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Yudel Gordon circled his wife's kitchen stove. After a considerable struggle he had managed to drag it far enough from the wall to go right round it. He was looking for the fuses.

Rosa, his wife, was sitting at the kitchen table, observing this singular scene. Yudel rarely attempted to repair anything and, on those few occasions, he was even more rarely successful. "We could get a repair man," she suggested. "I know they're expensive, but at least they have experience."

Yudel did not answer. This was a matter of pride. He had asked about stoves at the local hardware store and was trying to remember what the assistant had said. He recalled being advised that the fuses were probably behind a little lid or a flap.

"Perhaps it's time to get a new one," Rosa suggested, "the kind where the plates are sort of part of the surface. Everyone says they're so good."

"I spoke to a man who knows about these things," Yudel said. "I got the very best advice and he says it's probably just a fuse."

"A fuse? What does a fuse do to it?"

"It blows. And once it has blown the stove stops working."

"How can you tell whether a fuse is blown? Once you have it in your hand, I mean, how can you tell?" Rosa was trying to discuss the matter intelligently, exploring ways to be helpful. "You may not realise that the fuse is blown, or in the act of blowing. And what if the fuse has blown or blows while you are handling it? What action do you take to unblow it?"

"I don't know," Yudel answered patiently. "Perhaps once I find the fuses all will become clear." He had completed two full circuits of the stove, but had seen nothing that looked like a suitable place for hiding away fuses.

"Do you need a screwdriver?" Rosa asked.

"I don't think so."

"There's one in the kit of my sewing machine, if you need it. It's a nice little one. I've used it myself, around the house. I'll get it if you like."

"It's quite all right," Yudel told her. "I don't think that screwdrivers are useful in dealing with fuses." As an afterthought and a little vindictively, he added, "I think they're used for screws."

“Of course they’re used for screws, but they may work equally well for fuses.” She watched Yudel sceptically in silence for a moment, then she tried again. “You look as if you’re afraid to touch it. You can’t fix it if you’re afraid to touch it.”

“I’m not afraid to touch it. I don’t know where to touch it.” To demonstrate his confidence Yudel tugged at a small, embossed fascia plate next to the control panel. It swung open on hinges, revealing a row of six round glass objects.

“Are those the fuses?” Yudel felt that the intensity of her interest was excusable. She was, after all, the one who did the cooking. “I think so,” he said.

“The little devils,” she said, “causing so much trouble. They shouldn’t put them in. Are you sure about the screwdriver?”

“Quite.”

“How do you get them out to see if they’re blown?”

“Like this.” The two words had a heroic ring. Yudel grasped one of the fuses and twisted vigorously. It remained unmoved, as if set in concrete.

“The other way,” Rosa said. “Turn it the other way.”

Yudel twisted the fuse in the other direction and it came loose. In a few seconds he had it out and was examining its transparent sides for signs of blowing, whatever that was. “How did you know I was turning it the wrong way?”

“I reasoned that it turned the same way that screws do.” Yudel looked quizzically at her, expecting a more detailed explanation, so she continued, “Someone has to do the occasional screw around here. You don’t.”

One at a time Yudel removed all six fuses and placed them in a row on the kitchen table. “Now,” he said, trying to impart a businesslike tone to his voice, “let’s have a look.”

Rosa had already looked. “These two are blown,” she said. “See. They’re all blackened inside. That must happen when one blows. It sort of burns. The others are still perfect.”

Yudel looked at the two Rosa had indicated, then at the others, then back at Rosa.

“When you’re in town tomorrow, get us two.” She held out the two faulty fuses to Yudel. “Take these with you so that you bring back the

right thing.” As a sop to his masculine pride, she added, “I thought you did quite well. You did find them.”

The hallway chimes, an insistent connection to the world outside their home, intruded suddenly, driving away all preoccupation with fuses and screws. Yudel tried to ignore the sound. He was pretending to be busy with important matters.

The voice that reached Abigail over the intercom from inside the house was female and demanding. From a main artery a few blocks away there was a fair amount of traffic noise, so Abigail had got out of the car to get an ear close to the loudspeaker. “Yes,” the voice demanded. It was so strong and clear that it was unnecessary for Abigail to get out of the car.

“Is this the home of Doctor Yudel Gordon?” Abigail asked.

“It is,” the voice said, offering nothing more.

“I wonder if I could speak to him. My name is ...”

She could see the front door of the house from the gate. It had opened, cutting off her sentence before she could finish it. An imposing woman, perhaps in her late fifties, stood in the doorway. Her long, greying hair had obviously been left its natural colour and hung down to her shoulders. Her skin was the olive colour of many Mediterranean people. The skin around her eyes was darker, as if she had been too enthusiastic in the application of eye shadow. But it did not look to Abigail as if this woman ever used eye shadow. She stood still in the doorway, clearly studying both Abigail and her BMW. When she had satisfied whatever reservations she had, she started down the path towards the gate, at the same time pressing a button on a remote control that opened the gate and allowed Abigail to drive in.

The house was a typical Pretoria middle-class dwelling, which meant that there was no shortage of space either in the house or the half-acre garden that surrounded it. Like the mansion she had visited two nights before and all the neighbouring houses, its garden walls were topped by electric fencing. The woman who had let her in held out a strong hand. “I’m Rosa Gordon,” she said without smiling.

“Abigail Bukula,” Abigail said.

“What can I do for you?” Rosa looked straight into her eyes without any indication of hostility, but also no sign of friendliness.

“I work for the Department of Justice. I hoped I might see Doctor Gordon.”

Rosa seemed to take a deep breath. “What has he done to alert the Department of Justice?”

So it was the way Fransina had said. “He’s done nothing. I was hoping he could help me with a problem I have.”

“Yudel?” The disbelief in Rosa’s voice was unmistakable. “He usually manages to complicate matters.” But she stepped aside, gesturing to Abigail to come into the house.

Rosa led Abigail to a closed door and paused before it. “He also does some wonderful things.” Having satisfied herself that she had not left a poor impression of her husband, she knocked once before opening it. “Yudel, there’s a visitor for you,” she said.

Abigail found herself stepping into a large untidy study. Instead of standing vertically on the bookshelves, the study’s hundreds of books were stacked in horizontal piles on almost every surface, including some patches of the floor. An effort seemed to have been made to create a clearing at the centre of the desk. The eccentric-looking man she had seen in the C-Max parking lot had his back to her. He was facing a mirror hanging from a nail in the wall. At that moment he was trying, with paper scissors, to cut away a strand of hair that was even wilder than the rest. It came away and he snipped at a second strand. The overall impression his hair made was that its trimming may normally have been accomplished in the same way.

Abigail was suddenly overcome by an unexpected wave of shyness. There was something so private about the man, what he was doing and even the room she had entered, that she looked for a way of escape. She turned to look for support behind her, but Rosa had already left. By the time she turned back again Yudel was looking at her. “You were at the prison,” he said.

She told Yudel her name and where she worked. Then she held out a hand across the desk for him to shake, careful to avoid the piles of books. He put down the scissors and took her hand tentatively. The way he did it seemed to suggest that he was unsure of the wisdom of

physical contact with this pushy black woman. Yudel dropped her hand and looked at her without speaking.

This is quite a pair, Abigail thought. Are they husband and wife, or brother and sister? At least, from what others said, the weird little fellow was not overly respectful of authority. That trait could be helpful. "You seem to have access to C-Max. I need to get in to see one of the prisoners," she said.

"His name?"

"Marinus van Jaarsveld."

Yudel's eyes widened. He made no attempt to hide his surprise. "He is allowed very few visitors. If you're not on his visitor list, they are not going to let you see him. Van Jaarsveld himself has to give permission and he's not allowed many visitors."

"You were in C-Max this afternoon."

"I was invited."

"Doctor Gordon, I need to get in very badly." Her voice held a certain restrained determination that, for the first time, seized Yudel's attention.

"You had better tell me why."

"It's a complicated story," she said. And you will probably not believe me, she thought.

"Would you care to sit down?" Yudel asked.

At least I have his attention, Abigail thought. She had to remove a two-volume set called *Abnormal Psychology* from the offered chair. She dusted it with a tissue before sitting down. She had expected dust, but there was none.

"Do you always do that before sitting down?" he asked.

"No."

"You made an exception for me."

"Well ..."

"Well, you thought that a study that looks like this must be dusty too."

"Look, Doctor Gordon, I just need some help. I apologise for dusting the chair."

"Mr Gordon," he said, "but Yudel will do." He was still looking intently at her face.

“I beg your pardon?”

“Yudel. That’s my name. You can call me that.”

“Thank you. I knew that. I’m Abigail.” She had decided that telling her story was the only way she was going to get anywhere with him. She placed the books on the floor next to the chair and reluctantly began.

As she told the story, Yudel at first studied her face, then closed his eyes and leant back in his chair. It tilted over so far that there seemed a real danger that gravity might bring their meeting to an abrupt end. There was something about his obvious absorption in her story that put her at ease. She found herself again reliving incidents she would rather have forgotten. This strange man’s presence gave her a courage she had not expected. She told the story only in the detail that she felt was necessary to persuade him. He needed to know about the raid and that Leon had come to her aid, and he needed to know about the dates when the killings took place. The rest he did not need to know, and she had no intention of telling him. When she finished, Yudel slowly righted himself and opened his eyes. “You were at the raid in Maseru?” he asked.

“Yes. I was fifteen.”

“Marinus van Jaarsveld led the raiding party?”

“Yes.”

“Your friend was under his command?”

“Yes.”

“And these murders that have taken place since then were all on the same date?”

“Yes. It seems impossible, doesn’t it?”

“Nothing is impossible in human behaviour,” Yudel said. “The only thing ...” His voice trailed away as his thoughts impeded the words.

“Only what?”

“Only, these killings are the work of a man, not an organisation.”

Abigail already believed that, but hearing Yudel say it was as much a shock as if she had never guessed it. “Why?” Her voice was suddenly hoarse. “Why do you say that?”

“This is compulsive behaviour. Only people behave compulsively. Organisations may behave in aberrant ways, but compulsion is the preserve of the individual.” Yudel suddenly became aware of the change

in Abigail. She seemed to be shrinking back in the chair. It was only a moment before he realised that it was what he had said that had caused the change in her. He rose slowly and started round the desk. “Why do you want to see van Jaarsveld?”