

Praise for Tony Peake

A Summer Tide

'A controlled and subtly crafted novel that deals with a deep truth of human experience: flawed love that is yet worth struggling to preserve.'
Barry Unsworth

'One of the best novels I have read for a long time... All the best aspects of the English literary tradition are brought together here and woven into a bright whole... destined to become a kind of a classic.'
Alma Hromic, *Cape Argus*

'Peake's voice is individual, lucid, moving.'
Madeleine Keane, *Image Magazine*

Son to the Father

'A mystical vision of ordinary life... brilliant and rapturous.'
Hugh Barnes, *Glasgow Herald*

'A novel of constraint and reflection... loaded with wit, entertaining double meanings and cultural asides.'
Douglas Reid Skinner, *The Star and SA Times International*

'(Peake) writes with dry ease on the difficulty of being alive.'
David Hughes, *Mail on Sunday*

Derek Jarman

'Peake's extraordinary achievement is to have captured the spirit of each age, tracking the growth of Jarman the artist and man in the context of the changing world around him... Every great life is made greater by a great Life, and Peake has given Derek Jarman the biography he deserves.'

Simon Edge, *Gay Times*

'Outstanding ... the thorough-going life story that the British experimental director and gay crusader deserved.'

Nigel Andrews, *Financial Times*

'The best kind of biographical writing – simple and transparent – so you see through to the life.'

James Hopkin, *Independent on Sunday*

TONY PEAKE

NORTH
FACING

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*For my children and my grandchildren –
they are the future*

'As a child you can't really comprehend the meaning of far-off events; you live more like an animal, in the present world of the senses and within the dimly perceived horizons set by adults.'

Justin Cartwright, *The Song Before It Is Sung*

'I have lived elsewhere all my life.'

C. J. Driver, 'Elsewhere'

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STICKS AND STONES, Paul's mother would say, *may break your bones, but words will never hurt you.*

Remembering, I have only to close my eyes and there he is, my childhood self, pleading before another.

'But this term you said to try again! I might get lucky. That's what you said. You practically promised!'

It's 1962. Wednesday, October 3rd, 1962, to be precise, in the playground of a private boarding school in Pretoria.

'*Might*,' said the other. 'I said *might*. I promised nothing.'

'But that isn't fair!'

'Come again?'

'What you're doing, du Toit. It isn't fair.'

'And who are you – hey, Harvey, of all people? – to tell an *ou* what is and isn't fair?'

'Saying no to me now when only last term—'

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'Stupid *sout-piel*.'

He had with him some of his club: Strover; Labuschagne; Slug, of course. Who instantly provided the gleeful chorus: '*Sout-piel! Sout-piel!*' Someone with one foot in England, the other in South Africa, a penis that dangles, undecided, in the sea. *Salt cock* would be the slang's exact translation from the Afrikaans.

'Just because my parents were born ...' began Paul, though no sooner had he started along this line of defence than he realised its futility. Even supposing he found the right combination of words – words, again! – his adversaries still possessed a stronger one. So he just retreated, as he invariably did before du Toit and his cohorts, to lick his figurative wounds – the sort that only words can cause – elsewhere.

The playground of the school attended by Paul and du Toit, Strover and Labuschagne and the so-called Slug – along with over a hundred other boys, all presently milling about – was an area of ochre earth lying between the main building with its attached line of red-brick classrooms, and the cool green of the playing fields beyond, which was where Paul now headed because, since the fields were out of bounds during break, there he could temporarily escape du Toit's relentless teasing.

It had all started in their second year, when Paul had been rash enough to take into school one of his most treasured possessions: a diary given him by his maternal grandmother. The one who'd also suggested, at around the same time, that he be sent to live with her in England after what had happened in a place called Sharpeville. It

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was a five-year diary and had come wrapped in layers of rustling tissue paper. Just as soft, and wonderfully smooth, was its white leather cover. Though best of all for Paul was that it boasted a brass lock and a miniature key. He could write there what he would never dare write anywhere else.

But then the diary had somehow, sickeningly, vanished from his locker, resulting in such panicked misery that, even now, the mere thought of it could make his whole body prickle. The thought that by his own foolishness – for it had been foolish, incredibly foolish, to bring the diary into school, he saw that now – he'd made himself so vulnerable.

Stupid, stupid, stupid!

And how on earth was he to get it back? That was the next thing. He hadn't the remotest idea, and it was only at the end of a long, nerve-racked week – on the Saturday before lights-out – that Bentley major, in the bed alongside his, had put a stop to Paul's covert nightly sobbing by naming du Toit as the culprit. Though yet more tears had needed to be shed before du Toit had eventually got his right-hand man, Lombard, to fetch the diary, which he'd then carelessly tossed, along with its little key, on to Paul's bed, saying he'd not found it interesting enough to keep.

That was when the teasing had started.

Sissy! Mommy's boy! Coward!

And another Afrikaans taunt: *Rooi-nek!*

Because naturally the tanned du Toit didn't have anything as shaming as a red neck (unlike the pathetically

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pale Paul, whose mother kept him, as far as was humanly possible, out of the sun). Inescapable du Toit, who was also founder and captain of the school's most desired grouping. His own private club, uniquely configured. With other school gangs, the criteria for membership tended to be imprecise. In order to join du Toit's club, however, consisting as it did of just half a dozen specially chosen friends – ranked, it was said, from one to six – in order to join this club and be assigned a ranking, rumour had it that each potential friend must first perform an introductory task. And then, so as to keep – or improve – his ranking within the club, any number of further tasks, all set by du Toit. Even if, like Lombard, you were number one, you still had to prove yourself. If you didn't, you could very quickly drop down the ranks and face expulsion.

Not easy, then, or straightforward, being a friend of du Toit's. A more sensible boy might have considered himself better off on the outside. But that would have been to ignore the added pressure of Paul's parents. Their always desiring the best for him. Desiring also for him to make them proud; they were constantly going on about that, too. Forever urging him to fit in at school. To make more friends, why didn't he? To belong. They didn't like to think of him as being so lonely, not when they were spending good money on his schooling. Couldn't he try harder? As a favour both to them *and* to himself.

Then news that du Toit's club had recently welcomed an unexpected new member – Slug, ridiculous Slug! – causing something in Paul to snap. If Slug could be invited to join, then surely he could too? Never mind

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'Harvey, of all people' – what about 'Slug, of all people'? Slug who, as his nickname implied, was basically sub-human. Sub-human and repulsive. Fatter, for a start, than anyone else in their class. Short-sighted, too. Bottle-thick spectacles and body parts that wobbled as he walked, like pinkish jelly. But still a friend of du Toit's. The newest recruit. One of the élite.

Personal outrage, parental pressure: it was a potent mix and had, towards the end of last term, catapulted Paul into demanding of du Toit why he couldn't also become a friend. If Slug now was?

It was just before supper, when briefly there was no requirement to be anywhere specific. Except that you were not meant to be in the dormitory. Only after prep were you allowed to return there. Yet this was nevertheless where, in the end, Paul had found du Toit, lying nonchalantly on his bed in a blaze of sunlight.

Their dormitory had once been an upstairs stoep or veranda and, as a result, was largely open to the outside world. Three canvas blinds, now furled, were all that protected it from the elements, hence the copious sunlight flooding the neatly made beds, six of which stood below the open blinds, six against the opposite wall, each separated from its neighbours by a curtained locker, the one place in school (apart from your desk, which was meant only for classroom use) where you could keep items of a personal nature. Bentley major, his recently removed appendix in a bottle. Strover, his collection of signed photographs of the country's cricketers. And Paul – for a bit – his diary. Which was maybe how du Toit had

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come across it? From being alone in the dormitory when he shouldn't have been.

This thought, and the memories it triggered of that agonising week, had encouraged Paul to meet du Toit's gaze head-on and say, 'I'd be better than Slug for a start. Slug's ugly and really clumsy at things.'

'So! Harvey wants to do things for me! That's tit.'

'I just want to know why you think I can't be a friend. We're in the same class, aren't we? The same dormitory. We're both in Spier's General Knowledge Club.'

'What's Spier got to do with it?'

'I'm not so different,' continued Paul breathlessly, 'is what I'm saying. Even though you think I am. *And* I'm never horrid to you.' This, for him, was the clincher. 'So why are you always so horrid to *me*?'

Du Toit smiled. Sharp white teeth in a gilded face. Teeth that distracted Paul from noticing the look of faint speculation in the cool blue eyes.

'Okay,' he said, sitting up. 'Ask again next term. You might get lucky next term.'

Then the bell had rung for supper, bringing the encounter to an end. And now another bell was ringing too, signalling another closure: of morning break, of Paul's false hopes. For, all through the holidays, he'd imagined that in the new term du Toit would be true to his word. He'd be set a task, he'd perform it and hey presto! No more *sout-piel*. No more *rooi-nek*.

It was all so unfair! He'd used the right word, in challenging du Toit. 'Unfair, unfair, unfair!' he repeated aloud, kicking at the edge of the playing field, since in his

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present state it was an equal insult that grass should be allowed to lord it over bare earth.

Then he froze. In the middle distance, the green sweep of the field framed the dark outline of a crouching figure: Pheko, the school groundsman, rewhitening the lines on the pitch in anticipation of that Saturday's inter-school cricket match. Were Pheko to see him kicking his precious field, he'd surely remonstrate. As might another figure Paul also clocked in the middle distance, striding towards the compound where the live-in masters had their bungalows.

There were two such compounds on the edge of the school grounds: a hedged one for staff, out of bounds to boys unless you were invited in – like, say, for Spier's General Knowledge Club – and a smaller, walled grouping of much plainer dwellings, more hut than bungalow, near the ditch where du Toit also had a hut, the one where his own club meetings were held. Here was where the school labourers lived: Pheko and two other men whose names Paul didn't know, plus an indeterminate number of uniformed women who made the beds, swept the corridors, cooked the meals and served at table. Also nameless.

Though Paul could of course easily name the figure striding into the distance: Spier, whose history class came next and already the bell had rung, so why wasn't the master hurrying *towards* the classrooms?

Odd, that.

Pressing the back of a bony wrist into each eye in case of telltale tears, Paul started back across the bare red

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earth of the playground. Past the thatched rondavel at its centre, home to the tuck shop, and past the whitewashed arch nearby, from which hung the school bell. Heading for the line of brick-built classrooms, as red in colour as the playground itself, before which stood a quartet of implacable boys, providers of the gleeful chorus:

'Sout-piel! Sout-piel!'