

## The package

It came by special delivery addressed to Miss Lucy Jones. It was wrapped in brown paper, torn in places revealing the bubble pack protecting the “fragile “rectangular package the size of a couple of bricks. Mrs Jones carefully put it away in Lucy’s bedroom.

“I want to visit Aunt Louise in South Africa during my gap year “she announced one Sunday morning at the breakfast table.

“Isn’t that a bit too adventurous dear “came from her dad without looking up from the newspaper, his specs hanging precariously on the tip of his nose.

“I agree darling “her mother added placing a plate of scrambled egg and toast on the table for Lucy. “You start university in September and need to get ready for that. Besides Aunt Louise plans to visit her favourite goddaughter for Christmas this year. We can all see her then.”

A week later her bags were packed, and dad was driving her to the airport.

“We shall be landing in Johannesburg shortly. Please fasten your seatbelts. The ground temperature is 39C with north westerly breeze.” The captain recited his ritual in his monotonous voice.

Aunt Louise lived in a small village near the township of Soweto. Lucy quickly went through security and picked up her bags.

She scoured the many faces waving excitedly not able to contain their excitement and running with delight towards their family or friends. Many wore traditional brightly coloured clothes to match their mood and show their respect. Lucy felt uplifted after the long tiring journey.

Then she saw her. She blinked! Where was the sprightly woman, she remembered from 10 years ago. An elderly woman with a walking stick walked slowly towards her. It took a few seconds for her brain to register all this. Lucy quickened her step towards her. As she drew closer, she saw the unmistakable kind eyes and the smile that lit up her face and all her doubts vanished. Aunt Lucy gave Lucy a big hug and soon they were chatting, and it was old times again.

They were driven by Joseph the school caretaker’s son who picked up her cases and opened the car door much to her amusement!

Now don’t expect a five-star hotel dear she explained. I still live a simple life in a basic house. I’m afraid there is no TV or internet. And before you ask there is an indoor toilet and running water” she smiled.

Aunt Louise had come here 50 years back. She had dedicated her life to the village, started a school for girls and young women who wanted a better life. It wasn't easy but she was a determined woman and quickly connected with the locals. Her compassionate nature and empathy were soon recognised and enabled her to get funding for her dreams to materialise. It was at one of these charity events that she met Isaac. He was a match for her in every way, another rare selfless good human being. They had been married and spent all their lives dedicated to their ambitions.

Sadly, she lost Isaac 10 years back. He had succumbed to cancer and died in Johannesburg where he was being treated with Aunt Louise at his bedside. She moved closer to the school.

They were not blessed with children. Lucy was her only niece. When Lucy was younger, they used to visit them every summer but that had petered out as she grew older. She loved it here and always left tearful when the holiday ended. Now Lucy wanted to reignite those magical days. This was the first visit on her own.

Lucy woke up to lively music. The school children who had been up earlier were having their morning break. The classes were under a tree the foliage providing shade from the hot sun with a rug to sit on. One child started the song, and the others spontaneously joined in swaying and singing from their hearts. The lyrics were funny emotional and sad at times. They used tins old kitchen utensils and sticks as instruments. Lucy had not heard anything more beautiful. Aunt Louise said that they sang these songs all the time. Lucy had tears in her eyes. Life was so cruel. Most of the families were farmers and very poor. After paying an extortion to the landowners they were left with very little to feed their families.

Aunt Louise did not charge anything for the school. After the funding ran low, she used her own money.

Lucy was keen to visit the Mandela Museum and then the house where Nelson Mandela lived. She wanted to make her own way, but Aunt Louise insisted that Joseph would drive her there. "Sadly, it is still not entirely safe for a white woman to be walking alone I'm afraid". He too was a student and studying Business in Johannesburg after he was awarded a scholarship and helped his family at harvest time and during holidays.

On the last night Lucy was treated to a lively Zulu dance around a fire with the elders waving incense and spears, the ancestral spirits warding away evil, and blessings bestowed on her. Here her aunt was treated like a goddess.

Lucy left Soweto with a heavy heart. Her Aunt looked so tired and frail.

She spent the next few months traveling to Cape Town and Pretoria.

Her gap year was nearly over. The last stop was a week in India to see Mother Teresa's orphanage.

It was while she was here that she was given the devastating news. Aunt Louise had passed away peacefully in her sleep.

Numb with sadness Lucy sat quietly in the car with her dad.

She rushed in to give her Mum a hug. The silence said it all.

“There is something for you from South Africa” she said later handing Lucy the package.

Lucy carefully unwrapped it.

The box had butterflies and birds painted on it. It was an African urn.

Aunt Louise had come home.