CHAPTER 4:
Praise the Backstabbers

"Until you realize how easily it is for your mind to be manipulated,
you remain the puppet of someone else's game."
- Evita Ochel

I'm only a cynical bastard if what I say is mostly untrue. This isn't about exceptions such as real leaders and revolutions. This is about "everyday life" wherein we're frustrated at our shrinking living standards but still able to braai or dance the weekend.

Politicians from the majors know where they stand with us. They must be nice to get allocated an office by their party. Then we're a nuisance to be tolerated the next five years. If they engage, we'll keep asking for more. So, it's better to speak in generalisations and avoid us as much as possible until we're mentally exhausted into silence. Unless it arrives with destruction, protest has as much chance of survival as a television news cycle.

But the politicians repetitively turn up for the Media to say something they know we want to hear. It makes no difference whether it's positive or negative, they just must resonate our too often uneducated opinion about the latest topic. They need us to know they exist so that we can forgive them before the next election.

We're conditioned to hope and hate, forget and repeat... and live in a box designed by someone else's intention for us.

I'm inside a 'pretty' box that feels real, taught to believe that everything outside is terrifying darkness. No matter how much my little-little box keeps shrinking-shrinking, I'm going to bend and squeeze to stay inside it... and never discover that inside is the lie, and everything outside is all that matters.

Constitutional democracy is more for the politicians than voters... which makes them fear other politicians more than us. There's always someone who wants their chair, or to fight them for the chair with the bigger cushion. From our viewpoint, them switching places doesn't change much. Different faces don't alter the nature of politics, only who builds the boxes.

We've little to do with who rules the DA or the ANC. The laughing Jacob Zuma is the ultimate proof of that. But the same logic applies to President Cyril Ramaphosa and DA Federal Executive Chairman James Selfe - they live in a world of chairs not boxes.
You’re right if you pointed out that there’s leeway at the bottom. At some point, they had to climb out of the box and onto the chair. It’s more probable that someone lowered a ladder. No matter how they got there, ask yourself how many politicians names you knew when they got elected in your backyard. And if they later got kicked out of Council for being a thief, was it because of Public action... or because another politician or their own party wanted their chair? And of all those thieves that lost their chairs, how many got sent to that box called jail?

There are too many useful idiots and not enough anarchists.

It isn't democracy, just fucking boxes and chairs.

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Much that went wrong in Knysna began under Municipal Manager Lauren Waring. Those wrongdoings couldn't have happened without support from Director Finance Grant Easton. It was logical that in order to maintain cover-up, Easton would have to replace her when she left, the same way Vogt had replaced Eck at Knysna Tourism.

Like Van Eck, Easton was a deeply questionable character who'd become a scapegoat for DA necessity.

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I publicly predicted that Easton would become Municipal Manager. I almost lost my psychic status when he never applied.

A different white male emerged as the top candidate. But instead of hiring him, the Municipality re-advertised the position, stating they wanted an equity appointment. That meant they wanted a black or coloured person. The excuse for wasteful expenditure on more advertising contained a smidgeon of truth since the Municipality was behind on its equity goals. The illogic was not having advertised the stipulation the first time. What followed can only be explained as cronyism.

The previous winning white candidate was strangely allowed to reapply. That made perverse sense when Easton applied too. Maybe his presence was meant to be less conspicuous with other white folk in a black space.

Legally, the employer is required to adhere 100% to the requirements of the advertised post. That translated into the applicants needing to speak two main languages. Easton should've been immediately disqualified as a Scotsman who only knew English.
Before that, Easton had bizarrely been made Director Finance despite not having an accounting degree. He only had a Bachelor of Arts in Public Administration. Without that ill-gotten director's experience, it would have been further impossible to justify his application for the Municipal Manager post. During the short-listing process, it was stated that Easton's foreign qualification would have to be verified. That only happened long after he'd gotten the job, after Campbell and I had separately made complaint. The situation smelled a lot like Vogt's selection as Tourism's CEO, when his previous employers weren't contacted.

The concern is that when the wrong people get the job as a government official, they're compromised, possibly loyal to those who gave them the job rather than to the Public who pay their salary.

It was even stranger that the white and less qualified Easton was awarded the position when competing against a black candidate with a doctorate in Public Administration.

Roy Steele was the private contractor from ODS Consultants who assisted the selection panel that decided the appointment of Easton. It was rumoured that Steele and the panel were in disagreement.

The only logical explanation for Easton's hiring is that it was predetermined. The interviewers included those involved with him in maladministration and corruption. Deputy Mayor Esme Edge and ANC Chief Whip Stephen de Vries were both Tourism Board members, and Wolmarans was Mayor during that period. And it's possible that De Vries had been bribed through having his studies illegally paid by the Municipality, approved by Easton.

But Easton's appointment was delayed. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Mayor Wolmarans was forced to withdraw her motion that would've gotten him the job. That u-turn happened after DA Regional Manager Jaco Londt entered the building, calling an emergency meeting with the caucus. On her return, a clearly rattled Wolmarans told Council she was withdrawing her motion until she received the full ISDF report. That could only imply that she was waiting for Easton to be cleared of wrongdoing. It also suggested that her DA bosses in Cape Town were already aware it wasn't looking good.

I assumed our activism efforts had forced the DA to want to steer clear of another controversial decision, at least until they had a better plan in place.

In contradiction, Wolmarans re-tabled her motion a few weeks later, on 26 March 2015. She'd obviously been given the go-ahead. I don't know why but I'm guessing
she'd been told that her bosses would protect her.

Wolmarans wouldn't answer COPE Councillor Elrick van Aswegen why she'd lied to Council regarding the re-advertisement, the equity issue, and for the appointment requiring the ISDF report. Speaker Eleanore Spies never pressed her to explain, chose the DA's side, and called a vote knowing they were the majority.

Easton was made Municipal Manager and paid more than legally allowed. He was dubbed as the “Captain of the Pirate Ship”. Even the Knysna-Plett Herald carried that front-page title.

Campbell, through the Knysna Ratepayer's Association (KRA), questioned MEC Bredell regarding Easton's salary and his unverified qualification.

Bredell's \textit{response was bizarre}, stating that Mayor Wolmarans had the right to negotiate a premium as Council had given her the power to do so. I can't imagine how local nepotism trumps national law. And that was after the controversy of Waring's excessive salary which we'd been told would be rectified with her replacement. Regards the qualification, Bredell should've supplied an official verification from the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). Instead, he unprofessionally used the results of a website search engine. The real verification would only happen after my complaint to Parliament.

The \textit{second Parliamentary hearing} for my Love Knysna Petition was held early 2016. In the presence of Wolmarans and Edge (who'd changed her name to Esme Jeffreys), Easton dismissed all my allegations without addressing any of the main facts I'd presented. It was clear that he represented the Municipality and the local DA because Wolmarans verbally deferred to him in the presence of Edge, Paulsen and Christopher Bezuidenhout, the Municipality's Communications Manager. None of them realised that their lies would be explosively exposed and that the DA would backstab Easton and Edge.

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Back in Knysna, politics continued to be nasty business but thankfully aimed inwards.

Councillor Peter Myers had hatched a plan to take over the Council when he was still the Chairman of the DA Constituency. He'd since replaced Richard Dawson as my Ward 10 Councillor.

Susan Campbell delivered a \textit{complaint against Easton} just before the 2016 Local Elections. Even though we'd long stood against Easton and shared notes, she
suspiciously refused to share her evidence with me. Her odd behaviour was emphasised by the fact that I’d given her the opportunity to speak in Parliament against Easton and the ISDF. It had gained her television coverage.

The DA rarely acts on complaints, and hadn’t ever on mine, but Campbell’s friends were Peter Myers, Eleanore Spies and Mark Willemse. All had entered Council through consecutive by-elections, allegedly as part of Myer’s plan. The DA caucus had split roughly in half. Wolmarans led the other side. The timing of the complaint was obviously intended to be damaging. It worked. They won, Wolmarans lost.

The election happened just after the disciplinary procedure against Easton began.

Every DA councillor supporting Wolmarans was removed. They were the scoundrels the DA had hypocritically boasted about for repeatedly helping the Municipality score clean audits from an Auditor General that seemed to have taken sides with the DA instead of the Public. But politics is marketing, and marketing can cockroach quickly in different direction. Cape Town was backing Myers (but would turn against him the following year).

Wolmarans was supposed to have been dropped too but was allegedly saved through her friendship with ex-Independent Democrat (ID) mate, Patricia de Lille, who was then the DA’s Mayor of Cape Town and one of the candidate interviewers.

De Lille and Helen Zille had once upon a time despised each other. Zille had been more of a liberal then. De Lille had belonged to the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) whose slogan was chillingly ‘One Settler One Bullet’. But De Lille left them to start the ID. And the DA had needed a partner to stabilise their control of the City of Cape Town, willing to overlook De Lille’s history for political convenience. The DA would do act similarly in 2016 when informally working with the white-hating Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) to gain control of the Tshwane and Nelson Mandela Bay metros. The ID dissolved as an identity, joining the DA in 2010. The DA used the foothold to take control of the province.

We may never have proof of what deal they made. However, it was notable that when Zille became Premier, De Lille replaced her as Mayor of Cape Town’s three million residents. De Lille was one of four ID members who got that title. Wolmarans, who failed to win her ward in the election, was top of the proportional representative (PR) list. That meant that the DA made her the Mayor of Knysna. The Public had nothing to do with it. I’d been living there for two years and never heard of her.

What most never realised is that the ID had hedged their bet in case they were
betrayed. De Lille deserves a lot of the flack she receives but kudos to her self-preservation smarts. The ID would only officially become members of the DA at the 2016 Local Election. Until then, De Lille had leverage. And that allegedly saved Wolmarans from the dustbin where her comrades went. Wolmarans was moved sideways into the position of Speaker (which paid the same salary).

The DA moans about the ANC’s “cadre deployment” but the DA do the same without using that term. The USA was as devious when they never named their segregation laws collectively as something like “Apartheid”. Controlling the narrative and marketing are the legs of the beast that’s politics.

My consolation was that Deputy Mayor Edge, who’d been involved in an intimidation campaign against me, got kicked out as gracefully as an old bucket. Advocate Julie Seton, her life partner and one of my main protagonists, was also placed too far down the PR list to get elected. They knew their fate before the election results. They defended Easton, criticised the DA and supported the ACDP. Betrayal can be a funny bitch called spite. But its even funnier that later, when the winning faction became the underdogs, those 'ladies' were back supporting the DA, the other faction of course.

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Easton was suspended on 30 August 2016. The charges against him included:

- Unlawfully enabled and allowed the continuous use of the local premium preference policy [which allowed suppliers to circumvent B.E.E.]. Failed to implement the recommendations from the Auditor General, causing irregular expenditure of R7,924,285 (which means the Public was overcharged/robbed).

- In respect of the ISDF tender, illegally enabled the appointment of Knysna Creative Heads Consortium at a value of R2,749,338.

- In respect of Jam Electrical, an irregular expenditure of R1,133,234 (which the husband of Manon McDonald, Manager of the Electrical Department, received for his one-man company).

- On behalf of the Knysna Municipality, entered into two unlawful loan agreements with ABSA Bank Limited for the amounts of R17,301,600 and R1,720,000.

- Misled Council in respect of disciplinary proceedings against Budget Manager Avitha Sunkar (who'd been suspended, costing the taxpayer almost a million in stay-at-home pay).
- Inappropriate personal bias expressed to Susan Campbell in 2014 regarding a tender, to the effect that he would not, on behalf of the Municipality, “...do business with those Indians? I am sure Avitha [Sunkar] got them involved.”

- The arrogant and disrespectful statement to the Auditor General: "With respect, it appears that the Auditor General is auditing on the basis of Regulation. If that is the case, then, in future, Knysna will resort to the meaningless performance system of tick boxes i.e. do a report regardless of the value or meaning of the report. That is not what performance management is about but, if that is what the Auditor General wants and expects and audits, then that is what you will get. Put bluntly, this approach adds nothing to service delivery but everything to compliance, and compliance is made up nonsense.”

- An affair with an employee in his department which, over an extended period of time, caused significant staff problems.

- Irregularities in respect of town planning approvals undertaken whilst Council was on holiday in the middle of 2016.

The disciplinary wasn’t about truth and justice. It was about controlling the mess the DA had dug itself into. It was also about trying to keep Knysna blue.

My five years of complaints were as irrelevant as me been proven right. The DA and the Municipality never contacted me. Campbell would start buffering me regarding matters involved the new DA faction, led by Peter Myers who'd became Deputy Mayor. She was part of the faction, not as DA but as a very active supporter of Myers.

Several charges against Easton had direct relevance to my Love Knysna Petition. It was clear proof that only a few months before, the DA had lied to Parliament. Unfortunately, the National Council of Provinces (NCOP) has failed to hold them to account.

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The sixth day of Easton's disciplinary hearing was held on 15 March 2017. He'd heard the evidence against him and was supposed to begin his defence. Instead, he quit. The Municipality agreed to pay him his past bonuses and salary for the next six weeks. A similarity to what had happened with Shaun van Eck at Knysna Tourism. The waste of Public funds made my skin crawl.

Maintaining hypocrisy, the Municipality proclaimed victory. They stated in the Knysna-Plett Herald that the evidence against Easton had been "overwhelming". After I
pointed out that the Municipality had gone to the newspapers first, before posting it on their own website, the Municipality uploaded it, confirming the word “overwhelming”.

If "overwhelming", why had they not concurrently initiated criminal charges against him (as the law required)? Why did they not hold him financially liable?

I believe forcing him to quit was the only goal. In that way, a liability was removed, his accomplices were off the hook, and a new DA faction had been empowered.

Subterfuge is expensive. In total, it had cost the Public approximately R2.5-million for the DA to get rid of Easton.

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DA MEC Bredell recommended Johnny Douglas as Acting Municipal Manager. Douglas had previously been overpaid by the DA to leave when they’d taken over five years earlier. Douglas failed to respond to my request for the information I’ve related to you. I discovered the charge sheet against Easton in an envelope that had been squeezed into a crack in my front door.

That wasn’t my first anonymous informant. Some had scores to settle. Others were simply afraid to lose their jobs. I hope I get to shake their hands one day. They’re a happy reason to drink alcohol. I’m sure some of them are reading this book – thank you for assisting my pursuit of truth.

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Easton agreed to meet me but cancelled with the excuse that he was needed in Cape Town. He said he was now a hired gun who had to go wherever money was offered.
Johnny Douglas (Knysna Municipal Manager)
Grant Easton (Municipal Manager 2015-2017)