



The New Richmond Reader

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Third Ed.



Our Literary News from the Heart of the Karoo

Welcome To The New Richmond Reader

By PC Baker

From the Heart of the Karoo, in Booktown Richmond we are sending you the very first issue of the very first edition with a lovely short story from the father of BTR, none other than Darryl David.

This little ditty entitled Bliksem and Biltong le Grange has just won the highly prestigious Natal Witness newspaper's Short Story Competition for 2011.

It is not for lack of trying that DD has finally taken the winner's trophy and the R10,000 winner's cheque, (and a Merry Christmas to you too!) as he has confided in me that he has been submitting short stories since he was in short pants and knee socks.

But it was a proud night for Booktown Richmond at The Witness head office last night. In the snapshot category, Denise Gilden walked away with the prize for her brilliant debut short story The Dream. And where do you think she was born? Richmond in the Northern Cape!!! (now living in Pietermaritzburg). We are not including Denise's story here because Darryl had already invited Denise to BoekBedonnerd 2012 even before she had won. All the more reason not to miss next year's festival!

We are hoping that the New Richmond Reader will become the home of short story readers and more importantly short story writers. We know that there are many clandestine writers of this format, who are only ghosts, as they have no forum for their literary productions.

The New Richmond Reader will be sent into the ethers of the Internet every second month and any feedback and suggestions will always be greatly appreciated. In addition to short stories we shall be pleased to publish essays, poetry, letters, photographs and really anything else which you think someone would get pleasure from reading.

Just for interest sake for those who missed the lovely write up chronicling Booktown Richmond's endeavours to become a Picture – Book Town (Mural Town) in Beeld, I attach the link:

<http://www.beeld.com/Naweek/Nuus/Karoodorp-se-mure-kry-lewe-20111202>



Richmond, NC in the heart of the Karoo Photo by Jan Currin

Bliksem and Biltong le Grange

Written by Darryl David

“MUM, Dad is using the number two word again,” my daughter shouts to my wife.

“What’s the problem now?” my wife asks.

“I just phoned Tony and he said the brake pads alone cost R2 500,” I grumble to her.

“Well, why don’t you just miss this meeting for the literary festival?” she asks.

Miss the planning meeting? How can the chief organiser of the festival not be present? What kind of example would that set?

Later that day, I send out an SOS to my network of friends asking if they know of anyone travelling to Cradock or Richmond in the Karoo. If I can arrange a lift to Cradock, the Antrobuses of Die Tuishuise will take me to Graaff-Reinet the next morning, and Peter Baker will pick me up from Graaff-Reinet.

“Let’s hope someone phones me, otherwise lots of people are going to be unhappy with me,” I tell my daughter.

“I’ll be happy if you stay at home. Why do I have to go to school?” she grumbles.

Early the next morning, my cellphone rings. A gentleman with a heavy Afrikaans accent says he is going that way. If I am prepared to share the travelling costs and the car with his Alsatian, I am more than welcome to join him, he says.

And, so, four days later in the summer of 2009, I leave for Cradock with a total stranger, a Mr Le Grange. We meet at Southgate Shopping Centre on our way to Richmond, Ixopo and Kokstad. The first two hours of a nine-hour journey.

When I arrive in the car park, my blood pressure begins to rise at the sight of Mr Le Grange’s car — an old Chevrolet, like the one my grandfather had ... 30 years ago.

“Say hello to Bliksem,” Mr Le Grange says. “His bark is worse than his bite.”

I greet Bliksem who turns out to be a real teddy bear seated on a mountain of blankets on the back seat.

Halfway to Richmond, Mr Le Grange has to brake suddenly to avoid goats running on the road.

“Bliksemse ...,” he mumbles something in Afrikaans under his breath .

The Chevy is going surprisingly well for such an old car. Things are not so good in the back seat for Bliksem, though. All the blankets have fallen off the seat .

If you can call that a seat. Mr Le Grange must have detected the horror on my face, and says : “Ag, don’t worry about that. I’ll tell you all about that after we pass Richmond,” as he fumbles nervously for something on the floor.

“Can I help you,” I ask worriedly, just in case Mr Le Grange veers off the road.

“Nee, I’m just looking for my biltong.” My mind is distracted from this last statement by a strange sound emanating from the back of the car. As I turn around, I see Bliksem tearing at the upholstery of the back seat. “Ag, just leave him,” Mr Le Grange says nervously as he bites rather frantically on his biltong.

As we approach Richmond, Mr Le Grange and Bliksem seem to be getting more agitated. “What have I gotten myself into?” I think to myself.

As we leave Richmond, Bliksem settles down once more. Must be the tranquil countryside. This is the epitome of Africa, I think to myself on the road between Ixopo and Kokstad. Just up the road, I see an old VW Kombi that now functions as the local spaza shop. “Mr Le Grange, would you mind stopping so that I can take a photo of that VW upfront?” I ask. “Okay,” he answers agitatedly as he winds up his window, “but we have a long way to go.” When I get back into the car, man and dog are

frantically biting on biltong and seat, respectively. By now, Bliksem has chewed off virtually the entire back seat. Mr Le Grange, however, is making little progress with the biltong. Must be a really tough piece.

Very close to Kokstad, I can bite my tongue no longer.

"Mr Le Grange, why does Bliksem bite the seat?" I ask.

"Man," he says in-between a few bites, "I will tell you the whole story after our turn-off to Tsolo."

My daughter calls. "How far are you, Dad?"

"He's at Kokstad," she shouts to my wife.

"I'll talk to you later, girl."

After filling up at Mount Currie, we resume our journey. I hate this stretch of road. The taxis are a law unto themselves. My co-travellers seem to concur. A biting frenzy if ever you saw one. Near Mount Frere, I hear a strange sound behind my ears. Bliksem has now started on my head rest. Luckily, the roads are quiet today, and the Chevy makes light work of the windy inclines. However, you still lose time in the towns.

"Why didn't you take the N1?" I ask Mr Le Grange. "It would have taken us more or less the same time."

"Son, I am heading to the platteland to die. This will be my last journey through Natal and the Eastern Cape. Bliksem and I wanted to see this green stretch of country one last time."

"Are you sick," I ask worriedly.

"Ag, no, nothing like that. We are just going to the Karoo to spend the autumn of our lives. My wife passed away a year ago. There's nothing left for us here, so I thought I would return to the world in which I grew up. Besides ... Ah, there's our turn-off to Tsolo," Mr Le Grange says as he puts his biltong away. Surprisingly, it seems no shorter than when he took it out.

What a beautiful part of the world. Scenery to take your breath away, this stretch of road between Maclear and Dordrecht. I am developing respect for this old Chevy. Goes as well as my car, minus all the creature comforts ... and the back seat, of course.

"You know son, I was in the police force for almost 40 jirrs, Mr Le Grange says. Most of that time with the dog unit. Bliksem was my last dog. They let me keep him when I retired. Isn't that right, ou man? You must be wondering why he bites that seat," he says.

"Stress, my boy. Stress. Whenever he jumps into the car, his body is programmed to expect trouble. Highly sensitive creatures, dogs. What do you say in Afrikaans? Gespanne? Ja, that's it. But do you notice how calm he is now? Now that die swart gevaar of Mount Frere, Mount Ayliff and Qumbu is behind us.

"Strange thing, that. He was trained to expect the black man, the bantu, the African — call him what you like — he was trained to see them as the enemy. Trained is not really the right word, man," as he clicks his fingers. "Gekondisioneer, geprogrammeer, you know what I'm trying to say? I named him Bliksem because whenever I shouted his name, it sent a shiver down the spine of the criminals. Ne, Bliksem. Man, you won't believe the kak that went on in Richmond and the surrounding areas. Hot spot? Shit, that place was a bloody inferno. It was war, man, war," he says, as he gets his biltong out.

"What I saw, Son, no man or dog should be subjected to. Have you ever seen a person being burnt alive? Man, you never forget that smell. The eyes. The helplessness as a crowd prevents you from getting to the 'traitor', his hands tied with barbed wire and a petrol-filled tyre around his neck and arms. Ja, that Paton bloke was right: Cry, The Beloved Country. That was Richmond for you in the eighties."

The black necklace I think to myself. With white hands sometimes as puppet masters, we learnt through the TRC. The first victim of necklacing, according to the TRC, was a young girl, Maki Skosana. Worse still, pieces of broken glass were shoved up her vagina. "Ah, but your land is beautiful." Paton's words echo in my mind.

"But Bliksem knows he is entering new country. Only coloureds here. See how calm he is. Man, it has always fascinated me. How can they tell the difference? Bloody intelligent. Look at how he took to you. You have skin that would make a black man blush. But why does he not attack you? You explain that to me. Bloody intelligent."

"Mr Le Grange, I won't worry you again, but just look at that beautiful Dutch Reformed Church against that blue sky. I have to photograph it," I say as we approach Dordrecht.

“Okay,” says Mr Le Grange. “Maybe Bliksem needs a toilet stop.”

“The Afrikaans author Hennie Aucamp lived in this region,” I say to Mr Le Grange. “On a farm called Rus Mijn Ziel.”

“Is that so?” asks Mr Le Grange. “What a lovely name for a farm,” he says to Bliksem as he gives him his hardly eaten piece of biltong. “Rus My Siel. Jaaaa.”

Time flies when you are in conversations like this. Molteno/Steynsburg on the R56 or Queenstown on the N6, says the board ahead. Steynsburg, birthplace of Paul Kruger, says Mr Le Grange.

“Is that so?” I ask.

“Ja, man, everyone knows that. Did they not teach you that in your fancy school?” he asks as he chooses the road to Queenstown.

“Where are you going to, Mr Le Grange?” I ask, changing the topic.

“I’ve decided to go back to Hofmeyr, the town in which I was born. Ja, I heard houses are going for a song there, so I bought myself one, and now Bliksem and I are going to settle down to a peaceful life.”

“Yes, I know Hofmeyr, named after Onze Jan,” I say proudly.

“Daarsy! Yes, I will just do some odds and ends to supplement my pension. I was thinking of starting an upholstery business there,” says Mr Le Grange as I almost choke on my Coke. “In my day, farmers never bought a new car until it was completely stukkend. I reckon there should be a few classics in Hofmeyr in need of a new seat or two.

“Besides, Bliksem has trained me well in the job of upholstery, ne, ou pel.

“And Cradock is just 60 kilometres away. So if I need a hospital, that’s not too far. And, there are only coloureds in Hofmeyr. So I can finally restore this Chevy to the way she was, without Bliksem chewing away at the back seat. And let the men walk past her and envy her

beauty. It’s been a long time since she looked like the beauty she was the day I bought her. When I got married, this was our wedding car. It has taken us all over South Africa. Now she too must rest. But she must look beautiful in her last few years. We all are going to die in Hofmeyr. Ja, a man still needs something beautiful in his old age.”

As we approach Cradock, I am sad to leave my travel companions. My colleague Fanie was right, I think to myself. Dis gevaarlik om alleen te reis. Much better to travel in the company of others. Even with those who are about to sign off in that great guest book on Earth.

I wave goodbye to my fellow travellers. I say my hellos to Sandra and daughter Lisa Antrobus at Die Tuishuise. The phone rings as I open the door to Karoo Morning, my guesthouse for the night.

“Oh, I had a wonderful journey with Mr Le Grange.”

“Mr Le Crunchy?” my daughter laughs. “I can’t say that name. What was his first name?”

At that moment, it strikes me that I never got to know his first name.

But if I had to give him one?

“His name was Biltong le Grange. And his dog was Bliksem. From Hofmeyr Stofmeyr.”

About the Author



Darryl David

DARRYL David is the only Indian lecturer of Afrikaans in SA. He is the founder of South Africa’s only booktown in the Karoo (www.richmondnc.co.za), as well as founder of four literary festivals, among them the Midlands Literary Festival in Howick. He is the co-author of 101 Country Churches in SA.

Karoo Dawning

Written by Darrel Conolly

Petrus de Waal had enjoyed a privileged if not a full life. The only child of wealthy sheep farmers, Marthinus and Sarie de Waal, he'd been born, bred, betrothed and now sadly bereaved on Jakkalsdal, the huge Karoo farm where, save for his time at school and war, he'd spent his sixty-five years. He glanced lazily at the glass in his hand then turned to the man-mountain seated alongside him. "Ja, Kleinjan," he sighed, "we've come a long way together, you and me."

There followed an uneasy silence as Kleinjan Baartman set aside his book, drew heavily on a big black pipe, then slowly released a thick cloud of smoke through yellowed teeth and broad nostrils from which a mass of curly hair sprouted. Kleinjan was a man of few words. A man whose face, however, spoke many. He had been born not two weeks after Petrus, the first son of Ouseun and Meisie Baartman, foreman and head cook respectively to the De Waal family. As children, Kleinjan and Petrus had been inseparable, but such were the influences on young Petrus - the prejudices of his parents and peers, the intransigence of his teachers, the blind faith of his preachers, the bias of the media, the hypocrisy of the law-makers, the silence of a society which chose not to question, and the impunity of the law-enforcers who controlled that society's every move - that they, understandably it could be argued, grew apart in the years that followed. This estrangement had proven a cruel and bitter experience for Kleinjan. To Petrus, it had been a necessary evil - or so his parents, and in time his own conscience, would have him believe.

When eventually Kleinjan replied, it was with slow and measured words. "A long way, ja," he acknowledged. Then with eyes fixed on his pipe, he pressed a gnarled finger into glowing embers, as if to emphasise his point. "Together?" he questioned cynically. "Not always, broer. Not always."

Petrus shifted uneasily in his chair. "Whatever," he sighed in resignation, as he sought to move the conversation in another direction. "And now she's gone."

Kleinjan could but nod his head in silent acceptance and let the wetness that welled in his eyes speak of their shared loss.

The two men were sat on the wide stoep that, with its polished floors and lofty corrugated-iron roof, ran the perimeter of the Jakkalsdal homestead, Kleinjan with his pipe and book, Petrus his brandy and memories. Before them lay the great open expanse that is the Karoo; the far-off mountains - just minutes before a sombre grey - now daubed with lashings of mauve and purple; the endless blue emptiness above awash with delicate wisps of pink, and red, and crimson; and at the very heart of it, nature's ultimate icon, a glorious amber-coloured sun, so dominant and so radiant that when, in the stillness of that passage of day that is dusk, a flock of birds flew by, it was as if all the feathered creatures of this vast and ancient land had as one, taken to the sky.

Petrus sipped at his brandy and leant back in the old rocker. "And now she's gone," he repeated to himself for the umpteenth time, and remembered how she had come into his life that unforgettable September morning, so very many years before.

It was 1935 and both he and she were home from boarding school for the September holiday. They met at the Carnarvon Spring Fair; she a peaches-and-cream bubble of youth in the throws of blooming, he an awkward adolescent who's pimples already had. She, the only grandchild of an 1820 Settler who had tired of British life in that corner of the African continent that was Grahamstown, he, the only grandchild of a trek-boer who'd simply tired of trekking. She, raised some thirty kilometres from Jakkalsdal, yet as only occurs in places rich in land and poor in resources, a next-door neighbour. She, who spoke so little Afrikaans and he so little English. So diverse were their backgrounds, observed Ouseun Baartman in later years, that the Almighty had ordained their coming together, for the good of the Union he had reasoned, whose twenty-fifth anniversary their meeting coincided with.

Despite the great distances that for much of the time separated them, their relationship blossomed over the ensuing years, with the two corresponding regularly - she from Port Elizabeth and he from Graaff-Reinet - their letters of longing and loving often overlapping, such was the frequency with which they wrote and the infrequent nature of postal deliveries. Holidays were eagerly anticipated, relished on arrival and bemoaned for their brevity when at an end. One year she and her parents had travelled to Hermanus for the Christmas holiday, and so unbearable had been their separation

that Petrus had sworn never to be parted from her again, a vow, alas, he would be forced to break not three years later.

It was the tragic death of her father that precipitated their marriage. With her mother, Isabelle, bedridden and ailing, ownership of the family's sprawling farm, Malvern, passed to her. And so it was that on the very day that Great Britain and France declared war on Hitler's Nazi Germany, Petrus Ignatius de Waal took Mary Sylvia Fitzgerald, then just nineteen years of age, to be his lawfully wedded wife.

Petrus and Mary dreamed of a family unlike those that they had been born into. They dreamed of a large family and spoke on their wedding day of the Jakkalsdal homestead resonant with the sounds of children. Many of them; six, seven, maybe more! And long may the De Waals of Jakkalsdal prosper and grow.

But this was not to be, for the Almighty had willed that Petrus could not father such a family. The humiliation of it drove him to bouts of deep depression unlike anything his young mind had experienced, and were it not for Mary's enduring patience and undying love for him, Meisie Baartman once later suggested, Petrus would surely have taken his own life. Instead, he sought solace in his work. But none was forthcoming, for whichever way he turned, it was as if all around him knew of the disgrace that was his infertility. It came as little surprise to Mary and all who knew of his shame therefore, that when the call to service came, Petrus wasted little time in signing up to fight the Nazi menace. He'd be a man among men in a place where one's manhood was measured not by the efficacy of one's seeds, but by the boldness of one's deeds.

Four long years of war awaited young Petrus de Waal, and for those who remained on Jakkalsdal, four equally long years of drought. Indeed, these would prove to be the years that shaped the future of both the De Waal and Baartman families, as it was during this time of heartbreak and hardship that both Isabelle Fitzgerald and Marthinus de Waal passed away. It, too, was the time when Kleinjan Baartman not only took his childhood sweetheart to be his wife, but at the insistence of Mary and to the consternation of the local farming community, also took up residence with his bride in the old Fitzgerald homestead of Malvern. "Now don't listen to a word that anyone says about you and Lisa moving

into Malvern," Mary had told him. "With Petrus away at war and his father dead and buried, it's up to you and me to keep this little lot afloat. That's a big responsibility, Kleinjan, so as of today I'm appointing you manager of both farms. And I won't have any farm manager of mine living in a shack; no matter what the colour of his skin!"

With Petrus 'up north' and, Mary mysteriously 'otherwise occupied' during the summer of 1943/44, the two would see each other just twice in all these years of war and want. Never would Mary explain her whereabouts during that summer, and because of his unwavering faith in her, never would Petrus raise the question. Quite how Kleinjan had managed both farms single-handedly for the better part of six months still baffled an extremely appreciative Petrus, and yet he'd shown little, if any, gratitude at the time. It was an attitude the big man had resented deeply.

A last ray of sunlight settled briefly on Petrus's face as chin on chest, he watched the brandy swirl back and forth in the balloon glass he idly twisted in one hand. Relationships were like that, he mused. Ebb and flow. Bad times, good times. It was natural therefore, that death should be part of the cycle. The ebb and flow of life, as affected by death. He'd often heard it said that a death in the family brought its members closer together, but up until this very moment, had never given much thought to it. For sixty-five years he'd known Kleinjan. Or had he? How well do you know someone, he questioned, when you're unable even to own up to your most basic shortcomings? They'd spent a lifetime together and yet he'd never been man enough to admit that it was Mary who had shown him the light of day. A lifetime together and he'd never had the stomach to acknowledge that it was she who had proved to him just what a coward he was and how good a friend was Kleinjan. The time to right this inexcusable wrong was upon him. "Know something, ou seun?" he said as he battled to find the right words. "If it weren't for Mary, the two of us might not be sitting here today." He looked deeper into his glass in search of inspiration. Or was it courage? "And if it wasn't for this dop, I probably wouldn't have the guts to tell you what I'm about to.

If Petrus was unsure of how well he knew Kleinjan, the same could not be said of Kleinjan's understanding of Petrus. Sensing a long outstanding, yet by now unnecessary explanation was imminent; the big man

squirmed nervously in his seat, but as was his way, said nothing.

"It was back in 1964. December 1964," recalled Petrus. "I remember it as if it was yesterday. We were sitting right here on the stoep; Mary and I, just gazing at the stars. It was hot. Jislaiik, it was hot! Muggies everywhere.

"It's crazy, isn't it?" she said. "Here's this fellow in America, Martin Luther King Junior or whatever he calls himself. Anyway, here's this black fellow being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his non-violent resistance to racism. Yet just six months ago we jailed a man who espouses precisely the same principles. For life, mind you. We sent the man to jail for life, just because he demanded the same things for his people that you and I take for granted. Does that make any sense to you?"

"Who? This Mandela ou? But he's a communist," I said. Gees, Kleinjan, she nearly exploded, ou seun!

"Communist? Who said he's a communist? You don't know what you're talking about, Petrus! He's no more a communist than you are, and that's saying something."

"Well, he's a terrorist. They proved that ..."

"They proved what, Petrus? They proved absolutely nothing! Anyway, I've had enough of this ridiculous conversation. The trouble with you is that if you have a problem with another nation or race, you automatically label them. Anyone who holds different views to your own is an imperialist, a communist or a terrorist. That's particularly rich coming from someone who spent four years of his life fighting a fascist! And while we're on the subject of labels, Petrus, I've got one for you. You're a racist! If not an out and out racist, then certainly a separatist, and to be quite frank, I don't know which is the worse of the two evils."

"Shoo, Kleinjan! I'd never seen her so mad. She was fuming! So I tried to calm her down and get her to tell me what gave her the idea that I was a racist. You know, explain. I think that deep down most of us are racists; whites I'm talking about. But not in a vindictive way, if you know what I mean. It's just the way we are."

A red hue of embarrassment swept Kleinjan's tawny face. Not the embarrassment that comes of being at

odds with one's own shortcomings, but that which derives from a friend's discomfort.

"Well, eventually she quietened down a bit, but she obviously still had a lot she needed to get off her chest. You know what it's like with a married couple; you need to discuss something unpleasant, but because you know your partner will still be there tomorrow, you keep putting it off. Days, months, even years go by, and then something sparks it off and pow! ... it all comes out. At the end of the day though, it was us - you and me - that was on her mind."

Kleinjan readjusted his position then lifted his large frame from the chair and emptied his pipe into the flower bed below.

Unmoved by his friend's coyness Petrus pressed on. "I could see she was upset. 'Seeing you and Kleinjan together,' she said, 'I'm often reminded of two lines from a song my grandfather would sing. I think it was his school's anthem and he'd sing it whenever he was in a melancholy mood.' She sang it for me, Kleinjan, in that beautiful voice of hers."

Petrus wiped a tear from his eye. Immediately the big man beside him reached out and placed a comforting hand on his arm. "Go on," he said softly, "she's listening." And in an unsteady voice Petrus recited the lines that had meant so much to the grandfather of the woman who had meant so much to both of them: "Forty years on, when afar and asunder, parted are those who are singing today."

For a few moments the two men sat in silence, the one gradually regaining his composure, the other struggling to retain his. When eventually Petrus spoke, it was in full voice. "Although for some reason she never asked him, it was pretty obvious that the song reminded him of his school friends. 'How sad it must have been for him,' she said, 'knowing that he'd never see them again, especially with him being in a strange land so far away. Forty years, Petrus. That's a long time to hold someone in memory. Apart from the war years, you and Kleinjan have been together for almost fifty! How fortunate you both are. Yet look at the way your friendship has disintegrated. And it's all your doing, Petrus.'

"I tried to defend myself, but she'd have none of it. 'Have you forgotten those letters you wrote me from

school: like the one in which you said how you couldn't wait to get home; not to see your parents, or me for that matter, but to show Kleinjan how your place kicking had improved; or the one about the riempiestool you'd made for him in a woodwork class. They may seem trivial and somewhat childish now, but at the time they meant so much to both of you. Equally important - and I hope you'll never forget this - while you were at school in Graaff-Reinet, he was being put to work on the farm. A child denied an education by your own father because of the colour of his skin, damn it! Can you begin to comprehend just how far that sets a family back? Do you have any idea how it must have hurt? How it must still hurt? I doubt you do.

"And what of the war years when you were trying to find yourself, or whatever it was you were doing? He ran two farms after your father's death. Two farms. Not his farms, Petrus: yours and mine. You can't have forgotten that already, surely! It was love! Can't you see that? A deep, brotherly love that Kleinjan had for you that drove him for all those years. But that was a long time ago. Over twenty years ago. And all the while I've watched the two of you drift further and further apart; you, by fear of ridicule at the hands of some worthless people you call friends, he by fear of persecution at the hands of Vorster's henchmen. How sick is a society that allows its elected politicians and civil servants to drive a wedge between friends? No, family! For Kleinjan is family, as you will one day discover. How sick is a society that, having erred so, makes no attempt to correct its wrongs, nor seeks redemption?"

"She was right, of course. She always was. But I had no answers, so I kept my groot bek shut. The only thing that puzzled me was the bit about you being family. I mean, you're like a boet to me, I know, but the way she said it you'd have sworn we were blood brothers. But she wasn't finished. Oh no.

"When last did you fellows have a drink together?" she asked. 'By that, I mean a real session. I'll tell you when. Twenty years ago! Aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

"Mary,' I said, 'he's twenty miles away!"

"Thirty two kilometres, Petrus. I do wish you'd get used to decimalisation. It's been with us for four years and is not about to go away. Be that as it may, you visit Malvern at least three times a week, so what's preventing

you from stopping over for a drink once in a while?"

"Kleinjan, I'm embarrassed to admit it, ou seun, but I still didn't understand what she was getting at. 'Gees, Mary,' I said, 'we've ... sorry ... you've given him a nice house - a bloody mansion in fact - and we pay him as much as any white farm manager I know of. Then there's his kid. It costs us an arm and a leg to keep the little bugger, what's his name? Clinton! Yeah, to keep Clinton at that fancy school in Grahamstown.'

"I'm talking about friendship, Petrus, not your working relationship with the man or your moral duty to his family.' She paused, and with that look of hers - you know the one where she'd let you know exactly who was wearing the pants - she said to me, 'While we're on the subject - and this is something I've been meaning to discuss with you for a while now - for the job Kleinjan is doing, his salary is simply no longer good enough. I think we should give him a share of the business.' I couldn't believe my ears! 'But that's illegal,' I said. She gave me that look again, 'Then we'll just have to find a way around it, won't we. Apart from all his hard work, you don't know how good Kleinjan has been to you. One day you'll find out, and I just hope I'm still around to see the look on your face when you do.'

"I don't know what she meant by that last remark, but there you have it. That, ou seun, is how you came to be our partner, legal or otherwise: through Mary's wisdom and the goodness of her heart. Nothing to do with me, I'm ashamed to admit."

The big man rose gingerly from his chair and moved to the edge of the stoep. With one hand in his pocket, the other clutching the pipe he now sucked on, Kleinjan looked out over the endless plains that stretched before him. Plains he knew so well. Stark, moody, ugly, beautiful plains. He had been born amidst these plains on Jakkalsdal, he reminded himself, and would more likely than not die amidst them on Malvern, just 32 kilometres away. How confined had been his life. How parochial.

Night had fallen and a myriad stars now filled a black sky. In the distance Kleinjan could hear an isolated lamb bleating as the last of the sheep were herded into the kraal. It was the cry of a straggler. Just five years ago he could have told from here which lamb it was. Today, he couldn't be bothered. He was too tired; too bloody

tired to bother. With his back to Petrus, he took the pipe from his mouth and watched the smoke as it disappeared into the night. "Ja well, that was all a long, long time ago, broer. Nothing you can do about it now." He stared into the blackness and reflected on those lost years. "How time flies," he sighed. "Struth, it's 1985 already! Nineteen eighty-five," he repeated slowly. "How time flies." Wearily, he turned to face Petrus. "See you in the morning, broer," he said, and shuffled into the house.

Alone. Petrus de Waal felt sadly alone: lost of Mary and lost of hope. For whilst there had been Mary, there had been hope. Hope that the inevitable may never occur in his lifetime. That when twilight befell them, he might perish before she. It was less painful, he concluded, for a woman to preside over the death of a family line than it was for a man. The Fitzgeralds of Malvern were no more. How long would it be before the same would be true of the De Waals of Jakkalsdal? He leant forward, put his hands to his face, and wept.

Mary Sylvia de Waal was buried in the small Fitzgerald cemetery under a tree that only a European could contrive to burden such a parched land with: a large weeping willow which drank thirstily from a span of water caged by the dolerite-capped koppies that surrounded it. Perched on a hill, not a stone's throw away, lay Malvern, once of Fitzgerald, now of Baartman.

They sat in the open, at the foot of the hill that separated homestead from cemetery. The Anglican priest was a tall young man of commanding presence and voice. He spoke first of a childhood romance, the fires of which were lit when sweet Mary Sylvia Fitzgerald was just fourteen years of age, which caused some older members of those gathered to fidget uneasily in their fold-up wooden chairs. He recounted the initial difficulties their relationship had endured, she being of British stock and he of Afrikaans, which invited some in the congregation to nod their heads knowingly. The priest then reminded all of the day Petrus Ignatius de Waal took nineteen-year-old Mary to be his bride, and this was greeted with sounds of approval, for no young girl should remain unspoken for at such an age.

Wiping spots of sweat from his brow, the priest then referred to Mary's utter devotion to Petrus and how, early in their marriage, she would tell those so brazen as to question the couple's childlessness, that it was she

The clergyman then spoke of the De Waals' unyielding commitment to a better life for all who worked on their land, and this brought Petrus further unease for he knew that had it not been for Mary's hard work and determination, his meagre efforts would certainly have counted for naught. The congregation also learnt for the first time of how one evening shortly before Petrus had left to fight the good fight, Mary had chanced upon Kleinjan who, by the light of a candle, was teaching himself to read. So moved had Mary been that she had immediately offered her help, yet so proud was Kleinjan that he had politely declined. And so began a learning process which, had common sense prevailed, may have taken mere months, but instead took years. The value of self-esteem, however, cannot be measured in such simple terms, said the priest, and it was in this context that Kleinjan's decision to 'go it alone' should be seen. This touching insight was acknowledged with polite approval from those seated, and spontaneous hand clapping from those standing to the rear, which in itself resulted in calls of 'shush!' from those seated to the left, and 'shoo!' from those seated to the right. Returning to the De Waals' humanitarian efforts, the priest cited, in particular, their lifelong commitment to the Baartman family, who had for many years now occupied no less a dwelling than the Fitzgerald mansion, a revelation which evoked open gasps and stifled cries of 'skande!' from those to the left of the gathering and 'how could they?' from those to the right. And when the mutterings had subsided, he recalled how the Baartmans' boy had been schooled in Grahamstown, at one of the finest colleges in the land, which prompted the local member of parliament to rise from his seat, cry out that such a gesture was a 'bloody waste of good money!' and storm from the service in protest. The priest then touched on how, despite the laws of the land, Kleinjan Baartman had for the past twenty years shared equally in the profits and losses, the ups and the downs of Jakkalsdal and Malvern farms, which caused some to turn and look upon Kleinjan with envy, others to stare at Petrus in disgust, and Captain Fourie of the local constabulary to reach into a pocket for his notebook.

Once more putting handkerchief to brow, the priest now told of Mary's decision in December of 1943 to be of child, which caused all of those remaining to turn in unison and gaze upon Petrus in puzzlement, and an ashen-faced Petrus to stare back at them aghast. With sweat now running freely from the priest's forehead, he told of how Mary's uncle, also a man of the cloth, had

The priest went on to inform his now bewildered audience that Peter-Jan had been raised in the Port Elizabeth home of Mary's uncle. He told of how he'd excelled at school and, of his own choice, had studied agriculture at the University of Stellenbosch. Then, the priest said, soon after graduating from university in 1964 Peter-Jan had, with the help of his mother, bought a small farm in the Willowmore district. This had afforded him both security and the courage to propose to Sandra, who he had met at university and who he duly married a year later.

Kleinjan Baartman gently laid a hand on Petrus de Waal's thigh, as tears streamed from both men's eyes.

Putting his notes to one side, the priest then looked directly at Kleinjan and Petrus. Peter-Jan and Sandra, he continued, now had three lovely children; Petrus and Kleinjan, who were gangly youngsters in their early teens, and Mary, an eleven year old with a peaches-and-cream complexion.

"Then, in the summer of 1971," concluded the priest, "like my foster father who lies buried behind me, I was called to the cloth. And so it is both in this capacity, and that of son of the deceased, that I have I come here today: to bury my mother in the presence of my father, and the man whose name I and my family bear."

And long would the Baartman-de Waals of Jakalsdal prosper and grow.

About the Author

Durban born and bred Darrel Conolly came to Richmond in the Karoo some few years ago, where he occupies himself writing both South African historical as well as fiction material. Darrel is well known for his acute social commentary and incisive wit. He is to be found at the KarooZing Richmond Gallery on Loop Street in Richmond where he occupies himself tending his garden or madly typing away on his computer; always classical music in the background.



Darrel Conolly

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