

Mr Lodewyk Prinsloo, a clerk-in-charge in the employ of the South African Railways and Harbours, had risen to his present position from humble beginnings, and now owned a comfortable and unpretentious house at 14 Kensington Road, Claremont, Cape. The Prinsloos were a respectable and conventional couple, and the sitting-room was furnished with an old-fashioned sofa and armchairs, while on the walls were colour photographs of his parents and his wife's parents, of their own wedding, and their three children. The photographs portrayed his parents and hers as unsophisticated and worthy. There were also two pictures, of a mountain and lake that could well have been in Norway, except that there was some kind of balustraded terrace at the water's edge which looked as though it belonged to the Mediterranean rather than to the cold north, and this conclusion was strengthened by the presence in each picture of two beautiful women in diaphanous robes such as could only have been worn in the warm south. The two women were up early, for the sun had not yet appeared over the mountain, although its rising was clearly imminent.

It was Mr Prinsloo's day off, and he was reading the newspaper in his sitting-room, when his wife announced that two gentlemen wished to see him. She looked apprehensive and examined his face to see if she could find some clue as to the identity and business of the callers. When she brought them in, he understood her apprehensiveness at once. He could see that they were men of tremendous authority. He had never read Kafka, but if he had he would have recognized them. They wore black suits, and did not smile when they greeted him, or offer to shake hands. One of them said to Mrs Prinsloo, *Mevrou*, you must excuse us, we wish to speak privately to your husband, and she left the room more apprehensive than ever.

Mr Prinsloo was used to inspectors. The Railways and Harbours employed many kinds of them. They inspected passengers' tickets, buildings, railway lines, railway offices, docks, tugs, public conveniences, bridges, and by their inspections kept the great organization, so to speak, on the move. The inspectoral body exhibited a wide range of characteristics and temperaments — some inspectors were morose, some fussy, some authoritarian, some jolly and not to be feared at all. But Mr Prinsloo knew intuitively that his visitors were men of awesome power, and he was filled with fear, not a general fear but a particular one, the one that he had lived with all his life.

He did not ask his visitors to sit down. It was they who sat themselves down, and then intimated that he should be seated. The first inspector opened the conversation.

—Mr Prinsloo, let us begin our business. You are Lodewyk Hofmeyr Prinsloo, are you not?

—Yes, inspector.

—And you were born on the second day of February 1914 in the city of Cape Town?

—Yes, inspector.

—You married Petronella Margaretha van Vollenstein on the sixth day of June 1942 in the city of Cape Town?

—Yes, inspector.

—Mr Prinsloo, how do you explain the fact that on your birth certificate you are classified as coloured, but on your marriage certificate as white?

It is not easy for a man to answer questions when he is filled with terror, but Mr Prinsloo knew that his terror counted for nothing with the two inspectors.

— I put myself down as white, *meneer*. My whole family passed for white. My father was a white man, and my mother was a coloured woman, but she was as white as my father. That is their picture there, inspectors.

— Mr Prinsloo, we do not have anything to do with racial classification. I am from the Department of Labour, and it is my duty to inform you that as a coloured man you are not allowed to hold the position of clerk-in-charge in the Railways and Harbour Administration.

— You mean? You mean ...

— Yes, you are discharged as from today, but the Administration will not only honour its debt in regard to holiday leave, but will also give you an additional three months on full pay.

— Mr Prinsloo, I am an inspector charged with the administration of the Group Areas Act, and it is my duty to inform you that you will no longer be able to live in Claremont. This is an expropriation order signed by the chairman of the Board and you will be paid an amount to be determined by the Board. The Board will allow you three months to find a property that you can buy or rent in any area designated as a group area for coloured people.

Mr Prinsloo had given up all attempts to keep up any kind of appearances. He sat on the old-fashioned sofa with his head between his hands. The second inspector was moved to some kind of pity for him, the kind of pity that one might feel for someone who has been dealt with so pitilessly.

— There is one more thing that you must face, Mr Prinsloo. Let me tell you at once that your marriage will not be affected. It took place in 1942 and at that time such a marriage was legal. But your children will be affected. They cannot any longer attend any school designated for white children. However, I am

informed by the Cape Department of Education that your children need not be moved from their present
60 schools until you have found a property that you can rent or purchase, and that of course you must do
within three months from today.

— But my job? That is finished?

— Yes. You are discharged as from today. Have you any private belongings in your office?

— No.

65 — Then we shall go. Do not trouble. We can find our way.

They had hardly gone before his wife was at his side. He lifted his head from between his hands and
looked at her with some kind of inexpressible grief.

— Lodewyk, what did they want?

He wiped the tears from his eyes, but was not yet able to answer her.

70 — Lodewyk, I am asking you, what did they want?

— They ... well ... they came ...

— Yes, why did they come?

— They came, Petronella, to bring bad news.

— Bad news? Bad news what about? Your job, Lodewyk?

75 — Yes, my job.

— You've lost it?

— Yes. I am discharged. From today.

— Why are you discharged?

And when he did not answer her, she said,

80 — Have you stolen money?

— No, I have not stolen money.

— Then why? For God's sake, speak, Lodewyk. I am your wife. I have a right to know.

— They say, Petronella, they say, they say, I am a coloured man.

She shrank from him. She too was filled with fear.

85 — Lodewyk, are you a coloured man?

— I was born coloured. They have examined my birth certificate. But I've always gone as white. My whole
family went as white.

— But you were born coloured?

— Yes.

90 — And you married me knowing that you were coloured?

— Yes. I mean, I knew I was born coloured.

— How could you do such a thing?

— I loved you, Petronella.

She gave a wild, hysterical laugh that he had never heard in all their sixteen years of married life. Her face
95 was contorted with anger, not anger at the black-suited inspectors, or at the cruelty of such laws, but at the
man who had deceived her sixteen years before, and who today had destroyed the security and
respectability of her life.

— You'd better go out, Lodewyk. Because you won't like the packing. Go up to Kirstenbosch and look at the
flowers that bring you such peace. I never want to see you again. I never want the children to see you
100 again. You can come back at five. We'll be gone.

When Mr Prinsloo came back from Kirstenbosch they had gone. The house was empty. It had been
emptied just as had his life, of his wife and his children and his job and what, for better or for worse, he
had regarded as his happiness. In twenty 5 minutes, less maybe, the two black-suited men had
destroyed his world. The colour photographs of his three children, and of his wife's parents, had been
105 taken away. The wedding photograph had been slashed to pieces, and these were strewn over the floor.
There was only one photograph remaining on the walls, and that was of his own father and mother, of
the white man who had married a coloured woman, and whose children had all passed as white, until
today.

The coloured woman who worked for him came to him full of perturbation. Meneer, what's happened? Why
110 have they all gone?

Why should she not be told? Was he any better than she? Was he not returning to her and her people?

— Maria, they've gone because I've lost my job. I've lost this house too. It's because I'm a coloured
man.

— Those two men?

115 — Yes.

Meneer, I knew they were bringing evil.

She broke out with sudden vehemence, she, the docile, patient Maria.

— May God strike them down! May God strike them all down, meneer. They are wicked men. Didn't
they make us, meneer? And this is what they do to their own children. May God strike them down!