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December 1938

Jan barely noticed the evening breeze that was wafting off the Indian Ocean as he slammed shut the cottage door, flicked his cigarette onto the grass and strode back to the dance. His need for more cabernet sauvignon had been prompted by the infuriating sight of 'big brother' Pierre doing his best to charm the knickers off Deidre on the dance floor. Hell, he was fully five years older than her — and to make matters worse she seemed to be enjoying it! And trust Pierre to question his ability to hold his liquor when he was setting off to fetch more wine.

As the lights of the Coffee Bay Hotel came into view, joyful shouts and laughter reached him over the band's rendition of 'Red Sails in the Sunset' and the steady throb of the power generator. He was finding it difficult to think straight. While everyone else at Coffee Bay appeared to be having a fabulous time celebrating another New Year's Eve, he was having a bloody miserable one. He lengthened his stride.

The music stopped as he was approaching the hotel steps. Pierre and Deidre had been on the dance floor when he'd left and he expected them to be making their way back to their veranda table. . But tension seized him on seeing that the rest of the party were already settling back in their places and there was still no sign of them.

As he scanned the area, Deidre's older brother Luke called out above the din, 'They're probably at the cloak rooms. They should be back soon.'

Jan ran his hands through his hair. 'Thanks. Luke, I think I'd better pay a visit there myself' and strode off.

A busty woman with peroxided hair wearing too much makeup emerged from the ladies' toilet and smiled at him. 'No, if it's your blonde friend you're looking for, she's not in there.'

He dived into the gents but it was empty. Aware of Pierre's reputation with women, he was beginning to fear the worst. As he strode through the the foyer, lounge and card room he was plagued by images of his brother taking

advantage of the innocence of his seventeen-year-old childhood sweetheart. True, Deidre had never allowed him to do much more than hug and kiss her, he recognised that things could be a lot different with Pierre exercising the full force of his charm and experience.

He stopped a waiter. 'Have you seen my brother and the young lady in a blue dress? Did they go this way?'

The waiter's eyes were wide as he shook his head. 'No boss.'

Jan's search became increasingly desperate. Rounding a corner, he almost collided with a portly middle-aged man. 'Excuse me,' he said, have you perhaps seen a young couple pass this way recently? She's tall and blonde and —'

'Sorry,' he said with a wink, 'no such luck!'

Jan's heart was pounding. Perhaps they'd gone to the Kyles' cottage to fetch something – a stole? But the cottage lights were out and there was no sign of life.

He was about to extend his search to the laundry and garages when it struck him. He stopped in his tracks. The beach! ... Of course! That was it! The moonlight would have provided Pierre with a perfect excuse! He pulled off his shoes, ripped off his socks and jogged down the path, along the winding path through the bush and onto the gleaming sand.

The peaceful sounds and pristine beauty of the scene were wasted on him as he scanned the length of the beach, strained his eyes for a sign of movement. The tide had obliterated the earlier pattern of footprints in the sand. Plodding along the beach, he nimbly avoided the more assertive waves as they swept hissing up the sand in foamy sheets of water before receding just as smoothly.

Suddenly the glow of a cigarette caught his attention. Focussing on the spot, he was able to make out the shapes of a man and a woman, perhaps a hundred metres ahead. Could it be them? He strode deliberately in their direction and as the gap narrowed he could see that they were strolling hand-

in-hand. His concern turned to anger, then rage, when he realised that it was Pierre and Deidre. *Jislaaik!* He thought, just as I bloody well suspected!

Jan saw their heads turn briefly towards each other and heard a murmur followed by a low chuckle as they released each other's hands, moved slightly apart but kept coming. It wasn't difficult to guess the reason for the chuckle. He could feel his blood rushing to his head.

When the two were still about forty yards from him, there was a mocking tone in his brother's voice as he called out, 'Is that you, Boetie¹?'

Jan stopped, feet astride, hands on his hips. 'Ja, it's me alright!' he shouted, 'and I'm wondering what the hell you two are doing down here!'

He noticed Deidre hold out a restraining arm as Pierre shouted back, 'What are we *doing* here? ... Liewe land! Who or what gives you the right to tell us where or when we're allowed to take a walk?'

'You know exactly what I mean!' As they came face to face Jan spotted a large smudge of sand on Deidre's neck. 'I suppose you think now she's all of seventeen you can treat her like all those tarts at your so-called college!'

By now Pierre was confronting him with his feet astride, his arms at his sides and his fists clenched. 'Listen, you little twerp, she's a big girl now. She's perfectly capable of deciding what she wants to do and when — and with whom!'

1. Afrikaans for little brother, often used as a term of endearment