

## *Chapter Two*

## THE ROAD

THE CHILDREN WALKED quickly away from the village. The road was really just a track made by car tyres. Two lines of dusty red earth leading out across the flat dry grassland.

Once at the big tar road, they turned in the direction of the early morning sun, for that was the way to Johannesburg. The steel railway line glinted alongside the road.

"If only we had some money to buy tickets for the train. We don't have even one cent." Tiro sighed.

"Never mind. We'll get there somehow!" Naledi was still confident as they set off eastwards.

The tar road burnt their feet.

"Let's walk at the side," Tiro suggested.

The grass was dry and scratchy, but they were used to it. Now and again, a car or a truck roared by, and then the road was quiet again and they were alone. Naledi began to sing the words of her favourite tune and Tiro was soon joining in.

On they walked.

"Can't we stop and eat?" Tiro was beginning to feel sharp stabs of hunger. But Naledi wanted to go on until they reached the top of the long, low hill ahead.

Their legs slowed down as they began the walk uphill, their bodies feeling heavy. At last they came to the top and flopped down to rest.

Hungrily they ate their sweet potatoes and drank the water. The air was hot and still. Some birds skimmed lightly across the sky as they gazed down at the long road ahead. It stretched into the distance, between fenced-off fields and dry grass, up to another far-off hill.

"Come on! We must get on," Naledi insisted, pulling herself up quickly.

She could tell that Tiro was already tired, but they

couldn't afford to stop for long. The sun had already passed its midday position and they didn't seem to have travelled very far.

On they walked, steadily, singing to break the silence.

But in the middle of the afternoon, when the road led into a small town, they stopped singing and began to walk a little faster. They were afraid a policeman might stop them because they were strangers.

Policemen were dangerous. Even in their village they knew that...

The older children at school had made up a song:

*"Beware that policeman,*
*He'll want to see your 'pass'*[1]*,*
*He'll say it's not in order,*
*That day may be your last!"*

Grown-ups were always talking about this "pass". If you wanted to visit some place, the "pass" must allow it. If you wanted to change your job, the "pass" must allow it. It seemed everyone in school knew somebody who had been in trouble over the "pass".

Naledi and Tiro remembered all too clearly the

[1] Every black South African over sixteen years had to carry a "passbook" at all times. It named the place where that person had to live and work

terrible stories their uncle had told them about a prison farm. One day he had left his "pass" at home and a policeman had stopped him. That was how he got sent to the prison farm.

So, without even speaking, Naledi and Tiro knew the fear in the other's heart as they walked through the strange town. They longed to look in some of the shop windows, but they did not dare stop. Nervously, they hurried along the main street, until they had left the last house of the town behind them.