

## Flenters Ferreria

There came a day when mutterings began in the congregation. The town was growing and the magnificent old Dutch Reformed church, a replica of a famous London church, was filled to overflowing particularly on Sundays. Besides, the nuwe dorp had expanded to the extent where its congregation was a long way from the centre of the town where the old church still stands.

What's more, some of the more prosperous businessmen who lived in the nuwe dorp were a little irked by the attire of some of the poorer folk who attended the old church. These blessed souls did not have the money to dress up for church and this made the supposedly pious rich souls feel decidedly uncomfortable.

And so, it came about that meetings were held and that the Synod was called upon to bless an idea. There was to be a second congregation with its own brand-new church, in the nuwe dorp.

The Synod, naturally in favour of any expansion, agreed and the gathering and garnering of funds began. There were fetes and bazaars and tiekiedraais and you name it. The ladies baked and cooked as though their very existence depended on it.

A new dominee elect was identified and brought to the dorp to help with the collecting. He visited every sheep farmer in the district and everyone in the nuwe dorp.

All the divisions and petty jealousies of a small community were flecked open for everyone to see. Some farmers were happy with the old church and would not give a brass farthing for the new one.

Every small town has its eccentric – or two. Flenters Ferreria was this Karoo dorp's outcast. He used to attend the weekly stock fair sales wearing the same battered suit, full of winkelhake. You can imagine how the tongues wagged over this.

One day they were silenced. Flenters turned up at the stock fair with a twenty-pound note pinned over each winkelhaak. That stopped the carping about the winkelhake but he was still an outcast. Rumour had it that he lived on his farm with a servant in a, mmmm, "sexual relationship".

The young dominee was a truly religious man, not hung up about poverty, images and reputations and so it was that one day he arrived at the Ferreira farm - the first visitor since Venters' father had died many years before.

"Welcome dominee, Jacob Ferreira."

"Neels Van Wyk, pleased to meet you."

They exchanged pleasantries while Flenters's "servant" served genuine moer coffee and wonderful koeksisters. After the repast the dominee broached the subject.

"I was wondering if you would be prepared to donate something to the nuwe kerk?"

"Dominee, I have long since passed beyond the church. I cannot reconcile Christ's teachings with many of the church's policies and practices, less so, some of those of its so-called believers. But be that as it may, I do recognise its value to some and that it does fulfil a need in the community - for that alone it would be my privilege to help in my own small way."

He took the dominee out into the yard, "You see that grey donkey over there? You can have it. I will take it to Friday's stock fair for you and you can ask the auctioneer to sell it to the highest bidder."

When news of this gift reached the ears of the populace, they once again vented their spleen on Flenters by means of rumour mongering and surreptitious whispering, "How could he be so mean - a one and sixpenny donkey? Het die man geen skaamte nie?" (Does the man have no shame?)

The day of the stock fair duly arrived. After much haggling over, ". . . five shillings for this sheep..." and, ". . . eighteen shillings for that cow. . .," just the grey donkey remained.

"What am I bid for the dominee's donkey?" asked the auctioneer, rather sarcastically.

A voice said, "One thousand pounds."

The dominee, his mouth hanging open, could not utter a sound as Flenters counted out fifty crisp twenty-pound notes and handed them to a beaming, but still speechless, dominee Neels van Wyk.

The town folk were all baffled by Flenters's actions, all except the manager of the local Landbank.

In answer to a farmer's question the manager laughed, "It's quite simple, donations are taxable, but stock purchase isn't."

## **Raymond Hattingh**

A Dictionary of South African English:

**winkelhaak:** L-shaped tear', e.g., in cloth