

Africa's  
Snow White

*Summer Love*

Jealous Winter

by

JONATHAN ELOFF

***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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## Chapter 29

**J**ohann brought the Chevrolet Impala to a grinding halt in the gravel driveway of their home. Nicholas got out, hauling his hard-topped, black leather suitcase out behind him. He took a deep breath and let it slowly out again. Maybe it was just the relatively cooler mountain air and the wide-open spaces, but it always felt to Nicholas like freedom. No more waking up at six in the morning, no more sleeping in a room with more than a dozen other guys, and no more being told what to do, when to do it—and where. For the next month, he could do whatever he wanted. He grinned at the thought.

Nicholas started on his way to the house, coming up alongside his parents. Halfway there, however, he was ambushed by two streaking balls of fur—his dogs, Bobby and Scampy.

Nicholas got down on his haunches to greet them. They'd only jump up if he didn't. When they reached him, Bobby began energetically wagging his rump for lack of a tail and reaching up to shower him with slobbery kisses. Scampy was jumping up to do the same.

After enduring a few minutes of that, Nicholas laughed and started for the house again. His parents were already out of sight.

As Nicholas reached the front door, it opened to reveal his sister, Kristina, and his older brother, Philip. The latter was a few inches taller than Nicholas at just more than six feet; he had darker and shorter hair, and a strong chin that was darkened by facial hair even though he was clean-shaven. Last year, Philip had spent

summer vacation with his friends, but this year he'd decided to join the family in Siesta instead.

Nicholas stopped short of the door. "Hey, Krissy. Phil—long time no see," he said, setting his suitcase down and holding his hand out to his brother.

Philip caught Nicholas's hand in a vice grip, pulling him closer and then enthusiastically slapping him on the back. "*Ja, nee wat, back in the ol' dorpie, huh?*"

"Looks like," Nicholas said.

\* \* \*

"Piet!" Elizabeth exclaimed as she opened her front door. He was standing there in shorts and a T-shirt.

"Hello, Lizzie," he said, his eyes lighting up when he saw her. "I was just about to call you, but then I decided to come over instead. You finished packing for Siesta yet?"

Elizabeth nodded. "We're leaving tomorrow morning."

Pieter's grin faded. He already knew when Elizabeth would be leaving; they'd discussed it earlier in the week. She was probably reminding him so he wouldn't forget to say goodbye. He had tried again to convince her to spend the summer with him in Wellington, but she'd just reiterated her prior objections. *A pity*, he thought. *We would have had lots of fun together, Lizzie.*

"You want to go see what's playing at the *bioscope?*"\* he asked.

"Now?"

"If you're free."

She smiled. "I think I am. What's playing?"

"If I knew that, I wouldn't have said 'you want to go see what's playing at the *bioscope?*' "

"Smart Alec. Just let me check with my parents," she said, then disappeared inside to do so. She reappeared a minute later with a purse on her shoulder. "Let's go," she said, closing the door behind her.

Fifteen minutes later, they were in Pieter's car and driving to the nearby town of Paarl. They'd checked what was playing in Wellington's theater first, but it was relatively smaller than the one in Paarl, and they had al-

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\* *Bioscope*: cinema

ready watched the movie playing there.

Elizabeth watched as they passed an old, beaten up bus that was crawling along at an indecent speed. In typical African style, the bus didn't just have passengers on the inside, but on the outside as well, sitting on top with the baggage, or standing on the back bumper with their arms wrapped through open windowsills.

"Don't they ever fall off?" Elizabeth asked.

Pieter glanced at the bus in his rearview mirror and smiled. "Not usually. The bus driver rents them magnetic shoes."

"Really? I didn't know that . . ." Elizabeth said, her brow furrowing in thought.

Pieter started chuckling. "*Jinne*, Lizzie, you're gullible."

"It's not true?"

"Of course not," he replied, still chuckling.

"You rat!"

There was a moment of silence.

"That wasn't very nice, Piet. I believed you!"

He spared a glance from the road to give her one of his best *I'm-too-charming-to-be-mad-at* grins. She almost couldn't help smiling back.

Almost.

\* \* \*

"So . . . you're leaving for Siesta tomorrow," Lawrence said, swirling the last of his brandy around in its tumbler.

Edwin nodded. "It'll be nice to get away from the office for a while. What are you planning to do for the holidays?"

Lawrence frowned and cast Edwin a sideways glance. "Work."

"Couldn't they find someone to fill in for you?"

Lawrence shook his head. "I've got to prepare the company's sales strategy for the next quarter. Profits are down from last year, and the board wants me to find a way to bump them back up again."

"I thought the company was making good profits . . . 'strong positive cash flow'—wasn't that what the report from the sales division said?"

“Yeah.” Lawrence barked a short laugh. “But apparently not strong enough for the brass.”

“Well, either way, developing a sales strategy sounds like a job for the sales division, can’t you delegate it to them?”

Lawrence drained his glass and sighed as he set it down. “Unfortunately not.” He gave Edwin a grim look. “The board has been worried about me, Eddie. They won’t say it, but they are. Even if I’ve given them no reason for concern, my ‘unfortunate’ circumstances are enough. I think this is their way of seeing if I can still handle the pressure.”

“What? Put you to work when you need a break the most? That’s ridiculous. Delegate the task and take the credit, Lawrence; you don’t need to feel guilty—everyone does it.”

“Lawrence shook his head. If they found out, it would be as much as admitting that I can’t handle the pressure. I need to show them they’re wrong.”

Edwin frowned, his gaze dropped from Lawrence to the mirror-clean countertop, his eyes narrowing in disgust. *All cold calculation and no heart.* Sometimes Edwin felt he wasn’t cut out for business.

Lawrence gave a knowing smirk at the look on Edwin’s face. “Well, like it or not, that’s the job.” Lawrence motioned to the bartender for a refill, then Edwin drained his mug and pushed it forward for the same.

The bartender withdrew a bottle of brandy from the shelf behind him and refilled Lawrence’s tumbler. Then, taking Edwin’s empty mug, he refilled it from the keg of beer behind the bar.

“On the bright side, my wife seems to be doing better lately,” Lawrence said. “According to our maid, she’s taken to doing all the little errands that require her to get out of the house.”

Edwin stifled a grimace. Lawrence seemed to get some relief from talking about his problems at home, but Edwin would have preferred to talk about something else. *Anything* else. Lawrence continued, “I couldn’t be happier . . . I just hope she’s not driving drunk.”

“I’m sure she wouldn’t . . .” Edwin said, trailing off as

another, far more horrible thought occurred to him.

“Why not?” Lawrence asked.

“Hmmm? Why not what?” Edwin asked, distracted by his thoughts.

“Why wouldn’t she be driving drunk? She does everything else that way.” Lawrence turned back to face the bar and shook his head.

Edwin wasn’t sure what to say, so he took a gulp of his beer instead. Setting his mug back down and clearing his throat, he decided to change the topic. “Would you like to bounce some of your ideas for the sales strategy off of me?”

Silence. Lawrence was contemplating the depths of his drink as if he hadn’t heard. Edwin was about to repeat the question, but then, slowly, Lawrence turned to regard him. “No. Thanks for the offer, Eddie, but I think I’d rather just forget about it for now.”

“Ah. Okay, then.”

They lapsed into silence again, and this time it lasted much longer. Finally, Edwin couldn’t take it any longer, and he had the perfect excuse. He drained his glass. “Well, Lawrence, the best of luck to you, my friend, but I’d better get going. We’ll be leaving for Siesta early tomorrow morning.” Edwin hopped off the bar stool.

Worried that Lawrence was going to get drunk and drive himself home afterwards, Edwin offered, “You want me to give you a lift home?”

Lawrence turned to Edwin, his eyes glassy and out of focus. It took him a moment to process what Edwin had said. “No, that’s okay. I think I’ll just stay here for a while.”

Edwin felt a brief pang of guilt. How could he leave his friend all alone, still obviously depressed, and on their last day together for the next three weeks? On the other hand, he really *did* have to get going, either that, or get home to face his wife, who would nag incessantly about how late they’d be leaving tomorrow due to his “thoughtless indiscretion,” or some other such disparaging reason.

He chewed his lower lip, considering for a moment what he should do. But, having already declared his in-

tentions, he thought it best to follow through. "Well," Edwin said, "see you in three weeks, Lawrence."

Lawrence nodded slowly and held out his hand to Edwin. "Goodbye, Eddie." Edwin accepted the handshake—a desperate vice grip—and tried to ignore the shimmering look in Lawrence's eyes. Maybe it was just an effect of the brandy. "I hope you have a great vacation."

Edwin sighed and nodded. Lawrence let go of his hand, and Edwin turned and strode for the door. As he left, Edwin couldn't help wondering: without their games of golf and the time they spent together afterward, what did Lawrence have to look forward to at the end of the day?

*A drunken wife? That blasted sales strategy?* Edwin shook his head. And then there was the matter of Rebecca's frequent trips into town. Edwin's prior suspicions came vividly back to him, but he pushed them aside with a grimace.

He could only hope that he was wrong.

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