

Africa's
Snow White

Summer Love

Jealous Winter

by

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Summer Love - Jealous Winter

by Jonathan Eloff

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Published by Eureka Publishing

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Cover design by Jonathan Eloff

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.

International Standard Book Number: 978-0-9763374-3-0

Printed in the United States of America

by The A&A Book Printing Company:

www.PrintShopCentral.com

Chapter 2

Earlier that morning: golden rays from the rising sun were slanting into the dormitory through tall, lattice windows, and little clouds of dust were dancing down through them like snowflakes. Outside, the sprawling, grassy campus was broken neatly in places with majestic, green trees, rising like watchtowers from in-between the large, colonial stone buildings.

St. Andrew's was an old, English, all boys boarding school, located in the city of Bloemfontein. Today was the last day of school before summer and Christmas holidays began. Many *Afrikaner** families had been looking forward to this day all year; it was an opportunity to get away from the maddening monotony of work, home, and school. One such family was the Strauss family.

Nicholas Strauss was the middle child of three, 16 years old, with thick, wavy, chestnut-brown hair. One inch shy of six feet tall, blessed with a good complexion, a naturally athletic build, a striking smile, and piercing green eyes, Nicholas was the kind of guy who could make a girl blush just by looking at her.

As Nicholas lay in his bed, somewhere between sleep and wakefulness, a cacophony of roaring erupted in his ears. His eyes shot open. His heart began to pound.

Lions.

Nicholas blinked a few times, then connected the sound to meaning. He groaned, buried his head beneath his pillow, and went back to sleep. The city zoo was

* *Afrikaner*: African; a South African of Dutch and European descent

barely a mile from campus, and early morning was when they fed the lions.

Nicholas dreamt that he was standing on a verdant plain with a broad, blue sky overhead and lush, tropical mountains soaring in the near distance in front of him. A cool, winding river was flowing from between the mountains and gently hedging the plain on one side. Half a mile behind him, the river bisected a sprawling, white sandy beach, just before it emptied into the warm Indian Ocean.

It was Siesta, the caravan* park where he and his family spent their summer and Christmas holidays each year. Nicholas found himself wishing he could see the ocean again, and his subconscious accommodated by sending him whirring across time and space to walk barefoot along the beach. His senses were bombarded by a blessed recollection: the clean, white sand tickling warmly between his toes, the rippling azure water frothing a brilliant white as the waves crested and rolled to a crashing stop upon the shore—

Clank clank, clank clank, clank clank. Nicholas awoke to the cold, brassy sound of the Twells Bells, which were two pieces of iron railroad track strung up next to each other in the courtyard below.

By now sunlight was streaming into Nicholas's dormitory—an uninspired, rectangular room with old, scuffed wooden floors, dull brown walls, and white trim for the windows.

Nicholas sat up in his bed and surveyed a scene of unusual disorder through reluctantly opening eyelids. Where normally there would have been a neat double row of gray steel-frame beds and lockers traversing the length of the dormitory, this morning everything was out of place.

The last day of school! Nicholas recalled. *They may as well call it prank day,* he thought, as he surveyed his surroundings. His schoolmates were waking up all over the dormitory only to find that their shoelaces had been tied together, or that their hands had been filled with

*

Caravan: British English for an RV or camper

shaving cream—which had subsequently migrated to numerous other places during the night. Being the last day of school, no long-term punishments were possible, and the result was mayhem.

The pranks were all done in good fun, Nicholas reflected, unless the victim wasn't very well liked, in which case he'd better be somewhere else on the last day of school.

Nicholas noted with a smile that Bakkies Baker had had his bed raised up onto four lockers while he slept. Even as he watched, Bakkies sat up, and apparently not having noticed his predicament, swung his legs over the side . . .

A second later, Nicholas heard the boy's startled cry and watched as he nearly fell from a dizzying height. Unsurprisingly, the Beckett brothers—Jamie Beckett, known as *Shorty* for his stature; Billie Beckett, or *Muffy* as he was called for his often clumsy nature; and Harry Beckett, known as *Checkers* for his pervasive freckles—were standing there at the foot of Bakkies Baker's bed, laughing hysterically at the effects of their prank.

Bakkies Baker glared daggers down at the Becketts as he carefully calculated a jump to the floor. It never paid to be a deep sleeper at boarding school.

Feeling suddenly nervous, Nicholas checked himself over to make sure that he hadn't been the victim of any pranks last night . . .

And found a sticky knot of toothpaste in his hair. "All right, who was the weasel who pranked me last night?" Nicholas asked above the clamor of people laughing and yelling as they got out of bed and began going through their morning routines.

No one answered.

Figures, Nicholas thought.

* * *

As Nicholas walked down the long, stone corridor, he heard indignant shouts coming from the shower room. With a sinking feeling, he turned the corner.

Everywhere he looked, there were more people standing outside the shower stalls than in. The vast majority of the students were toweling off prematurely, and with

vigorous enthusiasm. Some of the guys still had glistening white suds in their hair. Most telling of all was the fact that there was no steam floating about the room.

Nicholas slowly undressed, setting his clothes and towel down on one of the wooden benches. Finding a free shower stall, he tentatively stepped inside. Cringing, he braced himself for the inevitable as he reached for the shower knobs—

“*Jislaaik*,* man! That’s cold!” Nicholas’s deep, baritone voice echoed from his shower stall, drawing knowing smiles and chuckles from the guys standing safely *outside* the shower stalls.

“Yeah, it really takes the mickey out of you, doesn’t it?” Jamie Beckett said just outside Nicholas’s shower stall.

After a flurry of activity, there was a short pause as the sound of running water stopped, and Nicholas hopped eagerly out of the shower.

“I guess old Mister Benson forgot to stoke the boiler again, huh?” Nicholas asked as he toweled off.

“That would be my assessment,” Jamie said. Grinning, he pointed to the sticky knot of toothpaste still lodged in Nicholas’s hair. “I think you missed a spot.”

Nicholas scowled. “Shorty . . . it was you, wasn’t it?”

“You wound me, Beaver,” Jamie said, using Nicholas’s nickname—so named for his two front teeth, which had appeared a little too large for his eight-year-old head when he’d first arrived at St. Andrew’s. “Why am I always the first to blame?”

Nicholas shot Jamie a narrow-eyed look. “Maybe because you’re always grinning like an idiot when these . . . *unfortunate incidents* occur.”

Jamie’s grin widened. “A bloke can’t help being happy, can he?”

“Hah,” Nicholas grunted, wincing as he tried to massage the toothpaste out of his hair with his towel.

* * *

The boys of Twells and Chandler House congregated in the courtyard for morning roll call, chatting excitedly as

* *Jislaaik*: Afrikaans for *wow*

they waited for their house prefect to call the roll and inspect their uniforms, which were clean and neatly pressed as usual, consisting of navy blue blazers and gray pants, topped off with stiff straw hats, affectionately known as *Cheesecutters*.

The boys heard Mr. Benson, a kindly, lean old man, with a dark, weather-beaten skin and a regrettable lack of hair, whistling merrily as he rode slowly by them on his bicycle.

“Enjoy your morning shower, boys?” Mr. Benson asked with a toothy grin.

Conversations were abruptly suspended as the boys turned to watch Mr. Benson ride away, their eyes narrowing in suspicion. One by one, their mouths dropped open as the puzzle pieces snapped into place.

“That rotter!” Jamie Beckett exclaimed. “He pranked the lot of us!”

* * *

Nicholas’s parents arrived to fetch him from St. Andrew’s at just after nine o’clock—the time when lessons would normally begin.

Nicholas saw them arrive from his place at the dormitory window. After saying his farewells, he grabbed his suitcase and left the dormitory. When he reached the stairwell, he encountered the Beckett brothers at the top, holding their suitcases two-handed in front of them. They were energetically chatting amongst themselves, every now and then giving Billie Beckett a gentle shove toward the stairs. Billie was shaking his head, his eyes wide. Nicholas shot them a curious look, but thought better of asking them what they were doing.

When Nicholas was about halfway down the first flight of stairs, he heard Billie raise his voice.

“Fine, I’ll do it!”

This was followed by a loud scraping noise which grew rapidly in volume, giving Nicholas his first warning. Then he heard Jamie yell, “Look out, Beaver!”

And that was his second.

Nicholas turned around, his eyes bulged, and he dove to one side just in time to miss Billie Beckett skidding down the stairs on top of his suitcase. Billie hit the bot-

tom of the stairs with an *oomph* and sprawled out like a beached whale. Nicholas sat blinking in shock on one side of the staircase and heard Jamie and Harry laughing raucously behind him.

“So? How was it, Muffy?” Jamie called from the top of the stairs.

Billie hauled himself off the floor and stood, swaying for a moment. Then he raised his fists into the air. “Bloody awesome!”

“Sweet! Come on, Checkers, let’s go!” Jamie said, and launched himself down the stairs atop his own suitcase. Harry followed suit.

Nicholas scrambled to his feet just in time to dodge again as Jamie rocketed through the spot where he’d been sitting, and then came to an abrupt stop as Harry came whirring down right in front of him.

“*Jislaaik* man! Watch where you guys are going!” Nicholas called after them. They gave no response. He shook his head with annoyance and walked to the bottom of the stairs. He passed a pile of laughing Becketts on the landing, turned, and then started down the next flight of stairs.

The laughing quieted a little. “Hey, Beaver! Your parents arrived?” Jamie asked. Nicholas paused and glanced back over his shoulder, nodding once. “Take care!” Jamie said, his words echoed by his two brothers.

Nicholas looked them over for a second—uniforms no longer neatly pressed, limbs entangled, chubby faces smiling impishly at him—and then grinned in spite of himself. “You too, guys,” he said, and continued down the stairs.

Nicholas marveled at how good it felt to be going home again. The prospect of sleeping in his own bed, having his *own* room, and of eating *home-cooked* food again was overwhelming. Self-consciously, he noted an additional spring in his step.

Halfway through the parking lot, he met his parents on their way to the dormitory. They stopped in front of each other, everyone smiling. Kathleen rushed forward to give her son a hug.

“You were well-behaved, I hope?” Kathleen Strauss

asked, holding her son at arms length, her short, artificially dark hair waving in the warm breeze. Dark hair was in fashion, since everyone wanted to look more like Elizabeth Taylor, and though Kathleen didn't bear much resemblance to the famous actress, she was very good-looking in her own right—a one-time cover girl, tall and slender, with a clear complexion and vivid blue eyes.

"Don't worry, Mom. I was very well-behaved," Nicholas replied, grinning. Kathleen smiled back, and they turned and began walking toward the car.

"Of course, he was well-behaved," Nicholas's father, Dr. Johann Strauss agreed. Then, with a twinkle in his eye, he thought to add, "All harmless fun aside, right, son?"

Kathleen looked shocked as possibilities ran through her mind. "You didn't get into any harmless *mischief*, did you Nicholas?"

"No, Mom," Nicholas chuckled.

"Good. I'm glad to hear it."

Nicholas noticed his father straighten his suit, a self-satisfied smile lurking at the corners of his mouth. Every bit the aesthetic equal of his wife, Johann was six feet tall, with a long, masculine face, and hair the color of charcoal with veins of silver running through it, worn habitually swept back by a liberal dab of Brylcreem.

Nicholas and his parents arrived at their car, its distinctive pair of triple taillights glinting various shades of crimson in the sun. It was a muscle car—a two door, dove gray, Chevrolet Impala, with the barest hint of fins on the back. His parents opened the doors, and Nicholas climbed in behind his mother's seat.

As Johann was driving through the school gates, Kathleen said, "Oh! By the way, Nicholas—" She opened the glove compartment, brought out a white envelope, and turned to her son. "You got a letter from Karen yesterday." She held the envelope out to him. "I thought you might like to read it in the car."

Nicholas's eyebrows scrunched together as he took the letter from his mother. "Thanks . . ." *That's odd*, he thought, gazing down at the envelope. He and Karen had met and briefly dated during his family's summer vaca-

tion at Siesta last year. Afterwards, she had insisted on visiting him at his home in Sterkspruit, complicating his life immensely, as he already had a girlfriend there—Denise, a sweet, blond-haired girl whom he had grown up with and with whom he had been friends with for as long as he could remember.

While Karen was visiting, Nicholas had introduced her to his best friend, Reggie Muir. Months later, he'd found out from Reggie's brother that Reggie and Karen were sending letters to each other from school. It had been obvious to Nicholas what that had meant.

So why was she writing to him now?

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