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University of Southampton

Faculty of Arts and Humanities

School of English

Black Star Rising: A Creative Exploration of Ghana's Independence

submission October 2025

by

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Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

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This thesis consists of a short story cycle, using a multiperspective approach to craft a series of perspectives on the Independence Day celebrations Ghana in 1957, and a critical commentary which contextualises the creative work by thinking through legacies of colonialism, the relationship between memory and forgetting, and the complex relationship with contemporary literary practice across Ghanaian, African, and Anglophone fiction.

The short story cycle is based on, and inspired by, interviews with people who witnessed the Independence Day celebrations in Ghana in 1957. Where original witnesses were not available the testimony of friends and family members who had heard the stories from the witnesses were used. When even this second-hand testimony was unavailable then letters, diaries and, in some cases, published memoir were used in order to glean material to inspire the stories.

With the exception of the Duchess of Kent, none of the characters in these stories represent real people. However, they are often inspired by an amalgam of the characters and reminiscences told to me during the research interviews conducted before writing. The stories have been written by a middle-class white European who was not present at the events described, but who has family links to some of the events. Implicit bias is therefore acknowledged.

The critical commentary that accompanies this short story cycle examines the concept of the 'implicated observer' and questions the appropriateness of such an observer fictionalising historical events which are not part of their culture. It considers questions of literary legacy, colonial history, and feminist perspectives, offering critical, theoretical and practice-based creative insights through a series of chapter 'shards'.

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Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

Print name: Bridget Blankley

Title of thesis: Black Star Rising: A Creative Exploration of Ghana's Independence

I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. None of this work has been published before

Signature:Date: /09/2025

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Chapter 1 Creative Component: Black Star Rising

These are the stories
buried beneath the clay of past
...
with a label that warns
of the danger in opening the moulding jar
*of memory*¹

‘Perhaps life always begins and ends in the middle of a sentence.’² As life, so with countries.

Does a country date from the time it was first conceived, from when its borders (no matter how arbitrarily) were drawn, from when its citizens were first enfranchised? Any or all may be true, or equally all may be irrelevant. These stories represent an arbitrary snapshot of the birth of a nation. At a point somewhere between chaos and stability.

Set in the first week of March in 1957, these stories take the official moment of independence to represent the birth of the nation of Ghana. They are untrue, and yet, neither are they lies.

Inspired by conversations with people who saw the flag raised at midnight on 6th March and letters from people who listened to the celebrations on the radio. These are the stories of people who might have existed about things that might have happened.

¹ Michael D Higgins, ‘(Taken from) Katie’s Song’, in *The Season of Fire* (Brandon Book Publishers, 1993), pp. 75–76 (p. 75).

² ‘On Not Finishing’, *A Point of View*, prod. by Adele Armstrong (BBC Radio 4, 17 April 2020) <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m000h94q?partner=uk.co.bbc&origin=share-mobile>> [accessed 24 May 2024].

1.1 Memory is Always True

Princess Marina's First Story

Memory is always true, even when it isn't. My Grandmother told me that, but that doesn't mean that it represents the wisdom of the Empire. My grandmother also says that spilling salt causes storms at sea and that drinking cold water will make your toenails curl. She is, as they say at home, as mad as a bath full of toads. She was very beautiful in her youth, not now of course, old people are never beautiful; I do not wish to grow old.

Well, here is my memory that is not my memory. As I board an aeroplane, any aeroplane, I remember George waving goodbye to me as he left Invergordon. I remember this clearly. I remember the face of the pilot and the co-pilot. I remember the gunners and the staff officers, and I remember George turning around and smiling as he walked from the canteen towards the aeroplane. I remember all of these things even though I was not there. I was in London when George climbed onto the flying boat, and yet I have no idea what I was doing at the time. My only memory is of that day in Scotland. The day when I knew that I did not want to be old and alone. It was also the day when I decided that I did not want to fly again. Yet here I am flying again. It is strange. My niece, Elizabeth, she prefers to travel by ship and, because she is the Queen she travels by ship and because I am only a princess, and a princess of a country that is now a republic, I am not allowed to travel by ship. So, I boarded an aeroplane in London, just as I remembered boarding that plane in Scotland. Then we landed to refuel, and I remembered the mountain rushing towards us and felt the aircraft shudder as it hit the trees. Although I did not see the mountain or the trees. And I remembered these things again each time we landed. I believe that I could have travelled here by boat, a commercial boat, the *Accra* or the *Aureol*, the *Ashanti* or Benin, but I was not asked how I wanted to travel. Such a small courtesy to show to the wife of your uncle, but no. I had to fly and remember the things that I have tried to forget.

I did not wish to visit Africa. Yes, I am a princess of Greece, but I am also a princess of Denmark. It is in northern Europe that I feel at home, London, Paris, Genève. I am dutiful, I am grateful, I understand my responsibilities, but I did not want to travel to this country. There are

rats and mosquitoes and innumerable scuttling things that I know will conspire to keep me from sleep. I know that many women sleep less as they grow older. I am not like that, not like my mother-in-law. My skin suffers if I do not sleep, my eyes lose their sparkle, my hair becomes dull. There are women, such as the Queen Mary, who do not mind the effects of heat and tiredness on their looks; that is because they had never been beautiful. This is the sadness of many English women, I may be a British subject, but I am not an English woman.

I am not the only British Princess, but perhaps I am the only one who can be trusted. My niece Margaret, such a terrible name like a bucket of stones, she could have represented her sister. But she would never be asked, imagine! Here is another memory that is not a memory, because it had not yet happened. When I smell the roses, after which she is named, I remember that she spent the war singing and playing music, although I have never heard her sing, and I remember that the ambassadors and the emissaries will revolt if a woman who wished to marry a married man were to represent the Queen. Margaret with her parties and dances would have encouraged many countries to demand that they will never be ruled by such a woman. This is a true memory even though it is not, because it could not be allowed to happen. I am here to ensure that this memory remains closed and cannot not be shared.

These memories will make me ill, I know that. I can feel them like moths nibbling at my brain, gnawing at my skull, desperate to escape. In memory of my husband, I will not allow that to happen. In memory of my grandmother, who is more than a memory, but who will be only a memory one day, I will rise above these terrible things and remain graceful and beautiful and calm. I will remain in the aircraft while the petty dignitaries, who by tomorrow will be feted by international industries and politicians, decide on their personal order of importance. I will remain here and not look out of the window and instead I will smoke another cigarette and wait, because in my mind I can already remember this day and I know what has already happened.

1.2 Royal Protection

Ruby's Story: Royal Protection

I'm here to watch the duchess. That's all, not the celebration, if that's what you call it, more of a wake in my opinion. But I've always enjoyed a good wake. From what I understand the natives out here do too. You can tell a lot about a people by the way they treat their dead. Celebrate a life well lived or hide them out the way. That's been the mistake out here, too much hiding. The boys who fought in the war, died in the war, HMG forgot them once they weren't useful. That's what started it, if you ask me. This tin-pot chief needed the sappers, and they wouldn't have bothered if we'd treated them better. But you didn't ask me, did you? No one does ask the people who know. It's all politicians and diplomats and Whitehall Johnnies saving a penny here and tuppence there and not caring who suffers. Not my problem, I'll just keep my eye on the Duchess and make sure she gets home in one piece. One last job, not much call for people with my skills in this brave new world.

I arrived three days ago, to get a feel for the place, and I'll stay until Tuesday when she's safely back on the plane. Someone else takes over then, someone on the plane – don't know who. I'll hang around till the plane takes off, still dangerous you see, while she's in the aerodrome. All those people, all the buildings, opportunities for the nefarious and there's plenty of nefarious sorts out here. The Duchess, the target if you like, is far too exposed on this tour. I admit that it's better for this old duchess to be put in the firing line rather than queen, but still, I would have arranged things differently. The problem is that most of the events were organised by civil servants, more specifically by that new Media Services department. Need I say more?

Of course, no one thought to check with a professional, they asked the new government, and you know all about them don't you – all communists. I've never trusted communists, nor fascists if I'm honest. In fact, best not to put your trust in any foreigners. Just think what that dreadful American did to the King. Just about sums them up. First, they try to destroy the royal family, then they try to break up the Empire. No, you can't trust the Americans. I'm fairly sure they were behind all this, the riots, the calls for independence and all that. All hush-hush of course, nothing official, that's how they work. Still, no point talking politics, leave that to the policy-wonks, stick to the practicalities I always say. But that's why I'm out here, in this God-

forsaken place, with the heat and the flies and the bloody dust – sorry. I’m here to make sure the Duchess comes home safely. Not easy, bloody difficult in fact. I don’t know the place, nor the people. I’m working in the dark.

In the S.O.E. we took our time, weeks, months sometimes. But this time - nothing. I know I’m an independent now, a mercenary if you like. Employed for what I know, and what I can do. But there should have been a proper briefing, particularly for a job like this. So, what Intel did I get? Three foolscap pages and a couple of photographs, and when? Two days before my flight. Of course I did my own research, telephoned a few contacts, went through the newspapers at the BL. chatted with the girls from Girton, had coffee with some of my SOE chums. (Coffee, not tea, too long in France – lost my taste for tea and biscuits). Good job I did as it happens, because all that Whitehall told me - and I don’t think I’m at risk of revealing any secrets here - is.

There are rumours that someone, possibly a member of the Northern Alliance Rebels, may attempt to harm the person of the Duchess of Kent during her visit to the colonies.

Well, that gave me a lot to work with! However, I mustn’t undersell the intelligence, there is more than that, they provided maps and a list of events this little gem,

It is likely that the perpetrator will be a native.

Well, as we used to say, it’s a good job you opened the door. No, I suppose it doesn’t sound so funny now, but we used to howl, we really did, ever since Samantha ... well I, you had to be there. The point is that’s not what I call a briefing paper. OK the maps might come in useful, and they’ve included a guide to West African wildlife. So, when I’m not looking for natives plotting to harm the guest of honour, I could always try to spot the thirty-seven species of lizard commonly found in the region. Of course, this will only be helpful if the rebels, or whoever they are, actually shower the Duchess with reptiles; but if they do, I’ll be able to identify any that might be venomous (most snakes) poisonous (most frogs) or harmless (all the rest.) But to be honest I’m more concerned about brass bullets than poisonous frogs. Even in the SOE we didn’t kill people with frogs.

I have killed people, of course I have, that was part of the job, not that I like to talk about it. But I have killed people, and I will again, if necessary. I don’t expect that it will be necessary though. I see this as being more a case of thwarting murder than indulging in it. It would be rather awkward really, if it did become necessary. It’s the politics. Wouldn’t be done

for a white woman to be caught murdering a black man at a time like this. I think I would have got away with it a few years ago because,

- a) No one would believe that a white woman could be a murderer.
- b) Even if they believed it the case wouldn't get to court, and
- c) Even if it got to court, she wouldn't have been convicted.

None of that counts now. We aren't in charge, or we won't be by Wednesday, so if I have to kill anyone, I had better have an escape route planned. I will have an escape route, part of the training, but I'll keep that to myself for now. It wouldn't be very professional of me to rely on luck. If we'd relied on luck, we would all have died in France. As it happens most of the agents who went to France did die, but it wasn't because we didn't plan. Mostly it was because we were betrayed and for once I know that no one will betray me. I know that because I'm working alone. I've no contacts in the Gold Coast, even the governor doesn't know I'm here. It's a strange situation, even for someone like me, employed by HMG but I'm not on the payroll. A proper brown envelope job. No names, no pack-drill. Just me and my wits. Well just me and wits and my pistol and a knife or two and the hunting rifle that I'll buy this afternoon. That is one advantage of this continent. No questions when you buy a hunting rifle. It would be easier if I was a man of course, it's always easier if you're a man, but then you're more likely to get caught as well so swings and roundabouts, swings and roundabouts. I like that about the colonies. They've got a nice old-fashioned view of women; still think we need protecting.

There's a downside of course, there's always a downside whenever you take a job like this. I can't fade into the background out here. The white community is too small, too parochial. Everyone has their own club, the Dutch, the Swiss, the Americans – not many of them yet – and the British of course. You can't slip into communities like that; they all know each other. That's why I didn't come by boat. A woman travelling alone is sure to attract attention. And as for spending fourteen days sharing a cabin with three other women, well there'd be no secrets there, I'll tell you. That's why I travelled by plane. Not BOAC - too obvious. I took the boat train to Paris then Air France to Abidjan. I don't like Air France, some of the aeroplanes are pre-war, but I was in France in '42 so I fit right in, still have a French passport, should have returned it but somehow, what with everything, it slipped my mind. So, I left London as Ruby Boreman and arrived in Paris as Louise Bisset. Keep things simple we used to say. Stick to names you remember, and I was Louise for three years, she's not someone I'm likely to forget.

I wasn't alone when I crossed the border. I wasn't even the only nun, I joined a group of *Seurs du Sacré Coeur*, with their entourage of small children, on the way to a new orphanage. I kept them company until we got to Cape Coast then I slipped away before dawn. I'd had enough of the thick habit and the dreadful underwear. I was more than ready to become Louise again. So here I am, sitting in the press office, drinking pink gin, the new reporter for Paris Match. No one pays me much attention as I'm not a newspaper man, just a silly foreigner writing about frocks. It's almost perfect. I get to go everywhere the duchess goes, at least everywhere public, and I'm confident that any attack will be very public. No point in a secret political assassination. They are the ultimate statement suicide. So, the trick to stopping them is to be ready on the big occasions.

I spent twenty-four hours doing what I do best, watching; a pistol in my handbag and a hunting knife in my right boot. Shakespeare was wrong with his pen is mightier than the sword nonsense. I could've taken down those journalists before they could order a whiskey dry. It would have been a pleasure. I can't say I wasn't tempted, happy to teach them a lesson or two. Patronising bastards! Sadly, except from personal preference, I couldn't justify slitting their necks. They didn't fit the profile.

Can't keep my rifle with me though – pity. Not the done thing, apparently, women carrying rifles, OK for the men though. Something I'll remember if I work in the tropics again.

I should be ready, but I'm not. I haven't been here long enough. I don't know what the people look like when they are behaving normally, do they look into your eyes before they kill you? Do they look away? Will this mysterious native work alone or as part of a crowd. I'm being paid to notice the abnormal but out here everything's abnormal. I can't read the crowds, they're too big, too noisy. Can't seem to see the pattern. Beginning to think I'm the wrong woman for this job. I shouldn't have taken it; I know that now. I knew it before if I'm honest. But it's hard to settle as a secretary, or a companion, when you've seen what I've seen. And I don't like to say it, but cash was short, and this paid well. A bit of fun, I thought, and a boost to the coffers. But now - I don't know. Will I see that twitch that says someone is nervous, someone looking too long, or not long enough? I don't know, and if I get it wrong, and they get through to the duchess, all hell will brake loose. But if I take out the wrong person, suddenly there's a diplomatic incident. I'm a soldier not a diplomat, I shouldn't have to make these decisions.

I didn't feel like this in France, not even when I first went out. I guess that's why the Brits are leaving. You can't rule a people who don't follow the rules. I always follow the rules, all the

rules, not just the ones in the book, that's why I'm still alive. People tell you that operatives survived by being flexible, by going with the flow so to speak, playing it by ear. Absolute rot! We survived by following the rules and having plans. Then, when the plans went wrong, we followed a new set of plans. That's how we survived, by making a plan, and another plan and often a spare plan in case the first two went wrong. That's what I'm doing now, while everyone is waiting for the party. I'm getting to know the place and trying to make my plans. I'm failing. I can't concentrate.

It's too hot, 80 maybe 90 some days, and no rain. I thought it rained in the tropics. Go up country, they say, if you want the rain. But then they also say there are more mosquitoes up country, can't stand the things. There are enough insects here, flies mostly, bloody great things that lay their eggs under your skin. Saw someone the other day winding a grub round a bit of wood and pulling it out of their foot. What sort of country has flies that do that, and did I mention the ants? Ants everywhere from tiddlers that crawl on food to great swarms that'll take the skin off your bones. Red ants, white ants, termites and timber ants and God knows what else. And if the bugs don't get you then the noise will, or the smell or the crowds.

I think I arrived too early, or not early enough. The brass hats haven't arrived yet. The word is they get in tomorrow. A week earlier and I'd have gone up country, got a proper feel for the place. Pity really, could have shot some game – just to keep my eye in.

1.3 An Old Coaster

Major Pocklington-Hansard's First Story

Been on parade all morning, told to report 0800 sharpish and make ourselves available to the press.

Briefing yesterday - 1530 – pretty thorough, some liaison officer, not seen him before, doesn't drink apparently – got that from Toby – doesn't go to the club, nowhere to meet a chap if he doesn't like a drink or two, good job we're all shipping out, wouldn't stand a chance in this heat without gin.

An hour of who's who, acceptable responses, chain of referral, etc. Something called PR, over from the States apparently. Load of Tommyrot if you ask me. Comes to something if you can't trust a British Officer. Handed out a great tome of dos and don'ts – fifteen pages, maybe twenty - then *Dismiss* and we're all sent off to learn the party line.

Didn't bother of course, knew what it'd be; proud of our achievements, right time to go, capable hands and so on; wasn't having any of it, called the steward to take it out back. Toby urged caution – good chap Toby, sort you can rely on – told me to hang on to the thing, best to be seen reading it, good form and all that. Did my best, even read a couple of pages, fell asleep trying, spilled me drink. Steward took the damned thing away, said he'd dry it in the kitchen, don't think I'll remind him to bring it back. Old Toby wasn't pleased, said I'd breached security, shouldn't have got into the hands of the natives. Tommy rot! What are they going to do with it, can't imagine they could read it, even if they wanted to.

Came down this morning –as per – just about to call the steward when I was marched out to the veranda for my interview. Bit surprised really, normally told to keep my head down and my mouth shut. Wasn't always the case, all started after that business in Tamale. Don't understand it. They were about to riot, could tell just by looking at them. You look at the whites of their eyes, they go yellow, or red sometimes. Saw it in India, damn glad I was moved from guard duty after, I can tell you. Saw it again in Tamale, so I opened fire. Need to stop that sort of thing before it starts. That's what I told the local rag. Caused a bit of a stir I can tell you, even picked up in London! Not seen the press boys since, not sure why, always seem to be somewhere else when they want a chat.

Thought it would be the same today, didn't think the papers would be interested in stores and requisitions, not really front-page stuff, unless it goes missing. Quite wrong, told I'd been asked for by name. A women's reporter, naturally I suggested they'd got the wrong man, not one for curtains and folderols, more of a man's man me. But no, it was me she wanted, had to comply, under orders, see. Bit of a relief when I saw her, good looking gal, dressed for the tropics, sturdy shoes, khaki pants, that sort of thing, not what I was expecting. Said her parents knew me in India. Can't say I remember them, would have thought I would, not many Frenchies out there. Would have remembered her too, remembered all the white women, especially the unmarried ones.

On my best behaviour – tried to be – spouted all the key phrases, glad to be off to Blighty, missing the family and all that. Not sure she was listening, kept changing the subject, least I think she did. I got a bit tipsy to be honest. She was a drinker, kept the whiskey flowing – never seen that in a Memsahib – had to keep up, couldn't let the side down, get squiffy in front of the fair sex, especially if she's holding her rum, eh? Funny thing really, not sure I want to go back to Blighty - hadn't realised - always thought I'd settle down, bungalow on the south coast, plenty have, why not me? Not sure now, talking to the Memsahib, felt young again, not ready for cream teas and constitutionals. Couldn't turn up at the old pile, second son, well third, Francis caught it in the Med, Charles runs the show now, never would have been me. Had to stand on my own feet, no surprises, just the way things are.

Had the steward bring lunch, nothing much, just light chop, pleased the Memsahib though, ate well, no fat on her, must be the war, damned Gerrys starved the French non-coms, not right you know, starving civilians, soldier to soldier, that's the British way. Stayed through the Pip-Emma, easy to talk to, good listener, asked questions, seemed interested. Not interested in the stores though, thought she would be, that's what the PR Johnnies said. Press would ask about the handover. Kept asking about the trouble in Tamale, very interested, what went on, who started it, why it was hushed up. Knowledgeable too, don't know where she got the info, actual info, not the cleaned-up version. Wasn't going to say, been warned by the brass hats, keep shtum, official line only. Tricky though, when she knew so much. And she wanted to know, made a change, meeting someone who pulled up the sandbag and listened. Wasn't squeamish, saw the logic of killing the natives. Like that in a woman: common sense.

Thinking of going up country. No point in waiting here. Not signing on for another year, good pay if you do, bit of a dash to keep the senior ranks. Couldn't do it, serving under a black man; not right, not right at all, look what happened in India - all went to pot, won't hang

around for that. Might try South Africa, got the right idea there. Might join their army, shouldn't be possible, not for a Britisher, but there's always a way, few shillings here, few pounds there and Bob's your uncle, you've been in South Africa all your life. Wonder about the Memsahib, journalist she calls herself. Don't believe her, not interested in frocks and fashion, she's running from something, recognise the signs, seen 'em enough. Don't think I'll invite her up country. The girlies are a bit soft when it comes to hunting, all God's creatures and all that. Look her up when I get back though, ask her for a drink maybe. Might amble down to the journo bar tomorrow; not much on till sundown; see how the land lies. Hand on the leg over lunch, didn't get a slap, must have been willing – couldn't pursue further, left just after. IMO she'd suit settler life, not here, can't settle here, no land, plenty of bush, no farms. Not like that down south, land there just for the taking. Reckon it'd suit us both, new land, new start, not saying together, don't want to push things, not unless it's wanted; don't want to shut the door either, not if there's a fire inside. Starting to sound soft, can't have that in the wardroom. One for the road then off, people to see, places to go, and letters to write if I'm going to move south. Might call round the Scissor Shop, get Uncle Morton to measure me up, can't hurt to get a suit, can't travel in fatigues. She was a fine woman, very fine – for a Frenchie.

1.4 The Seer

The Lebone's Story

'Ssss, ssssss!'

'Go away I'm not working.'

'Ssss, Auntie, over here.'

'I told you – go away.'

'Please Auntie, throw the bones for me. I have money Auntie, please.'

'Didn't you hear me child? I said go away, forget about fortunes and potions. They are not games. Not like the look-and-look away you played when your daddy was in town. You cannot un-see what's been seen child. Go home'

Lebene picked at the Bitter-Leaf twig she was holding. She wanted this girl, whoever she was, to go away; Lebene knew what the girl wanted. She wanted what all these girls wanted, a happy future. She wanted to know if she would marry a wealthy man, if she would have sons, and if so, how many? Would she live in the city, in a big house with a guard on the gate or would she live like her mother in a village hut with a lazy husband and too many children? Of course she wouldn't have an easy life, no woman did. Even rich women, even the Queen Mother or the wives of the politicians didn't have easy lives. The life of a woman was all tears and blisters.

Lebene would read their fortunes sometimes, if she had time and she felt generous, after all, she had to eat. She just didn't tell them the truth. It was as easy to say, 'your hopes will be your path,' or 'a good wife has many children,' as it was to say, 'dreams do not match reality,' or 'you will have more children than you can afford to feed.' These girls already knew what their futures would look like. After all, they'd seen their mothers, and their grandmothers have one child after another until their looks were gone and their husbands took another wife. The girls knew the truth, but they wanted to believe that the truth didn't exist. Such a life wasn't everyone's fate. Nothing is. There are girls on whom the Gods have smiled. Girls who were pretty and had rich daddies, but they didn't visit Lebene. Such girls knew their futures already. The girls who came to Lebene didn't want to see the future, they wanted hope and Lebene could give them that, for a small fee. She didn't cast bones for these girls; it was unnecessary and foolish. No, she kept a small bag of trinkets; pretty stones, some beetle wings, two bottle tops

and a broken hinge or two. They had no value, no magic, they were just things, curiosities that she'd picked from the side of the road; no harm could come from the patterns they made, no good either, but that was the point. The girls wanted her to put on a show, something they could tell to their friends. If this girl, the one who was hissing at her, she had money to waste on dreams and Lebene couldn't see why a little of that money shouldn't be in her purse.

Lebene dropped the stick she'd been holding. She was about to take the girl's shilling when she looked at what she had drawn. Had she meant to draw that? Surely not, she wasn't that foolish, there are people – things - that you don't want to call, and Lebene had just called them. Lebene rubbed the dust with her foot, her left foot of course, there was no need to make things worse than they already were. She looked at the girl, so enthusiastic, so keen. How sad. The girl looked straight back at Lebene; she didn't flinch. She should have flinched; she should have looked away like a decent girl. Lebene was tempted to whip her with the bitter-leaf twig, and she very nearly did. Then she remembered what she had drawn with the twig and changed her mind. The twig would need to be burned. So, she sighed and said,

'Why should I throw bones for you?'

'Because I need help and I know you can help me, I can feel it. I have to know, and you have to tell me.'

'You want to know if you will marry well, eh? Go home child, and ask your mother. She will tell you what it is to be a wife; that is her job, not mine.'

'No Auntie, it is not my future, well not really my future, well maybe, but no. It's a feeling I have Auntie, something will happen, not to me, or maybe to me, I don't know. But you can tell me, you will know. Please!'

There was something about this girl that wasn't right. Something urgent and dangerous. The girl had been touched by spirits before today and Lebene could feel the power flowing from her. It was stronger than her own but unfocussed, wild and raging. The girl was frightening. Lebene wanted to get closer, to look deep into this girl's eyes and see what was there. Maybe then she would see her own death, it was something she had longed for since the accident. Perhaps this girl has been sent by her ancestors. Lebene sucked the air through her teeth.

'Let me see.' she said, poking the girl with a bony finger. Yes, the girl was real, not all spirit and temptation. 'What's your name child and what have you seen?'

Esi, for that was the girl's name, sat at Lebene's feet. Better, Lebene thought, she's starting to show some respect at last.

'I asked for your name, not half of your name. What are you called, girl?'

'Esi Agyeiwaah Doku Blessing.'

'Mixed family, eh? I wonder where you stand in this world. Well, welcome Esi Agyeiwaah Doku. Now tell me, what did you dream?' For the first time Esi looked unsure, as if facing the old woman had taken all her strength as if, like a child demanding sugar, the attention was worth more than the prize.

'No Auntie not dreams. I have seen things, things that are not there.' Lebene said nothing, there was no waste in silence. The girl would say more when she was ready. Lebene reached into her basket for her tobacco pouch, then pulled a wooden pipe from the folds of her *Dhuku*. Filling the pipe, she looked at the girl, she'd have to keep an eye on this one, dreams were common, like ants on a mango her mother had said, but visions - Lebene shook her head - visions were something quite different, visions had to be managed. She smoked and waited. Eventually Esi spoke.

'It happens when I think about tomorrow.'

'Tomorrow-sometime or the day after today?'

'The day after today. Celebration day. A happy day that makes me afraid.'

'That is nothing, we all worry about new things, and a new country is new for everyone. But you have more to tell me, what can you see?' Esi shook her head.

'I can't say. Just tell me if it is true.' How stupid these girls are, Lebene thought. They tell me half a tale and want to know the ending. She sucked her teeth again.

'You have money?' Esi nodded and took out her purse. 'One shilling. Are your questions worth one shilling?' Esi nodded. 'You want to know your future?'

'No Auntie, not my future, more than that.'

'Well for one shilling you get your future.' Lebene took Esi's money and tucked the coin in her wrap. 'Sit there, say nothing. I need quiet for this.' Lebene, however, was not quiet. While Esi stared at the old woman, Lebene started to sing, taking first one thing then another from her

basket, selecting one, rejecting another. When she was satisfied, she spread a cloth, just an ordinary cloth, on the ground and shook her hands above it.

Esi screamed.

'It's bleeding! That flag is bleeding, can't you see?'

'Hush! There is no flag, just a cloth to keep the tokens from the earth.' Esi stopped screaming and Lebene resumed her singing before dropping her tokens onto the cloth. It was clear she didn't like what she saw. 'You girl, tell me what you see.'

'No Auntie.'

'Tell me!'

'There is a ladder and there is a war horn, and that could be a lizard, or maybe a crocodile, there are some animal claws or talons, I can't say which and there is blood, so much blood. How can you read this Auntie; how can you even look at it when the pictures change all the time?'

'They're meant to change child; they tell stories and stories don't stand still.' Lebene frowned at the objects, she walked around the cloth trying to see them better, how they had fallen, the way they lay, these things mattered. She couldn't see a ladder, or a crocodile, but an eagle, yes, she could see an eagle and its talons were gripped around something, a fish, no, two fish fighting. Not good, not good at all. Lebene could see the girl's future, or at least its shadows. She guessed that Esi was seeing the present, but a present that was happening elsewhere. The girl was right; the flag was weeping blood.

'Look again Esi, we need to be sure, can you see a castle, or a prison. I need to know where you will be when this happens.'

'A castle I think Auntie. A castle by the sea and a feast. There are people dancing, I am sure of that.'

'Is that all?'

'That's all I can see auntie. But I think that maybe you will be there. I cannot see you, but I feel it, we two will be at the celebration.'

'Yes child, I feel it too. We have a part to play. Come, come we must hurry.' Lebene had seen more than Esi. She had seen spirits floating around the girl, their hands reaching out,

pulling at her braids. Lebene gathered the tokens and wrapped them in the cloth, waving her hands as she did, trying to scare the spirits. Did she succeed? Lebene wasn't sure, they were slippery these ghosts; secretive and not to be trusted. She looked like Esi, the girl hadn't noticed, perhaps things would be OK. Still, it would be best to get rid of these tokens, not to cast them again. Lebene would have liked to burn them. Burning was definitely the safest way, but there was no time. She was also worried about the girl. If the girl saw her set a fire she would be frightened, maybe run away, maybe run straight into her fate, but without Lebene to protect her. No, burning was out of the question. She would bury the tokens and hope they would stay hidden until the danger was past.

'Esi, go and fetch something to drink and some snacks. We will travel together; we will be there by morning. The journey will be easier if our bellies are full. Go, and don't let the traders cheat you.' Lebene watched Esi walk towards the traders, then began to dig a shallow hole under the bitter-leaf bush. A deep hole would have been better but there was no time. So, she scraped at the soil until she had opened up a rat hole. She reached for the tokens, but they were gone. A child, six, maybe seven years old ran towards the crowd, cradling something in her hands. Lebene felt, more than saw her. She was there; she was not. But she had the tokens, and she knew their power, Lebene was sure of it, even though she couldn't say why.

'Come back child, come back.'

'I'm here Auntie, I have drinks and fruit and snacks.'

'No, not you Esi, the little one, she was here, but now ... never mind.' Lebene stood up leaning on Esi as she did. 'Come then, we have to be there on time, and before then we can see the procession on the way. Did you buy flags?'

'No Auntie, you didn't ask for flags.'

'Well, we must have flags. Everyone will have flags. If we have no flags people will notice, and we must be like dust on a traveller's feet.' They didn't buy flags. Instead, they left the place where the fortune tellers and talisman sellers had set up their stalls and hurried to where the wagons waited for passengers. Lebene, who knew which wagons were safe and which were held together with tin sheets and binding twine, ignored the first four vehicles.

'This one,' she said, 'it belongs to Kofi's boy. It will be fine.' It was clear that Lebene was not the only person who trusted Kofi's boy, the wagon was full. Lebene stood by the tail board and mentioned that she had seen a man sneaking into his sister-in-law's hut. The women in the

truck looked at each other, before, one at a time, they suddenly remembered about urgent business elsewhere. After three women had hustled their children back to the market, Lebene climbed onto the wagon, pushing Esi ahead of her. She was happy. Things were about to happen. She could feel it. She was not happy that the girl had to come along, but that couldn't be helped. Lebene knew that the girl was important. She would make things happen, or perhaps she would stop things that should be stopped. Lebene wasn't sure. She was only sure that the girl had to be at the parade because their futures were bound together.

For three months Lebene had been waiting for Esi, although she didn't know it was Esi that she'd been waiting for. She had been waiting for a child who dreamt of beginnings and endings. A child who, Lebene knew, would eventually make her living as Lebene did telling fortunes at the edge of the market. The child, Esi, had arrived and Lebene had seen into her dreams. Esi had seen into the future and Lebene had seen how the future could be changed. She did not appear afraid; fear would not have been helpful. Lebene needed Esi to travel with her into town, so she revelled in her status. She let others show their respect; she wanted the journey to be an adventure. It had worked. Esi was sitting on the seat next to her, chatting with the other passengers, excited to be going to the parade. Lebene knew what the journey held. Esi, although she had seen their future, did not understand. Two travelled and, if all went well, only one would return. Lebene was content. She leaned against the back of the wagon and chewed on the betel she'd been given. It would be a good journey and, if she was right, it would end well.

'Forward Ever!' She shouted as the wagon pulled away.

'Forward Ever!' Came the reply. 'Forward Ever!'

1.5 The Doctor's Wife

Hendrika's Story

No one should have to bear children in a country like this. Oh, the natives do it, but they are different. I have seen them in the fields, one minute they are working, the next they go behind a bush and give birth. Then five minutes later, they are back in the fields with the baby strapped on their back. I would not do this. It is bad for baby and even worse for mama. I stopped working as soon as my corset became too small. It is not possible to buy *zwangerschap* garments here, even the Swiss do not import them. It is worse than war time. My uniform was no problem; there is a woman in the market with a sewing machine. She is, as you can see, a skilled seamstress. She will copy anything you take to her, from an old dress to a picture of the latest fashion. Her prices were high, and her English was not good, but I reminded her that her family might need the hospital, and she dropped her prices immediately. I think she is the cheapest tailor in Accra now, although others say this is not so. She is not without fault. Her English is still appalling, and she makes no effort to learn Dutch at all. Also, she does not listen closely to what she is told. As an example, I wanted a new uniform, one that would accommodate my changing shape, so I gave her an old uniform, a very old one that was faded and torn. I told her, very clearly, that I wanted a replacement. I patted my stomach and told her I wanted it for the future. There was no need to mention the baby, I was sure that, as a woman, she would know what I meant. But when I went back, she had failed to make it correctly. It was the same size as the old uniform. It took some time before she understood my need. Even then she did not want to make the dress in dark blue serge. She claimed that such a dark colour would make the child grow sad. Even when I insisted, she still made a second dress in red and yellow cotton, one of those garish prints that the natives wear. I refused to take it, even when she said it was a gift. What message would it have sent? What authority would there be? My nurses would have treated me like a patient, or worse a wife with no mind of her own. That would have been quite unacceptable. My husband said I should have been more gracious. Rika, he said, he always calls me Rika, why could you not have taken the dress, the tailor is poor, and

she was honouring you with her gift. But what does he know? He does not understand women, and he certainly does not understand the market women. They do not like Europeans, and they especially do not like Netherlanders. It is fortunate for my husband that I understand their thieving ways, or the natives would take advantage of him. It is, however, not fortunate for me. I am punished by being here. This was not the marriage that was promised, instead it is some sort of hell – the heat and the flies and the fevers.

Everyone says that my husband is a good man, but it is not true, if he were a good man I would still be in Zaandam with my family. He would not have made me suffer so far from home. He has more love for his patients, even for the natives, than he has for me. That is why I am sitting outside in the dust instead of in my own living room, with a fan, and a cold drink and screens at every window. Look at my ankles! Do you know that I won the prettiest ankle competition for three years running when I was young? Now my ankles are so swollen that they look like *Krentbollen*, soft and puffy like unbaked dough. He does not care. If I were a black woman, he would talk gently to me and tell me to rest and raise my ankles on a stool. But for me he does nothing. Rika, he says, you are an intelligent woman, you are a trained nurse, you know how to take care of yourself. Tell me, what wife wants to take care of herself? If I had wanted independence, I would have stayed an *ongehuwde vrouw*, an old hag I think you say, or an old witch, like the one who is with my husband now. She is a witch, a real one. I heard the soldiers talking, they are afraid of her. I am not afraid of witches, although this country is full of them, witches and heathens, they have little time for the godly. Here they do not burn witches, like the English used to. My mother-in-law says that all Europeans used to burn witches, even the Dutch. But what would she know? She is happy to spread Belgian fairy tales. I cannot believe that the Dutch have ever burnt witches; that is the sort of thing that the British would do, or the Germans. It does not matter, here they do not burn witches; they shoot them instead. That is what has happened to this witch, the one that my husband is treating when he should be caring for me. I cannot understand this. The soldiers intended her dead, that is why they shot her. My husband is wasting our supplies on someone that will die anyway. I know about the native jails; they are places to enter not to leave. The courts are expensive and slow. It is better for the soldiers to let their captures die in jail and pay the families a few shillings compensation. If my husband was truly a kind man, he would let her die now and ease her suffering. This would not be the case in the Netherlands, we are a civilised country, we have fair trails and clean prisons. Everyone is treated equally, even witches and Nazi collaborators. My husband knows this

because his brother... well there is no need to talk of his brother, except to say that his family are still paying penance for his sins.

I have my sewing in my handbag. At home I would be sewing now, I would sit with my mother and my grandmother, and I would make smocks for the baby. This is what we do in the ninth month; the women in the family sit with the new mother and make her comfortable so she is ready to take on her new role. I cannot do this here. There are no women to give me comfort. The European women have no babies, they go home to have children or, if they stay, they are not like real women, they are more like *nijlpaard*, with bad tempers and big mouths and they stomp about on their fat legs like prison guards. Such women would not help me prepare to be a mother. And of course, I could not make friends with native women. So, I must make the baby clothes on my own, sitting on my own chair with no one for company. This is not the best way to prepare to be a mother, but it is my cross and I must carry it. My husband is here so I must be here, that is my life.

The parade will come this way, not for a while yet, not until everyone in Accra has watched it pass. We are at the end of the route. I wish my husband would leave his patients and take me home. If we do not leave soon then we will have to stay here until the morning. All the roads will be shut, and the natives will block the streets with their dancing and drumming. I cannot understand why the British let this happen. They claim that they drove the German army out of Europe, but they could not keep a few natives from taking over the Gold Coast. They have not even sent their Queen to say goodbye; they send her auntie instead. Queen Juliana would not have hidden in a castle cowering from a few black men. We would have left the country with our flags flying high. Not the British, they will slip away at midnight and pretend that they chose to leave. I will not leave. I will stay with my husband and my baby until we can travel home. My husband would like to stay until the native doctors have been trained. I have told him that this is impossible. I have told him that I must be with my family before baby's first birthday. I have told him that this is important for my family. I am not sure that he has understood this. He likes this country.

I think that the witch is dead. There is no noise from the hospital at all. The soldiers know this too. They are more relaxed; they have lit their cigarettes, and they are telling each other jokes. A dead witch cannot curse her killer: that is what they believe. Tonight, they will go to the Independence party and get drunk and congratulate each other on their luck. They are not brave these witch-killers. What would they have done if a real army had invaded their land? If the Germans had walked through their streets and eaten their food, would they have been so

brave? What if the SS had knocked on their doors and beaten them until they had sold their own sister to pay for their lives? They know nothing of being soldiers, these boys, these would be warriors. They think they are victorious, but this independence is not a settled thing. It is like the crust on a meat pie, fragile and sure to break. I have told my husband; we must leave before the pastry fails.

1.6 Medicine and Magic

Dr Muizen's Story

When you come to Africa you expect to make a real difference, saving mothers and fighting infections. You do not expect to spend your days fighting ignorance, and it was ignorance that brought the women into the hospital on Independence Day. My patients, the old woman and the girl – her daughter I think – seemed perfectly normal. There was an incident at the parade and the woman was shot. I cannot be more specific as no one was saying very much, at least not to me. That's usually the case with these things. Some trigger-happy youth shoots live ammo when he should have used blanks and suddenly everyone is silent. No one did the shooting, no one gave the order, and no one issued the ammunition. The less said the fewest people can be blamed. Not an African thing if I am honest, it was the same in the war. No one ever fired the first round, not the Germans, not the Dutch, not the boy in the field hunting rabbits. Everyone was just reacting to someone else's stupidity. It was after the shooting that the problem started. Not that being shot isn't a problem, but being shot doesn't have to be fatal, not usually anyway. But the rumour spread and soon everyone was saying that she was a witch. Something to do with a fetish she was wearing or the way her hair was combed. It could have been anything really; they don't need a reason. Someone shouts witch and before you know it the whole town is shouting witch and some old dear is chased into the bush – or in this case shot in the lower abdomen. Nasty wound, but, as I said, needn't have been fatal. It just needed treating straight away. Poor old dear, no one would touch her, she'd probably still be lying on the road if it wasn't for the parade. It doesn't look good to leave dead bodies on the road when half the world and its mother is driving by. According to the sergeant it was because of the blood. A witch's blood will kill you, apparently. In that case I better take out some life insurance for Rika, because, by the time I was finished, well I needn't tell you, you've been in as many theatres as I have.

In the end I believe they made the child pull the woman into the truck; but it was too late. By the time they got her, the child was in shock and the woman was dying. The soldiers had to touch her in the end. It was either carry her into the hospital or leave her in the truck. It seems that neither option appealed to them. Later, when I spoke to Rika, I learnt that the

soldiers spent almost fifteen minutes in the yard, arguing about what to do next. Fifteen minutes; what a waste!

Finally, two of them brought her in, straight into the treatment room – the orderlies couldn't stop them – a young lad carrying the witch like a sack of flour and the sergeant, encouraging the lad with his rifle. Scared witless the lad was, even after I chased the sergeant out. He just sat in the corner of the treatment room wailing like a woman. He was quite convinced he was cursed, wanted to go home to his family to die, and at the same time he wanted to stay and see if the witch died. In the end I had to give him a shot. I couldn't have worked otherwise.

Well, the boy was sleeping but his sergeant was on edge, not in the room, not outside, all the time waving his rifle like it was a fairground duck shoot. Stoked up with *jenevermoed* I'd say, common enough in the war, but not seen much of it here. There's no real need, everything's gone to plan, not like the mess they've got in Algeria. You'd need to keep your courage in a bottle out there; trouble is it's full of Arabs – no gin I'm told.

There are people who do not belong in a hospital and that young sergeant was one of them. He did nothing but sneer and grind his cigarette butts into the floor. Newly laid as well, part of the upgrade for the royal visit. I sent him out in the end, told him to 'run get madame from outside'. He made a point of misunderstanding, that type always does, not sure if it was put on or he really was that stupid – *Hij heeft het buskruit niet uitgevonden* – He didn't invent gunpowder I think you say. Anyway, he told me that the girl would just take on the witch's powers if she came inside. It was only when I told him that he could either fetch madame or help treat the witch that he went out; pretty sharpish too; I tell you that old lady had put the fear of God into her assassins, quite a feat for someone who was no more than a meter and a half from tip to toe. When it was all over, I asked Rika what they were afraid of? It was a *Nevus* apparently, on the palm of her hand. I hadn't noticed but Rika was right, it looked like one of those Akan symbols that you see on doorways. I can't remember which one exactly, but it must have been powerful magic, because no one would go near her, except the girl, of course.

It was a waste of time in the end. She'd bled out before Rika arrived; the sergeant following behind, unpredictable as a tamed wolf. He reacted as soon as he saw that the old woman was dead.

‘You have killed a Ghanaian citizen,’ he said. ‘This will have to be reported.’ Rika took control, she always does. She’s a strong woman my Rika, she will be a good mother when the time comes. She reminded the young man that we would defend ourselves against any such accusations and there would inevitably be a court case. He knew that he could be in gaol for months, if not years, waiting for the case to get to court. Everything was so unknown; it wasn’t a risk he was prepared to take. He tried to bargain with Rika, saying that we could keep the witch, and they would keep the girl. I had forgotten about the girl. Rika, who saw her arrive, had not.

The Sergeant was clearly unprepared for Rika. While he was still thinking about the prospect of gaol, she had snatched his gun and was demanding his attention. She was no more than a child in the war; she still looks like a child to me – but I am an old man. But war child or not, she is unafraid of firearms, we all learnt how to fight in those days. The sergeant knew he had been outmanoeuvred, his bravado gone, he lifted his sleeping companion and took Rika to collect the girl. I cleaned the old woman’s body, ready for the girl to say her goodbyes.

We took the girl into the treatment room, expecting the usual ululations and hysterics, but there was none. The girl was silent, twisting a cloth bag in her hands as if she wanted to be elsewhere while Rika and I whispered in the corridor. Rika said that the girl had to go. I suggested that we should wait until the celebrations were over; I felt we had more chance of finding the girl’s family once Accra was back to normal. Rika was adamant, the girl had to go; the child was not our responsibility. I couldn’t understand why she felt that way. One minute she was protecting the child, the next she was sending the child on her way, with no one by her side. It was hard to believe that my sweet gentle Rika could turn like the tide in a matter of minutes. She said that she had humiliated the sergeant in front of his men. She said he would not forget and would return for revenge. I argued that the men were so drunk that they wouldn’t remember anything by the morning, but Rika would not listen. She insisted that the girl was sent to her people and that we must book our passage home. I arranged for a driver to take Rika back to the bungalow while I walked the girl to the bus depot. Rika gave her a clean dress from the laundry along with a bag for the clothes she was wearing. I was concerned for the girl’s safety, but Rika insisted.

‘The best place to hide is in a crowd,’ she said. ‘The best time to travel is when everyone’s on the move.’ I could not argue with her, I can never argue with her, so when I took the child to the bus depot, I gave her ten shillings for her fare. I know it was far too much, but she had lost so much, at least she would not be hungry when she got home. As for me, I was not so lucky. When I returned Rika was waiting for me. She said she was going home before the baby

was due. She gave me a choice, go home or stay here alone, *graag of niet* – a choice of no choice. I said that I must think what to do, I have responsibilities that I cannot walk away from. Of course she understood. Rika is a very understanding woman; she told me to do my thinking at the club; very thoughtful. Away from her and away from the hospital I will be able to consider my responsibilities. I will take a room here tonight; I don't want to disturb her by getting home late and she locked the door when I left. A wise move, don't you think, with everything going on at the moment. I am lucky to have such a sensible wife. She will certainly make a good mother, when the time comes.

1.7 Interpreting Dreams

Esi's Story

It was a day I would never forget, a day that will be celebrated by everyone until the gods pull Ghana back to the sea, but a day when the clouds fell onto my soul. It started with a dream that felt like a nightmare. It ended with a nightmare that I wished was a dream. In between there was dancing and singing, there were shouts of *Forward Ever*, and flags and speeches and new beginnings and all together there was an all-giving all-taking day that will never be forgotten. It was a new Tuesday, and it reset time across all Africa.

It started like other days and yet it did not, because I did not go to work. I was a market woman who did not go to market. I left my mother's yams in the store house and walked to the road where the fortune-tellers sit. Why did I do that? I did it because I had been bitten by a dream and everyone knows that you should never ignore your dreams. But looking back I wish I had gone to market like a good daughter.

The next day I got a beating from my mother, but that was the least of my problems. In fact, the beating was almost welcome, it was something that I had expected. I had lied to my mother, and she let me know that lying was not acceptable. I didn't like the beating, nobody likes beatings, but a woman's life is full of beatings. The strange thing was when Mama picked up her switch I just stood there because, however bad it was going to be, it would be better than what had come before. And what had come before was the fault of my dreams.

I began to dream before Christmas, on the day when the big rains stopped. Nothing unusual there. When the nights heat up it's hard to sleep and the air is overfull. That's when the spirits settle on you, they settle on everyone, looking for rest after their wanderings.

The dreams were gentle at first, like the *sakasaka* running across your face. Then Bam! It bites your ear, and you wake up sweating and shaking all over, and your head is full of devils. There is blood and fire and screaming, like it is the end of the world and hell and a bush fire all at once. Well, that's how it feels – of course there is no actual fire, just witch fire that burns but doesn't scar. I didn't tell Mama about the dreams. I didn't even tell Efie. I didn't tell Efie because she would have told Mama, and the devil would have walked into the kitchen. Mama would have said I'd been riding with witches. She would have taken me to the prayer meeting and the pastor would have prayed until the devil left me, then the ladies would have sung until the devil

left me and if I still had dreams, they would have taken me to the witch doctor, and he would have made me drink herbs to purge the devils from me. Then if the dreams didn't stop, they would have sent me to a witch camp until I stopped dreaming, and if they knew that the dreams were premonitions, I would be in a witch camp right now and I'd never get to leave.

So, I didn't tell anyone about the dreams, even when they scared me. I said my prayers and I tried not to sleep, but still I dreamed. I waited for them to stop. Then, when I walked by the river I started to dream when I was awake. I saw the Gold Coast flag burst into flames, and I saw the new flag split and run with the blood of a slaughtered goat while the black star fell to the ground and disappear like water on sand. That is why I left Mama with her yams, just for a few moments, and I went to find the fortune teller at the end of the market. I wanted her to throw the bones. I wanted her to say that everything would be ok and that the dreams were not dreams and were just a fever, but she didn't say that. She could have said I had a fever, and I would have believed her, even if it wasn't true. Lying to me would have been a kindness. But she had no reason to be kind.

Auntie Lebene, they call her. She is the best seer in the market. She ignored me at first, even when I walked right up to her, even when I held out my money – Mama's money. She just turned her head away. I should have gone away then, while I could. I would have saved myself from stealing Mama's money and I might have saved myself from everything else.

I don't know what made her change her mind. One moment she was scratching in the dirt, the next she looked at me, right in the face. Then she spat at my cheek. Big, wet, red snotty spit just below my eye.

'So, you are real.' she said, 'Why have you come here, why come to me? Go to someone else, Go!' I just stood there. I wanted to know what the dreams meant, but I was afraid to say so. If I let the dreams into the world, they might come true. Then she asked me if I wanted to know my future, but she knew that wasn't why I was there. She made me tell her about my dreams, but I felt as if she already knew. I wanted to run back to the yam market, but I couldn't move, her eyes had tied me to the ground. I watched her cast her bones, even though they weren't bones, not to begin with, to begin with they were shells and leaves and animal skulls. They turned into bones as they hit the ground just like the flag in my dreams had turned into blood. The old woman made me look at the bones. I tried to turn away; but she held my head and forced me to look. I felt sick, the bones jumped and squirmed, making and breaking patterns, like ants on a carcass. I saw birds, that weren't birds, swooping down to catch crocodiles. I saw

lizards and snakes and witches and frogs, and I wanted to look away. I saw things that could not be there but were as real as my hand. I heard a party, with dancing and music that had no rhythm. I could hear the music, I could taste the food and smell the sweat of the dancers. I was afraid. But I still didn't know what my dreams meant. It was clear that Lebene knew and that she was excited by knowing.

I could have left then. While she was gathering the bones and putting them in her basket. I should have run back to Mama - but I didn't. While Auntie was burying her basket I should have turned and walked back to the market, instead I just watched her, waiting for her to finish. If I had gone home then I would have missed the parade, but parades aren't everything, it was my chance to miss everything else and to live a normal life again.

She said we should catch the bus to the city. That we should go to the celebrations, be at the parade and see the new president. I should have said no, but I wanted to go. I'd been asking Mama for weeks, I even said I would take Efie with me, and Efie would have whined for snacks all the time, but I knew that Mama wouldn't let me go alone. She said that I've reached an age when I needed someone to watch me. I'm not some chicken ready for the pot, I know what men are after, but Mama says knowing isn't stopping; so, unless I am going to the market, I can only leave the house with her, or one of her sisters or occasionally with Efie. I think that's why I thought it would be OK if I was with Lebene, she wasn't a *Bayifoo*, a witch, just a fortune teller, an old lady who would watch over me. I thought she would keep me safe, and she did. Thanks to her I'm back home, even though she isn't. Mama was still mad. She didn't care that I was safe, or that I had travelled with an auntie, even if she wasn't my auntie. Mami just took her switch and told me what could have happened. Now I can't even go to the market, only to the prayer meetings or the outhouse and Efie stands by the door when I go to the outhouse, just in case I try to run away.

But I was telling you about then, not about now. Lebene thought I knew something, something that I wasn't telling her. It wasn't true, I couldn't make sense of what I had seen, it was too mixed up, like the meat in a stew pot, a bit of this, a bit of that until you couldn't tell if it was goat or chicken. She knew though; she saw something in the bones that frightened her. Perhaps if she'd told me I could have stopped it, made sure we were somewhere else, but she kept her secrets. She said we had to get to the city. I said that I had spent my money, but she didn't listen. She hurried me to the edge of town, where the busses stopped, and we got in without paying. The conductor came to the seats but when he saw Lebene he shook his head.

‘Hello Auntie,’ he said, before jumping away. ‘Travel well Auntie, travel happy.’ He must have known her, or known of her, because he didn’t ask for our fare. The other women in the wagon knew her as well, they paid their respects, shooing the children and squeezing up to give us space. We had a whole bench to ourselves, and the other women offered us food and greetings. I refused, like Mama had taught me, but Auntie ate whatever was offered, swapping snacks for blessings. Still the journey was slow. Lines and lines of traffic, swerving and hooting and squeezing round the fruit stalls, everyone heading for town and no one getting there. One by one the women in the wagon gathered their baskets, and their children, and slipped onto the street as soon as they decided that close enough was good enough. We were hardly moving at all when the conductor opened the window and called to Lebene.

‘Roadblock ahead Nana-Baa, everything go stop. You want *okada*? I go fetch, quick, quick.’ Lebene snorted and began to curse under her breath. Curse like a drunk on a Friday, not like an auntie, not even like an auntie who’d found someone stealing her firewood. It was clear that she didn’t intend to pay for one of the motorcycle taxis that waited beyond the roadblock. I guessed that, like Mami, she thought *okada* were for people who could afford to waste money. We climbed out of the wagon and left the driver trying to cut the traffic. Lebene walked up to one of the soldiers, not the officer, one of the everyday soldiers. He was Fanté I think, not from the north and not Ga. Lebene grabbed his arm, and he squeezed his gun. But he relaxed when she spoke to him. She must have known him because she told him that his wife would give birth that night. Then she said that a son should see his father and the man smiled and waved us through the barrier. I asked her how she could predict a birth without seeing the mother and she laughed at me. She laughed a lot, even as she was dying.

‘You don’t have to know the truth to tell fortunes,’ She said. ‘You have to know what people want to hear.’ I knew she was lying. A man might want a son, but not every man has a pregnant wife.

I hoped that once we were through the traffic we would find a lift, but Lebene was in a hurry, so we didn’t wait. Instead, we pushed our way through the crowds, Lebene looking around all the time. I decided I was there to stop her falling. She did not look at her feet or the path before her, her eyes were on the buildings and the crowds around them. She was old, much older than my mother’s mother, older even than my father’s mother. Her bones must have grown thin and would break if she fell. I was wrong: she was tougher than a strangler vine. I had

to run to keep up as she elbowed through the crowds. She was not tough enough for what the day would bring though.

I called to her, but she wasn't listening, she was looking, not for someone, she didn't look into anyone's face, just at the crowd, as if the crowd was a single animal, she saw the mound and not the termites. She was moving slowly to the front of the crowd. Everyone wanted to be there, up against the road where the view would be good. Everyone wanted to be close, but Lebene needed to be there, even though we had arrived after the dancing had begun. When she reached the road, she pulled me next to her. It was a good spot. We would see the whole procession. She took a bag from under her wrap.

'Here girl, take four pieces. Don't look, let your mind choose, not your eyes.' I thought she was offering something sweet, but there was nothing but small wooden blocks. I took two, three, four, then started to look at them. Lebene slapped me.

'Don't do that!' she said. 'Give them to me, the way you first took them is important.' I handed over the blocks. The old woman studied them then pushed her neighbours out the way. There was much tutting and complaining, but they let her move. I followed, apologising, saying that she was old, and her mind was slow. She must have heard me because when she found her place, a little further down the road she slapped me again. Once we were settled, she gave me the blocks and asked me what I saw. The blocks had pictures on each side. I knew the pictures, everyone knew the pictures, they were everywhere, on door posts, on jewellery, woven into cloths. *He Who Would be King*, *God Protects* and *The Hero*, I knew these symbols, but the fourth - three leaves - was new to me. I asked Lebene what it meant.

'We were in the wrong place; we moved and then we will be in the right place.' We moved to her right place, but she didn't say what it was right for. She shook her bag again. 'Take another, find a fortune for yourself.' I put my hand in the bag; my fortune was *All Will be Well*. Lebene smiled. I should have smiled too but there was something wrong, her face had twisted, as if she had had to draw the smile on a stick, the way the aunties who pull Guinee Worms do. It frightened me. At least I think that's true, it's difficult to be sure when I first became afraid, it might have been later - when I was on my way home.

Everyone in the crowd was waiting for *Osagyefo*, the winner of battles, the new president. He was not expected until late afternoon, but there was plenty to do in the meantime. We were all there to celebrate, to party. Gold Coasters can party, and we had something to party about, we were about to become Ghanaians. Mama didn't think it was a reason to party, she says that

when change comes trouble follows, but not many people think like Mama, so the whole street was one big party. People were dancing and talking and cooking, setting up fires where they sat, the smoke and the fish and the peppers made me hungry, and I wished that Mama and Efi were with me. Efi would have been in heaven, she loves to dance and she's so cute that everyone spoils her. She would have been fed by all the aunties and, because she's a good sister, she would have brought sweetmeats back for me. But there was just me and Lebene, and Lebene was sitting by the road twisting her bag of fortunes and making circles in the dust, like a child after school. I went back to her, I was going to check she was OK, but she didn't want me around. She gave me some coins, mostly pennies but almost two shillings in total. She told me to spend the lot. I brought a flag first, because Lebene had told me that we needed flags. I was going to take them back when I passed a *kenkey* stall. It smelt so good, and I felt the money itching to leave my hand. So, I walked through the crowd eating *kenkey* with hot sauce and soft-shell crabs. I thought of the fortune that Lebene had given to me, *all will be well*. Everything felt well indeed. I stopped to listen to a highlife band. They were good, the music slipped into your bones and soon my hips rolled, and my feet tapped, and someone had grabbed my hand, and I was dancing. Man makes music and the gods say dance, that's what they say, and I danced and danced until the drums started. *Here Comes the Chief, Here Comes the Chief*, an old message for a new time. I went to look for Lebene.

There were more people, there was more music and more shouting, there was more of everything. I should have felt excited, but I felt uneasy. I wanted to get out of the crowds; I wanted to be with Lebene because I was sure she would need me. A boy passed with a cold box on his head; I stopped him and took two bottles. I felt for my money, but it was gone. I must have dropped it or maybe the snake-hipped dancer had stolen it. I put the bottles back and apologised to the boy. He didn't seem to care, I guess he had plenty of customers that day and I was just another woman with no money. I cared. It was as if my happiness had been folded up and packed away. How could I have been so careless? I couldn't replace the money, and I was sure that Lebene didn't have money to spare either. I worked my way towards the road. People pushed around me, everyone trying to reach the front of the crowd where they might catch sight of the procession and even, maybe, the great Osagyefo waving from his car. No one wanted to let me through. I squeezed under elbows and between mothers and their wayward children trying not to push, excusing myself to everyone, but I was being swept along the road and away from the front of the crowd. I was afraid of losing Lebene. I stopped being polite, I pushed children out the way, jabbing people with my flags then forcing my way past as they

looked around. Elbowing and barging like a pig in a mielie field until I was forced into the road. A policeman grabbed my arm.

‘Get back! Get to where you belong.’ He raised his hand, but I put on my little-girl-lost voice.

‘Help me Boss.’ I said. ‘I’ve been pushed away from my grandmother; Mama told me to look after her and’ I caught sight of Lebene, about five yards down the road. ‘Thank you, Boss,’ I said, ‘I see her; there. I’ve no money Boss, but if you let me go, I’ll get you a drink, you must be dry standing here all day.’ He started to walk with me towards Lebene, keen to get a reward for not arresting me, but he was called back by the sergeant. I ran to join Lebene as he turned. I didn’t want to buy drinks for the whole police force. Lebene pulled me off the road, scolding me for drawing attention to myself. Before we left the market, she had told me that we had to blend in with the crowds and I had done the opposite. I felt almost unworthy of her company. That sounds over dramatic now, like the village women who beat their heads when they have daughters, even when they need more girls to till the fields. But I wanted to beat my chest, to put my face on the ground and beg her forgiveness. It was as if I knew that the afternoon mattered, that she mattered and that I could have spoilt everything.

She knew that I’d lost the money, even before I told her.

‘I only gave you what I could afford to lose.’ She said, ‘and it was a lesson for you. Don’t trust a man with a nice smile and a sweet tongue. There’s always a man who’ll take your shillings, find the one who brings his money home.’ She was right, my eyes had been on the dancing not on the man. Her words provided no comfort; I was sure I had let her down.

Lebene stood up.

‘Listen!’ She said. The parade had begun. The music arrived first, before we could see anything. The crowd swayed and surged, straining to get the first glimpse of the parade, but we could only see the dust raised by the dancers’ feet. As the music got louder, we saw the first flags. Lebene told me that it was almost time, I felt it too, the excitement of the crowd and something else. Pressure was building, like the coming of the first rains. A storm was near, but the sky was still clear; it wasn’t rain but change that was heading our way. Lebene reached into her bag for a fortune, it was *Courage*. She seemed satisfied. She took the bag and tied it around my neck.

‘Keep it safe,’ she said, ‘and keep it hidden, don’t tell anyone you have it and if they find it don’t say it’s mine.’ I didn’t reply, the parade was coming, there was no time. She put her hands on my cheeks forcing me to look at her.

‘You stay here,’ she said, ‘and no matter what happens, don’t move.’ That’s exactly what she said, I remember, because it didn’t seem to make any sense. The dances passed and the first cars came into view. I felt cold, as if I had a fever coming. Then there were more drums and more dancers and finally we could see the main parade. He was there, our president, he was in his car waving at the crowds. Lebene turned from me and stepped into the road and the world slowed down, and the spirits danced in my ears. Lebene was right next to the president’s car; right next to the president himself. Police ran towards her from every direction. A rifle fired. Motorbikes swerved and the cars accelerated; scattering the band and the dances and the children waving flags - and Lebene fell to the ground. I forgot everything she said and ran towards her – straight into one of the soldiers. He would not let me through. I struggled and he held me until an army truck arrived. I was thrown in the truck and Lebene was thrown after me.

She was not dead, not then. I heard her last words. Mama says it is a privilege to hear someone’s last words, a blessing.

‘We have done it child.’ She said, ‘we have saved the president.’ I thought that they were her last words, but they were not. ‘Keep the bones safe child; you will need them.’ Another long pause, then her last words to me. ‘Remember, all will be well.’

There are many ways to know that someone is dead; there are people who can see the spirit leave a person like smoke rising from a fire, I am not one of those people – but I knew. There are people who touch the eyes or blow in the ear to check for death, I did none of those things. I knew because I could see the hole above her left eye where the bullet had entered, and I could feel her blood on my hands as I held her head. Her blood soaked through my dress and the flag I was holding and straw that I sat on, and the flies buzzed, and the music played, and the truck pulled away. I tried to believe that all would be well. I tried - even though I knew it was not true.

I wanted to go home.

I knew that Lebene had died, but the soldiers did not. They drove us to the hospital, not to Korle Bu where people are cured, but to the small, free hospital where the white doctors treat

poor people who have no money for medicine. I did not know this at the time, only later after the soldiers had gone.

The soldiers did not want to touch Lebene, they said she was a witch. She was not, she saw the future, she read the bones, but she did not cast curses, I am sure of that, although no one has told me. But the soldiers backed away, afraid of the harm she could do, even though she was dead. I thought that they would leave her with me, in that truck, alone until her flesh had been eaten and her bones were gone, but they did not. The one in charge took out his gun and waved it at the youngest soldier. He did not point it like they do in the films, his hand was shaking so the gun shook too; I thought that he might shoot me, because he could not hold the gun still – or perhaps as a punishment for running to Lebene. But I was safe, at least from him. The youngest soldier, the boy, picked up Lebene's body and walked, crying, towards the hospital. I was left, but not alone. I could hear the others, outside the truck. My mother was right; there are men who only see women one way. But Lebene had kept me safe. I heard what they wished to do to me, and I knew that they would not. They feared Lebene even in death, her blood protected me from their hands.

It was a white woman who told me that Lebene was dead. She did not know that I already knew. She was not kind, but she was brave. She was not afraid of the smell of death, even though her time was near. She took me into the hospital and made me clean myself. The shower was warm, and the soap was soft, although it smelt sour. No one told me to hurry; I think that the white woman knew that it is hard to wash away the smell of death. When I was finished, she gave me clean clothes, not a wrapper but a European dress that was a little too large. I don't think that she noticed. She gave me my wrapper tied up in brown paper. It was already attracting flies. I did not want to carry it with me, but she insisted. I did not see her again.

It was the doctor who walked me to the bus depot. He talked to me gently, as if I was a small child. I think that he will make a good husband someday. It will be a fortunate woman who becomes his wife. He gave me the things that he had found when Lebene died, some coins and a notebook and a packet of hard candy. He also brought me a new wrapper, just like the one in the brown paper, but new, with no tears or stains. My mother would notice that it was not my wrapper, but maybe not straight away, so she might not think that I had stolen it. The doctor also gave me a letter, one that Lebene had written; it had my name on the outside and the message.

YOU MUST PRACTICE.

I did not know that Lebene could write, but the letter, sooty and written in an unsteady hand, proved that she could. She wrote it before we left for Accra. She wrote it before she met me, I know this because that was the first line of the letter.

I have not met you yet, but you are on your way and when you read this you will be afraid.

That's all I have read. I will read the end later, when I am ready. As for the rest, my dreams have stopped, all of them. I have no bad dreams and no good dreams either, it is as if I am living in a bottle, and I cannot reach into the world. Mama has not noticed my new wrapper, mainly because I have to do all the washing alongside my other chores. She is keeping me busy so that I have no time to get into any more trouble. One day she will notice, but the more washing I do, the less the newness shows. I still have the bag that Lebene gave me. The one with the blocks of wood. I practice with them every day; I am practicing now, in the outhouse, trying to see my future. I can see very little, no husband and no children. I cannot even tell if I will inherit my mother's place in the market. No matter how many times I draw my fortune I get the same three messages. Travel Far but Return Home Quickly, Respect the Teller of Tales, and One Child has Many Parents. They mean nothing to me, but they must be a message because they are always in my hands. Perhaps I should practice elsewhere. Perhaps the outhouse is the wrong place to find magic. I don't know, but I know this much about my future, it has already been told, and Lebene saw what it would be.

1.8 Disappointment

Mother Francis' story

I blame myself, of course. No, that's not true, I am expected to say that I blame myself, but in fact I blame the girl. I blame her entirely. My intentions were, as always, entirely honourable. I did my best for her, we all did; but it has to be said – sugar won't sweeten a rotten apple – and that girl was rotten to the core. I should, perhaps, have enquired more; but I did not. I am too naïve when it comes to these girls, always thinking the best, always believing that they will become good Christians. It is my one weakness: trusting the little natives in my care. I have been let down before or course, but never like this. Never have I seen such blatant villainy.

I have spoken to the bishop, not that he has authority within this house, but we generally keep him informed of anything relevant. The bishop informed me that he knew something of the girl's history. He said that she was from the north, not far from the border I believe. Apparently, there had been a falling out within the girl's family and the child was taken in by the priest, a Frenchman I believe. The locals believed that the child was cursed and wouldn't attend the church while she was there. That was when the bishop became involved, the priest – I forget his name – had asked the bishop to find new work for her, away from the parish. Sadly, the priest died before any arrangements could be made; something of an occupational hazard up country I believe. By the time his replacement arrived the girl was gone. So, apparently were a number of books and some rather valuable linen that had been a gift from the priest's family in Limoges. That was all the bishop was able to tell me. He wasn't sure that our thief, and his thief, were the same girl. But I was sure that they were – I still am. A rat doesn't become a kitten just because you call it puss. Mattea was a thief, and the northern girl was a thief. Mattea was given a home and decent work in the convent and, as soon as she could, she took what she wanted and left. From what the bishop told me; his thief did the same. Then there is the question of what was stolen; linen, I ask you, who steals linen? The same wicked girl, that is who. Of course, it doesn't actually matter who the thief was, what matters is the betrayal. They are the same, these little heathens. I know I shouldn't blame them, our job is to teach, not to condemn; but when all is said and done, I cannot help feeling that our efforts are in vain.

Mattea was one of us. A member of our little family, you might say. When I found out that she was a thief it was a thorn in my heart. A betrayal, like the betrayal of our Lord. I will carry the pain with me – a scourge on my soul.

She was a strange child, perhaps I should say she is a strange child; I have no reason to believe that she has changed. She was always so thoughtful and self-contained, not like the other girls in our care, dancing in their funny little ways. It was as if her mind was elsewhere, except when she was in the kitchens with Sr. Crispina. She came alive then; strange really as Sr. Crispina was a mute. No one could get through to either of them but put them together and the room was full of laughter. I thought it a blessing at the time, but now I realise they were scheming behind my back, plotting what to steal no doubt.

It was a strange sort of theft when I think about it. The girl left the altar plate and the collection box. She only took her bed linen, three mosquito nets and a sack of rice from the stores. It wasn't the value that upset us all, it was the betrayal. The betrayal and the fact that she took Sr. Crispina with her. I've no proof that she kidnapped our sister, but well they both left together, and Crispina was no trouble at all before Mattea arrived. What can we do? Our sister was stolen from us, and I am sure that the girl was involved. We are bereft. We are suffering. We are praying for Crispina's safe return. We need her back in the kitchens, we have native cooks, and they do their best, but our sister had a light touch with the food and a strong hand with the servants. We are used to her being part of our community. She has been here since we found her as a child. We don't know how old she is, I doubt she does either, it's not something the natives are very precise about.

I told the bishop; we are a small community. We need all our sisters if we are to serve, even the native sisters. After all, if we lose one, how can we be sure that the other natives won't leave the convent as well.

1.9 Going Home

Sr. Crispina's Story

Crispina was old. She was so old that she could feel her father gnawing at her bones when she walked. But that wasn't new. Crispina had always been old, her hips swayed, her knees were swollen, and she was born with a frown that still lingered. It was as if the brothers, who should have lived, had laid their whole lives on her tiny shoulders. Born early, born ugly, her grandmother used to say, but despite a bowl of predictions, she survived those dangerous years and grew strong and even, some said, beautiful. She hadn't been called Crispina then. Such an unpleasant name, sharp against the tongue. She felt between her teeth, trying to pick at the language that had been stolen from her. Mompaga, yes that felt familiar, but she was not *Mamprusi*. Still, she was sure she had been called by that name. It was linked to her tear marks, but how? The memories had fallen away, if only she had a little more time, perhaps they would return. She lifted her hand and felt the scars, faint now, and hidden by the folds beneath her cheeks. She remembered feeling for them when she was young, when the sisters made her cover her face in prayer. What would they have said if they had known; known that every prayer was a longing for home?

She felt again for the words, there was more to her name, more than a single word that was somehow true and at the same time untrue. She found it at the back of her mouth. She remembered the pain when her tooth had been pulled from her head. The doctor had thrown the tooth on the floor, but, when he looked away, Crispina had retrieved it, placing it in the locket that she had been given along with her new name. Her tooth and a bone from St. Crispina, both kept safely next to her heart. The bone should have been returned to the saint's home, given to her family, if they could be found. Perhaps Crispina would have paid for a trader to take it with them across the desert, if she had believed that it had belonged to the saint. But she did not. The bone was so small, a chip from the butcher's floor perhaps, not a human bone, and not one that was more than fifty generations old. Such a bone would have been like power between your fingers. Such a bone would have been valuable; too valuable to be given to a Dagbani woman.

She felt for her language again. It was there, hidden deep in the hole where her tooth had been, pushed deep in her jaw, saved for when it was needed. She needed it now. She was lost on a bus heading north. She was sure that, if she could only remember her name she would

not be lost. Names are doorways, they tell us who we are. She said the name she had found over and over; a magic spell to restore her memory.

‘Who am I,’ she asked? ‘I am *Lariba*, I am *Sugri*, I am *Pagnaa*.’ Why did they steal her names, those white sisters? It was unnecessary, she would have stayed, she was a lost child, she would have stayed with anyone who made her welcome. She was lost again, searching for a map to explain her past.

She did not remember when the first white sisters came to Ghana, but she remembered when she moved into their home. She remembered that they were Swiss, from Switzerland, from the land of mountains; just like she knew that she was Dagbamba, from the Kingdom of Dagoba. She did not know where Switzerland was, but neither did she know where Dagoba was any more. She had known once, she had known many things once, but now her memories were like rain there and not there, disappearing into the ground she walked on.

The sisters had pictures of mountains on their walls. They also had pictures of Jesus with his chest torn open. She had looked at the mountains, but not at the pictures of Jesus. The mountains were more beautiful. There were no mountains in Accra where the sisters lived. She wondered why they would have left those mountains and travelled to a place that they clearly disliked. Perhaps, like her, they were lost. Perhaps they too had let go of a safe hand and left their families behind.

She had told the sisters that she believed in their injured Jesus, she could not remember why. Had she started to forget even then, when she was still a child. Had her family slipped from her mind so quickly. Did she forget her family because she lost her language or did her language fade because she had forgotten her family? When your language disappears so does your soul. If your voice is hidden by a false tongue, then you have no words left to describe the things that you have lost. Crispina had lost too many words, too many memories. She no longer believed that she would know her home when she reached it. She no longer knew if her home would remain to be found. Tears fell across her cheeks and settled in the tear lines that her grandmother had given her. She was, as she had been before, alone and afraid.

There had been a girl on the bus, sitting with her, she remembered that. She had liked the girl, who had spoken so gently. The child’s face escaped her, the face, the name, were already unreal, ghosts of someone she ought to know. For Crispina that child had no name. She knew that was untrue; the child would have a name, and the name would have been important

to the child, and the child's family. Yet the child's name had no value to the old woman. Unlike her own name, the child's name was not a gateway to Crispina's past. She felt no need to search for it; she let it slide from her mind. The girl had been at the convent, Crispina was sure of that, at the convent but not of the convent. The child had not been one of the sisters, but she had not been one of the students either. They had worked together. The child had not been a student, but she was Crispina's pupil. She wondered if she had been a good teacher. She was not sure, but the child had travelled with her, at least for a while. Crispina decided to believe that she was an excellent teacher. My name is Mompaga, she thought, Mompaga Lariba Sugri Pagnaa and I am a teacher. She shut her eyes and appeared to sleep. She was not asleep, but her thoughts came more easily when the journey did not distract her.

The white sisters had called the child a savage. They were fond of that word. The sisters believed that Ghana was full of savages; the children on the streets, the beggars and the drunks on the beach, the people who worshiped the old gods; all were savages. She had been a savage when she first found the white sisters; they had told her so. She was a savage, but she could be tamed. She searched for a word that meant savage, not savage like the beasts in the bible, but savage in the way the white sisters spoke. She could find no such word. It was not that her memory failed her, this time it was the language of the white sisters that had failed. There was no single word for such different people. The language of the white sisters was as barren as the land beyond her homeland; it was a language of sand, dry on the tongue and without colour. She understood why they had stolen her language; it was too rich for their palette.

She thought back to the days when she was a savage, like the girl who had travelled with her on the bus. She was thinking more clearly, memories tumbling over each other, delighting in her recovered language. The language that she had used before she met the white sisters. She had been a child then, hand in hand with her sister, her twin, the other half of her two-bodied soul. She strained to see her sister's face, but it was hidden, turned from her. Crispina could feel her sister pulling her home the same way that she had pulled her into the world. Her sister knew where they were heading, even though Crispina did not.

Her home was lost to her, her last days as a savage were not. Her family had travelled to the capital, where the white sisters lived, but they had not travelled to see the white sisters; why would they, there were sisters across the whole country, all the countries. Her family had lived in The Kingdom, their kingdom; they had grown from the very soil, like the cow peas and the yams. They had travelled to see a king, or perhaps a queen, who had come to tell the people that their old kings no longer mattered. They had no need for kings from other lands and yet

they had travelled to Accra to see and to be seen; to pay obeisance to someone who wanted respect but offered nothing in return. She remembered her mother saying that they should stay in their home, and her father insisting that they should travel. The word of her father had prevailed and the whole family had travelled to Accra. She did not remember the journey; she did not try to do so. It seemed unimportant; what mattered was that she had been with her family and her family was worth remembering; not their faces, but the feel of them. Not their voices but warmth of their bodies around hers. The sound of her family that should have engulfed her was still lost; hidden in the words that she had not yet found. She had lost her family, or they had lost her, and the white sisters had found her. Not found, stolen, she felt the rough arms of the white sister lifting her into the air; the sharp tang of brown soap caught in her throat there on the bus, as it had done when she was taken from her family.

The smell was unwelcome, as it had always been, the odour of the outhouse or the street cleaners. She remembered the black soap that her aunties had made, taking turns to stir the pots until the soap rose to the surface in a slippery layer. She rubbed her hands together, almost believing that they were soft again. She decided that when she got home, she would find a bar of black soap and scrub her skin until the smell of the convent was left behind.

With effort, she opened her eyes; one eye, the other stayed firmly closed. She was becoming half a woman, not one thing, nor another. No longer Crispina and not yet Mompaga, like a new-born; she was caught between worlds. Her body, like the clothes she wore, belonged to her and yet felt unknown. She knew that something was wrong, like her shoes, which were hers, but which had been moulded to someone else's feet, her arm felt as though it belonged to another, hanging loosely like hair that was left untied; comfortable but uncontrolled. Her mother had combed her hair when she was young, twisting and oiling her hair as she left her shaven headed childhood behind. The white sisters had shaved her head again treating her, not as the woman she was becoming, but as the child that she was leaving behind. Being reborn, they had called it, and what would they say now, those white sisters? Would they say she was being reborn again, or that she was walking towards a small death? She had rejected the commitment she made when she took the veil. For the first time she questioned the wisdom of leaving. She wanted to go home, to die in the place she had been born, but she had promised to stay. Would the land welcome her after she had broken her vow, or would it forgive her for making a promise that she had not understood.

It had been a long journey, and she was tired. She leant against the side of the bus to sleep. There would be much to be done once the journey was finished, she wanted to be rested. The bus reached Tamale and left again, heading towards the border as Crispina slept. In Accra she had boarded a bus for the longest journey in Ghana and, from the moment her companion disembarked in Kumasi, she sat alone. This remarkable event was due to the respect for her uniform. The white sisters were known, and mostly respected, throughout the country; their religion largely tolerated though rarely adopted and their impractical clothing politely ignored. Thus, even when passengers spilled from the benches, Crispina's sleep was undisturbed. So undisturbed that it was not until the bus reached Walewale that it became clear that Crispina was not destined to return to her home.

1.10 Market Queens

Abina's Story

'Eii, look at you today. You not going to the market, Beatrice?'

'Uh uh. And what about you Abina? You seem very well dressed for selling Pawpaw. Is that not your best wrap sister?'

'It might be, it might not. I have so many it's hard to be sure. And I believe you usually wear red for church. You started going to church on a Wednesday Beatrice?'

'Nah, nah, this is not my church wrap, and you know it sister. My church wrap is red, all red, no pattern at all. Look at me sister, my wrap looks red if I stand like this. Look, now when I move. You can see the green and the gold just like the flag. I went to the other side of the market to get this, all the way to Mama Fey. I am dressed for our new country, not like you, still dressed for the old.'

'Huh!'

'Huh yourself, Beatrice.'

Beatrice steadied her basket and walked away from the market. Abina did the same, well almost. She pulled her back straighter and raised her chin higher than her friend. Abina let her hips flow like the rivers in June, while Beatrice walked like a scaled child. Abina looked at her friend and sniffed, it would take more than Palmolive soap and a new red wrap to make a big man open his arms to Beatrice. For all her hard work, Beatrice still carried the market with her. It would be Abina who would secure the best seat on the Mammy Wagon; Abina who would get them to the front of the crowds, and Abina who would be noticed when the parade went by. She was, she knew, a woman to be reckoned with.

A wagon came towards them; it appeared to be empty. Abina wrinkled her nose as she tried to read the words on the dust covered cab.

The Road is Narrow, and the Cliff is Steep

The wagon didn't slow, but the conductor leaned out from the cab, calling out from his perch on the running board.

'Ride ladies. Ride Mrs. Any place on the road to Accra. Where you going ladies? Lots of room, seats for all, Accra Road, all the way to Accra.' Beatrice smiled at the conductor, he was a boy who was nothing and who would grow to be a nothing sort of man, but he was worth a smile. A smile might get her a seat in the cab, away from the dust. The conductor slapped the roof of the cab, and the old lorry began to slow. Beatrice turned and began to walk towards it, but Abina grabbed her arm.

'Nah sister. What's wrong with you? Did you leave your head on the pillow this morning?' Abina pointed her chin towards the conductor. 'You go. Go! We don't need you. No trips for us, go. You don't think my friend was smiling at you, do you? Stupid boy, go to Accra, we don't need you.' The conductor shrugged and slapped the cab again, shouting over his shoulder as the lorry picked up speed, but his words were lost in the screams and smoke of an unserviced engine.

'Why did you send him away? I am travelling to Accra today sister, I could have travelled all the way in a nice clean cab. That boy would have paid for my smile.'

'Uh huh, and it would have cost you more than a smile. When did you last see an empty wagon? Do you think we are the only people going to Accra today? Nah, nah. Many women are going to Accra, some will even take their husbands, but no one wants to travel with Ekow. Everyone knows he cannot drive; his brother is the driver not him. But his brother is sick, so he has taken the keys. That wagon will be in a ditch before it reaches Ejisu. Patience sister, wait and we'll find a better driver.'

'And how do you know about Ekow's brother?'

'Sister, I'm a Market Queen. I need to know everyone and everything. Now pick up your feet, I want to catch Ade.'

'Who is Ade? I do not think he is a local boy. Do you know this Ade Abina? Will he cheat us and steal our baskets?'

'Nah sister, nah. He has come over from Benin, but he has married a girl from Obuasi. His wife's father is a big man there, the new police chief. He will not cheat us, not even as much as a Kumasi boy, because he is new, and he needs to keep all the market women sweet. Come sister, come or he will be gone before we are there. Hurry now.' The women hurried on, Abina in the lead, Beatrice behind – tutting and shaking her head.

'I did not know, because you did not say. Nah, nah, you did not say at all. Now you are speaking to me as if I was your husband's third wife. That is not how a friend speaks to her sister.' Another mami wagon drove past, the benches overflowing. Still the conductor called out as he passed.

'Ride ladies? Nsawam, Apedwa, Bunso, all stops to Accra. Plenty more room, we stop, you ride' But this time Beatrice didn't smile and the truck drove by. They kept walking till the market was finally behind them.

'There,' said Abina, 'see sister, our chariot awaits us.' She pointed to a lorry; old, but newly painted with the words *Light in the Darkness* on the cab. While the words *God is Watching* were picked out in red and green along each side. The driver leant against the cab smoking while the conductor, older than most, helped three traders onto the benches, pushing their baskets after them.

'Hey there Abe! How is your new wife? You feeding her turkey berries yet?'

'Hey mama! Yes, yes, she is very fine. Very fine and very big and her aunties are cooking turkey berries every day, just like the foreign nurses say. How did you know it was so mama? Have you been throwing the bones?'

'Nah, nah. No bones Abe, I leave the bones to those who need them, but women know things Abe, women know things. Now, how much will you charge me and my friend here for a trip to Accra?'

'Ahh mama, I would like to let you ride for free, just for your blessings, but sadly I cannot do that. I must buy fuel for the journey, and I must pay the conductor his wages and I must pay my wife's brother for the money that I borrowed, and I must pay her father for the permit and there are so many expenses and such, such small profit. Ah if only I could let you ride for free, but you see mama, I just cannot do it,'

'Nah, not for free Abe, but for a fair price eh. That is what I ask, a fair price and a safe journey.'

'That I can promise you mama. I am the safest driver in Kumasi, safer than the Commissioner's driver even. Hey, Small James, these ladies are going to Accra with us, help them climb up and do not overcharge them, they are important ladies, eh.' Beatrice joined her friend

at the tail board and accepted Small James' help to climb aboard. They pushed their luggage under the benches and turned to the other passengers.

'Good morning, Mama; Sister; Sister. Good morning, Grandmother; are you well?'

'Greetings Sister; Sister.'

'Blessings, child, may we travel well.' Formalities had been maintained and hierarchies established. And all the while children and chickens squabbled to find their own pecking order on the floor of the dusty wagon. Once settled, gossip could be exchanged, and stories retold. But not until they all knew who deserved the most comfortable seat and who should be left to sit by the tailboard.

A shout came from the cab and the lorry lurched forward, jolting the women onto each other. The green-eyed child sitting between his mother's legs laughed and a baby whimpered before settling back to sleep. The women shuffled on the benches.

'So, how did you know about that driver's wife Abina? Was he right? Have you been casting bones? I did not know that you were no better than a witch chasing nightmares.'

'Nah, Beatrice, you don't need bones to know about babies. You just need to be married. It's true isn't it, Mama?'

'Not even married child, not from what I remember.' The old lady laughed till streaks of betel ran down her chin. 'Not every child has his father's eyes, eh? Least not in my house!' She winked at the young mother sitting opposite and who looked away, fussing at the child on the floor. The old woman wiped her hand across her mouth spreading the juice deep into her wrinkles. 'Unless their father has one good brown eye and the other is green, eh? Yes, yes, one green eye.' She started to laugh, then cough, then, leaning under the canvas awning she tried to spit onto the road. Instead, a sticky betel stain dribbled down the paintwork. She settled into the corner of the wagon, shutting her eyes and chewing slowly as if she was already asleep. She fooled no one, they all knew that grandmothers never close their ears.

'So, Beatrice, why is your basket so heavy if you are not going to the market? What you taking on our trip?'

'Just what I need for today, much like you sister.' Beatrice smiled and nodded towards Abina's basket. Before she could continue the wagon once again shuddered to a halt, lurched forward, then stopped again. Three girls were waiting at the side of the road. Their best

wrappers covered with dust cloths for the journey. Small James jumped from the cab to collect the fares from the new passengers, measuring their hips with hope as he did. The girls were younger than Small James, thirteen, he guessed, or maybe fourteen and surely in need of a little loving. He followed them to the tail board, but a chorus of tuts and Uu-hu's stopped him in his tracks. Women reached down and pulled the new passengers on board, depriving Small James of the chance to lay his hands on 'those sweet behinds'. As the disappointed conductor made his way to the cab his head was slapped against the truck and a sticky trail of betel landed on his shirt.

'I see what you thinking, and you'd better not think it again!' The words snapped at his pride. How dare these market women speak to him like that? Small James looked at his passengers. Most of the women were fussing and clucking over the girls, all except the dreadful old grandmother, who was asleep, her head resting against the cab. He could not even be sure who to blame for his humiliation.

'Yes, yes, God is watching me, and he looks through the eyes of women.' He said.

'Ehh? What you say? You blaming me for something?'

'No Ade, no. I'm just thinking in the storm, that's all. Thinking in the storm.'

'Good thing you're the only storm today Small James. If we speed up on this run and, if the traffic stays easy, we could get two, maybe three, more journeys today. We'll fill our pockets, Small James. I can almost hear those coins jangly-jangling in our direction.'

Unlike the men in the cab the women were not speaking about money. But money was on their minds. For Ade and Small James today was a day of plenty, but for their passengers it was not. This trip would eat into their profits, expensive rides and lost sales were hard to afford. Like all women they had been raised to close their hands around every shilling that came their way but sometimes sacrifices had to be made and this was a day for both celebration and sacrifice. They needed to be in Accra, where the fire would be burning. The handsome young president who was the match to the fire would be there; so, they would be there as well.

'You think a man can be president if he doesn't have a wife Abina? It's a big responsibility for a man to manage all on his own.'

'Sister, most men can't manage to get out of bed without a wife.'

‘Maybe two if he’s lazy.’

‘True, so how will a man, even a handsome man, do all the things that need doing without a wife, eh? You remember *Otumfu Asiba*?’

‘Oh yes, wasn’t he the chief who....’

But just as the conversation was about to bubble like a pan of rice, the wagon stopped and red road-dust smothered their chat. The drivers shouted, the women complained and Abina, who was resting against the cab, could see nothing but her fellow travellers.

‘Look right out Beatrice.’ She spoke. ‘What’s going on? Why all this stopping and starting? What can you see?’

‘Don’t poke me, Sister. I’m looking but there’s nothing to see, just folks wandering and wailing in the road.’

‘Then get on the roof now; look properly.’ Abina pushed Beatrice with such force that she had no choice but to climb on the roof or fall onto the road below. Wisely, but without enthusiasm, Beatrice hauled herself onto the roof, where she joined the young girls who were pointing and shouting at the commotion ahead.

‘Well, what you see girl?’

‘The road is blocked, but only blocked by people, I can’t see why we don’t just drive on through, there’s no logs, no traffic, just women and chickens and two brown goats. The goats look good, plenty of meat on them, they’d fetch a good price.’

‘What makes you think that I am interested in goats Beatrice? I am interested in getting to Accra on time. Now what is the problem with...’

‘Hush now, let me listen.’ Abina was about to give Beatrice a piece of her mind. What right did that girl; she always thought of her as a girl when she was offended; to hush her elders and betters. But Beatrice was right, she needed to listen to what was being said. It was not the women on the road who would slow their journey, it was the driver of their wagon. She needed to listen to what he was saying.

‘This is not our party, let’s go before we have to pay the drummers’

‘But Ade, think of the money. Five more passengers mean five more fares, and good fares too. These women are desperate to get to Accra, we could charge them twice, maybe three times.’

‘And how will our passengers take to that Small James? Will they smile when we tell them that they have to sit on the roof? No! they will curse us and ask for their money back.’

‘You will never make any money Ade. We offer our passengers a few pennies because they will have less room, then we charge the new passengers twice as much because their ride is in the ditch. Everybody is happy!’

‘Nobody will be happy Small James. Our passengers will not be happy, the new passengers will not be happy, and will certainly not pay extra, they have already given their money to Ekow, and the police will see how many people are in the wagon and I will have to pay a very big dash, so I will not be happy. Even you will not be happy Small James, because I will not be able to pay your wages’.

‘But the money! When will we get a chance like this? You worry too much Ade; If the police stop us, we can leave the wagon and run. We are young, they will never catch us.’

‘And you will never be a business-man Small James. You want to leave my wagon behind to save my business. If you had more brains, you could be a cow’s arse.’ Beatrice had heard enough, at least enough to report back to Abina.

‘Sister, Sister, you were right! That driver, Ekow, the one with the nice smile, he has driven his wagon into a ditch and his passengers have been turned out on the road. We have been so lucky Abina. You are so clever. We would be begging for a ride like those poor women if you weren’t so wise. I don’t....’

‘Begging for a ride, are they? And what is Ade going to do about that, I wonder.’

‘I can tell you that Abina, he and Small James are deciding how much to charge Ekow’s passengers and how many they could fit on the roof.’

‘Are they now? I think it might be time to give them a little motherly advice.’ Abina tightened her wrapper and climbed out of the wagon. As she walked towards the drivers, she was amazed to see the betel chewing grandmother pointing and stabbing at the young men with her crooked fingers. How had she done that? Abina was sure that the old woman had been

asleep when she was climbing from the wagon. Hadn't Abina seen her and wondered how she could sleep through the wailing and shouting from the road? Yet there she was, fragile as a songbird and as angry as a hippo. Yet she was telling those men as if they were babies. It was clear that the grandmother had no need for Abina's help. Abina walked closer anyway. She wanted to hear what the old lady was saying. She clicked her tongue; this old lady knew how to handle these small men. Abina was used to being in charge, used to telling other people what to do, but today she was like a child listening from the back of the class.

'Why are you waiting all this time, young man?' She was talking to Ade, but Small James answered.

'Lady, don't you worry about this coming and going. It is man's business. You go back to your nice comfy seat and leave this to us. You sleep sound and before you start to dream it will all be sorted.' For the second time that day Small James felt his ears sting. That old woman moves fast! Small James wondered how many heads she had slapped before his came into view.

'A donkey has no business telling the farmer how to plough; mind your manners boy.' Small James turned his back on the conversation and leant nonchalantly against the cab, pulling down his cap to hide his anger. He took a tobacco pouch from his pocket and, with more show than skill, he rolled his first cigarette of the day.

'So, young man, why are we still here?'

'Well, I was just discussing with Small James over there, how many extra passengers we could take into town.'

'Uh hu. And were you also discussing how you are going to talk your way out of losing your wagon when the police come by?'

'No Auntie.'

'Or how you were going to stop Ekow saying that you ran him off the road?'

'No Auntie, we hadn't got around to discussing that.'

'Oh, so maybe you were discussing how you could tell these ladies that you could only take two extra passengers without starting a small riot right here on the road?'

‘Well yes Auntie, we had started to talk about that. Small James thought that maybe we could take all these ladies. That’s if they didn’t mind squashing up a little or sitting on the roof for a while.’

‘And was Small James going to pay to get you out of gaol when your wagon was overloaded, and you killed all your passengers? Or hadn’t you got around to discussing that?’

‘What can I say?’

‘You can say that you are going to start up this wagon. You can say that you were not so stupid as to get involved in someone else’s misfortune, and that you are going to drive me and my sisters here to Accra, like we paid you to do; because we all have things to do that won’t wait while you start a party in the middle of the road. Is that what you were going to say?’

‘It was Auntie. It was just what I was about to say. Small James, help these ladies back into the wagon we need to get to Accra in time for the celebrations.’ The old lady patted Ade gently on the shoulder then winked at Abina before walking past Small James, snatching his cigarette, and placing it between her betel stained lips.

Small James, shocked into silence, kicked at dust as he followed the women. He could not buy any more tobacco until Ade paid his share of the takings and that would not be until the last run was finished. He had enough tobacco left for one more cigarette; a cigarette that he would have to share with Ade. He cursed the old lady under his breath; then he cursed Ade; then last night’s game and the ‘friends’ who had taken all his money.

‘Why not just curse yourself young man? Who will pay you if you curse your employer? And why shouldn’t a cheat take your money if you play cards with him? Eh? Now if you learn to play cards properly maybe your money would be safe. I could teach you; but no. I am a cursed woman, and the curse has made me forgetful.’ The old lady laughed, dropping ash on Small James’ head as she climbed back into her seat. Ade kicked the engine, and Small James grabbed the roof of the wagon, jumped onto the running board, and shouted at Ekow’s passengers to clear the road. He would climb back into the cab once they had passed the accident.

It was an hour before Ade pulled over. An hour when Small James was standing on the running board eating dust.

‘Just going to relieve myself. Top up the tank while I’m gone.’ Ade walked towards the bush that lined the road calling to Small James over his shoulder, ‘Don’t let the ladies wander, we have to keep moving if we want to get another run in today.’

‘Do this Small James; do that Small James; wipe my’ Small James stopped complaining as he reached into the cab to get the first of the Jerry-cans that had been stored there. ‘I’m a conductor not a labourer.’ He muttered. ‘I need more pay for this.’

‘You ready now? You ready ladies?’ Ade threw a cold beer to Small James. ‘You can thank me later when we get to the bar back home.’ Ade knocked open his beer and started the engine. ‘Let’s roll.’ He flicked an imaginary whip as they pulled away. Ade had seen every film shown in the new cinema. Every film being *Broken Arrow*, *Ambush* and *Beyond the Purple Hills*; the only films that the cinema owned.

It was a strange journey. Small James was silent, glaring at Ade, then at the road, then at the beer that he would have refused, if he wasn’t so thirsty. Ade, not noticing that Small James was ignoring him, was mimicking Gene Autry; he was word, and note, perfect. The cab was a dry place for sure. The wagon, however, was green with conversation; the women, having won their small battle with the driver, were ready to share gossip, food and such political views as could not be considered controversial. The trip was barely half done. Without conversation, and perhaps a little spicy gossip, the time would have dragged its feet like an old man in the town square.

‘You think we will see the President Abina; he is such a handsome man! A man like that needs a wife.’

‘And you think that you could be that wife, Beatrice? You are a good-looking woman, but he won’t even notice you. Think of all the pretty girls that will be buzzing around him.’

‘And think of all the scheming daddies who will be accidentally introducing their daughters to him. None of us have daddies in high places. If we did, we wouldn’t be riding into town in a mammie wagon.’

‘We need lots of scheming aunties, eh? If you want to know how to get things done, follow your scheming Auntie.’

‘Well, here is a little scheming, sisters. What if we all stood together when the president passes. One of us, he might miss. All of us would surely draw his eyes. What do you think, sisters, shall we stand together.’

‘Stand together and change the world, eh? Just like in the Positive Action. We will all stand together for Osagyefo again.’

‘We are the pride of Africa, he said so. The Market Women are the pride of Africa.’

‘You are not women, you are little girls, playing at being queens. Men say one thing with their mouth and another with their ass. Have you not heard? He is going to marry a white woman, if not white, then a light. Look at the women he’s been seen with, not a Coaster among them.’ The old woman clicked her teeth. She had seen too many dreams and had learnt that the good dreams never come true.

‘So, Mother,’ Abina said, ‘are you hoping to see the president as well? Will you come with us to the parade?’

‘No child, I’m too old for presidents. Men come, men go, but it’s only women who support you.’

‘Not even to help us to find good husbands?’ She laughed.

‘No, that’s a job for your own family. I must look to my family, at least to my sister. I feel that she wants to come home.’

‘Is she younger than you? Working in Accra? Where will you meet?’

‘Questions, questions! Do I look like your schoolteacher? I don’t know where she is, and I don’t know where I’ll find her. I had a dream, and she called to me. *Untessu*, she said, come! Don’t let me die among strangers. So, I catch that bus and this bus, and I walk till I see this wagon and at last I feel we are getting closer.’ The women tutted and cooed and offered the old lady their finest sweetmeats.

‘You must let us help you grandma, tell us your sister’s name so we can search for her.’ The old woman pushed them away.

‘I don’t need help; I’ll pull on this thread till I find her. We were as close as a foot and an ankle. I cried to my mama when she was lost. I could feel the thread being pulled thinner and thinner, but I was small, and no one listened – not until it was too late. Now she has called me, and she knows I will come.’ She turned her head from the other women, she may have been crying or not crying – old eyes are always full of water, who knows what they see.

They left the old woman to her dreams and turned their conversation to the dust on the road and the problem of looking their best for the parade. Beatrice began the complaining, but the others soon joined in. How long, they asked, would they have to wait until the wagons were all replaced with new German busses that had air-conditioning and glass windows.

‘Things will change now,’ Beatrice said. ‘The President has said so. All that money that was stolen by the British, it will stay here. No more thieves in the government, no more paying a dash to see anyone. Just new roads and new schools and a hospital in every town. You’ll see.’

‘And new clothes every Friday and weekends that are five days long. Your problem, Beatrice, is that you believe everything you hear on your nice new radio. Now just remind me, how did you manage to afford a thing like that?’ Beatrice and Abina fell silent. Knowing that your secrets aren’t secret is important; but Beatrice eventually decided, it should not be enough to end a friendship forever; ending it for an hour or two would suffice.

Although Abina and Beatrice were not, for the moment, speaking to each other the conversation in the back of the wagon continued to be lively and wide ranging. From where they would go, to who they would see; from the cost of travelling by train, to their chances of seeing the princess; everything was discussed, and nothing was off limits. They even debated which of them would make the best wife for the President – tactfully, they agreed that they all had merits but none of them were ideal.

‘Perhaps he would be wise to marry the daughter of the Paramount Chief.’ Was Abina’s diplomatic suggestion, although it was clear that she did not believe what she said. But then none of the other women believed her either, even though they nodded their heads in agreement.

As they approached the city the women began to sort their baskets and belongings, still discussing the best place to see the parade and gently disagreeing about how long to stay. The men, however, hardly spoke. Perhaps things would have been better if only Ade had noticed that Small James felt slighted, but distracted by plans for expanding his business, he did not.

They pulled into the bus depot an hour later than intended, but no one was surprised. Long distance timetables were more of a suggestion than a guarantee. The reports of train journeys that took 24 or even 48 hours longer than planned suggested that the, so called, efficient new transport systems would continue in the same vein.

‘I’ll go pay and you help the ladies out. Remind them that we’ll be here around noon tomorrow and the next day, and that my brother will run back to Kumasi at about five if they need to be home before tomorrow.’

‘I don’t think I’ll be doing that today.’ Small James said. ‘I’ll take my share now Ade. I plan on staying here in Accra. I think it’s the right time for a man like me to make a little money of my own.’

‘Now? Did you tell your mama; that sweet girl I’ve seen you with; anyone, anyone at all?’

‘I’ve just told you, haven’t I? You tell my mama, tell anyone you like, just give me my money and I’ll be gone. I’ll be back when my pockets are full, or maybe not. Maybe I’ll just live here in the city and become a big man in the government. Now pay up, I know you’ve got money in your pocketbook. I know because I put most of it there myself.’ The passengers were starting to complain. They were capable of getting down from the wagon on their own, but they believed that, as paying passengers, they should be treated with a little respect.

‘One moment ladies, just a little delay then I will be with you quick, quick.’ Ade hesitated. He needed to pay the watchman so that he could park his wagon, he needed to help his passengers so that they would want to travel back with him to Kumasi, and he needed to sort out this problem with Small James. Small James first, he thought.

‘Here, take your money and, because I am a good family man, I give you an extra two shillings. That way your mama won’t say that I left you to starve on the streets.’ Was it harsh to give Small James what he asked for? He would probably lose all his money on the first card game he found. No harm then, without money he would be back at the depot begging for his job back before the flags were down. And if he wasn’t, well Ade had an answer for that as well, he would let the watchman know that he was looking for a new conductor. A boy he could train – and pay half the wages he had been paying Small James. He flicked his imaginary whip again and walked over to the watchman, whistling *Don’t Fence Me In*.

Bills paid; Ade returned to his wagon.

‘Ladies, ladies! What can I say? So many things for a man to do, but now it’s time for the sweetest task, helping you ladies on your way.’ He reached up to take Abina’s basket, and with his other hand, helped her down. ‘My, you look fine Sister. Just like the bride on her way to her wedding. Go well Sister, and may the gods clear your path.’ Flattery, of course, but flattery

would bring passengers back to his wagon. The young girls who had travelled with throws over their wrappers caught his eye next.

‘Sisters, Sisters! Wise as well as beautiful. Just look at your wrappers, fresh from the wash after such a long journey. Take care Sisters and remember I will be here tomorrow, just after noon. It will be a sweet journey home. Don’t forget me, Sisters.’ Next, he helped Beatrice, then the mothers with their children, and the Aunty with her basket of chickens until finally only the old lady was still in the wagon. ‘Grandma, come let me help you. We are here, in Accra. You have reached the big city Grandma. Is someone meeting you?’

‘No, I will stay here, no one is here for me. You can take me back to Kumasi when you leave. Will you do that young man?’

‘Of course, Grandmother, but this was a long journey just to turn around and go straight home. There must be a reason to come all this way. Have you changed your mind about the celebrations?’

‘No, young man, I came to meet someone, but they have gone.’

‘Grandma?’

‘I came to collect my sister. I felt her calling. On the road I could feel us getting closer, then nothing. Somewhere on the road the link was broken, we were moving apart and now – I can feel nothing, she is not here. I must go home.’

‘You can stay here Grandmother, but I cannot stay with you. There are people that I have promised see, errands that I must run. Do you need me to fetch you anything?’ She shook her head. Ade got down from the wagon and headed out of the depot. He had not eaten for some time so headed to a food stall. The *Chichinga* was calling to him, as it always did. Since his wife became pregnant, she would not cook chicken for him. 40 weeks would be a long time to wait for a plate of chicken. At the stall he brought his lunch then thought again about the old woman on his wagon. Meat? No, she probably had no teeth. Waakye then, that was soft and didn’t she say she had travelled from the north. He paid for the meal, added a bottle of cold beer and grabbed at a small boy who had been hanging onto the storekeeper’s skirts.

‘Hey! You see that wagon, the red one with the yellow words? Take this meal and give it to the grandma who is sitting there. He picked two pennies out of his pocket. I will leave these pennies with your mother. You will be earning your own lunch today, eh?’ The boy looked at his mother then ran towards the wagon. Danso usually ran errands for nothing, or just to avoid

trouble, no one had paid him before. He was worried that his mother would not let him take money from this mad man, but she smiled and so did the driver. As he ran Danso began to plan how he would spend his pennies.

As they pushed through the crowds Beatrice and Abina had forgotten that they were not speaking to each other, so there was no difficulty in agreeing which stall was selling the best plantain, or that they should keep walking having been sitting since dawn. The parade was not due to start until late in the afternoon, but the streets were already crowded and there seemed little chance that the friends would see the parade, let alone be seen by the people in the motorcade.

‘We should go to the governor’s house.’ Abina said. ‘Everyone is waiting for the parade, but he will leave from the governor’s house, and he will go back there after the celebrations. Didn’t they say that *Osagyefo* would move into the governor’s house when the governor leaves?’ They lifted their baskets back onto their heads and began the long walk to the castle. *Osagyefo* needed a wife, or maybe two, and everyone knew that market women made the best wives. In addition, they needed husbands, while they were young and strong enough to bear sons. Surely it would be obvious to anyone; to the security guards; to the ministers; even to *Osagyefo* himself, that both Abina and Beatrice would make ideal wives. Unfortunately, it was equally obvious that, unless they could stand out from the crowd, there was no chance of matching the bride with the hoped for husband.

1.11 Ungodly Men

Mattea's Story

My father didn't call me Mattea. I chose the name myself; I own this name. It's my baptismal name, I spent two weeks reading *The Lives of the Saints*, a book I stole from the priest when I was cleaning his house. I didn't plan to steal it, that would have been foolish. Gods are not known for forgiving, and the priest's God is always angry. No, I only planned on borrowing the book, just until I had found a suitable name. But the Priest caught a fever, and he died – perhaps he had offended his God. Perhaps his God did not care about the priest but knew that I could sell the book and use the money to make a new life. I don't know, I was only a girl, and the priest said that girls are too sinful to understand the will of God. Now I know that it is not the girls that are at fault, but the men who teach them about sin, but I was only a girl then, so how could I know such things.

The priest was not a godly man, although he pretended to be, so I was pleased when he died. He was not the first ungodly man I had met, nor was he the most ungodly – that honour must go to my father – the man who named me *Awunduro*; Poison in your language. He looked at me and cursed me with that name so I would always walk alone. It was my punishment for being the daughter that he did not want. It was a cruel punishment, but it was not the worst.

I have been told that I should honour my ancestors, all of them, even my father. I have been told that if I do not, they will haunt my dreams and bring bad luck into our hearts. Well, I have never poured libation for my father, I have other ancestors who deserve my praise, he does not. I used to dream of him, in the days before I learnt to be free. I dreamt that he would come to my bed at night and beat me like he beat my mother. I dreamt that I could see the club in his hands and the blood on his vest, but I do not dream of him now. My sleep is undisturbed. I have been at peace since he drank too much imported whiskey that fell into the arms of Mama-Wata. She knew how I had suffered and held him in her embrace for more than three weeks. They tell me that the fish had eaten his soul. I am pleased and I am not pleased. He has left no ghost to darken my dreams, but there is no ghost for me to curse, no ghost to be hungry, no ghost for the priest's god to send to hell.

When my mother died, he had no interest in my fate. I would have died by her side if one of the women who washed her corpse hadn't shown pity and taken me to her home outside the village. I called her grandmother, and she called me *Obabaa* – someone else's daughter. It

was a good name, and I was loved. This was the first time that I was saved by the kindness of women. They taught me how to cook and clean and how to till the land. They taught me how to lean on others and to depend on myself. In other words, they taught me how to be a woman. The women were not mad, although the men said that they were. The women were strong, and the men were afraid of them. I wanted men to be afraid of me too. It was not to be.

When I was eleven, or maybe twelve, years old my father came to the women's village. He pushed the women aside, threw me over his back and took me, half naked, into town. His cousin, a big man in the city, wanted a girl to do his wife's bidding. My father, who was not a big man, even in our small village, gave me to his cousin to settle his debts. I was, to my father, a valuable asset. That value was seven shillings plus interest. The women of the village cried as I was driven away.

The big man's wife, who I learnt to call Madam, wanted a maid with light skin and a white apron. She was given a country girl with no shoes and no manners. She was afraid that I would bring fleas and lice into her nice clean home. She made me scrub my skin until it bled and had the barber shave my head. She gave me a black dress and a white apron and told me to stay in the kitchen until my hair had grown. I sat by the stove and cried for two days, until the cook slapped my head and told me that there was no more free food. To eat I must work, but my work was never good enough, so my meals were small. I learnt to steal food from the pantry, eating it quickly in the outhouse or high in a tree. The cook did not steal food, but she stole everything else, blaming me for the losses. When she had stolen enough, she went home, knowing that she had enough money to educate her son. And so, I became a cook and slept in the kitchen alone.

When Madam's son, who I was supposed to call the Young Master, came home from school he was told to give me lessons. I learnt to read and to write numbers in a green exercise book. When I had learnt to do these things there were lessons that his mother did not know about. He taught me how to please a husband. I was not ready for this lesson and screamed when he pressed himself against me. So, like my father, he hit me until I learnt to be silent. I only cried at night. When Madam discovered what her son had done, she hit me as well. Stripping my skin with a switch until I promised to repent. The boy was sent to England to study at university and I was sent to a witch doctor to drink brown spirit. I could not leave my bed for three days. Madam was so upset that she took to her bed, living off sherry and sweetmeats. Her husband was so upset that he took to mine. I called on *Mama-Wata* to help me again, but she did not.

Instead, it was *Asase Yaa* who came to my aid. She sent a *sasa*, in the form of a green mamba, into his path. He died before he reached his bed; I watched him die then poured a whole bottle of whiskey as libation, thanking *Asase Yaa*. I promised to do so again once I found work that paid a wage. Before dawn I was on a bus heading to the coast. I had taken three new outfits from the laundry, including the new yellow tea-dress that Madame liked so much. I slipped the market money into a bag, with my working clothes, a whole cherry cake and a tin of condensed milk. Once again, thanks to the intervention of the gods, I had escaped from the clutches of the ungodly.

The ungodly are everywhere and they are always looking to prey on the innocent. These are two things that I learnt when I left Madame's house; one - A maid cannot be too well-dressed or too pretty; and two – A maid does not need to have her own apron as the Misses likes to choose how her maid is dressed. I could not make myself look ugly, *Onyame* chose that I should be beautiful and that is that. I could not be old, and I could not be ugly, but I could choose to wear the clothes of an old woman and leave my hair undressed. This is the reason that, when I reached Accra, I went straight to the market and sold the beautiful dresses that I had stolen from Madame. I even sold the yellow dress that made me look so fine I could have kept it for my wedding day, but I had already decided that I had no need for a husband. What I did have need for was paid work and a safe place to live. There was work to be had, plenty of work, in the bars down by the beach. There was always work in places like that, but that was not the work I was looking for. I wanted steady work in a nice house with my own bed and clean sheets on the mattress.

There was a mission house near the docks. It was not meant as a place for women, but for sailors to rest between voyages. I did not know this at the time. I read the words Mission House on the building and thought that it was like the mission that Madame visited every Sunday. When I walked in the door, I knew this was not the case. The men in the hallway were very rough, half-dressed and mostly drunk. They made obscene gestures and called me foul names. I had once again arrived at the house of ungodly men. I would have left, but the auntie behind the desk called me and asked why I had come to that place. I did not feel afraid. I wanted to tell the men who I was, to ask who was brave enough to come over, to ask who was brave enough to share a bed with Poison. I knew that my name was a charm as well as a curse. I also knew that I needed somewhere to sleep, so I said none of these things. Instead, I looked at my feet and started to cry. I am small and the auntie was large and white. White women are not good at judging the age of Akan girls and she thought I was a child. White women are also very

fond of Akan children who have clean faces and soft soled shoes. She lifted my head, checking skin as if she were buying a goat. I should have complained, but I was young and in need of a bed and I thought that all white women behaved that way. When she was satisfied, she said that I could stay in her quarters for a few days, in the kitchen, where I would be safe and where I could help the cook with her chores. She also said that if I left the women's quarters for any reason, she would throw me back on the streets. This made no sense as she had not found me on the streets, she did not find me at all, I had walked into her mission. I had found somewhere to sleep, but I had not found paid work. That was to come, but not quickly.

A few days turned into a few weeks and turned into a small-forever. Boats came and went, new Europeans going up country and Gold-Coasters coming home. So many people who would need a cook or a maid in their new homes. Auntie had broken her promise to find me paid work, but that was to be expected, I worked hard, and I worked for free. There was no reason for her to help, her life was full of blessings and sugar. It was not until auntie returned to America that I found a job; or rather that a job was found for me. When auntie left and a new auntie arrived everything at the mission changed. The new auntie, and her husband, wanted new cooks and new houseboys; staff that they had chosen themselves. The old staff were given clean uniforms and marched to the port office as soon as the next boat came in. We waited for the people to reach the shore. Waited for them to say what staff they would need. 'One cook, three houseboys.' Or 'one house boy, one driver.' And on and on until all the waiting had been matched to all the arriving. The last arriving was an old man, a priest who was heading up country. The last waiting was me. He was not happy, he wanted a houseboy and a cook, male servants for a male house. He complained that I was a woman, then that I was only a girl. He thought that I would not be strong enough to work, and that I would run away for immoral purposes. Finally, he said that it would be unseemly to have a woman as a houseboy. I thought there would be no work for me that day, but the new auntie wanted us all to be working elsewhere and out of her mission. The priest was persuaded that I would be no worse than his housekeeper in his English parish, and in return he agreed to pay me half the wages of an untrained houseboy, with money docked for spills and breakages. I had my first paid job with, I was sure, a godly man. How foolish I was in those days.

Things that I learnt when I was the priest's housekeeper. That the African gods are not gods, but foolish superstitions – this is false. That the priest's god is the only god, and he is an angry god – this is half true. That women are sinful and wicked – this is sometimes true and

sometimes false. That the wicked should be punished – this is definitely true. And that men of God are not always godly – this is also definitely true.

At the priest's house I had a room of my own, but I did not have a bed of my own. The room had no windows and no fan and smelt of damp leaves and paraffin. There was no space for a bed, so I slept on one of the wooden trunks that were stored in my room. I would have liked to have known what was in the trunk, in case it was something unclean or ungodly, but I could not tell. The trunk, like all the boxes in my room, was closed fast with heavy locks and no keys. There was no key for the door to my room; at least not that I was able to find. The priest said that the innocent have no need for locked doors. This is true. There is no need for locks and keys in a room full of boxes that can be pulled in front of unlocked doors. I slept soundly in my room at the priest's house, although I do not think that I slept alone. Some days, when I returned to my room, I could tell that I was not alone. My clothes would be disturbed, and my bedding turned. The heavy boxes were not moved, but the smaller ones were not quite where I had left them. It was as if someone was searching for something lost. I was not sure but thought that it could be the spirits that were driven into the bush when the priest built his new church. Perhaps the priest kept their fetishes locked in the boxes, this would surely have made the spirits angry. So, I poured libation and asked the ghosts of my sisters to keep me safe. When the priest was away, I took one of the smallest boxes deep into the bush and left it there. The next day, when I returned the box was gone and a trail of small wood led into the trees. I did not follow, that would have been foolish and, even then, I was not a foolish woman.

I did not feel happy working in the priest's house, but it is not the nature of women to be happy when they are deprived of the company of other women. However, the priest was not a godly man, and I did not want to stay there once I had saved a little money. Saving money was not easy as every week he would find some excuse to dock some of my wages. Things would be broken that I did not break, or things would be lost that I did not lose. Small things, that would be found later, safe and unbroken. I asked the priest why my money was not returned when the things were recovered but he said that it was impossible. He said that the fine had already been given to the poor. This made no sense as everyone except the priest was poor, and the priest gave nothing away. The poor gave what they had to him so that his Angry God would not be angry with them. The priest was not a kind man but being paid a little money was better than being paid nothing and I needed money to start a new life. However, I could not stay there for long because I soon learnt that the priest was also an ungodly man.

The priest did not come into my bed like the other ungodly men, neither did he press himself against me; but there are many ways to be ungodly, and the priest was ungodly in many ways. The priest used to watch women; he watched their bottoms when they were scrubbing the floor, he watched their breasts when they were pounding yams, and he watched me when I went to the outhouse. He told me that I was wicked for tempting him with my body; but this was not true. How can a woman be wicked for doing what needs to be done in a private place? How can a woman be blamed for the actions of an ungodly man? I asked the priest these questions, but he had no answers except to say that Eve brought about the fall, and I was the daughter of Eve. I was not the daughter of Eve, or even the granddaughter of Eve. Eve is not a Ewe name or even a Gurma name or an Akan name. If Eve was wicked, then I was definitely innocent. The priest was not a man to listen to the opinions of women. He made me bare my back and he beat me with a switch. This was not acceptable, even my father would not have dared to do that. I ran to my room and stayed there until the priest wept with regret. I did not leave my room until my soul had healed.

When I saw the priest again, he said that he was sorry. He lied. He said that I should punish him for my pain. I was happy to do this as he was a cruel man. Thought of my humiliation and of my stolen wages and I beat him until his back was covered in blood. I would have beaten him for longer as my soul was full of anger, but I could not. There was no satisfaction in punishing a man who wants to be punished. I walked away.

I have returned to the start of my story, where I chose a new life away from the ungodly and chose a new name to take with me. But that was yesterday, this is today where I am no longer poor, cursed *Awunduro*, plaything of the ungodly but Madame Mattea, Market Queen and owner of the finest chop house this side of the railway. Saved from the ungodly by the kindness of women, white linen and a gift from the convent. I wonder sometimes if they realised what Crispina and I took with us? Nothing they used; we were careful about that. They would have noticed the everyday silver and sent the constable to find us and take us to the magistrate, well taken me to the magistrate at least. Crispina would have been sent back to the convent and made to spend her remaining days on her knees. That would have been worse than gaol for her. She told me once, before we escaped, that she would rather eat stones than spend any more time in the south. She is dead now; I can feel it. She was old when I was young, and look at me now, white hair and a comfortable seat! I tried to find her once, to thank her, but there was no trace, I think she changed her name. Perhaps she chose a new one, a fresh start after all those

years pretending to be someone else; or perhaps she reclaimed her birth name, the one her father gave her. She didn't say, I only knew her as Crispina.

Names, she used to say, are too powerful to be thrown into the wind. I have thrown names to the wind, names that I no longer needed, but this name, the one that I chose for myself, that is a name to be kept close. Crispina was a godly woman, not, I think a Christian woman, but truly a godly woman. She was an old woman and a thoughtful woman, who spent her time collecting kindness – kindness and the recipe for the sweetest palm wine in Ghana. That's what I sell at my chop house, Crispina's palm wine, palm wine with extra secret ingredients. It is not for everyone; I have market wine for the old men who drink too much and sleep under the mango trees. That market wine is powerful stuff but rough as a goat's backside. They wake up with their eyes in their pockets and their heads in their hands. There is only one cure for market wine – another drink of market wine. Those old men are good customers, buying and buying the cheapest wine every day and never noticing if it is sour or fresh. But for the people I like; for the women who don't cheat their customers and the men who don't beat their wives, they can drink Crispina's wine; the best in Ghana, the best in the whole of Africa. Here, a glass for you to try, and a small glass for libation, to thank Sr. Crispina for her blessings.

1.12 Not Quite Enough

The Weaver's Story

It was a fine cloth, the colours rich and the thread! The thread was the finest he had ever worked. He could have sold it for a good price to some big man; a chief perhaps or one of the new politicians who want to show which party they support. His wife wanted him to sell it; they needed the money she said. They always needed money, even though he worked hard there was never enough money. Every cloth has a price they say, but they also say that every man does as well. He did not believe that he was a man for sale so perhaps it was reasonable that his cloth was not for sale either. It was not an every-day cloth. It was made for a festival cloth; for wearing once and for being the centre of attention. Even his wife knew that this cloth was something special, but she had still insisted that it should be sold.

He had intended to wear this cloth himself. He wanted to look his best at the celebration, to show his neighbours that he was a man of substance – although he was not. He was a man who had too many children and an insubstantial house, but he had ambition. The president, the *Osagyefo*, they called him in the weaving compound. He had said it was time for the whole country to have ambition. The weaver was a party man; a man whose thumbprint could be found next to the red cockerel. If the president said that all Ghanaians should look to the future it was only right that he should look to the future and dress as the important man that he knew he would become.

He had woven 20 strips of his cloth, only four more were needed and the beautiful cloth would be complete. 20 strips joined by strong cotton thread. 20 strips sewn by 19 rows of his wife's tidy stitches and one strip half-finished on his frame. The sun would set within the hour, and the cloth was not finished, could not be finished. He could send his wife to the store to buy kerosine for the lamps, but even if he worked all night there would only be 21 strips, and his wife would have to leave her cooking to join the 21st strip to the rest. Could he ask her to do that? Ask her to leave her sisters when there was so much work to be done? He could not. There would be no celebrations in his house if he did, and in any case, it would not be enough. The cloth would still be too small. What was the use of a cloth, even a beautiful cloth, if it was too small.

He could, he supposed, still wear the cloth. He could drape it in such a way to hide the missing edge. The folds would be smaller, but perhaps it could be done; the weaver was not a tall man. He hesitated. What would people say? A cloth without a border was like a tree without roots. His neighbours would laugh at him. His customers would go elsewhere. What sort of weaver is this they would say. A skilled man would not leave his work unfinished. People would think he knew nothing. He could not wear half a cloth.

He had a second thought. He had another cloth, also unfinished. The one he had put aside to work on his independence cloth. He was a good craftsman, all his cloths were well made, even the cheap cotton ones. He could take the four strips from the plain Kente and convince his wife to join them to the new cloth. He could buy her some small gift, something to show he was sorry for giving her extra work when she was busy preparing for tomorrow. He would fold the cloth just so, hiding the poor cloth in the folds of the fine. He picked up the cloth folding it this way and that, trying to keep the folds just so whilst concealing the raw edge. It could not be done. If the edge was hidden on the right, then it showed on the left. The edge could be folded at his waist but would show on his shoulder. People would point and laugh. They would say that his eyes were so clouded that he could not see the difference between cotton and silk. If not, they would think that his mind was wandering, that he was a young man with the illnesses of the old.

He would listen to his wife. He would finish the new cloth and sell it for a good price and wear an old one. He had his father's cloth; he would wear that. If his neighbours asked why a weaver hadn't woven himself a new cloth for such an occasion, he would say that he wanted to honour his father. It would have been easier if his father had been a skilled weaver. Then his neighbours would have understood and praised him for showing respect. But his father had not been skilled. He had been careless and drunk, barely making enough money to scrape by. He could not wear such a cloth to the celebrations. It would be shameful for a skilled weaver to be seen in such a garment.

He asked himself why his life was that way? How could a good day for everyone else be a bad day for him? He had choices that were not choices. Join the celebrations dressed in an old cloth or in half a cloth. There was a third option, he could catch a fever, or at least pretend to catch a fever, and take to his bed. If he were ill the aunties would bring sweetmeats and nourishing broths. Instead of laughing at him they would be kind to him. But that brought its own dangers. If he pretended to be sick this week, would he catch a real fever next week? He had seen what could happen to a man who wished ill on himself. He could not take the risk.

He called his wife. He gave her some coins for the paraffin seller. It was not an occasion for half measures. He would work until dawn and through tomorrow. If he was ill, it would be because he had no time for sleep. If he was well, he would wear his new Kente, even if he had to pick up a needle himself. There was men's work and women's work, but if the locusts are coming everyone gathers the maize.

1.13 La Condessa

Carmen's Story

Natural beauties are made and remade every morning. You know this because you have made yourself into a natural beauty. You know this because every year it is a little harder to achieve. Being beautiful is never easy, neither is it cheap, but being beautiful is worth every second and every cent. It's an investment, of sorts. Not a real investment, like the uncut diamonds that you've sewn into the hems of your clothes, or the pure gold beads that you keep in a pill box on your dressing table. Those are investments borne of experience. No child of the *Infamous Decade*, when revolution followed coup and counter coup, would ever trust the permanence of banks or the reliability of local currency. This was the first, and only, lesson that your father taught you; be ready to run. He was not ready. He supported *Justo* for too long and was left, so you heard, broken and bullet-ridden on the banks of the *San Juan*. You did not see the revolution. By the time you were twenty-one you had moved to the United States where you lived as a mistress of the Argentinian Ambassador, whilst secretly marrying a young American as insurance. It was not a happy marriage but as a child of the church, you could not break free. So, you followed him to New York, where you were happy and to Seattle, where you were not. You spent his money and charmed his friends and, because there was no music in his soul, you went dancing without him every evening. When he moved to London, you went there too. The Atlantic crossing suited you, the arrival in Liverpool did not. Liverpool was as poor as Chaco but cold and grey. You followed him to London where you expected to dine with royalty, but you dined alone. Your American husband hardly earned enough to pay for a tailor and would not, despite your pleas, alter his accounts to increase your wealth. You had made a mistake. You had married an honest man, and you despised his honesty. A man should do everything in his power to make the most of his situation and your husband's power was stifled by his scruples. No wonder you no longer shared his bed. You were unhappy and unhappiness ages the skin. The coffee was stale, sold in bottles and laced with chicory. It was not fit to drink. Everything was rationed and no one had heard of fernet. You learnt to drink whiskey and wished you could die. And yet, despite your ill fortune, every morning you dedicated yourself to reinvention so that, even in London, you could shine.

Like the moon, your glory was revealed by reflected light. Like the moon, you were nothing without the sun. You longed for the sun, you demanded the sun and, eventually, you

even begged for the sun. When all this failed you took to your bed. You were as pale and listless as Puccini's Mimi, and the accountant relented, he loved you even though he must have known that you did not love him. He would have promised anything to make you happy, so he promised you sunshine and luxury. You used the last of your stolen silver to prepare for Monaco or Milan, for where else could your new home possibly be found. You bloomed again, a lily amongst the wall flowers.

You did not go to Monaco, or Milan, or even to Paris, instead you went to Bloomsbury where an old man with bad breath inoculated you against diseases that you had known since birth. Your arm ached and swelled, and your head burned with fever. This did not concern the doctor; it did not concern anyone. Their only concern was that you carried a small pink booklet with stamps and signatures which would allow you to travel to an infection ridden country that would remind you of home. This was not a good thing; you cradled no happy memories of your home. You stopped speaking to your husband. He said that you could not travel under your own name. Your passport, the blue American passport that you had married to obtain, called you by someone else's name, Mrs Geoffrey Brown. This was not your name, and you would not, you do not, answer to it. Your name is magnificent, imposing and, when said correctly, terrifying. Mercedes Carmen Del Rosa Fernandez Solar could never be mistaken for Mrs Geoffrey Brown. What sort of woman would abandon her name, her heritage, for something as unimportant as a husband? You know the answer. You spat your response to your mother-in-law the first time that you saw her. Only a woman who has no pride would abandon her name. Only a woman who wore tweed skirts and flat shoes would deny her roots. Only women like your mother-in-law and her daughters and your ugly, grey-haired neighbours would do such a thing. You would not. But, despite your best efforts, your husband stood his ground. Your passport, your shared passport, showed you as Carmen, wife of Geoffrey Brown. It did not even contain your photograph, which was unfortunate as you look magnificent in photographs, you have learnt to make the camera your own.

Initially you sulked but sulking, like smiling, encourages wrinkles, so you adopted dignified indifference instead. You threatened to kill yourself, but it was a pretence. You would never endanger your immortal soul, not even to punish your husband. You thought about returning to Argentina, but you knew that General Fernandez's daughter could not survive there. You had no choice; you boarded the *Chambray* for the two-week journey to the *Dark Continent*. You would never forgive the insult. You made it clear that you were unhappy. But that was to be expected because, as you explained to your husband, it was important for him to know when he had

failed. You had wanted to fly on a De Havilland Comet, like the film stars that you admire, fast, glamorous, and out of reach. Your husband's company would not pay for flights, so you travelled by boat. At least you travelled under your own name, and in your own cabin. It was an acceptable compromise. Even if you had to use your husband's name when you reached your final destination.

You were determined to dislike the posting, as was your right, but it turned out to be full of possibilities. You became content with your new life. Content but not complacent, you knew that happiness is, by nature, transient. Your place in this new society was dependent on your husband. You knew that this was a dangerous situation, but you understood danger, it was your birth right, like your blood it was intrinsic to life. The most dangerous situations are also the most profitable. Your husband did not understand this, but that was irrelevant. It was your danger, and it would be your profit, he would, or would not, learn to overcome dangers of his own. You know, you have always known, that everyone has their own canyon to cross.

You made friends, influential friends, friends or at least contacts, who understood the importance of making a deal. These contacts are good, but not good enough. You need to be where the power is, the new power. You need to be indispensable. You need to be seen on the arms of the chiefs, of the generals, of the president himself. That is why you will wear your green dress tonight. That is why you will wear an emerald at your throat. Just one, a single firestone to draw the eye. Tonight, you must be at your most desirable, and your most unobtainable. Tonight, will be the first note of the song. You will be one voice among many, but you will be the most perfect voice, the one that people will remember. But that is for tonight, not for now. Now you have other meetings with other contacts. Now you must not look too rich or too beautiful. The men that you are about to meet are as clever as you. They know how to set a price and then, when you think the deal is done, they know to ask for more. You have to make them afraid of you, and sorry for you, and preferably dependent on you and you only have one chance to do it. Can you do it? It is not the first time that you have become someone new, it's not the first time that your life has depended on creating a new persona, but this is the first time that you've been unsure. Can you do it? Can you convince these murderous men to murder him and let you live? Will they demand payment again and again until you have nothing left to give? Do they prey on the people or fight for them? How does it feel not to know? Look in the mirror Condessa, look closely, are you the anaconda or the turtle? The stakes are high. Is there fire enough in your heart to sit at their table?

1.14 Foreign Service

A Family Story

He had said it was a promotion, and she believed him, because that's what wives do in America, they trust their husbands.

It was only later, once he'd left, and once the gossiping started, that she realised how much he had lied. The first hint came at the post office. Irena had a parcel of clothes that she was sending to her sisters. As soon as she walked in the door, she heard two women complaining about John Jr. Irena was mortified. The women were house maids, hired help, and there they were discussing her husband's morals. Irena was minded to give them a piece of her mind, after all, what did women like that know about morals? Her husband was a war hero. She said nothing. People like her didn't engage with people like them, not in public. Irena decided, there and then, to fire her own cook as an example. She couldn't be sure that the cook had been gossiping but she might have been, and that was good enough for Irena. There were, after all, plenty of other cooks who needed work. She decided to keep the new cook on half pay for the first year, on a trial basis. Of course, she would have to convince the sisters that her actions were justified. That should have been easy, it was, after all, her house, well her husband's – there was no doubt about that – but his sisters tended to forget who was in charge. Irena decided that she should speak to her husband about his sisters. There was surely something that could be done about their attitude. But by the time she came home the sisters seemed less important.

The gossip hadn't been confined to the help. When Irena reached the coffee house, quite ready for a rest and a restorative slice of strawberry pie, the youngest of the Greenway girls turned away from Irena, even though she had clearly been seen. Instead of a friendly good morning, Sophie Greenway looked at her sister and asked what she thought of drowning the puppies if the sire bites. The waitress looked right through Irena and agreed, adding that you don't need to geld the stallion if the dam is dry. That uppity girl had no need to say anything of the sort, and the Greenway girls should have corrected her. Irena, who had thought so much of the Americans when she was young, wondered why she expected real life to be like the movies. She had no idea how to make these Americans accept her as their equal. All three women had stared as if Irena was no more than a pail of water on a rainy day. Irena went right home, too upset to eat pastries. Too upset, it turned out, even to fire the cook.

The next day at the sewing circle, Felicia whispered far too loudly to Lucie-May that some people should have the sense to stay away from decent company. She looked straight at Irena, who was so shocked that she stabbed her thumb with the new snipping shears that her mother-in-law had sent from Ohio. Irena went home to recover.

She had placed a call to her mother. She knew the call might not get through, but she had to try. Her mother had told her to marry John Jr., and her mother would know how to manage him. After all her mother had experience of these things; she had buried four husbands and, according to rumour, killed three of them herself.

The call came through in less than three hours and remarkably, it was connected to the right number. Her mother had not, of course, heard the gossip, but that wasn't necessary; she was sure of John Jr.'s guilt. Her mother was convinced of the innate guilt of all men – with the notable exception of her sons. She asked Irena if her husband had life insurance, before deciding that the presence of his sisters made the question irrelevant. Her mother offered two pieces of advice; empty the bank account, sell the silver and come home to her family with her newly found wealth, or keep quiet, use the housekeeping to buy gold and refuse to return to the same town after the posting.

Irena valued her mother's advice but ignored some of it. She felt, for example, that the silver, which was mostly plate, would be missed. Jewellery was more portable, and easier to sell. She sold the ugliest jewels from her husband's family – including some belonging to her sisters-in-law – and insisted that her husband took out additional life insurance before starting his new job. She also tweaked the household budget buying less meat and cheaper wine and keeping the savings in her stocking draw. She planned to transfer it to a savings account as soon as she found an excuse to leave the state.

She prepared to talk to John Jr.

He insisted that the promotion was real. An opportunity to serve the government in an overseas mission was an honour by anyone's definition – except possibly Irena's mother who felt that there was a clear hierarchy of nations. Irena was inclined to agree. But she also believed that, as long as her husband remained in Texas her marriage, and her social status, were at risk. John Jr. told her that the Governor, who had recommended John Jr. for the post, and John Snr. who had contributed to the Governor's re-election fund, thought it wise for John Jr. to leave Austin as soon as possible. Of course, Irena knew that without the Governor's intervention, John Jr would have left Austin by way of a cold cell in Huntsville, but she thought it was best not to

dwelling on might-have-beens. If she was honest, Irena wouldn't have minded if John Jr had been arrested, not if her plans had already been in place; but her plans were incomplete, so an overseas posting was to be preferred. What's more, she had to think of the boy. So, John Snr. spoke to the Governor, and the Governor had a word with the president and just like that, John Jr. was on the next plane out of town. It took a while for arrangements to be finalised: the approvals, the visas, the paperwork and the inoculations. It took even longer before Irena could travel, something to do with her being born outside the country, but slowly, the wheels of state rolled on and Irena, and the boy, were ready to leave for somewhere called The Gold Coast. Not the ideal situation, as everyone admitted, but necessary. It was an important posting, America needed a presence in the new country, and John Jr needed to be a long way from Texas. Ideally, he'd have been slotted into some minor position, in some unimportant country, where he could have been left until the whole thing blew over, but there was no sign of things blowing over, not in the short term at least. The trouble had been blamed on the blacksmith's apprentice, no harm there, the boy had something about him. But there's a difference in what the courts say and what the county says. The girl wasn't even fourteen, and what was worse, her daddy ran the local newspaper, and a local paper, in Texas, was a big deal.

None of this mattered to Irena, who knew that the girl would have been painted like a five-cent whore, and who was convinced that no decent family would have let their daughter leave the house that way. Irena had worn make up for the first time on her wedding day, a touch of American Beauty on her lips and a hint of Brightening powder on her cheeks, that's all she needed, and she was twenty-eight. She blamed the girl, not John, for everything that happened. Unfortunately, no one else saw it that way. Not even Irena's mother.

She did not intend to forgive John Jr, even if it was not his fault. Not then and not now. Men had affairs; she knew that. Her mother had told her on her wedding day, the same day she gave Irena an old, imported copy of the *Good Wife Manual*.

'You can expect him to start having affairs as soon as you're wed. If you give him a son, his or someone else's – he'll never know – you can lock your door with a clear conscience.' It was not the advice she had expected, but it turned out to be true, at least in part. Her husband had been repulsed by her pregnant figure, but all too soon it was clear that he did not choose to leave his wife alone. He didn't choose to leave any woman alone, especially women who wore red shoes and too much makeup.

Fortunately, he was particularly attracted to young blonde women who filled their clothes just a little too well. Irena had resorted to eating cream-filled pastries in an effort to discourage John-Jr's attention. When that failed, she had developed frequent headaches, imaginary at first, but eventually, thanks to her increasing need to self-medicate with imported vodka, very real features of her morning routine. Irena was unhappy well before her forced exile.

Once her passport arrived, she took their son to Europe. She felt that an English education would stand the boy in good stead. She wanted to find a school which had the feel of old money, but which welcomed cash of any kind. England, she found, was full of such schools, and the schools were full of the sons of diplomats and generals. She found it hard to tell one depressing building from another, so she enrolled her son in the third school she visited, not even sure of its name, but happy that more than five sons of the British aristocracy were already in attendance. The uniform was hideous and the discipline harsh, but Irena had assured her son that his father would be proud of him. Thus, freed of both husband and child she spent an enjoyable three months visiting her mother before touring Europe and spending her husband's money. She spent none of the money that she had in her own savings account. She was disappointed by the weather in London but delighted by Paris and Milan. When she received the call to join her husband in West Africa, she was somewhat confused as she had been sure that The Gold Coast was somewhere near Denmark. Before the arrival of John Jr's telegram, she had already acquired four trunks of new clothes and three cases of jewellery, but they were cold weather clothes, little use for Texas and no use at all for the tropics. So, she brought more clothes, placed her furs in storage, and flew from Basle to Palma, from Palma to Tunis and from Tunis to right across the desert to Accra. She did not enjoy flying and wished that she had travelled by sea.

Her husband had been at the airport. He had, in Irena's opinion, been far too jovial for a man who was hiding from a paternity suit.

During her absence John Jr had remained more or less faithful to his wife, at least as far as any man could be expected to be. There was, of course, the notable exception of an occasional dalliance with one of the Dutch nurses at the new hospital. But that could hardly be counted as infidelity, the girl was, after all, less than half his age. He was, in some ways, more like her father, or at least her mentor, than her lover. *Suikeroom* the girls call

it, he was not sure exactly what they meant, but he was sure it was complementary as they always smiled when they said it.

The Dutch, he had decided, were exactly the sort of women he admired most; blonde, busy, and discrete. He had hardly noticed them when he was there in '45; the years of occupation had left them too thin, too careworn and too desperate to exchange their favours for corned beef and nylon stockings. Despite his reservations he was still happy to see his wife; she was, as it were, contractually obliged to please him. His anticipation of marital bliss did not, however, mean that he intended to say farewell to the beautiful Theresa. There were things about the lovely Theresa that his wife, who was, he noted, beginning to become somewhat matronly and somewhat less obliging, could not match. He decided that it would be appropriate to let his wife recover from the journey. She did, he mused, look rather rounder and considerably pinker than he had remembered, particularly compared to Theresa. She had also arrived with an unreasonable amount of luggage. He settled his wife into the residence, assuring her that the house boy would arrive with her bags within the hour.

John Jr closed the door quietly, lit a cigarette and returned to his car. He had an itch that only Theresa could scratch, so drove along the coast road to the bungalow that he rented for her.

He knew that Theresa would still be working, but he could wait, and in the meantime the new house-girl had a good figure, and he was sure that, like her predecessor, she just needed a firm hand to bring her in line. He wondered what had happened to the last girl: he'd liked her, she was feisty, a real fighter, a biter when the mood took her. He smiled. The thought of her firm body pushed against the wall excited him. He wondered if the new girl would be the same, playing the good girl while being deliciously naughty. He didn't know her name, he never did. Not bothering with names was a deliberate strategy. He called every woman, even Irena, Sweetie Pie or Pumpkin. It was safer, especially now when his wife and his preferred lover might meet. No risk of calling out the wrong name, and any little gift ... well no names there either. John Jr was not a man to take risks.

He kept thinking about the last house-girl as he made his way towards Theresa. So delicious but sadly gone. One day she was there, teasing and tempting, then she was not – probably some family trouble up country, he didn't ask the details. John Jr had noticed that

quite a few of the young girls left in a hurry. Not the old crones, they worked till they dropped, it was only the pretty ones that left. Fortunately, there were always more pretty girls to replace them, this country was full of pretty girls who were ready to please. He didn't employ women at the residency though, only men – they gave the place an air of permanence. Marines on guard, houseboys indoors, gardeners in the, well the gardeners. The residency was more like a fraternity than a family home. He had always kept work and pleasure apart; it helped to avoid complications. As he drove, he wondered how much Irena would change things. He decided that the best plan would be to build a few extra rooms, an annex, just for Irena. She could put flowers about the place, and frills on the tables, heck he's even let her send out for those curtains that looked like grandma's bloomers, and she could hire herself a little maid or two. His mood improved. He'd spend the evening at the bungalow and see Irena in the morning; it would, he thought, give her time to miss him.

Schoon was reading when she heard the car. *Schoon* wasn't her real name, but that didn't seem to matter, when she arrived at the bungalow the sisters had looked at her, turning her this way and that, holding her chin and pinching her arms and agreed that she was *Schoon*. No one had asked her name, no one had even asked if they could prod and poke at her like a goat in the market, but they were strange these sisters. She had asked them once what sort of sisters they were, same father-same mother, father sisters or milk sisters. They did not answer, instead they had tapped her cheek and laughed as if she was a child who had fallen in the dirt. They treated her as if she was nothing, a monkey that was trained to fetch sticks. She resented them, but she envied them as well, these women with their easy lives, their soft hands and their slack morals. It was not that they did no work. Not like the women in the club drinking cocktails while their children slept, but lazy like all the white women, working in the hospital but not working when they got home. No housework, no gardening, no nothing, just coffee and books and a trip to the cinema every month. But she was happy here, they paid as well as the other whites but there was no man in the house to roll his eyes and follow her like an old goat. The old American came to see Miss Theresa, not her, at least that's what he had said, but men like that... tsk...they were never satisfied with one woman, no matter how sweet. *Schoon* had planned her day. The cleaning was done, the laundry ironed and the stew in the pot. Miss Theresa and the other nurses would not be home until late this evening, and the American had said that he

would not visit. He had told Miss Theresa that he had to collect someone from the airport. Someone important from Texas, someone who would be going to the Independence party in Accra. The nurses would not go. Schoon would not go. The nurses would expect her to serve drinks at the small party that they had planned. But that was to come, a next week thing. This afternoon she could relax. She took the tin of cookies into the shade. She grabbed a bottle of soda from the refrigerator and a book from the shelf. She had planned to spend her free time with Mrs Danvers, again. Perhaps that was why she didn't hear the car until it stopped outside the bungalow. Perhaps that is why she was alone in the house when he opened the screen-door, and perhaps that was why she never read English novels again.

Theresa and Mimi arrived arm in arm. They were happy. They had safely delivered six healthy babies to five healthy women. No mothers had died, no babies had died, no new cases of Yellow Fever had been reported in the town and both women were off duty for the next three days. No wonder they had been singing as they walked past the market. They had stopped at the post office and collected the mail from home and called in at the Swiss store for tinned ham and milk chocolate. Once Lisa finished her shift they would celebrate. Their celebrations should have waited for another week. But you cannot change a whole country to fit with one household, so the women had agreed to bring *vastenavond* forward. They would teach the house-girl how to cook a great *stampot* with potatoes and onions and carrots from the garden and have English pancakes for breakfast with mango and banana, and melted chocolate, which made them not quite so English but much more delicious. They had called out to *Schoon* when they reached the bungalow and were surprised that she did not answer. At first, they thought that she had gone to the market, or been outside tending to the chickens, but she had been in the kitchen curled, like the child she was, with her back to the stove. Therese and Mimi became nurses once again. *Schoon* had at first been unwilling to call nurses sisters, now she understood as her employers became her family, cradling and caring for her, cooing and stroking her face. They wanted to take her back to the hospital, but she said no. They wanted to call the police, but she said no. No was the only thing she said, so the nurses knew the extent of her hurt. They washed her and soothed her and carried her to her bed, speaking softly using words that she didn't understand because when we are in pain it is our mother tongue that fills our minds. They wanted to know who had hurt her, but she would not say.

Mimi asked their neighbours if anyone had visited the house, but no strangers had been seen. Some had seen the American in town and some had seen his car on the road to Accra. But no one had seen him visit the bungalow, but that was not surprising, everyone agreed that he would have no reason to visit when Theresa was not there. If only he had waited for her. If only he had used his key and fetched a cold beer, then he might have seen *Schoon's* attacker. Perhaps the attack wouldn't have happened, if only he had been there. Therese called the residency. She had wanted to tell him about the attack, to ask him if he'd seen anyone near their bungalow when he passed. She had expected him to be concerned, to ask if he could help, but he seemed annoyed. He had asked Therese why she thought he was there, if someone had seen him, if Schoon had been telling lies about him. Therese was shocked, but assured him that Schoon had said nothing, about him or anyone else. Still, he insisted that he had not left Accra, he even said that he could prove it if necessary. It was unclear to Therese why any proof would be needed. John Jr had said he had not visited, and she believed him. Of course she believed him, that's what lovers did, they believed each other. That one small truth among all the lies was necessary, it stopped the affair becoming sordid. Therese replaced the receiver. She would speak to Schoon again in the morning. If the girl remembered anything they would go to the police house together. If she did not, they would borrow a station wagon and take the girl home. It was unsatisfactory, but it was preferable to leaving Schoon in the house alone. Perhaps the girl might even confide in her family.

In Accra John Jr, sat in his study with his last cigarette of the day. Later that evening he would tell his wife that she should take up smoking as well, at least while they were in the tropics. It was necessary, he would say, to deter the mosquitoes, which were altogether more dangerous than those in America. Irena would decline. She intended to make up her own mind about life in the tropics.

Irena took less than a month to find an effective way of avoiding the dangers of life in West Africa. She spoke to the house boy and the cook. She learnt how the household had been run before her arrival and decided to make changes. She had quizzed the embassy chauffeur while he drove her to the Ladies Prayer Meeting and learnt when her husband used a driver, and when he chose to travel alone. At the prayer meeting, after they had praised the Lord for Irena's safe arrival, the ladies retired for coffee and the

detailed and extensive gossip for which Episcopalian ladies are famed throughout Christendom. The meeting was not long, but long enough for Irena to leave with a knowledge of which traders to avoid, and which could be trusted, at least as far as one could trust any trader. She had taken on board the advice to ensure that her staff should consist of young men, who would not tire easily and old women who would keep the young men in line. She also learnt which husbands were in danger of 'Going Native' and which would not stray further than the Officer's Bar or Boxing Club. Her husband was not mentioned as belonging to either camp, but Irena did not think that she could find his soft body in the boxing ring. She said nothing of this to John Jr. Instead, she sacked some staff, arranged weddings and provided generous retirement gifts for those who could not be replaced without comment. She arranged, at nominal cost, for the Ambassador's private car to be detained in the motor pool – spare parts could be so difficult to obtain at times and most importantly she made her plans to leave John Jr. Not to divorce him – that would have been too humiliating – and not, as her mother had recommended, to murder him – she was inexperienced, and murder might have been discovered. Instead, she decided to leave him in Ghana, while she returned home, or maybe to the east coast where she could rest and recover until John Jr's behaviour had been forgotten. She could not leave straight away, that would have been quite unacceptable in the closed world of the embassy wives. What was more the prayer group would have talked about her, and John Jr. for months. Her plan was to ensure that the tropics disagreed with her. She planned to succumb to the hundred small illnesses that were so common in Africa, whilst avoiding any of the major, life-threatening, ones. She felt that six months would be the ideal stay. Long enough to show willing and long enough to ensure that she could meet the Queen, or Princess, or Duchess or whoever would be at the big independence party. But mostly, after her changes to their household, just long enough for John Jr to be pleased to see her go.

1.15 Entitled

Trevor's Story

I have new shoes, fresh from Kingsway yesterday. They're not like school shoes; they are white with rubber soles and laces that seem to untie themselves every five minutes. Well, they were white yesterday, but they're not white now. The toes are a bit scuffed now, from when I played football and there are a few red mud stains on the sides. I guess I should have waited until the rain stopped; but what's the point of new shoes if you can't play football in them.

Claudie is in the yard now, scrubbing them with lye and green soap. She says that she will whip me if she cannot get them clean before the parade. I know she won't, it's not allowed. Ma said no corporal punishment and, even though Pa said that a boy needs beating, he mostly leaves the strap in his study. He wouldn't let a bloody native hit me even if they caught me saying bloody. I won't get the strap; Claudie wouldn't dare tell. She knows I've seen her in the kitchen with cook, drinking Pa's good Gin and eating the nice Swiss biscuits straight from the tin. They do it every afternoon while my parents are having their siesta. She knows that one word from me and she'll be sent back up-country where she belongs. I can do whatever I want, and nobody can stop me.

1.16 Card School

Ronnie's Story

Tonight, because we're serious, we're playing poker. If the ladies were here, we'd play bridge, and we'd only play for matchsticks, but not tonight. Tonight, it's poker, no limits, anything goes. The only question is how much I'll lose. No, that's not the only question; there's also the question of how much Phill will lose, or Tony or Franc; but that's their problem, with poker it's every man for himself.

I lost my car last time I played, not that Guy wanted it, he's got that sporty little Berkley parked up outside his bungalow. I've been in it once, when he brought it back from the docks. I guess he wanted to show off a little. I have to say, it's a beauty. He doesn't drive it much though. He hacks around in the company Jeep most of the time, but that's not the point. Guy likes to show his muscles. He was driving it today for some reason. Probably had eyes on some piece of fluff in the press pack. Plenty of them to catch the eye of a red-blooded man, I can tell you. Technically, Guy works for me, but I'm not sure he sees things that way. He's probably right, after all I'm the one who's short of cash. He takes £50 a month from me, docks my wages, records it as savings on the company's accounts and sends it overseas; something to do with avoiding currency restrictions he tells me. He claims it's the best way for me to buy back my car - Austin 30, imported it myself. I thought I'd turn a profit when I left, not now, the profit's all Guy's. God knows how much he's turning each month, I know I'm not the only one, he cleared the furniture from Phill's place last month. That caused a row or two I can tell you. Furniture comes with the bungalow, company property. It wasn't Phill's to lose. It's all back now, nothing said, but Phill's not been at the club much recently. I was quite surprised to see him here tonight, but that's the thing with Guy, he's a good sort, always willing to give you the chance to make your money back.

It's not that Guy always wins; just that the luck is with him most of the time. I remember five, maybe six months ago the Commissioner joined the table - cleaned us all out, Guy included. It was a cash only game as I remember, Guy left early, had to go up country the next day. Good job too, it really wasn't his night, he was down about £100 when he left. I'm pretty sure I broke even, won a few hands, lost a few, you know how it is. The commissioner started off well, I thought he was going to empty everyone's pockets. But his luck didn't hold, just after Guy left,

he had a string of bad hands. The game folded after that. It was a good night though. Pity Guy didn't stay; he'd have enjoyed it.

But that was then, this is now and Guy's about to deal.

Seven of clubs.

This is going to be my game; I can feel it. Guy's going to lose. I need this.

Five of clubs.

Phill and Tony fold. Should I? Not yet. It's not a good hand, but not a bad one either. What's more, Guy isn't focussed, got his eyes on my house girl. Pleased she agreed to work tonight, if all goes well, I'll put a little extra in her pay packet tomorrow.

Three, ten, queen, but the only clubs are the ten.

I fold. Franc flips, King and Jack of Hearts; lucky a royal flush. He takes the first pot.

Eight of clubs.

I'll tap out early if I start to win, build up some savings. Maybe I'll tap out early anyway. It's a fool's game to chase your losses. Can't afford to get in any deeper with Guy. I don't want to take any debts home with me.

Seven of hearts.

Wish I was better at maths. There are some jonnie's who can work out the odds at every draw. Not me. Only just scraped through Common Entrance. What's next?

Nine, six, four, all clubs.

Don't need to be good at maths to know that there are plenty of hands out there better than mine. I fold. Franc wins again with two pairs.

Seven of spades. Eight of hearts.

What are the chances of that? Almost the reverse of my last hand. Must be a sign that my luck's about to reverse. I'll stay in the game, no matter what.

Seven, six, five. All different suits.

One pair, could be better, could be worse. I look at Sephena, why won't she give me a clue, she must be able to see Guy's cards. Surely it wouldn't be cheating if she just gave me a hint, a nudge in one direction or other. Not suggesting anything serious, none of that knocking on the table stuff, just a hint, a smile to say keep going. No luck, I'm on my own. I stay in. Everyone stays in, we all raise.

Turn.

Three of diamonds

Where did that come from? First time I've seen diamonds this evening. Not much use, do I bluff or fold? I look around, what is everyone else thinking. Guy's a closed book, as always, but not everyone else. Come on, give me a clue. I can't risk it, not on this hand. I fold. Franc folds. Phill folds. It's just Tony and Guy; both raise. It's Guy that blinks first. Not surprising, I guess. Tony was a pro before he joined up. He used to wipe the floor with us before Guy joined our school. There is something between those two, not sure what it is, but there is something.

Two and three of spades.

Lady Luck isn't on my shoulder today. Still not worth folding yet. No one else seems to agree with me. Only me and Phill left. He bets, I call. Come one, come on I need a little luck to come my way. I've lost half my pot already. I can't go on like this much longer.

Queen and seven of spades. Three of clubs.

Well, it's a pair, but only of twos. It might be time to fold, but there are only two of us still in and I'm not sure it's the right time for the sensible option. So, do I call or raise? I raise; fortune favours the brave and all that. Phill comes right back, doubling my stake. I wish I knew him better. As a player I mean, not as a friend. Phill is basically a good bloke. You can rely on him to cover your back. He's been there for me a few times. Stood up for me over that business with the natives last year. Mustn't get distracted, this is about cards, need to leave everything else on the parade ground as they say.

I fold.

Phill's hand was good, and you can't complain about losing to a hand like that. I should have folded earlier. What ever happened to not risking the house? I must be more careful, remember that this is meant to be a game of cards, not a trip to court. I notice Guy looking

around the table. Checking something out, not sure what. I guess I should be pleased that he's not eyeing Sephena. He usually spends half the evening trying to convince her to work for him. You'd think he would bide his time. I leave at the end of the month, so she'll be looking for work then. I wish I could take her with me, to be honest. Officially of course. As man and wife. Not that I've asked her; I wouldn't dare, out of my class, as they say. Not sure she'd be happy back home either, not enough of her type around. Oh well, a man can dream can't he. Just like I can dream I'll win the next hand. Fingers crossed.

Jack and nine of clubs

I am beginning to think that I need a drink. Another drink I mean. No one would start a game of poker without a whiskey by their side. Just one though, you need to stay sober to have any chance. But you need a drink, even if it is just to give you a chance to think. Your turn to bid but not sure, take a drink and you get a few more seconds thinking time. Well, right now I need some thinking time, and my glass is empty. I'll just have to go with my guts.

I call.

Jack and three of hearts, six of spades.

A nice high value pair, this isn't time to fold. It isn't time to raise the stakes either, not yet. I look for Sephena, I want her to fetch me that drink, but she's gone. Not sure where; probably to the kitchen, or maybe out back. I'll just have to wait.

Jack of spades.

Everyone folds except Guy. Except Guy! Why is he still in? He's got a good hand, but how good. Let me think. Well, Royal Flush, a definite possibility, but not a strong one, there's only one Jack out there. Three of a kind then, more likely, but that doesn't matter unless it's with a King or Queen. I reckon the odds are on my side. I take the risk and move all in. Either I win or I'm out of the game.

Guy folds.

Guy folds! I'm back in the game. I need to calm down. I leave the table. Missing one hand won't hurt and I can get that drink. I excuse myself and walk over to the sideboard. They deal the next hand, but I don't pay attention. It's bad form to pay too much attention to someone else's game, particularly if you plan on rejoining the table later. I wait for the hand to finish. I didn't have to wait long, no one wanted to commit. I returned to the table for the next

hand, feeling much more positive now one good hand had reversed my losses. I know I said that I'd Walk away but, well another couple of good hands and I could pay off my loan, or at least part of it.

Here we go again.

Ace of spades, seven of clubs.

Feeling positive, I've a decent pot again, and a fresh glass of whiskey and I'm ready to win. It's nice to have an ace in my hand, but it's not going to win the game. It's the other cards that win, not a single ace and a middling seven. A couple of rounds of low bets then Tony folds.

Jack and seven of spades, two of hearts.

Here we go again, a pair of Jacks, good, but easily beaten. Franc calls, Phill raises. Raises like he has all four Kings up his sleeve. Guy folds. I take a drink, looking around as I did, trying to guess what Phill is thinking. Trying to see where Sephena is. I have two choices fold: or double Phill's bet. I would rely on Sephena for a sign. If I could see her, I'd bet, if not I'd fold. She isn't around. It was Phill's hand.

Two sevens, hearts and diamonds.

We all look at our hands, before we start betting. Someone comes to the door and Sephena answers it. I wonder where she has been hiding, not in the kitchen or she would have come through here. Surely, she wasn't in my room, she only goes there to clean – more's the pity. I can't believe I said that, even in my head. She's not some tuppenny tart, of course I wouldn't expect her to come to my room. God help me but this country is getting to me. Just as well it's my last tour.

I make a low bet, just enough to keep me in the game. Tony raises, everyone else calls.

King of hearts, Queen of diamonds, eight of spades.

I check, Tony raises, so does Franc. I fold.

Sephena comes into the room. She walks over to Tony and puts her hand on his shoulder. She has beautiful hands. She bends down and speaks, too quietly for the rest of us to hear. Tony gets up and makes his apologies. He has to return to camp, one of the guards was waiting for him, some sort of trouble. Nothing serious, but he wanted to get it sorted, what with

the *Great Palava*, as he calls it, kicking off in the morning. We all agree, what's needed is some good old-fashioned kicking up the good old-fashioned pants. Sephena sees him to the door. I wonder about her name. Where is it from? Did her mother give it to her, or did she choose it herself? It wasn't a native name, and it didn't sound English. I make a mental note to ask her next time we were alone.

I turned back to the game. Guy must have been saying something. He looks at me, waiting for an answer. I nod my head. Phill and Franc looked surprised. I had just agreed, without realising it, to double the ante. Why?

Ace and four of clubs.

Dear God, this wasn't the time for a nothing sorts of hand. I couldn't afford to lose, so I had to stay in the game. I decide to struggle on until the next cards were dealt.

King of clubs, five and two, both hearts.

Phill's out, Guy and Franc are in, I call. Was that the right move, too late to change my mind, pray for a good card.

Jack of clubs.

I try to work out my chances. Is the Queen still out there? Maybe, but do I want to bet on a single card? What about a straight? More chance there, unless Guy and Franc are holding threes.

I call.

Five of hearts.

I'm out. Time to leave the table. No argument this time, I haven't enough to plan another hand. Guy wins. No surprise there, he usually does.

Guy pulled the pot. I stood up. I'm out this time. No more cash. Guy says he will take a cheque. I refuse. If I lose, I'll have to travel home on the troopship. I had planned on flying, spending some time in Marrakech, and maybe do some walking in Switzerland when I change planes. I knew that I wouldn't do much travelling once I got home and settled down to teaching geography to the ink-stained sons of the nobility. Sephena slips into the room and top ups my drink. I'm distracted by the smell of her skin. She has brought in a plate of sandwiches; meat,

mustard and plenty of pickles. All the usual stuff. I don't employ her as a cook, I have a boy for that, but she knows the way to a man's heart.

Guy tries to convince me to stay in the game; suggesting a dozen things that I could put up instead of cash. I stick to my guns and the boys back me up. Then he suggests something different; says he will stand me £1000 in exchange for letting him have Sephena. Not for anything immoral, he insisted. Could I believe that? There had been a few times when I wasn't sure if Guy had any morals, and we were talking about Sephena. He insists that he is just looking for a new house-girl, while his has gone up country. I would pay her wages, but she would work in his bungalow instead of mine.; that was all. After I left, she could stay, and he would pick up the bill, or she could move on, no questions asked.

I refuse. Phill looks shocked. He says that using a woman as a stake wasn't on. Wasn't very British and all that. He gets up from the table, downs the rest of his whiskey and leaves. He calls on his way out. Something about the DC's reaction, but Guy has started rattling about in the sideboard. Looking for another bottle I think, the last one's already empty.

I don't want to wreck the game. If I refuse the game is over. They could play Heads-Up, but it's not the same. I felt a bit guilty, but a man has to have standards and staking a person in a game of cards! I mean, it's just not done, even out here. Then again, what harm would it do? We're only betting on where one house-girl will work for a few weeks. I won't be docking her pay or anything, just asking her to clean Guy's bungalow instead of mine. What's more, the game could continue, I was the host. It wouldn't do to let everyone down. I tell Guy that I'm in, but that I need to stretch my legs before the next hand. Tell them to get a drink while they were waiting.

Sephena takes my place at the table. I tell her to get up, ask her what she's thinking? A house girl joining a card school in a white man's house, what on earth would people say? I hadn't invited her, and she wasn't welcome. Then Guy says what we are all thinking.

'This game is too rich for you little girl.' She says nothing, all the time meeting his eyes. I admire her for that, not something the natives tend to do. 'And what will you bet?' Guy asks.

'You know.'

'And you know what's at stake if you lose?'

'I won't lose,' she said. 'Deal.' Guy shuffles the deck and deals. I walk around the table.

Two Nines, clubs and spades.

She sees me looking and lowers her cards. Everyone is still in.

There is a knock on the door and, as my house-girl is otherwise engaged, I answer it. The Commissioner pushes straight past me.

‘Heard there’s a card school tonight; don’t mind if I join do you?’ I can’t really refuse. It’s my bungalow, but it’s no longer my game.

King, Nine and Jack.

Sephena reaches for her drink. It spills and she apologises, mopping the table with her apron. Guy is livid, already convinced that he shouldn’t have let her play.

‘No harm done. Good timing in some ways. Let’s just null that hand and start again. Deal me in, old chap.’ The Commissioner is naturally less jovial than he sounds. It’s not a request, it’s an instruction. He doesn’t make requests to the lower ranks. He takes an unopened pack of cards from his breast pocket and hands them to Guy. ‘Don’t want to be using those old cards do we? Someone might be tempted to cheat. A slight pause. ‘Might even be me.’ He laughs, we all laugh, except Guy. Instead, he opens the pack of cards and deals the first hand. The commissioner keeps his eyes on Guy. Guy fixes his on Sephena.

‘Step away from the table will you,’ the commissioner says. ‘We don’t want anyone to claim that they’ve been distracted.’ I moved away, sorry that I won’t be able to see Sephena’s hand. Guy folds straight away.

Nine, seven, five. Clubs, hearts, diamonds.

Three of them are still in play.

Six of clubs

Another fold.

Five of clubs.

Raise, pause. Interminable pause. Fold. Sephena takes the pot. One game in and she no longer needs to use herself as a stake. She’s good!

Next hand, calls, folds, and Guy wins before any more cards are dealt. It's frustrating not being part of the game. I'm itching to join in. I ask Guy if he'll sand my Cheque. The Commissioner shakes his head.

'No go, I'm afraid. Cash only from now on.' Guy would have accepted the cheque, even a straight i.o.u. but the Commissioner has put his foot down. No Argument permitted.

I watch another couple of hands.

Two of clubs, two of hearts, nine of clubs.

I make myself an imaginary hand. Another pair of twos, maybe nines, or a couple more clubs with the hope of making a flush with the next card.

King of clubs.

My fictional hand has a good chance of winning. There must be plenty of good hands out there. No one is folding.

Nine of hearts.

Franc is out. Another round of bets then Sephena folds. Guy takes the pot.

Three and four of diamonds. Six of hearts.

I have no skin in the game, but I'm still getting too involved. I want Guy to lose, I want Sephena to win, and I want Franc at least to break even.

Ace of hearts.

Franc folds, Sephena folds. The Commissioner raises and Guy looks on edge. He could call, but if he loses, he will have to play cautiously; not Guy's style at all. He could even be out of the game; not something he's used to. He calls. Three Sixes against a pair of Kings. Guy's lost. I go to the kitchen for more ice, then refill the glasses. Guy must be distracted; he's just stubbed his cigarette on the Ace of hearts. He apologises profusely. Fortunately, Guy has a spare deck in his pocket and starts to take them out, ready to deal. Before he gets the chance Sephena remembered the cards I'd brought back from Kingsway this morning. She fetches two packets and lets Guy pick which to use. All very civilised.

I go outside before the next hand, sitting on the veranda to have a quick smoke and a breath of fresh air. A couple of drinks and a few cigarettes later and I've had time to think. Perhaps it's as well if I sit out the rest of the game. I've a few weeks left before I go home and if I cut to the bone, I might still get that holiday in Marrakech. I know that I'd still be paying Guy. I'll probably still be paying my debts to Guy when I'm retired; he never did tell me exactly how much interest I was paying. He's a good sort. He could have taken my coat, and my shirt as well, if he'd been inclined, but he's always been fair. I finish one more drink and go inside. I think that maybe I've had enough for tonight, I'm a bit unsteady and slam the screen door on my way. I look around, it's clear that I've missed the action. Sephena had left the table, and I found her in the kitchen. I ask why she's left the game.

'I only take what I can eat.' she says. 'I won back what was mine and enough to make life sweet. That's enough. Let the men play their games and settle their scores while the women dig the well and fetch the water.' I tell her that she isn't making sense, and she says that if I drank more tea and less whiskey my life would make more sense. I have no idea what she is talking about. Women are a mystery, native women even more so.

Franc comes in and says that he's going back to the Club. He says that the boys will want to know, and he wants to be the one to tell them. Then he throws a set of keys to Sephena.

'Don't know how much petrol's in the tank so check before you leave town.' He says, giving her one of those big brown envelopes that you get from the quartermaster when you arrive in camp. 'The Commissioner said to keep this with you in case you get stopped. It should help you avoid any problems.' Much to my surprise Franc plants a kiss on her cheek and wishes her good luck. She doesn't complain. Before long we can hear the Norton heading into town. I sit down.

The Commissioner puts his head round the door and thanks me for a good night. He says that he's giving Guy a lift back to barracks; something about having a man-to-man on the way. I forget to ask about Guy's car.

Sephena is about to leave. I want to ask her if she'll come back to England with me. I wonder if she'll take to being a school master's wife. I stumble over my words and end up asking if she wants to leave the tidying until the morning. She laughs at me. I worry that I have said my thoughts out loud.

'What is wrong with you?' she says. 'I thought that you were a decent man. A stupid man, but decent.' She picked up her bag. 'You are not decent; you are not even half decent. You

are as corrupt and arrogant and wicked as your friend Guy.’ Confused as I am, I know that this isn’t the time to mention marriage.

‘You and your friend Guy.’ Hang on a minute, Guy isn’t my friend, an acquaintance perhaps, or a colleague, but not someone I’d call a friend. That, apparently, isn’t the point.

‘You come over here, no one asked you, you call us uncivilised, you call us barbarians and thieves, then you steal our gold and make our men fight in your wars and then this. This... this unspeakable thing! You and your friends sit around at a table and think you can play cards for me! Did no one ever tell you that you are not slave-masters anymore. There are no slaves in Ghana. There are no masters either, and come tomorrow, when we take down your flag and when we burn it in front of your greedy, greedy eyes, there will be no white men in Ghana either.’ I try to point out that she is technically incorrect. There will, with the agreement of the new government, be white men in Ghana. I would like to tell her that I, myself, have been involved in the drafting of the agreements for a continued presence of British staff in both the Civil Service and the higher ranks of the military. However, it appears that she is uninterested.

‘Go home to your mummy,’ she said, ‘and make sure you teach your little white schoolboys that the cradle of civilisation is Africa, not Greece. Just ask your Mr. Dart if you don’t believe me, Mr. Teacher.’ I am at a loss. How did she know these things? Did she go to school, and if so, why was she a house-girl and not teaching in one of the native schools in town.

She walks outside, throws her bag into Guy’s car and starts the engine. She shouts out the window.

‘No, I’m not going to work for your card-sharp friend. I’m going to take this car, the one that I won playing poker, and I am going to ride around town so everyone can see me.’ She pulls away. I didn’t even know she could drive.

1.17 The Letter

The Story of The Down River Boys

We had to set fire to the station, because of the letter, the one that Bama stole from the minister's girl.

She is a *toutou*. Not an everyday *toutou*, not a *toutou* that your uncle would hire. This woman is high class, *fourfour* Kofi called her, he said she costs twice as much as the girls from the beach. Kofi is wrong, Kofi is as stupid as a monkey's arse. This girl would not drop her panties for less than ten, no twenty, shillings. She's not some pretty thing sitting by the bar. The minister's girl has got style. She doesn't work for a little money here and a few trinkets there. Like I said, she is high class; the best clothes, the biggest diamonds and the arm of our honourable minister when she goes out. She doesn't want your two shillings; she wants to run the whole bank. She is a clever one, eh? She knows when to be seen and when to disappear. She can make people disappear too; I think. That's OK, everyone has to get by, we have to get by, she has to get by. But we don't have to disappear just to make her get-by a little easier. Not even if we made her fancy letter disappear into our pockets. We are The Down River Boys; we've got the ear of the party and no *toutou* was going to make us disappear. We planned to be the big men in town once we got our chance, and our chance was coming soon – we could feel it. We've got the connections. My brother works in the shipping office, right behind the customs sheds. We've got access to everything a man could need, even a little sweetness now and then.

Bama didn't actually steal the letter; he just kept something that wasn't his to keep. But that's not stealing, that's just taking advantage of the way the cards fall, just thanking the gods when they smile at you. The girl gave him the letter, just like that. She leant out the window and gave him the letter with a whole bunch of other letters. So, he definitely didn't steal it, he just didn't take it to the post office like he was meant to. You could say he misplaced it, misplaced it into his jacket. It wasn't a plan; Bama is too stupid to make a plan. He was going to post all the letters, like he said. He just happened to see that one of the letters was addressed to the minister, and we are the Down River Boys, the party's Down River Boys, so we had to check it out. We had to see what business this *toutou* had writing to the minister.

It was good that Bama brought the letter to me. Some of the other boys, they can hardly read, they were cowboys as soon as they left their mother's wrapper. I am not like that; I went

to school. I read all the books in the mission house, I even took two or three for my little sister, that's the sort of man I am. That's why I'm the Big Man round here, because I have an education. I know things, I see things, and I make the decisions. What we do and what we don't do, is my choice and the Down River Boys follow. We don't just sit outside the Kingsway waiting for a celebration. We get our coats and get things done. We went to Abidjan once, on a secret mission, but we came home quick-quick, because this is the place to be, here in Accra where things are changing.

When I saw the letter, I knew it was special. I could tell just by the look of it. It had thick paper, not like schoolbook paper, not even like government paper. It was sweet, all lavender and the colour of cream, and what she said, eh eh! What she said would make a man from a boy. I tell you; I knew straight away; this letter was on fire.

We should have taken the letter to the market. The market women, they would have known what to do. Those aunties wouldn't stand for some *toutou* from the south trying to catch the minister's eye like that. There are plenty of women in Ghana, strong women, beautiful women, women in every town. The market women, all have daughters, some very hot daughters - not that I've ever got close enough to squeeze them. Those mammies keep a close eye; they are all saving their daughters to be Big Men's wives. If they read the letter, they would have got their brooms and sent this *toutou* home. But the letter was no use to the market women. You need schooling to read a letter like that, and there was no school for girls back in the beginning. We could have told them, read it out loud, but that was not a letter to read to your auntie no! They would have beaten us with their brooms instead and, after they chased us away, we would have had no chance of squeezing their daughters even a little bit, not even the ugly ones. This letter was burning a hole in my pocket, I had to pass it on, but even I, the head of the Down River Boys, did not know what to do with it. It was like giving a bag of shit to a monkey, you knew it was going to come back and hit you.

I sent Bama inside to get a beer or two. Bama is the best man for a job like that. He's big, I mean really big. He looks like he would pull up a tree just to shake the ants from the roots. Send Bama to get something and you always get a good deal. He doesn't steal. That would be trouble, and not just Sunday Pastor trouble. It would be party trouble too. Dr Nkrumah said that Africans should not steal from Africans. But if Bama politely suggests that he will buy one beer, and the assistant might want to donate a few beers to support the Boys because the Boys support the party. Then mostly we get a beer or two for free. Soon everyone be happy, even

Bama. Bama's daddy is the second pastor at the House of Prayer and Praising, and Bama can tell his daddy that he always pays for his beer because surely, he would beat Bama if he thought he was getting beer for free. That's how it goes for Down River Boys, a little truth here and a small, small lie there and the world slides by.

The beers slipped down well and gave me time to think about the letter. I gave it back to Bama and told him to hide it like it was his mama's gold. It made sense, if the *toutou* remembered anyone it would be Bama, and if he was going to drown there was no need for the rest of us to follow him down the well. I decide to work out if the letter would bring trouble or treasure in the morning. First there was dancing to be done. Mensah was playing at The Paramount and pretty girls would want to dance. The Down River Boys would need to be there, and *Haba*, it was a sweet, sweet night. That Mensah could play, the music filled our bones and the whole town was dancing. I would have stayed all night, if it wasn't for Bama.

We had been there for two, maybe three hours, I'm not sure. When the fill-in band got up, I went outside to make myself comfortable and there was Bama whispering to the sergeant's daughter. I was about to call out, wish him luck with this new girl, when I saw the look on her face. I stopped to listen. Eh! What he was saying! He was asking the sergeant's daughter to do the things that the minister's girl had promised in her letter. I ran over, this girl would tell her daddy, and her daddy would have us in jail before sunrise. He wouldn't care if we worked for the party, no man would let his daughter hear such things. I was too late. The sergeant's daughter had slapped Bama so hard that his teeth cracked. I checked my pockets for cash; Bama would need to get out of town fast. But when a fool's house falls it always lands on his cows. Bama took out the letter and showed it to the girl, trying to convince her that if the ministers' girl did those things, then she should do them too! Eh! We would all need to start running. I called the boys.

I needed a plan. That was my job, sweeping away the problems like old straw when the rains come. But time was too short for plans. We had to get the letter before the sergeant read it. There were ten of us, ten Down River Boys who always stuck together. Bama needed us, even if he didn't know it. I called the boys again. If they came, we could catch the girl and get the letter. The letter wouldn't have mattered if Bama hadn't shown it to the girl. It would just have been another letter that the postal clerks had stolen. Stolen or lost it wouldn't have mattered, if Bama had trashed the letter instead of reading it to the girl, we could have said that he took the letter to the post office with the rest and blamed the clerks for their thieving ways. But she knew about the letter. She knew that Bama had the letter, and she was taking the letter to her daddy.

If she'd got there, we would all have been stuck up a hippo's arse. We needed a dose of disappearing medicine, or enough gold to fill the Asantehene's pockets.

'Catch her Bama!' I called, but Bama is as slow as he's stupid. The girl got away. My boys arrived, not quickly - no one leaves a dance before they have to – but they all came - except Kwasi, who was trying to make hello-friends with Afua behind the bandstand. We didn't run; we didn't want anyone shouting Thief! Thief! and fetching the constable. So, we walked, slowly-slowly as if we were just out to look at the moon. When we got to the police house the girl was outside, slipping a little something under the door. It might not have been the letter, it slipped so easy, and the letter was in that thick cream envelope. We thought we were saved. We thought that the Gods had heard our prayers, but when a man prays for rain, he cannot complain about mud.

We caught the girl; we asked her about the letter. She said we were too late. She laughed at us, laughed at the Down River Boys, just as if she didn't know who we were. But anyone could see she wasn't a good girl. Good girls don't go to the Paramount where their aunties can't watch them. She was probably lying. But the girl was telling the truth, she didn't have the letter. Bama said he was sure of that. He checked everywhere, even under her wrapper, and man she screamed when he did. I don't know why. Bama wasn't trying to worry her; he was just looking if she'd hidden the letter. OK so maybe he felt around more than he needed, but not real worrying, she didn't need to scream that way.

So, Bama hit her. He had to shut her up before the whole town heard, so he gave her a little tap. Just a tap, that was all, not a beating, not like your mama gave you when you dropped the ladle in the fire, but the tap was from Bama, so she went down – bam! She wasn't dead, just sleeping. Cannot wake you up sleeping, like you get when you've drunk too many beers. We had so much trouble. I wished the winds would blow us out to sea.

I wished we had never seen the letter. It was like a gift of scorpions, all pretty until you rip the paper, then a bucket full of pain.

This was not how things were meant to be. By the next tomorrow the whole country would be celebrating, and the Down River Boys need to be there. We had an invitation, with the new flag and our names in gold letters. We were invited to the second overspill of the third Party-Independence celebration. We were officially somebodies. But we were also almost

prisoners in the town goal. If we were caught, then our gold names would not get us to the celebration. Nah, nah!

I walked across the road and headed to the police house. I could see no one, but if any no one was looking at me they would see that I was a fine young man taking a stroll in the evening. When I reached the station, I stopped, and I looked through the door. I looked in the way that a fine young gentleman would look if he wanted to check when the police house would be opening. The boys were hidden in the shadows. The screen door was closed, and the lazy officers had not cleaned the windows at all in a long time. Fortunately, I have very good eyesight. Unfortunately, the letter from the minister's girl was just inside, too far inside to reach with a long stick, but close enough for me to see that the sergeant's daughter had written something on the envelope. I am a man of action, so I did not stop to think. I lit a cigarette, then I demonstrated my cunning. I dropped the match by the door. I did not shake the flame, and I did not stand on the match. I just dropped it and walked away.

There was no veranda, so we sat at the side of the road, waiting for the station to burn. Nothing happened. The cigarette that we were passing between us burnt brighter than the door of the station. I looked at my boys. I was going to tell them that we should leave Accra until the trouble had come and gone, but I could not see Bama. I thought that maybe he had gone to worry the sergeant's daughter a little more while she would not notice. I would have sent Joseph to fetch him because it is not right to worry a woman when she cannot slap your face, but just at that moment Bama came from behind the station. He had a drum of kerosene on his shoulder. I think he had pulled it from a storage cage because it was too late for the motor store to be open.

'Eh Bama!' I called, 'what you make do with that drum?'

Next thing he heaved the drum off his shoulder and threw it at the little fire by the station door. *Haba haba* the flames! All the kerosene flew out the drum when he threw it, and the little flames grew up fast. I tell you I've never seen flames like it – and I set a pig on fire when I was a small boy. That station went up like an old broom, fire and sparks and smoke like a bushman's pipe. Eeeh! Then, like that wasn't enough, there were explosions, one, two, maybe five, bang bang all over the place. The sergeant's daughter made some groaning noises and Joseph, who thinks quick for a farm boy, ran over and started cooing and purring,

'Oh Miss, you OK, that explosion must have blown you right across the street. It was terrible eh.' And he helps her to sit nicely by the wall, and he sends someone off to fetch her

daddy just like he is a hero from the movies. He's sly, that Joseph, putting his shoes by the door when the girl is too dazed to know if it's day or night.

The next thing I know half the town is there, and the men are making a line to fetch water from the river and the aunties all fussing round the girl, and no one is asking why she was out on her own and we joined the line with the water, and I counted up the boys. Joseph was gone, he had picked up the girl and was taking her home to her mammy. Emanuel was busy collecting the empty buckets and forgetting to take them down to the river. There would be buckets for sale in the market tomorrow, Emanuel would see to that. I was still counting when the white officer called me over.

'You boy, you know Pastor Osei?' I told him I knew him very well, that he was my uncle.

'You'll know his son then, junior ranks say he's here, would be better if someone checked? Someone who knew him well, before the Pastor gets here. Got a strong stomach boy?' He took me away from the bucket line and over to a crowd of people looking at what no decent man should see. The officer lifted the corner of the cover cloth with a stick.

'That your cousin boy?' I couldn't speak. It wasn't Bama, I wasn't even sure it was a body, it could have been a fetish from the old times. All I could think was how can you clean and dress a body that isn't really a body, then I thought that it was good that Bama's mamma would not see him like that, and I was sick. I was ashamed, and I am still ashamed because a man should never be afraid to look at his friend's face, even if it turned out to be someone else's friend, and I was afraid. But I am one of the Down River Boys, the head of the Down River Boys. I should not have been afraid to look into any man's eyes. So, I wiped my face, and I went back to the body on the floor, and I looked for some sign that it had been Bama, I looked hard until the face was set in my brain. I looked until I could not forget, and I could not remember. It was definitely not Bama. I did not know his face, because even his mama could not have known his face. I knew his feet, the man had three toes missing and Bama had all his toes, and Bama had been wearing shoes, good shoes. He was a Down River Boy, not a farm boy, not some travelling man with cracked hands and no personal hygiene. Eeeh! I had to think quick. If this wasn't Bama, then where was he? Had he gone home or was he hiding somewhere, waiting for the palaver to stop. Someone sat me down and someone gave me whiskey, it gave me thinking time.

‘Well Sir,’ I said. ‘It could be the Pastor’s son. It could be, but I’m not sure. I need to fetch the Pastor. A man who knows his son might not recognise his brother.’ The officer did not understand. He did not understand anything about family, he only thinks with his own head. I said I should go ask the Pastor to come. I said that some news should not come from strangers. He was happy with that, one less job for his men to do.

So, I ran. I left the police house and ran across town. I ran out of town, past the machine sheds and the tin-sheet shacks, right up to the mission. I saw the pastor sitting in the shade, drinking tea like the ladies in the sewing circle. I paid my respects, and he greeted me. I started to tell him about the fire, but he was not surprised. I asked if Bama had come home, but he did not answer. He waved his hands towards his garden.

‘When did you last visit your grandmother?’ he asked. ‘You should go more often; she is old, and she can teach you about gardening.’ I told him that I would visit her soon, but that today I wanted to talk about Bama. He nodded and smiled as if he hadn’t heard me.

‘Your grandmother will tell you, that you cannot grow good fruit from poor seed and that even the best seed needs good soil.’ I wanted to shout at him, I wanted to say that his son was gone, that if he wasn’t burnt into ash he would be in goal until the forest died, but you cannot shout at a man like the pastor. I called on my strength and tried again.

‘Uncle,’ I said. ‘There has been a fire at the police house. A man’s body has been found, and the officer thinks that it might be Bama. I have looked at the body Uncle and I cannot tell. I don’t think it is your son, but it might be.’ I watched him pour more tea; he offered me a cup. I could not refuse, but still I tried to explain. ‘The police have sent me to fetch you. They want you to look at the body.’

‘Yes,’ he said. ‘It could be Bama. He has always been a boy to search for trouble under every rock. I will come.’ As we walked slowly back towards town he talked, maybe to me, maybe to himself, but still I listened. ‘It could be my son, who is waiting for me at the police house, it could be another man, a man who started the fire. It could even be old Dunkú, he was ill you know, and very old. He was born here, back in the Dutch times. His grandmother lived here or here-somewhere, near the police house maybe. He came to town to die; die where he was born, so his ancestors could find him. Heathen beliefs, but still, he was a good man.’ And so, he talked, and we walked together, slowly, slowly as if there was nothing waiting for us. I tried to ask him about Bama, I knew the pastor would tell the truth, but he said nothing about his son. He talked about the old man who was looking for his ancestors and he talked about his own family who

fled to Freetown because they wanted to be free, and he told me again and again to visit my grandmother. But he said nothing about his son.

The fire was out when we got into town. The boys were sitting by the river smoking, their clothes spoiled and their eyes red. I nodded to them, but I did not go over. Instead, I stood by the pastor as he looked at the body.

‘My son is missing,’ he said. ‘My son is missing, and I must find him.’ The officer asked him if the body was Bama’s.

‘I know this man,’ was all he said. ‘I know this man, and so I must stop searching for my son and instead I must arrange a suitable funeral.’ The officer turned away and the pastor said nothing else. He left the body and walked back to his church. I still did not think that the body was Bama’s body, but I had to believe the pastor, because he would not lie.

We went to Bama’s home this morning to pay our respects to his family. The pastor said that the body had been taken to the hospital in town. There could be no funeral, no praise songs, no preparations until they released the body, and that would not be until Thursday.

The boys have taken their tickets and gone to the Independence Celebration. They all agreed that Bama would have wanted them to go. Even Pastor Osegi said that Bama would have wanted us to go.

‘A celebration is a celebration,’ he said. But I saw the body – the body that I thought wasn’t Bama but that the pastor was going to bury. I am the only one who knows what he did to save his friends. So, I will not go to the celebration. Instead, I sit here on the balcony and pour libation for my good and stupid friend Bama who couldn’t wait for a small-small fire to grow and whose daddy does not mourn him. Bama was a good man, and I will drink to the day we meet again.

1.18 Leave No Trace

Major Pocklington-Hansard's Second Story

Got myself some free time. Strange really, everyone else is up to their eyes; not me, I've been told to keep myself in reserve. Told to stay in camp, back up in case one of the regular Johnnies falls sick. Surprised really; spoke to the M.O. and he said there's no reports of tropic-tummy or such like. Still, no hardship, eh? Although I'm specifically banned from the Club, apparently, it's been co-opted, by the press – loyal or otherwise. No chance of the usual morning freshener, eh? Decided to take French Leave for an hour or two. Can't say I expected to be missed, but no harm if I was, back to Blighty on the next troopship. A week in barracks, two weeks on HMS Overloaded, hard to choose between.

Thought I had plenty of time, booked m'self on boat three, requisitioned merchant ship. Nice looking, ex-liner ready for retirement, a bit scruffy, but better than sharing a bunk with the navy. All the nice girls might love a sailor, but not every chap does, if you know what I mean. Then, just as the circus came into town, I got a memo saying my bunk has been reallocated to someone from the press corps, and I'm on the first boat out. Complained to the C.O., much good it did me, but you have to go through the motions; not the done thing to just march with the band, unless you're in the other ranks, and they were booked on troopships anyway. So, took off into town first thing, few things to top and tail, as it were. Chance to get a pre-lunch tippie while I was there. All good, as long as I avoided the obvious watering holes, the Imperial or the Majestic. But you know what they say, the best hotel doesn't have the best prices.

Took m'self to Bobby Hunt's place first thing. Good chap has a reputation for being discreet, if you know what I mean. Got some of his 'special' photography done last year. Very good they were, enough to make an old man very happy, if you get my meaning. The normal sort of portraits, standard stuff, but there were a few, how to put it, family groups. Me and the little ones if you get my meaning. Nothing unnatural of course, just a bit of fun, horse play. Plenty of actual 'Horseplay', if you get my meaning. A bit of dressing up, the odd whip and harness. Nothing strange, nothing to hurt the fillies, but not the sort of thing you want to leave lying around. Thought I'd visit Bobby, give him a few extra shillings for the negatives. Just to be on the safe side. Blow me if he hasn't moved on. Shutters down, Closed for Business sign on the door. Went round the back, just to check, not much security there, so wandered in. Started looking

m'self. Neat files, old Bobby could have been a Quarter Master, if he hadn't managed to skip the call up – age you know.

Checked all the files, alphabetical, chronological, name rank and number, every way I could think. Nothing! Lost the old temper to be honest, messed the place up a bit. Got things out of the old system though. Just about to leave when I heard someone at the back door. Young native lad, seen him around, during the day, not in the special sessions. Ducked out the back door as he came in. Not one for explanations, specially not to the locals, shoot first and all that. At least that's how it used to be.

Not sure of next steps to be honest. Don't want to leave loose ends. Leave debt – not cash they say. Problem is they don't say what to do about keeping your privacy. You never know what will happen once we leave. Could have had a word with the Commissioner in the old days. Split a bottle or two. But now? Who knows which way the glass will fall. I'll just finish this then head back to camp. Best not be in town if anyone comes calling. Never been one for explanations if it can be avoided.

1.19 Balancing the Books

A Salesman's Story

Wasn't it St Matthew who said that no man can serve two masters? He could have been a salesman, instead of a tax collector. The tax man, ahh, such an easy life. The treasury tells him how much money to take and who to take it from and he has no problems. If only my life were that simple, two masters would be a blessing, I have at least three. I have to answer to two masters in Germany, I have to answer to two masters here in the Gold Coast and, like all men, I must answer to God. Perhaps the only thing worse is when you have to answer to a mistress. Not my mistress you understand. I have a beautiful wife and no need for a mistress. But I have let myself become the servant of a cruel mistress, one who understands gold even better than a Swiss banker.

I thank God that I did not have to fight in the war. Perhaps I should thank my parents for my Swiss citizenship, but if that is so then I must thank God for making my parents Swiss. I must also make allowances for people who are not so fortunate as me. I sell German cars. I run the only concession selling German Cars here on the Gold Coast; therefore, I am the only person who can really understand both the Germans and the Coasters. Well not perhaps the only one; there are the bankers. Those who manage the Ministers' gold. But they do not visit, customers must visit them in Zermatt or Geneva. Of course, wealth is not something that should be discussed particularly if it is someone else's wealth. It is not that the acquisition of money is wrong, it is just that it is private. Private in Switzerland, private in Germany and private here in Accra.

If I were not Swiss, I would not be able to provide a bridge between the Germans and the Coasters, or the Ghanaians as they now wish to be called. We Swiss are used to building bridges between nations. Bridges, tunnels, they are all the same. Except, perhaps, that tunnels can be kept secret. So, these are the bridges that I have to build. Mercedes have decided that their cars should be the number one car in Africa. The car that everyone who is anyone wants to be seen in. Not, you understand, the car for the masses. The car for the presidents, for the chiefs and for the ministers of state. For masses they would sell trucks and busses only. They had no interest in small vehicles with small profits. Cars which might be sold by a dealer but would be serviced by small town mechanics with parts they made themselves. Leave those markets to the old colonial powers Heir Brock told me. Something that I was happy to do, and yet, it would have

been useful to have some smaller cars to sell, staff cars to sell to the minister for this, or the secretary for that; one big sale for me and one convenient negotiation for the gentleman with the departmental budget. So, I build myself a secret tunnel. Just a small one, so that everyone can be happy; especially me.

I could not sell small cars from the Mercedes showroom. Mercedes decides which cars are on display in the showroom, what pictures are on the wall and even how big the windows are. The windows, which, by the way, are not suited to a tropical climate. They are the wrong size, and they face in the wrong direction, and they are not fitted with fly screens. This is something that I could overcome, but it is clearly inconvenient. I could not open another showroom in Accra, because my contract with Mercedes did not permit it. But, like the windows in my showroom, my contract was something that I could overcome. We Swiss are skilled at solving problems, it is what we do. Therefore, I invited my wife to visit me here in Accra. She did not want to stay here for very long, just a month or two I said, then you can go home. While she was here, we brought a little land, no she brought the land, the plot next to the Mercedes showroom. We arranged for a new showroom to be built. We put the windows on the right side of the building, and we put fly screens on the doors. She appointed me as her general manager and assigned me full financial authority. She brought jewellery and raw gold and went home to her mother. I filled our showroom with the latest Ford cars and a few ex-army motorbikes and arranged for the wall between the showrooms to be removed. I was happy, my wife was happy and my contract with Heir Brock was unbroken. Bridges and tunnels, this is what we need to succeed in business.

It has been a good time to sell cars in Accra. Every new minister, every new official, wants a new car, and no one wants to drive around in a British car. British cars are symbols of the past; the ministers want to be seen as men of the future. They want to reject everything that reminds them of being a colony. They love everything that the British hate, and everyone who the British despise; everyone wants a big German car. I am a happy man. Or I would be if only I could be sure that I will actually be paid for all the cars that I am selling. You believe me? You don't believe me? It does not matter. It is true, a fact of life, the fate of every salesman.

My life is a life of balancing. I must sell the cars that I am sent, but I can only do that if I am sent the cars that my customers want. I have been sent two cars that I did not expect to sell, but if I cannot sell them, I will not be sent more of the cars that I can sell. The life of a salesman is not always fair.

Last week the minister for – no, it would be unwise to say which minister. I will call him the minister for Bread and Cheese. So, this minister called me to his office. He wanted a new car, of course he did, everyone wants a new car, and I am a car salesman. He wanted a 170. He wanted a Black 170 with red leather seats, air conditioning, a screen to separate him from his driver and a built-in drinks cabinet. I explained that I could get such a car, but that it would be very expensive. More expensive than buying a standard 170 and a small Ford for the rest of his family. He was unhappy. He sent me away to reconsider, reminding me that the Department for Bread and Cheese needed to replace its fleet of 157 staff cars in April. This was not news to me. I was unconcerned, although, out of politeness I pretended to be surprised. I was building the first arch of our bridge. There would be many more meetings before we could cross the river.

The day after my visit I heard nothing. This was what I expected so I did not contact the minister. Instead, I called other officials, those who had already ordered their cars. I discussed their payments or arranged for small sweeteners to be credited to their accounts; whichever was appropriate. You must be patient to sell expensive cars in this country and the Swiss are a very patient people. I believe it is because of the mountain air.

On Thursday the minister visited my showroom. It was a surprise visit that had been carefully planned to put me off guard; and of which, I am pleased to say, I had been forewarned. We both knew that our negotiations would need to be concluded quickly. However, we both pretended that this was not the case. This pretence was not for my benefit. I had already surpassed my March sales targets, I had, in fact, surpassed my April targets. I had learnt, many years ago, that it is better to achieve your targets each month than have one good month followed by a string of failures. I did not share this information with the minister. Do not show your cards too early, my father used to say. My brother did not listen and had to marry the grocer's daughter in unfortunate circumstances. Meanwhile I waited for a wife who was both prettier and richer than my brother's wife. That is why I sell cars, and he sells in turnips. As you can imagine there is little profit to be made from turnips.

The minister arrived at one-forty-five, which is early for a visit from a minister. The police came in first, their hands feeling for their newly issued guns, keen to exercise their authority by clearing customers from the showroom. Then, because there were no customers to chase, they searched the cupboards and counters for hidden terrorists. Having found no threats inside they returned to the street hoping to indulge in some minor harassment among the lunch-time crowds. Although his visit was expected, such excessive armed security was not. The Minister of Bread and Cheese is not a high ranking official. Certainly not as high ranking as he

had hoped when the roles were allocated last year. In my estimation he would be approximately an hour behind the president's car in Wednesday's parade. I didn't mention this, neither did he.

He walked around the showroom, looking at this car, sitting in that one, running his hand along the bonnet of a third. This was all for show. All the ministers chose the same car in the end, a single coloured four door saloon, with cream leather seating. This was fortunate as this was the car that I had in stock, and the Minister had left it late to order his car for the procession. The Minister for Bread and Cheese did not want to be the same as every minister. He wanted to stand out in the crowd. He did not, however, want to stand out too much. It was not good for his career, and perhaps for his future, if he appeared to have a better car than the other, more important ministers. The Minister of Finance, of Foreign Affairs or the Minister for the Interior had the A-grade cars. The Minister for Bread and Cheese could only afford a B-grade vehicle. And so, we began. He admired the lines of the sporty 300s and asked if I would be happy to sell such a car to his department. I replied, truthfully, that it would make me very happy. I replied, less truthfully, that the car was not very reliable and that if the doors failed the car would need to be sent back to Germany. This was how I would start to build my bridge. He could not afford the car, so I provided him with a reason not to buy it. I suggested that he should look at the 170. You cannot go wrong with a classic car like the 170. He hesitated; he wanted something that would reflect his status, his family and his tribe. I guided him towards the carefully placed Fords, highlighting the differences between the 170 and the cars that would make up the profitable fleet vehicles for his staff. Few things show the value of an expensive car more effectively than looking closely at the alternative. I was close to getting my sale.

My showroom had been closed for over an hour. If the police remained outside for much longer rumours would spread. I decided to move the negotiations along. I got a bottle of schnapps from behind the counter and invited the minister to sit down. We drank, we talked, we drank some more, I explained that the schnapps was made from William's pears picked from one of two orchards in Thuringia. It was clear that he had no idea where Thuringia was. I was, of course, too polite to tell him. Eventually, I explained that I had accidentally ordered an extra crate of schnapps to be sent from Germany and asked, as he seemed to enjoy the taste, if he would help me out by taking the extra bottles as a gift. Fortunately, he was able to assist with this, and we returned to our discussion about cars. He agreed that the 170 was probably appropriate after all but insisted that it should be customised. Red leather, I explained, was unsuitable in the tropics, forgetting to mention the red leather that adorned the seats of the German Ambassador's car. He was adamant that his car should be, in some way, unique. I

suggested red mats in the footwells and privately mourned the Chinese rug that I would sacrifice to fulfil my promise. A sacrifice yes, but in exchange for a substantial order, one that was worthwhile.

He left and I reopened the showroom, but not until I had a small celebratory drink. I had supplied 35% of the cars that would take part in the presidential parade and had orders for over five-hundred staff vehicles. I booked an evening phone call to my wife so that I could share the good news.

Oh, how I wished that I had not praised the day before the evening. My beautiful sales figures were about to fall into the well. I couldn't see the well, but two days later my problems walked into my showroom. What did the Greeks say about Pandora? Wasn't it that she was beautiful? Wasn't that she was dressed by the gods, and that she could beguile men? This is how my Pandora came to me, and oh, she was beautiful! She was African, but not, I think, local. She told me that she worked in the Ministry of Bread and Cheese. I had not met her before, but I had heard of her, everyone had. She was a model, or perhaps a beauty queen, the stories varied. However, they all agreed that she had the minister in her pocket and that she had her eye on greater things. She wanted to be the first First-Lady of Ghana. She came in with attitude and an outrageous proposition. She wanted a car, a specific car, and did not see any reason to use her own money to buy it. She did not browse. She walked straight to the new 300SLs. She rejected the gullwing with a dismissive glance and placed a white gloved hand on the cabriolet. Hardly pausing, she suggested, no demanded, that we discuss the delivery of her new car. What's more she wanted our discussion to be private, in my office not at the sales desk where others might overhear. It was clear that this would not be an ordinary negotiation.

Her approach was simple: she would pay for a second-hand motorbike, and I would deliver the 'pretty little sports car' to her bungalow before sundown. Agreeing to such a tight turnaround was obviously impossible. Equally obviously, the young lady didn't expect agreement. As for the rest, that would be more difficult to arrange. The first question, and the most important in my opinion, was how would I benefit from the arrangement? The lady was one step ahead of me. She cut straight to the chase, as our American friends tend to say. If I provided the car she wanted, she would arrange for ten per cent of the Bread and Cheese cars to be upgraded from two to four door models. If I did not, she would arrange for negative stories about my cars to be released every week until I agreed to her terms or left Accra. It was not an arrangement, it was blackmail. She left her ultimatum on the table and left the showroom.

I had twenty-four hours. A single day to calculate how I could keep my reputation, keep my profits and keep the arrangement from Heir Brock.

The key question was how long she would remain in the Ministry of Bread and Cheese. It was clear that she would remain there, profiting from her relationship with the minister, until she found a better position.

I remained in the showroom long after closing time. If she became the First Lady, or even if she became the President's mistress then all the ministers' wives would also insist that their husbands brought them a cabriolet. Many of them would insist that only a Mercedes would do. One point in favour of the arrangement.

If I brought the car myself, and then sold it to her, I could cut the retail price. Another point in favour. Of course, this would mean that I could not legitimately replace my car for another year. Overall, break even.

The upgrade on fleet cars could be very profitable, but ten per cent upgrade would not be enough. Again, break even.

The threat of bad press had to be taken seriously. I asked myself if the threat was real and decided that it was. The proposition was too daring to be a bluff. She would have no qualms in driving me out of the country. I poured myself a drink. I had no choice; she would get her car. I had shaken hands with a blackmailer, and I knew that I would be tied to her until one of us left the country. It would probably be me.

She collected her car on Monday and drove it to the castle for a party that evening. She was photographed driving to a concert on Tuesday and by Friday the car was parked outside the President's residency. Perhaps she was just visiting, perhaps she had other ideas. I do not know, and I did not ask. All I can say is that I have three more 300s on order. I am confident that I will sell them, even at a price that I plan to charge. A man must make a living, even if that means scraping the cream off his employer's cake.

1.20 The Photographer's Apprentice

Ezekiel's Story

On the first of March I had been apprenticed to Mr Robert T Hunt for exactly seven years, three weeks and six days. Mr Hunt was widely thought to be one of the meanest men in Accra, refused to repaint his sign board after poor spacing made

Proprietor Mr R Hunt

Look, for all the world, like

Proprietor Mr RHunt

So, Mr Rhunt he became. Complaining when customers got his name wrong; but refusing to pay another seven shillings for the sign to be corrected. It was his meanness, I am sure, that bound me to such a long apprenticeship, although he claimed it was because I was slow to learn.

Seven years is a long time to be an apprentice but, as Mr Rhunt told me, photography is a skilled profession with many complicated chemicals and calculations. It takes twice as long to train a photographer than a mechanic or an electrician, and mechanics and electricians are generally much better at learning than me. This was why I had been paying six shillings every month for my apprenticeship, such long training is not without cost, he had said. Gaddo, my *Agya-ba*, said I was like a pig in a barrel, caught by my own stupidity. This Mr Rhunt is treating you like a fool, he said, like a slave from the old times. He said that I should have trained with a market photographer, then I would have learned my trade in a year; two at the most. I told him that Mr Rhunt used the new Kodachrome film so I could learn to take colour photographs on paper. That way, I told him, I would have more customers than the other market photographers and I would be able to charge more than them. He laughed at me, but not too much; we are brothers after all, and he knew I was right. Black and white was old style, everything would be in colour from now on, just like the new American films that they show in the cinema.

Gaddo was the first person I called when Mr Rhunt told me I was ready to end my apprenticeship. I was so proud. I realised that I must be some sort of genius, a real artist with the camera. Gaddo said we should go to town and celebrate. Gaddo can always find something to celebrate, getting paid, getting a smile from a pretty girl, anything. Mama had said that Gaddo

would celebrate the sun going down if it meant someone would buy him a beer. Even Papa said that Gaddo was trouble, and Papa

had run away to Freetown when he sold the captain's car and kept the money.

Gaddo said that we should drink first and then take the money to Mr Rhunt. I disagreed most strongly. Because I wanted to pay the money before Mr. Rhunt changed his mind and also, I knew if Gaddo and I went to the bar we wouldn't leave until all the money was spent. So, before I met with Gaddo, I strolled over to the studio, whistling the chorus of *Fine Woman* as I went. I was a happy man. Until, that is, I reached the studio; eleven am and it was closed up tight, shutters down and a shiny new padlock on the door. It was clear that Mr Rhunt had spent too long in the club again. I guessed that he'd forgotten that, without me, he'd have to open up the shop himself. I got my key and went to the back door, through the studio where I had expected to find him asleep, as usual, on the dark room floor.

He was not there. He had been there and been there, probably with company. It looked as if five, maybe six, men had been fighting in there. If they hadn't been fighting, they had been searching for something. I don't think they found it, because they'd smashed up the place before they left. I made my way towards Mr Rhunt's office, picking a careful path between broken glass and spilled chemicals. I knocked on his door, not too hard, I wasn't sure if waking him would be a good idea. But hey, I wanted to pay my debts and start my own business. There were plenty of opportunities for a good photographer, and I knew I was good. I knocked again, louder. Perhaps the drink last night was making him sleep soundly, and there had certainly been some drinking. As I pushed the door carefully, just in case – you know, the smell of whiskey almost knocked me over. I can drink as much as any man, when the party is rocking, but I tell you, the smell nearly made me fall down right there.

Mr Rhunt was not in his office.

It was clear that something was very wrong, and I did not want to be part of all this wrongness. All I wanted was to pay the money and collect the camera that Mr Rhunt had promised. I couldn't start my business from inside a police cell. I made my way back outside. I needed a cigarette, and I didn't need to set the place on fire when I lit it. As I stepped out back, I saw that the market crowds were beginning to gather around the shop. Not a waiting-for-the-shop-to-open crowd. Not that there were ever that many people waiting for Mr. Rhunt's shop to

open. Maybe one or two House-Mammies with their little white charges waiting for passport photographs; but only in August, before they all go back to English School. But this crowd was a proper crowd; a start-a-fight-and-finish-it crowd. Not a crowd that needed to see me coming out of the studio. I skipped over a couple of walls and looped around to join the back of what was fast becoming not a crowd but an angry mob. I kept my cool. Someone tapped me on the shoulder. I lost my cool. Just before I punched him in the face Gaddo grabbed my arm.

‘Calm down Brother,’ he said, ‘time to be somewhere else, the billy-sticks are out, and we don’t need our heads cracking today.’ Gaddo, who had seen more billy-sticks cracking more heads most, was right. It was time to move on. Mostly I am embarrassed by Gaddo but occasionally it’s useful to have a brother who has seen the inside of every police cell in Accra. We headed for Mama Greens. I thought we would go to one of Gaddo’s early morning bars, but no.

‘Those policemen will be looking for a fight, no need to give them the chance to break up a nice shady bar. Let’s have some coffee and a little bit of breakfast like civilized gentlemen.’ I laughed, not sure which was more ridiculous, Gaddo being civilized or Gaddo being a gentleman. But, as always, he was right; the police wouldn’t dare look for trouble in Mamma Green’s. We sat down and Gaddo slapped the Morning Post on the table. I began to read the headlines as a pretty girl took our order. Gaddo patted her bottom as she walked away, and a wet dishcloth sailed across the room and hit me on the back of the head.

‘Sorry ‘bout that.’ Mamma Green said. ‘I keep it specially for your brother there. He needs to learn to leave my granddaughter in peace.’ Gaddo sent a kiss in Mamma Green’s direction then turned his attention back to me.

‘So, did you know? You must have known. *Abeg*, you bring me some of his dirty photos. I have contacts, I’ll sell them easy, easy and we could split the profit, say 80/20.’ I winced. ‘OK you win, let’s say 60/40 I can’t say better, and that’s only because you are my brother, you understand?’ I couldn’t believe what I was reading.

Mr Robert Hunt is being sought by the Police Force of Ghana in connection to the production and distribution of indecent images. Anyone with information about his whereabouts should contact ... etc. etc.

‘No! I knew nothing about this, and no, I definitely didn’t find any of his dirty photos in the studio. I didn’t find anything there, just broken bottles and open files, like a rhino had been shut inside when a monkey bit its ass. Chaos!’

‘Well, what did you find? Did you pick up a camera or two at least?’ Mamma Green brought out breakfast, hot and steaming and a great way to take your mind off everything else. She picked up the dishcloth that she’d thrown earlier.

‘Don’t let him talk you into something you’d be ashamed to tell your Mama about.’ She said, making sure she flicked Gaddo with the cloth as she walked away.

‘Where do you think he’s gone? You sure he’s not in the studio somewhere?’

‘I don’t know, back to Europe maybe, or up north, those countries don’t care what white people do? But no, he’s definitely not in the studio, I looked everywhere.’

I read the article again. Why didn’t I know and how much money was he making from those photos while I was working for nothing taking portraits for graduations and grandmothers? I felt disgusted and cheated in equal measure.

‘I have to get back inside. He owes me.’

‘Now you’re talking. *Abeg* you, let’s go! Maybe we can make a new start, eh? With all that money that’s waiting for us.’ I was only half listening to my half-brother. I should have paid more attention, but that half of me that was not related to him would forget how much trouble the related half could get me into. That related half, my father’s half, was always the reason I got whipped at school. It was the reason that I lost all my money to card sharps when I went out with Gaddo, and it was the reason that Sergeant Nkansah kept such a keen eye on me. I was a good boy from a bad family, but it was only the bad family that most people saw.

‘What are you thinking about, because you sure weren’t listening to me.’ Gaddo was right, I wasn’t listening; I was thinking. Thinking if I really needed Gaddo alongside me when I went back to the studio. Thinking if I could sneak back in without him noticing. I still had my key, perhaps, like today, I could walk straight in as if I belonged there.

‘Well, are we going?’ Gaddo was getting impatient.

‘Not yet. I need time to think what we should take and where the stuff that isn’t broken might be. Oh, and I’ll need to make a list, what I’ll need to set up business myself.’

‘And how long will that take you, Mr List-Man? Don’t you think maybe we should just go in, grab what we can and get out, before every thief in Accra tries to steal our property?’ That was how Gaddo thought. It was our property already. Thinking about owning something was, as far as he is concerned, the same as owning something. That was why he’d spent so much time in gaol, and why he always claimed that he was innocent.

‘No, too many police at the moment. Too many market women wanting a little hanging as well. We will go tomorrow. This time tomorrow will be best. We’ll meet back here tomorrow morning.’ I got up, keen to leave before he tried to talk me into something risky.

‘Off you go List-Man. Go home and make your plans and I’ll just be hot here, watching what all those *policci* are planning.’ I put a couple of shillings on the table.

‘See you tomorrow Gaddo,’ I said, ‘Have yourself a beer and go home early. I’ll need you sharp in the morning.’ I didn’t want to waste money on Gaddo, but it was the only way. He would have followed me home, hung around, worried at my heels until I went out with him. But buy him a drink and he would be happy. Maybe he’d come around later, but my plan was to be out before then. I just needed to get him off my tail for an hour or two.

I didn’t exactly lie to him; but I wanted time to think without Gaddo interrupting. I waited until he had walked to the bar. Then waited another half hour to be on the safe side. As I said, you can always rely on Gaddo; just as long as you rely on him to let you down.

Once I was sure that the coast was clear I strolled along the road towards the studio. Hands in my pockets like I had nothing to do but mind my own business. Once I had checked that no one was about, I slipped into the alley like a night spirit in search of innocent souls. At the door I hesitated, the door wasn’t locked. Had I forgotten to lock it or was Gaddo right and every thief in town had his eye on Mr Rhunt’s cash box. I stepped inside, slowly so as not to disturb whatever might be inside. Silence. No one was there. I shut the door and turned on my torch.

I was grabbed from behind.

‘Don’t do that brother.’ It was Gaddo, I could breathe again. ‘Never shut the door when you are playing the burglar. Keep the exit clear, we may need to run.’

‘But the lights, if the door is open won’t we be seen?’ Gaddo laughed at me.

‘That, my brother, is why you need me. There’s no good coming from watching your feet if you can’t use those feet to run away.’

I looked around; the place was as messed up as I remembered.

'I thought about the cameras.' I said. 'They are all pretty mashed up, but maybe I can make one good camera out of all the pieces.'

'No need brother, no need. Come here *Abeg* you. I've found something that will make us smile like babies.' I followed him across the room to the stock room and through a small door that I had not seen before.

'Surprised? Bet you didn't know about this, nice little space, all hidden behind these painted boards.'

'Backdrops,' I said, automatically correcting him instead of listening to what he was really saying.

'Backdrops, frontdrops, who cares. The boards aren't important; it's the door and the room it leads to that's going to make us rich.' I followed, not quite believing what was there. A second studio, a secret studio, with all the equipment I needed to start my business.

'Is this what you need brother?' I nodded, trying to work out how I would get the stuff home. 'There's a wrapper in that corner. Load it up then carry your cameras like your mama carried you before.' It made sense, not for the developer though, I filled my pockets with bottles, put everything else I could carry in the wrapper and Gaddo tied it to my back. He was right, I looked like a mammy on her way to market. He gave me three thick envelopes and told me to post them in the morning.

'Don't look at them,' he said. 'Best you don't know what's inside. But make sure you post them, all of them, because little brother, you are about to owe me big time.' We went back to the main studio and Gaddo pushed me out the door.

'Go!' he said, '*Abeg* you, be somewhere else.' I thought he would follow but when I looked round, he wasn't there. Before I'd reached Mamma Green's there was smoke coming from the studio and a crowd was starting to shout for the Police. My brother to my rescue again. No one would notice a man carrying a baby when there was a fire to shout about.

The next day I took Gaddo's letters to the Post Office, weighed them and paid for the postage. I also paid a small dash to the counter clerk to make sure that the letters went into the

sorting box and not into his back pocket. I had not been to the Post Office before and it was surprisingly expensive. But I guessed that Gaddo was right, I owed him for my new camera.

Back home I sorted through the evening's loot. I had collected more than I remembered. I guess the shock of the hidden room had hazed my memory. At last, after all that time as a no-pay apprentice I was ready to open *Fine Photographs*, and it is a good time to be a photographer. Everyone is going to want a photograph to hang on the wall; a photograph to say, 'I was there when the flag was raised, and Ghana was born.'

I went out yesterday, taking photos of anyone and everyone. I took a baby walking on all fours round his Mama's market stall; some grandfathers playing *oware* under a tree and a beautiful woman in a red sports car. Man, she looked just like Audrey Hepburn. At least how Audrey Hepburn would look if she was born in Zanzibar. Sweet and sexy! I wanted the pictures for my shop window. OK so it's not technically a shop window. It's the window to my Mamma's sitting room, but she's visiting with her sister. I'll get my own place, soon as I have made a little money, till then I got to hope that auntie needs Mamma's help for a while longer.

The pictures are good, better than the studio shots that Mr. Rhunt used to take. So good I might even take them to the Daily Graphic. If people see my name in the Graphic, they will surely want their picture taken by me, the famous photographer. That's what I will do. I will print out copies of my photographs and take them to the newspaper, and then I will look for Gaddo. I have not seen him since he pushed me out of the studio. I will find him and take his picture, even if he is in gaol again. Especially if he is in gaol again. Convict looking through the bars, that would be a good picture. I could send it to our father to show that Gaddo is a fruit off the same tree. He would like that, and if he is convicted then I could sell the photograph to the newspaper. People always want to read about villains and scoundrels.

1.21 You Don't Know Me

May's Story

I know Princess Marina. I know everything about her. How she takes her tea, her shoe size, even which cigarettes she smokes and that she never smokes in public. She's never heard of me of course, but that doesn't matter; I know, someday, I'll meet her and then I'll be able to tell her that I understand, because she's just like me. We've even got the same name; Marina's just a posh way of saying May – that's what I think. I could have been Marina if I'd been born on the other side of town.

I didn't like her at first, well who did? Foreign she was; a Gerry. I know they say she's a Princess of Denmark, but that doesn't mean anything does it? They didn't really fight the Bosh, the Danes, neutral in both wars. I say you can't really be neutral, not when you're facing evil, so I wasn't sure, not to start with. But all in all, she turned out all right in the end, didn't she? You could almost forget she was foreign. Lovely kiddies she had; take after their father they do. Pity about their father, wasn't it? What with the war nearly over. I think it made her more like the rest of us, you know with the prince being killed in action, just like my Billy. Made us the same, sort of, war widows we were. She'd get a pension, just like the rest of us.

I lost Billy in the same year, same month actually, not that I knew it then. It was a month before I knew that my Billy was at the bottom of the sea. I didn't get the news straight away, see - not official like. Missing in action, they'd said, so I thought he'd be taken prisoner. I wasn't worried, just waiting to know which camp he was in. I'd knitted socks ready to send when I knew where he was. I threw them on the fire when I got the telegram, straight on the kitchen fire. It seems wasteful now, but back then I just wanted to get rid, couldn't bear the sight of them. She wasn't like that, the Princess, just got on with her duties, visiting hospitals and helping out in the kitchens; an example to us all. That's when I started my scrap book. It was to remind me not to give up. If she could do it, so could I, that's what I thought. I've got cuttings from all the papers, right from when the duke died. There are no pictures of the funeral of course, that would be disrespectful. There's a picture of her, with Her Majesty and Queen Mary. Ever so dignified they looked, with those thick veils and all. We didn't have a funeral for my Billy, not without a body. He's not even got a plot in one of those war cemeteries. But then they're for soldiers not for seamen. Sailors get lost at sea and there's nowhere to mourn. I used to go down to the docks when I was home, look out beyond the breakers and think about him. He couldn't swim, you

know, wouldn't learn. He said that learning to swim meant you didn't trust your boat and she'd turn against you. A lot of sailors think like that, fishermen too, very superstitious. Not that it helped them, not when the U-boats came. Sunk with all souls, she was, my Billy among them.

The Princess was lucky, she had a body, cried over it too by all accounts. Not that you can always trust the papers, not about everything. But I think that must be true, they wouldn't lie about something like that, not about the old King's brother. She bore it well really, the loss. Must have been hard, what with him having left the navy, she must have thought the risk was all over. It must have been his time, that's what they say, don't they? But to go like that, when he was only 46, and with a new baby too. Very sad it was. We didn't have any little ones, Billy and me. We were going to have them, once the war was over. Billy said he didn't want a family; he said things would never be the same after the war and it was wrong to bring kiddies into the world. But I told him, I wasn't getting married if I wasn't going to be a mum. I didn't want a big family, not like my mum, I thought three or maybe four, just enough to fill the house. Of course that didn't happen, not with Billy dying so soon. We'd only been married six months when his ship went down. I know some girls fell as soon as they were wed, but not me. Maybe that's as well, what with me being on my own, but I wonder sometimes, you know, what sort of mum I'd have been.

I moved to Camden after Billy died. I could have stayed at home; I still had my room and a little job at the Co-op. But what with the men coming home and my aunty telling me to find someone new, and my friends having babies, well – it all got a bit much. So, when my cousin told me that they wanted machinists where she worked, I caught the train down to London right away. I didn't much want to work in a factory, but the pay was good, and I got to see the Princess. Not meet her, you understand. But I'd see her sometimes, she worked at the Women's Hospital, in secret, but I knew it was her, even in her nurse's uniform. That's what comes of following someone like the Princess, you really get to know them. Do you know I took a picture of her once, from the top of the trolley bus? I've got it in my scrapbook; I've given it a page to itself. It proves I was there, in the same street as a princess. It's not the clearest picture, it's a bit blurry but you can tell it's her, especially once you know who you are looking for. I didn't tell anyone it was her, not during the war. You never know, do you, if some spy might have been looking for pictures of the Royal Family in case they invaded. So, I kept it a secret until after the war, then I showed my cousin. She thought it was just a picture of Euston Road. My favourite picture, except the one of my Billy in his uniform, and she thought it was nothing. But then she grew up in London, and Londoners are a bit different to ordinary people, aren't they?

I wanted to train as a nurse, like the Princess. I thought it would be useful, a real profession. There's always a need for nurses, but they wouldn't take me. They said I needed to have my school leaving certificate. It was the same thing for teaching, which surprised me. After all I only wanted to teach the little ones, but they said they had plenty of applicants, boys coming back from the war and women leaving war work. I wanted to be like the Princess, to do something useful. I guess that's what everyone wanted after the war, to give something back. It was a prayer, sort of, well, that's what they said. A way of showing I was grateful to have survived. I didn't know that's what I was doing, but I do now. The ladies of the Church Missionary Society explained it to me. They said that because I was grateful that my Billy didn't suffer, I wanted to keep God's little children from suffering. They said that losing my Billy before we had children was part of God's plan; just so I could give all my love to little African babies. I wasn't sure. I thought I just wanted to be like the Princess, but they said no. When I told Auntie I thought she would want me to stay. But she didn't, she said it would do me good, and anyway she had let my room, so it was probably for the best. It was almost as if she wanted me to go. In the end I realised that I had nowhere else to go because, without Billy, no one wanted me around.

I'd heard tales about Africa, all those wild beasts and mosquitoes and forests full of cannibals. Then there was the name, The White Man's Grave; I asked the Ladies about that, but they told me not to be silly. They said there were lots of opportunities for white women in Africa. Then one of them reminded me that the Royals went to the tropics, even the young Princess before she was Queen. Well, they wouldn't let a princess go if it was dangerous, would they? Even Princess Marina went abroad, not to Africa, but I didn't know that then. I saw the pictures of her opening a hospital in the jungle and I thought, yes, if she can do it, so can I. So, I signed up, there and then, I didn't think about it, they said I could take a week, but I didn't. On the 19th of June 1947 I filled in the form and agreed to be a missionary. The Princess would have been proud of me.

It was a Thursday when I signed up, so I should have gone back into the factory on Friday, but I didn't. The next morning, instead of going to work I caught the train down to Dover. That was a bit daft because I couldn't pick up my wages and I only had about thirty shillings in my purse, but I wanted to get out of town. I wasn't really thinking, I suppose, or I would have waited until after work, but I needed to talk things through with Billy. I brought a bag of yesterday's buns with me, and a flask of tea. I wanted to save as much as I could, because, you know, I'd be a day short when I got my pay.

I'd not been to Dover before, I'd not been anywhere south of the river, I'd never had the need. But it was a pretty journey. Lots of fields and pretty little stations. We stopped at all of them, even the holts, so it was almost eleven before we reached Dover. I wasn't sure where to go so I stopped for a cuppa in the station café. A cup of tea and an iced bun makes everything seem better, doesn't it? A little bit of luxury. I miss iced buns, you know. You can't get them out here, the icing runs, and anyway, there's the ants. Ants are everywhere, especially those little orange ones, they'd be all over iced buns if you baked them, sad, really, because I'd love to make them for the kiddies, whole rings of them with everyone squabbling for the one in the middle. Oh well. Anyway, as I was saying, I stopped in the station café and the girl behind the counter, ever so kind she was, even filled up my flask when no one was looking. The tea was a bit stewed but, beggars can't be choosers, can they? Well, she could see I was lost, and she asked me where I was going and when I said I just wanted to get to the sea she told me to go up to the castle and look from there because they hadn't cleared the beach properly. It wasn't like being down on the docks. But I could hear the waves and all that so I sat down with my flask and shouted in the wind and hoped our Billy could hear me. I told him what I'd done, and how I'd got nowhere to go now, and how the factory was laying off the girls now there were plenty of men without jobs. I'm sure I heard him say, *go on girl*, only it didn't sound like him, too posh, but I guess his voice would have changed, what with drowning. So, I sat there and had a little cry as I missed him so much and then this big sea gull swooped down and pinched the bag of buns, so I cried a bit more because I was hungry by then. An old man walked up, all tweed and country he was, calling his dog all the time. He stopped and asked if I was all right and I said I was. But I thought this won't do, crying like that in public. Billy wouldn't want me to be so soft, so I got up and walked away. I was going to go back to the station, but I must have taken a wrong turn because I ended up down by the docks. I felt better there, more at home. I could have a proper talk with Billy there, with all the coming and going and the smells and the sailors and the fish and chips all wrapped in paper, and I knew I'd be OK. That was the last time I really worried about leaving home.

I went back to London on Sunday's milk train. I stayed in the ladies' waiting room overnight. I was afraid to spend any more money. I had rent to pay. In fact, I had to pay the rent for another three months, but I didn't know that then. I went on courses every weekend and had books to read every week. I had to learn all about different countries, learn how to be a teacher, learn how to cook and how to care for sick children. All that time I didn't know exactly where I would be sent. I had hoped it would be somewhere close, like Malta or Egypt. My Billy went there in the war; he brought a shawl for me. Gave it me when he came home on leave. I haven't worn it though, it's black, but I couldn't use it for the funeral because it's got flowers. I don't

blame Billy though. You can't expect men to know things like that, can you? I still think it's special, the best thing anyone's ever brought me, except my wedding ring. I don't think I can really count my ring though, because he didn't buy it, we couldn't afford a ring, so his gran gave us hers. I can't wear it now, in this heat, still got it in my purse, of course.

Now look at me, out in the Gold Coast, running an orphanage. Well almost running it. There is the Reverend Mother, she is in charge of all the houses along the coast, but she doesn't visit St Catherine's very often, maybe once a year just before the almoners arrive from England. She's visited more than that recently, almost every day in fact. She wants to know that we will all be ready, children and staff, even the native staff. We will be going to the Independence Parade tomorrow. Can you imagine that? My children – I always think of them as my children – will be marching through the town, waving flags and meeting the new President. I won't meet him, just the children and the native staff. I'll be there though, in the background, waiting just in case I'm needed. In case any of the kiddies are unwell or something like that. Someone familiar, in case it gets too much for them. I expect things will change after independence, fewer jobs for people like me, but at the moment things are fine, just the way they always have been. We had a letter from the new government last week, asking what we were going to do to replace European staff with natives. I have to send our plan to the Department for Women by the end of June. I think it's a good idea, really, I do, it's just – you know – I don't know what I'll do when it happens. This is my home, here with the children and the other house mothers. There's nothing for me in England. Everyone's died – died or moved away. I stopped getting letters years ago.

I go down to the beach on my days off, walk along the sand, and watch the boys in the surf boats. I've asked Billy what'll happen to me, but he doesn't answer very much, not now. I wonder if he can't hear me, out here so far from home. I guess he's looking in the wrong places, in the wrong seas. Or maybe he's forgotten me, settled down to being dead, not thinking of the living. They must do eventually, I suppose. But I haven't forgotten him. I've got things to tell him, about the kiddies, and about having to move, and about not knowing what's happening, or if I'll be safe once the army leaves. So much to say and no one to say it too. I guess it would be different if I was one of those Catholics. They can talk to their vicars, can't they, on a Saturday when they go to confession. I think I'd like that. Not that I could be one of them, all that bowing and incense, not like a proper Church of England service. The saints are nice though. It would be nice to have a few saints looking after you – like St Catherine looking after the orphans.

I've another thing to tell Billy. Something even more important. If only he would listen. He wouldn't believe me though, so maybe it doesn't matter. I would have liked to tell someone, anyone, to let them know how far I've come. But who would listen to me? I couldn't tell the other house mothers, it'd look like I was showing off, and that wouldn't be right. You don't do that sort of thing do you, not to family, and we're like family here. The thing is, I got an invitation. Fancy paper and gold letters it was, from His Excellency. Can you imagine that? A personal invitation with my name on it, not some letter addressed to all the staff, but personally addressed to me. It's for a garden party at the Governor's Palace, fancy that. I went down to the beach to tell Billy when I heard. Straight away I went, I didn't even wait for my day off, but he didn't say anything. He kept quiet even when I told him who would be there. The governor and his wife and all the ambassadors and the head of the army and the police commissioner and the doctors from the new hospital and all the big politicians. He didn't say a thing. Even when I told him about the guest of honour, Her Royal Highness Princess Marina the Duchess of Kent. I told him that I'd probably get to meet the Princess. Just imagine, me meeting a Princess. I can hardly believe it. It's the best thing ever to have happened to me. I'm taking my scrap book with me, to show her. I want her to know how much she means to me. I want her to know that I understand what she has been through since the duke died. We're the same, see, the princess and me, except for the titles of course, and the castles, and the diamonds. But castles and diamonds aren't everything are they? Kiddies, though, they matter, things would have been different if I'd had children, Billy's children. That's why she copes, you know, for her children. It's always for the children, isn't it?

I thought I might be a governess when I get home, the sort you read about in the stories. I'd be good at that. I know a lot of things now, not like when I was a girl, I didn't know much then, not one for school, but then it wasn't much of a school, we mostly did needlework and laundry, and cooking of course. Not that I did any cooking, my mum couldn't afford the ingredients, so I just wrote out the recipes in best, and then helped with the washing up. I did a lot of washing up, but girls do, don't they? It's not like that here, not all the time anyway. The girls still learn sewing, but they learn on machines, big heavy old things with a treadle foot. That's better out here, in Africa, no electricity here, see, except in the shops, and the Governor's Palace. That's bound to have electricity, can't imagine using kerosene lamps in a Palace. The thing is the girls learn to sew on those old machines so as they've got a trade when they leave, means they don't need to go on the street, if you know what I mean. I'd hate to think any of my girls had to do that. Except for that Beauty, she went that way I'm sure, but I don't like to think of it. That's why I teach them to sew, and we do arithmetic and writing, lovely handwriting some

of my girls have, not the boys though, they haven't got the patience. Always running to get to Mr. Afufu's class. He runs the workshop. They get good training from him – and he gets plenty of free labour for his repair shop. Everyone wins. Except me. No, I mustn't think like that, I'm off to meet the Princess and I'm going to ask her if she'll put in a word for me, with one of those posh ladies in one of those country houses. They're not the sort that want to look after their own kiddies, and I could do it for them, just for a while, till they send them off to school. Cruel that is, if you ask me, sending them away like that. If I had any kiddies, I wouldn't send them off to school, I'd keep them with me all the time, just so you'd know they were safe.

I'm going to be all right I am. I might even stop coming down to the coast when I get home, just to show Billy that I'm OK. And I will be OK once I get back home and I'm working in a big house. The princess will see me right, I know she will.

1.22 The Last Party

Kojo's Story

There is a sign in the city, it says *Ga se gbe ji gbe*. The governor thinks it means

All roads lead to Accra.

He has been here for more than seven years and still he doesn't hear what is whispered. The British are told one thing, but we know something else. Ask a Ga man what that means; ask an Ashanti man; ask the Frafra or the Nanumba; we will all say the same. It means

The way of the Ga, that is the only way.

So, I ask you, what hope is there for me to keep my job once the new president moves into the castle – none. Today I am the Chief Steward, tomorrow I will be nothing. Tonight, I will dance and cry at the same time.

I voted for independence, of course I did; what else was I to do; vote to remain under the feet of a foreign power? What man would do so? Who would ask his mother-in-law to try his bed? I did not vote for the CPP, obviously. Akoto was my man, he still is. Not that I will say so if anyone asks; people whisper, tell tales, anything to make sure that you lose your job, and they are employed in your place. No, no, I do not believe in the so-called secret ballots. Nothing is secret, not from a man's wife, not from a man's neighbour and definitely not from a man's enemy. So, I pretend that I did not vote at all. I say that I do not understand about politicians or elections. Usually that is enough for people to stop asking, if it is not, if they say,

'But Kojo we saw you at the polling station.' Or 'Kojo we saw the ink on your finger.'
Then I say,

'Oh, you mean those elections! Yes, I voted. I voted for the chicken.' I say this even though there was no chicken on the ballot. Then they stop asking and shake their heads.

'That Kojo,' they say. 'He is too stupid to know how to vote.' This is a good thing. If the party people think I am stupid, then they will leave me alone. The CPP, the NPP, the NLM no one is interested in how I voted. Will elections always be like this? Will we always be checking who we vote for? I don't know. How could I know, I voted for the chicken? Ha! Maybe there will be no more elections, maybe there will be elections every week. This is not a question for men like me. The question for men like me is where will we work and who will we work for?

I would like to stay here, in Accra, but who *will* I work for? When the British have left, when the Swiss go home, and the Mission houses are empty, who will have the money to employ a steward. Perhaps everyone will have their own steward? Before the elections we were told that there is plenty of money. That there will be money for everyone once the British are not in charge of the customs houses and the cocoa farms. I hope that is true. If it is not, then what should I do? Learn a new trade? Can a steward become a shop keeper or a boatman? Will there be new training schools like there was after the war or will we be left to fend for ourselves. Should we return to our fathers, our tails between our legs like scolded dogs? No, I would never do that. I will not beg my father to feed and clothe me as if I were a small boy thrown out of the school room.

Tomorrow I will look for work, even if I have to work as a houseboy, even if I have to work as a streetsweeper; and if there is no work, then I will leave Accra. I will apply for a visa to work in America – there was an article in the Graphic saying that America will support our new country and its new government. Perhaps that is a good sign, perhaps they will welcome men who work hard, who have a good education and excellent references. Men like me. The Governor has promised that I will get an excellent reference when I leave, but only if I do not leave his service before he returns to Britain. This is unreasonable. If I remain as chief steward until the Governor leaves then the best government jobs will all be taken. This is a plan to make life easy for the Governor and difficult for me. This is why I will not try to find work in England. America is the place for me, the home of John Wayne and the land of the free! Nkrumah went to America. He studied there and became a lawyer, or maybe a priest. It does not matter. He left, he studied, and he came home and defeated the British. That is enough for any man to dream of.

My Uncle's wife, her brother works at the American Embassy, I will visit him tomorrow, in the evening when the parties have finished. We will have a drink together and talk about the best way to obtain a visa for America. The Americans have plenty of money. I am sure that there are many Americans who need to employ an experienced steward. If not, there are other ways to get there; holidays, studying or visiting friends. I have no friends in America, but I am sure that I will know someone who will lend me an American friend – for a small fee. I should like to get a visa to study in America, it cannot be too hard, there are many Africans who go to university in America. I could be a student in America and then, when I return, I could be a teacher or a small politician. There is definitely money to be made in the government by men with degrees from smart foreign universities. Maybe one day we will have smart universities here in Ghana. Not just in Accra, but in Kumasi and Tamale as well. That is for next year, maybe the year after, or for

ten years' time. I am a man who cannot wait for ten years. I must think what I will do today. Tomorrow I will also go to the library, I will find the names of the best universities in America, like the one that the president attended, and I will apply for a place there. Perhaps I might work for the governor for a few more weeks after all. A letter of recommendation from him would surely help with my application.

You see, I am not nothing, not a small man at all. Today I am a Chief Steward and soon I will be an Educated African with an American degree and a job in the government, and I will be the one employing a steward. There is never only one way, there is the African way, the Ghanaian way, even the Ashanti way. Forward Ever, Eh? Forward Ever.

1.23 Ghosts in the Castle

Princess Marina's Second Story

Memory is a string across time, vibrating with the voices that have not been forgotten.

I am ill, feverish, I hear voices. They are everywhere, whispering, screaming, talking among themselves, sometimes loud, sometimes softly, but all the time they are there. I heard them first at the aerodrome, as soon as we landed.

'Maren, Maren, Maren, Maren.' The noise of propellers, an aircraft waiting to leave, but the runways were empty. Nothing moved, except the smoke and the flies, and the little children. Two of them, both girls, pretty little things, running ahead of their governess. A scowling white girl and a Negress with a pretty smile. She was carrying the flowers, frangipani, or maybe portulaca. I learnt to arrange flowers not to name them. I am not a gardener. The children wore white shoes. So impractical. I would never put Alex in white shoes, not if she was here with me. There is too much dust, fine and red, hanging in the air. It is unfair to expect a child to keep clean when the dust is everywhere. It has settled on my dress, hiding in the folds of the cloth. Will it stain, I wonder, when I send it to the laundry? I have washed my hands three times, but I can still feel it, between my fingers and in the lines on my hands. My grandmother used to read palms, what would she say, if she could see my hands now? She would say that I have an old lady's hands, lined and veined. She would see omens. My heart line, a raw slash on my palm. I asked her once if I'd fall in love. She told me I would, but I'd die with a broken heart. She also said that it wouldn't be my heart that killed me, but my head. Your hands do not lie, she said. She was right. You can paint a smile on your face, but you are left with the hands that your life has given you. My hands are old, as am I.

I wonder what my grandmother would have thought about the flower girls. They were well behaved, she would have liked that, but they were ordinary, everyday children, peasants she would have called them. She had no time for peasants; we were told not even to look at them. She claimed never to have actually seen a peasant, she thought it was beneath her. She would have scolded me for acknowledging them, for taking the flowers from their hands. Times have changed. I thought the children were charming, images of each other like a picture and its negative. The black one in a white smock, the other so pale that she was hardly there. Where did they come from? They seemed detached from the crowd, almost forgotten. Like me, they did not belong at the aerodrome. I thought about those girls while I was waiting. The negress had

asked if I was a real princess. One never quite knows how to answer that because, of course, I am a princess. A child of the Blood Royal as they say, and yet not here, not anymore. The other child, the one who looked like Alex answered before I had time to speak. 'Of course she is not a princess,' she said, 'she hasn't got a crown.'

She was right, I am now merely a Duchess because I married beneath myself, as all women do. I married a Duke and now people have forgotten that I am a daughter of the throne, I have become the mere wife of a Duke. A sacrificial royal.

I spent an hour at the aerodrome sitting under that enormous umbrella. The boy who held it was strong for his age. He would have been used to working in the fields I suppose. He didn't move at all while I was greeting the chiefs and the sub-chiefs and the politicians and the prospective politicians. Did they train or is it inherent for the natives? Michael would have been looking around and waving the umbrella. He is never still; he will need to change.

I need to change; I will soon have more uninteresting people to meet, but I want to rest.

I can still hear the voices.

'Maren, Maren, Maren.' How do they know? No one calls me Maren, not now. Children are called Maren, not widows. Of course they didn't know, the voices are not real. They come from my memory, from a fever, from this unbearable heat. When I was in the Governor's car and out of the sun, the voices faded. I thought they had lost interest. I wish that were true. When I left the car, for what they called a Traditional Welcome, the voices were there again.

'Maren, Maren, Mar-Mar-Maren,' in time with the drums, with the dancing, I believe they are called talking drums. By the time we returned to the car my head was throbbing, no one had an aspirin, not even the lady's maid. Angelica would have been prepared. Angelica is always prepared, but she is unwell. She collapsed before we left the aircraft. It was fortunate that the doors had not been opened; the embarrassment if she had fallen in public. She has been taken to the white hospital, I will visit her tomorrow, if I have time. So, I am to be dressed by a lady's maid who I do not know and who does not know me; a negress, loaned to me by Lady Arden-Clarke. Not her own maid, that would have been a considerable inconvenience, and I am only a Duchess – not the princess that had been expected, and, as my hostess has mentioned more than once, 'everyone is terribly busy preparing for the celebrations!' I have refrained, so far, from responding to this provocation. The royal families of Europe do not respond to such rudeness. My mother-in-law, the last queen, would, I am certain, have had something to say. She was, in many ways, very like my grandmother.

The journey here was interminable, and I was tired. It is as if the time moves more slowly in the tropics, I must ask someone when I get home if this is true, it may, perhaps, be connected to being so close to the equator. The ten-minute journey to Government House, as I must remember to call it, took several hours. It was a relief when the gates closed on the town, and I was enclosed within the white, reassuring walls built by my ancestors. I felt at home. It did not look like a castle, more like a fort, or a prison. The thickness of the walls, the height of the windows, its commanding position, it was built for containment, a place of suffering. I felt its pain as I stepped from the car.

I have been given the best rooms, as is to be expected. I may only be a Duchess, but I am representing the Queen, and the Queen's representative cannot be housed in the servants' quarters. The rooms are large, well-furnished and look out both to the sea and to the courtyard. The bed is comfortable, and the linen is fresh, but I cannot sleep here. I can hear weeping. It comes from the walls, seeping from the very stones. No one else hears it, I have asked, but they just smile and ask if I need something to drink or perhaps a doctor. I do not need a doctor. I need to go home.

'It's cane rats,' they say. 'Cane rats running through the rafters.' But I am not a fool, they would not allow a representative of the queen to sleep with rats.

'It's a bush baby,' they say. 'Someone in town has caught a bush baby and you can hear it screaming.' It is not a bush baby – whatever that is – unless a bush baby is a spirit child, crying in pain for its mother. I know what hear, not an animal but a child, crying like my own little Alex when she lost her father. I am alone and yet surrounded by ghosts who are in this castle or in my head. It does not matter; they still haunt me.

Memories are always true, even when they've been forgotten.

My grandmother would say that because I cleave to the dead, I call to the dead. My grandmother knew about death. She would talk to our ancestors, asking for blessings, bringing down curses. Yet she did not mourn for her son. Weeping, she said, would stop the dead resting and trap their spirits where they fell. The dead, she would say, are as close as your breath, walking in your shadow, spreading mischief, seeking revenge. I was afraid, as a child, of the things she told me. I said this to the maid when she was arranging my clothes. I did not fear talking in front of her as I was sure that she could speak no English. I was wrong, she spoke several languages, both native and European, but that is of no importance. She had not spoken

so I assumed that she could not speak. It was a foolish mistake. When I knew she had understood me I expected scorn, but there was none. 'You should take care,' she said, 'these are no friendly ghosts.' She said no more, continuing to arrange my clothes in the drying room before leaving.

I have not slept. That, perhaps, is why I hear voices. They are not real, just waking dreams. Dreams that haunt me because I am tired and because I am hot and because the air is too humid. I understand now why my niece stayed at home. I would like to be at home - with my children. But she has a choice, and I do not. I am used to having no choice. The opinions of daughters do not matter, unless they are queens.

I hate this country, and I will be pleased to leave it. It is right to return it to the natives; they are used to the heat. The White Man's Grave it is called. An appropriate name. Everything here wants to kill you, the flies and the snakes, the scorpions and the savage animals. You could drown in the air and bake in the sun. It is a murderous country, targeting those who do not belong, slaughtering anyone not of its soil.

Memories are always true, even when you do not remember.

The maid returned today, entering my room as silently as before. I told her that I keep losing things. Small things, pens, handkerchiefs, nothing important, nothing that cannot be replaced, but it is inconvenient. Am I becoming careless? Is my mind failing? Will I slip back to my childhood like Aunt Grace? The maid shook her head.

'Let them go,' she said, handkerchiefs do not matter, pens do not matter. Let them take what you do not need.'

Perhaps she is right. Perhaps I am losing the things that I no longer need. Or perhaps it is the maid, or a friend of the maid who is selling my belongings in the market. I will not say anything, because if there is no thief, then my mind has turned, and I will become my grandmother and look for omens in the moonlight. I leave tomorrow. Everyone will be leaving tomorrow, or soon after, so why should I worry about a few missing trifles. It is of no consequence.

The maid hands me a leather bag, no bigger than a child's hand.

'Keep it close,' she said. I pulled at the string that kept it closed. 'No!' she whispered, snatching it from me before cradling it like a new laid egg. 'Don't look! It's too dangerous, full of power; much too powerful for a white woman. I gave your silver hairbrush for that.' I asked what

was inside, but she would not say. She just kept insisting that it would keep the ghosts away if it was close to my skin. I turned around while I lifted my skirts and tucked the bag into my pocket; the one that, ever since the dark days, I have sewn into every slip that I own. When I turned back, she had left the room. I felt calmer as I felt the bag, warm against my skin. I watched the waves crashing on the rocks and realised that the ghosts had fallen silent. They had not left, I could feel them in the room, like a sea breeze on a sunny day, but the voices were gone.

My sleep was uninterrupted by dreams.

When I awoke, she was in the room again, coming and going like a *Domania* in the winter. I wondered if it was her, and not her bag of secret magic that kept the ghosts at bay.

As I dressed, she asked about the fetish, smiling when she saw it safely stowed in my petticoat.

I told her that I would return it when I left, but she shook her head.

‘These are not the only ghosts, madam. These will stay, others will follow. They follow you like ants follow sugar. Keep it.’

And what about these ghosts I thought, and what about tomorrow? As the flag comes down and the country is reclaimed, what next? Will they be happy? Will they rest when I am gone? Can they rest until the last Englishman steps onto the last gunboat? Perhaps, it depends on who they are; or maybe on who they were.

Memories are always true, even if they are yet to happen.

I am ready to go home. I have been attentive at every reception, tapped my feet at every dance. I have shown interest, when I am not interested, and told no one that I miss my children. I have listened to speeches and smiled and I have given speeches that I believe to be lies. Failure is not the friend of the truth. My ankles are swollen, and my skin is dull. I long to hold Alex and brush her curls and whisper the stories of witches and houses that walk through the forests and children that turn into horses. I have an hour to rest. Then I will change and attend my final party, a last hurrah from the empire. I will be displayed like the prize marrow at a county show. I will be there so that everyone knows that the British have not been chased away. That we have chosen to leave a country that we have no further interest in. This is another lie; we have been chased away, thrown out like yesterday’s lunch. The British who live here are complaining. That is what the British do, they are not stoic like my people. They feel it is unfair that they have to go

home; they feel displaced even though this is a land where they do not belong. What do they know of displacement? Leaving your homeland, that is displacement. Having to go home, that is nothing. I do not want that life for my children, a life of wandering and never belonging. I have no home, not Greece, nor Denmark, nor Russia, not even England now that George has gone. We are alike, my ghosts and me. The unsettled ones, travellers, ignored and unwanted. We are hopeless and unnamed.

It is the unremembered who haunt us.

Chapter 2 Critical Component:

Musings of an Implicated Observer

2.1 Introduction

[My writing is political only in] the sense that I am the depository for the dead. There are dead people who speak through me³

This collection of short stories has forced me to become what Dorfman describes as a depository for the dead. This was not my intention. When I started to write these stories, and perhaps even before that, it was my intention to write a celebration of the men and women who had witnessed one of the pivotal events of the 20th Century. However, perhaps unsurprisingly, many of the people who shared their memories with me have since died. I feel the pressure to represent them fairly falling more heavily on my shoulders than I had expected. What could have been a collection of oral histories has become a way for the dead to tell their stories across time and across continents. The need to protect the identity of those who inspired my stories seems more important now than it did when I began. Partly as an act of gratitude to the story tellers, but also to preserve the memories of their friends and families. Telling the stories felt important, but disguising the storytellers feels even more important. It is, in some way, a small act that can partially repay the kindness of the owners of these histories.

Whilst writing these stories I have found, as many authors before me, that history is more complicated than I was led to believe. I became ever more grateful that I was not trying to reflect historical truth but to start with a history, or more accurately with several histories, and, as Günter Grass is believed to have said, *'to transform history, from dates and times, into how*

³ 'Writing and Political Oppression', *In Our Time*, dir. by Ariel Dorfman (BBC Radio 4, 4 August 1999) <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00545g8>> [accessed 5 October 2023].

*people reacted, were shaped and, in some cases, were distorted by it.*⁴ It is this freedom to not just interpret, but also to modify and remix, the memories of my storytellers, my witnesses of history, that has enabled me to feel comfortable in writing this collection, even though the original tales are not mine to tell. By a process of interpretation, I have been able to take the events known to us through memoir, documentaries and the printed press and transform them into the sort of fiction that will, I hope, reach people who might otherwise not choose to access the more scholarly accounts of these events.

Because of the cross-cultural nature of these stories, I will use this commentary to examine the challenges that I faced when writing my collection and outline some of the steps that I have taken to diminish the danger of inauthenticity and appropriation to which any such writing is prone.

⁴ 'Writing and Political Oppression', *In Our Time*, dir. by Nadine (quoting Gunta Grasss) Gordimer (BBC Radio 4, 4 August 1999) <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00545g8>> [accessed 5 October 2023].

2.2 Why Me, Why This, Why Now?

*Certain contexts and locations are allied with structures of oppression, and certain others are allied with resistance to oppression. Therefore, all are not politically equal and, given that politics is connected to truth, all are not epistemically equal.*⁵

It is a long time since I last visited West Africa; almost fifty-years in fact. My father was still alive then. Now, my one last remaining link with Ghana, my older brother, is over 70 and he has forgotten almost everything about our life before we moved to England. My parents, my sister, and all those uncles and aunties (both related and not) have died. All I have left are some badly damaged photographs, a few letters and one or two mementos which my mother had kept. These stories are, therefore, a collection of memories, twisted and changed so that their inspiration is hidden, but memories, nevertheless. They represent fragments of the past from my family, from friends of my family and, often, from people that I hardly knew. All of whom have helped me to add pieces to the broken jigsaw that represents one very small slice of the story of Ghana's independence. These stories are, in a way, an effort to preserve not just my memories, but also the memories of others. They are my attempt to share the inherited memories that Annie Ernaux calls 'the territories of youth.'⁶ I have taken these personal histories and woven them into the greater story, endeavouring to bring 'a human dimension into historical questions.'⁷ So, with so few links to West Africa left for me to explore, why did I choose to write this collection of independence stories now?

⁵ Linda Alcoff, 'The Problem of Speaking for Others', *Cultural Critique*, no. 20 (1992), pp. 5–32 (p. 15).

⁶ Annie Ernaux, *The Years*, trans. by Alison Strayer (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2023), p. 28.

⁷ Michal Bosworth, "'Let Me Tell You ...' Memory and the Practice of Oral History.", in *Memory and History*, ed. by Joan Tumblety, Routledge Guides to Using Historical Sources (Routledge, 2013), pp. 19–33 (p. 31).

It is the significant anniversaries that are likely to be the catalyst for commemorations.⁸ From exhibitions that celebrate the founding of nations,⁹ and academic discussions around the anniversaries of publications,¹⁰ to Speeches and Pageants honouring national successes. It is the tenth, the hundredth and the five-hundredth anniversaries that we celebrate. So rather than adding my voice to international commemorations that marked 60 years since the founding of the state of Ghana or even waiting for the centennial celebrations – possibly too optimistic as I would be almost 100 years old myself; I was prompted by a purely personal event. My late mother, having been diagnosed with cancer, wanted help sorting her belongings – Döstanging I believe it is called in Sweden. Although, at first, I was reluctant to take part in this acknowledgement of my mother's mortality I came to realise what a privilege it was to spend this time together. Time when there were no children, no husbands, and no work to distract us. We could just be, and, between countless pots of tea and far too much lemon cake, share memories and record final wishes. I posted old photographs to one grandchild and cine films to another. I sent jewellery halfway around the world and to the other side of town and arranged for local charities to collect unwanted furniture. Final administrative tasks that she undertook to make life easier for the family even though she clearly found them difficult.

I am grateful for her perseverance, as without it I would not have learnt so much about her 'more than just my mum' life. Like many people, I had underestimated what my mother had seen and done and all the people that she had met. It was the objects, more than the photographs or home movies, that seemed to trigger her memories and helped me to understand her life as a young mother in, what was then, the Gold Coast. There was a reel of Coates sewing thread, its paper label still in place, that my father gave her on their second wedding anniversary; along with a promise to buy a sewing machine when they completed their first tour of duty. The three months wait must have felt like an eternity for a seamstress with limited access to the latest fashions. She kept the thread, somehow managing to hide it from her children, as precious as her own mother's wedding ring. A two-shilling book signed by the naturalist George Cansdale, prompted stories of visits by the author on an expedition to capture

⁸ 'Our Anniversary Obsession', *Archive on 4*, 2019

<<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m00099qw>> [accessed 24 May 2024].

⁹ Free Library of Philadelphia, 'Centennial Collection: Digital Collection', *Exhibition Facts*, 2001 <https://web.archive.org/web/20151116042008/http://libwww.library.phila.gov/CenCol/exhibitionfax.htm?utm_source=pocket_saves> [accessed 8 April 2024].

¹⁰ Justine Houyaux, 'Through the Looking-Glass Sesquicentenary Conference 2021', *About the Conference*, 2021 <<https://throughthelookingglasssesquicentenary.wordpress.com/about-the-conference/>> [accessed 8 April 2024].

the ƆwƆ *kese* (or Magnificent Serpent) – which, incidentally, was presented to my parents three weeks after the *Noisy Englishman* was safely out of the area.¹¹ She did not mention if she kept the snake, I imagine that she did not. The book itself held no memories for me, but its notes of camphor and old paper reminded me of my father’s bookcase. We decided to keep the book. What, after all, was one more book in a room full of books.

There was one item that held memories for both of us. An old Kente Cloth faded and threadbare, that I had used as a counterpane for the first 20 years of my life. For me, it represented the security of a happy childhood. Somewhat like a comfort blanket hidden under a teenager’s pillow, it was time for me to admit that I had outgrown this particular part of my childhood. For my mother, however, it prompted much deeper memories. Memories that revealed its historical, rather than personal, significance.

“Bin or charity?” I asked, holding up the cloth. Throwing it away seemed wrong, but one glance at the condition made me realise that the local Oxfam shop would consider it worthless. My mother took hold of the cloth, running it between her fingers.

“I should have taken better care of it,” she said. “It was a gift, you know; one of many.” I waited. She lifted the fabric, light slipping through the places where the weft had perished, leaving a fine web of red silk. “Only the best cloths were made of silk, everyday Kente was made of a mixed fabric, lasts longer, but not so soft.” I was expecting mum to tell me that it came from the Asantehene or perhaps from the Queen Mother. (I knew that she had received at least one other gift from the Queen Mother, so it seemed possible.)¹² Instead mum explained about the origin of the silk (southern Europe) or the division of labour (women prepared the thread whilst men did the weaving) etc. etc. After a while I felt that I could re-write the book on traditional Kente; well maybe not, but I was sure that I could have a reasonable stab at a chapter on the subject. However, I was no nearer to knowing the providence of my old counterpane.

“He was a handsome man you know.” She said after a while.

“Who?” It was as if she hadn’t heard me.

¹¹ George Cansdale, *Reptiles of West Africa*, West African Series (Penguin, 1955).

¹² **Note:** ‘The Queen Mother referred to here is also known as the Asantehemaa or Keeper of the Golden Stool. She has considerable influence in the selection of the next Chief. It should be noted that the Ashanti society is matrilineal’.

“Yes, he was handsome, everyone said so. Not as handsome as your dad, no one was to my mind. But handsome in his own way. And charming; he was such a charmer, so polite, so thoughtful, always bringing little gifts. And always something for the children as well. He’d let Denise climb on his knees. Not John. He wasn’t one for hugging strangers, but Denise, yes, he always had time for her. He used to stroke her hair, blonde it was then. Stroke her hair and lift her up when she couldn’t climb. He was always welcome to visit. Your dad would talk politics with him for hours on end, well at least for bottle on end. Open a bottle, pour libation, talk shop then open another bottle. Long evenings. I wasn’t keen on him pouring libation indoors, but I liked his company.” My mother has still not told me who the cloth was from.

“His visits stopped when he got elected. Just like that - everything changed. He was surrounded by bodyguards, we didn’t know why at the time, but later, after we left, we heard about the assassination attempts. Not everyone thought he was a hero then, but I still had a soft spot for him.” I still could not work out who she was talking about. Not the Asantehemaa, obviously.

“Who gave you the cloth mum?” I asked.

“You know! You must know, I told you when you were small, when I used to tuck you up in bed. It was Nkrumah. He gave one to your brother as well. Not a real one, just fabric printed like a Kente; I remember him showing John how to wear it. But you know John, couldn’t keep anything.¹³ “That was when I found out that my mother, a collier’s daughter who grew up ‘on the wrong side of the church’ and who started working in at 14, knew President Kwame Nkrumah. I was shocked, I should not have been but, as I said before, it is easy to dismiss the experience of our parents’. But having learnt one piece of her history, I wanted to know more. I wanted to know everything, but I had to wait. My mother was ill, and talking exhausted her. Over time I was able to squeeze more information from her, drop by drop, but enough to start to sketch out her life after she married my father. She spoke of travelling to Ghana and the people she met there; about scandals and parties; naturalists and missionaries and about the day she met the Duchess of Kent. So, I made notes and called her friends. I spoke to our neighbours and their friends and eventually collected enough material to write these stories; prompted as they were, not by newspapers or anniversaries but by a well-worn cloth made from strips of recycled silk. I did not, of course, consign it to the bin. Instead, I am pleased to say, that I found the cloth a new home in the care of someone who truly appreciates it’s history.

¹³ **Note:** My elder siblings, John and Denise.

It would be fair to say that I was inspired by my mother's stories (and those of my other interviewees). However, I did not actually retell their stories. I took an event from one, a feeling from another and, often, the suggestion of a character from a third. I wanted to create an impression of the occasion rather than to claim that my stories represented historical facts. So, my Kente Cloth, that was so desperately in need of repair was combined with the news photograph of Ghana's first cabinet,¹⁴ became the starting point for my story of the weaver, *Not Quite Enough*.

¹⁴ Unknown, *The First Official Group Photos of Kwame Nkrumah's Cabinet Ministers*, approx 1960, Photograph <<https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/See-one-of-the-first-official-group-photos-of-Kwame-Nkrumah-s-cabinet-ministers-in-the-1960s-1925832>> [accessed 2 May 2024].

2.3 Memory and Forgetting

[I made an effort] to substitute and rely on memory rather than history because I knew that I could not, should not, trust recorded history to give me the insight into the cultural specificity I wanted.¹⁵

As was the case with my mother's Kente cloth, it was often objects that triggered the 'best' stories from my interviewees, the fetish kept by a missionary (although she swore that she didn't believe in such nonsense); the book that a forester's wife had been reading when a woman with gunshot wounds was brought into the hospital,¹⁶ and even the photograph of a pretty young woman who had won an old soldier's heart, then left him without saying goodbye.¹⁷ Indeed, when Sabine Marschall studied artifacts and memorabilia belonging to African migrants, she found that it was the everyday objects, more than photographs or souvenirs, that triggered the most poignant memories.¹⁸ (Although in the case of the photograph of the unrequited lover, this was certainly not the case). However, with this exception, the memories shared were more often than not linked to small, everyday objects. That being said, my experience, when collecting these memories, was more closely aligned with Barthes' observation that any material – object, text or picture – can be endowed with meaning.¹⁹ What is more, it appeared that the depth of endowed meaning was positively correlated with the clarity of the memories it evoked. However, this is only an impression, grounded on the interviews that I conducted as background research, and is not evidence based.

One question provoked by the above observation is whether meaning triggers memory or vivid memories endow increased meaning to the object being remembered? This, however, is outside the scope of this research and may be more appropriately be answered by scholars of

¹⁵ Toni Morrison, "I Wanted to Carve out a World Both Culture Specific and Face Free": An Essay by Toni Morrison', *Guardian* (London, 8 August 2019), section Culture.

¹⁶ W.A. Fairbairn, *Some Common Birds of West Africa* (Church Missionary Society, 1933).

¹⁷ **Note:** The tales attached to these three objects became the starting point for the following stories: *Ghosts in the Castle; Medicine and Magic; and The Old Coaster*.

¹⁸ Sabine Marschall, "Memory Objects': Material Objects and Memories of Home in the Context of Intra-African Mobility', *Memory Studies*, 24.3 (2019), pp. 253–69 (p. 253).

¹⁹ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Vintage Classics, 1993), pp. 110–11.

social science. More appropriate to this analysis is to question both the reliability of such memories and the extent to which their reliability is relevant when writing a fictionalised history. For ease, I will consider these two questions together, as they are, after all, intrinsically linked.

Before discussing the reliability of memory – not just, but especially, of those of events in the far past – it is necessary to know a little about how memories are laid down; because, as Sakiru Adebayo says in his recent monograph.

*What is remembered [...] is not the “actual event” but a representational form [...] a mediated re/construction of that event.*²⁰

That is to say, memories cannot be likened to the cine films of family picnics. Recorded once and kept for ever, unchanging except for occasional damaged by accident or time. They can more accurately be likened to the bardic fables, kept alive by the telling, and refined by repeated retelling. (A theme which I explore in more detail in the first story of this collection, which opens with the sentence ‘Memory is always true, even when it isn’t.’)

²⁰ Sakiru Adebayo, *Continuous Pasts: Fictions of Memory in Postcolonial Africa*, African Perspectives (University of Michigan Press, 2023), p. 40.

2.4 The Implicated Observer

*A fish doesn't know that it is surrounded by water. (Ewe Proverb)*²¹

I am such a fish; steeped in the legacy of colonialism and yet being unaware of the extent to which I am shaped by its influence.

Michael Rothberg famously described the phenomenon of the *Implicated Subject* as neither a victim nor a perpetrator, but rather a participant in histories. Less actively involved than perpetrators and yet not fitting the mold of the passive bystander.²² In other words to be vicariously responsible for the 'indirect, structural and collective forms of agency that enable injury, exploitation, and domination'²³

In this chapter my intention is to examine responsibility one step away from those that we might call *Implicated Subjects*; those who I will call *Implicated Observers*. Someone, in fact, like me.

There is a challenge around how should I define this person, who was not involved in the historical events but who was, inevitably, influenced by them. Europeans who were born into the legacy of colonialism are like the fish in the Ewe proverb; we are surrounded by the heritage of colonialism and yet we do not, cannot, notice the ways that it shapes our existence. We have no memory of what it is to be either colonised or coloniser, it is "other people's memories [that] gave us our place in the world"²⁴ Thus, my perception, and indeed that of all contemporary observers, is shaped by inheritance, experience and education. Why then, if I claim to have only benefited from colonialism in an accidental and indirect way, do I describe myself as an implicated observer?

There is a degree to which this implication is self-proclaimed; something that could be described as 'feeling implicated.'²⁵ Personal introspection, along with contemporary public

²¹ Cephas Yao Agbegmenu, 'African Proverb of the Month', African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories, 10 January 2009 <<https://afriprov.tangaza.ac.ke/proverbsofthemothoct09/>> [accessed 29 February 2024].

²² Michael Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators* (Stanford University Press, 2019).

²³ Hanna Arendt, 'Collective Responsibility', in *Responsibility and Judgment* (New York: Schocken, 2003), p. 157.

²⁴ Ernaux, *The Years*, p. 29.

²⁵ Michael Rothberg, 'Feeling Implicated: An Introduction', *Parallax*, 29.3 (n.d.), pp. 265–81.

discussion, highlights the extent to which I have been a beneficiary of colonisation. It is not that, like the Trevelyan family, I come from a family who became rich from slave ownership.²⁶ Neither did my family trade in poached ivory or smuggled gold from the West African countries that they lived in. However, I would not have had a comfortable middle-class upbringing if my father had remained in England. (Both of my parents came from similar working-class backgrounds; both lost one of their parents to illness when they were young, and both were sent to live with relatives to help stretch limited family incomes.) The reason that my mother gave for their move to Ghana was so that, unlike their siblings, they did not want to start married life living with their relatives. In fact, I still benefit from the legacy of colonialism as my home is rented from a charity started by the wife of a colonial administrator.²⁷ This is all without considering the ways in which the British nation overall benefited from the colonial legacy. Whilst writing this I have been reminded of *Tut*, the poem by Helen Johnson, in which she highlights that whilst we may not be guilty of overt partiality, we may well contribute to the problem in small, indirect ways.

*I know you are not the priest
Who plots damnation,
[....]
But the grit
In the wash of your gaze,
Scrapes casual abrasions,
An incidental graze,
And it builds up over the day,
In stalactites*²⁸

I believe that the phrase ‘casual abrasions’ is the key to thinking about the role of the implicated observer, the person who is unconsciously adding to the problem.

Yet, perhaps, if I am honest with myself, I am not just an implicated observer. Perhaps, by setting my stories in a culture that is not my own, and around an historical event that is pivotal to a country that is not my own, I am stepping beyond the status of implicated observer. It could, I believe, be argued that by writing stories based on the colonial exploitation of Ghanaians, I am adding to the harm of colonisation, simply by the act of repeating and fictionalising the histories of the people involved. In other words, have I become an *Implicated*

²⁶ ‘Wealthy UK Family to Apologise in Grenada Over Slave-Owning Past’, *BBC News*, 2023 <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-645257709>> [accessed 28 May 2024].

²⁷ SGN editors, ‘Little by Little We Travel Far’, *Our History*, 2023 <<https://www.sovereign.org.uk/about-us/our-history>> [accessed 28 May 2024].

²⁸ Helen Johnson, ‘Embracing the Mosaic: Crafting Collaborative Poetics in Research for Critical Resilience’, in *Doing Performative Social Science*, ed. by K Jones (Taylor and Francis, 2022), pp. 179–94.

Observer. Returning to Michael Rothberg's definition of the Implicated Observer as someone who does not directly take part in the degradation or injury but who nevertheless vicariously exacerbates the harm done by reviewing, observing or recording the original. Although most frequently associated with the field of Art History, it can equally be applied to any situation where the creative object draws on the exploitation of a third party.

I had to ask myself if there was a substantive difference between my use of colonial archives detailing an attack on a young house girl as inspiration for part of my story, *Foreign Service*, and Malcolm Browne's famous photograph of The Burning Monk.²⁹ In both cases an act of violence has been co-opted in order to tell a story. In some ways it could be said that Malcolm Browne was less guilty than I am. The monk was, after all, making a public protest by undertaking self-immolation. It would be fair to assume that when Thich Quang Duc chose such a dramatic form of protest he was aware that it would be considered newsworthy. So even if he did not give his explicit permission for the photograph of his suffering to be shared it could be argued that there was implicit consent. This was not the case of the women who inspired my story *Foreign Service*.^{30 31} Here, two violent sexual attacks on young women were reported in separate news articles. One may assume, particularly considering the moral attitudes of the time (mid-20th Century) that these women would not have sought to publicise their ordeals. Yet I have used their suffering as a starting point for a piece of fiction. Does this mean that I am adding to the pain of the victims by repeating these events, even if indirectly?

I must acknowledge that this is a danger, but not, I think, a great danger. The events are too far in the past and too far removed from my story to be easily linked, for example the article outlined in the Journal of American History, centred on the rape of two girls when their car was overtaken by young men celebrating their graduation. I was inspired by the record of the statements given by the young men, concerning their attitude to African American women. It was this dismissive attitude that was the inspiration for the attack that forced John Jr. to accept a job in West Africa. I do not believe that anyone reading the article alongside my story would be able to see the metamorphosis of one into the other. Similarly, I do not believe that by using the

²⁹ Malcolm Browne, *The Burning Monk*, 1963, Photograph
<<http://100photos.time.com/photos/malcolm-browne-burning-monk>> [accessed 22 March 2021].

³⁰ 'Note: This Was Based on an Article in a Scrap of Newspaper (No Date or Title on Cutting) about a Series of Attacks on House Girls Which Had Resulted in Three Deaths. This Was Found in a Box of Mixed Papers, Donated to the Bodleian Library by the Family of Eric Cunningham', not known, not known.

³¹ Vol. 91 in The Journal of American History No. 3 (Dec. 2004), pp. 906, 'Four Convicted in Rape Case', *Tallahassee Democrat*, 14 June 1959, p. 7.

report about 'an unidentified native discovered in a burnt out police house', in my story *The Letter*, added in any way to the pain suffered by this man's family.³² Defining this, and other stories as the reason for my implication in the harms of colonialism is, I believe, an act of self-delusion that borders on narcissism. To do so would be to put myself at the centre of any review of implication.³³ That was not my intention.

In fact, it is not, I believe, my decision to write any individual story in my collection that implicates me in the colonial legacy. Instead, it is the assumption that it is acceptable to write, from my privileged position, someone else's story. It is this assumption that makes me inclined, in Rothberg's words, to feel implicated.³⁴ However this is, I think, a double-edged sword. By claiming to be personally implicated in the benefits and detriments (depending on if you are looking through the eyes of the colonist or the colonised) of colonialism in West Africa, I am either acknowledging my privilege or placing myself at the centre of the analysis. Something that is almost narcissistic in nature.

Yet, as I mentioned earlier, I am in a position of privilege and that privilege does implicate me in the colonial legacy and, therefore, calls into question the appropriateness of writing about this pivotal moment in African history. I could have just abandoned this project and written instead about Mining or Lacemaking in Nottingham. Both sides of my family have deep roots in the English midlands and there would have been no question of implication. (Although, of course, I would have been just as attached to the characters as my writing would still have been grounded in 'inherited memories.'³⁵) Why then did I not do this and save myself from answering questions about keeping to my own lane? It was because the personal stories appealed to me. It was because, at least to begin with, I wanted to amplify the stories of those who had the quietest voices, and it was because I wanted to stretch myself as a writer and develop characters with whom I had little in common. I will deal with these questions in more detail when I discuss my writing process. However, at this point I would like to say that it is by concentrating on the individual characters in my stories rather than the wider political environment, I have come to accept that I can write these stories, as a privileged outsider, acknowledging my cultural

³² George Sinclair, 'Collected Documents from Sir George Sinclair'. (Bodleian Library Archives, 1970). Report on Fire in Police House used as part of the inspiration for *The Letter: The Story of the Down River Boys*

³³ Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject*, p. 19.

³⁴ Rothberg, 'Feeling Implicated: An Introduction'.

³⁵ Vanita Sharma, 'Inherited Memories Second-Generation Partition Narratives from Punjabi Families in Delhi and Lahore', *Cultural and Social History*, 6.4 (2015), pp. 411–28.

implication, but not solely defined by it, in order to create characters outside my own experience. This opinion is not universally espoused, the writer Kit de Waal, for example, has well publicised views on the matter. Whilst not saying that writers should never engage in cross-cultural writing, she has warned writers to ask if there is a legitimate reason to adopt the voice of marginalised communities if they are not themselves from those communities.³⁶ Whereas Bernadine Evaristo has said that ‘the whole idea about cultural appropriation, where you are not allowed to write beyond your own story, is ridiculous.’³⁷ Possibly, at least partly, as she has been able to create sensitive, believable characterisation outside her personal experience.³⁸ However she does stress the importance of thorough research and sensitive portrayal.

I have endeavoured to avoid the trap of becoming what Kate Law describes as a ‘white exiled writer[s] ... that are insufficiently mindful of history.’³⁹ However, I am, as I have said, an implicated observer of Ghana’s escape from the yoke of colonialism. I will, in the next chapter, describe some of the steps that I have taken to try to warrant ‘the privilege of being enabled by the generous contributors to my thesis] to tell these stories’, and hope that I have, at least, approached a satisfactorily nuanced characterisation.

³⁶ Kit de Waal, ‘Don’t Dip Your Pen in Someone Else’s Blood: Writers and the Other’, *The Irish Times* (30 June 2018), section Culture <<https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/don-t-dip-your-pen-in-someone-else-s-blood-writers-and-the-other-1.3533819?mode=amp>> [accessed 19 June 2019].

³⁷ Bernadine Evaristo, Bernardine Evaristo in conversation Girl, Woman, Other at Hay Winter Weekend, 2019 <<https://www.hayfestival.com/p-16063-bernardine-evaristo-in-conversation-with-peter-florence.aspx?skinid=16>> [accessed 17 May 2010].

³⁸ Bernadine Evaristo, *Mr Loverman* (Penguin, 1983).

³⁹ Kate Law, ‘Mostly We Are White and Alone’: Identity, Anxiety and the Past in Some White Zimbabwean Memoirs’, *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 29.3 (2016), pp. 297–318 (p. 299).

2.5 Stories and Histories.

*What Happened ... need not be set down here in full detail, because brutality is brutality and excess is excess and that's all there is to it. There are things that must be looked at indirectly because they would blind you if you looked at them in the face, like the fire of the sun.*⁴⁰

Would it not have been easier, or at least more honest, to have assembled my collected histories into a reliable nonfiction account built around the memories of the Gold Coasters that shared their stories? Or perhaps I could have justified writing a different book, one that was entirely fictional relying only on my existing knowledge, however slight, of the events that surrounded the independence celebrations in 1957. I would not be the first author to write 'outside my lane.' Indeed, it would not have been the first time that I had written "outside my lane"; my first book relied almost entirely on my imagination: I had almost no experience that mirrored that of my protagonist, and yet the book was shortlisted for the Carnegie book award. However, perhaps that is not a valid comparison as when I set out to write *The Ghosts and Jamal*, I intended for it to be set in an unnamed African country,⁴¹ in an unspecified time.

Should I then look for more relevant comparisons; certainly. However, the challenge must be to find examples of fiction that most closely align to my approach to writing this collection. As I have said earlier, I have not lived in Ghana, although the rest of my family has. My father travelled to West Africa in 1952, and my mother followed him six months later. My siblings were born in Kumasi in 1953 and 1954 respectively, where my family remained until 1960. After which my father's work took them to Nigeria. There is, therefore, no obvious reason that I should have chosen to base my research on people's recollections of Ghana's independence rather than Nigeria's?

⁴⁰ Salman Rushdie, *Shalimar the Clown* (Vintage, 2005). P 309

⁴¹ Although not intended, the settings for *The Ghosts and Jamal* was identified by readers and reviewers as central and southern Nigeria. I can now recognise how much of my own experiences growing up in Nigeria influenced my writing.

2.6 Writing and Re-Writing

*What he writes and does not write, what he sketches out, even preliminary sketches for the work, and what he drops ... all this interplay of differences is prescribed by the author-function. It is from his ... position, as an author, that he will fashion ... the still shaky profile of his oeuvre.*⁴²

As I have said previously, I knew that writing these stories would be, to say the least, challenging. However, I was also aware of the weight of expectation placed on me by the generosity of the people who had contributed to my research. Whether correctly or not, I felt a degree of responsibility to tell their stories kindly as well as honestly. Not just for the sake of the witnesses but also for their families. For example, one of my interviewees, who has since died, told me about a number of quite shocking crimes that he committed when he was living in Africa. I chose not to include any reference to these incidents. Partly this was because I really did not want to retell them (I found them so shocking) and partly because I do not believe that he had discussed this period of his life with his family. Was this cowardice on my part? Was I missing out important historical facts? The answer to the first question is probably, but I stand by my decision as being the right one for both me and my contributor's family. The second answer is a resounding no; the historical fact was important, his attitude to the people involved was shocking, if firmly held; however, the event took place after he left Ghana, so I felt that I would be falsely representing the history of Ghana's independence if I included this revelation. Clearly, I did change events in my short story cycle. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that I selected carefully which events I wanted to write about, and even more carefully which I wanted to avoid. I did not, for example, include Kwame Nkrumah in any of the stories – although my characters frequently mention him. I felt that to include imagined events which centred around such an iconic figure was inappropriate for someone who was not Ghanaian. For a similar reason I changed the letter writer in my story *The Letter* as I had been inspired by a book written by Nkrumah's 'friend' Genoveva Marais. This, along with her book *Nkrumah: As I Knew Him*, provided a starting point for this story.⁴³ However, as my conversation had indicated that Ms

⁴² Michael Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon, 1972), p. 222.

⁴³ Genoveva Marais, *Kwame Nkrumah: As I Knew Him*, (Janay Publishing, 1972).

Marais had received a considerable amount of abuse from Nkrumah loyalists after her book was published, I felt that it would be unfair to name her in the story, so the letter writer became the minister's mistress instead of the president's mistress. It made little difference to the story, which was essentially about the consequences of acquiring the letter of the title for a group of young party supporters. In writing these stories I was most interested in the personal lives of the characters and the degree to which the independence celebrations impacted on their lives. For this reason, there seemed no advantage in causing offence unnecessarily.

In order to provide a more detailed example of my writing process I will look at one of my stories in detail, *Ungodly Men*, and use this as an exemplar of the steps that I typically took in creating my characters. I have chosen this story as I particularly liked the character, Mattea, and because it provides an insight into several aspects of story creation.

Mattea's story (*Ungodly Men*) is one of the longest in the collection, although it is still less than four-thousand words long. I have deliberately chosen to write very short, short stories (almost flash fictions in some cases) so that I can widen the range of stories told within the limited document length of this thesis. Unlike many of my stories, for example *The Card School* which was based on an account given by a relative who had played such a game, this is one of the few stories not directly inspired by witness interviews and has, therefore, resulted in a number of challenges not present in other stories. I will explore these issues and then discuss the approaches that I have taken to mitigate them.

2.6.1 The Story

Told by a woman who runs a market chop house selling palm wine, *Ungodly Men* is a compressed life history of the Mattea. It is a troubling, but ultimately positive, story; beginning with Mattea describing her early life; then explaining how and when she changed her name. It charts how her meetings with a series of ungodly men and supportive women, helped her to change the trajectory of her life. It touches on issues of power and powerlessness. In addition, it focuses on the overlap between Christianity and traditional Ghanaian belief systems. Of all the stories in the collection it is the one that has the most tenuous connection to the independence celebrations themselves but, probably, has the clearest examination of the relationship between colonialism and subjection of women in what was traditionally a matrilineal society.

2.6.2 The Inspiration

The origin of this story was a number of news articles; not actually linked, but which I was able to combine to create Mattea's story. Take, for example, the early part of this story where Mattea, or *Awunduro* (Poison) as she was then called, was sent to live with a member of her father's family. This was inspired by both a recent news articles and on my mother's formative experience of being sent to live with her aunt. Although I had been shocked by the treatment that my mother described I must stress that it did not inspire the story directly. My mother was required, at 14, to do all the housework, and once she started work, to give all her wages to her aunt. However, my mother did not suffer from the sort of abuse that I detail in Mattea's story. At the same time as my mother was telling me how unhappy she had been in the years after grandma died a number of news reports highlighted the plight of young domestic servants in West Africa. One report, told to a reporter from the Thomson Reuters Foundation in Lagos, described how a ten-year-old girl from Benin was sent by her mother to work as a maid in Nigeria. The child told of her treatment at the hands of her employer.⁴⁴ A little later, I was forwarded a link to a report from a European missionary society highlighting a similar problem.⁴⁵ In particular this report, which incidentally did not provide even tentative solutions to the problem, described how children are sent to live with 'an uncle or cousin in a big city,' to seal an alliance or reinforce family ties. By taking this concept to the extreme, I was able to imagine how Mattea might be sent to work for her uncle in order to pay off a family debt. This was a useful plot device, enabling me to set in motion Mattea's unfortunate life story. A useful plot device but one which brought with it some dangers. Was I conflating attitudes and experiences of girls in unrelated circumstances and dissimilar cultures? For example, there is evidence of families being forced to sell their underaged daughters to richer husbands in post-conflict environments, such as Afghanistan⁴⁶ and Jordan,⁴⁷ in order to help the family finances. However, this is not

⁴⁴ Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani, 'Trafficked, Beaten, Abused: Life of a Nigerian House Girl', *Everything News, Reuters*, 24 July 2017 <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nigeria-trafficking-children-idUSKBN1A80ZI>> [accessed 1 November 2023].

⁴⁵ Peres Blancs France, 'Petites Bonnes en Afrique', *Voix d'Afrique*, March 2014 <https://www.peresblancs.org/petites_bonnes.htm> [accessed 10 November 2023].

⁴⁶ *Afghan Families Sell Their Children into Marriage Amid Hunger Crisis*, dir. by Al Jazeera Reporter, 2022 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ehvEQzvZ2iE>> [accessed 1 November 2023].

⁴⁷ 'Syrian Refugees Sell Daughters in Bid to Survive', *CBS News* (Jordan, 15 May 2023) <<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/syrian-refugees-sell-daughters-in-bid-to-survive/>> [accessed 1 November 2023].

analogous with Mattea's story. She was not married to her cousin, merely abused by him. I did not want to write a story about child marriage (something that is strictly illegal, but still, unfortunately, practiced in parts of Ghana).⁴⁸ I wanted to write about the abuse of power and the strength of women to overcome this.

2.6.3 Challenges

I felt that I had the kernel of a good story, however I was very wary of stepping outside my lane. There was, I believed, a danger of becoming one of the white writers who Kate Law says are 'characterised by linear, limited constructions, of African societies.'⁴⁹ I had to ask myself if I had begun to use colonial tropes in my writing, conflating the abuse of domestic servants (something that Mattea experiences on more than one occasion) with the conditions experienced in under-funded refugee camps. I hoped that this was not the case but needed to be sure. After all, by choosing to include stories, such as *Ungodly Men*, in my collection it was possible that my writing might fall into the trap of White-Saviour writing. That is to say, I wanted to leave the reader with the impression that Mattea was a strong woman, overcoming what was an extremely unfair situation, without the aid of 'well-meaning Europeans' such as the nuns who felt they were there to help the 'poor natives to make the best of their unfortunate lives.'

For this reason, I asked more than one sensitivity reader to provide feedback. In the end I asked two women and one man. Originally, I only asked the women, as I felt this was truly a tale of women rising above the patriarchy. However, later I realised that it was important to ask for feedback from a Ghanaian man as well. I did not want my personal beliefs to impact too heavily on the story that I was trying to tell. (Later I had to concede that this was not possible; I was always going to be imprinted on my writing, and I was foolish to try to avoid this.)

The feedback that I received was generally positive from all three readers, with one reader saying, when referring to *Ungodly Men*.

⁴⁸ Richard de Groot and et al, 'Child Marriage and Associated Outcomes in Northern Ghana: A Cross-Sectional Study', *BMC Public Health*, 18, 2018, p. 285

<<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5827991/>> [accessed 13 November 2023].

⁴⁹ Law, 'Mostly We Are White and Alone': Identity, Anxiety and the Past in Some White Zimbabwean Memoirs'.

*I didn't find any instance of the white saviour narrative or anything that was outrightly insensitive.*⁵⁰

And another commenting on the authenticity of Mattea is as follows:

*There is a beautiful display of Mattea's culture in this story. You did this by referring to the deities she worships and prays to, reference to the different names she bore – that were given to her by her father, by the women.*⁵¹

This gave me confidence in the authenticity of Mattea in West African eyes; however, I was still concerned about the degree to which I described the violence that she suffered. I had not originally intended to write stories that were so overtly violent, and yet several stories, including Mattea's, have a central theme of sexual abuse. Initially I was reluctant to include them. On one hand, I believe that the stories tell an important facet of the fate of some women in 1957, on the other I did not wish to include unnecessary violence. (Something that I personally avoid reading if possible.) However, I believe that the very human stories that they tell are important to the overall structure of the collection. I reminded myself that many of the short story writers that I most admire (Ama Ata Aidoo for example) do not shy away from more challenging story lines. In addition, there can be no doubt that Ghanaian women, like women all over the world, were subject to hidden abuse and no doubt will continue to be subject to it for the foreseeable future. In the same way that spoiled children will be obnoxious (Entitled); old women will want to die amongst their families (Going Home) and young women will admire handsome men (Market Queens). I have set my stories in the middle of the last century but tried to make them relevant to the contemporary reader. I have written about old people and children, Africans and Europeans, heroes and outright villains. I have been specific in many ways and tried to make my characters individuals whilst at the same time working and reworking the stories until their triumphs and challenges are universal. I hope that I have achieved this, but I cannot be sure. That is something that I will only know if and when I am brave enough to expose my stories to the glare of a wider audience.

⁵⁰ Maamme Blue, 'Sensitivity Report for Bridget Blankley', unpublished, March 2023 <https://tomandjerry.fandom.com/wiki/Puss_Gets_the_Boot/Transcript> [accessed 17 August 2025].

⁵¹ Samiat Bakare, 'Sensitivity Report March 2023', unpublished, March 2023.

2.7 The Broken Mirror: Shards of Literary Influence

*As though through a glass darkly
The age of strife I see
Where I fought in many guises,
Many names, but always me.*⁵²

History, like memory, is not a single event; we all see things from different angles. Those who were there have different memories than those who only heard their stories. Every time we recall events, every time we expose them to the interpretation of others, some tiny alteration is made. I tend to think of my literary influences in the same way. One minute I am sure that I am most inspired writers like Virginia Woolf's whose modernist novel, *Mrs Dalloway*;⁵³ is possibly the definitive example of the masterful use of internal monologue. A format more recently echoed in Madeleine Thien's prize winning collection *Simple Recipes*.⁵⁴ Or perhaps my writing is anchored in the stories that I heard as a child, those from my mother, who would weave new versions of the traveller tales from her youth⁵⁵; or Aunt Bisi's⁵⁶ stories of the deep forest terrified and captivated us in equal measure. Maybe my writing style is not inherited from either of these things, but on much, much more. On re-reading my recent stories there appears to be a strong link to what I was reading (both fiction and non-fiction) in my late teens; when books such as *Fear of Flying*,⁵⁷ *The Edible Woman*,⁵⁸ and *The Female Eunuch*,⁵⁹ helped to shape my

⁵² Robert H Patton, *The Pattons: A Personal History* (Crown Publishing, 2022), pp. 198–99.

⁵³ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, e book (Digireads, 2021).

⁵⁴ Madeleine Thien, *Simple Recipes* (McClelland and Stewart Ltd, 2001).

⁵⁵ **Note:** My mother had Traveller heritage. My great-grandmother being the first in her family to adopt a settled lifestyle. The rest of her family continued Travelling for several more generations.

⁵⁶ **Note:** Aunt Bisi was our Cook for a while. At the time we lived in the Nigerian bush about 30 kilometres north of Ibadan. She would sometimes tell us stories to keep us quiet while my mother had her afternoon siesta.

⁵⁷ Erica Jong, *Fear of Flying* (Holt, Rinehart and Wilson, 1973).

⁵⁸ Margaret Atwood, 'The Edible Woman', in *The Margaret Atwood Omnibus* (Andre Deutsch, 1991), pp. 9–261.

⁵⁹ Germain Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (MacGibbon and Kee, 1970).

opinions during the era of second wave feminism and the key female positive legislation.^{60 61} More likely, none of the above represent a single, definitive influence on my writing style. Instead, they have all impacted, to some extent, on what, and how I write. Like others, I have not written in isolation; after all, a writer is not, as Tanure Ojaide says, 'an air-plant, but someone rooted in a specific place and time.'⁶² And I am a European woman who was moulded by an army of strong, twentieth century, women.

It is because of this multiplicity of influences that trying to examine my writing feels like looking through a broken mirror, shards forming a distorted image; the whole is visible, but it is visible in fragments that don't fit together perfectly. It is not just the witnesses of Independence that have different points of view, with every story that I discovered so did I. Thus, there is not a single interpretation of my writing, the influences on my writing, or even the subject of my writing. Everything overlaps, sometimes contiguous and sometimes not. There is no single picture, except to the extent that these stories, these histories became more powerful in the telling and hopefully have become more powerful still by their juxtaposition.

Having said that there is no single influence on my writing I will instead consider how my work fits into various shards of the literary canon.

I said earlier that part of my motivation for writing these stories was to recreate a short story cycle, similar in form to Daniyal Mueenuddin's book *In Other Rooms Other Wonders*⁶³ where each chapter is a self-contained story loosely linked to both previous and subsequent chapters, mainly by the inclusion of reintroduced characters. I found the idea of writing stories that worked as narratives in their own right, but where deeper insights would be revealed by other chapters or stories in the collection, presented a new authorial challenge which would give me the opportunity to stretch my skills as a writer. However, Mueenuddin's work turned out to be more of a service station than a road map. It fuelled my interest but did not guide my writing. Mueenuddin's work, based on his knowledge of his native Pakistan, has no temporal link to a specific event. It provides a compelling and sharp-edged illustration of a country and its people

⁶⁰ UK Government, Abortion Act 1967, 1967

<<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1967/871/contents>> [accessed 26 July 2025].

⁶¹ UK Government, Equal Pay Act 1970, 1970 <<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1970/41>> [accessed 26 July 2025].

⁶² Tanure Ojaide, 'The Perils of a Cultureless African Literature in the Age of Globalization', in *Indigeneity, Globalization, and African Literature*, African Histories and Modernities, e book (Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), pp. 3–17 (p. 3).

⁶³ Daniyal Mueenuddin, *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* (Bloomsbury, 2009).

but is not grounded in particular historical events, as is the case works such as Maza Mengiste's *The Shadow King*,⁶⁴ or Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half a Yellow Sun*,⁶⁵ both of which are set during times of wars of independence. My stories like those of the aforementioned authors, are both temporally and spatially specific grounded, and like these authors I am too young to have experienced the events personally, so my stories, like theirs, are based on second, or even third hand reports. However, unlike them, I am writing from the perspective of an inheritor of the legacy of colonialists rather than of the colonised; something that I will discuss later in this chapter. Nevertheless, it is for reasons of similarity that I will start by considering the use of multi-narrator writing, and how my work may be allied with this format.

When thinking of the modern multi-narrator writing one may be forgiven for turning immediately to Bernardine Evaristo's and her 2019 novel, *Girl, Woman, Other*.⁶⁶ This novel spans the period from 1905 to 2017 and presents as a series of stories, each focused on a different character, with the main protagonist in one chapter becoming a subsidiary character in the next, and so on. It may thus be considered a saga for our times; comparable, in some ways, with Woolf's *Orlando*,⁶⁷ (although, of course, differing in both the time frame and the 'otherness of the protagonist/s.) Yet despite their differences these two novels have much more in common than this, modernist by design and feminist in nature. I feel privileged to be able to find points of comparison between my own prose and feminist, modernist, multi-narrated books, such as these. In the sections that follow, I will explore the series of 'shards' that inform my own creative practice.

⁶⁴ Maaza Mengiste, *The Shadow King* (Canongate Books, 2020).

⁶⁵ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Half a Yellow Sun* (Forth Estate, 2006).

⁶⁶ Bernadine Evaristo, *Girl Woman Other* (Hamish Hamilton, 2019).

⁶⁷ Virginia Woolf, *Orlando*, Paperback (William Collins, 2014).

2.8 Feminism; The First Shard of the Mirror

*the first woman God
ever made was strong
enough to turn the
world upside down all
alone,*⁶⁸

In this section, I will consider 21st century feminist literature, and in particular I will use *Girl Woman Other* as my main template; whilst, of course acknowledging the wealth of influences from earlier works in this tradition with such works as *Orlando*, *On Black Sister Street*,⁶⁹ *The Orchard of Lost Souls*,⁷⁰ *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*⁷¹ and *An Unnecessary woman*⁷² being some of my particular favourites.

Firstly, I must ask, what are the characteristics of feminism, or at least, what characteristics can be said to be commonly agreed upon? As a starting point I will take Penny Weiss' definition that she uses in the introduction to *Feminism and Autobiography*,

*Feminism offers a distinctive vantage point ... highlighting ... gendered constructions ... [and] the ethical and political consequences of such assumptions*⁷³

. The key phrase, I believe, is 'gendered constructions,' that is to say feminism is concerned with those cultural norms that are products of history, place, politics and people and which impact (often negatively) on the lives and opportunities of women. This being so, we may think of feminist literature as that which addresses these norms – overtly or otherwise. Therefore, we might expect the typical 21st century feminist novel, if such a thing can be said to exist, to explore, as a minimum, issues around female identity and expectations; to challenge typical patriarchal power structures; to show examples of strong, self-determined women; to highlight the increased challenges of intersectionality, referencing overlapping identities such as class,

⁶⁸ Sojourner Truth, 'Sojourner Truth: Ain't I A Woman? Women's Rights', Women's Rights National Historical Park, 2017 <<https://www.nps.gov/articles/sojourner-truth.htm>> [accessed 13 August 2025].

⁶⁹ Chika Unigwe, *On Black Sister Street* (Vintage, 2010).

⁷⁰ Nadifa Mohamed, *The Orchard of Lost Souls* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013).

⁷¹ Njabulo S Ndebele, *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* (Ayebia Clarke Publishing, 2003).

⁷² Rabih Alameddine, *An Unnecessary Woman* (Corsair, 2013).

⁷³ Tess Coslett and Et al, *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, Theories, Methods*, ProQuest Ebook Central (Taylor & Francis Group, 2000), pp. 19–20 <<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/soton-ebooks/detail.action?docID=168494>> [accessed 28 July 2025].

sexuality, gender and disability; weaving these into the plot and examining the extent to which these impact on the characters and their lives.

So, is it reasonable to consider *Black Star Rising* as feminist fiction? This question is difficult to answer, not least because, like the curate's egg, its feminist credentials are 'good in places.' Some stories, such as *Ungodly Men*, *Royal Protection*, and *The Seer*, feature strong, independent women, who have taken control of their lives. Many of the stories highlight the societal norms and expectations common in the post war era. However, there are stories, such as *Card School* and *The Old Coaster* show those same norms from the perspective of privileged white men, who have no intrinsic interest in changing the status quo.

The split between female and male-driven stories was informed by the memories of the people that I interviewed, most of them women. They told me stories of change, of alienation, of survival and of the lives of the men that forged or blocked their paths. I heard stories of strong women, so I wrote strong female characters. Although my intention hadn't originally been to write overtly feminist fiction, it was in many ways inevitable that I did; as Marisa Bates says in her recent book, '*the stories of women [are] feminism's most powerful arsenal*'.⁷⁴

Nikita Gill's description of a *Fearless Woman*, in her 2018 poem of the same name, neatly summarises the women that I have attempted to characterise in my fiction.

*Defined by no man, you are your own story,
Blazing your way through the world, turning history into herstory.
And when they dare to tell you
About all the things you cannot be,
You smile and tell them,
"I am both war and woman, and you cannot stop me."*⁷⁵

It feels as if this verse could have been written about the titular character in *Ungodly Men*: *Mattea's Story*. Mattea repeatedly rejects the roles assigned to her by others. In fact, we hear of this for the first time as the story opens.

*My father didn't call me Mattea. I chose the name myself; I
own this name. It's my baptismal name,*

⁷⁴ Marisa Bate, *And Still We March* (HQ, 2024), p. 27.

⁷⁵ Nikita Gill, 'Instagram: An Ode To A Fearless Woman', letter, 29 June 2018 <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BknQjHoH6NX/>> [accessed 30 July 2025].

Her original name, the one her father gave her, being designed to ensure that she would never marry. Then within that same paragraph she rejects the biblical concept of women being the source of original sin.

I was only a girl, and the priest said that girls are too sinful to understand the will of God. Now I know that it is not the girls that are at fault, but the men who teach them about sin, but I was only a girl then, so how could I know such things.

Instead, she blames the men who teach women about sin – possibly implying, as we see later, that it is the men who are guilty of these sins.

It is also worth noting the extent to which Mattea relies on women – both physical and supernatural for her very survival. Starting from when her mother died and the woman who washed corpses took the young Mattea to live with her and continuing until the end of the story when it becomes clear that Mattea's business is profitable due to the skills taught to her by the old nun Sr. Crispina. Even when she relies on the 'old religion' she calls on help from the ghosts of her sisters, and when greater intervention is needed, she calls first on *Mama-Wata* and then on the greatest goddess that she knows, *Asase Yaa*.

It would be wrong, however, to suggest that *Ungodly Men* is unequivocally feminist, take, for example, her lack of regret when she steals linen and silver from the convent, where she had sought shelter. Mattea does not tell the reader how she came to live in the convent with Sr. Crispina, but other stories, namely, *Going Home* and *Disappointment*, provide more insight. Overall, the reader is left with the impression that, like Ruth in *Life and Loves of a She Devil*,⁷⁶ or Eve/Allie in *The Power*,⁷⁷ Mattea escapes into a female only space in order to recover and rebuild. I have left the question of her motivation unanswered. Did she, like Eve, genuinely need space in which to recover from her trauma, thinking that

She likes it in the convent. The nuns, for the most part, are kind and the company of women is pleasing to Allie. She's not found the company of men has had much to recommend it.⁷⁸

Or is it more likely that having stumbled into the arms of the convent used it as a sanctuary to build her inner strength. Ending up as a stronger, more powerful woman.

*locking yourself away when you suffer, it is alchemy in motion. It is you rebuilding your blood, your bones and the spine you hold, from an abysmal situation.*⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Fay Weldon, *Life and Loves of a She Devil* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1983).

⁷⁷ Naomi Alderman, *The Power* (Viking, 2016).

⁷⁸ Alderman, *The Power*, p. 42.

⁷⁹ Nikita Gill, *Fierce Fairytales: And Other Stories to Stir Your Soul* (Trapeze, 2018), p. 122.

For other stories the feminist credentials are less clear. My characters may notice, and even comment on, the societal expectations that have impacted on their lives, but there is no overt message of 'the woman triumphant.' Take for example Ruby the protagonist of *Royal Protection*; she is clearly an intelligent and resourceful woman – having worked in France for the S.O.E; a skilled and valued member of a specialised team. By 1957 she felt underused and underappreciated, at one point saying, '*it's hard to settle as a secretary, or a companion, when you've seen what I've seen.*'

What is worse, in her eyes at least, is that she is now being briefed by men who are less professional than she is.

Employed for what I know, and what I can do. But there should have been a proper briefing, particularly for a job like this. So, what Intel did I get? Three foolscap pages and a couple of photographs, and when? Two days before my flight.

Her sarcasm about this briefing shows both her disdain for those 'Whitehall Jonnies' along with her reliance on colleagues from the S.O.E. and friends from Cambridge shows the trust that she places in women over men when she is in a tight situation. Later in the narrative she comments on the cultural norms that she lives with, which, incidentally she considers both a hindrance and an advantage. When musing on being a female assassin she says,

It would be easier if I was a man of course, it's always easier if you're a man, but then you're more likely to get caught as well so swings and roundabouts, swings, and roundabouts. I like that about the colonies. They've got a nice old-fashioned view of women; still think we need protecting.

Such a direct observation about society might be considered to be overt or even condescending, but I am not alone in including such unambiguous statements about societal bias. In chapter four of *Orlando*, when the titular character has first become 'a young Englishwoman of rank'⁸⁰ Woolf draws the reader's attention to the change in attitudes that accompanies Orlando's change in gender.

*It was not until she felt the coil of skirts about her legs and the Captain [Sic] offered, with the greatest politeness, to have an awning spread for her on deck, that she realized with a start the penalties and the privileges of her position.*⁸¹

⁸⁰ Woolf, *Orlando*, p. 99.

⁸¹ Woolf, *Orlando*, p. 99.

Although, unlike in *Orlando*, none of the characters in my novel have experienced life as both as a man and as a woman, they are nevertheless aware of the traditional expectations associated with their gender and with the degree to which events such as the return of men to the workforce following WWII and the promise of post-independence transformation has altered, or will alter, these expectations.

Like Ruby, many of the protagonists in my stories are aware of the limitations placed on women's ambitions. This is best summarised by the fortune teller Leboné when she complains about the unrealistic futures that young girls want her to predict for them.

She wanted what all these girls wanted, a happy future. She wanted to know if she would marry a wealthy man, if she would have sons, and if so, how many? Would she live in the city, in a big house with a guard on the gate or would she live like her mother in a village hut with a lazy husband and too many children. Of course she wouldn't have an easy life, no woman did. Even rich women, even the Queen Mother or the wives of the politicians didn't have easy lives.

However, Leboné, whose life is, to some extent, lived outside the mainstream, offers no solution to the lives of the girls who seek her help. Instead, she, somewhat despairingly, says that '*The life of a woman was all tears and blisters.*'

Not all of my female characters can be said to be model feminists. Irena, the first of the characters in *Foreign Service*, shows no empathy for the women who work for her, initially threatening to fire her cook because another servant offended her. For that matter she dismisses everyone, except her mother, as unimportant and uninteresting. Her greatest disdain, however, is saved for the fourteen-year-old mother of her husband's child.

Irena, who knew that the girl would have been painted like a five-cent whore, and who was convinced that no decent family would have let their daughter leave the house that way. ... She blamed the girl, not John, for everything that happened.

Therefore, although some of the stories have clear feminist credentials, others do not. However, the inclusion of female characters who do not support other women is not the only potential issue with referring to my stories as feminist text. A greater issue is the inclusion of sexual violence against women.

Feminist theory maintains that it is not possible to separate gender from power and power from the embedded status quo. To quote a United Nations resolution from 1993.

Violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which has led to domination over and discrimination against by men ... and that

*violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position.*⁸²

The social historian Verene Shepherd, has added to this, saying that

*Gender-based violence also has roots firmly embedded in patriarchal ideologies.... Patriarchal societies, combine with notions of gender hierarchy, race/ethnicity and class. In addition, religious orthodoxy, gender inequity, the lack of education around gender relations and the economic situation ... feed the problem as they empower men and keep women subordinate.*⁸³

This being said, it might be surprising that I have said that the inclusion of gender-based violence in my text is problematic – at least from a feminist perspective. The depiction of gender-based violence in literature or film is, by some feminist thinkers, should never occur, representing as it does a second violation of the women depicted. Something echoed by Michael Rothberg when he highlights the trauma caused by displaying pictures of the degradation of Jewish women in Holocaust museums, and questions if this double, or triple, trauma can be justified or if it is, in fact, a form of voyeurism.⁸⁴ There can be no definitive answer to this dilemma, as

*What is at stake is not just whether we speak about rape or not, but how we speak about rape and to what end*⁸⁵

I had not intended to include gendered violence in my text, but I did. Why? Because more than one of my interviewees spoke about it, either as victims, as witnesses or as y perpetrators. It seemed disingenuous to ignore what they told me. It is said that

*There is no single story of 'women's writing'. One woman's life and work can never, should never, stand for all women's lives and works*⁸⁶.

⁸² Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women*, General Assembly resolution 48/104 (United Nations, 1993) <<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/declaration-elimination-violence-against-women>> [accessed 8 July 2025].

⁸³ Verene Shepherd, 'Historicizing Gender-Based Violence', in *New Daughters of Africa: An International Anthology of Writing by Women of African Descent*, ed. by Margaret Busby (Myriad Editions, 2019), pp. 206–10 (p. 207).

⁸⁴ Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject*.

⁸⁵ *Feminism, Literature and Rape Narratives: Violence and Violation*, ed. by Sorcha Gunne and Zoe Brigley Thompson (Taylor & Francis Group, 2009), p. 28 <<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/soton-ebooks/detail.action?docID=995701>> [accessed 8 May 2025].

⁸⁶ Anna Beer, *Eve Bites Back: An Alternative History of English Literature* (Oneworld, 2023), pp. 14–15.

But the experiences of a single woman can be told and, more than that, deserves to be told, even, or perhaps especially, in an anonymised form. I have attempted to, as Jyotika Virdi, balance my writing to avoid eroticizing such violence whilst not denying its existence. Have I sanitised the narrative to support the '*patriarchal discourse of honour and chastity*'?⁸⁷ Well, I have certainly sanitised the narrative. Not everything that was revealed in my interviews was included in my final text. I was, after all, writing fiction, not history. However, I also felt that little would be gained by a detailed account of the actual violence. Would the women that I wrote about, the women who lived in the mid-twentieth century have described their experience in detail? Probably not. Gender related behaviours are always set in a social context. Some things are discussed and some are only implied, even now. I feel justified in including the sexual violence within work that was intended to be feminist, I have chosen the language carefully, I have presented the violence from the women's points of view, and I have reflected the reality as it was told to me. Therefore, I return to my original statement, can this work be classed as feminist literature; yes, in places.

⁸⁷ Jyotika Virdi, 'Reverence, Rape - and Then Revenge', in *Killing Women: The Visual Culture of Gender and Violence*, ed. by Annette Burfoot and Susan Lord (Wilfred Launer University Press, 2006), p. 251272 (p. 266).

2.9 Polyperspectivity/Polynarrative: The Second Shard

*There never were in the
world two opinions
alike, no more than two
hairs or two grains.*⁸⁸

The University of Hamburg's *Living Handbook of Narratology* provides two possible definitions of polyperspectivity: namely that [multiperspecivity] is either

*A basic aspect of narration
Or
A mode of storytelling in which multiple, often discrepant viewpoints,
are employed for the presentation and evaluation of a story and its
storyworld.*⁸⁹

More specifically, the philologist Vera Nünning, insists that the mere presence of multiple viewpoints is insufficient, claiming that in order to avoid the definition including most of contemporary fiction, the interaction between these perspectives must be integral to the story, representing, for example, the same event from different viewpoints.⁹⁰

Taking this to be a working definition then the story *Foreign Service: A Family Story* can be said to be a polyperspective text. The single event, the rape of the 'house-girl', *Schoon*, is told from three different perspectives, the first from John Jr., the perpetrator.

He knew that Theresa would still be working, but he could wait, and in the meantime the new house-girl had a good figure, and he was sure that, like her predecessor, she just needed a firm hand to bring her in line. He wondered what had happened to the last girl: he'd liked her, she was feisty, a real fighter, a biter when the mood took her. He smiled. The thought of her firm body pushed against the wall excited him. He wondered if the new girl would be the same, playing the good girl while being deliciously naughty.

The event is then told, or at least implied by the victim, *Schoon*.

She took the tin of cookies into the shade. She grabbed a bottle of soda from the refrigerator and a book from the shelf. She had planned to spend her free time with Mrs Danvers, again. Perhaps that

⁸⁸ Michel de Montaigne, 'Diversity and Dialogue Quotes', with Xavier Resorce Editors, Online Resources, 2013 <<https://www.xavier.edu/jesuitresource/online-resources/quote-archive1/diversity-quotes>> [accessed 13 August 2025].

⁸⁹ Marcus Hartner, 'Multiperspectivity', *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, April 2014 <<https://www-archiv.fdm.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/node/37.html>> [accessed 8 August 2025].

⁹⁰ Vera Nünning, *Multiperspective Narration: On the Theory and History of Perspective Structure in the English Novel*, trans. by Google Translate, German (Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2000), p. 18.

was why she didn't hear the car until it stopped outside the bungalow. Perhaps that is why she was alone in the house when he opened the screen-door, and perhaps that was why she never read English novels again.

Then finally the reaction of the nurses, in whose home the attack took place is described.

she had been in the kitchen curled, like the child she was, with her back to the stove. Therese and Mimi became nurses once again. *Schoon* had at first been unwilling to call nurses sisters, now she understood as her employers became her family, cradling and caring for her, cooing and stroking her face. They wanted to take her back to the hospital, but she said no. They wanted to call the police, but she said no. No was the only thing she said, so the nurses knew the extent of her hurt.

None of these tells us explicitly that John Jr. was responsible for the attack on *Schoon* and, indeed, the text does not tell us that she was raped. However, taken together the reader is left in no doubt what happened and who was responsible; a conviction that can only be reinforced when the reader recalls that Irena, John's wife, recalled that the reason for moving to the Gold Coast was because John Jr. had been accused of raping a young girl in Texas, where they had previously lived. So, this story appears to meet all of the criteria for polyperspectivity; the same event is told from three different perspectives; all three are necessary to fully understand what has happened; their interaction is integral to the story; and the perspectives are in conflict. But that is only a single story. I am less sure if the work as a whole can be considered to have polyperspectivity and to what extent other polyperspective writing has influenced my work.

The first book with multiple narrators that I remember reading, or more accurately hearing, was *Under Milk Wood*⁹¹. Poem, play or radio feature, (thus avoiding the necessity for a conventional plot) at the time I neither knew nor cared about its official genre, what I did know, in that pre-teen/teen crossroads when my father still read to me, was that this 'story' was full of intrigue and complexity. I loved the way that the tone changed between the first and second voices and between Captain Cat and his drowned crewmen.⁹² This was well before I had any intention of becoming an author, and yet, no matter how famous the actors, nor how brilliant the performance I still hear my father's voice when the characters 'cross and cast'⁹³ throughout the play. These voices are intrinsically linked – all the voices

⁹¹ Dylan Thomas, *Under Milk Wood* (Everyman, 1995).

⁹² Thomas, *Under Milk Wood*, p. 4.

⁹³ Hugh Stewart and Cambridge University English Country Dance Club, 'Elements of English Country Dance -', Note: Cross and Cast Is a Common Way for a First Couple to Move down a

contribute to the reader's understanding of the village and the characters who live, (or have lived) there.

First Voice

*Captain Cat, the retired blind seacaptain, asleep in in his bunk
in the seashelled, ship-in-bottled, shipshape best cabin of Schooner
House dreams of*

Second Voice

*never such seas as any that swamped the decks of his S.S.
Kidwelly bellying over the bedclothes and jellyfish-slippery sucking
him down salt deep into the Davy dark where the fish come biting out
and nibble him down to his wishbone and the long drowned nuzzle up
to him ...*

First Drowned

Remember me, Captain?

Captain Cat

You're Dancing Williams!

First Drowned

I lost my step in Nantucket.⁹⁴

In some ways this is the perfect example of polyperspectivity, demonstrating, as it does, that the use of multiple narrators is key to both plot and structure;⁹⁵ Yet, unless, like me, you thought of the work as a novella before you knew that it was written as a play, it seems strange to cite this as an example of the genre. With a few notable exceptions, such as Allan Bennett's *Talking Heads*⁹⁶ and Bela Zsolt's *Nine Suitcases*⁹⁷; we expect plays to involve more than one character and for the interaction between those characters to be essential to the telling of the story. Therefore, despite it being an early inspiration, and despite the fact that it superficially fits the criteria for polyperspectivity I cannot legitimately look for commonality between my work and work produced primarily for performance. I must look instead to novels and short stories for comparison.

Although, as Alexandra Valint reminds us, the use of multiple narrators within fiction is by no means a modern phenomenon,⁹⁸ I cannot claim to have been heavily influenced by Victorian fiction as it is something that I rarely read for pleasure. (I mainly read it when it was a compulsory part of English lessons at school) Therefore, although there are many canonical books that exemplify polyperspectivity, as I am examining the fiction that has influenced my

Longways Set. They Simply Cross over the Set Passing Right Shoulders and Go down the Outside One Place (the next Couple Moving up a Little to Let Them in). Some Three Couple Set Dances Use First Couple Cross and Cast, Cross and Cast as a Way of Getting the Top Couple to the Bottom., n.d. <<https://round.soc.srcf.net/dances/elements#Cross%20and%20Cast>> [accessed 8 May 2025].

⁹⁴ Thomas, *Under Milk Wood*, pp. 4–5.

⁹⁵ Alexandra Valint, *Narrative Bonds: Multiple Narrators in the Victorian Novel (Theory and Interpretation of Narrative)* (Ohio State University Press, 2025), p. 8 <Narrative Bonds>.

⁹⁶ Allan Bennett, *Talking Heads* (BBC Books, 2007).

⁹⁷ Bela Zsolt, *Nine Suitcases*, trans. by Lob Ladislaus (Johnathan Cape, 2005).

⁹⁸ Valint, *Narrative Bonds: Multiple Narrators in the Victorian Novel (Theory and Interpretation of Narrative)*, p. 262.

writing I will concentrate on more modern examples. In doing so I am faced with a dilemma. Should I consider my work as a series of linked short stories, as originally intended, or is it more accurately described as a composite or episodic novel, and does it matter? My initial thought is that it is currently too short to be described as any sort of novel, however this could be easily remedied by including stories that are still in draft form; I have the outline for two more stories based on characters from *The Letter* (The Pastor and his son Bama) one based on the children from May's orphanage mentioned in *You Don't Know Me*, A complaint from the wife of the weaver in *Not quite Enough* and a longer story, (almost completed) from the point of view of the minister's girl also first mentioned in *The Letter*. Together these stories would add at least fifteen thousand words to the collection. Not enough to rival the five hundred pages of Gabriell Garcia Marquez's episodic novel,⁹⁹ but perhaps enough to describe the work as a novella if not a novel. Although I wouldn't be so pretentious as to compare my work to any of Marquez's novels, I have no hesitation in affirming that his work has been a major influence on my writing. I first read *One Hundred Years of Solitude* in 1977 when it was a set text in my Spanish class. (Only later did I learn that it was not part of the syllabus, but a favourite of our teacher who believed in 'stretching' her students.)

This book, so much easier for me to follow when I reread the Penguin translated edition, seems to be a quintessential example of the polyperspective novel. Each story focussing on a particular member of the extended Buendía family with each chapter existing as a stand-alone story even though the chronology and interactions are better appreciated by reading them as a whole. Described as a novel, it could, perhaps also be described as a short story cycle, at least if we defer to the description given by Robert Luscher in his classic essay, *The Short Story Sequence: An Open Book*, where he says that such a story cycle (or sequence) should display recurrence of theme, symbol and character whilst also emphasizing the 'successiveness' of the stories.¹⁰⁰ So, taking the first four chapters of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, they focus, in turn, on Ursula's husband, her great-great-grandmother, her grandson and her house. Highlighting both recurring theme and character whilst at the same time making use of polyperspective to help the reader to become immersed in the family saga.

I have claimed this book to have influenced my writing, which I believe that it has; however, it is not, I believe the multiple points of view that have had most impact on my writing style but the importance of strong opening lines.

*MANY YEARS LATER, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendía was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice.*¹⁰¹

WHEN THE PIRATE Sir Francis Drake attacked Riohacha in the sixteenth century, Úrsula Iguarán's great-great-grandmother became so frightened with the ringing of alarm bells and the firing

⁹⁹ Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, trans. by Gregory Rabassa (Penguin, 2014).

¹⁰⁰ Robert Luscher, 'The Short Story Sequence: An Open Book', in *Short Story Theory at a Crossroads*, ed. by Susan Lohafer and Jo Elyn Clarey (Louisiana State University Press, 1989), pp. 148–70 (p. 149).

¹⁰¹ Marquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, p. 1.

*of cannons that she lost control of her nerves and sat down on a lighted stove.*¹⁰²

*COLONEL AURELIANO BUENDÍA organized thirty-two armed uprisings and he lost them all.*¹⁰³

*THE MARRIAGE was on the point of breaking up after two months because Aureliano Segundo, in an attempt to placate Petra Cotes, had a picture taken of her dressed as the Queen of Madagascar.*¹⁰⁴

Without claiming to have used such striking prose I have attempted to incorporate the idea of sharp and engaging first lines into my prose, from the first line of the first story,

Memory is always true, even when it isn't

Via the introduction to the Esi, in *Interpreting Dreams*,

It was a day I would never forget, a day that will be celebrated by everyone until the gods pull Ghana back to the sea, but a day when the clouds fell onto my soul.

To our rather sad introduction to *May in You Don't Know Me*,

I know Princess Marina. I know everything about her. How she takes her tea, her shoe size, even which cigarettes she smokes and that she never smokes in public. She's never heard of me of course, but that doesn't matter

So, although my writing has been shaped by my teenage reading of Marquez, I cannot say that his work is the key to why I wanted to attempt to try polyperspective writing. That is linked much more closely to the twenty-first century novels that I have explored since I started writing fiction myself. These books, examples of which I will discuss below, are of very different styles and approach the concept of Polyperspectivity in diverse ways. Although the similarity between these books and my own work may not, at first, be obvious, it is work such as these that made me want to experiment with both the style and the inspiration for my writing.

It is difficult to think of recent polyperspective writing without turning to Bernadine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other*.¹⁰⁵ This book, which tells the stories of twelve characters (both women and non-binary) and the web of interactions that links them. This book has definitely influenced my writing, although perhaps not in ways that would be obvious to the casual observer. Evaristo's main impact on my writing has been to make me realise that writing does

¹⁰² Marquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, p. 19.

¹⁰³ Marquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, p. 106.

¹⁰⁴ Marquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, p. 208.

¹⁰⁵ Evaristo, *Girl Woman, Other*.

not need to follow conventional rules; it is OK to experiment. In a 2019 interview, in which, incidentally, she reminds us that the initial inspiration for this book came from a radio play that she wrote to celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of Dylan Thomas's birth (clearly, I am not the only author inspired by *Under Milk Wood*). It is partly because of its origins that Evaristo describes her book as Fusion Fiction, or more specifically a fusion between prose poetry and flowing fiction.

there's a full stop at the end of each section. There was something about the flowing way in which I was able to write the story that meant I could go all over the place. It's almost like prose poetry. There aren't any paragraphs. As you're reading it, the sentences flow into each other.

*The fluid way in which I shaped, lineated and punctuated the prose on the page enabled me to oscillate between the past and the present inside their heads, outside their heads, and eventually from one character's story into another character's story.*¹⁰⁶

I was not brave enough to consider abandoning punctuation (perhaps next time) but I admired the way that the stories flowed into each other and that became a dominant influence on my intention, if not in my practice. In addition, I admired the way that Evaristo, like Dylan, clearly delineated the characters by using different styles and idiolects for each of her characters. Even without naming the individuals, the first three women, Amma, Yaz and Dominique, are clearly differentiable by Evaristo's writing style, taking the opening 'sentences' from each section.

*Amma
is walking along the promenade of the waterway that bisects her city,
a few early morning barges cruise slowly by
to her left is the nautical-themed footbridge with its deck-like
walkway and sailing mast pylons*¹⁰⁷

*Yazz
sits on the seat chosen by Mum in the middle of the stalls, one of the
best in the house, although she'd rather be hidden away at the back
in case the play is another embarrassment
she's tied her amazingly wild, energetic strong and voluminous afro
back because people sitting behind her in venues complain they can't
see the stage*¹⁰⁸

*Dominique came across Nzinga at Victoria station in the rush hour as
she was being knocked down by the steamrolling effects of*

¹⁰⁶ Five Dials, 'Bernardine Evaristo: "Older Black Women, Who Writes about That?"', interview with Bernadine Evaristo, April 2019 <<https://www.penguin.co.uk/discover/articles/bernardine-evaristo-on-writing-about-older-black-women-interview>> [accessed 8 December 2025].

¹⁰⁷ Five Dials, 'Bernardine Evaristo: "Older Black Women, Who Writes about That?"', p. 1.

¹⁰⁸ Five Dials, 'Bernardine Evaristo: "Older Black Women, Who Writes about That?"', p. 41.

*London's ruthless commuters determined to catch their trains at all costs*¹⁰⁹

It is becoming clear that, when rereading the fiction that inspired me to take a polyperspective approach to writing about Ghana's Independence Day, that there is a degree to which these polyperspective writers are themselves interlinked. It seems logical, therefore, to move from Bernadine Evaristo's work to a novel for which she wrote a forward, (not for the original, which was written in 2014, but for the tenth anniversary edition). This is *A Brief History of Seven Killings*¹¹⁰ by Marlon James.

A Brief History combines an actual event; namely the 1978 attack on Bob Marley at his home in Jamaica, with literary invention. In this work the unknown attackers have been given mythical lives and identities by the author. These invented lives are so detailed that, if it were not for the casts of characters listed in the introduction, it would be almost impossible to follow the story arc as this novel stretches across 32 years from 1959 to 1991 and is set in multiple locations – both in Jamaica and in mainland America. It may seem surprising that I have included this book as one of my literary touchstones, as it is so unlike my own work. It is, in fact, this very difference that has been the key to its impact on my writing. Firstly, like Bernadine Evaristo, James Marlon has a finely tuned ear for idiolect. His characters, even those who have similar backgrounds, have very clear and distinct voices. Consider two of the gang members from Copenhagen City, Bam-Bam and Demus; we are first introduced to Bam-Bam when he recounts the murder of his parents,

*I Know I was fourteen. That me know. I also know that too many people talk too much,, who never shut up, especially the American, just switch to a laugh every time he talk to you and it sound strange how he put your name beside people we never hear 'bout.*¹¹¹

Whereas, Demus has a very different voice, sprinkling his account with biblical references,

*Somebody need to listen to me and it might as well be you. Somewhere, somehow, somebody going judge the quick and the dead. Somebody goin' write about the judgement of the good and wicked, because I am a sick man and a wicked man and nobody ever wickeder and sicker than me. Somebody, maybe forty years later when God come for all of we, leaving not one.*¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Five Dials, 'Bernadine Evaristo: "Older Black Women, Who Writes about That?"', p. 75.

¹¹⁰ Marlon James, *A Brief History of Seven Killings* (Oneworld, 2024).

¹¹¹ James, *A Brief History of Seven Killings*, p. 7.

¹¹² James, *A Brief History of Seven Killings*, p. 52.

This subtle switch of language for each character is only possible thanks to Marlon's intimate knowledge of the places in which he has set his novel and the people who live there. In an interview the tenth anniversary of its publication he says that

*I knew that A Brief History could only work if it stayed true to the voices in my head, as opposed to the voices that people might want me to write.I wasn't trying to write a novel that was deliberately cool,I was trying to write a novel that moved to the pulse of how people move right now.*¹¹³

So here was my lesson: if I wanted to write from many perspectives, I needed to ensure that each perspective belonged to a character with a different, distinctive voice and that the voices were, or at least appeared to be, authentic. At first it seemed impossible; not only am I not Ghanaian, but I was writing about the past, and to paraphrase L. P. Hartly, the past is a different country, they speak differently there.¹¹⁴ How then could I achieve this authenticity, not by intrinsic knowledge, I was not there, and if I had been, would I have remembered details of the voices that I heard; my brother, who was four in 1957, certainly cannot? I could not even rely on faithfully reproducing the language used by the men and women that I interviewed for the book. Their voices today are nothing like those of seventy years ago, I could rely on letters written at the time, or on radio and news recordings; although these tended to be over formal for everyday use, they were, what James Marlon calls '*Colonial English: verbose and very passive*.'¹¹⁵ Occasionally, such as when I overheard two women discussing the clothes worn by someone in church that morning, I have used contemporary voices, modified slightly to reflect likely interests in 1950s West Africa. However inaccurate or realistic the voices of my characters are, I have endeavoured to follow one of the 'rules' of polyperspective writing and given each character a distinctive voice.

What I also learnt from Marlon's writing is that I did not want to create a cast of 70 named characters. Something that I felt was both unnecessary and difficult to manage as a writer. So, the final two influential books that I will mention here are Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*¹¹⁶ and Janice Pariat's *Nine-Chambered Heart*¹¹⁷ both of which have a much more manageable cast of characters, nine and four respectively.

¹¹³ James, *A Brief History of Seven Killings*, pp. 695–96.

¹¹⁴ **Note:** The Past Is a Foreign Country, They Do Things Differently There. Is the Opening Line to L. P. Hartley's *The Go-Between*, n.d.

¹¹⁵ James, *A Brief History of Seven Killings*, p. 695.

¹¹⁶ Chika Unigwe, *On Black Sister Street* (n.d.).

¹¹⁷ Janice Pariat, *The- Nine-Chambered Heart* (The Borough Press, 2019).

*On Black Sisters' Street*¹¹⁸ tells the story of four women who have moved from west Africa to Belgium where they now work as prostitutes. It tells the story of their lives and recounts the death of one of them, Sisi. Swinging easily between the past and the present and between the stories and secrets of each woman (although the focus is mostly on Sisi) this book is probably not quite a multi-narrator novel but is definitely shaped by polyperspectivity. The chapters are focused on the story of one of the women, Sisi, Joyce, Ama and Efe, however, the women are not narrators in the true sense. For example, the first chapter, which begins; '*Efe discovered sex at sixteen at the back of her father's flat.*'¹¹⁹ is a chapter about Efe but not narrated by her – much like the characters in many of my stories. A key learning point from this book was the need to research my characters and their situations thoroughly. Although I was unable to travel to Ghana to speak directly to anyone there, I did interview, many through third parties, their grandchildren, and for some of my European subjects via phone calls.

Chika Unigwe has stressed the importance of her research prior to starting her novel, saying that

*speaking to law enforcement agencies, health workers, etc. [as part of the research for On Black Sisters' Street] demonstrate[s] to me just how interconnected fiction is with life*¹²⁰

Which is something that I found reassuring, not having written fact-based fiction before. I also took her advice and tried to create nuanced characters, avoiding the tendency of some Eurocentric writers to rely on stereotyped individuals. (Although sometimes this was challenging as the gentleman that I interviewed for *Leave No Trace*, presented almost as the cliché of an old colonial soldier). However, even for Major Pocklington-Hansard, I did try to, as Unigwe suggests in the above interview,

*Consciously [find ways] to tell as authentic a story as possible, to drop all of my biases while writing out of respect for my characters*¹²¹

I learnt a great deal from reading *On Black Sisters' Street*, and on learning about Unigwe's process of writing. I was also able to clarify what I wanted from my writing. That is to say, I

¹¹⁸ Unigwe, *On Black Sister Street* (n.d.).

¹¹⁹ Unigwe, *On Black Sister Street* (n.d.), p. 49.

¹²⁰ Laura Barberán Reinales, 'On Writing Transnational Migration in *On Black Sisters' Street* (2009) and *Better Never Than Late* (2019): An Interview with Chika Unigwe', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 56.3 (2020), pp. 411–23.

¹²¹ Barberán Reinales, 'On Writing Transnational Migration in *On Black Sisters' Street* (2009) and *Better Never Than Late* (2019): An Interview with Chika Unigwe'.

wanted to include more voices, although definitely not as many as Marlon James, I wanted the stories to revolve around a single event, and I wanted to avoid relying on a single, omniscient narrator.

Having highlighted how much my decision to write from multiple points of view have been influenced by the above novels, I must now move on to my final novel, *The Nine Chambered Heart*. This book is very different from the other books that I have discussed but it is a book which, since I first read it in 2019, made me determined to extend my writing style, and in particular, to develop the skills to write about characters and events indirectly. The book consists of nine chapters, each directed at the unnamed protagonist, and each purporting to be a memory about the unnamed woman as told by someone who knew her. The author described the book as a biography of love which is also a biography of life.¹²² There is no indication of the time frame covered by the book, although the first chapter describes her at primary school and subsequent chapters are 'written' by her lovers. There is also no clear geographic location, something that the author said was a deliberate strategy to enable readers to fill in the blanks themselves. So far so unlike any of my work. However, it is the authors' motivation that inspired me to try my hand at polyperspective fiction. When asked about her motivation for writing the book she said that she

*Wanted to write something different, to look at the structure in a different way, to kind of play around with voice.*¹²³

The writer has achieved this; and more. It is an extended love story, but a love story in which we know nothing about the object of affection, who I will refer to simply as *The Beloved*. There is no indication in the book that the lovers have ever met, or indeed that they know anything about each other; something that has not been the case in any of the other books mentioned in the chapter. The only thing that links them is that they have all known *The Beloved*. To return to the original definition of polyperspective writing,

*A mode of storytelling in which multiple, often discrepant viewpoints, are employed for the presentation and evaluation of a story and its storyworld.*¹²⁴

¹²² *In Conversation with Janice Pariat*, prod. by HarperBroadcast, *In Conversation With* (2018), 1:25 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cAb5GLu-5o8>> [accessed 13 August 2025].

¹²³ *In Conversation with Janice Pariat*, 0:28.

¹²⁴ Hartner, 'Multiperspectivity'.

The Nine-Chambered Heart seems to me to fit this definition exactly. Taking three, random, chapters, The Saint, The Butcher and The Lighthouse Keeper. All three, as is the case with all the chapters, addressing *The Beloved* directly.

*YOU ARE TWELVE, and you loathe me.
In my class, you refuse to paint, because you think your pictures are
ugly. And I try and tell you, like every good teacher must, regardless
of whether I believe it or not, that you'll improve with practice.*¹²⁵

We learn that *The Beloved* is strong willed, and probably not artistically talented.

*Once the summer cools, and the rains lighten in the north we head to
the hills. Our first trip away together. It is also the first time we have a
terrible fight. The first of many....
We arrive at the town and disagree over where to stay.*¹²⁶

Now we know that as well as being strong willed, *The Beloved* is prepared to fight with her lover, but that these fights will not cause her to leave him. (Incidentally later in the chapter we also learn that she prefers comfort to cash.)

However, we are told that she drank cheap, *corner shop wine* with another lover, bringing the comfort to cash observation from an earlier chapter into question.

*THE NIGHT WE decide to marry, we're drinking cheap (but organic)
corner shop wine.
It's disgusting. So disgusting that we quaff down the first few
glasses so the rest don't taste as bad.
We are sitting in your room, your small room, in this city with a
river, which is full of buildings with small rooms. You told me that
much had changed since you were here last, studying, but not this*¹²⁷.

This implies that she has travelled and returned to the same city more than once. Later in the chapter we learn that this lover married *The Beloved*, but that the strain of the marriage has exhausted the lover. Also, in contrast to The Saint, in the first chapter, The Lighthouse Keeper thinks that she is artistic.

This book, this secretive and revealing book taught me not just about the joy of Polyperspective writing, but also about the choices to be made about what to reveal and what to conceal. None of the lovers are named, *The Beloved* isn't named and yet the reader feels that they know them; probably that they have met them, or at least people very like them, in the past. This book taught me how to invite the reader to become part of the story (partly by relying

¹²⁵ Pariat, *The- Nine-Chambered Heart*, p. 3.

¹²⁶ Pariat, *The- Nine-Chambered Heart*, pp. 31–32.

¹²⁷ Pariat, *The- Nine-Chambered Heart*, p. 161.

on narration that directly addresses the reader – or maybe *The Beloved*) Before reading this book I had been told that the use of polynarration encourages the reader's participation. It wasn't until I was caught up in *The Nine-Chambered Heart* that I realised how true this was and was inspired to try some of the techniques myself.

I started this chapter by explaining how a play influenced my writing, and I will end it by showing how a book of poetry has also helped to shape *Black Star Rising*; Jay Bernard's; *Surge*¹²⁸. These poems about the 1981 New Cross Fire were written whilst Jay was the writer in residence at the George Padmore Institute. He combines his own creative writing with contemporary photography and quotes from the bereaved. For example, he has included part of an interview that was recorded for the television news:

JAMES O'BRIEN: *Do you understand why the authorities have not been able to confirm that definitively to you?*

NAZANIN AKLANI: *Yes, because they let them bur for too long. You know, James, what's more horrendous than getting burned alive? You know, you ask yourself is there anything worse? And I'm afraid there is, you know. Having no remains*¹²⁹

Which in some ways can be seen reflected in his poems, for example the one entitled +, where a father identifies the body of his son, not by the body itself, but by the remains of the clothes that he was wearing.

*-they led us down to a room - and on the table there
you was - no face, nothing to speak of – I said – this is the body where you
found the clothes? – nod, nod – So I said, it must be you – this must be my
son*¹³⁰

Jay's book represents a valuable piece of social history. Perhaps this is part of the reason that I was drawn to his writing. I can clearly remember this event, possibly because at the time I was living, temporarily, in Hither Green, which is less than three miles from the events described. Jay's poems allow the reader to both gain an insight to the events surrounding the fire and to empathize with the deep trauma caused to the whole community. Would it be appropriate to compare my work to his? In some ways this would be ingenuous. I have written about an occasion that was, with few exceptions, celebrated. Whereas Jay's work is a peon to community and personal trauma and yet although the content is dissimilar, it would seem that the methods

¹²⁸ Jay Bernard, *Surge* (Chatto and Windus, 2019).

¹²⁹ Bernard, *Surge*, p. 44.

¹³⁰ Bernard, *Surge*, p. 13.

of research are very much alike. Like Jay, I relied both on witness testimony and written records to establish the facts as presented at the time and was able to contrast and expand these with the use of witness interviews and correspondence. A clear example of the Broken Mirror Narrative form that I discussed earlier. Details of the event cannot be seen at once; the whole can only be inferred by means of assembling the shattered shards of many memories and many sources. Therefore, when trying to summarise the research process that I adopted for my work, I feel it legitimate to quote Jay from the introduction to his book:

*'And the more I read and discussed the more vexed the relationship between public narration and private truths appeared'*¹³¹

My only option in telling this story of the one, pivotal moment in history was to become a collector of trifles and a scavenger of truths. Other writers may have the skills to provide a purely factual account of events. They may have the imagination or experience to write without reference to the archives and reminiscences that I came to rely on. But such maybes and perhapses are in many ways irrelevant. I am not other writers, and I cannot draw on their skills. I have had to rely on my own strengths. Deep reading, filtering and embellishing, listening gently and where necessary, prompting my research subjects to share their memories have all been essential to my research. I wanted to create an empathetic and diverse picture of the time. Using the shards of the mirror to look back on events that I did not, could not, remember myself.

¹³¹ Bernard, *Surge*, p. xi.

2.10 Post-colonialism/Post Colonialism: The Dominant Shard.

*What you hear in my
voice in fury not
suffering¹³²*

I have now reached the section of this thesis that has given me the most sleepless nights. It is also the section where I will be forced to drastically cull the number of books that have influenced my writing if I am to avoid deleting everything else that I have written in order to list several bookshelves of modern African fiction. I have read children's books from before WWI,¹³³ and twenty-first century memoirs.¹³⁴ I have devoured books such as Amma Darko's 1995 book, *Beyond the Horizon*¹³⁵ with its echoes of *On Black Sister Street*¹³⁶ – or perhaps *On Black Sister Street Echoes Beyond the Horizon* – and Nii Akykwie Parkes's *The Tail of the Blue Bird*, with which seamlessly blends Twi and English; along with science and superstition; to provide a new twist on the traditional 'Who done it'. I have reread classics such as Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*¹³⁷ and discovered writers who were new to me, such as Kaakyire Akosomo Nyantakyi.¹³⁸ All of which, though important to my research, had to remain on my shelf, unexamined in this section. This is not because they lack worth, but simply because I have had to be selective in those chosen as major influences on my writing. Similarly, it would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the many writers who, having written in Ghanaian indigenous languages (something acknowledged by the Ghanaian government since its inception.)¹³⁹ Contemporary writers such as, Kwasi Ofori-Mankata (who has reset some of the

¹³² Audre Lorde, *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House*, Penguin Modern (Penguin, 2018), xxiii, p. iii.

¹³³ Mary Bird, *Adaora: A Tale of West Africa*, Buttercups and Daisies (The Religious Tract Society, 1911).

¹³⁴ Jackie Kay, *Red Dust Road* (Picador, 2017).

¹³⁵ Amma Darko, *Beyond the Horizon* (Head of Zeus, 2024).

¹³⁶ Unigwe, *On Black Sister Street* (2010).

¹³⁷ Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (Heinmann African Writers Series, 1989).

¹³⁸ Kaakyire Akosoma Nyantakyi, *The Ancestral Sacrifice* (Chicago Spectrum Press, 1998).

¹³⁹ Maverick Ofoe Amedzoe, 'Institutional Memory', The Bureau of Ghana Languages (BGL), 2023 <<https://bgl.gov.gh/institutional-memory/>> [accessed 9 August 2025].

Greek myths in Ghana – Twi) to Poets such as Khairani Barokka¹⁴⁰ who writes in both Ewe and English; alongside those, such as Gladys Casely-Hayford,¹⁴¹ one of the first Ghanaian born writers to publish her work in a west African language (Kro). Clearly, as I speak none of these languages, (although I did read some for Gladys Casely-Hayford's English poems) I am unable to compare my writing to theirs, but the importance of their interpretation of traditional storytelling cannot be under estimated. Because of the wealth of talented Ghanaian writers (and of course the writers, such as Kamau Braithwaite who were inspired by their visits to Ghana)¹⁴² I am faced with a surfeit of authors to consider in this section. Therefore, I have decided to follow Edward Said's advice and accept that, '*you cannot grasp historical experience by lists or catalogues*,'¹⁴³ and so will try to be selective in the books that I discuss here.

There is a dilemma contained in the heart of this chapter. Should I examine the way that post-colonial literature (i.e. literature written after colonised countries regained their independence) or postcolonial literature (i.e. works that reflect the ongoing impact of colonialism on these countries)? It is not clear. I think that probably it is a piece of liminal work somewhere between colonial and post-colonial. That being said perhaps I should be less concerned with which side of the threshold it falls and more concerned with the extent to which colonial literature has influenced my work (and my opinions more generally). Like all authors I am shaped by the first stories that were told to me; resulting in my belief that

*that the books and stories we fall in love with make us who we are, or not to claim too much, the act of falling in love with a book or a story changes us in some way and the beloved tale becomes ... part of the way in which we understand things.*¹⁴⁴

As someone who grew up as part of a European family living in rural Nigeria I was certainly influenced by both the stories told to me in the nursery and later, by colonial literature Like

¹⁴⁰ Nine Archers Press, 'Ultimatum Orangutan Khairani Barokka', n.d. <<https://ninearchespress.com/publications/poetry-collections/ultimatum-orangutan>> [accessed 9 August 2025].

¹⁴¹ Yema Lucilda Hunter, *An African Treasure* (Sierra Leonean Writers Series, 2015).

¹⁴² Jarad Zimbler, 'Kamau Brathwaite's Poems from Ghana', *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 30.2 (2022) <<https://www.jwilonline.org/downloads/vol-30-no-2-april-2022/>> [accessed 9 September 2025].

¹⁴³ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (Viking, 1994), p. xxvii.

¹⁴⁴ Salman Rushdie, *Languages of Truth* (Johnathan Cape, 2021), p. 3.

many British children in the 1960s I grew up reading Rudyard Kipling,¹⁴⁵ ¹⁴⁶ Daniel Defoe¹⁴⁷ and Johnathan Swift¹⁴⁸: not to mention the fact that my first history book was a battered copy of *Our Island's Story*.¹⁴⁹ (I still have this although I did not, I promise, use it to teach my children, instead I have kept it because its scent reminds me of home). However, much as I would like to think that I have not written through the lens of Empire, I must admit, to return to Said, that like all authors, I inevitably reflect the relationship between culture and colonialism in which I was raised and to which I belong. I am, in fact,

*very much in the history of [my] society, shaping and shaped by [my] history and social experience*¹⁵⁰

and, of course, if I am shaped by my history then so is my writing.

I have clearly not written what could ever be called *real history*. Yet my text could legitimately be described as history adjacent. This being the case it is worth noting that the old adage that ‘*until the lion has his own historian, the tale of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.*’ So, as well as looking at other white authors who have represented African characters, I intend to compare my work with that of contemporary authors writing about, or close to, independence movements across the continent. However, my first comparison will be with a novel that addresses, not a fight against colonialism but an internecine war between the Igbo and Hausa peoples of Nigeria. The book, of course, is Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Half a Yellow Sun*.¹⁵¹ I remember reading the Q&A section of the back of the paperback when I first brought the novel. I re-read this section when I decided to write my Independence stories and found that her research methods were unerringly similar to my own. (Although I collected and copied photographs rather than taking them myself.

When asked how she prepared to write a book about events before she was born Adichie said

*I read books. I took photos. I talked to people. In the four years that it took to finish the book, I would often ask older people I met, ‘Where were you in 1967?’ and then I would take it from there. It was from stories of that sort that I found our tiny details that are important for fiction. My parents’ stories formed the background of my research, Still, I have a lot of research notes that I did not end up using.*¹⁵²

¹⁴⁵ Rudyard Kipling, *The Jungle Book* (Wordsworth Editions, 1918).

¹⁴⁶ Rudyard Kipling, *Kim* (Wordsworth Editions, 1993).

¹⁴⁷ Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (Wordsworth Editions, 1992).

¹⁴⁸ Johnathan Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels* (Wordsworth Editions, 1992).

¹⁴⁹ H.E. Marshall, with A.S. Forrest, *Our Island’s Story* (T.C. and E.C. Jack, 1905).

¹⁵⁰ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. xxvii.

¹⁵¹ Adichie, *Half a Yellow Sun*.

¹⁵² Adichie, *Half a Yellow Sun*, p. P.S.3.

As someone new to academia I felt vindicated in my choice of research methods. If confirming her knowledge of history was good enough for Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, then I felt that it was OK for me to plough the same furrow. But then, just as I had begun to feel comfortable writing my book, I heard a second, radio interview, in which, when she was asked about her decision to make the British character give up on writing his book, *The World Was Silent When We Died*,¹⁵³ and to allow the Nigerian houseboy to write it instead. Her response was both revealing and, for me, concerning.

*It is my very firm, ardent, belief that people should be allowed to tell their own stories. that the stories that get passed around of a place and a people should be written by people who are of that place.*¹⁵⁴

Where does that leave my writing? My first book was set in Nigeria (although never named, several people told me that they recognised locations that I thought I had invented). Should I not have written it as I am not a woman of that place? Perhaps I can justify that work as it was written from embedded childhood memories that I did not know I possessed. But this work; this is quite different. I cannot claim to be of Ghana or even from Ghana. Nowhere in my work do I claim that to be the case, and yet there will undoubtedly be justifiable questions about my right to write someone else's story; particularly as it is a story of decolonisation and I am from the colonising nation. As I have said, I do have familial links to Ghana, but are those links strong enough? My siblings were both born in Kumasi, but even they cannot be described as coming from Ghana, or the Gold Coast as their birth certificates claim. This is not my story and not my event. I am, like Robert in *Half a Yellow Sun*, an outsider looking in.

Like *Half a Yellow Sun*, *The Orchard of Lost Souls* is set during a civil war (ongoing). In this case, with the intention of permanently separating Somaliland from Somalia. Like Adichie Nadifa Mohamed emphasises the importance of talking to her elders as part of the research for her novels.

*For me research is quite broad. When I go to Somaliland talking to people is research, hearing stories is research. All of these small details that they told me form into my work.*¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ Adichie, *Half a Yellow Sun*, p. 433.

¹⁵⁴ 'World Book Club', *World Book Club*, with guest Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (BBC World Service Radio, 7 June 2009) <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0037mh5>> [accessed 15 August 2025].

¹⁵⁵ *New Writers: Nadifa Mohamed Interview*, dir. by The Film Atelier (Shepherd's Bush, 2013), 2:48 <<https://granta.com/granta-video-nadifa-mohamed/>>.

Mohamid, like Adichie, is another author who uses familial memories to inspire a novel that is about relationships in a time of conflict. Again, this makes me feel that my research method was valid; However, it also convinces me of the sparsity of my research. I was unable to travel whilst writing so my interviews were all conducted from the United Kingdom, sometimes in person and sometimes remotely, but my passport stayed firmly in the kitchen draw throughout this time. This has greatly reduced the likelihood that I will approach a publisher with this work, unless I am able to support my work with further, extensive research.

Unlike Adichie, Mohamed has not said that European writers should never write about Africa, 't but that doesn't mean that she hasn't voiced her opinion on the subject. Saying, '*So many things are written about Somalis, but so few things are written by them.*'¹⁵⁶ In many ways these two authors exemplify the essence of post-colonial novelists, echoing the thoughts of Ngugi wa Thiong'o and stressing the need for African authors to write African stories. Indeed, he goes further than these writers, questioning the very definition of what constitutes an African story when he asked, what is African literature.

*Was it literature about Africa, or about the African experience? Was it literature written by Africans? What about a non-African who wrote about Africa: did his work qualify as African literature? What if an African set his work in Greenland; did that qualify as African literature, or were African languages the qualifying criteria?*¹⁵⁷

The importance of this discussion can be seen when pre-colonial 'African novels' written by Europeans are re-read today. The 1939 novel, *Mr Johnson*. In which, despite the Author having lived in Nigeria for some time before starting the book, the characters are cliched (kindly British administrators and simple, obsequious, Africans) using derisive satires of their speech in order to convey his apparent scorn. Late in the book, when Mr. Johnson is on trial for murder, instead of offering any sort of defence when asked to make a statement to the court, the titular character says

No sah – no statement – I don't want to give you all dat trouble, sah. I jus' done it, that's all. I 'gree for dem Sargy too much – I never 'fraid of him – but when he come to catch me I 'fraid he take me for prison.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Magnus Taylor, 'An Interview with Nadifa Mohamed: African Arguments', interview with Nadifa Mohamed, 11 January 2013 <<https://africanarguments.org/2013/11/an-interview-with-nadifa-mohamed-i-dont-feel-bound-by-somaliabut-the-stories-that-have-really-motivated-me-are-from-there-by-magnus-taylor/>> [accessed 15 August 2025].

¹⁵⁷ Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (James Currey, 1981), p. 6.

¹⁵⁸ Joyce Cary, *Mr. Johnson* (Everyman, 1995), p. 212.

Although this is not an unusual approach to African characters at the time, where even children's cartoons were steeped in racial stereotypes (see, for example the character Mammy Two Shoes in early Tom and Gerry films)¹⁵⁹ it is clear with novels like Carey's being written in the pre/postcolonial eras, the issue of Africanness and African representation has become an increasingly important topic of discussion within literary circles.

Turning to my work, I must, in all conscience, examine on which side of the above line it falls. I should start by saying that, in no way would I consider this work to be an African story, even though it is set in Africa and it concerns a seminal event in African history. It is a European story set in Africa. Not least because I am a European author, but also because more than half of the named characters are either European or American. Even if I were to complete those stories that remain in draft form (i.e. those not included in the submitted text) there would still be a preponderance of non-Africans in the overall narrative. However, this does not mean that I can ignore the need for all my characters to be believable even if not always likeable. For me, one of the biggest challenges in this respect was the use of direct speech. Finding the right voice for all of my characters was a challenge – recordings are often overly formal, and the voices of my interviewees rarely reflected the voices that they had 75 years ago. This was particularly true when it came to the inclusion of racist or sexist language. I was uncomfortable including it and yet felt that it had to be there in order to ensure temporal authenticity. Hendrika's attitudes to the seamstress in *Doctor's Wife* and The Major's views on both women and 'natives' in *The Old Coaster* are typical examples of this dilemma. Their views are distasteful but were typical of those held by many Europeans in the 1950s. Any effort to make them more acceptable would have lacked authenticity and perhaps even drifted into the territory inhabited by writers like Joyce Cary¹⁶⁰ or Alan Paton¹⁶¹ which rely heavily on the 'African bad/White man good' troupe. These two characters, based closely on two of the people that I interviewed as part of my research were, covertly, quite unpleasant characters.

Another issue connected to characterisation was linked to my use of direct speech in some of the narratives; something I had rarely attempted in my previous work, and which I deliberately avoided in my previous novel as I did not think I could capture the voice of a young,

¹⁵⁹ *Puss Gets the Boot*, Cartoon short, dir. by William Hanna and Joseph Barbera (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1940).

¹⁶⁰ Cary, *Mr. Johnson*.

¹⁶¹ Alan Paton, *Cry Beloved Country* (Jonathan Cape, 1948).

Nigerian, Muslim child. For this work, however, I wanted to explore the use of direct speech. This presented not only the issue of creating believable voices in English but also ensuring that the reader did not feel the incongruity of them speaking English in the first place. Abina and Beatrice, the two women featured in *Market Queens*, would have been unlikely to speak to each other in English as, although it is one of Ghana's official languages, these two women would have been more likely to converse in Twi. But I do not speak Twi and, I suspect, that neither would most of my potential readers as, even in Ghana, where it is spoken by approximately 17 million people, it is only one of 80 languages in common usage.¹⁶² So, with the exception of occasional words included where they felt appropriate, (foods like *Chichinga* and *Kenkey*; common insect names like *sakasaka* and the Twi word for witch – *Bayifoo*) I have written in my mother tongue, English. The question of using African languages in stories about Africa has been the subject of debate since at least 1962.¹⁶³ Ngugi wa Thiong'o recalls the conversation at a literary conference where not only was the use of 'African languages in African literature' debated, but also what can, or should, be described as an African Language. Highlighting that in different parts of the continent, Arabic, French and English are all widely spoken and are often official languages, uniting different peoples within, and between African countries. It is worth noting that in Ghana the most widely spoken language is the language used by the government, namely English. English is, according to Kwame Appiah, '*The language of Ghana [...] but not of any of the peoples of Ghana*,'¹⁶⁴ a common occurrence in many former colonial nations. What then should we count as an African language? There can, I believe, be no clear answer, since even wa Thing'o wrote his early novels in English; his last English Language novel being *Petals of Blood*.¹⁶⁵ Later explaining that he found that the only way that he could capture the imagery of African ideas and African philosophies was, instead of trying to express his thoughts in English, to think and write first in his mother tongue, then to translate that word or phrase literally into English, and where necessary, checking his translation by thinking where the phrase would be used and modifying his translation accordingly.¹⁶⁶ When such extreme effort is required to capture his intended meaning it is easy to understand why for practical reasons, as well as those of political conviction, he now writes in Kikuyu. So how should we write about Africa, and what

¹⁶² Kwame Appiah, *The Lies That Bind* (Profile Books, 2018), p. 101.

¹⁶³ Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *In the Name of the Mother: Reflections on Writers and Empire*, EBook (James Currey, 2013), p. 15.

¹⁶⁴ Appiah, *The Lies That Bind*, p. 101.

¹⁶⁵ Ngugi Wa Thing'o, *Petals of Blood* (Heinemann, 1977).

¹⁶⁶ Wa Thing'o, *Decolonising the Mind*, p. 8.

language should we use? I turn to my favourite author for an answer, The artist, teacher, poet and politician Ama Ata Aidoo.

Taken from her poem *Ghana: (Where the Bead Speaks)*

*Yet if a string of beads is fine,
it sings,
it dances,
it jumps,
and sizzles.*

*If a string of beads is truly fine,
it can speak in a million tongues.
It will have something for all,
and say the most amazing things.¹⁶⁷*

At the start of this section I said that I was going to examine the relationship between my writing and that of African authors writing about decolonisation, but I have become distracted, following trails leading to discussions about language and considering novels set during recent civil wars. I think that I should return to my original path and discuss work set in post-colonial Ghana.

No discussion of Ghanaian writing is complete without reference to the multi-talented Ama Ata Aidoo, whose poem I have quoted above. Of her many books I have chosen the one that I read first, and which has, I believe, influenced my writing the most, *No Sweetness Here and Other Stories*¹⁶⁸ The collection, of eleven previously published short stories. The earliest of which, *No Sweetness Here*, dates from around 1962, in the middle of Kwame Nkrumah's term as President and twelve years before Aidoo became the Minister of Education in Jerry Rawlings's Provisional National Defence Council. The stories reflect life in Ghana during this period, that is to say from immediately post-independence to shortly before establishment of the Third Republic in 1979.

Aidoo has said that she prefers other literary forms to novels, which she claims contain 'too many words.'¹⁶⁹ An opinion that I wholeheartedly agree with; there is something satisfying in the freedom and compactness of a short story, even if it is later melded with other short

¹⁶⁷ Ama Ata Aidoo, 'Ghana (Where the Bead Speaks)', Poetry Foundation: Poems and Poets, 2017 <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/143815/ghana>> [accessed 17 August 2025].

¹⁶⁸ Ama Ata Aidoo, *No Sweetness Here and Other Stories* (The Feminist Press, 1995).

¹⁶⁹ Adeola James, *In Their Own Voices: African Women Writers Talk* (Heinemann, 1990), p. 22.

stories, that appeals to the sense of completeness, whilst allowing authors to avoid reference to temporal or geographic links that seem unimportant to the overall story arc. This is, at least in part, why I have chosen this collection of her short stories to examine how much my work has been influenced by her writing; starting with the second of the stories in this collection, *For Whom Things Did Not Change*.¹⁷⁰ In which we are introduced to Zirigu, the steward in a rural government rest house. Although it is difficult to calculate exactly when the story is set, we know that Zirigu started to work at the rest house more than ten years before the events in the story, so that would place the story in the mid-1960s, possibly close to the time when it was written.

The most obvious, but not only, influence this story had on my work was in relation to my story *The Last Party*. When I was first writing the story I was told that it wasn't appropriate to suggest that a Ghanaian wouldn't have welcomed the changes that came with independence. Although I should note that some of the interviews indicated that if not against the prospect of change, then some Ghanaians were, at best, indifferent and often sceptical about the degree to which any promised change would actually come about. In Aidoo's story Zirigu complains that the improvements that he expected, modest though they were, had not happened in the years since independence. So, when Zirigu explains to the black doctor, Kobina, that independence has made little difference to his duties at the rest house.

*At first, it was only white people who came her. Then a few black me began coming too. Now, they don't come any more – I mean the white men. How can I be sorry? Do I sound sorry? Between me and you, I can say that I don't know whether it has made much difference to me or not.*¹⁷¹

The Story ends on a rather depressing note. After telling Kobina that he and his wife had hoped that independence would mean at least a few small changes in his life – namely electric light and a flushing toilet – but this hadn't happened; the last words of the story are '*what does "Independence" mean?*'¹⁷²

My character Kojo, in *The Last Party*, is in many ways quite different to Zirigu, but Zirigu had a profound impact on his creation. Kojo, like Zirigu, had taken part in the ex-soldier training program. The mention of this in Aidoo's story provided confirmation of something that I had been told by one of my Ghanaian interviewees. She mentioned that her grandfather had taken

¹⁷⁰ Aidoo, *No Sweetness Here and Other Stories*, pp. 8–29.

¹⁷¹ Aidoo, *No Sweetness Here and Other Stories*, p. 26.

¹⁷² Aidoo, *No Sweetness Here and Other Stories*, p. 29.

part in such a scheme when he was demobilised from the army after WWII. I was sure that I had heard of this before, but I struggled to find any other mentions of the scheme. It felt like a useful plot device, but it was only when I reread *No Sweetness Here* as part of the preparation for my research that I remembered where I had previously come across the scheme. A minor point but I came to realise that existing fiction can also be a reference source if the author has strong, preferably natal, links to the place you are writing about. There is something about this story that stands out to the reader. It is the use of language. Zirigu speaks quite differently when he speaks to Kobina to when he speaks to Setu, his wife. At the beginning of the book, he speaks standard English to his wife, but a simplified form of Pidgin to Kobina. It is as if we are allowed to meet two different men called Zirigu, one who is coherent, self-sufficient and proficient and one who struggles with the use of standard English and who does everything he can to accentuate his subservient state. As the book progresses it becomes clear that this 'second' Zirigu is the result of affected behaviour. Behaviour, it could be said, that is designed to stoke the ego of the men who stay in the rest house. Despite this, Aidoo's keen ear for language means that there is no apparent incongruity in the text; the reader accepts that the Zirigu who says to Kobina

Massa, Massa, Massa.

[...]

*You say: Zirigu, wake me for eight. At eight, I com', you no wake. At 's pas' eight, I com', you no wake. Now, you go wake because 'e be nine o'clock.*¹⁷³

and

*It means ... but it is enough, my wife. The big men we saw yesterday are bad. These we see today are worse. And be sure that those of tomorrow will be like those of yesterday and today put together.*¹⁷⁴

To his wife.

I believe that this is because of the value placed by Aidoo on Ghana's tradition of storytelling, telling us how orature was one of her earliest memories, almost literally learnt at her mother's knee.¹⁷⁵ Perhaps this is the most important way in which the author of *No Sweetness Here* has been an influence on my work. She has taught me the importance of really listening to what people are saying, either to me, or in overheard conversations. It is the detail of speech that

¹⁷³ Aidoo, *No Sweetness Here and Other Stories*, p. 13.

¹⁷⁴ Aidoo, *No Sweetness Here and Other Stories*, p. 12.

¹⁷⁵ Micere Githae Mungo, 'A Conversation: Ama Ata Aidoo and Micere Githaw Mungo 2010 at Brown University', in *Essays in Honour of Ama Ata Aidoo at 70*, ed. by Anne Adams (Ayebeia Clarke Publishing, 2012), pp. 79–45 (p. 45).

marks them out from one another; the tiny nuances of speech that bring written characters to life. I am fortunate in that, as a child, women skilled in the art would tell stories to me. It meant that I grew up valuing both oral and written traditions of storytelling. I grew up knowing how to listen and because of that I was able to appreciate West Africa's oral literary heritage and to admire Aidoo's ability to shape it and adapt it for a world-wide audience.

The definitive postcolonial Ghanaian novel is probably *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*¹⁷⁶ by Ayi Kwei Armah; first published in 1968. A contemporary of Aidoo, they were born three years apart and approximately 100Km from each other; both have written extensively on postcolonial Ghana, but their writing is markedly different in style. Armah's book is a short novel, featuring an unnamed railway clerk, struggling with post-independence life. Unlike the stories in *No Sweetness Here*, we are told exactly when the events in this book take place, namely the week beginning 11th April 1965, with a reprise on the day after the coup that removed Nkrumah from office.

The railway clerk (as the man throughout the novel) is used as a means of commenting on the similarity between pre- and post-independent Ghana, saying that names had changed but corruption had not,

*Yet the stories that were sometimes heard about it were not stories of something young and vigorous, but the same old stories of money changing hands and throats getting moistened and palms getting greased. Only this time if the stories aroused any anger, there was nowhere for it to go. The sons of the nation were now in charge, after all. How completely the new thing took after the old.*¹⁷⁷

In this short extract it is clear that *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* can be thought of as both post-colonial and postcolonial in nature. It provides a commentary on the extent to which life in Ghana has, or in this case has not, changed since independence and it was written in the immediate post-independence era. As an aside it is worth noting that all three of these books were published shortly after President Nkrumah was deposed. This could, of course, be coincidental, but it seems likely that, considering the degree of censorship and political detentions towards the end of Nkrumah's presidency¹⁷⁸, it is not.

¹⁷⁶ Armah, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*.

¹⁷⁷ Armah, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, pp. 9–10.

¹⁷⁸ not recorded, 'Regime's Censorship Distorts Picture of Ghana', *New York Times* (New York), 1 January 1964, p. 3.

This book, with its emphasis on the minor corruptions of everyday life in the city became an integral part of my research, many of my interviewees, including the one that inspired the salesman in *Balancing the Books*, spoke of the need to offer a dash (small bribe) to make things happen in the Gold Coast. Armah confirmed that the same was true after independence as well.

The final book that I want to consider in this section is by another near contemporary of Aidoo, Cameron Duodu. Based in London, he is not best known for his contribution to international journalism than for his works of fiction. His novel, *The Gab Boys*,¹⁷⁹ first published in 1967, is, like the two previous works discussed, an examination of the lives of ordinary Ghanaians in the post-independence era. The novel centres around a group of young men of an age that sits somewhere between adolescent and early adulthood. Their main occupation is enjoying themselves whilst earning just enough money to support their preferred lifestyle. The action switches between Pusupusu, the village where the boys are from, and Accra, where they move to after upsetting the elders of their home village, so this is clearly a Ghanaian novel. However, I think that the behaviour of the young men (the self-described Gab Boys of the title) is universally relatable. Certainly, I can see the actions of my brother and his friends, who incidentally emigrated to Australia for similar reasons, reflected in the antics of the Gab Boys. A key lesson for writing here; make the characters relatable to the readers. Setting is key, details are key and as mentioned earlier language is key, but if the readers are to engage with the characters, then universal attitudes and behaviours are also key. This can be seen in my story *Market Women*. The setting is clearly West African, I mention clothes (wrappers), modes of travel (the mami wagon) and foods (Waakye and Chichinga), but, taken as a whole the story is relatable to non-African readers as most of us have listened to young women chatting for the entirety of long journey. The need to relate to specific to the general when writing about events that may be unfamiliar to the intended readers is something that I have tried to include in all of my stories; the pregnant Hendrika complaining about swollen ankles, Dr Muizen going for a drink after a trying day at work, or Ruby longing for a more exciting life; the precise details of the events might not be familiar, but I hope that, as is the case in *The Gab Boys*, that the underlying motivation is.

¹⁷⁹ Cameron Duodu, *The Gab Boys* (Fontana Books, 1969).

2.11 Modernism: Reassembling the Glass

*These fragments I have
shored against my
ruins¹⁸⁰*

I have always found that modernism is a slippery term. I believe that I am not alone in this, indeed, Matthew Morrison's student text confirms that it

covers a wide range of artistic developments including Juxtaposition, defamiliarization, stream of consciousness and free verse.¹⁸¹

Taking this as a working definition then it may be obvious why I am using it to conclude the section on works that have influenced my writing. It represents an amalgam of different styles and concepts, which can only be referred to as modernism when blended into a cohesive whole.

There can be no doubt that for many people the term modernism conjures Virginia Woolf,¹⁸² T.S. Eliot¹⁸³ or James Joyce.¹⁸⁴ All three published in the 1920s are reflective of post war consciousness, an excitement at the prospect of a new technological age alongside a fear of the destruction that the same technology had caused during the war. There was a wish to break with the old whilst also, for many writers, a nostalgia for an earlier, simpler time. Although later in this chapter I will argue that this post-war European view of modernism is too constrained, however, I will begin by using Mrs Dalloway as an exemplar of this view of modernism and seeing to what extent, if any, my work aligns with this definition.

I will start by including an extended quote from the book and use it to explain several aspects of classical European modernism. In this section, taken from early in the book, Maisie Johnson, a nineteen-year-old from Edinburgh, has just asked for directions from Lucrezia and her shell-shocked husband Septimus.

¹⁸⁰ T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land* (Mint Editions, 2021), p. 21.

¹⁸¹ Matthew Morrison, *Key Concepts in Creative Writing*, Key Concepts (Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), p. 83.

¹⁸² Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*.

¹⁸³ Eliot, *The Waste Land*.

¹⁸⁴ James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. by Danis Rose and John O'Hanlon (Folio Society, 2017).

*In London for the first time, come to take up a post at her uncle's in Leadenhall Street, and now walking through Regent's Park in the morning, this couple on the chairs gave her quite a turn; the young woman seeming foreign, the man looking queer; so that should she be very old she would still remember and make it jangle again among her memories how she had walked through Regent's Park on a fine summer's morning fifty years ago. For she was only nineteen and had got her way at last, to come to London; and now how queer it was, this couple she had asked the way of, and the girl started and jerked her hand, and the man—he seemed awfully odd; quarrelling, perhaps; parting for ever, perhaps; something was up, she knew; and now all these people (for she returned to the Broad Walk), the stone basins, the prim flowers, the old men and women, invalids most of them in Bath chairs—all seemed, after Edinburgh, so queer. And Maisie Johnson, as she joined that gently trudging, vaguely gazing, breeze-kissed company—squirrels perching and preening, sparrow fountains fluttering for crumbs, dogs busy with the railings, busy with each other, while the soft warm air washed over them and lent to the fixed unsurprised gaze with which they received life something whimsical and mollified—Maisie Johnson positively felt she must cry Oh! (for that young man on the seat had given her quite a turn. Something was up, she knew.)*¹⁸⁵

The first thing to notice is the deft and distinctive use of punctuation, and the extended sentence length. This allows Woolf to build a distinct approach to the interior monologue, and to free indirect discourse, also seen in the example below:

*For having lived in Westminster—how many years now? over twenty,—one feels even in the midst of the traffic, or waking at night, Clarissa was positive, a particular hush, or solemnity; an indescribable pause; a suspense (but that might be her heart, affected, they said, by influenza) before Big Ben strikes. There! Out it boomed. First a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable.*¹⁸⁶

This technique allows both an interior voice, and the potential for a multi-person perspective, and is typical of modernist literary innovation. It is shown even more clearly in that other modernist classic, *Ulysses*, where, towards the end of the book, Joyce writes a passage of over eighteen pages with no punctuation at all.¹⁸⁷ We see something similar in a more recent examples, Bernadine Evaristo's *Girl Woman Other*, which, like her earlier work *Mr. Loverman*, eschews conventional punctuation and only breaks the flow of the text at the end of each

¹⁸⁵ Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, p. 20.

¹⁸⁶ Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, p. 4.

¹⁸⁷ Joyce, *Ulysses*, pp. 674–92.

section by using a full stop.¹⁸⁸ In a post publication interview for *Girl Woman Other* she explained why she made this choice.

*As you're reading it, the sentences flow into each other.
The fluid way in which I shaped, lineated and punctuated the prose on
the page enabled me to oscillate between the past and the present
inside their heads, outside their heads, and eventually from one
character's story into another character's story.*¹⁸⁹

There is no question about the free-flowing nature of modernist texts as exemplified by the quotation above. It lends itself to producing a stream of consciousness writing, where we are allowed into the minds of the characters, we see events as they do and are invited to interpret them through the perspective of their lived experience. I too found this to be liberating. It made the crafting of stories such as that of Ruby in *Royal Protection* and May in *You Don't Now Me*, to be more of a pleasure than a chore, allowing me to feel much more part of the character that I was creating rather than merely an outsider describing what I saw. I did not, however, have neither the skill nor the inclination to step into, what was for me, uncharted territory. Fortunately, not all writers approach stream of consciousness writing by abandoning all conventional punctuation. You only need to look at the writing of authors such as Toni Morrison, to find, what may be thought of as, contemporary modernism which features multiple examples of conventionally punctuated stream of consciousness.

I first read her book *Beloved*¹⁹⁰ when a friend who was on secondment to Alfred A Knopf sent me a pre-publication copy. I admired the style (how could I not) but at the time it did not occur to me that a contemporary novel could also be modernist, at the time I considered that modernist literature, like modernist art, belonged firmly in the 1920s. It was the realisation that stream of consciousness, such as the frequent occasions where Morrison allows us to glimpse into Seth's mind, was a key feature of modernism, rather than just a key to producing engaging writing.

She is, of course, not alone, *The Things They Carried* (published in 1990 and set 20 years earlier) makes extensive use of this technique.

Anyway, the guys try to be cool. They just lie there and groove, but after a while they start hearing – you won't believe this – they hear chamber music. They hear violins and cellos. They hear this terrific mama-san soprano. Then after a while they hear gook opera and a glee club and the Haiphong Boys Choir and a barbershop quartet and all kinds of weird chanting and Buddha-Buddha stuff. And the whole

¹⁸⁸ Bernadine Evaristo, *Mr. Loverman* (Penguin, 2024).

¹⁸⁹ Five Dials, 'Bernardine Evaristo: "Older Black Women, Who Writes about That?"'

¹⁹⁰ Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (Alfred A Knopf, 1987).

time, in the background, there's still that cocktail party going on. All these different voices. Not human voices, though. Because it's the mountains. Follow me? The rock – it's talking. And the fog, too, and the grass and the goddamn mongooses. Everything talks. The trees talk politics, the monkeys talk religion. The whole country. Vietnam. The place talks. It talks. Understand? Nam – it truly talks.¹⁹¹

In contrast, to both Wolfe and O'Brien Amos Tutuola uses a similar technique but relies on first person narrative to achieve a similar end in his book, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*¹⁹² (originally published in 1952).

It is clear that the use of non-standard punctuation can lead the author into also adopting, at least for some parts of their work, a stream of consciousness narrative, which not only allows us to understand more clearly the thoughts and feelings of the characters, but also makes it easier to move between temporalities, abandoning the conventional progressive narrative form. Hence, referring back, once again, to the original example of Woolfe's text, we can see how easily she shifts Maisie Johnson's thoughts from how she feels in the present, (walking through the park) to how she will feel in the future, looking back at that same walk. To what extent have I been able to achieve something similar in my own writing? Well, as I mentioned earlier some of the stories are written in the form of streams of consciousness, allowing the characters thoughts to wander in what I hope was a realistic manner. It would also be true to say that Ruby, for example, does let her thoughts wander between the present and the past, largely because, as shown below, she compares her current, unofficial, assignment, to her work for SOE during the war.

Well, as we used to say, it's a good job you opened the door. No, I suppose it doesn't sound so funny now, but we used to howl, we really did, ever since Samantha ... well, I, ... you had to be there. The point is that's not what I call a briefing paper. OK the maps might come in useful,

As does Princess Marina, when she shifts from the false memory of a past event to mentally bemoaning her current position.

I remember George waving goodbye to me as he left Invergordon. I remember this clearly. I remember the face of the pilot and the co-pilot. I remember the gunners and the staff officers, and I remember George turning around and smiling as he walked from the canteen towards the aeroplane. I remember all of these things even though I was not there. I was in London when George climbed onto the flying boat, and yet I have no idea what I was doing at the time. My only memory is of that day in Scotland. The day when I knew that I did not

¹⁹¹ Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried*, E-book (Forth Estate, 1990), p. 75.

¹⁹² Amos Tutuola, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (Faber and Faber, 2014), pp. 32–33.

want to be old and alone. I was also the day when I decided that I did not want to fly again. Yet here I am flying again. It is strange. My niece, Elizabeth, she prefers to travel by ship and, because she is the Queen she travels by ship and because I am only a princess, and a princess of a country that is now a republic, I am not allowed to travel by ship.

However, the distinct qualities of modernist writing cannot be defined by the use of a single technique. Returning to the definition of modernism as

*Any of various movements in art, architecture, literature, etc., generally characterized by a deliberate break with classical and traditional forms or methods of expression.*¹⁹³

we note that it is break with tradition that exemplifies modernism; whatever prefix, classical, contemporary is appended to it, whether it is the Afromodernism of Tutoula or the Modernismo of Marquez; the most important differentiator is the fact that it can be described as breaking from the standard. The opportunity to experiment with form was part of the reason that I started writing *Black Star Rising*. When I started to examine the influences on my writing I quoted Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood*, a poem that's a play that (for me at least) feels like a novel. I will end by quoting from a prose poem that is also a novel, Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*.¹⁹⁴

It's a long way from home to Europe. A cruel past, a funny present, a major desert or two, a sea, an ocean, several different languages apart, aeroplanes bridge the skies.

Her journey must have had something to do with a people's efforts

'to make good again;'

Because right from the beginning, the embassy had shown a lot of interest.

*The minute her name had been submitted, they had come to the campus looking for her in a black Mercedes-Benz, its flag furled.*¹⁹⁵

It breaks most, if not all, of the conventions of novel writing, at least those commonly cited in 1977, when it was first published. It mixes poetry and prose, the text is chopped across the page and the language used, at least for the German characters, is non-standard, almost clichéd. The whole novel is decidedly non-linear. It is a gentle Bildungsroman with sharp corners and pointed elbows. It is a novel of many styles; but unquestionably modernist.

¹⁹³ Entry 'Modernism', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, 2002)

<https://www.oed.com/dictionary/modernism_n?tl=true> [accessed 20 August 2025].

¹⁹⁴ Ama Ata Aidoo, *Our Sister Killjoy* (Addison Wesley Longman, 1996).

¹⁹⁵ Aidoo, *Our Sister Killjoy*, p. 8.

At the beginning of the Broken Mirror section of this analysis, I said that I was going to examine some of the books that have influenced my writing in general and *Black Star Rising* in particular. When I reread my work in light of this analysis I can see the shadows of feminist fiction, possibly inevitably, reflections of post-colonial literature, and polyperspectivity, if the work is considered as a whole. Overall, largely as a result of my intention to stretch myself as a writer, I would have to describe *Black Star Rising* as a contemporary modernist work, a small but distinct experiment in form, style and voice made of samples and shards of a multitude of literary influences that I have absorbed over the past 60 years. In combining an observer's perspective with varied Anglophone traditions, the cycle offers a new, hybrid perspective on Ghanaian and European modernist creative practice.

2.12 Conclusion

*Beneath memory and experience, beneath imagination and invention, beneath words, there are rhythms to which memory and imagination and words all move. The writer's job is to go down deep enough to feel that rhythm, find it, move it, be moved by it, and let it move memory and imagination to find words.*¹⁹⁶

I cried many times whilst writing these stories, remembering the people who have inspired them, most of whom have now passed away. They left me their letters, their diaries, and long conversations about their youth. I have been privileged to become the keeper of their precious memories and to be allowed to pull them apart, re-assemble them and replace those parts that time has stolen with fragments from my own imagination. I am truly grateful to all of those who have supported me in this. Ursula Le Guin says in the above quote that the writer's job is to delve deep enough into memories and imagination to be moved by it and to let its rhythm find the right words. I hope that I have done that in this collection. It has been a challenge, but, mostly, an enjoyable one.

I have had to find my way across time; language today is not what it was in the 1950s. I have had to feel for the nuances and rhythms of Englishes that are not my own, the poetic and picturesque, the clipped and the childlike. I have listened to newsreels, tape recordings and interviews to try to capture the unfamiliar rhythms. I have sought advice from books, from writers and from people who remember. I have relied heavily on other people, as the greatest challenge has been one that I set for myself, to write outside my comfort zone, and outside my culture, in other words, to write outside my lane. But surely that is the point of creative writing research, to challenge yourself to do something new, to write in new styles, new genres, new anything-you-can-think-ofs and then to see what works, why it works and how it could be improved.

This has been, in a phrase that I hate to use, an emotional journey for me; getting to know my mother in the final years of her life; reading my father's diaries and finding treasures from their past. A happy/sad/exhausting time. I have heard the stories from 'Old Coasters' from the children and grandchildren of Ghanaians and a precious few stories from Ghanaians who were

¹⁹⁶ Ursula K Le Guin and David Naimon, 'On Fiction', in *Conversations on Writing* (Tin House Books, 2018), pp. 9–50 (p. 17).

there when the Black Star was raised for the first time. Their stories have made me smile, made me cry and sometimes shocked me to my core. So many glimpses of a single moment in history.

I was tempted to report their stories as told, to preserve the words that they said in the way that they said them. Unfortunately, that task was beyond my skill. I am a weaver of words and a teller of tales. My instinct is to fill the gaps in the stories, to create what ifs and if only we'd have knowns. So, I chose fiction, and I chose short stories – because the narrative was broken, disjointed with parts missing and parts misplaced, there were too many inconsistencies for a novel, and too many characters for a play. The short story cycle allowed me to incorporate so many stories, from the single phrase that led me to write *Going Home*, to the biography that led to *Memory is Always True*. I was able to link stories, recall characters and observe a single event as though through a kaleidoscope, with sparkling shards of memories forming and reforming patterns.

I would not have had the courage to write in this way without the shelter of a university. I would never have presumed to approach my publisher with such an outlandish idea; and yet, writing without the pressure of publication, with distant deadlines and supportive mentors has been a privilege. To quote Michael D Higgins again

*The coming out, the going in of the story followed no rules*¹⁹⁷

However, the opportunity to develop this as a doctoral project has also allowed me to ground my creative practice in critical reflection around ethics, observation and transcription, and to understanding the diverse literary traditions – from the multiperspective radio play, to the modernist short story, to postcolonial African fiction – that have shaped its composition. In doing so, both the short story cycle and the commentary offers a new cross-cultural and hybrid perspective, and a distinct contribution to our understanding of contemporary literary practice.

¹⁹⁷ Michael D Higgins, 'The Storyteller', in *The Season of Fire* (Brandon Book Publishers, 1993), p. 45.

Chapter 3 Notes and References

3.1 Additional Notes

Note from page 145: The Queen Mother referred to here is also known as the Asantehemaa or Keeper of the Golden Stool. She has considerable influence in the selection of the next Chief. It should be noted that the Ashanti society is matrilineal.

Note from page 146: My elder siblings, John and Denise

Note from page 148: The tales attached to these three objects became the starting point for the following stories: Ghosts in the Castle; Medicine and Magic; and An Old Coaster.

Note from page 157: This was based on an article in a scrap of newspaper (no date or title on cutting) about a series of attacks on house girls which had resulted in three deaths. This was found in a box of mixed papers, donated to the Bodleian Library by the family of Eric Cunningham

Note from page 161: My mother had traveller heritage. My great-grandmother being the first in her family to adopt a settled lifestyle. The rest of her family continued travelling for several more generations.

Note from page 161: Note: Aunt Bisi was our cook for a while. At the time we lived in the Nigerian bush about 30 kilometres north of Ibadan. She would sometimes tell us stories to keep us quiet while my mother had her afternoon siesta.

Note from page 172: Cross and Cast is a term used in country dancing. It is a common way for a first couple to move down a longways set. They simply cross over the set passing right shoulders and go down the outside one place (the next couple moving up a little to let them in). Some three couple set dances use first couple cross and cast, cross and cast as a way of getting the top couple to the bottom.

Note from page 178: The past is a foreign country, they do things differently there, is the opening line of L. P. Hartley's *The Go-between*

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