

# The Wedding

Vol-8: Africa's Snow White (Kindle version) \*\* DRAFT-8 \*\*

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**By:** Ian Eloff , contributions: Elizabeth, foreword: Jonathan Eloff

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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 quite real! The specific dialogue, however, is a product of the author's imagination, though less so in this novel. Some names have been changed to protect the identities of the characters—the guilty. . .and the innocent!



# The Wedding (7 years and 7 months later)

**By:** Ian Eloff, Contributions by: Elizabeth, Foreword by: Jonathan Eloff

*Once in a while, right in the midst of an ordinary life, love gives us a fairy tale!*



Who could have seen it all coming? Who could prepare for it? It's almost always a total surprise when we least expect it. I've heard so many people wish for a "Fairy-tale life" –better be careful what we wish for! Fairy-tales aren't all easy-going, harmless little stories. Almost all of them are tough stories, sad stories, scary stories and all of them have unsuspecting, sweet folks victimized by evil people, then just when it seems that hope is lost, there's a wondrous turn-around! Evil gets defeated and its victims emerge victorious to *live happily ever after!* That's what's about to happen in this story too. You'll finally read how it happened. Fairy-tales almost always start with: "*Once upon a time in a land far, far away*"- This fairy-tale's is no exception. *Once upon a time* is Dec 21<sup>st</sup> 1971 - *Far, far away* is the *Wilderness National park* in Africa. If let our imaginations wander, often we'll see our lives can be described by one of the old Fairy-tales. Some

modern mothers object to Fairy-tales –others use them to teach children that there's always hope for survival - to triumph; imparting beliefs in *happy endings* and *Justice!* In our family we have exact fits; *Cinderella* and *Snow-White*. In "*Reunion*" you read how that played into the title of these novels, and in "*The Wedding*" you'll finally get to see the queen, Constance, defeated! You'll also see not just one, but two *Wedding feasts*. But you'll have to wait till the next novel, *Redemption*, to see the queen (soon 88) fitted with red-hot iron shoes (*her conscience*) - forced to dance in them for the rest of her life... that's how the original fairytale ends too.

# Chapter 1 [\[Click for AUDIO\]](#)

## **Back at opposite ends of the world ... once again!**

Lizzie decided that she could not wait till Nicholas wrote – that it would be nice for him if a letter was there already, waiting for him upon his return to Cape Town – so she went to buy several prepaid Aerogrammes –the quickest, most economical way to send letters, airmail and long distance, though by their design, they limited her to 1 and 1/3 pages.

She sat down to write ...

*My dearest Nicholas ... oh how I've missed not having you around to make my days seem worthwhile! I've nothing to look forward to. I'm writing early so that this letter is waiting for you in Cape Town – that way you can reply to me soon after and I won't need to wait so long to hear back from you.*

*I have plenty of news. We overlooked an important problem when we were planning together – but I've got an idea how we can fix that. If mother does not see me getting any letters from you, she'll grow suspicious – even paranoid, thinking we're planning something, and that can only be bad news for us. But yesterday she as much as told me that she fully expects you to jilt me now – and that I'll likely never hear from you again – like, she said “He did to you when he was in the air force for two years.” – well, we both know she took your letters and destroyed them, but she still thinks she can fool me into believing that you lied to me and never wrote!*

*I was righteously indignant at her cruel insinuations, and told her so – predicting confidently that she's wrong, that you love me, that you'll not jilt me and that you'll write soon. That's when it struck me... I'm going to get letters from you at work, but never, ever bring them to her home. I'm then going to act*

*increasingly saddened by you not writing to me, and act paranoid, accusing her of intercepting your letters and withholding them from me. Heck, she's done much worse to us through the years – I'll only feel a little bad about deceiving her, but Nicholas, as they say, "all's fair in love and war," and what we find ourselves in, dear Nicholas, is both! Please do not call me at home – you have my work address and phone number – if you need it, but seeing how expensive that will be, let's see if we can make Aerogrammes work for us – they're economical and apparently they're the fastest way to communicate by mail. They're so small and light, they always make it into mail-bags on international flights! That's good!*

*Nicholas, I'm so sorry, once again that my mother has been so mean to you, I was there alongside you – so I suffered as well. She'd really want me to blame you for my pain, so that I'll crack under the strain and break off our engagement – but I'm not delusional – she's foisting all these cruel things on us – she always has! She's the problem, not you or I! My dad's really not been remotely fair in his support for me – or for us, but I do understand that he's in a very difficult position, so I make excuses for him – but really, I do not trust any of them!*

*Now back to more pleasant things ... Nicholas, I really love you and I long to be back in your arms again, so let us both pray that happens speedily – I'll do my part, and I'll let you know if I need you to help me – or need advise. For now just accept that I'm fully committed to being back with you before the 7 year, 7 month + 7 day deadline – even though you told me not to be bound by that any longer. I need a deadline to motivate me, and I'm working towards our happy reunion!*

*With all my love, your Lizzie!*

*PS. Please, oh please Nicholas – Let's never do anything to assist mother's wishes for our love story to not end well.*

When Nicholas returned, Sandra met him up at the airport and Denise had come along for the ride. The look of shock on their faces when they saw that Lizzie was not with him, was soon replaced with relief when he told them she'd be



coming back in a few months time to get married to him. Then the old childhood friends greeted each other with hugs and smiles and soon they were back in their apartment building again – inviting him to come up to join them for breakfast after he'd freshened up. When Nicholas opened the door of his apartment, on the floor, at the foot of the front door, lay a pile of letters and bills, which he quickly sorted through, finding the welcoming Aerogram from Lizzie! Excitedly he went to the kitchen, took a sharp knife and opened it, going to sit on the bed and read it. Nicholas smiled! "Pure genius!" he said out loud "Lizzie, you're a genius!" he repeated, holding the letter up in his hand, waving it as he smiled and exclaimed! He'd write her later, but first ne needed to take a shower - freshen-up, and then go and have breakfast with his friends. Before long, Nicholas was knocking on the front door of their apartment.

They ate, chatted and excitedly caught up on all the news. "Wow!" Denise exclaimed – she's really a mean one that mother of Lizzie!" she concluded. Sandra agreed. "How does she think that this will ever end up in her favor if she turns you and Lizzie into her enemies?" Denise went on "Really stupid!" she reiterated. "Actually, the only way her heavy handed tactics can ever work, is if she totally destroys Lizzie so that she has no more will to fight for her rights – for the freedom to live her own life, but I'm sure that won't happen!"

"Let's hope not!" Sandra remarked. "That would be sad!"

"This time Lizzie's being smart!" Nicholas said "So I'm very confident that we'll be having a wedding here in just a few months! I'll need you girls help in planning that!" he said.

"No problem Nicholas! We like doing that kind of thing!" they replied, already starting to get excited, starting to think big.

"Actually girls, I'd say we need to think small – when Lizzie comes back, we'll need to get married fast and since it's very doubtful her parents will contribute - and I have no money, it's going to have to be a real student wedding!" He reminded

them “Also, if her parents are not going to be with us, I think we need to have a wedding without relatives – I mean, if Lizzie sees me having fun on our wedding day with parents etc. then the absence of her parents will make her feel sad –that’s not a good thing! So a small, memorable, speedy wedding it will probably have to be!” Nicholas said.

“That will get tongues wagging in the little town we all grew up in –and probably elsewhere too” Denise said with a wink.

Both Sandra and Nicholas laughed –kind of nervously at her observation, they all knew how the ladies of Sterkspruit and surroundings counted down the months after a surprise wedding – before any baby arrived, on their fingers, and only lost interest in that subject, near at end of their 2<sup>nd</sup> hand.

“Oh well, that’s a small price to pay!” Nicholas said, smiling.

“Realistically Nicholas, when do you think this will happen?” Sandra inquired, trying to get some idea of a timeline.

“If Lizzie and my plan works absolutely to perfection, then I’d say July –otherwise, well, I really don’t know. Let’s just hope and pray that Lizzie’s acting debut works perfectly... otherwise things could get sad again. Right now both of us are full of hope – counting down the days!” Nicholas replied.

The friends all agreed to keep thinking positive and to plan for the best outcome – not to allow any room for negativity. This time they all agreed that as long as Lizzie and Nicholas don’t tip Constance off as to their plans to elope, their plans should finally work! However, they all also remembered the many ways that Constance blocked any marriage between them, in the past, and how devious - and successful, her plans had been to date, so they also agreed to keep a wary eye open for any signs that this plan had or could go awry – and to meet regularly, over Coffee and Tea, to evaluate its progress, also to put all their minds together on this issue. A playful sneaky smile crept onto Denise’s face “Nicholas, I have a great idea how to help you two lovebirds!” she said. Nicholas sat down to reply to Lizzie’s letter –first rereading it several times, smiling! He needed to send an Airmail letter.

*My dearest Lizzie ... thank you for beings so thoughtful! Your first letter to me was waiting here in for me, when I arrived back! Even though it served to underline the reality that once again we find ourselves separated – but this time not just in the same country but at the opposite ends of the world -me in Cape Town at the southern tip of Africa, you in Waterloo, Ontario, Canada - in the great white north of the Americas! But this time, I'm very positive about the outcome, though understandably nervous too! Yes, I'm missing you terribly – but I've counted down the days to significant events in my life before, and just as we all did in the air force, I'd suggest we follow our previous logic: As you may recall, it went like this: We met on 21st December 1971. So counting forward from there, we added 7 years + 7 months + 7 days to that, which got us to 28<sup>th</sup> July 1979. If we subtract 40 days from that, we're looking at June 19<sup>th</sup>. I suggest you mark that down on your calendar at work, as I've already done here, and when we reach that date, we start singing the old song “40 days and 40 nights” to motivate us! I have that song on cassette tape from my air force days, because it was a fond tradition for all of us who'd been drafted, to start the countdown to our return to civilian life and freedom. But actually, it's more appropriate to our situation! Now for some really good news! Denise had a brilliant idea – along the same lines as your plan. Instead of just acting more and more morose, and then heart-broken as the weeks go by and no letters arrive at your parents home for you – we need to do more! As an insurance policy, Easter's 3 months from now. I'll send a letter to you, timed to arrive just before Good Friday, that will sound very negative –almost as if I'm giving up and getting ready to break off our engagement –but not quite final –yet! In my letter I'll just be hinting at such an outcome, soon. That letter will definitely be delivered to her. I'm not sure how she'll stop herself from opening it –or even explain to you why it's been opened or what she'll do with it? Either way, it's her that needs to read it and I'm 100% sure she will! Now that we know how she thinks, that letter is going to make her ecstatic – even gleeful, and then you'll have a precious few months more to plan your escape, safely! I miss you so much Lizzie ...*

*I love you, I always have, and I always will! Here is the last verse of our countdown song ... though from my perspective:*

*Forty days and forty nights  
Like a ship out on the sea  
Prayin' for her each night  
That she would come back-a home to me  
Life is love and love is right  
I hope she'll come back home tonight!*

*With all my love, Your Nicholas – always and forever!*

Nicholas sealed the envelope with his letter and a photo in it, taken soon after Lizzie had first left for Canada, and then walked down to the nearby post-office to start it on its long journey to Canada, calculating it would arrive there around the end of January. The *loneliness was starting to bite now!*



"Selfies" are not new! They go back well over 100 years ... many cameras had timers! Nicholas sent this unusually somber photo of himself to Lizzie, perhaps to motivate her to rescue their love.

## Chapter 2

[Click for AUDIO](#)

### Valentine's day preparations ... in Canada

Lizzie sat reading Nicholas reply, his 1<sup>st</sup> letter to her, which had arrived in less than 2 weeks. It was an exciting feeling – Technology had made their lives easier. There was no longer a 2-3 month wait on the mail-ships for letters to arrive from overseas, Airmail letters and Aerogrammes were quick! Having figured out it took about 2 weeks for Airmail to arrive, both Nicholas and Lizzie were timing their next letters for delivery prior to February 14<sup>th</sup> – 1979. Lizzie began to think about what she would write to Nicholas –first rereading his letter several times... then smiling as she knew what to do!

*My Dearest Nicholas, thank you so much for your quick response to my letter! Of course when I get home tonight I'll start asking - feigning growing concerns, if any letters have arrived for me? Actually, it will be my acting debut in this crucial drama that's now unfolding, and I've got stage fright, though I'm sure I'll be fine by then. Please thank Denise for me - she had a brilliant idea, and I like your suggestion, as Easter is such an important holiday for us South Africans – almost as important as Christmas. It will buy us crucial time! I read your account of counting down the days to the end of your term of service in the air force – I remember well how, just before that 40 days was up, you made a bold gamble on us – on our love, surprising me in the Wilderness by running up behind me and embracing me. That changed the course of history, for us – even for Charles, though I'm sure he didn't appreciate it as much as you and I did! If you had not done that, I'd likely already be married to Charles – and our love would have successfully been murdered, forever, by mother. That's a terrible thought! Well, it didn't happen, and you, my true-love, returned to me, in the nick of time – and prior to the*



*end of those 40 days. With the benefit of Hindsight, in our case 40 days would have been too long for us, I'd have ended up married to Charles - so here's my Valentines day pledge to you – I'll do what you did for me... I'll too come back to you in Cape Town before those 40 days are up! Nicholas, the last verse of that old song is really looking at our situation from your point of view – the man stuck in far away Cape Town waiting patiently and hoping for his true love's return. I'm going to modify the verse especially for you for Valentines day - which sadly, we can't spend together this year ...*

*Forty days and forty nights  
That's just way too long for me  
So I'm praying for us each night  
Soon, my love, I'll be back with thee  
Yes, life is love and our love's right  
I'll soon be in your arms every night!*

*So my darling Nicholas ... happy Valentine's day!*

*From your Lizzie – Both now, and forever!*

*PS. Don't forget my 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday's here soon now...hint, hint!*

Lizzie sounded brave in letters - but loneliness was taking its toll. She had to work fast!



Lizzie had a little space left on the last fold of the Aerogram, so she applied her brightest red lipstick generously on her lips, then placed her lips over the free space. She smiled as she saw the perfect impression her lips had made on the paper, sealed it up, and set it aside waiting for the chance to walk on down to the nearest post-office to mail her letter.

Nicholas, walking back from buying more Aerogrammes at the post office in Rondebosch, was on his way to the pick 'n pay to buy some bread, butter and eggs, when suddenly a voice interrupted his thoughts ... a very familiar old voice!

“Nicholas!” He turned to look... happy with whom he saw!

“Shorty Becket! What on earth brings you to Cape Town?” he asked of the obviously happy chap in front of him now.

“I’m back doing my old Job – I was very good at it, and so Borden rehired me and sent me to Cape Town” Shorty said, in fact I handle all super-markets clear on down to George. Adding “Hey I’ve got all sorts of news to tell you! Let’s go over to the other side of Main rd. to the Pig and Whistle.”

Soon they two old school-chums were sitting happily chatting, drinking their beer, and Nicholas inquired ...

“So Shorty, what ever happened with Missy and you?” Did Sarah’s plan work? I’m judging from your smile, it did?”

“Well, it was a brilliant plan – which almost did not work, since her dad got rather involved again and messed with her mind, but in the end, she agreed to meet with me – alone, and I was honest with her, putting my heart out on my sleeve, and well, long-story-short, she forgave me – but only if I agreed to marry her almost right away!” Shorty said triumphantly, raising his mug of beer to his lips.

“And so ... Then what happened?” Nicholas pressed him.

“Her dad was furious! He thought I was history! But Missy stared him down and told him that he had to now choose

between still having her as his daughter, and being the grandfather to her children – or his plans to break us up and keep us apart!” Shorty announced, looking stressed.

“So what did he do?” Nicholas asked “Did he relent?”

“Not right away ...” Shorty continued “So Missy told me to go on down to the Magistrate’s offices with her, and soon after we were married ...” Nicholas interrupted “and Then?”

“She went home that night, and over dinner, broke the news to her family. I wasn’t there – that we both thought would not have been wise, but she told me, in great detail, what happened.” Shorty replied, stopping to take a swig of beer.

“And what did happen?” Nicholas asked – too intrigued to even pay his beer much attention. “Her dad stormed out of there, his wife followed him to their bedroom, and there they looked at all of their options, before returning.” Shorty said. “So what happened then Shorty?” Nicholas asked urgently!

“The dad and mom both announced that they’d accept the reality of their daughter’s choice, and that they’d give us a rather large sum of money – in lieu of the money they would have spent on a wedding, with which to start our married lives” Shorty said, triumphantly “And he’s a rich man!”

“Shorty, that’s fantastic! So where’s Missy now?” he asked.

“She’s in Joburg still, but packing up to come to Cape Town. She’ll be here in a week or so.” Shorty replied, smiling.

“Well, give me your business card and write on it any other phone numbers I’ll need to get a hold of you – I’ll find Sarah at UCT and let her know, then we can all meet here again for a pint or two when Missy’s arrived!” Nicholas suggested.

“That’s a great idea! I told Missy about meeting you and Sarah in London, and she was very grateful for the advise

and encouragement you two gave me! She'd love to meet both of you and, I'm sure, thank you both!" He replied.

The two old school-chums sat for a while longer, savoring their beer and discussing Nicholas' options – which seemed every bit as daunting! Shorty laughed at the plan they'd hatched to mislead Constance and buy Lizzie time to elope. "Nicholas, that's brilliant! I think it will work well!" he said, adding "Make sure to invite Missy and me to your wedding!"

"Of course I will, Shorty!" He confirmed "But you know what Shorty?" he said "I may need your help for the wedding – I sold my car to get the funds to go and rescue Lizzie" he said "I'm stuck without a car at a crucial time in my life, without Lizzie too, for that matter, just for now!" he said, laughing.

"Say no more Nicholas, I'll be there with the carriage – or in this case a Volkswagen Combi Borden's given me" he joked "I'll get you to the church on time!" He said, jovial as ever!



*Shorty Becket (RHS) Nicholas (Middle) Shorty's brother (LHS) St. Andrews school, 1969*

# Chapter 3 [\[Click for AUDIO\]](#)

## Valentine's day preparations ... in Africa

Nicholas was back in his apartment. He'd not heard from Lizzie again - yet, but he realized his letter would only be arriving there, at her office, about now. Waiting for her letter before writing again wouldn't leave him enough time to get a Valentine's day letter to Lizzie ... so he needed to write now!

*My Dearest Darling Elizabeth ... I want you to have a happy Valentine's day, even if I'm not there at your side, secure in my love for you! It will be a lonely one for me here, so I'm hoping that you're also thinking to write in a timely fashion, so that your letter arrives in time. As my next letter may not arrive there till after your 22<sup>nd</sup> Birthday, I'm also taking this opportunity to wish you a very happy birthday and to remind you to stay focused on our love for each other and our plans to end up together! Lizzie, Happy Valentine's and Birthday! My commitment to you and our love, is stronger than ever and I'd like to point out that by the time you read this letter, 1 ½ months would have passed since we said goodbye to each other at Toronto's airport. The time's flying by so fast now, and University's just about to begin, so for me time will pass even faster! I've started proceedings with the Canadian consulate, though I'll have to go to the Canadian Embassy in Pretoria to complete the process. I have been informed though, that as long as I pass my finals this November, and get my Bsc. in Computer Science and Math, I'll be welcomed with open arms in Canada. It turns out they're very short of workers with computer degrees – apparently they graduate in Canada, then get offered jobs in America at a much higher salary! That leaves Canada scrambling to fill their needs by importing talent from abroad, like me. So Lizzie, I promised your parents that after I graduate I'd bring their daughter back to them, and I promised you I'd take you back to your*



*family. None of them believed me at the time, so a bit of a mess ensued and some really cruel actions followed, hurting you and me and causing us much sadness – so technically I don't have to keep my promise, but in light of the brave things you're planning right now, I'll keep that promise! That means, after we're married and after I graduate, we'll be returning to Canada – and to your family there. In light of what we've just been through, and as we have discussed, let's plan to pay them a return visit on Christmas eve, 1979 – exactly 1 year after we were thrown out into the cold, onto the snowy streets of a deserted Kitchener. That would be an important symbolic act that may just get us all acting more like family – though by now I'm realistic enough to allow for other reactions to my gesture. Anyway, I'm mentioning this to show you what I'm doing from this end for our future, while knowing what you're doing at your end of the world, for our future. I'm not sure when you'll need to use this information, but I expect you may need to do so when you spring your surprise on them – that you're eloping to marry me in Cape Town, to mitigate her wrath and make her reevaluate any over-reactions, knowing that the alternative is that we never return to Canada – which of course means that she'll have lost you forever. I'm not sure she'll ever be that stubborn ... but I guess only time will tell. For now, please know that I love you, I always have ... and I always will! Never mind what tough challenges still come our way Lizzie – and really, a lot have already, we will face them together, united in the common purpose of securing our right to be a couple, to love each other and live our lives together, free of control and interference from anyone! You are my heart's fondest dream Lizzie, you have been for 7 years now!*

*With all my love, your Nicholas - waiting for you in far away Cape Town. God speed my love, may all our plans succeed!*

## Chapter 4 [Click for AUDIO](#)

### **Valentines day in faraway Africa ...**

Nicholas had just arrived back from his classes at UCT on the Tuesday before Valentine's day, opening the door to find the mail that had been put through the slot, lying on the floor. Ever hopeful, he looked through them to find a letter from Lizzie, but there were none. "Oh well ..." he thought to himself, it may be a few days late, but I'm sure it will arrive!"

He went to his desk, put his bag down, then went to start supper, remembering as he worked in the kitchen how he'd taught Lizzie the basics of cooking – though perhaps that was a generous term, for his methods were rather primitive! Still, they were superior to Lizzie's skills in the Kitchen as she'd never been allowed to learn anything in her mother's kitchen – other than to make toast and a bowl of cereal.

He'd need to write to Lizzie soon, as though he'd taken the precaution of wishing her a happy Birthday in his last letter, very soon she'd be turning 22. He'd been very blessed to celebrate her 21<sup>st</sup> birthday with her last year! They'd spent part of that day on Bloubergstrand – a beach overlooking Table mountain, but it was a stressful time, her mother did her best to make Elizabeth feel unloved, rejected - forgotten.

Nicholas had classes on Wednesday, Valentine's day, and since he'd slept in late, rushed off to catch the bus to UCT without Breakfast. Math class was over fast enough, and he was good at math, so he'd let his mind drift off to Lizzie in faraway Canada, still fast asleep no doubt, being only 4am in the morning there. He hoped that at least his letter had arrived there on time – but he'd have to wait a few weeks to be sure. As math class finished, him still having a few hours before Computer science lectures, he decided to go to the

student canteen for some Coffee, and perhaps a bite to eat. As he approached the canteen, he heard a familiar voice call out his name “Nicholas ... it’s me Sarah, over here!”

He turned to see her waving at him from among the throngs of students and made his way over to her.

“Hi Sarah!” He said with a smile, I’ve been hoping to bump into you sooner, but now’s good too! I have so much news ... maybe you do too?” he inquired, smiling at her again.

“Probably, she said –but I’d like to hear yours –what you say we get some coffee and a Cinnamon bun or something?” she said, motioning him over to the line-up of students with the same ideas “then go find a nice place to chat! My next class is only in a couple of hours” she said, smiling as always.

“Mine too!” He said as they got into a lineup, getting a tray.

As they got coffee and cinnamon buns, they chatted about the ‘coincidence’ of their London meeting – but Nicholas didn’t go into details as to what had happened since – yet. He thought it would be best kept for when they were sitting, settled in to chat for some 2 hours. Having paid, they made their way over to a empty table, against the window through which the could see the mountain behind UCT – Devil’s peak, a mountain that had claimed so many lives, including some that were fellow students – so it was aptly named!

“So I have some exciting news!” Nicholas started ...

“What?” Sarah interrupted, knowing the juicy facts till then.

“I bumped into Shorty the other day, we had a pint at the Pig and Whistle and oh my - he had a story to tell!” he said.

“Nicholas, I’m all ears – please proceed” Sarah smiled at him taking time to break off a piece of her cinnamon bun.

“Well Sarah, it seems that you’re quite the Emma!” Nicholas remarked – smiling, wondering if she knew what he meant.

Sarah knew immediately what he was referring to, so she asked him “OK, who’s life have I ruined in my matchmaking attempts? Whose love life did I not repair?” she asked.

“Well actually, you did rather well! You see, Shorty and Missy are married now and that happened back in January already, so things came together rather fast after you got him to send his telegram to Melisa!” Nicholas announced.

“Oh my ... I’m so happy to hear that! I had a few misgivings about pushing those two back together again - as I don’t know either of them well enough to even know that they’re a really good match –but that never stopped Emma!” she said, winking at him. “Please, fill me in on all the juicy details!” she said, picking up her coffee cup -waiting eagerly to hear.

Nicholas went on to tell her all that Shorty had told him – adding a few bits of background information on Shorty and Missy, so that she’d get a better feel for them and their chances of making their marriage work. The he summed up “So Sarah, you’re advice saved that love-story and made me more determined than ever to work towards saving mine!”

“Well that’s good news Nicholas!” She said adding wistfully “I’m really envious, you know ... I may end up with Jane Austin’s life if I’m not careful, always dreaming about that perfect match – a real romance, and never even marrying!” she joked, “but then again I may just find my Mr. Knightly!”

“I sure hope you do Sarah – you’re a sweet lady with a heart for romance so... in my opinion, you deserve at least that much!” Nicholas said, adding “But how would I ever know?”

“Well she said, if you’re ever back in the UK, with Elizabeth, or if that does not work out ... come anyway and visit with my dad and me in the Orkney Islands – I’ll likely stay there, like Emma did, looking after my dad – we’re very close! He raised my sister and me after mom died ...” She said.

Nicholas interrupted “Oh my ... I’d not realized that, but you did tell me about your mom, in London.” he said, looking at

her with a pained expression “How did you all cope? I recall you were very young - how old was your sister?” He asked. She smiled, then replied “Oh well, it all seems like such a long time ago now, I was only 5 and my sister 8, so I don’t really remember much about mum, but dad and my sister always speak so warmly of her that I’ve accepted that she was a lovely person. Dad was devastated, but my sister and I were determined to cheer him up, and so we did. He’s such a nice man, but he never married again – so you see, I really am an Emma, and as such I’ll keep my eye on Mr. Knightly – I’m sure he’ll show up to visit father and me one day!” she said smiling at him “And I’m sure dad will like him too!”

“I rather hope your Mr. Knightly does appear in your lives one day Sarah, I’m really a hopeless romantic – I’d just as soon have the whole world in love and married off as would Emma!” he said, smiling kindly – “as would you!” he said, and then added “Oh by the way, I just remembered ... Happy Valentine’s day!” he said to her with a kindly smile.

Sarah blushed, then interrupted him, feeling a tiny bit uncomfortable “So tell me what’s happened in the battle to free Lizzie from captivity in Canada?” she prompted him.

Nicholas filled her in on the details of what he knew, so far, and how their plan seemed to be working, at least as of now.

“That all sounds like it’s going to work for you both, this time” she remarked “I think you’ll have to write your first ‘Dear Jane’ letter sooner than Easter!” adding “That mother of Lizzie’s is quite the piece of work – so sooner’s better!”

Nicholas nervously laughed, agreeing with Sarah – then asked her “What do you mean by a ‘dear Jane’ letter?”

Sarah asked “Nicholas, have you ever heard of a ‘Dear John’ letter?” They’re much more common – guys aren’t as kind. “Yes” said Nicholas “A few of my fellow airmen got them.”



“A ‘Dear Jane’ letter is what a woman gets when she’s jilted” Sarah explained – the feminine form of a ‘Dear Jon’ letter. It’s a letter you’ll soon have to write to Lizzie” She explained.

“Aah ...” Nicholas’ said, I’d not have known. ‘Dear John’ letters on the other hand, I know all about – except that I struck out so badly with both girls I’d declared my love for – in writing, that I didn’t even get a ‘dear John’ letter!” he said laughing “I didn’t get any letters at all – never even heard back from either of them –at least not right then” he replied, shrugging his shoulders and laughing “Until I met up with Lizzie again and she asked me why I’d not written her? Only then did she figure out that I did write, twice, but that her mother intercepted my letters - Lizzie just never got them!”

“Oh my goodness Nicholas! I’m surprised you two ever got back together again – that’s one determined mother! At least my Mr. Knightly will not have to deal with mum – though, mind you, my dad’s fiercely protective – but not like that!” she added, then quickly said with a wry smile “You’ll have to tell me about that ‘other girl’ ... what was that all about?”

“Well, I still don’t fully understand exactly what happened, but after I figured that Lizzie had dumped me – without even the courtesy of a ‘Dear Jon’ Letter – I had to phone to try to speak to her and heard it from her mother, I then pursued a lovely young lady at teacher’s training college in Bullawayo, Rhodesia, Lynn. We were getting along just fine until Shorty – yes, the same Shorty, convince me that the reason I struck out with Lizzie, was that I didn’t fully put my heart out on my sleeve early enough –so he advised I don’t make the same mistake twice –that I waste no time in telling her how I felt” Nicholas said, adding with a chuckle “and we both know what an expert in matters of love Shorty is!” he said.

Sarah laughed, then drank some coffee -her mind busily trying to solve the mystery of what happened with Lynn? “But, before you continue, can I ask you how you really felt about Lynn?” Sarah inquired “I mean, right at that time?”

“Well ...” Nicholas said, I liked her, a lot, but Lizzie was my obsession, and I just could not get her out of my heart fully, enough to make it a clear-cut decision – but I was beginning to believe that maybe Shorty was right, and indecision on my part was making the girls all run away from me” he said.

“So I’ve gathered you were on the rebound - that then you wrote her a love letter telling her how you loved her?” Sarah said with a knowing look in her eyes like she already knew that wasn’t smart for both you or Lynn – way too early.

“Yes, I did – and I never heard back!” Nicholas exclaimed.

“And what makes you think she got that letter, Nicholas?” Sarah asked “Where did you send it to?” she prodded him.

“To her parents home in Salisbury – she was headed home for the holidays.” Nicholas said, a strange look settling in on his face “Not to the teacher’s training college like all my other letters.” he said, as it dawned on him what happened.

“So let me guess ... you just assumed, having been dumped by Lizzie – without even a letter, that the same thing had happened again?” Sarah inquired with a smirk. “Really?”

Nicholas looked ashamed “Yes ...” he said, suddenly looking confused. “That’s exactly what happened – I didn’t write to her again, I’d done so with Lizzie though, but to no avail.”

“Well Nicholas ...” Sarah said, shaking her head at him “One day, when you least expect it, you’re going to find out that Lynn never got your letter and has lived with that hurt all her life – thinking you wanted nothing more to do with her, but weren’t man enough to write her a ‘Dear Jane’ letter!”

“Oh no Sarah! I sure hope you’re wrong! I prefer my version of events ... I mean, I’d rather it was me that got hurt, than her!” Nicholas said, suddenly feeling like his whole world was topsy-turvy “But maybe it was more than a coincidence – as I’d never have gone back to the Wilderness to try to

meet with Lizzie again, to either get closure or restart our romance -if I had got a reply from Lynn, and well, as you've already figured out – Lizzie's always been my obsession!"

"Yes, you have a point there Nicholas – sometimes our lives take a very different turn, different than we could ever have anticipated -and had you persisted with Lynn, we'd not have met in London, Shorty would have lost Missy, and you'd not be sitting having Coffee with me ... figuring out how you're going to help spring Lizzie free from what sounds to me like a lifetime in hell – here on earth!" she said, smiling at him.

Nicholas laughed – nervously "It's all connected, somehow?"

"Yes, I believe it is!" Sarah commented "And I'll have to say, you and Shorty have given me enough material that if I ever wanted to write novels like Jane Austin, I'd be able to!" she laughed "But then again, I'm an Emma, remember? And she busied herself with other people's romances – and only as an afterthought, her own! I'm going to have to watch that!"

Nicholas laughed "Well, I think we'd better get going to our classes, but let's agree to meet with Shorty and Missy in a few weeks, shall we?" He suggested to her.

"Yes, lets do that! Here's my new number" she said, writing her phone number down on a piece of paper she tore out of her notebook "Please give me a call when they want to meet us, and for that matter, give me a call when you're feeling lonely – it's not boring being around you and Shorty, that's for sure!" she said, as they got up to go, still chatting away and laughing about all sorts of things on their way out, till they said their goodbyes. Sarah was a sweet girl, Nicholas thought as he walked on towards the Computer Science faculty "I sure hope she finds her Mr. Knightly ... one day!"

Then he had a really naughty idea... "What if, in the letter to Lizzie that Constance was bound to intercept, he hinted at Sarah having found her 'Mr. Knightly' – and it was him!" he

thought, then grimaced, thinking “I’d better warn Elizabeth though -just in case she starts actually getting very jealous!”

Wednesday Feb 14<sup>th</sup> 1979: Nicholas had returned to his apartment after his classes at UCT’s campus, opening the door to find a solitary letter – an Aerogram! He picked it up ... it was from Canada – from Lizzie. Putting his books down on his desk, he went to the kitchen to find a sharp knife to carefully open it and did so, immediately noticing the bold-red imprint of Lizzie’s lips on the last part of the letter! “That was thoughtful of her!” he said to himself as he proceeded to the bedroom, lying down on the bed to read it. Nicholas read every line of Lizzie’s Valentine’s letter to him with a joyful smile on his face and a satisfied faraway look in his eyes. He sighed as he folded the letter and held it next to his heart, closing his eyes and mouthing a silent prayer “Thank you Father in Heaven for my darling Lizzie – thank you so much, from the bottom of my heart! Please command your angels to look after her there – she’s in the midst of our enemy’s camp yet again and I’m far away from her, unable to help!”

Laying there, her letter against his heart, his eyes shut, he replayed the letter from his fiancée, Elizabeth, over and over again in his mind. Lizzie may be far away but for now he could feel the warmth of her love with him – and her poem!

*Forty days and forty nights  
That’s just way too long for me  
So I’m praying for us each night  
Soon, my love, I’ll be back with thee  
Yes, life is love and our love’s right  
I’ll soon be in your arms every night!*

He dozed off and in his dreams she was there with him now, lying next to him – and as he raised himself up on one arm to look at her, he could play with her hair and look into her eyes, see her smile - but neither of them spoke a word, then suddenly she was gone and he was left staring only at a pillow... the emptiness in his life returned... with vengeance!

## Chapter 5 [\[Click for AUDIO\]](#)

### **Elizabeth writes a postscript to her Valentine's letter ...**

At the other end of the world, it was mid-morning and the postman had delivered the mail to Lizzie's office. Most of the engineers were out in the field, so Lizzie was delighted to find Nicholas' letter to her and on Valentines day!

Lizzie read and re-read his letter with great interest, noting the important news regarding his immigration proceedings, but really savoring his words of reassurance and love! Her Valentine had really matured into such a considerate man – mind you, she thought, they'd both had so much to contend with, that they had no choice but to grow up, and do so fast!

Lizzie thought for a while, then took an Aerogram from her draw, and started to write a letter to Nicholas that will probably arrive at the end of February in Cape Town ...

*My darling Nicholas, thank you so much for writing and sending your Valentine's Day letter to me in a timely way! I've read and re-read your letter a few times – thank you for your words of reassurance and love. I really appreciate them, stuck as far away from you as I am, with my mother almost daily pointing out how you're back at UCT surrounded by pretty, nubile young ladies all seeking their mates, she's been trying her best to undermine my trust in you and to feed any paranoia I may have about losing you, so your Easter letter will definitely make her day! However, I'll be hard-pressed feigning my growing despondency till then - she may well start to get suspicious? I know what you need to accomplish with those letters – but just in case I get to read them, please be kind with your choice of words, since even if I know in the back of my mind that it's just acting, I'd never want to remember any words from you that even hint at us not*



ending up together – or staying together, or you not loving me. Please keep that in mind for our future years together. As you may have guessed, I have a strong spirit of rejection, so I overreact to even the smallest signs of any rejection, thinking my life's coming to an end. I know that's as a direct result of my mother's draconian tactics and treatment of me, but it's part of my personality and I'm not proud of it – but you do need to be aware of it, lest I hurt you in my attempts at self-preservation stemming from perceived rejection that likely isn't even a real threat. I've been acting really agitated of late at home, asking mother daily if any letters have arrived for me from you, and tomorrow tonight, when I go home I'm going to ask if any Valentine's day cards or letters arrived – and of course I know that none have and none will, so then I'm going to act really hurt and sad – but hopeful that they may still arrive there. I'm thinking that if she now has to wait till the 12<sup>th</sup> of April to get any letter from you, for me - that will be too long, and she'll start to get suspicious. I think you should write your first letter to her – because that's who'll be reading it, sooner rather than later. Plan for it to arrive in early March, but only hint at us not ending up together in it. Then later, for the 12<sup>th</sup> of April, write another more direct one, giving me the option to break off our engagement, in the best interest of both of us. That will buy me all the time I need to pull this off. I cannot see her letting me read either letter – I mean, how will she explain that they've been opened? But we never really can be sure, so I'll cross that bridge when I get to it and I will warn you if she does give them to me. Now to more pleasant things... Nicholas I love you so much! I miss you so much and I've often been fantasizing about becoming Mrs. Nicholas Strauss, and by that I don't mean only the wedding ceremony, but also our honeymoon that follows! Have you given any thought to where we'll get married – my favorite is still the stone church on Main road next to Tugwell hall, my old residence at UCT. It's a Methodist church and will be perfect. Please go and speak to reverend Hymen, he's probably still there, and explain the situation to him and ask if he'll marry us. As for the celebration afterwards, please give it some thought – you'll remember all the nice places we had dinner dances at – I'll leave it up to you, so you can just

*surprise me. What do you think of having our honeymoon at Fairy Knowe, on the banks of the Touws river, back in the Wilderness national park? You and I first kissed under the tall palms on that river bank, back in 1971, under the African moon. Very importantly, we can take a canoe upstream to our secret place one as we often have – we still need to make our final 7<sup>th</sup> wish there – jointly, after were married, remember? It may be the perfect romantic place to finally, fully become Mrs. Strauss ... if you know what I mean! I'm 22 and my adult female hormones are growing stronger now! I'm really feeling stirrings that I've not quite felt ever before. Anyway, give it all some thought and let me know what you think. Nicholas, you are the love of my life now and forever! Let's keep our dreams alive so that just maybe soon, all of our wishes come true!*

*Your Elizabeth, forever! Let's try our best to never, ever be apart for any Christmas or Valentine's day, ever - ever again!*

At the other end of the world, Nicholas sat down to reply to Lizzie's letter – now lying beside him on the desk, which he'd left half-open to boldly display the bright red imprints of her luscious lips – to inspire him!

*Dearest Lizzie, thanks so much for a lovely Valentine's letter! It arrived right on Valentine's day – I got it after returning from UCT in the afternoon – it sure made my day! I went into the bedroom and read it lying down on the bed – and after re-reading it I closed my eyes, still holding it – next to my heart, and fell asleep, dreaming a lovely dream – at first, that you and I were back together again here in Cape Town, but it was just a dream and I awoke to find just a empty spot and pillow next to me – something I've had to get used to now. Still, let's keep our hopes alive! This time we're counting down the days to your return to me and Cape Town. With that in mind, I've concluded that I really have to write a letter soon that will be sent to your parents house, that at least starts the process of diverting your mother's attentions away from what you're really doing and makes her think her plans have succeeded and that we are becoming increasingly estranged. So watch for any signs of her behavior becoming gleeful in March – then*

*act accordingly, though you'll have to wing it. Since she would not have seen any Valentine's letter or birthday letter from me, she's either going to be very suspicious, or happy – so be prepared! I sure like your revision of the "40 days" countdown song – not to mention your inclusion of the impression of your lips! I'm tempted to kiss them -but I may just get carried away and leave the thin Aerogram paper all soggy – so I'll look at it and admire it and dream of actually kissing you again one day – real soon!*

Nicholas went on to tell her about Shorty Becket and Missy, and Sarah, being careful to warn her that he was going to use Sarah as a decoy in the March letter to her mother, so that she would not be tempted to think it's a real issue – if she ever did get to read his 'red-herring letter'. Then he switched back to reassuring her of his love, to end the letter. *With all my love, Your Nicholas – for 7 years and counting!*

*PS. I know you feel most uncomfortable lying to your parents, but they're not mine – that much they've made very clear, so leave the misinformation to me! All you have to do is let her leap to her own conclusions, which will be based on her fond desire to have me out of your life ... and Charles back in it!*

Nicholas addressed that letter to Lizzie's office, set it aside and picked up a blank Aerogram – this one intended for Constance to intercept! He thought for a while, then wrote...

*Dear Lizzie, Thank you for your letter I received a few weeks ago. I've been so busy and distracted that I've lost track of time – so I really apologize for not getting a Valentine's letter to you in time, and that this letter may arrive a little after your birthday too, but let me now at least wish you a belated Valentine's day and birthday! I'm sure you've been kept busy with work. I'll look forward to news – when you next write.*

*London was a huge expensive surprise! Being marooned there for 3 weeks took care of whatever money I had left, not to mention all our unexpected expenditures over Christmas, paying for food and hotels etc. But it wasn't time spent all*

alone and grieving over our separation. Fate stepped in and on the same day, soon after I arrived, I met my 1<sup>st</sup> year Physics Prac partner, Sarah – the British girl I told you all about back then, and also Shorty Becket – from my days at boarding school! All three of us were in London, far away from any loved ones. Shorty had run away from South Africa, practically leaving his fiancée at the altar, and Sarah had broken up with her Afrikaner boyfriend whose parents were not thrilled with yet another English woman in their family. So we three spent a lot of time together consoling each other and keeping our spirits up. Shorty returned to South Africa to try and patch things up with his Mellissa, and Sarah and I have returned to finish our final year at UCT, together – both in the Science faculty. We’ve all seen each other again, and still plan to do so often – kind of like the 3 Musketeers, though the jury’s out on who’s who! Sarah’s a really sweet girl who, sadly, lost her mother when she was only 5. She was raised by her dad who never remarried, and comes across exactly like Emma in Jane Austen’s novel – still looking for her ‘Mr. Knightly’ – who may be right under her nose, as happened in the novel. She immediately set herself to helping Shorty and me with our love problems – with no thoughts given to her own future!. A really sweet lady! Her dad still lives in the Orkney islands - alone. After so many years, and so many terrible wounds inflicted on us by your mother, I admit to being mortally wounded now. I just cannot believe that once again you’re there and I’m here – back at opposite ends of the world, and we’re still officially engaged? That just does not sit well with me and probably not with you either? Our love should never be that complicated! I know it will be at least 2-3 years before I can get back to Canada and to you, if at all! I really will be at the mercy of Canadian bureaucrats and that can only happen after this year anyway. I have to finish my degree to stand any chance of going back to Canada. If all this sounds terribly hopeless – well, think about it ... it is! I think she’s won Lizzie –I really do! I find it difficult to imagine what kind of miracle will find us back together – let alone see us married. How about you? Give it some thought. I’m sorry if I sound despondent -truth is I am despondent and depressed!

Love, Nicholas.

## Chapter 6 [\[Click for AUDIO\]](#)

### **Constance walks into the trap ... But not as planned!**

Monday, March 5<sup>th</sup>: Everyone had left for work or school and only Constance remained in the house, cleaning and going about her daily chores when she heard the mailman deliver their mail in the brass mailbox at the entrance of their home. Stopping her chores for now, she went to retrieve their mail – a handful of mostly what looked like flyers for local businesses and supermarkets – and some bills. Sitting down at the kitchen table, she sorted through the mail ... then there it was! The long-awaited letter from Nicholas to Elizabeth! Constance held it up, a myriad of thoughts flashing through her head ... “open it!” – “No, then Lizzie would eventually get to know and meanwhile be very suspicious of me!” But she needed to know what was in that letter!” what a dilemma ... Constance was torn between opening it or giving it to Lizzie –but what was best to do now? Then it dawned on her – “This letter has come late – late for Valentine’s day, late for Elizabeth’s birthday, late for any reply to Elizabeth’s first letter – that cannot be good news for Elizabeth! Constance decided to wait till Lizzie came home, then give it to her – she could always sneak into her room tomorrow, when she was at work, find and then read this letter. At any rate, she would be able to judge from Elizabeth’s reactions upon reading this letter, what was in it – at least the general tone and intent of this letter!

It took every ounce of her self-control to place the letter aside, to wait to give it to Elizabeth –but that’s what she did!

Evening came soon enough, and Constance heard the car pull into the driveway and the Garage door open – then close. Hattie came in first, proceeding straight to her room, then came Edwin and Elizabeth, chatting away cheerfully.

“Elizabeth ...” Constance announced with a happy smile, “I have a letter for you!” She stood there waving the letter in her hand and Lizzie reached for the letter -but Constance held it away “No, not yet, supper’s ready, go freshen-up, get Hattie -let’s all eat supper first!” she said with a smirk.

“Oh mom, please! Surely that can wait 30 minutes or so?” Elizabeth pleaded – all the while frantically thinking “Why is she giving me this letter – that’s so unlike her – Puzzling!”

“No dear, the sooner we eat, the sooner you get your letter – so hurry!” she insisted “So hurry up now, then come eat.”

Pouting and making a sad face, Elizabeth retreated upstairs to go and get ready for supper, and when she was in her room, closing the door, she took off her coat, put down her bag then went to sit down on the edge of her bed “What do I do now? She thought “This wasn’t the way our plan was supposed to work! She was meant to open it! – time for a new plan!” she thought “I’ll just have to wing it, as Nicholas said “tonight’s going to be a dramatic night!” As she left her room she called out “Hattie ... suppers ready” and went downstairs. The family ate their Macaroni and cheese casserole, not a bad meal really –just a very often made one. Then came dessert – rice pudding. Soon enough it was over.

“Mom, can I please be excused?” Elizabeth asked “And, of course, get Nicholas’ long overdue response to my January letter – I’m sure it will shed light on why he forgot my birthday and Valentine’s day this year” Elizabeth pleaded.

“Yes dear – that would be OK now, she said, handing the aerogram to Elizabeth who wasted no time opening it with a kitchen knife and then retreated with her prize to her room.

Hattie also asked to be excused, leaving just Edwin and Constance still seated at the table “Now the waiting game starts Edwin!” Constance remarked with a expectant smirk.

“What do you mean dear” Edwin inquired, looking confused.

“Edwin – stop and think for a while ... you know I’ve been saying to you that it’s really odd that Nicholas ‘forgot’ Valentine’s day and Lizzie’s birthday ... I mean, when did you ever do that to me?” She quizzed him, looking defiant.

“Never dear – I always remember!” Edwin said defensively.

“Exactly!” Constance triumphantly exclaimed “Edwin, I predict all is not well with your daughter’s romance ... Anyhow, we’ll find out soon enough. I’ll go into her room tomorrow, find the letter and confirm my suspicions!”

“If you must dear – but I’m really just humoring you as I know you will anyway!” he said smiling sheepishly at her.

Lizzie lay down on her bed to read Nicholas ‘Long overdue’ Letter ... just pausing to reread a few sentences - to get a better idea of the material she had to work with, thinking what to do next. She could leave it in her room in a drawer where her mother was sure to find it, but then it would be a while before she’d be able to make their plan work – “no, I’d better to get the show on the road!” She weighed-up her options ... and her mind drifted to the boldest option first – then her imagination ran wild! Soon she knew what to do.

Stopping by the bathroom to wet her eyes and cheeks, then looking at her handy-work in the mirror, and smiling – no, she’d have to look sad – smiles were not appropriate now!

Then she proceeded on down the stairs to the family room, where Constance and Edwin were sitting reading.

“Mother, I don’t often ask you for help where my personal life is concerned anymore – but this time’s the exception. It appears that your predictions are busy coming true and I have to at least concede that much – so now that I have, please read this and tell me what you think, maybe I’m over-reacting?” she said, now handing the letter to Constance. Constance almost too eagerly took the letter from Lizzie and started reading. Lizzie went to sit next to Edwin’s chair –

looking most distraught – enough so that Edwin reached out and placed his hand on Lizzie’s arm and said “There, there dear, let’s not jump to the worst conclusions ... I’m sure things will work out, somehow?” He said, not sure what was exactly happening now – but feeling the need to comfort her.

As she read the letter, Constance had to fight her natural instincts to jump up and wave the letter in her right hand, held up high, while shouting “Yes...Yes! Finally!” and doing a victory dance – but instead she remained seated, and said. “Elizabeth, I tried to warn you my girl ... I could see this coming!” she said, feigning concern and sympathy for her.

Lizzie lifted her downcast head – a sad look on her face, her eyes still moist and said “I know you did mother – but I was too blind to see it – I didn’t even think it was a possibility?” She replied feigning total disbelief “What a fool I’ve been?”

Edwin spoke “Elizabeth, do you mind if I read the letter too – maybe, as a man, I can find something in it that explains things better – differently?” He asked, trying to help her.

“Sure, go ahead Dad, but I think you’re wasting you time...” She replied with a big sigh, sitting slumped over on the edge of the couch looking at the floor, adding “but just maybe?”

As Edwin read, then re-read Nicholas’ letter, with Constance prattling on at Lizzie about how men nowadays were no longer trustworthy, Lizzie sat silent. Constance rambled on.

Finally Edwin looked up and spoke “Elizabeth, it sounds to me like your mother’s heavy-handedness – coupled with the great distance now separating you two, and the unknown, but certainly very long time you two will be forced to live apart, has finally broken Nicholas’ spirit – it looks like he has very little fight left in him. I think he’s trying to give you a reason to end your engagement to him – something he cannot quite bring himself to do –he seems to be deferring that decision to you?” Is that what you read between the lines too?” He asked of Elizabeth - and then of Constance.



“Yes dad, I kind of got that feeling ... it’s tough not to!” Lizzie replied looking sad and resigned – totally beaten down too.

Constance, unable to contain herself any longer, interjected “Well I say you write to him right now, calling off the engagement and tell him how bitterly disappointed in him you are and that you never, ever want to see him again!” she demanded, adding “And give it to me to mail, I’d love that!”

Lizzie did not answer right away ... but after a while she looked up and spoke resolutely and in a measured tone “No mother, I’ll not do that to him – yet. I think he’s been badly beaten up by you over the years and whilst I understand you would like me to hurt him even worse than you ever did or could, I owe him one last chance ... so I’ll write to him and ask him plainly what he wants me to do and what, if anything, are his plans for our love and our lives?” She said.

“Well have it your way Elizabeth – but I think that when a tooth is hurting, it’s best to pull it out and get rid of the pain once and for all!” but Elizabeth interrupted her ...

“Mother, just maybe the hurting tooth can be saved? Then I won’t have to walk around for the rest of my life with a missing tooth, afraid to smile ever again!” Elizabeth retorted. “I’m at least going to try to get to the bottom of all of this – not right away, I want him to think things through on his end – just maybe he has a change of heart?” I can only hope so” she said looking over at Edwin and asking “What do you think dad? Am I being silly? Should I hurt him -or be kind?”

“I think yours is a reasonable approach Lizzie ...” he replied.

Constance got up in a huff ... “Well I’m off to bed now, come on Edwin – time to go and get some sleep! Elizabeth, are you going to be all right on your own?” she inquired, as they left.

“Yes mother, I’d say the rest is now up to me – to Nicholas and me, to work out. Time will tell ...” she said holding the letter and looking downcast, beaten, sad and humiliated.

As Lizzie lay in her bed, she finally broke out into a smile! That was a brilliant letter Nicholas – you even had me worried there for a while!” she thought, sighing with relief.

Lizzie smiled ... back to reality! This option had worked well, and she’d not really lied to her parents - she’d never done that. In her mind she concluded there was a very important difference in out-right lies than simply letting her parents read Nicholas’s letter and draw their own conclusions. She’d not needed to feign sadness... that was not a lie. She was genuinely sad about Nicholas’s departure and her captivity! She’d now let Constance’s plotting, scheming mind do all the dirty work and jump to all the wrong conclusions, fueled by her insatiable desire to control her young life ... plus her hatred of Nicholas! So she’d simply leave the letter where it could and would be found again by her mother. That would have to do for now. The one thing she could depend upon, was that Constance would reread her letter – gleefully! Lizzie reminded herself she’d read many instances in the Bible of God’s people tricking their enemies - thus sowing confusion

“Nicholas, now your next letter can wait till Easter and after that – just 2 months more and I’ll be ready to go back to you and we’ll finally get married!” she thought – sensing victory was now finally within their grasp. “I’ll write you tomorrow!”

As Lizzie lay in bed in warm flannel pajamas, snuggled up under the heavy down comforter – the wind howling around the house, snow drifts accumulating in all corners of the yard, ice forming on windows, she thought about Nicholas in faraway Cape Town – and how he really was surrounded with beautiful, uncomplicated women and girls, just Denise alone even was cause for concern – a really attractive blue-eyed, blonde bombshell who was Nicholas’s love interest before... and who’s mom adored him! But now Sarah too? Unattached, sweet Sarah? That was worrying! She’d have to warn her Nicholas about how predatory women could be!

“Why does being an adult need to be so tough, so predatory, so cruel? Why is it necessary to have to fight so hard for the

right to love? Why do people feel they need to be deceptive? Why can't everyone just let me live my own life unimpeded? Why the need for control over my love, life and future?" She sighed, deciding to rather ask God those questions instead, saying her prayers and drifting gently off to sleep. In her dreams things were not as complicated – she dreamt of wedding dresses and being back and alone with Nicholas again, in beautiful, sunny Africa ... back in his arms again, in his apartment ... and in her dreams, all was well again!



Elizabeth, like many young women, dreaming of wedding dresses in Canada ...



Elizabeth and Nicolas, happy to be together in their apartment.

## Chapter 7 [\[Click for AUDIO\]](#)

### **Constance is gleefully happy - Her plan has worked!**

Morning couldn't come quickly enough for Constance! She watched carefully at the breakfast table how Elizabeth was rather unresponsive - even morose, she imagined. That was definitely a good sign! If that letter was good news for Lizzie, it would be bad news for her - but clearly it was bad news for Elizabeth! She'd have to find and reread the letter - soon!

"Hurry up dears! You're all going to be late for work and school - you know how the winter weather affects driving conditions and times! Best to leave soon!" she chided Edwin.

"Yes dear - Lizzie, Hattie, are you both done?" Edwin asked, knowing full well why his wife was eager for their departure!

Hattie said nothing, but asked to be excused to go and get her school-bag - Lizzie answered in a rather feeble voice "Yes dad, sure, I'm not really that hungry anyway, we can go whenever you're ready - I need to go fetch my bag upstairs."

Constance heard the garage door open, the car start, pull out, the garage door close and soon the familiar sounds of their daily departure was over, and she proceeded to Lizzie's room. "Where would Lizzie leave the letter?" she thought - looking all around her ... then opened the top drawer of Lizzie's chest of drawers -and there it was! Unable to contain herself, she sat down on the edge of the bed to re-read the letter ... stopping only to smile, snicker and sneer! By the end of the letter she was delighted! Her plan had worked - Nicholas' money was gone... he was gone and his spirit was broken! Lizzie had read the same letter she'd just read - they all had, and it was more than obvious that Nicholas just did not have the staying power to, yet again, have to live

without Elizabeth for years... better yet, as a result of her stranding Nicholas in London for two weeks he had no money and a new very eligible young woman, who clearly liked him, had been placed in his life – not only in London, but also in Cape Town - and she'd be there every day for Nicholas when Elizabeth wasn't! Constance just could not believe her good fortune – but did! As she walked down the stairs, letter still in hand, to the kitchen, she'd make a pot of tea and sit and read the letter there again and again while enjoying her tea, savoring it all-this victory was really sweet!

Elizabeth thought about writing Nicholas – but decided that she'd wait a few days to first assess the effect it's had on her mother, and then only write with that news to Nicholas.

When they returned home that night, Constance was in a cheerful mood – happy!

“Hmmm ....” Lizzie thought “I wonder if she read it again?” then proceeded to her bedroom to put her things down and get ready for supper. She opened the top drawer and noticed that the letter was still there where she'd left it, but the hair she'd placed carefully on it, was not! Constance had read it!

Supper was served by a unusually chatty Constance, who watched Elizabeth very carefully for clues ... and thinking she'd found them, spoke “Edwin dear, you look very tired tonight, why don't we finish up here now and all retire to our bedrooms to get an early night's sleep?” she suggested.

Picking up on her cue, Edwin agreed, and soon they'd all left the table for their bedrooms.

As Edwin lay on the bed, Constance sat in the corner chair, and before he could ask her, she started to fill him in ...

“Edwin, my plan's worked out perfectly! Even better than if they'd spent the two weeks in a hotel here – which didn't happen, thanks to you – but now I forgive you!” She started to say, gleefully - before Edwin interrupted her ...

“Really? What do you mean dear?” Edwin inquired of her, surprised that she’d give him credit for anything positive.

“By stranding him in London instead, he not only was forced to pay for hotels there, thus depleting his rescue fund, but as lady-luck would have it, he met up with a very eligible young British girl called Sarah, who is not only very fond of him – and him of her, but also just so happens to be at UCT with him each and every day of the final year of his studies!” Constance announced gleefully! “Do you know what that means?” she asked Edwin “Can you even begin to imagine?”

Edwin lay there with his arms behind his head, looking at her – not smiling, then answered her “I do know what you want for Lizzie and Nicholas, but isn’t this just wishful thinking on your part? I mean, they love each other, and ...”

But he didn’t get to finish before Constance interrupted him. “Edwin, what you’re forgetting is Nicholas wrote Elizabeth about how despondent he was – basically beaten, not able to imagine a happy outcome for them – at least not within a couple of years. He practically gave Lizzie the option to end their engagement!” Constance said again, with glee!

“Well, that does kind of put a more serious spin on things, that I’d not anticipated!” he replied “But in hindsight dear, you really have been very determined and cruel to him – to them ...” He corrected himself “So if their love now dies and they never end up together, the blame for all of that lies with you – it rests squarely on your shoulders!” he remarked.

“Yes, and I’m very proud of that fact!” Edwin. “I’ve averted a major catastrophe for our family! I’ll happily wear the medal for that on my chest!” she said, now sneering as she replied.

“Perhaps dear, you’ve just brought on a huge catastrophe?” he countered “I mean, Lizzie’s life is now in ruins, or soon will be, and we’ll have to contend with that! You’ve not only broken his spirit, but hers too... and the costs of that are ...”

“Oh Edwin, don’t be so Stupid!” She snapped back at him – unable to accept his criticism “Of course at the right time, Charles will reappear in her life and Elizabeth will happily accept that outcome, and my original – too often delayed plans, would have worked to perfection! And Nicholas will just be a distant memory – a constant reminder to Elizabeth to never go against my demands again -a lesson learned the hard way!” she now said, with determination in her voice.

“Yes, if you say so dear ... as usual, you’re right!” he said.

“Yes I am Edwin – and don’t you forget it!” she warned him.

In her room, Lizzie lay in bed – way too early, with lots of time on her hands, and so her mind drifted to fantasy. She remembered all the romantic times her and Nicholas had spent at their secret pool ... wondering what could have happened there –if something had not always stopped them. Lizzie’s hormones, now at 22, had kicked in powerfully, and even her thoughts and fantasies were now more mature. Nicholas, after all, was her fiancé and they really did love each other. It was only a matter of time now and she’d officially transition from a young chaste maiden - to be his bride! That was healthy, normal and a natural prelude to becoming a mother herself. That thought is now what she’d concentrate on ... she imagined them lying in bed together, not just the two of them, but a baby suckling on her breasts while Nicholas lay beside her, adoringly... telling them both how very happy he was! That was such a beautiful fantasy – Lizzie was ready for adulthood and motherhood...over-ready!





## Chapter 8 [Click for AUDIO](#)

### **Nicholas finds out what happened ...**

Nicholas sat reading Lizzie's letter ...

*My Dearest Nicholas, this letter is going to make you very hopeful – in my opinion it marks an important milestone in our long, tough struggle to get to the altar. My mother reread your letter – of that there's no doubt! Your letter fueled her fondest dreams for my future, and I did not need to even lie once – I just let her sneaky mind do all that work for us. She is now convinced that our love's in trouble and that soon I, or you, will break off our engagement ... please Nicholas, never let her win! I'd die on that day ... my life would be over! On that subject, I've mostly made peace with Denise's friendship and past with you – she seems a very principled lovely young woman – though I really worried when I first met her! I mean, she's really gorgeous, you have a longer history with her than with me plus her mom's a sweetie. But I'm a lot more worried about Sarah! Meeting her, as you did, in London, sounded pretty romantic - but also very scary, for me! I know very little about her – though I recall you mentioning her to me in your 1<sup>st</sup> year at UCT. She sounds like a nice person – but she's made it quite clear to you that she's now unattached and looking for her Mr. Knightly, plus she's there with you so now you and her can see each other as often as you want to – or allow. Any healthy young woman my age, stranded in super-romantic Cape Town with a nice friend - you, will soon start thinking she's actually found her Mr. Knightly! I know you're probably not going to take this as seriously as I do, but those are the ingredients for a new love-story – hers, and it's one I'd rather not have become a reality! So please don't ever place yourself in compromising situation – and try to have friends with you if you meet with her again. I'm likely being a little paranoid here – but your letter was so convincing that I've*

*now had doubts too! We can declare your letter a resounding success – though with me now left feeling very uncomfortable. As to the matters at hand, I would still be evasive in your Easter letter – just come across as placing us and our love or marriage on a 2-3 year timeline. That way my mother will be lulled into a false sense of security. I've recently asked my boss if I can work lunch hours too, and he's agreed. I asked him to please pay any overtime to me separately so that my mother doesn't take it. That places us on an earlier schedule – so be ready when I finally write to let you know I've bought my ticket. With all that's now happening there –I'd really like to be back with you for all of the normal reasons - but also to ensure that Sarah, or anyone else, does not stand a chance to do what so far, my mother has failed to do! Funny how our worst enemies have always been women, hey? Well, I'll end this letter now, as in a few days I'd prefer to write you a love letter about us – not a complicated one with all sorts of fears, perils and plots to worry about... till then, farewell my love.*

*With all my love, as always, your sweetheart, Elizabeth.*

*PS. In case you haven't noticed – I need your reassurances!*

Nicholas sighed as he realized what Lizzie had said was true – nice as Sarah was, he'd have to avoid too much contact with her, so as not to give her any wrong ideas -that would not be fair to her either! Even so, he hoped that she'd be as gentle on him as Denise was, and still is. She'd always been a really classy lady, to be sure, now with a very handsome boyfriend, Tony –the kind most women just swoon over! He smiled as he thought what an incredible couple they were ... hoping that they'd be at Lizzie's and his wedding – together, and that there Denise would catch the bouquet and Tony the garter. That would be a very happy ending and would greatly alleviate any lingering guilt he still bore! Denise deserved to be happy! Actually, he thought, everyone did! For now he'd make something to eat, then his studies and then, later, before bed, he'd write Elizabeth to reassure her. He stood thinking as he made yet another Bacon and Egg sandwich... what he could say to reassure Elizabeth? This would need an airmail letter – Aerograms were too limiting!

## Chapter 9 [Click for Audio](#)

### **Lizzie is reassured ....**

*My dearest darling Elizabeth, I'd not thought of what it would be like for you to read a letter I'd essentially written to your mother, so for that do I apologize! I hope you find my honesty less of a problem, upon reflection, since if I harbored any idea of starting a romantic relationship with Sarah or anyone else, I'd certainly most likely have kept it all secret from you. But I concede, in hindsight, that what I wrote could be worrying for you – it's just that both of us thought you'd never even get to see my letter – based on what's happened in the past with letters I've written to you. I'm surprised that she chose to give the letter to you – unopened, and I'm left guessing as to her motives. The best answer I can come up with, is that if she'd not given you my letter –in thinking, you may have written me asking why there's been no letter to you? At that point I'd have found some way of telling you there was – that clearly your mother has been up to her old tricks again, and then her cover would be blown and we'd be more determined than ever to counteract her meddling. So, I have to concede that what she did was strategically brilliant of her, since it's very doubtful that you'd destroy my letter anyway. So then while you're gone to work, she could get to reread the now opened letter anyway. So let's just assume that will happen again at Easter – now that we know! I'll do as you ask in that letter – that makes sense. Now on to more important matters ...*

*Elizabeth, I could write many flowery words of love now, to reassure you ... instead I'm going to remind you of how I first declared my love for you and what it felt like for both of us. I'm going to write down the first and last verse of the poem I gave to you on the train station in Wellington the day I left for my 2 year stint in the air force. My reason is simply this – It's how I felt upon meeting you ... and it's how I still feel now!*

## **Summer Love ...**

*As I walked into that little store,  
She turned, I turned, our eyes met, she smiled.  
She transfixed me to the core . . .  
This beautiful young woman with the face of a child.  
For there she stood, smiling ever so softly at me,  
Her eyes fixed upon me in a most disarming gaze.  
This lovely young mermaid from that wondrous sea,  
She whom I'd seemingly lost in that relentless maze,  
Reappeared to me now as if through a swirling ocean mist,  
Her chestnut golden hair cascading around her shoulders bare.  
I simply had no choice; speechless, quite helpless to resist,  
I stood there, motionless, enchanted, held captive by her stare!*

*Lizzie, on a fateful day - 21<sup>st</sup> of December 1971, at the tender young age of 15/16, our lives both changed and now 7 years later, we've been through a lot of trials in our attempts to end up together – for our love to survive and thrive. Well ... It has!*

*For there on the edge of that watery trench,  
At the meeting of two streams,  
Upon our favorite gray, old bench,  
We shared so many happy dreams.  
Always the remaining days went by too fast,  
And there in that most pleasant land,  
I vainly wished they could forever last,  
Somehow for time quite still to stand.  
But alas, back home she would soon be going,  
And our love would have to wait another year,  
My heart broken, its sadness showing,  
As it cried a little tear.*

*Lizzie, that's kind of where we are – yet again, and my heart still feels the same sadness at being apart from you – in fact, further apart than we could've ever imagined in nightmares! I hope that upon reading these words again, from me, you remember the feelings that you had when you first read them - sitting alone on the platform of Wellington's station and the train with me on it, long gone. I want you to remember how you first felt when you read the words I wrote immediately after the poem's ending. Here they are again, as best as I can*

*recall and yes, I still feel that way today after so many years!*

*Elizabeth ... I love you! I always have, and I always will. Whatever happens, please remember that! I can't be there for you right now, but I will be back. I promise I will! Somehow, sometime, some way, somewhere . . . I'll be back! Life is short, Elizabeth, and true love is hard to find—but we found it! So please, Lizzie, hold me close in your heart, even while I'm so very far away and all seems so very hopeless.*

*With all my love, Nicholas.*

*PS. Elizabeth, I realize that though ours is not a love that was destined to be easy, smooth – for whatever reason ... it is one that was destined to be! We're meant to be a couple – I accept that. I'd like you to accept that too. Let's just move forward with our plans now, the end is in sight! Let's also pray about that and ask for Heaven's protection for us and for our love!*

*I love you Elizabeth, I always have ... and I always will!*

Lizzie smiled holding his letter, kissing the photo –a happy, warm feeling came over her. Nicholas was right... their love was meant to be! There was something about these last 7 years that made her think that there was a bigger picture that she couldn't see – yet. The author of their love-story wanted them to follow a script - but they needed direction.



## Chapter 10 [Click for AUDIO](#)

### **Love letters that cross in the mail ...**

*My dearest darling Nicholas, I'm pretty sure we're thinking along similar lines so our letters are going to cross in the mail. I'm taking no chances, so here I am, writing you another love-letter, from snowy Ontario, Canada and in time (I hope) for delivery to you in faraway sunny Cape Town before Easter. Nicholas, there's all sorts of things I can discuss now – but I'll leave them for my next letter. Right now I just want to write about my feelings for you – feelings of love. Ever since we met on December 21<sup>st</sup> 1971, you heading into grade-11, me into Grade-10, both of us barely 15 and 16, I've not been able to imagine a life without you – and every time during the last 7 years when it seemed that had indeed happened, I wasn't able to ever evict you out of that corner of my heart in which I've always had you tucked safely away. From our very first kiss on the river's bank under the African moon – there under a tall old palm tree, your touch has filled me with sensations that only now I'm beginning to fully appreciate. Even though you're gone, yet again, from my side... now even just thinking about all the times that we've embraced passionately, I get sensations that simply overwhelm me! It's almost like some kind of drug. I'm addicted and I don't ever want the antidote! My heart feels warm, my breasts swell and a kind of blissful peace floods my being – and sometimes I even feel a tingling nice sensation in the small of my back. Everyone gets to bed so early here that I'm left alone with only my thoughts in my bedroom. Then I have plenty of time to remember, think and dream snuggled up safely under my cozy comforter, with the snow and cold outside seeming so hostile. So I close my eyes and fantasize about us being back at our secret pool in the forests of the Wilderness National park – where you and I are Sir Ian and Lady Jennifer again ... and as always happened, we get very passionate – only this time, our secret safe-word*



is not used...and so we don't stop! I know it's only a fantasy, and I don't really know exactly what we do there ... but we're both very passionate - and whatever it is that we do invokes feelings in me so strong, so warm and enjoyable, that I like to fantasize for an hour or more each night - till I'm finally tired ... then I say my prayers, thanking God for you, and asking God to please look after us and to preserve us and our love, yet again, in these very cruel tough times. I do know this - I don't have a 'Plan-B', only my "Plan-A"... and that, Nicholas, has us getting married and living out our dreams together – forever! I think I know you well enough by now, to know that you feel the same way about me – about us, but if you're ever tempted to give away even just a small portion of your heart to another young maiden – please know this, a large portion of my heart will die. If you are not careful with my heart, it will break... and I'll surely die! I cannot live without knowing that you love me with all your heart – so please never, ever break my heart, or even wound it. We've passed that point of 'no return' – there's no way back to safety! My soul's now so intertwined with yours, that my happiness depends on you - on your happiness, more than ever before. My very life is now completely in your hands! I'm conceding that much to you - no more evasiveness. Nicholas, I'm fully invested in you! I trust you'll never let me regret this honest confession of my love – I'm extremely vulnerable ... my life's in your hands. I know we realistically evaluated the possibility of the first 6 of our wishes we've made so far, ever coming true - when we were in the Honeymoon suite of the Walper this last Christmas eve. Since you'd always need to live in or near big cities to be able to work in large computer data-centers, we'd likely never live in a place like that, next to our secret pool and waterfall – but Nicholas, in my fantasy, we do! Those are my dreams, so in them I get to decide where I will live and with whom – and Nicholas, I do get to live there for the rest of my life, with you! In my dreams we're lovers forever... never tiring of each other – forever young. They're my love's fondest dreams! So just imagine, Nicholas, that one day you and I are Sir Ian and Lady Jennifer once again, and we get to live in a beautiful cottage on the banks of a beautiful river, with its many pools and waterfalls and flowers year round – and that there we're



able to spend lots of time with each other, our love growing ever stronger. There we see out the rest of our days together, both happy, content, watching our children and their wives - or husbands as the case may be, succeed – all living close by enough for us to easily visit them all, and our Grandchildren being such a joy in our lives! I'm kind of fast-forwarding over our lives now, but I really need you to know that I'm staying focused... positive, here in faraway Canada, by dreaming big dreams and enjoying fantasies and their associated feelings. I've been practicing my new signature Nicholas... I absolutely love signing my name 'Elizabeth M. Strauss'! I'm yours, your true-love, forever. Let's try our best to never, ever be apart for any Christmas or Christmas eve – that's a “wish-breaker” and I'd really like to have all our wishes come true! I've been getting a lot of new feelings sweeping over me nowadays, as I'd mentioned above, and I've also been dreaming about our children. My wish is going to come true Nicholas! Be prepared for at least 2 children –maybe more, but definitely 2 sons that will proudly carry forward the Strauss family name!

**With all my love, your Elizabeth... soon I'll be your wife!**



Nicholas closed his eyes, holding her letter next to his heart with a happy smile on his face, as he thought: “Soon now Lizzie, very soon... you'll be back here in my arms – forever!”

## Chapter 11 [Click for AUDIO](#)

**Monday 9<sup>th</sup> April 1979 ... Nicholas's letter arrives in time!**

“Elizabeth, a long-awaited reply to your letter from Nicholas has finally arrived! Constance announced, producing the Aerogramme from Cape Town just as supper was ending “Since it’s still 4 days before Easter, maybe you want to read it now and reply to it soon too so that your sadness does not ruin our family’s Easter holidays!” she lectured Elizabeth.

“Mother, why do you assume the worst possible outcome? What do you know of my and Nicholas’s relationship that makes you so sure?” Elizabeth replied, adding “But just to fill you in on what’s at stake here, Nicholas’s previous letter made me realize how despondent he was – not really tough to imagine why, considering what you’ve done to us ... so I responded to him with a realistic request ... that we have to be married by December the 21<sup>st</sup> 1981, the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our first meeting in the Wilderness National park – about 3 years from now. Failing that, either of us could call off our engagement without recriminations, but also that by mutual agreement we could both still choose to stay engaged!” Lizzie concluded – adding “So yes, I’d very much like to see what he’s said, please give it to me!” Elizabeth said reaching for it.

Constance was truly amazed - her daughter had much more staying power than she’d given her credit for ... but what about Nicholas? She was curious! “Very well Lizzie, but for all our sakes – now that you’ve got us sitting on the edge of our seats, holding our breath, can you at least open your letter and look for his answer – then tell us all?” She said.

Lizzie took the letter and paused for a moment, opening it at the table, not quite sure how to proceed – then it dawned on her “This was a perfect opportunity to very publically buy

the time we still need -to lull everyone into a false sense of security!" she thought, then replied "Yes mother... I think that's appropriate since we're all here together. This is a water-shed moment in the life of your first-born child!" she replied, scanning the letter for her answer. She didn't have to do that, it was the very first paragraph, and so she reread it -this time, out loud to them all waiting with baited breath!

*My dearest Elizabeth, your letter filled me with a renewed sense of hope and so my answer is Yes, I agree to your terms! After 7 long, arduous years filled with ecstasy and agony in seemingly endless cycles, the least we can now do is to give our love these 3 more years to blossom and come to fruition. I'll be done with my degree in December of this year, after which I'll have 2 more years to make my way to Canada and claim my bride - and as long as you stand firm and do not allow your mother to veto those plans, yet again, I'll be there! We've already managed a 2 year separation when I was in the air force - now it's a bit longer, but also our love's a lot stronger now than it's ever been - though the pain is too.*

Lizzie stopped reading at that point and looked up at her mother and Edwin, saying "So how about it mother ... Dad, do we have a deal? Do you agree that we can get married if we ever get together again before the deadline of the 21<sup>st</sup> of December 1981? Dad - what do you think?" she said, first choosing the easier target ... watching Constance squirm.

"Yes Lizzie, that sounds perfectly fair to me - though I'd hasten to add, just to try and protect you from hurt, that is a very long time in a young man's life, marooned so far away from you - and he still has to jump through the many tough hurdles Canada will place before him, to immigrate here!"

"Thanks Dad!" Lizzie exclaimed, smiling -squeezing his arm.

"And mother ... do you disagree with dad? Do you accept these terms too?" Elizabeth asked of a now clearly flustered Constance who'd not foreseen this turn of events "Both dad and I do agree I'm facing tough odds ... but do you agree?"

Constance interrupted “Well, OK Elizabeth, but just so that you know exactly where I stand, I just cannot see all of this coming together for you two, so I’d not feel bound to this deal – if I were you. I advise you to feel free to break off the engagement, unilaterally, whenever it suits you to do so – regardless of Nicholas agreeing to your terms!” she said.

“Mother, I’ll not do that – this is a matter of honor for me and a very nice young man’s heart is now in my hands – I’ll be very careful with it, even as you urge me to cruelly break it in two!” Elizabeth said - her face now flushed ... for real!

“Well, suit yourself my girl! I happen to feel that in life it’s best to hold all the high cards in your own hand, and stack the deck with more, in your favor, as needs be – so that you win whatever happens! So do feel free to date others as the opportunity arises here or elsewhere ...” she said but didn’t quite finish making her point when Elizabeth interrupted ...

“And by ‘others’ and ‘here or elsewhere’ you mean Charles?”

“Yes Elizabeth, Charles... and maybe others? Who knows? Either way, you’re less likely to have to endure as much pain as you’ve had to endure with Nicholas – so your life could be much happier - he’s the reason for all your pain!”

“Mother, may I be excused ... I’d like to go and read the rest of my letter in private now, if you don’t mind” Lizzie insisted.

“Yes, go now – please do!” Constance replied, now irritated.

As Lizzie got up and left, she turned to address Constance “And mother, just so that we both understand this much ... Both I and Nicholas are fully aware that almost all sadness and pain we’ve suffered – and any rancor, is directly related to your plans for my life – and not to mine, or his!” she said.

Constance did not reply – Edwin looked uncomfortable, Hattie sat silent looking stunned... “Suppers around this dinner table were not boring lately!” She thought to herself!

## Chapter 12 [Click for AUDIO](#)

### **May 31st 1979: Nicholas is surprised by Elizabeth's letter!**

Nicholas sat stunned –needing to reread Lizzie's letter, just to be sure! Lizzie had kept her good news a secret... till now!

*My Dearest darling Nicholas, I have a surprise for you – be sure you're sitting down! This letter should reach you near the end of May, so you'll at least have 2 weeks or so to prepare. Today I bought my APEX 45-day return air-fare, the cheapest I could get to Cape Town from London and Toronto. I'm leaving here on Friday evening 15<sup>th</sup> June on Air Canada, arriving in Cape Town, from Heathrow, on Sunday morning 17<sup>th</sup> June on SA867 - the return part of the same flight that took me away from you, in the same Boeing 747 (I checked) that I left in, on October the 6<sup>th</sup> last year – But this time I hope there are no more mechanical problems or delays! Please be there to meet me ... I just can't wait! That's before our agreed to '40 days' countdown was meant to begin! I've already been to Canada manpower & immigration and got their permission to be gone for 9 months without my immigration status lapsing, The man there was a pleasant old German-Canadian man, who was clearly happy that he was dealing with a matter pertaining to love –instead of his normal rather boring routine. So he gladly endorsed my passport with a visa-extension. Now the only thing that can still go wrong, is that my mother finds out and throws me out onto the streets again, so I'll wait until the 14<sup>th</sup> of June or so to make my announcement – just in case! I'll also not hand over my final payment of my salary to her until just before I leave, so that if something goes wrong, she'll not be able to strong-arm me like she did to us last Christmas eve. All of this is going to lead to a rather nail-biting time, and I ask for your prayers to keep me safe now, but I think I have the element of surprise on my side. I'd say there's no need to write back now, your letter may not even arrive in time for me to get it. I've handed*

*in my notice, and finish work on the 14<sup>th</sup> June. I'm suggesting that we get married on any Saturday that follows my arrival – the 23<sup>rd</sup> or the 30<sup>th</sup> of June – so get to work... time's running out. I wanted to keep this as a surprise. It's been really tough for me to act sad at home around my old family, as I'm really bursting with excitement! How they'll all react to my news, is still not known, but this time we have the advantage –unlike on the 24<sup>th</sup> December last year, when she was so cruel. If I've learned anything from my mother's successful tactics, it's to keep the element of surprise and plan for contingencies. I'd really love you to be here when I make that announcement – at supper on the 14<sup>th</sup>, but I'll fill you in on all the details when I get there very soon after. I doubt very much that I'll get any support from them – so I come back to Cape Town with only my favorite yellow dance dress –but it was one you really liked me to wear, so why not get married in it? You know the old song "Tie a yellow ribbon round the old oak tree", which was your and my favorite song in your last year of High-school, back in '73, well, I've modified it's Lyrics a bit, for us:*

*I'm coming home  
I've done my time  
Now I've got to know what is and isn't mine  
If you received my letter telling you  
I'll soon be free  
Then you'll know just what to do  
If you still want me?  
Tie a yellow ribbon 'round the ole oak tree  
It's been years and years  
Do you still want me (still want me)  
And my love, you hold the key  
A simple yellow ribbon's what I need to set me free!  
I'm writing to tell you – please, oh please  
Tie a yellow ribbon round the ole oak tree ...*

*Nicholas, make sure you wear a yellow tie to our wedding. I've lost quite a bit of weight, specially for our wedding – my mother just thinks I'm pining away from a broken heart, when I push most of my food away each day, but I'm only doing what most brides tend to do so that we can fit into our dresses. Let's keep the wedding small – just friends, as you*

*suggested. Then later we can have a celebration with your family in Sterkspruit and surroundings – though not before we've first spent a few days, on our honeymoon, in the Wilderness, en-route to your family. We have important unfinished business there and we may never get another chance! That's where our love began and that's where it should be consummated – and that's where we still need to make our joint 7<sup>th</sup> and final wish! I'm tremendously excited – you may have noticed. Adrenalin has been pumping through my veins for days now, and I'm not able to get a full night's sleep as a result. Soon I'll be on the plane and headed back to you – this is our dream come true. I love you Nicholas! Soon I'll tell you that in person...in your arms. Your Lizzie!*  
*PS. I want to stirup passionate feelings in you...so here's a photo of me at 18.*





## Chapter 13 [Click for AUDIO](#)

### **June 14th 1979: Elizabeth makes a surprise announcement.**

Elizabeth waited until they'd all finished supper to make her announcement. Constance had just brought a store-bought frosted fruit-cake to the table, and was cutting each of them a slice for dessert, when Lizzie addressed Edwin...

"Dad, I need a big favor from you tomorrow ..." She asked, smiling –adding "Please say yes!" as she now winked at him.

"Yes Lizzie, maybe - what is it?" He inquired, rather curious.

"I'll need a ride to the Toronto airport ..." she continued, but she could not finish -Constance had dropped the plate with Hattie's slice of fruit-cake still on it, with a loud clatter – collapsing back onto her chair, suddenly looking very pale!

"Elizabeth, could you please explain what this is all about?" Edwin asked... noticing his wife's apocalyptic over-reaction.

"Sure Dad ... I'm leaving to fly back to Cape Town to marry Nicholas..." she said, but Constance – sufficiently recovered to speak now interrupted her in obvious shock and disbelief!

"But how? I mean where on earth did you get the money from for the airfares? By stranding him in London –I'd made sure Nicholas had none left and that you've not kept enough of what you've earned to afford the airfare!" Constance said emphatically - as if that would somehow change this reality.

"Thank you for confirming that you'd planned to strand Nicholas in London mother – we'd always suspected that, but your very hostile act backfired! Nicholas was the guest of Charles in London, though he wasn't there, so he got to

leave most of his money for me. I've simply added to that – enough to buy a ticket, and I've not yet given you my final paycheck –I've kept that in case you found out and repeated your heavy handed tactics and I needed to stay in a hotel.” Elizabeth said –“I'll give it to dad after he drops me off at the airport tomorrow night for my flight to London.” She said.

Now Constance angrily attacked Lizzie “How could you lie to us? How dare you ... you insolent child!” Edwin had gone to her side, now touching her arm, asking her to calm down.

“But when did I lie to you mother? I didn't, ever! I only let you eagerly draw all your own conclusions, and since they were born from hate and malice towards our love, they were wrong conclusions –I simply let you keep them!” She replied.

“But you said here – and you made a firm deal with us, that it would be 3 years still...” Constance stammered “Did she not Edwin?” she asked him, as he now sat there beside her.

“Actually no dear, that may have been what you wanted to hear, but I recall the exact deal was that if they ever made it back together again before 3 years was up, we'd give them our blessing –but then after that all deals were off – for them and for us, so as to say” He replied “You encouraged Lizzie to call it off whenever it suited her. Lizzie refused!” He said.

“That's not what I meant, I meant they have to wait 3 years!”

“And you hoped that by then I'd break off our engagement, breaking Nicholas' heart, as I distinctly recall, mother - and as dad has just confirmed,” Elizabeth reminded her again.

“Well this is all so sudden and so cruel Elizabeth, how could you do this to me?” Constance complained –now feeling light headed...disoriented, adding “you're being very mean to us!”

“It's not sudden for Nicholas and I, and mother, it's certainly not being cruel to Nicholas and me -unlike what you did last Christmas eve, to us! You know mother, we'll never forget

that as long as we live!" Lizzie said "We've all got a God-given free will and I'll not surrender that to you mother! It's my life -not yours! I'll choose whom to love, whom to marry and whom to spend the rest of my life with! That's exactly what you and dad did!" she said, now righteously indignant!

"That is quite true dear –we eloped to marry when your dad refused to give me permission to marry you -or to give you his blessing!" Edwin said, adding "There's no denying that!"

"Oh shut up Edwin! You're really not helping the cause! Your daughter's headed back to Africa and now our whole family is going to split apart because of some silly childish love she has for a stupid little Afrikaner boy back in Africa!" she cried "and now there's nothing we can do to stop her!"

"Mother, before you despair on those points, I want to point out that Nicholas has applied –as he promised he would, to come to Canada. Canada's given him provisional approval, pending him getting his Computer degree in 6 months time. So we're planning to be back in Canada on Christmas eve this year to start our married life and his working life, here – do you have any problems with that?" Lizzie inquired.

"Well, no ... that at least is a nice surprise, I suppose – though with him?" Constance said derisively, adding "I'd have preferred Charles!" she said, recovering "Far rather!!"

"Well mother, as you once did, I got to choose in the end, as is fair and proper!" Lizzie said "and I've timed it so that you can all attend our wedding. I know Dad's company shuts down in July for the Summer holidays, and I recall you both have lots of money locked up in South Africa still, that you'll be able to access once you're back, so finances should not even be a problem for this –so how about it?" Elizabeth said –inviting them to her wedding -everything carefully planned!

A cruel look came over Constance's face. She looked sternly at Elizabeth, replying "No Elizabeth, none of us will attend your wedding – your dad will not be there to give you away

to that boy - and you'll have no dress from us or any money to help with your wedding! This is a decision you've made on your own - so that's how you'll now return to South Africa - alone!" Then turning to Edwin she said to him "Edwin, you know how you've been bemoaning your fate here in Canada - that you had to leave your power-boat behind in South Africa - and our caravan? You have permission now to buy the best powerboat we can afford and rent an RV for us, for July! You and Hattie and I are heading to the 1,000 islands for a holiday of a life-time!" she announced triumphantly, sneering at Elizabeth ... "And you'll not be there with us!"

Hattie piped up first "Wow Cool...thanks mother!" she said, as Edwin said "That's a lovely idea dear! Thank you! At least I'll have some of the toys I left behind in Africa, back again!" Edwin said, like a child at Christmas opening up presents.

Elizabeth now choked back her tears as she got up to leave. Constance had done what she still could to hurt her. Now, more than ever, it was clear that her decision to return to Nicholas was the right choice to make! Nicholas would love and protect her from all this 'so called love'. As she left the table, tears flowing freely down her cheeks, she did not want to turn back - for them to see her tears. She heard them excitedly chattering away about their 'Holiday of a lifetime'. "No matter" she thought - "very soon I'll be gone out of this home, if it can even be called that, and I'll start my own home and family - I'll never treat any of my family like that! That's not love at all - that's control. I pity dad and Hattie!"



Edwin posing proudly with his new toys that Constance had given him permission to buy as a reward for not supporting Lizzie's marriage in any meaningful way. Somehow it escaped his notice that he was a dad too -and that he should just insist they support Elizabeth on her wedding day -but for him, toys were obviously a much higher priority - as was his slavish loyalty to his wife even if it meant hurting his children or later, grandchildren. But he did later show some remorse for this.

## Chapter 14 [Click for AUDIO](#)

### **June 14<sup>th</sup> 1979: Elizabeth's flight to freedom begins ...**

Constance had refused to come downstairs to say goodbye to Elizabeth, Hattie was confined to her room by Constance - only Edwin was willing to still acknowledge her. Taking her suitcases, he walked with her into the garage, put them in the trunk, then got into the car. Meanwhile Lizzie had got in too. Now the door opened, he backed out, stopped, closed the garage door, then backed out onto the street for their Journey to Toronto's International airport, to Terminal 2 and air Canada. Edwin really did not want to talk – he felt really raw inside. He was driving his favorite daughter to the airport to fly off to marry her long-time love, and that should be a very happy occasion for any dad – but it wasn't, thanks to Constance! Sensing this, Lizzie now broke the silence.

"Dad – is it so wrong ... what I'm doing?" she asked Edwin.

"No Lizzie – only in your mother's eyes, and as you know she decides for all of us what's right or wrong!" Edwin apologized

"But dad, are you not supposed to be the head of the family – you're the bread-winner, you're an important man!" Lizzie said "Isn't that reason enough for her to respect you and listen to you?" adding "it should be that way – shouldn't it?"

"Not in our family Lizzie, things don't work that way for us." adding "Somewhere along the line your mother took over."

"Well I'm going to change that in my family! I've seen how very destructive that arrangement is in our old family – and I'll not repeat her mistakes!" Lizzie said, adding "How do you feel about not being able to give me away at my wedding? I'd always dreamed of the day you'd do so, and the nice speech afterward at the reception, the father-daughter dance, not to mention a lovely white dress ..." Lizzie inquired, wistfully.

"Well Lizzie, really, what choice do I have?" Edwin replied.

“You do have a choice dad – you’ve just hardly ever chosen to exercise that choice!” Elizabeth said – though occasionally I see you stand up for what’s right -not nearly often enough! Edwin didn’t answer -when he did, he changed the subject.

“You know Lizzie, we had a strike at the tannery recently, and when I went home and told your mother – she said that I should come down very hard on them, lock them out and refuse to bargain!” he told her, adding “So I did that” he said

“Wow Dad, they’re grown men –many of them in their 50’s or 60’s, others younger with families to support –didn’t you at least talk to them and see what their grievances were?” Lizzie asked him, incredulous that he’d listened to his wife.

“Sadly no Lizzie, I took your mother’s advice instead of listening to my conscience, and the strike quickly grew out of control! So the owner of the company, George Colton, had to personally come there and step in to calm the situation down. Afterwards he called me into an office and announced that I’m being demoted - sent to a much smaller, older tannery in Cobourg, on the north west side of Lake Ontario.” Edwin said sheepishly, adding “It’s a nice place though.”

“Wow Dad!” Lizzie exclaimed “Does mother know this yet?”

“No Lizzie –I’m afraid to tell her, I’m such a failure” adding “I don’t know what to do when her plans fail! She’s not there!”

“But dad, she’ll find out soon enough – when are you due to start there?” Lizzie asked – sounding rather confused now.

“Before the end of Summer, Lizzie – so that means when you and Nicholas return – if that’s still your intention, at Christmas this year, we’ll be there already – so you’ve just seen the last of Waterloo and Kitchener” he added, smiling.

“Why then did you accept mom’s offer to spend dwindling savings on luxuries and expensive holidays when you could have spent July in South Africa and used locked-up funds there to pay for everything and even have been able to come to my wedding?” Lizzie asked, astounded at recent events.

“Because your mother had said we would not be going to your wedding and weren’t to help you in any way Lizzie –

and you know she'd make my life miserable if I ever went against her!" Edwin said apologetically "I hope you see that."

"In other words Mother is punishing me and shunning me because she did not get her way with my life – and you're OK with that?" she asked Edwin suddenly feeling a bit irate!

"I'm driving you to the airport, aren't I?" Edwin weakly countered "She did not want me to do that for you." he said.

"Yes dad – thanks for that, but it's the very least you can do for me – and by the way, at Christmas I gave you a photo-frame so that we could get a photo taken of you and I to put in it, whatever happened to it?" she asked him, wondering.

"Your mother took it and put a photo of herself in it, in her bikini on the Wilderness beach, and told me to put it on my desk at work" He replied "Imagine if I hadn't done that!"

"Wow dad –I'm actually very relieved to be leaving her home, since we can hardly think of it as ours! All the rules are hers and all the standards and norms of treating each other are dictated by only her – even our love and life!" Lizzie said, genuinely relieved to finally be leaving home – even under duress. "Have you ever stopped to think that no photo exists of you and I - ever?" Lizzie asked of Edwin, looking askance at him as he drove, adding "Do you think that's normal?"

"Yes, that's a shame Lizzie." He said smiling weakly at her.

"Yes Dad, it is...let's fix that sometime, shall we?" Lizzie said

"OK, when - and if, you come back to Canada, let's change that, shall we?" Edwin suggested "We don't need to tell her!"

Before long Edwin found his way to Terminal-2 and pulled up at the curb. He got out and opened the trunk, Lizzie exited and stood waiting on the curb there. Edwin brought her bags to her and stood there sheepishly. Meanwhile Lizzy reached into her bag and taking out an envelope, handed it to Edwin "What's this for?" Edwin asked her, holding it up.

"That's my final payment –cash from my final paycheck, with holiday pay –at least what's left after deductions" she said, "I told mother I'd be withholding this in case she tried to evict me and cause me to miss my flight or something, like she managed to do to me last Christmas" Lizzie replied, adding

"It came to \$1,077 but I've just put \$1,000 in the envelope – tell mom, from me, that even though there never was a deal to pay back my tuition at UCT – I mean the reason I never finished was that she pulled the rug out from under my feet as you all left for Canada in 1977, she said I had to pay it all back – so I'm making this final payment –do you agree we're square now dad?" Lizzie said –looking at him for an answer.

Edwin shuffled nervously around, looking down before replying "Yes Lizzie, I'd say that's more than fair – but don't you need some money for the trip back? And what happens when you get there with no money of your own?" He asked.

"I go to Nicholas with nothing, no wedding dress or dowry of any kind, just me –I'm what he's expecting and I'm all he's getting ... but dad, I just know that he will love me anyway!" she replied smiling, adding "you may need this money now."

Edwin was really uncomfortable – but knew that if he didn't return with the money, he'd be raked over the coals for helping Elizabeth with her wedding plans, and he'd suffer the consequences of that for months! "Thank you Lizzie" he said "Tell you what ... I'll show this to mother, tell her I've forgiven your study-debts, that this is going into my bank account to pay for my power-boat, but I'll not deposit this or give it to mother, instead I'll hide it away and keep it for you when you return with Nicholas to Canada. You'll need it more then anyway - believe me, I know!" he said with a sigh. "That way it kind of feels like you've got a wedding present." He said weakly -tucking the envelope into his jacket pocket.

"Sure Dad" Lizzie said, smiling kindly at him. "That sounds nicer than nothing and it will be our little secret" She replied

"Lizzie, mom said to me, last night, that the two of you likely will go stay in Siesta on your honeymoon - where you two first met," Edwin said, inquiring – adding "Lizzie, I'd really suggest you give Siesta a skip, it's empty this time of year anyway, and it will be no fun – but something else in the way she told me, was very upsetting ... please go elsewhere!"

"OK dad, you seem to know something I don't –but you have a point, there's not much fun to be had in a lonely place. I'll prevail on Nicholas to reconsider any plans he has for that."



“Good! Let’s just keep this between us, and Lizzie, one more thing ... contact your God-father, Uncle Eugene Montjoy, in Knysna. Tell him you’d like to visit with him, he’ll not say no and I think, once you meet him -you’ll begin to understand.”

“Dad, you’re suddenly so secretive, but I’ll do as you say. I used to get birthday cards from him with R20 and at age 13 he sent me my favorite novel, “*Pride & Prejudice*”. After you moved to Canada that stopped – guess he didn’t know where to send them to?” adding “I’d really like to finally meet him!”

“Yes Lizzie, I know you’ll enjoy meeting him. He’s is a very wealthy man from an important family in South Africa! I’d venture a guess he’ll spoil you, please send him my regards”

“I’ll do so dad. I’d like to thank him in person for a lifetime of kindness. Yes, it will be a nice thing to do. I’ll go see him!”

With that, Edwin motioned a porter over to them, gave him \$5 and said to him “Could you please see to it that my daughter gets to the right check-in counter for air Canada’s flight to London leaving in about 4 hours?” he said.

“Sure thing mister” the jolly man with a Sikh turban replied.

“Well Lizzie the time has finally come to say goodbye” Edwin said, his voice failing, shuffling -not knowing how to do that - since they’d never hugged before. That just wasn’t allowed!

Lizzie sensing that much, took both his hands in hers “Until Christmas dad! We’ll be back!” she said as tears now formed in her eyes, adding “And yes ... we’ll honor our agreement!”

Edwin smiled weakly, giving her hands a slight squeeze and in his failing voice said “Lizzie, I actually envy you... this is your flight to freedom -no such luck for me and Hattie. Take good care of yourself Lizzie ...” he stammered, awkwardly.

“Thanks dad, I’ll do that” she replied – then as he turned to walk back to the car, she called out softly “I love you daddy ...God bless and protect you!” He stopped briefly, but didn’t turn back to look at her –then got into his car, and drove off.

Lizzie stood there for a moment, watching till his car was gone from view... tears still fresh in her eyes, not as much for this good-bye –but for what may have been... if only he’d assumed leadership of their family ... then she turned to go.

# Chapter 15

**June 16<sup>th</sup> 1979: Lizzie's day in London – the end of an era.**

Elizabeth had contacted Charles too, telling him that she'd need to spend part of the day in London waiting for her next flight –an overnight return flight Saturday, on the very same SAA Boeing 747 that she'd left Cape town in, with Charles – some 9 months ago. Her luggage already booked through to Cape town, she cleared customs & immigration, walking out to meet a dapper English gentleman waiting there for her.

“Charles!” she called out, smiling at him, as both hastened to greet each other. Charles, already aware of the reason for her return back to Cape Town, extended his hand to greet her... but Lizzie put down her hand-luggage and moved on past his outstretched arm and put her arms around his neck, looking into his eyes, and with a smile said “Oh no Charles, you deserved far more than just my handshake!”

With the ice broken, Charles responded with a smile and then gave Elizabeth a warm hug, saying “Welcome back to London Princess!” adding “Your carriage awaits... but first we'll stop by our guest apartment in Putney, so that you can freshen-up -after these overnight flights, that's always nice!”

“Thank you Charles!” Lizzy replied smiling “That's really very thoughtful of you! I'd hate to arrive in Cape town a mess!”

“I rather think Nicholas wouldn't even notice” Charles said reassuring her “He's just going to be happy you're there!”

Lizzie laughed a little nervously before replying “Well I'd best just make sure – probably more for my own sake than his!” Soon they were being whisked through the highways and byways of London by Alfred who from time to time, as traffic allowed, glanced back in his rear-view mirror, at Elizabeth

and Charles, knowing something of their history. Soon they arrived at the guest apartment and Alfred got out to open the door for Elizabeth, who thanked him for his courtesy “Thank you Alfred! You make it all seem so easy, really!”

“Just doing my job miss Elizabeth, but in this case I’ll add that I’m happy to see you again... master Charles always talks warmly about you, and I can see why!” he said smiling.

Elizabeth smiled warmly back at Alfred, blushing slightly. Charles spoke “Thanks Alfred. Please wait here for us, we shan’t be long –then we’ll want to go on a bit of a ride again”

“At you service sir ... as always.” Alfred replied, respectfully.

In the apartment, Lizzie stopped briefly to look around her... this is where Nicholas spent two weeks in London, a key reason why she was now en-route back to Cape town to get married to him! Suddenly she felt very grateful to Charles... prompting her to say “You know Charles, I’ve always read and heard stories of the chivalry of English gentlemen, and after a bit of a rocky start, I’ve seen exactly that in you! I’m ...actually make that we’re very grateful to you for your help! Without which I’d not be on my way back to Cape town to get married!” adding, as she saw Charles wince “You make me very proud of my British heritage, Charles - and of you!”

Charles quickly recovered, now replying “It’s been a distinct honor helping Nicholas to rescue you Princess, though I’d hasten to add that you’ve played a key role in your own rescue –so don’t just think of it as us two knights in shining armor riding to your rescue! You get much of that credit!”

Elizabeth smiled, replying “That’s a nice way of looking at it Charles, but if any one of us 3 didn’t cooperate, I’d not be here right now... so thank you from the bottom of my heart!”

Charles thought it best to change the subject “Princess, let me show you to the master bedroom where you’ll find everything you’ll need to freshen up.” He said smiling at her.

Elizabeth was so pleased to be taking a shower, washing her hair and redoing her makeup – with nice soft thick towels and a hair-dryer –even a curling iron to assist her. While she got ready, Charles made some coffee and sat drinking it, thinking, with a sigh, how it could have been him waiting for his bride to return to London to marry him – if only he'd played the cards he was dealt a bit more wisely than he did.

Soon Elizabeth and Charles were sitting in a cozy pub, ready for a late lunch of meat-pies, chips and gravy and of course, a pint or two of British bitters! Somehow Lizzie's genes predisposed her to enjoying London's cuisine – found by Europeans to be a bit bland but genuinely enjoyed by her

As time passed, with quite a bit of beer emboldening her, Elizabeth confessed to Charles ... "You know Charles, when we last said goodbye at Heathrow some 9 months ago, I was really more than a little bit cut-up –emotionally speaking ..."

Charles interrupted, pausing with his pint halfway up to his mouth already, "Princess, to be quite honest, so was I! I'd be misleading you saying that I've fully recovered, but I'm not going to make your life anymore difficult than it's been – you don't need that right now!" he said lifting his pint to his lips.

"Thank you Charles, but I have quite a bit more to tell you," Lizzie continued "Nicholas has a recurring dream in which there are two of me, standing at the edge of a pool below a waterfall –identical in every way except one ... the me on the left loves him -but still wants to be with her mother. The me on the right loves him enough to want her freedom –and she wants to run away with him! He has to choose only one of us to marry, knowing full well that he's going to break the other's heart!" Elizabeth started to explain, but now Charles, fascinated at the thought, interrupted her, commenting ...

"Princess... that's a powerful dream, chock-full of real-life romantic imagery –probably born out of pain, I'd add!" he said, asking "So I'm really curious ... what happens next?" How does Nicholas deal with such a terrible dilemma?"

“Well, Nicholas starts to choose the me on the right -the one that wants to break free of her mother’s captivity and run away with him” she says, stopping to take a sip of her beer.

“And then Princess, what happens to the one on the left?” Charles asks her, genuinely intrigued by the possibilities.

“She starts to cry...” Lizzy replies “And as her heart breaks, Nicholas starts to feel desperately sorry for her and begins to change his mind – but as he does so, he notices the one on the right slump down at the waters edge, dejected and sobbing –heart-broken... even as the one on the left starts to smile” Elizabeth said, before Charles again interrupted her...

“Wow Princess, that’s a terrible dream – a nightmare really!” asking “But what happens next? You have me intrigued!”

“Of course the dream is not reality – which ends differently, I think, but in his dream, he just can’t break either of their hearts, so he leans forward, falling to his death on the rocks at the foot of the falls –in front of both of them!” She says.

“Oh my Princess, that really is a nightmare! I’m grateful that I never had anything like that happen to me!” he remarks.

Elizabeth took another sip of her beer before answering...

“But you have Charles! You’ve encountered both of them!” she said, noticing now how the truth’s dawning on Charles.

“You see Charles, the Elizabeth on the left was madly in love with you! You dated her -but along the way you also met the Elizabeth on the right -and it’s her that sits before you now, on her way to ensure that Nicholas never feels he has to fall to his death rather than choose! In effect I’m off to save him, to make sure his choice is an easy, natural one. In doing so I’ll silence my rival –the Elizabeth on the left, hopefully for ever, but realistically probably just for a little while. She still has to come to terms with our mother – to make peace with her. Failing that, she’ll have to accept she’ll be banished forever! I’m determined that one day only one Elizabeth will

remain in Nicholas's life – the one who's willing to elope with him ... and that's what I'm busy doing for him, right now!"

Charles was stunned! It took a while for him to recover enough to speak again, pretending to need to drink a few mouthfuls of his beer to buy him some time before he spoke. "Princess, what happens if that Elizabeth on the left ever reappears on the scene again?" he inquired of her, waiting...

"Well Charles, I'll just have to deal with her if and when that time comes... but that brings me to my confession – and I don't want you to read too much into this, I think we both know by now that I love Nicholas, so this is not an invitation – just an honest admission." she said, continuing "On my way to Canada after our very emotional goodbye 9 months ago at Heathrow, I sat dreaming about that Elizabeth getting to stay in London with you –while the Elizabeth on the right flies on to Canada to demand that her mother releases her to go back to Africa to marry Nicholas - so that we all live happily ever after -you, and yes, even my mother!" Elizabeth said, concluding her confession to a still stunned Charles!

Elizabeth stopped to take a mouthful of her beer now, watching as a range of emotions swept over Charles, who recovered enough to reply, with a forlorn smile "Well, as we British like to say, Princess – If wishes were horses, beggars would ride!" adding "But if that were ever possible, I'd have accepted the outcome, happily!" smiling at Elizabeth, then adding "But Princess, you can't please us all – so don't feel guilty. Someone had to lose. I accept my loss – grievous as it is -your mother has not!" he cautioned her "And she'll not make peace with you, ever - unless she wins!" Charles said.

"Thanks Charles! That's very honorable of you ... and yes, you're probably right regarding my mother – but I do have to at least try to make peace with her, she is my mother, after all." Elizabeth said "But I hope now that you will know I had genuine feelings for you and that I'm not just some fickle woman who simply played with your emotions!" adding "But I am the Elizabeth on the right... and we do have to go now!"

Charles sighed realizing their afternoon together had just flown by far too fast, motioning to the waitress for the bill.

Alfred soon got them back to the right spot next to the curb at Heathrow closest to South African Airlines check-in desks and got out to open the door for them. Elizabeth took a slightly uncomfortable Alfred's hand, then looked at him, saying "Thanks once again Alfred! And thank you also for taking good care of Nicholas when he was here last January! We really did and do appreciate your help!" she said smiling.

"You're welcome miss Elizabeth!" he said, adding "Please tell master Nicholas that I wish him –and you, a very happy wedding... and life!" Alfred replied, touched by her gratitude.

Soon Elizabeth had checked in and had her boarding pass, so she and Charles walked towards the security entrance.

"Well this is goodbye Princess..." Charles announced, trying his best to smile, adding "and I've got a bit of news I've been withholding." He said, seeing Elizabeth suddenly curious...

"I've accepted a position as the trainee manager of the 5-star Mount Nelson hotel in Cape-town, and I'll be starting there January 2<sup>nd</sup> – in 6 months time, but by then, sadly you and Nicholas will be off to Canada together -so it will be me, this time, living alone... far, far away from you – in Cape town!"

"Congratulations Charles!" Elizabeth said, adding "My word, that's a real honor! I know it's always been your dream!"

"Yes, well, it rather had a lot more to do with my dad's connections than with my natural talent for such things – though I'll be wrapping up my Hotel management training here in London by late November." he announced, adding "but that's the way our society works –connections!" he said.

"Still Charles, that's a dream come true for you!" Lizzie said.

"Yes it is Princess... so now, I've one more important thing I do need to say as we bid each other farewell" he said –and

before Elizabeth could ask, he continued “I know you and Nicholas invited me to your wedding, but I honestly really cannot attend! I’d just not be able to make it through your wedding ceremony without jumping up and making an idiot of myself, so in a slightly cowardly way, I’d like to preserve my pride – I hope you’ll understand? Please don’t feel hurt.”

“So this is our final goodbye then Charles?” Elizabeth said, already knowing the answer – the one that was best for all.

“Sadly, yes Princess... I hope that I’ve fully redeemed myself to you – and Nicholas?” he added “but I need to somehow move on now, to get past my feelings and to give you two the best possible chance to make a happy life together – without any ghosts from the past haunting you... or me!” he said “Let’s rather haunt your mother... she deserves that much!”

Elizabeth laughed –the tension was broken! They’d wrapped things up rather nicely –well, as nicely as could be expected, given history and circumstances. Elizabeth put down her hand-luggage to give Charles a final hug before entering the secure area “Thank you Charles! You’ve redeemed yourself!”

But Charles intervened, holding her at arms length, looking deep into her eyes, a wistful look now in his eyes, as he said “Princess, that Elizabeth on the left, and I ... well, we have a very sad unrequited love story, so if you should ever see her again, please tell her from me that I loved her ... that even with all her problems, I really miss her, and I’ll dream about her for the rest of my life – which is why this has to be our final goodbye.” But for now I’m speaking to the Elizabeth on the right... so Princess, I wish you both a very happy life... and one more thing... be very wary of your mother! I doubt she’ll ever change!” adding, ominously “Just beware of her!”

Elizabeth couldn’t talk, she didn’t have to –the tears in her eyes said it all. She gave his hands a final squeeze, smiled weakly at him –then turned to go, stopping briefly to wave to him one last time, seeing him wave too, before disappearing from his view. Charles just stood there ... then turned to go.



# Chapter 16

## **June 17<sup>th</sup> 1979: Elizabeth's flight lands in Cape Town ...**

Elizabeth knew the Cabin-crew of the SA867, Boeing 747SP, would soon be waking everyone for breakfast. She'd spent another night on a long international flight, now it was time to freshen-up for her first meeting with Nicholas in almost 6 months - "that's a challenge in these little loos" she thought "But I was very wise to at least wash my hair and change my clothes in the comfort of Charles's guest apartment!" she consoled herself "I'm a bride off to meet my groom after a very long absence and us ladies must do what we can -first impressions are important!" she thought, smiling! So now with all the people still asleep around her she at least had 20 minutes or so to adjust her hair and repair her makeup. She emerged feeling a lot better and looking radiant "I'm going to be married soon!" she thought "Finally! And there's nothing more mother can do to stop me now!" She smiled, getting back into her window seat - the seats next to her empty on this half-filled flight, the time of year having a lot to do with that. Wide awake now, she sat thinking ... "What will it be like to see Nicholas, again, for the first time in a long while?" She fantasized about her many options - and wondered what he had planned for her arrival? Usually something small and symbolic -meaningful to them!" she concluded. Soon the cabin-crew switched on the lights, announcing that they were just 2 hours away from landing in Cape Town Sunday morning, then served a full breakfast. Seeing the line-ups for the loos, Lizzie was glad she'd got there first - and early, when she would not be rushed. Enjoying the British-style breakfast of Bacon, Eggs and Sausages, she thought about where they'd go later in the day - maybe a Sunday night meal at the Spur in Newlands, she thought, their favorite restaurant during her varsity years - "a really nice change from McDonalds!" she thought.

Having no car, Sandy had driven Nicholas to the airport – probably a bit too early, and so the 2 old childhood friends from Sterkspruit stood talking about all sorts of things in the smaller International terminal, but clearly she was just trying to calm Nicholas down. It worked! Soon they found themselves waiting at the Customs area in arrivals – where Lizzie would exit into the main terminal, from. Now Nicholas had some serious butterflies flitting around in his stomach! The flight had arrived! Now it was only a matter of time...

The people started exiting with their luggage, and Nicholas and Sandy scanned their faces for Lizzie's ... the suddenly they both shouted "There she is!" and both waved frantically at her "Lizzie ... over here!" they shouted "We're over here!"

Lizzie stopped and scanned the people to find the familiar voices calling out her name – then a big smile broke out on her face as she exclaimed "Nicholas!" and she dropped her luggage as they ran towards each other! Nicholas closed the gap faster and, reaching Lizzie, scooped her up in his arms, holding her up by her waist - like a petite little Ballerina, him looking up at her, she down at him, tears of joy filling her smiling face, his eyes very moist too, but both laughing happily! He slowly brought her down to settle snugly in his arms, and they hugged in the most joyful dance imaginable!

"Oh Lizzie, I've missed you so! Welcome back to Cape Town!" he said, adding, after another hug "Thank you ... so much!"

Lizzie was having trouble composing herself, the stress of the last several months –with all its cruelty, now finally, safely being released –so she just collapsed against Nicholas' chest and hugged him, crying – and then sobbing, until she finally looked up and with a shy smile, she said "That wasn't quite the scene I've been imagining – I mean, look at me, I'm a mess –all my make-up's running down my cheeks now!" adding "but I'm back in your loving arms again, Nicholas!"

Nicholas consoled her "Really Lizzie, that's all that matters to me now!" he said, smiling through tears too - tears of joy! Then she noticed ... Sandra had been holding something for him, and walked over to give it to him – a lone, pure white Aurum Lily – the flower of love from their youth, like the

ones he'd always picked for her on their cherished canoe trips up-river into the treed-mountains, heading to their secret pool. Lizzie smiled "Nicholas, you remembered!" she exclaimed "I was kind of expecting some yellow ribbons or something, but this? No, this I'd not imagined! Thank you!" she said, giving him another hug "I'm so happy to be back!"

Then she also noticed that Sandy had watched their meeting unfold holding her Instamatic camera - looking apologetic." I have to apologize to both of you ..." she said, getting there attention "I thought I had some film left -but turns out I don't -so we'll just have to remember this scene!" she said.

"Oh Sandy ..." Lizzie replied "It's OK, really, right now I'd prefer that there are no photos taken of me ... I mean look at me, I'm most likely at my most un-photogenic right now!" Lizzie said, adding "Nicholas, would you please get my bags and then please could you wait for me over there" she said pointing to a bench against the wall "I'd like to go to go freshen up!" she said smiling self consciously at Nicholas.

"Sure Lizzie ..." Nicholas said "But really, you could have come back to me with ruffled hair, no makeup and dressed in an old potato sack and I'd have thought myself the luckiest man alive!" he reassured her "I'm just happy you're finally here!" looking back as he walked to get her luggage.

Lizzie laughed "Thank you Nicholas - but I do need to go and make myself at least a bit more presentable right now!" she said softly, smiling at him "After all I'm to be your bride -soon, I think?" she said smiling coyly at him, inquiringly.

Nicholas understood what she needed to hear now, so he stopped "Yes Lizzie, sooner than you think! Saturday the 30<sup>th</sup> is our wedding day! Don't leave me at the altar - alone!" Lizzie looked at him, a bit more serious now, replying "I'll be there Nicholas! Lady Jennifer's chains are all off now and so she's finally freed-up to marry her knight -sir Ian!" she said.

Having freshened-up, with Sandy's help, they emerged from the washroom chatting away, walking back to Nicholas, then all proceeded to the parking-lot, to Sandy's car. Soon they were driving on the highway, passing "Salt & Pepper", 2 power-station cooling towers - a landmark way back then.

Lizzie decided to tell Nicholas now “I saw Charles in London for a few hours. He cannot attend our wedding, but wishes us both all the happiness that our love can bring!” she said.

“That’s nice of him Lizzie!” Nicholas replied “I’m not sure I’d have been as gracious -or kind, if you were marrying him!” adding “It’s probably self-preservation on his part though.”

Sandy walked with them to Nicholas’ apartment – because she knew... As they got out of the elevator and turned the corner –Lizzie saw Denise there, obscuring something on the door of Nicholas’ apartment and distracting her purposely... while smiling at her... knowingly!

“Hi Lizzie! Welcome back! She said, giving Lizzie a hug, then stepped aside to reveal a solitary yellow ribbon on the door.

“Oh Nicholas –all of you!” Lizzie exclaimed “That’s beautiful!”

Denise took a key and opened the door – ever so slightly, handing Nicholas the key to his apartment, causing Lizzie to momentarily raise an eye-brow ... “Denise, with the key to Nicholas’s apartment?” He smiled, putting it in his pocket, Denise continued ... “Nicholas, why don’t you carry Lizzie over the threshold?” she suggested, now winking knowingly!

Nicholas bent over, put his left arm under Lizzie’s legs, his right arm under her shoulders and as she cooperated by putting her arms around his neck, then he picked her up and pushed open the door ... Yellow ribbons everywhere!

Denise and Sandy stood back – looking through the door at the unfolding scene as Nicholas carried her in, saying “Lizzie do the ribbons answer the question that your letter asked?” adding “I hope you have no doubts left in your mind now!”

Lizzie smiled, beaming her answer at him “Yes my love, I’ve done my time, I’m home... and I know you still want me!”

Nicholas took her to the bedroom, placing her gently down on the bed, then stooped down to kiss her forehead saying... “Welcome back... Mrs. Elizabeth Merriwether Strauss!”

“Soon Nicholas, very soon!” she winked at him, knowingly!

By now Denise and Sandy had entered, still smiling at the collection of Ribbons that Denise had installed while Sandy and he were at the Airport, then putting Lizzie’s luggage

down, they spoke “Well you two need some alone-time right now – but how about we all go to the Spur at around 7pm tonight for a reunion dinner?” they suggested ... our treat!

Both Lizzie and Nicholas concurred “Yes, that’s a splendid idea!” Lizzie said and Nicholas added “And luckily for us, Sandy’s got a car!” he said – “she’s the only one with a car!”

Then Sandy and Denise took their leave, smiling as they went back to their apartment, and closed the front door behind them. Finally Nicholas and Lizzie were back in the apartment, lying next to each other on the same bed that had been such lonely place without Lizzie -for 9 months!”

Nicholas and Lizzie just held each other – close! Was it a dream? Lizzie pinched him playfully “Ouch –what’s that for?” He asked “Just checking” she said smiling “We’re not dreaming!” she concluded, smiling again as they hugged.

Now Nicholas raised himself on one arm, looking into Lizzie’s eyes, playing with her hair with his free hand “Yes Lizzie, we’re fully awake, the nightmares are over –we can smile and laugh and love again!” he said “It’s not a dream!”

Then he moved his lips forward to meet hers, his hand now in her hair, holding her head up a little, as they kissed ... long and passionately! Lizzie came up for air first, her face flushed “Nicholas... I’d forgotten what your kisses felt like!”

Later, lying back in each others arms, a bit ruffled – but happy, content, they talked, easily, comfortably, as always – about the things they could not include in their letters for lack of space, and also of how the events unfolded in faraway Canada – Nicholas listening intently, smiling every now and then, laughing at funny parts and stroking her hair to console her during the sad parts... commenting every now and then, finally saying “Lizzie, normally the Knight in shining armor rides up on his trusty steed to the cave high up in the mountains, slays the dragon there, then rescues the fair maiden by breaking the lock and chains holding her captive and rides off into the sunset with her on his big white stallion, and then they both live happily ever after ...”

But Lizzie interrupted “Nicholas, in this modern version the Knight underestimated the old dragon – its fire was too

fierce! All he managed to do, before retreating, was to throw a key to the maiden, chained up in the dragon's lair, before retreating to a safe distance - his armor severely scorched, and to leave a horse nearby, for her, behind a big rock. Then while the dragon slept, the young maiden stealthily made good her escape, helped by the dragon's servant, making her way down to the horse, mounted up and galloped off to find her beloved knight. Soon they were reunited and two weeks later they were finally married, and lived happily ever after!" Lizzie said, smiling, adding "But the dragon's still very much alive and it's super-angry, vengeful, now that the maiden is gone from its lair with only a lock & chains still lying there... I'd hazard a guess her fire's now more dangerous than ever!"

Nicholas looked worried "Oh my, Lizzie - in our exuberance I guess we've been fooling ourselves thinking it's all over!" He remarked "I sure hope you're wrong ... but probably not!"

"Yes Nicholas, we have -and what the knight has agreed to do is, to marry that once captive maiden -and then take her back to that same angry dragon!" Lizzie said "Are you up to that challenge ... really?" She asked, looking deep into his eyes for answers. Seeing grave concerns manifesting there, she added "We can always change our minds... if you want."

Nicholas sighed "Elizabeth ... Since the process is already in motion, let's cross those bridges when we get there," adding "There are worrying warning signs that now may be the best time in our young lives to leave Africa - just like once upon a time our ancestors thought Europe wasn't the place to be, so they came here." Then he changed the subject "Lizzie... it occurred to me, as we were talking, we've left a dangerous loose-end in Canada - and by that I do mean with her."

Lizzie raised herself up to look at him, suddenly worried too. "What's suddenly worrying you now Nicholas?" she asked.

"My letters to you," he replied "You know she'll scour all the things you left there for clues to find any weakness. She'll then exploit it! My letters to you may just give her that!"

Lizzie smiled, replying "It was tempting to leave them in my dresser-drawer. After all her meanness to you and me, I had a naughty thought that then she'd know she's lost!" adding

“But in the end I got rid of them and just left the one’s she’d already read and... oh no - also the photos you’d sent me! I shouldn’t have done that! She could misuse those as she’s done with that photo of us standing next to dad’s speedboat, you in your air force uniform and me in my Bikini – the one I’ve never been allowed to keep. I’d venture a guess that her real reason is that she’s cut it down the middle in one of her strange rituals hoping to split us up - weird as that sounds!”

Nicholas smiled reassuringly saying “But Lizzie, clearly she’s failed! So for now let’s bask in the victory our love enjoys!” he said to her, playing with her hair to distract her - and him, from what he also feared were very scary possibilities!

“Yes,” said Lizzie smiling “Let’s do that, shall we? Now we have a wedding to attend, very soon, and this time it’s ours Nicholas ... it’s ours!” she said, smiling triumphantly at him!



“Indeed we do Lizzie ... let’s get ready to claim our victory!” Nicholas replied “It’s been a long, arduous road to the altar!



# Chapter 17

## **Toronto... George Colton unveils his plan to avenge Lawrence!**

George Colton was standing in his office with the Liquor cabinet open as he turned to an elderly German-Canadian man sitting in front of his desk “Schnapps ... Same as always Horst?” He asked, pausing before pouring.

“Yes sir, Mr. Colton!” Horst replied – make it a double!

Colton laughed ... “Yes, we sure have a lot to celebrate!” he said, walking over to hand Horst his glass of Schnapps, then returning for his French Cognac.

As George rocked back and forth in his big leather chair behind the desk, cradling his Cognac, he had a satisfied smirk on his face! “Congratulations Horst – you are the new Vice President in our company, in charge of the biggest, most modern tannery in Canada!” He said, raising his glass in a toast to Horst “I told you it wouldn’t be long, but I first needed to do something for an old friend before promoting you!” he said, watching as Horst smiled.

“What happens now to the South African ... the ex vice-president, Mr. Smythe?” Horst inquired of Colton “Does he retire to the old tannery in Cobourg – that’s what I heard?”

“Not quite, Horst...” Colton answered. What you don’t know is that the old Cobourg tannery is more costly to update than to close... your big new tannery in Kitchener has ample capacity to compensate for both!” Colton said laughing!

“So Mr Smythe is being demoted to manager-level, and being sent to a tannery that’s slated for closure - but when?” Horst inquired aghast, beginning to understand the plan.

“Within the next year – the earlier the better!” Colton said.

“Then Mr. Smythe returns to work for me in Kitchener?” Horst asked “I’m his assistant now – that would be strange!”

“No Horst.... Mr. Smythe joins the line-up in soup kitchens!” Colton replied laughing “And then my old friend Lawrence will finally have justice for his family!” Colton laughed.

Horst laughed too -rather nervously, at Colton’s reply “I’m not sure I ever understood why you didn’t just promote me to VP and let me run the tannery – but rather brought Mr. Smythe here from South Africa and gave him that position instead?” He said to Mr. Colton “But that said sir, I do appreciate the promotion!” he reiterated, raising his glass.

“Horst, you know when I asked you to agitate unrest at the tannery some time back – to stir up trouble there? Well, that was really just to formally pull the rug out from under Mr. Smythe’s feet!” Colton said laughing “That plan’s underway!”

“You mean you never brought him here to contribute to your organization in a meaningful way –but just to fire him?” Horst asked trying to understand the true depth of the plan.

“That’s pretty much it, Horst! But I had to make sure that his old position in South Africa was filled – and that he’d burned all his bridges back!” Colton said “And that he has!”

“Sir, if you don’t mind me saying so – that sounds like revenge?” Horst commented, adding quickly “Not that I’m complaining, mind you!” Horst said, starting to understand.

“Now you have the big picture Horst!” Colton said with a smirk. “But I have to do it in such a way that he cannot sue me or make trouble for me with manpower and immigration – seeing as I sponsored his immigration into Canada by giving him the VP position in the Kitchener tannery” he said.

“But why take Revenge?” Horst asked –still puzzled “What did he do to you that made you to want to destroy him?”

“He destroyed the life of a friend of mine in South Africa, in a similar position. Lawrence once saved my life from a Cape Buffalo that was intent on goring me to death, on a hunting trip we went on... that one over there” he said pointing at the head of a huge buffalo mounted on the wall above the bar...“so I’m simply repaying an old debt!” Colton replied, lifting his cognac to his mouth, adding “That’s almost done!”

"I see ..." Horst said, suddenly understanding "You can rely me never crossing you Mr. Colton, sir - clearly that would be very stupid of me!" Horst said – quite seriously, looking again at the Buffalo, remembering Edwin's approaching demise and looking over at George Colton –rather nervously.

"I'm sure we'll get along just Fine Horst ... I'm a tough man, as you know, but also a fair man. Work hard, deliver results and do as I ask, and we'll get along just fine!" Colton said, rocking back and forth in his chair, holding his Cognac.

"You can count on my loyalty and hard work sir!" Horst said, raising his Schnapps now, as a toast to their new understanding ... "I'm your man Mr. Colton!"

"Good!" Colton smiled – sure Horst would never cross him!

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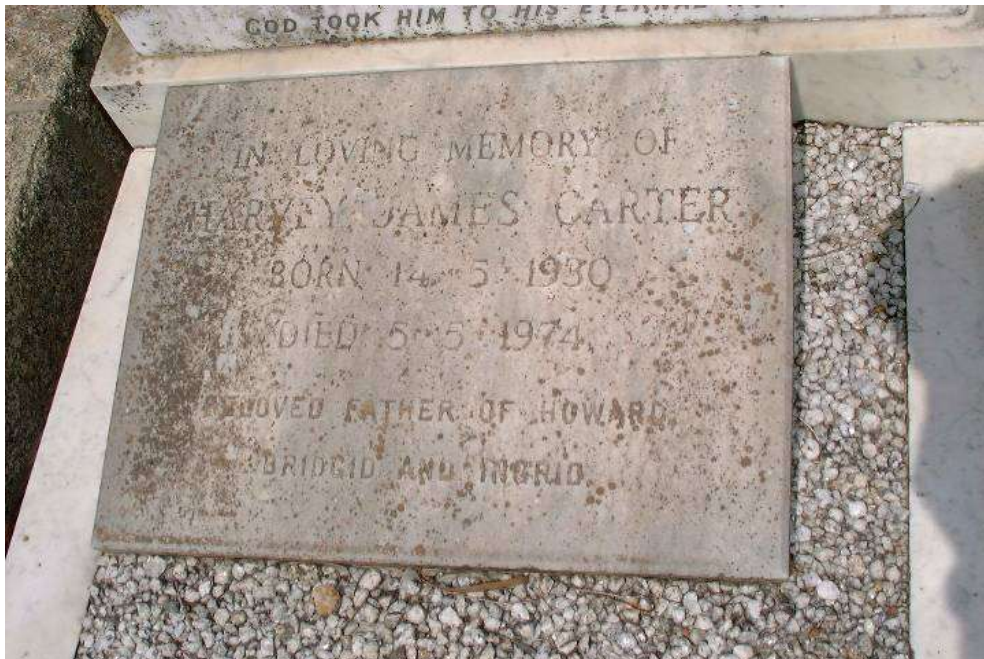
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Edwin was off to work to pack-up his office and say goodbye to staff before their big move. Hattie was still in school, but her grade-12 final school year was wrapping up fast now, so Constance was able to sit for a while with a cup of tea and reflect on all that had happened –and for once Lizzie was not at the top of that list! Edwin had let her down – badly! He was now a junior, once again, in the management team of George Colton's company, and they'd had to rush to find a home in Cobourg – a little town on the NW shore of Lake Ontario, between Toronto and Ottawa. She looked around her at her home... a big home by Canadian standards, but still nowhere near as big or prestigious as their last home in Wellington had been... the one she'd worked so hard to get from Lawrence and his wife – the one they'd exchanged for their smaller home "To do an ungrateful Lawrence a favor!" she reminded herself, as she lifted her teacup to her mouth. Now their fancy holiday to the 1,000 islands was ruined and would have to be cut short by 2 weeks, and to make matters worse, the RV Rental company had insisted they honor their contract to rent an RV for July, refusing to refund anything!

Worse yet, Edwin had been demoted – and that also meant a pay-cut, so when they went looking for a home in Cobourg, she had to settle for a home that was smaller and much less impressive than this home and their last home in Wellington

and was not even as nice as the home that they'd traded up from, with Lawrence. But it still had 3 bedrooms, although they all now had to share one smallish bathroom, and that she'd not had to do since their starter home as newlyweds.

Edwin's mishandling of the strike at the Kitchener tannery had cost them all dearly! They were once again reduced to where they'd been as a young family in Wellington – even Edwin's position in the company was lower than ever before, when he'd been Lawrence's assistant – before she arranged for his promotion with her clever plots and schemes. Edwin still did not know the pertinent details of why his old friend Lawrence arrived at such a low-point in his life that she'd easily been able to steer him to his 'assisted suicide' – "the honorable thing to do to make way for his old best friend!" she quickly thought -to ease her often troubled conscience. Constance didn't suffer from self-recrimination as, in her words "weak people were prone to do!" She made sure that if ever any guilt entered into her mind, it left there in a hurry! Now she reflected nostalgically on her successes, how she'd got 27-1<sup>st</sup> avenue, the best home in Wellington, on a hill overlooking the high-school, in a valley with vineyards, mountains providing an impressive backdrop to the view from her huge master bedroom and balcony. She sighed ...



"that's lost now –all of my hard work has been for naught!"

How she hated George Colton! He'd done this – brought them to Canada and then reduced them in circumstance to less than before! A steely-cold look came over her as she returned to the dark-place that had served her so well with Lawrence (Harvey Carter) and all others who'd made her life tough. Now it was finally time to pull the rug out from under George Colton! Like Lawrence he wasn't a religious man, so he'd have no defenses against the dark forces designed to sap his energy and, over a very short time, also end his life!

Constance was raised in the Transkei... the tribal homeland of the Xhosas in South Africa, in Indwe ... and it was there that her nanny had taught her how to connect with the dark forces that – though not as powerful as Heaven's armies, would be more than powerful enough to control or dispatch any spiritually weak people that could not, through lack of their faith or belief in Heaven and the forces of good, depend on or get enough protection. She'd been an eager student of her old nanny, learning the black-art of witchcraft and Voodoo, of curses & spells, from her, so that, as is common in Africa, she knew how to place a Hex on her enemies! That served her very well during her boarding-school days at Queenstown Girl's high, where she'd controlled all of the girls, to quickly rise to be head-girl, for her final year there!

Lately she'd only had to use those powers on Nicholas, but somehow they'd not worked as well – yet! She smiled as she thought of finally being rid of him – for good. Then Elizabeth would be free to marry Charles, they would rejoin the upper echelons of society and move to London – with his family's help, to live a life of privilege there, of class and style unlike any they'd enjoyed before! She controlled Charles, so he'd be her loyal servant for life – as Edwin was, just better placed in the grand scheme of things, and through his blind love for Elizabeth and his eternal gratitude to her for helping him win her daughter's hand in marriage... she'd have everyone under her control! Then she'd finally have her charmed life!

Only Nicholas still thwarted her plans to move on up in the world. She'd wait for a perfect opportunity - for danger and circumstances to align –then place a powerful Hex on him to get rid of Nicholas, forever! But that had eluded her... so far.

## Chapter 18

### **Nicholas & Elizabeth get a phone call from mom and dad.**

The phone was ringing in Nicholas's apartment, and Lizzie was closest to answer it... "Hello, this is Elizabeth" she said.

"Hello Elizabeth, this is Mrs. Strauss, welcome back to Cape town! We're thrilled that you came back to marry our son – you did the right thing, and I know it must have come at a high price for you, but your mother's alternatives for your life would have broken my son's heart..." Lizzie interrupted

"Thank you Mrs. Strauss, and rest assured, I have no desire to break Nicholas's heart – not just because I love him, but also because my heart would be broken too!" Lizzie replied.

"As his mom, I'm very glad to hear that Elizabeth!" she said, adding "How are you coping with wedding arrangements?"

"We're managing well - time's short, but Denise and Sandy are helping us, so I think it will work out well" then added "I'm sorry now Nicholas decided there should be no family present, It would have been nice for you and Dr. Strauss to be with us, I hope your feelings aren't hurt?" she inquired.

"No, we're onboard with Nicholas's thinking Elizabeth, we'd like you to have a happy wedding and celebration there with just your friends, since your family refused to attend –but uncle Corrie, Nicholas's godfather, has a nice party planned here, for when you two come to visit after the honeymoon ... which brings me to the real reason for this call!" she said.

"Yes Mrs. Strauss -you have me curious now?" Lizzie replied

"Well, maybe I'm wrong to assume this –but I doubt very much that your mother had a heart-to-heart talk with you about what to expect to happen on a honeymoon...and after, I mean as a adult woman as you soon will be?" she inquired.

"That's very perceptive of you Mrs. Strauss, the only advice I was given, was about not marrying your son." Lizzie replied.

“Elizabeth, my mom died – of a broken heart really, when I was just 12 – so I went to live with my older sister and at 16 I went to live in the YWCA, so when the time came to go to Dublin, Ireland, to marry Dr. Strauss -then a medical student, I had nobody to prepare me for our wedding night. I really didn’t have any clue about what to expect and what to do –and I rather wish, in hindsight, that was not the case! Anyway, I soon adapted –but I was pregnant right away as a result, which meant we had many new problems to contend with too –one of which was finances, so I had to leave my husband and return to live on their family farm in S. Africa, with his parents while he finished his studies.” She said.

“Wow, Mrs. Strauss, I never knew all that – so you and Dr. Strauss know what it’s like to be separated by distance too!” she said, adding “But I did take the opportunity in Canada to have a gynecologist fit me with a copper-T so that we’d not start a family too soon, if that’s what you’re worried about?” Lizzie inquired –not too sure if that’s why she called.

“That’s smart of you -but I’ve got more I need to tell you.” Kathleen said “I want to chat to you as a mature woman, about... well, men and sex, and you ... I hope you’ll let me?”

“That’s OK Mrs. Strauss, as you guessed, my mother’s never talked about any of that with me -and I’m 22 now!” she said.

“Well Lizzie, then it’s best we do so now!” Kathleen said, not knowing really where best to start with such a huge deficit to make up for “You’re just about to discover a whole new range of sensations and emotions that will change a lot of things in your life – kind of like when you first ate solid food as a baby -only it’s a lot more fun!” she continued “Just like with the baby-food, you’ll not become an expert in managing these new sensations -to fully enjoy them, right away, but take my word for it - sooner, rather than later ... you will!”

“You’ve got my interest peeked Mrs. Strauss, so please do go on –and it’s nice of you, to treat me like an adult!” she said.

“Elizabeth, I think that sex is the reason for the old English saying “Practice makes perfect!” she said, laughing, adding “And the same holds true for Nicholas – but we’ve already told him that much, long ago!” then continued “But there’s a



few more tips I can give you... I'm assuming that Nicholas has never seen you fully naked, though with our bikinis on the beach we left little to their imaginations, but here's a tip. Before consummating your union with my son, let him see you disrobe, fully naked – for the first time, if for no other reason than to get him very eager, but really as a symbolic gesture to have both of you transition into the adult world – one that there's no turning back from!" she said, knowingly.

"Yes, that sounds like a very adult thing to do, Mrs. Strauss, so I'll think of ways of how best to work that into our post-wedding activities, I already have an idea based on our past, and I can certainly see that it would be a rather significant symbolic gesture...but I'm assuming you have more advice?"

"Yes Elizabeth, I do – born out of experience really" she said, then continued... "I know my son well enough that I can assure you that you are his first lover, in the real sense of that word, and so don't expect him to be an expert either – but encourage him – He's a very passionate young man, just like his dad, and I can assure you, he'll perform well and be a fast learner!" Kathleen said, quickly adding, as she sensed Elizabeth was a bit uncomfortable "Of course I have a vested interest in all of this... you're going to give us several grandchildren one day, and of course, that's how we all came into this world too – and into our families." Kathleen concluded.

"Thank you Mrs. Strauss! I'm not so nervous anymore!" she said, adding "I really needed your reassurance! Thank you!"

"Well Elizabeth, I'm done –but feel free to call and chat to me anytime! If there's one thing I'm determined to do, it is that I'll always be sympathetic to you –My son loves me, and I him, and with that much credit built up, I can depend on him not getting cross with me for first giving you the benefit of my support!" she said "Now Dr. Strauss would love to say a few words to you too!" she said "So for now I'll say goodbye and please enjoy your wedding day! We had only 8 guests at our wedding in Dublin - and also no family!" She concluded.

"Thank you Mrs. Strauss, I'll remember all that!" Lizzie said "and for now, goodbye –but we plan on being with you soon! And by then we'll be married! I'm looking forward to that!"

That part of the call now done, Lizzie heard Dr. Strauss say  
 “Welcome back Elizabeth! I trust you’re happy and excited?”  
 “Yes, thank you Dr. Strauss –I’m really glad to be back here with your son and after your wife’s kind advice, feeling a lot less nervous now!” She said, adding “I had no idea that you two went through a lot of similar trials in your lives too!”  
 “Well Elizabeth, it didn’t escape our notice, so you have our support and our blessings! We’re very happy to have you become part of our family – and I know all of our extended family will welcome you without reservations too!” he said.  
 “Thank you Dr. Strauss, you have no idea how relieved that makes me feel –I mean all we’ve encountered from my family is hostility, and we’re both a little shell-shocked!” she added.  
 “I’m sorry about all that Elizabeth, but we did see it coming! Your mother and I really don’t see eye-to-eye, and Nicholas is not likely to endure her cruelty towards you - and him, for much longer, so I hope she gets her act together... but my advice to you both is plan on that not happening!” he said, adding “Hope for the best –but plan for the worst!” laughing.  
 “Yes, I think that’s realistic advice Dr. Strauss” she said  
 “Well, Elizabeth, please have a wonderful, happy wedding celebration and also a lovely honeymoon –then come here and visit with us so we can celebrate together!” he said “Can you please call Nicholas – I need to talk to him too.” He said.  
 With that Elizabeth said goodbye to Dr. Strauss and handed the phone to Nicholas, who was now standing next to her ...  
 “Hello Dad ... thanks for welcoming Lizzie!” Nicholas said.  
 “Our pleasure son, she’s part of our family now, but I need to talk to you as a Dr. now ... not just as your dad!” he said.  
 “Sure, go ahead dad” Nicholas said, unsure what to expect.  
 “Son, I’ve sent you some Pills – Bactrim, quite a lot of them, and there’s a good reason why...” he said, continuing “In my medical practice, one of the most common things I see is women who arrive in great discomfort and almost every time I know what it is before they start talking – Urinary-tract

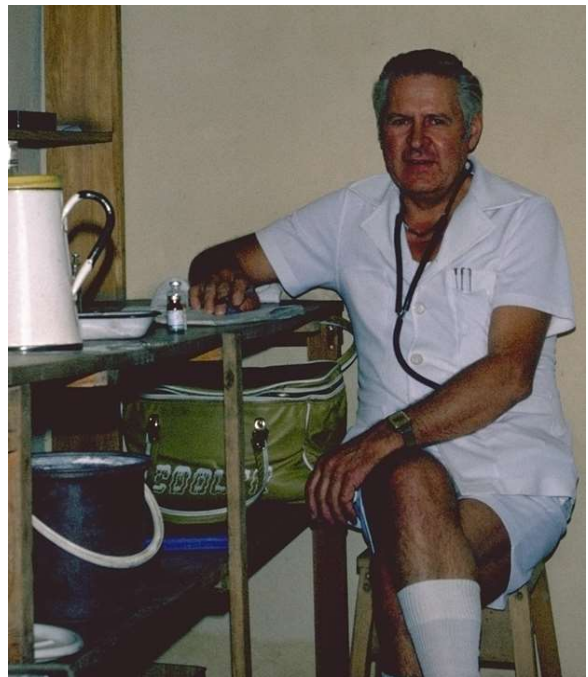
infections, generally brought on by sexual relations -often while on their honeymoons! That's what us old Dr's call 'Honeymoon Cystitis' and it can ruin a honeymoon!" he said.

"Wow thanks Dad!" Nicholas said "I'd never have thought about that and if it happened to us... well, we'd be searching for a Dr. and that would be really inconvenient as we're going to the Wilderness for our honeymoon and the closest city is George – quite far away, and I have no car anymore!"

"Yes that occurred to me, so listen up, this is what you need to look for, and do..." he said, then explained "If she ever has a lot of discomfort low down in her tummy -around her bladder area, if she needs to pee often and it hurts -but not a lot comes out and when it does it's turbid, then start her with 2 Bactrim tablets, followed by 1 every 12h for 3d, and lot's of water! She'll start to feel better in a hour or two. The good thing then is that for those 3 days, you'll both be able to enjoy the honeymoon without unpleasant consequences!" he said joking. Nicholas thanked him and they said goodbye



*Dr. & Mrs. Strauss in their early 50's - a key part of this contemporary fairy-tale, spent much of their life in rural Africa, helping the Xhosa & Sotho tribes survive illness, also tending to the health of their fellow villagers*



# Chapter 19

## **June 30<sup>th</sup> 1979: Elizabeth and Nicholas finally get married!**

It had been raining all week – typical in Cape Town for June, but today the sun was out and blue sky had returned. Nicholas and Elizabeth were dressed in their wedding clothes – Lizzie in her yellow dance dress, a broad-brimmed white hat with a yellow ribbon, and a yellow and white wedding bouquet – later, a yellow flower for her hair. Nicholas in a tan 3-piece woolen suite with a cream colored shirt and a yellow and green tie – color coordinated to match Lizzie’s attire. Shorty Becket –assisted by Missy, was gesticulating at them – while peering through his new 35mm camera, getting them to pose here, there, everywhere and to smile. As a setting for their wedding photos, they’d chosen the Gardens in front of the National Parliament building in Cape Town at the top of Adderley st. as it was always kept immaculately groomed, full of flowers, year round with no frost in Cape Town to kill them or to turn the lawns brown.

All would be well and good time wise, but Shorty was not an expert with his new camera yet, so they were running late.

“Oh no Nicholas, I’ve got some mud on the bottom of my dress!” Lizzie exclaimed – “What do we do now?” she asked.

“Shorty, let’s go back via their apartment where Lizzie can spot wash it then dry it with her hair-dryer” Missy suggested - and Nicholas agreed – that would work!

“Sure thing Nicholas old buddy!” Shorty said, hurrying back to his VW Combi – the company chariot entrusted to him.

With Lizzie and Nicholas now seated behind them, Shorty turned the key in the ignition switch ... nothing ... it would not turn over! He tried again – still nothing!

“Oh no!” Lizzie exclaimed “Our friends are gathering at the Methodist church on Main road, next to Tugwell hall, and we’re stuck in downtown Cape Town, Saturday afternoon!”

she said anxiously “I don’t think you’re going to get us to the church on time now Shorty?” trying to get him motivated.

Shorty just smiled – picking up a heavy piece of wood off the floor saying “Don’t worry folks, I know what to do!” before heading to the back of the VW Combi-van, opening the engine compartment and thumping the starter motor a few times – then closing the engine compartment and returning with a smile “Its just got a bit of an attitude in all this rain we’ve been having – so a few good thumps and it knows who’s the boss!” Shorty confidently said, before he tried to start it again. This time it started and pretty soon he was driving them – like a maniac, dodging in and out of lanes, passing on the shoulder – honking the horn and shaking his fist at all the slow drivers that he accused of the major crime of ‘impeding’ –arriving back at the apartment in record time, so Lizzy could clean the mud off of her dress - but late now.

Nicholas opened the door and Lizzie raced in, jumping over the letters and bills that the postman had delivered, lying on the floor at the foot of the mail-slot. Missy accompanied her to help her clean the mud off of the bottom of her dress. Nicholas stooped to pick the mail up, more out of habit than anything else... and him and Shorty entered, going to the lounge to wait there for Lizzie and Missy. Nicholas started sorting through the mail ...

“Oh no!” he said out loud, making Shorty curious - just as Missy popped her head around the corner, also curious as to why he was suddenly so worried.

“What Nicholas? Why did you just say Oh no!” they inquired looking concerned ... wondering why the mail was worrying.

“Here’s a letter addressed to Elizabeth from her mother in Canada ... I’m afraid that’s never good news, maybe I’ll just hang onto it for a while?” adding “Why spoil our wedding?”

“Maybe that’s a good idea... but then again just maybe she’s written to concede it’s not her place to choose a husband for Lizzie and that she’s now giving you both her blessing to get married?” Shorty replied “like what happened to us!” he said

“You guys are really something else!” Missy chimed in “You mustn’t make all these kinds of decisions for us girls” adding – “it’s better to acknowledge that we are able to decide what’s best for us and our futures! I mean, Shorty, if you’d confided in me before our wedding, you’d not have needed to run away to London, and Nicholas, from what I gathered, withholding a letter is one of the things that got Constance into trouble! I suggest that we give it to Elizabeth and let her decide” she said. Reluctantly, Nicholas agreed.

The dress repairs now done, they got back in the Combi for the short –fast, trip to the Church. Once seated, Shorty started reversing and turning to make their way to main road and ultimately the church. Nicholas reached into his pocket and handed Lizzie the letter ...

“What’s this?” she inquired, quite taken aback, then said “Oh, I see, it’s a letter from mother...I wonder what she’s writing about, I hope it’s good!” Elizabeth said wincing a bit.

All of them waited now with baited breath for Elizabeth’s decision, silently -Shorty navigating the Combi through the maze of traffic around the Mowbray bus terminal and train station, trying to get to the main road to turn to the Church.

Elizabeth opened the letter, and started reading... out loud.

*Elizabeth, I’m writing still hopeful you’ll come to your senses! I hope this letter reaches you in time before the wedding that Nicholas has, no doubt, been trying to rush you into –to force on you! I’m giving you one last chance to reconsider or else...*

Elizabeth stopped ... sighed, then spoke “Well, it was a vain hope –that mother would ever give us her blessing, so with everyone’s permission, I’m not going to read anymore of it!”

They all concurred with her, Missy speaking for them “Yes Lizzie, that’s definitely the right thing to do! I had to deal with my dad’s nonsense too, and you really just have to put your foot down... and on that subject -Shorty dear, please do that! We’re almost ½ hour late for the wedding!” she said.

Elizabeth continued ... “In fact, I’ll never read the end of this letter!” she said, folding the flimsy aerogram, then taking it firmly between her thumb and Index fingers of both hands, proceeded to rip it into shreds soon having just a handful of

confetti in her hands “I’m sure it will not help us today or ever... to know what she wrote –I’d rather never have her words stuck in my mind for handy use at any time I’m angry with Nicholas!” she said as she handed the scraps to Missy, asking her “Missy, could you please throw this out of the window for me, we don’t want it in here with us or at the church!” she asked Missy, who promptly complied with her wishes... scattered the pieces into the air as Shorty drove.”

Shorty guffawed “That evil-confetti needs to be washed off of the road by the next rains, which in Cape Town this time of year will return soon, then on down into the sewers where her words will find good company there!” he said, laughing.

They all laughed at the imagery Shorty’s remark invoked!

Nicholas commented for them “Shorty, you’re not normally that subtle –but well said! I agree!” then turned to Lizzie and said “Thank you Lizzie, we really don’t need to hear and remember her curses on our wedding day –for our lives! Had that been her blessing, well, that would have been different!”

Lizzie smiled at him, relieved that she’d read nothing really damaging –yet, and had been disciplined enough to make a very adult decision –for them! “Yes Nicholas ... suddenly I’m very glad she’s not here! I’m sure when the reverend gets to the part about ‘if anyone present knows of any reason why these two should not be married’ she’d have jumped up and had a lot to say to ruin our day!” Lizzie said “Now that won’t happen! She’s stuck in Canada... and we’re here!” she said.

Nicholas gave her hand a squeeze “Thanks to you my dearest darling Lizzie, she’s been thwarted a lot of late!” he said, smiling reassuringly at her, adding “Hurry up Shorty!”

When they got to the church, Shorty jumped out to go to the head of the step at the entrance to the old stone church to confirm his suspicion that everyone was already seated and Reverend Hymen was standing alone in the front, tapping his fingers on the pulpit – looking annoyed that they were late. “Common you two, hurry!” Shorty motioned to them, at the top of his voice, as Nicholas helped Lizzie out of the Combi and they ran up the stairs, holding hands, and on down the isle towards the front of the church - towards the

reverend – with Shorty and Missy right behind them, headed to where their friends were now seated and waiting for them. Arriving at the front, both out of breath, red-faced, Reverend Hymen's disposition changed, and the kindly old reverend burst forth into spontaneous laughter – “Well that's the first time I've officiated at a wedding in which the Bride and Groom ran down the isle towards me -holding hands!” He remarked, laughing, suddenly looking a lot more agreeable!

Both Nicholas and Lizzie smiled back – rather sheepishly, with Nicholas replying “and quite unrehearsed too, Reverend –it just happened this way because we were late after a wardrobe malfunction!” pointing down to the still damp spot at the bottom of Lizzie's dress “Mud from the last week of rain here in Cape Town” adding “Probably unavoidable.”

The reverend chuckled “Yes, well - That's Cape Town this time of year! Now let's get the wedding started, shall we?” He said motioning to Nicholas to stand on one side in front of him –and to Lizzie on the other side, now telling them “I've brought my Philips cassette recorder and have a C-60 in it to record the ceremony for Elizabeth's family who are all stuck far away in Canada, unable to attend -but who'd love to have been here!” he said “We'll have to keep it all short so that the tape won't run out on us!” he cautioned, adding “else they'll not ever hear me pronounce you man and wife!” Nicholas and Lizzie briefly looked at one another, Nicholas rolling his eyes, thinking “This reverend sure can ham it up!” while Lizzie thought “Maybe he's just trying to lay the groundwork for a future reconciliation -after I send this tape to my parents?” but then Reverend Hymen interrupted their thoughts... “Can I have the ring please?” He asked Nicholas –who froze! “What ring?” he said shocked “Do we need one?”

“Yes, for this ceremony you sure do!” the reverend smiled.

Lizzie held out her right hand to Nicholas, saying “Take my grannies engagement ring off my finger, let's use that.” She told him, smiling at the thought of it playing a major role! \*\*

Nicholas took Lizzie's right hand in his, carefully removing an old antique sterling silver ring with a largish amethyst \*\*

Remember this nondescript ring? It was destined to play a very important role in this story! As the 1st Grand-daughter this antique Silver & Amethyst ring, was inherited by Lizzie from her Granny.



mounted on it, off of Lizzie's ring finger, then handing it to an amused Reverend Hymen, who remarked "Well, nothing about this wedding is quite standard – but you two clearly love each other, so let's proceed, shall we?" and placed the ring on his open Bible, starting the ceremony. When they came to the part with the ring – instead of repeating after the Reverend "With this ring I thee wed" Nicholas, thinking fast ad-libbed, saying "With this ring – your much loved Granny's ring, I thee wed!" and nobody, even the Reverend, objected. Pretty soon Nicholas was allowed to kiss his bride, which he now did with much relief –and gusto, and soon

Reverend Hymen finished with "I now pronounce you man and wife!" to everyone present's applause! Then they went to his office to sign the registry and government paperwork, and were each handed copies of their new, officially signed wedding license to affix inside their 'Book of life' –the official identity document which contained everything. After that everyone went out onto the grand old church's steps where Shorty took an assortment of photos – with the Reverend taking a group photo using Shorty's new camera, for them all. They all thanked Reverend Hymen, who was still quite amused –but who had officiated over several UCT student weddings – being located right next to the residences, and had thus come to expect rather unusual weddings from time to time. He wished them well, gave them the tape and pretty soon they were all on their way back to Denise and Sandy's big apartment where there was an assortment of eats and drinks waiting for them, before the evening's dinner dance at Constantia-neck restaurant, high up in the mountains above Cape Town – but which only started at 8pm. So all the old friends enjoyed the lovely eats and drinks and each other's company, whiling away the time till it was time to go to the dinner-dance at the Constantia Neck Restaurant, the oldest restaurant in Cape Town, situated on the summit of Constantia Neck pass -the connecting link between Hout-Bay, Constantia and Newlands. The restaurant offered magnificent views over the Constantia Valley and False Bay – it was a perfect spot for Lizzie and Nicholas to celebrate their nuptials with their friends -and soon they'd all arrived.

The restaurant was full of its regular patrons coming to enjoy their Saturday night... wine was flowing, the dinner was great, as always and the dance band particularly Jovial! The table where Lizzie and Nicholas and their friends were sitting, was just off to the side of the band, and while they were just about to start their break, Shorty went up to whisper to the band-leader... and then, an announcement!

Ladies and gentlemen, I've just been informed by Shorty over here" he said pointing to Shorty – standing there next to him with an impish grin on his face, "that we have a very special celebration happening here tonight!" Then he motioned to Nicholas and Lizzie to join them on the stage, and when they were there next to him, with Lizzie blushing, and Nicholas not quite sure what to do -but to let him continue, he said "After almost 8 long years with many forced separations, against all the odds – and her mother's wishes, Elizabeth eloped back to Cape Town from that cold, snowy faraway Canada, to marry her childhood sweetheart Nicholas ... and Nicholas, after this beautiful; young lady has given up all of that for you, I want you both to look at the illuminated sign at the back door there ... You see what it says? Yes, that's right ... NO EXIT!" he said with a smile – "and that's what I want the two of you to promise us all here tonight, that you'll never leave each other or cheat on each other –ever! So are we going to hold them to that ladies and gentlemen?" He asked the crowd – who answered with an assortment of wolf-whistles and 'here-here's –then he turned to Nicholas and said "Nicholas say something to reassure Elizabeth, and us, on that score –we'll all be witnesses for her!" he said, handing the mic to Nicholas, who wasn't quite sure what to say... but then he smiled -he knew what to say!

Standing there with the microphone, facing Lizzie and the curious crowd, he took off his tie and held it up to Lizzie, then to the crowd, saying "I pledge to you Elizabeth, and do so before you all, that I'll keep this tie for as long as I live, to remind me of this wonderful day when I finally got to marry the girl of my dreams... and I will wear this tie to each and every one our children's weddings one day, and later to the weddings of our grand-children, and that at those weddings

I will still be by your side, as your loving husband and friend!” adding, as the crowd began to cheer, hoot and holler “I can’t promise the same for my suit –this tie will probably be the only thing left that fits me so far into our future!” he joked to raucous applause as wives poked their husband’s bellies ... and with that he gave the mike back to the band leader, asking him for two songs to be played when they returned from the break –which he gladly agreed to do, but first told the band to get ready... then led them in a rousing musical rendition of an old favorite “For they are jolly good fellows...and so say all of us!” and also ”Hip-Hip-Hooray!”

Returning to their seats now, Lizzie and Nicholas’ wedding reception -that had started with only 8 guests, their close friends present, suddenly had become a wedding reception with 100’s of kind, caring people wishing them well and cheering for them on, fascinated that this young couple’s love had survived so much and that Elizabeth was gutsy enough to defy her overbearing mother and run away from Canada, back to Cape Town to marry her childhood and university sweetheart, Nicholas! It felt like a regular, large expensive wedding reception “Nice reception, hey Lizzie? Considering all I had left for this was R130.” Nicholas joked.

Shorty had repaid Nicholas for helping him see things clearly in London so that he and Missy did get back together again -by rallying the good people of Cape Town to a noble cause... making this wedding celebration memorable indeed!

When they returned, the band leader announced “By special request – and our Sax player’s going to love this one –we’re starting with not 1 but 2 of Elizabeth’s and Nicholas’ songs. The 1<sup>st</sup> from their first dance at the Wilderness, way back in December of 1971 ... “I can see Clearly now!” and the 2<sup>nd</sup>. from their grade-12 year – and it’s my personal favorite too, the late Jim Croce’s hit “Time in a bottle.” The band started playing as the couples got up to dance –all making way for Elizabeth and Nicholas, urging them to the center of the dance-floor and joining them there to share their happiness!

Lizzie whispered into Nicholas’ ear... “Finally my darling husband, ‘I can see clearly now –the rain is gone, I can see all obstacles in my way!’ How about you?” she asked him ...

“Yes Lizzie, finally the words of our song make sense!” he said “Gone are the dark clouds that had us blind, it’s going to be a bright, bright, bright sunshiny day!” hugging her.

During the 2nd song, a slow dance, he sang along with the band, whispering into Lizzie’s ear “If I could save time in a bottle, the first thing that I’d like to do is to save every day til eternity passes away, just to spend them with you!” and picking up on his cue, Lizzie continued on with the 2<sup>nd</sup> verse “If I could make days last forever, if our words could make our wishes come true, I’d save every day like a treasure and I’d spend them with you!” as they hugged each other tight.

Denise and Tony were sitting opposite Nicholas and Lizzie and next to Sandy and her partner, Missy and Shorty Becket sat next to Lizzie, and Sarah and her Mr. Knightly (perhaps) sat next to them. Just 10 people in the wedding party – but really, it felt a lot more like they had 200 guests!

Their marriage was opposed, so many times, by her family – but now their wedding and reception was a very happy event –even with her family not there –maybe especially so! With only 4 friends and their partners, this was a day they would remember for the rest of their lives, and celebrate joyously each and every year they were still alive... together! Nicholas thought about the kind of person who’d sacrifice almost everything to marry the man she loved –not even caring that she’d then have no special wedding dress or big expensive wedding reception or her dad to give her away or have that special dance with her – yet she looked so beautiful in her yellow dance dress tonight, a bride among all the women there who had similar dresses anyway... no bridal or bridesmaids dresses in sight anywhere, and all the people here felt like their family –all rooting for them and their happiness – nobody present to curse them or their future. So really, Lizzie and he had a huge big expensive wedding reception after all –only everybody paid there own way and came from all over Cape Town to attend and share their happiness this Saturday night, to celebrate their marriage there with them! He could not imagine that any reception

organized by Constance could've been as happy -this had all worked out just perfectly, and for that, he was very grateful! "Hey Nicholas, don't forget we're leaving at 2pm tomorrow afternoon for George, I have to meet with Pick 'n Pay folks there Monday, Shorty reminded him "I'll take you the extra 10km to your Wilderness honeymoon hotel, but from there you're on your own. I think you'd both like that anyway!" He said, reminding Nicholas of the travel plans, with a wink.

"No Problem Shorty! We're more than ready!" He replied.

It was well after midnight when the all said their goodbyes and drove back with Sandy and Denise to their apartment – but once they were there, they noticed everyone was there too, carrying yellow flowers for Elizabeth and accompanying them to their front door –soon Nicholas and Lizzie knew why! All over the windows, written in white, were words like "Just Married", "Nicholas loves Lizzie" and "The stork strikes again!" –that one had to be removed first, since the stork had not (yet) struck them - and all the neighbors would see!

Inside their apartment were hand-made signs, along similar lines, but in the bedroom, hanging from the light fixtures, were panties and bras... and lots of colored paper streamers and confetti – and after they all laughed at the staged chaos, Nicholas looked at them all, demanding "So who was the sneaky genius behind all of this?" Everyone pointed to Denise! "Guilty as charged!" she laughed. "But how, when?" Nicholas asked? "I climbed through the milk hatch, Denise replied "Then opened the door and we all pitched in after that!" They all laughed. Soon after, with everyone still celebrating, Nicholas, holding up the garter in one hand, his champagne from the Walper in the other, announced "This is for Tony... anyone object?" They all cheered – especially when Lizzie then took her yellow bouquet and handed it to Denise –who finally blushed! Everyone there thought that Denise and Tony made a perfect couple! She was beautiful, he was handsome and both of them were such nice people! It was decided – they'd marry! Shorty took photos and the party continued with no respite till almost morning, when everyone finally said their goodbyes, with Denise reminding them "Don't forget we're all having Scones with Strawberries

& Cream and a pot of Tea, tomorrow at 10am – actually, make that today -in our apartment!” all agreed to be there.

By now Nicholas and Lizzie were so tired –and not too sober, once again as a result of the Walper’s champagne, so they resolved to tidy later and get much needed sleep before they left for their Honeymoon Sunday afternoon. But getting into bed they discovered that it’d been ‘short-sheeted’...“Denise!” both exclaimed “She did it!” –and of course, they were right! For those curious about the fabled wedding night -all that happened next was...well, snoring -but only for a few hours!

The wedding plans were working well – very well! No family, his or hers, were there to remind her of her family’s absence -just friends, and keeping every moment accounted for with happy, fun things sticking to a tight fast-paced schedule, no time for sober reflection, relying a lot on nostalgia to remind them of their love and that they were now, finally married, against all the odds... and that all their old friends were there to support them with celebrating their happiest time together, in a long while! That plan continued... unabated!

Sunday morning’s post-wedding breakfast was enjoyed by all –though everyone was suffering a bit from the previous days festivities and the lack of enough sleep, but they were all in good spirits when Shorty stopped to remind them that he’d be back in an hour or so, to drive them to the Wilderness for their honeymoon. That trip took 5hrs, with a brief stop at a Wimpy-bar in Swellendam for a burger, and soon they were checking-in at the Fairy-knowe hotel, then thanking Shorty for all he’d done to help them get this far!

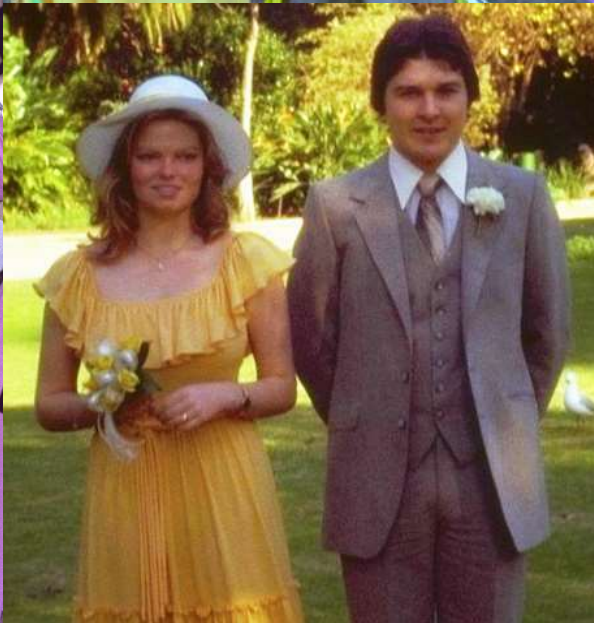




**Wilderness** 1<sup>st</sup> date - 1971   **Serendipity!** 1975, We meet again   **Cape Town** - 1979 Married!











## Chapter 20

### **Nicholas & Lizzie finally do consummate their union!**

Then they were on their own – finally their honeymoon had officially begun, though with both of them now rather tired and still a bit disoriented. They had a few days to enjoy this beautiful, now very peaceful, place –it was not high-season but thankfully warm and dry! After dinner at Fairy-Knowe in the Wilderness, Lizzie and Nicholas stood on the balcony of the room that they were set to spend a few precious nights in, overlooking the palms next to the river - the site of their first kiss, moonlight shimmering on its surface. The two of them still tired from the events of the last few days, stood there hugging each other. “Come with me Lizzie, I’d like to take you on a nostalgic walk!” Nicholas said winking at her.

As they wound their way along the paths to the banks of the river, hand in hand as before, they chattered away happily - the hotel was almost empty, so they had total privacy in this most beautiful, nostalgic place! Soon they stood beneath the tall palms on the river’s bank again. Nicholas turned toward Lizzie, placing his left hand in the small of her back, leaving his right hand free to caress her brow and hair, looking into her eyes as she, expectantly, smiled at him. Their kiss was gentle, kind, loving –fueled by pure nostalgia – this moment was almost 7 Years and 7 months in the making since their first kiss on that very spot -but now they returned here as husband and wife – well, OK, almost... one important detail still remained to conclude matters, legally and in every way, which is why Lizzie now pulled back to look into Nicholas’s eyes and with a coy smile say “Nicholas, I know we’ve both delayed this for years already, but I’ve got something kind of really special planned for our canoe trip up-river tomorrow, to our secret place... can we please wait till then?” she said, adding “We need to unite there as Lady Jennifer and Sir Ian one last time –for we do have to conclude what was started

there, once upon a time!" she said "And we do need to end as Elizabeth and Nicholas - before we venture forth into life!"

"Sure Lizzie, we've waited so long –or maybe more truthfully, we've been thwarted for so long, by circumstances, so I can wait – besides, I don't know about you, but I am real tired!"

They agreed, then kissed under a bright African half moon.

"Elizabeth..." Nicholas said to get her attention now.

"Yes Nicholas? What's on your mind?" Lizzie inquired.

Nicholas continued "Is it just me or have you also felt that we've known each other before we met here, somehow? I mean, on that day some 7 years ago when we first met, we hadn't even exchanged a word, yet I felt strangely compelled to walk around a bustling Caravan park to search for you."

Lizzie now looked deep into his eyes and replied "Nicholas, at exactly the same time I too felt compelled to walk around the park looking for you – even though we'd not said a word to each other!" Adding "Somehow we missed each other, but then we both proceeded to the Duka from opposite ends of the park, at about the same time" Now Nicholas interrupted

"You got there first and as I entered the store, I looked up, you turned around, our eyes met and you smiled – I kind of froze. Then you moved towards me and on out the door, but turned, beckoning me with your smile. I quickly followed, catching up with you. I'm not really sure why I did it, but I took your hand in mine and instead of pulling it away from me, you smiled, gently squeezing my hand –only then did we first formally introduce ourselves." Nicholas said, smiling.

"Yes, it somehow just felt right, very welcome –it was kind of like finding an old friend who I'd been apart from for eons!"

Lizzie commented, adding "We walked on down to the river, found a bench and sat there in each other's arms as if we'd always loved each other –and within a very short time we'd filled each other in on all those missing years – even down to the details like current boyfriends and girlfriends. It felt like we'd once lost each other and now, in the most unexpected, strangest of ways, out of the blue, we'd found each other again. That pattern of loving each other, then losing each

other, then finding each other once again has often repeated again and again in our lives!" Lizzie said "Nicholas, let's somehow stop that - what can we do to break that cycle?"

Nicholas now looked deep into Elizabeth's eyes -mesmerized, and replied "Elizabeth, you know they say that our eyes are a portal into our souls, and here's what I think happened..." he said "When God made all our immortal souls - probably long before we came down to earth and were given bodies, I think some of us knew each other - even loved each other, perhaps others were enemies. Then we were assigned our little bodies by God, and our families. We were scattered all over the earth. Only God knew where each soul went, and when and how, or if they'd meet again -we didn't. At some instinctive level, there's a yearning deep within us to find the one we'd lost long ago, to find our missing soul-mate..."

But before he continued, Elizabeth interrupted him "And Nicholas, you're my lost soul-mate ... and yes, I am yours!"

Nicholas smiled "Yes Elizabeth, you are! I've known so many beautiful, sweet girls, and they all had nice moms, but when I met you I knew, from the very first moment, that we were soul-mates - even before we'd spoken a word to each other!" adding "In fact, I knew then too that we'd get married but I also knew I'd better not say something like that to you, yet!"

Lizzie laughed "Yes, that was probably wise - I may have not understood the significance," clarifying "I really didn't think about us getting married until much later. When it occurred to me, I wanted nothing to stop us or to get in our way!" she added, smiling a beautiful happy smile, then said "Nicholas, we're back where our very first meeting took place and again we've weathered the storms of so many forced separations foisted on us! Here we are, on our honeymoon, back where it all began!" then added "But by the same logic, just maybe we knew another soul before we were given our bodies and our mortal lives began -that soul was bound and determined to come between us? She was given a mortal life too -in fact, I was born into this world through her ... you and I had to fight for me to be free, from being her captive - from her tyranny. Have you ever stopped to think what a huge irony it is that she was prompted on that day some 7 years ago, to

order my dad to stop the Mercedes and to offer my long-lost soul-mate a ride?" Lizzie said with a wry smile, adding "I think her strings were being pulled, as by now we both know that my dad rarely ever does much on his own!"

Nicholas laughed rather nervously "Yes, that is a huge irony and I'd have to think she's regretted it ever since!" he replied then added "Since none of us saw any of that coming ... and I really do think I can speak for all of us present on that day I'd have to think that God nudged us all back together again for a purpose that probably will become clearer over time. Perhaps it was our assigned mortal role to have to overcome the obstacles we've faced - to fight loyally, valiantly, for our love, for us to unite and strive together against her hatred of me and her jealousy of you -of our love? Lizzie, let's promise each other here and now that we'll never, ever, let anyone come between us again!" he said as Lizzie smiled lovingly up at him, prompting him to now lean forward towards her...

Lizzie met him half-way. And so it was that Elizabeth and Nicholas sealed that agreement and at the very same place – under the same palm tree that witnessed their first kiss, 7 years and 7 months ago. All was well again in their world!

Sunday night, the 1<sup>st</sup> of July, finally saw them finally able to have their 1<sup>st</sup> full night of sleep ... in each other's arms, in that romantic place from their now distant youth! With the windows of their room open, they could hear waves crashing against the shoreline a short distance away behind the sand dunes on the other side of the river – it was a most pleasant lullaby... so they fell fast asleep safely in each others arms.

On Monday morning they awoke to a warm rising sun – the sound of the waves now slightly muted, the fresh air having lost its cooling edge, warmer now. Lying cuddled in each other's arms –both blissfully happy, their love had prevailed! Nicholas and Lizzie got ready and went down to the dining-room for breakfast – the only ones there, and took their time enjoying bacon, eggs, sausage, toast, juice and Coffee/Tea. Then Lizzie went back to the room to prepare herself -while Nicholas went to the front desk to inquire about renting a canoe for the day – which, without any line-ups this time of

year, was a formality. That done, he went back up to their honeymoon suite, and found Lizzie smiling and ready to go.

Lizzie was sitting in the front of the canoe facing toward him as she'd always done ... "Lizzie, please be careful not to get my little plastic packet next to yours, wet!" Nicholas asked. "That's got Candles and matches and a flashlight for when we return later tonight, after we've made our final wish at our pool, under the stars!" he reminded her. She nodded. Soon he was rowing and guiding the canoe along, up-river, on a mirrored surface – with only their canoe disturbing its tranquility. Around them they heard sounds of exotic birds chirping – spotting a family of finches tending their young in nests hanging over the river's banks and a fish eagle gliding lazily up high in the bright blue sky. The first landmark they glided past, was Siesta, the caravan park where they'd met and which held so many memories for them. Nicholas spoke first "Hey Lizzie, should we stop over for an hour or so to visit Siesta and the Duka for old-times sake?" He stalled, slowing the canoe while awaiting her answer knowing full well they couldn't do that right now, as the next 5-10 min. was key to his plan to surprise Lizzie at the bridge ahead.

"Tomorrow will be fine for that Nicholas – quit stalling! I've got plans for today and they all involve you, me and our beautiful waterfall and pool – if you don't mind?" She said winking at him coyly "So I'd suggest you row a little faster!"

Nicholas smiled rowing with a new sense of urgency as he now heard the distant sound of the approaching steam-train, for a 'chance meeting' he'd carefully planned by inquiring about its schedule and knowing that about 7 or 8 minutes after leaving the Wilderness station, it would cross the bridge over the river. Now just before the railway bridge –the site of the 7 blasts of the steam train that led to their 7 wishes, he stopped the canoe, waiting. A smile alighted on Lizzie's face as she now realized why he'd been so cagey ...

"Look Nicholas, our old steam-train!" Lizzie exclaimed with great excitement as both of them now waved, smiling at the engineer who had one hand on the controls and was leaning out of the side, but this time he reached up to the chord of

the steam whistle and gave them 2 short blasts which made Elizabeth and Nicholas both smile and wave back at him!

“That wasn’t fair!” Lizzie said “We only have one wish left!”

Nicholas winked at her, replying “But Lizzie, let’s look at it another way, it’s 1 wish that the 2 of us have to agree on!”

The train now gone, Nicholas guided the canoe under the bridge on up the river past the ebb and flow camp grounds, round the corners and on up into the dense jungle covering the steep sides of the valley - and finally he spotted it! It was a flower native to this very place, but one which by now had spread all round the world – a white heart-shaped Aurum lily, with its orange upstanding spadix protruding from the very center of a white spathe. In a month there’d be many!

Nicholas stopped the canoe alongside the river’s bank to pick it for Lizzie, reaching over to hand it to her and saying “It’s the only Aurum lily I’ve seen today, so far –perhaps it was waiting here especially for you?” He said smiling, then winked at her “What would you say I just did to that plant?”

Lizzie smiled, stroking the beautiful white flower, touching the bright orange central protrusion, then replied to him, blushing “Yes, I think what you meant to say is that lovely young plant has just been de-flowered” then quickly adding “I’m glad we found it, though they’re hardly an endangered species! They’re popular in Canada and most places really, where they’re called Cala lilies and used for weddings and...” she stopped from saying more – choosing instead to look up at him and say “Row faster Nicholas... we’ll soon be there!”

Soon enough they’d beached the canoe on the banks of the river and walked a short distance to their pool. After a long absence, they’d now both arrived back at their secret place which had patiently awaited their return –for them to finish what they started many years ago, and to make a final wish!

Standing next to their pool again, Lizzie directed Nicholas... “Nicholas, please sit down on the blanket there on the sand, and don’t you dare get up until I tell you to! I’ve something I need to do and say to you here before we continue” she said.



Not quite knowing what Lizzie had planned, he obeyed her command, found a comfortable spot and sat down, looking at her standing there under the bright blue sky ... waiting.

“Nicholas, do you remember the many special moments you and I spent here, at our secret waterfall? Do you recall how I interviewed you here while we safely acted out our feelings? It may not have occurred to you, but I was interviewing you about very serious aspects of love, marriage... commitment!”

Nicholas looking bemused, replied “Yes Lizzie, you took me by surprise, but I figured that much out after a while, also that I was obligated to be truthful, which was quite easy.

Lizzie continued “Well Nicholas regard all of that as a dress-rehearsal for today. I’m going to repeat the same interview from a night long ago we spent together here, one last time! But now that we’re assured of total privacy – we’re the only ones on the river today, it will be in bright sunshine with a special twist, since we’re finally married ... but while you still have a small chance to run for the exit... before our marriage is consummated! After that, there’s absolutely no kind, painless way for you or me of ever backing out, but that said ... any attempt to run away will break my heart!”

Nicholas looked amused; he’d been here before with Lizzie.

“That’s fine Lizzie, though you always surprise me, go for it!”

Lizzie smiled sweetly at him, knowing what she was about to say would ensure his honesty, and then continued “Nicholas Strauss ... do you agree to answer all the questions that I’m about to ask you, truthfully ... with God as your witness?”

“Yes Elizabeth, I agree to do so, and you know I’m serious!” adding “This place has always brought out our true feelings”

Lizzie slowly removed her bolero jacket, gently tossing it to Nicholas. He caught it, placing it beside him. She paused, standing there before him, the mid-morning sunshine now shining brightly on the hills, rocks and trees, shimmering off the mirrored surface of the pool and onto her, bringing her into sharp focus – crystal clear! She smiled at him, then she ran her open hands gently, slowly over her top, over the front of her breasts, down her sides on to her waist, then on down over the jeans hugging her hips... then further on



down to her outer thighs – then lifting her arms to beckon towards him sitting there, with upturned palms, and said...

“Nicholas Strauss, do you approve of your bride?” she asked  
“Why yes, Elizabeth – that I sure do!” he quickly replied.

Lizzie looked pleased with his response – and continued.

Slowly she undid the buttons of her blouse – so that now it hung loose on her, fully open. Nicholas froze. *Oh my!* He thought, *maybe this acting stuff is about to unleash a genie that’s not easily going to go back into its bottle, here today – or ever! I’m not sure I’ve fully prepared for this!* But he kept his silence, not sure if their secret word would ever work in real-life again ... or that they’d ever want it to – ever again!

Lizzie brought her hair forward, over her shoulders, splitting it into two long thick mats, covering her chest - then slowly she took her blouse off, and gently threw it at him. Nicholas caught it and placed in on top of the jacket. Then she undid her bra throwing it over to Nicholas to add to a growing pile.

She stood there in the sunlight, her fingers twirling, playing with shiny strands of her long chestnut brown hair with its blonde highlights, then playfully placed some hair into her mouth, tilted her head gently sideways, pouted, then smiled coyly at him and calmly continued with her interrogation.  
“And now Nicholas, do you still approve of me?” she asked.

“Yes, Lizzie, I do –I approve of you!” He eagerly replied, again  
Then with a flourish and a flick of her hands, she threw her hair back over her shoulders, threw her head back, using her hands to smooth it back in place, hanging loose again down the center of her back –in the process, pushing out her young, perky, perfectly-formed 34-C cup, bare breasts...

“And now Nicholas, do you still approve of me?” she asked.

Nicholas was having great difficulty believing his eyes! Lizzie now stood before him, in bright sunlight – not in moonlight, a beautiful maiden, now naked from the waist up, with perfectly perky, round, full, well shaped breasts, and unlike before when she’d done this by candle-light, this time there was no doubting what he was seeing was not an illusion, now it was very real! Struggling to remain composed so that

his voice would be clear and measured, he replied to her ...

“Yes lady Elizabeth, I approve! I really, really do!” he said.

Sensing he was getting decidedly nervous and rather excited by her dramatic, sensual disrobing, Lizzie upped the ante ...

Slowly she undid the top button of her blue jeans, then she slowly moved its zipper downwards ... the bright sunlight offering no protection -no way of hiding what was unfolding.

*“No, this isn’t happening!”* Nicholas thought. *“This can’t be!”*

But Lizzie continued, slowly using her hands to remove her jeans and moving them down over her hips, then over her thighs, her knees - till they fell down around her ankles. Stepping out of them, she used one foot to deftly kick them over to Nicholas, who reached up and caught them, placing them with the now fast-growing pile of clothes beside him.

Lizzie stood there, almost naked before him, just her lacy pale-pink panties remained on her hips, both hands by her side, one leg slightly bent at the knee, her head gently tilted down to her left shoulder, perfectly illuminated by the bright sunlight shimmering off the pool and surrounding rocks.

“And now Nicholas, do you still approve of me?” She asked.

Nicholas was now breathing heavily, as he answered her ...

“Yes Elizabeth, I most definitely approve of you!” he said.

Now a small, nervous smile started twitching at the corners of Lizzie’s mouth as she bent forward slightly, grasped either side of her panties with her hands and slowly moved them downwards, stepping out of them with one foot, then the other before she used her right foot to deftly kick them over to Nicholas. By the time he’d caught them and was looking back up at her, she was standing upright again, completely naked on the soft white sands at the pool’s edge, smiling sweetly at Nicholas who was by now mesmerized, captivated by her beauty, disarmed by her brazenness -the first time ever he’d seen Lizzie, now his wife, fully naked, and not at night, but in the full light of day – under a bright blue sky!

“And now Nicholas, do you still approve of me?” She asked.

Nicholas’s brow had sweat forming on it as he answered her.

“Yes Elizabeth, I definitely do approve of you!” he exclaimed.

Now Lizzie took her hair back over her shoulders, and held it up in both her upturned hands, then continued on ...

“and, Nicholas, when my soft, flowing maiden’s mane – the pride of my youth, turns grey and brittle with age, will you still approve of me, will you still love me?” she asked, now sounding deadly serious - not playful, or sensual, as before.

Nicholas, stunned, looked up at her, standing there before him. “Yes darling, I will” He replied. “I honestly, really will!”

Lizzie flicked her hair back over her shoulders, rearranging it with her hands, then moving her upturned, open hands to gently cup her breasts from underneath, as she continued...

“and Nicholas, when my breasts grow old, and sag, will you still approve of me then? Will you still love me?” she asked.

Nicholas swallowed, past the lump forming in his throat, this was really serious! Lizzie was asking him for assurance.

“Yes, my darling Lizzie, I will still love you, all the days of our lives ... that I do solemnly promise you here!” he replied.

Sensing his changing mood she hesitated briefly - but then decided to press on. She moved her hands to her stomach, using both open hands to cover it, and now in a quiet more measured tone, and with a soft, kind smile, she asked him...

“and Nicholas, when childbirth and age have taken their toll, when I’ve borne you sons and my middle is not so flat and firm any more, but rounded, fuller and softer, will you still approve of me – will you still love me, truly, even then?”

Nicholas was stunned. Lizzie had him exactly where she wanted him - he had no choice; he had to reply truthfully!

“Yes Elizabeth, I will still truly love you, I promise!” he said.

Lizzie smiled reassuringly now, for she knew she was almost done getting the answers she sought. She moved her hands slowly down, over her hips, down towards her naked thighs drawing his gaze down towards the neat triangular, curly soft patch of hair below her waist that now held Nicholas’ rather stunned and attentive gaze -before her final question.

“And, Nicholas, when age takes its toll, and these hips are

fuller, well rounded, these thighs not quite as smooth and well formed any longer, will you still approve of me? Will you still love me? Will I still be your true-love ... your only love?"

Nicholas was shell-shocked. He'd promised before God, to tell the truth, and he was honor-bound to do exactly that!

"Yes, my dearest Lizzie, I will still approve of you, and I will still love you!" He replied - not knowing what to expect next?

"Nicholas Strauss... I stand before you now in this bright sunshine, fully naked, fully exposed to you for the first time! Please look at me ... I'm at my most perfect now! Time will soon start taking revenge on me for my brazenness, but the time's also finally come for you to claim your fair maiden, your bride ... me! Now's finally the perfect time for me to be transformed by you... from a young maiden, into a woman!" She triumphantly announced beaming him a seductive look.

Nicholas, still mesmerized - slightly stunned, hesitated just long enough for her to take some hair in her right hand and put it in her mouth, bend one knee, turn her head slightly sideways, playfully, then coyly smiling at him, say to him ...

"So what are you still waiting for Nicholas? The perfect time for us to consummate our love has finally arrived...it's now!"

Nicholas sprang to his feet and with two long strides closed the short distance between them, bent over, placed his right hand under her bare bottom, his left hand on her back and then swept her off her feet on into his arms, turning to carry her back to the blanket on the sand next to the pool, then bending down to lay her gently down; and with her laying there coyly giggling, he proceeded urgently to remove 1<sup>st</sup> his shirt then the rest of his clothing, tripping -almost falling, as he tried too hurriedly to step out of his jeans, but recovering his balance to briefly stand there before her fully naked, but better yet, fully at attention -and that attracted Lizzie's gaze! "Oooh... Nicholas!" Lizzie exclaimed, with a naughty girlish giggle as her eyes stayed focused away from his face, chest or biceps. Curiosity plus anticipation kept her gaze focused there "I approve of you too! I really, really do!" she exclaimed now rather urgently beckoning him with her index finger, seductively, to come to her, waiting eagerly on their blanket.

*Lying down next to her, he moved urgently towards her - she towards him, so that in an often well rehearsed way here, their bodies touched once again, perfectly naturally, becoming intertwined - only this time, for the first time, fully naked, fully engaged, in the complete privacy of their secret place. As they now passionately kissed, their hands combing urgently through each others hair, their breathing grew shallow, fast, Nicholas moving over onto Lizzie, she responding, receptive, submissive, eagerly! He briefly raised himself to look into her eyes ... just long enough to say: "I love you Mrs. Elizabeth Strauss! I always have and I always will!" Lizzie smiled as she replied "Mrs. Elizabeth Strauss ... that has such a nice ring to it!" Just then a happy, victorious smile alighted on her face, for she had fought valiantly for the right to become Mrs. Elizabeth Strauss - and she'd won! Nicholas noticed her smile, briefly returning it. Lizzie now closed her eyes thinking "Finally! No more dress-rehearsals!" as she tilted her head backwards, arching her back slightly, to better move in a passionate and ecstatic unison with her Nicholas, both now eagerly, fully engaged ... energetically consummating their marriage with a heightened sense of awareness for the new pleasurable sensations they were experiencing - as so many lovers also discovered when their own adult love-lives began!*

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"No -no -no -no Elizabeth!" Constance shouted in her sleep. Edwin awoke next to her, nudging her -to wake her from her nightmare. "You're having a nightmare dear, it's just a bad dream, wake-up, you'll see!" he said, trying to console her. But half-awake Constance was even meaner than usual "Oh shut-up Edwin, Really! What do you know about the supernatural?" she chided him ... "I've just had my worst fears confirmed, that disloyal little daughter of yours has carried through on her promise to marry Nicholas ... I just know it!"

"But dear, that's why she eloped, I mean, that's an expected outcome, the usual reason, isn't it?" Edwin feebly suggested

"Oh Edwin, just because she ran back to South Africa and to Nicholas, doesn't mean she'd have forgotten my threats of disowning her as our daughter if she ended up marrying that silly boy Nicholas -I'd have expected that would give

her pause for sensible thought, time to reflect on options ...”

Edwin interrupted her “You mean your daughter, she’s still my daughter, I never made any such threat –they’re also only ever your options dear – not hers. Lizzie is 22 and a woman now, she deserves the right to choose what to do with her own life – I mean, that’s exactly what you did when your dad forbade you to marry me, and at about the same age too...” but he didn’t finish as she rudely interrupted him

“Oh don’t be stupid Edwin! Comparing Lizzie to me’s stupid! I was so much more mature at her age – she’s such a child!” Emboldened by sleep, Edwin retorted “You underestimate our daughter dear, she’s a lot more grown-up than you give her credit for! If she has actually carried through on her promise to marry Nicholas, well, we’ll just have to adapt to that new reality. It would hardly come as a surprise – at least to me.” Edwin felt proud of himself...there, he’d said it!

“No Edwin, if she’s been so disloyal, it’s her that will have to adapt to the new reality of no longer being our daughter ...”

Edwin interrupted again “You mean your daughter, dear, she’s still my daughter, that’s the simple reality of all this!”

Constance grew silent, then in a steely-cold voice she replied “Edwin, it seems you have a thing or two to learn yet about loyalty ... your total loyalty to me should always come first!”

Edwin sighed, Constance was fully awake now, and on top form, any brief advantage he’d enjoyed in this discourse was over. “Dear, we’ll have to confirm your worst fears first, else all of this is mere conjecture, so till then, why don’t we just try and get some sleep – we’ll deal with this if and when it’s proven to be an actual issue –right now we just don’t know!”

“But I do know Edwin” Constance fired back “She’s done it!” “We’ll have to wait and see dear, but for now this should not cause us to loose any sleep...” He said, turning over to at least try and get some sleep - really hoping she’d allow it!

“Well, you go ahead and sleep Edwin, it’s almost morning, so I’m getting up to go and make myself a cup of tea, then to plan my new strategies” Constance replied as she arose.

Edwin smiled to himself, relieved; it would be far easier to get some sleep without her tossing and turning next to him!

“That’s a good idea, dear, and please try to be practical” he cautioned Constance as she slammed the door behind her.

“Insufferable idiot!” she muttered to herself “I’ll do what’s needed to break your daughter ... to bring her to heel! She’ll see things my way sooner rather than later ... you all do!” and with that she made her way downstairs to the kitchen. Sitting now with her cup of tea, she wondered if her letter to Elizabeth, with her warning and an ultimatum, had arrived in time – before their wedding? “Maybe not?” she thought, “That may explain things!” Brooding over her options, she soon arrived at that dark place she’d visited so successfully before - when all seemed lost ... Lizzie had let slip that she’d hoped they would return to where they first met, Siesta, the Caravan park in the Wilderness national park ... “That was it!” She thought, smiling now with glee! “Finally! The perfect alignment of circumstances! It’s his 23<sup>rd</sup> birthday tomorrow, let it be his last! I’ll place a hex on Siesta and him - a curse so powerful that, if Nicholas ever took Lizzie back there, which is most likely his plan for their honeymoon – they’d be parted forever!” Putting down her tea, she went to Lizzie’s room, opened her chest of drawers and removed the photo he’d sent her in which he looked so forlorn, then she returned to her chair, imagining how desolate Siesta would be this time of year; how Nicholas would probably use his family’s holiday trailer, parked there, for their honeymoon... nostalgic and cheap! Charles would’ve taken her to a 5-star Wilderness hotel! It all made perfect sense to her as she looked at his photo! Siesta was where their love was born ... and Siesta would soon be where their love would go to die! Her plan to do that almost worked 3y ago, but Charles was just too slow! Nicholas appeared again to ruin everything, in the nick of time! Oh how she hated that Afrikaner boy –and that photo of them! She consoled herself thinking what a sad, lovely young widow Elizabeth would make. Of course, after a suitable period of mourning ... she’d marry Charles!

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Lizzie lay in Nicholas’ arms, her head on his chest, flushed, a warm glow enfolding her as her heart now returned to its normal rhythms. Nicholas lay on his back, his arms behind his head, looking up at the surrounding trees and blue sky.

“Wow Lizzie! So that’s what we’ve been avoiding here - and elsewhere, for so many years now... I can see that there’s no going back, ever! We’re adults, we’re married! Mrs. Elizabeth Merriwether Strauss, you’re finally my wife after many years and so many sad farewells, and though one day it must end, I really don’t want it to ever end!” he implored... looking up.

Lizzie smiled, playing with a small clump of soft hairs on his chest before she spoke “Yes Nicholas, I’m finally yours and it all feels so right, so good! I know we’ll still face a lot of trials when we arrive in Canada to start our new lives there soon, but I’m hoping she’s had time to think it all through and to adapt to the new realities in our family, so that it’s all taken care of before we get there!” Lizzie said her voice hopeful.

“That would be most welcome Lizzie!” Nicholas replied “But part of me is filled with trepidation... she’s been a relentless, formidable foe of our love, so I just can’t see her changing so soon, so completely? Will you really let up your guard now?”

Lizzie paused for a moment to reflect, before she replied “You’re right Nicholas, but for the moment, let’s just bask in our love’s victories ... we’ve won many hard fought battles ... now we’re officially completely, legally married!” Lizzie said.

“Lizzie...” Nicholas said “Really, let’s take no more chances on that score” he said, turning towards her again –winking.

“Oooh ... Nicholas! You read my mind! Let’s make sure that we’ve fully consummated our marriage, it’s our honeymoon, after all!” she said, as Lizzie once again eagerly responded, now turning onto her back “But this time let’s take our time –and there’s no need to interrupt things... I had time to plan for our honeymoon ... So I made good use of Canada’s free medical coverage to get a gynecologist to install a Copper-T for me - so we’ll not have our sleep interrupted 9 months from now!” she said giggling, moving quickly to meet his urgent advances - for he was now much more intent on repetition than in replying to her at length on any subject!

Around them the sub-tropical jungle basked in the warmth of the sun, birds were singing to attract mates, some were already cooperating to feed their chicks and the butterflies and bees were busily pollinating flowers. Nearby a patch of



white flowers with orange hearts we're enjoying the attention of the bees! For Nicholas and Elizabeth it all made perfect sense now! It seemed the most natural thing to be a part of.

They'd fully joined the adult world! Their honeymoon was unfolding beautifully and on their terms with no chance of their first intimate union being sullied, in any way, by Constance's determined, unrelenting cruelty. They'd been wise to wait –these memories would last a lifetime! They'd always smile – or in Lizzie's case, giggle, when they thought about it all and reminisced together, over champagne or tea, coffee or beer - or just when they lay in each others arms!

Being what they are, honeymoons often demand repeated affirmations –just to be really sure! Theirs was no exception, as couples throughout history can attest to. So, nothing new to report for them-just nature running its course, as always.

All was safe and right again in their little world. They'd come full circle – back to the one safe, special place they'd kept a complete secret from even parents for the entire 7 years and 7 months they'd known and loved each other ! Now all that remained was for them to agree on their 7<sup>th</sup> and final wish. It had to wait for this occasion; it needed this union, first! As they lay there, now late afternoon – young newlyweds, still naked, in each other's arms, enjoying the unseasonably warm, sunny day knowing they still had an hour or two of afternoon to decide before the stars came out after sunset, they chatted away easily about everything –anything, about love and life, dreams, wishes, children and their future life in faraway Canada looming large now...a hostile, cold place. Nicholas planned ahead, asking the Hotel to pack them a picnic and he'd brought their favorite drink –Mountain dew, kept somewhat cool in the waters of their pool –too cool at this time of year to comfortably swim in. Now with their primal appetite temporarily satiated they dressed, returning to open their picnic packed for them by Fairy Knowe, finding an assortment of tasty little sandwiches, hard-boiled eggs, sliced veggies, cold cocktail sausages, cold Boerewors and little meatballs, cheeses -even 2 big slices, each, of carefully wrapped chocolate cake! This was a feast fit for a Princess – a lot fancier than anything they'd ever had here, before now.

But that wasn't the only special thing they'd savored here today that matched this delicious description! They'd always enjoyed good food. Now they'd awakened another appetite – one that never really seems to be satisfied either... similar to the natural, insatiable desire for good, tasty, wonderful food!



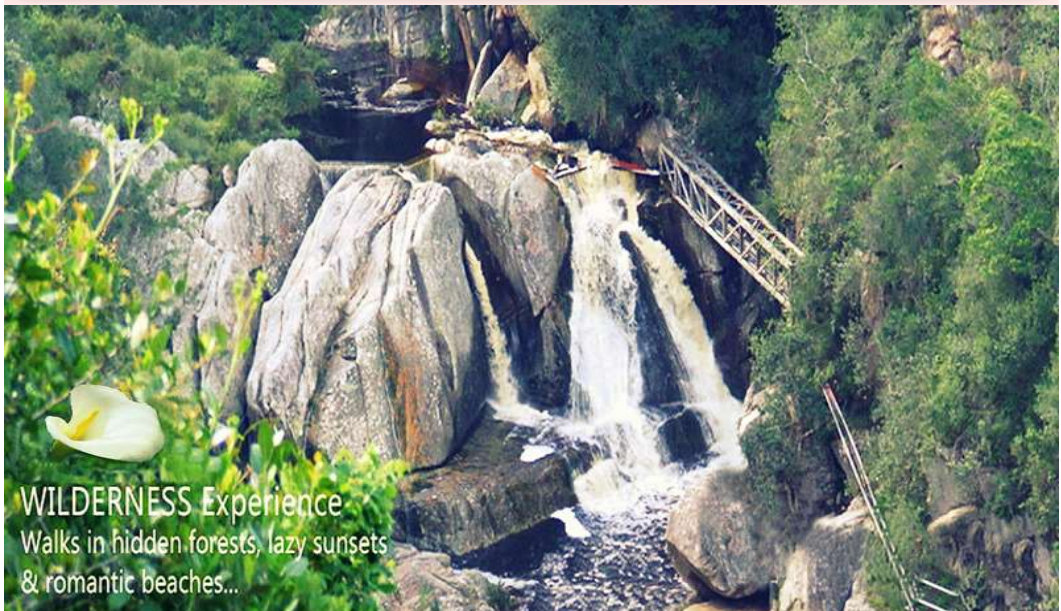
Nicholas now quickly got dressed, so that they could eat.











WILDERNESS Experience  
Walks in hidden forests, lazy sunsets  
& romantic beaches...

## Chapter 21

### **Nicholas & Lizzie get ready for their final wish.**

While Nicholas was opening all the food to get it ready for them, Lizzie opened the plastic bag she'd brought, removing a beautiful, 2-tone, pink, cotton, dress, proceeding now to put it on. Nicholas approved - Elizabeth looked radiant in it!

"Wow Lizzie, that's a surprise!" Nicholas said, stopping "It's really beautiful – and it's your favorite color!" Everyone knew very well that pink was Elizabeth's most favorite color of all!

Lizzie smiled appreciatively, saying "I got it for you -for now!" adding "We brides must have our special honeymoon dress."

Now as they sat enjoying their picnic, knowing they'd have plenty of leftovers, Lizzie opened up the conversation ...

"Nicholas, have you given any thought to our 7<sup>th</sup> and final wish? I mean, this is fortunately one we can now discuss out in the open and first agree upon before nightfall arrives."

"Well, kind of... I have elements of our final wish that we can discuss, no doubt so have you – though we've recently experienced feelings and emotions that are quite new to us, so we may want to somehow include in our wish?" he said.

"Nicholas ... don't be naughty! I kind of think that if all of our other wishes do come true, that part will be well taken care of – don't you?" She replied with a giggle and a wink.

"Well, it wouldn't hurt to include it somehow!" he reiterated.

"Ok, but as long as we do that tastefully – I'd not want the Blue Fairy to blush bright red here tonight Mr. Strauss!" She chided him playfully "So no X-rated wishes allowed!"

Nicholas laughed a little guiltily, then decided to get serious "So Lizzy, let's review what we've asked for and maybe what we haven't yet asked for will distill out of that mix?" he said.

“Good idea Nicholas ... so go ahead, I’m all ears!” she said, encouraging him to lead, remembering how the other way around had really not worked out well in her old family!

“Let’s see now, Nicholas began “We’ve wished that we’d get to choose, freely, to love and marry each other – rather than be forbidden to marry each other - then be forced to marry those we don’t love as much” and I think we can both agree that those wishes of ours are now successfully completed?”

“Yes!” Lizzie replied “They’ve both now come true –continue.”

“We both wished that one day we’d be able to love and live together, in a place like this...” he said, pausing to wave his hand across the panoramic image of the waterfall, pool and river before them, directing her to look at the beauty there.

“Yes, and though you’ve cautioned me that your career may well limit that to only being possible for our retirement age – at the earliest, I reserved the right to dream about that wish of ours coming true, well before then!” She reminded him.

“OK, that’s true, I’ll concede that small possibility.” he said. “Then I wished that we never, ever spend another Christmas eve apart from each other, as long as we both live” he said, concluding “Had I not been allowed to visit you in Canada last year, that wish would have been the first to fail!” adding “But so far, so good – and now that we’re married to each other, we’re in the driver’s seat directing that wish!” he said.

“Yes...” Lizzie agreed “I think that one is probably safe now!”

“Finally, Elizabeth, you wished that you’d bear me strong healthy sons (meaning at least 2) to take the family name – as you have too now, Mrs. Strauss...” He said smiling at her about to continue - but she interrupted him right then.

“Before we continue Nicholas, let me just spend a little time re-iterating why the Strauss name is so important to me – other than being a prominent name of main streets in South Africa and even the name of the most expensive property on the South African Monopoly set ... just before GO” she said, “It’s just that with my mother having done all those horrible things to me, to you and others, and with dad being well, let me put this tactfully – ‘not a strong man’, certainly not the

head of his household, I'm more than a little ashamed of the Smythe family name, so I'd really don't want it perpetuated. Fortunately, due to being one of only two girls, it won't be!"

"Shame Lizzie, I'm really sorry that turned out the way it did –but I rather think that we had very little say in that matter. I think that pattern for your old family was set in place long before either of us arrived on the scene," Nicholas remarked, before adding "But I do know our family is honored to adopt you, Mrs. Elizabeth Strauss, into our midst – So welcome!"

Lizzie smiled, relieved to have that out of the way, then said "Thank you Nicholas! I'm honored to become Mrs. Elizabeth Meriwether Strauss –though I'm going to shorten that to M!"

Nicholas chuckled "OK, that's understandable ... so now Mrs. Elizabeth M. Strauss ... what else?" he asked of her.

"Well Nicholas, we're getting down to the nitty-gritty of what we have and have not wished for, so you continue" she said.

"Yes, well, as I recall you also wished that you may love our children with a love that was very unlike what your mother calls love ... which is really just control, not love at all, and really, I'd say that your recognition of that fact, plus you no longer wanting to be a Smythe – but a Strauss, has placed you squarely on-track to fulfilling that wish!" he confirmed.

"Yes, I rather fancy it has!" She replied, adding "And by the way Nicholas, I never really said I'd not want daughters, or I'd be upset if we had girls, I just implied that I'd like to keep going till we've had at least two sons – which may mean we end up with a lot of children! Are you ready for my wish to become reality?" Lizzie asked – playfully nudging his ribs.

"Ha Ha – good one!" Nicholas laughed, rather nervously, as what she said sank in "But then we'll just have to practice more – like maybe right now?" He said, hopeful ... winking.

"Oooh ... Nicholas, I like your thinking!" But work first - pleasure later!" she reminded him now, with a coy smile. "Oh well...I thought we may need a break?" He said winking.

“So Nicholas, what have we left out?” She asked him, trying to get Nicholas to concentrate a little less on his hormones.

“I think it’s rather obvious Lizzie – we have not wished for long lives – together, and grandchildren, lovely daughters-in-law and/or sons-in-law, as reality dictates, and sufficient wealth ...” But right then Lizzie interrupted him again ...

“And good health! Yes, I’d hate for you, or I, to be left alone for many years here on earth! I’m sure you would too?”

“Good point Lizzie!” Nicholas said smiling lovingly at her “So do you have anything else you’d recommend we include?” he asked Lizzie, not sure if they’d anything more to agree on.

“Actually yes ... I’d been meaning to bring it up, but I’d not figured out an appropriate way to say it yet ...” she started

“Well Lizzie, how about you just say it, c’mon... out with it!”

“Nicholas...” She began, still a little nervous, then decided “if not now – when?” so she continued “You know we met here when I was barely 15, some 7 ½ years ago, and well, really we were just children ... but we’re adults now. Somewhere along the line we grew up – probably as a result of the pain that was so unfairly inflicted on us and many separations – you off to war – 2 wars actually when all was said and done, me finishing high-school, then off to University, then on to Canada and now eloping back to Cape Town to marry you” Lizzie paused to let all of that sink in, then continued “Well, right here in this beautiful secret place of ours, that’s been so protective over us all throughout our youth, I became a woman today – and you became a man. All those fantasies, all the play-acting we did here through the years, well, that was wonderful and we’ll never ever forget it! But it’s like this was our incubator and it’s done its job well so now we don’t need fantasy anymore. We need to move on into a real world - even one with all its problems. Do you understand what I’m saying or am I wrong?” she asked, seeking confirmation, watching as a whole range of emotions now engulfed him. Nicholas looked at Lizzie, as she spoke, and when she was done, he realized their youth was now officially over – that



part of their lives, wonderful as it was, was ready to end, a new era for them – harsher, yes, but very real, had begun! They needed to make a symbolic break with their past and move on into their future now, together – a very different future, to be sure – one with so many unknowns, Canada, her family, living far away from all of his family, starting a new life together, his career, all the homes they'd have, the children that would be born ... it all seemed a little scary!

“So Lizzie, I guess what you are saying is that the time for play-acting is over – now we have to get serious?” he asked.

“That sounds a little harsh Nicholas, but basically, yes!” she said “We need to put the past in a picture frame that we can pick up and, together, reminisce about from time to time – but we have so many adult challenges that lie ahead of us now, and I know we can face them, head-on and together!”

“Ok Lizzie, I think get the point –it's time for us to be adults” Nicholas said “But Lizzie, being young sweethearts here sure was fun!” he said, trying to get her to not forget it entirely!

“Yes Nicholas, it sure was, and maybe one day our dreams will come true - then as adults, we'll find a similar place to this, somewhere in the world, where we can do all of this again - in a home of our own, with a family of our own and not just be visitors to our secret pool once a year, but live there, together – forever! Nice as this place was, we always had to say goodbye to each other and to this beautiful place – there were no exceptions! We need more permanency than that. Lady Jennifer cannot return here each year to pine away waiting for Sir Ian to return from war, for their love's annual reunion to both enjoy a brief respite. This wonderful place has always been just that – it needs to be retired now.”

Nicholas sighed “I suppose you're right Lizzie, we should say goodbye to this wonder-filled place now... then leave to live in the real world, with all its many problems – but here, for us, they didn't exist. The sample you and I have had of that cruel world out there, doesn't exactly thrill me – though I suppose like everyone else we have to somehow endure it, and so we shall, but I will admit this much ... I'll work hard

and I'll buy into the dream of yours that one fine day we'll live together forever, not just visit, in a place like this – two young lovers again!" He said "That dream I'll dream along with you!" adding "Let's just keep the faith, we're together!"

"Yes Nicholas, it dawned on me, as you rowed me upstream in the canoe, one more time, that it will be the last time we do this, that we've actually come to say goodbye to our secret place. We came here to consummate our love that started here 7 years and 7 months ago –we came here to make our 7th wish, together, not our first of many wishes – our final, last wish! Our love was birthed here – in water, it's time it's re-born into an adult world. Perhaps not being able to swim here today wasn't such a coincidence? There's no unfinished business left here. We've both graduated to adulthood. We can go out to take on the world together! Are you ready for that? Are you with me on this Nicholas Strauss?" she asked.

"Yes Elizabeth Strauss ... I'm with you and you're with me, and that after all, was our fondest dream, one we'd dreamed right here for so many years now! We've done it Lizzie –our love survived! Now it's time to do all the more normal adult things you mentioned ... so Lizzie, how do we wrap this all up neatly, with a golden bow, neatly... with class?" He asked

"Well, for starters we're not living in a Disney movie, and the Blue fairy doesn't exist –but both of us now believe that God does exist –and that He really cares for us... if we'll let Him, so rather than make our 7<sup>th</sup>, final wish using our old format, why not let's say a joint prayer together here, asking God to please help us with the adult life we now are facing, to guide us through all its obstacles –better yet, around them?" She suggested – but seeing him a bit hesitant, she continued... "I'd really suggest that we both, jointly, thank God tonight, for everything that we have had come true – I mean, here we are, finally married! Let us entrust our lives, health, wealth, love and future family all to him... asking for his blessing!" Lizzie concluded "I mean wishes and blue-fairies are a sweet way to phrase things, for kids – but fairies are not real! Only God can –if He so wishes, deliver for us what we've asked for in our 7 wishes – so let's change the format of our last wish,

shall we? Instead let's make it a humble, grateful prayer to God –who really does care, if we're smart enough to actually ask Him for his blessings on our new family! I mean, we've not got the blessing of my earthly mother and we may never get that... as for those of my dad? Well, let's just say he does whatever mother demands of him – but God doesn't answer to her or anyone else! From what I've seen lately, unusual things happen when we begin to trust God with our lives. I mean, do you recall a certain SAA Boeing 747 having to turn around before take-off and to return to the terminal in Cape Town on October 6<sup>th</sup> 1978? I asked the crew if that had ever happened to that flight or plane, before –and they confirmed it was only that time! So here we are against all those odds!"

"Wow Lizzie – those are very serious, sobering observations. I think our passion here is spent now ... this is serious stuff! But yes, I agree... though may I just add a note of caution?"

Yes Nicholas?" She interrupted him, "What would you add?"

"I... and you, have seen how bad things can happen to good people – God's people, so let us never hold God responsible for not delivering on our wishes in exactly the way we've asked – let us concede that He is God, this is His Creation and that we're just a small part of that, then give Him the leeway to choose for us what's best –in other words, Veto powers!" Nicholas said – a lot more serious now, after Lizzie had directed his thoughts, temporarily, away from pleasure. "Mind you, not that He needs our permission for that - but you know what I mean, Lizzie ..." He said, smiling at her.

"OK Nicholas, what you've said is true, so though it's getting late now, we don't have to wait for any stars to shine - lets simply pray together here, asking God for all these things." she replied "I think we take turns speaking to Him, together as a newlywed couple –and start by telling him how grateful we are that he had His angels watch over us!" she suggested

"That makes sense Lizzie –and it feels right, so lets do that!"

As Nicholas and Lizzie knelt there next to their pool, the constant sound of the waterfall accompanying them, they

held hands and, for the very first time prayed together there. Lizzie insisted Nicholas Lead their prayers. Then they took turns speaking to God, thanking Him for allowing them to meet here, in the first place, on 21<sup>st</sup> of December, 1971 and for all the many wonderful years that they'd enjoyed here – loving each other, for nurturing their young love, allowing it to mature here and for protecting their love from enemies so that finally it could be consummated here; then asking their Father for His blessing and protection for their adult lives that lay ahead of them and for all the many things they'd agreed to wish for together here, today and also in the past.

The sun was setting. Realizing that only one nostalgic thing remained to be done, Nicholas quickly slipped out of his clothes and ran into the pool - but when the water hit his chest, it almost took his breath away. This time of year the pool's water was quite a lot cooler than at Christmas, which was summer-time. Instead of exclaiming about how cold it was, Nicholas stood up, water now up to his waist, then he beckoned to Lizzie to come in and join him in the pool, one last time – for old-time's sake. But Lizzie was suspicious, so she went to the edge of the pool and dipped her foot into the water - and not for long! Then she stood there laughing at him “Nicholas, are you crazy? I'm not going to swim in such a cold pool, with or without you!” Then she turned to walk away from the edge of the pool, laughing, just in case he did something silly – like try to splash her or grab her and pull her into it with him. But Nicholas wouldn't dare do so - they were both adults now and childish things were behind them.

Elizabeth handed him a towel as he emerged from the pool, shivering. He dried off in record time, then he got dressed.

Now they sat down next to each other and decided to enjoy the ambience of the sunset at their secret place ... feeling very satisfied that everything they'd wished for – or rather prayed for, this time, was about their future as a married couple - no longer wishes of young, unmarried sweethearts. It felt very special to return here ... as husband and wife! They spoke about what their plans were for their marriage, where they'd start out (Toronto Canada) how they'd earn a

living, what kind of house they'd buy, when they'd probably want to start a family (by 28) and so much more. But really they were stalling now ... both realizing, deep down, that by coming here today and wrapping everything up neatly, there really wasn't a need to return. From Canada, that would be costly and difficult anyway. The end of an era had arrived.

When they were done, they stood up to stretch their legs. It was dark now and after the sobering conversation here their mood was less focused on re-consummating their marriage; now more focused on all the unknowns that still lay ahead.

Then they packed up the food, blanket, empty pop cans and just as they were about to leave, stood there hugging each other, looking at their pool and waterfall, illuminated by the newly risen moon - one last time ... before Nicholas finally sighed and, taking out his flashlight, led Lizzie along the path back down to the river bank to where their canoe still lay patiently waiting for them. Both of them were silent.

It was now dark enough as they left, that neither of them had seen the tears forming in each others eyes as they'd turned to go... but by the time they'd reached the canoe, their tears had dried up and they were chatting away very relaxed and happily, once again, as they'd always done.

They preferred not to think or talk about their waterfall and pool they'd left behind. In a way they were gliding down the river - on into their future. They chatted about what they'd do later. Plenty of food was left plus a bottle of champagne waiting for them in their room. They'd go back to the hotel, shower and freshen-up and continue their picnic there.

They'd watch a moonlit scene below them - the site of their first kiss! But this time they'd not venture down to the river's bank, there to once again kiss under the palms there -in the moonlight. Instead they'd look down from a distance remembering that kiss with their champagne glasses filled. That all sounded very welcome and very adult, since, of course, they'd also be in the privacy and comfort of their room, where now kisses would lead to a lot more than they did down once upon a time, there under the palms ... once upon a time, back when they were still both just teenagers.

## Chapter 22

### **Saying a Sad goodbye to Siesta – but this time, forever!**

Nicholas and Lizzie were chatting away easily and happily as he now guided the canoe back down the river towards Fairy Knowe, having lit two candles and placed them on either side of her. Lizzie sat with her back against the front of the canoe, facing toward him. Combined with the moon's light, he had enough visibility to navigate the placid, dark river.

Lizzie looked at him and said "By the way Nicholas, though she didn't go into any detail of what I should do, it was your mom's idea for me to disrobe and let you see me fully naked before we consummated our marriage!" she said, smiling.

Nicholas laughed "I'll have to thank mom!" he said, adding "Now I understand why you didn't wear your honeymoon-dress from the start –it wouldn't have worked as well for your strip-tease!" which got Lizzie to smile and wink at him.

Their mood had lifted ... they were back doing what they'd enjoyed so much, for so many years, only now they were on their honeymoon! It was very quiet as they passed under the railway bridge, then on past a very dark Siestuary where the Serpentine river joined the main stream. Now as the canoe drifted silently by Siesta, the camp-ground where they'd met at Christmas-time way back in 1971, Nicholas spoke "Lizzie, look...it's in total darkness, Deathly quiet - not sure why?" adding "I have the key to my parents Caravan parked in its permanent spot, let's stop here a while to check-up on it, so we can tell them it's ok, when we see them later this week?"

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Nicholas and Lizzie were walking hand-in-hand, in the dark, in a deserted, eerily quiet caravan park, making their way to his parents holiday trailer, parked there, patiently awaiting the upcoming Christmas holidays when they would return for a month to enjoy the S. hemisphere's summer, the beach

and all the natural beauty. Now only the moon lit their way.

Getting to the caravan, Nicholas took out the key and tried the door handle – it was open! Suddenly they heard frantic activity inside and several black men exited in a great hurry, knocking Nicholas down. Lizzie let go of his hand, jumping out of their way, yelling “Careful Nicholas!” but Nicholas had slumped down to the ground. Lizzie now rushed to his side, thinking he’d been bowled over by the men as they’d rushed past him? But Nicholas was struggling to raise himself, and then Lizzie saw why ... he was holding onto the handle of a knife embedded deep within his chest, gasping for air with a labored gurgling sound ... a look of horror now on his face.

“Nicholas! Oh no–Nicholas! Please, please Lord, this can’t be happening to us, not on our honeymoon, not ever! Please let this just be a bad nightmare –please help us!” she cried out.

Nicholas collapsed backwards as Lizzie leaned down to hold him in her arms, her tears flowing freely, fighting to stop herself from becoming hysterical at a critical time when he needed her help ... but clearly Nicholas was fading fast now.

“Nicholas! Please stay with me –don’t close your eyes! Please try to stay alive! I can’t imagine a life without you!” But now she saw that the gurgling sounds, was blood from his lungs. As his head slumped sideways, it was flowing out of the corner of his mouth -worse yet, his eyes were now fluttering closed. Lizzie bent down to kiss his forehead, and through her tears, whispered in his ear “Nicholas, you can’t leave me now, please don’t! I’m too young to be your widow... please!”

With all strength he had left, Nicholas forced his head up, opened his eyes and looked at her. Through his gurgling, in a labored voice, he said “Lizzie... your mother was right, we should never have married. Please contact Charles, he loves you, he’ll do the right thing now. You two have my blessing.”

“No Nicholas! Stay with me!” Lizzie sobbed, heartbroken. “If only I’d listened to mother, this wouldn’t be happening!” As Nicholas’ chest heaved with a final sigh, through tears Lizzie said “I love you Nicholas! I always have, always will, always!” Nicholas didn’t reply with his usual reassurance. Instead he lay there limp, in her arms, eyes still open, looking up at her

in the moonlight. For a brief moment Lizzie thought she saw a hint of a smile in his eyes, then it was gone. Her soul-mate now lay lifeless in her arms and tears were streaming down Lizzie's cheeks, her chest racked with sobs as Nicholas' neck muscles relaxed and his head fell sideways, causing her to place her left hand behind his head, turning him to face her again, hoping against all her fears, that she'd still find some glimmer of life – of hope, left in his eyes. But Nicholas' soul had left his body, back to where it came from. Their shared hopes and dreams had ended... right where, 7y and 7m ago, they'd begun. Lizzie bent over, burying her face in Nicholas' chest, feeling the knife handle press against her cheek, still holding his head upright, her tears mingling freely with the blood drenching his shirt, sobbing. "Nicholas, I'm so sorry! Please forgive me!" she cried out to him "I should've known this would end badly. Nobody rebels against mother without suffering dire consequences. I should have let you go - that would've been kinder." Raising herself, still holding his head she sat stroking his face lovingly, her tears spilling over her cheeks, down onto him. Gently closing his eyes, Lizzie spoke "Farewell my love, until we meet again ... I'm sure we will".

Constance, sitting in her chair, alone at home in faraway Canada, smiled over her tea "Oh what a nice, happy ending that would be ... and so richly deserved - *for both of them!*"

End of AUDIO \* End of AUDIO \* End of AUDIO \* End of AUDIO \* End of AUDIO

Suddenly Lizzie shivered, looking at Nicholas illuminated by flickering candles in the front of the canoe. Remembering what her dad advised her, she said: "No Nicholas! I'd rather not do that, if you don't mind. It's been a long day. I'd like a shower now so we can relax back at our hotel alone. Let's come and spend the day here tomorrow, say hi to Mr. Nixon and walk around reminiscing about all the fond times gone by, check on your parent's caravan, then go and sit at our favorite old weathered, grey wooden bench in the Siestuary. Then we'll relive the many happy times we sat chatting there laughing, hugging and kissing! It looks to me like we'll have the place all to ourselves tomorrow – today's done for us!"

"Ok Lizzie! He replied –suddenly realizing that a warm, cozy comfortable bed lay patiently waiting all day for their return.



“Nicholas, I’m feeling very cold all of a sudden, please... row faster! We’re almost back to Fairy-Knowe. I’d like to go back to our cozy room. We can figure out, over champagne, what else to do ...” she said with a wink and coy smile that was clearly visible in the flickering candle-light illuminating her. But Lizzie was confused. Somehow the thought of revisiting Siesta wasn’t quite as appealing as it once was. She sighed.

Arriving back at Fairy-know, they blew out the candles and he beached the canoe so that Lizzie could get out first. Then he got out into the shallow water and pulled the canoe up onto the grassy river bank and turned it upside down – in case it rained later. Then they walked back to the front-desk to hand back the paddle. At the front desk the lady on duty, eating her supper, looked up at them “Young man, we were very worried about you two – we thought we may have to launch a search party! 6pm is when the canoes have to be returned. It’s almost 8pm, we’re glad you’re back!” adding “We figured your honeymoon was a good reason to be late”.

“Sorry about that” ... Nicholas replied, we kind of lost all track of time and only left after it got dark – speaking of which, why is Siesta in total darkness? We’re thinking of going back there tomorrow - to go and visit Mr. Nixon and spend much of the day there, reminiscing.” He asked her.

“You’d be wasting your time,” the lady said, after a sip of her tea, “Mr, Nixon died some time ago... from Prostate cancer, I believe, and the place is shut-down until his heirs can figure out what to do with it.” She said. “It’s basically deserted till then, and we’ve had reports that vagrants are now using it for sleeping quarters and using its toilets and showers and breaking into the caravans left there – it’s very dangerous!” she added, “overgrown with weeds and in decay - you’ll just spoil any old fond memories you two still have left of Siesta!”

“Well, that kind of changes things!” Nicholas replied “So we now have an extra day on our hands ... by the way, please thank the kitchen staff for a fantastic spread they provided for our Honeymoon picnic! We’ve got enough left for supper in our room” He said with a smile as they were leaving.

“You’re welcome! We’re quiet this time of the year,” she said.

Author's note: I didn't have to struggle making-up Constance's "dark fantasy". Over time, we've witnessed her speaking of and/or conjuring up "fantasies" far more cruel and diabolical than that! Twice we've had to run for our lives. Love stories of many loving couples continue to end in this sad way daily, in S. Africa – much more so now, than ever before! This particular tragedy is based on a very real one. I've included it on purpose. Shortly after Lizzie and Nicholas wed, a young couple, children of the small rural African community of Sterkspruit (where Nicholas grew up) lived this tragedy. Tabu (Denise's old boyfriend) managed a trading store high in the mountains, when several armed black men burst into the store. Tabu Mitchell knew they wanted the contents of the safe, so he took them to it, opened it and asked them to please not harm anyone – just take the money and go. But they tied them all up, face-down on the floor, shot each of them in the back, and then fled into the mountains. The bullet hit his wife's ribs, exiting out of her neck -it didn't kill her. When they'd left, she turned to call out to him, but he was gurgling blood out of the corners of his mouth, eyes glazing over. He died there, right next to her. She was pregnant with their first baby. Their baby was saved, his wife was partially paralyzed. South Africa, once a very romantic, safe place, is no longer a place we'd readily recommend to anyone! There's safer beautiful places in the world! We'd truly be saddened if anyone went there after reading the novels, and got hurt or killed! It's not even safe for wild animals who're being slaughtered by poachers. AK47's are cheaper than books... evil runs rampant!

Back in the late 1970's, in Cape Town, people would stop and wave at Elizabeth, saying "Hi Kate!" You have to be older to have watched "Rich man, Poor man" to remember how, in the south of France, in an epic love-story, Tom & Kate got married, and how, sadly, that love-story took a sudden, unexpected, deadly turn, as their honeymoon started. It had exactly the unhappy ending Constance ("the queen", Lizzie's mother) day-dreamed about, over her afternoon cup of tea, in faraway Canada, whilst Elizabeth & Nicholas were on their honeymoon in South Africa. She'd recently seen "Rich man, poor man" and knew her daughter was Kate's doppelganger. She relished "poor man" Tom's death, on his honeymoon, fantasizing of a similar fate for Nicholas. But thanks to Lizzie's dad (Edwin, in the novels) getting her to promise NOT to return to Siesta on their honeymoon, that ending, common in South Africa then, much more so now, didn't happen for them! Though they hide stories of extreme cruelty as well as they can, if you look - even just a little, you'll be horrified by the almost countless horror stories of mostly white young and old couples, families and children, not just being robbed (that's an afterthought) but cruelly tortured for hours - even days, raped in front of their parents or loved ones, then brutally murdered - by black (never white!) men that feign grievances, but were not ever alive during the apartheid era, and who've only ever suffered injustices under their very own (black) ANC rulers!



**Canadian documentary:** <http://Bit.ly/SouthAfricasShame>

## Chapter 23

**All good things come to an end ... even Honeymoons.**

It didn't take too long for Lizzie to shower and freshen up, and while Lizzie was ready, he'd gone to get a bucket of ice. By now the champagne was chilling perfectly, so he went to shower and got ready while Lizzie laid out the rest of their picnic on the small table in front of the window, overlooking the river and palms – with the moonlight doing a nice job of illuminating the scene of their first kiss for them. This was nice – no roughing it in a tent with a grass floor attached to the back of a caravan anymore, and though Nicholas could not afford the snobby 5-star Wilderness hotel – a famous honeymoon hotel, or even the scenic Holiday inn perched high on top of the bluffs overlooking the sea, Fairy Knowe was jam-packed with wonderful romantic memories for them and was cozy enough – with pretty gardens full of flowering Hibiscus of all colors, and many lovely walks.

When Nicholas came back into the room, Elizabeth stood looking out of the window in the dark to better see the scene before her. As Nicholas walked over to her and stood next to her, holding her hand, she gave his hand a squeeze, looked at him and smiled. With the back window, facing the sea, open –the hotel and surroundings perfectly quiet, the sound of waves crashing on the Indian ocean's shores could clearly be heard, reminding him of what they'd be doing tomorrow.

"We haven't been for walks along the beach yet – or to the terrace of the Holiday inn." He said, adding "Those waves sound so close, and they are -but it's one heck of a walk to get there from here! We're on the wrong side of the river! We have to take a long round-about route to get to a bridge to cross!" Nicholas remarked "So I'm just going to rent a canoe again – that would make getting to the beach easy!" he said. "That sounds lovely Nicholas" Lizzie said warmly, "But for now I'm just glad to be indoors, safe, clean and dry again!"

Both of them were quite hungry now, so while Nicholas opened the champagne and poured each of them a glass, Lizzie already started selecting tasty treats to go along with her bubbly – having learned on Christmas eve in the Walper hotel what drinking on a empty stomach tends to do to one! As they ate what was left of their picnic and drank their champagne, Lizzie and Nicholas chatted away, as easily as they ever did, but this time as a married couple, best friends and now... lovers. That was quite a milestone to celebrate – and so they did! Predictably, having eaten enough – but not too much, the champagne finished, Nicholas returned from washing his hands to find Lizzie in bed, the sheet covering all but her head, giggling at him, saying “Are you coming to join me here Nicholas?” adding “and just so you know... I’m only wearing this sheet!” she said, smiling most seductively! Well, anyone who’s been on a Honeymoon before knows that kind of invitation is rarely passed up –most often it’s eagerly accepted! Lizzie’s invitation was no exception to that rule! In what can only be called a rather ‘urgent way’ Nicholas quickly shed his clothes and climbed in under the sheets next to Lizzie - their choice of clothing matching now, and pretty soon they were passionately embraced again, making sure that their marriage was well and truly consummated so nobody could ever raise any objections! Afterwards they lay back in each other’s arms and chatted away excitedly about tomorrow’s plans. After a while though, as Nicholas was still talking about ... well, sweet nothings really, he realized that Lizzie was fast asleep in his arms, and so he lay there for a while, listening to the waves and her gentle breathing up against him... and soon he too drifted off into a happy sleep. Soon he awoke to find Lizzie standing over him “Wake up sleepy head, I’m not feeling well!” explaining “I need to pee often, but not a lot comes out! When it does, it burns and I feel weak, shaky!” adding “We need to go to a Dr. I’ve never felt this uncomfortable Nicholas – worse than period pains!” Nicholas got up to retrieve the Bactrim pills his dad had sent him. Filling a glass with water, he gave two to Lizzie saying “Yes, my dad warned me about exactly this! It’s a common side effect for most couples still enthusiastically honeymooning! Fortunately, I have the antidote here! Take

these” he said, reassuring her “you’ll soon be feeling fine! You’ll need to take one every 12 hours for the next 3 days.” Lizzie looked very relieved, and after taking the tablets, said with a wink “It’s sure real nice to be married to a Dr’s son!” Soon Lizzie felt better, and after chatting, drifted off to sleep. He awoke to find Lizzie feeling much better, getting ready. Hearing Nicholas wakening, she came out of the bathroom “Happy Birthday Nicholas! You’re 23 today, let’s celebrate!” Nicholas, still lying in bed, pulled Lizzie down into bed with him, smiling as he did so, saying “Thanks Lizzie, by the way, that’s sure a lovely birthday suit ... and you do wear it well!” Soon they were enjoying a hearty full English breakfast - Scrambled eggs, Bacon, Sausage, Toast, Jams, Coffee/tea - the only ones in the dining room! Coming here during the low-season had its perks! Privacy and service was excellent, food was good - the choice of rooms perfect! Prices were low. Back in their room again, Elizabeth made a call to Knysna. “Hello, who should I tell master Eugene is calling?” the man, obviously a butler, now asked a slightly surprised Lizzie. “Um ... Please tell uncle Eugene that it’s his God-daughter, Elizabeth - that I’m calling from the Wilderness,” she said, hearing the butler talking to a man nearby ... “Well Hello Elizabeth! This is a nice, unexpected surprise! I was wondering if I’d ever get to wish you a happy birthday ever again! You’re 22 now – I do keep track of that,” Eugene said “So what brings you to the Wilderness?” he asked. “I’m here on my honeymoon uncle Eugene, and we’re off to Knysna tomorrow, then on to Port Elizabeth, where I was born, to visit, for the last time, my roots and some family,” Lizzie replied “But I’d really like to see you tomorrow!” “That will be wonderful Elizabeth! You may not recall, but I was there for your birth - also at your Christening – I mean, I’m your God-father!” he joked, saying “I’ll send a chauffeur to the station to pick you up – there’s only one train now,” he said “It will be easy to find you – till tomorrow then!” With that they said their goodbyes and started out to enjoy their last canoe trip in the Wilderness, which was meant to

be to Siesta, to revisit where they'd first met –alone, but with that cancelled, it was now a short trip down-river to the very first bend. That all of 15 minutes – but saved them hours of walking! Dragging the canoe up onto the bank and hiding it under the trees, he took Lizzie's hand to help her up the hill and across the road to a path through the dunes that easily and quickly led them onto the beach. From there it was a lovely hour long walk -if one dallied to enjoy it, to get to the Holiday-inn sitting perched on the bluffs overlooking the magnificent scene - and dally they did! They took off their shoes and rolled their jeans up to their knees so that they could frolic together – chasing each other in the surf, doing their best to avoid the big waves that threatened to drench them, Lizzie acting like a young filly – giggling as Nicholas playfully chased her for wetting him with water she scooped up in her hands – allowing him to catch her, then squirming out of his arms to run to the dunes, collapsing backwards onto the soft white sand so that when he got to her, she was lying down coyly smiling at him, which made him, well ... more than a little eager! Lizzie eagerly encouraged his Kisses and Caresses, stopping him short when he started undoing the metal button of her Jeans "Later Nicholas ... back in the room! This spot here between the dunes may be perfectly private, but I'd rather not get a sandy bum today!" Nicholas sighed, then laughed "Yes I suppose that would be a bit of a hazard here, lots of sand!" he said waving his hand to show her what she already knew was all around them. Soon they were at the top of the stairs above the beach and putting on socks and shoes so that they'd not be denied a seat on the patio of the Holiday inn – which they weren't. The view was spectacular! Asking what Lizzie would like to drink now, she replied... "Woodpecker cider, of course!" That had always been their favorite drink here as young sweethearts, and since they'd each had more than enough Champagne last night, this tasty, bubbly light alcoholic beverage was not only nostalgic – but it was refreshing, and they had Nicholas' 23<sup>rd</sup> birthday to celebrate. Life was good! "Lizzie this is the best birthday of my whole life! Thank you!" Early the next morning, They checked out of Fairy Knowe, thanking the staff for a memorable honeymoon and got a

short ride from them to the Wilderness rail station, awaiting the old steam-train that would take them as far as Knysna. Soon enough they heard the whistle of the old steam train – the same one that prompted them to imagine they’d been granted 7 wishes, years ago. They enthusiastically stood up, waving the Engineer – imagining that the smiling old man maybe recognize them, which may well have been, as he gave them a brief “Toot Toot” of the steam whistle as he passed them and, looking back at them now, waved – then turned again to bring the train to a stop so that passengers could get on, or off. Soon they were on their way to Knysna, looking out of the compartment’s window as the train now crossed the bridge at Siesta under which they had regularly canoed – giving them a different perspective. Nicholas and Lizzie, sitting on the right hand side of the train, heading for lake country, saw the Siestuary at the meeting of 2 streams, spotting their favorite grey old bench ... but surrounded by weeds! The Siestuary was a very special, hidden little corner where they could go and sit in each others arms, next to the rivers, almost guaranteed to be alone, romance each other – and dream about their futures, and later, their life together! Lizzie excitedly exclaimed “There it still is Nicholas!” Our old favorite make-out spot! It’s a pity we couldn’t go back there. Siesta was where our love started, but South Africa’s a very different place now, not nearly as safe as in our youth. I’m not sure I’d like our last memories of Siesta to be ones of decay ... we’ll just have to remember it in our minds eye.”

Nicholas interrupted her now. “Lizzie, it will live on in the poem, ‘Summer Love’ that I wrote for you, declaring my love, openly, for the very first time.” he reminded her, and as the train rounded a bend, the Siestuary disappeared from their view, Nicholas hugged Lizzie, then recited the last verse of the poem he’d written for her years ago, from memory ...

*For there on the edge of that watery trench, at the meeting of two streams,  
Upon our favorite gray, old bench, we shared so many happy dreams!  
Always the remaining days went by too fast, and here in this most pleasant land,  
I vainly wished they could forever last, somehow for time quite still to stand.  
Alas, back home she’d soon be going, our love would have to wait another year,  
My heart broken ... its sadness showing, as it cried a little tear.*

Lizzie's eyes were moist now, but a smile alighted on her face as she gave Nicholas's hand a squeeze, saying "We've had 7 wonder-filled Christmases together, all but one of those – the Walper Christmas, we enjoyed here! We've shed enough tears from the 7 goodbyes we've had to endure, and after 7 years and 7 months, we're finally together Nicholas, now... and forever! We've made our 7<sup>th</sup> wish, together, and with God's blessing – which we sought at our secret place two nights ago, I feel confident about our future together!" Nicholas smiled and replied "So do I Lizzie ... so do I!" then added "You know, I'd not really counted all our goodbyes, but that sounds about right. Let's see now, there was the goodbyes at the end of our 1971, 1972 and 1973 summer holidays, that's three; Then June of 1974, just before I went to the air force, then after our surprise meeting, Christmas of 1975 – that's five; then when I put you on the plane to fly to Canada, in November 1978, last year; but then we were forced say goodbye after my failed rescue ... so you're right Lizzie, that's seven rather traumatic goodbyes! I'm sure glad there wasn't an 8<sup>th</sup> - I've suddenly got a feeling that would have been one too many!" he said, shivering, not sure why. "You know Nicholas..." Lizzie started "My mother once told me ... actually, she tried to make me believe it ... that she'd never really seen me cry until I met you ... that you were the source of all of my tears and that as time goes by, all of my tears would form a river, then a raging torrent heading for the edge of a mountain, that would sweep me over the edge of a waterfall, to my death on the rocks below – if I didn't get rid of you out of my life ... that I should rather go with her safer more secure option –and of course that was Charles..." Nicholas interrupted Lizzie "But Lizzie, that's most unfair of her ... I mean, were it not for all of her interference and her efforts to control your life, actually make that our lives, and to destroy our love for each other – well, I'd venture to guess that you'd not have shed many tears – least not of sadness!" "Exactly Nicholas!" Lizzie exclaimed "That's basically what I told her!" then added "I remember that happened after you'd left, after we'd gone to Niagara-Falls to say our final farewell before we once again were forcibly separated by her, so the



imagery of what she said was vivid in my mind as anyone who's ever visited Niagara-Falls stands in awe of that mighty river plunging over the edge of the escarpment and onto the rocks below – anyone caught up in that mighty river is sure to be washed over the edge of the abyss and perish on the rocks below the falls –that's really not a nice thought!"

"But Lizzie...that's not what happened, in the end!" Nicholas interrupted, feeling most uncomfortable with the imagery.

"Yes Nicholas, thank God for that!" Lizzie quickly replied as she sensed his discomfort, then continued "You know what I told her – to counter what really was her very bitter curse?"

"What Lizzie?" Nicholas asked "How did you disarm her?"

"I summoned up all the courage I had and through my tears I told mother that once upon a time I'd been blessed to swim in a beautiful, tranquil pool with you –far away from her and without her interference, and that in those early days, there were no tears, just pure, innocent love. But as time went by, her forcing me –us, to say so many sad goodbyes resulted in my tears filling that pool to overflowing, and it was only then that I'd been caught up in the ensuing raging torrent, swept to the very edge of the waterfall!" and before Nicholas could interrupt, she added "But that always, as I was being swept away by the river of my tears, I turned to look back, seeing her standing there smiling along the banks of the river and I desperately held up a hand for her to grasp... to pull me out to safety, but she just stood there smugly smiling, her arms folded tight on her chest, watching as I was being swept away towards the waterfall's edge ... on to a certain death."

"Wow Lizzie ... that's terribly frightening to think about!" Nicholas exclaimed "What did she say to you?" he asked.

"She didn't flinch or feel remorse – she just looked at me and with a smirk said that if I didn't do what she wanted, what she knew was best for my life, that I'd have to pay the ultimate price for my rebellion and that I would deserve it!"

"That's terrible Lizzie!" Nicholas sighed "How can a mother ever wish that outcome for a child – that's not love, that's control – plain and simple! It's also heartless!" He added.

"Yes Nicholas, that's what I concluded too!" Lizzie replied "And you know how I ended that cruel power play of hers?"

"I can't imagine Lizzie ... I'm shocked!" Nicholas responded.

"Through my tears I looked up at her and told her that while she'd always been willing to watch me being swept away by the river of my tears, towards my death -relishing my fate as a deserved punishment for not submitting to her will, to her plans for my life, that always - and often at the very edge of the waterfall, I'd turn away from her and find you standing there on a rock beckoning me to swim towards you, which I did! As I approached that abyss, I'd hold up my arm towards your outstretched arms and you'd always grasped my hand and at the critical moment, pulled me up to safety, into your arms, holding me, wet with the water... with all of my tears, tightly against your chest and reassuring me that I was safe and that you'd protect me -even give your life for me!" Lizzie concluded "Nicholas, she wasn't happy with that imagery!"

"Oh Lizzie ... I'm so sorry you had to endure all of that pain without me being there to help you get through it!" he said.

"But you were Nicholas! You were there with me then, safely tucked away in my heart... and it was your love for me, and my love for you that enabled me to endure that cruel attack, and the sadness that was once again, foisted on us, by her!"

"Well Lizzie, here we are ... Newlyweds, on our honeymoon, back where it all began, and we've just revisited the tranquil waters of our beautiful, safe pool at the base of the waterfall, and though it was too cold to swim, we officially became Mr. and Mrs. Strauss there! Some very beautiful memories were made there including our final wish. No plunging over the edge!" Nicholas said, adding "Love won! You won! We won!"

Elizabeth looked into his eyes, smiling at him, then settled her head snugly onto his chest as his arms enfolded her and said "Yes Nicholas... I thank God, and I know you do too, as we both needed a lot of help to get this far! We've needed a lot of supernatural help -even miracles, to survive her many attacks on us - on our love! I'm sure ... now that I have the benefit of hindsight, that on the first day we met, it was God prompting my mother to get my dad to stop their Mercedes, that day we were driving back from the beach, so she could offer you a ride back to Siesta. You ended up sitting next to me and later that day we'd meet again, and walk together,

hand in hand, on into our future! I believe that on that day, at age 15, the plan for my eventual rescue ... was launched!"

"You know Lizzie ... we discussed that on our first night at Fairy-Knowe, but that really rings true!" Nicholas exclaimed, holding her even tighter against his chest now, protectively.

As the train chuffed past the first lake with its island in the center, realizing that the wilderness was soon going to be behind them, Nicholas said to Lizzie "Why do I feel like we'll never be back here – ever again, Lizzie?" He asked her.

"Because Nicholas, we've left our childhood behind there..." she said pointing back at the now distant hills surrounding the Wilderness valley "Now, as adults, we'll soon head into the unknown - to Canada, to start an entirely new life – but don't worry, the sounds and scenes of many happy, loving times here, are forever etched into our memory, and will also remain a part of the beautiful beach, river, pool and waterfall – forever!" she said, adding "They're in our Garden of Memories, and we'll tend them and admire them there, together, as often as we want!" causing Nicholas to reply ...

"Yes, that's true Lizzie –I kind of wonder if some romantic person visiting there, will find the rewind and play buttons of that pool's memories – and, well, the scenes from Monday afternoon may get them a little too excited!" Nicholas joked.

"Nicholas!" Lizzie exclaimed, blushing. "Bite your tongue!"

Nicholas laughed ... teasing her "That's not quite what you said to me then Elizabeth!" he said smiling, winking at her.

"Be quite!" she rebuked him playfully "But I like naughty... now!" she said, smiling coyly at him, blushing noticeably!

"Well Elizabeth" He replied "I've a feeling we're well suited to one another –we think the same, on most things!" he joked!

The old steam-train chuffed around a chain of beautiful lakes, disappearing into dense forests, eventually emerging into a valley at the head of the Knysna lagoon. It traversed the sides of the lagoon into Knysna itself, which also held many fond memories from their youth! At the station they got off, looking around for a chauffer. That didn't take long, he stood there with a placard with "Elizabeth" written on it.

## Chapter 24

### **Elizabeth finally gets to meet her God-father!**

The Rolls entered a long driveway, proceeding along the side of a hill overlooking a beautiful beach at Noetzie, Knysna, coming to a circular driveway with gardens in the middle, stopping in front of a large old stone castle-like mansion. Standing at the top of the steps was a distinguished looking elderly man, formally dressed with a blazer, cravat and glasses. The Chauffeur opened the door of the Rolls-Royce.

As they arrived at the top of the stairs, Elizabeth up-front, she headed straight to the man standing there with a smile, extending her hand, asking “You must be uncle Eugene?”

“Yes indeed - I am,” then taking her outstretched hand, he stood back a bit and looked at her – as if he was looking for something from his past. Finding it, he smiled, then asked “Well, are you going to introduce me to this young man?”

“Oh, sorry about that uncle Eugene – I was just a bit taken aback. This is my husband, Nicholas Strauss, we’re just ending our honeymoon and off to PE, then to his parents.”

Letting go of Lizzie’s hand, Eugene now turned to Nicholas, extending his hand to him and saying “Welcome, Nicholas. I often wondered about my God-daughter - who she’d end up marrying is no longer an un-answered question,” lets all go inside – I’ve had the kitchen staff prepare a big pot of Earl-Grey tea, fresh scones for us all to enjoy – with strawberries from the garden, and of course, fresh whipped cream too!”

With that they all followed him into the mansion which for them felt like a castle, heading for a large, but cozy room with a high ceiling and large windows overlooking the beach. Eugene ushered them to one leather couch, then went to sit on a large leather chair facing them, a wooden table between them, no doubt for their tea which, right on time, appeared. A maid served them tea and when they’d all relaxed enough to start seriously chatting, it was Eugene who asked ...

“So Elizabeth, all you remember of me is that I’m your God-father and never forgot any of your birthdays throughout your childhood – but other than that, what do you know?”

“Lizzie stopped to sip her tea, then putting it back on the saucer, she smiled at Eugene and replied “I was told that you’re a old family friend from our Port-Elizabeth days, and that you were asked to be my God-father – please keep in mind I was an infant then. We left Port Elizabeth shortly after I was 3. So really uncle Eugene, I remember very little.”

“Hmmm ... well, I see that we have quite a bit of catching up to do, but before I tell you my story, I’d like to hear your and Nicholas’ story – how you met, where, when – everything!”

Nicholas, for once, said nothing. He just sipped his tea and enjoyed his scone, perhaps a little too much, whilst leaving all to Lizzie. Lizzie summarized their story, without leaving out the tough parts – with class, so he kept on drinking tea.

“Oh my Elizabeth, I’m shocked! Soon you’ll understand why, but for now I wish this cup of tea was Champagne as I’d like to toast you two ... I’m so very happy for you Elizabeth, and also pleased to meet you, Nicholas, and to know you stuck by my God-daughter through what can only be called, and I’m being diplomatic now, quite the ordeal! Thank you for that!” he said, looking at Nicholas, one hand holding his saucer, the other his tea-cup – held up high, for his toast.

Finally Nicholas spoke “Thank you for your kind words Mr. Montjoy – now we’re both dying to hear how you fit into the big picture? What was it that made you so kind and caring for so many years? I mean, you never saw Lizzie again,” so I’m more than a little intrigued, as I’m sure, is Elizabeth!”

Putting down his tea-cup, Eugene now sat back and took out his pipe from his jacket pocket, asking “Do you mind if I have a few puffs on my pipe while I tell you how I fit into the bigger picture?” he asked – before lighting his pipe.

Both Lizzie and Nicholas smiled, replying “That would be fine” both relieved that they’d be smelling the pleasant aromas of an well-used old wooden pipe, rather than the choking, pungent smell and burning paper of cigarettes.

After lighting up and taking a few puffs of his pipe, with his one leg over the other, his left hand in his jacket pocket and his right hand holding his pipe, Eugene started to explain...

“Well, so that I don’t spend too much time keeping you both in suspense, after hearing your own love story, suffice it to say that I’m the ‘Charles’ in your parent’s lives. Surprised?”

Startled, Lizzie’s hands shook noticeably, spilling a little of her tea into the saucer, and she promptly put it down on the table, before it got any worse – while Nicholas just sat there with his mouth somewhat open, aghast, surprised at what Eugene’s sudden explanation had revealed. Lizzie spoke first

“Wow uncle Eugene! That’s really a surprise to me – please go on, tell me as much as you feel comfortable telling me – I, make that we, would really like to know all details!” she said

Eugene clearly relished the affect his revelation had on her and Nicholas, and soon proved to be quite the talented story teller. “Elizabeth, you could have been my daughter – in fact I’d go as far as to say you should have been my daughter – but in the end I had to settle for being your God-father.

Seeing you now that you’re an adult, I accept that Edwin is your biological dad – I mean, just looking at you, you have the Smythe eyes, and they are quite unique! It does tend to run in their family, more than ½ of them have those eyes, so I’ll not trouble you on that score. I would hastily add that the competition for your mother’s hand in marriage was intense, and my biggest mistake was trusting her dad way too much! For whatever reason, that and Edwin’s motor-bike, favored him, and so it was that your mother broke off her engagement to me and effectively, and quickly, ran away with Edwin on the back of his motorbike – which, at the time, really angered her dad and greatly saddened me! But after hearing your story, I strongly suspect that in Edwin she saw a man she’d be able to control –she’d have preferred that! I wouldn’t have allowed her to get away with so much, to risk our family’s future. I cannot see a happy ending for all of you – unless she changes, but by now I’d have to say that her bad behavior is ingrained in her and that it would be easier for you to change your expectations than for her to change the ways she deals with family. Even so, I’ve never

forgotten her and all those feelings ... but now, after meeting you and hearing what Edwin's life was like, I must say Lizzie you've made my day - if not my life! I feel a lot more, well, for want of better words, blessed! I've had a very lucky escape!"

Eugene put his pipe down and rang the bell for the maid and when she promptly appeared, asked "Please bring fresh tea Mabel -and scones! Young Nicholas has wolfed down one I've had my eye on!" He said, smiling kindly at Nicholas.

"Please uncle Eugene – go on, please tell me as much as you can bring yourself to - I think it's vital we know!" Lizzie said.

"There is a funny story – well it is now, in hindsight. For a while back then, your mom listened to her dad and told the women at the reception desk of the nurses residence, where she stayed, that the only man she'd allow to call on her was the man who always wore a tweed jacket, glasses and a hat; that's me -not a man who drove up on a motor-bike wearing a leather jacket and tee-shirt – that was Edwin. He figured it out and so he bought a tweed jacket, borrowed some glasses and a hat and told the lady at the reception desk to say that 'The man with the tweed-jacket, glasses and hat was here to see her' ... Your mother came down and saw a man with his back turned wearing a tweed jacket and a hat. Assuming it was me, she went to meet him. Edwin turned and asked her to go out with him. She was so impressed by his cunning and gall that she did. She climbed onto his motor-bike and the two of them went out to have fun. About a month later she hurriedly gave the ring back and soon married Edwin."

Over several cups of tea and yet more scones, Eugene told them both everything they would need to know, not sparing his own feelings, ending by saying "I never did get married. I was left broken-hearted by your mother's cruel rejection of my love. Now I can see it was meant that you came by today to fill me in on what life would have been like had I won that competition! I'd say Edwin won the battle - but lost the war. That's really not a life! That said, Elizabeth I'd have been proud to have you as my daughter! You do remind me a lot of your mother when she was young, except you don't seem to have her penchant for cruelty – please keep it that way!



Even back then I did pick up on that - but my love for her blinded my reason and so I overlooked it,” and before Lizzie could speak he added “Over the years, I’ve grown very close to a widow in town whose husband died tragically after the birth of their second daughter. I’ve kind of taken them all under my wing and helped them cope, much like their dad – a friend of mine, would have. I know she’s more than a little fond of me and it’s my tardiness and apprehension –which was really just me wincing from your mother’s cruelty, that’s made me resist asking her to be my wife. But after meeting you and hearing all you’ve had to say ... well Elizabeth and Nicholas, please could you delay your onward trip to Port Elizabeth by just a day, and help me fix a grievous wrong? I’d like to invite widow Townshend here for dinner. I need your help –actually you both can help me. You can call your family from here and let them know that tomorrow I’ll get you both to them safely in my limousine. We’ll all be able to sit back and relax for the rest of the day and tonight What’s the rush hey? A whole life’s still ahead of you... please stay!” Nicholas looked at Lizzie, smiling, saying “Lizzie, I think that would be wonderful! I’ve really enjoyed meeting Mr. Montjoy and I’ve a feeling we’re in for a fun couple of days – actually, let’s make that a memorable couple of days!” he said to her.

“That would be wonderful uncle Eugene!” Lizzie replied with a big smile, getting up and going over to his chair “Do you mind if I give you a hug?” she asked, hesitating just in case.

Eugene opened his arms replying “I’d be hurt if you didn’t!” but instead of just allowing her a brief hug, he pulled her down onto his lap, his arms closing around her as he gave Lizzie a warm big old bear-hug! Lizzie responded warmly by putting her arms around his neck, laughing happily as she did! Then blushing a little, saying to him “Uncle Eugene, you know I’ve never been hugged by my dad, ever, or sat on his lap, as a little girl ... or later. In fact I have no photos of him and me. None of that was ever allowed by my mother.”

Nicholas just sat there, once again aghast, a piece of scone still in his hand – at a loss for words! But he knew that what was happening was a lot bigger than just him and Lizzie, so not knowing where it would all lead, he wisely remained on

the side-lines and let Eugene and his God-Daughter interact in much the same way he was used to watching his uncles and their daughters - naturally, warmly, best of all, lovingly. Eugene now helped Lizzie up, taking her by the hand saying "Come with me Lizzie" as he led her over to his big wooden desk. Then opening one of its lower drawers, he pulled out an old brown envelope, opened it, and removed the photo inside, giving it to Lizzie - watching as Lizzie's eyes lit up and she squealed with excitement, holding it against her heart as she did. Still holding it in her right hand, she flung her arms around Eugene's neck, saying "Thank you Uncle Eugene ... you've made my day! What a truly lovely photo! Can I please have a copy of it?" she asked, apprehensively. "Elizabeth, I still have the negative - you may take this one, I'll have another one made. As much as I've treasured this photo, I know it will mean even more to you, so yes, please take it with my blessing!" adding "Scratch that off your list - and just maybe you'll teach Edwin about the power of hugs! There's hope yet - just wait till he's alone with your family."



*The original photo Lizzie was given had her mother in it too. I Photo-shopped her out of that photo as she's long since lost all maternal rights - by her own choice!*

Lizzie looked at the photo again, admiring it, going over to Nicholas to show him, triumphantly saying “Look Nicholas, me as a baby with my dad – this is the only photo I’ve ever seen with me and my dad present in any photo, together!” “It would have been even nicer if I could recognize myself, if it showed me on my dad’s lap as a toddler or a little girl or older, but now I’m resigned to that never having happened.” While that was all unfolding, Eugene was on the phone and speaking loudly enough that Lizzie and Nicholas could hear “Milly, I’d really like you to come over for dinner tonight! Please say you will! I’ve got someone very special visiting me all the way from Canada, and my past. I’d like very much for them to meet you –my best friend for so many years already! Then he paused as no doubt she’d accepted his invitation to dinner, answering “That’s splendid! I’ll get George to pick you up in the Limousine, as usual, say at 6pm? Ok then, I’d better get the kitchen staff to start the preparations! Bye Millie... and Millie, please come here with an open mind and heart, I’d really like that!” Eugene said now to end their call.

Then he returned to his desk, to the same draw the envelope was removed from, retrieved a small velvet box and walked over to Lizzie and Nicholas. Once there he opened it to show Lizzie, watching as her amazement grew, saying “Elizabeth, this was the engagement ring your mother returned to me. Do you think Millie will be terribly offended if I proposed to her, tonight, with this ring? Would you?” He asked Lizzie.

Lizzie was still looking at the beautiful diamond ring she was holding in her hand, then she spoke “I think any lady would feel honored to receive this beautiful ring from you, uncle Eugene! I mean, it’s Beautiful and it’s, well, a huge big Diamond! I’ve never seen anything like it! Yes, give it to her!” then added “I’m so honored you’d do this with me, us, here!” Eugene smiled as he saw the approval in Lizzie’s eyes. This man was man quite unlike her own dad – much as she loved Edwin. His daring, bold character reminded her of Nicholas more than Charles whilst his wealth and ostentatiousness reminded her of Charles. For a brief moment, she wondered what it would have been like to be his daughter? She smiled then sighed, then banished that thought – it was time to get

back to reality! “Uncle Eugene, you’d better go and tell the kitchen staff about your special plans for tonight –we’ll wait here for you,” she now told him, then asked “Can Nicholas please use your phone to call his uncle and aunt in PE? I think they’d best know we’ll be there tomorrow instead” and readily got his permission, him setting up the call and then handed the receiver to Nicholas when his aunt answered.

With all that done, Lizzie turned to a still stunned Nicholas and said “Well Nicholas – this has all been a huge surprise! I’d never have guessed, not in a million years! This day and our honeymoon is sure turning out to be most memorable!”

The rest of the afternoon, which went on to include a bottle of Champagne and later, high tea – to still their hunger, was spent in planning the night’s surprise – a surprise Millicent knew nothing about – nor would even suspect, after many years of thinking that all she’d ever be to Eugene, is his best friend. As they sat excitedly chatting away and planning the finer details of the pending surprise. Eugene had an idea ...

“Elizabeth, if over the course of our dinner tonight, I ask you to tell the story of your love’s 7 year struggle to finally end up married to the one you love ...” But Elizabeth interrupted “7 Years and 7 months, uncle Eugene – believe me, even the last 7 months were painful, intense... so many things could have happened to thwart this moment - then I’d never have met you,” she said “It’s obviously all somehow connected!”

Eugene gave her hand a squeeze, smiled and continued “I’m really glad you’re here Elizabeth, 22 years is a long time! If you tell the story of your love’s travails as well as you did to me, earlier, which softened my old heart, I’ll venture a guess it will be just the ticket to prepare Millie’s heart - to get her ready for my proposal! Would you please help me do that?”

“Of course I will uncle Eugene -I’d be most honored to! I just hope, no, pray, it will work? What a happy ending it will be!”

“Splendid Lizzie! OK, the two of you can stay here and enjoy what’s left of the champagne and eats. I’m going to my room to write some thoughts down and prepare myself for tonight, I’ll get George to take your bags upstairs. A maid will come later and show you to your room. You can both get ready for

the meeting – I’m just so glad you’re here, though I am more than a little nervous! I remember getting my hopes up before in the game of love, or life, but I’ve a feeling this is different!”

And with that Eugene excused himself, leaving the two of them contemplating the day’s event. Nicholas topped up their champagne, saying to Lizzie “This time Lizzie, since we’ll no doubt be drinking again tonight, I’d suggest you have several of these little fancy sandwiches – the cute ones with their crusts trimmed off” to which Lizzie readily agreed.

Lizzie dressed again in her beautiful, 2-tone, pink cotton, long honeymoon dress – after all, tonight was very special! Nicholas wore his air-force blazer with the insignia of his squadron on its pocket, and together they went downstairs to wait for Millie’s arrival. Eugene was already there, looking even more dapper than when he’d welcomed them earlier, this time he even had a folded handkerchief in his jacket pocket and smelled of ‘old-spice’ – Lizzie’s favorite, though there was still a faint sweet aroma of his pipe present too.

“Wow, uncle Eugene, you sure look smart tonight!” Lizzie remarked, adding “Remembering Elizabeth’s first glimpse of Pemberly before she met Darcy there again, in Jane Austin’s novel, I’d have to say the scene is set for a memorable night! By the way, why did you send me “Pride & Prejudice” when I turned 13, along with my birthday card and the usual R20?”

“Because it’s a classic Elizabeth. It’s always been a favorite, and there’s one more secret I’d like to tell you ... but Lizzie interrupted him, saying “Uncle Eugene – maybe it’s just a coincidence, but my mother really acted like Mrs. Bennett did, in the novel, and for a brief moment my dad acted a bit more like Mr. Bennett – when Nicholas asked for my hand in marriage –my mother having told him to refuse permission!”

“Funny, I was thinking along those lines as you related your story earlier today, but Edwin’s much more like Wickham,” Eugene remarked “Strange how that all played out in your own life, hey?” he now said, looking at her and smiling.

Elizabeth, suddenly remembering, inquired “Uncle Eugene, what was that ‘one more secret’ you were trying to tell me when I interrupted you just now?” waiting with anticipation.

Eugene smiled, then replied “I sent that book to you to read, but also to your mother – as a reminder that her prejudice resulted in her running off with her ‘Wickham’ – to remind her of her error in having made a hasty judgment about my pride, at being judged by her dad to be the best choice for her, and to remind her that maybe she should’ve chosen to ignore her dad’s well-intentioned interference, but should have looked deeper, into my soul for good qualities, which she would readily have found - had she bothered to look!” Then he laughed and added “Oh well, it seems like real-life emulates fiction. After meeting you two, I’d say that she’d read it as a ‘how to’ manual to emulate Mrs. Bennet!” An observation they now all laughed about, then he concluded “At times I feel I’m a bit more like ‘Charles Bingley’, right now I’m not at all sure that my ‘Jane’ will even want me – after not doing the right thing for many years?” he confided in them both. Elizabeth smiled, touching his hand and said:

“Uncle Eugene, at least where my mom’s concerned, you were her ‘Darcy’! Obviously she’s regretted running off with her ‘Wickham’ – though I’d add he clearly does love her, in a strange kind of way, but to soothe your fears, I think that Millicent, like ‘Jane Bennet’ did, will welcome your proposal ...” but before she could continue, the sound of tires on the gravel of the circular driveway alerted them to the arrival of his ‘Jane’. Suddenly they all felt more than a little nervous!

Eugene excused himself to go and welcome Milly, while Lizzie and Nicholas stayed seated, waiting for her entry.

Eugene now returned with Milly, a cheerful lady of about 50 with strawberry blonde hair, pleasantly plump, striking blue eyes, wearing a shawl. Nicholas & Lizzie stood to greet her.

“It’s lovely to meet you, Mrs. Townshend, Lizzie said, offering her hand, “Uncle Eugene talks so warmly about you, telling us right up-front that you’ve been his best friend, for years!”

“Please Lizzy dear, just call me Aunt Milly - Mrs. Townshend sounds so dreadfully formal,” Milly said with a smile as she held onto Lizzie’s hand a bit, to give it a reassuring squeeze. Lizzie smiled, relieved. This was a nice lady, no airs about her! “Sure Aunt Milly, I’ll do that from now on – thanks!” adding “This is my husband of less than a week, Nicholas.”

“Nice to meet you too, Nicholas – it sounds suspiciously like you’re both on your honeymoon, am I correct assuming so?”

“Pleased to meet you too, aunt Milly!” Nicholas, being a fast learner, replied –getting an approving smile from her, adding “Yes, this is day 4 of our honeymoon, still a few more to go.”

Their greeting’s now out of the way, they all sat down and were given aperitifs by one of the maids, so that they could relax and chat before dinner. Eugene was the first to speak. “I think you’ll recall, Milly, that I’ve mentioned that I lost contact with my God-daughter a year or so ago – that the letter with my birthday card and the R20 I’ve always put in it, was returned “address unknown” –and since I’d always sent these cards and my gift to her at her parents home, that it looked suspiciously as if they’d moved and not yet told me where?” Eugene now said, to refresh her memory.

“Yes, I recall that incident –actually it was late in 1977, so almost 2 years ago now” then turning to Lizzie, she asked “So what happened Lizzy ... where did your parents go?”

“Yes, that was stressful, they’d panicked with the riots in Soweto and basically sold everything. Dad got offered a job in Canada, and in short thrift they fled the country. At the time I was in my 2<sup>nd</sup> year at UCT, also Nicholas and I were dating, seriously, and my mother pulled the rug out from under my feet - no more college for me, and insisted I leave Nicholas to go with them to Canada –so really, a big mess!”

“Wow! That was a over-reaction, for sure, but they weren’t alone. Lots of people –even from little Knysna, panicked and did much the same. They didn’t have the luxury of planning so a lot of those panic moves failed, likely more will. I tend to think leaving a country is a big decision and so careful research and planning’s always prudent,” Milly said, “but why are you still here? Why did you get married only now?”

Lizzie realized that the plan wasn’t unfolding quite as they’d expected – this conversation was only meant to unfold at the dinner table. Realizing that she’d not get another chance as good as this again tonight, Lizzie looked over to Eugene and smiled, batting her eyelids at him, signaling that she was about to proceed – so that if he wanted to abort tonight’s

mission, he'd have a chance to quickly change the subject – but instead he smiled and nodded his head. So Lizzie said to him “Uncle Eugene, this may delay dinner by a half hour or so – is that OK? Or are we on a rigid schedule tonight?”

“That’s ok Lizzie, we’re all enjoying chatting – the dinner can wait, go ahead, answer Milly’s question - and don’t leave out any of the juicy stuff!” He replied, knowing he needed to get himself ready, not exactly sure how this would all unfold, but sure that it would be a missed opportunity if he didn’t!

As Lizzie told the story of love found and lost, then found and lost again in seemingly never-ending cycles, explaining how Constance had engineered those very traumatic events, Milly grew more and more indignant – until she could not contain herself any longer! “Elizabeth my dear, I really want to commend you for having the fortitude to resist what clearly was an misuse of a mother’s power – and I don’t say that lightly, I have two daughters too, and I’d never do that to them!” adding “Of course it’s traumatic for any mother, when they’re getting ready to leave the nest – but it’s also perfectly natural! My two girls are in England now – thanks to your God-father Eugene’s generosity! They both love him like a dad and I’m sad that they had to go so far away from us – but extremely happy too that they’ve both now got the self-confidence to take on the world!” Then pausing to sip her wine, she continued “Clearly your mother hasn’t learned that letting adult children go is as natural as giving birth to them and breast-feeding them!” She said “But sadly that’s not all! Your mother seems to think she has the right to live her life vicariously through you – and that’s just not right!” Lizzie seemed pleased with aunt Milly’s confirmation – she’d always felt that something was unnatural about Constance’s repeated attempts at controlling her life – but it was good to get a qualified second opinion. “Thanks Aunt Milly, for your vote of confidence. I’d like to think that my mother will one-day change, especially after I ran away to Marry Nicholas, but somehow I can’t imagine her doing that. Do you agree?”

“Yes my dear... I strongly recommend that you and Nicholas just keep right on running – away from her. She’ll never get her act together. You may wish for her to be a normal caring



mother, but she will always only care about herself ... your poor dad and sister! I think you're going to be OK now, but their lives are ruined and they may never know what true love feels like – just constant control.” Milly now said, then turned to Eugene, saying “And to think Eugene, you've let losing her hand in marriage hold you back too, from leading a normal, full life, though I hasten to add you've done a very good job at soldiering on, even with all the baggage weighing you down... it's just that as your old friend, I'd really like to have seen you get over her a long time ago, and to move on.”

Thinking that maybe this wasn't the perfect opportunity, but happy enough for any help he could get, Eugene replied to her “Milly, it's taken 23 years and a visit from my God-daughter to make me realize that – and more! Whilst I've been licking my wounds, feeling sorry for myself all that time, poor Edwin's been paying the ultimate price for his victory – if you could even call it that. I listened to Elizabeth tell me their love's story earlier today and I was filled with a deep sense of regret – it was as if scales had fallen from my eyes! I had a ‘St. Paul experience’ – just in Knysna, not on the road to Damascus. I realize now what a fool I've been all these years! Milly, you've not only been my best friend, but through the years you and the girls have been my family – the only family I've ever had – but really, in hindsight, the best family I could have wished for!” Eugene said, moving towards her sitting on the couch, stopping to kneel down next to her, and deftly taking the velvet box out of his jacket pocket, before continuing - watching closely too at her whole range of emotions - ones that now made Milly drop her wine.

Elizabeth immediately got up and, using a serviette, took care of the little puddle, saying “Uncle Eugene, you go right ahead, I'll take care of this – we're all waiting with baited breath for what you're about to say ... please continue!”

“Milly, I've been such a old fool, I don't know how you ever put up with me?” Eugene said, then before anyone could interrupt, he opened the blue velvet box and removed the diamond ring inside, putting the box down and holding the ring in his one hand, between his thumb and index finger, he continued “Milly, I've wanted to do this for so long now –

but every time I did, I winced thinking of the rejection I once had to endure, so I took the easy way out, choosing to rely on your kindness and loyalty as my friend – my best friend, I'd hasten to add, scared that any bravado on my part would cost me you and the girls, my only family. But now I've been shown there's a huge reward - if only we're brave enough to endure the pain of rejection or separation, then to overcome our fears," and before Milly could respond, he proposed ...

"My dearest, Milly ... you're not only my best friend, but you are also the one and only woman left in this world that can set me free to love again ... please, and I mean this from the bottom of my heart, please say yes ... would you do me the immense honor of being my wife ... for the rest of our lives?"

Now, with a beautiful smile, Milly took his hand in hers and replied "Of course I will Eugene! I've dreamed about this moment for many years now – we've been a family in all but name and habitation anyway. I'd given up daring to dream of being your wife – in the real sense of the word, and was resigned to being your friend – rather than losing you. I do want that to still be a very important part of our future, as we both have so much history in that regard ... But to get back to your question ... Yes, I'd be most honored to be your wife!" and with that she held out her left hand to a now very relieved Eugene, for him to place the ring onto her finger ... With a happy smile, not noticing that Lizzie was hugging Nicholas and they were both enamored with the scene that was unfolding before them, Eugene deftly slipped the huge diamond onto Milly's ring finger ... and kissed her hand."

Dinner was a splendid affair! Eugene sat at the head of the table, Aunt Milly at his right, Elizabeth at his left – across from her, and Nicholas next to Lizzie. Several servants were kept busy bringing the several courses of their feast, and removing plates and utensils as needed – refilling their wine glasses –which meant that what started out as a Splendid affair, was soon a giddy affair! First came the soup, then a shrimp aperitif, then the main course, the catch of the day – which made Lizzie 'ooh and aah', as she loved fish! Then a wonderful black-forest chocolate cake for dessert, and lastly they enjoyed several types of cheeses and crackers with port

as they sat chatting away happily – assisted by the fact that clearly, all around that table, love was in the air. A young couple on their honeymoon and a couple as old as their parents who'd finally been set free to love each other, fully – and for the rest of their lives. Now Eugene made a toast ...

“Elizabeth and Milly, I'd like to toast both of you, the loves of Nicholas and my life, and to point out an irony ...” stopping briefly to clear his throat, “You see, it's occurred to me that we've all been victims of Constance, you two for the last 7 years,” but he quickly added “and 7 months,” and seeing the smile he'd brought to Lizzie's face he now turned to his Milly “and dear Milly, we too have been her victims –only for three times as long!” watching how Milly smiled and reached over to place her left hand on his - her ring finger with that huge diamond suddenly sparkling even brighter!” Milly replied ...

“But Eugene, its the victims in any fairy-tale that always get to live happily ever after – not the villains! So look around... here we all are, sweethearts, young and old, survivors and wouldn't you know it – driven into each other's arms by her plots and schemes that, I'll venture a guess, never had any of our futures or happiness in mind when she formed and executed them!” Milly looked radiantly happy – they all were! Later that night – much later, they finally decided that just maybe they'd all better get some sleep, and so reluctantly they let their festivities end – though everyone was still in such a giddy mood! They'd said their goodbyes and retired.

Then, in the turret room assigned to them, overlooking the beautiful beach, the windows open and the sound of the waves rhythmically washing the sandy shores acting as a lullaby – plus the copious amount of the finest champagne and wines, Nicholas and Lizzy lay in each other's arms, and such a warm feeling swept over them that even now on their honeymoon, they cared less about what normally happens a lot on honeymoons, and just wanted to bask in the afterglow of a perfectly romantic day. It was a night they'd never forget and soon they'd drifted off into a safe, happy, deep sleep.

Nicholas woke to see the sun streaming in through the open windows - Lizzie standing there looking out over the beach and ocean, the sound of the waves and smell of the ocean so

therapeutic and invigorating. "Lizzie..." he now said to get her attention "Are you ever going to tell your mother what's happened here – what we found out and how it's all worked out?" He asked, wondering if Lizzie had thought it through?

"Funny you should ask me that now as I'm standing here thinking it through, Nicholas" she replied, turning to him "Yes, I'll choose a time, after we meet again, but definitely without you present!" she said, clarifying "I don't want her ego to be so publically bruised that she'd feel humiliated in front of you – that would lead to her trying to punish us. I would like her to know I've discovered her secrets, that I now better understand why she's done all that she has – and that she no longer holds an upper-hand in trying to control my life, as I'm left wondering why and what for?"

"Yes, that makes sense Lizzie, so I'll leave that all up to you - though I'd love to be a fly on the wall when you spring this news on her, but I'll settle for you telling me –in great detail, afterwards, what her reactions were," he said, adding "We'd better go down to breakfast. Your God-father strikes me as being an early-riser, so he's been up a while," Nicholas said "Let's go down and spend the last few hours with him. We may never see him again once your mom finds out about all that he's told you – especially about her, and their past!"

"That sounds like a good idea Nicholas – why don't you get ready, you're quicker, then while I get ready, you can go and keep uncle Eugene company, over coffee?" Lizzie suggested.

When Lizzie was done – in record time, she emerged down the central stair and walked to the drawing-room, finding Uncle Eugene and Nicholas happily chatting away – after all they were now both happy winners in the 'game of love!'

"Good morning Uncle Eugene! I trust you had a happy sleep after all the wonder-filled moments of last night?" she asked

"Yes, thanks Elizabeth, that I sure did! How about you? I got them to put you in our best guest-suite - so that you know how special you are to me," he answered, adding "I'm sorry you have to leave so soon – but I do understand there are people waiting for you to arrive in PE, as well as in the Free-state and the Transkei. You two are understandably excited to see them and them to welcome you, as a married couple!"

“Thanks for your kindness uncle Eugene ... I’ll never, ever forget finally meeting you! Thank you for caring about me all these many years! Aunt Milly’s girls are indeed lucky to have you in their lives, actually... make that blessed!” she said.

After a wonderful chatty breakfast, it was finally time to go. They’d be driven to PE by George, in the Rolls-Royce, and Uncle Eugene would be staying to shore up his alliance with Milly –which was perfectly understandable! But as they were Saying their goodbyes, Uncle Eugene gave Lizzie an envelope

“Elizabeth, this is my wedding present for you. I’m appalled at what you’ve endured from your mother -and your dad! He should’ve stood up to her and done the right things for you. I reckon if your father can’t ... well then as your God-father, it’s my duty to step-up and do those right things, for you!”

Lizzie looked a little taken aback ... but smiled and gave him a hug “Thanks uncle Eugene, that’s really very sweet of you, should I open it now?” She asked of him “or wait till later?”

“Well Elizabeth, since we may never see each other again, I think now’s as good a time as any,” he replied “go ahead.”

Elizabeth opened the envelope finding a solitary piece of paper – a check made out to her, for R5,000 (about \$7,000) She stood there, silent – shocked, until the reality sank in.

“Oh my, uncle Eugene... that’s very generous of you! I finally have a dowry. Poor Nicholas here has had to foot the bill for everything – even my dental bills. This places me on a much more equal footing, as I feel like I’m going into our married life with more than just me, his bride. We sure can use this when we get to Canada to start our lives there from scratch” She said adding “Thank you, so very, very much, for caring!”

“You’re welcome Elizabeth, now come here and give me one last hug before the two of you disappear out of my life the way you suddenly re-entered it,” adding “we’re all better off now than a few days ago – money’s not something I’ve not had, as you can see – but love ... well, that I now have too!”

Elizabeth smiled as she gave Eugene a last warm hug. Then he took Nicholas’ hand “I know you’ll look after her Nicholas she’s a treasure... but you long since discovered that much!” adding “I pray that you 2 stay united, and your love strong!”



Before long they were comfortably seated in the back of the Rolls watching spectacular scenery unfold. The Garden route, as it is known, is one of the world's many beautiful, famous coastal trips - rivaling the coastal trip between San-Francisco and LA ... though with the warm swimmable Indian ocean-albeit one with an astoundingly scary array of hungry sharks that too often mistake the people for seals - which are their main source of food!

Beauty often comes hand in hand with danger, so people do venture into the warm waters – while always keeping an eye on the water for fins –more often than not, they're dolphins.

## Chapter 25

### **Elizabeth meets her new very large family...but only a few!**

Nicholas's uncle Frederic and his aunt Sister, as she was fondly called – being his mother's oldest and only sister, came out to meet them as the Rolls pulled up to their home, as did a few curious neighbors! They all thanked George and soon enough were sitting around the kitchen table with a big pot of tea and a fresh melktert, with cinnamon on top. Over tea, Lizzie mentioned that she was born and spent the first few years of her life in Port-Elizabeth, as well she often visited her granny here – so uncle Frikkie, as he was fondly called, said that later he'd take them 1st to the home where she was a little girl, then to her grannies old house. That made her return to PE most nostalgic ... very special indeed!

But now they were guests in his uncle and aunt's home, and being spoiled silly – because if there was one thing Auntie Sus – a big loveable old lady, excelled at - it was cooking and baking! So they were being royally spoiled!

“More Melktert for you Elizabeth? She inquired “Yes please Auntie Sus – but just a half – Nicholas will eat the other half, I'm ... well, let's just say I've had an elegant sufficiency!” she said smiling, but quite adept at speaking Afrikaans, so she added “And that's English for ‘Prop-vol!’” I seem to recall?

They all toured, laughed and joked, ate and drank until bed-time finally came – which it did rather early in their home, being almost 70 ... both of them being born around 1910.

Uncle Frikkie was a marvelously talented cabinet maker – besides having been a Principal at a local high-school, so he then took them into his work-shop and showed them a beautiful wooden jewelry box, which was small enough to pack with them back to Canada later in the year – and he presented it to Elizabeth, from them, as a wedding gift. It's still a most cherished dressing-table accessory to this day.



That night, Nicholas and Lizzie were to sleep like royalty in a big stately room, with high ornate ceilings on a giant ornate four-poster bed made by his uncle, and with big soft pillows and lovely soft eiderdown, made by his aunt, and a wash-basin in the corner, under a mirror and, importantly, a potty under the bed so that they'd not need to sneak out to use the shared bathroom, just off of the hallway, to go pee.

So Nicholas and Lizzie found themselves in bed at 9pm, on their honeymoon, with nothing much to do ... well anyway, to be more truthful ... not quite nothing, though Lizzie did a lot of giggling - and also shushing of Nicholas, who she thought was a little too noisy in that now quiet big old house. After a while, they both grew tired and just lay there in each other's arms telling each other how very much they loved each other and how very happy they both were to be together and in the company of so many friendly people - not enemies! "You know Nicholas, you have a lovely family! I've felt so accepted by them ... they're so unlike my family! I'll never forget them!" She said hugging him - prompting him to ask her "Tell me Lizzie, what stands out most in your mind about aunty Sus and Uncle Frikkie?"

"Uncle Frikkie is a kindly, intelligent man with a great sense of humor and an amazing talent for woodwork!" she said "and aunty Sus is a really funny, sweet old lady who sure can cook! She took me aside as you and uncle Frikkie were talking and gave me some really good advise!" Lizzie said.

"What was that Lizzie?" He inquired inquisitively.

Lizzie snuggled up close to him and whispered in his ear - her warm breath feeling moist as her words entered his ear "She said, Elizabeth my dear, let me give you some valuable advise ... go to bed early with you husband every night, but don't go to sleep! Spend time seducing him in between the sheets, and my dear, the next morning he'll be so sweet to you -and he will treat you like a Princess! I gave oom Frikkie three fine sons - and we've always been a passionate couple! We don't bother with TV after the news at 8pm, we go to bed together and I make sure he's so satisfied that he'll never be tempted to stray! I'll not let another woman near him! Ever!



My dad was stolen away from my mom by another woman when she was only 40 – she died of a broken heart! I'll never forget that Elizabeth - or what that did to me and my sister!"

Nicholas stifled a laugh – "That's my aunty Sus!" he said – she's such a loving old lady! Tomorrow, ask her to show you a photo of her when she was 21 –when they got married – she was 6' 2" in her socks! My grandpa was 6' 6", my mom's the shortest one of them all at 5' 8" – they're all from Swedish, Dutch and German stock – big people! You'll be astounded by what a beauty she was – long blonde hair, blue eyes, tall svelte figure - a real beauty by any measure!"

After chatting away for a while, they both fell fast asleep – only to be awakened at 5am by all sort of activity in the house "Don't worry Lizzie, what aunty Sus may not have mentioned to you is that all of my family get to bed early – but they also get up early! However, you can count on fresh warm bread, home-made butter and a huge assortment of jams to go with it, a big pot of Tea ... and lot's of chatting!"

"Yum ... that sounds so nice Nicholas! I'm going to get up and go chat with her in the kitchen – you can sleep in."

Lizzie said – nudging him playfully in the ribs, as she arose.

Nicholas had planned the time after her arrival back in Cape Town on June 17<sup>th</sup> -to get married, have their Honeymoon, then for her to meet as many of his large extended family as was feasible – knowing that they'd barely make headway with that – but that every one of them would welcome her into the family with open arms and lots of Love! That was very important, since Lizzie was repeatedly told by her mother that she'd lose her old family by marrying Nicholas!

After a wonderful long, chatty breakfast, with Lizzie being shown all sorts of family photos of aunt Sus's old family – also the family of her new mother-in-law, Kathleen Strauss, - or 'K' as she was known to most everyone, they were driven to the airport for their flight on an old 727 to Bloemfontein the old home town of aunt Sus' and Kathleen's family – but also the city in which many of Dr. Strauss' family lived and where Nicholas spent so many years at boarding-school, from age 8. The farewell was warm and genuine, they'd all

been happy to meet Elizabeth –and her them, also to see Nicholas again. Just before they left to board, Aunt Sus hugged Lizzie, then stood back looking down at her and said “Elizabeth my dear, Canada is a cold place! I’m going to start making a big quilt for you! When you get to Canada, please send me your address – I’m going to send it to you in the mail – they squeeze down small and don’t weigh much.

Nicholas let Lizzie sit in the window seat. They both watched as Uncle Frikkie and aunt Sus stood there waving, bidding them farewell, as was the custom in his family – to wait till the plane had taken off and gone from view before leaving.

Elizabeth was happy – the time between leaving Canada and now, was so jam-packed with activity, that she’d not once had a chance to be sad! Everything was just so exciting and her adult life was unfolding so very differently from anything she’d been used to in her parents home – where she felt like just another object to be moved around at her mother’s will - told not to have her own dreams and to acknowledge that her mother was always right and had never done anything wrong -she was perfect in every way... so naturally Lizzie was expected to do whatever mother demanded of her, like a pawn on a chess-board ... always in the shadow of the high and mighty queen. Suddenly her freedom felt so very good! She was being happily accepted and included, as an adult, in the lives of other adults – important, older, lovely people!

Soon the scenery looking out of the plane’s window, grew boring – they were over part of the Karoo, a semi-desert area similar to Arizona, making up a huge part of the country.

Lizzie sat chatting to Nicholas... “You know Nicholas, I grew-up in a family in which we all accepted mother as ‘perfect’ in every way –that defined ‘normal’ for me, but as I reached my late teen years, I started meeting boys, like you, and all their families – and they were all so very different than my family! So, little by little I started questioning my mother’s image of perfection and challenging her total authority over me and my life – and literally all of hell broke loose around me!”

“I kind of figured that out Lizzie – but it took me a while, since as you’ve seen from my family... they’re nothing like

what you accepted as ‘normal’ for the first 16 years or so of your life! It freaked me out that you had to deal with all of that – don’t forget that I also fell prey to her!” Nicholas said.

Lizzie interrupted “Yes, I’m sorry about that Nicholas, I’d really have preferred that she be nice to you – and to me!”

“Thanks! Because of how I was raised, I’m tough enough to deal with her...” He replied - but she interrupted him again.

“Sure, but don’t forget Nicholas, she was raised in boarding schools too – Queenstown girls high, where she was Head-girl, as she likes to frequently remind us all!” Lizzie chided.

Nicholas thought about that for a while – then changed the subject a bit “Well Lizzie, I’ve realized that your coming of age, so as to say, was going to be a process that would take time – 16 years of wrong conditioning does not disappear out of one’s psyche overnight. We all have things from our past that haunt us – maybe different things, like insecurities that arose from leaving home at age 8, only returning for school holidays –then when I was done with high-school, I was off to the air force for 2 years, then on to university for 4 years, and soon I’m off to Canada for a life-time or maybe not? My mom’s Siamese cat and all our dogs - have all spent much more time in my family home than I ever did, or ever will! But you know ... I’ve figured out we just have to make peace with the past – not let it ruin our future. I’m not really upset anymore about all that – I’m actually very grateful! It was a good school and actually a healthier environment to grow up in ... that brings me to talk about the next people in my family that you’ll be meeting soon,” He said smiling

“My uncle Manie and Aunt Alma and my cousin Mervyn.”

“Yes, please ... tell me a bit about them before we land in Bloemfontein – but I’ve known Mervyn during that 1 year he spent drinking and partying far too much, there at UCT – with you in Smuts hall.” Lizzie said. “The girls of Tugwell all knew him and his drinking pals as, well -a bit wild! I recall them driving by the girls residences after closing down the pub, piled into a car honking the horn and laughing as they drove by, mooning us girls ... I hope he’s calmed down a bit since then!” She said to Nicholas, looking a bit anxious.

Nicholas laughed! “Yes, well, he’s a brilliant guy –but in his first year a way from home he only graduated from the pub!” He said smiling “So his dad came down to Cape Town and packed him up –took back home to their local university out where he could be watched ... so after that he settled down!” Adding “Relax Lizzie, he said – you’ll not find anyone in my large extended family that will reject you! My uncle Manie, my dad’s brother –one of 7, by the way, a very handsome man –Clark Gable like, actually, is head of the Auto-workers trade union –but actually not a liberal! He has fantastic negotiating skills and has always resolved conflicts without the need for strikes – plus he’s a good public speaker and a veteran of WW2, in which he was a staff Sergeant in North Africa with the 8-th Army, as were almost all my uncles - Montgomery’s men. Aunt Alma was the very first person with some British heritage to enter our family tree, in centuries, having had a Welsh mother and, get this, an aristocratic dad – a count from Portugal, no less!”

“Wow Nicholas, that sure sounds like an interesting mix of cultures – and then she married into your Afrikaner family!” Lizzie said, amazed, inquiring “Was that ever a problem?”

“No, never! All of our family love her, she’s a real sweetie!” Nicholas replied “But you can thank her for one thing...”

“What’s that, Nicholas?” Lizzie inquired, looking at him.

“She smoothed the way for you - the first person with a pure British heritage - no Afrikaner blood ... to join our family!”

“You’re forgetting that on my Dad’s Mom’s side of the family, there’s a bit of French not too far back, but yes, you’re right, we’re mostly English or Scottish” Lizzie said, correcting him.

Nicholas smiled “Actually Lizzie, that kind of comes out a bit in your looks, around the eyes and cheeks – the French, I mean – and maybe also that you’re petite, like aunt Alma, by the way.” He remarked “ Then added “and you two have something else in common ... You both have a mole above your upper lip, and by the way, just so that you know, I’ve always found you very beautiful –mesmerizingly so!” he said. Lizzie blushed...then smiled coyly at him whispering a reply

“Thank you Nicholas, us girls really like to hear that, from time to time ... but lest you forget, a few days ago you got to see me fully naked, for the first time, standing before you in the bright sunshine, in nature, only 22 years old - probably at my very best, but I will age ... so please always keep your rose-colored glasses handy, you may need them!” she joked.

Nicholas smiled warmly at her, remembering... then told her “Lizzie, I doubt I’ll ever need them! Years ago, I found you and you found me and it felt like love at first sight – but it wasn’t really about beauty –although that didn’t hurt, there was something almost spiritual about my attraction to you, I was captivated by whatever that was? In hindsight I really do wonder a lot about our Matchmaker’s hand in all of that and what happened on that first day? However, it’s plain to see –to us and to everyone else, that we really do love each other –now with a love that has already been well tested!” He added, prompting a reply from her. She interrupting him ...

“Yes, I suppose that’s rather obvious to us, to everyone...”

Then Nicholas continued ... “So I’m sure we’ll always love each other! We’re going to be a very different family to your old family, Lizzie! Let’s agree to take the very best of our old families and reject the worst - then try our best to do better! But we’re not perfect - we’ll probably mess-up from time to time too, so let’s not be afraid to be honest with one another – to push back expecting such honesty from each other -as well as, of course, continuous improvement in each other.”

Lizzie smiled at him, reassured, agreeing on that strategy, then going to the washroom to freshen up before landing.

At Bloemfontein’s airport, they walked the short distance to the small airport building. Waiting for them was Nicholas’s uncle Manie and aunt Alma, who welcomed them just as warmly as they’d been welcomed in Port Elizabeth!

As predicted, Lizzie and aunt Alma got on well –from the start! Kindred spirits – in more ways than one. Aunt Alma was a strong believer, and that came out in almost all she spoke about – plus a very intelligent, knowledgeable woman, being the chief librarian at ‘the Friend’ Bloemfontein’s only daily English newspaper. Later Lizzie confided in Nicholas

“You’re right about your uncle Manie being ‘Clark Gable like’, she said “He sure has a certain way with words -with women, that make them swoon, a little, or a lot – I can see that!”

Later that day, after work, they all went to his dad’s oldest sister aunt Betty’s home, and there, all around a very large table, she got to know many of Nicholas’s family ... oom Koot, aunt Cookie, Cousin Kok and his wife, Miemie and everyone welcomed her warmly into the family –without any reservations and without prying much into her family’s history - though some already knew enough. Two things surprised Lizzie -the huge LP collection of the world’s best opera music aunt Betty had and that she made sure to play while they were eating, and the large quantity of really tasty food on the table there -roast leg of lamb, baked chicken, meatballs and a large number of potato, rice and vegetable dishes with the tastiest gravy she’d ever had, to ladle over everything! Then Trifle for dessert – Lizzie ate and laughed happily along with her new family, enjoying every minute ... really happy to be accepted by them so easily and also, so genuinely! Elizabeth was delighted to now be a Strauss too! The next day found Lizzie and Nicholas sitting in the back seat of Mervyn’s car – Him and his lovely blonde girlfriend, Karin, sitting up-front – on their way from Bloemfontein to Sterkspruit, for the last leg of the journey, all chatting away cheerily, when near Zastron, he now turned onto a dirt-road off of the main road, and they proceeded slowly onto a rough farm road, towards a big, impressive modern farm house. There waiting for them, were Nicholas’s aunt Joey, his dad’s other sister, and uncle Andrew, her husband. Once again they warmly embraced her, aunt Joey, in English, saying to her “Welcome into the family Elizabeth! We’re so pleased to finally meet you!” causing Lizzie to smile warmly and remark “Dankie tannie Joey, maar ek is ‘n Boland se meisie van Wellington, en ek het daar skool gegaan, Sub-A tot Matriek, met al my vakke in Afrikaans – so ek praat goeie Afrikaans – maar met hierdie Bolandse Aksent!” That made their day! Uncle Andrew chatted away easily with her in Afrikaans, very pleased that he did not have to try out his English, though he was a star Polo player – a very English sport!

Aunt Joey went to the old crank-handle party-line phone, and spoke to someone, in Afrikaans, before going to arrange the Tea and karringmelk buskuit (Buttermilk Rusks) that was to be served later. Before long a car pulled up, from the neighboring farm, and Lizzie got to meet a Jovial old man with tinted glasses wearing a hat to cover a balding head, Nicholas's uncle Jannie -his dad's second oldest brother, and his wife, also wearing glasses, aunt Kaaitjie (Kitten) who welcomed her too – though Lizzie noticed how warmly she greeted Nicholas, saying \* “Aag ou Nikkie, hoe gaan dit met jou? Jy't so 'n mooi klein vrou –met so 'n skraal klein lyfie, nes ek toe ek nog jonk was -voor al my kinders! Maar sy's so effens te dun, jy moet haar maar baaie lekker boerekos gee!” Nicholas laughed, nervously, replying with a wink “Ek sal so maak Tannie ... en Elizabeth verstaan Afrikaans heel goed!” which made them all laugh nervously ... Elizabeth smiled.

Soon they were all enjoying high-tea, Afrikaner style, around the very big table in the dining room –often used for Strauss family reunions, which happened, it seems, at the drop of a hat. Later they were joined by his uncle Philip, his dad's pleasant oldest brother who was well known for fixing all the farmers diesel tractors, and cars, in those parts, and by his wife, aunt Hester, a very talented seamstress, and they all had a second big pot of tea! After a few hours of everyone happily chatting away Mervyn, getting anxious, announced that they'd better get going for the last leg of the journey – into the mountains, on gravel roads, not safe for night-time travel. So after Lizzie excused herself to the bathroom – a side-effect of so much tea, they all said their goodbyes and the youngsters were on their way to Nicholas's parents, to Sterkspruit ... their ultimate destination.

\* Aunt Kitten's conversation: “Hello young Nicholas, how are you? You have such a pretty young wife -such a petite cutie, just like me when I was young, before I had 5 children! But she's a bit too thin, you must see that she gets healthy farm foods to stop her from wasting away!” And Nicholas's reply: “I'll do that aunt Kitten. Elizabeth understands Afrikaans really well!” they all laughed nervously ... Elizabeth smiled.



*R-L: Newlyweds Lizzie & Nicholas, his Brother, Mrs & Dr. Strauss, Nicholas's sister-in-law & sister*



*Nicholas visiting, from Panama, for his mom's 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday dinner - Dad's 85<sup>th</sup>, in 2011, 32y later*



*Nicholas & Lizzie –1979, finally relieved newlyweds, visiting with an aunt and uncle in South Africa*



## Chapter 26

### **Nicholas & Lizzie return to his hometown ...**

Mervyn had to proceed much slower now, the roads were rutted, plenty of loose gravel - rather dangerous, but they enjoyed the scenery which now became very Tibetan-like as they crossed over the Orange-river gorge then climbed with the road up into the mountains. Soon they came to the top of an escarpment that overlooked a fertile river valley, In it lay the little town of Sterkspruit (Strong-river) and crossing the bridge into the town, proceeded up its dusty main street past the Hilltop hotel and, at the tennis-club, turned down back towards the river -on down a hill, to a home next to the river, set on 3 acres of land, a long stretch of poplar trees lining the rivers bank. Mervyn stopped the car next to the front gate ... and the family dogs, now Bobby and Rusty, at first barking their alarm, were quickly convinced they were all family, and they enthusiastically greeted everyone!

Kathleen Strauss came out to greet them. Nicholas was her favorite – not that she ever said so, it was just obvious that he was, but she purposely went to greet Lizzie first, saying “Welcome back to our home Elizabeth!” You’re looking so happy and beautiful – you’ll have to tell us all about the wedding and, really, well – everything...”

But Nicholas interrupted “Not quite everything mom, some of it is best left to people’s imaginations!” He said, winking at her “We’re here fresh from our honeymoon, you know!”

Lizzie blushed, Mervyn and Karin laughed nervously and Kathleen went to give him a welcome home hug, poking him in the ribs “Now young man, don’t be so naughty! But we do want to hear about what it was like, suitably censored, of course! Well, come on in! Dr. Strauss will be returning from his clinics in the mountains shortly, and I have a big dinner

planned for tonight, Jane, Emily and even Suzie have been helping me in the kitchen all day preparing the feast.”

That sounded so nice to Lizzie – but she did recall how the Strauss family, unlike her English family, ate dinner late at night, after much socializing and drinking, like European peoples often do. So she asked “Thank you Mrs. Strauss ... actually, may I call you mom now?” To which Kathleen replied, hugging her “Of course you can dear! Please always do that! But what else were you trying to ask?” she inquired.

“Well, you probably remember, that in my old very English family, we have supper very early, so I’ll not last till dinner – unless I can find a snack or two” Lizzie replied, a bit shyly.

“Of course you can Elizabeth, why don’t you and Karin go to freshen up first, then join me in the kitchen where you can taste test some of the dinner menu we’ve got prepared... and Nicholas, can you and Mervyn bring in the luggage, Suzie will show you all to your rooms!” she said to them.

With that, the dogs still trying to curry their favor, they did what she’d suggested and soon found themselves with a beer in their hands and not quite so hungry – ready for the night’s festivities! Soon the sound of Dr. Johan Strauss’s truck coming down the gravel road to the house was heard – right after the dogs started barking again, running to the front gate. Nicholas and Lizzie went out to greet him, still in his white coat with his stethoscope hanging loose around his neck. “Hi son!” he said first grasping Nicholas’s hand, pulling him in for a warm hug – then turned and said “Hello again Elizabeth, we’re very pleased to see you back in Africa! For a while there we really wondered if you’d return... but I reckon you didn’t want to break Nicholas heart in two hey?”

Lizzie smiled, correcting him “or mine Dr. Strauss” she said smiling at him, which made him smile too as he went to hug her, saying “and please call me dad from now on, just plain old dad!” he said, giving her a warm hug “Welcome to our family! I’m assuming you’ve met quite a few of my brothers

and both my sisters, from what aunt Alma said to mom on the phone this morning?" he inquired.

Yes Dr. Strauss ... sorry, I mean Yes dad, I have, and I'm so relieved to tell you that they all welcomed me into the family without reservations!" she said, smiling – obviously relieved!

Johan smiled ... "That's actually standard practice for all of us, Lizzie. The one thing our family does shun –is rejection!"

Lizzie smiled, happy to that her new family was most unlike her birth-family. "I could get used to this!" she thought as they all proceeded back into the house. Soon they were all sitting in the porch, laughing and drinking and catching-up.

With so much to catch-up on, dinner was as late as ever, but they all enjoyed the 5-course meal immensely, which started with soup, then fish, then the main course, followed by dessert -finally cheese and crackers with port or Cognac. All the courses were served by Jane and Emily, with Suzie helping out and getting things ready in the kitchen. Plates were cleared away in a timely manner to make room for the next course and warm dinner-time banter and laughter were an integral part of it all. South Africans lived very well in the dying days of Colonial Africa and all the families she'd met enjoyed similar arrangements – just Dr. Strauss's home had more servants than most, which was, in part, due to them and their families getting free medical care too, so everyone wanted to work for them! So they also had a laundry maid, a stable boy, a gardener and a male nurse who also did the interpreting for Dr. Strauss who understood some Xhosa and Sotho - but not enough for his patients to tell him what he needed to know to treat them. Life was good –but it was about to change! Their days in Sterkspruit were numbered. The natives were growing restless now, and the European settlers were vastly outnumbered! They'd all have to leave if they wanted to stay alive ... but the current crop of children in Sterkspruit would mostly see out the last days there with their parents, before they left for faraway cities or countries. The colonial community would soon disappear – forever.

“We’ve got another big party starting tomorrow afternoon on uncle Corrie’s farm, Mayfair” Kathleen remarked, reminding them why they were here. That they were all looking forward to, very much! Nicholas’s Godfather and his family were a lovely family he’d known all his life, and they were the kind of people everybody loved – kind, caring, loving, generous!



*Elizabeth & Nicholas were so relieved to finally be married and have everyone acknowledge that much, accepting them into their adult world without reservations! Lizzie felt the warm welcome, of her into the Strauss family and it completely drowned out all distant screams of protest in faraway Canada as if they didn't exist. Lizzie was the brave heroine that saved the day, their wedding day!*

## Chapter 27

### **Mayfair's braaivleis reception, a farm in the African veldt.**

The Strauss family arrived first ... early in the afternoon to help out with preparations for the 2<sup>nd</sup>. Reception that uncle Corrie and Auntie Helene had kindly arranged for the young couple's home-coming. Their farm, Mayfair, was a beautiful farm in the African veldt, in the valley, at the foot of hills, half-way down to the Orange river – a Jewel, really, that at one time briefly belonged to the two older Strauss brothers, uncles Philip and Koot, but they'd both been deployed to North Africa to fight the Germans and the Italians there. Uncle Koot had been captured by the Germans and sent to a prisoner of war camp in Italy, and the farm had gone to ruin by the time the war ended – which was when Uncle Corrie and his first wife, Rosa, had bought it, but sadly, not long after they became Nicholas's Godparents, she'd died at a very young age, of Cancer, and so uncle Corrie was left all alone there – with his memories and grief ... though luckily their many friends visited him often to try and cheer him up. That kind of worked – but what worked best of all is a relationship he'd started – by mail, with a pretty young school teacher from the wine-lands of the distant Cape, though she was from Koring-berg (wheat mountain) which, as its name suggested, was a good place to grow wheat too! That relationship had blossomed into love, and Nicholas, though only 5, remembered their wedding there well, and only ever remembered -and was accepted by his aunt Helene as her adopted Godson. They then had 3 daughters, Elphia who everyone said had her fathers congenial nature and had blonde hair; Phialetta, a pretty girl with light red hair who looked so much like her mom did when she was young, and was more reserved; and Corena, who was a good mix of both with strawberry-blond hair and very definitely, as often is the case with the youngest children, feisty and outspoken!

Below the big old stone farm house, lay a social area with a huge fire-pit with a circular stone wall all around it – just at the right height to sit on and watch the meat being prepared over the wooden coals – always made from hardwood, thorn trees, because they made such good, hot , long-lasting coals and they did not smoke much, as Pine and other softwoods do, and so would not spoil the meat with foreign oily flavors. That was not a problem, since in the African veldt there's plenty of thorn-trees growing amongst the tall brown grass which the livestock, and even wild-life, often grazed on.

Seating 20 or more people there for a traditional Afrikaner Braaivlies (BBQ) was not a problem! Off to the side stood a few big old tree stumps that had been leveled to act as tables for the refreshments and, later, for the food – but there were also several white outdoor chairs and tables.

The Straus family was almost complete – even Nicholas' older brother, Philip, now a Dr. in East London and his wife, were there – she'd lost her left arm in a roll-over accident on gravel roads some time back –but adapted very quickly to using her prosthetic arm – even driving a manual geared car which required her to use her new prosthetic arm to change gears, seeing as in south Africa –being an old British colony, the driver sat on the right in vehicles - the gear-lever was thus on the left. Cousin Mervyn and his Blonde high-school sweetheart, Karin, were there too - only Nicholas' sister was missing –visiting with friends for part of the school holidays.

Then the guests started arriving –the whole Hepburn family, all 9 of them -with the addition of Cathy's new husband and 2 girl cousins, making 11 all in all – not a problem though, since they had a VW Combi which was really like a minibus! Then the Phoenix family, Uncle Mike, aunt Margaret, their youngest son, little Jon, and Shelia, their second eldest daughter. Lastly uncle Keith and aunt Moira, without their children – still grieving over the loss of their 2<sup>nd</sup>. son in a tragic shooting accident – as was Elphia, since they'd been growing ever fonder of each other -everybody had noticed! Nicholas briefed Lizzie on all of their backgrounds.

“Wow Nicholas!” she exclaimed “they seem such a happy bunch of people for having endured all of that!” she said.

“Yes Lizzie ... it kind of puts our problems into perspective.” he said “I mean you have an overbearing mother, a jealous sister and a weak dad. I now have a mother-in-law from...” he quickly changed course “Well, let’s just say - not from Heaven!” he continued – Lizzie laughed rather nervously.

“You’re right Nicholas!” she’d said “But at least we ended up back together again and through it all – through all of our many forced separations and my mother’s shenanigans, our love has actually grown stronger – but none of these people can get their wife, child or boyfriend back, not forgetting my new sister-in-law’s left arm.” She said, now very grateful!

“Exactly Lizzie!” Nicholas said, adding “It all comes down to this question: would we switch lives with any one of them? Would we exchange our challenges for theirs?” he asked her “No Nicholas, I wouldn’t” she said, now fully understanding.

“Neither would I!” Our problems are manageable.” He said. They were all there to celebrate the wedding of Elizabeth and Nicholas, and so those festivities began ...

The wood was set alight – it would have to burn for a long time to make coals, which allowed for plenty of time to have Beer, Champagne, Brandy, wine - and other refreshments, speeches and, of course, photographs – many happy photos!

The food was unbelievably good! Steak, lamb chops, several types of sausage, ribs, potatoes, grilled cheese and Tomato sandwiches (done over the coals) salads etc. and as much beer, wine, champagne or pop as what they wanted. As the evening set in, the air got a bit cooler and then the fire was needed. Most people stayed close to the fire to stay warm, occasionally taking more food off of the sides of the grill area where it had stayed warm too. The stars and the moon came out to greet them as did African creatures of the night, owls and, most notably jackals with their characteristic howls.

Elders – most notable uncle Corrie and aunt Helene, took time to chat to both Nicholas and Lizzie, separately and together, trying to impart some adult wisdom for them to use in their married lives – lessons they’d learned in life.





To say that Nicholas and Lizzie were very grateful for their kindness, would have been a major understatement! They were ecstatic! Lizzie did not shed one tear, or feel sad for one moment – even when most young women in her situation would be devastated by their delinquent parents refusing to help with, in any way, or even attend their wedding -also their reception! But Elizabeth was not sad now. She felt so accepted by everyone. Contrast that with what her mother had worked to do by shunning her. To Lizzie, the difference was most welcome, also clearly apparent! These people were not only all normal, they were nice, kind and loving! Best of all they genuinely cared, wishing them a happy married life. But she had a little secret helping her cope! On her right hand ring-finger she wore her granny's antique sterling silver & amethyst engagement ring, a family heirloom passed down the generations. Feeling it there, she'd imagined that her granny was present and had given her blessings for her to marry Nicholas and was very happy for her! Lizzie was her first grand-daughter, and they were close! She was gone by now, but not forgotten! Her defiance of all Constance's unfair demands through the years stood out in Lizzie's mind! It was their little secret! She'd had to deal with Constance withholding her son from her for most of her life after he was married, rarely getting to see him or her grand-children again - only when they conveniently dropped Lizzie & Hattie off for her to babysit, as they left on several overseas trips. She watched as Constance denied her son and her granddaughters the right to be present for the last birthday of his dad and their grandpa, as he lay dying of cancer in 1969 - something that the whole family found most cruel, as they'd all gathered there in Port Elizabeth to say farewell to him whilst he was still fully lucid. She understood Constance's cruel streak painfully well! Lizzie drew strength from her.



The party went on well past midnight, with the fire burning strong and the stories more and more fascinating – uncle Corrie had a way of telling stories that held their attention, and that got even better with some whisky or brandy! It was tough to say which reception was better? Both were really wonderful –but different! This one was relaxed and personal!



Nicholas's godfather uncle Corrie, toasts the bride & groom...Denise and her mom watch, amused



Elizabeth & Nicholas link arms together to drink champagne after his speech – notice the ring?





## Chapter 28

### **Back in Cape town ... soon it's time to graduate!**

Back in Cape Town again, Nicholas and Lizzie went about their days in their cozy one Bedroom apartment – but now as a newlywed couple, enjoying all the wonderful things that Cape Town offered ... in-between Nicholas's studies at UCT.

The Canadian Embassy in Pretoria called him to go there for his immigration interview, which was a pleasant formality since Canada badly needed people with Computer degrees.

Lizzie worked as a secretary again - to save up money for their planned return to Canada in December, before her visa-extension expired, and to help pay for expenses.

Then Lizzie's aunt Jean called her, inviting them to tea with her uncle Max and her, at their home in Kenilworth. They arrived not expecting the real reason for their invitation ... Uncle Max was Edwin's older brother, but unlike him, was tall and looked a lot like Lizzie's grandpa. Aunt Jean was a nice British lady, with a pleasant disposition. During tea, after the usual small-talk, aunt Jean disclosed the reason...

"Elizabeth, do you recall when Hattie was a baby, how sick she used to get?" Reminding Lizzie "You're 4 years older ..."

Lizzie immediately confirmed "Yes aunt Jean, I sure do! Her mystery illness went on for years, till she was about 4, and I was already 8 by then, so I remember quite a lot!" she said.

"But Elizabeth, were you ever told what was actually wrong with her?" aunt Jean inquired –already knowing her answer.

"No, Aunt Jean – it was a mystery, all hush-hush" she said.

“Well that’s why uncle Max and I thought to invite you two – I mean, we know how covertly the whole matter was dealt with in your family, and even all of the extended family were very puzzled, at the time, as were the Doctors and Nurses!” she said, continuing. “What was apparent to us all, was that Hattie suddenly came down with severe stomach infections, life-threatening ones, rushed to a Hospital by your parents, left there, nursed back to health, then returned home to have the cycle repeat – until around age 4 when Hattie could start reasoning and talking well ...then she had what was then called a *miraculous recovery* and never got sick again – other than the usual types of stuff. Do you recall that?”

“Yes, I do ... our family had a terrible time, the stress was immense and dad was forced to spend more time with us rather than go golfing after work with his friends – and on weekends. It’s lucky for us that mother had been a Nurse before she had me and became a housewife!” Lizzie added.

“Yes ... and she was very happy to be working in Hospitals and really missed being around the Doctors and Nurses and patients when she was forced to quit, as often happened in those days to us women starting a family.” Jean remarked before continuing “Well, all the Doctors and Nurses were baffled by the mystery Illness that threatened to kill Hattie, and your mother got a lot of praise for being so talented and long suffering – dedicated, as a mother and a nurse, really!”

“Yes, I recall that aunt Jean, but then suddenly all of that stopped and there was no reasonable explanation given! In fact nobody was ever allowed to speak about it ever again! The matter was considered closed – a bit puzzling!” she said.

“Well as best we can figure, a new pediatrician arrived at Karl Bremmer hospital and asked for all Hattie’s medical records, then called your dad in to see him - not your mom, which was really a little odd to all of us. Hattie was then discharged and soon declared, by your mother, to have been miraculously cured! When I pressed her on the subject, she was very uncomfortable, but eventually told me that Hattie

had Celiac Disease and that she – not Doctors, had figured that out, and that the new pediatrician was jealous that she was smarter than him, and so the matter ended.”

“Wow aunt Jean, I never knew all that!” Lizzie exclaimed.

“Yes, well, we kind of thought so. I mean what does a 8 year old girl really know or remember about all of this?” she said. “So that’s why we brought you two here today – to warn you to be careful when you have children, as it may be genetic?”

“Thank you for being so caring aunt Jean – and Uncle Max, we really appreciate you filling us in on all this!” Lizzie said, adding “I feel sure I’d never have heard about this from her!”

Then they chatted about other things and after a 2<sup>nd</sup>. pot of tea – served with an assortment of biscuits, they said their goodbyes and left – back for their apartment in Mowbray.

On the train, Nicholas spoke “You know Lizzie, My dad told me that next year he and mom are leaving Sterkspruit – It’s just getting too dangerous for white-settlers there now, and that he’d received a job offer from the Tygerberg teaching hospital that would involve him working at ‘Karl Bremmer’ hospital too. I’m going to mention this to him so that he can make the necessary inquiries once he’s there, to get to the bottom of this mystery for us –I mean, it’s important for us and for our future family ... we really should know!”

“Yes Nicholas, I agree, we need to know!” she said, adding “What’s always puzzled me is the way my sister’s miracle cure was dealt with by my parents –rather than shout about it from the rooftops, for all to hear, praising God, like most do, they acted ashamed and secretive and everyone was told to never broach the subject ever again – or else my mother would get very angry - my dad too! They shut everyone up!”

“But you know what’s even more puzzling Lizzie?” Nicholas said continuing “Aunt Jean explained that Celiac disease was caused by gluten-containing foods, and as long as I’ve known your family, your sister eats lots of pasta and bread!” he said, adding “Why on earth would your mother allow that if she knew that gluten was the cause of Hattie’s illness?”

## Chapter 29

### **Saying goodbye to Nicholas' parents ... and to Africa.**

After Graduation, having sold all their furniture, Nicholas and Lizzie caught the passenger train from Cape Town Station to Bloemfontein (the city of roses, birth place of “Lord of the Rings” author J.R. Tolkien) going through Belleville, Wellington and Worcester, before proceeding on through the Karoo to various towns along the way, arriving at Bloemfontein about a day later, Kathleen Strauss would meet them at the station to take them back to their home for a short vacation - to say farewell, before leaving Africa.

South Africa was famous for its rail service – even more so back then. Nicholas and Lizzie travelled in style – having a private sleeper compartment. The train needed to traverse many mountain ranges, and needed to climb from sea-level up to an altitude of 4,600 feet, and back then much of the journey was still by Steam-train, adding that extra old-style charm to the whole experience. The trains had plush dining cars, where Nicholas and Lizzie would sit and enjoy fine food and drinks while chatting away and enjoying the scenery, comfortable beds, showers and bathrooms. Nicholas had planned this trip for Elizabeth as a surprise, since they’d soon be leaving Africa, and he wanted her to have fond memories of it to accompany them to a new life in Canada.

Kathleen Strauss was waiting for them on the platform of Bloemfontein’s station, and they all greeted each other enthusiastically, before leaving on the 3 hour car-trip back to Sterkspruit, where a lovely big Dinner was being prepared by the servants to welcome back master Nicholas and his wife miss Elizabeth one last time – and of course, Nicholas’s dad Dr. Johan Strauss was eager to see the couple again and had a surprise for them. At dinner while they were passing the cheeses, crackers and Port around, he spoke...

“Son, you and Elizabeth are going on a brave new journey to start a new life in Canada, far away from your mother and I, much to our regret – but that said, since mom and I lived overseas for several years while I was studying at the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons, we know how tough that can be ... so I have a present here for you two, it’s our wedding gift to you to help you successfully start your lives in Canada.” He said, handing over a thick envelope to him. Nicholas opened it finding R5,000 in it (the 1979 equivalent of some \$7,000US) This was a huge present and really well appreciated! Nicholas and Lizzie got up and hugged both Johan and Kathleen Strauss, very relieved that they’d no longer be at the mercy of Constance – or dependent on her for anything! Then they finished dinner and retired to bed.

The next two weeks were spent largely with just Nicholas’s parents, in their home, but each day they walked around the little town and said hello and goodbye to those that were left there. Sterkspruit had already started emptying out, the white European settlers there – less than 40 families, all concluding that their lives were now endangered by shifting attitudes towards them – the Black indigenous population making it clear that they no longer wanted them there – and there were several 100,000 of them. Even the Hilltop hotel, once a famous place for the jolly men of Sterkspruit – the Bain of all of their wives, was now owned by a native man. The van Heerden family had moved to the neighboring town of Zastron, buying the Zastron hotel. It was at least safer there, with mostly European farmers and their families – many of whom were Nicholas’s relatives. Africa was changing and South Africa was the last colonial bastion left standing. The last days of colonialism there was playing out ... in earnest!

The people who remained in Sterkspruit were, as usual, very hospitable – though a few of the women – not many, did look suspiciously at Elizabeth’s mid-riff for any bulge, as they couple had married so suddenly a few months earlier, and of course, in a little community, there had been speculation! They went to say goodbye to Uncle Jimmy and aunty Louise,

The Cusens family, The Mathers and to others, then later – at the Zastron hotel, to Uncle van and aunty Anne, previous owners of the Hilltop Hotel, as well as to their son, also to Estelle –engaged, with a huge wedding ring on her finger! Uncle Corrie, Nicholas’s Godfather, was passing through from his farm to his trading station near Sterkspruit, so he stopped by to say goodbye to Nicholas and Lizzie. As usual he smiled –but he was more somber today, it was the end of an era. As Nicholas grasped his hand, he and uncle Corrie both somehow knew they’d never see each other again – Uncle Corrie saying as much, knowing his parents would soon be moving far away to Cape Town and that there would be no compelling reason for Nicholas and Lizzie to ever return here. It was mid-morning when he left, after Tea, and Dr. Johan Strauss had interrupted his clinic, getting patients to wait, so that he could join them for a quick cup of tea and so that he could also say goodbye to Nicholas and Lizzie before they left ... which he now did. “Son ... please write to your mother from Canada, and when you can afford it, we’d love you to call us too!” he said “You know we’d always thought that finally we can all move to Cape Town and be a big extended family there – watching grandchildren grow-up near to us, but plainly we have to adapt now to new realities. I too left my parents on the farm in Zastron, with your mother, to study overseas to become a Doctor, and it was tough for my mom, especially, but also my dad. In those days letters travelled by mail-ship, which meant they normally took a month to reach their destinations. You used to write to us about once a week from Boarding school, and mom would reply for us every week. Now airmail letters take about two weeks to reach Canada, so it’s not that different!” He said, trying to remain positive, but he saw that Kathleen was fighting valiantly to keep from being emotional - he to maintained a stiff upper lip! Then they took their leave of each other, hugging and wiping away a few tears – yes, even in the tough old Dr’s eyes, and he returned to his consulting room to see his patients before travelling to the mountains, a different direction each day, to see those who were ill that couldn’t easily get to him in the little town of Sterkspruit.



Soon enough the end came ... and it was time for Nicholas and Lizzie to be returned to Bloemfontein, from where they would catch a flight to Johannesburg – then from there to London, then New-york and finally Toronto, where Lizzie’s dad would meet them at the Pearson International airport.

The 3 hour car-trip to Bloemfontein went by all too fast for Kathleen and Nicholas, who had been very close. Always! Soon they were standing at the one solitary gate of the Bloemfontein airport and that dreaded moment had arrived.

“Goodbye Elizabeth, May God bless you my girl, and please continue to make my son happy ... clearly he loves you very much! Events of the past few years must have proved that to you by now, and please be his support in Canada – we cannot be there to help him emotionally and from everything we’ve witnessed, Canada, for our son... is hostile territory – you will be all he has there!” she said, hugging Elizabeth warmly, for they had a genuine love for one another, kindred spirits in some ways – but much more importantly, their common bond was that they both loved Nicholas very much!

“Thank you mom ... thank you for everything!” Lizzie said, tears forming in her eyes as she realized that she was taking Kathleen’s favorite child far, far away from her. “I promise I will love your son and I will never withhold him from you! You and dad will always be welcome to visit us and we will often come and visit you once you are settled in Cape Town, at least once every few years - or more if we can afford to!”

Kathleen was touched by Elizabeth’s assurances, and said “Well, dad is a Dr. and is quite wealthy, so you may see us there in Toronto first – maybe in a year or so, so get settled fast – we’ll want to stay with you and Nicholas, not in a hotel, they’re so impersonal!” she added “But you’re right, first we must complete our move to Cape Town, get settled in there before we join the jet-set.” She said smiling now.

“You’ll be welcomed there by us mom – count on it” Lizzie said, giving her another hug – but this time not so long.

Then the moment arrived that everyone dreaded...Nicholas and his mom had to say goodbye. Before they even hugged both of them had tears in their eyes, so for a while they just hugged saying nothing - reason being they couldn't talk. After a while they stood back, still holding onto each other's shoulders looking at each other through their tears ...

"Good bye son ... you know I love you and I'm so very proud of you! Take good care of yourself and Elizabeth, and let us know when you're safely in Canada – and write to us often, we'd like to know that all is well, but if you and Elizabeth run into trouble please let us know, we'll find a way to help!"

"I'll do that mom!" he replied, and please let us know what your new address will be in Cape Town, or wherever you end up living, as pretty soon I'll no longer know where to write?"

"I'll do that, son ... you'd better go now, you two are the last to walk outside to the plane there – the crew seem a bit anxious, though I suppose we can't blame them!" she said.

With one last quick hug, they turned to leave to walk to their plane, turning just before climbing the stairs into the plane to wave and blow a kiss to Kathleen, still standing there and she saw and waved back to them. This time Lizzie let Nicholas sit at the window – so that he could see his mom, for a few minutes more. He spotted her still standing there – and imagined she could see him too, but of course she couldn't see into the plane. Soon the plane's cabin doors were shut, and the plane taxied out onto the runway, then took off into the giant billowing puffy clouds - afternoons always brought thunder showers there, so the rough ride to Johannesburg's international airport was a good distraction.

Elizabeth put her head on Nicholas's shoulder, squeezed his arm gently saying "Don't worry Nicholas, you'll see your parents again –often! I promised them that, and I promise you too! Count yourself among the blessed to have enjoyed such a big, loving family! It hardly seems fair that we're now leaving a family who loves and cares for us ... for one that doesn't!" she said, adding "But who knows what the future holds – but God. Clearly He has a purpose for all of this!"

## Chapter 30

### **Johannesburg, London, New-York and finally Toronto.**

They'd have several hours to while away the time in Jan-Smuts International airport, and there to help them do that were their old friends, two from Sterkspruit days, Cathy, Denise's sister and her husband - and one from their wedding in Cape Town, Denise's handsome boyfriend Tony, who'd recently been transferred by his company back to Joburg, leaving everyone wondering if Denise and he would stay an item - or not? Everyone liked Tony and thought that he and Denise made such a good looking couple! "Match-making can sure be tough!" - everyone agreed, laughing.

Soon they were all saying their final goodbye's, and this time it was rather somber ... not only would these old friends not be seeing each other in a long time, Nicholas and Lizzie were saying goodbye, probably for life, to their youth and country of birth ... South Africa. So many wonderful memories, so many friends and all of their extended family ... soon gone! In Canada they'd know no one and have no family - least not any that truly cared about them, so it was like going to 'ground-zero' of a nuclear blast - nothing there, start over!

The flight to London was a night-flight, so after supper and a few hours watching a movie, they fell asleep lying against each other, the first time they'd been on an international flight together - their first attempt a year ago thwarted by Constance. Suddenly somehow it felt kind of exhilarating ... flying off into the sunset together, to start a new life in a far away land not knowing what awaited them there, but being determined to face all challenges to come their way -united!

Their adventure had begun, but first Nicholas had booked the flights to allow 4 days in each of London and New York. That way him and Lizzie could have a little bit of fun before that dreaded meeting they'd scheduled for Christmas eve!

Soon enough the flight-crew were waking everyone up for Breakfast – not long afterwards they landed at Heathrow, now an airport they were somewhat familiar with. Then caught the train into the city and made their way to their hotel in a nice area of London, not far from the theaters and checked in, freshened up and went right back out again to walk around as Tourists. Soon they found themselves on Oxford St. and marveling at all the sights – and of course Piccadilly lane, then Harrods – where everything was way too expensive for them, so they didn't spend much time but instead went back out to walk around and see at least some sights before finding a nice pub and having Bangers & Mash and British beer – which Lizzie, naturally, had a liking for, preferring beer to wine. That made Nicholas very happy as with his German ancestry, beer ran in his veins - not wine!

That night found them going to a musical, and then back to the hotel, where they finally had a good night's sleep - their sleep on the flight from Joburg to Heathrow not being that long or good! The next morning they had the full British breakfast that was included with their room by their hotel, and marveled at it - finally having an authentic big British breakfast - tasty and filling! Lot's of eggs, sausage, bacon, toast, marmalade, tea/coffee. The rest of the day they spent seeing the Houses of Parliament, Westminster Abbey, the tower of London, the London Bridge and Buckingham palace – and by the end of the day, they were back in another cozy British pub, enjoying Fish and soggy Chips – British style, mushy peas and, of course, a couple of pints of British ale! Sitting there they concluded that London was now off their 'must see' list – nice as it was, the best part was its nice old pubs – cheerful, good food, great beer and good company! So back to their hotel, shower, get to bed – have a nice beer assisted cuddle, then drop off to sleep in each other's arms till the morning and repeat. At the end of their London stay, they enjoyed another fine British Breakfast, and then it was checkout time and back to Heathrow for their flight to New York – the 'Big Apple' as some called it, not sure why? The flight to New York was a daytime flight and not that long – besides the 8 hour flight time almost cancelled out

the time difference, which was 5 hours, so they really had just lost 3 hours of the day – arriving at JFK airport around midday and taking a cab to their hotel in Time’s square, very near its famous landmark. From there they easily found their way around Manhattan, not venturing too far, but going to Macy’s –which though expensive, was nowhere near as expensive as Harrods! So Lizzy bought a few small things there, of the ‘frilly sexy variety’, much to Nicholas’s delight! It was three days before Christmas, and the city was decked out in Holly, trees and lights. This was an intriguing city – to it they would return some day, they’d agreed. One of the main reasons, in 1979, for Nicholas to stop-over in NY city though –was to buy something he’d need for his career, something that very few people had ... but all of a sudden, everyone wanted – including him! So it was that he bought his first personal Computer – an APPLE 2+ with a whopping 16K of memory and no disks, plus no screen, that’s what a TV was for! So Lizzie got lingerie - Nicholas got a PC? That didn’t quite seem fair since both of those benefitted him... only one benefitted her. “Oh well ... he’d be meeting mother again soon ... so I’d best keep him distracted!” she thought.

Then Dinner in a Time’s square restaurant, where soon a nice older black couple who sat in the booth next to them, for a while, struck up a conversation with them. They were on a short holiday to NY from Washington DC, government employees both of them, and they were fascinated to find out that Lizzie had eloped back to Africa to marry Nicholas, her childhood sweetheart –that now she was going back to face the music, in Canada –with her new husband! So much so that they insisted on paying the young couple’s bill -“Our treat!” they said “We haven’t heard such a nice love-story in decades ... at least not since Betty here, a southerner from Atlanta, ran away with me, a Yankee, to DC!” George said. With that, the two loving couples had a fun evening of good food and lot’s of stories of family feuds, love lost and found, and lost then found again. Both were living proof eloping was one way to ensure that a couple stayed together long! They had lot’s of fun on their stay in New York (most people do) and, without knowing it, left with this priceless memento of 22y old bride, Elizabeth’s first visit to New York, agreeing

to take exactly the same photo in 2004 on a return trip to New York city for their 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Sadly that would never happen –they didn't know that, back then. Who did?



Jennifer, 22 ... Taken on our Honeymoon in NY city, late December 1979, some 21 years before 9-11.

# Chapter 31

## **New Year's eve, 1979, Elizabeth returns... triumphant!**

Edwin was there to meet their flight from New York city which had now landed at Pearson International airport in Toronto, and was eagerly waiting for them to walk through the customs exit into the main arrivals area. But he had to wait till most of the passengers had already left, since Nicholas's entry into Canada now was not that of a tourist, but of a new landed immigrant and as such required a little more processing and paperwork. Soon enough he spotted them – waving enthusiastically at them! Elizabeth noticed and pointed Nicholas's attention in the direction of her dad, then said to him “That's a little odd ... dad's all alone here?”

Soon they were shaking hands and making small-talk, on their way to the parking garage where he'd parked his car. He put their luggage into the trunk and offered Elizabeth the seat next to him in front, but she declined saying she'd rather sit in the back seat with Nicholas, for reasons not clear to Edwin –yet, till Lizzie began to explain as they left ...

“You see dad, the last few times we were in your car, we were always together in the back seat - but back then under rather sad circumstances. Now we're returning under much happier circumstances, and I'd like to feel that will cancel out the previous hurts!” she said, rather seriously to him.

Edwin winced a little, then said “Yes, well Lizzie, maybe it's time for me trade the Oldsmobile Cutlass in on a brand new car – you know, new beginnings ...” He said, trying to put a more positive spin on things “I've been eyeing a nice white Pontiac Firebird ... it's a real nice sporty car!” he now added. Edwin loved cars! He looked for any excuse to get a new one, so to Lizzie this just sounded like a rather handy excuse! Soon they were on the 401 Highway, headed in the opposite direction to Kitchener-Waterloo, twin cities that had been less than a happy place for all of them. Towards Oshawa

then to Cobourg, on the north shore of lake Ontario. It had been snowing, the roads were slushy and snow-plows were still working and sprinkling salt on the roads so that tonight the slush would not freeze over. Edwin took it slow – partly because of the road conditions, but also because he needed to chat with them. Clearing his throat, he started ...

“Elizabeth, you and Nicholas no doubt know that mother was not at all happy with your plans to return to Cape Town and be married, and well .... Let’s just say she’s not quite adapted to the new realities yet, so please be patient. That said, I have a little something for you two ... please keep it quiet though, I have not got her blessing!’ With that, Edwin reached inside, into his jacket’s pocket, and retrieved the envelope Lizzie had given him when he’d taken her to the airport to fly back to Cape Town - to Marry Nicholas, then reached back with his one free hand and said “Here Lizzie, I kept my word to you, here’s your \$1,000 back, please keep it as a wedding present from me” he said, adding “It turns out the power-boat I bought ended up being about \$1,000 less than mom had thought when we’d first got a quote from the salesman, I switched motors from an expensive Mercury to a cheaper Chrysler” but mom doesn’t need to know that!

“Thanks dad! Don’t worry, your secret’s safe with me -mums the word” she said, eagerly taking the envelope from him. She at least now had a bit to add to the \$7,000 she’d kindly been given as her dowry, in Africa, to begin their new life in Canada. Nicholas, not quite sure what to make of all this, thanked him too, just in case he’d be seen as ungrateful.

“So Dad, please tell me what kind of a reception we can expect once we get to your new Cobourg home? I mean, forewarned is fore-armed!” she said with a nervous laugh, “and what about Hattie? I’ve heard nothing about her at all.”

“Lizzie ...” he started to say “We’ll know when we get there!” “Neither of them are happy -though most of that applies to your mother... but I did sit them down before I left, and I outlined the reality, once again, and told them to please be gracious in welcoming you both to our new home – then just maybe we can all try to have a fresh start in our dealings with each other, and that we should all be grateful Nicholas



brought you back to us, in Canada – I mean, if it were me I'd have been tempted not to do that! So ... while we're talking about all this, thank you Nicholas, from me, for bringing my daughter back to Canada – though I'm going to admit that if you had opted to stay there, I'd have been on the next plane back to Cape Town to ask for my old job back, to restart our old lives there! I'm a fish out of water in Canada, and I'm fearful my job may well become redundant soon -rumors are swirling among workers at the tannery. There are no other tanneries in Canada that could use my skills." He clarified, sounding worried. "If that's the case we'll be in a lot of trouble!" "I sure hope it's not though!"

"Oh no! That sounds really worrying dad!" Lizzie exclaimed.

Nicholas sat there, a little stunned, thinking "I wish he'd told us this months ago - maybe we did not need to leave?" but said instead "I'm sure things will work out for the best, Mr. Smythe, let's just stay positive! There are signs that South Africa has a troubled time ahead of it -that will mean a whole new series of problems need to be faced that at least we'll not have to face in Canada. In Africa ... no one knows!"

"True Nicholas, I think the best of our old '*good-life*' there is probably gone for good now, or soon will be!" He replied, happy that Nicholas at least was sounding so sensible.

Soon they were in Cobourg. Edwin gave them a brief tour of a now rather deserted downtown - probably to buy them all more time till the dreaded, inevitable meeting - but it was getting dark now so there'd be no more stalling! Christmas lights were everywhere – even on trees lining the roads, it was Christmas-eve, after all ... Exactly one year later. Edwin was driving them to (not from) Constance's home - unlike a year earlier. They now entered a quiet neighborhood, right on the lake-front, on the beach. Edwin stopped briefly to point at icebergs now accumulated there, barely visible in the dark. All of the homes were twinkling in Reds, Greens, Yellows, Whites and Blues – and many had Nativity scenes, Santa's, elves and Reindeer ornaments, illuminated on their snow covered front lawns. Then Edwin pulled the car into a clear driveway, with snow piled up on either side, but didn't open the Garage door. "I don't have an automatic door

opener” He said apologetically “Sometimes the door freezes shut, so nowadays I mostly park my car outside, so that if we need to go somewhere in a hurry, at least we can! Mom’s blue AMC Pacer’s in there now - horrid car, but she likes it.”

Constance was standing in their upstairs bedroom, peering at them from behind the curtains, looking down as Edwin got out, then Elizabeth alighted...she was still hopeful, just maybe? No such luck! There he stood ... next to Elizabeth!

“Nicholas!” she cried out loud “My daughter’s going to rue the day she ever defied me and ran away to marry you! I’ll do my best to make sure that you return, without her, back to Africa -where you belong, dead or alive!” she said between gritted teeth “You’ve no place in my family here in Canada!”

Just then Nicholas shivered and looked up, briefly seeing Constance standing there -the lights of the room making her outline clearly visible, framed by the window – but quickly she let the curtain go and it blocked the scene. “I thought I just saw your mother, Lizzie?” he said to her, pointing to the upstairs window above the front door – Edwin interrupted...

“Nicholas, help me here with your luggage” Edwin said to him “Let’s get in from this cold -I have some beers waiting for us, and yes Lizzie, some Champagne too!” he said to her.

“OK Mr. Smythe” Nicholas replied, grabbing the heavier two of their four bags, and waiting for him to lead the way.

Lizzie was already at the door waiting when she saw a light come on inside - then it opened. Constance stood glaring at her, arms folded tightly on her chest, blocking the doorway. Elizabeth stood there, on the outside of the threshold - not wanting to enter quite yet, waiting for Nicholas and Edwin to round the corner from the car and driveway with their luggage. Then, just as they appeared, she started talking ...

“Mother, as you can see, we’re witnessing dad carrying our luggage back into your home from out in the snow - unlike Christmas-eve a year ago, so I’m taking this opportunity to re-introduce you to Nicholas Strauss, my husband whom I admire and love very much!” But Constance interrupted her.

“Elizabeth ...” She said “I sent a letter to you after you ran

away -back to Africa, and I timed that letter to arrive before your wedding ... did it arrive there before your wedding?"

"Yes mother, it did, and on the way to the church I opened it and started to read it -but it started out all wrong, so I tore it up and threw it away. I really don't know what you wrote, beyond the first sentence, so if you want me to know, tell me in person now -but as Mrs. Elizabeth Strauss!" Getting no response, she added "So here I am..." but quickly corrected herself "Here we are, married, and back in Canada, ready to start our adult lives ... in the same country as you! I'm ever hopeful that, given time, you'll learn to at least like Nicholas a little bit, and for all our sakes, please do try! I'm Nicholas's wife now mother - and that's the way I'll die... but hopefully one day a very long time from now!" she added after seeing a look of horror appear on Constance's face. "Mother, may we please come in from the cold?" She asked, forcing a kinder smile onto her face - her attempt to elicit a positive response from what appeared now to be a statue standing before her.

Nicholas and Edwin stood there - frozen, and not from the cold! What they were witnessing was two adult women, one on either side of a threshold -each with their own fixed views of how Lizzie's life should be unfolding - but Elizabeth was no longer a Smythe! She was finally married to her Nicholas, who now had a Computer degree and full immigrant status in Canada - not to mention the \$7,000 in his pocket, and in hers, \$7,000 + her \$1,000 back! Uncle Eugene, had given her an ace to hide up her sleeve. Not only did she have a large dowry, placing her on a much more even-footing with Nicholas - but more importantly, she now had the means to resist her mother's manipulation of her and control of their love-story. It was as if Constance sensed that very few high cards were left in her hand - that Elizabeth now held them all - so with a sigh she moved aside from the door, saying... "Yes ... if you must, come on in - but make sure to wipe your feet well ... I have no servants anymore to clean the mess that winter so regularly makes of my house, here!"

Lizzie turned and looked back at her husband, then said to him, with a triumphant smile "Nicholas, you heard mother - and to quote the pilot of our last flight - the one from New

York ... Ladies and gentlemen, we've received final clearance to land in Canada!" she said, winking at him and to a very relieved Edwin! With that they wiped their feet and crossed over the threshold - from the slushy-cold, into a dry house. Edwin suggested they leave the luggage in the front foyer until later - after they'd each had a beer. Nicholas agreed, wondering if he was just being careful - not wanting to go back upstairs to retrieve their luggage if things did not work out well and they were forced to leave - but he dismissed that as 'temporary paranoia' and followed Edwin to the beer.

Just then Elizabeth spotted Hattie sitting on the landing of the stairway leading upstairs - looking rather downcast.

"Hello Hattie" Elizabeth said, "Aren't you coming down to greet us?" she asked, as she noticed Hattie sigh and get up. "Well 1 out of 3 isn't as bad as zero" she thought "Too bad!" then took off her shoes and coat, and went into the kitchen. Hattie followed her into the kitchen. Elizabeth broke the ice.

"I have so much news -and wedding photos to show you! We had a wonderful wedding and reception, two actually, and a fabulous Honeymoon -though I'm sad to report we didn't get to see Siesta, where we first met, again! Mr Nixon died some time back so it's been closed since - deserted, and we were warned by a receptionist at Fairy-Knowe, where we stayed, that it's not safe to go there -that it could be dangerous! So we decided against it - some things are best left in the past!"

Constance was gleeful hearing of Mr. Nixon's death "That's what happens to people I curse!" she thought, smirking ... then quickly recovering "That's too bad dear, I was so sure you'd be staying there!" she sighed, quickly adding "But you must return to it on the first visit to his family in Africa, it's very important for you both to go back to Siesta!" she said, "I'll pay half the cost -consider it a belated wedding present."

"Maybe you're right mother -Siesta was the birthplace of our love!" Lizzie replied -wondering why she was suddenly being so supportive of their love? "But then again, we did actually conclude everything we went there to do -wrapped it all up neatly -so going back would taint what we've accomplished; our transition from young childhood sweethearts to an adult married couple. No ... we'll likely never go back there now!"

“But dear, in life you should always keep options open, and visits to nostalgic places can only help the cause!” she said, adding “and that trip will result in a much happier ending!”

“I’ll think about it mother... but for now we have no plans to return to Africa soon, or the Wilderness and our childhood, for that matter” adding “What’s for supper? We’re starving!”

And with that the subject was closed, but not before Lizzie thought to herself “That’s most unlike mother? What’s she up to?” In truth, she did not know or fully understand –yet!

“Oh, and mother ... I have some exciting news for you, from your past!” Lizzie said, sensing that with Nicholas & Edwin safely away enjoying their beers, as South African men are wont to do, Hattie in her room ... now was the perfect time!

“Really? What might that be?” Constance curiously asked.

“Whilst on our honeymoon, en-route to PE, we stopped over for a visit with an old friend of yours.” Before the realization of whom that might be, dawned on her, Lizzie continued ...

“Uncle Eugene, my God-father, was very pleased to see me, and to meet Nicholas!” Elizabeth watched as now a range of emotions swept over a stunned Constance’s face ... and she stood motionless, with a wistful, far-away look in her eyes.

Recovering - and doing her best to not appear too flustered, Constance inquired “Really? What were your impressions?”

“Well mother, when I first saw his huge old stone mansion, and stood looking out over the spectacular view of the beach and ocean stretched out before me, I’ll admit that, for a brief moment, I understood how Elizabeth Bennett felt when she first saw, then later walked through Pemberly ...” and before Constance could recover, Lizzie added “You see mother, I’ve met your ‘Darcy’ – and he really is a nice man! He was so kind to me – to us! Now I understand why you’ve been so obsessed with me marrying Charles! All of your own dreams and hopes for importance, well, they’re far away and now belong to a lovely lady, Milly, who uncle Eugene proposed to while we visited him ... and with, by the way, the same rock of an engagement ring you returned to him before you ran away with that exciting young man, on his motorbike, and married ... my dad, who it appears, was your ‘Wickham’ -

though I'd hasten to add mother, he's really done his very best to make it all up to you through the years, somehow!" Clearly reeling, Constance asked "What else did you learn?" "Well, as I've just implied, uncle Eugene and I now both do know why you gave him his ring back, then ran off to get married, also that I am Edwin's daughter," again, before an even more shell-shocked Constance could interrupt, she said "My visit brought happy closure to Uncle Eugene, also to aunt Milly –soon she'll move into the most enchanting old stone castle in Noetzie, Knysna! Turns out that she has two daughters. Her family was good friends with uncle Eugene. Sadly her husband died while the girls were little. However, that gave Uncle Eugene a chance to be a dad. He's regarded them as his wards. They're both studying at universities in England, thanks to his generosity. Both are much Loved!"

Constance had finally recovered enough to reply: "Elizabeth, it's too late for me – but it's still not too late for you! There's still time to reverse your error –yes, even now. Nicholas, he's your 'Wickham', Charles is your 'Darcy'! then as she noticed Elizabeth's shock, added "I let my own prejudice - born from my desire to plot my own course in life and defy my father's choices for me, blind me to the many hidden, fine qualities, present in Eugene. I climbed onto the back of that exciting young man's motorbike, riding off out of Uncle Eugene's life, simply because I'd too hastily judged Eugene as 'too proud', and too over-confident, at having been chosen for me, by my dad, who, in hindsight, did have my best interests in mind!" And before Lizzie could recover from this unexpected turn of events, she continued "Dad's tenacity in courting me made the difference at a very crucial time – had he waited even a bit longer, I'd now be married to Eugene and, well, my whole life would have been different. Only when I sobered up from the euphoria of eloping to marry Dad, did doubts and regret begin to set in. Those, Elizabeth, are cancers. They grow and eventually consume one!" Then concluded "So yes, I was the 'Elizabeth' that spurned my 'Darcy'... then bested her sister, Lydia, by running off with 'Wickham' – and I've regretted it!" Elizabeth struggled to recover from her shock at hearing her mother's honest confessions, then, with her head spinning,

she attempted a rebuttal: “Mother, I’ll agree I’ve too resented your control of my life; you choosing who I’ll marry – who I’ll spend the rest of my life with - but I fail to see that Nicholas is, in any way, my ‘Wickham’! He’s a principled young man, educated at the best of private schools. He’s from a famous South African founding family, after whom the main St. in Johannesburg is named. They’re related, several times, to President Paul Kruger plus, via his maternal granny, he’s related to the first Prime-minister, General Lois Botha. His dad’s a wealthy Dr. He has a sought after Computer degree and a bright future. Your comparison’s irrelevant, it’s weak!”

“Elizabeth, on that day he ran up behind you, at the beach in the wilderness, looking dashing in his air force uniform, and hugged you – he pre-empted Charles’ planned proposal, and you decided to run off with him instead. So you’ve done exactly what I did ... you’ve spurned your ‘Darcy’. I’ve tried to make you see that, as I once did, you’ve eloped with your ‘Wickham’. Delay having his children Elizabeth! Once they are on the way, your whole life and all old options, change!”



Wilderness 1<sup>st</sup> date -1971 Serendipity! 1975, they meet again! Cape Town -1979 Married!

Lizzie paused, flustered, looking at Constance, then replied “Mother, I’m looking forward to having Nicholas’s children, and I’ll not stop till I’ve delivered him 2 sons – maybe more?” Indignant, she added: “I’ll not be bound by the characters in “*Pride & Prejudice*”, I’m not any of them -neither is Nicholas! If you’re to think of me as any character, in any story we all know, then the very best fit is ‘*Snow-White*’ –but think of the implications of both books, for you! Nicholas and I’ve always loved each other. He’s my soul mate ... and I am his. Please accept that mother, or you’ll just end up driving us away!”

*Constance, for once, just stood there, silent...still with a faraway, wistful look in her eyes.*

**\*\*The End\*\*** (Maybe? Because that still depends on Constance's actions - evil feeds Fairy-tales!)

# *Final Chapter* "Redemption" Vol9-DRAFT

## **The two Elizabeth's go out ... but only one comes back in!**

Nicholas watched as Lizzie stood out on the deck of Chalet-Rose, on the mountainside, high above the shimmering lake Okanagan – turned sideways, her left hand on the railing. Standing there, silent, facing Kelowna, across the lake from her, even though he could only see one side of her face, he could see she was crying. He thought about going out there, to hold her ... to comfort her, to tell that somehow this latest problem would be resolved, but then decided to wait a while longer – to give her time to process all the information they'd just learned from Chaplain Jim of the RCMP in Vancouver.

The wait seemed long, but in reality it was likely only 10min or so ... then Lizzie came back in, with no hint of any smile on her face, but paused between the sliding glass doors ...

"Nicholas, can you come out and join me on the deck? I have something important to ask you and I'd rather not want our sons to know – yet." Elizabeth said to him.

Nicholas didn't reply, but simply moved towards her and as she now turned to go back out onto the deck, he followed her back to where she had been standing before. As she got there, she turned to face him now, and as he got to her, she put her arms loosely around his neck – keeping enough distance so that he could see her eyes and face clearly ...

"Nicholas, today both me and my alter-ego came out onto this deck and we spent quite some time reviewing the events from the last 28y in Canada –culminating in the phone-call we just got from Chaplain Jim ... but only one of us went back in to summon you to this meeting. Do you know who and why?" she asked him, now looking deep into his eyes. Nicholas looked into her eyes, searching for some clues and then replied "After almost 28 years in Canada, I've grown to accept the two of you as my wife Lizzie, so no ... I can only guess at the reasons for all of this, you'll have to fill me in!"



Elizabeth's bottom lip started to tremble now, upon hearing his honest confession, knowing full well how much she'd expected of him through the years in Canada – but she drew in a deep breath and composed herself before continuing ...

“Nicholas, I want you to take us all as far away from her and Canada as we can possibly get ... and please do it quickly!”

“But Lizzie, 7 years ago I built you your dream home – this home, Chalet-Rose, and we've built a life here in Canada, do you really want to give it all up now? Aren't you perhaps over-reacting to the news we just got?” He asked, urgently.

“No Nicholas, the struggle between the two of me is finally over, for good! Hearing how my birth-mother took pleasure in the tragic death of their young son when their only ‘sin’ was to lend us emotional support to ward off her attacks, was the final straw!” Lizzie said, now sounding resolute, adding “I cannot ever let her think she has won any sort of victory. What she did was just evil, there's no other word for it! Chaplain Jim's right, your dad's right, Charles was right, Uncle Eugene and Aunt Milly were right, you're right too... and one of us Lizzie's was wrong to even hope, for so long, that she'd ever change! The ‘other me’ has conceded that now, we are both in full agreement. We want to run away with you and live, forever, as far away from her as what we can practically get –and not in the same country as her!”

“Wow Lizzie! A day that started out so normal, us enjoying tea and scones on the deck watching the sunrise, has sure turned out to be a big surprise! Maybe you'd rather want to sleep on it and discuss it again in the morning?” he asked.

“No, there's no need for that –now we need to start planning. You finally have only one Elizabeth to love!” she said firmly.

“Well Lizzie, I've waited very patiently for this day – one of our sons is at university and the other just finished High-school ... I've waited 28 years now, so if you take the 4 of us, well, that's 7years for each of us! If what you're saying's that our time in Purgatory is over, and that we now all need to leave to find a safer place to live ... well then, tough as that is to even think about now that I'm retired and turning 50 – as you will too, soon ... and as long as this is our final move,

then my answer is Yes ... I'll buy into that ideal!" adding "But only on one condition ... if you're Ok with that?" he replied.

"And what is that condition Nicholas?" Lizzie inquired of him

"That the Elizabeth that was still trying to get her mother's approval and acceptance, never, ever re-emerges -once we're in our new country, living our new life in that (as yet to be determined) land of far, far away!" Nicholas replied, adding "I think you know by now that was never going to happen!"

An apologetic smile appeared on Lizzie's face as she replied, "Nicholas, you have my word on that!" then to reassure him she added, resolutely "In fact let's make a pact ... right here, right now, that the only time we'll see my birth-mother ever again is when Chaplain Jim's young son comes back to life!"

Nicholas looked deep into her eyes... "Elizabeth meant every word she'd said!" he thought, then he replied "Ok Lizzie, I'll agree to those terms – but just to be very sure, that means 'never'... right?" he inquired –a frown starting above his eyes

"Yes, Nicholas...never! It's finally over! Both me and my once hopeful alter-ego, agree ... for the first time! It's time to move on, to put us all out of her reach...forever!" Lizzie confirmed.

"Well Lizzie, let's go and sit down, hold hands and pray to ask for God's help and guidance on this issue – at our stage of life we're really going to need all the help we can get! In fact, we're going to need quite a few miracles! The real-estate market's flat now, we've got two difficult homes to sell, not to mention all the other challenges we're going to face soon!"

Now, as Elizabeth and Nicholas sat there holding hands and praying, the orange glow of the sunset lit up the waters of the mirrored-lake stretched out in front of them ... the sun was setting on their Great Canadian adventure – they both knew that now. But what lay ahead for them all? What new dangers and challenges would they face? Where would they go? What would they do to make a living – starting over at 50, in a foreign land, one that had to be 'far, far away!' How would they ever be able to replace Chalet Rose, their dream home? How would they find a new country? What country would even consider taking in a family with two 50 year old parents, with sons aged 19 and 22 ... and their 11 year old

dog, Happy? So many questions and so many unknowns ... they'd need not just one Miracle - but several to make their latest escape even remotely possible. Then Nicholas spoke ...

"Lizzie, you know we've run away together 3 times already - well, ok, 4 times if you count your escape from her back to Cape Town to marry me. Anyway, this 5<sup>th</sup> really needs to be our last escape - so let's both pray that God guides us to the perfect place and speeds our exit, as it's quite obvious now that our cover's blown!" Nicholas said, adding "for 7yrs now, it's been a clear case of - the closer we are to danger, the further we are from harm!" he said, looking at Lizzie to reply.

"Nicholas, it's been a wonder-filled 7yrs in our dream home! I'm grateful to God, as I know you are, and though I thank Him for that privilege - I'm thanking you too for delivering His promise to me ... to us! But there's much more at stake here than our dream home and a comfortable retirement! How would God feel about us if we simply looked the other way at what my ex-mother's done to Chaplain Jim's family? No Nicholas, we need to stand-up for what's right and in so doing send a very strong message to her ... that all of her dirty tactics, all her hate and pride, all her efforts to control our lives -failing that, to destroy our lives, is over! She's lost! There's simply no return for her, ever! It's now only possible for her to redeem herself with God ... no longer with me, or you. There has to be a price to pay for her - for her crimes, even if she pleads with God for forgiveness!" Elizabeth said. Nicholas squeezed her hand firmly "OK Lizzie...let's do this! I'm not sure I'm cut-out for this 'retirement thing' anyway!" he said smiling at her "It was fun to retire at 43 - even if it was right under the nose of our old, relentless enemy, but I think we need constant challenges to ensure we stay alive!"

Elizabeth smiled back at Nicholas, squeezing his hand too and then replying "Yes Nicholas, this is the last place she'd ever have thought we'd be living! I just wish that we'd not told my relatives! Turns out they betrayed us. Yes ... I think that's true ... we need more challenges at our age than just planning the next Tea or Coffee date ... nice as those are!"

Nicholas changed the subject now "So Lizzie, we can go back to Africa ... my parents have offered us their lovely home as

they're getting very old now, and we already know Cape Town well ... but I have serious reservations about South Africa's future! I'm not so sure that we'd not just be jumping from a frying-pan into a fire!" he noted, awaiting her reply.

"Yes Nicholas, I think the best of Africa is in our past now – let's keep it that way. I don't think taking our sons back there is prudent – long-term!" So let's scratch it off the list.

"And the USA too –much as we really have wanted to live there, the immigration official told us that there's a 20 year waiting list - unless we sneak across the border, in which case we'd probably get citizenship and the right to vote in a few years – I'm not willing to live that precariously!" he said.

"And Australia ... when we looked into that option a few years back – before eloping to the Niagara escarpment, God shut that option down for us in a very definitive way!" Lizzie said, adding "Nice an idea as that was, we'd best not do so!"

"Lizzie, I've heard a lot of nice things about Costa-Rica on the Internet of late ... why don't you look into that for us?" Nicholas suggested, adding "It's far away enough... I think?"

"Ok Nicholas, let's investigate that option ... but also, pray!"

"Yes, that's always a good idea Lizzie! Let's continue to do that every day from now on – we'll need God's guidance and help with this plan... it's our boldest one yet!" Nicholas said "We need our sons to approve of the choice too, not just us!"

"Nicholas ... " Lizzie started to say, to get his attention.

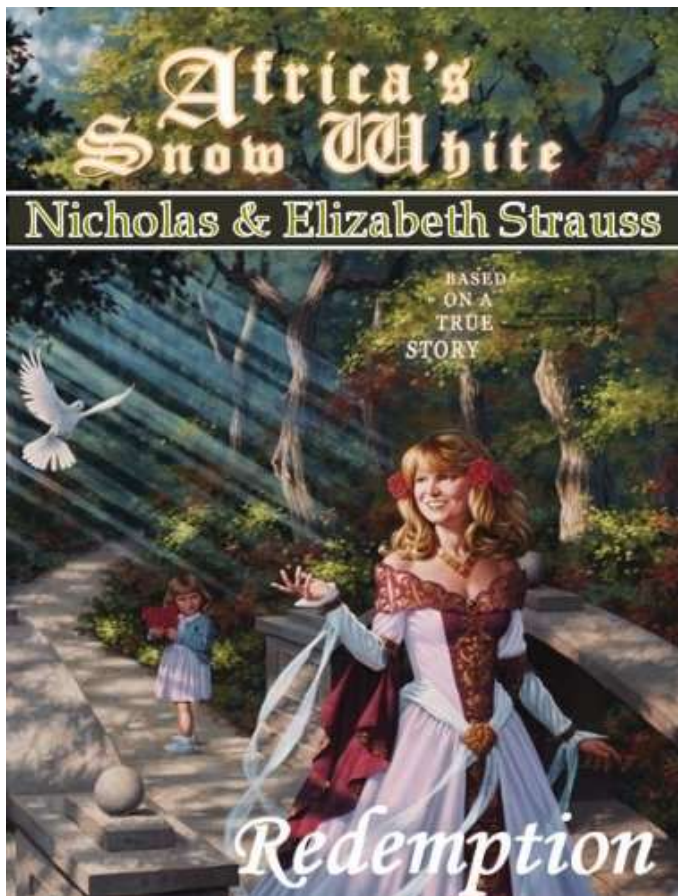
"Yes Lizzie? You have another idea or a question maybe?"

Lizzie smiled at him "Not really, I think we're in agreement on our need to finally close the book on our long Canadian adventure ... but what I was about to say is ..." then Lizzie turned to look at him and made sure he was looking at her before she continued "I love you Nicholas Strauss, and it's been an honor to be at your side as your wife for the last 28 years ... thank you for putting up with me and my alter-ego, she's been a bit of a pain at times... I'll be the first to admit!" Nicholas smiled reassuringly at Lizzie, then replied "Lizzie, I built your dream home across the lake from your ex-mother exactly because I knew that part you still lived in hopes that she'd change. I also knew of your desire to maybe reconcile

**Dec 1973:** Lizzie-17 & Nicholas-18 visit their secret place, a pool and waterfall deep within the Wilderness national park in South Africa, where they make the 1st two of their 7 wishes, before Nicholas's 2year term in the air force begins and they lose contact. Their wishes seem sweet but impractical as it's rare to end up living inside pristine national parks next to rivers pools and waterfalls –they're reserved for tourists! But dreams, even the impossible sounding ones, can come true! Imagine a place with just such a national park in which one can own property, but that's private, only home-owners and guests are allowed in, not the public, plus there's unsullied beauty and total privacy! **2006:** Elizabeth and Nicholas (49/50) bought a home in that national park, right next to a pristine river with many beautiful pools, waterfalls and its secret places, hidden safely inside of a National park in the highlands of ... **Panama.** Now if all this sounds like a fairy-tale ending to you, well, actually, it's better... it's very real!







**Redemption** exposes dark secrets barely hinted before. Lizzie asked for a concession. Constance has one last chance at her redemption - but if she does not, or if she tries, in any way to hurt our family ever again, then novels "Redemption" & "Deliverance" will be published, so it's our insurance policy against evil. You'll be amazed at how any characters in this story do get to enjoy partial or full Redemption, but it took nearly 5 decades in some cases! **Spoiler** Most have, except one! Here's a sneak-peek at what came next. Many hard-fought victories all savored. Fairy-tales are not safe, cute little stories. They are mostly dangerous, but do end "happily ever after, in a land far away" as so too, did this love story and fairy-tale. It's now an established, honestly earned part of our family history. When at 15&16, we'd 1st met (maybe again?) in Africa neither of us could ever have imagined that all of this would happen! It's been a wild ride-quite an adventure, and in the end, love triumphs over evil

With help from Elvis, here's a short video version: <https://bit.ly/3-Weddings-on-3-Continents>

**PS.** Dear Jen, I know you'll soon understand these novels were love-letters to you, from me, but I did allude to there being another love-letter to you, from your Daddy ... and that it was much more important, in the grand-scheme of things, than my love-letter, **so here it is:**

**Dear child,** Open the eyes of your heart and see me as I am. I am the Father who longs to draw you near, to comfort you with tenderness when you are lonely or afraid, to shield you with care when you cry out to me, to shelter you and protect you as an eagle protects its young. Though this world is clouded with mixed messages and with diluted commitments, my message is clear. My commitment is certain. I love you! You are mine. Though human love is not always consistent, my love is as sure as the sun-rise. I am here for you, and I will be here. Though others may forget you, I never will! You are my child and I am your Abba ... your Daddy! (by Claire Cloninger ©) **"I will not forget you!"** **PS.** and Jen, that's been perfectly true for you!

When asked if her son could write these novels, Jennifer said: "Well, OK, but only if there's a novel after the 7 Christmas Love-stories, showing how everyone, no exceptions, who're in the novels - in real life, were all dysfunctional, in some way - then how, one by one, they overcame their challenges, achieving Redemption - else all that writing these novels will do is relive a very traumatic time in our lives - there must be a purpose to all the pain!" Adding, later: "It must also give women hope that we can survive Breast cancer as Denise & I, leading ladies in this story, both did. Women panic, thinking it's 100% fatal, but by 20y after discovery&treatment it's only 20% fatal, on avg."

Africa's Snow-White's freedom in Panama → <https://www.youtube.com/Panama777>

# Chapter 7 **RIP** Douglas W. Pike Feb 1929 - Jul 2020

**Edwin's redemption**-Constance's evil plan defeated A precious last day for Edwin (Douglas) & Lizzie (Jennifer)  
*Excerpts from "Redemption" as yet unpublished (by Elizabeth's request out of respect for her dad while he was alive)*  
Imagine you have just 24hrs alone with your dad, before he disappears for **24 years** - then forever. What will you do?

**2006:** *Conversations en-route to Panama, by road, 11,000km from Vernon, BC, Canada:* "But Lizzie... you ended things with your dad on a high-note. I mean, as well as could be expected given what we've been up against. Not many daughters ever get to be there for their dad's redemption and Lizzie, on the last day you ever saw him, 9y ago, that's exactly what happened!" Nicholas remarked "True Nicholas ... that was a super-dramatic day! It started out so badly, but ended up so well – I thank God his wife was not there! Her evil plans for that final day would have interfered with God's plan! Ironically it was in her plan that he'd come to see us alone – so she wasn't there to derail the day's dramatic conclusion!" Lizzie said "She did not see that day's miraculous events coming - mind you neither did my dad or any of us!"

"Phew!" Nicholas said "I never expected him to arrive like that on a Sunday afternoon – unannounced, from so far away, and alone ... but even more surprising to me was his opening line "I should have come here to kill you today – but instead I'm warning you to stop looking into my wife's past. I'm duty-bound to protect her good-name ... at any cost!"

"Luckily I was listening in on the conversation from just within the front door, which was slightly open as you stood there to greet him!" Lizzie said, remembering how shocked she was hearing her dad threaten her husband, dad of her sons, and resort to such drastic measures anyway?

"Lizzie, I've rarely seen you that cross!" Nicholas laughed "You didn't hesitate – you instantly burst out at him, shouting "How dare you make such an evil threat!" adding "He was stunned! He'd thought it was just him and me, so there would be no witnesses –it would be his word against mine... I kind of doubt he'd ever have wanted his daughter to hear him say something so evil!" Nicholas now remarked, adding "I doubt he'd thought that plan up. I mean, I cannot imagine him wanting anyone dead, but she's often done so! We've witnessed her musings."

"Fortunately I did hear him –so the next hour or so was able to unfold according to God's plans for the day–not mothers!" Lizzie replied, adding "He rebuked me, saying that I should not call him evil, so I kind of softened it a bit by saying that he may not be purely evil – but he'd sure done a lot of very bad things by obeying her evil commands!" Lizzie said "and that he really should stop doing that kind of stuff for her!"

“He knew you were right Lizzie, that’s why he did not try to rebuke you again but instead turned to me, asking what it was that I’d found out about his wife that was making her so upset?” adding “I mean he really didn’t know, but assumed the worst. He was there following her orders to shut me up – one way or the other! But I called his bluff. I knew him well enough to think that killing me, even on her orders, was just not going to be his first option. Trying to shut me up by threatening me was his preferred choice! He’s not that brave and not a cold-blooded killer!”

“Still, you were taking a risk Nicholas – and after that day, I ensured that would never happen again! You’re the love of my life Nicholas – I couldn’t let her hate destroy our family! That was a worrying sign... we were being allowed to see the tip of the iceberg - of her evil plans, and with what we would find out about her after that –really it’s just as well I got you to then take evasive action!” Lizzie reiterated “Just as well!”

“Yes Lizzie, we were definitely being warned that she was so angry that she would sacrifice even her husband to shut me up – permanently, to save her ‘so-called’ perfect reputation!” Nicholas said “Her secrets we’d just barely begun to uncover were downright frightening, definitely evil! There’s no other word more appropriate! Your dad was shocked too!”

Nicholas said “But that was the catalyst for his redemption – I have to believe God had that all planned long in advance - His mercy in action!”

Lizzie grimaced, remembering what came next, then she smiled at the thought of how well that day ended! Edwin turned to Nicholas, asking “What did your investigations uncover that has my wife so angry? It’s my job to protect her ‘good-name’, so be careful, above all be respectful!”

“Well, it took some time ... but we’ve figured out how your family got to live in 27 1<sup>st</sup> Ave, and how your best friend really died and how you then got his job as the President (managing-director) - and I’m a bit surprised that you never knew any of the details behind all of that?” Nicholas said.

“My best friend committed suicide, Nicholas. I got his job because I had deserved it – that’s exactly what happened!” Edwin said. “What on earth has my wife got to do with any of that? Why would she worry?” he asked

“Mr. Smythe ...” Nicholas began “It wasn’t quite that simple! You see, after your best friend - the president of Western Tanning, lost his little boy to Leukemia, his wife became an alcoholic and cheated on him with a local mechanic – so in the little town of Wellington, she was disgraced and took off, abandoning him and the two little girls –but he still had you - his best friend, for support and could have made it through that crisis, if not for your wife’s very calculated intervention!” Nicholas said.

“What do you mean Nicholas? Please explain!” Edwin asked, suddenly perplexed, as it dawned on Elizabeth and Nicholas that he really did not know the truth! But Constance and Aaron Searle knew – so did Lizzie!



"I found out from Elizabeth that your wife then instigated a swap of your family's home for his mansion – which pushed his wife over the edge ... she had to give up the best home in Wellington for your home, 17 York St. which was nice – but, really, clearly not nearly as nice as 27 1<sup>st</sup> Ave!"

"Yes, we did swap homes – but that's what Lawrence wanted!" Edwin explained "Their home had too many bad memories – their little boy was sick and died there ... his marriage fell apart there." Edwin insisted.

"But a straight-exchange Mr. Smythe? I've been back there with my parents and we went to both homes – we were invited in, given tea there and that was not in any way a fair exchange!" Nicholas emphasized.

"Maybe not – but what has this all got to do with my wife anyway?"

"Actually, it was just one part of her plan to rise to the top in that town. It was her idea and truth be known, she hated Lawrence! He'd taken you away from her and your family to go drink at the golf-club, almost every day," he replied, adding "Soon after Hattie repeatedly got very ill!"

"Maybe ... she was not happy about that, but Lawrence did need a lot of support right then, and I was his only friend. I felt the need to be there for him to support him in his grief!" adding "If not me ... who else?"

"But that didn't stop her from taking his home and then also actively planning, actually plotting his downfall, Mr. Smythe!" Nicholas said.

"Nicholas – be careful what you say ... you have no proof!" Edwin now said, looking most uncomfortable and beginning to get indignant, angry.

"Please bear with me Mr. Smythe... I think you'll see where this is all going, soon enough!" he said "Do you recall you went on an overseas trip to recover from the bad investment Lawrence made on cow-hides?" he asked "To see Lawrence's old friend who'd bail him out of trouble?"

"Yes, I do ... but what's that got to do with things?" he said, confused.

"Well, before you got on the plane ... behind your back your wife called the owner of the tannery and filled him in on what Lawrence had done – you must have confided in her, and also told him that Lawrence was destroying the tannery and that you'd be the best man as president – and you would save the tannery!" Nicholas said, adding quickly – as Edwin tried to interrupt "That all lead to Lawrence being demoted, clearly soon to be fired –and she made it look, to Lawrence, as if you'd betrayed him and stuck the knife in his back – he just had no way of knowing it was her! That's why you had the huge fight with Lawrence at the Cape Town Airport just before leaving – he thought it was you!"

Nicholas said, motioning a restless Edwin to wait, that there was more "And with his only friend's betrayal, his little boy dead, his wife gone, his home lost and only a life insurance policy to depend on for income at his age, he then went back and – it would seem, committed suicide in your

master bedroom, while your flight had already left – on the way to meet with George Colton to try and save your old friend’s job and his life!” but now unable to listen to Nicholas anymore, Edwin angrily interrupted...

**“You’re a liar Strauss! You’re a bloody liar!”** Edwin shouted angrily.

Nicholas just looked at him, unfazed, then said “Mr. Smythe ... there’s your daughter” turning now to point to Elizabeth “Ask her what your wife did behind your back, she knows exactly what happened!” He said.

“Lizzie... is any of this true? Did mom really interfere behind my back to bring about any – or worse yet, all of this?” Edwin asked her, pleading.

“Yes daddy...it’s true...I came home from high school to find mom on the phone to Aaron Searle, the owner of the tannery, and listened to her tell him everything Nicholas has told you – she did get uncle Lawrence fired, as President, and you then got his old job because of her. But when the owner demoted him, it’s obvious that he didn’t tell uncle Lawrence that it was mom that had betrayed him, so he naturally concluded it had to have been you who’d done that to him ... that you’d wanted to take his job, not just his home, and at his age, in failing health, with everything that had gone against him – now seemingly you too, mom’s actions were definitely the primary catalyst for his death – suspicious as that was at the time! I recall that she was very proud of what she’d done! Realizing that I’d overheard her conversation - after she placed the receiver down to end the call, she turned to me, saying “Elizabeth... you’re not to ever mention what you’ve heard here! You’ll have to do this for your husband one day, my dear, they don’t have the guts to do it for themselves or for their wives or families! Daddy ...” Lizzie continued, watching as Edwin sat slumped over, tears flowing down his cheeks as the cruel reality set in... “Though I’ve seen you do some really nasty things for mother, I just have to believe you’d never have betrayed your old best friend - or for that matter have killed my husband, for her, here, today!” she added, watching Edwin now sitting there, his head down in his hands, sobbing, almost out of control... then added “I just know that you’re not that evil, daddy!” Elizabeth, then turned, motioning to Nicholas, saying “Please Nicholas hurry, get dad a beer, he clearly really needs it to calm down!”

Nicholas was pleased for the respite ... this was terribly sad - dramatic! Edwin instantly believed Lizzie – for he knew Lizzie would not lie to him about all or any of this! Now it all made perfect sense to him! He’d never been able to understand the very strange events of those days – it just didn’t make perfect sense to him, at the time – but now it suddenly did! Soon Nicholas returned with a beer for Edwin...finding Lizzie sitting next to Edwin with him still crying, Elizabeth trying to console him. He knew this was not the place for him right now. He went into the house leaving father and daughter alone there, to sort through the aftermath of these dramatic revelations. In hindsight, he had no idea of what was to come!

Lizzie opened the beer and gave it to her dad, urging him to drink some of it first to calm him down, still with her arms around his shoulders, trying to console him in his grief. His best friend had committed suicide, feeling betrayed, cursing him, neither of them knowing what Constance had done behind their backs ... or that she'd coolly engineered it all!

After he'd calmed down a bit, Lizzie spoke "Daddy, there is a way out of this mess for you ... one that both Nicholas and I have used too ... and it's time you listen to me... to God... to your conscience and this time - not to mother!" she said, not letting him speak yet "You really need to repent for anything you've done -both here today and in the past, that God's not happy about... and you need to ask for God's forgiveness for all those things, and Daddy ... the way to do that is for you to accept the sacrificial death of His Son, Jesus, and to beg God to wash your sins away and give you another chance - a chance to live a very different life from the one you've been leading. Daddy ... are you willing to say the sinners prayer with me now and accept Jesus as your savior... and promise God that you'll never allow yourself to do any more evil that mother yet may demand of you?" Elizabeth asked him now.

"Yes Lizzie, I'm finally ready to do that ... please go ahead, but I don't know how to pray" Edwin replied, so sitting there with her arms around her dad - him still sobbing, his beer still in his hand, Lizzie reassured him with a hug, then led her dad through the sinner's prayer. As Lizzie prayed the prayer, one phrase at a time, and Edwin, meekly as a lamb, repeated her words: *"God our Father, I believe that out of Your infinite love You created me. In thousands of ways I have shunned Your love and tested your patience. I repent of each and every one of my sins. Please forgive me. Thank You for sending Your Son Jesus to die for me, to save me from an eternal death sentence which we all deserve. I choose, this day, to enter into a covenant with You, and to place Jesus at the center of my life. I surrender to Him as Lord and Savior, over my whole life. I ask You now to flood my soul with the gift of the Holy Spirit, so that my life may be transformed and that I may no longer do any wicked things, to hurt anyone, especially my daughter and her family, on my own volition or at my wife's insistence. Please give me the grace and courage to honor this commitment for the rest of my days on earth. In Jesus name I pray to You, Father. Amen"*

Edwin had humbly asked for God's forgiveness and also accepted Jesus as his Savior! Even though Constance had used her powers - the sinister hold she had over him, to get Edwin to do and say so many wicked things to Elizabeth, Nicholas and their family, throughout the years ... Elizabeth, his daughter - the one Constance had so callously discarded, was now blessed by God to be the one to lead her own dad into a new life and on to redemption... Publically, willingly, humbly, before God and his favorite daughter at age 68, Sunday Aug 24<sup>th</sup>, 1997. Until his death in 2020 at 91-1/2, he honored his commitment to never again hurt Elizabeth or her family again. No doubt he was commanded to do so often, in those 24yrs by Constance, but never again obeyed her!

His Redemption was real, and without any doubt, Edwin is in Heaven! Constance, unchanged, is not headed there, so will never again see him, unless (that's really up to her alone) she repents and does what he did.

Nicholas reappeared with his camera to take a photo of the two of them – not knowing what had just happened there! He'd thought it was just a nice photo of Lizzie & her dad – also the first one of them finally warmly hugging each other! Imagine if you can, Elizabeth, 19y married, mom of 2 boys, now almost 41! It just doesn't get any better than that! Now that Edwin's gone home, leaving Constance all alone in the world, there is no harm telling this story, since she cannot work on Edwin, ever again, to get him to reverse his decision and break his solemn covenant with God. In fact she may never ever see any of them again, here or in Heaven. *If you look carefully, his eyes still have tears in them, as do Lizzie's ... but clearly Elizabeth's very elated!*



<https://amongfriends.us/animations/DouglasSalvation.mp4>

# Chapter 8

## **When you know you've got less than 24 hours to wrap things up – for life!**

*Lizzie told Nicholas what had happened... and so he held out his hand in reconciliation and forgiveness to Edwin, saying... “Welcome to the family, Mr. Smythe – and please, do stay the rest of the day – and also sleep here tonight. I’ll make us all a BBQ and I’ve got more cold beers!” he said – “But first, please come inside and pose with Lizzie under the painting of her -called ‘Born again’...you both are now! Please imagine you’re giving Elizabeth away, to me, on her wedding day...That and what’s happened here today will stay with Elizabeth forever as the most cherished moments with her dad –and I think we all know that you two may now never be allowed to see each other ever again, so let’s make this last 24hrs really count! So they all went into Mayfair - their big old stone-faced home on their acreage in Bears paw, on the border of the city of Calgary. What would you do if you knew you only had one last precious day with your dad?*

On that final day, while Lizzie was in the kitchen preparing the sides for the BBQ, Edwin & Nicholas had some time alone to chat – Edwin was still clearly distraught about what he’d discovered ... so he asked Nicholas “Something’s always bothered me Nicholas – in your investigations did you find out what happened to Lawrence’s two little girls, Bridgette and Ingrid? I’ve always worried that they ended up orphans and had a terrible life!” Edwin confided to him over his beer.

“Yes Mr. Smythe, when we finally pieced together the puzzle, Lizzie and I were horrified at that same thought! We could not rest till we’d found them both -that took long, but with the help of Lawrence’s cousin Clive, who worked at Western Tanning, we got enough clues to finally track them down! We found them, and their mother – living in Port-Elizabeth, your old home-town and Lizzie’s birthplace. I’d thought we’d needed to find the girls to give them closure - to explain to what frame of mind their dad was in when he effectively abandoned them, making them instant orphans – but oddly it was his ex-wife who couldn’t stop thanking us enough!”

“Oh my goodness Nicholas...why was that?” Edwin inquired.

“Well, without any of them knowing what really happened to precipitate those sad final days and all that then followed, she was blamed by all his family -and later, her daughters, when they were older plus she blamed herself for Lawrence’s suicide –a natural mistaken conclusion for all of them to arrive at. Now suddenly they all knew that it was not her – he’d actually moved on from her. Now they realized that they too were victims – as were Lawrence and you, of your wife’s lady Macbeth like ambitions for her husband and herself. She just couldn’t stop thanking us enough for going to the expense and trouble to track them down in faraway Africa, to set the record straight.” Nicholas explained.

“Thank you for that Nicholas – though you’ve now given me a whole new set of problems to have to deal with and to live with, even I’m relieved to discover that I was not to blame for Lawrence’s tragic death - given what happened back then, I too naturally blamed myself!” He sighed asking “But what about his little girls, did they adapt, recover, live nice lives?”

“Aaah, Ok, I’d not yet got to that. It turns out that Lawrence had a very rich life-insurance policy from long ago, which by then would pay out even in the case suspected suicide. So he left that to his girls and their guardian(s) along with a letter to each of them – to be opened when they were 16. Though I did not get to see those letters, his ex-wife filled me in on what he’d written – essentially he told his girls that he loved them and that he was a failure – at his age and without a job, and given his high position, unlikely ever to find a job again and in his mind he was unable to look after them. So unless they had access to his large life-insurance, they’d all face very tough times, especially since his health was failing. He’d need expensive medical treatments just to stay alive!”

“But how did his ex-wife feature in his plans for the girls?” Edwin asked.



“Lawrence wrote her too ... simply telling her that she was now to be their legal guardian, and that he’d provided the funds for them to all start over, far away from Wellington, the town in which he’s buried, in the same grave as his little boy. I could not find it, till a cemetery keeper asked if he was an ‘Uitlander’?” Did you know that?” he asked Edwin, looking for answers.

“Yes, he was cremated and buried in the same grave as his son. I was at his funeral.” Afrikaners were buried among lovely roses under shady palms. English were ‘Uitlanders’ (foreigners) buried arid sun-scorched ground, with ‘Dubbeltjies’ (thorns) around them”, he confirmed, clearing up a strange mystery that had dogged Nicholas for some time already.

“Ok then ... to complete the puzzle, his ex-wife came back to Wellington, collected the girls (and the money) and then they all disappeared. She stopped drinking, reformed – taking her responsibility as their mother seriously again, and raised them both – but never remarried or had any other children!” Nicholas said, adding “Plagued by her conscience for almost 30 years, as I later found out.”

“And what happened to the girls – I mean, did they turn out OK?” Edwin asked, still wanting to know more details, perhaps to get some peace.

“Actually Mr. Smythe, their mother confided in me that the older girl’s life turned out well – like it has for Elizabeth, but that the younger girl’s life swirled in drama!” Nicholas said “Kind of like with your daughters, Elizabeth & Hattie. I must say I found the similarity to be rather ironic!”

“Yes, that’s indeed an odd coincidence – at face value they do seem to have had the same environment shaping their lives, but Nicholas, let me assure you – that’s often an illusion... often times something unexpected happens to one of them that basically ruins their chances of ever having a normal life... that was the case for our two girls, and though I’m not going to go into anymore detail - suffice it to say that Elizabeth was the lucky one in that she did not have extra challenges foisted on her during her early years, and later for having met you ... to help her break free and live a more normal life! In case you’ve not figured this out yet, Hattie and me are really her captives, so the chances of us ever breaking free are ‘slim to none’! Please remember to tell Elizabeth that, one day – perhaps when she’s feeling sorry for herself, tell her that deep-down we both envy her freedom!” Edwin said, a wistful, faraway look in his eyes.

“Thank you Mr. Smythe. I think you know by now that I love your daughter and I’ll never stop loving her! Also that I’ll take very good care of her. If need be, I’d give my life for hers, so though we may never speak to each other again, please have peace on that issue!” Nicholas replied.

Lifting his glass with a smile, to meet Nicholas’s glass half-way, Edwin now said “Cheers to that Nicholas ... I’ll do what I can behind the scenes to protect you all, but you’ll need to be very vigilant from now on to insure your safety, also that Elizabeth’s life be as normal as possible! It’s nice that I know my daughter is in good hands ... please look after her well, also all of you! Don’t do anything to let my wife know how or where to contact you all, ever again. That would not be prudent!” Edwin warned “I’ll cause confusion to help you, when I can - as long as I live.”

“Well Mr. Smyth, as they say ‘The truth sets us free’ and I do hope, now that you understand better how your wife works on her own agenda in secret –even from you, that you will appreciate a bit what we’ve been through. We just don’t have the stomach for much more of her endless plotting and scheming, and clearly we’ve now been warned to be wary of her intentions – they’re getting more and more dangerous - you’d know that even better than we do, but I’d say it’s time for us all to disappear – to fly under her radar, so as to say, but anyway, even if we stayed here, you’d not be allowed by her to ever see any of us again, so I hope you do understand what’s about to happen ... and don’t take it too personally?”

“I’d really like it to have all been different Nicholas, but she’s not about



to change, and she's getting incensed hearing that you're snooping into her past! So you both have my blessing to disappear – I'll just have to adapt to that sad reality! That's the prudent thing to do, as she's getting desperate now and wants to win at any cost, to silence you -which must be clear to you from how this surprise visit by me, started out. I'll make sure you have time to plan a safe exit, but I can't stop her indefinitely! If she thinks she still knows where you live, especially you -are in danger!"

"We'll do that Mr. Smythe. Now I have a favor to ask" Nicholas said "You know how after disowning Lizzie – when she dragged you off to the RCMP to get them to tell us never to ever contact any of you ever again - that she was no longer your daughter ..." But Edwin interrupted.

"Nicholas, as we were leaving I pulled the RCMP officer aside asking him to please convey to Lizzie that my wife was not talking for me -that she's still my daughter and I'd like to keep some contact. Did he tell her?"

"Yes Mr. Smythe, he did. In an otherwise cruel, sad situation, Lizzie took great comfort in that!" he replied "But you still have most of Elizabeth's childhood photos, we have some slides. I fail to see why she needs them anymore? I mean, the last time we visited, she'd removed all photos of our family from their normal places in an attempt to punish Lizzie for not being 110% loyal to he – but it just made Lizzie angry! She clearly doesn't value family photos, but we do! They are, after all, photos of a girl that's no longer her daughter." Nicholas remarked "Can you please send us all of them, so Lizzie at least feels she once had a past – even if that was just a comfortable illusion, before having to endure her cruelty"

"I'll do that Nicholas – They're 35mm slides like the one's you've got, not prints, they're in a cupboard, not albums. It'll be easy for me to remove them to send them all to you!" he said "I can always feign surprise if she cannot find them later, though I doubt she'll ever look for them anyway"

"Thank you Mr. Smyth!" Nicholas replied "Please send them to me – I have a secret project underway to rebuild images of Lizzie's youth, every year, to make sure she actually still feels that she had a past with some of the fonder memories – ones that your wife is now trying to erase to punish her. I was there for part of her childhood, at least from age 15 onwards. I know there were happier times – maybe not for Hattie, but certainly for Elizabeth! I've met some of her family and they're nice folk."

"I'm very glad that you do these kinds of things for Elizabeth, to support her emotionally, Nicholas! Clearly my wife's agenda's to destroy her self-confidence and independence, then gather-up the broken pieces and get her to live in subservience to her, always praising her, never trying to stand up to her, ever again -but in the process, she'll be required to get rid of you and the boys, like Hattie's done and I'm being forced to do too! That's basically what Hattie and I are stuck living with, so please cut us



some slack. It's way tougher for us than it's been for Elizabeth! We don't dare rock the boat!" Edwin replied somberly "She makes it too painful!"

"Phew, Mr. Smythe, you have my sympathy!" Nicholas said, then asked "I have one more question, why did you write letters to relatives implying Elizabeth has mental problems and is under psychiatric care, when you know that's never been true? Elizabeth is just fine, unlike poor Hattie."

"I was under orders, because it looked to my wife like you'd zeroed in on her most closely guarded secret. It was a preemptive strike, designed by her, to discredit anything Lizzie may reveal to our family, so they'd not take anything she said, seriously." Edwin replied "I was used to write the letters to add credibility, but she dictated the contents. I was also told to write that you'd lost Hattie custody of her son, though we'd made it clear to her lawyer and the family judge that she was an unfit mother"

"Well that was wrong and cruel! I'd hope you find a way to fix that soon. But I think we've spent too much of this precious time, all you have left, you and Lizzie -I'll go and fetch her, and also a few cold beers for us. It's time for you, Lizzie and the boys to build up precious memories before you leave again tomorrow." Nicholas said with a sigh as he got up to go.

Then just as he was going, Edwin said "By the way Nicholas, that's really a lovely oil-painting you had done of Elizabeth!" adding "It's like an old masterpiece ... it must have taken a long time for the artist to paint it, and it must have cost you a small fortune!" Edwin remarked, adding "when you get back with our beers, please tell me more about it."

Back now with cold beers for them -also for Lizzie, before Lizzie came out, Nicholas gave one to Edwin and sat down "I had the good fortune of discovering an artist who's now world famous, very sought after - before that happened. Even so the painting cost me \$7,000 and took 3 months to complete!" adding "Some of his works hang in the palaces of Saddam Hussein, and illustrate his novels. Before he became famous, I bought as many of his originals as I could afford. Now I have a collection of the very best of his art that will one day be worth millions, conservatively speaking - but time will tell?" Nicholas explained to Edwin, shrugging.

"That's a stroke of good fortune, Nicholas, but for me the nicest one of all is of my beautiful daughter Elizabeth ... he said smiling, beckoning her to come and sit between them while he poured her beer - then gave it to her, along with a warm smile. For them it was a new beginning.

"Thank you dad ... I think I'll need to drink a few of these to relax! The food's done so we can talk while Nicholas does the BBQ" Lizzie said smiling at him, saying to Nicholas "Please do both steak & sausage for us old South Africans! We all like meat, and Alberta steak is excellent!"

Nicholas got up to BBQ the meat, leaving Lizzie & Edwin much needed time alone, to wrap up any loose ends - before that opportunity was lost.

“Dad, you know we were told mom’s dad was a difficult old man – so much so that Nicholas was surprised when he met mom’s brother, uncle Basil, who over a beer, told Nicholas that he just cannot wait for the old man to die ... it seems only his daughters really cared for him! Yet when you two were to marry, he did not approve of you, threatening to disown mom if she married you. When you two went back to visit him in Africa in a nursing home, what exactly happened there?” Lizzie asked, curious.

“Elizabeth, he did relent. They even came to our wedding. So mom felt she had to go and say goodbye to him – not that there were any signs he was about to die –because, well, we lived in Canada and couldn’t go visit him often. We visited with him that afternoon - more honestly, mom did. He ignored me, even after all these years. They chatted away about all sorts of things – like kindred spirits, she was always his favorite! When we finally said goodbye, he smiled at her in a very strange way... I was a little unnerved, and while he was doing so, he wouldn’t let go of her hands. Not long after we said goodbye and left, we were notified that he’d died shortly afterwards. It came as a huge surprise, as though he was 89, he seemed fine, enjoyed his food, eating heartily as we sat there. Staff told us he’d been waiting for mom to visit him, saying he’d not die till she did. It was really all quite strange - surreal!” Edwin remarked.

“The reason I asked, is that trip was in the early 80’s, and I noticed that, difficult as mom was before that, she was more difficult after she’d come back! Did you notice too?” Lizzie asked Edwin “Or am I imagining it?”

“No Elizabeth, you’re not imagining it. I noticed it too – she was really her dad’s favorite, the two brothers and her sister mostly gravitated towards their mother – her sister often complained that mom was her dad’s favorite.” Edwin remarked “That’s why, I think, he refused to give her his blessing to marry me – we eloped, like you ... he’d chosen a rich man’s son for her to marry,” adding “Of course when we returned to Canada, mom was starting menopause - that may have contributed too!

“Dad ... I hope you won’t take this up wrong, but I used to be mom’s favorite and she was opposed to me marrying my childhood sweetheart – Nicholas. We, like you, had to elope too. So even if she now recants and tries to make me believe that she never disowned me - though the RCMP definitely does not lie - and they dutifully delivered that message to me, Nicholas will not let me visit her when she’s old and close to death, even if she’s alone and in a nursing home! I don’t want to inherit a part – actually, make that any part of her spirit, in some strange supernatural hand-off, just before she dies! I’ll just not be taking any chances! We’ve all had a lot of problems with her ... I’d not wish that on my family!”

“Hmm... Lizzie, I’m not sure that’s even possible, but hey, why take any chances? I don’t think that will ever happen since neither you, I – or anyone else, has ever heard her say she’s sorry or that she’s ever done

anything wrong, so unless you acquiesce to all her terms of surrender, so as to say, like Hattie's done, you'll not be given that chance anyway. But my advice to you is that you all must now disappear and never look back! Like it or not, we're saying our goodbyes here today – not that I came here specifically to do that ... I was under orders to stop Nicholas from prying into her past, one way or the other. Now that you know all of this, why would you want to keep trying to fix things with her? It will only ever happen if you agree to sacrifice your life for her! In effect, you'd stop being Lizzie. You'd become Hattie. Let me assure you ... that would be very sad!" Edwin said "Hattie's had a terrible life compared to yours! So Elizabeth, as much as it hurts me to say this ... please don't do it!"

"Thanks for leveling with me dad! You've not often done that, but I've come to appreciate how tricky it is to live with her. Thanks also for your blessing to leave, to not keep trying. Maybe she'll change?" Lizzie added.

"I don't think so Lizzie ... since getting her to say she's wrong or ever was wrong and is sorry, is like getting blood out of a stone! But I love her and she did do me the honor of eloping with me - in a sense, so I'm honor-bound to stay with her to the very end now. Please respect that and never try to come between us, ever, as I'd really not like that at all!"

"Dad... I'll not come between you and mom, though she's certainly never lived by that rule with us - but I am left wondering if she's not lost touch with reality?" Elizabeth bravely asked ... wincing ... knowing she was now pushing him to his outer-limits. She was, after all, still his wife.

But Edwin didn't get angry with her... he just sat there looking at his beer for a while, before replying "I don't think so Lizzie ... she's clearly really still able to do a lot of things that require an immense amount of complex plotting & scheming! She's quite smart really, so no, I think it's something else, adding "She changed so much after Hattie was born – never was the same again! You're right, after what in effect was a death-bed farewell with her dad, maybe menopause too, she got much worse!"

Lizzie sighed... "Well dad, she's your and Hattie's problem and challenge now. I'll not let her run my life into the ground – but I'll still hold out some hope that she'll change – more for her sake, than yours or mine" Lizzie said, adding "I'm not quite ready to give up all hope, least not yet!"

"OK, I can accept that! It allows for hope - for all of us, but how now do we keep in touch since I'm not ever going to be allowed to speak to you or write you any letters – or visit, ever again... what do you think we can do?" Edwin inquired, sighing "Let's at least try, as I can warn you too!"

"I take it you still have a laptop PC dad, the one Nicholas helped you get and set up for you on one of your trips when you sneaked in a visit to us... Let's get Nicholas to set you up with a secret email account so that you and I can still keep in contact in case things change or for whatever

reason – even just to say hello, happy birthday, happy father’s day, but we’ll have to be very secretive!” She cautioned “She must never know!”

“That will be nice! We’ll probably never get to speak to each other or see each other again. At least this leaves a secret communications thread linking us together.” Edwin replied “I have my laptop here. Tonight let’s get Nicholas to set up a secret email account. I have internet to keep in touch with my sister and brother. She monitors it closely, so I can’t use that, she’ll know!” Adding, as an afterthought “Please, in anything covert you do, always leave me some wiggle-room -plausible deniability, so that if she suspects I’m in contact with you behind her back, I can deny it by saying “*I didn’t do it!*” Then if she presses me, I’ll double-down, saying “*I tell you, it wasn’t me! I didn’t do it!*” adding with a sly smile and a wink “I mean, what can she do? Contact you to ask you if I did it ... or not?”

“I’ll try to keep that in mind Dad, but right now I’d like to ask you about something very important - something that’s always been a mystery!”

“Yes Lizzie ... what do you want to know?” Edwin inquired.

“When I was about age 5 to 8 or 9, for 3 years or so, I’d often be bundled up - sometimes in the middle of the night after you got back from the Golf-club, but in the day too, on weekends, so that Hattie, who was very ill, was taken to hospital, yet again. I later found out which hospital, the Karl-Bremer hospital in Belleville, near the highway from Wellington” Lizzie said, noticing how Edwin became distinctly uncomfortable now “Nicholas’s dad now works there, also one of my old classmates, Stephanie, a Dr. works for him – we’ve been trying to get to the bottom of the mystery surrounding Hattie...” but Edwin quickly interrupted!

“Elizabeth, you know that subject is strictly off limits!” he said firmly “Ever since Hattie was miraculously cured, we’ve been forbidden to talk about it!” saying “That’s exactly what mom suspected was happening and really why I came here today to warn Nicholas to back off–or else, she’s furious that Nicholas is investigating Hattie’s childhood illness – in fact, that’s exactly why she demanded I write a pre-emptive letter to all relatives, telling them to not take anything you say seriously, also why she rushed me off to the RCMP and told them to tell you that you were no longer her daughter and were never to contact any of us, or family, ever again! I hope the RCMP officer told you I took him aside to tell him that you’re still my daughter?” Edwin asked, suddenly remembering.

“Yes daddy – thank you for doing that! It really helped me get through a cruel, tough time, knowing that much!” Lizzie replied, then asked “But Dad, it makes no sense ... why would mom not want us to speak about Hattie being miraculously cured? I mean any parent I know, us included when Daniel’s chronic asthma he’d suffered so much from since early childhood, disappeared instantly after a pastor friend prayed over him,

wouldn't try to hush it all up? Heck, we'd all shout it from the rooftops!" "Elizabeth, now that mom's not here, what've you learned about that?" Edwin asked, not able to answer, choosing to first fish for information.

"They're still investigating dad – it seems that some of her health records have been misplaced and they're still working on tracing all the Dr's and nurses that dealt with her case, but from the ones they have found, we do know it was lucky mom was a nurse, since Hattie suffered repeated bouts of life-threatening diarrhea, dehydrating her. She had to be placed on life support every time she was rushed to hospital and there nursed back to health – only to return home and get ill again, having the whole cycle repeat! I recall it was very traumatic for us! It only happened in Wellington, at home, always when mom told us you were neglecting our family - fortunately, never on our holidays. Then suddenly around age 4, it ended, never happening again. Hattie started having severe emotional problems, That's never stopped - she still does! It's all very puzzling!"

"Yes OK Lizzie, is that all that you've discovered till now?" Edwin asked.

"So far dad, yes – but this investigation is ongoing. We were invited for tea & cookies by aunty Jean and uncle Max, as a newlywed couple, and told that Linda's illness was Celiac disease, that it's genetic and so may surface in our children. We were very grateful, since as future parents, we'd really have liked to know what it was!" Lizzie said, adding "Aunty Jean also said we'd never, ever hear anything about it, from you two!"

"Elizabeth, what if I tell you it was not Celiac disease? Would you then stop Nicholas from investigating any further?" Edwin asked, urgently.

"Maybe dad ... but Nicholas confronted mom about this years ago, and she flat-out refused to reply. When pressed, no word of a lie, she denied Hattie was ever ill!" Lizzie remarked "But dad I was 6,7,8,9 - old enough to remember! Hattie was rushed to hospital, by you, several times a year for about 4 years. That's made Nicholas even more determined to solve the mystery! Why not just tell me, what was wrong with Hattie?" adding "I mean her and your reactions point to guilt, not gratefulness! Why else would Nicholas's investigating invoke such over-reactions, like wanting him dead? It's an obvious red-flag, pointing to misdeeds...maybe worse!"

"Elizabeth, please respect our family's right to privacy and secrecy on this matter! Hattie didn't have Celiac disease, though the relatives were told so. You can rest easy – it's not genetic!" Edwin said to reassure her, adding "Please, let's not ever talk about any of this ever again! You know it was forbidden to ever mention anything about it –to Hattie or anyone else! Let's just drop the subject now please ... you're 41, you've got this far without ever needing to know any of those details –please... let it go!"

Elizabeth stopped to look at him. He was almost pleading with her. She knew this was his real mission - he'd come to prevent them from finding

and disseminating the truth, but also that any more pressure would ruin the precious time they had left together. "Ok daddy, I'll change the subject. When are you going to retire?" she asked. Edwin was relieved! "Probably only when I'm around 80, Lizzie. I keep telling mom that when she asks me. She's never been happy with me away for 6-8 months each year, but I tell her we'll need the money in our old age – that if we run out of money then, it will be too late for me to work!" The truth is I need breaks from her constant plotting & scheming, paranoia & obsessions, just to stay a bit sane!" Edwin now said, confirming Lizzie's suspicions.

"That's still quite a few years away, I guess she'll just have to get used to waiting for you for much of the year. Besides, I recall you love to travel... where have you been lately?" Elizabeth asked "Any interesting places?"

"Yes Lizzie ..." Edwin replied, relieved to be talking about fun things again "To India, China, Korea, Japan, Columbia, Mexico – just to name a few ... wherever they still make leather and can use my services as a consultant, since Canada shut down all polluting tanneries" he added.

"That sure sounds exciting dad!" Lizzie said "Good ... I'm glad for you!"

"Thanks Lizzie! Really, your writing specialized cookbooks is not that different! I do recipes to make fine leathers – you think-up recipes to make fine-food! We're kind of doing the same thing, you and me!" Edwin said smiling "Nicholas tells me that you're getting to be quite famous now in the Low-Carb world, that's amazing Elizabeth, I'm proud of you!" adding "I'll have to watch your progress, but quietly, secretly, from afar!"

"Thanks dad... I'm still waiting for recognition from mom, even though my first little cookbook became a National Bestseller within 6 months and Nicholas even sent her a nice autographed copy - but still nothing!"

"Yes, well ... your mother's a bit strange that way. She doesn't like you or anyone else to outshine her, in any way! It's just the way she is."

"That explanation sounds plausible dad" Lizzie replied, adding "Last summer, after you and her first visited us here in this, my dream home, she couldn't even bring herself to say a complimentary, nice thing about our new home! In fact, you may recall, she wanted you and her to leave immediately to stay in a motel instead, even though we have 5 bedrooms and had already prepared one for you two. Your old friend, Nicholas's dad, was here and fortunately he'd already put a cold beer in your hand, which thankfully put paid to her sudden, urgent change of plans."

"Yes, I recall that Lizzie" he confirmed, suggesting a possible explanation for her under-reaction "I think it was overwhelming for her, as she'd not got advance photos from you of this lovely home and it's 3 acre property. She'd expected something a lot more modest for what is only your 2nd home. Instead when I drove up the circular driveway and she'd seen the size of homes all around you, and the golf-course, it began to sink in

that your family had just made a quantum-leap in the housing market!" "Well dad, soon after you folks left for home, having heard Nicholas say that he was off to Las Vegas, to attend COMDEX, the world's largest computer show, the week after labor-day long weekend, she went to great lengths to find Nicholas's boss at Petro-Canada, called him - I'd hope behind your back, not just once but six times in the week Nicholas was in Las Vegas, doing her best to get him fired, but also to enlist his boss's support to break us up!" Elizabeth revealed to a clearly stunned Edwin, saying "Imagine how I felt? I mean, she had nothing nice to say about my new home, but now she was doing her best for me to lose my home and my husband his income! Do you know how that would have devastated us? We'd just moved in a few months prior and have a large mortgage which is contingent on Nicholas continuing to earn big bucks!"

Edwin, shaking visibly, spilling some beer, put his glass down and sat forward in his chair, interrupting Elizabeth "Surely not Lizzie! I can't imagine she'd stoop so low, doing such horrible things! Maybe Nicholas is making this up, to turn you against her? I mean, it's unbelievable!"

"Well dad, when Nicholas returned from work, the Monday after arriving back from Las Vegas, he was called into his boss's office and told what had happened. That night when he came home, he told me what she'd done and I had trouble believing him too! I mean, what a terrible thing to do!" she added with emphasis then went on "But Nicholas anticipated my surprise and invited Alan and his wife, Patricia, to come and have tea with us, so that Alan and I could chat about what had transpired, in private, without Nicholas present, and I could ask him any questions I needed to. If you want, I'll call him at home? He will confirm what I'm telling you!" Lizzie calmly inquired of her now very overwhelmed dad.

"No Lizzie, that won't be necessary, I believe you." Edwin stammered, "I'm very sorry I've let her deceive me into thinking she's above-board. Clearly she doesn't respect your family's best-interests, or mine, at all!"

"You know dad, I'm having great difficulty with you, or others, calling her my mother, or having to call her my mom, when she's gone to such extreme lengths to hurt me, formally telling me she'll forget she ever had me - that I'm not her daughter anymore!" Lizzie said "I'm starting to call her my ex-mother or birth-mother. I just can't call her mom anymore!"

"Lizzie, I'm sorry! I advised her against such drastic action at the time. As usual she ignored my advice and now we have a huge mess on all of our hands to deal with - you're still my daughter Elizabeth ... that will never change!" Edwin said apologetically. "I didn't disown you, though she has. Technically you're not her daughter anymore. You're freed up from all Biblical edicts visa-vi her now - even in her vulnerable old age."

"Thanks dad! I'd like to remember just the nice things about you and I,



and I'll try to forget the nasty things you've done to me at her insistence, especially abandoning me unceremoniously on a cold street of deserted downtown Kitchener, Christmas-time, 1978, as well as recently writing to family to tell them I was some sort of mental-case and not to believe anything I'd have to say from then on," but seeing his rising discomfort, she added "I'm not going to ask you to defend your actions, as truthfully they're indefensible. If God can forgive you for your sins - forgive any of us, and His Son Jesus died for our sins, then I must forgive you!" Lizzie said, quickly adding "Daddy, today will always be remembered by me as the most special day I've ever spent with you in my entire life ... and I'm 41 years old now!" Lizzie said, giving Edwin a nice warm hug. Clearly relieved, Edwin hugged her back. Then they just sat there and said nothing for a while till Nicholas arrived with the news that the BBQ (Braai) was done and they could soon all eat. He'd noticed unfamiliar warmth between Lizzie & Edwin, also that both of them were struggling quite a bit with their emotions. Suddenly he felt a lump in his throat as well – none of them could now easily talk, so they all reached for their beers ... a short while later, after a few mouthfuls of her beer, Lizzie got up, saying "I'm going to get the food ready for us to dish-up, I'll call you when I'm ready!" she said, leaving Edwin & Nicholas alone for a while.

"I trust the time I gave you two, alone, was well spent Mr. Smythe?" he asked "I lingered a bit longer – so the meat's rather well done by now!"

"That's not a problem Nicholas – after this much beer, none of us will mind!" he replied, adding "But to answer you... yes we did cover a lot of ground while you were busy, and both of us really appreciated the time together ... alone!" then asked "Nicholas, would you please forgive me for the many nasty things I've done to you, Elizabeth, and to your family?"

Nicholas was stunned by his direct question "We both know that you did all of those things under direct orders from your wife, Mr. Smythe ... so yes, I have no reasons to not forgive you – especially today after you asked for God's forgiveness!" he said, adding "We all have things we're sorry about, and I'm no different on that score ... please forgive me too."

"I do, and thanks Nicholas – but I cannot blame my wife entirely, I mean I'm still ultimately responsible for what I do and say, even if she insists I follow her script. You have my word I'll find a way of never doing so to any of you, ever again, even if she demands I do!" he said, emphatically.

"That's very welcome news for all of us Mr. Smythe!" Nicholas replied.

Now Edwin turned to Nicholas and asked "I hope I'm finally redeemed in Lizzie's eyes -and in yours?" then he quickly added "and my grandsons!"

"Yes, I'd say that's true - but much more importantly you're redeemed before God!" he replied "And I know that you will never, ever, forget this day, as long as you live – nor will Lizzie ... or any of us, for that matter!"

Just then Lizzie popped her head around the corner “Come and get it” she said, cheerfully “Hope you’re all hungry! We have quite a feast here! Edwin and Nicholas got up to follow Lizzie into Mayfair, now chatting away rather relaxed, and after grace, they all took a plate and started dishing up –while Nicholas got another cold beer for each of them. Dan and Jon now joined them as they all returned to the deck to enjoy the



late afternoon sunshine and all the good food! Lizzie was, now a famous cookbook author. This last supper with her dad, was a truly sumptuous magnificent feast fit for a king ... which once again, he was. They all ate heartily, chatting away easily, happily as they drank their beers and went in to go and get seconds! The meal went on for more than an hour, As the sun set over the Canadian Rockies, they still sat there – all pleasantly full,

just enjoying the little time they still had together. The sun had set on their often stormy relationship too. It was as if the red, orange and yellow sky coloring the scene over the magnificent snow-capped Rockies, was a portent for all that had happened so far in their lives ... at least the storms were now over! Somehow they all knew God had a plan all along for how this Sunday had unfolded, that was far more complex than any of them could have imagined - one that was years in the making! A sunny fall Sunday, started out like others, turned out to be one of the most dramatic days of their lives! Nobody saw any of it coming. All their plans for this Sunday, especially those of Constance for Lizzie’s family and her far too loyal subject, Edwin, had been overturned. The end result was a most unexpected one ... Redemption for Edwin, and it was also the happiest and saddest day of Lizzie’s life! Monday morning came all too soon! Though most of us dread Mondays – this one was a real humdinger as Mondays go! Lizzie was by now home-schooling their sons, so they were there too to say goodbye to their grandpa, who finally was acting more like one, at 68! After a lovely extended breakfast and lots Tim-Horton’s coffee, their moods were now very different! That was understandable as the dreaded moment -saying farewell with no hope of any return, approached them all. Edwin sighed and got up, saying ... “Thank you for a wonderful Breakfast Lizzie and all the lovely memories! It will keep me from getting hungry on my long journey back. I’m just going to get rid of Coffee I’ve had this morning ... then I’ll have to leave.”



Standing outside in front of the house, his car still parked in their circular driveway where it was when he'd first arrived, Edwin's mood was more somber now. Nicholas asked him and Lizzie to stand and pose for two final photos – which they bravely did. He extended his hand to Edwin, saying “Goodbye Mr. Smythe, have a safe journey back!” knowing there'd a lot of time for Edwin all alone with his thoughts while now he'd have to help Lizzie cope. Nicholas took comfort knowing Elizabeth was stronger now ... because she'd had to be! Smarter because of the mistakes she made along the way. She'd learned from them and was now a happier wiser daughter and wife, despite the sadness

that was foisted unfairly onto her. He was too! It was a bitter-sweet ending ... *All of them knew that when Edwin returned home, and Constance heard his mission failed, that he'd never again be allowed to visit with Elizabeth's family! Notice all the hugging in these photos? His wife never did allow that, but now she wasn't present and finally there was a very special secret bond between him and Lizzie... Redemption for Edwin on the last precious day they ever had together! We often wonder what exactly happened when he returned home, reporting that her evil plan hadn't worked, but it was a warning to Elizabeth and Nicholas! Now her plots had taken an ominous turn from what they'd all had to deal with till now! Her dark, sinister, super-natural plots had now changed to much more usual overt, visible ways to eliminate enemies – and though she'd not get Edwin's help ever again, for her sinister evil plans -who else could she get, or pay, to do so? It was time to plan their escape before Constance had time to regroup! Edwin never again followed her orders to do her wicked bidding –she had to use others to do that for her, and that she did! But, predictably, he stayed with her. Even now in 2018, at 89*





(she's 87) he's still at her side – though definitely not nearly as trusted as in the many years before! All of them knew that when Edwin returned home a changed man but, predictably, he stayed with her... and even now in 2018, at 89 (she's 87) he's still at her side – though definitely not nearly as trusted as in the many years before! Now the time had come for Lizzie and Edwin to say their final farewell, and as could be expected, their hug was long, warm, wet! Both of them were crying. Nicholas could not stop tears either – but stopped himself from taking that photo! He wanted the last image for Lizzie to be a happy one, so she'd at least be able to look at it sometime in the future when the large hole in her heart has healed. His last words to Lizzie were ... "Thank you for

helping me yesterday Lizzie, I love you!" Then he choked right up. His Redemption was complete. This was the last time Elizabeth ever saw her dad, though there was one more phone conversation on father's day, a few years later, and it was extremely difficult to accomplish! But with help of our old British friend Dave to set it up, Lizzie got to wish Edwin one more "Happy Father's day" and they both exchanged "I love you, God bless you!" before the phone was grabbed from Edwin and slammed down. After that, only Constance answered the phone. **2020** 24 years after a fateful, blessed, almost perfect last day with her dad, he died, at 91, not of Covid, but Parkinson's and old age. In the last 24 years he'd declined all his wife's demands to heap any of her planned abuse on Lizzie and our family. Ever since that day Lizzie led him to salvation, he'd regarded her as very special! They'd kept a semblance of contact, secretly! Suddenly, one day, that all ended. His wife ensured nobody knew. Lizzie's sister was prohibited from telling her, but 7m later she found out. His wife swapped 24 years of tight control over her husband, for eternity apart from him, whilst Lizzie will get to spend eternity with him in Heaven, one day, after just these 24yrs apart here on earth. Either way, she no longer controls him, can't get him to hurt Lizzie ever again! He's safely out of reach. Eternity trumps 24yrs! Finally he gets to "Rest in peace" away from Constance. **RCMP Chaplain Jim said, hearing the news "He's free at last!"** And here's **one of many Facebook condolences:** "I remember these pictures well! I can't even in my wildest nightmares imagine any woman could be that evil. I am so sorry for your loss Jen 🙏 and oh yes 🙏 all of eternity with your Dad, now that's priceless!" 🙏 That's what loving, self-sacrificing, obedient actions yield ... complete, irreversible, joyous victory!