

dependant on Julia driving her wherever she needed to go. (Not that she travelled on buses - the suburb was poorly served by public transport in any case; the buses ran only once an hour during the day, and the last bus left town at half past eight at night. This was a suburb where each family had a minimum of two cars.) ~~xxxxxx~~
~~xx~~

If life could have continued like that, with tolerance from some members of the household and acceptance from others, it would have been all right. But there were always disturbing changes in the routine.

Joseph announced ~~onexday~~ that he was bringing his wife to come and stay with him for a while. For how long? Just for a while. Just long enough to make a new baby? Joseph giggled with embarrassment.

When he brought his wife home from the station, Julia was surprised. She was a shy child, looking not more than fifteen or sixteen.

'I thought you said you had two children? Surely your wife is not old enough to have had two children!'

'Not this wife - my other wife. This one my second wife.'

This was a suitable target for Mrs Ingram's disapproval.

'We have to help him support two wives! We whites can't afford to be married to more than one person at a time, but Joseph's doing so well he can get himself two wives.*'

'Where does he get the money for lobola - that's what I'd like to know? You know he has to buy cattle for lobola - he needs fifty or sixty pounds for each wife. How does he get all that money?'

The second wife had never been to Johannesburg before; she had never been to a town, even to a little country town. In all her life she had never moved more than a few miles around the remote country kraal in which she had been born. She had never seen brick-built houses, streets, shops, traffic, trains, the terrible ~~xxxxxxx~~ multiplicity of objects of domestic living; never slept on a bed, eaten from a table with implements. She had never seen water flow from a pipe when a tap was turned, nor could she comprehend how hot water was put into such a pipe. The electric cooker, refrigerator, washing machine and other kitchen equipment was totally beyond ~~the world of her experience~~. Even simple things, like cupboards for clothes, were totally unknown.

All day long she sat just inside Joseph's room in the yard, sat with the door open, but sufficiently withdrawn from the activities of the yard itself to be protected. She did nothing. Her hands lay folded in her lap, her head was lowered, ~~xxx~~ and only her eyes moved, watching Joseph, Maria and Freda ~~crossing~~ the yard

yard, hanging up clothes, entering the kitchen. She shared their morning meal of hard porridge, and they brought her a cup of tea and food in the evening. They accepted her passivity and were undemanding. But not Mrs Ingram. The girl's apparent idleness bit into her. *in the afternoon*

'Why doesn't she do anything? She doesn't lift a finger! You should get her to help in the house.'

'Why should she help - I'm not employing her.'

'No - you're only feeding her for nothing. She sits there eating everything that's brought, and she doesn't even wash the plate!'

'Mum, we can afford to feed Josphe's wife for a couple of weeks.'

'That's not the point - I wouldn't expect strangers to feed me without even trying to do anything in return. Why should she?'

'She doesn't know how to - she's never been to town before. This is all a very overwhelming experience for her, I expect. It's all too much.'

'She doesn't even sweep her own room - Joseph does it. How can she just sit and sit all day long? Just sit and sit.'

She stomped across the yard one day and confronted the girl. 'You shouldn't just sit there - how can you let Josphe wash your clothes for you? You must do some work! Work - sweep, clean - ' she mimed the act of sweeping, dusting.

The girl looked at her like a terrified animal, and remained silent.

'What's the matter with that wife of yours, Joseph?'

'Madam?' 'What's the matter - is she deaf? Is she dumb?'

Joseph merely smiled and shrugged.

'She doesn't understand any English,' Julia explained to her mother.

'She understood me all right,' Mrs Ingram grumbled. 'She doesn't want to understand. They're all like that. They understand what they want to.'

The girl remained passive and silent, eating little, scarcely moving. Only the trembling of her hands and the frightened glance of her dark eyes ~~revealed~~ indicated any emotion

After two or three weeks Joseph took her to the station, and sent her back to the country.

Mrs Ingram and hardly recovered from the upset caused by the girl's visit when there was new trouble. Maria's state of pregnancy, guessed at for a long time, became an indisputable fact.

'A nice, clean girl like Maria.' Then the refrain: 'They're all the same.'

Julia explained to Mrs Ingram that Maria was married and perfectly entitled to have a child.

'Married? When did she get married? She wasn't married when she came to work for us.'

'No, but she's been with us nearly two years. Last year she got married.'

'I didn't know. She never mentioned it. Why didn't she tell me she'd got married?'

'I suppose it didn't occur to her. You never ask her anything about herself. She wouldn't volunteer information like that.'

A shroud of silence seemed to cover their private lives of the servants. Julia knew a little about them, but Mrs Ingram knew ~~nothing~~ almost nothing. She knew Joseph ~~was~~ came from Natal and was a Zulu - 'they make the best servants; more trustworthy; always try to get a Zulu houseboy.' Freda's background and homelife was unknown, as Maria's.

'Where are you going to have the baby, Maria?'

'I go to my parents, Madam.' 'Where's that?' 'In Charlestown, in Natal, Madam.' 'Oh yes? What about your husband? Where's he?' 'In Alexandra, Madam.' 'And you don't want to have the baby in Alexandra?' 'We have not enough space. Only one room, Madam.'

Maria left for her parents' home a few weeks before the baby was born, and returned with the baby, a boy called Sampson, when he was only three weeks old. She ~~fix~~ breast-fed the baby in between her housework, and strapped him to her back after each feed. There he would fall asleep, and Maria gently removed him, still sleeping, and left him on the bed in her room for a couple of hours while she was busy in the house. Sampson was well-fed and a contented baby. His presence was scarcely noticed in the house.

Except by Mrs Ingram. As soon as ~~Maria~~ Maria went to her room to feed or to change the baby, Mrs Ingram found something urgent for her to do.

'Where's ~~Maria~~ Maria? There's an inkstain on the tablecloth - she must see to it now, or else it will get set, it will be ruined.' 'She's busy with the baby.' 'Oh now really, not again! That baby will be spoilt. She's always fussing with it. Or doing something for it. You know she washes our son's napkins with her baby's?' 'That's not so. I always soak the napkins, and Maria washes them quite separately from anything else.'

~~in fact~~ Maria ~~was~~ ~~meticulous~~

'But whose soap does she use? She uses our soap!'

Julia's youngest son was ~~six months old when Sampson~~ ^{was born} only three months old ~~when Sampson was born~~. Mrs Ingram worried about the germs and infections that the presence of Sampson might bring to her own new grandchild, Kevin. When Sampson was three months old she started a campaign for him to be returned to his grandparents in the countryside.

Maria could not work properly if she had to attend to ^{her own} the baby. Maria was supposed to be attending to Kevin - that's what she was paid for - but she had her own baby who took all her time. Maria took ~~Kevin~~ Sampson to the townships on Thursdays and Sundays, and lord knows what infections he picked up there, which of course would infect little Kevin. Maria's child Sampson was a big, strapping boy while Kevin did not seem to be putting on so much weight. Sampson imposed too much of a burden on Maria - it was unfair to expect her to look after two young babies. She simply wasn't up to it.

From the countryside, Maria was subject to pressure by her parents. They wanted her first-born child. She, dutiful daughter, knew she must take the child to them. She wanted to keep him just a little longer, to see him grow ~~just~~ a bit bigger. The grumbles, hints and open disapproval of Mrs Ingram were like darts in her side.

She held out until Sampson was ~~six~~ nearly six months old, then yielded to the double pressures. Sampson was weaned abruptly and taken home to live with his grandparents. Maria returned to Johannesburg feeling strange without the burden of the growing child on her back. Kevin laughed and held out his arms to her ~~he loved her~~ ~~Maria returned to her~~ ~~and~~ when she entered the house. Later in the afternoon he was fretful and would not sleep. Julia took him to Maria - 'Here, you can have this naughty baby. I've had enough of him.' 'Baby's not naughty,' Maria said reprovingly. She went and fetched a clean blanket. Bending forward, she mounted the golden-haired boy on her back, and wound the blanket firmly to hold him in place. ~~with~~ She busied herself with her various tasks, ~~washing the baby's clothes~~ singing softly to the little white boy. There, with his fair skin and blonde head firmly turned towards the comforting warmth and homely smells of her back, Kevin slept all afternoon while Maria washed and dried and pressed the many little garments, and hummed her wordless rhythms every time he stirred.

~~Exlzfzkzher~~ There was a tall block of flats where I worked so many years ago. Is she still living there - Mrs Miller. I left her one day and never returned, I never went back to her. A friend went and collected my clothes and blankets. I wonder if she understood why I could not look after her baby any more.

The work was not hard. In those big modern buildings in Hillbrow there are flat boys who service the flats. I did not have to polish floors or make fires. There was always hot water in the taps from the big boilers that the flat boys stoked in the basement

Mrs Miller went to work every day, and I had to prepare meals, to keep the flat tidy, to make beds and do the washing up. And look after the baby.

In the morning the baby slept in a pram on the verandah, and in the afternoons I took him for a walk in the park, and sat on the grass with him. Mrs Miller showed me how to prepare his food, to sterilise the bottles and boil the milk; how to make his orange juice, and to steam and strain his lunch-time vegetables. I did this all carefully, as I was shown. I was nineteen years old then, and I had a baby of my own.

My baby, Daniel, was three months old, and I had weaned him and left him in the township in the care of Ma-Mtumela, who had four children of her own. I paid her a few shillings a week for looking after Daniel, and I did this because I was not yet married and had to work.

I liked looking after the Miller baby, who was a very fat and easy child. I liked going out in the afternoons and sitting on the lawn labelled 'For European Children and Native Nursegirls Only'. Still, I could hardly wait all week for Saturday to come, so that I could go and see my son.

All week I slept each night in the room on top of the block of flats, a small room just big enough for two beds. I shared it with one of the other girls who worked in the flats. The window was placed high, so that we could not see out of it. Now, when I pass the blocks of flats, I wonder why they put our rooms, the servants' rooms, on the very top from which you would expect to have such splendid views, and then make all the windows so high and small. Why don't they put us down below, under the ground? Every block of flats in Johannesburg has that roof-top row of rooms, set back from the rest of the building, with the tiny slits of windows. Locations in the sky. Single and double rooms. Never space for anything more than the beds. We kept our clothes in cases or cardboard boxes under the bed, dresses hanging on those wire hangers that you get from dry-cleaners, on a nail in the ~~xit~~ wall. Always a small mirror on the wall as well. Showers, washbasins and lavatories in one room shared by all of us. Queues of us, very often, to use them. We were mostly young girls whose employers paid good wages ~~by~~ for domestic labour ~~prokamblyx~~ ~~thexbaskzixxtxexxunxtrgx~~ - probably higher than anywhere in the country. We all wore smart, starched overalls and white caps and aprons.

'We live crowded here like animals, and ~~there is no space~~ space all around us'

'But they won't build. We asked and asked. We've had dozens of ~~in~~ committees, people going . . .'

'And waiting. You were on that deputation, Armstrong, during the war when we went to the Health Board . . .'

'They won't build. It's someone's farm. It's not used, but they won't buy it for us, they won't build.'

And it was Shreiner Bhaduza with his hard, strong body and black winged moustache, Shreiner who always had a pipe in his mouth and a twisted stick in his hand, who leaned forward, and removed his pipe, and said:

'We must build for ourselves.'

'How can we build? We haven't money. We can't buy the land -'

'Never mind buying the land. We'll move in and build. We'll squat on the land and put up our own shanties.'

That was the start. The men exploded into excited talk. All the ~~men~~ men were members of the Alexandra Sub-Tenants' Association, people like ourselves who rented a room or a portion of a room from someone who rented a house or a portion of a house, people like us who had been paying high rents all these years for less space than the kitchen in the ~~white~~ houses of the whites where I worked.

It was mid-summer in December 1946. I did not know the plan, I only knew the committee met night after night, and there was a feeling of excitement. Then on Sunday the people gathered in Number Two Square, and Bhaduza and others spoke.

'We have lived too long in these rooms for which we pay through the nose. We are like cattle herded into one kraal, without room to lie down at night. If the Council won't build houses for us, we must build them for ourselves. And if they won't let us have land to build, we must take it for ourselves!'

The whole township seemed to resound with the clapping and the cheers. No one spoke against the plan.

We collected materials to build the houses. For a week we worked in a frenzy, combing the township for boxes and corrugated iron, buying sacks from the market, searching for sticks and poles.

'Tonight,' Armstrong told me one ~~Sunday~~ Saturday. We all left our houses at the same time, and trekked a mile away across the veld to the farm. The moon was bright, it was light, warm, clear. All the children were put together on blankets laid out on the field, the babies ~~sleeping, the older ones~~ and toddlers sleeping. The older children helped build the shacks.

~~Wasn't we not building?~~ We had no training, and we had no proper materials. No bricks, mortar, cement, glass, boards. We had whatever we could lay our hands on - poles, sacks, eardboard, paraffin tins beaten flat, and earth. In the moonlight we were black shadows working, typing, hammering; our ghost-town rose from the empty field in a pattern of angles, lines, shapes of all kinds. The committee supervised and insisted on a certain space between each shanty, laying out passages as our streets, and arranging groups to dig trenches some distance away from the shanties, to use as latrines.

The children were moving lines, fetching out blankets and household goods, trekking between the township and the field with pots on their heads and bundles on their backs. I have never known so much energy, so much laughter, so much helping of each other. The earth tamped down in each hut with pounding bare feet. Rocks and stones to hold the hessian walls or tin roof in place. The voices carrying far in the quiet night. Very rarely the headlights of a car speeding in the distance along the Pretoria road.

And the voices, like a surging wind, blew up and away. The sound became less. Night moved on, and we settled into our new homes and laid the babies on the blankets, and laid down on the tamped earth, and slept for a few ours.

The hot sun woke us early. ~~There's a brilliant day!~~ The sun burned through walls made of sacks, heated the tin and iron, turned the shacks into ovens. I went outside, then in again and called Armstrong to come out.

'What is it?'

'Look - just look! Our own town! We made it ourselves.'

He nodded with satisfaction.

POLITICAL DISCUSSION

Dick says "I'm a-political." Ed: "How anyone can sit and boast about being a-political in times like these beats me. You've got a country turning into a police state, your freedom filched, life becoming more difficult, and all I can say is when you're sitting in jail for some offence against the Nats that you didn't mean to commit I'll come along and jeer and say 'look where your a-politics have taken you!'" And again? You know, Dick, I'd like to see you ~~sit~~ when your house is on fire, sitting on the lawn and saying in a detached way, as you watch the flames devouring everything you possess: 'Fire is a most objectionable thing.'" (This in reference to the 'War is beastly. but what am I supposed to do about it, attitude.)

MRS. M. (*Ruth Miller's mother - it accounts for Ruth*)

A tallish, stringy sort of woman dressed in browns or greys or any nondescript colours. The point about her is that she never stops talking. She talks in a strong, firm, controlled voice. Her talk dominates everything completely, as it must have domitad her daughter when she was young. She is a woman who organises and runs things. She has complete charge when she is around. Her talk is quick, repititious, and irritating beyond words. It has the effect of silencing everybody completely, of reducing them to numbness. Yet in spite of this there is nothing in her appearance that is striking or outstanding. In fact she has the kind of face that you can see often, but never describe. No particular feature strikes you, so that all you recall is that she is like her clothes, rather drab and ordinary.

BEING OLD

SOUTH AFRICAN WHITES.
Helen Lewis speaking.

...Because all the time I was in SA I was of you while not a part of you, I was with you although I was not in with you. And to go back to that . . . My beautiful flat at Sea Point, it's got these wonderful big windows, plate-glass windows, looking out to sea, what a wonderful ~~wink~~ scene, and there in the middle of it, in the distance, Robben Island - all I would see would be Robben Island winking at me, and winking at me with the face of Nelson Mandela. What do they want? How can they go on living like that, what do they think about? Their shares going up, their bridge game, their children's clothes. I know it's not perfect here, so many things wrong, but at least you can talk, discuss, there is quite a lot of freedom - but there! I'll listen to the radio with its slanted news and vicious programmes. At least here I feel I can go on living, there it is a kind of death.

Collection Number: A3299

Collection Name: Hilda and Rusty BERNSTEIN Papers, 1931-2006

PUBLISHER:

Publisher: **Historical Papers Research Archive**

Collection Funder: **Bernstein family**

Location: **Johannesburg**

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