

# Outback Refuge Sample

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# Chapter One

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## UMTALI RAILWAY STATION, ZIMBABWE- MOZAMBIQUE BORDER - 1980

**T**he land had experienced it all.

Squabbles, rivalry, migrations, invasions, abductions and wars. Acts as old as Man. Acts as old as time.

From the ancient, pre-human beings and the primitive early tribes. From the great Bantu migrations to the gold trading civilisation of Great Zimbabwe. From the kidnapping Arab slave traders to the

swarms of Zulu impi invading from the south. Then the death and destruction of the white man's maxim machine guns.

And yet again, another fight for supremacy. Three tribes fighting for control, each convinced of the justness of their cause. The majority Shona tribes, the minority Matabele tribes, and the desperate tribe of White citizens.

After fourteen years, the weapons now finally silent. For a short time at least.

There was only one victor. Great their celebration. Bitter their revenge.

Despite the clear blue sky, dark clouds crushed Robin Harwood's soul. Cyclonic clouds. His beloved, sixty-year heritage no more. The shaft of a new reality striking his heart at the name on the station. Umtali painted over, the new Mutare painted crude by hand.

He approached the phalanx of soldiers surrounding the station complex. Arrogant faces, AK47s at the ready.

*Mkondo must have sent a platoon to every border checkpoint.*

Robin waited back as his companion approached the ticket-box, showed her passport and purchased a first-class ticket to the Mozambique coastal port of Beira. Their eyes met briefly as she reached the line of soldiers, each trying to dispel the other's fears. Lumping her hold-all, camera and recorder, she braced herself as she walked past the searing faces of the new regime. Not stopped, she entered her carriage.

*Thank God. Don't realise we're together.*

He forced himself to look straight ahead as he queued at another ticket box, and buying a fourth-class ticket, he showed a forged, but deliberately dirtied and dog-eared Mozambique identity card. Prodged at gunpoint, he reached a hessian screen at a side entrance and joined the line of male, largely rural Mozambique and Zimbabwean workers booked for the third and fourth-class carriages.

Aided by his darkened skin, he fought the capillaries that sought to flush his face; warn of the fear raging under his disguise. The line shuffled forward until a soldier's arrogant voice ordered all to strip.

*As expected.*

Robin stood naked, his throat like leather, his pulse thundering, praying the last-minute skin stain would go unnoticed amongst the variety of skin shades of his fellow travellers. His hairless, mid-brown scalp glistened in the sun as he gripped his well-worn boots between thumb and fingers, scruffy clothes and hat balanced on his other hand. With both hands hidden, the guards were unaware they weren't the dirt-ingrained, callous covered hands of his surrounding passengers.

"Papers!" The Zimbabwean soldier's demand was in Shona.

Robin shrugged, nodding to his identity card and train ticket he'd stuck in the headband of his battered hat. The soldier extracted both, studied them and stared into his face.

"Purpose of your visit?" The man again spoke Shona

Again, Robin shrugged.

"Purpose of your visit?" Voice raised, the man's demand was now in English.

Robin shrugged once more.

"Purpose of your visit?" The soldier finally spoke in stilted Portuguese.

"Return home." Robin's reply was in the best Portuguese he could muster, but far more fluent than his interrogator. "Visited sister in Dangamvura to celebrate your independence. Real party."

"Yes. Final victory after our glorious struggle." The soldier raised his fist in the air.

"Your final victory." Robin lifted his boots, attempting to duplicate the man's salute.

"But move along."

As Robin re-dressed in his thread-bare clothes, his companion settled into the front carriage of the plush, first-class compartment that he had travelled in so often before. Now his second time travelling fourth-class, he walked to the last carriages and pushed his way into the last spot on the wooden bench running around the carriage perimeter. The entry would remain door-less for the entire journey, the only light and ventilation in the putrid, crowded carriage. The remaining passengers sat on the floor, surrounded by chicken cages, baskets of produce, cardboard boxes and cloth-wrapped bundles.

The rattle of rifles and the scraping of boots silenced the babble. Not satisfied with their platform gate vetting, the troops re-checked passports, identity papers and tickets. At each mid-brown male, they studied both the man's face and the photo they carried.

Robin pulled down his hat, covering his face as he heard them approach. With little floor-space, the soldiers kicked over the passengers' cargo. Butted them aside with their rifles.

Robin's hat flew across the room. "Stand when you see a freedom fighter."

He immediately obliged, trying not to swallow as the man's rifle pushed deep into his larynx, his body rigid as the soldier's eyes swept from the photo to Robin's eyes.

*Hopefully his shadow will obscure the reflection from my dark contact lenses.*

The rifleman's eyes glazed, evidently deciding his brown skin and shaved head differed from the photo clutched so tightly in his hand. He continued his inspection.

Only then did sweat pour from Robin's forehead.

*Hope the stain doesn't run.*

In their respective parts of the train, Robin and his companion's heartbeats gradually slowed as the soldiers left the train. The locomotive



tive took up the strain and domino-like, the carriages began to move one by one.

*Escape!*

When anyone spoke, he replied in Matabele, the language of the new Zimbabwe's southwestern provinces. A language rarely spoken by the country's eastern dwellers.

He sank against the hard carriage wall as it rattled and swayed on the poorly maintained track, his mind going back to his last fourth-class journey. To the dusky woman he met in the port-side bar in Beira while awaiting its departure. A woman attracted by his youth and handsome, fresh face. A welcome change from her usual clients of rough seamen and labourers. A woman, who while relishing her time giving her virgin student a morning-long lesson in the art of love, still charged him all his cash but for a fourth-class fare home.

His smile grew at the memory; at the value he'd got from his hard-earned savings. A paltry price to discover more in those few hours than the average man would learn in a lifetime.

And while he would never forget that morning's lessons, it was the afternoon that was indelibly seared into his mind. Mkondo's train ambush, Robin the only Caucasian survivor. Robin's fluke rifle shot that pulverised Mkondo's testicles, further intensifying the man's hatred of his boyhood friend.

Robin's desperate escape, finally staggering into the Umtali police station ten days later.

## Chapter Two

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# NEWLY NAMED CITY OF HARARE, ZIMBABWE- RHODESIA

Four days earlier, far inland from both the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, Inspector Robin Harwood sat in his claustrophobic office, the irritating clack, clack of a decrepit fan giving no relief as it circulated the hot, dry air. Circulating the futility of the last fourteen years.

Face propped in his hands, he despaired that his beloved country had fallen to new rulers. Dismayed at the loss of all he held dear – a once happy family, the family farm, a loyal workforce part of the family. The rule of law. White friends and family killed and maimed. Close

African friends killed and maimed. Both whites and blacks uncertain of the years ahead.

His gut churned at memories made worse by Mkondo's wedding day murder of his fiancée and mother.

Soon, the highly productive family farm that his father had carved out of the virgin bush would be in ruins. Seized as a war trophy by one of the new ruling elite or offered to their supporters, disintegrating into subsistence plots.

*My spiritual home. But what options now?*

Little did he know that sanctuary awaited half a world away. To another place well inland of two great oceans. To a different continent. To the town of Alice Springs in Australia's vast Northern Territory.

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As an outgoing police Special Branch intelligence officer, he'd spent twelve years trying to halt the tide. But forces far greater than he had been at work. Insurgents backed by the communist might of China, the Soviet Union and North Korea. Sanctions from one-time friends the UK and US. All forces far greater than those of his small country.

*We neither won or lost the military war. But certainly lost the political war.*

The dark rectangle above the building entrance said it all. Stark against the thirty years of faded paint, a rectangle now exposed to the sun after the removal of the sign announcing a British South Africa Police facility. The BSAP, an organisation dating back to the British South Africa Company which invaded and for thirty years governed present-day Zambia, Malawi and Zimbabwe. The para-military police

force that continued under British colonial rule and Ian Smith's independent Rhodesia.

The wall's fading paint a stark reminder of a fading regime. Robin's lapel badges soon for the rubbish.

Despite the weight on his shoulders, there was one redeeming feature. A chance that Jennifer Bancroft might come back into his life. A smile crept across features furrowed by more than a decade of war.

*But would it end again like so often in the past?*

As a member of the old regime's intelligence service, Robin knew he was in Mugabe's sights.

Unless of course, Mkondo got in first.

And as if on cue, in a cloud of dust a battered Mark 2 Jaguar screeched to a halt outside his office. The once luxury car pre-dating the country's ongoing sanctions.

Joshua Mkondo lept out of the confiscated vehicle, his suit lightweight, tailor made. Six armed henchmen followed, their crisp new uniforms matching their equally new Chinese BJ212 jeep.

Mkondo's party swept through the foyer as if they owned the building, the metallic thud of brand new, hob-nail boots rattling the steel treads as they tramped up the staircase. His men remained in the corridor.

Robin looked up as Mkondo strode into his office, returning the black glare of his deadly enemy. The hostility charging the room was not just of two men who had fought on opposite sides of a decade-long war. Their malice was personal.

The lethal eye of the intruder's pistol aimed at Robin's head.

"Getup and follow." Pearl-like teeth glared through the gunman's dark-skinned leer.

"I know you can't wait to use that on me but you're a bit too bloody early." Eyebrows heavy, Robin returned the gunman's glare. "You and

your cronies may rule the roost in three days' time but until then you can fuck off!"

"Always thought you were the king when we played as kids. But now I'm the boss."

"For a while perhaps. I believe Mugabe's given you command of his planned 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade and he'll exploit your brutality while it suits him. I can only image the carnage you'll cause with the help of your North Korean sponsors. But Mugabe won't put up with your hot-headed insanity forever."

"Hot headed or not, you're my target now."

"Don't fool yourself." Robin fought to disguise the dread invading his body. "Like it not, your cronies need me until the after the independence ceremony. To prevent the catastrophe that you and your thugs bloody well deserve."

"Typical. Arrogant to the last but you're a dead man walking." Mkondo's eyes relished the weapon that he reluctantly lowered. "Both me and my good friend here will be waiting. And if anything goes wrong with the ceremony, yours won't be a quick death. I'll enjoy skinning you alive."

"I'm sure you'll salivate over every moment. But you've tried before. Many times. Always failed."

"Not this time," Mkondo spat out. "Won't stand a chance." Chest swollen and with an abrupt turn, he strode back to his vehicle.

Robin sat welded to his chair, beads of perspiration erupting across his forehead. The sweat of uncertainty. The memory sweat of surviving close Mkondo threats.

In three days' time, he and his colleagues would be under the new rulers' control. The new ruler's revengeful blood lust. But despite the looming peril he still had a duty to perform. While bile rose in his throat at the prospect, his role was to ensure no threat to the momen-

tous independence ceremony, and after a decade of investigating and fighting, his instincts screamed. Every nerve sensing a catastrophe.

But what threat? Where? When? How? By who? He poured over his 'persons of interest' lists, those who could disrupt the ceremony or worse. There was no shortage of possibilities. Disgruntled members of Mugabe's party and army jealous of his success; supporters of the Matabele and other unsuccessful freedom movements; agents of the Republic of South Africa's Bureau of State Security; blacks whose families were butchered by the insurgents for not supporting their cause; whites refusing to accept reality; whites whose loved ones had been slaughtered in the seemingly endless war.

Whereto start? The list almost endless and should he get it wrong, his fate wouldn't bear thinking about.

Face flushed, foreboding crept through his every cell, sensing disaster inevitable.

He studied every file, painstakingly eliminating the less likely until 47 names remained. He completed a summary document, and his trusty Matabele sergeant copied photos of each suspect. During his security briefing later that afternoon, Robin would issue all 47 images to those manning every security checkpoint.

Despite every bone in his body sensing disaster, he collapsed exhausted in his lop-sided office chair, his mind drifting. No longer to the horrors of the last decade but now on Jennifer Bancroft. Back in town for yet another report for the British Broadcasting Network, no doubt gloating that her beloved Marxists had finally seized power. Eager to see defeat in Robin's eyes. After her cutting words on their final break-up, no doubt ecstatic that the white regime would receive what to her, are our just desserts.

Jennifer Bancroft. School temptress. Dead fiancée's cousin. Frequent lover. Mugabede votee. Socialist know-all!

*Bitch!*

# Chapter Three

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## HARARE, NEW NATION OF ZIMBABWE

Jennifer Bancroft was wherever there for every good story. As the British Broadcasting Network's southern African correspondent, the up-coming ceremony was a must. Essential to record the end of a regime. To celebrate the end of an era. To the fall of the last vestige of colonialism. To savour her part in its destruction. Her part in the new beginning for millions of now free Africans.

Becoming an avid socialist during her Cambridge years she'd keenly followed the conflict, spending weeks trekking with the country's freedom fighters – Mugabe's Shona guerrillas largely supported by China and Matabele fighters supported by the Soviet Union. She felt an affinity with the victors, for it was her victory too.

And while following successful struggles through Colonial Africa appealed to her anti-establishment beliefs, her work on the Dark Continent had been good for her career. Her face and stories a regular



feature on British television and around the world. With Mugabe's final victory, her report on the celebrations would be her crowning glory. Insightful, penetrating, visually spectacular.

Jennifer's interviews primarily featured the Shona majority.

"We'll now lord over the whites. Take all their riches," gloated one man.

"Good schools and modern hospitals." Jennifer nodded in agreement, despite knowing that although primitive by British standards, Rhodesia had the best school and hospital system for the African population of any country on the continent.

But to appear balanced, she also interviewed a selection of whites.

"We used to consider ourselves more British than the British until the grubby UK politicians sacrificed us to prop up their growing immigrant vote." The distraught woman was in tears. "It stinks. And the British stink with it."

"It's a victory for the bloody communists you idiot. Britain spends billions fighting the Cold War against them, but openly encouraged them to overthrow our country."

Ian Smith, leader of the defeated white controlled Rhodesian Government was unavailable for an interview. He was on a South African lecture tour.

She couldn't wait for her exclusive interview with Mugabe, the incoming prime minister whose party held 56% of the new parliamentary seats. Knowing Jennifer to be a strong supporter and that she would ensure the widest audience for his words, he offered her an exclusive interview.

"The wrongs of the past stand forgiven and forgotten. If yesterday I fought the Whites as an enemy and the Matabele as rivals, today they are our friends and allies."

Jennifer enthusiastically recorded every word, well aware of the real meaning behind the new leader's mealy-mouthed statements. Of his dictator ambitions. That he and his henchmen would seize the white's assets and inflict genocide on his Matabele rivals. Of his eagerness to join the continent's Afro-Marxist kleptocrats, ransacking their countries as the west basked in the glow of liberating the down-trodden populations.

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As Jennifer conducted her interview with Mugabe, Joshua Mkondo paced to and fro in his spartan office on the city's outskirts. Appointed by Mugabe as commander of the planned elite Fifth Brigade, his agile mind plotted to ingratiate himself even further into Mugabe's inner circle.

With his tribal chieftain heritage dating back centuries, he'd been targeted in his early teens for recruitment into Mugabe's ranks. "Never again be subservient to the whites," they'd cajoled. "Become a great leader like your ancestors. A leader in the new Chimurenga. A leader in the new independent and Marxist Zimbabwe."

Embracing the challenge, he ruthlessly clawed his way up the freedom movement's leadership, a trail of torture, murder, assassination, coercion and violence in his wake. Fearless and brutal to all who stood in his way. The dreaded Whites' army. Their traitorous African police and soldiers. His father who believed freedom fighters only thugs. The rival Matabele independence movement. Any villager not 100% behind Mugabe.

When Jennifer Bancroft had once questioned why he'd killed his own father, he just laughed. "He refused to embrace the Freedom

Fighter's cause, sought to prop up the despised Smith regime by supporting the proposal for a parliamentary Upper House of Tribal Chiefs." But the reality was that his father had continued his loyalty to bloody Robin Harwood's family.

At Robin Haywood's name, Mkondo pupils narrowed, his eyes as dark as the black of his skin.

The bastard had thought we were friends, playing and exploring together, but he always had to be the boss. Always bloody superior. Unconcerned that Joshua's family lived in the farm's Kraal of mud-walled rondavels, working for a pittance while the Harwoods lived like lords in their grand homestead.

*Bastard's escaped too many times. Never again!*

## Chapter Four

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# ZIMBABWE INDEPENDENCE CEREMONY, RUFARO STADIUM, HARARE

It was a night of celebration. Spectacle. Festivity. Pomp. Ceremony. For months they'd prepared the huge soccer stadium, the 'Zimbabwean Theatre of Dreams', expanding its capacity for 30,000 carefully vetted invitees. All to witness the formal handover of a land and its people, giving hope to those disadvantaged by more than a hundred years of colonialism.

For those who'd skillfully exploited international power politics to gain unfettered power.

They would all be there. Their jubilant Communist supporters from the Soviet Union, China, North Korea, East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Vietnam. The UK and the US, both hated by the defeated Whites' for betraying their country. The leaders of independent African states and British Commonwealth countries. Citizens from every corner of the new nation.

But outgoing White Rhodesian leader Ian Smith would be absent.

Like so many of the outgoing political and administrative figures, Robin Harwood was forced to attend. All to have their noses ceremoniously rubbed into the faeces of their defeat.

But regardless of the change in his superiors, Robin's presence was critical to the hand-over's success. While he'd identified the main suspects, he had no part in the event's physical security. As a member of the loathed BSAP, he knew he'd be watched as carefully as any potential threat.

While he'd done all he could, he was certain there'd still be an incident. After ten years of front-line and back-room warfare, he could feel it in his bones.

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A jubilant crowd danced their way to the stadium entrances, naively believing that fourteen years of struggle would bring peace and prosperity to all. And while on-site security was not his job; Robin's eyes scanned every roof and window on the main approach, then circled and scrutinised each of the huge stands. Ambush sites, possible sniper

positions, anything out of place. Possibilities everywhere, but nothing immediately raising his suspicions.

The sight of Jennifer Bancroft spiked his blood pressure. Interviewing members of the jubilant dancers, her camera and sound men recording the setting and the excitement-charged crowd.

"Typical," he mumbled under his breath, a fervent mix of carnal memories, contempt, regret, betrayal and desire surging through his body.

*Just like her to big-note herself, take every opportunity to thrust her face into the lounge rooms of the world.*

Finishing a final piece to camera before moving into the arena proper, he noted her eyes narrow on seeing him in his formal uniform.

Both sets of eyes steely. Both aloof. Both tinged with remorse for what could have been.

As the last stragglers entered the venue, Robin was forced to follow, taking his allocated seat with a row of white former police, army and air force officers. All to have their noses ceremonially rubbed in the faces of their defeat.

Then the sight of Jennifer again, now part of the huge media contingent cordoned-off in front of the TV out-door broadcast van which streamed the ceremony throughout the world.

Stress finally reducing, the long ceremony began.

Prince Charles headed the official delegation in his white naval commander's uniform, a perfect foil for his blue sash, pilot's wings insignia, service medals, orders of The Bath and The Garter. A gold-braided aiguillette glittered from his right shoulder. Mugabe, the British Prime Minister's envoy and the UN Secretary General followed.

With a more modest aiguillette on his formal uniform, Joshua Mkondo sat to the side of the official party, next to other senior freedom fighter leaders. His look smug as his eyes focused on Robin.

The Reverend Canaan Banana then entered, Mugabe's selection of a puppet President. The revolutionary movement's obscure underling had once declared "whenever I see a guerilla, I see Jesus Christ". His pompous stance reminded Robin of the UK's Lord Carrington's jest that the man would help transform the economically buoyant but recalcitrant rebel white Rhodesian colony into a Banana republic. In more ways than one.

But despite his contempt for all assembled in the official party, Robin's eyes continued to scan the vast stadium.

First came singing. Endless singing.

Then dancing. Endless dancing.

Then the speeches. Endless speeches, fortunately interspersed with a performance by Bob Marley, the Caribbean born reggae singer. He would give another performance the next day for 100,000 fans not invited to the stadium performance.

Nearing Midnight, the night's finale approached. Robin knew it would be his last chance to catch anything unusual.

The arena lighting dimmed as Mugabe moved to a large, shining cauldron set in front of the official grandstand. Uttering a few words he ceremoniously lit the Flame of Independence.

The lights continued to fade as Prince Charles walked down to the arena, a cloth bundle under his arm. With Mugabe at his side he continued to the towering flagpole now starkly spotlighted in the centre of the field.

Then, just as the rest of the arena was about to be enveloped in darkness, Robin saw it.

Movement!

Something out of place near the TV outside broadcast van. Straining his eyes he couldn't identify the face, but he recognised the limp. Fearful of the tubular object the man carried.

*No Jack! Don't be so fuck'n stupid!*

Robin had eliminated Jack Hale from his persons-of-interest list; overlooking the significance of Jack's work as a lighting contractor. Like so many others, his was a sad story. Volunteering for the Royal Air Force in WW2 he survived the Battle of Britain and was shot down twice. Once over England and once over the snow-covered Italian Alps where he'd walked shoeless to safety in Switzerland, frostbite taking six toes. Toiling after the war despite his affliction, he turned an area of untouched bush into a thriving farm and while away on rotation as an Air Force Reserve pilot, the terrorists struck. His wife, children and the farm's entire African workforce and their families had been butchered, defiled. Robin knew of Jack's hatred of Mugabe and his cronies, but it was the betrayal of Rhodesia's white population by the Britain he nearly died defending, that had been bitterest pill to swallow. The British politicians who'd sold-out Rhodesia to buy the grubby immigrant votes necessary to keep their wafer-thin majorities in the UK parliament.

Robin looked left and right in the increasing blackness, then raced towards Jack, hopeful his movement would go unnoticed.

But Mkondo was immediately on his feet, unholstering his pistol.

Endearing himself to the vast crowd by introducing his address in the Shona language, Prince Charles and the new Prime Minister stood at the base of the flagpole, the Union Jack fluttering above. Two Royal Navy petty officers stood by and on the Prince's order, one lowered the British flag, the two sailors folding it with great precision.

The prince then took the bundle from under his arm and formally presented the new Zimbabwean flag to Mugabe. In turn, he handed



the ensign to one of Mkondo's junior officers who clipped it to the halliard. To a drum-roll which echoed through the stadium, the multi-striped flag with its distinctive bird statue image, gradually crept up the flagpole.

On reaching the top, an ear-shattering cheer erupted as both the Prince and Mugabe took two steps backward and saluted the new flag.

*Boom!*

The first report of an artillery 21-gun salute overshadowed the boisterous voices reverberating through the arena.

Robin's eyes widened as Hale extracted a rifle from the cylinder and kneel behind an enormous spotlight tower. Ignoring the noise and unseen by his quarry, Robin crept from Jack's rear.

Mkondo desperately tried to make up ground, Robin's body obscuring the rifleman's vague silhouette.

*Boom!*

The second round of the 21 gun salute reverberated around the stadium.

Oblivious of his surroundings, Jack raised his weapon.

Aimed at the heir to the British throne.

He took a deep breath. Centered the crosshairs of the weapon's telescopic sight onto the medals on the Prince's chest.

*Boom!*

Robin gave a desperate lunge, seizing the rifle from Jack's startled arms as he pushed the older man onto the ground.

*Boom!*

"Freeze!" shouted Mkondo, holding his pistol to Robin's head. Pleased he'd caught his arch enemy red-handed, a rifle firmly in his hands and pointing to Mugabe.

*Boom!*

“Not content with killing our courageous Freedom Fighters. You want to assassinate our leader too?”

*Boom!*

“Don’t be absurd. I just saved him from being shot!”

“I’m not blind! I can see what I can see.”

“You saw me with the others. I had no rifle then. I’ve just seized it.

*Boom!*

“I’m no fool! You obviously planted it in advance. With the rifle in your hands, you’re obviously attempting an assassin. Do you think I’m an idiot?”

*Boom!*

“Too late now, but you deserve to be strapped to one of those artillery guns. Have your guts blown to smithereens. Like Rhodes did to my forebears.”

*Boom!*

“No escape this time.” Mkondo’s face lit with a smile of accomplishment. An end to his loathed enemy. The man who’d escaped so often. The man whose rifle had inflicted the greatest insult of all.

Robin stood rigid, anticipating the bullet that would shatter his head.

“I should shoot you right now. But my future would be ruined if I did it during the ceremony. But be assured, you won’t last till morning!”

*Boom!*

Neither man noticed the figure moving silently from the media enclosure. Unseen as they also approached from their rear.

*Boom!*

With all her might, Jennifer Bancroft swung the base of her heavy radio-microphone. Colliding with the back of Mkondo’s head, he dropped his pistol as he collapsed onto the ground.

*Boom!*

“Run. You silly bastard!” Jennifer commanded as she knelt and picked up Mkondo’s pistol.

*Boom!*

“No. Don’t run.” Robin was cool and collected, despite yet another near-death experience. “Walk naturally through the darkness. No one will know what happened until the lights come back on.”

*Boom!*

Robin approached the African police sergeant commanding the gate security, who saluted on seeing the inspector. Robin returned the salute, determined to hold the guard’s attention so Jennifer could walk past the barrier un-noticed.

“Seen anything suspicious sergeant?” The man was amongst those he’d briefed that afternoon.

“Nothing so far.”

“Keep on your toes anyway. The danger’s not over until the official party are tucked up in bed.”

*Boom!*

“Leaving before you’re caught up in the departing crowd Sir?”

“Yes sergeant,” Robin continued through the checkpoint, his gait casual. “There’s a lot to arrange before tomorrow’s Bob Marley concert.”

*Boom!*

Jennifer’s BBN hire car was parked nearby and with its two occupants; crept down 7<sup>th</sup> Street, pushing its way through the sea of people prevented from accessing the arena. Finally free of the crowd, it picked up speed as the guns’ final explosion completed their salute.

At the first public telephone box, Jennifer jumped out to ring her bureau chief in Johannesburg, leaving a message on his answering machine

“Hi Bill, I’ve come down with a sudden wog and the way I feel, it’ll probably take a while to get over it. Completed all the interviews needed for the Independence piece and left Ted and Bill to complete filming the actual ceremony. It hit me so suddenly I didn’t have a chance to tell them I was leaving. Ted will fly down the tapes, and as it’s all self-explanatory, you shouldn’t need my input with editing. I’ll leave the hire-car in the hotel car park, the key on the top of the front, driver’s side tyre.”

## Chapter Five

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# UMTALI ROAD, ZIMBABWE/MOZAMBIQUE BORDER

Anticipating a need for a possible escape, Robin had squirreled away an old Vanguard Estate car with all his necessary escape requirements. Jennifer drove them both to its warehouse on the city outskirts and from her hire-car, grabbed her hold-all with her make-up and spare clothes. It joined her professional still camera and voice recorder in the back of the Vanguard.

“Get changed into civilian clothes and follow me to the car drop-off point. From now on you’re my driver/cameraman.”

They soon reached the city boundary checkpoint.

“Hold your breath,” Robin muttered, “time for the first real test.”

Jennifer waved her Press credentials and Robin showed forged identity papers. Passing without question, they headed east.

After 150 miles, Robin turned onto a faint bush track he'd reconnoitered the previous year. A rocky, horse-shoe shaped kopje hid the car from road traffic.

It was their first real opportunity to talk.

"What the fuck have you done?" Robin's voice couldn't hide his suspicion over Jennifer's rescue motives. "What on earth were you thinking? Why risk everything like you did tonight? I thought you were far too smart for that. Too committed to your beloved Commo mates."

"Why do you think, you bloody idiot?"

"How would I know? I no longer mean anything to you. You're too fixated on your murderous terrorists. Your beloved TV audience."

"I know Mkondo only too well. What a murderous bastard he and his cronies are. How he justifiably hates your guts. I had to protect you!"

"Protect me? Why the bloody hell would you do that? You've spurned me time and again. You hate my politics. You hate the way I love the old Rhodesia. You hate the way I've always tried to bring black and whites together instead of conflict and hate." Robin's voice rasped in his throat. "You glorify Mugabe and his Marxist cut-throats as they rampage through the countryside, murdering black and white alike."

"Robin, it was never like that."

"Of course it bloody was. I've never understood what you're really all about, but we've got a dangerous day tomorrow. We both need a good rest."

After the most rudimentary of meals they settled on an old kapok mattress laid out on the van's cargo floor, both taking great care their bodies didn't touch. Robin's mind raced.

*Is escape really possible? What could the future possibly bring?*

Nightmares of capture, too gruesome to imagine. Memories of Jennifer and times past. Torrid times. Bitter break-ups.

Despite their determination to keep apart, each could feel the other's movements; their breathing, the heat radiating from their bodies, their unique aroma. It was essential they be fully alert in the morning, yet sleep escaped them despite the long, stress draining hours leading to the ceremony. They tossed and turned in the confined space, adrenalin still surging through their every cell. Adrenalin surges that turned to carnal need as their bodies fought to wall out the danger. Two pelvises pounding for the first time in years. No words. Just grunts and groans to block out an unknown future. To block out the bitterness of past partings.

With pulses returning to normal, it was if they'd excised their fears. Their past regrets. Spent, they fell into each other's arms. Into the arms of a welcoming sleep.

Robin woke to a face hovering over his. Soft kisses as Jennifer lowered her head, her fingers caressing his cheek.

"Morning lover-boy."

He smiled. An expansive, welcoming smile. "Listen who's talking."

"I know we've always had a roller coaster relationship, but I've loved you ever since I first set eyes on you way back at Rannoch. You must know that! Just because we don't believe in the same things doesn't mean I've ever stopped loving you. There was no way I'd let you get killed last night."

"You'll never know how much of a wreck I became each time we broke up." Robin ventured into questionable territory. "I've been besotted ever since the snow-cave incident. But your career, your politics, always gets in the way."

"Rightly or wrongly we're here together." She kissed him on the forehead. "But we haven't time to prattle. Time to leave."

Robin's family always vacationed in their holiday home on the coast of adjoining Mozambique and knew that unlike British colonialists, the Portuguese had interbred with the local population for over three centuries. The country's population ranged from the blackest of black through every shade to the whitest of white. Mid-brown was Robin's choice.

Still naked, he fished out his disguise kit from the spare tyre area. His rugged peasant's clothes set off with a motley straw hat, a hole on one side and a haphazard fan of straw filaments sticking out. He gave Jennifer a pair of hand operated hair-clippers and on the lowest setting; she cut his hair as short as possible. A battery razor followed, totally erasing the last traces of blonde hair, his bald pate glowing in the early morning sun.

After a very thorough facial shave he gave her a bottle of mid-brown stain and a lint cloth.

"Made from the tannin of crushed Umbrella Thorn tree bark. Keep giving it a good shake as you apply it to my entire body, every crack, every crevice. One coat to the soles of my feet, two to my palms, three elsewhere and four to the places where my skin would be exposed to the sun - face, neck and lower arms."

She took the cloth, poured the coloured liquid onto it and applied the first coat until reaching his morning erection, still stimulated by memories of their evening's antics.

"Oh Robin! Put that thing away," she laughed, giving his protrusion a playful swipe.

"Certainly not," he replied as she re-shook the liquid. "It's critical that everything's fully stained. The last thing I need is fine white stripes around him if he's stained while wrinkled."



She continued, paying particular attention to his nostrils, the folds of his eyelids, ears, ear canal, groin, scrotum and bum crack. A cotton bud assisted in getting the stain into the necessary folds and crevices.

She stood back and looked at the handiwork of her first coat. "It's no good. All patchy."

"Why we need three and four coats."

The stain finally produced a uniform brown, lighter and darker in the spots required. Jennifer was satisfied with her achievement.

Robin then opened a small, spring-loaded box and fitted its contents. Obtained from one of his South African security service contacts on an earlier visit, the dark coloured contact lenses disguised the true iridescent blue of his eyes.

"You've done this before then?"

"Not on me, but something similar with past agents."

Next was black dye for his pubic and under-arm hair and further razor work to remove all blonde body, arm and leg hair. Jennifer was more confident using the black eyebrow pencil and the mascara to darken his blonde eyelashes.

"Pass muster?"

"Sexiest Mozambican I've ever met." Jennifer grinned. "But is this all really necessary?"

"Maybe. Maybe not. But it'll be too late if we wait until a detailed search. In intelligence circles, the starting point is to anticipate an enemy's possible strategy and tactics. If it was me, I'd insist on strip searches if I wanted to prevent a high-profile suspect from crossing the border."

"But how's your Portuguese?"

"I've been visiting Mozambique since I was a small kid and it's far better than most Zimbabweans."

"Right then! Let's get moving. Train leaves at 9.00."

Jennifer's press pass continued to work wonders at the remaining checkpoints, no guard questioning why a journalist would have a brown-faced driver. In the internationally sanctioned Rhodesia, old cars were a common sight.

As the station approached, they abandoned the Vanguard half a mile away, and walked towards the building.

# Chapter Six

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## PORT TOWN OF BEIRA, MOZAMBIQUE

**I**n her first-class compartment, Jennifer tried to analyse her actions. *What am I doing? Throwing my lot in with him again? Risking my life? Jeopardising my career? The insanity of lovers again?*

Robin had similar thoughts. He would've been stuffed without her help but why did she do it? Especially after the inevitable vitriol of past break-ups. Their loathing of each other's politics. Her hatred of everything Robin held dear. Her love of the bloody terrorists.

But as the port town approached, their thoughts turned to more urgent matters.

A taxi took them to the family business' small Beira warehouse where, like the Vanguard car in Salisbury, he'd stored an old but reliable 1958 Peugeot 203 escape vehicle. Old, dented and with rusty bodywork, it wouldn't stand out in impoverished Mozambique.

He'd ensured it was in good mechanical condition before storage but as the battery had been dead for years, Robin pushed the vehicle down the slight slope. On gaining sufficient momentum, Jennifer let out the clutch and the venerable vehicle coughed into life.

"We'll follow the N1 south, largely skirting the coastline and then turn off for the night at the old family holiday home in Vilankulos. Then on to the old Lourenço Marques and west into South Africa via Swaziland."

Made well before air-conditioning, conversation was difficult with the sound of the wind racing through the open windows, and while they spoke little, question after question flooded their minds.

Also now a Marxist state, Mozambique had supported the Zimbabwean terrorists during the latter years of the war.

*How difficult will it be to pass through the country?*

*Will Mkondo contact the Mozambique police and military?*

*What would the future hold?*

*Was last night just lust? After their past, could there ever be a future?*

The tension rose incrementally as each kilometre brought them closer to their overnight stay, apprehension becoming electric by the time they reached the family's long neglected holiday home. On the side of a hill north of the town.

"Remember the old place?"

Jennifer certainly remembered the building. Their blissful time together.

"It'll be dangerous to park in the front in case the police or military come investigating."

He drove past three more empty residences and pulled into the rear of a family friend who'd managed a British owned peanut plantation.

Nerves afire, they walked back to their real destination via the hard-packed macadam road, minimising footprints. Hands trembling,

Robin fumbled under the floor of the outside toilet structure to retrieve the back door key.

“Power’s long been disconnected but we need to keep the building as dark as possible anyway.”

Despite their exhaustion, adrenalin surged to their every extremity, every neuron afire. Desperate for the comfort, the safety and security of the other’s body, clothes flew in all directions as they locked together, oblivious to the bed’s musty smell. Survivor sex? A shield against the memories of their terrifying escape? A primeval calming of shattered nerves? Just lust? Or perhaps a new emerging future?

# Chapter Seven

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## VILANKULOS, MOZAMBIQUE

The morning sun beamed through a slit in the curtains, searing Jennifer's eyelids. Calling her to a new day. She shook her head, trying to clear her brain, trying to dispel the cry for more sleep. Her stomach then joined the call. Apart from a quick bite at the Beira station, they hadn't eaten.

She leaned across the unfamiliar bald head sleeping beside her and kissed Robin's cheek. "Come on sleepy head," she whispered in his ear. As a beady eye opened, she gently shook his shoulder. "I'm starving."

Robin forced himself to sit up, groggy and exhausted from a sleep dominated by planning and trying to predict every possibility that could foil their escape. Analysing and re-analysing his new relationship with Jennifer.

"Grab your razor and give your head and face a good shave," said Jennifer as she dressed. "I'll keep watch." She enlarged the gap in the curtain and for the first time in years, took in the glorious view of the bay, the opposite headland, the distant islands and the ocean beyond.

*An unforgettable past. Now only danger, uncertainty.*

Now shaved and dressed, Robin lifted a strategically loosened floorboard and reached for the second of his pre-prepared escape stashes. A thick roll of US dollars and two forged UK passports. The black and white photo in one showed his normal appearance while the other showed a bald, darker version of himself. He'd deliberately left his old Rhodesian and original UK passport back in Harare, not daring to be caught with them when escaping across the border. He'd only needed an identity card for that.

They tidied the house to as close as possible to the state they found it, re-drew the curtains and locked the back door. Returning to their car they put their gear in the boot and drove to town.

"As I'll blend in easily enough amongst the crowd at the local market, I'll get breakfast and supplies there. Far safer than an eatery. An attractive whitewoman like you will be easily remembered, so put your scarf over your head and stay in the car."

Pushing his way through the good-natured mass of shoppers, Robin first bought some locally made clothes, two enamel bowls and spoons. For breakfast, a generous serve of prawn coconut curry was ladled into one bowl. Next came several piping hot pãos, short, baguette-style loaves which would soak up the liquid. For lunch he bought flame grilled Galinha Asada chicken and prawn skewers barbecued in a garlic and lemon glaze which they could eat cold. For on-the-road snacks he haggled over a range of fruits, peanuts, bajia bean fritters, biltong and bottles of water.

"You've got a real feast there," said Jennifer taking in aromas of the fresh bread, curry, garlic and piri-iri.

"It'll be a messy eating in the car, so I think it'll be safe if we pop back to the house and eat at the table."

Robin drove slowly to ensure the curry Jennifer nursed in her lap didn't spill, then turned onto the narrow road leading up to the row of holiday houses.

Then, from behind, a siren screamed.

"Shit! Pull your scarf closer over your face and keep your eyes down."

Carrying a total of ten armed men, a short and a long wheelbase Chinese BJ jeep overtook them, forcing the Peugeot off the narrow road.

It lurched towards the steep incline. Robin battling the wheel as their car began to tip, two wheels in the air.

With no seatbelt to restrict her, Jennifer lunged across the vehicle to help stabilise it, the concerns of sloppy curry forgotten. Amazed at how she'd squeezed through the narrow front seat gap, she thrust her head and shoulder through the rear seat window for extra balance.

The wayward wheels returned to earth with a mighty thump, the well-worn suspensions shuddering violently. Fortunately, the old car remained intact.

Robin's only option to prevent a roll-over was to turn the wheels downwards. The car took off down the slope but as Robin forced down the brake, the tyres just skidded over the loose, dry earth.

Robin's fingers welded to the steering wheel as Jennifer gripped the back of the driver's seat, curry meat and sauce squelching between her fingers.

"We'll hit that tree," Jennifer screamed.

The large tree loomed in the centre of the windscreen and without an alternative, Robin hit the accelerator, hoping the wheels would finally gain traction and allow a slight turn. The tree flashed past, the side mirror and rear door handle disintegrating on impact.



Robin managed to achieve a degree of control as the slope began to ease until the backfence of a house loomed through the bushes. Still unable to stop, they ploughed through the wire barrier and raced beside the building, taking out its washingline.

"My clothes might be covered in food but they're not ready for a clothesline yet." Jennifer's laugh verged on the hysterical.

By the time they reached the front driveway, Robin gained sufficient control to turn into the street. To avoid revengeful householders, he continued to the main road and parked half a mile down the highway.

"So much for a curry breakfast!" Jennifer's laugh now shaky, her clothes drenched in the spicy liquid. Her nerves still quiver.

"Bugger the breakfast. Are you alright?"

"Shaken. But I'll live."

Robin got out of the vehicle, removed the wire clothesline caught in the bumper bar and the remaining articles of washing.

"I'll just check under the car."

Robin's head soon reappeared. "Damage's only superficial but we don't have time to clean up the mess inside. There's no doubt where those troops were heading, Mkondo's tentacles have reached us here in Vilankulos too."

"Time to move?"

"Not wrong there. Fortunately they don't seem to know about the Peugeot or they would have stopped us on the road."

They returned to the N1 and drove south towards Maputo, the renamed Lourenço Marques, until reaching the turn-off to a deserted beach Robin knew of just north of Massinga. "Time to get off the beaten track and clean up."

They stripped and washed their clothes and themselves in the salty water, the sight of their naked bodies almost un-noticed as the stress forced them to keep moving.

Waiting for the clothes to dry a little, they cleaned the curry from inside the car as best they could. Recovering as much of the remaining food as possible, their late breakfast was lemon prawn and pães, no longer hot. Finally with some food in their stomachs, Jennifer dressed from her hold-all spare clothes and Robin put on his semi-dried shorts and T-shirt.

“Can’t wait any longer,” he said. “The buggers could be waiting for us anywhere.”

They set off on the seven-hour drive, fearful of an ambush at every corner.

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