

Grahamstown  
Sunday, 21 April 1963

Delightful little creature,

I needed some neutral “in transit” days between the Cape and being back again, just to make the transition more gradual. After the week – and especially those three days – of change, I feel very averse to enduring, all over again, that old threat of a settled, “safe”, bourgeois life. Respectability. Predetermined reactions to predetermined stimuli. There are people for whom such an existence will never be a threat because they’re too free *within* themselves ever to get caught up in it; but I must constantly resist this opiate precisely because it would be so easy just to let it take me. During the week in the Cape you at least provided something of an antidote. Should I politely say “thank you”? That would make it too banal. Especially “our” night. [T.S.] Eliot’s line – “poetry can communicate before it is understood” – also applies, in a certain sense, to people who come together, freely, through sex. It is precisely an act of communion that, thank God, remains beyond words. I mean, what would I include in my little inventory – especially in the clear light of day?: a scent; memories of your hands, hair and breasts; your voice; tears; cynicism; game-playing; red wine; two double brandies; eyes: mocking, saying no, cursing, showing contempt, playing with me, saying yes, sweet and happy, or the-hell-in and huffy ...! All of this gets one nowhere. Luckily, however, these things are just starting points. Memories and bodies are mere titles of long poems; and our “sleeping together” is a sort of holy Mass, in which transubstantiation is complete. (Is this perhaps the most pure religion for us non-believers? Otherwise, why exactly would a person say “Lord God in heaven”? – Giuseppe di Lampedusa’s loveliest girl character does in fact say “Gesùmaria!”)

Is a body itself capable of remembering? I think its recollection is better than unreliable “memory”. My body remembers yours. And it’s not because of those few strategic little pains or the mark on my shoulder. Also not – I hope! – because I have now become “part of your

sorrow”; it’s more positive. The body’s memory, as opposed to the brain’s, is like imagery in the midst of matter-of-fact words.

Okay, go ahead and say: “What nonsense!” Or worse. I’m not busy with a Simone de Beauvoir dissertation here. I’m actually just busy saying in a roundabout way what I’ve already said: thank you.

Until such time as I get to see you again, I shall have to make do with your manuscript. (And please let me know when you think it’s time for it to be returned!) Luckily there is the unexpected prospect that my seeing you again might occur sooner than expected. Some or other study group in Stellenbosch has asked me to deliver three lectures there later this semester. Then I’ll be able to come and visit you on their account! This kind of lecturing gives me the shits. William Styron (have you read his *Lie Down in Darkness*?) said something like: “One thing I can’t stand is that a young writer, after having written one book, starts lecturing and giving pompous interviews on all sorts of subjects about which he knows nothing.” Long live Styron! But sometimes a collar is more precious than the dog that wears it.

Christ Almighty, and this morning a ceremonious telegram arrives here announcing that it pleases the South African Academy of “Art” and Science to award me with a “Eugène Marais Encouragement Prize for Drama”. Now that my hilarity at hearing this news has died down, I find myself in quite a pickle: first of all, I don’t have a clue (and neither, apparently, does anyone else) what kind of an animal this prize is; I don’t even know on what grounds it’s being awarded, or what it’s worth. And now? Must I reply: deposit the prize up your anus? Or should I accept it tongue-in-cheek because I could use a few extra rands and don’t in any case have too many illusions about my abilities as a dramatist? Or would that be “dishonest”? You see, I have long hoped that the Kakkademy would award me a Hertzog Prize one day so I can refuse it on the grounds that they’re incapable of making any decisions about literary merit. (Or would that be ridiculous?)

Meanwhile, my biggest task – and headache – right now is typing

up *Die Ambassadeur / Die Ongedurige Kind* [The Ambassador / The Restless Child]. I want to finish it now – if there hadn't been so many changes to add in the retyping process, I would have hired you as a professional typist. Now I'm sucking it all up myself – and there's no use moaning about mistakes. I want you to meet Gillian and Nicolette. (Fortunately I know you won't mince your words!) At least a fragment will be appearing in the second 60. But when will that be? Bartho [Smit] in fact sounded quite half-hearted about the journal's financial prospects in his most recent letter. He's arriving here in the next few days; I'll be able to learn more at first hand then.

I saw Rob [Antonissen] this morning, and without my asking, he referred to your poems in 60 (which he seems only now to have read). He says he's "very taken" with them. You've told me you don't care much what critics say, but maybe this will warm your heart a little. You've been through enough wintery things as it is. I know we relate as free individuals, hold each other to nothing, and don't commit each other to any bonds, but I do wish I could be with you; and help a bit. Not only to find a place to live and share every day's finicky little tasks with you, but maybe also to save you from the thought that "the cure for loneliness is solitude".

Please – for God's sake, Ingrid – don't do what you wanted to do in Jan [Rabie]'s house. No reasonable grounds exist for my being able – or willing – to persuade you otherwise. Maybe my insistence is based on purely selfish considerations. But *don't*. You must still make things like "Begin Somer" ["Early Summer"], "Dood van 'n Maagd" ["On the Death of a Virgin"], "Bitterbessie Dagbreek" ["Bitter-Berry Daybreak"], "L'Art Poétique", the series of "intimate conversations"; and we must once again make, together, what Afrikaans itself can't: love.

The sun's calling me outside (it's already fully winter here); I want to go sit in the garden and read [Paul] Éluard, and Jonker.

Write, Ingrid. And allow me to do anything I possibly can to help. In whatever way.

Send my regards to Chris [Lombard], and thank him again. And write – for us – a poem about: "The memory of evening is like an apple";

find a way to relate it to Adam and Eve's apple; when you're done, eat the apple; and then ask: what now? You will know how. I'm not a poet.

With love,  
André.

Sunday, 5 May 1963

André, my dear little heart,

I write you quite a lot more than I actually post – an old habit. Thank you for your letter of Tuesday, which you “shouldn’t have” written! I hope you will never again feel that you “should” this or that with me – I particularly like your open, honest, spontaneous reactions. And so your letter was actually a delightful surprise and I let a mistake through on the front page of the *Strydkreet*. But I told the foreman it was actually only 50% my fault, which confused him a little until I could think of a better excuse.

Guess what? My child arrived by plane yesterday and she is now sleeping nice and warm in the next room. She’s grown to be so cute and when I can’t bring myself to reprimand, I just have to laugh, especially when she calls me “little mommy”! I’m sitting here now at Jan’s table where we read Richard Rive’s letter, do you remember? Last night, with Richard – sorry – thought for a moment about Richard’s letter and wondered why I wasn’t intuitively “warned”! Last night I had a meal with Dan [Daniel] Kunene, such a civilised soul with an impressive kind of dignity and a quick mind. He is a lecturer in African languages at the University of Cape Town and at the moment head of the faculty. I am eager to introduce you to him when (when?) you come down to Cape Town. He is also the translator of the African poems in the Penguin edition of South African poetry. Trying to go overseas for a year for a study tour, but what a mess ... it’s almost impossible for him to leave the country because of all the suspicion ...

Did my last letter depress you terribly? I am not a prose writer – but, as you say, there are a few things in life for which, thank God, no words are necessary. I’d also love to speak to you, but heaven knows, not with words on a piece of paper. Also want to tell you about my new poem based on the Dutch hex-text “You put a spell on me, magician ...” then the poem moves in a kind of a dream atmosphere, I mow everything down and stand naked, all alone and happy, until the “spell” is broken

and I must go “back to my blood relations / back to my kin / back to the pre-birth-death / where I belong” [“terug na my bloedverwante / terug na my naasbestaandes / terug na die voorgeboort-e-like dood / waar ek hoort”].

André, you speak about renouncing things, is this an indication that they are being lost already, because “what is actual is actual only for one time / and only for one place / I rejoice that things are as they are and I renounce the blessed face ...” Allowing something to endure, will you find a charm for that, Magician? Child, I feel frustrated and so I went off to look for your little portrait in *Die Huisgenoot* so that I could, at the very least, see how your “declared” face looks ... it is rare to discover someone so suddenly and completely, and afterwards the *physical distance* as you call it, which everything now rests upon and where it happens ...! In the meantime, I swim in the ice-cold water of Clifton and I work, and I receive, it seems, hundreds of people ... and sleep so terribly much!

The poems you sent me are once again proof of your astonishing receptiveness and high emotional tempo – which is of course absolutely essential to the whole complex organisation of an artist’s tools. What this poem still lacks is the *technical expertise*, which will come later (if you kept it up and I know you should and now you must keep it up). Poetry lies just under the surface of your highly lyrical prose in *Lobola* and *Caesar*. I’m looking greatly forward to *Die Ongedurige Kind*, you will in no way burden me with it, I await its arrival with joy, to which I also have a right. To get back to the poems ... Most of them are successful, “Through the Looking Glass” and especially “the earth” that drifts away “like a dandelion seed” [“die aarde wat soos ’n sydisselsaadjie” wegdryf]. (The two people I showed the poems to in confidence – Freda Linde and Chris – both said almost without hesitation in the same words, although they didn’t see the poems as successful *as a whole*: “But there’s no doubt; he’s our man.” I also like “Meisie” [“Girl”] from: “*you*: you play with the sky” and especially “little Midas-child / under your fingers / everything becomes poetry ...”

Also “come and sleep with me” and some of the words that play like naughty children in dark rooms.

I hope you will continue, long, very long, after the original inspiration has dwindled ... Send me everything you write, and when we are together again, I would like to examine everything, line by line, also because I, I already know this, can learn so much from you.

But now I’m not writing another word. Soon you’ll believe that I am in love with you! But call me one night (when you get this letter).

Fixed time and Personal. Then I will hear your voice and see whether this is true!

Until then, darling,  
Ingrid.

ps: What is your second name? IJ.