

ANDREA JOHNSON

Bat and Full Moon, 2019
Oil on canvas, 14 x 11 in



COURTESY WINFIELD GALLERY

LISA FUGARD

The Ghost of Anton Viljoen

The Bushman tracker found the footprints just before sunset on the first day of our patrol in Ovamboland, south of the border with Angola. A faint set of tracks setting off across a salt pan.

Retief, our squadron leader, squatted down to look at them and then turned to me. “Viljoen, you see this? How many men do you think?”

“One.”

“Wrong. SWAPO bastards are clever. They walk in each other’s tracks. They change shoes, circle back, and next thing you know they are hunting you. Like a wounded buffalo.”

I looked around, to the east, to the west, behind and in front of me. I looked into nothing but shimmering heat. The possibility of making contact with fighters from the South West Africa People’s Organisation scared me, scared all of us. Even PK Strydom, who prayed each night for a black face to shoot at, was suddenly frightened. So he concentrated on all the snakes he’d shot on his uncle’s farm near Warmbaths. Puff adders and cobras and a few vipers. Snakes were neat and tidy, no body parts flying off when you shot them, just a bloodied end where the head used to be. And then that nice lazy swing of your arm as you toss a dead snake into the air. PK tried to think of SWAPO as just a snake standing up.

A restless sleep that night. The next morning we folded our tarps, loaded our packs, and set off, the Bushman in

front leading us down a dry riverbed and across another salt pan. In the middle of the day, when my boots were dusted white and the sun shrieked in my skull and the other *ous* looked grim, Retief prowled in a crazy circle, moving far away from us and then coming closer, closer, until he stopped in front of the Bushman.

“*Waar’s Swapo?*”

The Bushman pointed at the sand and this time we all squatted and tried to see what he saw. The faintest trace of a footprint left the night before. Sweat slopped off my face. A scorpion crawled out of a hole and Retief smashed it with the butt of his rifle.

“SWAPO’s a fucking *spoek*,” said PK.

Which got the *ous* whispering. What color is the ghost of a black man? And could you see a black man’s ghost at night? Wouldn’t it just disappear into the darkness?

We followed the Bushman until evening, when we set up camp among some camel thorn trees. While the *ous* dug into their rat packs, I stayed there because the day was turning on me and I felt soft inside. It had happened each evening since I’d arrived on the border. Five o’clock, the light suddenly so gentle, pink streams of clouds in the sky, and a coolness in the air that made me want to open my mouth and swallow it, made me think of deep kissing. And it wasn’t like I was *jags*, thinking about fucking. This was different, something all tender was wanting inside of me. Day after day it had been like this. Ovamboland was the girlfriend from hell, beating you up all day, then breaking your heart at sunset. I began to cry because the whole business felt so relentless.

I was a boy who cried. I chased girls away with my tears. Except for Rina. She didn’t like it when I cried and once she slapped me, but she didn’t break up with me. I cried when I was caught smoking *zol* in standard eight and I thought I would be sent to jail. I cried when I passed the physical for my military service, even though I had lit matches and breathed in the sulphur and prayed for an asthma attack. They gave me a document. Anton Viljoen to report for duty in the South African Defence Force on March 1, 1986. Two hundred *ous* on the troop train and five hundred mothers, sisters, and girlfriends on the platform. If you had a father or a brother, they said goodbye to you at home. Pigeons flying around the arched ceiling, the

cool damp concrete, and all those dresses and lipstick and tears, my mother waving in that funny way as if her arm and hand were made of wood. I went to the lavatory and sobbed. Later, I stood in the corridor with Lloyd Smits. He told me his dad said, "Lloyd, if they would take me I would go." Mr. Smits, with his thick rimmed glasses, his cane? Truly that would terrify SWAPO, make them drop their guns and run screaming across the sea back to Cuba or wherever it is they come from. "SWAPO! SWAPO! SWAPO!" we shouted through the open window until we were out of breath and that burnt smell of the South African Railways made us cough.

Someone struck a match behind me and I turned and saw the Bushman sitting on a rock, lighting up a cig. With tears dripping down my face, I said to him, "Christ, I am so lonely."

I didn't know if he understood me.

I cried some more, then wiped my face to smear the dirt so the *ous* wouldn't think I was a coward.

"Kom, kyk," the Bushman said in his crackling voice. He pointed at a hole in the ground next to him. "*Ystervark*."

I shook my head. Even though my last name was Viljoen, my Afrikaans was lousy. He scratched in the dirt until he found something which he held in the palm of his hand for me to see. A quill.

"Porcupine?"

"Ja, hy loop hier in die nag rond. As hy skriek of daar gevaar is dan staan sy penne orent." He made a strange sound in his throat, as if imitating the porcupine rattling its quills. Then he shook his hand at me, telling me to go back to the rest of the section.

I found the other *ous* swapping tins without labels, hoping to give away beetroots for bully beefs. Our rat packs drove Boet van Heerden crazy. "Why do they give us this *kak*?" he asked. "Do you know how easy it is to make biltong up here? It's so *voking* dry man. We shoot a few *springbokkies*, slice them, leave them to dry, and in a day or two we have biltong."

"Ja," said PK. "Just like the *boesmans* used to make, hey?" He waved at the Bushman, who was now crouched nearby, about to open his first tin.

"It wasn't the Bushman who invented biltong, you *doos*. It was the Afrikaner." Boet looked at the Bushman and asked, "Isn't that right?"

The Bushman ignored him and opened his second tin. Both of them bully beef.

During my watch that night I prayed not to see SWAPO; let me see the porcupine instead. I saw nothing. When Boet relieved me, I crawled into my bag and I prayed to have good dreams about Rina. Instead my eyes turned into kaleidoscopes: the veld so dry and bitter, stones spinning and twirling into spiders that turned into scorpions that melted into snakes that broke into fragments and rose as giant black men with guns who walked barefoot without fear.

The next morning, the Bushman called me. "*Ek het jou gister aand by die vuur gesien*."

I told him yes, I'd had the watch in the middle of the night.

"*Ek het ook die ystervark gesien*."

"You lie!"

It's true, he said, and he showed me the tracks leading to the tree where the porcupine had dug for roots. It was just a few paces from where I had sat.

That day was the same as the day before. Again, at midday, I squatted in the dust with the rest of the *ous* and tried hard to see the print of SWAPO boots. I saw nothing, not even an ant. A few minutes later, while the rest of them adjusted their webbing, the Bushman walked up to me.

"*Jakkals*," he whispered.

"Where?"

He tapped on the ground with his boot and I dropped down. There it was, the pad and the four toes, the spoor of a jackal.

It's recent, the Bushman told me, not more than an hour old. I raised my head and looked around. It was hard to believe. There had been nothing living to be seen since we started the patrol three days ago, except us and those sandy-coloured doves that called whenever we passed a tree. And now even the doves were quiet. A hot breeze blew puffs of sand across the flat land.

It happened every time we stopped. I'd be unloading my pack, about to sit down, and the Bushman would appear at my side. Sometimes he'd want to lead me off, other times he'd just point at the ground at my feet. There were tracks everywhere. We sat under a tree and to my left he showed me the spoor of a cheetah. He explained that a cheetah was half dog, half cat, and it couldn't pull its claws in. He told me the cheetah must have been sitting in the exact

same spot that I was, at the same time yesterday. It's the shade, he said, the little tree doesn't give much shade and that's what the cheetah wanted, the same way you want it. Then he pointed out the tracks of a gemsbok and several ostriches that had passed by. I wondered why I never saw any of the animals. What were they eating and drinking? The day was like a different kind of night and I was waking up each morning and not seeing.

In the middle of the afternoon we saw what looked like a dark sheet hanging in the sky in front of us. I thought it was rain but Boet said he'd seen that before, it was a sight that would torment a farmer because it looked so much like rain but was actually dust. Within an hour we were in the middle of it. Dust, stinging, blowing, creeping down my collar, sifting into my boots. Which wasn't so bad, because suddenly I was back in a *lekker* memory, running across the sand behind our block of flats to the corner shop. I'd just made love to Rina. I'd begged and begged before she said yes. She looked so thin, like a leaf, without her clothes on. She only smiled a little when it was finished, but I felt happy. For once it didn't matter that my mom had passed out from all the pills and the kitchen was full of rubbish. I was going to buy chips and pack of Lucky Strikes for me and Rina.

Ovamboland sand blew up my nose and worked its way between my teeth and gums. I squinted but the sand still found its way in and almost blinded me. I stumbled and bumped into the rifleman in front of me.

"*Vok!*" PK whispered. "Tanks, man! Look!"

Blitsvinnig we dropped to our bellies.

"T-55! Shit, man. Kiss your biltong farming goodbye, Boet," said PK.

I felt like I had electricity in my heart and I gripped my R4 and stared at the dark shapes on the horizon. Retief fiddled with the radio.

The Bushman started speaking in his own language and at first I thought it was our radio clicking with static. He danced around and laughed and grabbed me. I almost *klapped* him. I'd been friendly to the *ou* and now he wanted to hold me up so a terr in a tank could shoot me. He whispered in my ear. "*Olifante!*" I cried and I laughed. I laughed so much I could barely speak. Finally I squeezed out a word. "Elephants."

"You sure?" Retief demanded.

"He's sure," I said, and I pointed at the Bushman. But for safety's sake, I dropped back down until Retief made a positive ID. Nine elephants.

We traveled another mile that afternoon, the Bushman going on instinct until he found the tracks again. The elephants remained in the distance, straight ahead and slightly to our left. Because we hadn't eaten at midday, we fell upon our rat packs when we finally stopped. Afterward, Jimmy swallowed half of a Mandrax tab that he'd smuggled all the way through basic and we watched the sun set, the sky glowing orange. The camel thorn trees turned into silhouettes and so did the elephants, all nine of them distinct on the horizon.

"Our doppelgangers," said Jimmy. "*Vok*, man, this is heavy."

"What's that?" I asked.

"It's us, Anton. Didn't you figure it out? Nine of them, nine of us. Our doubles, man, marching around out there." He moaned and his eyes fluttered shut. It didn't matter, his words calmed me as I watched the large shapes dissolve into the night. I wasn't here, I was there.

When I woke the next morning, the elephants were gone. Some of the *ous* were still talking about it, how it would become another border story, the section frozen for an hour in a dust storm by a herd of elephant tanks.

The heat felt bearable when we set out, but not for long. The day turned brutal, ten in the morning and the sun had never felt so strong. Heads down, we trudged, and when I next looked up, the horizon had melted into the sky and the elephants were there in the distance, standing in shimmering sand like they were on the beach in Port Elizabeth. The sun making diamonds on the waves, a hamburger with onions from the Greek at the kiosk, the roll warm in my hands. Shit, I could even hear the seagulls and the beach was filled with girls and elephants and for a second I smelled the sea air and saw the way it blew through each girl's hair, making all of them beautiful and salty.

Then they were gone and we trudged through yet another salt pan, the Bushman leading us on, SWAPO's footprints everywhere.

That evening the elephants returned. All in a column, not moving, turning black as the sun sank behind them.

"It's us, man," I said to Jimmy, repeating his words to me.

He told me that when he was little, his parents visited Zim, which was then Rhodesia, and bought him a small red seed with a tiny cap on it. He opened it and out fell ten tiny ivory elephants.

Jimmy sat quiet for a long time. "I think they gave me a seed like that."

We had just started the patrol early the next morning, the sky still gray and low, when I saw one of the elephants step on a land mine. Black smoke and flames. The sound of the explosion and mixed in with that the awful sounds of the other elephants screaming and screaming as they ran away. My hands felt like rocks and I worried I would drop my gun.

The lieutenant radioed ahead to get a land mine report. "Exploding elephants. No wonder we don't see many of them," said PK.

I looked and looked but the others never returned. We continued to walk. By midday we were in thick bush and somebody said we were getting closer, just a mile away.

"Closer to what?" I asked.

"The border, man. We cross it. We go after SWAPO, right into Angola."

We cut our way through tangled vines, the muddy smell of the Cunene River in the air.

"We wait for orders. Maybe we cross later tonight," Retief said.

We set up camp and double-checked our weapons. I was sweating, the air was sweating, and Rina's last letter was plastered to my chest. I didn't have to read it again. I could feel how unhappy she was.

I walked away soon after that. There wasn't going to be much of a sunset. We were in a hollow, night would pour down on us, not like in the open stretches of Ovamboland, where it flew in on wings. I climbed an anthill. The wide banks of the Cunene were broken up with hoof marks. At the river's edge I saw the imprints of the huge pad. The spoor of a lion, so fresh the water still seeped into the tracks. They headed down river and I followed. Too much sun, too much loneliness, too much broken heart, too much fear of ever having to shoot a man. I saw my own heart beating across the skin of the earth and I followed.

It was Jimmy who noticed I hadn't returned from the river. He'd broken what was left of that Mandrax tab in two and was waiting for me. He mentioned something to

Boet, who then spoke to Retief, who sent the two of them to search for me.

They followed me following the lion and found a few remains under a tree. The lion sat two hundred feet away, bloody faced and full, and when it heard their voices, it moved off. Boet shot two vultures and, weeping, he carried them back into camp by their featherless necks.

Retief swore when they told him it was a lion that killed me. In an act of compassion that stunned the other *ous* in my section, he said, "No, my chinas, it was a land mine that killed Rifleman Viljoen." Retief had relatives in the higher-ups and they made it official. I died an honorable death.

The souls of dead soldiers rest in the border rivers—the Cunene, the Okavango, the Zambezi, the Orange, the Limpopo. That is why, after Jimmy was killed during that hot pursuit into Angola, his mother hung herself along the banks of the Orange River near Pofadder. We drift past hippos walking along the riverbeds, we float through the crooked mouths of crocodiles. Purple water lilies blossom above us. When the rivers dry up, we sink back into the sand; our tongues, our fingertips, our fragmented chests, the gall of our terror leaching out.

Lisa Fugard is the author of *Skinner's Drift* (Scribner, 2007), a New York Times Notable Book and a runner-up for the Dayton Literary Peace Prize. Her novel was also a finalist for the Los Angeles Times Art Seidenbaum Award for First Fiction. Her short stories have been published in numerous literary journals, *Outside*, and the British Council's *NW 15: The Anthology of New Writing*; featured on *Selected Shorts*; and anthologized in a Houghton Mifflin Harcourt textbook of world literature for high school students. She has also had numerous travel articles in the *New York Times*. Originally from South Africa, Fugard currently teaches writing workshops in her hometown of Encinitas, California.

KO UN

When I travel around the world

—Translated from the Korean by
Clare You and Zack Rogow

When I travel around the world
I visit restaurants
in several countries
among them
Ristorante Acqua Pazza Crazy Water Restaurant
in Saint Mark's Square
Venice Italy

It's at the corner of the piazza
right by my apartment for this half year

From time to time
I stop by that chatty *ristorante* of the locals
to soak in the Crazy Water
to get a little drunk and
to get a little full
before I go home

The moon lingers over the slanting campanile
floating motionless
and spreads its moonlight echo over the cobblestones of the piazza

Ko Un is the leading contemporary South Korean poet. During the period of the dictatorship, he was imprisoned for his dissent. While in jail, Ko Un began a monumental work entitled *Ten Thousand Lives*, where he attempted to write a poem for each person he had ever met.

Clare You taught in and coordinated the Korean program at the University of California, Berkeley. She also served as chair of the Center for Korean Studies at UC Berkeley. She has cotranslated modern Korean poetry and fiction into English, including books by Ko Un, Oh Sae-young, and Moon Cheung-hee.

Zack Rogow is the author, editor, or translator of more than twenty books and plays. He has received the PEN/Book-of-the-Month Club Translation Award and the Bay Area Book Reviewers Association Translation Prize.