

# 1

Oh shit. Everything has abruptly gone dark, I am feeling strange and cannot see anything. The beach, I am going to the beach, I packed a frosty beer for after my run, something is wrong. Oh shit, I must have banged my head, like I used to do when climbing Table Mountain in Cape Town, dreaming of the struggle, and cracking my cranium against an overhang. It will go away, I must just be calm and wait. Watered the tropical pot-plants, stared at the ten heads on the giant African sculpture in my beautiful apartment. Oh shit, how can I be so careless? The darkness is not clearing, this is something serious, a terrible thing is happening to me, I am swirling, I cannot steady myself as I wait for consciousness and light to return. I feel a shuddering punch against the back of my neck, and then what seems like another one. The sense of threat gets stronger and stronger, I am being dominated, overwhelmed. I have to fight, I have to resist. I can feel arms coming from behind me, pulling at me under my shoulders. I am being kidnapped, they have come from Pretoria to drag me over the border and interrogate me and lock me up. This is the moment we have all been waiting for, the few ANC members still working in Mozambique, with dread and yet with a weird kind of eagerness.

‘Leave me,’ I yell out. ‘Leave me.’

I jerk my shoulders and thrash my arms as violently as I can. I always wondered how I would react, whether I would fight physically, risking death, or whether I

would go quietly and rely on my brain and what moral courage I had to see me through.

'Leave me alone, leave me alone,' I demand violently, aware that I am shouting in both English and Portuguese, the official language of this newly independent state where I have been living for a decade. I've forgotten my Afrikaans after twenty years in exile, I'm screaming for my life yet with some control, some politeness, since after all I am a middle-aged lawyer in a public place.

'I would rather die here, leave me, I'd rather die here.'

I feel a sudden surge of elation and strength as I struggle, making an immense muscular effort to pull myself free. I might be an intellectual but at this critical moment without time to plan or think I am fighting bravely and with the courage of the youth of Soweto even though the only physical violence I have personally known in my life was as a schoolboy being tackled carrying a rugby ball. I hear voices coming from behind me, urgent, nervous voices not talking but issuing and accepting commands, and they are referring to me.

The darkness is total, but still I hear tense staccato speech.

'Lift him up, put him there.'

I am not a him, I am me, you cannot just cart me around like a suitcase. But I am unable to struggle any more, I just have to go along and accept what happens, my will has gone.

We are travelling fast, the way is bumpy, how can they leave me in such discomfort, if they are going to kidnap me at least they could use a vehicle with better springs. I have no volition, I cannot decide anything or even move any part of me. But I have awareness,

I think, therefore I am. The consciousness fades and returns, swirls away and comes back, I am lying down like a bundle, there is a point in my head that is thinking, and then oblivion and then awareness again, no thought related to action, but passive acknowledgement that my body is being transported somewhere, that I exist, even if without self-determination of any sort. I wonder if we have reached the South African border yet, I wonder who my captors are, what their faces look like, do they have names? This darkness is so confusing.

More urgent voices, speaking with rapid energy, treating me as an object, to be lifted and carried and moved this way and that . . . I feel the muscles and movements of people all around me, above me, at my side, behind me. Nobody engages me as a person, speaks with head directed towards me, communicates with me. I exist as a mass, I have physicality, but no personality, I am simply the object of other people's decision. They point their mouths to each other, never towards my head, I am totally present, the centre of all the energetic talking, but I am never included in the discussion, my will, my existence is being violated, I am banished even while in the group.

All is very still and calm and without movement or voices or muscular activity. I am wrapped in complete darkness and tranquillity. If I am dead I am not aware of it, if I am alive I am not aware of it, I have no awareness at all, not of myself, not of my surroundings, not of anyone or of anything.

'Albie . . .' through the darkness a voice, speaking not about me but to me, and using my name and without that terrible urgency of all those other voices '. . . Albie, this is Ivo Garrido speaking to you . . .' the voice is sympathetic and affectionate, I know Ivo, he is

an outstanding young surgeon and a friend ‘. . . you are in the Maputo Central Hospital . . . your arm is in a lamentable condition . . .’ he uses a delicate Portuguese word to describe my arm, how tactful the Mozambican culture is compared to the English one, I must ask him later what that word is ‘. . . we are going to operate and you must face the future with courage.’

A glow of joy of complete satisfaction and peace envelops me, I am in the hands of Frelimo, of the Mozambican Government, I am safe.

‘What happened?’ I am asking the question into the darkness, my will has been activated in response to hearing Ivo’s voice, I have a social existence once more, I am an alive part of humanity.

A voice answers, close to my ears, I think it is a woman’s, ‘. . . a car bomb . . .’ and I drift back, smiling inside, into nothingness.

## 2

I am elsewhere and other. There is a cool crisp sheet on me, I am lying on a couch, aware that I have a body and that I can feel and think and even laugh to myself, and everything seems light and clean and I have a great sense of happiness and curiosity. This is the time to explore and rediscover myself. What has happened to me, what is left of me, what is the damage? I am feeling wonderful and thinking easily in word thoughts and not just sensations, but maybe there is internal destruction . . .

Let me see . . . A joke comes back to me, a Jewish joke from the days when we Jews still told jokes to ward