DAN JACOBSON

THE TRAP

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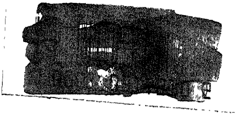
This extraordinary short novel is the author's first work. In it Dan Jacobson has succeeded in presenting both a vivid picture of life in South Africa, and a piercing commentary on human nature. It is the story of two men, black and white—Jacob van Schoor, a good *baas*, and Willem, the most trusted native on his farm—and the events which lead each to betray the other, and himself.

The trouble starts when Willem makes a false accusation against Setole, a native whose innate dignity withstands even a brutal beating, and persuades van Schoor to put him off the farm. Behind the unexpected climax in which the series of wrongs finally explodes is the hate-filled figure of Maclachlan, shopkeeper, who shares in Willem's guilt. The action builds up consistently to a violence at the end which is shocking in its impact, and an indictment of man's inhumanity to man.

One of the most impressive things about *The Trap* is the amount of complexity the author manages to contain within a small frame. Even those charac-

(Continued on back flap)



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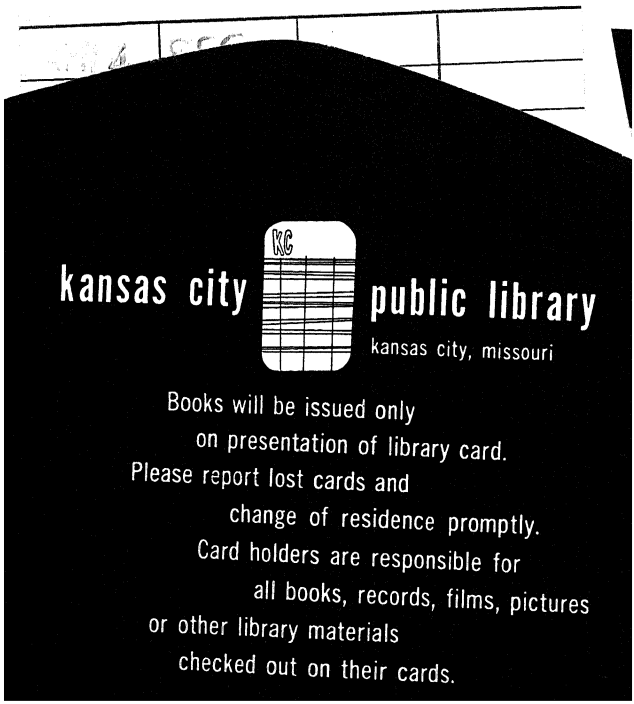


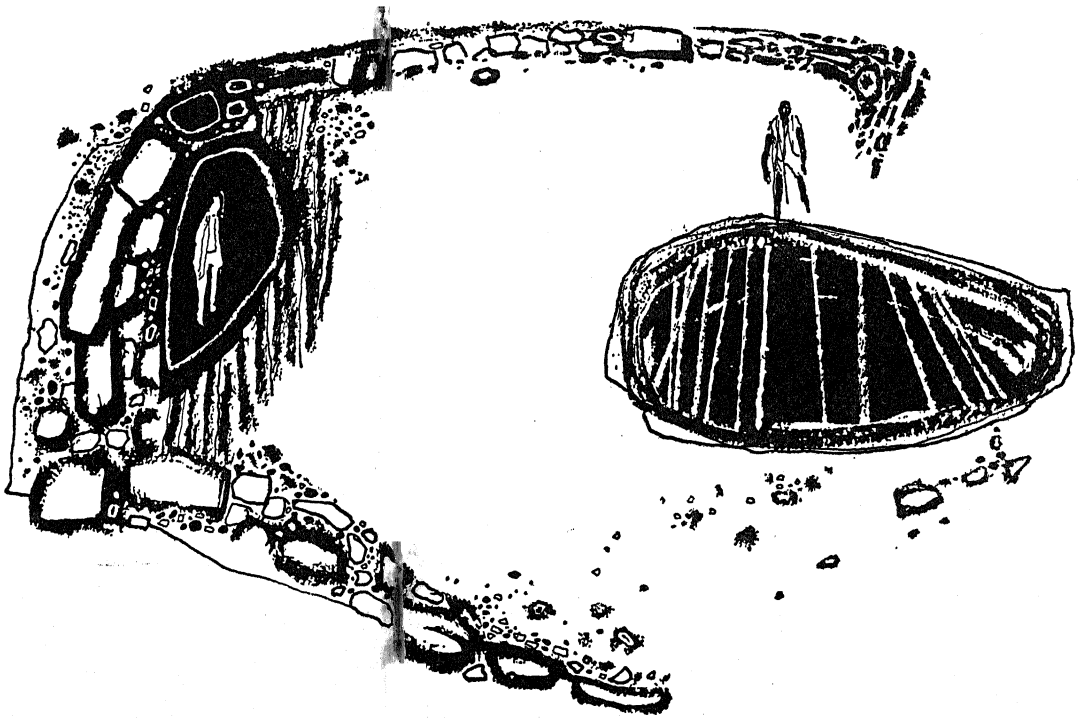
THE TRAP

THE TRAP

a novel by DAN JACOBSON

HARCOURT, BRACE AND COMPANY

NEW YORK



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TO MICHAEL AND LIEBE JACOBSON

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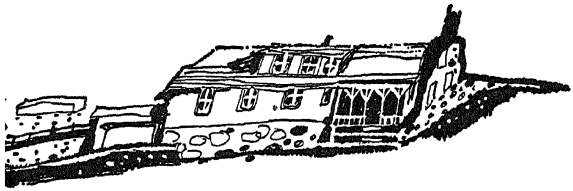
One SETOLE



In the silent rush of light across the veld, van Schoor turned and looked back the way he had come. He was alone. Behind him was his house and the little lavatory—the corrugated iron roofs shone gold as they caught waveringly, like water, the sun. To his right was the river, sunk into its cleft in the land, between the banks of rock. The water, where it could be seen, was green and running swiftly. Now early in the morning, when the sun was still low and there remained the night's coolness on the rock and even in places the night's dew, the land looked as though it were reposing; peaceful, and as yet not savaged by the sun. Van Schoor stopped short and stared at the black and gray bundle from some distance away.

It looked like a heap of old clothing, something abandoned, shabby, thrown away. One unlaced shoe pointed straight to the sky. One arm lay flung outward palm up, empty.

"Setole?" van Schoor said.

He came closer, and leaned over. He saw a bubble of blood swelling and collapsing beneath the African's nostril.

"Setole?" he said again. He took the man's coat in his hand and lifted the upper part of the body from the ground. The head sagged back, exposing the neck. He let the body go back to the ground.

He remained for a few moments silently at the side of the body. Then he heard a heavy, unconscious sigh, and gently he slapped the man's face.

"Can you hear me?" he said.

There was another sigh. Van Schoor could feel the slap tingling on his fingers; though he had acted in kindness it felt strange on his hand.

Then the breathing of the man beneath him changed, and he leaned forward and listened to the louder and more irregular expulsion of breath as the injured African struggled to be released from his unconsciousness. Van Schoor watched the struggle, way beyond his reach, and then left him and ran back toward the house, a few hundred yards away. He saw the native girl sweeping the

back stoep and called to her to fetch Willem, the boss-boy.

He came back more slowly, hearing his footsteps grating against the rock, and crushing the grass in his path. How quiet everything was, and peaceful—the cool veld, the indifferent broken line of the river. Only Setole was a flaw in the morning: a crack in the cup of stillness; a mark on the veld.

When he came back, Setole was awake. At any rate, one eye was open, and through it he was staring at the high morning sky. He seemed at peace then, lying on his back, as though he had just been born and was staring around him with wonder, and no suspicion. He stared at van Schoor in the same way, as the white man leaned over him and said questioningly:

"Setole?"

There was a pause before Setole answered. His eye did not waver: all it did was to focus lower, from the sky to the man, but the scrutiny he gave to each seemed the same.

"Ja, baas."

"Are you all right, Setole?"

"All right, baas?"

"Yes. Are you all right . . . ?"

"Ja, baas, I think I am all right."

Van Schoor was relieved. He said, "You gave me quite a fright. I thought you were dead when I first saw you."

"No, baas," Setole said.

Van Schoor did not know what to do next. "Do you want to sit up?" he asked.

Setole seemed to think the matter over. "No," he said at last, simply.

"Oh," van Schoor gestured with his hand. "But you can't lie here like this. Come, let me give you a hand." He took Setole's body in his arms and propped him against a rock.

"There, that's better."

Setole neither resisted nor agreed. Now that he was sitting up he could see more, and his incurious wondering eye went over rock and grass and the long view of the river.

"Am I on the farm?" he asked.

"Yes, you're on the farm. What did they do

to you in Dors River that you came home like this?"

"They caught me," Setole said.

"Who?" van Schoor asked.

"I can't remember," Setole said, and from the clear directness of his gaze it might have been true. He lifted his head to the sun, and said, "Look how low the sun is." He seemed a man with no memories or desires: he was still counting the simple perceptions, one by one.

"It's still early," van Schoor reminded him. He too looked at the sun, and the dark blue line of the horizon beneath it, and the level light that shone above and through the grass and thorn trees, and on the rocks. Even on that hardened veld the morning rested with tenderness, the softness of birth. And Setole, one eye open and blood on his black skin, sat on the ground and looked about him, open to the veld, seeming almost in his patience and simple perceptiveness, a part of it.

For a moment they sat together in silence. Then van Schoor stood up. "Can you walk to your hut?"

"Not yet," Setole replied.

Van Schoor laughed. He said, "As long as you're comfortable."

"I'm comfortable," Setole said. He too began smiling, and the thick injured lips slowly opened wider and forced the smile through his flesh; blood was suspended in his open mouth.

"God, they half-murdered you, Setole," van Schoor said, seeing the blood.

But this time Setole did seem to remember something. He shook his head, closing his eyes. Then he opened them slowly. "There was only one of them," he said.

"Only one of whom?"

"There was only one man who caught me. And it wasn't at Dors River. I remember. I think I was already on the farm when he caught me."

"Why didn't you fight him off if there was only one?" van Schoor asked.

"I was too drunk," Setole said.

Van Schoor shrugged. "Then it's your own fault. If you didn't drink so much then they wouldn't be able to catch you."

"Ja, baas," Setole said.

"So are you going to stop drinking?"

"How can I stop drinking, baas? I've always been drinking. I don't steal and I don't chase after women, all I do is drink a little too much. What can I do, baas?"

"Stop drinking."

"Ah, baas," Setole said. "It is easy for you to tell me to stop drinking. But it isn't easy for me to do it."

"I know. When I took you from Baas Harris in Lyndhurst, he said, 'Setole is a good boy, and a good plasterer as long as he stays sober. But when he's drunk, look out!' "

"Baas Harris is also a good baas," Setole said.

"You mean any baas is a good baas who doesn't give you the sack when you come home drunk."

"That's right, baas. Like Baas Harris said, when I'm sober, I work well, and I only get drunk on Sundays."

"Instead of going to church!"

"Does the baas go to church on Sundays?"

"Not very often," van Schoor laughed. "You get clever when they give you a hiding. But you'd

get even cleverer if you went to church like Willem."

"Willem?" Setole said, as though he had never heard the name before.

"Yes, Willem. My boss-boy."

"Oh that Willem," Setole said. But he seemed confused. "Willem?" he said again. He lifted his head to van Schoor and stared at him in confusion; van Schoor saw his eyes cloud and become obscure. "Willem?"

"He's coming just now," van Schoor said. "I sent for him to come and help you. Willem is a good boy. He goes to church, you know."

"Willem?"

"Yes, Willem," van Schoor said, a little irritated by Setole's incomprehension.

"I don't like that Willem," Setole said unexpectedly.

Van Schoor said: "I don't listen when my boys talk about one another. I'm not interested in whether you like Willem or Willem likes you. If you have a proper complaint you can make it."

"Ja, baas."

Van Schoor stood up. He stood for a moment above Setole. "I'm going now to have my breakfast, and Willem will help you to your hut. If you need anything from the missus you must ask for it—there's iodine in the house. That's to clean it," he added, seeing that Setole did not understand, "to clean it where they hit you, so that the cuts won't go bad."

"There was only one of them," Setole said.

Again van Schoor laughed. "You've told me that already. And it won't make any difference to the cuts."

"Ja, baas."

Van Schoor turned to go. But before he left he said to Setole, "You must look after yourself. You're not a young man any more and if you keep on drinking and if they catch you like this every time you won't last very long. And there's my work—I don't want to be kept waiting while you get sober or get fixed up from what they did to you."

"Ja, baas," Setole said. "I am getting an old man."

"All right then, Setole." But as he said it, putting his hat on his head, he saw Willem coming across the veld toward them, and waited for him.

When the other came, he took off his hat to van Schoor, almost formally. "Morning, baas," he said.

"Morning, Willem," van Schoor replied, and only then did Willem turn to look at Setole. "What have they done with you, Setole?" he asked in surprise. Then he immediately again turned his attention to the white man. "The baas sent for me," he said. He held his hat in front of his chest. He was dressed in clothes almost as ragged as the blood-bespattered ones that Setole was wearing, but he carried his more bravely, and he had a proud pair of army boots on his feet. He was rather a slightly built African, lighter-skinned than Setole, with a small receding forehead. His brow was perpetually lined, it gave his face an air of responsibility, and his gravity was enhanced by the controlled movements of his body from his hips as he watched and listened to his master.

"Ja, baas," he said, when van Schoor had finished telling how he had found Setole. He looked

at Setole, without expression, as if to confirm the story. Then he asked, "What does the baas want me to do with him?"

"To take him away."

"Take him where, baas?"

Van Schoor jerked his head. "Where do you think I want you to take him? I want you to take him into my house, and give him a bath, and put my clothes on him, and put him in my bed. What else should I want you to do with him?"

Willem's head dropped. They enjoyed the irony for a moment, Willem smiling faintly. Van Schoor went on: "Take him, look after him, do what you like with him, but, Willem, don't come and ask *me* what you must do with him."

"Ja, baas," Willem looked up, smiling strongly. "I understand now, baas."

"Good." Van Schoor turned to Setole. "Hey, Setole," he said, "can you stand up?"

"I can try, baas."

"Then try, dammit."

"Ja, baas." Setole stood up slowly, rising from his knees. He would have fallen if Willem had not

caught him and steadied him. But no sooner was he well on his feet than he jerked away from Willem, and stood by himself, tottering slightly, but standing.

Willem shook his head. "A drunkard is a terrible thing, baas," he said lightly.

"As long as he does work I don't care what he is."

"Ja, baas. That is all that matters for the baas and for the farm," Willem smilingly agreed.

"It is the farm that matters," van Schoor said.

"What would the farm be without the baas? The baas is the farm."

"Then you've got a *grootbaas*," van Schoor said, and again they laughed.

Setole did not laugh. He said, swaying slightly, "I am a good boy. I do my work properly, and I don't worry the women, and I don't swear. I am drinking a little too much, that's all."

"That's all!" Willem said ironically. He looked to van Schoor for approval, and encouraged by the amusement on van Schoor's face, he said again: "That's all!"

Setole chewed for a moment and then spat some saliva on the ground; he remained staring at it. Now that he was standing he looked merely wretched, a tattered and broken Zulu. He was dressed in a vest and a pair of gray trousers from some white man's suit, and a bunny jacket cast off from some white man's army. He wore canvas *takkies* on his feet, his toes poking through the ends. Van Schoor studied him. He said: "What can you expect if you spend all your money on drink?"

Setole frowned. Then, when he spoke, his voice rang surprisingly firmly. "At least it is my own money that I spend on drink."

"Come on, Setole," Willem said, jerking his body angrily. "The baas hasn't got all day to listen to your noise."

"When the baas is tired of me, the baas will send me away," Setole replied.

Van Schoor stopped what seemed to be an incipient quarrel between the two men. "Well, the baas is tired right now. The baas is going to have breakfast." He turned away, smiling.

But Setole stopped him. "Baas," he said, "baas."

"What is it?"

"Baas, I may drink a little too much, but I have eyes to see what is happening on the farm, and ears to hear." Tenderly, afraid of hurt, he touched his eyes and his ears with his hand. "The baas does not know what is happening on this farm. But I also know that I don't belong on this farm, so people mustn't be frightened that I am going to say anything. I am here to do my work and then I go back to Lyndhurst. That is all."

"What is he talking about?" van Schoor asked Willem.

"He doesn't know what he is talking about, baas, so how should I know?"

"I know what I am talking about," Setole said.

"Go, the two of you," van Schoor said. "I've heard enough for one morning."

Willem leaped to Setole's side. "Come, Setole," he said, placing his arm around Setole's waist and beginning to lead him away.

"Good-by, baas," Willem said. He looked back to van Schoor with a sort of grin on his face, ex-

pressing amusement and distaste for the job he had to do. Van Schoor watched the two of them go, Setole shambling alongside Willem.

"Bring my horse to the house, after breakfast. We must ride up to see the cattle," he called.

"Ja, baas," came the reply from some distance away.

II In the evening of the same day Willem came before his baas again, very gravely, this time, accompanied by his son. He stood before van Schoor and his wife, as they sat on the stoep enjoying the cool of the evening, and said: "Please, baas, may I speak to you?"

"What is it, Willem?" van Schoor asked.

Willem hesitated. He said: "I can't speak in front of the missus, baas."

"What have you got, Willem? Secrets?" Mrs. van Schoor called out jeeringly from her corner.

Willem looked down. He made no reply, and shielding his servant from his wife, van Schoor asked:

"Can't it wait until tomorrow morning?"

"No, baas," Willem said firmly. "Please, baas," he added. "Baas must understand that I can't talk about these things in front of a woman."

Mrs. van Schoor shrank more deeply into her corner. "Go and listen to his things," she said to her husband, and van Schoor stood up from his chair, getting away from her. Rather wearily, he walked down the path of the garden. When he reached the fence he stopped and turned to Willem who had followed him.

"Well? No one can hear you now."

Willem said: "I have something to tell the baas."

"I've heard that already."

"Ja, baas." Willem thought for a moment. "Baas must understand that it isn't an easy thing for me to tell."

"What is it, Willem?"

"I said to myself, I must tell the baas. The baas will understand." But he did not continue. He waited, perhaps for encouragement. Half-impatiently, van Schoor took a strand of the fence and rattled it, sending it vibrating down the length

of the garden. They listened to the shrill jangle dying away. Then, from the native huts, a dog yelped, yelped, yelped. That, too, died away in the darkness.

"I'm listening," van Schoor said.

Willem twisted his body, finally coming to rest and holding one arm up as though he were taking an oath. He brought out his confession with difficulty: "Baas, I must tell the baas the truth. It was me who beat up Setole like that last night."

"You!" van Schoor exclaimed. He stared through the twilight, trying to make out the expression on Willem's face. But he could see nothing. The veld around them was dark, and the rocks were humped closely in still blacker masses. High in the sky, there hung a thinner darkness, the sky still held some light, as faint as a breath, and as tenuous. A yellow lick of light came from the front room of the house, and there was an orange flame far off from one of the native huts. The rest of the world was hooded in darkness. "You?" van Schoor asked.

"Ja, baas," Willem said humbly.

"But why?" Willem did not answer. "What is going on here?" Repeating his question, Mrs. van Schoor's voice called from the stoep, "What's happening, Jacob?"

Van Schoor turned to her. "In a minute," he called through the gloom. Her question still waited. "What is happening?" he asked again, searching for Willem's expression.

The question had been asked three times. Willem answered it abruptly: "Dirty business!"

"What sort of dirty business? And why did you beat up Setole? What's he got to do with it?"

"Everything, baas. I beat him up because he's a dirty man."

"How—dirty?"

"Baas," Willem said, "the baas knows me well. I'm not a bad Kaffir. I do my work and I do it well. Has the baas ever had to complain against me that I didn't do my work properly?"

"No, Willem."

"And I am honest, baas. Has the baas ever missed anything that he gave me to keep?"

"No."

"Ja, baas. And the reason, baas, the reason is that I am a Kaffir with respect. I've got respect. I'm not the sort of man who goes around without respect for anything. The baas knows that I have respect."

"Respect" . . . van Schoor had often heard that word from Willem. It was the heart of his values. It was the core of his religion, his sobriety, his awareness of his status and his skin, and that of his master, his honesty, his faithfulness to his wife. Once there had been a difference between van Schoor and his servant over the question of a key. Before van Schoor's arrival the key to the shed behind the house had been kept by Willem, and van Schoor had simply taken over the system as he had, indeed, taken over Willem himself with the farm. But after a while he had decided to change it: he wanted the key to himself. He could still remember Willem's injured voice: "Baas wants to treat me as if I've no respect. Does the baas believe that I am a man with no respect?" He had let Willem keep the key.

He said now: "Yes, Willem, I know that you are a boy with respect."

"Ja, baas. Then if I've got respect, what must I do with a man who's got no respect at all, who's filthy—a dirty man, baas? I can't say how dirty he is, baas."

"But you must say, Willem, otherwise I know nothing."

"Ja, baas. I know. That is why I am here. Baas, last night, Sunday night, Setole came home drunk from Dors River. I found him there . . ." his voice trailed away to indicate the distance . . . "on the road when I was coming back from church. I helped him, baas, even though he was so drunk it made me feel sick just to look at him. I brought him here. He could never have found his way here if I hadn't helped him. I almost carried him." Willem stopped and drew in a breath.

"Yes?"

"Now comes the part that is difficult to tell the baas. I don't even know if the baas will understand what I am saying. Baas, when we got home this man, this Setole, wanted to make dirty busi-

ness with me. With *me!* Does the baas understand?"

There was a long silence. Van Schoor leaned against the fence, and felt the steel strand against his back, through his shirt. Willem stood with his head averted. Only the little boy was looking curiously from the one man to the other.

"Yes," van Schoor said at last. "I understand what you mean. I have heard of such things. But it is hard to believe, Willem."

Willem said simply: "Baas must believe it. It is the truth."

They were silent again. From the stoep, van Schoor heard the sounds of his wife moving in her wicker chair, and he turned away, leaning against the fence, his back toward Willem and the house.

"Baas, when we came to the huts, it was then that Setole wanted to start this business with me. At first I didn't know what the man wanted, but he wouldn't leave me alone. He followed me and called out to me and tried to take hold of me." Willem shook his head violently. "I never knew of such a dirty business before in my whole life, I

didn't understand it, I didn't know what was going on. But when I did understand what he wanted I hit him. I hit him again and again. What else could I do, baas? I was so angry. He ran from me and I chased him and caught him and hit him again. Then he fell over and lay on the ground, and I said, 'Setole, if you ever start your dirty business again I'll kill you. I'll kick you in the face, do you understand?' And I kicked him on the side to show what I meant. He lay on the ground like the dirty thing that he is. I said to him again, 'Do you understand?' So he said, 'Ja, Willem.' 'Good,' I said to him, 'then you know that this farm isn't a place for your dirty business.' He is just a kind of a dog, baas, he isn't a man. And I walked away from him to go back to my hut. When I walked away he was still lying on the ground where I'd caught him. And the next time I saw him was when the baas called for me to come and help this morning. I did help him, baas. If the baas gives an order then I must do what the baas says. But I didn't like helping him. I can tell that to the baas now."

They were both silent. Then van Schoor said, "Why did you not tell me?"

He saw Willem gesture in the dark. "Baas, I will tell you now. I did not tell the baas, and I am not a boy who likes not to tell the truth to his baas. I hope the baas will forgive me for not telling him the truth."

"I can't forgive you until you tell me why you did not tell me the truth."

"I know, baas."

Van Schoor shifted his weight from one foot to the other, and sighed, and looked around him. The night had deepened, he saw, and the sky had grown blacker, and the first stars were no longer vague, but each pricked sharply through the velvet sky. Willem waited to continue, submissive to his master's weariness. The little boy was squatting at the side of his father's leg, staring up at the two men. The whites of his eyes shone, the rest was darkness. Silently, almost experimentally, van Schoor slowly put a foot forward, caught the boy on his projecting knee, and pushed. The boy fell over on his back, "A, nee baas!" escaping from him as he

sprawled. He pulled himself back to his squatting position, teeth shining in a smile. When he had brought himself to balance, van Schoor's foot again came silently forward and again the boy fell. Neither Willem nor van Schoor said anything. This time the boy did not say anything, nor did he smile.

"Why did you not tell me?" van Schoor asked, turning back to Willem.

"I did not tell the truth to the baas, because, baas, I did not feel that this was the affair of the baas," Willem said haltingly.

Van Schoor said: "Everything that happens on this farm is my affair."

"Ja, baas, I know that now." Willem's voice dropped in admission. He said, explanatory: "Baas, I thought I was doing the right thing. I did not want to come to the baas with the things that happened among the Kaffirs here and which I thought the baas would never need to know about. I thought, 'Why should I drag the baas into such a business? It is dirty, and the baas will hate me for coming to him with such dirty stories.

You see, baas, I thought I had given Setole such a lesson that he would never dare start anything like that again as long as he is on the farm. I thought he would finish his job and then go back to Lyndhurst and whatever he does there, and the farm would be finished with him. Then why should I come running to the baas with my stories?' That is what I thought, my baas."

"But—"

"But I was wrong, baas. When it first happened I did think that I must tell the baas. I must tell the baas because he can chase Setole away, and that is all he deserves, to be chased away like a dog. That was when I was angry. I know, now, that I was right when I was angry, not afterward. When you have such a sin on the farm nothing is clean until you have chased it away and can live clean again. It is like mud in water, a little can make a river dirty." Willem's voice died away. He said, "Ja, baas," though van Schoor had made no comment, as if he were formally bringing his story to an end; it was like an amen at the end of a prayer.

But the story was not ended. Willem leaned forward and brought one hand up, cupped, an imploring gesture it seemed in the darkness. "If only I had done it," he said.

"What would have happened, Willem?"

Willem's hand shook backward and forward, and then his body swayed too, in grief. He said in a low voice: "My child would not have known of the sin there is on this farm. Oh, my baas, can you believe that anyone would do such a thing to a child?"

"No," van Schoor said. "No!"

"Yes, my baas, yes. *This* child." He ducked and brought the child up, holding him by the back of the neck. "Setole came and worried him the same way that he worried me. Only this morning it happened, when we were riding to see the cattle. And I did not tell the truth to the baas!"

Faintly, van Schoor asked, "Is this true?"

"It is true, baas. Where should the child have learned about such things if not from Setole? He hadn't known about such things until that man came to the farm. He learned when it happened."

"What do you mean—happened?" van Schoor cried out.

"Nothing happened, baas. The child ran away before anything could happen, and this evening he asked me what did Setole want of him, why did Setole worry him? What could I tell him, baas? I told him nothing, but I brought him with me to the baas, so that the baas could see for himself."

"I have seen."

"Ja, baas."

A silence followed. Then agitatedly, Willem broke into speech again: "Please, baas, chase that man away from the farm. He can't stay among us. We are good people here and we don't know what to do with such a man. Who will he worry next? He has already done so much damage." He rocked the child in front of him, who now that he was an object of attention had his head deeply down. "Please, my baas, I have come to you, my *grootbaas*. Chase that man away from the farm tonight, tomorrow morning. Don't let him stay among us any longer. I ask the baas to do it."

There was a silence.

"I will do it, Willem," van Schoor said.

"Ah, thank you, baas," Willem said gratefully. "I am glad to hear that from the baas."

"I can't believe that such a thing could happen on my farm," van Schoor said. He stared out to the night, toward the huts. But nothing could be seen from them: that one flame had flickered and gone out long before. He said:

"Yes, Willem, it's a bad business."

"Ja, baas," Willem said. He waited for a moment. "Now I can tell the baas that if he had not said that Setole must go I would have asked the baas to let me go."

"No, Willem," van Schoor said, "I wouldn't have let you go." He shook his head. "I can't let you go just like that."

Willem was tremendously gratified. He put his hat on his head and took it off again, a quick, humble salutation. "Thank you, baas, thank you." He smiled. "Now I will only ask the baas to let me go as far as Dors River tomorrow morning. My uncle is very sick there."

Van Schoor smiled too. "I think I can let you do that."

"Thank you, baas. I will be back as soon as I can."

"All right, Willem." Willem was a good boy, van Schoor felt. He could be trusted. He was a good Kaffir. In a teasing voice, he said: "So, Willem, you are a boy with respect."

Willem caught the teasing tone, but also the affection behind it. "Ja, baas, I am a Kaffir with respect."

"And the *klonkie?*" Van Schoor shot out a hand and cuffed the little boy on the head. "Has he also got respect?"

The little boy ducked away, and hid behind his father. "I hope he will have respect when he grows up," Willem replied gravely.

"All right, then," van Schoor said, his voice resuming its gravity, "I will fix it up tomorrow morning."

"Ja, baas. Thank you, baas. Good night, baas." He turned to the boy. "Say good night and thank you to the baas."

Strained and shy, the boy's voice came: "Good night, baas. Thank you, baas."

"Good night, *klonkie*," van Schoor replied.

He stood at the gate and watched them go from him. How quickly the night swallowed them up! He smiled, staring after them, hearing their footfalls growing vaguer in the night. They were black enough.

III

The next morning, when the day had cleared from the horizon and the early summer sun fell strongly on the flat and customary veld beneath it, van Schoor emerged from the house. For a moment he stood in the sandy garden, ringed by the wire fence, and stared beyond to the kraal. They were already working on it: Piet and Sout were sitting on the wall, and Jan Blom was wheeling a barrow load of rocks toward them, very slowly. Setole could not be seen.

Jan Blom put the wheelbarrow down, and rested for a while, sitting on the rocks he had been wheeling. Piet and Sout were arguing, apparently,

though the smoke from their pipes rose peacefully enough into the air. They waved their arms. Sout pointed and Piet shook his head. Sout shook his fist, vaguely, at nobody and in no particular direction, and then he put his pipe back in his mouth and leaned luxuriously over on the broad wall, hand hugging his knees. He leaned still further back until he was in imminent danger of falling, and then, like a pendulum, swung his body back. The two of them smoked, and nearer to van Schoor, Jan Blom stood half-doubled and began pushing the wheelbarrow forward. It stuck and he jerked at it violently a few times. He shouted to the other two, but they just waved at him, not even bothering to turn round. All injury, he stood with his arms akimbo and shouted at them some more. They ignored him entirely, and his voice slackened off. He jerked madly at the wheelbarrow, legs and arms flailing, and finding it obdurate, sat down again. This time he began feeling for his pipe. He also sat and smoked. He wore a cap way over his eyes, and an old vest. His trousers came to just a little way below his knees,

and his boots were held together by bits of wire. But he was full of leisure, and stared at the world, holding his head back curiously in order to do so from under the brim of his cap; neck cricked, he looked like a perpetually surprised insect. And now everybody was still, Piet, Sout, and Jan Blom, even the little goat tethered near one of the native huts. There seemed to be no one else nearby, not even any women from the huts. Just the three leisurely workers, the descendents of Adam Kok's bastard tribe, stretching themselves in the sun which warmed their bodies without any difficulty through the tatters of their clothing.

Van Schoor crept silently behind Jan Blom and knocked his cap off his head. Jan Blom turned, with an attitude of defense, but seeing who was before him, dropped it rapidly and seized hold of the wheelbarrow. He jerked at it a few times.

"Baas can see for himself," he finally panted.

Van Schoor reversed the wheelbarrow and pushed it aside of the little clump of pebbles on which it had been stuck. Jan Blom shook his head in utter amazement, and then suddenly smiled

showing both his teeth. They were quite symmetrically placed, one on either side of his upper jaw.

Van Schoor walked on with Jan Blom shoving the wheelbarrow before him, and groaning as he went. Piet and Sout had slid off the wall, and when van Schoor entered the kraal Piet was brandishing a hammer above his head and Sout was prodding unsuccessfully at the cement which Setole was carefully mixing, scooping it up in smooth liquid swathes and letting it slide again into the pool.

"Morning, baas," Piet and Sout said in unison. They stopped working for a moment, out of respect. They then fell on their work with vast energy.

Though it was still early in the morning, Setole had already managed to cover his face with cement. The fine gray powder was in every line and wrinkle of his face, and on his forehead. He wore on his head the ripped-off bottom of a cement bag, and his hair too was powdered.

"Morning, baas," he said. He scooped another spadeful of the mixture, and away it flowed, fall-

ing heavily into the pool. The spade went in again, circled, lifted with its load, let it fall.

"Setole!" van Schoor called abruptly.

The spade swung in its arc, hesitated, and this time the cement simply poured from it.

"Baas?" Setole said.

"Come. I want to talk to you."

Setole paused for a moment. He walked over to the kraal wall and leaned the spade against it. The last few drops fell on the floor of dry green dung. Piet and Sout were not working: they were watching the others. Then Jan Blom came hurtling round the corner at top speed, wheelbarrow rattling and rocks bouncing. "Lo-o-ok out!" he cried and let the wheelbarrow go, which disappointingly stopped running and fell to the ground with a jolt. "Hell! *Donder! Bliksem!*" Jan Blom shouted. Now he was exhausted. He wiped the sweat from his brow and shook it out graphically on the ground.

"I am ready, baas," Setole said.

"Come."

They walked out of the kraal, watched by the three workers. Van Schoor did not look behind him.

Setole took off his cement-bag hat and threw it on the ground just as he left the kraal, and their feet left the soft dung and struck once more on the rock and earth of the farm.

Van Schoor led the way. He walked toward the house, then swerved away from it. Finally he came to a stop in front of the house, but at some distance away, at the beginning of the incline the cattle used when they came down to the river to drink.

"Setole?" he said, and heard with surprise the questioning tone of his own voice. "Setole," he said again.

"Ja, baas."

"Setole, you must take your things and go. I can't have you on the farm."

"Ja, baas." Setole's reply was so flat and unmoved that van Schoor turned, clearing his eyes of the vague view of the house on the rise, and looked straight at Setole.

He saw again that the man in front of him was simply a wretched and humble Kaffir. He looked at Setole's bruised face, with the cement upon it,

and the flat fleshy nose and half-closed eye, and all the other marks of the beating Willem had given him—the peeled, indecently pink parts of the cheek where Willem's fist had landed, the scab beginning to form on the chin, and the blood that had dried and not been washed off under the ear. His clothes were worse than van Schoor had remembered them to be, all filth and rags. And he was small, though van Schoor had always thought of him as a stockily built man. He now saw him to be slight; he saw the high ridges of bone beneath the black skin where the shirt was open at the neck; and relief gave way to contempt.

"Setole, you must go," he said. "Today."

"Today, baas?"

"Yes."

Setole said nothing.

"Yes, today. You must get the hell out of the farm, and don't you dare ever come back here again. If I ever see you near my farm, if I ever see you in Dors River again, I'll flog the skin off your back, do you hear? I'll set the dogs on you." Van Schoor shook his finger. "I'll teach you a les-

son, a proper one, not the one that Willem gave you."

"Ja, baas."

Van Schoor started walking away. Setole did not move. He stood as he had stood while van Schoor had been talking to him, with his hands hanging in front of his loins, his shoulders slack. He was staring toward the river when he heard van Schoor's voice, from a few yards away:

"Well, what are you waiting for?"

Setole still stared toward the river, his back to van Schoor. Suddenly he felt a hand on his shoulder. The cloth of his vest tore with a sharp rip. Van Schoor shook him by the shoulder, and his body waggled loosely, without dignity.

"Well?" van Schoor said.

"Well," Setole replied.

The shaking doubled in violence, until van Schoor let go and Setole staggered back. He tripped and fell. The white man towered above him. "I told you to go," he said.

Setole stood up. He said nothing.

"Go!" van Schoor said. "Go!"

"Ja, baas," Setole said.

Van Schoor moved away again, but this time only a little way, watching Setole. The veld was quiet, and the heat was beginning to beat up from the ground. Setole's eyes were narrow against the sun, and van Schoor's shadow fell on the ground between the two men. Van Schoor moved; and his shadow moved, closer to Setole.

"Well?"

Setole said nothing. He did not seem obstinate; it was more as though he were too old and tired to waste his breath in a vain shouting across the desert between them. Rock lay between them; all was the rock of van Schoor's farm, pale brown, pale gray, hard, beginning to burn in the sun. Van Schoor's shadow slid silently over the rock, closer still.

"What are you waiting for, Setole?"

Setole moved unexpectedly. It was just a small inconclusive movement, a gesture of his arm.

"No," van Schoor said. "You must go. At once. Do you hear me?"

Setole shook his head. He looked round him once

more, to the river behind, to the right where Dors River station was hidden in the long swell of the land away from the river, only the tops of the trees poking above the horizon, and close ahead, to the kraal, where the three other boys were standing on the wall looking in their direction.

"Go, damn you!" van Schoor shouted, his voice swinging up shrilly.

Setole said quietly and reasonably, "I am going, my baas."

"Go then," van Schoor said. "Go now."

Setole moved his arms, holding them away from his body, like someone ready to go but not sure of the direction. His head moved this way and that, in quick searching jerks, strangely un-coordinated, like a bird trying to fly with a broken wing, or a fractured hand trying to grasp an object. Van Schoor stood aside: it was like a direction that he was giving. And Setole took the direction.

Head down, he dived past van Schoor, little shabby body moving in the strong sunlight, white vest, gray trousers, black skin. Then his back was

to van Schoor, and he was walking toward the huts with his usual stumbling gait. Van Schoor saw a piece of his *takkies* flapping open with every step he took, flapping open and closing, opening and closing, flapping open again. "Wait!" he shouted. "Setole, wait for me!"

But when he got to Setole he did not know what to say, he did not know why he had called Setole. They stood and looked at each other again, van Schoor wavering a little. At last, shrinkingly, he asked, "You haven't asked me why I am sending you away."

"It wouldn't help if I did know."

"No, it wouldn't help."

"Then I must go. Does the baas know if there's a train to Lyndhurst?"

"There's a train every day."

Setole started to move away, then stopped. "And my pay, baas? When will the baas pay me?"

"Your pay? Of course, I forgot all about your pay. I'll pay you now if you come to the house. I can give it to you at once."

"Ja, baas."

"How much is it that I owe you?"

"Doesn't the baas know how much he owes me?"

Van Schoor began calculating aloud. "Four pound eighteen," he said at the end of his calculations. "Is that right?"

"Ja, baas." Setole acquiesced without calculation.

"I think I've got that in the house. I'll go now to see if I have. Come to the house when you've packed your things."

"Pack, baas? What should I have to pack?"

"I don't know, I thought perhaps you had . . . Anyway I'll see you at the house just now."

"I can come now, baas."

"No, don't do that. I'll see you in the house in a minute. All right?" And he turned and struck toward the house. He walked through a little bush, and the thorns on its thin branches scratched at his trousers sharply, without tearing them.

And then he knew that Setole was following him. He stopped. Setole stopped too.

"Didn't I tell you?" van Schoor said angrily.

"Yes," Setole said. "But what was I to do? I have nothing to pack, baas."

Van Schoor waved at Setole, ineffectively, as one waves at a dog that insists on following one. Like an untrained dog, Setole flinched slightly, but did not budge.

"I can't have you walking next to me."

"Why not, baas? You have done nothing wrong." Though his remark was bold, Setole himself was not. His voice was evasive, and his body diffident; he was looking down. They began walking again, side by side, in silence.

When they reached the fence that surrounded the garden, Setole asked, "Where shall I wait?"

"Here in front," van Schoor replied. Then he saw Willem's son coming round the corner of the house with a spade in his hand, to continue his lackadaisical labors at the garden. The boy stopped when he saw van Schoor and Setole, and watched them cautiously.

Van Schoor did not know what to do. "Or wait at the back," he said.

"I can wait at the back if the baas wants me to."

Van Schoor stood unhappily between Setole and the boy. He looked from one to the other. They both looked at him, and he felt himself clumsily in the way, between them, among them.

He jerked toward the boy. "Go away," he said. "You can't be here now. Go back to your hut. You can come back in the afternoon, but go away now."

"Ja, baas," the child replied. He was reluctant to go. He began moving away slowly, looking back all the time with round staring eyes, and van Schoor stood, waiting for him to go. He could feel the sun pressing heavily down upon him; he felt himself rooted, stuck to the hard earth and exposed to the sun.

The boy walked off slowly, climbing through the wire fence, and pausing halfway through, body straddled, to look again. But at last his back was toward them and he wandered off in the direction of the huts.

Van Schoor said, "All right, Setole, I'll bring

you your money now. You can wait here in front if you like."

Setole squatted down, within the garden but very close to the fence, as if he did not trust to go in deeper. He looked up at van Schoor.

"Ja, baas."

Van Schoor went into the house. He did not see anyone at all, though he heard voices from the kitchen. The house was dark and stifling after the brightness of the air outside, and he groped in the wardrobe where they kept the money, behind his wife's clothes. He took out two notes; the rest he put back. They had to have some money in the house.

He went outside again, and came toward Setole carrying the notes. "I'll post the rest to Baas Harris in a couple of days, and you can collect the money from him in Lyndhurst," he explained.

"Ja, baas."

Now there was nothing more for either of them to say or do. Setole started walking away, and this time van Schoor knew that he would not follow him. He would stand where he was, stand, and

watch Setole go. He would see him go to his hut, and come out carrying his few belongings, he would see him begin walking up the cart track that curved to the house so graciously from the main road through the farm. Setole would stumble away, out of sight, out of the farm, and it would be done with.

"Good-by, baas," Setole said.

"Good-by, Setole."

Setole said suddenly: "One day I hope the baas will hear the truth of what is happening on this farm."

"I have heard the truth," van Schoor said.

"The baas believes that he has heard the truth. But he has not heard all the truth, and I am not going to tell him. I could also tell the baas some stories. . . ."

"I have heard one story. It was enough. What stories could you tell me?"

"They are things that I have heard and I have seen. But why should I tell them to the baas? Why should I help you, baas? The baas must see for himself what is happening on the farm, otherwise

he will believe anything that's told to him, and no matter who tells it. I am not going to help you, baas, because I don't want to help you."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"I know, baas."

This time there was no mistaking it—Setole was mocking his baas. Van Schoor stared steadily at Setole, and Setole looked back. Setole's eyes were weak, bloodshot, and there was a faint blue ring round each iris, a pale unlikely color in that dark face. His eyes were like mud, the sort one finds near a river's bank, slightly iridescent. Setole's eyes were gleaming, in mockery.

"Setole, is there really anything on the farm that you know about?" van Schoor asked.

"What should the Kaffir know that the baas doesn't know?"

"It isn't like that now. I am asking you."

"It is always like that, my baas."

"If you know anything that's been happening on this farm, tell it to me."

"Why should you believe me? If they told you the truth, then I am lying now. If I am telling

the truth, then there are other people you must chase away from the farm and keep me on. You can't believe both of us. But I am going away, so perhaps it is better if the baas believes the story of the people who are staying. It will be more peaceful for you, baas."

"I don't want peace. I want the truth."

"You will learn it then. I don't think the truth of this farm will be very peaceful for you though. Good-by, baas." Setole was unshaken. "Ja, baas. Good-by, baas," he said again. "Baas," he said for the last time, as though he were saying a name to remember it, and shambled away.

About an hour later, Willem asked van Schoor again if he could ride over to Dors River.

"Yes, all right," van Schoor said. "I told you you could last night."

"Ja, baas, I just wanted to make sure it was all right." Willem paused, then said, "Thank you, baas, for chasing Setole away."

"Yes," van Schoor said.

"Thank you, baas. The baas is good to his Kaffirs."

Two MACLACHLAN

IV

The cat on the stoep railing suddenly stretched its body, and arched its back. It leaped lightly from the rail onto the stoep and sharpened its claws on one of the wooden supports holding up the roof over the stoep, and then sprang into the garden. It crept along the warm earth, legs moving slowly in the dust between the stalks of last season's flowers. Its tail wove to and fro. It dragged its soft belly over the bricks at the side of the path, and across the path itself, to the other

side of the garden. There were no beds for flowers there, only a few small orange trees with the winter's tiny oranges rusting away out of reach. The ground between the trees was bare. The earth was dark gray in color, and fine. The cat squirmed through the dust.

*

It paused, huddled itself into the ground, shoulders working in small rehearsal of its spring. It lay crouched for some time, and then jumped forward, one, two leaps, and pounced. It danced and fell daintily forward again on its prey. It played with it for a little while, then came trotting back to the stoep. It leaped up easily, and ran the length of the stoep. As it passed him, Maclachlan saw the leg and papery wing of a locust protruding from the cat's satisfied mouth.

"Skats!" he hissed, and shot out a leg. But he was too late, and the cat disappeared round the corner of the stoep. Now Maclachlan had only the dusty, empty road to stare at, the blank railway lines on the other side.

But "Baas," came a voice from the passage. An African stood behind the gauzed door to the house. "Baas."

Maclachlan struggled in the chair to look behind him. "Why don't you stand where I can see you?" he complained, his voice constricted.

"Baas," the servant said without moving, "Willem of Driehoek wants to see you."

Still screwed in his chair, Maclachlan said, "Well tell him to come round and see me."

"Ja, baas."

Maclachlan heard the man's bare feet padding down the passage, and he turned slowly back to the normal position.

The fig tree, out of sight to the side of the house, crackled, a twig snapped. Maclachlan started. Then Willem appeared round the corner. Maclachlan straightened himself in his seat, his loose bulk around him, his head back and his light gray eyes staring at Willem.

Willem did not seem to be daunted by Maclachlan's stare. "Mister Maclachlan!" he said, enunciating the English words with a certain éclat.

"Yes?"

"How is it?" Willem asked, friendly.

"All right."

"I'm glad to hear that."

"You didn't come here simply to inquire after my health," Maclachlan said, nervously sarcastic. "I trust," he added.

Willem shook his head tentatively, a little puzzled, and encouraged by this, Maclachlan said: "What was it then that induced you to leave your native habitat and persuaded you to come and visit my own poor self?" His sarcasm exhausted itself early: he looked anxiously at Willem.

Willem's brow relaxed when Maclachlan's speech was over. He said in Afrikaans, "You still know more English than I do."

"I should bloody well hope so," Maclachlan said, also speaking Afrikaans. "Well, then, what is it? What do you want of me this time?"

"Nothing."

Maclachlan shook his head. "Have you gone mad? What will people say?" He stopped and jerked his head forward. He whispered furiously: "Look there now." A man was walking down the road, looking toward them, seeing Maclachlan on the stoep and the African in the garden before him. The man waved at Maclachlan, who waved

back and watched him go out of sight. The road was empty again. "Do you think he isn't asking himself what van Schoor's boy is doing talking to me like this? Hey?"

"I don't think he is," Willem replied casually. His voice sounded loud after Maclachlan's whisper. "You worry too much."

"You're a cheeky bastard. You're a black swine. You bloody black swine!"

Willem shrugged.

"Swine!" Maclachlan said, answering the shrug. "If you've got nothing to tell me, get the hell out of here. Do you think I like looking at your monkey face?" He screwed his own face grotesquely. "That's what you look like." He heaved forward in his chair, and stuck his face, still hideously contorted, toward Willem. "Do you know that?" he cried. "Do you think I enjoy having something like that standing in front of me every day?"

"I don't come every day."

"Thank God for that. I'd go mad if you did. With your monkey face and your English talk—goed moning, Mistaire Maclachlan—trying to talk

English! Who's ever heard of a black monkey talking English? Go back to your trees, you black baboon!" Even in his shallow frenzy of hate Maclachlan was quite pleased with that last remark. He repeated it, and scratched himself under his armpit. "Do you want monkeynuts? Is that what you've come for? Go to Levy across the railway line, he's got bags of monkeynuts in his shop and he'll give you some, if you don't behave like a cheeky Kaffir!"

But he could not go on. He had to lean back, stomach churning, and as the paroxysm exhausted itself his guts called out to him that it was not worth it, it was not worth it, no money was worth it.

"I haven't come for monkeynuts," Willem said. "But you can tell your boy to cut me some bread and jam and make me some tea before I go."

"All right, I'll tell him. But you promise you'll go when you've eaten?"

"No, I don't. I can't go away until we've had a little talk."

"I asked you if you had anything to tell me.

You said no. So what do you want of me now?"

"I have got something to tell you, but it can wait. Why are you in such a hurry, Mister Maclachlan? You don't open the shop for another half-hour."

"I know when I open my shop."

"Yes—and you also know where you get the meat that you sell," Willem said, smiling. "Don't you?"

Maclachlan started swearing again. He swore at Willem and at Willem's black skin. He ran through the usual litany of curses, but Willem seemed quite unconcerned. He was light, almost gay; his movements were freer, his brow less darkened; he was far more relaxed a person than he was on the farm. He began to whistle, standing with one hand on his hip, and the other in the pocket of his gray trousers. He was wearing his near-best clothes. His shirt was clean; formerly khaki, the color had been scrubbed practically to extinction and was now almost as pale as white, and where it was open, his skin could be seen gleaming darkly. His hat was on the back of his

head. Maclachlan thought of the eager and humble boy to whom he had first broached his scheme, and looked at the cocky Kaffir in front of him.

Willem broke off whistling abruptly. Someone was again passing down the road. They waited in silence until he too disappeared. He had not looked at them.

"I suppose I better tell what I have to tell you," Willem said. He laughed: "If a little visit from me makes you worry like this I don't know what you're going to do when you've heard my news."

"Why? What do you mean?"

"Well, it's bad news."

"What bad news?"

"I'm telling you. I have bad news."

"For God's sake, what is it?"

"The worst sort of bad news."

Maclachlan made a noise. There were no words; it was hardly a cry, just a high-pitched noise in his throat.

Willem looked at him for a moment. "Listen to what I have to tell you." He leaned forward, and as if hypnotized, Maclachlan did the same, over

the rail of the stoep. Willem breathed it out: "There's someone who knows about us," and as he said it Maclachlan's head jerked back as though Willem had spat in his eye. Willem pulled his head back more slowly, and surveyed the khaki-clothed, loose-fleshed man before him, with his wavering gray eyes, and blond hair, thin on his head, growing in a stubble from his chin, curling on his arms and legs.

"Oh my God," Maclachlan said. "Oh my God." His lips trembled, and he lifted one hand to cover his face. He rested like that, leaning his head on his hand. His elbow was on the armrest of the chair; the basketwork had loosened and hung from the revealed wooden bone of the chair in coils.

Eventually he lifted his head. Willem saw the tears in his eyes, sprung there involuntarily, like tears from a blow.

"What are we going to do?"

"We are going to go to jail." Willem took off his hat and bowed his head, as though in defeat, humiliation, despair.

"No," Maclachlan said.

"Yes," Willem replied softly, in the tones of defeat.

"Does he know me too?"

"He knows everything." Slowly he lifted his head. "There is nothing he does not know."

The tears that had hung in Maclachlan's eyes now began to trickle down either cheek. He made no noise of weeping, and his body hardly moved. "We can't go to jail," he implored Willem. "I can't go to jail."

"Ask Sergeant Prinsloo whether you can go to jail or not."

"What'll happen to my children? I was just going to write to my sister to say that she should come and look after them because I can't manage on my own. What must I do now? I can't go to jail."

"It is a pity about the children," Willem said.

Maclachlan asked: "Who is this man that knows about us?"

"It's a new Kaffir on the farm."

"How does he know?"

"He saw us. Two nights ago, when you came."

"Did he see me too?"

"I told you. He saw everything."

"Have you done anything with him? Please. What have you done with him?"

"What can I do with him? Kill him?"

Maclachlan shook his head blindly. "No, you can't kill him. Of course you can't kill him. We're not murderers. How can we kill a man?" But his hand was trembling. "We can't kill him."

"That's what I said."

"But can't you just chase him away?"

"How?"

"Can't you beat him up, make him go away, do something? You've got to do something."

"If I chase him away, the first thing he'll do is go straight to the police. Who knows what he might do?"

"Then what are you going to do?"

"Nothing. What can I do?"

"And what will he do while we wait?"

"I don't know."

Maclachlan leaned forward and cupped his face

in his hands. "I knew it would happen," he said. "I knew it all along."

"You didn't. If you had you would never have started the whole business."

Apparently Maclachlan had not heard him. He simply repeated, "I knew it was going to happen. Sooner or later it had to happen."

"Then why did you start it?"

"For the sake of the money," Maclachlan suddenly shouted, jerking his hand away from his face. "You fool—do you think I did it for fun?"

"No, I didn't think you did it for fun," Willem replied, equivocally.

"Money . . ." Maclachlan said.

Slowly he began to grow calmer, as Willem stood waiting before him; he even drew a little courage from Willem's indifference to the prospect of jail. And as he grew calmer he began to scheme, systematically; not with the twitching hopes that had first quivered within him, that Willem was perhaps wrong, that perhaps the man had not seen him. Those, like fear and greed, came spontaneously. But his schemes were subtler.

He looked up. "Money—is that what he wants? Can we buy him off? How much would he want?"

"I don't know," Willem said so dubiously that it was obvious he was wondering not about the size of the sum of money, but about the practicability of the entire plan. "He's a strange sort of Kaffir."

"Any sort of Kaffir wants money. He must want something otherwise he would have gone to van Schoor already. Have you offered him money?"

"Where would I get money to offer him?"

Maclachlan was thinking. When he spoke his voice was absent: "You should have some money out of all this. What do you do with the money I give you?"

"There isn't so much of it. And I'm saving."

"Saving!" Maclachlan said. "That's more than I'm able to do."

"I don't drink as much as you do," Willem said, and when Maclachlan lumbered to his feet Willem moved back and looked at the white man with pleasure.

"You're a bloody cheeky Kaffir. Do you hear

me? Don't you know how to talk to a white man?"

"I talk to you differently," Willem said.

"You're enjoying this, aren't you?"

"Yes," Willem replied. He could not conceal the fact, and saw no need to.

Maclachlan said: "You're a partner with a white man."

"Yes."

Maclachlan stared at his own white skin on his arm. Something was stirring within him. "You're a partner with a white man, but you're still a cheeky Kaffir."

"I'm not a cheeky Kaffir."

"What are you then?"

"Willem of Driehoek."

"And Willem of Driehoek is a cheeky Kaffir. You're a Kaffir, a Kaffir, a Kaffir. And I'm a white man."

Willem laughed. "That won't help you. They'll put us in different jails, that's all."

Maclachlan lurched back into his chair. "I'm not going to jail," he said.

Willem said nothing. Then at last he said: "So

you've got nothing to suggest to me that I should do about this man?"

Maclachlan shook his head. "You're so bloody clever, why don't you think of something?"

"I have thought of everything, and it doesn't help. All we can do is wait. I don't know what the man wants to do, or even if he will do anything. All I know is that he knows about us, and he can put us both in jail tomorrow if he likes. I thought I better tell you the news, so I came here. And that's all."

"Do you think he will do anything soon?"

"I don't think so. I think he's also waiting for something before he jumps on us, otherwise he would have already gone to van Schoor. Perhaps he prefers to keep us waiting like this. Perhaps he likes the thought that neither of us will be able to sleep as long as he is on the farm."

Maclachlan cried out: "I can't live like that."

"You'll have to learn."

"And what about our plan for two weeks' time?"

"Ah," Willem thought for a while. "I'm ready to go on with it."

The other man looked at him in amazement. "You have got a nerve," he said.

"Why not?" Willem replied. He truly did not seem to care. "If he goes to the police, we'll go to jail anyway. It will make no difference whether we stole sheep once or a hundred times."

"No," Maclachlan said. "I can't go through with it."

"Well, I want to."

"No."

Willem thought for a while. He said: "I tell you what, you stay here and don't worry too much." He smiled. "Or worry as little as you can. And I'll go back to the farm, and watch what happens there. He might even go away without saying anything to anybody—he is supposed to leave in about ten days' time. Then, if he goes, I'll let you know that it's all right. How's that for a plan?"

"No, no. You must let me know earlier what's going to happen. I'll go mad if I just have to wait here, and wait here, and not know what's happening."

Willem relented suddenly. "I'll let you know tomorrow," he said. "I think I know what's going to happen tomorrow."

"How do you mean?"

"That's my secret." Willem waited, smiling, body confidently poised.

"So you think it's going to be all right?" Maclachlan asked desperately.

"That I can't say. But I hope that these things won't turn out too badly." Suddenly he laughed; it was a jeer at Maclachlan. His game was over. "I'm going to get some bread and jam from the boy at the back. Good-by, Mister Maclachlan."

He did not wait for Maclachlan's reply, but went round the side of the house, leaving the white man on the stoep.

V

As he sat there, the scheme came quickly and simply to Maclachlan; he wondered why he had not thought of it before. It was so simple. It could not go wrong. He sat on, absorbed, working the plan out to its last detail. He

was a capable schemer—his schemes only failed because in action they became debased by the violence and slovenliness of his own feelings: he would lose himself, believing in the attitudes he had to adopt. But this time his feelings would be no danger to him. They would support him, and be believed by others: everyone would believe the lies of which Willem had reminded him.

When he was satisfied that every detail of his story rang true, he lifted himself from his chair. He called to the boy at the back of the house that he would be back in ten minutes, and began walking down the path. The sun struck at him, but uplifted by his purpose he hardly noticed it, though he wore no hat. He hardly noticed the road, or the dust scuffing round his shoes, the railway line and the truck that some Africans were off-loading, he hardly heard the noise of their cries. He walked through Dors River, carrying his portentous swaying body to the destination before it. He did not have far to walk. He passed three houses, a little shop, and then the hotel. The road swung round the corner at the hotel,

and he followed it, leaving behind him the two gaunt old-fashioned gas pumps, bright red in the sun, and the people on the stoep who had greeted him. Now before him was a stretch of veld, and the police station, a little stone building with a bed of flowers and a wire fence and a flagpole before it, with the flag hanging down in straight folds in the hot air, limp. Beyond that was the straight line of the national road to Lyndhurst, dark blue and empty but for a small glittering car that moved so smoothly it could have been standing still in the heat-tranced air.

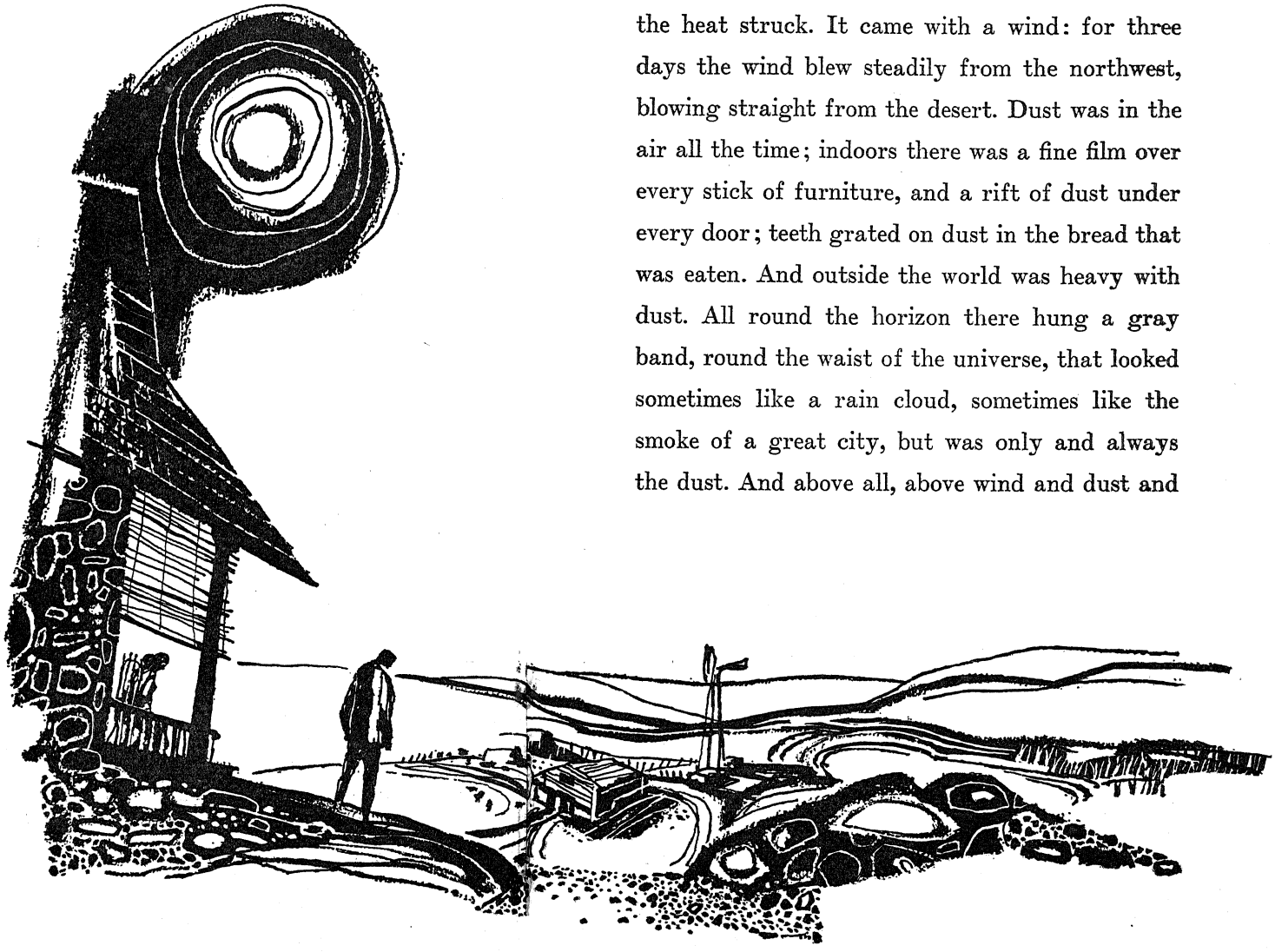
"Morning, baas Maclachlan." He heard a ragged chorus of voices, and stopped and stared around him. To the side of the hotel, waiting for the non-European bar to open, was a group of ragged Coloreds, the brothers and cousins and more distant relatives of Piet and Sout and Jan Blom. They stood in the shade against the wall, or simply squatted in the heat and dust. Maclachlan saw them: they were like flies to him, creatures congregating round the bar like flies around a piece of offal, all to be destroyed. He did not

reply to their greetings, but stared at them, and then moved more firmly on, dazed with his purpose.

He neared the police station. The car had disappeared, the veld was motionless. The only sound in the quiet air was the fitful beat of the engine pumping water for the station—the same sound that the travelers, lying full-length in their bunks at night, unable to sleep on their long journeys to the sea, heard when the train slowed down and stopped at Dors River, whose name they did not hear, but heard only, in that island of silence after the train's rattle, the crunching of feet on the dark platform and then the beat-beat-beat coming from the night, out of the darkness and emptiness, beating like the heart of the veld which they did know still surrounded them, and would, by day or night, in all their journeys. But as Maclachlan came closer to the police station, it fell away. All fell away from him, the beat of the engine, the veld, the road, the *koppies* far away like vague dreams of heat and rock. He entered the office, and as he did so, toweringly, his feet on the floor boards and

the sun banished, the man behind the counter looking up, already, proudly, he knew that what he was about to do was a blow not only for himself, but for all the people he knew to be his.

Three VAN SCHOOR



VI Then, for two weeks van Schoor's farm was still, and during those two weeks the heat struck. It came with a wind: for three days the wind blew steadily from the northwest, blowing straight from the desert. Dust was in the air all the time; indoors there was a fine film over every stick of furniture, and a rift of dust under every door; teeth grated on dust in the bread that was eaten. And outside the world was heavy with dust. All round the horizon there hung a gray band, round the waist of the universe, that looked sometimes like a rain cloud, sometimes like the smoke of a great city, but was only and always the dust. And above all, above wind and dust and

the parched earth, hung the sun—hot, dimmed by the dust, present throughout the day.

On the third night the wind slackened and dropped away and the morning came up clear. The release from the wind was a respite; waking on that morning and feeling that the wind had blown away at last, the soul stretched, expecting gentleness from the air and forgiveness from the earth. And it seemed at first that that would be granted, for after the long siege of dust the ground no longer seemed so raw, and the stillness of the air was delicate. But by ten o'clock of that morning the sun had sent a skewer through the heart of the earth, and each morning following thrust the skewer a little deeper, until at last the land was transfixed with drought. Every evening there was a movement of healing, but every morning the sun rose in the east and the crucifixion went on, methodically.

In the mornings, van Schoor sat on his stoep watching his cattle. The pan higher up on the farm was drying, and the cattle were leaving it. They grazed lower down now, and came for their

water to the river. Early in the mornings the long file of beasts could be seen going down to the river to drink, standing at the river's edge and drinking their fill, and wearily beginning their trek away from the river again. Later in the day they came down in ones or twos, but always, on his stoep, looking out of the window, walking to his house, van Schoor saw them going among the burning pale rocks, hoofs clicking, their heads down, making for the water, or their bodies straining as they climbed away from it. Their condition was still good, but the farm needed rain, would soon begin to need it desperately, and the rain gave no sign of coming.

Van Schoor was used to drought: he had grown up with it on his father's farm, there near Postmasburg, a farm like the end of the world, hot and ugly and drab, with the dark metal rock that all day, all summer had shone and stung with the heat. And for the past fifteen, twenty years he had been a foreman on various farms in the district. But then the drought had been on the land of the owner of the farm, not his own. For all those years,

as seasons had come and gone, summers succeeding winters, he had worked on other people's farms, branding cattle, shearing sheep, castrating young bullocks, occasionally when the owner of the farm was willing to take a risk, plowing in the spring and watching the young mealies turn brown and wither and die of drought. He had fixed the tall steel windmills and the dams into which they had pumped their water. Cattle were dosed and dipped, sheep delivered their lambs, goats clattered up the *koppie* sides, season followed season.

And every time, when his contract elapsed, he had been told to move on. Not that his employers had had anything against him. But his wife was impossible. They told him that too, some of them bluntly, others more tactfully, some of them saying that they didn't mind but it was their wives who were complaining—women who could no longer bear the strain of living on a farm with a woman who forced even van Schoor, who had loved her when they married, to admit to himself that she was near-mad.

Finally he could stand it no longer. He had al-

ways gone his own way, within himself, and for him all the moving around that he had to do as a result of his wife's vagaries was an irrelevance, a distraction. He was a quiet, rather soft-spoken man, a little shy because of his height; and he walked slightly bent, reducing himself; when he sat down his hands were in his way. They were big hands, with cracked and dirty fingernails, and on the back of each finger there were tufts of long hair that had been burned golden by the sun. All the years that he had spent in work on the land rested neither lightly nor heavily on him, but seemed to have passed through him, as the soft hair thinned on his head and the lines on his face became more marked, until there was something almost lizard-like about his face in its leathery wrinkledness, its imperviousness to heat. The sun had got into him young, and it had not merely faded him as it does so many whites, but had given him strength. He had the strength of leather, of biltong, of an African's feet who walks barefoot all his life, the strength of anything left long in the open and the sun. He had made his decision

to buy a farm of his own, where there would be nobody with whom his wife could fight, and where he would be alone.

Throughout the years he saved money and cattle, money and cattle, and then went to the Land Bank, and to a businessman in Lyndhurst who trusted him, and borrowed more money from them. Now he was heavily in debt, but if the year was good he would be able to pull through—some of the cattle would be sent to the slaughter polls at Lyndhurst, and he planned to start milking soon, and sending the cream to the creamery in Lyndhurst. At the moment the cattle were simply grazing across the veld at their own free will.

And he had tackled the tasks immediately before him with energy and resolution. The house he and his wife were living in had been fixed up, and then as the first real job of improvement, he had brought Setole in to fix the kraal, so that the milking could take place under tolerable conditions —a proper milking shed would have to wait. There was so much to do on the farm that the rebuilding of the kraal, which had lain in heaps of stones

on his arrival, was only a first, small job. Yet when Setole and his three helpers arrived and started work at last, he knew his power: where there had been nothing before, a few disordered rocks, something was now being made. He was making it, though he did no work, but stood at some hours during the day beside the workers, seeing the work go on. It was he who had made the stones to be brought, to be split, to be shaped, fitted on the walls that slowly grew longer and thicker under the care of them all. He had often been in charge of tasks on the other farms at which he had worked, but this delight he had never known before, because now he was alone, and it was his instructions alone that were altering the surface of the farm—he felt as though he was working with the earth itself, alone. And this isolation, even his wife could not touch. She still moved through those strange lands of hers which he knew so well by hearsay, but on his farm that did not matter.

And with his power, he knew peace, and his only grief was that he had waited so long before com-

ing to it. Setole's three helpers said "Ja, baas" and "Nee, baas" with a kind of basic insouciance really, which van Schoor felt and did not mind. When he went away he knew that they made jokes about him among themselves. The Long One, they called him, and walked on tiptoe to show how long he was. He did not mind that either. The veld lay pale brown under the sun that wheeled to the west; he stood alongside and apart from his workers as the day dropped away in gold and fire on the other side of the river; he watched them finish their last mix of cement and stack their tools and trail across the veld that the sunset had fired back to their huts. He sat on the stoep in the evening; he slept all night; he woke eagerly when the first silver rays of the sun shone from the east, for another day of activity and stillness, as the veld itself was still under the sun.

But with Setole's departure, the industry and activity on the farm seemed to slacken almost to vanishing point. Sout claimed that he was a plasterer and van Schoor let him have a go at the kraal wall, but it soon became obvious that Sout was no

plasterer. He mucked about with the cement quite cheerfully, and that was all, and the mix of cement he was busy with grew hard on the sheet of zinc and had to be chipped off and the broken bits thrown away to the side of the kraal. Then he used the three workers to bring soil in the wagon for the vegetable garden near the house. They worked badly, and during the dust storm did not work at all but merely sat to the side of the house and suffered audibly; once the heat had arrived they did no work during the middle of the day. Van Schoor rode over to Dors River to try to get somebody to replace Setole, but without success. He wrote to a friend in Lyndhurst, and the African they had arranged to bring simply did not turn up.

VII

The farm was still in those days after Setole left, with the stillness of something in a trance. The veld lay as though drugged with heat, in a fever from which it could never recover. The house was quiet. The native

huts seemed abandoned. Round the kraal walls there was no longer any movement; no bodies walked, bent, bowed, straightened as the work progressed; there was no longer the desultory crack of boulders being split by the ten-pound hammer which Piet had wielded so proudly and erratically.

The only movement was the shaking of heat around the walls, like something seen in a delirium; the only sound was the shrill call of the *koringkrieks*, rasping frenziedly in one dry scream. It was as though the heat, which bore down so directly upon the veld, assumed disguises, new forms: the eyes were attacked by glare, by the shaking of the veld, the ears by the scream of the insects, in an exacerbation that never let up.

Underneath the irritation of idleness and the attack of the heat, van Schoor knew anxiety. He did not think at all of what would happen if the rains did not come, if he had a bad year. Then he would be deeply in trouble, and all he had tried to do might be destroyed. But that he refused to consider: the rains would come, they had to come.

Only Willem was a source of reassurance. "The rains will come, baas," he said, and van Schoor asked him, "Are you sure that they will come? How do you know that they will come? Do you really think they will come?" revealing his doubts about Willem's word only in the hope that they would be dispelled.

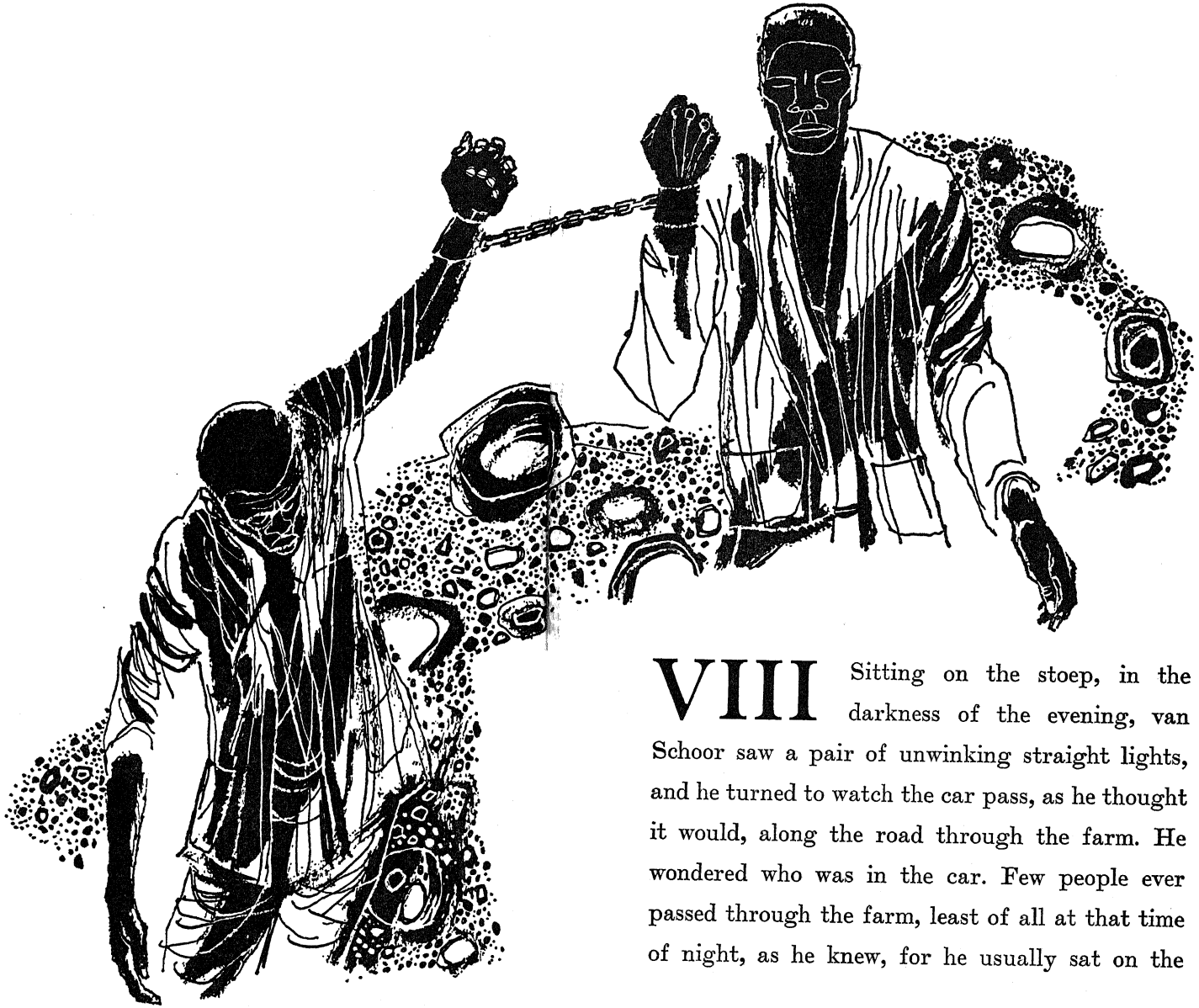
Willem frowned and looked grave, and admitted that the heat was bad, very bad, for that time of year, so early in the season, but the rains would come, he assured his baas. He knew that they would come. And, superstitiously, van Schoor thought that perhaps Willem did know what he could not know: that there was some knowledge locked in Willem's head that he could never share, some perception that Willem's black skin had that his own would always be without.

Day came after day: each dawn brought in a spectacle of drought. Spectacular enough it was too, with the great sun shining and the land lying locked in the heat, seized with the sun like a passion; and crazy sunsets, all frozen violent colors and rays of sun flat across a continent, a world.

And the suddenness with which the heat had come was frightening in itself.

A week after the dust storm, the land looked as though no rain had ever fallen there, as though no rain ever could, as though drought was in the landscape as the *koppies* were barren, ancient, and immovable.

Four WILLEM



VIII

Sitting on the stoep, in the darkness of the evening, van Schoor saw a pair of unwinking straight lights, and he turned to watch the car pass, as he thought it would, along the road through the farm. He wondered who was in the car. Few people ever passed through the farm, least of all at that time of night, as he knew, for he usually sat on the

stoep of his house in the evenings to enjoy the coolness. This night especially he was grateful to sit there, for he felt a cool wind upon his body. The wind had been blowing from the northeast quite steadily since the afternoon, and he knew that the chances for rain were good. The wind was the right one, and during the day clouds had hung in the sky: at first mere puffs of cloud, they had grown toward evening, deepening and changing color. They were high up, heavy but separate, by sunset, with a great glittering stretch of dry sky between each cloud; but now still they were massing against the west. The sky was dark and there were few stars.

He turned to look for the car again, and with a shock saw the lights were not traveling along the road. The car was coming straight across the veld, its headlights aimed straight at his house. He stared at it in disbelief, but the lights grew stronger and closer: he saw how insanely they were bouncing across the veld. Two eyes stared at him across the veld. In their light all the weaker lights of the sky disappeared, and now

all shadows stretched away from that shining center. He heard no sound: he only saw the lights shining, leaping, bucking closer. Then he heard the whine of an engine, and the lights stood for a moment. The whine ended and the lights leaped forward again. They were near. They were level with the native huts, and van Schoor saw them harshly outlined against the night, flat brown walls, all straight lines, and hollows of darkness between. And the glare of the lights caught him between the eyes, and he lifted one hand to ward them off. It was too bright, a great mechanical dazzle that filled the farm. He staggered back, arm shielding his eyes, and the flesh behind his closed eyelids was streaked over and over again with a livid white dazzle like lightning.

When he took his hand away from his face and opened his eyes, the light was gone from them. The van, it was a van, not a car, was parked in front of his house. The headlights stabbed the darkness: they shone on rock, and on the strong black line of the wire fence round the garden, they caught thorn trees in grotesque attitudes.

"Jaap? Is that you?" called a voice that van Schoor did not recognize from the van.

"Yes?" van Schoor replied.

He stared down at the van, hands hanging to the sides of his body. He did not move forward, but waited. Both doors of the van opened, then both were slammed shut, with a double metallic clank. Two men, van Schoor saw in the lights from the van, were walking up the path. He waited for them at the top of the steps.

"Who is it?" he asked. He saw one of the men was wearing a peaked cap.

"Is it the police?" he asked.

There was a laugh from one of the men walking steadily toward him. "That's right," a voice said. "We have come to arrest you."

"What have I done?" van Schoor asked.

Again there was the laugh. Then the two men climbed on to the stoep.

"Prinsloo," van Schoor said. "Maclachlan."

"Maclachlan it is, sure enough. Hullo, Jaap." And Maclachlan was up the steps, pumping van

Schoor's hand in his own. Van Schoor took his hand away.

"What is it?" he asked.

Suddenly the front door of the house burst open, and Mrs. van Schoor stood in the doorway. She was carrying an oil lamp in her hand, and the light that fell with a glow on her bosom sharply illumined her face, setting into prominence the frame of her cheekbones rising from her pointed chin to high beneath her eyes. Her eyes were in shadow, but they glittered blackly. Her head jerked from man to man, the black plait of her hair swinging.

"For God's sake, what is it?" she asked wildly.

Comforting her, avoiding trouble from her, was second nature to van Schoor. Automatically he said: "Nothing, Anna."

"How do you know?" She jerked herself toward the two men. "Tell me what's gone wrong. For God's sake, what has happened?"

Van Schoor wanted to move to her, but found he could not. "Anna," he whispered.

Maclachlan's voice boomed. "It's nothing to get

excited about. We're bringing you good news. What do you say, Sergeant? Clever, that's what we were, and because of that there's good news tonight." He threw his arm across his body in a gesture as though he were asking someone to come with him, to a party.

"What are you talking about?" van Schoor asked.

"Well, I don't know if you can actually call it good news," Prinsloo said more quietly.

"Bad news!" Mrs. van Schoor shouted. "I knew it would be bad news!"

"No," Prinsloo said patiently, "it isn't bad news either." He spoke very slowly, as though to a child, to make Mrs. van Schoor understand him. Then he turned to van Schoor. "It's quite simple. We've caught your Willem trying to steal your sheep. We've brought him along here to show you."

"My Willem?"

"Yes, your Willem."

Van Schoor was silent. Then he said: "But he isn't my Willem."

"Isn't he just!" Maclachlan said loudly. "Wait until you see him. It's your Willem all right—the bastard! We've caught him this time, and he'll never be able to do anything again. Not a thing," he said delightedly. He turned to Mrs. van Schoor. "Excuse the language, hey? But you understand how we feel."

"No," Mrs. van Schoor said sharply, and van Schoor himself said, "No—I meant—" But he could not finish the sentence. He stood in the middle of the stoep. "My Willem?"

Prinsloo stretched out his hand and took van Schoor by the forearm. "It's your Willem all right," he said, reassuring van Schoor.

This time he did not protest. He stared before him, above Prinsloo's head. Mrs. van Schoor stood to the side of the men. Her dress was undone at the breast, and she clutched it together with one thin hand. The other still held the lamp, tilted, and the flame ran against the glass, blackening it.

Maclachlan and Prinsloo looked at each other. Awkwardly, Prinsloo dropped his hand away from van Schoor's arm.

Then to save the situation, Maclachlan started speaking again. "Wait a minute," he cried. "Let's explain to the people. They don't understand what's going on. They don't know what's been happening, that's why old Jaap is looking as though his world's fallen in, with his mouth hanging open. Shut your mouth, Jaap, and listen to us. It's a real detective story." No one laughed. Van Schoor's expression did not change. So Maclachlan turned to Mrs. van Schoor. "There, there, Mrs. van Schoor, no harm has come to anyone." He put out his hand and patted her on the shoulder. She jerked herself away from him. Deprived of that role, Maclachlan turned again to van Schoor. "I tell you, Jaap, you ought to be proud of me. I've saved you a lot of trouble, and a lot of money. And you too, Prinsloo! You don't get an open-and-shut case like this every day. You ought to be grateful to me." He swayed toward them, ponderously.

"I am grateful to you," Prinsloo said.

"Don't mention it, man, it's my duty to you and Jacob here. We live together, don't we?"

Van Schoor saw Maclachlan's mouth opening and closing incessantly, and heard Maclachlan's voice beating against the air. But he could make no meaning of the sounds. He turned to Prinsloo, and asked, "Tell me what has happened."

"Well, old Mac here can tell you better than I can. He was in the business from the beginning."

Van Schoor looked at Maclachlan. He was talking to Mrs. van Schoor. Boom-boom-boom went his voice. They were all standing anyhow on the stoep. Van Schoor groped for order.

"Anna," he said, through the hollow clangor of Maclachlan's voice, "bring some chairs from inside."

"Yes, Jacob."

She left Maclachlan in midsentence. "So you see!" he shouted after her. Then he offered the others cigarettes. Prinsloo accepted one, and they lit up. In the flare of the match van Schoor saw Maclachlan's mouth; his lips were trembling a little as they pouted over the cigarette.

Mrs. van Schoor came out with two chairs, and the three men sat down around the little table on

which she had placed the lamp. Mrs. van Schoor stood behind her husband.

The two other men were puzzled. They had expected agitation, anger, excitement, and, in a particular secret way, fun: not this slowness to understand and move, even the desire to understand. Wasn't it simple enough? They had caught a Kaffir, one of van Schoor's Kaffirs, stealing sheep. What more did van Schoor want before he got excited? Nevertheless, Prinsloo began telling the story, while Maclachlan leaned forward, waiting for his opportunity.

"You see, Jaap, it's like this. About a fortnight ago Mac came into the police station and told me that your Willem had come to him and suggested that they should steal sheep—your sheep—for Mac's butchery, and that they should share the profits. Well, Mac did the right thing. He didn't say no to Willem, he said he'd think about it. Then he came straight to me and told me the story. I saw quickly enough that he was right, that the thing to do would be to get Willem properly, to trap him. I told Mac to tell Willem that

he agreed." Prinsloo paused. "I hope you don't mind that we didn't tell you about the business. It was Mac's idea, and I agreed with him."

Maclachlan jerked his chair forward. "It was my idea, Jaap. You see, I was bloody excited—excuse the language, Mrs. van Schoor—when Prinsloo and I decided what we should do. I didn't want anything to spoil it, you see. So I thought that if we told you, you never know, but you might just let something slip that would let Willem see that the game was up. I tell you I was so damn scared that I would do it that I didn't want to see Willem again. Oh no—I was too scared he'd see that something was going on. I wrote a letter to him making the arrangements. It's a lucky thing he can read, isn't it? An educated Kaffir!" He ended in laughter.

Prinsloo continued the story. "So I hope you understand, Jaap." Van Schoor nodded, and encouraged, the other went on.

"There isn't much else to tell you. Tonight me and Corporal Ngkane, you know him, my corporal, got into the back of the van when Mac drove

off to meet Willem. Willem was waiting for him, all right. He came when the signal was given to him, the lights going on and off. He had three good sheep lying there, with their throats cut. He and Mac started to heave them into the van—we were sitting right at the back, as quiet as anything, under a canvas, and when they were busy with the first one Mac shouted "Now!" and jumped on Willem. We were out of the van like lightning. Willem was fighting, but when he saw us he surrendered and I put the handcuffs on him. We got him. It's an open-and-shut case—stock theft, and the magistrates don't like that, as you know. He'll get a couple of years at least, and a couple of lashes to remind him of what's right and what isn't."

The story was ended. Prinsloo leaned back, smiling. Maclachlan too was smiling.

"Can I see him?" van Schoor asked.

"Of course. He's in the van now with Kane. We can bring him up to you if you like."

"No," van Schoor said. "I'll go down."

"This is more like it," Maclachlan said. His

smile was fixed on his mouth. "Now we're going to see some fireworks." He gave a short abrupt laugh, almost a bark, and stood up, leading the way.

The three men began walking down the path, leaving Mrs. van Schoor at the head of the steps, with the lamplight behind her.

IX

"Kane," Prinsloo called. They came to the back of the truck. It was dark inside: they could see only obscure movements.

Then Willem and the African policeman appeared. They were handcuffed together: they had to move together, as though they were helping each other. They stood at the duckboard of the van. "Come down," Prinsloo said. Willem and the policeman looked at each other, and the policeman moved his braceleted hand in a signal, and clumsily and carefully the two of them managed to stand on the duckboard itself. They teetered there for a moment. They moved very slowly, almost sluggishly, like creatures in a dream, locked

together, silent. Then Ngkane said, "All right," and together they jumped down, hitting the ground at the same time, almost falling, but managing not to. The handcuffs between them clattered. Swaying, still together like Siamese twins, they staggered toward the white men who gave way a little at their coming. At last they struck balance and stood.

"Baas?" the native policeman said.

There was no reply, for Prinsloo turned to van Schoor, as much as to say that it was now up to him. But van Schoor hung back at first. Then he moved slowly forward, a little. He and Willem stared at one another.

Willem's face seemed all distorted to van Schoor, and he wondered for a moment what had happened to it. Then, of course, he thought, of course, Maclachlan and the others must have given him a hiding when they had first caught him. He looked hard at Willem trying to see exactly what had happened to him, but could not make out the lines of the man's face. All he could see were hollows and darker and lighter places.

Maclachlan said suddenly: "There's no point in burning away my battery." He walked away, round the side of the van.

Willem spoke: "That man has been taking your sheep—"

Prinsloo walked up to him and his fist lifted and struck at Willem's face. This case was going to remain open and closed. Willem swayed and would have fallen if he had not been handcuffed to Ngkane. As it was he hung there, hanging by the steel links of the handcuffs grating against each other.

The lights of the car went out, and the darkness was deeper, though they had always been in shadow. Maclachlan's footsteps came back toward them.

"And what's happening here?" he shouted. Then he saw the way that Willem was hanging, and stopped. He walked slowly up to Willem and put his fist in front of the black man's face. "Hasn't he had enough yet?" he said, still loudly. "Do you want some more of this? Haven't you had enough of this?" He shook his fist. "Willem, you thief, do

you want some more? You black swine, do you want some more?" Suddenly, softly and swiftly, he said, "Well, you're going to get some more," and his fist too swung back and beat against Willem's face. "There," he said. "There."

Ngkane's free arm was across his chest and his hand had a fistful of Willem's clothing, holding him up. Willem's head lolled. They all waited in silence, and the head quivered a little. It lifted, sank again, lolling. It lifted and he managed to hold it erect.

Now van Schoor could see that it was Willem's face, though now it was horrible, so much of it featureless blood. He had watched the other men: it had been difficult to believe that those strange gestures that the men had made, like people pushing at a door or showing someone something, had actually been blows against a face. But he felt Maclachlan's hand behind his back. He was being pushed toward the battered Willem. He strained back, but the pressure remained. Or perhaps Maclachlan's arm was behind his back in friendship only. He did not know. He found himself in front

of Willem. He stared at him, and Willem looked back, but there was no recognition in Willem's eyes.

"Willem?" van Schoor said.

Willem seemed about to say something. His eyes moved from van Schoor to Maclachlan. He looked back at van Schoor, then lowered his eyes. He said nothing.

"What is going to happen?" van Schoor asked.

Willem shrugged.

"Ha-ha-ha!" van Schoor heard from behind him, from Maclachlan. "He's going to go to jail. That's what's going to happen."

Neither Willem nor van Schoor took any notice of this noise, penetrating their own closed and silent little world in the half-darkness at the back of the van.

"What is going to happen?" van Schoor asked again. His eyes and Willem's still met in the same unknowing stare.

Again Willem shrugged, slowly.

"Then there is nothing?" van Schoor said.

Willem did not answer.

"Willem," van Schoor said, "why did you have to do it?"

Willem did not answer.

"Why did you have to do it? Was it for money? What made you do it to me?"

Willem said nothing.

Van Schoor shook his head. "There is nothing." Then he added, "I should have known that this was going to happen." He groaned. He could not stand there any longer in front of Willem, utterly empty, defeated. Was everything a lie? Had everything been a lie?

He asked: "And Setole? Is that what he knew?"

Willem waited for a moment, as though trying to remember the name. Then he shrugged.

Van Schoor stood silently. A question moved within him, but he did not want to give it expression. Still, it rose to the surface. He lifted one hand toward Willem.

"And where is your respect?"

Willem was motionless, and van Schoor prayed for something, even here, a cheeky remark, anything. His hand opened in front of Willem's face,

with the palm naked and empty, and the fingers curled slightly inward, beseeching.

Finally, Willem shrugged.

Van Schoor's hand clenched, and he struck Willem. It was the first time he had ever hit a native not in self-defense. But when he had done it, he was glad. He drew back and waited for Willem to straighten. When Willem did so, he saw that he had hit Willem in the eye, for the one eye was closed. And when he saw it, he remembered, as though from a long time before, doing it; he remembered the feel of the eyeball beneath his fist, soft and resilient against his knuckle. Behind him, he heard Maclachlan and Prinsloo, and he turned vaguely to look at them. They were vague and distant, all seemed swallowed up in an obscure dream, the people and the van and the darkened veld, even Willem. Only near to hand was the feel of Willem's eyeball under his clenched fist.

Was that all, he wondered. He turned to Willem again, and again he slowly lifted his hand and hit, more powerfully this time. He hit against something hard too this time, and felt a sudden

savage streak of pain run across his knuckles like a living thing; and when he drew his hand away, it was no longer empty. He hit Willem once again, this time on the side of the face, on the cheek, and felt the softness of the flesh and underneath it the hardness of Willem's teeth.

Because he knew that he could go on now until Willem was a pulp, was no longer living, was no longer even a Kaffir, could go on beating Willem till he dropped with exhaustion and the feel of his fist on the other's flesh and bone could no longer have meaning for him, because he was not yet ready for an orgy, he turned to Prinsloo and heavily said, "All right, you can take him away now."

The two men jerked out of the spell in which they had lain, as though hypnotized, watching justice being executed, more than justice, right following its ritual in the dark.

"Take him away, Kane," Prinsloo said, and the dull chained pair turned to the van. But they could not get up as they had jumped down, and Prinsloo and Maclachlan had to help haul and shove

Willem into the back of the van. Van Schoor watched them. He saw Willem's loose and incapable body being handled like a sack of potatoes.

He nursed his right hand. The skin was rough under his fingers, broken, and the bone felt bruised.

When Willem was stowed away, the two others called to van Schoor, asking for coffee and something to eat. Now that the thing was done, the appetites of life returned. And van Schoor found that he too was hungry and thirsty.

He had a last look in the van. He saw the dark bulk of the two Africans, silently side by side on the floor. Further along the dead sheep lay in a paler heap, and as Maclachlan lit a match, for one second he saw the flare of the open eye of a sheep, a green dead glint that was quenched almost immediately.

"Yes, we can have some coffee," he said. But when he turned to walk up the garden path he saw all the natives of the farm standing in the darkness some distance away and watching silently. "Swine!" he yelled out, and rushed at them. They all disappeared, except for Willem's wife,

who fell to the ground, weeping. He could have kicked her, but he was not yet ready for that either. He walked away, he left her weeping on the ground, and she crawled after him for a little way, calling out, then groveled again. She lay on the ground, wailing.

X

"Well?" van Schoor's wife called out excitedly, loudly, above the wailing from the darkness beyond the fence. "Well?"

"Well what?" van Schoor said. "We want some coffee."

Mrs. van Schoor said excitedly and shrilly: "I always hated that Willem. What did I tell you, Jacob, didn't I tell you, Jacob? And you loved him, didn't you, Jacob?"

"Shut your mouth," van Schoor said, and strode up to her, one hand lifted. His hand trembled in the air, and Mrs. van Schoor shrank, dropped her head, her neck tense. Slowly van Schoor's hand dropped to his side, and slowly Mrs. van Schoor lifted her head. She hissed out triumphantly, "So

. . . so . . ." Her eyes shone, and her body remained crouching. She stayed in the lamplight like a glad, demented animal. She could spring now, tomorrow, always, all the days on their farm.

Van Schoor turned his back on her. "We want our coffee."

"You'll get your coffee," she whispered.

"Then go and make it," van Schoor shouted, body half turning toward her, and then changing. He stood firm. The stoop of his shoulders was like a hunch as he waited for her to go. He did not move until he heard the door close behind her.

Prinsloo came up the steps hesitantly, but Maclachlan was loudmouthed. They came clambering up, Maclachlan shouting that women did not know how to take these things. "You should have sent her inside, Jaap. This sort of thing is a job for a man. It upsets the women. You know how they are, Jaap."

And so, Maclachlan shouting and the others' appetites quickening, they all pushed into the house. In the living room Mrs. van Schoor had turned up two lamps, and the light was harsh.

In that harsh light they drank their coffee and talked and joked loudly. It was a strange sort of a meal, at a late hour, like a meal people take before going on a journey.

Outside, lightning flickered across the veld, through the darkness: the day's clouds had been true, rain was going to come after all. And in between, in lulls in the talk, van Schoor heard his wife singing to herself, chanting without meaning, unaware of the others as the brown liquid poured into the shining porcelain cups, as the men tasted its warmth and sweetness in their mouths.

Van Schoor sat, holding his injured hand. It was already beginning to swell; insistently, it was beating against his free hand.

(Continued from front flap)

ters who appear most briefly, van Schoor's wife and Willem's little boy, are full-bodied and completely realized. The author's sense of landscape is particularly keen: the glaring light which beats down on the farm at Driehoek, and against which the characters stand out so sharply, illumines a moment of truth and makes *The Trap* a memorable experience.

Of it, Saunders Redding has written: "Jacobson's *The Trap* is a very good and a very subtle novel. . . . I like the care that is taken not to labor anything (but everything coming clean as one is teased into thought); the astringent irony; the simplicity and strength of the writing."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dan Jacobson was born in Johannesburg, South Africa. He has lived in Kimberley, and is now in London. His stories have appeared in *Commentary*, *The Cornhill Magazine*, and in the anthology, *Modern Writing*. At present he is at work on a long novel, entitled *A Dance in the Sun*.

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