

Synopsis: *Revisitation*

This is the story of a woman in her thirties who has experienced great trauma through the violence of South Africa. After being the victim of various smaller crimes, culminating in her being hijacked, she is unable to engage with her life in an urban city and, therefore, seeks refuge in the coastal town of Herald's Bay in the Western Cape.

Her increased sense of isolation she experiences in the city and her battle with the fast pace of the post-modernistic world impact her relocation to the removed semi-rural town. Once in Herald's Bay, her sense of loneliness is heightened as she fails to form meaningful relationships with the community. Struggling to make ends meet, she becomes a stall owner in a regular weekend market. Her encounters with the stall marketers cause her to reflect on human interaction. She realises that she must forge relationships with the residents of the neighbouring areas if she is to overcome her sense of displacement and find inner peace.

At various points in the novel, there are chapters which relate back to the protagonist's life in the city, thereby showing the need for her to make changes in her life. Chapters will be interspersed with poetry, the protagonist's own writing which will show her psychological progression. Emotionally difficult chapters referring to her past will be written in third person as a way for the protagonist to disengage with the acts, showing her inability to accept and deal with the trauma/disconnect she felt in her experiences whereas present tense chapters (starting from when she arrives at the coast) will be written in first person narration to indicate her attempt to live in the present. Throughout the course of the story, the main character undergoes a transformation and reinvents herself. It remains to be seen whether or not she can accept her new identity and find a renewed sense of self.

Although the story begins on a depressing note, the tale will be interspersed with joyful moments and a sense of the beauty of the South African landscape will be espoused. The title *Revisitation* alludes to the protagonist's ultimate challenge of whether or not she will, by revisiting her past and by being revisited by her past, be able to overcome the memories which haunt her.

Revisitation

By

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Chapter 1: Floppy Blue Hat

All possible options run through her mind like an old film reel spinning forward. It couldn't have taken more than five seconds for them to dart through her brain but it seems as though she has been processing them for a few hours. The choices are black and white and dulled in the greys of a depressing day but in those moments her body works as a separate entity to her brain.

For an instant, she becomes animal-like, survival instincts on full alert, and the hairs on her arms stand to attention. A glance in the rear view mirror allows her to see a huddle of men standing on the pavement about forty metres away. Two of the men have their hands in their pockets. They are all turned to face each other in a curved formation, yet none of them acknowledges the others. They aren't quite shifty-looking, but there is something untoward about them.

It is an early Sunday evening. The sun is beginning to set. The old industrial section of town through which she is driving should have been quiet but there are people milling about and some walking down the right side of road, perhaps on their way home from church or from visiting friends. Other than the group of four men, there is nothing suspicious in the air.

She is on her way home after meeting with her friend, Lusanda. It had been a lovely afternoon, filled with friendly banter and some Kopana Café snacks. They had joked about the years they had spent working together in a famous retail store and she had relayed the story of how, when an obnoxious customer had wanted to return a gift shortly after Christmas without providing a proof of purchase slip, she had unfortunately not been able to accommodate him.irate, he had screamed, "It's a gift! I can't exactly go and ask them for the slip!" to which she had replied, "Surely, if it is a gift, Sir, you shouldn't be giving it back."

Of course, the customer had promptly phoned the store manager and made a complaint. She had always been rather cheeky.

The robot turns amber and then red. Not a bright new red, but rather the dusty red of a neglected municipal robot, looking rather sad in its chore of directing the traffic as if it feels saving people's lives is a mundane task and the world should rather sink into a form of anarchic rights of way. There are two cars in front of her, stopped dutifully behind the white line. As she places her foot on the brake, she notices a man to her right. They lock eyes. His thick bomber jacket, tattered at the edges, hides his right hand in the pocket of the aged material yet she doesn't need to see it to know what it holds.

In the seconds that the man takes to approach her car, she makes her decision. There is nothing she can really do. She tries not to panic. With the cars in front of her, she cannot go forward. Well, she can if she wants to ram into the blue Nissan a metre ahead, but something warns her not to do so. Moreover, a second glance in the rear-view mirror dissuades her to reverse. Not that there is any concrete reason not to – it is more a feeling, a spiritual guide, perhaps, warning her strongly that this is not the right action to take. So she doesn't do anything except keep her eyes locked onto the stranger's as he makes his way past the traffic to her driver's side window.

Without realising it, she has both undone her seatbelt and stalled her car, and then she is left with a dilemma. Her car has central locking. However, it only works from the button on the remote attached to her keys in the ignition. If she chooses to reach for the keys, she fears he will think she is trying to get away and he will simply shoot so she reaches over with her left hand and tries to lift up the lock on the car door. Luckily, the lock is not on the handle. It is on the top part of the door and can be easily seen by the hijacker. There is still a problem, though. The lock is known for jamming. It is the reason she usually uses the remote to unlock the doors, without which, she will struggle to open the car door. She fiddles with the lock, all the while keeping her eyes focused on the shiny silver gun pointed at her head.

Is that a silencer? she thinks. It looks like a silencer, but then, what does she know about guns? She is a city girl, trained perhaps in the art of street smart, but not in the art of weapons. He is becoming edgy.

“Hurry up,” he says. He briefly looks up and behind the car to the other side of the street.

“Just wait,” she snaps at him, “I’m trying. Calm down.”

Conceivably, this is not the moment for curt replies. His eyes flicker, his face half in shadow under the trim of his floppy pale blue hat.

“They’re getting impatient,” he responds quietly.

In that moment, she knows he is both her assailant and her saviour. When the door finally opens and she tumbles out, he snatches the silver chain from around her neck.

“Get your hands off me,” she snarls.

Suddenly, they are there - the four men from across the road. Already in the car, three in the back and one in the front seat. He turns and jumps into the driver’s seat. Then they are gone.

She stands for a few seconds in the middle of the road. The minimal Sunday traffic continues to pass, unhurried, unaware. She walks to the pavement and notices a crowd of about twenty bystanders.

“Sorry. So sorry,” a tall man says to her tenderly as he shakes his head.

She nods a thank you and resolves to walk across to the petrol station, a mere thirty metres away from the scene. She enters, beginning to become a bit shaky, and asks the cashier if she can use the phone.

“We don’t do that here,” the cashier states.

“As I said, I have been hijacked. They took everything. If you would just let me use the phone, I will ask someone to bring some money so I can pay you,” she explains.

“Hijacked? Here at the robots? Never! I don’t believe you.”

She tries again.

“Yes, I was hijacked. They took everything. I need to use a phone.”

The cashier relents.

She picks up the old handle on the phone and then pauses. She doesn’t know whom to contact. She doesn’t have any friends as such, more like acquaintances. Who will be willing

to come out and help her so late on the weekend? The people she knows from the riding school she frequents once a week live over an hour away. Her parents were no longer around and the colleagues whose numbers she had were all male, probably at home with their families. Will their wives mind her calling?

She opts to phone Franz, the funny-man who works the till next to hers. She counts on the fact that his sense of humour probably means that his wife doesn't take life too seriously either and won't mind him coming out to fetch her.

"Hey, Franz," she greets him with a nervous edge to her voice, "So sorry to call but I was wondering if you might be able to help me out."

Franz drops her outside her complex. "No time for a gas?" he laughs. "Sorry – I forgot you don't have any of that left, do you?" She fake laughs at his inappropriate joking then watches as his juiced-up bakkie speeds off down the road, spluttering as it goes. She waves to the security at the gate to let her in then marches up to the Complex Manager's flat to retrieve a spare key.

Opening the front door, she notices the dust settled on the bookshelf half blocking her entrance. Slowly, she runs her finger across the pages of the books she treasures and wonders why she allowed them to get so dirty, become so neglected. She starts to put her handbag down on her kitchen table then realises she isn't carrying one. She sighs and walks to the fridge and remembers that she had planned to order for a pizza to be delivered for supper tonight. Without any cash on her and her cards now blocked (she had managed to phone the bank's card emergency department earlier, gratefully using Franz's mobile), she gingerly opens the white seal door. Inside, she finds a jar of pickles, some bottles of sauces, a carton of milk and some cold meat slices. She opts for some cold meat and mustard, chopping up the pickles into tiny cubes to distribute over the ham. She forgot to buy bread on her previous grocery shopping excursion so settles for half a packet of cheesy chips she finds sitting in the cupboard.

Her flat sits at the bottom of a hill. If she looks out her bedroom window, she can see the mass of houses and complexes that run along the giant mound. She starts to sing the Malvina Reynolds song she recalls from a television series:

“Little boxes on the hillside,
Little boxes made of ticky tacky,
Little boxes on the hillside,
Little boxes all the same.

There’s a green one and a pink one...”

Her voice trails off and then she reverts to humming as she can’t remember the order of the colours. There was a purple one, wasn’t there? Or was it blue? She pulls her dark brown curtains closed and sits on the couch to eat. She reaches for the television remote and flicks through the channels until she sees the ‘Green River Gallopers’ is on. The screen shows how Henry, the star of the show and a wild child at heart, is posing for the camera next to a picturesque estuary. Behind him lies the promise of blue waters.

The trees lining the shore dip their branches in the water. She loves the flow of their leaves in the wind. Her soft spot for nature extends to the point that she can’t bear to see a dead tree or a burnt one. If she does, tears well in her eyes immediately. She berates herself for being sappy and tastes the piquant vinegar of the pickles which tickles the back of her throat. Henry has now stripped down to his shorts and his showing off his impressive chest. He jumps into a small river boat and beckons to the audience to follow him. They float off gently through the water. “If only,” she thinks.

She sits up suddenly, her back upright in her horse-riding position. “Imagine there is a terrible smell under your nose,” she hears her instructor say. “Posture, darling. Position and posture.” Very slowly, she does a 360 degree turn of her flat taking a mental inventory. One two-seater couch, only ever used by one. Two bookshelves, waist height, filled with books, slightly uncared for at present but very much loved. One box television that could be disposed of (she was considering a flat-screen anyway, even if it is only a small one). Nothing in the kitchen that was hers to take – the fridge and the microwave belonged to the owner of the flat. She walks quickly to the bedroom and then repeats her 360 degree turn, this time standing on her toes, crossing one foot over the other as if in a ballet pirouette.

“Curtains. I mustn’t forget the curtains and the bedding,” she thinks. She reaches for the bags stored in the top of her clothes cupboard and then she works speedily through the night, until she collapses on her bed still fully clothed, making untidy creases on the duvet she lies upon.

In the morning, she makes a quick call to her boss and tells him she needs the day off to sort out the things she lost in the hijacking. By ten o’clock she has sold her couch to one of her neighbours and has caught a taxi to the Internet café in the next suburb. Her fingers race across the keyboard. In less than ten minutes, she is done. She leaves the café with the printed page squeezed between her first finger and her thumb.

From the café, she walks two blocks until she gets to the bank. With the Monday rush of business, she has to wait a lengthy period and only manages to complete her transactions close to one o’clock. When she finishes with the smartly dressed banker, he shuts his door and heads off to lunch. She exits the security gateway, feeling an unusual lightness in her body. Her hand now clutches both the piece of paper and her new credit card.

She walks another block to the cell phone shop and purchases a new mobile. Nothing too fancy, but enough to allow her to communicate with the world and access the internet since she doesn’t own a computer. Then she runs to the grocery store, fills up some shopping bags with some food items for the month and begs the store owners to give her some boxes that they have kept at the back of the shop, left over from the deliveries of stock.

When she returns home, she realises she has enough time to make some calls. First, she phones her insurance company and puts some pressure on them to move her claim through the processes quicker than normal. Following this, she sets about phoning one person after another, one company after the next, until she finds what it is she is searching for. She sits down on the dusty blue carpet and switches on the television. She can’t find anything that interests her and she finds the news report too depressing to watch to the end. Stabbings, robberies, politics. “Why can’t they have a happy news broadcast?” she wonders aloud.

The following morning she wakes early. Franz has agreed to give her a lift to work until she can find a new car. Well, that is, a “previously cared for” vehicle as they call it now. Actually, his wife agreed, giving Franz strict instructions not to deviate from the shop to her flat and then home. “I swear she checks his kilometres when he arrives home,” she giggles, thinking of how the usually chipper Franz, stuttered as he felt the need to mention that he couldn’t stop at the shops if she needed him to or else ‘his woman’ as he referred to his rather jealous, she realised, wife would box him over his head with a pan. When they arrive at work, the piece of paper once again trapped between her fingers, she walks straight to the boss’s office where she spends a good half an hour. “That wasn’t so bad after all,” she tells Franz, as she skips off to work the till, her hands empty and free.

The next couple of weeks pass by without incident. Her fellow colleagues notice a change in her, but apart from Franz, his wife (who now makes a point to phone her husband every day on his way to work and on his way home) and her boss, no-one knows the reason behind it. She begins whistling whilst she re-organises the stock on the shelves that the customers have ungraciously muddled. She even greets the consumers with a more genuine grin and wishes them a pleasant day. She speaks with a lyricism in her voice that was not there before the attack and her walk has become decidedly more jaunty.

On the 16th day after the crime, she has released Franz and his pestering wife from their goodwill and is now driving her recently waxed red station wagon. Apart from a cigarette burn on the front passenger seat, it really does seem quite well looked after. She stops at a trinket shop, and looks through the row of dangling car mirror ornaments. She had considered buying one of those scented tree-shaped air freshners the hawkers sell at the robots, but when she had taken out her new rose-red wallet which toned with her car number two, the police had arrived and the salesman had hot-footed it down the street, followed by numerous other salesmen, a plethora of toys and mobile accessories, pirated dvds and kitchen dishcloths flying out behind them.

The sparkling, bear encrusted with a fake ruby heart, catches her eye. She turns it around in her hand as if giving it a little hug and keeps it there for a while as she scans the rest of the items hanging from the small hooks. On the final hook, she sees a miniature row of hats of

all shapes and sizes, joined to loops which can be slid over the rear view mirror, revealing the character of the driver who chooses them. There is a western cowboy hat which she finds quite appealing. For a moment, she imagines herself in Texas, on a quaint ranch, surrounded by horses and dust and land on which she can gallop her horse without being noticed. There is a sweet bonnet too, with a cleverly crafted bow on the side, calling out for a charming lady to let it swing gently from side to side as she trundles along at a slow speed in her old, but pristine vehicle. And then she sees it – the one that will be her tiny car ornament, the one that will dangle uninhibited from her rear view mirror as she drives along, the one that will be the reminder of what she has survived. Right at the back of the hook, hangs a plastic silver loop and, on the end of it, a floppy blue hat is attached.

She struggles to keep her eye on the road as she drives home. The diminutive hat keeps catching her eye, sparkling as the light shines on its pale blue enamel through the windscreen. When she enters her flat, she makes her way to the box in the corner where she has packed both her books and her stationery. She reaches for a pen and the green and gold embossed journal that has sat empty on her bookshelf for some time before being lowered into the cardboard container a few days ago. She lowers the ink to the paper and starts to write:

*Pale-blue
floppy blue blue floppy
hat*

The pale-blue floppy hat returns again and again to her mind. Not the little shiny one from the trinket shop, but the real one. The life-size one. The one that seems to grow and grow and take on a life of its own every time it revisits her, haunts her. In her memory, the image is transforming and the silver gun that appears beneath the hat sparkles as if taunting her, berating her on how powerless she is in the world. That evening, she makes one final call.

“I’ll be there in a week’s time,” she says clearly into the receiver.