

MARY DE WAAL
A Character Sketch
by Keith Fisher

The car glided to a stop in front of the main entrance to De Waal Park. The complex looked a hybrid between a small casino and a five-star hotel, a palatial edifice. It made a grandiose statement! Everything about Mary de Waal seemed symbolic of something in an exaggerated way.

Her limousine was not one of the luxury German models. It was a Cadillac stretch-limousine like those she had seen in American films and soapies. It was white and sported red leather upholstery. The metres of windows were tinted to allow one-way vision – from the inside, out. She had enquired about having the vehicle bullet-proofed. That would have slowed it down and would have allowed only the restricted rolling down of the windows.

“But why do you want to wind down the windows, Mary? The car’s air-conditioned.”

“And if I want to slow down and say hello to friends or clients we pass? I don’t want business friends thinking I’m a snob.”

The Cadillac remained unarmoured. It had been one of those difficult decisions.

Mary de Waal’s husband and son were waiting at the top of the crescent-shaped flight of stone steps that descended gracefully from the main entrance to the paved driveway. The driver’s door opened and Skinner, her chauffeur, having placed the vehicle in ‘park’, jumped out, walked around the front of the Caddy to the rear passenger’s door which was precisely in line with the entrance to the edifice and the two men descending the steps.

He opened the door as the welcoming pair stepped onto the paving. There was a moment’s silence and then her leg appeared as she stepped

from the depths of the red leather upholstery. Skinner offered her a helping hand. She was dressed in a black business suit and leather court shoes. She imported the sheer stockings from France. They didn't make the right colour in South Africa. She didn't wear a hat unless attending a very formal and important occasion and only then if there was a large investment in the offing. Her hair had natural waves she had inherited from her widowed shop-assistant mother, and the stunning honey colour was a secret known only to her stylist in Sandton.

The dark glasses were also French. She'd bought them on her last visit to Paris. She couldn't remember the name of the shop or even the brand of the glasses. She knew they were the height of fashion because they had cost her the earth. She didn't carry a handbag when on business. Instead, she had her black Morocco leather briefcase with 18ct gold fittings. Her cellphone was inside the briefcase. She accepted no calls unless from one of her confidants who had her number, and then only in an emergency. She used it to phone people she wanted to talk to. It was not a convenience for people who might try to phone her! They could work through her private secretary who guarded her like a Rottweiler.

Her husband, Charles, stepped forward to greet her. He kissed her cheek and took the briefcase from her and handed it to their son, Ray, who greeted her by kissing her gloved hand.

"Good afternoon, Mum."

"Hello, Ray, darling. Is everyone here?"

"All waiting in the board room, Mum. Herman Wylie has already tendered apologies. He's handed the figures to me and I'll handle the financial report, if you agree, Mum."

"Of course; I'll back you up if necessary."

Ray de Waal looked relieved. Herman Wylie, the financial director was out of town.

Mary de Waal took her seat at the head of the table. Against the wall behind her, large brass lettering against the wooden panelling proclaimed

“AGAPE INVESTMENTS INCORPORATED”

“Thank you for attending, ladies and gentlemen. We have a full agenda. The required quorum is present. I call on the secretary to read the minutes of the last meeting...”

Mary de Waal closed the meeting. It had not gone well. Ray had made a mess of the financials and she was concerned.

The three men were waiting as Mary entered her office and closed the door behind her.

“Mrs Mary de Waal?” one asked.

She was startled.

“Yes, how can I help you?”

“I’m Brigadier Stander of the Special Investigation Unit. I have a warrant for your arrest. We can leave by the rear exit and we can dispense with handcuffs provided you do as we request. Is that understood?”

“What’s all this nonsense about? Do you know who I am? The minister and I are close associates.”

“Captain Botha will read your rights and you’ll receive a copy of the charges at the station. You may phone your attorney after that.”

The news dominated the headlines of the morning newspapers.

“MARY DE WAAL OF AGAPE INVESTMENTS ARRESTED ON
CHARGES OF FRAUD, THEFT AND RACKETEERING”

“PYRAMID SCHEME BLOWN OPEN”

“HERMAN WYLIE FOUND DEAD IN CAMPS BAY PENTHOUSE,
SUICIDE SUSPECTED”

“HUNDREDS OF PENSIONER INVESTORS LEFT DESTITUTE”

“Remember, Alan,” Mary de Waal said to her attorney, “be a darling and
get Ray to bring me my cosmetic case before we go to the bail hearing.”