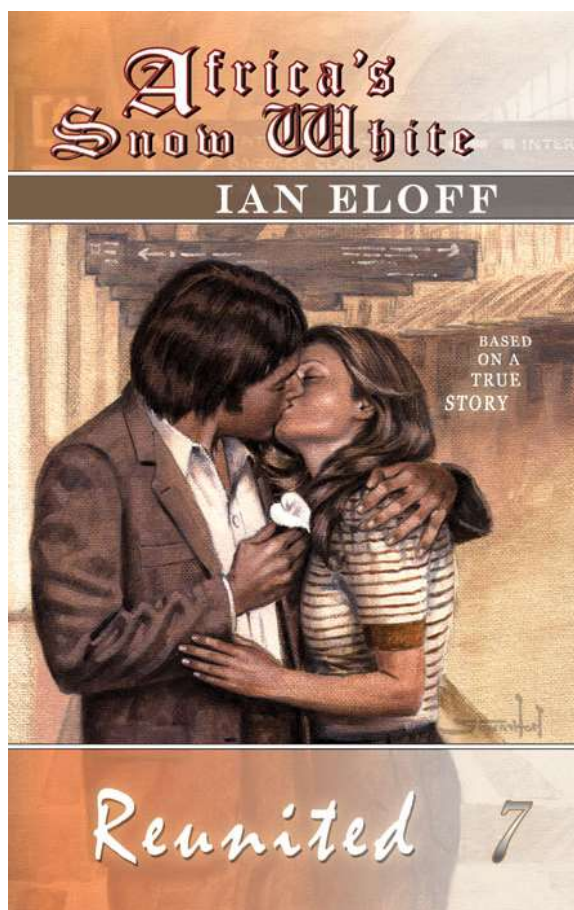


Africa's Snow White Vol-7

Reunited ** DRAFT-07 **



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By: Ian Eloff, *foreword by* Jonathan Eloff

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Reproduction or transmission of the book, in whole or in part, by electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or by any other means is strictly prohibited, except with prior written permission. You may direct your inquiries to Eureka.Publishing@gmail.com Because the "Africa's Snow-White" series of novels have a fairytale feel about them, people may assume that these books are works of fiction, but the places and characters, as well as almost all of the incidents, are real! Specific dialogue is a product of the author's imagination, though less so in this novel. Names have been changed to protect the guilty ... and the innocent!



"The course of true love never did run smooth" (a Midsummer night's dream)
Wouldn't it be a big relief if, in real life, this love story was frozen in time at any one happy moment when Lizzie and Nicholas were reunited? As someone who loves happy ever-after endings, that's where I would've chosen to end any fictional love story just to get relief from the constant roller coaster of emotions brought on by any love-lost, love-found and then love-lost again scenarios; several people in real life would have liked that ... but sadly Constance wanted this love story to end ASAP, for Lizzie & Nicholas's love to forever die, for their story ended "unhappily ever after!" The elusive "happily ever after", at this point already some 7 years in the making at the start of this 7th novel, stays elusive for another 7 months, as a key part of this African love story saw Lizzie forced to move from Africa to North America where ultimately she'd stay there for 28 years! In this novel, Nicholas traveled to Canada in November 1978, with the last of his savings, to rescue Lizzie and elope with her back to Africa so that they could finally get married there! We want you to believe in the power of true love, because they did! But if it's uncomfortable for you to read how, once again a long-overdue happy ending to their love story stayed elusive, well, just try to imagine what it was like for them. Mind you, if Constance was even a mildly caring, loving mother and mother-in-law, there'd be no novels at all! But even now at 87 she's as mean and dangerous as ever, and just in case you've forgotten –in all fairy-tales, evil drives the story! There were many opportunities to end their pain by walking away from each other, but they didn't! They knew that would only replace one pain with another and, in a real way, they'd both die. I hope you'll cheer for all their hard-fought victories, even as you wince at their defeats, for it seems that those make all victories that follow so much sweeter, in the end. In 'Reunion' we'll get many of those! Finally it was time to fight fire with fire!

Chapter 1

Leaving Cape Town.

Lizzie returned to wait for the announcement to reboard the 747, and that happened earlier than anticipated, at 10 pm.

She was forced by the confined space of the lounge and the many people waiting there to come to terms with Charles' presence. She really had no choice, as later on the flight she would be sitting next to him, on a very long, full flight! Slowly they struck up a semblance of a civil conversation.

Charles told her that he'd overheard the last part of her call to Nicholas. Unlike the reports that he got in London from Canada of major trouble between Lizzie and Nicholas, and of their relationship being over, clearly it was wishful thinking on her mother's part, and his, so he now realistically conceded that he had no choice but to accept Lizzie's current choice of Nicholas over him. However, he reminded her that once it was the other way around and that life and events can often change outcomes rather unexpectedly.

Lizzie was pleasantly surprised by his new-found honesty and his easygoing reasonable approach to reality, and then Charles pushed home the advantage.

He said nonchalantly that from his perspective in the long struggle to win Lizzie's approval, "It isn't over till you're happily married, for several years, to either Nicholas or to me!" then added, "Princess, if you don't mind I'm going to be a keen observer in that process and I reserve the right to be as opportunistic as circumstances allow!" and before Elizabeth could answer, he added again, "Princess, I hope you'll concede this is the very least you owe me now, given

our long, romantic history together. We did genuinely love each other ... once!" He looked for a moment quite forlorn.

Lizzie responded with a smile, then said, "Charles, I think that's fair, and I'm flattered, so as long as you do so in a gentlemanly fashion, that would not be seen as abnormal!"

Truth was, she thought his new-found honesty and softer approach rather flattering, however, she still cautioned him.

"But Charles, do not get your hopes up too high as I'm sure things will eventually work out well for Nicholas and me!" she said.

Charles sighed and smiled, accepting that possibility saying, "Friends, Princess?"

To which Lizzie, relieved too, replied, "Yes, Charles ... I'd really rather prefer that we end this chapter of our lives well and happily, so yes ... friends!"

The flight took off and its passengers settled in. They enjoyed their delayed supper with free wine before settling in for the long flight to London. Charles and Lizzie chatted much more relaxed and happily now, though they tried to stay away from "relationship issues" - both preferred to keep conversation light. After dinner, Lizzie pulled a blanket over her, said goodnight to Charles, and then fell asleep. As she slept next to him, Charles gently maneuvered himself next to her so that her head ended up resting on his shoulder.

For them, for a while anyway, things were nostalgically reminiscent of their happier times. Charles spent much of that time awake, pondering his options, and concluded that he had at least made some headway with his new, "gentle, honest" approach, and decided to continue with more of what appeared to be the best strategy, given the circumstances. Then he too fell asleep.

As the sun rose, and the crew started getting people ready for breakfast, Lizzie woke up to find herself snuggled into Charles' side, covered with a blanket, and in her half-awake state he did not seem quite as repulsive to her as before.

He smiled kindly then said, "Good morning, Princess, as always you look as beautiful asleep, as awake. I hope you slept well and I didn't snore?" he said, trying to sound cheerful.

Lizzie smiled, unsure of what to say exactly, sat upright, moved away from him a bit, then quipped, "I can't be held responsible for where my head lands during sleep in a cramped airplane, Charles, but actually, it was comfy."

But Charles interrupted her, gently touched her hand on the armrest next to his, and replied "It's okay, Princess, I'm not getting my hopes up or anything, but you can at least allow me the privilege of having enjoyed watching you sleep on my shoulder one last time! You were once my fiancée, if only for a brief evening. I think it's plain to see I've always loved you!" then quickly added, as he noticed her discomfort, "I mean even condemned men generally get given a cigarette before the firing squad dispatches them."

Now Lizzie laughed nervously. The tension between them dissipated now and was replaced by warmth.

Over breakfast Charles remarked that they would soon be landing at London's Heathrow Airport whose size would no doubt be overwhelming to Lizzie since it was her first time there. He mentioned that since he knew it well, he would accompany her to the correct terminal, and help her find another flight to Canada, as the flight she and he were meant to catch, would have left by then ... so Lizzie gratefully agreed to let him help her.

Suddenly Africa, her past and even Nicholas now, seemed so very, very far away. She was headed into a whole new world, one she would be seeing for the first time unlike Charles

who was an experienced traveler and lived in London. As the 747 approached London, Charles gave Lizzie a brief guided tour through the window, and soon they landed. They got their luggage, and Charles took Lizzie to the correct terminal for her later flight, helped her reschedule an overnight red-eye flight, and requested that the airline notify her parents of her flight changes. He helped her check her luggage in. Then he convinced her that as they had most of the day, and much of the night free, that he act as her guide to show her a bit of London, his hometown. Lizzie agreed, thanking Charles for his new-found, gentlemanly approach.

Charles replied, “Well really, Princess, what other choice do I have if I want you to remember me at least somewhat fondly, which is what I genuinely prefer. The past is, well, the past now!” he said, adding, “While you were being processed in the long foreigners’ queue at Customs, I had time to call my dad’s limousine driver to come and pick me up, as I’m not proceeding on to Canada with you anymore. By now it will be waiting for us. I now have no pressing engagement, if you’ll pardon the pun, so let’s go and have some fun in London, no strings attached – just two old friends touring a historic, famous city!” he said to Lizzie, with a reassuring smile.

Lizzie smiled, and nodded appreciatively, saying, “That sounds like a wonderful idea, Charles. By the way, thanks for being a real gentleman! I knew you had it in you, just waiting for the right moment to come out!”

Charles smiled and then winked saying, “At your service, Princess! Let’s go and explore my city ... grand old London Town!”

The reader can fill in the gaps ... sights, cozy restaurant meal, then towards late afternoon, a nice pub where Charles leveled with Elizabeth completely about all the plotting and scheming her mother undertook, and how he was convinced by her to participate in those plots and schemes, agreeing to let her direct events, only because he honestly believed that would enhance his chances of winning Elizabeth’s hand in marriage.

After having revealed all that, he looked over his pint and said, "Princess, in my obsession with having you become my wife, I made many mistakes ... the stupidest of those being me letting your mother direct my courtship of you! For that and all the other mistakes I've made along the way, I'm truly sorry and I now humbly ask for your forgiveness!"

Lizzie was stunned by the revelations and very touched that Charles would level completely with her - about her mother's underhanded plots and schemes and also about his heartfelt feelings for her. He told her how tough it was to witness her reunion with Nicholas and how her mother had planned for him to propose to her again on the exact same spot that she and Nicholas first kissed. He explained how he really was not comfortable with that! It was all a bit surreal for Lizzie, as it made Charles seem very human and it was not difficult to feel sorry for him!



Photo: Elizabeth, taken on the day she and Nicholas officially got engaged

Chapter 2

A TOUCHING LONDON FAREWELL ...

Late that night Charles returned Lizzie to Heathrow, once again in the back seat of his dad's London Limo and Lizzie thanked Charles for a lovely day, saying how much fun she had! Charles replied that there's still so much more to see of England and that she should experience it, reminding her that this is, after all, the home of all of her recent ancestors, so it's only natural she should feel at home! Lizzie laughed nervously, but conceded that she's indeed a daughter of England (dad's family) and Scotland (mother's family) – and that her grandparents all were born and raised there and only left for South Africa shortly after the Boer war - but before the 1st World war - and that was barely 60 years ago!

Charles pushed home his new-found advantage, suggesting to Lizzie that she will be passing through London, en-route back to Africa at some point in the future, and that then she must stay over a few days, as a guest of his family, and then he will introduce her to the many quaint English towns of the splendid English countryside ... adding quickly, as he saw her comfort level eroded, that he would arrange for his aunt to accompany them, at all times, as a chaperone, to ensure that she (and Nicholas) do not feel uncomfortable!

Lizzie was unsure about all of this, telling Charles that she shall have to think about that, and discuss it with Nicholas – to which Charles replies, “If Nicholas was in my position, would he treat you honorably if you found yourself back in Cape Town, alone?” Lizzie furrows her brow, thinking, and then conceded that he would do so too - prompting Charles to quip, “Well, please tell Nicholas that so will I, and that if he knows anyone in London who can be your Chaperone, I would gladly agree to let him or her accompany us wherever

we go! Better yet Princess, I will write Nicholas or maybe even arrange to see him when I return to visit with my Dad in Cape Town, and smooth things over, which I think at this point is the honorable thing to do. Don't you?" he asked.

Lizzie found herself unable to argue with what appeared to be a flawless gentlemanly attitude, so she didn't say "No."

Sensing that, Charles added, "Of course, we shall have to stay in touch, and you must realize that I have your mother's address, though I never intend to answer any of her letters again ... do I at least have your permission to write you in Canada?" Lizzie conceded that would be necessary ... and that her getting letters from him, rather than her mother, would be like justice of sorts. Charles chuckled along with her at the thought of how that would affect Constance, warning, "You may just have to hide those letters really well, because knowing her as we both do now, she will definitely try and find them and read them when you are out of the home!"

Lizzie agrees that is highly likely, saying that she will lock them in her jewelry box and always keep the key with her, to which Charles replied "You sure she will not try and pick the lock?" Lizzie giggled at the thought of her mother trying desperately to pick the lock. But then the moment came for them to part company ...

Charles took Lizzie's hands in his hands and standing at a respectful distance, looked into her eyes, smiling kindly at her. "Nicholas is a very fortunate man, Princess. Please tell him that I said so. It's been an honor to have loved you Lizzie, and to have felt your love for me - even though in the end, I lost! I'm genuinely sorry I made the mistake of trusting your mother and letting her plans for your life, and mine, replace what could have been ... had we been allowed to develop our own love story, unimpeded! I guess I'll never know how that could have turned out, but believe me when I say that I envy Nicholas, with every fiber of my being, and I

unreservedly apologize for trusting your mother, rather than trusting in you and our genuine love for each other!" he said
Lizzie blushed, interrupting, "Charles ..." she said.

"Yes, Princess?" he inquired, angling his head slightly.

"Apology accepted! And Thanks for everything ... and thanks for being a true English gentleman these last 24 hours!"

"Well Princess, in this case, sadly, this gentleman has lost, and it's indeed a grievous loss that I shall have to bear with me for as long as I live – but I do not regret meeting you and fighting for your hand in marriage, though I'd hasten to add, if I ever had a chance to do so again, I'd certainly not trust your mother to guide me through any part of that process again! I'd rather let you discover the real Charles Atherton, and decide for yourself whether he is good enough for you!"

Lizzie squeezed his hands, weakly smiling, lips trembling, her eyes newly moist, and softly said "Oh my Charles, just as on the night we first danced, and later kissed in the moonlight, on that patio, overlooking your father's vast estate in Paarl, before my mother got her hooks into you, I find myself at a bit of a disadvantage now. My legs feel quite weak as a result of your elegant speech – but let's not forget about Nicholas! I am betrothed to him ... and though I'm not fickle enough to dismiss all my feelings for you... right now I'd ask that you continue to be a gentleman, and not take advantage of the feelings I have safely tucked away in a corner of my heart."

With a sigh, Charles replied "Yes, Princess, and that is why I'm not going to try and kiss you again, though every fiber of my being cries out for me to do so, even now as we bid each other farewell, but can I at least give you a hug? As a friend? Your friend?" he asked a now clearly very emotional Lizzie.

Regaining some composure, Lizzie smiled and nodded. Charles pulled her closer, and gently embraced her, whispering softly in her ear, "Goodbye, Princess, I will never,

ever forget you – you are simply not a forgettable person. Please, be happy, with, or without me! That is now my fondest wish for you, and please always think only of the good times we had, not the bad. At least do me that favor, because Princess, we did have so many wonderful, happy times too –and we owe it to each other to not ever devalue them. They are simply now a part of our lives, and they should stay in our hearts ... in our garden of memories, cultivated, kept alive there forever! Never forgotten.”

Lizzie’s emotions now got the better of her as her composure crumbled, feeling genuinely sorry for Charles. Any and all lingering anger for him now completely dissipated! Tears were flowing freely out of her eyes and over her cheeks.

Charles felt the moistness of her tears against his chest, and leaning back, just enough, freeing his right hand from her back, reaching to his blazer’s top pocket and took out the handkerchief there, handing it to Lizzie. As she gently dabbed her eyes, she looked up at Charles’ face and noticed the tears hovering in his eyes too, so she handed it back to Charles, replying hoarsely, “Thanks, Charles, here looks like you need it too!”

To which Charles ruefully smiled, saying, “Well Princess, as an Englishman, I really should master that stiff-upper-lip thing, but I find this farewell to have defeated even my most earnest public school upbringing. Please forgive my slip - it’s just not proper ...”

Lizzie quickly interrupted, “But it’s human Charles ... and I’d really rather remember you that way, if you don’t mind?”

“I don’t mind that at all, Princess,” he replied, now dabbing his eyes with the same handkerchief ... “just as long as you do remember me,” Charles replied, carefully folding his now moist handkerchief. “I’ll never wash this handkerchief, you know ... It has your and my tears intermixed, and so it shall ever remain my keepsake of what could have been – if only I had not been so ridiculously stupid!”

Lizzie was visibly moved ... “Oh my, with this image in my mind of our parting and of our tears mixed together forever on your handkerchief, there’s absolutely no risk that I’ll ever forget you! Well I’m afraid I’ll start falling apart rather badly here, so I’d better go now Charles ... wouldn’t want to miss my flight after all we’ve been through to get this far!” Lizzie pleaded with a smile almost begging him to show her mercy.

Sensing the tide of their emotions now at a dangerous point, Charles looks directly into her eyes, searching deep inside of them, and holding her hands at a distance now, softly said ... “Farewell, Princess, a whole new life of adventure in faraway places awaits you. Please stay in touch and let me know how it all unfolds. Tell Nicholas I do reluctantly concede and that I’d be honored to attend your wedding, if and when that eventually happens – and, Princess ... one last thing,” he says.

“Yes Charles?” Lizzie asked, looking at him through tears.

“Beware of your mother, she has successfully ruined my life and lost me the one person who meant the world to me – and I mean that sincerely! Don’t let her ruin your life too, as she really believes she has that right, and if you let her, she will not hesitate to hurt you and Nicholas very badly, too!”

“Yes, Charles, you’re right, that much is fast becoming clear to me. I must admit I’m seriously nervous as I go now to face her, without anyone at my side for support,” she said.

“Princess ...” Charles now says to get her attention again.

“Yes Charles?” she says “What else has come to mind?”

“You know I’m not a religious man, but I’m going to say at least one prayer tonight, even if maybe God is not listening to me – but just in case He is,” Charles said, quite serious.

“Really Charles? I must admit in that the last 24 hours I’m seeing a whole new side to you ... you’ve really amazed me!” Lizzie remarked “I never had you figured as praying man?”

“Well Princess, it’s just that I’m going to ask God to help you as clearly you’re going to need all the help you can get once you are back in her lair, all alone there, without Nicholas or me to help you!” then adding, “You’ll need God’s help now!”

“I have the sinking feeling you’re right Charles,” she said.

“Believe me Princess, I know I’m right! I for one am not going to be answering any phone calls personally for quite a while, but rather have my Dad’s house staff do it for me - to make sure I never have to talk to her ever again!” he replied.

Lizzie laughed, replying, “Yes, she can be rather formidable and unforgiving. I really can’t say that I’d blame you!”

Charles snorted ... “Well, she’s your and Nicholas’ problem now, I don’t want anything more to do with her! Well then, that said, the time has finally come to bid you adieu, and send you off into battle ... you sure you wouldn’t rather just stay here and then let me put you on the next flight to Cape Town, to go back to Nicholas? That would be so much safer than proceeding on to Canada tonight?”

“Don’t tempt me, Charles, I might just take you up on that, but alas, I have to finish what’s been started, else all those loose ends will haunt me for the rest of my life.”

“Well Princess, at least our loose ends are tied up now. I consider that to be the case. I hope you agree?”

“Yes, Charles, let’s agree that’s indeed so, and Charles ...”

“Yes, Princess,” he asks, not wanting her to go or not speak.

“Thank you ... thank you from the bottom of my heart!”

“You’re most welcome, Princess, as always, I’m at your service. Let me know when you need my help,” Charles replied.

“God Bless you, Charles, and may you find a love that’s more noble than the love we shared for a memorable 20 months!”

“I rather doubt I will, Princess – but you have, and for now that will simply have to do!” Charles assured her, smiling.

“Oh, Charles, You’re going to reduce me to tears again ...”

“Well then, since my handkerchief is already quite wet, I’d better let you go to catch that flight, and let you ride on into battle in the great white north, deep behind enemy lines. Goodbye, Princess ...” Charles said giving her hands one last squeeze.

Lizzie returned that squeeze - gently removing her hands from his, replying, choked up with emotions, “Goodbye, Charles,” and before he could see the tears welled up in her eyes start to spill over and cascade down her cheeks again, she turned and in a daze walked towards the bustle of the security gates, joining the gathering crowd entering there.

Then before being swallowed up by the throng of passengers she turned and, from a safe distance briefly stopped, looked at him, lifted her right arm and gently waved a final farewell.

Charles lifted his folded moist handkerchief, and gently waved back, refusing to turn, keeping eye contact with her, letting her break with his gaze instead – then watched as she did –watched as she disappeared in the hustle and bustle of an ever-busy Heathrow.

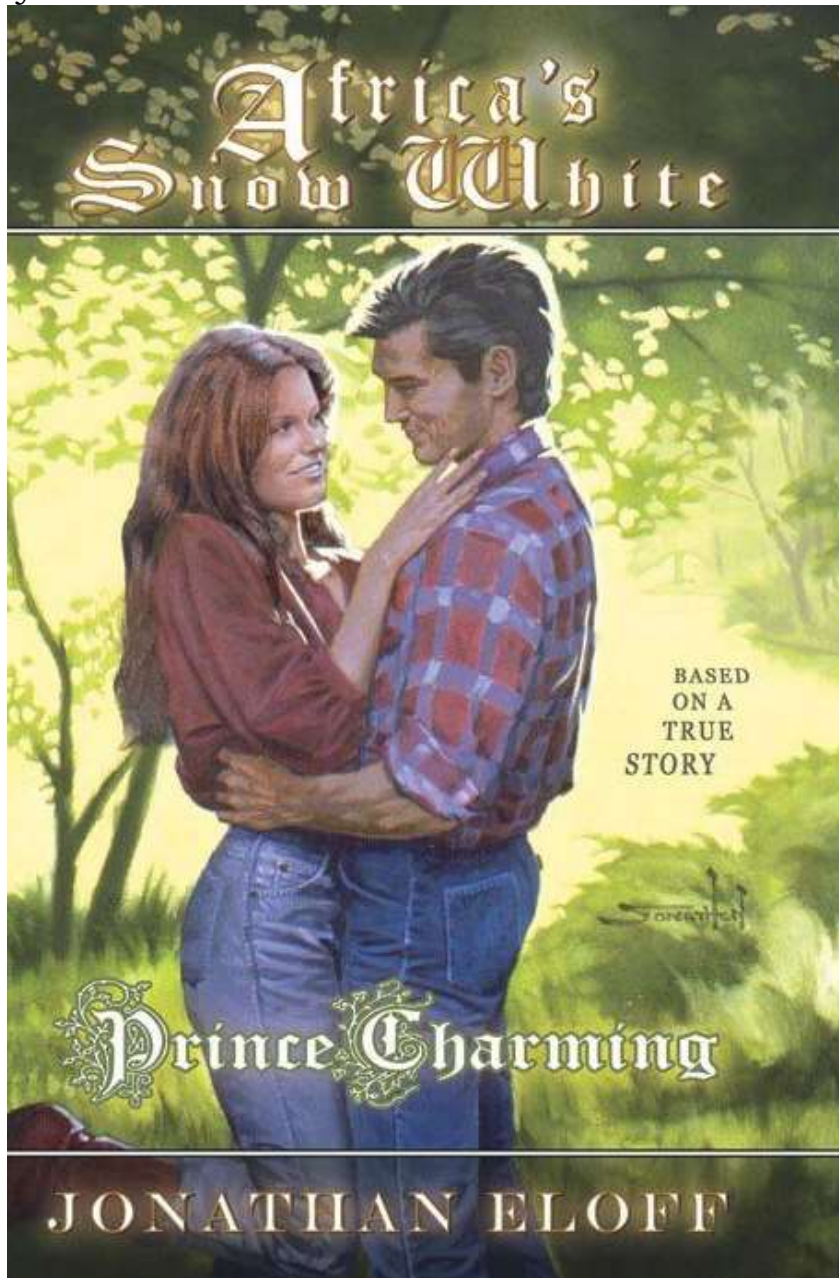
Quietly Charles said out loud “Goodbye, Princess...until we meet again, and I’m sure we will!” adding “Knowing your mother as well as I do, one day you’re going to need my help, I just hope you don’t wait until it’s too late” ... Then

realizing he's talking to himself, Charles turned to leave the Terminal, to get back into his waiting Limousine.

"Where to, sir?" The chauffeur asked.

"To my Club, Alfred, I sure could do with a stiff drink or two with my friends right now!" Charles said, still shell-shocked!

"As you wish, sir, just sit back and relax, I'll have you there in a jiffy or at least as soon as traffic allows!" Alfred replied.



In the back seat Charles close his eyes - hands behind his head, as he remembered.

Chapter 3

Oh ... Canada!

Lizzie made her way through the security check points and customs, then hurried to find the departure gate which was not very busy this time of year - or at this hour, probably because few people want to visit Canada in winter before the ski-resorts are open – really not much to see or do then.

She sat there waiting with many empty seats around her and had time to reflect. Her heart was sore, wounded in two places! The biggest wound; the worst ache was from her Nicholas she'd left behind in faraway Cape Town, but now she had another wound to add to that. By confessing his sins and asking for her forgiveness, the anger that sealed the place in her heart which Charles once occupied was removed, so some very old feelings emerged again. Lizzie had allowed herself to fall in love with Charles once, but now there was no easy way to get rid of that fact! Her anger had made it easier to put him in her past - but without it now she now felt confused and sad, her head spinning.

Then her mind drifted to a recurring nightmare Nicholas once told her about at their waterfall, their secret place. In his dream she was suddenly, somehow, duplicated – maybe one of an identical twin – maybe a clone – but essentially two identical, actual Elizabeths. Nicholas loved her – them ... not able to tell them apart. One day, standing there at the water's edge looking up at him standing above the waterfall above the rocks looking down at them both, they both were beckoning to him, imploring him to choose to marry one of them, and he knew he had no choice! But when he looked at the Lizzie on the right, with her hopeful smile, her eyes and hands beckoning to him, he started to choose her, but then the one on left started to cry, and so he felt so sorry for her

that he started to change his mind, only to see the one on the right now looking heartbroken, tears streaming down her cheeks ... Nicholas, unable to choose leaned forward and then he was falling ... sure to die there on the rocks below, before them both. But before he hit the rocks he awoke with his heart pounding in his chest, stressed out to his limit but very happy to be awake and that there was just one Elizabeth – not the two of his nightmare! Lizzie thought how convenient it would now be if Nicholas' dream was reality – that the Elizabeth on the right would choose him, and the one on the left would choose Charles. They'd have a double wedding, with everyone getting along and even with mother approving, since at least one Elizabeth did, as she'd demanded - marry Charles... and so they'd live with her mother, all 3 of them happy! But she'd ride off into the sunset alone with Nicholas, to live in a land far, far away next to a river, pools and waterfalls inside a national park as beautiful as the one they'd known and loved for so long now, and there she'd give birth to their 2 sons, and maybe 2 daughters and they'd all live happily ever after, growing old together and having their children and grandchildren around them, happy and...

"Tonight's flight from London Heathrow to Montreal, Quebec airport is now ready to board. All of those with babies or who need assistance, please come to the gate now. We'll soon be calling everyone else, so please have your boarding passes and passports handy!"

And with that announcement Lizzie's fantasy was over. Reality bounced back to remind her that she was now the Lizzie on the left – the one that had chosen to leave Nicholas and go back to live with her mother – but without Charles! She sighed ... Life and love sure were very, very complicated!

Lizzie boarded her flight. She would have a brief stop in Montreal before her connecting flight to Toronto departed. The plane was rather empty, so she got a window seat by herself, comfortable for sleeping, and it would afford her

privacy, time alone to reflect on the last few days but also to prepare herself mentally for the meeting that still lay ahead! After dinner, as the cabin darkened and everyone quietened down, she fell into a welcome sleep, with the constant noise of the engines providing a rather soothing numbness. In her sleep she dreamed of Nicholas, and in her dream she was in a flowing white wedding dress with Nicholas beside her, now reunited and at their own wedding! Just before she started to awaken from her lovely dream, she noticed that everyone with them there was smiling and happy and even Charles was there and raised his champagne glass in a toast to her and Nicholas, but her mother and dad were not there. Then in her half-awake state, she smiled, her eyes still closed and brought the blanket up to her chin, trying vainly to let the dream continue ... but the images refused to oblige. All that was left were the warm feelings of her dream. It seems that the Lizzie on the right in Nicholas' nightmare had a happy ending! With a happy sigh, she now opened her eyes and then suddenly she was overwhelmed by a deep sense of loss and longing. Her Nicholas was very far away from her ... and she was headed to the farthest corner of the world from him to live, once again, with the most bitter enemy of their love!

The Lizzie on the left in Nicholas' nightmare still had a few problems to overcome before being merged with the Lizzie on the right – back into only one person – the one that would, if all worked as she planned, soon marry Nicholas! The cabin now came alive. She turned opening the porthole cover and suddenly, thankfully, she was distracted by the view! Below her lay the most exquisite fall picture – Quebec in full fall colors, hills and valleys surrounding lakes and rivers, with reds and yellows dominating greens as far as her eyes could see! The immense beauty she saw filled her with a sense of awe, serving as a welcome distraction and soothing the sad pains of longing still aching in her chest. Suddenly Lizzie realized that she was in a place so different from what she had always known, alone and far, far away from any man she had ever loved! Still, the beauty was mesmerizing. Looking at the splendor of the Canadian Autumn, she

wondered for a while about what surprises her new life would hold for her now?

After landing in Montreal, Lizzie's immigration documents were processed by a plump, round-faced, friendly old man that reminded her a bit of Mr. Gee, the Station-master at Wellington station - at least in his kindly mannerisms. Seeing she was somewhat bewildered and that she was obviously alone and rather sad, in English, but with a French accent, he asked her who she had left behind?

"My fiancé, Nicholas," she replied, "and right now I'm really wondering if I'll ever see him again?" then sighed.

He smiled reassuringly and told her that in his many years in his job, he'd seen and heard a lot of stories of love lost then found again, and that she should never ever give up on love, but keep hope alive!

Elizabeth smiled and thanked him as he stamped her passport and said to her, "Well young Miss Elizabeth Smythe, for better or for worse, you're here now, so on behalf of all of us who love Canada, and call it our home, I'd have to say Africa's loss is our gain! Welcome to Canada!"

Lizzie smiled as he handed her passport back to her, thanked him for his kind words, and then she got up to leave as he beckoned for the next person in line to step towards him, and Lizzie exited into the crowds of people in the terminal, trying to find the gate for her final flight.

The flight to Toronto was short, but in the bright sunshine of a glorious fall day, she was again distracted by the sheer beauty unfolding endlessly below her - multi-colored forests and countless lakes - as far as the eye could see! The plane reached a vast, sprawling city that lay stretched out along a huge lake that looked like a sea to her with a tall tower dominating the horizon. This was Toronto; soon she'd know!

The plane landed, taxiing to Terminal-2. Lizzie followed with the crowd who seemed to know where to get their luggage, stumbling along carrying her hand luggage, on autopilot, hoping somehow she would end up in the right place, not sure who would be waiting for her and where. Sure enough, following the crowd was a good idea! Her luggage arrived on the conveyer belt and she was assisted by an eager young porter who spoke English with a familiar accent, and asked her where she was from and where she was going.

“I’ve just arrived from Africa and I’m really not sure where to go. My parents are supposed to meet me here,” she replied.

The porter smiled cheerfully, bobbing his head, “Well, I’m from India, miss. I’m pretty sure I know where they will be waiting for you, please follow me, young miss,” he said.



Nicholas and Lizzie as a young couple in Cape Town –before this drama unfolded.

Chapter 4

THE MEETING

As they exited through automatic doors into the terminal building, people were being greeted all around her, and the young porter deftly maneuvered her bags through a human traffic jam, saying repeatedly, “Please ... coming through!”

Then she became aware of a familiar voice above the noise...

“Lizzie ... here we are, Lizzie!”

Lizzie turned her head to locate the source of those words, and found her Dad standing there, alongside her mother and Hattie. Edwin smiled, and waved excitedly, Hattie looked bemused, and Constance wasn’t looking at her, but frantically scanned the crowds of people exiting from the baggage claim area. The astute young porter realized that those people were the ones who were waiting for Lizzie and moved the cart towards them as Lizzie quickened her pace.

Now feelings of righteous indignation rose up in Lizzie, and a quiet resolve took hold of her and settled in about her eyes and mouth. “Yes mother, look all you want, you will not find Charles anywhere in this crowd!” she said to herself.

As the porter kept pace, a thin smile crept onto Lizzie’s face and around her lips. She would just pretend she knew nothing of her mother’s clandestine plans to have Charles accompany her out of Africa, and onward to Canada - presumably to start a new life here with him and living according to mother’s plans. No, she would say nothing. “I’ll let mother raise that issue, then only I’ll react accordingly!” Lizzie thought to herself, a determined look settling in around her eyes now.

Hattie and Constance remained standing there, both clearly confused, but Edwin rushed forward to meet Lizzie and said, "Welcome to Canada, dear. It's nice to see you again!"

"Thanks Dad, it's nice to see you too!" Lizzie said, and then said, "I wasn't so sure I'd ever be allowed to see you again!"

Edwin winced hearing her words. Both remembered the stressful parting in Cape Town's international airport a year ago. "That's behind us now, Lizzie, come with me," he said.

Just then they reached the confused Constance and Hattie, and Lizzie used their confusion to her advantage. "Well hello mother, you seem a bit distracted. Anything wrong?" she inquired, a wry smile twitching at the corners of her mouth.

"Oh ... yes, hello, Elizabeth. Is this all your luggage, or is there more to come?" she replied, trying to cover up.

"No mother, it's all here, so let's go, I'm dying to have a hot shower and freshen up, and I'm rather hungry!" Lizzie said.

"But, but... shouldn't we wait a while?" Constance asked.

With the rather confused young porter fidgeting, suddenly looking lost, Elizabeth re-iterated, "Gosh no, mother, I've had my fill of planes, airports and crowds. I'd rather like to leave right away, if you don't mind," and added, "Do you really want to stay here in this crowded airport, any longer?"

The young porter cleared his throat, asking, "Do you have a car parked in the parking lot, or do you need a taxi, sir?"

Constance gave him a withering look for interfering with her plans, and retorted, "We came by car, but if we hadn't, we would have taken a Limousine, not a taxi, young man!"

Edwin, started to realize what was going on in his wife's mind, looked at Lizzie and inquired, "Lizzie, if you're very sure that's all ... shall we go to the car then?"

"Yes Dad, please, let's go," Lizzie replied, relieved he offered!

Then Edwin turned to smile at the agitated young porter and said, "Follow me young man, we are on level-3, parked near the elevators." The young porter looked relieved, as now at least he knew exactly what to do and where to go and so he lead the way for all of them to the parking lot.

Edwin and Lizzie followed, walking side by side, chatting comfortably. Constance and Hattie walked some distance behind them ... clearly confused, whispering, flustered. Lizzie smiled to herself, knowing what must be being said, but concentrated on making small talk with her dad.

They reached a large dark maroon car. Lizzie, knowing her dad's penchant for cars, remarked "Wow, nice car, dad!"

Edwin smiled proudly, opening the trunk, "Yes, it's an Oldsmobile Cutlass-Supreme and I rather like it!" he replied.

Now Constance, who had caught up with them and regained her composure, retorting, "Well, it's not a Mercedes like we were used to once, dear, but for now it will have to do!"

Edwin looked hurt and distracted himself directing the porter as he placed Lizzie's bags into the trunk, then tipped him and thanked the young man who looked rather relieved to be able to return to the terminal's more usual confusion.

Lizzie called after him, "Thank you for your help with my luggage!" and he turned while still moving and smilingly replied to Lizzie, "You're jolly welcome, Miss ... good luck to you in Canada, eh! Have a nice day!" Then walked away.

Edwin opened the front door for Constance, and she climbed in, and then he went to the driver's side, opening his door for Hattie to slide over, allowing her to get in behind

Constance. He directed Lizzie to sit behind him, sensing that would be safer for her and more fun for him.

As Edwin maneuvered through a maze of roads surrounding Toronto's airport to get to the 401 to head south, Constance turned to talk to Lizzie, asking her ...

"So how were your flights Elizabeth? Do tell us all about them. Start right at the very beginning with your flight leaving Cape town ... and don't leave out any details!" she demanded.

Lizzie smiled, and then gathered her composure to answer, knowing full well that Constance was prying about Charles ... if he ever was in Cape Town and where he was now?

In a very calm, measured tone she relied, "Well, really, what's there to say mother, you know, it's all rather routine stuff, I mean, under the circumstances ..."

"Yes, but tell us anyway ..." Constance prompted

"I'll start with Cape Town. Nicholas accompanied me to the airport where we bid each other a rather tearful, emotional goodbye, and I told him how very much I love him and ..." but Constance interrupted Lizzie.

"Yes, yes Elizabeth, you can skip over all the sappy parts, what happened next?" a frustrated Constance asked.

"Well, I waited to board the plane, then I did, but before we could take off the Captain announced that there were some mechanical difficulties and that we must disembark and wait for them to be fixed before taking off, which is why my flights were delayed." Lizzie said – of course, all of it true!

"Really, is that all there is?" Constance inquired impatiently.

“Well no, mother, the few hours I then spent in the airport departure lounge gave me an opportunity to call Nicholas in his apartment, to reassure him how very much I love him!”

“Elizabeth, you’re tiring me out with all your fawning tales of you and Nicholas, I would prefer to hear the other details!” she now says, getting very frustrated.

“Well, I’m not sure what you’re expecting me to say, mother. We eventually did take off for London” Lizzie said, smiling.

“Oh good! How was your flight, dear? Did you at least get to sit next to interesting people?” Constance prompted her.

“Well, the flight from London to Canada was rather empty, so I had 3 seats all to myself, and was able to get some sleep but the 747 flight from Cape Town to London was very full, and not quite so comfortable. I ended up sitting next to a man that made me feel most uncomfortable -at first, but then we turned back to the terminal and while waiting there got to know each other better – turns out he’s quite a nice man, so in the end we got along just fine!” Lizzie replied.

“Really, is that all you remember of your world travels?” a now clearly exasperated Constance asked.

“Well, no mother, now that you remind me, there is a rather important detail stemming from my delay in Cape Town...” Lizzie responded, pausing to gather her composure and calculating how to continue, to launch her counter-attack with maximum effectiveness!

Constance looked relieved, “Yes, yes, go on” thinking finally Elizabeth was going to clear up her confusion about Charles ... but Elizabeth was not responding quickly enough for her liking, so she added, “Well what would that be Elizabeth, come on, out with it, don’t keep us in suspense,” she said.

Elizabeth paused just long enough to focus on her mother's profile, to be able to see the expression on it then and all of her expressions that soon would ensue ...

"Well, before we finally left Cape Town, I was able to call Nicholas, and ..." Lizzie continued.

"Yes, yes dear, you already mentioned it! You can skip over all that," Constance replied irritated at the mention of him.

"Well, actually, no I can't mother, you see, I had the inspired idea then of inviting Nicholas to spend Christmas with us here in Canada, and he rather gratefully accepted. You know we met at Christmas and we've only ever spent one Christmas apart. We'd rather like to hold the line at that," Lizzie replied, noticing with satisfaction now as a startled, horrified look appeared on Constance's face!

Hattie snorted, fidgeting with her hands – uncomfortable. Immediately Constance's tone of voice grew cold and firm.

"Well I'm disappointed that you did not check with us first, Elizabeth, because we do not have room in our home for him, so you will have to call him and break the bad news to him when we get home soon. I'm sure he will understand!"

Edwin, now clearly agitated, his attention not fully on the crowded highway, cleared his voice to talk ...

"But, dear, the basement suite has a sofa bed and even a bathroom. I'm sure he would not mind staying down there, as youngsters adapt quite easily, you know ..." he retorted.

Just then the driver in the car behind them honked his horn telling Edwin to get out of the fast lane. Constance curtly interrupted him before he could go any further, "Just mind your business Edwin, watch your driving. We don't need an accident complicating our already too complicated lives!"

“Yes, dear,” Edwin said meekly, as he changed to the center lane and kept quiet for the moment.

Elizabeth seized the opportunity afforded by Edwin’s gaffe, and immediately said, “Thanks dad, that’s a splendid idea! I’ll be sure to let Nicholas know you said he could stay in the basement suite! I know he won’t mind at all, as long as we’re together! I’ll tell him to spend his entire university summer holidays with us, all 8 weeks of it!” Lizzie said.

A clearly angry Constance now retorted, “Well, let’s discuss this all later. Edwin, just get us home as quickly and safely as you can! I’m rather vexed by all that’s happened!”

“Where is home, exactly Dad?” Elizabeth inquired, changing the focus of the discussion away from Constance.

Relieved, Edwin answered, “The twin cities of Kitchener-Waterloo, Lizzie. We have a new home very near the University of Waterloo, I’m sure you’ll like it. Maybe you can continue your studies there?”

Before Lizzie could answer, Constance retorted with a snort, “Edwin, don’t be such a fool! I’ve already arranged for several job interviews next week for Lizzie in Kitchener, as a secretary. She will need to earn a living now, as we don’t have money to waste on universities. Besides, she needs to pay us back for the wasted two years of studies at UCT ...”

“Interviews, Mother?” Lizzie interrupted, taken aback.

“Yes Elizabeth, you’d better prepare yourself for them. You have only a few days to relax and acclimatize yourself...”

Then before Lizzie could respond, Edwin announced to them all, “Well, here’s our exit, we’re entering Waterloo. It won’t be long before we are home now! I can’t wait to relax again!”

Lizzie lapsed into silence, thinking about that word “Home.” Home was Cape Town and Nicholas just a few days ago.

To break the tension, Edwin played the tour guide, pointing out the university's sprawling campus and a cute little lake across from it, and then stopped to turn left, calling out the street name, "BeechLawn Drive", a new neighborhood of neat homes that all looked identical to Elizabeth, and she was left wondering where exactly the beach was anyway? Within seconds Edwin maneuvered the car into the driveway of #318, a 2-storey pale yellow home, on a smallish lot, with young trees in front and a prominent double garage, the door of which automatically opened, and as it did, Edwin happily announced, "We're here! Time to go in and relax!"

Before Lizzie could answer, Constance quipped, "Yes, we're here – finally! This is your home now, Elizabeth, so you'd better get used to it and you'd best adjust your expectations accordingly. It's nothing like the home we left at 27 1st Ave back in Wellington ... but it will have to do for now. Edwin, you'll have to take Lizzie's luggage upstairs to her room, while I show her around!" Constance commanded, still annoyed at him for offering their basement for Nicholas.

"Yes, dear", Edwin obediently replied, as he climbed out of the car and opened his door to let Lizzie out from behind him while Constance was left waiting for him to go around and open her door, which he forgot to do in his excitement, opening the trunk instead to take out Lizzie's luggage.

Constance was not amused, and opened her own door, let Hattie get out too, closed it and proceeded into the house.

As Edwin grunted and groaned up the stairs with Lizzie's bags, Constance gave Elizabeth a tour of the ground floor, with the living area being typical of a middle class North American home. The sleeping quarters and bathrooms were upstairs. The partially finished basement whose entrance was off the main hallway close to the kitchen, was mostly unfinished but had a small visitor's suite as she'd hoped.

“Perfect for Nicholas,” Lizzie thought, as a smile lit up her face. “Mother has no choice! He comes or I go!” she thought.

Lizzie appeared interested in her mother’s tour, was shown her room and allowed time to take a shower to freshen up before dinner. Edwin poured himself a beer and sat down in the family room (next to the kitchen) to watch the evening TV News then his favorite show “All in the family” with his favorite crusty old character, Archie Bunker. Constance, in her apron was warming up an already-prepared dinner and Hattie was busy in her bedroom.

With everything in the oven, Constance moved from the kitchen, appearing in the open archway of the nearby family room, and said, “Edwin ...”

Yes dear”, he replied.

“Just mind what you suggest regarding Nicholas’ planned Christmas visit. I have no intention of allowing it to happen, besides, I’ve still got no clue what happened to Charles? That basement suite was for him – not Nicholas! I’ll wait until a more appropriate moment to call and find out what exactly went wrong with my plans for him to accompany Lizzie. What on earth could have happened?” Constance asked, looking very perplexed! “He was meant to be there!” and added, “We had an agreement! I just don’t understand?”

“Yes, dear” Edwin replied, trying hard to imagine her away from the living room so that he could enjoy his beer – alone!

“And don’t even think of pouring yourself another beer, Edwin. Dinner is almost ready. You need to set an example!”

“Yes, dear,” Edwin replied, thinking how peaceful and un-stressful it was drinking his beers at the Golf Club after work and back in Wellington. As he lifted his glass to his mouth, he sighed. He thought, “That all seems so very far away now. So, just one beer, BUT this is a special occasion ... Lizzie’s home with us again, and that does call for a

celebration! That bottle of champagne chilling in the fridge will have to be put to good use!” Edwin smiled as he realized that, wiping his mouth after a long swig of cold beer. He continued his train of thought. “Yes, we do have a lot to celebrate tonight! Lizzie’s back with us again! At least I’ll have some friendly support. It’s been a long, lonely, time for me, having to deal with you and your little sidekick, Hattie!”

Elizabeth opened her luggage to find a framed photo. She stood looking at it wistfully... then placed it on her dresser in her new room. At least it would serve to remind her and keep her motivated – focused on what needed to be done.



*Lizzie and Nicholas, happy and in love a year or so before she left for Canada...
(Photo taken on the Wilderness beach, at Christmas-time Dec. 1977)*

Chapter 5

THE DINNER

Around the dinner table, with Edwin sitting at the one end, Constance at the other, their two daughters on either side, Edwin opened the champagne, then he walked around the table filling glasses, finally sitting down to raise his glass. “Welcome home, Lizzie. It’s nice to have you with us again! We’re glad you decided to leave South Africa to come join us in Canada – not much of a future there, I’m afraid. The country is in turmoil -best left in our past, I think?” he said.

Lizzie forced a smile as she raised her glass to her lips, thinking how unlike home this all felt for her now and wondered what Nicholas’ life was like the last 2 days. As Constance dished up, Edwin made small talk with Lizzie, asking her, “So this will be your first white Christmas! We’ve already had one and it’s beautiful – cold, but beautiful!”

Suddenly Lizzie felt cold and shuddered. Up until now Christmas always involved beaches, sunshine, warmth, laughter and for many years now, Nicholas ... and romance!

“Well that will be a new experience, Dad, but at least I’ll have Nicholas with me to help make it all feel a bit less foreign,” she replied “That sure will help me to adapt!”

Constance paused, clearing her throat, looking to Edwin for support. “Yes, well, Elizabeth, I would not get your heart set on that, dear. You know times have changed for all of us now, and I don’t think that will be at all possible!” she said.

A thin, determined smile crept across Lizzie’s lips as she turned the champagne glass between her fingers, looking at the golden bubbles rising in it, then replied, “Well mother,

you have 43 days to figure out how to adapt to your new circumstances of Nicholas' pending visit over Christmas. You see, for some strange reason a roundtrip return ticket was cheaper than a one-way ticket to Canada, so my APEX ticket is still valid for 43 days, all the way back to Cape Town! One way or another, I'll be spending Christmas with Nicholas, there, or here. So why don't you decide where I'll be spending Christmas, Mother, and please let me know soon, as I have presents to buy and arrangements to make!"

Flustered, Constance dropped the gravy ladle, knocking over her champagne in the process. Hattie snickered while Edwin gulped the remainder of his champagne hastily. Elizabeth raised her glass to her lips, savoring her champagne and the rather chaotic scene now unfolding all around her.

"Elizabeth! Just look at what you made me do! Hattie! Go fetch me a cloth!" Constance snapped, still quite flustered.

"More champagne, dear?" Edwin inquired trying to diffuse the chaotic situation; his support of Constance not assured.

Irritated that he did not take her side, Constance dismissed him. "Whatever, Edwin – just put it somewhere where it won't get in the way again!" she snapped back.

Hattie returned handing the cloth to Constance and she dabbed the puddle of champagne looking flustered, harried.

"More champagne, Lizzie?" Edwin asked, ignoring them.

"Why, yes, Dad, that would be nice. Make it a double!" she said with a wink, but leave some for yourself too!" Lizzie replied with a kind smile and another wink only Edwin could see, bringing a mischievous smile to his face, too.

Suddenly he was very, very glad Lizzie had arrived! She was the one person who understood that his lot in life was not an easy one - someone to lend him some moral support in an otherwise difficult life, saying "Yes dear..." way too often.

During dinner, Elizabeth chose a good moment when her mother had just filled her mouth with food and turned to her dad, noticeably in a good mood from the beer and several glasses of champagne, and undoubtedly quite a lot more assertive now as a direct result. "Dad, is it okay if I call Nicholas tomorrow morning? He really is waiting to hear that I arrived safely – it would be the nice thing to do."

"Yes, Lizzie, I think that would be the proper thing to do. He is after all your fiancé. Please send him my best when you do, and tell him that we're looking forward to his visit with us over Christmas, and to please bring a BIG bottle of Mrs. Balls' Chutney! All I can find round here is ketchup, or tomato sauce as we used to call it in South Africa!" he said.

"Thanks, Dad! I'll be sure to do that," Elizabeth replied, but her sentence was cut short with the sounds of Constance choking at the far end of the table, and Edwin rushed over to thump his wife on her back - lest she choke to death.

"Not so hard!" Constance finally managed to hiss at him, grabbing for her glass of champagne, but only succeeding in knocking it over again and then grabbing Hattie's and gulping it down instead. Edwin took advantage of the mayhem to open a second bottle of champagne while his wife was still coughing, trying to recover her composure in the kitchen - surreptitiously there to fetch the dessert.

As dessert was being served, the main course now finished, Constance once again, more or less composed, inquired, "So, Elizabeth, have you ever bumped into Charles again?"

Lizzie quickly placed a spoon of the gooey caramel pie in her mouth, giving herself more time to think of how to respond, tactfully - without actually having to lie to Constance.

Finished chewing, she swallowed, and taking the corner of her napkin, gently wiped her mouth before replying, "Why, yes, mother, I did, recently ... but you know how that all

ended the last time I met him and how Nicholas and I feel about Charles, so I'd really rather not discuss details of the meeting, if you don't mind. That's all rather special and very private and only my business now" Lizzie replied assertively, watching for Constance's reaction, closely looking for clues.

"I see ..." Constance retorted, burning with curiosity but not quite sure how to press her daughter further on the issue, decided to rather inquire, "Anyone for more dessert?"

"Yes please," Hattie exclaimed putting her bowl out towards Constance, as Edwin gulped yet more of the champagne, by now looking a lot more relaxed and happy, smiling at Lizzie.

Lizzie felt relieved! She was tired and just didn't have the energy to deal with any more of her mother's sneaky, prying questions and her clearly provocative intent. Right now she preferred to steer the course of events in her favor, rather than relinquish the upper hand to mother. Dinner ended.

Later, as Lizzie lay in bed, the room quite cool, snuggled under a thick comforter, her mind wandered back to Cape Town, to Liesbeeck Gardens and Nicholas, conjuring up images of Nicholas in familiar settings – images of happy times. She felt her eyelids growing heavy and as she started feeling herself drifting off to sleep, said softly, "Goodnight Nicholas ... I love you ... I miss you!" and in her dream-like state, she imagined she heard him replying, "Goodnight, my sweet Lizzie, you know I love you too, I always have, and I always will!" and then sleep overpowered her, thwarting her will to stay awake any longer. Outside it was snowing softly.

With Edwin already in bed, quite inebriated, Constance was getting ready for bedtime in the ensuite bathroom, with the door open, and berating Edwin for his ridiculous behavior, knowing full well things may have turned out different and in her favor, had he not had so much to drink. Alcohol, of any sort, seemed to make Edwin bolder in her presence.

"Edwin ..." she said.

"Yes, dear?" he replied with a heavy sigh, wincing a bit too.

“Why did you give permission for Elizabeth to call Nicholas, and why did you reiterate that he could come and visit here with us over Christmas?” she asked, her voice tinged with anger ... but Edwin took a while to answer, then did.

“Well, dear, what choice do we have, really? I mean, Lizzie’s made it quite clear that she still has her return ticket that will enable her to return to Nicholas before Christmas, and that if he’s not welcomed here by us, she intends to use it to return to Africa and to Nicholas.”

Irate, Constance interrupted. “Nonsense! You should have called her bluff, and then maybe I could’ve arranged for Charles to come spend Christmas here instead!” Constance angrily snapped back at him.

“But, dear, that will just drive her away far faster and far more permanently than you or I would like to have happen. Then getting her to come back to Canada again, later, will be much tougher than it was – if not impossible! I just fail to see how that’s at all helpful? I’m just looking out for our best interests. Sometimes one needs to compromise to win!”

“Well I’m not amused by your behavior tonight! We shall have to wait and see if you’re right – but I reserve the right to take corrective steps if it appears you’re not!” she said.

“Yes, dear. Can we please get some sleep now, I have got an early morning meeting at work” Edwin said almost pleading as Constance emerged from the bathroom, her hair in a net. She climbed into bed and switched off the light.

“Yes, lets do that! It’s been a rough day...one I’d just as soon rather forget!” she said, turning her back on him.

“Maybe, dear, but Elizabeth is back, under our roof again, after more than a year, so let’s please concentrate on the bigger picture here,” Edwin reminded her, trying to calm her down. “Let us be thankful that we’re all together again!”

“Yes she is, but not quite as I’d planned for it all to turn out,” Constance retorted. “If only Charles had played the part that I handed him on a platter, we’d have had a happy

ending here tonight!” she said, thinking of the basement suite already made up waiting for him and not for Nicholas!

“A bird in the hand, dear ... a bird in the hand,” he repeated, “is definitely worth two in the bush!”

“Oh go to sleep, Edwin, you’re too drunk to make any real sense right now!” Constance, clearly irritated, shot back, moving away from him and sighing deeply as she did.

“Goodnight, dear” Edwin replied, still pleasantly numb from the champagne, leaving a coolly-silent, irate Constance to contemplate whatever it was that went wrong with all her many plots and schemes – plans that should have rid her, forever, of that detestable Nicholas and gained her status and a respected standing in the upper classes of England.

“A good marriage of one’s daughter to a man of standing and substance is not a trivial matter,” she thought. “But it is essential! It’s hardly possible to go back and have another daughter now to compensate for the poor choices of an uncooperative daughter.” No, she’d have to break Elizabeth of her newfound independence. “Elizabeth will see things my way and she will comply with my wishes to marry a man whose family name and wealth would benefit me – all of us!” she thought. “Whatever does she see in that Afrikaner boy and his family? How could he possibly ever be an asset to me or my family?” she thought “No! One way or the other, he has to go!” of that Constance was certain. Her mind was made up and she knew that the only thing standing in her way, in the way of her getting back the respectability she’d lost when she followed her foolish heart and married a poor young tanner against her dad’s wishes, was for Elizabeth to marry well! “Hattie doesn’t have what it takes to attract the attentions of a Charles, and, really, there probably aren’t any to be found in this working-class country!” she thought.

“She was lucky to be introduced to Charles by me and that’s the only path left to social redemption for me!” she thought, “Elizabeth had better get her act together or all will be lost!”

Chapter 6

THE PHONE-CALL

“Lizzie!!! I’m so glad to hear your voice!! How are you?”

Elizabeth heard the relief in Nicholas’s voice, imagining him in the living room of his apartment, speaking on the phone.

“Well, if it were up to my mother, you would have had to wait until I could write you a letter, but with the help of Champagne induced euphoria - and my being back after a long absence, sitting next to my dad at dinner, I was able to prevail on him to give permission for this call - before my mother could object. Still, I thought I’d better wait until she was out shopping so we could talk in a more relaxed and private manner.” Lizzie added - knowing he’d approve.

“I was kind of wandering why you had not called sooner, but you were right to wait!” Nicholas replied.

“Yes, indeed ... How have you been coping, Nicholas?”

“Well you know me Lizzie, studying hard for mid-terms, but thinking of you - missing you Lizzie, a lot! How about you?”

“The past 3 days have been so busy, with so much that’s new and so many challenges, I must admit it’s made it all a bit easier to cope with my sadness – I have so much news!”

“Really? Go on Lizzie, out with it!” Nicholas prompted her.

Lizzie proceeded to tell him everything that happened, filling in the blanks from the last call, telling him he’s welcome to visit for Christmas ... getting responses ranging from utter

disbelief, with respect to Charles, to nervous laughter upon hearing of all Constance's antics and reactions after arrival. "Oh my, I see what you mean, that's really a lot to have happen in 3 days!" Nicholas summed it all up, after a while. "I'm sure your mother is beside herself trying to figure out why Charles did not show up, or whether he even made it as far as Cape Town, and what happened next. You know she's going to work very hard still to worm it out of you Lizzie, somehow she will, so please do be careful!" He cautioned.

"Oh yes, she's very anxious, but Charles is determined to avoid her - and the whole issue too, as am I, and with any luck, she is going to be totally stymied in her quest for what really happened in Cape Town's airport and everything that was meant to, afterwards - why her plans failed" Lizzie said.

"Yes, I can see that all really bothering her, but you are right not to be goaded into discussing it all on her terms, ever! I'd just keep it as the ace up your sleeve if you ever need it, but now it's smart to keep her off-balance - keep her guessing!" "However, I must say I'm rather surprised at Charles' about face, what do you think is behind his newfound Mr. nice guy persona, Lizzie? Do you think it's genuine... or just an act?"

"Actually, though it has crossed my mind, I must admit I really started believing in him, he seems to genuinely have conceded that it was you who loved me first and that it was my right to chose to continue to love you in return, that his biggest mistake was allowing her to manage his courtship of me - something he seems to genuinely regret now!" she said.

"And well he should Lizzie! I could have told him that you would never put up with that, but then that would have been helping him to court you properly, so it was probably best to let his and your mother's plans blow-up in their faces, as it did!" Nicholas replied with a chuckle ...

"Yes, it did so quite spectacularly, didn't it?" Lizzie replied, chuckling along with Nicholas over the phone, then saying

“What was really quite apparent was that Charles clearly understands that his alliance with mother cost him me!” Lizzie restated her point - for a reason, clarifying “Charles repeated himself several times, in slightly different ways, in expressing regret over that misstep!” Then Lizzie went on to explain “Most girls and women – guys... you too, have moms that are self-sacrificing, sweet, loving, caring - nice... but for whatever reason, I’m one of the minority who’s moms just don’t play or value that role correctly, and so, as time went by, I gravitated towards boys like you Nicholas, that were not inclined to want to assist her in running –actually, make that ruining, my life! I yearned for a knight who’d rescue me from her, one that rides off into the sunset with me on his horse - who’d help me live my life to the fullest extent I’ve been destined to do. Nicholas, that’s why you won my heart and why you still have it!” Elizabeth re-iterated. She needn’t have though; her point was now crystal-clear in his mind!

“Wow Lizzie, so I was actually the lucky one – the one your mother rejected! That makes me feel a lot better!” He said.

“Yes Nicholas ... I needed saving, and you may as well get ready to do that again! It’s clear to me now that I’m really just here to declare final independence from her tyranny,” she said, adding “That may come sooner rather than later!”

“Well Lizzie, I may as well start planning for that – it sounds inevitable” he said, then Nicholas summed it all up, saying: “Well anyhow Lizzie, if Charles’s change of heart is genuine, it’s most welcome! We certainly can do with fewer enemies colluding against us!” Your mother is a formidable foe, and she has steadfastly opposed our love and tried her best to devalue your love-story, with ever-increasing determination and ferocity. It would be a good idea to limit the number of allies she can muster to her cause of splitting us up, to keep us apart - forever” Nicholas said, adding “I pray she fails!”

“Yes, that’s my goal here now ... also I believe that Charles’s change of heart is genuine –at least I’d like to think that. He did say he’d contact you and officially concede defeat, also

to offer his conditional support to our cause. He thought we'll need all the help we can get ..." Nicholas interrupted... "Conditional? Did he elaborate?" Nicholas quickly inquired.

"Yes, he was quite specific about that! Charles made it clear that if ever you blew this chance to woo me - without any of his cooperation with her, or interference from him, he'd be as opportunistic in swooping in to pick up the pieces, as you were after I broke off the engagement with him! But you won't give him that opportunity now ... will you Nicholas?"

"Absolutely not Lizzie! Though I can't say I blame him for saying that much to you, I would have done the same if I were in his position." Nicholas confirmed "I'm OK with that."

"Well then, just perhaps you and Charles can come to a gentleman's agreement? That would be a nice ending to a rather tumultuous saga in our lives. It's time for peace!"

"I'm sure we can Lizzie, after all, we're both boarding-school brats, we may fight with each other, suffer bloody noses and yet some, but in the end we also know how to forgive and get along again, for the greater good of all involved! We do agree whole-heartedly on one thing..." Lizzie interrupted

"What's that, Nicholas?" she inquired.

"You Lizzie... both of us love you, passionately and without reservations - even with the tremendously awkward baggage you're forced to carry along with you into any relationships!"

"And by that you mean?" Lizzie inquired, already knowing his answer ... but wanting confirmation anyway.

"Your mother... let's face it, she's really been no help to me or even to Charles - especially not to you!" "So, strange as it may seem, we now all actually have got a common enemy - one that has often managed to disguise herself as a friendly supporter - even as a caring mother - but one who really only ever thinks of herself and her own needs. So yes, I'll

definitely take Charles up on his offer, it can only help!" adding "Charles and me are both boarding school brats!"

"Yes Nicholas, I'd like that very much, if for no other reason than to soothe my conscience, but let's not forget my mother was a boarding-school brat too, in fact she likes to remind us all that she was head-girl of Queenstown girls high!"

"Oh my Lizzie, you're right, I'd forgotten that much, but really, I'm not sure she would participate in a gentleman's agreement ever, anyway - or that she even knows how to?"

"Time will tell Nicholas, but I never recall her backing down, saying she is sorry or admitting guilt, on anything - ever! At times she gives the impression that she not only thinks she's perfect, but has always been perfect, and even though we know that's not true, she expects us all to believe it and to concede that she's always right and always knows best!"

"If that's true Lizzie then our tough times have barely begun, so I hope you're wrong!" Nicholas interjected, now worried.

"I hope I'm wrong too, but I doubt it Nicholas, still, we can live in the hope that she will change ... one day!"

Nicholas interrupts to change the subject ... "So you say I'm cleared to come visit you in Late November after my exams? How did you get her to agree and do you trust her on that?"

"Yes Nicholas, and if for any reason that changes, I will let you know, with a call from Cape town's airport again, but this time to come and fetch me from there to be with you forever!" Lizzie replies, the strength of her determination quite clear in her voice, even from very far away "My return ticket's still good for 42 days -almost the end of November!"

"Well Lizzie, part of me almost hopes that happens, what do you think the chances are?" Nicholas asks, now optimistic!

"It's not going to turn out that way Nicholas, My mother knows when she needs to change her tactics - and that's the part that worries me. Now it's no longer a matter of if

you are allowed to come and visit over Christmas, but what she's started planning for your visit?" Lizzie said, as she sighed "But I guess we'll just have to cross those bridges when we get there. So yes, pack your bags, buy your tickets, make sure that all happens before my return ticket expires, else she may well change her mind at the last moment. Also make sure your passport is in order and don't forget as a South African, you need a visa for Canada, I'd get that as soon as you can at the consulate in Cape Town".

"I will do that Lizzie, you can count on that!" I'd planned on selling everything I have to raise funds for what may come next anyway, my car... and Denise offered to buy my stereo, that should give me enough money to get there and back and have quite a lot left for unforeseen emergencies too, just enough for a return ticket back to Cape Town for you too ... if that should become necessary and that's what you want?"

"Oh Nicholas, I know how much you love your car and your stereo – I'm sorry to hear you have to part with them on account of me – and yes, I'll monitor things here, and just maybe I'll return with you if all is not well, so please leave enough for a ticket back to Cape Town with you - for me!"

"No matter Lizzie, they're all replaceable, you're not ... and I kind of hope you'll find plenty of reasons to return with me, though I'll leave that important decision entirely up to you!"

"Nicholas ..." Lizzie interrupted him, not wanting to get his hopes up quite yet... although she already knew the answer.

"Yes Lizzie?" He inquired.

"I really wish you were here with me, already!"

"I will soon be, not long now, time will go fast, you'll see!"

"Oh no, I hear the garage door, I'll have to end this call now"
"I love you Nicholas, I'll write you soon, please remember to reply very soon, as even with the speed of airmail that may

be the only letter I get from you before you arrive – but watch what you say, my mother may find and read it!”

“I will do that, Lizzie! I love you too Lizzie, I always have ...” but before he could finish, she interrupted him ...

“And you always will?” Elizabeth inquired, before Nicholas could finish his declaration.

“Yes Lizzie ... I always will, never mind what still lies ahead for us –please count on it! I’ve proven to you that you can!”

“Thanks Nicholas, I need to hear your reassurances. I’m so very far away from you now and more than a little scared!”

“I’m sure you’re going to be fine! God Bless you Lizzie ...”

“God Bless you too Nicholas, and also our love ... Bye ...” Lizzie hurriedly ended the call as her mother came into the house, her hands full of packages – but not before he heard Constance, in the background, yell ...

“Elizabeth, put down the phone! Come help me with these bags”, then heard Lizzie saying “yes mother” as she put down the phone, cutting his reply short, before he said his final “Goodbye” leaving him wondering what surprises the future held in store for them and their love for each other?



Chapter 7

THE JOB INTERVIEW

As Elizabeth opened the door of her mother's AMC pacer, parked outside of W.E. Kelly and Associates Engineering firm's office, and got in, Constance inquired of her ...

"So Elizabeth, do you think you got the job?"

Elizabeth hesitated for a while, then replied "Yes mother, the owner, Mr. Kelley interviewed me personally –even discussed salary and starting dates, and I told him I would get back to him tomorrow after discussing it with you and dad..."

"There's no need to involve dad ... when do you start and how much did he offer" Constance inquires.

"As soon as possible, and at \$1,400 per month, so after deductions, I will have about \$900- \$1,000 left each month! That should enable me to start saving for Nicholas and I to start our married life with at least a few of the essentials ..."

"Not so fast Lizzie!" Constance interrupts "you have to pay for your room, board and transportation too, not to mention you owe us for 2y of University expenses that were wasted!"

"But Mother, that rather unfair, after all you cut short my university education and you've imposed these living conditions on me, essentially forcing my move to Canada!"

"Yes, well ... we all have to face new realities Elizabeth, besides, it was your own very wise decision to come to Canada. In 2 or 3 years time you should have repaid your debts, so rather than complain, I suggest you phone Mr. Kelley, accept his proposal and start work tomorrow. The sooner the better!" Constance smiled ...

"Yes mother, that's probably best, the sooner I start, the sooner I'll be done with all this!" Lizzie replies, realizing that for now at least - she'd relinquished the upper hand.

“I’m glad you see it my way Elizabeth! I’ve always looked out for your best interests” Constance replied grinning smugly to herself – her eyes hardening into a steely gaze ahead, as if congratulating herself on her own genius for coming up with this plan, nodding her head gently as she thought to herself “Yes Elizabeth, we’ll see about that new-found independence of yours! I’ll make sure your wings are clipped really short and kept that way, forever! In just another 40 days your return ticket expires, and then the upper-hand in this power struggle too will return to me, where it rightfully belongs! There’ll be no more flying around freely by you, my girl, no more stubborn resistance to my plans! You’ll see things my way, you’ll do things my way and you’ll admit that I’m right, and I’ve always been right... and that’s just all there is to it!”

Elizabeth was left silently pondering her fast diminishing options as Constance drove them towards Waterloo thinking to herself how ironic place names were of her old hometown, Wellington, and now her new hometown, Waterloo, thinking to herself it was as aptly a named place for them as it had been for Napoleon – but only now for Elizabeth & Nicholas - soon to be defeated, not by some lowly Duchess or Duke of Wellington, as for Napoleon but by the ‘queen of Wellington’ ... her! A satisfied smirk now formed on Constance’s face.



Chapter 8

Charles visits Nicholas in Cape Town, as promised.

True to his word, soon enough Charles was back in Cape Town and contacted Nicholas who agreed to meet Charles at the Pig & Whistle, a student pub in Rondebosch - neutral territory. Before long the two of them stood in the entrance of the pub and Nicholas moved forward towards Charles to offer him his hand in his best effort to make peace with him.

As they stood there, grasping each other's hand, and looking directly at each other, Charles spoke first: "Well Nicholas... you won, I lost ... I just can't paint it any other way now!"

Nicholas was more than a little taken-aback by Charles's words "That's mighty big of you Charles, and I'm sure not an easy thing to say..." but Charles interrupted him ...

"There's something deep within me that resents my loss, but my schooling and tradition makes demands of me. So, as an English gentleman, I'm honor-bound to concede defeat and offer you my congratulations. We Englishmen often compete fiercely on the Rugby or Cricket field - and we do so to win, not lose - but if we've lost, we're also the first to go over to the winning team's players, and shake their hands! So it is Nicholas that I'm standing here, grasping your hand, though I'd have to admit the sting of this defeat is going to hurt like the Dickens for a long time to come!" he added, earnestly.

Nicholas looked at Charles, wondering how he'd be feeling right now if the situation was reversed, replying "Charles, I've felt that same feeling many times while competing with you for Lizzie, and I'd have to tell you, even though I too was raised in an English boarding school, I'm not totally sure I'd have mustered the courage to have done what you just did, so on that score, you have my respect ... and my Gratitude and, I'm sure we can both assume... Lizzie's too." He added.

Pausing briefly, Charles smiled letting go of Nicholas's hand.

Then he placed his hand on his shoulder, saying “Well now that’s dealt with, what do you say we both go enjoy a pint?”

At this point, both rather relived the tension was broken, laughing nervously, but agreeing, they entered into the pub.

Soon they’re discussing Lizzie in Canada and their fears. Now Charles took out his wallet, then removed a small B&W photo of Lizzie from it, handing it to Nicholas, saying “Here, I think I’d best give you this photo now, declaring an official end to a long-running conflict for Lizzie’s hand in marriage.”

Nicholas took it, looked at it, then did a double take, then handed it back to Charles, reaching into his pocket for his wallet, retrieving a small B&W photo of Lizzie – handing it to Charles, then said “Charles, I think you should keep it – as you can see, I have the exact same photo of Lizzie!” then he smiled as he noticed Charles’ expression run the gamut of “Oh my goodness, to well, I never!” and finally he too smiled.

“Nicholas ... it seems Elizabeth valued us both highly, and for a while at least, rather equally!” He said handing it back.



This B&W photo was taken of Lizzie by Pieter with a Kodak Instamatic - keeping one for himself. Lizzie asked him for the negative and through the years had 3 photos made. They were “Roses” she’d hand out to suitors that she really liked -but to no one else! The ending of Book-8 explains.

Nicholas smiled in agreement as he and Charles now both reached for their beer mugs to take a swig of beer –perhaps as a result of both being a little surprised by this revelation.

“Yes Charles, I can honestly say that Elizabeth is not fickle, that her feelings for you, and I, were genuine feelings of love that were the cause of much discomfort for her too, and that were it not for Constance siding so firmly with you, well it would have caused her a lot more pain than it already has!”

Charles candidly admitted -post-mortem style, Nicholas’ strategy of courting only Lizzie, was superior to his strategy of relying on Constance for help in courting her daughter.

By their second pint, they’d both definitively set aside any lingering differences and had now agreed to do everything in Lizzie’s best interest, first and foremost, from now on – which included forming a common-front against Constance, who’d clearly proven very dangerous to Lizzie and to them!

Rather than being able to come between them any longer. Their shared disgust with (and distrust) of Constance, had become a unifying force – It was easy to blame her for many hurts and so much of what’d gone wrong in all of their lives, simply because after comparing notes the trail pointed so directly to her in all things horrible for both them and Lizzie!

Charles extended an invitation to Nicholas and/or Lizzie to stay with him in London, as his guest, if he and/or they ever passed through en-route between Africa and Canada.

Charles, who knew of Nicholas’ plans to visit with Lizzie for Christmas asked him to then please find some way of telling Constance that he had no interest in communications with her, that letters and calls would be screened by house staff, and for him (and Lizzie) to not - under any circumstances, divulge his new private, direct phone number, which he’d given Lizzie, and also now, to Nicholas. He smirked as he explained that though his own phone number had changed, his address had not – but that he will simply be throwing away any letters arriving there from Constance, from now on. Nicholas raised his beer-stein to meet Charles’ sealing the deal. Constance now had three foes –and they were all united! Finally there was a faint hint of a hope to defeat her!

Chapter 9

NICHOLAS leaves for Christmas in Canada.

With his car and stereo sold, passport issued, visa obtained, tickets paid for and extra cash in his wallet – just in case, Nicholas was ready! Finally the time had passed and he was sitting in a full old Boeing 707 operated by sir Freddie Laker exactly for people like him who needed to travel, but without the high cost and all the associated bells and whistles.

Sitting between two burly British special forces soldiers who'd joined him in Gatwick on the last leg of his long journey from Cape town to Toronto, the soldier sitting in the aisle seat turned to Nicholas, extended his hand introducing himself: "Hi, my name's Dave, and this is my buddy Mike– what's your name mate, where you from, where you off to?"

"Nicholas ... a tired, hungry, thirsty guy all the way from Cape Town, heading to spend Christmas with my fiancé in Waterloo, near Toronto, deep behind enemy lines!" he says.

"Blimey mate, that's an interesting answer! It's a long way to go to visit a girl, she can't be just any girl, apparently she's got you under her spell –how did she get to be so far away?"

As they were taking off from Gatwick Airport, headed for Toronto, Nicholas explained in a short summary of events, how that all came about, as the air hostesses were starting to offer refreshments.

"Nicholas, what can we get you mate, a beer?" Dave asks.

"Oh yes, that will be most welcome!" Nicholas replied.

"3 beers for me and my mates please gorgeous" , Dave said winking to the air-hostess who just smiled kindly at his flirtatious words, having probably heard them many times

before and knowing full well that these men deserved their time off, that soon enough they'd be back in some or other life-threatening situation, serving their country - and hers.

Dave waited until Nicholas had poured his beer, and Mike was about to take his first long gulp to talk ...

"Here, steady on Mike, I reckon we need to toast a fellow soldier's sorry lot, his past battles and future victories – sounds like he's in a lot more danger than us!" he joked.

"Right on mate", Mike replied lifting his glass "May your victories be swift, and all your dragons slain Nick, go rescue your fair maiden! Rescue her from that evil queen" he said.

"I'm only going for a holiday, to visit till the end of January when University starts again ... " Nicholas starts to explain, but Dave cuts him short.

"Nick, old buddy, you recall what it was like when you had a war with Cuba foisted on you and your buddies in Africa?"

"Yes, I'd rather forget though – it's such a helpless feeling being in wars everybody else starts and we have to finish!"

"Exactly Nick – you get the picture! Let's drink to all us poor saps who have to do the dirty work for those in power. Cheers mate, here's hoping that your battles go well, and that your latest war is soon over – because, to me, it sure sounds like you're once again in a war -against your will!" Dave says lifting his beer waiting for Mike and Nick to do the same before drinking his beer.

"Nick... I had a girlfriend once, from high school days, but she went to a nearby public school, unlike me. Her mother was not pleased that she fancied me instead of some other toffee-nosed brat studying philosophy in Oxford" mike said.

"Really Mike, what happened?" Nicholas asks, feeling a sudden affinity towards the soldier in the windows seat.

“Well she’s married to him - now, they live in a posh London townhouse. She has two little’uns, I’ve heard, lives a pretty boring life with her professor, but I’m sure she has many fond memories of all the fun we had before her mother convinced her to marry him - and not me.” Mike laments.

“Oh no, Mike, that’s sad, how did you deal with all that?”

“I joined the special forces Nick, I don’t have much time to sit around feeling sad about her anymore – too busy trying to just stay alive most days, kind of like the foreign legion.”

“Well, having been through two wars, though thankfully in the air-force, I’d rather not do that, but I briefly considered becoming a fighter pilot as a result of my failing love-life!”

“We all deal with our setbacks in different ways, Nick, Take Dave over there – running from a badly broken home, where he had to grow up with alcoholic parents and brothers and sisters always in some sort of trouble” Mike said.

“Sorry to hear about that Dave ...” Nicholas says.

“Not your problem Nick, you’ve got enough of your own mate! We’re spending a few weeks visiting old mates of ours in the Canadian special forces and we’re going to be having uncomplicated fun. While we’re having some R&R, you’re off into battle, don’t think of it any other way – so prepare yourself for the battle ahead!” Dave warned, lifting his beer as if to toast a fellow soldier off to the frontlines of a war.

“I’m hoping you guys are wrong ... but I’ve got this sinking feeling you’re right” Nicholas replies, pensively drinking a gulp of his beer, a faint feeling of dread entering into him.

“No matter, tonight you’re safe here amongst us fellow soldiers mate, can we buy you another beer?” Mike said as he gestured towards the stewardess to get her attention.

“Yes, thanks Mike ... That would be nice!” Nicholas replied.

Chapter 10

Lizzie & Nicholas are reunited once again!

After getting his bags and saying bye to Dave and Mike, Nicholas cleared Canadian Customs then tried to find the exit where Lizzie told him her dad and her would be waiting for him. Carrying his back-pack over his shoulders, and a largish duffel bag, full of presents and his clothes, at his side, Nicholas exited the sliding glass doors of Toronto's Terminal-1, looking somewhat bewildered ... but then suddenly he heard a familiar and very excited voice above the confusing din of the crowded exit from customs.

"Nicholas!!" He turned trying to locate the source of that welcome voice... then saw Lizzie running towards him with a delighted smile brimming on her face. Putting down his duffle-bag in anticipation – and just in time, Lizzie flew into his arms, burying her face in his chest and wrapping her arms around him. Nicholas hugged her, lifting her off of her feet, saying "Oh Lizzie ... it's so nice to be holding you in my arms again!" and before he could elaborate Lizzie interjected

"I've missed you Nicholas, I've missed you so very, very much!" Lizzie replied, still bubbling with sheer happiness and obvious relief, now putting her arms around his neck and leaning her head back a bit to look into his eyes.

Their expressions grow more intense now, and they moved towards each other, but just as they're about to kiss, just before their lips met, off to the side two cheerful burly guys both issued loud wolf-whistles – out of tune and not in unison, but quite pointed in their direction and with intent!

"Go for it mate, rescue your fair maiden" ... "Yeah Nick, get your gal, sweep her off her feet" and with that - their kiss

interrupted, Lizzie, blushing, turned and smiled at the two passing young men that Nicholas was now waving goodbye to, as they turned, their hands on their back-pack straps, now walking backwards, Dave put his fingers between his teeth for a final loud wolf-whistle, Mike smiled, lifting his right hand to his head, saluting both Nicholas and Lizzie.

“Friends of yours?” Lizzie enquired?

“Yes, two guys I shared a few beers and laughs with on the flight – nice fellows, off-duty British soldiers, on leave, visiting friends in Canada.” Nicholas explained.

“Oh ... Lizzie” replied, suddenly understanding “Well, we’d better go and meet my dad, he’s waiting for us at the coffee shop – he thought I may like a bit of privacy to meet you.”

“That’s nice of him, is he alone?” Nicholas inquires -hopeful!

“Yes, just him and me. My mother is home with Hattie, doing last-minute things to get ready for your arrival.”

“Ok, let’s go meet your dad, I’m really eager to take a shower after 2 days and 2 nights in airports and on flights” he said.

“I can relate to that Nicholas, it wasn’t that long ago when I arrived here,” Lizzie said smiling and squeezing his hand. There was a spring in her step as she held his free hand, walking next to him, brimming with excitement, skipping along next to him, eagerly anticipating them being alone!

“There’s my dad” Lizzie pointed at Edwin still sitting nursing the last few sips of his Tim-Horton’s Coffee, “Dad, dad ... he’s here!” Lizzie exclaimed, getting her dad’s attention now.

Edwin arose to greet Nicholas, who put his duffle-bag down, but didn’t let go of Lizzie’s hand –Lizzie still clasping his left hand with both of her hands, lest he should, somehow, escape her yet again! Nicholas grasped Edwin’s outstretched hand, saying “It’s nice to see you again Mr. Smythe!”

“Nice to see you too Nicholas, welcome to Canada, at least it’s warmed up a bit outside, the sky has cleared and it’s not snowing anymore – on the way here the roads were horrid!”

“Nice as that is to know Mr. Smythe, as the old saying goes – never mind the weather, as long as we’re together ...”
Looking at Lizzie and squeezing her hand as he said so.

Lizzie raised her shoulders to her neck, turning her head sideways, and with an excited quiver and a delightful smile, pinched her eyes closed, squeezed Nicholas’ hand hard and made her wish “Oh yes Nicholas, as long as we’re together – and please Lord, let that be forever! Amen!” Lizzie said, opening her eyes again, just in time to see Nicholas’s smile.

“Well it’s obvious you’ve found your treasure Nicholas ... but did you remember to bring mine?” Edwin inquired.

“Yes Mr. Smythe, it’s been weighing down my duffle-bag!”
Nicholas says, pointing to his big canvass bag on the floor next to him. “I hope you don’t mind, I got you the caterers size -12lbs of Mr. Balls Chutney in a huge big plastic bottle!”

“Excellent Nicholas! I look forward to having some with this evenings dinner. I really cannot get used to putting Ketchup on everything, when I’m so used to Chutney. I owe you one!”
Edwin replies, clearly elated he could now cover his wife’s rather bland, steamed or boiled salt-free cooking with plenty of spicy, tasty chutney! Dinners would be palatable, again.

“I’ll remind you of that Mr. Smythe, one day I’ll need a favor from you.” Nicholas said, not letting the opportunity slip!

“No Problem Nicholas!” Edwin retorted, Shall we go then?
You must be eager to get cleaned up after your long flights?”

“Yes indeed, Mr. Smythe, that would be nice!” He answered.

As the car approached Waterloo, with Lizzie and Nicholas snuggled up in the back seat of Edwin’s Oldsmobile Cutlass

Supreme, Edwin driving - them still chatting away excitedly, Edwin announced "Well, here's our turnoff, we'll soon be there - I think you'll find the neighborhoods and homes very different here. I'm not exactly sure why, but in the second largest country on earth, property sizes are a mere fraction of what they are in South Africa, and homes are crammed so close! Everyone gets to view you sitting in your backyard and even sometimes neighbors get to look into your home from their windows, mere feet away, so curtains or blinds are essential here!" Edwin remarked preparing Nicholas for a different type of home to the mansion they'd left behind.

"That's not so new to me Mr. Smythe, I have an apartment in Cape town, and it's not as private as a home anyway ..."

Nicholas replied, trying to make Edwin relax a bit.

"Yes, but these homes, though spacious and comfortable, are less private than your apartment!" Edwin reiterated.

"Mr. Smythe, even if I were going to spend the next few weeks in a campground, as long as Lizzie was there with me, frankly, I couldn't care less!" Nicholas jokingly replied.

"Aah yes, Nicholas, I'm going to miss Siesta, again, this Christmas, it will be the second Christmas away from there, away from the beach, the warmth, the color, the people ..."

Nicholas detected a note of nostalgia in Edwin's voice and pressed him "Have you settled happily here, Mr. Smythe, you sound a bit nostalgic - like you're still missing Africa?"

"Truthfully Nicholas, I am!" Edwin replied as he maneuvered the car into a driveway, waiting for the garage door to open fully "But for the sake of peace, please don't mention that again, now that we're here, you'll quickly conclude that my wife suffers no rumblings of anyone's discontent and she demands no mention be made, at least not glowingly, of our African past! She's made up her mind that there's never ever any going back for any of us, and whatever her reasons are, they trump my nostalgia, or for that matter, anyone else's!"

Edwin's remark was understood by Nicholas and Lizzie, but his veiled warning, to both of them, went by unnoticed.

"Not a problem Mr. Smythe, I fully understand the delicate nature of your dilemma! I hope you have a few cold beers in the fridge?" Nicholas joked, trying to change the subject.

"That I do, though I had to hide them well, so unless they've been discovered, once you freshen-up, we'll enjoy them together in the warmth of the family room." Edwin replied, clearly relieved to have someone in the house that can enjoy a cold beer along with him, as Constance never drank beer.

"And cold Champagne for me, Dad?" Lizzie inquired of him.

"And cold champagne for you too Lizzie –for all of us!" Edwin assured her as he parked the car, switching off the engine.



Once upon a time, in a land far, far away, Christmas-time, 7yrs before, two long-lost soul mates had their 1st reunion – now they were back together again, albeit in cold Canada!

Chapter 11

Old enemies duel again - but this time on foreign soil ...

“We’re home dear!”, Edwin announced as he lead the way from the garage into the ground-floor of the home.

“I’m busy getting supper ready” she replied briefly appearing in the Kitchen entrance, wearing an apron, her mittens on.

“Hello Mrs. Smythe” Nicholas said, putting his bag down and stretching out his hand in a friendly gesture to greet her - but Constance simply raised her mittens to her chest and replied “Yes, well, why don’t you take Nicholas down to the basement suite and give him time to freshen up, Lizzie, then come upstairs and help me with supper” she said.

“Ok, mom” Lizzie replied as Nicholas was forced to drop his outstretched arm and pick up his bag to then follow Lizzie down the stairs to a cozy dark suite with a small bathroom.

“Hurry Nicholas! I want you back up stairs to come keep me company and I know my dad would love to relax and catch-up on all the African news, over a cold beer!” Lizzie said, as she turned to go upstairs and help her mother with supper.

“Sure, Lizzie – I can’t wait to freshen-up and come and relax with you – give me 20 minutes!” Nicholas smilingly replied.

Nicholas shaved and showered as quick as he learned how in the Air force and Boarding school, put on fresh clothes and returned upstairs, putting his head around the door of the kitchen saying... “That was less than 20 minutes Lizzie, and that’s new record for me, but I knew who was waiting!”

As Lizzie moved towards him, Constance interrupted ...

“You’ll just have to wait for her, young man, Lizzie’s still helping me –you may go and keep Mr. Smythe company in the family-room, we’ll call you both when we’re ready.” she said. Lizzie noticeably sighed and shrugged mouthing a silent “See you soon!” to Nicholas ... and winking at him.

Nicholas found Edwin already enjoying a beer, and he arose to get one for him too. Handing the Bottle of Canadian beer to Nicholas, along with a glass, he motioned to him, waiting for him to pour it then raised his glass to clink glasses with Nicholas’s “Well, officially, welcome to our home! It’s nice to see you again. How’s my old friend Johann doing?” Edwin inquired about Dr. Strauss “and also your mom?” he added.

Nicholas assured Edwin they’re both fine and will soon be heading for Siesta, which immediately filled Edwin full of nostalgia tinged with remorse. “Ah yes, I remember that well, but alas, Christmas here is cold, slushy and snowy – no beaches, Braais and drinking several cold beers hiding in the shade from the African Sun.” He said – looking forlorn.

Nicholas replied “Well, you can always go back for holidays Mr. Smythe, it’s far, but there are a lot of good reasons to go back and visit from time to time.” adding “Maybe real soon?”

“We can but live in hopes Nicholas, we can at least dream!” Edwin responded taking a mouthful of beer, then wiping his mouth with the back of his hand - “Let’s keep hope alive!”

“Supper’s ready”, Lizzie announced “why don’t you two bring your beers to the table so we can start dishing up,” she said.

“Sound great Lizzie, I’m starving!” Nicholas replies “What’s for supper?” as he followed her - Edwin already long gone.

“Steamed chicken and vegetables” Lizzie says, perceptibly rolling her eyes, “you may have to use some of the Chutney you brought for my dad – but there is at least tasty pudding for afterward - my mother hasn’t figured out how to steam that yet!” Lizzie informed him, with an apologetic smile, then

taking him by the hand added “Come on, let me show you to your seat ... you’ll be sitting next to me, of course!”

They arrived at a table where Edwin was already opening the Champagne and Lizzie sat Nicholas at Edwin’s side, with Lizzie sitting next to him, at her mother’s end of the table.

“So Nicholas ...” Constance began, as she’s dishing up for them “South Africa’s a mess now, falling apart fast, I hear?”

“Not really, Mrs. Smythe -though there are definite signs of discontent - but not nearly as bad as the Soweto riots at the time you all decided to leave in 1977!” Nicholas responded.

“Well, I give them all 5 years tops, before all of hell breaks loose and whites still there have to flee for their lives leaving everything behind!” she replies defiantly to his response.

“That’s only 1984 ... I cannot agree with that assessment,” Nicholas retorted, “It’s not reality – way too gloomy! He said.

“But I do, so it’ll happen –I’m confident of that! I’ll take a \$5 bet with you that I’m right!” Constance haughtily said as she interrupted dishing-up to extend her hand towards him.

Nicholas was a bit taken-aback, but recovered fast enough. So, with a smile, replied “I’ll accept your wager, Mrs. Smythe and all present can be the judges!” he said taking her hand.

Edwin, by now having poured everyone Champagne, raised his glass, quickly changing the subject to a less divisive one.

“Nicholas, thank you for coming to visit with us – and for bringing me the large caterers bottle of Mrs. Balls Chutney, that will probably last me almost a year,” he said, smiling.

“Thank you ... and you’re welcome Mr. Smythe, though I will say that it raised a few eye-brows every time I went through security!” Nicholas replies, clinking glasses with him now.

Constance, looking to steer the conversation back to her advantage, said “So young Nicholas, without much hope of ever being allowed into Canada, and with it being so very expensive to fly back and forth ... how are you now going to successfully continue to court my daughter?” she inquired.

Both Lizzie and Nicholas turned to look at each other, their eyes flashing covert messages to one another along the lines of “Does she know what our plans are yet?” and “How do we answer without lying?” Lizzie decided to answer her mother.

With her champagne glass in her right hand, she raised her left hand towards Constance – so that she could see her ring finger, replying “Mother, as you can see by this ring still on my finger, we’re still officially engaged. So we’ll both reserve all rights to answer your question – when that time comes!”

Constance, a little deflated at Lizzie’s ‘check’ recovered her composure quickly enough to put her glass down, take Lizzie’s left hand in both her hands, stoop her head down pretending to examine her ring, then mockingly said “Oh, I’d quite forgotten about that – maybe because it’s so tiny and insignificant – probably just a diamond chip!” she mocked.

Lizzie withdrew her hand to the safety of her place setting, saying “Mother, my lovely granny – Dad’s mom, left me her engagement ring, a sterling silver ring with an amethyst on it, as her first Grand-daughter. From that I’ve learned that the size or type of stone does not matter much – what does matter is the warm love that’s in my heart for the man that proposed to me!” she said, turning to Nicholas and smiling warmly before adding “and Nicholas, I’ll always be grateful for your proposal, and hopeful that soon we’ll be married!” now adding “We should think about setting a date for that!”

Edwin, having been emboldened by beer and champagne, and probably also because Lizzie invoked his mom’s name, raised his glass and said “Bravo ... I’ll drink to all of that!” as Constance glared at him. Lizzie and Nicholas smiled!

Furious but not looking to make too much of a scene, she waited for them all to be drinking their champagne and then she fired back... “Well if Charles were sitting here instead, you’d have a giant rock on that finger dear, not a little chip!”

Lizzie sputtered as she choked on her champagne, her throat burning as some of it went down the wrong pipe but recovered enough to say, with a rather hoarse voice now ... “But mother, he’s not here! Nicholas is, and I’d rather have a man with a big warm heart sitting next to me, than your choice of man – even with a big cold rock on my finger!”

Constance, having held the advantage of being on the attack for the last 10 min, was visibly shaken, remarking “What the ... I mean, so what news is there of Charles then? Any?”

Nicholas, sensing Lizzie’s ire, replied instead “Oh yes, I had updated Lizzie, but I suppose she hasn’t seen fit to share the information with you yet, so here’s the short version...”

“Charles called me requesting a meeting whilst in Cape Town visiting his Dad recently. I agreed to meet with him...”

But Nicholas was interrupted by Edwin, inquiring if anyone else would like a top-up of their Champagne glass, to which everyone agreed, perhaps in full agreement with Edwin’s approach - thinking that they might all need it soon, now.

“Oh Edwin, stop interrupting! I’ve had enough – so have you! Go on Nicholas” Constance berated Edwin angrily. Nicholas ignored her, and held his and Lizzie’s glass up to the bottle held by a clearly nervous Edwin, making small talk as Edwin topped them both up. Constance interrupted.

“Nicholas, I believe you owe me an answer”, an irritated Constance reminded him sharply, goading him on.

“Well, the meeting went well, very well, much better than I’d have expected!” Nicholas replied, then took time-off to sip

his champagne and remarked to Edwin that it's really a very nice dry Champagne - that maybe he should get more of it.

"Is that all?" Constance retorted, trying to get the focus back onto her need for any more information about Charles.

"No actually, there's a lot more!" Nicholas replied, turning now to look at an irritated Constance - squarely in her eyes. "He acted very gentlemanly, conceding the battle for Lizzie's hand in marriage, and then also wished us both well ..."

"Are you sure you're not making all of this up, Nicholas - it sounds unbelievable to me!" Constance interrupted him with a snort "Fanciful thinking - wishful actually, I'd say!"

"Yes, well, I was a little taken aback by his abrupt about-face on all of this, considering our rancorous history, but he seemed quite sincere - even inviting Lizzie and me to spend time as his guest in London when we pass through there again once we're married, and suggesting that he'd very much like to be present at our wedding - if at all possible."

"I'm afraid I'd have to hear all of this from him, I think it's all a case of wishful thinking on your part!" Then she turned to face Lizzie, adding "Lizzie I'd not put much stock in young Nicholas' version of events, if I were you, I know Charles well enough to confirm he's still desperately in love with you!"

"Actually, no, it isn't wishful thinking on my part, and I do have a message for you from him too, on that matter ..."
Nicholas continued, taking his time to sip more champagne.

"And what might that be young man?" Constance inquired with a contemptuous smile, lifting her champagne glass to her haughty lips and sneering at him as she did so.

At just the right moment, her mouth full of champagne, to return the favor, Nicholas said "Charles says to please tell you that he wishes no further communications with you - that as far as he is concerned, Lizzie's romance is now a

matter just between her and me, and that your energy should now similarly be switched to helping us, and no longer him and ..." but before he could finish, he and Lizzie watched as Constance, now choking, is forced to retreat into the Kitchen, again, where a series of desperate coughs and spluttering ensued. Turning to each other ... they smiled!

Edwin and Hattie hurried into the Kitchen to assist her, but Lizzie stayed seated, turning to Nicholas, squeezing his hand, saying "Wow! That went rather well! But I do wonder what the repercussions are going to be for you and I – you know my mother does not take defeat lying down, and this is a decisive defeat for all of her plans for Charles and me!"

"Yes, I was kind of wondering if I really should say quite that much –but she definitely goaded me into it" Nicholas replied

"Yes, she did, didn't she?" Lizzie laughed, "Well, she had it coming – that's definitely Justice ... and it's long overdue!"

The coughing and spluttering now having died down, Edwin returned, sheepishly, offering Lizzie and Nicholas yet more champagne, and announced, "Hattie is helping your mother get the dessert and coffee ready, they'll be back with us shortly!" then raised his glass to the young couple sitting next to him, Lizzie cuddled up as close to Nicholas as the seating would allow and said "Your mother and I once had to contend with her dad's opposition to our marriage - to us loving each other ... He thought his daughter should marry into wealth from the start – not to a poor junior tanner with a motor-bike for transport ... but he did eventually accept that we loved each other and had a right to live our lives the way we saw fit. I too have conceded as much to you two." He said, raising his glass yet again – enjoying all the toasts he'd been making, immensely ... probably also enjoying watching his wife be so eloquently put in her place – for once! Edwin knew that didn't happen often ... that he was regularly reduced to saying "Yes dear" and "If you say so dear" and "Whatever you want dear" and "You're always right dear!"

Chapter 12

Christmas is fast approaching.

Lizzie worked for a small CIVIL engineering company, and they had 2 weeks off over Christmas and new-years but it was still 3 weeks to go before Lizzie got her time off for the Christmas Holidays, so each morning Lizzie accompanied Edwin into Kitchener, as her workplace was close to the Tannery. Now that Nicholas was here, he went in with them and figured out things to do with his day, generally meeting up with Lizzie during lunch-break at a nearby city-center mall or one or other of the fast-food restaurants, then walking her back to her office, saying goodbye and afterward again returning to potter around town before returning to Lizzie's office and waiting there for Edwin to pick them up after work and return home each day - till the weekends, Friday afternoon, when they could be together all the time!

During their Lunch-hour meetings, Nicholas and Lizzie got to talk about everything they'd want, conveniently, privately.

Lizzie, sat next to Nicholas at a McDonalds, their meals now done – only soda left, playing with the straw in her soda ...
“Nicholas ...” she said looking up at him to get his attention.

“Yes Lizzie?” he inquired looking intently at her.

“I think I'm definitely ready to go back with you to Cape Town, as I'd hinted at - what's more, if I return with you, I have a feeling my dad will want to do the same!” she said.

“Hmmm Lizzie, not that I want to discourage you, but what is your reasoning – just so we can be clear as to why exactly we'd be doing this? It's going to be regarded as a hostile act by your mother!” adding “you may be right about your dad!”

“Look around you Nicholas, this is a cold bleak place – the people are friendly enough, but it’s devoid of the color and warmth we grew up with – and my mother’s still hostile!”

“Yes, it certainly looks bleak right now, but this is winter, so it’s hardly surprising - but I agree, your mom’s still hostile!”

“That she is!” Lizzie replied ... adding “and Nicholas, even if I mentally subtract out the snow and slush, and in my minds eye paint leaves on these bare trees, and place a few flowers here and there, it’s still a pretty bleak place with homes right on top of each other, crammed close together, looking so similar and no place as exciting even as the Spur – just endless fast-food places with food that tastes like cardboard with a dollop of mayonnaise or sauce added!” she remarked.

“Well, I must admit it’s a step backward in that respect, but there are places like the Keg that are similar to the Spur ...”

“I know, our boss takes us there occasionally –but Nicholas, it’s much more normal for people to eat at these fast-food restaurants because the alternatives we’ve been used to are so very much more expensive here, than in South Africa!”

“So what you’re saying, is that even as youngsters, and students, we lived better quality lives in South Africa than we could here?” Nicholas asked Lizzie – just to be sure.

“Exactly – but that’s not nearly all there is to it” she said.

“Oh, I see ... well what else are you basing your decision on? Though I can hazard a guess,” Nicholas said winking at her.

“My mother of course –she treats me like a captive child and I really don’t like that! I have to hand over my earnings to her and then she doles out a little bit to me, which really amounts to Pocket-money. I’m a young woman Nicholas, I’ve lived a better life than that already - it’s just not fair!”

“That’s it?” Nicholas inquired, knowing Lizzie wasn’t done.

“No, those are all just irritants. Nicholas, I want to go back with you. I want us to finally get married, live together – in your apartment for now would be fine, but later we can get a bigger place, maybe a home and start a family ...” she said.

“Oh Lizzie, that’s all the reasons I need from you!” Nicholas replied excitedly ... but Lizzie interrupted him.

“But there’s much more, Nicholas ...” she said.

“I’ve heard enough already, Lizzie ...” he interjected.

“No, actually, you haven’t ... My mother is never going to allow us to have all of those things if we stay where she can be in control of my life, in fact I’m convinced she wants to get rid of you, to get you removed from my life, permanently! I have to break free from her if I’m ever going to have a life!”

“But she seems to be fairly well-behaved, of late, what makes you think that Lizzie?” Nicholas asked, to be sure.

“All she is doing is stalling Nicholas ... I know her, she is biding her time, looking for an opportunity to regain the upper hand - veto power over our love and lives,” she said.

“Hmmm ... you’re probably right, but what options does she have? I mean, Charles is no longer cooperative and it’s only me in your life now” Nicholas replied, but Lizzie interrupted.

“Yes, but you still live in South Africa ... and she views my attachment to you as a massive threat to her plans to keep her entire family captive in Canada - along with her! I mean, this holiday is going to end in a few weeks, and then you’re heading back – my Fiancée, back about as far away from here as one can get, and I can already see she’s plotting to make sure you go back on your own, and end up staying there on your own ... and forever!” Lizzie said, tearfully.

“Wow – that’s harsh Lizzie, surely not?” Nicholas replied
“Surely by now she’s ready to adapt to the new realities?”

“No she has not! Count on it Nicholas – there has not been any back-tracking by her of her dislike for our love, and all she ever does is avoid the subject all together when I talk about any wedding involving you and me. She just does not want to face reality – she wants to make reality conform to her wishes, and in her reality, you and I don’t end up living happily ever after...or even staying together at all!” She said.

“Well Lizzie, since you put it like that, and since we’ve loved each other steadfastly for years, I’m very glad of one thing...”

“What’s that Nicholas?” Lizzie inquired, now hopeful.

“I sold my car and Stereo, and have just about enough money to buy you a return ticket to come back to Cape Town with me!” He said to her, squeezing her hand.

“Well, let’s do that then Nicholas!” Lizzie said, cheerfully.

“I suppose, except that ...” Nicholas started to say.

“Except what?” Lizzie asked, looking a little worried again.

“There’s still several weeks left before my return trip, and we may as well bide our time and plan to do all of this a little closer to that time, as a lot can happen, and once the money is spent on an economy APEX airfare, it’s non-refundable! I’d suggest we wait till after Christmas – maybe New year?”

“Well, OK, but I don’t plan on changing my mind Nicholas!”

“I’d be hurt if you do Lizzie, I’m counting on this to happen!”

“So then, when we get back to Cape Town, can we finally get married Lizzie?” Nicholas asked, wanting her confirmation.

“I’m counting on that Nicholas – in fact I insist we do! Have you changed your mind?” Nicholas just smiled at her across the table and squeezed her hands, replying “No Lizzie, never! You’ve always been my hearts desire, and it’s about time!”

Adding “Wow – imagine that! Finally, we’ll be married, that sounds like such a lovely dream! Lizzie, let’s start planning!”

“Yes, but let’s make it reality Nicholas – and remember, we will have to be very secretive about these plans, as if my mother even gets an inkling of our intentions, all of hell will break loose around us!” Lizzie cautioned him looking scared.

“I imagine you’re right on that score Lizzie, so we’ll just have to be extremely careful!” Nicholas reassured her “Come on, lunch is over, let me walk you back to the office” he said as he took her hand and they walked back to her workplace.



Elizabeth in her German Dirndl dress – the same dress she’d wear in the Walper hotel.

Chapter 13

Out in the cold!

While they were gone each day, Constance snooped through their rooms, finding all she was looking for, and then Lizzie's Christmas holidays came, and wherever Lizzie and Nicholas went, there too was Hattie, ostensibly because she wanted to be with her older sister – but in reality, she was there as her mother's spy, dutifully reporting back to her mother. Then they made that one fateful mistake -in front of Hattie!

Seeing Nicholas and Hattie sitting in a busy mall food-court, at lunch-time, waiting for her on Sunday and the day before Christmas, Lizzie arrived at the table, her coat on, standing back a bit, as she took her coat off, saying to Nicholas "Do you like my new Bavarian Dirndl-style Dress, Nicholas? It was on the sale rack –one of a few autumn dresses left in the German lady's store downstairs. It was quite affordable!"

Lizzie turned slowly to show Nicholas her cute little German traditional maidens' dress complete with traditional bodice, highlighting her perfect figure in a most Germanic manner – trimmed with fall colors, plus a cute little bolero jacket.

"Yes Lizzie, I like it very much! Maybe it's the German blood in my veins, still running strong" Nicholas said, reaching out to her to pull her onto his lap. As he did, her arms went effortlessly around his neck, and she placed her forehead against his, whispering "Ich habe es speziell für Sie mein Liebling" winking and then kissing him lightly on the lips.

"Lizzie, you know it's not fair, you can speak German and I don't know what you're saying!" Nicholas chided playfully ... prompting Lizzie to translate: "I got it especially for you my darling" and that caused Nicholas to smile affectionately! "But it's maybe a little bit Summery for Christmas-time in Canada Lizzie!" Nicholas said, precipitating the blunder.

Then without thinking, Lizzie spontaneously replied “I have a coat, but it’s really not for here Nicholas, it’s for our return to Cape Town – it’s summer there and it seemed to me to be a perfect honeymoon dress for May/June when ...” then, too late, Lizzie realized her blunder! Hattie overheard Elizabeth - Nicholas squeezed Lizzie’s side – giving her a horrified look, but they could see in Hattie’s face ... their cover was blown! Later returning home, they immediately notice Hattie being called to her mother’s room, and looking at each other with dread, they felt the tension rising within them. Shortly the mother came out of the room, with a triumphant Hattie hovering in the back-ground -but instead of attacking them immediately with news she has just heard from Hattie, she requested they run an urgent errand for her to the nearby supermarket, before all the stores close for Christmas eve.

Lizzie replied “Sure mother, but I’d like to go get changed out of my new dress first, if that’s OK with you?” She said.

“No! That will have to wait – I need you two to go and get these few things right away!” Constance now re-iterated.

Lizzie and Nicholas, somewhat relieved, did as they were asked, both dressed in warm coats, gloves and boots. So holding hands, they walked together towards a supermarket a few blocks away, off they went, chatting away, thinking they may have got lucky –perhaps Hattie didn’t get it right? But when they returned an hour or so later they noticed the garage door open, and a clearly stressed-out Edwin packing suitcases into the trunk of his Oldsmobile – their suitcases!

“Dad ... “ Lizzie said, trying to get his attention., trying to get him to look at her – in her eyes, which he just couldn’t bring himself to do, “what are you doing here with our luggage?”

“Whatever your mother’s demanding of me Lizzie, I have no choice in this matter, I wish I did! I hope you understand.” “What do you mean, dad?” Lizzie pressed him - but before he could answer, there was Constance standing at the garage entrance, arms folded, a cruel thin smile visible on her lips, her eyes strong, determined, fully back in control!

“We’re throwing you & Nicholas out of our home Elizabeth, onto the streets where you both deserve to be!” Constance angrily interjected “You ungrateful wretch of a daughter!”

“But why, what have we done to deserve this, I mean it’s Christmas eve, it’s time to be with family, what’s brought all of this on so suddenly?” Elizabeth asked, pleading with her.

“You and Nicholas are planning to return to South Africa, Elizabeth, Deny it if you can, though I won’t believe a word you say anyway –Hattie was there and overheard your plan!”

Edwin, with one hand now on the trunk’s lid, the bags packed, paused before shutting it, and asked “Is it true, Lizzie? Is what mom is saying true?” he asked her, hoping.

Lizzie looked at her dad and softly said “Yes dad, though we were going to wait to break the news till a couple of weeks after Christmas, and certainly we would have tried to find a gentler, kinder way, than this, to do so ...”

“Well then I’m afraid there’s nothing I can do. Your mother’s made it clear to me that the two of you may as well go now as later – that it would be too painful to have you stay here knowing you are going to leave!” Edwin replied, slamming the lid of the trunk shut, then motioning them to get in.

“But Dad, it’s Christmas eve, it’s frightfully cold and snowy, where are we to go, we know no one here, just you and mom and Hattie” Lizzie implored her dad with Nicholas looking on in disbelief at the scene unfolding before his eyes, almost paralyzed by events. He’d never imagined this end-result!

“Dad will take you to downtown Kitchener, there’s probably a hotel there that should be open over Christmas, you can stay there, but you’re not welcome to stay under my roof a moment longer! *Goodbye Elizabeth!*” With a huff, Constance turned on her heels slamming the door from the garage to the house, leaving Edwin, and the 2 of them, standing there.

“Well then you two - get in, we may as well conclude this unsavory matter as fast as possible,” Edwin motioned to them, opening the door to let them into the back seat.

Stunned and near tears, Lizzie got in. Nicholas got in next to her, Edwin got into the drivers seat, closing the door, then starting the car, reversed onto the street, heading toward Kitchener – not talking at all and not really wanting to!

By now Lizzie was sobbing, Nicholas tried to console her and Edwin was staring stoically ahead, driving. Soon enough they arrived in Downtown Kitchener and he turned the car onto King St. Christmas lights were on, but the street was empty, the northern hemisphere's sun by now having set. Pulling up next to a bench on this main street, Edwin stopped, popped the trunk, got out and started removing their luggage and placing it on the curb. Lizzie was still sobbing, Nicholas was flabbergasted as now Edwin asked them to "please get out," which they did, still in a daze.

"Daddy..." Lizzie started to say through her sobs "How can you do this to me?" she asked, pleading, hoping to make some sense of it ... though she couldn't think what possibly could? "I'm your daughter ... we've always got along well!"

"You're a grown woman now Lizzie, you've a right to choose your own way in life - but I have to live with your mother, and she has demanded that you and Nicholas leave her home, so really ... what choice do I have in this matter?"

"You do have a choice daddy, you're not just a husband, you're forgetting that you're a father too, and by doing mother's cruel bidding in this case, you're being just as cruel as her! Do you really want to be her accomplice in this horrible deed?" Lizzie pleaded with him through her tears.

"I'm sorry you see it that way Lizzie, I really am, but I have no choice in the matter," he re-iterated, looking ashen-faced.

"You do have a choice dad, you always have ... you always will! You just choose not to do the right things – you let her bully you into submission so you end up doing all the wrong things instead!" Lizzie replied, the ire now rising through her tears, adding "You can't hide behind mother's skirts dad!"

"Mr Smythe, you owe your daughter more than this, you really do, if you don't want to regret all of these very cruel things for the rest of your life, Please Mr. Smythe, I'm asking

you, respectfully ... do the right thing for her – this is your favorite daughter, I know the two of you are closer than anyone else in your family ... please don't do this to Lizzie!" Nicholas implored a now emotionless Edwin - to no avail.

Nicholas was trying to hold on to a clearly distraught Lizzie, Edwin opened the door to get in behind the wheel, but then paused long enough to speak to them over the car's roof.

"Here's the only thing I will offer ... If you two somehow come to your senses, and call-off your plans to return to South Africa, come and see me first ... at my office at the tannery here in Kitchener. I will insist that my wife let you both return to our home, until you, Nicholas, need to return to Cape Town, alone, without Lizzie! That's the best offer I can make, and that's my promise to you both! More than that, I simply cannot do!" and with that, Edwin, grim faced, got into his car, closed the door starting the engine and then drove away from the curb, not even looking back at them, a distraught couple left standing on the snowy curb, all alone.

Lizzie, holding onto Nicholas, sobbing, managed to lift her hand to wave towards the car's rear-view mirror, saying softly –with no chance of being heard "Merry Christmas... Daddy" through the broken-hearted sobs now racking her body - and then the maroon Cutlass Supreme was gone.

Suddenly everything around them was deathly quiet. Just them, Christmas ornaments, colored lights, their luggage and a bench next to a sidewalk of that empty main street.

Nicholas shuddered– "Wow, it's cold Lizzie, let's sit down for a minute and huddle close, we need to gather our thoughts and figure out what we're going to do to survive now ... I mean, much more of this and we're in desperate trouble!" Nicholas suggested leading Lizzie to sit down on the bench.

For a while they just sat there – stunned, huddling close to stay warm, the bitter cold now starting to do its evil work, finding it's way through their coats, gloves and socks. Lizzie buried her face in Nicholas's shoulder, her body wracked with sobs, not able to talk or reason. Nicholas wrapped his arms around her to keep her warm, his own body starting to

feel the searing cold biting into his back and arms. Then the snow started to fall -big soft flakes of snow, landing on their heads, their lips, their eye-brows, their lashes, on suitcases! Somehow, with the two of them sitting there next to the deserted main street, the lights and snow combined to remind them it was Christmas... Nicholas started to speak.

“Well Lizzie, it’s Christmas again, and here we are, sitting on a bench, together again, but oh so far away from the warm, pleasant surroundings of the Wilderness where we met and fell in love and spent every Christmas till now – and where we often sat on our favorite grey old bench, at night, but next to the river. I mean - if you’d told me then that one day this was going to happen, that the two of us would be sitting here, on this bench, at Christmas time, with snow falling all around us, at the other end of the world, you and me alone, huddling to stay warm –just to stay alive, I’d really not have believed you! But here we are Lizzie – and not by choice! So we’re just going to have to do whatever it takes to survive! We certainly can’t stay sitting here much longer! We’ll die here in each other’s arms – like Romeo and Juliet, but I’d prefer we both lived -so we need to find a warm place to stay the night and spend this unusual Christmas – somehow?”

Reduced to just sniffing now, Lizzie broke her silence and with a nasal voice, choked with emotion, said “Yes Nicholas, we have to... we will survive! I’ll not let her destroy our love!”



Chapter 14

The Calgary Highlanders to the rescue!

Just then Nicholas heard the muted sound of a car tires on the snow as it approached, and turned to see a lonely CAB driving up the deserted street, towards them. Standing up, he motioned to the cab, and it stopped. A wizened old man wearing a furry hat rolled opened the window to ask “What are you two youngsters doing alone here in this bitterly cold weather at this time of night? According to the radio, they’re saying it’s getting down to -10 tonight, so you cannot stay sitting out here for long! You need to find shelter - soon!”

Nicholas thanked the man for stopping and replied “Yes, I don’t think we can manage much longer, we’re not used to this cold, could you please take us to a nearby hotel that will let us stay the night?” Nicholas asked him.

“I sure can, young man! Here, let me help you get your luggage into the trunk: he said, getting out, the engine still running, then walking around to the trunk, opened it.

Nicholas first opened the back door for Lizzie, to help her into the warm cab, out of the cold, closing the door and went to help the cab driver with the luggage. Closing the trunk, the cab-driver motioned Nicholas toward the back of the cab saying “You’d better get in young man, those snow flakes on you two will melt fast in my warm cab! I make sure that its heater always works well, it’s a matter of life and death for me this time of year too!” He said with a smile.

Nicholas now got in next to Lizzie, the Cab-driver got in and turned to ask, “Any particular hotel? Or will you trust my judgment?” To which Nicholas replied, “Close by, warm and not too expensive will be best, thanks, but I do not know any hotels, so yes, definitely, we’ll trust your judgment!”

“Ok then, I’ll take you to the Walper, it’s just a few blocks away, and I know the doorman there well – He’ll look after the two of you!” With that he started to pull away from the curb, driving down the deserted street, with just the sounds of fresh crisp snow softly crunching under the cabs wheels.

“Where are you from? He said looking at them in the mirror.

“South Africa” Nicholas replied ...

“Oh my, you’ve come a long way from home to be found sitting all alone on this cold deserted street by me, and on Christmas eve!” the cabby exclaimed, clicking his tongue.

“We sure have, sir” Nicholas replied “we sure have ...”

“Not sir, young man, just James –plain old James, no airs about me, least not anymore” the driver said with a smile.

“Thanks James!” Nicholas replied, “At least the mention of your name gives us hope, in an otherwise bleak situation.”

“How’s that, young man?” James inquired, intrigued.

“We knew a chauffeur called James in South Africa. Were it not for him, we’d not be together tonight.” Nicholas replied.

“And that’s good? So far from home, all alone, in this life-threatening weather?” James responded, still confused.

“Yes James, you see, we’re at least still together – against tremendous odds, we’re still at least together he repeated – though I’d have to concede, we’re way out of our element!”

“That you are young man, and it can be deadly, so don’t take it lightly!” “What are your names? And how come you’ve ended up in this lonely predicament?” he inquired.

“Elizabeth and Nicholas, we’re engaged James ... and we planned on spending Christmas with Elizabeth’s parents who live in Waterloo, but things didn’t work out too well, and her mother threw us out onto the street, so here we are, alone on Christmas eve, and a bit scared!” Nicholas replied

“Well I’m not sure I understand all of what you’re saying, and she sure sounds downright mean, but I will predict this much Nicholas ... years from now, you’ll both look back at this night, and remember sitting on that bench, in the snow, just the two of you young sweethearts ... together, at the opposite end of the world from what you’ve always known as your home. Really, it’s the kind of thing that builds a special bond, like being in a war, in winter, in Europe, along with your fellow soldiers, with the snow falling all around you – a few hundred meters from the German front-lines on Christmas eve” he said remembering what that was like.

“You did that James?” Nicholas inquired rather surprised.

“Yes young man, I did, and I survived that Christmas eve, in the snow, and all of what followed - perhaps so that I could drive by the two of you here tonight, and somehow help you both to realize that you can do the same!” James replied with a wry smile, adding “somehow there’s a bigger script to life than the small one we see as we live each day. At my age I think somehow it’s all connected into a complex plot that’s been unfolding now for ... well, forever, so my meeting you here tonight when I was already meant to be home, was not a coincidence –it’s part of that grand-scheme I mentioned.”

“Well James, thank you from both of us that you did not go home early, I mean, judging from the deserted downtown here, I’d have understood your decision to not stay longer.” Nicholas says as James pulled up in front of the Walper’s main entrance, adding “So what do I owe you James?”

“A simple Merry Christmas Nicholas -that’s payment enough for this short ride! In a way I feel I’m repaying an old debt, because you see, I returned home to safety once – but many of my pals still lie buried in Europe with only a little white cross to mark the spot, with their name – largely forgotten by the generations that followed ours – but not by me and my old mates who made it – one of whom you’re about to meet here tonight at the Walper.”

Chapter 15

Nicholas & Lizzie's Walper hotel welcome ...

“Well then, let me first get the young lady safely into the warm lobby of the Walper Hotel, and then you and I can see to the luggage,” James cheerily announced, then proceeded to Elizabeth’s door, opening it, helping her get out and took her into the Lobby. “Just wait here miss, I’ll be back shortly” James said, motioning to another old man, dressed in a hotel uniform, “Hey Freddie boy, Come over here, I have a special delivery for you this Christmas eve! Help me here.” He said, briefly filling him in on the new guests.

Then the two of them went out to help Nicholas carry in the Luggage from the cab. Once they were all in, James placed his hand on Fred’s shoulder, saying to Nicholas and Lizzie “I’m placing you in the care of Freddie, him and I go way back – in fact we first met in WWII, and Freddie will tell you how we spent Christmas eve in 1944, in Europe, in the snow, as part of the Calgary Highlanders” he said, smiling.

“So you see, if old Freddie boy and me made it through that Christmas in 1944 -so can the two of you!” James said, now placing his other hand on Nicholas’ shoulder.

“Thanks James – we really needed to hear that message of hope tonight! Are you sure I don’t need to pay you for this life-saving ride?” Nicholas inquired, again, of James, as he smiled in the warmth of the lobby of the stately old hotel.

“Nothing -no money young man, but another simple request ... one day when you tell this story to your children and grandchildren – or to anyone else, include the part about two Canadian WWII veterans from the Calgary Highlanders, that came to your assistance on a cold snowy Christmas eve

in Canada, and how they survived a cold snowy Christmas on the front-lines - forced to listen to the nearby Germans serenading the Canadian lines with bugles and accordions, with musical selections including Christmas Carols such as Jingle Bells, with O Canada as a finale. At one point a bass tuba also joined in -after Christmas we returned to fighting.”

“I will remember to do that James ... and thanks, thanks to both of you, of all the people we could have met tonight, we really needed to meet you two most of all!” Nicholas replied, as both him and Lizzie, together, hugged the old man and wish him a very merry Christmas.

“Merry Christmas to you two as well! Freddie boy will take over from me now, his still serving on the front-lines tonight, I’m heading home to warm myself up by the fireplace and be with my wife. God bless you two, this Christmas and each and every Christmas yet to come. May you always spend Christmas together, happy, for as long as you both shall live!” James said, and with his hat now in his hands, he smiled, waved, putting on his hat and just before turning to go, said “Take good care of them Freddie boy, and merry Christmas to you too!”

“Merry Christmas to you and the missus too Jimmy old pal, I’ll be by tomorrow for some eggnog when I get off duty – see you then” and with that James was gone and Freddie started loading the bags onto his cart and motioned them to follow him to the front desk.

“Hey Jean, we have a young couple here from Africa, stuck in our fair town on their honeymoon (Freddie said winking at them) adding “They’re more than a little out of their depth, what can we do to cheer them up tonight?”

“That depends, what can you afford young man?” Jean asks

“Not much, I’m afraid Jean ... we hadn’t quite planned on spending Christmas eve on our own – but unfortunately it’s just the way things worked out.” Nicholas replied.

“Oh well, sometimes things happen for a reason” Jean replied “But I’ll tell you what, we don’t have much of a demand for our honeymoon suite over Christmas and today’s a Sunday – we’re empty! You two are going to be the only guests, so how about I charge you for a regular room, and we put you up in there till after boxing day – till Wednesday around noon?” Jean inquired with a smile.

“Thank you Jean, thank you so very much – that would be perfect!” Nicholas exclaimed.

“Well then Mr. and Mrs ...?” Jean continued ...

“Strauss - like the composer,” Nicholas interjected.

“Ok then Mr. and Mrs. Strauss, just fill in your names etc. here on this form and Freddie will have you and your bags up to the Honeymoon suite in a jiffy” she said cheerfully!

Nicholas complied and Jean handed the keys to Freddie and said “Oh, by the way, I forgot to mention, the honeymoon suite comes with free Champagne and breakfast in bed, and tomorrow we are having a special Christmas dinner in the Crystal ball-room that’s free for all staff and guests – it’s a long standing tradition here, at which all of our staff and their families are present too, it’s a lot of fun and the food’s real good! Even several German treats as well as normal Christmas fare, which with a name like Strauss, you should really appreciate!” Jean said to him, with a wink.

“That sounds like fun Jean, thanks, Elizabeth actually speaks German, I don’t anymore, even though my family is from there originally,” Nicholas replied.

“Really, is that so ... well Freddie, on the way up to the Honeymoon suite, tell them a bit of the history of Kitchener – they may be quite surprised!” Jean suggests as the phone started ringing and she had to answer it now.

“Come on then you two, follow me to the elevators” he said. “You see, what Jean was trying to say, is that Kitchener sounds British, but it used to be called New Berlin till the first World war, then they renamed it. We have the largest

population of Germans in Canada and each year we host the largest October-fest outside of Germany!" Freddie said.

"And you don't mind living here and celebrating with them after what you and James went through in the war in Germany?" Nicholas inquired -more than a little surprised.

"Heck no, the Germans we fought were just as much victims as we were. I'm sure all of them would have preferred to be back home with their families on Christmas eve, and not in the snow and mud a few hundred meters from us, wondering what nasty surprises tomorrow may bring." Freddie said with a shrug. "That's war for you – nasty stuff!"

"Well, here we are, just follow me and we'll soon have you settled into your comfy warm honeymoon suite" and soon enough, Freddie stopped at a room, unlocked its door, switched on the lights and lead them in. Then he turned on the wall-radio with it's predictable, continuous assortment of Christmas carols and favorites at that time of year ...

"Oh wow ... "Exclaimed Elizabeth, what a beautiful room – look at that big old four poster bed -and its lace curtains!", as she ran over to the bed feeling the curtains, then she spotted the bathroom and the huge bath and mirrors and marble everywhere! Then Freddie opened the heavy curtains uncovering a huge bay window - the round table and chairs now overlooking a beautiful scene right out of a fairy-tale!"

"Yes, with a beautiful view of the city square, in the snow, and its old German Clock tower!" Freddie said. This hotel has been here since 1893! It's an historic Gem!" he added.

"Thank you so much Freddie, this warm room and all of you caring folks we've met tonight are exactly what we needed!" Lizzie said, giving the old man a hug.

Freddie smiled, his wrinkles accentuated, replying "You're welcome miss ... here, give me your coats and gloves, I'll hang them up for you, and then added as he turned towards the coat-rack ... "And Nicholas, just take a look in the little fridge over there, there's enough cold champagne for you

two to have one heck of a party, but you'll have to call down tomorrow morning, when you're ready for Breakfast, as they have instructions not to disturb anyone in the Honeymoon suite - until they've asked ... and don't forget tomorrow night's Christmas dinner starts at 6pm sharp! Besides being the best Christmas dinner in town, we'll all be singing Christmas carols and enjoying the best German desserts and Schnapps afterwards. Plan on being there to join us all, the hotel is rather empty, but we'll all be there. We're a big happy family, everyone's invited!" He said smiling happily.

"Freddie ... that all sounds so happy ... so very welcome for us right now! Here, please take this tip, it's not much, but you've made an otherwise tumultuous night rather special already!" Nicholas said, trying to place the folded \$5 bill into Freddie hands. But he simply closed both of his hands around Nicholas's hands and said "Thank you young master Nicholas, but I really could not - not tonight. I've a feeling you two need all the help you can get - and tonight I'm just one more person in Kitchener that is privileged to be able to help as much as I can -and to let you two know that there are people around you that do care - even when those who should care, do not ... so please, the two of you - just relax now, and we'll see you tomorrow evening at the Christmas Dinner," Freddie said as he headed back out of the room, stopping only to say "And please call if you need anything more!" then, smiling, he started closing the door ...

"Thanks Freddie!" Nicholas called after him, with a smile, adding "Thank you, from the bottom of our hearts!"

"You're welcome" he heard Freddie cheerfully say out in hall, as he now turned to Lizzie - still admiring the nice features of the Walper's Honeymoon suite, and said "Well Lizzie, once again it's Christmas eve and other than all of that drama, we're still together, still in love!" then watched as Lizzie looked back at him, paused for a while, thinking about what he'd said and then she also smiled... a happy-sad kind of smile, to be sure - but at least it was a smile!

Chapter 16

A Cold and lonely Christmas eve – for the Smythes.

Hearing the car pull up to the house, the garage door open – then close, Constance, who was seated in her favorite big old leather, high backed arm-chair - her dad's favorite old chair brought with her from South Africa, her arms on its arm-rests, her hands firmly gripping its wooden accent, did not rise to greet Edwin as he entered the room, but watched him taking off his gloves, placing them in his coat pocket and hang it on the coat-rack ... and then only she spoke.

“Edwin, did you do exactly what I asked you to do?” She inquired, her voice calm, her face emotionless “Did you make sure to abandon Elizabeth on the sidewalk – out in the cold and snow ... that was key to my plan!” she asked.

“Yes dear, I did, though I must say, I’ve never felt as terrible as I do now! I sure hope your plan works!” He replied, the stress of his mission evident on his face and labored reply.

“Good! It’s done! We’ll wait patiently until Elizabeth cracks – that shouldn’t be long now. She’ll blame Nicholas for all the pain she’s suffering now, also for her past pain, for the loss of her family, then she’ll want him out of her life! You’ll see Edwin ... I know your daughter, she’ll do the right thing in the end...” but before she could finish, Edwin interrupted.

“You mean, she’ll do whatever you demand of her... right or wrong - that you’ll bully her into submission, like when we left South Africa? Do you really think this time it will work?”

“Yes Edwin, I do! She did come back to us here from Africa! By my calculations, Nicholas will run out of the needed funds for Elizabeth’s airfare back to Africa, in about 3 days, and she’ll have no choice but to return here... to her home...

to her family... to us – and alone!” Constance replied, a thin smile creeping over her lips –a steely look now in her eyes.

“How can you be so sure of that?” Edwin inquires.

“Because I’ve made it my business to stay on top of what they’re up to and I’ve long since suspected what they’re planning, and when, and how much money Nicholas and Elizabeth have, and how much it will cost to fly her back with Nicholas to Cape Town, - and the good news Edwin, is that by Boxing day, that will be impossible! So you see why it had to be tonight ... with all the travel agencies closed till at least Boxing day, their cause is lost!” and now Constance started chuckling “Their cause, Edwin, is a lost cause! It’s over - Elizabeth has lost and all that remains is to pick up the pieces and try to forget about that horrid Strauss boy, Cape Town, South Africa and all such nonsense! The sooner the better! Soon it will all just be a bad memory for us and Elizabeth will associate Nicholas with immense pain and suffering that she’d never had before - until she met him!”

“Well, I did make them a promise before I left them standing there in the cold, in King street, dear...” Edwin said, wincing as he waited for the inevitable response.

“And what might that be Edwin?” Constance inquires.

“I promised them that if they contact me at the Tannery, having changed their minds about returning to South Africa, I’d insist on letting both of them return here, at least until Nicholas’ flight leaves for Cape Town ...” Edwin replied ... but before he could elaborate, Constance, her demeanor now changing, her face contorted in anger shouted “*How dare you make a promise like that without first consulting me! No Edwin! Only Elizabeth is to come home! Nicholas Strauss is no longer welcome in this home! Why on earth would you go against my explicit instructions and my plan?*”

“Because it seemed like the decent thing to do under the circumstances ... I mean, he is Lizzie’s fiancée and we do know his parents! What if it was our daughter stuck in

South Africa ... like she was, they took good care of her while we were gone.” Edwin said, trying to explain himself.

“Who cares Edwin! That is his and their own problem ... I’m really most disappointed that you would want to make it our problem again!” Constance emphatically, angrily declared.

“Well dear, I made them that promise, and if they do ever contact me at my office - which really would rather surprise me now, that is exactly the only circumstances under which I will drive Lizzie back here to our home – else I will simply give them the balance of the money they need to return to South Africa, with my blessing.” Edwin stoically replied, wincing noticeably as he anticipated Constance’s wrath.

“You wouldn’t dare Edwin ... you don’t have it in you!” Constance chided him, sneering contemptuously at him.

“Well dear, I guess we’ll just have to wait and see ... won’t we?” Edwin responded, adding “I’m really tired now, I guess I’ll be sleeping in basement tonight, instead of Nicholas ... merry Christmas dear, your fondest Christmas wish has come true, Nicholas is not here in your home tonight, or tomorrow – it’s just a pity that means Lizzie isn’t too, but that was what you wanted – wasn’t it?” Edwin replied, as he turned to go down the basement stairs.

“Yes ... well, you can jolly-well stay down there until Lizzie returns home, and don’t bother me with anymore of your insufferable insolence!” Constance shouted after him.

Hattie, sitting in her night-gown at the top of the second-storey stairs, was intently listening to her parents. She now smiled, then softly sang to herself “Merry Christmas to me, merry Christmas to me ... princess Elizabeth is finally gone! Now the black-sheep is all they have left!” Merry Christmas mother –you may as well get used to many Christmases like this one –I’m your only daughter now!” as she turned quietly to sneak back into her room before mother came upstairs.

Chapter 17

Nicholas & Lizzie's Christmas eve restarts ...

Nicholas watched Lizzie standing in the bay window, in her traditional German Dirndl dress, her looking out at the old square below, with big snow flakes falling all round. It was a magical Christmas scene – filled with a mix of emotions ... love, pity, adoration and gratefulness. As they stood there, alone in the Honeymoon suite, he knew that was exactly because they were victims of a very cruel person's heartless schemes. This wasn't the perfect honeymoon night they'd always dreamed about. This situation was foisted on them and so they shouldn't allow themselves to be puppets on the strings of a cruel puppeteer! Ideal as this setting was, on Christmas eve, no less - a time of year that had always been so important in their enduring love story, their Honeymoon night would simply now have to wait until events in their romance unfold much more normally ... when they were married, and on their terms – not on Constance's terms!

As Nicholas moved to Lizzie, putting his arms around her waist, from behind, Lizzie turned her head slightly to the side and backwards, to meet him half way ...

"It's beautiful Nicholas, look at the big fluffy snow flakes falling all around, and the Christmas lights, the old Clock. Suddenly, after the turmoil we've been through today, it's so quiet, so peaceful. Once again Nicholas ..." and she turned to face him, looking up into his eyes before she spoke again, tears welled up in her eyes "Once again, I'm probably the only Christmas present you're going to get this year. I hope you like what you see Nicholas Strauss, because, for better or for worse, richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, you're stuck with me now. You're the only one I've got left in the whole wide world!" she said smiling through her tears. Nicholas, for a moment, was speechless – contemplating the immensity of Lizzie's words -the reality of their predicament,

but before he could reply, Lizzie continued ... “Nicholas, I’m in serious need of your reassurances now ... I mean, I’ve lost it all, on account of my love for you – I know that’s not your fault - it’s not even my fault –that you and I are both victims of mother now, but I really do need to know exactly how you feel about me and our love – and also our future together?”

Nicholas, now realizing the gravity of Lizzie’s words, replied. “Lizzie, you’ve just asked me several questions, so I’m going to start by answering the first one ... Elizabeth, I’ve always been happy with what I see in you, not just your beauty, but the wonderful, loving person I’ve always known you to be, so if all I ever get for any Christmas, is you, I’ll die a very happy man – though hopefully a long time from now!” he quipped.

Lizzie smiled at him through her tears, letting him continue.

“Lizzie, you know I’ve wanted to marry you for a long time already, that’s never been in question...” but before he could continue, Lizzie interrupted him ...

“It’s just that we’ve been engaged for almost two years now, and every time we’ve wanted to get married, something has happened to thwart us and prevent us from getting married. But now the one person who orchestrated all of that, has chosen to remove herself entirely from my life, so Nicholas, that also means she cannot say ‘No, not now, it’s not a good time’ or ‘Just wait for...’ or use any of her never-ending stalling tactics - ever again!” Now Lizzie looks up at him, peering deep into his eyes “There’s no reason to wait any longer Nicholas ... so I’m wondering, what’s your decision?”

“That’s certainly true Lizzie, though we’ve not been afforded the luxury of being able to plan any wedding - but if you’re OK with the idea, perhaps we can marry on the way back to South Africa, in London maybe?” Nicholas replied -but before he could explore more options, Lizzie continued ...

“Sure Nicholas, we can do something like that. I suggest that here, tonight, with the help of a bottle of Champagne and our imaginations, we distract ourselves from the cold harsh reality of what’s been foisted on us and dream about options ... I mean, we can certainly let a formal ceremony and government paperwork catch up with our reality a little

later, but for now Nicholas, on this Christmas eve, here in snowy Canada, let's imagine we're back in the Wilderness, where we first met and fell in love, and where we've always been at Christmas, again back under the African moonlight at our waterfall and pool... so then please listen well to what I am about to say to you... I really need to see and hear how you feel about me, about our love ... and about our future."

Nicholas hadn't quite figured out yet where Lizzie was going with her train of thought, but realized she was very serious about wanting some form of an iron-clad commitment from him –total reassurance, and given the circumstances, to him that was fully understandable. He looked out at the cold, snowy scene, the only color was added by Christmas lights.

"Lizzie, that's going to take some serious imagination on our parts –this is definitely not a familiar African Christmastime scene -but then again, we've always been able to imagine ..."

Lizzie smiled briefly, then became serious again. Holding both of his hands firmly in hers, Lizzie stepped back a little, so that both of them could focus clearly now on each other's faces and look deep into each others eyes ... and then after composing herself, she calmly and purposely proceeded "Nicholas Strauss ... I, Elizabeth Merry Smythe, promise, before God, to be faithful and true to you, and to love you forever, never mind what surprises life may still bring our way - and by now you should have an inkling that that's no empty promise on my part!" Then placing her right hand index-finger on his lips, to prevent him from replying to her just yet, she continued ...

"Nicholas Strauss, do you promise, before God, me and all of Heaven, to be faithful and true to me, to love me loyally, forever, never mind what hardships or challenges life still chooses to send our way?" adding "only the truth please!"

Nicholas, instead of replying right away, looked deeply into her enquiring, hopeful eyes – still moist with her tears, then with his free hand gently stroked her cheeks, as if to wipe away all remaining tears and any lingering hurt ... and as Lizzie removed her finger from his lips, he replied making sure to measure his tone and his words very carefully ...

“Elizabeth Merry Smythe, you know I’ve always loved you , and I know ... I always will! I promise you and pray with you tonight –on this, the Christmas eve of 1978, 7 years after we first met and fell in love in far away Africa, that God ... and yes, all of Heaven Lizzie, witness my solemn promise to you, that I’ll be at your side, faithfully loving you and only you, Elizabeth, forever, for as many days as God is kind enough to still let me live -to share your life, also to feel your love ... and by now, Mrs. Elizabeth Strauss, after all that we’ve been through, you too should have the good sense to know that I mean exactly what I say! So now it’s time to kiss my bride!”

Then, noticing the most beautiful smile appearing on her face, and the twinkle of hope in her eyes grow strong - like a ray of the bright moon’s light breaking through the mists in her still moist eyes, Nicholas moved his hands into her hair and cradled her head gently in his palms, his thumbs on her temples. Then he moved his lips towards hers and she, sensing the poignancy of the moment, moved to meet his lips. In that moment, with a steady flurry of great big snow flakes drifting gently by the bay-window, coloring the softly glowing world outside pure-white, with only the soft strains of “Silent Night” on the rooms radio still playing, they kissed ... as if it was their very first kiss again, at Christmas, in the Wilderness, 7 years ago, under the Palm trees, next to the river-bank, in the light of the African moon - only this time it was with snow falling softly all around them and now they were stranded all alone in the world, with no reinforcements anywhere near - or even easily contactable, for weeks ... and in faraway Canada. But in the Walper’s honeymoon suite, at such a meaningful time of year for them both... at least they were still together, still in love, still committed to each other.

Chapter 18

The Smythes contemplate the days events ...

Constance, still angry at Edwin, her hatred of Nicholas still fueling her adrenaline further, lay in her upstairs bedroom, tossing and turning, unable to sleep. At least her plan was enacted right on time. So now they were stranded in an expensive place for days before they were able to even try to escape, and when they do try, they'd find out that her plan had clipped Lizzie's wings, that a flight to freedom was now impossible! A satisfied smirk unfolded on Constance's face.

Edwin lay in what was Nicholas' bed - till now, on his back, his hands behind his head, sighing heavily whilst thinking, Nicholas' haunting words still ringing loudly in his ears ...

"Mr Smythe, you owe your daughter more than this, you really do, if you don't want to regret all of these very cruel things for the rest of your life, Please Mr. Smythe, I'm asking you respectfully, do the right thing for her – this is your favorite daughter, I know the two of you are closer than anyone else in your family ... please don't do this to Lizzie!"

Edwin winced. Those words would haunt him for as long as he lived unless he found a way to make up for his cruelty?

But it was Lizzie's words that bothered him the most ...

"Daddy ..." Lizzie pleaded, through her sobs, "How can you do this to me?" Her words repeatedly replayed in his mind.

"You're a grown woman now Lizzie, you've a right to choose your own way in life, but I have to live with your mother, and she has demanded that you and Nicholas leave her home, so really, what choice do I have in this matter?"

“You do have a choice daddy, you’re not just a husband, you’re forgetting that you’re a father too, and by doing mother’s cruel bidding in this case, you’re being just as cruel as her! Do you really want to be her accomplice in her cruel plans?” Lizzie had pleaded with him through her tears.

“I’m sorry you see it that way Lizzie, I really am, but I have no choice in the matter” ... but now, after the fact, lying contemplating the night’s events, tremendous doubts arose within him... it was clear that his daughter felt that he’d not lived up to his responsibilities and thus she couldn’t respect him or trust him any longer – and that’s what really hurt!

“You do have a choice dad, you always have ... you always will, you just choose not to do the right things – you let her bully you into submission and you end up doing all the wrong things instead!” Lizzie’s words echoed in his mind.

Edwin shuddered ... “Those words really hurt – and they always would,” unless he found a way to make it up to Lizzie? Edwin sighed. Falling asleep now would be very difficult, and sleep would no doubt be fitful – at best! He thought. What, if anything, could he ever now do to redeem himself in Elizabeth’s eyes? If he now gave her and Nicholas the money to elope he may as well go and see a divorce lawyer, Constance would make his life miserable, forever – even if she let him stay. That wasn’t an option, nothing was.

Hattie lay in bed, under her warm comforter, on her side, smiling contentedly. Their parents finally had seen Lizzie for what she was. Far from being a “perfect little princess who can never do any wrong” she was now the “black-sheep” of the family ... better yet, she was gone, out of the family! Now Lizzie would feel the pain she’d endured in the last 18 years! Hattie closed her eyes ... contentedly drifting off to sleep. In her dreams, she was the princess, her parents were finally doting on her, so proud of her ... heaping praise on her, and only her ... an only child, as if Elizabeth never even existed! Finally her life was normal - at least it was, in her dreams.

Chapter 19

Nicholas & Lizzie's Christmas eve continues ...

Nicholas turned to Lizzie as they stood in the bay window...

"Elizabeth ... let's continue to build on this happier mood ... how about I bring that table and two chairs over here, then you and I sit here and plan our wedding and life together?"

Lizzie looked at him, an eager smile emerging on her face.

"That sounds wonderful Nicholas! Can I at least go and first repair any damage to my makeup and freshen-up a bit?"

"Of course Lizzie, I'll get things ready here – don't take long!"

Lizzie quickly retreated to the bathroom, Nicholas started to prepare the room for what was to come – a nice distraction! Moving the small round table into the bay-window, framing perfectly the wintry Christmas scene outside, he placed the two chairs next to each other, behind the table, then went over to the mini-bar and opened it. Inside he found several bottles of wine and Champagne - it's the latter he selected, picking up two fluted glasses as he returned to place them on the table, then left the room to scour the passage for an ice-machine, returning with an ice-bucket half-full with ice. Placing it on the table, he worked the bottle of Champagne into the ice, and returned to the mini-bar to find what was still missing – a big bar of milk chocolate, the kinds you find in gift-shops in Heathrow and other European airports! He quickly went to the mirror to run his fingers through his hair and make himself at least a little presentable, just before Lizzie reappeared, her make-up repaired and saw the result of all of his efforts – thus prompting her to exclaim ...

"Wow Nicholas, that's really sweet of you ... I could do with some champagne now and what's this ... CHOCOLATE!"

Nicholas now moved over to her, delighted to see her smile and her return to happiness, prompting him to remark ...

“Lizzie, I’m so happy to see how you’ve bounced back from the events of tonight ... months ago in Cape Town, when I was forced to let you go back to live with your mother, I was convinced that you’d not survive if I didn’t ...” but Lizzie now moved to him, placing her finger on his lips, interrupting ...

“Nicholas, I’ve grown-up, I’ve had to! I’ve really never been given any choices by her - only by you! Yours was incredibly kind, perhaps foolish - you may have thought, while from her I got no choice – just stubborn, unbending selfishness!”

Nicholas reflected for a moment ... “Well Lizzie, at that very crucial, sad time, her rather prophetic words replayed in my head “If you love her ... you will let her go!” and Lizzie, I’ve always loved you and wanted the best for you ... I imagined I’d always be there with you, at your side - but I had to let you go... I couldn’t ever be happy, seeing you so unhappy!”

Lizzie now looked into his eyes, seeing them ever so slightly moist as momentarily he relived his pain, then she replied...

“Nicholas, you may not have thought so then ... but it was your very unselfish decision that won you your bride – plus her loyalty to you, from now on. My mother’s cruel actions have lost me for her. I’ll never again let her ruin my life or yours!” She paused briefly, noticing how it now dawned on Nicholas that his painful, unselfish decision won that battle –even when back then it looked like he had lost! She smiled.

Then Elizabeth continued ...

“I hope you’ll forgive that foolish young girl for causing you so much pain? I can hardly relate to her anymore - Please tell me you will! I need your forgiveness - I really, really do!” Nicholas smiled –a relived happy smile, Lizzie had grown up!

“Elizabeth ...” He always used her full name when he needed her to know he was real serious “I’m not sure why you’ve felt that way? Of course you have my forgiveness – though I’ve not thought you needed it - it was a matter of your survival!”

Lizzie looked relieved. That truly was a huge injustice she'd inflicted on him, one she'd felt a lot of guilt over ever since she'd left Nicholas to return to her mother in Canada. Lizzie winced as it occurred to her how different things could have been - if Nicholas had deeply resented her actions instead!

Then Nicholas continued ...

"Elizabeth, let's toast our loves victory and start planning our futures together right here ... right now? How about it?"

"Nicholas, now this room is beginning to feel a lot like our waterfall and pool back in the Wilderness ... I wonder if it's a lonely place tonight, or if two other young lovers have found its allure irresistible?" Yes, let's do that ... and let's not even mention my mother or my old family again here tonight and preferable not tomorrow on Christmas day either - It's their loss! We have to rise above it all -and not be defeated by it!"

With that said, Nicholas moved to seat Lizzie, and picked up the bottle of Champagne, examined it and jokingly said ...

"Well Lizzie, I'm afraid I have none of Charles' airs or even his knowledge of wines, I'm just hoping this is bubbly and cold!" as he now proceeded to uncork it, not yet an expert.

Lizzie giggled ... "Yes, well, he is a bit pretentious; I guess it goes along with wealth and his family's esteemed standing in British high-society -but really, I'd rather relate to British and German bar-maids right now, dressed in this Bavarian Dirndl dress... so I'd be just as happy with a pint of beer!"

The ice, of the days events, now clearly broken, their moods cheerful again, Nicholas poured Lizzie's glass of bubbly then filled his glass too, returning the bottle to the ice-bucket and sat down next to Lizzie, angling his chair towards her, lifting his glass, then watched as Lizzie reached for her glass and lifted it to meet his - and then Nicholas proposed a toast ...

"Elizabeth, I propose this toast, my feisty bride-to-be ... may our lives be long and happy, and all our dreams come true!"

Elizabeth clinked her glass against Nicholas' and they both took their first sip of champagne "Hmmm ... a crisp, fruity

vintage” Lizzie said, smiling - putting on some snobby airs.

“Yes well, thankfully it’s bubbly and cold!” Nicholas laughed.

“Now I’d like to make my toast” Lizzie replied “You know, it’s Christmas eve and if you cast your mind back – way back to our special place and what we did there ... we both got to make wishes, not just you” she said, teasing him. “My toast is that all 6 of the wishes we’ve already made there together, come true for us and also that we be granted an opportunity to make our last 7th wish back at our pool again in faraway Africa, and whatever it is that we’re moved to agree on for that final wish, that it also may come true in life!” she said.

“Bravo Lizzie ... that’s simply a splendid toast!” Nicholas exclaimed as they again clinked their glasses, sipping their champagne to seal the deal. “How about we sit here drinking Bubbly ... err ... I mean Champagne, and we remember each wish in turn and evaluate any progress we’ve made since then?” Nicholas suggested ...

“Excellent suggestion Nicholas! Let’s drink to that!” Lizzie responded, clinking her glass against his, now a little more giddy than before – the bubbly beginning to work its magic.

“Ok then ...” Nicholas replied, “would you mind terribly if I take the lead here and get this wonderful endeavor started?” he said, clinking his glass against hers, so as to encourage their mood of giddiness to continue ... which, aided by yet another sip of their Champagne, it did!

“Not at all sir knight ... I mean, Nicholas, whatever ... just get all of our fond romantic memories going here, as soon as you can!” she said giggling, before she took yet another sip.

Nicholas smiled... “This Christmas eve is going to be wonder filled again, despite the day’s events!” he reflected to himself.

“Ok then, let me see if I can recall how it all unfolded?”

“At your suggestion, as a result of the 7 blasts of the train’s whistle by the kindly old smiling engineer as I guided the canoe under the railway-bridge under the steam-train, up the river toward our secret place, we imagined that we’d

been granted 7 wishes, 3 each – meaning 3 Christmas eve’s together were required for us to make them there. Then a 7th to be agreed on jointly. All of our wishes had to be made at night, on Christmas eve, in each other’s company – except for the 7th, which would require a special journey back to our waterfall and pool in the Wilderness by us, and that sojourn there could be undertaken at any time, as long as we were still together, so we’d not be able to make our final wish if we were separated, not a couple in love. The 7th wish would have to be made, together, as a newlywed couple. Do those terms start to remind you of what we said and why?”

“Yes Nicholas! That’s sure getting my mind back to thinking what it was like, and what was said by us there... continue!”

“As I recall, when you suggested this pact, I passed the buck for our very first wish ... to you” Nicholas sheepishly noted.

“Yes, I do, I recall that very well! And why exactly did you do that? Remember, you’ve been drinking a truth-potion!” she said, winking as she raised her glass to her lips taking a sip.

“It’s simple really, I was in love with you Lizzie, but I did not have the courage to brazenly declare my love for you. I was afraid that if I actually said that, you’d bolt and I’d lose you”

Lizzie, who’d lifted her glass to her lips, now almost choked on her mouthful of champagne, laughing and spluttering as she did “Yes, I could sense you were being cautious –though a better choice of words would be ‘overly cautious’ – I was more than ready to hear your declarations of love, and had to use all my feminine wiles, resorting to rather sneaky ways to get you to say the kinds of things I was longing to hear from you – do you remember that?” Lizzie jokingly asked.

Nicholas chuckled, as he paused for a sip of his champagne “Yes Lizzie, I was acutely aware that you thought I’d been consistent in my romantic gestures towards you –but were of the opinion that I’d short-changed you on all of the usual flowery words girls like to hear – but truthfully, I concluded it was too soon to put my heart out on my sleeve completely, right then – though maybe I was just rather too scared?”

Lizzie laughed “You men ... well actually, some of you men!”
“What do you mean Lizzie?” Nicholas inquisitively inquired.
“Charles didn’t suffer from the same speech-impediment as you did, and come to think of it, Pieter was like you, and ...”
Nicholas interrupted her “But Lizzie ...”

“Yes Nicholas?” she asked, wondering what he was thinking.
“I got the girl!” he remarked, winking as he raised his glass.

Lizzie giggled - a champagne kind of giggle, to be sure, then replied “You did indeed Nicholas, there’s no denying that here and now!” she retorted, raising the glass to her lips to finish the last sip, then holding it towards Nicholas, giggled and with a wink said “You wouldn’t want your fair maiden to die of thirst in your arms here, tonight, now would you?”

Nicholas laughed as he refilled Lizzie’s glass “Lizzie, slow-up a bit on this glass, you’re drinking on an empty stomach, and at the rate you’re going, we’ll not even get as far as the 3rd wish of the six we’re trying to review!” he said as Lizzie giggled –she now suitably distracted from the days events, her mind focused on them, whilst her heart felt a bit like it was back again in their secret place – but that was largely due to the champagne and their desire to focus on their love for each other ... both past and present. Nicholas was happy that Lizzie was distracted... after all it was Christmas eve.

“So I suggested a safer way to be able to say those flowery things to you, whilst still leaving myself squiggle-room just in case you didn’t fully like what I was saying – though for that tardiness on my part, I almost lost you to Charles!” he continued “I’m not sure what I’d do, in hindsight, but I have no doubt what to do tonight, now that we trust each other!”

Lizzie smiled coyly at him “Nicholas, you think I didn’t guess what you were up to?” briefly watching him blush before continuing “But actually, I thought that was a very creative, romantic idea and, as it turned out, it was so enjoyable that we both eagerly participated – then repeated our play-acting so many times that my need for hearing your flowery words of love, abated long enough to buy you time – but you really

shouldn't have waited till the very last moment to declare your love for me –that was risking too much!" she chided.

Nicholas shuddered as he remembered the climactic scene on the train station in Wellington, as he left Lizzie to start his 2 years of national service in the South African air-force.

"Point taken" he replied, lifting his glass "That wasn't smart, I'll not make that mistake ever again!" He assured her.

Lizzie was happy, her head - and her mood, now felt giddy. She was sure of one thing – Nicholas loved her! He'd stood by her through thick and thin despite the pain inflicted on him –mostly because of her. He'd earned her gratitude and respect the hard way –Constance had seen to that! Best of all, he'd protected her from Constance's unfair attempts to control all aspects of her life - both then and now!

"Nicholas –you're stalling yet again! So I'm going to start ... " If I recall correctly, I'd suggested that we use the words of the blue fairy in Disney's Pinocchio to make our wishes, and though this champagne is making my head a little fuzzy, my first wish went like this: *"Star light, star bright, the first star I see tonight, I wish I may, I wish I might, have this wish I wish tonight . . . That one day I may get to live in a place like this, and lie there, every night, in my true love's arms ... with a love that's forever right!"* but then, as you did, I later also admitted that what I secretly had wanted to say, at the time, was: *"... that one day I may get to live in a place like this, and lie there every night, with my Nicholas, my true love, in my arms— with a love that's forever right!"* But I was a bit too shy back then to be that brazen about my love for you – see ..." She said with a wink "I was acting somewhat coy too!"

Nicholas gave her hand a squeeze and smiled knowingly at her, then admitted as much too ... "Lizzie, back then I was not able to come right out and say how much I loved you, I mean, directly to you –but I did find a few workarounds that served to signal to you how I really felt about you–I was shy"

"Well both of us seem a lot less shy around each other now, and given the challenges we've faced and the circumstances

we both find ourselves in now ... here, I mean, that's just as well!" Lizzie remarked "I'm not going to expect you to sleep on the couch – you're going to be keeping me warm in that big old Honeymoon bed over there later on, when we're done reminiscing ... which reminds me, you haven't recounted your 1st wish yet Nicholas ... quit stalling, let's hear it!"

Lizzie took another sip of her champagne, sat back a bit, holding the glass between both her hands, and nodded to Nicholas to begin. Nicholas looked adoringly at Lizzie. She'd distracted him rather well with talk of how the evening was going to end up ... so he was a bit rushed with his response.

"Lizzie, just like back then, I was so enamored with you and your wish that I knew I couldn't improve on it, so I basically copied it –just substituting words as I needed for it to sound right – so rather than give you both versions again, I'm just going to skip straight to the one that really counts – the one I was thinking about –my real wish, as I wished, back then"

"... that one day I may get to live in a place like this, and lie there every night, with you Lizzie, my true love, in my arms— both of us with a love that's forever right!"

Lizzie smiled approvingly as she remembered both times Nicholas and her had made, and later, discussed that wish.

"OK Nicholas, now comes the interesting part – let's evaluate those, our first wishes, and think about how, if ever, they're likely to come true – or not? What do you think? Has any part of our first wishes come true?" Lizzie asked of Nicholas.

Nicholas thought for a while, as he sipped his champagne ...

"Well, the part about 'with you, my true love in my arms, both of us with a love that's forever right' has now come true – we just need to ensure it stays that way, forever; but the part about 'living in a place like this, and lie there every night with you' – well, I think that just sounds so unlikely?"

Lizzie looked at him, playing with the glass in her hands ...

"How so Nicholas? I mean, I agree with the first part of that, but I'm not sure I follow your logic regarding the 2nd. Part?"

"Well Lizzie, we met and fell in love at 16 more or less, inside

the Wilderness National park, at the southern tip of faraway Africa –it’s within that park, in a rather remote part, that we found ourselves making this wish, at our secret place, up-river, hidden deep within the sub-tropical jungle there. I’m studying computer science - my profession is going to limit where we work, live and we raise a family - so I’m not sure how it’s even possible? I mean I’d like for it to be possible!”

“You’re forgetting the ‘one day’ part of our wishes, Nicholas, that’s not the same as ‘right away’ ... so I suggest we just keep that dream alive,” Lizzie replied as she winked at him.

“Ok Lizzie, I’ll agree to that ... so I’ll continue for us both, if you don’t mind – you can relax and correct me if I’m wrong”

Nicholas watched as Lizzie, now relaxed and happy, nodded in agreement, gathering his thoughts, before proceeding ...

“I believe our 3rd and 4th wishes went like this...first yours”
“*I wish I might, have this wish I wish tonight . . . that I will marry my true love, regardless of whom my mother thinks, for me, is right.*” But now Nicholas added “Once again, I couldn’t improve on your wish, so mine was” “. . . *that I will only ever be engaged to and marry, one woman -my true love, regardless of whom Lizzie’s mother thinks, for her, is right!*”

“Did I recall them correctly Lizzie?” Nicholas asked her.

“Yes, that’s completely accurate, but since you’re not a mind reader, I’ll fill you in on what was going on in my mind... as I made my wish, I didn’t allow for my true-love being anyone but you Nicholas! I had no idea what lay ahead, but I did know that I wanted to be your wife, yours forever!” she said.

“That’s nice to know! You’ll recall that when you asked me if I’d already met my true-love...I confirmed that she was you!”

Lizzie now coyly smiled at Nicholas “Yes, I remember that well ... so Nicholas has this wish come true. do you think?”

“I think so” Nicholas replied “We’ve both steadfastly rejected other options that have been foisted on us - though we’re not married yet, so let’s not let-up our guard!” he cautioned

her, and oh ... by the way Lizzie, I've never been engaged to anyone else,! That's definitely not in my plans!" He winked.

"Agreed Nicholas !" Lizzie said , holding out her glass to him . As Nicholas refilled her glass , he thought to himself "This is your 3rd. glass Lizzie, I'd better hurry here, else you're going to end up drinking way too much –and that would be a 1st!" "So, continuing on, our 5th and 6th wishes were made by us on Christmas eve there, a year ago, and mine went like this " *I wish I might, have this wish I wish tonight . . . that as long as we live, we'll never ever spend any Christmas Eve apart, regardless of what her mother thinks for us is right!*"

"Now that almost did not come true! I mean, in hindsight that was a very ambitious wish – since even if we'd spent only one Christmas eve apart, that wish would never then come true! In hindsight it would have been wiser for me to perhaps use the words 'most' or 'almost every' or something like that – but for now it's safe to say it's still true ... and let's pray it always stays that way!" Nicholas suggested.

"Yes, I'd not thought of it that way ... let's pray that way!" Lizzie replied as it too dawned on her that they came close to losing that wish. "Now, I think it's time for me to finish" "My final wish made with you, last Christmas-eve, was..." "*I wish I might, have this wish I wish tonight . . . that one day soon I'll marry my true love and give him strong, healthy sons, to take his name and love me too – and please help me to love them all, as long as I live, with a love that's both true and right!*" – a somewhat bold choice of words, as though I knew we'd get married – least I strongly suspected so, I had no way of knowing if we'll have sons or daughters – or for that matter have any children at all?" Lizzie remarked "But I'm sure hoping that we will, and really, we both will love our daughters, or sons - whichever we end up having!"

Nicholas chuckled "Yes, come to think of it, we were rather bold in our very specific predictions, but I'm in agreement with you, we'll love our children, girls or boys, whichever it ends up being – so that's really not a wish-breaker for me!"

"So Nicholas, the over-riding theme in all our wishes, is that we love each other, wish to marry each other and wish to never be apart from each other, ever again ... do you agree?"

“That’s accurate Lizzie, so let’s drink to that!” he said raising his glass to hers. As they sipped their champagne, he felt sure that their many sad, forced farewells were now finally behind them and they’d now be able to get on with their lives, together. He smiled at Lizzie – *oh how he loved her!*

Little did he know or even suspect, how devious Constance’s plan was - that their flight to freedom was doomed to failure and that their most painful, forced farewell was already well underway – just days away. But for now at least, Nicholas and Lizzie were blissfully unaware of that looming defeat - even as Constance was smugly counting down the days in eager anticipation of her ultimate victory! Just as well they didn’t know what now lay ahead for them ... as that would have resulted in the worst, unhappiest Christmas eve of all! Instead, they were fully immersed in a champagne assisted romantic celebration –both were happy, secure in each other’s love, and looking forward to their new life. Euphoria ruled!



Contrast that photo with Canada and how they found themselves huddling on Christmas-eve 1978



a Canadian statue of young lovers sitting out in the snow of an empty downtown on Christmas eve



30y later, S. America, Chagres National Park. Lizzie and sons? Is it even possible to live inside a National Park, next to rivers, pools and waterfalls? Was this just a vacation ... or was it several wishes come true?

Chapter 20

Nicholas & Lizzie's Christmas-eve, Honeymoon night ...

Nicholas now finished his glass of champagne, put it down on the table, and turning to Lizzie, he said ...

“Well Lizzie, it's been a long day, and I think we'd better get ready for bed now ... it's getting late ... it sounds like they have a very nice Christmas dinner planned for tomorrow.”

Lizzie looked at him, quizzically, finishing her bubbly too, putting her glass down. As she started to get up she had to steady herself by holding onto first her chair, then onto him on her way to get her nightie, and as she did so, remarked “Oh my Nicholas, I think I've had a bit too much to drink! I'm not familiar with this strange feeling, my legs are not quite cooperating very well with me right now!” she said as she made her way to the bathroom to get ready for bed.

Nicholas laughed “Yes Lizzie, I'm noticing a few changes in your gait, not Ballerina-like, but I believe that's temporary and will disappear overnight.” He said – as Lizzie giggled.

While Lizzie's was getting ready for bed, Nicholas stood in the bay-window looking out at the snow, still silently falling, wondering how they ever could've even imagined they'd be here tonight, in cold, snowy, faraway Canada ... he shivered.

Done now, Lizzie's emerged back into the honeymoon suite, heading back over to him. Then putting her arms around his neck, perhaps to steady herself – but also perhaps motivated by Christmas-card scenes they found themselves in, she looked up into Nicholas' eyes – searching there for ideas of what would come next, unsure herself of what to expect? Nicholas sensed her need for reassurance. Rather than say anything, he placed one hand on the small of her back, the other gently in her hair, at the back of her head,

and kissed her, gently at first, but soon very passionately – no words! For a while they just stood there, basking in their love, every now and then repeating the same kiss. Lizzie was now feeling decidedly light-headed, which was mostly due to champagne, but also with some strangely familiar feelings welling up within her chest – soon spreading to her entire body, even on down to her toes – feelings of passion, desire ... but this time champagne assisted and so, turbo charged!

“Nicholas ... “ Lizzie started to say, getting his attention.

“Yes Lizzie?” Nicholas inquired ...

“You know, I’m not sure our safe-word will work here?”

Nicholas laughed – kind of nervously “I think it’s still valid till the day we’re married – but after that it expires, forever!”

“Well, it’s just that I’m not sure I’d like to use it tonight?”

Lizzie said, looking coyly up into his eyes, both arms loosely around his neck “I mean, for all intent and purposes, we’re already married ... right?” she said “We’ve said our vows!”

“Yes, I think so, we’ve said our vows, rather formally I recall, and promised each other – and God, that we’d honor them!”

“Then Nicholas, tonight you may think of me as your bride!” Lizzie said, invitingly, winking at him “I’m relaxed... happy!”

“I’d better hurry up and get ready for bed too!” Nicholas now remarked, then eagerly bending down to place his one hand behind her knees, the other on the small of her back, lifted her, carrying her to their honeymoon bed, placing her down gently on it, bending over to kiss her forehead, saying “Let me cover you up and tuck you in so you can lie here and look at the snow flakes falling out there – while I get ready.”

Lizzie smiled contentedly up at him - not saying anything. Before long he emerged, walking over to the bed “Lizzie ...” he said, to get her attention - but there was no answer. Nicholas went closer, stood next to her in their Honeymoon bed ... her eyes were shut. How serenely happy she looked – like “Sleeping Beauty” he thought “and like her, fast asleep!”

Nicholas sighed ... thinking to himself “Last year it was the noisy love-birds that interrupted our passionate moments , this year it’s the quiet , gently drifting snow -flakes and the soft strains of Christmas music on the room’s radio that’s sabotaged our passions - and oh yes, all that champagne!”

With that reality sinking in Nicholas now got into bed beside Lizzie, gently moving her into his arms. She didn’t awaken, but instinctively snuggled into his chest. Nicholas smiled. “Considering how the night started...this is a happy ending!” Then as soft strains of Christmas music played on the room’s wall-radio, Nicholas closed his eyes thanking God for Lizzie. Before he could get too long-winded with his prayers, he drifted off to sleep with her snuggled safely in his arms. For a brief moment again ... all was well in their little world!



Elizabeth and Nicholas, 5 years prior, at Christmas-time in 1973, the end of Grade-12

Chapter 21

Nicholas & Lizzie awake on Christmas morning

Nicholas was still asleep as Lizzie woke next to him – a little bewildered. What happened last night? “Ouch!” she thought, “Why’s my head hurting and why am I feeling so strange?” She quickly went over their pre-bedtime activities ... then urgently nudged Nicholas, almost panicking, saying ...

“Nicholas, wake up!” She nudged him again. He rolled over.

Nicholas opened his eyes, blinked a few times, then smiled up at her –focusing on a rather worried, confused looking Lizzie leaning over him, her hair and her demeanor ruffled!

“Good morning Lizzie ... Merry Christmas!” he said, suddenly remembering what day it was ...

“Oh yes, Merry Christmas Nicholas” Lizzie said, also now remembering ... “So Nicholas, what exactly happened here last night? She said ... adding “Ouch! My head hurts!”

“I believe that’s called a hangover, Lizzie!” Nicholas replied, “Almost definitely as a result of treating Champagne like pop instead of with patience and respect” He jokingly chided her.

“Yes, well, I’ll be more careful in the future – but can you please fill in the gaps for me as my recollections are a bit sketchy?” Lizzie implored – looking rather worried. “I mean, I may be delivering on at least part of my last wish some 9 months from now if my mood from last night ended up the way all that champagne was urging it to end, for me, for us!”

Nicholas laughed. “Lizzie, I don’t think you can get pregnant from Champagne alone –though I’d hasten to add it’s often a serious contributor!” Nicholas teasingly reassured her “But if you’re asking what else happened, well then I’d also add that snoring is not an accepted method for falling pregnant – in fact, I think most would agree that it’s right up there with the pill as an effective means of birth-control!” he joked

Lizzie looked relieved ... “So what you’re saying is that nothing happened here last night?” Lizzie inquired again.

“Well, I’d not characterize it quite that way Lizzie... I mean, I think we did and said some rather adult things last night...”

Now Lizzie, once again very worried, interrupted him ...

“Nicholas... quit stalling, I’m not in that sort of mood, I want to know what exactly happened here – and by that I mean in this bed, last night, between you and me? What did I say or agree to? What exactly did we do? I can’t recall anything!”

Nicholas thought for a brief moment that maybe he could be evasive a while longer, but then he looked up into Lizzie’s eyes and knew he had to tell the truth right away –not later!

“Elizabeth, we were intent on making last night our honeymoon night –I mean, both of us were clearly in the mood for passion – but by the time I got to this bed ... in that short few minutes, you were sound asleep – and looking every bit like ‘Sleeping Beauty’, so I got into bed next to you and we slept cuddled up to each other and well ... here I am, having to answer a whole lot of urgent questions.” He said, smiling.

“So I’m still your virgin-bride?” Lizzie asked - just to be sure.

“Yes, you are – and if you are pregnant, that would be most unusual, so you can relax and return to lying in my arms.

Lizzie let out a sigh as she fell back into his arms “Thanks Nicholas ... Merry Christmas, again, and once again, other than my gift to you still under the tree in my parents home, that somehow did not manage to make it into my suitcase, I’m your only Christmas present today – though I’d hasten to add – You can’t unwrap this present quite yet, that will have to wait a while longer ...” adding “now that I’m sober!”

Nicholas chuckled “Thank you Lizzie, that’s a lovely present! Besides me being your present too, I have something for you – it turns out, I found another bottle of that Champagne ...”

Lizzie pulled a few of his chest hairs as she replied “Stop teasing me Nicholas, I’m not unwrapping either of those presents here – today! They’ll just both have to wait a while.

“Well, in that case, why don’t we just lie here for a while, in each other’s arms, chatting ... I mean, other than Christmas dinner at 6pm in the Crystal ball room, we have no fixed plans or commitments – though it does look like the snow has ended and the sky is blue, so later maybe we can go out for a walk – if we bundle-up! The ice on the outside of the windows hints at it being a bit cold!” Nicholas suggested.

“That sounds good Nicholas, you can lie here while I quickly go make myself a bit less ruffled looking, and I need to pee!” Lizzie, said, giggling, as she leapt out of bed “Ow...my head!” she immediately exclaimed as she got up, holding her head “I’ll have to remember that next time I drink champagne!”

Nicholas lay back on the pillow, his hands behind his head, smiling and thinking ... “It’s already late in the afternoon of Christmas day in the Wilderness, I wonder what my parents are doing?” All of them and Africa now felt so very far away. “But at least I’m here with Lizzie, to protect her and rescue her from a very cold country – back to warm sunny Africa!”

Lizzie emerged, still in her nightie, looking radiant, with a beautiful smile, despite her hangover. Nicholas got out of bed, preempting her return to bed, and led her to the bay-window overlooking the snow scene outside – under a clear blue sky and bright sunshine, and stood there for a while.

“Lizzie, look, the clock says it’s almost 9 am, we’ve certainly slept well and lingered in bed a while, so stand here for now, I’m just going to freshen-up too –I mean, brush teeth, shave. I’m just no match for your morning beauty” He said to her.

“Sure Nicholas ... but I’d like to get back into bed again and cuddle with you – it’s cold out there ... what’s our rush?” she inquired, smiling at him, grateful for his compliment. “and, by the way, don’t bother ordering room-service, right away I’m not hungry –in fact the thought of food right now isn’t very agreeable to me –let’s wait a few hours.” she said.

Nicholas laughed ... “No problem Lizzie, but your queasiness too shall pass, and I’ll ask them if we can be served our honeymoon breakfast at around 11am, that will give us

plenty of time to get hungry again before the Christmas dinner tonight – by then we'll be as hungry as ever!"

A short while later, Lizzie lay there, snug in bed with her Nicholas, both of them chatting away excitedly about their wedding plans, the trip back to Africa, and all the familiar people and places she'd left behind. It was carefree chit-chat that they'd engaged in ... freedom was beckoning and they were now able to love each other - without complications!

Later, while Lizzie got ready, Nicholas ordered in the room-service breakfast that was included for this suite, and when she emerged, before her was a cart with a few dishes on it – all with silver domed-lids, Orange juice and a carafe of coffee with small jug of cream and a bowl of sugar cubes.

Nicholas smiled as now Lizzie was curiosity about what was under the lids, asking "Lizzie, looks to me like you're feeling a lot better?" adding "Just as well you didn't have a 4th glass of champagne last night!" Teasing her as she laughed too.

"Yes, well, I'll have to watch that stuff! It kind of creeps up on you and you only notice it when you stand up –or try to!" she replied, now cognizant of the dangers of enjoying bubbly a bit too fast – or too much, adding "Please stop me at two!"

Nicholas laughs "Yes, I think that'll be more than adequate for you Lizzie ... somehow, you just don't need a 3rd glass!" Lizzie changed the subject "What's under these Nicholas? Can I look?" she asked him, burning with curiosity now.

"Of course Lizzie. Help yourself while I quickly get ready ... I won't be too long!" he replied, watching her lift the lids.

When Nicholas returned, looking and feeling fresh again, he noticed Lizzie enjoying her Coffee with what appeared to be a giant Cinnamon bun. He poured his Coffee, sitting down.

"What's that Lizzie?" he asked her "Looks really good!"

Lizzie looked at the menu that came with the cart, replying "It says this is Schneckenudeln... odd name, but it's nice!" she said, handing the menu to him to read too ...

"I can't say I understand any of that -but the 'nude' part of this pastry's name may be significant in the honeymoon suite!" he joked causing Lizzie to briefly blush as she smiled.

"Hey Lizzie, look at this ..." he exclaimed, lifting up another lid and finding Eggs Benedict "That's one of our favorites!"

"Yum! Lizzie replied, that's my next course, for sure!"

"I think I'll start with two of them rather - then only later have the nude pastry, but feel free to have sweets first!" he said to Lizzie, already fully aware of her penchant for cake.

They sat chatting away, enjoying their sumptuous feast and then Nicholas had an idea. "I wonder if the cinema on King st. is open this afternoon? It was closed last night when we sat on the bench nearby, but sometimes cinemas open for a Christmas matinee -for those feeling lonely with no family to enjoy Christmas with ... why don't I check?" he suggested, adding "It would be a great way to while away time before dinner - or we could stay in the room, you could get back into your nightie... I'll open up another bottle of Champagne and who knows, this time we may just not fall asleep?" he said, teasing her - noticing her blush even more this time!

"Nicholas! Stop being naughty! The moment's past and we've already agreed to stick to just two glasses of Champagne, so you're not getting as lucky here today as in your fantasies!" Lizzie chided him, "Besides it's Christmas ... be respectful!"

Nicholas laughed. "Hey, you can't blame me for trying! I mean, here we are, alone in the Honeymoon suite, lots of time on our hands, you're my Christmas present once again - and I'm yours, plus we have Champagne and even some Chocolate left too! It's cozy and romantic!" He winked at her.

"Go check on your movie idea Nicholas... that will be far safer for both of us today -I'm beginning to weaken, though that may just be the cinnamon in this pastry?" she joked.

Nicholas sighed, getting up and saying "I'll be right back!"

Now Lizzie was done with half of her very large pastry, so she decided to try the Eggs Benedict – dishing it up and freshening her coffee. Before she was done eating, Nicholas was back and had the information they'd need, for later on.

“Lizzie, good news! There's a matinee at 2pm, till about 4pm, which is perfect! We'll need to be at dinner at 6pm –so that's more than enough time to get back, relax, then get ready!” adding “and oh, by the way, you're going to love this! Just like Christmas night each year at Siesta, when Mr. Nixon screened a Disney movie for us all, this is a Disney movie too!” and before she could ask he told her “it's Snow-White!”

“Oh that will be lovely Nicholas!” Lizzie exclaimed, adding “Just what we need, an uncomplicated, fun movie to watch!”

“Yes, but we've still got 2 hours to while away till we need to go – it's very close by, actually – 10 minutes, and the sun's out in a clear blue sky today!” Nicholas says, adding - ever hopeful “There's still the Champagne!” Pointing to the fridge.

“Nicholas! Quit joking around! Let's just sit and chat, shall we?” she playfully scolded him “We still have our German Cinnamon-bun pastries and Coffee – let's enjoy them now!”

“OK, Lizzie, I'll join you on a coffee-date here –that sounds like fun too!” he said, taking one of the pastries and filling up his cup with coffee, cream and as usual, 2 sugar cubes.”

Nicholas and Lizzie kept chatting away about anything and everything – except the heavy stuff! No mention of family. The two of them were feeling so spoilt – so adult, so special, that it was tough to imagine Christmas day with her family would have been anywhere near as special Nicholas thought to himself – but wisely said nothing! Instead he suggested to Lizzie that they, being pleasantly full and relaxed, cuddle for the next hour or so, on the big old 4 poster bed – before they needed to go out in the cold to the movie. Lizzie agreed, getting up with a smile – distracting him by pointing out a fictitious red cardinal out in bright sunshine, in the snow-covered park below. While Nicholas was distracted – vainly looking for the bird, she snuck off to bed, climbing in under

the covers, so that when he turned around and saw her, she said to him “So Lover-boy, apparently you’re all talk hey? Spending precious cuddle-time looking for red birds in the snow!” Lizzie teased him while she posed seductively.

Nicholas knew when he’d been fooled and laughed – saying “You win Lizzie, you’re in bed first – but only because you resorted to deception! Otherwise I would have carried you off to bed!” he said “Like I did last night when you did your best ‘Sleeping beauty’ impression – which we’ll always be able to joke about – great story for our wedding, don’t you think?”

But she quickly interrupted him. “Don’t you dare Nicholas!” then added “That would be a sure way to miss out on what comes naturally after a wedding!” she playfully scolded him.

Nicholas laughed as he climbed into the bed next to her, to snuggle there with her. They lay in each other’s arms for the next hour, happy and content, quite oblivious to – actually, not even thinking about what a somber mood now existed in the Smythe home, not too far away in the neighboring twin-city. For now at least, it hadn’t entered their minds – or if it had, neither of them was willing to speak about any of them!

Later, sitting in the movie theater –mostly empty, they got to choose the best seats, now easy to find! The lights dimmed and the Disney classic color version, Snow White –animated, began. Soon Nicholas started to have doubts about his eager suggestion to take-in this movie-matinee! The queen mother was , well, the kind of the person Lizzie’s mother was! But Lizzie smiled as the young prince meets Snow-White at the wishing well ... wishing for the one she’ll love – that’s her Nicholas! But Lizzie grew silent when young Snow white’s taken to the dark scary forest at the queen’s command, left to die. Now this movie was hitting very close to home, or in this case, not home ... cold, snowy, dangerous streets ... on Christmas-eve! From that point on they both sat silently watching, neither wanting to admit defeat by suggesting they leave - that what they’re seeing was really what they’d been living. Only at the end of the movie, when the Prince kissed Snow-White and she awakens and is finally free to

live her life with her true-love, Lizzie spoke... She snuggled into Nicholas's shoulder – squeezing his arm with both her hands and said to him "Come my prince ... we have our own happy ending now too. Come on, let's go enjoy our special Christmas dinner together and imagine that it's the wedding banquet for us!" she said, adding "This movie hit a little too close to home!" then adding "I'd really not expected that."

As they were sitting back at the little table in their room, looking out at a dark scene with Christmas lights – night arriving so much earlier in Canada in the winter than in Africa... Lizzie said to Nicholas "Wow Nicholas, I could really relate to poor Snow White's struggle! People like James, our cab-driver who rescued us, and Freddie boy – Jean at the front desk that gave us this honeymoon suite, Room-service and all our friends... they're dwarfs – our loyal helpers. My mother's the queen –she's cruel, controlling and determined that everybody worships her as perfect and does her bidding without fail – and she's very jealous. Her loyal Huntsman – really, that's my dad, he even obeyed the queen to do such a wicked thing to me -to us! A cold night here is as dangerous, if not more so, than a dark lonely forest! Of course you're my prince Nicholas – thank you for saving me and leading me off on your horse into the sunset, to your castle to begin our happily-ever after..." but Nicholas interrupted her now...

"And Lizzie, you're the beautiful Princess, Snow-white ... actually make that 'Africa's Snow-white'... that's much more fitting!" He said jokingly, before she interrupted him again.

"I like that Nicholas! In more ways than one ... that rings true ... Yes, you may think of me as 'Africa's Snow-White'... and if you don't mind, I'll think of you as my Prince – so how about that Kiss? Just to make really sure I'll live!" she joked.

Nicholas didn't need a 2nd invitation – he was just so happy that she'd bounced back from the somber mood that came over her for almost all of the movie! He pulled her up by her hand - then standing there in the bay window, he kissed her to make real sure she'd not relapse into a coma. They stood there a while, then kissed again – just to be real sure, then

returned to their chairs to chat away about their lives and how it pertained to this movie. Lizzie commented again ...

“You know Nicholas, my English teacher, Mr. Ronaasen was Swedish, a learned man – spoke many languages, an expert on literature! He spent one entire class filling us in on some Fairy-tale facts, and it’s from him that I learned that in the original Brother’s Grimm Snow-White tale, the wicked queen is Snow-White’s real mother! The publishers only changed it later to sell more books, since mothers were more likely to read a story to their kids about the dangers of a step-mother moving in and taking over, than of a cruel, evil birth mother! Disney stuck to the changed version for this movie, probably for much the same reasons!” Before Nicholas could speak she added “There’s more ... the wicked queen was forced to dance at Snow-Whites wedding ball in the palace, in a pair of red-hot iron slippers ... until she dropped down dead!”

“Wow Lizzie! Imagine knowing all of that and being Africa’s Snow-White – stuck here in Canada in the snow!” he said, adding “What’s the significance of the red-hot iron slippers?”

Lizzie looked up at him, seeing a puzzled look on his face and answered “The red hot iron shoes she’s forced to dance in at her daughter’s wedding, is her searing conscience that plagues her, each and every day of her life - until she dies!”

“Lizzie ... lets go enjoy our wedding feast, now -without her!”

Lizzie smiled at Nicholas “Okay Nicholas – I’m ready for a lovely Christmas dinner, and yes, let’s think of it as the wedding reception of Snow-White and her Prince!” Lizzie suggested “That kind of neatly wraps up our whole day!”

With that Lizzie got up to go and get ready for Christmas dinner. Nicholas remained seated there – thinking about the irony of watching that particular Disney movie and under such strange, cruel circumstances –which ended so happily!

Lizzie looked beautiful dressed up in her cute Dirndl dress - almost like a real princess -but thankful to remain inside in the warmth of the hotel ballroom with central heating! All

the staff seemed to know about their only guests – the ones in the honeymoon suite, and they were included as family and given a spot at the main table alongside the manager, his wife and family –who turned out all to be German, and were so taken aback to have Lizzie converse fluently with them, speaking German, only with a British accent -but that just made their day! Nicholas, as usual, made light of the fact that though he was the German, by ancestry, he could not speak a word – other than “*Ich Liebe dich mein Schatz*” which he’d learned from Lizzie, memorizing it well – making for a handy alternate way of saying “I love you my darling!” when the circumstances seemed appropriate – but of course they both spoke another language too, and Lizzie really liked to hear “*Ek het jou baaie lief, my liefeling!*” from time to time!

The dinner went by all too fast –people stayed long, the food, drink and desserts were just wonderful and everyone had their fill and a good time – making sure the young couple they’d adopted for Christmas, did too! This Christmas was special for them... they’d been able to help ease any sadness a lonely Christmas would have amplified. Later Nicholas and Elizabeth finally took their leave, waiting till everyone had said their goodbyes – not wanting the night to end, feeling so special –like a bride & groom would do at their reception.

That night they slept a happy sleep, in each other’s arms, on a big old 4-poster bed in the honeymoon suite of the Walper, dreaming of carefree, loving times... and their secret place.



Chapter 22

Christmas in the Smythe home ...

Edwin had gotten up early ... he had no interest in staying in bed – all he'd do there is think and have regrets. It was time to go and make some Tim Horton's Coffee – at least that was one thing he liked in Canada, though he always thought it funny, since Coffee can't be grown in Canada. Now, with a fresh pot of coffee made, he went to go and sit in the family room, turning on the TV to watch – but there was nothing interesting on, so he picked up his library book instead, and putting on his glasses, sat reading, enjoying his Coffee – in peace, for a while anyway. Before long he heard a door open, then the shuffling on the stairs, coming down. He grew anxious -it was probably Constance. It was! As he looked up from his book, a bleary-eyed disheveled Constance stood looking at him – “Oh no”, he thought, “that was not a smile on her face! Here it comes!” bracing himself.

“Edwin, did you make coffee?” She inquired.

“Yes dear ...” He said, relieved, “The pot's still half full.”

Without saying anything more, she went into the kitchen, poured herself a big cup of Coffee, added milk and sugar and stirred it rather noisily – then reappeared and sat down on the other side of the room from Edwin, sipping her coffee.

“Now the waiting game begins, Edwin!” She said to him.

“By that dear, you mean waiting for Lizzie to come home to us of her own free-will?” he inquired, closing his book.

“No Edwin, I'm not foolish enough to wait for that silly girl to exercise good judgment ... I mean soon she'll have no other choice -other than live on the streets. She at least knows

enough to not try that!" she said smugly - sure of herself.
"She'll be forced to come crawling back home to me!"

"I hope you're right dear, we shall have to wait a while yet to find out if your plan's succeeded, or not?" he replied sighing.

"Oh it will succeed, Edwin, I'm sure of that! Lizzie and that boy Nicholas have no support network here - and they don't have enough money either, to elope - I've seen to that!" She said, snorting with delight as she contemplated her victory.

Just then Hattie appeared ... "Merry Christmas, mom and dad" she said with a cheerful smile - "What a wonderful sunny day it's shaping up to be, out there! Maybe we can go for a drive later after opening our presents?" she suggested, hopeful that they'd agree - thinking "It's just us three now!"

"Merry Christmas Hattie" both of her parents echoed back to her "We'll see, but that sounds like a nice idea - for later!"

"Can we open our presents?" she inquired, eagerly.

"Sure Hattie ... bring ours to us, we're not really in the mood to get up and sort through them right now." Edwin replied.

Hattie went to sit at the foot of the family Christmas tree, and started sorting through the wrapped presents there. "To Nicholas, with all my love, Lizzie" was the first one she found ... she tossed it to one side "No need for that today!" Then she found another "To my darling Elizabeth, from your Nicholas" - and tossed it over on top of Lizzie's present too. Soon she found one that said "To dear Hattie, from your big sister, Elizabeth" ... "I wonder what it is?" Hattie thought as she started opening it up. She removed the wrapping paper, revealing a collage photo-frame, and in it, a note from Lizzie.

"Dear Hattie, let's ask dad for some of the photos of us as we grew-up together, then we can jointly choose some to make up a collage of meaningful memories of us sisters." Hattie felt a tinge of guilt stabbing at her ... but she quickly covered the photo-frame back up and set it aside. "No point filling that up with photos now and putting it up anywhere

special!" she thought. "Elizabeth's gone, and now I'm their only child!" Hattie smiled smugly, reminding herself.

Then she continued, finding and opening the gifts from her parents – things she'd hinted at or asked for, no surprises.

"Thanks mom and Dad!" She said smiling as she re-entered the family-room ... "Here's my and Lizzie's presents for each of you" she said, as she handed them each two packages, "I got an empty photo frame from her" she preemptively added

"You're very welcome dear" Constance said, smiling at her. Edwin said nothing, just accepted the packages, opening the one from Hattie first -It was a manicuring set, with a variety of nail-clippers and scissors. "Thanks Hattie." He replied.

Then he opened Lizzie's present, finding a lovely gold photo frame with a note in it "Dear dad ..." it read "I must be the only girl in the world for whom no photos of me with my dad were ever taken – least none that I'm aware of, Let's fix that! I'm almost 22 now ... I'd like a photo of you and me for your desk and for me, I mean I'll inevitably leave the nest to start my adult life – a very normal, natural thing to do for a young woman my age and it would be really nice, for both of us to have a lovely photographic memory ... one of you and me."

Edwin winced ... so noticeably, that Constance inquired

"What did you get Edwin?"

"Oh ... just a nice photo-frame" he tactfully replied.

"That's nice! I'll have to find a photo of me to put in it for you" She said, smiling – unaware of its intended purpose.

"What did you get dear?" Edwin asked – not too curious, yet, but aware that he had to at least reciprocate and ask her.

"Lizzie gave me an ornate photo-frame too –with a little note"

"And what did that note say?" Edwin inquired, now curious.

"Oh, it said something about finding a suitable photo for it, so that I could place it on my dressing-table" Constance evasively replied, then added "I think that one you took of

me in Paris a few years ago, would do just nicely!” she said, placing it down beside her and getting up “Well, I’m off to go and get ready for the day – It’s Christmas ... time for us to celebrate!” she said, sounding sincere – looking triumphant.

When she’d left, curiosity overcame Edwin, and he arose to take a look at what Lizzie’s note to Constance had said ...

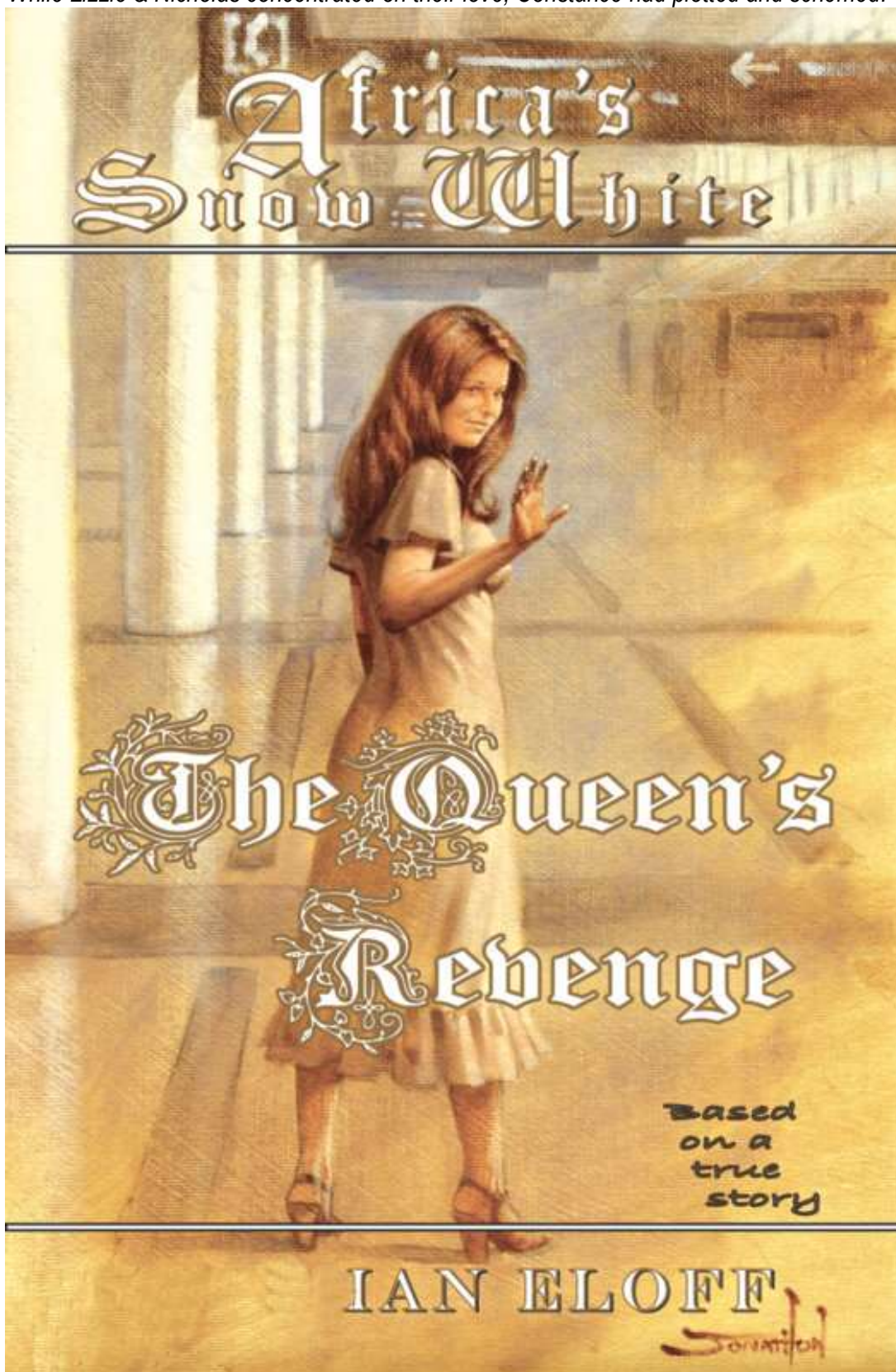
“Dear mom...” it began “One day I’ll marry Nicholas and naturally I’ll be leaving home then, so I’d like you to look through photos dad took of us, and select your favorite one to put in this photo-frame, then find some place nice for it, so that you can remember me fondly. Merry Christmas!”

Edwin winced again... “Lizzie had planned these presents for them all to precede her eloping back to Africa with Nicholas” he thought “What could have been a very happy time, with Lizzie saying a fond, loving farewell, is now marred from my wife’s heavy-handedness. It didn’t work for her dad ... and I just can’t see all of the cruelty she’s insisted on, helping any of us in the long-run,” and now, very troubled, he sighed.

He stood there for a while ... remembering what it was like when he sought Constance’s dad’s permission to marry his daughter – and didn’t get it, and how Constance insisted they arrange the details of their wedding themselves – and then invite her parents to attend – a defiant declaration of her independence, to be sure! He reflected on how he’d given Nicholas permission to marry Elizabeth – against all advice and wishes of Constance ... it made no sense to retract that.

“But ...” he thought, “Dangerous as it was - and still is, to show even the slightest signs of support for Elizabeth, just maybe if Lizzie returned to Africa, their own Canadian move would be reversed, and they’d all return to their cozy life in Wellington?” He sighed mulling his options, concluding that “Such complicated plots and schemes were best left to her! Constance relished those!” and then he put the note down.

While Lizzie & Nicholas concentrated on their love, Constance had plotted and schemed!



Chapter 23

December 27th, 1978 – a day of reckoning.

Nicholas looked stunned... taking a while to gather his thoughts, then asked the travel agent seated across the desk from them “So what you’re saying is that the cheapest option would be an APEX return airfare – that one-way airfares are way too expensive - but that even so, all the limitations on these fares not being eligible for ‘last-minute’ flights or urgent travel, like ours, means that we’ll have to wait here for at least 14 more days – but possibly 28 days?” He asked the lady, hoping that he’d misunderstood her.

“Yes, that is correct, but even with that restriction, unless you can come up with an extra \$300, you don’t have enough money to buy any APEX ticket back to Africa, even if we get creative and use a budget airline, like Laker airways, to get you to London for the first part of the trip” the travel agent added, “Meanwhile I’ll keep all this information here - for when you return with enough money to pay for the tickets.”

Nicholas politely thanked the lady for all her work, then got up, taking a rather confused Lizzie’s hand in his and saying “Come on Lizzie, let’s go to McDonalds for a coffee so we can at least evaluate our options.” trying to still sound hopeful.

Sitting down with their coffee, Elizabeth asked Nicholas “So what was that all about – I mean, I think I followed what she was saying, but surely we have other options to get me back to Cape Town with you?” she asked Nicholas, anxiously.

Nicholas, still clearly flustered, took a sip of his coffee, then replied “Lizzie, I’m afraid your mother has won her battle to prevent you from returning, with me, to Cape Town - for us to elope. If we’d been able to stay with them over Christmas and purchase the return-airfare to use some 14 days from now, whilst not having to incur costs of hotels, restaurants and transport to the Airport, our plan would have worked,

but right now we don't have enough money to do all of that, and the simple fact is that if we do now stay in a hotel for even just 14 more days, most of the money I have for your airfare would be gone anyway – putting our dreams further out of our reach – we've simply been outsmarted!" he added.

Lizzie looked shocked "You mean I can't go back with you to Cape town? Isn't there a way we can make this work in our favor?" she asked, hopeful that Nicholas would find a way.

"Sadly ... no, Lizzie." he replied, quickly adding "At least, not yet" as he saw tears forming in Lizzie's eyes. She brightened up, quickly asking him "You mean there's still hope for us?"

"There's always hope Lizzie, that much you and I have both learned the hard way ... and yes, the faster we act now, the sooner that can all happen for us!" he added, reassuringly.

"So what's your plan Nicholas? What are you suggesting we do?" she inquired, eagerly awaiting his answer.

Then Nicholas replied to her "Well clearly now every \$1 we spend on accommodation, food or transport is a \$ that will delay your eventual return to me in Cape town ..."

Lizzie interrupted "Eventual – that sounds terrible! Please tell me I'm misunderstanding you?" she begged of him.

"Ok Lizzie, here's how the math works best for us now ... to speed your eventual ... no, make that imminent return to be with me in Cape town, and for us to get married there ..."

now having Lizzie's attention, he continued ... "If we check out before noon, thus not wasting another \$100 of our precious freedom fund, contact your dad at his office and have him come and fetch us tonight, as he's promised he would – if we'd changed our minds, then I can at least give you what's left of my money to put in a secret bank account and you can add to it as you earn your paychecks, and even with your mother taking most of that, pretty soon, within a year or less, you'll have enough to buy an APEX airfare to Cape town – as long as you are very secretive this time, and do not make any of the mistakes we've made to alert your mother to what you have planned! It seems that in the end, it's going to be up to you to save this love-story of ours!" and Nicholas paused... then asked her "Are you able to do that?"

Lizzie, still shocked, replied “Yes, I think so, I’ve got the gist of it, but you’ll have to fill me in on all the fine-print of our plan just so that I don’t play into my mother’s hands again!”

“That sounds hopeful at least – but what about your dad? He’s a wealthy doctor, surely he will lend you a few hundred dollars to help us?” Lizzie asked, grasping at every straw!

“Right now, as you know, they’re not at home but in Siesta for another 2 weeks and even after that, it will take at least a week to get any money to me here in a way that we could use it – and by then all the money I have left will be gone!”

“So Let’s finish up here and walk back to the Walper to set the wheels of our new rescue plan in motion.” He concluded.

Lizzie was on the phone now “Could I please speak with Mr. Smythe? Please tell him it’s his daughter, Elizabeth and it’s rather urgent!” Lizzie said to Edwin’s secretary, who replied “one moment please” before Lizzie heard her dad answer ...

“Hello Elizabeth, this is a nice surprise! I’d thought you’d be on your way back to Cape town by now?” Edwin added.

“No Dad ... we’ve reevaluated the events of the last few days and concluded that now’s not a good time to elope or to get married, that we best wait a while still and get married later maybe when Nicholas has clearance to come to Canada - so I’m asking you to come and fetch me from the Walper hotel on your way home this evening. If you recall, you promised that if we change our minds, you’d insist on Nicholas being allowed to come home with me?” Lizzie reminded him.

“Yes, well, I did make that promise to you both, and tough as that’s going to be on me, I’d have to conclude that your decision is way tougher – so that’s the least I can do now!” He said, adding “I’ll pick you both up there at around 5pm.”

“Thanks Dad!” a very relieved Lizzie, exclaimed “And dad...”

“Yes Elizabeth?” he interrupted her, wondering what it was “I didn’t get to say this a few days ago ... Merry Christmas!”

“Thanks Elizabeth! That it is, now!” he quickly added before saying goodbye to end the call. Edwin sat there, bewildered, thinking “Well, you were right Constance, you’ve outsmarted

these two young lovers - you've broken Lizzie's free-spirit and got your way, but I wonder what the ultimate price of your victory will be - not only for Elizabeth and Nicholas - but also for our family?" he sat there thinking to himself.

Edwin sat there a while, his hand on the phone, thinking ... "Maybe I'll just surprise Constance tonight?" The idea was tempting - very tempting! He did not exactly relish any of her admonishments, and today was already busy enough with meetings ... but then he thought whether it was a good idea to give her extra-time to plot and scheme and agitate for Nicholas' exclusion from Lizzie's return home and he decided -it was best to just surprise her! "Phew!" he thought lifting his hand off the phone, relieved not to have to deal with her right away - "no point stirring the pot too early!"

As Lizzie placed the room's phone down, she looked relieved.

"Nicholas, my dad's going to honor his commitment to us, we will both be returning to their home today, at 5pm, so let's get packing and check-out. We can leave our luggage with the concierge and go and spend some time together till then ..." Lizzie suggested, but Nicholas had an idea ...

"Lizzie, let me go and speak with the lady at reception, I may just have come up with a better plan for today" he replied. Soon Nicholas returned, smiling. "Lizzie, they've said we can check-out late, but before 4pm, that they have no immediate bookings or plans for the Honeymoon suite, and that would mean only an hour or so of waiting in the lobby - warm and comfortable, for your dad to arrive." He announced to Lizzie.

"Considering today's events, that's welcome news, Nicholas!" she exclaimed "At least we'll have time to now gather our thoughts, in warmth and safety - and privacy" she added "of the Honeymoon suite. Here our plans cannot be overheard - so let's put our heads together and settle on a strategy!"

"Good idea Lizzie, let's sit down and start thinking how we can turn this defeat around into an ultimate victory for our future and, of course, for our love!" Nicholas suggested ... Jokingly adding "We've still got that last complimentary bottle of Champagne left ... would you like me to open it?"

"Lizzie laughed - rather nervously, "No Nicholas, definitely

not! We both need very clear minds right now to plan next steps, and as I rather painfully recall, Champagne did not help achieve that on Christmas eve ... but keep it, take it back with you to Cape Town, we'll open it after our wedding" "Splendid idea Lizzie!" Nicholas replied "let's get to work!"

Nicholas took the notepad and pen provided in the room, and started to write, explaining to Lizzie as he did so ...

"Lizzie, this is how much money we'll have after I pay our hotel bill today" and he wrote the figure down. "How much do you have?" He asked her.

"I'm afraid less than \$100, if I count-up all the change in my purse too" she smiled sheepishly, "Mother's taking the giant share of my pay-check to repay my UCT fees" she explained.

"That's really not fair Lizzie, but as long as you want to stay under her roof and not be evicted again, I'd strongly advise we don't rock that boat – yet!" he said ... and Lizzie agreed.

"OK then, with not much money coming in, this is going to be tricky ... but it can be done, though the execution of our plan will be almost entirely up to you now ..."

Lizzie interrupted "And by that you mean what exactly – please Nicholas, I need to know what to do, so be specific!" .

"Well, in 4 weeks or so I'll be headed back to Cape town, and you'll be on your own. It's essential that your mother not know what we've got planned - or what you're going to be planning – else, as we've just experienced, she'll thwart our efforts!" He warned ... Lizzie sighed, agreeing with him.

"So we'll need to open up a secret bank account that she has no knowledge of, and deposit most of my remaining funds into it – I suggest you keep the savings book in a draw of your desk in the office, never at home!" he warned ...

Lizzie looked hopeful, "I can definitely do that!" she replied.

"Then, as you get anymore free funds, go and deposit them into the savings account, and keep track of the balance – knowing that when it reaches around \$2,100 you'll have almost exactly enough to purchase a APEX ticket back to Cape town – but only do so with a little more than 14d left before you plan to leave – and please remember, to get those

low airfares you have to book at least 14d in advance, and after that you can't afford to stay in hotels!" He reiterated.

"Yes, I figured that much out this morning at the travel agency" Lizzie replied – now beginning to see her way out of their crises – a path to freedom finally looking possible!

"So Lizzie, by my calculations, in about 6-9 months you should have enough money saved to make this plan work – do you feel you can do it?" Nicholas inquired of her.

"Yes, I can do it ... I will do it! I mean, unless she has any more surprises planned for me ... for us?" Lizzie replied, adding "We've been surprised before – hopefully not again!"

"You've got a point Lizzie, our failures have always arisen from us underestimating her abilities to plot and scheme while we've just concentrated on loving each other and being a happy couple, so this time let's try to think 10 steps ahead of her – so, what do you think could go wrong?" he inquired.

"If she thinks I'm planning to elope, she'll pull out all the stops to foil my plans – so total secrecy is of the utmost importance! I don't like being deceptive, but in this case I shall just have to smile at her daily and tell her how happy I am to be in Canada with them and how much I'm looking forward to you returning to Canada – one day," she added.

"Agreed Lizzie! So if we speak on the phone –and that will have to be very seldom on account of it being so costly, let's keep in mind that she could be listening in upstairs and talk as if we've accepted her version of reality, and have resigned ourselves for a long wait before I have enough saved again to come to Canada to take you back to Africa with me. Let's lull her into a false sense of security, with her thinking years –while we're thinking months!" he said.

Lizzie whole-heartedly agreed "What else, Nicholas?" she inquired – looking at him thoughtfully now ... earnestly!

"I believe she'd counted on me and/or you, needing to stay in hotels for more than just these 3 days, based on your dad's promise to us – and I'm pretty sure she'd calculated that would drain the last of any funds I brought with me to spring you free ... but now that it's not turned out that way, and we do have your dad to thank for that, at least, let's

expect she'll try to find another way to accomplish that goal – so let's be vigilant and stay nimble, able to adapt quickly and effectively with counter-measures to thwart her plans!" he asserted – to which Lizzie, after some thought, agreed.

"You've got a point Nicholas – I'd not thought of that!"

"She knows my parents will be un-contactable for at least another 2 weeks, so she has to find a way to drain my funds in the next 3 weeks. She also knows that it takes weeks or more for any emergency funds to arrive from Africa, as they have very strict foreign exchange controls in place and it's simply not as easy as my dad going in to see his banker and asking for the Canadian dollars to be wired to us here. So she was counting on us being out of their home until I'm forced to use my return ticket – alone, with no money left, and you are forced to return to her and beg to be allowed back under their roof – on her terms, of course!" he added.

"Wow Nicholas, what a fiendishly horrid plan she hatched!"

"Yes Lizzie, and while neither of us relish another separation being forced on us, we both know we've endured worse! Now we're at least united in our desire to counteract her plans for your life –make that our lives, and we do have a common goal we've both committed to and are working towards – but Lizzie remember, it's impossible for me to get money to you in Canada –South Africa has currency controls in place and I doubt that they'll approve any transfer of funds from me to you based on your eloping to marry me! That's only possible for businesses or travelers – and I'm not travelling, so they'll not issue me a travel allowance without a ticket to show them - the same holds true for my dad!" Nicholas explained, so let's not factor in any possible help coming from Africa.

"Nicholas, what you're saying is that now it's mostly all up to me... and I agree, it does rather looks that way, unless we want to wait the 2-3 years more for you to return and fetch me, which is not a nice option for either of us – I just don't know how we'd cope –also, I'm not forgetting you'd given me a deadline to set a wedding date, and your kind offer expires around the end of this next August ..." Lizzie said, wanting to continue - but before she could, Nicholas interrupted her.

“Relax Lizzie, that was done for entirely a different reason and with a different set of circumstances – I’ll not hold you to that agreement! You just do whatever you have to do to get back to me, as soon as possible – that’s our new deal!”

“No Nicholas! While I appreciate your offer, I’ll honor our agreement! I’m tired of Lady Jennifer waiting all year at their secret place, for Sir Ian to come back from war, to spend each Christmas together for a brief romance – then once again being separated. That cycle’s now repeated for us each year, so far, in our lives. I’ll be back with you in Cape Town before the deadline expires ... we’ll finally be married!” Lizzie firmly asserted - “No more stalling ... for all or any reasons!”

Nicholas looked at Lizzie, smiling, before he replied “That’s a splendid answer Lizzie! You’re attitude is not one of fear or defeat, but one of steadfastly working towards our ultimate victory! I simply cannot disagree with any of that!” he added. “So we’re united then in our common cause – to have our love survive and triumph, to finally get married to each other, the sooner the better?” Nicholas said, to summarize.

“Absolutely!” Lizzie replied “and Nicholas ...” she continued “What ... Lizzie?” He interrupted her, curious to know.

“I want you to count on me doing whatever it takes to win this victory for our love! I want you to return to Cape town full of hope and the expectation that very soon we’ll be back in each others arms - and that nothing, and I mean nothing, will stop me from being your bride -soon! I absolutely refuse to murder our love, as my mother’s always insisted I do!”

“Wow Lizzie, I’m impressed! That’s the spirit! This morning started out looking like our love had been dealt yet another blow –but now I see it’s just a glancing blow, not a fatal one! This bodes well for our future – I mean, we’re united in this common, noble cause ... to fight for our love, to fight for the right to be a loving couple, to fight for your freedom – that’s all very positive, you know!” Nicholas added, approvingly.

“Yes Nicholas, it is, and please ... once again, please accept my apology for me not acting this way for the last year or so. I was so confused ... still growing up and getting my head together and my life’s priorities straight – I guess I had to go

back to living under her roof – and be forced again, to live by her rules, to figure out that I’m a grown woman now and I don’t want that for me ... for us, anymore!” Lizzie asserted, then added “Actions speak far louder than words! Last year you showed me that you loved me enough to let me go –even though it really hurt you... but my old family’s made it quite clear that their lives come first and that their plans are more important than my own wellbeing or happiness - so suffice it to say that I know I cannot trust or depend on any of them!”



Nicholas smiled! This time they’d have a different ending! This 7th Christmas could be the last time they’d be saying farewell to each other - yet again! It’s a temporary setback – the last gasps of a failing old tyrant-queen still wanting to keep control of those in her life. Reality was that her universe was changing. All her plots & schemes could and would be defeated given time and a unity

of purpose that such illegitimate attempts – unloving, unfair attempts at total-control of other’s lives, always seemed to encourage! “This time will be different!” he thought ... Smiling at Lizzie, he now replied “Yes Lizzie, it’s time that you and I changed our tactics to be more proactive rather than reactive - as we’ve been for far too long now!” adding “It’s time to think 10-steps ahead of her, and to fight her fire – with fire! We can do it Lizzie – more importantly, you can!”

Chapter 24

Constance's plan works - but needs tweaking!

As Edwin pulled into the driveway, having just told them that he'd decided to surprise Constance & Hattie with their return, Lizzie laughed rather nervously, "Dad, you're living very dangerously! I appreciate the fact that you're trying to ensconce us securely in the house rather stealthily - before she has a chance to object to Nicholas being here with me, but do you really think mom will accept this new reality?"

"She won't be happy Lizzie, that's for sure, but I did tell her that was my firm condition for your return, and that if she didn't, I'd give you the money to elope!" Edwin explained.

"Wow dad ... thanks! You really are just like the Queen's loyal Huntsman - even while carrying out her cruel orders you've shown me mercy ... by not following her plan exactly, but allowing a chance for me and our young-love to survive. You've redeemed yourself in my eyes, a bit ... but dad, part of me hopes she'll reject us returning now so you'll be able to then help us get married after all... what do you think the chances are of that?" Lizzie asked, now curious and hopeful.

"I'm not really sure what being her Huntsman implies Lizzie, but you're sure right about one thing - she's the Queen and she expects us all to be her loyal subjects -we're all there to serve her! She sees you as having been disloyal, in need of being brought back under her control, so we'd all better just keep that in mind from now on, but to answer your question mom's going to be very surprised, since I've not given her any chance to think this new turn of events through. I'd bet on the odds that she will accept your moving back as a big victory, and maybe settle for that? Sorry to disappoint you Lizzie, but for now let's all go in and see, shall we?" adding "Nicholas, she'll be in the kitchen - so please take your and Lizzie's bags in while I distract her - put them all downstairs in your room, for now." He said, looking decidedly nervous!

“Sure thing Mr. Smythe!” Nicholas, who’d been largely silent, just listening to Lizzie and Edwin talking, replied. Edwin wound his way to the kitchen from the garage, while motioning Lizzie to stay hidden in the passage behind him as he entered the kitchen. Constance turned to look at him. As he’d correctly calculated, she had an apron on and was preparing dinner, standing holding a pot in her hands -

“Hi Dear, what’s for dinner?” Edwin inquired?

“Spaghetti and meat sauce” she replied, turning around.

“Great!” Edwin exclaimed “Did you make enough for left-over’s, so we can have it again in a few days?” He asked.

“Of course, I always do! That way I’m not tied to this kitchen sink every day – rather than every other day!” she replied.

With the confirmation he needed, he motioned for Elizabeth to enter ... who by now had Nicholas standing next to her in the passage. “That’s good news dear, because we have some guests” he announced as Elizabeth walked into the kitchen, whilst in the background, in plain sight, stood Nicholas ...

Constance looked as if she’d seen a ghost - letting go of the pot of Spaghetti, which fell to the floor spilling its contents far and wide. “What! How? So soon? I mean ... why are you back here already?” She exclaimed, flustered “Look what you’ve made me do!” she said angrily, clearly upset that her plan to drain their finances had now only partially worked.

“Hello mom ... you’re obviously glad to see me back so soon! Here, I’ll help clean up your mess. Nicholas, why don’t you and dad go enjoy a cold beer in the family room while mom and I clean-up” Lizzie said, taking control of the chaos from a harried Constance, who was, for once, at a loss for words.

Edwin and Nicholas quickly vacated – cold beers in hand, taking Lizzie up on her welcome suggestion just as Hattie appeared in the Kitchen to see what all the noise was about – suddenly looking less than happy at what she was seeing

“Welcome home, Lizzie...” she now awkwardly mumbled.

“Thanks Hattie, you and I need to chat some time – but for now, go and suggest to dad that he order in Pizza... Mom’s in no mood to remake dinner tonight!” Lizzie said, smiling.

Chapter 25

Constance's plan to strand Nicholas in London for 14 days

The next evening they were all seated at the dinner table. While Constance was dishing-up, she broke the bad news "Nicholas and Elizabeth, I have sad news for you two ..."

Lizzie grew pale, Nicholas looked startled, Lizzie spoke first. "What is it mom?" She inquired, her head spinning with all sorts of dire outcomes wondering what Constance had done.

"Laker airlines called here today to inform me that their charter flight from Toronto to London – the one Nicholas is on, is now leaving in 2 days time - that Nicholas' booking has been changed and that he must not miss his flight!" Constance announced triumphantly - and way too eagerly!

As the tears started to form in Lizzie's eyes, the shock of what Constance just announced dawning on her, Nicholas squeezed her hand under the table and replied for both of them "That sure is bad news Mrs. Smythe, but I suppose it's within their rights to change my booking. That changes a lot of things for Lizzie and me as now I'll have to spend 3 weeks in London, on my own, waiting there for my next flight to S. Africa ... which is with another charter airline, not Laker."

"Yes, well, you don't have much time left here, and you'll need to start packing. Anyway, Lizzie starts work again soon - by which time you'll be gone, so enjoy the last couple of days you have together, it will be a long time before you're both together again – Lizzie cannot return to South Africa, she's staying here with me and I'm not sure Canada will approve your Immigration application in a mere matter of months - if ever, You're a single, young man with no job here, and they don't particular let a lot of your kinds of

people into Canada.” Constance now replied, with a smirk.

A short while later Lizzie and Nicholas were in his basement room – a place private enough to talk about their options.

“Nicholas ...” Lizzie said close to tears, “What are we going to do now? By forcing you to pay for hotels in London for the 3 weeks, she will get you to use-up the last of your funds we are relying on for me to elope!” Lizzie remarked, questioning.

“Lizzie, If you’ll recall, yesterday I wondered out loud how your mother was going to compensate for the partial failure of her plan to drain our finances – now we know!” and to prevent Lizzie from crying, he immediately continued “But as of now, this is just another obstacle, not a defeat. I mean I know there are cheapish student hostels in London and I can stay at one of them – even although that would still require a lot of our dwindling savings ...” but now Lizzie interrupted, suddenly breaking out in a slight smile ...

“Nicholas, I have a plan!” She announced, more cheerfully.

“What’s that Lizzie?” He inquired, somewhat bemused.

“Charles!” She now triumphantly replied.

“Really Lizzie, what do you have in mind?” Nicholas said.

“Charles had pledged to me that if I ever needed his help in combating my mother’s dirty tricks, he would help me – and he gave me a private number to call if I ever did need his help – and right now, I do – we both really do!” she replied.

“Lizzie ...” Nicholas replied, “You’re a genius!” he said with a smile – his eyes lighting up now, filled with hope. “But how do we contact him without her knowing – I mean, we would not want her to think her plan to get me to use up any money I have left has failed – that would just lead to even more plots and schemes being unleashed on the two of us!” Nicholas cautioned her, wondering what to do about all this.

“You’re right Nicholas ... we’ll have to act this all out very carefully, and make it sound like such a tragedy for us – not that you leaving three weeks early is pleasant, but you know what I mean” Lizzie continued So I’ll wait until my mother goes to the supermarket tomorrow morning, and make a reverse-charge call to Charles, which is what he suggested I do if I’m ever in trouble and need his help – he’ll accept the charges, and I’ll ask that he put you up in London for the time you’re there ... if I recall you told me that your meeting with Charles in Cape Town went rather well and that the two of you got along as well as could be expected?” she said.

“Yes, that’s accurate Lizzie” Nicholas replied “And if I may say so Lizzie ... you’ve come up with a Splendid plan!” Nicholas said with a smile and a wink – squeezing her hand.

“I suppose I could even ask him for a loan so that we can both fly the coup – but right now the logistics will make that tricky, as I will not arrive in London with you still there – but likely at least a week later, and it’s been my experience that when money is involved things very quickly get serious – even ugly. Accommodation is essentially almost a free way for Charles to help us and is generally part of hospitality – money almost always comes with strings attached” Lizzie noted, asking “What do you think Nicholas?” she asked him.

“It’s tempting Lizzie – very tempting, but I wonder how we’d feel years from now if we have to admit that it’s only thanks to ‘Rich Charles’ –and mind you, it’s really all just his dad’s money ...” Nicholas added “That we ended up together?” “No, I think we’ll just stick with accommodation – that will definitely save us most of what’s left of our money, and we do have a plan to add to that reasonably fast – to let you elope in a matter of only a few months” Nicholas reflected.

Lizzie smiled –quite proud of herself and relieved “Well, we’re not 100 % sure that he will help us ... but I believe he will!” She said, squeezing his hand too. “Now we can at least have a good night’s sleep! I’ll not fret and worry all night, though I’m pretty sure mother is gleefully celebrating her victory!”

“Yes, probably Lizzie ... but let’s not be sad” He said smiling.

In her upstairs suite, Constance could not stop herself from smiling delightedly “You see Edwin, it just does not pay to oppose me! I have turned what could have been a disaster for my planning, around into a wonderful victory! Nicholas is going to be gone from here – out of our lives, very soon now, and London is even more expensive than here – He will need to pay in Pounds – and that’s expensive!” she gloated.

Edwin was puzzled, so he inquired “Constance, how did you get this all done? I mean, I’m pretty sure it’s your doing!”

“Oh, you know me, I can be very persuasive” she happily replied “I called up Laker airlines and spun them a sorry tale about a poor student stranded here for another few weeks whilst his sick mom was all alone in faraway South Africa ... and they immediately checked to see if there was a seat available on an earlier flight – and there you have it!”

Edwin just shook his head and sighed “I sure hope you know what you’re doing dear ... if any of this comes out Elizabeth will be righteously indignant and I, for one, would not blame her! Then we’ll all lose!” Edwin replied, worried.

“But you’re not about to tell her any of this, now are you?” Constance cautioned him “That would be treasonous!”

“No dear, I’m not – that would precipitate a very nasty outcome, one I would not wish on any of us!” He replied.

“Good! Well then let’s just let my plan unfold” she said.

The next morning, with Constance and Hattie off to the supermarket, Lizzie made the excuse that she needed all the time she had left now with Nicholas, and with Edwin gone to the office, Lizzie had the opportunity she was looking for to contact Charles in London, the time being 5h ahead of Ont. “Yes, I will accept the charges operator” she heard Charles say... and then “Hello Princess, well, that didn’t take long!”

“What’s your mother done now?” he inquired, inquisitively.

Lizzie explained the dirty tricks her mother had unleashed on them, and some of her and Nicholas’ reasoning.

“Hmmm ... I’d have to agree with you Princess, it’s best that we leave her thinking she’s won – or else all hell will break loose for you, still stuck in Canada! OK, I see how I can help without being too generous to my old rival, but still being a gentleman. I’d rather not be remembered as a cad in your mind -we’ll leave that sort of thing to your mother. I’m due back in Cape Town in a few days myself, still, here’s what I can do for you...” He continued “We have a guest apartment in Putney, near the Tube and river. It’s a nice quiet area and it’s empty right now. I’ll have our chauffeur fetch Nicholas at Gatwick, where Laker airlines is located, when he arrives, and since they have so few flights from Toronto – Probably only 1 each week, it will be easy to find him there – just tell him to look for my Chauffeur holding a sign with ‘Nicholas’ on it, and he’ll take care of the rest” Charles assured Lizzie.

“Thank you Charles!” Lizzie exclaimed delightedly! “I’m so sorry to have to bother you, but ...” Charles interrupted her

“Princess, obviously I’m doing this to make things up to you, so no need to apologize ... I mean, I recall a rather sneaky plan of mine that stopped you from seeing Nicholas at the Worcester station, en-route to start his two year stint in the Air force. Back then I was being, well, for want of a better word, a bit of a cad! I hope this makes up for that and that you’ll forgive that part of me that was determined then to do whatever it took to win your heart –am I forgiven?” he asked

“Yes Charles, I remember that well, it was most stressful - painful actually, but I forgive you. I’m pretty sure Nicholas does too!” she added, then continued “and Charles...”

“Yes Lizzie?” Charles interjected

“Thank you ... thank you, again, with all my heart!” she said

“Oh Princess ...” Charles replied “It’s a forlorn wish now for me to have all – or even a part of your heart – clearly that honor now belongs to Nicholas, but it’s a nice sentiment.

Soon after Lizzie and Charles said their goodbyes, Lizzie turned to Nicholas “You’ve probably figured out much of what was said, but let me fill you in on the plan” she said.

“Lizzie, that’s Splendid!” Nicholas remarked. “I’ll probably be able to get by with \$200 or so, rather than burn through the rest of our savings now. Her intended death-blow once again turns out to be just a glancing blow! We will survive, Lizzie! Our love will survive this -but now it’s almost all up to you!”

“Yes Nicholas, and I will not let you - or myself, down! It’s time I did my part, as an adult, to make my dreams – our dreams, come true!” she corrected herself, smiling at him.

“Oh Mrs. Strauss, I love the way you’re thinking! I love you ... I always have and I always will” He said winking at her, noticing how his choice of words brought a smile to her face.

“That sounds so nice to hear you say – certainly the ‘I love you’ part, but especially the Mrs. Strauss part!” she said.



Chapter 26

Niagara falls ... a farewell to remember

It was evening, and Edwin had just arrived home. As usual Constance was in the Kitchen preparing supper for them. Lizzie and Nicholas were sitting on the couch in the living-room, hand in hand, when he entered, stopping by to chat to them ... with what looked like two tickets in his hand.

“Elizabeth, you know I cannot give you a ticket back to Cape Town, that would be worth my life” he began “But I can at least make your last day together memorable” he added “so here’s a little present for you two” he said, handing the tickets to Elizabeth.

“Thank you dad ... what are these for?” she asked of him.

“Two return Grey-coach bus-tickets to Niagara Falls, for tomorrow – I’ll drop you both off at the bus terminal on my way to work, and pick you up again after work” he said.

Lizzie arose, as did Nicholas, and they both thanked him for the nice gesture. Nicholas extended his hand in gratitude, Edwin reciprocated. Lizzie knew not to give her dad a hug – that was never allowed by Constance, so as usual, she stood before him, the tickets in her hands, made eye-contact and smiled at him, saying “Thank you dad, that’s really sweet!”

“You’re welcome dear, but for my sake, please just make this sound like it was your doing – your idea, and I’m not involved – other than as transport to and from the bus terminal tomorrow” he requested “I did not buy them, you did!” he said, winking at her “Lizzie, let’s be smart here!”

“No problem dad, It will be our little secret!” Lizzie replied.

While they were all busy eating, Lizzie - with a quick wink at Edwin -which went unnoticed, made the announcement, just as Constance had filled her mouth with food ...

“Nicholas and I are going to spend our last day together visiting Niagara falls, tomorrow ... dad, can you please drop us off to catch the bus there, on your way to work and pick us up again on your way back home tomorrow afternoon?” she inquired ... then before Constance could interject, her mouth still full of food, Edwin agreed -the deal was done.

Lizzie smiled, Edwin looked relieved, Nicholas looked happy, Hattie was downcast, using her fork to play with a few peas still left on her plate and Constance reflected, then said ...

“That means the two of you will be gone for the day ... the day before Nicholas is off to the Airport to fly to London, well that’s nice dear” she tactfully added, thinking how lucky she was. It was almost as good as him leaving a day earlier! That, in her mind, was a wonderful, welcome bonus!

It was still early in the morning when Nicholas and Lizzie were sitting cuddled up inside the bus headed for Niagara falls, but stopping at all sorts of little towns along the way. Outside the scene was grey and frigid, snow all around. This area of Ontario, surrounded by great-lakes, suffered the most in winter from what’s known as “the Lake effect” – resulting in a large annual snowfall, similar to Buffalo, NY and Rochester, NY – just across the USA – Canada border.

Inside the bus, the huddled up next to each other in warm jackets, Lizzie and Nicholas chatted away about the kinds of things that they could still have to deal with. Suddenly Nicholas had an idea! “Lizzie...” he said to get her attention

“Yes Nicholas?” she inquired, looking at him.

“Your mother has not acted in good faith ... and that’s stating things rather mildly - what if you use that as a pretense to not give her your monthly paycheck, and instead

use that money to add to our savings and buy your ticket back to Cape Town? That could happen as soon as one month from now!" Nicholas said, smiling –suddenly hopeful!

"Hmmm ... an interesting thought, and yes, I'd not thought of that, so let's examine that option closer ..." She replied. "Currently I end up with around \$700 each month, after payroll deductions, less than what I will need for my ticket" Lizzie remarked "The problem is that, as I see it, the minute I do that kind of thing, mother will evict me again, and I then will need at least 14 days worth of excess funds to pay for living expenses – that would be at least 2 months worth of my net-salary – which clearly I will not have, and I'd still need to buy the ticket! It's a nice thought – but I'm afraid mother has me as her captive until I can secretly save the difference we'll need for my ticket, live there – not in hotels, then buy the ticket and still get to stay in their home for the last few days before my flight to freedom." Lizzie concluded.

Nicholas sighed "Well, it was worth thinking about" he said, "I guess she has an edge over us with her ability to plan so far into the future and really is quite a genius – though as her victim, I'm rather tempted to make that 'evil genius'!"

Lizzie laughed –a little uncomfortably "Yes, not nice of her!"

Soon enough the bus pulled into the station at Niagara falls, with the driver announcing "Niagara falls ... we return to Kitchener at 3pm sharp, please don't be late, else you'll be spending the night in the honeymoon capital of North America, waiting for tomorrow's bus!" He joked, looking at Lizzie and Nicholas – clearly a young couple in love, he thought "But without any luggage?" He was a bit puzzled.

Nicholas and Lizzie smiled at him, both thanking him for getting them there safe and in a timely fashion, asking for directions to the falls – which he gave them. Then they walked, hand in hand, two young lovers, to the Canadian Horseshoe falls, chatting away somewhat excitedly – this was the only fun, touristy thing they'd done since he'd

arrived. They could now hear the thunder of the falls, and they saw clouds rising above the buildings. As they rounded the last corner the falls suddenly came into view ...

“Wow Lizzie!” Nicholas exclaimed – that’s a magnificent scene – though I’d hasten to add, not quite the waterfall scene we’ve been used to each Christmas – till now!”

“Yes, it’s every bit as impressive as we’ve been led to believe – an Icy, Cold, Snowy scene, to be sure, but really very beautiful in a winter-wonderland kind of way” she exclaimed

Nicholas had brought Edwin’s camera with him – a 35mm camera with a new roll of 12 exposure film in it. He asked Lizzie to stand at the railing at the edge of the falls, and pose for him. He took a few photos, with her still in a good mood then spoke “Elizabeth, I’ll be taking this memory back to Cape Town with me. It will have to be developed there once I’m back, but at least I’ll have a wonderful photo of you to remember our last day together ...” but she interrupted.

“No - not our ‘last day’ Nicholas, just one taken of our many forced goodbye’s ... the next photo I’d like is of me in Cape Town’s Airport, as I run out of arrivals to greet you there!” Lizzie determinedly proclaimed “and as soon as possible!”

Nicholas smiled before replying “Oh Lizzie, that’s a lovely dream –please do whatever it takes to make that come true!” then he added “You know Lizzie, when we were evaluating the progress of our wishes on Christmas-eve in the Walper, it didn’t occur to either of us that this is an one of Ontario’s National parks and these falls are spectacular - and look down there ...” he said pointing to the vast area of water below the horse-shoe falls “That sure is a huge pool below the falls!” Maybe that’s how our wish will come true one day?” He joked, adding “Though right now it’s icy-cold! I doubt one can safely swim near these falls anyway, we’d probably get arrested just for trying – if we don’t drown!” Lizzie smiled “Yes, Nicholas ... who really knows – but God? But I agree... this waterfall and pool is not for swimming in!”

They spent the rest of the day walking around the touristy areas, having Coffee dates, with naughty muffins and Cinnamon buns, chatting away excitedly, as young lovers tend to do in this romantic place, and at 2:15PM, made their way back to the bus, the first to arrive, and waited there for the driver to open the bus and let them be seated in it. As he allowed them in, he inquired where they were from, and what brought them here – and they briefly explained their dilemma to him. He just shook his head, remarking

“That’s a very sad story ... I’m really sorry for what you two have had to endure over this Christmas season! I’ve brought many a young couple here for their honeymoon, but never for their farewell ... still, I’m going to make a bold prediction, the two of you will return here as a married couple, one day, because this very cruel plan that’s been forced onto you will really only serve to unite you two in a common purpose - and that’s never a bad thing!” He confidently declared.

Both thanked him, saying “That’s a wonderful idea, we’ll agree to return here, together, in the spring of the 1st year we find ourselves back in Canada!” they said, both excited at the thought of what that would mean – they’d be married, one way or the other –whether in South Africa or in Canada!



This photo was taken by Nicholas, of Elizabeth, at Niagara falls in December of 1978.

Chapter 27

Farewell Toronto ... Hello London

“Edwin ... “Constance began, to get his attention.

“Yes Dear?” Edwin replied

“I want you to drive Nicholas to the Toronto Airport tomorrow morning ... Let’s make sure he gets there and leaves on that Laker airlines flight!” she commanded him.

“OK dear, I’ll tell my secretary that I’ll be a little late for work, and take him to Terminal-1 personally” adding “Lizzie can come too - she’s still on holiday.”

Constance sighed “I suppose that can’t be avoided – so let’s just get all of this over as soon as possible so we can get on with our lives and Lizzie can restart her new life here in Canada without clinging to the past ...” Edwin interrupted

“By ‘the past’ you’re meaning Nicholas and South Africa?”

“Yes Edwin – Both!” she stated, emphatically, now annoyed!

“You may recall dear, that Nicholas promised to bring Lizzie back to us in Canada once he finishes his computer-science degree at UCT – I considered that a noble, generous gesture, don’t you think you’re being rather unwise by still insisting that Lizzie give up on both her love for Nicholas and even any temporary return to Africa while he wraps up his final year at UCT?” Edwin replied – trying to moderate her stance.

“No Edwin, I’m not going to take that chance! How do you or I know that he will keep his word, or that Canada will even let him in even if he wants to keep his word?” she insisted.

“But dear, his degree, right now, as the computer revolution is in full swing, will almost surely get him landed immigrant status in Canada, and if he brings Lizzie back to us, I’d not blame him for doing so with a huge chip on his shoulder! I mean, you’ve really made their love complicated and their lives difficult, and you’ve insisted I join you in doing that!” Edwin remarked “I see nothing wrong with allowing the two of them to return to Africa, together – and let’s face it, under the circumstances I’d say that would buy us back a lot of good-will, which right now we desperately need!” he added.

“No Edwin, I’ve made my mind up! Just follow my orders!” she said, growing annoyed with his line of thinking “This will end that chapter in your silly daughter’s life – and allow her to start a new one here in Canada, living with us and there’s no room in my plan for Nicholas! She’ll get over him!”

“But dear ...” Edwin pressed on - now aware Constance was getting annoyed with him “Your dad’s opposition to our love and marriage did not work, and in the end, he lost! I mean, we almost never visited with them again after our wedding – I can count the times we all saw each other on my left hand and still have a finger left over!” he said, summing up now.

“Edwin... stop trying to sound like you know what’s best for Elizabeth’s life, clearly you don’t!” she snapped back angrily.

Edwin remained silent for a while ... the signals he was now getting were pretty clear. Constance was not going to change her mind –ever! It was her way or the highway! He grimaced as he remembered what she’d required him to do to Lizzie on Christmas eve. “Time will tell dear. For now the wheels of your plan are in motion and I’ll reluctantly go along with it.”

Meanwhile Elizabeth and Nicholas, safely in his basement room, were finalizing their plans. Nicholas was nervous.

“Lizzie, we only have a few more hours together, let’s make sure we leave no loose ends – that we both understand the plan really well!” He suggested, looking and feeling nervous, adding “Why not sleep here with me tonight, one last time?”

Lizzie gave him a hug and said “My parents go to bed early, they won’t even notice I’ll be sleeping here with you tonight!” then reassured him “Don’t worry Nicholas, my childishness got us into this mess and I will see to it that somehow, I will get to be with you again in Africa, and we will be married!”

Nicholas smiled “Oh Lizzie, I’m going to fight sleep just so that I can be aware of you being with me, and I really, really hope...” then added “and pray, that you’re right! But to be safe, I’ll write you at your work address, you can write and mail letters back to me from there ... your mother has been known to snoop – to read our letters and even intercept and destroy them. let’s not leave any clues as to our plans, lying around!” He cautioned her “Let’s outsmart her this time!”

“Agreed Nicholas!” That’s a good precaution! She replied.

“And remember Lizzie ... Loose lips sink ships!” he added.

“Don’t worry Nicholas, this time I’m going to act as if I’ve resigned myself to my fate and give them no clues as to what I’m planning to do!” Lizzie reassured him. “We’ve both learned the hard way, that we can trust none of them with any knowledge of our lives – so I’ll lull them all into a false sense of security, and organize everything very covertly!” Lizzie said, sounding so grown-up, all of a sudden.

“Excellent Lizzie! I’ll not be here to help you with any of that, but I’m confident you’ll manage, this time!” He praised her.

The next morning came all too soon, and before long, Lizzie and Nicholas found themselves huddled in the back-seat of Edwin’s Oldsmobile Cutlass Supreme - him navigating the 401 highway and the maze of roads leading to Terminal-1 of Toronto’s Pearson International Airport. Pulling up to the curb on the departures level, Edwin announced “We’re here” OK Nicholas, I’ll get your suitcase out ... you and Lizzie can say your goodbyes, I am in a hurry, please make it quick!”

“Sure thing Mr. Smythe!” Nicholas replied knowing that the

longer they took to say goodbye, the more problematic it would be anyway – best keep her spirits up! Nicholas got his suitcase from Edwin, extended his hand and said to him...

“Thank you for the ride Mr. Smythe – Please do whatever you can to look out for Lizzie ... naturally she may be rather sad for some time ... I mean we’ve been engaged now for quite a while!” He said, adding “I think you can relate?”

Edwin winced, knowing Constance’s plans did not include them or Elizabeth, ever seeing Nicholas again - but smiled and reassured him anyway “She is my daughter Nicholas, of course I’ll do that! Have a safe flight to London!” and with that he took the cowards way out - retreated back to the driver’s seat, waiting for Lizzie – with the motor running.

Nicholas and Lizzie stood at the Entrance – far enough away from Edwin that he could not hear what they were saying.

“Well Lizzie, the time’s finally come to say goodbye – again.” he said, with a feeble attempt at a smile, noticing now how Lizzie’s eyes grew moist. “I really wished my rescue mission had turned out differently, but I have a good feeling you’re going to pull it off, and be the heroine who saves the day for our love’s story!” Nicholas reassured her, forcing a smile.

Lizzie smiled at him through her tears ... “Please write me as soon as you get back to Cape Town – I’ll write too! I don’t care if our letters cross in the mail – just as long as I hear from you to keep my hope alive!” She said “and Nicholas, as you sit on that old Boeing 707 of Laker airlines - flying out of my life, yet again - for now, please know this much ... I will never, ever stop loving you and I will never ever forget you!” she said, forcing a smile, looking intently into his eyes.

“Lizzie, I’ve always loved you ... and I always will!” The next time we meet, whenever that is – and I hope and pray it’s sooner rather than later, I’m going to take you straight to the church and ask the reverend to marry us! I want to be able to know that you’re Mrs. Elizabeth Strauss!” He said.

Lizzie smiled – happier now at hearing him profess his love and reaffirm his intentions “Nicholas, that’s Mrs. Elizabeth Meriwether Strauss – and don’t you forget it!” she joked.

They hugged one last time... it was a long lingering hug, and Nicholas could feel her tears now, against his chest – then suddenly she broke away, giving him her best attempt at a smile as she turned to head for Edwin’s car, opening the front door to get in the passenger side, next to the curb. But as she did so, she turned to look at Nicholas, standing there alone now next to his suitcase, and blew him a kiss. That worked – it shocked him out of his dazed state. He quickly caught it with his left hand, and held it up to his heart. Then using his right hand, blew a kiss to Lizzie – she caught it, held it next to her heart for a brief moment, smiled, then turned and got into the car, closing the door –but turning to look out of its window, at Nicholas, still standing there with her kiss clasped firmly against his heart, waving weakly at her with his right arm. Immediately the car started moving down the length of the departure platform with Lizzie still looking back at him - then it rounded the corner and Lizzie disappeared from view and out his life, once again. Nicholas stood there for short while longer –stunned, realizing he was still waving with his right arm - but at nothing now. So he slowly dropped his left arm back to his side, picked up his suitcase with his right hand and turned to enter Terminal-1.

Before long he found the Laker airlines check-in desk, and since he was early, he walked straight up to the counter to check in. The young lady smiled kindly at him as she entered his name to find his booking. “I see we have a note on your booking Mr. Strauss ... we’re sorry to hear about your mother being ill, I’m sorry you had to cut your vacation short, but here at Laker airlines, we have big hearts – so we found a away to get you back to Gatwick sooner!” she said.

Suddenly it all became clear in Nicholas’ mind – “So that’s how she did it!” he said to himself. “Well, no point causing any confusion now, I may as well stick to the plans we have” he concluded – answering “Thank you for your kindness!”

he said, forcing a weak smile, 'I really appreciate this not costing me anything, being a student I really just don't have a lot of money!' he added. She looked up briefly from the computer terminal, smiled, asking him ...

"So do you want a Window seat, or an isle seat?"

To which he replied "Make that a window seat please."

Pretty soon his bag was checked and he had his boarding pass, so he made his way towards security, clearing that rather quickly, then walked to find his departure gate. Once there, he found a Coffee-shop, purchased a cup of Coffee and sat there, alone again – reflecting, as suddenly a huge void seemed to have opened up in his life again - his heart was now aching as an immense sense of fear gripped him.

"What if that's the last image of Lizzie I'll ever have?" he thought "What if this sad farewell is destined to remain in our minds, forever – what if I never get another chance to hold her in my arms and tell her how much I love her, ever again?" he winced! "No! He thought – quickly banishing those dark thoughts out of his mind – forcing himself to conjure up images of Lizzie at Niagara falls instead!"

Suddenly he started feeling the darkness lifting off of him. "Lizzie was going to find a way back to him! She would! He must believe that!" He admonished himself for allowing any negative thoughts to enter his mind –for allowing fear to grip his heart in an attempt to strangle the love ensconced there.

The flight to Gatwick was uneventful, Nicholas spent most of the time staring out of the window, thinking - but managed to cat-nap from time to time. In his dreams, the cold harsh reality disappeared. He and Lizzie were together again!

As the flight landed at Gatwick, the Captain thanked them for flying with Laker airlines and pretty soon they were all exiting, finding their way towards the luggage carousel for this flight. Nicholas cleared customs, but needed to show

them his return ticket to Cape Town from Heathrow in 3 weeks time, which eased their fears that he'd stay. Soon he walked out of customs on into the arrivals terminal, noticing a well dressed man with a jacket and cap holding a sign that read "Nicholas" – and he made his way over to him, putting his suitcase down long enough to extend his hand ...

"Hello, I'm Nicholas" He said "What's your name?" he asked.

"Alfred, sir. My friends down at the pub call me Alf, but I'm supposed to be more formal whilst on duty – working." he smiled, shaking Nicholas' hand.

"Well I'll call you Alf too then" Nicholas said "and no need to call me sir – I'm certainly not deserving of any titles!" He joked as he reached back down to pickup his luggage.

"Here sir – I mean Nicholas, let me get that for you" He said.

"Alf, really, no need to do that..." but Alfred interrupted him.

"Nicholas, if anyone here saw a Chauffeur walking chatting happily with his charge – who was carrying his own luggage ... well, I'm not sure they'd ever recover from their shock!" He joked "So If you don't mind, I'll do my job and we can relax and chat while I'm driving you to Putney." He said.

Sensing that he'd landed in another world, Nicholas politely acquiesced and walked next to Alfred, following him to the limousine. Alfred and he chatted about all sorts of things, on the way from the airport to Putney, with Alfred mostly acting as an informal tour guide. Soon they arrived at a neat 3 story Brick building away from the main road, surrounded with big, old Oak trees. Alfred opened the door for Nicholas, retrieved his luggage from the boot, and led him to the 3rd floor, stopping to reach in his pocket for keys, opened the flat's door and motioned for Nicholas to enter. It was a large, flat, 3 rooms, 2 bathrooms with a nice lounge and kitchen! Alfred gave him the keys, saying "Nicholas, It's all yours now till you leave – no wild parties mind!" as he winked at him.

“No fear of that Alf, my hearts still sore from saying goodbye to my Fiancée! I don’t drink much, so I’ll just be a tourist!”

Alfred smiled, “I kind of already knew what kind of a person you are – master Charles did brief me on who you are and what brings you here to us, and though it will cost me my job if it ever comes out, I’m kind of chuffed that master Charles lost at something in life – he rarely does. Everyone needs to lose at something – just to stay human” he said.

“Don’t worry Alf, your secret’s safe with me ... mums the word ey?” Nicholas joked, winking and smiling back at him.

“Well all right then ...” Alfred continued, I’ll leave you to get acquainted with the surroundings – though you look like you need to take a nice warm bath and some sleep right now” he said with a smile. “The telly’s over there, the bar there and the fridge has some supplies – but mostly for Coffee and such” Alfred clarified. “You’ll need to walk down towards the High St. where there’s a Sainsbury’s - also a Tesco, to get more supplies” then, as an afterthought, he added “Show me you ticket to Cape Town Nicholas, I’ll have to make a note of the flight and the date and time, so that I can come and fetch you to take you to your flight.” Nicholas found his ticket, and showed it to Alfred. “Oh good ... it’s leaving from Heathrow, and at a perfect time of day too – so traffic will not be too bad!” he announced, smiling happily.

“Thank you Alfred – I really appreciate you kindness, I’m a fish out of water in your city, and you seem to know it so well!” Nicholas said, extending his hand to greet Alfred.

“Call me if you need any help, Nicholas – my numbers on the list next to the phone in the kitchen” he said as he turned to leave. The door closed behind Alfred, and Nicholas was on his own. “Now to have a nice warm bath and relax a bit before bedtime” he thought to himself. Having this safe-house was really welcome! He’d have to find a way to thank Charles ... “It’s jolly good form of him ... helping an old rival for Lizzie’s hand in marriage!” Nicholas thought to himself.

Chapter 28

Elizabeth stumbles onto the perfect cover for their plans!

Elizabeth had not emerged from her room all day and it was now 4pm. With it still being mid-winter in Waterloo, it was already dark. Constance opened the door and finding Lizzie lying on the bed in the dark, switched on the light – Lizzie winced, covering her eyes to shield her from the bright light.

“Elizabeth, you need to get over him!” Constance started to say, adding “Lying here in your room crying, acting sad is not what grownups do! How many times have I told you to never ever let anyone see your tears –to rather go cry in the shower if you really must cry at all, so that nobody can see!”

“Mother, It’s natural for me to be sad – I’m not acting sad, and I’ll cry if I want to –it’s my heart that’s hurting now, not yours – you sound gleefully happy, actually!” Lizzie replied.

“Come here Elizabeth” she motioned to her “Come stand here with me, I want to show you something ... ” she said.

Lizzie sighed, getting up to go to her mother. If she didn’t humor her, there’d be no end in sight to her bullying tactics.

“Stand here with me and look into this mirror” she said, directing Lizzie to the full length mirror on the wall next to her “What do you see?” Lizzie said nothing, prompting Constance to continue “What a sorry sight! Nicholas is heading back to UCT to be surrounded with pretty young girls all looking to find their future husbands, and if I recall correctly, even his old girlfriend - the blonde bombshell, Denise, is there – living just a few doors down from him in the same apartment building –and you’re lying here crying?” Elizabeth tried her best to stay calm –Constance was clearly

goaded her and she really had to now watch her words very carefully else she may just end up giving her some crucial information about the plans she and Nicholas had agreed to!

“Mother – if I lose Nicholas over all the things you’ve done to us, I will never, ever forgive you! So you’d better hope that I don’t!” Lizzie replied, righteous indignation now rising in her

“Well I for one would be most surprised if Nicholas stays faithful to you – I mean he’s a healthy young man and the girls seem to like him - thought I really can’t see why?” Constance smugly replied, twisting the knife in Lizzie’s wounded heart “He may just disappear - never to be heard from again ... Like he did after he declared his love to you at Wellington’s train station - when the two of you said your goodbye’s there, just before he went to the air force for two years!” Constance said, sneering at Elizabeth’s rising ire.

Lizzie breathed in deeply, then measured her words as she replied “Mother, he didn’t want to disappear –you made him disappear! You never gave me his letters and you told him, on the phone, when he called to speak to me, that I’d moved on and was in love with Charles!” Lizzie replied, her face flushed “That’s hardly Nicholas’ fault, now is it?” she asked.

“Elizabeth, you only have his word for that – how do you know he wasn’t lying to you about all his supposed letters?” Constance countered. “It was all made up -an excuse for his philandering for 2 years behind your back, if you ask me!”

“Mother, I think the evidence is pretty clear – he was set up to fail by you in your obsession to have me married off to Charles – even Charles can see that now!” Lizzie retorted.

Constance looked a bit flustered at the mention of Charles turning on her ... “Well, he’s a real ingrate! If he’d listened to me he’d have won your heart and Nicholas would be ancient history – which I predict is what’s going to happen now!” she continued “I’d give Charles another chance ... If I was you!”

“But you’re not me mother! I chose Nicholas over Charles, and your meddling was a large part of the reason I did so! With Charles I’d always feel you were pulling my strings - through him! Nicholas at least gives me hope that one day I’ll be free of those strings and able to lead my own life and follow my own dreams – not yours! I’m going to give Nicholas every chance to stay true to me and I’ll look forward to his first letter arriving here in a few weeks time, after he’s back and able to write letters to me again!” a now defiant Lizzie announced, with a small smile forming at the corners of her mouth ... as it dawned on her that she’d just stumbled on a marvelous plan –a perfect ‘red herring’ to keep Constance from finding out what she had planned! “And please don’t throw his letters away again! I’ll know it was you!” she said.

“Elizabeth... I’ve never really seen you cry so bitterly and as often -until after you met Nicholas! He’s clearly the source of all your tears...” Constance confidently proclaimed, adding “You’d better watch out, my girl, your tears for Nicholas are forming a river that soon will become a raging torrent and will sweep you over the edge of a high waterfall like the one you saw yesterday... Niagara falls – unless you forget him!”

“Mother, you can’t control my thoughts and my recollection of events! I often swam with Nicholas in tranquil pools when you were unaware of our young love - the only danger there being that we’d fall ever more deeply in love with each other. In that safe pool, far away from you, I shed no tears – none at all! It was only after you realized how much I’d grown to love Nicholas -and him me, when you decided to intervene to change the outcome to fit with your plans for my life, that my tears started flowing, mainly because often my heart was breaking as I realized that if you get your way, I’d be parted from my sweetheart forever ... I’d just be a puppet on your strings, living your dreams and fantasies –and not my own!”

“Well my dear, if you insist on being so stubborn, you’ll be swept away to a very sad ending – you and your love will end up on the rocks below the waterfall of your tears for a young Afrikaner boy who doesn’t deserve any of your tears!

Lizzie now felt righteous anger rise within her, realizing that Constance was cursing her future - trying to doom her love, so she summoned up every ounce of courage to stay calm and replied "Mother, Nicholas has saved me from the raging torrents you've started, every time -and were it not for your devious plans I'd be on my way back to Cape town right now to become his wife! With him I always swim in tranquil clear waters, in a beautiful safe pool, in his loving arms. With you I always find myself above that pool, in the raging torrent of my tears, being swept away to the waterfall -on to a horrible ending ... but somehow, Nicholas is always there to pull me out of the swirling torrent of tears your jealousy started... to safety, into his loving, protective arms! I don't get feelings of safety or love from you at all - I just feel a constant barrage of jealous cruelty aimed at breaking my spirit and bringing me fully back under your control! So when I cry, it's out of sadness for being forcibly, cruelly parted from the one I love, the one I know truly loves me, and would give his life for me -something you'd never do for me; thus also out of sadness in seeing no such love coming from you, my mother - lastly out of righteous anger that you should so steadfastly believe you have a sovereign right to run my life -to ruin my life and then smugly watch me suffer if I don't do as you command!"

Constance angrily interrupted "Elizabeth, don't you dare call me jealous! Why should I ever be jealous of you? You're just a snip of a girl who'd be wise to mind your tongue and do as I say, else suffer the consequences of your unwise decisions! Don't for a moment imagine you'll ever rise above me in life - in any way! I'm the queen of this household! You'll do as I command! Don't you dare rock the boat!" adding "You don't understand loyalty -I expect you'd be prepared to die for me - that's what loyal subjects do! But Elizabeth, I'm not your subject... so why on earth would you expect that of me?"

Now tears were flowing freely over Elizabeth's cheeks as she realized her choice of words had struck a nerve -it was clear to her now - her mother was indeed jealous of her. She was young and able to start anew, to do things her mother could only now dream about - or vicariously achieve through her! The real reason for Constance's scheming, was her desire to

turn back the clock and explore a life she could have lived if only she'd obeyed her father's demands that she not marry Edwin -but marry the rich young man he'd selected for her! Elizabeth fought to control her anger, through her sobbing, as she replied "Mother, you're in your 50's I'm less than half your age, only 22. I've chosen to explore my own dreams -to treasure and nurture the love I found as an innocent young girl of 15. I believe in Nicholas -you clearly don't! I know he's a poor student now - a fact you've once again so callously taken advantage of to thwart his plan to rescue me! But he was there standing at the waterfall's edge. He caught a hold of my arm pulling me to safety -but you once again found a way to tear me from his arms, not to get me to safety, but rather to carry me upstream and there callously throw me back into my river of my tears again, then to watch with a cruel, jealous smirk, as once again I'm being swept towards the waterfall -and all because I will not submit my free will to your attempts to rule my life!" Then before the now very irate Constance could talk, she added "But I just know that before this latest river of tears, that you engineered, sweeps me over that waterfall, Nicholas will be there to rescue me, yet again and mother, I'll gladly hold up my hand to him to pull me out of the raging torrent - to safety, safe from you!"

"Elizabeth, pull yourself together! Dad will be home shortly, and I have to go get supper ready for all of us," Constance snapped back "Nicholas won't be there for you, to save you, this time! He's going to forget the source of all of his pain - you! You'll be forced to forget him - the source of all of your tears! And watch your tone of voice with me young girl!" she snapped back, turned to leave and clicking her tongue as she left the room, slamming the door behind her in a huff.

Lizzie looked at herself in the mirror, and suddenly smiled. "Yes mother, you're going to be proven right! There will be no letters arriving from Nicholas for you to hide or throw away again - none what so ever! To you it's going to look like I've been jilted by Nicholas - and this time I'm going to play the part of the sad, jilted lover with a lot of drama!" Lizzie thought to herself "This time I'm going to hide us, and our love, safely behind your own fondest, wished-for outcome!"

Lizzie started repairing her makeup, to look less ruffled for Edwin's return, all the time thinking how she's going to play the role of the 'poor jilted lover' – the poor forgotten fiancée! "It will be the perfect cover! Then I'll be able to do everything I need to without her harassment!" she thought "I guess I've finally learned that I now need to fight her fire ... with fire!"

Just then she heard the garage door open ... Dad was home, time to welcome him home ... at least he understood her.

"Good evening dear ... supper almost ready?" Edwin asked.

"Yes Edwin – how was your day?" She replied.

"Actually, not so good ... I'll need my sleep, I have important meetings in the morning, there's union troubles looming at the tannery." He said, adding "They're going out on strike!"

"Well Edwin you've seen me in action, you know what works best! I suggest you lock them out in the cold - like we did to Elizabeth and Nicholas last Christmas eve! They'll soon be back, begging for their old jobs back – but on your terms!" Constance told him, "Don't try to bargain with them, ever!"

"Yes dear, perhaps you're right – it did work rather well!" He conceded "I'll take a hard-line with them and hopefully after a while out in the cold on picket lines, they'll come back to beg for their comfy jobs?" he said ... Constance approved!

Lizzie stood in the dark looking out of her bedroom window watching big fluffy snow-flakes falling outside, illuminated by the street-lights. Suddenly she felt very alone. Everything was so foreign to her. Gone was all Cape Town's color and warmth - also Nicholas' kind words, smiles and hugs. She was now her mother's captive in this cold land far, far away. Her valiant knight had come to rescue his fair-maiden, but had been driven off by the old fire-breathing dragon. She was being held captive in the dragon's lair, against her will, locked up with chains, unable to escape... yet! It was up to her to pick those locks, cast off the chains and make good her escape. Her valiant knight had at least secretly left her with money that would help to speed her escape plans, but not enough yet. Worse yet, Constance's words now haunted her ... "I for one would be most surprised if Nicholas stays faithful to you!" Lizzie sighed, turning to go downstairs.

Chapter 29

The world's a very small place – when you least expect it!

Nicholas was making his way through a maze of quaint old roads, along Puntey bridge road, towards Putney bridge tube station, which was on the far-side of the Thames, when, half-way across the Thames, someone called out his name...

“Nicholas!” He heard a women’s voice exclaim “What are you doing here in London?” she said with a welcoming smile.

“Sarah ...” Nicholas said to a tallish, slightly chubby brunette with a barmaids figure and rosy cheeks, dressed in jeans and a turtle-neck sweater “I could ask you the same!”

“Well, you know I’m British ... I’m home for the holidays, silly!” she said winking at him “where are you headed?”

“Oh, just acting like a confused tourist in London – my first time. I thought I’ll head for South Africa house in Trafalgar Square, to catch up on the news back home – I’m stranded here for 3 weeks with nothing to do and not much money, so it will have to be a real economy student’s holiday!” Nicholas said, adding “what’s your plans for the day?”

“I was also thinking of going to South Africa house, to make sure my student-visa is up-to-date for our final year” she said – then with a smile “Mind if I tag along?”

“Of course not! We were Physics prac-partners for our freshman year – that all feels like it’s a rather long time ago, so you can catch me up on your life” he said, smiling at her, and so they continued walking to the tube station, chatting away as old friends do. They made their way to the platform, then climbed on board the train which, at this time of day,

was rather empty. Sitting next to each other, Nicholas asked “As I recall, when you and I were in 1st year, doing our pracs together, you were staying with your sister who’s married to an Afrikaner man – and you were dating his brother. How did that work out?” Nicholas asked, curious, as his and Lizzie’s cultural match-up was almost identical.

“Well, not so well ...” she replied “His parents were not very warm towards me – still had a bit of a chip on their shoulder from the Boer war, I guess? They made my sisters life rather tough at times too – but since the birth of her first child, my sister’s been getting along much better with them.” She said, adding “But I kind of figured they were not going to make it easy for us, so we broke up – pity really, he was a nice young man” she said with a sigh, but quickly recovered her composure, asking him “And how about you? I seem to recall that back then you were dating another UCT girl, I think you knew her from your teenage years?” she inquired.

“Yes, that’s right, Elizabeth – also British, like you – I’ve always rather fancied British and Irish ladies – and I’m an Afrikaner, so that says a lot ... but my whole family has had no problems with any of that – which is more than I can say for Lizzie’s family!” he said with a shrug the rather pained expression on his face clearly visible to her.

“Oh no ... do tell, you know misery likes company” she said, adding “We’re here now – this is Trafalgar, and we need to get out and get back up to street level” she said beckoning him, with a sympathetic smile – then suggested, “Let’s first go find a pub; it’s almost lunch-time and I could do with a nice pub lunch and a pint of bitters while you tell me all about what’s happened to you in the last 3 years” she said.

Nicholas didn’t know much about anything in London, so he let Sarah take the lead again, to find a pub for them to relax in – which was pretty much what he did in all their Physics and Chemistry pracs too - she was so confident and smart. Sitting down at a corner table, in a booth, now each with a pint of bitters, wiping her mouth after her first mouthful,

she inquired of him “So Nicholas ... what’s happened?”

Nicholas proceeded to relate a summary of Lizzie’s and his romance, with its many sad farewells and happy reunions.

“Oh my goodness Nicholas! I’d never have guessed any of that – you were always so polite and seemingly happy at university, it looked that way to me, anyway ... I had no idea about all of that turmoil going on underneath your smile!”

Nicholas smiled at her, drank more of his pint, then said “Yes Sarah, it’s been tough, but you know, I’ve always rather felt that tough times don’t last forever – that if you’re tough, you can outlast them -and since I was raised in an English boarding school, I’ve had to be tough to survive ...” adding “And happy too, never mind what’s happening ... just smile and power on through the worst of it all – that’s worked well for me” he said taking another sip of bitters.

“I’ll drink to that!” Sarah said, raising her pint to his, adding “You know, if Johan had fought for me half as hard as you’ve fought for your Lizzie ... I’d have stayed with him!”

“Really Sarah?” Nicholas asked her, inquisitively.

“Nicholas, you seem so naïve where we women are involved, but we’re a lot sneakier and more calculating – behind our smiles, than you’d ever imagine!” she said over her beer.

Nicholas looked intrigued “Yes, well, I’ve only ever had to deal with one nasty woman in my life –all my friends and their moms were sweet, I never had to worry about them.”

“But Nicholas, even the nice ones are calculating!” she continued – let me give you an example. “Smart women don’t run for the door at the first sign of stress in a couple’s life – but we do watch very carefully how you men deal with that stress! I mean, think about it ... when we marry, we often give up our careers, stay at home and have babies – least that’s the way it used to be ...” she noted, continuing

“That’s when we’re most vulnerable, needing a mate to depend on, to provide for us and our babies and to protect us from whatever harm comes our way... so if we see a mate is not prepared to stick by us in tough times – even if it only looks that way, we break-up with them before we’re married, pregnant or vulnerable!” she concluded ... with a wink.

“Wow Sarah, I’d really not thought of things quite that way – I’ve just been on autopilot where love is concerned” he said.

“But even so Nicholas, you’ve done exactly the right things to keep Lizzie in your life!” she said, lifting her pint glass to his, then to her mouth ... and continued “Obviously your boarding school life has set your pain-threshold rather high and that’s exactly what Lizzie likes most about you! She knows that with her mother any mate will need staying-power, that you’ll be there for her - through the good times and the tough times! Smart girls appreciate that!” she said.

“I see your point Sarah” he said smiling at her “and I’m committed to continuing that strategy -even more so now!”

Sarah smiled at him “Nicholas ...” she continued, I’m going to spend some time with you, coaching you – seems to me that you need all the help you can get right now – that mother-in-law of yours is diabolical!” she added “So here’s another observation ... Lizzie’s really sweet, but since she’s had such an overbearing, controlling mother, she’s likely a bit too passive – though she’d like not to be! You’re also her ticket out of what could well be her life-sentence – with you at her side, defending her, she’ll be able to emerge from her shell and blossom into a confident woman – able to compete with the rest of her species – but really, she’ll always need you to back her up then too! You may not have noticed this about women – but we’re actually fiercely competitive and often other women’s worst enemies – not just their friends! We can be very cruel to each other –cut-throat, really!” she stated, a determined look in her eyes. “Lizzie needs you, now more than ever!” adding “You’re her best hope for freedom from her mother’s control, all she’s known all her life so far”

Nicholas looked across his pint of bitters at Sarah –“What made you so strong, so confident Sarah?” he asked of her. “When I was 5 – younger than you were when you left home, my mom died, after a short struggle with cancer. After that it was just my dad, my sister and me against the world ...”

“Oh no Sarah, I never knew any of that!” he said “When I met you that day in Physics class ...” Sarah interrupted him

“Actually Nicholas, here’s another lesson in understanding us girls –well, at least the smarter ones” she said “You didn’t meet me – I chose you as my prac-partner. You looked kind of lost standing there, so before anyone else could, I walked up to you, grabbed you by the arm, introduced myself and told you we were now prac-partners” she chuckled, stopping just long enough for another mouthful of bitters. “Do you remember it any other way?” she inquired smiling at him.

“Actually, come to think of it, you’re right!” Nicholas replied.

“You see – we’re the ones that do the choosing – we only make it appear to the men that they get to choose, but really, we lead them through that dance – often right up to the altar!” she said, laughing “It’s a handy illusion though!”

Nicholas reflected ... what Sarah was saying made sense!

She continued “If you think back to all those Monday and Wednesday afternoons we spent together in the Physics and Chemistry labs, chatting while we worked ... I was actually interviewing you on all sorts of issues! It’s only when I asked you if you’re in a serious relationship and you told me you were –with Elizabeth, also at UCT with us, that I backed off. We continued on as prac-partners and friends.” She said.

“Wow Sarah ... I’d really not picked up on any of that!” he said, surprised at her candor “I’m sorry if I ever gave you the impression that I could be a romantic partner... I mean I’ve always respected all girl friends I’ve been honored to have... never thought of them as conquests – I always thought of

not wrecking their lives or breaking their hearts – at least as best I could” he remarked “But it’s not always possible...”

“Well Nicholas, unlike what some woman may have done, I respected your naivety and innocence where us girls were involved, and took any pressure off of you so that you could concentrate on courting Lizzie” adding “In hindsight, that was the right thing to do – it’s clear to me, now more than ever, that you and Lizzie were destined to be together, and quite frankly I’m more than a little envious – I’ve never had that same privilege, with anyone – and Nicholas, make no mistake, finding your soul-mate, experiencing true love, is rare!” she emphatically stated, adding “don’t give up on her!”

Nicholas now looked at his empty pint glass, and hers, and holding his up, said “Sarah, I don’t think meeting you here, in London, was a coincidence. Lizzie always likes to say there’s no such thing – that it’s just God’s way of helping while staying anonymous” he chuckled as Sarah motioned to a barmaid for another round of bitters for them. “I need a bit more of your wisdom and company – I sure can do with any useful tips in my ongoing battles for Lizzie – to stand before the altar with her and exchange our vows – that’s been a very elusive dream – still is!” He said with a sigh.

Their fresh pint arrived and they each took a sip before Sarah continued ...

“Nicolas, I may make you a wee bit uncomfortable with what I’m about to say now –but bear with me, I have an important point to make!” she started “I’d venture to say that you and Lizzie have been quite a passionate couple – you seem to have that air about you, and from what you’ve told me about Lizzie, I concluded the same for her ... but, and you don’t have to answer, if you don’t want to, have the two of you ever been intimate?” she inquired, watching Nicholas squirm a little, retreating behind his Pint glass of bitters.

“Well ...” he said, blushing a little, we are very passionate, but what exactly do you mean?” he asked her.

“Passions’ good – it’s awfully romantic and all – but before or after you and Lizzie were engaged, did you ever consummate your relationship – you’re both very healthy young adults!”

Nicholas looked a little shy now, but summoned up the courage to answer her “Well, no, even when we could have consummated our relationship – there was always a reason to pause - I guess we’re both idealists and we both dream of that perfect moment when everything in life is going so well and happiness abounds, again – you know, like in all the Fairytales – right after the couple ends up together forever, the part that’s left to our imaginations, the part we’re never actually told in those stories – the part about when and how they consummate their love!” and he laughed, nervously.

“Well Nicholas, I already knew that was the case with you two – and here’s the thing ... I’d venture to say that if, when her parents left for Canada, you’d grabbed her in your arms, stirred up her passions - and yours, then picked her up and taken her to bed with you, and ravished her ... she’d still be with you in Cape Town and then this current round of sad goodbyes and forced separations wouldn’t have happened!” Sarah said, smiling at him whilst stopping to savor another mouthful of her bitters ... studying him very carefully now.

Nicholas sipped his pint, reflecting before he replied “Sarah, you know, you’re right! I’ll never make that mistake again! If I am blessed enough to ever be with Lizzie, ever again, I’ll not pass up another opportunity! We’ve essentially said our vows so many times now, even before God, that we’re well and truly married – except for that important little detail, we’ve not consummated our marriage – yet!” he concluded.

“Nicholas, you needed to hear this from me – until you do that much, the opportunity remains for Lizzie’s mother, or someone else, to steal Lizzie away from you! It’s much less likely after you two have been intimate –mind you, not that I’m recommending you become a Casanova or anything that extreme. There’s more than enough of those guys around and they’re definitely not keepers!” she said “Stay true to

Lizzie forever – that’s key to still being together in your 70’s and 80’s - but don’t let this linger any longer, you’re both almost 23? I think” she inquired – Nicholas confirmed as much “and more than ready, after almost 7 years of being in love, for this very adult commitment! It’s the glue that binds – you know, like Super-glue!” She said jokingly, moving out of her seat and excusing herself “Watch my pint - and keep this table, I’m off to the loo” she announced, turning to say “You know what they say about beer, don’t you?” she asked with a naughty glint in her eyes, then pressed on “You don’t buy beer – you just rent it!” she told him, laughing. Nicholas laughed too –that was a funny way to look at it, but it was true, and right after she returned, he’d need to do the same!

When Sarah returned, and took her seat again across from him, he excused himself and made his way to the loo. As he emerged making his way back to the table –Sarah seated there with her pint glass in her hands, he spotted a familiar face – though a bit older, and looking sad.

“Hey Shorty... Shorty Becket!” he called out at the sad chap.

Shorty looked up, dumbfounded – “Nicholas? What on earth are you doing here?” he asked. Putting his arm on Shorty’s shoulder, he said “Come and sit with Sarah and me over there –you look like you need a pint and a bit of cheer!”

“That I sure do Nicholas, let me just get a pint from the barmaid quickly – I’ll be with you folks in a jiffy!” he said.

Nicholas returned and took his seat again, preempting the question forming on Sarah’s lips “ a boarding school pal of mine from my days at St. Andrews” he told her “and I’d hazard a guess that your wisdom -and even mine, might be exactly what he needs, right now –but we’ll soon find out?”

Shorty returned with his pint, looking at Sarah, saying “I gather you’re Sarah? Not that I’m clairvoyant or anything, but Nicholas did mention your name in passing” he joked.

“Yes, that’s me, she smiled” and you’re ...?”

“Shorty – just Shorty” he said, everyone calls me that.

“Well then, so will I ... Shorty, come join us and tell us what brings you from Africa to London?” she prompted him.

Shorty looked a bit embarrassed, but quickly rallied his courage – enough to answer truthfully. “I’ve run away from my responsibilities. I’m not proud of that – but too scared to fix things” he said, adding “I’m not even sure I can?” he said looking into his pint of beer – sheepishly.

“Oh my Nicholas, looks like Shorty here could do with our help and cheering up!” Sarah said. “Shorty, please explain.”

“Nicholas will tell you that while we were together in the air force, I had a really lovely girlfriend, Melissa – or ‘Missy’ as I fondly call her. Nicholas met her while he visited me in hospital where I was recuperating from my wounds” he explained – “remember that Nicholas?” he said.

“I sure do Shorty! I recall vividly how much she loved you and you her –and since back then I’d struck-out in all directions on the Romance front, I was actually more than a little envious of your happiness!” so what happened then?” Nicholas replied “Did she run off with another guy? What?”

“No, we got engaged and were meant to be married by now – as of a month ago –but I panicked, bolted here to London, leaving her, a jilted bride at the altar –well almost.” He said.

“And Shorty, what was your excuse or reasons for doing that to her?” Sarah immediately inquired – not sure.

Shorty stopped long enough to take a sip of his beer, and still looking down at it, replied “Nicholas here will tell you that at school I was really bad at math – I needed remedial help just to get a passing grade in math, it’s always really freaked me out!” he said – Nicholas confirmed Shorty’s statement, prompting him to continue “Well, after we got engaged – in fact, as a condition for his permission to marry

his daughter, her dad, a rich businessman in Joburg, made me a senior manager in his company, then gave me a corner office and a pile of pens, pencils a calculator and stationary, and I started getting all sorts of really complex financial statements to peruse and correct. He gave me a big salary, so that I could look after his daughter well, no doubt – but that’s all very scary stuff to me!” Shorty remarked, looking traumatized – then continuing “You see, before that I was a travelling salesman for Borden – you know, the Cremora brand is one of theirs, and I went around to supermarkets taking orders and sorting out their issues.” he concluded.

“And then?” Sarah prompted him, now very intrigued!

“Then I panicked ... I sat there in my corner office, really no good at anything I was supposed to do, feeling like a failure – wondering when they’d discover I could not do that job, fearful of losing any dignity I had left, and inevitably Missy’s respect - and then her love.” Shorty said “So I packed my bags a few weeks before the wedding, went to the Airport and flew to London – just disappeared so as not to have to face any of that – Well, here I am, really at a loss for how to proceed and missing Africa and her terribly!” He concluded.

“Wow Shorty – I’d never have guessed at any of that! How about you Nicholas?” Sarah asked “Did you suspect this?”

“Nope – not even slightly! Mind you, I could imagine the fear that gripped Shorty, sitting there in his corner office looking at all those numbers and formulas - that always got to him!”

“Well then, now that I’ve told you my sorry tale, what do you two think I can -or must, now do?” He asked them both.

Sarah answered first “Shorty, both Nicholas and I have quite a bit of experience with parental interference in matters of love, and I’d like to ask you a question ... was her dad ever unhappy with his daughter’s choice of husband?” she asked “Oh yes, he definitely thought she could do better – much better, than me! All of his business partners had very

eligible sons, and here she goes and falls in love with me – a travelling salesman, clearly I was not her dad’s ideal choice of a husband for his daughter!” Shorty remarked.

“Well then, here’s what happened to you Shorty ... the dad’s not a dimwit –he knew he should not forbid his daughter to marry you, that he should not deny you his daughters hand in marriage, but he also knew you well enough that he felt sure that he could, as events proved, psyche you out and set you up to fail, knowing full well that you’d panic and run for the door!” Sarah concluded, then took a sip of her beer.

Shorty sat there stunned ... “That all makes perfect sense now!” he said “What do you think Nicholas?” he asked.

“I totally concur Shorty – that was the plan to get you out of his daughter’s life! Both Sarah and I have had to deal with that kind of stuff too – so yes, you were doomed in your new management role, you never stood a chance there!” he said.

“Wow!” Shorty said –suddenly not feeling like such a failure, I was setup to fail – victimized, never stood a chance!” he said, perking up noticeably, adding “I’d like to hear your stories too, later, if you don’t mind, I’m just excited to finally realize how it all came together for Missy and me!” he said, asking “So now, what do I do? How do I recover from this fiasco – if at all?” he inquired, hopeful they’d have answers.

“Nicholas, if you don’t mind, since I’m the girl here and have already put myself in Missy - his Fiancée’s place in this sad story, I’d like to answer – but feel free to interrupt if you think I’m wrong or missing something” she added.

Nicholas smiled at her, lifting his pint, “No, go ahead Sarah, after all that I’ve learned from you here today, I’d say that you are by far the smartest person here in the game of love!” he joked, taking a mouthful of beer, waiting to hear what wisdom she had to impart in this complex and tragic case. “Well, not quite as good as you give me credit for Nicholas – else I’d still be with Johan” she replied, before turning to

address Shorty's question "Shorty, you really hurt that girl, I'd hate to think what the past few weeks have been like for her – but that's water under the bridge right now ... here's what I think you should do..." Sarah replied, seeing she had both of their rapt attention as they sat across from her, both nursing their beers "Send her a letter – no, make that a telegram, it's quicker!" she corrected herself. Here's what I would say in it, she said, digging around in her bag for a pen and paper and writing –then she read the note out loud"

"My Dearest Missy ... I'm so very sorry that I hurt you, but I panicked and couldn't see how you could ever respect, or even love a failure. I'm not cut out for the job your dad forced onto me, I can't even do basic math - let alone all the complex things he expected of me! I'm in London now, and I'm looking for a way to return, with the express purpose of facing you and explaining myself – even if you want nothing more to do with me – I'd deserve your anger and rejection, and I'll have to live with that for the rest of my life, but please give me a chance to tell you to your face that the problem was not you – it was never you, it was me that messed up!" I love you Missy, though I'm sure you're very hurt and angry with me right now. With all my love, Shorty."

"That's going to cost you quite a bit, but she'll also know that and really appreciate being put out her misery – she knows a letter with these same words will take 2-3 weeks!"

Shorty re-read the note "You're a genius Sarah!" he said. "This just may work – even if doesn't she'll have closure. I'll feel a lot better about that, I really don't like her to be sad!"

Nicholas lifted his pint, proposing a toast "Bravo – let's all drink to that!" he said, as the 3 musketeers lifted their glasses, saluting each other as they faced their challenges, and shortly after that Shorty excused himself to go and send the most important telegram of his entire life! But the big question for everyone present there was ... "Would it work?"

The End (Vol-7) You're going to enjoy "**The Wedding**" a lot, we sure did, we were there! It was to be the 1st of **3 weddings on 3 continents** for Elizabeth, though the 2nd & 3rd weren't planned.

These are Novels based on a true story, but how closely do they follow events?

Charles accompanied Lizzie out of Africa in a SAA 747, Friday night 6th Oct 1978 sitting next to her. Their flight was delayed, for mechanical reasons –the only time ever in its history! Charles assisted Lizzie in London but remained there. Lizzie was dazzled by the sheer beauty of Canada's fall flying over Quebec & Ontario. She insisted Nicholas be allowed to visit her and after he arrived she wanted to go back with him to Cape town, but their plans were uncovered by a suspicious Constance who then hatched her plan, resulting in them being thrown out onto the streets of Kitchener over the 1978 Christmas holidays, staying at the downtown Walper hotel and watching Disney's Snow-White. Sadly, as a result of all that, they didn't have enough money left for Lizzie's return with him to Cape town, so she remained there as the captive of Constance. They spent 1 day at Niagara falls before Nicholas was banished from Canada by Constance's fiendish plot - marooned in London for 2 weeks, where he stayed in Putney and as coincidence would have it, met up with an old university friend, Sarah –who lived in the Orkney islands with her widower dad. Shorty ran away from his Missy, to London, pretty much leaving her at the altar – but those two events are linked and it's how the next novel "The Wedding" starts out. Suffice it to say, other than imagining some of the reactions, conversations and interactions of others, what Lizzie & Nicholas lived through is presented here as a 1st-hand account of their love's challenges. They both lived it.



Ultimately this had become a battle to the death between the black queen and the white queen. Princess Snow-White had become the white queen and the jealous obsessed old black queen now threw caution to the wind, going all-out to destroy her challenger, at any cost! But that also meant she was making mistakes – lots of them! That played right into the hands of the white queen, who now could see clearly what her valiant knight had told her. She now knew that her mother wasn't able to ever concede control of her life to her, that it was best to stymie her and, failing that, disappear –which is what she'd finally do. Photo of Lizzie (at the Pacific entrance to the Panama canal, 2007, Lizzie age 50) After almost 40 years, the White queen had won the war!



Authors footnotes: I was sent off to boarding school at age 8 and never lived at home again, only ever visiting home since then... so I've said more than my fair-share of goodbyes and shed more than a few tears –but I often saw tears in my parents eyes too when they left me there and returned home. So I do

know the difference between loving farewells and cruel rejection or abandonment! What the “Lizzie” in these books was subjected to by Constance, Edwin and Hattie (whom she controlled) were not loving farewells! The chapter in which Lizzie and Nicholas are thrown out into the cold by Constance, was by far the saddest, most difficult chapter for me to write! To watch the woman you love being cruelly tortured by her old family -who supposedly love her, unable to do anything to stop it is a terrible, helpless feeling! I don't have to imagine it –I was there standing next to her watching her dad pack our luggage into his car, sat next to Lizzie in the back seat of Edwin's car, stood next to her on that icy, snowy sidewalk of downtown Kitchener, Ont. as her dad drove off, out of her life –abandoning her in the cold, and I was there sitting next to her on a bench wondering if this was going to be how we'd die? We didn't have any way of measuring how cold it was. We're told it was -6. For a young couple fresh out of Africa and not used to harsh Canadian winters, it sure seemed a lot colder! We knew we could not spend a night outside and survive. But by far the worst thing to deal with wasn't the cold weather ... it was the ‘cold-shoulder’ Elizabeth got from her dad! Lizzie and her dad were close –she loved her dad! Nobody deserves to be abandoned by their dad (or mom) like that! Even wayward children don't deserve that –but Elizabeth was an almost perfect daughter! She was always top of her class, hadn't smoked, didn't do any drugs, wasn't promiscuous - she was a ballet star and a sweet, intelligent, beautiful person who'd never brought dishonor onto her parents! Her only ‘crime’ was to say ‘no’ to her mother ...more specifically “No Mother, I'll choose whom to love, whom to marry and whom to spend the rest of my life with!” That was enough of an excuse for the mother to be very cruel to her – worse yet, she demanded Lizzie's dad do her dirty work for her –that made this rejection doubly cruel! She'd come to expect that level of cruelty from her mother –but now her dad was willing to do so too ... that was heart-breaking! It shattered her trust in his ability (or desire) to protect her from the cruelty of his wife. Ironically it had the opposite effect on Elizabeth that Constance had wanted! Instead of associating Nicholas with the reasons for her pain and suffering –with her dad's betrayal she was able to fully transition towards Nicholas to protect her from them all. She could depend on Nicholas –she could no longer depend on her dad! Nicholas, out of concern for her happiness, loved her enough to let her go, then later sold everything to rescue her. Her dad had callously abandoned her on a deserted, icy-cold street in a foreign country where she knew no one and had no family. The clock was counting down to the inevitable day for Lizzie's decision to elope back to Africa. After a betrayal of that magnitude by all of her old family, Elizabeth had little desire for her dad to give her away at her wedding –or her mom to object, again, at her wedding, or for her sister to jealously watch the ‘golden-girl’ once again triumph. Now all she wanted to do was to run away with her childhood sweetheart -to finally marry him. This was the turning point. As you've read, what looked to them like a victory looming for their love, was denied them once again by Constance's cruelty! But here's the good news –this would be the last time that ever happened!

Nicholas's oft-recurring nightmare most likely arose from this accidental 35mm double-exposure... two photos taken of Lizzie when the roll of film was on the last frame – the end of the roll. The film couldn't advance and so only one photo resulted - a blend of the two, showing two 18y old Lizzies - one on the left the other on the right, and it was one of his favorite photos of Elizabeth! Nicholas often wondered at the quandary it would pose if there really were 'Two Lizzies'? In reality, there were! Take a look at the two poses. The Lizzie on the left was still rather demure – way too dependent on her mother – whilst the other Lizzie, the one on the right, was determined, and ready to ride off into the sunset with Nicholas. He chose the Lizzie on the right but never could hurt or reject the Lizzie on the left. Failing to change mother, after 28yrs that Lizzie finally gave up trying, joined forces with her defiant alter ego and then eloped with her true-love to South America. Only then did Nicholas's often recurring nightmare finally come to an end. It's been 12y now since the "2 Lizzies" became one, finally united in purpose and in love, living free of bondage in a beautiful



land far, far away - from Constance, determined to never be enslaved by her, ever again!

These Novels tell a story, primarily that of Elizabeth (she's "Snow-White" in this story)

They're not candidates for any literary prize. Our son wrote the 1st 6 novels and he at least was raised with English as his main language. I got to write their romance scenes, as Lizzie's son wasn't comfortable doing so. My family's not English though, but unlike my Afrikaner cousins, we were sent to English schools at a young age and there we became reasonably fluent in it. The problem is, as you may already have seen when reading this novel, my grammar and punctuation leave a lot to be desired. Anyway, I'm certainly not pretentious – I'm simply telling Lizzie's story as best as I know how – so please forgive my bad literary habits, I came by them honestly. Most fairy-tales have victims and evil people who victimize them. They're not simple, happy little tales – rather they're fraught with danger and sadness, but they do generally all end "Happily ever after" – at least they do for the victims, while almost always the evil and cruel characters get their just desserts! This story's no exception. It does ultimately end "happily ever after" and "in a Land far, far away". The time has now finally come for that to all unfold. Constance is about to lose spectacularly – and she didn't see it coming! Of course as always seems to happen, she didn't take her loss as a sign to reform and try to make amends or get along with her erstwhile victims –rather she *doubled down* to be more determined than ever to win at any cost ... and so she became very dangerous!

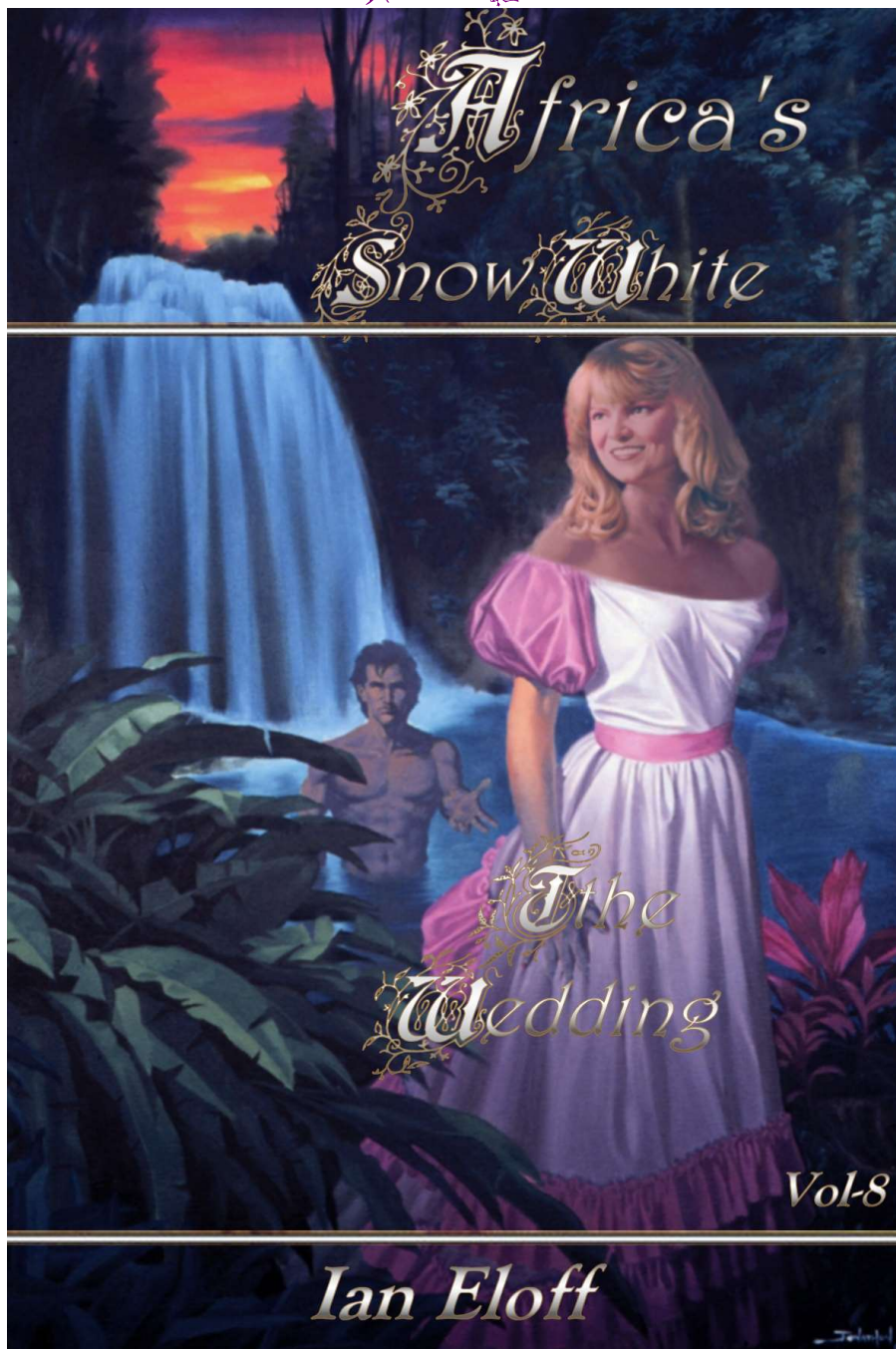


Niagara falls, popular honeymoon destination: Elizabeth (22) Dec 1978, a sad farewell - then 18m later!



"That's a very sad story ... I'm really sorry for what you two have had to endure over this Christmas season! I've brought many a young couple here for their honeymoon, but never for their farewell ... still, I'm going to make a bold prediction, the two of you will return here as a married couple, one day, because this very cruel plan that's been forced onto you will really only serve to unite you two in a common purpose - and that's never a bad thing!" He confidently declared. (Dec 1978, *Grey-coach bus driver*)

Africa's Snow White *The Wedding* (Vol-8)



Author: Ian Eloff (Nicholas Strauss) –with a lot of help from Elizabeth!

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EMAIL: Eureka.Publishing@Gmail.com

www.Facebook.com/AfricasSnowWhite