**Die paradysbossie**

**The paradise bush**

Halfpad tussen twaalf en dertien verlaat Elfie die smalle weg en begeef haar op die breë pad wat, so weet sy alte goed, reguit lei na die verderf.

Halfway between twelve and thirteen Elfie leaves the narrow road and sets off on the broad road which, she knows all too well, leads straight to destruction.

Verskeie dinge druk haar ylings vorentoe: die nuwe baba op haar ma se skoot, die verpleegster wat gehuur is om Oupa se nek en voete te was, die witkopseunskind wat langsaan ingetrek het, en veral haar heimlike vermoede dat Bileam se donker, nes dié van Aesopus, van fabelstoffasie is.

Several things are pushing her slightly forward: the new baby on her mother's lap, the nurse hired to wash Grandpa's neck and feet, the white-headed boy who moved in next door, and especially her secret suspicion that Balaam's darkness, like that of Aesopus, is of fable faction.

Oor laasgenoemde probeer sy met haar oupa praat (hy is immers ‘n godgeleerde én dateer boonop uit ‘n tyd toe kinders met donkiekarre skool toe gery het, ‘n dubbelkenner dus) maar haar ma sien dit aan vir stuitlikheid en verbied haar streng: “Vir wat lol jy by jou oupa met donkiedinge? Jy kan mos sien hy’s nie vandag so lekker nie. Wil jy hom nou verder ontstig?” (Wanneer haar pa met Elfie praat, sê sy Oupa is nie lekker nie; wanneer sy met grootmense praat, is hy … nee, toe maar.)

She tries to talk about the latter with her grandfather (he is, after all, a godly scholar and dates back to a time when children drove to school with donkey carts, a double-expert), but her mother regards it for stubbornness and strictly forbids her: Why are you bothering with your grandfather with donkeys? You can see he's not so well today. Do you want to upset him now?” (When her dad talks to Elfie, she says Grandpa isn't well; when she talks to grownups, he is ... no, don’t worry.)

Elfie wag tot haar ma (én Nurse, want dié twee is kop in een gestyfde wit mus) eenkant is, voor sy hom weer vra: “Dink Oupa regtig Bileam se donkie kon praat? Práát? Soos ek en Oupa nou?” en sy skud hom dringend aan die hand.

Elfie waits until her mother (and Nurse, because these two are head in one starched white cap), before asking him again: “Does Grandpa really think Balaam's donkey could speak? Speak? Like Grandpa and I now?” and she tugs his hand urgently.

Hy sit swyend soos ‘n standbeeld, met sy hande op die kniekoppe, turend in die vertes, asof hy reguit kyk na die hemelstad waar Ouma nou altemit met ‘n hekelwerkie sit terwyl die koffiewater sing. Arme Oupa. Hier kry hy nie meer koffie nie. Dis heeltemal te sleg vir sy hart.

He sits silently like a statue, with his hands on his knees, staring at nothing in particular, as if looking straight at the heavenly city where Granny is crocheting while the coffee water sings. Poor Grandpa. Here he no longer gets coffee. It's too bad for his heart.

“Oupa?” sê Elfie en bly saggies skud tot hy terugkeer aarde toe, na haar wat met die oopgeslane Bybel voor hom sit. Hy kyk só-ó na haar, lánk. Dan weer verlangend by die venster uit, na sy eertydse groentetuin waar nou net die paradysbossie nog staan. Lank sit hy so, voor hy eindelik klokhelder met sy mooi domineestem vir haar vra: “Wat staan daar geskryf, my kind?”

"Grandpa?" says Elfie and continues to tug at his hand gently until he returns to earth, to her sitting with the open Bible in front of him. He looks at her like that for a long time. Then longingly out the window, to his former vegetable garden where now only the paradise bush is still standing. He sits like that for a long time, before finally asking her with his nice reverend voice, "What is written there, my child?"

Elfie lees waar haar vinger plek gehou het: “Maar die Here het die bek van die esel geopen, en hy sê vir Bileam: ‘Wat het ek jou gedoen, dat jy my nou al drie maal geslaan het?’ Daarop antwoord Bileam die esel: ‘Omdat jy die spot met my drywe. Was daar net ‘n swaard in my hand – dan het ek jou sekerlik doodgeslaan.’ En die esel sê vir Bileam: ‘Is ek nie jou esel waar jy jou lewe lank op gery het tot vandag toe nie? Was dit ooit my gewoonte om so met jou te doen?’ En hy antwoord: ‘Nee.’ Toe open die Here die oë van Bileam, sodat hy …”

Elfie reads where her finger held: “But the Lord opened the mouth of the donkey, and he said to Balaam, 'What have I done to you, that you have struck me three times already?' Balaam answered: 'Because you're mocking me. If only there was a sword in my hand - I would surely have killed you.’ And the donkey said to Balaam, ‘Am I not your donkey that you have ridden all your life to this day? Was it ever my custom to do so to you? And he answered: ‘No.’ Then the Lord open the eyes of Balaam, so that he could …"

Elfie hou op met lees toe sy hoor oupa snork. Sy oë is toe, maar ‘n ligblou spleet glim onder die een ooglid, soos wanneer daar lig agter ‘n toe deur skyn. Sy kop sak skuins. Hy slaap.

Elfie stops reading when she hears Grandpa snoring. His eyes are closed, but a pale blue fissure gleams under one eyelid, as when light shines behind a closed door. His head slumps. He is asleep.

“Elfrieda!” roep haar ma uit die eetkamer. “Kom eet nou klaar sodat jy met jou skoolwerk kan begin. Kyk net waar staan die horlosie al en netnou moet jy vir jou musiekles gaan.”

"Elfrieda!" her mother calls from the dining room. “Come and eat now so you can start your schoolwork. Just look at the time and just now you have to go for your music lesson.”

Haar musiekles is ‘n fiasko, want sy het alwéér nie geoefen nie.

Her music lesson is a fiasco because once again she has not practiced.

“Kind,” sê haar musiekjuffrou treurig, “jy’t soveel talent. Hoekom begrawe jy dit in ‘n sweetdoek?”

“Child,” says her music teacher sadly, “you have so much talent. Why are you burying it in a sweat cloth?"

Elfie kyk stip na die klaviertande wat wit gryns. (Alweer Bybeltaal! Asof Iemand omgee hoe sy haar trillers en legato’s speel!)

Elfie looks closely at the piano teeth that grins white. (Again Bible language! As if anyone cares how she plays her trills and legacies!)

“Miskien behoort ek ‘n slag met jou ma te praat,” sêvra die juffrou nog.

"Maybe I should talk to your mother," the teacher says.

“Ek sal gaan oefen,” belowe Elfie gou.

“I will go and practice,” Elfie quickly promises.

Op pad huis toe steel sy ‘n handvol winterasters uit die musiekjuffrou se tuin. Die angs tril in haar ore (as die juffrou nóú die trillers kon hoor!) maar sy pluk tóg twee méér as laas week, en glip bewend van vrees en vreugde straat af. So!

On the way home, she steals a handful of winter flowers from the music teacher's garden. The anguish vibrates in her ears (if the teacher could hear the trills now!) But she picks two more than last week, and slips down the street trembling with fear and joy. So!

Die witkopseunskind staan by hul hek vir haar en wag. Hy takseer die buit in haar hand. “Dis nog niks,” bevind hy en skud sy goue kop. “Kom môre saam met my.”

The white-headed boy stands at her gate waiting for her. He looks at the loot in her hand. "That’s nothing yet," he finds, shaking his golden head. "Come with me tomorrow."

“Nee, dánkie.”

“No, thank you.”

Sy tande, egalig soos dié van die klavier, gryns net so wit.

His teeth, even as those of the piano, grins just as white.

“Bang geword, of hoe?”

“Scared, or what?”

“Gaan bars.”

“Go burts.”

“Sies, meisies sê nie …”

“Sis, girls don’t say …”

“Gaan bars, sê ek.” En sy spat by hul hekkie in.

"Go burst, I say." And she splashes into their gate.

“Van die musiekjuffrou,” sê sy vroom toe sy haar ma in die badkamer kry.

“From the music teacher,” she says piously when she finds her mother in the bathroom.

“Fraai. Sit dit in ‘n potjie op die eettafel.” En haar ma buk om die baba op te tel uit sy bad.

“Beautiful. Put it in a pot on the dining table." And her mother stoops to pick up the baby from his bath.

Haar oupa is alreeds gebad. Hy sit skoon geskrop in die stoel langs sy bed terwyl Nurse sy vingernaels knip. (As sy kon, sou sy die blou are op Oupa se hande ook wit geskrop het. Sy verdra nie ‘n merkie nie.)

Her grandfather was already bathed. He sits scrubbed in the chair next to his bed while Nurse cuts his fingernails. (If she could, she would have scrubbed the blue veins on Grandpa's hands as well. She doesn't tolerate a mark.)

“Moenie so in die oop deur bly staan nie,” maan Nurse. “Hy sal ‘n trek kry waar hy sit.”

"Don't stand in the open door like that," Nurse warns. "He'll get a cold where he sits."

Elfie gaan by die agterdeur uit. Dis nou donker buitekant en koud. Die stoeplig gooi ‘n bleek spookskynsel oor die leë tuin. Net Oupa se paradysbossie, doer in die middel, staan orent in die donkerte, maar met sy winterkaal takke lyk hy grieselig, soos ‘n geraamte sonder kop. Elfie ril. Sê nou Bileam se donkie was getóór!

Elfie goes out the back door. It's dark outside and cold now. The porch throws a pale ghostly look over the empty garden. Only Grandfather's paradise bush, in the middle, stands upright in the darkness, but with its winter-bare branches it looks grisly, like a skeleton without a head. Elfie shivers. What if Balaam's donkey was bewitched!

“Elfrieda,” roep haar ma, “kom eet!”

“Elfriede,” her mother calls, “come and eat!”

Sy vlug eetkamer toe. Daar staan die winterasters in die middel van die tafel, hulle koppe almal na haar gedraai. Terwyl haar ma die kos inskep, knik hulle met die kop vir haar: ag so, ken ons mekaar?

She flees to the dining room. There the winter flowers stand in the middle of the table, their heads all turned to her. As her mother dishes the food, they nod to her: oh well, do we know each other?

“ …En daarom sal ons vanjaar ‘n ander plan met Pa se verjaarsdag moet maak, dit kan eenvoudig nie anders nie,” sê haar ma vir haar pa en vee die baba se mond met sy borslap af.

“… And that is why we will have to make another plan for Dad's birthday this year, it simply cannot be any different,” her mother tells her father, wiping the baby's mouth with his breast cloth.

Elfie kyk stip na die baba in die eetstoeltjie. “Hoekom kan hý by die tafel sit en Oupa nie?”

Elfie looks closely at the baby in the dining chair. "Why can he sit at the table and Grandpa can't?"

“Ons gaan nie weer daaroor redekawel nie,” sê haar pa. “Nurse wil Oupa versorg vóór sy van diens gaan, en daarom eet hy in die bed. Eet jý nou maar jou groente op.”

"We're not going to argue about it again," says her father. “Nurse wants to take care of Grandpa before she leaves, so he eats in bed. Eat your vegetables now.”

“Maar ek háát groente!” roep Elfie met ‘n dun rafeltjie-stem uit en stoot haar bord agteruit. Die pot wintersasters tuimel om, binne-in haar bord. Dis die einde van hul glorie, én van Elfie se maal. Hulle gaan na die vullisblik, sy gaan na haar kamer. As haar ma van beter kon weet, dink Elfie onbewoë daar voor haar kamerspieël, het sy háár eerder in die vullisblik gegooi. Sy is so sleg, die see kan haar nie afwas nie. Poef!

"But I hate vegetables!" Elfie exclaimed with a thin rattle voice and pushes her plate backwards. The pot of winter flowers tumbles and falls in her plate. That is the end of their glory, and Elfie's meal. They go to the trash can, she goes to her room. If her mother could have known better, Elfie thought heartsore there in front of her room mirror, she would have thrown her in the trash can instead. She's so bad, the sea can't wash her off. Poo!

Sondagmiddae kom die familie gewoonlik koffie drink.

On Sunday afternoons, the family usually comes for coffee.

“En daarom kan ons eenvoudig nie anders nie, ons sal ‘n ander plan moet maak,” sê Elfie se ma, dié keer vir die familie. “Jasper het die vakansiereëlings maande gelede getref en goeie akkommodasie is skaars.”

"And that's why we simply can't help it, we will have to make a different plan," Elfie's mother tells the family this time. "Jasper made the holiday arrangements months ago and good accommodation is scarce."

“Bowendien het Aletta die vakansietjie broodnodig, met die huishouding, die baba én Pa om te behartig …” sê Elfie se pa.

"Besides, Aletta needs the holiday, with the household, the baby and Dad to take care of ..." says Elfie's father.

“Maar natuurlik!” stel die familie hulle gerus. Wéét hulle dan nie: die bejaarde word by die dag moeiliker – godsman of nie. Party dae moet jy hare op jou tande hê, en die gedaante van ‘n engel. Derhalwe is daar net één plan; sy tagtigste verjaarsdagviering word vervroeg, maar sonder sy medewete, om vredesonthalwe.

"But of course!" the family reassures them. Don't they know: the elderly are getting more difficult by the day – godly man or not. Some days you have to have hair on your teeth, and the shape of an angel. Therefore, there is only one plan; his eightieth birthday celebration will be sooner than plannes, but without his knowledge, for the sake of peace.

Elfie se pa en ma lyk verlig. Hulle is ook maar net van vlees en bloed. En probeer ook tog hul bes.

Elfie's father and mother look relieved. They are also only flesh and blood. And try their best, too.

Elfie neem vir haar oupa sy tee na die kamer, want dis vir hom te koud daar op die stoep. “Mammie,” sê hy toe hy haar daar in die deur gewaar, “het jy nou onthou om Boetman se klasgeld te stuur?”

Elfie takes her grandfather his tea to the room, because it is too cold for him on the porch. "Mommy," he says as he spots her in the door, "did you remember now to send Boetman's tuition?"

Elfie sit die koppie langs hom neer. “Oupa,” sê sy, “dis ek.” Hy kyk dwarsdeur haar. “Ons moenie laat slap lê nie, Menere. God verwag dat ons sal werk.”

Elfie put the cup down next to him. "Grandpa," she says, "it's me." He looks through her. "We must work hard, Guys. God expects us to work."

Sy los die tee, loop buitentoe na die agterplaas. Die seunskind van langsaan se witkop wip oor die heining. “Haai, wil jy hoor wat die loods gesê het toe die vliegtuig val?” vra hy en runnik-lag.

She puts down the tea, walks out to the backyard. The boy from next door's white head flips over the fence. "Hey, do you want to hear what the pilot said when the plane crashed?" he asked, laughing.

“Gaan bars,” sis sy en loop verby na die paradysbossie om ‘n appeltjie te soek.

“Go burst,” she hisses, walks past to the paradise bush to look for an apple.

Natuurlik dra die paradysbossie nie regtig appels nie. En paradysbossie is ook nie sy regte naam nie. Om die waarheid te sê: niemand ken sy naam nie en niemand weet waarvandaan hy eintlik kom nie. ‘n Familielid het die saadpeul toentertyd, nog lank voor Elfie se tyd, saamgebring en vertel dat die bossie op ‘n sekere tyd van die jaar uitbars in ‘n blomdos, pronk vir dag of wat en dan weer net so skielik asvaal word. As jy hom dan mooi dophou, sien jy mettertyd ‘n piepklein vruggie, amper nes ‘n appeltjie, jy kan hom net nie eet nie.

Of course, the paradise bush doesn't really carry apples. And paradise buss is not his real name, either. In fact: nobody knows his name and no one knows where he actually came from. A family member brought the seed pod at a time, long before Elfie's time, and told them that at a certain time of year, the bush burst into a flower box, showcase for a day or so and then just as suddenly becomes bare again. If you watch it closely, you will eventually see a tiny fruit, almost like an apple, you just can't eat it.

Elfie se oupa (toe nog in sy fleur en hoogleraar in godgeleerdheid) het die saad daar in sy groentetuin geplant en toe die bossie groot word, lewer hy sowaar sy oes, maar klein soos bessies en galbitter.

Elfie's grandfather (then still in his prime and professor of divinity) planted the seed there in his vegetable garden and when the bush grew, he actually delivered his crop, but small like berries and gall bitter.

“Vir wat spit jy hom nie uit nie?” het Ouma geneul. “Vir wat hier in die middel van die groentetuin?”

"Why don't you take it out?" grumbled Grandma. "Why here in the middle of the vegetable garden?"

“Nee, los hom maar,” het Oupa dan gepaai, “hy blom vir my so mooi.”

"No, just leave him," Grandpa then said, "he blooms so beautifully for me."

En dit was nou juis die eienaardige, elke jaar teen die einde van September, wanneer Oupa sy verjaarsdag vier, bars die bossie uit in blomme, ingeryg aan elke takkie, spierwit snoertjies met ‘n heidegeur.

And it was the strange thing now, every year at the end of September, when Grandpa celebrated his birthday, the bush burst into flowers, tucked into every twig, sparkling white cord with a heather scent.

“My verjaarsdagpresent van Bo,” sê Oupa elke jaar vir verjaarsdaggaste en vryf die spits blaartjies tussen sy vingers om die kneusgeur op te snuif. En ouma steek ‘n paar takkies in ‘n potjie en sit dit op die verjaarsdagtafel tussen die melktert, koeksisters en handtertjies. Só verjaar hy elke jaar, ook ná Ouma se dood, want nou pas Elfie se pa en ma hom op en hulle hou elke jaar vir hom ‘n verjaarsdagfees, met melktert, koeksisters en handtertjies, kompleet.

"My birthday present from Above," Grandpa tells birthday guests every year, rubbing the pointed leaves between his fingers to sniff the bruised smell. And grandma puts a few twigs in a jar and puts it on the birthday table between the milk tart, koeksisters and hand tarts. This is how he celebrates every year, even after Grandma's death, because now Elfie's father and mother look after him and they have a birthday party for him each year, with milk tart, koeksisters and hand tarts.

“Nou ja, dis dan afgespreek,” sê ma toe die familie aanstaltes maak om te ry, “vandag oor twee weke, dus. Laat weet die ander ook. En vra tog vir tant Drienie of sy weer kans sien vir die handtertjies.”

“Well, then it is agreed upon,” says Mom when the family made arrangements to leave, “today in two weeks time. Let the others know too. And ask Aunt Drienie if she can make the hand tarts again."

Daaroor voel Elfie wel bly. Dis haar gunsteling.

Elfie feels happy about that. It's her favorite.

Die winter tussen twaalf en dertien is muf.

The winter between twelve and thirteen is musty.

Dit ruik na dooie geld, na blare wat op die grond lê en stingels wat slymerig in die visdam se water roei. Die planke van die boomhuis vrot. Alles val uitmekaar.

It smells like dead money, leaves lying on the ground, and stalks that are muddy in the fish pond's water. The boards of the tree house rot. Everything falls apart.

Wanneer die lente kom, dink Elfie, gaan alles anders word. Sy ook. Hoe sy sal wees, weet sy nie, maar ánders. Miskien word sy skielik een môre wakker en weet dadelik sy’s anders, ánders; die reën laat nie haar hare kroes nie en sy’t die mooiste bene in die klas. Miskien sit sy die baba op haar heup en loop met haar na die kafee om vir Papadoulos te wys hoe groot hy is. Miskien ken sy haar musiekstukke en is betyds vir ete (mét skoon hande) en onthou saans om te bid.

When spring comes, Elfie thinks, everything will be different. She too. How she will be, she does not know, but different. Maybe she wakes up one morning and immediately knows she's different, different; the rain does not leave her hair frizzy and she has the most beautiful legs in the class. Maybe she put the baby on her hip and walk with him to the cafe to show Papadoulos how big he has got. Maybe she knows her music and is ready for dinner (with clean hands) and remembers to pray at night.

Maar eers moet dit lente word. En eers moet Oupa verjaar. (Sal sy hom sê dis ‘n verneukspul? Of sal sy wag dat ‘n bliksemstraal haar tref?)

But first it must be spring. And first, Grandpa must have his birthday. (Will she tell him it's a scam? Or will she wait for a lightning strike to hit her?)

“As dit maar net nie reën nie!” tob haar ma die Saterdagmôre terwyl sy koeksisters op ‘n bord uitpak. “Waar kry ek vir al die mense binnekant plek? En ons het juis die stoep so mooi getooi.”

"If it just doesn't rain!" her mother complained Saturday morning as she unpacked koeksisters on a plate. “Where do I get room for all the people inside? And we decorated the veranda so nicely.”

Elfie staan by die kombuisvenster met haar neus teen die ruit gedruk. “Daar reën dit klaar,” kondig sy aan en steek haar hand uit om die eerste groot swaar druppels op te vang.

Elfie stands at the kitchen window with her nose pressed against the window. "It's already raining," she announces, sticking out her hand to catch the first big heavy drops.

“Maak toe, kind,” kreun haar ma. “Die koek val vandag plat!” Sy het meel op haar wang en haar oë lyk rooi, asof sy stilletjies gehuil het.

"Close, child," moans her mother. "The cake will fall flat today!" She has flour on her cheek and her eyes looks red, as if she were crying quietly.

Op die stoep is Elfie se pa besig om die stoele so goed as moontlik uit die pad van die reën te stoot. Sy kop en skouers is klam gestuif. “Pa gaan lekker siek word van die nattigheid,” profeteer Elfie en draai roekeloos eenhand om die stoeppilaar. Die reën val op haar gesig, haar wange is nat, haar kop draai en draai.

On the porch, Elfie's father is pushing the chairs out of the rain as best he can. His head and shoulders are damp. "Dad's going to get sick from the wetness," Elfie prophesies, turning recklessly around the pillar. The rain falls on her face, her cheeks are wet, her head turns and turns.

“Kom uit die reën!” raas haar pa. “Wil jy vandag jou dood soek?”

"Get out of the rain!" her father scolds. "Do you want to seek your death today?"

Sy sluip deur die huis, verby Oupa se kamerdeur, en loer suutjies in. Nurse kyk op. “Kom sit ‘n bietjie by hom,” roep sy, “dan gaan help ek jou ma met iets.”

She sneaks through the house, past Grandfather's bedroom door, and peek in quietly. Nurse looks up. "Come and sit with him for a bit," she calls, "and then I'll help your mother with something."

“Nee, ek is besig,” sê Elfie en vlug. Haar hart skop soos ‘n wilde ding. As die bliksemstraal nóú tref!

"No, I'm busy," says Elfie, fleeing. Her heart kicks like a wild thing. If the lightning strike hits now!

Maar nee.

But no.

Wonder bo wonder trek die lug teen twaalfuur oop. ‘n Ligte windjie stoot die reënwolke verby en daar is die hemel sowaar skoon en helderblou. Die aarde damp soos die son daarop skyn. Die spreeus verjaar in die heining.

Miracle above miracle, the sky opens at twelve. A light breeze blows the rain clouds away and the sky is clear and clean. The earth damp as the sun shines on it. The sparrows having a birthday in the fence.

Elfie se pa stoot stoele reg en klop die kussings op. Elfie se ma steek melktert in die oond en neurie ‘n gesang. Elfie dra die baba op haar heup (maar nét binne-in die huis).

Elfie's father pushes chairs straight and knocks the pillows up. Elfie's mother puts the milk tart in the oven and hums a song. Elfie carries the baby on her hip (but just inside the house).

Toe die familie en vriende kom, is alles in rep en roer. Almal kry ‘n sitplekkie: grootmense op die stoepstoele, jongmense op die stoepmuur en kinders op hul duim. Oupa word in sy eie stoel sitgemaak, vlak by die verjaarsdagtafel. Elfie verbeel haar sy hoor die vier pote kreun onder die vrag koek. Daar word gesny en ingelaai.

When the family and friends came, everything was up and running. Everyone gets a seat: adults on the porch chairs, young people on the porch wall and kids on their thumbs. Grandpa is seated in his own chair, right at the birthday table. Elfie imagines she hears the four legs moan under the load of cake. It is being cut and loaded.

“Ag kind, vee Oupa se mond bietjie af,” fluister haar ma, met ‘n skinkbord vol koppies in aantog.

"Oh child, wipe Grandpa's mouth," her mother whispers, with a tray full of cups.

“Maar, Elfrieda, jy word mos alte groot en fluks!” merk tant Drienie haar duidelik op. “Kyk net hoe rek die ou beentjies nou!”

"But, Elfrieda, you are growing up and helpful now!" Aunt Drienie notices her clearly. "Just look how you are growing tall!"

“En wat dink julle van ons kanse in die laaste toets?” vra die ooms vir mekaar in die een hoek van die stoep.

"And what do you think of our chances in the last test?" the uncles asked each other in one corner of the porch.

“’n Mens moet nóú koop vir die somer,” sê die tantes in die ander hoek.

"You have to buy now for the summer," says the aunts in the other corner.

Teen skemer maak die familie traag gereed om te vertrek. Dit was ‘n lekker dag, sê hulle vir mekaar, en wag dat die kinders skoene en kouse bymekaar soek voordat hulle begin groet. Toe die laaste motor wegry, word Oupa kamer toe gehelp, want die luggie sny koud. ‘n Mens kan voel dit is nog wintertyd.

At dusk, the family slowly prepares to leave. It was a good day, they say to one another, waiting for the children to find shoes and socks before they begin to say goodbye. When the last car drives away, Grandpa is helped to the room, because the air cut cold. One can feel it is still winter time.

Elfie tel lekkergoedpapiertjies en koeldrankstrootjies van die grasperk op. Toe sy by die heining verbyloop, fluit iemand, maar sy kyk nie om nie. Sy gooi die goed so een vir een in die vullisdrom, sit die deksel op, vee haar hande af en wil by die agterdeur ingaan.

Elfie picks up candy wrappers and soda straws from the lawn. As she passes the fence, someone whistles, but she does not look up. She throws the stuff in the garbage one by one, put the lid on, wipes her hands and want to go in by the back door.

Toe sien sy die paradysbossie.

Then she sees the paradise bush.

Wit oortrek. Blommetjies ingeryg aan elke takkie, getooi met snoer op snoer. En toe sy daaraan raak: die heidegeur wat uit die spits blaartjies styg.

Covered in white. Flowers perched on each twig, sewn with cord on cord. And when she touches it: the heath smell rising from the pointed leaves.

Sy pluk, holderstebolder, ‘n hele handvol en nóg ‘n handvol en nóg! “Kyk, Oupa, kyk!” roep sy toe sy by die kamerdeur inbars. “Die verjaarsdagpresent!”

She picks a whole handful and another handful and more! "Look, Grandpa, look!" she calls as she bursts into the bedroom door. "The birthday present!"

Hy kyk en knik sy kop. “God is goed,” sug hy. “Ai, ai!” en dut weer in.

He looks and nods his head. "God is good," he sighs. "Oh, oh!" and nap again.

Ook haar pa en ma kom kyk. Dit lyk asof hulle iets wil sê, maar hulle sê dit nie, kyk vir mekaar en gou weer weg. Haar ma gaan haal ‘n groot glaspot. Sy steek die takkies versigtig in. Toe sy dit op die tafeltjie langs Oupa se bed neersit, lyk dit asof sy huil. Elfie se pa sit sy arm om haar.

Her father and mother also come to see. They seem to want to say something, but they don't say it, look at each other and look away again. Her mother fetches a large glass jar. She carefully inserts the twigs. When she puts it on the table next to Grandpa's bed, she seems to be crying. Elfie's father puts his arm around her.

“Toe maar, vrou.”

“Don’t worry, my wife.”

Daardie aand slaap Elfie nie dadelik nie. Sy sit in die donker op haar bed, en kyk uit na die paradysbossie wat spierwit in die maanlig staan. Sy weet dis die heel mooitste ding wat sy nog gesien het. Die mooi daarvan laat haar hart opswel, opswel, tot dit voel nou, nóú gaan dit bars, in tien miljoen klein stukkies, elke met spierwit vlerkies, wat dit op, op, óp vat in die lug!

That night Elfie does not sleep right away. She sits on her bed in the dark, looking out at the paradise bush that is white in the moonlight. She knows it was the most beautiful thing she had ever seen. The beauty of it makes her heart swell, swell, until it feels it's about to burst, into ten million tiny pieces, each with its own white wings, taking it up, up, up in the air!

Dis nog nie lente nie. Tóg voel sy reeds: dis anders.

It's not spring yet. Yet she already feels: it's different.

Sy sak af teen die kussing en maak haar oë toe. Die paradysbossie dans nog voor haar oë. Môre is hy seker vaal. Dis niks. Vandag het hy geblom. En wanneer sy piepklein appeltjies kom, gaan sy daarvan pluk. Vir Bileam se donkie.

She slumps down against the pillow and close her eyes. The paradise bush is still dancing in front of her eyes. Tomorrow it will be dull. It's nothing. Today it bloomed. And when it’s tiny little apples come; she's going to pick them. For Balaam's donkey.

**Inleiding tot die mistieke kortverhaal**

**Introduction to the mystic short story**

In hierdie verhaal gebruik die skywer winter- en lentebeelde as ‘n soort spieël van die hoofkarakter se onstuimige gemoed (emosies). In die beskrywings van die omgewing of ruimte kan die leser “sien”, “ruik” en selfs “hoor” hoe Elfie voel. Ons noem dit karakteropenbarende of emosionele ruimte. Elfie se emosies ontwikkel vanaf ‘n donker wintergevoel van skuld, wrokkigheid en ‘n negatiewe liggaamsbeeld tot ‘n ekstatiese lentegevoel toe die paradysbossie buite seisoen blom. Sy beleef as gevolg daarvan ‘n oomblik van ekstatiese insig en verandering. Dit word in literêre terme karakteronwikkeling genoem, want sy is aan die einde van die verhaal positief – anders as aan die begin.

In this story, the author uses winter and spring imagery as a kind of mirror of the main character's turbulent mood (emotions). In descriptions of the environment or space, the reader can “see”, “smell” and even “hear” how Elfie feels. We call it character revealing or emotional space. Elfie's emotions develop from a dark winter feeling of guilt, resentment and a negative body image to an ecstatic spring feeling as the paradise bush blooms out of season. As a result, she experiences a moment of ecstatic insight and change. In literary terms, it is called character development, because she is positive at the end of the story - unlike at the beginning.

Die twee kontrasterende beelde van die paradysbossie ondersteun hierdie ontwikkeling. Wanneer Elfie wrokkig buite gaan staan oor Nurse se hantering van Oupa, gooi die stoeplig ‘n “bleek spookskynsel” oor die donkerte waarin die paradysbossie staan: “met sy winterkaal takke lyk hy grieselig, soos ‘n geraamte sonder kop.” Let op die atmosfeer van verlatenheid en dood. Daarteenoor sien Elfie ‘n paar weke later met skemeraand ná Oupa se vervroegde partytjie weer by die agterdeur skielik die bossie: “wit oortrek. Blommetjies ingeryg aan elke takkie, getooi met snoer op snoer.” As sy aan die spits blaartjies raak, styg ‘n heidegeur daaruit op. Die kontras is duidelik: hier is dit nou ‘n sintuiglike oordaad van kleur, vorm en geur. Let ook op die woordkeuse vir die blommetjies, naamlik “snoer”, soos ‘n string spierwit krale om ‘n vrou se nek, of die snoer gebedskrale wat in godsdienstige seremonies gebruik word – haar oupa noem dit sy “verjaarsdagpresent van Bo”. Dis ook ‘n kontras met die winterasters wat sy “gebuit” het en wat sy gevoel het haar beskuldigend aangekyk het.

The two contrasting images of the paradise bush support this development. When Elfie stands outside in resentment of Nurse's handling of Grandpa, the porch throws a "pale ghost" on the darkness in which the paradise bush stands: "with its winter bare branches it looks greyish, like a skeleton without a head." Notice the atmosphere of desolation and death. On the other hand, a few weeks later, at dusk after Grandpa's early party, at the back door, the bush suddenly seems: “covered in white. Flowers lined up on each twig, sewn with string on string." When she touches the pointed leaves, a heather scent rises from it. The contrast is clear: here it is now a sensory overtone of colour, shape and flavour. Also note the choice of words for the flowers, namely "string", such as a string of white beads around a woman's neck, or the string of prayer beads used in religious ceremonies - her grandfather called it his "birthday present from Above". It is also a contrast to the winter flowers that she "exploited" and that she felt were looking at her accusingly.

**Literêre aspekte**

**Literary aspects**

Mistiek is ‘n begrip in die godsdiens en die literatuur. Dit kan omskryf word as die herkenning of ontmoeting en vereniging met die goddelike. Aan die einde van hierdie verhaal blom die paradysbossie heeltemal te vroeg en dít op Oupa (die godsman) se verjaardag. Hierdie bonatuurlike blomme aan die paradysbossie is ‘n teken van die vereniging tussen die godsman en die God in wie se diens hy sy lewe lank gestaan het. Die gevoel van aanraking met sy godhart het vir die verswakte Oupa soveel tevredenheid en berusting gebring dat hy só kon ontspan dat hy dadelik aan die slaap geraak het.

Mysticism is an understanding of religion and literature. It can be described as the recognition or meeting and association with the divine. At the end of this story, the paradise bush blossoms far too early and this on Oupa’s (the godman's) birthday. These supernatural flowers on the paradise bush are a sign of the union between the God-man and God in whose service he has stood throughout his life. The feeling of touch with his god-heart brought so much satisfaction and reassurance to the weakened Grandfather that he was able to relax in such a way that he fell asleep immediately.

Mistiek word in *Die paradysbossie* binne die Christendom geplaas, maar mistiek strek oor alle godsdiengrense heen en die siening van die godheid kan baie verskillende vorme aanneem.

Mysticism is placed in The Paradise bush within Christianity, but mysticism extends across all religious boundaries and the view of the deity can take many different forms.

Tyd word in literêre werke aan die gewone werklikheid gekoppel. In die mistiek word tyd soms opgehef – in *Die paradysbossie* blom die struik heeltemal te vroeg. Mistiek werk dikwels met tydloosheid, oombliklikheid, ewigheid en kortstondigheid: “vandag het hy geblom.”

Time is associated with ordinary reality in literary works. In mysticism, time is sometimes lifted - in The Paradise bush the shrub blooms far too early. Mysticism often works with timelessness, immediacy, eternity and is short-lived: "today it blossomed."

In die mistiek word daar nie aangedui wat reg en verkeerd is nie, of goed en sleg is nie. Aan die begin van die verhaal het Elfie die duidelike besef: daar is ‘n smalle én ‘n breë weg: jy kan net op een van die twee wees – en sy is op die breë weg. Hierdie verhaal eindig met Elfie se onbepaalde “dis anders” en “dis niks” – slegs aanvaarding en geen uitspraak oor reg of verkeerd nie. Onbepaaldheid is ook ‘n kenmerk van die mistiek. Daarby laat die ervaring met die paradysbossie haar aanvaar dat daar in die verhaal van Bileam ook ‘n soort waarheid steek.

Mysticism does not indicate what is right and wrong, or what is good and bad. At the beginning of the story, Elfie realized the obvious: there is a narrow and a broad path: you can only be on one of the two - and she is on the broad path. This story ends with Elfie's indefinite "it's different" and "it's nothing" - only acceptance and no statement of right or wrong. Indeterminacy is also a feature of mysticism. In addition, the experience with the paradise bush makes her accept that some kind of truth is hidden in the story of Balaam.