

# A must for Africana collectors

**FIELA'S CHILD** by  
Dalene Matthee (Viking)

**DALENE MATTHEE'S** newest book, "Fiela's Child", translated by the author into English, is a work distinguished by both its strength and sentiment.

A two-year-old foundling is left on the doorstep of a coloured family in Langkloof, Cape. He grows to mid-childhood in an environment of poverty, softened by the fierce and enduring love of his adoptive family.

His adoptive mother, Fiela, wraps her protective concern about him, keeping

him out of the public eye because he is a white child.

Years before, a little boy belonging to a Kysna woodcutter family — the forest dwellers, had disappeared, and was never found.

Years later, Government census conductors, concerned that a white child was growing up in a coloured family, nudge along the wheels of fate.

The white woman claims him as her own, in front of a magistrate, and this child of the Karoo "vlakte" must adapt to the strangeness of his new and alien family and forest environment, or perish.

How Benjamin Komoetie becomes Lukas van Rooyen, and how the re-transformation is achieved, is told with an empathy for human emotion and frailty, as well as with a rare sensitivity for the setting — South Africa's Garden Route and ostrich country.

Dalene Matthee writes with the intimate knowledge of, and love for her subject, that distinguishes the writing of two other daughters of the Karoo, Pauline Smith and Olive Schreiner.

Collectors of Africana, and lovers of a story well told will not miss out on this one.

Brenda Boulton

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