

As Written

by

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For my grandparents
and their farms.

To respect the dignity of a relationship also implies accepting the end when it comes. Except in my mind, except in my dreams, where the aftertaste of her still lingers.

André Brink, *Before I Forget*

Prologue

New York, New York, United States, 2020

A large security guard holds the door open.

—Hello, sir. How can I help you?

—I'm Mr. Jakowsky, here to see Mr. Joe Lorn, says a thin, smiling man. He should be expecting me.

The security guard calls up, and after taking Mr. Jakowsky's picture, hands him the temporary identification sticker and points to an elevator bay to his right.

—33rd floor. Someone will meet you there.

Mr. Jakowsky thanks him and makes his way toward the elevator with the manila folder tucked safely between his arm and ribcage. As the elevator pulls him upwards, Mr. Jakowsky can hardly control his excitement. He has been waiting for this meeting for over a month. The whole experience has been completely surreal to him; everything had happened so quickly. It had started at a party that he attended a few weeks ago. Somehow, perhaps it was because of that Brazilian man, the group of people he was standing with had begun to speak about immigration. He had shared his great-grandfather's story not only because it was topical, but also because it is a truly incredible tale and he has taken the habit of sharing it whenever the opportunity presents itself. As luck would have it, a book agent was among those people listening to Mr. Jakowsky tell his story. This book agent, a Mr. Joe Lorn, had come up to Mr. Jakowsky after the group disbanded and inquired on Mr. Jakowsky's interest in seeing if his great-grandfather's piece could be published. Mr. Jakowsky, an avid reader in his own right, was ecstatic at

the proposition and promised to scan the document and send it over if Mr. Joe Lorn would be kind enough to give Mr. Jakowsky his card. Mr. Joe Lorn obliged and as soon as he got home that evening Mr. Jakowsky began work on scanning the fairly long document. He finished by the following evening—the project being delayed only by petty matters like sleep and meals—and emailed the scanned pages to Mr. Joe Lorn.

That was a Sunday, and the following day—a Monday—Mr. Joe Lorn called Mr. Jakoswky to say that he had loved the parts of the manuscript that he had read and was most interested in publishing it. However, Mr. Jakoswsky's scanning job had been less than optimal and he would need to deliver the manuscript in hardcopy—if he felt comfortable doing so, that is; although, it would, of course, be handled with the utmost care and he really didn't have anything to worry about—so that the professional scanners who had attended prestigious four-year universities might scan them properly. Mr. Jakowsky had agreed and so he found himself on the 33rd floor of a Manhattan skyscraper waiting to deliver his great-grandfather's work to a Mr. Joe Lorn, who would in turn hand the piece to a highly overqualified intern who would repeat the job that Mr. Jakowsky had already completed, so that Mr. Jakowsky's great-grandfather's story might be published.

The whole fanfare took all of half an hour, and Mr. Jakowsky found himself back on the street before lunch. Mr. Joe Lorn had said that he would send the first round of edits to Mr. Jakowsky, but that he already had a number of interested buyers and he would be shocked if the book weren't published within the year.

A year and a half later, the book was released to excellent critical reviews.

I

David

The Docks, Klaipėda, Lithuania, 1912

From where he stands on the pier, the boat, surrounded by the negative blue of ocean and sky, looks enormous. It is the largest thing that David has ever seen. The steam is already spouting out of the four chimneys, pluming clouds into the otherwise clear April morning. A white lattice façade runs around the second deck, a distinctly American feature, he thinks. David, however, has no real sense of America. In fact, he has no sense of the world outside of the heavily worked road between Vilna and Malat, the small Jewish *shtetl* where he was born and where he had, up until this week, spent every day of his life excepting three when he had been taken to a doctor in a village towards the sea.

David has been traveling for the last week. The peddlers who came through Malat had told him that a boat was set to leave for New York Harbor on the 3rd of April, and that was all the encouragement that David had needed. Life in Malat had never been easy and in recent years the hardships had become almost unmanageable. The pogroms were nothing new in the Russian Empire; David's grandfather had dealt with them years ago in much the same way that David and his father had to deal with them now. It was this pattern, this cycle of persecution, of worry and fear, of hopelessness, that had first made him consider leaving Lithuania. Then he had received notice that he would be drafted into the Russian army. David was the youngest of seven brothers and his parents had saved their older children from the mandatory service by promising their last child to the

army—they had hoped that something would change, that Lithuania might break free from the Russian imperial rule. Their plan had not worked—nothing had changed—and so the weight of his brothers' freedom now rested on David's back.

The army messengers had come through Malat a day after the peddlers had. The soldiers were of considerable stature and austere; they donned thick hats and held wooden rifles outfitted with bayonets longer than a butcher's largest cleaver. These infantrymen had called a town meeting and read publicly the names of families from which they required men. When David heard his father's name called, his face flushed red, then drained white—the sudden flow of blood made his knees quake and he reached for a post to steady himself. He would die if he were to march with the Russians; there is no doubting it. He is small and slender, and while he is surprisingly strong for his build, he has nowhere near the adequate strength that would be required on the long marches and in the labor camps.

When he returned home that night, after completing his work at the mill, he saw a formal notice nailed to the door of his family's house. The paper was yellowing, but thick and impressive, official with the seal of the General Major emblazoned at the bottom. With the military notice, his hopes that life would improve in his homeland became utterly absurd; his life was what his life had been, and, no matter what he did, it was about to change drastically. In two weeks, a full regiment would come through the town and all those who were supposed to report would join up. David understood that he could not be in Malat when those soldiers came through—if he were still there, it would be as good as a death sentence.

He hadn't been able to convince his brothers to come with him. But now, standing in the shadow of the ships, he begins to think that it is for the best that he

is alone. They hadn't wanted him to leave, but his mind was made up and their doubt and fear would only have encumbered him. At first, he had worried that the army would demand the service of one of the others, but his father assured him that he could save them if he sent the military after David. He is leaving with the understanding that he will never return, that this is a clean break from Lithuania and his only chance of escape. His heart beats quickly with the promise of a new life. He is a fugitive in a new city en route to a new country with no hope of ever returning. He is hopeful that he will land somewhere that will be better than the old mill, the dirt roads, the labor camps, and the infantrymen in heavy black coats. Malat is not a Zion worth weeping over.

The boat is set to board within the hour. He settles onto his rucksack fingering his flimsy ticket; he had expected something more substantial when he purchased it, perhaps the same thick paper that the military notice was printed on or the expensive paper of his prayer book. But it was his ticket nonetheless, and it afforded him the right to step onto the monstrous ship and leave Lithuania.

He shifts his body anxiously, trying to coax the contents of his bag into a shape on which he can comfortably rest. He packed quickly. There was little that he owned and still less that he thought would be worth carrying over land and sea to a new place. He has three changes of clothes, his prayer book and prayer shawl, a small black notebook, and a silver *Kiddush* cup; that is all.

Squirming on his rucksack surrounded by the hum of the port market and smell of the sea, America feels far away. He doesn't have the words to explain it, but he understands the distance in a temporal sense—by the months it will take him to arrive. There was a cousin of a friend who had gone to America once, and

the stories that he told were intoxicating. Still, he has never been one to wish after wealth—he has grown up without running water, to speak nothing of the electricity that he’s seen in Klaipeda and Vilna; he needs little, but Lithuania has given him less than nothing; it has thrown him out.

At last, he finds a position in which he can relax, and he allows himself to close his eyes. The bustle of the port obscures into unfamiliar noises, and his mind takes respite in the deadening of the colors and visual stimulation. It is not just the people that are different here, it is the essence of life; here, movement has purpose punctuated by noises and gestures. Earlier, a peddler had taken David’s hand and shoved it into David’s rucksack in an attempt to convince him to purchase a timepiece, as if David’s choice was a matter of the peddler’s will. He had bought the old copper watch. He will get used to this world.

As he opens his eyes to check the time, he notices that someone is lurking behind him. He has heard stories of shady figures from the big towns. Such stories are common in the *shtetl*; they are a form of self-preservation; they ensure the proper balance of caution and fear that keeps the children from leaving. David adjusts to face the man, positioning himself between his possessions and the threat. But instead of an enemy, he finds a friend.

—David! I thought it was you!

David immediately takes the boy in his arms and feels a swell of sadness churn in his chest—in this instance he is overcome with longing for his old life. Solomon had studied with him in Malat. The son of the baker, Solomon is sturdy and square—the better qualified of the two to serve in the Russian army, and yet he too is here, on the dock, waiting for a ship. Solomon had heard that David was leaving

and, inspired, had chosen to leave Malat, as well, hoping that he would find David on his path.

But when David tells Solomon that he is boarding the ship to New York within the hour, Solomon objects. Gold, he says simply. Doesn't David know that gold has been found in the Transvaal of South Africa? That's where Solomon is going, and David would be mad to try and scratch a life for himself in America when he will be given a fortune on the tip of Africa. What is there for him in New York, Solomon asks. The answer is nothing, and, to David, at this point South Africa is no different from America; they are both not Lithuania, they are both outside of the Russian Empire, and that is all that is important.

The ticket to New York is easily swapped for one to Cape Town—the clerk behind the shoddily painted green bars at the ticket booth doesn't even take David's ticket back, he simply asks for a bit more money and issues a new, equally unremarkable slip of paper. The boat is scheduled to leave later in the evening and David and Solomon pass the time walking through the markets and piers of Klaipeda. The horses catch David's attention. Of course, there are horses in Malat—they work the fields and help till the barely arable plots where only potatoes can survive. These city horses, though, are of a different breed. Their muscles tighten with each step, forming hills valleys, landscaping their jet-black coats, and then recede, returning to the original smooth, flat shine. These horses drag stockpiled wagons from boats to storefronts; they prance. David can hardly imagine that the royal guard rides more noble creatures, perhaps one or two would be white, but in all other character they would be identical.

Although neither America nor South Africa is Lithuania, they are quite literally worlds away from one another. As he walks the streets of eastern Europe for the final time, a simple, abundantly obvious thought occurs to him: nothing can be anything but itself. The horses in Klaipeda are not the horses in the royal guard, but that does not make them the horses in Malat; and the horses in Malat are not the horses of the royal guard but they are as close to horses as any other horse that is a horse. The Transvaal is a place to go, a place to escape, and it will become a place to be, to find and admire other horses, which are the same horses and different horses than those he has seen in Malat and Klaipeda.

II

Albert

New York, New York, United States, 2014

Albert was almost seriously injured this morning. His head had been elsewhere as he tried to cross 81st St. at Central Park West. Had he not turned to look down the street when he had, he might have never known that the yellow cab swerved to the left almost side-swiping the car heading east. As it was, he had noticed the flash of a car and had turned to look down the street just as the taxi avoided him and barely missed the oncoming traffic. It had been close and yet, in the moment and in his subsequent reflection on the near-catastrophe, he realizes that he was certain throughout the experience that everything would be fine. Perhaps it is because there was no flashback in which he saw himself re-living his entire life, or because there was no instant of panic during which the faces of everyone he loved ran through his mind like billboard advertisements along a roadway.

Eating his dinner, he begins to understand just how odd his ennui had been. It had been a moment of clarity for him, a brief glimpse of absolute certainty about the future, an indescribable clairvoyance that led him through the situation without the slightest feeling of anxiety or even an awareness of just how badly he or one of the drivers might have been injured. That he might have died, or that he might have been the impetus for someone else's death, had not even occurred to Albert until several hours later when he was once again crossing 81st St. on his way home from work.

Reconsidering the early morning near miss is a welcome distraction from the

distraction that was responsible for his wandering into the street in the first place. The previous evening he had found a letter in his house written by his great-grandfather from his farm in South Africa, the contents of which had shocked, amazed, and terrified him. Albert hadn't slept last night, and aside from the present moment of retrospection on his ill-fated street crossing, he hadn't been able to think of anything but the letter all day. Sitting in his office earlier that afternoon, surrounded by papers, contracts, he had only been able to consider how the letter that seemed to have been written over a hundred years ago had the power to hijack his day and most likely a fair amount more of his time.

Albert was last in South Africa a decade ago for a family vacation. It was the same type of trip that he and his parents had made often throughout his childhood—it was a return for his parents and an opportunity to gather information for Albert, a chance to learn the country's pattern of life. During that trip, he had asked his mother to take him to the farm where she grew up. He had wanted to see the land that grounded his family in Africa; he had been curious whether the plot would prove meaningful to him. His mother had agreed, but as they turned into the farmstead two hours outside of Johannesburg, she began crying and insisted that they turn around—the new owners had cut down the trees that stood sentinel along the farm road, and as if scared by the missing protection, they fled from the road's nakedness.

His mother's reaction had left Albert all the more intrigued. He wrote about it incessantly upon his return—this when he was still in college and still writing. But as his opportunities for creative outlets grew slimmer and slimmer, Ster—as the farm was named—receded from his thoughts. Instead of the farm and its stories, he

became consumed with his job, with his marriage; his life in the present seemed more important than the frayed strings and dead ends of his past.

After years of not thinking of the farm though, during which time many of the people that he might have been able to talk to about it had died, Ster is once again consuming Albert. This time, the questions and mysteries are clearer, and the answers are even more opaque. It had been easy during his childhood to understand the farm as a place that gleaned all of its significance from his families love and connection to the land—the hours that his grandfather spent tilling the land, the days that his grandmother had spent in the little office compiling pages of data, the years his mother and uncle and aunt had spent wandering the fields searching for its secrets. Now, however, the full magnitude of its power teases Albert.

He is feeling antsy; he has never been able to sit still—in primary school, his teachers' most frequent complaint during conferences was that he would stand in class, they would all sit him in the back of the classroom to give him free range of motion; he thinks more clearly when moving. He heads toward the large window in the living room that looks out over Central Park. When he and Heather had first considered renting the apartment, the window had sold him on the space. In fact, it had always been the windows that had sold him on this city; the view of the countless lights and movement from above have always inspired in him a sense of the sublime—as one might feel standing on the hull of a ship looking out into a massive thunderhead. It is snowing lightly, and the flakes flutter in and out of sight as the wind pushes them under and through the streams of light coming through the windows of illuminated apartments, the headlights of the cars below, and most

quietly, the street lamps on the road.

If Heather were home, he would be able to work through this more easily. He picks up the phone, and even after calculating the time difference, and determining that it is three in the morning in Paris, still decides to dial Heather. She doesn't pick up. He had been hoping that she would be working late.

—Hi, Heath. I know it's late there; if you're still up, though, and get this message, give me a call when you can. All is well, I just have something that I need to talk to you about and I figured that you might be up. Either way, hope you're doing well. Love you. And also don't worry about calling too late. I'll be up. Just call when you can.

Albert hangs up the phone and walks back to the window. Slowly, he is beginning to realize that his uneasiness isn't rooted in his need to think, but rather in his desire to go, to see for himself, to learn the truth. This epistemic energy burns in him fiercely. In his youth, Albert would often attack his father with a barrage of unanswerable questions and incessant 'why's. His factual curiosity grew into a fascination with textual truth and accuracy, an attention to detail in words and phrases that had allowed him to be successful in his work. This letter, however, of all things that he had ever needed illumined, stands alone atop the list.

He retreats into his back bedroom, pulls a small traveling bag out of the closet and begins hastily filling the black tote with a random collection of summer clothes. When there seems to be enough for a day or two, he moves back to the living room and picks up the phone once more. He calls South African Airways for information on flights to Johannesburg. The next plane leaves in seven hours. He reserves one of the last seats. With his flight booked, he takes the bag to the entrance hall, sets it

by the door, pulls on his jacket and makes his way to the elevator, leaving the packed suitcase in the apartment. The elevator delivers him into the lobby. He is walking back towards 81st St. now, but crosses into the park before he reaches the intersection. Central Park is beautifully quiet under the muffling white powder. Suddenly, Albert feels as if he has been running; he is gasping for breath, but each mouthful of frigid air he swallows constricts his lungs further. He cannot remember walking to the park. Over and over, he relives the conversation with the airline agent. He is drowning in the cold air; he clutches at his throat, and stumbles to a bench nearby like a drunk. Prostrated, his hands reaching far above his head, Albert fights to regulate his breath. This is all explainable, he tells himself. The oxygen is at last arriving in his lungs, and although his heart is still pounding, his mind can wonder away from the task of breathing.

Looking up from the bench, the naked branches of the overhanging trees look like black webs against the light, which radiates from the lampposts. Albert watches motionlessly as the wind makes the shadows dance. In the day, shadows are those areas where light should be, but is not; during the night, they are those areas where the light that should be absent is rightfully removed. In the park, the light and shadows are equally unnerving.

Albert sits up on the bench to take inventory on the past 24 hours. He had been looking through his parents' old kist, where Heather keeps the tablecloths, for some napkins because they were out of paper towels and he had just spilled his beer. In his childhood home, the oak kist, carved with elaborate flowers and harnessed by a lion head clasp, had sat behind the door leading to the kitchen in an alcove that stretched four-and-a-half feet across and reached a couple feet into the

wall. It was without doubt one of the most interesting pieces of furniture in the house; it even stood out among the framed African figures and abstract serpentine stone sculptures, and Albert had always wondered why the piece was hidden in the corner. He now wondered if it had been hiding this letter, if his parents had known about it all along. The letter only caught his eye last night because the envelope was square and white—close enough to a napkin that it warranted a closer look. Once he pulled the napkin-like-object from the kist though, he knew immediately that it was something important; the paper felt old and it was nicely weighted, as if it had been made specifically to survive over a hundred years and four generations.

Once Albert read his great-grandfather's letter, once he saw his own name in the man's tall, elegant hand, the complex absurdity of what would follow had dawned on him. Even if it were some kind of hoax, or even if the letter were only the incoherent ramblings of an old man who lost his mind at a relatively young age, its very existence required Albert to act in some way—to try to understand. His first thought had been that he needed to go to the farm, to experience it for himself, and find whatever clues might be there that would help him understand how the writer had been able to know everything he had written. But then, denial and doubt had flooded him. All he knew of the farm had been shown to him in disjointed black and white video, disparate pictures, and broken anecdotes. To think that the letter might carry truth, that there might be some way that his great-grandfather that had laid out everything that would happen to his family years before it did was all too much, too unbelievable, for Albert. Surely, he had thought, it was a joke, perhaps the type of long con that he often used to trick his friends and family; it had to be Heather giving him a taste of his own medicine. Maybe she

had planted the letter years ago and even she had forgotten about it. But it is the physical qualities of the letter—the penmanship, the discoloration, and the dry crisp of the paper—that make Albert think that it is something more than a trick. If it had been Heather, she had done a hell of a job, spent hundreds of dollars even. And the more he had thought about it throughout the day, the less plausible it seemed. Heather didn't have the time to pull it off—and she hadn't for years.

As the day had matured, his belief in the letter's veracity had grown like a fire slowly expanding from a few pieces of kindling into a strong blaze. The whole process had culminated in his purchasing of the plane ticket and the subsequent panic attack. Sitting on the bench in the park, now with a light film of white hanging on his coat and hair, the fire has begun to burn low, the tall flames quickly dwindling after the height of their strength. Albert, once more, is doubting the letter; or perhaps, he is coming to his senses, recognizing that even if the letter is real, it is still insane to fly out to South Africa tonight before he even speaks to his wife and gives her the opportunity to claim responsibility for the stunt.

For the first time since he read the letter, he has reached a moment of peace. Inaction, right now, seems like Albert's best option—to sit and wait. If it is real, the letter has sat idly for years, so another day or two, or week or two, won't make any difference. And either way, Albert tries to reason, this is merely the type of curiosity that occupies the brain for a few days before flitting off and leaving that space to be filled by more immediate, pressing matters. This is no more than a goofy phase, and he is not running across the world on a goose chase right now; it would be ridiculous. In a few days, the letter will disappear from his thoughts.

Relaxed by this conclusion, Albert rises from the bench and retraces his

footsteps, walking out of the park. At the street side exit to the park, he finds his neighbor Emil walking his dog, Fido. The Labrador is friendly, and whenever Albert sees her, he wishes that she were his. He and Heather have spoken often about getting a dog, both of them love dogs and want one badly, but each time they discuss it, they come to the agreement that it would be unfair; they both work so much, and they have always agreed that raising a dog in an apartment is far from ideal. As Albert greets Emil and then reaches down to pet Fido, he contemplates asking the owner if he can borrow the dog for the night. He knows how strange the question would sound and what an uncomfortable situation it would create for Emil, but even though he is feeling better he would still prefer to not be alone tonight; he doesn't think that he will be able to sleep and if he had a bit of company the time might pass just a tad more quickly. Ultimately, he decides against it, thinking that if he allows this issue to bleed into other arenas of his life, it will only become more real and more difficult to control. He pats Fido once more on the head, bids Emil a good night, and carries on back towards his apartment building.

The snow has begun to fall more earnestly now—the flakes are larger and wetter than they were when he first left his building. Albert shakes the snow from his shoulders as he enters the foyer, and heads back upstairs to unpack his suitcase. Once his clothes are back in their proper drawers and the bag is safely stowed deep in the closet, he pours himself a whiskey, turns on the television and settles into an attempt to keep himself distracted.

Albert jumps awake when the phone rings. He doesn't remember falling asleep, but as he turns down the sound on the television, he sees that it's 3:34 A.M. On his way to the phone, he kicks the coffee table and stumbles forward, stubbing his toe

and banging his knee on the corner of the couch. Limping, he finally reaches the phone.

—Hullo, he manages.

—Al? Did I wake you? I'm so sorry, honey, but you said—

—No, no. Don't worry about it. I wanted you to call.

—Is everything all right? I just got the message now. We were starting late today and I haven't been getting very much sleep, so I decided to sleep in, but had I known that you wanted to talk—

—Please, Heather. It's fine, he says getting a bearing on his surroundings.

—Well, what's happening?

—I'm really not sure where to start.

Albert rubs his eyes. He has been waiting to tell Heather about the letter—he had been sure that if only he could tell her about it everything would seem much clearer. Now that he has the chance though, he doesn't know if he wants to tell her. Partially, he is worried that it will sound insane, that she won't believe him, or worse that she'll worry about him. But there's also something else, a desire to keep it to himself, an understanding that whether or not it was real, whether or not his great-grandfather had written the letter, it was meant for him to find and for him to read.

—Did you by any chance put some weird note in my parents' old kist? You know, the one where you keep the tablecloths? He asks.

—No, says Heather truly confused by the question. What did you find there?

—Well, there's a letter, and it seems like it may be from my great-grandfather and I just wanted to check that you weren't messing with me.

—No, I'm not. Heather says. That's so strange. I've never seen a note in there, what does it say?

—It's kind of to the whole family. Don't worry about it now. I'll show you when you get home. How's the work coming?

Neither Albert nor Heather mentioned the letter again during the conversation and Albert decided that he'd let the contents of the mysterious note sit until Heather returned and could read the words for herself. In the meantime, he would carry on with his life, and do his best to ensure that the letter didn't cause anymore car accidents. After hanging up the phone, he makes his way to the bedroom, lies down, and falls asleep almost immediately.

III

Hannah

Johannesburg, Transvaal, South Africa, 1980

This morning, a dense fog settled over Johannesburg. Hannah walks through the haze of Louis Botha Avenue with quick, stilted strides, grasping the satchel with the papers in it close to her hip. The jacaranda trees, their top branches lost in the thick low clouds, stand tall along the busy thoroughfare; she keeps glancing upward to them as if bargaining for her safe passage. Of course, there is nothing for her to worry about and she knows this well. A petite white woman with sharp features and soft bright eyes, there is no reason that anyone might stop her before she arrives at her apartment where her fiancé awaits her. Now, if she were black, she thinks, but quickly rejects the notion; such considerations are not worth the time. If she were black, not only would she be unable to leave South Africa, but she would also have already been removed from her home. She would further be unable to leave the home in the neighborhood, which, the government had decided, would be her new home but which had little to nothing in common with the home where she grew up and learned to be who she is.

From behind, she hears someone calling her name. She carries on walking forward. It comes again, more urgently this time. How this person knows her name, she has no idea. A hand falls on her shoulder, making her jump and spin wildly, landing her in a balanced stance like a sprinter waiting for the starting gun.

—Hannah, hey, the hand's voice comes.

—Jesus, Justine, you scared me.

—Well, I've been calling your name all the way down the street.

—I'm sorry, I didn't hear.

Justine is sprightly and well intentioned, a girl that Hannah has known since her time in the secondary education boarding school. They are the same year and had lived in the same quarters with eight other girls, all of whom were sent from the surrounding farmland to study in Johannesburg. While they had never been close friends, the two had always felt a bond of the sort forged from mutual struggle and self-pity, both had to watch daily as the children from the city returned to their houses and families while they returned to the dormitory. This sadness might have been less acute if either of them had less to miss from home, but both girls, as did most of the other boarders, wished for nothing more than to return to their farms, and revel in the elation of open fields and skies speckled with trees instead of buildings.

—You look gaunt. Is everything all right?

Hannah pauses; she wants, badly, hungrily, to tell Justine everything. There is a satisfaction in revealing secrets to people who don't deserve to be told, and she feels as if she has been walking around for weeks like an unexploded thing, just waiting for the requisite pressure to ignite in her a performance filled with tears and shrills. But she steadies herself, recalling once more that the secret of her leaving is not so much a secret of necessity as it is one of convenience—the fewer people that know, the better.

—I'm fine, thank you. Just a bit run down. How are you?

The formality of conversation has always been easy for Hannah. And now, trading trivialities with Justine, she enters a trance state of polite nods and well-

timed audible acknowledgments. She finds herself thinking that this will most likely be the last time she ever speaks with Justine, and her surprising aplomb at this realization reaffirms her confidence. As much as she will miss home, she has never been sentimental in her relationships.

After hearing about Justine's trouble with her final examinations and expressing her sincerest support, Hannah, wanting painfully to be back in her apartment, tries to remove herself from the interaction by explaining that Leo is waiting for her. Justine says that she understands, but that she's going the same direction and will walk with her for as long as she can. The simplicity and directness with which Justine speaks offers Hannah no choice other but to oblige and continue walking, moving forward with this most inconvenient companion. She had hoped that this transition—the collection and delivery of the papers—would operate as a precursor to the larger, more violent and scary transition of the next few days. The papers, once signed, would represent a nominal detachment, if not for her personally then certainly by association, and doing so, she had been thinking, would make less intense the physical movement that would follow. She had still been working to internalize this appeasement when Justine had torn her from her ruminations. Now, she is in the most unfortunate position of talking for the sake of politeness without having anything worthwhile to say, when she in fact has a number of worthwhile thoughts that she should be preoccupied with thinking.

If they were to continue walking down Louis Botha Avenue, they would arrive at the university. This occurs to Hannah not because it is where they attend classes, but because it is where they are most watched. The university is the epicenter of

the government's suspicion of the white community and for good reason. Behind its columns, in the halls and classrooms that smell most strongly of darkness and things not meant to be known, students meet and discuss and plan. These are not meetings meant to overthrow the government as such, but instead are the work of intellectual exploration—the way that the earliest novelists wrote travelogues from armchairs. Sometimes, the meetings bleed into the street, and it is these moments of strength that have the government and the police most concerned. Controlling the frustration and anger of the black population is simple; De Klerk has proven that there is nothing that he is not capable of doing and in this way has earned the authority of a mad man—the scared expectation that he will do anything to succeed. It is a terrifying logic that has spread into the white community and effectively suspended mass motion and arrested development. This government has chosen fear as its weapon and wields it liberally, all in the name of order. And what's worse is that Hannah feels the compulsion to order in herself even more urgently than she feels fear—she has been trained so well to obey orders that her decision to leave with him inspires in her a bashful guilt, like a dog that when told to sit but not wanting to oblige sticks his tail between his legs and haunches off towards the corner, looking back now and again to see the reaction of his owner, searching for forgiveness.

Justine is still talking about her examinations when they hear a commotion across the street. A number of police officers have surrounded a black laborer, a miner maybe, and are now yelling at him in thick, heavy voices. From the other side of the road, the man is almost invisible in the crowd of uniforms and fog. Hannah sees him backing away and ducking down, doing his best to make himself

small in the hope that he might be able to disappear entirely. There are other workers who stand by watching their comrade shrink and who, in their silence, disappear themselves, buried under the noise of the officers as if consumed in an avalanche of authority and low-lying clouds. It must be something about his pass, perhaps it is expired or perhaps he forgot it, or perhaps it is a forgery. The two young women slow their pace, but neither of them will stop and acknowledge the situation in all of its blatant and brazen horror. Hannah tightens her hold on the bag swinging off her hip.

Before they reach the end of the street the thick white fog has swallowed the scene and after they pass the next block in silence, the sound of the officers' admonishments die away too. As soon as they are out of earshot, Justine begins discussing the difficulties that she had with her law course once more. Hannah continues to listen idly until they arrive at her building. She says goodbye to Justine and mindlessly accepts her invitation for dinner the following week, if for no other reason than to shorten this final conversation.

When she opens the apartment door, he is waiting for her. The white cloud column hangs outside the window like a stucco wall, dotted and patterned by the precipitation hanging off the glass pane. She kisses him softly, hands him the papers, tells him that there were no problems, and moves into the depths of the apartment to begin packing. She takes the tattered brown bag—a leather, Samsonite vintage—out of the closet in the hall, sets it on the bed, and fits the first pile of clothes into the right side of the case.

He sits at the coffee table in the next room thumbing the papers carefully. From the corner of her eye, she can see the occasional flash of the pages, cresting and

sinking like a circling bird. This country has learned to make itself small and cramped. Even in her home, sheltered by the familiar tonality of comforting memories, even on this precipice, as she straddles the possibility of escape—just hours away now—the walls of his apartment have never felt more like a holding cell, down to their grey hue. The piles of documents are all in order.

Last night, neither of them could sleep. Leo had told Hannah that he had been thinking about Eric. The Vlakplaas had battered in his door the day after he left for the United States. They had heard the wood crumbling, a sound somewhere in between the satisfied snapping of a twig under boot and the panicked ping of a metallic gunshot. A few days before Eric had left, they had used his phone to try and dial through to the United States. Eric had a contact that he imagined would be a worthwhile resource in Leo's search for a doctorate program that matched interest. Leo had been speaking with the man based in New York for several weeks, but at his last attempt to make contact the call wouldn't go through. Instead, there were clickings on the line as if someone were tinkering with a clock—dull irregular ticks. Who the fuck is that, he had yelled, voice cracking. Eric had taken the receiver from his hands calmly, replaced it on the hook, and unplugged the telephone. Leo had been sure that when they broke into Eric's apartment they would question everyone on the floor, and that they would recognize his voice. He had retreated into the intimacy of their bathroom, a threshold that this military in its obsession with order would not disregard, and she had positioned herself in the living room, buttressed by the normalcy of the beige floral upholstery and wide criss-cross of the wooden floorboards, poised to deflect any questioning. The knock never came. They had been sure that it was a ploy, an

attempt at an ambush. A week later, the knock still has not come. Fear, she finds herself thinking, is well worth running from.

She has been feeling scared, too. At night, she twirls under the covers, kaleidoscoping different darkneses. She does not attend the rallies and the protests at the university, so there is no chance that they have her picture. She is not the one that the army wants. She is careful to not talk about her politics with anyone except him and a few of his friends. She and her friends try to be as apolitical as possible in their interactions. No, her fear is not based in what she imagines happening to her, but in the very possibility of being caught and found guilty of crimes by association. Nightsticks, uniforms, and black boots don't haunt her dreams, like they do his. Instead, she fights shadows and ghosts. She shakes at the idea of being yelled at. A faceless man has been starring in her recent nightmares. He speaks to her in harsh whispers. Sometimes, his hand will curl around her shoulder and begin to spin her; she rotates with his dictation, folding over herself like a pill bug in a boy's hand. When she wakes, the empty eyes feel omniscient in the blackness of their bedroom. She shifts closer to Leo, and does her best to regulate her gasping.

Her brother will be coming over any minute to say goodbye. He had told her that he understands, and after that they let the conversation slide into easier matters. After their parents and younger sister had left South Africa four years ago, they shared a flat in Linksfeld, and while their lives were centered in entirely different spheres—he always in the university library, she usually in the well-lit living room—having each other had blunted the loneliness of familial isolation. He is sharp witted, but Hannah wonders how much he understands what her leaving

means, wonders whether he has even realized that her leaving means that he is the sole member of their immediate family still based in South Africa. After matriculating, he had received an exemption from army service for medical reasons—a problem with his leg. The noise and messiness of politics have never been for him; he feels safer in the chaos of organs and controlled bleeding, or behind the shelter of fortified stacks of old books that smell like earth and ink.

They all are tied to the land; perhaps, they belong to it. None of them are brash enough to acknowledge this connection directly. Leo worries that in admitting his belonging, he admits collusion. Hannah worries that belonging means she will never be able to truly leave. Leo belongs to the continent—he is African, of the yellows of the scorched brush in the dry season, the greens of the lush bush in the wet, and the blood reds of the sky sliced open by the sun tumbling over the horizon. She belongs intimately to the land itself, to Ster specifically, the farm where she was raised, knowing its creases and folds like a young child recognizes her father's hand from years of touching, looking, holding. She carries its gravel in her elbows and its mud in her calloused feet. When she was small, Ster had been the whole world, her anthropocosmos; for hours, she would explore its fields and woods, searching out the perfect tree under which to read and be at rest. There were standards that she had for the bark—smooth, but not unblemished—and the branches—dense enough for shade, but wiry enough to draw shadows on the ground, which she would trace with a thin branch. Her brother is the same. He will never be able to leave; he belongs too deeply, too essentially, he does not question his belonging, like we have learnt to not question whether our houses are our homes.

—So they will have your picture behind the counter?

—Yes, but the file will be gone.

—You're sure?

—Hannah, please.

Hannah cannot help but continue to ask. She has asked him to be patient with her; this is all so new for her. Leaving is a decision he made years ago. When he was ten, the police came to his home to interrogate his father; a neighbor had seen their gardener's son playing in the pool with Leo and his brother. The officers were built like cubes and neatly uniformed. As they yelled at his father, he peeked through a crack in his bedroom door. For an instant, he caught his father's eye; his father glared at him with disdain, demanding that he retreat to his room to forego the embarrassing scene. Leo hid behind his door, scared and angry—angry that these men had intruded, that they had conquered his family's home, and forever burnt into its walls the resonances of his father's castigation.

When his first draft notice was left in the mailbox of his parents' house, they had hidden the paper from him. They had not even brought the letter past the gate, but instead, his father had gone at once to his friend who worked in the government and filled out the appropriate forms. That he would continue his studies at university after his matriculation had never been a question, and he had known better than to ask about the letter from the army, although he had been sure that it had come. His studies had allowed a postponement on his service, but not a complete exemption. He has taken three courses of study now. He finished a master's dissertation two months ago and is expected to be in the military office in Johannesburg three days from now. That same friend of his father's, who had

received his forms after the first notice, had guaranteed the interim period of freedom by hiding Leo's file for a month and a half, but the error had been corrected.

A rugby player at the university, big, wide, and strong, Leo would be able to physically handle anything that the South African army might ask of him. Chances are, his degrees would qualify him for a desk job where he would sift through information or work intelligence—spying on his friends. His job at the airport has prepared him well for these tasks. The army would feel lucky to have so smart and qualified an officer. The simple, difficult truth, which Hannah sees, is that he would make an excellent soldier. His drive and commitment to success would fit well within the military complex; in a different life, in a different place, in a different military, he would excel at the job. She thinks of him in uniform. From the safety of her bedroom, this daydream can breathe; she can indulge in the distractions of a life with more simple boundaries, with clearer answers. In a few hours though, they will have to leave the apartment and forfeit the protections that home promises dreams, will be expelled into a reality where they are aliens, wonderers.

He closes the folio of papers and moves through the hallway that used to house the family pictures—hung in an ascending diagonal that signaled to visitors that they were traveling from public to private space—and into the room where she is slowly, carefully packing the suitcase. They had taken the frames down a week before and after replacing the pictures in photo albums, had delivered some of the collections to his parents and shipped others to her parents. The irony of this dispersion had not been lost on them; they had spoken of playing god and

scattering the threads of their lives by way of postal carriers—these sorts of repetitive allusions never used to be possible. South Africa seems to be contracting as the world expands and advances; the future has lost its rhetorical power, which has instead been invested in the ability to make people scared, to create a fear that travels with them in their daily lives and bounces off the buildings they migrate in between. People have begun to speak in whispers, even indoors, even in their own houses and offices. He does not take well to being infantilized, offended, or controlled. He has a temper that highlights his broad shoulders—it too would fit nicely in the military. This way of life—the constant necessity to take care and distrust; the unhindered power of bureaucracy, of passes and papers; the suspicion of smiles and eyes, projected in all directions as if in a mirror; the government’s consistent challenges and the inability to operate outside of the system; the cost of implication that comes with buying milk at the grocery store—sets him on edge, and has made him contrary.

She has learned to manage his frustration in the year that they have been dating, and particularly in the four months that they have shared the apartment off of Louis Botha Avenue. Their building is unremarkable, a white façade with red trim and crumbling paint in the doorframe; and their apartment, although warm and well decorated in deep browns and soft beiges, is equally ordinary. Leaving the apartment does not trouble her, this little group of rooms is entirely beside the point.

Beyond her love for him, she understands well why they have to leave, why it is an obligation, if not a moral one then a humanistic one or a maternal one—this is no place to grow children; they would have to be hidden; they would be stunted by

tall walls and community guards. During her childhood on the farm, she had no way of grasping the confusions, contradictions, and horrors that were realities throughout most of her country. The small glimpses of insight that she had been afforded manifested in her total terror at school, where the order was strict, and the judgment certain. In her elementary years at the Afrikaans school down the road from Ster, she was subjected to daily underwear checks, during which female instructors would line up all of the students and check if their underwear matched the rest of their uniform. If a student were wearing the wrong pair of undergarments, they would be beaten and sent home shamed. It is the voyeuristic essence of this spectacle that she recognizes in the passbook checks and the forced expulsions, in the undercover operatives scattered around campus and the pictures of people of interest hung in government offices. Always and everywhere there is reason for concern; she can't remember when last she walked in public without the hair on the back of her neck dancing as if blown by a cold, sustaining wind.

She startles as his hand finds her rib and his fingers take hold in the soft spot under her chest plate; she lets him slowly spin her into his arms.

—This is what needs to happen, he says.

IV

Isaac

Leslie, Transvaal, South Africa, 1969

Isaac thinks of Ster geometrically—it is a vast array of concentric circles, divided further into slices like a clock. At its center is the farmhouse, a large, white-painted haven of comfort and culture; the warmly painted rooms and delicate furniture are the perfect counterpoint to the trees and fields, which twist greens, browns, and yellows in sublime mystery. For the children, the farm, in its enormity and majesty, is a never-ending playground—there are always more trees to climb, always more fields to explore, always more adventures to make. They use the land in ways that he wishes he could.

When he wakes up in the morning, hours before the sun, he can already smell the coffee brewing. Isaac's schedule is demanding and, in its seriousness, rewarding. He knows how lucky he is, how easily he could be somewhere else, or nowhere else at all. He loves being a farmer deeply. There will be moments during this day, as there are during everyday, where in the silence of the bush, when no one is moving and stillness blankets the fields, a breeze will pick up slowly and rustle the maize stalks and the fever trees. A whisper will slither through the crops and the sun will reach through the cool winter morning, warming any extremities not bundled in layers of clothing. In these moments, Isaac will be speechless; he will focus hard on remembering every detail, every color and taste of the Highveld, so that one day, when Ster is buried in his history, he might still be able to arouse in himself this feeling of overwhelming tranquility. That all of this is his, that it

cannot be wrested from him, is the sweetest feeling of all. He owns this land; he owns a piece of this country.

This morning will be spent with the potatoes. The children are home for the winter holidays, so they will come out with him to the fields after he returns to the farmhouse for breakfast in a few hours. Benny is leaning against the side of the farmhouse, warming his hands on a hot cup of tea, as Isaac leaves the house.

— Good morning, Bas, Benny says with a wide smile. About time.

Isaac claps a hand on Benny's shoulder and leads him over towards the field. They speak of the morning's schedule and what has to happen before they can start working on the spring crops. Benny is one of the only black foremen in the fifty square kilometers of farmland around Leslie. He is a hard worker and uniquely intelligent, well versed in the organic farming techniques that have made Ster stand out among the other South African farms. What separates Benny from the other workers, and what has made Isaac love and trust him entirely is his unending loyalty. Isaac maintains that only Benny's love for the farm even approaches his own. Their mutual love for Ster fuels a partnership and friendship that ignores the differences of their lives and positions.

As they walk the fields in the early morning, their breath trailing in small white plumes, they are both at complete peace. This is what Isaac's father dreamed of, and what Isaac had always imagined his life would be. In complete contentment, Isaac is brought to tears.

It is not the first time that he has cried in front of Benny—it had been Benny who had driven the family to Isaac's father's funeral—but in this moment of quiet, the tears seem out of place.

—I don't want to ever leave, Benny.

—Then stay, says the foreman.

The simplicity of the answer shocks Isaac. He lets Benny run the meeting with the working-group leaders, as he removes himself to stand on the side and think. The previous evening, he had read, for the first time, a letter that he had found in his father's chest. Isaac is unsure what to make of the letter. The handwriting is undoubtedly his father's, but the text is some strange mix of history and future predictions that is unlike anything he has ever read.

There are elements in this historical account that are new to Isaac. Whenever he would ask David about his life in Lithuania, his father's gaze would grow long as if he were trying to look back over years and oceans to the simple house in Malat filled with the memories of his family, and he would offer only peripheral information. Isaac knew that his father left his family in his early twenties; fleeing the Russians, he came to Africa and built a farm. David had wanted to own a piece of his new country and work in its soil and sun, living and thriving off the earth in a way that he never would have been able to in Europe. Otherwise, David's immigration is a mystery to Isaac. And while the bits in the letter about the future are unnerving, Isaac is happy for the bits about his father's past.

Growing up, Isaac had never wanted anything other than to inherit the farm. He was born in this land and belonged to its earth. On the smaller farm in Kinross where Isaac was raised, he would tell his nanny to wake him early so that he might be able to follow his father on the early morning rounds. When she occasionally did as he asked, he would trail in his father's wake as if a string were tied between the two, mimicking his gait and blowing on his hands for warmth whenever his father

cupped his own. On those mornings, his father's foremen would joke with the young boy. One day, they would say, your father will run behind you like a blind fowl, just you wait.

Once the work is divvied up and the foremen begin to move their workers to the appropriate corners of Ster, Isaac and Benny retreat to the farm office to take inventory on the seed and sort out the monthly wages. In the winter months, there are the fewest boarders from the Transkei and Eastern Cape; in the summer though, the migrant workers flood the farm, filling the barracks like a beehive, breathing life and chatter into the workers quarters. Isaac has never been able to decide which iteration of the farm he finds more beautiful. There is the peaceful quiet of the winter forces him to notice the details of the farm—the defiant growth of certain stalks that reach stunted buds through the frost, the cycle of the freezing and thawing mud, which transforms the light white-tipped browns to rich, earthy tones. And then comes the organic, manic, motion of the summer, which inspires and rejuvenates him; he finds in its sounds and activity the beauty of production and coordination.

The staple of Ster—the force that keeps the farm alive—is people like Benny; it is the permanent workers and their families that make the farm what it is. Many of them have lived on the farm since Isaac took over and their modest houses in the workers' quarters, although lacking electricity and plumbing, have been comfortable homes. Isaac takes pride in the love his staff has for the farm and rewards them in turn. Whenever there is an opening on the Ster staff, the lines of candidates looking to fill the position snakes over a kilometer, and more than once Isaac has had to turn away whole droves of people looking for work to ensure that

the line didn't interfere with the operation of the farm next door. His closeness to the staff placates some of Isaac's uncertainty about the politics of his country. He stays out of it for the most part, as do his workers. It is easy to escape the national stories in the monotony and majesty of daily life on the farm. Ster offers freedom and protection for both the workers and the owner, where they can live in their own way, with their own choices, and by their own rules.

He is a product of his homeland, but he is also a good, caring man—someone whose flaws are the result of ignorance rather than malice. The workers recognize this well, but it still does not put private toilets in their homes, nor does it wire electricity to their shacks. These are not expectations, and the workers understand that their wages surpass those that they would receive on any other farm in the area. Yet, Isaac even notices in himself the pastoral refusal to recognize the possibility of change—life is too good for him, as is.

Looking back, there were chances to do right by the workers. Eight years ago, on the day Hannah was born, the local wireman, James, had bestowed upon Ster cable-power. James, wetted by Isaac's gifted whiskey, had guaranteed that he would string the lines the day that his daughter came home from the hospital so they would be spared the nerves of relying on the faulty generators. In order to connect the electricity, James needed to run the line right past the workers' squat grey compound. No one, not James, nor Isaac, nor, at that moment Benny, had thought to send the wires through the compound and electrify the workers' living quarters. On the farm, surrounded by the pleasures of success and comforts of nature, sheltered from the fires of Sharpville and even the modest protests, naïveté is the status quo.

Back in the house, the sun is already streaming through the white lace curtains in the handsome dining room. Sketching bright lines across the platters of fresh food—eggs and steak and rich fruit—laid on the starched tablecloth, the yellow light is crisp and cool, the sun of winter. Isaac arrives at the table first and takes his place at its head.

—Are they almost ready, Nadine? He calls out.

—Yes, Mr. Isaac, Hannah and Derek will be in any moment.

Isaac leans back in his chair. It is uncommonly rare for him to beat his wife and children to the breakfast table. As he pours the coffee from the porcelain pot into his own china cup, touched with a blue floral pattern, he scans the room. So infrequently does he have the chance to take a full inventory of all that has come to him. Of course, his daily work with the farm books translates to a firm grasp of the numbers of the crops and animals that Ster produces and sells, but it is the intimate objects—those things that imbue Ster with a meaning beyond its fiscal necessity, beyond it being a place that provides shelter and sustenance for his family—which he so easily overlooks, that he so completely takes for granted.

In this solitary moment, Isaac's gaze bounces from the marble mantle and the large, wooden framed mirror, which had been his mother's, across the room to the cabinet with the shined brass handles and clasps which had belonged to Ruth's parents. Since his father's death, Isaac has been more cognizant of his position as a point along a continuum—a link between the past and the future. The letter of David's that turned up yesterday, penned in the slim, scratchy, diagonal handwriting, had made him consider not just his own point on the line, but line segments that overlapped—Ster for example and even all of South Africa. His

story and his father's story, and his children's stories, and his grandchildren's stories are all inexorably linked to Ster, to the plot of land and to everything that happens on it. For the first time in his life, Isaac can see the significance of each mundane moment on the farm. Each decision, from which crops to plant in the eastern most field, to whether or not to allow his eldest son to work in the mechanic's shop, seems important beyond exaggeration. He thinks of his father's letter and how each of his father's decisions laid the groundwork for him to be where he is, doing what he is doing, preparing his own children for their inevitable battles with people and places; the responsibility of these choices overwhelms him completely.

Just then, Hannah and Derek come through the open door, across from the mantel and the mirror, and wrench Isaac from his thoughts and the letter. They each walk to his chair and kiss him good morning before taking their seats and carefully unfolding their napkins. Neither of his eldest children is wearing shoes; Isaac notices the choice as an atavistic tendency. His feet are always cold. Today, he is wearing two pairs of socks and one day last week he wore four pairs. As much as he would have preferred to walk around the house barefoot, he would never have been able to manage the stinging cold floors pushing up against his toes. Isaac's children's aversion to shoes and socks had not come from him, but from his father, who resisted the constraints of shoes at every opportunity he had. His father never said so in as many words, but Isaac imagined that he figured that if he had gone through the hassle of coming to Africa all the way from eastern Europe he might as well have done his best to enjoy the relative warmth.

— Is your mother almost ready?

—She should be here in a minute, Hannah replies.

—Ok, then we'll give her another moment. Smiling at them, Isaac continues.

What do we have planned for the day?

—I was hoping to go work with Louie, Derek says.

—I'm sure you were. He'll be happy to have you.

—Can I come with you today? His daughter asks.

Isaac is taken aback. He knows that Hannah loves the farm, but only rarely does she ask to accompany him on his work rounds. Usually, she marches off on her own to search for a quiet, secluded tree under which to read. Happy for the company, especially the company of one of his children, and especially today—a day where the work should be fairly easy, and the day after he found his father's letter—Isaac quickly agrees.

But before he can outline what needs to get done, his wife, with their baby daughter in hand, skates into the room as if on ice. She is tall and beautiful, with a light complexion and dark hair. She walks across the room, wishes him good morning, and offers him the baby's forehead, like a platter of food, to kiss. The small girl smells of ointment and her mother, and Isaac's movement to take her out of his mother's hand is only interrupted by Nadine bursting into the room with a jug of orange juice and the stern insistence that everyone know how late they are and how soon Isaac has to return to the field. After pouring juice into the cups set at each place, she walks over to Ruth, takes the small child from her arms, and continues out of the room, leaving the parents alone with their eldest children.

Both Derek and Hannah eat quickly, eager to ensure that their vacation is spent in play rather than at the table, but between bites they are effervescent,

bubbling with ideas and possibilities for their holiday. Isaac enjoys it vicariously, as if he were watching them eat a delicious piece of chocolate cake, and he can tell by how Ruth is looking at them that she feels the same. It's how Isaac felt throughout his childhood. He was never a very good student, and so, he never much liked school. As soon as he would return home for holiday, he would waste no time before getting out onto the farm. Even then, he knew that this would be his life, just as he knows now that it won't be the life of any of his children.

After their breakfast, Isaac sends Derek and Hannah to go get their shoes on while he and Ruth finish their coffee. They sit at either end of the long wooden table looking at each other. Isaac has been waiting to tell her about the letter, or more accurately it's been something in between waiting and delaying. He needs her to know, but he cannot move past the sense that if he tells her the nature of the letter will somehow change, that in it no longer being only his it will somehow become not his at all. And yet, the words have been weighing on him so heavily since the previous evening that sitting at the table he feels as if he will be unable to rise from his seat and carry on with his day unless he shares the letter with her.

Isaac reaches into his pocket and pulls out a yellowing envelope—the color of the dead grass on the savannah—with his father's thin penmanship on the front.

—I found this last night, he begins.

—What is it?

—It's a letter from my father to the family.

Ruth reaches over as Isaac passes the envelope across the table. As she pulls out the thick paper, Isaac watches her closely, his gaze locked on her face, searching for any minute betrayals of what the words may inspire in her. It has

been a while, he thinks, since he has examined her face in so discerning a manner—she is unendingly beautiful; each twitch of her mouth and blink of her eyes breaks Isaac’s trance and so he is met with her beauty time and again, he is constantly and newly amazed. At last, she looks up from the letter and smiles a little sadly, as if upset in spite of herself. Even if Isaac had anticipated her reaction, his anticipation had not prepared him for the degree of her emotion. The moment he recognizes the slight quiver of her lip, he rises from the chair, races to the other side of the table, takes his wife in his arms, and kisses her on the forehead. He is surprised and moved that she doesn’t question the veracity of the letter—that she believes its truth and origin without the slightest hesitation.

—So, we are going, she whispers.

—This does feel like a sign at the very least, if not something far more powerful.

The sounds of the children running through the hall breaks the moment and Isaac releases his grip on Ruth’s shoulder.

—Are we ready? Asks Hannah, running into the room.

Isaac takes a breath. Smiles at Ruth, promises that they will return to the topic later, and leads Hannah out the door where Derek is already waiting to begin their day.

V

David

En Route, 1912

David wakes up to the rolling of the cabin and the drum of rain on the side of the haul. Otherwise, the cabin is silent. The sea is worth listening to when stroked by wind and storm; David has learned to internalize the sounds, the consistent pangs that he hears now tell him that the day will be cold; it is the sound of streaking wetness—rain and whipped up sea foam—that cuts through the air sideways and hurls itself, exploding on the side of the boat. This wet and cold slice through skin the same way they do through air. They fight for each inch; they crawl up veins and latch onto bones; they make one shiver under the blanket, they dampen thoughts. It would be a miserable day, a day of directionless wondering, if David weren't so excited. Today, they are set to disembark. After months at sea, David will, at last, see the beginning of his new home.

He lies still, not yet ready to get out of bed. The sheets are wet where they touch the cabin wall—a small crack allows a slow stream of rainwater to trickle through the aluminum siding. Solomon is in the bunk above him snoring softly. They have decided that they will make their way northeast through the Karoo to the Transvaal. Solomon has a cousin there who he says will allow them to stay with him briefly as they work to find their way. They are unsure how far it is to Johannesburg or how they will get there, but they have been assured by the crew, who travel back and forth from Cape Town, that there are ways of getting inland.

At last David's eagerness to see the details of his new country's coastline wins out over the cold. He swings out of bed, layers in his warmest clothes, and makes his way onto the deck. They haven't seen land for over a month—they sailed with the trade winds, moving directly south off the western hump of Africa before turning east as the ship approached the continent's southern tip. After only seeing vast blue for days on end, he is dizzy with the anticipation of greens and browns. He takes the steep narrow steps up from the cabin two at a time, without worrying about waking those still battling the wetness in their beds.

The view does not disappoint. David has been expecting vast plains of yellow sprinkled with a few tall, scraggly trees, positioned so that one can always and only see two. Instead, through the streaming rain and fog, he manages to make out the enormous shapes of jagged rock faces and mountains that far exceed in size any he has seen in Europe. Green and wet, this Africa is certainly more jungle than desert. Amazed, David reaches for the railing and leans out over the bow, letting the wind and water rip against his face. The sound of air and rain drown out the din of the waves crashing on the side of the boat. He is entirely alone and in his solitude he can, at last, confront just how alone he is. Solomon has been a great friend to him, and he will stay with him for as long as he can. He, however, is not responsible for Solomon, nor is Solomon responsible for him—they will each choose their own path. Looking over his new country, the excitement that he felt on the pier in Klaipeda returns. He had departed without thinking of arrival, but now that he is here, his departure and all that he left behind—Malat, the infantrymen, the pogroms, the horses, the mill—have faded into the recesses of his memory.

Over the first month of the trip, he had written to his family often. David has always enjoyed writing, everything from letters to stories. Whenever he had a free minute during the trip, he would sit out on the deck as they sailed through the tropics and describe the ferocity of the sun and the thickness of the air in the best words he could find. His home hung constantly in his mind, tempting him with thoughts of return. He knew, of course, that it would be impossible, that the infantrymen had already come and that his name would be added to a list, which would ensure that if he ever tried to reenter the country, he would be immediately handed over to the Russian army and sent to a labor camp to die. The thought, as it had since the day he left Malat, terrified and exhilarated him. Once he had made his decision, there was nowhere to return to; he could no longer even consider turning back.

Slowly, the pain of separation began to dull. He missed his family's company, but he detached himself from his old life quickly. Once he had learned to control the churning of his stomach, he began to enjoy his time on the boat. While his work at the mill had been difficult and tedious, he had always loved the sound of the water on the wooden paddles; and on the boat he would often look out over the railings at the back of the ship and watch the familiar white water of the wake sink into blue. The longer he had spent on the boat, the more he had found that he could simply replace certain pleasures with others: the canned sardines are an adequate replacement for the herring, his conversations with Solomon, although perhaps less personal, are just as lively as his talks with his brothers, the monotonous expanse of the ocean is far more interesting, although also more isolating, than the monotony of the dark forests, and the stories of the sailors are

even more enchanting than those of the peddlers who came through Malat every month. The farther south the boat travels the more confident he is that his choice was the correct one.

As they approach the shore, the rain dies down and the fog lifts, revealing the bay in its entirety. The line of mountains traces the arc of the ocean nestling a fifteen-kilometer slice of land between rock and water. The land is green and fertile—a fitting transition from the blue of the Atlantic. Cape Town stands out in the natural beauty. The modernity of the white buildings in the Dutch style—outfitted with curling arches and crossed windows—against the agelessness of the setting astounds David. There is newness here, but antiquity has not been forgotten; rather, it has been expounded upon, enlarged. Both the city and the nature benefit from the others' aesthetic.

They anchor at the mouth of the bay and wait to be pulled into the pier. By now, the ship deck is alive, swarming in preparation of disembark. Solomon has found David on the bow and the two of them stand in silence each consumed by the landscape of their new home. They have spoken often during the voyage of this very moment—of what Cape Town would look like, of how it would feel to step into Africa, of whether it would look like Lithuania, of how easy it would be to forget their home. And now, it seems unnecessary to reignite any of these conversations. They will step off the boat and continue their travels up towards the Transvaal.

David reminds himself of this fact—that even once he is off the boat, his journey is still far from over, indeed even once he arrives in Johannesburg, he will not feel settled until he has a home and money of his own perhaps even a bit of

land. He cares very much about finding himself a new home and even from the moment that he accepted that Malat was no longer his home, he determined to not do away with the concept all together. In awe of the majesty of Cape Town, his only anxiety is about how to recreate the stability of a home. He knows that he is a survivor—he has escaped the Russian army, there is nothing nearly as threatening in this corner of the world, and with the way that the seamen speak of the gold and rare minerals coming out of the Transvaal he should find a job and wealth in no time, he surely won't go hungry. Yet still, he will have to find a place to build, a place to make his own, a place where he might be able to belong. For good or ill, he had belonged to Malat and Malat had belonged to him. Now, on the edge of a new world, he is entirely unsure where he belongs, and for this reason, and this reason alone, he is frightened.

The tugboat finds its way to the liner at last, and once it fastens on to the back, it begins pushing the ship into the bay. David and Solomon have their bags packed and waiting at their feet. David notes that Solomon seems unsteady, ambivalent, as if he were contemplating staying on the ship and making the trip back to Klaipeda. But when David places a hand on his back, the other boy relaxes, turns to his friend, and smiles.

—Any moment now.

—Yes, and then we will no longer be Lithuanian.

—Then we will be South Africans, says David.

Why he offers this, even though he does not believe it, he is unsure. He knows, with a certainty that confuses him that he will never cease to be Lithuanian. Even if he never returns, even if Malat is razed, and the Russians burn the land out of

existence, there will always be the Lithuania that cast him. Even if he no longer belongs to Lithuania; it will follow him everywhere, and even on the days that he does not think about it, it will be there, waiting to remind him that it spurned and expelled him. David is ready to be a South African; he is open, ready to define himself as such, but he will never be *from* South Africa, and never again will he make his home in the land that he is from.

David walks down the steps cautiously, trying to stop the swaying of the earth. Walking, he thinks, has never been this hard. His first step in Africa is a wobbly one; it is insecure and careful; he regrets it immediately. He wishes he could take it back, do it over, step out into his new life confidently. An official points him to a line on his right; even standing still is proving to be a challenge. At the front of the line, a man looks over the passengers' papers, stamps them, and issues new identification numbers. When it is David's turn to approach the table, he lurches forward, catching himself just barely on the slab of wood and just about knocking the man's pile of papers onto the floor. The man glares at him, and then continues to shuffle through the documents. He stamps his card, gives him some pages that he cannot read, and motions for Solomon to come forward. And like that David is a South African.

VI

Isaac

Ra'anana, Central District, Israel, 1978

Isaac carries two glasses of water with him out to the balcony where Ruth has already set up their lunch of smoked fishes, cheese, and a fresh baguette. The warm summer air is dry and stagnant—even on the veranda of their top-story apartment a wisp of wind is something rare and is to be treasured. Life has slowed down to a tectonic pace. And yet, Isaac is not bothered by the passage of the days; they flow into and out of one another, discernible only by the changes in weather and visits to their children. This new existence is pleasant, so far removed from the daily chores of the farm that Isaac has trouble recalling how he was able to get everything done within the 24 hours that each day offered. As much as he enjoys the free time and the chance to fill them however he chooses, as much as he loves being in Israel, he misses Ster in every moment. After they emigrated, he had kept his controlling stake in the farm—flying back every few months to ensure that everything was operating smoothly—but after a couple of years, the trips became too arduous, and his connection to the farm, which had been inseparable from himself in mood and operation, began to strain. During the years when Ster was intimately and undeniably his, he would walk the land and intuitively sense the life of the farm—what it needed, what it wanted, what would come next. He knew each inch of Ster, each blade of grass and tree, each worker and overseer, each hired hand and machine, and separately understood the totality of how each of these individual components comprised the beauty of the sun rising over the lush

summer fields, rolling bright and red into the day, and the breathless suffocation that descended over the parched winter soil.

However, some time spent away from the farm had dulled Isaac's intuition. It was impossible to feel the farm when he hadn't seen the fields in six weeks and was ignorant of rainfall levels and worker morale. He could be told statistics, but there was no substitute for feeling the land. He had sold the farm and committed himself to his new life in his new home on this new land. In the year that has passed, he has been amazed by how easily South Africa has fallen into the recesses of his memory. Rarely now does he occupy his mind with thoughts of the politics of his old country, and when he does, it is only because his eldest son is still there grappling with the problems that he escaped. He is beginning to think that he never loved South Africa; and he knows that he never loved South Africa the way he loved Ster.

Isaac does love Israel, though. It amuses some people when they learn that he is from South Africa—running between the circles of hell, a friend once called it. Isaac can't make sense of these jokes. South Africa's demons were problems he never chose; he felt like a spectator there, always unable to really grasp what type of game was being played. In Israel, he feels not only as if he understands the rules, but as if he is a player, one of the people that have the most at stake in the game. He has felt this way for a long time—well before he and Ruth decided to make the move. Israel and its fate had always been his responsibility in a way that South Africa never would. It was the enormity of this initial realization—the realization that, apart from Ster, South Africa had very little to offer him and his family—that first made Isaac consider moving. This understanding compounded by his sense of

how important Israel was, how much of his family it might have saved—grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins—had forced him to consider where he was and where he needed to be.

And then there was the letter. Even though he and Ruth had spent countless hours in serious conversation about the move, and had both come to feel comfortable with the idea, Isaac is still unsure if they would have been able to mobilize without the letter. It had been the gentle push that they needed to break out of the gravitational pull of Ster; it had allowed them to make the move without feeling guilty; it had been the permission that Isaac had wanted from his father, the assurance that this was not a betrayal, but in fact something that David would have wanted his son to do.

Isaac has a unique quality that allows him to connect to quickly feel comfortable in new spaces, and such is the case in Israel. On Ster, his commitment to and existence on the land had allowed him to feel it in a manner that only he could access—as if they spoke in their own language. In Israel, he does not speak to the land, but he has come to know it, and what he lacks in knowledge of the landscape, he makes up for in his devotion to the country and the sacrifice that brought him to it. He knows that he will never be able to communicate with Israel the way that he did with Ster, but his gift of entwining himself into the framework of a place—whether that be a plot of land in the countryside or an entire country—is not lost in his new home. He felt the connection on his first trip to Israel; he had been exhilarated and ecstatic as if he had reunited with an old friend after being apart for ages.

That first trip had happened just as he and Ruth had begun to speak in earnest

about the possibility of the move. They flew to visit a couple that had left South Africa a few years earlier and were just getting settled down. Seeing the country had felt like an epiphany to Isaac; the deserts were mesmerizing in their vastness; the seas were astounding in their blueness. Wherever he looked, Isaac sensed the struggle for life in this country. There was energy and urgency in every action and every movement; when the sun set, it seemed to go down screaming not peacefully as it had on Ster.

Isaac can admit that the troubles of South Africa are easy for him to overlook because they only affect him peripherally. Yet, he imagines that the advocacy that he did on behalf of Israel when he was in South Africa is not so different from the work of the African National Congress. Of course, he would never identify with them—they are truly, very different—but there is a reason that the ANC had close ties with the Jewish community, and even if their main operatives in that community were reprehensible to Isaac as a result of their communist leanings, the Jewish and African struggles have shared a narrative. Isaac chose to struggle differently, to fight in a way that connected him to a different land.

From their veranda, they can almost make out the modest Tel Aviv skyline. Isaac will often squint into the summer haze straining to see the outline of one of the tall and growing rectangles. Today is fairly clear and bright. He swears that just above the horizon there is a bump that has to be the *Migdal Shalom*.

—One day, we will be able to see a full city skyline and then we will know that this experiment has succeeded, he says to Ruth.

—One day, she responds, our eyesight will be so bad that we can't see past this street.

Isaac laughs. If he has always allowed himself to be consumed by the places he is, Ruth has always been able to keep herself removed and look upon the situation objectively. It is what made her such a good worker in the farm's office—she could see the mechanism of the whole farm in the numbers—but also meant that she had no sense of which days were best to plant on or how long the chill would last. They balance each other nicely. Ruth tolerates Isaac's obsessions with minutiae and Isaac has learned that there are some times when he simply has to listen to Ruth because she will undoubtedly be right. Lunch is quiet and pleasant. They fall into each other's silences comfortably.

Usually, on a summer day with a bit of a breeze like today, they go on a walk to the park after lunch. Ruth didn't sleep well last night, though, and tells Isaac to go ahead. Isaac does as he's told, and after tightening his shoelaces, he makes his way to the elevator.

He does his best to stay out of the heat of the sun during the ten-minute walk to the park—crossing the street three times as the sidewalk esses with the road and the building's shadows change direction. The park is big; they have only ever walked the complete loop once, and it took them over an hour. Isaac considers attempting the circumnavigation, but because of the heat and the thought that Ruth might worry if he is gone for so long, he instead finds a shaded spot under a tall sycamore tree with discolored bark. Isaac has always been far more comfortable in the hot than in the cold, which slices through his skin easily. In today's summer heat, he basks and expands, spreading out his legs and draping his arms over the back of the park bench.

He watches as a few kids run by, a babysitter following behind them. One of

the girls trips and falls, scraping her leg on the concrete pathway. The babysitter swoops in expertly, raises the little child into her arms, and pulls her close; she looks at the cut knee and blows on it softly; the child hides her face, snuggling into the babysitter's neck. He remembers when it was his children who were crying and burrowing their heads, and it occurs to him how well suited the connection between neck and shoulder is for a human face. Since he's been in Israel, he has been noticing these small details about people and how they are constituted—how their eyes turn up in thought as if searching for the answer in the sky, or how their fists clench without them realizing when they are in a hurry. He wonders to Ruth whether it is his old age that has made him more perceptive, but he knows that it is just a change in the sorts of details he focuses on. Dwelling on the shape of the human neck is, after all, not so different from thinking about the directions that potatoes grow or how much room they need to expand. This is a different life, and Isaac's mind is beginning to adjust.

The girl is still crying—although the babysitter has now put her down and is kneeling next to her—when a tall, thin man with dark skin, black hair, and an oddly twisted nose approaches the bench and asks if he might join Isaac. At first, Isaac is startled; the man had come from behind him and even though his Hebrew is improving, he occasionally struggles to understand if someone speaks to him quickly and without context. Once he gathers himself though, Isaac holds out his hand offering the man a seat. Isaac has never been particularly personable and is self-conscious about his Hebrew, but he is feeling friendly today and decides to engage the man. As he looks toward him, he sees that the other man is around his own age; if he is not retired he will certainly be there shortly; given, however, that

it is the middle of the day on a Tuesday, it seems fair to assume that the man no longer works.

—It's a beautiful day, Isaac begins cautiously, unsure whether the man wants to be bothered.

—Yes, it is, the man says simply.

Then, they sit in silence. The girl is still crying. Isaac thinks of saying something to the man about the crying girl, but cannot think of anything worth saying, so instead decides to continue sitting, enjoying himself as he had before the man came over, and if he should think of something that he deems worth saying, only then will he attempt to reengage the man. Isaac struggles to clear his mind. Over and over as thoughts come into his head—that little boy's expertise on the swing, the hare that has been continuously hopping in a circle around a nearby tree and whether it is, perhaps, odd that this hare seems so committed to this pattern and that he had never seen a hare behave that way and he had been a farmer and had seen hundreds of hares in his life and never seen any of them behave like this—he judges them and finds them wanting. The cycle is torturous; he wants badly to speak to this strange, silent man.

They sit in quiet for a few more minutes, then Isaac, intent on saying something looks over at his neighbor to find that his neighbor has just turned to look at him. In embarrassment and discomfort they both look away, then embarrassed about looking away Isaac turns back slowly in an attempt to see if the man is still looking in the other direction. He is; he seems to be staring intently at a tree 10 meters away. They are like school children ignorant of how to handle themselves in this most basic of social interactions. At last, Isaac decides that something must be

done, and so he turns to this man and introduces himself. The man replies that his name is Yossi.

—Do you live around here, Yossi?

—Yes. Just two blocks that way. You?

Yossi's voice is gruff and guttural like so many of the Israelis who were born in the land.

—Yes. I live 10 minutes away.

The conversation seems in danger of dying out once more, when Yossi as if to avoid another awkward silence clears his throat.

—Your Hebrew is quite good. When did you make *Aliyah*?

Isaac loves when people use the word *Aliyah*, or *ascension*, to speak about immigrating to Israel; it validates his decision and reminds him that he did not leave South Africa, but rather, that he came to Israel.

—It is three years now. And thank you, I work hard on it. Did you grow up here?

—Yes. My father came from Russia and my mother from Poland. I grew up on *Kibbutz Ein Hashofet* in the north. Where are you from?

—From South Africa.

—Ah, South Africa, some trouble of your own you have there. So you go from trouble to trouble.

The two men have both loosened up and are now facing each other on the bench.

—From one sort of trouble to a very different sort of trouble.

—So then, why did you leave?

—I didn't leave, so much as came.

—Okay, so then why did you come?

—Why did your parents come? How many reasons are there for coming to Israel?

—So, it's not for the trouble?

They both laugh. Isaac is happy that he mustered the courage to speak to the man; strangers, he has noticed, have a way of relaxing one so that certain thoughts become unfettered. Perhaps it is that we don't know what they'll ask next or how they'll ask it, or maybe it is that we don't care how they might judge us, but there are certain things that strangers can get us to say that even those closest to us cannot dislodge from our minds. He is excited by conversations like this because just as he doesn't know what Yossi will say, he can't be sure how he'll respond either.

—But really. Did you leave because of what was happening there?

—No. The truth is that my wife and I had been talking about it for a while and then one day we just decided that we would do it.

Until now, Yossi's body has stayed relaxed and distant, as if he didn't want to commit too much to the conversation and would have been just as happy to sit and watch the day roll along. At Isaac's answer though, Yossi leans forward bracing himself by planting his long arms on the front of the bench.

—Just like that? He says. Get up and go? What makes you do that? Decide today is the day.

—Well we had some help.

—You see, I've never believed that people just wake up in the morning and

decide today is the day that my life will change. We aren't that brave, you know.

—I suppose so, says Isaac.

He turns away from Yossi; he isn't done speaking, but wants to gather himself before the questions that he is sure will come next. He wonders if it is worth it to tell this stranger about the letter, whether if he tells him everything Yossi would call him mad and leave at once.

—So what did you do in South Africa?

—I was a farmer.

Yossi laughs a thin wheezing laugh.

—A farmer coming to the desert. Is this the first *Aliyah*? Even the most fervent Zionist would have to be crazy to do that today. So what was it, eh? What was the push?

Isaac hesitates. If he is going to tell Yossi about the letter he must think of the words carefully, so as not to make any mistakes. He wonders if Yossi will think it's just an error of translation, a miscommunication.

—Well? Yossi prompts.

—Well, it was a letter that my father wrote before he died and which I found while I was going through his things.

—And what did the letter say?

—It was a very long letter about our family, and, well, it didn't give us much choice. It said that we would go to Israel.

—Ah, I see. I also lost my father a few years ago. Their shadows linger.

Isaac had never considered it like that—as a shadow lingering—he had always seen it more like a roadmap. The letter has been an awful burden, especially as he

sees its contents coming to fruition.

There is an old fable that he once read that tells the story of a man who came across a magician who said he would grant him a wish. The man was in a moment of crisis and wanted to be reassured that his life was moving in the proper direction, so he wished to see the future. The magician warned him that seeing the future would only redouble his anxiety because if he liked what he saw he would wonder with each decision if he was ruining his future and if he didn't like what he saw he would be stuck trying to change it. The man didn't listen to the magician, of course. Isaac can't remember exactly how the story ended other than that the man struggled for the rest of his life. He has tried to look it up, but can't find the text in any English collections and doesn't know where to look for the Hebrew. He considers telling Yossi this fable, but because he can't remember the moral other than listen to magicians when they give you advice and try to not learn what happens in the future, he decides against sharing it. Isaac has come to understand that this is the fate of the letter—this is the shadow. It's never exactly knowing, always being half-sure, half-confident, damned to a life of half-truths.

A different child is now crying near the playground.

—I am sorry for your loss, Isaac says.

—Don't be silly. It was years ago. The shadow fades.

—Yes, says Isaac, I guess so.

VII

Hannah

New York, New York, United States, 1981

Hannah is dreaming. Leo is there and he is wearing an odd top-hat; it is large and brown and far less defined than a top-hat ought to be. She has never seen him in a top-hat before, and she is intrigued. As she reaches out to touch the hat, she feels herself being pulled back. At first, the sensation is minor, like she is being tugged backwards by a weak ocean tide while her feet are planted in the sand. Then, the pull becomes stronger, so strong that she loses her breath. She is flying over oceans and cities now. There is a hook reaching through her spine; it locks into her navel, someone is cranking the line, spinning the wheel harder and harder, reeling her in, pulling her backwards. Her body isn't meant for these sorts of stunts. She is ripping apart; her arms and legs can't keep up, they will be gone. As her body reaches its limit, her tendons and sinew taut and fraying, ready to snap, she arrives. Her middle section relaxes as her limbs catch up. She is standing in a field at Ster. There is a man with a hat here, too. He is smaller and darker than Leo. His face is sun-brushed and loose, sliced with craggy lines—the result of hours spent in the fields.

—Uit die blou van onse hemel, he begins to sing, uit die diepte van ons see, oor ons ewige gebergtes, waar die kranse antwoord gee.

She recognizes the anthem from years of repetition. She tries to finish the song in the Afrikaans, but as she speaks, it is the English that comes from her throat, grainy and foreign.

—Calls the spirit of our country, of the land that gave us birth. At thy call we shall not falter, firm and steadfast we shall stand, at thy will to live or perish, O South Africa, dear land.

The man looks on solemnly, disappointed.

—I meant to, Hannah pleads. I tried to.

—It is not the Afrikaans that troubles me, Hannah, he says in English.

Far away, she hears buzzing, and then ringing. She opens her eyes. Leo's alarm is blaring on the dresser; he is just beginning to stir. The details of the dream have already left her, but she feels anxious as if she has forgotten something essential. She nudges Leo, and when he pushes her back, she gets out of bed, turns off the alarm, moves back towards the bed and begins shaking him.

—You have to get up, she says. But when he doesn't respond she takes to yelling at him. She wishes that this hadn't become her job, but she seems particularly susceptible to the alarm and he is apparently deaf to its tone.

Leo rolls over, grabs her, and throws her back onto the bed playfully as he rolls off its side and onto his feet. He stretches lazily and moves toward the bathroom of the small apartment.

They have been in New York City for five months now and Hannah is finally beginning to feel comfortable in her new home. She has settled into a routine that echoes the movements of the city; it is this type of synchronization that separates visiting from dwelling. She walks the same streets as the tourists do, frequents the same coffee shops as they do, rides on the same subway cars as they do, but her sense of the city is different now than it was when she first arrived. The street grid has become a lens through which directions are filtered; her eyes have adjusted to the warm dim of the lampposts' light. Often she walks the streets alone, and fancies

herself a local. If she doesn't talk—if she keeps her accent hidden—she can pass as one. South Africa is a hard place to be from today. She has learned this from experience. Even a simple greeting can betray her as a runaway, or, worse, as an accomplice. She has started to understand that for now, to be an American, she must be silent.

The previous Thursday, Hannah had been reading in the library. A classmate commented on her book. As Hannah responded, she braced herself for the other girl's reaction. First, there is the twinge of curiosity—the point at which they are unsure whether it is British, Australian, or South African. If she is lucky, they are too embarrassed to guess and too shy to admit that they can't decipher the hard 't's and long vowels. Other times, they know straight away, or they are either friendly enough or brazen enough to ask her directly. From there, the inevitable questions: What is it like there now? Are you on the run? Which side were you on? What will de Klerk do? Have you participated in the boycotts, the rallies, the marches? Then, there is the self-righteous bragging about their involvement in the boycotts that are crippling her country, or the condescending confidence with which they insist that everything could be solved if only the leaders were better educated. And, eventually—once she has sufficiently proven herself to not be a racist—there is the pity. It is the pity that bothers her the most because within the faux-sincerity of their apologies for the horrors that she has had to deal with, is the undeniable and embarrassingly obvious implication that she must be ashamed of her country. Their incapacity to recognize any nuance, their shocking lack of imagination and empathy that deems absurd the possibility that she might, in fact, love her country despite its flaws, never ceases to appall her.

The girl in the library decided to ask. When Hannah told her that yes, she was indeed from South Africa, the land of Apartheid, the girl lacking the creative power to compose a complete thought of any originality, responded:

—Oh, how interesting. How long have you been here?

—Coming on six months, now.

—Well, that's good.

Hannah had not been able to control herself. She felt the boiling begin deep in her stomach. It had rolled up through her chest, expanding and pushing the air out through her lungs. She clapped her hands over her mouth in an attempt to bottle up the swelling energy. She felt as if she would burst. Her cheeks rounded, heavy with air, and the corners of her mouth twitched up spastically. And then, she could no longer hold it in. She laughed raucously right in the girl's face. The whole library turned to listen to the rolling gasps of air, which sounded like screams. Hannah collected her belongings, and walked out the library, laughing all the while.

In this manner, her country of origin necessarily convolutes her growing comfort with New York City. She sees Leo struggling with it, as well. He has become the expert in his psychology courses on certain topics including oppression and prolonged trauma, and often when he and his classmates meet outside of an academic setting, their conversations meander, however cautiously, into the issue of race. It frustrates him too, but, she feels it in a different way; to her it seems as if outside of her home she is constantly working to obliterate South Africa—not merely to excise it from herself, but to destroy it entirely, remove it from thought, remove it from her world. And yet, in their house, Hannah and Leo have been

careful to preserve parts of South Africa that live in the objects around them—the tribal art, the teak leather laced benches and chairs, her grandmother’s plates and cutlery, the old pictures lining the walls, the dark oak kist, which all hold and grow memories.

Hannah moves through the hallway, as Leo gets dressed. She does not need to be anywhere until the early afternoon, but the south-facing apartment gets pleasant early morning light, by which Hannah likes to read, so most mornings, she rises with her husband. She puts the coffee on, and with her book settles into a chair near the window. She barely manages three pages before Leo comes into the room, tries to pour the coffee before it is done percolating, spills it over the counter splashing his shirt, curses, apologizes, and heads back into the bedroom to change saying he’ll clean it in a minute. Rather than wait, she moves toward the spill and mops it up; she hadn’t been particularly engrossed in her book anyway. Perhaps, she thinks, she needs a break from her reading routine. Scanning the apartment, she lands on the still sealed boxes, lining the walls of the apartment like insulation. Today, seems like a perfect day to recommit to this chore, to continue along the path towards completing this immigration.

When Leo returns in a clean blue shirt, Hannah relays her plan for the day. Leo, now behind schedule, nods quickly, and rushes to the door. Almost immediately, he realizes how he has brushed her off and returns.

—I think that’s a great idea, Han. You can wait for me to help if you want though.

—No, Hannah replied. It’s fine. I’ll enjoy it.

With that, she kisses him and leads him to the door.

Once Hannah is alone with the boxes, the enormity of her task becomes impossible to deny. It is not just the number of boxes, but also the space they occupy, that overwhelms her. Their old life is dominating their new home; their possessions are like ghosts, bleeding through the walls and the distance that they thought would separate them from everything back home. And yet, those holdovers will be so difficult to part with; they have carried South Africa in them for years, and given the castaways some small solace. She reminds herself that it is not a purging—she will not be simply throwing out the furniture and the china that they spent their money shipping over—yet, it is still a redefinition, an appropriation of emotional connections. Her unpacking will change the nature of the objects in essential ways, they will come, finally, to be intimate things that have been transported, that are out of place, that in every use recall a history and reality far removed from their current situation, their sillage forever lingering, floating the scent of memories and stories.

Hannah has always done chores the way a pig eats from its trough—quickly and with a complete disregard for the actual ingredients—from the moment she starts, the flutter of action and movement intensifies until the job is completed. This task, however, is not something that must be done to be accomplished. Rather, she finds herself thinking of the cliché: *it's not about the destination, but the journey*. And although she promptly dismisses the saying for its silliness, she enters the work with an appreciation for the process of cataloging this past. It has taken her many months to finish, and she sees no point in rushing through this final round of boxes, yet finish at last she will.

The first box is filled with another set of dishes—nicer more delicate pieces

than their ones for everyday use. They had been her grandmothers and as she unwraps each plate, saucer, and soup bowl, she moves through her memories of her grandparents' house on Ster, scrolling through the images, animating them like a flip-book. Hannah had always been particularly close to her father's parents. She envisions herself entering the home and gliding from room to room, all the while keeping a mental map of the layout on hand, ready if she were to lose herself. In Hannah's memories, her grandmother is in most rooms—she gives Hannah a kiss when she walks in the door, she is rolling blintzes in the kitchen, she is removing her jewelry and placing it carefully on the vanity in the bedroom. In fact, only from the memory of the study is Leah absent. There, she sees her grandfather, sitting in a comfortable chair facing the window. Paper is strewn over the dark heavy desk, and the religious books on the shelves make the room smell and feel like a synagogue. David stretches in the light, and after a moment longer of thought, turns to continue his writing. When he notices Hannah hovering by the door he gives her a big smile and calls her over. She comes to him. He is far younger in her imagination than he was at the time of his death—Hannah is pleased that she can remember him before his memory went. Hannah is holding a doll and after her grandfather kisses her lightly on the head, he asks if she will play in the study to keep him company. She agrees and reenters her game, only vaguely aware of how lovingly he looks at her—as if there were no more important or wonderful thing that ever existed.

Hannah has little sense of whether any of these memories are real, meaning whether or not they actually happened. They feel real; the way she accesses and experiences these images are no different from her remembrances of the previous

Tuesday's dinner. And yet, the specificity of the memories—that she can hear dialogue, that they don't seem like they have been sitting in her mind for decades—makes her doubt their veracity. Still, she can rest easily in the memories' emotional energy, as one loses oneself in a particularly touching movie, and they make the chore of unpacking far more amusing.

Hannah makes her way through the rest of the boxes by playing similar memory games, reliving the quiet comfort of Ster, the heat of the Clifton sand in summer, and the revitalizing magic that a late afternoon cup of tea has in the Transvaal winter. By noon, she has made her way through three-quarters of the boxes and decides to go through a last one before putting together lunch and heading off to start her day. She moves to one of the smaller boxes sitting by the bookshelf in the living room. As soon as she looks inside, she knows that she's chosen the wrong box—a box that will take her a long time, perhaps several hours, to sort through. Once she sees the old albums though, she can't pull herself away. Try as she might, she knows there is simply no way that she'll be able to avoid looking at these photos. Her entire morning has been devoted to the images and animations of her past life in South Africa, and now, as if a punishment for her stupidity of not thinking of it herself, these pictures have presented themselves to her just as she is planning to leave.

It is the collection of photographs that they had sent to her parents before she and Leo had left South Africa, and which her parents had shipped back a few months ago. Her mother had told her that she had added a few new albums to the collection, but Hannah hadn't gotten a chance to look through the box until now. Eagerly, she begins removing the familiar albums, resolving to find the new ones

first, and then reacquaint herself with the pictures that she already knows. The first one that she doesn't recognize is a large bound album with a dark navy cover and gold trim framing. Its contents are just as exciting as she had expected. They are pictures that she remembers seeing as a child—mostly shots of her parents in their teenage years. There are photos of a three-year-old Ruth naked on Clifton beach, and five-year-old Isaac in synagogue, and a number of portraits of her father's immediate family, always stoic and staring straight forward. One picture in particular catches her attention; it is a photo of her grandparents taken soon after their marriage. The image is faded around the edges and the aged sepia has forced an unfortunate brightness on their faces, but Hannah can still see her grandmother's sharp beauty and her grandfather's earnest restraint. They never changed, she thinks. This picture is who they were to her, as well; it is them just as she remembers.

Wanting to be even closer to the picture, to touch it, to hold it, she slides it out from its plastic cover. As she takes it in her hand, Hannah is surprised to find that its paper is thick and doubled, like an envelope or a greeting card; she had forgotten that many of her parents' photographs share a similar quality, surely the trademark of a certain South African photographer. Looking more closely, Hannah sees that a note has been folded into the opening between the two pieces of cardboard. Carefully, she pushes the yellowing paper out from the picture's crease. At first, Hannah thinks that the sheet of paper is only a part of the complicated architecture of the printed photograph, perhaps some extra padding. But, to be sure, she unfolds the thick, old, sheet. To her delight, she finds a letter written in familiar, tall, slanted penmanship. She can't quite place it, but she thinks that it

belongs to her grandfather.

As Hannah's eyes move down the page, the color recedes from her cheeks; after the first paragraph, the photograph of her grandparents that she had still been holding as she began reading falls through her fingers. Once she reaches the bottom, she returns to the top of the letter and begins again, then a third time, and a fourth, and a fifth. After she is sure that what she has read is actually what is written on the page, a wave of panicked confusion crashes on her. Hannah slumps to the floor, amazed. A reasonable person, she tells herself that there has to be an explanation, that she is just missing a piece of vital information and that this can all be explained away easily. And yet, the more she thinks about it, the more difficulty she has fathoming that any little fact would be able to clarify even a single aspect of the things that she is thinking and feeling. Her legs sprawled in front of her and her hands covering her face, she searches for any piece of family history that she might have missed to help explain the letter. She runs over birth dates and the years that her grandparents died. Nothing seems to add up. A harrowing solipsism descends on her.

A prank, she thinks trying to stabilize herself. A joke from her mother or father. Of course, that is the answer. That the paper looked so old and the handwriting belonged to neither of her parents did not disqualify this explanation. Perhaps they had found the old paper, and taken the opportunity. They had hidden it in the photograph because they knew she would find the image especially interesting. It's true that these sorts of games are not really in either of their character, but perhaps they were trying to help her adjust to the move—to lighten the mood.

Relieved by her conclusion, Hannah decides to call her parents and have her own bit of fun—she'll show them; she won't back down. She dials the Israeli country code and waits for them to pick up. After a few rings, her father answers. As soon as he picks up, she feigns panic, doing her best to channel her previous emotional state, crying and gasping for air.

—Hannah! Isaac says. What's wrong? What's happening?

—The letter, Hannah pushes out through fake groans. I found the letter. The letter. Oupa's letter. I found it.

Hannah hears the other end of the line grow silent. Feel bad now, don't you, she thinks, and decides to exaggerate her distress even more, but after another thirty seconds of quiet on the other line, Hannah chooses to give up the act.

—Da, I'm kidding, I know it's just a joke. I was trying to get you back.

Still silence.

—Hello? Dad?

—Hannah, it isn't a joke.

—What do you mean?

—I mean that it isn't a joke. It's real.

—You got me good enough the first time when I found it, believe me. You don't need to try and push me on it.

—Hannah, I'm not joking. His voice starts to rise. This is no joke.

Now Hannah is silent.

—We decided that you needed to find it on your own, but that you should see it sooner rather than later, so we put it in the album.

—Please just tell me what is actually going on. What is this? Hannah's

uneasiness returns.

—Your grandfather wrote this note when he said he did. I found it after he died. I checked with Ouma and she said it was definitely him that wrote it. She remembered how he worked on it.

—I don't understand.

—You won't for a while. Try to though. I can help.

Hannah falls silent once again, the anxiety, the unimaginable largeness of this enigma is rising in her.

—Hannah, if nothing else, for now. Take peace in knowing that you are where you are meant, that you were meant to come to New York.

VIII

Albert

Johannesburg, Gauteng, South Africa, 2014

Albert had shown the letter to Heather when she got back from her trip. She had been similarly surprised, but had taken it better than he had. Some joke she thought at first, just as he had assumed. But neither of them could fathom who could be responsible. He had been avoiding calling his parents because he thought that they might worry. Once Heather had read the letter and assured him that he wasn't crazy and that the letter did say what he had thought it said, they had decided that it was time to call his mother. She not only knew about the letter, but also admitted to leaving it in the kist, and try as they might to force her to concede that it was some sort of farce, she would not give up her story about the letter's veracity. She reasoned with them and told them to call her father. They did, and he also stuck to the same story.

That weekend his parents had come down to the city to try and explain everything. His mother had pointed out all of the details of the letter that had first made Albert so uneasy, so scared—the yellowing and weight of the paper, its obvious age, the slim slanted penmanship, which was identical to other notes that his great-grandfather had written. There was enough evidence that Albert had been convinced, and soon enough Heather was too.

His mother had seemed content with her work in convincing them, but Albert was far from ready to let the matter rest. Maybe it was because he was the first generation that hadn't lived on the farm, but once he had been made to believe that

the letter was real—really written by his great-grandfather, really written at Ster, really filled with accurate predictions about the future of his family from where they would live to the names of great-grandchildren he had never known—he was determined to go back to the farm and see how it all might have happened, or at least work to understand some kernel of the whole story, which was equal parts unfathomable and fascinating. That he would have to travel to Ster was beyond questioning

Over the next few weeks he had made his parents and grandparents agree to accompany him to South Africa and return to the farm. And so it is that Albert finds himself sitting in his cousin's house in Johannesburg watching the sunset and enjoying a beer with his parents and grandparents. They had decided beforehand that they needed to tell the rest of the family about the letter as it concerned all of them as well. Isaac had given a big speech in which he explained that he had kept the letter as secretive as possible in order to see how truly predicative it was and that once life began to unfold as the letter described he knew he needed to pass it on. Hannah and Leo's emigration had been the first of the letter's predictions that had come true without the subject of the prediction knowing of the letter's existence and Isaac had, therefore, taken the chance to pass on the letter to Hannah, who had in turn hid it in the kist, to be found by whichever of her children had ended up with the piece of furniture when they moved out of their house, which had, of course, happened to be Albert. As is no surprise, everyone thought it was a hoax, some elaborate plan for ends uncertain. But once the tickets were booked, once arrangements were being sorted, everyone slowly began to see that there was some substance to the story.

Tomorrow, they're going to Ster. Ever since they confirmed trip, Albert has been struggling to pin down exactly what it is he is going to look for. Everyone has asked him about it, or at least intimated the question, and yet no one has challenged his insistence on going. The lack of dissent has made Albert confident in his decision; it has made him sure that there is some reason to go, that there is something to find. He has been telling himself that he'll know it when he sees it, that it's alright to go into the experience without any expectations, and if he can't find any answers, at least he will have been there and seen the farm. Try as he might to calm himself, the truth is that he is terrified of finding nothing, of feeling nothing, of there being no clue, of the letter being the only piece of the puzzle, of there not even being a puzzle but only the letter and whatever the words written on the paper say.

The plan is for Isaac, Hannah, Albert and Albert's first cousin Steven, to make the two hour drive early the next morning. Albert understands that he needs the rest of his family to accompany him, but he wishes that he could make the trip on his own. He worries that they will be looking to him for guidance, that he will feel responsible if the journey is fruitless.

As everyone talks lightly on the patio, Albert sits in silence. Heather lets her arm slink over the armrest of his chair, her hand clasping his. He had read the letter over and over again on the flight over, searching the text for any hint about how his great-grandfather had been able to find all the information. The strangest part of the whole experience is that it feels as if he is living in a children's fantasy book—that there will be a well hidden inside a cave that overflows with the secrets of the universe. One night last week, he had even written down all of the possible

passwords he could think of—from ‘open sesame’ to ‘abra kadabra’—on the off chance that there would be a locked door with no keyhole behind which the magic of Ster was kept in a safe. The image of himself walking around Ster muttering passwords both amuses and petrifies to Albert. Tomorrow’s absurdity will only be compounded by the fact that Ster is still an operational farm, and the new owners have graciously agreed to allow Albert and his family to come visit. Albert has been speaking to an Afrikaans man named Piet who sounds like a giant. They had first spoken a number of weeks ago and then again earlier today to confirm the trip. Piet seems a reasonable man and once Albert had explained that they wouldn’t need any guidance and promised to not interfere with any of the daily operations of the farm, he had agreed to let the group come.

Isaac is the first to dismiss himself from the patio and head to bed. As he walks past Albert, he squeezes his arm, then bends down to hug him and whispers in his ear: I’ll see you tomorrow, Al. Thank you.

Albert instinctively responds with you’re welcome, but it sounds wrong coming out of his mouth. Why is his grandfather thanking him? For making him go back to Ster, where he hasn’t returned in more than 30 years? Or is it for taking an interest and believing in the story? Albert doesn’t know and he has room in his mind for any additional confusion. He buries his head in his hands and rubs his eyes. He doesn’t think he will be able to sleep tonight, but it would be equally worthless not to try.

As he begins to get up, his mother rises as well. She glides over to him calmly, takes him by the arm and says: “Can we talk for a minute?”

Albert agrees and they make their way back into the house and sit at the

kitchen counter. Looking at his mother, Albert thinks that Hannah has aged well. The creases in her face are soft and make her look refined instead of old or tired. She smiles at him.

—You know tomorrow will most likely be disappointing, Al.

He does, but he doesn't want to admit it before they've even left. At least for himself, he needs to maintain some facade of hope, an expectation that something might happen.

—I don't think so.

—I mean, it will be nice for you to see the farm, and me and Oupa wouldn't go back if we didn't feel like it were important... I just mean we might not find what we're looking for.

—And what might that be, Albert chuckles.

—Who knows? If I knew, I wouldn't be here.

—But we're here.

—But we're here and that's what I'm saying, Al. If nothing else, this brought us here and that might be enough. I know you want to find something, but maybe there isn't anything.

—And then we just leave the letter be?

—I don't think we should destroy it, do you?

—Of course not.

—So, I don't know what other choice we'll have.

Heather walks into the room and comes over to Albert's chair.

—I'm going to bed, she says.

—Me too, says Hannah, I just want to make sure you understand, Al. This is it,

one way or another, either it's a piece or it's the whole thing, but tomorrow is just a part of us being here.

Albert nods and gets up to hug his mother. She heads up the stairs, leaving Heather and Albert alone in the half of the living-room where the air-mattress is set up.

—How are you doing? Heather asks.

—I'm fine, says Albert, just antsy.

He isn't much in the mood to talk. He wants it to be morning already. He remembers how when he was a child he used to go to sleep early on the nights before they were scheduled to fly to South Africa so as to pass the time more quickly. If only he could fall asleep now and wake up tomorrow; if only he knew what it would be like. Why hadn't David written about this? In all of his detail and history, in everything he had chosen to include in the text about how their decisions would be made and how they reacted to the letter, why had he chosen to exclude the culmination of the story, the climax where either all questions are answered and some beautiful sense of closure is realized or where hopes are dashed and we are made to guess endlessly at the mysteries of the text and the story.

His father and Steven come back through the door, wish him goodnight, and head up to bed. Heather is changing in the bathroom, and he is alone in a horrible, hopeless way. There is nothing left for him in this story.

When Heather reemerges from the bathroom, Albert is in bed, fast asleep.

IX

David

Ster, Leslie, Transvaal, South Africa, 1968

Inspiration is a tricky term. Divinity is implied in some uses; in other situations, it may be used in its literal physical meaning: the action of breathing in. Still in other contexts, we may understand it in its figurative sense, in which case it is used to convey that something or someone—although, for rhetorical purposes, let us exclude the possibility that this someone or something is a divine actor or actress as that definition has already been accounted for—breathed into us some notion or idea that causes us to think and, in turn, act in a certain way. I mean to imply all three definitions when I write: *Ster* is an inspiration.

There is perhaps no better way to describe inspiration than through stories—we are able to spend time with characters and learn the machinations of their psyches. Reading a story is a project in empathy, and this story should be considered as such. I have never fancied myself a writer, but when I undertook this project I sought to find in myself a voice that would reach through generations. You see, since I began losing my memory, the past and present have faded; they now only occur to me as occluded outlines in my periphery. Thus, since searching back through my past is such an arduous and painful process, and considering how helpful my writing has been in keeping my mind clear even in the haziest of moments, I chose to write primarily about the future; or, rather, let's call it a single version of myriad potential outcomes.

Surely, you will have noticed that I have written only what I know or I have

assumed to know, e.g. I am assuming (from my perspective in this moment, sitting in my study on the farm) that in the year 1980 Apartheid will still be the status quo in South Africa and that in the 1970s Israel will still be fighting wars, although I will not assume anything about the farthest future time presented in my text as I am no geopolitical scholar, and even if I were, I would not be brazen enough to predict the state of the world half a century into the future. As such, I have worked diligently to limit the purview of the text to the characters—who are stylized versions of living and future members of my family—and their discovery of a letter, not dissimilar to this story itself, which miraculously predicts a family's future, the births, the migrations, the thoughts and feelings of each member.

At the center of the story is Ster—this place that has taken me in and blessed me with its beauty and peace. I first came to Ster after years of working for other men. Upon my arrival in the Transvaal, I held a position with a peddler and went from farm to farm selling goods. Eventually, I found a kind farmer who recognized himself in me. I apprenticed for him and worked on his farm for many years before I could afford a plot of land of my own. But once I had that first plot—it was only a few hectares in Kinross—I was inspired. I worked that land hard, and after a decade longer, I decided to buy a larger, nicer plot in Leslie; and so the family came to own Ster.

The moment I set foot on Ster I experienced something similar to my description of Isaac's first moment in Israel—it was an ecstatic exhilaration. I knew that this would become my home, and hoped that it would be the same for my children and my children's children's. And yet, the connection was even more immediate; in that first instance, I felt camaraderie with the land, as if together we

would do miraculous things. I suppose this point hits at the heart of the story as a whole. I believe with every fiber of my being that Ster is magical; half of me even has a mind that it is magical in the very way that I describe in the story, that indeed there is some predictive force in the words that I have written. Even if it isn't though, or perhaps especially if it isn't, if in a half century or a full century from now, some member of this family picks up this document, I want nothing more than for them to believe in the magic of this farm.

I have tried my best to express those aspects of Ster that feel truly magical—how Hannah used to disappear into fields for hours, how I and my son know the farm in an intimate way, how in the cold silent whisper of winter Ster felt repressed and in the lush summer it bubbled with life. These interactions were relationships in the truest sense: they were love affairs and sibling rivalries; they oversaw the sharing of secrets and the exaltation of lust.

Even if my story and my prose have not succeeded in capturing the complete miracle that is the farm, this document, as a concrete representation of my world and my feelings, holds a truth that would otherwise die with me. This paper, on which you are reading these words, is imbued with an essence. There is truth in these words by virtue of them being written; they represent a person, a place, a time; these words channel me, Ster, and the time that I have spent on the farm. Whether or not the details of this story are entrancing, whether or not they are persuasive, they are the concretization of our family's lineage and our family's connection to the farm. This document exists to say that no matter what happens, Ster has meant and will continue to mean something to this family, and anyone who thinks otherwise need not do anything else than pick up this account and read

it in full. So long as these pages exist, the magic and history of Ster will be preserved.

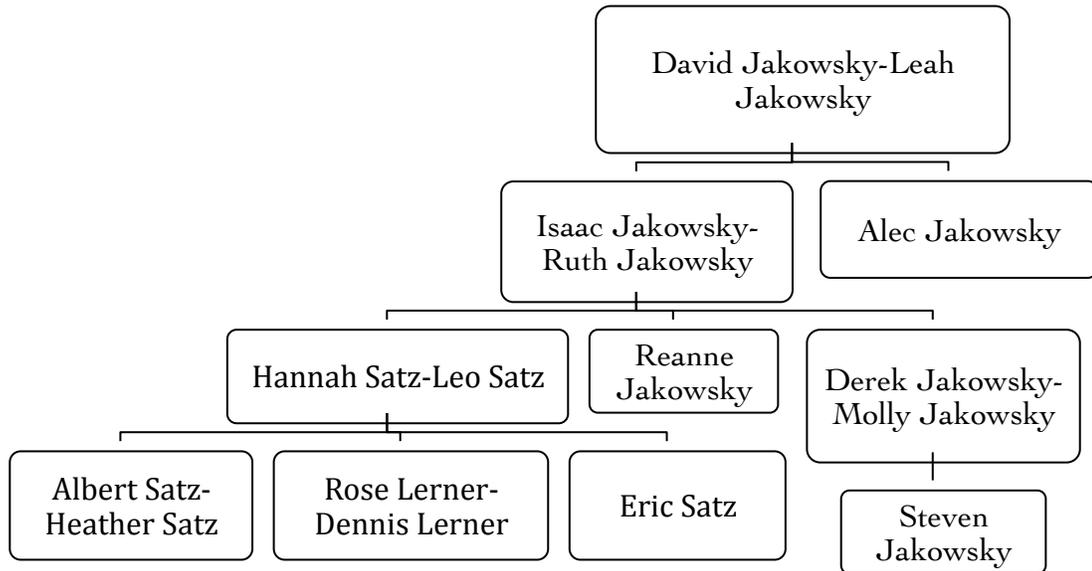
I am not so naïve as to imagine that Ster will be in the family forever; I already understand that my son is likely the last of our family to farm it. Yet, I hope that it will be preserved in our historical consciousness, that future generations, like Albert, will be drawn to it like a magnet, that no matter how far this family stretches, it will remain the common denominator to which everyone wishes to return. I hope that Ster will linger in our mouths and echo in our throats. I do not wish to damn this family to a lifetime of diaspora—a constant longing to return, a discomfort in any home but Ster—but rather, I wish that each of my children and their children and their children recall that in hard times, while horrific events were happening across the world, there was a moment when this family found true happiness and peace.

Ster was that spot for me and my children, but it will not be that place for you or yours. Ster means star. Let this story guide you, as it will.

Post Script:

David Jakowsky died on 13 February 1968, the week after completing this manuscript.

Family Tree and Timeline of Relevant Dates in David's Story



- 1892: David Jakowsky is born.
- 1912: David Jakowsky immigrates to South Africa.
- 1920: Isaac Jakowsky is born.
- 1924: David Jakowsky purchases Ster.
- 1956: Hannah Jakowsky is born.
- 1968: David Jakowsky dies.
- 1969: Isaac Jakowsky finds David's letter.
- 1976: David, Ruth, and Reanne Jakowsky immigrate to Israel.
- 1978: Isaac Jakowsky sells Ster.
- 1980: Hannah and Leo Satz immigrate to the United States.
- 1981: Hannah Satz finds David's letter.
- 1986: Albert Satz is born.
- 2014: Albert Satz finds David's letter.

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