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Born without a name

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BORN WITHOUT A NAME

Essays and novel submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS: CREATIVE WRITING

(BY COURSEWORK)

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Date of final submission: August 2006

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COMMENTS FROM THE PROPOSAL:

WRITING THE FICTIONAL NARRATIVE ENTITLED "BORN WITHOUT A NAME", A SEQUEL TO BESSIE HEAD'S NOVEL *THE CARDINALS*

I chose Bessie Head's work not only because her life is poignantly expressed in her writing, but also to endeavour as far as possible to fill the lacunae in her novella *The Cardinals.* Much of my inspiration is derived from the semi-autobiographical elements in her narrative and the way it culminates in the characters Johnny, Ruby and Mouse. Exploration of this unusual triumvirate provides many challenges and I will strive to do it justice. Writing a sequel to *The Cardinals* is also my personal contribution towards a process of postcolonial healing and a tribute to the literary legacy so generously left to us by a woman who rose from her adverse origins to become a legend in her own time.

In my view Bessie Head invents the protagonist Johnny in *The Cardinals* in representation of the father she never knew. In writing the sequel I give this mythical man a pedigree and political recognition. By recreating the male protagonist in the sequel, I pay special tribute to Bessie Head as a fiction writer and as a courageous woman who battled with demons throughout her life. Adversity did not sway her from her determination to write. She was alienated by her mother's family who failed to offer her moral support, let alone anything else. The sequel explores the inner and outer dimensions of the lives of the protagonists and recollects the injustices from South Africa's political past. It is impossible for any story based in that time not to be political, or as political as I am able to make it within the limitations of my personal observations and experience.

I give Johnny a family name. I chose the name of De Meillon to provide him with an authentic history. In researching family names of early Cape settlers I came across a Henry De Meillon, who lived in the Cape from 1823 where he farmed, and where, in his leisure time he produced memorable works of art, which are on display in a Cape gallery. I thought he would be an ideal ancestor for the fictional character, Johnny. The original Henry De Meillon married a Dutch woman called Johanna and in the text I suggest that Johnny's given name is derived from this source. To limit the sequel to eight chapters I

do not make mention of the slave families who toiled in the De Meillon vineyards to cultivate selected vines and perhaps interbred with the De Meillons and took the name as their own, some of them possibly entitled to it as direct De Meillon descendents, and some not. Although they are excluded from the text, I submit a family tree to help assemble a family history that is entirely fictional except for the original De Meillon couple. Any events thereafter are invented and bear no truth to any De Meillon descendants that may be alive at this time.

The sequel's main focus is on a child secretly born of mixed parentage in a colour conscious South Africa of the late 1930s, coinciding with Bessie Head's own birth. The sequel expands on the communist phobia that gripped an apartheid society of the 1960s, borrowing from the communist family in *The Cardinals* who befriended Charlotte Smith and accepted her into their home. It provided her with opportunities to expand her knowledge and develop a social conscience (Head 1993: p 11).

The story is about Coloured people, but I prefer to write about them as people and not as members of a specific race group. The notion that Ruby was white is subverted by the following sentence that appears in *The Cardinals*: "He looked at the two dark wings of her eyebrows and the smooth stillness of her dark brown face, 'Where did you grow up?' he asked" (Head 1993: p 52). She said she grew up on a farm and Johnny tells her that he grew up in a slum.

Ruby's frantic plea when she encounters Johnny on the lonely stretch of beach is: "Love me! Love me! Love me!" (Head 1993: p 52). I interpret this as Bessie Head's plea for love and acceptance and the desire for family. I see it as a feverish search for a true identity. I also see it as her intense wish for the insecurities of her life to be swept away by a black knight on a white horse, the black knight being 'Johnny' who represents not only the father, but the white/black in juxtaposition with Bessie Head's own hybrid heritage.

In writing a sequel to the novella, I give the characters the recognition and the social status that Bessie Head herself deserved. She died too soon and in her short lifetime she was deprived of the benefits her writing started generating towards the end of her life.

I hope to give insight into that era of the novella from the perspective of someone born of mixed parentage and the poverty and hardships suffered in the 'African' context. I also want the characters to transcend Africa and move abroad into an environment other than South Africa to escape the persecution of the apartheid conditioning. I would like to ensure that they enjoy the sense of freedom that was their birthright in the country of their forebears.

I regard the writing of the sequel as bringing finality to a story that seems incomplete. There is scope for setting the protagonists on the path to fulfilling what I see as Bessie Head's secret dreams of a life she perhaps wanted for herself and her son. Eilersen and MacKenzie's biographies of her hint that she preferred a simple uncomplicated rural life. It could be that she wanted everything and settled for nothing, the primitive conditions of her home in Botswana being evidence of this. She lived simply without modern conveniences, placing herself on an equal footing with the living conditions of thousands of families who live in Africa. In writing a sequel to her novella, I hope to peel away the surface layers of a woman whose written words went beyond the ordinary and to reveal within the unfathomable depths of her psyche the clever, loving, seething, beautiful, frightened, but angered human being whose hatred could be fierce and whose love overwhelming. In the sequel these aspects emerge in certain characteristics present in Johnny and Mouse. It culminates in their incestuously-spawned daughter, the Ruby doppelganger: Jewel.

Margaret Daymond in her introduction to *The Cardinals* argues that the novella "is not only expressive of complex fears and angers" but that there is a haunting beauty in its many love stories; in addition there is treachery and deception in Mouse's orders to find a wheel chair for an old lady in desperate need of one (1993: p xiv). It projects newspaper reporting of noble deeds as deception that promotes the newspaper's image through a fabricated tale. In her role as a reporter Bessie Head may have come face to face with contrived acts of compassion that were falsely represented. In view of the semi-autobiographical nature of *The Cardinals* it is quite possible that Bessie Head herself experienced this kind of false reporting.

The subject of incest in the novella could be a representation of Bessie Head's disregard for the laws of a rigid Calvinist government. The possibility of forbidden love

may have haunted her throughout her life, but especially so at the age of twenty-five when she wrote *The Cardinals.* Daymond maintains that Bessie Head gives the impression that her protagonists, although they were unwittingly blood-related, had a right to pursue their love. The boundaries of a blood-tie relationship was so deeply embedded in Bessie Head's instincts that they emerged in her writing of T*he Cardinals* in the intimacies of an older man and a young girl in representation of Bessie Head herself. She could have become entangled in a relationship with someone who was actually her father, and she would not have known. There is much speculation in literary circles as to who her father may have been. The assumption that he was a race-horse stable hand has not been proven. I am convinced that Bessie Head researchers will eventually uncover all the hidden facts of her life.

Biographical Perspectives on Bessie Head's Life

Baby without a Name or a Race

Johannesburg

WELFARE authorities at Vereeniging are caring for a baby that not only has no name and no known parents or home but does not even belong with certainty to any particular racial group – an important factor in this racially segregated country.

A few days ago the baby, a boy, was left, wrapped up in what looked like just a bundle, by an African woman in a rural shop near Vereeniging, 36 miles from Johannesburg. He was taken to hospital, where doctors tried to determine his race. After checking his gum and tooth structure, eye colour, and hair texture, they decided that, provisionally at least he was white.

There have already been enquiries from local white families who would like to adopt him. But there is another, and unmentioned, aspect of the case which would make this difficult; time may show that he is not white but a half-caste.

25 02 1967

The Legacy of Apartheid edited by Joseph Harker page 56

Bessie Head saw South Africa as "a place that crushes dreams" (Head 1993: p ix) and quite rightly so, for she suffered only sorrow and rejection from the time she was born in 1937. Her mother was committed to an asylum for the insane, very likely because she openly defied white society and had a child by a black man. (This took place in 1937, prior to the 1949 Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act and the 1950 extended immorality Act that criminalized sexual relations between whites and Cape Coloureds.) Bessie Head's mother had two small sons from a marriage and one died in a tragic accident. It was after this sad event that the sign of mental illness started to manifest itself in this gravely traumatized woman. Bessie's conception is greatly speculated on and it can only be assumed that any association Head's mother may have had with the father of the child drew little notice from her family under whose protection she had been placed at the time.

Bessie received only one visit from her grandmother while she was in an orphanage, although her mother repeatedly requested that Bessie should receive an education and made monies available for this purpose. In reading about Bessie Head's childhood I came under the impression that her mother was forcefully kept from seeing her illegitimate daughter. Incarcerated in an asylum the unfortunate woman had little contact with the outside world. In this same way Bessie was kept from having any contact with her mother or her mother's family.

In her introduction to *The Cardinals* Margaret Daymond notes that sexual interaction between black and white had been "outlawed" in 1927 (1993: p ix): "In 1957 the amendments which are referred to in *The Cardinals* were passed" (p ix) and anything of a sexual nature between whites and races such as Black, Coloured and Indian "was criminalized" (p iv). However, these laws failed to prohibit sexual contact between the races in its entirety. The human element could not be legislated against.

I quote from Joseph Harker's "The Legacy of Apartheid" to re-create the circumstances in which Bessie Head's protagonists in *The Cardinals* lived and worked. It also illustrates the sort of environment in which Bessie Head had to live as a second-class citizen and work as a journalist. The extract refers to the amendments to legislation under the various laws of racial segregation:

> Each of these pieces of legislation might have been comic had it not been for the enormous suffering, disruption and degradation they also brought. Squads of officials checked the structure of people's hair, their nose shapes or the colour of their fingernails to reach a decision that would determine where they could live, how they would be educated, what medical care they would receive, what jobs they could do, who they could sleep with, who they could marry, even where they could be buried. Families were shattered when these pseudo-scientists decided a child was "coloured" and her parents white; a husband this, his wife that. Police raided rooms and pounced upon cars in lonely backwoods to prevent and punish racially-incorrect copulation (p 56).

Bessie Head later married and had her son Howard. To escape the racial discrimination in South Africa she applied for a passport and a visa to Britain, but her request was declined by the British and the South African apartheid authorities refused to grant her a passport. She then went into exile in Botswana. She had a teaching post but it soon ended and Bessie Head remained distressingly poor and struggled to survive in her new country, which itself held back citizenship from her and her son over a period of

many years. She continued writing and some of her work found its way into print, but the pickings were scant. *The Cardinals,* her first novella, was published only after her death.

Sadly it was also long after she had died, and only after she had achieved renown, that the surviving members of her mother's family acknowledged her as kin. The pathos, the poverty, the struggle for survival and the fruitless search for an identity in Bessie Head's own life is reflected in *The Cardinals.* Isolation remains with her even in death in a remote cemetery in a lonely grave marked by a scattering of stones, but the spirit of this unusually gifted woman will live forever in her writing.

De Meillon Family Tree

Henry De Meillon (A settler of French descent – the name taken from a real person of early nineteenth century)

| Marries

| |

Johanna Grobbelaar (Dutch descent|

|

| Malay Imam (arrives on the farm to give religious instruction to Malay slaves on the farm)

|

| Nuurruman

Marries

|_____ Katje (Slave)

| |

Saartjie Alabaster

|

Blaartjie

|

(Johnny's mother, a freed slave leaves the farm and moves to Bo Kaap. As her financial position declines, she moves to District Six and later, under apartheid demolitions, she moves to a slum dwelling in a small town accompanied by remaining family members)

| | | |

Johnny Glen Arabella (the child prostitute) (numerous other children Fathers unknown)

(news writer) (habitual criminal & later a preacher)

|

|

| |

marries Mouse (Miriam, Charlotte Smith) and Elizabeth Jones

| | | |

Jewel Jonathan Henry

|

marries Norriman

Pierre Boucher marries Veronique de Clerque

| | |

Ruby Opal Clara

THEORETICAL INTRODUCTION:

THE CARDINALS AND ITS SEQUEL, "BORN WITHOUT A NAME"

THINGS I DON'T LIKE

I am black.
Okay?
Hot sun and the geographical set-up
Made me black;
And through my skin
A lot of things happen to me
THAT I DON'T LIKE.
And I wake each morning
Red murder in my eyes
'Cause some crook's robbed me again,
Taken what little I had right out of my hands
With the whole world standing by
And doing nothing. . .
Okay?

A poem by Bessie Head (MacKenzie 1990: p xiv)

Genre and sub-genres of Bessie Head's novella and the sequel in question

Bessie Head's *The Cardinals* can perhaps best be described as psychobiographical in a semi-autobiographical context. Freudian and Lacanian insights explain the behavioural traits of the characters. Freud and Lacan are believed to have set up the Oedipal theme as the prime unit of individuation. *The Cardinals* centers on the characters that consist of Johnny, Ruby and Mouse, the abandoned offspring.

Many sub-genres are likely to appear in a work of fiction and in this instance in both the *The Cardinals* and the sequel. Psychoanalytical perspectives are in juxtaposition with history that serves as a backdrop to the story of Johnny, Ruby and Mouse. Politics which is "defined as practices and ideas related to government" (Quinn 1999: p 261) plays an equally important role in the apartheid context of the times. The sequel is a combination of the psyche, history and the politics of the time.

"A novel is not just something about which you can say, 'Okay, I'll write four pages a day and in one hundred days I'll have four hundred pages,' Stephen Coonts says (Clark 1992: p 7). From my experience in the writing of this sequel I know that it cannot work that way. You may write for months and at the end of a period discard the lot. You return and do it again, so the initial idea of a novel that you jot down in six weeks may only emerge in six years as a completed piece of fiction. Coonts maintains that you are required to devote at least 2000 hours for a book of any size. In can mean that you have to give up everything else in your life to complete the writing of a novel and even when you make such a commitment, the end result may result in failure.

"Readers must remember that they have to accept the ultimate lie that is at the core of fiction" (1992: p 17). However, writers have to keep in mind that lies that are too exaggerated will not convince the reader, so attention must be given to the credibility of the story you tell. Sophisticated readers will allow you some license if your lies are believable (1992: p 17).

The story of Johnny, Ruby and Mouse centers on the Oedipal complex and expands the Orphic element designed to reflect both mythical and realist conventions. Myth can be regarded as fundamental to human consciousness and in one way or the other often works its way into literature. The sequel is intended to hover on the incestuous relationship of Johnny and Mouse and culminates in the Orphic-type resurrection of the dead Ruby in the advent of Johnny and Mouse's daughter Jewel, a Ruby *doppelganger.* In support of my argument I refer to Toni Morrison's *Beloved* where the protagonist's dead daughter dies as a baby and re-appears in the form of a young woman who lives amongst her family until she eventually returns to the unknown. Both Johnny and Beloved's mother harbour an unconscious longing that commands a return of a dead loved one in the Orphic-myth tradition. Although I feel that there are elements of the Orpheus myth in *The Cardinals*, I must also assume that the Orphic slant was entirely unintentional on Bessie Head's part.

There is the question of prequels and sequels. These have been done before: *Foe* as a sequel to *Robinson Crusoe*; a fascinating prequel to Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* and a sequel to Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* called *Scarlett.* A character can also be used over and over again by the same author or by different authors, an example

of such a character being Alexander the Great, who appeared in different stories, the best known perhaps being *The Alexander Romance.* A Greek writer of Alexandria composed his work out of two books, one historical and the other consisting of various stories about Alexander. *The Life and Acts of Alexander of Macedon* was said to have been antiquity's most successful novel. There are eighty versions of this novel in twenty-four languages. *Beowulf* contains a part of *Alexander.* The Alexander stories influenced medieval heroic fiction and the story of mythical King Arthur (Doody 1997: p 29). Bessie Head's male protagonists appear repeatedly in her stories as patriarchal, powerful and charismatic--Johnny from *The Cardinals* being a perfect example. Like Head's modern-day male protagonists, Alexander always set himself up against the feminine, an example being Queen of the Amazons. The readers of those early novels were intrigued by travel and this may have been one of the reasons why the Alexander stories were popular in ancient times (1997: p 30). The backdrop to Bessie Head's stories was mystical Africa that had an appeal of its own. Like ancient stories, Bessie Head's stories often project the idea of the story behind the story; the hidden story or a hint of a deep secret. The sequel hopefully subscribes to metaphor, metonymy and irony which encompasses and helps shape all of human thought in the world.

Bessie Head's own words answer the question of why I chose to write a sequel to *The Cardinals:* "Sometimes a book burns its way into one's mind and is never forgotten" (MacKenzie 1990: p 98). Every time I read it, images of varied possibilities invade my imagination. I'm then challenged to explore the unique triumvirate which is Johnny, Ruby and Mouse. In its semi-autobiographical mode the three protagonists are strongly representative of Bessie Head herself and I bring the story to a more decisive conclusion. *Born without a Name* aims at giving the mother, the father and the child a sense of belonging and a family history. The word 'Cardinals' in Head's novella means, "Those who herald change" (Eilersen 1995: p 55) and not the Cardinals of the Catholic Church. My intention in the sequel is to position the characters in roles that help bring about the political changes imminent in a country of legislated segregation.

Gillian Stead Eilersen, author of Bessie Head's biography, argues that the most powerful message in *The Cardinals* is the protagonist's attempt "to master the art of writing" (p 55). This occurs in the story of a young child who rose from a morass and

advanced to astounding self-taught levels of literacy. The sequel is meant to fill the gaps in *The Cardinals* and to continue to explore the outward and the inward worlds of the protagonists who were formed by Bessie Head from events in her own life and from dimensions of her own character. She retains a presence throughout the text in an implied selfhood. I also like to think that the sequel is a tribute to a courageous woman who battled with demons throughout her life and despite constant setbacks, left a splendid literary legacy when she died on 17 April 1986 (MacKenzie 1190: p 105). Bessie Head could borrow from the elements with ordinary words like rain clouds, the sun and the wind and turn it into poetry. That was her extraordinary gift and part of the legacy she left to the world when she died.

The year Bessie Head died, the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group paid a visit to South Africa intending to find a peaceful solution to racial conflict. Instead, the South African Defence Force launched politically un-strategic military and security police attacks on Botswana, Zimbabwe and Zambia, allegedly aiming at the African National Congress. These thoughtless acts sabotaged the visit and sanctions against South Africa were called for. A nationwide state of emergency ensued as sections of the population revolted and innocent people were attacked by government-supported vigilantes who destroyed large sections of black townships (Harker 1994: p 214). The attacks on other countries subverted the true purpose of the visit to Africa of this eminent group.

At her own request Bessie Head was buried in the Botoloate cemetery in her adopted country on arid land. Her grave is marked by a scattering of stones: "It is sandy and stony, straggling and weed-ridden, but it looks out over the Serowe plain with the broad, sweeping vision that was Bessie's own" (Eilersen 1995: p 293). In that early death Bessie Head transcended her humble beginnings as at last her soul was set free and she no longer felt the pain that life inflicted on her.

The greater loss was South Africa's.

In a poignant one page sketch under the title of *Home* Bessie Head writes: "My home is someplace where the wind don't blow. My heart rests someplace where the wind don't blow. Strange place this, funny place this; all black, and dark, and quiet – and the wind don't blow" (Head 1993: p 145). Did she mean this to be a place after death

where she could find peace in solitude and isolation? I'm sure home wasn't South Africa, I'm not sure if it was Botswana. I don't doubt for a minute that it was just Africa in some small corner "where the wind don't blow" (145).

In my sequel I hope to bestow on the protagonists the peace of mind that Bessie Head sought but did not necessarily find in South Africa or in Botswana. I hope to be able to portray a Johnny who emerges from his inherent restlessness and achieves an interiority of hopefully more tranquil perspectives. In the novel Ruby escapes into death and in the sequel Mouse transcends her origins.

The relation between the sequel and Bessie Head's novella

My sequel opens *in medias res* rather than at a chronological beginning. This narrative convention is used to confirm that the sequel starts where Bessie Head's novella ends in the middle of things (Quinn 1999: p 170). In addition, the narrative technique in which the male protagonist's intimate thoughts and impressions are related gives immediate access to what is inside his head, unlike the technique used by Bessie Head in her text: she imparts a spectral dimension to her characters, making them a little unreal. In *The Cardinals* Ruby is wispy and ethereal, Johnny is portrayed by Bessie Head as godlike the one moment and in the next as a demon. He seems to be in an ongoing struggle within his own consciousness. He veers between rash, irrational impulses the one moment and a cold withdrawal in the next. He is both sane and insane. I hope that when I relate Johnny's private thoughts in the sequel, it will give deeper insight into a character in the novel that remains as much of a mystery as Bessie Head herself. I hope I have executed the task of writing the text by keeping as closely as possible to the verbal texture of Bessie Head's novel, but avoiding the repetitive use of words, for example, 'doltish' as on page 123 of *The Cardinals* and 'clot' on page 115 and on several other pages.

Bessie Head was both dreamer and realist (Eilersen 1995: p 294). She retained her close contact with elements of the earth, e.g. her love of animals, her farming endeavours in Botswana and the nurturing of her son in juxtaposition with the frequent metaphysical aspects of her writing. In the sequel Mouse takes care of her daughter and continues living her life as best she can after Johnny leaves her. At the same time she strives towards reaching greater heights in her writing and dreams of a life of equality for

herself, her daughter and everyone else in South Africa. From Bessie Head's comments on communism in *The Cardinals* I arrived at the conclusion that Bessie Head's political views were left-wing and I hope to expand on this notion in the sequel.

My examiners may wonder why a white woman like me would choose to write a sequel to a novel written by a Coloured author about Coloured people. Part of my interest stems from the lasting friendships that developed over the years when together with members of a Coloured community we defied the apartheid authorities during the struggle against forced removals from a previously specified residential area. The struggle continued as the children in the community grew from infancy to adulthood, some falling by the wayside, others becoming post-apartheid political leaders. I feel that my close observations of a Coloured community helped me understand their situation in an apartheid world and that the contact I had with members of this community over the years enables me to write about them as if I were writing about members of my own family or close friends.

Overall structure and primary concerns

Illegitimacy, cross-breeding and incest play major roles in *The Cardinals*, and *Born without a Name* follows suit. Bessie Head was illegitimate by birth and of bi-racial origins, but both these issues were overshadowed by the incest theme portrayed in *The Cardinals* and in the sequel. It is to be expected that Bessie Head may have been concerned with the possibility of a suitor turning out to be her biological father, and I argue that this is the reason why the issue cropped up in the first novel she wrote, namely *The Cardinals.* Originally, *When Rain Clouds Gather* was accepted as her first novel, but after her death *The Cardinals* appeared and it was established that it was the first novel she wrote although not the first to be published. It can be assumed that her mythical man was first fashioned on the Johnny character of *The Cardinals.* After that he appears everywhere in her writing. One example is her poignant short story "Life," where her female protagonist falls under the spell of the dominant male cattle-man called Lesego. The power in him attracted her and he in turn was drawn to her because she was different from all the other women in the village. The political slant to the story is given in the opening chapter in the mention of the setting up of borders between Botswana and South

Africa in 1963. The female protagonist called Life is really the unfortunate victim of the border restrictions and is the sacrificial lamb on the altar of apartheid's enforcements. She is compelled to return to her tribal origins, but had already learnt the ways of the big cities (Trump 1999: p 271 – 280).

Bessie Head assumed that her father was a black stable hand (MacKenzie 1990: p 3). How he fitted into the picture is not clear, for estranged family members have stated that they were not involved in horse racing at the time. Bessie Head may have invented the story herself as she gave free rein to her imagination about a family she never knew. Whether it is a fabrication or not makes little difference. Of more importance is that her deeply traumatized mother received the warmth and affection that was sadly missing in life from someone who remained obscure. Bessie Head may have fantasized about a hero-father who would rescue her from the alienation and rejection she was subjected to from her early years.

Starting the sequel from where Johnny and Mouse consummate their professed love for each other, results in matrimony and the birth of a daughter. From there the story progresses to events that reveal the secret of Mouse's birth. Johnny discovers the truth but keeps it from Mouse. It culminates in Johnny's departure from Mouse and their small daughter. It is a new start for both Johnny and Mouse, each following separate paths. When his daughter leaves school she meets up with her father for the first time and she meets his second family. I borrow his wife Liz from *The Cardinals* and give her a more prominent role in Johnny's life. He writes the story of himself and Ruby and leaves it to be read after his death and only when he dies do they all learn the truth.

Elizabeth George in her book for aspiring writers says the following:

> …I know how well known actual locations have become for me in novels that I've loved. And then to actually see these places…Montgomery's real Lake of Shining Waters! How amazing it was to climb Jane Austen's Box Hill! To walk on the Cobb at Lyme Regis, to see Granny's steps, to experience the wild moors of Yorkshire and the atmosphere of Dartmoor…to see how an author has taken a spot that really exists and then made that spot equally vibrant for the reader … Reading doesn't get better than that, neither does writing (2004: pp 277,278).

When I write about the characters that I get to know in *The Cardinals*, and the ones that I create in the sequel, I have to try and place them in settings I am familiar with

and to convince the reader I have to provide a background that is geographically and historically as accurate as possible. At the same time one must not lose sight of the fact that it is all encompassed in a fictional context, so imagination plays a major role.

Issues and debates that continue in the sequel

The Cardinals borders on metafiction because it calls attention to its own fictionality in contrast to its autobiographical mode. The sequel expands on clues from the *The Cardinals* and these develop from chapter to chapter. From Bessie Head's novella, I borrow and build on the views expressed by the communist who took Mouse into his home and sent her to school. I recreate the family and give the son a name. Names for the family members are omitted in Bessie Head's novel. In the sequel they remain the shadowy figures originally created by Bessie Head in her novel. The views expressed on communism in the original text were surely Bessie head's own. It is evidence of her own radical political stance in defiance of the right-wing governance in South Africa at the time.

The protagonist Johnny in *The Cardinals* plays a stern patriarchal role, but in the sequel's first chapter he is repelled by the revelation that Mouse is his daughter and he imposes measures of self-castigation for not discovering the blood-tie before the relationship was consummated. In Bessie Head's novel she hints at Johnny's enjoyment in kissing his sister who shares a bed with him. In mentioning it to Mouse, Johnny seems to suggest that incest is a primordial instinct and that society categorized it as taboo. The primal feelings that fall into the category of an unconscious sexual desire for the parent unites the mother, the father and the child and may extend to the siblings towards each other. Freud (Gay 1995: p 290) argues "that the parents' affection for their child may awaken his sexual instinct prematurely (i.e. before the somatic conditions of puberty are present) to such a degree that the mental excitation breaks through in an unmistakable fashion to the genital system." If we agree with Freud, then this is mirrored in Johnny's unnatural - or some may argue - his natural response to his sister's need and affection for him, intensified by the sibling connection. As the young person reaches sexual maturation, respect for the incest-barrier develops in accordance with the cultural

demands made by society. It is Johnny's consciousness of this barrier that makes the notion of incest abhorrent to him in the sequel, but not in the novel.

In Dacia Maraini's novel *The Silent Duchess,* an undesirable uncle violates his small niece at the age of four or five. After the incident she is mute and remains mute throughout the novel. She is no older than fourteen when she is forced into a marriage with the villain who escapes punishment for his despicable act against her as a small child. Johnny's incestuous act was not deliberate but I allow it to prey on his conscience in the sequel, for he forces his attentions on an innocent girl.

In order to assess the extent of the protagonist's transgression in the sequel, I examined the revisions to the Criminal Procedure Act of 1999, which state that in criminal proceedings in which an accused is charged with incest,

a) the accused shall be assumed, unless the contrary is proved, to have had knowledge at the time of the alleged offence, of the relationship existing between him and the other party to the incest,
b) whenever the fact that any lawful and binding marriage was contracted is relevant to the issue in criminal proceedings, at which an accused is charged with incest, such fact may be proved *prima facie* in the manner provided in section 237 as the proof of the existence of a lawful and binding marriage of a person charged with bigamy (Du Toit, de Jager 1999: pp 238-239).

The protagonist unwittingly committed the crime and if he had been charged and found guilty, the punishment would have been the same as if he committed bigamy. It seems that in the apartheid years a prison sentence for committing incest wittingly was a less serious crime than being in contravention of the Immorality Act. To be charged under this Act brought destruction and disgrace to offenders and their families. Incest within a family would be concealed from outsiders. Mouse as a news reporter can be presumed to have come across cases of incest in her news-reporting assignments. Incest forms part of the overall debate in the sequel, but not openly so because it remains a closely guarded secret until the death of the male protagonist.

Psychoanalytical perspectives indicate the connection of parent-child incest to be the symbolic killing of the rival parent which is central to the development of the young adult. The Oedipal complex crops up in real life and often creeps into fiction. Oedipal elements may have found their way into Johnny's consciousness and result in the torment he experiences when he stumbles on Mouse's true identity and the agony he undergoes

for ignoring a niggling consciousness that plagued him throughout their association. I see the symbolic murder of the parent by the child, in this instance Mouse, who, if she knew of the incest, would take revenge against a father who orchestrated the seduction or from what I read on page seventy eight of the novel, perhaps not. This aspect of the incest dealt with in *The Cardinals* is expanded on a little further along in this essay.

In ancient Greece incest was not uncommon among the gods and humans followed suit, sometimes to their detriment – Oedipus being an ill-fated example. Old Testament biblical narratives relate that Lot is seduced by his daughters, perhaps because nature dictated that they go forth and propagate their species and the seduction of their father was solely for this purpose. Genesis 19; verse 37, tells us that the two tribes comprising the Moabites and the Ammonites emanated from the incestuous mating of Lot and his two daughters. Other examples are that David's son and daughter become ensconced in sexual intimacy and Joseph harbours a fondness for his stepmother (Quinn 1999: p 168). Shakespeare, in *Pericles,* Prince of Tyre, openly refers to the antagonist's incestuous motifs: King of the Antioch has a sexual predilection for his daughter.

Johnny does not know that Mouse is his daughter, but in Bessie Head's novel the issue is brought up and the reader may be given the impression that the unconventional Johnny could easily have defied society and the law and could knowingly have committed incest and could perhaps have convinced Mouse that it was not committing an act against nature, but defying the laws of the country and simply opposing society's mores. In support of this conjecture I give the following quote from *The Cardinals*:

> My sister always used to sleep next to me and when I woke in the morning, she'd have her arm tight around me like this, I used to like it. It's a comforting feeling to wake up and find someone with their arm around you. Now that I come to think of it, I must have been a little in love with her too. I used to kiss her, not the way a brother should kiss a sister but the way a man kisses a woman, like this.
>
> He looked at her with an amused gleam in his eyes.
> Do you think there was anything incestuous in that?
>
> "No," she said (Head 1993: p 78).

I argue here that it can be expected and understood that both protagonists had little respect for any of the laws under an apartheid or colonial-based government and would perhaps have had no qualms in defying any of the laws under such rule. In my

sequel I convert Johnny to a man who would defy the law on political grounds but not knowingly when it involved an act of incest.

The English Romantic poet Percy Byssche Shelley sees incest as an example of pure uncorrupted love of a brother and a sister in his poem "Epipsychidion" and I quote a paragraph on "Epipsychidion" from Bloom & Trilling's *Romantic Poetry and Prose*:

> The theme, as in Blake's *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* is the necessity of free love, but Shelley characteristically at last sees love defeated not by societal and individual repressions, but by the separateness that irreparably shadows the human condition. Taking its occasion from Shelley's love affair with Emilia Viviani, which ended badly, the poem emulates Dante by seeking to make Emilia a kind of Beatrice, a guide to a higher, more visionary existence. The title, which means a work about the soul out of my soul, expresses an intention to universalize this experience of passion (1973: p 455).

The following extract is from the poem itself:

> …The soul that burns between them, and the wells
> Which boil under our being's inmost cells,
> The fountains of our deepest life, shall be
> Confused in Passion's golden purity
> As mountain-springs under the morning sun
> We shall become the same, we shall be one
> Spirit within two frames, Oh! Wherefore two?
> One passion in twin-hearts, which grows and grew… (p457).

To Johnny the moments of intimacy with his tragic sister may well find expression in the last lines of this poem: "One hope within two wills, one will beneath/ Two overshadowing minds, one life, one death, One Heaven, one Hell, one immortality/ and one annihilation. . ."(p 457).

An example of sibling love in English drama is John Ford's '*Tis Pity She's a Whore'* (Quinn 1999: p 168) which sympathetically depicts the incestuous passion between a brother and sister but without amelioration of tragic consequences in the courtly love tradition (Brodwin 1972: pp 366,292-3). It was Ford's masterpiece and is manifested in the false romantic ideals against which the protagonist Giovanni takes revenge against his beloved sister Annabella's infidelity. She accepts the marriage that is forced upon her and although she continues to love her former lover she is willing to devote herself to a husband not of her choice. She turns to religious conversion and Giovanni suffers the rejection and unwillingness and turns it to an inversion of the courtly

love tradition as he resorts to fatal vindictiveness against his beloved Annabella (Brodwin 1972: p 394). I give the following extract from Brodwin in drawing an analogy between Giovanni and Bessie Head's Johnny on the grounds that his prostitute sister dies a violent death in a stabbing incident in the novel:

> For Ford the commitment to Courtly Love is the highest human value but the false romantic obstruction to this commitment, posed by the shallow complacency of the individuals and society which would restrict the lovers' freedom, proves so great that the attempt to maintain fidelity can lead the feminine soul only to despairing death and the masculine spirit only to a revenge whose triumphant fulfillment reflects the Heaven's judgement against the prime human sin of false romanticism (p395).

In recent times there was the brilliant Roman Polanski film *Chinatown* and the tragedy of a father and daughter in an illicit love relationship. A daughter was born of this union and she was hidden from society and passed off as suffering from a neurosis. As Bessie Head herself writes: "There are many people like me in South Africa whose birth or beginnings are filled with calamity and disaster, the sort of person who is the skeleton in the cupboard or the dark and fearful secret swept under the carpet" (1990: p 3). *Chinatown* confirms that there are many people born across the world that are hidden away from the gaze of onlookers.

"Psychologists tell us that a dream set in a dreamer's past is indicative, and can signify repressed material that needs to surface" (Doody 1997: p 28). In writing about the past writers may do so because there are repressed issues that need to be expressed in an effort to uncover the buried past (1997: p 28). In *The Cardinals* this may be precisely what Bessie Head accomplished. "— the cumulative stories of fathers and daughters press us towards central recognitions" (1997: p 93). On the other hand "…defectiveness in a story, may lie in the reader rather than in the author" (93).

In my sequel in the first chapter I deal mainly with the torment suffered by the male protagonist when he discovers that his wife is also his daughter. However, it is not possible to write a sequel to *The Cardinals* by placing the main focus on the question of incest alone. The unusual family dynamics of Johnny, Ruby and Mouse warrant detailed attention, but without losing sight of the political complexities of the time and these I have to bring into the sequel in greater detail than Bessie Head had done in her novel, although Bessie Head in her life held strong anti-apartheid political views. She was

unable to express these views in writing in her novel at the time because of censorship and possible repercussions.

Destination for publication

At this stage the destination of *Born without a Name* is intended for my supervisor and the examiners that follow. The constraints of the market place will dictate whether publication of the sequel will be realized. For the purpose of the MA In-Writing by Coursework, I submit the chapters in condensed form. Whatever the outcome, I will have had the experience and the satisfaction of having written it and that brings its own rewards.

I do not want to make unrealistic claims about the eight chapters I have written. It is difficult enough to target a specific audience in a multi-racial society with eleven different languages and large cultural diversity. One can only hope that it will be meaningful to an audience, however small such an audience may be.

Elements of advocacy in *Born without a Name*

Illegitimacy has become a common occurrence in postmodern times; it is not the stigma it was when Ruby in *The Cardinals* gave birth to her child in 1937, the same year as Bessie Head's birth. I give the following extract from *The Cardinals*: "On a day in June 1937 a car stopped alongside on the road and a beautiful young woman climbed out with a wrapped-up bundle in her arms. She wrinkled her nose in distaste as the stench of the refuse dump and the slum assaulted it…" (Head 1993: p 1). The tragic Ruby returns to her home and goes into her room and slashes her wrists. Three lives are drastically affected by the illegitimate birth of a child: Johnny loses a woman he loved, and she loses Johnny, the baby and then her life. An innocent child is deprived of the security of a family. Outside-of-marriage progeny are now more readily accepted by family members, and parents are willing to acknowledge or lay claim to their children instead of placing them in orphanages where they remain hidden. Adoption laws have also changed in more recent times to accommodate children who wish to trace their origins. Since the abolition of apartheid laws, children of mixed-race liaisons are no longer frowned on by society and abandoned and orphaned children are fostered and adopted across racial boundaries.

In 1950 the Immorality Act criminalized sexual contact between whites and Cape Coloureds and whites and blacks. Indian and Chinese were covered under these laws and relations between them and whites were regarded as criminal. Legislation banned any sexual intimacy across racial barriers and many lives came to ruin (Harker 1994: p 212). Bessie Head was ten years old when the National Party came to power in 1948, ousting the United Party not by individual votes but by the number of seats obtained through coalitions.

Bessie Head's life was traumatic from the start and it can be understood that she drew from her own tragic life to write her novels. "As a South African 'Coloured' Bessie Head was subjected to all the brutalities meted out to those citizens not born white" (MacKenzie 1990: p x). She also suffered under the prejudices that plagued the pre-apartheid era on the basis of her mixed blood. She was a victim not only of South Africa's discriminatory legislation but also its racial barriers that were in place long before the laws of racial segregation were imposed by the National Party regime. This remarkably talented woman was not even able to obtain a passport when she left for Botswana in 1964 (MacKenzie 1990: p x). It was the year of the Rivonia trial. Eight political leaders were sentenced to life. It was also in 1964 that South Africa was excluded from the Tokyo Olympics after refusing to allow mixed-race teams (Harker 1994: p 212). In addition Walter Luthuli was banned for five years. The United Nations recommended total economic and other sanctions as "the only feasible way of ending apartheid" (p 212). When Bessie Head left South Africa, she left a nightmare-world (1990: pxi). When she died, she left a rich literary heritage of her adopted country and the country of her birth and of her forebears, namely South Africa. She left behind snippets of a life that was far from prosaic. She left us with a shame that touches each and every white South African familiar with her life and work.

It is interesting to speculate what turn Bessie Head's life could have taken if her mother's family had accepted her into their fold. Would she have suffered the nervous breakdown that spurred her on to posting a notice at the local post office in Serowe that accused Seretse Khama of cannibalism and incest? It seems as if the notion of incest was embedded deep within her consciousness and that it found expression through this unpredictable act. However, I am at a loss to explain the accusation of cannibalism

against Khama. It resulted in her being taken into psychiatric custody. She emerged from her spell of psychiatric treatment a stronger and more balanced individual.

Despite her setbacks, she achieved fame in her life through her work and her spirit. Craig MacKenzie writes:

> The memory that remains with me from that visit in 1985, however, is of a small, vital woman with a crippling legacy of loneliness and rejection, eking out an existence in a quiet corner of Africa. She had lived a good deal of her childhood and adulthood in the cities of South Africa; she was an author whose works have been translated into several European languages, who had been hailed the finest woman novelist in Africa, who had been offered citizenship of Norway and numerous trips abroad, all expenses paid. And here she was, a woman alone with her son, living in a two-roomed dwelling without the convenience of electricity or plumbing (1990: p xviii).

What a pity that Bessie Head was discouraged by a well-meaning Wendy Cullinan about relocating to Norway and accepting Norwegian citizenship. She wrote to her as follows about Norway in 1974.

> I can't imagine you going there, to what I imagine as a chilly white land full of large blonde Nordes or whatever they are called. I'm sure this is the wrong thing to say to you, or write to you, but nevertheless the idea of it makes me feel sad … I know you ought to get out of Botswana, but awful old mother Africa sinks her hooks in deep & I hope you're ready to feel the painful tugs (Cullinan 2005: p 144).

How different life could have been for Bessie Head and her son Howard if she had accepted Norwegian citizenship. She may have lived longer and enjoyed a standard of living that she wasn't able to afford in Botswana or South Africa. There would have been more advanced health care in a first world country like Norway. She would have been able to focus purely on her writing as her day to day struggle for survival would not have been the burden it was in Africa. The social support would have been there for herself and her son. From the letters between herself and the Cullinan couple, I have gained the impression that although Bessie Head used the people of the villages in Botswana as material for her stories, she was unhappy living there and being so pitifully poor throughout her life. I also get the impression that the locals in Serowe were not always on friendly terms with her. If she had been granted a British visa at the time she applied for it, she would perhaps have risen to the challenges of a wider literary world and enjoyed its richer rewards.

In my sequel to *The Cardinals* I hope to emulate the tone and cadences of Bessie Head. I intend to examine the conditions that led to the inequalities of a turbulent time in our history. In addition I am strongly driven by a desire to give the *The Cardinals* finality in an ending that Bessie Head herself so richly deserved in her life. If the sequel does not conform to ideas of equality between human beings and the belief that every individual is entitled to basic human rights, then I have not succeeded in what I set out to do.

Because Bessie Head was refused a British visa as well as a South African passport at a time when she needed it the most, I have moved the protagonists in the sequel to a politically and socially more congenial environment and only allow them to return when South Africa becomes a true democracy.

Lastly, I wrote the sequel as a tribute to a tragic, yet extraordinary woman.

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BORN WITHOUT A NAME

'…I started to create a mythical man there and he has
since appeared everywhere…He is 'Africa' and the
'beautiful birds dancing in the wind,' and
'Earth and Everything.'

Bessie Head in a letter to Patrick Cullinan

CHAPTER ONE

"There's someone at the fucking door."

It was one of those days after the night before and his mood was stark and black as the night. At this moment the interior of his throat tightened painfully as he strained tar-coated vocal cords to their fullest capacity to summon his subordinate wife to open the door. He regarded her swollen belly as grotesque although it was due to expel the fruit of their coupling that had been largely instigated by him outside of matrimony. Her customary silence intensified in these last weeks but her eyes spoke louder than words and they reflected the expectation of his inevitable plunge into total degeneracy. There are silent depths below speech that can mean more than words and he thought that this was the case with the pensive wench he married. He never knew what secrets lay dormant behind the dark glow of her eyes. Following his call for her to answer the knock at the door culminated in a fit of coughing that ended in vulgar sounds as he cleared the phlegm that coated his throat. Unable to hear any sound of movement in the next room he prepared for a further attempt to goad his wife into subjugation.

He called her Mouse, but it was a nickname she didn't deserve because she wasn't a mouse. Out of revenge against the species called women, he refused to acknowledge her qualities. Sometimes in deep contemplation he would admit to himself that he was afraid that he would once again love too well.

He knew she had a deadline and being interrupted at a vital point of one's work, was annoying. With limited space at their disposal, she worked in the front room where a

creaking door gave access to the house directly from a covered verandah. The only way he succeeded in getting some response from her was to interrupt while she was working.

Writing was a sacred thing for them both and at this moment he was assailed by pangs of guilt for the deliberate intrusion on his part. Outside the window of their bedroom he could hear the whimpering of what he described as the canine whelp Mouse rescued a few days ago from the assault of youths who had nothing more exciting to do. Johnny objected to it being kept indoors and she had made a little shelter for it outside the back door. Mouse had gone to elaborate lengths to provide a snug place for the frightened animal and Johnny had stuck his head through the open window and said: "Are you building a king's palace for the mutt?"

"You ought to have more compassion." Her eyes were blue/black in the light from the afternoon sky above her."

"In a few days you'll have a human creature to take care of."

"I'll manage. Her name's Dixie."

"You're calling the kid Dixie?"

"No, I'm calling the puppy Dixie."

"It's a fancy name for a mutt."

"I know. I like it."

"It's American South. Give the mutt an African name, then at least you're patriotic."

"Are you going to call our child China or Russia?"

"Christ, no!"

This had happened a few days ago and the only time the puppy stopped whimpering was when Mouse picked it up. Turning his aching head away from the window he reached for the bottle of stale bedside water and swallowed a few mouthfuls to soothe his throat a little. Wallowing in self-pity he muttered to no one in particular that his whole life was a fuck up. He did not yet know that his drinking days would end as the future unfolded in revelations that would change his destiny. He would ultimately suspect that the whole thing was deliberately orchestrated by a God that disliked him from the start.

He knew that Mouse blamed his misdemeanours on the news-gathering fraternity who were merely acquaintances, for he had few true friends. His news-reporting companions gathered on the slopes of the mountain to briefly escape the pitfalls associated with their profession. Sometimes in the glow of a sunset or under the influence of hemp his thoughts would return to a time when he knew Ruby. It had been a chance meeting on a fisherman's beach but the impact of the encounter set him on the path to changing his status in life. The alternative could have been a path of destruction for first she had enticed him into loving her and then she recoiled in horror when he appeared on the street as a hawker of the fish he had caught that morning. "The bitch was my other soul" he thought over the years and he wondered why he lived his life in hope of finding her again some day. He embarked on a programme of self-education, for he longed to say to her, if they should meet again, "Remember me, Johnny De Meillon, the man you conquered with your flashing eyes and wind-blown hair; the man you offered your soul to in exchange for his?"

Losing Ruby drove him to a strange madness. If only she had known that he was not an ordinary bastard. He was a De Meillon bastard from a long lineage of bastards and that was a thing to boast about, like descending from a long line of nobles. What irked him the most was that she turned her back on him because of his social status. Their love had burnt into the rocks as the sea washed over them. They lay in each other's arms, sometimes quietly, but more often absorbed in a blinding passion. He wasn't her social inferior then. Different religions emanated from obscure sources in their respective ancestries but they were oblivious to the principles of Christianity and Islam that may have helped deflect them from a path that was destined to lead to disaster.

Johnny knew that he blasphemed unashamedly at times, but in his moments of deep sorrow and his darkest hours he asked God humbly why he chose to forsake him, so entrenched in him was the religious dogma of his childhood.

It took years for him to feel that he knew enough to enable him to find work as a news reporter. After working as a free-lance news-gatherer from the slums he applied to the Head Office of *African Beat – The Paper of the People* and the Boer-Viking PK who was his immediate superior admitted to him: "Johnny, you're damn good at what you do. Just don't slack down, because then you're out!" Johnny curbed his tongue and his

temper and as Johnny continued to astonish his employers with his energy and his talent, PK gradually accepted him into his circle of newspaper acquaintances. Love/hate camaraderie grew between them and saved them from many a serious squabble, for PK was stubborn and Johnny was a rebel by nature.

Leisure hours became synonymous with mountain excursions. On paydays they were joined by girls they met in bars and sometimes the group included a curious mix of women who came along for the thrill. After cannabis-induced debauchery in the night where there was much entwining of pubic hairs during indiscriminate coupling, the rays of a hazy sunrise would penetrate reluctant eyelids and some would awake in shame and guilt. Lately Johnny kept to himself on these outings and his only vice was the consumption of too much wine, like the crude reds that exploded in his head the next morning.

Over recent months he had joined subversive political ranks and the strict rules imposed by the hierarchy prohibited over-indulgence of any kind. His child-bride Mouse, alias Charlotte Smith, who he discovered was not even the Miss Smith he married, but someone without a name, knew nothing of his venture into subversive activities. Although she would have given her wholehearted support in his endeavours to help free the country of apartheid rule, he preferred to keep her out of danger. His involvement with a group who was intent on overthrowing the government could not be divulged to anyone except those who were dedicated to the cause and involved as activists.

At times it irked him that Mouse had seemingly sprung from nowhere but then he argued in his private monologue that there were an abundance of foundlings in their midst, for humanity sowed its seed in wild abandon amongst their people.

It was Johnny's nature to cajole and tease and he would often do so to extract a response from Mouse. Once he said: "You must be from another planet, because you're unlike anyone I've ever known." She remained unreadable and he would arrive at the conclusion that even if she knew the details of her birth, she would guard it forever in secrecy. But it was clear that she had little knowledge of where she had sprung from. The mystique that enveloped her was, he admitted to himself, part of the attraction.

Mouse and Johnny drifted into matrimony two years after they met in the offices of the *African Beat*. Their courtship was brief for Johnny was a forceful personality and took command of any situation that came his way. She resisted his overtures, but over the months she shared his dwelling with him Johnny was intent on using his experience with woman and his natural cunning to work his way into her life and eventually into her bed.

The matrimonial ceremony was in a magistrate's court and was really a dismal affair, they both thought. He didn't want a religious ceremony. Mouse agreed and said to him:

"My god is Darwin. I don't know any other."

Holding her to him as closely as possible during the courtship, he replied, "I believe in a God, but I also believe that he has it in for me, so I'm going to distance myself from him for the time being, just in case he notices that I'm happy at last and decides to be spiteful."

"Do you really believe in a God?"

"I do believe in God and I used to believe in his celestial associates like the saints who will approach God on our behalf. My faith in them died when my sister died."

"How old was your sister, Johnny?"

"She was only eleven when she sold her body to help feed us. She was twelve when she was stabbed to death one night in a dark street." It reminded him how she had sobbed the night before against his back in the urine-stained bed they shared. He wondered then where God was when her baby-heart broke and the innocence vanished from her child-eyes. "Damn prostitution! It was introduced when the white man landed on our shores," he said to Charlotte. "Before that time such favours were free."

"What was your sister's name?"

"Arabella, and I prayed harder when she died than at any other time of my life, because I believed that God had the power to restore her to us. I always believed that children didn't die and I thought that someone had made a huge mistake."

His younger brother Glen very quickly took her place in the vermin-infested bed beside him and he imagined that Arabella had died so that Glen, who had weak lungs, could sleep in the warmth of a bed instead of on the hard floor. She was the sacrifice so that someone else could live, like selling her beauty for the few coins that fed them. To a

degree Mouse was like his sister: stoical, dependable and sacrificial except that Mouse had strength and a determination that made her a force to be reckoned with. Arabella succumbed to pressure; Mouse's withdrawal into silence formed a shield that could not be penetrated and that was her protection.

Johnny discovered the facts surrounding Mouse's birth a few days after his daughter was born. They named their baby Jewel, or at least Johnny did, after the newly-discovered grandmother sent flowers to the hospital. Mouse placed the flowers beside her, seemingly pleased, but stating that she didn't feel up to a visit from someone she didn't really know. At this stage any visit from an outsider would have been considered intrusive for Johnny knew that she was having difficulty in what he called: "functioning as a milch cow." He hinted at supplementary feeds, but this didn't find favour with anyone. He was therefore agitated by Mouse's fruitless struggle to produce enough sustenance for a very greedy baby.

He thought he would escape from domesticity by telephoning the alleged grandmother's attorney to help Mouse come to terms with the startling revelations that had emerged about her past.

It had all started when Mouse opened the door to the stranger. Johnny must have dozed off after she allowed the stranger to enter their home. That morning the poison from the night before was stabbing at his eyes and awareness was at its lowest ebb as he lay there in semi-slumber, trying to recapture the remnants of drunken bliss.

Then he heard words torn from deep inside her, "Oh, please, leave…" then a strangled call that sounded like "Johnny!"

He covered his nakedness and a subsiding erection and rushed to the front room. Mouse was sitting at the table clutching her stomach.

"I'm afraid you will have to get her to a hospital very quickly, she's having birth contractions." The man looked directly at him taking in his drink-etched features and the two-day stubble. The stranger shook his head and Johnny retreated a few steps as a new kind of shame washed over him.

The man looked pityingly at Mouse and lifted his hand to pat her shoulder but she edged away from his touch, her face screwed up in pain.

"What is going on?" Johnny asked and immediately regretted his harshness for she turned from him as well and it stabbed at him more than the effects of the crude wine.

Jewel was born that night after a long and difficult labour. Johnny had hoped for an opportunity to speak to Mouse about the morning visitor but as usual she withdrew into her silence.

It was a long slim alabaster child. She had a strange familiar look that nibbled at his gut like ghost maggots. It was only months after she was born that he could openly associate her in his mind as a miniature of the Ruby he once knew. He felt that he had snatched the pristine baby girl from the seraphs themselves and not from the fiery pit of Hades, like Orpheus, to retrieve his lost love. He would have sworn that a doctor hadn't extracted her from the slender limbs of the young woman he thought of as his child-bride.

The night Jewel was born and prior to his knowing about Mouse's origins, he was perfectly happy to be a father. The way he had treated Mouse weighed heavily on his conscience. He had looked at her from the bottom end of her hospital bed and saw her bloodless face while the spirit of the tiny creature he had fathered crept into his heart and he was so enraptured with the notion of fatherhood that the nursing sister permitted him to hold the infant a little longer. He thought that although he may have unknowingly fathered other children, this one he knew for certain was his.

Much later his mind would dwell on the startling facts that had come to light. He had failed to respond to his instinct where Mouse was concerned because he became absorbed in a new kind of happiness that had eluded him since the advent of Ruby.

He acknowledged long afterwards that doubt had tumbled into his consciousness but he had thrust it aside to hang onto the magic of the moment. He should have investigated the circumstances of Mouse's past before he allowed their association to grow into a forbidden love.

Instead, as the months went by primordial instincts tormented him, but he misinterpreted them. As time went by Mouse retreated more and more into her silence. In an attempted escape Johnny first embarked on a path of self-destruction, but was saved

by his conscience. In the months of her pregnancy, he avoided her most of the time because something familiar niggled at him.

Two days after Jewel's birth Mouse received flowers from an unknown woman and it was only then that she told Johnny about the startling revelation that the stranger who called at their house the morning of Jewel's birth, had conveyed. He then recalled that the stranger had, in the confusion of Mouse's birth contractions, given him a card and so Johnny telephoned him to try and sort out what seemed like a case of mistaken identity.

Returning to the newspaper's offices he telephoned the man who called himself what Johnny considered to be a laughable name for an attorney namely, Lefty Alan. Speaking to him on the telephone Johnny thought he lacked the grandiloquence of most of the law graduates Johnny had come into contact with through law-court reporting. Johnny expected rich elaborate words from him to prove to this son-of-a-bitch that he could match such eloquence any day, but his verbiage was as ordinary as the next man's.

"Your wife's grandmother is a widow." He said, and went on to tell Johnny how she lost her daughter who committed suicide after she had given birth to an illegitimate child. The grandmother wanted to atone for the mistakes she had made in the past. It took a year for them to trace Charlotte Smith who was at first known as Miriam, a name given to her by Sarah, the shack-mother. They were in contact with all the foster homes Charlotte had lived in as a child and eventually traced her through a man who was currently serving a prison sentence for his belief in communism.

Johnny said: "I only vaguely knew of her year with the communist family."

"He has a high regard for Charlotte. He said she read avidly and sang the *Internationale* with more gusto than his own children. He regretted that they lost contact with her after his imprisonment."

"Where's my wife's supposed grandmother?"

"She lives in a secluded hamlet at the sea."

"What was the daughter's name?"

"Her name was Ruby and she was a beautiful girl, more beautiful in fact than the two younger girls, Opal and Clara." He named the hamlet and Johnny sat up to listen more carefully because it suddenly sounded familiar: that it was the exact place where he

met and loved Ruby. He now had no doubt that Ruby was Mouse's biological mother and that he, Johnny De Meillon was her father. He felt that his past had caught up with him and he was unable to reply in coherent words, so he replaced the receiver. He didn't know how long he sat with his arms wrapped around his head, hiding his eyes from the world for the tears flowed unashamedly.

Sometimes we look at someone without really seeing them. It was in this way that Johnny had always looked at James, his colleague and a fellow-reporter in the office. James had walked around to speak to Johnny at his desk in the open office, but made a hasty retreat when he realized that Johnny was not in a fit state to speak to anyone. He was thus not surprised when Johnny rose from his chair and hurried out of the office.

The irascible Johnny went missing for three days.

He hid on the mountain slopes until the sweat from his body and the tears from his eyes drove him down the slopes and back home. Before escaping to the seclusion of the mountain, he had only called at his house to collect the puppy. He took it over to a neighbour's house and said he would come back for it in a few days.

The neighbour Soraya, looked surprised when she saw him at her door and asked, "How is Charlotte?"

"She's well, thank you."

"You don't look too great, what's up Johnny?"

"I have a reporting matter to attend to and I don't know where I'll be."

"I'll be pleased to look after the puppy."

"Please send Charlotte some flowers." He placed money in her hand and walked away just as abruptly as he arrived.

It had not even occurred to him earlier to send her flowers and this added to the myriad of transgressions that plagued his conscience with regard to the young girl he had mistakenly married.

Three days later when he came down from the mountain, he was in a dishevelled state but clearer in his mind. He called home and after sprucing himself up a bit, he called at the offices of the attorney who was handling the affairs of Mouse's newly discovered grandmother. Once he was seated on the well-worn chair in the reception area he was

plagued by unprecedented misgivings and was on the point of walking out, when the elderly receptionist said:

"*Mnr* Alan will see you now."

"Thank you." Johnny rose slowly for he was shaky from lack of food and drink, but exercising control over his weakened state he walked through into Lefty Alan's office.

"Did Mej Pallas offer you any tea?" Lefty Alan asked him without really looking up from the documents on his desk and despite the circumstances of his visit, Johnny wondered how she had come by the name of 'Pallas' a Western corruption of the slave-name Paul. It had become habit to question everything with the expectation that there might be an interesting story concealed behind a name or a face. It was his reporting instinct at work and he was pleased to know that he could still function in a normal manner after the shock-revelations of the past days.

The mission school had schooled Johnny in the ways of acceptable manners and he offered an apology for having replaced the receiver so abruptly without the usual telephone pleasantries. Subdued by recent events he managed to say to the man behind the desk, "I'm sorry I replaced the receiver so rudely, but this whole business has been a shock to me and besides, I think I once knew Ruby."

"Why do you think that? The man opened a drawer and pulled out an old photograph and said, holding it out towards Johnny:" Is this the Ruby you may have known? You can see for yourself how beautiful she was. I think once you had seen her, it is quite likely that you would never forget her."

Johnny politely took the photograph from him, but his hand shook. He looked a long time before it fell from his hand and he felt his knees buckle. He staggered forward and the attorney rose from his chair and came around the desk and helped him back onto the chair."

"Mej Pallas!" He called out in a booming voice: "Bring some tea, quickly!" When the tea arrived Johnny watched him shovel several spoons of sugar into a chipped cup, beat it in the manner that one would beat eggs for an omelette and then apparently satisfied that the sugar had dissolved, gave it to Johnny to drink. He stood by until he had finished the last drop.

"When did you last eat?"

"I can't think about food."

He pulled a worn-out swivel chair around to where Johnny was. He sat down heavily and said: "Tell me about the Ruby you knew back then."

He listened carefully while Johnny told him as much as he could of the time he knew Ruby. He also told him of how the young girl Charlotte Smith came to work at their offices as a junior reporter. He told Lefty Alan about her initial battle to grasp the art of reporting and then about her outstanding success. He spoke of their courtship and their marriage and how they had started drifting apart from the time she became pregnant, for it was then that she seemed to trigger a memory in him that he could not place.

"Ruby was always my secret. I could never share what I had felt for her with anyone. It was too private. Instead I developed an unfair bitterness towards women and treated them as objectionable creatures, even pure and innocent Charlotte."

Johnny left the attorney's office as soon as it was polite to do so after he told Johnny all he knew of Ruby's life and the way she died. The nausea Johnny felt and the gnawing at his insides remained and he knew that sooner or later he would have to leave Charlotte and the child. He thought that Lefty Alan knew it even before he told him. As Charlotte's attorney he promised to take care of her. He said something about an inheritance, but Johnny was too distracted to pay attention.

Back at the office James came to him and said, "Come, walk with me to the food stall on the corner."

By this time James must have realized that there was something so utterly wrong that Johnny could not speak of it and he remained silent during the ten-minute walk. He bought food which they shared where they sat on the low stonewall of the church. Johnny took a bite of the sandwich, but could not swallow. The lump that had formed in his throat prevented him from even swallowing water without difficulty.

Although there was a park adjoining the church area, they avoided benches reserved for whites and in protest avoided the benches reserved for those of a darker hue. This practice had become habitual, so they sat in the shade of giant trees that were planted in the time of their forebears and they sat in silence. Johnny felt the tears run down his cheeks. He could not prevent it. It just came about involuntarily, the physiological result

of pent-up emotions. James glanced sideways at him and he sighed in sympathy for Johnny although he did not know the reason for Johnny's obvious distress. The animosity that existed between them in the past had diminished when James sensed Johnny's pain. Usually they would quarrel in earnest or jabber in jest, but today neither of them spoke. This brought them together in an intimacy that always eluded them in the past and in that moment they came to a silent compromise to avoid any conflict in the future. Afterwards, when it was time, they both slipped off the roughness of the wall and walked back to the offices. Johnny swore to himself that he would show more tolerance towards others. In his consciousness there lurked the notion that despair would accompany him for the rest of his days and he wished he had never been born.

As they walked back he noticed that rain clouds had gathered on the mountain and moved at a pace where they would blot out the sun in moments.

The cobbles were uneven under Johnny's feet and he staggered a little and James looked at him, his face grave with concern. He reached out to steady their pace and Johnny let him.

All those years ago the light had dimmed for Johnny when Ruby turned her back on him. Were the tentacles of that torrid love now reaching out to destroy him or was she reaching out in order to draw him to her in death. At that moment he wanted to be with her in her lonely grave more than he wanted anything else. He wanted his dust to mingle with hers for all eternity.

It was inevitable that he should leave. He would have to leave before Jewel became too attached to him. If he stayed he would destroy two precious lives. At times he thought that he was actually deluding himself, for he realized deep in his consciousness that he wanted to escape from the accusations in Mouse's eyes. He could no longer bear to have her gaze unwaveringly upon him, questioning his coldness.

Charlotte mentioned that Jewel's light complexion invited comments from passersby on the street whenever she walked with her. Johnny suspected that the genes of the original Henry De Meillon had something to do with that and of course only God knew to what extent Ruby added to Jewel's degree of whiteness. Charlotte was struggling to accept her

new-found identity and the fact that she had a family. Not only did she have a child, but also a grandmother and two aunts who lived in another country. Race was something both Johnny and Charlotte transcended and it did not matter to either one of them whether their forbears were White or Black. It is common knowledge that in those early days of the Cape everyone joyfully mixed when it came to sex: The evidence is there for all to see. How Jewel's obvious whiteness would affect her future in a racially divided country bothered them, but neither one of them could discuss it openly with the other. Johnny felt that they were a hybrid family unit – an unholy *hotnot* trinity and he wondered what the future would hold for the child.

Charlotte's inheritance was useful after all. She could upgrade the house they lived in. The first improvement she made was the supply of hot water and a proper shower room with an inside toilet. Dixie was still not allowed in the house, but she took her baby and the puppy for walks, Jewel in her pushcart and Dixie on a leash.

Johnny left them before their first Christmas together just when Jewel took her first faltering steps. He had obtained employment as a publishing house editor in Johannesburg. It was a time in which he intensified his anti-government activities and threw in his lot with those who were intent on eliminating apartheid. Several strategic points were earmarked for insurgent bombing in and around Johannesburg. He did not mastermind this. The hierarchy issued orders. Johnny and his compatriots put them into practice. In the first abortive attempt, a young white university student blew himself into eternity. In another, along with a sub-station, one of their most accomplished activists blew his arm off. With scant means at their disposal it was a matter of trial and error. Later Johnny became more adept at these tasks. But that was much later, long after he left Charlotte and Jewel.

Their leaders were jailed but they continued to bomb sub-stations in protest against electricity being exclusively for a privileged section of the population. Although electricity was not the main gripe, its sources of supply happened to be the easier and most sensitive targets. Interruption in the supply of electricity affected white households and the business sector - industries in particular.

Sometimes walking through one particular park in the center of Johannesburg Johnny thought he would opt to blow up benches occupied by white vagrants, but he somehow had an unspoken rapport with them and greeted them like old friends. As he passed by them they would call out for a *stompie* or a few coppers. Sometimes Johnny paused to exchange *skollie* banter and their toothless smiles would grow to a cackling as he sauntered away.

His new employers had no knowledge of his subversive activities although they were known liberals. However, they were surprised at his talents. They were also astonished at his dedication to work. He no longer consumed copious amounts of alcohol. He still paced up and down for hours, at times. They ignored his pacing in sharp contrast to his previous boss PK, who had so strongly objected and described it as a disturbance. He no longer lost his money playing dice on street corners, not that he didn't miss the thrill of an unexpected win.

Lives depended on him and he had to have his wits about him at all times. He lived in a room where the window faced a brick wall. The events of his life played itself out like a Greek tragedy in his lonely hours. The only accommodation he thought would be safe enough to hide in was this room in an old Islamic quarter and every day he listened with reverence to the call that summoned Muslims to their prayers. It brought back memories of home especially of his young adulthood when he tormented those beautiful girls in garments that concealed them from head to toe.

"Now", he thought "I am living like a fucking priest, without the fucking, like priests are supposed to do". In his lonely moments he would sometimes finger his previously offending member, but it remained passive and he thought of this as a blessing for he dare not venture from his room in search of a woman.

He missed Jewel's baby smiles and her first words. He was pleased in one way that he no longer had Charlotte's recriminating gaze to endure, though it did not mean that he did not love them both.

His surplus money he kept under a loose wooden block in the floor. In his bare room, a mattress on the floor, a rickety chair and a table on which perched a relic of a typewriter the events of the night before he left for Johannesburg constantly invaded his thoughts. Before he left the house, Charlotte had flung herself at him. She clung to him

like she once did when he pulled her from a raging sea. They had just eaten their last supper and he could still hear the tormented words as she ripped the buttons off her blouse to expose the delicate skin of her breasts. She did this to entice him to stay and he clasped her in a death grip but then violently flung her away from him

He did not want her incestuous touch; he did not want to see the madness in her eyes or hear her velvet voice change to grief-stricken contralto levels, as she sobbed.

"I am not your lover: I am your fucking father!" With great effort he managed not to fling these words at her. Half demented he stormed out of their house into the night unmindful of the cold and the rain outside. It was only when he reached the top of the street that involuntary sobs wracked his body. He felt that not even God's baptismal waters from above could cleanse him, least of all the tears that fell from her stricken eyes. He was a doomed man. Later, drenched and suffering from exposure as strong southerly winds hit the sloping streets, he made his way to a safe house in a white suburb. Incoherent and suffering from exposure he stood at the door while the deafening sounds of the rain on the tarred road created an illusion of unreality. One of the occupants in the house collected his luggage from Charlotte the next morning and drove him to Johannesburg in one day.

He did not know that in the not too distant future he would be forced to leave his country and bid a final farewell to the life he had known up till then and the only times he would return would be incognito.

CHAPTER TWO

Charlotte Smith De Meillon placed her hand on her protruding stomach. Her back had ached since daybreak and she thought it an opportune time to leave her bed and work on her latest story for the newspaper published as the *African Beat.* Deeply ensconced in the imaginary characters of her story, she tried to ignore the knock at the front door. The door opened up almost directly onto the street and she thought it might be her friend Soraya, who lived a few houses away. She pushed the small Remington typewriter away from her and pressed her hands on the table to support her body. She moved the chair backwards and then stood up, her hands pressed on the table for support. Johnny's offensive shouting from the next room for her to open the door left her unperturbed because it was what she expected on mornings when he suffered from the effects of a night-long binge.

She shrugged at his command and gave her stomach a little humorous pat in the secret pact she felt she had with her unborn infant. Her movements were slow because the niggling pain in her back had now moved to her stomach and she attributed this to the fact that she had been stationary on the chair since five *ante meridiem.*

As she unlocked the warped door on its rusting hinges and pulled with all her strength to open it, she heard Johnny cough. "It's the result of his night in the cold misty air of the mountain," she thought and looked at the elderly little man in a shabby suit standing outside under the sky's faint drizzle. She swung her gaze from the stranger to the sky beyond him and saw that darker clouds were moving in from the Atlantic

"Good morning. I'm looking for a Charlotte Smith that works for the newspaper, the *African Beat."*

"I'm Charlotte Smith, D e M e i l l on." Spelling the name, she said: "I'm married now."

"They told me at the newspaper. I'm Lefty Alan. Both names are my real names. I'm a lawyer and I represent Veronique Boucher.

"I've never heard of her."

"Can I come in? The news I have is not bad news but it will surprise you and may even shock you. In your present condition I'd prefer you to sit down."

Charlotte stood aside for him to enter and wondered if he was selling a funeral policy. Whatever it was, she decided instantly that on their joint income they couldn't afford to die yet. With the baby coming so early in their marriage additional expenses had to be met, so dying would have to wait because there was still too much living to do.

"I can't afford insurance, if that is what you're selling." She pointed to the only other chair in the room, as she gratefully dropped back onto the chair she had just vacated. "The kid's doing somersaults." She said to no one in particular, hoping the stranger would detect the hint and leave as soon as possible.

"I'm not selling anything. I'm here on behalf of my client Veronique Boucher. She believes that she's your grandmother. I believe that too, because I helped her find you."

Charlotte frowned and said, "I don't have any family. I was raised in a shanty town until I ran away. It's preposterous to think that there's a grandmother out there that I didn't know about!" She didn't want to lose her composure but wondered what other tactics he would use in order to sell what was important enough to bring to her attention through a ridiculous lie.

It occurred to her that she might be confronted by a madman. She said, "My husband Johnny is in the next room, perhaps you should come back when he's up and about later in the day."

He didn't look mad. He looked as if he had stepped out of a cartoon in his well-worn suit, yet he had the confidence of an educated man. "No, pay attention to what I'm saying, the lady who thinks she's your grandmother is outside in the car. I drove her here this morning. Her daughter Ruby had a baby in July 1937. Your grandfather died a while ago and left you some money. I'm their attorney and they instructed me to find you."

"I never had a mother."

"Everyone has a mother."

"Well, if I had a mother, she gave me away to a woman who lived in a shanty town. I regarded the woman in the shack as my mother."

"If what we think is true, then your mother was my client's daughter Ruby who had a baby, gave it away and then went home and cut the veins in her wrists. Ruby's

father tried to find you over many years, but later he was an invalid and had to abandon the search."

"They didn't want me when I was born. Why would they want me now? I have a life with my husband Johnny and any day now I'll have this baby." She placed her hand protectively on her stomach. "I prefer you to leave."

"When your grandfather was alive he told me that your mother loved your father, but she turned from him because she was ashamed to tell her parents that he was just a fisherman. Your Grandmother deeply regrets that she withheld her love and sympathy when your mother needed it the most. She had other children but one by one they relocated to other towns. Ruby's two younger sisters live in other countries. Your grandmother lives alone. Each child received their share of your grandfather's estate. Your share has been held in trust for you. They were never a well to do family, but with insurances and properties, your grandfather's estate was large enough to leave each child an ample portion.

"I don't want it. They abandoned me when I was too helpless to look after myself."

"I understand how you feel, but please think about what I've told you." He looked around him, "The money will come in handy now that you're having a child. You'll need a bigger place to live in to start with."

"No, this is my home, besides where do you think a Coloured family will find better accommodation? If we move from here it will just be to another slum."

"There are other alternatives, if you have enough money to pay for it."

"I really don't want money from anyone."

She screwed up her face as the pain in her back turned to sharp stabs. Suddenly water ran down her legs, soaking her stockings and her shoes that were fortunately not her new ones. Charlotte stared at the puddle that spread unceremoniously around her feet.

The man thought it almost comical the way she looked in amazement at the wet floor. "Something's happening to me. Johnny!" She called, but did not recognize her own voice. She was filled with fear of the unknown. "Johnny! Help me, please."

Seconds later Johnny appeared naked to the waist, his good looks etched with fatigue. He looked at the stranger who was leaning over Mouse patting her shoulder. She edged away from him, her face screwed up as a new wave of pain washed over her.

"What is going on?" He walked towards her, but the fumes from the night's alcohol drifted towards her and she pulled back from his touch as well. For an instant she saw the hurt in his brooding eyes, the amber turning to a darker hue as he gazed questioningly at her and then at the stranger.

"You must get her to a hospital otherwise the child will be born before you get there."

"Who are you?" Johnny looked annoyed at the man's intrusion at a time like this.

"Your wife can explain, in the meantime get her to where she will be taken care of. She might need all the help she can get."

"What are you talking about?"

"My wife has had five children and she's also a small woman."

The warm fluid that had escaped from she knew not where inside of her, was beginning to turn cold and she wished the man would leave so that she could shower and change. The pains were coming in quick spasms now and if this continued she thought she would stop being polite to him.

She turned and walked towards the door that led to the back room where her clothes were kept. Looking over her shoulder she noticed that the man was introducing himself to Johnny. Then he walked out into the rain through the door that led into the street. Before he left she noticed that he passed a card to Johnny and she heard him say that they must contact him as soon as the child was born.

Johnny calmly called an ambulance, explaining that his wife was about to give birth. Charlotte was shaking from the shock as the waves of pain intensified. In the bedroom she took one of her shapeless dresses from the cupboard and in between the pains she thought of how Johnny always says, "Do you like looking like a fucking Voortrekker?" He was always critical of her clothes and in response to him she withdrew into her silence where no one could intrude. She felt safe from anything that threatened her when she was mute. He sometimes struck her, not too hard, but hard enough to sting her cheek. The look in her eyes made him instantly repentant and each time he promised

not to do so again. In the beginning she tried her best to obey his commands, but since her pregnancy self-assertion became as powerful a weapon as her withdrawal into her interior world. Johnny had begun to realize that in the role of a mother her priorities would change and his role in her life would take on a new dimension.

She finished showering under warm water that trickled out in scanty droplets from a makeshift shower and, still shaking, she managed to dress herself and pack a little overnight bag. Warmer and dryer than before, the shaking was subsiding, but not the contractions. She sat down on the chair at the table where she had earlier typed her story and waited for the ambulance to arrive.

Johnny was now in the shower and she hoped he would obliterate the odours that he brought with him from his night of drinking on the mountain. Over the past months he had gone on these binges far too often and at the slightest dispute between them he would flee and only return the next morning. She hoped that once the child was born, he would start acting more responsibly.

During his more temperate weeks he would spend his time listening to New Orleans Blues and start writing stories that he handed over to her to finish. At other times they would select reading matter from a collection of books and journals that they bought from the second-hand shops and stalls. Johnny went through various phases and his behaviour changed from one moment to the next. Sometimes she thought there was a god-like quality in him, but because she didn't believe in any sort of a god as such, she wondered why she saw that quality in him. He wanted to be pampered the one moment and the next he would stride up or down the sloping streets in giant strides like an ancient warrior. She often felt when he lay on her, that he would draw the soul from her body. She would squirm under him and whisper, "I can't breathe." He would pull away from her and moodily leave their bed.

The ambulance arrived almost an hour after it was summoned. Johnny did not accompany her. He made an excuse when the ambulance arrived and said he would see her later. "I need coffee." She knew that it was true. The effects of the alcohol made him drink cup after cup of tar-black coffee the next morning.

She thought the ambulance would never reach its destination for it was ambling slowly along stopping now and again as the driver shouted a greeting at some or other acquaintance. As it drove on its way she thought of the day she and Johnny took their marriage vows in that dreadful court-room in the bleak Coloured section that symbolized holy matrimony to hopeful couples. Someone took a flash-photo of them and now in retrospect she remembered how she hated the photograph and hid it away in a drawer. The unknown photographer asked them to pay in advance for a copy of what would be regarded as the only official wedding photograph they would have. It was supposed to be the most important event of their lives, yet neither one of them had thought it necessary to arrange for a photographer. They could have asked James from the office, who took most of the photographs for the newspaper. When the official handed them the marriage certificate, she thought it looked exactly like the forms on which death sentences were written. In her work as a reporter she had seen several and always thought that the solemnity of the issuing of a written death sentence evoked a deeper fear than when the death sentence was pronounced by the judge.

She hated it when Johnny called her Mouse. At first she thought it sounded as if he thought of her as his pet mouse, but when the name stuck and everyone in the office called her Mouse, it irritated her. In future she was going to insist on being called Charlotte.

Johnny liked to tell her what to eat, how to dress and what to read. She disregarded his advice most of the time on the first two, but when it came to what she should read, he could not be faulted. James who works with them in the office calls him a walking library.

Sometimes in those early hours of dawn, when the desire to be close to another person sneaks up from nowhere in the dark, she reaches out to touch the back of his head resting on its white pillow, but then draws back because she feels that he is somewhere beyond the reach of a mortal and the hopelessness of it all escapes in a forlorn sigh.

He asks: “What’s wrong? Why such a drawn-out sigh from you, Mouse?”

“I think of those shack days I suppose. It haunts me.”

“Don’t allow it to do that.”

"I 'm also troubled by what the government is doing to our people. They appear to be happy people, but they're really sad. Have you noticed how seldom they complain about their circumstances? They talk and laugh and practice their little dance steps, but underneath they're dying a slow death."

"Go to sleep, Mouse. You can't save the world."

"We both write. We're reporters. We can be the voice of the people in the Cape."

"Shh! The house might be bugged, you silly little clot."

Charlotte retreated into the dark and tugged at the blankets. She snuggled into her pillow and started making up a story for the following week's edition of their newspaper. It was the story of a lonely child and the tattered copy of a children's book that she clutched to her breast. Over time the child memorized each printed word in it.

She was in the labour ward of the hospital and there was a nurse with her. She was breathing through some sort of mask that the nurse placed on her face from time to time. It had a strange odour, but it made her feel sleepy and lessened the pain. They kept prodding her to stay awake, saying, "The baby will be coming soon. You're dilating quite well. Lie still, it will be over soon."

"She is very narrow." A man's voice said. "She should have had a Caesarean. Have you seen the father? He's tall. I saw him out in the passage earlier. He asked me about her. Charlotte pushed the unknown man's hands away from her and he said, "Don't, my dear, I have to scrub again if you keep touching me. Sister, help her push a little. No! That's too much, just slightly. Good girl. I see it, it's a small baby. It shouldn't be giving us so much trouble. Here it is, it's a girl, a beautiful girl." Then everything stopped and she fell into a blissful sleep, or at least she thought she was sleeping although she kept hearing voices.

When she awoke, Johnny was leaning over her. "We have a daughter. She's embarrassingly white. Are you sure you didn't cheat on me?"

She was so annoyed that if she had the strength she would have flown out of bed and hit him. She didn't answer and the fierce glow in her wide black eyes told him that he had gone too far. She turned her head to the wall.

She heard him say, “There’s that look again. It reminds me of someone, but I don’t know who. Sometimes I even think it’s my mother looking at me with such bitter disapproval.”

She didn’t answer. Then he asked, “Why do you hate me?” His voice was just above a whisper, but loud enough for her to hear.

She turned to look at him. “I hate you sometimes but I love you most of the time. Everything is all mixed up in my head when you’re around. You intimidate me most of the time. You don’t act as if you love me either. You get into bed and turn your back on me. I talk to you and you walk away.”

“It isn’t you that I turn my back on, Mouse. I turn my back on the world and my past. I turn from the images that haunt me from my childhood and my youth.”

“I’m sorry Johnny.” She reached out to him and he took her hand.

After a while they started discussing possible names for the little girl. “I think I’d like her to be called Jewel.”

“What sort of a name is Jewel?” She asked.

She hadn’t seen her baby yet, so a name is difficult to decide on now. Couples gave their babies the strangest names, fancy ones. She liked the old-fashioned kind, but she knew that Johnny would choose something untraditional.

Johnny left and she lay there, eyes closed, thinking about this wonderful thing in her life: A baby girl. Then she remembered the arrival of the stranger at their house that morning before she was brought to hospital. She thought of what he had said. He said she had a grandmother. Where from? Why make an appearance the exact day her baby is born? What sort of people were they to have abandoned a defenceless baby in a shack to be brought up on a dung heap? If it was true what the man said, then she really didn’t want anything to do with them, because they had so little respect for a life, her life.

The following day she was able to spend more time with her baby. She placed the child on the bed next to her and removed the wrap so that she could study its hands and feet. She had never seen anything so beautifully sculpted. This was the only treasure she wanted and she would work her fingers to the bone to provide her child with the best education. It was what mattered in life. It provides security and independence and it can

take her child across the sea to a better place one day. She didn't want the child to live in a country where they start killing you from the time you're born.

Looking at the baby she thought: 'Johnny's right, she is white, or at least pink. Her skin is pale, like porcelain. Little pink hands snatched at the air above her and pale feet sensuously kicked against Charlotte's stomach. A young nurse stood beside the bed and gazed at the little red mouth that fed so lustily from its mother's pale golden breast.

"She's a little pink animal." Charlotte whispered.

"She's a beauty. When I pick her up to bring her to you, she opens her eyes and I'm sure she senses that she's being taken to her mother."

The woman in the shack had called Charlotte Miriam. She hated the name. It was too biblical and Charlotte was not religious enough to have a name like that. Charlotte Smith was the name the social worker gave her and it was the only name she would ever acknowledge. She read the bible when the old man in the shanty town taught her the letters, but when she was placed in the communist household, she read Darwin and kept reading Darwin, and a little of Engels and Marx for the year she lived in their home. She lived happily in that family. They were kind to her and they passionately believed that education was a basic human right that en masse would lead to an ideal egalitarian society. She learnt more in that year than in her years in other foster homes. Recently she made enquiries about that family but she was informed that the old man had been given a prison sentence. The children were being cared for by other family members. The old man never harmed anyone. He believed implicitly that communism was the answer to the world's problems. He believed that everyone would be equal under communism and Charlotte started believing him, because he repeated it so often. He said everyone was entitled to work in whatever field he or she chose. She personally couldn't wait for communism to take over in the world. "What a grand world it will be," the old man, the communist, always said to his wife.

"I will try and find that family as soon as I can get around again." She said to herself.

At that moment the nurse came into the ward and handed her a bunch of mountain flowers. The card said that they were from Veronique Boucher, her grandmother. She

quickly placed them on the bedside table because they felt prickly in her hands. She wondered if it was because she was agitated by the whole incident that had taken place the morning on the day of the child's birth. 'Who is this woman?' She thought. It is clearly a case of mistaken identity. She felt almost sorry for the woman, whoever she was.

Charlotte was experiencing a little difficulty feeding the baby. She worried that sustenance was too slow in coming and that the infant would perish from hunger. Johnny thought it might relieve a lot of stress if the feeds were supplemented, but Charlotte thought otherwise. She was very much into natural foods and said that she was failing her child. She was slipping into a slight depression, especially when Johnny suddenly stopped visiting her. "Post-natal," the matron said when she was consulted.

He stayed away for three days. No-one heard from him. He had been her only contact with the world outside of the hospital and suddenly she felt abandoned. What if Johnny walked away from her now? If he failed to collect them from the hospital? It reminded her of the time she spent in hospital after she ran away from the shanty town. Engrossed in negative thoughts, tears started flowing on and off and this mood lasted for three days and then suddenly Johnny was back. She thought he had been through some sort of transformation. His face was gaunt; his eyes sunken, with dark shadows. This time she couldn't work it out. She studied him in great detail as he stood next to her bed. She wondered if he had spent the three days drinking. "Drink was going to kill him, if women didn't get to him first," she thought.

She was allowed to walk in the passage and in circles around the ward. Her slippers kept sliding off her feet, for they were now too big for her. Her dressing gown was on loan from her neighbour. Her nightdress, one of two, was close to shreds, but she had darned and laundered them both carefully before she came to hospital for the birth.

Johnny looked back at her and if she didn't know any better, she would have thought that his expression was that of someone who had suffered deeply.

"Why are you so glum?" she asked, trying to sound cheerful to conceal her concern.

"I'm just tired." She noticed he didn't say "I'm just tired, Mouse." Hooray, she thought she was winning this round. Perhaps he will get used to calling her Charlotte at last.

"Did you forget that you had a wife and child in this hospital?"

"There's another life out there, in case you've forgotten lying here in the lap of luxury."

"You can be so hateful!"

"Yes, I know. I spent three days sitting on the mountain, thinking about it."

"You're always doing that, Johnny."

"Yes, but this was different."

"Okay, are we going to talk about it, or is it none of my business."

"It's none of your business."

"Aren't married people supposed to talk about the things that bother them?"

"That doesn't give you the right to intrude into my thinking time. You have it too and I don't interfere."

"You know you interfere in everything I do or say."

"Well, there are some things you can't tell a woman, they go blabbing to everyone else so let's change the subject."

"If anyone divulges anything in this family, it isn't me." After a short silence she asked, "Do you want to see the little one, she's the sweetest little mite imaginable?"

"No. Not today. I'll see enough of her when you get home."

After Johnny left, Charlotte wondered why his attitude had softened towards her, but why he was distancing himself from the child. He was less abrupt but strangely preoccupied. "Something unusual was going on in his life," she thought.

Then she returned home. He carried her shabby old overnight bag and she carried the brand-new baby. PK, had been generous enough to allow Johnny to use the *African Beat* vehicle for the sole purpose of taking her home.

Charlotte was surprised to see that Johnny had made changes in their house. A narrow bed had been brought in for him to sleep on and it was placed in the front room. It was covered in a patchwork quilt and a few scatter cushions. It gave the room a warm, snug feel and provided additional seating, but she was a little disconcerted when he said,

"You and the child must use the back room, which is quieter and away from the street. I'll sleep in the front room."

"Will we be sleeping separately?"

"I'll just disturb you and the kid if I come in late at night."

Charlotte took the bag from him and walked into the room he had prepared for them. She had hoped that he would spend more time at home now that they had a child. The baby was sleeping. Charlotte placed her in the middle of the bed with pillows tucked in around her to ensure that she didn't roll off the edge.

Johnny stood at the door of the room and said, "She can't roll off yet, can she?"

"I just want to make sure." It was such a relief for Charlotte not to have the baby's weight pressing on her pelvis. Her breasts were extended and hurt, but after the feed she knew they would improve again. Johnny said it was ridiculous to feed a child from the mother's own body. "For goodness sake, there are feeding bottles and scientific formulas," she heard him mumble as she walked from the bedroom to the kitchen. Although she herself had not been fed by her birth mother and had grown to adulthood and so had thousands of others, yet she still believed that it was the natural thing to do. She was close to the earth from the time of her birth: An earth woman. Feeding her child was natural and sensual and she would persist.

Charlotte noticed that Johnny hadn't called her Mouse once since he fetched her from the hospital. As the months passed the infant filled out and startled them both with radiant smiles.

One morning when the sun was shining and the season's cape winds settled down, Charlotte received a telephone call from Lefty Alan, one of several he had made since she returned from the hospital with Jewel.

"This is Lefty Alan." He said as if she didn't know who it was. She thought he sounded more optimistic than the previous times.

"How are you and your child getting on?"

"We're doing well. Is that why you're calling me?"

She heard him chuckle. "You want to get to the point, don't you? You don't waste time, just like your mother Ruby."

"I know very little about this mother you keep telling me about. You say she's dead, let's leave her that way. What's on your mind this morning?"

"Mrs Boucher wants to meet you. There's also the matter of your money. We can't keep it, it's yours."

"Although Johnny doesn't agree with me, I've told you what you can do with the money, Mister Alan, sir."

"Charlotte, listen to me. Your grandfather tried to find you from the time Ruby gave you away. Honour his memory and take your inheritance. Your mother would have wanted it, for it is in fact her portion of the inheritance. The other family members have already had their share."

"I never knew of a mother until you showed up to tell me of one!" Charlotte wanted to replace the receiver, because she felt that tears were threatening and she wanted to avoid getting emotional about this family that is being thrust on her.
When Johnny arrived home from work, he found her staring out of her bedroom window.

"Is something wrong with the kid?"

She shook her head, but was unable to reply. Johnny walked to the crib that was a gift from PK, who had insisted on being Jewel's godfather. Johnny had said at the time, "A whitey for my daughter's godfather, Christ what's next, a black prime minister in South Africa?" They had all laughed, but PK took the role of godfather seriously and doted on the child.

"The kid's trying to swallow her toes, so she must be hungry." Johnny's remark interrupted her thoughts and she turned to the baby to attend to her. She realized that the practical side of life took precedence, especially when there was a child to care for.

Later that night after she had gone to bed Johnny suddenly appeared beside her on the bed. "Tell me what's troubling you and try not to cry, because I'm damned if I can hear what you're saying in between that confounded sobbing."

Eventually she told him how difficult it was for her to accept what Lefty Alan insisted was true about her having had a mother.

"Perhaps Ruby was your mother and when you think of it, the poor girl most likely had no other option but to give her baby away."

"But why give me to a shack woman? The man she lived with tried to molest me and I shudder to think what would have happened if I hadn't run away."

"You'll have to forget about all this nonsense and focus on Jewel. The past is gone, you can't get anything back to change it. You have a child and she will need your strength when she grows older. You know how important a mother is to a girl. See to it that she has a better life than you had."

"What about you, you're her father, don't you have a role to play?"

"You know me. I might not always be around. A child's future is mainly determined by the mother."

"It sounds as if you have plans that don't include a wife and child?"

"There's no knowing what I'm going to do. I'll go where my work takes me and there are other options opening up for me these days." He turned away from her as her eyes opened wide in shock and then filled with tears.

The following week Lefty Alan phoned to tell her that the arrangements were made for her to meet her grandmother.

Waiting for them, Lefty Alan said to the elderly *Mej* Pallas in his office, "Nothing in life surprises me. You should have seen Ruby. She was a beautiful young girl and an outstanding dancer. She won one competition after the other. They lived in a house in a small settlement at the sea. It is a very remote place with just a few houses. In fact Veronique Boucher still lives there. Most of the other people have sold out to a developer, but she hangs on because of the memories."

"Ag *Meneer* Alan, I hope everything will go well this afternoon. The husband Johnny is such a fine man, and he's so handsome. His voice sounds like the ones you hear on the wireless. What a pity I'm an old woman."

"It's called a radio these days." He walked to the window and looked out to see if either Charlotte or Veronique Boucher were arriving. "Charlotte is over twenty years younger than he is. I don't think he'll exchange her for an old woman twice her age, *Mej* Pallas." He said it good-naturedly, so that *Mej* Pallas couldn't possibly take offense at the remark.

"Is she beautiful like her mother?"

"Yes, but in a different way. Her eyes are too large for her face and they are as black as coal. You'll see her this afternoon. I must say I don't see much of a future for Charlotte and Johnny. I get the feeling that either she'll move on in life or he will."

Veronique Boucher arrived before Charlotte, who had the excuse that her baby had demanded a feed at the last moment. The older woman was sitting on a chair in the lawyer's office when Charlotte walked in.

He said to Veronique Boucher: "Veronique, I want you to meet Charlotte De Meillon. Charlotte, this is your grandmother."

"Come to me, my child." She held out her arms to Charlotte, who hesitated at first and then shyly approached the older woman. She kissed Charlotte on both cheeks more than once and peeked at the baby whose sparkling little smiles played around her mouth. Her dark curls crept from underneath her white bonnet and the woman held out her arms to take the child from Charlotte. After some moments, Charlotte said, "She's heavy, you'd better sit down." Her voice shook.

Veronique kept looking at the child. She looked up at Charlotte and said, "She's a bonny little girl. I can see you take good care of her."

"Thank you for the flowers."

"I wanted to visit you then, but I was advised not to rush things."

"I can't believe that I had a grandmother living so close to me and never knew." Charlotte was about to cry, but her grandmother led her to a chair. She held Jewel gently in her arms and said, "She's so much like Ruby."

They talked together for an hour or more and then when they eventually emerged from the lawyer's own office where the meeting took place, he knew that they were reconciled. He also knew that now he could get down to the business of attending to the money matters that affected both the grandmother and her granddaughter. Lefty Alan didn't begrudge Charlotte anything because she deserved it all and he would see to it that her circumstances improved.

Later, alone with Charlotte in his office she said to him:

"Why do they call you Lefty when you write with your right hand?"

"My mother had so many children she didn't have a name for me when I arrived. My sister who was a year older slept on the mother's right hand side and I slept on her left hand side. I was referred to as the one on the left and so she called me Lefty. Alan was the name of the guy who got her pregnant. When she registered her children, she recorded me as Lefty Alan and I swear that's the truth. Anyway he wasn't such a bad guy because he arranged for me to study and supported me until I qualified."

"At least you knew your father."

"I didn't see much of him and the last time was at my graduation." Lefty Alan told her as they left his office and he walked downstairs with her. At the bus stop he said to her, "I'm pleased you've learnt to accept the circumstances of your birth and that you've forgiven Veronique."

"I'm grateful to your lady in the office for taking her home. Veronique told me that I have an aunt in New York and another in London, both my late mother's younger sisters. It is still difficult for me to believe that I have family not only in this country but in other countries and I wonder what my aunts are like. Did you know them?"

"All the Boucher girls were great lookers, like you. Opal works as a stage designer in London and sometimes in New York. Clara is a nursing sister and when I last heard she was in London."

Charlotte smiled at the compliment. "I hope I meet them some day."

"I wish you success and happiness in wherever you choose to be in future. You should use your money to set up a decent home for yourself and your child."

"Johnny is also part of my family."

"Well, yes, but don't rely solely on him for happiness. Get a proper education and see where it takes you."

"An education won't get me into a better job. I'm Coloured."

"The political system will change and then you'll be qualified. Think about it. I've been reading your stories and articles in the *African Beat* and I see great potential. Your aunts are a success and you can develop your talents as well. Ruby was a wonderful dancer and an artist at a young age."

"I would really like to know more about them."

"Speak to your grandmother when you see her again."

Once a month Charlotte was collected at her home and driven out to where her grandmother lived. It looked like the beach where she nearly drowned once. Johnny had pulled her from the huge waves. She remembered that a strange feeling had come over her. Nothing seemed real, except the dark blue water that swirled around her feet and engulfed her body. She felt powerless as the waves pulled her under and then pushed her back to the surface again. It had been both pleasurable and frightening and she was on the point of surrendering to the might of the waves, when she was caught in an iron grip and pulled back onto the sand. Johnny had been furious, but she couldn't explain that it had been impossible for her to withstand the power of what felt like giant tongues that twisted around her and pulled her away from him. It was as if the sea had a massive consciousness that lived and reeled and that said to her, "Johnny is not for you. He belongs to someone else. I'm taking you away from him into the cold secret depths of the ocean." At the time Charlotte thought that these were the words she heard to the rhythmic sounds of the drums of ancient forefathers. In retrospect she knew that it was her imagination that turned the sounds of the waves into words, caught as she was in that moment of danger.

Charlotte stood looking past the rocks towards the sea. Jewel was back at the house with Veronique who wouldn't stop fussing over the child. The kid was getting cute; even Johnny had started paying attention to her. She laughed and bounced on his knees and when he came home at night her little arms would reach for him. She and Johnny had not resumed a proper married life after Jewel's birth. He remained distant and sometimes stayed away from home for days at a time. She never questioned him and he never offered explanations. They were growing farther apart and she did not know what to expect from one moment to the next. Standing there in her isolation, she wondered why she thought of him at this particular moment when she should be at peace within herself, surrounded as she was by sand dunes and frothy waves as they came cascading over the protruding rocks to form little pools of water.

The hamlet was sheltered from all sides by mountains and Charlotte noticed how a light mist enveloped everything in its wake and the lights in the houses went on.

Fishermen who camped on the beach lit their lanterns and the hamlet was transformed into a "place of imaginary fairy coves and pirate caves," she thought.

"What a magical place to be brought up in," she said afterwards to Veronique while they were having tea at a table in the bay window that overlooked the wide expanse of grey water.

On Charlotte's first visit Veronique had shown her photographs of Ruby and her sisters. Together she and Veronique went through a pile of school certificates and diplomas for dancing that had been awarded to the girls.

"I love this place. I'll live here till the end of my days. After that you and your aunts can dispose of it and share the money."

"Leave that to your two daughters. I don't want anything. I have more than enough now. Did Lefty tell you that he will help me buy a car and arrange for me to learn to drive to give me more independence? I'm very excited."

"What about a new house. You can always come and live here, if you can't find anything suitable."

"It's too far away from where we work."

"Perhaps you should apply for one of those new government houses. Verwoerd isn't wasting time in demolishing the slums, is he?"

"You're right. Soon District Six will be nothing more than a memory." Charlotte didn't want to discuss the apartheid prime minister of the country with her grandmother. She didn't know what her sentiments were and she didn't want to bring up contentious political issues. Her grandmother wasn't an easy woman to get to know. Charlotte thought there was a coldness in her, and Lefty Alan was the only person Veronique really felt at ease with, only because she had known him since the early days, when she and her husband were first married. Although she was kind to Charlotte, there was distance. Veronique's fondness for Jewel, was obvious, though.

"PK, our boss offered to buy a house up against the mountain in his name, but it would of course be ours. He thinks that Jewel won't fit in where we are at present. He's her godfather, you know."

"Has she been baptized?"

"Johnny and I don't believe in it."

"You're non believers?"

"We're not sure. I suppose we're agnostic. Johnny is less so, because he owes his early education to the mission schools."

"Can I arrange to have her baptized in our church in the town?"

"I'll speak to Johnny, Veronique. I haven't set foot in a church since I left school. That was the only time I ever went to church in fact."

"Was it the communist's influence?"

"No. I have other reasons."

A few months later the baptism took place and Johnny, Charlotte and PK turned up with Jewel for the event. It was a clear, sunny day and Veronique served lunch out in the garden. There wasn't much garden, for nothing really flourished in the sand except for a grapevine that provided the shade they needed and a patch of grass. They could hear the sea in the distance. The mountains protected the hamlet from fragments of Antarctic cold that drifted in from the Atlantic in winter. The stone house stood on a mound that had piled up into a dune over centuries of sand that had been washed in from the sea and deposited by the southerly winds that wound their way in between the craggy mountains along the coastline.

At first Veronique distanced herself from PK, but soon warmed to him for he was a jovial sort on a social level. He also pandered to her religious convictions and this found favour with her, for she was greatly attached to her church.

"What are your proper names?"

"Pieter Karel, Mrs Boucher."

Bored with the conversation, Johnny excused himself and went on his own to explore the rocks and the long stretch of beach. When he returned Veronique asked him whether he had liked the church service, he said, "It was tolerable. Do you believe that Jewel is saved from eternal hell fire now that she has been turned into a little Christian?"

"I do, actually."

"If you feel so strongly about it, why didn't you allow your daughter to baptize her child before she dumped it and killed herself?"

"I admit I handled the birth of my daughter's child very badly and I'll regret it till the end of my days." Tears had sprung into her eyes and PK saved the situation by laughing and pointing to Jewel who had stuck her toes in her mouth.

There was a chill in the air not just from the sudden change in the weather that blew in from the sea. Veronique remained the gracious hostess but with coolness towards Johnny. Charlotte withdrew into her usual silence. PK kept the conversation going by talking of his parents on their farm in the Karoo.

Later they travelled back to Cape Town in PK's car. Jewel was restless and both Johnny and Charlotte were pleased when the day's events came to an end.

It was in December 1964 that Johnny announced that he had been offered work in Johannesburg by a publishing house. The events leading up to his departure were shattering for Charlotte. His boss PK and James were not overly surprised because they now knew that there were political aspects to Johnny's life that his young wife did not know of. James would never reveal what he suspected. PK would, but although he guessed, he had no proof of Johnny's political activities. Besides, if he did know he would never betray him to anyone. PK just wondered why it took Johnny so many years to decide that he wanted to be involved in what Johnny always declared was a useless struggle, in any case.

After Johnny departed for Johannesburg, Charlotte stayed away from the office for several weeks. She was reluctant to discuss her personal life with her boss and James and the new woman who worked there as a receptionist. After the weeks had gone by and she had heard nothing from Johnny, she decided to return to work. PK stuck his head out from his office, and called to her.

"Mouse, come in here. We have to talk."

She walked into his office and he noticed that she was wearing a white top and a smart black skirt. She wore heeled shoes and stockings that showed her legs off to advantage. Her hair had grown longer over the past two years and she wore it tied in a tight knot at the back of her head. PK noticed how shiny and smooth her hair looked combed back from her face.

"I think it's done you a lot of good to be without Johnny. You're looking swanky."

"What's swanky?"

"Smart and suitably dressed for an up and coming reporter."

"I've never come across a well-dressed reporter. They don't earn enough."

"True, look at me. I can't afford to drink and dress. Now that Johnny's no longer with us, I want you to do his stories. James is inundated with photographing and editing."

"I'll do my best." Charlotte walked to the door and then turned. "Don't call me Mouse. My name is Charlotte. You'll see the spelling on my application form. Please see that I'm called Charlotte in future."

"Wait! Don't go. Sit down for a moment." He lit a cigarette, took two puffs and placed it on an overfull ashtray. "Don't think too harshly of Johnny. He was always irrational. I still believe he truly loved you and Jewel, but I think that there was some hidden reason why he left."

"I think it was that woman Liz, your old flame."

"That's possible. I didn't think they were that involved though. Before he met you, it was just a game to him. I just want to tell you that James and I noticed that he would go out and sit under the trees in the park and talk to two men. The men always wore suits and carried brief cases or newspapers. I'm sure there were political motives behind these meetings."

"Johnny wasn't politically connected to anyone. You know he wouldn't trust a politician."

"My reporting instinct tells me that Johnny was and is heavily involved in politics."

"He left because our marriage was a mistake. Since Jewel's birth we lived together like strangers and I think that his decision to leave me was taken at the time she was born, because that was when he changed."

"Mouse, don't torture yourself over Johnny. He might come back when he realizes what he's lost. The bastard attracts women like honey lures flies into its sticky trap and then he discards them with distaste."

"I hope you don't think I'm one of his flies." Tears had sprung into her eyes and PK walked around to her side of the desk and pecked her on the cheek."

"You were the prize. You came to us as a frightened child, now look what a stunning woman you've become." His large hand closed over her chin and he looked into the dark pools that were her eyes. "You have spirit. You'll get over this and I'll always be here when you need me."

In fact it happened that she was always there to help PK when he needed it. She often bailed him out of trouble whenever he was locked up for some or other contravention of the publishing laws and sometimes for more serious offenses. Now and again she saw to it that he had a proper meal. Her own cooking was hopeless, but her neighbour Soraya prepared wonderful dishes. Charlotte either bought the ingredients or paid Soraya for them. She also paid her for looking after Jewel during the day.

Now that she had her own car she enjoyed many outings. One of them happened to be a regular visit to the prison, where her old communist foster father was kept. He remained cheerful throughout her visits but she could see the sadness in his fading eyes. She talked to Lefty Alan and he promised to work on getting the old man's sentence commuted or at worst to get it reduced on account of the man's failing health.

On one of the visiting days, she met the son Norriman, the eldest in the family. The son's name was taken from the Norriman of the early Cape who is recorded in the official archives as an Imam who fought for freedom. This early Norriman left behind a reputation for assisting the oppressed and downtrodden slaves of the Cape. The old man took this name for his first born in honour of that early opponent of Dutch colonialism. Norriman was a law student and his studies were being sponsored by contacts outside of the country. The family received support from the same source. One of the younger daughters was being sent to a school in Swaziland and Charlotte offered to buy her uniform and books.

Norriman was of medium height like his father. He held his shoulders well back when he walked. He had the straight black hair of the Cape's early Batavians and like his sisters he had dark passionate eyes, their mother's eyes. Charlotte remembered their mother with fondness. She had always been in the kitchen. She baked breads and cakes

for several customers to add to the family income when Charlotte lived with them and then one day she collapsed and died and the social worker told Charlotte that she could no longer remain in the household.

The young man said to Charlotte as they walked from the prison to where she had parked her car: “My sisters want to see you. They were pleased when I told them you visit our father. Can you come on Saturday?”

The first she heard of Johnny was one evening when there was a knock at her door and an unknown man stood there and said he had a message from Johnny De Meillon. Jewel was trying to feed herself, but the mashed up food kept sliding off the spoon. Her toys were scattered from one end of the room to the other. The man smiled at the child and greeted them both politely. Charlotte thought she had seen him somewhere before, but could not recall where or when.

“Greetings, Johnny asked me to come and speak to you on his behalf.”

She invited him in and they sat opposite each other each of them waiting for the other to start speaking first.

“Where is he?”

He’s in England. You must have heard that he lives there now.”

“Has he told you why he left us?’

“He left you because of his involvement in the struggle. Don’t ask too many questions for I can’t answer them.”

“Why didn’t he tell me at the time?”

“What he undertook to do for his people was confidential. Many lives depended on him. Besides it was too dangerous to involve you in any way, because of the child.

“I could have gone with him.”

“That would have been impossible.”

“How well do you know Johnny?”

“We did our training together. I got to know him very well. I regret that I have to tell you that he now has a new life with another woman. They have a son.”

Charlotte had taken Jewel to sit on her knee, but placed her back on a rug on the floor where she once again happily reached for her toys. Charlotte’s head was swimming.

News of Johnny was a shock to her, especially the fact that another woman and her son were his new priority.

"What about our daughter? She needs a father too."

"It's a sacrifice he is prepared to make and you must do the same. The child will understand some day."

"What does he want me to do?"

"I've brought papers for you to sign that will release you both from the marriage."

"You mean, he's asking for a divorce?"

"Sign the papers for your sake and for his. He can't come back here. I'm sorry that I'm the bearer of bad tidings."

"It's not your fault. I think he's proved himself to be a coward not to speak to me personally. He's not the man I thought he was, so I'm prepared to sign to be rid of him." Her tears fell onto the document she was hurriedly scanning. Her hands trembled as she handed the signed papers back to the man.

"Tell him from me that I will never forgive him for this."

The man had introduced himself when he arrived but Charlotte was too flustered to have paid attention, and could not remember what he said his name was. "What did it matter what his name was anyway. She never had a name. She wasn't Charlotte Smith, she wasn't even Johnny's Mouse any more. She chose not to be Miriam, so then who was she actually? She was no longer anyone's wife, but she was a mother and that mattered." She preferred not to know who the man was or what Johnny's address was in the United Kingdom. The visitor left as inconspicuously as he arrived, his car parked down the road from where she lived.

He said, "I'll keep in touch; please don't discuss this visit with anyone."

She knew she had to summon courage to face a new chapter in her life. She lifted Jewel up from where she was playing on the floor. She held her close until she started wriggling. She walked out of the front door and went to the house where Soraya lived.

Soraya opened the door and Charlotte collapsed in her arms. The sobs that wracked her body brought no tears. Incoherent words expressed her grief. Her neighbour took Jewel from her and held her on one arm while the other led Charlotte into the house.

Jewel said, “Mummie.” She reached for her mother, but Charlotte had withdrawn into her private world.

“Can I telephone someone for you? It’s not a good idea to be alone at a time like this”

“Please phone Norriman. He’ll come.” Charlotte managed to say between her sobs and her uncontrollable shaking.

CHAPTER THREE

Botswana was the first step in a journey that became an escape route for Johnny from racial prejudice. The first town he reached was Francistown, a north-eastern town in Botswana. He was travelling with a companion called Ben Gorshel, an actor/director in protest theatre. Ben had been hounded by security policemen for months. Botswana was an alternative venue for refugees from the parts of Southern Africa that were still in the grip of colonial power. It was also a destination for humanitarian volunteers from other parts of the world. When Botswana gained independence in 1966 its government offered unquestioned sanctuary to refugees. Botswana, which had always been considered as un-strategically hemmed in, now became the most strategically placed location for escapees from political persecution.

Johnny was often seen in Ben's company in and around Johannesburg. Ben Gorshel was widely known for his political stance and his work in theatre.

"Ben, the bastards called at my office this morning. They wanted to know what my connection is with you. My bosses weren't pleased and called me in and asked for an explanation."

"Were these guys in plain clothes?"

"Of course. You know they hide behind their clothes, their badges and their search warrants. I asked them for identification and the one got rough and it caused a bit of a disturbance in the office."

"Do you think your bosses might ask you to leave?"

"They may, but I'm not going to wait around until I'm tried under the Terrorism Act like the Anglican Dean of Johannesburg. He was sentenced to five years' imprisonment."

"He's lodged an appeal against the sentence."

"If he succeeds, he'd better leave the country while he can."

So both Ben Gorshel and Johnny De Meillon drove a battered vehicle across the border into Botswana undetected by the authorities on both sides of the border gates. Ben talked and bribed his way through the border post at a time that hovers between the dead of night and the grey sky of early morning: a time when those who work long hours are at

their most vulnerable. It worked in their favour and they were ushered through the gates with the utmost speed to avoid possible detection during the change in shifts.

Johnny looked at the map and said, “Well, we’re in Francistown. I don’t know how the hell you got us through the border post.” They drove on for a while and then Johnny said: “The camp is located on the outskirts of the town so we’ll have a little way to go. I hope the car stops overheating.” Johnny had to ask farmers and people in villages for water to keep the level topped up all the way to their intended destination otherwise the car’s engine would have broken down. They would have had to travel on foot or hitchhiked and that would have been risky.

They reached the camp just as the sun appeared on the eastern horizon. Their arrival was unexpected so they waited around for accommodation to be organized for them. Johnny heard them mention Liz Jones as the person in charge of finding a place for new refugees.

“Is this Liz Jones from Cape Town?” Johnny asked the camp overseer.

Yes, we call her Lizzie. She’s been here for several months. Someone in Cape Town informed the security police that she ran a safe house for insurgents, so she left in all haste.”

“I knew Liz in Cape Town,” Johnny said to Ben. They were sitting in the shade of a cluster of trees. There were several huts in the camp and some hastily erected tents.

“She’s one of your old flames, I suppose.”

“We spent a few sweaty nights together, but nothing major.”

“You have all the luck in the world with women. I had one lousy encounter with a girl and my wife found out and that’s why I’m here. She threatened to inform the authorities that I was a member of a banned organization. I hope this ex-friend of yours will see to it that we have somewhere decent to sleep.”

“As long as I have a light to enable me to read at night, I’ll be happy.”

Johnny ended up reading in the dim light of an oil lamp each night. He shared the tent with Ben who would fall asleep instantly, while Johnny read until his eyes hurt from fatigue. His mind seemed to work best at night when he usually did most of his writing, which was not possible in cramped circumstances. Occasionally he made a few notes for use at a later stage.

He last saw Liz in Cape Town when she barged into his slum house when courting Mouse was still in its fragile stages. He had quite a bit of explaining to do, both to Mouse and to Liz. Liz had stormed out of the house and Mouse was cool towards him for days afterwards.

With Liz running a safe house it was very likely that he came into contact with her now and again, but their affair was never resumed, and not long after that incident he and Mouse were married.

It was a nuisance to have women in one's life, Johnny thought. He remembered all those years ago when Ruby briefly came into his life. Her final rejection nearly destroyed him. At the time he felt that no other woman could ever fill the void she left. Long afterwards there were women of all descriptions until he stumbled on Mouse. The unexpected discovery after he married her, that Mouse was his daughter, was the final blow. Since then he hasn't touched or even looked at a woman. He knew that the few times he spent with Liz meant everything to her and nothing to him.

One night in the camp they sat grouped together under the Botswana night sky. The myriads of stars were unable to cast their light from that great distance, so the exiles sat reminiscing in the glow of a fire, the terrain around them enveloped in darkness. Johnny had sat quietly, hardly tasting the strong black coffee in his mug. Ben had spent the whole night talking of the arrival of Darwin at the Cape in 1836 when the colony was under British rule.

"He accumulated masses of flora and fauna and joined the famous astronomer John Herschel in observing the night sky in that region." Ben rambled on in what Johnny proclaimed to be his stage voice. Ben had a family member in Parliament in the opposition ranks and he was able to provide a lot of information of what went on behind the scenes. The information he had, he only imparted to Johnny on rare occasions, but to Johnny it was more interesting than history. Darwin belonged to the past and it was only the present that mattered to Johnny.

Johnny had sat there pretending to listen but kept a watchful eye on some of those distant stars, wondering what forms of life inhabited other worlds. Then he said: "My wife Charlotte is Darwin-obsessed and I helped her research material for the articles she wrote on him." There was a marked silence as his compatriots stopped talking and

waited for him to continue, but he remained silent. As they sat there they all remained nostalgically quiet, thinking their private thoughts and longing for their past lives.

After a while Johnny looked across at Liz. The firelight had caught the reddish glint of her hair and for a moment he felt a stirring in his groin. He didn't know if it was the rekindling of the memory of Charlotte or the presence of a woman amongst them. Although she wasn't the only woman in the camp, she was the most appealing of those present. His perception that women were inherently inferior to men stuck in his mind, but he admitted that there were exceptions and the women in the camp were strong-minded, self-reliant and determined to be part of the struggle to free Africa of white supremacy.

An armed struggle had begun in Rhodesia and in the mandated territory known as South West Africa. Under South Africa's new prime minister John Vorster, apartheid continued on its merry way in spite of economic pressures. However, a new Black militancy was slowly emerging. News filtered through to the exiles in the camp in Botswana that a Convention had been held a little more than 60 kilometers from apartheid's capital, Pretoria. Although the delegates were restrained in their speeches, their anger towards their self-appointed white masters was obvious to observers.

During a lull in the conversation Liz had moved closer to where Johnny sat and, leaning towards him, she asked: "I meant to ask you if you've been able to keep in touch with your wife and child?"

"We haven't been in contact since I left. I'm afraid she'll never forgive me for leaving in the first place."

"I wondered at the time what it was that prompted you to leave Cape Town just at that time."

"There were personal reasons." He pushed his chair back. He said, "Excuse me, I'm off to bed. We have a training session quite early. Perhaps you should all think of retiring for the night. Remember that the commander said we must conserve our energy. Once we leave Francistown, we'll be in for a rough time."

Liz stood up as well and said, "Wait for me, I hate walking in the dark." In the light of his torch he looked sideways at her profile. He thought she looked nervous. She wasn't a large woman and he instinctively moved a little closer to her. Here in the bush

she walked around in sneakers instead of the ridiculously high-heeled shoes she wore when he saw her in Cape Town. Her nails were also neatly cut and not long and shimmering like they used to be. Her face was devoid of make-up and she had a well-scrubbed and healthy look about her. However, he wasn't in Botswana to be distracted by a woman.

"You have less to be frightened of here in the bush than in Cape Town, you know."

"Nothing ever frightened me in Cape Town. I lived in a very secure house. Remember it served as a safe house during dangerous times. We took every precaution against intruders."

"You'll recall that I'm quite familiar with where you lived. The house was littered with angry little dogs and hissing cats."

"My animals didn't like visitors, but I would have sent them outside for you."

"Thank you." They walked side by side, touching now and again as they swayed in the dark. "What have you done with them?"

"They have been given to friends and the house has fortunately been sold."

From deep in the bush echoed the mournful call of a wild animal. The sound startled Liz and she caught Johnny's arm in a frightened grip.

"Hey, let go, woman. I'm also scared of wild things that come creeping out of the bush."

"Rubbish, you're not afraid of anything. Come into my hut for a while for old time's sake. I have some cold beers."

"My dear, I no longer drink." He walked away without looking back at her.

If Johnny could have read her thoughts as she watched him vanish under the shadows of the trees, he may have avoided her altogether from then on. Liz was a woman who usually got what she wanted and she wanted Johnny De Meillon more than any man she had ever known and she was determined not to let him get away this time.

She no longer wanted to be alone in her bed at night. She lay there in her flimsy nightwear and imagined him on top of her, filling her with his manhood like he once did.

Several months later Johnny was sent off on a special mission to North Africa and Liz left for England on the British passport granted to her on the strength of her last marriage. The house she inherited was on the edge of Highgate Wood in London and it was her immediate destination.

"When you return from your mission, will you join me in London?" She asked Johnny hopefully before they parted.

"I can't promise anything." He placed his hand under her chin and raised her face to his. He said: "Thank you for the times we've had together. I have obligations to two other people as well and I have to find out what's happened to them."

"Be careful, the South African authorities have their informers everywhere and it won't be easy to wind your way across the borders."

"I realize security measures have been tightened since the latest Black Power scare." After Verwoerd was killed more stringent border post rules were in place. Johnny had been so proud of all the *hotnots* of the world. He was just sorry that he hadn't thought of killing that "Hollander bastard first, before the foreign *hotnot* did." He said at the time.

Johnny was due to leave for an undisclosed destination to resume his training in the use of explosives, to enable him to train others. However he was determined to return to Cape Town incognito first to enquire about Mouse and Jewel. His appearance had changed for his hair had streaks of grey and he had grown a beard. He was also burnt to a deep brown as a result of the long hours of the outdoor life he had been exposed to since the Johannesburg days. No one could possibly associate him with the Johnny De Meillon who wore suits to work. His cheeks had filled out from living on a stodgy diet in the camp.

He drove a friend's car to Cape Town from Botswana and this time without the persuasive skills of Ben Gorshel he drove along un-charted desert roads and up along the west coast until he unobtrusively reached Cape Town. He sat in the car a little way from their old house while he watched from a distance. He was unreasonably perturbed to see Charlotte in the company of a young man who had the straight black hair of a Malay. They had stopped in a car at her front door. They kissed. Johnny was beside himself with spurts of jealousy, although he knew that he had no claim to the two people he abandoned. To leave them was the only solution he could think of. The front door of the

old slum cottage opened and a little girl ran out to greet Charlotte. The sight of the child in a flounced skirt and locks of dark hair that did a wild dance as she dashed towards the car dimmed as his eyes filled with involuntary tears. Charlotte had got out and held her arms towards the child. The man followed and Johnny realized that he was not much older than Charlotte.

Johnny felt as if he had no breath left. He could feel his heart pounding in his chest until it hurt. He saw the door to the house open again and a woman came out. It was Soraya. He was tempted to speak to her, but he knew it would be dangerous. He reversed the car and drove back down the sloping street, glancing back longingly at the house that was once his. The houses had nearly all been demolished. It was a miracle that their old dwelling had survived apartheid's demolitions. He felt resentment well up in him not only because of the wanton destruction of people's homes in the area but resentment towards the younger man he felt had stolen his life.

That night Johnny started his protracted journey northwards and this time it went way beyond Francistown to foreign lands and to the sounds of strange languages, which he tried his utmost to learn to speak. On his way to the northern coast, he encountered men who were loquacious and daring, while all one could see of the women were their enormous black eyes and Johnny was unwittingly reminded of Ruby, Charlotte and Jewel, the fatal triumvirate of his constant nightmares.

Johnny found work on a cargo vessel that sailed from North Africa to Britain. He arrived in England on a day of rare sunshine and Liz Jones was there to meet him in Portsmouth. In her arms she carried a dark-haired boy of two. She had written and told him about the child, but he was reluctant to believe in what he thought might be a ploy to entice him to England. The boy was born exactly nine months after their time together in the camp in Botswana and he couldn't find adequate words to express how he felt and Liz misconstrued his silence, thinking that he was reluctant to accept the boy as his son.

"He's your son, Johnny."

"I don't doubt that. The little bastard is the image of me."

"If that is how you're going to refer to a child I've waited for all my life, we'd better settle it right here and now because that is not what I want for him. I can give him

love and security without you. Damn you, Johnny, he's a miracle. I never thought I would have a child."

"Liz, my dear, please forgive me. My slum background is inclined to surface at the most inopportune times." He hugged them both and said to her, "Looking like you do at this moment, it isn't going to be your last. In fact I want a whole soccer team of handsome sons." Johnny was relieved when he saw tears come into her eyes and he said silently to himself: "Sweet Jesus, that was close! I have to be more careful what I say to her. I've hurt so many people in my life."

Charlotte had signed the divorce papers and Liz and Johnny opted for a pagan wedding ceremony. Liz wore flowers in her hair and Johnny and his son wore splendid velvet suits on Liz's insistence. Johnny objected saying that they looked like *fin de siecle* dandies. During the ceremony the priestess bound their hands together and after a series of incantations, they were married. Johnny was impatient with what he afterwards described as sorcery. He was pleased when the ceremony ended and they could go home.
He was also pleased that he had got it over with.

Liz realized that life wasn't going to be easy with as complex a man as Johnny De Meillon, but she was prepared to take the chance. She was expecting their second child but she wasn't sure if she was entirely happy about it. Johnny seemed so indifferent, but at least she will have her children to compensate.

At first they lived in the picturesque town called Burford. Over week-ends they cycled to Bourton-on-the-Water at an early hour when the soft mist rose from the canal on its linear route through the centre of the town. As soon as the little tea shop opened, they clamoured at the door to sample the home-cooked breakfast. Afterwards, they set off for home again singing freedom songs along the way. It was a way of life Johnny and Mouse had often spoken of and now he was ironically experiencing it with someone else.

He didn't know if he was happy. Happiness was an illusion and it was an illusion he didn't have. There was a certain gratification in seeing Liz so content, but he didn't think it would last. Liz had become very British and devoted much time to saving the bats in the adjoining wood to their house and she was involved in campaigning for their survival.

"Liz, why save these vile creatures?" an exasperated Johnny asked, for the house was in a state of disorder most of the time, but not offensively so. The dishes at least didn't pile up in the sink. However, nothing had its proper place in their home and they were constantly searching for keys, pens, newspaper cuttings and books. Johnny hated the state of chaos. Mouse was always so neat.

"They're a threatened species, like the whales." Johnny thought it best not to debate the subject for else she would demand more of his time and he preferred to pace and think and then get on with his writing. His favourite pastime was to escape into his thoughts while he listened to his music. Sometimes he played Mouse's old favourite arias and then he would think about her and Jewel.

From time to time Johnny received news from South Africa of a personal nature. The latest was that Charlotte's new husband was killed by bullets meant for his father, who had been released from prison. He wondered what had happened to Charlotte and Jewel. Johnny decided to go to a public telephone to speak to PK about them. He would know if they were safe.

"They're in hiding, De Meillon. It's a surprise to hear from you after all this time."

"Is Mouse still working for you?"

"She will be when all this blows over. At the moment she is very frightened. Her whereabouts are unknown, and understandably so. She's grieving and greatly traumatized by the whole incident."

"What about my daughter?"

"Mercifully she didn't quite realize what was happening. It happened in seconds. The gunmen used silencers."

"Thanks, I'll keep in touch to find out how they are."

"De Meillon, it's a bit late to be concerned about them now."

"Believe me I didn't leave them because I wanted to. I had a good reason."

"It couldn't have been anything Charlotte did. You broke her heart."

"She found someone else within a surprisingly short time, so I'm reluctant to believe the 'breaking-heart' bit of the saga. I'm phoning from a pay-phone. I don't want to use the time to argue with you about my wife."

"You mean your ex-wife."

"Well PK, you were always sweet on her so now's your chance."

"Go to hell, De Meillon."

"I've always been in hell." He replaced the receiver without saying goodbye. He thought PK was being deliberately obstructive. He should rather have spoken to good old James, but then PK was Jewel's self-appointed god-father and more likely to have information about them. He couldn't blame others for seeing him as a villain because the true circumstances are not known to them. No one except himself and Lefty Alan knew of the incestuous nature of his marriage to Mouse.

Johnny's younger boy was called Henry in honour of the first De Meillon who settled in the Cape. Johnny often walked out of the house just to escape from the noise the two boys made. The older boy was afraid of his father and Johnny made little effort to win him over. The boy clung to his mother and Johnny shouted and said she was bringing him up to act like a girl. Henry was more like his father, not necessarily in looks, but in his boundless energy. At an early age he learnt to do wonderful things with his camera and he often contributed to the school magazine. The older boy was introverted and sometimes found refuge in the wood to avoid confrontation with his father. Johnny would scold him for the slightest reason or else ignore him completely. He never greeted the boy unless Jonathan greeted him first. Henry was daring and would openly defy his father.

Johnny was not a communist, but he understood that the notion of communism would appeal to Mouse or Charlotte as she preferred to be called. She had been an abandoned child and had been sadly poor all her life until her maternal grandfather's money rescued her and gave her the stability and security she never had as a child and a young person.

The ordinary things in life eluded Johnny in the latter years of his life while he fought his personal demons and grappled with the complex world of political writing and the precarious nature of political movements in exile. It was fortunate that, like Charlotte, Liz had her own money, although he gave her whatever he could spare from what he earned. He was successful as a fund-raiser for various causes and was often used in this capacity. He never spoke of his accomplishments or his failures to Liz and she

didn't know of his plans from one day to the other. She was willing to offer her support, but she realized that although he lived with them, she would never really know everything about him.

They survived some very stormy years while the boys were growing up. It was touch and go and there were times when she thought he would never return when he left on the pretext of some mission or other. He never stayed in contact when he left and would return without any explanation of where he had been or what he had done.

"Johnny, I feel that you should take a little more interest in the boys. They wonder why you're not like other fathers. They ask me and I keep making excuses for you."

"Liz, accept me for what I am or kick me out of your house. If you're unhappy with having me around, then I can leave."

Then one day Johnny received a letter from Charlotte. The memory of Charlotte and Jewel had grown dimmer over the years and the letter unnerved him when it arrived. One of the organization's couriers brought it to his door. The letter informed him that Jewel wanted to apply to study in Oxford. She had a good pass in her final year at school. Lately Jewel mixed with the wrong crowd and Charlotte worried about her. Jewel wanted the experience of studying overseas and Charlotte requested Johnny to enquire and apply on her behalf. She had attached Jewel's certificates and references from her school.

He didn't let Liz read the letter, he just advised her that the girl was arriving and said that she would be there for a month before the course was due to start and that she would be staying with them in London. Johnny had made the necessary arrangements for her to be accepted.

"I don't know if it will be a good idea. Our lives will be disrupted and the boys may not accept her. She's a total stranger." Liz was furious. She had to reorganize the bedrooms by crowding Jonathan and Henry in the one room where they fought constantly and she wondered how she was going to survive the crisis. She had her misgivings about meeting the girl for the first time. "What if she's a bad influence on the boys?" she asked herself.

"Why does she have to study here?" Jonathan asked his mother.

"I know it's an imposition, but we have to be civil to her, otherwise we'll evoke your father's wrath."

"I don't know if I care, Mum. She's a stranger and this is your house anyway. It isn't Dad's house."

"Jonathan, don't make a fuss. She'll only be here for a month. In two year's time we'll have to start thinking about your future. Perhaps you'll be able to study in Oxford. You have to make early career decisions to get accepted in time."

Jonathan shrugged and walked away. She knew he was going off to see Peter, their neighbour's son, the same age as Jonathan. There was a girl too, Peter's sister, Jean. Peter and Jean were both going off to train as dress designers after their O Levels. The design school was based in central London, just a bus ride away.

"I suppose it hasn't been easy sharing your life with me, Liz?" Johnny asked that evening, for he noticed that she was unusually distant.

"No, it hasn't been easy but I never expected it to be. You're a complicated man, Johnny, and I always have a sneaking feeling that you're unhappy. The boys aren't very happy about your daughter's expected arrival. They feel it's an intrusion."

"Christ, she's my daughter."

"We don't know her."

"Well then, you'll damn well get to know her. If she isn't welcome here, then I'm not either."

"Johnny, are you looking for an excuse to leave?"

"Liz, do you think I want to leave now after living through so many fucking miserable years?"

"I'm sorry you were so unhappy."

"Unhappy isn't the right word."

"You've been with me for so many years. Can't you just pretend to be happy for the sake of your sons?"

"I'm not the pretending kind, Liz."

"Oh, God!" She raised her hands and covered her eyes and her shoulders shook as she cried out of the desperation and the helplessness she felt at that moment.

"It's a life we both settled for." He said more gently. Gentleness was foreign to his nature, but he had to smooth things over before his daughter arrived.

"I'm grateful for my two sons, but why do you deliberately hurt me? You lash out against Jonathan and he's always well behaved and surprisingly respectful to us in spite of the way you've treated him all his life."

He turned from her and climbed the stairs to his study. She heard him shut the door and turn the key in the lock.

Liz hoped that he would dislike his daughter so much at first sight that he would send her back on the same plane.

Henry was even less enthusiastic than Jonathan about their half-sister's anticipated arrival. That night he said to Jonathan: "What if she's a silly cow?"

"She can't be if she's been accepted by a college in Oxford. You have to achieve a fucking good mark to get in. You also have to produce proof of good behaviour from your school and that's something you'll never achieve, Henry."

"I'm lucky Mum hides my school reports from Dad."

"Well, Dad's Dad. We're stuck with him or at least Mum is, because we can move on in life and move away from here, Mum can't."

"Do you think Dad will be paying for her studies?"

"Mum says it's being funded through a family trust."

Meanwhile in that year of 1983 in South Africa P.W. Botha achieved a 75% vote for his power-sharing with two new chambers in parliament, namely, the Coloured representatives and the Indian delegates. Most voters supported the changes that were imminent. It was a start to the constitutional changes that were to develop over the next decade, although the Blacks were still excluded at that stage. Most thinking individuals knew that Black rule was inevitable. In the mean time Whites still had the largest chamber in parliament. The role of prime minister was replaced by an executive president in control of all three chambers. By 1984 the exclusion of Blacks from the new constitution created chaos in the townships and the South African Defence Force moved in to reinstate order. One year later police opened fire on mourners at a funeral for

political activists and over twenty people were killed. Violence erupted in the townships. More than one thousand people were killed when thirty five thousand troops were deployed to curb the uprisings.

In 1985, P.W. Botha's government made a surprise move and abolished the Immorality Act and the Mixed Marriages Act.

Johnny received all the details of Jewel's pending arrival. In great anticipation he travelled to Oxford and through one of his contacts arranged suitable accommodation for her. He could hardly believe that she had reached an age where she would attend college.

He awaited her arrival with his usual impatience. He started convincing himself that she may have grown into a dumpy young woman with hairy armpits and heavy spectacles. His people always said that pretty baby girls grew into plain women. It would serve him right if this was the case with Jewel, for he placed far too much emphasis on physical appearance. It really only matters what's inside the human shell and for her to achieve entrance to a University is all the proof he needs.

Over the weeks of waiting he became restless and Liz dissolved a tranquilizer in his tea each morning. She hoped he wouldn't notice. It helped him survive until the date of Jewel's arrival. At Heathrow he waited for her to walk into the main foyer. He was on his own; a lone figure, tall and gaunt, holding back tears through narrowed eyes as she came gliding along. She hesitated for a moment and looked directly at him. "It's Ruby," he thought. He summoned all the control he could muster not to disintegrate at the doppelganger's spectral feet.

CHAPTER FOUR

At an early age Jewel would look in the mirror and realize that she was pretty, in fact almost beautiful. Learning at school was easy. She had a good memory. She would look at the printed word once and would remember it word for word, almost. The other kids in the class came to her for help with Mathematics. If it had been difficult for her to learn her mother may have had trouble in getting her to school. Jewel had a mind of her own and only went to school because she succeeded in being one of the top students and she enjoyed the work and basked in the glory of being a bright pupil. The private school PK had arranged for her to attend from her early years gave her access to A Levels and she passed with distinction. It was in her final year that she gathered around her friends that Charlotte didn't approve of.

She had gone into town with them on a Saturday and returned with pierced ears. Charlotte didn't object to the piercing itself but to the fact that she should have discussed it with her before doing it. Charlotte felt that she was losing control of her daughter. It was difficult to accept that Jewel had reached a stage in her life where she thought it quite appropriate to make her own decisions.

"I don't think you should have had your ears pierced without discussing it with me first."

"I'm nineteen, Mum. I must be allowed to make some decisions."

Then another time Jewel arrived home in the company of a young man Charlotte had never liked. "Jewel, I don't want you to see him again. He isn't your class. I think he isn't the right sort of companion for you."

"Okay, then you go and find a nice Coloured lad for me to go out with. Perhaps someone more like my real father?"

"This isn't a matter of race. It's not because the boy is White. He smokes and I've smelt alcohol on his breath. He's not to see you again and that's an order. He's too old for you."

"He's twenty-two, Mum. I've always done what you've expected of me, but you're going overboard now."

"Where are you going?" Charlotte demanded as Jewel walked away from her.

"I'm going to phone PK. Maybe he can talk some sense into you."

"Well, phone him, maybe he can talk sense into you!"

After that Charlotte detected alcohol on Jewel's breath once or twice. Then she found a packet of cigarettes in one of her pockets.

"So now you're smoking as well, are you?"

"Oh that. No they belong to someone else."

"Jewel, I've said very little about the drinking and although I'm horrified that you've actually started smoking, lying about it I won't tolerate. If you can't trust me enough to tell me the truth, then I think you should move out."

"Move out! Isn't this my home too?"

"Yes, it is, but you must respect it and have some consideration for me. I've brought you up on my own and it hasn't been easy."

"Is it my fault that I haven't had a father?"

"We're not talking about fathers. We're talking about you lying to me when I don't deserve to be lied to."

"Mum, it's difficult to always tell you the truth because you exist in a kind of make-believe world where everything is expected to be wonderful. Life isn't wonderful, Mother, but you want me to believe it is."

"I knew from an early age what life was all about. I don't need a thoroughly spoilt child to tell me that I live in a make-believe world. Go to your room and stay there, I have work to do."

"I always have to go to my room so that you can meet your deadlines. You never have time for me."

"That's not true, Jewel."

That night after Charlotte had finished her work and after preparing a meal that Jewel hardly touched, she went to the girl's room to speak to her. Jewel was all she had and she wanted her to confide in her, like she used to do when she was younger. It was only lately that these strange characteristics had developed and Charlotte was sure that it was due to peer pressure and the influence of "that confounded boy" as she called him.

"Jewel, can I come in?"

"It's your house, so come in by all means."

"Can we declare a truce?"

"Okay." She could see that Jewel had been crying.

Charlotte sat down on the bed and looking at Jewel, she said: "I'm sorry you're upset. I don't want to be hard on you, but I also don't want you to learn to smoke and drink. They're hard habits to break. I know what it did to your father. If he had carried on like that it would have killed him."

"You mention my father, but you forget that I never knew him. I want to hear from him why he abandoned us."

"He's married to someone else and lives in England."

"You have never given me a very satisfactory explanation."

"He fled the country for political reasons. He then met someone else and asked for a divorce and I agreed. I've explained this to you many times."

"Well, I want to see him. I want to get to know this so-called father. He deserves a telling off."

"Would you like to study overseas? If you go to England you can meet him and decide for yourself what you think of him."

"I think I would like to go away somewhere and perhaps England is a good idea. All you ever hear about in this country is how much money is being lost on the stock market and inevitable Black rule."

"I'll make enquiries and see if I can get you into a university somewhere in England. There's still time to apply, they only start in October."

"Are you sure, Mum?"

"Yes, my darling, I'll see what I can do."

"How will you pay for it?"

"I've created a family trust specifically for your education."

It was with some trepidation that Charlotte wrote to Johnny De Meillon via her incognito contact, advising her former husband that Jewel wanted to continue her education in England. She attached copies of her certificates and asked him to make enquiries on their behalf. She stipulated that she would cover the costs involved in airfares, clothes, books and fees. PK was going to provide the pocket money and pay for the accommodation. All Johnny needed to do was make the arrangements, submit the necessary applications and

inform her and Jewel of the outcome. She did not know if this was a wise move on her part, but she felt that it was time that he took some of the responsibility for a daughter who needed to know her father.

To Jewel Norriman always seemed to be too young to be a father. He was only a year older than Charlotte and Jewel's image of a father was of an older man. She also really never got a chance to get to know her mother's second husband and the first one not at all. The second one died too soon and the other one ran off. PK filled the role of father to his utmost and she loved him for trying so hard. He attended all her school activities and remembered her birthdays. He was boisterous but kind and he had no one else to fill the void in his life. Lefty Alan, the family lawyer, took an interest in everything she and her mother accomplished. The two men certainly made up for the lack of a father in her life. She often wondered why her mother and PK never got together, but then it would have been a contravention of South Africa's race laws in earlier years. In 1985 of South Africa's history, discriminating legislation had been repealed. It was a relief for her to get away from the ongoing debates that dominated conversations on the question of race and the inevitability of Black empowerment. It would be a relief for her to be in a place where people were people and not classified according to skin colour or racial heritage. It would be wonderful to live without fear of reprisals, as they had done after Norriman died. She actually tried never to think of Norriman. The memory of not being able to stop screaming when she saw blood squirting out of him, drenching her mother's clothes, her mother's hands and her face would forever remain imprinted in her mind. She thought her mother too had been hurt. Norriman's sister came running from the house and Jewel found herself being swept up and carried away from the scene of the killing. She knew that something bad had happened and her concern was more for her mother than anyone else. It was only when she grew a lot older that she realized how easy it had been for all of them to have been that gunman's target. It was such a soundless killing except for the screeching of tyres on the tarmac. Norriman fell and the old man, always unsteady on his feet, fell sideways against the car. It was the unfortunate Norriman that took the full blast of the shooting. The old man hurt his arm when he fell; the noble non-political Norriman died. At an early age Jewel realized that it was what he would have wanted to do.

Jewel's mother never spoke about or referred to the incident of the shooting. The carnage would forever be imprinted in all their memories despite everyone's deliberate silence on the matter. After the incident and after Norriman had been taken away, her mother Charlotte fetched buckets of water and washed the blood off the sidewalk. Jewel watched as it ran into the gutter and down the slope in the same direction that Norriman had been taken away in the ambulance. Jewel remembered wondering if the blood ran down the road in pursuit of Norriman, so that it could find a way back into his body. She imagined that he suddenly sat up and said: "I'm alright again. My blood has come back to me." She would imagine him smiling and she would be so relieved because then her mother would stop crying and everyone wouldn't be so sad. And the old man wouldn't have died so soon. He collapsed soon after his son's death.

The day of the old man's funeral, her mother screamed at a strange man who pulled the red cloth from the coffin.

"Leave that alone. Don't touch anything. You don't have any business here. Your victim has died of a broken heart because you killed his son." It was my mother, shouting in a voice I didn't recognize as hers as she used all her strength to push the man away.

"The flag isn't allowed. It's forbidden to display the communist flag in this country."

"Don't you dare touch the casket. Show some respect for the dead and the bereaved." Her mother and the man were tugging at the red cloth and Jewel started crying in as loud a voice as possible to distract them. She succeeded, for her mother turned to her and held her close, while the man glared angrily at her mother.

The man turned to his companion and said: "*Die donderse vrou is mal*." No one standing close to them could hear what he said to his companion. They all thought that he said they should leave because he abruptly turned and left the scene. Only PK heard and used the words in the headline on the front page of the *African Beat.* He was fully prepared to take the consequences of such an action.

After that PK helped her mother acquire occupation of a house she paid for but PK bought in his name. It was high up against the mountain. On the mountain side they had huge trees bordering their tiny garden and they would have had a view of the sea, but the house next to them blocked it.

"Someday I'll build a loft room and then we will have a view of the sea from there."

"I don't mind. I like this house the way it is and I like school."

"Do the white kids accept you as one of them, or do they question you on whether you're Coloured."

"Oh, Mummy, they don't say anything about being Coloured or White. Remember uncle PK took me to be registered. The fees are paid and I work hard and that's all they're concerned about. I'm just Jewel De Meillon."

"I'm relieved. Anyway Uncle PK is related to the principal and he made the man swear he would protect you.

"Is it such a bad thing to be Coloured?'

"Not at all, darling. Be proud of what you are and the day will come when you can openly admit that you're Coloured without being judged because of it."

"Is that what my father is busy doing, working towards us all being equal?"

"Yes he is and he has had to make a lot of sacrifices in order to help bring about the changes that we all hope for."

"Who's all?

"All the races like the Coloureds, the Indians, the Malays, the Blacks and some of the Whites, too."

The breeze always blew strongly at their house, because it was high up against the mountain. It didn't whistle in through the cracks in the doors and windows like their grandmother's house at the sea. Her mother said that when the wind whistled its way in through openings that only it could find, she always felt inconsolably sad. She preferred the strong breeze that blew in their garden and bent the trees sideways in one direction. Jewel and her mother planted an abundance of creepers and shrubs. On days when the breeze rested, as her mother was fond of saying, Charlotte and Jewel enjoyed their meals out in the open.

As she grew older, boys joined their group of girls and there would be a scattering of youngsters in and out of their house all the time. When the boys reached the stage where the fluff appeared on their chins, her mother warned her about the dangers of allowing the boys to take liberties.

"Oh, Mum, I know about those silly things. It's all the girls talk about, like so and so is doing it with so and so; this one's brother and that one's cousin or whoever…"

"Just a minute, doing what?"

"You know, the things males and females do together."

"How do you know about such things?"

"Oh Mum, I wasn't born yesterday."

"Jewel, do you mean to tell me that you and your friends talk about boys and sex, and who's having sex with whom?

"Yes, and we think they're very silly."

"So you really think they're being silly?"

"I do, for doing all that stuff with each other."

"Jewel I want you to promise me that before you decide to do any of this silly stuff with anyone, you will discuss it with me first so that we can talk about it."

"I promise if you won't laugh."

"I promise I definitely won't laugh."

During the flight Jewel read from a copy of Kingsley Fairbridge's *Veld Verse* which she had brought with her simply because he wrote those verses before he went to study in Oxford in 1908. The grassy, bushy African landscape had in fact been his public school. It was where he learnt about the indigene that lived off the soil and the creatures that dwelt in the African environment along with them. He learnt about the legends of each terrain and he listened fascinated to the stories passed on through oral tradition. Africa was Jewel's heritage and her pride dictated that she retain that kinship.

Towards the end of the flight Jewel's thoughts turned to the anticipated meeting with a father she couldn't remember. She knew she hated him. It only occurred to her over the last few years that she hated her father. Sometimes she hated her mother as well for allowing her father to leave. "She could have fought for him," she told herself. She wondered where this so-called father had been when she and her mother sought refuge at her grandmother's house at the sea. It was like a prison for none of them dared venture outside the house. She sat at a window for hours and watched as the waves broke against the rocks, not wanting to be a nuisance in her mother's life, but at the same time wishing

that she could scramble over the rocks and dip her feet in the rock pools. Her mother was there all the time and that was a special treat. Charlotte worked from home. PK was a regular visitor and Lefty Alan brought provisions for them and sweets for her.

She was quite frankly glad to be rid of her over-protective mother. They had got on a lot better in the last few months after their last confrontation about the smoking. She lied to her mother and Charlotte knew, for she was no fool. Her mother thinks she has stopped, but as a matter of fact she had started at the age of sixteen and it was difficult to give it up now. She couldn't wait to say goodbye to her mother at the airport and as soon as she was alone she lit a cigarette in the smoking section of the restaurant. She ordered coffee. Her mother only allowed her to start drinking coffee in her A levels year. Prior to that she was expected to drink nothing but pure fruit juice, like a baby. Now she was old enough to drink whatever she liked on the plane and she intended taking full advantage of the facility.

Her mother had said: "You'll be flying back for Christmas. I couldn't spend a Christmas without you."

"I thought we don't celebrate Christmas. You always say it's just a means of spending more money than we have."

"I never had Christmas as a child, so the habit remained with me. I'm not too bothered about spending too much money over a holiday period. Everyone needs a break once a year.

Jewel knew she would not be home for Christmas if she could help it.

She turned to look back at her mother's lone figure. She had the notion that something was hurting, like hurting somewhere deep inside her mind, but she pushed it aside and ordered a Bloody Mary from the stewardess on the plane. The image of her mother remained fixed in her mind as she looked at the darkness through the window of the aircraft. The first rays of light on the horizon also brought light into the cabin and the normal flight breakfast tray from which she ate very little with her stomach in a spasm as she anticipated the meeting with the stranger who was her father. Her mother wasn't there to force-feed her and she was thankful for that. In fact whenever she thought of her overly protective mother and her estranged father, she didn't want food at all. At home when her mother forced her to eat, she would empty her stomach afterwards by pushing

her toothbrush down her throat. Alcohol was also more potent on an empty stomach, except that you could not tolerate too much of it, because then you would feel sick. There was always the danger that her mother would know that she had taken too much alcohol when she ended up feeling sick, so she had to be careful.

She knew it was him the moment she saw him. Tall and straight, he seemed to tower over everyone else and she immediately felt his gaze upon her as she walked towards him. Her heart beat fiercely against her ribs as she looked directly at him with all the other airport activity vanishing into the background. As she drew closer she saw that he was crying, but she steeled herself and kept aloof as he grasped her tightly in his arms and cried unashamedly into her hair.

He kept murmuring "Ruby… Ruby…" but she was Jewel. Her mother had told her that her father chose the name himself, so how can he keep repeating the wrong name?

She was unable to speak, so she couldn't tell him that she was Jewel and not Ruby. In that moment she had forgotten that there had been a Ruby somewhere in the family. She heard the name mentioned by the grandmother. Of course, it was the name of the girl who died. Her mother's mother was Ruby.

"The bastard doesn't even know my name, so why is he crying?"

Jewel thought the woman Liz had given her a cool reception, but she ignored it and gave her attention to the two boys instead. They were sitting on either side of her on the worn leather couch below the stairs. She liked the house but thought it a bit messy. The woods spilled over into the back garden with the branches of enormous trees shading part of the dwelling. The front of the house was on a busy road, but the back was as if a little bit of the country had been sliced off to give them a back garden of oversized trees. A small gate concealed by shrubs gave them access to the wood and the three of them scrambled in and out from under the shade of those green leaves all day long and sometimes Liz accompanied them into the wood at dusk to observe the hectic flight of the bats. They were tired from the exertion of exploring every inch of the wood and were now huddled together on the couch, their father in his chair opposite them.

He had been spending more time in their company since her arrival. Jonathan sat next to her and he admitted that she certainly wasn't the sort of bitch they had expected. When they're in the wood she pulls out her cigarettes and has started teaching Jonathan to draw the smoke in slowly, hold his breath and then exhale. She told Henry he was still too wet behind the ears to smoke. He hadn't heard the expression before and she explained that he was just simply too young to smoke and that he would have to wait another year or two.

"If you don't let me have a puff, I'll tell on you."

"Jonathan and I are old enough to smoke, so you can tell if you like, but it would just prove to us how much of a child you still are." So Henry didn't tell his parents that she and Jonathan were smoking.

"I can't wait to get to Oxford for then I can smoke the real thing."

"You mean cannabis?" Jonathan whispered so that Henry couldn't hear properly.

"Of course, have you smoked any?"

"Yes, but it did nothing for me."

"It will after a while. But don't make a habit of it. It's best just to smoke it now and again."

From where Johnny was sitting he stared openly at his daughter. He tried to establish in what way she differed from Ruby. They were similar, but Ruby had a darker skin, burnt by the fierce African sun that shone on her as she wandered on the open stretch of beach that extended for miles.

"I saw Jean kiss Jonathan the other day," Henry said and laughed and his father replied, "Girls are meant to be kissed." Then he looked at the surprise on their faces and added: "Within limits, of course."

"Oh, I know all about those limits. Mum never stops warning me," Johnny heard Jewel say and he wondered if she had had a boyfriend back in South Africa.

"Well, I think Peter's sister wants to be Jonathan's girlfriend. Sometimes he dodges her, though."

"I don't want a girlfriend, they're expensive. You have to pay for their sodas and things." Jonathan decided to put things straight about Peter's sister.

"It's okay if they kiss you for it, isn't it?" Henry wasn't prepared to drop the subject yet.

"That's buying affection," Johnny said to Henry and suggested that they discuss some other topic, because Henry was trying very hard to make fun of the sensitive older Jonathan. However, Henry carried on regardless of his father's stern look.

"Sometimes Jonathan and Peter hug and Jean laughs."

"That's enough now Henry. Go and see if you can help your mother in the kitchen. Leave the kitten in the box on the back porch and don't forget to wash your hands before lunch." He had held the kitten in his arms and it had begun to irritate Johnny. He wished Liz wouldn't gather all the stray kittens in the area.

Jonathan spoke more freely once Henry had departed. "It's a pity that you have to go to that dreary old Oxford. It can become depressing on a Sunday afternoon when the sun shines and there are tourists everywhere and the students and townsfolk are out on the river in their dreadful boats. The town looks better in winter when it rains or snows and the lights come on in the stores and houses and you scramble to get inside just to keep warm. You only have a month of reasonable weather left, before the winter really sets in."

"You'll be going there sooner than you think, my boy, and you'd better get used to the idea. Your mother won't be around to mollycoddle you."

"It will be great to have you in Oxford as well, Jonathan. The only thing is you'll be starting and I'll be finishing." Jewel now really dreaded going to this unknown Oxford. "I hope you'll all come down and see me when I'm there." She got up from the couch and excused herself to see if she could help Liz in the kitchen. She was on her best behaviour, but deep in her consciousness she knew that she and her father were going to have to thrash out the issues of the past. She didn't hate him as much anymore, because somehow he had been so pathetic at the airport and she realized that their separation had perhaps been just as difficult for him as it had been for her over all those years.

From the moment she had walked into their house and seen the expression of coldness in Liz's eyes, she knew that this was not a happy home.

At the table during the meal, possible careers for the boys were discussed and Henry said, “I want to be a soldier.”

“You’ll be nothing of the sort. I had enough of that when your father…” Liz stopped in mid-sentence, realizing that Johnny’s militancy was confidential and that she had nearly betrayed his secret activities.

“When my father what?” Jewel looked questioningly at both Liz and her father.

“You’ll know some day – the time isn’t right yet,” Johnny replied and gave Liz one of his fierce looks.

Her father’s intense gaze was quite disturbing at times. His mind was closed to everything around him. She wondered if Liz knew all his secrets. Sometimes the old Johnny charisma would break through his reserve and he would enthusiastically discuss the courses she wanted to take in Oxford. Her father also seemed to know a lot about the world’s great thinkers and she enjoyed talking to him, but the occasion rarely arose for them to have prolonged conversations, for either Liz would intervene with some excuse or Johnny would depart to his upstairs study.

Under the pile of books on the ethnic-carved coffee table, Jewel found a little book that contained a quaint story. It was printed on hand-made paper and bound in cloth. It was one of a limited edition, signed by the author and the artist, and at the time of publication it was sold for one guinea. The proceeds from the sale of these books went to two specific charities, the one the Cape Non-European Night School Association and the other The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals at Grassy Park in Cape Town. While she read, Jewel was unaware of the patches and lumps of the couch because it was an absorbing story of a young boy and his dog Blackie. It related how the boy took his sick dog to Grassy Park in a broken-down perambulator. The story was written by C De Bosdari and the illustrations by Karin Stromsoe. The inscription at the front of the book simply said, “From Mouse with Love.” The title of the book was *Ten Tickies.*

It was of course like thousands of other stories about little Coloured boys. She had been told by PK that her father’s heart broke when his sister died. She wondered if her father had a dog that he loved when he was a child. Uncle James told her that her father grew up in a large family and that there was never enough to eat. She also knew that missionaries instilled in him a love of letters and English. In Cape Town she often

saw children on the streets asking for money. Many women and children were abandoned by their fathers and left to fend for themselves. Jewel knew that her own mother was a foundling. Her mother never spoke of the past but only of the future, so Jewel never heard the full story of her mother's life. She wanted to know about her mother and her father. She felt that they were purposely secretive about their past lives.

In Johnny's family they all helped with the household chores, except Johnny. Jewel, trained by Charlotte, picked up various items that were left lying around and tried to find proper places for them. She tried to sort out the many newspaper cuttings, many mentioning her father and the work he did towards freedom for all South Africans. No one was allowed to enter his study at the top of the house. Liz said you could see the whole of central London from the window of that room. The room was often locked, and everyone kept a respectful distance. Sometimes in the evening Jewel heard strains of *E Lucevan le stele* from *Tosca.* She recognized it because her mother played the same aria over and over again.

"Liz, I knew my father loved music, but I understood that he was keen on jazz."

"There are a few exceptions and I think he has your mother to thank for that."

Jewel loved walking around the neighbourhood. She found it quite a novelty not to look around for would-be assailants. Sometimes she and her mother had hiked on the mountain, but her mother always felt uneasy about walking in the town or on lonely hiking trails after Norriman was killed.

The time with her father and his family passed quickly and soon it was time for all of them to say goodbye to her on Paddington Station, where she boarded a train for Oxford. Liz had remained aloof throughout her stay, but the two boys had warmed to her. What unnerved her was the way Johnny would sit and stare at her whenever he had an opportunity. It appeared as if he looked but he did not really see and she wondered where his thoughts were and what memories were evoked in him at the sight of her. "It seemed beyond what was normal," Jewel wrote in a letter to her mother.

Her arrival at the station at Oxford was fraught with difficulties as she attempted to drag her luggage down the stairway to street level. At her second attempt with part of her luggage left on the higher platform she discovered that hidden away at a corner at the one

end of the platform was an elevator. She wondered what possessed her mother to include so many loose bags and packages in her luggage.

At ground level she approached a taxi, but the elderly driver directed her to a taxi at the end of the long queue. She was eventually dropped at her lodgings in Jericho. The end terrace had attractive features from the outside with a freshly painted dark-blue door; a large basket of flowering plants adorned the wall beside the door; a welcoming light shone from a lace-curtained window. The surrounding area seemed run down but she reminded herself that this was England and a bit of shabbiness didn't matter.

The driver placed her luggage at the front door while Jewel rang the bell. The door opened almost at once and a young man said, "Don't tell me, you're the new student. Welcome to Oxford. I'm Dave."

"I'm Jewel De Meillon."

"Oh, I know, you're father has addressed us at Ruskin - my college is down the road. I'm one of his fans." He pulled her luggage into the passage, and at the same time said, "The other chaps will help me take it all upstairs. You're in the room at the top of the stairs."

"I have to settle the taxi fare." She rummaged in her bag and pulled out a few one pound coins. She handed them to the driver and indicated that she didn't want change. Her father had placed some money in her hand when she left and she could afford to be generous.

The driver and the young man seemed surprised at her gesture. The driver, pleased with the tip, helped with the luggage and then returned to the vehicle and drove off.

From her room she had a view of Oxford's famous spires. It had started raining and in the early evening mist, Oxford looked like the pits and suddenly she was wondering why she was there. It was to be her home for the next three to four years, depending on her successes or failures. What was important was that she was free. She was not under anyone's supervision and her sole purpose in being on her own was to get laid. The bed had been made and was ready for her to use and she had every intention of gaining great

knowledge of life in that bed. The very thought of it intrigued, as well as amused, her. The bed appeared to be soft and warm and she longed to sink into it.

Dave said, "I'm sorry that you're right at the top of the stairs. You're lucky though, because you're close to the shower and lavatory. We have to traipse to the second and third level to get there. By the way, all the doors remain unlocked, in case of fire." He turned to look at her and he said, "We respect each other's privacy."

She was glad to be here because at home living with her mother it had been impossible to invite a boy home and any sexual activity had to be conducted in hidden corners and under trees in the dark and little progress, if any, could be made under those conditions.

He rambled on while he helped her with the smaller items of her luggage. "I'm at Ruskin, just down the road. Martin is a theology student. He's going to be a priest. He seldom talks to us because he thinks about God all the time. The girls fall over themselves to impress him, but it's a waste of time because he has undertaken to be celibate. The two girls are Kate, an American student, and the other one is a post-graduate called Hilda Brown-Davies, whose folks own an estate in the country. She's an aristocrat, Martin's Irish and Kate just loves the Irish, being an American of Irish descent.

Jewel felt she was staring dumbly at him not able to catch each word as it tumbled from his mouth quickly and somewhat indistinctly. Of course she realized that it would take time for her to get used to the accents that were foreign to her. "English didn't sound like the English she was used to at home," she thought.

As he turned to leave her, he said, "Your father telephoned to remind me to get you to call him on your arrival."

"Thank you, I'll do so. Is it a pay phone?"

"No, we keep a record of all the calls. When we get the bill it more or less works out fairly."

"Your room isn't very big, but then one can't expect to compare it to Blenheim Palace."

"What's Blenheim Palace?"

"It's a nobleman's estate on the outskirts of Woodstock. We'll take you there, sometime."

"Oh, don't worry, I'll be working most of the time anyway."

"I say, you do speak weirdly. Do they speak English where you come from?"

"I grew up speaking English, but other languages are also spoken in my country."

Once alone in her room she walked to the window and looked down into the street below. Two young girls dressed entirely in black were crossing the busy intersection. They seemed to be immersed in a serious discussion and Jewel hoped she would be able to form friendships with other students quite soon. Tomorrow she would explore her immediate terrain and familiarize herself with the location of the different colleges.

She met her fellow-lodgers the next day. She had spent the whole day registering for her courses and had met some of the other students and one of her lecturers. The following week she wrote an entry examination and passed with top marks. She telephoned to tell her father the moment she was home and then sat down and wrote to her mother telling her of crumbling buildings, the strange mix of people and the many, many different accents. She told her mother that no-one could understand her at first, but now they were getting used to her accent. "You spent so much money on speech lessons for me and here I am in England and they think I'm speaking a foreign language and meanwhile I'm hearing what sounds like a foreign language."

Her student house was very well-run and they had a roster for each occupant to perform certain duties. They did their duties in pairs so as to lighten the load. Jewel was to do kitchen duty with Martin every Saturday. Saturday was cleaning day in the student lodgings. Jewel trained for an hour every day and within a few weeks she knew every nook and corner of the town. She ran in the university parks and along narrow twisting lanes. She ran on green meadows and cobbled streets. On Sundays she ran for two hours on tarmac. Her studies were still in the early stages and the serious work had not yet begun. She was tearing at the bit to undertake some really challenging tasks soon.

Alone in her room she smoked and once even drank beer on her own. All it did was make her sleepy. She never worried too much about food.

One morning she came around the corner and bumped into Martin. She thought she saw a deeper colour appear on his usually pale skin. "Was he actually blushing?" she

asked herself and wondered if physical contact of any description was forbidden by his religion.

"Good morning…" he seemed to stammer a little. Jewel smiled and said, "Most students and townsfolk are still asleep at this hour. Where do you go to so early?"

"I attend early mass at Grey Friars."

"What on earth is Grey Friars?"

"The name of the order I intend joining when I complete my studies."

"I've never heard of it. I don't know about such things. My parents aren't religious."

"You can come to mass on Sunday. You may like it."

"Are you inviting me?"

"Mass is open to anyone. You don't need an invitation. Come if you feel like it. The church is just around the corner."

"I'll tell you on Saturday when we're in the kitchen. We have to clean it and provide the meals for the day, remember?"

"Are you losing weight? You seem thinner than when you arrived."

"It's possible. I don't think about food too often. I can't seem to find anything that's worthwhile eating, except the confections."

"I meant to ask you what courses you've enrolled for in your first year."

"Oh, right. Mathematics and Physics."

"Oh, I see. It'll be tough won't it?"

"No." She said goodbye to him and then ran on towards their house, thinking that there was something very attractive about him, not only in his looks, but in his voice. His incredible shyness was a challenge and it would be interesting to see how long it would take to trigger his interest in her.

After several months she started looking forward to working in the kitchen with Martin on a Saturday. It worked out that he prepared the meals and Jewel did all the cleaning and washing up. She devoted the whole day to scrubbing and polishing everything in sight.

Dave said, “South Africans are really weird. Not only do they speak strangely they are also forever cleaning everything. Imagine expending all that energy on something that will be in a mess again in a few days.”

“I like the way she speaks. It’s cute and I think she’s dedicated in everything she does, so let her scrub and polish the kitchen. Besides, the kitchen needs it after you lot have finished with it at the end of the week.”

“You like her, in fact I think you more than like her.”

“Nonsense, you know I can’t get involved with a girl in that way.”

“In what way can you get involved?’

“Not at all, in fact.”

“A chap can get lonely, though.”

“Of course Dave, I’m only human and she’s stunningly attractive. She’s also very young and on top of that she seems so innocent.”

“She’s bloody beautiful and if you don’t know it then you’re not made of flesh and blood.”

“I can see she’s beautiful, but I’ve renounced the desires of the flesh and I have to keep trying.”

“You’re not a priest yet, and besides who will know?”

“I would hate to have on my conscience what I think you’re suggesting.”

“Oh, come on, Martin. No-one will care a fig, least of all God, if you screwed a pretty bitch.”

“Be careful of your choice of words, Dave. It would be a sin if I made love to someone outside of marriage, not just for me but for her as well and I must consider her first and foremost.”

“You’re a screwball, alright.”

“Dave, listen to me, I’m going to pretend that we never had this conversation. Keep away from Jewel. She’s here all on her own and I’m going to keep an eye on her. I want to warn you not to go near her because you’ll have me to reckon with and I’m a lot bigger, older and stronger than you are.”

“I like the willing ones.”

Martin walked away shaking his head.

Her father was coming to Oxford to address students at one of the colleges. Jewel had just written her final examinations and knew she could take some time off to be with him. He was going to be in Oxford for two days.

The Sunday before he arrived she walked past a Church and went in. Church bells could be heard from all around the town and somehow it gave her a sense of peace. She sat quietly on one of the back benches and tried to listen to what the person standing at the alter was saying. The service was nearly at the end of the proceedings, but she didn't know that. She saw people walk past her towards someone at the front of the church and he seemed to place something in their mouths. As the queue of people returned to their seats she felt something brush against her. She glanced sideways and saw Martin. He kneeled beside her. As he did so he took her hand and held it tightly until the congregation had received the priest's blessing and then when it was all over he led her out of the church.

They walked along and he was still holding her hand.

"That was really beautiful," she said and smiled at him.

She gently pulled her hand away from him and reached into her purse. "Oh, such beautiful flowers." She smiled at him and bought a mixed bunch.

"I also think you're…"

"Go on…you think I'm what?"

"I don't know. Let's go. I have some cramming to do before to-morrow."

"Martin, you know everything there is to know about God, what on earth could you still have to learn?"

"I know very little and it's impossible for a mortal being to know everything about God."

"What if there isn't a God?"

"Then I'll just believe in goodness."

"How boring. Why must one be good all the time? I think it's sometimes good to be bad."

"It depends what you mean by being bad. If it means that you want to harm others, then it's never good."

"There are one or two people that I'd like to harm."

"I hope I'm not one of them."

"No, never you. Perhaps my father— I want him to suffer for leaving me as a small child. I grew up not knowing what he was like. Perhaps it's my mother that I should blame, for she failed to keep him."

"Jewel, you're too fine a person to harbour grudges against you parents. Your mother brought you up and they're now paying for your studies. I don't think you've been deprived of much."

"I was deprived of a father."

"It's best to forget about that. Focus on your work. You have your whole life ahead of you and it offers great opportunities. In Ireland children are sometimes abandoned by their parents on the square in Dublin and they always end up being pleased when they team up with their parents again."

"In South Africa small and older children are often just dumped somewhere."

"That's reason enough to realize that you're one of the privileged set. Be grateful."

That following week she saw little of Martin and the other students at her lodgings. They were all meeting deadlines. Her father had arrived and she walked down to Ruskin to listen to the talk he was giving. It overwhelmed her a little, for he spoke of matters she didn't fully comprehend, but the applause he received at the end of the session and the many people who gathered around him afterwards was proof that his words had touched each and every one of those in the audience.

At last he was free and she went to speak to him. He was still a stranger to her and she was cautious about approaching him while others were clamouring for his attention.

"Jewel, I'm pleased you were here. I'm staying at the Randolph for tonight. Come and have coffee with me there. They have a very comfortable lounge."

Once they were seated in the elegance of The Randolph, Jewel said lightly to her father, "You are part of a left-wing struggle, yet you stay in the snobbiest establishment in Oxford?"

"I wouldn't stay here out of choice. It was pre-arranged for me."

"Oh, I love it. I haven't sat on such comfortable chairs since I left home." Jewel picked up the silver coffee pot and said, "Black or white?"

"I'll have black coffee, thank you." He sat back in his chair and said, "Strange question, black or white, sort of symbolic of what we are as a family and also as a nation or a group within a nation."

"I've never been aware of the difference. I just think of myself as a person."

"That is how it should be." There was a moment of silence and then he casually remarked, "Jewel, I'm very happy that your mother was able to provide you with a comfortable home and a good school as a result of her inheritance."

"What inheritance? I always thought we lived on the proceeds of her earnings."

"I'm sorry I mentioned it. Your mother is a very private individual and seldom talks of her affairs."

"You left us, not knowing if we were being looked after?"

"I knew of a substantial inheritance from her maternal grandfather."

"Why did you leave us? Why did you stop loving Mum?"

"I didn't stop loving you or your mother. There were unusual circumstances that forced the issue. Someday you'll know the truth and I hope that both you and your mother will be able to forgive me."

"Someday is a long time to wait for the truth to become known. To this day my mother can't figure out why you left her. She plays those arias over and over again and I know that she cries."

"Jewel, I know her life has been sad and that she lost loved ones, but there were circumstances over which I had little control."

"Well, I would like to know about them."

"Some day you will, I promise."

There was an uncomfortable silence and then he said, "Come I'll walk you back to your lodgings."

They walked along slowly to where she lived and he told her a little about her mother on the way.

"She read everything in sight. I had never come across anyone so hungry for knowledge.

"I'm not going home this year. We need a break from each other."

"Perhaps your mother will miss you so much that she'll come here."

"I hope not. Not yet. anyway. Living with parents can be very stifling."

"Jewel, it all depends on what sort of living you want to do."

"Oh, boyfriends and things." She reached into her bag and lit a cigarette.

"Is that wise?"

"What, boyfriends?"

"Well that too, but I'm referring specifically to the smoking. Does your mother know?"

"She caught me at it—the cigarette, not the boyfriends. I'm more careful when it comes to boyfriends. Anyway, she was furious and we went through a bit of a bad patch for a while. She believes I've given it up."

"That's dishonest, isn't it? Why are you taking revenge against your mother after all she did for you?"

"She lost you. If she was so wonderful, why did you leave her?"

"You'll know some day. Something happened that I can't talk about."

"Is it something she did or did you desert her because you fell for Liz, because she was white and quite rich."

"Of course not! I didn't leave because of another woman. I only got together with Liz long after I left your mother. There were circumstances beyond my control that separated us. Please Jewel, try and accept that. You're harbouring so much anger and it isn't healthy."

"Anyway, I could pick up that you and Liz aren't getting on too well. Why is that? You have nice sons."

"My sons are nice and I know I don't help them build up self-esteem. There is just something in my makeup that drives me into a state where I treat the people that I love badly."

"You should get counselling."

While they walked he suddenly said: "I think your mother will do her bit through the transition that is imminent in South Africa. Who knows, she might get into Parliament."

"Will you return to Africa then?"

"No, I'm afraid not, perhaps on a visit but never again to stay. I've become too accustomed to my life here and the boys are British. I am too, actually. I have British citizenship. Britain has been good to me. Africa wasn't."

Jewel took her father into the lodging house to meet her companions, partially because she was secretly proud of him. She had seen Dave in the audience. In the basement living area he was busy cleaning his saxophone. Martin was at a table reading from a pile of notes. The girls were watching television.

Dave said, "I'm honoured to meet you, sir. Your talk was very informative and I hope your predictions about changes in South Africa become a reality."

"I hope so too," her father said and laughed.

They all sat around chatting for a while and then her father stood up and said goodnight to them. Jewel walked with him to the door.

When they reached the door and she walked outside with him, he turned to her and said, "That young man Martin has his eyes on you all time – I hope nothing's going on between you, Jewel."

"I'm sorry to say that absolutely nothing's going on between us except friendship."

"Be cautious. He's got more in mind."

Jewel laughed and said, "He's going to join the priesthood. He's celibate, everyone tells me, and for the life of me I can't figure out why."

"Are you attracted to him?"

"All the girls are, but we're wasting our time."

Her father kissed her on the cheek and said, "Take care. Don't become over-fond of him."

"Oh, I'm already over-fond of the guy."

"Come on now, Jewel, you're making me anxious."

"Don't worry, he won't have sex with anyone."

"Well, put that bluntly, I suppose I can rest assured that you will do the right thing." These were her father's parting words and Jewel stood on the front steps watching his tall figure disappear around the corner.

"I wonder if I'm starting to not hate him so much," she thought.

Some time after that Jewel met a young athlete and for several months he was her constant companion. She enjoyed his attentions and especially the many kisses they shared in between training sessions. For some unknown reason she couldn't allow it to grow into anything more than just kissing and touching and she never invited him to her room. Her romance with him ended when he went off to post-graduate studies in another town.

The summer holidays were due and she was in her third year in Oxford and had still not been home. Jonathan meanwhile had become an under-graduate, but was busy adapting to university life and they spent little time together. It was nevertheless nice to have him in the vicinity and they often met for coffee and a chat.

Then it was midsummer holidays in England and she was due to leave for South Africa the next day. There was a little incident when her towel fell onto the floor while she was taking a shower and it got soaking wet. She decided that she would dash from the shower to her room for a dry towel. She flung the bathroom door open and ran into Martin. He caught her arm to stop her from slipping on wet feet.

"Sorry, I came up to give you a message." He placed a slip of paper in her wet hand, turned and ran down the stairs without looking at her again. She stood transfixed, then ran to her room, grabbed a towel and flung it around her, for by now she was shivering from fright as well as from the cold.

"So he saw me naked. Big deal." she muttered as she hastily changed into warm pajamas. She went to bed early that night because she was leaving on the morning flight. She had just slipped in under her warm covers, thinking that her initial intentions of entertaining a passionate lover in her bed had come to nothing, when there was a soft knock on her door. She called for whoever it was to come in.

"I just wanted to say goodbye to you and wish you a safe journey."

"That's really nice of you, Martin."

He looked around for a chair to sit on, but she said, "Sit here on the bed. I don't bite."

They chatted for a while about insignificant things and then he said, “What happened to the athlete?”

“Oh, he sort of dumped me. I haven’t heard from him since he left.”

“No one in his right mind would dump you, Jewel.”

“Well he’s a sort of a hero in his chosen field, so there are lots of girls keen on him. I’m not particularly bothered.”

“I was actually jealous of him.”

“No!”

“Yes.” He leaned forward and kissed her full on the lips and she thought that it was the most sensational kiss anyone had ever given her.

He stood up and said, “Have a good trip, my darling. I’ll see you when you get back from your vacation.” He walked to the door, stood there a moment and then he was gone. She could think of nothing else but that he had called her darling.

Afterwards she wondered if it had been a dream.

CHAPTER FIVE

Charlotte settled down to work and domestic seclusion once she overcame the longing for a daughter who had been so much part of her life since she was born. The wind nearly always blew on the side of the mountain where they lived and it reminded her of the times Jewel arrived home from school when the wind would lift her long dark hair above her while she clutched at her tunic with her one free hand to prevent the skirt from billowing up around her waist. Sometimes clouds sailed in from the sea to float over pitched roofs towards the mountains like spectral boats. On other days the interior of the houses were flooded with sunlight. She remembered the occasion when Jewel once said, "It looks as if whales are eating giant scoops of ice cream with all the white clouds out there on the water."

PK had suddenly stopped what he was doing and said: "What a great idea, the three of us can also go and have ice cream at the corner store. They serve big scoops of the stuff and they come in delectable flavours." Charlotte had asked PK to repair the catch on the gate although she knew he hated the domestic scene in all its forms and she thought he was now finding an excuse not to finish the task.

"Oh boy, what are we waiting for? We can walk there and back." Jewel was suddenly perkier than she had been all day. She removed her gloves and pushed the garden fork into the moist soil with a flourish.

"I just knew the gate wouldn't be fixed today. Everyone always comes up with an excuse. The garden service man said he didn't have the right tools last week. PK now you have the tools, but suddenly you want ice cream."

"Oh come on, Mouse, give us a little time off. Jewel has been planting seedlings all afternoon. I'll finish off when we get back. The gate just needs a couple of screws and the catch will be back on."

"Who's Mouse? It's Charlotte. If that's all it needs, why is it taking so long?"

"Charlotte Smith De Meillon, I'm not a husband, a lover, a father or a handyman. I'm a godfather and fixing things isn't part of my job description."

"Alright, PK. Leave it. You and Jewel go and get your ice cream. I still have a lot of work waiting for me inside the house. To-morrow I'm back at work and you'll want

the latest on the proposed Tricameral Parliament because you'll say that Head Office wants readers to understand why Black people are excluded."

"Right now I want ice cream. Come along, Jewel." He grabbed her hand and Charlotte watched them stroll down the road, nudging each other and laughing as if nothing mattered but the fact that they had escaped a scolding from Charlotte.

Charlotte remembered every detail of her role as a mother and was well-aware that she gave Jewel little attention out of necessity due to work and having to meet deadlines. She muttered a silent thank you to PK and Lefty Alan for always being there for both of them. PK understood when Jewel needed someone to talk to. Charlotte remembered Jewel's tears at sight of the first spot of blood on her sheet one morning when she woke her mother with the words, "Mum, I, I think I have cancer." She had just turned thirteen. Charlotte explained about menstruating and took her to a doctor who went into great detail on the subject and who assured her that she didn't have a malignancy. Charlotte felt she had failed her daughter by not warning her that changes take place in the body during puberty. Somehow time had gone so quickly and Charlotte said to PK afterwards, "It was just the other day that she was little. How can she be menstruating already?"

"I wouldn't have thought it possible either," he had said.

Now alone in the house for the first time, Charlotte just had her memories to keep her company and on the rare occasion PK would call around for news of Jewel, always proud that she achieved good marks.

Charlotte would laugh as he told the others in the office how well Jewel was doing in Oxford and then when he saw the look of amusement on Charlotte's face and noticed James winking at his co-workers, PK would comment, "Allow me this indulgence, Charlotte. Jewel is all I have, even if she's really Johnny De Meillon's daughter."

"I'm grateful for the interest you take in her. You've filled many gaps in her life, so you may indulge yourself as much as you like."

Jewel wrote and told her how much she missed her home and especially the long days of summer sunshine. She also missed all her surrogate Dads, like PK, James and Lefty Alan. "They all added something to her life," she said. Cape weather was easier on one's state of mind than grim British winters, she wrote in her letters. Many letters passed between mother and daughter over time, but Jewel was always careful not to mention Johnny and his family too often.

Charlotte kept very much to herself, except that occasionally she joined PK and his usual crowd, mostly just to extract information from other news writers. Her articles had as time went by become politically bold even before the unbanning of the African National Congress, the Pan-Africanist Congress and the South African Communist Party in 1990. In that year capital punishment was suspended. The year was also significant because Nelson Mandela was released from prison. Oliver Tambo returned to South Africa after 30 years in exile. By the year 1991 the African National Congress had agreed to halt military training. Declarations of peace were signed and South Africa started moving towards democracy. The views Charlotte expressed often invited comment from the reading public. She gained mostly positive comments from readers of the *African Beat* and occasionally sharp reprimands and once or twice telephone threats. Socially she kept a low profile, which she had become accustomed to doing since the attack that killed Norriman all those years ago.

Charlotte knew that Jewel said very little about her father in her letters. Jewel had spent Christmas with his family. Charlotte wondered whether Johnny celebrated Christmas these days. If he did it would be so unlike him. She also wondered if he looked much older. She regarded him as ageless for he took as little notice of chronology as he did of any human-invented rule. He created his own private laws and lived according to his own perceptions of age.

Lefty Alan kept in touch and often called either at Charlotte's office or at the house. He was close to becoming an invalid these days and planned to retire from his law practice, but still acted as executor in her grandmother's estate.

"Well, Charlotte, you have a nice share of the money from your grandmother. There's something for Jewel as well and it's enough for her to carry on with her studies

anywhere in the world. The sea-side property was sold for quite a sum of money and there is ample for all of you even after deducting the cost of the retirement home."

"What a pity that the hamlet will become built up."

"I agree. I thought perhaps you should keep one of the units."

"I think it's such an ill-fated place. I'll always be conscious of it being where my mother died. If it hadn't been for the sad memories, I would've considered it."

After a few moments she said, "I'm glad my grandmother was at peace when she died and that Opal and Clara, my aunts, managed to see her while she was still lucid enough to know that they were there."

"I suggested that they invest in two of the units at the hamlet, but they both said it was a place of sadness and they didn't want to live there. They told me it always depressed them and that's why they left in the first place."

"They told me that too. They're two classy ladies, aren't they, Lefty? Their lives are in England where they have their spouses and their children."

Charlotte slipped into one of her habitual silences and only after a while she said: "Jewel will be home this week. I expected her earlier but she postponed her return flight because of a crisis in Johnny's family."

"I hope it wasn't serious. I actually liked that man although he came across as crude and harsh. Of course I haven't seen him for more than twenty years. In the meantime he has certainly made a name for himself in the political arena."

"Although he was always outspoken, I really never expected that of him. He was adamant that he detested politicians. If he intended to mislead me he certainly succeeded."

"He was forced to keep it secret, I'm almost certain of that."

"He could have told me, I would have been willing to participate."

"Perhaps that's why he withheld the details of his involvement. He didn't want you and Jewel to be at risk."

"I was in more danger married to Norriman, only I didn't realize it."

"That is all behind you now."

Over the years Charlotte and Jewel settled into their house against the slope of the mountain. The years drifted by and Charlotte devoted many hours to her writing while Jewel progressed from childhood into young adulthood. Charlotte could never really separate her thoughts from the events of the past. Sometimes she became preoccupied by them. The fact that the shots that killed Norriman were silent perpetually haunted her. She never knew that death could be so soundless. One second he was standing next to the car smiling at them and helping his father and in the next he collapsed onto the curbside with a hole in his forehead. She will never forget how his startled eyes became expressionless as they stared at nothing. He must have died almost instantly. Blood started pouring out of him from everywhere. Out of his nose, his mouth and through holes in his clothing. She saw the lifeblood seep out of her beloved and she heard her child screaming. She placed her hands on the wounds to stop the flow of blood and the old man tried to stop her. She couldn't see properly because tears were blinding her. Someone took Jewel into the house and after the ambulance arrived and took Norriman away she ran to the house to fetch buckets of water to wash his blood from the sidewalk and the pink water ran down the slope in the gutter before the old man shook her arm and said that a neighbour would drive them to the hospital that Norriman had been taken to. Some of the young men in the neighbourhood would finish cleaning the sidewalk. Besides it had started drizzling and the sky was darkening. Jewel had come running out of the house and clung to her, crying and asking where the white car had taken Norriman.

She remembered how at the hospital she was questioned by an officious security policeman and how rudely she reacted to questions about the man who had given her happiness and cared about her child as much as she did.

"You must have some idea of who committed this crime."

"Ask your government," she shouted and strangers began staring at her, wondering what had got into the exceedingly small woman who stood there as two large men towered over her while she shook her fist at them.

"Lady, we're trying to help you. Was your husband involved in anything illegal?"

"No! He was brought up to be honourable."

"But his father is a known communist."

"That does not make him a criminal."

"Lady, you know it's prohibited in this country to be a communist."

"Norriman was not a communist. He didn't even hold it against this government when they took his father away and robbed the family of their breadwinner."

"You were also married to Johnny De Meillon. He's suspected of subversive acts and is wanted for sabotage."

"I haven't heard from him for years. Besides, there isn't any connection between killing Norriman and my ex-husband's political activities. They're separate issues."

The one policeman was a Coloured man whom she knew through her newspaper work and she turned on him, her words aimed at wounding him, penetrating his conscience: "You ought to be ashamed acting against your own people on the side of this government."

"I'm trying to do my job and you're not making it easy for me."

"Right, I intend making it very difficult. Don't underestimate the power of the press."

"Are you threatening us?"

"Of course I am." Suddenly her face crumbled and she burst into tears and the old man took her arm and led her away from them. He led her into casualty where he forced her to sit down and patted her shoulder until she became quiet.

Eventually they permitted Charlotte and the old man to leave the hospital and offered to take them home. Always polite, the old man accepted the offer gratefully but Charlotte had misgivings in the car on the way home, for she reminded herself that members of the party and those who belonged to other political movements had ended up dead, always with the excuse that they committed suicide.

When the old man died Charlotte thought that sorrows never came in single file, but in clusters. In her reporting days she discovered that when misfortune struck a family, it would be one of a succession of ill-events. The old man had been frail and ailing for a long time, but she knew he died of grief. His funeral was secretly organized by an unknown group of people and a red flag covered the casket. Military defence vehicles were parked in the vicinity, the young soldiers in them poised for action. The two security policemen were there and Charlotte became involved in a tussle when they tried to remove the flag and then Jewel saved the situation by howling as loudly as she could.

Afterwards she told her mother that she did it on purpose and that the tears at first were forced but afterwards came naturally and she couldn't stop until long after the two policemen had left the scene. The funeral carried on until sunset. Various speakers took up a lot of the time. First there was the service, then hordes of people at the cemetery. The mourners came from everywhere and couldn't fit into the community centre afterwards, so residents in the vicinity came to their rescue, accommodating and feeding the overflow. Charlotte said to PK years afterwards that, "If ever there was a raucous funeral, that was one."

From the time of Johnny's departure, PK took Jewel under his wing, always making sure that she remained unscathed by shielding her from South Africa's discriminatory laws. Charlotte and Jewel lived in the house against the side of the mountain in partial seclusion with as little contact with others as possible. As Jewel grew past childhood into early adulthood, she gathered around her friends from her school from the upper strata of white society who never questioned or remarked on Charlotte or Jewel's possible race classification.

Charlotte remembered how when she arrived home after the funeral she packed as much as she could into cases and boxes and piled them into the car. Norriman's family members had come to the house and taken the old man's remaining children to their homes. Charlotte placed Jewel in the back of the car, tucked her in and then drove along back roads until she reached her grandmother's house at the sea. No-one knew about her grandmother except Lefty Alan and PK. Her grandmother was a well-guarded secret. She had become sickly and Charlotte's presence in that lonely place was more than welcome. Her grandmother knew of Norriman's death, as Charlotte had been in constant touch with her using only the office telephones.

The period had been one of the trying times of her life. Once she was settled in at her grandmother's house, both PK and Lefty Alan paid regular visits and Charlotte felt that she was slowly regaining her sanity in the seclusion of the hamlet. She went back to being Charlotte Smith and eventually settled into a more peaceful existence.

PK had made it possible for Charlotte and Jewel to move into the house against the mountain. She would be eternally grateful to him. PK arranged for Jewel to attend a

private school where his brother was the principal. In turn he was grateful for the contribution Charlotte had made to the *African Beat* over many years of hard work.

Now in her house Charlotte had added the loft room that gave her a view of the city and of the sea in the distance. It was meant as a surprise for Jewel on her return from England for the summer break. Jewel was going back to Oxford to graduate. Charlotte hoped that Jewel intended staying on in England for post-graduate studies. She didn't want her coming back to Cape Town permanently until after the political transition. As she stood at the window of the loft room, she looked out over the city and reminded herself how much a part of her the city had become; it was central to her being. With its sun and its wind it lulled and swept her into its consciousness.

The moment Jewel walked through the glass doors of the airport building Charlotte knew that her daughter was no longer a child but a grown woman. She had long since had her twenty-second birthday, and had about her the confidence of a sophisticated young person. They heartily embraced and kept looking each other over to absorb the changes that were evident and those that weren't.

"You're wearing an elegant coat, Jewel."

"One of Jonathan's friends made it for me. He studies designing in London. Jonathan knew him as a child in their neighbourhood and we're all friends."

"Do you feel quite at home in England now?"

"Not at home exactly, I've just become used to it. Beautiful Cape Town's my real home. It was breathtaking to see the mountain again."

Arm in arm they waited for Jewel's luggage to arrive. Jewel packed very little of her student clothes, for she knew her mother would want to take her shopping, although she didn't want her mother to spend money on her. Besides, she had enough of everything. She used her pocket money to buy presents for her mother, especially books and tapes that were unobtainable in South Africa. She bought a pair of hand-crafted shoes for PK. She hoped they would fit his exceedingly large feet. She obtained the size and the measurement of his feet from her mother, who had on one occasion asked him to leave the imprint of his foot in the wet concrete of a pathway in their garden, saying that it would look like the footprint of the Abominable Snowman.

"I have loads of photographs of the lanes and colleges of Oxford to give you an idea of the place."

"I can't bear to think that you will be leaving again so soon. Why have you cut your holiday to just a few weeks?"

"I had personal business to take care of."

"Not too personal, I hope."

"Well, it concerned Jonathan. I had to stay on to give him all the support I could. He's on an island with Martin now."

"I thought you were dealing with a crisis of your own. I've been worried about you."

"You don't have to worry, Mum, the fellow I like prefers God to me. He's chosen a religious life and will never marry. I offered to have his children and allow him to be a priest at the same time but he was so shocked he avoided me for weeks afterwards."

"You will do nothing of the sort, if I can help it. There won't be any more fatherless babies in this family."

"Oh, that's so old-fashioned, Mum. Women don't need men to father their babies or help take care of them, as you know."

"A child must have both parents."

"I never had my father to help bring me up and I guess I'm okay, aren't I?

"You're wonderful, but that's not the point. I want a respectable life for you. I don't want you to struggle to bring up children on your own."

"Don't look so glum, mother. Martin turned my offer down and was just as shocked by my proposal as you are. I also had another boyfriend, but he went to study at another university. I never heard from him again but it didn't matter, because I was more attracted to Martin, who is wonderful while the other one was just okay."

Jewel was surprised to see her mother driving a new car, not an expensive model, but new nevertheless. "You must have come into a fortune," she said and looked sideways at her mother.

"I inherited some money from my grandmother's estate and I've been sensible with my investments."

"Father mentioned a legacy and then when he realized I didn't know anything about it, he wouldn't say any more on the subject. So I don't know if we're rich or poor."

"We're neither. Let's just say that if I continue working until I'm sixty-five we'll be fine."

The next day Jewel looked at Charlotte's collection of tapes and said, "My father listens to the same arias that you listen to. I think he still thinks about you. No-one is allowed to enter his study. It's just simply out of bounds."

"I'm surprised he listens to opera. He always loved jazz."

"I suppose it reminds him of you."

"I didn't think he would want to be reminded of me. There was someone in your father's life before me and that was where his thoughts were. I always sensed it."

"It would be nice to know a little about one's background. Neither of you ever tell me anything about your lives before you knew each other."

"There was nothing to tell. I never had a family and your father made his own way in life. He has a mother, but I never met her. One must just get on with life and not worry about family. They either exist in one's life or they don't. Sometimes they're just a bother, like your father's brother Glen. Your father was forever bailing him out of jail."

"Oh boy, you mean we had criminals in the family?"

"Now, don't go on about it. We don't want the whole world to know."

During the following weeks as Jewel wondered through the house marvelling at all the changes, she said in a teasing mode, "You have got lots of money. Look what you've done. We now live in half a double-storey residence. Only rich people live in such opulence."

The car was parked in the street because the house took up the whole portion of the stand, with the garden at the back. Small portions were terraced up along the slope. Charlotte had thought of various ways to create a parking space in her grounds for the vehicle, but failed to find a final solution. The two women had the whole of September to be together. Jewel was forever running to the front door to see if the postman had arrived.

Dining on the lawn one evening, Jewel said to her mother, "Why don't you come with me to England? The break will do you good. There are small cottages to let in the one village outside of Oxford and it'll be pleasant in the countryside. You can stay until

the winter sets in and until I graduate. I'd like to have my old mother there for the graduation ceremony."

"So now I'm your old mother? The other night you and PK were going on about how youthful I still looked. I'd like to remind you that I'm only in my forties, young lady."

"Why did you marry an old man like my father?"

"He wasn't old. Age doesn't feature in his life."

"That's true. Sometimes I think he thinks he's immortal."

"He is immortal. He'll go on forever in some way or other, even when he dies."

"Why didn't you guys give me a little religious tuition? I remember that you even forbade them at school to force me to attend bible class. Martin was shocked when I told him I had never been to a church."

"Forget what Martin thinks. You have been to church."

"When exactly did that take place?"

"When you were a baby and your grandmother insisted that we have you baptized."

"Did my father know?"

"He was there but he got bored and then picked a fight with your grandmother. After that she practically ignored him each time she saw him. After he left me, she said she always knew he wasn't any good."

"Why were you and my father so anti religion?"

"Your father lost his faith when his sister died, I think. There was also something that happened in his youth that embittered him and he became anti just about everything. He never spoke of it, but I guessed."

"It's sad, you know Mum, because I think one can find solace in a faith, no matter what it is. What put you against it?"

"The first book I read was the bible, but I didn't really understand what it was all about. Then in the orphanages I was treated badly, so I hated church. If you have a desire to join some faith or other, I won't stop you. You're free to choose, you know."

"Well, I've been toying with the idea of looking into Catholicism. There's something ancient and pagan about the Catholic mass that really appeals to me."

"Isn't it just because your romantic interest of the moment is a Catholic?"

"Yes, it could be, but I've been to mass a few times in Oxford and I find it tranquil. It means something to me. Maybe if I go into it properly I won't be so intrigued by it."

"Yes, because it will no longer be a mystery."

By the end of the holiday Jewel had persuaded Charlotte to return to England with her. Jewel telephoned her father and asked him to organize accommodation. Her own accommodation at the student house was terminating soon and she would just return there to pack up her belongings and collect her luggage. Her honours class was starting in October and she had to return before then. She hoped to be settled in the cottage before classes started because she was warned that it would be a very demanding year. Jonathan should have been going into his final year now, but it seemed that he was taking a sabbatical and staying at the religious retreat a little longer. Jewel wondered if Martin was coming back to Oxford. She was so excited about seeing him again after experiencing that wonderful moment when he kissed her.

She had now spent enough time in the sun and was satisfied that the Cape wind had blown on her face again and she was ready to return to England and to Martin, she hoped. She was also looking forward to seeing her father again. She hadn't received one letter from Martin in all this time, but several from Jonathan and he had given her news that she didn't really want: that Martin intended remaining at the monastery.

News reports were reaching Charlotte in Oxford in their quaint cottage in the year of 1994, that South Africa's homeland administrations were collapsing one by one. The South African Defence Force had to be called in to stabilize various situations, especially one in the apartheid-created homeland of Bophuthatswana, where rightwing elements tried to take advantage of the turbulence, but failed in their efforts when some of their own members were shot dead. It was alleged that the neo-Nazis fled when the South African Defence Force arrived to help Bophuthatswana citizens resist the invaders. Negotiations for an Afrikaner homeland had not succeeded but all factions were encouraged to register for the elections. A rightwing split occurred when the party known

as the Freedom Front announced that they intended taking part in the coming elections. It was also alleged that police officers had supplied arms to Inkatha during the peace negotiations to spark the violence that spread across the country in black demarcated areas.

Charlotte had been in England since the previous October and felt that she was missing out on pre-election news-making events. Although she enjoyed the tranquillity of England's country life, news items on the developments in South Africa were unsettling and she longed to return to Cape Town. She wanted to play her part in the changes that were occurring.

Johnny De Meillon and his wife Liz were coming to tea on the Sunday to meet her. Johnny was away on one of his overseas visits so could not attend Jewel's graduation. Charlotte was pleased that their first meeting after so many years had been postponed a few times, but now it seemed inevitable that they should meet at last. She couldn't help wondering if he was anything like the old Johnny she knew so many years ago? She couldn't imagine what he looked like or how he spoke these days, but each time she thought of the anticipated meeting her heart missed a beat and her legs felt as if they were buckling. For Jewel's sake she held on to her inner strength and told herself that if she survived the early events of her life in a shack, Johnny's betrayal of her and Norriman's death, then she could survive meeting Johnny De Meillon again and the woman he chose above her.

CHAPTER SIX

The cottage was next to a stretch of farming land and both Charlotte and Jewel were enchanted at the thought of awakening each morning to the sounds of rustling grass on the green field and the farm animals that came to their back fence for tidbits. The cottage was at the end of a winding lane and it was quite a novelty for Charlotte to stroll through stretches of countryside without worrying about safety. Her greatest delight was the nearby village where church bells pealed on a Sunday morning as she discovered hidden lanes and walked on moss-covered paths. All the doors in their lane were painted green. Lush creepers and baskets heavy with flowering plants adorned the walls of the cottages and Charlotte wondered why every town and every village in the world couldn't look like that. It was a joy to be able to leave the doors of the cottage unlocked. Nearby were neighbours who had an apple orchard and they made and sold the preserve. One could open the gate and walk up to the front door, select a jar of preserve and leave the money in a box on the porch. Charlotte now had several jars of apple in their kitchen for each time she walked past the apple-tree-owners she bought a jar of preserve because she found the assumption of trust on the part of the owners so appealing.

From the front garden of their cottage they had a charming view of Oxford and in the early morning Charlotte could see the canal mists rise above chimneys and church towers. Charlotte knew that Cape Town was regarded as one of the most beautiful cities in the world, but it was tarnished by the lack of housing for that section of the community that consisted of impoverished people. The amazing fact about Cape Town was that from the murky brew of swamp inhabitants, there often emerged beings of unexpected genius: athletes, musicians, preachers of oratory distinction, a politician here, a poet there. Above all, Cape Town was her home. It was where she belonged.

"Don't buy any more apple spread, Mum, otherwise you'll have to take crates of the stuff home with you on the plane. I'm not going to be able to eat it all."

"You can give a couple of jars to Liz and your father on Sunday."

"Are you nervous about meeting him again?"

"I suppose I am. I'm pleased I'm not as bitter about him leaving us as in the past. I always intended telling him off but now most of it is forgotten and I really think we were both better of without him. I don't think he was meant to play the role of a father."

"Oh, I had it out with him about leaving us. He couldn't offer an excuse. He just said that someday I'll understand. He's become withdrawn over the past year but Jonathan reckons he's cheered up a bit lately. It would be interesting to know what actually goes on in his head."

"It's better not to know. You may not like him at all then," Charlotte warned.

"When he met me for the first time he didn't seem as passionless as he appears to be with his family" She paused for a moment and then said, "Oh, I meant to ask you, have you any idea why he called me Ruby when he first saw me?"

"I have no idea."

"You always assured me that Jewel was the name he insisted on from when I was born."

"My mother was called Ruby."

"Perhaps he was confused seeing me for the first time after so many years."

"He probably mixed up the names under the strain of the moment."

"It's strange though, don't you think?"

"He's a mystifying man, Jewel, and no-one will ever understand why he says and does certain things.

Jewel couldn't arrive at any satisfactory analysis of either her father or her mother. The true facts of their lives were well-hidden from family members and from the world, for that matter. Perhaps if they unburdened themselves, her mother would emerge from her long bouts of silence and her father from his discontentment.

It would be interesting to observe their first meeting after so many years. She hoped something would transpire that might throw some light on the events of the past.

Only three members of the De Meillon's arrived for afternoon tea on the Sunday in question. Jonathan was still away on the island off the Galway coast in Ireland. Jewel had some news that she wanted to convey to them all and she wondered what the reaction would be.

They arrived in mellow weather. There was a batch of crumpets to be served with farm honey and good English tea. Introductions between Johnny's family and Charlotte were done so hastily that Jewel missed out on respective facial expressions and initial reactions.

It was not until they were all seated in the tiny parlour that she studied them all in turn. Henry was photographing everything in sight, as usual. Johnny was at the bookshelf, studying titles. Charlotte and Liz were the only two that were animatedly discussing issues concerning the life-expectancy of the planet.

"Birthrates have escalated to 250 per minute globally," Charlotte remarked.

"There are five major ecosystems that serve to support human economies…" Liz added at one stage of the discussions.

Then Jewel said, "Would any of you like to see the circles in the field a few hundred yards from here? There is no natural or scientific explanation for them."

"I want to see them." Henry stood up immediately and picked up his camera.

"Henry, you waste a lot of film. Shouldn't you reserve some of it for when you and your mother visit Jonathan?"

"I have to photograph the circles."

Charlotte, Liz and Henry went off to look at the mysterious circles and Jewel and her father stayed behind to chat a little.

"Are you still skipping meals, Jewel?"

"Not really."

"You must be, because you've lost the weight that you gained after the two weeks in hospital. The doctors warned me that if you persist in these abstentions from food for such ridiculously long periods the damage to your system can be permanent."

"Martin shouldn't have summoned you to Oxford. It wasn't as serious as they all made it out to be."

"You were so dehydrated that they feared for your life. Nothing's more serious than that. Let me remind you that alcohol is dehydrating and drinking it is not what the doctors describe as taking sufficient liquids."

"I'm not doing that anymore. Please don't tell Mum. She doesn't know about it. I don't want her to start fussing as well."

"We fuss because we care about you."

"I'm on the mend, so there's no need for her wrath as well. I've been having religious instruction in preparation for entering a convent and I don't want any of you to

be concerned at this stage." She looked at her father as he narrowed his eyes in disbelief. "I'm only in the initial stages," she said, studying him intently.

"Christ. You too! Is it my fault?"

"It isn't anyone's fault. It's just a personal choice. Catholic sisters helped me recover from the worst of my eating disorders and I've become close to them. I want to give it a try. I might be able to help people like myself."

"Young woman, your education has cost a great deal of money and now you want to throw it all to the wind to go and lock yourself away in a convent. Find a nice man, marry him and have a family and fuck the religion. What is it with you and Jonathan?"

"You're very crude."

"Jewel, why have you never called me Dad, or father or fucking well something instead of you this and you that?"

"Because to me you were just you this and you that!"

"I can't believe what I'm hearing."

"Well, I'm appalled at the language you use."

"Why do you want to go to a convent?"

"Perhaps I seek salvation."

"What rubbish, you've hardly lived. Why would you need salvation?"

"You know nothing about what goes on inside of either Jonathan or me. You haven't really been a hands-on father, have you?" She felt herself capitulate as she saw the sadness in his eyes. "I'm sorry." She stretched her hand out towards him and said, "I'm so dreadfully sorry."

Johnny was spared the embarrassment of replying because her mother, Liz and Henry came barging in at the door.

"Dad, you have to see this. It's only at the bottom of the lane a little way into the field." He pulled his father onto his feet and almost dragged him to the outside.

Charlotte had a view of the lane from where she sat. She watched as Johnny followed Henry to the field. She thought Johnny looked weary. His tall figure seemed a little bent and he walked with his head down, as if he wanted to monitor his steps. She

watched them vanish around a corner, almost into the sunset. Suddenly she wondered if he was ever real. She said softly: “Was he a fantasy father figure to me all these years?”

Liz thought she heard what Charlotte said. She asked. “I beg your pardon? I didn’t quite hear what you just said.”

“I, I. Oh dear, I was actually half reminiscing.”

“Reminiscing about my husband?”

“No, about the man he was when he was my husband. It’s just a very faint memory now.”

Henry was running towards their cottage. His father wasn’t with him. He was calling his mother. All three women responded to his call as they sped to the field where Johnny lay unconscious. Charlotte wondered if he had only really existed in the imaginings of the four people who ran towards him. They reached him in the glow of the autumn sunset. He still had a pulse.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Johnny was often puzzled by the lack of contentment in his life with Liz and their sons. The only reason for this that he could think of was that he never succeeded in expunging from his inner self the memory of Ruby, Charlotte and Jewel. Visions of Ruby as he thought he once knew her were fused in his mind forever. Visions of Charlotte and Jewel as they were when he left them in Cape Town had dimmed, but still plagued him. Sometimes all three of them twisted together in a sort of witchery that produced coal black eyes, wild hair and slender arms that sucked him into a vacuum from which he could not escape. He came to the conclusion that he was undoubtedly the crazed descendent of the original Henry de Meillon. He imagined that ghostly maidens from a forgotten past wreaked their vengeance on him for the sins committed by generations of De Meillons. In his saner moments he knew that these notions were illusory and whatever went on in his mind at times was out of touch with reality.

Jonathan, their first-born, was what Liz regarded as a miracle. It was her first pregnancy after two previous marriages and innumerable relationships. The two sons were good kids, but the older one was over-sensitive, Johnny thought, and could do without Liz's coddling. Johnny was semi-pleased when he observed that wild Cape Coloured blood manifested itself in Henry from an early age, but it was also a reason for concern.

"How many children do you have, Mr De Meillon?" a young newspaper reporter once asked him.

"That is a difficult question to answer."

"Is it true that in your country and amongst your kind of people a man is allowed to have several wives?"

"Several wives spread over a lifetime or several wives like the Mormons?"

"I suppose you can say, like the Mormons."

"Certain tribes in Africa don't believe in monogamy. Often for practical reasons and through traditions that have been passed on through the ages they acquire several wives. However, I am not descended from any of those tribes. I'm a Coloured and they have regretfully been conditioned by the white man to wait until the one wife dies before

another is taken. When they become desperate enough they resort to a legal separation or divorce. Does that answer your question?"

He never saw anything written by the young reporter on the subject of multiple wives in Africa in the publication she represented.

When Johnny met his daughter for the first time after twenty years, he knew he came close to exposing the truth. A brief spell of common sense saved him and he regained his composure almost immediately at that moment. When he saw the resemblance to Ruby for the first time in so many years he had an urge to fling himself at her feet and weep for the sorrows of the past. He immediately sensed the anger that simmered behind her beautiful but rigid face. Resentment was deeply embedded in her and it reflected in her eyes. He knew there was little he could do to help her understand without revealing the truth in relation to Charlotte. He had the story of Ruby recorded on almost one hundred sheets of paper and these were sealed in an envelope to be opened in the event of his death. He wrote it in an effort to seek the forgiveness of Charlotte, Jewel and Liz. He also wrote it for his two sons, so that they may forgive his seeming lack of affection for them. He showed little love for his children except when it concerned Jewel, who perhaps hated him the most. One day they would know that he loved them all but only in different ways.

He knew Liz wasn't happy about having Jewel stay with them for a month before her departure for Oxford. Liz thought that in a battle for his love, Jewel would win and she and the boys would come off second best. Liz remarked a week before Jewel was due to leave for Oxford: "Johnny, I think you ought to speak to Jewel about smoking too much and she hardly eats anything. You must have noticed. I just wonder if her mother knows about the smoking and that her daughter might have an eating disorder."

"Liz, don't fret about this. The smoking is just experimental. The novelty will wear off. She is naturally slim." He was just about to say that she was slim like her grandmother Ruby, but he curbed his tongue in time. He thought what hell it was to carry such a secret for so many years and not be able to share it with anyone, except that one time when he confided in Lefty Alan.

During Jewel's first year in Oxford Johnny was offered an opportunity to address a group of students and he spotted his daughter in the audience. His talk carried the

audience through from the time of colonial powers to the present. He predicted that apartheid rule was hurtling towards extinction. At the end of his delivery he had a standing ovation from an audience that had many young South African students amongst them and they consisted of Black, White, Coloured and Asian.

Jewel wound her way through the crowd that clamoured to speak to him. After a while he excused himself and invited Jewel to join him in the lounge at the hotel where he was staying. She seemed to enjoy the luxury of having coffee served on a silver tray and sat quietly savouring it.

"You can't just live on coffee, Jewel."

"Oh, I never think about food. As a child I thought of nothing else but the next meal but later on I thought of nothing but boys and thereby replaced the need for food, much to my mother's delight for she had never mastered cooking."

"At your age you should feel free to eat whatever you want. There's no need to starve. You're thin enough. Let's order some sandwiches."

He noticed that she appeared to enjoy the sandwiches, but the moment they left the hotel she lit a cigarette and inhaled deeply as they walked side by side on the wet sidewalks.

"Liz thinks you smoke too much."

"Liz has no right to comment, has she?"

"Does your mother know you smoke?"

"No."

"Then why smoke when you know it will affect your health later on and also upset your mother, who never smoked in her life."

"Because I don't really care if it affects my health. I don't want to live that long anyway."

"If you don't care about yourself, then you don't care about your mother or about me."

"I didn't say that."

"Maybe not in words but certainly in your actions." Johnny turned to look at her. "I would give my right arm if I could see you smile more often."

"Well, you'll have to do a lot of fancy footwork to convince me that you care whether I smile or not."

"I understand how you feel, but believe me I loved both you and your mother."

Jewel laughed scornfully and said: "Here's res, come in and meet the others.'

At that first meeting when he saw Martin leaning over a pile of books, he sensed that there was an underlying emotion between Jewel and Martin. When he was ready to leave and she walked to the door with him he questioned her and she assured him that although she was interested in Martin, he was only interested in God.

It didn't totally convince Johnny, but he felt a little more at ease at the news.

Johnny would have been very worried indeed if he knew that Jewel went straight up to the bathroom, tickled her throat and brought up the coffee and sandwiches. Martin knew, because she used the bathroom on the second level next to his room and he was preparing to retire for the night when he heard her vomiting.

He knocked on the bathroom door and said: "Jewel, are you alright? Do you need help?"

"Go away. Leave me! I'm fine."

He waited outside the door until she came out of the bathroom, and said very sternly: "This is going to become serious, Jewel. You can't keep purging your stomach."

"It's that confounded man, I hate him so that I feel sick at the sight of him."

"Are you talking about your father?"

"Never mind, I'll tell you later."

"You can't mean your father. He's highly thought of."

"That's because no one knows him."

"He's a patriot."

"Yes, he is but he's not a father."

In Jewel's second year, Johnny spoke to Martin on one occasion when he answered the telephone at the student residence. Jewel was out and Johnny had been worried about Jewel's weight loss ever since Liz had first mentioned it to him.

"Martin I don't want to load this off on you, but I'm afraid someone will have to keep an eye on her. I know you have exams soon and your time is valuable, but can you find the time to see that she drinks liquids and eats at least two meals a day. She has a

large enough allowance to enable her to pay for adequate meals. She can buy pre-prepared meals if she's unable to prepare food herself."

"I'll keep an eye on her, sir. I'll make a point of having meals with her. The problem is she induces vomiting after she eats."

"I had no idea."

"She tells me that she has been doing it since she was in her teens."

"How could her mother never have noticed this?"

"The victims are very secretive about it."

"She's so painfully frank about everything else. I can't understand how she's kept this to herself."

"I think Jewel might be a troubled young woman. I know of a group of women who might be able to help her. They can help her come to terms with whatever it is that causes her periodic abstention from food."

"I'll pay whatever it costs."

"It won't cost anything, except a thank you."

"She and Jonathan get on well together and from next year he can keep an eye on her and then you'll be relieved of the burden."

"It truly isn't a burden."

In Jonathan's first year away from home he and Jewel hardly saw each other. They only met now and again. Martin was often with her. Jonathan quickly realized that Jewel and Martin weren't lovers. He sensed that they wanted to be, but Martin was going to be a priest. Although Jewel was interested in more than companionship she gracefully accepted Martin's friendship and learnt to appreciate his concern for her and the help he gave her over a difficult time in her life. Gradually she settled into a healthier eating pattern and successfully completed her third year of studying.

The summer break had just started. She was due to leave for Cape Town to visit her mother when Liz telephoned Jewel to ask her to postpone her flight and come to London to help calm her father who was ranting and raving after walking in on Jonathan and his friend Peter.

"What is the problem, Liz?"

"They were embracing."

"Embracing in what way?

"Like lovers. Your father is threatening to kill them both."

"Let me speak to him."

It took a while for Johnny to take the call. She could hear Liz talking to him, her hand obviously covering the instrument. "Jewel, you want to speak to me?"

"Have you bothered to ask Jonathan why they were embracing? It was very likely quite innocent and you're turning it into a fiasco."

"My son's a fucking faggot!"

"That might not be true at all and I think you should calm down. He's possibly just confused about his sexuality. He needs sympathy, not insults."

Jewel didn't leave for Cape Town the next day. She and Martin went to London to try and rescue Jonathan. The outcome was that Jonathan accompanied Martin to a retreat against Johnny's better judgment and when everything settled down, Jewel left to spend what was left of her summer break with Charlotte in Cape Town.

Then Johnny received news that Charlotte was coming to England to be with Jewel. They were going to be accommodated in a cottage on the edge of farming land in Cumnor Hill. Johnny always suspected that he would come face to face with Charlotte Smith at some time or other. He would now have to look into her accusing eyes and confront retribution. He had always hoped that nature would introduce a merciful end to his life before he was forced to look into the two black pools that were Mouse's sorrowful eyes.

Johnny knew his health was on a decline and quite frankly he looked forward to finding out what was on the other side of life, after death. He suspected that there was nothing but if there was something in the beyond then he hoped to meet Ruby so that he could say to her: "Look deep into my soul and see what you've done to a human life: Look carefully at the person I've become and tell me you like what you see." He imagined how he would clasp her to him for all eternity; the woman who escaped from him in life. It would be eternal revenge. He thought that if God created life on earth and heaven as a reward for good behaviour and hell as punishment for committing despicable

deeds, such a God would bar him from his heavenly mansions. If it was Hell he was destined for, then he was sure he would dwell there with Ruby.

In all Johnny's wild imaginings he did not visualize Charlotte to look like the person who opened the door to them on the Sunday afternoon they were invited to tea. Her hair was silver-streaked and pulled back from her face. An ethnic garment hung straight down from her shoulders and partially concealed the slight plumpness of her body. Around her neck she wore several strings of African beads.

She gave her hand first to Liz and then to Johnny. Jewel stood behind her mother and Johnny was pleased to see that there was a marked increase in her weight. Her colour was good, her hair had a healthy sheen and above all, she smiled as she welcomed them. While they were all chatting, he watched Jewel examining Henry's new camera and Liz and Charlotte trying to outdo each other on the threats to planet earth. Johnny sat down and in turn studied them all individually, his gaze resting on each and every one of them. It was strange how like his mother Charlotte was in height and build. Of course she was still attractive, like he presumed his mother would have been if she had not been forced to eek out a living in their ancestral shack in a hellhole of a Coloured township. Charlotte lived in comfort on the proceeds of the inheritance from Ruby's family: an inheritance that should have been Ruby's and one that she should still have been enjoying if it wasn't that she had been reduced to bones and dust in a lonely grave. Instead of Liz, it should have been Ruby who sat there talking to Charlotte and her granddaughter. Fate had played a trick on all of them and had directed their lives in directions that were never intended. Mercifully Charlotte had shed the scars of her origins in a shack; Jewel at this stage looked as if she had recovered almost completely from the ordeal of an eating disorder. It also seemed as if some of the anger she carried in the beginning had abated a little.

Sitting there he became aware that he didn't feel well. There was a niggling pain at the top of his head. At times it traveled down into the back of his neck and then suddenly felt as if it attacked his forehead. He felt a slight nausea that he blamed on the tension of coming face to face with Charlotte again after so many years.

Leaning towards Liz, he whispered, "I need one of those prescription tablets. I have a bad headache."

"I didn't bring them."

Then Jewel said, "Mum, why don't you, Henry and Liz go and see the circles in the field?"

Johnny watched them leave. Then Jewel came and sat next to him.

"I have something to tell you. I have decided to join a religious order. I'll devote my life to prayer and to those who need help."

"Christ," he said. She said she was going to be a bride of Christ. He had expected her to become Martin's bride but now she was devoting her life to helping others. She said she might just spend her life praying to God to save the world and cure people of their ills. It now appeared that he had a kind of a saint for a daughter: He, Johnny De Meillon, a confirmed heretic. If there really is a God then he certainly enjoyed playing tricks on the De Meillons.

He heard Jewel say, "I will return to Africa to work there. They will need all the help they can get."

"Are you doing this because you still have romantic notions about Martin?"

"No! I've stopped all that hankering after him. He helped me a lot and stood by me when I experienced a really difficult time. He has also been very good for Jonathan and I'm grateful to him. I've chosen a life that I want to lead, so please be happy for me."

"So both you and Jonathan are choosing a religious life. It's ironical when your mother and I …"

"Jonathan may not take the vows. He's still young. He's dealing with personal issues at present and I'm sure that when he finally decides how he wants to live his life, he'll talk to you and Liz about it."

The party of three returned to the cottage and Henry was as usual out of breath for he seldom slowed down. He said: "Dad, come and see the circles."

Johnny felt himself being pulled to his feet, but the pain in his head had increased, yet he allowed Henry to guide him through the door and down the lane towards the field. Johnny's brain was working and he was saying to someone, but he didn't know who it was: "I don't remember seeing the circles. I remembered very little except that there were voices: a stranger's authoritative voice, Liz trying to revive me, Charlotte's hand on my forehead. I knew her touch and Jewel clutching at my hands. I could hear the tears in her

voice and she was calling me Dad. She had never called me anything before and I felt a great joy surge into me because of it. Then it seems as if I slept for a very long time."

Johnny tried very hard to awaken from his strange kind of sleep where there was silence and darkness and then on and off awareness. He opened his eyes and saw tubes and beings in white. He tried to speak but the words never reached his tongue. He thought he spoke but there was no sound.

"Mr De Meillon, can you hear me sir?' He hadn't been called sir since he last addressed a group at the Muslim College in London.

He nodded that he could hear, but it was more a nodding of the eyes. Nothing else seemed to move in his face. He wondered if he still had a face. He couldn't lift his hands to touch his face. "Was he dead, perhaps?" He thought that it was possible. He must have slept again for without opening his eyes he was suddenly awake and he felt Liz's presence. He tried to ask for Mouse and Jewel, but the words remained unsaid.

"Try and move your fingers." It was Liz's voice. She sounded tired. He felt her hand pressing his fingers and he tried to pull his hand away. He knew his fingers moved.

"Sister, I think he just moved his fingers."

Within another few days he moved his legs. "I think the paralysis has affected his face and his arms. His legs seem to move." It was a male voice that spoke.

Then he heard Jewel's voice say: "I'm not surprised, because it'll take more than an old stroke to induce my father to keep his legs from moving."

Johnny knew that something had happened to him there on the green field with the last rays of the sun highlighting a decaying church steeple, a thatched roof here and an old shingled roof there. He recalled how blissful the sleep had been and how it saved him from Charlotte's accusations, except that there were no accusations, or demands for an explanation. She was gracious and composed and afterwards during the sleep he had fallen into he felt her presence deep within his consciousness. He felt her compassion.

When next he opened his eyes, Jonathan was beside him. "His handsome son," he thought. The boy he ignored, because he looked too much like him for he always felt that if he allowed his affection to show, he would be what Johnny was as a young man. He had always feared that the bad blood of the De Meillons would manifest itself in the unsuspecting descendants. He didn't want his sons contaminated by that blood. Jewel

nearly succumbed to it. She's saved now. Martin rescued her. He remembered her saying that she was following a religious path. "Hal-ee-bloody-loo-ya!" He actually heard himself saying it and Jonathan heard it too and he called to the sister and he said, "My father just said what sounded rather like Halleluiah. Can he be regaining his speech?"

Jonathan was overjoyed, although the sound emanated from his father's throat with difficulty, it was the uttering of a word and proof that his brain was functioning.

Johnny talked to himself in a silent way, although he had lost his speech. He said: "To wake up from what seemed like an eternity and find Jonathan sitting beside me, looking intently at my face dispelled any notion I may have had about having died and reborn in a new unpolluted body. I was just beginning to hope that this time around I was a White man, born into a White man's privileges, when I was rudely reminded that I'm still in the same old life."

Jonathan saw to it that Johnny was propped up with pillows. To have the notion that reincarnation did exist shattered, by his son's presence, encouraged Johnny to try and regain his speech as soon as possible. Within weeks he could hold a pencil and scribble a few words on paper. He rejoiced when he was able to feed himself. Then his speech improved and he was allowed to leave the hospital and go home. A sister came every morning to check on him and help him regain the use of his limbs, but somehow the process was slow.

Jewel came and informed him that she had graduated from her honours class and achieved top marks.

"Did you tell me you were joining a religious order?"

"Yes, I hope that didn't cause your stroke."

"No. I was under treatment for high blood pressure, but I ignored the advice and rarely took the tablets. I thought I actually died. I suppose if I had, Satan would have sent me straight back. Perhaps he did and that's why I'm recovering."

"You must be a tough old warhorse to have made such a remarkable recovery. I don't think Satan had anything to do with it."

"I want you to be strong, Jewel."

"Oh, I am. I'm fully recovered." Jewel smiled at her father and touched his hand.

"Are you happy?"

"I'm as happy as anyone can be in this life."

"What other life is there?" He asked hesitantly for his speech still failed him sometimes.

"The spiritual life that follows after this physical one."

Jewel turned his hand over to study it. "You have such finely shaped hands. If you are a direct descendant of the original De Meillon, he must have been quite an imposing specimen."

"You'll be able to work it all out if you go to the archives. I've also put together a family tree. It's included in the papers addressed to each of you."

"When can we read what you've written about our family?"

"Not now, Jewel. Be patient and you'll learn all you want to know in due course."

Johnny had been home for 11 months when he had his second stroke. Liz found him slumped against his desk in the upstairs room, where he preferred to spend his days. That night she and Henry had helped him downstairs to their bedroom where she kept a watchful eye on him at night.

This time Johnny didn't know how long he lay in a semi sleep. He was back in hospital and one by one his family members came to see him. He didn't know if he imagined it, but he thought he heard Jewel tell him that she and Martin had at last decided to marry. He may have dreamt it. He would never know. Jonathan's decision was to remain in the monastery. Charlotte was still here but with the coming democratic elections he thought someone said that she had been placed on the proportional list and that she may go to Parliament. He was unsure of whether he dreamt it or whether he actually heard the others speak of it. He drifted in and out of consciousness.

Then at last Ruby came to him and held him close. At first she held him so tightly that he could not breathe and then he felt sudden release as she kissed his lips and he slipped into total blackness.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Johnny had openly called PK, "that fucker, PK."

PK admitted himself that he deserved the title because in earlier times he copulated as often as he could in between his editorial duties. In addition to his cavorting he was also guilty of boozing, lying, cheating and blasphemy, but never racism. Because of this Johnny, James and Charlotte forgave him for whatever other shortcomings he had.

"We all descend from that *grande dame* of distinction, also known as Australopithicus Africanas, alias Mrs Ples from three million years ago, so we should be permitted to follow our natural apelike instincts. We should also not lose sight of the fact that we have a common ancestor and that makes us family." PK always expounded views along these lines after a few swallows of some potent brew or other during the course of a moonlight picnic on the mountain, as he was doing at this moment.

Charlotte laughed and said, "Now you're talking my language, but I hope we've transcended those primitive instincts and that you'll behave like a respectable modern man instead of like an ape. I'm not staying. Jewel's at home with a group of friends and there's no knowing what they can get up to if I'm not around." Charlotte had parked her car a little distance from where PK had made a fire, with eats and drinks spread out on a wooden table. She really didn't want a party. It's not as if she would be deserting PK, because his other friends were expected to turn up. She saw car lights move along the road that leads to the picnic spot and she didn't feel too bad about leaving early.

She always knew that PK loved Johnny like a brother whilst coveting his genius in sibling-styled rivalry. In Johnny's bitterness he rejected PK as a brother and a friend, even as a fellow-human being, for Johnny never trusted a White man. He respected PK's authority at work though, as they all did.

"Have you heard anything from that previous husband of yours?"

"If you mean Johnny, then the answer is no – I haven't heard from him in person during all these years, but we have kept in touch through a mutual contact."

"Who?"

"PK, you know I can't divulge information like that and you should know better than to probe."

"That bastard ex-husband of yours snatched the only two women I could have married without hesitation. He married them both, not at the same time of course, but in fairly quick succession, you must admit."

"I don't want to delve into the past."

"Is it that painful?" He lit a cigarette and blew the smoke into the air above him as if he wanted the smoke to spiral up into the sky to meet the stars.

"Yes, because it encompasses the memory of Norriman and I don't want to have nightmares tonight."

"Johnny always wanted to prove his superiority, but I loved that half-caste *bliksem.* We had a mutual understanding and the one would never have betrayed the other." He looked across to where Charlotte was preparing a sandwich for them both to share. "Except for the fact that he stole my women."

"PK, I was never your woman. You've also had plenty of women of your own, so don't begrudge him what he had. He and I had a very short time together and it never really worked out between us."

"That was because he was too old for you."

"And, you're not too old for me?"

"Don't rub it in, Charlotte. I'll be a better proposition for you than any young buck would be."

"I'm not looking for anyone."

"What's more I love Jewel like my own kid."

"What you've done for her is more than anyone would do for their own child. She has a high regard for you too, PK. I don't know what I would have done during all these years if you weren't around to help me. Jewel and I will never forget."

Charlotte left after a while and PK sat on the mountain on his own reminiscing about the days when he and Johnny worked closely together for the newspaper. He didn't know what it was about Johnny that touched him so deeply, even after his defection PK would get an involuntary lump in his throat when something occurred that reminded him of Johnny. It was like when he was a child in Sunday school: he would listen to the story of the Crucifixion and the tears would flow and he would lean over and pretend to fasten his shoe laces. PK felt this same 'Jesus' thing for Johnny De Meillon and he could never

understand why, because in his experience of the man the only conclusion he could come to was that he was a coward and a sexist. He didn't even fulfil his role as a father to his daughter.

In the early years the horror of the reality he and Johnny came across during their reporting investigations, often ended in the waste paper basket instead of in the columns of the paper, because they knew the censors would reject it. Johnny never took it calmly. He would say, "I'll blow the whole fucking lot of them sky-high."

Johnny calmed down a lot after he met and married Charlotte. After Jewel was born he became introverted and never spoke in jest or joined them at their mountain parties. Then he left practically overnight. What's more he also left Charlotte and the child. Luckily she received some sort of legacy and it helped her survive during a difficult period in her life.

PK was thrilled when he heard that Charlotte had stumbled on a grandmother and that the old lady had money. He was delighted that she had an inheritance from her grandfather's estate. "It could make a darn good story." He said to her.

"It's too sensitive," Charlotte insisted and PK dropped any thought of it being a good story for the *African Beat.*

After Johnny left Charlotte, PK called her in and asked her to tell him what she knew of the woman who claimed to be her grandmother.

"She says her daughter's name was Ruby and she had a baby and left it in a shanty town for their washer woman to look after. She then went home and cut the main arteries in her wrists and bled to death. When they found her it was too late to save her."

"God forbid! What a good story, yet such an awful one."

"It's a tragic story, PK, especially when you happen to have been the child that was discarded and left to rot in those conditions."

"I'm horrified, Charlotte. Are you able to recall any of it?"

"Yes, the problem is that the horror of that decaying swamp will always be in my memory. To this day I can smell it if I close my eyes."

Charlotte always said that Johnny De Meillon was like a being without a beginning or an end and that when he left it felt as if he had been a consciousness that existed over aeons

and then unobtrusively slipped into invisible immortality. PK found this a bit melodramatic but after some thought on the matter he decided that it was closely associated with what he felt.

It was only many years later that PK learnt the true story of Johnny De Meillon's life. It was after he died and Charlotte returned to Cape Town with his ashes. She was accompanied by Johnny's son Jonathan. His gaze was intense like Johnny's. PK thought that there was something rather mystical about him. He had a lot of compassion for those who suffered.

'It's very sad to see these street urchins." He said. PK noticed that he was inclined to brood about things for days, very much like Johnny did. Both Charlotte and PK reprimanded him when he handed a handful of coins to a boy in tattered clothing who had the remnants of herpes on his lips and a glue-induced haze in his eyes.

Afterwards Charlotte and PK were sorry that they told him that the boy would just use the money for glue, for it upset Jonathan to such an extent that he went looking for the boy to try and arrange for him to get the help he needed. He couldn't find the child again. Most of these abandoned children were nomads and lived in the sewers or on remote mountain slopes.

"He might have been hungry and with the little bit of money I gave him he could only buy food for a few days." Jonathan pondered on the child's plight for days and gave Charlotte and PK a conscience.

PK speculated that if Liz hadn't been so obsessed with Johnny from the time she first met him at one of their gatherings on the mountain, Jonathan could have been his son. "A Catholic priest for a son?" How would he or the members of his Calvinist family have coped with a situation like that? But then if Jonathan had been his son he would probably have been a Calvinist *predikant* and that would have pleased his old mother. PK suspected that there was something sinister behind Jonathan's religious leanings. Suddenly it dawned on PK that perhaps Jonathan was gay. He recalled the case of the *Dominee* in his home town. PK's mother innocently referred to him as a gentle soul, and PK and his father nudged each other and sniggered, especially at his cousin's wedding when the very same *Dominee* had the foyer redecorated for the occasion. White doves

fluttered their frothy wings against a background of what his mother called “Misty Rose” chosen by the *Dominee* himself. PK was curious to know if Jonathan fell into that category. He had taken a liking to Jonathan because he had a quiet reserve and also because Jonathan was so enthralled with every nook and corner of Cape Town.

When PK read Johnny’s story about Ruby, he was hell bent on running it in serial form in one of the magazines which now came under the auspices of the publishing company that owned *African Beat.* It was his idea of a last tribute to Johnny De Meillon, but Charlotte refused because she and Jewel were too personally involved in it.

One day that story will be published, he thought as he drove to the remote sea hamlet nestling protectively in the swirling cape mists. James was in the car with him and he was pleased because the houses were now only partially demolished and the land was being re-zoned for general residential purposes. Most of the houses had their doors and windows removed by now and those remaining, swung backwards and forwards in the strong breeze that blew along the rugged coastline. PK and James both thought it sounded queerly busy, as if ghostly people were strolling in and out of the derelict buildings. PK was pleased when he saw Charlotte and Jonathan arrive in her car.

Jonathan was carrying a small jar that contained Johnny’s ashes.

Before scattering the ashes, Jonathan, the still-to-be-ordained priest chanted prayers that PK thought would never end and afterwards PK hurriedly mumbled something from his Protestant childhood. James uttered a prayer in Arabic for he originated from a Muslim family.

With Johnny’s ashes scattered and the required prayers said, Charlotte shouted above the roar of the wind that, “The sand is stinging my face.” The four of them hurried to their cars.

At the car park Charlotte cried a little and PK hurried to comfort her. It was the excuse he had been waiting for. At last he had the opportunity to take her in his arms for the very first time in the twenty-five years he had known her. Charlotte allowed him to embrace her only briefly and then she pulled away.

As he and James drove away from there, James couldn't resist saying: "She pushed you away, so why the hell are you looking so pleased with yourself?" PK didn't answer and just grinned more widely.

After a while he said, "I was just thinking, James, our little Mouse is going to Parliament. I'm so proud of her. I know she'll be one hell of a parliamentarian."