Bitter Winter



Paul Slabolepszy

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Cast

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BITTER WINTER was first performed in The Studio at Pieter Toerien's Montecasino Theatre in Johannesburg on 20th February, 2025. JEAN-LOUIS was played by ***Andre Odendaal****, PROSPER by* ***Oarabile Ditsele*** *and FELICIA by* ***Chantal Stanfield****. The play was directed by* ***Lesedi Job****.*

BITTER WINTER, a play made possible by a grant from the Baxter Theatre, Cape Town, is dedicated to artists everywhere who work and create their entire lives, enriching and expanding the cultural landscape for all humankind, yet end their days in poverty...

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Final Performance Draft

The reception room of a run-of-the-mill Johannesburg casting agency. Several chairs line the walls. A carpeted floor; to one side, a table covered with a mustard-coloured table cloth, upon which we see sheets of paper, script pages, printed forms, a pen or two. A hot-water urn. A tray with coffee, tea, milk, sugar, a plastic container of biscuits, mugs, plastic tea-spoons.

Lights up... late afternoon...

A gentleman in his early 70s walks in as lights come up. Dressed in an old, clean pair of trousers, polished, well-worn shoes, an ancient, ill-fitting corduroy jacket with elbow patches and a spotless shirt with a fraying collar, JEAN-LOUIS LOURENS could well pass as any old-age pensioner awaiting assistance of some kind. He sits on one of the chairs next to the table. Staring straight ahead, 'miles away' and deep in thought for a considerable period, he gives the impression that he may well be in a state of catatonia.

Lourens suddenly grimaces and grabs at his abdomen in pain...

He takes several deep breaths... in...out... in... out... leaning forwards onto his knees in order to allow the pain to subside. One might get the impression that he has passed out, but he is only holding on until the pain subsides completely. Sitting up with a deep intake of breath, he recovers somewhat, allowing the blood to flow through his legs and the rest of his body. He gets to his feet...

Lourens paces about, trying to get the blood moving... he moves across the room and peers off in the direction of what we assume to be an adjacent office...

LOURENS: *(Tentative, apologetic)* Hullo...?

Nothing... he hovers... drifts about... looking about the room, his eyes are drawn to an 'unseen' full-length mirror in the audience-side wall... he stands before it, flattening down his unruly hair and adjusting his jacket... he stares at his image for a few moments... the proud classical actor who once strode like a king upon the stage, now but a gaunt, withered shell... it cuts deep...

LOURENS: *(Mortified, a whisper)* Goeie genade!

Turning away from the mirror, he heads across to the table… gets himself a mug and unscrews the cap to the instant coffee jar… he pops a heaped teaspoon of granules into the mug and three sugars… he feels the urn… finding it cold, he frowns, fiddles with the switch… lifting the lid, he thrusts his hand into the water… it's tepid…!

Muttering angrily under his breath, he gives up on the coffee and takes a biscuit from the container… takes another, self-consciously popping them both into a jacket pocket… taking another biscuit, he begins eating it and sits down on the nearest chair…

He goes into his 'dwaal' again, whilst munching, staring into the middle distance… eventually he speaks… the line sounds rehearsed… not yet convincing…

LOURENS: 'So you're the one they call the Redeemer…'

He pauses, ponders… digging a hand into a jacket pocket, he hauls out his 'sides', the pages with dialogue for his scenes. He briefly reacquaints himself with a particular scene, mouthing the first few words. He folds the pages and pops them back into his pocket…

He gets up, stands with his feet apart and creates a 'cowboy pose'… imagining a Sheriff at the ready and about to draw his six-gun…

LOURENS: *(Muttering, a steely delivery)* 'You come riding into this town like you own it, Gabuza, but know this, I am the Law. You break the Law, you pay the price'.

(Beat, firmer)

'You break the Law, you pay the price!'

He stares ahead… miming a devastatingly 'quick-draw'…

At this point, a young, imposing black man, late 20s, early 30s enters, (SL). In stark contrast to the older man, PROSPER MANGANE wears the threads of an 'established star' – designer tracksuit, flashy baseball cap, and designer sneakers. He carries a pristine medium-to-large backpack and listens to music through top-of-the-range headphones attached to a very fancy smartphone…

Lourens has taken his pages from his pocket again and is perusing them…

Mangane takes no time at all in locating his chosen chair and plops onto it, clocking the older man briefly without acknowledging him. He puts his backpack on the chair the old man was sitting on. Lourens winces at the distinctly audible hip hop coming through the young man's headphones…

Lourens returns to his chair, only to find that the youth has dumped his backpack on it… clocking the youth, he turns and moves to sit on a chair downstage of the table…

Almost immediately a third character enters from the Office (SR), bustling in at speed. FELICIA WILLEMSE, a no-nonsense casting director (mid-to-late 30s), is smartly dressed in what might best be described as 'the corporate look'. Her attention is focused fully on the younger man as she heads across the room…

WILLEMSE: *(Mortified)* Prosper Mangane, I'm so sorry. How long have you been waiting?

The young man snaps off his music, yanks off his headphones…

You've had some tea…? Some coffee?

MANGANE: I'm cool. *(Flipping his baseball cap around, back-to-front)*

WILLEMSE: Your flight is when?

MANGANE: Eight-twenty-five.

WILLEMSE: OR Tambo, right? Hamilton's on his way. As soon as he gets here we'll do this thing. *(Sycophantic smile)* In the meantime, anything you need, just…

She indicates the door through which she has just come… Mangane puts on his headphones and resumes listening to his music… Willemse turns to leave…

LOURENS: *(Tentative)* Excuse me, er… Miss?

Willemse swings on him, a glimmer of recognition…

WILLEMSE: Ah. Mr Lawrence.

LOURENS: Lourens. Jean-Louis.

WILLEMSE: Yes, yes. Of course. Felicia Willemse.

LOURENS: Have we met? *(Extending a hand)*

WILLEMSE: Yes, we have. You've filled in a form? *(Shaking his hand)*

LOURENS: Form?

WILLEMSE: Your details. *(Indicating the forms on the table)*

LOURENS: *(Flustered)* I did that the last time.

WILLEMSE: The director's flying in from America. You're a blank slate to him.

LOURENS: Ja, no. I understand. *(All a little overwhelming)* It's just the lady who was here the last time...

WILLEMSE: That would be Yolanda. My associate.

LOURENS: Yes, that's right. I gave her all my... you know. CV... photos.

WILLEMSE: You got the brief... studied the scenes?

LOURENS: You mean, have I like...? Ja. No. All up here. *(Taps head) Hopelik.*

Willemse has already turned to leave, heading for the door through which she came...

WILLEMSE: *(Her mind on other matters)* Help yourself to tea or coffee.

LOURENS: *(A beat, clocking the urn)* Er... the... the dinges... it's not working.

Willemse is gone... Lourens lamely turns to Mangane...

There's no hot water... *(Indicating the urn, disconsolate)*

Mangane appears to be responding to this, but the nodding he is doing is simply him keeping time to the music on his headphones... the music which goes on and on...

Lourens takes a form from the table and picks up a pen... the preoccupied Mangane continues to nod along to the music in his headphones, ignoring the old man...

Filling out his form, Lourens grimaces in pain, although this time the sharpness is not as powerful as the first time it occurred... not wishing to draw too much attention to his discomfort, he quickly switches to rubbing his arms, then blowing at his hands...

Mangane, in his warm clothing, is well insulated from the cold… not that he could care two hoots about the older man's distress…

Lourens resumes filling out the form… every now and then glancing at Mangane, seeking some kind of connection, or at least a look that would suggest 'we're-in-this-together'… even a smile would help… nothing is forthcoming from the youth…

LOURENS: *(Shivering) My magtag!* It's like a yskas in here!

Mangane's smartphone begins ringing. He snaps off his music and takes the call…

MANGANE: *(Into phone, vernacular) Yes, Kay-Gee, bru… no, it's great, I'm all packed, ready to go…! (Beaming) No, only tonight… I'll be landing in London tomorrow morning… (Laughing) Ja, ja, you can climb in my backpack, only you pay the excess…! (Listens) You'll sleep with the baggage…? Hai, moegoe – it's not Jozi to Harare…! You more than twelve hours in the aeroplane…! (Switching to English)* Ten days… not so long. Fo' sho', I'll call you when I get back… show you my ticket for Kendrick Lamar… *(Chuckles)* I didn't tell you…? I told you, bro'. Big Concert in Paris! I'll take a selfie. Make you guys so jealous you'll be howling on the floor…! *(Laughing)* Ah, voetsek, man…! I call you when I get back.

He ends the call and shakes his head, briefly clocking Lourens, who taps at his form…

LOURENS: *(Shaking his head, sadly)* These people… *ai tog… (Holding form aloft, dripping disdain, then reading the question) 'Can you ride a horse…?'* I mean… *Liewe aarde…!* Would I even be here if I couldn't ride a horse?

(Beat, reading new question)

'Are you prepared to do scenes that require nudity…?'

(Displaying his 'sharp wit')

They must know – me, kaalgat – they making a Horror Fliek.

Mangane's cold, disinterested look indicates he is not in the mood for small talk and Lourens gets the message. The younger man abandons his headphones, now focusing fully on his smartphone, scrolling and messaging…

On the odd occasion that Mangane glances up to briefly clock Lourens, the latter's forced smile is met with a look that borders on hostile…

Lourens, self-consciousness finally getting the better of him, digs a hand into his pocket and hauls out his pages… he reads through bits of his dialogue, silently mouthing the words. This goes on for some time… two individuals wrapped up in their own worlds…

Lourens gets a little more animated in the reciting of his lines… what was in effect a 'mime show' turns into something else, a touch of the macabre. For any onlooker not au fait with auditioning procedures, they could be forgiven for believing Lourens to be a befuddled and distracted old man, ambling around and talking to himself…

LOURENS: *(Muttering)* … There are those that whisper behind my back… spreading rumours and lies… *(Momentarily lost, glancing at his lines)* The badge that I wear, I have earned… *(Forcefully)* … The badge that I wear, I have earned…!

Mangane glances up from his texting, smouldering… Lourens apologises…

Sorry. I'm just… *(Indicating his pages)* If it's disturbing you, then… *(Mangane resumes texting)* Okay. I'll just…

Lourens briefly paces about again, mouthing his words silently. This is not working for him. He thrusts the script pages back into his pocket and sits down again…

Lourens rocks gently back and forth on his chair… Mangane, eyes down, is texting…

Lourens begins to quietly do a few 'voice warm up exercises' that begin slowly and softly, almost imperceptibly, growing faster and louder…

LOURENS: Pip-pip-pip… pop-pop-pop…! Elmarie le Roux dra a rooi raam bril… 'n rooi raam bril dra Elmarie le Roux! Drom-drom-drom! Dromedaris…! *Dromedaris!*

Mangane clocks the guy, a look that says 'this-old-fart-is-a-pain'. A sheepish Lourens falls silent and there is another pause... Mangane texts... Lourens studies him intently...

LOURENS: It *is* you, isn't it? Am I right?

MANGANE: Sorry?

LOURENS: You?

MANGANE: Me?

LOURENS: That advert on TV... Absa. FNB. You on that big ocean-going yacht-kind-of-thing. You drinking cocktails at sunset. There's that lady smiling up at you and then there's something about '*Bank with the bank that's got your back of so iets.*

MANGANE: Invescor.

LOURENS: *Invescor – daarsy!*

(Beat)

Ag, sorry. It's on the tip of my tongue. What's your name again?

Mangane's look is disbelieving, disdainful... 'You-don't-know-my-name!?'

MANGANE: Prosper Mangane.

LOURENS: *Prosper*, that's right. *(Beaming)* I was going to say Precious, but I thought, ag man, that can't be right. *(Upbeat)* I'm Jean-Louis Lourens.

He crosses to shake hands with Mangane, who puts out a fist to merely fist bump.

MANGANE: Sharp. *(Distinctly unimpressed)*

The young man immediately turns his attention back to his smartphone...

A long pause during which Lourens alternates from glancing across at the door through which Willemse departed and clocking the young man who continues to silently receive and text messages, doing his level best to avoid conversation...

Eventually anxiety gets the better of Lourens and he again breaks the silence...

LOURENS: I hate this waiting around. Just now my words are all gone.

(Beat)

I wonder if there's anyone else?

Mangane couldn't care less… resumes his messaging…

Sjoe…! Haven't been to a Call-Back in… dunno how long. *(Grins)* A person must be positive, not so. Can't be many actors lining up for this ol' toppie, hey…? *(Moving to the table, picking up the 'brief', reading) 'Sheriff Eckhart, 70-plus… a grizzly Lawman set in his ways… tough as teak and stubborn as the day is long'.*

A beat… Lourens smiles… another weak attempt at breaking the ice…

At least it's good to know we're not up for the same part.

Mangane briefly clocks the older man, emotionless… then resumes his messaging…

LOURENS: *(Clocking the 'brief' again, chuckling)* You have to laugh at these movie people… always following like sheep. Ever since that Four Fingers for Marseilles, everybody sommer wants to make cowboy flieks now.

MANGANE: Five.

LOURENS: Sorry?

MANGANE: Five Fingers. For Marseilles.

LOURENS: Ag, sorry. Ja. Four Fingers… Five Fingers… numbers keep going up. *(Indicating Title on the movie brief)* 'Six Guns at Sesriem'. All we need now is another Magnificent Seven. *(Chuckles)* Magnificent Seven in Senekal.

He chortles at his own joke… there is no reaction whatsoever from Mangane, who zips open a side pouch on his backpack and starts fiddling around inside it…

Mangane takes out a thermal vest, looks at it for a moment then puts it back in the backpack, takes out his passport and travel itinerary and checks them… his focus is already on his trip, and concerns of the moment are but a fleeting irritation…

Lourens watches the younger man in silence for a while… it strikes him that this may well be the perfect opportunity to initiate conversation…

LOURENS: So. You going to Paris?

Mangane looks at him… 'What's-it-to-you…?' A beat…

MANGANE: London. Then Paris.

LOURENS: Business or pleasure?

MANGANE: ADR.

LOURENS: Ay-dee-aar…? *(Frowning)* Ah…! Of course! Dubbing. Done my fair share of that for the old S-A-U-K. *(Proudly)* I was the Afrikaans voice of Larry Hagman!

Mangane has no reaction to the name…

Larry Hagman. J.R. Dallas.

Nothing…Lourens ploughs on…

Ja, jong. You go to Paris make sure you got that… English-French-French-English… little boekie. In France, if you don't sort of… *Bon jour*, *S'il vous plait -wie-weet-wat*, they just look at you… what's this *stuk drol* here under my shoe?

A beat… Lourens chuckles, recalling how he learnt his lesson the hard way…

'Would you like to sleep with me tonight?'

Mangane gawks, his expression is priceless…

Ja, you see…! Your face! I was also caught out like that, hey.

Lourens launches into his story, relishing it…

I'm a young actor… innocent, still learning the trade. It's a gala performance of Moliere's *Tartuffe*. After the show, the cast, we mingling with the audience… there's the wife of the French Ambassador sashaying around, champagne glass in hand. I ask one of the older actors if he thinks she enjoyed the show. Bladdy skelm says *Why don't you ask her*. And then he tells me how to say it in French.

MANGANE: *(Quiet, disbelieving)* You fell for it?

LOURENS: *(Mimicking fellow actor) Voulez-vous coucher avec moi ce soir? (Mimes a slap-to-the-face) Gwha-daaa...! (Wry smile)* Needless to say, the memory of that *snot klap* to my *kakebeen* remains with me to this day.

MANGANE: *(Drily)* Lucky you didn't try it on the husband.

LOURENS: *O, hel...!* He would've looked like you did two minutes ago!

A brief pause... a wistful, faraway look wafts across the face of the older man...

Ja. Paris... say the word, you can see it... the Seine... Notre Dame... *(Chortling)* That little bookshop. Shakespeare and Company. *(Snorts)* These days, Troyeville to this place is the furthest you see me travel. And that's *nogal* by minibus-taxi.

Mangane is still digesting this when Willemse comes bustling in from the Office.

WILLEMSE: *(All 'Business')* Right, gentlemen. I'm really sorry to do this to you, but our director's stuck in Customs. Ugh...! It's all red tape and protocols.

LOURENS: *(Deflated)* This is Mr Hamilton?

WILLEMSE: Raubenheimer, Mr Raubenheimer. I've just got off the phone with Yolanda. She's not exactly sure how long this is going to take.

LOURENS: So what do we do now?

WILLEMSE: *(Matter-of-fact)* In your case we might need to reschedule.

LOURENS: *(Mortified, turning away and quietly muttering) Ag, fok!*

WILLEMSE: Prosper, it's important you meet with the director and have a chat.

MANGANE: Cool.

WILLEMSE: Our commitment to you is that you'll make your flight with time to spare.

LOURENS: What about the others?

WILLEMSE: Others?

LOURENS: There's no other Call-Backs?

WILLEMSE: None that I know of. And certainly not today. *(Keen to get back to her admin)* Right... I'll be next door. Prosper, anything you need, just...

LOURENS: Coffee. We need coffee... *asseblief...! (Moving across to the urn)* This thing's broken. Could be the switch, the plug... *wie-weet-wat...*

WILLEMSE: I'll get somebody to... I'll send someone out. *(Turning to Mangane)* What would you like...? Cappuccino...? Americano...?

MANGANE: Americano.

LOURENS: Make that two. Thank you so much.

Willemse sweeps out... Mangane is back to his texting, leaving Lourens hovering...

No other Call-Backs. *Kan jy dit glo?*

Lourens is even more discombobulated now after hearing the news that he may well be the only actor in line for the part of Sherriff Eckhart... he shudders, anxious...

Doesn't get easier, you know... as you get older. You think the nerves will go... *(Grim)* Not a demm!

Lourens sits in his chair... anxiety and the cold are getting to him... he rubs his arms...

Oefffff...! Is it just me or is it freezing in this place...? Maybe we should've asked her for a blerrie heater as well as a *warm koppie koffie. (Shudders) Urgh...!* How we suffer for our Art, hey! *(Recalling, grimly) Titus Andronicus...!* When that mad German director put us in g-strings and open sandals in the middle of the coldest winter ever recorded. My poephol was knyping so tight I could hardly put one foot in front of the other.

The jerking 'tight-arse' mimicking of the walk, as well as the arm-rubbing from the neurotic old man eventually becomes too much for Mangane...

MANGANE: *Eish!*

He zips open his backpack and starts digging around… hauling out the thermal vest, he places it in the old actor's lap…

LOURENS: *(Looking at the vest, surprised)* What's this?

MANGANE: I'm catching a cold just watching you.

LOURENS: Thermal vest?

MANGANE: It's summer on that side.

LOURENS: Then why did you pack it?

MANGANE: It's a question I'm asking myself.

(Beat)

LOURENS: *Liewe hemel…!* Are you sure?

(Turning the vest over in his hands, vacillating)

This is very kind of you.

Lourens slowly takes off his jacket… placing it on his chair… he picks up the vest in a manner that suggests he is about to put it on over his shirt… Mangane reacts…

MANGANE: *Yho*, dude… goes underneath.

LOURENS: Oh. Ja. Of course.

Lourens undoes the buttons of his shirt… while he goes about putting on the thermal vest, Mangane is calling a buddy and leaving a message…

MANGANE: *(Into phone, vernacular) Hey, Kay-Gee-Bru… remember that girl you came with to the Premiere… that girl… Mbali. That girl is Top Ten…! I need her numbers… play the Five for me…! I need a wing-man…! Tell her that Pros is a Big Dog and he's going to London!*

At this point, Lourens has put on the thermal vest…

LOURENS: *Sjoe…!* This thing's quite warm.

MANGANE: That's why it's called 'thermal'.

Mangane goes back to the call with his buddy… into phone, vernacular…

Eish…! There's this white man here. He's a nightmare! I'll call you later… (Nodding) Sho'-sho'.

Mangane ends the call… Lourens is now putting on his shirt inside-out…

LOURENS: *(Putting on his jacket)* You must give me your address. I can wash it and then... *(Reacting to Mangane's amused grin)* What...?

Mangane chuckles at the 'vision' before him, indicating... Lourens clocks his shirt and notices what he has done... gasping, he quickly takes it off and puts it back on the right way round...

LOURENS: Ag, nee man...!

Immediately starts re-doing the buttons...

Director sees me like this he'll think *die ou grapjas skiems* this movie's a comedy!

MANGANE: You'd get that part.

Lourens completes buttoning up, tucks in his shirt and puts on his jacket again... he breathes deep and calls out anxiously...

LOURENS: Kom, kom, kom, Meneer Raubenheimer... die son trek water!

He smooths down his clothing in the mirror, checking his 'look'...

Hamilton Raubenheimer. I wonder if there's a 'P' in the middle of that... or a 'J'... *(Proclaiming)* Hamilton J. Raubenheimer. Now *that's* an American. *Windgat* enough to make us South Africans get *benoude boude*.

He heads across to the table and picks up the container of biscuits...

What's the bet the vent's got about twenty-five suitcases and Customs is going through every single of them. *(Offering)* Biscuit?

MANGANE: *(Declining, in vernacular) I'm fine.*

Lourens returns the container to its spot on the table and takes a couple of biscuits for himself, popping one into a pocket and speedily devouring the other...

LOURENS: I suppose it makes sense, hey... cowboy fliek. Who better to direct a *skop-skiet-en-donner* than an American?

MANGANE: He's South African. *(Not looking up)*

LOURENS: Raubenheimer?

MANGANE: Doesn't speak your language.

LOURENS: *Wraggies?*

As Lourens returns to his chair and sits down, Mangane stares at the old guy, astonished that the dude is so out of touch…

MANGANE: You here to see this guy. You know nothing about him? *(Off his blank look)* They sent us that link last week… interview on CNN. It went viral.

LOURENS: Viral?

MANGANE: Internet. Over forty-thousand hits in forty minutes.

(Beat)

This dude is all over social media.

Mangane holds his smartphone aloft, wiggling it about… Lourens gets it…

LOURENS: Oh. Ja. Ag. I'm not on the… in the… that stuff. I'm a… whatjoocall… techno-freak. *(Flinches)* Sorry. Phobe. *(Attempting to deflect with a gag)* My phobes and my freaks. Always getting them *deurmekaar*.

Mangane shakes his head and is back into his device, scrolling… a beat… Lourens is on the defensive now, suddenly acutely aware of his '20th Century' mind-set…

Fillums are fine… television… I've done my fair share. *(Searching for 'dignity')* It's just… *(Proudly)* I'm more of a theatre man, myself.

MANGANE: *(A disdainful snort) Mxim!*

(Beat)

LOURENS: What?

MANGANE: Nothing.

(Beat)

LOURENS: You went *'Mxim!'*… *(Accusatory)* What did you mean – *'Mxim!'*?

A beat… Mangane shakes his head, smiling quietly…

You think it's a waste of time?

MANGANE: There's no money.

LOURENS: Correct. *(Firmly)* Only Knowledge. Skills. Discipline.

(Beat)

Where did you study?

Mangane's turn to be self-conscious... he looks down...

You didn't study. How did you get into this business?

MANGANE: Talent.

LOURENS: Talent only goes so far. Like good looks and a six-pack.

(Mangane's laugh is more of a smirk)

You laugh? Theatre gives actors something they never get anywhere else.

MANGANE: Says who?

LOURENS: Says anyone who's ever worked on the stage. *(He means it)* The theatre, young man, is the furnace where the steel of a performing artist is forged... the place where every aspect of the human condition goes under the microscope.

MANGANE: And you. You've done this? *(Still with 'attitude', a snide grin)*

LOURENS: I have indeed. Okay, there's parts I wanted to play and never got the chance. It's the same for every actor. There are no short cuts.

Mangane's ***phone begins ringing****... as he answers the phone and listens to the caller, his supercilious grin twists into a dark frown... this is NOT the news he wanted to hear...*

MANGANE: *(Into phone)* Ja, Archie my bra... hit me. What's the damage...? *(Startled)* Come again...! *(Listens, jumping to his feet)* For fuck-sake, bra, where you come with that? You can't be serious, dude...! *(Listens, distraught)* No, no, no, no, no... aikona, uh-uh. Leave it. Leave it. Don't touch it. Do nothing!

He ends the call and 'clicks' his tongue, outraged... Lourens cannot help but respond...

LOURENS: *En nou...?*

MANGANE: Twelve-and-a-half thousand to fix my door.

LOURENS: *Slaan my met 'n nat vis!*

MANGANE: These panel-beaters are sharks!

LOURENS: What you driving... a Lamborghini!?

MANGANE: *(Livid, in the vernacular) I'm not paying* that *for a fucking dent.*

LOURENS: How old is your car?

MANGANE: It's not old. It's a pre-owned Audi A3! Nine thousand kays on the clock!

LOURENS: *(Like this makes a difference?)* That's here to Beaufort West and back! It's twice round the blimmen block, man.

MANGANE: *Shit!*

LOURENS: Must you now really own a *windgat* vehicle like this? *(Off Mangane's look)*

It's like a hole in a blerrie bucket! Every cent you earn sommer draining away!

MANGANE: *Eish, madala…!* You don't know what you talking here.

LOURENS: *(With 'feeling')* I know exactly what I'm talking. I've been there myself.

MANGANE: *(Stung, angry) Hey…!* You have never been where I am! *(Switching to vernac)* Your life and my life… two different things!

LOURENS: When I was a young man…

MANGANE: When you were a young man, you had Followers!?

LOURENS: Followers?

MANGANE: You didn't even have computers, never mind social media!

LOURENS: No, you right. There was no twitters and tweets and *sulke goed* when I was your age. But there was a time, believe it or not, when the name Jean-Louis Lourens made people sit up.

MANGANE: What people are these?

LOURENS: People who went to the theatre… who read the newspapers.

MANGANE: *Die koeranta. (Unimpressed)*

LOURENS: When you're flavour of the month, you think it's always going to be like this. Cigarettes. Alcohol.

Parties. I look at you, your flashy clothes, your car, I see myself fifty years ago. *(Off Mangane's combative look)* No, no. *Sowaar*. It's like a Replay, a Kyk-Weer. Okay, we didn't have TV and the fillums were few, but I was working. I was windgat. I was never going to get old. Not once did I think of putting money away. Saving for the day when the jobs dry up... when the phone stops ringing.

(Beat)

There's no pot of gold at the end of this rainbow, young man. No fat pension to pull you out of a gat that's so deep you can hardly see the sky.

MANGANE: *(Zero empathy)* I must feel sorry for you now? *(Blurting out before he can answer)* Tell it to someone who cares. You are not my father.

Lourens, stung, stares at the youngster, then turns away, opting not to pursue this...

LOURENS: *(Blurting it out, angrily) Waar op aarde is hierdie koffee nou, man?*

He drifts about... Mangane is back on his headphones, hitting 'Play'... while listening, he goes back to messaging on his smartphone... Lourens observes the young man, aware of the tension between them, frustrated... muttering, half to himself...

Kyk hierrie laaitie nou... op 'n anner blerrie planeet... 'Tik-Tok... Insta-gram... Selfies...' *(Bewildered) Jislaaik, jong mense deesdae...!* 'Vlogs...!' *Kan iemand vir my asseblief verduidelik... wat de hel is nou 'n bliksemse-blerrie Vlog!?*

Mangane, distracted, looks up from his texting... with the music in his headphones, he hasn't heard a word the old man has said... Lourens swings away, exasperated... noticing his completed 'personal details' form on the table, he stops dead in his tracks.

Ag, look at this now. *Blik-skottel...!* I forgot to give her my...

He waves the form about, replacing it on the table and picking up another one...

You not filling in one of these things?

Lourens crosses to Mangane, trying to draw his attention to the form… irritated, the young actor whips off his headphones and snaps off the music…

MANGANE: Hey, *madala…!* Stop waving that thing in my face!

Lourens taps the sheet, adamant…

LOURENS: It's the form. You got to fill it in.

MANGANE: *(Grim-faced)* I've already signed my contract.

Lourens is gobsmacked… he takes a step back…

LOURENS: You mean… hey…?

Lourens takes a moment to digest this… Mangane is texting…

That's great… that's… *sjoe!*

(Beat)

Who you playing? *(Penny drops)* You playing Gabuza!? That's a nice part. It's the lead! *(Mightily impressed)* Hell, man… congratulations!

Mangane's smile is more of a smirk, he shakes his head as Lourens rambles on…

Sjoe…! I can see what's happening now. You see what's happening now…?

(Triumphant) It's the Inter-Play…! Two Males… Alpha Males… Face-to-Face…! *(Off his blank look)* They want me to read with you… Eckhart and Gubaza.

MANGANE: *Gabuza!*

LOURENS: Gabuza-Gubaza-Whateva…! They in all of these scenes together and they looking for Chemistry. Okay, not so much Chemistry as… the power-play between the characters. How these two… Opposing Forces have a go at each other, and can I, as the old Sherriff, stand up to this young man.

(Beat, suddenly enthused)

You don't want to maybe go over the lines?

MANGANE: *(Muttering, in the vernacular) This mlungu is driving me crazy.*

LOURENS: *(Half to himself)* Okay. Okay. No problem, I'll... er... I'll... *sjoe!* This is more than a Call-Back, it's a... *sjoe!*

He hovers, turns away... takes his script pages out of his pocket and absently peruses his lines... he clocks Mangane, who is still totally involved with his smartphone...

Can't believe you already got the part. Lucky for you, young man. Fantastic.

(Beat, probing)

How did you get it?

MANGANE: *(Distracted)* Huh?

LOURENS: Gabuza. When did you...? What I mean, is... how did you...? *(Flustered)* You audition then they gave you a screen test?

Lourens pockets his pages and crosses to sit down on his chair again... Mangane is staring at him, a mix of barely contained anger and astonishment...

MANGANE: You don't know who I am, do you? Me. You don't know?

Unsettled by the younger man's obvious displeasure, Lourens is trying desperately to 'mend fences'...

LOURENS: *(Contrite)* Listen, er... Prospect. These days I'm not sort of... in the know about the industry. Who's in, who's out. What's hot, what's not.

(Beat)

I didn't mean it earlier. What I said about movie actors.

MANGANE: That we kak. *(Still smarting, also fuming at being called 'Prospect')*

LOURENS: I didn't say you were kak. I was just looking at it from the experience I've gained in *my* life... from the things *I've* learnt... trying to point out that to be an actor, a complete actor... working in theatre is the best way to get there.

MANGANE: And where is this place?

LOURENS: Sorry?

MANGANE: I'm trying very hard to see where it's got you.

(Beat)

I look at this man who doesn't even own a *skorro-korro*... who looks to me like he hasn't got the fare to get home, and I'm asking myself... is this the man I must listen to if I'm seeking advice?

LOURENS: My present situation has nothing to do with what theatre has taught me.

MANGANE: This stuff that it's taught you, it's all inside your head. You talk of this thing, 'the human condition', as if it is something to be learnt... to be studied only through many days and lots of talking. What if it is something that some people, they have lived... they live it every day?

(Beat)

Ha 'un cavi, Grootman. Where I come from. The shit I've had to deal with. Before all of this, I was working as a barman, earning nothing but small change. Taking kak every night from drunk customers. Cleaning up the vomit from the floor and then sleeping in the store room at the back when it was too late to go home. Home, that wasn't all that much better... four people in a house hardly fit for even one. Lights and running water that when you get it, it's like Christmas!

(Beat)

When somebody comes along, they want to put you on TV because your face they think it's right, you don't say *'Voetsek, I must learn first how to do this!'* You take the job. You are glad for the job. And if the job leads to other jobs and makes you money, you are happy. Very happy.

Lourens has no response to this outburst... Mangane's words hang in the air... silence...

Willemse arrives bearing the promised coffee, oblivious to all that has gone before...

WILLEMSE: Here we go, gentlemen. Apologies for our faulty equipment... *(Placing the coffees on the table)* Two Americanos. Help yourselves to sugar and whatever else. *(Indicating biscuits)*

LOURENS: Excuse me, Miss Willemse. Where might I find the... er...? *(Grimacing)*

WILLEMSE: *(A step ahead)* The Gents is one floor up.

LOURENS: Thank you.

Lourens, clutching at his side, moves purposefully towards the SL entrance and exits...

Willemse hovers over the coffees at the table...

WILLEMSE: Milk and sugar, Prosper?

MANGANE: Black. Thanks. No sugar.

Willemse removes the lid to one of the coffees, hands it to him...

WILLEMSE: I feel terrible asking you to hang around like this.

MANGANE: Waiting at the airport... same thing.

WILLEMSE: It'll be really good for you to meet Hamilton... establish a working relationship. He'll be able to give you a heads-up on what he has in mind.

MANGANE: What about the scenes with me and this...? *(Indicating 'upstairs')*

WILLEMSE: I don't know. The last time Yolanda called, she said she'd be taking Hamilton to his hotel so he could freshen up a bit.

MANGANE: We'll be chasing the clock.

WILLEMSE: Time enough. *(Grimly) Urgh*, I really hope we can get in the readings before you gotta go. Tracking down our gentleman upstairs is a nightmare.

MANGANE: Why is that?

WILLEMSE: *(Flustered, evasive)* Ag...

MANGANE: He's not staying in one place?

WILLEMSE: *(Backtracking)* I shouldn't be *skinnering* about other artists.

She wants to leave it at that. Mangane's probing look prompts her to reveal more...

Ever met an actor that doesn't own a cell phone? To reach him, you've got to call some woman who then takes forever to pass on the message.

MANGANE: His wife?

WILLEMSE: Somehow I don't think so. Her name's Gladys Ndlovu. Yolanda calls her his agent. He should pay her commission. Shame.

(Beat)

That's the one thing I don't like about Casting. Watching all these actors come in here and try so hard. Especially the older ones... their vulnerability... the look of expectation on their faces when they've given it their best shot and now it's all over. How was it? How was *I*? Could I do it again? So desperate for some kind of affirmation and all you can do is smile and thank them for taking the trouble.

(Beat)

And then you picture them... going home, sitting around... waiting for that call... Yes or No. Most of the younger actors give the impression it's win-some, lose-some. They want the part, of course, but if it goes to someone else there's always a Next Time.

(Beat)

You notice his shirt?

MANGANE: Shirt?

WILLEMSE: His collar. It's all, like... you know... coming apart.

(Beat)

I was looking through his publicity shots. He's always wearing the same shirt. It's almost like it's the only shirt he's got.

(Beat)

MANGANE: *Yho*. Felicia. Maybe you shouldn't be doing this job.

WILLEMSE: That's what Yolanda says. She says I get far too involved. Maybe I should switch to marketing. Stay in the film business... focus on something else.

Trawling the Internet for info on actors who have already been cast is a whole lot better than going through all the angst that accompanies the build-up.

Willemse's ***phone starts ringing****...with a wave to Mangane, she exits to Office...*

WILLEMSE: *(Into phone)* Good afternoon... Actors' Lab. How can I help you...?

Mangane, still seated, sips at his coffee... he proceeds to 'Google' Jean-Louis Lourens on his smartphone... muttering the odd snort of surprise, he smiles... scrolling on, perusing the old man's CV... eventually the-man-himself returns from the Gents...

LOURENS: *(Eagerly)* Aah, koffie-koffie-koffie. Never was a *koppietjie* so welcome... *(Adding milk and three sugars)* Thought they'd gone to Guatemala to grow the beans, roast them, pack them and send them over by nogal rowing boat.

He grabs another biscuit and dips it into his coffee, sitting down to enjoy it...

MANGANE: *(Clocking phone, impressed) Yho*, madala! Seems you walk the talk.

LOURENS: Sorry?

MANGANE: All the time I'm thinking who is this popeye? And here he is... *(Tapping his phone)* Mzansi's one and only Jay-Lo!

LOURENS: *(Lost)* Jay-Lo?

MANGANE: I'm Googling you.

LOURENS: *(Surprised, moving across to see)* I'm on Google?

MANGANE: *(Reading) 'Jean-Louis Lourens, born... 1955. Best known for his work in the theatre, has long been a stalwart on the South African entertainment scene'.*

LOURENS: Is that *Wiki-Leaks? (At his shoulder, scanning screen)*

MANGANE: Wikipedia.

LOURENS: Where do they come with all of this? *(Sipping at his coffee)*

MANGANE: *(Reading, struggling) 'Erepenning… vir… Toneelkuns? (Lourens helps him with the correct pronunciation)* What's that?

LOURENS: Ag, it's… er… Medal of Honour… I dunno… Stage… Kuns… whatever.

MANGANE: Stage… stage… plays… English… Afrikaans. *Eish…!* So many awards.

LOURENS: *(Self-deprecatingly)* Looks a lot more when you throw them all together.

MANGANE: Shakespeare… *yho!* More Shakespeare. You do this *mlungu* too much!

LOURENS: Of course, yes. The greatest story-teller that ever lived.

MANGANE: *(Sniggering) Eish…!* He's dead. He's finish.

LOURENS: Oh, yes…? Then why is it everyone's still quoting him?

MANGANE: Me, I never quote that guy.

LOURENS: You've never said 'Love is blind…? A heart of gold…? Jealousy is a green-eyed monster…?' All William Shakespeare, young man. 'You've got to be cruel to be kind.' These are not things that've sommer popped up from nowhere. Writers have been stealing his words, his stories, ever since he wrote them over four-hundred years ago. I mean – *flippen hel* – he's even in this blerrie fillum!

Lourens puts down his coffee and hauls his script pages from his pocket…

Lourens crosses to sit down beside Mangane… he cannot do so as the youngster's backpack is on the chair… Mangane sighs and removes the backpack, allowing the old gent to sit down…

LOURENS: Dan-kie!

He starts trawling through his pages, searching for the relevant passage…

Here, look here… where's it now…? Sherriff Eckhart… when he's speaking to Gabuza… *(Reading) 'They blow*

through this town, the bitter winds of winter... blow, blow, blow... winds that bite to the bone...'

Showing Mangane the lines in his script...

The Bard of Stratford... right there! King Lear. Richard the Third. *(Smiling)* People can say what they like about dead and finish... *(Tapping at the relevant passage)* Here he is... Shakespeare... alive and living in 'Six Guns at Sesriem'.

MANGANE: I hope they paying him a percentage.

Mangane chuckles, thinking this is funny... Lourens is dead serious, on a roll...

LOURENS: *(Grimly)* The first time I read these lines, I thought, ja! This part is mine.

(Beat, reflective)

Funny how life works. Always wanted to play Richard the Third and never got the chance. *Voila!* Along comes a cowboy fliek... *('Becomes' Richard, evil voice) Now is the winter of our discontent... made glorious summer by this son of York...*

MANGANE: That's the Sherriff?

LOURENS: It's Gloucester.

MANGANE: *Glossta'?*

LOURENS: Opening of the play... the speech where Richard, the Duke of Gloucester, sets up his evil plan to grab the throne of England. *(Relishing this)* Murder... skulduggery. Destroying every obstacle in his path until he finally becomes king.

(Beat)

MANGANE: Sounds a good part to play.

LOURENS: It's what's called a Gift.

Mangane has all the while been 'Googling' more info on this 'Glossta'... he gasps as he discovers how important King Richard III was in English history...

MANGANE: Hey...! *(Eyes on his screen)* Did you know... this Richard... this Glossta'... when he died, the old England, it was finish!

LOURENS: What you looking at there?

MANGANE: I'm looking at Shakespeare... *(Gasping) Eish...!* This dude... he's in this movie, fo' sho, bro'! You were right...! *(Reading, with feeling)* 'A horse... a horse...! My kingdom for a horse!'

Lourens smiles fondly at the recollection... he's 'back there' again...

LOURENS: As a young man I watched Cobus Rossouw take on Richard in the old Hofmeyr Teater in Cape Town... late nineteen-sixties... *(A wry chuckle)* Still remember going home... taking the big cloth from the dining room table, throwing it over my shoulders and standing before the mirror... hunch-back... withered arm... *(In front of that mirror again) Nou is die winter van ons ergenis... stralend versomer deur dié son van York...*

He stops... the words hang in the air... Mangane is captivated... a pause...

In those days if you called yourself an actor you could do all the great characters... Hamlet... Merchant of Venice. *Die hele donnerse spul.*

MANGANE: *(From left-field, a 'challenge')* You ever try the black dude?

LOURENS: *(Thrown)* Sorry?

MANGANE: That black guy. Your great white storyteller wrote a play about...

LOURENS: Oh. Yes. Othello.

MANGANE: You played him... shaved your head... painted yourself black all over?

LOURENS: No. I... er... *(More than a little self-conscious)*

MANGANE: It was too dangerous?

(Beat)

Where was the danger... for you to play a black guy or getting a black guy to play a black guy with white guys...? White guys and black guys together?

Lourens senses that Mangane is messing with his mind and stands up...

LOURENS: What do want me to say here?

MANGANE: I want you to tell me if the sky would have fallen down.

LOURENS: The sky...?

MANGANE: *Woomph!* Did you think God would send lightning... *Gwaah!*

LOURENS: I didn't think that, no.

MANGANE: You thought nothing? Niks!?

LOURENS: I thought about it, of course, at the time... the... Situation.

MANGANE: The 'Situation'? *(In the vernacular smiling) This mlungu calls a crime against humanity a 'Situation'.*

An uncomfortable pause. This could go anywhere... Mangane lets him off the hook...

You think I could play this guy?

LOURENS: Who? Othello? *(Ponders this)* Not now, of course. You're too young. But with study and commitment... working with a good director... absolutely.

MANGANE: *(Wry snort)* I'm too young for Othello. You're too old for this King.

LOURENS: Too old for the stage, maybe, but not for my mirror. *(Flash of old fire)* Standing before that mirror in my room, the Duke of Gloucester looks deep into my eyes and tells me his story all over again.

(Beat)

MANGANE: You still do that?

LOURENS: Sometimes that's all an old actor is left with.

MANGANE: *(Cheeky smile)* You do it for this director, he gives you Sherriff Eckhart.

LOURENS: Richard the Third in Afrikaans? The soutie will think I'm talking Greek.

MANGANE: Greek, Afrikaans... doesn't matter. It's what you have in here!

Mangane taps at his chest... a brief pause...

Show me. *(Grins)* You say the Sherriff, he's like this Richard. Let's have a look.

LOURENS: Ag, don't be silly, man...

MANGANE: I'm serious.

LOURENS: *Mors met my.*

MANGANE: I want to see this *skebengu...* hear these words that are still with us after four-hundred years... corruption... theft... murder... skulduggery.

Mangane has moved purposefully to the table, putting aside the cups, biscuits and other things to take off the table cloth... Lourens cannot believe what he is doing...

LOURENS: Prospect, listen. This is wasting time...

MANGANE: Prosper.

LOURENS: Prosper! *Demmit...! Prosper! Allamagtag...!* We should be doing the lines now for when this *groot man* walks in here...

MANGANE: We'll do the lines, fo' sho. *(At last removing the table cloth)*

Mangane holds out the table cloth for a vacillating Lourens... a brief stand-off...

LOURENS: You're expecting me to now throw some magic switch, and...?

MANGANE: All I know of Shakespeare is from school... a white colonial hangover just to make us angry in exams. If, as you say, me, I want to be an actor, I must...

LOURENS: I can't teach you to be an actor in one afternoon...

MANGANE: You been there! You walked the walk! Me, I know *fokol! Niks! Nada!*

LOURENS: *(Stung) Is dit nou so...!?* Only a moment ago you were telling me you couldn't take advice from a vrot-old has-been who can hardly afford a taxi.

MANGANE: I was angry. I thought you were patronising me. What you told me is true. A *popeye* who thinks he knows everything will soon see his *arse!*

(Beat)

I work with these guys... in the movies, on TV... actors. So-called. They just want to know where's the mark on the floor...! When am I getting my close up? Don't shoot my bad side... this is my good side! To learn the words is too much trouble and all they want is the bucks. Celebrity. Free Ride. *Fok* everything else! Me, I've got no time for that shit...! I want the McCoy! The *real* McCoy!

Mangane holds out the table cloth, demanding Lourens takes it... the older man is moved by the passion and desire of this young actor... he slowly reaches out, takes the table cloth and drapes it over his shoulders, knotting at his neck...

LOURENS: *(Muttering)* Ek kannie glo ek doen hierdie ding nie.

A beat. Lourens breathes deep, realising that there is no going back... as he moves to the centre of the room, preparing for his 'performance', he outlines the scene...

It's a street in London. Gloucester is all alone, lurking in the shadows. When he limps into the light, he addresses the audience.

MANGANE: Why is he limping?

LOURENS: He was deformed. In his case, it was in body *and* mind. Ruthless ambition... twisted logic... Shakespeare painting the complete picture.

Mangane takes a seat... Lourens, with his back to the youngster, takes a few moments to settle himself... pause drags on... he then slowly turns and instead of the famous soliloquy, the speech that rolls off his tongue comes from another place entirely...

LOURENS: *Ergenis... dis 'n skande... dis nie regverdig dat 'n winter so lank, so bitter, so aaklig kan wees nie...*

A beat… a deep, aching sadness as the cloth drops from his shoulders…

Wat doen ek hier? Is this now all that's left of my life?

He slowly places the cloth on his chair and picks up his coffee…

I was a young boy. Andre Huguenet and Anna Neethling-Pohl… the very first Afrikaans Macbeth… *(Reliving it all over again)* My mother had come to Pretoria from the platteland to visit an old school friend… dragged me along with her. *(Smiling)* Her friend had three tickets for a Shakespeare and apologised, not realising that little Jean-Louis was even littler than she thought. My mother had no problem with that. The *gewelddadigheid* her son witnessed in his own house on a daily basis was far more *traumaties* than any goings-on in some… far-away Scottish castle. *(Ironic laugh, shaking his head)* What she didn't know that day was that she was about to launch her one and only son on a journey that has still yet to end… *(Reaching out, melodramatic) 'Is dit 'n dolk wat ek hier voor my sien, die hef na my hand? Laat my dit gryp…'*

Arm aloft, Lourens remains transfixed by that imaginary dagger… Mangane is silent, allowing this old man to go wherever this takes him… Lourens slowly drops his arm…

All my years exploring… researching… digging deeper and deeper… weeks… months… rehearsing… sometimes right through the night. Exchanging thoughts and ideas with directors and actors, all of them having travelled this road many times before… working, fine-tuning, building up to that all-important Opening.

(Beat)

And then a different audience every night… challenging you, keeping you sharp like a razor blade… willing you to make them laugh or cry and give them something to walk away with that has fed their spirits, their souls… made them feel good to be alive, to be human, to be here and now and walking this earth!

Lourens suddenly grimaces… Mangane's phone rings… he immediately rejects the call and notices the old man's pain as he staggers to his chair… sitting down, Lourens to cover up what Mangane might have witnessed by launching into a new story…

LOURENS: My first job as an actor we toured the platteland. Travelling all over by kombi… visiting small *dorpe*, performing in schools, church halls. Even a bioscope or two.

(Beat)

This one time we're passing the outskirts of Cape Town… heading off on tour. Next thing, the lead kombi's turning off and we following it along this dirt road. There's this open patch of land near all these tin shacks and pondoks… small groups of kids running around. Our Company manager, ou Jannie Groenewald, stops, gets out… all the actors and crew, same thing. Everyone's asking what's this now? Jannie says, no – we sommer doing the show right now! No costumes… only props!

MANGANE: *Yho!*

LOURENS: While everyone else is unpacking the skips, me and the actor playing Tybalt climb up on the roof of our kombi and start singing.*(Singing, lustfully) I'm so hungry, so hungry for lo – o – ove…! (Breaking off)* It was a big song at the time on the wireless. Before you knew it, all these people start suddenly appearing out of nowhere. Wasn't long before we had this audience of – *sjoe* – must'a been about sixty-seventy, maybe more…! Soon we felt – ja, okay – looks enough now. Ou Jannie asks them all if they'd like to see a play called *Romeo and Juliet.* Everyone goes – *Ja, ja… gooi… asseblief… lekker, fantasties. (Smiling, shaking his head)* And then our well-meaning stage manager, Bee Berman, goes and causes the biggest *gemors* in the history of live theatre!

MANGANE: Ja?

LOURENS: *(Declaiming) Would you like to see the play in English or Afrikaans?* The whole crowd, they shout *Afrikaans! Afrikaans!*

MANGANE: You say *No Problem!*

LOURENS: Aikona! *Big Problem!* The production was in English...! This was all now turning into a total bladdy *kakspul!*

MANGANE: Bye-bye and – *phweet!* – you out of there!

LOURENS: Not a demm. We went for it. *(Shaking his head, cringing)* Poor Matthew Graham... can't speak a word of Afrikaans, he's playing the Chorus. It's hard enough doing – *Two households, both alike in dignity, and yada-yada-yada* – now all of a sudden, it's... *('Becoming Matthew Graham', loud, OTT) Twee... huishoudelike... alby... van hulle... likewise... in... digniteid...*

MANGANE: *Eish!*

LOURENS: We shouting *deftigheid...! Waardigheid...!*

MANGANE: *Yho!*

LOURENS: Hell, man. It was torture. Like pulling blerrie toenails! Would've taken us two weeks to finish that play. Ou Jannie's doing this 'sign language' there behind the people and we switch slowly back to English.

MANGANE: The crowd, they enjoyed it?

LOURENS: Oh, ja. 'Specially the fight scenes. When Romeo and Juliet did the death scene everything went quiet. Tears... *tjanking... 'Hy's nie dood nie, hy's nie dood nie...! Soen hom...! Soen die oukie!' (Smiling, shaking his head)* The people didn't want us to leave. Some wanted us to do it again. Another play. Any play!

Lourens clocks Prosper and chuckles...

MANGANE: What?

LOURENS: I was just thinking. You... you're the perfect age for Romeo.

MANGAN: You think?

LOURENS: Lose a bit of weight, I can see it... the balcony scene... Juliet coming out... *Romeo... Romeo... wherefore art thou Romeo...?* And you down below... looking up at the girl of your dreams.

Prosper chuckles and shakes his head, recalling a past event pretty similar...

MANGANE: *Eish...!* I've done my balcony scene! *(Smiling, as he recalls the occasion)* I'm seventeen... had this girlfriend. She lived a few streets from me. Some nights I went to see her, just to talk... sometimes late-late. If she was sleeping I would throw small stones against the window of her mother's house.

Lourens gasps... Prosper laughs, finding this vastly amusing... miming tossing stones and quietly calling her name...

Ping... ping... ping...! This one time, she wasn't waking up and the stones were getting bigger every time...

LOURENS: *Ag, nee, wat...!*

MANGANE: *(Miming throwing stones) Bong... bong... BONG...!*

LOURENS: You broke the window!?

MANGANE: Worse! This big-fat stone is flying towards the window and it opens...!

(Off Louren's startled look) It's not my girlfriend, it's her *mother...! (Mimes stone going into mouth and half-choking) Plop...! Ghaaaaagh!*

Mangane does a choking 'mime' before 'spitting out' the 'stone'... they both laugh...

LOURENS: No light from that window broke, hey?

MANGANE: Ne-vah! Fok Romeo! It's Yussain Bolt... *pshhheeow...! (Mimes running away)* Olympic one-hundred metre record, all the way home!

LOURENS: *(Still chuckling) Ja, jy will mos!*

There is a pause, before Mangane, keen on hearing more, speaks again...

MANGANE: Must be exciting going to new places all the time... feeding people the stories of life.

(Beat)

LOURENS: It was tough... hard work... long weeks away on the road. Living out of a suitcase. Cheap hotels. Not much to do but drink when the show's over. Roll into bed and then up again before the sun rises to drive on to the next town.

(Beat)

There were actors who hit the bottle on those tours and couldn't find ways to stop. Relationships... break-ups... make-ups... then break-ups all over again. *(A wicked laugh)* Fritz Conradie hiding in that bladdy tree... refusing to come down.

A beat... again, that quizzical look from Mangane...

It was a tour of, ag... I dunno... some Tennessee Williams that went on for over three and a half hours. Ou Fritz was having this affair with the leading lady. All of a sudden she drops him for this good-looking bladdy walk-on... *bliksem het een blerrie lyn. Liewe Hemel!* The Drama! Ou Fritz throws a cadenza and disappears.

MANGANE: *Yho!*

LOURENS: Half-hour call... no sign of the leading man! *(Shaking his head, grimly)* We about to send out a search party, this little laaitie comes charging into the hall. He tells us, no... there's this ou oomie up a tree in front of the *Algemene Handelaar*... he's singing very loud. Off we all go. Sure enough, there's ou Fritz, clutching to the upper branches of this huge blerrie boom, drunk as a skunk.

MANGANE: *Eish!* You cancel the show?

LOURENS: Not a demm! The Police... the Fire Brigade... a few gallons of *moer-koffie* to the rescue and plus-minus one hour later, the curtain finally goes up.

Both men are laughing... slowly recover...

MANGANE: *(Smiling)* There's a movie in there.

LOURENS: Could write a bladdy book.

MANGANE: You should do it. Hire a camera. Find the actors.

LOURENS: What actors? All passed on. *(A sad smile)* Of that *hele ou spul* strolling players, I'm what you call *die laaste sardintjie innie blik.*

MANGANE: This guy from the tree?

LOURENS: Ou Fritz Conradie? *(Disdainful snort)* He did what my father said would happen to me if I became an actor. Drank himself to death.

(Beat, reflective)

Moffies and prostitutes... that's all we were in his eyes. Hobos. Wash-outs... *(Bitterly, it still cuts deep)* *Vuilgoed.*

There is a brief pause and a mood change from Lourens... a touch of bitterness...

He never spoke to me again, my father. After telling my parents theatre was going to be my life, he cut me dead. *(Ironic chuckle)* I think his anger came more from the fact he suspected I was gay and this was now the proof.

(Beat)

What it did to my mother... *(Shaking his head)* We kept in touch writing letters. Mine, I sent to my older sister. My ma would go there to read them. Four o'clock on a Friday she'd be waiting at the tickey-box, hoping I could make that call.

MANGANE: Tickey-box?

LOURENS: Public phone by the post office. We had this arrangement that whenever I could, we'd have this little chat once a week... just the two of us. If ever I was passing through town, I'd arrange to meet her. Somewhere he'd never find out.

(Beat, heart-felt with a hint of anger)

It still breaks my heart to think he could have done this to her... to us. Tearing a family apart all because he believed his disobedient, unrepentant son had brought shame upon our name. *(Snorts)* My sister told me of the speech he made on the night of his retirement. Thanking his family... his wife and daughter. Of the happiness the *two* of them had brought him throughout his working life.

He shakes his head, a tired smile... he sits down in his chair... brief pause...

Must be very different for you? Proud father... his son... such a big star on TV.

Brief pause... Mangane looks devastated...

MANGANE: My father died when I was nine.

(Beat)

LOURENS: I'm... so sorry.

MANGANE: *(Brusque, galvanised)* Come. Your words. This guy will soon be here.

A darkly preoccupied Mangane moves to the table, snatching up several pages...

LOURENS: Please forgive me... I had no idea...

MANGANE: What scene you want to do?

Handing pages to Lourens... flipping through his own stapled pages...

LOURENS: *(Flustered)* The one I know best is that first meeting.

MANGANE: *(Reading) So you're the one they call the Redeemer...?*

LOURENS: I know it. At least I *think* I know it.

(Beat)

You okay with this?

MANGANE: I'm cool. *(Certainly doesn't look like it)*

LOURENS: You sure?

MANGANE: Fo' sho. Come. Hit me.

LOURENS: Fine. Okay. Hang on...

Lourens takes a quiet moment to get into 'character'... Mangane stands, room centre, pages in his hand and ready to read... Lourens takes a deep breath... now 'Eckhart'...

LOURENS: *(Steely, 'grilling' him) So you're the one they call the Redeemer?*

MANGANE: *(Monotone, reading) It's a name the people have chosen.*

LOURENS: *Are you up for the task?*

MANGANE: *I am what I am. What men choose to call me is for them to decide.*

(Beat)

LOURENS: *(Dropping out of 'character')* You going to do it like that?

MANGANE: *(Looking up from the page, lost)* Huh?

LOURENS: Gabuza? You going to play him like that?

MANGANE: I'm reading it.

LOURENS: You're the lead.

MANGANE: I know that.

A beat... Mangane appears distracted, subdued...

LOURENS: You haven't thought about this character, yes or no?

MANGANE: Time enough. I'm going overseas tonight.

LOURENS: Sooner you start, the better.

MANGANE: *(Devoid of all humour)* Thanks, Prof. I'll remember that.

(Beat)

Come. Let's go.

LOURENS: *(Gently)* You want to talk about it?

MANGANE: It's okay. I'll do as you say... work on the part.

LOURENS: I'm not talking about this fillum. I'm talking about your father. *(Off his startled look)* You want to tell me what happened?

MANGANE: It was an accident. *(Blurting it out)* He was crossing the road! He was hit by a car! It was very quick!

LOURENS: All I'm asking is...

MANGANE: *(Exploding)* He's dead, okay! My father's dead! Gone! Long-time already!

Lourens suddenly grimaces, clutching at his stomach… Mangane still boils with rage…

LOURENS: *Aargh…!*

MANGANE: Talking… talk of what…!? I must talk and you must listen!? Why now…!? You never listened before! All the time when you could listen to what people like my father were saying, you told us to *voetsek…! You* can now *voetsek…! Fokoff!*

LOURENS: *(In great pain) Uurgh…!*

Lourens is staggering to the table, leans on it and starts coughing and choking…

Mangane is oblivious to this as he hammers on…

MANGANE: You need this job…!? I also need this job…! For my brother, my sister… for all of us…! *(Ramming it home, apoplectic)* It's our turn now, old man!

Mangane hurls the pages onto the table… grabs his backpack… hurling it down again… his out-of-control rage suggesting that there is perhaps more to all of this…

MANGANE: *(Muttering in the vernacular, apoplectic) Where are these fucking people now? I must go to the airport! I'm gatvol of all of this now!*

As Mangane paces angrily about, fighting to control his seething emotions, he slowly becomes aware of the older man's condition…

MANGANE: What's wrong?

LOURENS: Nothing, it's… *ugh!*

MANGANE: You *befok*, *madala*, you know that! *Befok* in your *kop!*

Lourens straightens up, doing his best to shake off the pain… Mangane clicks his tongue again, angrily… Lourens props himself up, one hand on the table…

Mangane watches Lourens slowly regain his composure and his mood softens…

MANGANE: You want some water?

LOURENS: I'm fine.

MANGANE: You talking shit, old man. I've been watching you… *(He helps Lourens to a chair, and fetches some water*

from the urn) This is happening all the time. *(Offering water)*

LOURENS: Ag, it's just age... *die ouderdom. (Takes a sip of water) Sowaar...* getting old is not for sissies.

MANGANE: You been to the hospital?

LOURENS: *Asseblief!* Sit for seven hours, they slip you a coupla' Panados.

MANGANE: You must let them look.

LOURENS: And then what? You go there by the Oncology Section they tell you there's a two-and-a-half year waiting list for a blerrie operation.

(Beat)

MANGANE: How do you know this?

LOURENS: Hey?

MANGANE: They tell you this?

LOURENS: *(Blustering, on the offensive)* What can they tell you you don't orready know? *(Flinching)* The day is only so long. Comes a time when that old clock in your *liggaam* starts tick-tocking to his own blerrie beat. Stop-start... stop-start.

There is a pause during which the older man's frailty does not go unnoticed...

Listen, Prosper... this is between you and me, hey?

MANGANE: This?

LOURENS: This... what's going on here... *(Indicating his abdomen)* I need this job. I don't want anyone thinking this old top is past his Sell-By-Date.

MANGANE: You must still go there to the clinic.

LOURENS: Yes. No. *(Flinching)* I'm sure it's just a... what-d'you-callit? Maag-dinges... ulkus. Ulcer. *(Rubbing the area)* Flares up when I get... you know?

MANGANE: Worried?

LOURENS: Only when I'm like... butterflies. Going *tekere* down there.

(Beat)

MANGANE: *(Smiling, gently)* You should sing. *(Off the old man's quizzical look)*

My gogo sings. Whenever she is anxious I can hear it.

LOURENS: Your grandmother?

MANGANE: Very quietly, she sings a song. Always the same one. And then it's okay.

(*Beat*)

LOURENS: You live with her?

MANGANE: Not anymore. I bought a house. My brother and sister they live there too.

LOURENS: That's nice.

Brief pause. Mangane, composed, continues… his need to 'unload' now is palpable…

MANGANE: After my mother died, it was just the four of us. Me, Bongani, Nontokozo… and my gogo taking care of everything. Food. Clothing. *(Smiling)* Always making sure we were up in time for school. I got small jobs on the weekends… running here, running there. And all the time her saying, no-no-uh-uh, I must focus on my studies. I must study to be a lawyer. *(Laughs out loud)* To be a lawyer, for Gogo, was like the Oscars-Grammies-Golden Globes all rolled into one!

A beat… he chuckles again before rolling on…

Law and Order was always close to my heart thanks to Chunky Charlie. (Off Lourens's confused look) When I was a kid my father had lots of those… what-did-they-call-them…? Stories-with-pictures… photo-books…

LOURENS: *(Twigging) O, ja…!* Those books with all the *kikkies. (Chuckling) Die Wit Tier… Ruiter in Swart… (All coming back now, beaming wide)*

MANGANE: Chunky Charlie, the township detective. A battered old hat and a full-length coat. He was a top-dog undercover crime-fighter and what he pulled out from under his coat! *(Whistles) Phweee-phwoow…!* This one time, it was a long ladder-long… ten feet!

LOUREN: *Wraggies?*

MANGANE: I'm telling you! That Chunky Charlie China, he was Magic. I loved him! *(Wicked chuckle)* My mother had a Sunday coat... long one, olive-green... her prize-possession. Whenever she was out of the house, that thing was never safe. *Yho...!* Me... wearing my detective coat... hitting the streets... Orlando West, Dube... Mofolo South... *(Chuckling)* I'm jumping on every suspicious-looking kid who crossed my path. *('Chunky Charlie') Hey, wena. You are under arrest! You have the right to remain silent or forever hold your piece! (Himself again) Eish!* What that 'piece' was, I had no idea. I just knew it sounded right. And there I would leave them, tied to the nearest tree, street pole, whatever. Everything I could find... panty-hose-stockings... old Shoprite shopping bags... *yho! (Laughing now)* The things I pulled out from inside that coat! People's faces, they were like – *Ghaagh...! (Does a 'drop-jaw' expression) Eish!* No matter how much time it took me to make that coat look Number One again, she always knew. I think it was more the look on my face when she walked through the door that said – *Hei...!* This Charlie's been playing Chunky again and now he's going to see his *gat...! (Indicating belt-across-the-bum strokes, child-across-her-knee) Hey wena, Prosper. Pah! Pah! Pah! (Grimacing) Eish...!* My backside was so sore, it hurt for three days even standing up.

LOURENS: Ja, well. You were a naughty little bliksem.

MANGANE: *(Mock hurt)* Hey, monna! I was doing my research!

They share a laugh... then Mangane falls silent...

Three years after that thing with my father, my mother got sick. All the stories she loved to tell me dried up. With my father gone it was like the sun had stopped shining. She always said he was no saint, but he was hard-working... responsible... never *tjatjarag...*

A beat... a sad, wistful smile washes over his face...

When I got my award last year, I dedicated it to them both. *(Off Lourens' quizzical look)* Best Newcomer... local movies... *(Back there again)* When everyone had left the hall, I went there behind the stage...

Looking up and holding an imaginary trophy aloft, heartfelt...

Look, Mamma... Baba... look! I've gone one better than Chunky Charlie. No little books with photos for me... I'm in *moving* pictures!

(Beat)

LOURENS: Jy't 'n lang pad geloop, Prosper.

MANGANE: I think about it a lot. What if that movie director had walked into some *other* bar to shoot his commercial? I could still be mopping floors, cleaning glasses... nothing more than a shoulder to cry on for the broken and *babbelas...* sad, lonely popeyes weeping for long lost girlfriends.

(Beat)

LOURENS: Listen... Prosper... you must forgive me.

MANGANE: For what?

LOURENS: Your... achievements.

MANGANE: It's cool.*(Chuckling)* Me, I've done the same thing with you. I come in here... I see this nervous old *mlungu* and I'm thinking, please, don't let him talk to me. *(Laughing)* And then I'm learning – *yho!* – this guy, he's got the Goods!

Lourens is not so sure...

LOURENS: Ja! Let's hope the 'Goods' is good enough for this windgat from America!

MANGANE: Fo' sho! If it was me, your name would already be up on that poster.

LOURENS: You reckon?

MANGANE: I can see it now... *(Indicating a large movie marquee)* Six Guns at Sesriem...! *(Singing famous iconic cowboy movie tune*) Prosper Mangane...! (*Continues cowboy tune)* Jean-Louis Lourens...and us...! Walking the red carpet!

Mangane enacts an elaborate 'slo-mo' movie walk down the red carpet, pulling out his six-guns and silently 'pow-powing' imaginary 'baddies'... Lourens watches on, spellbound... before abruptly 'killing' the beautiful moment...

LOURENS: *(Totally unimpressed)* Ja, I'm glad you see it like that. Me, I've got a horrible feeling this vent is not coming... *(Anxiety building up again)* In fact, he hasn't even arrived. He's still in Hollywood and this is somebody's idea of a not-so-funny joke.

MANGANE: *(Chuckling)* Hey, madala, don't worry. He's on his way. You can then call Mrs Ndlovu and tell her Guess What!?

LOURENS: *(Warily)* How do you know about Gladys?

MANGANE: Miss Willemse. She told me that for people to get hold of you they have to call Mrs Ndlovu... *(Stops short, quizzical)* She's your... wife?

LOURENS: No, no. No...! Goodness me. Me, I've never been married. No, Mrs Ndlovu's my landlady. I rent a room from her there in the back... the house where she lives. *(Wry snort)* She's very patient with this old *bliksem* when it comes to the end of the month.

MANGANE: Ja? *(He's been there)* It gets tight with the moolah... you short on the cash?

LOURENS: *(Flustered, self-conscious now)* I get my state pension, of course, and then with the extra bit coming in from the TBF...

MANGANE: TBF?

LOURENS: Theatre Benevolent Fund. It all helps.

(Beat)

MANGANE: You have no other work?

LOURENS: No, listen, I don't sit around, hey. I've got a little... part-time thing going there by the Skiros Café. *(Pretty chuffed)* Old Niko, he calls me in now and then.

MANGANE: You help run the shop?

LOURENS: Ag, sometimes he has to run out for this and that... I run the fort for him when it's not so busy. *(Smiling)* He's got a nice-big TV. I can sommer sit there and click through all the channels... *(Suddenly twigging, brightly) Hey...! That's* where I've seen you... your ad on the TV!

(Beat, shaking his head and chuckling)

Incredible all the things you can catch these days... travel anywhere in the world just by pointing a remote! *Tshik...! (Miming the 'action' of a TV remote control)*

A beat... shattering the mood, a relieved, upbeat Willemse sweeps in again...

WILLEMSE: Okay...! Let's pop the champagne corks!

LOURENS: He's here? *(Scarcely able to believe it)*

WILLEMSE: On their way from the hotel. *(Checking her watch)* Allowing for rush-hour they should be here any minute.

Lourens flinches, clutching at his abdomen... whether this is in response to actual pain or a wave of anxiety, we don't know. He heads off in the direction of the 'Gents'...

LOURENS: Excuse me, I must just... *(Moving off, uncomfortably)*

WILLEMSE: *(Anxious to engage with him)* Mr Lourens, wait... before you...

Too late... Lourens has departed... Willemse sighs, exasperated...

MANGANE: This dude knows I got to leave in half an hour? *(Checking his watch)*

WILLEMSE: It's fine. There's been a change of plan... *(Off Mangane's quizzical look)* Yolanda will explain when they get here.

MANGANE: *(Warily)* Explain?

WILLEMSE: It's complicated. This American's had an exhausting flight, and...

MANGANE: He's still coming?

WILLEMSE: Yes. Like I said. They're both on their way.

MANGANE: Cool. We can get straight to the scenes.

WILLEMSE: *(Blurting it out)* The scenes have been shelved.

(Beat)

MANGANE: What do you mean? *(Bristling)*

WILLEMSE: We still have to get you to the airport, and...

MANGANE: *(Irritated now)* Ja, ja... we drive quick...

WILLEMSE: *(Smiling, tweezer-lipped)* No, you don't understand. Mr Raubenheimer needs every minute available to him to discuss your part.

MANGANE: We'll do that.

WILLEMSE: Yolanda suggested I organise an Uber for Mr Lourens.

MANGANE: You telling me this director's not going to see him?

WILLEMSE: It'll all become clear when they arrive.

MANGANE: *(Anger growing)* This is bullshit!

Mangane has whipped out his smartphone and started scrolling...

I'm calling Yolanda.

WILLEMSE: Prosper, please...

MANGANE: That old man is here for a reading today. *(Number-searching on his phone)* It's life-and-death for the guy!

WILLEMSE: Please... stop...! I'm... *please!*

MANGANE: *(Cutting his call)* What?

(Beat)

WILLEMSE: *(Flustered)* Yolanda made it very clear that we should... we should...

MANGANE: *What?*

WILLEMSE: Wait.

MANGANE: Wait for what?

A mortified, embarrassed Willemse finally cuts to the chase...

WILLEMSE: Mr Raubenheimer has signed an American.

A beat... Mangane is staring at her in disbelief...

The Sherriff. He's cast an American as Sherriff Eckhart.

MANGANE: You shitting me.

WILLEMSE: *(Her expression says she's not)*

MANGANE: This movie... it's South African!

WILLEMSE: It's also International.

MANGANE: Exactly! Global audience! Some guys would kill for that!

WILLEMSE: It's how it is.

MANGANE: Who's this guy using? Robert de Niro!? Harrison fucking Ford!?

WILLEMSE: I don't think so, no. The actor they've signed up is probably...

MANGANE: *(Apoplectic, in the vernacular) Fuck this! This is not happening!*

Willemse hovers... clocking the door to the Gents and then heading for her office...

WILLEMSE: I'm sorry. I've gotta go organise that Uber.

MANGANE: *(Harsh, accusatory)* When're you going to tell him?

WILLEMSE: I'm sorry, I can't... I can't look at that old man and tell him to his face. *(Exasperated)* Now, if you'll excuse me I have things to do. I'm sorry.

Willemse swings away and departs for her Office... Mangane is stunned... looks helplessly about... he is still grappling to come to terms with this new turn of events when an upbeat, determined Lourens comes barging back into the room...

LOURENS: Okay, Prosper... come... we must *wikkel...! (Grabbing a bunch of script pages from the table, rifling through them)* The Redeemer scene first.

Lourens is thrusting pages at Mangane, who simply stares at him, not taking them...

Mangane's face suddenly takes on an expression of grim determination...

MANGANE: You have to show them.

The younger actor is suddenly galvanised, hyped-up...! He heads for the table cloth on the table, whips it up and moves back to a confused Lourens...

You got to show them the thing that's in your heart.

LOURENS: *(Gawking)* What's all of this now?

Mangane is trying to force Lourens to take the table cloth…

MANGANE: To hell with stupid lines…! *(Adamant)* You give him Shakespeare, he sees the Sherriff. Two for the price of one!

LOURENS: *What…!?*

MANGANE: *Ka-maan…!*

LOURENS: They'd never accept that!

MANGANE: *(On fire)* My first audition they wanted the lines. I gave them Denzel Washington…

LOURENS: *(Protesting)* Prosper…

MANGANE: I hit them with *Training Day*. They shat their pants!

He thrusts the table cloth into Lourens' unwilling hands…

LOURENS: Ek kan dit nie doen nie!

MANGANE: You can! Let this Big Deal movie-man see what a real thesbian is made of.

LOURENS: Thespian.

MANGANE: You're an actor…! *(Driving it home)* How many actors have done half the stuff you've done?

Lourens turns the cloth over in his hands, mulling this over… a brief pause…

LOURENS: *(A nervous smile playing about his lips)* Richard the Third… for a *skop-skiet-en-kowboi* director…

MANGANE: Knock him sideways!

Lourens knots the 'cape' around his neck… moves to the centre of the room… a beat…

LOURENS: What happens if I'm hallway through and he…?

MANGANE: Shhh…! No time! Come!

Mangane stands to one side… a beat… Lourens 'channels' Richard III, half-heartedly…

LOURENS: *Nou is die winter van ons ergenis*
Stralend versomer deur dié son van York,
En al die saamgepakte wolke oor ons huis
Is diep begrawe in die oseaan…

He peters out… Mangane is staring at him, scowling…

MANGANE: You gonna do it like that? No, old man…! You can do better than that!

Mangane switches off the light to establish a better 'mood'…

For a moment, Lourens seems lost… back in character, he goes again, stronger now…

LOURENS: *Nou is die winter van ons ergenis*
Stralend versomer deur dié son van York,
En al die saamgepakte wolke oor ons huis
Is diep begrawe in die oseaan…

MANGANE: *(Encouraged)* Yes…! *Yes…!*

LOURENS: *… Nou lê daar kranse van oorwinning om ons kop,*
Vernielde wapens pryk as 'n gedagtenis…

As Lourens drives on, his performance grows in power and majesty…

Ons onrus is nou omgekeer in feesgelag,
Ons vreeslike opmars in die ritme van 'n dans.
Die nors gesig van oorlog frons nie meer,
En pleks van swaar beskutte perde te bestyg
En teenstanders verwilderd op die vlug te jaag,
Verwyl hy speelse ure by 'n vrou,
Met die wellustige geluide van 'n luit.

Mangane is spellbound as Lourens switches gears, notching up the intensity…

Maar ek – wat nie gevorm is om lig te wees,
Of liefderyk, versot in spieëls te staar –
Ek – wat daar grof uitsien, en die statigheid ontbeer
Om voor 'n speelse nimf verby te pronk –
Ek – belemmer in die reëlmaat van 'n lyf
En deur die fratsige natuur gekul,
Verwronge, gans onklaar, en voor my tyd
In hierdie ademende wêreld ingedwing,
So kreupel en afsigtelik boonop

Dat honde by my koms begin te blaf –
In hierdie weke speeltyd ná die stryd
Het ek geen vreugde om die tyd verby te kry:
Ek kan maar net my skadu in die son begluur
En my wanstaltigheid berou…

Crashing in on this scene and breaking the mood, is Willemse, who is startled by the sight of Lourens in this now gloomy room, wearing the table cloth for a cape… a beat…

She snaps on the light with the switch closest to her Office…

WILLEMSE: What's going on here?

Absolutely nothing happens… a pause as Willemse stands, gawking… Lourens breaks out of character and drops the table cloth from his shoulders… Mangane is spellbound by the depth and intensity of the performance he has just witnessed…

MANGANE: *(Still awestruck)* He's got the part. Look no further.

With Willemse still rooted to the spot, Lourens takes the cloth back to the table…

WILLEMSE: What you doing with our table cloth?

Ignoring Willemse and approaching Lourens, Mangane is adamant…

MANGANE: I saw him… I saw that *skebengu…!* You're the man, my man!

WILLEMSE: Gentlemen… please…

A hyped-up Mangane turns away from Lourens and now hones in on Willemse…

MANGANE: This Raubenheimer… he's got to think again!

WILLEMSE: What are you talking about?

MANGANE: Before he's seen what this man has to offer he can't use anyone else!

WILLEMSE: You know that can't happen.

MANGANE: Call Yolanda…

WILLEMSE: You didn't tell him?

MANGANE: Gotta change the plan!

LOURENS: Tell me what? *(Thrown, confused)*

MANGANE: He wants a Sherriff, he's got the Sherriff! *(Indicating Lourens)*

LOURENS: What's going on?

Willemse swings on Lourens, giving it to him straight…

WILLEMSE: Sherriff Eckhart has been cast. An American actor's playing the role.

MANGANE: Uh-uh! *No…!* Never…! *Ne-va…!*

WILLEMSE: I'm sorry, Mr Mangane, this is none of your business!

MANGANE: Fuck you people!

LOURENS: *(To Mangane, hint of betrayal)* You knew about this?

MANGANE: *(Ignoring Lourens, bearing down on Willemse)* A man, he auditions. He gets a Call-Back. He comes to the Call-Back, they tell him, no – we given it to some fucking *kwere-kwere…!* It's bullshit.

LOURENS: How long have you known?

Mangane grabs his phone and storms out through the door to the passage… Willemse starts heading off towards her office… stops suddenly, realising that Lourens is owed at least some form of apology… an awkward pause…

WILLEMSE: I really am sorry about this. *(Feeling for him)* I had no idea and neither did Yolanda. (*Lourens is expressionless, looking away)* If we'd known about this decision earlier, then… *(She breaks off, really struggling now)* I can't thank you enough for your… patience, your… professionalism.

LOURENS: *(Dead quiet)* Tell me something. Is it all…? *(Hesitates)*

WILLEMSE: I'm afraid it is. The Producers have insisted on a name. *(Catching herself)* I'm sorry, that sounded… *(Trying again)* What I mean is…

Lourens manages a tired smile, dark humour his only escape…

LOURENS: *Die koeël is deur die kerk.*

WILLEMSE: I was going to call for an Uber, but Yolanda thought you might want to… would you like to meet the director?

LOURENS: I don't think so, no.

WILLEMSE: No. Under the circumstances, it's... it's... *(Indicating, off)* Then I'll... I'll...

LOURENS: Yes. Ja. Thank you. *(Calling out as she is about to leave)* Oh, and... please tell Mr Mangane not to worry. He mustn't make a fuss on my behalf.

WILLEMSE: *(A joyless smile)* There'll be other films, Mr Lourens. I'm sure of it.

With Willemse gone, Lourens remains dead still... he lingers, rudderless, for some time. Slowly, very slowly, he drifts across to the table and removes the script pages from his jacket pocket... tossing them down into the dustbin.

He hovers again..... spots Mangane's backpack located on the chair... feeling his age now, he moves slowly towards it... begins taking off his jacket...

Lourens then removes the thermal vest... folding the vest, he carefully places it on top of Mangane's backpack...

He puts on his shirt again and buttons up... as he puts on his jacket again, the sharp abdominal pain returns with a vengeance... he groans, sitting down and doubling up... it takes a few moments for the pain to subside... he straightens up... breathes deep...

He is on his way to the door to leave when Mangane returns at speed...

MANGANE: *(Catching him leaving)* Hey... Dalas...! *(Concerned)* You're leaving!?

LOURENS: I don't need a free ride from these people.

MANGANE: No, no...! You can't go home!

LOURENS: Prosper...

MANGANE: No...!

LOURENS: It's over...

MANGANE: They can't do this to you!

LOURENS: It's out of our hands.

MANAGE: *(Exploding)* Bastards!

LOURENS: Prosper...

Lourens takes a deep breath and crosses to the highly aggrieved young man…

Think about this now. Think carefully… *(Deeply empathetic)* Doing something silly now is not going to help.

MANGANE: *(Not letting up)* No. I'm waiting for them. They must come. I'm telling them, they must see your Richard, your Shakespeare!

LOURENS: Prosper, listen to me. *(Voice-of-Reason)* Gabuza is a strong part. This film, you never know… it could go bigger than anything you've ever done before.

MANGANE: What about you? *(Desperate)*

LOURENS: Me, hell, man… look at me.

MANGANE: I'm looking at you. I've seen you. You're an actor… you're the Sherriff!

A beat. Lourens smiles, touched by this young actor's desire for justice to prevail…

LOURENS: *(Tenderly) My seun…* I appreciate what you're trying to do for me here, I really do. If you can excuse the old cliché, maybe it's time for this old Sherriff to ride off into his own sunset.

MANGANE: *Ngeke!*

LOURENS: I've come a long path. *(Heart-felt)* You need to do it for your gogo… your brother and sister. But most of all, you need to do this for yourself.

Mangane opens his mouth to protest… Lourens holds up a hand, forthright…

Art is the food that feeds the soul and I have fed thousands. Dis nou jou kans.

Mangane hesitates… then smiles… they are both smiling…

Now you give this windgat Yankee hell, you hear me. You show him what South Africans we made of.

MANGANE: Fo' sho.

LOURENS: And, ja… enjoy your trip to *Gay Paree.* Give my love to all things French.

MANGANE: I'll make sure I won't say anything that might get me a klap in my face.

(Beat)

LOURENS: *(Beaming, thrusting out a hand)* Totsiens, Prosper Mangane.

MANGANE: *Hamba kahle*, Mr Shakespeare. *(Shaking hands)*

LOURENS: *(Mildly disappointed)* What happened to Jay-Lo?

MANGANE: You like Jay-Lo?

LOURENS: *(Smiling)* Mzansi's One and Only.

Mangane is not smiling… he is also not letting go of Lourens's hand… eventually he does so, and the older man hovers, looking questioningly into the young man's eyes…

Breaking away, Lourens turns to leave… Mangane's voice stops him on the way …

MANGANE: It wasn't an accident.

Lourens has his back to Mangane… he slowly turns around…

That thing that happened with my father all those years ago.

(Beat)

It was a hit-and-run. They caught him… a rich white man with enough money to make his time in jail not the half of what it should have been.

(Beat)

It is hard to forgive.

(Beat)

LOURENS: Forgiveness can take a long time.

A pause… Lourens slowly turns to leave… Mangane's voice stopping him again…

MANGANE: Is it okay if I get Mrs Ndlovu's number?

LOURENS: *(Dead earnest)* If you want lessons on Shakespeare, I don't come cheap.

MANGANE: I can call you?

LOURENS: It would be nice to get a call from a place where time stands still.

MANGANE: It's like that?

LOURENS: A person goes to Sesriem it's something you never-ever forget. A gorge... so deep, so grand... like a temple... cut into the earth over millions of years by a mighty river that comes and goes... and then comes again in full flood. You stand on that dry river bed and the canyon walls fold in around you... towering higher and higher... *(Looking up)* Reaching ever higher into that bright-blue African sky.

Brief pause... Willemse enters and catches the two men still together... eyes on Lourens, glowering... she speaks with a firm tone...

WILLEMSE: Mr Mangane, the Director's arrived. He's looking forward to seeing you.

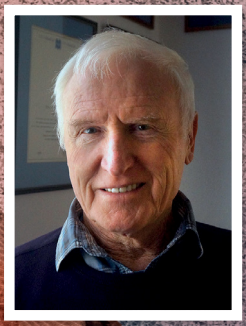
A concerned Mangane turns to look at Lourens, who calmly nods, reassuringly...

Mangane gently taps at the palm of his hand with a fist... lights slowly fade... to...

BLACKOUT

From acting out improvised stories beneath a baobab in the playground of the Musina Primary School (Limpopo), as a 12 year-old, to performing in his very own play at the Old Vic in London 20 years later, Paul Slabolepszy has travelled a remarkable journey in the Theatre, both locally and internationally. With thirty-nine plays (many of them first produced at Johannesburg's famed Market Theatre) as well as a host of TV and film screenplays to his credit, 'The Slab' has established himself as one of South Africa's foremost playwrights, screenwriters and actors.

Equally at home dealing with powerful, thought-provoking themes in plays like ***Saturday Night at the Palace, Mooi Street Moves, Pale Natives, The Return of Elvis du Pisanie, Suddenly the Storm, Bitter Winter*** *and* ***Midnight in Parys,*** Slabolepszy's comedies likewise continue to delight audiences wherever and whenever they appear. ***Boo to the Moon, Under the Oaks, Life's a Pitch, My Low-Fat Almost Italian Wedding*** and the 95' Rugby World Cup classic ***Heel Against the Head***, starring the late, great Bill Flynn, have achieved legendary status.



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