JOHN JAMES

John James was a second-year law student following in his father's footsteps, although it was not a given that he would become a senior judge like him. The family home was high up on Table Mountain. His mother, Isabel, was a renowned interior decorator and she said, "My most successful project was my home." From the start she engaged the award-winning architect, William Conway for she admired the breathtaking homes he had designed, stunningly modern and every one different. Isabel wanted her house to be the best and vastly different from all the rest. The four acres of land which she had bought presented many challenges, but she was excited about the sweeping views that lay beneath it, reaching city, sea and out to Robben Island.

The house was built on stilts from the road below. There was a garage for four cars and a room for the security man who checked all people and goods delivered before taking them to the lift that rose to the house's sitting room. This was a long and wide corridor like room. The back wall was built of rocks taken from the mountain and fronted by

sliding doors of sheer glass facing a small, flowered garden. On top of this was a narrow infinity swimming pool with views stretching south over the buildings below to Robben Island and beyond. This room had horizontal sections on each end one facing east which housed the kitchen and dining room and faced the city and across it to Devil's Peak and Table Mountain, and the other facing west to the range of mountains called the Twelve Apostles and was the bedroom suites. There were four – one for themselves, one for John and two for guests.

John preferred to live in a University Residence. His parents' house was some distance away and traveling to and from was not on. He shared a luxury type furnished flat with his two best friends Peter and Paul. They had been friends for life as their parents were friends of John's. The three of them all had girlfriends. John had met Gillian in his first year studying Law. She was a tall, pretty girl with red hair, green eyes and a slim but curvaceous figure. They had much in common because they loved skiing, playing tennis and eating out. Peter fell in love with Patsy at a university social.

She was an extrovert blonde. She returned his love. They found they didn't have much in common, but she learnt to ski, and Peter learnt to ride a horse. Paul was rather shy and he met Sandy at a party in John's home in Fresnaye. She was also shy and a little withdrawn but after a couple of glasses of wine they found they both had a passion for music, especially for Beethoven.

During the summer vacation when John was staying at home, he decided on the spur of the moment to fly to France and ski. He did not tell Gillian who was holidaying with her family in Australia nor his parents who were visiting friends. He decided to phone them from France. Unfortunately, this was something he forgot to do. He was lucky to find an empty room in the little village where the skiing season was in full swing. He spent the day recovering from the journey and the evening in a small, cheerful brasserie called Bonne Chance.

The next day he took the ski lift and stepped out happily. It was a lovely clear and sunny morning. In the afternoon an ugly cloud swept over the mountain and John desperately tried to get out of its path. But the avalanche started with a mighty crash as volumes of snow poured down the slope engulfing John. Emergency services managed to dig him out. “What’s your name?” a man asked him. “I don’t know,” he replied. “Where do you live? Are you from France?” “I don’t know,” answered John who spoke French fluently. “We will take you to the hospital to check for any injuries. Maybe by then your memory will have returned,” the man said. But it didn’t. Not for a long time.

After a week, John still hadn’t returned home for the holidays, and Isabel became worried. Isabel went to her husband Percy, the Judge. “Oh dear,” he said, and set in motion a search for John. He was not on the missing persons list, nor in any hospital or morgue. He was not the unidentified man who had drowned off Muizenberg’s beach.

When John was declared fit to leave the hospital having only sustained bad bruising, the doctor came to him and said, “We can’t let you out to wander around the town in your condition. I have called Philipe of the Good Samaritans to help you. Because you look like an English man with your blonde hair and blue eyes and not a bit like a French man, I have given you the name of John. Ah! Here is Philipe. I have told him all about you.” “Hello John,” said Philipe shaking his hand. “It’s my pleasure and privilege to help you. Eugenie, my wife, has just popped out to buy some fresh baguettes for lunch. We have your room ready for you as you will be staying with us, Let’s go!”

“I can’t tell you how grateful I am for your kindness and hospitality,” he said to Eugenie, a short pretty young woman with a sparkling smile. “Oh!” she exclaimed, “We are Christians, and this is how we serve our Lord.” “What are Christians?” asked John. “Why don’t you come to church with us tomorrow, you will see,” she answered. “Come, I will show you your room and then we can have lunch in the garden.”

The next morning, they walked to the village church. The bells were ringing, and people were walking into the church. John stared at it amazed. It was beautiful with a high beamed ceiling and stained-glass windows. He enjoyed the hymns as he had a strong, fine voice and the hymns came up on a big screen near the front. The pastor preached a sermon to which John listened with interest. It was from a book called the Bible, and the pastor spoke passionately about two verses from it. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. If anyone here today believes this and wants to be saved, please come to the front and I will pray for you.” John got up and went forward. “You are now a Christian,” said Pastor Francois And the congregation said, “Hallelujah!” And a great sense of peace came over John. He had forgotten God, but God had not forgotten him.

Philipe had a friend who owned a bookshop near the town's university. He went to his friend, Raoul, and told him about John. "He needs a job, he's getting quite depressed about not being able to pay his way." "You've come to the right place," answered Raoul, "my helper has just resigned. Got a better job as supervisor in a factory making sweets. So please bring John - I am sure we will get along."

Raoul and John got on famously. John quickly settled into the routine and proved himself to be a good and helpful salesman. Customers liked him and told their friends who were also university students. John was so busy that he did not have time to browse the books themselves. One day a student came. "I want the book by Mark Hannity. It's called THE BASICS OF LAW." John took it off the shelf. "Here you are sir," he said handing it over and accepting payment. John was oddly very excited. He took a copy and opened it. "I know this book well!" he exclaimed to himself as he paged through it. "I must have been a second-year university student somewhere in the English-speaking world."

Meanwhile, back home in Cape Town the distraught Isabel and Percy went to their church's minister. "Please, Father Benedict," Percy said, "Please will you organize a church group who will meet for prayer every day that we might find John?" And in France, John arranged a prayer group of his friends to meet for prayer every day that he might be reunited with his parents. Both groups prayed unceasingly and fervently and made some days times of prayer and fasting. The church group was joined by John's friends and Gillian. The French group decided to tell John's story in all the English-speaking countries in the world. The members sacrificially paid for this.

Isabel was sitting in her lounge staring out across the sea far below. There was a ring on her cell. "Good morning, Ma'am," said the security guard. "Your newspaper has just been delivered. May I bring it up?" "Yes, do, please." she replied. He came in through the open glass doors, put it on the table and left. She languidly picked it up. "More bad politics," she said to herself and then the ad caught her eye, and she read it, becoming more feverish as she read.

“Percy! Percy!” she shrieked, “come quickly. We’ve found John!” And she burst into tears. When they were able to speak, Percy said, “I will book our flights to France as soon as possible and our accommodation too.” “We must take Gillian also,” said Isabel. “I will phone her now.” They set off the following evening on Air France and arrived mid-morning. There was an easy connection to their destination. Dropping their luggage off in their hotel suites, they walked quickly to the church. It was a Friday and John’s group were praying. “Lord Jesus, please let John’s parents find him. Bless our advertisements!”

The church door opened with a loud creak. Everybody turned to see who was coming in. “Mum!” shouted John as he ran to kiss her, and then “Dad!” as he hugged his father and, finally, “My darling Gillian.” And he kissed her passionately. “Hallelujah!” cried the congregants and Father Benedict said, “Let us rejoice and be glad!” And Percy cried, “We have ordered supper at the Savoy Hotel for our son who was lost and is found.”