Excerpts from
***The Incredible Beat of my Heart***
**by Henali Krut**
Deep South, 2021

followed by excerpts of the same stories
from the author's Afrikaans translation

***Gerusloos Ongemerk***
**by Henali Krut**
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**The garage**

I woke up one morning and found that my father had unplugged me and moved me to the garage. I do not have a very active imagination and so this is basically the most shit thing that could ever have happened to me.

Humans have soft corners in their daily routines and brilliant things grow there like mould. Essentially the same is true of garages – but that would be garages in general, and my mother is a hoarder. Sometimes things become so intense that they flip back into nothingness. The garage is my home now and I accept that, but such lassitude has taken hold of me that I find myself spitting up into the air. And waiting.

I heard they found that shadows are composed of the black that goes out of keys when people turn them the wrong way in their locks. There has not been a shadow in the garage since I got here. I have never before been this invisible. While I stood in the living room, all I ever wanted to be was something else. I would control my diet and obsess over the patterns of my thought. While 40 is, generally speaking, the new 30, this has not proven true for me.

At night I pray for redemption and the ability to distinguish between night and day. If I had hands, I would touch myself to know where I am. But I have only my own sighs, soft and incessant things, as affirmation of only my cardio-vascular person. I heard that when you're not able to sigh, parts of you will actually blow up. It would start in your extremities. If I had hands they would swell. These are the things you never think about when you are fully functional.

**My killer's fingers**

My killer flipped me over and opened the flap of skin he had cut into my torso. He sighed like he was happy. My killer has the ugly sort of hands that a lot of male bass guitar players have. These sorts of fingers taper in a very bad way. As though they have upside down ice-cream cones growing out of their palms. My killer moved his fingers like his hands were dancing sea anemones.

'Get to the damn point, twinkle toes,' I snapped at him.

'Shut it, pizza face,' he said and turned my face to the back wall with a sharp jab of his ugly palm. The most annoying part of being dead was not being able to turn my head back and stare him down. People were always too chickenshit to look directly at my face. As though one of my pimples might explode on them if I moved the muscles of my face to meet their expressions.

My killer started to stroke the tips of my ribs. In the classically paradoxical effeminate way that male bass guitar players' hands go about their business, his palm was always lower than his fingertips. Like his palm was heavier than his fingers. This is exactly the opposite of what a piano player's hands do, have you ever noticed? My killer started tapping the tips of my ribs with his fingers. Very lightly at first. Like a kitten paws a toy.

'Here we go,' he mumbled and then my killer gave my bottom-most rib a sharp rap with the knuckle of one of his ugly forefingers. He did it again. Like my rib was hollow and he could sound out just how empty it was inside.

'Exquisite!' he gasped and rapped again. But I didn't hear shit.

'Fucking lunatic,' I said to the back wall.

'Shut it,' he said and needlessly shoved me at the back of my head.

My killer started playing me. He played the tunes I used to teach myself because no one really talked to me at school. These tunes were simple and tripped over themselves as they went. My killer was obviously a beginner.
But he improved with time. As his shed grew mouldier and mouldier and then drier and drier again and the lightning storms gave way to dry white light falling across my decomposing body in stripes, my killer improved.

One day he lifted both arms over his head and interlaced his fingers. I could hear them crack and so could he. His eyes popped with the crack.

'Hear that?' he asked, and brought his hands down to look at them. He held his hands out like I was a fire to warm them by.
My killer rubbed his hands and then sank them into my yawning chest and he played me a final time. If I could have turned my head to look at him play me, I would have. Instead I peered through a

tiny slit in the back wall. I could see little blue flowers growing in between the tall grass outside.

My killer dug a hole in the backyard and put me inside. He left the heap of earth next to the hole. With time the heap grew weeds that now dip into my hole. I look at the tiny ants going up and down the weeds. Sometimes a bird crosses the sky.

**Like a person**

Carel runs his index finger up and down the bridge of his girl's nose. She wiggles around in the sheets to lie closer to him.

'Did you put it in his butt?' she asks, smiling and rolling the head of his penis between her thumb and middle finger. She was always asking him about his past. Who he kissed, what he did, where his penis went. Carel liked it. It let him feel like he had a beginning and an end and like the world was a circle around him extending evenly to all sides.

'Incoming!' Carel yells, whips the sheet off his girl and plants a wet raspberry on her stomach as she squeals.

'Stop it!' she says, but she is laughing.
Carel moves his face around in the spit that clings to her stomach.

'You're scratchy,' she complains and reaches for his stubbly face to drag her fingertips around on it.

Carel wiggles down. He puts his nose between the cupped hands of her vulva. Her clitoris still feels hard against the tip of his nose.

'Boink,' Carel says and bonks it.
She laughs and puts her fingers through his hair.

'If you blow a raspberry I'll rip your scalp off.'

'Blowing air into a vagina can kill you,' Carel says, lifting his chin and looking up at her through her pubic hair. It was true. He read it online. He puts his nose back in her vulva. It fit so neatly. He opens his mouth and sucks a little, swallows. Carel didn't want to make a baby but he wanted something to happen between their cells.

'You make me want to take pictures of flowers,' he says, sitting up. When the girl laughs the springs in the mattress sing.

'So tell me,' she says, 'did you put it in his butt?'

'Keep your nose out,' Carel says, but he doesn't mean it.

A few weeks back the girl had looked at him across the kitchen table and said, 'You make me feel like a person.' He knew that she was quoting a movie but it didn't matter to him. In fact, it was better that other people had said it too. A person, Carel repeated to himself and felt the bones in his limbs.

'Babe,' he says, putting his elbow on her pillow and leaning in close to her face, 'darling, pumpkin,' (to test the sound of it) 'baby bird, pookie pie.'

'I have a name, Carel,' she says.

'Sexy Tits McGee,' Carel says, grabs her hand and shakes it.

'Fuck off,' she laughs.

**My mother kicked me into space**

My mother sent me into space in the little tumble-dryer we kept in the room which was much too dirty to be called 'laundry room'. She never asked me how I felt about it. My mother has never been a particularly considerate person. Of course it is possible she may have found the Lord or yoga since my departure and consequent arrival and subsequent orbit. But I doubt it.
People like us don't change and that helps to explain why I'm looping Ananke endlessly. Ananke being one of Jupiter's shittiest moons because that is just the way my luck has worked throughout my life.

'Get in and shut your mouth!' my mother fumed and I bent my small body over so it could fold in half and I concentrated and made my elbows go soft. I tucked them under my chin and I concentrated and made my knees go weak and my small body crumpled and fell to the floor in a pile. I concentrated and made the pile a ball.

'Get *in*!' my mother said, with the 'in' italicized, as you can see, and I rolled myself towards the tumble-dryer.

It was cold inside and I vibrated when she slammed the door. 'This will teach you,' she said and me and my tumble-dryer were lifted and carried to what could only be the garden in a clunk, clunk, clunk with a huff, huff, heave.

'Wait,' my mother said and my door was opened with a flash of light and peach blossom because it was spring. She grinned. Her mouth was red. My mother bent down and took out her phone. She put her face next to the tumble-dryer-hole.
'Cheese,' she said, and took a photo without my consent.
'What did I do?' I asked, but she smiled and looked down at her cellphone.

'What did I do?' I asked as she shut the door and manoeuvred my tumble-dryer onto a molehill.
'What did you do?' she asked, like it was a question about a question, because it was. She stepped back to get a running start, grunted twice and kicked me into space.

**HomeShop**

There's a saying that doesn't translate well, but goes something like: When you're sad you're half as sad, When you're happy you're twice as happy. She came up with a third: when you're nowhere you're three times as nowhere. It was a kind of solace, that third leg. Youngmi tried to remember it when she went for her 42nd bow hello or bye-bye at HomeShop, where she worked, exactly as she was supposed to. She did the little dance when the song came on (team-spirit).

It was Spring and she loved Spring. But HomeShop was inside: three floors underground and four floors above ground. The manager had installed Youngmi on the Exercise, Machines & Accessories floor, which was two floors deep. This was his little joke, because she was fat.

But she decided to forgive him. What did it matter, anyway?

'People aren't against you,' she told a girl when she found her crying in the employees-only toilet, 'people are just out for themselves.'

She had to take her own advice too. Especially in her family's tiny apartment. When her mother became too much, she had to remind herself forcefully that her mother was just a human in the same way she herself was just a human. Sometimes Youngmi remembers what she saw from the other side of the TV when she was very young: Her mother and father lying awake and neon from somewhere across the street flashing into their house rhythmically. Her mother turning her face to her father and the neon flashing pink and green on her mother's eyeballs. 'You,' she said, touching his nose with her index finger, 'have haunted me all my life.' Her father reached up and took the index finger in his hand.

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It's not that she thinks it's a bother to bring her purse home from HomeShop instead of leaving it in her little locker every night. It's just that it would be terrible to think that she's stuck at HomeShop. Stuck to the extent of not taking her purse out of her locker.

There was a controversy two years ago – HomeShop did not let any of its 27 000 employees nationwide take even an hour off on a national holiday to vote in a national election. But she thought that it would take longer than an hour to vote in any case. Taking a bus or subway and then going to wait in those terrible lines in those stuffy buildings. She didn't really mind bowing hello and bye-bye on that day instead of voting. But some of her co-workers grumbled and refused to do the little dance when the song came on and one of the check-out ladies took a bottle of champagne a customer was trying to buy and smashed it on her little check-

out computer screen. She cried when she was fired in front of everyone and security escorted her out up the many escalators.

The customer who wanted to buy the champagne was issued with an apology-voucher. Youngmi was brought in to bow very deeply to him. The manager was the one presenting the voucher, but he did not want to bow deeply and everyone knew that someone had to do it. She didn't really mind. It was her job to bow, after all.

There was something wrong with that customer. After Youngmi bowed to him, he went and got a red g-string on the Clothing, Female floor. He took it down all the escalators and went to stand in front of her, where she was back at her post, bowing at the Exercise, Machines & Accessories shoppers.

'Sir?' Youngmi said. She saw that he had something crumpled in his fist. He said something like 'eat up' and held out his fist. She reached out to take whatever he was holding. It was a split-second decision she did not really make – a kind of polite instinct. The g-string plopped onto her palms, the price tag dangling from it. It was cheap, she saw, on sale. The man looked her up and down, licked his lips, smirked. She went red. He walked away with a soft little snort.

I will just wear this, she thought, and that will be my revenge. But, later, when she stretched the g-string between her two forefingers – after checking that no-one was about to come into the employees-only toilet – it was clear that it was too small for her. If it was not a g-string, you'd have thought it's meant for children. She frowned. Maybe the point of the insult was not that she was a woman, but that she wasn't small?

**This one**

'If you could have done things, what would have you done?' I am at home with my mother after being away much too long.

I expect her to deny that she was not able to do things, to say 'What makes you think that I had no choices!?' But, no, she answers calmly: 'I would have been like you,' her face blank and honest. No hint of irony.

My mother sweeps her hand in a curve in the air. I don't know what that means. Perhaps she's indicating the shape of the globe. Or how I move around on it. I don't like travel, but she does. She touches strangers on their shoulders when she comes across them in faraway places. She loves touching, she loves being far away. She loves the opportunity to speak English. Upon return she shouts, 'We was away for the weekend,' across the fence to her neighbour, Agata. And Agata, Polish immigrant, replies in her equally but differently broken English, 'Welcome again to your home, Alida!'

Alida bemoans the falling rand and the exorbitant cost of air travel. She looks me up and down. She wants me to make a gesture, do something special for her. She wants me to buy her a plane ticket and research premium local attractions. She wants me to organize a trip for her. If she has joined the massive club of old Afrikaners abandoned by their children, it is only right that she should be compensated for it in some way or another.

I am emotionally coerced into going to church. Standing around on the lawn afterwards, Alida ropes in her fellows to aid in her plot.

'This one lives overseas, as you know,' she says, and touches the small of my back (something she never does when it's only the two of us). Some of my aunties and uncles in Christ gather around us, crane their weathered faces forward and I kiss them on their lips. The communion wine, still sweet at the back of my throat, only-just on their breath.

'Ah, yes, overseas,' they nod. The squat church building in the background, waiting for next Sunday like a tick waits in tall grass. The dry white light of the Highveld falls on our little circle: timeworn leather-bound Bibles, sorry comb-overs, worn-out suits and faded dresses, ever-practical shoes – all of it beautiful in the right light.

'So beautiful, you grew up so beautiful,' one says and I say 'Dankie, Tannie.'

'Good job, your mother says you have a good job,' and I say 'Dankie, Oom.' And then, always and inevitably: 'Organize a trip,' and all of them nod, 'your mother so loves to travel.'

Organize a fucking trip? I won't. Because I don't want to part

with my money. This one may live overseas, but my mother has other children. Why must the organization of something so nauseatingly expensive befall this one? To see my mother, in a sun hat and flip-flops, drinking something exotic on a beach, asking nefarious strangers to take her picture? I am not in the habit of being generous. Such a grand display of filial reciprocity would only seem fair to me if I was, say, my mother's favourite. And the evidence is to the contrary. I don't blame her – the way I love her is as jagged and hideous as the way she loves me. 'This one is the difficult one,' she says when she talks about me. 'This one is the baby,' by which she means there is such a thing as youngest-child syndrome and that I suffer from it. 'This one is unmarried,' by which she may or may not mean 'well done'. 'This one – ' she says simply and cocks her head. 'This one is back!' she shouts at Agata and Agata re-welcomes me to my home.

'If you could have done other things, what would you have done?' I ask my mother. Unwanted conversation is the only gift I can force out of my tiny heart.

'I would have been like you,' she answers. She twists her mouth to one side.

'The whole world –' she says and stops herself.

'But, you know…' she trails off. 'I could not move.' She uses the English for 'move' which means more than it seems like. My mother keeps her fingers spread wide over her knees to ease the arthritis, they dig into her legs when she says this.

**Dikkop**

'She comes only for a little while and then she fucks off again.' Mamma steps closer to Oom Danie and says it conspiratorially. Like she and Oom Danie are going to meet me behind the toilets after school and show me what happens to kids who come only for a little while and then fuck off again.

'That's what she's like!'

'My goodness, my goodness gracious,' Oom Danie says to me, flustered, 'what a great big world we live in. And I still think of you as a little girl holding onto Mamma's skirts.'

'Nou is sy yslik,' Mamma says. 'Now she is enormous.'

'Yslik!' she says again and nods at Oom Danie. As though he said it and the burden to agree has fallen to her.

'Well the birds,' Oom Danie turns around in an old-man shuffle, gestures to his garden as a way of getting out of the road – where we live there aren't proper pavements.

'Well the birds are alright. One of them passed…' he peters off, gesturing at the garden.

'I came upon her lifeless body – over there,' he points, finger shaking, '30 years old.'

Decades earlier Oom Danie lured the spotted dikkops from the veld at the bottom of the hill to his front garden with mealworms and bloodworms and a lot of patience. It was not like he was stealing them since he has no fence and they were free to go if they wanted.

A shaky forefinger goes up to the side of his face and he wipes away a tear.

'The male has taken to sitting on the nest since. But are the babies dead in their eggs too? We have no way of knowing, really.' He shakes his head. '30 years old, she was.'
Mamma reaches out and places a hand on his arm.

'She was part of your life, Danie, wasn't she?'
He nods, swallows the tears.

When we walk off Mamma looks at me with something heavy around her eyes. She asks me with a straight face: 'Are you 30 yet?' and turns back to wave at Oom Danie before I can answer.

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**Die garage**

Op ’n dag word ek wakker en sien nee my pa het my prop uitgetrek en my in die garage kom afplak. Die garage strike my as die kakste plek denkbaar (miskien het ek nie veel van ’n verbeelding nie).

Mens het pap draaie in jou lewe. Pap draaie wat spoed afneem en in jou daaglikse roetines opdaag, en dis juis in daai draaie waar briljante goed soos mos broei en groei. Garages is op dieselfde beginsel uitgedink: broei en groei. Dis egter nie van toepassing op mý situasie en dié garage nie. Want my ma hoard. Dit gebeur mos soms dat dinge só oorweldigend raak hulle bigbang terug tot niks. Die garage is wel ’n dak oor my kop en die lot van minderbevoorregtes ontgaan my nie. Maar tog. Dis of die niks-nêrens ’n hand is wat my beetkry. Wat my só beetkry dat ek nie anders kan nie: ek spoeg in die lug op, en wag.

Iewers het ek gehoor waaruit skaduwees bestaan: die swart deeltjies wat sleutels afskei as jy hulle verkeerd by sleutelgate indruk. Nou ja. Wat skaduwees in die garage betref: nog nie ’n enkele een gesien sedert ek hier aangekom het nie. Nooit vantevore was ek so onsigbaar soos nou nie. Snaaks hoe dinge werk – toe ek nog in die sitkamer gestaan het, was my grootste begeerte om iets te word wat ek nie was nie. Ek het my dieët streng beheer, met ’n ystervuis. Ek was obsessief oor die patrone wat my gedagtes wou aanneem. Nou ja.

Veertig is seker die nuwe dertig, maar ek voel oud. Saans bid ek vir verlossing en die vermoë om tussen dag en nag te onderskei. As ek hande gehad het, sou ek aan myself vat. Maar al wat ek het is my sugte, my sagte onophoudelike sugte – ’n bevestiging van my kardiovaskulêre bestaan, ja, maar nie veel meer nie. Iewers het ek gehoor as jy nie kan sug nie, blaas jy op. Dit begin by jou vingerpunte en tone. As ek hande gehad het, sou hulle opswel. Hierdie is die soort goed waaroor jy nooit worry wanneer jy nog ten volle operasioneel is nie.

**My moordenaar se vingers**

My moordenaar flip my om en lig die lap vel wat hy uit my bo-lyf uitgesny het op. Hy sug lekker.

My moordenaar het manshande. Die manshande van ’n baskitaarspeler, sou ek sê. Die vingers loop so teen hulself af – soos onderstebo icecream cones met die roomys wat afsmelt. My moordenaar laat sy vingers dans. Soos ’n see-anemoon.

‘Kom tot die punt, Fiela Vlooi,’ snou ek hom toe.
‘Sjarrup jy, puisiegevreet!’ kap hy terug en klap my agter teen my kop sodat my gesig muur toe draai. Die ergste deel van dood wees, is dat ek nie kan omdraai en hom ’n vuil kyk gee nie. Mense is nog altyd te bang om my reg in my gesig te kyk. Asof een van my puisies op hulle sou ontplof as ek my gesig moes trek om met hulle te interface.

My moordenaar begin oor die punte van my ribbetjies te streel. Met sy vingerpunte. Met sy palms laer as sy vingerpunte. Soos ’n musikant wat nie weet wat hy doen nie. Wat nie sy tegniek ken nie. Soos die teenoorgestelde van ’n goeie pianis. Gat oor kop, duime en vingers. My moordenaar begin sy vingers teen die punte van my ribbetjies te raps. Eers liggies. Soos ’n katjie wat speel.

‘Daarsy,’ mompel hy en piets my heel onderste ribbetjie hard. En toe weer. Amper asof my bene hol is en hy wil hoor hoe leeg dit binne my kan eggo.
‘Asemrowend,’ snak hy en piets weer.
‘Mal fokker,’ sê ek vir die agterste muur
‘Sjarrup, jy!’ met ’n klap onnodiglik hard agter teen my kop.

My moordenaar het tunes op my begin speel. Die tunes wat ek voorheen vir myself moes leer omdat niemand by die skool ooit regtig met my gepraat het nie. Eenvoudige tunes wat hakkelrig uitkom. My moordenaar is obviously ’n beginner.

Maar hy het verbeter. Mettertyd het die skuur mosseriger en mosseriger en toe weer droër en droër geraak. Die donderstorms het plek gemaak vir die hoëveld se droë wit lig om in strepe oor my verrottende lyf te val. Daar is ’n tyd vir alles, sê die Prediker, en die tyd vir my moordenaar om te verbeter was voleindig.

Op ’n dag lig hy sy arms bo sy kop en verstrengel sy vingers. Hulle knak hard en lekker. Sy oë rek toe hy dit hoor.
‘Hoor jy?’ vra hy en kyk verwonderd na sy hande. My moordenaar het sy palms teen mekaar gevryf, hulle diep in my gapende lyf ingedruk, en my ’n laaste keer gespeel. As ek my kop kon draai om hom te sien musiek maak, sou ek. Maar ek kon nie. Ek het deur ’n gleufie in die agterste muur gestaar. Blou blommetjies tussen die lang gras buite gespy.

My moordenaar het ’n gat in die jaart gegrawe en my binne-in gesit. ’n Hoop grond langs die gat gelos en nie gebodder om my toe te gooi nie. Mettertyd het die onkruid swierig op die hoop begin groei en die langes dip nou by my gat in. Ek kyk hoe die miere op- en af klim. Partykeer vlieg ’n voël verby.

**Iemand**

Carel wikkel sy wysvinger soos ’n sywurm oor die brug van sy girl se neus. Sy wriemel in die lakens rond om stywer teen hom te gaan lê.
‘Het jy dit in sy boude gesit?’ vra sy, die ene glimlaggies, en rol die kop van sy voël luisaam tussen haar duim en middelvinger. Sy girl het altyd baie vrae oor Carel en sy verlede. Wie het hy gesoen? Wie het hy gevry? Wat het hy gedoen? Waar was sy voël orals in? Carel waardeer dit. Dit laat hom voel hy is ’n mens met ’n begin en ’n einde – met die wêreld wat eweredig om hom ’n sirkel lig skyn.

‘Incoming!’ gil Carel, en pluk die lakens van sy girl af. Hy blaas spoegerig poepgeluide op haar maag. Sy gil lekker.
‘Stoppit met jou blase!’ sê sy, maar sy lag. Carel vryf sy gesig oor haar maag.
‘Jy krap,’ kla sy, maar sit haar hand op sy gesig en trek haar vingerpunte oor sy stoppelbaardjie.

Carel wikkel ondertoe, sit sy neus tussen die biddende hande van haar vulva. Haar klit voel nog hard teen sy neuspunt.
‘Boink,’ sê hy en bons sy neus daarteen. Sy lag en verstrengel haar vingers in sy hare.
‘As jy daar blaas, pluk ek jou kopvel af, ek sweer.’
‘Nooit,’ sê Carel, ‘lugborrels in jou vagina kan jou doodmaak.’
Hy lig sy ken op, loer deur haar krullerige swart haartjies vir sy girl. Dit ís so. Oor borrels en vaginas. Hy het dit op die internet gelees. Hy sit weer sy neus in haar vulva. Dit pas so knus. Hy maak sy mond oop en suig ’n bietjie. Carel stel nie belang in babas maak nie, maar hy wil wel hê iets moet tussen hom en sy girl se selle manifesteer.

‘Met jou in my lewe,’ sing hy mompelend teen haar nat vel, ‘lyk die wêreld so mooi!’
Sy girl lag só lekker dat die springs in hulle matras saamsing.
‘So vertel my,’ sê sy, ‘het jy dit in sy boude gesit?’
‘Hou jou neus uit my sake,’ antwoord hy, maar hy speel net.

’n Rukkie gelede het sy girl stip oor die kombuistafel na hom gekyk, ‘Jy laat my voel ek is iemand,’ het sy gesê. Carel het geweet sy haal een of ander fliek aan, maar dit het nie vir hom saak gemaak nie. Inteendeel, dit het haar woorde soeter gemaak – die idee dat ander mense ook hierdie tipe goed sê. Iemand, het Carel saggies vir homself herhaal en sy bene binne-in sy lyf voel lê.

‘Babe,’ sê hy en sit regopper, sy elmboog op ’n kussing gestut, ‘my cherry, my patrysietjie.’ Hy bring sy gesig al hoe nader aan hare.
‘Ek het ’n naam, Carel.’
‘Mejuffrou Tieties,’ sê Carel en gryp en skud haar hand.
‘Fokof,’ lag sy.

**Die verskriklike geklop**

Ek moet uitkom. Trek my stoukies aan en draai my superman-kombers om my skouers soos superman self. Ek vat net my stank – omdat dit die een ding is wat ek áltyd vat. Saans sleep die dooiegoed hulle lywe by die stadsdreine uit en gooi hulself onder buswiele in. Almal toeter en blaas en skree.
'Warrefok!' skree die busse.
'Jou ma se poes!' skree die dooiegoed, met hulle gesigte vertrek. Ek skree nie en ek toeter nie, maar ek stink. Ek sweet reg deur my supermanmantel, die ongelooflike koue van hierdie stad ten spyt.

Ek sal nie verdwaal nie, want die stad het sy eie logika. 'n Logika wat ek kleingekry en my eie gemaak het. Sê maar ek is 'n piepklein power ranger en die stad 'n moerse robot. Ek sit in spandex neon binne-in die robot en druk knoppies en stoot handvatsels en die stad doen wat ek wil hê. Links, links, links, regs, links. Soos ek deur die stad stap, mars die stad voort. Ek dring al dieper die stad in. Die stad is myne.

Mettertyd besef ek dat 'n hond op my spoor is. Wanneer ek omkyk, lig hy sy klein gesiggie om my in die oë te kyk. Sy oë is pure hond: helemal swart, blink, analities. Honde herinner my aan daai skildery waarin hulle op hulle sterte sit en poker speel, sigaar in die pote, aan die politiek praat.

Die een wat my volg, kyk my op en af. Bereken hy die spoed waarteen ek – stomme mensekind met lomp arms en bene – myself deur die stad kan voortruk? Hy lek sy snoet. Hy vergelyk my ledemate met syne. Myne is meteen triomfantelik, te lank en te kort. Syne is kompak en dinamies. Hy lig sy kop (triomfantelik, seker). Ek skoffel terug in my stoukies. Hy kom al hoe nader.

Agter my skree 'n baba skerp en skielik en sy skree klim diep in my linkeroor in. Asof die baba 'n kokkewiet op my skouer is. Toe ek omdraai, sien ek ek het op sy ma se tone getrap en ek beduie gedweë: jammer, jammer. Sy beduie terug: nee wat, jong. Maar die baba raak al hoe kwaaier en hy trek sy gesig soos dooiegoed. Soos hy huil spat die snot op sy ma se hare.

By my huis is die enigste ander mense dié in my rekenaar. My huis byt elke dag nog 'n homp van my af. Maar hier buite is die hond reg agter my, en die baba reg voor my. Of andersom. Ek moet hulle sidestep, my supermanmantel styf vashou en my tone onder teen my stoukies vasknyp dat hulle nie afval as ek wil hardloop nie. Dis noodsbelangrik om van die baba en die hond af weg te kom. Aan die linkerkant kan ek in die verkeer wegraak. Aan die regterkant kan ek in 'n groep rokende mans verdwyn. My hart jaag en ek kan dit duidelik sien: ek is 'n strateeg wat geprogrammeer is om die verskriklike gekloppery te probeer ontwyk.

**HomeShop**

Almal in Seoul se werk was kak. Youngmi moes haarself daagliks herinner om nie ’n gegewe perd in die bek te kyk nie. Ek moet dankbaar wees – sy het die konsep van dankbaarheid soos ’n horlosie op haar pols gedra. Netjies hello en koebaai vir die HomeShop customers gebuig. Omdat dit haar werk was, en omdat sy haar werk wou doen. Elke keer as die Homeshop-liedjie oor die interkom speel, het sy ook die dansie gedoen (samewerking, spangees).

Daar’s ’n sê-ding wat nie lekker vertaal nie, maar dit kom daarop neer dat gelukkige mense twee keer so gelukkig is, as wat hartseer mense hartseer is. Youngmi het haar eie derde been vir die sê-ding uitgedink: die wat nêrens is, is drie keer soveel nêrens. Dit was vir haar ’n troos, die derde been. Elke keer as sy hallo of koebaai gebuig het, het sy daaraan gedink.

Dit was lente en sy was mal oor die lente. Maar HomeShop was binnenshuis: drie ondergrondse en vier bo-grondse vloere. Die bestuurder het Youngmi op die Exercise, Machines & Accessories vloer staan gemaak. Sy ou grappetjie (omdat Youngmi vet is).

Sy’t besluit om hom te vergewe. Wat het dit in elk geval saak gemaak?
‘Mense is nie téén jou nie,’ het sy ’n meisie getroos wat huilend in die personeelbadkamer voor die wasbakke gestaan het, ‘mense kyk maar net na hulself ’.

Sy moes haar eie raad ook volg. Veral as sy by die huis was, in haar gesin se klein woonstelletjie. As haar ma vir haar te veel word, moes sy haarself hard herinner dat haar ma maar net mens was. Nes sy, Youngmi, net mens was. Soms het sy ’n herinnering herroep: haar ma en pa wat langs mekaar wakker lê en die neon van oorkant die straat wat ritmies deur die venster val en pienk en groen in haar ma se oogballe herhaal.
‘Jy,’ het haar ma vir haar pa gesê en haar wysvinger op sy neus gesit, ‘spook my lewe lank al by my.’ Haar pa het sy hand gelig en haar ma se wysvinger in sy palm toegevou.

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Dis nie dat sy dink dis ’n schlep om elke aand haar handsak huis toe te bring nie. Dis nie dit nie. Youngmi weet nie hoekom sy haar handsak in haar HomeShop locker los nie. Sou aaklig wees om te dink sy sit by HomeShop vas. Soos haar handsak in haar locker sit. En tot só ’n mate dat sy nie eers haar handsak iewers anders heen wil vat nie.

So paar jaar gelede was HomeShop in die nuus omdat nie een van die honderde takke landswyd hul duisende werknemers eers ’n uur wou afgee om tydens die nasionale verkiesing te gaan stem

nie. Toemaar wat, het sy gedink, dit sal in elk geval te lank vat om te stem. Die pendel en die lang toue en die bedompige geboue. Volgens haar was hallo- en koebaai-buig op verkiesingsdag nie so erg nie. Maar haar kollegas het onder mekaar gebrom en bot geweier om die dansie te doen as die HomeShop liedjie oor die interkom speel. Een van die vrouens wat by die till gewerk het, het ’n bottel sjampanje wat ’n customer wou koop, op haar toonbank aan skerwe geslaan dat die drank en glas spat. Sy het in trane uitgebars toe sy voor almal afgedank is. Die security guards het styf langs haar gestap toe hulle haar via die roltrappe uitbegelei het.

Die customer wat die sjampanje wou koop, het ’n geskenkbewys en ’n verskoning ontvang. Youngmi is ingeroep om diep vir die man te buig. Die bestuurder het die geskenkbewys oorhandig, maar hy wou nie so laag buig nie en almal het geweet dat iemand anders dit sou moes doen. Sy het nie regtig omgegee nie. Dit was immers haar werk om te buig.

Daar was iets fout met die customer. Na Youngmi vir hom gebuig het, is hy Clothing, Female vloer toe. Hy’t teruggekom met ’n rooi deurtrekker in sy hande, vir Youngmi gaan opsoek waar sy terug by haar pos was, aan die buig vir die Exercise, Machines & Accessories customers.
‘Meneer?’ het sy gesê en dadelik gesien daar was iets in sy vuis opgefrommel. Hy het iets soos ‘lekker eet’ gesê en sy vuis vir haar uitgehou. Instinktief het Youngmi haar hand uitgesteek, om te vat wat hy wou gee. ’n Splitsekonde besluit wat sy nie regtig gemaak het nie. Die deurtrekker het op haar palm geval, die prystag wat afhang. Dit was goedkoop, het sy gemerk, op uitverkoping. Die man het haar stadig op en af gekyk, gegrinnik, sy lippe gelek. Toe sy begin bloos, het hy omgedraai en met ’n sagte snorkie weggeloop.

Ek sal dit dra, het sy gedink. En dit sal my wraak wees. Maar later, toe sy die deurtrekker tussen haar twee wysvingers span (eers seker gemaak die deur na die personeelbadkamer is toe), was dit duidelik dat dit helemal te klein vir haar was. As dit nie ’n deurtrekker was nie, sou mens gedog het dis vir ’n kind bedoel. Sy het gefrons. Is dit die punt? Is die belediging nie dat sy ’n vrou is nie, maar dat sy nie klein is nie?

**Dié een**

‘As Ma iets kon doen, wat sou Ma doen?’ Ek is tuis by my ma ná te veel jare weer eens verbygegaan het.

Ek dink eers dat sy haar gaan vervies, aandring dat sy al die ietse wat sy wou, wel kon doen. Maar, nee, sy antwoord rustig: ‘Ek sou soos jy gemaak het,’ haar gesig oop en eerlik.

Met haar hand maak my ma ’n kurwe deur die lug. Ek weet nie wat sy bedoel nie. Miskien wil sy die vorm van die wêreld beklemtoon, of hoe ek daaroor reis. Ek hou nie van reis nie, maar sy wel. As sy vreemdelinge op vreemde plekke teëkom, vat sy aan hulle skouers, knoop geselsies aan. Dis vir haar lekker om Engels te kan praat. As sy terug by die huis is, roep sy die buurvrou bo-oor die muur.

‘We was away for the weekend, Agata!’

En Agata, Poolse immigrant, antwoord in ewe gebroke (maar anders gebroke) Engels:

‘Welcome again to your home, Alida!’

Alida kla oor die swak rand en die belaglike pryse van vliegtuigkaartjies, en kyk my op en af. Sy wil hê ek moet ’n gebaar maak, iets spesiaals vir haar doen. ’n Pakket koop, ’n bed-en-brekfis bespreek. Teen haar sin moes sy aanvaar dat sy deel uitmaak van ’n groep ou Afrikaners, wie se kinders sonder hulle uit Suid-Afrika vort is. En dit sou net reg wees dat sy vir hierdie skande vergoed word.

Ek word afgepers tot ek saam kerk toe gaan. Ons staan na die tyd (vir kwaadgeld, myns insiens) buite op die gras. My ma se vrinne sien hul kans en skuifel nader.

‘Dié een bly oorsee, soos julle weet,’ sê sy en vat aan my laerug (iets wat sy nooit doen as dit net die twee van ons is nie). My ooms en tannies in Christus staan nader, stoot hulle pruilmondjies uit vir soengroet. Die nagmaalwyn, nog soet agter in my keel, is ook op hulle asems.

‘Ja, natuurlik, oorsee,’ knik hulle. Die kerkgebou staan vierkantig agter ons en wag vir volgende Sondag, soos ’n bosluis in die lang gras wag. Die droë, wit lig van die hoëveld val op ons groepietjie: voosgevatte leerbybels, outydse comb-overs en blou perms, verbleikte maar gestrykte rokke en pakke met odd-man-out knopies. Praktiese skoene, natuurlik. Alles lyk mooi in die regte lig.

‘Pragtig, jy het pragtig grootgeword,’ sê een en ek sê ‘dankie, Tannie.’

‘Goeie werk, jou ma sê jy het ’n goeie werk,’ en ek sê, ‘dankie, Oom.’ En dan, telkens: ‘reël ’n trippetjie,’ hulle almal knik, ‘jou ma is so lief vir reis.’

Reël ’n fokken trippetjie. Ek sal nie. Want ek wil nie van my

geld afstaan nie. Dié een bly dalk oorsee, maar my ma het ander kinders. Hoekom moet die reëlings vir iets so onsettend duur op dié een se skouers val? My ma, in ’n sonhoed en met plakkies aan, wat iets eksoties op ’n eksotiese strand drink en wildvreemdelinge vra om haar af te neem! Vrygewigheid is nie my sterk punt nie, en so ’n fantastiese vertoning van liefde sou net vir my gepas gewees het as ek my ma se witbroodjie was. En die bewyse dui op die teenoorgestelde. Maar ek kan haar nie blameer nie – my liefde vir haar is so gekneus en geknak soos hare vir my. ‘Dié een is die moeilike enetjie,’ sê sy as sy oor my praat. ‘Dié een is die bybie,’ bedoelende daar is iets soos jongste-kind-sindroom en ek ly beslis daaraan. ‘Dié een is ongetroud,’ waarmee sy óf welgedaan óf die teenoorgestelde impliseer. ‘Dié een is die eiewyse een.’

‘Dié een,’ sê sy gewoon, en kyk my so. ‘Die een is terug!’ skree sy oor die muur vir Agata en Agata welcome my again by my home.

‘As Ma iets kon doen, wat sou Ma doen?’ vra ek, want ongevraagde gesprekke is al geskenk wat ek uit my swart hart gedwing kry.

‘Ek sou soos jy gemaak het,’ antwoord sy. Haar mond trek skeef eenkant toe.

‘Die hele wêreld…’ begin sy, maar keer haarself.

‘Jy weet mos…’ My ma sprei haar vingers oor haar knieë om die artritis te paai.

‘Ek kon nie move nie,’ sê sy. Ek sien hoe haar vingerpunte by die sagte vel om haar knieë inbeur.

‘Ek kon nie move nie,’ sê sy weer.

**Dikkoppies**

‘Sy bly net vir ’n rukkie en dan vat sy weer die pad,’ Mamma tree nader aan oom Danie en sê dit sameswerend. Asof sy en Oom Danie my na skool agter die badkamers gaan inwag, om vir my te wys wat met kinders gebeur wat net vir ’n rukkie bly en dan weer die pad vat.

‘Dis hoe sy is!’

‘My gedorie,’ sê Oom Danie en beduie ek en Mamma moet in sy tuin kom staan, moet uit die pad kom, al loop ons altyd sommer in die middel van die pad as ons om die blok stap.

‘Hoe vlieg die tyd nie. Om te dink ek onthou jou as kleintjie wat aan Mamma se rok vasklou.’

‘Nou is sy yslik,’ sê Mamma.

‘Yslik!’ sê sy weer en knik. Asof oom Danie dit gesê het en sy maar net saamstem.

‘Nou ja,’ sê hy, ‘die voëls, julle weet,’ hy skuifel-skuifel met sy oumansvoete oor die gras, ‘enetjie het nou afgesterf.’

‘Ek het op haar dooie lyfie afgekom,’ hy beduie die bosse in, wysvinger wat bewe, ‘sy was 30 jaar oud gewees.’

Dekades gelede het oom Danie die dikkoppies vanuit die veldjie onder teen die bult na sy tuin toe gelok. Dit het hom meelwurms en bloedwurms en bitterlik baie geduld gekos. Dit was nie asof hy hulle wou steel nie. Hy het nog nooit ’n heining gehad nie – as hulle die pad wou vat, kon hulle.

Sy bewerige wysvinger vee oor sy oog, vee ’n traan weg.

‘Die mannetjie het nou op die nes begin sit. Hy broei. Maar is die kuikentjies nie dalk al dood binne-in die eiers nie? Ons sal nie kan sê nie,’ skud hy sy kop, bewoë.

‘Sy was 30 jaar oud gewees.’

Mamma staan nader en sit ’n hand op sy skouer.

‘Sy was deel van jou lewe, nè, Danie?’

Hy knik, snik nog trane.

Soos ons wegstap, kyk Mamma na my met iets swaar om haar mond. Sy vra my gewoon: ‘Is jy al 30?’ en draai om en waai vir oom Danie voor ek ja of nee kan sê.