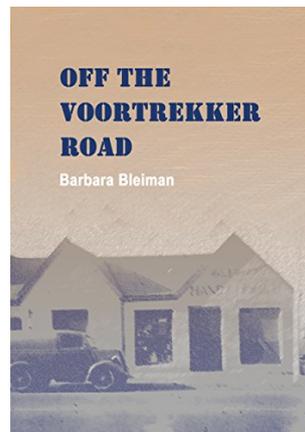




FROM OFF THE VOORTREKKER ROAD

BARBARA BLEIMAN

Barbara Bleiman's novel is set in South Africa in the 1930s and 1940s, a period that saw the rise of apartheid. It draws heavily on stories told to her about her father's early life in Cape Town, the child of Lithuanian and Russian Jewish refugees. Her father became staunchly anti-racist and, as a barrister, defended many black and 'coloured' people (a term used then), who fell victim to a range of discriminatory laws.



CHAPTER 2

1939

Pa's hardware store stood in Parow, at the far end of Main Road, the long thoroughfare stretching east to west across Cape Town that eventually came to be renamed Voortrekker Road, after the rugged, tough-minded Afrikaners who had settled the Cape. Parow, in those days, was quite a distance from the city centre, out beyond Woodstock, Maitland and Goodwood. Property was cheap and rentals easy to come by, so Malays and Jews, Afrikaners and English had started to crowd in, and the suburb was growing by the day.

On one side of the store was Irene's, the women's outfitters. It sold corsets and brassieres, blouses, suits and bright cotton frocks, the most glamorous of which appeared on two smiling, painted mannequins in the window. On the other side stood Krapotkin's butcher's shop, its large plate-glass window filled with pallid sausages, mounds of worm-like minced beef and lean joints of lamb hanging from silver hooks. A sticky yellow paper in the front of the shop was always black and buzzing with flies. Krapotkin was a large, pink-faced man, with hands

as red and raw as the meat he handled and a voice loud enough to wake the cockerel himself. He was in the shop, from early morning till late at night, heaving dripping carcasses and slapping bloody joints of meat onto wooden boards, slicing, chopping, grinding, sawing through flesh and bone, all the while singing, laughing and swearing so loudly that my mother said that Krapotkin and his butcher's shop would be the death of her.

The hardware store had a sign painted on the front with, "Neuberger's Handyhouse", in a clear, unfussy style. It stood a little apart from its neighbours, its whitewashed walls yellowed with age, its sloping tiled roof in some need of repair. On one side of the door stood rolls of carpet, stepladders and brooms. On the other were baskets filled with dishcloths and dusters, bars of waxy household soap and boxes of washing suds. A notice in the window said, "Everything you need, from soap and rice to chicken feed!" and "10% off for bulk bargain buys!" A faded red-and-white striped awning was pulled down every morning to provide shade from the hot midday sun and wound back up every evening when the store was closed.

My father, Sam, had bought the store six years earlier, just before his marriage to my mother and I was born a year later. He worked all hours, either out the front or in the back yard, cutting wood or linoleum, measuring string, counting nails and screws, cutting strips of biltong or weighing biscuits from the big jars that lined the counter. The hired girl, Ada, helped out while my mother moved between the kitchen, the back yard and the shop front, cleaning and cooking, talking to customers, and keeping an occasional eye on me.

Where could I be found, on a typical day in 1939, four-and-a half years of age and living in the Handyhouse with my ma and pa? Occupying myself with toys? Splashing about in a tin tub of water to keep me cool in the blistering heat of the day? Playing a game of five stones with a little friend, or sharing a tasty slice of homemade melkert? No. I would be sitting in the corner of the store, on my sack of beans. The sack was high enough up for me not to attempt to climb down but not so high that I would do myself serious damage if I did. Little Jackie, aged four, knock-kneed, wide-eyed, dressed in shabby grey shorts and a grubby cotton shirt, stick legs swinging against the rough hessian of the bulging sack, sitting watching and saying nothing.

Ma would tell me stories at bedtime. Sometimes they were fairytales, sometimes family stories but often the two were mixed together, a blend of fact and fiction, magic and mundane, then and now; the biblical, the superstitious, the humorous and the sad, all woven together into a strange and complex fabric.

'Once upon a time, long ago and far away, ' my mother said, 'there lived a man named Solomon, who was a cobbler. He was born into a Jewish family in a shtetl far away in Russia, a poor peasant, but clever and practical and full of hopes and dreams, a storyteller, a joker, the centre of attention at every wedding, barmitzvah, festival day or village party. He built a small wooden house for himself, he married a decent Jewish girl, he fought for the Czar, he saw his house burned and his synagogue razed to the ground, he felt hunger and he felt fear, and, finally he took his destiny into his hands and fled with his lovely wife across the wide seas, the swelling oceans to Cape Town, where he settled and had a family, a gaggle of girls, who, one by one married and left home themselves. One of his daughters was called Sarah. That's me,

Jackie, your own mother, your ma. Solomon is Oupa, your very own grandfather. ' She kissed me on the head and then she carried on.

'And then it came to pass that Sarah married Samuel. And they lived in a store and they called it the Handyhouse. And soon they had a child of their own, a little boy with many names: Jacob, Jack, Jankele, Little Jackie, son of Samuel and Sarah, grandson of Solomon, the shtetl cobbler, the man with a stout heart, a steel will and a voice that told an endless river of tales.

Your curly black hair comes from your grandfather, Jackie, your skin as dark as an Eastern prince's, your black, black eyes, like the 'ten a tickie' buttons your father sells in the shop. Your looks you got from Oupa, that's for sure. Maybe you got his cleverness too, with your serious eyes that always seem lost in your thoughts. But what happened to your voice, Jankele? Where oh where has it gone? Who knows? Perhaps it's been locked up by an ogre, in a great big iron box in his castle? Maybe, like a little bird, it's flown away over the seas to find its way home to its nest in Russia? It's waiting there, collecting up all its stories, getting itself ready to fly back again to Parow, and tell them, when the right moment comes?

Four-and-a-half years old; too young to start school, too old to be carried around on Ma's hip or wrap my legs round her waist and hang my arms from her neck, too big to sit in the highchair in the back room, sucking on rusks and pieces of salty biltong, while Ma, Pa and Ada bustled around me. So all day long, I sat on my sack of beans in the store, the Handyhouse, or in the sawdust on the floor, where someone could keep an eye on me. I watched the customers coming in and out, the bell tinkling as they stepped on the mat, carrying their parcels of dried peas or biscuits, candles or string.

Here was Mr van der Merwe, with his flat nose and sunburnt face, his strong, hairy legs spread wide. He had patches of damp sweat under his armpits and down the back of his khaki shirt. He scratched himself inside his trousers, like Ma told me not to. 'It's rude in public,' she said.

'Ooh yirrah! That sun's a bugger today.' His Afrikaner voice was hard like gravelly stones and each word seems to trip up his tongue on its sounds.

'I've brought you something,' he said to Pa, dropping his voice down low, till it was almost a whisper. He handed over a small brown paper envelope. 'It's not the whole lot. But it's the best we can do.'

Pa stared at him, stony-faced. 'We've been waiting for well over two weeks now. Your wife promised to pay up days ago.'

'Times are hard,' said Mr van der Merwe, shaking his head. 'It's not easy.'

'For us too,' said Pa. 'I'll expect the rest next week.'

He turned abruptly to Millicent, the Shapiro family's maid, to serve her. Mr van der Merwe cleared his throat, raised his hand awkwardly in a half-hearted farewell and left the shop.

With her yellow-brown skin, her hair plaited and knotted in tight rows on her head, Millicent was usually the last to be served, even when Mrs Shapiro had asked her to fetch back the family's groceries in a hurry. I was dark-skinned, like Millicent, taking after my mother's

peasant father, as she had so often told me; not pale like Pa, or peachy-pink like some of the little English girls who came into the store, or red in the face like Mr Krapotkin, the butcher, not black-black like the boys who swept the road outside the store, or the labourers who climbed out of the truck every morning to work on the new shop across the road.

And here was Millicent, saying ‘Yessir’ to Pa and waiting to be served, as usual.

‘Tell your madam that I don’t have the crystallised fruit. I’m expecting an order.’

‘Yessir.’

‘And tell her the snoek is fresh from the smokery. Best quality fish. That’s why it’s a bit more pricy than usual.’

‘Yessir.’

‘And make sure you don’t throw away the bill by mistake when you unpack. It’s tucked inside the big paper bag.’

‘Yessir.’

‘At least you can rely on the Shapiro family to pay up,’ Pa said when Millicent had left and the shop had gone quiet. ‘A good Yiddishe family.’

‘Times are hard,’ Ma said. ‘With all this talk of Smuts taking us into the war, people are nervous – they don’t want to spend money.’

‘Times are hard, times are hard. That’s all I hear.’ Pa sighed. ‘Of course they’re nervous. Aren’t we all? But I’ve got a living to make,’ and he went out the back to the yard, slamming the door behind him.

Ada was cleaning the counter, slopping soapy water onto a cloth and wiping it vigorously, her thin arms stretching as far as she could reach, in great sweeping movements. She paused to wipe her forehead.

‘How’s your mother, Ada?’ Ma asked. ‘Any better?’

I felt sorry for Ada. My mother always said, ‘Poor whites are almost worse off than Cape coloureds. They have nothing.’ I liked Ada. She patted my head and kissed me on the cheek. She made me bread and butter when Ma was upstairs lying on her bed with her door shut. She told me silly jokes and sometimes, if the coast was clear and there was no risk of Pa appearing, she came up close and dropped a little chewy caramel into my hand. It was a shame if Ada had nothing.

‘My ma? She’s so-so,’ Ada said.

‘Would you like a little bit of time off to go and see her?’

‘Ag yes, missus. That’d be nice, lekker. But if you need me here, with it coming so soon and everything, then I’ll stay. My friend Maisie’s visiting Ma for me sometimes. I’m paying her a few tickies to go by the hospital and check on her. But it’s not the same as me going myself. It’s not long now, the doctors say. Her time’s coming.’

‘You’re a good girl, Ada, and you don’t usually ask for these things. And you’re a hard worker as well. Even Sam thinks so. I’ll talk to him and maybe you can go early this evening and come back on Thursday. Give you time to see your Ma.’

‘Thank you missus. You’re good to me.’

Ma went over and patted her on the shoulder. ‘And now I think I’ll go find Sam and speak to him.’

Ada came and picked me up from the floor. She brushed the sawdust from my shorts and kissed me heartily on the cheek.

‘You don’t know what’s coming little man!’ she said. ‘You don’t know what’s gonna hit you, when your ma’s time comes.’ She laughed heartily, but I didn’t know what was so funny. Ada’s mother’s time was coming; Ma’s time was coming. Ma’s time kept coming and coming but it never seemed to arrive. And when it did, I couldn’t think what it was going to bring.

CHAPTER 15

1944

One day, a good few months after our return from Bloubergstrand, Mrs Mostert came into the shop with Terence. He was smiling at me and tugging at his mother’s arm.

‘Ask,’ he said. ‘Please mama, ask.’

He flapped his arms up and down wildly. Mrs Mostert laughed. ‘You look like you’ve just eaten a hot babotie Terence! Calm yourself down.’

She turned to Ma. ‘Would Jackie like to come for a day out at the beach, at Hout Bay?’ she said. ‘It’ll be a long day, but he can sleep over at the garage so we don’t disturb you coming back late. It’ll be a chance for you to have a bit of a rest. It’d do you good, I’m sure – you must be in need of a break, with the baby on the way.’ She paused. Sauly was looking up at her with big open eyes. ‘And Saul can come too if you like.’

Ma placed one hand on her growing belly. She smiled.

‘Both boys off my hands for a day... and no Sauly waking me up first thing in the morning. Boy, that’d be something!’

But then she saw my crestfallen face. Sauly was a nuisance; he cried and whined and wanted to join in all my games. If I refused, he went running to Ma to complain. If I let him play, he invariably spoiled things by ignoring the rules. It always ended up in arguments and tears and Pa or Ma would step in, crossly reminding me of my duties as an older brother and the expectation of greater maturity that rested on my shoulders. In one way or another, Sauly always managed to make trouble. And what’s more, he was clearly becoming Pa’s favourite, usurping the position that I had once held and now lost, seemingly forever. Sauly was quick with his fingers, keen to help when Pa constructed paper aeroplanes or little balsa wood boats. He loved weighing and measuring, playing with all the little implements that Pa had made for

me when I was small and in which I had failed to show any real interest. Sauly was not my favourite person.

Ma looked at me hard, then sighed. ‘ Let Jackie go on his own. It’ll be a nice outing for him. He deserves something good for a change.’

Terence and I shared a conspiratorial smile.

Ma packed up a small little bag with a towel and my grey woollen swimming trunks, a pair of pyjamas and a toothbrush, Sauly all the while howling in the background, ‘ Me toooooo, me toooooo.’ I suddenly felt sorry for him and a bit ashamed at the delight I felt at leaving him behind. Should I tell Ma that I wouldn’t mind if he came along? No. It was too good an opportunity to be free of him and the rest of my family as well. I didn’t say anything.

Ma moved heavily over to the jars of biscuits on the counter. She unscrewed the lids and filled a big paper bag with a good mix of the best biscuits. ‘For the journey,’ she said. My eyes were focused on the door, watching in case Pa came back in at any moment and caught her at it and said something embarrassing in front of Terence and Mrs Mostert, or worse still, found some reason why I could not go to Hout Bay after all. But Ma managed to hurriedly scoop up some extra fig rolls and drop them quickly into the paper bag and collect everything together for my trip to the seaside before Pa had returned from his errands.

Mrs Mostert gave Ma a quick squeeze on the arm.

‘I’ll bring him back safe and sound, tomorrow evening,’ she said, ‘I promise you.’

Walter is driving the Chevy. Mrs Mostert is sitting beside him. Walter is singing at the top of his voice, a jazzy tune that makes him sound like he’s laughing as he sings.

Pack up all my cares and woe

Here I go, singin’ low

Bye, bye, blackbird.

Where somebody waits for me

Sugar’s sweet, so is she

Bye, bye, blackbird.

From time to time, Mrs Mostert and Terence join in. I sing along, but only in my head, not out loud and the words I sing are a little different. Bye-bye, Cape Town. Bye-bye, the store. Bye-bye, Ada. Bye-bye Ma, Bye-bye Sauly. Bye-bye Pa.

On the back seat, we sit surrounded by bags, beach balls and striped towels. I look out the window as the houses of Parow and Cape Town flash by. Table Mountain looms up, a thin layer of cloud hanging low above it, like white marshmallow, and beneath it the gardens of Kirstenbosch lush and green, with the rhododendrons in full bloom. Soon the buildings and houses thin out and are replaced by countryside: fig and loquat trees; orange groves, grassland, rocky boulders; shacks with corrugated iron rooves and dusty yards with petrol cans, old tyres, goats and donkeys; clumps of thin pine trees; an open, empty road; a black man and woman,

carrying cases on their heads, walking slowly from somewhere to somewhere, with the morning sun beating down on them; a single candyfloss cloud; the dust of an open-back lorry filled with African labourers, who smile and wave as they go by; a man sitting under a fig tree with a small pile of over-ripe mangoes for sale; a large bird swooping down to catch a lizard in its beak; the wild squawk of seagulls. And then at last – at last! Flashes of bleached white sand and foamy turquoise sea.

Walter parks the car and we carry everything out over the hot sand which burns my bare feet and makes me hop and skitter down towards the cooler wet sand near the sea. He sets up the big green umbrella, the towels, the picnic blanket and the hamper in a quiet spot, not too close to other bathers. There are coloured families sitting on the sand, making sandcastles and swimming in the sea, and there are white families, sitting in a different part, making sand castles, and swimming in the sea. We sit on our own, neither with the coloureds nor with the whites, in a strip of no-man’s-land dividing the two. Mrs Mostert splashes sun oil on Terence’s nose and shoulders but not on mine. ‘You don’t need it, Jackie, with your nice olive brown skin, like a little Arabian prince.’

Terence and I fight our way out of our clothes, flinging them down any old where, forcing our legs into tight woollen swimming trunks, poking them in the wrong way, getting our toes stuck in our hurry to get down to the sea. We race out for our first swim of the day, plunging into the shallow waters and splashing wildly, as the waves crash in and suck noisily back out again.

At midday Walter takes our lunch out of the hamper, which has been packed with ice to keep the food cold, and puts the dripping containers down on the large picnic blanket. He lays the sandwiches out on the plates and, with a sharp knife, slices up a large watermelon. It splashes pink juice and pips onto the white linen cloth that the sandwiches have been wrapped in. He opens cold bottles of fizzy drink, which hiss as he pulls off the lids with his teeth. My drink tips up in the sand and it bubbles and trickles away before anyone can right it. The tears are coming but Walter only laughs and reaches into the hamper for another. Terence giggles. I smile shyly and take a big gulp of soda that explodes in my mouth, like the froth of a sugary sea.

Walter sits down on the big picnic blanket and opens a bottle of beer for himself. I watch him. He helps himself to sandwiches. He is in his swimming trunks, legs stretched out, toes in the sand. He is sturdy, though not especially tall. His arms are strong and muscular, his skin hairless and brown. The hair on his head is short. It is springy and black, with just a fleck of grey here and there. His mouth seems to take up most of his face, his teeth a little crooked but white against his dark skin.

I look at Mrs Mostert. She too is watching Walter, with a little thoughtful little smile on her face. She is plump and pale, soft and large as a cream bun, rolls of fat appearing at the top of her bright-blue swimming costume. Her hair is unpinned from its usual knot, and tangled from the salt and the wind. Without her usual dusting of face powder, her nose and cheeks are spattered with freckles. She’s not the same Mrs Mostert who collects me from the Handyhouse

in her tidy skirts and dresses, or the business-like woman who serves customers at the garage. Everything about her has loosened, expanded, softened.

After lunch, Terence and I build sand castles and dig ditches, then run back into the sea, splashing in the shallows, while Walter and Mrs Mostert lie back on their towels and doze, close to each other, sheltered by the big green umbrella. The warm seawater rises up and washes over me. I wonder what Sauly is up to at home and am glad that he hasn't come too. No Sauly, no Handyhouse, no Pa.

Terence finds a large piece of driftwood, gnarled and knotted and bleached white by the salt of the sea. He wants to show it to Walter, to ask if Walter can carve something out of it with his knife. We run back along the beach, scanning the umbrellas for the big green one that signals our place on the sand.

As we get close to the umbrella, I see that Walter and Mrs Mostert are not alone. They are both sitting up straight and two men, fully dressed in short-sleeved shirts and cotton trousers, are standing in front of them.

'Stay in the sea,' shouts Mrs Mostert but we are already out of the water and running up the beach to see what is going on.

'Stay away boys,' calls Walter and then, more sternly, 'Don't come closer.'

Terence and I hold back. We stand where we are, watching, unable to go either backwards or forwards. Now Walter gets up from his towel and places himself in front of Mrs Mostert, standing between her and the men. There is shouting. There are bad words.

'Pasop. Watch out you blerry kaffir-lover,' one man is yelling at Mrs Mostert. 'We're gonna donner you and that coloured bastard of yours.' This man is tall and thin, with an angular face and a long jaw. His face is red with fury.

The other man, smaller and fatter, with large sweat stains on his shirt, is yelling too. He's holding a big stick that he is swinging towards Walter, only narrowly missing him each time, like he's playing a game with him. Walter looks about to see if anyone will come and help them. On towels, stretched out, or under their umbrellas, people are reading their books or sunning themselves. Children are playing ball or digging in the sand. Everyone sitting close by has turned away, facing the sea, or looking towards the ice-cream kiosk and the café in the distance. No one acknowledges that anything is wrong.

Terence is trailing the large piece of driftwood behind him. I wonder if I should grab it and run and hit the men with it. I could bash them on the legs, whack them as hard as I can, hit them and hit them till they run away. But I don't move. I just stand on the sand watching. The tears are coming and I can't hold them back.

The man with the stick prods Walter, stabs at his feet, as if poking at a crab to make it close up tight inside its shell or scuttle away in fright. Walter stands his ground but makes no move to stop him. I don't understand why. Why doesn't he just grab the watermelon knife from where it's lying on the cloth and use it to defend himself. The man grips the stick more firmly. He grunts as he takes a bigger, faster swing which arcs towards Walter, whipping his legs so that

he flinches. And now the other one, the thin one who up until now has just stood and shouted, joins in, punching Walter in the face so that he falls back heavily onto the picnic blanket. He falls into the plates and left over sandwiches and overturns the hamper. Mrs Mostert screams. At the sound of her voice, the two men casually turn away and stroll off down the beach, as if enjoying the nice weather and a relaxing day at the seaside. One whistles as he walks. The other laughs.

Mrs Mostert is weeping and now faces from nearby are turned towards us, watching. But no one moves from their places under their umbrellas. They just sit and stare.

‘Don’t worry, May. It’s OK. I’m all right,’ says Walter, dabbing at his mouth, testing the damage. He spits out a single, bloody shard of broken tooth and holds it out on his hand. Mrs Mostert passes him the white linen cloth that the sandwiches have been wrapped in and he presses it to his face to stop the bleeding.

He looks anxiously towards Terence and me, to see if we’re OK.

‘Let’s pack up, boys. It’s time to go home.’

Slowly we collect everything together and put down the umbrella. Walter carries most of the bags but we help with the buckets and spades and beach ball, which we hand to Walter to put in the boot of the Chevrolet. He takes out the little plastic plug and squeezes the ball, allowing the air to slowly exhale, till the ball is a flat, flabby circle, hardly recognisable any more.

In the car, Mrs Mostert is sniffing into her handkerchief. Walter pats her knee gently.

‘We’re OK,’ he says. ‘No real harm done. We’ll be fine when we get back to Parow.’

Terence, who has been sitting quietly next to me, asks, ‘Who were those two men?’ and his mother says, ‘Just nasty men, silly men. Don’t worry, we won’t see them ever again.’

‘Your face is all puffed up,’ Mrs Mostert says to Walter. ‘Does it hurt a lot?’

‘It’s OK,’ Walter replies. ‘A pity all the ice melted. It would have been good as a little icepack to keep the swelling down.’

‘You want to go back home Jackie, instead of coming to stay the night with us?’ asks Mrs Mostert kindly, twisting in her seat to look at me. ‘You upset by what’s happened and want to be with your Ma?’

I shake my head. ‘I want to stay the night with Terence and you,’ I say.

‘Good boy,’ says Mrs Mostert. She turns back to face forwards again. There is a little pause. Her voice is light, breezy but I sense something important is being said. ‘Perhaps don’t tell your Ma and Pa about what happened, then, eh? No need to worry them with nonsense like that. Better for them not to know. We’re all fine aren’t we? All done with now. I’ll make a nice chicken pie for supper when we get back and it’ll all be forgotten.’

I nod my head. All will be forgotten. All will be forgotten. Nothing will be said.

When I got back to the store the next morning, Ma asked me how the trip went.

‘Was it fun?’

I nodded.

‘Did you swim a lot?’

I nodded.

‘Did you eat a nice picnic?’

‘Yes.’

‘Did Mrs Mostert drive you there?’

‘No.’

‘Oh,’ said Ma, surprised. ‘So who drove you all that way out to Hout Bay? Not Mr. Mostert, I suppose. He’s still sick in the sanatorium with tuberculosis from what I’ve heard. Been there for months now.’

‘Walter.’

‘Walter?’ said Ma. Her face flushed red. ‘I didn’t know Walter was going with you to Hout Bay.’ There was a moment of hesitation and then, ‘Does Walter often go on trips like this with May Mostert?’

I shrugged.

‘Is he around with you a lot, when you go to visit Terence at the garage?’

I said nothing.

‘Does he sit and eat with you at the table, for instance?’

I nodded. Was that the right thing to do?

‘And come and go in the house as he pleases?’

I looked at her and said nothing. Why did this matter? Why was Ma asking all these questions?

‘How friendly is he with her? With Terence?’

I shrugged.

‘What on earth is going on between May Mostert and Walter?’ Ma said under her breath.

‘Ma, is Walter Mrs Mostert’s other husband?’ I asked. It was a question I had often wanted to ask and it didn’t seem to me to be a dangerous one. I didn’t think Ma would mind and since I couldn’t ask May or Walter or Terence, Ma seemed like my best bet. She would know.

Ma frowned. ‘What sort of question is that?’

I went on, undeterred. ‘Is Walter Terence’s pa?’

‘Of course not, silly boy. What put that into your head? Walter’s coloured. He’s the paid boy at the garage. How could he be Terence’s father? Terence is white and Walter’s a kaffir. And anyway it’s none of your business. That’s something for you to think about when you’re a big boy, not now.’

There was a little pause.

‘Was everything nice at the beach Jackie? No problems or anything?’

I nodded vigorously in response to her first question and shook my head firmly to her second.

Mrs Mostert had told me not to say a word. I had followed her instructions. Whatever trouble she wanted me to deny, whatever revelations she was concerned to prevent, I felt sure that I had succeeded in doing as she said. I’d not given anything away. As far as I was concerned, Ma was none the wiser and I had done my job of staying silent. Ma’s frowns and questions didn’t worry me too much. May Mostert had asked me to keep a secret and I was pleased that I had managed to achieve that.

***Barbara Bleiman** is an education consultant and writer at the English and Media Centre (EMC). *Off the Voortrekker Road* is her first novel, published in 2015. It was followed by *Accidents of Love* in 2017 and a collection of short stories, *Kremlinology of Kisses* published by Blue Door Press in October 2021. She has also written a book about English in secondary education, *What Matters in English Teaching*, (April 2021). She blogs and writes for EMC and on her own website www.barbarableiman.com.*