

Burgers Daughter



Nadine Gordimer



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BURGER'S DAUGHTER

Nadine Gordimer, winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1991, was born and lives in South Africa. She has written numerous novels, including *The Pickup*, *The House Gun*, *My Son's Story*, *A Sport of Nature*, *July's People*, *The Conservationist* (co-winner of the Booker Prize in England) and *None to Accompany Me*. Her short stories have been collected in nine volumes, and her nonfiction pieces were published together as *The Essential Gesture*. Gordimer has received numerous international prizes, including, in the United States, the Modern Literature Association Award, and, in 1987, the Bennett Award. Her fiction has appeared in many American magazines, including *The New Yorker*, and her essays have appeared in *The New York Times* and *The New York Review of Books*. She has been given honorary degrees by Yale, Harvard, and other universities and has been honored by the French government with the decoration Officier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres. She is a vice president of PEN International and an executive member of the Congress of South African Writers.

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I am the place in which something has occurred.

Claude Lévi-Strauss

One



Among the group of people waiting at the fortress was a schoolgirl in a brown and yellow uniform holding a green eiderdown quilt and, by the loop at its neck, a red hot-water bottle. Certain buses use to pass that way then and passengers looking out will have noticed a schoolgirl. Imagine, a schoolgirl she must have somebody inside. Who are all those people, anyway? Even from the top of a bus, lurching on past as the lights go green, the group would not have looked like the usual prison visitors passive and self-effacing about the slope of municipal grass.

The schoolgirl stood neither in the first rank before the prison doors nor hung back. There were several young men in roll-neck sweaters and veldskoen, men in business suits worn absently as an outer skin, an old man with a thrust-back head of white floss, women burrowed down into slacks and duffle coats, one in a long skirt and crocheted shawl, two in elegant tweed suits, with gold jewellery and sunglasses worn not as a disguise but as an assertion of indifference to attention. All were drawn up before the doors, invaders rather than supplicants. All had parcels and carriers. The voices of the women were clear and forceful in the public place, the white-haired man put his arms on the shoulder of two young men in private discussion, a tall blonde woman moved within the group with chivvying determination. She it was who borrowed the old man's horn-headed cane to knock on the door when three o'clock passed and they were still standing there. As there was no response she took off her high-heeled sandal and hammered away with that in the other hand, as well. No one was in a mood to laugh but there was a surge of movement and voices in approval. The schoolgirl pressed forward with the rest, turning her head with the bold encouragement with which glances were linking everyone. A small slotted door within the great double ones opened on eyes under a peaked cap. The blonde woman's face was so close against the door that the warder drew back and in an instant reasserted himself, but as a fair-ground gun meets its pop-up target, she had him.

—I demand to speak to the Commandant...we were told we could bring clothing for the detainees between three and four. We've been standing here twenty-five minutes, most of us've got jobs to go back to.—

There was an argument. A man with a briefcase arrived and the group quickly tunnelled him to the fore; he was allowed in through another door within the great portal and then, one by one, the men and women handed over their burdens through this doorway blotted dark by the shapes of warders. The schoolgirl was urged on, given way to by others; Lionel Burger's daughter was among them that day, fourteen years old, bringing an eiderdown quilt and a hot-water bottle for her mother.

Rosa Burger, about fourteen years old at the time, waiting at the prison in a brown gymfrock over a yellow shirt and brown pullover with yellow stripes outlining the V-neck, was small for her age, slightly bottle-legged (1st hockey team) and with a tiny waist. Her hair was not freshly washed and the cartilage of her ear-tips broke the dark lank, suggesting that the ears were prominent though hidden. From the side parting of her hair there was a strand that twirled counter to the lie of the rest and had bleached lighter due to contact with chemicals in the school pool (2nd swimming team) and exposure to the sun. Her profile was prettier than her full-face; the waxy outline olive-skinned people often have, with the cave of the eye strikingly marked by the dark shining strip of eyebrow and the steep stroke of eyelashes, fuzzing at the ends like the antennae of moths. When the girl turned, there were many things disappointing —jaw (she chewed a bit of peanut brittle someone offered) heavy for the small chin, nostrils that cut back too sharply, half-healed and picked-at blemishes round the big soft mouth that curled and tightened, hesitated and firmed when she was spoken to and she answered, a mouth exactly like her father's. But her eyes were light —washed-out grey, at a certain angle so clear

the convex of the iris appeared transparent in the winter afternoon sunlight. Not at all like his brown eyes with the vertical line of concern between them that drew together an unavoidable gaze in newspaper photographs. The brown and yellow of the school outfit did not suit her colouring, allowing that she probably had not slept well the previous night and had not had time to eat between hurrying home from school and coming to the prison.

Rosemarie Burger, according to the headmistress's report one of the most promising seniors in the school in spite of the disadvantages—in a manner of speaking—of her family background, came to school the morning after her mother was detained just as on any other day. She asked to see the headmistress and requested to be allowed to go home early in order to take comforts to her mother. Her matter-of-fact and reserved manner made it unnecessary for anyone to have to say anything—anything sympathetic—indeed, positively forbade it, and so saved awkwardness. She displayed 'remarkable maturity'; that, at least, without being specific, one could say in the report. The other girls in her class seemed unaware of what had happened. They did not read the morning newspapers, listen to the news on the radio, nor were they aware of politics as something more concretely affective than a boring subject of grown-up conversation, along with the stock market or gynaecological troubles. After a day or two or in some cases even weeks, the recurrence of their schoolmate's surname in connection with her mother, on the placards of street demonstrators against preventive detention, and the observations of parents, remarking on the relationship—Isn't the daughter in your class?—made her circumstance known and accepted at school. She was granted the kind of sympathetic privileges that served for the crises of illness or divorce at home which were all the hazards the children knew. Her fellow prefects divided her playground and other duties between them. Her best friend (whom she had told about the arrest and detention the first day) said she could come and stay at her house, if she liked—probably without having consulted her own parents. The school was a private one for white English-speaking girls and they innocently expressed their sympathy the only way they knew how:—Bloody Boers, dumb Dutchmen, thick Afrikaners—they would go and look up your mom. As if she'd ever do anything wrong...

It did not occur to them that the family name was in fact an Afrikaner one.

'Among us was a girl of thirteen or fourteen, a schoolgirl still in her gym, the daughter of Lionel Burger. It was a bitter winter day. She was carrying blankets and even a hot-water bottle for her mother. The relatives of the people detained in a brutal dawn swoop had been told they could bring clothing etc. to the prison. We were not allowed to bring books or food. Little Rosa Burger knew her mother, that courageous and warm-hearted woman, was under doctor's orders. The child was dry-eyed and composed, in fact she was an example to us all of the way a detainee's family ought to behave. Already she had taken on her mother's role in the household, giving loving support to her father, who was all too soon to be detained as well. On that day he had put others' plight before his own, and had been tirelessly busy ever since his own wife had been taken in the early hours of the morning, going from police station to police station, trying to establish for helpless African families where their people were being held. But he knew that his schoolgirl daughter could be counted on in this family totally united in and dedicated to the struggle.'

When they saw me outside the prison, what did they see ?

I shall never know. It's all concocted. I saw—see—that profile in a hand-held mirror directed toward another mirror; I know how I survived, not unhappily, if not popular then in unspoken, acknowledged inkling that I was superior to them, I and my family, at that school; I understand the bland heroics of badly-written memoirs by the faithful—good people in spite of the sanctimony.

I suppose I was aware that ordinary people might look down from a bus and see us. Some with wonder, knowing whose relatives and friends we must be—even somebody's daughter, look, a kid in gym—and knowing why we were there. Flora Donaldson and the others talked loudly in high voices the way another kind of woman will do in an expensive restaurant and, in very different circumstances, for the same reason: to demonstrate self-confidence and a force of personality naturally dominant of an environment calculated to impress or intimidate. I draw that analogy now, not then; it's impossible to filter free of what I have learnt, felt, thought, the subjective presence of the schoolgirl. She's a stranger about whom some intimate facts are known to me, that's all. We were aware of ourselves and the people belonging to us on the other side of the huge, thick, studded doors a way that the passers-by would not understand and that we asserted, gave off—Wally Atkinson who had no one inside but had been in many times himself, and came to fly the standard of his white hair among us, Ivy Terblanche and her daughter Gloria, determinedly knitting for Gloria's baby while waiting to hand over pyjamas and soap for husbands who were also father and son-in-law, Mark Liebowitz shaking his weight from one foot to the other in the kind of nervous glee with which he meets crises, Bridget—Bridget Sulzer formerly Watkins formerly Brodtkin born O'Brien—banging on the prison door with the heel of a multicoloured sandal from which the worn green leather peeled back, her sexy high-arched foot with thick painted toenails bare in spite of the cold. Even the two women I don't think I knew, the fashionably groomed ones who didn't belong (Aletta Gous attracted the friendship of wealthy liberal women whose husbands, at that time, let them run the risk as an indulgence) had set themselves apart from their background in the strange arousal of the persecuted. One of them had had her cook bake a special wheat-germ loaf (Aletta was always a food-faddist) and the lady argued high-handedly when the warder refused it; I remember because she gave it to Ivy—the queer occasion made such assumptions of sudden friendship possible—and Ivy broke off a bit of crust for me to taste when she gave me a lift home.

I was in place, outside the prison; both my parents had been expecting to be picked up for several weeks. Of course, when it happened, and they took my mother, the reality must have been different from the acceptance in advance; it's impossible to conquer all fear and loss by preparation. There are always sources of desolation that aren't taken into account because no one knows what they will be. I just knew that my mother, inside, would know, when she got the things I was holding, that I had been outside; we were connected. Flora pretended to cuddle me against the cold, but I didn't need her kind of emotional excitation. She talked about 'the girls' in there, and my mother was one of them. Flora was a grown-up who made me feel older than she was.

I knew them nearly all, the people I stood among, and didn't need to look at them to see them as I knew them: as I did the way home, the appearance of a landmark at a certain turn. It was that door that I see: the huge double door under the stone archway with a bulb on a goose-neck looking down as a gargoyle does. The tiny hatch where the warder's eyes will appear could be a cat-door if it were lower. There are iron studs with hammer-marks faceting the white sunlight like a turned ring. I see these things over and over again as I stand. But real awareness is all focused in the lower part of my pelvis in the leaden, dragging, wringing pain there. Can anyone describe the peculiar fierce concentration of

the body's forces in the menstruation of early puberty? The bleeding began just after my father had made me go back to bed after my mother had been taken away. No pain; just wetness that I tested with my finger, turned on the light to verify: yes, blood. But outside the prison the internal landscape of my mysterious body turns me inside out, so that in that public place on that public occasion (all the arrests of the dawn swoop have been in the newspapers, a special edition is on sale, with names of those known to be detained, including that of my mother) I am within that monthly crisis of destruction, the purging, tearing, draining of my own structure. I am my womb, and a year ago I wasn't aware—physically—I had one.

As I am alternately submerged below and thrust over the threshold of pain I am aware of the moulded rubber loop by which the hot-water bottle hangs from my finger, and the eiderdown I hold against my belly is my old green taffeta one Granny Burger gave me when I was not old enough to remember her; my father thought my mother's double-bed one was too big and too beautiful to get spoiled in prison. The hot-water bottle is my own idea. My mother never used one; and so—as I prepared the device I imagined her swiftly discovering it—she would realize there must be some special reason for its having been sent. Between the black rubber washer and the base of the screw-top I have folded a slip of thin paper. When I came to write the message I found I did not know how to address her except as I did in the letters I would write when away on a holiday. *Dear Mom, Hope you are all right.* Then this innocently unsuitable tone became the perfect vehicle for the important thing needed to convey. *Dad and I are fine and looking after everything. Lots of love from both.* She would know at once I was telling her my father had not been taken since she had gone.

My version and theirs. And if this were being written down, both would seem equally concocted when read over. And if I were really telling, instead of talking to you in my mind the way I find I do. One is never talking to oneself, always one is addressed to someone. Suddenly, without knowing the reason, at different stages in one's life, one is addressing this person or that all the time, even dreams are performed before an audience. I see that. It's well known that people who commit suicide, the most solitary of all acts, are addressing someone. It's just that with me it never happened before. It hasn't happened even when I thought I was in love—and we couldn't ever have been in love.

If you knew I was talking to you I wouldn't be able to talk.

But you know that about me.

After the death of her father, someone who had had no importance in their life, someone who stood quite outside it, peripheral, one of the hangers-on drawn by curiosity who had once or twice looked in on it, appeared at her side. Years before, when she was a university student and her father was not yet on trial, not yet sentenced or imprisoned, the young man had come for a Sunday swim at the house. She said. She must have invited him; many people came on Sundays, it was a tradition. They came when she and her brother were little, they came when her mother was detained, they came when her mother was dying of multiple sclerosis, they came when her father was out on bail during his trial. Nothing the secret police could do could more than interrupt. Life went on; Lionel Burger, in his swimming trunks, cooking steak and boerewors for his comrades and friends, was proof.

This guest was a young man named Conrad. A pale acne-scarred back to the sun, lying in the way of

but never putting out a teasing hand to catch the black and white legs of children who raced round the edge of the pool. He rested his chin on his forearms, and sometimes his forehead pressed there. He was not the type looking for commitment. There had been, were some, and they were quickly recognized. Sometimes their potential was made use of. He was not even a paid spy posing as the type looking for commitment; that had become a recognizable type, too. Lionel Burger would not restrict his daughter's normal student sociability for fear she might be made use of by one of those. But this boy was of interest to no one; let him look at them all, if the spectacle intrigued him: revolutionaries at play, a sight like the secret mating of whales. He got his boerewors, hot and scented-tasting, from the hands of Lionel Burger himself, like everyone else. Rosa was a pretty thing as she grew up; many boys would follow her, not knowing she was not for them.

Once or twice during the trial she had noticed this Conrad in the visitors' gallery of the court. She moved inevitably in the phalanx of familiars, the friends some of whom disappeared, arrested and arraigned in other trials, in the course of her father's. Once when she had gone out to telephone from the Greek café nearby, she met the chap on the pavement on her way back to the court-house. He offered her an espresso and she laughed, in her way of knowing only too well the facilities of the environs of this court, always she was aside from her generation in experience of this kind—where do you think you could get an espresso around here?

—You can, that's all.—He took her down a block, round a corner and into a shopping arcade. She understood he must have followed her out of court. Real espresso was brought to a little iron table by a black waiter dressed up in striped trousers, black waistcoat and cheese-cutter. She pulled a funny face behind the waiter, smiled, friendly and charming, any girl singled out by a man. —What do you think that's supposed to be? In Pretoria!—He pushed over to her an ashtray lettered THE SINGING BARBER.

—What do you think he feels about your father?—

—My father?—

Her beau broke a match between his teeth and waved its V in the direction of the court-house.

Oh, she understood: the blacks, do they know, are they grateful to whites who endanger their own lives for them. So that was the set of tracks along which this one's mind trundled; there were others who came up to her, sweating and pitched to their greatest intensity, Miss Burger you don't know me but I want to tell you, the government calls him a Communist but your father is God's man, the holy spirit of our Lord is in him, that's why he is being persecuted. And there were the occasional letters that had been coming to the house all her life; as soon as she was old enough—her mother knew what that was; how did she know?—her mother let her see one. It said her father was a devil and a beast who wanted to rob and kill, destroying Christian civilization. She felt a strange embarrassment, and looked into her mother's face to see if she should laugh, but her mother had another look on her face; she was aware of some trust expressed there, something that must last beyond laughter. It was a Saturday morning and when her father had come home from his early round of visits to his patients in hospital he had given Baasie and her their weekly swimming lesson; at that moment with the letter before her, 'her father' came to her as a hand cupped under her chin that kept her head above water while her legs and arms frogged. Baasie was afraid still. His thin, dingy body with the paler toes rigidly turned up went blacker with the cold and he clung flat against her father's fleshy, breathing chest whose warmth, even in the water, she felt by seeing Baasie clinging there.

In the coffee bar she was still smiling. She seemed to savour the domino of sugar she held, soaking up dark hot coffee before she dropped it in.—Oh leave the poor waiter alone.

—No but—I'm curious.—

She nodded in jerky, polite, off-hand dismissal, as if that were the answer to the idle question she didn't ask: ~~What brings you to the trial? A girl in her situation, she had nothing much to say to a stranger, and it was difficult for anyone outside what one must suppose—respect, awkwardly—were her intense preoccupations, to begin to talk to her.~~ An important State witness was due to be called for cross-examination before the court rose for the day; she knew she must drink up and go, he knew she would go, but they sat on for a minute in a purely physical awareness of one another. His blond-brown hand lying across the vice of his crossed thighs, with the ridiculous thick silver manacle following the contour of the wrist-bump, the nape of her armpit in a sleeveless dress, shiny with moisture as she pushed away the tiny cup—the form of communication that is going on when two young people appear to have no reason or wish to linger.

Most of their meetings were as inconsequential. He came to the trial but did not always seek her out—supposing she was right that he ever had. Sometimes he was one of the loose group centred round the lawyers and her who ate sandwiches or grey pies in the Greek café during the lunch adjournment; it was assumed she brought him along, she thought someone else had. He did not telephone her at work but she met him once in the public library and they ate together in a pizzeria. She had thought he was a university lecturer or something of that kind but he told her, now that (without curiosity) she asked, that he was doing a post-graduate thesis on Italian literature, and working on Wednesdays and weekends as a bookie's clerk at the race-course. He had begun the thesis while studying in Perugia, but given it up when he spent a year or so in France and Denmark and England. He was vague about what he had done and how he lived. In the South of France, on a yacht—Something between a servant and a pet, it sounds—

He was not offended by her joking distaste.—Great life, for a few months. Until you get sick of the people you work for. There was no place to read in peace.—

It was a job for which you did not need a foreigner's work permit—he knew all the ways of life that fitted into that category. In London he squatted in a Knightsbridge mansion. He'd fixed up a condemned cottage, in Johannesburg, with the money he'd got for bringing in a British car duty-free, after having had the use of it for a year abroad, an arrangement made with a man who had bought it in his name.—Any time you need somewhere to stay... I'm often away for weeks. I've got friends with a farm in Swaziland. What a wonderful place, forest from the house all the way to the river, you just live in a kind of twilight of green—pecan-nut trees, you know.—A casual inspiration.—Why don't you come there this weekend?—

It didn't occur to him:—I don't have a passport.—

He didn't make sympathetic, indignant noises. He pondered as if on a practical matter.—Not even to hop just over there?—

—No.—

He looked at her in silence, confronted with her, considering her as a third person, a problem set up for both of them.

—Come to my house.—

—Yes I will, I'd like to see it. Your big jacaranda.—

—Bauhinia.—

—Bauhinia, then.—

—I mean now.—

—I have to go to Pretoria after work this afternoon.—But at least it was a serious answer, a practical matter that could be dealt with.

—There's an adjournment till Monday, isn't there?—

—Yes, but I've got permission for a visit today.—

—It's virtually on your way back.—

The mansion and garden of the early nineteen-hundreds to which the cottage belonged had been expropriated for a freeway that was being delayed by ratepayers' objections; in the meantime the cottage was let without official tenure at an address that no longer existed.

The wavy galvanized iron roof was painted blue and so were the railings of the wooden verandah. From an abandoned tennis court brilliant with glossy weeds a mournful bird presaged rain. The bauhinia tree lifted from shrubs and ornamental palms become a green-speared jungle; the two rooms were sunk in it like a hidden pool. It was safe and cosy as a child's playhouse and sexually arousing as a lovers' hideout. It was nowhere.

She came in out of the sun and the traffic of the highway straight from the prison and he got up from some dim piece of furniture where he made no pretence not to have been lying, probably all afternoon, and kept her standing just within the doorway, rubbing himself against her. The directness of the caress was simply the acting-out, in better and more appropriate circumstances, of what was happening in the coffee-bar. Desire can be very comforting. Lying with the vulnerable brassy smell of a stranger's hair close to her breathing, she saw flies swaying a mobile beneath a paper concertina lantern, the raised flower pattern within the counted squares of a lead ceiling over-patterned with shadows cast from the garden, his watch, where his hand lay on her, showing the time—exactly one hour and twenty minutes since she had been sitting on the bench on the visitors' side of the wire grill that fragmented her father's face as the talk of other prisoners and their visitors broke the sequence of whatever he was trying to tell her.

—Lucky to find a place like this. It's what everybody always looks for.—

—Easy. Convincing the rich old girl or old guy who owns it is the only trouble. They'd have a black if it was allowed to have blacks living in, because you can control a black, he's got to listen to you. But a white who will live in a shack like this will always be young and have no money. They're afraid you'll push drugs or be politically subversive, make trouble. When I said I worked at the race-course that was okay; the kind of honest living they understand, although not socially acceptable to them, at least part of the servicing of their kind of pleasures. You keep your mouth shut about university, they don't trust students at all. Not that I blame them. Anyway, suits me. If I can finish the bloody thesis and make my hundred, hundred-and-fifty a week among those crooks and suckers at the race-course, I'll push off to Mexico.—

—Mexico now! Why Mexico!—

He got up, stretched naked, yawned so that his penis bobbed and the yawn became a cat's grin. He put the flat of his hand on some books on a brass tray with a rickety stand.—No good reason for people who must have good reasons. If I read poetry or novels I like then I want to go and live in the country the writer knows. I mean I just want to know what he knows...—

—Lend me something.—

She tried the names on the books he handed her.—Octavio Paz. Carlos Fuentes.—

He corrected the pronunciation.

—Ah, you've learnt Spanish?—

He came over and touched a breast as one might adjust the angle of a picture.—There's a girl giving me a few lessons.—

She would not have noticed if he had no longer been about; if he had disappeared at any time during the seven months of her father's trial, she would simply have assumed he had gone off to Mexico or wherever. In fact, once when, chin on hands across the table among friends and hangers-on, at tea-

break while an observer from the International Council of Jurists was commenting on some aspect of the morning's proceedings, he looked up at her under his eyebrows and raised a hand in salute, she recognized the greeting of someone who has been away and signals his return. He took a lift back with her to Johannesburg. He was one of those people who usually wait for the other to begin to talk. The Defence evidence in the afternoon had gone badly; there was nothing to say, *nothing*. She was aware, in the presence of another in the car, only of actions that usually are performed automatically, the pla of the tendons on the back of her hand as she shifted the gear-stick, the sag of her elbows on the steering-wheel, and her glance between the rear-view mirror and the road ahead.—How was it?—

—What was?—With an edge of challenge to her preoccupation.

Her voice went light with embarrassment.—You've been—where?—Cape Town...?—

—You're always so polite, aren't you. Just like your father. He never gets rattled. No matter what that slimy prosecutor with his histrionics throws at him. Never loses his cool.—

She smiled at the road ahead.

—You must've been very well brought up. No slanging matches and banging doors in the Burger house. Everybody marvellously up-tight.—

—Lionel's like that. Outraged, yes. I've seen him outraged. But he doesn't lose his temper. He can be angry without losing his temper...never, I don't remember even once when we were little... It's no put on, he just is naturally sympathetic in his manner.—

—Marvellously up-tight.—

She smiled and shrugged.

—The old girl this afternoon. She was a friend?—

—Sort of.—

—Sort of. Poor old girl. Trembling and snivelling and looking down sideways all the time so she wouldn't meet his eyes. Not just the eyes, she couldn't let herself see even the toe of his shoe. You could tell that. And saying everything they'd got out of her, dirtying herself... All in front of him. I watched Number One accused. He just looked at her, listening like anyone. He wasn't disgusted.—

—She's been detained for nearly a year.—The driver must have felt her passenger studying her.—She's broken.—

—She was a bloody disaster for your father today. What is this—Christ-like compassion?—

—He knows what's happened to her. That's all.—

Her consciousness of the set of her profile made it impossible for him to say: And you?

To make him comfortable, she gave an aside half-smile, half-grimace. —Not 'well brought up', just used to things.—

The day her father was sentenced he would have been there, the narrow face pale as a Chinese mandarin's with the drooping moustache to match, ostentatiously ill-dressed to rile a stolid gaze of heavy police youths creaking in their buckled and buttoned encasement. She didn't remember seeing him although it was true that she had slept with him once or twice. Family feeling overruled other considerations as at a wedding or funeral; an aunt—one of her father's sisters—and uncle, and cousin from her mother's side came to be with her despite the fact that they had never had anything to do with her father's politics. As at a service in church, the family took the first row in court. The aunt and female cousins wore hats; she had with her in her pocket the blue, lilac and red paisley scarf she put on only when the court rose as the judge entered, each day of the two-hundred-and-seventeen of her father's trial. All around, everywhere except the high ceiling where the fan propellers were still, there were faces. The well of the court was lined with bodies, bodies shifted and surged on the benches behind her, pushed up thigh against thigh, the walls were padded with standing policemen.

He—her father was led up from cells below the court into the well, an actor, saviour, prize-fighter, entering the realm of expectation that awaits him. He was, of course, more ordinary and mortal than the image of him as he would be on this day had anticipated; a spike of hair stood away from his carefully-brushed crown, her hand went up to her own to smooth it for him. She saw that he saw his sister first, then the cousins; smiled at her, in remark of the family assembly, then deeply, for herself. Lionel Burger and her father, he gave his address from the dock. She knew what he was going to say because the lawyers had worked with him on the material and she herself had gone to the library to check a certain quotation he wanted. She heard him speaking aloud what she had read in his handwriting in the notes written in his cell. Nobody could stop him. The voice of Lionel Burger, her father, was being heard in public for the first time for seven years and for the last time, bearing testimony once and for all. He spoke for an hour. ‘...when as a medical student tormented not by the suffering I saw around me in hospitals, but by the subjection and humiliation of human beings in daily life I had seen around me all my life—a subjection and humiliation of live people in which, by my silence and political inactivity I myself took part, with as little say or volition on the victims’ side as there was in the black cadavers, always in good supply, on which I was learning the intricate wonder of the human body... When I was a student, I found at last the solution to the terrifying contradiction I had been aware of since I was a schoolboy expected to have nothing more troubling in my head than my position in the rugby team. I am talking of the contradiction that my people—the Afrikaner people—and the white people in general in our country, worship the God of Justice and practise discrimination on grounds of the colour of skin; profess the compassion of the Son of Man, and deny the humanity of the black people they live among. This contradiction that split the very foundations of my life, that was making it impossible for me to see myself as a man among men, with all that implications of consciousness and responsibility—in Marxism I found it was analysed in another way: as forces in conflict through economic laws. I saw that white Marxists worked side by side with blacks in an equality that meant taking on the meanest of tasks—tasks that incurred loss of income and social prestige and the risk of arrest and imprisonment—as well as sharing policy-making and leadership. I saw whites prepared to work under blacks. Here was a possible solution to injustice to be sought outside the awful fallibility in any self-professed morality I knew. For as a great African leader who was not a Communist has since said: “The white man’s moral standards in this country can only be judged by the extent to which he has condemned the majority of its population to serfdom and inferiority.”

‘...The Marxist solution is based on the elimination of contradiction between the form of social control and the economy: my Boer ancestors who trekked to found their agrarian republics, subjecting the indigenous peoples of tribal societies by the force of the musket against the assegai, were now in their turn resisting the economic forces that made their feudalistic form of social control obsolete. The white man had built a society that tried to contain and justify the contradictions of capitalist means of production and feudalist social forms. The resulting devastation I, a privileged young white, had had before my eyes since my birth. Black men, women and children living in the miseries of insecurity, poverty and degradation on the farms where I grew up, and in the “dark Satanic mills” of the industry that bought their labour cheap and disqualified them by colour from organizing themselves or taking part in the successive governments that decreed their lot as eternal inferiors, if not slaves....A change of social control in compatibility with the change in methods of production—known in Marxist language as “revolution”—in this I saw the answer to the racialism that was destroying our country then and—believe me! believe me!—is destroying it even more surely and systematically now. I could not turn away from that tragedy. I cannot now. I took up then the pursuit of the end to racialism and

injustice that I have continued and shall continue as long as I live. I say with Luther: Here I stand. *Ich kann nicht anders.*'

An hour and a half. Nobody would dare stop him.

'...stand before this court accused of acts calculated to overthrow the State and establish a dictatorship of the proletariat in this country. But what we as Communists black and white working in harmony with others who do not share our political philosophy have set our sights on is the national liberation of the African people, and thus the abolishment of discrimination and extension of political rights to all the peoples of this country... That alone has been our aim....beyond...there are matters the future will settle.

'...For nearly thirty years the Communist Party allied itself as a legal organization with the African struggle for black rights and the extension of the franchise to the black majority. When the Communist Party was declared a banned organization, and later formed itself as an underground organization to which I belonged, it continued for more than a decade to take part in the struggle for black advancement by peaceful and non-violent means....At the end of that long, long haul, when the great mass movement of the African National Congress, and other movements, were outlawed; the ears of the government stopped finally against all pleas and demands—what advancement had been granted? What legitimate rights had been recognized, according to the "standards of Western civilization" our white governments have declared themselves dedicated to preserve and perpetuate? Where had so much effort and patience beyond normal endurance found any sign of reasonable recognition of reasonable aspirations? ...and to this day, the black men who stand trial in this court as do must ask themselves: why is it no black man has ever had the right of answering, before a black prosecutor, a black judge, to laws in whose drafting and promulgation his own people, the blacks, have had a say?'

Not the squat stern pantomime dame in a curly grey wig up on the bench: nobody dared silence him. Not the policemen who had brought him in, between them, not the plain-clothes men as familiar as tradesmen coming to the house since she was a child.

'That is my answer to the question this court has asked, and my fellow citizens may be asking of me: how could I, a doctor, sworn to save lives, approve the even accidental risk to human life contained in the sabotage of selected, symbolic targets calculated not to harm people—the tactic to which the banned Congress leaders turned in the creation of Umkhonto we Sizwe, the Spear of the Nation—turned to after three hundred years of repression by white guns and laws, after half a century of white indifference to blacks' reasonably formulated, legitimate aspirations... the last resort short of certain bloodshed to which a desperate people turned as a means of drawing attention after everything else had been ignored—'

One hour and forty-seven minutes.

'My covenant is with the victims of apartheid. The situation in which I find myself changes nothing...there will always be those who cannot live with themselves at the expense of fullness of life for others. They know "world history would be very easy to make if the struggle were taken up only on condition of infallibly favourable chances."

'...this court has found me guilty on all counts. If I have ever been certain of anything in my life, it is that I acted according to my conscience on all counts. I would be guilty only if I were innocent of working to destroy racism in my country.'

They heard him out: the words of the condemned man, and the last judgment on those who had condemned him, the judge learnedly and scrupulously impartial within the white man's laws, the secret police and the uniformed police who enforced them, the white people, his own people, who

made the laws. The sentence was what her father knew was coming to him; and she, and the lawyers and everyone around them throughout the trial knew was coming. The newspapers reported a 'gasp through the court' when the judge pronounced sentence of imprisonment for life. She did not hear an gasp. There was a split second when everything stopped; no breath, no heartbeat, no saliva, no flow of blood except her father's. Everything rushed away from him, drew back, eclipsed. He alone, in his short big-headed body and his neat grey best suit, gave off the heat of life. He held them all at bay, blinded, possessed. Then his eyes lowered, she distinctly noticed his eyelids drop in an almost feminine gesture of selfconscious acknowledgment.

She looked straight ahead because she was afraid someone would speak to her or lay a hand on her

At the back of the court where the blacks were crushed in, standing, so that when the seated whites turned to look up, they were overhung, the shouts flung out: Amandhla!

And the burst of response: Awethu!

Amandhla! Awethu! Amandhla! Awethu!

They fell upon her father: his flowers, laurels, embraces. He grinned blazingly and raised his white fist to theirs.

Then it was over. A thin back went down to the cells between many policemen. It was finished. The groupings dropped apart, lawyers, police, clerks moving across each other. The plump, desperately calm face of her father's counsel, prematurely aged by jowls of tension round his gentle, rosy mouth, looked for her and she struggled to get to him. He kissed her and she sank for a moment into the cushion of that cheek, smelled something he put on when he shaved. A foreigner's British voice was saying past her ear—And here life means life.

I know those hours afterwards. After someone has been taken away.

After my brother drowned. After arrests. After my mother died at ten past five in the afternoon at the hospital and when we got home the sprinkler was on in the garden and the washwoman's baby was trying to catch the spray in his hands.

I think that while my mother was alive and my brother was a baby my parents arranged their activities so that one of them was in the clear, always, one would always have a good chance of being left behind to carry on the household if the other were arrested. Of course they also calculated on the Special Branch preferring to leave one of them apparently at large, in the hope of being led to others who were working underground. Nobody told me this, nobody discussed it at home—I just knew, as children know about things their mothers and fathers discuss in bed at night. Then when my brother and mother were gone, there was me. If my father were to be arrested, there would always be me.

Afterwards, there are toys, there are cupboards full of clothes, there are bills and circulars from people who don't know the addressee won't receive them. Although there are no documents or letters because people like my father and mother cannot preserve anything that establishes names or connections, there are boxes (an old round leather box with a buckle fastening, I am told people—perhaps Lionel's grandfather—used to put stiff collars in) containing broken things you don't know why have been kept. The furniture in rooms is arranged in accordance with a logic of movement, of currents of life about it that are no longer there.

Theo had wanted to take me home with him but I said I would go back to the house first and come to the Santorinis' later.—To eat with us.—Yes, I'll have dinner with you.—We'll open a bottle of Dao.—Dao was my father's favourite wine.

Theo could say that to me. He wasn't merely my father's counsel, he wasn't even only a friend. When a hostile colleague had taunted him—lawyers named as Communists by the government are disbarred—with more than professional interest in the Burger case, he had everted his pink, clean lip—Let's say my heart is in it.—

I knew I would have to go through a scene with Lily, and her husband Jamison and any of her other cronies who happened to be gathered at the house. It was she who had given baby photographs to the press when Tony drowned. She had gone into mourning, black from head to toe, with only the salmon coloured palms of her hands and the whites of her eyes for relief, when my mother died. She did for us all the things white people had taught her one ought to be expected to do. I knew she would be shocked that I did not come back borne along by the aunt and uncle and cousins who had, with the blood-loyalty that was their form of courage or kindness, sat to hear the sentence pronounced. I wanted to take Lily up to my bedroom so that we could sit on my bed and I could put my arms round her and let her have her cry, but she was seated formally among the up-ended *chaises-longues* and pool equipment on the porch outside my father's study with Jamison and the servants from round about who were her intimates, waiting for me. I had told her many times that she must expect my father to go to prison this time for a long time. I had tried to prepare her. But she was sitting there as at one of her prayer meetings waiting for the good news, the Lord's mercy. There was a tray with a jug of orange juice and one glass—for me—on the rusty table with the hole where the sun umbrella used to be fitted. They all got up from the screechy wrought-iron chairs whose cushions she had stored away, and when she saw me coming in, just as I had been day after day for all the time of the trial, she understood there was no good news, no Lord's mercy, and her obstinacy fell away from her. She said with a belligerent sense of tragedy—What they did do to him?—

Then she wept and rolled her head and fiercely waved the others away. Her keening, trilling shriek seemed about to begin, but some sense in her was watching me and we were making a tacit compact that she would not fall to the floor in hysterics. I stroked her head that felt like a lumpy mattress, her springy African hair divided and plaited in tiny pigtails under her doek (I had often watched her do it as a child). She rocked me with her.—God is going to stay with him in that place. All the time, all the time. Until he come home.—Here she interceded for us, too, mediating our rejection of belief into the acceptable form, for well-off white people, of merely neglecting to go to church. I don't know what I said; we had our form, too, for correcting without offending—You think of him, Lily. You'll think of him often and he won't be alone.—Something like that.

Arms round each other, just the two of us, we went slowly to the big kitchen where she had cooked so many meals for my father, his family. The alarum clock that she took to her room every night stood on the windowsill above the sink, tacking down the seconds of the end of the first day—*life means life*. At last, she said eggs were finished, and no bread for breakfast tomorrow. So I went out again that day and drove to the Portuguese greengrocer down the road. The west-facing hill where the shops were held the heat of the afternoon sun that made garish the scratches and smears on the car windscreen. Barefoot white children already in their short cotton pyjamas were buying milk and cigarettes and a bonus of chewing-gum or ice-cream cone to take up to the flats above. I was among young women my own age, some with children on the hip or by the hand, their backs and breast-slopes stained deep pink-brown from an afternoon in their swimming-pools; among black men in overalls, silently drinking bottles of coke or orangeade where they stood; among authoritative middle-aged white women bearing the casques of freshly-tinted hair as they selected strawberries and lettuce and lemon according to the plan for a dinner-party. Henriques knew we bought brown eggs, extra-large. My mother must have started the preference; anyway, Lily always insisted on it. Henriques had a smile for

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