

PINK
CARNATIONS

BY

NUALA URAIH

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This book contains some fictional names, places, tribes and characters. South Ciskei is a fictional country and Xbosatan, a fictional tribe. The story is set in the period where the oppressed people are seen as fighters to sustain their heritage which the western world colonized. However, some of the events portrayed in this story are obtained from both the historical and real-life events from South Africa and Nigeria.

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PROLOGUE

South Ciskei Uprising, The 1976 Massacre

The howl of the failed revolution could easily be heard through the walls of my mud house that windy morning. It was a concoction of the vibrating noise from the muzzle of the firing of guns accompanied by the screams of the brave local school children as they succumbed to death. The screams were distant, yet sharp, piercing into the thickness of my sleep and jolting me to life. I could recollect the events of that morning with curious clarity, how my heart beat faster than my native drums. I recall the expression on papa's aged face that very day, a harvest of pride, victory and fulfilment.

Papa was an upright man, tall and handsome with a bronze skin that made him the toast of young and old ladies alike, in spite of his age. He was also a respected teacher and village activist who would always be found wearing thick reading glasses and a short sleeve shirt, complete with a bow tie over a threadbare trouser.

Earlier that morning, Papa had suddenly fallen sick with a bout of fever and Mama had persuaded him to stay back home instead of going to school to join the demonstration while she mopped his hot body with a piece of cloth soaked in cold water. The fight was initiated by papa as South Ciskei local people were trying to preserve the African heritage because the western world had invaded their space for years and mistreated the native people. The word on the street was that the

neighbouring countries had lost their heritage and their ancestral land has been replaced with taller buildings, their names westernized and their folk songs replaced with the western blues. Papa hated the blues.

At about 12pm that nascent afternoon, while we were having our brunch of cocoyam and palm oil, we had an unexpected visitor. Initially I frowned at the interrupted brunch because, you see, we always ate twice daily: that is a brunch and a dinner with no in-betweens. That was how we survived on Papa's meagre salary. My train of thought was cut short when a white man with a long unkempt beard stormed into our house in company of two white police officers with an air of assured authority. I took a quick look at my father's face. As usual, he looked composed, but I remember seeing a flicker of fear in his eyes after those men of the law interrupted our family mealtime. This was so strange to me because I had never seen a white man come into our quarters. You see, back then the white people were seen as mini gods who did not mix with coloured people, especially in their homes.

'This is the Sheldrake home, isn't it?' The white man asked aloud. He had a mean mien, he was about 6 feet tall, broad shoulders and with a memorable moustache that curled up at each edge

'If it is Sheldrake the head teacher, then it is.' Papa replied as he laboured to his feet, Mama supporting him.

'Don't transfer any disease to us boy,' the leader warned as he moved menacingly towards father. 'We heard you are the audacious teacher who is leading those fools out there to make this village ungovernable.

I would ask that you do not disrespect my home, if you come into it uninvited!' papa challenged him.

'Really?' he asked with a smirk. 'So it is true? In that case, perhaps I should show you what it means to disrespect. Arrest him.'

As if that was an opportunity to teach him a lesson, the police officers descended on him first with sturdy slaps then viciously handcuffed him. Papa cut the picture of the meek Jesus I often heard about in our Sunday school classes at Savior's Baptist Church. Like a lamb led to Golgotha. I remember he didn't fight back as they dragged him out of the house, hands chained, pride drained. But Mama wailed and wailed. She struggled with the officers. Papa spoke to her softly to reassure her that he would return home soon. They were attempting to take Papa to their car but Mama blocked their way. She tried to grab the Whiteman by his neck collar while she scratched his face. He let out a cry of pain as Mama's fingernails dug unto the flesh on his face.

'My eyes!' he screamed and at the same moment he tried to grab onto mama's neck with his eyes shut. I saw papa struggle to break free from the police officer's grips and chains, but it was no avail. They held him tightly and then shoved him at the back of the seat of the car.

'You bastard! God will punish you,' she screamed at him in our local Xhosatan lingo as he tried to push her away from him. But it seemed Mama was determined. There was venom in her eyes, the kind of look I had never seen before. Was it the demon in her which she had carefully tamed that was let loose? Was it a woman's love? Or unbridled hatred for her husband's traducers? It was a new mama we saw that morning. My baby sister, Mather, began to cry while I sobbed too.

'Enough! Let that woman go,' a deep baritone voice with unmistakable superiority suddenly halted the chaos. It was a whiteman with a fiercer look and a more commanding tone. He was dressed up in a brown English suit and held a gold-plated walking stick. I thought at that

moment that he must be important because as soon as he came the other Whiteman let mama go.

'This little bitch tried to kill me brother,' the cruel bearded white man screamed in anger as he let mama go. I then realised that the whiteman with the authoritative tone was indeed related to the other angry whiteman because they had similar facial features.

'Interesting that you let a little negro woman overpower you, Jefferson.' He continued without a smile 'The English and bloody American press have flooded the whole area. We can't risk more negative publicity. I am running for office soon. So, release the man.'

The policemen and the angry bearded whiteman looked defeated, mama rushed to the car door and quickly opened the door for papa. When papa got out of the car, with mama holding unto his arm in tears, he looked up at the whiteman and murmured a thank you. But the whiteman didn't reply. He took a few steps towards mama and papa, with his gaze on her face.

'We are so very grateful...' Mama stammered.

'You are the head teacher?' he asked, without shifting his gaze from mama. Papa didn't like his look towards mama. But he was helpless. Mama spoke up for him while still in shock. 'erm...no sir...I....'

I wasn't asking you madam.' Still looking at her.

Papa got the clue and in a subdued voice, spoke. 'I am the science teacher.'

'The school is burnt down. You and your people would need work to feed your family soon...'

I do not understand?'

I am opening a coal and goldmine soon. I need all the hands I can get. Though you are a teacher, but your knowledge and the respect you have garnered among the people will come good. So you can come and work for me as a manager.'

'Are you trying to bribe me?' papa growled.

'He will come,' mama immediately interrupted papa, as she took the white envelope from the man's outstretched hand.

'Let's say I am trying to provide good employment for the minority. Isn't good employment one of the causes for your fight?' he asked firmly. Papa nodded in agreement.

'What the hell! He can't be a manager brother,' the other whiteman named Jefferson tried to protest but his brother shut him up with a wave of his hand.

'Let's go.' He commanded.

And just like that, they left our home.

Papa died a few months after he took up the job at the gold mine.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE YEAR 1994, ST DOMINIC CATHOLIC CHURCH, NIGERIA

Their angelic voices could be heard miles away. It was the familiar worship songs from the choir of the magnificent St. Dominic's Catholic Church. Correspondents from all broadcasting networks in the world focused their camera on the face of an aged soloist who treated the solemn congregation to 'Ave Maria'. She was clad in a black choir robe alongside the rest of her choral group members.

The church is packed with a congregation of both black and white men and women. They are mostly clothed in chic black outfits, and head fascinators. The cameras gradually trailed the faces of the congregation. Some were captured sniffing their noses with handkerchiefs while others were seen wiping the tears from the corners of their eyes.

Soon, the tenor of the choir decreased, which indicated that the song was coming to an end. The camera rested on an attractive black lady in her twenties, who was sitting at the front roll of the church. She put on a large, dark Oliver Goldsmith Manhattan's sunglasses that concealed the unique features of her tired eyes and neatly powdered cheek

bone. A simple lace scarf wrapped around her head. Her gaze was transfixed on a closed gold plated coffin, covered with dozens of pink carnations flowers which were placed ahead of her. She began to slowly and painfully clutch her plain twenty karat gold necklace for emotional support. A frail hand reached out to her left hand for solace. She then let go of her necklace. The face of a black man in his sixties was now the attention of the television network, who sat next to her. He was dressed in a black two piece French suit. He whispered in her ears. At the same time the soloist finished her song. The man got up and slowly walked to the front of the church. He was accompanied by a white elderly man, who took the microphone and spoke to the silent crowd.

‘Thank you all for being here today. It sure has been a long journey for us all...’

SHELDRAKE

South Ciskei, Southern Africa, Shweta Township, 1984

The scenario of the slums in Shweta township, which was under the control of the city council at that time, during the apartheid could easily be envisaged based on the prominent tales of the contentious lives of its inhabitants. The rows of tiny shanties or small brown houses, were commonly called ‘matchbox’ houses for the Negros. These matchbox houses were built on piles of garbage near bumpy roads, rustic streams with abandoned broken bottles. The withered leaves from the Eucalyptus trees mostly bore conspicuous sign

posts, scribbled with racial restrictions, which could easily be seen from afar. These signages would read ‘the entrance of the South Ciskei’ a ‘Private road’ or ‘Negros entering this area must have a permit’. Also, scenes of desolate little Negros who mostly appeared unkempt, scantily clothed and atrophied could be pictured taking their daily naps in front of their parasite infested homes. Their domestic pets ran around the frightening streets. The images of the firing of open missiles by white policemen and the thunderous voices from black revolutionaries were still heard as they irately marched along the dodgy streets of the district, in search of autonomy after the abrupt South Ciskei uprising and massacre.

However, most children may also be spotted playing gleefully with imaginary football with empty Coca-Cola and milk cans despite the scary uprising. Also, older men contentedly smoked cheap tobacco with broken pipes while they drank their local whisky - what do they call that drink now? Fuga, yes, I think they call it fuga - as they drown their worries in a game of draft. They did not know a better way than to escape the racial struggles with intoxication of strong liquor. After all, as the saying goes, what you don’t know won’t harm you.

In my yard, before the cock would crow, most middle-aged women dressed up in their neatly sewn housemaids’ uniforms can be seen rushing out of their quarters to catch the early morning train to their work stations. That picture of strong and inspired women was the most memorable picture of my neighbourhood at that time. Mama, a beautiful petite bronze skinned middle-aged woman with a stunning

afro hairdo was constantly the object of attention in my small neighbourhood. In the mornings, she struggled with the door as she tried to lock up our dilapidated front door. That morning as usual, she was cursing noisily in our native Xhosatan tongue, as if the poor thing could hear her. Her profanities were mostly caused by my baby sister, a six-year-old pain in the arse who always cried out aloud as soon as she tried to hinder the front door from shutting when mama was late for work.

My sister always reminded me that Mama would often yell behind the shut doors:

‘Stay in the house and wait for your brother, Mather! Oh good Lord, I will kill him when I get a hold of him.’

You see, I was hardly ever around.

But wait. Before I start telling my story, let me introduce myself. I am Mandiva Sheldrake, a proud South Ciskei African native from the Xhosatan Clan. I lived with my mother, Mara, and little sister, Mather, in the Shweta ghetto, Old Panaville, which was beside the popular borders of Danaloof and Meadowstick to be exact.

The series of events that metamorphosed me from a timid young man to an iron willed, ruthless adult started in April 1984. This date was also memorable, for the reason that it was one of the hottest days in Shweta. The leaves from the oak trees were withering and the humidity in the air was unbearable. Sweat oiled by the blazing sun rolled down my temple into my misty eyes. I was exhausted from the day’s work. The work is called *black man’s work of shame*. For it was

what the majority of coloured men from South Ciskei did for survival back in the days. This meant every elderly Negro were working their arse off in the coal and gold mine alongside their underage sons. It was a case of slave fathers, slave sons. The little ones would run errands in the same mine like getting a bottle of milk and pastries for their white masters for breakfast or shine their dusty shoes. Failure to do these could result to the harshness of exercising the fucking apartheid rule. This was because back then the Xhosatans tribe in Shweta were governed by the toothless Urban Bantutu Council, which had no executive power and could only act in the advisory capacity to the white authorities. For this reason, we often referred to this council as the *'useless Boys Club'*.

The white Superintendent who indirectly called all the shots for the eleven administrative offices, by which the Shweta Township was controlled, was a ruthless man feared and hated at the same time. I was amongst the victims of his terror reign. On the local television, his justification for engaging in any inhumane acts was that as the mayor, he understands that to rule such a community needs force, and he must exact such a force. Most Africans are animals, he reasoned, and he would not hesitate to treat them as such. For example, he preferred giving white collar jobs to the white minority and the odd jobs to the Negroes because 'he needed blacks to take responsibility and go to school'. Worse still, any Negro caught stealing even a piece of bread was served maximum sentence. They hardly ever get an opportunity for any proper hearings or appeal from the court. Rumours had it that these cases were intentionally lost in transit. The superintendent was popularly known as 'The

Mad Mayor' amongst my peers, which was translated as a white terrorist and supremacist by most black locals.

Papa had died slaving in the Mine when I was only seven years old after he had taken the job offer from the Mayor back then. The memories of papa's death still tortured me in my dreams. We received no apologies, nor compensation, which justified his nickname. It was typical of the regime; we were to lick our wounds in silence and without complaints. So, my mother had to work extra hard to put some food on our table. Unfortunately, she ended up working for the mayor. The horrible mayor owned everything in South Ciskei.

Now as I tell this part of the story I am 15 years of age, tall, slim with a muscular physique; yet my infertile body hadn't grown any pubic hair. I frequently dressed up in my favourite blue khaki shorts and brown worn out singlet which had the South Ciskei flag boldly printed on it. I loved my homeland despite our state of poverty.

I stood over the hilltop with a broad grin on my face as I watched two middle aged black men wrestle. One of the fighters was Papa's brother and the other a stranger to me. I swung my fist in the air to imitate my uncle, the bald-headed fighter, as he pummelled his opponent into submission. The fight was soon over. I began to clap as the winner of the fight approached me. I ran to meet him with a warm embrace, not minding the sweat all over his muscular body. My uncle, who was nicknamed Jide Sheldrake, was victorious once again. Papa had explained to me years ago that uncle was nicknamed Jide because he took after his favourite boxer, a

Nigerian, named Jide who came to South Ciske to fight one time. However, Uncle Jide was like a dreamer to mama which irritated her. She believed he had no savings as he invested his little income from the bar he worked in, buying lots of books which he then somehow used in preaching to the villagers on subversion.

I moved towards him screaming in excitement, ‘That was brilliant Uncle!’

But his response was a cold rebuke.

‘My boy, you can’t be showing up here every day to watch old men fight. Aren’t you meant to be in school, Mandiva?’

‘I don’t want to go to school. I want to be a fighter like you.’ I replied in Xhosatan ‘Besides I have been out of school for a while because mother couldn’t pay the fees for my exams.’

‘But your mother goes to work. Don't they pay her?’

‘She has been going, Uncle. I think she is even doing extra shifts at MDS boy’s residence now. She said she hasn’t been able to raise the money completely.’

I remember Uncle frowned at me before giving me a nudge, ‘Don’t let them white folks hear you calling the mayor MDS, boy. You would be out of school for life; you will be bunkmates with the real Mandela in prison at Robin Island.’ He gave me a gentle smack on the head then wimped as he watched me flinch. As we walked home, he continued ‘Is the rumour true? Heard Mayor's wife is returning today with her son from England.’

Suddenly it hit me. ‘Oh my God, I forgot to deliver the milk for mother to make pastries.’

I picked up the bucket filled up with bottles of freshly extracted milk from the cows in the dairy farm and raced down the hills with it. After a few seconds, I came within the touching distance of a large estate that had the astonishing grey mansion in its centre. I searched my pocket to show the security guard at the gate my pass before they let me go to house. But it seemed I had lost it during my run.

‘I can’t find my interior passport sir,’ I pleaded to the two black security guards outside the gate.

‘Then you can’t enter, son. We are expecting special guests today so they told us to beef up security.’

You see, the interior passports were used to control black settlement and it was called the Pass Laws. Black workers used the identification passport to enter the cities during work hours, because the rest of the time, coloured people were not allowed in the cities at that time. The Pass Laws represented a lucrative opportunity for white-owned mining companies to employ and exploit black workers while enjoying their massive wealth. In a nutshell, it was illegal for a black person not to carry a passbook.

‘His with me. Let him in.’

I heard a voice from behind. I turned around to see Mr Misshini. He was the oldest butler in the premises and Mama’s good friend. He was always looking frail when he stood at the front door of his station but always had a big

smile on his face as he did his job serving the white man. He showed them his pass. The security guards nodded and let me in.

‘Oh thank you, Mr Minschini. Mama would have killed me if I didn’t show up.’

‘I know, son. Now hurry to the kitchen. She has been waiting,’ he smiled as he rushed me into the house through the backdoor to enter the kitchen.

The kitchen was a vast space, it was appropriately fitted with modern kitchen utensils which was orderly arranged above the kitchen cabinet. The room was filled with black men and women of various heights, shapes and sizes. The most striking thing that they shared in common was the colour of their skin: black; and that of their aprons: white. Some were cutting vegetables on chopping boards, while some were pulling out freshly baked corn bread and cheese soufflé for desserts out of the oven. Other younger looking valet, butler and footmen were being ordered by the older kitchen hands in the native language to assist in carrying the desserts to the dining hall. I browsed around the kitchen in search of mama and at the same time tried my best not to be carried away by the sweet aroma of freshly baked corn bread that filled the room. Eventually, I located her at a corner rolling out dough on a wooden pan.

When I finally approached her, she looked up at me and pulled a face. I recalled her saying ‘I can as well give you a good knock on the head, Maddy. You know you are late and I waited in the house all day for you to get back with the

milk. I had to leave your sister home alone; you know I can't afford to lose this job.'

I stammered an apology. I knew mama's knocks could make a grown man cry.

'I am so sorry mama it won't happen again.' I put the milk down on the table in front of her.

'I guess you stopped by the hills again to watch that brainless uncle of yours fight. You better wake up Mandiva from your trance and work hard, and make some money or go to school. Do you want to end up like Jide – a broke man who can't afford to keep a wife or help his sister-in-law, nephew or niece in any positive way? And stop looking at the damn floor because I have told you this one million times before. Look at me when I talk,' she warned, loud enough for me to feel threatened but remained silent not to provoke her further or attract the attention of her co-workers.

'Sorry mama,' I apologised again.

'You would be sorrier if I lose this job, boy.'

I was thankful when the head cook, an elderly woman in uniform, came in and interrupted the discussion. She was Auntie Rose, Mama's best mate. She had apparently watched the drama between mother and son and knew something was wrong.

'It's okay Miriam, stop scolding the boy. The mayor's wife will arrive in two minutes. We all have to be outside to welcome them—' She turned to the chefs and announced, 'we are wrapping up our cooking now. The mayor and his

guests are received in two minutes. We have to be of our finest behaviour. That is if you still want your jobs, I am damn sure I want to keep mine. So, we wait outside to welcome them.'

Within a few seconds, the kitchen was magically tidied up by the workers. They all took off their aprons and made their way to the mansion frontage.

'Mama, can I come?'

'Yes, but be of your best behaviour. That is, your mouth shut at all times.' She agreed, rushing to the entrance door at the same time grabbing hold of my hand. That is one thing about my mother. She forgave you as quickly as she rebuked you.

Soon all the coloured staff members of the Mayor's residence had filed out like primary school pupils on a Monday morning assembly to the front of the house. We were left standing outside the burning sun for a few minutes. Most of us began to sweat as the flies settled on of our foreheads. We couldn't have stood for more than five minutes, but it seemed like an hour to me. I began to grumble. A middle-aged limping white man soon approached us. Everyone immediately fell silent as they heard the firm sound of his limp on one leg, aided by a wooden cane. He was known as Mr Jefferson Van. I recalled that the white Dutch man was the same person that intruded our home years ago and tried to arrest father. I frowned. The only difference between him then and now was his limp. He was dressed in a white plain shirt, grey tuxedo with Cowboy boots and a grey western hat to match. As he approached nearer the servants, I could smell the fear that was on every

one's faces. He was accompanied by five white bodyguards with guns. Jefferson was feared amongst most people in town. He was known to be ruthless, egotistic on his belief in white supremacy and he openly oppressed the Negros. He was known as the voice and the right-hand man to his brother, the mayor.

'When are they coming mama, I am hungry?' I asked to the chagrin of my mother.

'Hush your mouth Mandiva.' Mama pulled my ears. You better learn how to control your mouth boy. She hissed.

Jefferson made a croaking cough for attention and he watched every servant present adjust their bodies. They tried to stand at alert like soldiers. To me, it still seemed we were still in the 18th century at the time of slavey, as the staff acted just like the captured slaves known as Chicken George or Kunta Kinte from my favourite novel *Roots*. Jefferson then read out loud the telegram from his brother, the mayor. When he finished, he added as a footnote, 'The mayor would be here in the next 3 minutes. At least that leaves sufficient time to get you niggas to tidy up your mess and look presentable for the mayor and his company.'

He turned to Mr Minschini, the short beefy butler standing directly opposite him who had helped me at the gate earlier. He walked closer to him. Sweat dripped down his temple. Jefferson pulls out a handkerchief from his left breast pocket and covered his nose.

‘Hey boy, why are you sweating like a pig? You have a distasteful body odour and are killing the buzz here. What’s your name boy?’

I recall the Butler replying, ‘Minschini Sir’ as he began to tremble with fear, sweat on his temple dropped on his white-collar shirt. The buzzing of flies seemed to increase at that moment. He looked stupid.

‘You don’t look clean enough, besides you are too old for this job. Your appearance would jolt my little nephew and his mama. You are fired Minschini boy.’ The servants began to mumble amongst themselves as Minschini immediately prostrated on the floor crying for mercy. He grasped Jefferson’s one good leg as he cried for a plea. Miffed, Jefferson used his walking stick to hit the butler’s hand. Minschini was at the same time screaming in his native tongue to the murmuring workers.

‘Silence!’

All the servants became quiet.

‘Please sir, if you sack me, I am finished,’ he pleaded in laboured English. ‘I have worked here for long, master. I need to pay my children’s school fees sir, my wife is sick!’ Minschini grip tightened on Jefferson’s legs. Jefferson took off his hat at the same time he looked down at Minschini in disgruntlement.

‘Education is not meant for your kind. Your body odour soils the floor on this land boy. Don’t let me repeat myself. I said you are fired.’ Immediately he said that. His

bodyguards cocked their guns and pointed them at Minschini's face.

'You are trying to harass a white official. That's clearly against the law. Now let go off my leg,' Jefferson calmly commanded him.

Minschini slowly pulled his hands off Jefferson's leg and remained on the ground with his face down and started sobbing. Jefferson kicked the stone in front of him. A cloud of dust and sand from his boots covered on Minschini's face. Minschini still remained on the ground sobbing and coughing from the dust he just inhaled. Poor Minschini, nobody was brave enough to plead on his behalf. It appeared that everyone knew that trying to plead on his behalf would amount to signing off on their own jobs. They could only give him a sorry look from their respective positions. When he would not get up, Mama was brave enough and walked up to him and assisted him to stand up on his feet.

'Go home brother, it's okay.' She consoled him, at the same time she bent down to pick his cap, which lay on the floor and handed it over to him.

We all watched him leave the mansion of the white man that day. I remember the painful leap he took as he dragged himself out of that fucked up mansion. He was a shattered old man. That was the last time we saw Minschini at work. As we would later learn, Minschini got home that night and seeing his five children and sick wife, and with no hope of ever being able to take care of them, he turned to the street for help; when it wasn't forthcoming he tried to steal from

the mayor's mine. He was caught and killed like every other African man that crossed the governor's path.

As if waiting for Minschini to drag his odour making body out of the compound, the mayor arrived in a convoy. Two glossy blue Volkswagens pulled up in front of the house. The door of the first car pulled up and a tall white man stepped out; he was grey haired with black moustache. He was clad in a two-piece grey French suit with black leather shoes. I realised that he was the same man that saved papa from being arrested years ago from his obnoxious brother. The other vehicle was accompanied by a young sophisticated lady and a white dark-haired boy of my age. The lady was nicely dressed in a grey floral dress and a nude straw hat. She stepped out the car and took off her sun glasses. Her deep blue eyes briefly scanned the place. Her perfume enchanted the place better than the stench of the native leaves I usually picked up for mama in the fields. She was the most beautiful creature I had ever set my eyes on. Even as a child, I was struck by her sheer class and beauty. She looked so poise and sophisticated, like the models I saw on the cover of magazines whenever I go to the mayor's house. Her red short curly hair which terminated neatly at her cheekbone reminded me of the coral beads worn by the great kings of the Xhosatan tribe. Her perfume and aura around her captivated and intimidated every poor folk that stood in front of the mansion that day, at least, the looks on their faces gave away that much.

Now as I recollect, I understand what I saw that day, that made me alter my entire perspective on life. Here was a rare combination of poise, grace and elegance and I wanted it all.

I had come to terms with reality, there was a social stratum that I and my family didn't belong to and it was blaring down at us in our black faces.

For the first time in my life as a boy, I wondered why mama or any of those other African women didn't look like the lady of the house. I later learnt that she was from a royal family in Britain, having the title 'Duchess of York'. My undying fascination was agreeable with her British accent. At that time, as a little boy, I thought she spoke funny. My thoughts were suddenly interrupted by the husky voice of her husband, Mayor Stan Van.

'I hope the house is clean enough for my wife and my son. They haven't been to Africa before and I am sure you would make them comfortable.'

As he spoke a skinny white boy of my height, in grey shorts, white collar shirt and a bow tie stepped out of the vehicle. We all turned to see his face, only for him to take cover behind his mother's bosom. He looked frightened, as he gazed at the crowd of black servants before him. I felt it was awkward for a boy of his age to hide behind his mother's skirt. But I also felt sorry for him. He looked lost and frightened with the amount of negroes forcefully smiling at him. Now, I know this 'sorry feeling' was ironic because the people that should be pitied 'was us', the labourers.

Soon, we were all instructed to proceed to our territory, the kitchen. A welcome cocktail party was taking place in a few hours. It turned out that was the social gathering that would determine my fate.