

## Prologue

### October 1953 - Rethabiseng, Pretoria, South Africa

Irene du Plessis heard shouting coming from her husband's office at the other side of the house. She reluctantly got up from her faded chintz armchair, where she had been sipping an iced tea and reading the latest issue of *Vogue*. The latest being June 1953 and was sent by her younger cousin Louise, who had emigrated to America. It took several months for the magazine to arrive by boat. Every parcel Louise sent also contained a letter telling Irene she should emigrate too. This issue was all about Queen Elizabeth II's Coronation and Irene was transfixed by all the stunning clothes and jewels. She read the magazine for times like this, when she felt fed up and depressed at the lack of luxury living in a backwater.

Leaving the parlour, Irene walked down the cool, dark corridor, past her daughter's playroom, from which she could hear voices.

"Damn, why is that kaffir child always with my Marta?" she murmured to herself. Normally she would have gone into the room to tell Sarah to go back to the servants' block but she wanted to find out what this noise was with Marnix.

Sarah, named after Marnix's mother, who had died a week before the child was born, was the daughter of their housekeeper-cook Lulama and a year younger than Marta. The two girls provided each other with friendship. Irene would have preferred her daughter to befriend the girls from the wealthy white family at the neighbouring farm who came to visit their grandparents for weekends and holidays.

By the time she reached the office doorway, the noise had quietened to a loud conversation. She stood outside, listening to a voice she vaguely recognised as Lulama's brother's. He was trying to sell her husband what he said was a special diamond. Irene tried to squint through the crack in the door to see this 'diamond' but the candlelight was bad and all she could see was what seemed to be an ugly glassy stone sitting on the desk, on top of an old paper bag.

She heard Marnix firmly and angrily say no and order the man to leave. As he did so, his footsteps falling heavily on the stone floor, Irene jumped back into the shadows. The man opened the door, slamming it shut as he walked away towards the servants' block, no doubt to take his anger out on his sister.

Irene opened the door and entered to see her husband squinting over his accounts. "What was that about?"

"He said that he had a diamond that was the other half of the Cullinan," Marnix sighed.

Irene's heart jumped. She remembered, just before the war, her grandmother telling her stories which had at the time resurfaced, about this 'other half' of the world's largest diamond, found not far from their home in Pretoria. The old lady had said cynically that ever since the diamond's discovery in 1905 there had always been stories of the mythological other half: one that it was with the old Magato tribe in Zoutpansberg in the north of the country; another of a well-known criminal tricking a native who had found the missing diamond into selling it for what turned out to be a bag of fake money. When Irene asked if there really was a second half, her grandmother had laughed, saying that finding the other half of the Cullinan was as likely as finding a pot of gold at the end of a rainbow. Irene had been so disappointed then and she felt

disappointed now, that her husband had dismissed this man. Perhaps it was the real thing and this was the luck Irene had been hoping for. She had given up praying. Her life was not meant to be like this. Why should they have so little money and her daughter have no chances compared to the English family next door? Her husband had always let her down and now he was about to do it again. With a sudden anger inside her, she left him without a word and made her way to Lulama's room to speak to the brother.

"Lulama, where is your brother?"

Her maid was sitting on edge of the narrow bed, looking very vexed.

"He has left, Mrs du Plessis. He was upset and said that he had to sell to your husband something as a bad man was after what he had and he wasn't safe to keep it."

"To keep what?" Irene feigned ignorance.

"A strange stone. He thinks it is worth some money. It must be if someone else wants it that bad. He said something about a famous royal diamond. But I don't know; he has always made up stories."

"Did he take it with him, Lulama? I don't want dangerous people coming here looking for it." Irene's heart was beating fast.

"He left it with me for safekeeping. Said he'd come back in a couple of days when he had found a buyer. He didn't want to carry it around with him as it is quite big to hide on his person."

"Well if Mr du Plessis thinks it is nothing then perhaps you should get rid of it. Throw it in one of the fields. I'll take it now and do it, as you must go to make dinner. The sooner it is out of the house, the better."

"I don't know, Mrs du Plessis. He said that he would be back to get it in a couple of days."

"I am sure it is nothing, Lula," Irene spoke unusually kindly, trying to placate her upset maid. "Why would he have such an important stone? It would be with diamond dealers if it really was a diamond. He won't be back. He was illegally trying to sell false goods to Mr du Plessis."

Lulama nodded and got up off her bed, lifted the old thin mattress, and handed over the brown paper bag with the rock inside.

Irene took it from her and walked towards the door. "Now hurry with dinner. Mr du Plessis will be hungry and I want Marta to go to bed before too long." She reached the door and without turning around said, "And Lulama, please remind your daughter to stay in the servants' quarters."

In her bedroom, Irene sat at her dressing table and took the rock out of the bag. It was fairly heavy - she guessed around two pounds in weight. It didn't look to her like a diamond, which she'd thought were bold, beautiful and bright, but even she could see it was not just any old rock from the fields; it had two coarse sides and then a third side that was sharp and straight; virtually gleaming, though not as she imagined a diamond would gleam.

She had little experience of diamonds. Her engagement ring was just a small opal that had been Marnix's mother's. She should have known then that he wasn't the right man for her. She had travelled to Johannesburg and seen the stores selling sparkling diamond jewellery and of course she had seen the pictures in her copy of *Vogue* of the British Crown Jewels. The huge diamond in the Crown itself didn't look at all like this ugly thing and it definitely was from the original Cullinan Diamond.

She put the rock in the back of the table's deep drawer and returned to her soft chair to carry on

reading. She particularly wanted to finish re-reading the bit about the Crown Jewels now that she might have the missing part hidden in her drawer. However, she couldn't stop wondering what she would do if the rock really was a diamond, and the Cullinan's other half at that. How would she sell it without causing a big furore? She smiled to herself as she thought that she would be able to buy everything in the magazine. She would move to America to live, as Louise had so often suggested. She and Marta would have the life that was rightfully theirs. Irene thought then that she would persuade Marnix to go to Pretoria the next day so she could go to look in the National Library about diamonds, especially this famous Cullinan one.

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Two days later, having done some research and realised that there was every possibility that the rock in her dressing table drawer really was a diamond; though of course no idea if it was the sister of the Cullinan, Irene was already making plans to leave and go to New York City. She had spoken to her husband, without mentioning the rock, and showed him the letter from Louise. She implored him to sell the farm and start a new life for the sake of their only daughter. Marnix laughed at her and said she was mad, that she should start helping him with the farm instead of drinking tea and reading silly magazines which only put ideas into her head. However, Irene had survived 32 years of living in a way that she knew she was not meant to. Why should she not have the life of those women in *Vogue* with beautiful clothes and shoes? She had given up helping on the farm years ago but still her hands looked like maid's hands. It was too much. Just as she thought she might cry, she pulled herself together and decided that she would leave Marnix and the farm. Take her daughter and diamond and start again in New York City with a new name and a new life. She would send Louise a telegram to wire her some money. She could pay her back tenfold with the sale of her lucky charm. For that is what she felt it was.

Once she received the money from Louise, she would give Lulama what she was sure was more than enough for her brother.

She was just about to go to her writing desk to start making plans when she heard a deafening gunshot, followed by screaming, coming from the direction of the kitchen. She ran to find Lulama on the stone floor, blood pouring out of her head. Little Sarah was screaming and crying while shaking her mother. Marta was standing at the door to the kitchen, staring dumbfounded.

"What has happened? Who did this?" cried Marnix who pushed past Irene as she stood holding onto her daughter.

Marta now spoke in such a gentle voice you could hardly hear it, "We were on our way to the kitchen to get some lemonade when we heard Sarah's uncle shouting and then we came in and saw him fire the gun at Lulu."

"What was the shouting about? Why did he kill her?"

"He was shouting something about a diamond." Sarah sobbed, looking at her mother.

**December 2010 – London**

Jemima was waiting on the ground floor of Vogel House for the lift which would take her five floors up to the press office. As per usual it was taking forever. She pulled her BlackBerry out of her black Christian Dior bag and began tapping away frantically. She wanted to finish the email that she had started on the bus on her way into work.

*<<So basically, after much begging, I went down on him. After all, he had made the most delicious scrambled eggs and smoked salmon and I had managed to avoid doing it since we got back together. But it was awful. I was so hungover and I had to be in the office in an hour and just as I was moving up his very long but not very toned torso, Fritz said...>>*

The lift doors clunked open. Fortunately it was empty so she stepped straight in but just as the doors were closing, they jolted back open with such a force and noise that she jumped, dropping her phone. Before she'd had a chance to retrieve it she was joined by three other members of staff squeezing in around her.

"Oh, I am sorry, I don't think that there's enough room," she said, looking down at her phone which was about to be trodden on and hoping that the lack of room in the tiny lift would deter them. She was also worried that her breath might smell of the glass of wine she'd had at lunch at Ceconni's.

"That's OK. We'll breathe in!" joked one of the girls, putting Jemima's urgent email to her flatmate Flora on pause once more. They were squashed in like sardines for the ride up in what Jemima was sure was the slowest lift in Mayfair, if not London.

Once they had shuffled out at the third floor, she picked up her phone, which she saw had a couple of missed calls from an unknown number. When she finally arrived at the fifth floor, Jemima made her way to her desk. Throwing her heavy bag on the floor, her BlackBerry still in her hands, she slung her grandmother's mink on the back of the chair, kicked off her beautiful black Nicholas Kirkwood heels, which she still hadn't paid off on her credit card, and sat down to continue. Just as she was getting to the punchline of her email, the phone rang on her direct line. It was Mr V.

"Hi Mr V... sorry ... yes, I'll pop down now," she said, tapping as fast as she could:

*<<"Was intending not to drink this week, but I've got a date tomorrow night." Can you believe he said that!?!>>*

Jemima put the phone down on her desk, retrieved her heels and, telling her assistant Zoe where she was going, started to walk back out of the office again, wishing that she had not had that drink with Ariana, the jewellery editor of *Tatler*. Hair of the dog only made her more exhausted and irritable.

"Oh yes, Mr V did call a few times, as did Anna – sorry, I forgot to tell you..." drawled Zoe, very unapologetically, looking at her Facebook page. Jemima only just managed to ignore her and, taking a deep breath, walked towards the lift. She would not let Zoe annoy her today.

Jemima Fox-Pearl was Global Head of Communications at Vogel; one of the most exclusive jewellers in the world. Mr V was Sidney Vogel, the eponymous founder of the firm, who had begun his life living behind his father's barber's shop in Liverpool, as a child sweeping up the hair that his father cut

from the seamen who worked in the docks. He now spent his life, when not flying around the world in his private jet, buying beautiful diamonds and precious stones to create even more beautiful pieces of jewellery.

The Vogel global headquarters were housed in a large townhouse, at 22 Arlington Street, behind the Ritz hotel and overlooking Green Park. It had once been home to a Prime Minister, something which Jemima always imagined Mr V quite liked. The press office was on the top floor, which in the prime minister's day would have been the maids' attics, and was very low and poky. As you descended the floors, however, they became increasingly large and luxurious, with expensive pieces of art adorning the high walls. Mr V's private office was in what would have been the drawing room on the first floor and overlooked the rose beds between the building and Green Park. The Vogel store was on the ground floor next to the reception with a separate entrance from the street. They were in the process of buying another bigger store on the corner of Piccadilly and Bond Street.

*Damn, I should have locked my BlackBerry, she thought whilst waiting for the lift, I bet Zoe will look at what I am doing and I definitely do not want her seeing that email to Flora.*

Zoe Weinberg was an American Park Avenue Princess. Jemima had been so nice to her; too nice probably, when she arrived, and now the former intern was clearly out for her job. Jemima hoped she would not get her way. Mr V had once said he thought Zoe was quite stupid, although he had only met her twice, which was music to Jemima's ears. Nevertheless, there was something about Zoe, which Jemima knew needed to be nipped in the bud. If she was honest it also infuriated Jemima that not only were all her friends engaged, if not already married, but so was her 24-year-old assistant, who loved to show off her Vogel ring which was bought in Manhattan from the store on Fifth Avenue.

Also part of the press office was Noémie Rousseau who was out of the office that day at a fashion shoot. Noémie was a beautiful French woman who had been working for Vogel for some six years. She was part time and only came in to deal with magazine shoots, being normally very occupied with her three beautiful blonde sons.

Flora Fairfax, who Jemima had still not finished the email to, was one of her best friends, her flatmate, and going out with Benjy Pocock – brother of Jemima's on-off boyfriend Fritz. Flora often giggled in delight when hearing of Jemima's rail crash of a love life, now that she had such a stable life of her own.

Fritz, although very good-looking, was very stupid. He desperately wanted to get into finance to prove something to his father but as well as being stupid he was much too lazy to do so. Despite this, Jemima had been happy enough to re-ignite their relationship, but what he'd said that morning had put paid to her dreams of a double wedding with Flora.

Standing waiting for the lift once again, Jemima could feel herself getting more and more worked up at both Zoe's attitude and what Fritz had said to her earlier.

*I just cannot believe he said that to me.* Once inside, she looked at her reflection in the lift's mirror as she started the slow descent. *I know what Flora will say – I shouldn't have jumped back into bed with him so quickly - but after all the drinks he poured into me I didn't even know I had until I woke up the next day... urgh, I must stop this, harden up and move on. He will only continue to hurt me.*

She looked closely at herself, thinking that despite the late night and horrid morning she didn't look so bad that she should be single at her age. She was tall and slim with golden highlights in her shoulder-length hair which she always wore swept up off her fairly pretty face. She wasn't perfect but she wasn't completely imperfect and she was determined to get a Vogel rock on her finger before too long.

The lift arrived at the first floor with a jolt and the noisy doors slammed open, bringing her back to her senses. Jemima crossed the heavily-piled carpet, passing a couple of Picassos, and knocked on Sidney Vogel's door. This was his new office, just refurbished from being a private client salon, and she had not as yet been inside.

The door was opened by Anna Smith, Mr V's PA. Anna was a pretty, petite but neurotic woman in her mid-40s with bobbed brunette hair à la Anna Wintour, her heroine and the Editor-in-Chief of *American Vogue*.

"He's not happy, Jemima, he's been calling your office for hours," she whispered accusingly.

"Zoe didn't mention anything, until I said I was coming down just now. Why didn't you call my mobile? What does he want?" Jemima replied nervously, realising that the missed calls must have been from them. She sometimes forgot that 'Unknown' numbers were more often than not from a Vogel line and not just the bank chasing her for an unpaid credit card bill.

Butterflies playing havoc in her tummy, Jemima wished again that she hadn't had that glass of wine earlier.

"Sit down, I'll be with you shortly," came an eerily calm voice from somewhere Jemima couldn't tell. Other than a huge beautifully polished David Linley oak table, an Apple MacBook, a pretty sparse sideboard, and four huge pieces of what some people might call art on each of the walls, there was nothing else in the room. There was the outside of course; huge French windows looked out over beautiful rose beds to Green Park, but it was raining and she could not imagine Mr V was out there. Anyway, due to the noise of the rain and density of the bullet-proof security glass, no outside voice would be heard.

Jemima sat down on one of the two chairs on the opposite side of the table to the laptop and looked about her. She had never seen such orderliness. The sideboard, also oak, had a candle burning and a selection of colour-coordinated invitations leant against the wall. The candle gave off quite a pungent smell and she recognised that it was the same as those in the boutique. Slightly heady. Tempting. *Diamond-buying-tempting*.

The artworks were definitely of a certain taste. One looked like a giant KitKat wrapper, only omitting the words 'KitKat'. Red and silver foil taking up some three square metres of wall space above the sideboard. On another wall, what could be described as a *trompe d'oeil* was an exact replica of the French windows opposite but rather than reflecting the park outside, the 'view' was of a desert island amidst a sea made from sparkling gems and a shark nose-down in the crystal-simulated sand. It reminded her of the world famous diamond-encrusted shark which was in the Vogel reception – fitting for a company which boasted several sharks amongst its employees. It had been in Mr V's previous office and always reminded her to keep cautious. There was a huge portrait of the man himself by Lucian Freud – more to her liking - and one of Andy Warhol's famous silk screens of Marilyn Monroe. Suddenly, part of the wall opened and Mr V appeared. He was a fairly tall, slim man with a shock of thick white hair and a faint hint of a Liverpudlian accent. Sidney Vogel was dressed more casually than normal, with a well-pressed white shirt tucked into a pair of stone-coloured Levi jeans. He smiled at her in his usual way and she felt immediately at ease, kicking herself for always thinking the worst. She

wondered why everyone appeared so in fear of him; Anna was like a rabbit in the headlights in his presence.

“Jemima,” he said slowly as he sat down and, opening a drawer by his waist, pulled out an auction house catalogue, “are you busy this evening?”

Although it was a Monday and she had woken with a hangover, Jemima had been intending to be busy as she was thinking of going over to Fritz’s again, putting to death any ideas of his Tuesday night date. But the more she thought about the way he had behaved that morning, the less keen she was on the idea and thought she would actually prefer a night on the sofa chatting with Flora or now, perhaps, a date with her boss?

“No... well, not really.”

Mr V raised an eyebrow and she immediately thought she had not given the right answer.

“I would like you to accompany me to an auction at Bothebie’s so perhaps you can rearrange whatever plans you may have had?”

The question appeared rhetorical.

“Of course, I am sorry. What time would you like me to be there?”

“We’ll leave from here at 7pm, so I will see you downstairs in the reception. I presume you have something to change into? The invitation says Lounge Suits.” He looked her up and down whilst pushing a white, embossed invitation across the table. Her outfit of skinny jeans, despite them being her friend’s luxury label MiH, with one of Fritz’s smaller Savile Row shirts which she had thrown on that morning at his flat, was clearly not up to a Bothebie’s *soirée*.

“Of course, I’ll pop home.” If she was quick she could fit in her blow-dry and really look the part at the auction. Mr V was now pushing the catalogue across the table, open at a page showing a huge rough diamond.

“Good. Now this is what I am interested in. It is a remarkable and mysterious diamond that has come onto the market officially as a rough diamond, although it has been worked on, in so much as it was part of a larger stone. However, it has never before been seen publically.”

“Yes, I have read about it; the Vanderpless Diamond. I read that it has the same gemmological origin as the Cullinan.”

“Ha!” Mr V laughed. “That probably came from Bothebie’s PR team trying to make it go for more. Have you been to an auction before?”

“It’s so interesting,” Jemima continued, “I love history and it is such a mystery, this old lady auctioning off a huge rough diamond. I wonder how she happened to have it? And no, I haven’t ever been to an auction but have been to several of the preview events at Bothebie’s.”

“Whatever the rumours, I am not that interested in the history of a stone – it is the future which is important. Now, by the time my driver gets us there the auction will be about to start. I will introduce you as my PR. Do not answer any questions, before or after. Smile and leave them to me. Just watch and learn.”

“OK. Thank you so much, Mr V. It sounds really exciting.”

“It is exciting but also very important that you, being my Head of PR, convey the correct image.” Thank goodness she had that Neville’s appointment. “Very well. Now run along and read up about the

gem if you like. It may, or may not, come in useful.”

Just before she opened the door he spoke again. “One more thing Jemima, where were you earlier when I was trying to find you?”

“At a PR lunch with the jewellery editor of *Harper’s Bazaar*.” Jemima hoped he’d not smelled the wine on her breath.

“I do not want you wasting your time or my money lunching with journalists. I employed you for more important reasons than sitting in Cecconi’s as you no doubt were.”

With that, she was dismissed. Goodness, what else would she do if she didn’t take journalists to lunch?

And more importantly, what should she wear later?