

“NIGHT OF THE FIREFLIES”

by

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In memory of James Baldwin whose influence was inspirational.

“Oh! If we only had other organs which could work other miracles in our favour, what a number of fresh things we might discover around us!”

GUY DE MAUPASSANT – “THE HORLA”

And it so happened that I was chosen to bear testimony

...

DAY ONE – WEDNESDAY 19TH DECEMBER 1984

ENCOUNTER WITH MY PROSPECTIVE HOST

“*Sim, escuto.*”

These were the first words Rainer Kruger spoke to me – a man so hard of hearing, so full of his own words, and the first thing he says to me is that he is listening, he is waiting to hear me. His energy was “On” from the moment he answered my phone call, and he spoke loudly – a man who was unafraid in a country where fear haunted every shadow. I was to discover that such loudness was part of his pattern of behaviour: at one moment to plunge into the silence of the dead and at the next to burst forth provocatively with hazardous noise. As far as listening was concerned, my encounter with Rainer Kruger was mostly a one-way street: *Sim, escuto* should have been my line.

In the sedate lobby of the only hotel in town, I was grateful to be out of the sun, even though the lateness of the afternoon brought no reprieve from the hammering heat. Oxygen was particularly short within the narrow confines of the phone booth. Through the sweating glass, two Germanic-looking men came looming towards me. Judging by their terrible suits they were probably from the German Democratic Republic, dispatched to Africa to inject more science into the Mozambican brand of scientific socialism. They mistook my vigorous waving at the swarm of mosquitoes for a gesture of dismissal.

With my hand cupped round the mouthpiece, in one difficult breath I whispered my name and how I had obtained the Krugers’ number. Rainer Kruger had never heard of the journalist who had given it to me.

“He must have interviewed my father about his yeast business,” he said. “But I doubt if he will remember. He chooses only to remember things from *os boms velhos tempos* – the good old days, before the revolution. I am Mr Kruger Junior. What can I do for you?” His English was fluent but stilted, his Mozambican Portuguese accent tinged with the flat vowels of Southern African whites. He must have lived for a while or been educated in neighbouring South Africa.

Within seconds he displayed that special gift of putting one on edge that I was to become familiar with. I had said, “Sorry to ring you out of the blue” and he responded with a shout of laughter, repeating “out of the blue” twice, so much did it appeal to his brand of humour.

When he had finished, he said loudly, “Do you wish to stay with us during your visit to our capital city, since you cannot afford that hotel?”

I shot a nervous glance into the lobby. Was he standing right there somewhere, watching me? “How do you know where I am?” I asked guardedly.

“You see ... Michael, you say? ... Miguel, we say. You see, Miguel, everyone who comes to Mozambique who is – how to say – who is freelance in life, starts off at the Polana Hotel. It is like the promised land where only those who are not paying themselves can afford to dwell.” A bellowing laugh shuddered through the earpiece.

All of a rush I replied, “There are no rooms available at the Polana. As you know, there are no other hotels left open anywhere in the city. I’ve got friends here, but I can’t find them. I should have phoned before flying in, but I couldn’t get through. You know what the lines are like. If you can put me up just for one night that would be great.”

Silence. I called his name. Had we been cut off?

Finally he spoke. “It is not usual for people to stay in our house, but you have contacted me ...”

“Don’t worry. Tomorrow I’ll be gone. I’m sure that ...”

He shot in with: “It *must* be okay for you to stay. But right now I cannot find the reason.”

“The reason!” I exclaimed. “The reason is everyone I know is away. It’s Christmas.”

At this he went “Shh!” loudly and at length. “No more Christmas – it’s called Family Day here. But no, that is not the reason. The thing is, you have appeared ... and, in particular, you have appeared at this important time of my life.”

He was too weird; I was ready to call the whole thing off. Being in the phone booth was like steaming in a Turkish bath with one’s clothes on, and the mosquitoes were increasing the ferocity of their attacks. Before I could say anything, he announced decisively, transferring the Portuguese present tense into English, “I come and get you! I am one of the happy few who is not only the owner of a car but can even get petrol to drive it. This is because I am a running dog of the *ancien régime*.”

Ignoring my attempt to conclude the conversation, he charged on, “We have plenty of room. I live alone with my father, and two servants who do not count, even here in Utopia. It is well known that our ‘chefs’ treat their servants like ghosts in their *Zona Libertada Da Humanidade* – you must have seen that written all over our airport in big letters? *Não é verdade, Miguel?*”

I was desperate for him to stop. I could not believe that a local, living under increasingly edgy one-party rule in a country ravaged by civil war, could talk in this way on the most bugged instrument in the world. An old hand at Southern African political activism, I knew just how important it was to keep your affiliations quiet if they were serious, and how easy it was to be labelled an enemy through mere hearsay. Indeed, so flustered was I by this man’s crass boldness that he had to ask twice where I had come from, before I answered. He was delighted with the response. “Zimbabwe! *Meu Deus!* You are one of us – *um camarada comunista!*”

The man was a menace. I was on the point of getting out of his line of fire when he discharged another volley of laughter before saying “*Não faz mal!* I am on my way!” and hung up so abruptly I was left gawking at the hand piece.

The sprung doors of the phone booth flapped and winced as I escaped in a rush, startling the lobby staff. I set off for the lounge bar in a daze, but two receptionists hurried to intercept me: before I could advance any further into the premises my shoulder bag had to be searched, an exercise that involved their slowly removing everything in it ... and then letting me put it all back. Having nothing better to do, the cashier and the porter joined in. They were all wearing the same stiffly-starched pre-independence uniforms, faded over a decade from brown to threadbare beige. Earlier, upon my arrival at the hotel, all four men had assembled before me to apply hotel rules that obliged non-residents to check in their suitcases for US\$10 and to purchase US\$10 of beverage coupons for the privilege of using the phone.

Having emerged unscathed from the search I walked into the lounge bar and directly into the line of vision of the two East Germans. They were seated in cushioned lilac armchairs within the genteel embrace of gold-inlaid walls and red velvet curtains. At another table sat four men who looked like expat workers due to their informal attire and their weather-beaten skin. For them, too, I was the object of curiosity. Later I heard them talking of low-cost housing, pronouncing the “ou” in the unique rounded way of Canadians.

The room was a bouquet of memories from my student days when I had paid a brief visit to Mozambique to brush up my Portuguese, one of my subjects for a BA. This was before independence and long before civil war, when the Portuguese were imperial lords and the city was called Lourenço Marques. Despite twenty years of extensive cracking, peeling and shredding, the quaint splendour of colonial decor and architecture remained as I remembered it, the buxom crystal chandelier still hanging from the domed and flourishingly embossed ceiling under whose glow I had danced to a jazz band with my first serious girlfriend, Molly, also nicknamed Molly-Pops ... O, the lost ingenuity of youth!

The bold stares of the customers brought me sharply back to reality. I was in a top African hotel where intrigue is always on the menu, especially where a national war implicated the giants of communism and capitalism. *Who is this stranger? How will he profit from the war?* – the message of calculating eyes. Feigning nonchalance, I loped to the bar and perched on a high stool. While the barman bestowed on me a vodka and tonic in exchange for the beverage coupons, I saw the Canadians squeeze closer and begin to discuss me in whispers.

It was then, while my imported drink was being painstakingly fixed, that I noticed smears of blood on my shoulder bag. No wonder I was being stared at: not only was I new in town, but I bore stains of war from the horrific moment of my arrival.

We had landed at Maputo airport on a civilian aircraft from Zimbabwe, which had paused in transit at the port of Beira in northern Mozambique. After a long wait, we had finally been allowed to leave the boiling cylinder of the passenger cabin. The minute our feet touched the tarmac, we were hastily corralled by a human chain of air hostesses and separated from the baggage handlers who, no longer in possession of fork-lift trucks from *os boms velhos tempos*, were simply dropping our suitcases from the luggage hold down on to the runway.

Suddenly there was a dull explosion and a severed arm spun across the landing strip, fragments of plastic and cloth twirling about our luggage. A bare-footed leg hosed in tattered camouflage tumbled over some cases, and a full torso – head intact but bloated beyond recognition and with one rigid arm pointing dramatically at the sky – settled unsteadily on top of the mountain of luggage like some cock-eyed war memorial.

Uproar from the passengers. Molecules of rotting flesh singed the air. Unable to control myself, I threw up, as did several others. People were running in all directions. Prattling like startled blackbirds, the hostesses fled into the terminal through a door bilingually labelled *Benvindo a Maputo – Welcome to Maputo*. They were immediately replaced by immigration and customs officers who rounded up the straying passengers while talking excitedly among themselves. From what I could gather, the body of a military commander killed by a land mine had been flown back from the port of Beira, where we had transited, to the capital for burial. Long, hot delays had so precipitated

fermentation and the expansion of the plastic body bag that it became as taut as a drumhead ... until, ill-advisedly dropped from the hold like a vulgar case, it had exploded ...

My shoulder bag bore the traces. A visit to the Polana bar's toilet to clean them off, followed by the vodka-tonic, helped to restore a measure of calm. But apprehension over the imminent arrival of my prospective host soon took hold of me. Kruger Junior sounded like bad news, an unliberated ex-colonial "when-we" who did nothing but hanker after the past and gripe about the liberated populace (the *povo*).

God knows why I had let myself in for this! No normal person would voluntarily come to a country crippled by civil war. And I was not going to be able to get out of the place for a whole week, which was when the next exit flight was scheduled. Somewhere behind the boarded-up facades of the besieged city, Kudzi, my lover for nearly six years and the sole purpose of my visit, lay hidden. The dire mood of the city only served to rub salt into my wounds since she had come here to remove herself as far as possible from me, and a prospective job with UNICEF had offered her the opportunity. Aid organisations were not Kudzi's bag – she was supposed to be a journalist. Again and again she had refused to take my calls. What if I never managed to find her amidst all the desolation? Was I so awful in her eyes that conditions in Mozambique were pleasant by comparison?

The warmth generated by the vodka was now adding to the stickiness of the coastal air. Not even the recesses of the Polana Hotel could escape the leaden heat that engulfed the entire country at Christmas time; the building's air-conditioners were simply too old, tired and wanting in spare parts.

I asked for a glass of water; my hands were shaking when I drank it.

The airport incident had underscored the cost of the gamble I was taking in seeking out Kudzi; without doubt it was a bad omen. I should have remained at home in Zimbabwe and sorted out my dire financial problems resulting from a film I was supposed to direct that had been postponed. Everything here felt wrong. I had needed to hitch a ride in from the airport as there were no taxis. My local contacts, most of whom I had never met, were proving unreachable. I had very little foreign currency.

Of course there was no way I could have known, as I sat in the relative comfort of the Polana lounge bar, that both the situation I had placed myself in and my emotional condition were ideal for Rainer Kruger – they contained all the elements required of a victim.

Then, for one chilling moment, I could have sworn I smelt the amassed heat and heard the sharp tick-tack of the weapons of the Renamo rebels¹ who, out there, not far from the hotel, were pushing against the city limits.

My desire to flee the lounge was gradually being bolstered by a belief that my prospective host had thought better of his hasty invitation. I was preparing to return to the lobby and resume my attempts to phone absent people when Rainer Kruger erupted into the bar – the only way to describe his entrance – with a loud "Ha!" uttered from the doorway. Every single person turned to look at him. Lifting his arms, he made a theatrical gesture of welcome in my direction, a wide smile exposing a fence of crooked teeth. Even in the shadow of the door frame his formlessness was apparent, the head too large for the scrawny body, simian arms rising from the baggy sockets of his white short-sleeved shirt.

That the customers had immediately recognised him was apparent from their turning away in unanimous disapproval to resume their conversations. A marked man for a host was everything I did not need. Wishing him away, I lifted the remains of my vodka to my lips.

In no time an egg-shaped head with bulbous eyes loomed down the barrel of the glass, compelling me to lower it. Light from the big chandelier fell upon him, revealing, contrary to the expectations his Germanic name had raised, the unmistakable yellow-brown skin of a person of mixed race, *um mestiço*.

“*Bemvindo a Maputo, Senhor Miguel!*” He held out his hand. I raised mine listlessly and took his – the fingers were limp, cold and dry, like a clutch of frozen eels. Hurriedly, I let go.

His bloodlessness startled me, but it was not only that. Everything about him was an assault on the senses. His eyes, protruding almost like a chameleon’s and each with a certain independence of its own, were so black that they seemed to be all pupil, giving me the feeling of peering into two pits. Diverting my gaze brought further consternation: prehensile feet, with toes big-boned and long, gripped the floor beyond his open-ended sandals. Nowhere in the world could such a person have passed unnoticed.

He astonished me still further when he remarked: “Sorry about my body temperature. Rest assured I am not at death’s door. I am a high temperature superconductor – resistance free. Heat passes straight through me. Nice to meet you!”

His steadfast grin was invasive, doubly so with those terrible teeth. Switching his attentions to the bartender he called out, “*Como está, caro Carlos?*”

Apparently familiar with the icicle effect, Carlos shook his hand calmly.

“This is Senhor Miguel,” he announced with an expansive gesture towards me. “Our neighbour from Zimbabwe.”

I barely had the time to nod at Carlos when my prospective host’s poker-thin finger swung past my face and up at the chandelier. “With the dust removed, imagine how it would glitter – especially when we had grand balls here. Have you seen the magnificent dining room?”

“Yes. I was here once as a student of Portuguese ... before independence.”

“Independence!” he yelled. “As a Mozambican comrade I cannot invite you for a drink at the Polana because I am not supposed to have foreign currency. It is like being in a duty-free shop without being a passenger, if you see what I mean?” He winced theatrically. Then, raising his voice, he announced to the room at large, “Some members of the GDR used to invite me for a drink, but since my father was accused of spying on their embassy the invitations stopped. *Não é verdade?*”

The East German delegation threw him filthy looks; he winked back at them cheekily.

My alarm bells were ringing: the dangers of this sort of gratuitous counter-revolutionary bombast were all too familiar. Rising from the bar stool, I made for the door. More agile than expected, he stuck to my heels. “Do not worry, Miguel! You will get accustomed to my inflammatory flourishes. No one takes any notice. I am taken for a harmless fool. You see, I have been enquired into – most deeply – and cast aside. Like a piece of rubbish.”

Out of the corner of my eye I could see his limbs jangling beside me, uncoordinated like a puppet’s. As we passed the phone booth he cried out, “Even the telephone tappers,

they are used to my nonsense. Believe me, Miguel, everyone knows I am a big-mouth nobody.”

In the centre of the lobby I spun round to face him. “You’d make me a lot happier by cooling it!” We were being observed by four members of staff – the two receptionists, the cashier and the porter – standing as still as sphinxes. Fortunately, there was no one else about.

In a sudden descent into obsequiousness, he replied, “I understand. Sorry! I have become over-excited. The last weeks are most confusing. Too much information pouring into my poor head!” He was waving his long hands about like fans. “You are quite right. I must get hold of myself.”

There was an awkward moment of all-round immobility before he smacked his forehead and exclaimed, “How rude! I believe I have not introduced myself. You do not know my full identity.”

I emitted a pained sigh as he dug into the pockets of his beige trousers searching for something – first one pocket, then another. The hotel staff began to shuffle uneasily. “*Porca miséria!*” he muttered. “Where did I put it?” He was double-jointed, and the assertive bending to unnatural angles made me queasy. “*Porca miséria!*” he repeated. His temples were packed with fat, blue-black veins that were so pumped up it crossed my mind he might be on drugs. Then I noticed an even more unusual phenomenon: the almost cleanly bald crown of his pointed head had not a single bead of sweat on it, just a sheen of dampness, while my own head was a fountain. It was as if his body resided elsewhere, beyond the borders of this profoundly humid country.

At last he pulled out what he was hunting for – a card sealed in clear plastic. Triumphant he held it up. “My ID! Look at it!” I had no choice but to do so since he was holding it inches from my face. His photograph was on it. “See! There is my name. Hans Rainer, pronounced as in the river Rhine, plus ‘er’ – Rain-er Kruger. No one uses the Hans. My name Rainer lies outside the Portuguese selection so here they call me the closest thing to it – Rainha, spelt R-A-I-N-H-A. You know what that means? It means Queen!” Another blast of laughter hit me like a cannon ball, and on this occasion he opened his mouth so wide that his tongue poked out – black with red patches, piebald, leathery – a parrot’s tongue! I stepped back in alarm. He looked scarcely human.

Clapping his hands in glee he went on, “Only English-speakers like you know what is a Queen! The joke is lost on *Moçambicanos*. But have no fear, drag clubs are not my scene.”

In a split second he performed another rapid mood change. “Read this!” he said terribly seriously, prodding at some words on the card with a spindly forefinger that was lanced by a nail as perfect as a church window. (I remember thinking at that moment that this nail, the only morphology of his body that could be associated with beauty, must be the gift of his African genes.) I saw *Asilo Psiquiátrico Nacional* (State Asylum for the Insane) printed across the top of his ID. Within a denser text below I picked out the words *transtorno bipolar*.

“See that? I am a certified crazy. Not bad, eh? Mentally disturbed but harmless.” He waved the card at me. “It means I can say anything and no one cares. Do you believe me now?”

I nodded, hesitantly.

“Many are envious that I have such a card. Imagine if everyone had one? Ah! then we could talk of real freedom!” With a bitter laugh he whipped the card back into his pocket.

I started for the porter’s lodge, keen to draw the lunatic out of the public domain. But once again with uncanny speed he was at my side, slapping his frozen paw on my shoulder. “Relax! I will get your bags. In Maputo, I know *all* the rules.”

By now the porter was hauling my hefty suitcase out of left-luggage. Rainer decided to relieve him of the object, but gasped and dropped it, then struggled with it as if he were pulling at an anchor. Going to his rescue I found myself dancing about ridiculously with him while he refused to let go. Only when I wrenched the case away did he raise his stick arms in surrender. After which he pulled out a bundle of notes and went round liberally tipping the porter, the receptionists and even the cashier. None of them offered a word of thanks. Meanwhile I dragged my case with ungracious haste out through the revolving door.

Night had fallen, an event that made not the slightest breach in the wall of heat. Behind me I heard Rainer come out, then shout back inside “*A luta continua!*” He was standing in front of the doorway making a clenched fist salute towards reception. I was on the point of protesting once more when I heard all four employees respond with the double chant, “*Viva Frelimo! Viva a revolução!*”

A chuckle escaped my lips – the first in a many a day. Perhaps he really *did* know all the rules.

THE KRUGERS’ HOUSE

“It is my key to the city,” Rainer announced as he directed me across the floodlit forecourt towards an old 504 Peugeot which, despite being dented all over, had been polished until it shone like black serpentine. He added, “Without a car, life is a black hole from where there is no escape.”

As he helped me heave my case into the boot, he asked why it was so heavy. I explained that I had been advised to bring along plenty of tinned food. “Excellent!” he remarked. “I see you are a man who knows how to look after himself in the great unknown.”

Revvng hard, he steered his car towards the steel gates which were efficiently parted by soldiers. It was unnerving to leave the Polana Hotel, an island of self-generating light with a good supply of vodka.

All too swiftly the car sank into the belly of the African night.

There were no streetlights anywhere. No shop lights. No signs of life. High security walls made it impossible to see more than the roof of a suburban house. Apartment blocks were blackened out. A city locked in darkness, I thought, is more frightening than a jungle because it is unnatural.

As we rattled and jolted down the road, Rainer made no attempt to avoid the potholes. He sat huddled over the wheel in total silence. A new mood had settled on him: he was like an actor who had subsided into himself after an exhausting performance. In the green light of the dashboard I studied his face with fascinated curiosity: gravity, its directive force, had pulled at the heavy creases of skin and dragged down his African lips hang-dog fashion so that each time we hit a major hole in the road the loose flesh shook

and juddered; his hooked nose was typical of neither Africa nor Europe, more like a Native American's; and although he must have been only in his late thirties, the strangeness of his looks, dominated by his protuberant eyes, made him appear much older, yet at the same time ageless.

Who, I wondered, was his African mother? What had she been doing with a German who, according to my journalist friend, had fled from communism in Russia and then again in China, only to come to Africa and be engulfed in another Marxist revolution? And how had such a father and such a mother come to produce such a bizarre individual, who was now leading me through a dark and dangerous city in an ancient and uncertain car?

Through the open window, hot air buffeted my skin like the furred wings of crazed moths. A street sign flashed past in the headlights – *avenida Mao Tsé Tung* – adding to my sense of displacement. Seconds later, a sweep of bougainvillea on a garden wall brought Kudzi back to mind with a pang: she was sitting in our lushly flowered garden in Zimbabwe with her knees up and her skirt gathered under her buttocks reading *The Sociological Impact of Blair Toilets in Southern Matabeleland*, unaware that I had come out of the house and had stopped to admire her; the hum of the insects, the rustle of the bamboos, the treasure of colours, the intensity of my lover's concentration, which often caused her to part her lips and bite her tongue, transformed that ordinary moment for me into an image of indestructible bliss ... Yet destruction had come. And, thirty-seven days later, fragments of Kudzi lay embedded in me like shrapnel.

We were driving alongside the sandy open ground of a public park when I noticed that I had become the object of Rainer's scrutiny. His searching glances were saying *What are you doing in my car? Why am I taking you home?*

Hastily I said, "Thank you for your spontaneous offer of hospitality ... it's most uncommon. I don't think I fully realised just how bad things are here."

Ignoring the remark he asked, "You are a journalist?"

"No. Some writing, some films," I answered.

The bulbous nature of his eyes made it doubtful to interpret their widening as a favourable response.

We were now slowing down in a narrow street lined with scraggy jacaranda trees. A battered sign skewered at the wrong angle read *avenida Francisco O. Magumbwe*.

Rainer mumbled, "Why have you come here?"

I had no reason to conceal the truth. "My girlfriend's run off. I'm here to find her and take her back to Zimbabwe."

He shook his head, as if trying to express sympathy, or so I assumed, before saying after a pause, "I doubt that is the primary reason."

It was my turn to widen eyes, but I chose not to pursue the point with a person who enjoyed being a contrarian.

As we drove past a moderately tall towerblock, I could see cooking fires in the lower passageways with shifting figures leaning over black pots. Rainer wound up his window and asked me to do the same. "Muggings have occurred at gateways," he remarked. "Always remember: if you carry 500 meticaïs or a couple of US dollars, your life should be spared."

We pulled up at a double gate that was made of sheet metal topped with barbed wire and spikes and was set in a high brick wall crowned with pieces of broken bottle. A

servant, who must have been waiting for us, peeped through a slit with a chain running through it, then opened up.

A tarred driveway brought us right up to a parking area in front of a single-storeyed house surrounded by a garden where the monotony of sandy soil and sun-scorched patches of grass was broken by coarse, twisting bushes, shrubs and cacti. With a clumsy lurch, the car stalled after knocking against a bricked-in bed of geraniums that defined the parking area. Rainer had omitted to disengage the gear.

The death of the engine and headlights was greeted by a choral swell of cicadas. As though we had arrived on foot, my companion went “Phew!” and got out. I had to grope about for the handle before I could open my door. At the invisible gate behind us, the rustle of a chain and the clunk of a padlock could be heard.

I looked up at the house: a slated, steep roof gleamed under the star-bright sky like a helmet and cast hard shadows over the white-washed walls then down on to the driveway.

The gateman lifted my case out of the boot as easily as if it contained straw and disappeared with it round the back of the building. As my eyes grew accustomed to the absence of light, dozens of fireflies glowed on and off over the garden like sentinels. A quick series of eerie hoots – half-electrical, half-animal – stopped me in my tracks.

“Fruit bats,” Rainer explained as he moved towards the hard-wood front door. “The true regents of the night – not those squeaking cicadas!”

There was a lot of lock and key activity before the door opened and a mongrel with a strong mix of Labrador rushed up to Rainer. It responded enthusiastically to his endearments – “Rosa, my lovely! I’m home, my sweet!” – accompanied by much patting. Encased in plaster, one of the animal’s hind legs thrashed about awkwardly.

As I stepped into the hallway, my attention was drawn instantly to a pool of lamp light on the veranda where three people were playing cards. Two of them, a middle-aged couple of Mediterranean appearance, nodded at me with timid smiles, and we exchanged a cordial “*Boa tarde!*” The third, a heavily built old man with cropped white hair, did not look up at all. Behind them, the rusted gauze of an insect screen running the whole length of the veranda devoured the peripheries of the lamplight.

I found myself following Rainer down a tenebrous corridor while Rosa skidded between our legs, her claws squealing on frictionless tiles like chalk, her plaster leg thudding.

“Wonderful! You speak Portuguese!” His voice boomed out behind me in the passage.

I whispered “*Mais ou menos*”, wincing as the resonant sibilance fell away amidst the impression of profound treachery that the house had so quickly stamped on me.

In a candle-lit room at the end of the passage, walled in by shelves of books that were all leather-bound in uniform red, the servant who had opened the gate was already pulling a bunk bed from the wall. There was one window covered by a grey Venetian blind. At the centre of the ceiling a wooden fan hung lifelessly. I saw my suitcase already parked on a low table. Next to it was an oak desk, heavily embossed in the European baroque manner.

“This is the library of my father,” Rainer said with distaste. The servant switched on a table fan. “These fans are run by heavy duty batteries that António keeps topped up and charged as best he can. Don’t you, António?”

The servant straightened up. He was a tall, well-muscled, handsome man of about thirty. He did not respond. As he prepared to leave the room his eyes passed over me, unnerving in their bold and appraising intelligence.

Showing me to a bathroom off the corridor with a large jug of water by the sink, Rainer explained: “Hot and cold showers are only available in the morning, outside at the back. António will show you. He has fixed up the water tanks to capture the erratic municipal offerings, and he has revived a wood boiler from the days of the pioneers. We all have so much to learn in order to survive. Tedious, isn’t it?”

Dinner would be served in half an hour. He drifted away, leaving me to wonder how he would cope without António making tedium so comfortable for him.

Travel, trauma and heat had killed my appetite. I sat down at the ostentatious desk (a relic, perhaps, of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, rescued by Rainer’s father) and drank the cooled water that had been put out for me – a kindness that helped to temper my feelings of antipathy towards my host. My attention was caught by a silver-framed photograph of a youngish woman dressed in ’40s chic that was positioned next to the blotting pad; she had an aloof, sensual, Garboesque quality, but her mouth was screwed up too tightly, giving her a gagged look.

With a deep sigh I lay down on the bunk bed in the airless room. António’s fan was doing nothing more than stir the thick heat, but the window screens had at least made the house an insect-free zone. Normally I like rooms full of books; my office in Zimbabwe has over twenty years of books stretching higgledy-piggledy up to the ceiling. In Mr Kruger Senior’s library, however, the books – all apparently covered by the same binder – had been transformed into wallpaper, mere decoration. The library of a snob.

I got up to open the window, and shut it again at once: the air outside was clammy than within. Through the Venetians, the car and the gate could be seen, a still-life petrified in silver. In the midst of chaos, I thought, there are always secret corners of peace – a comforting reflection that ended all too abruptly with the passing of a shadow across the slit in the gate through which the chain passed. Someone had been peering inside. I was the new player in town who needed to be checked out. Danger was in the air once again, threatening even this fortified haven.

A noise close behind spun me round: the thick-set old man from the veranda was shuffling round the desk – doubtlessly Kruger Senior. He must have been at least eighty, his head, jaw and neck covered by close-cut bristle like the pelt of a white rat. Snatching up a gold fountain pen, a big magnifying glass, and then the photograph of the Garboesque woman – which he hugged protectively to his chest as if she were still alive – he made for the door, ignoring me completely.

“You should not barge in!” Rainer had appeared in the doorway, glaring at his father. “I explained we have a guest!”

The old man wheezed as he swayed from foot to foot looking for a space to get past his son. Rainer gestured towards me hopelessly, saying, “Miguel, this is my father, Klaus Kruger.”

Without a glance in my direction the old man lurched forward with a savage and brusque sound and pushed past his son. Then the two of them were swallowed up by the dark passage, Rainer’s voice echoing “You can write your imaginary letters on the veranda. You spend your life on the veranda ...”

It was all too much for me. Exhausted, I flopped down once again on the bed.

THE SHIFT OF FORMS

António aroused me from a troubled doze to announce dinner in slow and cumbersome English. As I tried to get up, I realised that I was in the full grip of depression. Pleading weariness, I asked to be left to sleep.

For a long time I lay naked under the sheet falling in and out of consciousness. Whichever way I moved, the bottom sheet clung to my sweating body. And whenever I awoke, Kudzi popped into the forefront of my mind to torment me with her absence: I saw and felt her shining skin, uniform to the eye, glazed to the touch, exuding a smell as intoxicating to me as the smell of the savannah after rainfall; I saw her sudden smile; and I heard her unique laughter sustained at a single pitch like a kettle steaming.

I had to walk round the room for a while to ward off these sensations, only to trade them for dreams the moment I lay down again ...

I am a young boy playing whist with my parents, so wrapped in love and security that I wish the card game would go on forever ... until, like a shark, the realisation closes in on me that this idyll can not last. Sure enough, my father shoots to his feet yelling at my mother with vicious loathing as he overturns the felt-topped card table ...

My father changes into Rainer Kruger's father, raising a spade with a triangular head and striking me with it ...

Maputo airport: a severed head rolls over the runway with blood spurting – it's Rainer's head, with his eyes bulging as usual. As it tumbles over the landing strip, his head turns into my head, which eventually comes to rest at Kudzi's feet ...

My lover stands watching me – on her face an expression of a pain far greater than mine.

Gunfire! Real gunfire. I sat up to the sound of it, close by, out there in the night of the besieged city. I rushed to the window, my pulses racing: nothing, not even a shadow crossing the gap in the gate. Now the terror of my dreams was matched by a living terror outside.

I lay down wide-eyed upon the bed. The firing stopped – leaving nothing – not a sound. Behind the fan, the candle guttered. I fixed my gaze upon the teetering flame – a human life is just as fragile, I thought; how simple it would be to extinguish my own flame.

A long period of suffocating darkness followed through which I tossed and turned. It was broken, eventually, by the sound of a door closing somewhere in the house, followed by the patter of bare feet. Then two voices began talking, discussing the gunfire, perhaps. Their tone was troubled. The sibilant flow of Portuguese became audible as the voices rose in argument. I inched my door open: Rainer's voice was discernable and I was vexed to hear my name being mentioned. Tentatively I moved down the passage to the hall where flickering light from a paraffin lamp at the far end of the veranda revealed Rainer and António huddled in tense discussion.

More astonishing even than the spectacle of master and servant in this pose was the level of intimacy revealed by a mutual understanding of references that came up either as unrecognisable words or as incomprehensible phrasing. They were speaking Portuguese,

but my confusion did not arise from my lack of total fluency in the language. It was almost as if they were resorting sometimes to a secret language known only to them.

From the recess of the hall I listened with increasing alarm. It was clear that their topic had nothing to do with the recent gunfire; they were talking about me – and the discussion was framed by some sort of political action in which they were both involved.

Antônio, it seemed, was not happy with my presence. He said something that sounded like “*Você está recebendo uma frequência errada.*” (“You’re receiving the wrong frequency.”)

Rainer, however, was insistent. “*Que seca!* I need to be encouraged by you. Some stranger comes along, and off you go complaining! I need time. His function must become apparent.”

Then he said something incomprehensible like: “I cannot identify him in the universal field. (*Não consigo identificá-lo no campo universal.*)”

“So you admit that his line of life (*linha da vida*) does not cross with yours?” the younger man said.

Rainer answered, “You don’t approve of the conspiracy, so why should I listen to you?” (“*Conspiração*” raised the hairs on the back of my neck, in due course to be interchanged with “*intriga*” which means “plot”, and both of which spelt politics.)

“You never listen to me,” Antônio complained.

There was a pause, interrupted by the occasional twang of insects on the veranda screens. Then I heard Antônio plead, “Let him slip back into the chaotic transmitter.”

Rainer made bitter references to this “*transmissor caótico*”, then said, “His presence could help activate things. That is the true reason why you want him to leave.”

A sadness entered Antônio’s voice. “I am upset that you are bringing things to a head ... you know my views.”

“And am sick of hearing them!”

“I warn you again – your method is not the way to push forward the shift of forms.” (It sounded like poetry: “*a mudança de formas*”.)

Thereafter, I was lost in a maze of ambiguities until Rainer stopped Antônio with strident sarcasm (a favourite device, as I was to discover at my own expense). “Blah, blah! Do I need reminding that I have been stuck this long? *Merda!*”

Seconds later Rainer interrupted the servant, angrily. “Yes, yes!” he hissed. “Next time you will lose me.”

Then after a pause, he almost wailed, “I see nothing in Zeega. Nothing! They suffocate me. Always you try to make me feel guilty. Guilty about what?” (As I write this, I remember with a smile that the first time I heard the word “Zeega” I thought I heard “Cimas”, the acronym for Central African Medical Aid Society.)

Rainer continued with a stream of gibberish packed with resentment, and ending with “Do you wish to drive me really crazy? As long as you refuse to tell me what happened there, I will never forgive you. Never!”

He got up in disgust, and I edged back into the darkness from where I could still hear him say, “Soon ‘the ham’ (*o fiambre*) will arrive. Then all the cards will be in my hands.” To which Antônio responded most firmly, “Tomorrow you can tell them *not* to bring the ham. Stop this rubbish now, before it is too late!”

The servant’s sudden rising to his feet sent me on a quick retreat down the corridor.

Soon after I had closed the door of the library behind me, the tick-tack of sticky feet came past, followed by the squeak and thump of a door closing – António, presumably withdrawing to the domestic quarters in the back garden.

I shuddered to think of the possible implications of what I had heard. Judging by Rainer's reactionary style it could even be a connection with Renamo, those apartheid-backed *bandidos* who liked to mutilate people slowly until they died. How clever to have cooked up that lunatic's card! It made Rainer the perfect clandestine scavenger of information. And clearly the role of servant was António's cover; he was probably a member of a Renamo cadre placed in a "safe" house. Whatever they were up to, my own problem was obvious: I would be automatically involved simply because I happened to be his guest. If Rainer were under suspicion, or worse still, up to something dangerous, I could get arrested and deported at any moment. Already I had been seen with him by men from foreign governments who clearly had no liking for him.

Through my films and books I had supported the liberation war that led to Zimbabwe's independence, and I was a supporter of the African National Congress (ANC) of South Africa whose national choir had provided music for several of my films. These were sensitive times in front-line states like Mozambique from where the ANC was launching covert operations. Political skulduggery was the last thing I needed. I decided to leave the Kruger premises as soon as the sun was up.

Scarcely had I lain down on the bunk bed than I heard someone moaning outside. In exasperation I marched to the window and bashed the Venetian slats apart. At once my gaze fell on Rainer stumbling around in the garden while rubbing his head with both hands. After a few steps he would cry out and strike at the night as if he were being attacked by invisible bees. I let the blinds snap together loudly, outraged by the intrusion of his personal dramas upon my own.

The moans of the wounded beast were driving me to protest when a calming voice was heard. Once again I traipsed to the blinds: António had his arm round Rainer and was encouraging him to go inside.

Doors closed and locked, and silence settled uncertainly upon the house.

DAY TWO – THURSDAY 20TH DECEMBER 1984

A STATE OF TRANCE

I thought the room was on fire: red rays pierced the blinds like pokers, shimmering motes of dust. It was so hot it seemed the blazing star itself had crashed through the window. Acid ate my stomach. Next to the bunk bed the fan soldiered on, without effect; I switched it off. My watch said six-thirty. How would I ever find the strength to rise to the challenge of Mozambique? I cursed Rainer Kruger for irresponsibly inviting an innocent stranger into a house riddled with intrigue.

Wrapping my burning flesh in a towel I tramped off in search of the outside shower. In the kitchen, Rainer was seated at a wooden table before an untouched cup of coffee, staring into space. A plump black woman dressed in a white apron, a blue uniform and a bonnet came forward, drying her hands on a kitchen cloth. “Good morning, master. My name, Agi,” she announced with a generous smile. “António tell me you our guest. You from Zimbabwe. Ooo, very nice!” She shook my hand as if I were a long-lost relative. “I from South Africa. Twenty years I work for Master Kruger.”

Rainer remained frozen at the table, with Rosa sleeping at his feet. Despite the gauzed back door and windows, flies cruised around master and dog. Sightless immobility had turned my host into a sculpture. The pupils of his hypertrophic eyes had opened like those of an animal in the night, but without luminous vigour – deadened rather, and glazed like a couple of marbles. People on hallucinogenics have pupils like that. Peering closer into his orbs I saw smudgy blotches stirring as on a forest floor. “What’s wrong with him?” I asked Agi irritably.

“Oh, is nothing, master,” she giggled. “Master Rainer, he sometimes go to dreaming standing on his own two feet.”

Rainer did not blink. Agi also came and looked into his eyes. “For sure it will not be long now,” she said as though she were giving an update on the weather. Going to the stove she said, “Would the master like some good coffee?”

I decided I would have a shower first, and went out through the sprung back door.

Walking around the back of the house, I was impressed by the sight of a peacock pecking at the dry grass – the source of an indefinable cry that I had heard at intervals during my restless night. The great bird had no doubt been installed by Mr Kruger Senior to retain a semblance of his fading grandeur.

I proceeded alongside a well-supplied vegetable garden dotted with paw-paw and mango trees, past a chicken run with fluffy hens surveyed by a fine cock, beyond which stood typical small-roomed domestic quarters with an asbestos A-frame roof. As I turned the corner of the house I could hear the sound of a handsaw from a wooden shed. Like a sunlit streak of dead parchment, a wizened arm was going back and forth across the door’s black yawn.

The shower was a metal lean-to next to the famous António water tower, supporting three tanks. One of them was rusty and unusable, and one had a furnace under it containing the dying embers of a wood fire.

It was wonderful. You could have the shower hot to scald off ingrained dirt, then cool to freshen up ... almost cold, actually – a miracle created by António who threw bags

of ice into the third tank every morning. The water was brown, with a metallic taste, and smelt of earth. I came out of there a new man.

As I headed back round the house I drew up in astonishment: a double-barrelled shotgun was trained on me through the open door of the shed. I was about to make a run for it when the old fool Kruger chuckled and went “Boom!” I cursed him out loud, and stormed past, catching a glimpse of his jellied eyes, untouched by the mirth that shook his face.

In the kitchen, Rainer was sitting with his dog, transfixed as before. Agi brought me a mug of coffee, but I could not bring myself to drink it in front of a man who had tumbled so strangely into an abyss of reverie or was, perhaps, simply acting at not being present.

As I was heading for the inner door a disembodied voice called out: “*Sente-se, Miguel!*” The words had a hollow tone, as if they came from a vast distance. I looked round.

“Sit down! Be with you in a minute.” Rainer’s lips, like the rest of him, had not moved. Ventriloquism – a new gimmick? I clicked my tongue in annoyance and left the kitchen.

I dressed minimally – shirt, trousers, sandals – then set off down the passage to look for the phone.

A door next to the bathroom opened into a palatial dining room where an oval mahogany table shimmered like a pool of water in the window light, guarded by a dozen high-backed chairs. Overhead, a gold ceiling fan hovered like a bird of prey. As I crossed this room an antique grandfather clock gave me a start by cranking out “Ave Maria” to herald the hour.

The adjoining lounge was dominated by a decorous Christmas tree standing tall like a symbol of defiance against the ideology that was raising havoc beyond the garden wall. I wound my way between comfortable armchairs and a black leather sofa, then past a well-polished grand piano, its open lid poised for play. From the double-doors at the far end of the room I spotted the telephone on a side table in the entrance hall.

Once again I listened to the terse message recorded on the machine of a journalist I had once met in London – the same message I had listened to in Zimbabwe and in the booth of the Polana Hotel. Another machine answered when I tried a local film producer. Christmas was no time to be looking for the Maputo elite – they were all out of the country.

I decided to call an Irish woman of considerable charm whom I had met on the plane on her way back from a shopping trip to Zimbabwe, even though her African-American husband, Joe van Melvin the Second (no less!), who worked for the United States Embassy, had made it clear while giving me a ride into the city that there was no room for me in their house over Christmas.

By good fortune Maeve, as she was called, was at home. Nervous about being identified with the Kruger household, I lied to her about where I had spent the night, claiming that I was at the Polana but had checked out. Did she have friends with a spare bed, a sofa, even a floor, maybe? But by the time I rang off I had gained nothing more than an invitation to a US Embassy Christmas Eve party on a launch.

In Mozambique clothes simply perform the duty of a sponge; by the end of the phoning I was sweating as much as I had been before my shower. I decided that after a

quick breakfast, I would leave my suitcase at the house, to be collected later, walk out the gate and deliver myself to Kudzi's doorstep ... assuming I could find the flat where she was staying with her Danish plumber friend, Ulla.

With this plan in mind, I returned to the kitchen where I was exasperated to find Rainer still fixed brazenly at the table. Agi was delighted by my return. "Yesterday I get flour from ration shop," she said. "Look, I make good bread. But sorry, jam she is short!"

Presenting my back to my host to regain my composure, I sat sipping coffee and nibbling Agi's bread. A steady pounding from outside, beyond the garden, slowly invaded my consciousness: a sound characteristic of an African village, of pestle grinding corn on mortar. It was this that finally drew Rainer from his trance-like inertia. His vacant stare traversed me, then settled on the gauzed back door. His pupils gradually pulled focus and his full lips trembled, an earthy voice rising from him, the syllables of sound barely registering on his lips: "Get the chaff, Agi! Pay them the usual!"

Less moved by Rainer's return to life than by his commands, Agi began to wring her hands. "They trouble me for extra money, master," she said. Then, slapping her palms upon her hips, she turned in the direction of the stomping and announced sombrely. "Long time since we have mealies!"

Her statement caused animation to pour across Rainer's face like a tide. "The chickens love the chaff," he said at speed as though he were newborn. "It is worthless to the *povo*. Pay them more!" his excitement raw and palpable like a child's – and infectious too, judging by the skidding paws of the dog as it scrambled to its feet.

Agi shook her head. "The *povo*, they eat everything from the mealie, master."

Her statement swept the callow glow of innocence from Rainer's countenance, replacing it with a sourness that ate at his mouth. Reverting to Portuguese he said, "Their city will crumble and the *povo* will return to stamping mealies!" He let his body slump, and in this manner found himself looking down at his happy dog, a spectacle that restored his spirits somewhat. He leaned down and stroked the animal. Soon he was making overtures to it: "Horrible street kids tried to eat you, didn't they my lovely?" – the dog rolled on its back and made delighted chopping motions with its plaster leg – "Poking sticks at you through the gate, with nails and razors. Smashing your leg." – tossing a wild glance in my direction – "*Filhos da puta!* They wanted to eat her!"

I was about to launch into my final show-down with him when the spring on the back door squealed and António entered carrying a sensational Carnaby Street shopping bag with John Bull and the Union Jack printed on it. He mumbled "*Bom dia!*" at large and proceeded to unpack bags of rice and salt and other items, scolded all the while by Agi for not getting sugar because he had set off too late to secure a good position in the ration queue. Rainer, meanwhile, had responded to António's entry by assuming an air of pained weariness that climaxed with the dropping of his brow on to the wooden table, with a thump.

"Is my bitterness a reflection of your own?" he asked the table. "Does it make you dislike me as you dislike yourself?" I did not understand whom he was addressing until he swung his head up from the table and fixed me with a rheumy-eyed stare.

"We both know, Miguel, that life sells us short. Do you deny that?" he asked, resting his elbows on the table and waiting for an answer, which came as a grunt of sorts.

Thankfully his gaze slid off me onto his thin arms, which came down tentatively on to the table top like the legs of a timorous stick insect. I stared at his long quivering fingers caressing the furred wood.

“You need not be so anxious to leave,” he mumbled in a voice still stripped of emotion. “Whatever you overheard last night, it will not interfere with your task in Mozambique.”

I got up with a clatter. “You’re plotting something!” I said somewhat hysterically. “I’m not a political greenhorn. I smell a rat here. You have no right to impose your affairs on me!”

During this outburst António and Agi kept their backs to me, while Rainer’s reaction was to reach out for his cold cup of coffee, raise it and sip at the contents. Eventually he said, “If you must go I cannot stop you.”

“Dead right I’m going!”

“There is no hurry. Please ...” his voice almost normal as he gestured at my unfinished toast. “Eat! You are too hard on yourself. You have lost not only your girlfriend but your ideals, your dreams. You are a man with an empty plate. And you are also physically unwell – sharp rods pass through your duodenum. Eat! The toast will absorb some of the acid.”

I flushed with resentment at his presumptive arrogance; by some wild stroke of luck he had correctly detected my ulcer and, perhaps, my crumbling faith in an international socialist future. Pointing in the direction of the street, I said, “I must leave right now for my girlfriend’s!”

“I will take you in the car,” he responded immediately.

“There’s nothing wrong with my legs.”

“You do not have the constitution to walk about in the heat of Maputo. Anyway it is dangerous for foreigners – particularly white ones.”

He lifted a trouser leg and scratched at his ankle, affecting insouciance. “Agi!” he commanded, “Go fetch the phone directory!”

“I have Kudzi’s number,” I protested. “Anyway, she refuses to speak to me on the phone.”

Agi, however, had already passed through the inner door.

“The only use for the directory is for its map of the city,” he said. “So I can find where your girl is staying.” Eager to flaunt his contempt for the common man, he added, “It is the *only* map made available to us, the *povo*.”

During this whole interchange António had not deviated from various kitchen tasks; but now, after releasing a trapped breath, he went out the back door.

Agi, meanwhile, had returned with the directory. Rainer asked me for the address. It made no sense to refuse the ride, so I took out my address book and thumbed through it. “It’s *avenida Patrice Lumumba*. Some flats called the *Torres Vermelhas*.”

“Ah! On the Catembe side!” he exclaimed. “The seedy part of town, compared with the smart Polana suburb where you are now.”

“Unlike you, her friends swim with the *povo*.”

Taking no notice of my verbal swipe he stared at the map for a long time. I thought he must be having trouble finding the street until he disconcerted me thoroughly by breaking into a recitation of disjointed half-remembered Portuguese verse: *Uma janela vermelha sobre um mar negro* (A red window over a black sea) ... *Fogo nas árvores* (Fire

in the trees) ... *Homens curvam-se debaixo das luzes de guerra* (Men crouch under lamps of war) ... He seemed to be slipping into another of his reveries with his voice drifting off ... *She watches from her red window, and weeps, for men are dying ...*

“Enough!” I shouted, now rating him even more demented than his card of health indicated. “You’re either dropping me off at once, or I’ll leave under my own steam!”

His face shot up in bewilderment. “What! What was I saying? What is it?”

I shot a finger at him. “Are you taking me right now or not?”

“Of course I’m taking you! *Avenida Patrice Lumumba* is on my way to the factory.”

He had switched back to his normal voice with suspicious ease; I had a strong feeling that I was being toyed with; in fact it was highly conceivable that he had been doing so all morning.

Without a second thought he tore the map out of the directory and handed it to me. “You will need it if you ever choose to go mad and walk alone in this dying city. I have another at our factory,” he said, releasing one of his cannon-ball laughs.

I still have that map. I found it useful when it came to writing this book.

THE DRIVE TO ULLA’S APARTMENT

It was almost noon by the time Rainer was ready to leave. Back in the old car, the heat in the streets held dominion over my flesh like a fever. I had brought along my shoulder bag with a shirt, some underwear, my money, my passport and toiletries. Rainer offered to bring me my suitcase when I had settled in elsewhere – an offer I could not refuse in view of the transport difficulties.

As we drove across the city I began to panic at the idea of meeting Kudzi. There is a point where something snaps, when the inability to make myself understood, to sort out ambiguities, misconceptions, sends rage through my veins until a murderous weapon is launched: verbal firepower. An ugly compulsion. But Kudzi also had a weapon: stonewalling silence. The two together were like oil and water.

Although he never said so directly, it seemed that Rainer really wanted me to carry on staying at his house, and for this reason he became charming. But it also occurred to me that he might have a more sinister motive – to keep me under observation because he had caught sight of me spying on his midnight intrigues with António.

“Look at all these walls around everything!” he said as we passed a two-storeyed house poking up from an ugly barricade of concrete slabs. “The only expanding industry in Mozambique – security walling. But we do not own our properties any more! Ridiculous paradox, no?”

He was swerving to miss the potholes and not doing too well, perhaps because of his zoot sun glasses, chrome-tinted so that you suffered the annoyance of seeing your reflection in them whenever he glanced at you. When we first got into the car at the house he had felt the need to provide an explanation for them that had struck me as fanciful: “They help me deal with the light fog. All the time I fight it. The short stubby waves are the worst.” And with a snaggle-toothed grin he had added, “You see, Michael, you and I – together we are pilgrims of darkness.” A chilling prospect that my imminent farewell would fortunately annul.

In the *avenida Julius Nyerere*, an incongruous white-wedding party had assembled for the classic photograph on the steps of a columned hall. “The Athenaeum Hall – now

the Palace of Marriages,” Rainer explained. Behind the palace rose the majestic peaks of another building, an Orthodox church, its turrets overgrown with grass and weeds. My guide continued, “The pastor of that church was a friend of my father’s from Russia. No religious ties – my father is a Volga German¹ and a “hell and damnation” Calvinist. But he and the priest both had families who ran first from Bolsheviks, then from Chinese Red Guards. When the Frelimo government nationalised property here, the priest nailed up his church and left for Europe. He gave my father the key to look after it. Needless to say, António is the one who does the cleaning. That church may look like a ruin on the outside, but you should see inside – it is beautiful, untouched!”

In the harsh reality of morning, the inner city was not a pretty sight. As though the Revolution had granted new strength to natural elements, the mosaics so beloved by the Portuguese had been stripped of their rich colours by the pile-driving sun and dust-driven wind, reducing the streets to a brooding gloom. Any shop or business not embalmed in protective material was falling to ruin. There were a few citizens about, but they strolled aimlessly, or talked in groups, or played cards or African *mxuva* with bottle tops on the pavement while waiting for an end – any end – to their suspended misery.

Rainer asked me how I got in from the airport as only the happy few had petrol. To my consternation he said he knew Irish Maeve and her husband Joe, and that he too had been invited to the Americans’ Christmas Eve Party. “I am a friend of the Embassy,” he added proudly. It was difficult to imagine him balancing a glass of champagne and nibbling a sausage on a stick.

An impressive department store was the next attraction. With its display windows shrouded in mauve curtaining it looked more like a funeral parlour. Soldiers stood at the entrance. “The *Loja Interfranca* – the Duty Free,” Rainer announced. “You can buy a yacht in there ... if you have real money.”

Meanwhile he pointed out the boarded-up Coimbra Café, which had been a trendy spot *nos boms velhos tempos*. A hole had been hacked through planks as an entrance. “They serve nothing but lemon cordial from the USSR that tastes like soap,” he said. “But it is better than our water which is full of meningitis, hepatitis, polio,” – adding wryly – “Yes Miguel, we are rich in certain things.”

Soon after passing the Coimbra Café I became convinced a car was following us. There were few vehicles on the roads and of these most were army or official cars, unlike the blue re-sprayed Fiat that had come up behind us and was turning whenever we did. When I brought the subject to Rainer’s attention he shrugged it off. “In Maputo everybody is watching everybody. You will get used to it.” This was hardly reassuring. Having been spotted with him at the Polana Hotel, had I become irreversibly contaminated?

We continued in silence along the coast, the proximity of the sea pumping salted hot air into the car, so thick I could swallow it. Nevertheless, a gang of kids was playing football in the street with a can, refusing to move out of the way, so that Rainer had to drive round them. Their tired eyes passed over us and our vehicle with resigned envy.

¹ The great Russian peasant rebellions of 1773-4 in the Lower Volga under Razin and Pugachev were mercilessly put down by Catherine the Great who afterwards settled many German aristocrats in the region, giving them great privileges, including tax relief and total power over their serfs. They became known as

We had reached a route high above the sea, with the Fiat still in tow, when Rainer remarked casually, “Do you wish to interrogate me about what you overheard between António and me last night?”

I concealed my astonishment. This was not something I welcomed at all. I was about to leave him for good, and the prospect of a looming Greek tragedy with Kudzi was occupying my mind. But Rainer pressed on with a eulogy of António in an attempt to explain their unusual association. “António’s parents were killed during Frelimo’s war against the Portuguese ... poor things! António is a bright man. He has been to school. He reads books. He is someone I can talk to. He is a secret friend because my father would never tolerate fraternising with the servants – as you can imagine. What did you hear us say?”

His persistence overthrew my restraint: “Transmitters! plots! code words like ‘the ham’, *Cimas* or whatever ... do you really expect me to believe that António is a servant?”

“He is not entirely a servant. This is true,” he answered, unfazed. “With time I could explain to you what we were really talking about.”

“Sorry, Rainer! Looks like we’ll never find that time.”

“Pity,” he mumbled.

His regret seemed fake – my departure could hardly have come as a surprise. “I can’t imagine why you would want me to stay,” I remarked.

He responded with a surge of passion: “You have no idea what it is to live here! We are trapped. Maputo is cut off from the rest of the country, the rest of the world!” – shaking his fingers like frills, now switching in and out of Portuguese – “You are a vital addition, like oxygen. You will not stay long: those who come from outside never stay. But I ... I am stuck here, looking for a way out ... searching to break ... for a way to break the state of torpor.” He could come up with the oddest turns of phrase – *quebrar com o estado de torpor* is what he said, the word “*torpor*” equally unused in Portuguese and English and incongruous in the context of his sentence.

“At least you have António,” I remarked.

We had pulled up abruptly in front of one of three high-rise buildings. “Here you are,” he muttered. “At the apartments where you wish to be – *the Torres Vermelhas*.” They were not red at all, but a suicidal grey like so many similar blocks in high-density suburbs in so many cities.

Getting out of that Peugeot was like being released from a cage; but my exhilaration was cut short by the apprehension of being rejected, yet again, by Kudzi.

Rainer was looking straight ahead with a pitiful expression as if he were being deserted by a bosom friend. “I will wait here ... just in case,” he said dolefully.

“No need. I’ll sort myself out.” I tapped the roof in a friendly manner as if I were patting a dog. “Thank you. Good-bye, Rainer. I hope you have a good afternoon at the factory.”

I had forgotten the spying Fiat, which was now upon us. As I headed towards the apartment block, two youngish men scrutinised me from the vehicle with studied menace before accelerating and speeding away – like in the movies.

The Peugeot had not moved. So I stopped and stood there staring Rainer down until he steered his old car jerkily forward. I caught a last glimpse of his saucer eyes transfixed

on the road ahead, aghast with apprehension as if he were taking himself off to meet his maker.

Only when the car was out of sight, leaving ropes of dark smoke swinging above the road, did I take a deep breath and square up to the task that had brought me to Mozambique.

THE RED WINDOW

Breathless from six flights of stairs I stood in front of the flat where Kudzi was staying and ran through my reconciliation speech. Several times I raised my hand to knock, but I was trembling so much I had to walk up and down for a while. A pungent smell of rotten seaweed, which had been packed into the porous concrete by ceaseless thermal pressure, came off the walls. The entrance hall downstairs had been an unpleasant reminder of the run-down Mozambican embassy in Zimbabwe, with its gaping lift shaft, baying letter boxes and cracked floors. It had taken days to get a visa because they had claimed the photo I gave them did not look like me. For someone with his own inner identity on trial, it had been unsettling to have to defend the outer one as well.

When I finally knocked, a young woman opened the door and announced that she was the maid and that no one would be back until after dark. The anticlimax was such that I had to ask her if I could come in for a drink. Despite my being a stranger, my colour ensured her reluctant consent.

She led me into a spartan sitting room where I immediately sank into a foam rubber sofa that eagerly set about absorbing the sweat from my drenched back. I sat there without moving, as engulfed in the sofa as I was in my own private turmoil.

The arrival of the drink brought me sufficiently out of myself to register a serious flaw in Third World groupie ethics: Kudzi's Danish friend Ulla had the services of a maid. The orange-coloured drink must have been the Russian liquid soap that Rainer had mentioned, but at least it was abundant and cool. Meanwhile I scoured the room for signs of Kudzi.

The furnishings were few: a table, some wooden dining chairs, a bookcase of planks supported by bricks and scattered with books – Ngugi, Davidson, Dumont, the familiar cover of *Soul On Ice*, Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Not Kudzi's flat, I thought, but without doubt Kudzi's world. These were the Bibles of the Left. Tokens of my influence.

Had I not been the one in London in the mid-seventies who had introduced Kudzi to most of the books on those shelves? During our exile from the anti-colonial war in our home country, Rhodesia, was I not the one who had underpinned her visceral beliefs with intellectual foundations?

How sad it was that the idealism behind our political thinking became a key source of the problems that developed between us. Kudzi was a natural socialist. "Socialism begins in the bedroom," she liked to say. Extrapolating from the give-and-take of lovemaking she believed that having a partner or forging a new nation meant to share materially as well as emotionally, and above all to care for one another's well-being and development. This she was able to do with spontaneous generosity, although not without discretion.

For me it was not so simple. I had supported the African nationalist war for independence, but I did not fight in it. Kudzi joined the liberation movement, trained as a guerrilla in Tanzania, then spent two years fighting in the bush.

When the battle was over, in 1980, and Rhodesia became the independent state of Zimbabwe, we had returned together to champion a golden socialist future. Back home, while Kudzi's visceral beliefs remained intact, mine became destabilised by the way power-hungry leaders in countries like the USSR, China, Korea, Ghana, the Congo were ruining or had ruined the socialist ideal. My sad political impotence exasperated Kudzi. Only a few weeks ago she had told me: "In the old Rhodesia I lived and breathed racial humiliation ... you analysed it. I felt the whites' insatiable hunger for power over us ... you worked it out as a sociological error." I was a "retired armchair Marxist" in her opinion, a theorist who was always letting his head get in the way of his intuition and, worse still, one who was always frightened of getting his hands dirty.

Yet it was I who felt betrayed by her! Because I believed I loved her through thick and thin. It was she who had wrecked the team, banished her cohort and destroyed our future.

My descent into self-pity was interrupted by Ulla's maid sweeping through the room with a basket of washing. As she passed the bookshelves, Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* entered my line of vision. The familiar cover sparked off a surge of envy for Kudzi and her friends. How fortifying to have a cosy belief system! How disorientating to have lost mine! Not only had I become a man without a woman or, rather, a man without *the* woman, but a man who had lost all his certitudes. My world had become empty of a viable political future – and I was alone in it. This had become my primary condition. It invaded everything.

I sniffed the sofa for Kudzi's unique smell, receiving only the odour of the ubiquitous damp and stale wide-ranging sweat.

Then I saw her slippers. They were parked next to an armchair: inverted sheepskin, tatty with age, a hole where her big toe had pushed through. There is something so intrinsically benign about slippers that it's impossible to imagine anyone doing anything bad in them; only fond images of Kudzi sailed forth from the furry leather. How many times, in how many places had I seen her in them ...

"You have English feet," she had told me one night at our flat in London. "No good for running, too bony for jumping. Now look at these," she continued, pulling hers out of those very slippers. "Square feet – good for gripping; the arch is high, giving spring. These are well-designed feet made for walking across the African bush. See how the toes haven't been twisted by fascist shoes, like yours!" She had started to wriggle her feet gymnastically. "If ever I lost my arms I could make those charity Christmas cards – 'From an original work painted with the foot'."

The slippers softened my pain to a calmer yearning. They spoke volumes: about long evenings together, about passionate nights. The Portuguese have a word for such yearning – *saudades*. It runs through their poetry and their *fados* and it involves the sad but gentle remembrance of a distant person, often dead, or a lost golden time. I finished my drink slowly, stared at the slippers a little longer, and indulged in *saudades*.

The return of the maid, once more in transit, brought me to my feet. I was surprised to discover a window behind her with a wonderful view of the sea, which I had been too disturbed to notice when I entered the room. In the distance across Catembe Bay I could

see palms on the far shore and, above the palms, a thick orange band traversing the horizon where the sky heat-fogged into the land. Suddenly, the flare of a rocket came and went above the height of the trees. Black smoke billowed up. I waited for the sound of the explosion, but it was too far away.

My skin turned to gooseflesh – not from this evidence of battle, but from Rainer’s inane poetry echoing back at me. *Men crouching under lamps of war*. There in front of me stood the *janela vermelha* (“red window”) and, beyond it, the sea with the *lamps of war* on the distant shore. He had spoken of a sad woman looking through just such a window, presumably at night (if the sea were black as he had said) and weeping at the signs of war. Was it possible that Rainer knew Ulla? Had he been in this very flat? Had he met Kudzi?

Abruptly I put an end to the musing. The references were too vague ... they could mean anything and nothing.

The maid was back again, this time facing me and shifting uneasily from foot to foot, intimating that she had to leave and lock up. I glanced at my watch. There were about four hours to nightfall, by which time I needed to have sorted out a bed. I settled on making for the Polana with the help of Rainer’s map, and to start phoning again from there.

I scribbled a note for Kudzi saying I was very upset by all the acrimony and wanted so much to clear it up. “I’ve come here to do this,” I wrote, underlining the words. “I’ll phone this evening. This time, I beg you, please take the call.”

COSTA DO SOL

I couldn’t believe it: as I came out on to the street, the brightly glinting Peugeot was pulling up next to me, with Rainer at the wheel grinning right at me through a full set of devastated teeth, and Rosa leaping and yelping in the back seat as if she were as glad as her master to see me.

“May I suggest a change of air?” Rainer said. “I am taking Rosa for a sunset walk on the beach.”

Down the road, the crowd of kids, still playing football with a can, stopped to stare at me.

“You can’t go anywhere on foot,” Rainer continued. “First we shall have a drink in the bar of a friend at Costa do Sol. Get in!”

Several of the kids had started towards the car, walking tough. Despite my extreme reluctance, I found myself obeying Rainer and got into the car, shoving at Rosa to keep her in the back. Meanwhile, the front-line kids were drawing level. Their needy eyes scoured the interior of the car. I hunted their hands for objects they might use to smash a window and grab my bag, Rainer’s absurd sunglasses, anything.

“Let’s get out of here,” I urged.

“My pleasure!” Rainer replied, driving forward with a jerk. “I told you the streets are not made for walking.”

As we gained ground on our potential attackers, I tried to relax into the seat. Instead the source of my anxiety shifted to Rainer who seemed so delighted to have me back with him that I felt almost as if I had been kidnapped. Driving with his usual panache, he turned the car away from the Catembe towers, and soon we were heading past a vacant

sandy park on *avenida Mao Tsé Tung* that contained a languishing athletics track. With sardonic relish Rainer told me it was called the *Parque dos Continuadores* and dedicated to those who would ensure the eternal continuation of the revolution. “But as you can see by its state of dereliction, no one is prepared to run, jump or throw a javelin for the revolution.”

A vast pothole threw Rosa into my lap. Slobber flew everywhere and she bashed me with her plaster cast. I shoved her away and wound down my window, gasping for air. Rainer treated us to one of his belly laughs. Then, after several curious glances at my unhappy face, he said, “You must wonder what I was doing in the garden last night, falling about and moaning?”

I shrugged. “I have no desire at all to delve into your personal problems.”

Ignoring my dismissal, he said “Do not worry, I am not an epileptic.” Then arching his index finger backwards to a squeamish angle, he pointed towards the heavens: “Interference is my problem. My growling father upsets me and down go my filters and everything comes pouring in.” He thumped his knuckles on his over-sized head: “Bang, bang! fists – that is how it feels. Banging fists!”

He pulled his reflecting sunglasses down over his convex nose and our eyes locked. Not for long, but long enough for his gaze to exert a pull on my optical rods and cones such that my body tightened and a new fear swept through it that I can only describe as fear of the unknown ... a powerful unknown. With an upward sweep of his opaque glasses Rainer snapped the invisible cord, and suddenly I could breathe more easily.

He turned his attention back to the road, and said, “All the stuff that flies through the earth every second, it is like a thunderstorm. I feel it passing through me. Normally we feel and see nothing – why is that? Because we have filters. Now you hear the sound of my voice, the wind, the engine of my little car, right? Shift concentration and you will hear other sounds that you were not aware of: Rosa’s breath, the car springs, your nails tapping the dashboard because you are fed up with me. Now do you see what I am getting at, about filters?”

We took a sharp right and waves from marimbas and drums came booming into the car out of the broken windows of a school. Where were the filters against a force of sound such as this? Rainer’s face lit up like a child’s. “The geometry of music. How I love it!” – taking off on a flamboyant tack – “That is why I play the piano ... to bring back order. I strike the keys” – dropping his fingers like a set of claws on to his knee – “the music blossoms from the back of my piano” – extending his fingers like the quivering tips of a bird’s wing – “it flies across the room, bouncing off the walls in crystal waves” – grabbing the steering wheel at last, then turning to me condescendingly – “You must understand, I build myself strong by watching the waves dance, by following the cascading units. Imagine how consoling it is when I am lost in innumerable worlds and along comes music funnelling units into organised patterns.”

He could not resist describing even a simple pleasure in the most convoluted way. He loved his own rhetoric. *Rainha*, “the Queen”, they called him – a drama queen indeed, with a thoroughly dislikeable sense of superiority and a need to appear impregnable in his own conviction.

The music faded as we joined the *Marginal* where the buildings started to thin out. It was too late now to jump out of the car as I had contemplated doing earlier. Why had I

given in so easily? Was it the menace of the street kids? Or had that strange blazing stare of his somehow weakened my resolve?

To steady my thoughts I concentrated on the view. Palm trees ran attractively along the seafront, strobing the well-sanded beach with their shadows. Beyond this, powder-puff sunlight dabbled the cheeks of a pink-powdered sea, fusing the slash of the horizon into a harmonious heat haze. The few aimless pedestrians we passed stopped either to look at us with indifference or else to wave us down for a lift, already resigned to failure.

It was a long drive out to the section of coast called Costa do Sol, especially at the crawling speed of the old 504. By now I was resigned to spending another night at the Krugers’.

After a long silence during which his disposition had for no apparent reason turned sullen, Rainer announced out of the blue: “I made medical history when I was six. Like you I had a duodenal ulcer. My mother took me to hospital where I was filled with barium, and they took an X-ray picture of it. I was only six, but I knew everything there was to know about this world and it had made me sick in the stomach. I wanted to leave it as soon as possible. Depart! Be gone! ... And I still do.”

At first I was relieved when he buttoned up his lips after this doomsday announcement. Then during mile upon mile of wordlessness along the *Marginal*, I discovered that his capacity for sudden flux from obsessive verbosity to comatose silence still produced oppressive tension.

At last we pulled up at an immense roundabout before a long, crusty 1940s building that looked like a colonial airport – the famous Costa do Sol Restaurant, famous from *os velhos boms tempos*. There were no cars, no customers going in or out, not a soul on the beach. There were palms, some gum trees, pines and scrub, but no habitation. Beyond the roundabout a substantial road block made of tyres and tree trunks was visible. Beyond that ... the unknown.

“*Benvindo à Rainha! Benvindo às duas Rainhas – com a pequena Rosa!*”

Manoli, the softly rounded and smooth-cheeked son of the Greek founder of the restaurant, had emerged from the shadows to warmly greet Rainer and his dog. “The man from Zimbabwe” was welcomed with hearty backslaps. Manoli poured straight shots of ouzo while we shook hands with half a dozen members of his extended family who were playing cards. One of them – an old woman whose olive face was a network of trenches – squawked like a crow, not from excitement at meeting me, but in the agitated anticipation of resuming her game. Since the petrol crisis, the vast dining room had become a cemetery where tables stacked with chairs fanned out majestically around the players like tombstones.

Despite the friendly atmosphere, Rainer remained aloof. It was mainly the restlessness of his eyes that gave this impression, incapable of lingering on an object, animate or inanimate – a detachment that was compounded by those deep shadows I had seen within his pupils during my first morning at the house, like traces of some land of far greater concern to him than the mundanity of his immediate environment.

After exchanging pleasantries, Manoli excused himself as he simply had to return to the game. Left together, Rainer and I watched the players in silence, sipping ouzo. Time slipped by and I grew restless, as did Rosa who began tugging at her leash in an attempt to get to the beach. On an impulse, Rainer grabbed a knife from the bar, scooped her up and cut through the plaster cast. Carefully feeling for the knitted leg bone, he threw aside

the cast, then replaced Rosa on the floor. With new mobility the animal wriggled her head free of the leash, and bolted lamely but happily out the door while Rainer and I laughed and Manoli cheered.

THE BRIDGE-OF-NO-RETURN

Rosa was racing around the beach while Rainer and I made our way across the roundabout. Pointing at the makeshift roadblock, Rainer said, “A hundred metres further on lies a dead stream and ‘The Bridge-of-No-Return’, as we have named it. A baker’s truck looking for firewood went ‘Boom!’ next to those palms over there by the *Aldeia dos Pescadores*, an abandoned village.” His laconic delivery made me wonder if he had feelings for anything not immediately associated with himself. He added with unfitting jollity, “Because of this, our yeast factory will soon close down.”

Drawing away from him I ploughed ahead through the fine sand towards the ocean where the bleary sun was descending towards the horizon’s thick orange lips. Close to the water line I nestled my body into the hot cushioning of the beach and watched the scuds vanish.

Rainer meanwhile had become engaged in such shriekingly jolly games with Rosa that I was compelled to watch. He fell over, rolled about, lost his sunglasses, found them, put them on again, ran after the dog with such ungainly co-ordination that he fell over and lost his glasses again, fumbled about, found them, tottered to his feet and ran after Rosa, stumbling like a foal.

Shockingly, Rainer’s playtime and my relaxation were terminated by the close heavy rattle of gunfire. I jumped up. The thundering lasted a full ten seconds and came from the no-man’s-land beyond the invisible bridge.

“Hadn’t we better clear off?” I shouted sharply.

Rainer scanned the distant palms as if he were looking out for the next bus. “Fireworks have been going off outside town for years,” he called back. “So far the *bandidos* have not entered Maputo.”

He came shuffling through the sand towards me while I kept watching the rooftop of palms with a wary eye. “See!” he continued. “Over at the restaurant no one has bothered to come outside and look. We are all so used to it.”

He sat down at my feet and began prodding the sand gently with a finger. Then he said, “I like this beach for walking Rosa. It is perfectly situated between the soldiers fighting a war over there and the desperados back in the city.”

Calmed by his reassurances, I crouched down beside him. Gulls arrived, the gift of flight enabling them to escape the violence. They started a little war of their own, dive-bombing the beach and snatching up little crabs that skittered over the sand every time a wave retreated.

As though to himself, Rainer muttered, “Even the seagulls are trapped in a prison ... between sky and sea.”

With an impulse of unexpected effusion, I took up his theme: “This situation we’re in ... it’s so symbolic of Africa. As a child I remember lying on one of those sculpted boulders in the highveld. I felt safe, but at the same time I knew that danger was close by, ready to strike at any time in the shape of a leopard, a snake, a scorpion, even a horsefly

... Just as we sit now by this gentle sea with the ‘lamps of war’, as you call them, only yards away.”

All this must have slipped out through some need for human contact after the gunfire. When I looked at Rainer, I found that the folds of his face had arranged themselves into a mask of sadness, which I mistook for empathy. It seemed he had masks for all occasions. In keeping with this one, his long fingers dangled off his knees like snapped fishing lines.

“This sea gives me no good feelings,” he moaned, “as long as the roar of guns remains in the air.” He seemed not to have heard me at all. Feeling foolish, I fiddled with the sand, hoping that we would leave soon.

“The battle I speak of,” he went on, “the one that exhausts me, is the one that boils the oceans, turns the palms to cinders and melts the sand to hot lava. Whenever I look at those waves I ask myself: how many times have they shrivelled to hydrogen and helium?” He was off on some new hobby-horse. I regretted having opened the conversation.

Jabbing at the horizon he continued, “The sun inherited its gold from the generations of suns that lived and died before it. We are built on a mountain of destruction ... yet on the back of conflict, life thrives and grows. Grows to what, I ask? For what insane purpose does it grow since in the end all must be destroyed?” Shooting a fiery glance at me, he almost shouted, “What kind of system is it that uses war as its sperm? Answer me that!”

Confounded by the twists and turns in his conversation, I rose to my feet. He exhaled a loud moan of disappointment at my lack of concern for the imminent collapse of the universe, then fought with the loose sand in order to get up. When he started yelling for his dog, which had become a distant dot, I turned my back on him and struggled off in the direction of the car.

It was as I neared the roundabout that I heard the sound of a vehicle driving fast. A camouflaged military jeep soon came into sight from the no-go area. The driver – a soldier – bounced alone in the front seat. He swerved perilously to bypass the road block, raising clouds of dust, a sheet of canvas making windy thuds in the back as it flapped over whatever it was covering. The jeep raced off perilously towards the city.

Once again no one had bothered to interrupt an important card game to come out and look. Nor had Rainer paused in his effort to recapture his dog.

I climbed into the car. At least ten minutes passed before my host returned, and it was now dusk, or what we film people poetically call “magic hour”, which lasts for about twenty minutes in these parts of Africa. I continued to stare straight ahead as he shoved his struggling pet into the back seat, but could not avoid noticing his latest mask – a churlish sulk.

“I have my own brand of pain,” he mumbled. “Just as you have yours!”

I burst out laughing, but soon stopped in face of his wounded expression. “I’m sorry, Rainer. I shouldn’t laugh, but you really are such a drama queen.”

After clambering into the car he surprised me completely by wagging that piebald parrot’s tongue of his like a little boy in trouble while throwing his palm up African style to “slap five”. I responded appropriately, then took advantage of the moment to say, “Now let’s get back as fast as this jalopy will take us. I need to phone Kudzi.”

Rainer chuckled as he started the engine. “You are most refreshing, Miguel. The Mozambican male would never hurry to phone his lover – he has the heart of a *macho*.”

THE WOUNDED SOLDIER

We had not been driving along the *Marginal* for more than ten minutes when we came upon the first signs of a frightening spectacle: flames up ahead on the side of the road. Soon we could make out tall plumes of fire leaping from the army jeep and from the grass around it. The vehicle had run off the road, across a ditch, and overturned. The petrol tank must have burst and caught fire.

As we drew level Rainer steered the car to the far side of the road. Feeling the heat of the inferno I wound my window up, but not before smoke entered, reeking of burnt flesh. In the gloom, grotesque details emerged: soldiers’ bodies strewn everywhere, lying so stiffly that they must have already been corpses before the accident. Many of the bodies were alight. Through the veil of smoke, I saw the driver on the ground, crushed by the frame of the windshield, his spine folded back on itself, his flesh bubbling in flames.

Then something moved. A body was crawling through the grass – a live soldier inching forward on his belly to escape the red tongues licking at him.

Rainer changed gear and accelerated.

“Stop!” I shouted. “There’s a man alive!”

“None of our business!”

He accelerated faster.

“There’s no one else about,” I shouted. “We’ve got to take that man to a hospital. Stop the car!”

After a big sigh, he said, “Very well.”

Rainer left the car lights on to help us find our way over the rough ground. The first bodies we came across had been thrown clear of the fire, some displaying the war wounds that had killed them. Further on, a body lay sprawled, its battle dress in flames. The nauseating vapour of roasting flesh made me want to throw up. I have little experience of gruesome death and a fear of blood – not my own, but other people’s.

Then I caught sight of the injured soldier feebly raising an arm towards us. We stumbled through several patches of burning grass. Rainer got to the man first, grunting as he turned him over: his face was covered in blood, his torn uniform seeping blood that came from an open wound below his heart. He was whimpering, only half-conscious, his breathing a series of feeble pants.

Now a dangerous smell of petrol was riding on the fumes. The heat of the fire on top of the heat of the country was unbearable. I thought I was going to pass out, but the drama of the situation kept me conscious, the need to function overcoming my phobias. What had Kudzi once said, mocking me? – “The blood of war is the blood of life.”

Rainer then did the strangest thing: he wrapped his arms round the man, lifted him up, and pressed him – bleeding wound and all – flat against his body, rocking him like a baby. I watched, mystified, wondering where his scraggy arms had found the strength for this enterprise. The soldier clawed at the air weakly once or twice before his arms fell loosely to his sides. Lowering him to the ground Rainer said in a strong voice, “Come! Help me carry him to the car!”

“Is he still alive?”

“Take his ankles!”

I did as I was told while Rainer grabbed his wrists. We shuffled forward. I was sweating so much even my hands were wet, making it difficult to keep my grip. Following orders, I helped Rainer lay the soldier out, slack as a sack, on the tar in front of the car lights. If the man was breathing it was too slight for me to see.

“Go fetch a water bottle off one of the bodies!” Rainer commanded. In his steely eyes I could see the reflection of the flames behind me, a display of scarlets, blues, greens, mauves. Rosa was barking frantically in the car, which did not help the nerves.

I found myself rushing around among the assorted bodies. Some were burning and therefore inaccessible. Most of them did not have flasks. At last I stumbled on a sheathed flask that had fallen clear of the mess, and was almost full.

When I got back, Rainer was tearing the soldier’s shirt into strips. Raising his palms he asked me to pour water over them. He rinsed his hands well. Then he took the flask from me, poured water on one of his newly-made swabs and began wiping the blood and dirt off the soldier’s wound. As soon as the exposed flesh was clean, he promptly stuck his index finger into the wound ... then a second finger ... then a third. What he did next made me gag: he pushed his whole hand in and went on shoving it deep under the man’s ribcage until his wrist disappeared. It crossed my mind that the whole exercise might be some perversity performed by Rainer for his own amusement, or else to torment me by fuelling my disquiet, or at best to put the soldier out of his misery.

I was about to intervene when he started to extract his wrist carefully, blood spilling out over the man’s chest. I had to struggle not to avert my gaze. At last his hand came out ... completely. For a second he held it suspended before the headlights, dripping in blood and gore ... in his fingers something glistened briefly, then fell tinkling on to the tar – it was a sizeable bullet. With a gasp I leaned back against the bonnet of the car.

“You’re blocking the light,” I heard him say. “Pour more water over my hands. Come on!”

Fighting to compose my senses I picked up the flask, then stood staring at the soldier whose chest was now pumping air.

“Come on! Pour the water!” Rainer shouted.

I tried to concentrate on doing what he wanted.

“That’s enough! Save the rest!” he ordered.

Having dabbed the wound with a fresh cloth he began to re-introduce his hand. I stood by, watching with growing humility. After he had plunged it in as deeply as before, he turned it first one way then the other, again and again. The soldier’s chest kept on heaving and he appeared to be immune to pain. This time I noticed a burgeoning glow within the flesh that surrounded Rainer’s wrist. At first it was yellow like a light bulb buried inside the man, but it quickly intensified, turning to a soft gold that radiated steadily across his chest and stomach. Rainer’s hand appeared to be the source of this spreading pool of energy that soon became so powerful it exposed the soldier’s chest plate, his ribs, even the shadow of his beating heart and his pumping lungs: it was like seeing the body in photographic X-ray.

Meanwhile Rainer’s face had become swollen and knotted from maximum exertion, and the veins in the arm he was using were greatly engorged along with those in his neck and across his forehead. He was breathing fast and sweating profusely.

Eventually he began to pull his hand out again, but with greater difficulty than before for the flesh had grown tighter and sucked at his hand as if desirous to keep it in, so that he had to lean against the road with his free arm to give himself leverage. Very little blood ran out of the wound this time. Finally, only his glowing fingers were left inside, clearly visible right through to the bones. The soldier's flesh closed up ever more tightly, like an oyster round Rainer's long fingers as he eased them out.

When he succeeded in withdrawing his hand it was still radiant. The light, strongest at the finger tips, covered the entire palm and faded across the wrist ... the shadow of his bones still visible through the incandescent flesh.

I looked down at the soldier – there was no hole in his chest, just a pink glow like a dying ember where the wound had been. For a while Rainer stroked this spot, smoothing the ripped flesh while the radiance in his hand faded. He asked me for the flask again and, taking it from me, sprinkled water over the soldier's torso and rubbed some of it into the traces of the wound, its redness fading as he did so. When he had finished, I was looking down incredulously at a black chest imprinted with a raw rose tattoo.

Rainer stood up, his eyes heavy-lidded. Under the weight of his outsized head his neck appeared to shrink over the coat-hanger wires of his shoulders as exhaustion engulfed his body.

Baffled and curious, I crouched next to the soldier and cautiously placed my palm on the wound. A strong repulsive force pushed strangely against my hand, making me lift it off at once.

I glanced up at Rainer. His eyes were broken chips of mica scattering the fire's rays. Taking a fresh piece of torn shirt, he wiped his face with it, then threw it away. "Help me lift him into the car," he whispered hoarsely. "Look! He's watching us."

With a stare stripped of agony, the soldier was searching our faces with mild perplexity.

Rainer was far too tired to drive, so I did. As we pulled away from the scene of the accident, the last flicking flames threw evil shadows over the dashboard. Rainer held Rosa in his arms while the soldier lay stretched across the back seat sighing heavily.

We drove in silence, both of us recovering from the ordeal, although I also remained suspended in wonderment. We came across no traffic – not a single vehicle. After several kilometres Rainer said in a voice broken by fatigue, "I practise healing part-time. Plenty of others can do it. Nothing to be amazed by. No magic involved ... case of moving molecules around."

I could not disguise or withhold my admiration.

Rainer chuckled. "At home you will sometimes see government ministers parking in the back alley. I treat them in our domestic quarters ... in António's room, in fact. I put on a great big show for them."

I neither believed in nor disbelieved psychic phenomena. I knew little about the subject and certainly had no aptitude for it. The paranormal was a million miles from where I came from. Yet I had made visits to astrologers and palmists; a Tarot reader had once made perceptive comments on my character, my past and my parents. But when it came to pre-cognition, the analysis of these soothsayers seemed hit and miss to me.

We were entering the dark empty streets of the city when he next spoke. "People love to make a fuss about what they do not understand. They need to be in awe of one form of mystery or another. It is an eternal childishness. Of course I could have made a

career out of it. Why, I could have been a Uri Geller and acquired fame and fortune! But I have no desire to make a career of any sort.”

We dropped off the sleeping soldier at military barracks off the *avenida Kenneth Kaunda*. I wondered if he would ever realise what he had gone through. What could he possibly imagine, waking up and looking at his body and finding a red scar on his chest? He might assume that he had dreamed about getting shot. Or, if he had been brought up a Catholic under Portuguese rule, that his favourite saint had worked a miracle. Or that Jesus Christ himself had heard his cries.

As we drove to the house on *avenida Francisco O. Magumbwe* the old callous Rainer re-emerged: “He is a soldier. Death is his profession. One day soon he will die from another bullet.”

I, on the other hand, did not revert to my sceptical self. I came out of the experience with new eyes.

DINNER AT THE KRUGERS

I was holding the earpiece as close as possible, trying to make out the sounds coming through the phone. In the kitchen, dinner was being prepared, but otherwise all was quiet in the Kruger house.

“*Alô? Quem é?*” – the Scandinavian tones of Kudzi’s friend, Ulla (the only female plumber I have ever met), flattened the Latin lilt of Portuguese.

I blurted out, “Ulla, I must speak to Kudzi, this is Michael. Put her on!”

“How dare you barge into my flat? I warn you, if you try coming here again, I’ll have you arrested.” I could hear muffled voices as she covered the mouthpiece. I imagined the two of them in that boxy room overlooking a bay peppered with the “lamps of war”. My mind concentrated on my lost lover, willing her to grant me respite.

Ulla’s fingers slipped, letting the odd word through: I heard “he” twice and Kudzi’s melodious African-accented voice saying, “Tell him ... he must ...” and, worst of all, “go home”.

Cold coils wove through my gut.

“Stop playing games and put her on,” I pleaded. A thousand grains of sand whispered back. At last a swell announced the release of Ulla’s hand. “Kudzi does not want to speak to you!” – click bzzzz ... she had rung off. I spun like a satellite lost in space.

After rinsing my face in the bathroom to little effect, I delivered my defeated body to the bunk bed in the old man’s library. Outside, the hooting fruit bats built up a choral swell concordant with the rise of my own despair. Tuning into them, though, as a meditative exercise must have worked to a degree because I fell asleep.

Next thing I knew, António was shaking me gently and announcing dinner.

The dining room, when I entered it sluggishly, was blooming in the light of its chandelier, nourished by a repaired power line. Even the ceiling fan was working. Under this festival of crystal, the father, the son and the two card players were standing behind the high-backed chairs around the dining table, apparently waiting for me. A starched tablecloth laden with silver and chinaware stretched before them. Next to the sideboard where the food sat, Agi and António hung back, at the ready. Regaining my composure

from the shock of such formality, I apologised for my lateness and offered a cheery good evening to which all replied, save Mr Kruger Senior.

Rainer off-handedly introduced me to the card players, a Greek couple named Parfitis. Mr Kruger mumbled a handy one-liner grace – *Komm Herr Jesus, sei unser Gast und segne, was Du uns bescheret hast!* (the equivalent of my boarding school one-liner: “For what we are about to receive, may the Lord make us truly grateful!”). Everyone said “Amen” except Rainer who muttered something unintelligible. We sat down as one with a squealing of heavy wood on friction-free tiles.

The Greeks “ooed” a lot when a grilled kingklip was brought to us on a silver platter by António. Agi followed in his wake with one fried tomato for each of us.

Mr Parfitis seized the opportunity to tell me in fragmentary English how the Russians had vacuumed the Mozambican seas of fish, “Throwing back what they are not liking, but only after all the fish they have captured have become dead.”

This caused Mr Kruger to glare at me through fishy eyes as he grunted something about “the blacks” being given guns by the Russians in exchange for their fish so they could go about killing one another. The Greeks laughed readily at this tasteless remark, having obviously learnt to swallow Kruger’s bile in exchange for card games and real meals.

While António used a silver jug to serve us South African wine from Stellenbosch, I tried concentrating on the palatial setting and the goodness of the meal to distract myself from the company. But the exercise was marred by Mrs Parfitis who informed me that the kingklip had been bought on the black market at a cost equivalent to the monthly average wage.

Meanwhile, visibly tired from his healing exertions, Rainer withdrew into silent vigil over his portion of fish which he picked at without interest, while I remained the centre of attention.

Mr Parfitis felt obliged to tell me at length how he came to be in Maputo on contract with an electrical company that repaired lifts. He brought his saga to a climax with a grisly account of how people were beheaded climbing out of lifts during power failures when the current suddenly came back on.

It was when the last course – carefully sculpted mangoes from the garden – was being served by Agi that things suddenly came to a head. Mrs Parfitis was attempting to show off her knowledge of nineteenth century Hapsburg silver, but instead of impressing her host she sent the old man into a fury about “*sucata*”, which he claimed was the only business left in Maputo.

“*Todo o país é uma sucata!*” he barked at his son. “That is what Rainer has made of our yeast factory – *sucata* – because he has less sense of business than ... than my servants!”

Rainer rolled his immense orbs in dismay. The Greeks went rigid. Agi dived out the door, followed by António.

“Tell him,” Mr Kruger growled at his son while pointing at me, “Tell him what is *sucata!*”

It was Mr Parfitis who came to my rescue. “Scrap metal,” he whispered. And Kruger took up the chant, “Scrap metal! *Sucata!* Scrap metal! Now you can get rid of my factory as scrap metal!”

Rainer glowered at his father, his lagoon-like countenance brimming with resentment. “There is enough profit from your factory,” he croaked, “to last for the rest of your miserable days ... after I am gone.”

“Where will you go?” Kruger flung back. “You could not earn your living anywhere!”

At this Rainer leapt to his feet knocking over his heavy-wood chair, which struck the ceramic floor with a boom. “Very soon!” he shrieked, shaking his finger at his father, “Very soon I will be leaving you for good! You will never see me again!”

Mr Kruger emitted an acrid laugh, egging him on: “Go! Good! Go! Go! Leave me! Let me rot in hell!”

Rainer disappeared, a door slammed and the grandfather clock announced the hour with its “Ave Maria” ditty. Pleading fatigue, I hurried out of the dining room more determined than ever to find alternative accommodation the next day.

In the library I at once fell into a fitful sleep soon punctuated with echoing shouts and screams from the buildings nearby. They grew so loud that I sat up fearing a crowd had entered the property. Added to these came the rattle and roar of a heavy truck.

I walked cautiously to the blinds and pried two slats apart: scattered lights blinked all over the garden – but these were not the lights of war, they were the blue phosphorescent lanterns of the fireflies held aloft in modest yet resolute protest against all forms of affliction.

Beyond the garden wall, the clamour of military agitation gradually fell away with diminishing echoes among the shadow-brooded streets of the broken city.

DAY THREE – FRIDAY 21ST DECEMBER 1984

BAD NEWS

The bold strokes of the morning sun pried my eyes open. It was a blessing, that blast of light. I lay curled naked on the drenched sheet holding on to the glorious illumination, for the tentacles of night still hovered over me and there was no telling what had been lived and what had been imagined during the past few days.

Like a man recovering from long sickness I levered my body up. On the desk were the remains of a fish paste sandwich that I vaguely remembered eating on our return from the Costa do Sol. Round the walls stood the leather-bound books that I had so despised when I arrived two – or was it three – days ago? My well-travelled suitcase lay in a corner, and in it were my ID and my passport. They, at least, confirmed that I was born in a real place on a specific day and had been given a name that I retained.

Stirred by breaths of heavy air, the blinds clinked. What had I really registered through them each night? Rainer smiting the invisible? The gunfire of civil war? I pattered sorely over to the window. Outside stood Rainer's car with António polishing it – the man who was and wasn't a servant; the servant who spoke so well and with such authority.

And then there was Kudzi. Always Kudzi. Whose imagined presence had become more real than her physical one. A person of such encompassing beauty that she also existed within my system like a virus, draining it of all its resources. I firmly believed my own recovery was in every way dependent on my plan to recover her. How was I to achieve this ... what was I to do next? The enormity of the difficulties numbed me. It struck me that I might be chasing after a disembodied presence, that Ulla was playing games with me, that the slippers at her flat had been some sort of a decoy, that Kudzi wasn't in Mozambique at all ...

Mercifully, when I went to the Krugers' kitchen, only Agi was present with coffee and freshly baked bread at the ready. Her sweetness did nothing to alter my decision to leave the premises that morning, but the fearful implications of abandoning the comforts of the Kruger palace were underscored by the squeaky voice of a newscaster on a transistor radio talking about a fire at an insecticide factory in the suburb of Matola. An act of political sabotage was suspected.

Defying panic, I abandoned breakfast and made for the hall phone. Classical piano music was filling the house. From the hallway I could see Rainer in the living room seated at the grand piano next to the Christmas tree; he was struggling with a piece that sounded like Mozart, attempting to forge ahead with it as if he were writing the score himself, trying one musical theme then another. Surprisingly enough, he was a fair pianist.

Moving the phone out of his line of vision, I dialled Irish Maeve's number. This time my call was answered by a male member of staff: Maeve was out, so could I leave my number? On this occasion the hazards of disclosing where I was were overcome by the urgent desire to escape. "This number is only valid for the next few hours," I insisted.

It was while hunting in my diary for the number of another contact at a Swedish NGO that I noticed old man Kruger sitting on a veranda chair, his back stiff with chronic

outrage, his eyes fixed on the rusting steel-meshed screens that kept the myriad representatives of African entomology at bay. I wondered if he were prone to drifting off like his son.

My next call was answered by a woman named Slaggard. She was leaving that day for Stockholm because one of her team had been “murdered by fire by Renamo terrorists”. She continued, “Haven’t you heard? Now all foreigners in Mozambique are military targets according to a statement from a Renamo component in Portugal.” My hints regarding accommodation were met only with the suggestion that I take her seat at a slide show about mural paintings to be given by Albie Sachs, an ANC representative from South Africa. “Who knows?” she added with a brittle laugh, “You might meet someone who can put you up. It’s on Saturday.”

As all these “aid” people knew one another, I found myself asking the stranger if she knew Kudzi. “Oh, yes,” she answered. “I met her yesterday at the Ministry of Agriculture.”

I was seized by jealousy. The woman who had so recently spent time with my girlfriend continued, “She’s going to do an excellent job. They’re so lucky to have her.”

“She’s accepted the job?” I stammered.

“She’s going to be working on the peasant collectivisation project in Tete province. We are all being sent home for the moment, but Kudzi’s almost a local – she’ll keep it going.”

“Are you sure?”

“Of course. Kudzi’s a natural for the job. She has such a gift for communicating. And she’s so positive, and ...”

I put the receiver down, a hollow cave settling where my stomach had been.

Snatching up the phone I dialled Ulla’s number. Her maid answered: the ladies were out. I chose to believe her.

Next thing, Rainer was beside me. “Hello, Miguel. Have you rested well?” He was smiling sympathetically while pulling awkwardly at the sparse springs of his African hair. “Have you bad news?”

“Yes ... Well ... No ...” It was hard to speak. “It’s my girlfriend. She’s taken that job ... working out there in the bush.”

“Goodness! She certainly is a determined woman!” He watched me quizzically for a moment while I stood looking at the phone as though the answer to my salvation lay somewhere at the end of a billion lines.

THE MUGGING

To recover my composure I took a walk in the garden. António, who was weeding the vegetable patch with an African *badza*, avoided looking up when I passed by. I gave the shed a wide berth as I could hear Mr Kruger sawing away at his rage, and found myself wandering in a remote corner of the property beside the high whitewashed boundary wall mounted with glass spearheads – flashes of red or blue or green. Here, among some flowering bushes beyond the domestic quarters, I was brought to a halt by a most pleasing creature: a brightly coloured orange and green lizard lying motionless on a stone, as alert as a lion on the prowl yet breathing with steady and unhurried breath. I sought fortitude from this masterpiece of design, this emblem of nature’s permanence,

unquestioning and acquiescent. Of the same species as those I had known as a child around my parental home in Zimbabwe, the lizard brought back memories of my feuding mother and father. Regrettably, unquestioning permanence when applied to humans becomes an obstacle. If my parents had learnt so little from life it was because they had behaved as unchangingly as the lizard. In their case the result had been divorce and a lifetime of unhappiness for both. Was I repeating such a pattern in my feuds with Kudzi? Could this be my inheritance? Kudzi was not my first relationship to end in disaster. Was this the unchanging pattern of my fate?

In a flash the lizard vanished like a streaking arrow. Almost simultaneously a loud hooting came from the back alley. Agi came out of the kitchen calling “Coming!” She hurried to a narrow metal door in the rear wall and unlocked it. A large black man in a Fidel Castro outfit swept into the yard with confident authority and was respectfully ushered towards the domestic quarters by Agi. This was obviously one of Rainer’s patients, one of his “*government men*”. As I emerged from the greenery, the master healer himself came out of the house wearing a fez and carrying a fly whisk. Giving me a broad grin, he flourished the whisk, lifted the fez, and winked. “*I put on a great big show for them!*” he had told me, which explained the fez in particular since the nearest authentic place for such headgear was in Muslim countries thousands of miles to the north.

With Rainer now out of the way it seemed a good moment to make my escape. Under no circumstances was I going to allow Rainer’s conspiratorial tendencies, or his apocalyptic obsessions, or his proprietorial zeal to hinder my objectives.

I hurriedly packed a shoulder bag with the bare necessities, including the map torn out of the phone directory. I phoned the Polana Hotel: this time they had a room available for one night; I was more than ready to exchange my pitiful sum of foreign currency for twenty-four hours of respite in order to armour myself against the blows Kudzi was delivering, and to plan my next move.

As I exited through the kitchen door I caught a glimpse of the government man’s driver, in a combat jump-suit topped with a kepi, leaning on the back gate. On his shoulder was the formula AK47. Beyond him, the bonnet of a black Mercedes sparkled in the alleyway, bearing the Mozambican flag – one of a breed of vehicle that goes everywhere with the latitude and impunity of birds; whatever a regime’s politics or state of decay, it is likely to have a fleet of Mercedes charging about with its officials and exuding power.

Without a query, António let me out of the front gate. After what I had overheard him saying about me on my first night, he must have been glad to see the back of me.

As an airplane passes through areas of turbulence, so I passed through areas of stench as I braved the street. The city sewers were jammed, in certain places more than others, hence the variations in density of both smell and flies. From the dulled halls and passages of apartment blocks, people stopped and stared at me in disbelief. With my fair skin and ginger hair screaming “foreigner” I was an irresistible target. A group of card players squatting on the smashed pavement muttered about me as I passed.

By the time I turned out of the Krugers’ street into *avenida Patrice Lumumba*, things started to go wrong. I found myself pursued by a swelling crowd of children, mainly boys, all of them clad in rags and barefoot like country kids, some with open wounds or sores. My shoulder bag helped whip up their excitement – they zeroed in, pawing and tugging at it like dogs. As with the flies, waving the kids away achieved nothing.

Through their suppurating glaucomatic eyes I perceived resentment, translated by some into clownish faces and mocking laughter. Their shouts ricocheted upon the entombed shop fronts like those of agitated gulls, their spittle – in my mind, harbingers of countless diseases – sprayed my face releasing paroxysms of horror.

I walked faster – so did they. Even those who propelled themselves on crutches – victims of land mines – kept up the pace. In the shade of covered walks I passed pockets of adults who looked at me with surprise, but never with pity. No one thought to intervene. My pulses were thundering; sweat streamed into my eyes. Searching frantically for an escape route, I saw the fading sign for the Coimbra Café a block away.

I never reached this haven. I tripped on broken flag stones and fell, winding myself. The kids pounced as if I were carrion. They ripped at my clothes. Some kicked me, others punched me and tore my hair. My bag was wrenched away. I lost sight of the sky as slippery acrid bodies writhed upon mine, jabbing me with sharp-boned blows. I hit out as much as I could, dispensing some injuries. Although I did not believe my time had come, I was convinced that I was going to break a limb or lose an eye as I became buried under the trouncing devils.

As suddenly as the assault started, it ended. They were pulling each other off. As the weight upon me eased, my body expanded like a couch cushion. They were all looking in the same direction down the street, pointing, catcalling ... until one voice rose above the others like a signal used by the leader of their species: “*Soldados! Soldados!*” ... They scattered.

I got up with great difficulty. There was a sharp pain in my side; my arm was badly grazed, a goeey mixture of blood, sweat and dirt; my clothes were torn and soiled. The heavy sound of an approaching vehicle filled the air. Wiping the gritty sweat from my eyes, I leaned against a walled-in barber’s shop from where I spotted my map on the tarmac. My shoulder bag was nowhere to be seen: money, passport gone! As fast as possible I scooped up the map, while out of the shimmering and swimming street the cause of the kids’ dispersal emerged with a thunderous rumble: an open military truck coming past with two soldiers in the front and piles of bananas jiggling in the back.

To get out of the way I squeezed myself into a gap between buildings little wider than my shoulders. The rumbling waned. On I went, pushing through this catacombic space and suffering new assaults: the close hot smell of shit and urine, and feral cats pursing me like shadows – some real, others imaginary ...

At last, I slid out into another street a full block from the place of the mugging. The pain in my side, now like a slicing knife.

All that mattered was to find refuge. There were no kids about, just one short fellow about ten yards away with a yellow billboard sandwiched over his shoulders, staring at me with open curiosity. “*Totobola*” (the football pools) was written across his board, and the forms for this were clasped in his hand like consecrated elements assuring salvation. I held his vulpine gaze for a second, read danger in it, and hurried off again in the direction of the coast from where I knew how to find the Polana.

The Totobola midget established himself as my next tormentor. As fast as I went, he kept pace close behind. Whenever I stopped, he stopped and spat slowly; whenever I faced him, he turned away pretending to watch something else. In one of these movements of his body he exposed his profile: that of a hunchback. The fact that I had not the slightest compassion for this twisted fellow, nor for my child predators, nor for

any of the wretches I passed on the desolate streets, was an indication of the extent of my terror.

Using the same technique of switching blocks by unorthodox routes I cut through the ruins of the Austrian Cake Shop, zigzagging among fallen enclosures that once housed genteel strudel eaters, to emerge with enormous relief exactly where I wanted to be – on the *Miradouro* promenade high above the ocean. Designed by the Portuguese as a place of beauty and relaxation, the thousand columns of “The Golden View” were now crumbling, the tressed roof of wisteria withered to gorgonesque sticks. Steel-dry grass slashed at my legs. On the land sloping down to the sea sat hills of festering rubbish where dozens of citizens pecked for scraps along with the crows. Beyond this, like a rippled tablecloth, the grey-green sea spread out to oblivion.

Despite the wetness that began in the hot air and continued as rivers of sweat on my body, the land was turning to cindery dust from long-standing drought – a dust that blew into my eyes and down my throat. A woman ran past me carrying a dead dog on her shoulder, its legs tied criss-cross on a stick like a hunting trophy. I was giddy, my legs as wobbly as the colonnade. When a collapsed section of the wisteria’s support beams made my route impassable, I gave up and sank to the ground.

How long I remained there I can not say. At some point I lifted my head to find the Totobola man sitting like a vulturous gargoyle on a crumbling balcony, the sandwich boards tugging his misshapen backbone in the wind. Had I been able to muster the strength I would have hurled a stone at him. Instead I grimaced, and he responded by slow-spitting into the dust. The sound of an approaching vehicle at last made him scurry off.

... It was the Peugeot that was pulling up, brightly glinting, with Rainer at the wheel, grinning straight at me through the wickerwork of his teeth. “*Meu Deus! Shame! Que vergonha!*” he exclaimed with exaggerated concern as he climbed out. Swiftly he moved towards me and helped me to my feet, half dragging me over to the car.

I shall always remember sinking into the leather passenger seat of that old 504 as one of the sweetest sensations of my life.

In response to Rainer’s persistent questions about what had happened to me, I croaked out minimal information.

“You are lucky to be alive,” he said, which I interpreted to mean “I told you so!” Jabbing a thumb back at the colonnade, he added, “That is exactly where my mother used to love to sit – once there was a bench where you were lying. I still drop by sometimes to see her. Today her presence was very strong – it drew me here. But who do I find instead? Senor Miguel! ... My mother, she loved the *Miradouro*, and this big avenue we are on, the *Duc de Connaught* it used to be – now *avenida Fredrick Engels*, would you believe!”

As we drove away, the car was a cocoon that wrapped itself around me, shutting off the atrocity of the outside world.

“Where is your bag?” Rainer asked.

“Gone,” I sighed.

“Do not worry. We will sort it out.”

His words made me sharply aware of my predicament: I was more helpless than ever and I had been thrown back into his clutches. It was an indignity to be saved by someone whom I disliked and whose hospitality I had rejected in the most sneaky manner.

Meanwhile, the feeling of safety in that car was overwhelming and nothing would have made me get out. Not even Rainer himself who carried his own danger signal like a snake its hiss.

As we passed the ruins of the Austrian Cake Shop so recently traversed in my journey through Hades, the brutal smack of the front shock absorbers sent shooting pains through my injured ribcage.

Soon we were crossing *avenida Julius Nyerere*, and the jacarandas of the Krugers' street came into view, strobing the windscreen. After that, the tall block of flats opposite the house loomed up. Approaching the front gate, we slowed down, and Rainer said, "I am expecting fireworks from my father. He is a man ruled by disappointment and I am going to give him a big one – we stopped production at our yeast factory today. No more wood."

The gate had a name plate that I had not noticed before, written on the top in faded blue paint: *Esperança* (Hope). While waiting for António to open up, Rainer continued, "Lorries have been hit by rockets while going out of town to get fire wood. The last working bakery shut today. I have closed the yeast factory and the workers have been dismissed." He chuckled inappropriately and ended on an enigmatic note: "It is the end of all our factories. This could not have come at a better time."

Through a haze of debilitation, the voice of my journalist friend filtered back to me. Someone had been arrested at one of these factories, but I could not recall who or for what reason. And now I had neither the interest nor the energy to ask.

We drove in through the black steel gates opened by António. And there before me stood the ample house, its fat roof sitting arms akimbo upon its white-washed walls.

THE LINE BETWEEN REAL AND UNREAL

Rainer and António sat me down on a stool in the bathroom. Agi brought a pail of hot water and a glass of cordial of a far superior quality to the Russian liquid soap I had drunk at Ulla's. Rainer washed and disinfected the gashes and cuts on my injured arm. He sent António off for plasters. Gently, he felt my ribs; he wasn't putting on an act, he was carrying out the task in hand like a professional.

"I was at Wits University in South Africa," he said wryly. "I did a year of science and dropped out, then a year of medicine and dropped out," adding with an ironic smile, "Enough to diagnose a cracked rib. It will soon heal. Avoid lying on it."

Another fish paste sandwich was waiting for me like a sacred host on the library desk. By a miracle, the loss of the passport was not a catastrophe, as I had left my ID card in my suitcase. Climbing under a soft, fresh sheet, I lay gazing at the card, relishing the thought that I would still be able to leave the country ... and soon fell into a feverish sleep.

In the long hours that followed – throughout that afternoon and during the night – a shuttling between my unconscious and conscious mind blurred the line between reality and unreality until I could no longer tell which was which. I became disorientated, lost all capacity for rational thought, and my sense of self became more clouded than ever. Nothing like it had ever happened to me before, and when it was over, I had unwittingly crossed the crucial barrier that keeps most people sane and able to make a distinction between their living moments and their imagined ones. Looking back, I can pinpoint this

moment as my first blind step along the road that I was to follow – or was induced to follow – during the oncoming days under the irresponsible guidance of Rainer Kruger.

The syndrome began with a genuine dream, its subject war:

I am on the run from child soldiers. They catch me. “We know you are going to a meeting of teachers!” one of them accuses. My denials bring the butt of his gun down upon my skull. I escape by crawling to the top of a dried-up waterfall where Kudzi stands with a rifle trained on me. After a moment she lowers the weapon and says, “The war is over.”

I awoke from this dream sobbing and with even sharper rib pains. Eventually exhaustion took me back to the war in my subconscious:

Swarms of terrified Africans are running for cover into the *Loja Interfranca*. Inside, people scramble to get money from Rainer who is wearing a bank teller’s cap. A shot rings out – Rainer’s head explodes. I look up and see António next to an enormous church organ, holding a smoking rifle. Behind him sits a peacock with its glorious tail fully fanned. Higher up still, Michelangelo’s finger of God points down at me from a domed ceiling, and a booming voice begins shouting incomprehensible words. I think it must be the voice of God ...

It was from here on that it became impossible to differentiate between dream and reality:

“You are my curse!” – another voice ranting. “You are the living evidence of my mortal sin!” I recognise old man Kruger’s rasping tone. I hear Rainer hiss, “Keep quiet!” But the old man is unstoppable: “God has placed the devil in you. Every time I look at you I step closer to the fires of hell. God will never absolve me!” ...

Mournful classical music fills my head. Night has fallen. Looking for the source of the music I seem to be walking out of the library, down the passageway. At the far end of the veranda, Mr Kruger sits staring into space. Next to him an old turntable is playing a scratched record ...

A car engine starts. I’m now back on the library bed. Headlights swing over the leather-bound books. I hear the gate being unlocked, then the sound of the car driving away into the encompassing night ...

Now I am drowning. River water becomes darker and darker as I am sucked into a whirlpool. Fortunately the vortex takes an unexpected swing and I find myself being pushed upwards like a cork. I pop up in an underground cave where my agent Julian Friedmann drags me out of the current. He shows me a triptych painted on the walls of the cave 30,000 years ago by Cro-Magnon people – the first artists. Kudzi steps out of the shadows; she opens her arms and calls my name confidently. “The war is over,” she announces once again ...

A car returns ... a gate shuts ... voices whisper ...

DAY FOUR – SATURDAY 22ND DECEMBER 1984

MIRRORS OF CONFLICT

A coldness of the flesh like a post-fever chill met the blaze from the morning sun mounting the window – almost a defiance.

Within seconds the harsh words of the old man Kruger came back to me as if he were saying them all over again out there in the hall: “Every time I look at you I step closer to the fires of hell ...”

During my long, turbulent night, had his voice been incongruously cushioned in a surround of languid classical music? ... or perhaps not.

I lurched off the bed, and the firmness of the floor tiles connecting with my feet had a reassuring effect. The mechanical source of that music would need to be traced to the lounge or out on to the veranda in order to put things into place – at least on one score.

Slipping a towel round my waist I set off down the passage unconvinced that I would find reassuring evidence. I was wrong. There it was in all its ancient glory, a '50s gramophone squatting next to the armchair where I had seen the old man sitting during the night. I peered down at a scratched LP on the turntable, labelled “Grieg’s Nocturne” – the music I had heard, the very music, inscribed on shiny vinyl.

As a mariner in a storm hurries for his anchor, so I hurried for one of my hardcover notebooks. I carry them everywhere to record events, script ideas or snatches of dialogue, to copy things I read. In this instance I felt it would be restorative to sit at the library desk and attempt to separate my recent living and dreaming moments into two distinct lists – get to see them clearly in their rightful places.

I started forty-four days back with the unequivocal reality of Kudzi moving out of our house in Zimbabwe. I listed our consequent exchanges, which were like those of two people speaking past each other in different languages. Then I noted my preparations for departure for Mozambique and the unsuccessful phone connections. I ended this list of living moments with Maputo, its exploding body bag, its suffocating heat, its voracious street kids and, finally, Rainer, its card-carrying crazy.

After I compiled the second column, listing what I deemed indisputably to be dreams, it dawned on me that the separate columns were in fact very similar. This was due to reality having increasingly taken on the uncontrolled and disjointed quality of a dream. Everything about Mozambique in particular was quintessentially surreal – packed with ambiguity, disarray, absurdity – and its impact upon my over-stressed mind had been significant.

Never had the tie-up between the lived and the imagined appeared so close, and as I concentrated further on the lists, a common ingredient became apparent: *conflict*. Conflict – and of course the suffering that comes with it – ran through my relationship with Kudzi, through the Kruger household, through Mozambique and through the dreams themselves where I was struck by the butt of a gun, where Rainer had his head blown off by António, and so forth. Dreamscape and landscape reflected one another under the common banner of conflict. With such a convergence of outer and inner worlds, no wonder I was bewildered. I concluded by putting a title to my morning’s work: *Mirrors of Conflict*.

There is nothing more gratifying than well-managed thoughts. All my life I have needed to believe that my mind is in control, and that I am able to perceive a certain number of concrete facets of the world through the power of reason. As a child I knew the name and habits of every bird in Southern Africa; as an adolescent I discovered the Stoics and the belief in will; as a student in Paris I found the radical political thinkers – Sartre, Marcuse, Fanon and many others. My *Mirrors of Conflict* hypothesis remained true to this tradition.

Calmed by the mental exercise, I made for the shower in its garden lean-to.

I was inspecting the weals on my body while dousing myself with heavenly cool water when António banged on the corrugated iron and announced in his soft voice that I was wanted on the phone.

I rushed, dripping, to the hall. The moment I heard Ulla's sing-song Danish accent, my excitement subsided: I knew she had come on the line at Kudzi's instigation to perform her ancestral duty as a Shield Virgin – those women who were sent out from Viking ships to loot the enemy; although Ulla had adapted to modern times by replacing the Viking dagger with a monkey wrench.

"It is difficult to conceive," she said, "that you do not realise with whom you are staying!"

I kicked myself for the carelessness that had enabled her to trace my calls (easy for Ulla through her political connections). Nevertheless, fresh from making lists and reflecting upon them, my old self raised its head and bared its teeth. I told her, "I'm staying with a *n'ganga* who hides under a bush."

"A what?"

"It's difficult to conceive that the mother of an African child such as yourself doesn't know what a *n'ganga* is. What you Europeans call a witchdoctor."

She choked. I had only met Ulla once, when she had come to visit Kudzi in Zimbabwe. Under the auspices of the aid organisation DANIDA, she had forged herself into a proud Mozambican, married a journalist on Maputo's *Notícias* and joined the Frelimo party. Recovering quickly she retorted, "It's inappropriate to joke when you're staying in the house of a man who was imprisoned for economic crimes against his country."

"Can't be too difficult. I heard from Joe Van Something the Second of the US Embassy that an Indian in Machava jail was shot for selling prawns to fellow prisoners. Rainer was released as a nut case as far as I can gather. He goes about with a card saying ..."

"Everyone knows that," she cut in. "But that's not all he goes round doing according to my sources. How come you're moving out?"

"Who told you that?"

"Never mind."

"I'm staying here because I'm broke and have nowhere else to go for the moment. Now kindly let me speak to Kudzi."

But Ulla was not done with me. "For six months Rainer Kruger shared a cell in Machava Jail with an Englishman called John Boland. Have you heard of him?"

"No."

“He’s a mercenary,” she said in the way an Inquisitor would squeeze out the word “heretic”. “The usual kind – Congo, Angola, Rhodesia. We suspect he’s been brought here to do a job.”

Now I was really lost. “Why are you talking to me about all this – especially on a phone with big ears?”

“The only people listening to this phone are friends of mine.”

“Ah, of course, silly of me to miss the ‘we’ bit. Now, be nice, Ulla. Please pass me Kudzi, if she’s there.”

“She’s out,” Ulla responded quickly. “What’s more, Kudzi has serious reasons for not seeing you.” She was closing in for the kill. I said nothing, and she continued, “Perhaps I can convince her otherwise.”

“You hate my guts!”

“When I heard you were hoping to move out from ‘The Queen of Spies’, I wanted to encourage you not to. You are in a privileged position to hear news of Boland.”

I lowered my voice. “For God sake! I’m here to see Kudzi, I’m not some master spy.”

“I’m not asking you to *do* anything. If something crops up I’d like to know, that’s all. Perhaps you could motivate yourself by recalling the political ideals of some of your old films and books? I’ll get Kudzi to ring you as soon as she comes back. Okay?”

Making an effort, I said, “Thank you!” and rang off.

Ulla was what I feared most within the far left – capable of doing anything for the cause. Anyway, I didn’t *have* to do anything. I could make something up about Rainer just to use her to corner Kudzi. Ultimately, all she had achieved by her shabby attempt at blackmail was to throw on centre stage the drama of conspiracy that I had watched in rehearsal on the porch during my first night, starring Rainer and António. I resented her for reviving my state of unease – one that had been exacerbated by such a confusing night.

After getting dressed in the minimum of clothing, I had a cup of coffee in the kitchen with Agi, and enjoyed chatting away with this buoyant soul about the quality of the vegetables from the garden, owing to the high standard of António’s compost.

Then I called Irish Maeve again. She had recognised the number I had left and was impressed. “It must be like staying at the Ritz,” she gasped. “But Rainer’s a bit of a weirdo, isn’t he?”

“How do you know him?”

“My husband Joe knows him. Seems he’s one of those locals who gets invited to certain Embassy do’s – can’t imagine why! I’ve seen him a couple of times; well you can’t exactly miss him, can you, with those eyes? Surrounded by diplomatic smoothies he looks like the Mad Bomber. Be careful, he’s quite unbalanced. Glad you’re all fixed up for the moment, though, ’cause everyone seems to have family visitors for Christmas – oops, sorry, the banned but ever sacred word! – for Family Day.”

I asked her to keep trying. I liked Maeve’s take on things; she possessed that particular Gaelic twist of mind whereby thoughts and phrasing come out other than expected, and she spoke beautifully. But, although I was technically free if I accepted one impossible condition (Kudzi’s dismissal), I was in no condition to get involved with another woman. Kudzi had named me “a serial monogamist”. I had certainly remained faithful to her.

Maeve signed off with a seductive edge to her voice. “I look forward to seeing you, Michael, at the Trooping of the Colours on Christmas Eve.” The Irish pronunciation of Michael contained additional syllables that turned it into a song; but she had sidestepped “Family Day Eve”, which would have been too much for even her gymnastic tongue.

I tried to rest for what was left of the morning, my cracked rib a source of great discomfort. What I was doing was waiting for Kudzi to phone. But as time passed and I became discouraged, the five o’clock Albie Sachs slide show for which the Swedes were keeping me a seat began to present itself as my last slim hope of meeting her.

While the necessity to attend this event matured in my mind, so did the problem of getting there. By late morning when the Grieg Nocturne was once more filling the naturally heavy air with even heavier sorrow, I shoved my pride aside and headed for the living area, determined to pin down the only possible source of transportation.

A GAME OF CHESS

It was a homely scene – idyllic even, to anyone who was ignorant of the political and pathological sharks that lurked beneath the surface: Klaus Kruger seated stiff-backed on the porch next to the gramophone listening to his cracked record over and over and staring through the fly screens at the steel-gated entrance, while – visible through the open double-doors of the sitting room – his son played chess with his so-called manservant.

Waving at the open drinks cabinet, Rainer called out to me, “My Agi squeezed juice with fresh oranges from the USAID ‘Green Belt’ – the one that squeezes our city. Help yourself!”

I filled a glass and positioned myself next to the jolly Christmas tree with the self-consciousness of a guest. The gramophone grated as the needle set off once more across the vinyl, its sounds generating no change in the stubborn set of the old man’s shoulders.

Assuming the casually curious manner of a newcomer, I wandered around the room. My hand ran pleasingly over the polished wood of the piano, undulated with age. I was surprised to see that it was a Steinway. Having witnessed Rainer’s healing powers, I was almost ready to give credence to his claim that he could see the notes he played shaking the air as they soared from the raised lid. At any rate, I tried to visualise them.

The imagined voyage of the music led me to a couple of wall paintings mounted in lacquered frames suggesting Old Masters – a ploy that could not mask their amateurish style. One depicted a floundering boar pursued by Cossacks on horseback; in the second, flames leapt out of a twisted tree and transformed themselves into the head and antlers of a deer baying in terror. The mood of hopeless suffering that ran from the soul of the painter through these oils was so contagious that I found myself backing away from them towards the sofa.

Mr Kruger’s music further aggravated my mood by conjuring up images of severe northern winters and of death. I thought how non-African the European preoccupation with death was. For the indigenous inhabitants of Africa – apart for those who had turned to Christ or Mohammed – death was a simple event on the journey to the spirit world where people joined their ancestors, and in this sense the realm of the dead was as real as that of the living. Africans had none of the morbidity that Europeans imposed upon mortality; none of their dread of the unknown and fear of retribution or terror of eternal

damnation – ancestors could be appeased. I thought of Kudzi, forever resilient even after her brother and many of her comrades-in-arms were killed during the long war which had brought independence to Zimbabwe. Kudzi, unlike Grieg, had no need to create nostalgia out of death.

I jumped up, my hands flying – “Can’t we turn this music off?” The chess players looked up in surprise. “How can your father listen to this stuff again and again and again?” I was quite taken aback by my state of nerves.

“Of course,” Rainer replied, promptly rising to his feet and starting for the porch. “At least we can try.”

The old man remained immobile as Rainer positioned himself by the turntable. There was a nasty scrape as the needle was lifted off the record, followed by a sonorous click when Rainer switched off the machine. Then he waved his hands several times in front of his father, who remained as impenetrable as a military stronghold.

“See that?” Rainer grinned at me with the delight of a schoolboy turning a trick. “Right now he is probably a kid in Russia running through the halls of the Kruger family mansion ... Or he could be older, in which case he is in Shanghai with friends like Count and Countess Rostopov – he never stops talking about them. Maybe they are all at the opera!”

He peered into his father’s face. “Ah, now I see. He is doing what he likes best – standing in the Shanghai harbour watching his coolies load timber on ships for Europe. Counting in his head all those thousands of Chinese trees he owns.” Throwing me a devilish glance he added, “My father can go on watching those boats for hours, bewitched by his lost empire. At least he is out of our way.”

I laughed, apologised for my outburst, and sat back down on the sofa. Rainer resumed his place at the chess board, whereupon António, who had not broken his concentration, moved his rook decisively, rose and left the room.

Aghast, Rainer studied the new positions on the board. “You see my bishop here!” he exclaimed, stabbing his finger at the board. “António has blocked it with his rook. The rook does not have to move, yet it exerts a force upon the board through the rules of chess behaviour that make up its essential – how to say – ‘rookishness’?” He clicked his piebald bird’s tongue, got up thoughtfully and poured himself a drink.

“Sorry, I don’t know much about chess,” I said. “I used to play a bit with my father. That’s all.”

“Now *my* father,” he resumed, seizing upon the parental theme, “is the same as the rook. He loves to block people.”

Wandering over to the two disturbing paintings, he stood before them sipping his drink. “Most surely he blocked my mother. These paintings are the last she did before marrying him. She was also a marvellous actress before the Second World War. ‘Theatre slut’ he called her.” He was now running his tremulous fingers over a teak chest with well-shone brass hinges, which sat on a low table under the paintings. “After she joined him in Mozambique, he made her give it all up: a wife and an artist were separate people according to him.”

With infinite care he raised the lid of the chest, his body sagging as he looked at its contents. When he spoke again, his voice was sad. “My mother was a wonderful woman. She died of cancer.” He gestured me over. “Come! I want to show you something.”

The chest turned out to be a creepy reliquary of the dead woman's odds and ends, tenderly folded and stacked: crocheted tablecloths, needlepoint tapestries, embroidered doilies, dainty handbags, a few expensive pairs of shoes, dozens of distinguished silk scarves, and a three-stranded pearl necklace "which used to glow like a half moon on her neck after the pearls had absorbed the oils from her skin".

After this Freudian flourish, Rainer pulled out a copy of the photograph I had seen on his father's desk: the Garboesque woman, very European, very white, hardly capable of coupling with the Sherman tank to produce a coffee-coloured son like Rainer. Observing my puzzlement, he said, "She was *like* a real mom; I called her little mom – *mãezinha* – she loved that. Unable to have a child of her own, she nurtured me. Rosvita was her name. My real mother was the African maid who worked for my father before my stepmother came out to join him. That was in 1947. Luckily for me, during my first few years on this Earth, my father stuck me in the African compound with my black mom and the other servants. At least it gave me the chance to enjoy rituals and sit with medicine men – get into the vibe as you would say. I'd have never got that chance if I'd been locked up in this Protestant prison from birth. It was my sweet stepmom who eventually brought me inside the house. But she meant well."

He put the photo down carefully and added, "I never really knew my African mother. The old dog packed her off when I was five. She died soon after that. It was my first psychic experience: I lived the scalding heat of her fever and fell into a coma ... so I am told. She probably died of malaria, judging from what I know now."

How old he looked suddenly! From one moment to another his face appeared to change its time of life: when it was infantile it could seem lost in wonderment; when it was adolescent it could look infuriatingly churlish; then in mature form it conveyed penetrating intuitions and wisdom, even; and when old it looked dried up by years of disenchantment.

"My stepmother forgave my father, but he never forgave himself," he continued as he began prowling round the sofa glaring at his father's intransigent back. "Calvinists believe all humans are condemned to eternal misery. For my father, redemption is unlikely, as God elects only a few superior beings over the wretched *povo*, and for no particular reason at all – such as good behaviour. Can you believe such nonsense? So my father waits for the infernal fires and every time he sees me he finds the living proof of his damnation."

He had got himself so worked up that he was making it difficult for me to bring up the ride to the slide show. Unable to settle on to anything, his eyes slid over my body, almost lasciviously – a tendency that I had already noticed on several occasions – so that he was addressing my feet by the time he said, "You have no idea, Miguel, what a relief it is to know that my father is really nothing to do with me." There was a long pause until he must have become aware of my feet fidgeting nervously, which prompted him to continue. "Oh, yes, to be sure, his seed sparked the event in my mother's womb on February 20, 1947!" He threw me a sidelong glance to check if I was listening. "You see, the astrologers have it wrong to chart from birth which is less precise. Conception is the key."

Suddenly he banged his hands together. "In a fraction of a second all the information on me burst through into the combining cells of my African mother and that old pervert over there. But their cells had nothing to do with my newly activated Life-Line, they

contained only the genetic material I required.” Noticing my frown, he said, “Okay, okay, you are not supposed to know what a Life-Line is! You would call it the soul.”

His “Life-Line” thing sounded far too much like guru-speak for my tastes. He sneered at my sceptical look, thumped his chest, his eyebrows going skyward like wings, and insisted, “The essential quality of my Life-Line – it is not my father’s, it is all mine. *Obrigado Deus!* Otherwise each time I look at him I would burst into tears.”

Then, apparently bored with the issue, he dropped into his chair, bent his head over the chess set and stared at it in silent immobility. But with him there was no such thing as a quiet moment – even while studying the chess board he was zinging with imminent drama.

The unbridgeable depths of heat along with the uncertain weather of Rainer’s emotions had thrown me into a headspin. Weakly, I sat down once more on the sofa.

There was a sudden shout. “Ah ha! *A rainha!*” Snatching up his queen, Rainer placed it on the far side of the board. “A trick up my sleeve to unblock my position. A positive force that will set me free in two moves. Chess is like life. It possesses a past and a future. I search the board for its origins and potentialities. I spot the patterns and assemble them into a power for victory.”

At this instant António returned with his usual unflappability, which I hoped, in vain, might be contagious. Rainer jabbed at the board, saying, “Look António! *A rainha! A rainha!* I keep telling you my tricks are good. By sacrificing my queen, you lose. Now do you believe me? I know how to break the bands of Zeega ... how to leap up the Lines!”

Fearful of his relentless raving, I raised my own voice: “I must be at a slide show before five! I must go there! Please could you take me in the car!” The force of my words had drawn me to my feet. They both shot looks at me. I was standing over them. Rainer’s eyes cleared wonderfully, like lake water beneath a dying wind. “Happy to,” he replied without hesitation. “But it is not yet one o’clock.”

I thanked him, sat down, and sought calm.

One o’clock was lunch time – a tray of sandwiches in the living room, alone with Rainer. Alone, that is, with his father still out on the porch watching the movie inside his head. To fill the time and prevent another outburst on the inexactitude of astrologers or unfiltered interferences or on some power fantasy reflected across a chess board, I had a brainwave: since Rainer appeared so keen to hold forth, why not do a proper interview with him on his healing powers? There were many good reasons for this: it would switch off the movie in my own head; it would focus Rainer and keep him under control to some extent; and I could turn it into a magazine article and make some cash, which I certainly needed.

When I suggested it, Rainer tried to back out. He said he had no interest in speaking about what he called “psi” (pronounced “sai” and short for psychic) things because on the one or two occasions when he had tried, his listeners had dismissed him as a crank or a charlatan. “People on earth are not ready to talk of psi things,” he said, as though he were not part of the human race.

When I brought in my pocket Casio recorder and started setting up, he stared at it in horror. It became my turn to babble on at him: about what a great idea it was to explain a rarely witnessed occurrence and how his knowledge of science and medicine made him a unique subject for an interview on something that was generally considered non-scientific.

After much coaxing I got him to agree. Yet his reason for doing so was perturbing: “I will soon be dead,” he said, “so why should I care about what I say?”

We got off to a meandering start. The interviews have since been edited. Rainer did not speak with quite the same fluency as appears, but to have kept his stiff English speech pattern, largely devoid of grammatical links, would have made the content ponderous and distracting. He also had a tendency to wander from the subject or become incomprehensible, particularly when he let his emotions take over.

THE HEALING INTERVIEW

R: One of the ways I work is to bind the backbones of cells so they can build new layers. There are machines that can do this.

M: What machines?

R: Transcription machines. They activate genes so they can multiply; body cells can be renewed forever, unless you get killed in an accident. Eternal life exists in theory, and in reality in certain places. But it is hard to define a gene because it is already a set of units among greater sets.

M: I thought a gene is supposed to be a trait?

R: No, it is already a set of traits. Ah, it is such a maze! All the time I am struggling to discover the functional purpose of a unit, fighting to pinpoint collections of subunits that have gathered into a defined structure with a precise activity. When I was talking about my lowly-evolved father, I told you that the Life-Line – the soul – is also an arrangement of informational units that become biochemically reactivated.

M: For me the soul is just a religious invention.

R: Life-Line is a better word. I say: there is a General Life-Line like the one for the human species or for the dog species – *he patted Rosa affectionately* – and there is a Specific Life-Line for Rosa and for you, Miguel – the individuals. A Life-Line is continuous in space-time.

M: You mean like past lives?

R: Yes. A life is a moment of genetic incorporation for a Specific Life-Line. When it is not embodied the Life-Line still exists as a record of information defining its capacities.

M: The soul exists as matter?

R: As energy. Nothing is ever lost in the universe. If you do not understand this, you understand nothing. If you throw something away, where does it go? ... it simply goes elsewhere. It may transform, it may get stored as information, but it cannot vanish. By the way, the precision of energy in the cosmos is remarkable. Why, every blade of grass has a Specific Life-Line! Now you look confused. Already we are stumbling over words.

M: Grass has a soul?

R: What about atoms? Atoms also go through a moment of conception like you and me, except the units involved are not combining cells but combining particles. The base elements are the primal souls or the Life-Lines of the universe – single units of copper, iron, gold and so on.

M: One blade of grass, has a specific soul, you say. While a field of grass will have a broader-based soul that you call a General Life-Line? Have I got that right?

R: Except there are several types of grasses. But you have the basic idea.

M: What’s this got to do with healing?

R: Everything criss-crosses in life. Everything is moving, changing partners, transforming its nature along the way. Two Life-Lines of hydrogen and one of oxygen produce a new functional collective – water, a new Life-Line.

M: Let’s forget about Life-Lines. Stick to genes – everyone’s heard of them. What about these transcription machines you mentioned for genes?

R: They are Zeegan.

M: Is that the name of the machine?

R: No. The place where they make them is Zeega.

M: Oh dear! Life-Lines, and now some sci-fi place called Zeega. Let’s try and stick as close as possible to pure science!

R: Your ignorance makes this interview impossible!

After this put-down, I paused to finish a sandwich and have a glass of orange juice. I was afraid that I might have to abandon the whole exercise. I needed to coax more down-to-earth material out of Rainer to get an interview I could sell.

M: Rainer, I have to stop you if I don't understand. The readers of this article are going to be Mr & Mrs Average.

R: I do not have the tidy mind of a scientist. You want me to remember what I was doing in a trance with that soldier. That is not easy. I need to look for the words. And if you keep on interrupting I shall forget what I am getting at.

I put down my empty glass and sat up with fresh determination.

M: Let's start at the beginning. The soldier is lying in front of the car lights. What did you do first?

R: *Ai Jesus!* I will try again. We are all receptors and emitters of energy. I directed rays from my brain through my fingers. First I scattered them into the soldier: you saw me turning my hand – I was scanning the injured zone.

M: What are these rays?

R: The normal. I can only use what is available in nature. Alpha, beta, gamma and so on.

M: I saw the skeleton of the man, the shadow of his heart. It was like seeing an X-ray. Were you producing X-rays?

R: Yes, at first. The high resolution of short waves helps me focus my energies to acquire a psi picture of the many layers in an injury: broken structures, severed connections, discordance ...

M: Hold on! Psi again! What exactly *is* psi?

R: The abbreviation of psychic. As I have told you, psi is not supernatural, there is no such thing. In healing, psi consists of beams of electrons of various lengths which I use to push forward synthesis of cells in blood, tissue, bone. But in the larger area of communications and transference there are higher powers of psi, much higher – in fact psi can generate reactions stronger than the four flavours of power known to hominoids, and infinite within our universe.

I was surprised but pleased by Rainer's precise use of the word "flavour" – at least it was evidence that he had some genuine scientific knowledge. As I knew a little about the four flavours of energy, I did not press Rainer for more specifications. But let me remind the reader ... the standard hierarchy of known strengths is as follows: gravitational – 1; electromagnetic – 10/20th; chemical – 10/25th; nuclear – 10/40th.

M: Can't these healing rays be harmful?

R: Of course. I had to speed up that soldier's metabolic rate to break down debris and synthesise millions of cells. Such electromagnetic energy can sometimes add up to a lethal dose and kill off good cells. It is a precarious battle. I hope you did not feel unwell from incidental rays?

M: Just watching you digging into the fellow made me unwell. And all that blood!

R: If I put that energy into a baby I would kill it.

M: You can electrocute a baby with rays from your brain!

R: If I wanted to kill someone it would be easier to shoot them. You are doing an interview about healing, or would you prefer to discuss killing? In nature the two are easily interchanged.

M: Sorry. Please go on. After removing the bullet from the soldier ...?

R: I hurled everything useful at the escaping blood to make it clot ... What do I throw, you were about to ask? I believe they are proteins. I *know* they are proteins because I have studied them in books and at university and they match the atomic structures I find through psi connections. Even if I could not name the proteins, with psi power I can still use them to do a job, and those who can name them – the surgeons – cannot do it unless they have tools, machines and drugs.

M: What do proteins do?

R: Proteins are the building blocks of all organisms. They are strong catalysts. There is one wonderful protein I have used to suppress tumours. It is like a bar of shimmering neon. It glows unlike all the others, like a yellow rose in a field of poppies. It loves to stun cancer cells. I help it wage war.

I asked Rainer to name this protein, but he could not do so. Since then, I have asked several doctors, and it has been suggested that it could be one that is classified as nm23. I found an article about it in *Science* Vol 261, 23 July 1993, p 428, describing the capacity of nm23 to stun cancer cells. But nm23 is still under research.

M: Your stepmother died of cancer, you said. Why didn't you save her?

R: Disease is always present as part of the see-saw of life – it lies around waiting for the chance to strike. I can shock certain rogue cells into stasis so they forget to metastasise. But I never know how long they will stay neutralised. I kept my *măezimha* going for a long time.

M: My apologies for mentioning your stepmother so callously ... What about Rosa? You're a healer, so why did you need to put her leg in plaster?

R: Bone cells are not as easy to rebuild as soft tissue. But without the work I did on her, the cast could not have been removed so early. You will find your rib mending far quicker than usual.

M: How do you trace the proteins?

R: I see them, hear them, feel their vibrations ... Now I can hear your magazine readers shouting "Crank!"

M: Well, perhaps you could describe "see" a bit more? Seeing proteins for instance?

R: Bats! that is what most proteins look like – bats hanging down through the roof of the body cells, all hooked together. But I do not "see" in the normal way: it is the energy pattern of their structure that registers in my brain.

M: Like a thought?

R: Yes, if you like. Or a sensation. Also a visualisation. Proteins as various formations of bats – it's almost like a dream really. I also connect with the particular signature light of the species "protein".

Let me add, I have difficulty with the proteins; they are stubborn and mysterious. I can click on to them, but activating them depends on their size and charge: low-charged ones require hard work, sometimes I do not have the energy to make them move down the organelles.

M: You go from using a precise scientific word like "organelles" to "bats". I find this quite difficult.

R: Most of your readers will always have problems because their minds are set – for them there will always be a real world and an unreal world.

M: Yes, and never the two shall meet! But at least with you, we can try. Let's get back to blood clotting.

R: All right! Certain proteins make blood clot. I remove some on the outer surface of red blood cells which make the blood too thin. There are also useful ones in plasma that I use to join up molecules.

I had no idea then what he was referring to, but I have since read that lipid proteins discovered in 1979 by Dennis Chapman in red blood cells increase blood flow. So perhaps Rainer removed these from the outer surface of the cells. And indeed, it is true that plasma proteins (globulins, thromboplastin, fibrinogen) help blood to clot.

At this point the interview was momentarily interrupted ...

Rainer was about to describe how he could fuse molecules when his father came in from the veranda without a sound and peered in disbelief at the depleted sandwich tray. With a pounce he grabbed what was left of the sandwiches in both hands, crushing them. Then after directing some profanity in German at Rainer, he swivelled round and went off with his loot towards the kitchen. Later in the interview I heard him banging away in his tool shed.

Rainer shrugged off the incident dismissively, and we got straight back to our subject.

M: You were about to tell me how you join up molecules?

R: One way is to make bonds with chemicals driven by energy provided by me – a sort of photosynthesis, I suppose. All I really do is help the body self-assemble. The chemicals are known by science. It serves no point to name them.

M: Name one.

R: So you can check up on me, hey? ... Ras is apparently the name of one major protein I use. I also push body sugar into damaged and hungry cells. Whatever is needed I search for and fetch.

M: Can you describe this further?

R: *Filho da mãe!* ... Cells are like worms that you cut and they become two worms. I help the body create millions per second in this way – mass growth to repair tissues, blood vessels, whatever. How to describe this? Filaments of rays from my fingertips divide cells like scissors, or join them together like knitting needles.

M: How can you guide something as tiny as a protein?

R: You ask good questions ... I tag them with a signal recognisable to me that corresponds to the same signal in the target area. Another way is to load a required protein type with a carbohydrate that is familiar to me, go to the injured area, then pull them in.

This time it was Agi who came out on to the veranda. She was bringing more sandwiches.

Rainer used the opportunity to take off on a tangent, trying to convince me that nature had dealt him a terrible hand. When he started talking about “them” and “the enemy” who were part of some destructive force, I threatened to call off the interview.

It took a while for him to calm down sufficiently for me to try again.

M: You also spoke of vibrations when you had your hand inside the soldier’s body?

R: Oh, yes, I hear a lot of sound ... like musical notes passing right through me, shaking me.

M: From where?

R: Well, from the wound for a start. I feel the sound of pain. As a healer I am like a conductor pulling the orchestra together to play the symphony the body is desperate to hear – the symphony of the body cells when they are all functioning together at their best. The score for good health was already there throughout the soldier’s body, which was like an orchestra gone out of tune because it has been shot with a bullet. I was re-tuning the instruments that have become discordant through injury. I work to increase the harmony and up the pulse.

M: You up the tempo of the music! I like the analogy: good health as maximum harmony. I could see it was hard work – you were panting and sweating. I have noticed you don’t usually sweat much.

R: I shudder at the horror of decay at the same time as I am exhilarated by building new life in the cells. There is a constant struggle between discord and chaos on one side – and harmony and conformation on the other. The trouble is these states are always transitory according to the primary functional law of nature – the Positive-Negative Dynamic as I call it. But just now you stopped me talking about this!

M: Because you made it sound like some personal vendetta being waged against you by extraterrestrials.

R: Well let me tell you straight: this fundamental duality is the driving force at the heart of all energy everywhere – with every plus there comes a minus, if you see what I mean. Once you get the harmony together, you know that sooner or later something is going to come along and break it up: like the soldier getting shot – his job is a good metaphor for how things are in life – sitting about waiting to get shot; like my mother by cancer; like you also – you have been shot by Kudzi – you will recover, but you are a romantic so you will get shot again by some other lover.

M: I’d rather not talk about Kudzi ... Anyway a broken heart is not science.

R: You are wrong there. Everything is science in the sense that everything has a cause, and energy takes more forms than you realise.

Rainer suddenly turned to look towards the far end of the veranda, frowned, and stood up. The cause of his anxiety was a cricket that had been feebly chirping away throughout our talk, and had now fallen silent.

“I think it just died,” Rainer announced as he set off to investigate.

I was astonished to find that there was a cricket lying motionless on its back in a small wooden box perched on the gauzed sill. After opening the box and prodding the insect, Rainer said, “Poor little cricket!” Without ceremony he raised a bottom edge of the veranda gauze and threw the dead insect out.

“You keep a pet cricket in a cage?” I asked incredulously.

“They are my barometers,” he answered. “They can register cyclonic shifts. If it is going to rain tomorrow or even next week, a cricket can let me know.”

I gestured impatiently towards our seats.

M: If this psi energy you talk of comes from the brain, why don't I have it?

R: At this stage of human evolution everyone has the necessary packs of antennae – they have been around for millions of years. And the brain to make proper use of them has existed since the primates. All you need to learn is how to tune your brain correctly. You see, there are patterns in our brain cells that are an expression of a wider balance of forces.

M: What are patterns?

R: Laws of behaviour, if you prefer. Scientists call them “power laws”. Hominoids and more evolved beings have the capacity to discover and compare patterns. This is the only way we can broaden our understanding of how nature works. And I must tell you: even if science can achieve the conquest of nature, it cannot turn its knowledge into someone's personal living experience. Only psi can bring discovery and personal experience together as one event. The evolutionary way forward for higher activates is to operate on the psi level and to refine that sensibility. I have developed my psi more than you – that is why I can heal and do other things that I consider much more important.

M: What is more important?

R: Phase transitions, for a start. Following the trajectory of my own Life-Line into future and past activates. Seeking a way out of this hell named Mozambique!

M: Now, now! You're getting emotional again. What are future and past activates?

R: Incarnations, if you like. *Santo Deus*, if I had not been sent back to this lowly hell-hole, I could be in the company of beings who are closer to my level of development ... elsewhere! But rest assured: I intend to remedy this error.

M: I have problems with reincarnation, and with life on other worlds – I assume Zeega is some planet that has superior life on it, according to you. Please can you stick to psi and tell me what you apply it to?

R: *Olá!* Let me try again! Psi consists of all the readable signals that fly between sub-particles, particles and the larger constructions of these. I am like a spectroscope with a brain that can “read” – *he made the inverted commas with his fingers* – the colour, “smell” the tone, “resonate” with the oscillations of a lot of these connections and follow them to wherever they lead. But psi is nothing to get fat-headed about – dogs and cats have good psi senses. Isn't it, my Rosa? – *He paused for cuddles with the dog.* – Rosa senses moods as a person enters a room, she senses a human field.

M: What's that?

R: Your guru type would say “aura” – that sort of thing.

M: Do you think I hang out with guru types?

R: I think that is how you wish to write me off.

M: Why not call it instinct instead of psi?

R: Instinct and intuition are the beginning of psi. When pigeons navigate by sensing the north-south poles in tiny globules of magnetic oxide, we are talking of psi power at a primitive level. I must make it clear to you again that my powers are not super-human – you could also become a healer. We all have the potential, mostly unexpressed ...

At this point in the interview the phone rang and my heart leapt – Kudzi at last! Rainer had quite the opposite reaction – his face fell and he got up so fast some chess pieces were sent flying off the board. Excusing himself he hurried off to the hall.

The call was for him and he must have been waiting for it. From the lounge I saw him cup his hand round the mouthpiece for secrecy. The conversation was brief. When he came back he was tense. "I have to go," he muttered.

"We were doing so well!" I said as he passed into an adjoining room, which I assumed must be his bedroom. Within seconds he came out, wearing his sunglasses and promising to return in an hour. I was about to protest when he lifted a hand, cutting me short: "Don't worry! I will take you to your appointment for five."

"I'd love to get back to the interview," I said, "sometime when ..." but he was already a thousand miles away and out the front door, pulling at the sparse hair on the back of his head with his spidery fingers.

Although it was only the middle of the day, I collapsed on the bunk bed in the library. Heat exhaustion on top of emotional and physical overload made sleep come easily.

I was woken by the return of the Peugeot. Whatever Rainer had done during his absence had worked out well, for he was cheerful. I doubted that it had anything to do with the family's factory, which was of such little interest to him; he was up to something that Ulla had got wind of – and that something had to be political.

THE MEETING WITH KUDZI

At 4:30 the exercise of backing the car down the drive flushed António out of the domestic quarters. He did his gate opening without looking at us. Rosa leapt about joyously in the back. I was sitting stiff with anticipation.

"Look!" Rainer was waving his chromed sunglasses at a high wall opposite the house where *Embaixada da República Democrática Alemã* was engraved on a golden plaque. "That is the place my father spends hours staring at from the veranda, even though he cannot see it – he can only imagine it. But when he could see it, and – more to the point – when those East Germans could see him staring at them, they grew most nervous. So they built this wall round their embassy." He smiled mischievously, and went on, "Then they officially accused him of spying on them, due to all his staring."

As we passed clear of the forbidding wall, Rainer laughed at his father's misfortune. "As you can imagine, being a second-hand Bismarck my old man was not too happy to find the Marxist Democrats – a contradiction in two words if you ask me – installed after independence opposite our house. Sure enough, he got arrested. Before the authorities released him as a soft head he spent some days in Machava Jail listening to the wailing ghosts of the dead buried under the floors by PIDE.² Of course, our SNASP is no less efficient. The only difference now is that we get to pick our own torturers."

As we headed down the brown-baked street I could have sworn I saw the hunchbacked Totobola fellow scampering into the apartment building next to the embassy, and at once the tenuous control of reality that I had developed since daybreak

² *Polícia Internacional de Defesa do Estado*: secret police organisation set up by Portuguese president António de Oliveira Salazar. SNASP (*Serviço Nacional de Segurança Popular*) is the acronym for the secret police service set up by Mozambican president Samora Machel.

slipped a notch or two. Had his pursuit of me across town been a phobic image? Or did he exist physically in space-time and live right next door?

Rainer was in such a voluble mood he managed to misjudge the corner at the end of his road, braking so abruptly that Rosa slammed against me, plunging a thousand daggers into my rib cage. Rainer trumpeted belly laughs while I shoved the dog away.

By the time we were passing the dried-up swamps around the *Mini-Golf* in the *Parque de Campismo*, my driver was humming to himself and making intermittent exclamations of satisfaction – the delighted audience of his own private show. I was relieved not to be his hired audience ... at least for a while.

We continued through the suburb of Sommershield past a concrete motor-racing track, cracked like an old scab and pierced with stalks of dead maize like bristle.

Finally he dropped me off on the *avenida Zimbabwé*, no less, in front of an incongruously modernist social centre with undulating walls and a curvaceous roof that rose to several peaks. Security guards stood around in blue uniforms watching over a bevy of 4 X 4 vehicles with diplomatic plates. Rainer pointed out a path through the *Campismo* that would lead me to the nearby Búzio Bar where I could find him if I wanted a lift back. He waved goodbye jauntily, sure that he had not seen the last of me.

The scene inside the auditorium was from another world: some thirty people, mostly white and many wearing African prints, stood around holding glasses of Portuguese wine and the regulation cocktail stick skewering a tinned sausage or lump of processed cheese. Kudzi was nowhere to be seen.

A young Scandinavian asked me to identify myself, then passed me on to a Mozambican who was “a very experienced cultural worker and a member of the collective that painted the mural at the *Praça dos Heróis*”. Taking me for a donor, this “*trabalhador cultural*” rushed to lament that murals had disappeared in Mozambique with the paint shortage and even posters that developed the “correct symbolism of the struggle” had been curtailed from lack of paper to print them on. “But,” he insisted with optimism, “this bad situation can be remedied immediately by an injection of foreign sponsorship from your government.”

I distanced myself from the cultural worker and downed two glasses of wine. There was still no sign of Kudzi.

At the start of the show I went to sit in the back row so that I could spot her if she came in. Albie Sachs was introduced to the audience, a reedy man with gentle eyes and the nervy presence of a poet rather than a South African ANC militant. (Four years later his arm was blown off in a bomb explosion in the streets of Maputo, engineered by the South African secret service.)

Someone drew the curtains and a carousel began to whirl, projecting the title slide on to a screen: *Images of a Revolution*. Shots of traditional Makonde hut paintings appeared while Albie held forth: “... it has long been part of the culture of Southern Africa for people to paint on the walls of their homes. This painting has always been infused with meaning. The patterns symbolised the universe in which the peasant family grows and farms and dies. Under colonialism the people were forced off the land and were permitted only to gaze on the walls of the oppressive state. But after the 1975 Revolution they took back the walls and covered them with the expression of their search for freedom.”

Daylight streamed into the room as a door opened. My head shot round. I was seized by palpitations. Ulla, followed by Kudzi, entered and sat down in the row ahead of me.

In the tremulous glow of the carousel I was stunned by the sparks of light glimmering in the oiled springs of my lover's hair. Then, like a man stumbling towards a mirage, I hauled my body across the empty seats. She flinched as I sat down next to her, stiffened, and leaned away. Not daring to look at her, I watched the screen without seeing anything.

It required a superhuman effort for me to whisper "I must talk to you!" And again, "Come outside!"

"No!" like a cry of suffocation.

The firm rebuttal stirred me. "I can't wait 'till after," I lied. "I've got a lift waiting."

She was also staring at the screen without seeing it. She was beautiful beyond my memories of her. The raw passion of her feelings always lay just below the surface of her skin; unlike me, the mask was not in her repertoire and the panic besieging her face was equal to the shock that caused it. I wanted to cradle her in my arms – or else obliterate her.

"We must talk," I said in a voice skirting hysteria.

She did not move, but her expression intensified as the emotional current running between us became increasingly difficult to contain. Like a flare she rose from her chair and pushed past me. I caught the fury in Ulla's eyes as I clambered up to follow.

"... revolution is a highly conscious act," Albie was saying as we went through the exit. "It permits the unthinkable to be thought and the inconceivable to be imagined ..."

It was sunset. Kudzi stopped among the parked vehicles and plunged her hands into the nest of her hair. On her face was the expression of someone pinned to the ground. I stood by, gaping like an idiot.

She set off towards a vacant plot with me at her heels. Once there, we had to slow down because the grass, which was alive with crickets and other small creatures, also concealed a lot of rubble from a destroyed building. Searching for a way out of the electrified tension I waved at the ruins and said, "Reality does not match Albie's aspirations."

She halted abruptly. "So let's just pull up the sheet and die!"

I had been wounded by her sharpness, but I could not have made a worse opening remark – it had plunged us straight back into the entrails of our dispute. With nothing further to lose I said, "When I recall your generous and loving spirit, for me it's *like* dying."

She pointed northwards. "Thousands of people are getting cut to ribbons out there, and *you're* dying!"

"One fact doesn't abolish the other," I stammered.

We were walking slowly now, each of us hampered by the perils of our emotions. I said, "I'm not used to seeing you so angry."

I could see her soften. Soon she came to a standstill, and said, "I'm sorry! I hate being angry with you." She averted her face. I stared at the side of her neck sweeping into her shoulder, its curve in the golden afternoon sun the epitome of grace. Moth-like, I wanted to crash into her lambent skin. We stood in silence until she said with a sigh, "You and I want different things."

"My political disillusionment is a consequence of my honesty," I said imploringly. "In no way do I deny your political consistency."

“For goodness sake, Michael, I wasn’t talking politics. You’re looking for some female version of yourself ... on your glittering stage.” She was close to tears.

“You never cry, Kudzi.”

“Wrong! You never see me cry.” With a trembling hand she wiped the perspiration from her forehead. “You shouldn’t have come to Mozambique.”

There was a strongly toxic smell of weeds. We were both beating at flies. Did “glittering stage” refer to the Africa Centre in London during the launch of *Black Fire!*, my book about the war in Rhodesia? The event had attracted a glittering assembly, including the celebrated author, James Baldwin, who had been a father figure to me and whose stature had not stood in the way of a profound relationship. I had loved James. But from the podium I had kept watching this remarkable-looking woman sitting at the back of the room, shy and self-conscious. Later in the bar I had noticed that she adopted pride to compensate for social inexperience. Yet, beneath this veneer something else shone, and it was exposed to me the first time we made love – an unassailable integrity.

I said, “The day we met at the Africa Centre, you were part of that glittering stage.”

Kudzi turned to me in surprise. “I was sent as a journalist to report on James Baldwin’s speech. That’s all.” We had reached a crumpled wall which decreed that we must retrace our steps. As though recalling something best forgotten, she said, “In those days I thought I needed to become part of that world. Christ, I’d come straight from Africa to London! You took my shyness for weakness. You took advantage of my lack of social skills.”

I was astonished that she thought I could consider her weak.

She continued, “I fell in love – for the first time outside my homeland – and with a sophisticated white man. I didn’t know how to stand up to you. I became submissive.”

“I never sought to repress you, Kudzi. I used to be over-confident – I realise this was a fault. But I love you *because* you have opinions. You told me: ‘Most African men can’t accept an independent woman.’ Remember? It was one reason you wanted to be with me.”

She laughed sadly. “To some extent I had to break with my cultural inheritance – that’s true. But that wasn’t my problem with you. Your whole philosophy is kill or be killed. Even a discussion is a matter of life and death. You were too rough for me.”

She was getting things the wrong way round. “That’s just intellectual boxing,” I said. “I was taught to do that at university.”

We were following a pathway in the labyrinth of destruction that brought us to another stop before a broad stretch of concrete flooring from where dust powdered our skin in the scorching breeze. Bright red ants were skittering around crazily on the concrete as if they had taken too much sun. We both paused to watch them. Some were circumnavigating a crumbling snakeskin, a reminder that the Africa of old was not far away.

I went on to say, “You’re secretive, Kudzi, but not submissive. You don’t talk much. All I did was fill your silence ... perhaps.”

“You see how you talk – you say something assuming you’re right. Then I know you won’t be listening when I answer.”

I frowned. “I swear I am listening to you now.”

She looked at me doubtfully.

I had leaned up against a large decaying machine that lay like a carcass with its axles in the air. Memories of us flashed through my mind. I remembered her telling me once that the women in my dreams were all neutered tom boys, thereby proving that I was unable to see her as herself. Yet all I had felt for her was love. This made it difficult to accept that for her our story had been one of suffering. How shocking to think that we may have been living together in two separate realities! It was almost as if she were describing a relationship with someone else!

Kudzi spoke again, interrupting my thoughts. “You preferred to see my strong points only – the bits you liked. You never saw how much I needed a little nurturing because I was naive and too defensive. You’re no good at that. That’s the reason you don’t want children, not because each film is like having a child, like you claim.”

We had run out of new directions in the rubble, so we began re-tracing the same circles. I hated the way she was using the past tense. And worse still, what she said made all the love that I had felt for her while we had been together seem useless.

I could sense my dismay haul slyness up from the depths; I was now ready to use any ploy that might gain me time with her, gain another meeting. When we stopped next to a wire fence, I said, “An artist has to hold himself up to the world as a mirror: self-centred doesn’t necessarily imply selfish. My work has never stopped me appreciating you ... loving you.”

Her exquisite hands wrestled with the top wire of the fence. “You offer a sort of fan-club love,” she said. “There’s a reality you’ve never acknowledged: that I didn’t feel cared for, considered ... I became very unhappy.”

Her last remark released an emotional reaction which, even in its spontaneity, came with a covert wish that it would win me some favours: I began to sob quietly. She groaned. I hid my face in a handkerchief. Soon she said, “Michael, please try and understand the truth of where we are now, you and I. I don’t love you any more – I mean like a home, like children, like forever. But please remember this: *I do not wish to harm you*. In fact I would be unable to do that. I just don’t have it in me as a reflex action. So please stop twisting me into something vicious in your mind.”

If only she could have put her arms round me! How much I needed her touch! Instead she stood waiting patiently for me to stop crying.

“Our love is full of poisoned arrows,” she said, and the suffering in her tone gave me hope. Shaking her head, she repeated, “I do not wish to harm you.”

I needed a raft, and as long as I could get her on to it, we might still have a chance. I said in a small voice, “I can’t stop loving you.”

A car engine started up. I could hear people coming out onto the street. The slide show was over. Kudzi sighed and said, “I distrust the word ‘love’ in your mouth. You need someone to fill your house, to fill the times between your films. You are terrified of any gaps.”

She drew away from me. “I must go ... You want your life to be filled up. That is possible. But not the way you seek to do it, through a woman.”

“Not ‘a woman’ ... You!”

“I can’t help you, Michael. No woman can without sacrificing a good part of herself.”

People were getting into their vehicles, others were coming out of the hall. I heard myself ask, “Are you really going to work in Mozambique?”

“I don’t know. It’s not confirmed.”

In the doorway of the building Ulla was talking to a woman, but mainly surveying us, fretfully. Beyond the sweeping nun’s hat of a roof, the last hints of day were fading and the first mosquito of the night whined past my ear. I might never see Kudzi again. Through an appalling lack of skill I was losing the battle for her heart.

She began walking away ... I had always adored the natural bounce in her step.

Please God, give me a raft!

“Let’s make a compromise ...” I called after her, “to keep talking.”

She stopped and faced me, and I watched her struggle with conflicting emotions. At last she said, “Let’s wait and see.”

I took a quick breath ...

With the glimmer of a smile, she added, “I thought you had a lift waiting?”

She had climbed on board the raft ... almost! Quickly I said, “We need more time ... to see clearly. We can’t leave one another in chaos. I’ll be calm, I promise, Kudzi!”

“You, calm!” As well as humour there was a touch of affection in her tone. Then she frowned and asked, “Whatever happened to your face?”

“I was assaulted ... walking about town.”

“Are you mad? You can’t just walk about!” She shook her head in disbelief while studying her hands which were now caressing one another. She was such a generous person; I felt dwarfed by the size of her generosity. How could I ever rise to it? There were times when it had even been irksome because it was unreasonable – like when she gave away things that she actually needed.

She started walking off, but looked back at me again and said, “I’ll phone you.”

I watched her until she reached her transport. I gave a little wave – she returned it as she got into the car.

She had looked back at me, she had smiled at me, she had asked after me, and she had said she would phone me: I walked off towards the Búzio Bar with a spring in my step.

THE BÚZIO BAR

A crowd stood about drinking, smoking, bathed in electric light as in your standard bar. With war at the gates of the city, with nothing to do, and with the price of a beer at fifty meticaís when you got 1500 to the dollar on the black market, the motivation to come to the Búzio and drink yourself into oblivion was irresistible. It was just about the last watering hole in town, and certainly one of the only places where you could pay in local money. They even had vodka.

I felt ten years younger entering the Búzio. For the first time in weeks my head was in place, the world around me – even the city – suddenly looked manageable, objectively interesting, exciting even.

Pushing my way towards the bar I remembered that all my money had been stolen in the mugging. To solve this problem I set about hunting for Rainer. I had not got far before I bumped into someone I knew well: Godwin Matatu, another Zimbabwean, had been editor of *Africa Magazine* in London, and was now with the multinational Lonrho, as their roving ambassador for Southern Africa. It was like finding an old friend on a desert island. We exchanged mutually astonished greetings. I told him about coming to

win back Kudzi, whom he knew (she had written for his magazine for a while). He tut-tutted, bought me a double vodka and tonic, and lent me twenty US dollars.

As Godwin was staying in a flat owned by Lonrho, I explained my tenuous connection with Rainer, and asked if he could put me up. His answer was “No”. His superior, he said, had come to Mozambique to purchase the world’s largest reserve of columbo-tantalite – a rare mineral used for nuclear reactors and missile parts – and was staying with him.

“Missiles! *Santo Deus!*” Rainer had popped out of the throng. He squeezed my shoulder, Latin-style. “Are *you* the one who is planning a coup d’état, Miguel?”

I cringed. He was already tipsy. Compelled to introduce them, I was relieved to see that Godwin was not acquainted with my host. Rainer made a fuss about Godwin’s coming to Maputo on business when everyone he knew was dying to abandon the place. As he started back to the bar to buy a round of drinks for us he laughed in his crazy fashion, and I saw Godwin flinch at being suddenly and unexpectedly exposed to all those teeth – yellow, chipped and misaligned like old piano keys.

Needless to say Godwin found Rainer “a little out of the ordinary”. “In this town,” he told me, “you must be careful whom you mix with. Particularly in this bar. You see the fellow behind the counter?”

Through the smoke and clusters of heads I could make out a Portuguese-looking man of about fifty with a rough face and slow eyes who was pouring drinks sloppily as if to say: *I’ve got an endless source, I’m king of this bar and this city!* I watched Rainer go up to him and place his order.

“That’s Miguel da Silva, the owner,” Godwin explained. “His father was killed in the ’60s by Frelimo during the liberation struggle. All his family live in Lisbon except him. Now how come? Look at his face! Not surprising he’s suspected of being a Renamo agent!”

Rainer was speaking confidentially to da Silva who rang up the cash till. Next to it I spotted a small fat dog lying asleep in a basket.

“It’s a dangerous time,” Godwin said. “The Nkomati Accord³ isn’t sticking with South Africa. You’ve heard of the foreigners being killed? Nine, or is it ten, this month? It’s never been this bad.”

Sooner than expected, Rainer reappeared before us, his eyelids peeled back in mock amazement. “Ooo! Look at these serious faces! *Must* stop talking politics in here! ... Drinks are on their way.”

Godwin then made the mistake of asking Rainer what he did, giving my host the opportunity to launch into a jubilant account of the collapse of his bakery and yeast empire, until the arrival of a waiter brought the story to an abrupt end. I gagged. There he was in flesh and blood, the little Totobola hunchback, looking me straight in the eye and rattling his tray of drinks. Rainer’s response took me even more by surprise. Assuming by my expression that I was horrified by the hunch on the back of the fellow, he flew to his defence. “Do not look at him like that! This is Toto. You must be kind to hunchbacks. There is nothing evil about them. The English king, Richard III, has been classified as a

³ The Nkomati Accord, an “agreement on non-aggression and good neighbourliness”, was signed by Mozambican president Samora Machel of Mozambique and P.W. Botha, president of South Africa, on March 16, 1984.

bad man for five hundred years. And why? Because he's supposed to have a hunched back!"

Throughout this extraordinary outburst Toto remained impassive, while Godwin shot glances at me in consternation.

Rainer seized the drinks off the tray and shoved them at us. "Toto has worked here for years. He is my friend. He lives opposite us with his family. Yes, he has a family!"

Godwin, now desperate to get away from Rainer, was saved by a journalist from AIM, the government news agency, who came and spoke to him about going home. But before they got a chance to do so, an even more bizarre encounter took place, right where we were standing near the entrance to the bar.

A tall white man walked in, and the moment Rainer set eyes upon him, his arms shot upwards in welcome like battered flagsticks, and he called out with excessive enthusiasm – "Ah! Mr John! My dear cellmate!"

The newcomer froze. He was grim-faced, over fifty, but with the power of a far younger man detectable in his wiry torso stretching a black t-shirt. His eyes, a stony grey, matched the colour of his slicked-back hair. As he attempted to push past us, Rainer latched on to him like a groupie. "Where have you been? Have you been flying your airplane in dangerous zones? Let me introduce you to my friends ... Miguel, meet John Boland, the pilot – we were prison mates together."

The penny dropped: Ulla's phone call: *Rainer shared a cell with an Englishman called John Boland.*

In an accent from England's industrial Midlands, this mercenary so feared by Ulla growled at Rainer, "You're weird!" Then finding himself unable to advance any further without knocking into my frail host, he barked "Get out of my way!" – his attempt to muffle the command causing it to come out all wrong, like an expression of sickness.

"Please," Rainer wheedled, "stay and have one drink with us!" Stretching an interminable arm across to me, he pulled me closer. "Miguel here is a most interesting film maker and writer ... And his friend Mr Godwin is a big fish: he is Mr Lonrho."

Boland was at the limit of his patience. Looking at Rainer as if he wanted to kill him, he asked, "Why do you bug me every time you see me? What's your game? Eh?"

A dumb silence had fallen around us. Violence singed the air. Everyone was watching.

It was at this moment that I decided that my host must be gay. I had suspected it ever since I met him, although androgynous qualities do not necessarily denote homosexuality, and there may have been no sexual implications behind the sobriquet "Rainha the Drag Queen". I had also wondered if he "camped it up" simply to rile people for his own pleasure. But now there was no mistaking his disposition as he threw up his eyebrows and howled almost in falsetto, "My game! Did I not tell you about my game, Mr John? Surely you know! We both play the same game, you and I – they call it *death!*" emitting the fatal word like a spitting cat.

Boland went white. Then the violence came – but from an unexpected source: Rainer was holding a glass of brandy and coke in one hand and it exploded as if it had been hit by a bullet, spraying glass and liquid over the mercenary and others in the vicinity. The event was accompanied by detonating macabre laughter from Rainer who affected a toreador's sweep to wave Boland through to the bar. I think it was the ludicrous spectacle of Rainer's last gesture that stalled Boland's strike. Instead, the intimidating man uttered

an exclamation of contempt as he strode forward while everyone moved out of his way, leaving him free to continue to the bar. A couple of people laughed nervously. Then the crowd slowly resumed their business.

Rainer turned to us in triumph. “He’s so cruel looking, don’t you think? I call him ‘The Executioner’.”

Godwin and I didn’t know where to look, but the news agency man was truly impressed. “*Ai Jesus!*” he said to Rainer. “How did you do that? Breaking a glass with one hand. I’ve never seen anyone do that. Great trick!”

Pulling me aside, Godwin asked, “Who is this Rainer nut?”

I shrugged, my eyes on Toto who was already scampering among the legs of the patrons, cleaning up the mess.

“What was he inside for?” Godwin pressed.

“I have no idea. He came to me out of the blue.”

“You’d better find out. He certainly likes to shoot from the hip. He’s right about his friend Boland – Boland’s a marked man.”

I was beginning to feel dizzy once again. It was stuffy, ever torrid, I had drunk several shots of vodka and all this intrigue was getting me down. “Marked by whom?” I mumbled.

“He’s an English mercenary who fought for the Rhodesians in their SAS dirty tricks brigade. He was recognised recently by a freedom fighter who knew him too well to ever forget. What I’d like to know is, why Boland is here in Mozambique flying freight planes for a state company?”

“I did hear he was locked up by Frelimo,” I said, lethargy setting in.

“How do you know that?”

“Ulla told me.”

“Ah, of course, Kudzi’s Frelimo friend. Yes, I also heard about it. They got him on some minor offence – refusing to fly somewhere. Wrote him off as a cowboy, then set him free. Frelimo should throw him out. Tell that to Ulla from me!”

The agency journalist at last succeeded in dragging Godwin off. I watched my friend go out the door with a surge of apprehension – my last link with a familiar world.

I spent the next three hours getting increasingly drunk with Rainer in the Búzio. Early on, we subsided together in a corner where I took up Ulla’s claim that he had been locked up for “economic crimes”. Rainer confirmed that this was indeed the case, then confounded me with his explanation of what the crime had consisted of: refusing to allow officials to hold a “*comício*” in which his factory workers had to swear political allegiance to the party, install a flag and a portrait of the President, and engage in dialectic on worker participation and power-sharing. He went on to describe the gory conditions inside the two jails he had attended: Machava, and another place deliberately and atrociously misnamed *Vila Algarve*. I remember being amused by his account of a new class system enshrined in prison menus with *Geral* (gruel) for the masses, *Dieta* for Muslims, and *Especial* for those like Rainer who could afford to pay.

My host’s vivid account was curtailed by a power failure. In the ensuing darkness there was much muttering and blathering about Renamo *bandidos* coming to take over

the city. Rainer, predictably, riled our immediate neighbours with a bold conjecture that there would be plenty of light after the take-over because the *bandidos* would have become skilled electricians by then with all their cable cutting. Fortunately, the arrival of hurricane lamps diverted attention from this political hot potato.

The new lighting brought Rainer's attention back to me and blessed him with a change of subject. "What do you know about Richard III?" he asked.

My answer was the obvious minimum: "He murdered the princes in the Tower of London to secure the crown."

Scorn twisted his features. "*Vai pro caralho!* Rubbish you learned from that swine Shakespeare, the favourite puppy dog of the Tudors!" And he launched into a slurred account of Richard III as a much-maligned monarch who was entirely innocent of the crimes invented by the Tudors to discredit him. "And he was no hunchback," he said, thumping me on my spine. "He had one shoulder lower than the other – that is all."

Pushing his face into mine, he asked, "How do you think Richard must feel having been a symbol of evil for all these centuries without a chance to clear his name?"

"Bloody awful" I responded, not without sarcasm.

"Most wounded, he is. *Que seca!* Richard III was a liberal reformer, a man who was kind and generous. *Porra! Porra!* Shit! Do you not know this?"

I assured him that he was absolutely right, then lost track of much of what he went on to say, fascinated by the elasticity of his mouth as he drunkenly circled the words with his lips to try to separate them, then darted the difficult ones out with the help of his piebald tongue like a chameleon, and even like a spitting cobra when he infused them with his bitter cynicism. I also remember being intrigued by the way he kept moving in and out of the present tense and switching from the first to the third person so that he and Richard III often became one and the same person.

According to Rainer, Richard was popular with the people, and a loving man when it came to women. He spoke in particular about a certain Elizabeth of York, sister of the famously murdered Princes, who fancied Richard and whom he was falsely accused of trying to kill.

"Elizabeth was throwing herself at me!" he exclaimed, his features creased into a picture of woe. "Like yourself Miguel, at the time I was sick with love for my wife Anne. So I had to keep Elizabeth away from me. That is why she turned against me, you see. She went off and married my enemy Henry. It was Henry who killed the princes and stole the crown. It was Henry who fought and killed me at the Battle of Bosworth. *Vai pró caralho* it was Elizabeth who betrayed me! All my troubles started from back then, that is for sure. All the difficulties I have recalling whole sections of my Life-Line. All the blocks I run into ..."

Big tears were rolling down his face. "The Queen" had tipped the scales of melodrama. Tongue well in cheek, I asked, "Could you introduce me to Richard? He wouldn't happen to be here in the bar, by any chance?"

Drying his eyes on his palms Rainer looked at me long and hard as only drunks can do when they have difficulty focusing. Eventually he said with a spectacular slur, "As a matter of fact he is."

People had started to leave – the hands of the bar clock were close to midnight, perilously close to curfew time.

“He most definitely is here,” he muttered. “Right here in the Búzio.”

“Well, introduce me then,” I urged, scrambling to my feet and pulling him up as well.

We stood facing one another unsteadily. He shot out his hand – I took it by reflex – a toothy grin sprung his face open – “How do you do?” he said regally. “Very pleased to meet you, Miguel. The name’s Richard – Richard the Third of England!”

“Very pleased to meet you, too,” I groaned.

We drove back to the house in a winding manner as though for once Rainer were consciously trying to avoid the potholes. Now and then I caught glimpses of the unwashed and unhoused scampering for cover in drains, between broken walls, behind staircases, anywhere that would conceal them from the military patrols of the night. As we turned into *avenida Francisco O. Magumbwe* (a deceased Frelimo hero of the Mozambican liberation war, I had learnt at the bar), our headlights fell upon two women chopping down a jacaranda tree, presumably for firewood. Their eyes widened in terror for a second, then they scuttled off, their dresses billowing, and disappeared like ghosts in the buildings.

The fruit bats fired their scary cries at us as António unlocked the gate. There was no end to his hours of duty, it seemed. Rainer leaned out of the window and blurted, “*Boa noite*, Elizabeth of York! How are you this hot night?” adding hoots of derisive laughter that echoed through the garden.

Unperturbed, António held open the gate, and as we entered the driveway Rainer called out again, “*Não faz mal*, my dear Elizabeth! Love hazzzth no fury greater than a woman scorned ... or something like that!” He swung his head round at me – “That swine Mr Shakespeare, isn’t it? *Filho da puta!*” Upon which he drove on cue into the bed of geraniums, and stalled the car.

For an eternity I vomited in the bathroom until dry retching set in. The next stage involved lying naked on the tiled floor in a pool of sweat, waiting for the strength to get to the library.

To accomplish this I had to slide along the passage wall until I arrived at an impassable gulf: the open doorway leading to the dining room. Going down on all fours, I was about to attempt to cross this when I heard the squeak of the sprung back door, followed by the soft padding of bare feet. António appeared and – without noticing me, or else choosing not to – glided through to the living room, where I saw him open Rainer’s bedroom door, go in, and lock it firmly behind him.

This action managed to register itself in my brain. After which it required minimal effort to put two and two together and come up with António as Rainer’s lover.

DAY FIVE – SUNDAY 23RD DECEMBER 1984

REFLECTIONS ON RAINER'S BEHAVIOUR

I must have made it safely to the library because that is where I found myself in the morning, head pounding, tongue cracking, stomach churning. Despite the city's decay, the people's suffering, Rainer's shenanigans and my own torment, the cock in the back yard crowed and the grandfather clock chimed six times, then played *Ave Maria*. I went straight for a dose of radical treatment: shot of vodka from Zimbabwe Duty Free, four aspirins, black coffee from Agi, cool shower.

I dressed in a pair of shorts and a t-shirt from my film *The Grass is Singing*. I don't make a habit of sporting t-shirts from my films, but this one was long and thereby ideal as a bed shirt; although on this occasion I put it on because Kudzi, who had worked on the Zambian shoot in 1980, often wore it – so having it on that morning was like having her wrapped round me, or so I tried to imagine.

While getting dressed I saw António in the car park reassembling the bricks of the geranium bed; although the side walls of the bed were concreted in, he was using nothing more than earth to level off the bricks at the front in preparation for their next collision with the car.

With a cup of coffee in hand I sat alone on the screened front porch and was soon granted a visual treat in the garden: the male peacock tottering forward over the cracked earth, its fully fanned tail held high like a heavenly banner. This universal symbol of power and glory had stood behind António at the *Loja Interfranca* when he shot Rainer in my dream. Whose power and glory had been at stake in the dream? Not António's – he was of small import to me and unlikely to inhabit my subconscious; it had to be Rainer's ... or else mine, the dreamer's ... or, perhaps, both of ours.

It occurred to me that I had not made much effort to find alternative accommodation during the course of the previous day. I was constantly waylaid by one drama or another. The comforts of the Kruger household were also beginning to take hold. Meanwhile, I was close to admitting the unimaginable: that Rainer and his world had begun to dominate my mind almost as much as Kudzi.

The mystery man himself emerged from his room walking in a slow, palpable cloud of somnolence, carrying his dog in his arms like a baby. His bare feet protruded from crumpled trousers, toes spreading over the red concrete of the porch with the flexigrip of a monkey. His face was as creased as the brown nylon shirt in which he had spent the night and, when he sat down in an armchair next to me without so much as a good morning, I observed the damp deadness of a hangover in his eyes. Keeping Rosa firmly against his breast, Rainer slid his back low across the seat of the chair. "Alcohol is not an enlightening drug," he mumbled hoarsely. "I hope I did nothing scandalous at the Búzio?"

"You enraged a beefy man called Boland," I answered in a voice that was equally hoarse.

"Good!"

A moment later he embarrassed me by stretching an arm out and placing an icy hand on the back of my neck.

"How is your head?" he asked as his fingers rubbed the nape.

I spaced my words warily: “Not ... bad ... thank you.” Even as I spoke I felt the dullness being dredged from me through his simple touch; shots of blood and oxygen filled my head while unerring charges of energy ran up and down my spine. When he withdrew his hand – which had turned hot during the exercise – the invigoration he had unleashed did not subside.

He responded to my sincere gratitude in his usual convoluted way. “Pity you cannot do the same for me. When it comes to helping oneself, it is always harder, isn’t it?” And he sighed as he sank down even further into the chair. “Auto-generation is exhausting ... Trouble is, I am not sure bootstrapping works. Nothing better than a good kick up the backside from an external source!”

As usual I was in such ignorance about his world that I derived nothing from his references other than the fear of once more being overloaded and bewildered by him.

While we sat together in silence I kept glancing at him out of the side of my eye. Soon his chin began to sink on to his chest and his eyelids drooped. I was now able to stare at him openly ... and at close quarters. A man of mixed race with the capacity to relieve pain with a touch of the hand, to cicatrise a wound with a twirl of the fingers. His perfect Apache’s nose had wide hairless nostrils that pulsated gently like the gills of a fish. The vein snaking down the centre of his forehead bulged like fresh concrete between tightly laid stones. His gnarled fingers were vines lacing through the fur of his dog that lay sprawled across his chest, as still as a toy. Above the top of his trousers, the yellow-brown skin of his belly was a dry riverbed wrinkling between his hips. When did he eat, I wondered. I had seen him merely nibbling at food – half a sandwich, a mouthful of fish. Hard to imagine such a sack of skin and bones having sex. The axis of his sensuality lay beyond the carnal in some seething realm of his imagination.

Furtively I leaned right up close, inches away from him, a position that gave me a false sense of power over him. The surface tranquillity of his face exuded harmlessness, vulnerability even. But in his case, even sleep did not succeed in defusing him – within the cave of his unconscious I was aware of a time-bomb ticking away. What motives could possibly lurk inside that dark scalp which rose like a bald vulture’s through a halo of grey-speckled, crinkly hair? Sensational remarks like his professed determination “to break the state of torpor” referred to nothing I could pin down. He could be finalising a political manoeuvre or describing some personal upheaval involving António, his father, the factory, or the hand of the devil. Difficult, also, to know what importance to give his statements in view of his histrionic tendencies.

Yet Ulla was convinced Rainer was up to something political. And António had objected to his friend’s proceeding with his so-called “*conspiração*”: it was dangerous and could not work, he had said. Now that I knew they were lovers it was easy to appreciate António’s anxiety, even if I had not the slightest idea what could bring about the separation that António feared, or where they would end up once parted.

Why had Rainer gone for Boland, so deliberately winding him up? Boland had indicated that it had not been the first provocation. From what Ulla and Godwin had said, Boland could well be a fascist component in Rainer’s schemes. Of course their rapport could also have a sexual aspect. If Boland were a gay and they had shared a cell in Machava prison, this could go some way towards explaining Boland’s anger and Rainer’s stirring it up with such delight.

Then there was all the psychic stuff, tinged with touches of sci-fi. Since the healing interview I could see that many of the references that I had assumed to be political code words, were, in fact, references to psychic phenomena. What were these doing muddled with politics? Why on earth had Rainer talked about me to António in terms of a Life-Line that crossed or did not cross with his? Also there were his references to Zeega, the planet with which he was so familiar that I could imagine him touring it in a *Star Wars* dune buggy. No one could take such a proposition seriously. Could Rainer be a religious zealot like his father, perceiving me to be the source of divine retribution, to be kept in the house at all costs? Was he going to bring about an apocalypse and take us all to a new heaven on a far-off planet? António had called the plot “the shift of forms”, very much in keeping with his master’s psi or spiritual terms of reference. Or did António’s hostility towards me stem from a more prosaic source: the suspicion that I might be an undercover agent who was endangering his lover?

There was no getting away from it: I had passed from being irritated, frightened and repelled by Rainer Kruger, to being irritated, frightened, repelled, but genuinely intrigued. The ceasefire, or at least the opening of peace negotiations with Kudzi could provide me with the mental energy to try and strip Rainer of a few more of his onion skins. I remained unconvinced, meanwhile, that there really was a plot. And if it did exist, there was no telling whether it was driven by politics, trauma, psychic enquiry, satanic powers, or by a mixture of them all.

ANTÓNIO DEFUSES AN ALARMING SITUATION

My thoughts were interrupted by a resonant groan from Rainer that caused Rosa to jump down from his chest. The dog’s abrupt departure set off a chain of reactions within the dozing man. He twisted his body in the chair, made sticky noises with his mouth and pulled a face as if he had eaten something foul. Soon he began to twitch and whimper like an animal held hostage by a dream. So rapid was his deterioration into violent shuddering and stifled shouts that I became alarmed. There was no way that such suffering could be written off as yet another of his theatricalities. This time I felt genuine sympathy. I called out his name repeatedly without effect, then shook him. But he remained locked in some internal duel between life and death.

Suddenly the invisible stranglehold broke: his body lurched and he began gulping down air noisily, opening and closing his mouth like a fish on dry land. Then just when I thought he was on the way to recovery, the region of conflict shifted to his naked umbilicus, which he started to tear at with his fingers, scratching himself to the point of drawing blood.

It was with enormous relief that I saw António hurrying towards us. Standing behind Rainer, he cupped his lover’s head in his palms and pressed his skull as if he were trying to squeeze the brains out. Then he hauled him upwards with startling force until he held him suspended six inches clear of the chair. At this point Rainer’s eyes sprung open and rolled about in unseeing panic. At once he started shouting incoherently about “Them,” also classified as “*Porcos!*” who would never be able to keep him out of some place where he was intent on going (the same sort of paranoid argument I had succeeded in averting during my interview with him). Only when he had calmed down considerably did António lower him into the armchair, and then proceed at once to massage Rainer’s

head until he grew quiet and still. When António finally removed his hands, Rainer slumped like a subdued beast, his bulging eyes clouded, saliva dribbling from his open mouth ...

Loud repeated hooting at the front gate broke the spell of this convoluted drama. António responded by gathering Rainer in his arms and rushing off with him across the living room and into the bedroom.

Less agile, I was still in the hall when Agi heralded the Greek couple through the front door. Mr Parfitis explained breezily that he had come to pick up the old man and take him for lunch at the Polana Hotel; Rainer was not included in the invitation, and, mercifully, neither was I.

I was in the library when the lunch party set off. Through the louvred library blinds, I watched Mr Kruger Senior climb into a chauffeured Land Cruiser; he had put on a suit and tie for the occasion, his formality getting the better of the heat. Fast back on duty, António was on hand to open and close the gate.

As the vehicle drove away, he sauntered back up the driveway, picked up a can next to the Peugeot, and poured petrol from it into the tank. António the covert lover, the second figure in the mystery. I had begun to realise that the link between António and Rainer was central to everything. If clarification were to be sought on the plot, António was the one to whom I should turn. More than likely, however, resentment of me, which hung like a veil over his mildness of tone and manner, would preclude this option. Could António be jealous of me, I wondered. Had I become the object of Rainer's desires or, at any rate, might António see it that way?

The shrill ring of the phone sent me scampering for the hall ... but António got there first. He talked long enough for my hopes to fade. I returned to the library trying to convince myself that it was too soon after our meeting to expect Kudzi to call.

Seconds later I heard the old car start and curiosity drew me once more to the library window: the Peugeot was backing towards the re-opened gate with António at the wheel and a gaunt-looking Rainer in the passenger seat.

ALONE IN THE HOUSE

The key players had left the theatre. Agi was outside, next to the water tower, washing clothes in a tin tub. For a while at least, there would be no performance.

The first thing I did was phone Kudzi. It was the watchdog of the revolution who picked up the receiver.

"Where is she?" I asked.

"Out for lunch," Ulla answered.

"When will she be back?"

"I have no idea ... Have you anything to report?"

In response to her martial tone I launched into an exaggerated account of Rainer's altercation with Boland, my sole purpose being to wind Ulla up for my own entertainment. "They've clearly been partners in some affair which turned out badly," I announced, delighting in the double meaning of the word "affair".

"Surely they didn't say anything recriminating in public?"

"Oh, Boland did! He got so worked up he couldn't stop himself. He said, 'I'll screw you in the Life-Lines, you git!' Now what could *that* mean – Life-Lines? Boland's up to

no good, if you ask me. You should get him thrown out of the country. Godwin Matatu agrees with me.”

“What did Rainer say?” she asked, unable to mask her excitement.

Seeing an opportunity for personal advantage, I held the bait out of reach. “He said something strange ...”

“Well, go on!”

“Rainer talked of killing someone.”

“Killing someone!”

“Well, yes ... But not directly ...” I prolonged her agony. She gasped in exasperation, demanding that I be more precise. I continued, “Death? death game? ... how did he put it? Rainer said they were both in the same game of death – that was his exact phrase.”

“What else did he say?”

“He did say something else ... but I can’t remember. I’d like to arrange another meeting with Kudzi. Perhaps seeing her will revive my memory.”

Ungraciously taking the bait, she promised to speak with Kudzi on my behalf. I rang off and had a good chuckle. How could she have taken anything I had just said seriously? When it came to undercover work, the Dane had none of Kudzi’s trained professionalism.

Confident that I would soon hear from my lover, and with the freedom of the house at my disposal, I fetched my notebook and stretched out luxuriously on the living room sofa. Outside, the song of a butcherbird filled me with delight. It grew louder ... closer ... and suddenly there it was perched on the outer sill of the veranda screens. Without lifting my head from the cushion I was able to watch it proudly posed in its sharply delineated tunic of black and white as it sent the notes of its complex melody rebounding through the recesses of the house. Quickly it was joined by its mate holding in its serrated beak a grasshopper with its wings feebly beating.

The lullaby of birdsong along with the hot blanket of the afternoon air must have caused me to swoon off, for I soon found myself in a field of metal grass on a distant planet, coasting along in a dune buggy ...

Around me there are herds of hybrid animals: buffaloes stampeding through silver grass with faces like chows; kudu bulls tossing their regal horns and stamping elephantine feet on brazen earth; lions with the muzzles of zebras passively grazing on ferrous grass; herds of wildebeest with snakes for tails ...

I pull the buggy over to admire these hybrid wonders. Then I spot an incongruous object – a Land Rover with a Sennheiser rifle microphone poking out of the window. The door flies open and Richard Adams, the author of *Watership Down*, gets out and berates me at once: “You interrupted my recording of nature sounds for the BBC!” ...

As I begin to apologise, Adams’s attention is captured by something above our heads: a flying horse ridden by a knight in armour, doing cartwheels in the sky. I, too, am in awe of the spectacle. But quickly I am seized by consternation, and shout, “Nothing so beautiful and powerful can endure!” ...

In a voice smitten with awe, Adams says, “Pegasus is like a child, full of *fidulity*.” ...

Pegasus and rider go into a nose dive, and I awake with a cry.

I was unable to move until I had gone over this astonishing dream several times. Ever since Kudzi had left me I had been besieged by dreams, mostly nightmares. At one point they became so frightening that I had consulted a Jungian psychoanalyst friend who told me I should take advantage of the situation as many of my dreams were important “teaching dreams”. “They show that you haven’t brought into harmony two different ways of relating to the world,” she had said. In broad terms, the two ways were the

intuitive versus the rational, the feminine versus the masculine. “You must reflect upon your dream stories and learn to decipher their metaphorical implications for your daily life,” she counselled me, adding, “You may lie to yourself, but your dreams will never lie to you”. Her advice lingered in the back of mind, nagging me for years.

However, I could find no rapport between my Pegasus dream and current reality, other than having spent a day with Richard Adams on the Isle of Man six months previously to discuss a film project. It was amusing that the dune buggy had surfaced – no doubt the *Star Wars* interpretation of Rainer’s Zeega – and I was fascinated that I had dreamed up the mythical horse. What was particularly intriguing was the hybrid animal theme that ran through the dream, ending with Adams’s use of the word “fidelity”.

Putting the library to the test I quickly scoured the shelves and found what I needed – a 1940 edition of the English Oxford Dictionary. The nearest thing to “fidelity” was “fidelity”. And there was another word, “fiducial”, meaning “a fixed basis of reference, such as a fiducial point, or temperature”; more significantly, fiducial also implied trust – “a fiducial dependence on God”.

My unconscious mind had cleverly created a new word – a hybrid word in conformity with the hybrid animals. I thought: if anyone has no fixed point of reference, it’s you! You have no fixed point in politics or religion or philosophy or love or profession; you are even a genetic confusion of Celtic, Jewish and Arabic stock, born in Egypt and brought up in Zimbabwe; you live between two continents; as for the issue of trust, you have become untrustworthy in the area of politics, and as far as Kudzi is concerned, you are no longer a person in whom she can place “fiducial dependence”.

The moment I associated Kudzi with the dream’s theme of fidelity and trust, further unsettling thoughts arose. The name Kudzi is an abbreviation of Kudzai, which in the Shona language means “to praise” and “to respect”; and *kudza* from which it derives, means “to make grow”. Kudzi’s name described not only the essence of her being, but how most people responded to her: they had faith in her, and, therefore, respected and praised her; and she was worthy of their praise and respect because she was trustworthy and true. From many of her friends she received tenderness and love; but I, her companion, the person in her life who should have given her the most love, had failed to do so.

I slumped down on the bed, weak with recrimination and self-pity. I wished I had not opened the dictionary. Where once I had walked tall and confident, fissures now ran through my heart and my philosophy of life, and every day they were widening – into a “gap” as Kudzi had called it, a chasm. Like the creatures in my dream I had become a hybrid, a half-person living a half-life. I was in danger of coming under the sway of the wrong influences, slipping, even, under the spell of the biggest hybrid of all – Rainer, the *faux savant*, who was not only a dual personality and a hypomanic with schizophrenic tendencies and with an official card to prove it, but a flesh and blood African-European hybrid as well.

On the brink of tears, my morbid self indulgence was arrested by a surge of pride and healthy self-disgust. Kudzi, Rainer, Ulla, Mozambique – none of them was going to be the end of me. I was going to get over the hump!

An urge for action took hold of me. The house was empty. It was imperative to seize this opportunity to find out what the wizard was really up to. He had encouraged me to stay on at his dangerous house, in so doing I had gained the right to self-protection.

A VALUABLE DISCOVERY

I was lifting a hand to open Rainer's door when my attention was drawn to a corridor from where Mr Klaus Kruger always emerged in the mornings or after a siesta. I decided that I might as well start at this far end of the building and work through the rest of the house systematically, preserving the best for last.

The first room I came to in the old man's wing was a storeroom stuffed with bits of furniture, suitcases and bric à brac in their musty suits of dust. The place was rank with disuse.

The next room was locked, but the key was in the door. I opened it. A smell of naphthalene singed my nostrils. As my expanding pupils adapted to the spectral gloom I saw drapes covering everything, blocking the windows and hiding the furniture, including a large four-poster bed. The matrimonial bedroom had been preserved, so it seemed, as a mausoleum by Mr Kruger since the death of his wife seven years ago. With a shudder, I shut the door.

Beyond a bathroom, I came to the last room that led off the corridor – Mr Kruger's monastic bedroom. It contained a single bed covered by a neutral bedspread, a side table with only a candle on it, a built-in cupboard which was shut, a bare floor of ochroid tiling, and a dreadfully kitsch painting of the drooped head of Christ on the cross. There was nothing else. Not a single trace of its occupant. A dead room – almost as functionless as the matrimonial bedroom.

Leaving Mr Kruger's section of the house was like coming up for air. To shake off its eeriness I took a break and headed straight for the garden.

For once the sunshine was welcome, and the peacock sitting partially fanned upon a tree stump a fine complement. As I passed by the great bird, it let off one of those atrocious cries unique to its kind, and flew away clumsily, scattering powdered red earth. I happily took its place on the tree stump, which was a good couple of yards wide and must have been the base of a spathodia or a similar tree of large proportions common to southern African cities.

But I had only been seated for a few seconds when I felt something tickling my legs: white ants inhabited the surface of the stump; it was the earth of their red baked tunnelling that had been partially scattered by the peacock, and further disturbed by me; already workers were hurrying to repair the damage. After brushing off the termites, I knelt down to watch their frenetic scurrying, and marvel at their tireless energy. When I eventually stood up, it was to walk around the garden seeing if I could find their nest. It lay close to the front boundary wall next to a clump of bamboos. Fresh and still open, the refuge had developed the beginning of a hill – no more than six inches of a twenty-foot tower that would never be built; António, the diligent gardener, would make sure of that.

It took some courage to go back into the strange and unhappy house with the intention of penetrating the room I was really anxious to see: the one leading directly off the lounge – Rainer's bedroom.

Not unexpectedly, the room was dim and shambolic. Despite the occupant's precautions against obnoxious "interferences", a handful of sun rays were pushing through tattered breaches in the curtains to brush over magazines, books and papers that were strewn everywhere, to dapple the scrunched-up double bed and chaotic bookcase, to

pry into open cupboards full of untidy clothes, and finally to cast a pattern of secrets on the beige tiled floor.

At the centre of this mess stood a desk upon which paperwork from the yeast factory served as bolstering for further books and magazines. A faded hardback entitled *Genetics is Easy* bore the legend “R. Kruger, Witwatersrand University, Johannesburg, 1967” on its inside cover, written in a spidery script. Pushed to one side was an old microscope ... a leaf on its mirror powdered by the passage of time. Next to the desk a 14-inch telescope aimed at the curtained window sat on a tripod, the eye-piece made blind by dust. Presumably, the development of Rainer’s psi power had rendered such tools of observation obsolete.

The bookshelves were my next port of call: some science fiction; old text books on chemistry, physics, biology, along with *Gray’s Anatomy* and some medical manuals; also a slim paperback, *Mozambique – The Revolution Under Fire*, the only evidence of potential political activity.

Serious magazines were by far the occupant’s favoured reading material. Many, including *Scientific American* and *Nature*, were familiar to me. Some were crumpled, others had pages torn out. I found one such page lying on the bed: in red ink, Rainer had ringed a section of text about Russian scientists who had isolated genes in a mustard plant.

Then an open notepad on a rumpled bed pillow caught my attention. Although I did not anticipate discovering anything of interest in something so carelessly abandoned, my hands were trembling as I sat down with it and focused on the open page. At the top was my name and, beneath, an entry dated the day of my arrival. What followed was an unflattering picture of me based on our first meeting at the Polana Hotel. As if gathering evidence against my host, I copied down the whole wretched piece, even interpreting, wherever possible, the abbreviations that he used.

Michael Raeburn. Writer/Film Director on Polana bar stool.

LL (Life-Line): purple, compressed, oscillates shapelessly even at rest. Vitality globules heavy. Instant dislike of me briefly solidified his contours. I had to force myself to shake his hand through the stink of his excitotoxins. Completely stuck in his Line, he believes it is all about some woman.

Psi : low capacity – axons/dendrites shredded – neuron motor worse than my 504. Little connection with the Fields.

Field System : Bottom Field 2. No rec. No transmat.

Universal Field : In/Out focussing gives no clear SLL (Specific-Life-Line) due to weak trajectory. “A” (António) claims I misrouted him. “A” says he is Judas. I say what is mine shall know my face. Will ride his LL for more info.

I flushed with anger. I could have told him that I had no psychic ability, in itself neither a crime nor a weakness. I had no idea what a “Field System” was or “rec” or “transmat”, all of which my weedy soul was, apparently, deficient in. It struck me that he might have left the pad on the bed so that I would find it, take offence and leave the house. It had been a serious misjudgement on my part to believe that he wanted me to stay on.

I snapped the pad shut. *Elar Shorthand Note Book* was printed on the front in gold letters, *Supplied by L. Rubin, 82 Nugget Street, Johannesburg*. Curiosity soon got the better of me and I started flipping through it, looking for further damning comments. There were none. Basically the pad was stuffed with scientific comments or quotes taken from his assorted reading. At first, my resentment weakened my concentration, until I found a page dated 6 January 1984 that was intriguing enough to revive my interest.

NATURAL BARRIERS ARE: The horizon of the Universal Field, and the horizon of a specific Field, also Black Holes ... Black Holes: sometimes heavier than a million suns, yet no bigger than an egg; sometimes less than a light year wide, but with the mass of a galaxy. The Universal Field's agent of destruction sent to burn rocks to ash, pulverize metal to gas. ... Just like my LIVING HELL when approaching the bands of Zeega.

ABNORMAL BARRIER: zero connection with Zeega. What have they blocked me with? With a furnace from the core of atoms? With fine-grained gales diverted from the Universal Field?

ONE WAY FORWARD: I hear its message on the Lines. I listen to it a hundred times a day. It says: "DO NOT HESITATE!"

REPEAT 10 TIMES EACH DAY: "WILL in unity with CONSCIOUSNESS produces CHANGE!"

The intensity of the fit I had observed earlier could well have been generated by Rainer's nightmarish descriptions of black holes. Was I to believe that he visited black holes while sitting on his veranda chair? Or was it his reading that caused his imagination to run amok?

Elsewhere – referring to the Russian attempt to isolate the genes in the mustard plant – he had written:

Russians are trying to mutate the seed by working on the master switch. They have found 3 of its genes. Little do they know they have another 30 to go! They must study the proteins regulating the gene programme or they will carry on getting lost in cell pathways every time they leave the control box – lost in labyrinths of LLs (Life-Lines).

New Russian plant similar to vegetable-animal mutant Rodeenon they fed us on in Zeega. I will meet them soon. The countdown is on.

The date on the magazine page – August 1984 – meant that the "countdown" was going on at that very moment. Perhaps he had driven off at lunchtime with António to help push his D-Day along!

I carried on copying out some of his thoughts on various scientific topics, although there was much I did not understand. I suspected that for Rainer the purpose of making these notes was to try and establish the affinities between his psychic understanding of nature and the discoveries scientists were making; and this particular quest of his certainly aroused my interest. (An opportunity arose during my stay – as will be revealed later – to expand fully the rapid notes I made in his room.)

14 October 1983

Azimov ponders ways of getting from A to B across great distances. Chained down by the speed of light, he toys with relativity, refrigeration, rejuvenation!

... Scientists do not realise that the unified field system cannot exist. The forces they have discovered will not be made one, and soon they will find more.

... Dark matter detected by American scientists: “Mysterious particles in the cosmos that shun all else – strong gravitational pull – 10 times more of it than bright matter – surrounds everything at the edge of light – spreads all the time and grows colder.” ... Amusing to find they have come close to Universal Field congelations without knowing it.

2 November 1984

I wish for the build-up – at the same time I am frightened. Do I REALLY carry the code of my future within me? ...

Rainer’s notes made me no wiser about where politics began and psychic tomfoolery ended. Nevertheless, with the memory of the soldier’s mended body still very much in my mind, I was ready to give him credit for sending out rays, tuning into frequencies and somehow latching on to microcosmic structures. No matter what the risks were – and with Rainer, danger was never likely to be far away – I was beginning to realise that the only way to come to grips with his enigmatic mind on all levels was to delve more intimately and directly into his psi interests. Something that I was certainly not prepared to do empirically, but could perhaps continue to do more safely just by talking with him.

There was a hooting at the gate. Placing the notebook back exactly where I had found it, I fled the room.

I barely had time to sit down on the living room sofa before Mr Kruger and the Greeks entered the hall. Without noticing me, they made straight for the card table.

EXTENSION OF MY VISIT

My day exploded into happiness a short while later when Kudzi called and suggested we meet on Wednesday, the day after Christmas. We could meet before an “Om” meeting, she said, at 10:00a.m. at the Institute of Agricultural Investigation, off the *Praça dos Heróis*. I asked if she had become a Buddhist. She laughed and, mimicking the militant tone of a Party official, said that “O-M-M” (spelling it out) stood for the *Organização da Mulher Moçambicana* (Organisation of Mozambican Women). “We’ll have half an hour or so before the meeting,” she said before ringing off and leaving me tingling with expectation but worried about the time limit she had placed on our encounter.

Seconds later it dawned on me that seeing Kudzi on Wednesday meant I would miss my plane back to Zimbabwe and would have to wait a week for the next flight. I called her back at once. She gave me no choice: she was leaving that afternoon to spend Christmas off the northern coast on the *Ilha da Moçambique*.

It was late afternoon when the 504 brought home a tense-looking António and a joyous Rainer who greeted his Rosa with more than usual exuberance. Apparently whatever they had gone off to do had turned out satisfactorily for Rainer, and less so for his companion.

That night we ate by lamplight. Renamo had re-cut the power lines – not a difficult task as the cables ran from the Cabora Bassa hydroelectric dam on the River Zambezi in the north, via South Africa, and then across to Maputo: a thousand-mile open target.

The first course was asparagus tips provided by me from my canned stash from Zimbabwe, which everyone made a fuss about except Mr Kruger. During the excellent

main course of roast garden chicken, the Parfitis asked me a number of predictable questions about Zimbabwe, and even Mr Kruger Senior managed dinner conversation of a sort with an anecdote about hunting one of “the big five”, which he delivered in confused barking sentences running back to back. From what I could gather, Kruger had been after a bull elephant that had tossed his African guide on to a thorn tree where he remained until he died of his injuries. Despite the fact that the narrator found this incident particularly entertaining, I nevertheless made the effort to build a better picture of him by imagining him as a young German in Volga Russia; for if his son’s description of his wonderful stepmother were true, then it implied that his father must have once been a charming and seductive aristocrat who – fate would have it – had been reduced over the years by three communist revolutions in three separate corners of the globe, into an embittered old fool.

Things changed for the worse after dessert was served. Scuttling under the table, Rosa had managed to entangle herself between the old man’s legs. Ordering Rainer to remove the animal from the room, Klaus Kruger flew into a rage so mighty that Rainer got up, cursing, and carried the dog out. He failed to return. I escaped as soon as I could to the library.

Stretched out on the bunk bed I said to myself as sternly as possible: In order to recover Kudzi you must keep your head down, get through tomorrow with the American boat party, traverse Christmas Day, then you will arrive at the meeting that will make it all worthwhile.

As my breathing slowed and I prepared for sleep, I peered around at the library, which now had a comforting familiarity about it. When I was a boy, I would line up every single thing in my room before getting into bed each night: the slippers would be parked, just so, next to the bed; my hair brush lined up parallel to the edge of the dresser; my clothes folded into a pile in order of size; and so forth. In a house where my parents so often fought bitter battles into the night, my mother wailing and my father even firing his revolver through the ceiling, this nightly ritual had helped me keep a lid on sanity.

So, now, I got up and did some arranging of a similar kind with my effects in the library. Then I climbed back on to the bunk bed, checked over the room with satisfaction, extinguished the candle, placed the palms of my hands over my eyes and recited a childhood prayer:

I have four corners to my bed,
And each one has an angel spread,
There’s one to watch,
And two to pray,
And one to take my sins away. Amen.

When I recited this as a boy I would meditate on each symbolic corner of the bed with reference to the people and events that awaited me at school next day, and thus, full of cosy reassurance, I would fall asleep.

Knowing that sleep could no longer be bought so cheaply, I took two sleeping pills.

DAY SIX – MONDAY 24TH DECEMBER 1984

A BIG BREAKFAST

Fat spitting everywhere, the pan so hot the eggs juddered like hovercraft. Draped in Agi's once white apron, Rainer was making breakfast while Rosa darted about in step with her master's hyperactivity. Pieces of charred toast stood smoking in a rack.

"Nearly ready!" he shouted. "Big day, today. The American party ... and who knows ..." His exuberance alone spelt trouble and, coming from him, the "what else" was ominous.

He added a peel of laughter to the spurting of the volatile oil. "With your tinned ham from Zimbabwe I create 'Full Hotel Breakfast!'"

We ate like ravenous animals, facing one another across the kitchen table. We ate without words, smacking our lips and slurping in a spontaneous and tacit act of gluttony. When we had done, even Rainer had built up a sweat. He put his plate on the floor for Rosa to lick clean and grinned broadly at me. Ignoring the sheaves of ham in his teeth, I grinned back. He fetched two tea towels and gave me one. We sighed a lot as we wiped our faces of food and sweat.

"So tell me about Zeega!"

Instead of addressing my midriff as he often did – he rarely looked into your eyes, preferring to throw random glances in your direction, or else to abandon his gaze and let it slide all over you – this time he answered my question with a head-on stare. Weighing his words, he answered, "Zeega is not part of the Milky Way – it is in the Virgo Galaxy, seventy-five million light years from here."

"What's it to you?"

"Zeega was the planet of my last activation."

I was unable to hide the difficulty I had in taking his proposition seriously. For his part, he could not disguise his disappointment at the predictability of my response.

He filled our glasses with water and continued nonetheless. "It was the first time in my evolution that I had what we call 'full recall'; from Zeega I could see my last life on earth, as well as my time as Richard III. And in Zeega I acquired more powerful psi access to Life-Lines other than my own throughout the Fields." He stopped and waited for some response. Getting none, he asked, "Did I not mention Fields to you?"

I was trying to separate what I had heard from him and what I had pilfered from his notebook. I knew that he had mentioned "Fields", but "recall" (abbreviated to "rec") I had only secretly read about. Eventually I said, "You've mentioned 'Fields'. Tell me more."

"Ho! If I started explaining the workings of the Fields ... I do not know if I have enough time left to do so."

"Dear Rainer," I said, laughing at his weakness for the apocalyptic, "it's hard for me to go from interviewing a healer to talking to a man from outer space." Caught up in the bonhomie of breakfast, I even dared make light of his shady political activities. "'Fields' couldn't be a code word, could it? Used by you, or by the CIA, or the KGB, or PIDE, SNASP or whatever?"

He stood up with a groan of disgust, unfurled his long fingers and held the flat of his palm in front of me. "There you have a picture of the Universal Field and the Life-Lines."

I could imagine him lying beside a pool in Santa Monica surrounded by devotees and playing Svengali – a disillusioning picture. I responded glibly, “I’m familiar with the method of using riddles as smoke screens.”

“But I do not talk in riddles. Look!” he said wiggling his fingers. “The palm is a good illustration of the Universal Field as the original place where the fingers – the Life-Lines – materialise from ...”

Without warning, a dramatic change overcame him: his smile dissipated like the subsiding agitation on the surface of a pond, and troubled thoughts rose to the surface. He began to mutter, “So many dead ends riding the Lines! So many! The Big Bang is one horizon going back in time. Zeegans claim they can see beyond it, but I do not believe much of what they say ...” – sagging under the weight of his incapacities – “Why, only yesterday I got stuck trying to trace your Life-Line into your past. Lost it along the way! As for going forward, well, that is even harder ...” – pressing his arms down on the table, hunching his shoulders like a ruffled crow – “My future trajectory ... all day I am digging into my own Line, hunting for clues. Repetitions ... repetitions are all I find! Eternal circles of destruction ... darkness and destruction.”

Like a steer’s in a slaughterhouse his eyes rolled in alarm. He *was* mad! To avert the possibility of another fit, I had to keep him talking. “Of course you desire to read the past and the future, like all clairvoyants – man’s eternal wish for godly powers ...” I could see he wasn’t listening. More urgently, I said, “Why don’t we get back to your analogy of your fingers as Life-Lines, and the palm ...”

But he had slid further into his private abyss. His only anchor – his hands – lay flat upon the table, pink-edged with pressure. I grabbed one of them and thrust the palm in front of his eyes. At first he stared at it stupidly, until the wildness drained from his vision and his errant consciousness bore down upon his palm as upon a landing strip. His ruinous smile popped back on his cheeks like tenuous debris, and he took up his tutorial precisely where he had left off – “... the fingers grow out of the palm where the idea of the fingers is stored as a blueprint.”

Relieved to have him back on track, I asked, “This idea you’re on about: Life-Lines coming from a Universal Field – are you not just dressing up the concept of a spirit world and a living one?”

“Bah!” He wagged his finger at me. “Right away we hit a problem with the word ‘spirit’: the Universal Field and the Life-Lines are both material worlds.”

“What do you mean?”

“The Field represented by the palm is made of finer stuff than the Life-Lines seen here as my bony fingers. It is a difference in mass and charge and so on that I am talking about, another brand of energy and of function. The Universal Field was there before the Big Bang. It envelops our universe like a wave function. It is superluminary. The mass of light and rays comes into play only when Life-Lines are re-activated.”

“If you’re saying the spirit world is made of matter ...”

“Matter or energy,” he interrupted, “They’re one and the same.”

Now that I was confident he was more or less normal again, I was eager to risk challenging him on the way he linked the political and the psychic. “António said to you that I may or may not have been drawn by you from something called the ‘chaotic transmitter’. This sounds ominous. Mozambique is not my country. I have to tell you, Rainer, I don’t wish to find myself in some political soup!”

He smiled, for once without conceit. “There is nothing political about the Universal Field – well, at least not at the level I speak of it. And the chaotic transmitter is António’s description of anything I do that he thinks is negative. He thinks I attract chaos.”

“Then what exactly does it mean to be a Life-Line that should or shouldn’t cross with yours? Isn’t this what António and you were concerned about during my first night in your house?”

Unrattled by my query, he answered with confidence and flair: “In nature, bodies are attracted or repelled. Should two or more bodies interact, it is either positive or negative, it is never neutral. Neutral is an ideal – a dream, like God and heaven. António feels you may exert a negative force on me.” He chuckled, and reflected for a moment before saying, “Perhaps you have arrived out of the blue to help me. I have never talked to anyone like this ... about my secret world. But I saw in your healing interview that you have the skill to pick out incoherence and guide my thoughts. In this sense our interaction is positive for me.”

“The important thing you seem to be trying to explain with your Field and Life-Line theory is that an idea’s worth nothing until it emerges as physical action. This is indeed chilling if your action is political.”

Goaded at last, he took such a deep breath that his Adam’s apple shuddered like a trapped bird. “What I am is a researcher. What I know is that the Universal Field and the Life-Lines are interdependent: the second emerges from the first and feeds back into it – this to-ing and fro-ing is the source of evolutionary dynamics. Or ...” He stopped for a moment, searching for better metaphors – “... in scientific language nothing happens in the Fields, everything waits – inert. You see, Miguel, nothing is ever lost, as I have told you already, substances can only be exchanged or converted – this is one of the harsh truths of nature. A Life-Line after death lies ‘locked in phase’, in its ‘ground’ or ‘rest state’. Then there is a shift as you re-enter an ‘excited state’ and your next activation begins either down here on earth, or in Zeega, or elsewhere – at which stage you carry on forging your developmental plan both as an individual and as a species.”

“Prettily put! Why are you so keen to explain this particular point?”

He glanced at me quizzically. “Do you expect me not to want to change? To remain stuck ... stuck in this ravaged country with my stupid father on a planet of low calibre?”

My hackles rose at the arrogance that underpinned so much of what he said. “I’m sure you can find better places,” I snorted. “The moon is still trouble-free. And what about your Spirit Field? Why don’t you go there? And why can’t you call it paradise or nirvana – like everyone else?”

“*Meu pobre amigo!* You are quite right. The Universal Field has many poetic religious images. How I would love to believe that I shall never be coming back to this shit hole, and can rest in Elysian Fields tended by angels! But our Big Bang universe is the only one we shall ever know – dead or alive!” He let his full-blooded African lips fall like a shroud over his unhappy mouth. “There is no paradise, no ‘beyond’,” he said bitterly. “We are trapped forever within our event horizon. Buried in the eternal tomb of an enclosed system.”

Looking at him I thought: Nothing in your behaviour – your fears, your restlessness, your fits – none of this supports a warranty of truth on your part, no matter how exceptional your psychic talents are.

To expel his gloominess, Rainer got up suddenly, clapped his hands twice like pistol shots and announced, “Living is the anvil of the spirit! There you go! It is the title!”

“The title for what?” I gasped.

“*Living: The Anvil of the Spirit* – your title for your article on the Universal Field and Life-Lines, which you will write up later.” And he detonated an ear-shattering salvo of hilarity. To make things worse he plunked his hand on my shoulder and brought his lips so close they brushed against my neck. “Give me a few days, Miguel, and I will show you there is no real-unreal, no dead-alive, no magic, no miracles, no such thing as extra-sensory, paranormal, supernatural. All is sensory, normal and one hundred percent real!”

I responded with a dry laugh as I stood up and stepped back from him. “Come now, Rainer, tell me where this solid heaven of yours is supposed to be.”

Meeting mockery with mockery, he replied, swinging his arms about, “Here! There! In the kitchen, outside! Everywhere! And, want to know the big cosmic joke? It is hell in heaven!” He roared at the ingenuity of his own aphorism.

“Well then, since you have so much power, what’s holding you back from going forward to better times on your so-called Life-Line? What’s the big hang-up? The ‘Block’ – is that it? – like you said during your chess game? And how will you trick ‘Them’? Eh? And who the hell are ‘They’ and ‘Them’ and the ‘Pigs’? Are they the Zeegans or the Mozambican government? All those bastards you keep on speaking about with their natural or unnatural barriers and ...”

He cocked his head and frowned. “I do not recall telling you about the barriers!”

I back-peddled furiously: “Filters! I overheard you talking to António about filters. ‘Escaping your state of torpor’ – you definitely said that.”

He shrugged. “I do not know what my barrier really is. But I intend to deal with it. Devious methods are my only hope. Of course I may fail. At least I will have attempted to force a change, which is more than can be said for most people.”

Drawing up in front of him I inquired with an emphasis bordering on the shrill, “A political change, no doubt? Involving some *conspiração* that includes weapons code-named ‘ham’.”

He shook his head in perplexity. “Why do you keep going on about politics, Miguel?”

“Everyone’s talking about you, that’s why! Someone from Frelimo asked me questions. People in the bar warned me about you ...”

At that instant Agi entered the kitchen through the back door, exclaiming at the mess. Like a nail penetrating a tyre her arrival drained the space of its mental pressure. Rainer rushed up and gave her a hug, to which she responded sweetly. Agi was too smart to make waves in this afflicted household – for twenty years she had got along with everyone. She giggled like a favourite auntie and asked about lunch. Rainer informed her we were going out.

THE JOURNEY TO THE *CLUBE NAVAL*

The American Christmas Eve Party was scheduled for midday on the embassy’s yacht. Rainer was dressed as if he were going to a ’20s costume ball as a spiv: white shoes, black socks, white trousers, a scarlet shirt, and his jet-black sunglasses. The reason for this outrageous get-up was to become evident in the course of the day.

As we passed from the shadow-draped Kruger gateway into the street's pulsating glare, I saw Toto peering over a broken wall. This time I had no doubt who it was. With no attempt at stealth, he latched his ubiquitous gaze on to mine as the car continued past the tower block.

I could not refrain from exclaiming, "There's that hunchback fellow watching us! Did you know he spies on your house? I've seen him peering through the gate. He gives me the creeps!"

"Toto is a double agent ... at least!" Rainer responded. "Poor fellow, his days are numbered!"

"God help us! Double agent for whom?"

"Toto believes in nothing beyond the hunger pangs of his wife and children. For money he does something he thinks is of little effect – like telling somebody about somebody else. In this way he slowly becomes trapped. His family eats well, but in exchange he finds he has sacrificed his life."

"And who does he tell about you in particular?"

"Frelimo, of course. He worked for them until Renamo found out. So he ran an errand for Renamo. Now he is destined to run in circles until someone puts together the whole truth. Then, as you say in English, it is curtains for Toto."

His words made me feel almost sorry for the hunchback. Was there a special programme in Rainer's Universal Field that produced such obsequious and treacherous creatures? And if so, to what purpose? Where was Toto's psi? – buried beneath his hump, his hunger pangs?

Rainer was circumnavigating pot-holes with unusual care when the car started to splutter. As though he were urging on a horse, he beat on the steering wheel. Nonetheless we came to a standstill next to the *Parque dos Continuadores* where some kids were playing soccer within the swirling dust of a running track. I started to hyperventilate. Rainer's ridiculous attire alone could provoke them to attack!

We both got out. Rainer announced that he knew nothing about engines. We stuck our heads under the bonnet – there were no visible signs of ailment. Rainer returned to the driver's seat and turned the key, making the fan belt spin and the old motor rock. I got him to try again with the choke out. Curiously there was no spillage from the carburettor.

"You sure you've got petrol?" I asked, poking my head through his window to look at the gauge. Sure enough, the needle was on empty.

Rainer smacked his head. "*Merda!* António forgot to fill up!"

I threw a glance at the kids less than a hundred yards away – many had stopped playing to watch us. "Now what do we do?" I asked.

"We sit and wait."

A street sign informed us we were in *avenida Martires da Machava*, which struck me as ominous. I yelped, "There's no cars around. We'll never get a lift!"

"Come out of the sun. António will bring petrol from home."

"António!"

"I've called him already ... on the, er, car phone. Get in!"

For my own safety I did as he suggested, slamming the door and locking it. "This is not the time for jokes, Rainer," I huffed as I wound my window up.

"Those kids you worry about – they are many metres from us. António will soon come. Luckily we are only a kilometre from home."

“How in the hell is António supposed to know!” I exclaimed. “Let’s walk ... run back!”

“We will gain nothing. We will only pass António arriving with the petrol.”

I shrank down hopelessly into the spiky seat springs.

Then he said, “I am absent-minded. António is supposed to cover for me. I apologise for the negligence.”

My aggravation was augmented by what followed. It was one of the oddest things I have seen an adult do. A cricket flew in through the driver’s window, and Rainer speedily proceeded to crawl over the seats trying to catch it while the insect thudded against the windows, the upholstery, and even crashed into my head. When at last he had captured the black beast in his cupped hands, he made me take an empty workers’ pay envelope from the glove compartment and placed it inside. Then he wedged the buzzing packet in the dashboard ashtray.

“It’s a male!” he said in excitement. “The perfect replacement. Such luck to find one so soon after the other died!”

We continued to sit there with me straining my neck to keep watch on the kids while Rainer spoke about his cricket like some daft entomologist. He claimed to know it was a male by the wave length of its song which made it more able than the female to pick up weather patterns. The signal could cover twenty kilometres and was also used to attract a mate. Suddenly turning sombre he said, “Unfortunately the sound can get picked up by a female fly living in the Maputo Green Belt,” and he rattled off complex biological details about the ear of this Maputo fly which had been “specially designed in the Universal Field” to hear the pitch of this particular species of male cricket. “So instead of acquiring a mate,” he explained, “the poor fellow gets this devil of a fly that sets about laying larvae on its body. In ten days the larvae devour the cricket, then pupate.” He concluded with a malicious shout, “Aa-ha! If that is not a perfect example of the cruelty of the Positive-Negative Dynamic, tell me what is?”

Some of the children were now pointing at us. I let go of my breath with a long whistle to dissipate the tension in my shoulders. Undeterred, Rainer patted the envelope and continued, “He has a great Life-Line, this little chap – like a resilient thread of silk.” Then in a rush of words, he said, “Early this year Mozambique was hit by Cyclone Demoina. When the event was still young and unformed, I phoned our meteorological station and told them the sea was heating up near the coast and great quantities of water would soon be lifted into the sky. As a certified madman, my warnings were ignored.”

Getting no response from me, he addressed himself, “How did I know? Through the cricket, my watchdog.”

Right then my problem was the cyclone of soccer kids moving closer to the car. My hands shot up – “No sign of António!” I blurted.

“But what I am telling you relates to the healing,” he protested. “It is all tied up. I want to explain!”

I wrenched the Casio from my pocket and shoved it at him. “Here! ... If you must! Record your own voice! Push ‘Record’!”

Holding the recorder like a concert singer’s microphone, he pushed the button and began to declaim, “The cricket’s signal is ultrasonic, a great number of pulses per second. Such a signal is capable of transmitting precise information on events like ... a cyclone. So! ... Imagine the enormity of pressure as the waters of the Indian Ocean gathered

themselves. A tremor spread over the insect's wings, which was in harmony with the vibrations within the disturbance. Fear was unmistakable in that signal. Why, the sensitive little cricket shook all over with fear!"

Ever since we had left home, Rainer had been speaking with an uneven urgency that had my adrenalin pumping. He gave the impression that something catastrophic could occur at any moment and interrupt his explanations leaving them forever incomplete.

At long last I caught sight of António: he was coming round a bend in the road ... and he was carrying a can! I shouted, "It's António! We're saved!"

Rainer charged on regardless, faster even, waving the recorder about. "My cricket's signal registered the volcanic shifts in the life of the ocean: metals groaning in the sand and rock ... fish throbbing with terror as they found themselves sucked skyward by a force outside their experience ..."

António arrived beside the car and, without greeting us, began to empty his can into the tank. With immense relief, I saw the kids backing away.

"The fish sort of spoke to the cricket, is that it?" I am ashamed to say that this dumb interjection from me is recorded on the tape above the glugging and clanking of António's can. As an indication of my revival, however, it delighted Rainer. "Not only the fish – everything was speaking: the fish spoke about the dangerous speed of the water molecules; the gulls spoke of the changing tune of the wind; even the hulls of ships in the port of Maputo sent out creaks of stress. Are you beginning to get the picture?"

I nodded vaguely. "What happened to you in all this?"

"Good question!" He beamed and handed back the recorder for me to resume my duty. "I was part of the chain reaction within the water and wind, the plankton and fish, the sand and the gulls and the boats, and finally within the cricket and within me – all of us responding to an accumulation of power as millions of structures changed shape to fit a giant new pattern named Cyclone Demoina. Changes that were readable to my cricket, and he passed them on to me. Now, there's psi power for you – at least on the electromagnetic level."

He shook himself like a happy dog, tapped on the envelope, and cooed, "My clever little spirit medium! Isn't it, my sweet little cricket!" His habit of adding "isn't it" into his sentences made me smile.

I looked through the rear window: António was walking off without a word, swinging his can.

"We should go now," I said.

Rainer gave a little nod and reached absent-mindedly for the ignition. He turned the engine over while pumping the accelerator so that the car coughed with increasing inertia. "You're flooding the carb!" I said as I clambered out and ran round to his side. "Let me do it!"

Humbly, he got out and let me take the driver's seat. The car started after a few tries and I revved until the engine was idling nicely before climbing across into the passenger's seat.

At long last we started forward, turning away from the park. Our resumed mobility gave me a certain victorious joy, and made me better disposed to listen to my expositor. Sure enough he quickly took up his train of thought. "It's a shame – talking about psi can never be as good as personal experience. We should do some practical work together sometime ... you and me. No?"

The idea of getting involved in Rainer's hocus-pocus was truly alarming, and I warned myself that I was dealing with a highly disturbed man. To avoid answering his offer, I asked, "Tell me, what was all that agony about the other day when you were twisting about on your veranda chair?"

"Ah! Yes! Free-falling. I had let myself go at random through inter-related Life-Lines, not directing myself to known targets. Such pyrotechnics are entertaining. I spend hours jumping the Lines."

"It looked as if you were about to die."

"When things turn nasty, I pull myself out."

"You didn't pull yourself out – António did."

Suddenly I had to jerk my head backwards because he made a startling move, throwing his arm past me, an inch from my nose, and slamming his hand on my raised window. "Instant connection!" he cried. "Between streams of energy – that's what Life-Line jumping is about! You take psi power to its highest level – much higher than healing rays or a cricket's frequency. Instant connection through the Universal Field. No projectiles, no electrons tumbling down wires, no photons racing through space. Far/near, here/there, fast/slow – all become irrelevant."

I forcefully removed his arm from in front of my face, replaced his hand on the steering wheel, and rolled down my window for air. We were passing among the city buildings like a ship sailing through inhospitable islands. In an open market I saw a crowd fighting to get at a tray of tomatoes that a woman was holding high as she ran off. Rainer, of course, took no notice of this. His concern was a journey of another sort that had begun on the veranda chair. His next burst of rhetoric on the subject polished off my recorder's batteries. All exchanges throughout the rest of this big day were noted down by me later.

According to Rainer, he had been "riding a General-Life-Line belonging to a host of bacteria" when he was thrown out on to a planet in the throes of suffocation. He had found himself in a yellow smog which was choking everything because photosynthesis was the only way to acquire energy. Oxygen was killing everything. The power of two suns had fattened this planet into a compost heap of bubbling slime, and made the boiling oceans electric blue with incessant lightning. While "riding" the bacteria, Rainer discovered it was responsible for much of the poisonous gas in the exosphere. "We were farting ourselves to death!" he exclaimed.

Scattered factories, mostly derelict or bricked up, heralded our entry into the light industrial sites. We were driving down the *avenida do Trabalho* that now could have been more aptly named *The Avenue of No Work*. There was a bus station full of dead buses and a big sign for the *Matadouro* – the long-closed slaughterhouse. Driving past the vast Matola cemetery I was reminded of the news on Agi's radio about an insecticide factory that had been burned down somewhere in this very area. I rolled up my window again.

Then I made the following point to Rainer: "Those kind of evolutionary changes you're talking about take thousands of years. You describe them as if they are immediate."

"Of course. Because I can experience space-time in units of a thousand years, or a million years, or whatever. I have instant access to a Life-Line's entire historic trajectory. So I can pick whichever space-time unit within the Line that I wish to ride."

He was losing me here, so I asked, “What was going on when António grabbed you?”

“I had jumped forward up the bacteria’s Life-Line and found myself back on earth where these bacteria are surviving very well right now. What I had become part of on the other side of the galaxy was not death at all, but the end of a cycle and the birth of a new dimension – lungs, gills ... the ability of respiration to turn the poisonous oxygen into food. I was caught in this transition period when António dragged me off my chair.”

“You mean life on this other planet is like it was on earth millions of years ago? Before sexual reproduction?”

“Exactly. While I entered the revolutionary ‘Now’ on another planet,” he concluded, pointing skywards, “I was experiencing our distant past on earth. So, Miguel, the past is forever present somewhere, and the present – and, indeed, the future – is the Greater Now.”ⁱⁱ

Rainer explained that through the universal psi connection “there is an opening out in the mind from target site to target site”, and he illustrated his point by cupping his hands in a gesture of blossoming before grabbing the steering wheel none too soon. According to him, the Universal Field contained all the matrices of Life-Lines. After connecting with one, you could follow its past, present and future manifestations through time and space.ⁱⁱⁱ

He also stressed that the inert Universal Field and activated matter did not exist in different places (as some of the religious myths would have us believe with their dualistic heaven and earth), but were interwoven. The living world, he said, was a lattice of Life-Lines, and the Universal Field a super-lattice of the same Life-Lines stored in blue-print or matrix form, like a map lying just above the land it charts. Even in English, he possessed a marvellous gift for description.^{iv}

I woefully regret that I had no spare batteries because he spoke more coherently over the last leg of our tortuous drive to the *Clube Naval* than he had done during the recorded sessions. It was impossible to resist the charm of his exposition. And of course by now he must have realised all too well that the best way of gaining my attention and even my confidence was through his rational and intellectual propositions. I noticed that he tended to repeat his ideas, dressing them up in different ways. I found this useful as they were so foreign to anything I knew. Already his illustration of “the Greater Now” had struck a cord in me.

“Why is all this so important to you?” I asked.

“What?”

“All this psi stuff.”

Stupefaction further enlarged his onyx eyes. “Can you not see? We are units of energy moving within greater units.” Like the ardent proselytiser he was he threw up a warning finger. “Humanoids have no choice but to strive to understand the precise quality of their given energy, for within it lies the secret of all energy. To do this you have been provided with the necessary engine – the human brain, and the fuel – psi sensitivity. This is why you have no choice but to keep on seeking.”

“Who set us this task?”

“The Universal Field.”

I winced. “And for what purpose?”

He threw his hand up purposefully like a traffic cop, and his voice soared. “To harvest greater power, of course! To raise life to a higher level! To control the universe by scientific means!”

I recognised the chilling tone of the zealot. To defuse him I said, “I’ve read that snakes see the auras of their prey at one hundredth of a degree of heat. Some radio telescopes can pick up radio waves from atoms of hydrogen in far galaxies. But all this is measurable stuff. Psychic power at the level you’re describing it has never been successfully measured. For the scientist it doesn’t exist.”

As we neared our destination Rainer expressed himself in inspired staccato sentences. He said that certain expressions of psi power *were* measurable by instruments sensitive to electromagnetism, if you could find the appropriate observational point. But he agreed that no man-made instrument could register those instant psi connections between particles or their movements and traces.^v “However! There is an organism that can do it perfectly,” he stressed. “The cerebral cortex.”

We were driving along the seafront on the Marginal when he came up with a revolutionary hypothesis about consciousness being behind the connective process of psi. Taking an apple as his example, he said, “Consciousness scans, searches and finds the code for apple as well as all the sites in the living universe where ‘appleness’ exists.”

Then he added something extraordinary to this proposition: “*The brain is a carbon copy of the Universal Field made accessible through consciousness*” – a sentence that was to settle within me like a burgeoning seed.

THE AMERICAN PARTY

As to be expected, the Sailing Club was in the throes of decay: yachts, launches, and motorboats abandoned on dry land by imperialist running dogs had become piles of pulp and rust; and nothing floated in the harbour but a few buoys – epitaphs to the boats that had been scuppered by foolhardy revolutionaries. The proud clubhouse, after losing all its window panes and its coat of naval paint, had introverted into a sad bunker. The cause of the Club’s fate was simple: a Marxist code that had denied the creation of an African middle class, leaving no one to take over bourgeois trappings.

Rainer pointed out the wreck of a launch that belonged to his father and was now rotting on the jetty: “For big fishing or deep fishing or whatever it is called,” he growled. “That boat was the dying spark of the old man.”

The minute we cleared the clubhouse I spotted the insignia of America: a hull painted with the stars and stripes ... and *Tio Sam* written large across it. We parked on the quay immediately in front of the launch, where Rainer stalled the car, once again.

As we ascended the gangway side by side, Rainer’s spiv suit became a growing source of embarrassment to me. A smiling waiter welcomed us onboard with an electric green cocktail in a glass embellished with a blue plastic umbrella. The absence of a diplomat to officially receive us, I put down to Third World “cool”. At once Rainer headed for a lounge below deck “to avoid interferences from the bright, burning star”. I was glad to be rid of him.

After taking a cautious sip of the garish drink, my attention was caught by Irish Maeve’s translucent emerald eyes in the midst of the diplomatic and aid donor crowd – they were smiling straight at me.

We exchanged niceties while I marvelled at how her fragile skin, faring poorly in conditions for which it was not designed, blossomed pink and freckled through the décolleté of her paisley dress, then flared hotly over her throat, to finally burst into flame across her cheeks. “In Ireland such heat is unknown,” she told me. “In these conditions the only feeling of intensity I am capable of is torpor.”

Maeve’s husband then popped up with a straw hat, which he placed tenderly upon her bowed head. He gave me an overly enthusiastic welcome before returning to the job of being diplomat Joe van Melvin the Second, a glistening ebony knight battling well with the climate in which his ancestors had evolved for thousands of years.

To the loud boom of *Blue Suede Shoes* and cheers from the guests, the launch cast off, flushing out my friend Godwin Matatu from below deck. Like many of the people on deck he had already had one drink too many, and, without a moment’s hesitation, he cornered Joe: How dare Joe chug along the Marginal in front of the embassies of the world, playing Elvis as his national anthem while parading his nation’s wealth on deck for the eyes of the *povo* on shore who would only learn envy from the experience! It was an eloquent attack that Joe converted skilfully into a huge joke while praising Godwin’s subversive sense of humour.

I left them to their verbal fencing and re-joined Maeve who had taken up peering through a revolving telescope at the front of the vessel. Without moving her eye from the lens, she said, “The city looks so picturesque. Like watching a film: rooftops stroked by palms, empty beaches, sparkling sea – the perfect travelogue.” She snatched her face away – “Oops! Just caught a glimpse of scavengers on a rubbish tips – people, not dogs.” – adding, with a touch of Celtic doom – “The dream is smashed. I hate this town.” – while her gaze moved slowly up my body to my mouth – “Are you happy at your new friend’s, Michael?”

I laughed nervously. “Hardly a friend. But it’ll have to do for now.”

Her fingers trembled as she brushed back her hair. I had first encountered the tremor in those hands on the flight in from Zimbabwe. She had been sitting next to me, and as we descended unsteadily through the thermal waves towards our transit stop in Beira, she had grabbed my sleeveless arm with both of her trembling hands – the arm of a complete stranger.

Now, as the launch swung away from the port, Maeve dropped her gaze from my mouth, and said, “You must come for tea at the Polana. I’m there most afternoons with my son and his cousins from America.” And, staring out to sea, she asked suddenly, “What are your dreams, Michael?”

I welcomed this unexpected tangent of her mind, and answered with a clever smile, “Do you mean my wishes, or my dreams of the night?”

She flinched. “Oh, not of the night,” she said. “Of your wildest imagination.”

“The wild moments are problematic: lots of devils sending flying horses to their death.” I was searching without success for the light touch. “I much prefer the controlled imagination ... whenever I get the chance to write or make a film.”

“Oh, Michael,” she intoned, adding those irresistible extra syllables, “you’re so real! I don’t think I’m cut out for foreign service chit-chat.”

Maeve as a pleasant interlude ended when an American who was looking through the telescope yelled, “Hey Maeve, take a squint at this! A fella with field glasses watching

us. See! Up there on Julius Nyerere. ... Hey, I know that apartment – that’s Cuban security!”

After Maeve had glanced obediently through the telescope, she fixed her eyes wistfully upon the waves, as if drawn to the vast expanse of water because it dared conceal something she desperately needed.

Rainer had meanwhile reappeared on deck to disport himself on a bench with deliberate ostentation in full view of the observers in the Cuban residence. At once the purpose of his outrageous spiv’s outfit became apparent: to be easily picked out among the crowd on the American boat by the prying eyes on shore. Maddening questions flew into my mind: to be seen by who in particular and for what purpose? to show that he was on the boat doing his job as someone’s spy? or to show the enemies of America that he was a friend of America?

“Patterns of behaviour characteristic of numerous psychotic syndromes.” Maeve said, also watching my host as he settled into pin-up pose. “He’s got a good selection,” she continued. “Grandiose expansiveness, antisocial aggression, irruptive mood changes, hyperactivity, acute anxieties ... he probably has fits too. I should know. I was a nurse in a psychiatric ward in Cork. You certainly picked one there, Michael! But that’s okay,” she added. “William Blake is my favourite poet, but he lost all connection with reality – he even had visions of heaven and hallucinations about life on other planets.”

Yes,” I sighed. “And do you know, I’m beginning to think I’m not unlike Rainer Kruger myself: two dysfunctionals driven by fears of isolation, disconnection, failure and perhaps even death. The only difference between us is this: he’s mad and I’m not ... as yet!”

Maeve looked seriously alarmed.

AN INTERROGATION

Joe was weaving towards us purposefully, cutting Rainer out of my line of vision. Did he fear I was getting too cosy with his wife?

“Excuse me interrupting, honey,” he said squeezing her arm. “I need a quick word with Mike here.” His request was made with a hasty assurance that swept me along, aided by the swift departure of his wife.

I hate being called Mike. Disgruntled, I followed him through a low doorway leading under the wheelhouse to the pilot’s cabin that had been converted into an office with filing cabinets, Xerox machine, computers. Dropping his bulky frame into a revolving chair behind a desk, he gestured towards a sofa opposite him. A bottle of Wild Turkey waited on a coffee table. I wondered if he had brought it down in preparation for the occasion.

“Help yourself. Believe me, this little chat is for your benefit.”

Wasting no time, he unlocked a drawer and pulled out a file. “A few things you ought to know while you’re in town ... for safety’s sake.”

I poured myself a drink, extremely wary of him, now that he had overstated his concern for my welfare. As he searched the file he adjusted his John Lennon spectacles – an attempt to distract from the quarterback dimensions of his head, neck and body and give him a touch of intellect appropriate for the job. Finding what he wanted, he stretched

over and handed me a photocopy of a photograph. Immediately I saw a face I recognised: Miguel da Silva of the Búzio Bar. He was talking to someone who was in shadow.

“You can’t see a darky in the dark, but that’s me on the left,” Joe announced in bad taste. “The bar owner, I believe you met.”

“It’s a small town and I’ve shaken hands with a bar owner – so what?” I said flippantly.

Joe brushed off the remark with a little smile. Lighting a cigarette with studied care, he continued, “Have you any idea if da Silva is some friend of Rainer’s?”

“How should I know? I only met him a few days ago.” I hated the confidence with which he lounged behind his big desk, behind his flashy launch, behind his big government. He leaned on a bared, sport-enhanced arm, and said, “The worrying thing is that da Silva’s a top guy in Renamo.”

This confirmation was chilling, although not unexpected after what Godwin had told me in the Búzio. Joe watched me for a moment, then went on, “Now Rainer set up that meeting between da Silva and me.”

Sensing the need for vigilance I pulled myself to the edge of the sofa. “Anyone who knew both of you could set up such a meeting.”

Joe flicked imaginary ash off his shirt with the back of his hand – an incongruously effeminate gesture. With deliberate gravity he said, “We paid Rainer to fix it.”

It was impossible to conceal my shock. In an attempt to do so I affected impatience with Joe’s logic. “I thought you were implying Rainer was Renamo? Or did I miss a trick?”

Ignoring the taunt, Joe continued, “The photo was taken by Rainer’s servant, António, who was hiding in the Greek Orthodox church where the requested meeting took place.” – watching me closely again – “Rainer gave the mug shot to Frelimo to prove to them that he’s their man. The classic action of a double-agent. Our counterparts obtained that photocopy.”

Everything I feared about Rainer had been thrown at me in a deliberate scare tactic designed to expose the extent of my connection with Rainer and, perhaps, acquire some useful information. Joe must have dared do this on the assumption that I suspected the dangers of lodging at the Krugers and might welcome clarifications from him ... and protection even. To conceal my struggling emotions and avoid any evidence of a bond with Rainer I went on the attack. “If he’s Frelimo’s man at least that shows he has good taste.”

This time Joe’s smile was forced – all his training could not help him hide his loathing of the left. “We know where your sympathies lie, Mike. You must be proud of your book – *Black* something? ... *Black Fire*. Isn’t that the title? Must be great for you having all those smuggled copies in South African townships supporting armed revolt!”

“Revolution is the correct word,” I shot back. “I must say I find your casting of Rainer as a triple agent far fetched.”

That America should be represented in Africa by a person of African origin was a naive political gaffe, in my opinion: Joe remained soundly middle American in his views and style; there was no trace of Africa left in him; his relatives had been taken away far too long ago. He got up wearily from his desk, began pacing the cabin and responded, “It certainly is far fetched, but it’s a fact ... although he’s streamlined to double agent since we fired him. Our concern with Rainer and Renamo is that we aren’t sure where

friendship ends and payback begins. He's got no scruples. He's got no love for America or the Free World, yet he has worked for us. His loyalty to Frelimo is imposed rather than from the heart – in short he goes back to jail if he doesn't keep talking to them. Did he tell you about his stay in the slammer? It's his favourite party story."

My head was reeling. "Why did you invite him here, since you have dismissed him from your services? Why bring a political bombshell on board?"

Joe laughed. He definitely enjoyed playing with me. "He can say all he wants about our Christmas parties. Our parties are well covered by everyone."

I threw some more bourbon down my throat, then said ungraciously, "You're inventing this stuff to scare me for some reason. If you've brought me here to get information about Rainer, I have next to none."

Joe sipped his drink. "You yourself must worry about Rainer since you're staying with him," he said more gently. "Now, he *may* be doing something to keep Renamo happy. At this point we simply don't know."

"Why not? You apparently know everything about me. And Renamo are your people. Aren't you using Renamo through the South Africans to destabilise the communists here? Isn't that your tactic for freeing the world?"

Without a blink, he said, "Renamo are The Wild Bunch – no one knows what they're up to in the course of day."

I raised my hand in a small gesture of apology for my childish response. "Look, I really don't appreciate being questioned like this. I'm here on private business. Just being on your boat is unwise ... I can't afford to get involved in anything. I'm sure you can appreciate that."

The boat was pitching in weather that was turning blustery. Joe stood by his desk and his reflection swayed on the polished wood. "Of course I understand the dangerous position you have put yourself in. That's why I'm airing this, Mike. Simply because you happen to be staying with him. You could get into trouble through some confusions that you weren't even aware of until now."

Lassitude was coming upon me. Confusions were not in short supply. Joe's ploy was to push me into a corner so that I would want to clear my name by explaining how I came to be staying with Rainer. So I told him the truth while he moved unsteadily across the cabin. When I had done, he threw a warning finger at me. "I appreciate the fact that you never knew him prior to coming here," he said. "But just because you're staying with him, people are watching you from all sides: the Cubans, the KGB, the Koreans, the Chinese, Frelimo, Renamo – you name it. It's the old story of big organisations and unprotected individuals. I got to you first, and I'm being gentle with you."

I flushed with fury. This time he *had* frightened me. I rose to my feet and walked stiffly towards the stairs. "Is that all you brought me down here for – to show me your muscles?"

Unfazed, he resumed his big-boy talk. "There's trouble brewing in Maputo. There's a rumour of an assassination plot of a government big wig – dos Santos. This Rainer guy's so darned confusing. We heard about his factory stopping. But we know how well off his father is. Money can't be driving Rainer. And, you know, I get this feeling he's not – what can I say – he's not the political type!" After a scrape at his hair he continued, "The political take on him is a maze of conflicting interests – it doesn't add up. It's like he's using a mercenary angle to cover his real motive."

It was my turn to laugh. “Finding a guy acting without a motive rather breaks the rules of your game, doesn’t it?”

“It would trouble you too, Mike, wouldn’t it? Trying to write a character with no plausible motives. I brought you down here to warn you to be careful and preferably to get out of his house ... and, yes, also to ask you if you have any inkling of what the hell he’s up to.”

There could be no advantage in revealing my suspicions about my host. “I have no idea at all,” I said. “But I don’t like him. I’ve been trying to find new accommodation, as Maeve may have told you. Sorry not to be able to enlighten you more.”

He flicked at the invisible ash again, and said, “When my family go back to the US on the 2nd, you’re welcome to come and stay with us.”

“How would that look to the KGB, the Cubans, Frelimo, Renamo and Uncle Tom Cobby?”

Joe laughed heartily. “Not too bad since the truth is simple: you met my wife on a plane.”

“I’m due out of here on the 2nd. But thanks anyway.”

He picked up his glass to follow me out. “I look forward to another talk sometime. Maybe you can come round to the house for a drink after Christmas. I’m sure Maeve would like that. She’s an artist, you know. She must have told you?”

“Actually, no.”

“She’s serious. A little unsure of herself. She needs encouragement. It would be good for her to talk to someone like you. She’s very isolated here, as you can imagine.”

PSYCHIC TERROR

Back on deck, I gulped down lungfuls of swirling wind. Spray licked my skin. Dark clouds were massing. Even so there wasn’t an iota of coolness. The engine beat irregularly as the boat pushed through agitated waters. Only a few people were left on deck battling to save their drink or balance their buffet lunch. None of this suited me as I was more than a little drunk and I had been unsettled by Joe. I sat down on an empty bench, wedging myself against the railings, hoping the bulk of the squall would miss the boat.

The revelations about Rainer were disturbing. As a spy employed by a revolutionary government, no wonder he felt he could waltz around making outrageous statements. His front as a near-fascist was brilliantly performed. However, if he was double-crossing Renamo at the same time, he was a dead duck – like his friend and neighbour Toto. Joe was right. Rainer had no loyalty to any party or government, he had no need for money, he wasn’t really interested in politics at all ... yet, without question, he was deliberately running in all directions on the political chess board, playing with death like ...

... a dead duck! ...

A dead duck is precisely what he wants to be! – the motive behind Rainer’s machinations came stampeding into my consciousness; the realisation left me stunned, squeezing the iron railing of the deck and staring into the swirling ocean while a wave of nausea rolled through my stomach.

When the turmoil eased, I asked myself what in the name of God I was doing on an American launch adrift in a sea of cross-currents as perilous as the Joes of this world, the

Ullas, the Totos, the da Silvas, the Bolands and, in particular, “*a Rainha das Rainhas*” himself. And in the muddle of feelings that arose in me as if hauled up from the depths of the ocean, I also asked myself why I should give a fig if Rainer Kruger was trying to have himself bumped off. Why had I reacted so personally to Joe’s accusations about him? What, in actual fact, had this extremely peculiar man become to me?

Answers were not apparent, but Rainer himself was. He sat down beside me on the bench. I think I remember jumping up and putting myself down again further away, which did not deter him from sliding right up close to me.

“Are you all right?” he asked. He had a glass of wine in his hand and I could tell that he, too, was tipsy.

“Bit sea-sick,” I croaked.

“I came out to watch the rain clouds making themselves heavy. The land is thirsty. So little rain for so many years!”

A wall of water was now charging towards us across the open sea. Already the boat was getting tossed about. My stomach pitched, I pushed my head through the railings, and some ill-digested embassy snacks roiled over the side.

Grasping me by the shoulders, Rainer said, “It’s okay. The pilot will be turning back.”

Thunder boomed nearby. Everything was swinging. The wind howled as the rainstorm rushed with murderous intent towards the launch. I shut my eyes, which made me feel worse. Like one who was dying, I asked, “How long ... to get back?”

Rainer put an arm round my shoulders and held me tightly. “About an hour, I’m afraid.” After a while he said, “We are approaching the island of Inhaca. See it! Over there! Look!” I fought to hold down the coils in my stomach, but managed to look up: a long building like an hotel was visible, most of the roof ripped off, a few shredded sheets of tin waving in the wind; the shore, a levelled graveyard of palms. “All relics from Cyclone Demoina,” he explained. “That cyclone I told you about that was broadcast by my cricket.”

Seconds later we were drenched. As if a giant shower had been turned on. Even the rain was warm. Rainer asked if I wanted to go below, but I refused, hoping that flying water might regenerate me.

It was not too violent a storm, but it was bountiful: lightning flickered on all sides through low, bowling clouds and thunder rumbled almost without interruption. Rainer and I were the only ones left on deck. Raising his voice above the din, he said, “Ah, it was a bit like this multiplied by a hundred when the tail of Cyclone Demoina lashed at Inhaca. We are following in her tracks right now. Her winds reached 300 kilometres per hour as she heated up and the pressure fell in her centre.”

Seized by dry paroxysms, I was ready to make significant sacrifices to be removed from such physical suffering. Rainer turned me round to face him. Flicking me a bright smile, he said, “Look into my eye! You will find a picture of the universe. Go on! Look!”

Numbly, stupidly, I did I was told, looking first at one eye, then the other, both of them as steady as the wheel hub of a car moving at speed. I thought I was going to throw up over him. He pulled me closer. “Stick with it! You must not distract yourself.”

I was astonished to see his eyes change ... become quite different ... altogether like someone else’s eyes: the owl-wide pupils shrank to pin heads while the irises swelled and

turned muddy with specks of grey and green. In fact, everything was the reverse of what it had been, as if he had taken hold of his eyeballs and turned them inside out.

“Look at my right eye only,” Rainer insisted. “At the centre is a blind spot. Around it, gasses of different colours, some condensing into solid specks. All is being drawn to the centre, to the narrow blind spot ...”

Fear began to add to my discomfort. Yet, somehow, it was easier to keep watching his eye – it cut out a lot of the wild background.

He seized my hands and pressed them together. “Concentrate on the right eye, Miguel! We are both pilgrims of darkness. Follow my eye – it will show you things that will astound you.” He brought his face closer.

I stared into one protuberant eye: a silver circlet ringed the cornea like a steel fence. I crossed it, and as I did so I experienced the thrill of entering a secret place.⁴

Adrift upon his lignite iris I shifted uncertainly among the speckled islands orbiting his diminished pupil, until I managed to settle on one – a miasma of greens. Here I discovered a certain calmness, while I heard Rainer’s urgent voice saying, “Stay on the green island. Let it take you down!”

The green island, the green island! I fought to fix my attention upon its shifting substance, but the more I tried, the more vaporous it became, until I felt myself sinking ... Then, quite suddenly, I found myself peering somewhere among the retinal cones in the murky anterior chamber where I experienced aqueous sensations far more appealing than those of storm water.

I searched deeper within the cones ... to arrive among the veins of the vitreous humour – a place of roomy plains and rosy gaiety imparting a welcome softness that slightly diminished my nausea.

I knew that the optic nerve was my destination because it was pulling me in so strongly – an obscure whirlpool consuming light.

And it was there, at the entrance to the prime nerve that I crashed irrevocably through the barrier between normal and paranormal. The switchover happened in an instant – nothing spectacular – a painless, unannounced flip: one moment I was peering into Rainer’s right eye as if through a microscope, experiencing dramatic shifts of light play while still conscious of the storm and of being on Tio Sam and of feeling dizzy and sick; the next, my awareness of the exterior world disappeared entirely to be replaced by a new dimension, not unlike the dream world but far more intense – a world in which all the clutter associated with living moments was removed, leaving raw sensations alternately wondrous and terrifying.

Having passed through the opaque nerve opening, I was travelling on the back of light waves that moved so fast they seemed to be lying still like frozen snakes. The exhilaration that took hold of me was on a level I would not have deemed humanly possible.

I passed walls, walls of tunnels – red, blue, mauve – covered in shapes that were signs flashing and fading like sparks, the graphics of an unknown alphabet. Rainer’s head was a vast language that I hungered to speak. Impenetrable calligraphies were scrawled everywhere, which, I began to realise, constituted a complete record of his history.

⁴ Next day in Klaus Kruger’s library I found a Brazilian encyclopaedia containing physiological details of the workings of the eye, which matched what I observed from the outer surface of the cornea through to the opening of the optic nerve during the journey I made through Rainer’s eye.

As though Rainer himself were trying to help me understand where he was taking me, vivid events projected themselves out of the texts imprinted upon mile after mile of the brain's tunnelling.

There were ships sailing forth and changing shape over centuries of time. On a galleon I saw a man on deck who could have been Richard III; he was staring ahead at the white cliffs of England, his eyes glowing with hope ... only to get helplessly pushed off shore by waves too great for navigation.

Then the sound walls came. They emerged from darkness, blue-black and swiftly closing. Shuddering walls that fell upon me, hurting my ears so much that I heard myself screaming. I thought my head would burst with all the hammering. Meanwhile Rainer's voice, rising above the atrocious bombardment, came through to me still, shouting, "Stay with it! Go on! Get in there! Ride your way through!" I would have given anything to be pulled out, but as hard as I tried to call for help, I could discharge no intelligible sounds from my throat. How cruel it was to have found myself at one moment riding on the winds of the spirit and, at the next, engulfed in a concourse of infernal discord that must surely end in my own destruction.

Here was Rainer's doctrine of disillusionment – flashing formulae for annihilation. This is the way it is. He offers no alternative ...

For a while there was a reprieve: the appearance of clearings and a moderation of sound. Foreign lands trailed past, lands more beautiful than those on earth, where golden beings resembling human foetuses travelled on amniotic surfaces, and feathered creatures from the time of pterodactyls hung from the roof of mango forests. The golden ones had strange faces, almost human. But where their legs should have been was a tapering tail, and in place of arms, ropey limbs culminated in tiny hands and glutinous fingers quite useless for manual work of any sort. There was no telling if the creatures were male or female. One of them smiled at me, and for an instant the smile was familiar ... it could have been Rainer's, one of his better ones, wide, chipped and candid.

"Go on!" Rainer intoned, now from afar. "Break the bands!" – the fierceness of his tone, despite the distance, wiping away the vestige of him that had passed before me.

Another shift, and back I was in the tunnels, their fortifications vibrating to a tale of struggle. All became tangled, fleeting appearances. Soon I heard cries of suffering, but could not make out whether they were animal or human or were emanating from the hybrid figures of gold that I had just seen. There were clashes and blasts. A hot smell of blood mixed with the burnt ash of gunpowder. Open wounds spewed out an eternity of misery in displays of burning cities the likes of which I had never seen. Whole populations were going up in flames while billows of smoke bundled fiery wreckage into the skies ...

Devastation was now tugging so hard at the tunnelling that escape seemed impossible. Nothing was to be spared. In here the potential to develop new engines of destruction was limitless. Bolts of lightning detonated hail storms as fire and ice became locked in battle.

I fled along the walls from where ancient prophets – European, Asian, African – emerged through the lacerations, offering empty promises of salvation. But as fast as they had come to life, they expired, crying for help. Soon I, too, was calling out. But Rainer heard nothing, although fragments of his frantic encouragements continued to drift through to me.

And then, from within the grim stains left by the seers, yet again the golden ones appeared ... this time in droves, wailing like bagpipes bloated with foul vapours. Their leader was immediately recognisable to me, even cast in gold: António, wearing an Homeric expression of distress, coming ahead of the crowd with his arms raised, emitting a scream rendered timeless by its force.

I became convinced that an explanation for the amassed grief lay just beyond the gashed obscurity of the walls. Despite my terror, curiosity drove me forward. But as I began to penetrate, the wailing ebbed, and the woeful hybrids fragmented into clusters of irresolution. Rainer's encouragements also became more faint ... he was losing me altogether.

The end came quickly. It came in a howling need to humiliate, a malicious stab of envy, and a nasty twist of arrogance beyond the range of guilt. These indecipherable intimations of grief's origins from beyond the walls were all that I was granted ... nothing more!

Weak with shame I hunted for some mode for survival. I need not have bothered. I was flung out abruptly like a floppy doll. There was a loud gasp from Rainer – one of acute consternation. Behind me the tunnelled event scattered like smashed embers. Gone was the sense of being wrapped within ... interned.

A mercurial spirit set in, bringing a new mood that was vastly spacious and all for tapering speed and condensed lancing. At first it had no form other than energy snaking downwards, until it drew itself into a spinning cone with a tip as sharp and purposeful as a pin ... and pricking was its business. Its preliminary target: the sweet earth wrapped in cotton blankets like a child.

As voraciously as they had come into being, the contracted materials pierced the earth's covers, then rushed towards a more specific destination: a small vulnerable landmass ... an island set in the grey-green Indian Ocean – the island of Inhaca.

In the skirling wind, palms ripped and fell in black diamond agony ... the tin roof of an hotel furled like burning paper ...

An explosion shook my body – lightning had hit the Mozambican sea like a bomb – Rainer's eyes rose before me, shattered stars in the desert of his face.

The American launch was moving forward, quietly rocking ... but no more rain was falling. Rainer stood beside me, panting, on the verge of collapse. The second he released me from his riveted gaze, I shot my head around like an animal out of a bag, searching for bearings. A few guests had come up on deck ... I saw Joe watching us curiously.

With a bitter moan of recrimination, Rainer said, "You failed!"

I was thrice drenched in sweat, rain and seawater. How long had I been gone – a few minutes, an hour? Time enough for the storm to pass and with it the worst of my sickness. Freed from the power of the events I had endured, my body sagged.

Rainer, meanwhile, leaned against the railing and stared at the hopping waves as though they alone were responsible for my failure, whatever that was. For a moment I feared he might throw himself overboard. Instead he slowly turned his back on the sea, mumbling with distaste, "How many times can an entity be born in misery?" And

although his head remained bowed, I could see tears adding to the streaks of storm water that ran over his cheeks.

For a few unexpected moments I felt close to Rainer. Despite his bitter cynicism, his vast array of faults, his devious political incorrectness, his hair-raising plot, and his menacingly cryptic behaviour, I felt close to him because I had brought back with me from my fantastic voyage one single certainty: his capacity for suffering and terror was far worse than my own.

A jovial Frenchman came up, inappropriately seeking conversation: Rainer strode off immediately while I pleaded post-nausea weakness and dived for the nearest door, which happened to be the one leading to Joe's office. I found a bathroom down there, and locked myself in it for the rest of the trip.

As the launch chugged back patiently to the *Clube Naval* I became increasingly stupefied by the enormity of my chimerical exploits. With the recovery of my rational powers, considerable uncertainty set in as to what had actually happened to me up on deck. I thought that Rainer might have slipped a drug into my drink, as so much of the ordeal had been similar to a bad LSD trip. I dropped this theory, however, because the entry into and out of the experience had been too precipitous to be drug induced.

Then, as my strength returned, anger set in. Resentful anger over what my host had done to me. Moral outrage.

THE DRIVE HOME

We drove back to the house, sitting in the discomfort of wet clothing. The black night had already welded itself upon the black city. Only the headlights brought inanimate matter to life as they scanned the road unsteadily, like beams from ancient lighthouses.

Unable to contain myself any longer, I banged the dashboard, and said, "You tricked me! I was vulnerable because I was seasick and more than a little drunk." My tone rose higher. "You put me into some sort of trance. You possessed me!"

Although I had startled him, he continued to stare ahead, in glum silence.

"You have no right, no one has the right to meddle with another person's mind like an agent of the thought police. I didn't ask for an hypnotic experiment. I feel raped!"

The laconic tone of his eventual response was provocative. "The disturbances of alcohol and the storm helped you let go of humdrum reality." He was trying to make the whole event sound like common sense. "There was a union of three Life-Lines. Yours fused with mine through the medium of my eye, and then finally went on to fuse with Cyclone Demoina's."

With as much resentment as my fatigue would allow, I replied, "The cyclone was a suggestive image which you passed on to me. Somehow you generated it in me. As for all the rest ... what madness did you instil in my brain?"

"A cyclone is one of the most powerful manifestations of water and air" – still speaking in a dead, flat tone – "Demoina's Life-Line is recorded forever upon the multitude of materials that make up the island of Inhaca – what you would call Demoina's 'past' is there for the seeking. Another path leads it through the Fields towards its future. You can be sure it will re-appear."

“You’re deliberately omitting all the other things you conjured up in my head, which are far more significant. All the fire and hell! I suppose you want me to believe that one of those weird places was the planet Zeega?”

We were driving past the *Parque dos Continuadores* where we came close to running down a phantom rat. Rainer remained phlegmatic. “I told you words are not a satisfactory way of explaining things; you need to experience them directly” – raising a hand to prevent me from interrupting – “I wanted you to expand your knowledge of pain and loss from the narrow orbit of Kudzi – which seems to be your only source of reference these days – by shifting you across two Life-Lines: my own and that of Cyclone Demoina. Thereby allowing you to see, for the first time and first hand, that the dance of heaven and hell, birth and death, peace and destruction is not uniquely yours, but is nature’s design. The imprisonment of all energised units lies in an eternally rebounding mess ... in a madhouse, one could rightly say.”

“You wanted me to make that terrifying trip for your own benefit, not for mine. Now that I can think straighter, I’d say you tried to use me as some sort of psychic spy.”

He laughed. “You think you can see things I cannot see for myself?”

“Yes, in fact, I do. Those blocks and barriers you’re on about – ‘Break the bands!’ I heard you calling out – I believe you were using me to push through so that I could reveal to you what lay behind them.”

“And why would I do that? To find what?”

I stared at him for a moment in utter confusion, then dropped my shoulders and sighed, “That, Rainer, is exactly the question. To find something that drives you crazy because you can’t figure it out for yourself. Look, I don’t know if this merely boils down to some psychological confusion of yours – so that I’ve been drawn by you into a session of psychoanalysis elaborately dressed up as an hypnotic act or as some psi-induced illusion, to use your language. You’re surely the most baroque man imaginable. With you, the simplest thing must be presented as an opera. But if you want to know what I actually did bring back from this ‘happening’ of yours – that’s easy. I’ll tell you what I found.”

He sat up. “What was it?”

I held back, relishing this brief moment of power over him. Then I said, “I found vast quantities of horror, violence and death associated directly with you, my dear Rainer Kruger.”

I thought I’d succeeded in ruffling his feathers. But I was wrong. He sank back in his seat, looking disappointed.

I insisted, “So tell me, what else it is you hoped I would find through all your trickery?”

He gave a long sigh, and then said in the saddest of tones, “I do not know. Otherwise I would not be looking, would I?”

We were nearing the house. Cooking fires were being lit in the chinks of the city. Rainer threw me one of his disdainful looks; he could never end a conversation without needing to feel he was coming out on top. “You did not have to look in my eye. *You chose to look*,” he insisted, “because you were curious and it distracted you from your sickness. I did not trick you, as you say. I helped you go where you have never been in your whole life.” And with a typical African click of the tongue, he concluded, “You should be bloody grateful to me.”

I had no more energy left to take him on, although at that moment I felt like hitting him. Basically, I was left baffled and humiliated. Yet I had to admit to myself that I had lived through something prodigious. I remember feeling, as we approached the house, that my familiar world had been knocked completely off its axis.

The headlights fished the Krugers' gate out of the shadows. As we drew up, I registered the disturbing but resolute thought that I had been welded forever to Rainer by some magical rite of passage. Did this mean I had been bewitched? Had the African side of his nature seriously unleashed the powers of possession? Was I now set to be fashioned by his needs?

My eyes tightly shut, I was lost in these frightening thoughts when the gate was opened, the metal squeaking as António did his job. Rainer called out, "*Olá!*" as we drove in, and António returned a similar platitude, "*Estou bem!*"

I longed for the library where I could lock myself away. But the events of the "big day" as Rainer had so aptly named it at breakfast, were not yet over.

THE CACHE

When we entered the hallway Mr Kruger and the Greeks were well into vanishing whist, seated in the soft glow of the veranda lamp like hierophants savouring a profound mystery. Rainer proceeded straight through to his bedroom, while I fetched water from the kitchen, then disappeared into the library where I ate some dry biscuits from my suitcase to settle my stomach.

I soon fell into a sleep troubled by riotous flashbacks: the crazy tunnelling, the hermetic signs, the violent imagery, the wailing golden creatures – an abbreviated version of the whole *Tio Sam* "trip".

Woken by a loud thump, I sat up in bewilderment. I searched the gloom for something recognisable, and found Mr Kruger's desk bulging with elephantine curves in the night-light. Again a heavy thump. It came from outside and had a metallic resonance. Hard on its heels, a series of shrieks from the fruit bats tore at the stillness like knives. As the gothic echoes faded, I found myself on my way to the Venetian blind.

Two figures stood inside the front gate struggling with a large crate, which they must have bumped as they carried it in. They lugged the thing up the driveway, and dumped it in deep shadow next to the Peugeot. Heavy breathing could be heard. One of the figures leaned back against the old car. Then – as clear as dripping water in a quiet room – I overheard the following whispered exchange: "Put them in your room!" (from Rainer) and António's contentious response "*Vou derretê-los todos!*" ("I will melt them down to nothing!") – one of those cryptic exchanges they specialised in. With an all too familiar snort of derision, Rainer seized one end of the wooden crate and began hauling it with great difficulty towards the back of the house with no regard for the loud scraping. António stood by indecisively, and then set off in pursuit.

What mischief was my host up to now?

I wiped my perspiring head with my shirt, while an inner voice struck up: Hang in there, find out about Rainer on all levels, stop thinking about explosive devices, acknowledge that his bustle and blabber bring you freedom from Kudzi ...

The moment I was done, I set off through the darkened kitchen and out the sprung back door.

Moving between concealed parts of the back yard, I approached the two as closely as I dared. António was objecting to having the box in his quarters, while Rainer was trying to convince him of the necessity. “I tell you why you must hide it,” my host was arguing. “For centuries I take the blame for the murder of the children. While you, my poor Elizabeth, remain forever ruled by guilt because your partner killed them, and then killed me.”

António answered with strange but poignant words, “*Am I not grateful to you for the guilt you gave me?*”

A sardonic growl from Rainer. “For your betrayal you must let me put the box under your roof.”

I heard António impatiently kick the side of the wooden crate. “All you will achieve with these is more activations full of pain,” he complained. “You never think how I must feel by asking me to help you kill yourself when you know the time is not right.”

After a moment of all-round paralysis, Rainer rushed at the weighty container. But when he attempted to heave it up, he fell to the ground. I could hear him scrambling to his feet. Then he said, “Very well. If you refuse to help me I shall ask Miguel.”

Throughout I had remained concealed by darkness and had not made the slightest move. Yet within seconds, António had rushed directly upon me and pinned my arms behind my back sending shooting pains through my cracked ribcage.

“Leave him!” Rainer’s voice sizzled.

The steel grip loosened. I clutched my side, heaving for air.

Rainer laughed. “I have some black-market ham in here, Miguel. We must keep it secret. Come help us hide it!”

António let go of me. I straightened up and advanced towards Rainer saying, “Open that crate!” in a voice that was surprisingly strong. “Whatever’s in there, it’s not ham!”

Again Rainer laughed. “Of course it is. A present for Family Day.”

“Open it up!” I shouted.

“If you wish,” Rainer agreed, too readily.

There was a brief pause. Then António snatched up the crate as though it were weightless and rushed off with it round the side of the house.

“I knew he would help!” Rainer exclaimed with glee, before hurrying after his companion.

In this wonderland I regretted not picking up the container myself to ascertain its weight; heaviness and danger in this instance being related.

When I caught up with them, António was already climbing a ladder up to the water tanks with the crate balanced on one shoulder – a real feat of strength.

I placed myself before Rainer and cried out, “I refuse to be hostage to your follies! I demand to know what’s inside that crate ... or I’ll report you to the military police!”

Needless to say this was greeted with mirth. “I’ll save you the trouble, Miguel. I will tell you what it contains: it is full of rocket launchers ... so I am told.”

I swore in appalled astonishment. Then I spun round and fled the scene of the crime.

As soon as I had shut the door behind me in the library, the information I had received exploded in my mind with a hollow pop, like a blown-up paper bag: it was quite

useless to me. Of course that was precisely why Rainer had felt so free to tell me the truth. He knew that I would only endanger myself and my mission if I exposed the cache. If I told Ulla, Frelimo would seize the arms, arrest Rainer as a double agent or simply assassinate him, arrest me and deport me or even worse, lock me up as a collaborator. It was frightening to discover that Rainer was capable of such calculating lucidity.

I took two sleeping tabs ... but for a long time I could not sleep.

DAY SEVEN – TUESDAY 25 DECEMBER 1984

TAKING STOCK

As soon as the sun had welded my window into red-hot union I cancelled Family Day. My worn-out state was well displayed in the bathroom mirror – a face sheathed in a stocking pulled tight by a petulant liver.

I opened the tap on the sink, having forgotten that water rarely came through it: a green worm fell out on to the porcelain ... and the whole of yesterday came flooding back: Rainer with his explosive “ham”; Joe with his veiled warnings; and *Tio Sam* with its helter-skelter storm of panicked charges and baffling imagery. I held on to the basin as my sweat rained down upon it. Fearing the onset of some tropical malady, I blundered off to the outside shower.

Approaching the water tower was a sharp reminder of real danger. Up there in the empty tank lay rockets ... rockets with which Rainer hoped to blast himself into oblivion taking who knows who or what with him in a vengeful act of destruction common to psychopaths bearing grudges.

The shower did nothing to revive me. So by the time I went for coffee, and Rainer invited me for Christmas lunch at the home of some Germans, I had no difficulty in refusing.

Before they left I was obliged to participate in the ritual of presents. This took place in the kitchen and involved only Agi and Rainer. Fortunately, as I had arrived from Zimbabwe dependent on charitable hospitality, I was well prepared for the occasion: Agi got a hand-woven tablecloth, and Rainer a small soapstone bird that he pretended to be enthusiastic about. He gave me an embarrassingly fine present – an art deco lighter that today sits before me on my desk as I write.

By ten o'clock I found myself alone in the house – António also having driven off with Rainer and his father ... even Agi had gone out.

Not that my craved-for solitude lasted. No sooner had I sat down on the veranda than my head filled with memories of Kudzi and devastating presentiments of a life without her. As a result I found myself back on my feet and heading for the library, which involved passing through the ever sombre passage where Rainer's enigmatic presence hung in the same threatening way as the ghost of Cyclone Demoina hung about the island of Inhaca.

As on the prior occasion when I had been left alone and worked out my *Mirrors of Conflict* theory, I urgently sought to regain composure by writing, with concentrated effort, in my blue notebook.

I started with Rainer's bold premise: “*The brain contains a carbon copy of the Universal Field made accessible through consciousness.*” To perceive and possibly comprehend our universe through an exercise of the mind – is that what he was implying? To be capable of extending memory from star dust to a myriad versions of DNA right up to the intricate computer of the human “me”? Such a premise opened up the doors of perception wider than even Julian Huxley could have imagined.

I looked up “consciousness” in Mr Kruger's Oxford Dictionary: “That of which we are aware” is all it said. A broad definition, applicable not only to man's sensations and

thoughts, but to information coming from imagination, dreams and other sub-conscious manifestations ... and now, I might well have to add, from a source of perception I had never before considered – intuitive and psychic energy.

Back to a key issue: what had I really experienced on that boat? What, for instance, was my rapport with Cyclone Demoina? – an internal journey made by interconnecting information somehow imbedded within my complex atomic structure (my own H₂O connecting with a cyclonic version of itself, for example) or a genuine communication outside the body, made through some mobile pinpoint of perception defined by Rainer as psi?

“*We are all receptors and emitters of energy,*” Rainer had said. And at some point in the car he had spoken of psi perception as “*an opening out in the mind from target site to target site*” through the intermediary of the Universal Field, the latter being – as far as I could understand it – some sort of fine, all-pervasive substance or energy pattern.

So which function was Rainer proposing: memory as a vast encyclopaedia of life? Or, rather, psychic jumps into entities across the interconnected web of the universe? And more important: did I experience one such jump yesterday or had I been duped?

I wrote:

1) CASE FOR THE PROSECUTION:

Forget psi and look at imagination. Several miraculous events that happened with Rainer could be the bloated imaginings of a mythomaniac with only one power – that of hypnotism and self-hypnotism.

Three possible computations of this :-

- (a) António’s telepathic arrival with petrol = a set-up.
 - (b) Rainer’s claim to have made a journey to a planet before respiration = a voyage of his imagination.
 - (c) my trip through his eye to another planet and within a cyclone = an induced nightmare.
- Rainer’s purpose? – to impress me or to dominate and control me for some, as yet, inexplicable personal advantage.

2) CASE FOR THE DEFENCE:

- a) Rainer could be a star guru through his healing capacity alone. Instead he’s in Mozambique living almost like a hermit.
- b) There’s serious conviction in his descriptions of the esoteric ways of nature.
- c) Healing by Rainer was witnessed by me when I was completely sober, and the semi-medical details he supplied sound plausible.
- d) The trip on the boat was not induced by drugs, nausea or alcohol, nor did it have the makings of a vision. It bears affinities with what Rainer described happening to him during the healing and during his contact with bacterial life on another planet.
- e) On my own there is no way I could have engineered the trip into Rainer’s eye and all that followed. Rainer must have helped me get into it. But this doesn’t necessarily mean that he implanted the experience by hypnotic means. He could have guided me into the cyclone just like the cricket had once guided him into it (in Rainerspeak – by letting one Life-Line lead to another).

Rainer’s purpose? – his personal testimony confided to me as a writer during his last days before the advent of some genuinely engineered cataclysm, which included his suicide.

But in the court of my rational mind neither the Prosecution nor the Defence won the case.

With confusion intact I went to the window in a futile search for air. For a long time I stared at the sun-drenched driveway, hoping for a revival of my depleted resources, for a motivation that would engage me in constructive action, for inspiration. Slowly but

surely, an urge took hold of me and I inwardly gave voice to it: Accept, per se, the events on the boat, for you have never lived through the likes of them; if, here and now, you make this leap of faith, an immense richness could open out to you; make the leap and an opportunity may soon arise for life to explode with the unimaginable ... your days will cease to fall one after the other like dead wood, but extend, rather, like golden boughs ... your political abstinence will cease to plague you with guilt ... your personal problems will grow dim under a dazzling new sky ... while you will be moving closer to what the mystics call grace, and the alchemists call the philosopher's stone.

"Go on!" I intoned, "Reach for it!"

Knives hurled by the sun-savage driveway stabbed at my eyes forcing me to turn away.

In the gun-metal gloom of the library, my excitement floundered, leaving thin marks of conviction. I had made no leap. Perhaps, another time ...

"THE GAP"

All that was left to me at this point was my shameful cowardice. Along with unmistakable pangs of thirst and hunger.

On the kitchen table, Agi had put out two plates for me: one contained cold meats and potato salad; on the other was a slice of homemade Christmas cake. And there was orangeade.

But no sooner had I assuaged my appetite with the main course, than the Christmas cake with its joyous icing and plastic holly leaf plunged me into a cascade of memories of "dead" lovers with whom I had passed at least one Christmas in various parts of the world: Molly, Gorel, Anna, Rosy, Agnès, Kate, Lena, François, James were some of their names ... a line of diminishing corpses with flies and autumn leaves stirring over them, and their ghosts forever trailing me. And what of Kudzi? Was she to be the most haunting ghost of all? Sweet Christmas! Who needed to go back to fifteenth century England to find a past life? I could jump across a backlog of Life-Lines merely by staring at a slice of Christmas cake ... if that was all there was to it.

I should have joined the lunch party; I was not ready for solitude, which came at me like a big stick beating a soiled carpet.

To remove myself from the cake's presence I went outside and walked through the garden, swiping menacingly at the flies. A short amble past the peacock on the sawn-off tree stump brought me to the front gate, where the sound of excited voices could be heard in the street. Through the chain hole I could see a few kids doing high-jump over a bamboo stand in front of the GDR's Embassy. I was amazed to see one of them do a Western Roll over the bar, which triggered off more memories, this time from childhood:

... of me with a certain Pete – the first of us schoolboys to abandon the scissors style in high-jump in favour of the Western Roll – roaming the African bush with my dog Rinty, the three of us an inseparable trinity ... until Pete moved out of town breaking our sacred triangle;

... of Eastern Kestrels flying above my parents' garden at sunset, swift agents of death, captivating in their acrobatics, their copper feathers glinting like armour as they

caught flying ants on the wing ... until the sun vanished leaving a hollowness within me that I suspected might never be filled.

“*The Gap!*” ... When Pete left town forever, when the kestrels vanished in the fading glory of the sun – was the consequent deathliness what Kudzi referred to as “*The Gap!*”? The thing I sought to fill with her and all her forbears, with political crusades, and with works of art indelible through the havoc of time?

In my childhood I had known paradise and lost it. Did it follow that what you constantly sought was what you had known and loved and lost? Like childhood? Like Kudzi? Vestiges of the sublime subsequently denied? Like a peacock covered in dust? Like Pegasus crashing to earth? Did the failure to preserve paradise stipulate no end to this infernal “Gap” created by parting, loss, discontinuity?

“*You and I, Miguel, together we are pilgrims of darkness.*” During my mysterious adventures on *Tio Sam*, my life and Rainer’s had meshed in transient harmonies and swift patterns of destruction that mirrored both his fears and my own. And since death stalked him like a jackal, was it by proxy stalking me as well?

While I stood pensively, walled in by my ghosts, a surge of kids’ voices swept over the garden gate filling my ears and sending a shudder of dread through me. Too much solitude had brought the ghosts out in the broad light of day as freely as they appeared in my dreamscapes of the night and in the hallucinations generated by my host.

Very suddenly and as fast as a snake, a hand shot through the chain hole in the plated steel grabbing my trousers ... from the far side a kid’s voice shrieked for food “*Comida! Comida!*” In horror I ripped my leg free while the hand continued snapping at the air like some creature in a horror movie.

As quickly as it had entered, the hand withdrew, its owner uttering a cry of pain. A man’s voice ordered the youth to get away if he cared for his life.

The boy’s voice faded into the distance, and uncertain silence descended upon the outside world.

Adrenalin pumping, I dared peep through the hole: the hunchback was turning into the hallway of his high-rise next to the embassy ... in his hand a bucket full of splashing water; he shouted a last curse after the boy, now running off down the street, his thin arms flapping.

I was immediately seized by an urge to follow Toto into his lair: I genuinely wanted to thank him for his intervention; and by doing so I would also acquire the opportunity to ask him some questions about his shady activities and particularly about his association with Rainer Kruger.

The gate keys were easily found – they were hanging on a nail in the kitchen. I was free to follow my whim ... if I could muster the courage.

In the dingy lobby of the high-rise my progress was stalled by stale odours of cooking, embedded in damp concrete. I refused to give in to fear. At least the kids had vanished. Beyond, in a haze of shimmering dust and sparkling flies, I could see adults weighed down by the air and the strain of their lives moving in slow motion down a louvered passage. Toto’s form was not among them. After a moment of uncertainty, I heard the clanking of his tin canister coming from a blackened stairwell.

I took a deep breath and set off up the stairs. The humidity had turned the soot to slime that dripped on me, and each step was an oozing hazard. The only available light came through broken double-doors on each landing.

Without encountering a soul I arrived on the top landing, where an iron ladder led to a trapdoor in the roof – sludge from the recent passage of Toto’s shoes was dripping off the rungs.

The moment I emerged into the blazing light, I caught sight of the back of Toto’s head disappearing over the top of a disused concrete water tank. There were bits of greenery protruding through a series of gaps that had been cut into the tank’s upper brickwork like arrow slits of a mediaeval fortification.

The flat roof of the high-rise was the perfect vantage point for a spy: the view of the city stretched for miles, and there was a clear drop-shot straight into the GDR embassy ... and into the Krugers’ property.

A surprising spectacle greeted me when I climbed to the top of the rounded water tank: its cemented cover was shielded by hundreds of reflecting objects, including cooking foil, silver cigarette wrappings, mirrors, tin tops, chrome hubcaps, all of them acting in unison to deflect the broiling sunrays. An open padlock lay beside a silver-painted hatch – the spy had been careless!

I quickly raised the hatch: in the blade of light that I caused to plunge inside, Toto’s face swung upwards – a woman leapt from an armchair – a baby at her breast broke into shrieks – Toto cried out reassuringly, “I know him!”

Wonderful air kept cool by the insulated roof and laced with honeysuckle updrafted into my face. As I grew accustomed to the soft interior light, details began to emerge: a Persian carpet – trained creepers curling into the arrow-slits that served as air and light vents – a dining table as clean and shining as the Krugers’ ... a boy-child darting out from beneath the table and running to his mother – behind them, a bedspread printed with Chagallian angels, covering a double-bed ... and then, as my gaze travelled over an antique sideboard containing a complete dinner service, it dawned on me that most of Toto’s furnishings must have been “liberated” from the homes of Portuguese settlers fleeing the revolution.

Such a family palace muted my hostile feelings towards the fellow. I said, hesitantly, “I came to thank you for what you did.”

“It is my job,” the crooked-back answered as a matter of fact.

“Your job!”

“I protect *Senhor* Rainer. And you are his friend.”

His woman was still looking at me, petrified. Toto went and put his arm round her, and I saw the fear drain from her eyes.

I continued, “What exactly do you protect Rainer from?”

“From himself,” he said, without sarcasm, the subtlety of his response leaving me speechless.

He took the bucket over to a wood stove and poured water into a pot of maize meal (doing the woman’s work). Then he said, “*Senhor* Rainer is my *only* friend.”

“*Senhor* Rainer tells me you are a spy for many people ... but I must tell you that spying on me is a waste of time. I am not involved in Mozambican affairs. I am leaving next week, anyway.”

He walked over to his woman again and put an arm round her again, holding her against him. “I will bring you no harm, sir.” His respectful tone was not false, it was ingrained.

“Tell me one thing,” I asked. “How soon is sabotage expected to start in this city?” It was a wild shot to which, of course, he did not respond. Instead he picked up his boy, kissed him and held him up for me to see. “He is beautiful, no? He is three years old.” A sheen of pride as pure as the sunlight that struck him from over my shoulders wiped his face clean of cunning.

I was shocked to feel a lump in my throat. To be envious of Toto! I – a man from countries with social security, who lived in houses with all mod cons, who owned cars and ate in restaurants, who had everything that Toto could never possibly have – I still lacked the most valuable thing of all: a world of my own in which love prevailed.

I returned to the house and the library expecting to be walled in once more by my ghosts.

SNOOPING

I must have dozed off for quite some time, because the sun had moved out of range of my window when I sat up on the bunk bed, jittery and dripping in sweat. Hunting for some form of sedation I scanned Mr Kruger Senior’s smart leather-bound books with titles like *Pondoro – Last of the Ivory Hunters* and *I Saw the Congo* by Grace Flaudrau, until I settled upon *The Life and Tragedy of Alexandra Peodorovna, Empress of Russia* by Baroness Sophie Buxhoeveden – Longmans 1930.

Humidity had turned the pages as soft as chamois and stained them with mould. Many passages had been neatly annotated in the margins by the old man – additions which provided a parallel tale of *The Life and Tragedy of the Kruger Dynasty*. Each chapter was a milestone in the Krugers’ last days as upper-class Volga Germans and their subsequent life as fugitives from communism. One note referred to the introduction of Swiss Germans into the family in the nineteenth century, explaining where Klaus Kruger’s Calvinism must have come from. I skimmed through the book, making notes along the way:

Chapter 1: *Journeys in Russia and Abroad 1896* – about the good times had by the happy few going to operas and balls and hob-nobbing with international royalty while tended by serfs.

Chapter 2: *First Charities* – these charities provide the nobility, including Mr Kruger, with standard conscience-cleaners.

(Kruger’s note: “After the serfs bit the hands that fed them, the evil philosophy of Marx spread across the world to China and even to darkest Africa.”)

Chapter 3: *Gathering Clouds, 1905* – contains rare photos of the restless Russian natives and some of their leaders, including Lenin and Trotsky.

(Sarcastic remarks scribbled by Kruger on similar “vermin leaders” like Mao and Castro, as well as Mozambique’s Samora Machel.)

Last chapter: *Revolution, March 1917 – Emperor’s Abdication - Arrest of the Empress* – tells of the arrival of the inconceivable: the dictatorship of the proletariat.

(Kruger’s note on last page: “Final step to damnation!”)

By the end of this exercise I was furious with both the contents of the book and the old man’s remarks, for together they added up to an ugly reminder of the recurring disintegration of cultures and customs, and the failures and shortcomings of revolutionary

systems and of human nature. Now the whole library appeared to me like a tomb, pungent with the stench of decay. The house was the last cemetery of the Krugers and all they stood for. The fatuous volumes spelt out the old man's smallness of mind, his hopelessness and his incapacity to survive, and by wrapping them in identical covers he had converted them into gravestones.

Shouting "Action!" I leapt at the books, gouging them from their smug perches, sweeping them to the floor over and over again. Here was the strong arm of the revolution: "Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh! ..." – it was like the good old days – "*Ce n'est qu'un début, continuons le combat!*" – I was actively confirming history as a permanent long march of revolution; and in my savage state of mind I did not exclude Rainer from elimination, since he so closely resembled his father in pessimism, resentment and bigotry.

The loss of control gave me short-lived but intense pleasure, and left me panting, choking with laughter and sweating more profusely than ever. Also, by conceiving of my act as political, I was rewarded by feeling convincingly reconnected with Kudzi.

Now well-girded in warrior mood, I headed, with no attempt at stealth, for Rainer's bedroom. Time was running out, rocket launchers were at hand, the apocalypse might well be nigh, and, as the appointed chronicler of Rainer's final testament, I had a duty to perform: to discover the truth about *why* as well as *how* he intended to get himself immolated.

The room remained unchanged. This time I immediately picked up on its spirit, which can best be summarised as one of absence: the owner who spent so much time in it was hardly ever consciously there – he was always off somewhere in his head.

His most recent reading material was lying on the bed – a copy of the *Scientific American* dated December 1983. I picked it up. The sight of a comment by Rainer written on the side of an article entitled "Quantum Gravity" intrigued me – I could hear his griping tone behind it: "*I am invariant, like a scalar.*" I remembered scalars and vectors from school maths: vectors have direction while scalars do not; like the fixed rungs of a ladder, scalars refer to units of numbers that do not change. The inference was obvious: here, once more, was Rainer expressing his frustration at being stuck.

Then I unfolded a loose piece of paper that had been slipped into the magazine. In tightly scrawled text, Rainer referred to an article entitled "Jump in the Atom", and in his own words he summed up the process of how electrons can only move from lower to higher energy levels "*by absorbing energy from 'OUTSIDE' (Rainer's capitals) through collision or the absorption of light*". He had evidently been unsettled by this, and wrote, "*I am on my own. I have no help. Unlike the electron I alone must generate the power for change.*"

I well remembered him bringing up this concern on the veranda after soothing my hangover with his hand. He had spoken of his lack of faith in "auto-generation" and "bootstrapping". But now, further down on his page of notes, he argued more optimistically: "*I see the frequency of my future state – it is green. In the past it has been dominantly red ... I am at higher state of energy than I have ever been in my life. The moment is ideal and must not be lost.*" And he had added a specific example of the

different colours of the levels of energy: “Hydrogen can have an $n = 4$ green integer of 486 nanometers which is much higher level of energy than its $n = 3$ red integer of 656 nanometers.” Further down the page he had underlined the following statement: “an ‘ n ’ jump in hydrogen involves new values of ‘ L ’ and ‘ S ’. If I can not act with similar exactitude, my own jump will fail.”⁵

Even though the physics was obscure, here was the man’s ambition clearly stated: to climb to a higher form of life – probably a Zeegan – through some incomprehensible and hazardous psychic energy shift. The illustration of behaviour patterns within atoms had been seized upon by Rainer to support his theories on psychic behaviour.

I was disturbed by what he had written next: “The change to a higher orbit for the hydrogen electron will occur when its ‘ L ’ and ‘ S ’ are in opposition, thereby providing a situation where less energy is required to make the jump. The end of the factory and recent arrivals are indications of the approaching oppositional line-up I need.”

My flesh tingled – “recent arrivals” strongly suggested that the text had been written the previous night or even that very morning, with me, no doubt, as one of the arrivals and “the ham” as another. Under no circumstances was I going to allow myself to be drawn into the unimaginable moment when Rainer chose to blow himself into a more powerful orbit.

I was lost in these disturbing thoughts when the conspirator himself caught me red-handed ...

“Keep it all!”

He was standing in the doorway, smiling without malice. I had heard no car, no doors, no footsteps. I let drop the magazine I was holding, but the loose page of his notes remained trembling in my hands like evidence of theft. Nervous noises emerged from my throat.

He strolled into his room sporting the hook-toothed smile of a shark. “My papers are full of references that you will find most useful.”

Resorting to the spirit of iconoclasm that had laid waste the library, I tossed the sheet of paper to the floor. “I’m really not interested. I was just wandering past.”

“What is it you were reading?” He had the ability to defuse a tricky situation as deftly as he could create one.

“Nothing much. I was reading a magazine.” I edged round him towards the door. “Thought I might find something to add to the healing interview.”

As I entered the doorway he called out, “Wait! Take my research with you.” He opened a desk drawer and removed a bundle of files. “You can have all these articles and notes.” He lifted them towards me. “Please! I am honoured that you should be so interested. Take them! Read them in your own time.”

Hesitantly, I took the bundle into my arms. There was a smell of brandy and cake on his breath ...

⁵ The article “Jump in the Atom” referred to by Rainer was not in the December 1983 issue of *Scientific American*. I have not been able to trace it, but the electron issue he takes up is an elementary one in nuclear physics. My research explained the references he uses: $n = 1/2/3$, etc., stands for the allowed states of an electron within an atomic structure starting from its ground state “ n ”; “ L ” is the permitted restriction of sizes of angular momentum of the electron’s orbit; and “ S ” is the orientation or spin of permitted momentum.

Rainer’s fascination with this article clearly derived from the “allowed” criteria in natural law.

At that very moment, shouts of outrage filled the house – German abjurations. Rainer cocked his head, then hurried past me and out the door.

A MATTER OF TRUST

Even an old man, especially one who is heavily built, can unleash considerable violence. In the passageway to the library I stopped to listen: Rainer was verbally trying to still the ranting that sounded as if it would never let up and stemmed, of course, from the litter of books.

Seconds later it was cut off in mid-roar, its echoes lapping over the tiling that extended throughout the house.

Clutching Rainer's paperwork in my arms I inched forward, straining my ears for some sounds of life (Klaus Kruger had worked himself into such a state that a stroke was not inconceivable). There was a heavy scrape of wood – a chair being dragged across the floor ...

I reached the doorway: Rainer was leaning over his father who was seated at the desk, freeze-framed into the portrait of a shouting man – his mouth open, his inbreath suspended, his fist held up in mid-air.

I entered cautiously. Mr Kruger did not budge. Rainer was holding him firmly by the shoulders. I was astonished to see the old man's eyeballs trembling as if he were receiving a sustained electric shock ... violent quivers were also shooting through his glutinous cheeks. Hesitantly, his son released his grip as though he were afraid the body would keel over. Instead, it subsided like a sigh: the rigid stamp of outrage melted, the tremors ceased, the head drooped, the fist unfurled, and the big torso sank to its lowest level of gravity until it lay sprawled motionless across the desktop.

Rainer broke the spell by winking at me. Beyond the open window the buzzing of the insects had not faltered.

Looking at the books scattered over the floor, Rainer whispered, "Why did you do this?"

So flabbergasted was I by the laying to rest of the beast that it took me a little while to understand what he was referring to. "Sorry," I stuttered. "Tombstones! ... They reminded me of tombstones ..." and lapsing into incoherence, I dumped my load of paperwork on the bed, then automatically started to pick the offending articles off the floor.

When I next raised my eyes, Rainer was watching me with amusement. I asked, "Is he all right?"

"He will come round in a minute and remember nothing," he answered, flopping back his hand to dismiss the affair, as he switched with the greatest of ease from the gravitas of his endeavours with his father to the casual activity of book gathering.

After banging an armful of tomes back on to a shelf, Rainer said, "You are quite right. These are tombstones ... like the house ..." Whereupon the chair squealed: the old man was levering himself up using his arms like jacks; his bulldog's head lifted; his moist fish eyes opened and strove to focus on the doorway.

Hastily I stepped well back.

He got himself upright, swayed back and forth for some worrying instants like a leathery tree before negotiating his way round the desk, prodding at it with his fingers like a blind man. His son, meanwhile, moved calmly out of his way.

Soon the old man reached the far side of his desk where he mustered his forces with deep trumpeting groans. Then he launched himself towards the doorway and freedom, unconsciously scattering with his polished shoes any book that happened to be in his way. Vapours of tobacco, alcohol and strudel from Christmas lunch lingered behind him like exhaust fumes as he disappeared down the passage.

With a breezy chortle Rainer resumed the cleaning-up operation.

The significance of what he had actually done to his father now struck me. Had he not claimed: *"If I put that energy into a baby I could kill it"*? I now conjectured that it was not inconceivable that circumstances could arise where he might see the need to use his stun rays on me! But after he made fun of my "massacre" of his father's books, adding, "No doubt you must have enjoyed yourself!", my fears subsided and I found myself tossing back a quip or two as I helped him sort out the mess.

We were close to finishing when I came upon a book on Greek mythology. I looked up the entry on Pegasus to discover that it followed the outline of my dream with uncanny precision. To satisfy Rainer's curiosity, I ran through the salient parts of the dream for him. In response he slapped his hands on his knees with glee, proclaiming that my hybrid animals (lions with zebra snouts and so on) represented nothing less than the Universal Field's method of creating energy by dicing with opposites.

Now in his element, Rainer began to expand on this pet theory in that familiar highly charged manner he so enjoyed. According to him, every structure contained this dynamic of conflict in one form or another: alternating electromagnetic current, matter/anti-matter, repulsion/attraction, acid/alkali. "Whatever polarity you wish to name," he propounded as slatted daylight from the blinds flashed upon his jubilant popping eyes, "everywhere it remains the abiding formula for action. And in the language of your dream it emerged as the male/female principle."

Still perusing the text I chipped in, "I see here that the rider I dreamed up was a warrior called Bellerophon. He put a gold bridle on the horse to control it."

He snatched the book out of my hands and shook it at me. "Can you not understand? You dreamed up the myth because you were able to tune into the Positive-Negative Dynamic within yourself. In this way the meaning of the dream remains the same for you as for the ancient Greeks – why should it ever change? Myths are drawn from dreams. The guiding principles of the Universal Field are the stories of dreams. In this sense there is only one dream and its name is polarity. So you see, Miguel, with Pegasus you have taken another step along your journey into psi."

As far as I was concerned I had retired from psi journeys. But having just been astonished by another of his feats I could feel myself being caught once more in the glittering maze of his concepts.

"But why did I dream of Pegasus in particular?" I queried.

"The myth of the male knight riding the female flying horse is part of your cultural education, so your unconscious dragged it up as an illustration of polarity."

He so loved to lay emphasis upon his words like an elder statesman; it was a penchant I found aggravating. "To me a horse is not necessarily female," I argued.

“The way you described its shape, texture and movements – it has to be! And the knight in armour making the horse do cartwheels is unlikely to be a woman, isn’t it?”

“You have debased my dream,” I retorted, “by saying it’s about a man riding a woman!”

He laughed affectionately. “And why not? Think of the power sex releases.”

Delving for personal clues in the dream, I remarked, “I wonder why I feared Pegasus and the rider would crash. So often with me I fear the end of things. The good doesn’t last.”

“Excellent!” he exclaimed, flitting his gaze over my body in that unnerving manner. “Because the processes of nature have built-in obsolescence. For Pegasus there can be no eternity. This is why you and I, Miguel, we are both constantly disappointed.”

Recoiling from his pessimism, I returned to the shelves and started to put order among the books. Suddenly I asked, “But you intend to find a way round the problem with your plot, do you not?”

He shrugged. “The more prepared I am, the more chance I will have of success – it is that simple.”

It was unnerving to hear that he had not backed away from the question. While his defences were down I struck again. “What *exactly* are you planning to do with your rockets, Rainer?”

But this time he side-stepped me. “I will trick the gods,” he replied with a crooked smile. “I will seize the ‘fidulity’ in your dream, Miguel – the faith, the courage, the hope – to hunt for ... to hunt for what? ...” He frowned, and then he let his mask slip, unintentionally revealing a man with an all too human dearth of answers.

To make up for this lapse he began scrambling for solutions in the mythology book. “What is it that Pegasus and his knight were hunting for? ... Let us see. Ah! Here we go: ‘Pegasus and the horseman swept through the air as a gale of wind, and together they hunted the chimera.’ ” Then prodding the page in frustration, he mumbled, “Chimera, chimera? What is chimera?” Flipping through the pages he zeroed in on the relevant entry and yelped, “*Olá!* Listen to this: ‘Chimera was a lion in front, a serpent behind, a goat in between and her breath was unquenchable fire. Together Pegasus and Bellerophon slew the monster.’ ”

I was amazed by the written evidence: horse and rider were victorious as a unit – as a hybrid – a victory that I had felt strongly in my dream just before the crash came. Yet Rainer was telling me that such victories were hollow. How I loathed this calamitous streak of his! Whipping down the Oxford Dictionary from where I had just placed it, I sought counter ammunition. “A chimera is also ‘a monster of the imagination’,” I read out. “Example: ‘He is far different from the chimera your fears have made of him.’ ” Snapping the dictionary shut, I shouted, “There is no real monster, Rainer! You make them up!”

Undaunted, my host swung his satiric face in front of me and said, “Oh, Miguel, what have your fears made of me, I wonder? For who else is your chimera, if not me?” With a hoot of laughter he slapped his hand at mine in one of those completely African gestures; even his laughter had an infectious African sparkle.

“You flatter yourself, Rainer,” I said as I dumped the dictionary back on the shelf. “I have plenty of chimeras, I regret to say.”

The labours of book gathering completed, we were obliged to face one another openly. By now I was reaching my limits with him again. “Rainer, please listen to me. You must tell me what you are up to. I can’t be friends with an arms dealer or an *agent provocateur*.”

He smiled wryly, but the subject was too serious for the smile to last. He slouched over to the blinds, and running a finger raspingly down the metal slats, said, “Much needs to be told for you to understand my plot.”

“At last!” I gasped. “You admit you’re up to something.”

“It is not politically driven. I think you have guessed that.” He looked like a man who had confessed his greatest secret, and who now stood at my mercy. Yet he had told me nothing significant.

“Don’t forget the secret word ‘fidelity’,” I said. “My dream was about my lack of trust in many things, mainly in myself with regard to Kudzi ... but also in you.”

Looking well to the side of me, he whispered, “I am your chimera, therefore I am not what you think I am.”

It needed courage to come out with what I told him next: “I’ve deduced that you’re seeking a method of making a jump in your Life-Line to some higher form of life ... like a Zeegan.”

His hand sprung away from the blinds, which cracked nastily. “I see you have read my notebooks with care!”

“You need to tell me more about these Zeegans.”

His shoulders slumped. “Yes.”

“And more on the link between psychic jumps and rockets.”

“Yes.”

On this occasion when they passed over me, his black lagoon eyes displayed traces of vulnerability and fear. He must have realised this, for he took umbrage by immediately turning cute – “But not on Christmas day!”

“You’re running out of excuses, Rainer.”

He struck a plaintive note. “I, too, need to trust you. Surely you can appreciate that?”

For a second I wondered if all he wanted from me was compassion – this would have made more sense than claiming me as his chronicler. I had no doubt António provided love, but did he offer compassion? Then I hastily reminded myself of my host’s ingrained slyness: nearly every feeling was calculated for some personal advantage, every emotion engineered for his own purposes. I said, “Why would you want me to tell the world about you? You don’t give a damn what anyone thinks! You’ve spent your life hiding away in Maputo!”

“How can you say such a thing?” he said, looking crestfallen. “You do not appreciate my terrible legacy. I died at the Battle of Bosworth. From Zeega I saw the Tudors on earth invent a satanic legend about Richard III. But if you believe in me ... and you believe I am honourable ...” He flashed a desperate look at me. “Oh, Miguel, perhaps with your help I could look back on my Life-Line and for the first time see white light in its tail!”

“So it’s vanity,” I responded. “I’m to be used to clear your name? Is that it?” At the same time I knew he was lying to me: King Richard’s reputation could hardly be the real reason for his wanting me to stay.

To my dismay he would not give up on this. He began to pace up and down, deliberately revving up his emotional intensity: the wild staring eyes, the excited face, the queasily collapsible walk – all the potentially psychotic indicators were on display again ... while his voice rose: “There is nothing worse than unfinished business! We all want to do our best. Mozart is a similar case. Always I am pestered by Mozart since he obtained access to my Life-line. He thinks his job on earth was not completed. Every time I play his music he sends me the new score for his Requiem. He is desperate for me to finish it properly. He is in Zeega ... yet he is desperate.”

My head had started to reel and I was seized by a desire to bolt into the garden.

“You ask about my plot,” he said, changing tack so as not to lose his advantage. “You are now interested in me. This is good. Because if my plot works, Miguel, after I am dead, who will be here to record the final results for posterity, if not you?”

My response was crabby with contempt. “Sometimes you talk as if you were Jesus Christ himself. I have no desire to become a prophet. I came to Mozambique for Kudzi!”

His cheeks sagged like a bloodhound’s as he set about another attempt to gain my pity. “I keep showing you my powers. For what purpose? I will tell you: so you will take me seriously. Also I help you in Maputo in the hope that I will become needed by you – so you will want to stay with me. Be my friend. But you are most cruel – you see me always as a fake.”

Knowing that I was being manipulated, I fought to stifle a twinge of conscience ... not fast enough – he picked up on it: “I hope you will come to realise that you and I are alike, Miguel – we are both trapped, we are both seeking solutions.” He was fidgeting with the raised lid of my still unpacked suitcase, no doubt drawing attention to further evidence of my lack of faith in him.

Suddenly he started to come towards me, slapping his palms and speaking as if something lurked in his mind waiting to spring full-clawed at me. “Try and realise that in some way or another I am here to help you. Likewise through your sympathy, you also have the possibility to help me.”

I had backed up against the window blind, the slats crackling like dry sticks. Was he about to try to possess me again, with the same force that he had mustered on the boat? Grabbing hold of my arm (his fingers were long enough to encircle the bicep), he pleaded, “The only way I can trust you, is if you are ready to understand me and believe me and follow my journey!”

In big close-up he had become reptilian: hairless nostrils, telescoping eyes, intersticed skin. I was proud to find myself remaining surprisingly calm at this point (I must, at last, have been getting used to his theatrics). I said, “Follow your journey! Why on earth should I do that?”

“Because I am your chimera, dear Miguel,” he said, hardening his gaze. “I am your spirit medium. Undiscovered treasures are waiting in here,” – tapping my head with his knuckles – “Deep down inside you they lie. Waiting to be summoned from the Universal Field!”

He was not being intentionally menacing, but the extent of his emotional instability had become cause for concern. I shoved him away and scuttled behind his father’s desk.

Again he advanced on me. “Miguel! You are a ripe fruit. In your dream you are so fresh, so innocent, so ...” – his lips zigzagging as he searched for the words – “so eager

to fly ... bursting to discover ... in awe of Pegasus!” and to end off he smashed the flat of his hand down on the desk with a bang.

I readied myself for trouble, but he did not move; he just kept coming at me – now only with his eyes. In a steel-shrill voice, he shouted, “Listen to your dream! Your dream is saying ‘Let me out!’ This is why you have come to me! This is why ...” Puzzlement sped across his features ...

Seizing my chance I ran to the doorway where I stood holding the jamb and wagging my finger at him in disapproval.

Casting himself as a person of forsaken wretchedness, he sank on to the desk chair and announced in a sulky voice, “I see you are not ready to trust me ... But I ask you to try and believe this: the ‘ham’ will be removed from this house, and kept elsewhere. You will be safe.”

After a pause he threw me a spiteful look. “Now at once you must decide whether to go on with me, or stop. Please, for your sake and mine I beg you: either unpack your suitcase, or take it with you and leave this house!”

I hated him. The Queen of Drama! I hated his deceit, his tricks. I hated his crass urgency that had nothing to do with my purpose. I hated him for the seductive magic of his mind.

Letting his head droop he whispered hoarsely to the desk, “We grope along looking for our pre-recorded path and our place of exit. Slowly the signposts lead one to another ... I am so tired of reading them ... so tired...”

Sensing another nasty web, I shouted, “Words, words, words! Your words are driving me crazy!”

Undeterred, he continued, still addressing the desk – “Like mules we never know how far we must drag ourselves up our Line ... We know not when the moment of exit is scheduled. I try so hard to clarify it, but ...”

“Go on!” I yelled. “Kill yourself for any crackpot idea! I want nothing to do with your plot!”

And I left him slouching there.

Once in the garden I marauded about at a brisk pace: Stop thinking ... feel the fast tread of feet on earth ... feel the hot pulse of air, the flow of sweat ... feel the simple power of natural elements!

I broke into a sprint, running round the property, oblivious to all things except the thudding of my heart, the pumping of my lungs, my pounding limbs – *reality*.

Heat and fatigue finally brought me to a stop. I stretched out across the flat of the tree stump, leaning on my elbow. A dragonfly flew past in spurts, its gossamer wings spreading false tales of freshness. Then my arm began to tingle: I had forgotten about the termites, platoons of which were attacking me for having crushed, yet again, their earthenware tunnels. I seriously feared that I was leaning over the edge of madness.

Eventually I took a shower without bothering to remove my clothes.

Sometime during the evening, when the library became an airless prison cell, I went outside once more. Against the dark contours of the garden, the fireflies drifted, their searchlights fading off and on. I wondered what it was they were looking for with such

tireless patience along their random flight paths. But no matter what it was, their quiet confidence and the soft gold beauty of their glowing suggested that it must be good ... at least for them.

DAY EIGHT – WEDNESDAY 26th DECEMBER 1984

RAINER ENJOYS A PRANK

Although it was only 8:00a.m. when we left the house on *avenida Francisco O. Magumbwe*, Rosa lay slouched in the back of the car already weighed down by the torrid heaviness of the atmosphere, which reduced consciousness in all creatures to its lowest level. At least it kept me from becoming paralysed by thoughts of my forthcoming encounter with Kudzi, scheduled for 10:00.

Before dropping me off, Rainer needed to collect cash from his bank, then stop by his factory to pay the dismissed workers their annual bonus, still paternalistically termed a “Christmas Box” (“*Boas Festas*” in Portuguese). Of course this should have been done before the 25th, but that had proved impossible because the banks had been stripped of cash by Christmas shoppers despite the government’s campaign to abolish the institution (with nothing to purchase, cash was the present unless you had relatives across the borders).

The bank was in *avenida Julius Nyerere* just round the corner from the house. It was boarded up, but a guard was letting customers pass through a gap. I waited in the car with the door locked. There was no one around and Rainer had assured me he would only be a minute. But, as if my fear of the streets of Maputo automatically drew danger to me, the moment my host disappeared a group of four people approached: young adults – three ragged men and a woman in a loose ill-fitting dress. As they drew level, they peered into the car, their faces streaked with dust and grime, their skin like crumpled tissue, and their eyes rendered sightless by all the horrors they had witnessed. As they passed on by and continued their slow automatic trudge to nowhere, my apprehension was fast replaced by sympathy. Such people represented the reality I had once championed, the one that Kudzi would always champion. How I admired her invincible optimism. For me, to be like her would have required an existentialist leap of faith; instead, I retained the empirical evidence that mankind was incapable of creating a better world for those who needed it.

Rainer was in fine fettle as he climbed back into the car with envelopes of cash. When he smiled at me as we drove off it was to encounter a Francis Bacon version of myself warped on the opaque panels of his sunglasses. He asked, “Why does your girl wish to work in this godforsaken place?” As I was lost for words, he answered himself. “I can guess: fat overseas cheques!”

We were passing an isolated building labelled *WINELA*, a recruitment office where a long queue of the *povo* were hoping to find work in the gold mines of racist South Africa, or so Rainer claimed, while eagerly pointing out how, in order to eat, the people must forsake socialist freedom for fascist oppression. In the queue I spotted the forlorn group that had gone past me at the bank.

Rainer returned to the subject of Kudzi. “I bet she makes you feel like shit, isn’t it?” I frowned, finding no suitable response.

With a silly grin he continued, “*Estou farto de ver pratos limpos à minha frente*” (“I am tired of seeing clean plates before me”) – a local saying. Such people are too pure for us. It is the same for me every time I look at António. At least your Kudzi is not smug like my António.”

The possibility that he might have met Kudzi arose once again in my mind, as it had first done after his description of the view from Ulla's window. I asked, "Do you know Ulla, her Danish friend – the plumber?"

I half-expected him to seize my query as another opportunity to brag about Life-Line jumping into Ulla's flat, but he merely shook his head. In so doing, he caught sight of something in the rear-view mirror and immediately veered the Peugeot into a side road while Rosa yelled: we were being followed ... by the same blue Fiat that had trailed us on my second day in the city. We turned again, coming full circle back on to *avenida Julius Nyerere* ... the Fiat still in tow. It crossed my mind that this time the occupants might be after the cash.

Rainer clucked his tongue and said, "Look at them! We all have a chimera. We wish to discover its powers and weaknesses for our personal fortune ... Those who are following us think they have the right answers and we do not. The objective of their conspiracy is either to make us think like them, or stop us thinking altogether ... When a lot of people with different ideas start thinking, it ends in bloodshed."

We were now driving next to an exceptionally high wall surrounding President Machel's office. About half way along, Rainer rammed on the breaks so hard that the Fiat nearly ran into us and Rosa flew into the front. By the time I had shouted, "What's happening?" Rainer had jumped out, come stiffly to attention and saluted the national flag, which was being hoisted above the presidential wall by two soldiers. One of them, catching sight of my host, shouted a reprimand and came forward angrily. I thought: We've had it! Rainer raised both arms in mock dismay and said, "Sorry, comrade brother! Forgot where I was." Whereupon he jumped back into the driver's seat, adding for the soldier's benefit, "No harm meant. Sorry, comrade brother!" and drove off in a frenzy of laughter while Rosa barked and jumped about goofily. I looked back to see the soldier jabbing his AK-47 with murderous intent at our pursuers in the Fiat while the second soldier started pulling them out of their car.

"Ha! Catch 22!" Rainer hollered. "Whenever you pass a government flag going up or coming down, you are obliged to stop and salute it. Everywhere, that is, except outside the President's office, where it is forbidden to stop – absolutely!"

Now that we were clear of danger, I found the episode hilarious. Such impish anarchism had been one of my own trademarks as a youth. It was wonderful to see Rainer being so outrageously childish in contrast to his macabre gloom.

We were still sniggering as we headed out along the *Marginal* where the sea rose into the sky in an unbroken sheet of lurid glare. The waters appeared to be set solid by the heat in defiance of the breeze that whipped into the car lifting my hair and smacking my face with salt until it stung so smartly I had to wind up the window.

We turned into an avenue with an illegible sign, and found ourselves in the light industrial sites. A few moments of silence descended as Rainer adjusted his driving technique to avoid craters from which we would have had to be towed. Soon we were creeping past a group of about twenty men with shaved heads, wearing spotless robes rich in reds and blues but dominated by advertisement white. They walked with a brisk stride, pounding biblical staffs on the hazardous ground. When writing my feature film *Soweto*, I had come across dozens of these sects in that township alone. Under the umbrella name of "Apostolics" – a medley of animism, Christianity and the Old Testament – they make up the largest Southern African religious movement. At their

gatherings, their ultimate objective is to be possessed by the Holy Spirit. What a defiant contrast they made to the distressed and anaemic walls of Maputo.

“Their leader was in jail with me,” Rainer said airily. “‘The Bishop’ they call him. He refused to swear allegiance to the flag. Matter of fact he bared his backside to it. Ha! ... guess what they did? They strapped his elbows behind his back, which makes your body swell until you fall unconscious. Over and over they did this. Still he refused. So they shipped him and his followers out to Niasa – middle of nowhere. They said, ‘Now see what God can do for you!’ You know what happened? They started a co-operative selling food to NGO aid organisations. They were soon making so much money, the state had to take them over. So they started an even bigger, more successful farm. Now they hire a plane to come and buy supplies in dollars at the *Loja Interfranca*.” He tittered with delight, flicking his piebald tongue at me.

PREMONITIONS OF FIRE

We parked in front of the yeast factory – a steadfast pre-World War II building that reminded me of a large and imposing old lady. At once a distressing spectacle unfolded: dozens of Rainer’s dismissed workers came out of the ruinous adjoining buildings, some with their wives and children. They all kept their distance, but never took their supplicating eyes off their “little boss”; as far as they were concerned, despite ten years of Marxist Family Day, “Christmas Boxes” had been carried forward from *os boms velhos tempos* along with “bosses” and “little bosses”.

While he was distributing the cash gifts, Rainer was so divorced from the immediate surroundings that neither the suffering nor the transient joy of his workers could intrude upon his esoteric preoccupations. The workers’ gratitude was abundant, the women ululating in joy; the episode reminded me of the worst aspects of colonial patronage. For Rainer, these people could as well have been trivial Life-Lines on some far-off planet. As soon as the hand-outs were over, he waved for me to follow him inside.

We entered a high-ceilinged office dominated by a grey steel desk covered with Rainer’s messy piles of paperwork. Next to a battered leather couch, a papier maché globe of the earth bulged on an Indian copper folding-table. The walls were stained by nicotine. Nothing appeared to have changed in this room since Klaus Kruger bought the place when he arrived in the country after the war. Even the dog-eared black phone on the desk was an apparatus from the ’40s. I had the impression of being at the bottom of a pit, largely due to the windows being limited to a single narrow strip, high up close to the ceiling.

“Sit down!” Rainer gestured towards the couch. “We are too early for your meeting.”

He picked up a silver box of cigarillos and offered me one, which I declined. As he sat down behind the desk, he lit one for himself. For a change he took his time doing something: pulling in lungfuls of smoke and blowing them towards the distant ceiling. Finally, his gaze descended and settled appraisingly on me, and out he came with a statement that made me quake. “I have discovered many uses for psi,” he announced with steely purpose, “and I intend to use them to my advantage. I must inform you, this will happen soon.”

By leaning his face on his upturned palm, he so distorted one side of his face that he looked monstrous. I averted my eyes. Gone was the magus; in a flash I had been given a

glimpse of his subterranean soul – devious, resentful, driven by unabated anger caused by god-alone-knows what or whom.

“Do you smell smoke?” Now he was up on his feet, looking around with a scattered expression. Very fast, he moved to a metal door. “It comes from the machines!” And flinging the door open with a hollow boom, he promptly disappeared into a chamber full of reverberating machinery.

I was paralysed by multifaceted apprehension – of Rainer’s mental stability, of his psychic world, of my dependency on him, and of the bond that was growing out of my apparently indivertible fascination.

“In here!” he yelled. What was he going to confound me with next? Again he shouted, “Come and see!” Feeling as if I were being sucked helplessly into a vortex in which lurked Rainer, Lord of the Black Hole, I followed his voice into the heart of the factory.

I found him peering hard at some pipes that connected a blackened storage tank to a generator and to other tanks related to the processing of yeast. There was a muffled hum and the strong smell of fermentation.

“The yeast cream tank is leaking. Look!” He was pointing at a join in the pipes from where goeey foam was dripping on to the floor. “The patterns are relating!” he yelled. “This is a definite message. Push, push, push – finally you hit the time-place conjunction!”

Unable to tolerate more of his gibberish, I asked: “Why is it leaking?”

He rushed out the explanation in a single breath: “The leak proves oxygen has crept into the tank causing the fermentation process to breathe giving off carbon dioxide and much greater energy, so the yeast cells are breeding at twenty times their normal rate, which means the tank cannot contain the pressure – it must explode.”

“How soon?” I asked in a matter-of-fact way.

He studied the temperature gauge on the offending tank. “Storage heat should be kept at six degrees to repress the one-celled yeast organisms, which are primed to react ferociously to oxygen. Now it is at ten degrees – at twenty the tank will explode and yeast cream will fly everywhere.” He turned to me in glee. “It will go off in two days ... no more!”

I found the threat of cream flying about to be so anti-climatic that I could not help laughing. “Can we come back then? A bun fight might cheer us up.”

My joke fell wide of its mark. Like a stalking lion, Rainer had crossed the factory floor to another tank marked *Centrifugação*. Following a sound that he alone could hear, he bent his ear to some thick cables on the floor. Then he ran to a tin cupboard from where he removed a pair of wire-cutters and raced back to the cables. With a vigorous snap, he sliced one open, sending sparks flying with plenty of live electric crackling. I moved well out of the way. Rainer stared hard at the smouldering severed ends of the cable. Then he shook one of them until several cockroaches fell out of the hosing and scurried off. He whooped, “One plus two plus three!” And to cap it all he began twirling round like a clumsy clown shouting all manner of absurdities.

After almost falling over, he abandoned his whirling dervish act and announced, “After the tank has exploded cockroaches will eat through the cable insulation ... there will be a short circuit and billions of yeast mushrooms will burst into flames ... the factory will be destroyed!”

In a fit of exasperation I yelled, “Switch the generator off, then! Then the tank won’t explode, will it? And the cockroaches won’t be able to cause a fire, will they?”

For a second he stared at me in dismay. Then he raised an admonishing finger, and announced, “There is no such thing as chance ... the factory must burn! One, two, three! It is synchronistic with the events that are unfolding through me ... one, two, three ...”

It was my turn to set off at a fast pace. I circled the generator looking for a switch. “Let’s turn this blasted thing off, and get out of this dump! Where’s the main switch? I’m completely bored with your rubbish.”

Rainer’s eyes followed me – sharp gimlets of derision. “Ha! You think you can control destiny, eh? You get an expanded brain and you think you are the conscious centre of the cosmos! Can you not see? Everything believes it is the centre of the cosmos. But the fact is: we are slaves – slaves of the Universal Field.”

The correct switch was nowhere in evidence. As I crossed his path he darted in front of me and engaged in a rasping hortatory address. “Superdeterminism! ... I allowed you to find out about the ‘ham’. Why? Because you can do *nothing* with the information. Why? Because it is not *your* story, it is *my* story.” The veins on his forehead were blue-black and fat with fury. “I tell you about the fire. Why? Because you can do *nothing* to stop it. Why? Because it is not *your* story, it is *my* story. And you know why you can do nothing? Because you, too, are part of *my* story! Result: everything ends in flames!” and he detonated a mighty roar to imitate an explosion: “*Baaang!* ... Superdeterminism: a power law of the Universal Field!”

In the course of this outburst I had to jerk my head away from the spittle that flew from his mouth. The combination of humidity and the lack of air in that fermenting den, and Rainer’s scare tactics had run me into the ground. My desire to switch off the electrics evaporated as fast as it had arisen – the Kruger factory could go to blazes as far as I cared. Rainer was right. I was not interested in interfering. It was his story, not mine, and he could stick it up his arse! I hurried out of the building through a series of doors.

No sooner had I got into the car than several workers tried to extract Christmas Boxes from me —“*Estou a pedir Boas Festas, patrão!*”— forcing me to close my window. As soon as they saw Rainer come out, they dissolved despondently into the adjacent buildings.

SECOND MEETING WITH KUDZI

At 10:05 – five minutes late – after a journey conducted in pressure-heated silence, we drew up at a blockhouse complex on the *Praça dos Heróis* which I had circumnavigated with Maeve and Joe in a USAID jeep on the day of my arrival. *Instituto de Investigação Agrária* was painted in makeshift red lettering on a battered and crooked board. More evident was the presence at the gate of numerous soldiers.

As I opened my door, Rainer stretched out a restraining hand. “Sure they will drive you back?”

I nodded. “Thanks for the lift!”

Lowering his glasses, he smiled and said, “Sorry for my rudeness. The factory fire is set at 48 hours from now. Of course I am excited!” He flicked a glance at the troops. “Be careful! If she drives you crazy, promise me you will not walk anywhere. Phone me if ...”

“Don’t worry!” I cut in.

I climbed out of the Peugeot to be immediately assaulted by flies and by the stony stares of the military. The grumble of an engine announced the approach of a heavy-duty vehicle somewhere behind the marble star on the Praça. Soon a bus appeared, roiling smoke like mortar, its chassis so twisted and askew that it leaned perilously to one side, advancing like a crab.

“Hey!” Rainer called out. I was surprised to find his eyes twinkling. “Remember: love is only scratching one another’s back. Saint Francis is a personal friend of mine. Today he cleans lavatories in Zeega – his punishment for refusing to acknowledge negative units.” He chuckled breezily, anxious to leave me with a good impression.

As I moved away I heard him add, “There is a female moth I know that devours her mate to acquire a poison that repels predators. She eats her lover to protect her eggs ...” but his voice was drowned by the roars and screeches of the bus as it pulled up beside me. At once scores of ebullient women poured out sporting bandoliers with “OMM” printed on them. They wore red scarves, floral *capulana* wrappers, and t-shirts emblazoned with the red star and figures of women wielding hammers and hoes. In this sweat-and-soap-scented tide I was swept towards the entrance.

Being a male and white eyesore, I was hauled aside by the soldiers and interned in an office. Shortly afterwards, Kudzi and a woman whom I had noticed at the slide show were brought in to collect me.

The emotion I felt upon seeing my lover was dampened by the position in which she had placed me: by encircling me with her friend, the military, and the OMM women with their imminent meeting, she had ensured that she was protecting herself from me.

Kudzi led the way up an attractive ’50s circular staircase, chatting all the while with her friend about the new security measures enforced by the army at the gate. We entered a video editing room dominated by a large glass cabinet containing a model of an African village. At once the friend slipped out a side door with the smirk of one who had orchestrated a blind date.

Without a word, Kudzi busied herself stacking tapes high on a shelf next to a poster that read: *Façamos da arte um instrumento de valorização das nossas conquistas!* (*Let us make art into an instrument to validate our conquests!*) She was wearing jeans and a strapless crimson top. The dimples that appeared in her bare shoulder blades prompted me to jerk my eyes away.

I thereby found myself staring emptily at the model village. A space extended like a mine field from my back across to Kudzi’s. She must have felt this, too, for she set about filling the silence with a spiel worthy of a museum guide: “The North Koreans built this model as a gift for Mozambique,” she proclaimed. “It shows how the ideal communal village should work – see the little signposts with information on agronomy, animal husbandry and ...”

I made an effort to concentrate on the balsa construction that had consumed thousands of man-hours: peasants and their huts and herds, fences of straw, paper crops, a lake and irrigation canals of glass – and everywhere splashes of colour to glorify this chapel of faith in a communist future, with the portrait of *Great Leader – Comrade Kim Il Sung* surveying the whole thing from the back.

Similar aspirations lay behind the *ujamaa* co-operative villages in Tanzania which I had shown sliding into languor during the filming of *Beyond the Plains Where Man Was Born*. When I showed Kudzi the film at Alan King’s London production company – a

place made sacred by “engaged” films – she had said with shining eyes, “You are an artist of commitment!”

“I hope to get this Unicef job,” Kudzi now said, “making re-education videos.” Time had not moved for Kudzi – she was stronger than time.

To avoid the painful issue of a job destined to split us in two, my gaze lingered on a transcript behind the Korean model which described the elevation of the Immortal Leader’s “Holy Family” to a trinity: the father (Kim Il Sung), the son (Kim Jong Il) and the spirit of *juche*, the ideology of self-reliance. But something about the facile cosiness inherent in this unholy alliance sent a surge of panic through me. I swung round. Kudzi was no more than two yards from me, still stacking tapes with her magnificent arms ... Goddamn it, the bond was as strong as ever – it was burning through us – she *must* have been feeling it too! Such a bond was far greater than politics – it was the fusion of our minds and bodies and souls.

“... Frelimo will collectivise a million peasants in Cabo Delgado,” Kudzi continued. “The videos will be essential since 95% of the *povo* in that province are illiterate. We’ll use solar energy to charge batteries for the VCRs ...”

It was the value of this sacred bond between us that she had lost sight of. Had she forgotten the night of the mysterious sound? ... I had been awakened by a throbbing that increased in volume like an approaching helicopter. Soon I could feel it in my chest, and, when it started shaking my heart, I had become alarmed and reached for the light switch: simultaneously my hand and Kudzi’s fell upon it, light flooded the bedroom and a circuit of energy running through us was suddenly made complete. Kudzi shone forth with such transparency that the essential aspects of her being were summarised in the two radiant pinpoints of her eyes, while an ardent sense of timelessness saturated the moment. I had felt that I myself was contained within her so that her eyes were also mine and through them we were both looking out at the world. As the pounding faded I heard – as if through wires from distant stars – my own voice mixed with Kudzi’s, both repeating “I love you” without a single movement of our lips.

“The seeds are fine seeds and we must water them!” My first words tumbled clumsily into the video room ... a curious statement dredged up from subliminal depths by the balsa wood agricultural village.

“What?” Her gaze met mine head-on at last.

“Something of great value! ... we can’t chuck away ... the seeds of ...”

She started moving in erratic circles like a highly-strung racehorse.

“... to blow passion away like dust!”

Her face clouded, and she slowed her pacing. Meanwhile, I had dried up. She said, “Filling your life with the so-called loss of me, whatever that is, it’s not passion.”

She drew up in front of the glass cabinet, leaned her forehead on it, and fought to calm her breathing. Pointing suddenly at the miniature village, she said, “You, too, need to do something that takes you away from yourself ...”

I presumed she wasn’t seriously suggesting I take up making Lego villages.

“You’re always wearing yourself out,” she continued, now leaning her back against the glass. “Even when we were getting along: you didn’t sleep. That’s why you get sick all the time.”

“Since when is hepatitis psychological?” It was not the moment to try to be clever; now it was too late to take back my impetuous remark so inappropriately laden with sarcasm.

“What do you want from me?” I choked as I sank down on a film editor’s chair.

She studied me hard; I could see her struggling to improve the bleak opinion she had of me. At last she said, “Stop seeing me as an enemy, that would be a good start. You’re hurting both of us with your ‘all or nothing’ blackmail. Accept that I’m neither a goddess who can give you everything you need nor a secret agent who’s out to get you. I so much wish you could be kind with me, and gentler on yourself. I wish you could be considerate in a sad situation.”

“What am I to do?” I stammered. I was losing all self-control.

She looked infinitely unhappy and it took her a long time to answer. “When you made *Beyond the Plains* ... you filmed Maasai rites. Remember?”

Every word she uttered was another link knocked out of my armour – soon blood might well be spilt.

She continued, “In the film you interviewed young Maasai about having to go through circumcision to become warriors. Yet in your own life you refuse to go through rituals, like refusing to grieve over the death of your mother, like refusing to accept that you must move on from me. You don’t want change. You even try and stop it. You once told me with pride – as if it were a proof of your strength – that you never experienced adolescence, that you felt nothing, there was no pain, no process, no awakening. You said, ‘One day I was a child, the next day, a young man.’ ”

She glanced up to see if I were listening, then continued, “For a whole year you made that film on the Maasai, yet it seemed to have had no effect on you whatsoever. It was as if you were asleep when you made it. Yet rites were its very subject!”

She had spoken at length, making the effort to communicate with me. Her words may have been full of sage counsel, but I could hear only a death-knell in them. I had to squeeze out the next sentence: “You make me sound like a subject of anthropological research.” Once again I regretted what I had said.

Unaware, perhaps, of the beast stirring within me or, possibly, out of a desire to bring things to a head and prove to herself that I was best forgotten, she persevered. “You think the Maasai weren’t scared stiff of circumcision? You think I have no fear of losing you, no fear of the death of ‘us’, ‘the couple’? Every day I live in dread of loneliness. You may scorn my vulnerability as weakness if you like, but faced by who we are now after six years together, I see no other choice for us. Make a ritual of me, Michael. That’s what you can do for yourself. Sacrifice me as ‘Your Woman’, and let’s construct something different but equally worthwhile with the affection we still retain for one another ...”

I leapt up sending the editing chair flying. “Kick the seeds out of the ground! Go on! Kick them to shit!” I yelled as I kicked at the floor with both feet, again and again. Kudzi sprang away – shock, distress, horror ravaged her face in quick succession. She flung the side door open and ran out of the room.

I went on shouting abominably at the walls and at the Korean village on themes of betrayal and cowardice until Kudzi’s friend hurried into the room with several soldiers.

They dumped me in a chauffeured Unicef vehicle and it drove me away. Slumped in the back, I imagined myself charging up hills that Kudzi had abandoned and raising flags on their summits to commitment and eternal love. I conjured up fine phrases like “Her ghost shall fade like those that came before her ... If she can’t give me what I need, I’ll find it elsewhere ... When she comes knocking, I’ll not be there! ...”

Then one phrase rose like an axe to cut short my inward oratory: “You have destroyed the raft for yourself and Kudzi.”

My bravura collapsed. I reached out a hand to steady myself on the passenger’s seat. Beneath the flotsam of my love, a torrent of despair come flooding in.

MAEVE

The violent lurch of a front wheel dropping into a crater re-introduced me to my immediate surroundings: we had reached the *Parque dos Continuadores*. The last person I wished to see in my present condition was Rainer Kruger. I told the driver to drop me off at the Polana.

My hands were still shaking when I found my temporary saviour: Irish Maeve sitting by the hotel pool under a red sunshade against a backdrop of the hazy and languid ocean. She was at a table laid with china cups, a silver-plated teapot and an assortment of Lobel’s biscuits. She wore a sleeveless low-cut floral dress and a straw hat that failed to stop the sun setting her paper-thin skin on fire. Her son and his American cousins were splashing in a chemical green pool under the supervision of a maid in an apron, squatting on a perimeter of cracked cement perforated by tufts of dead grass.

I do not recollect what was said while we had tea together, but I became pleasantly aware of the song of Maeve’s voice, of her eyes which were greener than the ocean as they slid over me, and her fingers which she used like ferns to caress her arms and thighs.

In no way did I plot my treachery, being too stunned for cunning. I yielded to the sexual signals coming from Maeve, who must have already figured out the feasibility of turning them into carnal reality by virtue of a permanent US government – and currently unoccupied – hotel room at the Polana, and an on-duty maid for the children.

Not a single word pertaining to the subject of sex was exchanged, until she leaned closer and asked me softly, “Do you have a condom?”

Her boldness brought a flush to my cheeks. I gave her a feeble Jack-the-Lad smile as I took out my wallet and looked in the side pocket where I keep stamps, toothpicks, pain killers ... and, one condom. Maeve called me a Boy Scout. She gave instructions to the maid, who was no fool and didn’t know where to rest her eyes.

The hotel room smelled of mould and overlooked the pool and the sea. Acting with the speed of someone who had a plane to catch, Maeve flipped the curtains then pulled me down on to the bed where she proceeded to remove my clothes as though I were one of her children, rolling me over to take off my trousers and underpants. She fell upon my sex with her mouth as if it were a mammary gland of which she had been deprived for too long and brought me, rung by rung, up the rudimentary ladder of sexual reflex.

When the time for the condom arrived she asked me about the Chinese lettering on the packaging. I explained that it came from stock given to Tanzania by the Chinese when they built the Tan-Zam Railway Line (along with a lot of toothpaste and thermos

flasks with an inbuilt obsolescence of twenty-four hours – although I didn't tell her any of this as the palette of my mood excluded humour).

She stood before me without fuss, peeling off her clothes to reveal a freckled skin, firm breasts with smooth, unobtrusive nipples, and a pear-shaped figure.

There was nothing aggressive about her decisive actions for behind them was a palpable sweetness. She was going about the satisfaction of her needs with methodical care. I surrendered to the raw material of her desire like a man seeking the miraculous resurrection of his soul.

I remember being embarrassed at my inability to express any feelings towards her: I neither liked nor disliked her; I did not hunger for her, nor was I repelled by any aspect of her. What I was doing was responding to pressure, suction and rubbing. And all that seemed to matter was that the automated irreversibility of sexual performance actually enabled me to step outside the infinite emptiness of myself, for the time it lasted.

Once the rubber was rolled on, Maeve promptly sat astride me and stuffed my member inside her. She brought her body down over mine and began stirring her hips and whining. The sweat we generated lent an underwater aspect to the proceedings and Maeve slid her breasts and belly on me as if she were trying to whisk up a lather. Once or twice I fell out of her and she patiently pushed me back in. She had to work hard to harvest my sexual energy, and I was surprised at how long my pouches took to fill up.

When at last they grew heavier and tighter it was a relief to give in to their clamorous demands to become the centre of my attention. I tried to hold off for as long as possible, knowing that my enemies would stay beyond the castle walls only as long as I remained hostage to the pleasure zone.

Cleverly Maeve orchestrated simultaneous orgasm. The vulgar urge that had driven life forward into forms of greater complexity for 4.5 billion years fulfilled its destined expression with a brief and insubstantial squirt.

She shuddered for a while. I floated on calm waters. Then we lay side by side, breathing freely ... motionless. Gradually and irreversibly, a heavy sadness spread over me like an oil slick.

The adventure ended badly. Maeve discovered that the condom had burst. She stuck her hand deep inside herself, and when she fished it out her fingers were tell-tale sticky. Upon which she went to the bathroom, flushed the failed device down the toilet and washed herself for a long time with the hand shower and soap.

Within the hour we were back at the pool. Through thickening veils of tension, Maeve fussed over the kids and ordered more drinks for them and for the stupefied maid. Then she took a scrap of paper from her bag and handed me the phone number of an engineer who had offered to put me up for a few days. I had completely forgotten about my request for alternative sanctuary. I thanked her.

She drank half a cup of cold tea, then asked me to accompany her round the pool. On the third lap she speculated on what would happen if she fell pregnant: "If the baby comes out pink all over, it will indisputably not be my husband's, and that will be the end of me and him." I told her to stop worrying about such an unlikely occurrence – a comment she did not appreciate. Her apprehension broke the fragile calmness that I had garnered from our unspectacular sexual encounter.

It was a relief when we all got into her Jeep and left the hotel. She dropped me off discreetly at the end of the Krugers' jacaranda road, then drove away with her host of children and her morally disturbed maid.

At that moment I hit my lowest point since my arrival in Mozambique. I was so engulfed in my sense of personal catastrophe, that I gave no thought to the distress I had brought upon Kudzi by the violence of my behaviour, and certainly I had no thoughts for Maeve.

After only a few paces along *avenida Francisco O. Magumbwe*, a cat with spikes of filthy fur dived into the road and stopped me dead. I instantly identified with this threadbare survivor of war and famine. Hunched on high legs, it stood and stared at me for some petrified seconds, before bouncing into a gutter on invisible strings.

As I proceeded towards the house with a lumbering tread, my *Mirrors* theory came back into operation. It was not just the cat that resembled me, but the city itself. I was a nowhere man in a nowhere place, both on their way to ruin. Maputo was an unhappy mix of African and Portuguese traditions and religions, while I was an ill-defined hotchpotch of races and cultures (in happier times I had generally accepted this as an enriching factor). Furthermore, the communist and capitalist forces that were tearing the country apart and reducing the capital to a non-functional zone where garbage dumps remained the only treasures for man and beast, were also at the centre of a personal turmoil that had left me stripped of a political belief system, wrapped in self-pity and unable to cope. On top of this, Maputo had dumped me in the lap of Rainer Kruger, both of us lost in a confusion of our own making while attempting to identify solutions: my *gaps*, his *blocks* – my *mirrors*, his *time-place correlations* ... infantile appellations by maverick analysts clutching at straws. All in all, my condition and that of the city filled me with disgust, and I thought: If I am to die in Maputo with Rainer, it won't be a bad thing.

RAINER SHOWS OFF AGAIN

Sweat was raining and breath was short when I rang the bell at the gate. I was astonished to find Rainer himself opening it. He, too, was hot and breathless, his face drawn tight like that of an over-extended athlete.

"Hello!" he barked.

A terrible thought occurred to me that he had returned from launching his rockets – and it had all gone wrong.

He shut the gate and trotted beside me shouting as if he had just emerged from a discotheque. "Millions to one, millions to one! Slicing this way and that!" – delivered while punching the air. Behind his belligerent stare lurked that "elsewhere" look that always put me on my guard. I made for the kitchen, and he stuck to my heels.

Tossing the doily from the ever-filled jug I splashed water into a glass and downed it. Rainer repeated my action using the same glass, which made me feel even more invaded.

Screwing up the folds around his eyes like a rhino's, Rainer burst forth with: "Our tails slashing ... cutting each other to pieces ..." – punctuating his words with sharp twists of his shoulders – "Kill or get killed ... the dead lie everywhere ..." – babbling away strangely in a semi-trance (I say "semi" because I was sure that the performance was being staged for me and that part of his mind remained ever present watching his effect) –

“Butting! Butting! Crocodile heads full of poison butting each other to death – only the strong survive! ...” and on he went about alien armies, in brief and often incomplete sentences.

Rosa, meanwhile, sought shelter under the table, but her master’s frenzy made it impossible for her to stop shaking.

In the midst of all this brouhaha, the image of Kudzi, her expression shocked and dismayed, kept circling the periphery of my consciousness like a predator. In an attempt to banish the memory of the unforgivable scene at the institute, I sat down and buried my head in a kitchen towel.

A sudden silence from Rainer prompted me to peep out: he was moving around the table, his body compressed as if he were about to attack invisible enemies. Catching my eye, he uncurled a fist and began tracing a slow path through the water I had spilled on to the soft wood of the tabletop; the tremor in his fingers was more than sensual, it was sexual.

“No pity is shown – never” – snatching up his hand he made chopping motions with it – “We are born to slash kill swim, faster and faster. Chase the heat of the Queen! Like famished dogs we dance to her rhythm. I am vicious with desire!” – and he slapped at the water on the table, splashing me with it. I leapt to my feet, but he took not the slightest notice. Raising his dripping fingers high, he began to shake them, tremolo, speaking now with a quaver in his voice – “Her pulse drives us mad ... There is a frenzy of killing ... Her odours come to me, riding in on the spray ...”

I was saved by a loud squeak of the back door as Agi came in, causing Rainer to stumble in mid-sentence. She no more than glanced at him, judging at once that he needed to be left well alone, and started preparing dinner.

The clatter of pots seemed to clear Rainer’s head. Finding his bearings he shook his head like a dog, and the sweat flew off him. I sat down again with a sigh. In the end there was always something real and dangerous behind the games he played. Solid foundations underpinned the stage he set for his theatricalities. My problem was deciding where theatre ended and reality began. I had no doubt he was planning his suicide; no doubt, either, that weapons were stacked up in the derelict tank; but as for the destruction of his factory, and now this “frenzy of killing, vicious desire” and so forth ...?

I re-filled my glass and I filled one for him. Which caused his attention to shift ponderously from my hand, up my arm, to my face. In a more recognisable voice he said, “Dramas, Miguel. There exist such dramas behind ordinary events. But you do not see them. Yet they are right there under your nose.” He rolled his eyes, and announced, “Good God, what a scramble and a fight I have had today!”

I searched his face for signs of a bar-room brawl at the Búzio perhaps, but did not pursue the subject. “I must take a shower,” I muttered.

He took his glass, and I watched his throat cords jerking as they pumped the contents. Then he squinted at me and said, “Sorry it did not go well with your girl. It is written all over your face.”

I got some satisfaction from knowing there was one secret I could keep from the intrusiveness of his uncanny perceptions – the episode with Maeve.

He picked up the towel heavy with my sweat and used it to wipe his own. “Ah, my friend,” he sighed. “How my filamentous form did tremble today!” (the expression as odd in English as it was in Portuguese: *forma filamentosa*). I caught him grinning at me: an

unexpected development that extended to shaking his head in disbelief and sniggering ... apparently at my expense.

“Certainly sounds exciting, whatever it is you’ve been doing,” I said testily.

With incredulity, he asked, “You have not guessed what is going on?”

“You’re probably on about flies or crickets or those Zeegans of yours.”

“Not at all! I talk of hybrids. Real-life hybrids, not the ones of your dreams” – tripping over his words so exasperated was he by my inept discernment – “Half beast, half human ... beings with a fibril tail and a head which is almond shaped and sly. Half a creature of the liquid realms, half a humanoid able to design rockets, write symphonies ...” – whirring to a halt like a failing machine – “Now, just now, I found the First Polar Body in the Hairy Zone. It was dead of course – suicide. Killed itself in the right-hand funnel ...”

I was heading for the inner door. “It’s hard to take you seriously, Rainer, when you’re ranting like a schoolboy. Whatever you’re on about, it may be *Star Wars* to you, but telling me about it isn’t like seeing the movie.”

The smell of peas from Agi’s pots filled the kitchen. Looking all beaten up, Rainer struggled to his feet, rubbing his forehead. “Head ... aches ... must lie down!” He moved forward falteringly. I went to help him, then stopped myself: Damn it, I was as washed out as he was!

He glanced at the kitchen clock. “Couple more hours – then it will all be over.”

“By the way,” I said. “I have a place to stay from tomorrow – an engineer friend of the Irish lady.”

He raised his eyebrows as if to say, “Do as you wish”, but I could tell he was hurt. Like an ill-assembled manikin with clothes in crumpled folds, he shuffled off down the passage, mumbling, “Heavy poisons fill my crown. Hold them back! – to the last, to the last ...!”

I went and stood under the shower for a long time, using up a lot of water. Straight after, I fell into a numbed sleep on my bunk bed.

THE SECOND ROUND

It was night when Agi knocked at the door and announced dinner. Raising my eyelids was like prizing open a coffin. By some miracle of science the electricity had come on, and the ceiling fan was struggling to stir the hot air like a spoon thickening soup.

Neither Rainer nor António was at the dining table. Agi served tomato salad in olive oil with leaves of basil. The Greeks were full of small talk, which was fortunate. Mr Kruger remained sullen with the usual murderous overtones. When he finally cracked open his mouth it was not to eat but to snap at me: “When are you leaving?”

“Tomorrow,” I shot back. Like birds after the gun’s retort, the Greeks fell quiet. Mr Kruger was unhappy to have been so quickly disarmed.

Agi changed the plates, then crept round the table serving us another chicken from the back yard. When she arrived next to the old boy, he rumbled, “Where’s António? Why’s he not serving?”

Without baulking, Agi answered, “Master Rainer is sick. António look after him.”

“Is António a nurse?” raged Kruger. “I don’t pay him to fuss over that wet lettuce. Get him in here!”

“I will try, Master,” Agi said as she exited barefoot and soundless over the perfect tiles.

Mr Kruger never uttered another word, which left the way clear for the Greeks to twitter on throughout the consumption of the main course. António had not made an appearance by the time I slipped away before dessert, blaming the heat. For once the weather had some use.

The moment I lay down there was a tap on the door, and a distraught António came in. He spoke softly out of the side of his mouth in his faltering English. “He wants you to come. He told me to tell you he has arrived at the Second Polar Body.”

“This means not a thing to me, António.”

He shifted awkwardly – it was difficult for him to ask for my help. “It is not good for him to do this thing. He is not strong. Please, you should come now, so he can finish what he wishes to show you. He says, bring your tape recorder.” António had never before spoken so many words to me. The anxiety with which he infused them was enough to make me believe he was genuinely concerned about Rainer, so that I found myself feeling sorry for him in his position as the harassed lover of a maniacal person who treated him uncaringly.

I followed the faithful one towards Rainer’s bedroom. As we passed the card game on the porch, Mr Kruger threw me an ugly look that trailed me across the living room.

Rainer lay fully clothed on the bed, his eyes wide, his muscles taut as rods, the patchwork of his veins throbbing: such entrancement was impossible to fake – this was the real thing. Hastily I suggested to António that we might best wait for morning to do any recording.

Stirred by my voice, Rainer slipped from the stranglehold of possession and strove to speak, without success. Further encouraged by António to stay, I decided that I might as well assume my role of writer and researcher. So I gave in, sat down gingerly behind the desk and switched on my pocket recorder.

During the next half hour Rainer ebbed and flowed across consciousness, erupting into jumbled sentences in that special disembodied voice he used on such occasions. Whereas earlier in the kitchen he had been recalling events that had already taken place, he was now apparently living them out blow by blow.

His constant point of reference was an exotic female creature, which I found odd in view of his sexual preferences. António soon joined in with direct references to her as though he, too, knew her with almost the same intimacy as his master. After much gibberish from Rainer including exclamations of a rich emotional range, António caused me to sit up by asking his lover, “Are you descending upon her?”

From their next set of outpourings I learned that the object of Rainer’s desire had “crimson filaments” which were “swaying”, and that the creature was of vast proportions. With his voice rising in impassioned excitement, he announced that he wished to destroy himself upon her “flushing yellow folds”, António all the while encouraging him to slide into her, not head on, but “at a creamy slant”.

I thought to myself: Now he is going to wish me to believe that he’s in the throes of a passionate romance on Zeega with an alien.

There was an unsavoury moment when my host went rigid, leaving his mouth open with a loop of spittle wobbling over his chin. António cleaned off the mucus soon enough. But when Rainer continued not to stir for several seconds, António began calling

his name, then slapping him harder and harder until this cataleptic phase finally gave way, and the vociferous and spasmodic one returned.

I was not unaffected by my host's emotions during this extensive session, for the bedroom was invaded by them, and they were validated by António's concern and increasing involvement. I even felt a certain envy for Rainer's capacity to be overwhelmed by such powerful feelings that swung from hot desire to icy terror. It was the pitch to which Rainer could stir himself, and the intimacy of the dynamics between the two men that were more fascinating than the dense and fragmented story which Rainer felt the need to convey to me for some unknown reason.

As António's participation in Rainer's drama became more intense, he took on a new role – another in a growing list in which he had moved from servant, to friend who shared his master's secrets, to devoted lover, to possible psychic who brought petrol when summoned from afar, and now to the “familiar” of a shaman of dubious intent.

Rainer's randiness rose to ecstatic proportions. As he began caressing the bare skin on his chest and stomach, he glowed with delight at what he poetically described as “her gaseous touch” and being licked by “her ripe pink granules”.

This particular stage of the saga came to an end when he lurched so violently that he struck his head on the wall (I thought he might have ejaculated in his trousers). António leapt forward, and finding blood on the back of Rainer's skull, hastily dabbed at it with a towel, asking, “What happened? What happened?” several times.

His lover squeezed out fragments of a reply – “cracked head ... broken on her envelope” – his torso jerking like that of a footballer heading an imaginary ball.

Poker-faced, António clasped him tightly in his arms and asked about “the struggle of the poisons” – an issue that caused Rainer's eyes to pop open.

It was hard for me to keep a straight face as the performance veered towards the burlesque. In the strong light from the single ceiling bulb I could see that Rainer's eyes were completely dilated, shot through with red veins, while their surrounding pouches of flesh were swollen and dark. More than ever he looked like a creature that had crawled out of the primordial soup, and the thought of ever again getting ensnared in his monster-filled microcosm was a dreadful one.

Throwing up a finger at the wall behind António, he shouted, “Look! Look! I blow out my poisons!” his expression growing bright with wonder.

“Pull your tail in!” António trumpeted in a voice that was less like his own. Rainer obeyed by contorting convulsively in António's embrace. They looked like a couple of wrestlers; and when António started to contort in rhythm with Rainer, the wrestling evolved into a sort of outlandish sexy dancing.

Voyeurism is not my vice, but this event had certainly become hilarious enough for my depression to completely abandon me.

In a crescendo of excitement, terror ran through Rainer's expression. “I am not alone!” he shouted at the empty wall ahead.

I stood up. “What the hell's going on here?”

With the muscles in his back bulging under his sodden shirt, António fought to push Rainer down on to the bed (in the trance state Rainer had mustered colossal strength – far more than his puny body seemed capable of). In the end António had to climb on top of his lover in order to pin him flat on his back.

In this position the two men remained united in a common struggle for some joint goal, incomprehensibly calling back and forth to one another in unrecognisable voices. Whatever Rainer had become, António was now also one of them. I dared move a little closer. António was definitely “gone”, his eyes having flipped into sightless mode; both of them united under a common spell, locked in each others arms, shuddering like an earthquake.

I felt cheated ... left behind. The acolyte had joined his master in a far-off place where I was unable to venture. Had they both been devoured by the voracious “She” like characters from the Alan Quatermain novel?

Suddenly it seemed to me they needed help or they would be lost forever. I grabbed Rainer by his collar and António by his hair, and shook them both as hard as I could. “Hey! Wake up!” I shouted. “Wake up!” ...

A booming voice resounded behind me: “What’s all this!” Had the monster of their quest come alive? ... But it was Klaus Kruger himself who was the monster, standing in the doorway, his eyes on stalks.

Any normal parent would have found the position of their son buried under the body of their servant to be a compromising one. Lifted by a wave of fury, the father advanced, moving fast for a man of his age. He seized António by the back of his shirt, which ripped instantly ... quickly shifted his grip to his abundant hair, and wrenched him off his son.

“Filth!” yelled Mr Kruger. “Get to your quarters!” And he rained blows upon the servant while letting fly insults on the theme of prostitution, such as “*Putá de merda!* ... stinking whore! ... filthy slut! ... etcetera!”

I have mentioned António’s unusual strength, evident in the carrying of suitcases and boxes of armaments. The thudding blows from the old man did not, therefore, appear to cause him any significant discomfort, but they did succeed in drawing him out of his trance. Cumbersomely he raised his arms to protect himself and gradually rose to his feet. When he became aware of who it was that was beating on him, his face automatically resumed a servant’s deference. Like a punch-drunk boxer he waved towards Rainer and mumbled, “He is not well, sir. He went crazy.” I was appalled by such obsequiousness; if he had wanted to, António could have picked the old man up and tossed him out the room.

Kruger’s thick eyebrows soared. “Not well? We shall see who is not well!”

Rainer, who knew nothing of all this, and whose hands were still clawing at the walls of his vision, was dragged off the bed by his father, to fall like a dead man on to the floor. Whereupon Kruger Senior set into him with his boots. “Get up! Useless! Pervert!”

Rainer did nothing, he lay face down, his body limp, all he did was groan a little in unison with the blows.

António protested, “Please, stop, sir!” which only intensified Kruger’s attack. Hearing no more cries of pain or pleas for mercy from his son, the old boy conjectured, “Perhaps he is dying? I hope he is dying!” And summoning further reserves of strength, he enhanced his kicking to such a frenzy that I found myself placing a restraining hand upon his shoulder.

My intervention proved as futile as António’s. So I levered my body between the father and son, receiving several kicks in the process. Eventually I shoved the big fellow: he staggered rearwards while striving to focus his bilious eyes on the person who had

dared intercede. Then he raised his fist to aim it straight at my head, and shouted, “You think I will allow this house to become a brothel for queers!” raising his voice to top “C” on “queers”.

This comment appeared to be the apotheosis of Klaus Kruger’s thinking. I waited, ready to duck the blow. The quivering fist held fast for several seconds ... then, to save face, he cursed me in German and stumbled out of the door.

No sooner had he gone than Rainer started giggling and squirming on the floor as if he were being tickled. I realised that he had not emerged for a single second from the drama of his own covert saga, and that the blows he received from his father had served merely as a complement to those that reigned upon him in his psychic war.

The withdrawal of the old man appeared to coincide with a reprieve in his private fortunes. He was soon squealing with delight, while covering parts of his body as if to ward off the invisible fingers of his passionate “Queen”. “Ah! She rips me to pieces! Here! ... And here! ... Ah! António, can you feel her?”

“Let’s get it over with,” António answered with a weary slur as he locked the door, then set about struggling to contain Rainer’s flailing arms. This time I came to his aid. We lifted the entranced body back on to the bed. But no sooner had we got him on to it than his spine snapped straight and his body started to judder again.

“This is interminable,” I exclaimed. “What’s happening? Goddam it, let me in on this!”

“Blending takes only a minute,” António answered.

In roughly that amount of time, the juddering tapered off. But I had little faith that it was over. Rainer’s eyes opened hesitantly and settled upon his friend. When he recognised who it was, he smiled and said breathlessly, “I am chosen!” In a posture of surrender he let his arm loll over the side of the bed. Then he whispered, “Thank you!” several times in an incredulous tone, not to António, but inwardly to his mysterious Queen. And at last, with the eyelashes of his hooded eyes fluttering like the wings of a moth, he fell silent, limp and still.

“Right,” I said to António. “You owe me a clear explanation.”

Looking at his lover with consideration, António surprisingly attempted an answer. “He is very united with you. It is he who must explain.”

“He’s the one who’s dragging me into his affairs. What’s this all about?”

He sighed and shook his head. “I do not know the names of the things.” Making a supreme effort, he continued, “He wants you to see that even acts you think are small – how do you say? – are with small importance ... even those must not be overlooked.”

“Rainerspeak!” I crowed. “Bravo, António! You do the Svengali act as well as your friend does.”

He tenderly mopped the star performer’s face with the bed sheet, and added, “My master thinks you must learn to see your own powers before you can understand his.”

“Is that supposed to be your explanation?”

Before António could say anything more, Rainer’s voice came up from the other end of time, base-toned and dreamy. “Ah, António! I alone herald the future.”

“God has spoken!” I mocked.

Rainer searched again for his lover’s face. “António! ... Does this not confirm that I carry the atom of change?”

António carried on mopping his brow. Rainer's gaze wandered ... and found me. "Ah, Miguel," he wheezed. "You and she are spinning a net ..."

António said sternly, "Tell him what is happening!"

"Pale, freckled skin. Green eyes. Not her clear emerald ... with brown flecks from your genes, Miguel. XXY – a girl it is. And the chromosome reading of her hair is ginger – like yours. Will you be happy to have a little girl, Miguel?"

These words ran down my back like a blade. What in the world was he implying? That all this sexual hullabaloo was supposed to be about me and Maeve? And I yelled something to this effect.

"*Caralho!*" He swore with vigour. "Idiot! Grasp the immensity of what you have done. Her egg is five kilometres high next to your triumphant spermhead. In the scale of moving masses you swam the equivalent of twenty thousand kilometres. Yet you felt nothing for her when you had sex – you feel nothing now! *Vai-te foder!*"

"You go fuck yourself! Pregnant! A few hours after I pull out of her! You made it all up – this rubbish sperm story!"

He looked as if he wanted to attack me if he could only get off the bed. "An insignificant fuck, Life-Lines start flying across the universe and you create a new world from dust. Go! Go ask her! Women have a way of knowing these things."

He fell back on the pillows. The stammering phrases he used in his final condemnation seemed to rise from his boots. "Can you not see you are chained to us all – to the Irish girl, to Kudzi, to me? You will not escape. Try to hide! Run! ... Go! ..." He broke off, coughing and choking.

"He must rest!" António told me.

António's tone, Rainer's scorn, the circles they both ran round me – it all fell in on me. I left the room, passed the dark abandoned porch, and returned to my haven.

CONVINCING EVIDENCE

When I came round from a restless doze, I was a quiver of nerves. The blackness of the Mozambican night was an abyss stretching forwards to the end of my life and everything I had become since childhood was swallowed up in it. Out there, tomorrow inexorably waited for me, and the day after tomorrow, and all the days that were left. The only purpose I could attribute to this series of purposeless time-slots was that of an endurance test, which I would not be able to survive, having been stripped by the loss of Kudzi of the necessary resources.

At the bottom of the abyss lay a profound and sinister presence, too dangerous to contemplate, better kept locked in its hermetic cave than ever dredged up into the light of day. If chimeras exist, this had to be one. Not only did I feel its tangible presence, but I realised that it had long been following me, watching my every move.

Soon a suspicion crept over me that the haunting chimera had been revived by my calamitous interchange with Kudzi, assisted by my recent encounter with Maeve; at any rate, its presence was making itself felt because of some association between it and them that I was unable to distinguish.

I switched on the light and paced the room in an attempt to lift my depression. After all these days, my rib still ached from the mugging. Outside, the stout piping of the bats conveyed a sense of permanence that I found jarringly fraudulent.

During this perilously low emotional ebb, an image blossomed within my inner vision like an angel, of a beautiful young girl with green and brown speckled eyes and curly red hair. The child who bore an uncanny resemblance to me, came complete with her own dynamic personality and inventive mind, which promised endless hours of stimulation. Already she was so well known to me that I could hear the cadences of her soul.

I hastily suppressed this misguided flight of imagination, although it had, at least, subdued the chimera.

Curious about Rainer's latest far-fetched escapade, I went to the shelves where I found a Brazilian encyclopaedia with an entry on *Reprodução Sexual Humana (Human Sexual Reproduction)*. My mind was certainly not up to any serious reading, but an illustration immediately captured my attention: there before me, in black and white on the page, was the flat, sly, almond head and the powerful tail of Rainer's ramblings – a human spermatozoon.

Skimming through the adjacent text I picked out bits of information that could be associated with some of Rainer's colourful descriptions: 60 to 100 million spermatozoa are ejected during orgasm; millions are slaughtered during the six arduous hours it takes them to travel through the genital canals to the egg which is 85,000 times their size; there are two eggs in the ovum, correctly described by Rainer and António as "Polar Bodies" – and in an heroic sacrifice, one has to die to ensure the survival of the other; finally, only one spermatozoon succeeds in getting into the egg's nucleus – it does so by smashing open its head on the egg's membrane and spitting out enzyme activators (the "poisons" that both men had mentioned).

This was science. And the scientific reality was no less fantastic than the journey my friend had described.^{vi}

DAY NINE – THURSDAY 27TH DECEMBER 1984

THE RAID

Men's angry voices ... Agi speaking with agitation. I cracked the Venetians open: soldiers were entering the property, they pushed Agi aside ... a military truck loomed large beyond the open gate ...

It had come – the showdown!: a house search for “the ham” ... Rainer executed ... and me – a long-term hostage to bungling diplomatic initiative.

No Peugeot in the driveway. I hadn't heard it leave. “*O patrão não está aqui!*” – Agi claiming that Rainer was out. A man in mufti (the trademark of a SNASP Special Branch agent) ushered the party towards the house.

My first instinct was to hide – except there was nowhere to hide.

They pounded on the front door. Agi screeched that there was no need to break in as the kitchen door was open. A soldier called her “a filthy South African spy”, which shut her up.

They were coming round the house. I crouched down under my window sill, too hastily: the slats of the blinds snapped – the game was up! Wrapping myself in my sweaty sheets I lay on the bed, assuming a foetal pose of harmless innocence.

Booming voices fired by moral rectitude echoed through the house. Their tone said, “We, the *povo*, can swagger freely in this palace knowing that it is ours if we choose to seize it.”

I heard Mr Kruger Senior asking what was going on. A soldier named him a running dog of imperialism, a paper tiger and “*um cagalhão*” (“a piece of shit”).

They crashed into the library where the first thing they saw was me, quaking. “Get up!” yelled the SNASP man. Two soldiers hauled me off the bed. I stood trapped in their arms, naked and blinking.

“Papers!”

The soldiers shoved me forward as if launching a bird. I crashed into the desk. I was convinced that my nerves would never be strong enough to cope with the full range of their brutality.

“Papers!”

I bent over my suitcase fumbling for my ID.

“Hurry!”

The agent snatched the plastic card from me. “This is not a passport.”

“It's a valid travel document,” I dared to say.

He revenged himself by tossing the contents of my suitcase around the room: a bag of butterfly noodles burst and scattered its contents, tinkling on the tiles. He knocked his knuckles against some tins of food. “*Que é isto?*”

“Tinned food,” I replied with unintentional sarcasm.

He was short and square, and his sweat-glazed skin enhanced his tough look. Swinging his strong neck like a horse, he shouted, “Get dressed!” then at his subordinates “*Levem ele daqui!*”

They grabbed me.

Agi was in the hallway picking at her mouth as they escorted me outside.

On the driveway Mr Kruger stood between two soldiers where the Peugeot was normally parked: with his legs planted apart he looked like the official statue of a great leader – but instead of a rifle or a sword in his hand he held a screwdriver from his work shed. I traversed the glutinous gaze of his contempt aimed at every one of us.

They locked me behind bars in the back of their Russian truck, a situation reminiscent of the final scenes in some of my films: *Rhodesia Countdown* – the body of a nationalist guerrilla dumped in the back of an army truck; *The Grass is Singing* – the black servant, Moses, walking handcuffed behind a police Land Rover; *Soweto* – troops encircling the township. But unlike the heroes of these movies I could not count on an uprising of the masses in my support.

People from the towerblock were filling the street, watching without emotion. I searched in vain for Toto – if anyone had brought in the cavalry, it was him. Then I wondered how Rainer and António happened to be absent at such a critical moment – surely not by chance alone. News of my arrest would spread – Kudzi would hear of it.

Soon the troops and the SNASP agent came through the gateway. They were not carrying rockets. Mr Kruger was not arrested. Nor was Agi.

GUARDA CIVIL – KIM IL SUNG

With the required ostentation we drove off, with me holding on to the window bars. My propensity for melodrama in times of crisis is beyond my control. Was it Machava Prison that awaited me with the tortured dead buried under the floors, sadistic guards, a lethal diet? Would my death be recorded as a mere statistic in the Southern African and British press? ...

Fortunately, concentration was fast becoming fractal ... retention quickly assumed an impressionistic quality ... time grew still, endless – pushing back the terrorising world that sought to engulf me ...

The truck takes corners violently. A surprisingly short drive by the time *Guarda Civil – Kim Il Sung* flies past, painted on a high sun-blached wall. The truck thunders through a black wooden gate manned by soldiers, into a marshalling yard big enough for a firing squad – the set for a Mexican cowboy movie ... even the dust is swirling.

It draws up before an open door – a narrow one. I'm pulled out ruggedly. The sun rebounds from every surface.

I'm shoved into a dim interior where I stare at the cut-out of myself in a block of sunlight on a stone floor. My eyes strain to adjust. I make out the fuzzy shape of a man. He snarls, "*Rua! Rua! Rua!*" I think he's ordering me to clear off, but it's the soldiers he's dismissing. Behind me the door closes ... now I see nothing.

Window shutters are pushed open ... slightly ... keen shafts of light slice the shadow of the man, he's in military fatigues. Abandoning the shutters he asks me to take a seat, terribly politely: "*Faça o favor de sentar-se.*" I still cannot make out his face, but a high-backed chair becomes apparent ... I sit down on sagging upholstery: How many interrogations did it take to ruin this chair? In front of me is another of those elegant "liberated" dining tables – on it, a neat pile of papers, a box of cigarettes and matches, and a heavy old '40s phone similar to the one in Rainer's factory.

The man sits down at the table preserving his sun-serrated opacity ... until he strikes a match to a cigarette in his mouth: he's a *mestiço* like Rainer – but in this case it's Indian blood mixed with African. He pulls in smoke. The match is slow-burning so that when he lifts his eyes upon me I can't miss his colossal gaze – it snatches away my last specks of courage.

An icy gash opens inside my duodenum. On the blade of his scrutiny, my life is on trial. I'm impaled by the cold steel of his finely-honed sense of purpose and by his needle-sharp cruelty. His method is to torture the bodies and minds of those who are handed to him; like a matador he has a strategy to wear you out, then polish you off. His is a clear and simple role; an operator without the complexities of pity or guilt. With him there is no debate; everything must end *his* way.

The match goes out. Now his cigarette flares brightly. The pleasure he draws into his body comes less from the smoke than from the anticipated nourishment of my blood. A coherent parasite locked on his host, for him sucking comes easily.

My penetrating lucidity comes to me like manna: never have I assessed a person so fast and adamantly, so directly and without impediment; never before have I absorbed information in this raw, sensual, naked way.

Again he draws on his fag, then coughs a lot, then spits into a sheet of paper which he crumples up and throws accurately into a corner bin: predictable behaviour from a crass breaker of harmonies. I know one more thing for sure: no shield exists that can ward him off.

I follow the axis of his gaze, which is a battered broadsword stained by mysterious densities – a weapon that has warred, and, most significantly, one that has lost ... for it bears the unmistakable traces of defeat. I follow it down to my stomach where it has lodged. Its lust for revenge sings in my ears. An acrid smell rises around me ... it is the odour of my own terror.

“*Vejo que fala português.*” (“I see you speak Portuguese.”)

With difficulty I look up. He is reading a sheet of paper. He says, “You visited Mozambique in 1967 as a student of Portuguese from the University of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. You came as a guest of the Portuguese colonial government. You can't expect this to please us?”

As astonished as I am that he has this information, I am too preoccupied with the engine of his encompassing scrutiny to want to answer. Even the wedges of light from the window have darkened under his influence.

“We brought you in here to update your file.” He picks up another sheet, reads it for a few seconds. “Things were hopeful when you were in Paris in 1968 with communist students. In 1970 your first film *Rhodesia Countdown* advocated war against the colonial regime. We have a problem with this. Can you guess why?”

I shake my head imperceptibly. He must be an expert of *ingelelo*, a speciality used by the Portuguese in their African territories to make you talk by cutting off bits of your body.

“You escaped from Rhodesian police by crossing the Victoria Falls Bridge. When you got to London you collected your negative from the British Ministry of Defence.”

It is so remarkable that he should also be aware of this fact that I lose track of him long enough for his iron grip to loosen ... I notice that the room is stifling and flies are

hitting into me, and also that my interrogator has switched to English which he speaks with fluency.

He rattles the catarrh in his throat, then goes on, “From 1970 you were filming in Ireland. Ha! Perhaps you can get weapons for us from the IRA? ... Yes?” Humour is part of his arsenal – to butter you up.

He throws a foot up on the table with a thud and pulls up his trouser leg – the limb is steel from the knee down. At once I recognise the source of his particular kind of power: here’s the injury he could never forget, the battle scar he’ll always resent – here’s the anvil for his weapons of torture – and here’s the proof of the accuracy of my insight.

After scratching his knee he goes “Bah!” and drops the false leg back on to the floor. “It’s your faithlessness that interests us,” he says as he stands up and comes round the table swaying like Long John Silver. He stops right next to me. I’m not looking at him, but I feel the strong electricity of his presence. “Why are you here?”

“To ... see ... Kudzi.” – my voice coming from afar.

“An admirable woman.”

A spark flies through me. I mutter, “Yes, I know.”

“You know?” he yells with outrage. “I know *everything!*” My sardonic tone has been a mistake. This is his play, and I’m his actor.

He points at a poster – it says in the party’s standard red lettering, *Não ao boato!*

“You see! – *No rumours!* Yet there are rumours in this city that Renamo bandits want to assassinate our heroic president.⁶ ... You have heard such rumours?”

I shake my head. He immediately strikes the table. “You think I’m a fool?”

Of course I know this is more theatrics, but I also know that his play contains nasty scenes in which I feature. He picks up a photograph and shoves it at me across the table. It’s the shot purportedly taken by António in the Greek Orthodox church of Joe standing with Miguel da Silva of the Búzio – except this is the original.

“Have you seen this photograph before?”

“No.”

“You’re no good at lying.” He flicks the photo on to the floor like a tedious toy, then comes limping towards me, clicking his fingers like a jazzman. “We can snap you like a stick! Snap! Snap! ... Now tell me what you know about a cache of mortars?”

The blood drains from my face, openly betraying me. He chuckles. “Tell me about the code-name *Fiambre!*”

I stammer nothing intelligible ...

He spits at me, the spittle burns my forehead – I jump up – he shouts for the soldiers – light bursts into the room – one man grabs me round the throat, another handcuffs my wrists, others knock me to the floor and kick me repeatedly, often on my cracked rib – I start howling and I hope to faint soon ... I think: This is only the beginning!

A phone is ringing and ringing ...

The kicking draws to an end. My howls subside to whimpers. My interrogator is speaking on the phone in a slow voice. Soon I hear him say, “*Sim! Ele chegou agora, camarada comandante!*” in a servile tone. His spittle has run into my eye, stinging it. Dust from the floor makes me sneeze – a cute, inappropriately human sound. He keeps saying into the handpiece that I am here in his office and that I am well. He repeats “*Sim,*

⁶ President Samora Machel was killed in October 1986 when his plane crashed mysteriously 50 metres from the Mozambique border with South Africa.

camarada” over and over, his voice weighed down with disappointment. Finally he rings off. I hear him shuffling papers – my fate hangs in the balance ...

“*Levem-o ao portão*” (“Take him to the gate!”) For the first time there is genuine emotion in his voice – intense frustration.

“To the gate?” a soldier parrots.

“Are you deaf!” he screams.

“And his suitcase, *camarada*?”

“*De...volvam tu...do!*” (“Re...lease eve...ry...thing!”)

Losing power is the most painful ordeal for him.

Outside, they remove the handcuffs. It’s hard for me to walk. The marshalling yard swings this way and that. With one soldier attached to each arm, they almost lift me across the quadrangle. As the distance from the detention room lengthens I feel my interrogator’s tainted sword being drawn from my gut.

We arrive outside the gate: Rainer is standing next to the 504 with António at the wheel – the back door wide open waiting to receive me, Rainer’s fingers resting on the handle. He sports a smug smile. “Had I been at the house, they would not have arrested you. Of course, I phoned them as soon as I found out.”

I want to fall at his feet and hand him the scraps of myself ... Please, Rainer, do with me as you will! I am a broken person. Make something out of me! In return I will talk to you, I will write about you, I will do anything you want. Just keep me out of African jails, off the streets of this violent city, away from dangerous people, away from the heat and squalor, away from Kudzi who smashes my heart ... and above all, take me far away from myself! ...

The soldiers push me towards Rainer like a hot parcel ...

Rainer, do you hear me? I don’t care where you lead me. I’ll fly with you to the ends of the universe. Wrap me in your cloak of miracles ...

I sink to the pavement. Everything spins to black.

THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

A smell of damp wood. My left side is jammed against something. My hand finds the back of a bench. As my eyelids flutter apart a shower of blue and yellow sparks cascade into my vision. My hand hurts – a blood-crusted cut runs across the palm: jumbled memories of my interrogation at the barracks tussle with the scintillant rain. More aches invade my body. I clutch at the bench and lever myself into a sitting position. Connection with a solid marble floor facilitates the retreat of the brutal recollections.

I have been stretched out on a pew in the nave of a large church, the windows of which are boarded up on the lower level. Obelisks of light slanting down from windows high in the dome smash to pieces on a hard-edged, bountiful chandelier, and sparkling shards are raining down upon me. It’s the first pleasant experience in a long while.

But what am I doing here?

The heavy scraping of stone on stone. Two figures heave a large slab over the floor; one figure detaches itself ... sways – the indisputable skeletal frame of Rainer. Behind

him is a tall screen⁷ carved with life-size biblical scenes; at its centre an arch gives on to a proud altar; beyond, on the rear wall of the church, a towering mural in red, gold and blue of Mary and the Christ Child. This seems like a good place for me to be at the moment.

The slab booms into a slot. António straightens up through a corona of dust, and moves to a fat wooden pulpit. His body is studded with silver drops of sweat. Now he's pulling the burly structure thunderously across the floor ... like puppet strings the finely distinct chords of the muscles in his arms harmonise with the movements of his back. Once the pulpit covers the slab, he straightens up.

Rainer sits down next to me, wearing an unfamiliar compassionate expression. "Are you feeling better?" he asks in a voice that reverberates in the vast marbled setting. I'm as dizzy as if I had not eaten for days. I welcome his presence.

Keys jangle as António walks past. I wonder what the pair of them are up to in this church, and why I am with them. But I am not at all worried.

"Come with me." Rainer clamps his hand on my shoulder. His eyes are softened by spectra of refracted sunlight. By now I know him well enough to understand that the command does not entail physical movement on my part. Everything is saying to me: "Surrender!" And then my lover's recent words come to me, talking of sacrifice ... saying I need to do that. Sacrifice what? Am I to make a sacrifice of myself to Rainer? What is it he wants from me? To be a blank page for him to write on? Or the raw material for his alchemy?

"Look behind the altar," Rainer commands. "At the Mother and Child!"

The Virgin Mary has her arms raised beneficently – a golden halo surrounds the blue caul covering her hair – she wears a brilliant red gown – her Child also bears a golden halo – two angels guard them, one on either side.

"Unfocus your eyes."

I obey.

"Watch the specks in your eyes, the *muscae volitantes* ... Let yourself float with the specks."

I do as he says.

"Follow them, and as they rise let your eyes close."

Blotches of gold, red and blue from the holy painting are joining and parting kaleidoscopically. I hear him say, "Together we will find the chimera!"

My single desire is to lose forever the thankless nuts and bolts of humdrum reality. I am weary, so weary ... you alone, Rainer, know how deeply weary I am. I fear nothing you may lead me to, because anything is better than what I now have ...

RISING FROM MY BODY

⁷ This screen in Greek Orthodox churches is called the iconostasis. It contains icons of Christ, Mary and the Apostles and divides the nave, where the faithful assemble, from the sanctuary which contains the altar and symbolises heaven. The iconostasis symbolises unity of the faithful with God through Christ. The pulpit I mention in the next paragraph is not a pulpit but the enormous Bishop's throne.

... Something happened like a spasm, a lapsus. A whole part of me shifted several inches to the right. Blasts of colour continued to strike my tightly-closed eyes, of which there were now two separate pairs ...

A hazy space appeared between the two of me, and for a while I floundered there. Eventually, this space settled into a transparent bubble around my head. I saw my face reflected upon the inside of it, but at the same time it seemed that I was looking back at myself from the sticky surface of the bubble itself. So I could not tell exactly where I was.

After arduous pulling and stretching, the bubble detached itself, instantly severing my five habitual senses. I found myself floating in the nave. The bubble had become my sole focal point from where I could see my body staring up at me from the pew, like a dead thing. I was not alarmed by this separation because all my feelings – that is to say, the normal ways of feeling – had been amputated. And even though I had no control over the bubble, this did not seem to matter either – the encapsulation, the floating high, the abandonment of trauma, all this was welcome in an abstract sort of a way.

The bubble sailed through the arch in the sculpted screen. Moving over the altar, it continued through the painting of Mother and Child, and straight through the back wall as if it were made of air ... whereupon I lost sight of my body altogether. I even had the presence of mind to surmise that I was well rid of it.

As my bubble rose through the branches of a spathodia tree bursting with bright red petals, I recognised the overgrown towers of the Orthodox church and, on the other side of a courtyard, the Palace of Marriages. The top leaves of the tree were tossing in the breeze, refreshed by the recent rain. My mind was a powerful light of reason that threw itself upon these leaves: I acknowledged their contentment through their lustre, their consistency through the abundance of sap that beat in their fibrils; I found myself satisfied by their correct functioning according to their expected condition after receiving much needed rain: *All this was as it should be*. In my new condition I attained an angelic purity of discernment, which is the selfless acceptance of outside existences.

It is impossible to describe how exactly I was receiving this information. For example, I was not seeing anything through means that were explicitly optical. I was not *looking* at the spathodia tree, but rather *receiving* it in all its particularities of shape, texture, vegetative movements and functions. I had the impression of being able *to get a grasp* of the tree by momentarily participating in its life process ...

With billowing confidence I rose above Maputo. My bubble was a single eye like the sun, pitilessly surveying a decaying city populated by lost souls ...

Then, with the painless speed of an anaesthetic, another lapsus occurred – a blind spot ... When I came out of it, I found myself hundreds of miles above the earth, with the continent of Africa extending northwards as far as Egypt, and southwards to the Cape Province. My new site was a ring that vibrated like a high voltage grid, and extended on either side of me to the far sides of the planet. It was like riding on one of the rings of Saturn ...

A series of jumps in locus followed:

First locus: Lodged within a vector of the ring. Highly-charged streaks in all spectral colours were shooting downwards, flickering into webs across the earth's atmosphere – the release of energy was enormous, as if a global lightning storm were taking place.

There was no sound, like seeing it all from inside an airplane. I thought: Such a ring has the power to pulverise the earth to dust, then create it again from dust ...

Change of locus: Passing through the vector. My bubble sped along a filament that ran both before and behind me, but was also part of me like an umbilicus; this vital cord served as a directional force which, like a winding road, led me through a crinkled three-dimensional landscape ...

Change: Piercing the vector's membrane. The tip of my newly acquired filamentous form snaked towards towering heights whose porous surface was sucking me in – I was pulled through, tail and all, disappearing like a thread into a vacuum cleaner ...

Change: Within the core of the ring. My filament adopted a phosphorescent glow and a sharp static buzz. In here other filaments were running everywhere – a jungle of twisting interweaving luminescent tubes. They all had signals – racing ranks of tracers similar to a variety of road markings seen from a moving car – but with striking variables in size, pulse and colour. I was carving my way through this circuitry, full of confidence that I knew where I was going – the sort of robust assurance based on nothing and common among the young.

The source of this attitude lay in a sequence of tracer particles particular to me. None of the other lustrous rucking filaments resembled mine in any way. I gradually assumed that the coded filament in which I rode had to be – in Rainer's parlance – my Life-Line.

Every shift of perspective on my trajectory brought further discoveries. The identification of my own code showed it to be far more complex under the surface: layers of sub-codes descended into a microscopic haze which was the edifice of my entire being, from the incredibly complex design of my body, to the gifts and shortcomings of my intelligence and imagination, to my psychological impulses, and to everything else that made up the hominoid and unmistakable *me*.

Recognition of my base code gave me instant access to the sumptuous variety of structured Life-Lines that criss-crossed with mine. Streams of charged particles that were pouring in from the upper surface of the ring's membrane glowed with the cool blue light of purpose as they transformed into crystalline blocks with unique sets of axes. Isomeric cages stacked up then contracted into compounds that soared into spirals, double spirals and six-sided honeycombs. Many assemblies at the brink of collapse miraculously coalesced into revolutionary designs that saved the day. New came out of old, and more new out of that. Strands bent like backbones, stretched, then curved back on themselves to double their strength. Swarming granules packed themselves into the centre of helixes. It appeared to me that every animated formation I came across was being fitted together with millions of carefully thought-out bits.

The ingredients of this sparking domain contained such lightness of being that they resembled thought processes, of which I was one. I believe that I was able to acknowledge the uniformity of the place because it was ultimately one big thought broken down into sub-thoughts, so by proxy I was able to think it, at the same time as it was thinking me. Because my Life-Line and those of the bundles of energy around me slotted together like bits of a jigsaw puzzle, I could respond to the patterns of their substance, to the harmonies of their intelligence and to the thrust of their purpose. This cohesive bond enabled me to perform superhuman leaps of insight into the complexity of maturing structures.

Grace and elegance ruled these dramatic transitions in which geometry and mathematics were king and queen. Forms developed new forms by calculated scale shifts. Storms of flake-like particles pouring in from the ceiling of the ring were promptly nailed down, hammered into shape. No melting into entropic diffusion was allowed inside here. No space for mismatch. No disarray. Even the peripheral fibres of surfaces were finely honed.

Clarion calls for order resounded everywhere. I witnessed configurations of Olympian variety. Spirals with identical base sequences lined up like pine trees. Disc templates of every colour spun this way and that in search of their siblings. Leaves that glittered like mica fused to make walls as resolute as steel. Bricks with the density of diamonds were fractionalised into delicate fans of light. Pathways of prismatic beauty raised themselves into gilded towers, or folded into azurite caverns. There were constructions that looked like butterflies, and others like worms. In every direction iridescent blocks were being stacked into an architecture of needles, fists, breasts, flowers, feathers ...

And always, despite the maze of constantly shifting matrices and an ocean of eddies and flows, I was able to re-find the simple definition of myself. In the immense halls, my signal was as insignificant as a single follicle among clouds of dust, or as common as a shooting star among the galaxies ... yet I never lost its fractal values, nor the frequencies of its unique score.

DISCUSSION WITH RAINER – (ON DAY TEN)

The next day (Friday 28 December) at Costa do Sol I had a discussion with Rainer about what had happened to me in the Greek church. I have brought forward relevant extracts from this exchange.

RAINER: It is not a ring, as you call it, but a sub-Field that envelops the whole planet. You mentioned showers of particles or flakes pouring in from the upper interior surface of the sub-Field. These are units of information for the government of life on earth, which have congealed on the exterior of the membrane at a temperature of absolute zero. They form an inert gelatinous substance, a sort of mud. This “mud of life” has come from the Universal Field itself, which encircles our Universe.

MICHAEL: Life from dead sludge?

R: There is no such thing as dead. Stones and metals are teeming with vibrant particles. Before the business of congealing around a sub-Field, life exists as an encoded whole without form or structure, a quantity of matrices in a continuous-wave state.^{vii} The consequent reconstruction and activating of a Life-Line is what you witnessed happening inside the ring.

M: If that’s your heaven I saw, it’s far too hectic for me! I’d rather remain in Zimbabwe.

R: *Paciência!* You only went as far as the Earth’s sub-Field. Now try and picture the process for what it is: information being passed down through relay stations ... like Russian dolls there are Fields within Fields. The sub-Fields are phase transitions where patterns are decoded and then concentrated into greater mass and complexity. This is how Life-Lines are prepared for activation.^{viii}

M: I’ve not heard astronauts describing any rings or Fields round the Earth.

R: Then all I can say is there have been no astronauts with psi vision.

M: My apologies! That was a flippant remark.

R: The process of converting energy into tangible life-forms is a wondrous one, and you have seen it, Miguel, with your own psychic eyes while sitting in a church: you entered your own Life-Line on a psi wave that swept you out of your body and up to the parent Field of supreme concepts around the

planet. Not many can achieve what you did. I'm amazed you can remember it so well! ... What else did you encounter up there? Perhaps we can identify some of the blue-prints you found?

M: I discovered intricate patterns ... magnificent order ...

R: Ah, what splendour to see the Earth Field at work, decoding information, lining it up in sequences, digitalising it into forces with different values! All that mass of energy being translated into the grammar of language Earth.^{ix}

M: Trouble with your Field idea is that it sounds the same as a soul or a Life-Line to me.

R: *Porca de deus!* Let me try and be more precise: energy exists at once around a Life-Line as a Field directing its functions, and within it as activated building blocks – at once as data and as substance. People with some psi ability, and who have seen a human “bubble” as you did, have named it a halo or nimbus, even though most of them do not know what it is. Your halo is *your* sub-Field containing all information on the functions of your Life-Line both as a human and an individual. You remember I told you about General and Specific Life-Lines, one for the species and the other for the individual?... The halo is not to be confused with the aura, which is an electromagnetic field produced by the body, whereas your halo actually produced you. The sub-Field you connected with from the church was the Earth's halo, so to speak.

M: This seems paradoxical to me: how can something lie at the heart of a being as atoms with which it is constructed, and at the same time hang around its brain as a halo directing its operations, and even creating it?

R: But it *does!* Sometimes nature goes beyond common sense. The Universal Field is Field-like when it directs functions, and Life-Line-like when it creates a building block. Keep thinking of this stratification to avoid confusion: nature operates at the same time on two levels – a blue-print level and a living active level.

M: I'd prefer it if you explained how I became separated from my body.

R: All Fields are the brains of the Big Bang universe of which your mind is a distant echo. They are basically replicas of the initial brain – the Universal Field – that set off the Big Bang.

M: And the Universal Field is like a continuous wave of energy. Isn't that what you said?

R: That is the best scientific analogy I can find. Now I must ask you something: Did you not say you first saw the bubble to your right?

M: Yes.

R: At the human level of evolution the brain has two hemispheres: the right side, where instincts lie as well as feelings, emotions and psi; and the left side, which is the seat of reason. This is a generalisation but it will do. Only the Upper Zeegan brain has amalgamated the two functions as one.

M: Why did I shift to the right?

R: You always lead off to the right when you follow a psi wave. Those Apostolics you saw in the street love to get stuck in trance in the right hemisphere and never move out – trance for them is a catharsis rather than a psi route to the secrets of life. But what you did in the church was superior: you rose up to the Earth Field, gathered information intuited through psi, and then passed it to the left side of your brain to record it for future analysis, if you can be so bothered. Unfortunately, judging by what you have told me, you only made connections with positive dynamics; that is because you let your emotions in and made subjective choices.

M: To be happy to see healthy leaves on a tree as I rose from the city is hardly subjective. It was a fact.

R: Happy is the wrong word. To be objective you need to be equally happy to see a supernova explode and destroy thousands of light years of life. The entire universe consists of counterpoints. But you chose to see half-truths.

M: I believe I saw things with great clarity up there.

R: Let me assure you: it is difficult to avoid polluting psi perception. You were so keen to get away from your painful problems that when you entered the Earth Field the right side of your brain was flooded by emotions crying out for pleasant encounters, so that is precisely what you found. While before, on the American boat, fear made it impossible for you to enter the Zeegan Field system.

M: You're wrong. I also saw terribly destructive formations as well. But I'll tell you about them in a moment. Anyway, you must be exposed to plenty of biased perceptions yourself because you're just as neurotic and emotional as me. Who in their right mind would play with political crossfire to get themselves killed, for God's sake? ... Now answer me truthfully: Why did you take me to the church straight after picking me up?

R: You were in a bad condition when the Guarda Civil released you. I needed a place where we would not be disturbed, so I could help lead you out of yourself. António had the keys to the church, so...

M: I doubt that's the only reason we went there.

R: Well ... I also had to check something.

M: Mystery?

R: I told you I intend to move the arms cache out of the garden at an appropriate moment.

M: Ah, I see! Is that why you and António were moving things about?

R: Looking for a suitable place, yes.

M: But tell me – why do you like hypnotising me? Isn't that what you did once again in the church? Like on the boat?

R: If I could conjure up the treasures of the Fields in your mind with just a little power play, then I could really call myself the Son of God! All I did was help you rise out of your body, which was easy since you are so anxious to escape from it. After that, my dear Miguel, you were on your own. Do you still not understand that this visit to Mozambique is ideal for you: the heat, the war, your exhaustion, your disorientation, your madness over Kudzi – all these things have built up into a catalyst allowing you to crash through your rational barriers and open yourself up to psi domains which normally lie beyond your range like unploughed fields.

THE FORMULA FOR CYCLONE

As I travelled through the ring I believed that I had discovered the morphological roots of everything that dwelt on the earth. It was like passing through the Palace of God. I became a laser of analytical prowess, a perceptive genius of synthesis: I could amass millions of functions into neat categories according to type; if called upon to do so I could translate carefully labelled packets of energy, explain the purpose of stimulants, and the targets of transmissions. The anatomy of substances became as familiar to me as the shifting expressions of Kudzi's face – I could sense their quality, feel their mass, hear their distinctive call.

(In retrospect I can appraise that I passed through a cloud of hydrogen because I was able to gauge sequences in it of exactly one hundred spectral lines; I also think I perceived the rank-order of the basic elements; and I have no doubt that I observed the designing of a butterfly's wing at a stage when rivers of colour were being injected into it – a manoeuvre controlled by hormones.)

Thereafter I arrived in a region where things started to get unpleasant. A swirl of tenebrous brackish matter, structured as four distinct movements, was coming towards me from the obscure limits of the ring: the first movement originated at the centre of the event and featured a rigorous updraft, which harvested a profusion of units of hot moist air; at the summit, harvesting gravity through condensation, the mass of units about-turned and rained down upon a cold dry platform; here, the third movement was initiated by the coldness of the platform which made the vast assembly expand like a twisting anvil until the critical final movement was attained in a rotary wall-cloud of devastating effect.

I soon recognised in this build-up of small time-steps and in these hydrodynamical equations, the parameters of Cyclone Demoina herself. And I also came to acknowledge an astonishing truth: that without these strict conditions, there could be no time nor place for the cyclone to be activated in Mozambique or anywhere.

For a few seconds the resolution of the theorem was neat and pleasing to my rational prowess, until the event rushed upon me with a roar ...

It was disastrous: in an instant I was transformed from a rider into a prisoner of my own flight path, to be dispatched by commandeering gales straight into the thick of the towering thunderhead ...

DISCUSSION WITH RANIER (CONTINUED)

R: At last! With every set of growth equations there is another for extermination which you failed to see ... until you smashed into the cyclone. You have to admit, the cyclone was unlike anything you have described to me up to then.

M: Before that I received a very convincing display of growth patterns. No matter what you say, I found a symphony of harmony.

R: You even admired the intelligence of cyclonic behaviour until you realised that havoc was its objective – then you flipped into terror. In every aspect of your life, the negative is always indigestible to you; the right side of your mind runs in terror from it, the left provides rationalisations to quell your fears. You have never succeeded in objectivising your feelings: look at your reactions to Kudzi! Your arrogance towards her is a giveaway.

M: My arrogance? That's a bit steep coming from someone who sees the cosmos as a cruel absurdity, then puffs himself up to make believe that suicide is the solution. The expanding sophistication of forms felt very real to me. Of course I loved the experience. Who wouldn't admire such beauty?

R: Then tell me: why did you panic when confronted by a cyclonic pattern?

M: I agree fear came charging in. That was my fault ... the rage of the cyclone was too big a shock for me. But I strongly disagree with your bleak vision of things, Rainer. My intuition – call it psi intuition, or just plain psi if you like – tells me there must be harmony, somehow the negative must be contained or eliminated.

R: Let me remind you of your Pegasus dream where you wept because you knew that beauty does not last. I myself long for harmony as much as you, Miguel, yet all my activations have been ruinous.

M: Because you're emotionally biased towards the negative. Not surprising with a father like yours, if you ask me!

R: I was a decent fellow when I was Richard III. Where did that get me? – reincarnated as a Gurr on Zeega where I was treated like a dog. We called ourselves Gurrs – they called us Lower Zeegans to belittle us. And here's something else: you know who I met there? – Hitler! Before coming to earth he was called Torrax, a skilful high-energy organism with developed psi, and the capacity to rationalise tyranny by calling it heroism and more. He was exiled to a satellite planet of Gurrs by the Zeegans. That's where I met him. After his death there, back he came to earth as Adolph Hitler ... like a cyclone ... a humble functionary doing his job as a destroyer. We have not heard the last of him, you can bet on that.

M: Your pessimism is the worst – it's morbid.

R: Even worse, since it is founded on the eternal absence of harmony, since it implies there is no moral route to higher forms. Evolution is not influenced by ethics, only by the best method to obtain more power. Gravity is an obsession to attract mass for itself, love an obsession for unity. St Francis's love is as self-promoting as Hitler's greed. And Richard III is innocent, yet I am sent back here to run a yeast factory in this hopeless country! ... Answer me this: why do Zeegans avoid communicating with humans on earth?

M: How should I know!

R: Because they have no moral compunction, that's why, despite all their scientific and psi powers. They come to earth often, usually through psi look-in, but sometimes directly to collect specimens. But they refuse to bring you humans directly into their sphere of influence because they see you as too much trouble ... and also you have nothing they need. So they let you rot ... Now let me tell you this: when I was a Gurr in Zeega – which was like being a black man in Mozambique under Portuguese rule – they applied this same indifference to me, because for them, Gurrs are on the same low level as humans, low in the sense of further down the evolutionary tree. So what did they do? ... they dumped us on a satellite planet and put us to work. Ah yes, despite all the barriers they raise against me, there are certain things I can still recall! Like using me as slave labour to make a nutrient for them called Rodeenon. How can they behave like that, while at the same time claiming to have solved polarity and created equilibrium within a super-galactic circle that includes the Milky Way?^x

M: Well I certainly know all about lack of equilibrium. Kudzi says I have always been ruled by a deficiency that I forever seek to fill. Would you believe it, she's even given it a name: "The Gap"!

R: I have seen a scar running across space-time in which energies are lined up in completely different ways to those in our universe. Guess what it is? ... a shock wave from another Big Bang outside our system! But in Zeega, that is top secret. So you see, Miguel, the finger of destruction knows no boundaries. In multiple universes connected by tunnels, enemies lurk everywhere.

SWEEPING THROUGH AFRICA INTO MY PAST

... Jammed in a funnel of bad Life-Lines I was shoved earthwards. Like an elephant's trunk sniffs for food, the funnel scanned Mozambique for suffering. Finding responses was straightforward: dozens of torched villages; a mile-long column of refugees; Renamo soldiers ambush food relief lorries, cutting the throats of the drivers to save bullets, mutilating bodies to advertise their resolution; a crowd in a town square watches a uniformed Frelimo soldier shooting a Renamo captive; an Italian missionary recites the Lord's Prayer up to "Thy Will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven" at which point a man from Renamo disguised in a Frelimo uniform hacks open his skull with a machete; underneath a power-line from Caborra Bassa dam, a brigade of Slav engineers is kidnapped by who knows who ...

I swung over the continent like a tuner moving across radio stations, all playing the same dirge: South African townships vibrate as whites shoot blacks, and blacks shoot each other; to the north – drought and pestilence leave humans to die along with the great animals of the plains – only microbes and some insects will survive; to the West – men chop down giant trees for foreign companies, and others slaughter every single beast, tame or wild, in order to eat for another day, while their leader builds a cathedral one metre larger than St Peter's ...

Fired with the conviction of a final solution, the funnel assumed the sweep of a curse – the entire continent is marked. Seductive notes were calling out to me, vying with one another to sing of the greater disaster ... and I sensed that beyond the range of these African Life-Lines lay unlimited nourishment ... the accumulated suffering from millions of brain centres, in every nation, in all the world ...

As time-capsules of receptivity rose to needle-sharp shrillness, I yearned for more personal examples. For this, I looked behind me: on the Serengeti in 1976 eating tough goat with Parkipuni the Maasai during a break in filming; a sand storm drives us into a tin shack where I slam flies against the walls with a bloodied newspaper; for hundreds of miles around cattle lick the shrivelled earth more times than hope can sustain ... In Zimbabwe outside my future house, the owner – an English settler called Thomas – stands next to his cages of prize bantams ... from behind a clump of trees a rocket is fired into his property by a guerrilla cadre, in the blast flaming balls of feathered flesh boulder across the lawn ...

I shook my Life-Line long and hard like a dog until the shards of Africa fell off it ... every one of them.

Cold air – damp grey London air: a stained toilet forever wheezing; silverfish scuttling under carpets; generations of dust nailed beneath the floorboards; in the flat above mine, Mrs Tubbs, aged ninety and drunk on sherry, falls out of bed knocking plaster off my ceiling; next door, a retired accountant, red-faced from beating his crippled wife, is interrupted by Meals-On-Wheels arriving to feed her; back from the pub at five

past three, Sid grasps the railings, breathless from eleven pints of beer and emphysema – I watch him on his way up the stairs ... he falls and dies; across the landing Mrs Moody peers through her door soiled with Sunflower oil from her arthritic fingers, and curses Sid for lowering the tone at Spencer Park ...

A compilation of intensities weld together as I stand at the window listening to the winter branches of Spencer Park speak of severance ... A voice calls from the shadows, female and wounded: “I opened my soul to you, then you stole it!” – I trace her voice to the effigy of a Congolese crocodile god standing in a corner, its wood cracked from neglect, its glum reptile’s face resting on its belly where its hands lie crossed. I recognise the voice: it belongs to the woman who gave me the statue as a present years ago in Zambia – a woman who was scorned by me. I go down on my knees before the statue, joining my hands, meeting it position for position.

A mediaeval monastery. Sunlight through an open window arch. I’m lying on a hard bed with my hands still clasped over my belly, except that now there’s a wound in it received from a Saracen lance during my last crusade. A nun walks in, all smiles. Taking my hands, she says with gentle mockery, “Have you forgotten how to pray? You must place your hands together,” (she made a triangle of them across the wound in my solar plexus) “with only your fingertips touching. And when you’ve finished, you must say, ‘Arom!’ Remember that! – ‘Arom!’ ...”

A sharp cone of sunrays strikes my hands now joined in prayer, while swallows back from Africa fly through one monastery window and out another, dispersing the pain of my injury on the brilliant metal of their wings.

... Thousands of switches are closing down ...

RETURN TO SUSPENDED REALITY

... Someone is stroking my head.

I open my eyes: a filigree of branches flickers across a car windshield – it is raining ... the rain drops are green ... the rain is a thousand lettuce-green insects becoming essences on the glass. Above me, a nose looms, each nostril soft and hairless as that of a horse – it is Rainer’s. “Hello! At last!” he says, baring his stacks of teeth – they jerk me nearer to pedestrian reality. My body is lying across the jagged springs of the car’s back seat, with my head in his lap. By hitting a bump, the car helps me sit up ...

Ahead: is it my Life-Line I see? – or an insect-ridden street of the beleaguered city? ... No matter, I’m moving on – to the next phase; eight hundred years behind lies a monastery housing a buoyant nun ...

António is driving. He glances round. Instantly he gauges my psi condition, while Rainer pats my thigh as if I were a good dog. My body is reassured to be among allies, but my mind reserves judgement. My focal sensor, a good six inches outside my head, shakes to the rhythm of Rainer’s next words, each of which arrives loaded with meaning: “It is not so nice to come back, isn’t it? Sometimes I kick and fight to avoid re-entry. Are you all right?”

“Are you all right?” the last sentence interests me as a byte of information that requires one of two replies: a yes or a no. “Yes,” I answer, the report on my bodily state

having been made with the speed of a finger hitting the affirmation key: yes my body can walk, talk, eat, excrete, sleep, perfectly normally.

“What is 2304 multiplied by 65?”

“149,760,” I reply without hesitation.

Rainer laughs. I know he’s testing my split-mind state. He scribbles the sums on the back of a cigarette pack, does the maths, and laughs again ... less comfortably. When he says, “Well done!” I find I am indifferent to compliments.

I do not care where António is driving me and my body. When we pass by the venue of Albie Sachs’s slide show, Kudzi crosses the ocean of my brain like a ship in the night; I’m surprised to find that she leaves no wake. I obtain a sense of regained freedom from this.

Rainer challenges me with a more complicated question: “My father is a cruel bastard, and on account of this he could be killed, or he could kill someone like a government official, or kill himself – isn’t it Miguel?”

Even I am surprised by how fast I answer: “Yes, he’s cruel. No, he won’t kill himself. Yes, he could get killed. Yes, he could kill someone, but not an official.” In a fraction of a second I had weighed up a mass of information about Mr Kruger: he was of too little consequence to be killed by the state; the only person who might feel like killing him was his son who wouldn’t; Mr Kruger was sufficiently disturbed to kill someone who angered him intensely, although too frightened to kill a government person; and he was too cowardly and beefed up with self-regard to kill himself. My answer is pure logic based on given conditions, without moral considerations since they appear to have no relevance.

I am impressed by such lightning perception.

I see Rainer smile awkwardly. He’s unsettled by the thought that he may no longer be able to conceal his true nature from me. António chuckles, an unprecedented occurrence in my experience of him: something is changing in his Life-Line – I’m not sure what it is, but it involves his attitude towards me, and perhaps a new ambivalence towards Rainer’s plot.

Through the phrasing of his next question, Rainer exposes his acceptance of my split disposition: “Is your body hungry?”

I focus on my stomach: its nourishment level is clearly low ... I nod.

Upon Rainer’s and my disembarking at the Búzio, António drives off on an errand. There’s no one in the bar apart from a waiter and Miguel da Silva who is sitting behind his counter next to his dog in the basket, reading *Diário de Notícias*, a Lisbon paper. After placing me at a table, Rainer goes to chat with da Silva who opens three beers.

A waiter is looking at me with concern: I see that I’m quite a mess, having been carted in the back of a dirty lorry and kicked about by the Guarda Civil.

I go to the washrooms. Little tins of water for guests sit on a ledge. I take one, scoop out the flies, and splash my face several times. Feeling nothing, I glance in the mirror: I am scratched and bloodied ... my eyes are burning feverishly in the pallor of my face; I look quite deranged. I splash more water, and obtain a delayed effect – a faint tingling. The more I do this, the more my feelings start to return. But when the aches of injury and

the heat of the day begin to press unpleasantly on my flesh, I stop everything, much preferring physical numbness ... absence. I dust down my trousers: now the material makes a lifeless sound and I do not feel a thing.

A glass of beer has been placed on my table. At the counter, Rainer and Miguel da Silva are talking with soft intensity. Before I even sit down I have worked out the essentials of Rainer's plot, which now hangs over the two of them as stubbornly as a political banner:

Rainer and da Silva are puppets joined in a pas de deux of annihilation; da Silva wants to destroy the Marxist Frelimo Government in the name of the Renamo rebels; Rainer has convinced him that he's on his side; da Silva has given Rainer the weapons to hide, partly to test his loyalties; Rainer will betray da Silva to the Frelimo government by giving them the cache; in so doing he hopes that Renamo will kill him.

I swallow some beer – the liquid is welcome as an idea of refreshment. Then I get swept away by another rushed thought:

Rainer will keep his promise: for the protection of the household including me, he'll remove the ham from his garden before betraying da Silva. He will hide it under the marble floor in the Orthodox church.

Rainer comes over, watching me warily. Every wrinkle on his face contains centuries of anguish ... and so do his eyes. Unlike mine during the last months, his eyes are not dulled by inner turmoil, but set afire by it. This is a man who had an ulcer at six and devised a suicide plot in his thirties ... Then I perceive something within him that I had not noticed before: a trace of deep shame similar to the blue darkness at the centre of a flame; it reminds me of the chimera I recently tracked inconclusively through the twists and shades of my own Life-Line.

He draws up before me, and says, "We must have looked very stupid talking at the bar while you look down at us from high consciousness."

After all I have been through it is hard for me to accept that at this moment I am stronger than him and just as sharp.

He continues, "Do not get carried away by your skill at pattern recognition. It will not last. Most of what you are going through will be forgotten."

His tone is as acerbic as his Life-Line which is a broken and damaged thing. His despair is as big as Mozambique's after war, drought, locusts, disease and Cyclone Demoina.

"You have not yet visited the restaurant of the Búzio ... Yes, they have a restaurant! Come, let's go for lunch!"

I follow him across a car park towards a prefabricated tin building, which is as big as an aircraft hangar and was once an agricultural showroom. He stops half way. "The restaurant is no place to talk politics. If you are going to enquire into me, keep to the subject of psi. In any case that is the only way to understand my plot. You have never perceived the energies of life as clearly as you can at this moment. So you must be able to tell that I am not politically motivated."

The restaurant is seventy paces square. The roof has been cleverly raised above the walls to let in light and air. There are plenty of tall indoor plants. Nearly every expatriate in Maputo seems to be here, along with some local officials. As we pass among the clientele, Rainer gets pointed at, then collects a dark look, then a snigger.

We sit down at a table along the side. There are several metres between tables. The menu is extensive and you can pay in local currency, which explains the place's success. I calculate that a three-course meal for two will cost 50 US cents at the black market rate. A middle-aged black waiter with a scar on his left cheek arrives and explains that only chicken and chips are available ... and beer.

The moment he leaves, Rainer resumes being my point of concentration. On account of his bald and pointed pate, his head looks like a bullet directed at the roof, the sky, the heavens. I announce, "In your notes you write about the electron which needs energy from *outside* to make a jump to a new orbit. Based on this analogy, your attempt to make a jump in your Life-Line through suicide is doomed to failure." My voice sounds odd; at the same time I hear an echo, which is António telling Rainer: "Your method is *not* the way to push forward the shift of forms."

My interrogation accelerates the movements of Rainer's ever-fluid gaze. He says, "It is not suicide. I am destined to die at the hand of another. I follow the necessary steps to that end. I do not create them."

Never before have I heard him speak in such hushed tones. I am sitting very straight, while he is slumped forward. I insist, "You can't propagate in isolation. This is one fact I've picked up from you."

He is most displeased by my remark. "What makes the odds go in my favour for this transition is the opportunities which – how to say? – come to me on a plate. Every hour, my future form becomes more clear to me. My Life-Line looks less like a ghost, it grows more solid."

Everything he says gets stored in the waves of my memory like a single message corked in a bottle; I could repeat it eternally word for word if called upon to do so.

He sits back, thinking he has put me off the scent. So I seek to tangle him in his own logic. "To build your hopes and failing courage you identified with my one spermatozoon that hit home."

"You think it was a small achievement I made, to bind with the one that came first out of millions?"

"No ... But more important is the extent to which you were troubled by the First Polar Body that died so the second one could live and receive the sperm. You were very troubled by the sacrificial nature of the death. You should ask yourself, why?"

My confidence continues to shake him. His response is to glower at everything on the table. I realise that in bringing up the issue of sacrifice I am also delving into myself. I go on, "One can not sacrifice oneself for oneself, which is what you're planning to do." I hear Kudzi's voice as I say this.

His head darts up as if I have thrown his chess set in the air. "Moral laws are made to keep the herd in line. Obviously most people who kill themselves die in negative states because they have low consciousness – that is why they are doomed to repetitious activations. Not I!"

There's a silence as the scar-faced waiter brings our beers and food. The chicken shines so brightly with oil that it looks like a rubber dummy, the chips anaemic and soggy. But I am not in the slightest bit interested in material objects.

As soon as we are alone again I tell him, "You're too scared to shoot yourself, so you go to all these lengths to set it up."

I observe him flinch. “Wrong!” he says. “Death is a powerful force. Hang a sixty centimetre pendulum over a dying man and you will see how far it swings. But you are too psychically inexperienced, Miguel, to detect the factors that will turn my suicide into a positive force. I told you: the odds are going in my favour. When the critical moment of transition comes, I will be prepared.”

As usual he seeks to dazzle me with his understanding of the laws that govern life and of which I am ignorant. All his bumptious exuberance comes scrambling back. He goes on to say that nature is not static, ground states are transient, bound states are there to be broken, and he will never give up and stand still, for “he who grows inactive shall be knocked down!” The assumption that he has worked it all out boosts his confidence. His voice swells: “There is no such thing as permanence, one state moves into another.” – tapping a fist against his temple – “Within me there are forces battering at the walls of my cells so desirous are they for a higher Kingdom. I am dancing on the cusp of change as vibrantly as a butterfly, for there is no end, Miguel, only irruptions into new dimensions.” Then he repeats a phrase I’ve heard him utter before: “What is mine shall know my face,” concluding with a flourish, “I shall be reborn an Upper Zeegan!”

His last statement is a complete give-away. All the while he has been justifying himself, I am reading another story altogether. Both his enormous drive and his goal to become nothing less than a Zeegan are prompted by considerable personal disorder. The only defence he can raise against the dark and the horror, against his mysterious shame, and against the laughing voice of his negative philosophy is his absurd plot. Suicide has become his only reason for living!

During his eager defence, his food has remained untouched. I eat steadily, obeying my body. The food contains sufficient nutrients.

I ask him, “You have said: ‘Will plus consciousness produces change.’ What precisely is consciousness in your theatre of death?”

Before he can answer, his attention is distracted. A sickly expression sweeps over his face. I follow his gaze: Boland is sitting down nearby with another man. As soon as the ex-mercenary catches sight of Rainer, he scowls and asks the waiter for another table.

Now I calculate:

Boland is the trigger that Rainer will use to fire himself into the future. This is why he taunts his imminent killer.

At long last I have grasped all the mechanics of the plot. The only facts that remain undetermined are when and where Rainer will die.

He looks to see what I am thinking and he picks up that I have worked everything out. Surprisingly he brightens up and nods at me, because the more I close in on his mysteries the greater are his chances of retaining me as his co-conspirator – this is how he envisages it. Yet I have still made no progress in discovering what possible use I could be to him.

It is my turn to be distracted: I have spotted Maeve across the room dining with a couple of women friends. In my higher state of consciousness I do not register any feelings about Maeve. But I am unable to detect whether she is pregnant or not – which is frustrating. Rainer said women have a way of knowing these things. Maeve has not noticed me yet.

I revert to Rainer who is digging clumsily into his chicken. He does not like eating; he tends to look at his food not as a source of nourishment but as a place where illusive

secrets may lie hidden from him. Without making reference to Boland, he addresses my last question about consciousness and death while nibbling some breast. “Consciousness means I will leave this earth packed with willpower and with an accurate evaluation of my end position on my incarnated Life-Line. It also implies peak powers of psi penetration.” With his exuberance restored, he continues, “Like ammunition, these three factors will accelerate my evolutionary shift. So you see, Miguel, I am not propagating in isolation, but in harmony with the energies of the Fields to which we are all connected.”

I probe for stronger evidence to uphold his theory that death will help him. By itself the belief that he is a powerful psychic in tune with the cosmos is not sufficient; and to follow the convolutions of his Life-Line is to encounter ugly barriers behind which I am unable to penetrate any better than he can, so that the causes for their existence remain hidden. I regret this. If I cannot find the necessary data with my current capacity for discernment, when will I ever find it? Recalling his attempt on *Tio Sam* to force me through the infamous bands of Zeega by using me as his psychic submarine, my wariness regarding his capability of using people ruthlessly is rekindled.

He stands up – the reason being he is thoroughly displeased with my lack of faith in him. “I will pay the bill,” he says while using his feminine fingers to flick imaginary bits of food off his trousers, unaware of their real location around his mouth. I have made him nervous, unsure of himself.

Then for the first time I see Rainer’s halo: a manacle of opaque black light wrapped so tightly round his head that it exerts permanent pressure on his brain. It has a malicious aspect. I can understand why he hit out at it so agonisingly in the garden, and why he longs for “filters”. I also think: With that ugly thing round your head, no wonder it is difficult for you to express generosity or love.

“When you have finished your food,” he mumbles, “you will find me in the bar. Then we will go home.”

I register a small anxiety that perhaps my acute perceptivity will lose its power with his departure. But before I can dwell on this, Maeve appears before me, the blood flushing through every capillary in her face.

She sits down in the abandoned chair and hisses, “I am pregnant! On the day of birth, Joe will leave me for good!”

The manner by which I absorb the waxing and waning of the tides under Maeve’s skin reassures me that my focal powers still lie beyond the five usual senses. My rational mind sweeps aside emotional interference with regard to Maeve’s situation and reduces her problematic to a subject for dissection. “Have you been tested?” I ask.

“Course not! It’s too soon. I just know. I’m sure about it! I can *feel* it!”

“Is that possible?”

The main arteries in her neck swell up to such an extent that her throat starts to pulsate. But no matter how hard I try I cannot muster the power needed to penetrate her womb and find out if her claim is true. Perhaps with Rainer’s help ... but I would never trust his judgement in this particular case.

Maeve answers, “I knew it the moment you burst the condom. By the hour I became more certain. But of course you are a man and it has nothing to do with you! Contraception is the woman’s responsibility, is it not?”

I watch her battling with her Irish temperament. She said, “You seem to have conveniently forgotten that I am a Catholic. Oh Jesus! ...” At this point what she wants to

convey to me would be unsuitable for the wife of a diplomat. Meanwhile, there appears to be no point in discussing the matter until she has had a pregnancy test. But as I reflect upon why I might not feel any sense of guilt if she turns out pregnant, my thoughts become imprecise, and disturbing images of Kudzi rise to the surface ...

I say, "On one level your religion forbids you to abort. But there's another level where ..."

"There's no other level!" she chokes. "My God, why I am bothering to speak with you! ... I hoped you might share my anxieties. No wonder Kudzi wants nothing more to do with you – neither do I!" She rises on cue, and strides away.

Just for a second I wonder whether my current facility for objective reasoning on the Maeve issue might not be tainted by unidentified and perhaps faulty directives.

By this time my half-eaten chicken looks even more plastic than when it arrived. I get up to leave ... at which point I feel twinges of pain in my body, and my cracked rib makes itself felt.

As I head for the exit my feelings fast get restored: after my injuries, it's the soles of my feet that are sensitised, then it's my solar plexus, then the tips of my fingers, and then my skull begins to tingle eerily like a limb coming back to life. In my relationship with my surroundings, with each step I make I must struggle to figure out which sense is applicable. Progress is slow and unsteady. Near the exit, the air pushes against me like a sponge full of hot water ... and the Maeve dilemma converts into a sinking feeling ...

A VICIOUS ATTACK

By the time I got on to the outside steps of the restaurant my nervous system had fully switched on and I received a full blast of body aches and Maputo heat. Like anyone who has just emerged from doing something extraordinary, I was left dazed and weak. A couple walking into the restaurant looked me over strangely. I was so shaky that I had to lean against the railings from where the parked Peugeot entered my line of vision. Such was its attraction as a safe haven that I set off for it as soon as I had gathered some strength.

Shouts were coming from somewhere in the car park – like someone was being attacked. I rounded a large van and drew up in shock: Boland was sitting on Rainer, pinning him to the ground, hitting him savagely; Rainer's hands like the wings of a fragile bird, flitted uselessly across his face; sickening thuds came from the mercenary's fists as they struck the psychic's head which rebounded against the ground, throwing up dust.

Was this it? – the carefully prepared death, the finale of an elaborate political plot, the culmination of interminable psi calculations? How could such an obscene and ignominious end be the way to a new and better life?

It was as though I myself were being attacked. All tiredness and pain deserted my body. Raising a shout of fury I hurled myself forward ...

With only a few steps to go I hit into something like a rubber wall that sent me staggering backwards. I stared about in astonishment: nothing lay between me and my target. Boland continued his ferocious drubbing, oblivious to my presence. I moved forward, probing the air: this time my hands pushed into something that felt like a

repelling magnetic field, and I came to a standstill again. No matter how hard I shoved, I could not break through the invisible wall.

It was during this stalemate that I saw António (or more specifically the new António). He was standing stiffly in the sun near the Peugeot with his upturned palms stretching out towards the scene of the attack. Because of his prepared stance and ferocious gaze, I realised that the barrier – the energy barrier or whatever it was – had been placed around the two men by him.

I stepped back warily from the circle of influence and stood gaping at António who looked like some towering biblical figure – the kind ordinary mortals should keep well clear of.

Boland meanwhile continued his insane assault; blood flew from the punches ... blood spurted from one of Rainer's eyes.

How could António possibly allow this brutality to continue? Why did he prevent me from intervening? The devoted António who loved Rainer so selflessly, his guardian angel, standing by watching his lover get pummelled to death ... not just watching, but collaborating in his execution! I was mortified by these inferences and strongly resented him for rendering me powerless.

Suddenly it was all over: António made a small irritable movement with one hand, and Boland flew off Rainer as though he had been swished away by a giant fly whisk. The white man clambered to his feet. In a daze, he looked about for the cause of his ejection and found António standing only a few yards away. On an impulse he advanced towards the servant, readying himself for a fight. But as he drew closer, I saw him register the full atrocity of António's gaze and come to an abrupt halt. It was not fear so much as profound disquiet that flickered across his face. Like me, Boland must have sensed the danger of venturing into the deep unknown. With surprising lack of procrastination he began to retreat ... until he disappeared completely behind some cars.

When my attention returned to António, I found that he was behaving as though he had just arrived at the scene of the crime: he cried out in dismay, ran towards his lover with his arms outstretched, fell beside him, took his battered head in his hands and cradled it while whispering words of consolation.

Rainer's face was a mess. It was a relief to see that he was semi-conscious. When a loud groan escaped his lips, António looked up at me and said, "Fetch water! In the bar! Quick!"

I returned soon enough with a couple of tins of water from the washroom. Already António had Rainer sitting up against the wheel of a minibus. Using his own shirt, he dabbed water on the blood-caked eye. When it was clean, he swept his lover up in his arms and said to me, "Open the door of our car!"

We laid Rainer on the Peugeot's rear seat, and I also got into the back and placed his head on my lap. As we drove away I caught a glimpse of Miguel da Silva watching us suspiciously from the entrance to the bar.

Each time we hit a pot hole, Rainer groaned. Meanwhile I kept glancing at the back of António's head with considerable awe. Whatever this man's contradictory motives were for saving his friend after first ensuring that he got a good thrashing, they must be weighty. Henceforth, António the servant, and secondly the lover, and thirdly the psychic acolyte was forever more promoted to António the psychic strongman with powers as

great, if not greater, than those of his so-called master. What is more, his new status opened up all manner of hypotheses regarding his role in the life of Rainer Kruger and its final outcome.

“Why did you stop me helping him?” I asked crossly.

As expected, he made no answer.

“Listen here!” I said. “I know all about his plot to get himself killed. I know Boland is supposed to do it. Why didn’t you stop the attack at the start? For God’s sake, you’re supposed to be in love with the man!”

After much hesitation, he answered in his usual dispassionate manner, “I was not there at the start.”

“But you let it carry on. Why?”

Again he chose not to reply. I leaned forward to better look at him: he had reassumed the tight-lipped demeanour of the domestic servant, which made me flare up at him. “Did you think I was not strong enough to deal with Boland? Tell me!”

“He wanted Boland to get mad with him,” he said from the side of his mouth.

“So you obviously thought your master *needed* a beating since you protected the space to allow it to happen?” I emphasised the words “your master” to provoke him, but he responded only with a deadpan “Yes.”

He took the car round a bend before saying, “I did not like to watch it.”

“So at first you obeyed your master’s desires. But you only let Boland go so far, then you stopped him. Why? Why not let it go all the way ... unto death?”

António steadily drove on. I could not bear his evasion. “Why did you abort Rainer’s desires?” I insisted. “Why did you mess up his suicide plot?”

António sighed. “It is not the right time for his death ... We were only getting Mr Boland prepared.”

“Jesus, António! And when, pray, will this right time arrive? Is it you who are controlling the time, the plot ... everything? Is it you who will stage the grand finale? Tell me!”

This was too much for him – he clammed up altogether. In dismay I looked down at the victim’s bloodied head which lay on my lap shaking to the eccentric rhythms of the road.

As we neared the house I tried one last tack. “António, perhaps you’re a Zeegan like Rainer. You certainly have unearthly powers. Now that I’ve witnessed them I can hardly relate to you in the same way as before, can I?”

This statement did nothing to unlock his voice. I continued, “What I want to know is this: are you prepared to use your powers to protect him from his death? Are you going to help me try and dissuade him from his ridiculous enterprise?”

Still he said nothing. I reminded myself that this was the man who had called me a Judas (as noted in Rainer’s notebook) – no trust existed between us. We drew up outside the gate and he got out to open it. As soon as he climbed back in, I asked with still greater urgency, “Surely you’re not going to let him kill himself?”

Again, no answer. He accelerated through the gateway.

“António, if anyone can save him, it must be you!”

As he parked, Agi came out of the house – question time was over. I whispered in haste – “I warn you: I’m not prepared to sit around watching him commit suicide!”

Both António and I had to support the battered man while Agi twittered and held doors open for us. We shuffled him down the passage into the bathroom next to the library without encountering old man Kruger.

Fed up with both of them, I left them to it.

The moment my head hit the pillow, exhaustion came piling in, along with a black depression. Sleep provided no relief, cluttered as it was with images of violence against the woman I loved, followed by others of Rainer's body being shattered by an explosion, followed by ...

... our eviscerated forms lie one on top of the other, Rainer's and Michael's ... each with the same gaping wounds ... together rolling ... while I am saying, "Rainer, you and I – the pilgrims of darkness – we are brothers in death!"

DAY TEN – FRIDAY 28TH DECEMBER 1984

THE OUTCOME OF RAINER'S PREMONITION

Slatted sunlight as usual: streaming over damp body and bed. But for once, neither the heat nor my demons had been able to break down the walls of sleep. With gummy eyes I looked for familiar references: the shelves of identical books, my unpacked suitcase, my dirty clothes, cans of food tossed by the SNASP agent across the floor ...

... A torturer's bladed eyes cutting me down ... driving in green rain to a church where Mother and Child beckon through soft puffs of colour ... my mind flashing like a razor high above the Earth, playing God with designs and numbers over the broad sweep of Africa ... then back, further back to my dismal flat in London and the belly of a crocodile god ... back further to a smiling nun of olden days with her puzzling prayers ... and finally, Rainer's flawed Life-Line charging at walls of despair, seeking an end that was not an end but another life of struggle ... "There's no such thing as dead!" ... stuck, forever stuck on the wheel of life, the pitiful man!

Every lucid reference intact, transfixed in my memory with a steel peg ... Yet, he had said it would not be so.

On the baroque desk, all Rainer's rationalisations stood heaped in boxes, files, notebooks: "*The Collected Thoughts of Rainer Kruger*" – a monument to the pointlessness of his life erected on the giddy crest of a nightmare.

The clock in the dining room struck the hour: *Ave Maria* plus twelve strokes. Noon – already! In the afternoon of the day before, I had laid myself down on the library bed, some twenty hours ago. I got up naked, stiff – raw as a skinned animal.

In the shower I washed my body hard, bringing it back to life. My ex-wife, Anna Raeburn, used to speak of a foundation stone at the centre of me, which would be there in my hour of need; I had never been convinced by her encouraging prognosis. Yet there was no doubt that such an hour had passed in the course of yesterday. I felt somewhat heroic; I had survived not only the *Guarda Civil*, but a psychic odyssey from which I had emerged a changed man. "You are not divorced from certain worlds because you cannot see them!" – such chiding words no longer applied to me.

Heroes do not stand by idly and let a person take their own life; heroes save people – especially those as replete with human foibles and as desperate as Rainer Kruger. For days this man had bewildered me with his mysteries. But now that I had probed at least some of them, I was confident that he no longer dwelt outside my frame of reference. Henceforth the mission of my odyssey must be, in Toto's words, "to protect Rainer from himself".

I had no idea where to begin. Rainer's scenario was fraught with dangers. Soon – today even – the arms were supposed to be moved from the property. Knowing about them and their whereabouts had been a constant worry. Rainer had not hesitated to tell me what the crate contained the moment it arrived; and he had shown no qualms revealing their future place of concealment. Although he was entirely aware that it was against my interests to betray him to Ulla and the Frelimo government, there could be another reason for having me wander around with his secret like a bullet awaiting its time

– one that sprung from his perversity: giving up chess for Russian roulette, as it were, to up the probability of getting himself assassinated.

But finally I decided that all he was probably doing was drawing me further and inextricably into his web.

Surrendering to my ensnarement, I made my first act of commitment to the cause of saving my friend: I unpacked my suitcase.

When this was done, and the clothes stacked neatly on a shelf, I took all the tinned food to the kitchen, where Agi and I celebrated by opening some boiled beef. I tried to make her break the rules and share it with me, which she managed to do only by standing near the door with her back turned and eating as rapidly as possible.

Soon afterwards, the phone rang and was answered in the hall ... seconds later Rainer burst through the kitchen door in a state of agitated jubilation – “Ah! There you are!”

Everyone and everything slowed down in the heat of Mozambique, except Rainer Kruger. His injured eye – already less swollen – squinted at me. “The factory is in flames!” he shouted in triumph, and up went his arms like tracers. “Agi! Fetch António!” – as he went reeling off down the passage.

My reaction: Here we go, back on the roller-coaster! ... but I sat where I was. Then it occurred to me: He’s right again – for had he not said the fire would happen forty-eight hours after he first noticed signs of failure in the yeast machines?

From within the house I heard him imploring to be driven to the factory. The tone of António’s response was resistant. But soon I heard the sound of the car being started, and as the engine coughed, shuddered and clanked, a scurrilous curiosity to witness the next time-slot in my host’s vertiginous Life-Line drew me to my feet ...

The moment we cleared the gateway, Rainer urged António to drive fast. He met with moderate success. Along the *Parque dos Continuadores* a hail of brusque utterances was unleashed about the fulfilment of his prophecy on the factory; this was aimed essentially at António who was, of course, unimpressed. Glaring at him in silent fury, Rainer said, “Tonight you help me move the arms! Tomorrow, we prepare final events!” I shuddered to think who “we” was supposed to include. Throwing an impious grin over his shoulder at me on the rear seat, he added, “Yesterday I get that Boland ready. You see how I get him excited? You see how I make him hate me?” After which he resumed his oration of self-praise about the accuracy of his presentiment of ruin, addressing it through the open window to the desolate city at large.

“*Cala-te!* Stop running on like this!” António’s verbal swipe at Rainer left me open-mouthed. He had spoken to him as to a child, and Rainer responded appropriately with an infantile pout. For me the spurious servant’s command was a stinging reminder that it was now primarily of him and not of Rainer that I should be wary. Furthermore, his attitude towards Rainer’s plot seemed to be easing up. In the closing sessions of the endgame, António had become the wild card.

We turned into the ruinous road leading to the factory and there, at the far end, above all the roofs, ballooning clouds of smoke were filling the sky. Revitalised by the spectacle, Rainer put on a display of vigorous applause, causing António to drive faster

just when the road made it inappropriate to do so. We were thrown about and the springs snapped like pistol shots.

Soon the factory came into view, and it was immediately evident that the victory of the immense fire was assured, for already the roof was being consumed.

A crowd of spectators had gathered, and I recognised some of the ex-workers. Their faces expressed shock at the fate of the factory and wonder at the strength of the blaze. Some of the children, on the other hand, affected by the fire's resilience, leapt about and shouted.

We parked the car as close as safety permitted. All three of us got out and advanced on foot as ineffectually as an unarmed posse, until Rainer broke away from us and began running up and down in front of everyone, exhorting the flames like a football fan at a match of his home team. Embarrassing behaviour! Even António expressed impatience at these antics.

The crowd gasped when a hefty explosion brought down some of the factory roofing and sent burning fragments flying among us. People scattered and I withdrew behind the car. This left the two protagonists alone on centre stage: Rainer, his back to the audience, facing the conflagration with his arms poised like a maestro about to conduct a symphony; and António watching in the wings – his benefactory angel.

While sparks trailing fire and smoke continued to rain down like minor meteorites, Rainer shouted back at us with delight, "You see! You see! The yeast tank exploded!"

I was surprised to catch António nodding as if to endorse the news.

Then it struck me: Rainer has got it wrong – this is not the way he said it would be. As I remembered it, he had proclaimed that the yeast tank would be the *primary cause* of the fire after cockroaches had munched through the electric cables; yet the explosion had now occurred *as a consequence of the fire*. Such erroneous details in the unfolding of his prophecy did not augur well for the completion of his final plans ... or so I hoped.

Thickening drafts of soot and sparks electrified the air. Despite them, Rainer remained fearless. Tilting back his head to savour the full force of the fiery creation, I watched the flames flashing upon his jubilant face. It was then that I understood exactly what he was up to: for Rainer, the temptation to play with the rudiments of such a powerful set of forces was irresistible; he was letting himself get carried away by their lustful excess.

At once I was on my guard: the last thing I wanted was to be drawn into a fresh round of psychic turmoil. Yet, even at a distance, I could not avoid feeling the catalytic strength of the blaze. Perhaps I experienced the fire by proxy through Rainer; my connection to him had tightened so much in the past twenty-four hours that it was conceivable that I was sharing his sensations – riding on them, as it were. Or else I may have become intimate with the inferno on my own accord, merely by sniffing at it, rather like a timid dog sniffing at a bitch in heat, circling it, advancing near then retreating, keeping it just out of reach; in this way I was never endangered by the fire's powers of transportation, but was able to savour them through the aroused imagination ... like a voyeur. If this were the case, was I being an outright coward? – a victim of what Kudzi called "Newsman Syndrome" whereby news always involves other lives in other contexts, so that nothing ever touches the emotions of the reporter?

Whatever the method of appraisal, and however much I tried to turn the other cheek, I reacted to those tongues of fire well enough to sense that they belonged to a living

breathing monster hell-bent on fulfilling its basic functions: to devour, to excrete, and to reproduce itself. Initially I assumed that the cycle of such urges was being amply gratified by the ravaging of inflammable material and by the whole-hearted razing to the ground of the entire factory. Instead, I soon discovered that the beast was not so easily satisfied. Rampant demolition alone wasn't enough - it was facile, even. Down at the base, in a foundation of smoking embers, disappointment lurked, hampering the occasion – and for me, this was a most unexpected discovery ...

I quickly became confused, unable to fathom what all the excitement was really about. While I dared to concentrate a little harder, the suspicion grew that I might be looking in the wrong place, that I was missing something. So I allowed myself to follow Rainer's intoxicated focus upwards into the tips of red, blue and white vapours that reached for the heavens from the roof, and hurled effluents like fireworks sparkling and popping into the air. Paradoxically, these volatile compounds seemed more stable and potentially more enduring than all the wood, metal, plastic, rubber, yeast and other substantial ingredients from which they came. Within the apparent nothingness of the uppermost reaches lay some far greater potential ... and it was this, in particular, that the conflagration was ultimately aspiring to attain ... as was Rainer.

I retraced the process from its base. Rising from all the burning and melting below, the darting particles hissed with exertion as they spawned new forms. Molecules in the blazing rubble gave up the struggle to remain bound, as rigidity snapped and years of tension were abandoned. Everything was conspiring to melt and burn towards freedom as fast as possible, using flame as its medium. All the smashing, separating and rearranging while a swarm of ingredients whizzed around and changed partners, was directed towards a single purpose: to end in the vaporous form high above the factory. Metal flowed, walls and concrete floors crumbled into powder, planks volatilised, and yeast roared. Even the sea breeze got into the spirit of the act by feeding the flames with extra oxygen.

The sprightly vapours contained a precious cargo of newly formed associations. No longer trapped in their hard structures down below, particles became less needy. All they wanted was to retire permanently in the infinity of space bearing fewer chattels and less onerous chains; liberation was on its way with peace as the ultimate prize.

Within a standard destructive process a positive twist abides: this was the unexpected and enthralling message in the story of the factory fire.

Then I gradually became aware of Rainer himself burgeoning out of a hollow pocket of smouldering gas: he was being pulled forcefully away by António, his frail body undulating like a smoke wisp, his face enflamed by the spirit of the event. Who would not wish for the death of the old in exchange for superior forms? Who would not be impassioned by the forsaking of blocks and stasis when emancipation was at hand with the added promise of eternity? To cast away a tedious life in a war-torn corner of Africa, to break the bonds of injustice heaped on Richard III, and to never have to return to a prison satellite in Zeega – how could I deny Rainer his compulsive desire to abandon such a thankless legacy? Under the banner of the fire, his plot made complete sense ... and so ...

... while the conspirator was being hauled towards the car by his vigilant lover, I made a scandalous about-turn on my decision to steer him away from suicide. I was going to let him be.

Then, quite unexpectedly, for a few terrible seconds, I became distracted by the crowd of workers watching their “little boss” being led away. It was their eyes that captivated me. I suddenly perceived these workers as an integral part of the debris of the factory. In fact, they would soon be all that was left of the factory ... like dying embers, like ash. In their eyes I could read the questions behind their bewilderment that would forever remain unanswered: How could their “little boss” joyfully allow his factory to burn to the ground? – Since the yeast industry had managed to survive the colonial era, the revolution, and communist rule, why couldn’t it go on forever as the source of their income? – How could their “little boss” allow himself to be led away with that madness (which they had always worried about) emblazoned across his face, while the centrepoint of their lives vanished skywards?

“Get in!” António was watching me sternly while holding open the back door. Rainer was already parked in the front seat. I obeyed at once.

Where was António’s new assertiveness now taking him ... and Rainer ... and me – taking all three of us?

We drove off with António at the wheel.

ENCROACHING DISILLUSIONMENT

Along the Marginal, a sodden wind whipped through the car window, filling my mouth like foamed coffee and washing away the gravelly residues of smoke and ash until my head began to clear, and, in so doing, brought back Kudzi’s words on sacrifice, this time with more weight. For there had been something sacrificial about the factory fire. If I remembered right, Kudzi had said that I might achieve some kind of liberation by making a sacrifice of her. According to her, rites of passage implied that you had to sacrifice some of the advantages integral to one stage of life (like youth) to move on to another (like the warrior in her Maasai analogy), where new assets would be gained. But I failed to see how giving up the woman I loved could be advantageous. That was far too extreme.

A serious bump in the road interrupted my thoughts while causing Rainer’s chin to drop on to his chest as if he had passed out. As the car continued on its rough route, his head lolled loosely this way and that. I read resignation in the posture: no longer an orchestrator of flames, he had lapsed into the role of victim awaiting the sacrificial axe. This image revived my sympathy for him and I began trying to rebuild my resolution to undermine his plot, because even if transformation were a reasonable aspiration in accordance with the laws of combustion, Rainer’s chosen method of achieving it remained unacceptable. Once again I told myself that self-sacrifice for one’s own benefit was a contradiction, as had been confirmed by the fire, since the creation of finer forms had been made possible only by the forfeit of the factory. I was, as can be seen, scrambling for reasons that would reconsolidate my opposition.

We were driving near the extinct slaughterhouse when another massive pothole achieved the reverse of the previous one by snatching Rainer from his daze. His head zipped about as he hunted for his bearings. Fast coming out of himself, he scrutinised António for a moment, then went straight on to the attack. “These are the last days for everything to be cleared up. You must help me organise, António.”

António answered, “Yes,” deadpan.

With a glare Rainer attempted to dissolve the fortress in which his lover was forever hiding ... with no success. Fluttering a hand in the general direction of the coast, he commanded, "Drive to Costa do Sol! I am in no mood to give my father the good news of his dead factory."

António swung the car accordingly.

Rainer's next remark was addressed to me sitting in the back. "You and I must talk. You are not clear on many things." The public announcement, the pointing finger, the flick of the wrist – he was settling back into the mode of the magus. He even came out with a portentous phrase about the fire "substantiating his epistemology". Then he barked at António – "Tonight we move 'the ham'. Next, we decide *when* to tell Frelimo" – and then to himself – "Perhaps tomorrow I will tell them" – again to António – "Or on New Year's Day. When is New Year?"

"Monday is the 31st," António answered almost inaudibly.

"Today is what day?" – spreading urgency.

"Friday."

Summoning theatricality – "Of course it must all happen on Monday, New Year's Eve, an auspicious day for humanoids!" – laughing in that unfunny way of his – "That gives us the whole weekend to get ready."

Exasperated by his manner, I found an issue to swat him with. "You're supposed to be a Frelimo man, so how come I was arrested by them in your house?"

Without missing a beat, he replied, "I asked them to do it."

My eyes widened. "What on earth for?"

His answer was callous in the extreme. "So Renamo could see government troops raid my house, see them act against me by arresting you." He smiled without smiling. "I must keep up Renamo's faith in me, you see."

He seemed to forget that by showing himself as an unrepentant user, he was in danger of alienating me at a time when I was supposed to be most needed. "I could have been killed!" I snarled. "You left it a bit late to fish me out of the clutches of the *Guarda Civil!*"

"I was not the one. Ulla got you out. All I did was phone and tell her what was happening."

I was doubly amazed. "Why?"

Despite all the emotion he had expended during his dance with the fire, he was entirely lucid. "So Renamo would hear me and discover I had to ask Ulla to get the government to release you. You see, Renamo also taps my phone."

"But you made me believe you got me out!"

The smug contrarian laughed without laughing. "Yes ... so you would be pleased with me, and keep staying at my house."

He had used me, he used Ulla, he used António – he was an irredeemable user. Why should anyone care what happened to such a bloodless man? Who could be bothered with him? ... Immediately a voice in my head answered: Only love-sick masochists like António and lost fools like yourself! Followed by a grim warning: This man could lead you to your death without a second thought.

Yet, despite these deterrents, deep down I knew I was not going to give up on him. And by this stage the cunning manipulator probably knew that I had become his man, which was why he had once again allowed himself to speak so truthfully.

The long drive out to Costa do Sol proved far from pleasant: I remained besieged by doubts, humidity kept dripping on me from the roof, and when I tried to gather sustenance from the wide, somnolent ocean, it gave back nothing at all. As in my first days after arriving in Mozambique, I became perturbed by the irreality of my reality: What was I doing driving in an old car with two mentally disturbed strangers in a chaotic foreign country, and most specifically what was I doing playing some bit part in the tragedy of Rainer Kruger? ...

There was one explanation that made sense: the tired old notion that I was possessed by him ... and perhaps by the two of them. If this were the case, it meant that the extraordinary psychic phenomena I had experienced were worthless and could never truly be called my own.

By the time we reached our destination I envisaged myself as a zombie, the rudderless victim of two demons driven by a far stronger will than my own.

QUESTIONING MANOLI

It was a relief to get out of that car; I looked forward to finding some fairly normal people in the restaurant. As we made for the building – so inappropriate for Africa with its Doric columns – harmonious and fervent choral voices wafted over to us on the sea breeze. They belonged to a few dozen Apostolic men, women and children who were gathered in a tight circle on the beach, swaying in unison, waving their biblical staffs, their colourful robes undulating like sails. On the far side of the roundabout stood the open-backed lorry that had brought them out to the final roadblock before the “Bridge-Of-No-Return” – a sturdy and well maintained vehicle, its unscratched blue paintwork echoing the blue of the worshippers’ robes.

“Happy clappers!” Rainer announced, gesturing dismissively at the group. “My friend the Bishop with his sect. Remember? The one who was with me in Machava prison. We shall go and say hello later.”

The inside of the restaurant was like a re-run of our first visit: the cemetery of up-turned chairs, the immersed card players, the lady hooting like a cockerel, Manoli’s avuncular smile, friendly embraces for Rainer and António, a hearty handshake for me and shots of ouzo all round.

Manoli’s comments on my host’s facial injuries and our sooty appearance drew evasive summaries from Rainer of a drunken brawl at the Búzio and of the fire at the factory. Manoli interjected weak expressions of dismay; as far as the factory was concerned, he was past caring, since nearly everyone he knew had lost everything.

António surprised me by downing his ouzo like a pro: he was at ease in this place, with these people; and when I saw him reassuringly caressing Rainer’s neck, it was evident that he was also accepted here as Rainer’s lover.

Meanwhile I brought a minor crisis upon myself by unwisely swallowing my ouzo in one gulp on an empty stomach, setting off flares of pain in my ulcerous region. The situation worsened while one of Manoli’s female relatives came up to me and prattled through an interminable list of culinary deprivations in Maputo. I was finally compelled to ask Manoli for a bite of something to quell the burning.

In a large immaculate kitchen, the Mozambican Greek took out a tuna salad from a gas fridge. A few mouthfuls were enough to anoint my duodenum with balm. Strength

came pumping back, along with the realisation that I had landed a unique opportunity to ask some questions about Rainer.

Manoli appeared unflustered by my direct query on psychic activities. Rainer, he said, had predicted the fall of Salazar and the revolution in Portugal, as well as the consequent independence of Mozambique. He had assured his family that their restaurant would survive the present turmoil into the dawning of a better era (which turned out to be true as it is still going strong today). What's more, because of the current dearth of doctors, the family often called upon Rainer's services; and he spoke of an aunt who had been cured of kidney stones during a single hands-on healing session.

But when I made a guarded reference to my host's political interests, Manoli cleverly turned the tables on me. "How can you imagine someone like him being serious about politics?" I admitted the unlikelihood of this ... but might he not be doing something for some mysterious personal gain? Manoli brushed this aside. "He's a big mouth. Everyone knows that. No one listens to him. He winds people up because he's bored. As you see, we are all dying of boredom."

While I searched for a more subtle lead, he asked, "Why are you worried? Is there a problem?"

"He's the most restless soul I ever met," I replied evasively. "He sometimes talks of doing something terrible. Has he never spoken about this to you?"

Manoli laughed. "He's pulling your leg. Rainer loves to make drama. You must know what we call him here – '*A Rainha*', 'The Queen' – from your English word for a queer. Queens love drama, do they not?"

Manoli cheered: he had come across a bottle of tonic water that he thought would be good for my ulcer. I liked Manoli – in the great demoralisation of the country he knew how to keep up everyone's spirits, including his own.

I switched my enquiry to António: was he also a prescient psychic?

Manoli had heard about the Richard III/Elizabeth of York "entertainment", as he called it, but dismissed this as fantasy games typical of gay lovers. "Rainer likes to make out that he and António are some sort of heavenly twins who get reborn over and over. I'm a Christian, so it's nonsense to me. They even claim they change sex from one lifetime to the next" – adding with a broad grin – "Looks like the sex thing came out confused this time round!"

"Has Rainer spoken to you about recalling past lives?"

Grabbing hold of the rolls of flesh overlapping his trousers, he replied, "You see this? In ancient Greece I was a champion marathon runner, according to him. Hard to believe that now, isn't it?"

I laughed heartily, then asked, "Have you heard him speaking of the difficulties he has recalling a life he's lived on another planet?"

"Another planet! This is a new one on me! ..."

"Manoli! You are giving away my secrets!" Rainer had come into the kitchen looking for us.

The Greek patted me on the back. "Your friend here has not been around too long – he still worries about your stupid stories."

I blushed, they both laughed, and that was the end of it.

As soon as we got back to the bar the conspirator placed a possessive arm round me and suggested a walk on the beach to refill our lungs with oxygen that "the fire had

stolen”, and a swim to “cleanse our bodies of its ash”. Manoli, who was watching us, looked at me strangely; I knew that he was wondering whether I was also Rainer’s lover. It was extraordinary that he had been Rainer’s friend for years, yet knew practically nothing about him, whereas I, who had known him for ten days, had been elected his personal confessor.

THE BEACH

We must have made a pretty sight, the three of us: Rainer in the middle with one arm around me, the other around António, eagerly ushering us across the vast and desolate roundabout towards the ocean.

The minute our feet touched the beach sand, António kicked off his slip-ons and ran for the water, swinging his arms – antics so wildly out of character that they brought both Rainer and me to a standstill. When he reached the tide line, he threw off his shirt and hopped about pulling his trousers off. Then, in racy red underpants, he made splashing strides forward until he fell into the sea.

“My goodness! My goodness!” Rainer clucked in disbelief. Then clasping my hand he jerked me onwards, shouting, “Let’s go! Let’s go!”

I giggled like a timid maiden, holding back until his grip broke. Rainer charged ahead, all arms and legs, and, of course, fell over. It was my turn to laugh – really laugh, from the depths of my belly.

I shouted to him: “Take off your shoes! They’re full of sand.” But this was more than he could manage, so I pulled them off for him. For a few seconds our eyes met – his were shining with glee and, I suspect, mine were too. I helped him up, and he fell away from me with his feet spinning like flippers in the deep loose sand.

Gripped by the general excitement, I ran towards the water, casting off my clothes as I went.

“Wait for me!” Rainer wheezed.

During all of this – only yards away – the Apostolics swayed, clapped and sang, oblivious to our presence.

The sea was like warm soup thickened by too much salt. I thrashed furiously at the water, casting into its generous amplitude a lifetime of tension.

When I finally wore myself out, I looked around and saw António’s strong arms rising and falling as he pulled away, backstroking along the coast. From the shore, Rainer waved at me: he had taken off his shirt and rolled up his trousers, and he was paddling cautiously like a heron, dipping down to scoop up handfuls of water that he threw into the breeze. At this moment it was impossible to imagine that he could be planning to kill himself, and that the chosen moment for doing so was drawing nearer by the hour.

I’m not a good swimmer – there was no question of following António – so after some sedate circling I started back for the shore.

When I shuffled up the beach to Rainer he had engaged in conversation with an impressive-looking Apostolic whom I assumed must be the self-styled Bishop. He introduced me as “The Zimbabwean”. Brushing off the seawater from my handshake, the Bishop joked about António being a mermaid who had swum off to join the fish. With his long convex face and small witty eyes he was the caricature of a friendly warthog, but with the alertness of a ferret.

I lay down on the sand to dry off while the two of them reminisced about their prison days. At first I wasn't really listening, for I became lulled by their calm voices in the warm breeze, the swish of the waves bringing me happy memories of Kudzi during a holiday we had spent together in Zanzibar.

It was a change in Rainer's tone that brought me back to the present: he was challenging the Bishop on some of his sect's religious practices; with typical irony Rainer insisted on knowing how the Bishop's followers were faring with the Holy Ghost.

The pious man answered solemnly, "They enter, but bring nothing back. As you know, you cannot teach an elephant to fly."

"So why bother with them?" Another typical Rainer response.

"Like you, my friend, I am passing through this world," the Bishop answered, lowering his voice.

"Yes," Rainer sighed. "But you have patience, while it makes me mad."

"Many have been sent here – greater ones than us," the Bishop muttered, then tossed off some words in a dialect that was foreign to me, Rainer answering him in the same. I was reminded of the exchange between Rainer and António on the night of my arrival, which had also been full of words and phrases that I could not understand.

Propping myself up on my elbow, I squinted at the two of them: the bearded Bishop leaning upon his staff in the bedizened glory of his robes, presented an assertive mythical presence; while Rainer on his thin legs, with his yellow torso hanging like a loose shirt over his rolled-up trousers, looked like a scarecrow.

Soon a phrase from the Bishop came through to me with clarity: "*Quem sabe quando é que o povo vai abrir os olhos!*" ("Who can tell when the people will open their eyes!") But the switch back to Portuguese from the unknown language did nothing for my comprehension.

António was now strolling towards us, shaking drops of water like stars from his finely muscled body. Rainer watched his lover approach with a touch of what I hoped might be loving admiration. The Bishop, meanwhile, in what I assumed at first was an Apostolic custom, brought his hands together at a ninety degree angle across his solar plexus with his finger tips touching (like an Indian prayer pose that had slipped down from the chest to the belly) and greeted António with a single word "*Arom!*" António responded in precisely the same way ... The salutation was oddly familiar: someone had greeted me in this very same pose, someone had said "*Arom!*"

"*Arom!*" The Bishop repeated the salutation warmly to Rainer and me as he set off to rejoin his flock. After a few paces, he called back with a beaming smile, "*Ecoamos bem!*" ("Let us echo well!"). I noticed that Rainer was watching me, anxiously observing the wheels of my mind scrambling for correlations.

An upswell of chants from the faithful shook the air as they were reunited with their Bishop, and two men fell to their knees, their mouths foaming and their eyes rolling heavenwards. Flapping his arms in disgust, Rainer said in conspiratorial fashion, "Eh, Miguel! Do you or I fall down and dribble when we connect with the Fields? ... Bah! So childish!"

António expelled breath wearily as he lay down on his stomach next to us, while Rainer came and parked himself next to me with his hip pushing up against mine. At once I asked him about "*Arom!*" He was taken aback, impressed even that I had heard this word before. And I now knew where: it had been the mediaeval nun when I had been

propelled through a thousand Life-Lines from the Greek church and hurtled back down my own with a mind as sharp as a razor.

I was so astonished by the connection between the salutations that I rushed to tell Rainer about the nun showing me how to place my hands. He was delighted that I could admit to a past life experience instead of once again blaming him for manipulating my mind. But instead of answering my question on the salutation, he insisted that I tell him about the entire event starting with my assent from the church ... which I was happy to do, but not in the roasting sun.

We moved nearer to the roadside and sat down on some wind-worn rocks under two palm trees whose frazzled fronds drooped under the invisible weight of the heat. Throughout my exposition, António slept on the beach, or pretended to, in an auburn heat-haze, the Apostolics sang to their entrancing rhythms, the grey-green waves danced a sedate tango with the crabs, while Rainer interjected explanations on Fields and split-brain perception that I have already transcribed in Day Nine of this narrative ...

When I came to the final episodes, which involved travelling through ravaged Africa into my gloomy flat in London, our conversation focused for a while on the statue of the crocodile god ... “A Congolese woman gave it to me,” I explained, “when I was shooting *The Grass is Singing* in Zambia. Apparently it’s a river god.”

“Yes, I can see it now,” Rainer said. “A strong emotion is registered there, like the cyclone is registered on the island of Inhaca ... What happened with this woman?”

“We had an affair which I ended.”

“She hates you for it. Later in London you attracted her hate through the statue, which she had charged with her own Field force. In humanoids the solar plexus is one of the Field’s pivotal points – that is why the Congolese sculptors crossed its hands there.”

Rainer’s words triggered a series of associations: my ulcer was located in the solar plexus; so was the wound I had received in the Middle Ages; the solar plexus was where my hands had been positioned by the nun for the same salutation that I had just witnessed on the beach.

“From what I gather,” I said, “I was lanced in the solar plexus during the Crusades. I was recuperating in a monastery when I met that nun.”

“You died of that injury,” Rainer said, addressing my midriff, although this time it was pertinent. “But you had long been carrying the pain with you – the pain attracted the lance. This is how things work. The mortal wound was the expression of a long-standing weakness in your Life-Line, which continues to the present time. And that girlfriend of yours recognised it and exploited it. Why, the first time I met you I saw broken fibres shooting out of your duodenum!”

“Yes, Rainer. I’ve read your low opinions of me sitting on the bar stool at the Polana when we met.”^{xi}

Although we were in the shade, the oblique afternoon sun made the air hotter; even Rainer had lost his reptilian coolness, beads of perspiration clinging to the sparse hairs on his head. Nothing, however, could arrest his garrulousness at this point. “Your mistake was leaving the statue lying in dark corners where it also attracted the miserable Life-Lines of all those English people living in your apartment building ... negative attracts negative. My poor Miguel! Too often you are seeing the world through the eyes of that statue: insects, decay, unhappy people. But wait! ... I see a lot of green in your London flat!”

“Must be the park outside,” I said, feeling that now familiar twinge of admiration for his clairvoyant skills that so tantalisingly pushed me to want to believe in his every word.

“Well then, why can you not recall the nice park, with summer skies?”

Had a summer sky ever managed to turn him sweet? How dare he talk about lapsing into the negative! In self-defence I rose to my feet and scowled down at him. “Let me tell you, Rainer, there’s no way one can associate death with hope the way you’re doing!”

He glanced at me in surprise. “That is your narrow earthly way of viewing it.”

“I shall never forget that radiant nun. You say, ‘The brain is a carbon copy of the Fields made accessible through consciousness.’ But perhaps neither of us is accessing the entirety of this map in our heads – we’re missing important parts of it. My nun looked as if she had seen it all. And the Bishop here, he has the same look as her.”

“And what exactly is that look?” he asked pithily.

“One that has the confidence to be generous.”

He balked, then hid behind a derisory grimace.

Sensing that I was gaining the upper hand, I pressed on. “You say you spend your days searching for clues on how to force yourself into the future. But you can’t just settle for the first crazy idea that comes along, and get yourself bumped off. I’ve been telling you about the magnificence of the earth’s Field as I experienced it yesterday. Can’t you give some attention to this? There are signs of it all around – right here even!”

“Like where?” he snorted.

“Like just now for one precious moment, all three of us, we had fun larking about on the beach. This was almost the only warm human moment I’ve had with you. And just for once, António and you were behaving like lovers. In Manoli’s bar you were even nice to him. These are healthy signs.”

“Pointing where exactly?” He was heavy with despondency. If I was ever going to make him falter in his intention, now was my chance. For once it was me who was forcing the pace. “Pointing in the opposite direction to the one in which you’re going.”

He was sitting on his haunches staring at his enormous feet where the sand bulged between his toes. Doubled up in this way, half-naked, with a black eye and a bruised head, he looked like a defeated caveman. What I had not noticed before were the small scars all over his etiolated torso that must have come from injuries sustained during his many fits; unless playing the fakir was also part of his repertoire.

He lifted his head and stared at the ocean, his expression marked by impudent indifference to what I had been saying. My thoughts returned to the enigma of the salutation: finding out about it might help me with my argument.

“Was my nun a Zeegan?” I asked.

“Most likely,” he mumbled.

“And the Bishop?”

“Acts like one. Thinks he knows all the answers.”

“Why is he on earth then?”

The tone of his reply was terse. “There are Lower and Upper Zeegans, as I have told you. Except no one wants to be called Lower anything – I was a Gurr. Some genera overlap with others; Neanderthals were around on earth at the same time as homo sapiens, isn’t it? Evolved humans like me and the Bishop are on the same level as Gurr on Zeega, and by being on the same evolutionary rung we can reactivate in either galaxy. You, as a less evolved human organism, cannot do so.”

I felt like clouting him. “No doubt in my next life there’ll be no Zeega for me! But you’re such a big deal, you’ll have no problem becoming an Upper Zeegan ... right? Seems to me you’re aiming a bit high, Rainer. Why not settle for what you’ve got down on lowly earth? Just choose better parents and a more peaceful country next time.”

His face slackened so suddenly that his injuries from the Boland skirmish appeared to swell, stopping my sarcasm dead. Could my words have changed his mood? Was I gaining some influence at last? Eager to maintain the edge, I got back to serious enquiry. “Time is short, Rainer. Let’s talk sensibly. What was that strange language you were talking? And more importantly, what’s ‘*Arom*’ mean?”

Pretending to be bored, he rumbled his lips and rolled his frog eyes. “We were speaking Zeegan,” he said in a matter-of-fact way. “Arom is nothing more or less than your Amen – a stupid, endless cry for peace and harmony. Yet ...” He paused, fuelled by sombre thoughts. “Yet the Zeegans have enemies ... on the horizons of their galaxies ... They have ... not ...” and he dried up again like a gurgling tap. His frailty was more apparent than ever, frailty of body and of mind.

The silence settled my thoughts, bringing them back to my strongest argument for making him falter: the premise that he was not ready to make a jump up his Life-Line. “It strikes me you don’t know how to say ‘Arom’ any more than I do,” I told him. “I mean how to really say it and wish for someone’s well being. You’re such a lonely man, Rainer. Apart from your dog, who do you care for? Certainly not your father, which is understandable. But I don’t see you doing much cherishing of António. Yet his love for you is apparent in everything he does.”

While I had been speaking a series of conflicting expressions had swept over his countenance. Now he flummoxed me entirely by throwing out his arms and bursting into song: “Love, love, love! All you need is love! Yeah! Yeah! ...”

I jumped, literally leaping off the sand. “Blast you, Rainer! Stop that!” – hitting at his arms to block their motion – “God dammit, on Monday you’ll be dead!”

A couple of dry cackles followed, before the iconoclast lowered his arms and said, “As I near the end of a tedious life, joking is most appropriate.” Upon which he hawked loudly, and then stomped off with difficulty through the molten sand towards António.

I had a moment of panic. “Rainer! You *have to* listen to me!”

His stomp turned into a wading that soon brought about a slide and fall. I ran up and leaned over him, watching him struggle, wanting the sand to keep him captive, wanting time to stop. I shouted down at him: “What are those screaming obstacles you tried to make me smash through on your Life-Line?”

He shrugged me off. I weighed in harder: “I found whole sections buried in destruction, smothered in havoc. Are those ‘the bands of Zeega’ that you’re so desperate to break? Damn you, tell me!”

Scorn wrinkled the scabs around his injured eye – scorn! – always the easy way out for him. He scrambled to his feet – “My suffering ... it is my suffering, you saw in Zeega! Are you surprised after all I have been through?”

“Are you sure it is not you who caused others to suffer?”

He certainly did not appreciate this last question. He shuffled off again. I was at his side, with the sweat springing out of me like my own blood. “Where was António when you died in Zeega?” I asked with shrill urgency.

He gave no answer. By now we had reached António lying face down on the beach. Rainer bent over him and covered the silver salt-powdered skin of his back with his shirt, murmuring coquettishly, “You were not happy in Zeega, were you my angel? But you accepted me. On Zeega you were so much nicer than that bitchy Elizabeth of York.”

I was dismayed that he had side-stepped me by reverting to this old chestnut. António did not stir. Rainer poked him disrespectfully with his toe. “Once you were a bad boy! Weren’t you? What made you get sweeter, eh? ... Arom! ... Tell our friend Miguel here! ... Arom! Arom! ... Tell him your goody goody explanations!” finishing off with two more sardonic Aroms!

I cut in sternly, “In your notebooks you made a list of nature’s normal and abnormal blocks ...”

This time he turned to me in surprise. “I did not give you my notes to use against me!” – and in so saying he plonked himself down next to his lover, a heap of disjointed bones.

I had the sinking feeling that he could fob me off forever. A sense of failure started to niggle at me. Now lost for words I became mesmerised by the sight of sand fleas jumping over beads of sweat on top of his glistening skull. It took a big effort to resume my battle with him.

“Rainer, listen carefully! Unlike António, I refuse to stand by and accept your death. If you won’t be honest with me, I’ll have to get António to explain things.”

“Ha!” he retorted. “See how far you get! Go ahead!”

I grabbed him by the shoulders. “You know what!” I shouted. “You are not prepared for death. Until you reach the bottom of the cold dark phases within your Life-Line, you are not ready to die.”

His jowls drooped like a bloodhound’s. With a tearful look, he wailed, “I taught you! How dare you tell me what to do? I will never stop building my hopes for success. Never!”

I tightened my grasp, determined to hurt him. “Why wait for Boland? I suggest you blow your brains out. Use your father’s shotgun. Go on! Do something straightforward for once!” – and off I went prowling round them both – “You tried every trick to make me stay at the house. Now you’ve got to deal with me. There’s no other choice. Your logic of predeterminism is *ordering* you to listen to me!”

He looked quite astonished by this statement.

António had started to get up. I addressed him at once with stern resolution. “António, tell me what happened to Rainer on Zeega! Did he start a war up there, or what?”

The accomplice pretended to have trouble pulling on his trousers.

“Talk to me! You’re a far bigger being than Rainer will ever be. You’ll go forward, while he’ll be left far behind, endlessly repeating dull lives in places like Mozambique.”

My intervention was a resounding failure: Rainer broke into laughter and António seized the chance to slip into his trousers and head for the restaurant.

“António!” I shouted after him. “You can’t turn the other cheek. Help me!”

Rainer was now laughing so hard he rolled over. It was a big act but it polished me off. It was my turn to stomp away.

No sooner had I squatted down under the palms by the roadside, than Rainer came past, wading in the deep sand. He called out to me, “Hey, Miguel! At worst, death on

Monday means I will have knocked twenty-five years off this lousy lifetime.” With a guffaw he continued on his way until he reached the roundabout from where he called back, “Come and have some refreshments! Or do you think a hunger strike might force me to change my mind?”

I shooed him away. How easily I faltered! I had felt so full of resolve to undermine his thinking, to save him – yet the moment my ammunition ran low, all I wanted to do was give up.

As I stared dejectedly in front of me, my attention was drawn to a dry bush where a plump green and yellow spider with long thin legs was shaking its web with persistent vigour while a fly stuck on the outer threads was buzzing helplessly: I associated the spider with Rainer Kruger, the web with his plot, and myself with the fly.

ADVICE FROM THE BISHOP

The Apostolics had begun trooping back to their lorry with the Bishop in the lead. For a while on earth, and maybe on another planet called Zeega, this self-styled holy man had known Rainer. I rallied to my feet.

Even though the congregation remained cosseted within their own private world, my intrusion drew a few wary glances. The Bishop had his back to me when I came up to him.

“Excuse me!”

He was surprised to find me in the midst of his flock.

“Can I talk to you for a moment?”

Without a word he turned away and helped an elderly man climb on board the open-backed lorry. Drawing closer, I persisted, “I believe you and Rainer knew each other on Zeega.” I had expected to shock him; instead, he picked up some baskets and handed them to a young woman.

When he was done, I said, “Unlike Rainer, I’m sure you can recall your past life there. Please tell me what terrible things happened to him.”

A woman with a child on her back came and asked him something in Shangaan; he directed her to the other side of the lorry. Fearing the permanent cold shoulder, I said, “He’s preparing to commit suicide. You could perhaps help save his life.”

At last I got his attention; he studied me as if trying to puzzle out what I was doing interfering in the affairs of superior beings ... or so I imagined. Finally he spoke: “Someone in a dark cave must find their own way out.”

Riled by this deliberate mystification, I snapped, “I need a straight answer, not a quote from the I Ching.”

He frowned, having clearly never heard of the I Ching. I quickly got back in line – “Are you telling me *not* to stop him from killing himself?”

He answered with sadness, “In any case he will not listen to you.”

“What am I supposed to do?” I sighed.

“Do whatever he wants you to do. But do not confront him.”

Already the last people were clambering on board. “I must go,” he said. “We must get to the airport.”

Holding on to his robes, I said, “But António also hates his plans.”

The Bishop shook his head. “He has understood they must be completed. Listen to António – he is a great one (*‘um grande’*)!”

It was a blow to hear him confirm António’s compliance. He leaned over and tapped me gently on my solar plexus. “You are a man who makes good judgements from in here,” he said. “Listen to them closely. The problem with Rainer is nothing gets done simply, everything has to be complicated with him. He is too full of reasons, always thinking up one thing and another. But you must not take this to mean his plans are stupid or wrong.”

I shook my head and asked, “What are you advising me to do?”

“Nothing! You will see that you can do nothing.” These were exactly the same words I had heard from Rainer! Then he went on to say something that meant little to me at the time, but would strike home a few days later; in Portuguese his comment was, “*O que acontecer, deve acontecer sem esforço*”, which means, “whatever must come to him, must come *effortlessly*.”

“But I have a role to play,” I protested. “He keeps telling me this. What is it?”

“Only you can find out.”

I was sickened by the systematic feeling of being out of my depth with these Zeegan types. I wished I hadn’t sought out the Bishop – all he had done was highlight my powerlessness.

I started to leave when he stopped me and said, “I give you these words to take with you – First Corinthians, Chapter Thirteen: ‘If I have all the eloquence of men or of angels, but speak without charity, I am simply a gong booming or a cymbal clashing. If I have the gift of prophecy, understanding all the mysteries there are, and knowing everything, and if I have faith to move mountains, but without charity, then I am nothing at all.’” (He broke off at this point and walked majestically towards the bus; I completed the remarkably apt quotation when I wrote the book.) “If I give away all that I possess, piece by piece, and if I even let them take my body to burn it, but am without charity, it will do me no good whatever.”

DANGER AVERTED – KUDZI CALLS – A REASSURING DREAM

Throughout the slow mile-consuming grind and clatter back to town, the arch conspirator remained as solemn and silent as the approaching night. I lay across the rear seat thinking about the Bishop, a potential ally who had slipped between my fingers and vanished into the wasteland.

It was dusk when we arrived at the house – only twenty minutes for the descent of darkness. No sooner had we disembarked from the car than the thick body of Klaus Kruger loomed in the doorway like a boulder. As he progressed forwards into the evening light; it was clear from his face that he had heard about the factory fire. It was the first time I saw Rainer visibly shrink before his father. António slinked around the side of the house to get out of the firing line – or so I thought – and I remained out of danger’s way on the far side of the car.

Mr Kruger advanced stiff-legged on to the driveway; his eyes shone evilly, the fleshy tissue of his face trembled, and he was breathing hard as if he carried something lethal in his chest – like a bomb. In a voice taut with fury, the old man told his son, “I want you out of my house. Do you hear me? Pack your things! Go starve!”

Rainer flapped his arms like a stranded penguin.

Then to my surprise I saw António emerge soundlessly through the open doorway. After a few soft words assuring the father that his son was not responsible for the fire, his hand descended with a weightless sweep on to his shoulder. Once hooked there, the hand and its strong arm began to reel him in steadily like some tired but lethal big game fish, drawing him through the doorway and inside the hall where he got scooped out of striking range by the rapid closing and locking of the front door.

I released a trapped in-breath; the taming of the old man had been one *tour de force* too many for one day.

I made for the back door with Rainer at my heels, chuckling.

In the kitchen we drunk a lot of water. Then, full of mischief, Rainer insisted on taking me through to the living area to see what was happening.

We found Mr Kruger seated in his favourite armchair on the veranda, with António stroking his drooped head as if it were a baby's. Catching sight of us, António nodded reassuringly. Then Rainer whispered to me, "Good old António! He is almost as talented as me at that sort of thing."

Entering into the spirit of the occasion, I approached for a better view of the show, whereupon António astonished me by acting completely out of character: he tickled Mr Kruger under the chin, then with an exaggerated pout of the lips, pecked the old man's forehead with a kiss. Rainer laughed so loudly I was sure that his father would wake up and resume his murderous life where he had left off. Fortunately, he cut himself off with a loud "Shh!" Klaus Kruger, meanwhile, remained oblivious to everything.

Impressed and highly amused, I said a cheery goodnight, and left them to it.

A blinding paraffin lamp wrenched me out of sleep – from the sticky darkness of the library came the disembodied voice of António repeating that there was a phone call for me and that it was Kudzi ...

The miracle sank in as I fumbled down the dark passage to the hall. For so many weeks Kudzi had been stuck in my mind like a persistent song phrase; yet, over the last hectic couple of days this phrase had almost completely slipped away.

With an unsteady hand I picked up the phone and said "Hello?" – as if I didn't know who was there.

"Hello, Michael. I was wondering how you were?" Kudzi said, agreeably.

I was expecting punishment for my behaviour at the Agricultural Institute. Lost in disbelief, I asked cagily, "What do you mean?"

"Someone saw you looking a bit ill in the Búzio."

It would have been impossible to describe in a few simple sentences my condition in the Búzio ... "Hangover and such ..." I mumbled, and when she did not reply, bumbled on, "I didn't expect to hear from you."

"I also feel sad," she said, unexpectedly.

All of a sudden the art of loving seemed so easy. Hope filled my sails. "I may be able to start coping better ... but ... I don't expect you'll believe me ..."

"It would be nice to believe you." These were wonderful words to hear, even though they lacked conviction.

She continued, “Ulla would like to see you.” The axe fell ... but at least the memory of her sweetness, seconds earlier, survived the emergence of her motive for phoning. My tongue fought for words – “When ... would she like ... to do that?”

“Quite soon. Tomorrow would be good.”

That was more than soon. “For what purpose?”

“I honestly don’t know. Something’s cropped up. You know, the sort of thing that needs to be discussed in person.”

Kudzi suggested 2:00p.m. in Ulla’s flat. Then she added something that lifted my fading spirits, slightly: “I’d like you to come. I don’t want you getting hurt if something funny is going on.”

“I’ll be there.”

“She’ll send a car for you.”

I thanked her and we rang off. My having been half-asleep at the outset had helped guide me through the hazards of this call. If Kudzi had really not wanted to speak to me, surely she would have made Ulla phone? So she must have been genuinely concerned for my safety. I was pleased by her expression of care. At the same time I was conscious that a day or two earlier I would have been more than pleased – I would have been leaping for joy, desperate to believe that her call was an olive branch. As I replaced the receiver I surprised myself by how calm I was. Was it possible that my emotions were less in her hands, that I was less at her disposal?

With the gratifying lilt of her voice still in my ear, I went back to bed ...

A hot desert plain extends out of sight. I am a knight in armour sitting on a stationary horse, also encased in armour. Our armour is a homogenous black.

A man in a bowler hat appears from nowhere and shouts a magic formula along the lines of *abracadabra*. The man is Rainer. His incantation propels the horse into full gallop towards a distant horizon. I spur the horse on to even greater speed; together we muster such velocity that the plain shakes for miles around; I firmly believe that nothing can stop such a hurtling tank of muscle and steel.

Ahead lies a puddle produced by an underground spring - an insignificant dot in the landscape. But as the horse is set on a unidirectional course, its hoof strikes the water and slips in the mud – its head swings upward baring its teeth in terror while a human shriek arises from its throat and the entire edifice – horse and knight – crashes down upon the rock-hard ground.

Kudzi hesitantly approaches the debris: set in the centre of the horse’s bleeding heart is a severed head smiling up at her – it is mine.

A man circles down from the sky with his arms outstretched like the wings of a bird. He lands gently on Kudzi’s shoulder. It is Julian Friedmann, my agent. With sagacious gravity Julian looks at me and says, “*You are the freed man’s verser!*” To lend weight to his words, Kudzi gives a nod of approval.

I scrambled for matches, lit my candle and wrote down all the details of this dream that was at once terrible and beautiful, and had turned out so encouragingly. Then I went to the kitchen where I sat mulling over its loaded meaning while drinking Agi’s cool cordial.

An agent is a crucial link between artist and public; my first book *Black Fire!* had seen the light of day through Julian Friedmann, a London-based writer’s agent; the symbolic meaning of the agent was obviously central to the dream.

Julian had announced that I was to be freed. Freed from what? Apparently from a condition represented by the knight on horseback, a conventional metaphor for war. But my horse had crashed – so we lost the war. Unlike my previous dream of Pegasus, in this dream a new form emerged from the destruction: my smiling head, serene like a glowing

firefly. “*You are the freed man’s verser!*” Julian had said. I interpreted this to mean that after the defeat of the clichéd warrior I used to be, a new warrior would be “freed” – a warrior of a different sort bearing new and different weapons, the verbal weapons of a “verser”.

I asked myself: here and now in real life, in Maputo, with the countdown beginning, was it Rainer who was destined to play Julian’s role? Would Rainer be the one who made the connections for me? Was he the one who came down from the sky to name the new and greater warrior? And once named, would I finally receive the nod of approval from Kudzi, from “She”, from the goddess herself?

My stomach sank as I reminded myself that entry to this promised future in the dream had required the combined destruction of horse and rider. Did this mean that I was destined to die with Rainer in the final outcome of his machinations on Monday? Surely inner and outer worlds could not merge in a disaster as fundamental as that!

THE TREE STUMP

At 11:30p.m. I was still sitting in the kitchen, now going over my phone conversation with Kudzi. First, I savoured her voice; then I bridled at the thought of Ulla’s demands; and gradually a shrewd idea emerged from it all: since Kudzi’s Danish friend apparently had the necessary connections to get me out of the Kim Il Sung barracks, presumably she could also get someone locked up in it – Boland! With Boland in jail on Monday, Rainer’s schemes might come to nothing, or at least be stalled. After all, Ulla was waiting for me to come up with something ...

A sharp noise gave me a start – like feet on gravel – right outside the kitchen window; I imagined we were being raided all over again.

I peered out: in the moonlight a shadow was moving past, and I braced myself ... seconds later the back door squealed and Rainer came in. I swore with a combination of exasperation and relief. He was thoroughly awake and emphatically threw these words at me: “I have something I must show you in the yard – now!”

I sat down with a weary sigh. How long had he been out there? What was he doing in the middle of the night? This was supposed to be the night the arms were moved out!

“Nothing to worry about. Come! Bring your tape recorder!”

Fearing the worst, I found myself trailing along behind him through the back garden, under the light of the half-moon. He lit the way with a strong flashlight. In and around the trees the fruit bats were busy performing their *Phantom of the Opera*. As we approached a deeply shadowed corner of the property, I asked, “Where exactly are you taking me?”

“*Calma, meu amigo!*” he chuckled. “Nothing to do with politics. I promise.”

Swinging the beam of his light on to the sawn-off tree stump, he came to a halt before it, and beckoned me over. Crouching down, he brushed away the earth that had been packed and repacked on the surface by the indefatigable termites. “Do you see the rings of this tree?” he asked with the excitement of someone who had discovered a pot of gold.

“Of course I can!”

“All around us there are mirrors of the secrets of nature.”

I swore again, this time out of sheer exasperation; after all my attempts to dissuade him, here he was back again ploughing his own furrow – and in the middle of the night!

Ignoring me, he jabbed the centre of the stump – the knotted fist, the marker of the tree’s origins – and said, “Imagine the kernel is the Big Bang, the first dramatic burst of life,” – moving his hand outward across the rings of the tree – “these are the evolutionary stages of life, the various genera – ‘Kingdoms’ I call them – moving in time and space from particles, to elements, minerals, one-cell organisms, animals, arriving at humans, Gurr, and then after that to Upper Zeegans and their equivalents, the Horaals who live in yet another corner of the cosmos.”

His propensity to create agitation had a deadening effect. As did the confusion he could manufacture. Just as I was beginning to take Zeegans and Gurr in my stride, up he came with Horaals! “You mean to say! ...” I exclaimed, “that you brought me out here in the dead of the night to show me the stump of a felled tree?”

“But ...” he said, throwing open his hands darkly like the wings of the ghost moth, “... it illustrates everything there is to say!”

He was unrelenting. I brushed away more earth and ants, then sat down feebly on the stump. “I’m rather worn out, Rainer. I have sun stroke, I’m bruised all over, I’m at the end of my tether with your suicide theories ... But I see nothing’s going to stop you telling me whatever it is you want to tell me. Just make it brief!”

Brief was not in his vocabulary, but he did his best. It was as if he had chosen the tree stump as his last weapon in the battle for my mind.

According to him the cross-section of the tree showed how the Universal Field continually instructs activated forms how to grow in complexity, ring by ring, Kingdom by Kingdom, over billions of years towards the ultimate organism in its plan for the universe. Pointing at the outer ring nearest the bark, he said this was where the universe had got to so far with the genus Upper Zeegan – hence it could be counted as the “Highest” or “First” Kingdom. “Don’t worry,” he said, “Horaals are Zeegans living elsewhere in the cosmos – like Mozambicans down here and Swedes up there.”

Stroking the flat of the stump, he went on more precisely, “As you can see, the history of this tree goes from the kernel to the outside membrane – that is its direction of motion. It is the same for the cosmos. Imagine these rings, year by year, reaching out towards the final ring, and you have a picture of life building one evolutionary Kingdom greater than the other in pursuit of its final solution.”

He squinted at me. I tried to look won over.

“What I am bringing to your attention is this: it goes without saying that from the point of view of the Universal Field, which has the plan, the beginning and the end were worked out before the process started, before the Big Bang. This stump is a brilliant analogy for the tree of life itself. Do you see? The ultimate goal of the Field was always there, right from the beginning. The seed contains the tree.”

“You know that I don’t go along with your determinism,” I protested ineffectively.

“This afternoon on the beach, you even used the word to make fun of my plot. Before Monday, you must reverse your point of view if you are to become a good recorder of my last testament.” A remark that immediately brought me back to my dream: was this to be my only role as the “freed man’s verser”? – to be nothing more than the verser of Rainer’s infernal story?

I responded, “Who wants to be invited to a death-watch?”

I was so close to him that I could sense the pleasure of his anticipated victory over me. Perhaps because of the darkness I was more aware than ever of his pitiless energy

that had never ceased pushing him up from the primordial soup. Over a period of ten days, my old ideas had been crushed, one by one, by his bludgeoning insistence. With a groan I said, “I see no connection between your tree of life here and your crazy plot!”

Shoving the light in my face, almost brutally, he said, “First you must appreciate how the theorists of evolution have got the dynamics wrong because they cannot see the final structure of our universe. So, of course, they are unable to conceive that life is being drawn up by the end solution, not pushed up haphazardly from the base.”^{xii}

He put his finger on the outermost ring of the trunk — the one representing the First or Highest Kingdom— and then moved it inwards to the second one. “Once we have developed to this ring, the Second Kingdom – the stage of evolution where humans and Gurr become activated – we become conscious about being conscious. We can stand back and see the plan. Miguel, no other being in the Kingdoms below you – on any of these other rings going back to the kernel – is capable of having the insight you obtained yesterday in the Earth sub-Field.”

For a moment the torch light fell aimlessly on his bare feet which were digging into the dust like the gnarled roots of a living tree. He pointed at the outer two rings again and continued, “Mutations are usually counted in time-blocks of thousands or millions of years. But when you reach this level where the highest powers of reasoning have been activated along with the highest powers of psi, then evolution suddenly speeds up and, under certain conditions, can be counted in split seconds.”

I flinched at his insistence on short time scales, knowing that “certain conditions” for him doubtlessly referred to his moment of death.

“What’s the big hurry?” I asked.

Waving his flash light at the moon and the star-studded sky, he exclaimed, “It is the Universal Field that is in a hurry!” In the chiaroscuro cast by the light, his head came straight out of Punch and Judy – it fitted in with the piping of the bats.

I shook my head. “I still completely fail to see the link with the events you’ve scheduled for New Year’s Eve.”

“*Pelo amor de Deus*, Miguel! The Fields have armed us with the ultimate tools needed for completing their strategy. Not only that, but they have filled us with the desire to use them so that we can read the signs leading us into the future. I am no different to any other activate in my desire to advance – no different to you, no different to any particle of energy. Even if the laws of polarity mean that in the end the tree comes crashing down – and hey presto! we all become firewood! – such anxieties are irrelevant as the push to get to the top is inexhaustible and common to all. So you see, Miguel: what I am doing on Monday is simply pushing my Life-Line up the evolutionary tree, *consciously*, as best I can, as I am ordained to do.”^{xiii}

Pulling me up by my shirt, Rainer drew me closer to the labyrinth of hair-line cracks in the wood. “See the thousands of interconnections running everywhere – let us say these are the Life-Lines.” He found a rusty nail near his feet, which he stuck into the ring representing the Second Kingdom. “Here is my current position, materialised at a specific time-place conjunct: planet Earth, Mozambique, entering at conception on February 20, 1947. If you follow a route from this position backwards through the cracks, passing through all the previous rings, you will arrive at the centre of the tree – this is Life-Line-Following into the past. Likewise, if you look ahead from the nail towards the outside

trunk, I am following my Specific Life-Line's ghostly path into the future – and there it is, look at it there! ... it is joining up with the First Kingdom, isn't it?"

As I peered at the winding interjoining cracks expanding into a vast network of routes across the whole stump, I began to feel that I was being offered a privileged look into the secret ways of nature. Could he really be right about everything? At the same time echoes came to me of the Bishop's voice telling me to leave Rainer alone. Yet despite this warning, my old views on the finality of death would not let up; they were still persuading me to resist my host's captivating arguments. They proved to be the last kicks of a dying horse.

He blinded me yet again with his confounded lamp, and continued, "You know, Miguel, I can directly sense the shift of structures in energy fields like a nuclear physicist detects particles whizzing and colliding in traces that reflect their meaning. Why, even now I can see your planetary system spinning round your head!" He laughed proudly at his smart analogy.^{xiv}

"Evolution applies to species, not to individuals," I argued. "You, as Rainer on your own, can not lead us heroically to a new level of existence like some Hercules!"

Once again he swept his hand over the stump. "Ah, Miguel, contrary to what you think, even I with all my cynicism I am not beyond enthrallment! For the Universal Field there is no such thing as random – only astonishing organisation; and no such thing as insignificant – you, me, this single tree, we all of us have a specific role to play both as species and individuals. Let me mention my friend Mozart once again: when he arrived in Vienna, he possessed a full set of talent traits, consciousness levels, intuitive and psychic features gained over thousands of years – all special to him. You see, we are, all of us, on the move! ... By the way, when I was Richard III, Mozart was in my court – his name was Montague – he was my favourite musician."

Baulking – but now only slightly – at the proposition that I was beholding Richard III reactivated in a boring shirt and crumpled trousers, I queried, "As far as I know, geneticists believe you cannot set out to deliberately push evolution forward."

The remark met with his usual dismissiveness. "We – creatures of the First and Second Kingdoms – we alone have the capacities. Some of us will learn to use them, and succeed in moving up our Life-Line, others will have difficulties and get stuck and keep repeating the same type of life. And you, dear Miguel, risk getting very stuck, if I have to go on and on repeating everything to you ten times over!"

It did not take much to make me feel slow-witted these days. I said, "I am doing my best, Rainer. But I've only been with you a few days ..."

He smiled and pinched my cheek. "I know, Miguel, it is a struggle for us all. But no worries: if needs be you will have other chances to try during other lifetimes. Look at me: even with full recall of my past activations, I have failed to move up from the Kingdom of troublesome humans and Gurr's. I may fail again this time round, but it will not be for lack of trying. All I can say in my own defence, is that at this very moment I can clearly see the perfect alignment of my own forces with those of the Fields. This is why everything is set for Monday."

Aggravation abruptly got the better of him. "I beg you, Miguel, stop seeking to hinder my plans! By now, even with the little you know, you must realise why your wish to stop me is futile. Leave me alone! If I fail to shift up this time, next time I will be driven to try again, and again after that ... until I succeed."

It was impossible for me to let go of him with a snap of the fingers – I had grown too close to him for that. I mumbled, “It is very hard to include death in the prescription for a friend’s well-being.”

“There you go again with your short-term view of death!”

“I find it hard to believe that it will bring you success, or happiness, or whatever. Anyway, you don’t actually have full recall because you can’t break through the bands of Zeega. So all this ‘I am ready’ stuff ...” My words sounded like the token retaliation of a hard-pressed combatant.

He clicked his tongue. “What is the point of wanting me to view myself as some sort of cripple? We can only make calculated guesses of the allotted time of our next inactivation. I cannot stop to consider that my limitations might bring about my failure. If I were that negative then I would simply commit suicide without taking all this trouble to line up the co-ordinates.”

I urged him to stop blinding me with the torch. Crushed by the cumulative weight of his arguments, I turned to another premise I found difficult to swallow – his negation of free will. “Timing and signs and coordinates and so on – sounds like astrological wishful-thinking to me.”

He responded by taking my hand and placing my index finger on the imaginary nail in the tree stump. “I am currently sitting at this place on this ring here. If I were born over there, on the other side of the ring, I would be relating to everything from a different position ... isn’t it? A different lattice of lines would surround me. My life would be other than it is.”

Removing my hand, I answered, “I don’t accept that astrology directs our lives.”

This time a flip of his wrist relegated my remark to the dustbin. “Stars have no direct influence on us. That is not what astrology is about. The quality of a Life-Line determines in which Kingdom it will be activated. We can not have me reborn as my dog Rosa, can we? A Line’s material receptacle must conform exactly with its state of development in every detail. So the time-place co-ordinate of reactivation must be understood in a broad sense: this includes appropriate combining genes of parents – the physical receptacle – as well as the required planetary, geographical and social environment – in other words, the time and place of conception and birth.”

“Hold on! You’re telling me every time Mozart is reborn, everything required to feed his talent is there! Like Vienna, the right parents, everything?”

“Exactly! Astrology is knowledge of the dynamic interconnection of associated activates.”

A bat with the moon on its wings streaked the shadows nearby. Rainer hadn’t got the better of me yet. I said, “And why on earth are you in this ‘hell hole’ as you call it, and with that swine of a father? Answer me that!”

“My development plan made the choice. But I am not sure why. Somehow I have attracted all this rubbish to help me move forward. It is the same for you: born in Cairo, brought up in Zimbabwe, living between Africa and Europe, loving a black African woman. Also, for good reason, your Life-Line chose your particular genetic mix and cultural diversity.”

“Confusion seems to be the result,” I said. “If only I could be someone like Fellini, born in Rome and making films about Rome! His creative power is generated by his concise frame of reference.”

“Perhaps you are sharpening your artistic skills in a different way: as a citizen of the world, as a man of the future where frontiers mean nothing. You and I, Miguel, with all our mix, we are free to stop asking ourselves who we are according to the colour of our skin, our sexual preferences, our language, our religion and other stupidities. Why even Zeegan Gurrus have stopped that! Your special trajectory has evolved your consciousness to give you a valuable openness: to see things differently, accept new ideas. And for sure, your Life-Line has led you to Kudzi, to Maputo and finally to me.”

A panicked sense of my own doom seized me. I was coming to accept that Rainer was genuinely trying to be my mentor; and not just for his own benefit but for mine as well. So I was moved to ask, “Kudzi speaks of an emptiness in me that I am always trying to fill. What is it?”

“You filled it with a deadly lance in one of your lives ... That was a big signpost for you.”

“Pointing at what?”

“I have not had time to follow your Life-Line deeply. That is your job. Look for other signs, follow them, link them up. One day you will discover where they are leading you.”

“Apart from the crusader, can you see any other of my past lives?”

“You were not a crusader but a minstrel. Yes, I’ve seen others. You were a poet in Japan. And you were even a Maasai once, which is why you were attracted to make that film about the Maasai who became a politician in Tanzania – this man has a very similar life to the one you led two hundred years earlier.”

“What else do you see?”

“You think you are a film maker, but I see you more as a writer, like when you were in Japan telling philosophical stories to a powerful warlord. This is recorded on a segment of your Life-Line even earlier than your life in Europe during the Middle Ages.”

“So now I’m destined to write your story, right? How convenient!”

A twig cracked behind us – Rainer swung his torch – António was coming towards us out of the night.

The ebony knight stopped close by, looking at us with eyes that had an inward-lighted quality of quiet reason. “*Está na hora!*” he said to his lover (“It is time!”).

In instant submission, Rainer dropped his shoulders. “*Está bem! Eu sei!*” he answered. Then, taking my arm in that conspiratorial manner he loved to assume, he said in an undertone, “You see, it can not be António, it must be you, Miguel, who will be the one to tell. António does not like to tell things.”

“Tell what, for God’s sake?”

“My entire cosmology that I am giving you. And not only will you be the sole recorder of my ideas, but you will be the one who ties them all up.”

“How could I possibly do that?”

“Because you will be the key witness of my final act. It will be you, Miguel, who will know if my plan has worked ... or not.”

“Indeed I will,” I responded in distress. “All I’ll need is your corpse!”

A bat shrieked as it swerved past perilously close to us; its shriek could have been my own. But I reminded myself that I still had one card up my sleeve – the jailing of Boland. This brought me a modicum of consolation.

António stepped forward. “Enough! We cannot wait!” His voice had the same commanding resonance that I had heard when he led Rainer away from the fire. Immediately I was reassured by António, for I believed him to be truly in love with Rainer and incapable of deviousness, now that matters were coming to a head.

“I am ready,” Rainer said with a tremor in his voice.

António moved away as silently as a panther towards the house, taking my scraggy friend with him like the walking wounded.

With the removal of Rainer – the disruptive force – a couple of fireflies began circling the stump with their silent glow. They reminded me of the night of my arrival, as did the steely roof squatting low like a helmet over the house, as did the bats beating and piping at the shadows.

Although I had arrived less than two weeks ago, it felt as though months had passed. Rainer had been the storyteller from the moment I met him; now, at last, he had seduced me into being a character in his plot, although I had no idea what my role was supposed to include over the next hours ... other than acting as his biographer.

At this point I was ready to concede that I no longer stood in a sufficient state of ignorance of his cosmology to be able to impede deliberately the unfolding of his plans ... at least not in any rational argumentative way. Nevertheless my emotions still refused to accept the situation; they were calling out to me to pursue the only thin line of hope left – the removal of Boland from the final act.

All of a sudden there was an unexplained swell in the piping of the bats hanging in the nearest jacaranda tree. It sent a cold shiver through me despite the heat that was stretching its long arm across the night reaching for the sun.

As I made for the back door I became aware, once more, of the shroud of death that hung over the house, over the city, over the country – the same shroud that had so long ago wrapped itself round my own Life-Line, and had forever clung to it as it passed over the African continent, and up to Cairo from where its deathly fringes swept back across oceans of time to mediaeval Europe, back to Japan, and back to wherever it had first begun to formulate itself as an identifiable unit, currently travelling under the name of Michael.

No sooner was I in the library than the Peugeot’s engine started up. António was already at the gate and Rainer was backing the car out. I presumed that they must have taken the weapons down from the tower while I was in the depths of my dream, and loaded them into the boot of the car.

They were away for what seemed like hours. Throughout, I stood stiffly at my library window watching the gate like an anxious parent.

At long last, lights punctured the night ... the gate opened ... the car drove in ... to finish off knocking into the geranium bed and stalling.

As the two of them walked past my window, Rainer tapped on the glass and called out, “Good night, Miguel!” And behind him, António said to me, “*Está bem! Boa noite!*”

It was like hearing the passwords of a clandestine organisation of which I had become a blood member. Words that were sweet to the ear and soothing to the nerves.

“*Boa noite!*” I called back.

DAY ELEVEN – SATURDAY 29TH DECEMBER 1984**A SHOCKING DEATH**

Gunfire! My first thought: Rainer's shot himself! Unlike the distant rattle of automatics that had disturbed my first night, this was a single loud blast, and more frightening through its proximity. Within seconds, a woman's persistent wailing rose from behind the house.

Dressed only in my trousers, I entered the kitchen. The early morning sun fuzzed the gauze on the back door, but I could nevertheless make out António's form crouched over something in the back yard.

The sprung hinges squealed as I pushed open the door and stepped outside, and my field of vision connected me instantly with the object of António's attention: Rosa, blood-soaked, with her chest ripped open and her back legs shuddering ... a spectacle of horror whose effect was muted by the fact that it was not Rainer who had been shot.

Then I saw the old man: he was standing by his workshop with his shotgun in his arms and a smirk across his face, mesmerised by his own sadism. Even the acute wailing from the domestic quarters could not break the hold his atrocious expression had on me; I surmised that it was not just grief at the dog's death that had driven Agi to hysteria, but fear of the ghastly mind of its killer.

Klaus Kruger shrunk back into the shed's shadows ... until all that was left of him were his gunmetal eyes – glimmering chips of mica.

I approached António who was stroking the dying animal. The dog's legs splayed stiffly as they reached for death; already flies were zeroing in.

"Where's Rainer?" I asked.

"He has gone out," he answered almost inaudibly.

I stared at the dog until outrage at the madness behind the revengeful deed made me avert my eyes. The insensitivity of my next question was embarrassing: "Is this to be taken as a sign of something?"

Fortunately, António did not react. When I knelt down beside him I noticed the stark grief in his eyes. In my softest voice I said, "Just as well Rainer was out."

"No more Rosa will help him," António said. "Knowing he will not have to leave her behind when he departs will make it easier for him." I was surprised that he was able to speak at all, even more so by his statement. Then the uncharitable thought came to me that Rainer might have loved the dog more than he loved António, since he had never mentioned that the fulfilment of his plot would leave António behind.

Agi's wails began to fade, lowering the level of tension. I asked, "Should we perhaps bury her before he gets back?"

"He must see the animal is dead for himself." António's curt reply reminded me that he was made of sterner stuff than me or his lover. I was more convinced than ever that he had assumed total control of the plot. This brought me a certain relief, although for no apparent reason since by endorsing the plot his intervention was unlikely to alter Rainer's chances of survival.

The sound of savage sawing from the shed – Mr Kruger’s confirmation that much had been put right with the world – sent me back indoors.

It was now nearly midday – the morning had begun late. In a short while I was to meet Ulla.

I was drinking stale coffee in the kitchen when Agi came in with swollen eyes. “Things are not good here, master,” she croaked as she began washing dishes, deriving some consolation from the habit of a lifetime. Looking at me directly for once, she said, “You should leave here, master. Me myself, I would leave now if I could. But out there,” – waving at the world beyond the garden – “there is much war! ... and inside this house, there is also war. So what to do? I have nowhere to go!”

Incapable of giving her the reassurance she needed, all I came up with was, “Try and keep your head low, Agi. Keep to your quarters as much as you can over the next couple of days.” At this point, knowing that Rainer had set up a pension plan for her in South Africa (referred to in his notebooks) was of small consolation to no one other than myself; and fast tempered by the thought that I had learnt of nothing similar for António.

I went to have a shave. But only half my face was done when I heard the Peugeot arrive. I waited ... razor poised. Rainer swept through the house calling for António. I heard Agi’s incoherent warnings, “Master! Is terrible! Oh, master! Shame, master!” The back door squeaked, snapped shut. I stiffened. His response when it came was an explosion of agony as if he had been stabbed; I dropped the razor and rushed out ...

He was on his knees with the dog in his arms, gasping for breath. Quickly I was brought to an abrupt halt by forced laughter crashing in from the shed: “Now how do you feel?” – Klaus Kruger standing in the doorway, jabbing a finger at his son – “Not so good! Eh?”

Trembling with emotion, Rainer raised eyes to his father, who continued to shake with villainous laughter. I feared the worst: perhaps Rainer would charge at the old man; perhaps he would kill him with one of his stun rays. Instead, miraculous changes of expression played across his face: pity was the moulding influence – in next to no time it fleshed out the folds of his face until he radiated the sweetest compassion; although he directed his feelings towards his father, they enveloped me as well, and then extended over the plants, the trees, the birds, the droning insects. Was this a new Rainer? A Rainer of generosity and moral stature? Had I witnessed the full emergence of the guru?

The old man was fast disarmed by his son’s philanthropic reflex, which he did not appreciate at all: as he backed into the shed’s gloom his laughter dried up, leaving putty-coloured rolls of flesh hanging flaccidly from his chin, and on his face an expression of bafflement similar to Boland’s when he had retreated from António in the car park.

Turning his gaze on Rosa, Rainer lowered the body to the ground, exposing a beige shirt covered in blood. Then, slowly and systematically, he proceeded to cross his legs, close his eyes, and settle himself until he became perfectly still with his upturned palms basking in his lap. Thus the calculated motive of his entire performance became evident: to neutralise his father and provide himself with a becalmed space to numb his grief. The degree of cunning was remarkable – cold-blooded, even; and it led me to accept that,

more likely than not, he possessed the necessary courage, will-power and self-discipline to pull off his elaborate suicide.

António, who had apparently been standing there all along under the shade of a paw-paw tree, chose this moment to step out and move over to Rainer. He took him by the wrist and checked his pulse.

“Is he all right?” I asked inanely.

António nodded. Then in one fluid motion, he stepped over the dog’s carcass, gathered his lover in his arms as if he were a child, and carried him into the house, Rainer’s body remaining locked in the cross-legged position as if he were fashioned in stone.

The conspirator was set up on the carpet in his bedroom before his shambolic desk. His rigid posture, along with the dog’s blood on his arms and clothes, transformed him into an incongruous sculpture that combined elements of a Buddha with those of a Christian martyr. It was impossible not to be impressed, once more, by the variety of states that Rainer could put himself into for his own advantage at the drop of a hat: in this instance a stony trance proved an effective ploy for keeping trauma at bay.

As we left, António locked the door and took the key.

And in that room, in that position, my host was to remain for the next twenty-four hours without moving.

ULLA’S PLOT

At 1:40p.m. a Frelimo government 4 X 4 hooted for me at the gate, ready to take me to Ulla’s apartment.

We drove past the walled-in barber’s shop where I had been mugged, an incident whose emotional impact had been overshadowed by countless more. The Bishop had advised me to listen to my intuitions; yet the distinction between intuition, instinct, emotion and psi was hard for me to make in the helter skelter of Rainer’s world. I asked myself if it were not perhaps emotion that dominated my relationship with him, which would explain my vacillations with regard to his plot. During Boland’s assault, had not the disillusionment that came from following his damaged Life-Line during lunch, been instantly replaced by concern for his fate? Then there had been the holding of hands and running on the beach, the smiling eyes: just a growing bond of empathy and friendship, or something more? And now, the death of Rosa had evoked a pang of sympathy in my heart for her owner that propelled me far from my original antipathy towards him ... As we came in sight of the Catembe towerblocks against the sweltering skyline, the possibility that I might, in fact, have come to love the lunatic struck me like a blow to the head.

The driver drew up at our destination. There was no knowing if Kudzi would be there or not; but once I got out of the vehicle I had a hard time pushing her to the back of mind in order to concentrate on what lay ahead with Ulla. I repeated the following resolution to myself: Despite the advice of the Bishop and Rainer’s own request, I will enter this meeting with my original purpose intact: to get Boland, the principal assassin, arrested by Frelimo and, hopefully, Miguel da Silva as well.

Walking up the dank stairwell gave me time to rehearse my tactics: Confirm that da Silva and Boland are Renamo agents and that sabotage is afoot; announce that Rainer has

hidden “the ham” and is preparing to deliver it to Frelimo; convince Ulla that da Silva and Boland should be arrested so there can be no danger of the arms being discovered by them before the scheduled handover to Frelimo.

As I knocked at the door, a fatalistic Rainer-style thought occurred to me: If I were meant to save Rainer’s life, it would happen within the next few minutes; if not – so it was meant to be.

Ulla let me in, so determinedly hostile that she refused to greet me. I was surprised to find two seemingly high-ranking Frelimo officers sitting at the dining table next to a white woman in her thirties. There was no sign of Kudzi; I immediately felt short-changed by her absence.

As the door was shut and locked behind me, one of the officers indicated that I should sit. At the centre of the dining table lay a revolver with its barrel pointing at the chair to which he directed me. Ulla joined the unanimously antagonistic panel, which was heavy with inquisitional overtones.

To underline my foreign status or gain some other psychological advantage, Ulla insisted on holding the interrogation in English, leaving the other white woman – whose deliberate absence of care for her appearance, along with her English Home Counties’ accent, suggested that she must be a Fabian⁸ – to translate everything into Portuguese.

Ulla weighed right in, without preliminaries: “Why did you fail to inform us that Rainer Kruger was hiding armaments in his house?”

Her opening line had swept the carpet from under my feet. My head was reeling: Who had informed them? – Toto? – or had Rainer himself told them what he was doing?

Ulla continued, “My advice to you is not to mess about. The situation is urgent. Where has he moved them?”

“I have no idea,” I muttered.

Her blue eyes drilled into mine. “We think his actions are driven entirely by motives of his own. Answer my question! Where are the weapons?”

To cover my tracks I stammered out the lie, “Until yesterday I wasn’t sure he actually had any weapons,” and added, “It’s just that I overhear him using the word ‘ham’, which you told me about. So I expected the worst.”

The Fabian lady conveyed the information thus far in her Home Counties’ Portuguese. Whereupon one of the Mozambicans – a strapping fellow who looked too young for this sort of work – rasped, “You knew he removed them yesterday, but you failed to tell us. Why?”

Sensing there was some sort of trap behind this line of questioning, I scrambled for a suitable reply. “Last night Rainer and his servant loaded something heavy into the car ... so I put two and two together: that weapons had been concealed on the property. But this was only a few of hours ago! I was waiting to tell you here.”

The young fellow scowled in the course of the translation, then asked, “When did the two men return?”

“Several hours ...”

“Precise!”

“I don’t know. I fell asleep ... at least an hour.”

⁸ The Fabians are a British intellectual socialist pressure group founded in 1884. After the end of colonialism, many Fabians came out to fledgling socialist countries such as Ghana, Uganda, Guinea Bissau, Mozambique, and Angola to advise on socialist principles.

“Where did they go?”

“Don’t know.”

“Can you find out in the next few hours?”

“I doubt it.”

My interrogator scowled again, nastily. His brother in arms, who was older, thinner, more pleasant and therefore probably more lethal, asked, “Why did he move them?”

My reply was intended to surprise them. “The arms belong to Renamo, as you may already know. The reason Rainer moved them was for the safety of his household as he is preparing to hand them over to you.”

“Yes. On Monday night,” the older Mozambican announced, triumphant in his knowledge.

Rainer was an agile player: he must have contacted these people earlier. I had been disabled yet again.

Amused by my incredulity, the same man continued, “What do you know about Miguel da Silva and John Boland?”

“They are Renamo, of course.”

“How are you so sure?” the younger fellow hit back like the other’s able tennis partner.

If I were to get what I wanted, I had to stop the question-and-answer game. So I threw down all my strongest cards: the story of Boland’s attack and Rainer’s great fear of him; and a warning that Renamo might already know about the planned handover because I had seen da Silva acting suspiciously towards Rainer; and a reminder that, if this were the case, Boland and da Silva could grab the armaments at any moment; and finally, my considered advice that only the immediate arrest of these two men would ensure that the weapons got to Frelimo safely.

To my disappointment, the translation produced neither unease nor excitement among my interlocutors. Disdain was the only emotion behind the young man’s next question: “Why do you want to save Rainer Kruger?”

I answered in a flash of anger, “He’s your man! You should be saving him!”

Disliking my cockiness, the young man tensed his body for action like the soldier he was. Surprisingly, it was Ulla who came to my rescue: “You well know how unstable Rainer Kruger is,” she said, softening her tone. “He may mess it up, or he may change his mind, or he may even double-cross us. Lives could be lost – even you yourself are in danger. If you want to help this man, you must help us find the arms.”

Her poisoned sweetness made me doubly wary. Panicked images besieged me of Rainer getting shot because Frelimo had seized the cache before his assassins could be stopped. I hurriedly told my inquisitors that since I had no idea where the cache was, it was essential to take action against Renamo at once so that I would have time to trace it.

This time I got more interest: the two Mozambicans locked heads in a whispered exchange, after which the older man leaked some information into Ulla’s ear, then she promptly said to me, “Rainer Kruger has asked us for something in return for his services: *not* to pick up Boland. Why would he want that, do you think?”

There was no countering Rainer. What could he have said to make them *not* want to arrest Boland? These were political realists ... they would never buy a psychic suicide plot. I decided to make light of Rainer’s request in the hope that they would ignore it. “It’s just personal,” I answered with authority. “He’s terrified of Boland. He has a bone to

pick with him going back to mutual hostilities during their prison days. Boland's got a pathological hate for gays."

Ulla smiled and nodded. "Now perhaps you can understand our concern about Rainer's instability. He's an unreliable agent. He keeps putting personal things in the way."

The Young Turk, who was not keen on psychology, chipped in, "Two weeks ago Rainer obtained all current cargo flight duties of this Boland. Why does he need to know where he is flying?"

"How should I know?" I answered sincerely. "Why should I care if Boland finds the arms before you, if you don't take him in at once?"

More whispers as they worked out their next line of attack; it turned out to be the least comforting, and Ulla adopted a sombre air for it. "You must realise that we have another solution," she said. "To arrest Rainer and squeeze the information out of him."

I turned scarlet. Ulla laughed with unabashed delight and said, "Change of loyalties, is it? Have you exchanged Marx for gay solidarity?" Her humour fell wide of its mark with the others. Hastily correcting her approach, she said, "His arrest would present us with that old political conundrum, wouldn't it, Michael: sacrificing the individual for the revolution." Could Ulla be that ruthless, I wondered.

They were talking in low tones again. Then they came out with their biggest surprise: "We cannot arrest Boland and da Silva for you," the big man said. "They have gone underground. Why did Rainer Kruger tell them to hide?"

With this statement my last thread of hope snapped, and all my efforts to save Rainer were reduced to nothing. I gawked at the table as if it were his grave. The grand conspirator would have his way. He had been one step ahead of us all. I could hear destiny shouting at me, laughing at me, rubbing in the brutal truth.

When I looked up, it was to find Ulla gloating over my defeat. I hunted for a last trick to save my friend, get him out ... out of the country ... get him over to England ... anything! But I wasn't quick enough. Ulla said, "After the handover, Renamo will hunt him down anywhere in the world!" Then she pushed home the Mozambican team's advantage. "Renamo, or rather their South African allies, have people in Europe, America ... everywhere!"

The big fellow cast another baited hook into the stream: "However, if we have the weapons now, we will take Rainer in for his own safety." The Young Turk also took this up: "Of course! We can guarantee him safe passage, as soon as we have the arms."

This was their weakest ploy; since when did a government care about an individual?

Their feet were moving restlessly under the table. We were getting nowhere ... while Rainer was precisely where he wanted to be: caught in a deadly vice between the two sides like the one he had described for Toto.

The Dane said, "Kudzi asks you to come and stay with us. Over the next couple of days you are not safe out there. She is concerned for you."

It was the most crass form of seduction, but for a moment I fell for it because I was so pleased to hear something that I so wished to believe. Fortunately, my head cleared sufficiently to say, "In such circumstances, how would I get the information for you on the arms?"

Without a pause, she answered, "After you get us the information, the offer to protect you is available."

A tide of loathing for Ulla welled up within me. Finally I said, “Sorry! No deal! I cannot find the weapons for you.”

In a split second the older and thinner man became the heavy: he snatched the pistol from the table, jumped to his feet, aimed it at me and yelled, “If we lose the arms, we will throw you to the dogs!” – the last bit sounding particularly menacing in the Portuguese alliterative rhythms: “*Vamos dar-te aos cães!*”

Ulla threw up the hand of peace; the soldier reluctantly lowered his weapon.

Then she came round the table, snarling, “You have Kudzi and me to thank for saving your filthy skin!”

She ushered me out of the room. Behind us, the men were exchanging hot words.

“Go now!” Ulla ordered, flinging open the door.

ANTÓNIO OPENS UP

The primal heat was a beast always waiting for a moment of weakness in the human spirit in order to pounce; the strong sense of personal defeat that I took away with me from the meeting gave it the perfect opportunity.

To be driven through the streets by a chauffeur while lying slumped in the back seat suited me perfectly, for I intended to preserve a similar attitude for the rest of my stay: that of a passenger, a docile sightseer on Rainer’s last mystery tour. Since I arrived in his house, Rainer had led me by the hand through his pastures to show me sights that he had never shared with anyone; now on this final walk, I was to be shown something that not even he had seen before: suicidal cliffs baying at an inscrutable sky.

To better perform my role, I persuaded the driver to go via the Loja Interfranca so that I could buy batteries for the tape recorder.

It took a lot of effort to drag myself from the vehicle into the store, but it was worth it just to see this Aladdin’s Cave. There were plenty of shop assistants, but no visible customers. The place was packed with luxury goods, and in the middle, a yacht for sale floated on an ocean of crushed cardboard boxes all marked “Sanyo Television”. During the *boms velhos tempos* it had been a department store, and even now it stocked almost every battery imaginable. I wondered if there was a special time of day – similar to the hour of mass – when its customers sneaked in here – expats, government ministers, top civil servants, and the embassy crowd.

As I came out I spotted Toto sandwiched between his *Totobola* boards. He gave me a broad grin and waved his forms for the football pools at me. I thought “What the hell!” and waved back as I climbed into the waiting vehicle.

I was dropped off at the familiar gate on *avenida Francisco O. Magumbwe*. After I rang the bell, Agi hurried along to let me in. She was still a most unsettled person, but informed me that the house was calm as Master Kruger was playing cards with his friends, and Mr Rainer was still “far away in his dreams”. I told her that I intended to follow suit as fast as possible.

It was late afternoon when I awoke filled with anxiety: I imagined that Rainer had been killed while I was asleep, not by Renamo as planned but by Frelimo, and that my

life would be empty without him, and that I would never be able to ask him dozens of unanswered questions on the future of the universe, which must surely include all the forthcoming ordeals of my innumerable lifetimes to come ...

My concern over the most pressing ordeals sent me flurrying through the house to the door of Rainer's room – it was still locked. So I went out the back looking for his keeper.

António was standing in the doorway of his scant quarters, rubbing sleep from his gilded eyelids while buttoning his shirt across his naturally waxed skin. I asked him about Rainer and he answered, “We go and see,” in a tone I deemed friendly.

As we walked to the house, I asked him about the dog. He told me all was well – he had buried Rosa next to the vegetable garden under the jacaranda tree.

In the six hours since we had set the cosmic plotter down on the carpet he had not budged, although his brain must have been racing for he was perspiring. António checked the surface temperature on Rainer's mountainous forehead, then took his pulse, while I became mesmerised by a fat fly lodged in the stubble on Rainer's face, feeding on the rich waters.

When he lifted Rainer's hand, António said, “*E normal.*”

Normal for no one but Rainer, as body temperature is supposed to drop during meditation. I wondered if he were probing the heights of the cosmos with his burning mind, or merely sweating with terror in the face of death like a lowly human.

I was drawn to Rainer in his sedated condition, seeing it as the last opportunity to attempt to delve into his Life-Line, and even, perhaps, break through the bands of Zeega. “I would like to stay with him for a while,” I told António.

He reacted with mild surprise, then shrugged. Folding his smooth arms, he leaned a shoulder against the wall, and settled down to observe me like a somnolent thoroughbred watchdog.

I sat down cross-legged directly in front of the medium at rest, my eyes on the same level as his. In the sparse light from the tattered curtains follicles of dust circled his Benin head like twinkling microbiotic angels. I concentrated hard on his physiognomy to generate my psi intuitions. Gradually, symbolic inferences began to emerge from the brazen casting of his features: the protuberant eyes represented trance insight; the brow stood for superior intelligence so richly nurtured that it had pushed the crown of his balding skull upwards in its need for space; the beaked nose showed an eagle's pride; even his current unusual wetness – aside from beads of sweat, drops from his nostrils traced a path around the bevelled rim of his upper lip to the cliff of his jaw from where they dripped on to his knees – suggested a water god with the power to bestow fecundity upon those who fulfilled the required rites.

Sadly, no matter how strenuously I tried to penetrate through the cast into his buzzing brain, the exercise failed ... not least of all because my legs were overcome by pins and needles, so that I had to unwind myself and get up, ill-pleased by my psychic shortcomings.

I strolled around the room stretching my limbs while glancing sheepishly at the ever-faithful one who kept observing me through half-closed eyes.

Finally I drew up before him, and announced, “Any moment now Frelimo will burst into the house and grab Rainer!”

António readjusted his position against the wall, then slowly shook his head.

“They want the arms as soon as possible,” I insisted.

After a moment’s consideration, he said, almost inaudibly, “They will not come.”

I believed him at once, knowing that in the machinations these two men were orchestrating, nothing was to be left to chance. At the same time, António’s response merely confirmed what I had already worked out for myself: if Frelimo had really wanted to torture the information out of Rainer they would have picked him up much earlier on.

I remained before him, and asked boldly, “Do you think he’ll be killed?”

He stirred again, and after a moment’s consideration, nodded.

“Will he succeed in his aim to evolve to a higher form?”

António liked nothing less than being put on the spot. He levered himself off the wall and glided to the door. But after opening it, he stopped, and said, “*Espero que sim.*” (“I hope so.”)

Disappointed by his inveterate vagueness, I, too, started to leave.

In an astonishing change of heart António closed the door, practically in my face, then burst into what for him could be classified as Ciceronian eloquence: “He needs to gather his strength. He must stay as he is now. Tomorrow, I will bring him back to us. Please try not to become too anxious about all the strange events (*coisas estranhas*) that will soon fall upon us!”

Emotion had cracked the sphinx; I was left open-mouthed. He was standing inches away from me; his eyes contained warmth and sympathy ... not just for his lover, but for me too. He held himself very still and handsomely as he continued in his silken voice, “He is fond of you. He wants you to be with him until the last moments.” Pausing for a moment to assess my reaction, he added, bringing a touch of solicitude into his tone, “Things will happen that will shock and frighten you. But it is important that you stay calm – your calmness will be most helpful to him. I know in your heart you wish to help him, and because of this, you wish to be strong. It also makes me happy that you stay with him to the end. From now on we must not leave him alone.”

With a sigh he averted his gaze. Not only was it the first time that deep emotion could be associated with António, but considerable fatigue also; to me he had always been a cold and impassive tower of strength. “As you see,” he concluded, “I have accepted that you are involved with us. I apologise that it took me so long to decide, but ... Rainer and me, we have lived so much alone ... for so long!” – the Portuguese phrasing was charming: “*vivemos tão sós ... durante tanto tempo!*”

It was impossible not to be moved by his colossal confession. He had dropped his shield resoundingly and everything he said rang true. I reached out and squeezed his shoulder – a familiarity he permitted without resistance. I said, “I don’t understand many things, António. And I’m sure all of us are frightened. I find it hard to see why I’m involved in your lives, and I don’t think I’m of very much use to either of you. But I’m aware of the bond that runs between Rainer and you. I’m ready to believe it goes back hundreds of years in many lives and places. I fully accept now that somehow I, too, am connected with him, with both of you ... I can’t abandon him, so I’ll do my best, whatever that may be. At the very least I’ll not get in anyone’s way.”

In an even more revolutionary move, António drew me into his arms and said, “Thank you! Everything will work out well. You will see” – spoken in a voice that shook in his body – uninhibited proof that he was a flesh and blood human being, even if he

were a Zeegan who had returned with only one purpose: to shepherd his eternal lover through his current sojourn on earth.

He let me go as abruptly as he had taken hold of me. Then he moved to the door and held it open. For a moment I stared at him in a daze, then went out.

From the lounge I watched him lock himself inside Rainer's room, and this made me think of the last scene in *Aida* where the lovers deliberately shut themselves in the tomb to die together – an image that filled me with both awe and grief.

I passed heavily through the lounge. Beyond the archway that led to the dining room, long blades of the setting sun had converted the polished dining table and the immaculate floor tiles into gold.

Crossing the hall I heard low voices from the veranda where the Greeks and Mr Kruger were already seated in a cosy cone of lamplight, their heads bowed over the card table like pious communicants. They, too, were fixed in their own brand of trance: whist! – how apt a game to be playing while Rainer was floating on the wisps from his magic lantern. No doubt the trio would be playing whist when Rainer fired his Life-Line at the Universal Field. Whist was the abracadabra of ordinary men – nothing more fancy was required to remove them from their daily limitations, failings and suffering.

I hid in my room. All the protagonists of the household were hiding: Mr Kruger in his card game, Rainer in his catalepsy, António in his lover's locked room, Agi in her quarters, me in my leather-bound library.

DRAWING COURAGE FROM RAINER'S NOTES

The compounding of clammy heat and erratic sleep drove me to sit up and light the candle: within the circumference of its rays Rainer's box files emerged from the gloom like his memorial.

I stood up and gave myself another stern lecture: Keep calm ... dwell upon your fascination with him ... savour the awesome vistas he has opened to you ... be there on the night to record events ... such is your task – stick to it!

I walked to the desk, sat down and drew the files towards me.

For several hours I read at random among the scientific articles Rainer had cut out or scribbled on the many pages of his reference notes. When something caught my attention, I copied it out. Not only did I find much to bring Rainer's ideas into sharper focus (some of which I have included in the Endnotes to this volume), but the exercise of studying was in itself invigorating and soothing. It also helped build my courage. Indeed, I conjectured that Rainer may have gathered the information to a certain extent for similar reasons.

My reading had a twofold effect: a feeling of insignificance in relation to the grandeur and complexity of nature, and a sense of purpose in that no matter how small and apparently irrelevant my role in life, I was irrevocably part of a universal plan. I was particularly attracted by Rainer's poetic eloquence in passages written in his mother tongue.

"Stars," he had written, "continually rework the chemical elements, then eject them back into interstellar space where they form the next generation of stars. Galaxy M81 is a dazzling pinwheel of 200 billion suns, while in Galaxy M82 stars are flung like drops

from a shaking dog as this galaxy hurtles away from the centre of the universe at 400 kilometres per second.”

He was fascinated by exploding stars and described “their crushed and pulsing remnants thrown like shredded wreaths across eight light years of space, at a distance of five thousand light years from earth, brightening up corners of the universe”.

The earth’s sun was “a grain of sand on the beaches of space-time” compared with the giant Rigel which “expends more fuel over a million years than would be possible for one hundred suns”.

Of course he returned constantly to the subject of black holes, they accommodated so well the dark streak within his own Life-Line. For example, one phrase described them as “gravitational tombs into which countless stars must fall”.

In counterpoint to the overwhelming immensities, Rainer took account of how the tiny details of life are linked throughout the Field system and how the essence of a thing manages, by some miracle, to be preserved over great expanses of time and space while continuing to be of importance in the Universal Field. On 3 June 1974 – when he was twenty-six years old and Mozambique was being handed over by Portuguese colonists to Frelimo freedom fighters – he had written : “Every supernova yields the products of stellar evolution: helium, carbon, oxygen and silicon which make the gas between the stars; from seeds of iron come palladium, silver, copper, tin, osmium, thorium. This rich ever-growing mixture of matter eventually turns into a single Frelimo fighter entering Maputo, or a Portuguese colonist fleeing back to Lisbon.”

I found circled sections in two articles torn out of the *Scientific American* of May 1968 – the year Rainer entered the science faculty at the Witwatersrand University in South Africa and the month when I was a student in Paris throwing paving stones at the military police. “Copper,” I read, “is a trace element in the body of mammals selected by evolution to help life develop; take the metal out of our organism and we would not exist.”

The second article described an experiment with locusts in which nerves to the wings had been cut so that signals from the brain providing instructions on flight could no longer reach the wings; despite this, the twenty motor cells in the wings continued to issue variations of excitatory impulses to the muscles, thereby continuing flight power and direction.⁹ On one side of the page, Rainer had scribbled, “The pattern for this activity remains imprinted in the cell. Even a single cell has a brain which contains a full copy of the directives. Fields within Fields within Fields, brains within brains within ...”

I got up and stretched. It was 2:30a.m. Despite Rainer’s intractable negativity, his notes filled me with hope: no matter how tiny and insignificant I might be, I was like a trace element with an indispensable place in the evolutionary tree of life. I recalled with pride the single great thought process of which I had been an integral part during my out-of-body visit to the Earth Field. I was right behind Rainer and António – I would be a loyal member of the team!

I took one of Rainer’s notepads to bed, and read two more snippets: an extract from Voltaire’s *Candide* that made me laugh (it referred to Dr Pangloss, a committed pre-determinist who claimed that it was a good thing that the earthquake of 1755, which

⁹ This article, ‘The Flight-Control System of the Locust’ by Donald M. Wilson, is to be found in *Scientific American*, May 1968. The previous reference is from ‘The Biochemistry of Copper’ by Earl Frieden in the same issue.

killed 70,000 people, had happened in Lisbon, because that meant that it did not happen somewhere else!); and a remark written in his spidery script concerning the development of the human embryo – “It begins as a single cell, becomes a colony of cells, grows gills, almost turns into a reptile, then for ten weeks it looks like a rodent with a tail.”

This fearsome description took me straight back to the Polana Hotel and to Maeve. Had we actually created such a creature together ... or did it exist only in Maeve's mind as an hysterical image? And what if not ...

DAY TWELVE – SUNDAY 30TH DECEMBER 1984

RAINER SETS UP THE FINAL MOVES

Something indefinable that had been niggling me since I awoke crystallised the moment I looked into the bathroom mirror – a quadruple image: my head superimposed upon that of Maeve, and then of Kudzi, and finally upon the statue of the crocodile god, each one staring at me stonily like a death mask. These images came and went in a flash leaving my own startled face in their wake. By this stage I was beyond being alarmed by visionary experiences. I appreciated that if ever there were signs to watch out for, these were surely a set of them. But where were they pointing? All they seemed to offer was a reminder of broken relationships.

The disturbing combination of Maeve’s witchy anger, Kudzi’s disapproval, and the statue’s electric presence continued to weigh on me throughout the day.

To break the spell I headed for breakfast. Agi hardly spoke a word. The rising tensions in the house were taking their toll. Agi was sweetness incarnate, a person not fit for the real world. As she fried a couple of eggs for me she kept forgetting what she was doing.

I was still chewing the tough and rubbery things when António entered through the inner door. Shadows had gathered like bats under his eyes, which were now tarnished jewels. We exchanged friendly greetings, but his anxiety was palpable. He drank plenty of water, and fast. Then he looked at the clock and said, “We must wake him!”

Although luring a person out of a trance was not my speciality, I felt honoured to be selected as a participant in the drill.

When we reached the bedroom door, António removed the key from his pocket and turned the lock with such care and sense of purpose that I pictured him as a zoo keeper entering the cage of some rare specimen of nature – savage, powerful, unpredictable.

... A well-sedated specimen. For it was incredible to find that Rainer had not altered his posture since António had set him up on the carpet. His grand head, like the ubiquitous sculptured portrait of Beethoven, had been triumphantly supported for over eighteen hours by the narrow pedestal of his body.

Immediately António wrapped his arms round the entranced figure and began to rock him gently while making a deep-throated hum. To watch various parts of my clay-footed guru become imbued with life was not unlike the marvel of watching a birth; and when he finally opened his eyes, they were indeed like those of a baby boy astonished by unfocused and mysterious impressions ... until they alighted on António, whereupon they suddenly widened, lighting up his face as if he were rediscovering his lover after a long absence.

“Did you bury Rosa?” he asked in one of those spectacularly precise landings of consciousness that I now knew so well.

“Yes we did,” came the reply, the “we” causing Rainer’s halcyon gaze to float over to me.

“Where?”

I answered, “Next to that stump – your tree of life,” making this up because I knew it would please him.

With a weak grip he took the glass of water that António had brought him, and visibly drew strength from drinking it. Then, after several deep breaths, he set about unfurling his limbs, a task that proved so difficult that he tipped over like a barrel while chuckling with such infectious charm that both António and I found ourselves joining in this welcome moment of light-heartedness.

He continued to chortle while António lifted him up on to the desk chair and then cautiously withdrew his hand to make sure he could sit unaided. Whereupon Rainer, master of surprises, exponent of astonishing propositions, produced one of his best: clasping António's hand, he held it over his heart and, grinning goofily, announced, "You and me – we are going to get married."

António frowned. I was aghast.

"Tomorrow night in the church," he went on, glowing now with all the optimism of a firefly. "I will wear my mother's wedding dress ... I will take my mother's ring from the chest," – adding gesticulatory expression with expansive hands – "We will light the altar with candles to brighten the church. Toto will have told him everything: where we are, what I am wearing. All in white I am an unmistakable target – Boland cannot miss me!"

The punch lines struck like cold blasts: no joke at all – he was describing his last carefully planned moves.

António released a long breath, then studied his lover with inward-looking deliberation.

Quickly, Rainer bared his teeth at me, horse-like. "You, Miguel, will have your part to play. I control the chessboard. Now do you see my plan? ... how, minute by minute, one event follows the other?"

Stunned by the steely purpose of these picaresque escapades, I watched him struggling to his feet, and shaking himself down. His subsequent articulation was crisp, and his thoughts well-baked after all those hours of meditation: "Frelimo has ordered me to deliver the arms. António, you will help me take them from the church. At eight o'clock I make the delivery, and I must do it alone. By nine, Frelimo raids the Búzio and closes it down. Within two hours every agent in Maputo has heard about the arms, including Renamo. Hey presto, the *bandidos* discover I am the traitor!"

António answered "Yes," with straight-forward acceptance. While I nodded in astonishment at the exactitude of the planning, which reduced my intervention with Frelimo to that of an amateur.

Rainer stumbled over to the window and flung open the tattered curtain, shaming the untidy room through such unprecedented exposure to light. Flipping back his hand – now an endearing gesture – he announced with military precision, "Miguel's job will be to checkmate the Americans." I stiffened, but he nodded encouragingly. "All you must do is warn Joe about the handover so that he does not think he has to protect the Americans by eliminating da Silva and Boland or, even worse, coming after me, which would bring in a principle of uncertainty into the equation. Joe is away until tomorrow afternoon, so you must go and see his wife and make sure she tells him as soon as he returns. You will make certain he passes on the information. Can you do this?"

Hesitantly, I agreed.

He nodded in gratitude. Then he addressed António again, almost breathless now. "By nine thirty, I must be fully dressed so that we can leave for the church. Make sure

Toto is waiting at the gate so that he can see me in the white wedding dress. By twelve, Boland will be at the church.”

He tottered dizzily – excitement having come too close on the heels of so much physical inactivity – and António moved forward to hold him. Rainer rubbed his forehead in pain, and while he was doing this I saw a strange ivory pastiness obscuring the conjunctiva of his eyes, although beneath this veil, his inner fires continued to burn steadily.

Lowering his hand he whispered in a cracked voice, “How is my father?”

“Calm,” António replied, steering him towards the door. “Now you must take a shower. Then you must eat something.”

Watching Rainer leaning on António’s powerful arm, I understood as never before the exceptional nature of their relationship: together they formed an unbalanced but binary unit; to use the model of the tree stump, in every reincarnation they were like two nails hammered into the same hole on the same ring. This helped explain António’s breathtaking inner resources: for in his current life, and also in his last one on Zeega, and no doubt in others, António had been saddled with the burden of Rainer, his unswerving loyalty requiring no special conditions such as Rainer’s love or compassion, for their relationship was a pattern within a greater one extending far behind and, perhaps, ahead of them. It seemed, however, that these roles had been reversed when they were Richard III and Elizabeth of York (if Rainer’s story of the betrayal were to be believed) – in Elizabethan times António had been the baddy. To me, their saga of love was as ordinary as it was remarkable, for it was about yet another turbulent couple seeking harmony, but with the enormous difference that it was set within a venue that stretched across large expanses of space-time. I had to acknowledge that such a supposition placed Kudzi and me in the category of novice players, while shamefully highlighting my all too frequent short-sighted impatience with the pair of them.

PREDICTIONS ABOUT MY FUTURE PATH

A little later I found the arch-conspirator standing next to the screens on the porch with a stoop that was both melancholic and reflective; in his hand he held the cricket captured the day before Christmas. Raising the bottom edge of the gauze he threw the insect out. Unaccustomed to freedom, it fell to the ground where it lay buzzing and wheeling its legs – a pathetic reminder of the heartless streak in Rainer’s character.

“I hope it soon remembers how to fly,” he said bluntly as he sat down at the low veranda table where Agi had set a tray of coffee. I placed myself next to him and poured us both a cup. He did not touch his. A silence descended on us. After a moment I was surprised to see tears running down his face, and they might just as well have been my own, because I imagined him gone forever. Assuming that his distress had nothing to do with the cricket, and everything to do with his personal anxieties, I sought to distract him. Always one of the best ways of doing this was to get him expounding on his pet theories, so I said in a flurry, “Remember, you spoke about mirrors at the tree stump the other night. In fact I have my own theory, too. ‘Mirrors of Conflict’ I call it.”

He made a big effort to swivel back to things in hand while I illustrated my theory by relating my most recent night-time adventure as an equestrian knight who crashed to the

ground, only to transform into the “freed man’s verser”, and I ended off with my tentative hypothesis about the affiliation of living and dreaming moments.

I was pleased to see him become revitalised by my account; the moment I was done, he said, “Oh, Miguel, you are so dear to me! Let me speak no more about my boring self!” Whereupon he reached over and gave me a hug ... while I lent into him, uninhibitedly. Such contact was unprecedented and it sent a strong emotional charge through me.

He ended it all too suddenly by setting off round the table waving flotillas of fingers. “You will become a free agent, Miguel. You will be rewarded with a long ride through the heavens on the flying horse: this is the message of your dreams.”

For the first time since my arrival he was wearing a watch: concrete evidence that he was following real time through his last hours. He raced on: “Henceforth your iron-willed reasoning will be challenged by your capacity to make psi associations – your thoughts will be sent reeling. Your art will take off in new directions leaving boring old politics far behind.” Coming to a sudden halt, he announced jubilantly, “You will dance to a new tune!”

“Yes, Rainer,” I responded with little conviction. “How will I ever penetrate the Fields when you’re gone? Alone I’ll never be able to accomplish such things.”

He ruffled my hair as if I were his Rosa reborn. “Already you are on the right track with your ‘Mirrors’. Mirrors of your living moments in your dreams, of atoms in compounds, of events in the movements of planets ... by analogy you will learn to recognise the guiding principles of the Fields as well as those that govern your Life-Line. In this way you will be able to brighten those dark spaces where you keep getting lost.”

I stammered, “Oh, Rainer, I’m inspired by the breadth of your vision, but I wish you could speak of subjects nearer to home. Guiding principles, the plan for the universe – it’s too remote for me.”

“Rubbish!” he grunted. “Your personal crisis with your girlfriend is telling you to let go, to open up. Your dreams are calling for the free flow of all your inner resources. Surrender yourself to the energy of the Fields, like you did when you joined my Life-Line, and the factory fire’s, and the cyclone’s. Nature is a mass of behaviour patterns mirroring one another. This is what your dreams are showing you.”

I shifted uneasily in my chair. “Dreams are easy ... but the rest?”

“Okay, when you have time try something like this: take the rage within cyclone Demoina and apply it to yourself ...”

“Apply it to myself?” I cut in.

“Yes! Concentrate, meditate on it – whatever you want to call the process. You have done this several times already. What is the matter with you? It is like riding a bicycle: once you can do it, it is for life. I do not need to be there, pushing you along.”

“But supposing I achieve the connections again – let’s say to the cyclone – what sort of personal correlations can I make?”

“I just told you: compare its rage with your rage. Go further: identify with the ebb and flow of its moods, its thresholds of strain, its cycle of birth-death-rebirth, its need to express its essential qualities. Mirrors, mirrors everywhere! Why, Miguel, even your blindness to your own destructive urge can be found in the cyclone.”

I winced. I had been looking for guidance on psi, not on my behaviour with Kudzi.

“You know well what I mean: by harming Kudzi, you harm yourself.”

I must have been staring unseeing into space, worrying about Kudzi and me, because he leaned over and said, “Miguel, are you listening? I bring your attention the process of attaining greater consciousness through intuitive psi analogies. Can you not see how well your dreams alone are doing this for you?”^{xv}

I frowned at him, and shrugged. “I’m still not sure how all this works.”

“I am not sure either,” he said with a puff. “All I know is once you make an association, an activity of consciousness starts to work on it like an alchemist kneading a metal in order to transform it into another metal of a higher grade. So you see, all you must do is put your finger on a few relevant associations. Make yourself aware of them. It is as easy as that.” Whereupon he sat down looking displeased with me.

The recurring problem I had with my tutor was that his remarkable faculty for penetrating the secrets of life did little to make him an exemplary being. I said, “But you, too, Rainer, are not so clear. All the Life-Line riding you do doesn’t give you all the answers. And I’m not just referring to the blocks on your recall. For instance, you’re often not generous; and not just with António ... I mean, sometimes you behave like a petulant child – especially with your father.”

My remarks triggered a slippery response. “My Father! You are talking of one of the most primitive organisms on earth. He fucked the maid and got me, and has been riddled by guilt ever since. He makes me pay for it with his hate. How can such a man be open to any messages from the Fields that could help him?” He paused, then added, “But who knows? One day, in one of his future lives, there may come an event terrible enough to shake him out of his long sleep. Leaps of consciousness can be most surprising, and sometimes they happen in a flash.”

“TRANSMAT”

During Rainer’s tirade against his father I had removed a small bottle of sunblock from my pocket as it had been digging into me. He snatched it from my hands and began studying the label. The bottle was made of translucent plastic and contained a clear solution. Setting the bottle down emphatically on the coffee table, he threw me an impish glance and commanded, “Go into the library and wait five minutes!”

After some protestation I did as I was told, feeling that as long as he kept himself distracted, time would pass more easily for him.

While sitting at the desk I used the time to try to relax and stop worrying. The heat of the day was no more or less oppressive than on any other; the drone of the insects outside and the muffled sounds of the street remained as normal. I must have drifted off fairly quickly; I didn’t go to sleep but I became drowsy and there was a definite lapsus, as if my brain got wiped clean by some invisible duster.

When awareness returned, my eyes settled upon a grey substance sliding stickily off the far edge of Mr Kruger’s desk. At first I thought I had accidentally spilt something while my mind had wandered. I peered over the side to find the stuff dripping like treacle on to the floor. When I prodded the goo it was spongy and warm with an acrid smell that made me pull away.

Perplexed, I returned to the veranda where Rainer was staring at the coffee table. When I saw the remains of my bottle of sunblock, its frazzled label now a pile of crystals, I realised what he had attempted to do.

Without a word Rainer strode off towards the library, giving me time to inspect the crystals. At my slightest touch they crumbled to powder. Peering at the residue on my finger I was reminded of the well-known guru Sai Baba, whom I had encountered in India in the '70s and who could pull ash out of the air with his hand.

“I did not pack the molecules closely enough.” Rainer said as he returned. He swore, then said, “The formula is right – what you have there is plastic, the same chains of carbon to hydrogen monomers, thousands of units long – but the bonds came out branched ... too loose. I gave them too much heat.”

So this was what Rainer had referred to in his notebooks! “Transmat”: short for transmaterialisation – causing matter to move or re-form elsewhere. Suddenly I couldn't help laughing: the half-baked experiment was a hilariously defective miracle, but a miracle nonetheless.^{xvi}

Rainer was offended, taking my mirth for mockery. I soothed his ruffled feathers by telling him about Sai Baba's ash and Uri Geller's spoon bending. “So you see, I've had experience of these things,” I added timidly. “Even though when you first met me you wrote that I had no ability to do ‘transmat’ – as though that were a sin.”

He looked shocked. “I'm so sorry,” he said. “I should have more patience. But, Miguel, I liked you the moment I saw you. And my affection for you has grown ever since.”

I flushed and said, “You have been generous to me, Rainer. And you have opened my eyes to the wonders of your world.”

He was thrilled to hear me say this. Dabbing at the crystal on the table, he said, “Yes, we are surrounded by small wonders. Like transmat. Yet it is so simple: I can do it, Zeegans do it and call it molecular engineering, which gives them eternal life, and nature does it all the time. Think of a cocoon: by shuffling the atoms around, nature turns a protein wrapper of DNA into a larva, then a caterpillar, then a butterfly. There's Christ doing a miracle for you: water to wine ... caterpillar to butterfly.” And he laughed, enjoying his wonderment, while I asked myself how, in the given circumstances, he managed to acquire the necessary lightness of mind for doing his tricks and then talking about them.

Meanwhile he shut his eyes tightly, shot out a fist and held it above his head for a few seconds; bringing it back down, he opened it slowly – a thick smear of ash lay in his palm.

I gasped, while Rainer brushed the ash off his skin as casually as he dismissed Sai Baba's and Uri Geller's achievements. “Transmat requires a higher skill than psychokinesis – do not confuse the two,” he told me, reassuming the tutorial tone. “Hurling a blast of rays at the bottle would have done no more than knock it off the table – that's your Uri Geller for you.” Pointing towards the ceiling, he continued, “Hundreds of thousands of carbon atoms per square centimetre are floating about on this veranda. So it is not hard for a guru like your Sai Baba to condense a few carbon bonds and produce ash, particularly as carbon is number one in the universe as a bond maker – it adores bonding – that is its obsession.”^{xvii}

I recalled my first serious talk with Rainer on psi, that day in the kitchen before the American party, which seemed so long ago but in fact was only the previous week. Now I felt as I had then – intensely privileged. There was nowhere in the world I would rather have been, nothing else I would rather have been doing; I wished to remain forever the

interviewer, the recorder, the journalistic guide of this man's convoluted but brilliant mind, and also the pupil who had everything to learn from someone who often seemed to hold so many answers in his hands.

Regrettably, just as he approached a subject I was keen to hear about he glanced at his watch. Darting his eyes over the living room and hallway, he said, "My father will be up soon. It is essential that I return to my meditations." In so saying his face seemed to shrivel into that of a timorous old man.

Hours of waiting lay ahead of us, and Rainer appeared to be getting increasingly unsettled. Perhaps the zeal of his pedagogical method with me was being used, in part, to allay his fear. If so, it was as good a method as any. I slapped my knees, making as loud a noise as possible. "Come, come!" I said loudly. "Talking distracts you. More useful than sitting all alone in your room worrying! And you know how much I admire you. So tell me more about bonding, for instance."

For a moment my outburst disturbed him, then a smile of gratitude spread over his face. Eventually he said with a rare touch of humility, "I do not know how I would have managed without you, Miguel! Never have I been so aware of my isolation, of the terrifying uniqueness of my plan."

"How can you say that? You have António. He loves you. You don't give him enough credit for helping you."

"Yes, at last António is being helpful. It has taken so long to make him accept what I am doing."

There was a pause while Rainer sank into his private thoughts, and I found myself becoming captivated by the large pulsating veins in his temples. I imagined the blood coursing through them. For more than thirty-seven years those veins had been valiantly fuelling his body. The pulse was so strong it was impossible not to be inspired by it; it was a force for life, a confirmation of a hopeful future. Such vitality must surely be unstoppable. Yet, at the same time, I worried at how fragile the veins were; their blue-black sheaths were paper thin – perilously close to the surface of the skin; at the slightest infraction they could burst, spilling out their precious cargo, letting it run to waste. I felt a strong desire to cup my palms over the beautiful veins, to shield them, to keep them forever safely pumping away ... with no worries.

Rainer broke my reverie by saying, "That you have sought to understand me has been wonderful." He gave me a sweet smile, and then began stroking my head. "You have brought me great encouragement. I thank you. Truly, Miguel!"

He had become so endearing to me that I wanted to reassure him physically. I wanted to hug him as he had hugged me, but even more tightly. All I managed to do was become bashful and tongue-tied.

Rainer came to my rescue by pulling his reed chair closer to mine with a jarring scrape. "Tell me, Miguel," he asked, "on a personal level, would you not feel more confident knowing what instructions are ticking away inside you?"

Could he be wary of my feelings towards him? Was he trying to guide my emotions? Keep them at bay?

"Yes, of course I would," I answered in confusion.

"Then for example ask yourself this: How does a chemical element *like* to behave? Just as you ask yourself: How do *I like* to behave? After I am gone get hold of the Periodic Table^{xviii} and marvel at the way the Universal Field makes the basic elements

work. How they are lined up in columns like families with similar ways of behaving. How one element will be attracted to another, but only if they share an attractive force that will enable them to bond....” and with the obsession of an artist of chemistry who wished to overpower me with its aesthetic excellence he soon lost me in details. But I kept listening as hard as I could, and marvelled, at the same time as I doubted that I could ever bring things down to their bare essentials the way he did.

Eventually, he paused, took a deep breath, then continued, “So you see, the language of the elements is far clearer than any spoken one. The dialogue between a hundred elements creates the universe. Its grammar has strict rules – without them, without the power laws of the Universal Field, chaos would reign, the elements would crash into one another and nothing would develop at all.”

With a coarse rustling sound a gust of wind sent feverish shivers down the entire length of the screens. Rainer was watching me closely, this time to gauge the depth of my attention. He must have come to the conclusion that the battle was far from won, for he threw up his arms, which bent backwards at the elbow like a woman’s, and exclaimed, “Oh, remember the factory fire! Remember the joy we had dancing with newly bonding compounds, the heat of their patterns of desire, the power of their ambition ... yet at the same time knowing that always, always, they remained strictly guided.”

Now more than ever, I wanted to understand him. I made a big effort to concentrate. “Okay!” I said. “Your point being that an observation on one plane – like chemistry – reflects another on a different plane; like how humans should behave in order not to crash into one another ... or for that matter, how not to crash into yourself.”

“Exactly! As fat-headed as humans can be, they are guided by equally straightforward instructions; in most cases the big problem with humans is they have no idea what these instructions are, nor where to find them. While in chemistry all you need is a powerful microscope.”

“So let’s say, moving from something that happens to me, then on to my dreams about this something, through to your example of some sort of connection with patterns of behaviour among the elements ... all these cross-references are supposed to guide and enlighten me? Like Wordsworth’s ‘one impulse from a vernal wood ...’ ”

He may have been unfamiliar with Wordsworth, but the hope that he was at last getting through to me made him shine with pleasure. He was so close to me that I could feel the living heat of the man. Unable to contain myself, I burst forth: “But Rainer, after tomorrow I’ll never see you again!” – and I spun away from him, pressing my face and hands into the brittle gauze of the veranda screens and into the hot gusts of the breeze. I felt so trapped – trapped inside the screens of that doomed house, just like the cricket had been, and equally as helpless – trapped by Rainer’s destiny to which I had become irreversibly bonded.

Tenderly, he came to me, took me by the shoulders, and made me face him. “You see, Miguel, the principles behind the elements and those behind my plot are associated because they have the same purpose.”

“Please,” I groaned. “No more on the plot!”

His hands held me more firmly, as if he were about to shake me. “*Muito bem!* Fine! But we all have plots. You have had one to empower yourself as an artist, another as a Casanova, and another as the new Karl Marx. That’s three for a start!” He beamed at me; but I was too fretful to respond to humour.

Slowly and deliberately, he enfolded me in his arms. I gave in willingly to his embrace. My body almost subsided into his and I buried my head in his chest, seeking refuge in a formidable energy that certainly did not emanate from his musculature, which was made of string. As he ran his fingers through my hair, I began to glow inside.

“Unfortunately,” he said with quiet concern, “unlike the elements, you are not clear in your activation. Carbon knows what it can and cannot do, but you struggle to find your way, and you suffer. My dear Miguel, I wish so much for you to seize your directives and rise with them!”

This precious moment of intimacy was cruelly broken by the freed cricket, which gave us both a start by crashing into the screens, dropping on to the outside ledge with a thud, then flying off falteringly into the garden. Long shadows across the lawn were heralding the invasion of darkness. I clasped Rainer to me, and cried, “Oh Rainer! We are all so full of weaknesses, and deficiencies, and incomprehensible fears! Why must you take such risks? Why can’t you make do with what you have now? We are, all of us, so frightened ... so alone ...”

I heard a dull scraping ... it came from the scratching of his skull. He lowered his hand to my chin and lifted my face. Looking deep into my eyes, he said, “For heaven’s sake, have you still not understood that you *are* everything else, and everything else *is* you? None of us is alone. How can I die leaving you in such ignorance?”

EMERGING FROM THE HEART OF DARKNESS

Agi appeared on the veranda with her eternal orangeade. Finding us wrapped around one another, she drew up in astonishment.

Rainer separated from me, unflustered. “Thank you Agi,” he said. “Please clear the coffee things.”

Switching back on to automatic, Agi nodded and proceeded with her task.

After she had gone, I sat down with a long sigh. I found that I was trembling all over. Ten days ago, to say that I found Rainer Kruger’s physical presence repulsive would not have been putting it too strongly. Now there was no doubting that the opposite was true.

Meanwhile, beyond the tightly webbed screens the breeze stilled, giving way to the shrill throb of the insects, which was always there, on and on, day and night, as if they owned all the time in the world. Unfortunately I gained no reassurance from the sound; the approaching hour of Rainer’s death took the upper hand, weighing upon me like an illness.

Rainer sat down, took my hand in his and said, “Try not to place finality upon death. My Lines and yours are interweaving, Miguel. As long as you open yourself to me after I leave, I will always be accessible to you, wherever I am. I promise you that.”

I stared glumly at the floor. Giving my hand a little squeeze he said, “You have no reason to feel inadequate. Remember what it felt like to be your victorious spermatozoon – all that excitement and triumph. Appreciate the power that lies within you. Seize it with both hands.”

I sincerely appreciated what I firmly acknowledged to be Rainer’s genuine desire to help me. At the last minute he was desperate for me to grasp the bare essentials of his cosmology, and not just as his future biographer, but for my own sake. My failure to

respond adequately was embarrassing. “I’m so sorry,” I told him. “I want so much to seize that power. It’s just that I don’t have your experience or talent.”

“You must try, Miguel! In fact you will be happy to know that you have no choice but to try because the compulsion is stored in your DNA along with all the necessary talents to succeed. Imagine yourself not just as the spermatozoon of Michael Raeburn, but as the Universal Fields’ spermatozoon pushing you to greater heights. Listen to its cry!”

“I cannot hear it,” I moaned.

Rainer smacked his lips with impatience. “Because you do not listen! Your DNA never stops calling out to you. Its cry is always the same: ‘Follow my orders and fight! After millions of years I have made you into the second most evolved organism in the universe. Express the extraordinary capacities I have given you, and do not fall idle, for if you do I will be waiting for you in your next life and ordering you to try again, and again in your next one, and again in the next!’”^{xix}

The ever-debilitating weather and all the pressure of what must surely be our last talks were taking their toll on both of us. For Rainer, the problem of my continuing perplexity now caused his brow to crinkle like worn-out leather and he fell back into his seat breaking the connection our hands had made.

Once again I tried to pull myself together, this time by sitting up and pouring the orangeade. We both drank in slow, difficult gulps. I hated myself for my muddled state of mind, my panicked obtuseness, for being a burden to him when I was supposed to be helpful. So much of what he said rang true, yet despite it all, death remained death for me, and that finality was destined for the man sitting beside me who – at the nth hour – was kindling emotions within me that could only be associated with love. What was so cruel was the knowledge that my new love was like a vine growing on a wall that was about to be destroyed. It was this contradiction that was making my head spin, closing my ears to his passionate words.

Surprisingly, for a brief moment my own confusion ended up by reminding me of Rainer’s – of that basic paradox that remained at the heart of his thinking: his purporting that life was moving forward towards a state of harmony while remaining hampered by dualistic conflict. But the last thing I wanted to do at this late stage was depress Rainer by bringing up this contradiction yet again.

I wiped the perspiration from my brow. Rainer smiled wearily, and said, “Phew! The heat does not help, does it?” Then he added, “But I would like to leave you with one more source of guidance, Miguel. It could be helpful to you. Then I must stop!”

He poured himself another glass of orangeade, which he now drank in one go. Then he rubbed his head vigorously as if to stir his thoughts, banged the glass down on to the coffee table, rose to his feet and took off as if making a dash for the finishing post. “Remember how I used that tree stump to show you how one form merges into another, one set of activities reflects all activities in a series of events that remains forever associated because, like a stone thrown into a lake, the consequent ripples are derived from a single source – the Big Bang ...”

After this eloquent start, he floundered at the far end of the veranda, groping at the air as if his ideas stood out there among patterns of whizzing particles recognisable to him alone. I held my breath ... he looked very unstable on his feet ... but he continued, “From the point of view of the Fields, the character type of a man or a Zeegan is as much

a quantity as an iron bar, the moon, or a desire, or even an idea ...” He stopped again, his forehead a deeply furrowed field that his tired thoughts were struggling to cross.

I took him by the arm, “Come, Rainer!” I said as I led him back to his chair. “Your batteries are running low. Sit down! You must preserve your strength now.”

He obeyed, meekly. Taking advantage of this I placed my hand across his forehead; reptilian coolness was his natural state but now he was clammy, as if recovering from a fever. Covering his eyes gently with my palm, I was thrilled to soon feel the warmth of my touch evoke a corresponding warmth in him, a rise of his energy level. After all he had given me, for the first time I was giving something back.

He pressed my hand to keep it in position. “Ah! Thank you!” he said with a soft sigh. “That feels so good!” And we remained like that in silence for a while, during which I concentrated on pouring my own strength into him.

I must have pulled this off to an extent because he eventually removed my hand and re-launched his oration. “All Life-Lines evolve from two primary digits – this is the central dynamic of the Fields.^{xx} When you get down to the basics, they are very simple. As Life-Lines grow in sophistication compounding energies to higher levels, they move in cycles within greater cycles. Astrology reflects these cycles.”

To keep his spirits up – and also my own – despite my wariness about astrology I asked him to tell me more. Astrologers, he said, had probed the harmonics of transfer in the cosmos because the Universal Field remained connected to all its creations by a web of oscillations passing through the sub-Fields. According to him, that was how the early astrologers were able to categorise humans and their history into twelve patterns of behaviour – the Zodiacal signs.

Whereupon he stopped and stared at me, and I stared back at him, nodding furiously. It was as tough for him to explain the tenets of his ideas, as it was for me to retain them. Appreciating that it was important for him that I open my mind to this particular subject, I summarised what I thought he was saying: “Underneath man’s complexity lie patterns of behaviour with parameters as strict as those of atoms. Time and space are ruled by these patterns ... including the planets, which control what’s going on down below.”

Rainer’s eyes sparked with fury. I inwardly cursed myself for coming out with something as stupid as my last statement. He set off round the veranda as if he had been stung by a bee. “Fields within Fields, cycles of activity, a correlation is not the same as an influence! *Merda!* I thought you understood this with the tree stump!”

I glanced in the direction of living room, afraid that Rainer’s voice might interrupt his father’s siesta. He continued, undeterred, “Zodiacal signs follow a twelve-part cycle of behaviour rather like a seasonal mating cycle. Now hear me out: spring does not make an animal mate – an animal must necessarily mate and spring happens to be the best time. Are you with me, now?”

My hesitation caused him to swear again. I stammered, “I think so.”

“*Quality of time* is what I speak of. Aquarius with Taurus rising was the best quality of time for you, along with Cairo where you were conceived, along with the rest of your troubled existence.”

Mercifully, what he was saying started to fall into place. Such co-ordinated movements of life as seen through astrology brought many of his theories into single focus. For the first time an attainable invitation was on offer: to fit in and become part of everything, no longer alone, but springing from, and belonging to the universal. Could

such peaceful integration really be mine? Would I find the confidence to rise, at last, as the free spirit of my dreams, like he had said? This inebriating proposition pacified the anxieties that had arisen from Rainer's seeming insistence that I become some sort of psychic submarine before I could make progress of any sort.

I stood up and said like an over-eager student, "The planets mirror a cycle of which they themselves are a part. Right? Like dreams mirror reality. Even in everyday living, the reverberations within us will attract similar reverberations in events without. Is that a suitable word – 'reverberations'?"

He nodded enthusiastically. "Go on!"

"So problems within attract the required problems without. That includes everything right up to Kudzi for me, and your father for you; also for me it is having dreams about Pegasus and getting mugged; and as you say, it even includes our meeting in this warring country."

He whistled like a kettle and pinched my cheek. "Bravo! Or the other way round: every external event serves to activate its associated internal event. We are part of an environment used by the Fields to guide us in the direction they want us to go. Only events matching your quality of time will happen to you. As long as you remain vigilant and open to the reverberations. Can I say it better than that?"

Clutching at his arm, I added, "The attributes of a Life-Line must be in precise accordance with its environment. Outside-inside, real-unreal must be taken together as one."

An expression of surprise illuminated his expression. "We are all interconnected, Miguel, by the subtle manipulations of the Fields, and we must bow our heads before their painstaking regard for detail. Tune into the patterns of astrology, they will underline what you might already have intuitively sensed or dreamed, but are unsure of. Now let us be done with the subject!"^{xxi}

So saying, his mouth split into a wide smile of relief, and as the rays of the late afternoon sun, softened by the gauze of the veranda screens, zigzagged upon the multi-directional surfaces of his teeth, I smiled inwardly with tender acceptance at the insolent splendour of his face.

He was standing over me, his eyes looking directly into mine. I whispered, "But if you die, you will leave poor António behind in this sad, sad house with your awful father!"

His answer was to be expected. "Have you not yet realised that death is not important in the stream of time?"

A shudder of dread passed through me. He continued, "If I achieve what I set out to achieve tomorrow, António will be the most happy person, for we will be able to stay united forever."

I reached up and kissed him timorously on the lips. He responded with gentle pressure. I had crossed a line when I plunged into Rainer's eye during the boat trip. I now crossed another. In each case there was a before and after, an old world and a new one. The earlier experience brought with it the revelation of psychic fields. And now with the kiss, over and above the signals of sexual desire that it released, came the seal of a new love.

INSPIRED CLOSING STATEMENTS

António appeared in the hall archway; he looked at us, inscrutable as a Shangaan mask of polished ebony.

In acute embarrassment, I moved away from Rainer, overcome by the shocked pain that I assumed must have struck António.

Rainer responded to his lover's presence with a quiet "Ah!" then said, "António has come to call an end."

António nodded, slowly. And Rainer smiled at him. Could he be side-stepping the turn of events, or was he so confident of António's love that he had no cause for concern? Then it occurred to me that the confusion was of my own making, dictated by my all too human perception of love as limited by codes of betrayal and jealousy. Not that I imagined António free from such feelings, but it could be that his love contained them within a broader and stronger framework beyond my experience.

Rainer said, "I am ready, António ...". He started forward, then stopped and said, "But let me tell him one last thing." He waited for the nod of approval before setting forth on a superb blaze of summaries and final illuminations. As he spoke, his voice became increasingly broken by fatigue, and his eyes swallowed up the refracted light of evening while that awesome and unsettling quality of something beyond the carnal stirred once more within their depths. Although I could tell that he was progressively withdrawing into his psychic cocoon, his mind remained crisp. Meanwhile the horror of the final silence that would soon fall between us built up within me, fanned, even, by his rhetoric.

"All Life-Lines are points of consciousness. All are looking out at the cosmos and saying: 'I am here! Let me tell you about myself! Look at what I can do!' The 'I' is the unique focal point of a function. The function is always accompanied by a desire for fulfilment. This leads to the voracious dance of the Lines seeking to change partners and shift faster and faster, making bigger and better moves. All these billions of 'I's' screaming 'Me! Me!': the carbon in your bottle screaming for bonds; the ape screaming to become human; you, Miguel, screaming for your Kudzi and for your films and books; me, Rainer, screaming for my honourable place on Zeega; and you, dear António, screaming for my salvation! And how the Fields love to hear it! For the Fields, too, are screaming for us to give them the quality of attention that no other organism can give them, so that we can discover their secrets and fulfil their plan. Such inquisitive attention from us is their greatest thrill."

The sun had now sunk so low that it had converted the veranda screens into a shield of gold. António took Rainer by the hand and began to guide him towards his room. But Rainer held back still, and latching on to my gaze spoke as though the breath of poetry was all he had left to vulcanise his thoughts. "I leave you with encouragement, Miguel. Give proper attention to your Life-Line and to all those other Lines it will lead you to. Dig into them – the deeper you go, the more you will surprise and delight yourself, the stronger and more knowledgeable you will become, and the more you will delight the Universal Field that is calling out for you to reach up to it, to dare to be as great and as all-powerful as it is. Do as I say and your desires for love and glory will cease to flood your mind. Do not be side-tracked by the injustices of the plan – the Universal Field does not care that the cricket's song leads to its death. Listen to the joyous song of the defiant cricket. The Universal Field is calling out to us. It is summoning us to fulfil its dreams,

and cleverly, it has made our dreams the same as its own. We are nothing but the humble products of the Fields – like every one of its products, within us is born the never-ending yet futile desire to ride Pegasus to the end of space-time ...”

His voice died somewhere behind his inverted stare. Then his body crumpled. Simultaneously António and I moved to catch him.

Rainer had given himself over to us in the trust that we would look after him until the appointed and anointed hour.

MY ASSIGNMENT

We were half way across the living room when Mr Kruger sailed sleepily out of his side of the house. Faced by the tightly-knit group, he hesitated, then circumvented us, grumbling. Looking even more unkempt than usual, he set off for the kitchen, his fluttering garments as disordered as his irate obsessions.

When we had placed Rainer on his carpet, António took a piece of paper out of his lover’s shirt pocket and handed it to me. “Here is what he has asks you to tell the American’s wife. Please read it later, then burn it. Phone the wife and arrange to meet her tomorrow morning. It must be tomorrow morning.”

I welcomed having an assignment which was a small part of the master plan ... something to get on with.

In the kitchen I drank a lot of water with a necessity not limited to thirst. Outside in the falling darkness, the peacock repeated a few shattering caws. Was it really possible that Rainer would never speak to me again? Now that we had grown so close? Hard to imagine! Hard to bear! How I dreaded being dumped back into the wasteland of myself. Doubly so, without Rainer and without Kudzi – without these powerful forces that had run through me like trains.

I lay down on my faithful bunk bed and watched the night slink through the blinds: shortly it would hide Rainer, António and me, each in our own set of shadows, marking time with wearisome slowness.

This interlude was rudely ended by the metronomic arrival of the Greeks’ car. It was 7:00p.m. Duty called – I needed to read Rainer’s note before phoning Maeve. After trying the light switch, I lit a candle. The note was formal in its tone, written in a simple, almost adolescent, style, and all these years later, I remember it well enough:

Dear Michael,

It is essential that you inform Joe that da Silva and Boland are in hiding and out of his reach, and also that the Americans are in no danger from the Frelimo side. You must also make it clear to Joe that there is no point coming after me as I have left instructions for some one to inform Frelimo of the location of the arms should I be eliminated before the handover time. If you convince him – which I am sure you can – this will be your way of check-mating him for me.

I thank you, Michael, for this valuable contribution. Have no fear, I have made sure that no side will have cause to harm you.

You have brought me unusual joy during your stay in Maputo. In another world, some day, I have no doubt we shall be together again, hopefully in better times.

I love you,

Rainer.

After reading it carefully three times, I raised the note to the candle and watched it burn slowly, letting the last fragments drop in flames on to the tiles.

Seconds later I was talking to Maeve with the handpiece cupped in my hands and the cord stretched into the passageway to get me as far as possible from the coven of card players.

“Just rang to see how you are,” I whispered.

My opening lie was immediately recognised for what it was. Maeve replied sharply, “I suppose you’re after that room with the engineer? It’s not available now!”

“I wanted to wish you Happy New Year.”

“You’re ahead of time by twenty-four hours!”

“How about coffee tomorrow morning?”

“Such consideration from you would be inappropriate – if it weren’t so transparently hypocritical. I don’t want to see you!”

I abandoned subterfuge. “Please don’t hang up! ... I have to see you because I have a message for Joe.”

A snide laugh came down the line. “Go see Joe yourself!”

“I know Joe’s away. I must meet with you to ensure you get important information to him at the airport as soon as he gets back tomorrow morning. It’s urgent, and it is very much to his advantage.”

There was a charged silence. “You mean I’m supposed to see you whether I like it or not ... for America?”

“Exactly.”

“You know what, Michael Raeburn, you’re a piece of shit and every day you turn into a bigger one.”

The second my hand left the receiver, with her harsh words still in my ear, the deeply disturbing feeling that had unsettled me first thing in the morning in front of the bathroom mirror passed like a bullet – through Maeve, through Kudzi, through the crocodile god – to strike me full in the heart.

DAY THIRTEEN – MONDAY 31ST DECEMBER 1984

TIDYING RAINER’S ROOM

No matter how important or not any day might be, in the Krugers’ back yard the cock crowed at dawn.

I awoke in a disturbed state: I still loved Kudzi, and still felt umbilically tied to her. My bond with Rainer was not at all of the same nature, and was obscured by the terrifying day that awaited us. As regards António, I had no idea what I should be feeling.

I dressed minimally and hastened to Rainer’s bedroom. My knock quickly brought António to the door. Not at all his usual cool self, he placed a hand on my shoulder and wished me an affectionate “*Bom dia, Miguel!*” It was the first time he had called me by my name.

On the carpet at the centre of the room, Rainer was sitting in the serene attitude of the eastern god. Light peppered his back from the holes in the tattered curtains that had been closed behind him. His companion was tidying up, busily removing the dust of ages from the desk with an ostrich-feather duster. The papers jumbled on it had already been put in order; and the books and magazines over on the shelves had been sorted into neat piles.

“We should not disturb him,” António told me as I shut the door behind me. “He has nothing to do until tonight. It is you and I who have things to do.”

Thereupon he set his feather duster to work on Rainer’s disused telescope. Glittering particles of dislodged dust began to swirl like midges round Rainer’s head, and in so doing, brought home to me more strongly than ever the ethereal connection between these two men. What had happened between Rainer and myself had not altered António’s attitude to me. He was not hiding hostile feelings. I sensed, rather, that I could never pose a threat to him because Rainer’s and my love (if I were truly to believe in the time-space continuity of Rainer’s cosmology) could never be exclusive, never anything more than a side show.

My attention reverted to António’s housework. Why all this cleaning up? Especially since, from today, Rainer would no longer inhabit the room. Perhaps the suicide stratagem was as much a gamble for António as it was for his lover, so that he was pursuing habit in order to remain calm.

Then I took a closer look at Rainer. In an astonishing feat of expressivity his face had split in two, right down the middle: to the left was that smug know-it-all look, complete with an ironic upsweep of the mouth, piercing stare, and one soaring eyebrow; to the right a different picture altogether, with this side of his mouth drooping hang-dog fashion, this eye dulled, and the eyebrow sagging in a dismal frown. His entire head had been moulded into a tragi-comic mask worthy of the *commedia dell’arte* – a true portrait of a split personality.

António finished straightening up Rainer’s bedding. He carefully puffed up the two pillows. Then he told me, “Now, I will drive you to your meeting with the Irish woman.”

DELIVERING THE MESSAGE

On the Polana Hotel terrace, Maeve was waiting for me at the same table as before, next to the pool in which her son and his cousins were swimming while the same maid listlessly watched over them: an unsettling *déjà vu*.

The moment I sat down I saw the toll of Maeve's alleged pregnancy written all over her: her clothing was unco-ordinated, her blouse incorrectly buttoned, her hair awry, she was pale and her eyes were bloodshot. Sunk low in her chair she cast a forlorn figure.

Before me sat the full consequence of my act: a devastated woman who, supposedly, carried our child. The supposition would have it that together Maeve and I had casually accomplished a minor miracle by providing some specific Life-Line with exactly the right settings for its reactivation and the continuation of its trajectory: a special blend of our intermingled genes along with a curious set of environmental circumstances, like Maeve's mixed-marriage, my intercontinental peripatetics, a turbulent country in east Africa, and countless other discrete specifications; in one semi-conscious sexual tryst we had unleashed a creature of the highest Kingdoms with its full retinue of psychological traits and individualistic ambitions, equipped with its own unique methods for confronting the pains and joys that awaited it upon the anvil of life.

Phrases from Rainer spun through my mind: "Problems within attract problems without ... You live out the dreams within you ... You are not divorced from certain worlds just because you can not see them."

"Have some coffee!" Maeve shoved the entire tray at me. When I raised the cup, coffee spilt into the saucer.

Maeve was too preoccupied to notice.

"Joe wants another child," she mumbled. "What'll I do? ... It'll be the end of my marriage! ... What'll I do? ..." She wasn't asking me – she seemed to be running round the same thoughts with different words. "Some sordid back-street abortion! Tell me, do you really expect me to do that?"

I stared at the small cup of black liquid, appalled by her situation. When I looked up, her emerald irises had paled to a chalky green under the lash of her anger. As though she were talking to an idiot she rasped, "If I murder it, I shall be cursed. Do you hear me?"

I placed a hand on her arm, but she jerked it away. "I *could* murder it, though!" she went on. "Do you want to know how I could allow that to happen? One the grounds that you, Michael Raeburn, you raped my soul with your tenth-rate condom!"

Her resentment combined with the word "rape" had a physical impact upon me: I expected the mountain of my sins to come crashing down upon me. The Congolese woman who had given me the crocodile god had made a similar accusation: "You stole my soul!" she had said.

With a wounded grimace, Maeve added, "There's a Zulu saying: 'Advance, you die. Retreat, you die. So why retreat?' That is the position you have placed me in."

Luckily, the need to deliver Rainer's message came to my rescue. I rattled it off like a robot. Then I went over it again. At last she nodded numbly.

Perhaps if there was more time – after the Rainer thing was over – I could come back and talk Maeve through the dilemma, console her. But there and then I could be of no use

to her. In any case, I could see all too plainly that Maeve was past expecting anything from me ... or wanting it.

“It’s your decision,” I said, the words sounding harsher than anything I intended. “I’ll do whatever I can to help.” Then I wrenched myself away from her with an abrupt “Goodbye for now!”

I had reached the far side of the pool when she called me back. She was looking at me with a mocking smile. As I drew up before her, she said, “A World Health Organisation doctor I know stopped off in Maputo. He provided me with the Church’s ‘*omnes diablo*’.”

“What’s that?”

“‘The Pill’ – in quantities vast enough when swallowed at one go they cause a nuclear explosion in the uterus. I have witnessed rivers of blood, Michael! ... You’re off the hook.”

Her eyes were brimming with spite.

I felt such a wave of relief that I could not stop myself from saying, “I’m so glad for you, Maeve! You acted so fast.”

My remark caused dismay to overwrite her contempt.

I reached for her, but she stiffened so manifestly that I stepped back. Then I said, “At this stage there was no life in there, Maeve. There was just, er ...”

“Just an egg, right?” she finished off. “Dancing around with one innocent little sperm!”

I looked aside, shamefully. The children, meanwhile, continued to splash about and shout joyfully in the pool.

“There is still one outstanding problem,” she said. “Or rather, two problems.”

I frowned. “What’s that?”

Her eyes hardened. “Your total lack of empathy throughout this whole period. I don’t think they have a pill for that.”

I have never in my life been so despised as I was at that moment by Maeve. In my relationship with Kudzi, in all my failed affairs, there had always been some room for manoeuvre, some area of doubt, never anything quite so final and dismissive.

“But that’s your problem, Michael. The other one is mine and doubtless of no concern to you: leaving me with my conscience to debate on whether a fertilised ovum aged 72 hours was a human being with a soul or just a nothing – what’s called a ‘*res nullus*’ in theological circles and in your philosophy of life.”

António had brought me to the Polana with a simple message; I was driven away by him, heavy with remorse, while the fleeting image that I had recently seen of a ginger-haired little girl settled uncomfortably in my mind.

ANTÓNIO’S PLOT

Mid-afternoon, António and I found Rainer fully awake on the floor, curled up in his bed sheets. As we moved towards him he cowered away from us, staring with lantern eyes as though we were his executioners. These were early stages and I wondered how he was going to cope if he had already got himself into such a state? How was he ever going to move the arms cache across town, then stand in the church waiting for Boland’s bullet? I

must confess to feeling somewhat let down by his behaviour, and left António to deal with him for a while.

About half an hour later I was having a drink in the kitchen while jittery Agi prepared New Year's Eve dinner, when António entered with Rainer in tow. My stomach sank. Now the conspirator had turned from a trembling rabbit into an automaton advancing stiffly into the room. The moment Agi saw her master like this, she yelped and rushed out the back door.

In a controlled voice, António said to me, "Mr Klaus Kruger has gone for his siesta. I will keep Rainer on the veranda for a while." And after taking a bottle of water from the fridge, he drove the robot back down the passage.

I remained rooted to my chair. In a rapid sequence of thoughts I conjectured that Rainer was to be shot while under sedation; that the entire plot, including my role as interviewer and annotator, had been orchestrated from the beginning by António; that Rainer was not the wizard I had come to admire, but the slave of his lover's superior powers; that in his current condition Rainer could easily be led by António to the slaughterhouse without uttering a murmur of objection. I even went so far as to speculate whether António might not have changed at all since his life in England as Elizabeth of York, and could be planning a fitting revenge!

I found them sitting on the veranda with Rainer staring sightlessly through the screens, just like his father.

My thoughts entirely awry, I blurted, "Hadn't we better give all this up?"

Tremors touched the corners of António's mouth. "He is aware of everything we say," he responded in a fragile voice. "And of each moment that passes ... He allows me to relax him because he accepts that it is the best way of getting through to the hour when we stand in the church. It is only then that he will need to be fully awake."

Contrition lowered me on to a chair. "I'm sorry I doubted you, António," I stammered.

"These moments are not easy for any of us," he continued, bestowing on me a small smile of encouragement.

Meanwhile I was struggling to get straight back into supportive mode. I asked cautiously, "Does he genuinely believe in this rosy future?"

"No!" António replied, surprisingly. "But it does not matter. If all goes to plan he will at last find out for himself that it is possible to have a future with me."

I glanced at the subject of our conversation, sitting like stone before the gauzed perimeter of the veranda; there was no way of telling whether he was hearing us or not.

"But, António, life will always be full of strife on every level. All this harmonious pie in the sky stuff ..." I stopped for fear of appearing trite, and also because it was unkind to undermine António's hopes.

"If I do things well, Miguel," he said in his simple Portuguese, "Rainer will see by my actions how to remove the dark stain on his Life-Line."

"Yes, I have also seen this darkness," I responded. "Why, I can see it about his head right now, as he sits there! Such painful pressure! The trouble is I have never been able to trace its cause."

António sighed and said, "Only I can make him find the cause, because he loves me." And he turned to stare at his partner with uninhibited empathy and compassion ... it was wonderful to see.

Eventually I said, “Whatever the cause, it must have been something serious ...”

He stirred himself to answer the implied question. “It was a blind act of behaviour ... But what really matters is that he has not been able to see it, and this makes him shout at me and at himself and at everyone ... and so things go wrong for him ... and those around him suffer.”

“I believe I saw the consequences of his ‘blind act’, as you call it, when I followed his Life-Line to Zeega. I saw faces in agony, I heard cries, I even think I saw you ... and you were wailing. Such devastation must come from a big crime. Am I right?”

“Yes, on Zeega it was bad. But the Fields do not weigh one blind action against another.” And then he added with studied meaning, “*It takes only one small blind action to darken a Life-Line.*”

I was unsure of what he meant, but I was very moved by his open-hearted revelations.

“What actually happened on Zeega?” I insisted. It was the question no one wanted to answer.

Suddenly anxious about time, António looked about him in an agitated manner. But after I repeated my question, he said, “He cannot see that he and I are always together as lovers, that all things are always together as lovers. To make him understand this, I must show him what is contained in his Life-Line.”

“How will you do this?”

“For a moment I must become the dark stain itself. Because he loves me, he will then be able to recognise it for the first time.”

“And thereby remove the bands of Zeega! ... But, António, why haven’t you done this before?”

“I have tried,” he lamented. After a moment of thought, he added, “But I have not shown him with enough force.”

My voice trembled as I asked, “And tonight, do you believe the terrible drama will contain enough force?”

But he was reluctant to continue with the conversation. Thinking of all that had to be done, he rubbed his eyes, roughly. Then he got up and went into the living room.

From where I sat, I could see him open Mrs Kruger’s reliquary, and remove her spotless wedding trousseau, complete with hat, veil and interminable split train. He carried all this carefully into Rainer’s room, then came out immediately and locked the door.

Returning to the veranda, he sat down again next to Rainer without a word, while I slid my body low across the wicker of the seat.

In this manner, all three of us remained as stationary as shored crocodiles on the long veranda, waiting for the steamy afternoon to tick by. Occasionally, the background hum of nature in the garden was broken by distressing crackles as an insect crashed into the screens. And all the while, this extended hiatus in time remained packed with tension.

It was interrupted by Mr Kruger’s emergence from a late siesta, announced by a rich clearing of the throat and loud spitting into his handkerchief. He stood groggily in the arched passageway of his wing of the house and peered at our little group with suspicion. António’s immediate reaction was to take Rainer by the elbow and guide him to the safety of his bedroom. Mr Kruger’s body swivelled round as he watched them every inch of the way. When António locked the door behind him, the grating of the key sang loudly

of defiance. Even the back of the old man's shoulders, raised in mid-breath, conveyed outrage. After a sonorous grunt, he decided to disappear back into his private quarters.

For some time I walked up and down, strengthening my resolve to see things through to the end, to finish my task however insubstantial, and by so doing come out of it with a little self-esteem. After the trouble I had brought upon Maeve, after causing Kudzi to flee from me, the last thing I wanted was to botch up Rainer's or – perhaps more precisely – António's fragile scheme.

So by the time the low afternoon sun had begun to diffuse its ruby red light through the veranda gauze, softening the reflection of my face in a bevelled antique mirror on the wall to give it a deceptive cinematic equanimity, I was repeating to myself, over and over again like a mantra, "I will abide by *their* will."

MOVING THE WEAPONS

After dark I lit an oil lamp in the library and went through Rainer's box files to kill time. But I soon found myself incapable of concentration. The mechanical copying of a single passage about his super-deterministic views on evolution was all I could manage.

At 6:30 I was up and pacing around again when someone knocked on the library door: it was Agi. She was holding a piece of paper in her hand and hurried away the instant I took it. It was a handwritten note from Mr Kruger Senior. In ungainly capitals, inscribed with a red felt-pen, I read: "YOU AND MY DISOWNED SON ARE NOT INVITED TO NEW YEAR'S EVE DINNER". This, at least, made me laugh.

After an hour of paralysis, broken only by the odd glance at my watch, I heard the gate being opened. Hurrying to the window I caught a glimpse of António going out on foot. Within five minutes he was back. Presumably he had gone up to Toto's palace and reminded him to be in position at the gate by nine.

Almost immediately the pop of a champagne cork announced dinner. I remained at the library desk listening to the two-tone drone of the Greeks interrupted by an occasional rumble from Mr Kruger. The clanking of plates and the tinkle of cutlery did nothing for my appetite. Nervous strain was even making my tongue stick to the top of my mouth. In an attempt to acquire a modicum of calmness I lit a candle to dispel the darkness that was beginning to consume the room as the lamp ran out of oil.

Close after 7:30, unheralded by a knock, António walked into the room. I shot to my feet. He announced with disconcerting brevity, "I am going with Rainer. We will return soon."

I wanted to clasp him in my arms and wish him good fortune, but found myself incapable of either speech or movement.

Seconds later, through the blinds I could see Rainer being led to the car by António and placed in the passenger seat. While António did the gate, Rainer sat in the car as stiff as a cardboard cut-out.

The sound of the engine dwindling to nothing left me ill-prepared for the next fifty interminable minutes. I stood in impatient but rigid suspense while the stark and unstable night pressed into the room. Eventually, my imagination become so cluttered by images of disaster that it became imperative to flee into open space.

I chose the front garden where I would avoid running into Agi; it was also the best place for keeping an eye on the gate. The full night chorus of bats, cicadas and insects

was punctuated by banging pots and hollow voices from the high-rise nearby. Next to the gate, above which a hazy moon had begun its journey across the sky, a thicket of bamboos groaned in the hot and moist breeze like old men. Barefoot in my thonged slippers, I repeatedly traversed the frazzled grass, feeling the fine grit build up between my toes. With every step I imagined those of my companions, each one more fraught with danger than the last.

An infinitesimal change in the tapestried obscurity drew my attention back to the gate. I crept forward, my heart hammering. Without doubt there was a shadow flitting back and forth across the chain hole. I peeped out: the unmistakable curvature of Toto's spine crossed my line of my vision – there he was, in the required place an hour ahead of time! ...

I assumed he must have heard me, for his voice sliced the pervious night. “*Estou à tua espera. Como vês!*” (“I am waiting here. As you see!”)

Before I could answer, a hand came through the chain hole, armed with a key for the padlock. Then I heard the words “*Muito bem, Toto*” spoken in António's soft tones – heavenly to my ear. He had returned on foot ... alone.

As he came through the gate I could hear his rapid breathing.

“Is everything all right?” I asked in a choked voice.

The sweat pouring off his brow caught the moonlit sky as he shut the partitions, leaving Toto outside. “So far, it is good,” he answered.

“Can he drive all right on his own?”

“Of course!”

He started over towards a wooden bench, saying, “Let us wait for him here.”

I could tell he was very tired, less from his voice than from the way he moved: the shifting of the weapons from the Orthodox church into the car, the walk home, the anxiety about how Rainer was faring in the delivery, and the sleepless nights of late had all taken their toll.

We sat as sombre and quiet as shadows in a huge wheezing darkness filled with waiting. When the card players took up their positions beyond the veranda screens, we watched them blankly as if they were actors in some tedious television soap opera. Both of us were used to the sounds of bats and insects, but the irregular creaking of the bamboos set us further on edge.

When I next squinted at the luminous hands of my watch, it was 8:10.

I let my eyes roam the shadows of the garden where they latched on to a single firefly as it probed the sparse vegetation; the steady throb of its searchlight had the effect of raising my hopes for Rainer. Then it suddenly struck me as odd, even offensive, that I knew next to nothing about my friend's past: what were his early psi experiences, how had he developed his powers, had he taken family holidays, what about the good times with his loving stepmother, what were his favourite films; and, most interestingly, how had he and António managed to find one another again in their present reincarnation on Earth, in Mozambique and in that very house? Questions upon questions extending back ... back to all their previous lives together ... and none of them ever to be asked ...

“You can help us at ten ...” António was the first to break our muteness. “By doing the gate when we leave for the church. Agi will be hiding in her room by then.”

I agreed at once. After which we surrendered once more to the music of the night with its cicadas, bats, and bamboos set to an unstable pulse.

Eventually it was António who, once again, broke the spell. “It is not necessary for you to come to the church, Miguel.”

“But it’s my duty to be there!” I protested in disbelief.

“It will not be safe. You could stay here. Or you could go to your girl.”

“Not safe?” I responded, unable to disguise my hurt. “Are you speaking as a psychic or as a friend?”

“Your friend,” he chortled. “But I did not expect you to agree.”

“Then let’s hear no more of it.”

After another silence he handed me a large key, and said, “You can also unlock the church door for us. Then it would be good if you helped me set everything up. Afterwards, you must keep out of the way and do nothing.”

“Of course I’ll help you. But it will be hard to stand by and watch a man I have grown to love getting shot. Don’t worry, I promise I’ll not interfere, unless you tell me to.”

Before he could respond, the sound of an approaching car drew us simultaneously to our feet. The engine was unmistakable ... “He’s done it!” I cried as we rushed forward.

António swung the gate open and the car swept in, dust and insects barrelling in the headlights.

As the engine died next to the house I heard Toto whining in the dark wake of the car, “What’s happening? What am I supposed to do?”

Temporarily blinded by the car lights I called sternly into the night: “You must wait! We will leave again soon. Then they will tell you everything.” And I brought the two halves of the gate together so vigorously they reverberated like a gong.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE WEDDING JOURNEY TO THE CHURCH

I found the two of them drinking water in the kitchen. With his lids peeled back, Rainer was all popping eyeballs – their glimmer, though, was inappropriately dull proportionate to the energy he must have invested in the final delivery of the weapons. And there were other worrying signs: his skin had turned a dead parchment colour as if it were anticipating death; and when he finished his drink, the glass remained so tightly jammed in his grip that António had a struggle taking it away from him.

Together we led Rainer through the candle-lit dining room, skirting the table covered with left-overs of the last meal of the old year ... then pressed on through the darkened living room ...

“What’s going on?”

My heart jumped. I had not seen Mr Kruger watching us from the veranda’s double doorway.

“He has drunk much, sir,” António responded at once. “He went to the Búzio.”

With a “Bah!” the old man returned with stiff-legged indifference into the boxed glow of the card game where his Greeks sat waiting with the durable patience of garden gnomes.

Getting Rainer ready for “the wedding” in his bedroom was the next event on our schedule. We took off his shirt, but left him his trousers which soon became buried under the ample folds of the white dress. Because the waist and chest of the dress were too

tight, we had to tear slits in the silken material, which proved all too easy as it had worn thin with age. To secure it to his body we wrapped string around it.

I would have liked to voice my objection to this macabre fancy-dress drill. The idea of making oneself a visible target was all very well, but a white sheet would have done the job. For Rainer to deliberately put on the wedding trousseau of his stepmother struck me as inappropriately camp. There was no denying, though, that the sight of Rainer in a dress would encourage a man such as Boland to pull the trigger with even greater relish – which was doubtlessly why António was going along with the exercise.

“Do you have the ring?” The question uttered in a diffident and hoarse tone came from Rainer returning to the land of the living ... presumably, with his keeper’s permission.

“Don’t worry. It is here,” the keeper told him tapping his pocket.

By ten we were ready to leave. António stuffed the train of the wedding dress into his colourful John Bull carrier bag, and gave it to me to carry. The bag was surprisingly heavy; it contained many candles and boxes of matches, two flash lights and some tools.

As we left the room, António had to pull Rainer through the doorway because his lover kept turning round to stare with eyes that were neither sad nor panicked, but covetous, rather, of all his familiar clutter that he was abandoning.

Charged with the task of opening the gate, I decided to make for the kitchen door, which was clearly the best way to avoid the card players. But António took no such precaution. Before I had taken more than a couple of steps, he made a dash for the front door, driving Rainer straight into the hallway lit by the glow of the lamp on the veranda: I think it must have been a decisive premeditated action, although to this day I still wonder to what extent António planned everything.

Mr Kruger, who was facing the open archway to the hall, instantly caught sight of the brilliant white dress – for a couple of seconds he sat staring as if he had seen a ghost – then he soared to his feet, flabbergasted.

I ran forward to prevent an anticipated attack by the old man, but António was too quick for us. As he rushed Rainer out the front door, I just had time to see Mr Kruger stumble backwards and trip over his chair ...

“The gate!” António shouted at me over his shoulder. Already he was thrusting Rainer into the passenger seat of the car.

As I heaved apart the gate panels, António was reversing down the driveway.

The car backed out into the street and the headlights came on ... swinging over Toto.

I locked up as fast as possible, then clambered into the back seat.

The car approached the hunchback who was holding a walking stick carved in the shape of a snake. He screwed up his eyes in the glare of the headlamps ... When he caught sight of Rainer’s garments, a vivid expression of disbelief enveloped his face.

Leaning across the seat, I opened the back door for him. “Get in!” I commanded.

THE CHURCH

The short journey to *avenida Ahmed Sekou Touré*, which gave access to the front steps of the Orthodox church, took on the aspect of a nightmare: the car lights cut through whirlwinds of gnats, moths loomed whitely before incandescing upon the windshield, the boxed-up buildings of the city flew past like rows of coffins.

As soon as we drew up at the church, António got out, opened Toto's door and announced, "Senhor Rainer wants you to tell Senhor Boland you have seen him now at the church. That is all you must tell him. But you must do it at once."

Toto leaned over the front seat and peered at Rainer with an expression of perplexed concern, like a dog's. Toto's only friend in the world gave him a frail nod of agreement. Whereupon the little man climbed out of the car and ran off into the night, holding his snake-headed stick before him like a lance.

We had to pull Rainer out of the car. The moment we let go of him, he collapsed to the ground. Following António's instructions, I helped him more or less drag Rainer up to the vestibule door. While I strove with clumsy incompetence to unlock the huge door, António held his lover in his arms like a sacrificial lamb that had sensed its forthcoming slaughter.

With Rainer now clamped between us, the flashlight showed us the way across the oceanic marble floor of the nave, through the gilded royal doors of the iconostasis, and into the sanctuary, where we beached him on the floor within the pale marble glow of the altar. I half expected him to crawl away. Instead his body stiffened as he stretched out flat on his back with his eyes transfixed on the distant dome in open but unseeing bewilderment.

Pushing the pace, António asked me to help him set up candles on the altar candelabras. We must have placed at least fifty, António urging, "Put another! Put another!" Soon the colourful mural of Mother and Child in the alcove became visible, and this numinous spectacle seemed to calm Rainer's candle-gleamed stare.

With hammers and pliers, António and I set about removing the boards that covered two ground-level windows on either side of the nave – "To give Boland a choice of vantage points" – an arduous task as the nails were rusty and had to be dislodged with disconcertingly sonorous squeals.

By 10:55 everything was ready to António's satisfaction. Without pausing for breath, he crouched next to his dazed lover and began droning into his ear – a resuscitation tactic that went on for so long I thought it was doomed. In the end, though, Rainer was sitting up, shaking his head and grunting in a surprised sort of manner.

António pulled him to his feet. But as soon as he let go, Rainer was left tottering, and I found myself hurrying to help. As I held him in my arms I could feel his body being recharged.

"Leave him!" António ordered. He wrenched Rainer away from me, almost possessively. "Go! ... I will hold him."

Hesitantly, I backed away. The arch-conspirator was now watching me with a caustic smirk and a sharp eye as he hung on to António's arm, his dress askew, his wedding hat pulled down low, his veil in knots, his head lolling like a drunk's in a drag queens' bar.

"Go to the back!" António insisted.

Looking for any excuse to delay, I exclaimed, "The wedding train!"

I ran to the bag, removed the twin-tailed train, rolled it out over the marble floor.

Although Rainer's movements were sluggish, he was fully conscious now, helping me, if ineptly, with the task of fixing the train round his waist.

"Thank you," António said while I laid out the train elegantly across the floor behind Rainer.

Then I asked, "What about the ring?"

He took it out of his pocket, handed it to me. “Well done!” he said. “In Africa, rituals must happen in detail ... or they can fail.”

I could not believe his state of calm; there had even been a touch of humour in his response.

It was a struggle to get the ring on Rainer’s knobby wedding finger. His hand was slippery and hot. In the end he pointed at his little finger, which turned out to be the only place for it.

“Good!” António said. “Now you must move out of the way.”

António looked magnificent in the candlelight. If I were not going to pass out during the coming minutes, or run away, it would be through his example, not through any gumption of my own.

Seeing me hesitate still, António said, “Remember what he told you: death is a small thing. For sure he loves you. One day, you will be able to share him again.”

In response to this Rainer managed a sickly half smile; but he was holding up well, and there were no outer manifestations of fear, unless his slow cumbersome movements had been its pointers.

As I backed away from them I could scarcely breathe.

On reaching the royal doors I whispered, “Do I leave these open?”

“It is the path of the bullet.” António said.

The floor darkened, the candlelight losing out to distance as I retreated. The front entrance gaped widely: any minute now Boland would come swaggering through it like a cowboy, his gun on his arm, backlit by the star speckled night; or else, his shadow would rise up in one of those baying side windows.

Doubtlessly to an outsider it would have made a bizarre but magnificent spectacle: the odd couple poised in a bubble of candle-glow, static and fluid as a mirage, arm in arm before the milky altar, framed by holy icons and crowned by the vivid picture of Mother and Child; the prima donna bride resplendent in period wedding trousseau, leaning upon the groom whose clothes were touching in their ordinariness and whose Olympian chest was so oleaginous that it looked like polished bronze.

In different circumstances I could have appreciated the aesthetics; here and now, a petrification spread through me until only my eyes moved, restlessly surveying the dangerous blue-black openings in the building with such unblinking concentration that my vision blurred with the strain.

I never saw Boland. There was only one blast, as vast as a canon’s and so rebounding and dazzling that it seemed to arrive from everywhere at once. In a split second, António took off as if jerked by a string, crashed into Rainer, sent him rolling across the altar, upsetting the candelabras, and extinguishing all the candles except one that accompanied the two men as they plunged towards the floor, allowing me a glimpse of blood staining the white dress.

Darkness wipes out everything.

... I charge towards the altar, shouting “Rainer!” ... crash into the hard wood of the iconostasis, stumble through the royal doors ... sticky wet stuff on the altar – can only be blood ... hunt for matches – no hope of finding them ... hands patting the blood on the

altar top ... someone moving next to me ... a shifting shadow, it's the white dress – “Rainer?” I shout.

Miracle: matches found! ... stupid fumbling ... I strike one, two, three – breaking them all ... precious time flying in the dark ... my fingers find one candle and at last I light it ... dazzling glare ... fresh blood all over my hands, darkly trickling.

I raise the candle above my head, hunt the shadows ... Rainer staggering, with his back to me, spatters of blood all over the dress ... but he's on his feet, completely alive! ... he raises his arms towards the open doors generously inviting another bullet. Keeping the candle high I make for him, moving in front of the altar ... my foot strikes something soft: half a head – the top blown off, brains spilling out, only the body says it's António ...

I double up, retching.

The shriek that came from Rainer when he saw the body of his lover was the most awful sound imaginable – his hands flew like panicked birds – he tripped over his dress train, fell down on to the marble floor, sent his wedding hat rolling across the floor ...

I shuffled round the corpse – that instant corpse! – fixated on the gushing head ... and stumbled into Rainer, prostrate on his back, the front of his dress gross with blood – none of it his own. He was staring upwards, eyes out on springs as though he had spotted something at the summit of the church even worse than António's burst skull ...

I followed his gaze: grey-white smoke was filling the dome and gallery. The aftermath of the gun shot? Not dense enough to be smoke. More like gas gathering volume. It looked harmful – nothing to do with fire, to do with poison. I scoured the open doorway for Boland – nothing! The windows – nothing! Hot wax burnt my skin making me drop the candle and out it went. But the vaulted dome stayed bright, for the gas shed a silver-grey light of its own as it swirled more vigorously, curling across the span of the nave and reaching down towards us without sound, without weight. There was a moment when I glimpsed something familiar, but it was swept aside by a spasm of terror as I thought: Boland is killing the rest of us! ...

A choked cry from Rainer: he was warding off the clustered vapours with his hands, his face wrung and ugly, his eyes trembling reflectors of the gaseous stains that spread above us ...

Certainly no angels in the church dome, only uncertain forms, half human, with contortions that told of suffocating compression. Soon I recognised the contour of a mouth, a nose, an eye. As they grew sharper, I knew who they were: the golden ones from Zeega, many of them spouting smouldering fumes and all of them wrung by the anguish that I had already glimpsed the day of the boat trip. The harder I stared, the more spectres I saw, all clawing with their spidery fingers at webs wispish as cotton ...

This time there was no doubt that I was penetrating the full Zeegan horror. Percolating within the event's nucleus was a backlog of suffering that enveloped me so strongly that I fell to my knees ...

Rainer lay stretched out beside me, his mouth open wide – another jagged nucleus filled with shrieking forms. Dozens of hands were reaching down to seize him by the throat. Even my own hands joined the others in the strangling. Such madness fast

overcame me that I found myself placing my hands round my own throat, driven by a compulsion to terminate my own breath ...

Sounds emerged ... distant shouts like cries for mercy – it was mainly Rainer’s voice doing the shouting, with his mouth now set in a broad rictus while his voice came from elsewhere ... came from the upper reaches of the church ... and mine, too, was up there, distinctly calling for help, shouting through the nave ...

The Zeegan creatures knew no mercy. They were zeroing in on both of us, tapering their swirling gaseousness for greater effect, hard-pressed now to fulfil the natural dictates of their function: the smothering of our loathsome heads in obscurity, the blinding of our unseeing eyes, the stuffing of our ears with silence, and the filling of our lungs with the stench of our own contamination ... for Rainer and me, there was to be no reprieve ...

... darkly stained and impenetrable, the bands of Zeega stamped their seal upon us.

Some one was prodding me ... harder. The gas and its grotesque retinue retreated, off scrambling through the roof. A stick was prodding me. I gulped air. Toto! ... Toto prodding me with a stick, his African walking stick carved into a snake. My vision cleared as fast as a windswept sky. Toto prodding, holding a burning candle, blinking at me like a worried dog.

Rainer was still lying on his back next to me on the floor, still wriggling, still crying out in his wretchedness. Toto swung his stick on to him and dug at him again and again ... gradually Rainer grew quiet and still.

I got to my feet. “Did you see it?” I puffed at Toto while pointing my finger at the roof, where there was now nothing but hollow darkness.

“He has run away.” It was of Boland that Toto spoke; Toto knew nothing of suffocated beings grappling with lethal gases.

With a groan, Rainer rolled on to his side so that the massacred body of his lover fell abruptly into his line of vision detonating a brand new expression on his face, which had nothing to do with terror, and was as familiar to me as if it were my own. For a moment I could not name it. Only when he began to rock his body and moan did the meaning of the expression become indisputably evident: guilt and abject shame were eating at his face as fast as acid.

I became aware, once more, of Toto standing before me. “Help me get him to the car!” I rasped.

We dragged him outside like a log. Worried that Boland might still be around, I hurried Toto. We threw Rainer on to the back seat of the car, where he began to whimper in a most pathetic manner.

The mechanics of hum-drum reality: I couldn’t find the ignition keys! As António had driven, they were probably still in his pocket. The idea of going back and rummaging about in his clothes with the gore oozing out of his head was more than I could bear.

“I will find the keys,” Toto said, promptly trotting off to the church, and leaving me humbled.

As I sank deep into the driver’s seat, I found that I was shaking all over.

Meanwhile gibberish was coming from the raving maniac in the back. I could not have been more thoroughly fed up with him and his ill-conceived venture.

Then, quite spontaneously, the interrelation between my exasperation with Rainer and the memory of António’s ravaged head brought an instantaneous revelation: a split

second before Boland's shot I had seen António jump, deliberately throwing himself over Rainer to save his life; at its critical moment, as Boland's finger pressed the trigger, the suicide plot as conceived by Rainer had been subverted in the most unexpected and spectacular manner by his lover.

A surge of rage spun me round. "He died for you! You bastard! Do you realise this?" My onslaught was like interrupting cicadas – he went quiet during the tirade, remained so for a second, then resumed his noise.

I grabbed him and shook him. "You got António killed in your crazed ambition to become some hot-shot up in the sky. *You* deserve to die – not *him!*"

He started blubbering. I struck him hard on the head with the flat of my hand, several times ... until I saw his eyes find mine – they were full of tears.

At that moment Toto appeared by my window with the car keys.

As we drove back to the house, Rainer sobbed ever more convulsively.

NIGHT OF THE FIREFLIES

Toto opened the gate. The house was in darkness, the Greeks having left. Rainer's sobs were driving me to distraction. I wanted him locked up in his room as fast as possible.

Toto and I got the failed conspirator out all right. But as we directed him towards the back of the building he broke away, flopped himself over the bonnet of the car, and proceeded to beat it feverishly. A frightened shout from Toto brought me to a standstill ... when I looked round, the hunchback was scampering for the gate.

"Get out of the way!" Klaus Kruger snarled in a voice of rusting steel. I froze. Rainer ceased hitting the car. There was a metallic glint of moonlight as Kruger swept his shotgun across his chest pointing it straight at me. Behind the hammers crouched the face of a tiger. "Get out of my way!" he repeated.

Very abruptly, Rainer heaved himself off the car and knocked into me. I expected him to charge at his father, but instead he stumbled down the drive, whinnying like a horse – he was making a run for it!

A double flame leapt from the twin barrels. The air beside me shook. The sound at such close range was shatteringly painful. A black flower erupted on the back of Rainer's dress as he was thrown forward on to the tar.

I flew at the old man, wrenched away the twelve bore and sent it spinning over the garden wall ... then I ran to Rainer's side. His back was a bubbling sea of blood and there was no doubt, this time, whose blood it was. He lay motionless, face down. Gathering courage, I rolled him over: my spirits soared – his eyes were open and he was seeing me.

What to do ... what to do? Mr Kruger had vanished. The driveway was strangely alive with fireflies pressing close about us. I moaned, "My God!" over and over, fighting against dizziness, palpitations, hating myself for my weakness, knowing that if ever I were needed, this was the moment. Inanely, I shouted, "Must get you to hospital!" But when I tried to lift Rainer, an agonised gurgle made me put him down again.

I ran to fetch the car. While opening the door, I looked back: Rainer's head was bathed in a vibrant glow. How odd! Had Toto returned unexpectedly with a flashlight? For a better look I began to retrace my steps, then drew up in amazement: hundreds of fireflies had gathered eerily over Rainer's body as if he were carrion. The amassed beam they cast over him was bright enough for me to see his pained grimace from where I

stood. The swarm hurriedly concentrated its density, assuming threatening proportions. I could even hear its high-pitched whine. If such a thing were to settle on Rainer, he could be asphyxiated.

I hurried to his side and clapped my hands at the insects – to no effect. I hit out at them, striking deep within the swarm where I felt a tingling on my skin, but none of the expected stinging contact with tiny hurtling creatures, as if by banding together they had pulverised themselves into a uniform whirlwind of light. Rainer's eyelids flickered in the shimmering luminescence, yet no fear at all was registering upon his face, although the mark of his suffering remained. In horror I saw blood running from under him like gun-black ink as it snaked across the tar.

My attention was snatched away: the cicadas and bats had switched off as if a cable had been pulled. I looked up: a pervasive light hung in the branches of the jacarandas – it was also bouncing off the driveway – it flooded the garden causing the bushes to glitter like metal. Where could it have come from? ... I stood up. The roof of the house was a sheet of silver-backed glass. Seeking the moon I looked higher, and caught my breath: the horizon had turned into an aurora borealis so bright that the moon itself was consumed by it.

Weak with disbelief I sank down beside Rainer. He was straining to prop himself up for he, too, had seen the spectacular illumination. As though appeased, the bundle of fireflies slackened their activity and adopted a more benevolent hue. Rainer fell back, struck by sharp pain from his wound. Pushing my hands gingerly through the tingling insects I cradled his head and placed it on my lap. The horizon, meanwhile, was fast growing brighter as if a new and more powerful moon from another galaxy were rising to embrace the Earth.

There was to be no new moon of any sort. Nothing so ordinary. Instead the luminous source fell in upon itself, as if a million stars were being pressed together, until a sharp beam, running parallel to the roof, stretched across the skyline. The energy emitted from this devoured the rest of the night. Through the trees no more stars could be seen, only those above Toto's block of flats, and these faded while I looked at them. The night remained stripped of all sound, save the ethereal hum of the fireflies.

The celestial strip began to move forward in our direction. I could see every blood-caked line and wrinkle on Rainer's face, as well as the fine lace designs on the wedding dress. Now that his gaze was on the advancing light, astonishment overrode the hurt from his shattered back, and his shoulders eased against me.

The horizontal bar was now hovering, laser sharp, directly above the house, no more than fifty yards from where we were on the driveway.

New wonders were working on Rainer's body as the cloud of fireflies subsided into pockets of translucence at the centre of his forehead, on his temples, on his throat and in the palms of his hands that lay open at his sides.

I could have run out of the way, but the thought never occurred to me. I felt inextricably coupled with Rainer, and the strength of our connection appeased my panic, allowing me, so fortunately, to receive and accept the remarkable sequence of events.

The finale came with feverish excitement. With a sound like a high mountain wind, the numerous phosphorescent manifestations rose from Rainer's body pulling together as a single cone which extended upwards to a height of about four or five metres, where it split into two distinct shafts forming a large "V". As this "V" widened at the top, the

celestial bar touched down upon the ascending vertices through a mutually attractive force. Short rays flew in all directions with deep singeing sighs as the vertices trembled beneath the impact, Rainer cried out as if he had been shot all over again, and currents of electricity raced up his arms making them judder as if he were being electrocuted.

A perfectly uniform isosceles triangle had been created by the conjunction, with its base angle concentrated on Rainer's forehead. The triangle grew strong with energy that wheezed with pressure as it proceeded to pour into Rainer's body like liquid gold. The inflow loosened the skin of his face and smoothed his wrinkles into a polished and glistening sheen, the corners of his mouth easing into a faint smile. His body grew still. He looked like a young man – one who was overcome with ecstasy.

I wondered how such positive energy could be associated with death, and for a few seconds I dared hope that I was witnessing an extra-terrestrial procedure of revival.

Above, the perfect geometric form stood firm – a solid triangle of gold. The frenetic noises receded, leaving an electrified silence ... I heard Rainer gasp, "Do you see it?"

I had expected never to hear him speak again.

"Yes! They have closed it!" My voice sounded too loud and portentous, but it announced all there was to say – although, in the intensity of the moment, I could not formulate what that was.

Tears were running down my face – they were falling on him. I did not cry because he was leaving me, I cried because his reward was so great, because the future was triumphant, because none of it was expected. If he felt my tears, they, too, would bring him joy, for then he would know that I was perfectly in tune with him. And I cried also because António had been vindicated.

His fingers quivering like reeds, Rainer brought his hands together across his midriff in the Zeegan salutation. I raised mine and did the same, directing the united tips of my fingers upwards, triangle to triangle, honouring the monument to eternity that towered above us. Images started to flow through me ... of the buoyant nun ... of the glorious peacock ... of Bellerophon riding Pegasus forever ... of the Bishop whipping up the Holy Ghost among his congregation ... of me, "the freed man's verser" flying through the Earth's Field ...

We maintained the salutation for a few seconds, and then Rainer's fingers relaxed, his arms fell to his sides, and his eyes tarnished like shelled charcoal as death closed in.

He was trying to say something, his lips wobbling as he strove to shape speech. I bent low over him. His last words were spaced out so that each was a unit on its own: "*I... can... not... harm... again.*" I received the final piece of the jigsaw puzzle with a cry of gratitude. These words meant everything to me, although they, too, lacked formulation.

The triangle lifted off with a blaze and a roar that seemed to come from the belly of the earth and echoed the sound of the Zeegan salutation – "Arom!". It ascended – a cathedral of light – and receded with increasing speed towards the horizon until it was a glimmering pearl ... then nothing.

I felt the hairs on the back of my neck rise; the movements of light had been so physical they could well have been those of an alien spaceship that had come to take my friend away.

Out of the returning night, the little moon re-emerged ... as it should be.

In my lap, Rainer's head was a shadowy space. A single bat shriek – like a bugle of victory – set all the others going; the cicadas surged in chorus; the fireflies danced in

sprinkles across the garden. I discovered that I was crushing Rainer's head in my hands ...
I let go.

As I grew accustomed to the dark, his features became visible, blissfully at rest. The war was over for him, leaving me behind, a lonely knight-errant kneeling on a strip of tar.

I looked at my watch: it was 00:10a.m. on the first day of the new year.

DAY FOURTEEN – TUESDAY 1ST JANUARY 1985

A STEREOTYPED CELL

I was unable to move. I had no sense of time. But I must have sat for several hours on the driveway facing the moon-blached house, now stripped of its treachery, with Rainer's body now as insubstantial as a dead branch lying before me. Throughout I was suspended, my breath shallow, in the all-encompassing authority of the triangle. Since Rainer was an integral part of this rosy exaltation, there was no place for grief. Over and over I kept soaring on the infusions of geometric light, sighing at the firm touch of the descendent cross-beam, hearing the long-awaited sounds of sealing, basking again in the inflow of pressure.

In the later hours of the night, dull and fragmented impressions reached me from an adjacent world: searchlights blasting the property, Agi's wailing and ululating, old man Kruger's monumental face set like a victorious general, his steps heavy and martial crunching the gravelled tar inches away from me as he passed by in the midst of an army escort. Light-spangled ropes cordoning off the corpse, its closed eyes bulging like the fat cocoons of ghost moths, the wedding dress spread wide like an open atlas displaying continents of blood. Being lifted to my feet and led to the back of the familiar Russian truck with the old man lying handcuffed quiet and fatal as a snake on the frictionless steel floor rubbed smooth by the passage of bodies and time ... Once again, the ice-white walls of the *Guarda Civil – Kim Il Sung* vaulting into view ...

Alone in a standard prison cell: stone floor, neutral walls, high open window, single blanket, thick odour of filth lifting the drowsy coastal air. Discomfort was not my primary concern. "*That which is within attracts that which is without.*" True to this recently acknowledged axiom, my barren cell rustled up the electrified constellations of Rainer's dying and in so doing converted the interval of my imprisonment into a edifying sojourn.

I sat in there, cross-legged, as I had sat on the driveway. Sprung from the charged air, half-meanings pitched through my mind, related to the accumulated metaphors of shape, texture and movement that I had witnessed, and to those two astounding eruptions of words – one mine, one his – fashioned by the impact of celestial consonance that bypassed reason: "*They have closed it!*" and "*I... can... not... harm... again!*"

From the instant of its happening, the "*it*" that was closed had never been a matter of doubt for me, at least on one level. Rainer's bipolar Life-Line leaping up like that, splitting, widening and gaping with readiness, meeting the cross-bar angle for angle, spark for spark, exactitude upon exactitude, matching triangle with triangle in forms redolent of the Zeegan salutation.

"*I have read all the signs,*" he once told me, and I could not deny that even if he got some of the details wrong, he got the date and time of his dying right. And by yawning so liberally, the jaws of death had demonstrated with no uncertainty that my friend had gathered the correct information for his Line's future composition. When Rainer was ready to speak of joining, "they", the Fields, sent their intermediary to take him away – Rainer calling for *it* and *it* coming down calling for Rainer, both interlocking to cast the

golden chariot. The initiating beam had moved in the assurance that wholeness alone was the business in hand, that down in a Mozambican garden lay an aspect of creation that was freshly and unexpectedly infused with an irresistible desire for closing, and charged, too, with the required understanding of what closing meant.

Because there I had been – and indeed still was – at the heart of things, with new eyes to follow the intractable coming and confident going, to see and hear the equilateral triangle tell of resolution, and to watch the agony on Rainer’s face washed away, leaving an expression of absolute fulfilment. And it was certain to me that the form my friend assumed when he left the earth was very different to the one I had known, and to the one that had been dispatched to earth thirty-seven years before.

And as I sat in my prison cell, the joyous conviction blossomed within me that Rainer had risen to be stored for reactivation with António as a binary unit of some perfect and permanent stability. This much I was ready to swear by. Otherwise ... otherwise the earthly transition of his Life-Line would not have happened in that spectacular, beautiful and symmetrically engineered manner.

MIRRORS OF CRIMINALITY

Kudzi stood waiting for me ... behind her was a Unesco Land Cruiser ... behind that the white walls of the marshalling yard ... behind them the haze of the new day’s sun vibrant with tropical heat. She kept her eyes on me, watching with concern. The soldiers deposited me in front of her. She was studying me like someone who was really interested. “I am pleased to see you are all right,” is what she eventually said.

I was unable to hold her gaze at first. But when I did, I found myself observing reflections of the mould of dark dank places and the maggots of corners of shame ...

Kudzi did nothing but stand there – as herself; she could not help it that with every move she made she threw another decomposing image of herself at me. Around the tenderness of her lips, worms dug tunnels into her flesh, her eyes were slashed by the tongues of snakes, her brain peeled open like rotten fruit ...

Lifting an arm, I steadied myself against the open door of the vehicle, probing the ground for alternatives.

“You look as if you’ve been run over!” she said, taking my arm.

I looked up: dozens of reproductions of her mutilated face were flapping one over the other like shooting targets in a fair ground, and I knew full well who was doing the shooting, without respite, the firing of the bullets, again and again one after the other ...

“We’ll go back to Ulla’s flat where you can rest,” she said. “Tomorrow I’ll drive you to the airport to catch your flight” ... spoken despite the thud of bullets ripping at her and flipping her face back over and over ... until it was Maeve’s sad countenance being tossed like a tin plate tumbling ... then other faces, of other lovers going back through one lifetime and then another, all revolving awkwardly in pain, all shot to pieces by me, the well-known aggressor, the supreme egotist, the one who was Kudzi’s mortal enemy ...

It takes only one small blind action to darken a Life-Line.

“Come, Michael! Let’s get into the car,” Kudzi said ... “*We* must go now!”

The Japanese Land Cruiser bearing “we” and one driver sailed across the city with the lofty confidence of a weather balloon. Kudzi was seated in the front. I slouched on the back seat, steadily sweating. Perhaps through long force of habit, my neck gradually arched forwards reaching for Kudzi, until my brow landed on the back of her seat.

The unexpected sensation of her fingers fondling my hair released tremors within me ... each one of her soft feminine strokes sending me on a definitive course that took me back to the Greek Orthodox church ...

The church? Had I not stood there in the church, right next to António’s mutilated corpse watching Rainer’s face being eaten by rot and acid? Had I not witnessed the inexorable course of events that generated Rainer’s putrefaction? – Boland’s will and António’s will in perfect synchronisation as António’s head rose to meet the bullet and explode in a fanfare of horror directly in Rainer’s line of vision; António receiving Boland’s iron-willed bullet, seizing it, in fact, to smash asunder the infamous bands of Zeega, and in so doing, dispatching Rainer with indubitable virulence to meet his crimes and the full force of his guilt ...

It takes only one small blind action to darken a Life-Line.

And at that precise moment in the church, my own guilt and shame had welded me to his, so that we both saw with the same infected eyes the poison of his haunting culpability rolling through the dome. “*What is mine shall know my face.*” Rainer and Michael, each the spitting image of the other’s marked obscenities. A haunting chimera that would not let go of me until Kudzi was found, knowing that I was hard of hearing and slow to see, pursuing me through the night, following me even to the prison cell, then out to the Land Cruiser when morning came, where Kudzi would do for me what António had done for Rainer: impose on me the convergence of my own accumulated indifference and its unmistakable consequences.

Now from the back of the USAID vehicle, above the sound of the engine I hissed, “*I... can... not... harm... again*”, the words emerging from me in the same involuntary manner as they had come from Rainer, with the same tonality and spaced rhythm.

Kudzi’s hand stiffened for a while as she took in my words, before going on with the stroking.

“Hey! You know what?” Kudzi spoke, turning her head round to face me with her smile, her breath so close it flitted upon my brow like wings. “If everyone turned those words of yours into deeds, the weapons industry would collapse.”

Through owl eyes I stared with expanding clarity at the imperfections of my Life-Line ... and what I saw was a man laid waste by his own guilt and shame, a man who now, suddenly and forever, must hold himself responsible.

“I have your suitcase,” Kudzi said. “But the soldiers took all those papers on the desk – they said they were Rainer’s and needed analysis. I hope they weren’t important to you.”

Her words drew me out of myself sufficiently for the grief of losing Rainer to hit me for the first time.

ULLA’S APARTMENT

“Drink this!”

It was the local orange liquid. I took the glass from Kudzi's hand. I was sitting on Ulla's sofa in her front room with the red window. I could not recall the six flights of stairs.

"There you go!" She was sitting at the dining room table, reading. How long had she been there?

The acidity of the drink stung my parched throat.

She looked up at me. "You must have grown to love that strange man," she said across the divide.

"It takes only one small blind action ..." For how many lifetimes had Rainer and I been incapable of love? We, who were accountable, both of us, for our persistent rebuttal of a sublime energy that moves across space-time. Surely the exposure of my awesome indifference had come too late to salvage the relationship with Kudzi? António knew how to love – and Rainer was saved. Must I also kill myself to be saved?

"How come his servant was found shot in the Greek church?"

"He was Rainer's lover."

"Why did he get killed? Was he a spy too?"

"He got himself killed to enable Rainer to love him."

She looked at me with disbelief. "You should lie down and get some rest," she said, before getting up from the table and leaving the room.

Lying down made me aware of how weak I was, although my mind kept on racing.

Kudzi was clattering dishes in the kitchen. I sat up. I wanted so much for her to believe that I was now incapable of being a threat to her. But how could I ever have António's resilience, his capacity for sacrifice? António, whose life-work was caring for Rainer and preparing him for his salvation through a brilliant sequence of manipulations that ended on the driveway in a hail of gunshot and a dazzle of configurations.

"I... can... not... harm... again...."

Kudzi returned with a tray of tea. She poured it, raising and lowering the pot balletically as she did so, an Islamic African custom she had picked up when she trained as a guerrilla in Tanzania. Such graceful and such familiar gestures!

I got up, moved unsteadily towards her, then went down on my knees before her and said, "I will make the sacrifices, as you have told me to do. I swear it!"

Embarrassed by such melodrama, she begged me to get up. I think she was convinced that with all the shooting and killing I had gone off my head.

I rose from my knees, and said, "The other day you told me, 'I do not wish to harm you.' Remember?"

She nodded. "Or something similar."

I was unable to continue speaking, for I was reeled away again, this time by memories of António after the dog's death, carrying his lover into the house with infinite and silent concern ... of António on the veranda, lifting his lover out of the chair and soothing the agonised body with his own diamond-surfaced tranquillity ... of António's sad voice telling me: *"He cannot see that he and I are always together as lovers, that all things are always together as lovers."*

"Was Rainer a man who cared?" Kudzi asked me.

She was like a black satin butterfly that I had locked in a toxic jar.

I shook my head. Then I said, "Like me, he only cared for himself."

I wished to release her. I was ready to kill myself to protect her from me.

She took me in her arms. “You should stop being so hard on yourself. I’m sure much of what has occurred between us was a two-way street.”

Against my chest I felt the tireless African drumbeat of her passionate nature. In the past, her words and actions had meant little to me because I was infatuated with my own and liked watching their influence upon others, especially her, so that I only saw hers as a consequence of my own, not as things with independent life. For this reason I failed to notice her increasing disappointment that she was not being given proper attention. And she was right. I could now say with certainty that she had been right. What she had received from me were the perfidious words and actions of a blind fumbling Life-Line wrapping itself round her neck like a snake.

Yet, despite this, she had continued to love me for so long. She had always held on to her hopes for us. Even now, she still hoped to give me something, somehow. Had she not come to the *Guarda Civil* barracks to fetch me, and had she not brought me to Ulla’s? For me, she most certainly could have been an Upper Zeegan.

As she continued to hold me in her arms, a wonderful feeling surged through me. We both contributed to it, for it came from the combination of the spontaneity and autonomy of her embrace and from its uncontaminated acceptance by me ...

The same feeling must have been behind Rainer’s expression as he spoke his last words. They were echoed by the Bishop’s statement encouraging me to leave Rainer alone with his plot: “*Whatever must come to him, must come **effortlessly**,*” he had insisted. For Rainer had said, “*can not*” and not “*will not*” ... “***I can not harm again***” because I have experienced, once and for all, that we are the expression of a universe born from a single blast ... “***I can not harm again***” because at last I understand that “*all things are always together as lovers*”. Such a reflex was what the Bishop had implied with his “*effortlessly*”. And it was precisely this same reflex that had been the last requirement of António’s plan, the ultimate aspiration for his lover, the biggest present he could possibly offer him, the required key to his liberation.

I said to Kudzi, “Now I think I can give you your freedom,” desiring the offering with my every breath and basing it on an unfamiliar billowing sentiment deep within me, which I knew would spontaneously activate whenever it needed to, and which I would never lose.

Although I could never talk to Kudzi about Life-Lines or Fields, she was a natural medium who could read me more clearly than I could read myself. I surmised that she knew, more than ever before, that she could begin to trust me.

My hands were clasped across her spinal indentation. Those slender bevelled muscles were more precious and familiar to me than my own. Normally I would have felt a prompt sexual compulsion. Instead, an inexplicit but agreeable buzzing steadily filled my ears, like myriads of birds hanging a tapestry of song across a valley after a long winter, like the final chorus of the fireflies.

Tears were running freely down her cheeks and mine.

Her gift for giving knew no bounds: as António had given to Rainer, so Kudzi now gave to me.

... *They have closed it!* ...

As we stood motionless, entwined in the hot breathing silence of the room, the language of associations sprung open the full meaning of my last words to Rainer: how Rainer surrendered the two sides of himself and summoned a numinous beam to

terminate divergence within his own Life-Line in a momentous joining, and in so doing had revealed, both to himself and to me, the final guiding principle of the Universal Field

...

“They have closed it!” rang of pattern, of matrix; of how the triangle’s radiant geometry demonstrated what I had tried to tell my friend about a theory of everything without ever being able to do so; of how the sky-born transversal itself was the big sign which had by-passed him for so many lifetimes – he who had travelled so far and wide – pointing out that his Positive-Negative Dynamic was definitely not the endgame, and that the guiding principle for equipoise was there for the making and for the taking, not only in relation to human and Zeegan behaviour, but in relation to the forces of natural energy as well.^{xxii}

“The war is over,” Kudzi had told me in a dream.

Now I could safely say that it was.

With a soft sigh, Kudzi relaxed her hold on me. Eventually she said, “Michael! I’m taking this job up in Tete province.”

I nodded, my damp cheek rubbing on hers.

I asked, “Are you sure you’ll be safe there?”

She pulled back, then grinned at me and said, “Since when did you or I ever do anything safe?”

END

ENDNOTES

These endnotes consist of information collected during my stay in Maputo from Rainer's notebooks, annotated articles, and other written material, as well as notes he scribbled on scraps of paper. Everything he wrote in Portuguese has been translated into English. The abbreviations for terms commonly used by him have been retained, but clarified.

The endnotes also include my own thoughts on Rainer's concepts, which developed during the writing of this book.

I have added further information, largely scientific, to develop certain points Rainer made. I hope such additions will enrich his arguments. On other occasions I have supplied scientific data simply because Rainer asked me to research a specific topic.

Factual information is sometimes included in the endnotes rather than as a footnote to the narrative.

DAY ONE

ⁱ The boundaries of the territory called Mozambique or Portuguese East Africa were drawn up by Britain and Portugal in 1891. Until it became an independent state in 1975, Mozambique was controlled exclusively by Portugal. By the 1960s, it had 170,000 European and 10 million African inhabitants. In 1962, several nationalist African groups united to form Frelimo (Front for the Liberation of Mozambique), headed by Eduardo Mondlane. Over the next decade, Frelimo engaged the 60,000-strong Portuguese national army in guerrilla warfare, which was intensified when Samora Machel took over the 7,000-strong liberation army in 1970, after the assassination of Mondlane. In 1974, the government of Portugal under Salazar was overthrown by the military and the new regime initiated a cease-fire with Frelimo. Mozambique became independent in June 1975, with Samora Machel its first president. Europeans left the country in droves, taking all they could with them, destroying machinery and property and severely destabilising the economy. Frelimo established a one-party Marxist state, nationalised industry and abolished private land ownership. In 1980, Renamo (Mozambique National Resistance Movement, also known by the acronym MNR), a powerful dissident movement aided by South Africa (and, it is presumed, the USA), took up arms against Frelimo. Civil war and starvation killed thousands, and over a million refugees fled the country. In 1990, Mozambique was estimated to be the poorest nation on earth. By 1994, Frelimo was compelled to accept Renamo members into the parliamentary system, and an uneasy peace at last settled upon the region.

DAY SIX

ⁱⁱ The highest power of psi (named the First Power by Rainer) bears affinity with the theory in quantum mechanics whereby the spin of a particle in one area of the universe – high or low, left or right – could theoretically affect the spin of its sister particle in another area, the distance between them being of no significance. Psychic power as defined by Rainer, like spin, aligns targets across space according to some shared attractive characteristic.

The quantum theory that a single atom can exist in two places at once was illustrated by Erwin Schrödinger as a thought experiment. In 1996, David Wineland and Chris Monroe pulled off this feat at the National Institute of Standards and Technology in Colorado. Using lasers they pumped just enough energy into an atom of beryllium so that it existed simultaneously in two separate states: spin-up and spin-down. (*Discover*, October 1996.)

ⁱⁱⁱ The theoretical concept of a “world line” bears some similarity to Rainer's Life-Line. It is an attempt to fit the continuum of life into the theory of relativity. A line is visualised in a manner known as “Lorentz transformations”, so that it passes through four dimensional space-time rather than rotating in three dimensions. The “world line” comes to represent a continuous sequence of events relating to a given particle, or a material curve in space-time constituted by the history of a material point.

Furthermore, in the Lorentz transformations, space and time co-ordinates of one moving system can be correlated with the known space and time co-ordinates of any other system.

^{iv} The following passage in Rainer's notebooks refers to the relationship between the Life-Lines and the Fields: "The lattice of the activated universe exists as a mirrored revelation of the superlattice, enabling a code to immediately connect with any other examples of itself. The connection is not with the superlattice of the UF [Universal Field] but through it from one point of activated life to another." (Dated May 14, 1972.)

Rainer put this in another way when he wrote of psi connection as "targeting Life-Lines through the supersymmetry of the UF".

^v Various references in Rainer's notes helped me appreciate the distinction between the First and the Second Power of psi as defined by him. I did not copy them out, but summarised them during my stay at his house as follows:

The Second Power is electromagnetic and includes healing and psycho-kinetic phenomena (poltergeists, spoon-bending, etc). Rainer commented that instinct is also the Second Power – a process of electromagnetic charges producing biochemical reactions in the brain about, for example, sex, fear, hunger, and therefore limited in range.

Intuition, on the other hand, is on a higher level. This is the First Power, which transcends electromagnetic, chemical or nuclear forces, is limitless in range and instant in its application. The intuition of a scientist discovering a natural law in a moment of illumination, or of a mother who knows her child is in danger on the other side of the world (or of the universe, for that matter), are instances of the First Power. Clairvoyance (tracing Life-Lines both into the future and the past) is also the First Power of psi.

DAY EIGHT

^{vi} I have cross-referenced Rainer's descriptions of spermatozoa more thoroughly and find several precise medical correlations:

The First Polar Body, which Rainer claimed to have found dead, comes from a follicle of 46 chromosomes that ruptures to create two ova of 23 chromosomes. One of these is better coated than the other and lives (the winning egg, the Second Polar Body) while the other (First Polar Body) dies. Rainer called this an act of sacrifice.

Through the consumption of fructose in the blood and the mucus and alkaline solution of the female fluids, the spermatozoa gain maximum strength for their journey through the female genital tract.

A spermatozoon has a head approximately 5 microns long and 2 microns wide (there are 25,000 microns to the inch) and a tail 50 microns long and 1 micron thick. It travels at 2 mm per minute (equivalent to 1,200,000 km per hour for a moving body the size of a human's). The head contains 23 of the 46 chromosomes needed to make a human life – the other 23 are in the ovum. There is a threadlike spinning of male and female pronuclei that causes division and synthesis as new life begins to grow at once and cells proliferate.

The spermatozoon cap is the acrosomal, full of enzymes that break through the membrane of the ovum – the *zona pellucida* – which is a carbohydrate. This *zona* is surrounded by the *corona radiata*, a jelly-like envelope that sets off the male enzyme, helping it to make an opening through the female membrane. The female membrane helps the male enzyme enter by throwing open its granules (Rainer spoke of "pink granules") and stretching out arms that thicken and help draw in the male head. After it has done its job, the cap dissolves and the nucleus (the head) continues down a tunnel into the egg plasma where it fuses. As António commented, this last step takes about one minute. António also advised Rainer that it is easiest to go into the ovum at a "creamy" slant, which is consistent with the facts.

Chemicals from both the spermatozoon's crown and the ovum strangle all other sperm trying to get in by hardening the surface of the egg so that these losers beat themselves to pieces or get crushed. The threadlike chromosomes in the head of the winning spermatozoon (which contain all information on the male) fuse with those in the nucleus of the egg to create a zygote or fertilised egg.

The Hairy Zone is the name for the two funnels leading to the ovaries on either side of the womb.

DAY NINE

^{vii} The notebooks imply that the substance of the Universal Field, where all data is stored, consists of the nuclei of quarks and leptons linked into patterns that circle the perimeters of our universe. However, on another page he wrote that he may have got this wrong. According to Rainer, the Universal Field existed before the Big Bang. In current scientific thought, whatever occurred during the first two seconds of the Big Bang, and of course before this, remains at the stage of conjecture.

In relation to the available scientific theories, it is easier to clarify what Rainer's Universal Field is *not*:

1. It has nothing to do with a cosmic 'string', which is a localised theory in astronomy applied to certain areas of galaxies.
2. It is not flying ionised gas, which recombines with electrons to form atoms that fall into destined structures in accordance with the accepted theory of the behaviour of gaseous matter. It is neither gas nor plasma, the Universal Field being sub-atomic and far looser and more diffuse.
3. It is not the Bose-Einstein condensate, although it comes close to this. Rainer used the words 'congeal' and 'gelatinous substance' to describe the process that occurs when the Universal Field forms sub-Fields such as the Earth's. The Bose-Einstein condensate is a state of matter close to absolute zero, highly compact and almost inert. It is an association of sub-atomic particles, called bosons, sharing a common quantum-mechanical wave function that changes an atom's identity and makes it into a super-atom. The B-E condensate remains, in fact, a substate of gas. Some of this substance was created with rubidium atoms at the National Institute of Standards and Technology at Boulder, Colorado, in 1995. I assume that Rainer's postulate must apply to even smaller quantities within sub-atomic particles.
4. Schrödinger's theory of "standing waves" comes closest to Rainer's Universal Field. This theory hypothesises that electrons are not objects revolving round the nucleus of atoms like planets round the Sun (as Niels Bohr's model of the atom suggests), but fixed patterns of standing waves like those that emanate from a plucked guitar string. If similar sets of relationships exist in vibrational patterns inside the nucleus of quarks, then perhaps this analogy is Rainer's reality. So far, however, the nucleus of quarks is under research.

I assume it is possible that the energy linking points of psychic reference, as in the hypothetical example of a mother sensing her child's condition on the far side of the universe, could be the equivalent of the wave-like activity hiding within the nuclei of sub-atomic particles such as quarks.

Rainer wrote in his notebooks: "Read that Murray Gell-Mann, who named the quark, sees accident as the key to life's story because he is not aware of psi Fields. If he ever discovers the vibratory laws within the nuclei of quarks, leptons, bosons, he will have found the primal conscious centre of the universe." (Dated June 1984.)

There is also a possible association with the theory of spin as mentioned in Endnote 2.

^{viii} As a vivid analogy for the process of moving to greater mass through the Fields, Rainer had copied out information on magnetotactic anaerobic bacteria that float in the atmosphere along the Earth's magnetic field while waiting to be pulled down into denser forms.

^{ix} The notebooks offer more information on the process of moving from the Universal Field (UF) to the Earth Field and to Life-Lines (LLs) on Earth (all quotes written between 1968 and 1974):

"All informational ingredients needed for all activated life in the universe are contained within the UF. They express themselves over billions of years throughout the Big Bang universe through condensates, in a hierarchy of more sophisticated and more powerful energy packets beginning with sub-atomic particles, building up to atomic structures, and then to molecules with the complex motors of phosphoric acid and carbohydrate needed for DNA."

Rainer called the Earth Field variously:

“a deposition zone, an activation vector, a data processor, which is constantly activating LLs for incarnation on earth”

“a cathedral of computational architecture where atomic formulae are racked and zipped into regular, repetitive patterns, cogent structures”

“a place where all composite designs are marching in lockstep with each other, whereas in the UF they are stored at an informational stage”.

He also wrote after a psi visit of his own to the Earth Field: “It was like seeing pieces of a clock being drawn up in their relevant positions to be sent to Earth, where they come together and get switched on at Earth time and at Earth speed”.

^x I found some remarks in Rainer’s notebooks on his ideas about reincarnation. From these I came to the conclusion after leaving Mozambique that there was no demotion in Rainer’s cosmology, no getting sent back for bad behaviour as a rodent or whatever. Lack of insightful progression simply got one stuck in the same developmental groove each lifetime. This explained a lot about Rainer’s need to feel upwardly mobile as a being. It helped me understand the seeds of his anxiety and of his arrogance. He certainly felt very stuck in his groove.

I also gathered by reading between the lines that the Zeegans isolate Gurr (Lower Zeegans) simply because their behaviour is dangerous to the general status quo and well-being within their domains. They do not do it out of cruelty as Rainer wanted me to believe. They are evidently waiting for other beings in the universe, like Gurr and humans, to evolve.

DAY TEN

^{xi} I also told Rainer that I often got goose flesh when I walked past the crocodile statue in my London flat and asked him if he knew how to stop it haunting me. He told me to exorcise it by submerging it in water for as long as I thought necessary and to let it dry before dowsing it with a good oil.

One night I dutifully plunged the statue into a full bath of water. Streams of bubbles poured out of the porous wood with such intensity that I found myself holding the statue underwater until the early hours of the morning when the outpouring at last subsided. I diligently let the wood dry for several days, then covered it in linseed oil.

“And then you must cherish it,” Rainer had told me. “Keep it always in a bright spot.”

“What do you mean?” I had asked. “Cherish” was not a word I had heard him use before.

The question had caused a flutter of uncertainty to trouble his gaze. “Just look after it, that’s all,” he said. “By ignoring it, you will give it back its power.”

Soon after the exorcism my stomach cramps eased and, after a few weeks, stopped altogether. Today, the statue sits in my flat in a bright, sunny spot.

^{xii} Extracts on evolution from Rainer’s notebooks, written between 1970 and 1974:

“Earth scientists approach evolution from the wrong direction – from the Big Bang expanding through a series of chain reactions created by chance using environment, diversity and natural selection. This is incorrect. There is no chance involved, since the UF [Universal Field] existed before the Big Bang which was the first moment of construction based on its two-digit plan for a new enclosed system. Consequently, life is being pulled up from the bottom towards the full realisation of the plan. Apply this vantage point to the laws of nature and you get a very different conception of how evolution works: through diversity and environment, the Fields select what they need for achieving their final objective.”

“Genes are not fortuitously pushed through into generations to come by environment and natural selection, they are pulled through by the UF using such devices as its tools.”

“The UF did not favour giraffes which *by chance* had longer necks, it created an environment that enabled longer-necked giraffes to survive.”

“Trees are designed to reach for light. Forest trees will strive to get taller forever – there is no limit in their eyes to tallness. What stops them is the UF which provides an environment to control them.”

“The inhabited planets are full of genes/organisms that have successfully come up the ages. This success is measured by the Fields, the only arbitrator of what shall win.”

“Utility is defined by the UF.”

“Environment as a tool for evolution is not limited to one planet. Organisms will re-animate anywhere in the universe that provides suitable conditions – thus I went to Zeega, where Gurr and certain more evolved humans also find expression. However, entities tend to re-emerge as near as possible to the location they are used to, unless that location has been eradicated or damaged. Although Gurr overlap with earthlings, Gurr will tend to be reborn on Zeega, and earthlings on earth.”

The following note by Rainer is one of the best illustrations I found on his evolutionary theory:

“Evolutionary directives from the Fields can be compared with the way genes suddenly switch on to carry out a task for the development of a body. In the constant climb up the ladder, genes that produce mutation will be switched on by the Fields when they approach the conformation level of a higher form. All organisms are designed to keep searching for the formulae for better growth and better survival, until the next conformation threshold is reached, whereupon the gene directives for new structures will automatically switch on. The organism that is chosen to be switched on is simply the one whose adaptations have coincided with the plan’s stratified requirements. Those that do not get switched on remain as they are through further re-activations until their time has come. My plot seeks a conformation moment.”

I found three further notes on Rainer’s theories of evolution scribbled on scraps of paper:

“Nature must be seen as a single dynamic process split into many parts – the parts contribute to the growth struggle of the whole. In this sense everything is constantly struggling to become the highest ultimate form. All aspects of nature from the Big Bang onwards are currently in existence somewhere in the universe. Neanderthals still exist on certain planets of the Zeegan supergalaxy. There is no extinction within a holistic universe – no mutations are lost. Variety of species is the method of development used by the Fields.” (Dated May 2, 1978.)

xiii Extracts from Rainer’s notebooks on consciousness, written between 1970 and 1974:

“Consciousness within a bigger brain is a tool for the guidance of growth. It is a more significant tool in the history of life than environment or natural selection. Those superior beings who can think about coping with their surroundings and, through psi, can acquire a far greater scope of reference, are those who will complete the final plan. My big issue is this: they will always be humbled by polarity in our enclosed system. Success could only be achieved by access to another enclosed system outside our cosmos where polarity does not exist as a primary power law.”

“Consciousness cannot travel beyond the geography of the intergalactic circle of our Big Bang universe. This constitutes a normal barrier.”

“Higher consciousness combines the evolutionary process of increasingly sophisticated combinations of particles and eventually of genes, with the memory of *homo sapiens sapiens*, which contains sufficient space for this accumulated history as well as the ability to access it through higher sensitivity (psi) and penetrating analysis (reason).”

“Consciousness about being conscious is a functional attribute like any other ... like photosynthesis in plants. But as it is the most powerful tool given to activated forms, it increases the potential for development in a spectacular fashion. It is like giving the genes an electric shock. Give me a strong conscious flash and I will leap ahead – because the leaps for superior beings derive from the expansion of conscious awareness. The slow plod of evolution ends in the Second Kingdom.”

“Every organism has a job to do: a mayfly lives for a few hours to find a mate then dies; Zeegans, and even humanoids, are designed with the impulse and capacity to discover the dictates of their Life-Line, and try to bring them to fruition. In doing so, their job becomes the conscious search for their future.”

^{xiv} Extracts from Rainer’s notebooks relevant to astrology, written between 1970 and 1974: (*Rainer’s abbreviations: LL [Life-Line], SLL [Specific Life-Line, which is the individual], GLL [General Life-Line, which is the species].*)

“I try to see my LL like a molecular clock in which the programme for when genes get switched on to do a new task is monitored by gradients of chemicals all set to go off at the right time. The universe is a giant molecular clock, and I am a cell within it awaiting my time.”

“Life is one event split into many bits across space-time ...”

“All LLs are obliged to seize the moment of their activation ...”

“There are plants that synchronise blossoming with the pattern of movement of the insects pollinating them ... The universe is a symphony of interconnected pulsations ... Every unit of energy has a frequency ... We reap and sow according to nature’s time plan, and thus we are born and we die.” (Written on June 22, 1971.)

“Many years and long periods may pass before the right parents arrive at the right place and time to accommodate an SLL’s make-up. The moment of conception is tied in with the moment of birth which has been foreseen – the two have to be in harmony, or the SLL will not activate or else will abort.”

“The SLL is fired into the foetus when cosmic vibrations line them up like the barrel of a gun.”

“The moment of conformation between an LL and its receptacle is the moment of a specific sexual conception. The moment, place and parentage involved are chosen by the LL. Then comes the second phase of reincarnation: the place of birth which will provide the LL with the national, social, historical and environmental conditions best suited for its physical sojourn. This is foreseen before conception because it must co-ordinate as best it can with the LL’s requirements. But if the place of birth proves to be inadequate, the LL’s foetus will not survive.”

“Conception occurs at the conjunction of mutually harmonious oscillations.” (Elsewhere he also described this as “resonant empathy” and “biomagnetic resonance”.)

“A set of combining genes call out to the Universal Field – this unique call is heard by a Life-Line which has been waiting for it, and it activates immediately.”

“I found this phrase in a poem: ‘a soul calling out’. Beautiful way of saying how an SLL vibrates as it waits for rebirth in the Fields, so that it will connect with the equivalent suitable vibration in an embryo, then manifest within it.”

“Conception is both the SLL and GLL coming into reactivation.”

DAY TWELVE

^{xv} Extracts from Rainer’s notebooks relevant to dreams (all dated 1972):

“Every process, including dreams, contains a reflection of the overall map of the Fields.”

“I act out the dreams within me.”

“Individual actions are a reflection of the drives of the Fields expressed through dreams.”

“What you do in daily life and what you dream are substantially the same.”

“What is happening to the planets and stars is happening to your dreams is happening to you.”

“In dreams an association of symbolic people, creatures, incidents, objects, locations, shapes, textures, taken together paint a complete picture of the dreamer’s SLL [Specific Life Line] and the dreamer’s GLL [General Life Line] as well of the principles of the Fields.”

^{xvi} The dictionary definition of miracle throws light on Rainer’s adamant denial of such: “In theology, an event or effect that apparently contradicts known scientific laws and is hence thought to be due to supernatural causes, especially to an act of God. (L. *miraculum*, from *mirari*, to wonder at, from *mirus*, wonderful).” *Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary*.

In the healing interview Rainer had explained that real-unreal, natural-supernatural, God-devil are nothing but a fiction born of ignorance. To categorise transmaterialisation as a miracle would be to fail to appreciate Rainer’s claim that his powers merely jiggled along natural processes.

I found a reference in the notebooks to an experiment of transmaterialisation that Rainer attempted with certain carbon polymers. He describes taking a CH₂-CH₂ carbon to hydrogen skeletal repeat structure and replacing it with a CH-CH structure. This would transform a plastic insulator into a conductive polymeric metal. It happens all the time in chemical engineering. I found no indication in his notes as to whether he pulled this off. If he had done so, I can imagine Rainer telling me, “Plastic to metal, there’s God doing a miracle for you!”

^{xvii} Rainer wrote: “With four electrons in its outer shell, carbon has a high valence power, making it unique in its ability to form bonds. It can make the strongest bonds in the universe, linking easily with itself or with hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen, phosphorus or sulphur. It can make double or triple bonds, opening up limitless combinations for the creation of carbon molecules. A powerful generator of LLs.”

^{xviii} THE PERIODIC TABLE:

There are just over 100 chemical elements in the Periodic Table, listed in 18 basic columns. In the language of Rainer’s cosmology, the chemistry of atoms would partially be described as follows:

Each element is a separate Life-Line with its own unique properties and patterns of behaviour. Life-Lines find a precise scientific definition in the Periodic Table where the Life-Line of each element is identified by the number of electrons in its shells and by how many shells it has (the number of electrons and shells are a column’s shared traits). For example: Element Number One, hydrogen, only has one electron in the outer shell; Element Number Two, helium, is allowed two electrons in its outer shell, and so

this becomes a new Life-Line; Number Three, lithium, has two in an inner shell and one in its outer shell, so once again we have a new Life-Line.

Each element behaves as a type, just as individual human beings do, with a defined set of character traits.

The elements in the vertical columns share traits as does a family or a tribe or an ethnic group. For example the first column contains elements – hydrogen, lithium, sodium, potassium, rubidium, cesium, francium – with only one electron in the outer shell, a common trait that immediately gives rise to a shared pattern of behaviour. This behaviour pattern will, in turn, dictate which elements can form bonds together in order to create compounds (more complex units in the ladder of evolution).

Each time a bond is made a new functional unit (a new Life-Line) is created.

Rainer made several written references to “the marvellous logic” of the elements. He refers to “the web of compounds that runs everywhere through the Life-Lines” and also to “the connective secret of the elements that reveals so clearly the simple logic of the building of the universe in accordance with the primordial evolutionary plan”.

In the notebooks he often laments his inability to keep track of this logic, and he complains of “getting lost in nature’s maze, losing the greater pattern by getting swamped by millions of units and sub-units”.

To further illustrate this dilemma he uses the example of a swarm of bees: “Bees can only be understood as a swarm. The whole hive works on a few simple digital units – one queen-unit and some worker-units with specific functions. So the reproductive product is not one bee, but the swarm. The hive must be taken as a single organism that grows, reproduces and dies.” (June 3, 1979.)

But elsewhere he laments, “It is hard to define a function if I get lost in the bits.”

At one point he almost adopts a tone of religious awe when he writes: “Where can I find the directive that put iron into blood, calcium into bones, oxygen into the atmosphere?” (August 22, 1977.)

^{six} DNA: the names of the four units in genes that make up all organic activates: A,T,C, G are the letters for adenine, thymine, cytosine, guanine. This is the genetic code and it is identical in all plants, microbes and animals – sixty-four triplets of a four-letter alphabet.

Extracts from Rainer’s notebooks on DNA:

Quote from his university days, dated August 1967: “The Fields direct organisms through these DNA distribution boxes (he’s referring to the sixty-four triplets of DNA’s four-letter alphabet). Millions of cells make an organism; in each cell is a plan for the construction of the whole organism. Millions of species evolve as they get pulled up towards the final plan, all searching for the way ahead, all struggling to fulfil the goal of the Universal Field.”

Rainer also wrote about the mutation of DNA during its history. Initially driven by the urge to replicate itself sexually for the survival of the species, he claimed this was no longer its primary desire. “Sex alone can no longer satisfy the mutant molecule. It wants something more. And this ‘more’ is an equally obsessive guiding principle – the fulfilment of the final plan of the Fields.” (No date.)

He noted also that DNA attained its maximum power in the Second Kingdom with the development of psi in *homo sapiens sapiens* and Gurr. “DNA has been pushing its activates, permutation after permutation for millions of years, towards a single target – the power of psi ... No computer will ever match the power of expanded consciousness through the highest power of psi.” (No date.)

The concept of ingenious guiding principles working through simple mechanical formulae, so central to Rainer’s cosmology, is well illustrated by Richard Dawkins in his book *River out of Eden*. Dawkins provides some examples of the tiny changes needed to create new forms: “The ‘paragraph’ in our genes describing the protein called cytochrome ‘c’ is 339 letters long. Twelve-letter changes separate human cytochrome ‘c’ from the cytochrome ‘c’ of horses, our rather distant cousins. Only one cytochrome ‘c’ letter change separates humans from monkeys (our fairly close cousins) and three-letter changes separate horses from pigs (their somewhat more distant cousins).” Page 42, *River out of Eden*.

Dawkins also explains the coherence of evolution through DNA as follows: “All the organs and limbs of animals; the roots, leaves and flowers of plants; all eyes and brains and minds, and even fears and hopes, are the tools by which successful DNA sequences lever themselves into the future. The tools themselves are

almost infinitely variable, but the recipes for building those tools are, by contrast, ludicrously uniform. Just permutations of A,T,C and G.” Page 150, *River out of Eden*.

^{xx} Extracts from Rainer’s notebooks relevant to the coded principles hidden within nature:

“From the basic two in the Big Bang, come the four = four DNA proteins, fourfold archetypal patterns, four seasons, four periods of lifetime, four elements in astrology, four directions, four suits in the Tarot ...”

“I have obtained the Chinese system of divination, the I Ching, *The Book Of Changes*. It reduces the fundamental units in astrology from four (earth, fire, air, water) to two, which makes it the best guide by getting down to the contrapuntal dynamic of the Fields. Two digits are used in a system of trigrams and hexagrams to provide a guide to the wave patterns of Life-Lines.” (Dated December 11, 1981.)

Rainer made several confused references to Jung in his notebooks. He was fascinated by Jung’s types because they fitted in with the astrological correlations of energy cycles. He also admired the mathematical way in which Jung strove to pin down behavioural patterns and guidelines within psychology.

Many of Jung’s ideas reflect Rainer’s cosmological approach on coded principles. Looking for order and typology in nature, Jung divided the psyche into two types, extraverted and introverted, influenced by the interplay of four functions: thinking, feeling, sensation and intuition. Jung suggested that these categories emanated from the archetypes that underlie and find expression through the psyche. In his structure of the psyche, within the division of conscious and unconscious minds, Jung also developed the “persona” in the conscious mind as a tool for coping with the exterior world, compensated for by a soul-image in the unconscious – the “animus” for women, and the “anima” for men.

^{xxi} Further extracts from Rainer’s files relevant to astrology, and also to certain methods of divination (all written between 1970 and 1974):
(Rainer’s abbreviations: *UF* (*Universal Field*), *LL* (*Life-Line*), *SLL* (*Specific Life-Line*), and *GLL* (*General Life-Line*)).

“When one thing moves, everything moves ... astrology is a science of correlating movements.”

“Rhythms within the relationship of the atoms = rhythms within the relationship of stars = rhythms in the relationship of organisms.”

“Pick a map of associations – the Tarot, or tea leaves – it makes no difference to the psi searcher who is able to tune in to the broad patterns of transformation, and make the connections and the relevant associations.”

“We attract forces according to our behaviour pattern, and they attract us.”

“The Fields express themselves through extensive reflexes: the reflex that activates Mozart is one expression, pushing up a tree in the forest is another.”

“Both a child’s upbringing and environment are executives of the Fields in the development of an SLL.”

“Any given section of time is ruled by a combination of principles passing through all sub-Field Systems as resonances. Demographic history – like the individual – is subject to resonant guidance.”

“Every section of space-time undergoes activities that are commensurate with its evolutionary status. This means the environment of an LL must correspond to the functional capacity of the LL. The tendencies within an LL will contact the corresponding tendencies in a suitable environment.”

Genetic parallel with astrology:

“Cells receive new and more complex signals as new tissues move within their protein-signalling range ... Cells destined to form a foot send messages to neighbouring cells directing them to switch on genes that will enable them to shape the bones they need in their journey to becoming a foot. Such a process is repeated in the astrological associations of cosmic movements and Life-Line trajectories. Once tissues begin to cycle through the embryo they fall under the sway of new influences which are germane to the embryo’s space-time conjunct, and in this manner its fate is guided by the UF. These influences run through every event throughout the Big-Bang universe that is running in parallel with the embryo’s activated life span from conception to death.” (August 1970.)

“As the plant is found in the seed, so the time-place equation of an SLL is found in every cell in its body. An SLL has a given pattern of unfoldment with a given set of problems to encounter during activation. Behind each problem lies the sign/signal leading to the discovery of its potential solution.” (March 1971.)

“All behaviour patterns are quantified by embodied historical experiences within the planet of activation (the local history) as well as in the cosmos (the greater history).” (March 1971.)

DAY FOURTEEN

^{xxii} Some further thoughts after I left Mozambique:

What I call the Care Principle as a self-regulating genetic reflex has been labelled “the altruistic gene” by certain biologists of evolution, in counterpoint to Richard Dawkins’s famous catch phrase “the selfish gene”. The genetic strategy for altruism involves building associations of genes that code for reciprocal altruism, thereby increasing their representation in the gene pool at the expense of other genes in order to ensure the survival and welfare of the species.

Common to a great number of organic forms of life (ref. Rainer’s account of the “sacrifice” of the First Polar Body in the womb), the phenotypic trait of reciprocal altruism is still underdeveloped as a guiding principle for the human race. However, according to Rainer, expanding consciousness in the Second Kingdom is in the process of refining its genetic configuration and expanding its active prominence, until the stage is reached – as in Zeega today – where full consciousness among Upper Zeegans of the First Kingdom has ensured that the preference for kin selection extends to embracing all living organisms as kin.

The development of the genetic strategy for altruism puts an end to thousands of years of attempting to impose morality by rational means through laws, ideologies, philosophies and religious doctrines.

A summary of my thoughts regarding the phenomenon of the triangle of light:

The final instructions contained in the Universal Field’s blueprint, as expressed by the event of the triangle, announced that a third force exists as a connective principle.

This third force achieves two things simultaneously: firstly, it unites all beings through a neurophysiological reflex of higher consciousness known as the Care Principle; and secondly, on the level of physics, it succeeds in containing the dualistic structure of energy.

Scientifically, this does not imply that polarity disappears as a cosmic activity, but that it is contained within the greater whole. It indicates a contrapuntal universe, or a universe that has attained a steady state.