

Africa's
Snow White

Summer Love

Jealous Winter

by

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Summer Love - Jealous Winter

by Jonathan Eloff

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This book is a work of fiction, but most of the places, characters, and incidents are real. The specific dialogue is a product of the author's imagination, and names have been changed to protect the identities of the characters.

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THE TRUTH BEHIND THE FICTION

I can't take credit for this story, since it's older than I am. What you're about to read is a compilation of events which actually happened, involving characters who, for the most part, are still alive today.

With only minor exceptions, I wrote everything as it was described to me by the people who were there to witness the events, and not as my imagination might have dictated. The result was a surprising mix of the laughter and tears and heart-wrenching scenes which so typify real life.

The more I researched and wrote, the more I realized that my imagination was almost superfluous to the process, which in this instance, I suppose, makes me more of a journalist than a novelist. That said, I didn't go looking for this story. It was under my nose for a number of years before I actually saw it for what it was, and when I saw it, I realized that it had to be written down before it died with its characters. So read on, knowing that as you do, you're turning through the pages of history.

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO:

All the boys who ever walked the hallowed halls of St. Andrew's School; all those who ever found love, discovered it was out of reach, and went on reaching anyway; and to all the victims.

nnocence

Chapter 1

South Africa, 1971: the little town of Wellington was located in a profoundly scenic valley of the Western Cape. To the east, it was hemmed in by the majestic Hawequa Mountain Range, and to the west by the dark, rolling green patchwork of the *Cape Winelands*, stretching out as far as the eye could see. The town lay on the banks of the Kromme River, and was nestled at the foot of the Gröenberg, a large, extinct volcano with lush, green slopes.

December 10th was an offensively hot and dry day in Wellington. Under the infernal scrutiny of the noonday sun, Elizabeth and Hattie Smythe were walking home from school with seeming indifference to the weather. Their last day of school, a half day, now behind them, and the holidays ahead, only propriety, and their school bags, which hung weightily from their shoulders, kept them from sprinting the distance.

Elizabeth was nearly sixteen years old, with long, chestnut brown hair; a slender, curvaceous figure; and an exquisitely smooth, white complexion. She was five feet and three inches tall with deep blue eyes and an inescapably infatuating smile.

By contrast, her younger sister, Hattie, was shorter, with darker brown hair and sad, brown eyes. She was also very pretty, though barely twelve years old.

Both girls were wearing their school uniforms—blue dresses of a strictly regulated length, with white socks and trim. As was school regulation, their hair was done

up in braids and their faces free of any makeup. Their school blazers were draped loosely over their arms, every now and then waving in a warm breeze.

Suddenly, Elizabeth became aware of hurried footfalls pounding down the sidewalk behind them, and then a voice: “Lizzie, wait up!” Elizabeth and Hattie slowed and turned to see Pieter Kruger and his brother, Jacobus, running to catch up with them.

“You two seem to be in an awful hurry,” Elizabeth commented, noting the sweat pouring down Pieter’s and Jacobus’s faces.

“Elizabeth—” Pieter began breathlessly, but then stopped himself, realizing that what he was about to say ought to wait until he’d had a chance to catch his breath. His expression softened in sympathy.

“What’s wrong?” Elizabeth asked, noting his expression.

“We just saw Thomas and Sarah kissing in the schoolyard. I’m so sorry. I thought you’d want to know,” Pieter said. Jacobus nodded solemnly, a pinched expression on his face—Sarah was his girlfriend.

Likewise, Thomas was Elizabeth’s boyfriend, but the news seemed to stab her like a blunt knife. She felt hurt and betrayed, but she hadn’t been very interested in Thomas, so the wound was only skin deep. She was more surprised than heartbroken.

“Thank you,” Elizabeth said in a subdued tone. “I’m glad you told me.”

“If there is anything I can do . . .”

There was a pause as she thought about it. “Walk with me?” she asked, her blue eyes bright and shining in the sun, made bluer still by the color of her dress.

Pieter hesitated. He secretly *loved* Lizzie. He didn’t want to take advantage of her vulnerability. But they were friends—neighbors, too—he had to be there for her. He would simply have to resist the temptation to be more than a friend.

“Sure, Lizzie, I’ll walk with you,” he replied.

The four of them broke into pairs, with Elizabeth and Pieter walking together in front.

“I suppose you’ll be leaving for Siesta soon?” Pieter asked, chancing a lighter topic.

Elizabeth was grateful not to talk about Thomas. “Yes, tomorrow actually,” she specified, her face brightening.

“That soon?” he asked. “I wish I was going. It sounds like you have a lot of fun there.” Elizabeth sent him an inviting smile, and he met her gaze openly.

“How’s Florence doing?” Elizabeth asked.

He looked away. “We . . . broke up a few days ago. She didn’t want to go to Stellenbosch University with me, and I didn’t want to go to Cape Town University with her. She couldn’t handle the idea of a long-distance relationship . . . and that was that.”

“Oh. I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be. We weren’t really in love. I would’ve gladly applied to her choice of university if we were.”

Elizabeth nodded. “It seems like it was for the best, then.”

“It was. Besides which, I’m in love with someone else,” Pieter said, his gaze finding hers once more.

Elizabeth looked up at Pieter, a naïvely questioning look in her eyes. He broke eye contact nervously, turning his head to stare at the ground as they walked. He had been determined not to take advantage of Elizabeth’s vulnerability, but she was sending all the right signals, and somehow, she didn’t seem all that upset about Thomas . . .

“You know, Lizzie, I was thinking, when you get back from Siesta, we could—I mean—would you like to . . . to go on a date with me sometime?” he asked, swallowing visibly.

“I’d like that very much, Piet,” Elizabeth said, smiling at his sweetly fumbled words. Pieter was handsome—six feet and two inches tall, with curly, golden-brown hair; green eyes, the color of spring; and a wiry frame—but his good looks had failed to impart much confidence.

“Really?” he asked.

“Of course,” Elizabeth said and flashed him an alluring smile. She couldn’t help being amused by his uncertainty.

As the four continued walking home, their conversations now flowing effortlessly, Pieter couldn’t keep the smile from his face. He looked up at the clear blue sky and almost sighed. Somehow, the day seemed even brighter now than it had before.

* * *

“Edwin, dear, could you get that?” Constance Smythe called down to her husband from the second floor of their home as the telephone rang again. A brief silence followed her request as Edwin got up from the couch where he had been reading.

“I’ve got it,” he replied just before picking up the phone in the kitchen. “Edwin Smythe speaking. What may I do for you?”

“Hello, Eddie.” The voice sounded flat and very tired.

“You sound terrible, Lawrence. Are you all right?”

“Ben’s dead.” Lawrence’s voice cracked as he spoke about his son.

“Oh no—” Edwin broke off in shock and was silent for a long moment. “I can’t imagine what you’re going through. He was a good kid.”

“The funeral is tomorrow. I’d really appreciate it if you could be there.” Lawrence was having difficulty speaking now.

Edwin caught a glimpse of his wife as she entered the kitchen. “Don’t worry; we’ll be there, Lawrence. What time is it?” Edwin noticed his wife give him a disapproving look, her ice-blue eyes flashing briefly at him. He wondered what she expected him to do. Perhaps she was upset that he had accepted an invitation without asking her first.

“One o’clock,” Lawrence said.

“Not to worry, we’ll be there, and if there’s anything else we can do—we’re pretty busy getting ready for our

trip to Siesta tomorrow—but I'm sure we could spare the time."

"Oh. Right. Your holiday." Lawrence blew his nose. "I forgot, Edwin. I'm sorry. I don't mean to be a downer."

"No, that's quite all right. We will see you tomorrow."

"Thanks, Eddie. I knew I could count on you," Lawrence said and hung up the phone.

Edwin put the receiver down gently. "That was Lawrence Stevens . . . calling to invite us to his son's funeral tomorrow."

Down on her haunches, Constance seemed to be fuming as she rummaged through the kitchen cupboards, banging pots and pans in a discordant racket.

"You should have told him we couldn't go," she said, still searching the cupboards.

"He was in quite a state. I couldn't exactly refuse. Don't worry, we'll have plenty of time tomorrow; a funeral isn't going to slow us down much."

"Such depressing news should have been saved for a more appropriate time. He knew you were going on holiday. He should have waited until you got back to tell you."

"He said that he forgot about our holiday . . ."

"Oh, I'm *sure* he forgot," Constance replied. "But what's done is done. There's no use crying over spilt milk."

Edwin felt relieved that she was going to drop the subject. "Don't worry, dear. We'll forget all about this morbid business once we're in Siesta."

"I hope so," Constance said, and with that, she gave up searching the kitchen cupboards and stood up to face her husband. Constance was a small person, roughly the same height as her eldest daughter, Elizabeth, with an equally small frame and a soft, pleasant face that made her appear delicate and unassuming.

"What time is the funeral tomorrow?" she asked.

"One o'clock. I imagine the service won't be more than

an hour long, and we can skip the reception,” Edwin said, fiddling nervously with his shirt collar.

“Well then, I suppose we’ll just have to be ready to go the minute we get back,” Constance said, her long, darkly-dyed hair flaring as she left the kitchen.

Edwin heard her calling for the maid as she left. No doubt it had something to do with what she’d been searching for in the kitchen.

Now that his wife was gone, Edwin let out a breath he hadn’t realized he was holding. He still felt dazed. *Poor Ben*, he thought. *Dead at age seven. What a life. What a world.* He was still standing next to the phone and now he eyed it accusingly. *A harbinger of doom, that’s what you are*, he thought. Edwin ambled back to the couch in the living room where he’d been reading earlier.

A minute later, the doorbell sounded and Thandiwe, the maid, ran to get it. Thandiwe was one of the local people, dark skinned and chubby, but very kind—like her namesake, which was *Xhosa* for *loving*. She came by a couple of times a week to help with chores around the house, particularly the laundry.

Thandiwe opened the door. “Oh, hello, Miss Elizabeth, Miss Hattie. Did you have a good day at school?” the maid asked with a cheerful smile.

“Very good, thanks,” Elizabeth answered.

“I’m glad to hear that,” Thandiwe said, her smile broadening. “Your father is in the living room. I suspect he’ll want to speak with you . . .” Her smile faded now. “He’s just received some bad news from Mister Stevens.” Thandiwe reached for their school blazers.

“Oh . . . ?” Elizabeth replied, absently handing Thandiwe her blazer.

“What sort of bad news?” Hattie asked.

“It has something to do with Mister Lawrence’s son; that’s all I know.”

Edwin was sitting on the couch, contemplating the front cover of his book. He was thin and slight of build at five feet, seven inches tall, with closely-cropped, ash

brown hair that was swept back from his forehead. His most remarkable feature, however, was his eyes: they were light brown and oval-shaped, slanted slightly down toward his nose and up at the corners, with his dark eyebrows naturally following the slant and heightening the effect. The look wasn't oriental, since he still looked distinctly English, but it did cause the casual observer to wonder.

Elizabeth and Hattie came striding into the living room and slowed upon seeing their father's brooding expression.

Elizabeth set her backpack down on the floor. "Hi, Dad . . . Thandi told us you have some bad news?"

Edwin looked up from idly studying the front cover of the book he'd been reading. "Oh—hello girls." He hesitated, then sighed and said, "Lawrence's son, Benjamin, died, and your mother and I will be attending the funeral tomorrow."

"That's horrible!" Elizabeth said, her eyebrows drawing together with feeling. Hattie's lower lip was quivering, but she said nothing. "This is just a day of bad news, isn't it?" Tears were forming in Elizabeth's eyes. She barely knew Benjamin, but that didn't stop her from caring.

Edwin stood up from the couch and moved to put a hand on Elizabeth's shoulder. "I know, dear, but that's life isn't it? There's no use crying about it." Edwin missed the implication that Elizabeth had received some bad news of her own. "Well, go on, girls. Dry your eyes and put your books away. You'd better do some of your packing for tomorrow."

Elizabeth picked up her books again and headed upstairs, but Hattie just stood there in shock, looking up at her dad and sniffing.

Edwin looked down at Hattie. "Well? Time is wasting." At that, Hattie charged away in a mad dash for her room.

Edwin sighed. "Don't run up the stairs, Hattie!" He

called after her, but it was no use. She wasn't listening.

Hattie ran past Thandiwe at the top of the stairs, nearly knocking a load of washing out of the maid's hands. Thandiwe looked startled, but she turned with a frown to watch Hattie run past. The door to Hattie's room slammed shut, and Thandiwe took that as her cue. She set the washing down in the hallway and knocked gently on Hattie's door.

"Is everything all right, Miss Hattie?"

* * *

Hearing all of the commotion, Constance emerged belatedly from her room, which was down the hallway from Hattie's, just in time to see Thandiwe disappear inside Hattie's room.

Suspicious, Constance ambled down the hallway. She appeared in the doorway to Hattie's room a moment later. "Thandiwe . . ." Constance said, trailing off warningly as she took in the scene—Hattie receiving a warm hug from the maid.

Thandiwe broke the hug and turned to face Constance. "Yes, madam?"

"Come to my room, would you please?"

"Yes, madam."

Constance headed back to her room, but Thandiwe lingered to give Hattie a reassuring smile before following suit and closing the door behind her. Thandiwe arrived in Constance's room a few moments later, whereupon Constance immediately leveled a reproving frown upon her.

"I don't want you spoiling my girls, Thandiwe. We've talked about this before. We mustn't encourage them to behave so emotionally," Constance said.

"But, madam, everybody needs some comfort from time to time."

"I've said my piece, Thandiwe. Don't let it happen again. You're a good maid and I'd hate to lose you over such nonsense."

"Yes, madam," Thandiwe replied, sounding crestfallen.

“It won’t happen again.”

“Good, I’m glad that we could reach an agreement. You may go, Thandiwe—oh, and don’t forget to iron my beige dress,” Constance said as she went to her closet to retrieve it. “I’ll be wearing it for the journey to Siesta tomorrow,” she explained, handing the dress to the maid.

“Yes, madam,” Thandiwe said, taking the dress and leaving the room.

Constance watched her go with a sigh lying dead upon her lips. *Grief is a strange sort of thing, she thought. It makes people behave so improperly.*

She considered for a moment that Lawrence Stevens and his family would be grieving far more than her daughters. Apart from his late son, Benjamin, Lawrence had two young daughters and his wife, Rebecca. They would all be missing Benjamin terribly.

A thought occurred to Constance then: the Stevens family might be interested in moving someplace where they wouldn’t constantly be reminded of what they’d lost. Constance nodded absently. *Interesting . . .*

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