



FROM WORLD WAR II TO THE PRESENT

37. Nelson Mandela

Nelson Mandela

***Long Walk to Freedom* (1995)**

What is your name?  159

Long Walk to Freedom tells the story of Nelson Mandela (1918-2013), who became President of South Africa in 1994, and is about the struggle for freedom in South Africa, led by Mandela as an iconic anti-apartheid freedom fighter.

On my way down to Thaba 'Nchu I passed through Kroonstad, a conservative Free State town about 120 miles south of Johannesburg. I was driving up a hill and saw two white boys ahead of me on bicycles.

- My driving was still a bit unsteady, and I came too close to them, one of whom
- 5 suddenly made a turn without signalling and we collided. He was knocked off his bicycle and was groaning when I got out of the car to help him. He had his arms out, indicating that I should pick him up, but just as I was about to do so, a white truck driver yelled for me not to touch the boy. The truck driver scared the child, who then dropped his arms as though he did not want me to pick him up. The
- 10 boy was not badly hurt, and the truck driver took him to the police station, which was close by.

- The local police arrived a short time later, and the white sergeant took one look at me and said, 'Kaffer,jy sal kak vandag!' (Kaffir, you will shit today!) I was shaken by the incident and the violence of his words, but I told him in no uncertain terms that
- 15 I would not, and certainly would not just because a policeman had told me to. At this, the sergeant took out his notebook to record my particulars. Afrikaans policeman were surprised if a black man could speak English, much less answer back.

- After I identified myself, he turned to the car, which he proceeded to ransack¹. From under the floor mat² he pulled out a copy of the left-wing weekly, The
- 20 Guardian, which I had hidden immediately after the accident. He looked at the title, and like a pirate with his booty³ cried 'My word, we've caught a communist!'

1. **proceeded to ransack:** it. *perquisì a fondo*

2. **the floor mat:** it. *la pedanina ai piedi del sedile*

3. **booty:** it. *bottino*

Four hours later he
returned...

'What is your name?'

25 'Mandela', I said.

'No, the first one,' he said
I told him.

'Nelson', the sergeant
said, as if he were talking
30 to a boy, 'I want to help
you resume your journey.

But if you are going to be
difficult with me I will
have no alternative but to
35 be difficult with you and
lock you up for the
night.' That brought me
down to earth and I
consented to everything.

40 I resumed my journey late that night, and the next morning I was travelling
through the district of Excelsior when my car ground to a halt. I had run out of
petrol. I walked to a nearby farmhouse and explained in English to an elderly
white lady that I would like to buy some petrol. As she was closing the door, she said,
'I don't have any petrol for you.' I tramped two miles to the next farm, and
45 chastened by my unsuccessful first effort⁴, tried a different approach. I asked to see
the farmer, and when he appeared I assumed a humble demeanour⁵, 'My baas has
run out of petrol⁶,' I said. (Baas, the Afrikaans word for boss or master, signifies
subservience.) Friendly and helpful, the farmer helped me.



4. **I tramped ... effort:** it. *Ho scarpinato per due miglia fino alla fattoria successiva e, frenato dal fallimento del mio primo tentativo*

5. **demeanour:** it. *atteggiamento*

6. **My baas has run out of petrol:** it. *Il mio padrone è rimasto senza benzina*