

DIE GYSELAAR

(The Hostage)

by

Frannie van der Walt

INT. GIRLS' DORM - CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Adolescent female voices are enhanced by a long, dull corridor. Flickering fluorescent lights bounce off boring beige walls and linoleum floors. The product of public school funds. Outdated, but well-kept.

A few posters, subtly pushing the feminist agenda under the guise of school spirit, adorn the walls, adding a little cheer to the general eeriness of a dormitory at night.

An echoing CLIP CLAP and a low dragging HUM announce the late arrival of GRETHA (18), still roughly dressed in her school uniform. She drags a tired upright bass case as tall as she is, her alibi for missing the usual nightly dorm activities.

Sirens sound faintly some ways off. But this is nothing out of the ordinary. This is South Africa, after all.

Light and general cheer spill from a room up ahead. Gretha slows as she nears it.

GIRLS, ages raging from fourteen to eighteen, sit on beds, neatly in a row, chattering away merrily. The general assortment of pyjamas and school blazers proclaim the impromptu nature of this gathering.

Head tilted, Gretha peers inside. Smiles fade. The volume fades from robust to mute in mere seconds as one by one the Girls notice Gretha.

With a raised eyebrow and a quick motion of the head, ROELIEN (18), clearly the one in charge, gives the signal. A GRADE EIGHT Girl closes the door in Gretha's face.

Gretha swallows hard on her sadness and/or disappointment. She trudges away, down the long, lonely corridor.

INT. BATHROOMS - NIGHT

Her feet in slops, her body wrapped in a towel and a toiletry bag in hand, Gretha approaches the showers. She clings to her towel as if it would grant her safety in this danger zone.

Steam rises from all but one shower. Gretha questions this with a frown. It's too late for the showers to be this full.

She chooses the unoccupied stall.

INT. BATHROOMS - SHOWER STALL - CONTINUOUS

Gretha draws the shower curtain closed. The other showers turn off, just as she does so. Curiously. Giggles follow. Even more curiously. But Gretha doesn't dwell on it.

Within the safety of the shower stall, Gretha removes her towel and readies her toiletries. A practiced routine.

She turns on the shower. Steam rises. With the water at the perfect temperature, Gretha steps in under the stream.

Clear water circles the drain.

Fully drenched, eyes closed, Gretha sniffs.

Brown water circles the drain.

Gretha's eyes shoot open with shock as realisation hits her.

GRETHA

Euwh!

With a splutter, the water shuts off, leaving Gretha grossed out, confused and dripping dirty brown liquid.

Keeping well clear of the shower's trajectory, Gretha tentatively turns the tap... nothing.

INT. BATHROOMS - CONTINUOUS

Gretha peers out of her shower stall. The bathroom is empty, except for a few fading giggles.

She leans into the neighbouring shower stall, also, like all the others, empty. She tampers with the taps, but this shower is dry as well.

There's nothing for it...

INT. CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Drenched, with her formerly virginal white towel now stained with dirty brown, Gretha checks to see if the coast is clear. Quiet. Except for sirens somewhere off growing ever louder.

The coast is clear. Gretha tip-toes down the hall. She rounds the corner...

Waiting in passage-formation on either side of the corridor is, seemingly, the entire population of the girls' dormitory. Girls line the walls.

Eyes wide. Gretha pauses.

A sudden burst of joint laughter makes Gretha jump.

Her head and eyes downcast, Gretha takes on the gauntlet before her, the only way to her bedroom.

Then the chanting starts...

GIRLS
(chanting)
Bully beef! Bully beef! Bully beef!

Gretha endures the torture all the way to her door, refusing to shed a tear. She shuts her bedroom door behind her.

MATRON (O.S.)
Alright, if everyone is quite
finished. Bedtime sounded hours
ago.

MATRON, a short and stocky house mother, ready for bed, and action, stands with her hands on her hips, hen-like watching over her clutch.

The Girls disperse, taking their time and chattering their congratulations on a prank well executed.

MATRON (CONT'D)
You too, Felicia! Come now!

CUT TO:

INT. DORM ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A closed door fails to drown out the laughter, but Gretha pushes hard against a Harry Styles poster at its back, as if it would.

She is alone in a two-person room, with only one bed matrassed and made. Only one wall postered.

MATRON (O.S.)
(through door)
...Felicia! Come now!

Sirens grow ever louder... then fade into the opposite distance. Flashing blue lights come and go with the sirens.

Only now do the first tears spill over. When the sobs start, there's no stopping them.

Gretha suppresses the sound with a hand, but enough escapes to hide the rattling of a filled plastic bag being flung through her open window.

Behind Gretha a revolver pokes through the window, followed by CARL, young, skinny and knackered. He falls to the floor with a nearly inaudible thump.

Carl raises up to his full height, with his revolver in one hand and a plastic bag full of goods in the other, just as Gretha turns.

A sob, her last sob, sticks in her throat with her breath. She freezes to the spot.

Gretha makes a move for the door, but Carl is faster, dropping his bag of goods in the sprint. Gretha only manages to open the door a sliver before Carl slams it shut.

Carl's free hand clasps firmly over Gretha's mouth. He presses Gretha up against Harry Styles, with the revolver next to her head. A friendly reminder of his control.

CARL
(keeping his voice low)
Where's your roommate?

Carl's face is close enough to Gretha's for her to see the yellow stains on his teeth.

Gretha gives a wide-eyed shake of her head.

CARL (CONT'D)
Do you need a reminder of what
would happen to you if someone
found out I was here?

Gretha seems to ponder this question for the shortest of moments, before she shakes her head.

Carl slowly releases pressure from Gretha's mouth. He turns to stand lookout at the window, picking up his bag along the way. It rattles.

GRETHA
(re: bag)
What's in the bag?

CARL
My own business.

The flashing blue lights are only faintly visible coming in through the window. That, as well as the street lamps, are the only sources of light in the otherwise dark room.

Gretha waits patiently for further instructions, becoming more aware of her own semi-nudity. None forthcoming--

GRETHA
What would you like me to do?

CARL
(without removing his gaze
from "outside")
As long as it's in silence, I
couldn't give a shit.

INT. DORM ROOM - NIGHT

Carl ducks out of sight when the flashing blue lights get momentarily brighter.

Gretha, still in her stained towel, sits on her bed, arms folded. She seems unafraid, almost to the point of defiance.

GRETHA
What did you do?

CARL
What do you care?

GRETHA
I... I don't care.

CARL
I'm a stranger with a gun to your
head. For now that's all that you
need to worry about. Now shut up. I
don't argue with children.

This comment hits a nerve with Gretha.

GRETHA
(mumbling)
I'm not a child.

CARL
What?

Gretha answers Carl with an almost convincing scowl of defiance, combined with a moment of silence.

GRETHA
I can cry out, you know?

CARL
I can shoot you, you know?

GRETHA

The whole dorm will hear you.
They'll call the cops and you'll go
to jail. What do you think about
that?

Carl considers this a moment, shifting his attention from the window to Gretha.

CARL

Perhaps. But you won't be any less
dead.

Finally, a flash of fear appears in Gretha's eyes. More importantly, for Carl, this seems to shut her up.

INT. DORM ROOM - NIGHT

The door opened just a sliver, Carl peers down the hall. Echoing footsteps tells him that it isn't clear. He closes the door.

Gretha seems to have taken over the lookout point at the window. The faintly flashing blue lights indicate that this route isn't clear yet either.

Carl reaches for the light switch.

GRETHA

Don't!

Carl's raised eyebrow asks "why?"

GRETHA (CONT'D)

It's lights out. If the Matron
finds out that my lights are still
on, she'll come see what's up.

Carl nods his appreciation at the warning.

He turns his attention to Harry Styles.

CARL

Fan?

Gretha shakes her head, embarrassed.

CARL (CONT'D)

(re: poster! Duh!)

No?

Gretha shakes her head again.

GRETHA

Liezl de Swardt posted on Instagram that she hooked up with his bodyguard when she was in Istanbul.

CARL

Who the hell is Liezl de Swardt?

GRETHA

She's dating Stephan Els. The captain of the first team.

CARL

So you pretend to be a fan because the popular girl is one?

Gretha answers with a silent pout.

CARL (CONT'D)

If Liezl de Swardt jumped off a bridge, would you do it?

To Carl's surprise, and annoyance, Gretha seems to consider his question with greater care than is needed.

CARL (CONT'D)

What is the matter with y--

KARLIEN (V.O.)

(through door)

Belinda? Could I get a tampon?

Carl and Gretha both become frantic when the door starts opening, searching for a hiding spot. With no other options, Carl flattens himself against the wall behind the door.

KARLIEN, a fresh faced eighteen year old, fully opens the door revealing a semi-dressed, semi-stained Gretha caught in headlights.

KARLIEN

(re: empty bed)

Where's Belinda?

Carl catches Gretha's attention, raising the revolver to his lips in a "shhh" gesture. He makes the warning clear by raising the revolver level with Karlien's head.

Gretha's wide eyes shift from Carl to Karlien.

GRETHA

She... she moved in with Lonél.
Room 22.

Karlien looks Gretha up and down in disgust.

KARLIEN

Of course... Why are you still in
your bath towel?

Gretha hesitates, unable to stop herself from stealing a
glance at Carl.

GRETHA

I'm... I'm not--

KARLIEN

(sniffing)

Gross. You smell like last night's
stew.

Clearly intended to embarrass, which, clearly, hits its mark,
Gretha turns her eyes to her toes.

KARLIEN (CONT'D)

Cheers, Bully Beef.

Karlien closes the door.

Carl relaxes.

GRETHA

Karlien?

Karlien pushes the door open.

Carl shoots Gretha a scowl, raising the revolver again at
Karlien.

GRETHA (CONT'D)

I have a tampon for you.

KARLIEN

Euwh. I don't want one of your
jumbo tampons.

GRETHA

I don't use jumbo--

But Karlien doesn't wait for the end of the sentence. She
closes the door, leaving Carl fuming.

GRETHA (CONT'D)

(to Carl)

I don't use jumbo tampons.

Carl responds with angry silence... but only for a second before his hand is around her throat and his revolver pointed between her frightened eyes.

Carl aggressively pushes Gretha towards her bed.

CARL

You little bitch. If you can't keep
that pretty mouth of yours shut,
I'll give you another hole in your
face.

Gretha puts her hands on Carl's, the one around her throat, in a strangely intimate moment, making Carl pause.

Carl composes himself. He gives Gretha a final shove. She sits down hard on her bed, giving Carl a strange look that definitely isn't the intended fear...

Carl takes up his lookout position at the window, where the flashing blue lights persevere.

GRETHA

You think I have a pretty mouth?

Carl answers her with a lingering glare. Then returns to his lookout. Gretha cracks a shy, suppressed smile.

INT. DORM ROOM - NIGHT

Gretha keeps lookout again, while Carl sits on the bed. The flashing blue lights are ever present.

Carl toys with his revolver, attracting the attention of Gretha. She stares.

CARL

What?

GRETHA

Nothing.

Carl sighs.

A beat.

GRETHA (CONT'D)

Did you kill someone?

This evokes a smirk from Carl.

CARL

Not yet.

The implication of Carl's statement flies well over Gretha's head.

GRETHA

Did you know that someone held
Meera Jordan at gunpoint in her own
house? Her entire family.

Carl is visibly annoyed.

CARL

Who the... I don't know who Meera
Jordan is!

GRETHA

(in a "duh" fashion)
Meera Jordan is head girl.

Carl is stunned silent for a beat.

CARL

Do you really... Look, nothing of
this...

(gestures to dorm bedroom)
... matters. For Meera Jordan and
Karlien Jumbo Tampon this is as
good as it ever gets. For people
like you and me, life gets better
after high school.

Again Gretha seems to miss the point. She looks Carl up and down.

GRETHA

Well, high school must have been
particularly shit for you.

Carl takes a deep, annoyed breath, shaking his head.

CARL

Kids.

INT. DORM ROOM - NIGHT

Gretha peers down the hall through a sliver in the door.

Carl leans out of the window. The blue lights are gone.

Gretha turns to Carl, somewhat sad. She nods.

Carl winks at Gretha. Bag of goods in one hand, revolver in the other, he puts his foot through the window.

CARL
Well, cheers... Bully Beef.

Carl teases Gretha with a smile. She answers him with a sad one of her own. She knows it wasn't meant to hurt.

Carl ponders.

CARL (CONT'D)
Hey. Don't let them get you down.
It gets better. I promise.

GRETHA
I know.

Carl gives a final smile, then ducks out of sight--

GRETHA (CONT'D)
Wait!

Carl's face reappears.

GRETHA (CONT'D)
Do you really think I'm a child?

Eyes locked on his, Gretha opens her towel. She looks down at her body, then back up at Carl. The question stands.

Carl swallows hard.

He has to decide between two forms of freedom...

Carl makes his decision. He climbs back through the window.

He strides over to Gretha, dropping his bag and revolver on his way. He takes her face in his hands and kisses her. Passionately.

The pair fall on Gretha's bed with Carl on top.

It's not long before Carl's pants descend to below his butt.

CLICK.

Carl pulls away, looking down at Gretha, confused.

BANG!

Blood paints the ceiling red.

Carl looks down at where their bodies make contact. Then back up at Gretha, silently asking 'why?'

Blood appears at his lips. Then he drops down onto Gretha, motionless between her legs.

Gretha, with blood spatters all over her face, wiggles her hand free from between herself and Carl's dead weight. She drops Carl's revolver on the floor.

Gretha scrunches up her face. She blinks. Rapidly. Then tears start forming, shortly followed by racking sobs, just as the door flies open, letting in light, a hysterical Matron and concerned faces.

INT. CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Waiting in passage-formation on either side of the corridor is, seemingly, the entire population of the girls' dormitory. Girls line the walls.

Wrapped in a blanket and with blood mingled tears streaming down her cheeks, Gretha is led between the double line of Girls by Matron on one arm and a PARAMEDIC on the other.

Every single Girl holds out a concerned hand of solidarity towards Gretha, giving a reassuring touch as she passes.

Red and blue lights flash.

Gretha looks up. Remnants of a grin touch the corners of her pretty mouth.

THE END