

Chapter Five

THE CITY OF GOLD

THE LORRY JOLTED to a stop and the driver came round to the back.

"OK?" he asked. "You can stretch your legs for a minute.

He helped them down.

"Your lorry is very fast," Tiro said.

"Yes! But it's not *my* lorry. I only drive it for the baas."[1]

They didn't stop for long because the driver had to get to Johannesburg and return the same day.

"Look out for the mine dumps," he told the children, as they climbed back up. "It's the earth they dig up to get to the gold. Jo'burg is the city of

[1] "boss"

gold, so they say!" He gave a dry laugh.

The children looked oddly at each other.

"What's the matter?" the driver asked.

The children were silent for a moment. Then Naledi said quietly, "Our father worked in a mine and he got sick with the coughing sickness. He died there."

"*Awu! Awu!* That's bad!" the driver shook his head.

The children watched out for the mine dumps. When their father was alive he used to come home once a year. He would tell them about the great dark holes and passages under the earth.

"But Rra, why do you go away for so long?" they remembered asking him.

"To get money so you can eat, my children."

Nor could they forget his last visit. The terrible coughing in the night and Nono's soft worried voice.

Now these mountains of sand had taken their father for ever. Naledi put her arms round Tiro.

The countryside disappeared and soon buildings seemed to follow buildings without end.

"This must be Jo'burg!" exclaimed Naledi, as the lorry raced along a great wide road towards tall

shapes which speared up into the sky. There was noise, smoke and a horrid smell coming from the traffic. So many cars, so many people!

"How shall we find Mma?" Tiro whispered.

"We'll find her somehow," Naledi comforted.

The lorry began to slow down. The buildings now seemed to be crowding in on them. Naledi and Tiro sat tightly together, trying not to feel frightened.

Finally the lorry shuddered to a complete stop and the driver came round to the back.

"This is where I unload. I would like to take you safely to your mother, but my time here is too short. Wait here while I find the right bus for you."

"But we…" Tiro began, but the driver had already disappeared into the crowd. He was back soon.

"There's a bus stop just round the corner for Parktown. Come, I'll show you."

"But we don't have money for the bus, so we have to walk," Tiro now managed to tell the driver.

"What children! You've got a lot of guts, but you know nothing about Jo'burg. It's dangerous! You can't walk here on your own. Here, take this!"

He pushed a few coins into Naledi's hand and before the children had finished thanking him,

he began to steer them through the crowd.

At the bus stop he explained how they must say where they were going and ask where to get off the bus.

"You don't need to wait with us here, Rra. We'll be all right now," Naledi assured the driver.

He didn't seem happy about leaving them on their own, but Naledi insisted they could manage. It would be too bad if he got into trouble. The children thanked him again and they made their farewells, before he was swallowed up once more amongst the city people.



Chapter Six

A NEW FRIEND

AS THEY TURNED towards the road, there was a bus with the word 'PARKTOWN' in big letters on the front. It was slowing down a little way up the road and the doors were opening. Through the front windscreen they could see the driver was black.

"Come on, Tiro!" called Naledi, pulling him by the arm. They were just about to jump aboard, when someone shouted at them in English, "What's wrong with you? Are you stupid?"

Startled, they looked up at the angry face of the bus driver and then at the bus again. White faces stared at them from inside as the bus moved off.

Naledi and Tiro stood on the side of the road,

shaken, holding hands tightly, when a voice behind them said, "Don't let it bother you. That's what they're like. You'd better come out of the road."

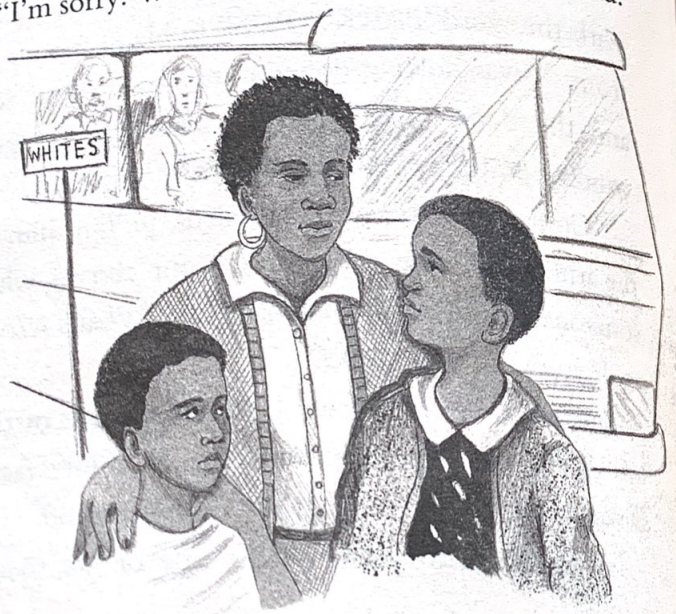
A young woman put out her hand to bring them on to the pavement.

"You must be strangers here if you don't know about the buses. This stop has a white sign, but we have to wait by the black one over there."

She pointed to a small black metal signpost.

"You must also look at the front of the bus for the small notice saying 'Non-whites only'."

"I'm sorry. We forgot to look," Naledi explained.



"It's not you who should be sorry!" said the young woman forcefully. "They should be sorry, those stupid people! Why shouldn't we use any bus? When our buses are full, their buses are half empty. Don't you be sorry!"

The children glanced at each other. This person was different from their mother. Mma never spoke out like that.

Naledi took out the letter and when the young woman looked at the address, she exclaimed, "But this is near where my mother works. I'm on my way to visit her today, so I can show you the place."

"Thank you, Mma,"[1] the children smiled. Lucky again.

"By the way, I'm Grace Mbatha. Now, who are you both, and where are you from? You speak Tswana the way my mother does. Maybe you live near my mother's people."

So, once again, the children began their story.

Luckily the bus wasn't full when it arrived. Grace had warned them that in the rush hour you were almost squeezed to death. As the bus trundled along, stopping and starting with the traffic, there was a chance to stare out of the windows. Tiro thought the

[1] "mother" in Tswana. The children are being polite to an older person

cyclists were very brave, riding in between all the cars. Naledi kept trying to see the tops of the tall buildings, twisting her neck round until it began to hurt.

The bus now heaved its way up a steep hill and soon they were leaving the city buildings, seeing the sky again, as well as trees, grass lawns and flowers either side of the road. Behind the trees were big houses, such as they had never seen before. Grace smiled at the way the children were staring as if amazed.

"Don't you know the people in this place have a lot of money? My mother looks after two children in a very big house and there is another person just to cook and another person to look after the garden."

Naledi and Tiro listened with interest. Mma never liked to talk much to them about her work when she was at home, although once they had overheard Mma talking to Nono about the child whom she looked after. Mma had said "The little girl is very rude. She thinks I belong to her mother. You should hear how she can shout at me."

Naledi wanted to ask Grace to tell them some more, but she was still a little shy, and soon they had reached their stop.

They stepped off the bus on to a wide pavement along a street lined with great leafy trees.

"That's the road where your mother works, at number twenty-five. My Mma works at number seventeen in the next road down there. Can you manage now?"

The children nodded, and then Grace added, "If you need somewhere to stay tonight, you can come back with me to Soweto. I'm going home at six o'clock, OK?"

Tiro and Naledi thanked Grace, although they were a little puzzled about needing somewhere to stay. After all, they would be with their mother now and they would be going home with her as quickly as possible, back to Dineo.

As they turned to go down the road, they suddenly felt very excited – and anxious too. So much had been happening that they hadn't been thinking all along of their little sister.

"Please let her be all right," now pounded in Naledi's brain.

Half-walking, half-running, they made for number twenty-five.