

FRUIT OF A POISONED TREE

A true story of murder and the miscarriage of justice

By: **Antony Albeker**

(To be released in all major bookshops and on Kalahari.net by 24 May 2010)

In June 2005, **Fred van der Vyver**, a young actuary and the son of a wealthy Eastern Cape farming family, was charged with murdering his girlfriend, **Inge Lotz**, allegedly bludgeoning her to death with a hammer as she lay on a couch in her lounge.

The case against Van der Vyver seemed overwhelming. His behaviour at the time of the murder appeared suspicious and incriminating, and a letter, penned by Inge on the morning of her death, suggested that the two had been fighting. But it was forensic evidence that seemed to prove his guilt: his fingerprints were found at the scene, one of his shoes was matched to a blood stain on the bathroom floor, and traces of blood were found on an ornamental hammer that had been given to him by the victim's parents.

And yet, in one of the most sensational and controversial murder trials in South African legal history, Van der Vyver's lawyers sought to turn the tables on the police, accusing them of fabricating evidence and lying to the judge.

In **Fruit of a Poisoned Tree**, prize-winning author Antony Albeker takes you into the heat of this epic courtroom battle. Albeker's eye-witness account of the trial presents the reader with all the evidence and testimony of the trial, while also placing it in the context of a society and a justice system that are being stretched to breaking point.

It was the most sensational murder trial of the past two decades. For ten months during 2007, Fred van der Vyver stood trial, accused of using an ornamental hammer to bludgeon his girlfriend Inge Lotz to death.

When the trial began in February 2007, a guilty verdict seemed certain: the police had found his fingerprints at the scene, the alleged murder weapon had been found in his car, and a blood stain on the bathroom floor had been matched to one of his shoes. Yet, after a high-profile trial, in which some of the world's leading forensic investigators testified, and which cost his family more than R10 million, Van der Vyver was acquitted.

But the story is far from over. It has already attracted the attention of the world's largest association of professional forensic investigators, the International Association for Identification (IAI). The outcome of the trial, however, was rejected by the family of Inge Lotz, who have only recently withdrawn a law suit against him. Van der Vyver, in turn, is suing the Minister of Police for nearly R50 million, alleging that all the evidence against him was fabricated by detectives.

Acclaimed author Antony Albeker sat through the entire trial and, in **Fruit of a Poisoned Tree**, he explores the extraordinary circumstances in which the justice system failed both **Fred van der Vyver** and **Inge Lotz**. Part courtroom drama, part investigative journalism, Albeker enters the heart of the challenges confronting the judicial system in South Africa today.

Fruit of a Poisoned Tree is Antony Albeker's third book about crime and justice in South Africa. His first, *The Dirty Work of Democracy*, won the Recht Malan prize for non-fiction and was short-listed for the Sunday Times Alan Paton award. His second, *A Country at War with Itself*, is widely regarded as one of the most authoritative accounts of the reasons for South Africa's crisis of violence and of what to do to rectify it.

Praise for Fruit of a Poisoned Tree:

"Fruit of a Poisoned Tree is an important contribution to understanding the textures and dynamics of certain aspects of South African culture and specifically of the machinations of the criminal justice system.

Altbeker excels in his relentless and meticulous re-arguing of the Lotz murder case, obsessively picking through evidence and testimonies, like a latterday Sherlock Holmes, and bringing into play not only an astute judgment of facts and character, but also offering a compelling analysis of the degeneration of the investigative prowess of law enforcers.

It is a chilling revelation of the rotten state of the administrative capacity and the professional bankruptcy of policing in South Africa. This is obligatory reading for those interested in the current state of the nation.

It reads like a thriller and is utterly un-put-down-able. It leaves the reader with serious food for thought.

It almost convinces one that fiction has become redundant in this country."

– Marlene van Niekerk, author of **Triomf** and **Agaat**

"It's a legal thriller, a murder mystery, a social commentary, a bit of history and a travelogue of the

most sensational court case of the past decade. It is exhaustively researched, beautifully written,

totally mesmerising and absolutely riveting. My wife is reading it now

– I'll have to fix my own dinner for the next few nights."

- Deon Meyer, author of **Blood Safari** and **Thirteen Hours**

"South African literature has not seen true crime of this standard for a very long time.

Antony Albeker has married an expert's knowledge of the criminal justice system with a storyteller's

flair for narrative and suspense. The result is a book that provides rare insight into the often compromised nature of our courts, yet reads like a high-voltage thriller. If you thought you knew

something about the Inge Lotz murder trial, Albeker has come, like a master decoder, to disabuse you of that notion."

- Kevin Bloom, journalist and author

"Altebeker's narrative of the Inge Lotz murder trial is both shocking and riveting, and beautifully written."

- Peter Harris, author of **In a Different Time**

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