

MIRROR IMAGE

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Writing Prize 2016

Hamilton, New Zealand, 25 July 1981

Rain spat at Meggie as she trudged home through storm-darkened streets. Being mocked at school for opposing the Springbok tour had put her in a black mood. She had tried to explain, slowly and simply, that playing rugby with South Africa was “kind of supporting apartheid”, but her schoolmates had laughed. Meggie kicked a tin can lying in the gutter. Those stupid kids.

Overnight, Meggie hatched a plan to show them. She would join the big protest that afternoon at the rugby field. Along with hundreds of others, she would try to stop the hotly anticipated game. There was one hitch: her parents had forbidden her to go because it could be dangerous. That didn't matter. They didn't need to know.

At two o'clock, Meggie left the house, saying she was going to a friend's place and would be back in a few hours – surely enough time for a protest.

As she approached the stadium, she stared about in wonder. Hundreds of protesters were there, all risking injury or arrest to bring down apartheid.

The next few moments were overwhelming and passed in a blur. Meggie was swept along in a people-tide. The crowd surged forward and broke down the fence. Everyone rushed onto the field. Finally, after much confusion, loudspeakers boomed, “The game has been cancelled.”

A firm grip on her shoulder made Meggie look up. A policeman stared back. “This isn't a good place for a young girl. I'll take you back to the station. You can wait for your parents there.” He probably expected a chagrined look but instead got a big smile. Proud of the way she'd stood up for her beliefs, Meggie grinned at the TV cameras and gave a quick, shy wave as she was frog-marched away.



Johannesburg, South Africa, 25 July 1981

Crickets sang in the cloudless, star-sprinkled African sky. Remnant sounds from a late-night party drifted through the darkness. Zodwa sat with her knees to her chest, listening to her brothers' steady breathing. She couldn't sleep. Sometime in the next hour, her father would fetch them to watch the rugby on their neighbour's new television. Zodwa wasn't especially a rugby fan, but it excited her to watch a game in the hope that the Springboks would be beaten.

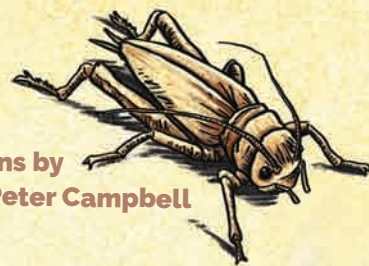
Softly the door creaked open, and Zodwa's dad crept in. Her woke her brothers before coming over for her. They dressed swiftly, then stepped out into the crisp night. Their neighbour's was warm and inviting as Zodwa and her family entered and settled down to watch the rugby.

The broadcast had barely begun when what looked like a swarm of angry hornets rushed onto the field. The game didn't start. Excited talking broke out around her, but Zodwa's eyes stayed glued to

the screen. The hornets morphed into protesters carrying signs and chanting. Their message was unclear. Didn't they like rugby?

Finally Zodwa could make out what they were saying: "One two three four. We don't want your racist tour!" She read the words on a sign: "End apartheid for good." Breathless, she realised what the protest was about. The people were saying no to apartheid!

Peering closely at the crowd on the small black-and-white screen, Zodwa spotted a girl her age being escorted away by a policeman. Instead of cowering, the girl kept a brave face and smiled broadly. A kid, on the other side of the world, standing up for Zodwa and her people's rights! At this moment, Zodwa knew for sure that things were going to change.



illustrations by
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Mirror Image

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