

LEAP OF FAITH

A fiction by Michael Picardie

I am on the way home to our redbrick Edwardian flat above the *chichi* shops just across the road from the train station. Very late on a Saturday night - been out with my old class-mates from the Mendelson College in north London.

Bloke with a Makarov pistol – by the look of it - is apparently waiting for me outside Hampstead Heath Overground Station. He's just checking it, thinking nobody's around except me, the target.

In my pre-rabbinical life, I was trained in East Germany and the Soviet Union to fight in the Bozambwe liberation struggle so I know what these guns look like. I ran like hell towards Keats Grove and then Parliament Hill Fields, zig-zagging like the mythological hare of the Bushpeople. He was following. I could hear the sound of his footsteps echoing my own. What immortal hand or eye could frame such fearful symmetry?

Tyger, tyger, burning bright, save me.... My name is William Blake Ndebele. Except we are not Ndebele. We lived amongst them. We are Lemba. We are black Jews.

I dodge between the trees. At 55 to be able to zig-zag is a credit to *Being as Care* which blessed me with ingenuity and agility. The *cognoscenti* will recognise Heidegger before he became Nazified.

The hot lead hits me in the back and I fall but knowing I am a likely target for the ultimate *coup de grace*, checking that by taking the back alleyways I have evaded him I jump into a London Borough of Camden's aluminium pavement bunker, burying myself in the midst of the contents - a huge amount of oak, beech and sycamore leaves. These details I recall with hallucinatory clarity. In shock, adrenalized I don't feel pain. I bleed profusely from the wound made by the bullet which must have come out the other side because the medics later couldn't find the damn thing. Two wounds internally avoiding vital organs. There was extensive havoc in the abdominal region to be seen on the X-rays and the MRI scans but in the connective tissues and small veins and arteries.

He is rummaging around looking for me to finish me off. I emerge suddenly like a jack-in-the-box from the bunker, knocking his gun out of his hand, me soaked in blood, stuck with leaves all over my bloody jacket and trousers and rapidly losing consciousness, not at all like some Bacchanalian satyr, a nature god in ecstasy. No vine leaves. With a Luger bought from my friend Charlie Bloom, veteran of El Alamein and Tobruk, I shoot my attacker in the face before he can find his weapon in the dim street-lighting. He falls away onto the pavement, apparently dead or dying. I immediately regret this. My Freudian/rabbinical super-ego, my conscience has kicked into. I try to give him the kiss of life but his face is covered with blood. I think my bullet must have entered his mouth and so distorted it I can't find it. I panic. Perhaps the police will do me for murder.

The reason, as I told the police and the inquest, as to why I was armed was this: this was not the first time I had been targeted in the streets of London. Something to do with opposing the dictator of Bozambwe, Raphael Mutapa who, calling himself an African Marxist, had wiped out villages of the Ndebele, our neighbouring tribe including us Lemba people who opposed the Zezuru majority tribe

in a civil war between two armies of liberation in the 1970s. Then there was a cross-tribal Movement for Democratic Liberation, whose leader was Montague Tsavanga Mutapa's secret police beat and tortured and tried to kill in a faked car accident.

I dial 999 on my mobile, giving my location and circumstances. I lie down in the gutter clothed in blood-soaked leaves next to the body of Mr X. I have tried giving him mouth to mouth resuscitation, but it is no good. I have blown his face away. There are no lips, only a bleeding hole.

Armed police arrived in minutes, no sirens screaming. Too late on a Saturday night, early Sunday morning. Don't disturb the residents of Hampstead, disturbed enough already by the poets, novelists, playwrights, actors, musicians settled in the Vale of Health. Still kneeling, I stagger like an amputee towards the police and ambulance. My own gun - I still think of it as belonging to the German prisoner or corpse from whom or which Charlie Bloom acquired this, by now, ancient, but licenced WW2 Luger. I throw it towards them shouting I've been attacked by a gunman. Knowing the touchiness of the Metropolitan Police terrorist squad I sit on my heels and reached for the sky – the *rakiya* which is the created firmament in Genesis. Hebrew. Biblical myth. Just the cosmos.

Although I was, am, black they didn't kill me immediately as I feared they might, mistaking me for the aggressor, a *jihadi* perhaps with a suicide vest. I shout: "It's me, rabbi doctor William Blake Ndebele! This guy is a Zezuru from Bozambwe. Some sort of political vengeance by Raphael Mutapa. Mutapa killed half my family in Limpopo Province, Bozambwe. I wrote about the civil war in Bozambwe. Look it up on your smartphones, my thesis: 'Tribe, Politics and Ideology in the Bozambwean Civil War' by W.B.Ndebele. I'm a Lemba!"

The police stare and listen incredulously. One of the armed policewomen looks me up on her smartphone and they know I am genuine. As if they know or care much about the black Jews of Southern Africa and those incredible tribal wars and struggles for power from which the British Empire was supposed to free us.

They seem to accept me disarming myself as a token of good faith. Charlie Bloom, was a member of the high command of *Pfumo Rorudzi* the Spear of the Nation as if the Zezuru are the only nation in Bozambwe.

Charlie was a little feller. Not well. Long term illness. Contracted at El Alamein or Tobruk perhaps. Fighting for world democracy.

I am lucky the Met didn't wipe me out for good measure. Kill the trouble in one fell swoop, the victim as well. And then back for late coffees at the station. After all, a couple of blacks late on a Saturday night, what do you expect? Justice? No, But I'm in luck. A black copper with a Taser approaches me. Shines his torch on me and the would-be assassin. He lifts up his countenance to me and I feel he gives me peace.

He frisks me and breathalyses me.

The ambulance crew approach to try to revive my assassin. Kiss-of-life. No lips. Face blown away. Just a bleeding hole.

With exquisite tact, they load us both into the same ambulance. Just a couple of blacks one already gone to meet his maker or his unmaker in a body-bag.

Surely a local London manifestation of a tribal war. With a large scissors a kindly black female paramedic in surgical gloves cuts me out of my dark rabbinical jacket, shirt, vest, trousers, already wrecked with blood, gives me a local anaesthetic, cleans and staunches the wounds with antiseptic and masses of cotton wool, clamps or sews up the wounds and wraps me in bandages to finally stop the bleeding from my back and my abdomen where the bullet had entered and exited. By this time, they have my assailant and his brains zipped into a body bag to stop his blood and mine flooding the vehicle. They mop the floor of the ambulance with a disinfectant, dry the mop in one of those plastic bucket-drains, chuck the blood and water down the cobbled gutter.

Don't ask me if they take me to the Royal Free Accident and Emergency round the corner. I am passing in an out of consciousness due to shock and the anaesthetic. Shakily I give my mobile to the ambulance paramedic and press Jessica my wife's number and give her my diary with my name in it saying, "Tell Jessica Cohen my wife I was shot but will live and what hospital we're going to..."

It takes the skills of a number of surgeons to fix me up more permanently. Fortunately, I have the backing of the Mendelson College and my dear wife as to my credibility as a witness and complainant / victim. As important at home I have I the licence and the invoice for Charlie Bloom's Luger so they don't have an excuse for *klapping* me on a charge for carrying an unlicensed offensive weapon.

Jessica is at my bedside. She is a beautiful, red-haired 50 year old, mother of our mixed-race children, Judith and Rosie aged 30 and 28. Jessica is a poet, painter, dancer, actor, always in work. She and Charlie Bloom although 85 give Chief Inspector Clarence of Scotland Yard an authoritative account of why the Bozambwe National Liberation Movement's armed wing of *Pfumo Rorudzi* – should have it in for me when I have served with distinction as director of the Southern African Anti-Colonial Movement for half my working life.

Someone has evidently taken out a contract against me and the agent, probably impoverished, has tried to kill me for Bozambwean security police money and, as I am to discover later, is rewarded with Bozambwean passports and visas for him and his family to live in the UK. Assets compared with living under the aged dictator of Bozambwe, Raphael Mutapa who recently got toppled. Thanks be to God. Amen and amen.

But what was my original crime? My crime was that I had made severe ideological mistakes in my earlier political career: criticising the Movement for being too much under the control of the Party – the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Trying to get Ian Jones's British Bozambwean quasi-independent colonial government to take action against township intimidation which could take the form of being burned alive with a petrol-filled tyre around your body whilst your hands are tied behind your back if you oppose the Zezuru militants in *Pfumo Rorudzi* trying you for treason in a kangaroo court – boys of 16 come in from the bush.

I mean, for heaven's sake, have they learned nothing from history? Yes. The British Protectorate of Bozambwe had the best education system in Southern Africa. My psychotherapist wife Jessica and I have researched political consciousness in the high schools of Limpopo and Zambezi Provinces.

These pupils, not the boys in the bush, fear Terror. They fear Stalinism. Southern Africa with Big Business already writ large as the main player in the agricultural, commercial, financial, manufacturing and mining economies? Bozambwe both flourished and suffered enough from private enterprise without a Stalinist economy which as we know could really be the rule of the party bourgeoisie anyway, giving expertly farmed “white” land away to peasant subsistence farmers and cronies of the President. Besides the CPSU had given up on the liberation struggle in Southern Africa by 1980 when Bozambwe was launched as a future democratic state by the British and the English-speaking whites in response to our futile fighting in the frontier states and in Bozambwe itself when it was still a British Protectorate. I say futile because we were riddled with spies.

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It was dark. There wasn't a soul around except him. Not Kierkegaard. Him. The Other. With complete impunity, he looked around us and seeing nothing, this man, as black as me pointed a pistol in my face and then, didn't pull the trigger, but just stared at me like a wild, frightened animal, frozen. Why?

I didn't stop to think. I tell you I ran – I ran.... I zig-zagged – in between the trees – ducking behind cars. He still didn't shoot.

I leapt into faith in going on with my absurd life.... Until, as I turned into Parliament Hill Fields, the hot lead hit me in the back.... Then, I fell into the Kierkegaardian abyss of hell. In Hebrew, it's called *Sheol*.

I am a Jewish convert and work at a liberal synagogue in London. But who would want to believe in a God reached only by a leap of faith? I do. We create the myth of God, like Kant created the Categorical Imperative as a transcendent. But they want to believe that by virtue of reasonable understanding and good deeds they are watched over by YHVH. Why can't I get them to accept this hermeneutic as a homiletic? Because if I do their and my jobs as Jewish identities are at stake.

So that is the way it is. To add to my agony my name somewhat, absurdly, is Rabbi Dr William Blake Ndebele. I always say, “Call me Bill!”

My parents are educated school-teachers and they admire the poetry of a man who had compassion for child chimney-sweeps. They were, are, entranced by the tygers, tygers, burning bright in the forests of the night. The fearful symmetry of Being which, undomesticated, is without human Care but when ready-at-hand for us, being-in-the-world, is all that God is. It's a virtuous circle. You have to be reasonable, good – *then* that creates faith which creates further reason and goodness. Absurdly, it often goes wrong.

I think he was frightened suddenly by the prospect of killing a fellow African. I hailed him in isiZulu / isiNdebele: “*Siyabona, ngami wami!*” I see – acknowledge - you my friend.

As I said before, although we speak isiNdebele and live amongst the amaNdebele in Bozamwe and South Africa, we belong to the Lemba tribe of Southern Africa. On the Y chromosome of some of our men there are Semitic markers. We are regarded as experts in circumcision. Every Lemba boy is given a circumcision knife with which he is buried.

I dived for his cock and balls, intending to pull them to frighten him, he loosed off one shot, dropped his gun for a moment, He screamed like a girl, scrambled around for his pistol, I ran like Zola Budd. He ran after me. I hid behind a wall. As he passed me I screamed at him: "שכחת את אלוהים *Shchacht Elohim!* You have forgotten God!" I climbed over a garden and watched him stealthily through the shrubbery searching for me. He was frightened of God and death and murder. I felt sorry for him. He could hardly keep a hold on his pistol.

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It is thought that our Lemba tribal men may have originated in Yemen where we acquired Semitic genetic - sometimes Kohanite – priestly – characteristics, and married Arab or African women and then joined the Bantu-speakers in their migration south to Southern Africa carrying with us Israelite rituals like keeping the Sabbath, avoiding pork, respecting the ten commandments, observing the festivals, reading the Torah in Hebrew if we could find white or Oriental or Spanish Jews to teach us, since, as we migrated, each generation kept losing the skill of reading the ancient Israelite texts.

It was all sporadic and haphazard. Now the proper Jews require us to convert by law which they call *halacha*. Which I did. Believing God to be a willed belief, faith-in-itself rather than an objective Being. We leap in faith from mythological subjectivity. At my conversion, and at the interview to train as a rabbi I put the view that God is really Being as Care, solicitude. I wonder if they knew it was pre-Nazified Heidegger. His lover Hannah Arendt showed Care in testifying for him at the French de-Nazification tribunal. They stopped him teaching at Freiburg University for some years after the war, then, he was reinstated. He was an opportunist but reconstructed Western philosophy.

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So, to return to faith, Heidegger and Kierkegaard indirectly saved my life through an unconscious association with danger spurring me to action which threatened me in a split-second instant of time at the very edge of mortal existence when it was him, my killer, Joseph Mwari, or me creating a situation of intense *angst*. It's not magic, or a superstitious miracle, but the reason why I am still breathing. .

But why me? I know the comrades accused me of selling out when I criticised their African Marxism – condemning themselves by hiring a hit-man to eliminate the very dissidence the outlawing of which confirms the nullity of their dogmatic faith, faith without *nous*, *phronesis* and *sophia*. No intuitive understanding, no practical intelligence, no interpretative overarching wisdom. Even Maimonides in the 12th century accepted Aristotelian empiricism and the ethics and rationality of faith and free will. Like Spinoza. Both were anathematised. God was in nature. In Kabbalah's primal man, Adam Kadmon. Perhaps Darwin saw God in the evolving of a creature who had consciousness. When Maimonides said to meditate on the mind of God through the Torah minus the anthropomorphism he also may have meant minus the primitive totems and taboos, with accident also built into our contingent nature and Nature as contingency. All these theologians and scientists looking to preserve human decency are full of contradictions.

I am not a vengeful man. God or accidental good fortune, avenged me by enabling me to kill my assailant, although I pity him and his family. Now that I am well I must find them and make reparation to them for robbing them of their murderous breadwinner. He is black like me, a

Southern African like me from what I could see of him in the fluorescent light of Hampstead Heath Overground station and the dim street-lighting in the Vale of Health and thereabouts, with high cheekbones and a yellow-brown skin and even a highly bridged almost Semitic nose, a Zulu or a Sotho or a Ndebele or a Zezuru-speaker – I heard him curse me in – Zezuru - but not a Lemba like me since I know all the Lemba people in London - London so full of the most varied of *homo sapiens*. So I cursed him in return in Zezuru: “iwe wakanganwa Mwari”. His surname happened to be “Mwari” which means God in Zezuru “You have forgotten God” is what I said. There are plenty of British and Americans called “Lord”, “Godde”, “Christe” “Christie”. It threw him off balance. He must have thought I was a ghost or psychic.

As for me, God willing, I hope to make reparation by the Day of Atonement and into another Jewish year. To be able to argue with Being as Care on the holiest day of the year, to have it out with some personification of Being as to why I should have suffered attempted murder for no good reason. That is my great hope.

I am one of the few ordained black Southern African rabbis in the world. Perhaps there is not enough Being as Care to acknowledge my identity. There are plenty of black Jews in America, and in Israel the Ethiopian Jews – *falashas*. The Yemenites and the Moroccan and the Iraqi Jews are pretty dark. And the Cushites of southern Egypt and the Hyksos dynasty of Pharaohs are Semitic Africans if not outright Jews.

If God is an absurd idea – what shall I do? In whom shall I trust? Where is this Being as Care?

There is no Chosen Race.

To have got this far – and then to come so near an absurd death in Hampstead Heath village near the Overground railway station.

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My old mother and father, in their 70s by my bedside in Bart’s Hospital. They live with me and my dear wife and our teenage children in Hampstead Heath village in our red-brick Edwardian flat. They are shocked but tremendously relieved, as delighted as I am to be alive after this attempt on my life which is splashed all over the London papers, the social media, TV, the BBC. I write this in Bart’s Hospital with a policeman in attendance to ward off any unwelcome assailants still thirsting for the blood of William Blake Ndebele, one of the exiled Lemba of the ex-Commonwealth Republic of Bozambwe. My life is not worth tuppence in the streets of Limpopo Town and Zambezi City.

Touchingly, my old Ma and Pa offer up a mixed Judaeo-Christian prayer by my bedside, with the plain-clothes copper chiming in with a sincere “Amen”. To Ma and Pa everything positive is miraculous. Judaism and Christianity, our Lemba heritage, my migration from Russian socialism to rabbinical Judaism.

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A properly Orthodox rabbi, a Hasidic black Jew from Jerusalem is on tour in London and America. He comes to see me in Bart's Hospital. He has quite a job getting permission from the police stationed at my bedside and the hospital reception to let him visit me. He is Nathan Dhlamini. I have known him for years. He's a linguistic and analytic genius. He speaks, writes and reads 6 African and 5 European languages, an expert in Talmud and biblical exegesis. We talk in English rather than his native Swazi or my own Ndebele to reassure the cop that he, Nathan Dhlamini is not another enemy wanting to shoot me. In fact, a cop downstairs asked to search him. What a palaver.

Nathan Dhlamini would make his own enquiries about finding the answer to the current mystery and the political issue: find the would-be murderer's associates and family. One could not rely on the Met to unearth the mystery of how and why, now that Bozambwe was a supposedly independent secure dictatorship bolstered by China, my enemies in the Movement and the Party would want to commit a murder so vindictive against someone who had more or less retired from the Struggle – totally unimportant – living in London practising rabbinical Judaism?

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There was a rather nasty coroner's inquest about Joe Mwari the would-be assassin. He lived in one room with his young wife and daughter as subtenants in another family's

crowded council flat in Kensington and Chelsea not far from Grenfell Tower which burned down a few months ago.

No one at the Home Office or in the police knew anything about Joe Mwari, except that he his wife and daughter entered the UK on what were discovered to be valid Bozambwean passports and temporary visas given by the British High Commission in neighbouring South Africa since the British kept out of way because of the vindictive paranoia of the Leader Comrade Mutapa in Bozambwe itself. On the strength of his acceptance as a student to study of all things criminology and police work at the University of London ,Mr Mwari, known to be a murderous, torturing security policeman, and his family were given visas.

No one knew anything more about him except that he tortured and murdered for a living. When I got out of Bart's Hospital - more or less restored to physical health after months of further surgery and rehabilitation - on the request of the police and the Home Office - we turned up at his widow's and daughter's room in a council block named Chelsea Tower, a more or less impoverished island of deprivation not unlike the burned- out Grenfell Tower: yes, in Kensington and Chelsea amidst the great and the good or at least the rich of this, the most opulent London borough.

Naturally his wife was furiously angry when two dark-suited rabbis, one the survivor / victim of her dead murderous husband assassination attempt, and a British social worker and a British policeman turned up at a bereaved woman's single room in an overcrowded flat. We had sent a letter from the local social services department saying we were concerned about her and her daughter's welfare. Nathan Dhlamini could speak Zezuru, her language, the language of the majority tribe in Bozambwe, as could I, and he was completely fluent in my native Ndebele, the language of the peasant victims of Raphael Mutapa who had inflicted genocide on amaNdebele in the early 1980s after instructions in techniques of massacre from North Korean officers who were world experts. 20,000 amaNdebele

were killed in the name of African Marxism - the Ndebele working for the white farmers – this was their crime.

The latter, the white commercial farmers, were also the victims of attacks and expropriation by “war veterans” (supposedly of the bush-war in the 1970s and 80s but containing unemployed, and some uneducable – alcohol addicted - proletarians from Zambezi City and Limpopo Town and displaced subsistence farmers.) Inflation exploded making the Bozambean dollar worthless. 3000-4000 commercial white farmers were at the heart of the economy, about a 1000 of whom were now expropriated, and their amaNdebele workers murdered *en masse*. The infrastructure of Bozambwe collapsed. Comrade President Raphael Mutapa aged 93 and his ambitious wife (aged 50 and given a Ph.D. by the University of Bozambwe for a thesis on African feminism allegedly written by an ingratiating university professor on her behalf) creamed off profits from ex-white farms run by Red Chinese disciplinarians. The Mutapas were eventually displaced by a bloodless army coup led by the Interior minister Ambrose Ngagara in 2018.

No wonder the daughter didn't want to go home. The policeman and the social worker were a black Caribbean and a Southern African. The dead assailant's wife, Mrs Mwari was actually Zezuru and therefore, in that tribalism existed, still a sworn enemy of the Ndebele victims of the great ex-Leader Comrade Raphael Mutapa. Mrs Mwari evidently had some standing in the Zezuru Party hierarchy. She was understandably full of hatred against me. She swore in Comrade Mutapa's name that the secret police of Bozambwe, the Central Office of Information, would not rest until they had hunted down and killed me, an enemy of the black people of Africa. Clearly, she did not fear deportation. Her teenage daughter Nomsa tried to hush her mother and wept about how she wanted to stay on at her nice comprehensive school in Holland Park.

Rabbi Nathan Dhlamini, quite calmly and less of an interested party interpreted all this for the policeman and social worker, Sergeant Benedict and Mrs Daniels. When all was quiet for a moment, Mrs Mwari, suddenly flared up again, rushed into the kitchen, drew a big carving knife out of a wooden block and launched herself at my throat, calling me a dog in Zezuru. The sergeant was quick to disarm her whilst Rabbi Nathan and Mrs Daniels and Nomsa restrained her, but the policemen cut himself doing so. More blood. Nomsa slapped her mother till she stopped what Mrs Daniels called a “hissy fit” and went to fetch bandages and plasters and antiseptic from a neighbour. Then the widow of the would-be assassin delivered herself of another denunciation which took on a nastier racist overtone, whilst her by now frantic daughter tried to stop her mother breaching the Bozambwean version of the Official Secrets Act which probably doesn't exist:

“We know all about you! Ndebele? You're a Jew! The Lembe are Jews! We know what you did! During the days of British Bozambwe! When you were collecting money from the Jewish *petit-bourgeoisie* the shopkeepers of Zambezi City and Limpopo Town for your campaign of *Jewing* the Ndebele and the Zezuru! When the Zezuru guerrillas pamphletted the Ndebele villages that supplied your white Mr Kaganovitch with labour for his mealie farm, warning them to burn their identity documents because the police used those “passes” to track so-called trouble makers - you confiscated the people's legitimate means of struggle! Your Mr Kaganovitch called the British Protectorate police who arrested the addressees – the village headmen and detained them for months whilst you went free building your Jewish schools to brainwash the people with propaganda. Your Religious Education classes in the schools said the Jewish Lemba and converts could get good

jobs in Israel – nothing at all about the rightful struggle of the Palestinians against the Jews who colonised their land like the whites here in Bozambwe!” It went on for longer in Zezuru because being a pre-modern language it has to use a less precise, a long-winded semantics to spell out exactly what is being said. None of it was true. The last thing Israel needed was displaced, semi-educated black immigrants. It was hard enough for Oriental (Mizrachi) Jews to get work because of the white Ashkenazi Jews hegemony.

Nomsa, the daughter in English: “Mother, if you don’t be quiet, they’ll deport us! Daddy promised we would stay in London. I am tired of all the struggle and no money in Bozambwe!”

“No money? Who destroyed the economy? The Jewish Lemba here and his fellow Judases!”

“ The Zezuru farm invaders who killed the white farmers and the amaNdebele scum. *We* democratised the economy so Comrade Mutapa could nationalise it under Chinese supervision!”, shouted Mrs Mwari waving her arms around like a woman possessed.

Nomsa slapped her till the poor, bereaved woman fell silent, weeping bitterly.

Sergeant Benedict intervened: “Mrs Mwari, you better be quiet or you’ll come along to the station with me and we’ll charge you with attempted murder or aggravated assault of me or conspiring with your – ahem – late husband – to kill Rabbi Doctor Ndebele in front of Hampstead Heath Overground railway station. We’ll take you into custody till you’ve quieted down, OK? “

To reinforce his point he played back a recording of Mrs Mwari’s outburst he’d made on a tiny CD recording machine pinned to his lapel which synchronised with a video working through a small camera on his police cap showing her attacking him with a carving knife and his own hands getting cut as he grappled with her.

Meanwhile everyone quieted down. Nathan Dhlamini had brought his *kasher* lunch with him and after washing his hands and saying the blessing in Hebrew shared out the smoked salmon and salt-beef sandwiches he’d bought from Bloom’s Restaurant which used to be in the East End and was now in Golder’s Green. What a fuck-up, I thought. I politely asked to use Mrs Mwari’s bathroom and had a good conversation with God – Being-as-Care-in-the-World – to quote the pre-Nazified Heidegger whom all good Jews suspect – on principle without having read him. They dislike Sartre, Camus, certainly Kierkegaard and Nietzsche.

“Being!” I whispered. “This is a total fuck-up! This poor woman and her daughter *and* there is a son somewhere out here in the wilds of Kensington and Chelsea, who plays and sings in a boy band. What is to save them from deportation to the dictatorship of Bozambwe? Have you no mercy? The daughter is a star in the drama class in the middle of her “O” levels or whatever they call them these days. Then the son, Mordechai Mwari – you know the grime, punk, rock scene. More trouble on the horizon.”

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I still need to pop ibuprofen to cope with the pain from weeks of surgery. We have a conference in the police van about what to do. Just then Nomsa comes running towards us across the courtyard of Chelsea Tower, gesticulating frantically towards the top floor balcony-passageway. Mrs Mwari is

hanging by her hands from the railing, ready to let go and drop 15 or so floors in an apparent genuine suicide attempt. Bizarrely, she is singing a Zezuru-Popular Front, song I recognised, invoking the spirit of a Bozambwean medium chosen by important chiefs after trance-auditions. Just then an ambulance and a fire-engine arrive – obviously called by Nomsa or the neighbours after this turn for the worse in Mrs Mwari’s mental state. Firemen rush out equipped with a resilient body-catching device of some strong synthetic material stretched between a large circle of steel tubing. They stand under Mrs Mwari in the courtyard of the tower block in case she lets go.

Another couple of heroic fireman go up in the lift and crawl over the 15th floor balcony-passageway and heave Mrs Mwari kicking and screaming over the half-wall into safety and tie her wrists and ankles with plastic ties before a paramedic rushes up from the ambulance in the courtyard and gave her an evidently heavy sedative injection.

Peace at last.

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I am exonerated at the inquest. I acted in self-defence. The late Joe Mwari is now revealed to have been employed by ex-President Mutapa’s Central Office of Information (the secret police responsible for the torture and murder of all threatening oppositionists). Mrs Mwari has been in Bethlem Royal Hospital in Beckenham Kent where rabbi Nathan and I visit her regularly. She and her two teenage children Nomsa and Mordechai and Rabbi Nathan and I walk behind the coffin in some remote London cemetery. It is all inexpressibly sad. An African clergyman conducts the Christian funeral service. The Metropolitan Police are there in small numbers in case a tribal fracas occurs. The amaNdebele and the amaZezuru are there for different reasons: the former to celebrate and the latter to mourn. Thank God the cross-tribal Movement for Democratic Liberation are there keeping calm.

I gave a sermon on mercy, forgiveness on Saturday morning at the children’s service in the liberal synagogue near Regents Park, and then Jessica and I and Judith and Rosie go to the cricket at Lords. We watch South Africans and Caribbeans and Bozambweans playing in a county match. Women. Women playing cricket in peace and harmony. Of course there are drunks in the crowd making obscene remarks. But that was sex, not race. They are asked to leave by august-looking stewards. A scuffle breaks out. The police arrest someone. The sun shine, the ball swings and spins on the khaki-green wicket. The players appeal for a catch or a leg-before-wicket decision from the umpires and the television match official up in his office behind the stands with his technology.

This happy Isle. I killed a man called Mwari – God. Fortunately, the Talmud corroborates the right to self-defence. Nathan Dhlamini next to us sharing his *kasher* salt-beef and smoked salmon sandwiches saw me praying and sweating in a lather of guilt. He blessed me in Hebrew in a whisper with a smile: “May the Lord lift up His countenance to you and give you peace.” It was like a treasured gift. I visited Mrs Mwari and Nomsa Mwari every year on the anniversary of Joe Mwari’s death, bringing them book vouchers and flowers. Nomsa finished school and became a fairly successful actor. Mrs Mwari actually did an Open University course on counselling the bereaved and got a job with a local HIV/AIDS charity.

What more can I say, except to thank Kiekegaard and to console the spirit of Heidegger, poor man, a mistake worse than my one killing, colluding with the killing of six million and more? Comparing them with the industrialisation of animal farming?

That night Jessica stroked me to sleep when I awoke with my traumatic murder nightmare and blackbirds sang at dawn.

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