

To the reader:

**“We learn nothing from presenting
a sanitized, scrubbed version of
history for posterity.” – Bettina Wyngaard.**

This book does not shy away from
sensitive and complex issues people of
colour, women and children faced in the past
and still face in society today.



PART One



It was almost too dark to see. His feet danced blindly over the hard ground. He peered over his shoulder but couldn't see the man any more. Then a shot rang out. Somewhere behind him. Closer. Each shot was closer, and his pursuer's bestial laugh louder.

His lungs were on fire and tears impeded his vision, but somehow his legs kept driving him forward. What was he thinking? What? Playing hero, or whatever that was? All for nothing.

No one was supposed to die before their sixteenth birthday.

Another shot. A bright yellow spark spat against a rock less than two metres from him.

Run, Pete. Run.

The day after

Pete de Lange stared out the bus window. The early-morning sun slowly raised its head, illuminating the world in golden pastels. Farms lay stretched out in a pale-yellow mist to the horizon, watched over by the silhouettes of black-wattle and eucalyptus trees. Strewn puddles of crimson mud formed a glistening mosaic to remind farmers of the harshness of nature. Everyone had waited in hopeful angst for the first rain, but all they got was the fist of the unrelenting sun. Until last night, when, in a thunderous explosion, the rain had finally quenched the land, but it was too late.

This new year whispered promises of hardship to Northern Natal.

“Are you going to play senior rugby this year?” Michael asked, the second-smartest and second-smallest guy in Standard Nine. He had short, dirty-blond hair, so perfectly coiffed that the rows left by his comb were still visible. Without any conscious thought, Pete shifted his gaze from the outside world to the guy next to him. It was difficult to look at Michael without recalling Joe Bester tackling him with such force that his broken rib pierced his lung. It was probably more than seven years ago now, but he could still hear the wheezing sounds escaping Michael’s gaping mouth. And all because his dad had wanted to toughen him up. He wondered whether Michael was grateful for Joe Bester’s tackle, that it saved him from a lifetime of rugby.

Pete just nodded. He tried to force a smile but couldn’t tell if it worked. He knew Michael was just trying to make conversation, but the last thing he could bear right now was idle chat.

Did it happen? Did yesterday really happen?

“What’s today’s date?” Pete asked, taken aback by his own question.

Michael laughed softly, shyly, the sound almost imperceptible against the cacophonous background noise of teenage voices on the bus.

“Hello? It’s Wednesday, 15 January 1986. The second day of the new school year.” Michael shook his head. “Did you bump your head or something?”

“Just checking if you’re awake,” Pete said in a deeper-than-usual tone. This time certain of his smile, albeit slightly abashed.

Pete turned to the window again, not looking at the world beyond, but at his shallow reflection in the dirty glass. His eyes looked tired, their usual green replaced by a vague grey, framed by blackish half-moons. His lips were dry, and when he opened his mouth it felt as if they would split open and bleed. He looked like a child, he thought. He had shaved a week ago, but the lines his Wilkinson Sword had drawn were still there. The fluff apparently dead under his skin, just like this year’s mealie crops. He gazed up at his large forehead to where the zit with nine lives had finally packed its bags and left. Before he could stop himself, his eyes panned upwards. And there it was. That hair.

It happened. Yesterday happened.

It was supposed to be the perfect day. And it was until good old Raj had butchered his hair. Pete tapped his fingers against the severed ends where his painstakingly crafted fringe had been his pride less than a day ago. It had taken all summer holiday, six long and boring weeks, to look like Don Johnson.

It was a new year, his Standard Eight year, and he could almost be considered a senior. It was that difficult-to-define place on the seesaw between juniors and seniors – the middle child of high school. This was the year when high-school careers were made, because if you waited until Standard Nine, it was too late; then your social status was elevated purely because of age. But if you could make a name in Standard Eight, that’s when the hot girls noticed.

That was why yesterday he had forgone his divine right to claim the prime seat in the junior bus and had ventured onto the senior bus, and why he was seated in this seat, next to a nerd.

But where he sat was inconsequential. He was one of only three Standard Eights on the senior bus. With him were Ivan, back for his third – and apparently final – attempt to pass Standard Eight, and Renate, who could sit anywhere she pleased because she was without question the most beautiful being in all of creation.

When Walter, the pesky Standard Nine with hair so orange that carrots envied him, had shouted from the middle of the bus, “Hey, what are you doing in this bus, china?” a hot poker had pierced his gut. He knew he was found out, but he had rehearsed this moment in front of the mirror a hundred times and answered with feigned confidence and without hesitation, “Ah no, man, don’t tell me this is the wrong bus. I’m sure my parole officer told me this was the bus taking everyone back to prison.” Walter had no retort and some of the kids giggled, but most importantly, he was in.

Yesterday had started so well. There was even a split second when he could have sworn Renate smiled at him. At school, Don Johnson made an immediate impact. No longer the insecure Standard Seven with a permanent pimple on his forehead, no, this was a confident, zit-free, man-of-the-moment. That was, of course, until the hair inspection at the end of assembly. The new headmaster glared at him as though he had the mark of the devil tattooed on his forehead. But that wasn’t going to ruin his day. He took his caning knowing that it was like a badge of honour, a rite of passage. The awe in the eyes of his classmates was something to behold and made all the pain worthwhile.

Now, with his hair destroyed, all that awe and respect would be gone before the first bell rang. But what did any of that matter now, after last night?

The bus crawled past the drive-in. He couldn’t believe they were going to shut it down – he had dreamed of taking Renate there someday. But his thoughts would not let go, they kept taking him back to that moment yesterday, standing in front of the bathroom mirror, inspecting his newly destroyed hair.

“Come on, Pete, let me have a look,” Deanne de Lange said from behind the bathroom door.

“I’m not eight any more, Ma,” Pete said as he opened the door.

Deanne struggled to conceal her grin and let out a muffled snort. “I see Raj used his blunt pair of scissors again,” she said as Pete tried to get past her. Her outstretched hand dangled in the air, trying to touch what was left of his hair. Pete had to duck low to escape her probing fingers.

“I told you I should have gone to the salon.”

“Don’t be cheeky. You know very well that there is a big difference between fifty cents and five rand. Besides, salons are for women.”

“But look at this, it looks like a blind crab cut my hair.”

“There’s a lesson here, Pete. You were the one who insisted on keeping that fancy Hollywood hair even though you knew how strict the school rules were.”

“But Ma!”

The back of her right hand nestled on her hip. “Rules are either kept or broken.”

Pete gave a long sigh. “Everyone said they might change the rules with the new headmaster coming in.”

“Stop listening to *everyone*. Those rules have been in place since before the Second World War and they will stay like that long after your grandchildren have finished school.”

“Whatever,” Pete mumbled, striding towards the kitchen.

“What did you say?” Deanne asked.

“I said: I’m going for a run.”

“Be home before dark!” she shouted as he flung open the kitchen’s screen door. “And stay away from Uncle Gerrit’s farm – remember what happened to Bennie’s dog!”

“Okay, Ma-a.”

Pete studied his reflection in the bus window. He knew his mom saw right through him. She would have watched him closely as he pretended to run towards the primary school only to run in the opposite direction minutes later.

How he wished he hadn’t gone for that run. Nothing, not even getting into the first rugby team or being good enough for Renate, was worth the price of that run.

Pete hated running: it was a futile exercise of forcing your body to overheat. To make it worse, the scenery along the way wasn't exactly awe-inspiring. The swimming pool, the broken streetlight, the rusty 1956 Studebaker abandoned in the empty field that was set alight at least once every two months. The monotonous houses of New Extension that seemed to wait in a perpetual sigh along Faversham Road for something to happen, and the same people doing the same things every day of their lives in a carousel of aimlessness in this armpit of a town.

He ran along the edge of the small fishing dam with the best clay in the district, but his thoughts were wholly occupied by Renate. He could see her perfectly formed calves running in front of him. Her small, green running shorts a flame luring him in, and her long blonde hair dancing about her shoulders, a playful promise. Then she turned. The sun glistening on her pure, white skin. Her smile like diamonds framed by the most sumptuous red lips. Faster and faster his legs carried him forward, the fire inside him scorching. He pushed himself until he was sprinting flat out, past the ruined remains of the old farmhouse and the tiny handwritten sign that read "Private property – Keep out". He tiptoed at speed across the cattle grid, leaped over the sagging fence and ran the final stretch toward the top of the hill to where the rocks rose like towers in the elongated shadows of the setting sun. There was only one turn left before he would reach the top, then he would turn around. First, he had to douse the Renate-fire.

At the top of the hill, Pete dropped to his haunches. He fought for air but felt good. The sun was perilously close to the horizon, and he knew his dear mom would not be impressed if he got home after dark again. Her disappointment had to wait though; he wanted to take in this moment first. A sudden rumble drew his attention. A dark bank of cloud had appeared above Durnacol, the nearby mining village, and it seemed to be heading his way. Probably more bark than bite, he thought, like all the other times. He turned back towards the west. The big red ball had dipped almost half of its body behind the vast majesty of the Drakensberg, surrounded by a few dotted clouds painted in pink and purple. Who knows, he thought, perhaps Dannhauser wasn't that bad after all.

A shrill whistle sliced through the dusk air. Pete turned toward the sound, deep in thought. From the other side of the hill, a black guy, probably his age, was running towards him. His mind flashed back to the previous night's news bulletin about exiled black communist terrorists plotting to slaughter all the whites. He strained his eyes, trying to see if the guy was carrying a gun or a knife, but he saw nothing. He considered running, but then it hit him: black guys were faster than whites, everyone knew that, so it would be futile. All Pete could do was watch as the potential communist came closer and feel how his left leg started to shake. The black guy wore faded blue safari shorts that were too big for him, a torn T-shirt with the words **DURNACOL'S 25TH ANNIVERSARY** printed in faint red letters, and was barefoot. Sweat formed a laager around his short black curls. He was the spitting image of Shaka Zulu in tribal dress, assegai in hand, in the painting on the wall of Pete's Standard Three history class.

"This is private property. You are not allowed here." The words were like a bucket of cold water in Pete's face. His voice was deep, with a particularly heavy, strained accent.

Pete felt the anger ignite in him. "You don't talk to me like that, kaffir!" And there, for the first time, he heard how the k-word fell out of his mouth. His parents said it was a swear word. It grated his tongue, but in a way made him feel powerful *and* ashamed. Simultaneously.

"Is this your farm now all of a sudden? And my name is '*baas*', you don't get to call me 'you', hear me?" the words jumped out before he could even process them.

The black guy stopped a few metres from him. A frown cut his forehead in two, he sucked his fat bottom lip into his wide mouth and seemed to dig his teeth deep into it. His arms were tucked safely behind his broad-shouldered frame.

"This farm is the property of Mr Gerrit Jacobs. He does not like trespassers, *baas*." He spoke laboriously as if someone had just heaped two large bags of mealies on his shoulders.

A strange sensation bounced around inside Pete. He wanted to smile. He had never spoken more than two words to a black guy his age, and here in one quick swipe he had rendered young Shaka harmless. How he wished Renate were here to see him in action.

The black guy peered over his shoulder twice.

“Serious, *baas* Gerrit will shoot, no jokes.” He was staring straight down at the uneven road at his feet. His shoulders drooped somewhat and beads of sweat rolled down the sides of his face.

Pete looked at him. He appeared smaller than at first glance. “And what about you, hey? Are you supposed to be here? Maybe I should tell *baas* Gerrit that you’re sneaking off to town?”

“Please, I was just running—” The sound of an approaching vehicle stalled his words. They gawked at each other in panic. Pete could almost feel Uncle Gerrit’s bullet slicing through his flesh. His mom’s warning spun around in his head. Why was he always so bloody stubborn?

They spent a moment in petrified disbelief. Then, as if a gear started turning simultaneously in their minds, both darted for the nearest rock, the black guy running around and Pete leaping over it. They flopped down with their backs to the rock. In all the haste, they accidentally brushed arms. Pete pulled away and, without thinking, wiped his arm on his shorts. Their breathing was fast and shallow, each trapped in their fears, both regretting that they had gone for a run.

The vehicle stopped close to the rock. Pete looked at the black guy next to him. He saw raw fear in his eyes – the darkest ones he had ever seen. There were tiny yellow lines in the whites of his eyes, and for a moment Pete wondered whether that would be the last thing he’d ever see.

A door opened. Music leaped into the dusky sky. Pete recognised the song in an instant, Duran Duran’s “The Wild Boys”. He was confused. Why would a fifty-year-old farmer listen to “The Wild Boys”? The black guy must have had the same thought, because, without a word or gesture, both turned as silently as they could. There were a few crevices in the rock, and each chose a vantage point as far removed from the other as possible, but with the best possible view.

A young man in his early twenties stood next to the driver’s side of a brand-new Toyota Hilux. He was singing along with gusto while pissing on an unsuspecting khaki bush. Pete recognised him. He’d seen him at church; not every Sunday, but often enough. He farmed somewhere near Uncle Ampie on the Normandien road. Rudie-somebody. But what was he doing there?

The passenger door swung open. Pete almost gasped aloud. A young Indian girl jumped out and started running straight towards their hideaway rock. Her arms flapped like those of a trapped bird, her mouth half-open, her eyes puffy and damp.

Pete couldn't bear it; he had to look away. Without realising it, his eyes were on the stranger next to him whose face mirrored the emotions coursing through him. Pete could feel the blood drain from his face with every step the girl took towards them.

A moment later, Rudie realised what was going on and chased after her. Mere metres from their hiding place, he kicked the girl's shin; she lost her balance, flew through the air and tumbled to the ground in a dusty heap. Rudie swooped down on her and grinned. She sobbed and tried to wriggle free, but he had pinned down her arms with his knees and sat on her chest. He started laughing. A thunderous, fiendish laugh.

Pete couldn't look. What do you do? What do you do?

The girl did her best to twist herself out of his stranglehold, but she couldn't move the six-foot-five Rudie.

"I like a curry with a bit of a kick," Rudie hissed. "Tonight's your lucky night; you're going to taste some proper boerewors."

With renewed determination, she writhed and kicked and managed to throw him off balance. But he recovered quickly and gave her three sharp slaps in the face before he moved his hand down her leg and started lifting her dress.

The black guy gestured for Pete to do something. He felt his anger rise again.

The girl screamed.

"Scream as much as you want, bitch, no one will hear you. Scream your little heart out, get those vocal cords nice and loose, because you'll be screaming with pleasure very soon." Rudie leaned in again, this time pressing his left knee against her neck, his full weight behind it. In one swift move he reached under her dress – the rip of her panties echoed among the rocks.

Pete motioned with his head to the black guy, pleading with him to do something. But he just shook his head and pointed at his face, like *that* was supposed to be an answer.

When he looked again, Rudie was standing and had planted his giant red leather boot on her neck. He slowly started undoing his belt, pulled down his zipper and let his shorts slide down his legs and drop onto the girl's face.

"Please, please don't. I won't tell anyone, please, I beg you, sir, please, please," she cried out in the brief moment he lifted his boot from her neck.

A smile curled into his sparse yellow moustache. He shook his head very slowly, not breaking eye contact, and dug his hand deep into his grey Y-front underpants. She was screaming but no sounds came out, and tears left muddied lines on her face.

"Stop!" Pete carefully opened his eyes and realised he was standing. He started blinking his eyes feverishly and he could swear he saw his heart beating against his shirt.

From the corner of his eye, he saw that the black guy was also standing. Pete had never fainted before, but he suspected he was about to; black dots appeared in his vision and he struggled to focus on the young giant glaring at him.

Rudie stepped backwards and pulled his hand out of his underpants.

"I see what's going on here." He wiggled his finger in the air. "Snuck away from home to come and roll around in a mud hut." He stepped closer. "Now listen to me, you moffie, faggot piece of shit. Be a good little nancy and piss off home. And tell that pillow-biting turd next to you to fuck off. I'm busy with grown-up stuff." Rudie pointed his finger straight at Pete's right eye, making him feel as though he'd thrust it right into his skull.

Pete's lips moved but nothing came out.

"I'm only going to ask once," Rudie growled and took a couple of steps forward.

"You can't," was all Pete could mutter.

"I can't what, faggot?" Rudie adjusted his kudu-skin hat and Pete could see his red-blond hair stuck to his forehead.

"It's ... against the law." Pete tried to breathe but his throat had closed completely.

"I'll give you a little lesson in *my* laws," Rudie shouted and stormed back to his bakkie.

Before his brain could process what was going on, Pete seized the moment with Rudie's back turned to him. He raced around their hide-away rock, realising the black guy was with him, and helped the girl to her feet. Her arm felt thin and fragile. She had no chance in hell. They turned and ran as fast as their feet would carry them past their hiding place, past more rocks, straight toward the horizon where cerise and violet had morphed into dark grey.

The black guy took the lead. He seemed to know where he was going, and at that point Pete wasn't about to question his knowledge of the farm. The girl ran closely behind Pete and he could hear soft little yelps as she suppressed her tears.

"Run! Let's see how you outrun my bullets!"

Rudie's voice drowned out everything, even the sound of their feet hitting the dry ground. Then Pete heard a shot.

They clambered down a little ravine. The going was painfully slow, and Pete could sense Rudie gaining on them with every step they took. Another shot reverberated in his ears, or perhaps he was replaying the first shot in his mind. The girl was not a natural runner and even less of a climber. Every time he had to stop to help her and urge her on, he ground his teeth a little harder. In contrast, the black guy danced down the ravine like a klipspringer. Pete always thought he was agile, but he couldn't keep up with the floating feet of the guy in front of him.

A bright yellow spark spat against a rock less than two metres from Pete. The sound followed a moment later. A chill, unlike he had ever experienced, scraped along the soft skin of his back like a frozen spike.

Rudie's laughter crashed like waves over the three of them. "That was close! Woohoo! The next one will leave brains on the ground, eh. And then I'm going to get me my curry!"

At the bottom of the ravine, twilight was starting to wane, making it hard for them to see where they were running. The black guy ran next to Pete and gestured that he should follow him. Pete reluctantly obliged, as a better alternative was hardly jumping out at him.

The girl fell and the two boys grabbed her on the run; she barely touched the ground. The black guy led them through thick reeds, birds chirping and fluttering angrily. On the other side was a muddy dam

that was almost completely waterless. Without hesitation, the black guy flung himself into the mud, smearing the thick black gunk all over him. After a moment's hesitation, the girl followed suit. Pete kept looking around him, but he couldn't see or hear Rudie anywhere. Then a loud bang silenced the birds. A deep thud echoed against the dam wall. Pete dived full-length into the mud, rolling around, smearing as much as he could over him. With lumps of sticky black muck smeared all over their bodies, the three crept into the supposed safety of the reeds. Twilight had almost completely stepped aside to make way for the night, with only the mountains in the distance harbouring the last few dabs of daylight.

In the reeds, however, there was not even a hint of illumination.

"I've got all night! No worried mommy waiting for me at home." Rudie's voice was very close now.

"How original. I know you're in the mud, dipshits! Do you think I've got 'arsehole' written on my forehead?"

A long silence followed. Pete couldn't believe how loud his breathing was and how deadly quiet the others were.

"Last chance. Come out now, give me the bunny chow and you can go suckle on mommy's tits ..."

Pete closed his eyes when a couple of shots splashed into the shallow puddle in the centre of the dam. Then silence. Where was he?

Bang!

It was the loudest sound he had ever heard. The reed next to the girl exploded in a powdery mess. A muffled shriek escaped her pursed lips. She slapped her hand over her mouth, but it was too late, Rudie had heard.

"Ha! Gotcha!"

His oversized boots slowly, purposefully shuffled towards them through the reeds.

Pete opened his mouth, desperate for air to fill his lungs. He gawked at the unending darkness for answers, but only more questions came.

Then something broke through the infinite darkness. Two beams of light illuminated the horizon – his heart beat in his mouth. The beams moved quickly and grew bigger by the second. Uncle Gerrit? He must have heard the shots ...

“Shit!” Rudie growled so close that Pete could hear his breathing. “Shit! You lucky piece of ... aargh!”

The hate in Rudie’s voice was like the claws of a beast digging into Pete’s skull.

As the two headlights got closer, they could hear Rudie’s footsteps moving away from them.

“I know who you are, Petrus!” The black guy jerked his head around, the whites of his eyes the only thing Pete could see in the faint light of the approaching vehicle.

“Or Pete, like you call yourself these days. Think you’re supercool, don’t you? Pete de Lange, son of Rikus and Deanne.” The black guy’s eyes disappeared in the darkness. Pete tasted bile in his mouth.

“If you ever say anything about tonight, and I mean even in your bloody sleep, then I’ll tell the whole freakin’ world that you are a mof-fie. A faggot. You understand? But not just a normal faggot, no, everyone will know *exactly* who you like to pull your pants down for. Your life will be over, dipshit! Oh, and Pete, I’ve seen how your mommy checks me out with those hungry eyes of hers, gagging for a taste of my boerewors. So if you, that pickaxe *or* that curry-munching slut do so much as think of tonight, I’ll give your mom more than just a taste! That I promise you. You hear me, Pete-de-fucking-Lange?”

Rudie’s footsteps grew fainter and fainter.

In the distance, they could hear the door of the Hilux slam shut and how Rudie raced away without turning his lights on. A couple of minutes later, Uncle Gerrit arrived. He got out of his car without killing the engine, inspected the tyre tracks in the beams of his headlights, got back in and followed the tracks in the direction of town. He returned soon after, turned off his headlights and switched off the engine. He started walking, his flashlight dancing wildly in the darkness. Pete watched him closely as he climbed down the ravine and came towards them. His flashlight suddenly stopped, zoning in on something on the ground. He bent down and picked up a shell casing. Pete didn’t dare blink. Uncle Gerrit turned the shell casing around and around between his fingers and sniffed it. Pete wondered if he had forgotten how to breathe. Uncle Gerrit slipped the shell casing into his pocket and walked towards the dam. The beam from his flashlight

broke through the reeds. The three lay still, frozen in their muddy fortress, hoping, praying that he would just turn around and go, and that this damned night would end.

The earth's orbit came to a near standstill. In the mud, time was like a scalpel slicing open Pete's soul from one side to the other. Uncle Gerrit kept on walking up and down the dam wall. More than once, he flashed straight at them, but thankfully he didn't spot them. After his fourth turn along the wall, he stopped dead in his tracks. For Pete, it felt like ice was pumping through his veins. But then Uncle Gerrit suddenly turned and walked back to his car.

They watched the car disappear behind the hill but remained silent for several minutes longer. No one had dared to move or make a sound since the girl's near-fatal shriek.

A rumble of thunder woke Pete from his daze. He drew a deep breath and slowly lifted himself out of the mud. The mud was reluctant to let him go, so much so that he nearly fell over when he finally managed to pull free. He scraped his fingers over his mud-covered arms; it was sticky like syrup and reeked of compost. The others followed his example, and together they staggered through the reeds and out towards the ravine. The silence was unbearable. Pete's mind was spinning between thoughts of his dad's impending dismay, Rudie's fiendish laughter and the pleading eyes of the girl walking behind him. He wanted to say something, even if only to break the insufferable silence, but it was as if the mud had sucked his lips closed too.

The girl hesitated at the place where Rudie had pinned her down. Her silhouette was shaking. They pressed on, over the sagging fence and the cattle grid, and had passed the ruin of the old farmhouse when the black guy suddenly stopped. Pete and the girl stopped too, turning to him questioningly. It was he who broke the silence.

"I must go back. Eish, I'm in big trouble already."

"We have to get her home," Pete protested.

"People don't like blacks walking around town at night. I'm sorry ... I—"

Before he could finish his sentence, the girl threw her arms around him and whispered a thank-you. He stood frozen, as if he had seen a ghost.

A sudden flash illuminated the world around them. Lightning pirouetted in the clouds and a veil of imminent rain galloped across the parched earth. Pete glanced at the other guy. In a bright, prolonged flash their eyes met for a moment. They nodded, and then both turned away.

The heavens opened. In true Northern Natal style, the rain for which everyone was so desperate, bucketed down in large lead-like drops. Heaven's silver bullets burned Pete's skin with each strike, taking with it the mud covering him, lump by lump. He loved it – the rain at its intense best was one of his favourite things – standing outside, experiencing every piercing drop. Tonight, however, the rain had an entirely different meaning, because, with every stride he took, it washed away the tears that had appeared uninvited. Yes, with every step it washed away more and more of the stinking mud, and with every step he felt as though he was getting further and further away from Rudie's laugh. But when he looked to his right, *she* was still there.

By the time it dawned on him that she was still running next to him, the rain had cleansed her from nearly all the mud. In the thundering symphony of lightning, he could see how her long black hair stuck to the sides of her face. He couldn't recall noticing her face up until that moment. She had high cheekbones, perfectly ovoid, and her eyes were an incredible light brown, which appeared almost translucent in the radiance of the blazing sky. She also wasn't as skinny as he had first imagined; she had the curves of a woman.

Pete looked away. How could he look at an Indian like that? She was an Indian. A blasted In-di-an.

He snuck a quick look at her again and noticed the cutest little dimples in her cheeks. Stop it now!

A car approached and they ducked for cover behind a jacaranda tree. He looked at her again, and then quickly away before she could notice. He took off his windbreaker – which he only wore to sweat more to lose weight quicker – and draped it over her head and shoulders. She accepted it bashfully. Her eyes gave away her knowing that she looked far too Indian to be out in this white area at night.

They ran past the swimming pool and the primary school, past the library to the corner near the police station. Here she stopped.

“I live down there,” she said, pointing to a little side road. She hastily took off Pete’s windbreaker and handed it back.

“I’ll walk you home,” Pete said hesitantly.

“My dad will come out swinging an axe if he sees any boy near me.” She smiled and her mouth curled effortlessly into her dimples.

Almost mechanically, Pete stuck out his hand. She ignored it and hugged him. A soft hug, lingering for a fleeting moment.

“Thank you.” Her whisper caressed his skin and tickled his ear.

Then she let him go, turned around and scurried down the street.

Pete gaped after her. His arms hung next to his body like two rugby socks. His mind was still, the rain was loud, and within seconds, she was gone.