

PROLOGUE

Jack

I DREAM OF ZANELE AT THE WHEEL, HER KNUCKLES AND FACE outlined by streetlights. We speed past vacant lots. She's driving too fast. Rain comes thick and heavy on the windows. It's the kind of storm that happens only on the highveld, the thunder loud and rapid. She doesn't speak. I need her to. Maybe she's counting the people who've died since we first met.

I calculate how fast the storm is coming up behind us—as if that helps. Zanele is taking us somewhere only she knows.

The things I am good at, lying and mathematics, are useless now. In the moments before the end, I can do nothing.

We crash onto the highway railing, the front chassis crumpling into the windscreen.

Another scandal, a black girl and a white boy found in a car with no explanation besides the obvious one.

THAT'S WHAT I DO NOW—SLEEP AND WAKE UP AND GO OVER things that have already happened or might have happened. I eat breakfast, a boiled egg and four slices of white bread, while I wait for a phone call that I know won't come. In Soweto, smoke rises from the shacks. Meena says that ever since the protest the police fire at plastic bags, animals, little boys—anything that moves. I read the newspaper over and over, thinking they'll mention Zanele. But they don't. The same footage on the protests repeats on the television. I call Meena at the shop and she tells me no news is good news.

I ask for less and less as the days pass. First, I wanted Zanele to apologize for all the things she didn't tell me, to apologize for disappearing without warning. Then all I wanted was for her to come back. Then it didn't matter if I didn't see her again. As long as she was alive.