



The Cardinals: With Meditations and Short Stories (African Writers Series)

Bessie Head

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Intense personal experience of South Africa's brutal social system, a sense of stifled creativity, and a distaste for politics made Bessie Head leave for Botswana on an exit permit at the age of 27. There, in her chosen rural haven of Serowe, and despite a severe mental breakdown, she wrote novels and stories that earned her international recognition as one of Africa's most remarkable and individual writers.

The publication at last of *The Cardinals*--thought to be the first long piece of fiction Head produced and the only one she ever set in South Africa--is an exciting literary event.

After a childhood of poverty and abuse in the slums of Cape Town, the protagonist unexpectedly lands a job as a reporter in the offices of African Beat. She is too withdrawn to flourish in her new world and struggles to find her identity as a woman and a writer against the muckraking demanded by her editors and the sexism of the newsroom. Johnny believes in her, but his faith carries its own dangers. Questions of origins, identity, sexuality, writing, love, revenge, and politics unite to propel the characters to joy while disaster waits.

The seven short pieces of fiction included in this volume come from the years immediately after Bessie Head went to Botswana. Among them is "Earth Love," which she called the "goddam best bit of writing I ever did."

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