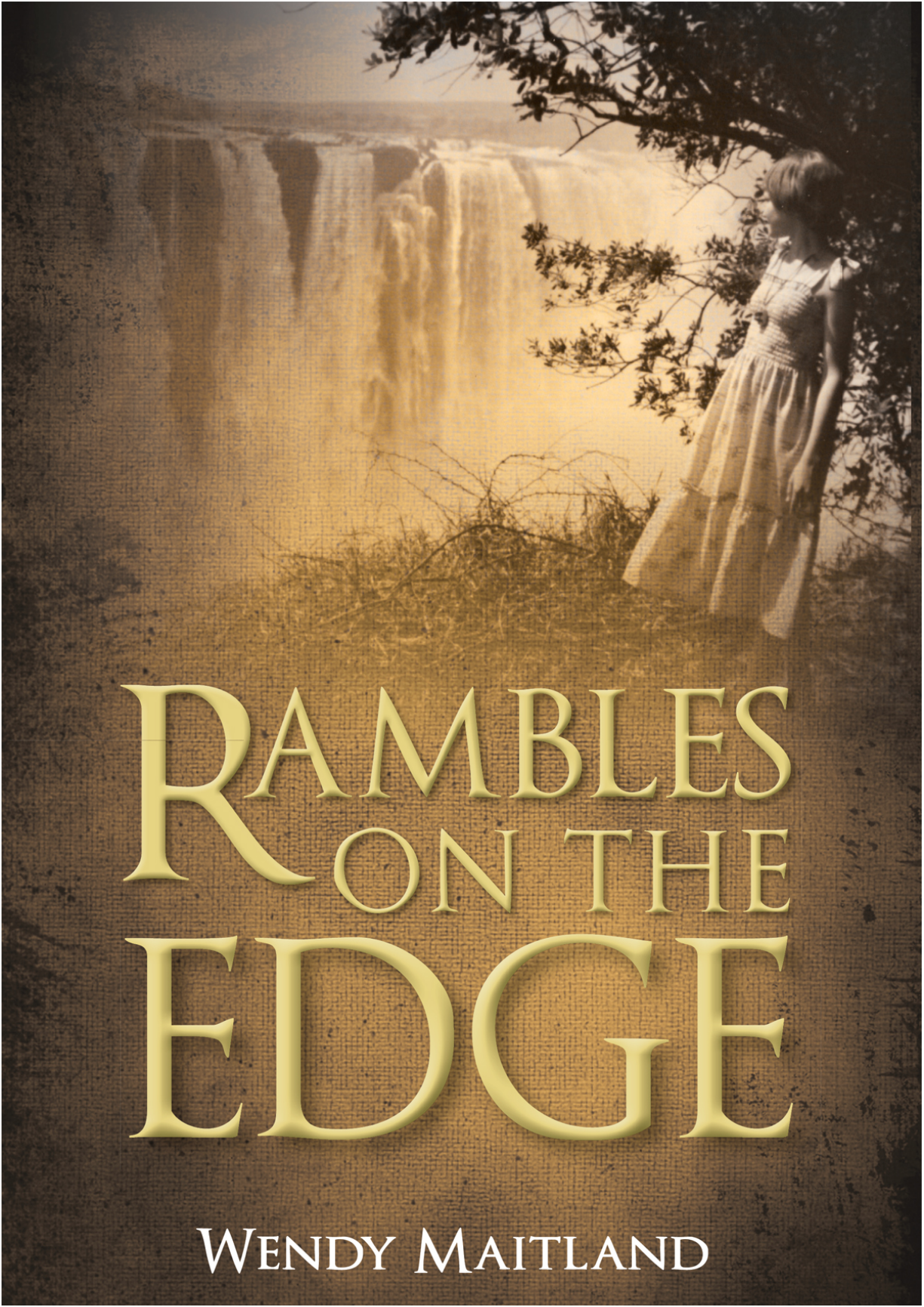
A woman with short hair, wearing a white, sleeveless, tiered dress, stands on the right side of the frame, looking towards a large, wide waterfall. The waterfall is the central focus, with water cascading down a rocky ledge. The scene is bathed in a warm, golden light, suggesting late afternoon or early morning. The background is a soft, hazy landscape with some trees and bushes. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

RAMBLES  
ON THE  
EDGE

WENDY MAITLAND



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ON THE  
EDGE

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Published by Dolman Scott in 2020

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Rift Valley Rambles - Published in April 2018 (978-1-911412-65-6)

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Also by Wendy Maitland:

**Rambles with my Family** – Published in April 2017 (978-1-911412-44-1)

These are no ordinary rambles, and the family is no ordinary family. On the first page they trip innocently into a war zone and the story gathers pace as they flee from one hazard to the next. These perils don't end with the war as the family becomes nomadic, led by a headstrong, intrepid father who is restless and driven. As his family ever more hopefully clings to dreams of normality, the story is both funny and tragic but, always compelling.

*“This is a completely delightful narrative, written in an easy and fluid style. It portrays a significant time in history and is totally engaging in its multiplicity of themes. The author expertly and honestly describes the complexity and influences of family dynamics and all that becomes normalised in the interactions. Throughout the narrative one is led to admire stoicism and realise the power of endurance in challenging circumstances. It was a huge disappointment to reach the last page and know that there would be no further opportunity to be enveloped in the life and times of this intriguing and unique family.”*

**Rift Valley Rambles** – Published in April 2018 (978-1-911412-65-6)

RIFT VALLEY RAMBLES continues the story told in *Rambles with my Family* as Wendy returns to Kenya at the age of twenty four, leaving behind the jumbled misfortunes of life at home as she sets out to find new purpose and direction in a country on the verge of independence from colonial rule. She arrives with hopes and plans that are quickly challenged as it remains a recurring feature in these rambles that nothing ever goes quite to plan. Setbacks impose themselves unpredictably alongside a shifting tide of history that in Africa has its own momentum and drama. The observation of these events with candid humour provides an antidote to misadventure, while all this takes place on a farm in the great wide, wild and glorious Rift Valley of Kenya during a time of political change and evolution.

*“This is the long awaited second part following “Rambles with my family” by Wendy Maitland. Having read her first book I was desperate to know what happened next. It is an inspiring account depicting the life of a remarkable woman in Africa during the sixties. Like the first novel (which I highly recommend to read first) I was unable to put the book down (252 pages!). The author has the gift to draw you into a different place and time. Having read the difficult journey through her childhood in her first book I was amazed about her ability to forgive others and concentrate on the joys of life as a young married woman. Her own liberal and nonjudgmental views give her account of events great credibility. If we all had a little bit of Wendy’s honest and fine humoured character in us, the world would be a truly magical place.”*

To Charles  
who from his head and his heart  
gives the most generous of gifts



# INTRODUCTION

This is the third book in a series based on the true story of my family as we became caught up in world events from the start of the Second World War to a roller-coaster of family dynamics as normal life failed to resume. In this concluding book the story moves from Kenya to Rhodesia where we arrive full of optimism with no inkling of future events. During the closing years of white rule there were many good and happy times to enjoy, until the ferocity of what became a terrifying war erupted with destabilising force and sent us on a new search for somewhere safe to live. As usual in these rambles, nothing goes entirely to plan, and there is both tragedy and comedy as the story unfolds.

Right at the top of the list of people to thank this time are those like you reading this introduction, so you are included among generous readers who wanted another book and encouraged me to go on with the story. Then there is Ros, and Louise too, for their corrections if I have got things wrong. Next there is my very kind friend Sue Daly who puts photos and text together and gets it all sent off, and before any of this can be done there is wonderful Vivien Lipski who edits and assists my ramblings: thank you Vivien, and all of you.

People who have appeared in previous stories turn up again in this one, so they are mentioned here to avoid confusion:

David	a family friend
Adam	my husband
Louise, Simon and Peter	our children
Fa and Muz (Craddock)	my parents
Babs	Fa's new wife
Andy	Muz's new love
Elaine and Ros	my sisters
Andrew (Spindle)	my brother
Les	Elaine's husband
Len	a previous admirer of Muz
Lanner	long lost love of mine
Alison and Cen (Hill)	Adam's parents
Fran	a family friend
Nakuru	the town in Kenya where I grew up
Glanjoro	the Hill family farm in Kenya

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# CHAPTER 1

As soon as the decision to leave Kenya had been made, it was as if we had launched ourselves like surfers on an unstoppable wave rolling at speed towards a far shore that was only vaguely visible. There was very little time to get our move underway and my main concern had been for our much loved Kipsigis ayah Elizabeth, who was grief-stricken to be losing 'her' children (having no confidence that I was capable of looking after them myself), and finding a new family for her where she would be appreciated and well treated. She and David had established a link through mutual despair at our departure and he promised that he would take care of her until a new position was found.

He came to help me pack up, bringing tea boxes and piles of newspapers, telling me that army people are experts at packing and moving as that is what they do all the time. He was an immensely kind and reassuring person to have around, practical and methodical, while Adam disassociated himself from any actual hands-on involvement in the packing-up process, saying that he had better things to do. He was planning a route for us to drive through Tanzania and Mozambique to our new home in Rhodesia, carrying as much luggage as could fit inside and on top of our Cortina Estate. Adam's valiant 1956 Land Rover that had seen us through so many years of adventures and never let us down, very sadly had to be sold.

The Labradors, Roger and Ruin, were despatched to an animal transport company in Nairobi from where they would

be flown by cargo plane to Salisbury. Our third dog, Beetle, had already gone to join the pack at Glanjoro House, which was a good move for her as one of the Pointers was her mother.

We were almost ready to leave when Fa decided it was too risky for us to drive with a baby thousands of miles through the African bush, without medical facilities or any kind of civilised amenity along the way. All we could be sure of encountering, he said, were swarms of mosquitoes and tsetse flies and insisted that I should go by plane with the children while Adam took the car. There would be more space in the car for luggage that way too, he suggested.

David once again helped out and took me to the airport with the children and Elizabeth, resulting in a highly distressing scene as we said goodbye and Elizabeth refused to let go of Peter, clinging onto him and wailing so loudly that ground staff came to see if he was being kidnapped. By this time all of us were sobbing and David had to prise Peter from Elizabeth's arms, putting his own arm around her as he led her away through the airport, and I felt utterly bereft. For months and years afterwards, the person I missed more than anyone was Elizabeth. She was much more than a nanny: she had been a kind and motherly figure to me as well as the children, scolding me when I was forgetful or made silly mistakes, but most of all laughing with me and being perpetually cheerful and loving.

Friends told us the difference between Kenya and Rhodesia could be summed up as follows: 'Kenya is the Officers' Club and Rhodesia is the Sergeants' Mess.' I was curious about this distinction and wanted to see what was meant by it when we became part of this new society. European settlers in Kenya were mainly British, which they might have thought gave them an edge, while many Rhodesians were descendants of Dutch Afrikaner families who had trekked north from South Africa to escape the aftermath of the Boer

War. The conditions they endured were so brutally harsh, they needed to be very tough to survive and had done so with pride in this new country.

Adam had accepted a dairy manager's job offer by post from a farm at Gwelo in the southern part of Rhodesia, without meeting the owners or seeing the farm in advance of our arrival. Up to this point our only contact with Rhodesia had been a brief excursion a few weeks earlier to have a quick look around. This had followed reports from friends already there who sent glowing accounts of the country's prosperity and lifestyle with, in particular, excellent schools, which for us was a pressing issue now that Louise had reached school age.

Kenya was our home and leaving was something we could never have contemplated before independence in 1963 brought uncertainty for those of us who, despite feeling we were Kenyans and having a deep allegiance to the country, were not indigenous Kenyans and that was a crucial difference. Adam had been born in Kenya and knew no other life apart from school in England, so it was more wrenching for him to leave, but Rhodesia was still Africa and offered a quality of life enhanced by an environment of surpassing beauty and diversity. The splendid mountains, thorn trees and golden savannahs of Kenya were there replaced by monumental granite outcrops rising from the russet colours of Mopani woodlands and plains: Africa in a different guise, but no less glorious.

Our nearest neighbours in Gwelo were Afrikaners, Letty and Henk, who spoke Afrikaans at home with their children, either Shona or Ndebele on the farm with the African workers, and English when they were with us. Swahili was unknown and everything felt very different and foreign, especially the climate: scorching hot just then at the height of the southern African summer and, later on, bitterly cold in winter.

We moved into the dairy manager's house with the possessions that Adam had managed to bring with him in the car, and waited for the dogs to arrive. We needed their company to help us feel like a normal family again. The animal transport service was an efficient organisation that handled all manner of live cargo for zoos as well as transporting domestic pets. Expert care from door to door was provided with veterinary supervision, at no little cost. Quarantine restrictions did not apply in this case and the dogs were delivered all the way to the farm, arriving in massive crates that looked solid enough to have transported lions, but were impressively clean with plenty of bedding. The dogs were in excellent health and spirits, leaping out to greet us ecstatically and race around sniffing all the new scents. Having them with us lifted morale all round.

Our house was quite superior by farm manager standards with a guest cottage and swimming pool in the garden, but best of all, a telephone. The owners of the farm were what Adam described as local cattle barons and lived in grand style, displaying their wealth in a way that successful farmers in Kenya never did. It was almost a point of honour among those who were better-off in Kenya settler communities that the more you had in the bank, the less you let it show, which in some cases meant very short rations for farm managers and other employees. Here in Gwelo our new bosses, Lawrence and Thelma Maclean, exhibited none of that modesty and were in addition devout Baptists who believed in Christian charity, heaping us with generous perks and hospitality. Adam had been surprised and delighted to find that he was in charge of a pedigree Friesian herd luxuriating in cultivated pastures, with a modern milking parlour and well-trained, reliable labour.

Simon, now three years old, went with him everywhere and was called 'Baas Stompie' by the African workers, amusing them as he scurried about on his short (*stompie*)

legs. Peter was already walking at ten months and sometimes went along too, hand in hand or carried piggy-back by Simon who was his devoted carer. African children often carried babies on their backs, but Thelma Maclean disapproved of Simon doing the same. 'Going around like an African,' she complained, and insisted on engaging a nanny for us, explaining that it was important for us to have the right kind of nanny. 'We don't have *ayahs* here,' she said. 'That's for Indians.'

We had arrived in time for Christmas 1969 and I went to look for cards to buy in Gwelo town, twenty miles from the farm, after dropping Louise at primary school. She had settled into Class 1 enthusiastically, expecting that she would be reading and writing within days since being given new pencils and an exercise book.

Gwelo was a sizeable town on the main road running all the way from the capital city, Salisbury, to the Limpopo river marking the border with South Africa. It was a big step up for us from Nakuru's one street of hugger-mugger shops with very little choice or variety. Gwelo had department stores and restaurants along pavements lined with flowering trees that spread their bright petals like confetti underfoot. I could even buy a newspaper, a rare treat, at one of the stationery shops selling Christmas cards. Some of the cards showed the usual nativity scenes and among them were others that stood out with bold lettering. 'Those are the most popular ones,' the shop assistant said when she saw me looking at them. Printed across a snow scene there was a caption in large letters: 'KEEP CHRISTMAS WHITE.' I stared at the words, dismayed. That kind of message would not be tolerated by anyone in Kenya and I had not been expecting anything like that here.

The Christmas cards symbolised an attitude that we became increasingly aware of, particularly on outings with the children and our new nanny, Alice, when we stopped at



roadside cafés as we used to in Kenya, all sitting at a table together having something to eat and drink on a hot day. The first time we did this in Rhodesia we were told: 'Blacks are allowed in here, but they are not allowed to sit at the same table with whites.' This made me feel very uncomfortable and out of place after the more congenial manners of Kenya.

Despite the Maclean's kindness and the many advantages of the farm, I was terribly homesick for Kenya and a way of life that I fitted into, while in Gwelo I felt displaced. I missed Fa, and Muz too, disappointed that neither of them seemed inclined to visit. There was nothing connecting us to the rest of the family and all my friends, except letters.

A surprise visitor did come during those early months, introducing himself as Sidney Franklin from East Grinstead in Sussex, explaining that he was a friend of Fay Craddock (Muz) and wanted to meet us. She had not mentioned anything about this friend and we were intrigued. He was our first visitor and was a charming cultured man, a widower, who it turned out had known Muz for some time so her silence was puzzling, especially as it became clear during his stay that his feelings for her were more than casual. We sensed that he was looking for approval and that this had been the purpose of his visit. It was an approach that seemed very sensible, but how could he not know about the lurking presence of hopeful Andy, standing first in line of prospective suitors?

'I'll have to go and check on Muz,' I told Adam, 'and see what's going on with Andy, and why she hasn't told us about Sidney who is precisely the kind of man she should go for - genuinely caring, with his feet on the ground; also very well off so he could give her security.'

'Ros says your mother is still stuck in a bog of depression, taking all sorts of pills to help her sleep and stay

sane. She might not be in a frame of mind to be receiving suitors, whoever they are.'

'All the more reason for me to go and see what's going on. But I'll have to get a job to pay for fares, I know that. Anyway I need a job; I need to use my nursing, and keep my brain in gear.'

Getting registered with the Rhodesian Nursing Council was straightforward and in less than a month I was working as nurse/receptionist for a surgeon, Mr Comline, at his consulting rooms in the town. This fitted in with school runs for Louise, and the boys were safe on the farm with Alice and Adam.

Mr Comline was very exact in the way he worked, slightly austere but devoted to his patients and highly regarded. As well as all routine clinical nurse procedures, I did his book-keeping, sent out bills, typed his letters and enjoyed every day at the surgery. The work was satisfying as I understood how Mr Comline liked things to be done after years observing Fa who was similarly meticulous. Mr Comline appreciated what I did for him so it was a mutually agreeable situation, besides which my wages were mounting up week by week.

There was a small hotel in the same street where I went for lunch each day and the same table was always reserved for me, with two places. A demure woman called Marguerite occupied the second place since the head waiter had put her there on my first day, which I thought was a friendly gesture and that Marguerite was an unusually friendly girl. All through lunch, every day, men would stop at our table to chat and make dates with her. She noted down days and times in a diary that she kept beside her on the table, making me curious.

'You seem to have an awful lot of boyfriends,' I remarked after a few days.

'They're not boyfriends, they're clients,' she laughed.

'What sort of clients?'

'What do you think?'

I looked at her, confused by the contrast between her modest appearance and what she was suggesting.

'I would never have guessed.'

'It's why the waiter put us together, to make things look respectable. You sitting there in your uniform sharing a table with me. You don't mind, do you?'

'Of course not. I like you. And your clients are always very polite to me.'

'You've given them ideas. Some of them want me to put on a uniform like yours now, when they come round. But it's kids' stuff compared with some of the weird nonsense they ask for.'

'Such as?'

'Not nice. But the worst are the police. They think they're entitled to freebies. It's mostly when they're on night shift, getting bored. They come round any hour when I've closed up and gone to sleep, waking me up for what they think is their perks. Then they want to hang around smoking and drinking while I'm trying to get rid of them, telling them I don't do night work.'

Gwelo was a surprising place, full of Dutch Reformed Church repression alongside more relaxed elements like Marguerite's services openly on offer, and others that Adam discovered when he went to have a haircut. Finding what looked like a barber shop with a sign saying 'Gentlemen's Hair Parlour,' he went inside and was directed to a booth in a line of similar booths occupied by men. This looked ordinary enough until he noticed that all the hairdressers were topless girls, wearing nothing but the briefest of mini-skirts.

'I didn't want to look as if I'd been caught off guard, so I had to pretend this was normal, sitting there with breasts bouncing around my face as scissors were applied to my

hair,' Adam told me when he came home. 'You know how I detest mammary hyperplasia. It's bad enough in cows, but in humans, it's obscene.'

'You seem to have survived the ordeal, and you've had some proper styling for a change, instead of army scalping. What did it cost?'

'I can't even remember how many dollars I shelled out in the end. All I could think of was how to escape before getting suffocated.'

At weekends our swimming pool was popular with neighbours and friends. We enjoyed having *braais* (BBQs) and everyone contributed, bringing baskets and boxes of food and beer. The Afrikaner families brought *boerewors* sausage and enormous steaks as well as, for dessert, a type of doughnut that was a completely new discovery for us in the area of gastronomic thrills. These exquisite pastries were called *koeksisters*: made in the shape of plaits and deep-fried before being submerged in chilled syrup to come out golden and oozing. I had never encountered these before coming to Rhodesia, and there was another superb national favourite - piri-piri chicken, which appeared on all restaurant menus and was a staple of household menus too. *Braais* were an art form in Rhodesia and purists dug a pit or trench which was filled with burning logs under a metal grille, where the men of the party gathered with long forks to supervise the sizzling and turning of the meat. We had one of these *braai* pits in our garden and used it for parties despite my fear that a child might fall onto the burning embers. Our neighbours couldn't understand such squeamishness and said even the dogs knew better.

The pool was another wide-open menace, again laughed at by others, most of whom had their own unfenced pools and believed all objects, including children, were equipped with natural buoyancy. At one of our Saturday parties,

watching children jump in and out of the pool with a great deal of noise and bobbing about in the water, it looked safe enough from where I was sitting with other mothers, drinking and chatting. Louise ran up at one point saying something that I couldn't hear through the clamour and thought couldn't be very important, until she started pulling urgently at my arm to get attention, when I caught the words: 'There's a baby in the bottom of the pool.' She pointed to a small shape lying on the pool floor, only faintly visible among the ripples. One of the older children, alerted by the sudden panic, dived down and retrieved the baby, lifting it up and bringing it to the side. Amazingly, as soon as it was out of the water it spluttered and cried, appearing none the worse for nearly drowning, but this incident showed how easy it was to miss a child slipping in unobserved despite so many watchers, and made me permanently wary of pools.

Peter had his first birthday at the farm with a tea party and cake with one candle, over which Simon hovered closely to blow it out for him should he hesitate. All the children who came were wearing their best clothes, under instruction from Thelma Maclean, I was told, to whom appearances mattered almost as much as Godliness. Peter had an infant-size safari suit for the occasion, following male fashion since all Rhodesian men wore safari suits: casual ones with shorts for every day, and smarter ones with long trousers for the office. School uniform for boys was a khaki suit of the same style with shorts, a very practical arrangement. Peter looked cute in his tiny outfit and was a charmer, always smiling and cheerful. His petite size was constantly remarked on as most other children his age were twice his weight and height, while he remained physically dainty with big dark eyes and long lashes that he was prone to blink beguilingly. I was impatient for Muz to meet him while he was still at this endearing age and it was not long after his party that I had

enough money saved for fares, so I was able to gather up the children and take them to England. Direct flights from Salisbury to London were banned under sanctions and we had to fly to Johannesburg to catch a connection from there. Adam was nervous about letting us go, fearing the separation and how it might unsettle us even further. Rhodesia didn't feel like home. Despite its many advantages, we still felt like foreigners.

When I arrived with the children at Muz's house with its very English name, Forest Lodge, and there she was, waiting at the door in her apron, it felt wonderfully warm and welcoming after relays of very long cramped journeys by plane and train. The children thought it rather novel to have a gran as well as a grandma, and Louise was especially glad to see her Gran as she had missed grandma Alison along with so many other loved and familiar people left behind in Kenya. When Ros arrived for the weekend that was another excitement as she and Louise were already close, almost like sisters instead of aunt and niece. They actually resembled each other in looks as well as temperament, and even the way Louise walked reminded me of Ros at a similar age. Ros and Peter were meeting for the first time, and then there was Spindle who arrived to great fanfare from the children, his face radiant as he watched them playing with some of his old toys brought out for the occasion. Unable to resist joining in, he lay down on the floor with them, his long legs splayed out as they all tumbled about and Spindle became a happy child again, released from the constraints of hospital life, or home life, trying to conform to adult expectations.

Peter had lately grown into a habit of fastening himself onto one of my legs like a small monkey clinging to a tree branch for safety and comfort. All the recent travelling and unaccustomed activity seemed to have unnerved him. If I was wearing a skirt he would hide underneath, much to the

amusement of Spindle who thought it comic that Peter was using my skirt as a tent. Having Peter clamped to my leg was limiting in a household with no domestic help and innumerable chores to be done, so Muz borrowed a play-pen from a neighbour and Peter was put behind bars. Spindle and the others played zoo games with him, roaring through the bars as he stood there trapped, while they jumped up and down and ran around the room pretending to be animals. This made him screech until the noise level erupted sufficiently to disturb Muz in the next room listening to serious music on the radio.

She decided that Louise was old enough to start ballet lessons at the Bush Davies School where she worked as its musical director, and we all went along to watch her first steps in the beginners' class as she entered self-consciously equipped with a pair of pink satin dancing shoes. Boys were not allowed into the house unless they were pupils, so Spindle was put in charge of Simon and Peter who were to wait outside in the garden, while the rest of us went in to watch the class. Miss Bush was a martinet who tolerated no interruptions and drilled her pupils with a steely eye and voice, tapping fiercely and frequently on top of the piano (at which Muz sat), to correct any dancing error or inattention.

It became evident quite quickly that Louise was never going to be a graceful light-footed dancer, and I didn't want her to be traumatised by Miss Bush's sharp criticisms. On this first day, long before the class ended, there was a sudden furious tapping on the piano lid by Miss Bush as she stared transfixed at figures with staring faces pressed against the windows of the room, looking in from outside.

'There are some horrid urchins observing us!' she cried, as if there might have been a hundred of them instead of just three ragged boys peering in. I ran outside and quickly pulled them away before Miss Bush could investigate, leaving Muz to bring Louise home. After that experience

none of us dared go back, except Muz, who remarked that she hoped Miss Bush would never find out that the urchins were her own son and grandchildren.

Muz was in better spirits than I expected from Ros's reports and my arrival with the children clearly lifted her, but the real reason for her renewed optimism was a blossoming romance with childhood sweetheart Andy. I didn't have to wait long to meet him as it soon became obvious that he was a fixture in Muz's life, purring up the drive in his Austin Princess car, reverently rubbing a duster over it before he lumbered into the house. He plainly resented my presence and pointedly ignored me each time he arrived. Muz would hurry to greet him at the door, fumbling to remove her apron before being clutched by him in a clumsy embrace.

'My lovely little bit of feminine pulchritude waiting for me. Delicious Fay - I'm here again,' he would exclaim eagerly as Muz allowed herself to be seized in this blundering way. Ros and I thought it was horribly creepy and that there was something distinctly repellent about Andy altogether.

When I suggested to Muz that Sidney Franklin was a much more suitable prospect for her, she rejected it with a wave of the hand. 'He's much too old for me,' she said dismissively.

'He's not that old,' I argued, 'and he's done much more with his life than Andy who has spent his life doodling.

'Don't be silly. He had an important job as a draughtsman. It was a reserved occupation during the war, so he wasn't allowed to be called up because he was needed at home as part of the war effort.'

'It's hard to imagine Andy making an effort in any capacity let alone any extra exertions due to there being a war on. He's a nonentity - even Mary his sister says so.'



'I don't know why you're so down on him,' Muz replied defensively. 'He has a very loving nature. He is the only person who has ever helped me with Andrew, driving me to and from the hospital, taking an interest.'

'Sidney is very concerned about Andrew too, and wants to help. He has contacts that could get him released from hospital into sheltered accommodation, with support to lead a much more normal life.'

'Yes, I know about that, but I doubt Andrew would qualify. Sidney has all kinds of contacts in the health and education world. He is one of the governors of Christ's Hospital school and provides bursaries from his own money. He's a very generous man and a good friend, but Andy is the man of my heart since your father has gone.'

It seemed there was nothing more to be said now that Sidney was written off along with war hero Len (a previous suitor), and we were left with lumpy Andy. The looming prospect of a more formal partnership between him and Muz provoked me to increasingly desperate attempts at confronting her with the realities of such a scrounger becoming a permanent attachment. 'How can you put up with Andy being so lazy that he refuses to walk anywhere? He never does more than amble a few steps from his car to the nearest armchair. We are a walking family, it's in our DNA. It's what we do at every opportunity. We never sit about. You used to despise people like that.'

'It's because of his accident years ago. He never completely recovered his energy.'

'It's nothing to do with any accident,' I said scornfully. 'You said yourself he used to sit on his mother's lap even as a young man, just sitting there, lolling about.'

'Well, it was charming at the time, and now he likes me to sit on his lap, which is charming too. But not in front of you, of course, since you are so disapproving of our lovemaking.'

That observation put an end to any further conversation on the subject as any mention of lovemaking in association with Andy was too much to bear.

East Grinstead was in an area of glorious walking country that included Ashdown Forest where we took the children on mellow afternoons, Peter in a pushchair while Louise and Simon ran ahead. If Andy came too he would drive us there and then sit in the car reading a book while we walked. Ros likes to tell the story about one of these walks when I was wheeling Peter in the pushchair, deep in conversation with Muz, while Ros and Spindle walked behind. Peter stood up in the chair, pointing to a bird he had spotted, trying to draw my attention to it, but lost his balance and fell out of the chair onto the path in front. 'You never even noticed,' Ros reminds me on those occasions when family misdeeds are being revisited. 'You just ran him over with the empty pushchair and carried on completely oblivious, yakking away to Muz. When you eventually noticed, and stopped to pick him up, he didn't even whimper or make any fuss at all, obviously used to that kind of negligence.'

It was just as well that none of us were soft-centred when we went to stay with Adam's aunts at Howleigh and the children were introduced to their legendary beach picnics. These carried on all year regardless of weather, so that in winter we would be crouched on the shingle like survivors from a shipwreck, huddled together with wet dogs, lashed by an arctic wind. None of this deterred the aunts who rallied us with forced cheerfulness and sandy sandwiches that the dogs snatched from our hands. 'Here, have a b-boiled egg instead, the d-dogs don't like those,' Aunt Diana would stammer through frozen lips. 'It's slightly b-bracing today.'

Back at their house, keeping warm offered a different set of problems in the absence of central heating or provision for such unaccustomed requirements as drying nappies.

'Granny mustn't catch sight of them,' the aunts warned me, 'so you'll have to hang them on the rail above the Aga after she's gone to bed.' Granny had never been exposed to the sight of a nappy. There had always been nannies and nursemaids to deal with such things for her own children and she would find it offensive to observe, even accidentally, any such article on display now at this stage of her life. Regardless of these and other eccentric prohibitions, we all loved being at Howleigh where the aunts fondly prepared such a varied programme of events for us that it was impossible to be bored or unhappy.

On other visits, in summer it would be long hot days at the county show or village fetes, in between picnics in meadows where we lounged on tartan rugs, buzzed by wasps. Evenings were spent in a twitter playing cards or getting out the sherry glasses for neighbours coming round; the glasses sticky with lip and finger marks from the previous time used, with only a dip-wash afterwards by the aunts before being put away ready for the next round. Howleigh's tiny scullery did not allow for hygienic washing up in a stone sink at knee-height designed for dainty Victorian kitchen maids, and now visited as briefly as possible by the aunts.

'We can't seem to get village girls to come up the hill and oblige any more,' Granny complained, unable to comprehend that those village girls who used to slave in the kitchen for a pittance were long gone. Somerset village girls now went to university or took the bus to Taunton where they worked in smart offices or shops, while Howleigh stayed mothballed in a time-zone where innovations such as a washing machine or electric kettle were thought by Granny to be dangerously modern.

Muz however had a marvellous invention called a twin-tub that was wheeled out on washdays when hoses were attached to the sink to provide a water supply and draining

outlet. One tub did the washing while the other was a spin dryer, working together in a combined operation that I found captivating despite the close supervision required. There was a tendency for the machine to lose control at maximum revs when the wash-tub went into rock-and-roll mode, slopping soapy water onto the linoleum floor, while the spin-tub tottered and lurched to a roar of increasing vibrations. At this point there would be a shout from Louise in the sitting room next door where she and the others were watching *Magic Roundabout* on TV: 'We can't hear anything, Mummy. You're making too much noise.'

We were settling into a contented routine at Forest Lodge and I wanted to enjoy it for as long as possible but the children were starting to ask: 'When are we going home? When are we going to see Daddy?', making it clear they were missing him. The time away was having a different effect on me as the energising environment of southern England began to evoke a sense of belonging and continuity. In the early mornings I opened my bedroom window as wide as it would go and leaned out to take big breaths of air that were stingingly fresh and cool, making me feel supremely alive. The break from Africa was giving me a sense of renewal, re-connecting with Englishness and the reassurance of a shared history and heritage that I had not fully comprehended or appreciated before. I didn't want the children to be unaware of this identity themselves, and was conscious of an increasing unease about the situation in Rhodesia as the children imbibed the spirit of Ian Smith and all that he stood for. Adam went along with the ideology for the sake of good relations with others we had to live with, and his vision of our future was whole-heartedly Rhodesian. Whatever my own feelings, I had to go back there and make the future work for all of us.

I was standing at the open window one morning when Muz called me. 'There's a telegram for you.' I thought it

might be Adam asking about a return date. But it wasn't. It was from Agadir in Morocco with just one sentence pasted on the paper form:

SURVIVED EPIC ACROSS SAHARA ARRIVE BLIGHTY 2 WEEKS MUST SEE YOU DAVID.

I showed it to Muz, who was hovering anxiously. Telegrams arriving unexpectedly were alarm bells for anyone who had been through the war. 'Who's David?' she asked suspiciously. 'Why is it so important for him to see you?'

'He and his wife were friends of ours in Nakuru and David in particular helped a great deal with our move, helping me pack up, and looking after Elizabeth. No doubt he has news of her and other things to tell me about.' But I knew the invitation held more than casual interest, especially if he was on his own. I went upstairs with the telegram in my hand and stood at the open window again, looking out until I was shivering both with the cold air and unexpected anticipation. David had told me about a plan to drive across the Sahara with army friends when he was posted back to re-join his regiment, but there had been no expectation that I might be in England myself when he arrived.

On fine days when Muz wasn't working, we often went on picnics and the children's favourite place was the end of the runway at Gatwick airport where they could watch planes landing and taking off. What they watched out for most eagerly was a Cessna that looked like Grandpa's plane, keeping alive the hope that any Cessna arriving might be his. Gatwick airport in 1970 was hardly more than a runway with sheds at one end where passengers assembled in an atmosphere of no great formality. A nursing friend who had trained with me at the Royal Free Hospital, now lived nearby under the flight path in a rambling house where she had

settled in bohemian disorder, absentmindedly gathering babies and children around her. Four of these were her own, and three were stepchildren who came with someone else's husband whom she had collected along the way. On visits to her, my own three were absorbed into this blithe household, running wild in the paradise of their tangled garden abandoned to the incessant roar of planes overhead. For a family of plane spotters like ourselves this was nothing but joy, and I loved the old house that had evolved during three distinct architectural periods. Its centrepiece was a modest but exquisite Tudor house crowned with a fanciful crenelated roof, standing between a Georgian wing on one side and a Victorian wing on the other. Each section had its own staircase where all ten children (when we were there) raced up and down, swinging from the banisters like lemurs.

It was into this tumult of family life that David arrived, unshaven, sunburnt and dog-tired, hours after driving off the Dover ferry, having arranged to meet us there. This was to spare Muz the dilemma (had he appeared at Forest Lodge) of deciding where he fitted on her moral spectrum of suitable friends for me to be associating with. There were no scruples in the minds of the children who were so pleased to see David that they all wanted to sit on his lap at the same time. Louise perched herself there proprietorially, reaching up to rub the bristles on his face while being flirtatious in a way that looked overly impudent at her age. If anyone was going to flirt with him it would be me, I thought peevishly, not my six-year-old daughter. Several days followed in a carefree state of unstructured time as clocks and watches were ignored and mealtimes occurred randomly. A great many bottles of wine were emptied as we sat around the enormous kitchen table, chatting and idling until tugged by the children to go and look at something they had built or knocked over during mad games. Too soon David had to leave, to go and visit his mother in Somerset, and we