

RARE & PROTECTED

A play by Pieter-Dirk Uys

(an adaptation of his Afrikaans play *Die Vleiroos*)

As of 9/3/2015

PRESS COMMENTS AFTER SOUTH AFRICAN PREMIERE OF *DIE VLEIROOS* IN JULY 1992

'This play proves that Uys is one of our top dramatists.' BEELD

'One of the best things he has done ... meticulously observed, warmly empathic, touching and frequently amusing.' SUNDAY TIMES

'It's quite a different Pieter-Dirk Uys one gets to know ... This time it is an Uys who speaks from the heart with a different sort of piety and compassion about ageing, about values, about friendship, about nature, about how man and his planet are being dismantled ... and yet the humour and lightness is not left out. The script leaves a deep impression.' RAPPORT

'It is a charming, intelligent, compassionate and tender play ... a moving and delightful triumph for Uys.' NATAL DAILY NEWS

(*Die Vleiroos* is Uys's first 'post-apartheid' play. It was performed for the first time at the Nico Arena in Cape Town in June 1992 and was directed by Uys himself. It saw seasons at the Grahamstown Festival, the Civic Theatre Johannesburg and the Oudtshoorn Klein Karoo Fees, directed by Lynne Maree. *Die Vleiroos* was translated into English as *The Marshrose* – which has here been adapted as *Rare and Protected* in 2014.)

Orothamnus zeyheri (The Marshrose)

An exceptionally beautiful protea, the famous marshrose is the only species in this genus. It is extremely rare and in danger of becoming extinct as only a few plants remain in almost inaccessible spots high in the mountains above Hermanus and Betty's Bay in the Western Cape. Attempts to cultivate it have not been successful.

The plant grows in marshy soil and consists of one or more erect branches as much as three metres tall. The flowerheads are of exquisite shape and beauty. Although the pomegranate-red branches have a covering of fine hairs on their outsides, they are at the same time smooth and shiny, and have a delicate, wax-like translucency. They overlap and are curled back at their edges in the fashion of a rose. It flowers in early summer.

The generic name, *Orothamnus*, a Greek word meaning 'mountain branch', was given by Carl Pappe in the mid-1850s after he became the first colonial botanist at the Cape. He also gave the protea its specific name – *zeyheri* – to commemorate his friend and fellow botanist, Karl Zeyheri.

CHARACTERS

FERDINAND 'FERDIE' BARNARD – a business man in his 30s

NEDDA BARNARD – Ferdinand's mother

LIZZIE SMITH – Nedda's former servant, now companion

SOFIE CLARENS – a childhood friend of Ferdinand now living in the USA

The play takes place in the South African seaside resort of Avonstrand, where the Barnard family spent their annual holidays. This is where Nedda Barnard retired to after the death of her husband.

The time of the play is in the winter of 2014 with flashbacks to the summer of 2012.

There are seven scenes.

SCENE ONE

[A darkened room. Slides of Cape flora, one after another flashed onto the wall. NEDDA's voice explains each image]

NEDDA [Voice]

[Slide One]

Disa uniflora! The emblem of our Cape Province, also known as the Pride of Table Mountain ...

[Slide Two]

... *Erica patersonia* ... those yellow clusters make it look like corn on the cob ... a mielie

[Slide Three]

... my beloved *Mimetes hirtus* ... makes the autumn, winter and spring such a joy ... *Mimetes* ...

[Slide Four]

... ah ... the Giant Protea. Do you know, here and on Table Mountain they're perfectly round; along the coast in Knysna long and narrow. Wonder what's wrong with Knysna ... [Laughs] We have three big ones down here, our Three Kings of Avonstrand.

[Slide Five]

Orothamnus zeyheri ... the marshrose ...

[FERDINAND switches on the light. SOFIE has also been watching, holding a box in her arms. She exits. It is raining outside. The slide image fades in the light. There is a projector on the table. He switches it off. He picks up binoculars and looks out of the window]

FERDIE

'There is only one reality, Ferdinand ...'

[He replaces the binoculars and walks round the room looking at the things in it, the detail. NEDDA's voice is heard again]

NEDDA [Voice]

There is only one reality! Among all the billions of us, only one reality. Yours. Or mine.

FERDIE

That's two realities, Mother!

SCENE TWO

[Flashback: Summer. LIZZIE and NEDDA enter. The bright sunlight warms the room during these flashbacks. They go to the window. LIZZIE looks out with the binoculars, which she then shares with NEDDA. They look out to sea]

NEDDA

It's crude oil.

LIZZIE

Ja, sies.

NEDDA

Just look at it seep out on the swell.

LIZZIE

Like tar. Chocolate. Pitch black toffee.

NEDDA

Think of the poor fish ... the baby seals ...

LIZZIE

The fat tannies on the beach with tar joining their knobbly toes ... old goose feet ... shamepies ...

NEDDA

Seagulls suffocating in oil.

LIZZIE

White tannies on the sand with pitch black feet!

NEDDA

What is that monster trapped on?

LIZZIE

Rock ridge just under the surface.

NEDDA

No rock ridge there.

LIZZIE

Doctor H often pointed there and said, 'That ridge will one day catch itself a very big fish.'

NEDDA

Can't remember.

LIZZIE

I remember.

NEDDA

I don't remember. Doctor H was my husband. I don't remember.

LIZZIE

He was your husband, yes.

NEDDA

Yes.

LIZZIE

That you remember?

NEDDA

Yes. That I could never forget.

[FERDINAND is still there and listens. NEDDA looks around uncomfortably]

LIZZIE

What is it, Miss Nedda?

[NEDDA looks straight at FERDINAND]

NEDDA

Nothing.

LIZZIE

Tell me. Maybe this time it's someone I know.

NEDDA

There's no one, Lizzie.

[FERDINAND smiles and exits. LIZZIE and NEDDA look out again.]

Pause]

LIZZIE

And that ship's captain? When on a dark night you go and park your tanker on a nonexistent rock ridge, what happens to such idiots?

NEDDA

Viva *Costa Concordia*! Sell their tales to the tabloids and make a fortune.

LIZZIE

To be able to afford expensive oil-stained seal gloves for the little wife at home.

NEDDA

Their sort should be hanged. Wish I was the Godfather, just for a day. Get all those drunken drivers, rude shop assistants, arrogant clerks, wife beaters ...

LIZZIE

Hang them all?

NEDDA

Shoot in the knees first, then acid in the eyes.

LIZZIE

And that captain?

NEDDA

Off with the gonads, then hang the bastard!

LIZZIE

What nads?

NEDDA

Testicles, Lizzie. Balls.

LIZZIE

Haai? But it's only oil, Miss Nedda.

NEDDA [*Sarcastic*]

It's only nature.

LIZZIE

Bit radical.

NEDDA

Destroying nature ... 'naturephelia' is a crime against God!

LIZZIE

Things somehow always come right in nature, Doctor always said.

NEDDA

Till that last nonbiodegradeble tin breaks the tired old camel's back. Is its back broken yet?

[*They look out again*]

LIZZIE

Her back. Men always name ships after women.

NEDDA

Oh yes?

LIZZIE

Yes, then they don't feel bad when the poor things end up on the rocks.

NEDDA

If that oil goes up in flames, could it set our veld on fire? I wonder ...

LIZZIE

Sparks in the sea?

NEDDA

Oil makes flames on the waves.

LIZZIE

My pa once had a small boat called *Tess*.

NEDDA

Was *Tess* your mother's name?

LIZZIE

My ma was Gertruida.

NEDDA

My mother was Gertruida!

LIZZIE

Your ma was Maria.

NEDDA

Whose mother was my ma?

LIZZIE

Your ma was Senora Maria ... I can't remember her surname, sorry.

NEDDA

It was also my surname before I married Herman Barnard. No, her sister was Gertruida.

LIZZIE

An Afrikaans name? But your family was Italian.

NEDDA

My aunt ... Claudia! See. I remember. [*She sees the projector on the table*] Why is that thing there?

LIZZIE

To remind you.

NEDDA

What must I remember?

LIZZIE

Just think how convenient it would be to show Doctor's slides against the wall, rather than to fall about in the bushes out there looking for dying ferns.

NEDDA

This thing won't work.

LIZZIE

Because this thing needs a plug in the wall.

NEDDA

The man in the shop promised this machine also worked with batteries ...

LIZZIE

This has always been an electrical machine, Miss Nedda.

NEDDA

Then it's a complete absurdity in a house without electricity.

LIZZIE

One of many.

NEDDA

I told that man we don't have electricity in Avonstrand. He said: Good for you. When Eskom switches off, you won't even know the difference!

LIZZIE

Ja, cheeky. Other people here have generators ...

NEDDA

Pollution, Lizzie. Noise contamination.

LIZZIE

With a generator we could show our slides.

NEDDA

What for? I'd rather go out there and look at the originals.

[Pause]

LIZZIE

The new tarred road has chased all the flowers up into the mountain.

NEDDA

We still have exquisite specimens right here in our fynbos.

LIZZIE

Could be as exquisite on the wall, and more comfortable than crawling around the brambles in search of ...

NEDDA

You're right, but happily we have no generator or electricity!

LIZZIE

Just think, I could watch all my soaps on TV.

NEDDA

You broke your portable radio, not me.

LIZZIE

Ag no, Miss Nedda, I want to see *Sewende Laan*, *The Bold and the Beautiful*!

NEDDA

You've got money. Go and buy what you want.

LIZZIE

A TV?

NEDDA

Sorry, no electricity.

LIZZIE

Portables have batteries. What about these computers. Laptops. An oPad!

NEDDA

iPad. Here? No!

LIZZIE

And this is a democratic household?

NEDDA

Of course. We both have the vote.

LIZZIE

I vote in favour of a TV.

NEDDA

And I vote against. My majority carries the day. [*She looks outside again*] What's going on out there?

LIZZIE

Miss Nedda, there are such lovely nature programmes on TV ...

NEDDA

Don't tell me that's an oil tanker on the rocks!

LIZZIE

Fish and seals and slimy things with those Latin names, all having babies under water, and it's all on TV!

NEDDA

How terrible! We must telephone someone at once!

LIZZIE

We also don't have a phone. Master Ferdie sent you a cell phone.

NEDDA

It doesn't work here. Why didn't you tell me about that?

LIZZIE

We've never had a phone here. Doctor H wouldn't allow it. No phones, no decent fridge, no mixer and blender, no TV ...

NEDDA

Now I'm ready for those you-know-whats.

LIZZIE

... no you-know-whats either.

NEDDA

Oh yes, there are. Where did you hide them?

[NEDDA exits]

LIZZIE

When we still lived in town during Doctor's illness, I had my own TV. But now, basking here in Nature's smile, I sit with nothing.

NEDDA *[Off]*

Am I warm?

LIZZIE

You're cold ... very cold. The big electrical cables have already been laid underground ...

NEDDA *[Off]*

And now?

LIZZIE

Cold ... all we have to do is say: thank you Eskom, switch us on.

NEDDA *[Off]*

How much colder ...

LIZZIE

Icy in the winter without heaters ...

[NEDDA enters and searches the room]

NEDDA *[Off]*

And now?

LIZZIE

Icier. Say yes, and they'll bring a nice wire to the house, and we can spend all our time switching things on and off. No more candle wax. No more paraffin lamps. That smell. The oil heaters. That smell!

NEDDA

Now? Hot or cold?

LIZZIE

Frozen stiff as iron. Oh yes, we could also afford one of those steam-irons!

NEDDA

Where did I hide them?

[She looks panicky. LIZZIE comforts her gently]

LIZZIE

Think nicely, Miss Nedda ...

NEDDA

'Think'? You are telling me to think? Thank you, Lizzie, but I do have a brain. Thank you Lizzie Smith, I have also written books. Real books about our veld and flora. And you? You can't even address a Christmas card without your tongue hanging out of the side of your mouth like a simpleton. And you ask me to 'think nicely'?

LIZZIE

Where did you hide those chocolates?

NEDDA

I must. You steal all my things.

LIZZIE

Now why should I steal? You give me all I need. Thank you Miss Nedda. Except maybe a plug in my room.

NEDDA

You know I'm not well, and so you take advantage of my insecurities.

LIZZIE

Yes never mind, I also searched for the chocolates last night.

NEDDA

See! And you also couldn't find them?

LIZZIE

No. Someone hid them away too well.

NEDDA

Of course. In the bedroom. [*She remembers*] My bedroom! [*She exits to the bedroom. Off*] How close am I now? Hot or cold?

LIZZIE

Warmer, Miss Nedda. And when are we going to town to buy the new magazines?

NEDDA [*Off*]

I'm opening the cupboard!

LIZZIE

Still warmer ... I've suffered for weeks without my magazines ...

NEDDA [*Off*]
The drawer ...

LIZZIE
Which drawer?

NEDDA [*Off*]
Underclothes ...

LIZZIE
Cool.

NEDDA [*Off*]
The scarf drawer?

LIZZIE
Freezing! How am I to know what is happening in the world without my magazines and TV?

[*NEDDA appears holding a framed picture*]

NEDDA
We get the paper delivered every Saturday morning. We know exactly what's happening in the world.

LIZZIE
Only what I decide to read to you.

NEDDA
Why is this picture of me in a drawer?

LIZZIE
Every time I put it back on the mantelpiece, you put it back in the drawer. Last time you didn't even know who it is.

NEDDA
It's me just after I arrived in South Africa from Milano. To do research on the fynbos. We heard about this pre-Ice Age vegetation. I met Herman Barnard. My Ice Age was over. [*She giggles*] Look at me, Lizzie. Bella. Do you ever wonder what it was like to be beautiful?

LIZZIE
No, I remember it well, Miss Nedda. It was wonderful. Now try the sock drawer.

NEDDA
The sock drawer? [*She goes back*] Oh! Sock drawer! Hot or cold?

LIZZIE
Fires of hell!

NEDDA [*Off*]
I have them!

[*Enters with a handful of chocolate bars*]

LIZZIE
Don't eat too many before lunch.

NEDDA
But these are the white chocolates.

LIZZIE
Chocolate is chocolate....

NEDDA
I wanted the bitter chocolate.

LIZZIE
The bitter is finished.

NEDDA
Oh? But we only bought it only yesterday.

LIZZIE
Two weeks ago, Miss Nedda.

NEDDA
The bitter chocolate?

LIZZIE
And ate it all last week.

NEDDA
You?

LIZZIE
You.

NEDDA
I don't want to eat this white chocolate. It looks old.

LIZZIE
The last magazines we bought was three weeks ago ...

NEDDA

Horrible little white squares. Here, you can have them.

LIZZIE

I'm not allowed to.

NEDDA

I know. But I'm giving you permission. [*She presses them on her*]

LIZZIE

I'm not allowed to eat chocolates, Miss Nedda.

NEDDA

Oh really? Why?

LIZZIE

Sugar in my blood. One bite of that and my heart will stop.

NEDDA

Oh nonsense. Stop trying so hard to adopt white middle-class ailments.

LIZZIE

Diabetes is in my family. Far too sweet for your world.

NEDDA

Well, give this chocolate back to the shop. Say it's old. Full of worms.

LIZZIE

It's not old.

NEDDA

It was once nicely bitter and black. Now it's horridly white and old.

LIZZIE

Some of us are, yes. Okay, just put it with the others.

[*Among the others NEDDA finds the bitter slab*]

NEDDA

Here's the bitter!

LIZZIE

Give it. You said it was old.

NEDDA

When?

LIZZIE

Few minutes ago.

NEDDA

Never. I was searching all over for it.

LIZZIE

And my magazines?

NEDDA

I promise. Tomorrow.

LIZZIE

And a TV?

NEDDA

Of course.

LIZZIE

You promise?

NEDDA

On my word. Magazines and a TV. [*She eats some chocolate*]

LIZZIE

Just remember, it's nearly lunch time.

NEDDA [*Teases*]

Want a piece? It's so delicious ... mmm ...

LIZZIE

No, thanks.

NEDDA

Why? Aren't you allowed to? Poor Lizzie. Watch it go into my mouth. Mmmm. Are you scared you'll pick up weight? Get fatter; no one here will care. And when the season starts and the dusty beach houses will swarm and teem with the rich city families, burnt red, peeling and hung over, you can just put on one of your old pink nanny overalls and waddle around happily as an old maid. No one will say: There goes Miss Lizzie Smith, Nedda Barnard's friend, look how fat she's become in spite of her diabetes. [*LIZZIE looks out unconcerned*] They will whisper: It's that old coloured nanny who steals poor Nedda Barnard's chocolates!

LIZZIE

What's happening out there?

NEDDA

Are you now cross? Lizzie?

LIZZIE

Looks like a Taiwanese oil tanker.

NEDDA

Get angry!

LIZZIE

From another world.

NEDDA

I know you hurt under all that pretence!

LIZZIE

My heart is breaking like imported Venetian glass. Miss Nedda, you're missing all the fun. Come and look.

[NEDDA looks out]

NEDDA

Is that ship was on the rocks?

LIZZIE

Impossible.

NEDDA

Look!

[They look]

LIZZIE

But surely there are no submerged rocks there.

NEDDA

What do you know? My husband always said one day that ridge would catch itself a good victim.

LIZZIE *[looks up and sighs]*

Where are you now, clever Doctor H?

NEDDA
My husband?

LIZZIE
'Look after the Madam, Lizzie ...'

NEDDA
My husband is dead.

LIZZIE
'Yes Doctor.'

NEDDA
You know he's dead!

LIZZIE
I miss him.

[*Pause*]

NEDDA
Well, you're not under contract, Lizzie. You can always go back to your own family, now no longer cramped together in the slums of yesterday's politics.

LIZZIE
Ja, my middle-class family who say this Avonstrand and its candle-lit shacks are just a waste of time?

NEDDA
There you'd have your own little room behind the new double garage.

LIZZIE
With electricity, yes.

NEDDA
I'd just advertise for another one.

LIZZIE
Another what?

NEDDA
Lots of people looking for work out there. [*She looks out*] It's bleeding! That monster is vomiting black gall.

LIZZIE

No place for me there. My children's houses are full of their children.

NEDDA

Like toffee ...

LIZZIE

Doctor actually promised me a pension when I came back to look after him.

NEDDA

Think of the poor fish and seagulls covered in oil ...

LIZZIE

Is all this my reward, or his idea of a joke?

NEDDA

The faces of the baby seals on the television news with their big eyes will let people weep comfortably and easily forget the proud oak trees dying of the plague ...

LIZZIE

He never really liked me. Even at the end when he preferred my care to that of his own family.

NEDDA

Poor Mother Nature.

LIZZIE

A TV and magazines would help.

NEDDA

The veld and flora ...

LIZZIE

And fewer 'flora'.

NEDDA

What are you moaning about, Lizzie?

LIZZIE

It'll all come right, Miss Nedda.

NEDDA

Who always said that?

LIZZIE

'Don't panic; everything will be okay'?

NEDDA

Yes, it's so familiar.

LIZZIE

Every politician.

NEDDA

Ferdinand?

LIZZIE

Doctor H.

NEDDA

Doctor Herman Barnard.

LIZZIE

'Don't panic, Lizzie, everything will be okay.' And then he died. He lied.

NEDDA

He lied because he loved us. And everything is okay.

[She is upset. LIZZIE picks up the brush and starts on NEDDA's hair]

But how can it all be okay? First we had the veld fire and then that terrible new road; the squatters on the beach. Missiles being secretly tested up there, and now that bleeding poison pod on the rocks. How can it ever be okay? *[She strokes her hair]* My hair is still strong. I used to tease my mother and say we had good Milanese peasant hair. She was such a snob. Bella Mama. How old am I?

LIZZIE

How old do you feel today?

NEDDA

Fifty. *[LIZZIE grunts]* No?

LIZZIE

Mmmmm.

NEDDA

Warm?

LIZZIE

Cold.

NEDDA

60? 65?

LIZZIE

Bit warmer.

NEDDA

It'll all be okay. [*Then abruptly*] Leave me. My friends out there take me as I am. The meerkat doesn't mind how old I am. Actually the tortoise is probably far older than me in tortoise years.

[*NEDDA exits*]

LIZZIE

Put on your hat, Miss Nedda?

NEDDA [*Off*]

Little waterbuck? Come talk to me ...

LIZZIE

Here, what about your pills ... Miss Nedda? [*She counts out pills and leaves them on table. Picks up a letter*] And what do I do about this? Hey, Doctor? Are you listening up there on your ever-thinning ozone cloud? If you biologists are as good at your jobs as you said you were, how come Mother Nature's pants fall off after every little bump in the road? [*Calls*] Miss Nedda? Leave the goggas alone, your creepy crawlies! [*Speaks to Doctor*] I could've gone and stayed with my kids in the city. Watched TV. Read magazines. We have lovely plastic flowers in our house there!

[*NEDDA comes in quickly*]

NEDDA

They're here again.

LIZZIE

Who's it this time? Anyone I know?

NEDDA

Tell them I'm not home.

LIZZIE

I told those electrical people last week ...

[*There is a knock at the door*]

NEDDA

Just remember, I'm not here.

LIZZIE

And me?

NEDDA

Say you're the ... what are you?

LIZZIE

I live here.

NEDDA

You must be something.

LIZZIE

Can't I just be your friend?

NEDDA

Some job, Lizzie!

LIZZIE

Housekeeper?

[NEDDA sarcastically shows around the room]

NEDDA

Do you want to so readily admit guilt?

LIZZIE

Nurse?

NEDDA

Who's sick?

LIZZIE

Secretary?

NEDDA

Yes, I like that. I'll listen in there. *[Sees the chocolate bars as for the first time]*
Where did these come from?

LIZZIE

Bought.

NEDDA

Bitter chocolate? I hate it! But it's all that remains for me. You steal all my favourite white chocolate bars and eat them, don't you! *[A knock. She calls loudly]* Yes, hang on, she's coming!

[*NEDDA exits. LIZZIE opens the door. SOFIE enters*]

SOFIE
Morning.

LIZZIE
Morning, Miss.

SOFIE
Eh ... Lizzie?

LIZZIE
Yes.

SOFIE
Doctor Barnard?

LIZZIE
No, Lizzie Smith.

SOFIE
No, we're here to see Nedda Barnard.

LIZZIE
Yes, she's not here.

SOFIE
I'm Sofie Clarens.

[*LIZZIE talks loudly for NEDDA to hear off*]

LIZZIE
No, we don't want any of your electricity, really.

SOFIE
Well, I'm sure candle light is very romantic.

LIZZIE
No, we only use candles when we must. We have oil lamps. At night I can read my magazines without bifocals, because the light is so good. Better than electricity.

SOFIE
Sounds romantic. What's happening out there?

LIZZIE

Just a tanker on the rocks.

[*FERDINAND enters*]

SOFIE

Ferdie, it looks more dramatic from here ...

[*FERDINAND holds up his cell phone*]

FERDIE

Battery's gone. Let me get the charger.... hello Lizzie.

[*FERDINAND exits*]

LIZZIE

Hello, Master Ferdie.

SOFIE

Just use your eyes, Ferdie, and you'll remember what you see. Where is he?

LIZZIE

Gone to fetch the charger. Doesn't that need electricity?

SOFIE

Ferdie's father always said something like that would happen one day.

LIZZIE

Maybe we should be glad he's not here to say 'I told you so.'

[*FERDINAND enters with his charger*]

FERDIE

I wonder how many millions of rand is being wasted out there. Heads will roll somewhere. [*He looks around for a plug*] Don't tell me ... for fuck's sake.

SOFIE

No electricity, Ferdie. Use your eyes.

LIZZIE

Master Ferdie, your mother thinks you're from the council.

FERDIE [*Sighs*]

I don't have the energy for any of her little games. Still no electricity? I sent her a cell phone last year.

LIZZIE

It's still in the box.

SOFIE

Isn't she expecting us?

FERDIE

I was forced to write.

LIZZIE

Yes, there's your letter.

SOFIE

Can't she remember anything? What's wrong with her?

LIZZIE [*Loudly*]

Doctor Nedda Barnard is not here.

FERDIE [*Calls*]

We come with good news!

LIZZIE

Better to tell me first.

SOFIE

It's more than just news, Lizzie. It's business. [*Calls*] Auntie Nedda? [*No reaction*]
Is it....

LIZZIE

No, it's not. Alzheimers is incurable.

SOFIE

Is that what the doctors say?

LIZZIE

I read that in a magazine. With pictures.

FERDIE

Lizzie lives here as well, Sofie.

LIZZIE

I'm her companion, you know. Ja, we share.

SOFIE

Companion? I see ...

FERDIE [*Calls*]

Nedda? It's today. I'm here.

LIZZIE

I also see to her medication. I did promise Doctor H before he went.

SOFIE

But if she doesn't remember anything ...

LIZZIE

It's okay, when she forgets, I'm here to remember for her. It's just when she panics that things get out of hand. You know, Master Ferdie, sometimes she remembers everything back to front. Most of the time it's more interesting than the facts.

FERDIE

You gave me your word, Lizzie. If it got really bad, you'd let me know and we'd get her proper professional help!

LIZZIE

And so I'm here. I look after your mother.

FERDIE

In the land of the blind, the white stick leads.

SOFIE

But how is your health these days, Lizzie?

LIZZIE

Your ma is not worse, Master Ferdie. I always remember everything she tries to forget. Like which pills to take when

SOFIE

But you don't remember me.

LIZZIE

Miss Sofie, you were always in all the old magazines. They said there that you were from overseas, but I remembered you were one of us. You did well.

SOFIE

Ja, not bad for a cross-eyed tomboy.

LIZZIE

Cross-eyed? Never! Just one eye looked the other way!

[They laugh]

FERDIE *[Calls]*

Nedda? I can smell your perfume.

LIZZIE

She's not here ...

[NEDDA enters, not really clear as to who they are]

FERDIE

So I see.

SOFIE

Morning, Auntie Nedda.

NEDDA

Auntie?

FERDIE

Is Father's camera still working? We should take some photos of that tanker ...

LIZZIE

I'll know where it is ...

[LIZZIE exits]

SOFIE

Auntie Nedda, you remember me, don't you?

NEDDA

Of course. *[She doesn't]*

SOFIE

Ben and Sally send their love.

NEDDA

Oh yes?

FERDIE

We're a bit late. Sorry. Damn it, we should have stopped at that hotel and recharged the phone!

NEDDA

The phone you sent me? No, it doesn't work here.

FERDIE

The boys wouldn't leave their rugby and fly down with me ...even though I hired a 4 x 4 specially for them ... But I suppose you're pleased ...

NEDDA

No ...eh ...yes ...

FERDIE

Sofie is here on holiday from New York.

SOFIE

I have plans to travel around South Africa a bit more and see our old world before ...

NEDDA

Before it's someone else's new world?

SOFIE

... before I go back to America.

NEDDA

Ben and Sally?

SOFIE

Mom and Dad..

NEDDA

Of course. Are they well?

SOFIE

Considering. And how is Auntie Nedda managing, after Doctor H's?

NEDDA

I think she's fine.

FREDDIE

She means you.

NEDDA

Me?

SOFIE

Auntie Nedda, yes.

NEDDA

I'm 'Auntie' Nedda?

FERDIE

Yes.

NEDDA

No.

[LIZZIE enters with the camera]

LIZZIE

Come, Miss Nedda, I think it's time for the pills!

NEDDA

I am not 'Auntie' anything!

LIZZIE

Here's the camera but I don't think it's still loaded.

NEDDA

Who are you?

SOFIE

Sofie Clarens.

NEDDA

I don't have any family called Clarens. So you can't claim me as Auntie. I am Nedda Barnard. Call me that, or Nedda, or Doctor. But please spare me this 'Auntie'! And you with your 'Nedda'? Who said I'm your Nedda?

LIZZIE

Miss Nedda, please!

NEDDA

And Lizzie Smith, I'm not your 'Miss' either ...

NEDDA/LIZZIE

... I'm your Madam!

[An old joke between them. FERDINAND and SOFIE smile politely]

NEDDA

Well that was a pointless bit of fun. Lizzie, go and find some cool drink for these children.

FERDIE

I thought we could drive to the hotel for a quick lunch. I need to recharge the cell phone.

NEDDA

Ferdinand, live dangerously. Imagine the next hour without a cell phone! [*She laughs*] I first want to hear how Ben and Sally are.

LIZZIE

Want any clues?

NEDDA

Not yet ... [*She thinks carefully*] Clarens? [*She can't remember, searches for clues*] Eh ... farmers?

LIZZIE

Cold.

SOFIE

What?

NEDDA

Clarens ... veld?

LIZZIE

Warm.

SOFIE

Is this some kind of game?

NEDDA

Flowers?

LIZZIE

Hot, hot, hot!

NEDDA

The marshrose!

LIZZIE

Glory be!

NEDDA [*Remembers*]

For goodness sake, yes! Ben and Sally! Where are they? Ben's daughter Sofie Clarens! Of course. [*Looks at FERDINAND blankly*] And who's this?

FERDIE

Ferdinand ...

NEDDA [*Teases*]

Do I know you?

SOFIE [*Shocked*]

Your son ...

LIZZIE

Stop teasing, Miss Nedda ...

NEDDA [*Laughs*]

You two should've got married then, know that, Ferdie? Sofie, yesterday you were only that high, cross-eyed with pigtails. Ben and Sally's pride ... [*Then sudden realisation*] Oh God, is it bad news?

SOFIE

No. Not really ...

NEDDA

No one dead?

SOFIE

No, they send love.

LIZZIE

Don't panic ... [*She comes closer to NEDDA*]

NEDDA [*Moves away*]

Okay, Lizzie, okay. Sofie, your family's piece of fynbos is still the greatest heritage.

FERDIE

Nedda, that's the problem. That piece of veld ...

[*LIZZIE chips in to stall him*]

LIZZIE

Yes, I remember when I started working for Miss Nedda and the Doctor. Oh yes, Miss Sofie, how you and Master Ferdie and Miss Blanche often came visiting

from your boarding schools and how I had to look after you lot on the beach. Too lazy to go mountain climbing with the big people.

FERDIE

When I looked out of my window, that mountain rose up from under my feet like a wall.

SOFIE

And I just wanted to pick everything pretty and wear it in my hair, but picking was always the greatest sin!

NEDDA

Every spring and autumn we would scramble up behind the house. Then we only had that old gravel road. Quite in order. Nothing uncalled for or offensive, like today's four lane gash. Up there in Hectormans Kloof ...

SOFIE

Near the spring, with its ginger-ale water.

LIZZIE

It's now a popular camp for religious groups. Happy clappies.

SOFIE

Oh no!

NEDDA

Oh yes! Then behind the Lion's Ear and the old Rhinohead Rock, to eventually reach the soft marshland on top, between those slabs of bleached stones ...

FERDIE

It was freezing up there...

NEDDA

We had to search with care. She was never a very hospitable madam in her own territory. She was never in the same place twice. Your father always found her first ...

LIZZIE

Such an expert, that Professor Ben Clarens, I remember ...

SOFIE

They could've named her after Doctor H ...

LIZZIE

Goodness me, *Orothamnus* Barnard?

NEDDA

Nonsense, Herman didn't find her first; she found us. Soon the marshrose made her home with us, safe and loved. And then, like all perfect fairy tales, who should come along, as subtle as a runny tummy? The wicked witch of progress! Ferdinand's beloved modern world, with its wide roads and spilt oil. Hairdryers. Cell phones. Thank God, Ben Clarens was sent by nature to protect the last hideaway of the *Orothamnus zeyheri*. Your father was the Rottweiler at the gates, Sofie. And here you are. Lovely. Why?

FERDIE

Damn it, we'll have to start from scratch.

SOFIE

Not all those details

FERDIE

Nedda, we have to ... [*He can't find words*]

SOFIE

Actually it's really my problem. Auntie Nedda, I had ... [*She stops*]

[*Pause*]

NEDDA

Funny, you children were always so crazy about the fynbos. Not Ferdinand's lot. His tribe can't function here without their computers and TVs and hairdryers and plugs round every corner. Oh dear me, the tears when they come here, scared of spiders and 'creepy crawlies' and fresh air and stars. Your little urban gnomes.

SOFIE

Zeyheri! How can I forget her? Does she still reside up there in her mountain penthouse? Auntie Nedda?

NEDDA [*gasps*]

Lizzie!

LIZZIE

What's wrong!

NEDDA

I remembered ...

SOFIE

'*Zeyheri's* sister' is what Dada called me.

NEDDA

... I remembered without pills!

LIZZIE

See, I told you not all is gone!

NEDDA

But I also remember that I remembered!

SOFIE

Dada always said that apart from his piece of paradise, his great love was for your mountain up there. Your marshrose homeland.

FERDIE

Ben was very ill.

NEDDA

I didn't know. Or did I know ...

FERDIE

Yes Nedda, we were there! In the hospital!

LIZZIE

Don't panic ...

NEDDA

When?

SOFIE

After Dada's stroke ...

NEDDA

Recently?

SOFIE

No ...

FERDIE

Last year ...

NEDDA

I didn't know.

LIZZIE

Milk everyone?

FERDIE

Three white, one black. Or have you forgotten?

LIZZIE

Miss Nedda saw both your parents in hospital, Miss Sofie.

NEDDA

I wasn't there. I swear I'd remember that!

LIZZIE

Never mind, I remember that.

NEDDA

Don't anyone listen to her! Lizzie twists everything around. We were never in a hospital. Ever since my husband had to die in one, I swore never again. I'd rather stay here and disappear like mist in the dawn. Like water in the soil.

FERDIE

We were planning to come last week in time for your birthday ...

NEDDA

My birthday?

FERDIE

... but Sofie had to finish some or other project in Los Angeles.

SOFIE

New York ...

NEDDA

What is your work? Or should I know?

SOFIE

I run a modelling agency now.

NEDDA

Oh.

LIZZIE

I see you in all my magazines.

SOFIE

Old snapshots.

LIZZIE

I thought so.

NEDDA

I don't read those magazines.

LIZZIE

That's true.

FERDIE

We stopped along the road and walked up against the mountain.

SOFIE

Wonderful view. Still so unspoilt.

NEDDA

Too many houses. Ugly houses. Ugly people.

FERDIE

I hadn't realized how much damage the fire had done.

LIZZIE

Never mind, Master Ferdie, the fynbos's coming on fine.

SOFIE

The whole mountain was ravaged?

NEDDA

And thanks to that, new plants are popping up in the most unexpected places!

SOFIE

So it was a good thing?

LIZZIE

Oh yes, a good roaring bushfire is the best broom.

NEDDA

Out here a new life demands the warm ashes of the old.

SOFIE

Like in New York, life thrives on death.

NEDDA

We were so bone dry after the summer.

LIZZIE

The lightning struck somewhere high up in the mountain.

NEDDA

We really thought this time the house would go up in flames.

LIZZIE

We fought so hard to keep the sparks away from the roof!

NEDDA

Lizzie was black from the smoke and so was I.

LIZZIE

Sisters!

NEDDA

Then there was no more water ...

LIZZIE

.. because the pipes had melted.

NEDDA

We had to wash off in the sea.

LIZZIE

Palmolive in the salt water!

NEDDA

Lux in the sea sand!

LIZZIE

Oh but we did laugh!

NEDDA

And we stank of the smoke! For days!

LIZZIE

But Miss Nedda, you have you admit. Thanks to that horrible new road, the fire couldn't jump across and burn down our house.

NEDDA

That disgraceful new road! Like an open wound across the face of the veld. And for what?

SOFIE

Drives well.

FERDIE

It's now only a twenty-five minute drive, while in the past it took over an hour.

NEDDA

A four-lane hardtop? Here in the middle of nowhere and nothing? Why?

FERDIE

Progress.

NEDDA

Military. Everything is corruption.

FERDIE

No, Nedda. Development. Infrastructure. Growth.

NEDDA

Bla bla bla. They're testing unmentionable things up in our mountain.

FERDIE

No they are not!

NEDDA

Yes they are!

SOFIE

Auntie Nedda, what are you saying? What things?

NEDDA

Weapons against who? Me? Against the little waterbuck? Out there is the target! They should blow up those damn things out there!

[She refers to the tanker]

LIZZIE

It's doing a good job all by itself.

FERDIE

Thanks to the new road, this house survived the fire. Yes or no?

NEDDA

Ferdinand, they stole some of my property to build that road. Didn't ask; just came and took.

SOFIE

So they owe you money?

FERDIE

Who are 'they'?

NEDDA

Didn't even build us a ramp down to our garage.

LIZZIE

It's true! The car tyres keep sliding on the wet grass.

FERDIE

Thanks to 'them' and their road, at least you're now part of civilization.

NEDDA

Glory be!

LIZZIE

Still without TV or magazines ...

NEDDA

And then there's also the threat of electricity ...

FERDIE

A nice tarred road to the front door. Not a smashed axle on the old corrugations ...

NEDDA

Even if you don't want it, you must still pay Eskom.

FERDIE

Car? Hang on. Who drives the car?

NEDDA

I do.

FERDIE

How can you still drive? Nedda, your license was declared invalid when you ...

NEDDA

... when I reversed into something big, yes. It wasn't meant to be there.

FERDIE

A police van, yes!

NEDDA

Alright, Ferdinand, I lie. Lizzie drives.

LIZZIE

I do?

FERDIE

Lizzie drives? That's even worse!

LIZZIE

What do mean worse? Easy! I learnt it from the TV. *LA Law* and *Dallas*. They just jump in, switch on and vroom – gone!

FERDIE

Lizzie drives??

LIZZIE

It's just: our car's steering wheel is on the wrong side.

FERDIE

Because it's an American car on *LA Law*, Lizzie!

LIZZIE

That's not my fault.

SOFIE

Where did you learn to drive, Lizzie?

NEDDA

She told you. From the TV which her children allowed her to watch. Not here.

FERDIE

Nedda!

NEDDA

Never mind Ferdinand, we won't drive again. I promise.

FERDIE

I'll have the car towed in and sold! You don't need a car!

LIZZIE

And in case of emergency?

FERDIE

Like what?

LIZZIE

All the time. Needing to drive into town for ... well ... you know ...

NEDDA

Lizzie's magazines.

FERDIE

What?

NEDDA

You'd leave two old ladies alone in the veld?

LIZZIE

What if one falls over?

NEDDA

We don't even have a phone.

FERDIE

I sent you a new cell phone!

LIZZIE

No electricity to pump up the battery.

NEDDA

No loving young people to help us ...

[Pause]

FERDIE

You want me to come here? And look after you? I have my job, my commitments

...

NEDDA

No, I don't, but take away our transport and we'll be forced to hitch hike!

LIZZIE

And then we'll get raped!

NEDDA

And murdered!

LIZZIE

And whose fault will that be?

NEDDA

You decide our fate, my son. [*Pause. He is stunned. Then she laughs*] A joke, Ferdinand.

FERDIE

In appalling taste!

NEDDA

Mother's pulling your leg.

FERDIE

That's so uncalled for. Murdered ... that's really not funny.

NEDDA

It was meant to be a joke!

[He sulks]

LIZZIE

Then why are you driving a tractor!

SOFIE

A four-by-four. He hired it, thinking his boys would be tempted to come along for the adventure.

LIZZIE

Oh yes?

SOFIE

It's very fashionable in the USA. Especially in urban areas.

NEDDA

Very outlandish here in the rurals.

LIZZIE

Oh. Four-by-four hey? Looks easy to drive ...

FERDIE

No!

NEDDA

Oh, leave the children, Lizzie. They're so bland!

FERDIE

Thanks a lot.

NEDDA

Boring, Ferdinand, dull!

FERDIE

The boys are actually with their mother till next week. Her new friend has a powerboat on the Vaal.

[*Pause*]

LIZZIE

So Master Ferdie, how is she?

FERDIE

Getting married again next month.

NEDDA

Do I know about this? Do I care?

FERDIE

No. I only found out recently. In the magazines!

NEDDA

But you get to keep the children?

FERDIE

The boys say they're now big enough to look after themselves.

[*Pause*]

SOFIE

Maybe we should've got married to each other way back then, Ferdie?

FERDIE

Maybe, yes. Our divorce would have been much more pleasant.

SOFIE

You gave me a little tin ring, remember? I even said 'I do'.

FERDIE

Oh?

SOFIE

You've probably forgotten.

NEDDA

Forgetting is a family hazard.

SOFIE

Then, once we got divorced, I would keep the kids, and you could be free.

FERDIE

Don't worry, I am free.

NEDDA

You modern young things get married far too soon. Your little milk teeth are still waiting for the tooth fairy's ten cents, and already you're veterans of the divorce courts. But why are you still single, Sofie? Is there something wrong with you?

FERDIE

Nedda!

NEDDA

Let me put that differently: in your United States of America, is there anyone left with whom there is nothing wrong?

SOFIE

Who is ever alone with good friends?

LIZZIE

The magazine article says Miss Sofie has a younger man in New York.

FERDIE

Toy boy?

SOFIE

Neither. Just a friend.

NEDDA

What do Ben and Sally say when they read all that?

SOFIE

'My child, is he black?'

NEDDA

Is he?

SOFIE

No, but you know Mom and Dada. Always expecting the worst.

LIZZIE

And that's the worst?

SOFIE

Wasn't it? Till recently? [*Pause*] Ferdie?

FERDIE

Yes. Nedda, what do you want to do? We can talk here, or go to the hotel. [*She shrugs either way*] We must talk.

NEDDA

What do we want in that awful noisy hotel? We can talk here.

FERDIE

Lunch, Lizzie!

LIZZIE

We've some chicken leftovers. Don't tell me you're vegetarian.

NEDDA

We'll stay right here in our ringside seats and watch how Ferdinand's modern reality can destroy a million years of evolution in a day. [*She refers to the ship. Whispers to LIZZIE*] What was that he said about my birthday?

LIZZIE

I also forgot.

[*They giggle. FERDINAND looks round the room*]

FERDIE

Who did the painting job?

NEDDA

Very good people.

FERDIE

Oh really?

NEDDA

Very artistic. Who were they, Lizzie?

LIZZIE

You and me.

NEDDA

We chose that colour?

LIZZIE

You up the ladder. Me on the floor.

NEDDA

Not bad for two old ladies.

SOFIE

I think it's just perfect. You don't have to change anything to the house. Mom and Dada will probably want it just as it is.

[*Pause*]

NEDDA

Oh?

FERDIE

You've forgotten again, Nedda.

NEDDA

I hope so.

FERDIE

My letter explained everything in detail!

NEDDA

There is your letter.

LIZZIE

We were busy reading it ...

FERDIE

Can't my mother even read her own private letters?

NEDDA

Was there something important in that letter, Lizzie?

LIZZIE

No, Miss Nedda. Just news about his divorce, about your grandchildren's love for you; how they all so desperately miss Avonstrand and the fynbos ...

FERDIE

Must you always interfere, Lizzie? My father didn't throw you out all those years ago for no reason.

LIZZIE

In those days I had my own family problems. And I was never 'thrown out' as you say.

FERDIE

My father wouldn't take cheek out of the mouth of a

LIZZIE

Go on, say it: a maid?

FERDIE

You were a cheeky maid!

LIZZIE

And your father, the Master, was a typical ...

NEDDA

Say it ...

LIZZIE [*can't say the word*]

..... I don't use that word any more.

NEDDA

Tell me what you wrote in that letter, Ferdinand!

LIZZIE

No! Not now. Let's get lunch ready. Miss Sofie? Come.

[NEDDA *panics*]

NEDDA

What is being plotted and planned behind my back? Have you all decided to have me committed somewhere?

[*Pause. LIZZIE quickly changes the subject*]

LIZZIE

And so, Miss Sofie? When last were you at the plot by the sea?

SOFIE

Ferdie, you said ...

FERDIE

There was nothing about the plot in the letter!

SOFIE

Auntie Nedda, you remember our plot?

NEDDA

Plot ...?

LIZZIE

Miss Nedda always says you make it sound like a parking place. The most beautiful unspoilt piece of veld in the country. Ja, she remembers it well, this 'plot'.

SOFIE

Well, you see, that's the story. After Dada's stroke they couldn't get to the plot ... to the veld for months. Eventually my brother and his wife collected them and drove them across the mountains to the sea ...

NEDDA

The sea ... I can smell it. The second turning left after the BP garage, just beyond the old Strendel farm. The road was always dusty in summer, or muddy in the winter rain. You drive down to the sea, until those gray and orange rock slabs crunch under the wheels. Then you swing to the right. A slow drive to the sand dunes where one year after a sudden shower, a whole regiment of field mice danced under the rainbow. We laughed till we cried. Then you just look across at paradise, like it was after the creation. Proteas and painted ladies, ferns and heather ...

SOFIE

The old *melkbos* with its gnarled caverns of drooping leaves and ancient branches.

NEDDA

Yes ... eh ... [*Thinks hard*] ... *Sideroxylan inermis*!

LIZZIE

The guarri tree?

NEDDA

Eh ...yes ... it's on the tip of my tongue ... *Euclea racemosa*!

SOFIE

And the beach olive?

NEDDA

Do you remember the name of the beach olive, Ferdinand?

FERDIE

No, I never could remember those Latin names.

SOFIE

I do! *Olea exasperata*?

NEDDA

Glory be! Then there was ...

LIZZIE

Disa?

SOFIE

Elegia?

NEDDA

Thyrsifera!

LIZZIE

Erica?

NEDDA

Patersonia!

LIZZIE

Gladiolus?

NEDDA

Carneus! And my beloved *Mimetes hirtus*!

LIZZIE [*Whispers*]

Glory be!

NEDDA

Nowhere a sign of man. No broken leaf, or city-shoe footprint in the sand. And so it stayed for all those years, and could for the rest of time too, God willing, even long after we've gone.

FERDIE

No.

NEDDA

Yes! Without your damn electricity, or Google or military roads!

FERDIE

No, Nedda. No.

[*Pause*]

SOFIE

Well you see, Auntie Nedda, when they got to the plot, there was a house. In the veld ...

NEDDA

They built a house in the veld?

SOFIE

An enormous suburban castle, bathrooms and bedrooms and patio and pool and a tennis court in the making.

NEDDA

I don't believe it! Ben and Sally?

FERDIE

No, some Black Diamond from Pretoria. They'd actually bought a plot further up the coast. Chose a Spanish-style mansion out of the catalogue and had it built!

SOFIE

But on the wrong plot.

NEDDA

The wrong plot?

FERDIE

On a desk in Pretoria, all plots at the sea look more or less the same.

NEDDA

A house on the wrong plot? It's criminal!

FERDIE

If you want to put it so bluntly.

SOFIE

It's a beautiful house ... if you like the Spanish style ...

NEDDA

Everything they treasured is gone?

FERDIE

Nedda, not everyone in the world shares your obsession with plants. The new owners threatened lawsuits and worse. There was some BEE connection with the people my company are in business with. Never mind all that. Luckily I still have the right contacts and we could renegotiate with the owners.

NEDDA

Black diamonds?

FERDIE

... now they are getting their Spanish-style home built on the right plot and everyone is happy.

NEDDA

Everyone is happy.

FERDIE

I think it's very decent of the builders to then allow Ben and Sally to keep the house they hadn't built. Naturally it was all 'in lieu of etcetera etcetera'.

SOFIE

Ferdie's company did so much to help. We are all so grateful.

NEDDA

And what do they say?

SOFIE

Well, both Mom and Dada think ...

NEDDA

No, not them. I mean all our rare and protected friends in that paradise of fynbos? They must be delighted by all the apologies and thank yous. Lying there crushed and broken, suffocated by concrete and gravel?

[Pause]

SOFIE

Ah. Well you see, Auntie Nedda, there's more to the story ...

FERDIE

Ben and Sally said no.

NEDDA
Glory be!

SOFIE
They refused to accept the apologies. They said they'd go to the highest court in the land ...

NEDDA
I'll serve cake and coffee ...

SOFIE
So then the builders said, if they – that's Mom and Dada – if they had their eye on any other piece of similar available fynbos along the coast, they'd buy it for them no matter what the cost.

NEDDA
Who'd buy what for whom?

FERDIE
The builders ... my contacts ...

LIZZIE
Warm ... warmer ... warmest ...

NEDDA
What a complicated story ...

[SOFIE and FERDINAND confer softly]

SOFIE
You said this had all been discussed!

FERDIE
It's in the letter!

SOFIE
But she doesn't remember anything!

NEDDA
No, I remember nothing!

[Pause]

LIZZIE
And did Master Ben and Miss Sally find a place?

SOFIE

Here.

NEDDA

They found something here? At Avonstrand?

SOFIE

Well, this is the only other piece of paradise Mom and Dada know. Close to their best friend. And the Princess *Zeyheri*.

FERDIE

The builders will buy this ground at any price, Nedda, after which it can be transferred to the ownership of Sofie's parents.

NEDDA

This ground?

FERDIE

We're talking millions of rands!

NEDDA

We're talking about my home.

LIZZIE

Ja, our home.

FERDIE

It's not complicated ...

NEDDA

No, it's simple. Our fynbos is not for sale!

FERDIE

It won't be a sale, Nedda. It's between friends.

NEDDA

Oh? Suddenly you're my best friend?

FERDIE

Ben and Sally.

NEDDA

I cannot believe they'd let it happen!

SOFIE

Can't we just discuss some ideas?

NEDDA

This is my veld ...

FERDIE

There's a lot of nice comfortable space with us in Pretoria, Nedda. Also a modern granny flat at Blanche's house in Provence.

NEDDA

Mon Dieu, mon cherie, I seem to have forgotten all my French!

FERDIE

Even your Avonstrand will have to move into the twenty-first century soon. It's on the cards!

NEDDA

Not my cards.

FERDIE

And don't forget the talk of a proposed nuclear power plant ...

NEDDA

Ferdinand, read my lips if you can't hear me. Mother says no! [*She puts on a scarf*] Lizzie? I'm going out to the real creepy crawlies.

[*NEDDA exits*]

SOFIE

Damn it man, Ferdie! You said it had all been discussed with her!

FERDIE

Did you read the letter, Lizzie?

LIZZIE

Yes. The few letters she still gets, I read to her. Most of them just tell of the death of another friend. So I lie and say someone's become a granny again and not to panic because everything will be okay. Then she laughs and we can manage another day. Miss Nedda's world must stay full of good news.

FERDIE

You're making her ill!

LIZZIE

Sick and tired of this new world and its lies? Oh yes.

FERDIE

You know what I'm referring to! All this was in that letter to my mother!

LIZZIE

I don't just lie. I also censor. [*Waves the letter at them*] But the best of all was on page 3. This big stick of a 'nuclear reactor on your proteas.' I nearly laughed out loud. Shame on you, Master Ferdinand! She's not a dumb animal that you're trying to frighten away; she's your ma!

FERDIE

We need that money, Lizzie.

LIZZIE

Why? Two old ladies eat less than one of your man-eating Rottweilers up there in the north.

FERDIE

Alright then, it's me. I need the money!

LIZZIE

Your BEE business?

FERDIE

Yes.

LIZZIE

What is it called in the magazines, Miss Sofie? Rat Race?

FERDIE

A financial recession mean bad times for everyone.

LIZZIE

Ja, the little waterbuck comes down from the kloof and drinks from our dripping tap, because the mountain water is sick. The ginger-ale brown in it is nearly bleached a dead white, like poisonous jelly.

FERDIE

The military's involvement up in the mountains promised a clean environment.

LIZZIE

So thanks to your contacts, the little meerkat and all our friends will die? The environment will be clean and empty.

FERDIE

We don't need Nedda Barnard's permission, Lizzie. Or yours.

LIZZIE

She's the head of the house.

FERDIE

Blanche and I are in agreement about this. Our mother must decide. Either she agrees, or we agree on her behalf. It will just look better if it comes from her.

SOFIE

See, Lizzie, Mom and Dada will only accept this if the offer came from Auntie Nedda herself.

FERDIE [*Looks out*]

Where is she ...?

LIZZIE

Measuring the foundations for your nuclear reactor.

FERDIE

No wonder everyone thinks she's nuts. She's talking to the plants!

LIZZIE

It's a democratic household. We all have the vote.

FERDIE

Do they talk back?

LIZZIE

Sometimes. [*She also looks out*] You don't really see anything out there, do you, Master Ferdie. Look to the left: there's a red-chested cuckoo in the bush. Over there under those reeds, a small tortoise we call Auntie Joan. Nothing exceptional. Just old friends.

SOFIE [*also looks out*]

Shouldn't we go to her?

LIZZIE

No, wait. Time for pills. Mine's for blood and hers are for courage. [*She counts out pills on a plank with a glass of water*] Remember, Master Ferdinand, when you were still a pipsqueak? Your father was so worried that you might stay smaller than the rugby ball? I had to feed you a spoon of cod liver oil every night after supper.

FERDIE

Yes, but I spat it out into the veld.

LIZZIE

Ja, and look at those giant proteas now. See how strong and confident they are.

[LIZZIE exits to NEDDA with the pills]

[Pause]

FERDIE

I must've been 10, 11, 12 ... In the bath. Old Lizzie with the facecloth and soap, scrubbing my back, washing my ears, rinsing my hair. My eyes were always full of suds ... Then she laughed loudly. I asked 'What's so funny, Lizzie?' More laughter as she pointed with her finger. 'Look!' she said. 'Look, Master Ferdinand Barnard!' I looked ... saw nothing ... hell, I was only 10 or 11! 'What is it?' 'Look, man! Your little dove's getting feathers!' [Pause. SOFIE tries not to laugh] She was the last woman I allowed into my bathroom.

SOFIE

I'll remember that.

FERDIE

At first I could never understand why Father couldn't stand the sight of her. But I suppose it was as clear as daylight to anyone else. Our father didn't take shit from a coloured servant. And this particular servant wouldn't take shit from any white!

SOFIE

That world is now so far away ... [Then she laughs] Your what? 'Little dove'?

FERDIE

I was 14, when one morning after an argument in the kitchen, she left without farewell. We were hysterical. Life without Lizzie was unimaginable. Blanche and I somehow kept contact with her through the years, even though Father had forbidden her ever to 'darken our door'. So behind his back she'd come and have tea. Usually on Saturdays, while our parents were playing with their plants. Blanche and me and Lizzie. Just standing around. Uncomfortable. Stuttering. Two whites, one coloured. At first through habit, she would sip weak tea out of her old cracked mug. Suddenly one Christmas, it was Earl Grey tea in one of Nedda's fancy cups. Then one May, could it have been the 31st? Remember Republic Day? We three were sitting round the dining table eating homemade cakes she'd brought to celebrate the white homeland. We were having a deep conversation like big people.

SOFIE

Deep conversation?

FERDIE

Politics; unheard of in our house. No mention of plants. Then the next year Nedda joined us in the sitting room, quite normal: three whites and one coloured. Only the maid we had at the time, stormed out in fury, refused pointblank to

serve one of her own. And then on one fine day Doctor Herman Barnard joined us.

SOFIE

Had your 'little dove' left the nest already?

FERDIE

Oh yes, I was married by then. Our twin babies lying in Lizzie's arms. In comes the new proud Grandpa, very formal and aloof. But still he sat there with us. 'How are things at home now, Lizzie?' 'Fine, Doctor.' 'Children growing up?' 'All of them are grown up now, Doctor.'

SOFIE

I can see it. Rembrandt should have painted it.

FERDIE

Crazy days. It was the first time a nonwhite had been invited into our sitting room, drinking from our best china. Lizzie Smith just allowed our prejudice to crumble, just through old habits.

SOFIE

I think she's very good for your mother.

FERDIE

My mother's always been at her best when starting things: us as babies, their marriage, this house. It was Blanche's idea to find Lizzie in her retirement and bring her back to look after Father in his last year. And when he died, Lizzie was at the funeral, very subdued to one side with her three sons. Blanche asked her to stay on. At first Nedda was not mad about the idea of the kitchen help back as a companion, but just look around.

SOFIE

Oh my God, this also Lizzie's house! [*She's upset*] No, hang on! What about Lizzie?

FERDIE

Never mind, she gets paid well. She can always find other work.

SOFIE

Is this her work, or her life? Her love!

FERDIE

She has her own family. [*He takes her hand*] Did you really say 'I do'?

SOFIE

What?

FERDIE

'Yes, Ferdinand Barnard, I will marry you.'

SOFIE

Oh yes, I did say I do.

FERDIE

So why didn't I hear it?

SOFIE

Oh, you did. You waited with your reply till we were down on the beach with all the other kids, even those common Hendricks twins with their redheaded ma, and you said 'Sofie Clarens wants to marry me!' And then you turned to me and said: 'Sorry, I won't marry a squatter.'

FERDIE

Never! Come on ...

SOFIE

My parents were always on their plot in a leaking tent. In your eyes I suppose we were squatters.

FERDIE

That I really don't remember.

SOFIE

'Stick insect. Ragdoll ...' What else did you call me in front of the others. 'Sofie Bandy-leg.' 'Clarens the Cross-eyed Giraffe!'

FERDIE

You were!

SOFIE

I only needed a small operation.

FERDIE

You do look different.

SOFIE

More mature? I also had a little nose job ... little boob job.

FERDIE

I thought something was different there.

SOFIE

Oh good, so all that investment wasn't wasted. As a mere child you were, as we fondly say in the States, one real true little son of a bitch.

[*NEDDA and LIZZIE enter*]

NEDDA

Now don't put the blame on this bitch. Ferdinand, I had a long chat to the creepy crawlies about giving up their homes and they also say you can go and fuck yourself. [*Turns to Lizzie*] Are those the right words, Lizzie?

LIZZIE

That's exactly what they said, Miss Nedda.

FERDIE

Just read the letter, Nedda.

SOFIE

Can we just decide once and for all what we are going to do?

NEDDA

Of course we must. I'm sorry about your parents, Sofie. Deeply and honestly upset about their loss. I wished there was something I could do. Maybe go up to the top of the mountain and find the Princes *Zeyheri* to photograph which you can email to them with my love.

SOFIE

Dada is paralysed and in a wheelchair. Mom's eyes aren't yet healed, in spite of the operation.

NEDDA

And you live far enough away from the problem, but well off enough to suggest this solution?

SOFIE

That's unfair.

NEDDA

I was talking about Ferdinand. And if they came to live here? Without electricity or telephone? A lame old biologist and his blind lady love? [*Pause*] Come now, children! Not enough thought is going into all this! Think!

SOFIE

I hardly sleep at night!

NEDDA

And you look wonderful! Lizzie, where are my boots?

LIZZIE

In their usual place.

NEDDA

Moscow? Cape Point? Under the bed?

LIZZIE

Behind the kitchen door, on last weekend's *Argus* as usual.

[NEDDA goes to the door, stops and turns]

NEDDA

What did you call it earlier, Ferdinand? So surprisingly deeply poetic? In the land of the blind, the white stick is God?

FERDIE

Not quite, but close ...

[NEDDA exits]

LIZZIE

Boots? That's all we need now. *[Calls]* Miss Nedda, it's too warm to go walking around outside!

FERDIE

Lizzie, what am I going to do?

LIZZIE

Nothing. Get into the tractor and go back to civilization. Tell your boys their granny misses them. Lie a little. It keeps the air clean.

FERDIE

She must just sign the papers.

LIZZIE

But didn't you say she's nuts. Her signature will mean nothing!

[NEDDA enters ready to climb]

NEDDA

My poor boy, your nice expensive handmade imported shoes aren't ideal in which to clamber across rocks and gullies. Lizzie, bring the flask of cooldrink for the pills. Bring the pills.

LIZZIE

And who are we trying to impress with this Great Trek into Paradise, Miss Nedda? The businessman, or the beauty queen?

[*An explosion outside*]

SOFIE

God, what's that!

FERDIE

The oil tanker!

LIZZIE

How long will that now burn ...

NEDDA

Days, weeks. Pitch black clouds. Day for night.

LIZZIE

Our poor creepy crawlies won't know if it's time to chirp or to snore! [*They look*] So? Practically speaking, what happens now?

NEDDA

Practically speaking? Lizzie, your choice of words are always so spot-on.

LIZZIE

If we're going out, I must lock up. Those squatters on the beach eat anything that's soft, and take everything else to build into their shacks.

NEDDA

We're going mountain climbing.

LIZZIE

A joke?

NEDDA

No. Go put on your pink takkies.

LIZZIE

On one condition.

NEDDA

Only one?

LIZZIE

I get my TV?

NEDDA [*pretends to think and then*]

Alright.

LIZZIE

Magazines delivered at the door?

NEDDA

That's two conditions.

LIZZIE

Remember, we have two witnesses. [*As she exits*] Remember what you've just witnessed!

FERDIE

What was that about?

NEDDA [*Smiles*]

Can't remember.

FERDIE

We don't have time for a long walk.

NEDDA

Trust me, Ferdinand. We'll take the old road, like in the happy days when your father was here? When Ben could walk and Sally would laugh? And when you children were young enough to demand dreams! And old Lizzie would swear like a trooper carrying the picnic basket and bottled water. Those good old days when we were the unchallenged Kings and nature our Versailles. [*FERDINAND grumbles and exits*] Ferdinand, you're such an old man!

SOFIE

What are we going to do up there, Auntie Nedda?

NEDDA [*Whispers*]

She's waiting for us, Sofie, there in her rock palace. The sun will shine an unnatural gold through this burning oil, but it will look soft on her pink cheeks.

[*LIZZIE enters ready*]

LIZZIE

I took an extra blood pill, just in case.

NEDDA

I feel like a young waterbuck.

LIZZIE

You'll just have a stroke up there, Miss Nedda.

NEDDA

Then you'll be on your own, Lizzie. Rather come and have a stroke with me.

LIZZIE

It's very warm. Where's your hat?

NEDDA

Warm? Warmer?

LIZZIE

Hellfire hot!

[They laugh. FERDINAND enters with a photo album]

FERDIE

Where's this album been for all these years? *[Sees all are ready]* Oh shit, do I have to come as well?

NEDDA

Of course, you're the man. We might be attacked.

LIZZIE

Anything is possible nowadays.

FERDIE

Do we know exactly where we are going?

NEDDA

To ask the prettier sister if she wants to share her paradise with Mom and Dada.

SOFIE

It depends on *Zeyheri*?

[As NEDDA and LIZZIE go out]

NEDDA

Now, see that you're not right behind me when we climb, Lizzie.

LIZZIE

Don't be bossy, Miss Nedda.

NEDDA

The loose stones, remember last time?

LIZZIE

No hell, Miss Nedda, do you take me for a bloody fool?

[NEDDA laughs as they both exit]

[End of the flashback. The lights take us from the summer to winter]

SCENE THREE

[The sunlight of the flashback ends. Now it is raining outside. SOFIE plugs in her cell phone charger]

SOFIE
Still not a great signal.

FERDIE
Do you know these ugly children?
[He gives her the album]

SOFIE
Where did you find this?

FERDIE
I don't know where to start.

SOFIE
It doesn't feel right. Packing up all these things ...

FERDIE
Someone must do it.

SOFIE
Ferdinand, I hope heaven is far away from us today ...

FERDIE
Even if it was above us, Sofie, not one of them could see through the clouds without their bifocals.

SOFIE
... far, far away so that no one we loved could see what we 'have' to do here.

FERDIE
If it makes you that uncomfortable, we don't have to do anything. We can go back and do something else. Let strangers come and feed the bonfire.

SOFIE *[Sighs]*
No, we're here.

FERDIE
It was your idea to come back together.

SOFIE

I'm glad I'm back. Our last visit ... thought about it so often ...

FERDIE

My hay fever's starting again. House dust now ...

SOFIE

I just miss the sun.

FERDIE

... the flowers in spring.

SOFIE

It's all like an old black and white photo out there ...

FERDIE

Well, I can assure you we did the right thing.

SOFIE

Well, it sure doesn't feel right.

FERDIE

Someone's got to do it. [*She looks at him*] Sofie, someone must do it! Wouldn't you rather it were us?

[*SOFIE pages through the album*]

SOFIE

They kept everything. Even my sketchbooks ... [*She looks at one*] Here are my working sketches of the Princess *Zeyheri*. Dada always hoped I'd become an illustrator. He'd write the texts and I'd immortalize his damn flowers.

FERDIE

This place always depresses me in the rain ...

SOFIE

Oh look, a truly original Clarens.

FERDIE

Who's that supposed to be?

SOFIE

Don't you recognize the young Ferdinand Barnard in his prime?

FERDIE

My nose is smaller.

SOFIE

No, your head's bigger.

FERDIE

[He sighs and sits. Eats some chocolate]

Want some? *[She shakes her head]* The sock drawer is full of bars of bitter chocolate. The scarf drawer filled with sweets. Pills everywhere. Dried flowers with Latin names squashed between the pages of books in Italian.

SOFIE

And piles of magazines in Lizzie's room holding up her gleaming new TV set. I even found an old *Cosmopolitan* with me on the cover.

FERDIE

Look here. The book of old remedies. *[Hands it to her]* Take it back to America and all your sick friends.

SOFIE

They're not just in America ...

FERDIE

What?

[She looks at him, wants to answer, then shakes her head]

SOFIE *[Reads]*

'Mix manure with milk and place on wound. It will heal overnight.' *[She laughs]*
The manure milkshake!

[End of the present. Lights takes us out of winter into flashback to the summer]

SCENE FOUR

[The sunlight streams us back into the flashback. LIZZIE enters with a basin of water. SOFIE has the book]

SOFIE

... This is crazy!

LIZZIE

Master Ferdie, take off the shoe.
[FERDINAND limps to the chair]

FERDIE

Can't ... too sore.

[NEDDA enters with medicine]

NEDDA

Pipsqueak! You sprained your ankle, my boy, not broken your back! Rub this on it! *[She gives him ointment]*

SOFIE

Auntie Nedda? Listen to this. *[Reads]* 'Mix manure with milk and place on wound. It will heal overnight.'

NEDDA

Ha-ha, the Manure Milkshake! Let me see? 'Remedy for body pains: drink a bottle of brandy quickly. Pain will vanish.'

FERDIE

That's what I need right now!

NEDDA

I've seen it even work among disbelievers.

LIZZIE

Put your foot in the water, Master Ferdie!

SOFIE

'Remedy for the Simple Man'? Where did you get this book?

NEDDA

I don't know. No, I mean I really can't remember. If you had to ask me now about all my little things – the books, the candles, the playing cards, the puzzles, the silly pointless clutter from here and there, from whom and where – what could I

tell you? [*Shrugs*] Yes well, here they are. Hitched a lift on my wagon of life and came along for the ride. [*Looks in the book*] Here's just the thing for Ferdinand's ankle. [*Pretends to read*] 'For a painfully sprained ankle that occurs when city boys with fancy city boots climb mountains carelessly, without taking heed of their mother's good advice. Wash child's ears out properly and stand him in a draughty corner for an hour without chocolate or ice cream!'

LIZZIE

With foot in water!

FERDIE

Very funny. I'm not going to be forced to cut open my expensive shoe ...

NEDDA

Good old remedy for the simple man... [*She feels faint*] Oh hell...

LIZZIE

You okay?

NEDDA

Keep talking nonsense ...

[*She looks tired. Waves LIZZIE's attention away*]

LIZZIE

Ja, just don't use my best knife, hey Miss Nedda? Like the old days when he scratched around my kitchen to find something he wanted for the garden.

SOFIE

What was he doing in the garden?

LIZZIE

Cutting a rod from a branch.

FERDIE

A rod for Lizzie.

LIZZIE

Learn beating women at an early age?

FERDIE

Excuse me?

LIZZIE

If the shoe fits, cut it open, Master Ferdie.

[*He glares at her*]

SOFIE [*Quickly*]
And why a rod?

FERDIE
Blanche and I would wait for you to come round the corner...

LIZZIE
...usually carrying a full tray...

FERDIE
...and then whack! On your fat bum!

SOFIE
Ferdie no! Shame on you!

LIZZIE
Ferdie yes, damn hard!

FERDIE
But you never once dropped the tray.

LIZZIE
Or caught up with you, you little terrorist.

FERDIE
Once you chased us and grabbed hold of Blanche by her hair.

LIZZIE [*Mimics*]
'Lizzie, if you hit me, I'll tell Papa!!!'

FERDIE
You gave her the hiding of her life.

LIZZIE
Just what you call 'in lieu of etcetera'.

FERDIE
In lieu of...

NEDDA
What? You beat my children?

LIZZIE
Of course. They also put insects in my bed.

NEDDA

Thank goodness I never knew this then.

LIZZIE

Someone had to tame those wild animals and teach them some manners. And with respect, Senora Dottore Barnard, in those days you and your husband didn't spend that much time with us.

NEDDA

Ours was always a family united!

LIZZIE

Yes, but not in the normal sense of the word. You two always preferred to be behind closed doors, with your eyes pressed up against those periscopes.

NEDDA

Microscopes.

LIZZIE

Amoebas and Latin things that made my stomach turn.

NEDDA

Wonders of life.

LIZZIE

Maybe, except that those two little wonders of your lives you left to the faithful cheeky nanny to tuck up at the end of the day.

NEDDA

How dare you! I loved the children!

LIZZIE

I brought up the children!

[Clearly a touchy argument. NEDDA sulks]

FERDIE

Yes, and just look at them now.

LIZZIE

How grateful I am that all my sons have good families. They have their own homes, fully paid for. Good jobs. No debt!

NEDDA

And no divorces. Is that a Coloured thing?

FERDIE

I meant your white kids, me and Blanche.

LIZZIE

I know what you mean.

SOFIE

Don't you miss your family, Lizzie?

LIZZIE

What for? You're all here. Okay, I'm going to see to lunch. Miss Sofie, want some tips on how to cut onions without crying?

[LIZZIE exits followed by SOFIE. NEDDA sits and stares at FERDINAND till he feels uncomfortable]

NEDDA

You look just like your father.

FERDIE

I don't.

NEDDA

You don't look like me. You don't behave like me.

FERDIE

No, thank heavens.

NEDDA

No, you're pigheaded. You're insensitive. You're old before your time.

FERDIE

I'm just not used to climbing mountains in my city shoes.

NEDDA

You're sour, Ferdinand. That you didn't get from me, or from your father.

FERDIE

If my ankle didn't decide to stop us in our tracks today, you would've had a heart attack and died among the fynbos, Senora Dottore. I saved your life.

NEDDA

Don't flatter yourself! I would've been up and down already, if it hadn't been for you.

FERDIE

Okay. It's all my fault.

NEDDA

It was like climbing with an old man.

FERDIE

I was climbing with two old women!

NEDDA

Sour, Ferdinand. We've all had our disappointments in life, but it didn't make us sour.

FERDIE

And when last did you climb that mountain?

NEDDA

Sour!

FERDIE

Or can you conveniently not remember.

NEDDA

Last week!

FERDIE

Years ago!

NEDDA

Sour!

FERDIE

When your friends still could climb.

NEDDA

We did it every week.

FERDIE

Oh? And who comes here now?

NEDDA

Everyone!

FERDIE

Every week?

NEDDA

We just don't have time.

FERDIE

None of you have gone up there in years, Nedda. And as far as you know, even the marshrose might have kicked the bucket by now too.

NEDDA

Oh no, she's there.

FERDIE

How do you know?

NEDDA

Like I know that my children are still there, having not heard a word from them for months, or seen them for longer. And you do look just like your father! Except you're sour. [*She pages through the remedy book*] Funny, no simple remedy for madness.

FERDIE

You're not mad.

NEDDA

Then the world is mad, but one of us definitely needs urgent help. [*Pages on*] Don't panic, Ferdinand, everything will be okay. I'm much better. Really. Since your father died, there have been some moments of being alone that were ... difficult to handle on my own. We were together for so long, as one energy, one reality. And when he suddenly went on without me.....? How can I put it ... I found myself standing in the rush hour traffic of life, without the strength to dodge the monstrous fears that bore down on me. Like those huge trucks on the freeway. I suppose being alone means one just gets more easily scared of silly things.

FERDIE

What silly things?

NEDDA

Oh, take your pick. Getting old silently. Going mad silently. Becoming ill silently. Dying silently. [*Puts book down*] No, sorry, there is also no remedy for being sour. [*Looks at him again for a time*] Why are you really here, Ferdinand? You never come here, unless there is something you want. What is it you want this time?

FERDIE

I'm a business man: I work. I don't want.

NEDDA

Ah, so this is a business visit. Going to put up a nice supermarket around here for the meerkat? Or a sports field where the field mice can play rugby?

FERDIE

A nuclear power station. It's that or fracking. That's on the list too.

NEDDA [*Laughs*]

And so is the Second Coming. It wouldn't surprise me, if the whole thing wasn't so totally absurd. [*She looks out at the ship*] Flames on water. Oil belongs in the ground, like military roads in a military camp and plugs and switches in a dreary suburb. Not here! [*Stares out at the ship*] Does the Simple Man have no remedy for simple pollution? Something to tame simple progress? 'Close the eyes and the ears tightly and don't panic, because everything will be okay.' [*Pause*] So my boy, what are we to do now?

FERDIE

You must decide.

NEDDA

Let me think 'nicely', as Lizzie suggests. I'm not young ...

FERDIE

That's not the point...

NEDDA

Stay out of my thoughts. I'm not healthy anymore. I can't do my work any longer. Only sometimes I can recall and repeat things worth hearing, but then there is no one here to listen.

FERDIE

You have Lizzie ...

NEDDA

It's like talking to the cat.

FERDIE

She lives for you!

NEDDA

I'm sick of her goodness, her eternal patience. I find I go out of my way to make her madder, but she never even gets cross. She is so ... patient!

FERDIE

It's her job to look after you.

NEDDA

What do you know about looking after anyone? My children are too busy with their careers. And besides, they don't like the veld.

FERDIE

Not true ...

NEDDA

Reality. Here you can just be you. No façade. No guile. No intrigue.

FERDIE

That's right, Nedda, I'm home.

NEDDA

And aren't I lucky! Now I've been given the chance to cash in before it is commandeered and pulled out from under my feet.

FERDIE

Life goes on.

NEDDA

And so I must now hand over my life into the loving custody of those who will at least respect and nurture my passion. [*She throws some dried flowers at him*] I am truly blessed.

FERDIE

Yes, Nedda, you are blessed.

NEDDA

When did you stop calling me Mother?

FERDIE

When you stopped being a mother.

NEDDA

And if I vote against this blessing, I will be the one who looks like the old fool.

FERDIE

If you want to put it so brutally, yes.

NEDDA

How is it possible that I can so easily be painted into a corner with my own brush.

[*LIZZIE enters with SOFIE. They carry trays*]

LIZZIE

I thought we'd have it on our laps.

[NEDDA *gets up*]

NEDDA

Don't think for me.

LIZZIE

You can have it at the table if you like.

NEDDA

I don't like being treated like an invalid.

LIZZIE

Miss Nedda, this is only having lunch!

NEDDA

Give me mine. [LIZZIE *hands her a plate*] I don't want to eat among strangers.

[NEDDA *exits*]

LIZZIE [*Calls*]

And don't give it all to the meerkat! He's already too fat. His wife complains.
[SOFIE *looks amazed*] Oh yes, the meerkat is her newest friend.

FERDIE

What's he got that I haven't?

SOFIE

A sense of humour? [*Holds the plate in front of him*] Must I chop it up in little bitty pieces for him to eat because he has a sore footie?

FERDIE

Yes, Ma.

LIZZIE

Excuse me while you two play housie-housie. I'm going to sit out there with my old pals. And in the meantime, as you Americans always say on TV 'Get your God-damned act together'!

FERDIE

Lizzie ...

[LIZZIE *exits. Pause*]

SOFIE

She tells me there are days when your mother can't remember anything.

FERDIE

Not today.

SOFIE

How can you let her live here alone, without a phone, without help, without a brain ...

FERDIE

She has a brilliant brain!

SOFIE

Had. The British had an Empire; Greta Garbo had a career; Dr Nedda Barnard had a brilliant brain.

FERDIE

It comes and goes. After Father's death it seemed as if she wanted to neutralise the past. Wished I could. Sometimes I wonder if all this isn't just Nedda's way of evading responsibility. It is too often very convenient.

SOFIE

And how's the foot?

[He shows that there is nothing wrong with the foot]

FERDIE

I had to do something to stop them. *[He looks out]* You see, they both talk to each other at the same time and no one listens.

SOFIE

I think someone hears.

FERDIE

No, I was wrong. They eat and talk at the same time. Amazing ...

SOFIE

Well, Ferdie, you can't leave her here among these desolate beach houses.

FERDIE

It's a full-time job ...

SOFIE

You've now at last got the time to think of someone else.

FERDIE

Oh yes? And what's that supposed to mean?

SOFIE

You said it. Your wife's found another man. She's okay. Your sons will soon be married and, like their parents, will happily divorce.

FERDIE

Not all marriages go on for as long as those of my parents and yours.

SOFIE

Ferdie, this is today, not last year! Life is on fast forward. What you fuck up in your bedroom, echoes within minutes across the media from east to west. Even my half-blind mother sent me the front-page report.

FERDIE

All just media blah blah blah. You should know.

SOFIE

'Top businessman beats up society wife?'

FERDIE

Yes, and Sofie Clarens is pregnant.

SOFIE

Ferdie, you pulled my hair. You forced sand down my throat. But you never ever hit me! Who taught you that?

FERDIE

I never laid a finger on my wife!

SOFIE

Your army experiences?

FERDIE

After eighteen years of marriage there was nothing left between us.

SOFIE

The stock market?

FERDIE

It just happened, Sofie.

SOFIE

You don't just do that to someone you love!

FERDIE

We didn't like one another.

SOFIE

I don't like most people I have to work with, but I don't beat them up!

FERDIE

I didn't beat her up; I loved her!

SOFIE

Then spare me your love.

FERDIE

We fell in love. We married. We had the boys. Happy families. Then we started looking at each other with irritation. Her way of eating put me off, her perfume. Her laugh! She put me down in front of our friends and strangers. I started drinking too much, and then ...

SOFIE

Sounds very familiar.

FERDIE

We also reflect American soaps.

SOFIE

And the boys?

FERDIE

They went wild. I think they smoke dagga.

SOFIE [*Mocks*]

Smoke dagga! God help us!

FERDIE

We never smoked anything!

SOFIE

Believe me, if I knew something would help, I would've smoked sheep shit! And you too!

[*Pause*]

FERDIE

I can't talk to the boys. I leave them notes. We SMS. Tweet. They delete my emails.

SOFIE

Why don't you come here as a family and leave that equipment behind?

FERDIE

I don't think my sons like me.

SOFIE

The fynbos was our bond, Ferdie. We were joined by a chain of fresh flowers, till drought us did part.

FERDIE

Now it all seemed normal. Every end of year, after boarding school, into Father's big new car and we'd be here in the veld, barefoot within hours.

SOFIE

Pipsqueak! You were always too scared of thorns to go barefoot!

FERDIE

I ran on thorns without flinching!

SOFIE

You ran with constant flinching! I heard you flinch!

FERDIE

Our parents looked happy. We sounded happy. The country pretended to be happy. And there wasn't a problem that couldn't be eliminated.

SOFIE

For squint flat-chested virgins like me, Christmas holidays were always a nightmare.

FERDIE

But we always had such fun. What was the problem?

SOFIE

How can I put it...?

FERDIE

Try.

SOFIE

God, please let someone bump me!

FERDIE

Bump me?

SOFIE

You mean I've been saying it wrong all these years?

[They laugh]

FERDIE

Bumping! We didn't do that then, Sofie. Bumping was a sin.

SOFIE

I was prepared to burn in hell. I prayed: 'Dear Jesus, forgive me, but let me be bumped before the New Year, and I promise I'll be good. I'll help the poor and the sick and the ancient in years! And yes damn it, I'll even become a nun!'

FERDIE

The Catholic Godfather was then heard to shout 'Glory Be'?

SOFIE

I even stopped laughing. A child without fun? I was scared I'd suddenly start crying for no reason.

FERDIE

I never knew.

SOFIE

I was so scared of feeling sorry for myself.

FERDIE

You never were.

SOFIE

Oh but I was. I even wanted to commit suicide.

FERDIE

Here at Avonstrand?

SOFIE

Well, I usually put it off till later. I didn't want to miss the next day's great adventure.

FERDIE

It being?

SOFIE

A bump. With the Godfather's help.

[They laugh]

FERDIE

Remember the Hendricks twins?

SOFIE

Yes. With that redhead ma. She could never wear her false teeth because their mongrel dog wanted to bite her!

FERDIE

She had to chew her picnic with her dress over her head. I you-know-what'ed them.

SOFIE

I-don't-know-what'ed.

FERDIE

Bumped.

SOFIE

They were hideous!

FERDIE

Big boobs.

SOFIE

Yes, but what are big boobs, when your brainbox plays host to a whirl of hot air?

FERDIE

In those years, everything.

SOFIE

Okay Ferdie, I didn't have big boobs.

FERDIE

You had no boobs.

SOFIE

You couldn't have looked properly.

FERDIE

No, I probably didn't.

SOFIE

My IQ was my weapon against life.

FERDIE

You can't fold your palms around an IQ ...

SOFIE

Big talker!

FERDIE

What were their names?

SOFIE

Common girls. Memory fails.

FERDIE

Mara?

SOFIE

And Sara, or something.

FERDIE

They both stood with their bare backs against the rocks, down there on the beach where the brown water bubbled out of the big stone.

SOFIE

You mean, exactly where I once dedicated my Special Rock Garden to God?

FERDIE

Exactly there.

SOFIE

Is that all there was to doing it for the first time?

FERDIE

I thought it was rather special.

SOFIE

Pathetic.

FERDIE

Jealous.

SOFIE

What? Of that Mara and Sara with their ...

FERDIE

Just jealous!

SOFIE

Oh please!

FERDIE

It's your own fault.

SOFIE

I didn't want to go with you.

FERDIE

You could've just asked.

SOFIE

Me? Ask you?

FERDIE

Nicely ... maybe bought me a cool drink ... slipped me a few rand.

[She throws something at him playfully.]

Pause]

SOFIE

Was it nice?

FERDIE

Was what nice, Sofie?

SOFIE

The two-in-one you-know-what?

FERDIE

Well, thinking back now to the other things we did together against the rocks, with our feet in your Garden to Jesus, I can really say I can't remember a thing.

[They laugh. Hold hands]

SOFIE

Who would've thought we'd be sitting here like this, me with my multi-dollar magazine cover pout and you with your million-rand tabloid scandal, and tell rude tales about Mrs Hendricks' girls' boobs?

FERDIE

Six million rand debt.

SOFIE

How is that possible, Ferdie? I thought you knew what you were doing?

FERDIE

Win some, lose some.

SOFIE

Win some, lose everything. How much will they cough up for this land?

FERDIE

Three million plus.

SOFIE

They're mad!

FERDIE

That's our price for the last resort of the Princess *Zeyheri*.

SOFIE

My subsidized sister for sale.

FERDIE

You said your parents want this more than anything. The company must pay up, or end up in court.

SOFIE

How deeply are you involved in this mess?

FERDIE

How do you mean?

SOFIE

The house on the wrong plot; the rape of Avonstrand? Mom and Dada will never take this place out from under Auntie Nedda.

FERDIE

They don't have to know about the deal.

SOFIE

They're not senile. Old people talk to each other.

FERDIE

We just need their signatures. Then we can move amounts around.

SOFIE

Millions?

FERDIE

Maybe billions! Everyone's doing it.

SOFIE

But it can't be that simple? That painless?

FERDIE

We're doing the oldies a favour.

[NEDDA enters from outside with a cardboard box full of toys. LIZZIE also enters with one]

NEDDA

These were in the garage.

FERDIE

We must still talk about that car ...

NEDDA

Help me with this box, girlie ... there. Now this is everything I promised to give you.

LIZZIE

Father John?

FERDIE

What?

NEDDA

Father John, will you be able to get rid of all these toys at the Church bazaar? Are people still that generous? It's so long since I've been to a local fundraiser. I must come this time; it always has such a wonderful feeling of timelessness. Like the old days with its soft pain and silent screams. *[She is aware of their stares]* What's wrong? Is this junk useless?

LIZZIE

'Father John' is stunned by your generosity.

FERDIE

Lizzie ...

LIZZIE

Miss Nedda's decided to clean things out, 'Father John'! Look what heaps up over the years?

[FERDINAND looks in the box]

FERDIE

My old toys?

LIZZIE

Take them.

FERDIE

I don't want them.

LIZZIE

Take them and go! It's time to leave now.

NEDDA

These things once belonged to my children.

SOFIE

Oh really?

NEDDA

Yes. I had two children, didn't we, Lizzie?

LIZZIE

You did, Miss Nedda. Two lovely children.

NEDDA

The girl and the boy.

SOFIE

Where are they now?

FERDIE

I'd also like to know.

[NEDDA scratches in the boxes]

NEDDA

Look, Father John, a beautiful book about our Cape flora. With illustrations. By H and N Barnard.

FERDIE *[Reads]*

'To Ferdie, from Mother and Father Xmas 1956.'

NEDDA

Still smells new. He just unwrapped it, sighed and left it under the tree. Never looked at it again.

FERDIE

I know the book well ...

NEDDA

Ah, but Father John is different. God and Nature have both become refugees along Life's freeway. But the children so often would forget about the tiny plants under their feet, as they'd run to be first at the barbecue, or to fight about who got the biggest ice cream cone.

FERDIE

Just took a shortcut through the veld ...

NEDDA

What is this?

[She holds up a piece of Meccano set]

FERDIE

Part of a Meccano set.

SOFIE

What a wonderful thing to have!

NEDDA

With the little screws and funny wheels, yes. He so passionately asked for this, even prayed to God at night. And then when he got it, just let it lie around the house. Like everything else.

FERDIE

Oh no, I didn't.

LIZZIE

Oh yes, you did. All over the house.

NEDDA

And this? *[She holds up a toy banjo]*

FERDIE

You can't give that away. It's my banjo ...

NEDDA

It's a broken banjo ...

FERDIE

It just needs proper strings.

NEDDA
Strings?

FERDIE
To make it play.

NEDDA
My son wouldn't sleep till he got a banjo, but then as always he was just too lazy to learn how to help it make music. So he just let it lie around the house and here it is.

FERDIE
No.

LIZZIE
Yes.

FERDIE
I want to have it fixed.

NEDDA
Can you play this thing, Father John?

FERDIE
I never learnt ...

LIZZIE
Wait now, Miss Nedda, why don't you send it to your son's children?

NEDDA
I don't know what my grandchildren want. I watched them grow up, but they gave me no clues. I would give them socks for birthdays. Handkerchiefs for Christmas. Books. Many books. A bicycle for Simon. A skateboard for Henry. Then it became easier. Money. That's what they ask for.

FERDIE
What?

LIZZIE
Yes. Little notes to Granny begging for money.

FERDIE
What!

NEDDA

They didn't want to ask their father. They were scared of him.

FERDIE

What ...

LIZZIE

Then Miss Nedda sent a postal order. Do we still have postal orders or is it all internet now?

FERDIE

What!

NEDDA

My grandchildren are also scared of the veld. Keep seeing snakes everywhere.

LIZZIE [*Whispers*]

There are snakes everywhere ...

NEDDA

I think my grandchildren are even scared of their granny. Scared of me? Why me?

FERDIE

[*Mutters*] Lizzie, this is ridiculous ...

SOFIE

Auntie Nedda? You can't all these toys away! These are Ferdie's precious childhood memories.

NEDDA

It's what they call tough love, Sofie. Lizzie and I must start cleaning out the house. Sort out cupboards; give things away. Everything is so cluttered with bits of life and pieces of death. Like these. [*She holds up a bottle of shells*] Collateral damage.

SOFIE

I think I filled that bottle with those pink shells when I was nine. There was a spring tide. The beach lay pink with these rubies. Look, the colour hasn't faded after all these years.

NEDDA

Pink like the marshrose.

SOFIE

How long has it been here?

NEDDA

Orothamnus zeyheri has been here since the beginning of beauty. Long before we came to spoil it all. Long before ships chose to rock and roll.

[*FERDINAND gets up; forgets to act a painful fool*]

FERDIE

These toys go back with me.

NEDDA

A miracle! Father John's foot is healed! Glory be!

FERDIE

You don't give away anything that's mine!

NEDDA

Father John, it is all yours! Look around and take what you want. Everything must go. [*Whispers*] What can I take to the sanatorium, Father? Maybe a book or two?

SOFIE

Auntie Nedda, you can take what you like. Not so, Father John?

FERDIE

Sanatorium?

NEDDA

It'll be an eternal twilight zone. I'll have to share a room with another pathetic old mad mother. Someone's cackling auntie who stinks of lavender water and talks in her sleep. Telling all her sad important secrets that sound so stupidly familiar.

FERDIE

What are you talking about, Mother!

NEDDA

He called me Mother!

FERDIE

No one said anything about a sanatorium! All Blanche and I need to do is move a sum of money from one account to another.

SOFIE

'Blanche and I'?

NEDDA

Father John, you now sound just like my son. He's a nice man, but is so obsessed by money. But as a man of God, you must be practical and beg without shame. Holy Mother Church has good reasons; my son only has debts. [*An explosion outside*] Look what's happening in the sea!

FERDIE

Mother! Nedda! In God's Name ... I'll call you anything you like! That's an oil tanker on the rocks: you've seen it! I am your son: you've already recognized me! This is Sofie Clarens who grew up in front of you. This is the reality. I know you're playing hide-and-seek somewhere in that brilliant brain, but for God's sake, just come out for ten minutes and sign the documents. Then you can go out and chew at the rare flowers and shrubs for all I care!

SOFIE

It's unnecessary to shout at her!

FERDIE

Then fuck off! You're not family!

LIZZIE

Bully!

FERDIE

You too!

NEDDA

I thought I was doing the right thing ...

LIZZIE

You were. Master Ferdinand always gets nasty and mean when he doesn't get his way.

NEDDA

Am I playing hide-and-seek?

LIZZIE

No, he's just saying things to hurt you. Look at him. Shame, the man is disappointed with his life.

NEDDA

Reality.

FERDIE

No, here there is more than just your reality. I am in deep financial trouble. You can help me out of it.

LIZZIE

Or he helps himself.

NEDDA

Why didn't you just say so?

FERDIE

It's only a clump of bushes. Flowers get picked and wither and die! The Taiwanese make prettier silk blooms and they last forever!

NEDDA

Yes, I suppose to some people they will always be only a clump of bushes. We were often made fun of by those who knew nothing. People who shouted that housing was more urgent than a plant with an alien name. 'Just flowers', they'd sneer. Well, it was more than a career. It became our struggle. [*She picks up a pressed flower*] I suppose some invest money and collect fine belongings, but we tried to save the greatest treasure for our children and their children. Natural jewels. The opening of a small flower is so much finer than the opening of a large bank account. [*She picks off petals as she speaks*] At first I also strained to hear what other people were saying about the politics that seethed in the world across the mountain, but my husband just tried to show me the bigger picture. 'Nedda, always remember: Nature is the truth; Man is just the question mark.'

FERDIE

Nuts.

NEDDA

But you're right, Ferdinand. There is just one reality in your world. Your own opinion is all that counts. For you. And then there is the only other reality: mine. Because that is what I see and understand. Or just your reality, dear Lizzie, because it's through your eyes that you observe, and give truth to what you see.

LIZZIE

Am I being thanked for something here? Or blamed!

FERDIE

Well, Nedda, I really think you've fallen off the trolley!

NEDDA

And you also look adorably quaint.

LIZZIE

You're all getting too deep for me ...

SOFIE

'Because it's through your eyes that you observe'? Auntie Nedda, when I was little, I didn't believe I was one with my body. I thought I was sitting inside my head, and looking out of the windows of my eyes towards the outside. Like a ... like a driver!

NEDDA

Sofie, yes! Me too! My body was just my means of transport. I was inside, safe and secret.

SOFIE

Because if you closed your eyes, everything would go away.

NEDDA

Gone! And you become invisible. [*She closes her eyes and holds out her hands. SOFIE takes them in hers*]

SOFIE

Just one reality.

NEDDA

Of course. If you don't like it, it's up to you to adapt your expectations so that the reality suits you, and no one else.

FERDIE

Like you keep doing?

NEDDA

No, Ferdinand, according to you, I've fallen off the trolley. Like an old bag of potatoes.

LIZZIE

We can't drive our car. Now we've fallen off the trolley. Where do we go from here?

NEDDA

But he's right, this sour son of mine. I do often hide somewhere in here ... [*Points to her head*] ... and go through all the diaries of my past, trying to find my spelling mistakes. And some of them are still there for the world to see. Careless mistakes in the chapters called 'Blanche' and 'Ferdinand'.

FERDIE

No one is pointing fingers here.

NEDDA

I'm not guilty of anything, just aware of the consequences of too little done too late.

FERDIE

It's too late for many things, Mother ...

NEDDA

I am not your mother. [*She points at LIZZIE*] There's your mother. She bathed you, washed you, chose your clothes, dressed you. Taught you to speak, sometimes in words that your father and I couldn't even risk in thought. Her opinions became your answers and her questions your problem.

FERDIE

The little dove's feathers are moulting, Lizzie.

LIZZIE

Jissis, and you people haven't even had wine!

NEDDA

Just a pity you didn't inherit the most important gift. She wears it on her sleeve.

LIZZIE

You've all fallen off the trolley!

NEDDA

Her sense of humour. Pity it's not catching. My children are both so bland, so dry. In nature, at least the rains come. What can be done to bring a bit of moisture to barren lives?

SOFIE

Sign the papers, Auntie Nedda.

NEDDA

That's a cloudburst of need. Where is the drizzle of pleasure?

[*NEDDA strokes his head gently and exits*]

[*The light changes from flashback to present*]

SCENE FIVE

[It is raining outside. SOFIE sits and stares out. She holds the banjo. LIZZIE stands to one side]

FERDIE

What are you thinking?

SOFIE

Something your mother said. It didn't make sense then, but I think I understand in now. *[Pause. He kisses her. She pulls away]* What are you doing?

FERDIE

Last time we were here together, you didn't seem to mind.

SOFIE

That's because I hadn't seen you for ages. We talked of the old days. Our youth.

FERDIE

And now, are those feelings of youth gone?

SOFIE

Ferdinand, there were no feelings.

FERDIE

You kissed me.

SOFIE

You kissed me.

FERDIE

You kissed back.

SOFIE

I don't remember.

FERDIE

Right here. Nedda and Lizzie were out there stalking butterflies ...

SOFIE

I feel Lizzie so strongly here today ...

[LIZZIE exits]

FERDIE

After that visit here we went out together a few times. Or is that also too far in the past to remember?

SOFIE

I felt sorry for you. If I recall correctly, you were in the first year of your divorce?

FERDIE

Yes.

SOFIE

You owed money all over the place?

FERDIE

Yes.

SOFIE

You were pathetic.

FERDIE

Do you sleep with everyone you feel sorry for?

SOFIE

Not everyone, Ferdinand. The beggar in the street gets a few dollars. [*She picks up the banjo*] You never took this?

FERDIE

No. [*Plays with the banjo. Pause*] Well I'm sorry, I never meant to invade your privacy like that. I thought, wrongly perhaps, that there was at least a feeling of warmth towards me. I didn't expect our business around this house to force us into a relationship. I apologize I kissed you. I take it back.

[*He kisses her again. She pushes him away annoyed*]

SOFIE

What is it with you men? Either you're unmarried or married, or divorced or separating, but in spite of how we feel, you're always entitled to just help yourself and take what and when you want!

FERDIE

I kissed. I didn't take.

SOFIE

But I'm not sorry for you anymore. This is a different reality.

FERDIE

'Remember Ferdinand, there is only one reality.' You feel Lizzie's presence? Nedda is everywhere. I think I even smell her perfume.

[*Pause*]

SOFIE

You do. I found it on the table in there. For so long parents are the only reality. And then when they suddenly go on without you, the feeling of being abandoned is terrible. I was ... I am still so stupidly jealous of those brittle street kids without background, with their quick defences and smart-arse opinions. [*Holds up photo*] Look.

FERDIE

Nedda and Lizzie and your Mom and Dada.

SOFIE

It's a selfie!

FERDIE

Never! [*He looks*] You're right. They surrendered to electricity and then plugged everything in. Lizzie even started tweeting.

SOFIE

Is that the new car in the background.

FERDIE

Oh God, the car ...

SOFIE

The hearse.

FERDIE

We said we wouldn't ...

SOFIE

Sorry. [*She looks at another picture*] Mom and Dada, Ben and Sally. He looks like a rumpled ragdoll in his wheelchair, and she's laughing as if she can see through her blindness. God, they were amazing.

FERDIE [*looks too*]

Your Dada with a cigarette and Mom with a glass of Chardonnay.

SOFIE

They were happy together. Always. I just knew they never made mistakes. Never

told lies. Never cried. Never felt pain. Never gave pain. Whatever happened that was bad had to be my fault.

FERDIE

Stop it. [*They look at more pictures*] I often wanted to swap parents with you.

SOFIE

You're joking?

FERDIE

Often wished Ben and Sally were my Mom and Dada.

SOFIE

And I wanted yours! At least I knew your mother would tell me some of life's secrets.

FERDIE

My mother was the last person in the world I'd have gone to.

SOFIE

Your ma was always half-naughty about 'those things'.

FERDIE

Sex?

SOFIE

I felt safe with your mother.

FERDIE

But if your parents were so open about everything ...

SOFIE

All except the you-know-whating.

FERDIE

The bumping.

SOFIE

Oh, constant lectures on the cross-fertilisation of *proteacea*, and the Mother Meerkat's clitoris, but never ... I wonder now if they ever did the you-know-what.

FERDIE

They bumped you here.

SOFIE

I think you and I were probably just found abandoned under the same rare and protected giant protea bush out there.

[*Pause*]

FERDIE

Sofie?

SOFIE

What do you want, Ferdinand?

FERDIE

Nothing really, just wanted to know ...

SOFIE

Yes?

[*Pause*]

FERDIE

I didn't hurt you, did I? You know ...

SOFIE

You once set my plaits on fire.

FERDIE

No, that time in Johannesburg? In the airport hotel ...

SOFIE

Hurt? No.

FERDIE

I'm glad. I tried so hard ...

SOFIE

Ferdie, you were good.

FERDIE

... tried so hard not to hurt. I always thought it was just love-with-feeling, but that feeling became violent. I didn't think I could ever be gentle again. Be normal with love.

[*Pause*]

SOFIE

You were normal, Ferdie.

FERDIE

Sofie ...

SOFIE

Thanks, but I'm very happy on my own.

FERDIE

Okay. [*Pause*] Okay.

[He exits. Lights take us out of the winter present and go into the summer flashback]

SCENE SIX

[*In the flashback. Bright and sunshine. NEDDA and LIZZIE enter*]

NEDDA

.... I think that was the first time I stood up and said no. Doctor H was horrified. He said: The University does not allow mixed races. So I said: Then I go back to Italy. We broke the laws, Lizzie. I gave my lecture to a mixed audience.

LIZZIE

Yes. Me. I think I was whiter than some of the people round me. Miss Sofie, we found Miss Nedda's academic gown right at the back of the cupboard. I was the only non-white in the audience. It went on for two hours!

NEDDA

You slept through most of it. [*They laugh*]

SOFIE

Where is Ferdie?

NEDDA

Don't ask me. When he was a boy, I could say: 'Down on the beach with you.' Then as you all got bigger and braver, I lost my assurance about your whereabouts. Are they here, or there? That Ferdinand. Funny boy. When he became moody and didn't get his way, he'd always lash out at the giant protea bushes.

LIZZIE [*Looks out*]

There he is, in the little pathway to the beach.

NEDDA

Lashing away at the giants? [*Sighs*] Go to him, Sofie. You really bring out the best in him. He finds it so hard to communicate what he really feels. The older he gets, the further he seems to run from me. And now this divorce. Yes, it's a pity you two didn't marry as we'd planned. Is it too late for dreams?

SOFIE

No. Not unless you have to get up early.

[*SOFIE exits*]

NEDDA

And they say I'm nuts! What are you smiling about?

LIZZIE

Still determined to make a nest for your boy.

NEDDA

The marshrose is also laughing at me, sitting up there in her tower, sticking out her pink tongue. She knows I'll never see her again.

LIZZIE

We'll climb those rocks once more, watch what I say.

NEDDA

You believe that? So often in the morning I think, yes maybe. But then comes the afternoon and I don't know any more. Why do I feel so ancient today! My son is bad for me, Lizzie. If only he was just a name on my birthday calendar behind the toilet door, or a familiar little sour face in the photo album. Then I could be as energetic and full of adventure as always, in spite of the setting sun. But oh catastrophe, when I see the suspicion in his eyes, and have to hear the weariness in his soul, I find myself searching for a helping hand to that hole in the ground.

LIZZIE

His cloud just doesn't have that silver lining you demand round every corner.

NEDDA

But it's only money, Lizzie! For goodness sake! If it was memory, or the loss of talent, or limbs, yes! But money? Soldi, soldi, soldi! Everyone's got money. I have money.

LIZZIE

So do I.

NEDDA

I have more than you.

LIZZIE

Only because you've always had slaves who slaved for you for free.

[An old joke. NEDDA doesn't react. Pause. Then NEDDA has an idea]

NEDDA

Let's spend our money!

LIZZIE

On what?

NEDDA

Tomorrow we'll take the car and go to town.

LIZZIE

You're not allowed to drive!

NEDDA

You drive. I won't tell. Then we'll buy ... make a list.

LIZZIE

What on?

NEDDA

This letter. What is it?

[Picks up FERDINANDS's letter]

LIZZIE

Church circular.

NEDDA

Looks like Ferdinand's writing.

LIZZIE

Father John and Master Ferdinand have many things in common. So what do we buy?

NEDDA

Jigsaw puzzles! Difficult ones with lots of blue sky and tiny flowers in a big field.

LIZZIE

Our Scrabble has lost some letters.

NEDDA

Just the rude ones.

LIZZIE

You can't play Scrabble without Fs and Bs.

NEDDA

Then we'll buy a new set.

LIZZIE

Monopoly?

NEDDA

I love Monopoly! What else?

LIZZIE

One of those new TVs.

NEDDA

I mean serious things.

LIZZIE

It's important for me.

NEDDA

I say no.

LIZZIE

And I say yes. Today my majority wins!

NEDDA

Lizzie, I don't want that sort of thing in my house. First the portable, then come the wires. Then a hotel with casino and bars! Then the end of everything!

LIZZIE

And after loading my nice TV, all my magazines and ...

NEDDA

Forget it. The idea was stupid...

LIZZIE

... then we buy us a new car.

NEDDA

We have a car.

LIZZIE

We buy a 747.

NEDDA

That's a plane.

LIZZIE

What is Ferdinand driving out there?

NEDDA

A tractor.

LIZZIE

4 x 4!

NEDDA

A tractor like that? For us?

LIZZIE

Then we buy four new beds...

NEDDA

We're only two.

LIZZIE

... with those Japanese mattresses that straighten out old bent backs.

NEDDA

Futons.

LIZZIE

Yes, like in my magazines!

NEDDA

Yes?

LIZZIE

Yes. And then we go visiting Doctor Ben and Miss Sally.

NEDDA

In a tractor? With four beds?

LIZZIE

And then you invite them to come and live here with us.

[*Pause*]

NEDDA

Yes?

LIZZIE

Yes.

[*Pause*]

NEDDA

Yes...

LIZZIE

You know you'll give in and sign that paper?

NEDDA

Yes...

LIZZIE

It's all just a game.

NEDDA

Yes.

LIZZIE

You love your son too much.

NEDDA

Yes.

LIZZIE

Good. He'll get what he wants. But we make the first move.

NEDDA

Yes ...

[NEDDA starts crying]

LIZZIE

Why are you crying, Miss Nedda? We'll all be together.

NEDDA

Because I'm so happy. Ben and Sally and you and me...

LIZZIE

All the rooms still waiting for grandchildren that never come, can now make space for drips and bedpans.

NEDDA

But Ben and Sally need medical help?

LIZZIE

We have enough drugs here to open a tuck shop!

NEDDA

And if it can't heal, at least let it feel good!

[She produces some chocolate triumphantly]

LIZZIE

Doctor Ben can bring some of his red wine ...

NEDDA

... and with Sally's recipes, you can conjure up heaven over the old gas stove.

LIZZIE

A new gas stove! Everything we aren't allowed to eat.

NEDDA

Or drink.

LIZZIE

So what do you think?

NEDDA

Can you handle three old crocks?

LIZZIE

I'm still the youngest, willing to learn. *[They laugh]*.

[FERDINAND and SOFIE enter]

FERDIE

Every time I walk in on your two, you're giggling. What's the joke?

LIZZIE

We can't remember!

[More laughter]

FERDIE

Well, whatever you're on, I want some too.

SOFIE

We'd better start moving to get back. We're on the last flight to OR Tambo.

NEDDA

Before you go, a ride round the block. Can we all four fit into your tractor? I want to see what this machine can do.

FERDIE

Why do I feel this is not a good idea?

LIZZIE

We can go and say hello to the marshrose, isn't that right, Miss Nedda?

NEDDA

Warm, warmer, warmest!

FERDIE

Impossible.

NEDDA

But now it is possible, Ferdinand. Isn't this tractor like the things the military people use to get up onto the mountain?

FERDIE

Yes, but...

NEDDA

So? Thanks to your friends in the Department of Defence, we now also have a road that should be able take us up to see an old friend.

FERDIE

And when you get up there?

NEDDA

If the marshrose is blooming, Ferdinand, I'll sign your papers.

SOFIE

And if not?

NEDDA

Then we'll sit and wait till she blooms.

FERDIE

But what if this marshrose doesn't exist? If your Princess *Zeyheri* is another fantasy?

NEDDA

She'll be there.

FERDIE

But what if she's not there?

NEDDA

Then I see no reason to sign anything. [*She gently pats his cheek.*] I think our Ferdinand is really looking forward to finding a rare flower today. Glory be. There's a first time for anything!

FERDIE

Oh, Mother.

NEDDA

Lizzie? Bring Doctor's camera seeing that all the modern equipment's batteries are flat. We need to take some snapshots. As proof.

LIZZIE

I can't remember how it works.

NEDDA

I remember. I remember everything.

[*She exits. LIZZIE follows, then turns to FERDINAND*]

LIZZIE

I wish you hadn't come, Master Ferdinand. You will destroy her flora and veld. It'll kill her.

FERDIE

Someone is going to do it. Shouldn't we at least keep it in the family?

LIZZIE

I'll help you on one condition: that you wait till she's gone.

FERDIE

That could take years.

LIZZIE

And Master Ben and Miss Sally also.

SOFIE

Thank you, Lizzie.

LIZZIE

Then you can do what you like with all this. Myself? I've always preferred plastic flowers anyway.

FERDIE

I can already see you in the fynbos with your banner: 'We Say No To Nuclear!'

SOFIE

Lizzie Smith, faithful to the end.

FERDIE

As always, dear old Lizzie. What would we do without you?

LIZZIE

Master Ferdinand, you forget so soon. I was always just your cheeky maid.
Never your best friend.

[LIZZIE exits. The flashback in summer ends as the lights change]

SCENE SEVEN

[The lights bring us back into the winter and the present. FERDINAND sorts the slides into the box.]

FERDIE

'There is only one reality, Ferdinand ...' *[He looks out. SOFIE enters with a box. In it NEDDA's favourite hat and the shawl she always wore]* It must've been a day like this when they decided to go up and say goodbye to the Princess Zeyheri.

SOFIE

I wonder whose idea it was?

FERDIE

I think it was truly democratic. Nedda and Lizzie and Ben and Sally sat here and decided.

SOFIE

A landslide in favour.

FERDIE

They knew exactly what they were doing. There were enough of Ben's best bottles in the wreck to prove they'd had a party up there. They toasted their Princess, then plodded back to their tractor. Probably told the same old jokes like in the glory days. Held hands. Closed their eyes. Threw their pills out over the cliff. And then the driver, that cheeky old Lizzie, changed her four-by-four into a 747 and soared into the sky. Glory be.

[Pause]

SOFIE

There aren't many of Mom or Dada's things that I can use. Besides, I'm not a hoarder.

FERDIE

Sentimentality isn't your strong point.

SOFIE

Oh but I am. Achingly so ...

FERDIE

I'm not. *[He looks around]* Maybe I'll keep the colour slides. Do you mind?

SOFIE

Of course you must. [*She points at the projector. He shakes his head*] No, of course, you can have the slides scanned. Will you email them to me? sofieclarens@aol.com [*She strokes the old projector*] So, thanks to hateful progress, the old dinosaurs could revive their beloveds against the wall.

FERDIE

Yes, they're extraordinary.

SOFIE

Yes, they were.

FERDIE

I mean the flowers.

SOFIE

So do I. [*Pause*] Ferdinand, I'm staying.

FERDIE

I thought we might...

SOFIE

Ferdie...

FERDIE

...without any you-know-what'ing.

SOFIE

Rather not.

[*Pause. SOFIE takes out the shawl and puts it around her shoulders.*]

FERDIE

What about your commitments in the States? Didn't they ask you to be a judge on one of those TV shows?

SOFIE

I said thanks but no thanks. Give it to Madonna. I want to find out if I can still look at the world through my little windows. Tell me, Ferdie, if I close my eyes tightly, am I truly invisible?

FERDIE

Yes, absolutely invisible.

SOFIE

I have an appointment with a princess who lives up in the mountain. I need to find that one reality.

FERDIE

Keep a little for me. [*They look out at the sea*] Isn't that where the oil tanker went on the rocks?

SOFIE

Oh? I thought it was over on that side.

FERDIE

I don't think so.

SOFIE

I really can't remember...

FERDIE

I'm sorry about the little Rock Garden you dedicated to Baby Jesus.

SOFIE

But then you're going to build him a nuclear cathedral!

[*FERDINAND exits. SOFIE has put on NEDDA's hat. She closes her eyes. We hear the voices of NEDDA and LIZZIE*]

NEDDA [*Voice*]

Tell me where she's hidden herself!

LIZZIE [*Voice*]

Search, Miss Nedda.

NEDDA [*Voice*]

Is she here?

LIZZIE [*Voice*]

Cold.

NEDDA [*Voice*]

What about here?

LIZZIE [*Voice*]

Cold colder coldest ...

NEDDA [*Voice*]

And here?

LIZZIE [Voice]
Warmer ...

NEDDA [Voice]
And now?

LIZZIE [Voice]
Warmer!

NEDDA [Voice]
I have her!

LIZZIE [Voice]
As hot as hell fires!

[They laugh. It gets fainter]

SOFIE
Glory be!

[She even looks like Nedda Barnard as the lights to blackout.]

THE END