

# The Scissors

Effects of Foreseen and Unforeseen Consequences

*To Bouwer*

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# Artist Note

I was taught a simple principle early in my life.

When you are looking for something – opportunity, leverage, change – you do not search miles away. You draw a dot where you stand. Then you look at the dots closest to you. The people. The systems. The structures already touching your skin.

Only once those are exhausted does the field expand outward.

I followed this principle instinctively. Later, I understood something else.

The dot is not static. It is an impact.

Every action taken at the dot sets something in motion. A decision made in one place alters conditions elsewhere. A conversation. A delay. A threat ignored because it had been ignored before.

These effects do not move evenly. They do not respect distance, intention, or moral framing. They propagate through systems already under strain.

Most of the time, the person acting at the dot never sees the consequence. It is absorbed by others. By people who were not present. By structures that were already fragile.

We tend to believe catastrophe requires malice. That harm requires intent.

It does not.

A dot does not know which ripple will be fatal. It only knows that ripples follow.

This book is not a warning.

It is a record.

# Part I

The Dot

# Chapter 1

## Steam

*Perspective: Jacques*

*Friday, August 5 · 12:04*

The first thing I noticed was the steam.

It was early winter. The air inside the boardroom still held the sharp cold of the morning. The tiles were white. Not hospital white. Office white. The kind that pretends nothing permanent will ever happen on it.

Anton lay on his back.

Because the floor was so cold and the blood leaving his body was so hot, a faint mist was rising from the pool widening around his head. It looked like breath, but he wasn't breathing. It was just heat transfer.

I stood in the doorway. My hand was on the brass handle. I was holding a file. Matter of S.J. Cloete.

The blood wasn't moving like water. It was thicker. It moved with purpose, finding the lowest point in the uneven tiling. It flowed away from the heavy oak table, past the leg of the leather chair that had been kicked over, and traced the grout line toward the far wall.

There was a drain there. A small brass floor trap installed when this room was a patio. The liquid found the slope. I had never noticed the slope before. You don't, unless something liquid forces you to.

The smell arrived then.

It didn't smell like violence. It smelled like iron and wet rust, cutting through the lemon disinfectant we used on Fridays.

I looked at his face.

There was a hole just below his nose. A dark, neat point of entry. It broke the symmetry of his face. He didn't look scared. He looked surprised. His eyes were open, fixed on the ceiling, staring at a damp spot on the cornice.

The steam continued to rise, twisting slowly in the shaft of sunlight coming through the sliding door.

I didn't scream. I didn't drop the file.

I watched the red line reach the brass drain. It hesitated for a second at the lip, surface tension holding it back, and then it spilled over.

Gone.

I looked at my watch.

12:04.

# Chapter 2

## The Density

*Perspective: Anton Bouwer*

*48 hours prior*

I have always been aware that I see the world in two passes.

The first is practical. It measures. It weighs. It looks for imbalance. It keeps track of margins and pressure points and the way small errors compound over time. It is the part of me that understands why companies fail and why some can still be pulled back from the edge. It does most of the work.

The second pass comes immediately after. It fills in what the first one leaves out. Faces. Intent. The human friction inside clean structures. It rarely contradicts the first, but it softens it enough to keep things moving.

I have never tried to separate the two. They work better together.

At 09:15 I was sitting at the oak table in the boardroom. The same table I bought at an auction outside Pretoria years ago, back when the firm still felt provisional. The surface had a shallow scratch near one corner that I'd never bothered to fix. It reminded me that permanence is usually an accumulation of tolerated flaws.

Esther sat opposite me.

She was early. She always was. Her file lay unopened in front of her, hands folded neatly on top of it. She had dressed carefully, but not ostentatiously. That balance takes time to learn.

“Anton,” she said. “You wanted to see me?”

I let the practical pass run first.

I saw the hours she had billed over the past six months. The clarity of her submissions in the Venter matter. The way she handled clients when things turned ugly. She did not waste motion. She did not inflate language. She understood leverage.

Then the second pass followed.

I saw the nights she stayed late without being asked. The way she spoke about her son without sentimentality. The loyalty she had shown when the firm had tightened belts and tempers during Covid. The quiet way she absorbed pressure without advertising it.

“I didn’t want to see you,” I said, keeping my voice even.

Her posture changed almost imperceptibly. A tightening. Professionals notice those things in each other.

“Is it the Cloete file?” she asked. “I can –”

“I don’t want to see Esther the associate anymore,” I said.

I slid the document across the table. The paper made a dry sound against the wood.

“I want to see Esther Mulusi, director.”

She didn’t touch it at first. She looked at the page as if it might move on its own. Then she looked back at me. The room felt different in that moment. Not heavier. Fuller.

“Anton,” she said quietly.

“Fifty-one percent,” I added, leaning back. “It isn’t charity. It’s arithmetic. You’re already running half of this place. This just makes the structure honest.”

It wasn’t the whole truth. But it was a clean one.

She picked up the document. Her hands were steady except for a slight tremor in her fingers. The kind that disappears once the body catches up with the decision.

“I don’t know what to say,” she said.

“Then don’t say anything,” I replied. “Just sign it. After that, I’m taking my wife to lunch. You’re welcome to join if you want. I feel like celebrating.”

She laughed once, softly, as if testing whether the sound was allowed.

The sun was coming through the sliding door at an angle that made the white tiles look brighter than usual. The room felt settled. Finished. I noticed a damp mark on the cornice above

the far wall and made a mental note to call the contractor the following week. It wasn't urgent. These things rarely are.

"Thank you," she said. "Sir."

"Don't call me that," I smiled. "We're partners now. We're all just grains of sand, Esther. I'm just a slightly older one."

She smiled back. Unguarded. It suited her.

I checked my watch. 09:30.

The day was moving cleanly.

Everything felt aligned.

# Chapter 3

## The Warning

*Perspective: Andre Bouwer*

*Thursday evening · Home*

Dinner was ordinary.

That was the problem.

The chicken was slightly dry. My mother had overcooked it because she'd been distracted. My father noticed but didn't say anything. He carved it the way he always did, starting with the breast, knife steady, movements economical. No tearing. Clean separation.

My younger brother was talking too much. He was explaining a goal he'd scored that afternoon, replaying it again and again with his hands as if repetition might improve the outcome retroactively. My father nodded at the right places, correcting a detail here and there without looking up.

I watched the table.

The plates were evenly spaced. The cutlery lined up. My father liked that. He said disorder wastes energy. I believed him because most of the time he was right.

The phone vibrated.

It was face down next to his plate. That alone was unusual. Normally it stayed in his jacket pocket or on the sideboard. It vibrated again. Short bursts. Messages, not calls.

My father didn't react.

"You're not listening," my brother said.

"I am," my father replied. "You cut inside too early."

My brother stopped mid-sentence. "How do you know that?"

"You always do," my father said. "It works because the defender expects you to go wide."

My brother accepted this and went back to eating.

The phone vibrated again.

This time my father glanced at it. Just long enough for the screen to light up against the tablecloth. I saw his jaw tighten. It was subtle. It passed quickly.

"Everything okay?" my mother asked.

"Yes," he said. Too quickly. Then, recalibrating, "Just work."

He finished carving and placed the knife parallel to the fork. He wiped his hands carefully with the napkin and picked up the phone.

I couldn't read the message, but I saw the pause before he unlocked it. A hesitation measured in fractions of a second. Not fear. Assessment.

He read it once. Then again.

“I got another one,” he said.

“Another what?” my mother asked.

“A threat,” he said. His voice was even. Almost bored. “Nothing new.”

The room changed. Not dramatically. Just enough for me to notice.

“What kind of threat?” I asked.

He looked at me properly then. As if remembering I was old enough to be part of the conversation.

“The kind that comes when people are angry,” he said. “Money compresses people. They say things.”

“Do they say they’re going to hurt you?” I asked.

My mother stopped moving.

“They say all sorts of things,” he replied. “That doesn’t mean anything.”

“That’s not an answer,” I said.

He smiled. The reassuring one. The one he used when he wanted a subject closed.

“Listen,” he said. “If I treated every message like it mattered, I wouldn’t be able to do my job. Business rescue is emotional. People lash out. Then they calm down.”

“Shouldn’t you tell the police?” I asked.

“For what?” he said. “A message on a phone? They’d file it. Nothing would happen. And then the next time I actually need them, I’m just noise.”

My mother shook her head slightly. “Anton –”

“It’s handled,” he said gently. “I promise.”

He placed the phone back on the table, face down, and picked up his fork.

“Eat,” he said. “It’s getting cold.”

I watched him chew. Calm. Present. The same man who taught me to drive by explaining friction before speed. The same man who said panic costs more than patience.

I wanted to believe him.

I did believe him.

That night, in my room, I lay awake longer than usual. I replayed the moment when the phone vibrated. The pause before he unlocked it. The way he said nothing new.

Adults say that when they believe repetition has made something safe.

Or when they believe naming a risk gives it power.

The house settled after midnight. Pipes ticking. A door closing softly somewhere down the passage.

I told myself it was fine.

It had always been fine before.

# Chapter 4

## The Song

*Perspective: Esther Mulusi*

*Friday, August 5 · 09:50*

I heard him before I saw him.

It wasn't a whistle. It was a hum. Low and steady, carried easily down the corridor from the corner office, as if the building itself had decided to pass it along.

I was standing at the filing cabinet outside my office – the glass still didn't have my name on it yet, but the space was already mine – pulling the FICA documents for the Venter merger.

Anton turned the corner.

He was wearing the charcoal suit. The one he kept for High Court appearances or days when the numbers finally agree with the law. He usually walked with a slight forward lean, as if friction were something to be managed. Today there was no friction. He moved easily, almost gliding.

He stopped when he saw me.

He didn't check his watch.

He didn't ask about the file.

He just smiled.

It wasn't his client smile.

It wasn't his courtroom smile.

It was the smile of a man who had closed the equation.

"You look dangerous, Anton," I said, sliding the drawer shut.

"I feel dangerous," he said. "Light."

He adjusted his cufflinks, more from habit than necessity.

"The Cloete matter?" I asked.

"Finished," he said. "Liens lifted. Structure restored. We're back to physics."

"And the humming?" I asked.

He laughed. "Is it that obvious?"

"It's echoing."

"Good," he said. "There's a song in my heart today, Mrs. Mulusi. A literal one."

"Why today?" I asked.

He stepped closer, lowering his voice, though the corridor was empty.

"Because in two hours," he said, "I'm taking my beautiful wife to lunch. I'm ordering the wine I'm not supposed to order at midday. And I'm turning my phone off."

I smiled. "You don't turn your phone off."

“Today I do,” he said. “The dots are behaving. Can’t you feel it?”

I could.

The energy around him was contagious. The fluorescent lights felt warmer. The stack of work waiting on my desk felt finite. Manageable.

“Go,” I said. “Before something interrupts you.”

“I’m going,” he said.

He turned toward reception, toward the glass doors, toward the car park. After a few steps, he stopped and looked back.

“The damp spot,” he said, gesturing vaguely toward the boardroom. “Remind me to call the contractors on Monday. I don’t want it spreading.”

“Monday,” I said.

“Have a good weekend, Esther.”

“You too, Anton.”

He walked on. The hum returned, softer now, fading as the glass doors slid open and closed behind him.

I went back to my desk.

I remember feeling happy. Not excited. Not relieved. Just certain that things were in order.

I opened the Venter file and began reading from the top, already thinking about how we'd weathered worse than this and come out intact.

The clock in the corner of my screen changed.

09:55.

# Chapter 5

## The Echo

*Perspective: Monica Bouwer*

*Friday · 13:45*

The table was set for two.

Not ceremonially. Correctly. Two water glasses. Two folded napkins. Cutlery aligned on pale linen.

I arrived early. Anton treated lunch the way he treated court dates: as a fixed point that held the week in place. He had said one o'clock. He had said it with the same certainty he used when he told clients the numbers would eventually agree with the law.

I sat with my phone face down beside the glass.

That was our rule on days like this. No screens on the table. No work bleeding into the hour.

A waiter approached. Clean shirt. Hands that moved like he had done this long enough to stop thinking about it.

"Just you for now?"

"For now," I said.

He set the menu down and left.

The room was warm in the way wine farm restaurants are warm in winter. Heat held in timber, glass, stone. Outside, the vines sat in rows like dormant machinery. The mountain line was clear. The sky was steady.

At 13:07, my phone vibrated in my bag. Once. Then again.

I left it there.

At 13:18, the woman at the next table checked her phone, then checked it again. She made no sound. She just stared longer than normal, as if the screen had become a doorway she did not want to step through.

At 13:22, the restaurant manager crossed the floor and spoke to the waiter in a voice designed not to travel. The waiter nodded and wiped a table that was already clean.

At 13:25, my phone vibrated again. Longer this time. A call.

I took it out.

No missed calls from Anton. If he was delayed, he called. Not out of romance. Out of habit.

There were messages instead. From numbers I did not recognise. A link. A headline preview. A name.

I did not open the link.

13:26.

I dialled his number.

One ring. Two. Voicemail.

His greeting played. Neutral. Short. His name stated as if it were an ID tag, not a person.

I ended the call before the beep.

I stood. Not urgently. Deliberately. The body behaved as if I were simply going to the bathroom.

The manager stepped into my path.

“Ma’am,” he said.

He did not touch me. He did not smile.

“Are you Mrs Bouwer?”

“Yes.”

“There’s been an incident,” he said. “I need you to sit down.”

I looked past him, through the glass. The vines sat in rows. The mountain line remained. The world did not register that a person had been removed from it.

A waiter cleared a plate at a nearby table. Ceramic on ceramic. Ordinary sound.

I sat.

The linen napkin remained folded. The second water glass stayed empty.

The table was still set for two.

It would remain set that way until someone decided to restore symmetry.

# Chapter 6

## Structure is Care

*Perspective: Elsie*

*The Bouwer kitchen*

Sir AB never sat down when he taught.

He leaned against the counter in the kitchen, one hip resting on the edge, as if the lesson were something temporary. His jacket came off first. Then his watch. He placed both on the sideboard in the same order every time. The watch faces up. The jacket folded once, not twice.

“Show me what you don’t understand,” he would say.

Not what you got wrong. What you didn’t understand. There was a difference, and he insisted on it early.

I was fourteen the first time he explained algebra to me without using numbers. My brother was at the table doing homework that involved fractions. Sir AB stood behind him and watched for a minute without speaking. Then he picked up a fork and placed it next to the salt cellar.

“Balance,” he said. “Not fairness. Balance.”

My brother frowned. I watched.

“If I move the fork,” he continued, sliding it a few centimetres, “the table doesn’t collapse. But something else shifts.

Pressure goes somewhere. That's what the equals sign means."

My brother nodded as if he understood. He didn't. I did.

Sir AB saw it immediately.

"Elsie," he said, turning to me. "Come here."

I stood. He handed me the fork.

"Move it," he said.

I slid it back to where it had been.

"There," I said.

He smiled once. Not approval. Recognition.

"That's enough for today," he said, and reached for his watch.

My mother watched from the sink. She never interrupted. She called him Sir AB even when he told her not to. Not out of distance. Out of accuracy. He was not family. He was structure.

He paid our school fees without ceremony. No speeches. No photographs. He asked for report cards once a term, glanced at them, and handed them back. When I brought home distinctions, he nodded and said, "Good. That reduces future load."

He never spoke about stress. But he carried it.

On the morning he was killed, he came to the house earlier than usual.

My mother had not finished wiping the counter. The kettle was still boiling. The radio played quietly in the background. Sir AB stood at the table and watched me pack my bag.

“Matric,” he said. “Final year.”

“Yes, Sir AB.”

“Drop the ‘Sir,’” he said. “You’re not an intern.”

“You leaving today?” my mother asked.

“Yes,” he said. “Board meeting. Then lunch.”

“With your wife?” she asked.

He nodded.

“She likes the place with the oak trees,” he said. “The one that doesn’t rush you.”

He looked at my bag.

“You’re taking physics?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“Good,” he said. “It will teach you humility. Maths teaches control. Physics teaches you where control ends.”

He reached into his jacket and took out an envelope. Plain. White. He placed it on the table without pushing it toward me.

“Open it later,” he said. “Not here.”

He put his watch back on. Jacket on top. One smooth motion.

As he reached the door, he stopped.

“Elsie,” he said.

“Yes?”

“Don’t confuse kindness with leakage,” he said. “People will ask you to carry weight that isn’t yours. Learn the difference early.”

Then he was gone.

The envelope sat on the table until I left for school. I didn’t open it on the bus. I didn’t open it at break. I waited until I was home.

It was a letter of recommendation. Not emotional. Not flattering. Precise. He described my aptitude in terms of load tolerance, pattern recognition, and error correction. He had attached my transcripts. He had signed it without flourish.

At the bottom, in smaller writing, he had added one line by hand.

Structure is care.

When my mother came home later that afternoon, she did not speak at first. She put her bag down. She sat at the table where the envelope had been.

“Elsie,” she said.

“Yes, Ma.”

“They shot him.”

I waited for the sentence to finish. It didn’t.

That night, the kitchen felt larger. The radio kept playing. The kettle boiled dry because no one turned it off.

Sir AB’s watch was not on the sideboard. His jacket was not folded. The fork remained where it had last been placed.

The table still held.

But the load had changed.

I stood and moved the fork back to where it had been that first day.

The balance did not return.34

# Chapter 7

## Spinoza’s House

*Perspective: Reitz Bouwer*

I did not raise my children with religion.

This was not a rebellion. It was a conclusion. I had spent my life inside systems that collapse when they rely on exceptions. Law. Physics. Institutions. Anything that requires a miracle to function is already broken.

If you want something to hold, you remove the miracle.

I taught at the university for four decades. Constitutional law. Jurisprudence. The architecture of constraint. I told students that rights are not wishes. They are load-bearing compromises negotiated under scarcity. I told them that freedom survives only when it is bounded, and that any system promising purity will eventually demand blood.

When they asked what I believed, I quoted Einstein.

Spinoza’s God.

Not the god of reward or punishment. The god of necessity. The god that reveals itself in the orderly arrangement of things. I did not adopt this because it was fashionable or profound. I adopted it because it matched observation.

Reality behaves lawfully.

It does not care who is watching.

Anton understood this intuitively. He did not arrive at it through theory. He arrived at it through work.

As a boy, he dismantled clocks to see where the time went. As a man, he dismantled companies to see where the pressure accumulated. He was not cruel. He was precise. People confused the two because precision is uncomfortable when it removes excuses.

On the morning of the fifth, I was in my study.

The house was quiet. Not silent. Quiet. Wood settling. A bird on the gutter. The radiator clicking as it adjusted to the ambient temperature. Systems reporting their state.

I was reviewing a paper on proportionality. The argument was familiar. Intent weighed against harm. Mitigating circumstances. The hope that language could absorb force without deforming.

It could not.

I had known that for years. I taught it anyway. Institutions require rituals to mask their limits.

The phone call came at 10:53. A captain whose name did not anchor. Rank without substance.

He used the word incident. I asked him to define it. He said Anton had been shot. I asked if he was alive. He said no.

I acknowledged the information. I told him I would arrive when I was able to be useful. He found this irregular. I ended the call.

Grief did not arrive. Shock did not arrive. Those are secondary responses. They require time to accumulate.

What arrived first was contradiction.

The system had failed. Not morally. Mechanically.

Anton had operated within the law. He had trusted the wall. He had treated threats as dissipative noise. That assumption had been incorrect.

I stood and walked to the window.

Outside, nothing had changed. Cars moved. People crossed the street. The world continued because the world always continues.

Law had proven insufficient as a wall. It filtered outrage. It categorised harm. It slowed collapse. But it did not prevent predation when incentives aligned against it.

A stronger structure would be required.

Not mercy.

Not outrage.

Not belief.

Constraint.

I returned to the desk and closed the book in front of me.

Proportionality would not survive this test.

I opened a new notebook.

On the first page, I wrote a single word.

*Definitions*

If something was going to hold after this, it would have to be built without appeal.

I picked up my pen.

The ink flowed evenly.

The system, elsewhere, was still processing.

Here, a different system began to assemble.

# Chapter 8

## The Void

*Perspective: The Family*

The house did not change immediately.

That was the first distortion. Rooms retained their proportions. Furniture remained where it had been left. Light moved across the floor at the same angle it always had in the late afternoon.

Monica entered first.

She did not remove her coat. She did not put her bag down. She stood just inside the doorway and let the door close behind her without guiding it. The latch caught cleanly.

Andre and Herman followed. Andre paused to take his shoes off, then stopped himself. The rule no longer applied. Rules are only meaningful when the person who enforces them exists.

They moved through the house without speaking.

The kitchen bore no evidence of disruption. A mug sat in the sink where Anton had left it that morning. Tea residue at the bottom, already darkening at the edges. The kettle was cold.

Monica touched the counter, then withdrew her hand. The surface felt wrong. Not dirty. Empty.

Andre went to the living room and stood near the window. He looked outside without focusing.

Herman checked his phone. Messages continued to arrive. Offers of help. Statements of shock. Requests for comment.

He put the phone face down.

They did not sit.

At 18:15, Reitz arrived.

He did not embrace Monica. He stood in front of her and looked at her face as if confirming a measurement. Then he nodded.

“I’m here,” he said.

She acknowledged this with a slight movement of her head. Enough.

They sat then. Not together. Distributed across the room, maintaining lines of sight without contact.

At 19:07, the first reporter appeared at the gate. Camera raised. Light mounted. He waited, understanding that patience often yields access.

Herman went outside and spoke to him quietly. The exchange lasted less than a minute. The reporter left.

Inside, Andre walked down the passage to his father’s study.

The door was open. The chair was pushed in. The desk was clear except for a notebook and a pen placed parallel to its edge. Anton had not written in it. He had prepared to.

Andre sat in the chair and placed his hands flat on the desk. The wood was cool. The room smelled faintly of paper and polish.

He looked at the notebook.

Blank.

Intent without execution. Potential halted mid-sequence.

Down the passage, Monica opened the bedroom wardrobe. Clothes hung in order. Shirts arranged by colour. Jackets aligned. The absence registered not by what was missing, but by the surplus of space around it.

She closed the door again.

At the firm, the damp mark in the boardroom broke through the paint. Moisture spread along the cornice where the slope met the wall. Black mould formed slowly, feeding on the same structural weakness Anton had noticed and deferred.

By morning, the first staff member would arrive early and see it. They would make a note. It would not be urgent.

At 21:30, Andre asked a question.

“Did he know?”

Reitz spoke first.

“He knew there was risk,” he said. “He believed the structure could absorb it.”

“But the structure didn’t,” Andre said.

“No,” Reitz replied. “It didn’t.”

Later, when the house settled and the outside noise thinned, Monica stood alone in the kitchen.

She took a glass from the cupboard and filled it with water. She did not drink. She watched the surface until it stopped moving.

Up the passage, Andre lay awake. The phone vibrating. The pause. The word incident. The lunch that never happened.

In the city, files were sealed. Cameras archived. Traffic normalised.

In the house, nothing had been restored.

The void was not a feeling.

It was a configuration.

And it had just been installed.

# Part II

The Ripple

# Chapter 9

## The Vacuum

*Perspective: Vusi Kumalo*

*Rosebank Police Station · 14:30*

The phones were already ringing when I arrived.

Not loudly. Not urgently. Just continuously. Different tones bleeding into each other, overlapping without coordination. The front desk sergeant answered one call while another rang unanswered two meters away. Someone had turned the television volume up too high.

I stood near the door and watched.

Every channel carried the same image. A still frame pulled from a phone video. Police tape stretched across the entrance to an office park in Saxonwold. The caption bar moved steadily beneath it.

PROMINENT ATTORNEY SHOT DEAD

HIGH-PROFILE BUSINESS RESCUE MURDER

No name yet. Just function.

I walked to the counter. The sergeant was new. His posture was correct, but his eyes kept flicking between the handset and the entrance, as if expecting instruction to arrive through the door.

“Captain Kumalo,” I said.

He nodded too quickly. “Sir.”

Behind him, two detectives argued in low voices. Not about the case. About jurisdiction. One of them gestured at a printed form with unnecessary force.

“This one’s going to the top,” the detective said. “Provincial will want eyes on it before sunset.”

I placed my card on the counter. “What do we have?”

The sergeant hesitated, then shrugged. “Clean hit. Boardroom. Four shots. In and out.”

“Witnesses?”

“Office staff. No one saw faces. Masks.”

“Cameras?”

“Being pulled. The General is already upstairs.”

I looked back at the television. A reporter stood outside the cordon, jacket zipped high, speaking with practiced urgency.

“This has sent shockwaves through the business community,” she said.

Shockwaves.

It was the word people used when violence crossed a line visible from where they stood.

I stepped away from the counter and called Herman. He answered on the second ring.

“It’s done,” I said.

Silence on the line. Not shock. Compression.

“Where?” he asked.

“Saxonwold. Offices.”

“Who?”

“Anton.”

A pause. Longer this time.

“Dead?”

“Yes.”

“I’m coming,” he said.

“There’s media,” I added. “Police. It’s loud.”

“Good,” he said. “Let it be loud.”

The line went dead.

I put the phone back in my pocket and walked outside. The air was warmer there. Sun on concrete.

A convoy of three marked vehicles tore out of the garage, sirens wailing, blue lights cutting through the afternoon glare. They turned left, heading north, toward the money.

I watched them go.

Every siren heading north was a siren not heading south. Every detective pulling footage in Saxonwold was a detective not opening a docket in the Flats.

The system was awake now.

And it was already, efficiently, deciding which deaths mattered.

# Chapter 10

## The Severance

*Perspective: Albert Bouwer*

*Stellenbosch / Cape Town International*

Eighteen months before Anton was killed, I lay face down in the dirt behind a farmhouse outside Stellenbosch and felt my name leave my body.

The retreat had been advertised as a weekend of silence and integration. Executives. Founders. People who had optimized everything except the thing pressing against the inside of their chest.

I had signed up because a man I respected told me it had changed his marriage. I did not care about my marriage. I did not have one. I cared about the hollow space behind my sternum that no amount of revenue could fill.

The facilitator was calm in the way people are calm when they have stopped performing competence. She weighed the dose on a kitchen scale. Dried caps. Stems like cracked wood. She placed them in my hand without ceremony.

“How much is this?” I asked.

“Enough,” she said.

I ate them with water. The taste was dry earth and something chemical underneath, like the smell of a damp cupboard.

Forty five minutes later, the property line dissolved.

I was lying on grass behind the farmhouse. My face pressed into soil. Ants moving across my wrist. I could feel each leg as a distinct point of pressure, six per ant, and the information did not alarm me. It informed me.

The ants were not separate from the wrist. The wrist was not separate from the soil. The soil was not separate from the mountain behind it.

The boundary between Albert Bouwer and the field failed.

I did not see God.

I did not meet an ancestor.

I did not receive a message.

What happened was simpler and worse.

The architecture of separation – the one I had spent forty years reinforcing with money, with technology and companies, with the relentless insistence that I was a discrete unit moving through a world of other discrete units – that architecture crashed down.

I was not Albert.

I was not a founder.

I was not a brother or a son or a South African or a man.

I was a region of a field that had temporarily believed it was local.

I wept.

Not from sadness.

From recognition.

The way you weep when a bone that has been set wrong for years is finally broken again and reset. The pain is real. The alignment is better.

Then it faded.

The “I” returned.

The property line came back. The ants became ants. The soil became something under my face that was making my glasses dirty.

I sat up. The facilitator was sitting on a bench nearby, watching without watching. She handed me water.

“What did you see?” she asked.

“That there’s only one thing,” I said.

She nodded as if I had told her the weather.

I drove back to Stellenbosch that Sunday evening. The office was dark. The server room hummed. Forty-nine people would arrive Monday morning and sit at desks and believe they were building something that mattered.

I did not tell anyone what had happened. A tech CEO in the Western Cape talking about shared consciousness and psilocybin is a tech CEO looking for new investors. I kept it inside the way you keep a fracture inside a cast. Stable. Invisible. Load-bearing in a direction no one could see.

But the void behind the sternum was gone.

In its place was something harder to manage. A suspicion that every separation I had ever enforced – between myself and employees, between profit and consequence, between my life and the lives downstream of my decisions – was not a wall. It was a hallucination.

–

The call came on a Friday.

I was reviewing a deployment schedule when Herman's number appeared. Herman did not call during business hours. Herman called at night, from cars, about things that did not survive transcription.

I answered.

"Anton is dead," he said.

The words arrived before the meaning. They sat in the air for two full seconds, inert, like objects that had been placed on a table and not yet identified.

"They shot him," Herman added. "In the boardroom."

I stood. My chair rolled back and hit the glass wall behind me. The sound was sharp and small. A woman at the desk nearest the door looked up. I turned away from her.

“What! When?” I asked.

“This morning. Just now. Monica just phoned me.”

He is dead, now. Anton is dead, now, and I am arguing with a deployment schedule about latency.

I don’t remember ending the call.

The office continued to function around me. Keyboards. The hiss of the coffee machine. A laugh from the breakout area, truncated when someone saw my face.

My world began to spin. Pressure building up everywhere because the nausea makes you hold your breath. I didn’t know what to hold. I understood, but that made it worse.

I looked at the room.

Forty-nine people. Engineers who believed in iteration. Designers who believed in elegance. Support staff who believed that proximity to innovation provided a buffer against the country outside the security gate.

I just wanted to leave.

Anton had believed in walls. In law. In structure maintained through attention. He noticed damp spots on ceilings and called contractors on Monday. He believed that if you repaired the cracks early enough, the structure would hold.

The structure had not held.

Two men with guns had walked through the wall as if it were not there. Because it was not there. It had never been there. The wall was language. The gun was physics. Physics does not read.

I sat back down. The chair rolled forward. I placed my hands flat on the desk and felt the laminate under my palms. Cool. Smooth. Engineered to resist fingerprints.

The deployment schedule was still on the screen. Timelines. Dependencies. A system designed to produce output at scale.

Scale.

I thought about the forty-nine people in the room and the twelve AI agents I had been testing quietly for the past four months.

The agents did not take lunch. They did not require medical aid. They did not sit at the back of the room and ask questions about severance.

They processed, iterated, and delivered at a cost-per-unit that made the spreadsheet look like a different language.

I had known for months that twelve agents could replace most of what this room produced. I had not acted on it because acting on it required a reason that felt large enough.

The reason had arrived.

Not as logic. As collapse.

The last structure I trusted – my brother, his certainty, his walls – had been removed. What remained was a room full of people and a field that did not recognize boundaries.

–

Monday.

I stood at the front of the glass-walled meeting room. The parking lot below was full. Cars in rows. Orderly. A visual lie.

“I’m closing the company,” I said.

No preamble. No softening. The room deserved the truth before it deserved comfort.

A man near the door inhaled sharply. A woman two seats down looked at her hands as if they had changed shape. Someone laughed once, short, involuntary, then stopped.

“When?” someone asked.

“End of month. Today is notice.”

The questions came fast after that. Severance. Medical aid. References. The mechanics of ending.

I had spent the weekend building the package. I owed them that. Five times statutory for anyone who had been with me more than three years. Three times for two years. Everyone else, one and a half. It was more than the law required. It was more than most founders would offer. It was not enough. It is never enough when the floor disappears.

I walked them through it. Calmly. Completely. I answered every question. I did not rush.

“And medical aid?”

The question came from the back. A woman I recognised but could not name. She had a daughter. I had seen a photograph on her desk once. Small face. Braids. School uniform.

She was new. Three months. Her package would be small. The cash would cover a month, maybe six weeks. After that, the buffer was gone.

“It ends with employment,” I said. “That’s how the scheme works. I can’t extend it beyond the contract.”

She nodded once. Not agreement. Registration.

I wanted to say more. I wanted to tell her I understood what that gap meant. That I had run the numbers and knew the distance between a salary with medical aid and a salary without it. That the distance was not financial. It was structural. It was the difference between a system that catches you and one that lets you fall.

I said nothing.

Because saying it would not change it.

I left them with HR. I told HR to be generous with the references. To help anyone who needed it with their CV. To keep the phones on until the last day.

Then I walked back to my office and packed. Laptop. External drives. Passport. I did not take the plant. Plants require maintenance.

At 14:30, I called the insurer.

“Group cover terminates with contracts. Confirm.”

They confirmed.

That was the wall I could not move. The scheme was tied to employment. Employment was ending. The cover would end with it. I had paid what I could. The system would do what it does.

I sent one email. Operations Ceased Effective Immediately. I did not send a follow-up.

By midday the building had changed temperature. Not physically. Socially.

The hum that accompanies belief had dropped out. Conversations thinned. Footsteps slowed. The air felt like it does after a generator shuts down – a silence you only notice by its arrival.

I booked a flight that afternoon. One-way. Cape Town to Manila. Economy. I did not need comfort. I needed distance. I needed the sea. I needed to be somewhere where the walls were made of water and the only structure that mattered was the wind.

I never had to work again. The money was old and deep and quiet. It sat in accounts that did not require attention. No investors. No debt. No board. No one to call. I had built the company with my own capital and I was closing it with my own authority. That was the point. Sovereignty is not wealth. It is the absence of permission. But I would work. I would work with twelve agents, a laptop, two ultra-wide screens and seven windows open at a time, from a catamaran anchored off Palawan, because the work was clean and the work was mine and the work did not require me to be responsible for forty-nine lives I could not protect.

At the airport, I watched the departure board update. Delays. Gate changes. Systems correcting for load.

I thought about the woman at the back of the room. The one who had asked about medical aid. She would calculate tonight. About her daughter. About prescriptions. About the distance between where they lived and what they could no longer afford.

I did not know her name.

The field does not recognise boundaries. I knew that. I had felt it in the dirt behind the farmhouse, with ants walking across my wrist and the mountain behind me holding its shape without effort.

But knowing the field is one thing.

Operating inside it is another.

I boarded the plane. I ordered a beer and watched the condensation slide down the can. Gravity works everywhere. Jurisdictions change. Physics does not.

Anton believed in holding. In repairing cracks. In the wall.

I believed in exit.

Both of us were wrong.

When the seatbelt light went off, I closed my eyes.

Behind me, forty-nine people began recalculating their lives without buffers they had assumed were permanent.

Somewhere else, a hospital queue lengthened by one.

I slept.

The system had adjusted.

And it had done so without asking permission.

# Chapter 11

## The Queue

*Perspective: Felicity*

*Tygerberg Hospital · Evening*

My daughter stepped into the hole on the way home from school.

The cover had been missing for weeks. Everyone on the street knew. We walked around it the way you walk around anything that has been broken long enough to become landscape. The children knew. The dogs knew. The rain knew where to go.

She was carrying her bag with both hands because the zip had broken and she did not want her books to fall out. She was looking at the bag. Not at the pavement.

The drop was not deep. Half a metre. But her leg folded under her at the angle legs are not designed to fold, and the sound it made was not a sound a child should produce.

I heard it from the kitchen.

By the time I reached her she was sitting in the hole with her leg turned wrong and her face doing something I had never seen it do. Not crying. Not screaming. Holding. As if the pain had filled her so completely there was no room left for noise.

I lifted her out. She was heavier than I expected, or I was weaker. Both. I carried her inside and laid her on the bed and wrapped the leg in a towel the way my mother taught me. Tight. Stable. Hold the shape.

I called the ambulance.

The woman on the line took my address, asked me to describe the injury, and told me a unit would be dispatched.

That was at three in the afternoon.

By five, nothing had arrived.

I called again. The line rang eleven times. A different woman answered. She said the call was active. She said I should wait.

I did not have medical aid anymore. That had ended when the job ended. Three weeks ago the company had closed and the cover had stopped and I had signed the papers and taken the money and it was already gone. Rent. Food. School fees. The money moved through my hands like water through a towel. It passed through and left the shape behind but nothing else.

At six I wrapped my daughter in a blanket and carried her to the road and put her in a taxi.

The driver looked at her leg and did not ask questions. He drove fast. The fare was forty rand. I paid it with coins.

The queue did not announce itself.

It did not begin at a doorway or end at a desk. It existed as density. Bodies arranged to minimise friction, each person occupying the smallest possible footprint without vanishing.

Chairs were already full. People stood in clusters that shifted when someone coughed or leaned. Children slept in postures learned early – heads tilted against plastic, limbs folded inward to conserve space.

I carried my daughter through the doors.

Her weight had changed. Not heavier. Looser. The tension that had kept her rigid in the taxi had begun to leak out of her, replaced by something softer and harder to manage.

A security guard pointed without looking. Left. Then right. Then sit.

We sat.

The chair was moulded plastic. Warm from the body that had just left it. I positioned her across my lap the way the taxi driver had shown me, careful not to let her leg move. The towel was still wrapped tight. It had dried in places and darkened in others.

I filled in the form.

Name.

Age.

ID number.

Next of kin.

I wrote my own name twice.

The nurse glanced at the page, then at my daughter’s leg. She did not touch it. Touch costs time.

“She’ll be seen,” she said.

“When?” I asked.

“As soon as we can.”

I had already learned that this sentence did not contain information.

Time in the queue moved differently. It thickened. Minutes stretched, then collapsed into each other. The clock above reception advanced one minute at a time, but the room did not respond.

Her breathing came in short pulls that did not reach the bottom of her chest.

Names were called. Others were not. A man with a bandage on his head stood up twice, then sat again when no one looked at him.

My daughter stopped asking questions.

Her eyes remained open, but unfocused. I spoke to her anyway. About school. About the dog she wanted. About the birthday party she said she didn’t care about but talked about every day.

She nodded once or twice. The nods became smaller.

The smell changed.

Not iron. Not blood. Something sour and faint, carried on recycled air. The room's systems compensating.

A woman across from us pressed a cloth to her mouth. A child coughed until an adult told him to stop, as if coughing were a choice.

I checked the time.

The ambulance call still showed as active on my phone. No update. No cancellation. Just waiting.

A porter walked past with a trolley. The wheels squeaked on the tile. He adjusted the load with his foot without breaking stride.

My daughter's breathing had shortened further. Each inhale seemed to stop early, as if the rest of the air were unavailable.

I stood.

I went to the desk and spoke quietly.

"She's getting worse," I said.

The nurse looked at the screen, then at my daughter, then back at the screen.

"Everyone here is getting worse," she said. Not unkindly. Precisely.

I returned to the chair.

More time passed. I do not know how much. The television in the corner played with the sound off. Images of traffic. Weather. A presenter's mouth moving without consequence.

At some point my daughter stopped responding to my voice. Her eyes remained open, but the nods were gone. Her skin felt cooler through the towel.

Her hands had begun to shake. Not from pain. From effort. The body trying to hold what was leaving.

I raised my hand.

Nothing happened.

I raised it again.

A different nurse approached. Younger. Tired in a different way.

“She needs to go through,” I said.

The nurse bent slightly and looked at my daughter’s face. She placed two fingers on her neck, then checked her watch.

“Come,” she said.

They took her through a door marked AUTHORISED PERSONNEL ONLY. I followed until a hand stopped me at the threshold.

“You can’t go further,” the nurse said.

The door closed.

The queue adjusted.

I sat back down.

I waited.

I knew before the door opened. The body knows. Not through thought. Through the absence of the thing it had been holding itself together for. Something in my chest released, not upward, not outward, just gone. The way a rope goes slack when what it was holding has already fallen. Later, a doctor came out.

He did not sit. He did not consult a file for long. He spoke carefully, as if pacing might change the result.

“She went into shock,” he said. “Her heart couldn’t take the strain.”

I nodded.

“The injury was severe,” he added. “Sometimes the body can’t compensate.”

I nodded again.

He waited for a question. I did not have one.

I signed another form. The pen slipped slightly on the paper. My hand corrected and finished the line.

Outside, a siren passed without slowing.

I stood on the steps with the folded papers in my pocket. The air felt different there. Cooler. Thinner.

No camera pointed this way.

No alert was issued.

No case number was generated that would be reopened later.

The queue inside closed the gap where we had been sitting. Another body took the chair. The system redistributed load.

I walked home alone.

The manhole cover would be replaced eventually. Another one would go missing somewhere else. The sequence would repeat with different names.

The hospital would record the intake.

It would not record the loss.

The queue would continue to move.

The ripple did not stop.

It never does.

# Chapter 12

## The Rogue Grain

*Perspective: Herman Bouwer*

*Strategic Response Unit · Friday, 18:00*

The war room was cold.

Sixteen degrees. Cold kept operators awake. Cold kept machines honest. Comfort made people careless.

I stood in front of the main display.

Johannesburg filled the wall in layers – streets, zones, response corridors. Green dots marked our patrol units. Red dots marked active incidents. The system refreshed every three seconds.

There were red dots everywhere.

Vusi came in without knocking. He didn't sit. He placed a folder on the glass table and kept his hands clear of it, as if touching it would commit him before the words did.

"Ballistics came back," he said.

"And?" I asked.

"Nine millimetre. Hydra-Shok. Professional load. No casings left behind."

"The police?"

“Moodley’s chasing noise,” Vusi said. “Hijackers from Alex. He thinks it was a robbery that escalated.”

I laughed once. It dried out before it became sound.

“Robbery,” I said. “They walked past a laptop worth fifty grand to put a bullet in my brother’s face. That wasn’t a robbery. It was a liquidation.”

I turned back to the map.

The green dots moved in predictable loops. Alarm responses. Fence breaches. Panic buttons pressed by people who could afford to be afraid.

Shields.

“I’m done with shields,” I said. “I want a sword.”

Vusi glanced at the operators behind the glass. Headsets on. Eyes fixed on feeds. Either they couldn’t hear us, or they had learned not to.

“What exactly are you asking for?” he said.

“I want the unit active,” I replied. “The off-book one. I want eyes in the hostels. Presence at the taxi ranks. I want the man who sold the job.”

“That’s illegal,” Vusi said.

He wasn’t objecting. He was calibrating.

“The law is a wall,” I said. Anton’s voice surfaced without invitation – calm, certain.

“He believed that. He believed the wall protected us.”

I walked to the window.

Outside, the city was changing colour. The sky bruised as the sun dropped. Streetlights came on in uneven patches. From this height, it looked orderly.

It wasn’t.

It was terrain.

“And the wall fell on him,” I said.

I stayed at the glass.

“I’m funding it,” I continued. “Double rates. Cash. No paper. I want a name by Monday.”

“And when you have a name?” Vusi asked.

I turned.

“Then we balance the books.”

He watched me for a long moment. He wasn’t measuring anger. Rage would have disqualified me. He was measuring stability.

He saw strategy.

“I’ll make the call,” he said.

He took the folder and left.

The map refreshed.

Green dots kept moving. Red dots multiplied. The system was busy doing what it always did.

Nothing was being fixed.

I took my phone from my pocket. Anton’s last message was still there.

Don’t worry. The law is the wall.

I deleted it.

The screen went dark.

# Chapter 13

## The Transaction

*Perspective: Jacob “Steak” Mpofu*

*Friday morning*

The shirt was new. Black cotton. Markhams. Still stiff at the collar.

I liked the way it held shape when I moved. New clothes make people assume intention. They don’t ask questions if you look like you planned to be there.

I checked my reflection in the car window and adjusted the cufflinks. Gold-coloured. Cheap. They caught light anyway. Light doesn’t care what something costs.

We had tried Wednesday. Four of us in the Tiggo. Drove out to the offices and the place was crawling with maintenance. Scaffolding. Workers. Too many variables.

Sipho had cursed from the driver’s seat. I told him to shut up. Patience is free. Mistakes cost.

We rescheduled for Friday.

The call to the office was clean. Whoever set it up knew exactly what to say and what to ask. The right names. The right language. The right problem. The kind of problem that makes a business rescue man open his diary without checking twice.

We didn't invent the meeting. Someone upstream built it for us. We just arrived.

–

Friday. Four in the car. Sipho driving. Me. Nkosi in the back.

Tshego stayed in the vehicle with Sipho.

We pulled into the complex. Security came over to the car immediately. Professional. Clipboard. Asked for identification from the two in the vehicle.

Tshego smiled. "We don't have it on us now. No matter. The meeting inside is going to be a long one. We'll wait, but actually, we're going to leave and come back later."

The guard wrote something on the clipboard. They drove out.

They did not come back later. They stopped a few metres from the entrance and waited with the engine running.

Meanwhile, Nkosi and I walked in.

The reception area smelled like polish and paper. Awards on the wall. Framed certificates. Symbols of stability that people trust because they don't understand how easily it breaks.

A woman behind the desk looked up.

"Morning. We're here for the meeting."

She checked a screen, nodded, and pointed down the corridor.

The corridor narrowed toward the end.

The boardroom door was open.

Anton Bouwer stood when we entered. Taller than I expected. Thinner. Calm in the way people are calm when they believe the room will protect them.

He introduced himself. Shook hands. His grip was firm and even. A man who measured people by contact.

“Where’s the bathroom?” Nkosi asked.

Bouwer turned and pointed toward the door behind the bar.

He saw the gun before he finished the gesture.

His body understood before his face did. He was already moving. Not toward us. Away. Out through the boardroom doors, around the bar, trying to reach the outside.

Nkosi went straight for him.

I went around. Cut him off.

He was fast for a man in a suit. He nearly made the door. His hand touched the frame.

I raised the gun.

Point blank.

The first shot took him through the nose. Clean. He went down. The sound was contained – the room swallowed it the way rooms swallow everything that doesn’t fit.

I fired three more times. Two hit the body. One missed entirely and buried itself in the wall.

Four shots total. One fatal. One body. One flesh. One plaster.

He was on the tiles. The blood was already finding the slope.

I bent down and swept the four warm casings into my palm. Dropped them into my pocket. Brass on cotton. No sound.

Just outside the bar, a man sat with a sandwich. IT contractor. Laptop open. He had seen everything. His mouth was open and his hand was still holding the bread.

We saw him.

He saw us.

I did not raise the gun.

He was not the job.

Three CCTV cameras covered the corridor and the boardroom entrance. Red lights steady. Recording. We had walked past all three coming in and we would walk past all three going out.

We did not care.

Joburg has cameras everywhere. Cameras do not shoot back. Cameras do not follow you into Tembisa. Cameras make evidence that enters a system designed to lose things.

I adjusted my hat. Covid mask still in place. Nkosi was already walking.

We went out the door. Through the gate. Into the car.

Sipho pulled away at normal speed. Normal speed draws less attention than urgency.

I checked my hands. Steady. No tremor. The gun was already in the bag.

We merged into traffic.

The transaction was complete.

# Chapter 14

## The Celebration

*Perspective: Jacob “Steak” Mpofu*

*Tembisa – The Tavern · Saturday, 22:30*

The bass was so heavy it rattled my teeth.

I sat in the corner they called VIP. It wasn’t VIP. Just a section roped off with red velvet that smelled like beer. But it cost money, so the view was better.

The bottle was already open.

Hennessy VSOP. Gold label turning under blue light. I poured without looking and watched the liquid hit the ice. Amber over white.

The shirt was the same one. Black cotton. Markhams. Still stiff at the collar. The cufflinks caught light when I moved. I let them.

“Steak,” the guy next to me shouted over the track. “You win the lotto, my brother?”

I leaned back and let the couch take my weight.

“Work,” I said. “Just work.”

He looked at the bottle. Then at the fold of notes in my pocket.

“Must be heavy work,” he said.

“Easy,” I said. “Clean.”

I drank. Burn first. Sweet after.

For a second I closed my eyes.

The room came back. White tiles. The suit. The way the man looked at me when he saw the gun. Not fear. Recognition. As if a model he trusted had just returned an error he had not predicted.

The girl in the red dress watched from the bar. She hadn’t looked at me yesterday. Yesterday I was Jacob. Yesterday I was dust.

Tonight I was Steak.

I waved her over.

She smiled when she reached the table. Hungry. I knew that smile. I’d worn it before.

“You want a drink?” I asked.

“I drink what you drink,” she said.

I poured for her without measuring. Let it spill. Abundance.

“To the ancestors,” I said.

“To the ancestors,” she said.

We drank.

I touched the cufflinks again. Cold metal on warm skin.

The news played on a screen above the bar. Helicopters. Sirens. Men in suits using big words.

Let them run.

They were looking for a ghost. A mastermind. Someone important.

They wouldn't look here. They wouldn't look at a man in a Markhams shirt buying drinks for the whole section.

I was invisible.

I laughed, deep and loose.

I was the man who killed the big man.

And nobody knew it but me.

# Chapter 15

## The Mastermind

*Perspective: Thabiso Majat*

*Sandton · Friday evening*

The notification arrived while I was eating.

Sashimi. Yellowtail. The restaurant in Nelson Mandela Square where the waiters know not to interrupt. I glanced at the screen without picking up the phone.

A status change. Amber to green.

I finished the piece on my chopsticks before I looked again.

TASK: COMPLETE

I put the phone face down and poured more sake.

Anton Bouwer had been a problem. Not a dangerous one. An irritating one. The kind of man who believes paperwork has weight. Who files injunctions as if a judge's signature can stop money from moving.

I had offered him terms. Good terms. Market plus premium. A polite exit from a position he was going to lose anyway. He had responded with statutes and affidavits and a tone that suggested he believed the law was a physical object.

It is not.

The law is a service. It works for whoever maintains it. In this country, maintenance is expensive and inconsistent. I can afford the maintenance. Bouwer could not.

He should have taken the money.

I checked the banking interface on the second phone. The escrow had released. Funds moved from a shell in Mauritius to a holding company in Cyprus, then fragmented into instruments that would settle where they were designed to settle. Clean. Layered. Untraceable by anyone who follows rules.

The people who investigate these things in South Africa do not follow rules. They follow budgets. And the budgets ran out years ago.

On the television above the bar, the headline scrolled.

PROMINENT ATTORNEY SHOT DEAD.

It sat there for three seconds, then slid down the feed. A market correction in Asia replaced it. Then weather. Then a celebrity divorce.

Noise finds its level.

The land parcel was still marked PENDING on the project map. Not for long. Without Bouwer, the injunction would thin. Paper loses strength when the author disappears. The next filing would pass. The one after that would not be contested.

I thought about the cost. Not the money. The money was nothing. Four payments. Small. The kind of numbers that don't trigger alerts because the system is calibrated for bigger fish.

The cost was attention. Attention is the only currency I respect. Everything else can be manufactured.

The waiter brought green tea. I did not thank him. Gratitude creates obligation. I pay. He serves. The exchange is complete.

A message arrived from Legal.

Proceed with next step?

I replied with a single character.

Y

I did not think about the family. Families generate noise. Heat that dissipates without affecting outcome.

I thought about the land. About what it would become once the obstruction was cleared. About the margin between acquisition cost and development value. About the way numbers feel when they stop arguing.

Outside, traffic moved in lanes. People in cars believing they were making choices. Accelerating. Braking. Adjusting.

None of them understood they were participating in a system.

I always have.

That is the difference between me and Anton Bouwer.

He believed in walls. I believed in flow.

Flow won.

# Chapter 16

## The Leak

*Perspective: Louis Jordaan*

*Centurion · Night*

The message arrived while I was brushing my teeth.

I saw the screen light up in the mirror and ignored it. Messages create urgency where none exists. You learn that early if you survive long enough inside other people's schemes.

The second vibration came before I finished rinsing.

I dried my hands before picking up the phone. Water ruins touchscreens. It also ruins composure.

Thabiso: We need to talk.

That was new. He usually did not need to talk. He issued instructions. He sent approvals. He moved money. Conversation was for people who doubted execution.

I replied: When?

Thabiso: Now.

I sat on the edge of the bed and checked the door. Locked. Habit.

The television was on in the living room, sound muted. A news anchor's mouth moved without sound. I recognised the headline without reading it.

PROMINENT ATTORNEY SHOT DEAD.

My phone vibrated again.

Thabiso: You're fine. Relax.

People say that when you are not.

I typed and erased twice before sending.

Police were here this morning.

The dots froze. Then:

Thabiso: Routine. They talk to everyone.

That was a lie. Not a dramatic one. A procedural lie. The kind that keeps systems moving until they don't.

"They asked about transfers," the officer had said. Casual. Friendly. He had not taken notes in front of me. He had asked me to repeat figures instead.

Figures stick when repeated.

My phone vibrated.

Thabiso: Did you say anything?

I thought about the spreadsheets. How clean they looked once you learned which columns not to expand. How the numbers always balanced if you stopped asking where they came from.

I thought about my daughter asleep in the next room. Seven years old. The way she kicked the blankets off in her sleep.

I typed: No.

It was true in the narrowest sense.

Thabiso: Good. Then do not start now.

The sentence did not threaten. It closed.

I placed the phone on the bed and stood. The room felt smaller. I opened a window. It did not help.

I went to the kitchen and poured water into a glass. My hand shook once, then corrected. A droplet spilled and ran down the side and pooled on the counter. I wiped it up immediately.

Leaks create trails.

My phone lit up with a news alert.

SOURCE CLOSE TO INVESTIGATION CONFIRMS FINANCIAL MOTIVE.

Source.

The word lodged somewhere behind my eyes.

I opened the drawer of the bedside table. The gun was there. Bought legally. Background checks. Waiting period. Paperwork stamped and filed. The system had approved me as low risk.

I took it out and placed it on the bed.

The metal was cold. It did not care who I was.

I checked the ammunition. Counted once. Then again. Counting is not a habit. It is a delay.

I thought about my daughter's breathing in the next room. Steady. Trusting. The rhythm of a body that believes the world will hold while she isn't looking.

I placed the barrel against my lips as if testing the temperature. The metal was colder than I expected. It tasted like keys. Like the inside of a lock. The room was still. The television next door was still playing. Canned laughter. A jingle. Someone selling something to people who would be alive tomorrow to buy it. I could hear her breathing through the wall. Steady. Trusting. Seven years of breath, each one assuming the next. The gap between the barrel and the trigger was the last place a different decision could live. It was narrow. It was closing.

I pulled the trigger.

The sound was contained.

Later, someone would find me and make the necessary calls. A form would be filled in. A cause selected from a dropdown menu.

Somewhere else, a thread would go quiet.

The leak had sealed itself.

# Chapter 17

## The End of Steak

*Perspective: Jacob “Steak” Mpofu*

*Tembisa – Shebeen · Three months later*

The place was already loud when I arrived.

Not music loud. People loud. Voices stacked on top of each other, pushing air around without saying much. A shebeen does not fill. It compresses. The walls sweat. The floor sticks. Everyone is too close to everyone else, which makes hierarchy easier to test.

I pushed through without apologising.

Someone slapped my shoulder and said my name like it was a compliment. The name had travelled ahead of me again. Names do that when they are useful.

I ordered beer. Bottled. Cold. The glass neck slick with condensation. I drank half in one pull and let the bitterness reset my mouth.

A woman leaned against the counter and looked at me without blinking.

She wasn’t young. She wasn’t careful. She knew exactly how much space she was taking and had decided it was correct.

I stepped closer.

My hand brushed her hip as if by accident. Testing. Pressure without commitment.

She turned. Her eyes hardened first. The rest followed.

“Watch yourself,” she said.

I smiled.

“You know who I am?” I asked.

A man at her side did not smile.

“I know who you are,” he said. His voice was calm. Too calm. “Step back.”

The room thinned around us. Not empty. Focused. Attention reallocates quickly when it senses imbalance.

I laughed.

“That’s cute,” I said. “You think this is your space?”

He did not move.

I stepped closer anyway.

The knife appeared without announcement. Not flashed. Not raised. Just there. Short blade. Practical. No ceremony.

I felt the impact before the pain arrived. A pressure just below the ribs, followed by warmth spreading too fast to be sweat.

The second strike landed deeper.

Balance goes first. Strength drains next.

I staggered back and hit the wall. The room exploded into motion. Chairs scraped. Bottles shattered. Someone shouted. Someone else ran.

The man stepped away. No follow-up. No flourish. He had achieved the required effect and stopped.

I slid down the wall.

My hands went to my stomach. Red soaked through my fingers. Thick. Dark. Not arterial. Liver. I knew enough to know that much.

I tried to stand. My legs did not respond.

The floor was cold. Concrete. It pressed up through my clothes and into my back.

People moved around me without direction. Someone shouted for an ambulance. Someone else said it was pointless. No one knelt.

I tasted metal.

The woman was gone. The man was gone. Space closes quickly after it opens.

I thought about the money. It had arrived. That mattered.

I thought about the slope of the floor in the boardroom. How the body had folded when it hit. How clean it had been.

This was not clean.

My breathing shortened. Each pull came shallower than the last.

I laughed once. It came out wet.

That bitch wasn’t even tight.

The music came back on. Lower at first. Then louder. The room recalibrated around my absence.

Someone stepped over my leg.

No sirens arrived in time to matter.

The name would last longer than the body.

But not much longer.

# Chapter 18

## The Decay

*Perspective: Narrative overlay / Time-lapse*

*Timeline: 24 months*

Time does not heal.

Time dissolves.

Three months later

The docket moved.

Case 345/08/25 shifted from the General's desk to a Captain's desk. Two weeks after that, it was placed in a cabinet in the basement. The word shockwaves disappeared from the language. The system absorbed the disturbance and returned to baseline.

The blue lights stopped flashing in Saxonwold. Patrols resumed their loops. The office park learned how to be quiet again.

In Tembisa, a man called Steak was stabbed in a shebeen over a woman who did not want to be touched. He bled out on concrete. The music came back on before the ambulance arrived. No connection was drawn to Case 345/08/25. No connection would ever be drawn.

In Centurion, a man called Louis Jordaan put a legally purchased firearm in his mouth and pulled the trigger. His daughter was asleep in the next room. The cause of death was recorded from a dropdown menu. A WhatsApp thread went quiet.

Six months later

The damp spot in the boardroom broke through the paint.

Black mould formed along the cornice. Slow. Patient. Feeding on a room no one entered anymore. What had been postponed spread without urgency.

Esther Mulusi resigned. She closed her files cleanly. She left the country.

The firm dissolved. Nothing replaced it.

In Bishop Lavis, a manhole cover was replaced by the municipality. Another one went missing three streets away. The sequence continued with different addresses.

Twelve months later

Elsie stood in the UCT hall in a gown that did not fit properly across the shoulders. The fabric was stiff. The mortarboard kept slipping. She held it in place with one hand while they read her name.

LLB. First class.

She thought about the fork. The salt cellar. Sir AB at the kitchen table, explaining algebra through cutlery because he believed understanding was a right, not a reward.

She thought about the letter of recommendation with the handwritten line at the bottom. The ink slightly different from the printed text.

She would not practice in South Africa. She had decided that months ago. The system that produced her education was the same system that had failed to protect the man who paid for it. She could not serve both.

Three days after graduation, she flew to London. She did not look back from the window. Looking back is sentimental. She had learned from the best that structure is care, and care sometimes means leaving.

Thabiso Majat sat in a restaurant in Sandton and paid with a card linked to a company that did not exist. He laughed easily. He had forgotten the sound of gunfire.

He believed time erased consequence.

It does not.

It accumulates it.

Fifteen months later

Albert sat on the deck of a catamaran anchored off Palawan. Two ultra-wide screens glowed in the cabin behind him. Seven

windows open. Twelve agents processing. The work was clean and the work was his.

The water was turquoise and deceptively calm.

He did not read the South African news anymore. The headlines had stopped mentioning Anton's name months ago. The system had metabolised the event and moved on. That was what systems did. They absorbed disturbance and returned to baseline.

He thought about the woman at the back of the room sometimes. The one with the daughter. He still did not know her name.

The wind shifted. He adjusted a line without looking. The hull steadied.

Eighteen months later

Reitz Bouwer sat alone in his study.

He did not look at photographs. He did not revisit memory.

He read the law.

Once, he had believed in balance – human rights, proportionality, intent. Grief stripped the sentiment away and left structure exposed. He saw the wall clearly now: where it bowed, where it cracked, where language about dignity had been repurposed to protect predation while silence consumed the rest.

He picked up a pen.

He did not write a memoir.

He did not write a manifesto.

He wrote constraints.

Definitions.

Conditions.

No appeals to mercy.

No appeals to outrage.

Only stability.

Twenty months later

Thabiso Majat was arrested at OR Tambo International while boarding a flight to Dubai.

Two officers. No drama. They asked him to step aside. He smiled. He asked if they knew who he was. They confirmed that they did. A thought crossed his face as the cuffs closed. Brief. Involuntary. The kind that arrives before the filter engages. Maybe I shouldn't have killed the white cunt. Not remorse. Arithmetic. The cost had exceeded the return. That was all.

He was charged with conspiracy to commit murder, fraud, and money laundering. The indictment ran to forty-seven pages. The evidence included banking records from Mauritius, cell tower data, and a single witness statement from an IT contractor who had been eating a sandwich.

Thabiso's lawyers filed seventeen motions in the first week. Postponements. Jurisdiction challenges. Constitutional objections. The system responded to each one the way it responds to everything. Slowly. Without heat.

The trial date was set. Then moved. Then set again.

The wheels turned. Slowly. Without heat.

Twenty-four months later

Reitz placed the final page on the stack.

Three hundred pages.

Heavy in the way finished things are heavy.

The title was exact.

**The Bouwer Code**

A Framework for Systemic Equilibrium

It was not a proposal.

It was not an argument.

It was an operating system for a structure that had failed.

He picked up his phone and dialled a number he had not used in years. A private line. Texas.

The connection opened.

"Reitz," the voice said. "I heard about Anton. I'm sorry."

"Don't be," Reitz replied.

A pause.

“I’ve finished it,” he said. “The fix.”

“The fix for what?”

“For the system,” Reitz said. “I’m sending it now.”

The line stayed open.

Outside, the city continued its routines. Traffic flowed. Screens refreshed. Somewhere, a queue advanced by one place.

The mould in the boardroom had reached the window frame. The glass had fogged from the inside. No one had opened the door in eighteen months. The damp spot Anton had noticed on the cornice – the one he had planned to fix on Monday – had become the room.

The wall had already failed.

But someone had written a new one.

# Part III

The Cut

# Chapter 19

## Constraints

*Perspective: Reitz Bouwer*

The paper resisted at first.

Not physically. The resistance was conceptual. Words arrived too easily and therefore could not be trusted. I discarded three pages without rereading them. Rereading creates attachment. Attachment introduces error.

I began again.

Definitions come before arguments. Without definitions, disagreement masquerades as principle.

I wrote the first line slowly, as if speed might deform it.

A system is stable if it can absorb disturbance without exporting irreversible harm.

I paused. The sentence held. It did not comfort. It did not accuse. It described a condition.

Law is not an expression of values. It is an instrument for allocating constraint.

That, too, held.

For years, I had taught proportionality. Balancing tests. Context. The careful choreography of competing rights. Those

frameworks assume good faith and bounded harm. They assume time exists to deliberate.

Time does not always exist.

Anton’s death had not violated the law in theory. It had violated it in application. The wall had been present. The force had gone through it anyway.

I did not feel anger. Anger wastes precision. I felt misalignment.

I wrote until my hand cramped and then wrote through it. Pain focuses attention. It discourages ornament.

Intent does not mitigate outcome.

Visibility does not equal severity.

Delay increases downstream load.

I did not number the statements yet. Numbers imply hierarchy. I wanted a field.

At midnight, I stood and walked to the window.

The city lay beneath the study, lit in grids that pretended order. Traffic pulsed. Sirens rose and fell. Somewhere, a generator kicked in and smoothed a local failure.

Systems compensate until they cannot.

I thought of Anton at the table, explaining balance with a fork and a salt cellar. He had believed in maintenance. In early intervention. In noticing cracks before they spread.

He had been correct within limits.

Those limits were now visible.

Punishment is not moral expression. It is load redistribution.

I underlined it once and left it. The phrase would anger people. That was acceptable. Anger is a form of attention.

Deterrence is not fear. It is predictability.

At dawn, Monica knocked softly and came in without waiting.

She did not ask what I was writing. She looked at the pages and then at my face.

“This won’t bring him back,” she said.

“No,” I replied. “It won’t.”

She waited.

“It may stop the next one,” I added.

She nodded once. Not agreement. Acknowledgment.

When she left, I added another line.

Mercy without structure is leakage.

I stopped.

The page was full. The definitions held. The constraints interlocked. The system was complete.

But it had no centre.

A framework without a terminal principle is a machine that runs but does not know what it is running for. Every definition I had written constrained behaviour. None of them said why.

I sat with it until the answer arrived. It arrived not as philosophy. As exhaustion. As the simplest possible compression of everything the system was trying to prevent and everything it was trying to preserve.

I wrote it at the bottom of the last page, beneath the definitions, beneath the constraints, beneath the load tables and the edge cases.

*Do not impose unnecessary harm. Extend structural care.*

The page held.

I closed the notebook and labelled the spine.

Constraints.

# Chapter 20

## The Challenge

*Perspective: Elsie*

*London · Video call*

The call connected at seven in the morning, London time. Eight in South Africa. Reitz was already at his desk. I could see the notebooks behind him, spines labelled in his handwriting. The room looked the same as it always had. Books. Lamp. The window where he watched the city pretend to function.

“You read it,” he said.

“I read it,” I said.

He waited. Reitz always waited. He did not ask for opinions. He created space for them and let gravity do the work.

“It’s brilliant,” I said. “And it’s dangerous.”

He did not react.

“Punishment as load redistribution,” I continued. “Deterrence as predictability. Mercy constrained by structure. You’ve built a machine that removes human judgment from consequence.”

“Human judgment is the failure point,” he said.

“For whom?” I asked.

The question sat between us. Reitz leaned back. Not offended. Recalibrating.

“You know what happened to Sir AB,” I said. “You know the system failed. You know the wall didn’t hold. I’m not arguing with your diagnosis.”

“Then what are you arguing with?”

“The prescription.”

I pulled up the page I had marked. Section 7. Constraint definitions. The language was exact. Too exact. It left no room for the thing I had learned at that kitchen table with the fork and the salt cellar.

“Sir AB taught me that understanding is a right,” I said. “Not a reward. He sat with me for hours. He didn’t optimise for efficiency. He optimised for comprehension. For dignity. Your framework treats people as load. As throughput. As units to be redistributed.”

“Because that is what the system sees,” Reitz said.

“The system is not the only thing that matters.”

“It is when the system is the thing that kills people.”

“And your terminal line,” I said. “The one at the end. Do not impose unnecessary harm. Extend structural care.”

“What about it?”

“It’s correct,” I said. “And it’s cold. It sounds like an engineering specification. Nobody will feel it. Nobody will carry it home with them. Nobody will teach it to their children.”

He said nothing.

“Sir AB didn’t say extend structural care,” I said. “He sat at the table and taught me algebra with a fork. That was the care. Not the definition of it. The act.”

Silence. The connection held. I could hear traffic through his window.

“Elsie,” he said. “What would you change?”

I had expected argument. Not the question. It arrived without defence. Reitz meant it. He wanted to know.

“Section 7,” I said. “The constraint definitions. You’ve sealed every edge case. You’ve anticipated every failure mode. But you haven’t built a door.”

“A door for what?”

“For the person who falls through the system not because they chose to, but because the system was never built to hold them. For Felicity. For her daughter. For the woman at the back of the room whose name nobody learned.”

I did not know those names. Not then. But I knew the shape of the absence. I had grown up inside it.

Reitz was quiet for a long time.

“You’re asking me to build mercy into a system designed to eliminate it,” he said.

“No,” I said. “I’m asking you to build a floor. Mercy leaks. You said that yourself. But a floor doesn’t leak. A floor holds. The people above it can be constrained all you want. But below a certain point, the system catches instead of cuts.”

He picked up his pen. I saw him write something. I could not read it from the screen.

“Who taught you to argue like this?” he asked.

“A man who explained algebra with cutlery,” I said.

He smiled. The first time I had seen him smile since Anton died.

“Send me your notes,” he said. “All of them.”

“They’re rough.”

“Good. Rough holds better than polished. Polish hides the joints.”

Before she hung up, I heard his pen stop.

“What if I said it plainly?” he asked. “Not as specification. As instruction.”

“Try,” I said.

A pause. Then, quietly, as if testing whether the room could hold it:

*“Don’t be a cunt. Be kind.”*

I laughed. Once. Surprised.

“That’s not legal language,” I said.

“No,” he said. “It’s load-bearing.”

The call ended. I sat in my flat in Hackney and looked at the rain on the window. Grey light. Wet streets. A city that functioned because people followed rules they did not write.

I thought about Bishop Lavis. About the manhole that had been there for weeks. About the daughter whose name I would never know.

Sir AB would not have walked past it.

He would have called someone on Monday.

# Chapter 21

## The Hand-Off

*Perspective: External reader*

*Private office · Night*

The document arrived without preamble.

No cover letter. No context. Just a file name and a checksum.

He opened it because the checksum was clean. His office occupied the fourteenth floor of a building that had emptied hours ago. A glass of water sat on the desk, flat since morning. He had been reading since seven. Proposals. Analyses. Frameworks that arrived dressed in confidence and collapsed under the first structural question. The stack beside the glass was a year of failure disguised as ambition. Nothing he had read in twelve months had survived contact with the problem it claimed to address.

The title page was spare. No dedication. No foreword. No attempt to persuade.

The Bouwer Code

A Framework for Systemic Equilibrium

He skimmed the contents once, then scrolled back to the first definition.

The language was not legal. It was not philosophical. It was mechanical.

Terms were constrained before they were deployed. Edge cases were sealed before they could metastasise. Nothing relied on intention. Nothing asked to be trusted.

He read the first section twice. Then the second.

He leaned back – not in admiration, but in verification. The structure held. There were no soft joints. No inspirational gaps. The logic did not request belief. It assumed execution.

He ran failure modes.

They were anticipated.

He ran scale.

The framework did not resist it.

He ran incentives.

They were not moralised. They were redirected.

Outside, the building had thinned to maintenance traffic and light. He did not notice the hour change. He noticed the absence of friction.

This was not a theory.

It was a patch.

He scrolled to the final page. The definitions ended. The constraints ended. The load tables ended.

Beneath them, in a different hand, two lines.

The first, struck through:

*Do not impose unnecessary harm. Extend structural care.*

The second, written below it, unedited:

*Don't be a cunt. Be kind.*

He read it twice. Not because it was unclear. Because it was the only line in three hundred pages that did not require the other two hundred and ninety-nine to stand. He looked at the struck-through version again. Someone had written the correct answer – precise, unassailable, committee-ready – and then drawn a line through it. Not because it was wrong. Because it was not enough. The formal version would survive a boardroom. The one beneath it would survive a prison yard. A kitchen table. A child asking why. Whoever crossed that line out understood something that most people who write frameworks never reach: the final compression must hold in rooms where no one has read the preceding pages.

He opened a new message. Two recipients first. One west. One south.

No explanation. Just the file.

A minute later, he added two more. Then one more.

He did not frame it as ethics.

He did not frame it as justice.

He framed it as stability.

The replies arrived without ceremony.

Reading.

This is different.

Call me.

He closed the document and stood.

Not because the work was finished.

But because it had left him.

# Chapter 22

## The Execution

*Perspective: System / Observer*

*State facility · Morning*

The room was white.

Not hospital white. Industrial white.

Tiles ran from floor to ceiling, sloped imperceptibly toward a drain set dead centre. A brass fitting. Clean. Unremarkable. A hose coiled neatly against the wall, unused.

Thabiso Majat stood where the marks on the floor indicated.

His wrists were secured. His ankles aligned. The restraints did not hurt. They did not need to. They were calibrated to remove movement, not dignity. The chin brace lifted his head by fifteen degrees.

Enough.

The plate behind him was fixed in place. Steel, faced with layered marine board, skimmed smooth and painted white. It did not look like protection. It looked like structure.

There was no audience.

No priest.

No officer.

No human hand on a trigger.

The system had already confirmed identity. Confirmed conditions. Confirmed compliance.

A countdown appeared on the wall opposite him. Large numerals. Neutral font.

00:00:30

Thabiso's breathing was fast but controlled. He had spent months telling himself this would never happen. Years believing time would dilute consequence.

It had not.

00:00:20

He thought about money. About how easily it had moved once it was no longer attached to faces. About how silence had followed him wherever he went.

00:00:10

He noticed the drain.

The slope of the tiles.

The way the floor did not argue with gravity.

The thought arrived without force.

I do deserve this. The thought surprised him. Not because it was wrong. Because it arrived without negotiation. He had expected fury. He had expected the system to defend itself, to file one more motion, to find one more angle. Instead, the

calculation completed on its own. The land was not worth this room. The money was not worth this countdown. The man in the boardroom had been real and he had not cared and that failure of care had been the only miscalculation that mattered. The fury came anyway, a half-second later. Fury at being caught. Fury at the room. Fury at the way this country had finally decided to enforce something. But the fury arrived after the recognition, which meant it was commentary, not correction.

Not as confession.

As recognition.

I was the cunt.

00:00:00

The command executed.

The sound was contained. A single, dry report. No echo.

The body reacted before the thought could finish forming. Then it stopped reacting.

Blood appeared immediately. Dark. Hot. It spread thinly at first, then thickened as it found the slope. Steam lifted where it met the cold tile.

It moved the same way it had before.

It traced the grout line.

Reached the brass lip.

Paused for a fraction of a second.

Then it spilled over.

Gone.

The room did not change.

The system logged completion.

Closed the process.

Released the space.

Outside, the day continued. Traffic moved. Screens updated.

Somewhere, a queue advanced by one step.

No announcement followed.

No silence was observed.

The equation had balanced itself.

# Chapter 23

## The Drain

*Perspective: The room*

The hose ran for four minutes.

Water followed the slope the way the blood had. The way the rain did when the room was still a patio. The gradient had not changed. The brass fitting accepted the flow without comment.

The tiles returned to white.

The restraints had been removed. The plate wiped down. The hose coiled and hung on its hook. A maintenance log was updated. A timestamp entered. The room was available.

No trace remained beyond the record.

In the city, a morning cycle completed. Traffic slowed, then cleared. Shops opened. Phones vibrated. The day assembled from parts that had learned to fit together.

In Bishop Lavis, a manhole cover held.

In Hackney, a woman opened a notebook and continued writing.

In the Philippines, a man adjusted a line and watched the horizon hold.

In a boardroom that no one entered anymore, the mould had darkened the window. The damp spot had become the ceiling. The room had returned to what it was before anyone decided to hold meetings in it.

A patio. Open to weather. Governed by slope.

The drain sat where it always had.

Patient. Unremarkable. Ready.

The system does not celebrate.

It does not mourn.

It closes loops.

What remains after closure is not justice or mercy, but configuration: which paths are open, which are sealed, where energy goes when introduced, how quickly loss is absorbed.

The next disturbance would arrive from somewhere else.

It always does.

# OMO

Okay Moving On

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| | |
|---|---|
| **Series** | The 420 Code |
| **Catalogue** | Ø Records |
| **Title** | The Scissors |
| **Medium** | Systems Consequence / Structural Enforcement |
| **Artist** | G |

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STUDIO 6