MRS HORACE HAMILTON-SMITH

Mrs Horace Hamilton-Smith lived with her three children in a large apartment in Kensington, London, with a communal garden stretching down to a small canal of the Thames. Horace had conveniently passed on – she knew not where – some years ago, leaving her enough money to enjoy her indulgent lifestyle. Mrs Horace Hamilton-Smith was a poet - a very modern poet. She had no time for those things – iambic pentameters – she had learnt at school. “My dear, I write as I speak!” Which was somewhat unfortunate.

Neither did she have time for her children – which was fortunate – employing a young and energetic Nanny Lulu who was at this moment chasing Alasdair, Isabel and Catherine through the garden as they shrieked and laughed and caused Colonel Brinkfast in the next apartment to phone the concierge and complain.

“Lulu! Lulu! Come here! It’s that wretched man complaining about the children again!” Mrs Horace Hamilton-Smith’s voice carried well beyond the adjoining property causing Colonel Brinkfast to slam his bedroom window. “Oh dear, Lulu! Whatever am I to do? Can’t you control the children?” “They’re still little, Ma’am - and full of life!” Lulu, panting, replied. “Well, I’m going out soon – the Poetry Club – you will stay in tonight, won’t you?” “I’m sorry, Ma’am, I can’t. It’s my church night. You know I told you about it last week.”

“Church! Always church! I must go to my meeting. I really wish you weren’t so very religious, Lulu.” “I can take the children with me – there’s Children’s Church at the same time. And they will love it! They sing and have stories and play games. It’s great fun.” “But St Paul’s Parish – I’ve heard they’re an odd bunch.” “No. They’re just like me. And the Barrington boys go too.” “The Barrington boys go there. I can’t believe it. Oh well, I suppose once won’t hurt them, and I simply can’t miss my club. I’m reading my new poem, ‘Forgotten Dreams’.” And that’s how Alasdair, Isabel and Catherine became enthusiastic members of St Paul’s Parish Kids’ Club.

A few weeks later Mrs Horace Hamilton-Smith was admiring her bright blue nails, flecked with gold, and thinking how very convenient it was that Lulu – such a gem -didn’t mind taking the children to church with her. It meant that she could have the occasional poetry reading right here in her home, where her friends called her Sybil, and they would not be disturbed by the children. Of course, sometimes it wasn’t so convenient. She didn’t like being bombarded with questions about religion, and from children too. She must watch their manners. People don’t talk about religion – at least not often. Why just yesterday Alasdair had bounded into her bedroom while she was resting and asked, “Mummy, do you know God loves you?” “Of course, darling, God loves everybody.” And

then Isabel rushed in and said, “I heard that means you will go to Heaven when you die.” To which she had replied, “Of course, Isabel. We will all be with Daddy, and everything will be wonderful.” Then Catherine, who had wandered in, asked “How do you know?” Really, they are getting impossible. I must speak to Lulu! Of course, Horace would approve. He insisted we have the children christened, and that we go to Christmas service every year. And that before we opened our presents! Dear Horace, he must be longing to see us. And she had sighed and sent the children to find Lulu.

Before long, it was Christmas. There was great excitement in the house. “Really,” thought Mrs Horace Hamilton-Smith, “Lulu’s turning everything out of the cupboards, and all for a Christmas play. But the poor little lambs are so excited.” “I’m an angel!” Catherine had shouted running into the sitting room with Isabel hard on her heels. “Of course you are, my pet.” “No! No!” Catherine sounded impatient. “In the Christmas play at church.” “I’m also an angel! And Lulu’s going to make us white dresses and big wings and golden bands for our heads.” added Isabel. “I suppose Alasdair has a part too?” queried their mother. “Yes! He’s a shepherd. And Lulu’s making him a staff, and a scarf over his head because it was very cold. And she’s making some lambs too out of that old carpet in the attic that you were going to throw away.” “Well, I never! I never knew all this was going on!” “But you

will come and see us in the play, won't you Mummy?" asked Isabel. "I suppose so," she replied with a sigh.

The great day arrived. The church was full. It really did look rather festive, thought Mrs Horace Hamilton-Smith as she sat down next to the Barringtons. Such a nice couple. So well connected. And all the children were so sweet, singing and acting and being prompted from behind a painted hillside scene. They'd made a hole in it and stuck a torch through which shone on and off. The Star, she thought, it must be. As she left the church, the Rector was greeting everybody. "Wonderful show," said Mrs Horace Hamilton-Smith. "Two of the angels are mine, and a shepherd." "Yes, they're great kids." replied the Rector, shaking her languid outstretched hand. "So many shows now they are at school. Last week it was Cinderella at the girl's school. Absolutely too divine!" "I would say ours was a bit more divine." laughed the Rector. Really, she thought, rather a nice young man – and a Rector of all things. Well, dear Horace would be pleased.

Ten years passed, and Lulu had graduated from nanny to housekeeper. Mrs Horace Hamilton-Smith simply could not do without her. She was self-publishing her second book of poetry, "To be or not to be?" Rather clever, she thought. Her book, of course, dealt with important issues of the day and was very modern. That made her think of Alasdair, now

sixteen and a gifted artist. His art teacher at school said he was quite extraordinary, except he was limited and took no interest in modern art. “Nature is so wonderful, so beautiful.” he’d said, after his mother had tried to enlighten him and taken him to Tate Modern some years ago. And he still thought the same. “But art has meaning.” She’d replied. But he didn’t seem interested in meaning.

Talking to Colonel Brinkfast one day – quite a nice old boy now the children were past screaming in the garden – she’d invited him to a soiree in her home. He came – once. But he had been very kind to the children, inviting them to the pantomime and places he thought they might like. They simply loved the music museum with all the old pianolas playing away. “Why don’t you let Alasdair have private painting lessons?” asked Colonel Brinkfast one day. “I know just the man – knew his father well in Africa – served together you know. Diplomatic work – I was in South Africa for a time – during the apartheid era. Now his son, John James Sinclair, is a foremost painter – water colours and oils, and would certainly be useful to Alasdair.”

And today, could you believe it, Alasdair was giving his first exhibition – in the church hall, of all places. She had so wanted to hire somewhere smart, serve drinks and canapes – that sort of thing. But Alasdair wouldn’t hear of it. “They’re

coming to look at my paintings," he said stubbornly. "I've asked everyone. And Mr James Sinclair is making a speech and has asked some of his friends too." Arriving at the church hall, she was surprised to see Lulu, Catherine and Isabel in long black dresses, white aprons and lace mop caps. "What on earth?" she started to ask when Isabel bursting with pride said, "We're waitresses! Lulu hired our clothes for tonight. And we made lots of lovely meringues and chocolate cupcakes last night while you were out!" "And I made some salmon and cucumber finger sandwiches – I knew you would want that!" said Lulu. "We are serving tea and coffee afterwards."

About sixty people arrived – some friends and some people Mr Sinclair thought would be interested in his pupil's work. He'd brought easels and put the paintings on them, covering them until after the speeches. He wished he didn't have to open the show. "Hello everybody!" he said. "So glad you could come. This is Alasdair's first exhibition, and if I'm not mistaken it will be the first of many. As you can see, there are 20 easels. Alasdair will uncover his work now. Please have a look – they are for sale at very reasonable prices which Alasdair is donating to the Kid's Club here at the church for some things they need."

Even his mother was surprised – such glowing colours – their garden in spring, sunset over the park, a magnificent tree, the flowers along Flower Walk in Hyde Park. Really, she felt so proud. And there was quite a hubbub as people wandered around. In no time all twenty paintings were sold, and Alasdair presented the Rector with 200 pounds!

A few days after the exhibition, Rector Matt called on Mrs Horace Hamilton-Smith. “Just doing my rounds!” he remarked easily as he followed her into the conservatory at the back of the house. “Lulu said you would be in this afternoon.” Lulu brought tea and they chatted for a time – about Mrs Horace Hamilton-Smith’s poetry. It appeared to be her sole preoccupation. As he rose to leave, she picked up a book from a pile on the coffee table. “Here it is… “To be or not to be?” Very modern, you know.” “Thank you!” he said, taking the book. I shall read it with interest”. And here, pulling a small booklet from his jacket pocket, is a little book for you called “Why Jesus?” It’s been very influential worldwide.” “Oh! Thank you! I shall read it!” But she never did.

Some more years passed, and with them more changes. Clever Catherine, bespectacled, brown haired and plain - but with a sweet and charming look when she smiled, was about to enter medical school, and start the arduous journey to becoming a doctor. She wanted to do something useful with

her life. A keen Christian, she had been chairman of her school's Christian Association for she was a good speaker and leader. She had recently moved into a flat with two other medical students who were also Christians.

Alasdair was preparing to leave for South Africa. Now a successful artist, he wanted new subjects, new light and new opportunities. South Africa, much in the news with the release of Mandela, attracted him. He lived in a top floor flat which had a large attic for his studio and was also near St Paul's Parish. Isabel, still at school, was the family beauty. With her luxuriant blonde curls tumbling down her shoulders and slim, but curvaceous figure, she turned heads wherever she went. She was intelligent but not in the least academic and had no idea of what she wanted to do when she matriculated. She lived at home.

Mrs Horace Hamilton-Smith was just the same, dependent as ever on Lulu keeping her home running, and being the confidante of her children. She had joined the local gym and went every other day, running in Kensington Gardens when not at the gym. It was so important to keep the body in trim! And to have coffee and cake afterwards with her new friends was such a treat.

The children, the Rector, and even Lulu had asked about her soul. “All this talk about the soul!” she complained. “I was born a Christian, christened, I go to church at Christmas, I’ll have a Christian funeral one day. So please stop all this talk about conversion and my soul! There’s plenty of time to think about that.”

A curate had just come to help the Rector for the church had grown enormously, and a new church was being built in the large church grounds. He was fortunate in that his curate was no less than a Rector, Rev Matthew Sinclair. He was quite young being fifty-nine but had been ill and was recuperating after a long spell of sick leave. He soon became known as Rector Matt, and he did much of the church visitation. Soon after his arrival he called on Mrs Horace Hamilton-Smith. Lulu opened the door. “Hello, Lulu,” he said, “are you visiting too?” “Oh no!” she replied, “I’m the housekeeper. Please follow me. Mrs Horace Hamilton-Smith is working in the conservatory.” Leading the way she opened the door. Mrs Horace Hamilton-Smith was standing with a slim volume in her hand, her arm outstretched, her eyes staring through her glass roof as she declaimed, “To be or not to be? What a nonsensical question!” “Madam,” said Lulu, “Rector Matt is here to see you. I’ll bring tea.” “Oh welcome, Rector. Welcome. You just caught me at my poetry. I am giving a reading tonight. You must come.” “I’m afraid I can't,” he

replied “I’ve got the junior prayer meeting, and I’m also supposed to be recuperating. I thought I would drop in and make myself known.” “I know quite a bit about you,” she said, “Lulu’s forever talking about the church.” Lulu walked in pushing a tea trolley laden with homemade scones, strawberry jam, a silver coffee pot and all the other necessities for an English tea. “Lulu’s homemade scones,” sighed Mrs Horace Hamilton-Smith taking a bite, “I don’t know how I keep my figure.” They chatted about generalities, and her family whom Rector Matt had got to know quite well in the short time he had been at St Paul’s Parish.

As he left, he invited her to the Harvest Festival the following week, and she said she would come, it would give her some ideas. But not, unfortunately about God. Lulu was organizing her helpers who were decorating the church for the Harvest Festival. Members were coming in laden with flowers, fruit and vegetables. Someone brought a huge, platted loaf of bread, someone else a bundle of wheat. Lulu was pleased. Rector Matt, coming in to see how things were going, wandered over to her. “It’s looking most attractive, Lulu,” he said, smiling. “Yes, I’m very pleased with the response this year – it’s the best I can remember, “she replied smiling. Isabel waltzed up. “Hello Rector Matt! Hasn’t Lulu done a good job? Like she did for us. Don’t know how we would have turned out without her!” She hugged Lulu affectionately,

“been a real mother to us!” And off she went. “I suppose I have been, in some ways. They are almost my children,” she remarked to cover her embarrassment as Rector Matt looked at her quizzically. “They were real little monkeys when I first saw them. All very strong willed.” And that was the beginning of their courtship, conducted very circumspectly.

When Alasdair flew to Cape Town, Lulu was still the housekeeper. Mrs Horace Hamilton-Smith often used her as a sounding board. “Have you heard from Alasdair?” she asked. “He writes to you more often than to me.” “That’s because we have so many friends in common,” replied Lulu. “I suppose so. The church probably.” She sounded petulant. “And I sent him a copy of my new book too, and the review. I was so proud of it. Our Poetry Club doesn’t often review books, but they thought mine was the best. Alasdair could have written.”

Alasdair, meanwhile, was settling in his new studio. He’d found one in Sea Point, a suburb near the city but also near several inviting beaches. His studio was small but on the top floor of an old building from which he could see the sea, and the incredible sunsets, a new one every day. He painted furiously, and soon found a ready market, especially among tourists from the nearby hotels. He had already exhibited with other artists at The President. Housekeeping was easy,

too, and there were so many restaurants and takeaways nearby. A church wasn't so easy to find, but after a few weeks a neighbour invited him to a service, currently in a school hall. It was so like St Paul's Parish that Alasdair felt at home immediately. The only difference was that this church was completely multi-racial. At tea afterwards, a young black woman offered him some cakes, and they started to chat. She knew quite a bit about art, so he invited her to come round and see his work if she was interested. She told him that she ran a charity in a township on the other side of the city for deprived children. Would he like to visit? "Of course," he answered. "It will be very interesting to see the township, and what you do." And so began their friendship. Lulu did not tell Mrs Horace Hamilton-Smith. She knew what her reaction would be!

Princess picked him up in her small but new car. He had asked her if she was a princess. She laughed and replied, "Only to my parents – I'm their only child!" After an hour, they reached Khaylitsha. He saw the small, corrugated iron shacks jammed closely together, and all in disrepair. There were some better constructed houses, and in the main street a municipal library and a couple of charitable organizations. Princess pulled up in front of a fairly large building with a garden in front. It was called HOPE.

“I work here every morning,” she said, “except Sundays. There is a small staff of ten local Christian women. In the afternoons I fundraise and buy some extras.” “What is the purpose of HOPE?” Alasdair asked. “Basically, we care for about 100 deprived children. They come here for breakfast before school as their parents are too poor to feed them. They come back for a sandwich after school, and we keep them occupied until about 7 when their parents get home from work. Crime is rampant here, and children go missing or are even killed for muti. That’s witchcraft medicine.” Alasdair was speechless. He looked at Princess, so assured, so unaffected. “Can I help?” he asked. “Oh, we’d be so grateful!” She replied. “They love art, some, I think, are very talented.” They looked at each other for a long moment. And that was the start of their romance.

Mrs Horace Hamilton-Smith had just returned from a walk around the square. She held a few letters. One was from Alasdair. She was pleased. He didn’t write to her often enough. She sank down into her favourite armchair, put her feet on the pouf and opened the letter. “Lulu! Lulu!” she shrieked, “come quickly!” “I’ve had such a shock!” she gasped as Lulu came running. “I can’t believe it!” “What’s the matter, Ma’am?” asked Lulu. “It’s Alasdair – he’s got a girlfriend!” “Well, that was bound to happen sooner or later.” “But she’s black! Black!” “But Ma’am,” said Lulu, “times have changed.

It’s quite common nowadays.” “Not in my circle! He shouldn’t have gone to Africa! And now I’ve a migraine. Bring me some coffee and cake – I need sugar.” Lulu went and the doorbell rang. It was Rector Matt. “Hello Lulu,” he said, “I have come to tell Mrs Horace Hamilton-Smith the good news.” He walked off into the drawing room. “Hello, Mrs Horace Hamilton-Smith,” he said jovially, “are you having a good day? I saw you in the square.” “The worst in my life!” She spluttered. “What poor Horace would say if he was here, I simply don’t know. Alasdair’s got a black girlfriend!” “Nothing wrong with that,” he responded, “is she a Christian?” “Of course,” she responded petulantly – he met her at church.” “Couldn’t have met her in a better place” he replied. Lulu came in with the coffee, served them and left. “I’ve come to tell you my very good news!” “What’s it?” she asked disinterestedly. “Another special preacher, I suppose?” “No,” he answered, “Lulu and I are getting married!” “What?” She jumped up. “I can’t believe it! You’re a Rector and she’s just a housekeeper.” “But she’s a very fine Christian, and eminently suited to be a Rector’s wife! And I love her very much.” “What about me?” she asked, “after all these years, too!” “Lulu has organized all that – your new housekeeper bakes cakes and will see that everything runs smoothly. She is a widow with no children. Her name is Mrs Agatha Love.

Mrs Horace Hamilton-Smith sounded mollified as she said, “I will see how we get on. I suppose she’s a Christian too?” “What better?” he replied smiling. This brought a reluctant smile to her face. “Lulu!” When Lulu came, she said, “Come and have coffee with us – I’ve just heard about your, er, situation.”

Alasdair was now 23, tall, dark-haired, and handsome in a typically English way. Catherine, also tall but with straight brown hair but was not a beauty. Her kind and determined face had a charming smile. She was 21, and in her second year at St Bart’s studying to be a doctor. At the Christian Union meetings she had met Timothy Barrington, her old friend from St Paul’s Parish before the Barringtons moved to Kent. They were firm friends, and were rapidly becoming more. Timothy was a year ahead of her at St Bart’s. The undoubted family beauty was Isabel. She was 19 and had just finished school. Wherever she went, she turned heads. Long blonde curls cascaded from her smallish head, her eyes were large and violet blue. She had not been a brilliant student like Alasdair and Catherine, and had no idea what she would do next. At present, she was enjoying a gap year with her mother who was excessively proud of her stunning daughter.

Shortly after Lulu’s engagement invitations went out inviting the whole church to attend their wedding. Mrs Horace

Hamilton-Smith was at her most gracious. “Lulu,” she said, “I want to take you to buy your wedding present. Something very nice. Let’s go to Harrods.” She took Lulu to the crockery department. “I thought a Royal Doulton dinner service would be just right for a Rector’s wife. What do you think of this one? Lovely Eastern pattern.” “Yes,” replied Lulu hesitantly, “it’s very beautiful and so kind of you, but would you mind if I asked you to buy 50 cups and saucers and side-plates? They would be much more useful for a Rector’s wife in a parish than a beautiful dinner service!” “Just as you wish, Lulu, just as you wish.” Sybil was at her most gracious.

The great day dawned. The ladies of St Paul’s Parish had decorated the church in white. There were huge arrangements of various white flowers and the pews on the aisle had posies of tiny white roses tied with satin ribbon. In the hall was a wedding cake, big enough for everyone, and the ladies had set the tables with biscuits, sausage rolls, and cucumber and salmon sandwiches. A visiting Rector, and friend of Rector Matt, was officiating, and Mrs Horace Hamilton-Smith, as she walked in with a huge hat wobbling on her head, felt quite like the mother of the bride. She had just brought Catherine and Isabel, the two bridesmaids, to the church. She thought her girls looked simply lovely- Catherine in pink and Isabel in pale blue. They both wore coronets and posies of Sweet Peas.

The organist was playing hymns, and Rector Matt, who had been a widower for many years, was waiting patiently for his bride. Suddenly there was a burst of music, the bridal march! Everyone turned round as Lulu, a picture of loveliness and looking far younger than her years, stood in the entrance. Her simple satin dress enhanced her beauty. Beside her stood Alasdair who had flown in that morning to give her away. Mrs Horace Hamilton-Smith felt so proud.

At long last, the newly-weds were off, and Mrs Horace Hamilton-Smith was reclining in her favourite chair with Alasdair opposite. “Now Alasdair,” she said brightly, “what about this girl? So unsuitable.” “Mother,” he answered, “we are in love.” “Love!” she said, waving her hand dismissively, “puppy love!” “No, real love,” he replied, “and when I get back, I intend to ask Princess to marry me – if she will have me.”

The great day arrived. Isabel woke up excited and expectant. Three months with Mummy in Europe. Paris first! She couldn’t wait. Everything was packed and ready. She had slept in her old bedroom so that they could make an early start. The phone rang. It was Harold. Isabel had fallen in love with Harold Hurt. Sybil had been delighted. Such a suitable match. Mr Hurt was a diplomat. The marriage had taken place in St Margaret's, Westminster and Sybil had arranged a

lunch at the Savoy. “Hello, my darling,” he said. “Just phoned to wish you a wonderful time, and say how very, very much I am going to miss you. But I understand that your Mum is getting on and wants a final fling as she says!” “Thank you, my darling,” replied Isabel, “I’ll miss you awfully too! I’m just going to wake Mummy.” Going into her mother’s bedroom, Isabel was surprised to see it still in darkness. She switched on the light, and said brightly, “Get up, Mummy! Our great day has arrived!” Her mother groaned. “I feel terrible,” she said. “I’m so hot and itchy!” It was chicken pox. “Three weeks rest,” ordered Dr Philips, “I’ll organize day and night nurses.”

Isabel spent the day comforting her mother who was very sorry for herself and proving a difficult patient for the nurse. By early evening, she felt her mother was in good hands, and said she was going back to her flat, and would see her mother in the morning. She parked near Kensington High Street, and bought roses for her flat, and all the delicacies she and Harold liked. They would have a quiet evening. She sang happily as she drove to their flat in Chelsea. Gathering her parcels she ran up the steps and rang the doorbell. Harold would be so surprised! The door was opened by a scantily dressed young girl. She said, “We weren’t expecting you!” And she slammed the door shut. Isabel was aghast. Terribly shocked, she dropped the roses and the bottle of wine so that it shattered on the tiled floor. She fled down the steps. Running to her car,

she had to stop. She vomited on the pavement. It ran down her dress. Sobbing uncontrollably, she got in the car and drove. “Nanny! Nanny!” she sobbed. “I must get to Nanny!”

She never knew how she got there. Little North Mudmarsh was about fifty miles from London. She took the motorway until the roundabout to the village, passed the duck pond, the church and graveyard, the few shops and stopped outside Nanny’s thatched roof cottage. Nanny was in the small garden trimming the climbing roses over the front door. “Nanny! Nanny!” she cried as she stumbled to Lulu and fell sobbing into her outstretched arms. Lulu looked at the lovely Isabel, dishevelled, dirty and tearstained. “Come inside, my baby,” she said, “and tell Nanny what’s happened.”

By the time Uncle Matt, for that’s what the children called him now that he had married Lulu, returned from visiting an old parishioner, Isabel was bathed and put to bed in one of Nanny’s nightgowns, and sipping some of her special vegetable soup. Isabel was feeling less distraught, and able to talk.

When Isabel woke the next morning, she was covered in an itchy watery rash. Lulu took her temperature. “It’s high, “she said, and called the doctor. It was decided that Uncle Matt

would go to London, collect her packed baggage, and tell Sybil that Isabel would be staying with them for some weeks as she had had a dreadful shock, and now had chickenpox. He found Sybil lying on a daybed in the conservatory. She extended a languid hand. “Hello Matt,” she said, “so kind of you to visit me when I am so very weak and sick.” “Actually,” he replied, coming abruptly to the point, “I’ve come about Isabel”. “Oh, she’s with Harold. Forgotten all about poor me! She didn’t even phone last night!” “She couldn’t!” he said. “She was with us. She has had a dreadful time.” And he told her what had happened.

She listened attentively, and then said, “Oh dear! She’s such an innocent! I really thought the year she spent with me had made her more worldly–wise. My dear Harold had many girlfriends. I just got on with it, and we lived as I do now. “It’s all Lulu’s fault – and St Paul’s Parish,” she remarked petulantly. “At least my Poetry Club have been concerned, most concerned about me.” When Matt got home, he said to Lulu, “I must pray for forgiveness, I really felt like slapping her!”

It took a few weeks for Isabel to recuperate. She slowly ate more, and sat in the sun in the garden, and slept in the afternoons. Lulu thought it was time for Isabel to start walking, and so they set off one morning. The Rectory was

next to the ancient 12th Parish of St Mark's Church. Pretty cottages with thatched roofs lined the road on both sides, culminating in the village. It had a small common, with a duck pond, one old oak tree, a post-office, a popular pub, a small grocery shop where Lulu stopped to buy mushrooms for lunch, and a bakery where she bought a small chocolate cake for tea, and a large, crispy, and newly baked round loaf for lunch.

The village was surrounded by beautiful, wooded hills and small farms. Uncle Matt started taking Isabel for gentle walks, stopping here and there to sit on large boulders and chat. Where there was a public way through farms, they climbed over stiles and enjoyed watching small lambs frisking in the sun.

One day Isabel said to Uncle Matt, "I have been thinking about my life, and what I should do with it. You and Nanny have been so very, very kind to me, but now I must move on. I was never really converted like Alasdair and Catherine, and I want to be a real Christian now." Uncle Matt was most moved, took her hand, prayed for her, and made the sign of the Cross over her. "I have been thinking of what I can do to lead a useful life. I'm not clever like Alasdair and Catherine, but I do get on with people, and I have decided to train to be a nurse."

She went to see her mother. Mrs Horace Hamilton-Smith was horrified. Her beautiful Isabel washing the sick and emptying bedpans, and goodness knows what else! “I am most disappointed, Isabel,” she said. “I have wasted so much time, when I could have been writing, and finding suitable, well-connected suitors for you.”

Alasdair and Princess continued their courtship, getting to know each other better, and falling more in love by the day. Alasdair had painted his first portrait. It was of Princess, and he thought it was very good. He invited her to look at his latest work but did not tell her what it was. She was surprised and thrilled with it. “May I buy it?” she asked, “I would love to give it to my parents.” “No,” he replied, “it is my gift to you, and you can certainly give it to your parents if you wish. Let’s go out for supper. The President has a wonderful smorgasbord.” “Oh,” said Princess, “I really don’t like to go to crowded places where all the socialites are eating. I know a super Indian restaurant down the road, it only has ten tables.” So that is where they went and had a lovely romantic evening.

The following day, Alasdair bought an engagement ring, a one carat brilliant cut diamond set in gold. He asked Princess to have a picnic with him on the beach at Camps Bay. He went to Giovanni’s in Sea Point, and bought rolls, butter, ham,

mustard, gherkins, and shredded lettuce and tomatoes in mayonnaise, two slices of their famous baked cheesecake, and an expensive bottle of wine. She was still at HOPE, and he drove there to pick her up. It was sunset when they reached Camps Bay. The setting sun over the sea, and the spectacular sunset was a romantic setting. “Will you marry me, Princess?” he asked. “Oh! Yes! Yes!” she responded, flinging her arms around him. After enjoying the picnic, Alasdair asked, “When can I meet your parents?” “What about coming for dinner tomorrow night?” she answered. “I will pick you up.” Alasdair was very surprised when she drove to Bishop’s Court and into an impressive entrance where the security man saluted her as he opened the large wrought iron gate. Princess stopped in front of a large single storied sprawling house. “Alasdair,” she said, “I have not been honest with you. I had many suitors but knew they did not really love me. They just wanted the wealth and prestige marrying me would bring them. I know that you truly love me, and I want to marry you more than anything in the world. My father, at fifteen, had to support his poor family as his mother was widowed and had four children. He started selling vegetables from a wheelbarrow, buying them at the market and selling them at a small profit. He is now one of the richest men in the country. Come and meet my parents. As I told you before, I am not a Princess of one of the many tribes in South Africa, but to my parents I am their Princess. I am an only child. Let’s go, they are dying to meet you.” Taking Alasdair’s hand, she

led him into her father’s study, and the first thing he noticed was his portrait of Princess hanging over the fireplace. Princess’ father shook his hand, and her elegant mother embraced him. “We are so very happy,” she said, “that Princess has found a man that truly loves her.”

While Alistair was courting Princess, Catherine and Timothy had graduated and married. Alasdair had flown home to give her away, and Matt had officiated at the wedding at Saint Paul's Parish. It was a lovely ceremony. Catherine was a radiant and beautiful bride, and Isabel was her bridesmaid. Sybil had arranged for lunch at the Savoy Hotel, and afterwards the happy couple had left for their honeymoon in Ireland. They joined a rescue ship which was currently being refurbished and were due to sail in a couple of months. Isabel, who had passed her nursing degree with flying colours, was going to join them. The rescue ship visited places all over the world which lacked medical care. Operations were performed, vaccinations given, eyes tested, and glasses given, pregnant women screened, and local midwives trained, and supplies left. Severe and urgent cases were referred to the flying doctors group which took them to the nearest hospital.

Sybil was waiting expectantly for Alasdair to arrive with Princess. She had gone shopping and bought several outfits - a blue linen jacket ensemble, and a couple of summer

dresses because they would be staying for a few days in the small castle Princess' father had bought. "Hello Mother," said Alasdair, opening the front door, "Here's Princess!" "Oh, my dear," said Sybil, kissing her. "I am so happy that Alistair has met the love of his life! Come to the Conservatory, Agatha has made Alistair's favourite cake, and we shall have time to talk before we fly." An hour later, a Rolls Royce arrived and drove them to Gatwick where they boarded the Gabas' small jet and flew to Scotland. The castle had its own landing strip, and the Gabas were sitting in a lounge near to it. The meeting was most cordial "Welcome!" said Elizabeth, kissing Sybil. "So very happy to meet you!" said James, giving Sybil a hug. They walked through the beautiful park up to the castle, and Sybil had a wonderful time as she got to know Princess and her parents. The wedding was planned for the next month and would be attended by Alasdair and Princess' families in the 14th century church in the park.

The wedding day dawned. It was a beautiful spring morning. Everyone woke up with a sense of expectancy. Matt was officiating at the ceremony in the ancient church in the park. It was filled with daffodils, roses, peonies and fresh greenery. Both families were there, and Lulu was up early to help Sybil, Isabel and Catherine dress. Princess had chosen two of her cousins, Isabel as bridesmaids, and Catherine as her maid of honour. They were wearing full-length floral-patterned silk

dresses, with circlets of miniature pink roses on their heads. Sybil had chosen a blue dress, with a large blue hat decorated with big blue organza flowers. Serena had chosen a gold silk dress and a white organza hat with a broad pink satin headband ending with a large bow at the back. All the Gaba ladies had chosen to wear colourful African dresses and turbans. All the men were in black tie with white rose buttonholes. Serena and a maid were helping Princess to dress. They were all feeling very emotional. Princess had chosen a fitted lace top which continued to the skirt, and then to a big swathe of netting on the huge crinoline skirt which had another swathe of lace before ending in more netting. She was the picture of perfection. James came in, kissed her, and said, “My beautiful daughter is a bride”. He gave her a golden necklace with a cross pendant set with diamonds and put it around her neck. Serena placed a circlet of tiny white roses and a fingertip net veil over her head.

Meanwhile, everyone was in the church and the organist was playing “Jesus, joy of man's desiring” by Bach. Alasdair was waiting at the front while the bridesmaids arrived, followed by Princess and James in the Rolls Royce. The organist pulled out all the stops, and played the Wedding March as the congregation rose and turned to watch Princess and James walk down the aisle. Reaching the front of the church, he turned her veil back, kissed her, and gave her to Alasdair. The

service was the traditional Anglican service. During the first hymn, “Praise, my soul, the King of Heaven”, all Princess’ family danced as they sang. The whole congregation rose and joined in. It was a joyous occasion with Alasdair and Princess making their vows “until death us do part” and exchanging rings as they all stood outside the church, the congregation showered them with confetti, and waved the blissfully happy couple off as they were driven back to the castle. Everyone else walked.

The reception was held in the castle's banqueting hall. It, too, was filled with flowers, and a catering firm, based in Glasgow, had prepared a beautiful table down the long hall, with white tablecloths, varied flowers in bowls, and lovely silverware belonging to the castle. Alasdair made a humorous speech on behalf of himself and his wife, James' speech was nostalgic but happy. After lunch there was much singing and dancing. Then Princess and Alasdair changed into casual clothes and were waved off by the happy families and were taken to the jet that was flying them to Chile for a month-long honeymoon. When they returned, they planned to continue working at HOPE, with Alasdair painting. James and Elizabeth had given them a large house in Constantia as a wedding gift, and Sybil had given them a canteen of silver cutlery.

One year later, Mrs Horace Hamilton-Smith had just finished reading from her latest book of poetry, I REMEMBER, to her avid followers drinking wine and eating canapes in her apartment, when she collapsed and died.

The family had all come from wherever they were in the world. Lulu was there and Matt was conducting the burial. Serena and James were there, as well as three ladies from the Poetry Club. The children were all very sad, mourning a mother who had not been a good mother, but was their mother and they loved her, and who they knew had never had time to consider God's overtures to her, and would never be meeting her dear Horace in Heaven.