

H. B. KIMMEL

# Cherubim, and a Flaming Sword

I LOVE THE PUBLIC GARDENS in Cape Town and was strolling in there one Saturday morning when my attention was caught by a figure leaving the Public Library and walking down the steps.

Except for the fact that he was much fatter and no longer wore a school uniform he looked much the same as when last I had seen him many years before.

"Leibbrandt!" I called out, "aren't you Jan Leibbrandt?"

"Of course yes. Aren't you Sam Warner?" he replied coming round the fence.

"Of course."

"Hell, we were at school together."

He had been an Afrikaans-speaking boy but had attended an English-medium school and he spoke the language fluently.

"What are you doing these days?" I asked as we sat down on a bench.

"That's just it man, nothing — and you?"

"I'm a clerk. I always was keen on book-keeping."

"Man, I had to give up everything. My whole life's work. I had a store in the Transkei but I had to leave. Life was so unbearable."

"How sad! What are you going to do now?"

"That's just it. I am going to do political work."

I remembered now that at school he had always been good at debating and essay-writing.

"Tell me something about it."

"You see, I am what you might call a refugee from the Transkei. In many ways it is a black man's country and over there a white man cannot do what he likes. It's not like here."

"That is shameful!" I replied.

"Yes, now I hope to start up an office over here as the headquarters of a movement which will fight the system over there."

"Look, I must be going," he said suddenly as he rose to leave. "I'll see you some more."

"I'll look out for you," I replied, "and good luck!"

I USED TO GO to the Gardens nearly every Saturday morning after shopping in town but it was not until some weeks later that I again met Jan Leibbrandt as he was going up the Avenue towards the Gardens.

He seemed livelier and greeted me loudly as I caught up with him.

"How are you and how is the movement?" I asked.

"Man, terrific. We have our setbacks but things are generally improving. You must give me your address and we'll put you on our mailing-list."

"And how are you settling into South African life again?" I asked.

"Man, it's just O.K. Here a person can employ whom he likes. If one needs a servant there is no shortage. Here a white man can hold his head up high because he knows the country is his own. Over there he is not too sure."

"But while it is marvellous to live in a free country like South Africa, one must not forget one's brothers back home."

"Unfortunately, this government, here in South Africa, which actually created the Republic of the Transkei, have disregarded their responsibilities to the white people over there."

"There is even a defence agreement between South Africa and the Transkei."

"Isn't it shameful! Who knows when those South African arms might be used on the white population!"

"I hope something can be done," I remarked helplessly.

"I'm shortly going on a trip to a number of white countries overseas. People over there must be told how difficult it is for a white man living in the Transkei."

"Goodbye," I said as he turned off to go to the library, "give me the address of your office, and I'll look you up when you return."

ONE DAY, SOMETIME LATER, I was passing near the address he gave me. I was feeling depressed and thought I would go in.

"No, Jan has not come back yet," the secretary said in reply to my question.

"I'm glad to see the movement has an office," I observed.

"Yes, it's difficult. All the worthwhile causes are broke," she answered.

She was an efficient looking girl, sophisticated and a little unhappy.

"Are you a refugee from the Transkei yourself?" I asked.

"No, I'm afraid not. An old boy-friend of mine actually first aroused my interest in the plight of the whites there. He is a bit of a hero now. He had been arrested for beating up a kaffer but managed to escape. Imagine treating a white man like that!"

"What did you do before you took up this?"

"Oh a number of things. I was at university. I've worked in the Animal Welfare Society and in the office of the Nationalist Party. I've gone overseas. In between I've had a nervous break-down."

"Now I'm doing this. This has been the most worthwhile. I feel I am really doing good. It is not like an ordinary office job."

"Well, I'll be back some time to see whether Jan has arrived."

"Oh, you might as well know. He is back in Cape Town, after all."

"Really!"

"Yes. He's very much on his guard. All the refugees are scared of being kidnapped back to the Transkei."

"You can't be serious!"

"Oh yes. They could catch a white man they want and paint him black. As he wouldn't have a pass, the South African police would send him back. In any case, the South African Government cannot be trusted, for after all, they founded the Transkei."

I reflected on all this on the way home and thought how unaware one was of the amount of persecution and suffering in the world. How complacent we all were.

I FAILED TO RECEIVE any circulars from the office but a few weeks later Jan telephoned. They were rather short-staffed and wanted me to come to help address envelopes on Saturday morning. I agreed quite eagerly.

A number of people were busy working when I arrived at the office. Jan looked well and full of energy. Someone stood at the door, on the alert.

I asked Jan whether his trip had been encouraging.

"Man. I made a lot of contacts. I have been trying to find the right pressure groups to get their respective governments to act on the Transkei issue. I found a great deal of sympathy among people like the Empire

Loyalists in England and the John Birch Society in America.

"These organisations have promised me that if I formed a government in exile in Cape Town, they would recognise it whenever they won power."

"I have also been trying to organise a boycott of Transkei goods but everyone agrees it will be ineffective unless we can persuade the Transkei's main trading partner, that is, South Africa, to co-operate."

"That would be difficult," I replied, "but don't you think that a boycott would hurt most the very people whom it is intended to help, that is the white men with industries on the borders of the Transkei, and possibly the white people in the territory itself?"

"You know, that really is a silly argument. No cause has ever been won without sacrifice. Besides, when the blacks in the Transkei begin to feel the pinch economically, they will be more ready to work properly. At the moment these Bantu are better off than in any part of Africa and far too self-satisfied."

The others in the office had gone on intently with their work except for an occasional knowing smile. It was as if they had heard all these arguments before. I felt somewhat ashamed of myself. Except for the inevitable eccentric who went into political movements, they all seemed so dedicated.

"On Saturday night," Jan pointed out to me as we concluded our work, "we are having a party for Piet Fourie who has just arrived from the Transkei. I hope you can come. The idea is to raise funds and to attract people into the movement. Here is the address."

THAT NEXT SATURDAY NIGHT I had not intended going to the party but as I had quarrelled with my wife, I went off on my own.

The secretary from the office was at the door. She asked me for fifty cents and I went in. There were about thirty people there when I arrived and the number hardly seemed to rise above this throughout the evening. Most seemed despondent but the five or six who had actually been to the Transkei could be coaxed into talking about it and could command the most attention.

Piet Fourie was introduced. He wore a

suit and an open neck shirt as if he had worn his Sunday best to the beach and had decided to be comfortable. He had very curly hair and a flat nose.

He made a speech to the effect that we should hunt down Bantus in Cape Town who had come from the Transkei and beat them up.

It became obvious during the evening that a split was developing in the movement. There were those who believed in violence to achieve liberation and others who did not. I also learned that a government in exile had been formed but everyone did not approve of the cabinet.

I had promised to give one or two people a lift home but before we left, there was a row because someone had found another wearing a jacket that had apparently been produced in the Transkei.

"If our own people cannot observe the boycott, how can we expect others to do so!" he screamed.

DURING THE WEEKS that followed, I received circulars from the office but my wife persuaded me not to go to the meetings.

"Do not get mixed up in politics," she said.

One evening, however, I was coming home with her from some friends when we met the secretary coming out of a cinema with a friend. She remembered me.

"How is Jan Leibbrandt?" I asked.

"I suppose he's all right. He's broken away with Piet Fourie. They're starting a new outfit."

"A more militant one?" I asked.

"Yes. They plan to attack Kaffirs from the Transkei working here in Cape Town to induce the others back home to change their attitude to work."

"And the rest of you do not believe in this?"

"No. Hitting a cheeky Kaffir is one thing but I do not believe the time is ripe for political violence. All other means of coercion have not been exhausted. For example, I am still hoping for United Nations action on behalf of the whites in the Transkei."

On the way home my wife was furious.

"I told you to leave politics alone," she scolded.

I saw Jan Leibbrandt only once more. It

was late one afternoon during the week and he was hurrying down the Avenue. He looked over his shoulder once or twice. Perhaps he still feared being kidnapped. He seemed to try to avoid me.

"Hullo Jan, how are you?" I asked.

"All right," he said smiling as if he had just recognised me.

As he did not look friendly and seemed anxious to leave, I said goodbye. I thought he felt disappointed in me. Perhaps he felt I did not sympathise with his splinter-group or did not recognise his government.

AFTER THAT MEETING, whenever I asked after him, people seemed to be making excuses for him, others were evasive. Nobody offered any definite information.

Now Leibbrandt is a common South African name. My wife had an ailing uncle with that name, and it was through this fact that I learnt of Jan's death. We had gone on a month's holiday to the eastern Transvaal and when we arrived back we learned that the uncle had died. She felt we had to visit his grave. At the cemetery a workman directed us. "You will find a Leibbrandt buried in the last month down there," he said.

It turned out to be Jan's grave.

On the tombstone was the following engraving which my wife found enigmatic — "So He drove out the man and He placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubim, and a flaming sword."

The next day I managed to go to the office of the *Cape Argus* and asked for the back copies for the last month.

When I found the report it had this to say —

#### WHITE MAN BRUTALLY KILLED

*The body of Jan Leibbrandt, 34, farmer, was today found in the Bantu men's quarters, Langa, after an explosion. It is believed he was kidnapped and then murdered with an explosive device. The room in which he was found was used by men who had recently arrived from the Transkei and twenty-five have been arrested and charged in connection with the incident.*

*"We shall nip any terrorism in the bud," a police spokesman commented.*

When I told my wife what had happened, she persuaded me not to say anything. "Whose side are you on, anyway?" she asked.