

# The Elephant's Footprint

Joan Zawatzky



## Praise for the Scent of Oranges

*"The elegance of Joan Zawatzky's writing is a big part of what makes this story so memorable and delightful. Her words flowed right through me and led me into a story so full of life, nature and relationships. I never wanted it to end."*

Ashley Merril, Front Street Review

*"The Scent of Oranges by Joan Zawatzky is the first book I've read by this author but hope to read more. Right away I was transported to South Africa. I could picture everything that Linda saw as if I was her. Joan captures the essence of South Africa with the mystery and intrigue of murder."*

Cheryl's Book Nook

*"Zawatzky's style is wonderfully descriptive and I felt transported to South Africa through the pages of the book. I also loved learning more about South Africa and its people. The Scent of Oranges dynamically explores intense interpersonal relationships and I found it fascinating."*

Tara's View on Books.

*"The South African setting is beautifully recreated, with lovely descriptions of the landscape and people, and the author has written a thoughtful depiction of life under the terrible system of apartheid and its aftermath."*

Book Buzz

*"I think this novel will really appeal to people who like to sit and savour the writing and ...a mystery unfolding."*

Peeking Between the Pages

*"I was intrigued by the storyline and the uniqueness of the characters. It was fascinating to be taken to a new place, into a culture so different from anything I have known. I was just as curious as Linda, as she continued to push through dead ends and as she discovered astonishing things about her family. The ending did not disappoint."*

That Book Addiction

*"I really enjoyed this book. It was so sad, yet poignant. So many lives were ruined all because people judged others by the colour of their skin and not the type of person they were. It was an excellent read. It gave me plenty to think about. So buy it!"*

The Bluestocking Guide

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This novel, set in South Africa is a work of historical fiction. While the story is a product of the author's imagination, the backdrop to the novel is real. One of the venues of The 2010 FIFA World Soccer Cup was Rustenburg, a thriving town at the foothills of the Magaliesberg Mountains. While most of the characters in the book are fictional, reference is made to existing people and groups of people living in South Africa, such as the Rain Queen, the Tswanas and the San or Bushmen who are said to have inhabited the country for approximately 20 000 years, and whose treasured rock art bear testimony to their residence.

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## About the Author

Joan Zawatzky was born in South Africa. After completing her studies, first in art and then in psychology, she moved to Australia, where she worked for many years as a counselling psychologist. Though painting remained a hobby, she decided to try her hand at writing. She wrote *There's a Light at the End of the Tunnel*, to help her clients overcome depression. *The Scent of Oranges*, her first novel, is set in South Africa and was shortlisted for the Australian Books Alive Programme in 2007. Recently she began writing full-time. *The Elephant's Footprint* is her latest novel, and the next in her South African series. She lives in Melbourne with her husband and their Siamese cat.

**Other books by the author**

***There's a Light at the End of the Tunnel:***

*Self -Help and Hope for Suffers of Depression. Stories, Solutions  
and Strategies.*

Publisher: Hybrid 2002

***The Scent of Oranges***

Publisher Australia: JoJo publishing 2006

Publisher UK and USA: Garev Publishing International 2008

## Acknowledgements

Prior to writing *The Scent of Oranges* and *The Elephant's Footprint*, I knew the history of South Africa and had read about the changes since the Apartheid years, but what I needed to know was current information to help me appreciate and understand the new South Africa. I am especially grateful to my sister-law, Estelle Zawatzky, for not only providing this information, but also for her invaluable help with the final draft of the book.

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Finally, I thank my husband and my friends for their caring encouragement.



For my husband, Hymie.

## Cast of Characters

### **The Van Wyks**

Linda van Wyk, amateur detective and recently qualified private investigator.

Connie van Wyk, Linda's eldest brother and owner of the farm where Linda grew up.

Vince van Wyk, Linda's younger and favourite brother who is a physiotherapist.

Hannes van Wyk, murdered when he was fourteen, many years earlier. Linda finds the murderer.

Pa (Piet van Wyk), Linda's father, deceased three years earlier.

Ma (Gladys van Wyk), Linda's mother, deceased 20 years earlier

### **The Moeketsis**

Kosigo Moeketsi, young ngaka or healer/diviner found murdered in the Pilanesberg Nature Park

Galani Moeketsi, Kosigo's middle sister who is also a ngaka

Thabang Moeketsi, Kosigo's eldest sister who is a healer and naturopath.

Mr Moeketsi, elderly wealthy father to the Moeketsi sisters

### **The Lagaris**

Tansie Lagari, Linda's nanny when she was a child on the farm.

Nandi Lagari, Tansie's sister who is secretly a midwife and healer.

Rosie Lagari, Tansie's daughter. Grew up with Linda on the farm and is her closest friend and, despite great difficulty, became a doctor and then a paediatrician.

### **The police**

Chief Detective Inspector Arnie Swart, Head of the Homicide Division, Rustenburg Police.

Detective Inspector Phineas Phefo, in Arnie Swart's team.

Detective Sergeant Amita Pradesh, a member of Arnie Swart's team.

### **Others**

George Hughes, archaeologist and Linda's friend and lover.

Ivan Sherwell, archaeologist and George's friend.

Wil du Plessis, Linda's ex husband

Josh, Linda's cook and cleaner

Tobias, wise old man who lives on the mountain.  
Jairus, sorcerer, witchdoctor  
Jake, farm owner  
Tagoe, the Moeketsi's next door neighbour.  
Kenneth, Kosigo's boyfriend  
Rethabile Letsebo, older ngaka, second healer found murdered.  
Nathaniel, lived and worked for Pa and is now Headman of a new farm.  
Amos, tour guide  
Stan, tour guide  
Samuel, Headman at Connie's farm  
Sunshine, the third person found murdered  
Esiekiel, old man who was Headman of the farm prior to Samuel  
Karel, Josh's partner

*The landscape is different,  
The forest is fading,  
behind the naked oak trees  
The mountain stands dry.*

*Why do I dream of the drought,  
The desiccated days that had us bound  
To a spot in the ground  
where we fervently prayed  
for water to be.*

*Why didn't the sun  
scorch the injustice  
stamped on our bodies,  
marked in our minds?*

*From: The Dry Days of my Childhood in I've Come to Take  
you Home, Diana Ferrus 2010*

## Rustenburg, South Africa 2010

**I**n the cherry dawn, a film of dew is the only moisture on the parched veld. Soon the sun will boil and with not even a breeze to stir the trees, animals will scour the veld for water and shade.

The Tswana guide claps his hands.

'Good morning everyone and welcome.' He smiles broadly at the tourists and taps the microphone.

'Everybody in seats now... and eyes watching!'

A weak sun rises as he drives into the heart of the Park. Excitedly the tourists point to swooping birds and a distant herd of zebra gathered around a cracked hollow, once a drinking hole. When he spots an elephant stripping the top leaves off a mopane tree, he pulls up.

'The elephants are eating breakfast. Come on everyone. *Out!*' The thud of the huge beasts on the move echoes through the bush. Politely he helps the older members of the group off the bus and holds down the crackling grass for them to move in closer.

'Look, there near the trees!' He raises his voice as he steers them past an orange anthill.

The tourists watch amazed as the elephants denude the trees of leaves and strip bark from trunks.

While looking out for danger, he notices unusual markings on the ground and branches ripped from a thorn tree. He bends to examine the earth and sniffs the dry grass, flattened in places. Shaking his head with concern, he mutters to himself.

'Sorry people, we have to leave immediately. Everybody

back in the bus, please.'

Protesting loudly the group clambers onto the bus. A count of his passengers and he turns on the microphone. 'Please stay in the bus. There is something important I must check. I'll be back in a few minutes.'

Hurriedly he follows the tracks, the fetid smell and swarm of flies. An amber haze hangs between the trees, swirls through branches and settles on leaves. After checking that he is alone, he treads warily towards a dark heap beneath a tree. A young Black woman is lying there in blood soaked earth, her head cradled in an indentation in the ground, a branch roughly torn from a tree pinioning her breasts. He does not need to feel her pulse or listen to her breath. Her frightened, staring eyes tell him she is dead. If the visitors were not waiting, he would examine her more closely.

In his haste, he snags his finger on a thorn tree. Cursing he licks the sprinkling of blood and glares at the offending branch. He frowns as he turns to confirm what he has seen. A dead black snake is draped on a tall branch. He is almost certain he is looking at the mysterious and deadly Black Mambo that Tswanas associate with spirits of the dead. Shivering he scurries into the sunshine. When he returns to his passengers, the elephants have moved on.

He wipes his brow. 'We *must* return to the camp. *Now!*'

Once the engine is humming, he clicks on his cell phone to contact the park ranger. No dial tone. After another quick count of his charges, he slams the door shut and roars off. With a dismissive wave, he ignores the group's complaints. They pass a troop of grey - brown baboons with pink bottoms, gibbering loudly to each other as they race across the dirt road. The largest baboon herds the troop into the veld.

'What's up with the baboons?' A man in the front seat asks.

'They see ... smell something in the veld that makes them scared,' he replies, summoning all his patience.

# One

The first purple light broke through the South African night sky as I set off for the Pilanesberg National Park. Dazzling Sirius and the dawn star Canopus hovered over the horizon. In past years many believed that those fortunate enough to see Canopus at sunrise were about to witness a significant event.

Only a few kilometres outside Rustenburg, well-maintained houses in tree-lined streets unravelled into a spread of makeshift shacks. Those with jobs, woke for work. Along the pavements, rows of hawkers arranged their goods on slabs of wood, hoping for sales that day. To improve the country's image to visitors, the hawkers would soon be gone, but nothing could make the slums disappear.

The traffic choked up as I reached the newly built soccer stadium, rising from the dawn mist like a primeval animal. The stadium was to be a key attraction for the 2010 World Cup soccer games in a few months. Practice matches were already being played there and those eager to secure seats for matches that day began to queue for tickets. Even that early, the piercing sound of the *vuuzela* could be heard. Excited supporters blew their plastic horns that would become symbols of South African soccer.

By the time I drove through the *Bakubung* gate at the tip of the Park, the sun baked the scorched earth. I had dreamt of visiting the Park for years, but what I saw that day was nothing like my memories of lush undulating veld and wooded ravines. Now dust blocked my nostrils and caught

the back of my throat. Everywhere, plants buckled in the heat.

Two modern tourist buses blocked the driveway to the lodge. I parked some distance away and strolled towards the reception area. There was no sign of a receptionist and after ringing the service button without result, I gathered some brightly coloured brochures and stuffed them into my handbag. I found shade outside under a striped awning, sat on my suitcase and waited.

A police car drove up and screeched to a stop. Two police officers, a man and a woman, climbed out and headed in my direction.

'Bugger of a case, this,' the man said.

'If the big boys hadn't pushed us to follow it up, who'd bother,' the woman replied. The man's voice was familiar.

'Detective Inspector Arnie Swart!' I called out.

'Chief Detective Inspector, now.' His grin was broad. He was as tanned as I remembered him but leaner, and he wore an expensive suit with a tie too wide to be fashionable.

'What's brought you here?'

'I've been promising myself a weekend at the Park for as long as I can remember. It couldn't wait any longer.'

'When I last saw you I was thinking of leaving the force. I'd had enough, but when the Chief retired two months ago I was offered his job, an offer I couldn't refuse.' He straightened his back with pride.

'Of course,' I said.

'You're looking well...very well,' he said as he gave me a practiced top to toe appraisal. 'A real coincidence, bumping into you here.' Before I could reply, he turned towards the police officer standing next to him. 'I'm sorry. I didn't introduce you two. Detective Sergeant Amita Pradesh ... Linda Van Wyk.'

'Pleased to meet you, Sergeant.'

Her ponytail bobbed as she nodded.

'It must be year or two since I last saw you. What've you been up to?'

'It's three years, actually. I've been back to Australia.' I

laughed. 'I enrolled in an investigator's course there and now have my P. I. license. I haven't worked up to private detective yet but I've been doing some part-time investigation.'

He pursed his lips and nodded. 'I can't say I'm surprised.'

He waved away my attempt at an answer and glanced at his watch. 'We have to get back to the station. Right then, Sergeant, grab those cold cokes from the bar.' He wiped his brow. 'That bloody place is more of a madhouse than ever. More murders, more rapes every day.'

He lifted his hand in a half wave and half salute and walked to the car. 'See you around.'

The sergeant closed the door too hard and they were off in a dirt cloud. I stood watching their car disappear. A coincidental meeting? I didn't believe in coincidences.



The receptionist returned and attended to the long queue. At last it was my turn. She handed a key to an elderly man, who was to carry my suitcase to my room. I followed him along a flower lined path until he stopped at a hut on a rise. He was about to turn the doorknob, when he dropped my suitcase, 'Hau! Serurubele!'

A Praying Mantis clung to the screen door. The brownish cricket-like insect lifted its triangular head and huge eyes in my direction, seemed to nod and then disentangling itself from the wire mesh of the door, hopped away.

'It is very special ... brings you message from ...' He pointed upwards and then looked at me. I was not certain if his look was one of respect or astonishment.

'Too dry. I not see one here for long time.'

I smiled. I liked the idea of the welcoming visitor.

The hut was made of mud bricks with a conical straw roof but contained all the comforts I needed. As I unpacked my bag, I thought of my visit to South Africa three years earlier and how I met Arnie Swart. I came to Rustenburg to attend my Pa's funeral. After the burial, I intended to spend sunny hours on the farm where I grew up, but my time was

consumed by a task Pa set me before he died. Over the years, he became increasingly uncertain about the guilt of three Blacks charged in 1951 and later jailed for murdering my fourteen-year-old brother, Hannes. It was Pa's last request that I investigate the murder. It was a ridiculous request as the little I knew about crime investigation came only from books and movies. At the time of Hannes' murder Arnie Swart was a junior, a constable. I was a child and Arnie was my hero. I remembered his rugged handsomeness and vitality.

All those years later, when I returned to Rustenburg for Pa's funeral, Arnie had climbed the ladder and become a detective inspector. With no idea where to start my investigation, I asked for his help. At first, he refused to look into a case closed years earlier. With the overwhelming number of current crimes, there was no time for it. Fortunately, he fancied me and his desire to please me softened his attitude. Though he refused to be directly involved, he agreed to review any useful information I discovered.

Phineas Phefo, Arnie's junior officer together with workers on the farm, were the ones who helped me to find the clues pointing to Hannes' murderer. Though the then farm manager admitted to killing Hannes, he was too old and sick to stand trial. A month after my return to Melbourne he had died.

Thoughts of Arnie faded as I spread the brochures, snatched from reception, on the bed. Impulsively, I decided to splurge on a two-day tour that offered a visit to a volcanic crater, the discovery of ancient sites and game spotting. Most tempting was the idea of eating meals cooked on a campfire like a true tourist. None of these activities were new to me but I hoped that the reliving of them would meld with my sweet memories. With the tour starting the next morning at sunrise, the rest of the day was mine.

I felt a twinge of guilt. I had arrived in South Africa five days earlier and had barely moved into the house Pa had left me in his will. Instead of spending the weekend with my brothers and their families, I had rushed off to the Park. After

## *The Elephant's Footprint*

our years spent apart, a whole weekend of togetherness was daunting. There would be all those questions about my future plans. Would I stay in the house or sell it? Would I stay in South Africa for a while or return to Australia? My excuse of longing to see the game park again, was a useful one and close enough to the truth. I told myself that there would be more than enough time to catch up with family.

Suddenly tired, I sank into the softness of the old fashioned, candlewick bedspread. I slept deeply. When I woke the air in the round room was cooler. I was aware of the silence and emptiness, the stark white washed walls and the faint smell of insect repellent spray. At least there were no mosquitoes or fleas. My idleness forced me to acknowledge my loneliness. I was an expert at blunting the edges of emotions. If I was honest with myself, I would have admitted how much I longed for a lover's touch, a shared word, an affectionate hug and the pleasure of sex.

After a shower, I dressed and ambled through the property. I came across several boreholes that helped to create the abundant garden paradise. Close to the reception area, a group of women weeded the lawn and sang softly as they worked. They were mainly older women, wearing traditional coloured scarves, wound around their heads. Only a few people sat near the pool, as most of the guests were out touring. I found a sunny spot and delighted in the sunshine before returning to the room.

Later, I changed my clothes and followed the sound of singing to the dining room. I arrived as a Tswana group were nearing the end of a traditional dance in the lounge. The lodge was putting on a show for an enthusiastic crowd of tourists. I had seen Tswana dancing many times in the past – the men wearing short, animal skin skirts, stomping and shuffling in the front line and the women gyrating and clapping in the background. The crowd applauded and I joined them.

In the dining room, a waiter showed me to the table I was to share with a family. We chatted amiably while we all studied the menu. It was an extensive menu and included

international food as well as traditional Tswana dishes. I was hungry and ordered a starter of seafood cocktail. For the main dish, I decided to be adventurous. The chef's suggestion was a Tswana favourite, *Mashonzha* on a bed of *Amandunbe* and a side dish of *Morogo*.

The man at the table laughed as he read the description of my choice in English. 'Rather you than me. I think you're going to eat grilled caterpillar-like worms from the mopane tree, on a bed of creamed, mashed sweet potato with a spicy peanut sauce and a bed of leaves.'

My nanny had given me a few of the worms as a treat when I was little and I remembered liking them.

'Yuk worms,' one of the children said.

'They're large worms. And anyway, we all eat prawns,' I retorted. The food took ages to arrive, but it was hot and tasty and I ate the lot, even though the *Mashonzha* worms were a bit stringy.

That evening, I turned on the television for the news. During my going to bed ritual, I heard the newsreader report that a young woman had been killed in the Rustenburg area, but I missed further details. A momentary look at the screen and the face of a young Tswana woman, who could not have been more than seventeen, stared at me. Her round Tswana face and her large golden eyes bored into me. Too tired to ponder on the exceptional nature of such a report, when so many young women died weekly and unnoticed, I flicked off the television. As I curled into sleep, the girl's face was still with me.

# The Elephant's Footprint

*The Elephant's Footprint* is an intriguing crime novel laced with romance and set against a South African backdrop. Linda, a sharp and intuitive detective leaves Australia, to return to her birthplace Rustenburg, amidst the excitement of the World Cup soccer challenge. She finds the once lush farmland crippled by drought, lawlessness is on the rise and disease is rampant. At critical times, such as this, the local community seek help from their healers and witchdoctors. Even Voodoo resurfaces.

Her skill in detection is well known, and she is persuaded to join an overworked police force in a murder investigation. Initially, the police believe that an elephant savaged a young woman found dead in a nature reserve. However, it soon becomes clear that sinister human influences are at play. This is the first in a number of bizarre killings of female healers. Inundated with crime and the added responsibility of security during the World Cup, the police give up the search for the killer and she continues to investigate alone.

She meets and falls in love with George, an archaeologist working on rock paintings in the area. With his support, she challenges evil forces trying to remove her from the case. But will her perseverance and George's scientific knowledge help her to uncover the murderer?

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