



OUTBACK REFUGE

Outback Adventures Book 4

Seven Chapter Sample

Chapter 1

NEWLY NAMED CITY OF HARARE, ZIMBABWE RHODESIA

1980

It was as old as Man. As old as time. A land that had experienced it all.

Family squabbles, tribal clashes, territorial conflicts, wars, invasions, massacres, kidnappings and genocide. From the pre-human forages of ancient times, the squabbling of primitive early tribes, the ancient gold trading civilisation of Great Zimbabwe, the Shona migration, the kidnapping Arab slave traders, the impi invasion of the Matabele, and the death and destruction of the white man's maxim machine guns.

And once more, three noble tribes had fought for supremacy. The majority Shona tribes, the militant Mashona tribes and the desperate tribe of White settlers.

With weapons finally silent after fourteen years, there was only one victor.

Great would be the celebration for some! Bitter their revenge.

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Despite the clear blue sky, dark clouds crushed Robin Harwood's soul. Cyclonic clouds. His beloved homeland no more. Gut churning, he dropped his face into his hands as he sat in his claustrophobic Salisbury office, towards the middle of two great oceans.

Life would never be the same. Made worse by the death of his fiancée and mother on his wedding day. Murdered by one-time childhood friend Joshua Mkondo.

But while Rhodesia will always be my spiritual home, what options have I now?

Little did he know that final sanctuary would lie half a world away. To another place midway between two great oceans. To the centre of a different continent. To the town of Alice Springs in the southern regions of Australia's vast Northern Territory.

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As a Special Branch officer in the intelligence arm of the British South Africa Police he'd spent twelve years trying to halt the tide. But forces far greater than he had been at work. Forces far greater than his small country.

Despite its name, his BSAP, the British South Africa Police, was unrelated to either Britain or the Republic of South Africa; a par-military force very different to the police patrolling the streets of London, New York or Sydney. Originally an arm of the British South Africa Company which invaded and governed present-day Zambia, Malawi and Zimbabwe for thirty years, the para-military police force continued under both formal British colonial rule and Ian Smith's independent Rhodesia after his Unilateral Declaration of Independence.

The family's beloved farm would soon be in ruins, offered as a war trophy to Mugabe's fellow terrorists. They would rejoice at its confiscation but ignorant of modern farming, he knew the highly productive farm his father carved out of the virgin bush after volunteering to fight for Britain during WW2 would become a barren, unproductive wasteland.

Militarily, the outgoing White government had neither won nor lost the long, bitter Bush War. But it certainly lost the political war, treated as a pariah by the international community. As part of the old regime's intelligence service he knew he'd certainly be a Mugabe target; unless of course, Mkondo got in first.

As of tomorrow, he and his colleagues would be under the new rulers' control and they'd need to tread carefully. 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 there no threat to the historic independence ceremony.

After ten years of fighting his instincts were screaming. Every nerve sensing that danger lurked in the city. But where? When? How and 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 jealous of his success; supporters of the Mashona and other unsuccessful other freedom movements; blacks whose families had been butchered by the insurgents for not supporting their cause; rogue elements of the Republic of South Africa's Bureau of State Security; whites refusing to accept reality; whites whose loved ones had been slaughtered in the seemingly endless war.

Where to start? The list almost endless and should he get it wrong, his fate would be even more tentative.

Face flushed red, foreboding crept through his every cell. Despite his best efforts, he could feel he'd be unable to prevent the inevitable.

He pored through every file, painstakingly eliminating the less likely until just 47 names remained. He completed a summary document and copied photos of each suspect. During his security briefing later that afternoon, all 47 images were issued to those manning every security checkpoint.

Despite every bone in his body sensing danger, exhausted, he collapsed in his lop-sided office chair.

His mind drifted. Not to the horrors of the last ten years but to Jennifer Bancroft. Back in town, no doubt gloating that her beloved Communists had finally seized power. Eager to see defeat in his eyes. After her cutting words on their final break-up, she'd be ecstatic that he and his white establishment were receiving their just desserts.

Jennifer Bancroft! School year temptress! Cousin of his now dead fiancée! One-time lover! Socialist know-all! Mugabe enthusiast!

Shit!

Chapter 2.

NEWLY NAMED CITY OF HARARE

Jennifer Bancroft always ensured she was there whenever there was a good story. As the BBN's southern African correspondent, she had to be there for the ceremony. Wanted to be there for the end of a regime. To celebrate the end of an era, the fall of the last significant 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 supported by China and Matabele fighters supported by the Soviet Union. She felt an affinity with the victors, for it was if it were 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 her stories of were 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. Taking 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 by far 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 the growing immigrant vote in their own constituencies.” The distraught woman was in tears. “It stinks. And the British stink with it.”

“It’s a victory for bloody Russia you idiot. Britain spends billions fighting the Cold War against the Communists but here they 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 that Jennifer was both a strong supporter and that she would ensure the widest audience for his words, he offered 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. Now commander of Mugabe’s elite, North Korean trained Fifth Brigade, his agile mind plotted to ensure he became part of Mugabe’s inner circle.

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

Joshua embraced the challenge and 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 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 an Upper House of Tribal Chiefs. But worst of all, he was loyal to bloody Robin Harwood and his family."

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

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

The bastard's escaped my clutches far too many times. Never again!

Chapter 3.

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.

To those who'd skilfully exploited international power politics to gain unfettered power.

They would all be there. Their jubilant 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 handover's success. While he'd had done all his role would allow to identify potential 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 be an incident. After ten years of front-line and back-room warfare, he could feel it in his bones.

But who? What target? From where?

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A jubilant crowd danced their way to the stadium entrances, fully believing that the end of the ten years of struggle would bring peace and prosperity. 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 to immediately raised his suspicions.

Then, 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.

"The bitch," he mumbled under his breath, a fervent mix of carnal memories, contempt, regret, desire and betrayal 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 saw her eyes narrow as she noted him in his formal uniform on the outskirts of the crowd.

Both steely eyes. 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 on the end of a row of white police, army and air force officers. Then Jennifer's vision 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 country.

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.

A shiver raced down Robin's spine on seeing the smug look on Mkondo's face, eyes constantly 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 what will literally become a Banana republic.

But despite his contempt for all assembled in the official party, Robin's eyes constantly scanned 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 the Prince 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 arena was about to be completely enveloped in darkness, Robin saw it. Movement!

Something out of place at the TV outside broadcast van. Despite straining his eyes he couldn't identify the face. But he certainly 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 contractor for the national TV broadcaster. 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 the 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 were all 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 developed the greatest bitterness. The British politicians who'd sold-out Rhodesia to buy the grubby immigrant votes necessary to keep their wafer-thin majority in the UK parliament.

Robin looked left and right in the increasing blackness, then raced towards Jack. Certain his movement would go un-noticed by the guards he overlooked Mkondo who had stared at him all night. Immediately on his feet, Mkondo unholstered 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.

Prince Charles then took the bundle from under his arm and formally presented the new Zimbabwean flag to Mugabe. Mugabe in turn handed the ensign to a junior officer of Mkondo's 5th Brigade 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 noticed Hale extract a rifle from the cylinder and kneel behind an enormous spotlight tower. Ignoring the noise and unseen by his quarry, Robin crept towards Jack's flank.

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

BOOM!

Oblivious of his surroundings, Jack raised his weapon and aimed at the heir to the British throne.

He took a deep breath. Centred 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 just 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."

BOOM!

"Do you think I'm an idiot? You, standing with the rifle in your hands and pretending you're not an assassin?"

BOOM!

"Too late now, but you deserve to be strapped to one of those artillery guns and 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. Finally an end to his loathed enemy. The man who’d escaped so often; the man whose rifle shot had castrated him, pulverising his testicles.

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

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

BOOM!

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

BOOM!

“Run you silly bastard,” she 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?” The sergeant 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 casually moved forward. “There’s a lot to arrange before tomorrow’s events.”

BOOM!

Jennifer’s BBN hire car was parked nearby and with its two occupants; crept down 7th 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 the 21-gun 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 you 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 carpark, the key on the top of the front, driver's side tyre."

Chapter 4.

UMTALI ROAD, ZIMBABWE/MOZAMBIQUE BORDER

Anticipating such an emergency, Robin had squirrelled away an old Vanguard Estate car with all his necessary escape requirements. Jennifer drove them both to its warehouse on the city outskirts. From her hire-car she grabbed her hold-all with her make-up and the spare clothes she needed when shooting different scenes. She dumped it, her professional still camera and recording machine in the back of the Vanguard.

"Get changed into civilian clothes and follow me to the car drop-off point. From now on you'll be my driver/cameraman.

They soon reached the city boundary checkpoint.

"Hold your breath," Robin muttered, "time for our first real test."

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

After 150 miles, Robin turned onto a faint bush track he'd reconnoitred the previous year. A rocky, horse-shoe shaped kopje hid the car from all 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. "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 face flushed red. "You constantly glorify Mugabe and his Commo cut-throats as they rampaged 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. Both need a good rest.”

After the most rudimentary of meals they settled on the old kapok mattress in the back of the vehicle, both taking great care their bodies didn’t touch. Robin’s mind raced.

Is escape remotely possible? What will the future bring if we succeed?

The ramifications of capture are far too gruesome to imagine.

Then memories of Jennifer and his times past flashed through the nightmare. 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, tiring hours they’d both spent leading up to the ceremony. They tossed and turned in the confined space, adrenalin still surging through their every cell.

But adrenalin 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. Block out the bitterness of their last parting.

Finally, with pulses returned 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 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. 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. We need 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 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 would be 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 which totally erased 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 bark of the Umbrella Thorn tree. 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 - my face, neck and lower arms.”

She took the cloth, poured the coloured liquid onto it and commenced 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 is 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 was needed to get into certain folds and crevices. She stood back and looked at the handiwork of her first coat. “It’s no good, it’s 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 happy with her achievement.

Lastly, Robin 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 iridescent blue of his true eyes.

“You’ve done this before then?”

“Not on me, but something similar with various 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 Mozambiquan I’ve ever met.” Jennifer grinned. “But is this all really necessary?”

“Maybe. Maybe not. But it’ll be too late if they do a detailed search. In intelligence circles, the first thing is to anticipate the 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 since a small kid and it’s far better than most Zimbabwean border guards.”

“Right then! Let’s get moving. Train leaves at 9.00.”

Chapter 5.

UMTALI TO BEIRA RAILWAY

Jennifer’s press pass continued to work wonders at the remaining checkpoints, no guard wondering why a journalist was travelling with a brown-faced peasant. 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.

A phalanx of severe looking soldiers stood around the station, AK47s at the ready.

“Looks like Mkondo’s not only sent out the word, he must have sent a platoon of his bloody 5th Brigade to every border crossing.”

Robin waited back as Jennifer approached the ticket-box, showed her British passport and purchased a first-class ticket to the Mozambique coastal port of Beira. Their eyes met briefly as she approached immigration control, 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 Mkondo’s troops. Not stopped, she entered her carriage.

Thank God. They obviously don’t know we’re together.

Robin queued at another ticket box and bought a fourth-class ticket to Beira, showing his forged, but deliberately dirtied and dog-eared identity card.

He noted that like Jennifer, all women passengers went unhindered but male first and second-class passengers were all ushered into the station masters office, one by one.

A strip search like expected.

They’d set up a hessian screen at a side entrance and Robin joined the line of poverty-stricken Mozambique and Zimbabwean third and fourth-class male passengers. They shuffled forward and as they approached, the ever-vigilant soldiers ordered all to strip.

He held his two boots together with a thumb in one and his fingers in the other. In his other hand he held his scruffy clothes with the hat on the top. His hands hidden; the guards were unaware they weren’t the dirt-ingrained, callous covered ones of the surrounding workers.

“Papers!” The Zimbabwean soldier’s demand was in Shona.

Robin shrugged, nodding to his identity card and train ticket he'd stuck in his hat's headband.

The soldier extracted both, studied them carefully and stared directly into Robin's face.

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

Robin shrugged once more.

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

Robin shrugged again.

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

"Return home." Robin's reply was in as fluent a Portuguese he could muster. "Visited sister in Dangamvura to celebrate independence. A real party."

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

"Knew you would win. God was on your side," Robin lifted his boots in an attempt to respond to the freedom fighters' fist salute.

"I know. But move along."

Jennifer settled into her plush, first-class compartment in the front carriage while Robin walked to the rear of the train. He'd travelled on the train many times in his younger years, normally first-class. But from his only ever fourth-class trip, he knew to push his way onto one of the few remaining spaces on the hard wooden bench which ran around the carriage perimeter. The sliding door would remain open the entire journey, the only light and ventilation in the crowded, putrid, windowless carriage. The remaining passengers sat on the floor, surrounded by cages of chickens, baskets of produce, piles of cardboard boxes and cloth-wrapped bundles.

The rattle of rifles and the scraping of boots disturbed them both. Not satisfied with their thorough vetting before passengers boarded the train, Mkondo's troops re-checked passports, identity papers and tickets. Each time they came to a white or light skinned male they carefully compared him to the photo they carried.

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

Reaching Robin, one seized his hat, threw it across the room. "Stand when you see a freedom fighter," he ordered.

Robin immediately obliged.

The man's rifle swept back and fro below Robin's chin. He stared first at the photo and then into his fugitive's eyes, the reflection from Robin's contact lenses obscured by the man's shadow. His inquisitor finally decided Robin's brown skin and shaved head corresponded with the photo he returned.

Only then did sweat begin to pour from Robin's forehead.

Hope the stain doesn't run.

In their respective parts of the train, Robin and Jennifer's frantic heartbeats gradually slowed as the soldiers left the train, and domino-like, the carriages began to move one by one as the locomotive took up the strain.

Freedom!

When anyone spoke to Robin he replied in Mashona, the language of Zimbabwe's south western provinces. A language unspoken by eastern dwellers of the country.

He sank against the hard carriage wall as it rattled and swayed on the poorly maintained track, his thoughts going back to his last trip on that train. To the dusky woman he met in the port-side bar in Beira while awaiting its departure, the woman who'd relieved him of all but a fourth-class fare. His smile grew at the memory, at the value he'd got from his hard-earned savings, a paltry price for a morning-long lesson in the art of love, learning more in those few hours than the average man would learn in a lifetime.

While he would never forget those morning's lessons, it was the afternoon that forever seared itself into his mind. Mkondo's terrorist ambush, Robin the only Caucasian survivor. Mkondo's castration by Robin's fluke rifle shot. His desperate escape, finally staggering into the safety of the Umtali police station ten days later.

In her first-class compartment, Jennifer tried to analyse her actions.

Why throw my lot in with him again? Risk my life? Jeopardise 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 vitriol of their last break-up. Their loathing of each other's politics. Her hatred of everything Robin had held dear. Her love of the bloody terrorists.

Chapter 6.

PORT TOWN OF BEIRA, MOZAMBIQUE

On reaching the port town, they caught a taxi to the family business' small Beira warehouse. Like the Vanguard car in Salisbury, he'd stored an old but reliable 1958 Peugeot 203 escape vehicle there. Old, dented and rusty bodywork, it wouldn't stand out in Mozambique.

He'd ensured it was in good condition before storage but as the battery had been dead for over a year, 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. It largely skirts the coastline but we'll turn off for the night at our old family holiday home in Vilankulos. Then 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.

Now also a Communist state, Mozambique had supported the Zimbabwean terrorists during the latter years of the war.

How difficult will it be to pass through the country?

Would there be contact between Mkondo and 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 had become 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's house 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? Simply lust? Or perhaps a new future emerging?

Chapter 7.

VILANKULOS, MOZAMBIQUE

The morning sun beamed through a slit in the curtains, searing Jennifer's eyelids. Calling her to join it in 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, still groggy from a troubled sleep. A sleep dominated by planning and re-planning 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. His old Rhodesian and original UK passport were deliberately left back in Harare, not daring to be caught with them when escaping across the border. Only an identity card had been needed for that.

They tidied the house as close to 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 a less frequented eatery. An attractive white woman like you will be far more 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 barbequed 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-piri.

"It'll be a messy eating in the car and 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 and turned onto the narrow road which led up to the row of holiday houses.

Then, from behind, a siren grew louder and louder.

"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-built BJ jeep overtook them, forcing the Peugeot off the narrow road.

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

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

The wayward wheels returned to earth with a mighty thump, the well-worn suspension 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're going to 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.

The slope began to ease, providing Robin with a degree of control until the back fence 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 washing line.

"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. "The 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 reaching as far as here in Vilankulos."

“Time to move?”

“Not wrong there. 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 they reached 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 pãos, no longer hot. With 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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