

## Amaryllis Belladonna by Jack Hoffmann

Malmesbury was a typical South African town. It lay about forty miles north of Cape Town, in the *Swartland* (Blackland) so named apparently because of the ubiquitous *Renosterbos* (Rhinoceros bush) which turns black when parched by the sun. It was known for its warm sulphur springs that were said to cure rheumatism. It later thrived on wheat production and sheep farming.

Malmesbury had always been a predominantly Afrikaner town.

Debora Becker was born in Malmesbury in 1911. The circumstances of her birth were shrouded in mystery and gossip. Naomi, Debora's mother, had two daughters. She had arrived in South Africa from Lithuania just before Debora was born. Rivka was three years older than Debora. The girls' father had disappeared soon after Debora had been born. Or was it just before she was born? Herein lay the mystery, the family's dark secret. The enigma was exacerbated by the fact that whereas Rivka was dark skinned (though not dark skinned enough to raise eyebrows in the race-conscious Cape Colony), brown-eyed and blackhaired and looked like her mother. Debora had light skin, blonde hair and green eyes tinged with brown. Debora didn't even look Jewish. It was not that all Jews were dark. Many had blonde or auburn hair and blue or green eyes, but they somehow looked Jewish nevertheless. Debora didn't. So tongues wagged, fingers pointed, and rumours flourished.

Had Naomi had an 'affair' with some handsome *shegez*? She didn't seem the type. Had the unmentionable happened? In whispers, the question was voiced: Had she *chas ve'chalila*, God forbid, been raped? Either scenario would explain why her husband had disappeared never to be heard of again.

Naomi worked her fingers to the bone sewing and cooking and baking to keep herself and two daughters fed and clothed. All her motherly love was showered on Rivka, the apple of her eye, Rivka her bright, cheerful, beautiful *nachessl*. Debora was not physically mistreated by Naomi nor was she ignored. She received an equal share of everything, except for her mother's smiles, kisses, hugs, clucks of joy, and love. At first, Debora did not register the difference for what it was. She thought it the natural consequence of her being the younger daughter, especially when she noticed that her youngest cousin seemed to share the same fate. But gradually, the truth dawned upon her when she saw that it was not the same in other families, where all the children shared their mothers' love and attention in equal amounts.

Things became worse when Rivka started taunting Debora with the rumours she had overheard from the adults' huddled whisperings. 'You're not really my sister. Your dad was a *shegez*. My dad

left us because of you. Our mother hates you. Everybody hates you because you're not really one of us. You're really a *shiksa*. And you are stupid.'

Debora cried and sought solace from her mother, rushing to bury her face in her mother's apron, her tears and snot mingling with residues of flour and egg.

'Is it true that I'm a *shiksa*? Is it true that you don't love me? Is it true that no one loves me?'

Naomi's face reddened, her jaw clenched, and her eyes narrowed. 'Don't you EVER say such things! Get out of my sight!'

Afrikaans was the language of instruction at the only school in the town. Here things were even worse for Debora. She faced a three-pronged attack. From the Jewish girls, she received her usual barrage of '*Shiksa! Shiksa! Shiksa!*' From the Afrikaners, she suffered tirades of '*Jood! Jood! Jood!*' And from Jew and Afrikaner alike, taunts of '*Stupid! Stupid! Stupid!*' She was excluded from the other girls' games of hopscotch, their skipping rope contests and their giggled conversations. She sat by herself hugging her rag doll and holding back her tears.

As Debora became more and more beautiful, Rivka became increasingly jealous of her fair skin, blonde hair and greenish eyes. The jeers, jibes and insinuations increased. Debora became more and more introverted and sullen. At some stage, her cascades of Botticellian hair were cropped to the length of a boy's to make her look less beautiful. Her feelings of worthlessness, her yearning for love persisted.

When Debora was old enough, her mother sent her out to do the shopping. Each time, she was dispatched with a negative remark like 'Don't forget the sugar this time!' or 'Don't let that *mamzer* Mr Rabinowitz crook you again!'

Despite her mother's mistrust, Debora loved this errand, her moment of independence, of worth. Carrying two capacious straw baskets, she smiled as she closed the gate of their humble house built of yellow brick and a corrugated iron roof. It was a clone of the other houses in the neighbourhood in which the less well-off citizens lived. She made her way onto the streets where the more prosperous burghers lived in large, whitewashed, double-storied, thatch-roofed mansions with ornate gables in the Cape Dutch style. These were surrounded by lawns, flower beds and stately oaks.

One of these was the home of Naomi's brother Abraham Cohen, his wife, Leah and their three children. Abraham was a merchant and supported his unfortunate younger sister as much as he could, both financially and morally. Besides every sabbath eve, Naomi, Rivka and Debora spent Pesach and the High Holidays with Abraham's family. Debora loved the white cleanliness and fine furnishing of the house and dreamed of one day having such a home.

Debora proceeded past the Dutch Reformed church building which dominated the town. It was chalk white with an impressive clock tower. A large forecourt allowed space for ox wagons and horse carriages. Today it was empty, but it would be filled to overflowing on Sundays, at *Nachtmaal*, Eucharist, and at Christmas.

She reached the commercial centre of the town. She passed The Royal Hotel on De Kock Street. It looked so grand. She would have loved to peep inside but had never dared. She turned onto the town's main thoroughfare, Voortrekker Street. It was lined by shops of every description. There were two butchers. One sold kosher meat, the other *treif*. There was a baker, a grocer, a greengrocer, a draper, a haberdasher, a shoemaker, an ironmonger, a carpenter, a jeweller, a tanner, a saddler and a blacksmith. Many of these shops were owned and run by Jews. There was a high step up from the dusty street onto the concrete pavement. The shops were painted white and were roofed with corrugated iron painted green, red or silver. To provide shade against the scalding African sun, the roofs extended over the pavements where they were supported by columns.

As she walked past these shops, Debora recognised the characteristic smells they exuded – fragrances of wares too expensive for her family, exotic scents of faraway places that she pictured in her dreams. The kosher butcher's smell was of garlic polony, mutton fat and the damp sawdust on its floor. The baker's bouquet was of freshly baked bread and cinnamon buns. The draper had a dusty scent of cotton fabrics and skeins of wool. The dairy gave off an aroma of fresh cream and Cheddar cheese. At the grocer, open hessian sacks of flour, rice, sugar and coffee beans filled the air. The shop that sold beer, wine and spirits was called the bottle store. It did not allow children to enter and did not welcome natives. The heady smell of its products pervaded out onto the street. The barbershop smelled of singed hair, hair oil and bay rum. From the ladies' hairdresser, escaped warm, ammoniacal gusts from the hairdryers that enclosed heads full of colourful, comical curlers. The chemist exuded eau de cologne and menthol. There were places that she had never entered, so for her, they had no smell at all; two banks, a shop called Ladies' Fashions and another with signs that read Gentlemen's Outfitters. Occasionally, in the latter two, the dummies, normally displaying the latest fashions behind large glass windows, would be unclothed. Debora would blush and avert her eyes as she passed their pink nakedness.

She entered the grocer's shop. Mrs Kopinsky was behind the counter. Debora had hoped Mr Kopinsky would be there. He was kinder. Mrs Kopinsky looked up. 'Ah, Mrs Becker's blondie,' she said with a sneer.

'Good morning Auntie,' said Debora in a timid voice as she looked down at the concrete

floor. 'What do you want?' 'A dozen eggs, a pound of flour and half a pound of sugar, please Auntie.' 'We only sell sugar in pound portions now. I can't give you half a pound.'

'Of course you can,' said Mr Kopinsky, walking in from a back room. He smiled at Debora and said, 'Hello, *sheine meidl*.'

His wife glowered at him and muttered something unintelligible under her breath.

As she left the shop with her purchases, Debora wondered why men were always kind to her while women were always mean.

She entered the draper shop. Mr Goldberg looked up from his work. He was cutting a length from an enormous roll of wine-coloured cloth.

'Good morning, Debora. What can I do for you?'

'Good morning, Uncle. My mother asks for two yards of your least expensive cotton fabric in white, please Uncle.'

She remembered his kindness from the last time she was here. While she had waited for him to serve another customer, she had stood staring at a large bin of off-cuts. Bands of white, shreds of green, strips of red, squares of yellow overflowed onto the floor.

'What's so interesting, Debora?' he had asked.

She had blushed and covered her mouth. 'Sssorry, Uncle. I just wondered how much they cost,' she stammered, pointing to the bin.

'Cost? It's rubbish. I just throw it away. You want some? Take as much as you like.'

As Mr Goldberg wrapped the length of fabric, Debora said, 'I made a doll from the pieces you gave me last time. Thank you, Uncle.'

'That's nice. You must bring it next time. I would like to see it. Maybe we could go into business together.' He laughed.

She smiled.

'Do you want some more? Just take.' 'No thank you, Uncle,' said Debora remembering the scolding she had received from her mother.

'I don't want you begging from the shopkeepers! We may not be rich, but we don't need their charity.'

After she had visited a few of the other shops and completed her shopping, Debora decided to take a different way home. Near the edge of the town, she passed the rather small but nevertheless imposing, yellow and white *shul*. It served not only Malmesbury but the surrounding towns as well. It was packed to capacity on the High Holidays. It even boasted a *mikvah*, a ritual bath.

A few hundred yards away, in a shallow valley on the outskirts of the prosperous town, Debora glanced at the clustered huts, hovels, sheds and cabins of the natives. Few of these were more than makeshift, haphazard assemblies of wooden boards, sheets of corrugated iron or stacks of bricks. She had been taught that the natives were here to serve, not to be part of the thriving community.

Debora's youngest cousin was a boy a few years younger than she. His name was Nathan, but everyone called him Natie. He was what was known in those days, as a scallywag. He wasn't studious like his older brother or diligent and obedient like his sister. Like all little boys of the time, his hair was cut very short, but no matter how short it was cut, an intransigent tuft above his right eye poked cheekily against the grain of the rest. While all the other hairs pointed directly upwards at a right angle to his scalp, this tuft pointed backwards, the hairs lying flat against his scalp, a classical cowlick. To those outside the family, it was seen as an endearing, somewhat comical feature, like a supercilious eyebrow in a boy that was anything but supercilious. His mother said it was the Devil's horn. There was always a runnel of snot protruding from one or both of his nostrils. The colour and consistency of the snot varied with the seasons. It was watery, sparkling silver in the springtime, the colour and consistency of egg white in the summer and thick custardy yellow or pea soup green in the winter. Earlier, his mother had stuffed a clean handkerchief into his pocket each morning.

'Use it!' she had instructed. But it was invariably lost in the veld within minutes so that she soon stopped bothering. Instead, his cheeks would, at first, glitter with a broad swathe of mucus like the trail of a giant snail. At some stage, the mucus would dry into a crust giving the appearance of the scab of a third-degree burn.

'Where's your hanky, you *snotneus!*' would be the inevitable inquiry when he got home. Natie enjoyed his secret adventures in the wide outdoors where it seemed to be eternally summer. He would venture alone into the hills around the small town and play for hours among the tussocks of tall grass with their spiky heads. They reminded Natie of the brushes the servants used to sweep the chimneys. The grey-green tufts of *renosterbos* which turned pitch black in the winter months grew everywhere. Ou Piet, the gardener, had once told him that they had this name because they were the favourite food of the rhinoceros. Ever since then, Natie had dreamed of seeing a rhinoceros. In fact, this was the main reason for his daily excursions into the *bos*, but he never did see one. He had to make do with an occasional tortoise painstakingly scabbling its way over the rocky ground. If he was lucky, he might come across a small troupe of chacma baboons

and he would giggle at their bright red arses. There were many birds too. They swarmed in huge flocks, flew in pairs or soared solitarily high upon the thermals. Natie's favourite was the Cape white-eye. They were little birds with bright yellow plumage and an endearing ring of white feathers around their eyes. Their breasts and bellies were pale grey. They chirped and piped gaily and incessantly. Natie tried to imitate their complicated concertos but could not. He watched fascinated, as they caught insects in mid-air and feasted on nectar, flowers, berries and grass seed. They laid eggs the colour of his cousin, Debora's eyes in neat little nests. If he hid and stood unmoving, he could watch them feeding their wide-mouthed, ever-hungry chicks. He relished the sight of the myriads of wild flowers that transformed the grey-black landscape into a pageant of glorious colours in the spring. He did not know their names, neither in Afrikaans nor in English, but he recognized every one and gave them names of his own, simple names like Whitey, Pinky, Stinky, Dewey, Secret.

Natie was always in a hurry, rushing about from place to place just like his friends, the white-eyes. His haste made him prone to collisions, spills and minor accidents. These left evidence on his knees, his shins and sometimes his nose. His clothes too bore witness to his frequent mishaps. He often returned home from his adventures with tattered shirt, ripped pants or missing shoe.

'Look at you! You're becoming a *shegetz*, a *chattis*!. What can we do with you? Can't you be a *mensch* like your brother and sister?'

He bore his inevitable scoldings and chastisement with fortitude, but nothing could change his spirit. He had found a different path from that which his parents thought suitable for a small Jewish boy. Finally, his parents seemed to give up and left him to continue his *goyish* pursuits.

'He'll grow out of it, please God.' they sighed.

They left him alone, ignored his eager reports of the day's discoveries. His sister despised him and constantly told him that he stank. His bookish older brother lived on a different planet. There were no other children nearby of the same age who had interests similar to his. Then he noticed the solitary, tearful, sad, silent, little girl with the closely cropped hair whom he had known all his life. He had of course, always been aware of his cousin Debora, but she was just a *girl* and thus of no interest. She was a being on the periphery of his horizons. Now he suddenly recognised her as a kindred spirit, a fellow outcast. So early one morning, he asked her if she would like to see his whiteeyes. She lifted her eternally downcast eyes to face him. Her look bore a combination of shyness, surprise and questioning; shyness, because she was always shy, surprise because no one ever spoke to her and questioning because his eyes were not white. Was this to be just another bout of teasing and humiliation?

'But your eyes are not white.'

He giggled. 'No, they are birds, you silly.'

'Birds?'

'Yes, come. I'll show you.' He darted off.

She did not know what to do. If she followed Natie, it would become yet another excuse for her mother to scold her. If she did not, she would never see a white-eye, and maybe Natie would never speak to her again. She hesitated, her mind a turmoil of indecision. Then she turned and rushed off after him. After what was the longest sprint of her life, Debora saw Natie suddenly stop ten paces ahead of her, turn and place his index finger across his lips. He beckoned silently to her by eagerly flexing his vertically raised right palm toward his body. She stopped her unwonted sprint, arched her body slightly forward and tiptoed towards him. When she reached his side, he too continued forward with bent knees and with carefully placed steps. She followed and was soon at his side.

He took hold of her hand. She gazed at him, but he was concentrating on his mission. The warmth of his palm spread up her arm and flowed into her heart and her consciousness. They silently approached a tree. When they were about a yard away from its trunk, he bent down to a crouch. She copied him. With his free hand, he pointed carefully to a fork in one of the tree's lower branches.

Not being used to exploring nature, she was not sure what to look for. But then she noticed a small nest. Over its rim peeped a yellow bird with white eyes. She was so filled with joy that her free hand jumped to her mouth as she let out a gasp of excitement. The little bird flew away. Natie looked at her. Her smile copied the bird, and she felt her tears rise. She felt so useless. She had destroyed even this little miracle. Natie would scold her just like all the others, and he would never take her hand again. But he smiled and asked enthusiastically.

'Did you see it?'

'Yes, but I made it fly away.'

'No, you didn't. It was because she saw us. Come!' he said and pulled her towards the tree. He hoisted himself up to the lowest branch and sat on it. 'Come!' he said again.

Debora had never climbed a tree, had never dared. 'I can't,' she said.

'I'll help you. Grab my hand.'

He held on to the branch with his right hand, and she took hold of his left. He heaved while she struggled to pull herself up, but neither of them was strong enough. He let go of her hand and jumped down from the branch.

'Grab the branch with both hands,' he said.

While she flexed her elbows with all her strength, he held her around the waist, wedged his shoulder under her buttocks and pushed her onto the branch. She sat there insecurely while he clambered back onto the branch.

'Well done!' he said. Debora tingled with pride.

Natie now took hold of the branch above and raised himself to a standing position.

'Do the same,' he said to Debora.

She felt apprehensive, but after the compliment, she experienced a small surge of confidence, copied the movements he had used and was soon standing at his side. He shuffled a few steps along the branch until he reached the fork where the nest was wedged. He beckoned to her with his right palm, his left hand still clutching the branch above for support. She shuffled tentatively, once again aping his movements. She dared not look down although they were only a few feet above the ground.

When she reached him, he pointed eagerly into the nest, 'Look!'

She followed his pointing finger. The tiny nest was lined with feathers, grass and dry leaves. It held four tiny, smooth, eggs of the palest green. They seemed so fragile that she was afraid to breathe on them lest they break. Had he shown her a cache of diamonds, she would not have been more moved. She beamed, both at the sight of this treasure and at the knowledge that she had been invited to share his secret. He jumped from the branch and helped her down.

She started crying.

'*Bliksem!* Damn!' he said. 'Have you hurt yourself?'

'No.'

'Then why are you crying?'

'Because this is the happiest day of my life.'

When she got home, she was both scolded and beaten. 'Where have you been? What have you been doing? Just look at your filthy dress!'

From that day forward, Debora and Natie remained the closest of friends. They became soul-mates, inseparable. They communicated in a combination of Afrikaans and English, peppered with an occasional word or expression in Yiddish. They prattled and chirruped like the weaver birds in the trees at sunset. They chortled and giggled like a brook flowing swiftly over pebbles. They exchanged tales of their scoldings, they comforted each other in their adversities, they gave each other the love no one else had ever shared with them. When Debora was tearful, Natie hugged her tenderly. Her tears and his snot mingled. He was her tower of strength. She was his golden



beacon.

They spent every possible moment in each other's company. Natie revealed to Debora the wonders of the grasses, the trees, the flowers, the birds and the insect in their fair Eden. They collected pebbles and seed pods, feathers and eggshells, and bones bleached white by the sun. Debora pressed flowers between bits of cardboard under her mattress. The pride of their collection was an empty tortoise shell. They hoarded their treasures in a secret hiding place.

Ou Piet was their only confidant. He was a tiny, wizened, old man with peppercorn hair. His skin was yellow-brown and wrinkled all over like a prune. His eyes were almond shaped with prominent epicanthic folds. He seemed always to be gazing into the far distance even when he was looking directly at you. Although he was as thin as a stick, his abdomen bulged and was topped by an everted belly button. He wore tattered cast-offs and a single-strand necklace of fragments of white ostrich eggshell. When he smiled, his face beamed like the reflection of the sun in a puddle of muddy water and the frightful state of his dental health was revealed while his eyes glistened behind their overhanging lids. He had but a single premolar in the right side of his upper jaw and only a pair of incisors and a solitary molar in his left lower jaw. These fugitives from tooth decay were surprisingly white. Ou Piet, who looked ninety but who was probably only in his forties, was employed as a sweeper and garden 'boy' by Natie's mother.

He was a Khoikhoi. His ancestors had roamed the vast expanses of this south-western corner of Africa seeking pastures for their herds of cattle, ten centuries before any white man ever set foot at the Cape. When the first Dutch settlers infiltrated the region and encountered this nomadic folk, they called them Hottentots, an alliterative imitation of the clicking sounds of their language.

Ou Piet was an inexhaustible source of stories. He entertained Natie and Debora with the folklore and fables of his ancestors. He told them of their supreme being *TsuiGoab*, the creator of all things and their devil *Guanab*.

'Just like Elohim and Satan!' shouted Debora excitedly.

He shared with them the magnificent victories of their great general, *U-tixo*.

'Just like King David!' shouted Natie not to be outdone.

Ou Piet revealed to them the messages in the chirping of locusts, the hooting of owls and the wagging of cows' tails. He explained to them the protective properties of various roots and of wet clay smeared onto the skin. Debora shivered and clutched Natie when Ou Piet told them that water flowers were the spirits of dead girls who had angered the rain. He told them how one could bring the rain by burying a chameleon.

'*Foie tog!* Shame!' they both retorted.

'Ach, no, don't worry! If it rains, the chameleon will survive and will be dug up again,' explained Ou Piet.

'And you know how to stop the rain if it's raining too much?'

'No, tell us!'

'The chief sends an old lady out into the rain. He orders her to bend over, lift her *kaross* and expose her naked bum to the rain clouds. The clouds get so embarrassed that they cover their eyes and flee, taking their rain with them!'

The children shrieked with laughter. He chilled their marrows with stories of naglopers, ghouls, who prowled the night with their companions, the owl and the baboon, haunting the sleeping villagers and digging up the bodies of the dead.

Sometimes all three paid the price of their delinquency.

'Piet, you *Hotnot*, stop wasting your time! Get back to work! Do you think we pay you for messing around! If you don't watch out, we'll kick you out.'

'And you two *skelems*! I won't have you wasting the time of that *Hotnot*!'

The only time that Natie was really clean was on Friday evenings, the eve of the sabbath. In the late afternoon, he would be seized, stripped and placed in a metal tub full of warm soapy water. He was viciously scraped and scoured, deprived of his snot and the detritus of his adventures. Grit, mud, vegetation and other biological products were violently scrubbed from his hair. He never cried. He focused on the soothing warmth of the water. He was dried, and his abrasions and cuts were anointed with brilliantly green, startlingly red, outrageously purple or violently yellow tinctures which stung. His hair was brushed, but his cow-lick remained recalcitrant. He was dressed in a clean white shirt and short pants, clean socks and buffed shoes and marched off to shul. He sat on the wooden bench to the left of his father, Abraham, who was attired in his high collar and a three-piece suit. To the right of his father, sat his serious older brother, who now, after his bar mitzvah, was also dressed in a suit with long trousers.

The hubbub of voices subsided into silence as the *hazan*, cantor, broke into song. Natie's father and brother followed the service decorously, with deep respect and rapt devotion. Natie fidgeted, swung his feet under his seat, and tried to keep himself from picking his nose. He searched the women's gallery for Debora. All the women were dressed in long black dresses with frothy lace at the necks. A pearl necklace glinted here, a more impressive piece of jewellery sparkled there. Naomi and her two daughters, in keeping with their lowly status in the congregation, had seats in the back row of the gallery. So it was difficult for Natie to spot Debora behind the batteries of high black hats in the rows in front of her. Natie concentrated solely on this mission. He heard not a

word of the singing, the chanting, the rabbi's sermon. His father nudged him from time to time and Natie tried to focus his attention away from the gallery but in vain. Then he spotted her, a golden halo amongst the banks of darker heads. Could she see him? Could they get into eye contact? Suddenly he could see her gazing at him. He beamed and waved joyously. His father growled and slapped his saluting hand down. Natie could see Naomi too, glowering at Debora.

After the service, the two families joined for the sabbath meal. The two candles had long since been lit. The flames competed for attention with the tall, freshly burnished silver candlesticks. The two families stood in silence around the table. Natie and Debora had long since been barred from sitting together to prevent indecorous behaviour. Abraham sang the *kiddush* which reminded the Jews that God had rested on the seventh day from his labour of creating the universe and entreated them to remember that day and keep it holy. He held a bejewelled silver goblet. After blessing the wine, he took a sip from the brimming goblet and passed it on to his older son standing at his right hand. He, in turn, took a drop and passed it onwards around the table until all had taken a sip. Then Abraham removed the intricately embroidered cover that had until then hidden the two plaited, golden brown, sabbath loaves. Elsewhere, they were called *challahs*, but South African Jews knew them as *kitkes*. He pronounced the blessing for bread, broke off a piece for each member of the family, sprinkled them with salt and passed them around. Everyone sat, and the meal was served by a native servant who had also been scrubbed clean and dressed in spotless white for the occasion.

The typical meal started with *gefilte fish*, finely chopped fish, mixed with egg, chopped onion and bread crumbs, spiced with salt and pepper, stuffed back into the fish skin and topped with slices of carrot. It was traditionally served with *chren*, chopped horseradish mixed with salt, vinegar, a touch of sugar and perhaps grated beetroot. This was followed by steaming chicken soup with great circles of yellow fat. The main course was the boiled chicken that had given rise to the soup, served with potatoes and other vegetables. Dessert was usually a compote of stewed fruits.

During the meal, Natie and Debora could only send transient glances or surreptitious waves to each other. Nevertheless, they loved the serenity where they were, for a few holy hours, free of castigation and chastisement. They were sent to bed soon after the meal.

Then next spring, Natie took Debora to see a flower. It was his favourite of all the flowers he had come so lovingly to know. It grew tall among the rocks and tufts of grass, even taller than his thigh. It had long, spear-shaped, dark green leaves. It had clusters of blooms, each one of which was much bigger than his hands. They were shaped like the funnels that hung from hooks in the kitchen at home. Each flower had six beautiful petals. Most of them were white with blood-red

veins. Others were a shy pink and some a meek, pale purple. In the morning light, they sparkled with dew.

Secretly, he had already named this flower Debora, after his sad, tearful cousin, because it was as beautiful as she and he loved the flower as he loved her.

'Look!' he said with his usual enthusiasm and happy smile of anticipation. 'Its name is Debora!'

Many years later he would learn that this flower was called *Amaryllis belladonna* and that there was discussion about whether the name was derived from *amaro*, Italian for bitter (the plant's bulb was bitter) or from the Greek *amarysso*, to sparkle. Natie had no doubt which etymology he preferred.

He would always remember his Sparkling Belladonna.

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## **Amaryllis Belladonna by Jack Hoffmann**

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