her bed, the Church shunned him as a fornicator, and Radijn, in a final effort to put an end to the shameful affair, took the child

from Sara's breast and sent her to live with Jan de Vos, keeper of tolls on a distant mountain pass. De Vos was instructed to keep Sara indoors at all times, and Dawid Malan at bay.

The toll-keeper tried, but he had to leave his home from time to time. One day, a slave informed de Vos that something curious had happened while he was away. A white man had crept into his cottage, spoken to Sara, and then slipped quietly away. Who was it? The slave had no idea.

On the night of August 11, Dawid Malan rose from his bed and crept into Vergelegen's stables. He saddled two horses, loaded them with provisions, powder, and shot. And then he rode out into the night and started climbing the pass that led over the Hottentot's Holland Mountains and away from Cape Town. In his day, the pass was just a rough track that wound tortuously up the hillside, following a path worn centuries earlier by herds of migrating antelope. Near the stone cottage of the toll-keeper Malan whistled like a bird, and a woman materialized out of the darkness. Sara mounted Dawid's spare horse, and they rode on up the pass together.

It was a long and grueling climb, so dawn was probably breaking by the time they reached the mountain's crest. If his eyes were keen, Dawid might have seen a frenzied scurrying between the tiny farmhouses far below. Finding two horses missing, Elizabeth Malan had broken into her estranged husband's bedroom and discovered his bed unslept-in. She galloped over to Harmonie, tears streaming down her face, and told Jurgen Radijn, who instantly dispatched a rider to check on Sara's whereabouts. She, too, was gone; her guardian, the toll-keeper de Vos, was out on the mountainside with his flintlock and his dogs, searching for the spoor. Radijn's messenger wheeled and rode off to raise the alarm. The fugitives had to make haste.

Ahead of Dawid and Sara lay a cool, high plain called Overberg, the land beyond the mountains. They pushed on across it, riding as hard as they could. On the third day of their flight, an inquisitive militiaman barred their way, and Malan was forced to give a false name, and a false account of himself. He claimed to be Jan Nortjé of Cape Town, and introduced his dark-skinned companion as his wife. After that, they avoided farms and settlements, although a sharp-eyed widow spotted them and they skirted the town of Goudini. Beyond Goudini lay the Breede River. In Dutch, *breede* means "broad," and there was only one way to cross such a river—by ferry.

The ferryman, one Abraham Finnerholm, was surprised to see a well-horsed white gentleman on his landing. Such gentry seldom passed his way. Finnerholm couldn't help asking his name. "I am Jan Nortjé," said the stranger. The ferryman asked his business, but the traveler gave no reply. All this was most unusual. The details lodged in the ferryman's memory, and when the pursuers galloped up to his landing a few days later he was able to give them an unmistakable description of Dawid Malan and the missing slave girl.

Beyond the ferry, Dawid and Sara drew away from the Cape, where nature was benign. The landscapes across which they now crawled were arid, and empty. The green grass of the Cape gave way to dust and rocks and thorns. The ridges above them were lined by spiny aloes, each as tall as a man, a watchful sentinel against the sky. They were drawing closer to the frontier, to Africa. There were few people, no permanent settlements. After about two weeks of hard riding, they came to a wide canyon cut deep into the earth by a muddy brown river. This was the Great Fish River, the Cape Colony's outermost frontier. Ahead lay the howling wilderness, full of wild beasts and hostile savages; behind, the scaffold for Dawid Malan, death by strangulation for his runaway slave lover.

Dawid's first life was over; he must have known he would never return to the Cape. The Dragoons were on his trail, but they would turn back short of the frontier and return to the castle with the evidence they had gathered. A trial would be held, and Malan found guilty in absentia of stealing

slave. The Council of Justice would issue a decree banishing him from the Dutch colony forever. His disgraced father would disown him, the authorities strip him of his rank in the burger cavalry, and his bitter wife attempt to have him declared dead. He had sacrificed everything for the love of a black woman.

That was quite something, I thought, a Malan forfeiting his birthright and all his worldly goods for the sake of a black slave—staggering, in light of the humiliations Dawid Malan's descendants would later inflict on their half-breed brothers and sisters. In a century to come, Afrikaners would claim that the so-called colored people were spawned in dockside brothels by seafaring white rabble, certainly not by Malans and their pious Calvinist ilk. It was a Malan, the dour and bloodless Daniel François Malan, who rose in Parliament to promulgate the laws that made it a crime for blacks to sleep with or marry whites. The same Malan stripped Dawid and Sara's colored descendants of their right to vote, evicted them from white suburbs, and chased them out of white schools. No wonder this tale had been buried in the archives, the trail to it obscured by that cryptic M. The honorable Daniel François was linked by blood, and even love, to the colored people he so cruelly scorned.

Those moldering court documents made it clear that Dawid's feeling for Sara was no mere fit of lust. Dawid was an educated man. He knew the law. He must have calculated his losses before saddling his horses, and known the price he would pay. Yet he went ahead with it, stole away with a black slave girl to brave an uncertain future in a terribly dangerous place. To go that far, he must have loved Sara, and that love must surely have opened his heart to other black people. So it seems fair to say that Dawid Malan left the Cape a racially enlightened man. And then he crossed the river and disappeared into Africa, where he was transformed, as all white men who went there were transformed.

I shall tell you the details of that transformation in due course, but first we must consider the nature of the wilderness into which Dawid and Sara had fled. In maps of the time, the territory behind the Great Fish River was shown as a void. Nobody really knew what was out there, save wild beasts and savages and wild white men in animal skins. It was a place of nightmarish harshness, hot and dry, with meager, shallow soils and, in places, grass so sour that cattle balked at eating it. It was stricken by periodic droughts and hailstorms, infested with lions and leopards. Huge swarms of locusts darkened its skies and crossed its rivers on bridges of their own dead. Migrating antelope flowed across it in herds so huge that they took days to pass a single point.

The white men along and beyond the frontier lived as nomads, moving from place to place as their grazing wore out. They were simple to the point of idiocy, naming each feature of the landscape for its characteristics: the Great Fish River, the Broad River, the Snow Mountains, the River of Elephant. They were desperately poor, ragged, and mostly illiterate, and their Dutch was degenerating into the vulgar dialect that would later be called Afrikaans. They lived by the gun, and according to the Old Testament. Its tales of tribes wandering in the desert spoke to them, and so did its notions of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

Since straying from the Dutch-ruled colony a century earlier, these nomadic Boers had extracted many teeth. At first, the country they moved into was populated by yellow-skinned races that disintegrated in the face of white advance. Those Hottentots not wiped out by smallpox were made servants; and as for the stone-age Bushmen, they were regarded as dangerous vermin. The Boers saw no distinction between domestic cattle and wild game and preyed on both alike, so they were hunted like wild dogs, and if caught, slaughtered; no one was spared save those women and children who might be tamed and put to work as chattel. It was cruel, but then the Bushmen themselves had the

cruel hearts of beasts of prey. They would hack a limb off a living cow and eat it before the bellowing animal's eyes. ~~Once the Bushmen had tasted the white man's retribution, they began to retaliate in kind.~~ A Boer who didn't kill one when he had the chance was likely to collect a poison arrow from behind a rock, or find his family butchered when he returned from hunting.

And so the Bushmen were dying out, retreating into the deserts and mountains, but the blame for their sad fate did not rest with the white men alone. Others persecuted them, too. These were the Xhosa, the magnificent and warlike African tribe that was migrating slowly down the east coast toward the Cape even as the Boers advanced to meet them. Like the Boers, the Xhosa had driven the weak before them, and had never met a foe sufficiently powerful to contain them. In 1778, the Boers and Xhosa came face to face along the Great Fish River. Both races owned vast herds of cattle, and that alone doomed them to clash. The fact that the Xhosa were savage and heathen in white eyes merely made it easier for whites to kill them.

The Xhosa had no writing and few tools, not even the wheel. Their incomprehensible tongue is full of strange clicks. They went naked save for a fringe of beads and a cloak of animal hide. They daubed their bodies with red clay, and traded cattle for wives. They worshiped their ancestors and blamed illness and misfortune on witches, who were routinely smelted out and put to a hideous death. They left their old to die in the bush, bled the vaginas of young girls to cool their lust, and twirled thorn twigs up the rectums of ailing babies to bleed the bad blood out of them. In the words of an Englishman named Steadman who hunted and explored beyond the frontier in the early nineteenth century, the very sight of the Xhosa produced in a white man "the most appalling sensations."

On the other hand, early travelers were scarcely more complimentary of the Boers who inhabited the void beyond the Great Fish River. Most concluded that they were sliding back toward barbarism, each generation growing wilder than the last. When a stranger came among them, they swarmed over him like curious savages, fingering his fancy European clothing, gaping in awe at his modern guns and possessions, asking childlike questions. The Boers, observed the botanist Lichtenstein, were rendered "no less laughable than dangerous" by their "ignorance and crude conceptions." As to how the Boers felt about him, the record is silent. Very few of them could read or write.

And so white men squared off against the Africans, and in 1779 the war began—a war without end, a war that just *was*, and still is, for what started then is still not finished today. The Xhosa rustled cattle, and the Boers' bloody reprisals usually turned into outright raids of plunder. Capturing Xhosa cattle, one white frontiersman noted, was easier than breeding your own. On both sides, men died in droves, but the black bodies were always stacked deeper, because the white men had guns. The strategy was to ride within range of the Xhosa, fire a volley, and gallop off before the sprinting warriors were close enough to hurl their spears. It was an ignoble form of warfare, but then the Boers could ill afford casualties: There were scarcely five hundred able-bodied white men and boys on the frontier in the 1780s, ranged against a hundred thousand Xhosa. Neither side was strong enough to win an outright victory, so the line of battle swept back and forth across the Great Fish River for decades.

There were many such frontiers in the world at that time, but this one was unlike most others. All the Dutch really wanted of Africa was the land they could see from the battlements of Cape Town Castle. They had no imperial ambitions, no interest in the interior. Dutch governors seldom sent military expeditions to help the beleaguered frontiersmen. Instead, they sent bailiffs to collect the "lion and tiger" tax, the "pontoon" tax, and the quitrent on farmland. Most Boers resented paying taxes to a government that did little or nothing for them, so the taxmen invariably returned to the castle empty-handed. At one stage, there was talk of dispatching troops to tame the frontiersmen and

seize their taxes. It came to nothing, though. The governor was warned that if he sent soldiers, the Boers would kill half of them, salt their corpses and send them home with the survivors, “as earnest what they would do to any authority that should dare interfere with them.”

So the frontiersmen struggled on alone. In 1793, they drove the Xhosa out of the Zuurveld, a buffer zone separating black from white. Two years later, a British fleet sailed into Simon’s Bay, captured Cape Town Castle, and raised their flag over the Cape Colony. The Xhosa took advantage of the ensuing disarray to pour across the frontier in force, looting and pillaging all the way to Mossel Bay, almost three hundred miles to the south. More than half the Boer farms on the border were abandoned or destroyed. In the following decade, the Boers pushed the front line back across the Great Fish River. In 1811, the Xhosa reoccupied the buffer zone. It went on like that for almost sixty years.

This then was the maelstrom into which Dawid Malan and Sara vanished in August 1788. Elsewhere in the world, great upheavals were taking place, new orders coming into being. In America, democracy was twelve years old. The French were poised to topple Louis XVI in the name of liberty, equality and fraternity. It was the Age of Enlightenment, but Dawid and Sara seemed to disappear into darkness.

I spent months in the Cape Town archives, reading the yellowed annals of those times, searching for clues to their fate. At first I found none, just chronicles of hatred received and hatred applied, of raids and reprisals and bloodshed. And then I started reading the chronicles of Slagtersnek, the first Boer rebellion against the British. Around 1806, the British installed a magistrate on the frontier, ordering him to impose upon it the rule of law. As the British conceived it, that meant justice for all, not only for white men. To the Boers, the very idea was abhorrent. Their concept of relations between master and servant, or Christian and heathen, arose from the Old Testament’s most stern and unforgiving passages. Read selectively, the Old Testament provided divine justification for the way they lived and the cruelties they inflicted on the dark-skinned heathen: “a whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool’s back.” The Boers found succor in such stern Old Testament injunctions. They found the New Testament less palatable, however, and some of them seemed to disregard everything in the Bible save the bit about stern punishment.

One such frontiersman was Frederik Bezuidenhout, a shameless fornicator who had a white wife, a black concubine, and a house full of half-breed children. Like many of his neighbors, Bezuidenhout was less a pious Calvinist than a creature of Africa, where the strong eat and the weak are eaten—beaten, as the case may be. In 1815, Bezuidenhout whipped a Hottentot shepherd named Booie. After the flogging, Booie took up his goods and vanished. A few weeks later, a horseman rode out to serve a summons on Bezuidenhout. Booie had been to see the British magistrate in Graaff Reinet and laid a charge against his white master.

The Boers did not accord servants, heathens, and blacks generally the right to do such a thing. When Bezuidenhout heard why the horseman had come, he “flew up, with fists swaying to and fro,” uttering “curses and invective” and declaring that he would sooner die than answer such a summons. The British magistrate ordered him arrested, but that was easier said than done. Bezuidenhout inspired “general dread” in the hearts of more civil men, and the magistrate’s *veldkornets*, his sheriffs, were too scared to set foot on his land. The stalemate dragged on for months, making the mighty British Empire look foolish and ineffectual. In the end, the magistrate had to dispatch troops to bring Bezuidenhout in.

True to his word, Bezuidenhout holed up in a cave with his musket and opened fire on the redcoats who slew him with a bullet in the heart. His death ignited a smoldering anti-British sentiment among



the frontier Boers. In the Boer view, British missionaries and administrators were siding with the enemy, interfering with their right to chastise and slaughter the dark-skinned heathen as they deemed necessary. The frontiersmen swore drunken vengeance over Bezuidenhout's coffin and, once it was laid to rest, rose up against the British. The rebellion that followed heralded the start of another war that continues to this day—the war of words and moral recrimination between Boers and other white men. In military terms, the Slagtersnek uprising was an utterly futile affair, soon put down by British troops. In the aftermath, the ringleaders were rounded up and put on trial in the town of Uitenhage.

And that is where Dawid Malan resurfaced—among the race-hating white savages in the dock, on trial for high treason. The man who abandoned his birthright for the love of a black woman had become what would one day be called a white supremacist, willing to die rather than accord black people equality before the law. According to evidence laid before the court, it was Malan who penned the rebels' insolent communiqués. He set the paper on the saddle of a horse and scrawled upon it with a quill pen. When the writing was done, the illiterate rabble peering over his shoulder asked, "Is it proper?" As a learned man, he was a figure of influence among the rebels. Indeed, the prosecutors singled Malan out as a man "of the most dangerous sort"—one of a triumvirate of white barbarians "who have never submitted to any authority, who have been the greatest part of their lives among savages, and are men of the most depraved morals."

I cannot tell you what became of Sara in the intervening twenty-seven years; she simply disappeared from the records, and her resurrected lover now had a white woman at his side, and a brood of strong white sons. Nor can I tell you what befell Dawid Malan in the void, what caused his heart to turn. All I know is that he was one man when he crossed the river into Africa and another when he reappeared, and that his transformation paralleled the transformation of his entire tribe, for that was what the Boers had become in their isolation: They had become Afrikaners, the white tribe of Africa, arrogant, xenophobic, and "full of blood," as the Zulus say of tyrants. They had their own language, their own customs and traditions, and a myth to light their way, a mystic Christian mission on the Dark Continent. They spoke of themselves as bearers of the light, but in truth they were dark of heart, and they knew it, and willed it so.

The Afrikaners lived in isolation, but rumors and fragments of ideas reached them from the outside world, borne by deserters and outlaws and missionaries. They heard of the American Revolution, and of the new philosophies sweeping Europe—of the Jacobin doctrine of liberty, equality, and fraternity, of Rousseau's concept of the Noble Savage, and of the Enlightenment, the civilized reinterpretation of the Scriptures upon which all this was based. They did not like what they heard. To them, such ideas invited a degree of moral introspection that could make men weak and doubtful. On the frontier, it was an eye for an eye, and then an arm for an arm, and a leg for a leg, or so the Boers believed, and who was to say they were wrong? There was nothing in the Xhosa's history of expansion and conquest that suggest that they were any more willing to love than the white man. *Bloed roep om wraak. Siyabiz igazi wetho*. That was a saying on both sides of the frontier. It means, "Spilled blood calls for vengeance." In such a place, or so the Boers believed, a weak and doubtful man would soon be a dead one.

And so, when rumors of the Enlightenment penetrated their wilderness, the Afrikaners considered them, consulted their Bibles and preachers, and finally reached a consensus: These new ideas presented a threat to their survival, and should be suppressed—not only in the world at large, but in their own hearts. Soon, many Afrikaners were calling themselves Doppers, after the little metal caps with which they snuffed out candles. They called themselves Doppers because they were deliberately and consciously extinguishing the light of the Enlightenment, so that they could do what they had

do in darkness.

There are many truths about Afrikaners, but none so powerful and reverberant as this willful self-blinding. It was the central act in our history, or so it seems to me. The men of Dawid Malan's generation were the first true Afrikaners; they were the mold, and all who followed were cast in it. They snuffed out the light, and we have lived ever since in darkness. We shit on the altars of Western enlightenment and defy the high priests who would have us behave in accordance with its moral tenets. It was so; it is so.

Dawid Malan was spared the gallows and died in 1824, but his spirit lived on. His sons' Great Trek of 1838 was essentially a flight from the light, from the enlightened policies of the British. The Voortrekkers drove into the heart of the Dark Continent, where no light penetrated at all, and there, on conquered land, they set up Boer republics in which blacks were ruled in accordance with the Dopppe principle. There was apartheid by another name in those republics, and apartheid of sorts in the era of British dominion. After Daniel François Malan came to power in 1948, there was apartheid in earnest, but it was really nothing new. It was the same old Dopppe principle, disguised in the language and strategies of twentieth-century totalitarianism.

It seems to me, looking back on history, that all of South Africa's agony is rooted in Dawid Malan's ancient act of self-blinding. The Dopppe spirit survived the centuries and finally blossomed as apartheid, and we are eating its poisonous fruit to this day. The Dopppe spirit manifests itself in everything my tribe has done to dark-skinned people: in repression and censorship, pass laws and job reservation; in the disfranchisement of our colored brothers and the razing of District Six; in the Sharpeville massacre and bloody Soweto uprising; in detention without trial and interrogation by torture; in the death of Steve Biko and the jailing of Nelson Mandela; and finally, in the shooting of black schoolchildren in township streets. It all leads back, in the end, to Dawid Malan and a law formulated on the far bank of the Great Fish River two hundred years ago: You have to put the black man down, plant your foot on his neck, and keep him that way forever, lest he spring up and slit your white throat.

What would you have me say? That I think apartheid is stupid and vicious? I do. That I'm sorry? I am, I am. That I'm not like the rest of them? If you'd met me a few years ago, in a bar in London or New York, I would have told you that. I would have told you that only I, of all my blind clan and tribe, had eyes that could truly see, and that what I saw appalled me. I would have passed myself off as a political exile, an enlightened sort who took black women into his bed and fled his country rather than carry a gun for the abominable doctrine of white supremacy. You would probably have believed me. You almost believed myself, you see, but in truth I was always one of them. I am a white man born in Africa, and all else flows from there.

*Socialism has done an invaluable service to humanity, and not the least to Christianity itself, by turning its searchlight on the evils of the existing system. We hope and pray that Christianity and socialism may be so guided in their future development that the deep yearning, the widespread movements, and even the passions and the violence of the age may prove to be but the birthpangs of a better social world.*

—DANIEL FRANÇOIS MALAN, architect of apartheid

I was born in 1954, a member of the tribe that upheld Dawid Malan's legacy, a citizen of the country ruled by it, and son of a man who believed in all. And yet, if you'd put it to my father that he believed blacks had to be kept down lest they leap up and slit white throats, he would have insisted that he thought nothing of the sort. He would have told you that his faith lay in something called grand apartheid, the overarching ideology that promised to make white South Africans and all their nine subject African tribes "separate but equal" in separate nation-states. In favor of this schema, he would have offered some fairly sophisticated arguments revolving around the awesome power of ethnocentricity and the apparent failure of the integrationist solution everywhere from Ireland to Armenia, from Chicago to Nigeria. My father had an uncanny ability to discern a moral basis to apartheid. In fairness to him, there was one, in the beginning, but it was betrayed in the year of my birth.

Soon after coming to power, in 1948, the government of Daniel François Malan set up a commission to establish what would be required to turn South Africa's bitterly poor and crowded tribal homelands into free and economically viable Bantustans. The Tomlinson Commission tabled its report in 1954, and it must have made disheartening reading for true believers in ethical apartheid. It said that vast tracts of farmland would have to be expropriated from whites and turned over to blacks. It called for massive investments in infrastructure, education, and industry. It concluded that it would cost at least a billion English pounds over the coming decade to make apartheid work—ten times more than the Malan government had planned to spend. This was far too high a price to pay for good intentions, of course, so the Tomlinson Report was buried. After that, separate but equal became an empty slogan, and apartheid was just another variant of the ancient Afrikaner doctrine of keeping blacks down.

Ah, but I knew nothing of such things in the year of my birth. When my eyes opened, I found myself in a split-level suburban house surrounded by similar houses, in a white suburb much like any other white suburb anywhere else in the Western world. My father worked for Total, the French oil company, and my mother taught at a school for the mentally retarded. Mr. Prior, who lived next door, worked for Volkswagen, and Mrs. Pretorius across the street was a primary-school principal. Our house had three levels. My mother, father, brother, and I lived in the top two stories, and the black servants lived at the bottom, next to the garage. I had two living grandmothers, and two dead grandfathers, who were pictures on the wall. One grandfather was wearing a broad ceremonial sash and topcoat and twirling his handlebar mustache. The other grandfather was sitting at a desk, brooding and smoking. His name was Stephanus Jacobus Malan, and he had died the year I was born.

Stephanus Jacobus Malan was said to have been a melancholy man. He had a smattering of education, rare for an Afrikaner of his era, and was known to quote Shakespeare and sing snatches of opera in his more buoyant moods. Mostly, though, he was melancholy. He would come home after work and shut himself into his study to drink brandy and read. There was always a cigarette in his

mouth. He didn't puff it, just let it dangle there, burning slowly, the smoke trailing up his cheek and over his squinting eye. After fifty years, the stream of smoke left an indelible yellow streak across his face. In the photograph, it looked as though someone had slashed his cheek with a knife.

Stephanus was the bookkeeper in a dusty sheep town called Calvinia, which lay in the semidesert Great Karroo—three hundred miles north of Cape Town and south of almost nothing. There were no blacks in Calvinia, only Afrikaners, “Boer Jews,” “Hottentots,” sheep, dust, and locusts. My grandfather married a Steenkamp, daughter of Piet Steenkamp, whose farm was almost as big as some European countries. They had five children, of whom my father, born in 1920, was the second eldest.

My grandfather Stephanus was a SAP—a supporter of General Jan Smuts's South African Party, which was in power at that time. General Smuts was that rare creature, a reasonable Afrikaner, an internationalist and a philosopher. He was also a segregationist and white supremacist, of course. Everyone was. Even the Communist Party deferred to Dawid Malan's legacy and organized under the slogan “Workers of the world unite and fight for a white South Africa.” In any event, my grandfather was a SAP, but Calvinia was no SAP town. It was the parliamentary seat of Dr. Daniel François Malan, leader of the Afrikaner National Party.

Dr. Malan passed himself off as a full-blooded Afrikaner nationalist, but his credentials were dubious. He sat out the Boer War in Holland, where he was a student, and later returned to South Africa with a head full of exotic philosophies. In many ways, Malan was a classic early-twentieth-century intellectual, a Utopian social engineer inclined to speak of socialism as a “passionate and imperious demand for justice,” a “moral force” more powerful than “the fury of the storm.” He was also a Calvinist, though, so he resolved the conflicts between Marx and God in God's favor, and wound up a national socialist of a uniquely Afrikaner ilk.

After his return from Europe, Daniel François became a minister in the Dutch Reformed Church and later, a politician. He was a pale man with soft white flesh, soft white hands, and weak eyes. Like most social engineers, he was somehow cold and bloodless, more comfortable with books and theories than with human beings. He apparently remained celibate until late middle age, and his belated marriages—first to M. M. Van Tonder, and then to Maria Louw, a niece of my grandmother's—had less to do with love than with his need to cut an acceptable figure on the political hustings, or so the cynics said. Malan's National Party was bent on ousting General Smuts and his English-speaking chums, and D.F. himself was applying his rather formidable intellect toward a “scientific” and final solution for the native question.

Dr. Malan's 1938 election campaign caused a rift among his Calvinia cousins. D.F. was blood—second cousin to my grandfather and married to my grandmother's niece besides—but Stephanus Malan did not allow that to sway his judgment. In his eyes, D.F. was something of a clown, but my schoolboy father, Adriaan, thought otherwise. He had been all the way to Cape Town and seen District Six, the sprawling colored slum above the docks. District Six was the reputed lair of whores, drunk sailors, and knifemen. He shuddered at the thought of going in there, and concluded that separation of the races was probably a good idea. There was a solid segregationist plank in the National Party platform, so Adriaan Malan threw his support to D.F., in defiance of the rest of the family.

The Nats stood for segregation, but Smuts's SAP also stood for segregation. Since there was little to choose between the parties on that score, it was clear that their differences would have to be resolved by violence, in accordance with Boer political tradition. It was a very rough campaign. The Nats started it, breaking up a SAP rally with their fists. In retaliation, the SAPs swore that Dr. Malan would never speak in Calvinia again. The Nats picked up the gauntlet and organized a rally in Calvinia

town hall. When Dr. Malan arrived, a riot broke out, and he had to beat a strategic retreat to the home of one Schalk Pienaar. The SAPs gave chase. Malan's supporters armed themselves with sticks and prepared to defend their cowering candidate.

Just then, a distant bell rang, and school let out. My barefoot, eighteen-year-old father and his barefoot friends came running through the dusty streets and arrived on the scene just as the confrontation was coming to a head. The SAPs were parading up and down outside Pienaar's house carrying their candidate, a certain Dr. Loek, on their shoulders. Dr. Loek was waving a blown-up photograph of a prominent Nat leader borne aloft like a hero on the shoulders of some black men. This was intended to show that the Nats were actually soft on blacks. If they truly favored segregation, how come they had such ardent black supporters?

"The Nats are *kafferboeties!*" cried Dr. Loek of the SAP. A *kafferboetie* is a "brother of blacks"—nigger-lover, if you will. It was a grave insult, but Dr. Loek was so sallow of complexion that he could have passed for a light-skinned black man himself. A Nat lady pointed an angry finger at him. "What are you to talk!" she shrieked. "You black Abyssinian!"

After this exchange, a fight was inevitable, and the Nats and SAPs joined battle. In the ensuing melee, my father struck his first blows for the National Party, and one of his friends, finding his shoes squishy with blood, discovered a stab wound in his buttocks. The battle was inconclusive, but Dr. Malan was so shaken by the SAPs' show of force that he moved to a safer constituency, where he was easily reelected. Ten years later, he became prime minister and started shoveling blacks around like cement in the name of his apartheid doctrine.

I tell you this story because it was the centerpiece of my Afrikaner political heritage. My father was a man of few words, and disinclined to waste those he spoke on philosophical dispute with small boys. When I was old enough to understand these things, I often asked my father how he came by his political convictions, and why he supported apartheid. His invariable answer was, "We have no choice. We must make it work." One day, though, I caught him in an expansive mood, and he came out with that story. I was taken aback by its farcical tenor. It was hard to imagine my old man fighting SAPs in the street, but then his transfiguring passion was lost to me too.

In my father's youth, in the twenties and thirties, race wasn't the central issue in white South African politics. Afrikaners of his generation were less concerned about keeping blacks in their place than tearing down the Union Jack, resurrecting the lost Boer republics, and uplifting the *volk* from its poor white penury. As my father saw it, his own SAP father was something of a collaborator, a lackey of the English king. My father did not quote Shakespeare, and he had no love for the British Empire. It was the British, after all, who had invented concentration camps, using them to crush Afrikaner resistance in a war still remembered with great bitterness.

In 1939, Adriaan Malan went off to the University of Stellenbosch, crucible of Afrikaner nationalism. The campus was seething with radicalism. Student nationalists wanted nothing to do with the looming war in Europe, and when it broke out, many joined the *Ossewa Brandwag*, or Oxwag, or Sentinel, an extremist sect virulently opposed to South Africa's entry into World War II on the British side. My father joined up too. For several melodramatic months, he was a virtual terrorist, attending clandestine midnight meetings on the university's rugby fields or climbing "like a baboon" into the surrounding mountains, to plot sabotage of the British war effort and guerrilla war against the traitor Smuts.

In Stellenbosch, the Boer rebel cadres merely talked about such things, but their comrades in Johannesburg actually did them—blew up a police station and a power pylon or two. At that point, the

*Brandung* started falling into disrepute, becoming so nakedly fascist and Germanic that even Dawid Malan denounced it. At that, my father quit the organization, and his career as a terrorist came to an end. Beyond that point, he more or less withdrew from active politics, although he always marched step with the *volk*, subscribed to Afrikaans magazines and newspapers, and voted for the National Party.

After graduating from Stellenbosch, he became a teacher of mathematics at a high school in Queenstown, where he met my mother. She was a jolly-hockey-sticks headgirl type, the school's lively mistress of gymnastics. It was a most unlikely love affair. My mother was English-speaking, my father a real Afrikaner who stumbled and stuttered in the British tongue. They were an "interracial couple," in the newspaper usage of the day, but they fell in love and married anyway—an act of tribal treachery on both their parts, given the lingering bitterness between Briton and Boer. After the wedding, my father returned to Stellenbosch, earned a second degree, and emerged a personnel manager. My brother Neil was born in 1952, and I in 1954, and we lived in a triple-story house on Penelope Avenue, in a Johannesburg suburb called Blairgowrie.

Having married an Englishwoman, my father had little choice other than to embrace a doctrine known as "broader South Africanism," which held that it was time for the English and Afrikaners to let bygones be bygones. Ours was a "dual-medium" household. My brother and I spoke English at school, Afrikaans at home. Dinner began with grace, and concluded with a reading from the Bible. On Sunday mornings, my mother slicked down my hair with Brylcreem and put on my Davy Crockett tie, and we went to the Afrikaner church, the Dutch Reformed Church, where dreary sermons were preached and dirges sung. After church, there was Sunday school, where we studied the *katkisasieboek*—the heavy gray tome of Calvinist catechism. The book was full of solemn warnings about idolatry, Catholicism and heathen Judaism, but it made no mention of the *swart gevaar*, the black threat. It was not necessary. The legacy of Dawid Malan was taken for granted.

We lived in the city, but every year or so we'd go on a pilgrimage into the heartland, into Afrikanerdom. It started in Calvinia, where my grandmother, the widow of Stephanus Jacobus, lived in an old-age home. My father had converted her from a SAP to Nat, and she became a party stalwart in her old age, always turning out to flip pancakes for the apartheid-supporting faithful at National Party rallies. She was a nice old lady. She smothered me in the lavender-smelling folds of her hug-bosom and pressed treats on me—pancakes with cinnamon and sugar, and *koeksisters*, twists of deep-fried dough saturated with golden syrup.

From Calvinia we trekked south to the Sandveld, where my Uncle Ben farmed sheep on the shore of a cold gray sea. It was a barren and lonely place, the Sandveld, charged with an ominous and forbidding power. Ben's farmhouse stood all alone in a desolate, dun-gray landscape, shuttered against the harsh light, the heat and drifting sand. The house was dark and gloomy inside, the heavy Victorian furniture sinister under dust drapes never removed unless the Calvinist *dominee* was due to visit. At dusk, an old crone in a long black dress came hobbling across the sand dunes to fetch food at the kitchen door. She was a *bywoner*, one of Ben's white vassals, too old to work now and living out her life as the master's pensioner. Her name was Tannie Jeanette, and she terrified me. She had hair warts on her face and a hunchback, and I took her for a witch. She once bought a portable radio from the Jewish peddler who made the rounds of those lonely farms. When the peddler returned, months later, Tannie Jeanette tried to claw his eyes out, claiming he'd sold her a radio that spoke only in English. She had never owned a radio before. She didn't know it could be tuned.

There was an Afrikaner for you. Almost all of us were that way, three or four generations ago. I

fact, everyone on Ben's farm was a throwback in some sense or other. The Mongolian cheekbones of the brown-skinned shepherds recalled the Hottentots, a race long extinct. Ben's speech was haunted by the *brei*—a roll of the *r* that harked back to French, a language unspoken in South Africa for almost two centuries, and his white *bywoners* spoke an archaic dialect called High Dutch.

Indeed, the *bywoners* themselves were archaic. There were three of them in all, Tannie Jeanette and two men named Nic and Evert. They were unlike any other whites I had ever met, standing in virtually the same feudal relation to their master as the brown shepherds. They lived in bare rooms whose whitewashed walls were hung with the skins of trapped animals. The men often went barefoot, wore beards that hung to their chests, and sawed through the throats of kicking sheep on a bluegum stump in the yard of the farmhouse. They were the last of their kind, but then Ben's way of life was dying, too. It seldom rained on the Sandveld, so he drank from a brackish well. His wife cooked on one of the old cast-iron stoves with balled claw feet and lighted her house with paraffin lamps. At night, they slept under karosses made of jackal skins.

I think Uncle Ben was happy in the nineteenth century, but his wife Millicent aspired to better. She wanted tiled bathrooms, pop-up toasters, eye-level electric ovens and other trappings of white civilization. She was my father's youngest sister, and very beautiful, with raven hair and skin as dark as a Spaniard's. She was stern, pious and prone to fits of shrieking: at children, at Ben, at the ragged colored girls who slaved over the cast-iron stove in her kitchen. Ben, on the other hand, was a quiet, goodnatured fellow. He smoked a pipe and wore khaki shorts. There were lines around his eyes from squinting at the sun, and he seldom felt the urge to speak.

His farm was big and trackless, and he traveled it in a prototypical beach buggy, an old car stripped down to its engine and steel skeleton. It took half a day to cross the farm, and Ben always brought his rifle along in case he saw a buck for the pot, or a lynx; the lynx took lambs, so he shot them on sight. In the far corner of his land there lay a *vlei*, a marsh that was home to one of Africa's largest breeding colonies of flamingo. As we drew near, the sound of the engine startled the birds into flight, and there would be streaks of pink and gray across the sky, as if the sun was rising at noon.

At day's end, we drove over the sand dunes to watch the gray-green Atlantic breakers rolling onto the lonely, windswept beach. There was always a gale on that beach. It picked up sand and blasted it into your legs, and it stung so sharply it made you want to cry. Sometimes a defense-force Shakleton flew by at rooftop height, patrolling against the Russians. Ben knew they were out there, lurking, because a Russian lifejacket had once washed ashore on the beach. The Russians were the enemy. That was already known. Ben's only son grew up to be a professional soldier, and went off to fight Russia and Cuban surrogates in darkest Africa. His daughter also joined the army, and married a very famous South African soldier indeed—Captain Wynand du Toit, shot and captured by Cubans in 1985 while trying to blow up Gulf Oil's installations in Angola.

When we returned to the farmhouse in the evening, the brown shepherds would be lined up in the courtyard, tin beakers in their hands, waiting for their "tot"—their daily ration of *vaaljapie*, a crude white wine that came from a town two hours' drive to the south. Ben kept the stuff in a stack of leaky old barrels, in a room where the sandy floor had remained damp with wine for generations. As the door of the wine room swung open, the pungent smell of *vaaljapie* permeated the yard, and everyone's mood seemed to lighten. The tired shepherds drew their daily tumblerful and settled down along the walls of the barn, talking softly. Sometimes I sat with them. The wall at my back was still warm from the sun, golden dust hung in the air, and the evening was filled with the heady fragrance of cheap wine. It was the best time of day on that farm. When I went back twenty years later, the farmhouse

was empty and abandoned, its shutters flapping in the wind. Ben was dead, his wife had moved into condo, and all the *bywoners* and brown shepherds had vanished. But I picked up a handful of dust from the old wine room, and it still smelled of *vaaljapie*.

From the Sandveld we traveled inland to Nieuwoudtville, home of Tannie Aletta, my father's elder sister. Her husband, Jooste, was a sergeant in the South African Police. They lived in the stone police station. When we visited, they put us in the whites-only section of the adjoining jailhouse, where we slept under rough blankets on bare wooden bunks. This seemed very exciting to me. I shivered deliciously at the thought that my bunk might once have harbored a murderer or bank robber. I once asked my aunt if this was at all likely. "Oh no," she said, "it's very quiet here. There has never been a murder here. It's only the coloreds who kill each other."

Nieuwoudtville lay at the foot of the Bokkeveld Mountains, high and dry and sometimes very cold at night. Through the barred window of my cell, I saw a dusty street, a post office, a general-dealer store, a church, and distant mountains. The town was a speck in a vast ocean of arid scrub and dust. Its emptiness was frightening. Even more frightening were my cousins, tough little fellows with brush-cut hair who ran barefoot over thorns and played rugby to maim on fields of dust and stone. They called me *Rooi Jan*, or Red Rian, a play on my name that embodied a scornful reference to the Boer term for a foreigner who turned pink and peeling in the blazing African sun. They were barbaric little tribesmen, those cousins of mine. I was always relieved when we moved south to Clanwilliam, where my uncle Etienne taught farmers' sons in the village boarding school.

My uncle Etienne was a gregarious fellow, darkly handsome, with a flashing gold tooth in his easy smile. Decades later, I opened a book called *The Super-Afrikaners* and discovered his name in it. In fact, both my father's brothers were in it. They were both *Broederbonders*, members of the Broederbond, the secret society of Calvinists and apartheid zealots that constituted the spine of the Afrikaner power structure. The prime minister, his cabinet, most Afrikaner MPs, and all senior civil servants were Brothers. The Broederbond's invisible hand controlled the state broadcasting corporation, the censor board, the police, the education system, and probably the army too. The Broederbond was a sinister organization, ruthlessly dedicated to the aggrandizement of Afrikaner power and the imposition of doctrinal purity on South African minds.

Even in retrospect, my Oom Etienne seems a most unlikely Brother. He had none of the trappings—no Mercedes Benz with tinted windows, no lucrative government contracts, and no secret bank accounts bulging with the profits from crooked land deals, at least as far as I know. My Oom Etienne even had a sense of humor, not a quality for which Brothers were known. He owned a movie projector and when we visited, he'd show us Laurel and Hardy shorts or Al Debbó's lunatic Boer farces. He had a Wagnerian passion for rugby, but as for apartheid, I never heard him mention the word.

And that was Afrikanerdom for me. Those pilgrimages marked me, to be sure, but they were not enough to make me a true Afrikaner. Even my father failed in that. I was always sceptical and disdainful of those things that lay closest to the Afrikaner heart. I used to stare up into the eaves of the church while the *dominee* droned on, wondering how on earth God tolerated such boredom. I flinched when the brush-cut Boerboys came in for the tackle, and struggled to breathe in the oppressive Calvinist atmosphere of their homes. I was intimidated by the immensity of the landscapes in which they lived, and horrified when they shot wild animals out there.

Once, crossing Ben's farm in his buggy, we flushed an aardvark on the sun-blackened plain. Aardvarks were harmless and inedible, but Ben was tired of breaking axles in their burrows, so he gave chase. The creature disappeared down a hole in the ground. Ben leapt from the buggy, rifle in hand.



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sample content of My Traitor's Heart: A South African Exile Returns to Face His Country, His Tribe, and His Conscience

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