**Look into my bullethole**
**Henali Kuit**

I faked a kind of incompetence till my father was forced to come back from the war and take care of me.

I centred the incompetence around my mind. Not my own anymore, I said (weepily). Dunno what to do, I said. At wits end!

Sure enough, my father showed up on the stoep a few days later. Looking important missing an ear because of the warring.

‘Pappa!’ of course this was an exclamation and my face was flushed.

My father emptied his pockets in my palm in response. A feather (red, soft). A porcupine quill. A handful of shiny rocks I didn't want and about which he had a lot to say.

Finally: a bullethole. Rounder than I'd have thought possible. Bloody, very bloody. But somehow not sloppy. Circular. Perfectly focused. My father turned it over in my open palm and right away my palm held it proudly: a bullet hole right through my hand, next to the swell of my thumb. Right away it ached like something I'd misplaced but never lost. I lifted it to look at the world through its bloody frame. I could see the white of my tendons when I tilted my hand away from me. I brought it up to my face  to smell it. It smelled like rust. It smelled like the farm late at night.

Growing up on the farm was the first gift my father ever gave me. It was an inadvertent gift because he didn't really have any place else to put me but I considered myself lucky nonetheless. The bullethole would be a grand addition to my life here. Would the bullethole whistle in the wind when I run across the fields? That would enhance the experience of running. Underline it in a high pitch.

'Thank you, Pappa,' I said, holding the bullethole up to him and clutching the other gifts in my other hand. My father responded by ruffling my hair and telling me to get him a cup of coffee. My father sees me as a person with soft turns in a soft personality, as someone who ask for things and waits to receive them. In turn I look at my father as someone who sits down on the stoep after returning from war and asks for coffee without as much as entering the house first. And yet my father brought me the bullethole after I had merely expected the shiny rocks I didn't want. You see how I underestimate him.

‘Cream?’ I asked.

‘And sugar,’ he responded.

As I brought the kettle to a boil, I held my hand over the spout and watched the steam rise though my bullethole. It was delightful.

My father devoured a plate of Hertzoggies along with his coffee. The sweet tartness of the jam compliments the bitter coffee.

‘Ah’, he said

I had garnished the plate with the red feather and three of the shiny rocks. When the cookies were gone, my father took the biggest little rock between his fingertips, brought it to his lips (there were Hertzoggie crumbs on his moustache), stuck out a small pink tip of tongue and licked.

'Uh' he said, taken aback, bringing the rock up to his eyes to inspect it. He moved his eyes to me, glared.

'More coffee?' I asked and he nodded silently.

In the kitchen I lit a fat cigar, opened the window to send a smoke signal to my fiancé on the farm next to ours. I brought my palm up to my face, inspected the roundness of the bullethole as my lungs burned with smoke. I made a wish and exhaled right into my bullethole. As the smoke funnelled through the hole, I felt a sort of childhood glee returning to my body. The smoke had a reddish tint when it came out on the other side. I made a long spout of smoke like I was a dragon. I pumped my arm and imagined that that would make the smoke expel with more force. I brought the cigar to my lips again and sucked. I exhaled one long strip of smoke and three short dots all of them through my bullethole. It tingled.

Alost immediately I heard my father from the stoep. The sound wasn't a word. It was a noise that feigned surprise to suggest welcome. My father might have said 'look who's here' if he were the type to prefer words to noises.

'Fiancé!' I exclaimed because I share my father's features but not his muggy silence.

In a flurry of emotion I did not really expect, I froze at the kitchen window and kissed my new found bullethole, poking my tongue trough it at the bottom-end of the kiss. I felt a warm brush of feeling start at my buttocks and creep up my back.

'Sit, sit,' my father said from the stoep and I heard my fiancé remark on the missing ear and the smell of war clinging to my father's handshake.

I prepared the coffee carefully. I put Hertzoggies on a plate and garnished, once more, with the red feather and the shiny little rocks. I squinted through my bullethole to look at the treats glistening in the red frame.

'Ah,' my father said when I brought the tray out on the stoep and my fiancé stood up and smiled. His eyes ran over me and got bigger on my bullethole.

'What happened?' he took the tray from me and put his face close to my hand.

'Nothing,' I said, 'it was a gift from my pa.'

'I see,' my fiancé meant it literally. He did not stop looking at my bullethole till he had finished two cups of coffee and three Hertzoggies. I am a very intuitive person and I knew that he was looking at the bullethole itself and not through it.

After a while the air got cool and we watched the sun go down. My father sighed with appreciation. I said that the farm was beautiful. At that my father motioned with his hands that it was time to go indoors. I sat down in the living room and my fiancé waited for my father to retire to the next room before he got up and came to sit next to me.

We sat on the loveseat, my fiancé grazing his leg against mine, the heat slowly raising in my chest, my father eventually clearing his throat importantly from the next room.

'Well I need to get going, then,' my fiancé said more than four times but did not go, sat next to me, twice brought my hand up to his face to look into my bullethole and smile. I realized then that the saying is true: all happy families are the same.

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