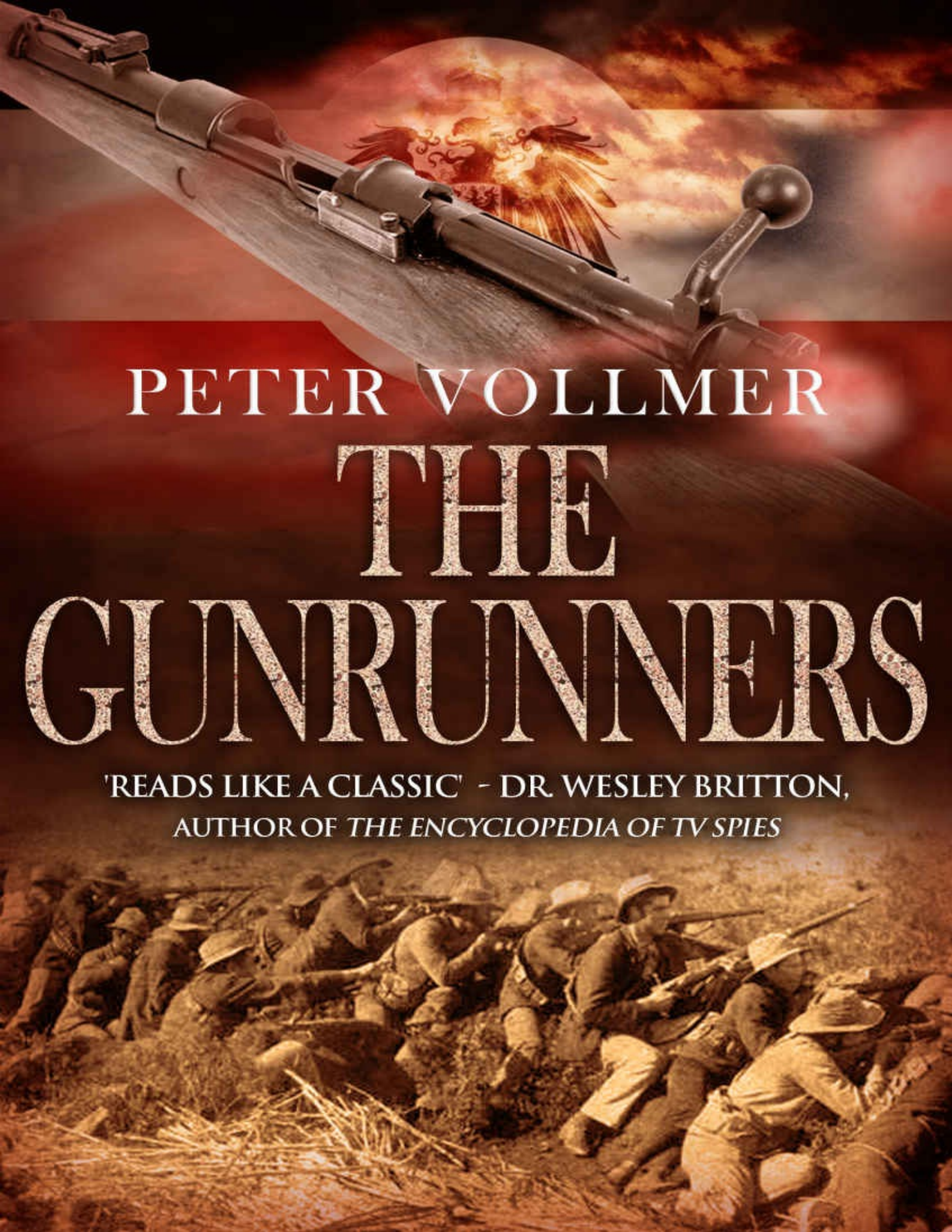

PETER VOLLMER
THE GUNRUNNERS
'READS LIKE A CLASSIC' - DR. WESLEY BRITTON,
AUTHOR OF THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF TV SPIES

THE GUNRUNNERS

Peter Vollmer

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to my wife, Elaine, without whom the novel would never have been written.

Foreword

The Gunrunners is a historical novel set in the middle of the first decade of the 20th century in Angola and SudwestAfrika. It was a time when the region was controlled by European colonial powers, and the indigenous peoples were none too happy about it. The central character is Werner von Dewitz, a German officer in the army of Kaiser Wilhelm II, assigned the task of infiltrating a gunrunning operation that is causing political turmoil when it crosses borders between German and Portuguese regions. In particular, the guns are being sold to the Herero, one of the dominant native tribes revolting against the imperialism that oppresses them in the German colony SudwestAfrika, the country now known as Namibia. Fluent in several languages, Dewitz masquerades as a Portuguese manufacturing representative to penetrate the Angolan gunrunners' network while working with military officers and intelligence agents of the two countries in his relentless pursuit of the outlaws.

The book is gripping and engrossing on several levels. For one matter, the settings are vividly sketched with constantly changing battlegrounds, from steamships to rail trains to desert forts to wagon trains to a diamond mine to barges and warships, as man fights man and man fights nature. The author is adept at capturing the terrain of a continent he knows firsthand and brings the period of colonialism alive in an era of telegrams, wagon trains, and German military officers with monocles and waxed moustaches who can dance to waltzes.

The story is fast-paced; von Dewitz quickly moves from one setting to another with a growing circle of comrades who have subplots of their own.

For example, representing the Portuguese government, Captain Louis de Sousa is an amiable and reliable comrade-in-arms, as are the native servants, Philippe and Paulo. At any given time, Werner and his aides are exploring one angle of the investigation while Louis and his friends are pursuing another. They need this multiple assault, as the operation they uncover has one layer after another they must crack open to lead to the ultimate kingpin. Then there are the two women competing for Werner's affections: Maria, the mistress of the gunrunner Dos Santos, and Dorothea Eggers, the doctor who attends Werner's wounds more than once.

The Gunrunners is a rich high adventure of the old-fashioned variety with well-sketched characters, continually shifting rough and wild settings, and trails winding through political corruption, conflicting loyalties, and impassioned duels with both European and native weapons of war. It reads like a classic that could have been written during the time in which it is set; it is well worth wider appreciation. Indeed, one suspects the author is going to become associated with action-adventure of a high quality.

Professor Wesley Britton

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PROLOGUE

The air was clear and cold. An early morning swathe of mist hung low over the shallow undulations of the bush and tree-studded plain. In the larger open areas between the stunted, flat-crowned thorn trees, frost crystals clung to the blades of the sparse grass, reflecting with a faint sparkle the emerging light of dawn. Only directly below the tree canopies was the ground free of frost. To the east, the Erongo Mountains were still a silhouette against the rapidly approaching sunrise. Already above the mountains, long shafts of sunlight pierced the sky above.

A faint smell of wood smoke tainted the early-morning air.

The German marine lieutenant had removed his grey campaign hat, as had the Askari lying on the ground beside him. The rest of the Askaris and Schutztruppe marines lay in a defensive line on both sides of the commanding officer and the Askari. The black soldier was his batman, but over the months a bond had developed – something beyond that of master and servant, but rather a relationship born out of mutual respect, if that was what you could call such an affiliation in this rigidly enforced distinction of colour and class that was practised in the Imperial German colonies. Most soldiers treated the indigenous people no better than they would treat slaves. These two men were an exception. They wore summer uniforms of thin linen: the officer was clad in a light grey as worn by the Imperial German Schutztruppe in the colony of SudwestAfrika; the Askari was clothed in light khaki, his tunic and shorts crudely tailored, as were the sandals he wore. They had taken up their positions two hours ago and now some shivered in the cold of the morning. For others it was a combination of both cold and

fearful apprehension of what was to come. The battle lines were already drawn.

As soon as the sun rose, it would bathe the countryside in warmth, and by midmorning, it would be uncomfortably hot; this was typical of the area bordering the Namib Desert, situated in the still wild and untamed colony on the southwestern coast of Africa.

In the stillness of the encroaching dawn, he could clearly hear the chink of bridles and the stomping of horses' hooves and all those other sounds that accompany the saddling-up of horses as the enemy went about breaking camp. The marines were close, no more than a few hundred yards from the encampment. On both sides of the officer his men were strung out, lying prone on the ground with their standard issue rifles, the long-barrelled 8mm Mannlicher GEW88 at the ready with bayonets fixed. The lieutenant clutched his military issue revolver at the ready.

He knew that the rebel Hereros would have to come this way as they continued to make their way south from the border with Angola where they had recently acquired weapons from Angolan gunrunners who plied their trade within the safety of their own country. These Portuguese degregados did a lucrative business with the Hereros who waged a civil war against their new masters in the German colony.

The lieutenant did not know that the Herero commander had split his troop. His main troop, which guarded the wagons containing the guns, was now wedged between two smaller troops of mounted men on each side, keeping a distance of about a half-mile from the wagons and their escort. From these splinter columns, scouts had reconnoitred ahead. The previous day, the German marines had been detected, and the Herero commander realised that an attack by the German forces was imminent.

Major Zietzmann, commander of the colony's Abwehr Abteilung

(Intelligence Division), had said this operation would be a piece of cake. Well, the lieutenant hoped the man was right.

The rising sun suddenly peeked over the distant mountains. Its rays struck the white mist below, the reaction miraculous: it was as if God had suddenly opened the shutters, the light improving tenfold in a near instant. The young officer decided it was time to give the order to attack but decided to wait another minute to ensure his men had the benefit of the full glare of the sun. Suddenly from the east, directly out of the sun's light, he heard the distant drumming of galloping horses. Forced to look directly into the sun, it was difficult to see anything, but the lieutenant realised that his troop had been lured into a trap. The lieutenant and his Askari looked at each other, both realising what was happening, fear etched on their faces.

The sound of the approaching horsemen galvanised the encamped main troop of Hereros into action, the sound of the approaching riders a signal. They immediately mounted and charged the German marines from the opposite direction.

The German lieutenant realised their fate was sealed; still, he immediately ordered his men to form a defensive circle. He knew this to be futile, but there was nothing else to do. The Herero riders approached from all sides at a full gallop. A fusillade of marine rifle fire mowed down the first line of cavalry, the riders spilling from their saddles, but others followed the first, cutting through the kneeling marines like a scythe. The marines worked the bolt action of their rifles as fast as they could, killing yet more of the riders. Other Hereros, some now on foot, shrieking and yelling in their lust for blood, instantly followed their fallen comrades, brandishing their rifles and shooting at the marines and Askaris. The Schutztruppe seemed to know that this was the end, there'd be no escape; death was inevitable. The only thing to do was stand their ground and fight to the end, working their rifles like

automatons: shoot, load and shoot. Still, their numbers rapidly diminished as they were shot and fell, their defence circle shrinking until only the lieutenant and a few Askaris remained.

Soon the ambush area was shrouded in dust which billowed from the milling horses' hooves, cloaking the sounds of gunfire and the shrill screams of the dying. Within a few minutes, with the exception of the odd shriek, silence had again descended on the bush. The marines were all dead, the Hereros even killing the wounded. The lieutenant's batman had died instantly, a bullet entering his temple, his head exploding in a mist of blood. The German officer had fallen to the ground next to him, mortally wounded in the chest. Within seconds, a Herero slid from his saddle and drove his spear into the man's throat. Others who still lived were summarily dispatched with the thrust of a stabbing spear or another bullet. The brave marines had killed more than their own number, giving a good account of themselves, but the enemy far outnumbered them – they never stood a chance.

The Herero rebels removed whatever article they fancied from the dead: clothing, boots, sandals and other private possessions as well as all rifles and ammunition. The items they had no interest in, they discarded in the dust: letters, photographs, pay booklets and other items. They left the dead where they had fallen and hastened to leave the area, afraid that other marines were close by.

A few hours later, the first vultures made their appearance as black dots circling ominously, high in the sky. It would take three days before a German mounted column came upon the macabre scene of the massacre. These were new recruits recently arrived from Germany and out on their first patrol in this newly acquired colony of the German Empire. The hideous sight they would behold when they came upon the scene of the ambush would haunt most for the rest of their lives.

CHAPTER 1

Werner von Dewitz, a young German marine officer, leaned back against the door jamb of the bridge, bracing himself against the continuous motion as the steamer thrust her bow into the south-westerly swells. The storm had dissipated during the early hours of the morning and now it was nearly dead calm. The only movement of air was the slight breeze he felt on his face generated by the ship's forward motion as it sailed down the coast of Africa. Each incoming wave heralded a brief tremor through the steel deck plates underfoot, accompanied by a magnified throb of the ship's engine as she strained to lift her bow over the top of each huge wave and slide into the following trough.

He was impatient to set foot ashore. The steamer, a combined cargo-passenger ship, had departed Hamburg nearly five weeks ago, Europe then already caught in the first grip of winter, the home country having received its first blanket of snow. The ship had steamed down the coast of Africa into the Gulf of Guinea, its first call the German colony of Cameroon, where they had languished in port for days while cargo was discharged, the tropical heat and humidity nearly unbearable. Now they sailed against the cold Benguela Current, which originated in the Antarctic and hugged the coastline of the German colony of SudwestAfrika, which was his destination. Tempered by the cold current, the climate was cool. He knew that a score or so miles to his left, the ocean ended against the shores of the Namib Desert which straddled the coastline.

Black coal smoke boiled from the tall yellow funnel painted with bands of black, white and red – the national colours of Imperial Germany. Below the

rings, a huge insignia was emblazoned on the funnel, proudly proclaiming her lineage. She was a ship of the German East Africa Line, built primarily to serve the recently annexed colonies: Cameroon, Togoland, German SudwestAfrika and Tanganyika. Imperial Germany had scrambled to acquire colonies; she too was now a member of the European empire club.

The SS *Tanga* slipped into the first clammy wisps of a seemingly endless fog bank; this wide ribbon stretched north-south over the coastline and over the ocean, a legacy of the previous night's storm. Visibility had been reduced to a few yards and the captain was forced to order a reduction in speed. The appearance of dense fog along this desert coastline is startling. The rapid changes in weather are unique to this area and this results from hot air descending from the highlands. The air is further heated during its passage over the desert as it moves to the coast; it is hot and dry and when it encounters the cold air over the sea, then condenses creating a miles wide band of fog along the entire coastline. This phenomenon is typical of cold current coastlines such as those off the coasts of Chile, Peru and southwestern Australia.

The foghorn blast startled the young officer out of his reverie, its low rumbling sound reverberating through the ship as its warning boomed out into the mist. Soon, cold damp tendrils of water vapour enveloped the bridge, the bridge railings and deck now wet with condensation. The distant boom of surf would be the first warning that the ship had veered too close to the treacherous shore. The fog bothered Werner, the ship seemingly lost in this cocoon of grey even though the captain had assured him that they were well-off shore.

"Herr Leutnant," the captain said to the young man who had been his companion for the past five weeks on the long sea voyage, "I'm afraid this damn pea soup will delay us. This coast is dangerous and more so in this

damn fog. We are only hours away from Swakopmund, but if this doesn't lift, well, we'll have to heave to and wait it out. I'm sorry, I know you are looking forward to stepping ashore today."

The lieutenant chuckled softly, more in despair than amusement. "We'll wait, Herr Käpitan; what else can I do? A few more days won't make any difference," he sighed. "God, I feel like the Flying Dutchman, cursed to stay on this ship forever."

Werner was a career officer, an Oberleutnant in the Imperial German Marines. Born in 1868 in Kiel, Germany, he was the son of a general in the Imperial German army. Werner had had no choice; from a long line of military men where family tradition set the rules, he would assume his father's military role, as had his elder brother. As attaché to the Imperial Consular Services, his father's postings had taken the family to England and Portugal, and Werner spoke both English and Portuguese fluently.

Two months ago, he had been transferred to the Abwehr Abteilung, the German military intelligence, and from there sent to join the Schutztruppe, a marine division assigned the task of protecting the German colonies. On his arrival, he was to report to Major Zietzmann, the officer who headed up the Abwehr Abteilung in Windhuk. He now wore his new blue-grey Schutztruppe uniform, but his shoulder boards – the black base with the four silver cords and the star signifying his rank – were still from his previous regiment, immediately revealing his actual military origins. Not that it mattered; transfers were not unusual.

Still in his late 20s, Werner was tall, 6ft 2ins, his light-brown hair cut short in typical Prussian fashion, his chiselled facial features pale from too little sun. Although it was midsummer here in the Southern Hemisphere, he was hidden in his bulky winter uniform. Still, it was evident that his body was lean and hard. He had shaved early that morning, but his cheeks and chin still

revealed a faint shadow. Most officers had moustaches, trying to emulate the Kaiser, some taking this to ludicrous extremes with waxed, twirled and pointed ends. Werner was an exception, preferring his upper lip bare. Piercing steel-grey eyes flecked with tiny specks of silver indicated a stubborn masculine strength; women found him attractive.

At the ring of the ship's telegraph, he turned to look at the huge dial atop a polished brass pedestal bolted to the bridge deck. The needle now pointed nearly straight down, reading 'Dead Slow'. The ship was beginning to wallow in the swells, barely making headway.

"I was going to skip breakfast," he said, "but now that we seem to be wallowing in the doldrums, I think I'll get myself something to eat. I'll be back later." He flicked a half-smoked cigarette over the bridge wing railing.

The captain nodded and resumed his vigil.

Werner entered the small dining saloon. Most of the other passengers had yet to make an appearance, but a young woman stood at the sideboard. He frowned. Miss Eggers confused him. She was exceptionally beautiful, and he had hoped for a brief romantic interlude during the five-week voyage. However, she kept to herself, and except for the occasional polite greeting, they had said little to one another. Clearly, she was not one easily drawn into conversation. While it could not be said that she rebuffed him, it was clear that she chose not to mix, meting out the same treatment to all 20 passengers aboard.

She was seated at the captain's table every evening. To Werner's chagrin, the captain had insisted that he, as an officer, should host another table. While his fellow diners at his table were pleasant, none was a beautiful young woman!

However, the captain willingly volunteered such snippets of information as he had garnered. Were he the lieutenant, well, he too would have had more

than a casual interest.

Dorothea Eggers was returning home after recently completing her medical studies in Germany. Werner was surprised to hear that she was a doctor. In the face of overwhelming male prejudice, very few women chose to pursue the male-dominated medical profession. Truly a resilient woman, Werner thought.

She now stood before the breakfast buffet, helping herself to a roll and cold meats. The breakfast was typically continental: croissants and rolls, cold meats, pickled herring, and cheese.

He looked at her in the mirror above the buffet. Her auburn hair, which cascaded to her shoulders, surrounded her face, emphasising her high cheekbones and full mouth. He thought her eyes were her most alluring feature – these were a startling light blue, and when she looked at him, he invariably felt a twinge of unease; it was as though she saw right through him. She, too, was tall. Although she wore a long skirt and a blouse buttoned to the neck, there was no mistaking her narrow waist and well-proportioned body.

“Good morning,” he said, giving her a friendly smile, lowering his head in the customary bow.

She acknowledged his greeting but then fell silent.

“Well, Fraulein Eggers,” he said, still smiling, attempting to draw her into conversation, “we’re nearly there.”

“Yes,” she replied, not turning around to look at him, her voice devoid of any encouragement for further conversation.

“Are there people waiting for you in Swakopmund?” he persevered.

“No. I’m leaving for Windhuk by train.”

“Ah, so am I; maybe we’ll be travelling together again.”

“Really? How interesting,” she replied politely, venturing no further

information.

Impossible woman, he thought, realising that if he persisted, he would make a fool of himself.

They took their places at separate tables and ate in silence.

The engine revolutions increased slightly; the ship was underway again. Through the saloon windows, Werner saw the mist was clearing, shafts of bright sunlight already stabbing through the fog.

She turned to look at him and smiled slightly, adding: “It would seem that we are lucky today.”

He just returned her smile, not saying anything. After he finished his breakfast, he returned to the bridge.

*

A few hours later, by which time the mist had completely disappeared, Swakopmund finally appeared on the horizon to their left. While the town served as the only harbour, it was actually no more than a small cluster of buildings interrupting the flat, bare coastal desert expanse. It dominated by a high lighthouse and watchtower. These structures stood stark against the forlorn pale background and the scattering of high-roofed, two-storey buildings that made up the town. A huge half-constructed jetty penetrated a half mile into the incoming waves, its seaward end a hive of activity, pile-driving machinery and cranes precariously perched on a latticework of girders and steam engines belching smoke.

The sight of the coastline and the barren hinterland imbued him with a feeling of deep sorrow and anguish. No more than six months ago, it was here, in this distant outpost of the German Empire, in a country wrestled from the indigenous Black population, that Werner had lost his elder brother. He too had held the rank of Leutnant, but he and his whole detachment had died in a firefight with the rebellious Ovahereros far in the north of the colony. His

grief-stricken father had written him with the shattering news of the loss of Ernest. The death of his brother had come as a tremendous shock. Like his father, he had tried to accept the news stoically, but had found this difficult and painful. Still, he harboured no feelings of revenge but just saw it as a wasted life in Germany's attempt to emulate the rest of the European powers who all seemed hell-bent on acquiring as many colonies as possible.

Wilhelm II, the imperial Kaiser, had taken the opportunity presented by the rapid industrialisation of Germany to launch the modernisation of the country's land and naval forces. The other major powers of the world now considered Germany a major player in this exclusive club. Since Germany defeated Napoleon III's forces at the Battle of Sedan in 1870, which led to the fall of the Second French Empire and the creation of the French Third Republic, the world knew that Germany's might was on the rise. The huge shipbuilding yards in Kiel and Hamburg launched naval ship after naval ship – battleships, heavy cruisers, frigates and destroyers. The Mauser bolt-action rifle, the Maxim machine gun, the lightweight breach-loading howitzer and the mortar were now Germany's main tactical weapons on land. A feeling of pride and strength had uplifted the Germans; they considered themselves nearly unconquerable and equal to Great Britain and Russia in might.

The features of the barren land, the town, the beach and the nearby dry riverbed drew into sharper relief as the ship slowed upon its approach to the designated anchorage just offshore. The stark and harsh aspect of the scene before him struck Werner as vaguely depressing. He continued to study the shoreline as the captain turned the steamer into the wind and the low swells rolling in from the southwest. The vessel slowed and came to a stop. Shouts from the bridge alerted the crew forward to release the anchor, and with a rattle that resounded throughout the ship, the chain sped out of the hawsehole.

To Werner’s disappointment the passengers were not permitted to disembark until the next morning.

*

The next morning Werner woke to calm weather. After breakfast, the captain ordered the crew to lower the launch. He was one of the first passengers off the ship but saw that cargo off-loading was well under way. A string of barges was already alongside, the ship’s derricks disgorging cargo from the ship’s holds.

Swakopmund was a typical colonial boomtown. Of its few hotels, the two-storey Bismarck Hotel was the most prominent, built on a hummock overlooking the coast. The beaches were pristine, shimmering white in the sun that had broken through the mist, these assaulted by the huge waves that continuously crested and tumbled into a cauldron of white foam. There seemed to be no trees at all.

Werner soon found himself ashore.

An hour later, having only to walk about a half-mile, Werner entered the local military command post which served as the area headquarters. The building was complete with a typical barracks gateway, an arched entrance with boom and guardhouse manned by two marines with bayoneted rifles. The outermost walls of the buildings even had ornamental medieval embattlements, not for the purposes of war but rather as décor. Here in the desert, he was reminded of a French Foreign Legion fort that had been plucked from the Algerian desert, built to withstand attacks from Saharan Berbers.

As ordered, he reported to the officer in command of the transit barracks, receiving his orders and a rail ticket for the train that would depart that evening for Windhuk, the capital and hub of the colony, about three hundred miles east.

The journey would be slow, the coaches swaying from side to side, the fine dust of the Namib Desert penetrating everywhere. The narrow-gauge train contained only three passenger coaches, the rest of its length taken up by box and flatbed railcars loaded with imported supplies and war materiel. The front of the train reminded him that there was a war on; the locomotive was preceded by a sandbagged flatcar complete with Maxim machine-gun and crew as well as additional marines with rifles.

The local Imperial forces were waging a civil war against the Namas and the Ovahereros, indigenous tribes refusing to submit to German rule. Farmers had been forced to abandon their cattle ranches and seek shelter in the local towns where detachments of Imperial troops were garrisoned, so creating safe havens. Despite this precaution, more than a hundred German farmers and their families had already perished in the conflict, murdered by marauding tribesmen using guerrilla hit-and-run tactics and armed with modern rifles and the knowledge to use them.

The train departed Swakopmund during the late afternoon; most of the passengers were Imperial marines, with only a few civilians. Werner saw Dorothea Eggers on the station platform and waved. She stiffly acknowledged his greeting.

At the station cafeteria, he purchased two large bread rolls, sliced down the middle and stuffed with ample portions of sliced smoked sausage and pickle. A hawker was selling beer of which the packaging was ingenious – packed in bags with wet straw to both protect and cool the contents. He bought a bag. These bags were hanging in all the compartments, and once the train departed, they swayed violently with the train’s motion, the movement through the air assisting evaporation, keeping the beer surprisingly cold.

He retired to his compartment for the evening, hanging his own bag of beer from a coat hook. Once the train left the coast, its speed matched the speed of

the sea breeze, and there was little movement of air. It soon became stiflingly hot. The locomotive initially struggled, moving no faster than a fast run, straining to pull the coaches and wagons up the slight incline that led to the hinterland. However, belching smoke and steam, it soon chugged its way through a flat desert landscape, the ground bare and completely devoid of any vegetation. A thin film of dust now covered everything. In the distance, Werner could see the odd outcrop of rock while far on the eastern horizon a small range of mountains jutted into the sky, its peaked slopes now tinged orange by the setting sun. To the south, the ground slowly sloped down towards the dry Swakop River a few miles away. It flowed east to west, parallel to the railway line. Only during exceptionally wet years did the river flood, the water pushing through the desert to the sea, at times becoming a raging quarter-mile-wide torrent, discharging silt, bloated animal carcasses and uprooted trees into the sea.

Werner never left his compartment other than to relieve himself. Most passengers were new marine conscripts from Europe who had disembarked a few weeks back and who had just finished a three-week acclimatisation course in the desert. This military contingent contained a sprinkling of officers, but they were billeted with their men. They were being transferred to units stationed in the hinterland. It was also their duty to protect the train in the event of any attack.

Early in the evening he ate the bread rolls, washed down with the refreshing cold beer. A Black bedding boy appeared to prepare his bunk, and at about ten that evening he retired. He removed his tunic and boots, unbuttoned his shirt, and sprawled out on top of the bedding. Blankets were not necessary, it far too hot. He sighed, thankful he had the compartment to himself. The soldiers and NCOs who made up the bulk of the other passengers were not so lucky; they shared, four men to a compartment.

His sleep was fitful. He tossed and turned, the desert heat finally forcing him to remove most of his clothing.

A massive blast from the front of the train awakened him, and before he could collect his wits he was violently flung from his bunk into the opposite wall of the compartment. Fortunately, the opposite middle bunk had not been raised and its padded backrest absorbed his momentum. As his head hit the wall, there was another enormous crash, followed by an ear-splitting grinding sound. The carriage was no longer on its rails. He felt it vibrate violently as its wheels cut through the sleepers. With a horrendous screech of tearing metal and the splintering of wood, the carriage eventually stopped, leaning over precariously.

Stunned and blinded by the enveloping dust, Werner lay on the floor for a few seconds. Most of the lights had been shattered by the impact: the near darkness left him disoriented. He gingerly felt his forehead. An enormous swelling threatened, but the skin did not seem to be broken. Just a touch of wetness, he thought.

As he collected his wits, he became aware of people screaming and cries for help. Clearly, they needed all the help they could get.

He groped in the semi-darkness for his clothing, eventually finding his breeches, tunic and boots and struggling into them. The riding boots required enormous effort in the darkness and confined space. He was aware of the continuous sounds of a gunfight outside the train and the shouts of the soldiers and screams of the passengers. Faintly, he heard a distinct female cry for help, repeated every few seconds, and realised that this had to be the voice of Miss Eggers.

He was frantic. The sliding door of his compartment refused to open; it was jammed shut. The carriage was distorted because of the impact. He then turned to the window, now lying diagonally below because of the tilt of the

carriage. He kicked out the jagged pieces of the shattered window, climbed over the sill and cautiously lowered himself to the ground. Pandemonium reigned. Shots rang out in the darkness and bullets ricocheted off the coach. Men climbed and crawled from the wreckage, dazed and confused.

He rapidly moved along the wrecked carriages, passing a sergeant who was bellowing at his men, seemingly oblivious of the shooting around him. Fleetingly, he marvelled at the sergeant's tenacity. Even in this initial atmosphere of confusion, the NCO berated a shocked and disoriented soldier who had clambered from the wreckage without his rifle.

"Damn idiot! Get back and fetch your fuckin' rifle!" the implacable sergeant bellowed at the poor man.

"Help!" Werner heard the muffled female voice call again. He realised that it had to be Miss Eggers.

Jumping over prone soldiers firing into the darkness and skirting pieces of train wreckage, he fought his way towards the front of the shattered coach, peering into the broken windows and calling her name. The half-toppled coach towered over him, and he expected that at any moment it would come crashing down. The broken windows emitted little light – some even in total darkness.

Finally, he found the compartment from where she was calling.

"Miss Eggers? Are you all right?" he called loudly, hearing movement inside.

"I think so, but I can't get up," he heard her grunt. "Ugh! There's something heavy on top of me that I can't move."

Suddenly, above the sounds of gunfire, he heard the drumming of horses' hooves and realised that a band of horsemen were charging the train.

"Miss Eggers, I'll be with you now. Just hang on for a moment," he shouted.

He flung himself down next to a prone marine who was already shooting wildly into the darkness.

God, the man's shooting at nothing, he thought. It's black out there; they couldn't see anything.

"Stop!" he shouted. "Give it to me," he demanded, wrestling the rifle from the conscript; the soldier, still a boy, was clearly overcome with fear.

Just then, the horses appeared out of the darkness, nearly upon them. He could distinguish the white-shirted riders and remembered being told the Herero rebels preferred this dress. Intensified shooting broke out along the length of the train. He took aim at one of the foremost riders. There seemed to be scores of them, all yelling and brandishing rifles which they discharged in the direction of the train while riding, quite a feat. As they closed in, they were revealed by the reflected light of a fire which had started within the wrecked carriage, the dry wood partitioning burning fiercely. The charging Hereros were so close, all he needed to do was point his rifle and pull the trigger. He felt the rifle discharge and saw the bullet strike the man's chest. He was already looking for his next target, but out of the corner of his eye he saw his first victim fling up his arms, drop his rifle and fall from the saddle. Within seconds, he despatched another in similar fashion. The soldier next to him did not look up but tried to squirm his way into the hard ground, believing that it would protect him from the hail of bullets buzzing around them.

The engagement lasted for no more than 30 seconds. Suddenly, it was quiet again except for a solitary shot or two. The enemy had vanished, leaving behind their dead and a few rider-less horses that soon galloped off into the desert. Realising that it was unlikely that they would have to confront another charge, he handed the rifle back to the still bewildered conscript and ran back to Miss Eggers' compartment.

He pulled his revolver from its holster and, grabbing it by the barrel, cleared the remaining shards of glass from her compartment window. Then he carefully climbed over the sill, still afraid that the coach could topple over. Somewhere forward of the compartment, the fire's faint light was beginning to illuminate the scene. He sucked in his breath, realising that the fire would soon engulf the tinder-dry wooden carriage. He saw that she, too, had been catapulted from her bunk, but the force of the violent impact had broken the bunk from the compartment wall and now lay across her, pinning her to the floor. He grabbed hold of the bunk and, with a Herculean effort, lifted it slightly. She wormed her way from under it.

"You're not injured, are you?" he asked.

"No, I don't think so, just shocked and bruised," she replied, her voice barely audible as she clutched his arm. He grabbed her other arm to assist her in getting to her feet amid the shambles of the partially destroyed compartment.

"You're going to have to climb through the window," he said. "I'll help you down."

Suddenly, she pulled free from his grip. "No, wait!" she said. "I need my gown and bag; I'm still in my nightclothes."

He could see her in the approaching fire's glow, rummaging in the wreckage of the compartment, the light reflecting off the silk sleeping attire. He could distinctly hear the crackling of fire as the carriage burned. The smell of burning wood and paint began to permeate the air. He stood ready to be of assistance, the fire was now dangerously close.

"I can't find my bag!" she said exasperatedly. She found her gown, stuck her arms into the sleeves, and tied the cord round her waist.

"What bag is this?" he asked. "For God's sake, leave it; the carriage is on fire!"

“It’s my medical bag!” she insisted.

Christ! Of course! She was a doctor. She would need her bag.

He joined her on all fours, both scrabbling to find her shoes and medical bag.

Once they found the bag, they both crawled out of the window. Quickly, he looked around to get his bearings. The fire was now a raging inferno and brightly lit the surrounding area. They could not have stayed much longer in the wrecked train. He saw that an NCO had taken command of the situation and had organised the new recruits in a defensive line along the length of the train. He could hear only sporadic shooting now. This was a typical Ovaherero hit-and-run attack. The Schutztruppe had recovered from the surprise and were organising a defence as the rebels melted into the darkness again. They’d done enough damage.

The surroundings were now bathed in light as the fire roared, huge flames leaping into the air.

“Sanitär!” The shout for medical assistance was loud.

“I’m going to help,” she said, alerted by the call for medical attention. In the faint light of the approaching dawn, he saw that she had sustained a few scratches and a nasty cut to her forehead which she kept dabbing. He realised there was no stopping her; she was resolute. She grabbed her bag and rushed off to where the shout for medical help had come, her gown trailing in the dust.

Werner scrambled down an embankment to where the soldiers lay prone on the ground, their rifles at the ready. A Feldwebel who stood behind the prone soldiers threw him a salute.

“Herr Leutnant, I think they are withdrawing. If they intended to damage the train, well, they’ve managed that all right; the damned thing is completely wrecked!” the sergeant said, gesturing towards the train. Most of the coaches

had toppled over and one burned ferociously, spitting and crackling, leaving a pall of smoke in the just emerging dawn sky.

"Sergeant, how are your men?" Werner enquired.

"Fortunately, only two are in a bad way. The others have minor injuries. It's those soldiers on the flatcar up front, poor buggers. It's a sad business. They all perished when the track blew below them. One civilian was killed and another wounded by enemy fire. Three more marines died in the skirmish that followed. The engineer and fireman are okay – truly a miracle. They jumped when they saw that the rail track ahead had been tampered with. The engineer either broke or sprained his foot, I'm not sure which. One wonders where the damn Herero got the explosives. It is a pity that those on the flatcar were not ordered to jump. I can't believe they didn't see what the engineer saw."

"Where is your captain?"

"On the other side of the train, Herr Leutnant," the sergeant said.

The faint pre-dawn light rapidly brightened and soon the vast expanse of the surrounding landscape was visible. He realised they were still in the desert but the area was no longer barren; it was now interspersed with scrub and patches of thin desert grass. The sergeant remarked that they were near Usakos, a small town on the fringes of the desert, which served as a rail junction.

"No more than a settlement, sir," the sergeant added. The mountains, which encircled the town, were visible in the distance.

Dry gullies and small wadis criss-crossed the surrounding area, some with small flat-topped thorn trees that grew on the dried stream banks, none taller than a man. The rare rains on the fringe of the desert were just sufficient to enable these hardy trees and bushes to survive the arid climate. The guerrillas had sought cover in the dried gullies and concentrated their fire on the train from there. A small band of men, he thought, their objective appearing to be

not to engage the troopers but to destroy the train. They harboured a deep respect for Imperial tactics and firepower. Before the Schutztruppe could undertake any retaliatory action, they had melted into the desert, a classic guerrilla warfare manoeuvre.

Werner and the sergeant picked their way through the wreckage and detoured round the burning carriage to the front of the train. The forward section of the train had jumped the narrow track that was buckled and distorted from the explosion. Several shattered boxcars and flatbed rail trucks lay on their sides, their cargo scattered over the ground. The locomotive also lay on its side, severely damaged, probably irreparably, Werner thought. Miraculously, the boiler appeared to be still intact, hissing steam into the grey morning sky. The flatcar was a mangled wreck of wood, steel and ruptured sandbags. A small group of soldiers was removing the dead. The sight was horrifying – the mangled flatcar and the blood-splattered bodies, some even partially dismembered. He found the captain and the train engineer inspecting the wreckage. The captain turned on hearing Werner's approach.

"What a mess," the captain said. "We've attached a portable telegraph to the overhead lines alongside the rail track, but it seems the rebels have cut the wire. We cannot make contact with either Swakopmund or Usakos. However, it's not too bad. When we don't arrive and they don't hear from us – you know, no telegraph contact – they'll send the Draisine from Usakos to investigate."

"What are they?" Werner asked.

"Hand-operated trolleys; they're slow, so it will take awhile."

The Feldwebel seemed to have a better grasp of the situation than his optimistic captain and politely interjected: "Sir, I had better get the men started on finding the train's water bottles and anything edible. We might be here for a day or two. They'll have to send coaches from either Windhuk or

Swakopmund."

"Excellent idea, do that," the captain responded heartily.

"You realise that I've only just arrived from Germany, but should you require my assistance, I'm here at your command," Werner said politely.

The train guard pushed over to join them, not at all intimidated by the officers. "I've had this happen before," the guard ventured. "I have cable to repair the telegraph lines. These swine are always cutting the lines. You'll probably find that they were cut only a few miles from here. If only we had horses."

By ten o'clock, the blistering heat of the midmorning sun forced them all to seek shade. The soldiers kept a constant vigil for the guerrillas, but they had vanished. Werner had not been able to salvage his personal belongings and neither had Dorothea; her things had been consumed in the fire, as had Werner's valises.

Suddenly, over a small rise from the direction of Usakos, a column of cavalry appeared. They numbered about 20 and were Imperial Schutztruppe, their light-grey uniforms and African campaign hats recognisable even from this distance.

The column halted. The commander dismounted and saluted the train's officers, and then introduced himself.

"Rittmeister von Brandt," he said, bowing his head and clicking his heels. The other officers responded similarly.

"Herr Hauptmann," the Rittmeister said, addressing the captain, "we've just come from Usakos. During the night, the guerrillas cut the telegraph lines and at daybreak we were sent to repair them. We found the cut about three miles from here. While the two linesmen were up the telegraph poles, they reported smoke in the distance; we decided to investigate, and here we find you." He stared at the wrecked train. "As I said, the lines are repaired; you should be

able to contact Usakos now."

"Thank you, sir, " the train guard said and scurried off to the rear of the train to set up his equipment and make contact with Usakos.

"I'm Jurgen," the Rittmeister said, offering Werner a cigarette which he gratefully accepted.

"Werner von Dewitz, but please address me as Werner," he responded, pleased to note the turn from the usual rigid form of address common amongst officers in the Imperial army.

By noon, Werner could see the approaching Draisines; four or five trolleys, loaded with men, rails and sleepers, slowly moved along the track towards the wrecked train. When they arrived at the break in the line, they stopped and the men immediately started to off-load their equipment, readying themselves for work and taking instructions from their burly white supervisor. Only once he was satisfied that his men knew what to do did the supervisor leave his men and approach the waiting officers.

"Not the first time the guerrillas have mined the track in this region, sir," the supervisor said. "We'll have the line repaired in no time, but the train is a different matter; a salvage crew will need to come from Windhuk. Meanwhile, a locomotive and coaches should have left Usakos by now. You'll soon be on your way."

The train finally got under way in the early hours of the next morning, the Draisines coupled to the rear, hitching a free ride. The cavalry detachment under the command of Rittmeister von Brandt, had left the scene of the attack soon after the replacement train had arrived.

The sun's heat was unrelenting, but fortunately, it was a dry desert heat. Werner remained in his compartment and removed his uniform tunic, his chest bare until one of the other officers gave him a shirt. He only ventured out for short periods. He was forced to share a compartment with two other

officers who, while polite, were clearly friends and kept to themselves. Dorothea had been given a compartment of her own, from which she never seemed to emerge; all her clothing had been lost in the coach fire. Werner found his thoughts returning to this beautiful woman. She seemed to be everything a man could wish for – and brave as well! She had been the only person on the train with proper medical training, and even though a woman, the officers and men alike acknowledged her ability and status, dutifully carrying out any instruction she issued. Yes, she had been quiet and aloof on the voyage, but here she easily assumed command, ensuring that the commanding officer assigned men to assist her with the injured. In this world of men, her only concern was for those in her care.

The train was slow but its motion was enough to disturb the dust which billowed up from beneath the coaches' wheels, penetrating everything and adding to their discomfort.

They eventually left the desert behind, travelling through rolling savannahs occasionally interspersed with thorn trees. As the track wound its way farther into the hinterland, the savannahs gave way to dense African bush, granting the passengers an occasional glimpse of antelope, baboons and guinea fowl.

At each stop, hawkers offered a variety of items, including bags of beer. These were extremely popular, the only cold refreshment available other than fresh water kept in canvas bags. These were not quick stops: the train usually stood for an hour or more, the engineer and his stoker refilling the boiler tanks with water and taking a meal break. Clearly, the train ran to no fixed timetable: it was on colonial time.

Dorothea Eggers's initial aversion to any form of social interaction with him seemed to have eased. As they approached Windhuk, he ventured out of his compartment to find her standing in the passageway, staring out of the window. She was now wearing a dress, which she clearly must have

borrowed, the hem a little too high. She seemed pleased to see him and they exchanged some small talk.

Subtly, he endeavoured to question her. He asked where she was ultimately heading, hoping that there would be occasion to meet again.

“I’m to take up a position with the Finnish Lutheran mission in the north, close to the Angolan border. The mission desperately needs professional medical doctors in the clinic they have established and, not like others, the Finns are not opposed to female doctors,” She said.

He realised that it took dedication and, above all, an overwhelming desire to help your fellow man in order to serve in these remote outposts. He thought she had to be an altruistic and unusual woman.

Near to the Angolan border right in the very north of the country? He was disappointed – the chance of any engineered meeting with her seemed impossible.

“Why opt for an outpost in the middle of bloody nowhere?” he blurted out, unable to contain his feelings. “Missions don’t pay well and the indigenous lot haven’t got a bean!”

“Missions don’t pay well and the indigenous lot haven’t got a bean?” she said, repeating him. “Somebody has to help them.”

He just silently looked at her. She giggled for the first time, finishing with a smile. “Come, come, Captain. It’s not always about money.”

“You won’t find many people agreeing with that,” he replied before he could stop himself, not that he was thinking about money but rather this woman’s desire to help those who had nothing.

Her smile promptly vanished. “You’re like the rest – you don’t realise that they need our help, but what do we do? We mistreat them. Excuse me, I need to freshen up.”

He was flabbergasted; he just stood there watching her walk away, her back

stiff. A particularly resolute woman he again thought as he settled back in his compartment for the rest of the journey.

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The train rounded the last bend before Windhuk, a signboard alongside the track proclaiming that only another five kilometres remained to the capital. Werner and Dr Eggers stood in the compartment passageway again; they could see the town sprawled across a huge valley, surrounded on all sides by hills and high mountains. The bush and the grass were drab and scorched, the ground burned to dust by the harsh sun. It seemed a forbidding place. Clearly, it had not rained for months.

Dorothea reached out a hand to bid him goodbye, favouring him with one of her rare smiles.

“I’m deeply in your debt,” she said sincerely. “Thank you for coming to my assistance.” She said nothing, however, of them ever meeting again.

With the clang of a bell, the train slowly entered the station. The platform was thronged with people, expectantly craning forward trying to see those they had come to meet, their faces lighting up when they recognised them.

The architecture was similar to many towns in Germany; most buildings had the familiar steep roofs that were usual in Germany, although heavy snowfalls seemed extremely unlikely here in the Tropics. The buildings were widely separated from one another, with large tracts of vacant land in between, but there were no trees here, just flat expanses of gravel and sand. The roads were mere gravel strips and any movement over them resulted in clouds of dust, the mica flakes contained in the soil glittering in the sunlight. Until the rainy season, which would start in the next few weeks, everyone had to put up with the choking dust.

The main road, aptly named Kaiserstrasse, had shops fronted by cemented boardwalks and shaded by overhead canopies. A horse-drawn tramway plied

the gravel street from the Ausspanplatz at the end of town to its opposite terminus close to the railway station. The Ausspanplatz was a specially designated area where all wagons out spanned their oxen, as ox-wagons were not allowed in the town. Only horse-drawn carriages were permitted.

Werner immediately jumped into one of the few carriages awaiting passengers, requesting the driver to take him to military headquarters; he scowled at the driver's distrusting look at his smudged and dirty uniform without tunic or hat.

Twenty minutes later the horses finally arrived at the steep incline that wound its way to the fort perched on a ridge hill which overlooked the town. They drew up below the steep embankments of the raised ground on which the fort was erected. He thanked the driver, took some money from a bundle of banknotes in his pocket, and paid him, not forgetting to tip the man. The clothes he wore and the money in his pockets were his sole possessions.

The fort overlooked the town. However, it was not a fort in the true sense, but rather constructed to serve as an administrative building. He entered the main entrance hall, which offered a few cushioned reception chairs and was staffed by military personnel behind a few counters. They stared at him and he realised that it was the state of his clothes that drew their attention. He approached the centre counter and returned the non-commissioned officer's salute. He announced his name and military origins and immediately apologised for his state of dress. He also briefly reported the occurrences of the past two days to the sergeant on duty, who listened intently.

"One moment please, Herr Leutnant," the sergeant said and swung round to disappear through a doorway behind him.

A minute later, an officer emerged, trailed by the sergeant.

They saluted each other.

"The Feldwebel has told me of your misfortune," the captain said looking

him up and down and smiling dryly. “Lieutenant, it seems you are in desperate need of assistance. I think a new uniform would be a good start. Please follow me.”

The captain led Werner down a few corridors towards the back of the large building. They finally entered a large room, which contained rows of wooden shelving stacked with every conceivable item of military clothing, riding equipment and mess gear. The captain leant over the long counter that split the room and addressed the sergeant behind it.

“Hartmann, see that the lieutenant here is fully – and I mean fully – kitted out. This is to include full dress uniform and spare clothing. Major Zietzmann will sign the issue dockets when presented to him.”

The captain turned to Werner and reached out a hand, a smile on his face. “Welcome to SudwestAfrika, Herr Leutnant. You may change in the officers’ ablution block which also contains baths and showers. I will arrange accommodation for you in one of the local hotels until we can find appropriate military digs for you. I’m afraid the uniform may not be a perfect fit. However, there are tailors here in town that do an excellent job. Meanwhile, the issue uniform will have to do.”

Werner thanked the man profusely. Once issued with everything, including the necessary soldier’s chest and bags, he retired to wash and change. He emerged much later, feeling a good deal more comfortable and presentable.

He returned to reception, where he was immediately led to Major Zietzmann’s offices. He entered the room and was surprised to find it reminiscent of any high-ranking officer’s room in Germany. A huge portrait of Kaiser Wilhelm II stared down from the wall, the emperor in full uniform, complete with pickle helmet and tall riding boots. The German Imperial crest – the black eagle with spread wings – adorned the opposite wall. The huge desk was adorned with a massive blotter pad, crystal inkwells and ornate

lamp.

Werner saluted and again formally announced himself. The major came round from behind his desk to give him a firm handshake, welcoming him to the division, and then invited him to take a seat.

Werner took a seat opposite Major Zietzmann. The major, resplendent in his tropical marine uniform, was not given to small talk; he had a somewhat overbearing attitude towards junior officers. Once satisfied that Werner's needs had been seen to, he lost no time in getting down to business.

"Lieutenant," Zietzmann began stiffly, "the Ovahereros –they are the rebels as you no doubt know – are well armed. Mauser rifles, to be precise – K88s, the most common weapon in southern Africa. It was and still is the Boers' favourite rifle. Ask the British, they'll tell you of its accuracy during the Boer War a few years ago. Now large supplies of these weapons, plus explosives, mines and other armaments are being smuggled in to the Hereros and Namas, and we believe that these emanate from Angola, from the Kunahama tribe. Lord only knows where they acquire these. The Kunahamas are actually a sub-tribe of the Ovahereros that live in southern Angola, and they often cross our border to get medical attention from the Finnish and Rheinische missions situated up north."

"I've heard of the missions you refer to," Werner volunteered.

"Right. Well, Angola seems to be the source of most of these illegal weapons. The Portuguese have very little control," the major said.

"Sir, why do we not ask the British to intervene?" Werner asked.

"The British? You must be joking!" The major gave a dismissive wave of his hand. "The British don't like us. Our emerging German empire, our armament industries, our navy, especially our battleships, and our large military forces concern them. They proclaimed Bechuanaland a protectorate primarily to create a buffer zone between the Boer republics and us,

concerned that we would supply the Boers with war materiel from here, crossing Bechuanaland to the Transvaal Republic during the Boer War. I'm sure you'll recall that at the time, Germany was extremely sympathetic towards the Boers and assisted them, exporting arms to the port of Lourenço Marques in Mozambique. These went directly by rail to Pretoria, the capital of the Transvaal Boer Republic. The British have not forgotten."

The major paused for a moment, taking a sip from his coffee cup before continuing.

Suddenly, the expression on the major's face changed; it seemed as though he had suddenly recalled something. "You are Leutnant Manfred von Dewitz's brother, aren't you?" the major asked.

Werner nodded his head.

"The loss of your brother and his detachment in that engagement with the Hereros a few months ago was tragic, and you have my sympathies. I'm sorry to use that as an example, but clearly, you'll now realise that the Hereros and their friends are not to be trifled with. This uprising is a very serious matter."

"I do realise this, Herr Major," Werner answered.

"Actually, I've a confession to make. Given your loss, the death of your brother in that firefight in the north and your extraordinary linguistic talents, you are the perfect choice for this operation, or should I say assignment. I've known for a while that you pressed your military commander back home to be transferred to the Schutztruppe and shipped here; you made it clear that Tanganyika was not acceptable. I too, knew your brother and want to see his death avenged."

Werner was astounded at what the major knew; his dumbfounded expression said it all.

After a few seconds pause, the major continued.

"Good. So, as to your assignment: we want you to infiltrate the gunrunners'

operation in Angola," he said, replacing his cup and looking up expectantly at the Leutnant opposite him to gauge the man's reaction.

"Good Lord, Herr Major, that would be spying!" For a moment, Werner visualised himself facing a Portuguese firing squad or, worse still, a noose.

"I know, but we are not at war with Portugal. Even if they found out who you were, the worst that could occur is deportation."

Werner frowned. "How am I supposed to go about this?"

"You will pretend to be a Portuguese trader from Lourenço Marques, an agent for two German firearm manufacturers. This has already been arranged with these manufacturers, and they will verify your bona fides should that ever be necessary."

"How do I get there?"

The major did not immediately reply. He offered Werner a cigar from a humidor. The young officer declined. The major meticulously prepared his cigar, clipping the end. Only after it was alight did he continue.

"A German steamer will round the Cape of Good Hope en route to Germany from Tanganyika. Fake documents will state that you boarded the vessel in Mozambique. On its return voyage, it docks at both Swakopmund and Benguela. One of our Askaris, who also speaks Portuguese and some German, will accompany you. He is already in Swakopmund where he will join you when you arrive."

"Why Benguela, and not the Angolan capital, Luanda?"

"Most illegal weapons finding their way into Herero hands appear to come through the ports of Benguela and Namibe; these towns are on the southern Angolan coast. Of course, some also cross over border from the north of our country, from the Congo. Namibe is not really a town; it's a fishing village – just a few huts. Intelligence has established that a Mr Antonio dos Santos, a local trader and entrepreneur, is the kingpin, the big commanchero if you

like. We believe that as a legitimate agent for the Mauser Waffenfabrik, you may be able to get close to him."

"Commanchero? What's that?" Werner asked.

"Ah yes. The Americans gave that name to gunrunners in their wars against the red Indians. A name that has stuck. I believe it's actually Spanish."

Werner realised that intensive planning had already gone into this undercover operation and all options carefully considered. The relationship between Germany and Portugal was cordial, he knew that. The major was right, there seemed to be little danger in what he was about to undertake. He had no doubt that he could play the part well, as his knowledge of the language and of Portugal was excellent. In fact, he had a few influential friends in Portugal. The military had probably also considered that aspect. He would be able to drop a few names that would stand him in good stead, should the need arise.

The major handed him a thick folder tied with a red ribbon.

"These are the companies you represent as an agent. Study this in detail and return it to me once you have memorised the information. My aide will assist in providing you with all the civilian kit you will require. The paymaster's office will ensure that you have sufficient funds and a letter of credit from the Banco Nacionale Ultramarino."

"How do I contact you?"

"That will be difficult," the major said. "However, in the file is an address you can use to send a telegram. It will have to go a roundabout route, but that's the best we can do. As I said, you're on your own here."

Werner was aghast at what he read; this was a lucrative business, involving vast sums of money. From the report he soon realised that the army had not been successful, they not sure who the ringleaders were. A new tactic was necessary, the best to infiltrate their operation as a civilian outsider. He also

realised that if the gunrunners ever blew his cover, his life wouldn’t be worth a damn. Good God, he had never volunteered for this! Just because he had the background and language skills, the army believed he could masquerade as a Portuguese trader. Did they not realise that he would be continuously under scrutiny? He was a firm believer of the old adage; you can bluff some of them some of the time, but not all of them all the time. How long would he be able to get away with this?

Werner spent three weeks in Windhuk, staying in the Hansa Hotel as a guest of the Imperial government. With funds provided by the Abwehr Abteilung, he kitted himself out with the best of clothing as befitted a successful businessman. All items were carefully scrutinised to ensure that none contained any reference to anything German or military. Most clothing had to be tailor-made to ensure a perfect fit as would become a gentleman of his new stature, the tailors working long shifts. It took near on three weeks before he considered himself ready to leave for Swakopmund.

CHAPTER 2

The train departed Windhuk at ten in the morning, scheduled to arrive in Swakopmund at about the same time the next day. The train journey was hot and dusty, and had it not been for the welcome beer in straw bags, it would've been unbearable.

The conversation with his superior officer kept running through Werner's mind even as he his way back to the coast to carry out Zietzmann's orders.

When Werner stepped off the train in Swakopmund, his appearance and identity had been transformed. Nothing now showed that he had ever been in the military. His business dress was impeccable, his luggage carried by porters, and he exuded an air of success and prosperity.

He had been told to be on the lookout for a tall black man dressed in grey flannels, a white shirt and grey homburg. The man would be waiting for him at the entrance to the station building. He immediately spied the man standing close to three or four carriages, which were expectantly awaiting a fare. Werner approached the man. He was taller than most local Blacks were and appeared to be all muscle and sinew. The black man flashed a smile at Werner, revealing perfect white teeth. His complexion was also darker than most, his hair cut short and close to his skull, his eyes wide and large.

"You are Philippe?" Werner enquired.

"Yes, boss," the man, replied.

"Please, I'd rather you not address me so. You are fluent in Portuguese, I'm told. Call me Mestre."

"I will, Mestre."

"You know that you are to be my servant. I'm sure that you have been told

that there is a need for secrecy and that you are to say nothing other than the fact that you are in my employ. We will always speak Portuguese when in public. Best we speak only Portuguese, no matter what," Werner said condescendingly.

"I know what to say, Mestre," the man replied. Werner sensed that the man had taken affront.

"Good, then we should get on well."

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The ship was already at anchor off Swakopmund. They boarded the vessel that same afternoon.

Three days later and after a tedious and monotonous voyage, the ship dropped anchor in Lobito Bay. The usual barges congregated around the ship to take on the cargo that the ship's derricks swung out over the water and slowly lowered. These also brought cargo from the shore: timber, coffee, sisal, salt, hides and boxed ivory. The same barges took the two men ashore; they were the only passengers to disembark.

Werner knew that the town of Benguela was founded in 1617. The town was typically Portuguese colonial with the distinctive Portuguese architecture similar to that found in Brazil, the town dominated by the central Catholic cathedral. The buildings were set well apart; the beautiful streets lined with crimson-blossomed acacia trees.

Angola had been engaged in a low-grade civil war for years, with the Portuguese exercising full control but concentrated only in the towns. A full company of colonial troops was garrisoned in Benguela, commanded by white Portuguese officers and NCOs. While some soldiers were Whites, the remainder of the garrison was made up of indigenous Blacks.

Although slavery had long been abolished, with the Portuguese government a signatory to the anti-slavery manifesto, the inhuman practice was still rife.

Brazil, which before independence was Portugal's largest and most prosperous colony, still demanded slaves. The chiefs of the various tribes in the country selected prime candidates from their own people and handed them over to the slave-traders, using them as human trade goods. Of course, this all took place in the utmost secrecy, as the penalty for slave-trading was severe.

Philippe found them a small horse-drawn carriage, which Werner hired on a semi-permanent basis. With Philippe playing the part of the cavalherico who trotted alongside on Werner's left, any passerby would have thought a well-to-do cavalheiro had arrived in town – precisely the impression he wished to create.

The hotel was an imposing building with a large balcony on the first floor, overlooking the street. The balcony housed an extension to the dining room, its sides open to the outside with green canvas roll-down awnings to protect the interior should it rain. It overlooked the sea, and in the evenings, it would be a good vantage point to observe the splendour of the setting sun disappearing over the horizon. A slight breeze blew in from the sea, the cool air a refreshing welcome after the hot summer day. The hotel must surely draw a fair clientele during the evenings; a good place to start, Werner decided, especially with a glass of wine or beer.

Telling the driver to wait, he climbed the few stairs to the hotel portage, entered the foyer and approached the reception desk where a voluptuous black-haired woman with light olive skin and striking black eyes greeted him.

"Good day. Your best room please, and accommodation for my cavalherico," he instructed, assuming the pompous attitude expected from a prosperous businessman from Portugal.

"Certainly, Senhor," she said, sliding the hotel register towards him.

"What time is dinner served?"

“Dinner starts at eight, Senhor. However, maybe Senhor could be a little early and have an aperitivo with the other guests? I could introduce Senhor to the others. We also have a few locals coming to dinner. Some are important people.”

She bent over the hotel register to read his entry, her low-necked dress displaying her ample cleavage.

“Thank you. That is kind of you. And my cavalherico?” Werner enquired.

“Be assured, we will look after him, Senhor. Please ask him to report at the kitchen door behind the building.”

Werner straightened up after signing the register and looked over at the woman behind the desk once again. She was not unattractive, and she did have a figure that caught his eye.

“Please, will you call for a porter for my bags,” he asked.

She smiled at him and turned to a short, muscular man standing nearby.

“Take the Senhor’s bags to Room 2,” she said.

Having instructed Philippe to go round to the back, he climbed the stairs to the top floor, following the two porters who carried his luggage down a dimly lit hallway to his room. Once inside, he was pleasantly surprised. The room was filled with light, with large windows and a high ceiling, seeming to make the room bigger than it was. Snow-white sheets invitingly covered the bed.

“When would you like to bathe, Senhor?” the porter asked.

Werner had been looking forward to a bath for days, and he told the porter he’d like one right away. Soon a troupe of three servants entered the room, carrying large buckets of hot water. They filled the tub. Werner disrobed, stepped slowly into the hot water, and lay back, a stein of beer in his hand, feeling rather pleased with himself.

He dressed for dinner with care, so as not to appear too ostentatious. Although his dress was purposely subdued, he still exuded the air of a

prosperous merchant.

A thunderstorm had passed over during the late afternoon, resulting in a light rain, just sufficient to further cool the air and dampen the dust, releasing that wonderful smell of rain and wet dust experienced only in Africa. He walked down the stairs to the large lounge and adjoining dining room, both flooded with the orange glow of the setting sun. Several residents and guests were already enjoying the customary aperitivo.

Madame Rodrigues took him by the arm. “Senhor de Almeida, people tend to be less formal in the colonies. May I introduce you to some of our patrons?” she asked.

The hotelkeeper had also changed, and her black gown had an attractive low neckline. She was in her mid to late 30s; her thick shining black hair tumbled to her shoulders and her fair skin revealed a slight olive tint. Back in the past, her ancestors had crossed the colour line, and she was probably a third or fourth generation mestiço. Probably, her great grandfather had been a degregado, a criminal from Portugal sent to Angola instead of prison. Usually it was the peasants, the illiterates and the very poor, who were guilty of serious crimes. The Portuguese government, similar to other countries in Europe, transported and dumped them in the colonies where they were given their freedom after a short period of incarceration. These degregados, which included a small smattering of the criminal rich, would frequently take African women to be their companions. This was the norm, there being ten white men for every white woman in Angola.

Madame Rodrigues steered him towards two men and a woman, the younger man dressed in the uniform of a captain of the Portuguese colonial forces.

“Excuse me, Captain de Sousa,” she said smiling. “I would like to introduce you to our new guest.”

The captain's wife, a petite and attractive brunette, softly acknowledged his greeting. Captain Louis de Sousa was a young man in his early 30s. He flashed Werner a friendly grin and shook his hand. The other man was elderly, his hair and goatee grey. That he was a man of stature was evident, his bearing and mannerism a giveaway.

"This is his Lordship, Senhor Alberto de Mello, the provincial district judge, or juiz, for the Benguela district," Madame Rodrigues announced with affected deference.

They shook hands, the man's grip firm. Werner saw that he had large hands, the skin not as soft as would be expected from a person of high office. Werner thought him to be about 40, and slightly above 6ft in height. His hair was black but peppered with grey and combed back. His cold grey eyes carefully appraised Werner.

The men exchanged pleasantries and as a bell tinkled, signalling that dinner was about to commence, the judge invited Werner to join them at their table.

Barefoot Blacks, immaculate in white tunics, and black trousers, and the customary red sash from shoulder to waist, served the best of Portuguese cuisine: fresh shellfish followed by a choice of game or white fish or the finest steaks followed by dessert.

The subject of Lisbon dominated the conversation as this was the judge's home city. Luckily, Werner had lived in Lisbon; otherwise, the judge would soon have recognised him for an impostor.

"So what do you hope to sell in this part of the world?" de Mello finally enquired.

"Well, I represent several manufacturers," Werner began, "and I understand you have a large Boer population here, those who fled from the Transvaal and Free State Boer republics. Much of the merchandise I have to offer would stand them in good stead. For instance, I've ploughs and other farming

equipment, steel tools and kitchenware, as well as rifles, pistols, ammunition and a host of other items."

"Are you aware that we have clashes with the indigenous tribes from time to time?" Captain de Sousa interrupted.

"Yes, so I've heard. This seems to be usual in the colonies."

"Of course, I need to remind you that the selling of weapons to the indigenous people carries a severe penalty," the captain said quietly.

"Captain, I'm well aware of this. You may rest assured that I have no such intentions," Werner replied, hoping he sounded sufficiently convincing. He certainly did not want to find himself under scrutiny by the local authorities.

The judge intervened.

"Take care. There are gunrunners around. They are not selling weapons to the locals; rather, they take them across the border to the Blacks who are fighting the Germans. There is a full-scale war in German South West Africa, you know. The Germans are extremely sensitive and believe we are not doing sufficient to halt these gunrunners. They are our captain's biggest headache and they are careful to avoid our patrols."

Judge de Mello looked at both Werner and the captain, waiting for a response.

"His Lordship is right," de Sousa said. "Gunrunning is extremely lucrative and stopping it is difficult."

"Who are these gunrunners?" asked Werner.

"Some Portuguese locals. I daresay you'll find out soon enough. Not comprising the dregs of society as one would assume; in fact, we believe members of the elite are involved."

"Gentlemen, let me assure you, I don't deal with gunrunners," Werner said, hoping that his voice contained a degree of finality.

"Please, Senhor de Almeida," the captain said, "If I have been

misunderstood, I apologise. I would never have thought that of you."

A minute or so later, Captain de Sousa put down his knife and fork, as if to indicate that he had an important announcement to make. He dabbed his moustache with his napkin and spoke.

"You may not have heard, but we are plagued by a troublesome tribe, the Kunahamas, who control the land near and along the Kunene River, the border with the German colony to the south. The Kunahamas are very sympathetic to the Hereros, the tribe that is at war with the Germans. In fact, they have similar origins. One could say that they are really one tribe split only by the border. We believe the Kunahamas are ready to start a more intensive campaign of insurrection in our country. I can mention that this is already common knowledge in certain circles. Currently, I'm awaiting reinforcements from Luanda. Under the circumstances, I would suggest you proceed with caution, and should you go inland, avoid going south."

Werner was surprised at the captain's remarks: that the Portuguese proposed to deal with the Kunahamas was excellent news.

"I have no intention of getting embroiled in some uprising. I note your concerns," he replied.

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The next day, Werner went through the pretensions of trading with the local citizens.

He called on traders, showed them his catalogues, and took what orders were forthcoming. He was surprised that the traders showed great interest in his wares, in particular in the rifles and ammunition, the finest German weapon manufacturers could produce and competitively priced to boot. He realised that he actually could make a fair living!

A few days later, a coastal steamer from Luanda docked and discharged a detachment of 250 men men under the command of a Major Olazabal; they to

reinforce the local garrison. These reinforcements comprised predominantly Black soldiers with about 50 professional White cavalrymen. Major Olazabal was also to assume command of the total military contingent in the district.

Werner soon realised that Major Olazabal had never served in the colonies before and that he lacked the experience required to command troops in both the Tropics and this type of terrain against an enemy who resorted to hit-and-run tactics in the dense bush of the hinterland. Your enemy could hide 50 yards from you and you would never see them. He was all pomp, tailor-made uniforms, gold braid and black ostrich feathers, with an attitude that did not permit local advice. Werner hoped the new major would at least take advice from his captain, a man of experience who knew both these parts and the ways of the local population well. Sadly, as in all armies, rank often stifles experience and initiative – a flaw that results in disaster and defeat.

During the last few weeks, reports had filtered back that the Kunahamas planned attacks on homesteads and smaller settlements along the banks of the Kunene River. The river flowed south through the colony and then turned west, over the Ruacana Falls to the Atlantic Ocean, creating the border between German SudwestAfrika and Angola.

Major Olazabal combined the force he had brought from Luanda with the local militia and the garrison to form a mixed brigade. Some were mounted on tsetse-fly hardened horses, others rode oxen, while the rest either marched on foot or rode on the ox-wagons.

Amid some fanfare, the column departed Benguela towards the Kunene River where Major Olazabal hoped to be reinforced by a further contingent of mounted Boer militia.

As Werner wanted to get nearer to the gunrunning, rumoured to be rife in that area, he and Philippe joined the column on horseback. The only other Black riding a horse was Paulo, Captain de Sousa’s servant. All the other

servants were on foot. Both black men were suitably armed with rifles.

Huambo is a large settlement in central Angola through which the railroad the British were building would pass. Although Olazabal's column would turn south well before the town, the major proposed to send a detachment of mounted troops to Huambo to make his presence known. From Philippe, who had heard it from other servants, Werner learned that Antonio dos Santos, the most important trader in that region and de facto administrator, ran his gunrunning operation from the Huambo area, in the heart of Kunahamas territory. Werner requested permission from Major Olazabal to accompany the detachment.

At Bolambo, a village on the wagon-trail to Huambo, the main column turned south. The detachment, under the command of Captain de Sousa, broke away and continued eastwards, needing to cover about 50 miles before reaching Huambo. The major had retained the more seasoned troops in his column, leaving the captain with the recently trained black troopers and a few NCOs and militiamen. The NCOs were spread amongst the men, but the militiamen formed their own group, not mixing.

They were hard-working colonists, composed of some Portuguese but mostly Boers trying to protect their possessions. Most eked out a living as ranchers or were coffee and sisal plantation owners. The Portuguese government, keen to increase the white population, had granted these men large tracts of land, sufficient in size to ensure a viable livelihood. The government still received convicts, the degradados transported from Portugal and Brazil. They were set free here, virtually without restrictions, in the hope that they would integrate with the existing colonists. Most of them soon adapted, settling in well, usually taking black women as wives, retaining their rugged and rough lifestyles. They were certainly not the company a gentleman or officer would seek. Werner avoided them. He and Captain de

Sousa had developed a comfortable rapport, and in the evenings they sought each other's company, sharing a campfire.

After passing through numerous indigenous tribal villages, where the locals maintained large herds of cattle and tilled the land primarily for their own use, the column eventually entered Huambo. Werner was surprised at the size of the tribal settlement, which sprawled over a large area from which the bush had been cleared. Huambo was the seat of a local sub-tribal chief who, with his subjects, counted their wealth in cattle. The locals came from afar to barter their goods at the few trading stores established here, which carried everything from clothing and trinkets to cooking pots, rudimentary agricultural tools and just about anything else required. From the inhabitants the traders received sisal, hides, raw rubber, corn, salt and ivory. However, the item every man desired was a rifle. This was never said aloud, but all knew it. A rifle was a prize.

Captain de Sousa decided that his unit should spend a few days at Huambo. The few resident traders had erected primitive dwellings for themselves, but none was a guesthouse and there was no hotel or lodge. The village did not cater to modern-day travellers. They found a suitable camping site amongst the widely dispersed huts and the troops were directed to erect tents and build a large boma, a corral constructed from cut-down thorn-tree branches to provide protection for the horses and oxen overnight. Marauding lions and leopards were as much a danger as cattle theft, a lucrative pastime amongst the tribes and even more so during this period of simmering discord.

By the time the sun had crept close to the western horizon the men had transformed the open area into an organised camp. The tents were in neat rows, and in between the aisles of canvas and forming a straight line down the centre, rifles had been stacked at exact intervals. Werner saw that de Sousa was a stern disciplinarian. His opinion of the man's military prowess

improved day by day as he watched him exert his command over this motley band of men. They respected him.

The two officers shared a tent. A large canvas awning was attached to the tent, creating some shade from the harsh sun. A folding table and chairs stood below this.

With a sigh of weariness de Sousa collapsed into a chair, gesturing for Werner to do the same.

“It seems the locals consider our arrival quite an event. I’m hoping the traders invite us for a drink and possibly a meal. This lot is hungry for news,” de Sousa said, taking a long drink from his water bottle.

“Where on earth would we eat? I’ve seen no proper buildings,” Werner asked.

The captain laughed.

“You’re right, there are no houses. They also live in huts, just as these tribesmen do. However, you’ll be surprised how comfortable and well appointed they are. These traders make a good living and they live accordingly, with all necessary amenities, including women.”

“Women?”

“Oh, yes. Most have brought their own women with them.” He lowered his voice. “Some even have one or two white men in their employ. Invariably, these are dubious characters and should be avoided; they are thugs and some are ex-convicts.”

Paulo, the captain’s dark-skinned batman, appeared with two beers and a note which he handed to de Sousa. Werner took a sip of beer. His face lit up with surprise; the beer was cold.

“Good God, where did this come from?”

“I told you, the traders live in style.”

The captain studied the note and looked up.

“Well, we’ve been invited by the kingpin, Senhor Antonio dos Santos himself. This should be both pleasant and interesting.”

He raised his beer in a toast, taking a generous drink and loudly smacking his lips. Straight from a cool-room, the beer was a welcome change from the lukewarm water they had been drinking.

Late that afternoon, the two men, accompanied by a detachment of four soldiers, rode to dos Santos’s store. The day was ferociously hot. Werner and de Sousa were both dressed in jodhpurs, high riding boots and white collarless blouses, as it was far too warm for any type of tunic or jacket. Werner wore a pith helmet; the captain, a Portuguese officer’s cap adorned with a short black ostrich feather. Custom and etiquette had little place in this climate.

Their destination was a great deal more than a ‘store’; it was a huge compound, surrounded by an 8ft-high wall of wooden stakes, made of poles as thick as a man’s arm and driven vertically into the ground, each so close as to touch the other. The entrance to the compound was a labyrinth designed to restrict the number of persons who could gain entrance simultaneously; it was a series of passageways constructed of the same closely packed perpendicular stakes, so narrow as to allow only two men to pass. Within this stockade huts of various sizes had been built. Some were dwellings while others clearly used as storerooms, stables and open-sided sheds.

A large thatched hut stood on a small knoll, dominating the centre of the stockade. A long, wide veranda surrounded the building. Windows were cut into its thick walls. These contained no glass but had shutters made of woven reeds, hinged at the top, so that they opened and closed from within. This was no rickety hut, but a properly built abode clearly capable of protecting the interior from the worst of thunderstorms.

Once inside the stockade, a swarthy white man, accompanied by another,

accosted them. Without greeting them, the two men motioned that they were to follow. The swarthy white man had a livid burn mark on the left side of his face. It seemed as if he had been branded at some time or other. This lent him a menacing appearance.

"One of those I spoke about," de Sousa said quietly to Werner.

"I should call him Scarface," muttered Werner.

The two men introduced themselves. Scarface's name was Morreira and the other man was Pedro Roche. The latter's face was severely pockmarked. It seemed that he had been a victim of smallpox as were many inhabitants.

Werner spoke out of the corner of his mouth, Louis barely hearing him: "This one we should call Pox."

Louis just smiled.

As they approached the hut, a voice called out: "Captain! It's been a year since I last saw you!"

Werner could not distinguish anything in the dark shadow of the porch. As Morreira waved them forward, both men climbed the few wooden stairs to the landing where a huge man confronted them.

He stood tall, his legs widespread on the planked floor, his hands on his hips, his forearms almost the size of an ordinary man's upper leg, his shoulders massively wide, his belly hanging over the belt of his jodhpurs. Although the man at first glance appeared fat, there was no hiding his enormous strength. Werner likened him to a wrestler, not somebody he would care to confront in a fight.

"Dos Santos, you get bigger every time I see you," de Sousa joked, returning the greeting.

"And who is this with you?" the huge man asked, indicating Werner. "A civilian? I'm surprised."

"I brought him along especially to meet you. He is in the same business as

you. This is Senhor Joachim de Almeida from Portugal, recently from Mozambique."

The captain stepped aside to allow Werner to pass and take dos Santos's proffered hand.Werner expected his fingers to be crushed. In fact, the handshake was quite normal, as dos Santos greeted him with due deference.

"I need to know the latest news," the trader said. "Come, please sit."

He snapped his fingers; two servants immediately appeared and awaited his instructions. "Bring beer and wine," he demanded his tone brusque. "And bring lamps," he added as an afterthought.

Werner looked closely at the gigantic man. Perspiration bathed his face and he ccontinually wiped it with a large bandanna. Although they were seated a few feet away, he could actually smell dos Santos; no amount of cologne could disguise the rancid smell of sweat which his body seemed to ooze continuously.

They exchanged the latest news; the trader was extremely interested in the progress of the railway the British were building from Lobito into the hinterland. He, in turn, confirmed that the situation in and around Huambo was tense, with the locals influenced by the war raging in neighbouring SudwestAfrika, as the Kunahama tribe began to believe that they could take on their Portuguese masters in similar manner. Recently, there had been attacks on homesteads; they were easy targets as by the time the military arrived the attackers were long gone. The insurrection was still sporadic, but the Portuguese authorities feared that a full revolt would encompass all the territory situated along the banks of the Kunene River, the home to many colonists.

"The situation continues to ferment," dos Santos remarked, "but fortunately, the locals view me as a necessity, supplying the items they need."

"Are they well armed?" the captain enquired.

“Indeed, they are.”

“I hear many have the latest rifles. Where do they acquire them?” the captain bluntly asked.

Dos Santos seemed to hesitate and then, with a sweep of his arm, indicated the horizon. “From all over. Even from SudwestAfrika and our own military deserters. Many rifles originate from the war in the north and from the Belgian Congo. These savages are fighting wars on all fronts in all colonies, be they British, Portuguese, Belgian or German. There seems to be an endless supply of weapons. The same goes for ammunition; they have large caches of ammunition.”

Werner said little, letting the two men talk, the information giving him insight into the customs and actions of the local population in the face of the storm clouds of war gathering in this part of Africa.

“Senhor de Almeida,” the huge man said, turning to the side, “what brings you to this outpost in wildest Africa?”

“Please, call me Joachim. To be frank, it is business. I’m an agent for several German manufacturers. Previously, while in Mozambique, I was told that I could do quite well here.”

The man laughed, his belly shaking.

“Of course, you have heard that I’m a trader too. In fact, I pride myself as the biggest in these parts. My purchases are enormous: cloth, farming equipment, knives, rifles, ammunition, pots and pans. I buy most items; I buy in bulk, all directly from Europe. What do you have that I don’t already have?”

Dos Santos did not drink wine or beer, but rather a popular Portuguese brandy drunk by the locals. Werner had tried it before; it was rough on the palate and had a kick like a mule, certainly not for the fainthearted! The huge man was not sipping his drink but taking generous swigs from his glass.

Werner did not doubt that the evening would develop; all it needed was time and copious quantities of brandy.

He needed to capture the man's attention.

"Well, I believe I could negotiate a handsome discount were you to do business with me. In fact, my principals have instructed me to establish some sort of permanent trade relationship with the traders in this country. To do so, they are prepared to be quite generous. I'm sure you will be surprised at the terms and discounts I can offer."

He paused for a moment to allow dos Santos to digest this information, and then continued: "But let me not bore you with business this evening. I'm your guest, and that would not be proper."

"Senhor de Almeida, my storerooms are full of valuable merchandise. I have large quantities of ivory and hides, bales of sisal and bags of coffee. Would you not prefer to barter with me? You would profit handsomely from such an arrangement. This would rid me of the task of having to transport these items to the coast and arrange for export. I could make you a deal you could not refuse." Dos Santos lapsed into silence and then added, "Ah, but I forget, we'll discuss business tomorrow."

The oppressive heat and the insistent buzzing of insects attracted by the lamps began to irritate Werner. He tried to limit his intake, but by the time they eventually sat down to dinner, late in the evening, both he and the captain had drunk too much. Dinner was served by two servants and overseen by dos Santos's mistress; she an exquisite woman of mixed blood, with flashing green eyes, black hair, a thin waist and a full bosom. Werner tried not to stare at her breasts above her plunging neckline, which bobbed with her every movement. Dos Santos noticed his furtive glances.

"I see you find Maria attractive," he remarked with a sly grin.

The bastard, Werner thought, he was doing this intentionally. He made a

mental note to take care; this man was dangerous.

"Yes, she certainly is beautiful," he said quietly.

She heard him and smiled, flashing her white teeth, but refrained from any comment. Dos Santos merely smirked.

After the drab fare of the last few days, the excellent food was welcome: fillet steak sprinkled with coarse salt and skewered on long sticks, grilled over an open fire, complemented with wild potatoes, all of which was washed down with copious quantities of wine and beer. Werner watched dos Santos: the man's appetite was astonishing. He devoured the equivalent of a two-man meal, accompanied by glass upon glass of cool red wine. As his alcohol consumption began to take its toll, what little decorum he had previously displayed evaporated. As Maria served him, he would stick out an arm and fondle her, winking at his table companions as if it were a joke, ignoring her obvious embarrassment. The ribald remarks accompanying these gestures merely added to the woman's discomfort.

Dos Santos's behaviour annoyed Werner, but he remained silent, not wishing to initiate any confrontation. The man and his woman was a private affair.

While appearing not to do so, Werner continued to watch Maria. From her body language and demeanour, he soon realised that she feared dos Santos. How could such an attractive woman have allowed herself to be trapped in a situation where she had to live with such a repulsive man?

The rest of the evening degenerated into an alcohol-induced fog, with dos Santos getting louder and louder and de Sousa reduced to a state of euphoria, a weak, sick grin on his face. Periodically he would burst into song, to which a drunken Werner would add his off-key baritone voice. Finally, dos Santos succumbed, collapsing in his chair, his loud snores heard even above the raucous behaviour of the other two men. With the help of a servant, Maria

got dos Santos to his feet and led him to their sleeping quarters.

When she returned, Maria emerged from her shell, smiling and laughing and encouraging the two young men in their merriment. She even had a few glasses of wine. She brought a gramophone out from the house and proceeded to play a fiery Portuguese dance.

“Come, dance,” she insisted. “Come, dance with me!”

Werner and de Sousa forgot the heat, their exertions leaving their skin shiny with perspiration as they danced, circling the length of the veranda. She never seemed to tire, her head thrown back, talking and smiling at her partner.

Finally, the two thoroughly inebriated men rode back to their campsite, serenading the countryside, their escort keeping a diplomatic distance behind them.

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In the morning, Werner woke up groaning. He had collapsed onto his cot the previous night without closing the mosquito netting, which hung from an attachment above his bed. His arms, upper torso, and face were now covered in mosquito bites. To add to his discomfort, his head pounded, threatening to burst like an over-pressurised boiler.

He called for Philippe, who stooped to enter the tent. The cavalherico took one look at Werner, shook his head, and muttered: “If you wash your face, Mestre, you’ll feel better.”

Werner carefully swung his legs off the cot and hung his head down, slowly massaging his temples. Staggering to the table, he held his head over a huge enamel dish while Philippe slowly poured water over his head. Werner gagged, rubbing his hair and face with the cascading water.

“Good God! Never again,” he mumbled, falling into a camp chair and dabbing at his face with a cloth the servant had handed him.

“Should I arrange to have breakfast brought to you?”

He made a face, a clear indication that food was the furthest thing from his mind.

“Cristo! Have you no compassion? Just bring black coffee.”

Philippe snickered and left, returning some minutes later with a large mug. Werner sipped the black coffee; it was strong and sweet.

“How is the captain? More to the point, where is he?” Werner asked, only now noticing that the captain’s cot had been removed from the command tent.

Philippe rolled his eyes, a sympathetic look on his face.

“Not good, Mestre. We moved his cot out of the tent and erected a separate tent for him alongside.”

“Why?”

“He’s the commanding officer and others should not see him like that,” said Philippe, pantomiming some wretch losing his supper. “This came for you,” Philippe added, handing him a note. He saw that it from dos Santos, requesting that he please attend a meeting at his stockade.

CHAPTER 3

Taking Philippe with him, Werner rode off before the captain woke. The two men left their horses in the care of a servant at the main entrance and entered the labyrinth of poles.

Maria was waiting to greet him with a warm smile. “Senhor de Almeida, how do you feel this morning?”

He still had a pounding headache.

“I’ve felt better, but no doubt, it will improve as the day goes by.”

She smiled knowingly.

“Follow me. I’ll take you to Antonio,” she said.

Dos Santos was seated behind a large table spread with an assortment of documents and catalogues. He seemed unaffected by the previous night’s proceedings. Werner was dumbfounded; the man had consumed enough liquor to fell a horse, yet here he sat, as if nothing had happened. He clearly had a cast-iron constitution. It took an exceptional man to survive last night unscathed.

“Good morning, Senhor de Almeida. Are you ready to discuss business?” the huge man asked.

“Morning to you, sir. Yes, I’m ready to talk, but please, I must first thank you for your kind hospitality of yesterday.” He turned to Maria. “The food was excellent.”

“You may dine with me again this evening,” dos Santos said, “that is, if you wish.”

“Thank you, I’ll speak to the captain, but I believe he is impatient to be on his way. We still need to meet up with the main column again.”

Dos Santos stared at him for a moment and then spoke. The relaxed atmosphere of the previous evening was no longer evident – this was business.

“Let’s get straight to the point. I have a warehouse full of goods. I have an inventory thereof here in front of me,” he said, pushing a few sheets of paper across the table to Werner.

Werner took the pages and studied them. He was amazed. There were bags of coffee, bales of raw rubber, many bundles of salted dry cattle hides, and at least a ton or more of ivory.

He looked up and addressed dos Santos.

“This is worth quite a sum – a fortune in fact. I would have to do a calculation and will need some expert help to place a fair value on this. The bank in Benguela would assist me, as they mentioned that they were conversant with items traded in these parts. What do you wish to buy from me?”

“Most items you have. I studied your catalogues early this morning.”

This surprised Werner. Last night this man was dead to the world before them, but he had still risen early enough to study his catalogues and prices. A lesser man would have had a touch of alcohol poisoning!

“I’ll take from all your items, but what I’m really after are your rifles, both the Mauser and Steyr. I’ll take 250 of each.”

“Really – 250 of each!” Werner blurted, visibly astonished.

“Don’t be so surprised. Yes, that would be sufficient for a year. That’s no more than a rifle or two a day. An easy sell or barter in this part of the world.”

“Who would you sell them to, if I may ask?”

Dos Santos never even hesitated. “Certainly you may, I sell most of them in the British and Belgian territories. The local Boers also buy them.”

Werner knew this to be a flagrant lie but dared not say so. He knew that the Belgians and British jealously guarded their own markets; they would not permit any intrusion by the Portuguese.

“The law states that I may not sell to the indigenous people in Portuguese territory. Well, I abide by that, but that’s really none of your concern. This is a business transaction.”

“No, of course, you’re right, it’s not my concern. Time is more my concern. This could take a day or two to take care of, and Captain de Sousa is impatient to leave.”

Dos Santos gave a dismissive wave and then said nonchalantly: “Let him leave. You and your servant could stay a night or two here and then catch up with the column later. If you need an escort of a few men, I can provide such a detail. Maybe this deal is big enough to warrant you returning to Benguela without having to go south?”

He heard footsteps and turned. Maria entered the room, bringing more coffee.

“Maria, Senhor de Almeida will be staying a night or two. Please make arrangements.”

“Whoa! Not so fast,” Werner said. “I need to speak to the captain.”

“Don’t worry, it will be fine. I’ll vouch for your safety.”

This is madness, he thought. Here was his biggest enemy, and he was vouching for his safety. If dos Santos only knew who he really was – he would be as good as dead!

This new development placed him in a quandary. He desperately wanted to go south and find out how the weapons got over the border into SudwestAfrika. He could only do that if he travelled with Captain de Sousa. However, dos Santos’s surprise proposal presented him with a unique opportunity.

The two men exchanged small talk for a little while, and then Werner bade Antonio dos Santos good day and left the stockade, returning to camp with his head still pounding from the alcohol of the previous night. The developments of the morning added to his discomfort.

Werner spoke to de Sousa, mentioning that dos Santos had pressurised him to stay a few more days so that he could conclude his business. The captain appeared glad that he'd been able to find a ready customer so soon and insisted he stay behind and make the most of this lucrative business deal. Werner had said nothing of the guns involved in the transaction, leaving de Sousa to believe that a wide assortment of merchandise was involved. However, the captain did not ignore this and soon raised the pointed question.

"Did he offer to purchase rifles from you?"

This took Werner by surprise, and he remained silent. Caught off guard, his expression said it all; Captain de Sousa took this as an affirmation.

"How many?"

Werner hesitated for a moment. He decided not to mention a figure. "We haven't discussed numbers yet, merely prices."

"Well, if it's okay by you, I like to know how many he proposes to buy. In fact, Joachim, I must insist that you divulge this information. The military needs to know."

"Why?"

"It would not bode well for us if these weapons fell into the wrong hands. We like to keep our eye on these things."

Yes, de Sousa was on the lookout for gunrunners, but did the authorities suspect dos Santos? If they did, well, that was news. Never had de Sousa indicated this before. Werner considered it too soon to probe the captain's reasons for asking. Maybe at a later stage, he thought.

"Look, he never gave me an exact number but I have the impression that it

would be a large order – I would imagine he'd order a stock to last his trading store about a year," Werner replied.

Werner saw, however, that his reply did not satisfy the captain.

CHAPTER 4

Early the next morning, in the cool before the sun rose, the two men bade each other farewell, expressing the hope that they would see each other soon.

“Be careful when dealing with dos Santos, my friend,” the captain said. He refused to elaborate when pressed by Werner. “I am not happy that he offered to supply an escort. I insist that an NCO with 20 men remain with you at Huambo, to escort you when you choose to rejoin the column. You can say that I’ve done this out of concern for your safety. After all, we now make our way south into Kunahama territory – an escort would be wise.”

Philippe remained behind at the military camp with the troopers while Werner rode across to dos Santos’s stockade. Maria welcomed him warmly and showed him to the guest room. It was part of the hut’s complex, but still removed from what he thought was his host’s private section of the hut. A huge bed dominated the room, made up with spotlessly clean white linen. A mosquito net hung suspended from a beam in the roof. Reed mats, decorated to depict some sort of local flora, covered the floor. The usual washstand with toiletries stood in the corner, and next to it was a small cupboard and a chest of drawers for clothes.

Maria bubbled with excitement, happy to have him staying with them. She was a sultry beauty, but she was keen to chat, and Werner hoped she would respond to his subtle attempt at prying should the opportunity present itself.

Once he had settled in, dos Santos took him on a guided tour of the trading complex, finally entering his main storeroom, a large warehouse. The warehouse was crammed with bundle upon bundle of raw rubber and bales of sisal; the floor littered with ivory tusks of all sizes, blocks and bags of salt,

and dried and stacked wild animal and cattle rawhides.

“This is all yours,” dos Santos indicated with a sweep of his arm. “You should profit well. All you have to do is undertake to deliver my 500 rifles and the other goods. They must be delivered to Namibe.”

“Where on earth is Namibe?” Werner enquired.

“It’s a small fishing port south of Benguela. Just a few huts, but it has a natural harbour.”

“Do ships off-load cargo there?”

“No, not normally. Only if requested. The facilities are far too primitive. Everything is brought ashore in small boats. The recipient has to arrange these boats – there is no harbour authority, military establishment or police force. I hire the boats from the local fishermen. I’ll give you the details later.”

Damn! This man was certainly well organised, he reflected. Was this how he got his rifles ashore and avoided customs?

“All right, let’s do the sums. You need to tell me how I am to get this to Lobito. There’s has to be a few wagon-loads here,” Werner said with concern, not knowing how to arrange the transport.

“Don’t worry, I’ll arrange with local transporters to load this and take it to Lobito for you at an acceptable price. However, final packing will be your responsibility. I’ll see that a local carpenter I know assists you with crates – he owns a large carpentry shop in Benguela. In fact, he’d probably crate it all for you ready for shipment for a reasonable fee.”

They returned to the room that served as dos Santos’s office. Already, the day had warmed; it was uncomfortably hot and Maria brought beers. The men haggled over their calculations and finally agreed to the exchange: 500 rifles plus ploughs and various other agricultural implements and some riding tack were traded for the near total contents of the storeroom, the barter to be approved by Werner’s bankers.

Werner noticed a smaller storeroom, which dos Santos did not include in the tour; in fact, he purposely ignored it or so Werner thought.

“Anything in there?” Werner asked as they walked past.

“Nothing important; used agricultural and carpentry tools, nothing worth inspection,” dos Santos said, brushing the question aside. However, how the door was secured with two large locks and a large cross bar indicated otherwise, and the offhand comment merely aroused Werner’s curiosity.

After a large lunch, they retired to their rooms for the customary siesta. Werner lay on his bed, finding it difficult to sleep in the oppressive heat but eventually dozing off.

Suddenly, some inner sense awakened him. Without moving, he slowly opened his eyes. Maria was standing next to his bed, silhouetted against the light from the doorway.

“What are you doing here?” he asked, taken aback.

“Shhhh! He’s asleep,” she whispered, a finger to her lips. She moved nearer and placed her hand on his arm.

“I need your help,” she said. “Please, won’t you help me?”

“What do you mean?”

“I need to leave here; I can no longer live with this man. Please! Take me with you when you leave,” she implored him.

“Good Lord, I can’t do that, I’m his guest. He’ll kill me! Really, this is none of my business,” Werner hissed, his features taut. “Please go. Leave the room before somebody sees us!”

She walked to the door and turned to face him.

“I’ll speak to you tonight,” she said quietly and disappeared.

He was dumbstruck. This was serious; he could not get involved. At worst, dos Santos would be after him with a vengeance and all deals off, the military intelligence division’s plans shattered. In addition, he would probably be

dishonoured in the military's eyes. God! They could cashier him, he thought. Nobody would believe she came to him; everyone would think he had made a play for her!

Late that afternoon, he and dos Santos made final arrangements for the removal of the stored goods and the order and reception of the new shipments. If dos Santos were to open the letters Werner was sending to his "principals" he would find nothing to arouse suspicion; it was a normal business transaction. Werner thought the matter somewhat amusing, wondering how the German military would respond to this request to supply rifles.

As the sun set on the horizon, the two men relaxed on the veranda, the servants ever at the ready with cool beer, wine and brandy. His brow and jowls glistening with perspiration, dos Santos knocked back quite a few brandies. Werner rationed his intake of cool beer, careful not to be obvious; a repetition of the previous night would not do.

They agreed that Werner would leave the next morning to catch up with Captain de Sousa's small column. The bartered goods would remain warehoused in Lobito until the arrival of the rifles from Germany. Dos Santos did not appear concerned about customs: there were no military officers stationed in Namibe, a forlorn stretch of deserted beach on the coast of the Namib Desert, although patrols did occasionally pass through.

The trader had made no request for ammunition. This intrigued him.

"All these rifles and no ammunition – I find that rather strange," Werner said.

"No, I've ample supplies," dos Santos said. "Besides, ammunition is available from Portugal; it's suitable for these rifles and a damn sight cheaper."

What Werner and German intelligence did not realise was that large

quantities of ammunition had been smuggled from South Africa. These stocks originated from hidden Boer arms caches, unearthed after the Boer War, and the ammunition found its way on ox-wagons through Bechuanaland and Rhodesia into southern Angola and SudwestAfrika.

By nine o'clock that evening, dos Santos had again drunk himself into a near stupor, becoming barely coherent. Apologising to Werner, Maria finally persuaded him to retire and led him to their bedroom. Werner remained on the porch, too hot to contemplate sleeping. He lolled in the large woven cane chair, his shirt open to his navel, his legs spread out in front of him, a stein of cool beer at his elbow.

Maria returned and sat down in a similar chair opposite him, sipping a glass of wine, and peering at him over the rim of the glass.

"He won't wake before morning," she assured him, removing any fear that the man could suddenly return to the porch unannounced. "I know him; he's dead to the world."

He stared at her apprehensively. A faint sheen of perspiration glistened on her face and on the swell of her breasts, revealed by the plunging neckline of her blouse. She wore a flared, dark red skirt, which she now hitched up, revealing her legs to the knees. Did she wish to cool herself or did she have some other ulterior intention? Deep inside he felt the stirring of a wanton need which he tried to ignore. This woman was about to play him – a dangerous game.

"Are you going to help me?" she asked quietly.

He shook his head. She had to realise that this was impossible.

"Please!"

"How can I help you?" he asked. "I'm doing business with this man – that's important to me – and then to help you escape, well, I just can't do it. In fact, I don't want to hear any more about it." He rose to leave the veranda.

“No, no, I understand. Do what you have to do, but don’t forget. Maybe one day you’ll have a chance to help me. You’ll come this way again.”

He doubted whether he would ever come this way again, but that he could not tell her. “I’ll remember,” he quietly replied.

He took a chance. “What’s in that locked storeroom?” he asked his voice so low she could hardly hear him.

“Why?”

He hesitated for a moment.

“Well, he says there’s nothing of importance in it, yet it’s the only store that is locked; more than that, it’s virtually barricaded.”

She looked down the length of the veranda before replying: “Guns.”

“What do you mean – guns?” he hissed, repeating her.

“Yes, he will soon take the shipment south. So I’ve overheard. Of course, I’m not supposed to know that these are guns, but it is difficult to keep a secret in this compound. I also speak the local language fluently; these people are my friends. I hear much from them.”

His immediate thought was that she could be an asset, but he quickly dismissed the idea. He was not taking her with him.

“When will he leave?”

“Within the next two weeks, but I’m not sure. He awaits a message from one of the Kunahama tribal chiefs. He plans to leave with two or three wagons and about 20 men. The two white men will also accompany him. They’ve done this before.”

“That’s a small army.”

“That’s right. And don’t forget he has the protection of the Kunahamas – no one would dare attack him.”

“Hmmm, truly, that is extremely interesting,” he mused reflectively.

“What’s that?” she asked a puzzled expression on her face.

“Nothing, I was just thinking.”

“Do you want to see the storeroom? I can get the keys.”

He was undecided. He was very keen to see where the guns came from. But the danger? If they were seen, he doubted whether either of them would live to see the next day.

“It’s still early,” she said, “he’ll never wake up.”

“What about the servants?”

“They hate him; he beats them and has even killed some of them. They will never say a word. Also, it’s unlikely that any will see us.”

He hoped she was right. He nodded his head in affirmation.

He followed her down the steps into the faint moonlight. He could discern the surrounding huts, most showing no light, the huts of dos Santos’ men clustered in a far corner. Even these were dark, most occupants having retired.

“What about the white men?” he anxiously queried her.

“Don’t worry. They’re on the other side of the compound.”

She quietly removed the locks and then indicated he should lift the wooden bar. He did so, placing it gently on the ground. As she opened one of the double doors, it gave a loud creak; they both froze, fearful it had been heard all over the compound. Nothing stirred except the continuous chirr and squeak of crickets and insects.

The strong smell of grease and gun oil accosted his nostrils as they entered the storeroom. In the faint moonlight that illuminated the interior, he could see crate upon crate stacked on top of each other. He stepped closer, trying to distinguish the stencilled writing on the wooden slats. It was too dark. Maria handed him a box of matches from a shelf on which was also a lamp. He struck a match.

He studied the writing in the yellow light. He realised it was German, the

Gothic style immediately recognisable. Emblazoned on the crates were the words “Mauser Waffenfabrik.” Below this was recorded the type of rifle. Shit! These were German rifles. How did dos Santos get them? The match died. Reluctantly he struck another, fearful that the light would be seen. Finally, he found the destination stencilled on the green painted wood. It read:

Zuid Afrikaansche Staats Artillerie
Hoofdmagazyn Kerkstraat PRETORIA
Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek
Over
Lourenço Marques, MOZAMBIQUE

Werner had no doubt that these were Boer weapons originally consigned to Pretoria during the Boer War, which ended in 1902. These rifles were probably part of the last weapon consignments and had never reached their destination. The crate each contained a dozen 8mm K88 Mauser rifles. He estimated there were about 25 crates: 300 rifles.

How dos Santos had gotten his hands on these was a mystery. The Portuguese, or rather, associates of dos Santos, had probably misappropriated them in Lourenço Marques at the close of the war, he thought. With the confusion that reigned during the latter part of the war, anything was possible.

“Okay, let’s get out of here before we’re discovered,” he said, taking Maria’s arm and guiding her out of the storeroom. They carefully replaced the bar and locks, and then slunk back to the porch. He noticed that she did not let go of his hand.

It was only a few minutes past ten. The servants had already left, so she poured them each a nightcap. They sat on the porch in silence. She neither raised her proposed escape nor made any mention of their clandestine visit to

the storeroom.

She sat quietly sipping her drink in the sultry night air. He sighed, took a drink, and began thinking things through. This was dangerous territory. He was convinced of that. Dos Santos would kill Maria and him in a second if he discovered what they were up to. That man was ruthless and without conscience, this he already knew. He could only speculate what dos Santos would do to this woman if she left him. He desperately wanted to assist her, but to do so would jeopardise the whole operation. It would have to wait.

“Well,” he finally said, breaking the silence: “I’m off to bed. Good night.”

CHAPTER 5

Once again, he awoke with a start. The room was lighter, the moon now higher in the sky. The windows were open, the shutters not lowered, allowing the moonlight to stream in. The mosquito netting restricted his vision; he could not discern anything clearly beyond it.

Suddenly, the netting was lifted from below. He could clearly see the shape of Maria's body through her translucent nightdress. Without saying a word, she let the netting fall behind her and lay down on the bed beside him, pressing her body to his.

She brought her lips close to his ear. "I need you," she whispered.

"Cristo!" he exclaimed. "Are you mad? What are you doing?" He realised immediately what a stupid question it was. "We can't do this!"

He spoke as quietly as he could, certain that his voice travelled far, out through all the open windows and into the rooms without doors.

Softly, she began to kiss his face, her moist lips gliding across his skin, all the while slowly running her hands over his body. He smelt her sweet fragrance and felt the first stirrings of his own arousal. This was not lost on her. She now kissed him passionately. His instinct was to push her from him, but found himself succumbing to his desire, throwing caution to the wind, and then responding fiercely to her advances. He returned her kiss, both his hands sliding over her body beneath the nightshirt, finding her breasts, the nipples firm and erect. He pulled up her nightshirt and took a nipple into his mouth; he rolled his tongue around it. She moaned softly.

Their breathing quickened. Suddenly, he thrust her away.

"Please, be sensible, this is stupid!" he hissed, reluctantly holding her at

arm’s length by the shoulders. “Go back to your room – now!”

“Will you help me?” she asked.

This time he did not hesitate. If this was what it was going to take to get her to leave, he was prepared to concede to anything: he was terrified that dos Santos would make a sudden appearance.

“Yes! Only if you leave. I promise I will help when I am ready, but this could take a few weeks. You have to believe me.”

She stared at him, silent.

“All right, I’ll go,” she said, “but remember, we are accomplices now. You know about me as I know about you. And I think I know what you are doing here. You’re more than just a trader! Still, I’ll keep your secret.”

With that, she rolled off the bed. The flimsy nightshirt fell back over her knees, but not before he glimpsed the dark triangle of her sex. Without a further word or glance backwards, she disappeared under the mosquito netting.

Lieber Gott! Werner thought to himself, falling back onto the bed. That was close. Still, he could not help being disappointed; he had not made the most of the opportunity.

CHAPTER 6

Werner could see a few isolated thundershowers far off on the eastern horizon, but despite it now being the height of the rainy season, the rain eluded them. Autumn approached, it was now March, the ground was parched and grazing was sparse. What little there was, was dry and without nourishment. Most game had migrated, the wildebeest, kudu and buffalo moving northeast to where good grazing was still to be found. Surprisingly, the thorn trees, always the last to suffer from a lack of rain, still carried a thick green canopy.

Every afternoon, the clear sky would magically transform, small puffs of floating cotton wool appearing, rapidly growing to large cumulus clouds. But before they could condense and start to rain, strong winds would blow in from the desert in the west, driving a dust storm before it, driving the clouds away and leaving the land as parched as before.

The heat was intolerable. The oxen moaned as they pulled the heavy wagons, the drivers either leading their animals or walking alongside the train of oxen and wagons, cracking huge rawhide whips to drive the beasts on. Near naked in their loincloths and their bodies coated with the dust raised by the many hooves, these men allowed no ox to shirk its duty.

Ahead of the ox-wagons marched a small troop of Askaris, led by a NCO on horseback. Only a few enjoyed the luxury of a horse. The bulk of the troopers were on foot, single file, forming a straggling line which wound its way through the bush. Both Werner and Philippe were on horseback, their horses positioned immediately behind the ox-wagons.

“For God’s sake, Philippe, when is it going to rain?” Werner grumbled.

“God, we need water.” Finding the heat unbearable, he had stripped off his cotton jacket and his collarless shirt was open to the waist.

The servant remained silent, lifting his eyes and searching the sky. After a while, he spoke. “Patience, Mestre. It will soon rain. All the signs are there. At least, we will have water this evening. The Kunene is near.”

Philippe’s tone was resigned, in typical African fashion, his voice flat and monotonous, as if he considered Werner’s question an affront. One did not question nature – that was God’s business.

The NCO had been pushing the animals and troops for the past three days and still their advance scouts had not made contact with Captain de Sousa’s column. Werner was uneasy. Rumour had it that the Kunahamas had risen in revolt, deserting their villages. However, the NCO was a veteran and had led many a troop into the hinterland. The men were disciplined, their sergeant ensuring that they scouted their proposed route well ahead of the small column. In addition, he also placed outriders on each side, about 500 yards distant from the column, to warn them of an ambush.

Suddenly, a horseman emerged from the bush on the side of the track. Startled, Werner drew his rifle from its scabbard, working the bolt action and pumping a round into the breech.

“Mestre, it’s okay, that’s a scout,” Philippe said, holding out his arm.

The NCO immediately raised his hand, halting the column. The scout spurred his horse forward and was soon in whispered conversation with the NCO; he then turned round and trotted back in the direction he had come. The NCO beckoned Werner forward, an expression of deep concern and shock etched on his face.

“Major Olazabal’s column has been attacked by hordes of Kunahamas. They have been wiped out to a man, including the Boer militia that recently joined them. The rebels struck while the troops were encamped on the

riverbanks, about 30 kilometres south of here. God help us! Olazabal's force made up more than half our total southern Angolan military contingency. Other than a few soldiers garrisoned in small towns and outposts, Captain de Sousa's men are all that's left. This is a disaster!"

"Christ! What about Captain de Sousa?" Werner asked. "Are he and his men safe?" He was also appalled at this news.

"He tells me that de Sousa has dug in at a strategic spot on the river, believing an attack on his force to be imminent. He is hoping we will attempt to join up with him. I propose we do that, immediately," the NCO said, clearly not asking for approval, merely informing Werner of his intentions.

"How far from here to the captain?"

"About 15 miles."

"Will we still make it to him today?"

"We have to. The Kunahamas will not fight at night if they can avoid it. We must move on immediately. I want you and your cavalherico to move up and ride alongside me."

The NCO quickened the pace. Joining de Sousa's detachment would strengthen their numbers and increase their chances. He allowed no further stops for rest; the troops were forced to eat on the march. By the time the sun disappeared behind the horizon, water bottles were dry and men and animals alike were thirsty. The oxen bellowed. They had not drunk for two days and water was now the rallying cry.

Suddenly, the pace of the horses and oxen quickened, they no longer needing to be persuaded by the whip. "What's happening?" Werner asked. "The oxen, they seem to be suddenly in a hurry."

"They've picked up the scent of water," Philippe replied smiling.

The bellowing of the oxen increased, and then one by one the heavy animals broke into a half-trot, straining at their yokes. They burst forth from

the bush that lined the river course, the smell of water in their nostrils, and waded into the shallow water. There was no stopping them. They pulled the wagons into the knee-deep stream and stopped, lowering their heads and drinking their fill.

The horses followed suit, the riders still on their backs, seemingly unaware of the danger of crocodiles.

“Fucking stupid animals! Get them out of the water, now!” the NCO shouted.

With difficulty, the troops drove the horses and oxen out of the water. Once back on the riverbank, the men filled buckets with water and placed them before the oxen and horses, allowing all to quench their thirst before resuming the march.

*

Ahead of him, through the dense bush and thorn trees lining both sides of the riverbank, Werner discerned a flickering light. Quite unexpectedly, the troop broke out into an open expanse bordered by bush on three sides and the river on the other. Other lights now became visible in the dark: the small campfires of Captain de Sousa’s detachment. He wondered why the captain had revealed his position by permitting his troops to light fires. Riding next to him, the NCO appeared to read his mind.

“Don’t worry. The Kunahamas know exactly where he is encamped, although I don’t think they expected us to arrive. They won’t know we have broken from the main column. Anyway, they know he can’t move and that he has chosen the best defensive position he can find. They’ll attack at their leisure. Hell! Be sure, we’ll not be going anywhere from here! Some of us may make it to heaven soon!” Then he solemnly added: “For some it will surely be heaven.”

“Shouldn’t we rather take the fight to them instead of waiting for them to

attack us?”

The NCO did not respond. Werner was about to repeat the question when it crossed his mind that the NCO probably considered military tactics beyond the comprehension of a civilian, not worth a reply. He did not pursue the matter.

As they entered the camp, soldiers ran forward and led the animals into a boma already full of oxen and horses. He dismounted and saw Captain de Sousa approaching. The usual welcoming smile from de Sousa was absent; he looked exhausted. The burden of responsibility his friend carried was more than most could be expected to shoulder. The news of Olazabal’s end hung like a pall over the camp, and most felt they were about to share the same fate. De Sousa was haggard, unkempt and unshaven, his uniform coated with dust, his attitude one of near resignation.

“I’m certainly glad to see you again, even though I actually sent a runner to tell your NCO not to try to contact us. I must assume he was intercepted by these bastards,” de Sousa said, shaking his head resignedly. “I just can’t believe it! It was a massacre. You won’t believe this; the good Major Olazabal didn’t even have scouts out! The Kunahamas caught them completely in the open – Olazabal and his men were not even prepared for an attack! The bastards killed them all. Those Black and Whites, the troops and militia who did not die in the initial attack and who were captured, were horribly tortured and then bludgeoned to death. A few did escape but they were not military men. The sight was ghastly – bodies like broken dolls amongst the thorn trees. Cristo! The vultures had already gathered; it was sickening!”

“How many were killed?” Werner asked, his face registering his shock.

“We counted 313 all in all.”

“Did you bury them?”

“No, it was too dangerous to stay. The terrain afforded us no protection; we had to get out of there. The only thing to do was head for the river. At least with the river at our backs, they can’t surround us.”

“What about help, you know, reinforcements?”

“Of course I’ve sent out men on horseback, but I have no idea whether they made it or not and from where to draw these reinforcements?”

Werner was silent; their position was precarious to say the least. “How many men have you got?” he asked the captain.

“Merda! Not enough, about 130. A few more militiamen have joined us since the farmers heard the news. But I think we are up against about 2000 or more of these damn savages, most with rifles.” De Sousa paused and then exclaimed furiously, “Fuckin’ gunrunners! You can be sure that those who didn’t have rifles before certainly have them now! They would’ve taken them from the dead, and with ammunition to spare. How do I rate our chances? Well, to be honest, not good.”

“Your defences?” Werner asked.

The captain gave a humourless chuckle.

“Not good either – certainly not up to an attack of a few thousand. I’ve done what I can: surrounded the camp with trenches. The ground is easy to work, no rocks. The troops have dug themselves in well. I don’t believe the Kunahama know how difficult it is to overcome troops hidden in trenches. Victory will come dearly to them. Come, I’m about to do an inspection; see for yourself.”

They walked the perimeter. Most men were eating their evening meal, hunkered down in the trenches, their rifles lying on the shallow parapets, ready for immediate use. An atmosphere of fear pervaded the trenches. Most ate in silence. A grim silence hung over the men, the question of survival foremost on their minds.

The command post was little more than a depression dug in the bed of a dry stream, which when in flood, emptied into the main river about 100 yards behind them. This would afford them some protection from gunfire and from any attack from the rear.

The captain smiled wryly.

“I haven’t any beer, but I can offer you wine.”

“That’s fine,” Werner said.

“Were you ever a soldier?” the captain asked.

Werner was taken aback. “No. Why do you ask?”

“Well, soldiers have a way about them. You’ve the same mannerisms. All I have to do is put you in uniform – you wouldn’t be a soldier, but an officer. You are used to giving orders – you’ve done it before. As I said, you have that way about you.”

“Probably because of my father. He was an officer, in fact, quite a disciplinarian,” Werner quickly replied, hoping that it would appease his friend’s curiosity.

“You just stay close to me, okay?” de Sousa said.

“Sure.”

*

Werner opened his eyes to find Philippe shaking him. “Mestre, wake up. The captain wants to speak to you.”

He took the wet cloth the servant offered and wiped the sleep from his eyes. He was stiff, his joints reluctant to work properly in the early morning chill after a night on the ground on a blanket. The emerging dawn, an orange-pink streak on the eastern horizon, already lit the surrounding camp. He stumbled out and into the trench next to the captain. The trench was not that deep, only about chest high.

“Morning. Have you noticed? It’s dead quiet. I can’t even hear any birds.

Usually they make quite a racket at daybreak. Something is going on out there," the Portuguese officer murmured.

"Somebody's coming!" whispered the trooper standing next to the captain. Four men burst out of the bush and slid into the trench.

"They're coming!" the sergeant stammered between gasps for breath. "Hundreds of them, no more than a kilometre away."

"Where are these men from?" Werner asked, indicating the breathless quartet.

"Reconnaissance sortie. The moon was nearly full last night, providing sufficient light, certainly enough to see. I thought it would bode well to try and find out what the Kunahama are doing," de Sousa replied.

Again, Werner's respect for this Portuguese officer ratcheted up another notch.

Barely minutes after de Sousa had given the NCOs final instructions what to do if they were attacked, the Kunahamas were attacking their left flank, making a drive parallel to the river, avoiding a frontal attack on the Portuguese forces. At first, the enemy made no sound as they approached, but once the first shots were fired, the shouting, yelling and screaming swelled. Sporadic firing broke out as the troopers saw the first signs of movement behind the trees and thorn bushes. A light breeze blew, carrying the smell of burned cordite to the noses of those in the command post. As the intensity of the fight escalated, the sporadic rifle shots gave way to full barrages, with further screams and shouts intermingled with the gunfire. Werner soon realised that the Portuguese forces faced an overwhelming onslaught. The Kunahamas charged en masse, penetrating the perimeter defences, driving the troopers out of their trenches and back towards the centre of the camp.

De Sousa, using runners and shouting constantly, kept regrouping his men, trying to present an impenetrable defence to the enemy.

Driven by their captain, his troops made a brave and supreme effort, and standing their ground they managed to counter the Kunahamas' advance, driving the rebels back. Much of the battle had now been reduced to vicious hand-to-hand combat, the Kunehamas attacking the soldiers in their hastily prepared defence positions.

The dead and wounded were soon strewn on the ground, their blood seeping into the sand. Sanity no longer prevailed; rifles, bayonets, swords, and machetes were being used by men now driven by a madness only known to those who fight for their very lives. The air was raucous with the shouting and screaming of men facing death. The Kunahama dead littered the approaches to the trenches, mown down by the hail of fire from the soldiers, but still the casualties did not deter them. Endless streams of reserves immediately replaced their dead and wounded, once again charging the trenches in full strength.

The battle had been raging for hours and still the troopers were managing to repel the assaults on the trenches. Werner had lost all sense of time, firing randomly at the enemy every time they presented a target. He believed he had killed dozens; his rifle was so hot he could not touch the barrel. Dead and wounded lay all around him, the trenches offering the only cover from the continuous rifle volleys fired by the enemy. But it was obvious they could not hold the enemy much longer. All were exhausted; their sweat-stained shirts clung to their bodies, their eyes were wild with fear – many already believing that they would not emerge from this fight alive.

Werner never left the Portuguese captain's side.

Captain de Sousa looked at him and said: "Joachim, you have to get out of here!"

"Christ! I can't do that – what about you?"

Just then, about a dozen Kunahamas broke out of the bush and charged

straight at them. It appeared that the rebels had realised that these were the officers giving the orders to the troops.

Werner coolly raised his rifle to his shoulder and squeezed the trigger. The head of the man he shot at exploded in a sickening mist of red that covered the oncoming rebels around him.

Repeatedly, Werner fired. Bullets flew past him, in front of him, and beside him, tearing into the flesh of the troopers on his right.

“Captain!” he screamed as he reloaded. “I don’t know how long we can keep up this fire!”

“We damn well better!” De Sousa shouted back, “or we’re fucked! But you should leave!” he repeated. “Don’t fuckin’ argue! I want you to cross the river, taking your servant and my batman with you. We can’t hold out much longer. I’ll follow; you can give me covering fire from the other side. Take enough horses with you. Include a horse for me – hurry!”

“Many horses have been killed.”

“Take any horses. Just hurry! There’s no time left.”

“What about the other men?” Werner asked his conscience and his duty as an officer not to accept what the captain ordered.

“Cristo! When it gets to hand-to-hand combat, most Blacks will just takeoff into the bush, strip off their uniforms and hide. Some of them have done this before! The enemy will think that they’re just one of them. Just go – now!” he shouted, his voice louder and pitched higher.

Werner was finally convinced. De Sousa was in command – and this was a direct order.

Hunched over, Werner, Philippe and Paulo ran towards the boma, dust spurting around them as the enemy concentrated their fire on the movement. Once inside the boma they were hidden, but bullets still ripped through the stacked branches, showering them with broken twigs and leaves. Stray bullets

had found many animals; dead and dying horses and oxen lay on the ground, blood seeping into the dust, their cries mingling with that of the men.

They rounded up four saddled horses, probably those from the reconnaissance group who had not had time to strip the saddles. Once in the saddle, Werner savagely drove his heels into the horse's flanks, driving it towards the river and then it into the flowing water. He heard others behind him. He had not realised how deep the water was until the horse sank below him, his weight driving it under. He slid from the saddle and grasped the pommel with one hand. He let the horse drag him as it swam to the other side. The others did the same around him. The river was swift and the four horses were rapidly swept downstream, away from enemy fire. Reaching the opposite bank unscathed, they concealed themselves deep in the dense bush that thronged the riverbank. Here they waited, listening to the fight still raging.

Werner peered through the branches, watching the river.

The sounds of battle continued unabated and then suddenly rose. An enormous volley of shots accompanied by wild cries, shouts and screams proclaimed the end, the last of the soldiers fleeing into the bush.

Upstream about 100 yards away, de Sousa exploded from the bushes and sprinted for the river, a band of Blacks in pursuit, some in loincloths, others dressed in trousers and white shirts. Brandishing a mixture of rifles and machetes, they were yelling as they tried to catch the captain. He leapt into the water, taking long high strides through the shallows and when finally knee-deep, he dived in and swam frantically towards the opposite bank. Werner and Philippe immediately opened fire, and the surprised rebels hesitated long enough to give de Sousa a chance. He was swept downstream and the distance between him and his pursuers swiftly increased. Finally, he staggered through the shallows and scrambled up the riverbank to be met by

Werner's group with the horses. The exhausted man grabbed the proffered reins and swung into the saddle. They galloped into the bush away from the river, putting as much distance as possible between them and the rebels.

After about five miles, de Sousa reined in. Werner saw the look of distress on his man's face.

"I did not desert my men, so don't judge me!" de Sousa blurted before anyone could say a word. Clearly, he felt that he should have stayed with those men who had not escaped.

They all looked at him in silence.

"Cristo! The command post was totally overrun," he said in an anguished voice, "I'm lucky to have gotten away with my life. If there was anybody I could have helped or saved, I would've done so."

"Wait a minute, who am I to judge? I would never do so," Werner responded, wanting to reassure his friend. "You were all brave men. I saw you fight; please, I understand what happened."

"I'll never forget this," de Sousa said, his voice still quavering as he recovered from the shock of battle and his miraculous escape. "The bastards broke through our defences and simply overran us, shooting and hacking at my men. We held them off as long as we could, and then when we could see there was no stopping them, we fled. Some of our Blacks were clever and did as I told them to do: they stripped off their uniforms, picked up rifles and clothing from the dead rebels, and melted into that rebellious mass. In the final moments before we were about to be overrun, it was mayhem. But I'm sure a few got away; I hope so."

The officer's appearance was pitiful. His uniform was torn and covered in blood and gore, this not entirely washed off by his forced swim. His face was partially blackened by gunpowder and his eyes white in stark contrast, but reflecting a deep sadness.

“What do we do now?” one of the men asked.

“We ride, and get as far away as we can. I think we should go southeast into the desert. That will give us our best chance of survival. The Kunahamas keep away from that area and the tribe that controls it; they are not involved in this rebellion. Or so I believe.”

“Hell, we haven’t got any water or food!” Werner mentioned.

“I know. But it’s too dangerous to stay here. Have we an option?”

De Sousa was silent for a moment, waiting for a reply. Receiving none, he continued: “Well, that takes care of that then. No one is to fire their weapon. We don’t want to draw any attention.”

They walked eastwards, trailing the exhausted horses behind them, the sun beating down relentlessly and the heat overpowering. Away from the river, the terrain changed; the bush was less dense, and they were now able to see 100 yards or so ahead. Still, the captain insisted that his batman reconnoitre the terrain ahead of them and when Werner looked at him questioningly, told him that Paulo was an experienced soldier and an excellent scout.

“That’s why I chose him to be my batman in the first place. Also, I believe we may find our enemy on this side of the river as well, ” De Sousa said.

By the afternoon, the men were thirsty and hungry. The usual cloud build-up had started at midday, and by mid-afternoon huge cumulus-cloud concentrations dominated the sky, occasionally blocking out the sun. At least it gave the riders some relief from the heat.

Surely, it was raining in the distance, Werner thought, as he saw distant lightning flashes and heard the low rumble of thunder. Gradually, the cloud mass above them darkened and the lightning flashes neared. Suddenly, a lightning bolt struck the ground a short distance before them, followed by a thunderclap seconds later. Soon the first large drops of rain dropped to the ground with loud plops, their impact raising tiny clouds of powdered dust. In

typical cloudburst fashion, the rain steadily increased in intensity. Soon they were drenched, water streamed from their hats and the horses' coats glistened wet. They cupped their hands to catch the rain, greedily drinking the water and smiled for the first time that day, the feeling of relief incredible. The deluge was intense; it was pointless trying to speak to one another, the drumming of water on man and horse drowned out all other sounds. The torrent soon weakened, but by then the ground was awash, small streams flowing everywhere. The cloudburst vanished as quickly as it arrived. The storm announced its departure with a few rumblings of thunder, slowly receding in the distance, as did the lightning flashes. The rain had swept the heat away, and the light breeze which accompanied the rain was cool and refreshing.

The men allowed the horses to slake their thirst from the numerous streams that had materialised everywhere. After drinking as much as they could, the men filled their canteens, hoping this would see them through to the next source of water.

As it darkened, de Sousa called a halt and the men immediately stripped the saddles from their exhausted mounts. The two black men conversed softly; they were out of earshot and then suddenly disappeared into the bush. The captain remained silent, seemingly unconcerned about their disappearance. A half hour later, they returned with a few wild melons; these were green and round with soft spikes, and some with speckled white patches. They called them naras. They cracked open like a watermelon, revealing a yellow pulp, which the men extracted with their hands and ate. The contents were sweet. Exhausted, they huddled in their saddle blankets which afforded at least some protection against the hordes of mosquitoes, using their saddles as pillows.

Werner struggled through the early dark hours of his stint at sentry duty. The morning chill seemed to penetrate to his very bones. Shivers racked his

body. He groaned; he had an excruciating headache. Even after the sun rose and bathed him in warmth, bouts of shivering still racked his body. God only knows what, but I hope I'm not coming down with something, he thought. He said nothing to the others, hoping to keep his condition to himself.

Once astride his horse, however, it was sheer agony, the horse's motion seeming to aggravate his condition, his headache ready to split his skull. This did not go unnoticed. Philippe was the first to comment.

"Mestre, I think you have the mosquito sickness. I can see you are cold in this hot sun. Does your head hurt?"

He nodded his head carefully in affirmation. "It's getting worse," he admitted. "I'm about to fall off this horse."

"Merda! It's malaria," the captain said, immediately signalling the party to a halt. "We can't let you ride. We'll have to build a travois so that you can lie down. Your horse can pull it. Let's do it now."

The job was difficult with neither axes nor rope; they had to hack the branches from trees with their knives. Paulo found a type of African vine, very flexible and strong, which they used to tie the various wooden poles together. In addition, Philippe and Paulo wove a rough net from the vines, making a bed on the travois. Hopefully, it would withstand the rigours of travel. They still had a long way to go.

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Werner's condition rapidly deteriorated, and he was soon showing the first signs of delirium, rolling his head from side to side and murmuring under his breath.

"What are we going to do with him?" the captain asked aloud, addressing nobody in particular.

"Capitano, we must take him south into in German territory. They have doctors and medicine," Philippe said.

“How do you know this?”

“I lived there for a while. When I lived with the Germans, there was a Rheinische mission, but the Finnish mission is nearer.”

“But that will take days!”

“It will, but I can make a medicine from some leaves, which will help.”

De Sousa estimated that if they turned south they would encounter the Kunene River again where it turned westwards towards the Atlantic Ocean. They would need three days for the journey. They were still in territory controlled by the Kunahamas. They would have to proceed with extreme caution. They had no alternative, for without medical attention, Werner might not survive.

By the next day, Werner had lapsed into total delirium, rambling in German and Portuguese with the occasional English phrase thrown in. He barked out military instructions in German; fortunately, de Sousa did not understand them. Then followed hours of unconsciousness during which he shivered violently and his teeth chattered. On the third day, he started to perspire profusely. The captain halted the small group near a stream containing rock-pools filled by the recent rain. He and Philippe took turns bathing Werner with cool water, trying to lower his temperature; his body was so hot to the touch, it seemed on fire. Philippe disappeared into the bush, returning an hour later with a collection of leaves. He mashed them, mixed the sap with water, and dribbled this into Werner’s mouth. That night, the captain took a chance and shot a gemsbok. They barbecued the meat over hot coals.

The next day they crossed the Kunene River again where the water was shallow as it passed over a string of small rapids. They now rode in a southerly direction into SudwestAfrika but remained on guard even when they finally crossed what they thought had to be the border. This was no more than an imaginary latitudinal line, not something the Kunahamas or Hereros

recognised, certainly not in this time of conflict.

“How long before we arrive at the mission?” the captain asked Philippe.

The black man stared into the distance. The land was now flat, without stone or hill. This was a vast floodplain, a seemingly endless flat expanse of dried silt which stretched into the distance, heat mirages dancing on the horizon.

“Another day if we do not have to avoid lions and elephants,” Philippe eventually replied. “But, there are also many buffalo; all these animals can be dangerous.”

He was right. During the course of the next day, only once having to circumvent a pride of lions shading under a very large camel-thorn tree, they came upon a settlement, a congregation of small adobe huts and primitive buildings made of mud, brick and stone with corrugated iron roofs. A small church with a squat steeple, its sides of corrugated iron, stood proudly above the rest of the buildings. A few wells dotted the settlement while a windmill, its vanes slowly spinning in the light breeze, pumped water into a round brick and cement reservoir. Three children were drawing water from one of the wells, hauling the filled buckets to the surface by a rope running over a pulley. They were overseen by a black man, probably their father, who stared at the four horsemen as they rode into the settlement. Corrals on the outskirts of the settlement contained a few cattle, goats and horses. A few scraggly chickens roamed among the buildings, scratching and pecking in the dust. This was no new settlement; this mission station had existed for some time, a haven of peace in this war-torn country.

As the horses stopped outside a large building, three women emerged; they were all dressed in identical light-blue frocks, their skirts reaching to the ground. From their appearance Werner knew they had to be of Nordic origin, their complexions light similar to white porcelain, and their hair, the little that

showed from beneath their bonnets, a sun-bleached blonde. The white starched bonnets were similar to those that Catholic nuns wore, but of a different design. They immediately undid the ropes that secured the unconscious Werner to the travois.

Assisted by Philippe and Paulo, they lifted Werner from the travois and carried him indoors. He was covered in dust. The woman who appeared to be in charge addressed de Sousa in German, but he shook his head and replied in Portuguese. Philippe, who understood both, then translated for the captain.

“What are they going to do?” de Sousa asked, looking at Philippe with concern.

“They will look after my Mestre. They say we must stay in another building; this is the hospital. Don’t worry, I know this place; these people are kind. They will help us.”

The captain looked suspiciously at Philippe.

“What do you mean, you know this place? You speak German? Where did you learn to speak the language?”

Philippe countered: “I am from Angola but went to school at a mission school near here. That’s where I learned to speak German. I don’t speak it well.”

“Huh! You are a strange one. You are Angolan?” de Sousa asked.

“Yes.”

“Where did Senhor de Almeida find you?”

Philippe proceeded to tell the captain precisely what his master had told him to say: “In Angola.”

“He was in Angola before?”

“Yes, when he left, he took me with him to Mozambique.”

The captain shook his head. “Strange – he never mentioned that he had been to Angola before. Are you sure?”

“Yes, that’s when he employed me.”

The captain mumbled under his breath but did not pursue the subject further although it was evident he was puzzled.

It was clear that Captain de Sousa found the Finnish missionaries to be a strange lot. They did not treat the indigenous people as servants, but rather as equals, although the Blacks carried out all instructions as if they were servants, treating the missionaries with respect. In Angola, the Whites treated Blacks as the property of the government, knowing that they were forced to take up whatever employment was offered. Not to do so could lead to the person’s arrest. It was no better than slavery; they just had given it a different name – contract labour. If you had the misfortune to be a Black and the government found you were unemployed, you were forced to work for a specific period for the government, building roads or similar projects, or you were assigned to a plantation or ranch that needed labourers. If you refused, you were jailed. Wages were barely above subsistence level, but no negotiation was permitted.

Captain de Sousa was given a small room in an adjoining building. Its interior walls were whitewashed with lime that reflected the light, creating a bright but sterile mood. It contained a narrow cot with a table against the wall on which stood an enamel basin and a jug of water. The bed was complete with white linen, surrounded by a mosquito net which hung from the ceiling. A window opened to a courtyard from where voices could be heard, but he was not able to understand what was said.

The Finnish nurse was in her 40s, her Nordic face pale notwithstanding the harsh sun. That she was a missionary was obvious, her disposition serene and aloof, a large crucifix hanging from a blue and white ribbon round her neck. She spoke to the captain and Philippe translated. He could bathe if he wished in a separate room, which she indicated down the passage. This contained a

large zinc bath surrounded by slatted wooden floorboards. The captain nodded his head in approval and asked if water could be brought as he wished to bathe now. She smiled and said she would see to it.

Intermittently, Werner slipped out of consciousness, only vaguely aware of those around him and of being laid on an oilskin-covered examination table. His clothing was removed and he felt someone bathing him, the water cool on his body. He was aware of two women attending to him while another looked on.

“Mein Gott!”

The two nurses halted their washing and looked at each other questioningly, surprised by the doctor’s outburst.

“Carry on, carry on,” the nurses were commanded by another female voice.

Werner opened his eyes. A beautiful face, surrounded by auburn hair, peered down at him, the forehead furrowed in concern. For a moment, a fleeting glimmer of recognition manifested itself but faded, the beautiful face lingering as he again lapsed into unconsciousness.

The woman, the source of the surprised exclamation, proceeded to examine him, taking his temperature with a rectal thermometer, looking into his nose and ears, listening to his chest with a stethoscope and thumping his body with her fingers. She inserted a catheter into his penis to obtain a urine sample. At her request, the nurses turned him on his side; she then efficiently administered two injections to his buttocks – a quinine solution and a sedative. This done, she scribbled on his chart.

Although still racked with fever, the injection began to take effect and he slipped further into a drug-induced deep sleep. His shivering subsided, his body relaxed. Although it was midday and the heat oppressive, they kept him covered with a blanket.

CHAPTER 7

The doctor was shocked. She remembered him as the German marine officer on the SS *Tanga*.To see him here with a Portuguese officer, was a surprise. The clothing de Sousa wore was clearly the remnants of what had been some military uniform, but it was definitely not German. From his servant, they had already gathered that the group of men had fled southern Angola where they had been attacked by the indigenous people.

As always, the bush telegraph was quick. All already knew that conflict had broken out between the Portuguese government and the Blacks in southern Angola. What she couldn't understand was why would he have been so deep in Portuguese territory? After all, he was a German officer and normally would not be permitted in Angola. Who was this man in Portuguese military uniform?

Dorothea knew that Pastor Dokter Vlotzka Haiddenon, the chief theologian of the mission, generally chose not to interfere, leaving the administering of the sick to her. She had joined the mission and had proven to be an extremely competent physician. The pastor's doctorate was in theology so he could not be of assistance in medical matters, but he appeared to have great faith in her abilities and seemed to consider her a godsend in this remote region, always treating her with respect. She smiled to herself. Qualified women doctors were unheard of, certainly in German SudwestAfrika, and now she had chosen to practise her profession in this isolated, predominantly Black area. She realised that the pastor was already aware that she was not overly religious. Purposely raising this aspect, he had tried to question her. However, she of evaded his questions.

These men, however, were another matter entirely. She knew that the pastor needed to report their arrival to the military authorities. They had arrived on horseback, fully armed, accompanied by two servants, no clothes, and without camping or any other basic equipment. This region was populated by black men. There were few white men other than soldiers and they were stationed at the few military outposts. No farms had been allocated to white colonists in this vast area that bordered on Angola. Already, it was known that they were the sole survivors of some ghastly insurrection in Angola. Astonishingly, the sick man was carrying a considerable amount of money, most of it in Portuguese escudos, although he also had both German and English currency on him. This money was contained in a money-belt, which the nurses had removed. The belt was now in the pastor's office under lock and key.

At dinner that evening, Dorothea listened quietly as the pastor seemed compelled to raise the subject of the unforeseen arrival of these men with his senior staff.

"I will have to report these men," he said. "The authorities are sensitive to movements across the border. It's the gunrunning that concerns them, and the money-belt carried by your patient is worrying. Why on earth would he have so much money on him?"

Dorothea looked at the pastor seated at the head of the table. "He does not strike me as a dishonest man," she said quietly. "Pastor, if I may, I suggest that we wait until the patient recovers from his delirium, then we can speak to him. Now, he is still incoherent."

She hesitated. She was about to tell the table that she had met the patient on board the ship from Germany, but for reasons she could not place, she decided not to do so. Better he told his own story when he could.

"How long before we can speak to him?" the pastor enquired.

“I imagine within a day or two. He is strong and should recover quickly now that he is receiving proper medical attention.”

“Well, in that case, I will accede to your request. Where is the Portuguese gentleman?”

“He declined our invitation to supper and preferred to take his meal in his room. Not being properly dressed was his excuse,” a senior assistant missionary replied.

The pastor said: “I believe the man’s uncomfortable, being a Catholic amongst all us Lutherans. Well then, Dr Eggers, I’ll wait to hear from you about our mysterious man’s progress.”

CHAPTER 8

Werner lingered in that state of consciousness that hovers between light sleep and barely awake. His eyes were shut, and he did not want to open them. However, there was movement around him and he finally opened his eyes. He became aware of a woman leaning over him. Her face somehow gave him comfort. He breathed in her fragrance and realised that it was something he sorely missed. Suddenly, with a shock, he realised that it was Dorothea, the beautiful and yet distant doctor he had sailed with aboard the steamship *Tanga*. If anything, she was even more beautiful in her simple dress, her hair done up neatly in a bun.

"I don't know what I'm doing here," he said, his voice barely above a whisper. "But I know you. Miss Eggers? Dorothea? Is it really you?"

She smiled noncommittally.

"It's Dr Eggers, actually. You've improved, but you will continue to suffer bouts of fever for a while," she said, recording his temperature on a chart.

"I do feel better, in fact I'm hungry."

"That is good news. I'll arrange breakfast. How about a boiled egg, a roll, and coffee?" she replied visibly pleased.

"Fine, but could you make that two eggs?" he asked.

She raised her eyebrows in pleased surprise.

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He had just finished his breakfast when she entered the room again and sat on a chair next to his bed. She placed her elbows on her knees and leaned forward, speaking in a low voice.

"You need to tell me what is going on. Pastor Haiddenon is curious. He is

in charge of this mission and he thinks that your friend is an Angolan military officer and he knows that you have a huge sum of money in your money-belt. He says he needs to report you to the military commander at Ondongua."

"Where's my money?" he asked, his concern evident.

"I told you before, but you probably don't remember. It's safe with Pastor Haiddenon. But let me finish; they don't know you are a German officer. What's all this secrecy?"

He did not immediately reply as he mulled over an answer. "It's complicated," he eventually said.

"Isn't it always? And who is the Portuguese officer? What's he doing here?"

"We were attacked in Angola and fled south. They brought me here because my servant knew of your hospital. That's all I can tell you." He paused for a moment and then added: "I would like to speak to Captain de Sousa. Could somebody please ask him to come here?"

"Very well. I will say nothing and leave you, but you owe me an explanation – just remember that. I'll call Captain de Sousa," she said and then left the room.

CHAPTER 9

Hearing that he was awake and obviously feeling better, de Sousa arrived, freshly shaved, his clothing washed and looking quite presentable. He smiled at Werner, clearly relieved at his friend's condition.

"Cristo! It's good to see you've recovered!"

"Yes, I'm feeling better. And you? What's happening?" Werner asked anxiously.

"Nothing really, I've been waiting for you to get better." The man's smile disappeared, replaced by a concerned frown. "I can't speak the language and your cavalherico has to translate every time I say anything. There's no doubt that these people are extremely curious about us, but then, my friend, so am I. I have been speaking to your cavalherico – there are a few peculiarities in your story that we need to discuss."

"Such as?"

"You speak all these languages; you have a way about you that indicates a military background, and when delirious you speak German and give orders in German. I've told you that before and you should have heard yourself while delirious. First, I thought you some sort of spy. But why? Portugal and Germany are friends. Who are you really?" de Sousa insisted.

Werner stared at his friend. "A spy? That's ridiculous," he finally said.

"Is it? I'm your friend first, and then a Portuguese officer, so will you tell me?"

For a moment, Werner was at loss. Without help, it clearly was a near impossible task to deal with dos Santos, the gunrunner. And that was his mission; he constantly needed to remind himself of that. Dos Santos could

move through Kunahama territory with impunity, free to deliver the rifles from Huambo across the border – he had to be stopped. But Werner did not have the faintest idea where dos Santos proposed to have these delivered in SudwestAfrika.

He took a deep breath.

“Dos Santos is a gunrunner,” he said, looking the Portuguese officer in the eyes.

“Okay, I know that, but what has that to do with what we are discussing?” was the nonchalant but surprising reply from de Sousa.

“Everything!” Werner blurted.

The officer turned round and walked to the window, staring out into the courtyard. He lit a cigarette, blowing the smoke into the open air. Werner realised his statement had caught the man totally by surprise. He did not press him, but patiently waited for a reply. Finally, de Sousa turned to face Werner leaning back against the windowsill, staring intently at his new friend.

“So?” The officer clearly expected Werner to add to his statement.

The bastard, Werner thought, now he wants to play a game – but he’s telling me nothing! What am I going to do? I’ve already said too much! He didn’t know what to say.

But it was de Sousa who again spoke. “So we agree – he’s a gunrunner? Are you trying to sell him rifles?” de Sousa finally asked.

“No! Well, yes. Let’s say I’m pretending to sell him rifles,” Werner ventured.

“So then you must be trying to stop him?”

“Yes, I’m trying to stop him,” Werner said, exasperated. Where was this going?

“Interesting. Why didn’t you say so in the first place? Because so am I, and in fact, so are others in the Portuguese government,” de Sousa retorted.

They laughed, relieved to have broken through some invisible hurdle. “You’re a German officer, aren’t you?”

Werner did not reply.

“Okay, don’t say anything. I know I am right! What do we do now? This is your territory,” de Sousa said.

“I think we stick to our story. As soon as I can travel, we leave here and intercept dos Santos when his rifles cross the border. I can call up reinforcements.”

“What rifles are you referring to?” de Sousa asked, looking somewhat bewildered.

Werner told his friend in detail what had transpired the night after the captain’s column had left.

“Okay, we knew about those rifles. The weapons won’t cross the border here,” de Sousa said emphatically.

“What do you mean, you knew?”

“Well, some people in our military intelligence know. They’ve received information that dos Santos will take these rifles to Namibe, on the coast in Angola, that’s in the very south. From there, using a fishing vessel, they’ll sail further south along the coast of SudwestAfrika until they reach Sandwich Bay. This lies about 30 miles south of Walvis Bay.”

“Yes, I know the place. I saw it on the map. I read everything I could on the country once I knew they were shipping me here.”

“Well, at high tide a small ship can cross the sandbar and enter the lagoon. Although surrounded by a sea of dunes, it’s unique in that it has fresh water. An underground river seeps below the sand dunes into the lagoon. There was more to Major Olazabal’s column than just a show of strength for the benefit of the Kunahamas; Major Olazabal and I had proposed to intercept dos Santos’s wagons when he moved south. Very few knew of the plan. That

piece of shit has been selling guns to our enemies as well as our own people for the past two years. Initially, we were suspicious of you, especially when we heard you wished to go inland. You were nearly arrested! You remember the juiz, de Mello? Well, he voiced misgivings about you; he didn't think you were what you pretended to be," de Sousa laughed.

"How do you know so much about Sandwich Bay?" Werner asked.

"I've been there by ship. It's an oasis in the dunes. The lagoon is surrounded on one side, where the dunes slope into the lagoon, by a vast impenetrable mass of reeds, reaching far above a man's head. The lagoon is tidal – the sea rushes in and out. Crossing the sandbar can be dangerous. The wind is ferocious. However, in the early morning, with the correct tide and the wind nearly calm, a ship with a shallow draft can pass through the lagoon's entrance."

They heard footsteps. Somebody was approaching the room.

"So do we agree, we stick to our story – you know, what we said before, that we fled conflict in Angola and wish to return?" de Sousa hurriedly asked.

"Yes."

Captain de Sousa bowed to Pastor Dokter Haiddenon who stood at the door. The pastor was a portly man, dressed in a grey striped suit. He was in his mid-50s, both his hair and full beard grey and streaked with white. A pince-nez was perched on the bridge of his nose, attached by a black ribbon to his waistcoat. Werner thought that men of God had a special way about them, evident in their mannerisms. They always looked humble, although this did not necessarily mean they were; they merely looked it. This missionary displayed the same traits.

A chair was placed next to the bed, but the pastor ignored it, choosing to stand. "Are they looking after you?" he asked.

"Thank you. I'm grateful to you and your staff," Werner replied.

“That is a considerable amount of money you were carrying,” he said abruptly, immediately getting to the reason for his visit.

“Yes, I know. I’m a manufacturing representative. I was trading in Angola and got caught up in a rebellion.”

“Yes, we have heard of an enormous loss of life in southern Angola. They say about 400 souls were killed. We have prayed for them,” the pastor solemnly said.

“We were lucky to escape with our lives,” Werner added.

The pastor shook his head, both his anguish and disapproval evident.

“These wars are tragic; they know no boundaries. I need to report your arrival here to the local military command. Where will you be going when you leave?”

“We will return to Angola. You have probably realised that my companion is a Portuguese officer.”

“Yes, I have. I will report that you arrived needing medical attention, having fled from the Kunahamas after the battle and are now returning. Your money-belt is safe in my office. You can collect it whenever you wish.”

“I would like to make a donation to the mission.”

“Thank you,” the pastor said. “That will be appreciated.”

By the next day, Werner could leave his bed and take stock of his surroundings, but Dr Eggers convinced the men to remain another week at the mission to enable Werner to regain his strength.

During the morning, the small hospital was a hive of activity. The missionaries had established a medical clinic which drew the sick from the surrounding Ovambo area. The Ovambos were the dominant tribe in northern SudwestAfrika. The sick and frail would arrive daily before sunrise, limping and shuffling with small children on their backs or in tow. They would form a queue, standing or sitting on the ground for hours, patiently waiting their turn

to be attended. The clinic opened its doors about seven in the morning, and by midday the staff had usually dealt with the last patient.

CHAPTER 10

Werner sat on the hospital porch on a crudely constructed bench. The captain, although impatient to be on his way, joined him. The two men discussed their next course of action; both were adamant that dos Santos needed to be stopped. The captain was convinced that dos Santos would use the current insurrection permeating southern and central Angola as an opportunity to transport his rifles to Namibe without interference. He would encounter no government patrols; in fact, the Kunahamas would provide protection.

“I believe he left Huambo shortly after us,” the captain said, “and by now, he must be only be a few days from Namibe. We will never be able to intercept him. Anyway, what can we do with only a few men? We have no reinforcements available. I’m sure absolute chaos still reigns in southern Angola.” De Sousa was smoking one of the pastor’s donated cigars. He blew smoke towards the corrugated roof of the veranda, bored and disgusted. “God! This would be better with a beer, a glass of wine or, better still, some port.”

“Better still with female company,” Werner chuckled.

“Of course. All we have here are nuns and doctors. Quite awful; they’re religious and career-oriented. They certainly don’t appear to have any interest in men.”

“Cristo! Have a heart, they’re missionaries! And besides, what about your wife?” Werner said, laughing.

The smile disappeared from his face and his expression grew serious again as both men lapsed into silence, pondering their predicament.

“Maybe I’m wrong,” de Sousa said. “Maybe he won’t make for Namibe. If I were he, I would make for the border. Who is going to stop him? I can’t see the Portuguese stopping him – they’ve never done that before!” He was silent for a moment, but then spoke again. From his expression, it was clear that something had just occurred to him. “I would like to suggest we send our two servants out as scouts; they can use our horses and pretend to be Kunahamas. They can ride back to Huambo and scout around, listen to bush talk – you’d be amazed what you hear. If dos Santos is in the southern area, many will know. Orders will have been issued that he and his men are not to be harmed. If I’m right, we can lead him into a trap.”

De Sousa stubbed the cigar into the sole of his boot and flicked the butt over the veranda railing.

“That’s quite an undertaking! Who’s going to help us?” Werner queried. “We certainly can’t take them on alone.”

“Surely you could spirit up some German reinforcements?”

Werner guffawed, a loud sound in the stillness. “I need to think about that,” he replied, a plan beginning to take shape in his mind.

He mulled over the captain’s suggestion for a moment. Of course, he could send a cable to Major Zietzmann; the military was bound to react. He had no idea of the strength of the military forces in the north of the German colony. This was Ovamboland, and the Ovambos were not at war; that was about all he knew.

“As you said, we need to send the two men off. I’ll ask for my money-belt back and give them money to use for supplies and also if they need to buy their way out any bad situation.”

When approached, the two black men saw no danger in returning to Angola in the guise of Kunahama warriors. They both spoke the language fluently. De Sousa suggested that they pass themselves off as members of the attack

force involved in the conflict with the Portuguese. If asked, this was where they had acquired their horses and guns. They listened attentively to his instructions and all agreed on a place to meet on their return. Eight days was considered sufficient for them to establish dos Santos's whereabouts and the direction his wagon train was heading. Werner re-emphasised their mission: they were merely to observe and not be seen themselves.

CHAPTER 11

Dorothea Eggers no longer hid behind her professional façade, and from time to time, she would bestow a smile on Werner. She realised that the officer was on some covert military mission and felt that the less she knew, the better. He, on the other hand, pressed her for information, asking where the nearest telegraph office was and how often German patrols came through this area and where they were garrisoned.

“I don’t know what you are planning,” she said one evening, clearly concerned. It was after supper and they were on the veranda. “But I hope this will not involve the mission at all.”

“Good Lord, I would never permit that,” he immediately replied.

“So … something is going on?”

“We are here only because I needed medical attention; otherwise we would be hundreds of miles away.”

CHAPTER 12

The day after Philippe and Paulo departed, a mounted column of Schutztruppe arrived at the mission, part of the force garrisoned at Ondongua about 60 miles away under the command of Major Ferdinand Graf zu Dohner. Werner and de Sousa approached the Feldwebel in command of the troop. He told them that although this part of the colony was peaceful, discontent still simmered amongst the Ovambos, the dominant tribe in this area.

"But," he proudly added, "the Schutztruppe are ready to deal with any insurrection."

"Does the town have a telegraph office?" asked Werner.

"Yes," replied the sergeant. "It is for military use only, but the local civilian population are allowed to use it in an emergency. Do you wish to send a telegram?"

Werner hesitated. He certainly needed to send a telegram but did not know quite how to do it without the sergeant and others reading the contents.

"Yes, but it is in Portuguese."

"That's okay, who cares? It's not the first time a Portuguese telegram has been sent from there. You'll be surprised at the number of Portuguese in Ondongua."

Werner drafted the telegram, addressing it to the Portuguese Consular Office in Windhuk, to a Senhor Mugeiro, the undercover name given to Werner by the German authorities. This would alert the Intelligence Division who would intercept the telegram before any attempt could be made to deliver it. Major Zietzmann would be the ultimate recipient.

After some thought, Werner drafted the following:

CONSIGNMENT IS ON ITS WAY TO SüDWESTAFRIKA VIA PORT NAMIBE STOP SEA ROUTE FINAL DESTINATION SANDWICH BAY STOP WE ARE IN SWA NEAR ONDONGUA STOP AWAIT YOUR INSTRUCTIONS STOP REPLY C/O ONDONGUA STOP DE ALMEIDA

He handed this to the sergeant in a sealed envelope and mentioned that he and his colleague would possibly visit Ondongua during the next few days for supplies before returning to Angola.

CHAPTER 13

The two blacks rode rapidly north, crossing the border where the latitudinal line that demarcated it met the Kunene River. They soon approached villages, but these were deserted; they realised that the rebellion had spread rapidly south, most men probably joining the Kunahama rebellion and their womenfolk hiding in the bush, afraid of Portuguese reprisals raids.

They soon encountered Kunahama raiding parties. That they were on horseback was a godsend. The rebels believed the two blacks to be scouts sent out by the tribal chiefs to reconnoitre and they treated them with deference and answered all questions without suspicion or hesitation. The rebels controlled all territories in southern Angola. Philippe audaciously cross-questioned the rebel commanders as to the whereabouts of a small wagon train that would have recently departed Huambo, making its way south under the protection of Najamo, a Kunahama kingpin. Although the Kunahamas knew of Najamo, none knew of such a wagon train.

Philippe and Paulo penetrated further into Angola, then changed direction and rode northwest towards the coast and the small fishing harbour of Namibe. The bush gave way to rolling savannahs but this still with a scattering of stunted bush usually no higher than waist-high. The occasional dry river did have a narrow strip of large thorn trees and near impenetrable bush that lined the riverbanks. The area was deserted; it was near impossible to eke out a living in this semi-desert. Huge herds of springbok and gemsbok roamed the plains, the area unaffected by the rebellion. It seemed their quarry had disappeared into thin air. They persisted, forced to ride farther north on the outskirts of the desert.

On the third day, they halted atop a shallow hill, the only high ground for miles around. They hobbled their horses, leaving them free to roam and graze on the sparse grass. They lit no fire but ate the biltong – salted venison marinated in vinegar with herbs and then dried in the wind until it was as hard as rock – they had brought. They washed the meal down with water. The sun set rapidly, the evening sky filling with a band of stars that stretched from horizon to horizon. The air was crystal clear; there was no moon.

Philippe rose from his haunches and stared into the distance towards the north. “Paulo, look! That’s a fire.”

Yes, there was a light in the distance.

“It’s a campfire, but it is a long way from here,” Philippe’s companion volunteered. “It could be dos Santos.”

“Who else, my friend? It must be him.”

“Don’t be so sure. We’ll need to check.”

“Okay, let’s sleep, but we must rise early and move before daybreak. Just before it gets light, we can stop and hide, and watch them from a distance. If they are travelling south, they will move towards us. We’ll need to be careful.”

Philippe patted his companion on the back.

“Don’t worry, even if we are seen they’ll think us rebels. But still, better they don’t see us.”

CHAPTER 14

Dorothea was at odds with herself. She was devoting far more of her professional attention to the marine officer than was necessary. He was rapidly regaining his strength, the malaria now under control, the quinine doing its work. She enjoyed talking to him. Every evening, after work was done and the sun slipped below the horizon, the white mission staff congregated on the veranda, nurses and mission teachers, Dorothea and Pastor Dokter Haiddenon. Both de Sousa and Werner would join them.

She thought him rugged and attractive, and even though a military man, he seemed caring and compassionate. He was certainly different from the local Europeans, who usually treated the black inhabitants abominably. ‘Untermenschen’ was the descriptive word: all who were not White and European fell into that category; they considered no better than slaves and treated accordingly. Werner, however, acknowledged that this was their country and that they had first right to it, a sentiment certainly not shared by many, some of whom considered such remarks subversive.

Even de Sousa surprised her. Rumour had it that the Portuguese were particularly harsh and cruel, still practising slavery, wrenching blacks from their families and tribal lands and sending them to Brazil, never to see their homeland or their families again. She recalled that De Sousa had more than once voiced his abhorrence towards this practice and said that the Portuguese authorities should deal harshly with those traders. Embarrassed, but feeling obliged to make some sort of excuse for this reprehensible practice, he had reminded them that the colony was, until recently, used as a dumping ground for criminals and other exiles, and that perhaps no better could be expected

from people who really represented the dregs of society. Some, he had added darkly, had infiltrated the provincial governments and accounted for much of the corruption found in the lower levels of administration. Unfortunately, for a price, some officials closed their eyes.

The same could not be said of the Boers. Between 1880 and 1890, they had trekked from the South African Boer Republics across the Kalahari Desert to escape British rule, enduring tremendous hardship before finally settling in the Angolan highlands and along the Kunene River. Most belonged to strict religious sects – Protestants in a predominantly Catholic country – aloof and jealous of their heritage, but fair and correct to the extreme, paying their workers for work done, if not with money, then in goods. They treated the indigenous people with kindness and respect, but mixing with them was taboo; they immediately ostracised anyone who crossed the colour line.

*

She sat on the veranda in a cane chair opposite Werner and watched him surreptitiously and noticed that he had difficulty sitting still, clearly fretting and impatient but trying to appear nonchalant and unconcerned.

Five days had passed since Philippe and Paulo had left the mission. Werner had told her that dos Santos was under way with the rifles that he'd seen in the storeroom at Huambo, but didn't know where he was heading with the consignment. If dos Santos succeeded with his plan, then he would be to blame.

"Are you always this quiet?" Dorothea asked.

"Yes, I suppose I am. I'm not one to make small talk."

"I can't help but get the impression you are troubled. Is anything wrong?"

"No, I'm fine. I must thank you again for bringing me back to good health. I'm lucky to find you here, that in itself is a miracle," he said.

"I'm glad we had the chance to meet again," she said, showing some

embarrassment. “You probably thought me rude on the ship, but I was concerned about this new turn my life was taking and wasn’t inclined to make small talk.”

He did not reply.

His presence at the mission disturbed her; she often found herself thinking of him, her mind wandering. In his company, she was both excited but at the same time, confused. Quite ridiculous, she thought. What is this man to me, surely just another patient? However, she knew this was not so – he was much more.

Every evening they would all would sit down to dinner at the big, long table with Reverend Haiddenon seated at the head.

After Werner had accepted an invitation to this table, Louis eventually joined them. Although he had taken his meals in his room, the missionaries had persisted with their daily invitations to dinner. Werner ascribed this to the fact that being missionaries, they needed to be endowed with persistence, as the conversion from heathen to Christian was known to take time. Of course, this was a joke, he had said. Initially, Louis wasn’t quite sure what Werner meant, but eventually did but did not appreciate the remark saying that Protestants sometimes had the strangest sense of humour. The theologian asked that they all join him in prayer, a protracted process in which Werner and Louis never seemed feel entirely comfortable. He imagined de Sousa found it even more difficult, though the man’s expression revealed nothing as they stood behind their chairs with heads bowed.

“I’ve noticed that your servants are no longer with us,” Pastor Haiddenon remarked as they all took their seats at the table.

She already knew the pastor; he didn’t miss a thing.

Werner replied: “That’s right; we’ve sent them on a private mission. They should return in a day or two.”

“Presumably you’ll be leaving then?”

“Yes, we are impatient to be on our way,” he said.

“And where will that be taking you?”

“Ondongua,” Werner replied.

“Are you not returning to Angola?” Haiddenon persisted.

“We will head back once we’ve concluded our business in Ondongua. Hopefully, the Portuguese will have brought the rebellion under control by then.”

“Not likely; our war here – or rather Germany’s war – has waged for some years now. How can you hope that peace will prevail so soon in Angola?”

“The rebels are not as organised there as they are here. I believe a strong military presence will see a rapid return to peace,” Werner replied politely.

“Why don’t you stay here and wait until it is safe?” Dorothea asked.

“Unfortunately, we have serious matters to attend to and the captain wishes to return home – he has a wife waiting for him,” Werner replied smiling.

After dinner, the three men made themselves comfortable on the veranda, the theologian generously offering each a cigar. Soon cigar smoke drifted away.

Suddenly the stillness of the evening was interrupted by the sound of approaching horses. Philippe and Paulo rode into the forecourt. Their servants had returned!

CHAPTER 15

Philippe and Paulo awoke as soon as the first signs of dawn appeared. The sky was still dark. They immediate prepared to stalk the camp in the distance. They removed the hobbles from their horses but tethered them to bushes in a dry arroyo, tying blankets over their eyes to ensure that they stood motionless and silent. They silently made their way towards the encampment they had seen, they using the scattered bushes as cover. The fire had died during the night but reappeared as the camp awoke and someone stoked the embers and added fresh wood.

About 200 yards from the camp, they dropped to the ground and slowly crept forward. Fortunately, the oxen and horses were corralled on the opposite side of the camp in a makeshift boma. They stopped about 40 yards from the perimeter and lay motionless on the ground, waiting for the sun to appear above the horizon. With the sun more or less directly behind them, it was unlikely that they could be seen.

Philippe estimated that the camp contained about 20 men. Most were Blacks, but he did see four Whites. He saw no sign of dos Santos. The man's sheer size would give him away; if he were there, he would be immediately recognisable. There always was the possibility that he was still asleep in a wagon, but Philippe believed this unlikely.

"Philippe!" Paulo whispered fiercely, his face revealing his concern. "The fat one's not there. I can't see him anywhere!"

"I know. That's strange."

"Where do you think these wagons are heading?"

"Not Namibe. Ondjiva, I think. That's on the way to SudwestAfrika, but

more towards the sea, towards the Ruacana waterfalls. This track goes that way. They probably chose that route to avoid German patrols. There are Hereros in the Kaokoveld near the Kunene River. That's across the river; I'm sure that's where they're going."

"Look, they've all got rifles."

It was true; both black and white men had rifles. That was unusual; seldom did Blacks carry rifles, only in the military, otherwise this was forbidden. The Hereros and Kunahamas were the exception; they were at war. Philippe had no doubt that this was dos Santos's wagon train.

Still on their stomachs, the two men slowly returned to their horses. Staying below the skyline, they walked their horses away from the camp along the course of a small, dry riverbed. Only when they were a few miles away did they mount up. Their task done, they rode off at a trot towards the border, keeping a lookout for rebels. They rode for 36 hours, stopping only to rest and water their horses, making it back to the mission by the next evening.

CHAPTER 16

Werner and de Sousa excused themselves and stepped down from the veranda to speak to their servants. The two Blacks were exhausted, their bodies streaked with dust. Similarly, dust caked the sides and hindquarters of the horses. The horses foamed at the bit, their heads now drooping with exhaustion. The two servants had ridden their mounts near to collapse. They handed them over to two grooms who attended to the stables which belonged to the mission.

“I’m glad you made it safely back. Thank God,” Werner said, relief etched on his features.

Philippe and Paulo collapsed on the ground next to the corral, leaning back against the posts, their chests still heaving from the hard ride.

Werner waited until Philippe had regained his breath. “Well, Philippe, what can you tell us?”

“They are heading towards Ondjiva, not Namibe. Dos Santos is not with them. We counted about 20 in the group, all with rifles. Four of them are Whites. We didn’t see any rifles in crates.”

“That’s not possible!” de Sousa interjected, “He must be with them.”

Paulo repeated with some irritation: “He’s not with them,”

“Shit! Where is he then?” Werner said exasperatedly.

“I think he’s looking after a second consignment,” de Sousa said quietly.

“Sweet Jesus,” Werner said, “what do you mean, a second consignment?”

“He’s done this before, supposedly sent out two consignments. The man’s devious, full of tricks.”

“Captain, where would he be taking it?”

“To Namibe,” the Portuguese officer, said an expression of uncertainty on his face. “Or so I think. He is sending that shipment by boat from Namibe to Sandwich Bay, just as I told you.”

“Well, Captain, if so, I’ll have to get hold of our intelligence people. We have to stop him. What about the wagons we saw?”

“Werner, please, my name’s Louis. I’d rather you called me that. As Paulo has said, I think dos Santos’ men are bringing them across the border. Probably, near the Ruacana Falls. However, if the wagons contains rifles or not, we don’t know.”

“Okay, Louis,” Werner said nodding his head in acknowledgement, “we leave for Ondongua at first light. Let’s hear what my CO has decided should be done.”

*

Werner did not leave before he had a chance to see Dorothea again. He made his way back to the veranda, where she was sitting alone on a bench. The others had already retired. He slid onto the bench next to her.

“I did not want you to leave before I saw you again,” she said quietly. “I can feel it in the air; you’re leaving tomorrow, aren’t you?” She did not look at him but stared at the veranda’s planked floor.

“Yes, I have to,” he softly replied and surreptitiously took her hand in his. She immediately grasped his fingers.

There were still sounds of movement within the large dining room that led onto the veranda. She furtively turned around to see whether anybody was there.

“Will you be back?” she asked.

“Yes, I’ll return,” he replied, not sure whether he was lying. He really had no idea what would happen in this seemingly mad quest to stop the gunrunners.

“Dorothea!” a voice called from within.

“I must go,” she said and then leaned towards him and let her lips briefly brush his. Then with a rustle of clothes, she rose and disappeared through the French doors.

This show of affection had taken him by surprise. He made up his mind – he would be back.

*

The ride to Ondongua was boring. The terrain was completely flat, no rocks or stones whatsoever; it was obvious they were still crossing the same vast floodplain that stretched from east to west across northern SudwestAfrika, and interspersed with thorn trees. This was known as Ovamboland.

Ondongua was a sprawling Ovambo settlement. The huts were scattered at random and with the high, wooden-poled picket fences that surrounded them, they appeared similar to stockades. The ground between the huts was just dust and sand as all grass and other ground vegetation had long since been worn away or destroyed by the summer sun. Pathways, they deeply worn tracks in the ground connected the huts and kraals. These were six inches deep, the powdered dust billowing up with every step.

The German military was encamped a few hundred yards from the settlement where the surrounding bush commenced, their tents erected with exact precision, the canvas canopies forming a straight line. A large, single-storey building, really no more than a large hut built from mud-brick with a corrugated iron roof, served as the command post. The German Imperial flag fluttered from a flagpole. The telegraph wires were clearly visible as they exited the roof of the building and connected to a string of poles which disappeared into the distance. In fact, there were two sets of lines: one connected with Windhuk via Tsumeb, Otjiwarongo and Okahandja; the other disappeared in a northwest direction towards Oshakati, the Ovambo tribal

chief’s place of residence.

Werner and Louis made their way directly to the command post. After the bright midday sunlight, the interior was dark, and it took a few moments before Werner’s eyes adjusted to the gloom. A rough counter blocked further entrance to the hut, and a Schutztruppe sergeant in full uniform rose at the approach of the men; it was evident that he was surprised to see two white civilians.

“Good day, gentlemen, have you lost your way?” he asked in German, his eyebrows arched in an obvious attempt at humour.

“Guten Tag,” Werner replied. “In a way – yes. A rebellion in Angola and the need for medical attention brought us south to SudwestAfrika.”

“Oh yes, I heard about you. You were at the Finnish mission at Olukonda. One of our sergeants reported your presence to our CO. You speak German extremely well.”

“I spent many years in Germany and am, in fact, a representative for several German manufacturers who sell goods to the Portuguese. Actually, I’m expecting a telegram; my name is Joachim de Almeida. Where can I enquire whether you have received a telegram for me?”

The sergeant smiled. “You’re at the right place,” he said.

He extracted a yellow envelope from a cubbyhole in a large bookcase and handed it to Werner.

Outside, they found a bench under a tree where Werner sat down and opened the telegram. It was from Major Zietzmann, not that this was the name used by the major. The sender was Senhor Mugeiro, the major’s undercover name and the telegram written in Portuguese. It read:

CAN ONLY SPARE MOUNTED COLUMN OF 30 MEN. WILL ARRIVE ONDONGUA ON 14TH STOP COLUMN UNDER COMMAND OF RITTMEISTER V BRANDT STOP PLACE YOURSELVES AT HIS

DISPOSAL WITH YOUR FULL COOPERATION STOP TRACK DOWN SHIPMENT APPROACHING BORDER STOP VON BRANDT AWARE YOUR BACKGROUND STOP WILL SUPPLY FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS STOP MUGEIRO

Well, Werner thought, the telegram wasn't exactly written in code, but no doubt the major knew what he was doing. The chances of a security breach were probably remote; what clandestine agent would be on the lookout for secret messages between Windhuk and Ondongua? Werner handed the telegram to Louis.

"Who is this Rittmeister von Brandt?" Louis asked. "Are we going to have to do what he tells us to do?"

"Hell no, Louis! I've met him. This was in the desert when the rebels ambushed the train from Swakopmund to Windhuk; he's a decent fellow. Yes, he'll be in command, but I'm sure the major would have told him to take our advice. After all, we know what's going on. Don't worry, we will intercept the wagon train Philippe and Paulo saw, and destroy it. The good Rittmeister certainly can't do it without us. He wouldn't even know where to find them."

"Well, we'd better succeed. If we don't, the Hereros will get those weapons. I see the major has said nothing about the other shipment to Sandwich Bay."

"I don't think it's being ignored. It'll take a few weeks before it arrives. There is still time to deal with it."

The sergeant appeared in the doorway and beckoned Werner and Louis nearer. "The major would like to see you. Please follow me."

They followed the soldier into the back room which served as the major's office.

The major, standing in the middle of the room, struck an imposing figure.

He was in full uniform, his boots polished to a mirror shine, his uniform pressed as if ready for any parade ground inspection. His moustache was an exact copy of the Kaiser's, the pointed ends pointing vertically upwards, and his brilliantined hair combed straight back against his scalp, the first tinges of grey discernible around his ears and temples. The all-important monocle was clamped in his left eye. Lavish furnishings had transformed the office into a piece of Germany: the rough walls were whitewashed and adorned with paintings, most portraits of military men in uniform, some obviously of bygone eras. Werner assumed that these probably were portraits of the major's family. Others depicted hunting scenes. A thick Persian carpet covered the floor, and in a corner, a bust of the Kaiser stood on a pedestal. An imposing desk took up the larger part of the room, and two deep-red buttoned leather chairs claimed a corner, a low coffee table between them.

"Major Ferdinand Graf zu Dohner," the major announced himself, holding out his hand in greeting.

Good God, Werner thought, a duke in command of this forlorn place! The poor bugger, he thought. He had to have done something quite bad to be sent here. Dukes did not command remote outposts in the colonies! The aristocratic families in Germany would often ship their black sheep to the colonies, hoping that they would get lost, preferably for good, lest they bring scandal on their families. Werner had a sneaky feeling that the major probably filled the bill admirably. He wondered what the man's transgressions had been.

"I have had word that you are to wait until Rittmeister von Brandt arrives tomorrow. Would you good gentlemen care to inform me of the purpose, both of your arrival here and that of the Rittmeister with his troop tomorrow?"

Werner thought it best to say as little as possible. "We are to act as guides,"

he said. “We know no more than that.”

The major’s face was cold as he absorbed the snub.

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The next day, Rittmeister von Brandt greeted Werner by name before he could draw him aside to hush him and whisper that he was now a Portuguese trader named Joachim de Almeida.

“Sweet Jesus, if it isn’t the Scarlet Pimpernel,” von Brandt laughed. “Now he’s Portuguese and even speaks the language fluently. Do you think I can trust you? Zietzmann said that I was to listen to you and do what you suggest. Is that safe? You look like a spick farmer.”

Werner frowned at him; derogatory remarks about the Portuguese would not go down well. Fortunately, Louis had no idea what was being discussed, as they conversed in German.

Jurgen von Brandt was surprised to learn that Louis was a captain in the Portuguese colonial forces. However, conversation was difficult, and Werner continuously translated for the Jurgen and Louis. Jurgen listened to their story with amazement but realised the seriousness of the situation when he heard how they had barely escaped with their lives when fighting the Kunahamas.

“The battle is currently a major topic of conversation in military circles and one of the main news topics in SudwestAfrika,” Jurgen commented.

A sergeant approached the men and saluted Jurgen. “Herr Rittmeister, Major Graf zu Dohner has requested that you and Senhor de Almeida accompany me to his office.” The sergeant did an about-turn and marched smartly back towards the command post building.

“Careful, Jurgen, the major has not been told anything,” Werner whispered quickly. “I have the impression his nose is out of joint because Zietzmann has left him in the dark.”

They strode into the major’s office. The post’s commanding officer stood in front of his desk, bristling with controlled anger. Jurgen threw him the smartest parade ground salute, clicking his heels, and announced his rank and name, stating that he and his column were reporting to Ondongua as ordered by Major Zietzmann.

The major ignored Werner as if he did not exist.

“What is the purpose of your mission?” the major asked. “I was merely told to expect you. This is highly irregular.”

“Herr Major, with respect I must inform you that all I’m permitted to say is that we are to intercept a wagon train, and to that end I am to allow the two Portuguese gentlemen to accompany me. This is a secret mission.”

“This is most irregular,” the major repeated testily. “This area is under my command. I will take this up with the Oberkommando der Heere in Windhuk.”

“Herr Major, this mission is sanctioned by the OKH.”

“Nonetheless, they could have used my troops. Will you require assistance?”

“No. No, sir.”

“Well, in that case, it is pointless saying any more.”

“Thank you, sir.”

Jurgen threw the major another smart salute and left the office.

Once they’d left the building, Werner raised his eyebrows enquiringly. “Well?” he asked.

“What can I say?” Jurgen replied. “The good major is seriously pissed off. He considers it an affront that he was not included in these deliberations. As he puts it, after all, this is his command. Christ, I didn’t know what to say! Whatever else happens, let’s do everything by the book and not give him any reason to get nasty. Believe me, he’s fuckin’ mad! Who knows, maybe he

doesn’t like Zietzmann.”

Werner translated for Louis who found the major’s attitude amusing. Then on a more serious note, he reminded Werner that they should be leaving as soon as possible. The Rittmeister agreed. The men were allowed only an hour to refresh themselves and have a quick meal. By midday the column, now with Jurgen, Louis, and the two servants in tow, resumed its mission.

The belated summer rains were about to arrive in full fury. Massive concentrations of cumulus cloud built up during the afternoon, the sky darkening. .Violent flashes of lightning and near-deafening claps of thunder heralded the first raindrops which in minutes turned in to a torrential downpour. Those at the head of the column could scarcely see more than 20 yards ahead. The ground was soon awash, the horses stepping through inches of water. The troops had quickly donned oilskin rain-slickers, but they were no match for the rain. Soon water streamed off all of them, finding its way into their clothing beneath.

Louis brought his horse up close to Werner and shouted across to him through the rain: “I hope it’s not raining where dos Santos’s wagons are. The rain will wash away their tracks: we’re supposed to intersect them on this heading. This’ll make it very difficult for us to find them.”

Werner looked ahead. It was no good. He could hardly see anything. He called Philippe nearer.

“Will we lose dos Santos’s wagons in this rain?” he asked.

“I don’t think so,” he said. “It’s not raining like this over the whole country, and anyway, the wagons are further west towards the desert. It probably won’t rain there at all. We’ll still find the wagons.”

Werner was relieved. They were expecting to intercept the wagon train the next day.

After about an hour, the rain let up and the sky rapidly cleared, leaving the

earth refreshed and transformed. Flying ants appeared. Swallows seemed to materialise from nowhere in their hundreds, swooping and diving on the ants in a feeding frenzy. The unique fresh smell of rain on dust permeated the atmosphere.

As darkness approached, the troop quickened its pace. They found a natural clearing amongst the thorn trees where they halted to make camp. They pitched no tents. Certain that the gunrunners were upwind of them, they prepared a quick meal over a well-shielded small fire, and then turned in, exhausted, sleeping in blankets on the ground and using their saddles as pillows.

At first light they broke camp, and before the sun had crept above the horizon they were in the saddle again, Rittmeister von Brandt impatiently urging them on. Philippe and two other black Askaris were sent to scout a few miles ahead. The idea was to locate the gunrunners' scouts before they saw them. The Rittmeister and the Askaris had removed their uniforms and were now dressed similarly to the local inhabitants, wearing only rudimentary pieces of civilian clothing. As the sun warmed them, the Askaris bared their upper torsos, as was the custom.

Late that afternoon the scouts intercepted fresh wagon tracks, headed towards Ruacana. The number of horses accompanying the wagons indicated that this must be the gunrunners' wagons. The military column swung south in pursuit, travelling parallel to the Kunene River. Soon the scouts reported the wagon train a few miles ahead. Immediately the Rittmeister called a halt. They could rest and eat, but no fires were to be lit. Two NCOs joined the Rittmeister, Werner, Louis and their two servants to discuss a plan of action. Philippe confirmed that all the dos Santos' men who accompanied the wagons were armed and had their own horses, which made them mobile and dangerous. If they were to be overcome, stealth was essential. A frontal

attack would just result in too many casualties. A sneak attack under cover of darkness would give them the best chance of success.

After much deliberation, it was decided that Werner, Louis, Philippe, Paulo, one NCO and an Askari would spearhead the initial assault, approaching the wagons from the opposite side to where the gunrunners had their horses corralled. As night approached day the wind always turned, blowing from land towards the sea; it was usually no more than a slight breeze, a distinctive feature along this desert coastline. This placed them downwind. As they approached the wagons, no animals would pick up their scent. At the first sound of gunfire, the Rittmeister would lead the rest of his men in a mounted charge on the camp. Werner and his men would don white bandannas to distinguish them from the enemy; nobody wanted to be mistaken for the enemy when the Askaris finally charged!

At about one o'clock, the small group, strung out in single file and on foot, set out at a brisk pace towards the gunrunners' camp with Philippe and Paulo in the lead. They slowed down as they saw the faint flicker of a campfire. The fires had been allowed to burn low, but it was light enough to see the wagon train lookouts on the outer ring around the wagons. There appeared to be four, which was usual, one for each corner of the compass. However, two were not at their post but were seated on the ground near the fire. One had fallen asleep.

Crouched low, the men slowly approached the campfires. Most of them were armed with rifles, but Werner had opted for a shotgun, both barrels loaded with buckshot. He also had his revolver in a holster attached to his belt, as did Louis who had decided on two revolvers instead of a rifle. About 100 yards from the camp they lowered themselves to the ground and laboriously crawled forward. Werner wished he had donned thicker clothing; his knees and elbows soon hurt from the small cuts and abrasions inflicted by

pieces of gravel and thorns. The Boers called these little thorns ‘duiweltjies’ – little devils. Appropriately named, Werner thought. They were smaller than a marble, but rock hard and surrounded on all side with sharp thorns. He gritted his teeth and continued to creep slowly forward.

In the moonlight he could see Philippe in front of him. His batman slowly turned to face him, pointed at himself and then his companion, drew his finger across his throat and indicated the camp with an outstretched arm. Werner read their intentions: they wanted to stalk the sentries and slit their throats.

Werner shook his head. He thought the idea insane! This could go wrong. That was not part of the plan. Philippe was not about to listen and this was not the time to argue; he reluctantly nodded his head in assent. He knew there would be no stopping them; clearly, they were already taken up with the euphoria of the coming fight.

Not to be outdone, Werner crawled towards the nearest wagon. As he neared the wagon, he saw Paulo rise from the ground behind the half-asleep sentry. With lightning speed, Paulo placed his hand over the man’s mouth, jerking his head back and simultaneously slashing the blade of his knife across the man’s exposed throat. There followed the sound of a rush of air and then bubbling as blood pumped from the severed carotid artery.

Paulo slowly lowered the inert body to the ground. Werner was stunned by both the suddenness of the ghastly attack, and the gruesome result.

The man’s sudden death had alerted no one; the camp was still quiet. Werner crawled forward. Suddenly, he heard a thump followed by a whooshing sound – the sound a man makes when he has the breath driven from his body by a tremendous blow. That was all he heard. He saw nothing; everything still appeared normal. A wagon towered above him. Sounds of snoring emanated from the top; he presumed that this must be the sleeping

place of one of the senior members of the wagon train, as most of the men were in blankets on the ground around the fire.

Werner rolled under the wagon. The wagon's planked floor bed had wide gaps in it; he could see the faint moonlight through the slits.

"Aaaaaah!" A loud death shriek pierced the silence. The starlight shining through the slits disappeared as the occupant rose from his bedroll blocking out the faint light. Werner took the shotgun and thrust the two barrels against the slit in the boards. He squeezed both triggers. The roar of the shotgun in the confined space below the wagon was deafening. Wood splinters and dust flew in all directions, followed by a loud thud as something fell to the broken wagon floor. He rolled from beneath the wagon. A body hung half over the tailboard of the wagon, arms and head dangling down, blood glistening in the moonlight. Werner split open the shotgun and ejected the two smoking shells. From his shirt pocket, he shoved two fresh cartridges into the breech and snapped the action closed again, quickly drawing the two hammers back.

Pandemonium reigned as men shouted and gunfire erupted. He remembered the white bandanna; he pulled it from his pocket and drew it over his forehead. Nearby, he saw Philippe bending over a fallen man, a short stabbing spear in one hand and an enormous machete in the other; he had a wild look in his eyes, the whites clearly showing in the dim light. The scene had been transformed into something ghoulish and macabre.

"For God's sake, somebody help me!" he heard Louis shout in Portuguese. He spun round and saw Louis grappling with a huge man who had him by both wrists. He was no match for the man who slowly bent his arm backwards, trying to force him to release his revolver. Werner never hesitated. He drew his revolver and at point-blank range pulled the trigger. The heavy bullet entered through the man's eye and blew off the back of the man's head. Louis was splattered with blood and brains.

“Sweet Jesus!” Louis exclaimed. “That was close. Thanks.”

Standing back to back, the two officers surveyed the scene around them. In the seconds that had passed, some men were still trying to extract themselves from their blankets while others had already found their weapons. The air was filled with a cacophony of shouts, screams and gunshots. Werner and Louis blazed away with their revolvers but the gunrunners had started to return fire, and the first bullets were whistling past their heads.

“Christ! Let’s get out of here!” Werner shouted, dragging Louis with him to a wagon, taking cover behind the wheels. They saw no sign of their companions, but from the shooting it was evident they were very much alive.

Suddenly he heard the drumming of approaching hooves. It had to be the Rittmeister approaching with his troops. The riders swept into the camp, sabres drawn. The enemy, still in disarray and shock, were no match for the mounted horsemen who cut them down with pistol, rifle and sword.

It had taken no more than a few minutes to overrun the camp. A pall of dust now hung over the camp, the air tinged with the smell of cordite. Somebody threw fresh wood on the fires which soon caught and illuminated the surroundings. The dead and wounded lay scattered around the wagons, the cries of the wounded mixing with the heartbreaking sounds of dying horses. The troop had only one Sanitär who had his hands full attending to those moaning and screaming in pain.

A concerned Rittmeister dismounted from his horse and rushed towards Louis.

“I’m all right! Please, it’s not mine,” Louis shouted, realising that Jurgen thought him seriously wounded, seeing his face and hair spattered with blood from the man Werner had summarily dispatched with a shot to the head.

Jurgen looked at Werner and urgently asked: “What’s he saying?”

“He says it’s somebody else’s blood, not his!” Werner replied.

Jurgen’s relief was evident and he began to laugh. Werner joined him. A smile broke out on Louis’ face and then he laughed, releasing his pent-up fear and apprehension.

The Askaris rounded up the survivors. They had no way of knowing how many had escaped. A search of the wagons revealed the rifles still in their crates.

“So the wagons did contain rifles after all.Where is dos Santos?” Jurgen asked.

The NCO stepped forward. “We have already asked the prisoners, Herr Rittmeister. They say he is with another wagon train – more wagons than this one – on his way to Namibe.”

Werner realised that Louis had been right after all. Dos Santos was both devious and cunning.

“Well, we should get going in the morning. We need to catch them.”

“Herr Rittmeister, they say he probably is in Namibe by now. Besides, many Kunahama rebels accompany him. Certainly, too many for us to take on,” the NCO added fearfully.

“Sergeant, let me be the judge of that,” Jurgen berated him, his annoyance showing.

Werner decided to intervene. “Jurgen, the sergeant’s right. This is not even German territory. It’s one thing to catch them in the bush as we’ve just done. It’s an entirely different matter attacking a Portuguese fishing village. That could create an international incident.”

Jurgen said nothing; he merely nodded, indicating that Werner was right. “Werner, ask Louis if he thinks the Portuguese can do anything.”

“What can my people do?” Louis asked. “Our army in the south has been virtually wiped out. It will take weeks before reinforcements arrive. We don’t have a choice, we have to go south to Sandwich Bay and intercept him when

he tries to land his cargo in your country."

"Look, we've won this round," Jurgen said. "Let's get back to Ondongua and contact Zietzmann. Let him decide. We can tell him what we've just learned."

"Well, we'll have to be smart about it," Werner replied. "It'll take dos Santos no more than a few days to sail from Namibe to Sandwich Bay. He may not have loaded the weapons on a ship yet, but how long can that take?"

The Askaris carried the wounded to the wagons where they were made as comfortable as possible. At gunpoint, the prisoners were ordered to climb aboard the wagons. Once seated, the Askaris tied their hands behind their backs. They were a sullen lot. Werner wondered what fate awaited them. Which court would try them, the Germans or the Portuguese? Did it really matter? Whether it was at the hands of the Germans or Portuguese, he was sure they would come to a gruesome end. In both colonies, the penalty for gunrunning was death by hanging.

The troops returned to Ondongua. Two of the wounded troopers succumbed to their wounds while en route. Rittmeister von Brandt called no halt to bury them but ordered their bodies wrapped in blankets and kept in the wagon, to be buried with full military honours at Ondongua. The troopers showed little compassion for their prisoners, withholding water and food until Jurgen was forced to intervene; he commanded the troopers to look after them. This was done with great reluctance; the troopers considered them an unnecessary burden and if given a choice would have ended their lives right there and then.

Their return to the command post with both the prisoners and the illegal rifles did nothing to improve Major Graf zu Dohner's demeanour. He was still affronted that he had not been party to the preparation and assault on the gunrunners. Jurgen chose to ignore him, which only exacerbated the

situation.

From Windhuk, Major Zietzmann cabled the Portuguese military authorities in Luanda and informed them of Captain de Sousa's role in the mission. As a result, they seconded him to Zietzmann's operation. Werner was elated that the two of them would continue to pursue dos Santos together. The Portuguese were unaware that Senhor Joachim de Almeida was a German lieutenant masquerading as a manufacturer's representative. Dos Santos had no reason to believe otherwise. Werner hoped the deal they struck was still in force.

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The command post's medical facilities were austere, primitive, and with only a medical orderly and little in the way of medication. The arrival of the wounded on the post created a problem. The major immediately dispatched a rider with a request that the Finnish mission make their doctor available. A day later, Dr Eggers arrived by horse-drawn wagon, bringing two Finnish nurses with her and a few black servants. They immediately erected two tents, one a temporary operating theatre and the other a care unit. Only after she had attended to the wounded men's needs did she allow herself to notice Werner. She was surprised to see him again but greeted him warmly. Concern soon replaced her joy when she realised that the wounded she was attending were the casualties of an assault that included Werner and Louis. However, when she questioned Werner, he would not discuss anything related to the past week.

Alone with Werner, Louis broached the subject. "Werner, the lady's upset; it's evident she cares for you."

"It's a whim on her part. It probably will pass. Don't forget, I was her patient once," he replied nonchalantly.

"Methinks you became more than just a patient. At least you could be more

receptive.”

Werner merely nodded. However, Louis persisted in bringing up the subject, believing himself an expert in the love department. In typical Latin fashion, he kept telling Werner how he should launch his campaign of seduction.

When Jurgen accompanied by Werner entered the small Lazarette to check on Jurgen’s wounded troops, Dr Eggers confronted him.

“Herr Rittmeister,” she said, “a good few of these men require specialised treatment. Unfortunately, such care is only available in Windhuk. I must insist that they are sent there as soon as possible. We have done what we can here, but if they don’t receive specialised treatment soon, we may lose them.”

“Doctor, please, I note your concerns. My men and I have been ordered back to Windhuk; we will leave tomorrow. These troops will accompany us. However, I insist that you also join the train and attend to the men until we all arrive in Windhuk. Your two nurses are to assist you. I will ensure that the mission is compensated for your time.”

“Herr Rittmeister!” she protested. “I cannot leave here and neither can these nurses. They are missionaries!”

Werner was surprised by Jurgen’s uncompromising attitude but thought it better not to interfere. However, he looked at Jurgen with an expression of disapproval.

“You forget, Doctor, this country’s at war. You have no alternative. Please make the necessary arrangements. I, in turn, will ensure that you are returned to the mission as soon as it is expedient, which should be once we get the wounded to the military hospital at Windhuk.”

Not waiting for a reply, Jurgen spun on his heel and walked out of the Lazarette.

Dorothea wiped the sheen of sweat from her brow with the back of her

wrist.

Werner said: “I’m sorry, there is nothing I can do, but he is probably right. They are his men and he must care for them the best way he can.”

“I know. I realise that I have no alternative but to obey the directive. Also, I understand that the Rittmeister really had little choice if his men are to receive the best medical attention. The condition of two of the wounded is serious. The two nurses will be unhappy; they are devoted missionaries and have no desire to go to Windhuk.”

Werner could not help the exhilaration he felt knowing that he would be on the train with her. He took her hand and squeezed it.

“Everything will fine,” he said trying to reassure her.

*

Hurried preparations were made to move the wounded to Tsumeb, the last town on the northern railroad which connected with Windhuk. This was 80 miles from Ondongua. Two horse-drawn carriages were employed to carry the wounded. Fortunately, the terrain was flat and devoid of stones. The route the wagons took was mostly through soft sand. This area was an extension of the Kalahari Desert, a massive expanse of sand and bush that stretched in a north-northwest direction across the border, a good 200 miles into Angola. If not for the soft sand that cushioned the movement of the wagons, Dorothea doubted whether the seriously wounded would have survived the journey. Jurgen and his men, accompanied by Werner, Louis and their servants, rode ahead of the wagons, keeping a constant lookout for marauding Hereros.

They arrived in Tsumeb and boarded the train. The reason for the rail line’s existence was the discovery of rich copper ore deposits near the town.

The train consisted of flat-deck wagons to which a few passenger coaches had been hastily added. The troops occupied the first passenger coach coupled directly behind the three boxcars which were attached to the train for

the exclusive use of the troop's horses. As this was a narrow-gauge line; the train's speed never exceeded 25 miles per hour. No dining car was provided and the stationmaster reminded Jurgen that his people must ensure they had sufficient food and water before the train left as there was little to buy on the way.

The train departed Tsumeb late that afternoon. As it approached its maximum speed it began to sway alarmingly; the passengers that were standing were forced to find something to grab hold for support. Werner immediately thought of the wounded. God knows how they felt; this could not be comfortable. Fortunately, it had recently rained, so the ground was still damp, which kept any dust to a minimum.

Werner preferred standing in the corridor, hanging onto the handrail. This was a lot more comfortable than sitting on the green leather-bound coach seats and swaying from side to side. Others had taken their cue from him and there were now several people in the passageway.

Initially, Dorothea had busied herself making the wounded as comfortable as she could. Now she joined Werner and Louis in the corridor.

Hanging onto the rail, she brushed the hair from her face with the back of a hand. "Really, this is awful!" she said. "We can't travel like this all the way to Windhuk! It's like riding a fun fair! I'm afraid it will jump the rails."

Unable to keep a straight face, Werner started to laugh.

Louis understood the tone of voice and laughed too.

"At least we don't travel in toy trains in Angola. Cristo, this is really ridiculous!" Louis said to Werner, who just rolled his eyes.

Bloody Portuguese, Werner thought. First, better lovers; now, better trains. What next?

A particularly violent sway of the carriage broke Dorothea's hold from the rail and flung her against Werner, who caught her. For a moment, he felt her

breasts pressed against his chest and caught the scented smell of her.

"Sorry," he said, "but if I hadn't caught you, you would have fallen."

She was flustered, her flushed face betraying that she was as aware of him as he was of her. She moved away, walking carefully down the passage.

Louis noticed the fleeting seconds of intimacy between the two and looked knowingly at Werner, pursing his lips.

Bloody idiot, Werner thought. He is enjoying this!

The officers and troopers had bought a numbers of sacks containing bottles of beer in wet straw. These now swayed in most compartments. With little else to do and spurred on by the summer heat, many bottles of beer were consumed. The train took on a slightly festive atmosphere. Two NCOs were trying to draw the two nurses into conversation, while in another compartment, loud guffaws followed ribald jokes.

Werner and Louis had consumed a few bottles between them and both had relaxed their normal professional façade. Louis dug his elbow into Werner's ribs, bringing his mouth close to his ear.

"Come on, Werner! What are you waiting for? Go to her! You know she wants you!"

"Christ!" he snapped. "This is not some Portuguese bordello! The doctor is a lady and I'm an officer. Don't be bloody mad!"

Louis immediately took umbrage. "Don't knock Portuguese bordellos. Many men frequent these establishments. Let me tell you, our women are ladies. They know how to treat their men."

"Well, that may be so, but I'm not about to make advances on the doctor, if that's what you mean!"

"If you don't, you'll lose her. There are too many men here, and she is truly beautiful. Somebody else will take her."

Werner remained silent. However, he had to agree Louis was right;

something definitely sizzled between them, and both of them knew it.

Dorothea had disappeared. He wondered where she was.

Louis's eyes were slightly bleary and his grin, now sloppy, made him look stupid. He waved his empty beer bottle at Werner who shook his head, indicating that he had had enough. Louis lurched off to their compartment to get another. The moment Louis disappeared he walked down the corridor towards the adjoining passenger car. He stepped over the coupling onto the landing, the loud clackety-clack of the wheels and the banging of the coupling assaulting his ears. Dorothea stood in the corner of the landing, leaning against the railing, staring out into the night as it rushed by.

"What are you doing out here?" he asked.

She turned to face him and smiled. "The swaying made me feel ill."

"Can I get you something?" he asked.

"No, no. I'm fine now. But you can stay and keep me company."

For a long while they both just stood there looking out, the lights radiating from the compartments illuminating the bush rushing by. A particularly violent lurch again threw her against him.

He caught her, but this time he did not immediately release her but held her close, her shoulder against his chest. She did not attempt to break from him; instead, she placed a hand on his arm around her waist as if to say it was only natural that he be holding her.

Slowly his emotions got the better of him, and he lowered his head and gently kissed her hair above her ear. She drew her head back, as if to get nearer to him. He kissed her ears and slowly slid his lips down her neck. She turned her body to face him, lifting her lips to his. As they kissed passionately, she put her arms around his neck, pulling him close. He felt his own passion and arousal as well as her heightened response. She did not object when he lowered his hands to clasp her buttocks and draw her lower

body hard against his.

Suddenly, she regained control of herself and drew away from him. She looked down at her feet, unable to look him in the eyes.

“I’m sorry. This should not have happened,” she said clearly embarrassed. Before he could say anything, she turned and walked quickly away.

Werner followed her down the passageway. When she got to the nurses’ compartment, she insisted that the two NCOs immediately leave. They did: Werner saw that the NCOs knew better than to argue with a doctor. Once the NCOs left, she entered and immediately slid the door closed behind her.

Werner was dumbfounded. It had all happened in seconds. He had wanted to say something, but she had disappeared before he could get a word out. Overwhelmed by the unexpected change in their relationship and the few seconds of intense intimacy, he waited a few minutes to regain his composure and then returned to his own compartment.

Louis was sprawled on the bunk snoring, oblivious of what was happening around him; his body moved from side to side to the sway of the carriage. An empty beer bottle rolled back and forth the carpeted floor. Just as well, Werner thought, heaven help me should he ever find out what had happened!

Dorothea did not speak to him for the rest of the journey. Werner was morose, at loss how to handle the situation. Of course, Louis pressed him wanting to know whether he had made any advance and what had happened.

“Nothing!” Werner would tersely reply.

This left Louis mumbling words relating to Werner’s amorous and sexual inadequacies and adding some vulgar Portuguese expression about a stupid dog never getting a bone.

The train journey took a day and a half. They arrived in Windhuk during midmorning. A NCO with three Askaris waited on the platform to greet Werner and his companions and see them settled in a hotel. Werner was

informed that Major Zietzmann wished to see Louis and him at three that afternoon; they were to join him for later dinner later and should dress accordingly. The NCO assured Werner that he would ensure that Louis was issued appropriate clothing, compliments of the German government.

Werner and Louis spent the next few hours making themselves presentable, soaking in a bath, getting a shave and having their hair trimmed. Louis was clearly disappointed with Windhuk when comparing it to Luanda in Angola. Werner had to remind him that Luanda was 300 years old while Windhuk was not quite 20.

“Nor is it built on a tropical seacoast,” Werner added. “Families in Angola have been in the country for hundreds of years, establishing small empires and palatial homes supported by dozens of servants. The Germans have only just got here.”

His second meeting with Major Zietzmann was far more amicable, with the major jovial and receptive and keen to congratulate the men on their success against the gunrunners. “Of course, the current tense situation in Angola must play into dos Santos’s hands,” the major said, “as the Portuguese are having difficulty making their presence felt in the southern part of their country. That does not mean that we should relax our efforts. On the contrary, I propose to make an example of this man.”

The major paused, lighting a cigar. “You say he is in Namibe?” he asked, the question directed at Louis.

Werner saw his companion start with surprise, not expecting the major to address him. Werner translated.

“That is the information we got from the prisoners, sir.” Louis replied.

“Well, we need to intercept him. It’s pointless trying to mount an operation from within your country. I’m trying to get the Imperial navy to assist, but strangely, they have no ship that can assist us. I know that sounds ridiculous,

us being at war, but then there is no war at sea at all. They say there is no call for the Kriegsmarine to be present."

"I don't imagine that dos Santos will use an ordinary fishing boat to smuggle these weapons into Sandwich Bay," Louis said. "He will surely consider some resistance from us a possibility and will prepare himself for such an event. Knowing him, he will make sure that he is able to defend himself. However, an attack from the sea may surprise him."

"He needs a craft small enough to pass over the sandbank that bars the lagoon's entrance at high tide," the major said, blowing smoke at the ceiling. "The current at Sandwich Bay is quite treacherous, or so I'm told. Therefore, a steam-driven boat will be essential. Probably something between 40-70ft. Certainly not larger. At most, he will have about 10-15 men aboard."

"Well, we'll certainly need something of similar size," Werner countered.

"Yes. I have found something. It's a 50ft steam-driven cutter. The port authority used it to tow barges from outlying ships anchored off Swakopmund to the small jetty behind the breakwater. It's not armed at all. I'm told she's an absolute bitch and has an inherent vicious roll, guaranteed to make the best seaman ill. Any voyage from Swakopmund to Sandwich Bay is bound to be an unforgettable experience."

The major could not hide the twinkle in his eye as he watched the two officers' faces as Werner translated.

The major then added: "I'm for it, but then I won't be aboard – you will be. What do you say? Otherwise it will have to be a land-based operation and that will probably not allow us to catch him. We may get the rifles, but probably not him."

"Who will command it?" Werner asked. "We don't have a captain! What about navigation and seamanship?"

"I've found an old Navy seadog who has just gone on pension and decided

to retire in Swakopmund because he likes the place so much. Surprisingly enough, he jumped at the opportunity. However, I should warn you, I'm told Kapitän zu See von Moelkte is difficult, a genuine pain in the ass."

For a moment, all were silent, digesting the major's latest information.

"Gentlemen, we don't have much time. Oh, incidentally, Captain de Sousa, you've been placed under my direct command." With that, the major slid a folded sheet of paper over his desk towards Louis, who read it. It was short and direct: obey the major's instructions to the letter. The commander-in-chief of Portuguese colonial forces had signed it. The note also included his superior's admiration for the interception and destruction of the gunrunner's wagon train in Angola.

"Sir," Louis said, addressing the major, "it will be a pleasure to serve under your command."

"Thank you."

Werner smiled, relieved that he would have Louis at his side in the fight against dos Santos. The Portuguese captain knew dos Santos and knew what to expect. More importantly, he despised the man and wished to see him and his operation destroyed.

Werner looked at Louis who gave him a barely perceptible nod.

"Major, we need to go to Swakopmund and meet the good Captain von Moelkte."

"Excellent! I will assign Rittmeister von Brandt to you, with 15 troopers. Oh, incidentally, Lieutenant, you've been promoted to captain."

The major removed a box covered with red velvet from the drawer of his desk and slid it over to Werner who slowly lifted the lid of the box to peer inside; he saw his new symbols of rank: two shoulder boards, each board with two parallel silver bars and two stars.

"Thank you, sir."

“You certainly earned them. Congratulations. And you, Captain de Sousa, are bound to be in for a surprise on your return to your country.”

Werner again translated and Louis’ face beamed.

CHAPTER 17

The three captains stood on the foredeck, all in uniform; even Louis was in a German Schutztruppe uniform with all insignia removed other than the shoulder boards depicting his rank.

Although it was already nine in the morning; there was no sign of the sun, the sky an endless blanket of low-lying fog. The sea was dead calm, its surface oily smooth except for long, undulating swells that slowly moved in from the southwest. The boat slid over these as it chugged southwards. Black smoke billowed from the high stack mounted over the wheelhouse at the stern where two black men, stripped to the waist, took turns keeping the boiler stoked with coal. Although she was sturdy, conveniences aboard the tugboat were few. The 21 men aboard shared one head and a small stove, and except for a few privileged, they all slept on the deck. The major was right; she was a bitch, rolling like some drunken whore in a seaport bordello, her forward mast swinging in a wide arc, the motion guaranteed to persuade the weak-stomached to lose their last meal.

In Swakopmund, engineers had feverishly worked on the boat. A steel gun platform was riveted to the forward deck plates just behind the entrance to the fo’c’sle on which a converted 3-inch howitzer had been mounted. The only restrictions on forward fire were the forward mast stays. The 19 troopers, which included two NCOs, were all armed with rifles.

Major Zietzmann had not been entirely truthful about von Moelkte. On seeing him for the first time, any expectations Werner may have had that he was about to encounter a recently pensioned captain of the line were instantly dispelled. The man must have come up for retirement before the turn of the

century – there was nothing recent about him. He was an obnoxious fellow whose vocabulary contained the foulest language, and he was certainly too old to be commanding a ship about to enter battle. When agitated, which was usual, he would wave his large clay pipe around and give vent to his feelings, berating the crew, the tugboat, the soldiers and the rest of the world in an uninterrupted tirade. That the man had a penchant for schnapps was an understatement; Louis was convinced this was his sole source of sustenance.

Werner's suggestion that they increase speed sent the man into a near apoplectic frenzy – von Moelkte considered the request an insult.

"She is already at full speed," von Moelkte snapped, "flat out, in fact! Look at the boiler!"

He pointed to a brass plaque attached to the boiler; Werner had to crane his neck forward to read the grime-covered gauge.

"Do you see that? What's it say?" the seadog asked sarcastically, a cloud of foul-smelling tobacco smoke engulfing them in the close confines of the wheelhouse-cum-boiler room.

"Is that French?" Werner asked.

"You're fuckin' right! This is a piece of French shit, built in Le Havre. God only knows how she landed up in our hands. If I push her any harder she will start to behave like a French tart: trying very hard not to give you what you want! You have to treat her gently if you are to get anywhere with her, if you know what I mean. She is already close to working herself to death."

Werner quietly wondered when the old man had last had a piece of French tart, or whether he could even remember what that must have been like. However, he seemed to understand the complexity of the piece of machinery before them. That was something to be grateful for. He looked at the old mariner. He wore a uniform of sorts. God knows when it was last cleaned, and the front was spattered with the remnants of many past meals. Over this,

he wore some sort of pea jacket.

“I understand,” Werner said. “How fast are we going?”

“About six knots, but I could give you eight for a short period if you really fuckin’ needed it,” von Moelkte said, exposing a few tobacco-stained teeth as he broke into a grin for the first time.

For a moment, Werner thought he saw the man’s eyes twinkle. Christ! Was he looking forward to his own Götterdämmerung, a last encounter on the high seas before he died?

As the mist dispersed and the sun came out, an awning was hastily erected over the forward deck to provide shade. The wind had come up and the boat was ploughing through a fair chop which occasionally threw a spray of seawater over the bow. Most now frequented the gunwales, their stomachs desperately trying to rid themselves of their contents.

By nightfall the fog appeared again, making everything damp and unpleasant; the soldiers huddled under their blankets as they slept on the deck.

The boat steamed abeam of Sandwich Bay at about two o’clock in the morning. The steady thump of the steam engine suddenly wound down and then stopped, the only sound the lap of waves against the hull and the faint hiss of steam. All navigational lights were doused. Far in the distance, towards the east, they could hear the boom of surf, its sound a constant warning that to approach spelt disaster; this was a treacherous and unforgiving coastline and graveyard to many a ship.

The three officers approached von Moelkte in the stern.

“The bastard never sleeps! Just being near him is an ordeal,” Louis whispered. He found the captain abhorrent, always swearing, burping and farting. Werner just smiled.

“Gentlemen, we are about three miles off the coast,” von Moelkte said.

“Unless you have something particular in mind, this is the best place to be, way out here. This coast is too damn dangerous.”

“Captain, if we remain here,” Werner said, “dos Santos is bound to see us. We need to take the boat into the lagoon.”

The captain looked at the three men and sucked on his pipe which made a disgusting sound as the air bubbled through the accumulated spittle.

“Cristo!” Louis quietly said, wrinkling his nose.

“What did the wop say?” the sea captain asked.

“Nothing. It was just a general remark,” Werner lied. “You know, something in Portuguese. Can you take us in?”

An awkward silence followed.

“Only during the day and then also only at high tide. That’ll be around ten. That’s if the mist has cleared by then.”

Jurgen said: “Okay, let’s do it. Dos Santos can’t be far off. Like us, he’ll have no alternative but to approach during the day and at high tide.”

The captain allowed the boat to drift, the Benguela Current slowly taking it north, its movement assisted by the south westerly swell. Around nine o’clock they got underway, the mist still present but already showing the first signs of breaking up. As they neared the coast, the sea’s mood subtly changed as the bottom shoaled; the boat was now in the grip of a ground swell. To the east they could see the dunes and, to their surprise, a swath of reeds surrounding the lagoon on the landward side where the dunes swept down directly into the water. Here the water from the Kuiseb River was forced underground; its passage barred by 50 miles of row upon row of high sand dunes. From underground, the water seeped into the lagoon, displacing the sea and creating an oasis.

Jurgen had told them that the place was not entirely deserted. Years ago, a few stragglers from some Strandloper tribe – beachcombers of Hottentot

descent – had settled here, finding the place perfect as fish, small game and abundant waterfowl supplied them with ample food. The lagoon was naturally protected, access made near impossible by land other than by a narrow causeway between water and dune only visible only at low tide. Few ventured into the lagoon from the sea as this required a special boat with a shallow draught and a more than fair degree of seamanship.

As they neared the coast they could clearly see the entrance to the lagoon. The tide had just changed and the sea was starting to flow through the mouth. As it rushed over the sandbar it created a barrier of small waves continuously cresting and breaking.

“We need to be damn careful here,” von Moelkte said. “We could easily be swamped.”

With that, he opened one of the many valves that protruded from the boiler. The thumping of the steam engine took on a more urgent note, the deck vibrating beneath their feet. The boat suddenly showed a surprising burst of speed, a white bone firmly clenched between its teeth as it sped towards the turbulent water discoloured by the sand and agitated by the action of the waves over the shallow sandbank.

The calmness was an illusion. As they neared the sandbar the waves seemed to grow in height. The captain’s remarks now began to take on a different meaning. He was at the helm, his pipe clenched firmly between his teeth, his concentration focused.

The boat did not quite match the speed of the incoming waves. As they entered the mouth a following wave rapidly developed a towering crest and threatened menacingly, raising the stern of the boat. The boat could easily broach, slewing it sideways, spilling all into the water, not to mention that any water cascading over the unprotected rear of the boiler could also have explosive results.

“Lieber Gott! This is bloody dangerous,” Jurgen said, hanging onto to a shroud as the boat speeded up, propelled forward by the advancing wave. The captain was proving to be an expert after all; he handled the boat masterfully, keeping her stern up against the racing wave and sliding before it into the calmer inner waters of the lagoon where the mass of moving water seemed to lose its momentum, the towering waves well behind them.

Louis extracted a large bandanna from a pocket and mopped his brow. “Whew!” he said. “You know, I think I’m actually beginning to like the old man, even if he does stink and fart. All he has to do is keep me from swimming in the sea.”

Jurgen insisted on knowing what Louis had just said. Werner translated; both men then doubled up with laughter, much of it out of sheer relief.

The captain forced the boat stern-first into the large bank of reeds along the lagoon’s edge on the landward side, the boat forcing the tall green stalks aside until the boat was invisible from a distance. This activity disturbed a swarm of insects which now buzzed around the men and crew who swatted wildly trying to keep them away. Eventually, the insects settled down but not before they had bitten or stung.

The captain busied himself overseeing the operation of the boiler which continuously belched black smoke. Not knowing when dos Santos would make his appearance, it was crucial that they maintain full steam pressure on the boiler so that they would immediately be underway if required. However, smoke would be a definite giveaway. The stokers had to ensure the coal in the boiler never smouldered, only slowly adding coal to the fire, so removing any trace of smoke.

Another concern was the whereabouts of the contingent of Hereros who were supposed to receive the weapons once they were landed. They doubted whether dos Santos would come ashore with the guns before the recipients

arrived. The operation had to have been well orchestrated; messages had to pass between the gunrunners and the rebels, a rendezvous had to be arranged, and payments made. How was this done? There had to be some undercover group within the colony, an organisation whose people were not even remotely considered subversive. Major Zietzmann had touched on the subject but had not elaborated. He had merely said that he would ensure that a detachment of troopers was deployed in the desert on the southern borders of Walvis Bay, the small British enclave about 40 miles south of Swakopmund. This was part of the British Cape Colony, the only natural harbour along the coast, which had served as a whaling station and had access to fresh water. The British had annexed this ten-mile by 50-mile, seemingly useless stretch of desert with little opposition from the Germans, and had no other presence in the area. The Germans were free to travel as they wished. A German military force camped on the borders of Walvis Bay would not concern the British as long as it did not cross the Walvis Bay border.

Werner felt frustrated. Somebody had to be receiving the weapons. Where were they? It was possible that the German military detachment might have intercepted them, but that would be contrary to the plan. The commander of the detachment encamped on the border of Walvis Bay had been warned not to make contact with any rebel groups until meeting up with Jurgen’s party. The idea had been to deal with the recipients after they had received the weapons from the gunrunners.

During the night, the fog slowly moved in from the sea. When they awoke the next morning, the boat was fog-bound and the men not able to see more than three or four yards in front of them. Not a breath of wind stirred the air; it was deathly quiet, except for the distant sound of the constant surf.

Dos Santos was expected today. If he were to enter the lagoon, it would be later in the morning, when the tide was at its highest. Jurgen ensured that his

troops were ready; they checked their weapons and laid out their ammunition. The three men assigned as gun crew readied the howitzer. They had been placed under the command of Louis who was qualified to handle similar pieces of artillery. Louis had told Jurgen that he'd spent a few months with the Portuguese army's artillery school. They had only brought 20 rounds of ammunition, as this was considered sufficient. Now all they could do was wait.

Within a few hours, the fog had cleared completely and the sky now crystal-clear.

"A sail!" the lookout cried.

The three military officers crowded into the bow, standing on the gunwales to look over the reeds. A sailing ship appeared beyond the spit of land to the north, about three miles offshore. Wisps of smoke could be seen from a small funnel visible through the masts. Jurgen peered through his binoculars. He could see men on deck. Already the sails were coming down, the ship now making way under steam. Abeam of the lagoon entrance she turned sharply to port, heading straight for the entrance. The ship resembled a Dutch barge, about 45ft long and wide at the beam, with a shallow draught. For stability under sail, she was fitted with two huge leeboards, one on each side of the hull, that could be lowered into the water to function as a keel to minimise any sideways drift. No flag fluttered from her stern.

Werner actually smelled von Moelkte before he saw him, and he turned to find the captain next to him, his pipe clamped between his teeth. They all peered over the reeds at the approaching barge.

"I'm surprised," von Moelkte said. "That's a fuckin' channel barge. You'll find them in Holland; there aren't many of them around here. The only other place I've seen these is in the Congo, particularly around the river mouth. The Portuguese use these in Cabinda and on the Congo River. No doubt,

that’s where he acquired it.”

“Can he outrun us?” Werner asked.

“You’re damn right he can,” the captain answered. “Those boats are fast, what with their shallow draft and huge sails. Steam-assisted, she’ll have a good turn of speed.”

“Damn! We must stay hidden and hope he gets close to us. This is the deepest part of the lagoon, up against the dunes. Let’s hope that this is where he proposes to anchor.”

With the wind close on her stern and the steam engine running the sailing ship cut through the water, riding the waves as they had, and swiftly entered the still water of the natural harbour. As predicted, the boat headed for the deepest part of the lagoon.

“If we let them get too near to us, they’ll see us,” Jurgen whispered. “I’ll have the men open fire once she is in close range.”

Werner nodded.

The barge slowly crept forward, seemingly headed straight for the tugboat hidden in the reeds. The gun crew had swivelled the howitzer around on its pedestal until it was pointed at the barge, it no more than 400 yards distant when Jurgen gave the order for the cutter to break out of the reeds. Von Moelkte opened the steam gate valves, the propeller churned the water at the stern, and the boat surged forward, its bow bursting out of the reeds.

Everyone heard the shouts of surprise as the barge crew saw the tugboat.

“Fire!” Jurgen shouted.

Louis yanked the lanyard. With a roar the cannon belched smoke, a shudder passing through the ship as it absorbed the shock of the recoil. Immediately the breech was slammed open and the spent shell ejected, clattering to the deck. A massive fountain of water erupted just ahead of the barge, which was steaming straight for them. Already the crew had the next shell in the breech.

The barge frantically swung to port, exposing her starboard side. Suddenly, a hinged part of the gunwale dropped down.

“For Christ’s sake! Get down! Down! That’s a machine gun!” Jurgen shouted the binoculars still glued to his eyes.

Werner could’ve kicked himself – a bloody Maxim machine gun. That or a French Madsen would’ve been perfect and not all that difficult to come by. Zietzmann had not arranged anything like that. He probably thought the howitzer enough. That dos Santos could acquire a machine gun had never entered his mind.

The crew and troopers immediately dropped to the deck, but the machine gun was already chattering loudly, wood splinters and ricochets flying in all directions as part of the gunwale disintegrated. One of the gun crew lay writhing on the deck, shot in the stomach. Jurgen rushed forward to help the remaining gunner again aim the heavy weapon, dropping to the deck every time the machine-gunner walked the spray of the Maxim’s bullets towards the gun, the fusillades tearing the rest of the tugboat’s gunwales to shreds. Fortunately, the hull plates withstood the deadly onslaught.

A few seconds later, the big gun roared again. The shell exploded on the hull of the barge, shattering the thick planking and blasting a huge hole in the barge’s hull large enough for a man to walk through. The explosion had also torn the wheelhouse apart, shredding the planking, and the shattered remnants had been blown high into the air, falling into the lagoon with multiple splashes. The Maxim gun crew had not avoided the blast; flying shrapnel decimated them.

A jagged cry of success broke out amongst the surviving tugboat crew.

“God knows where the man got a Maxim machine gun!” Jurgen said. “Watch out, he has a new gun crew!” Jurgen warned the others as dos Santos’s rebels took up position behind the machine gun.

Again, the lagoon reverberated with its deadly chatter, the men on the cutter again dropping flat on the deck. The fusillade passed overhead like a swarm of angry bees. Clearly, dos Santos' new gun crew had still to master the Maxim.

Von Moelkte lay flat on the aft deck, keeping an eye on the boiler. He had stuck a long pole into the rudder post that protruded vertically from the stern, and this pole now pointed forward, allowing him to steer the cutter while still prone. Amazingly, he still had his pipe clenched in his mouth.

"You damn better do something soon about that fuckin' barge!" the old sea dog shouted.

"Can you ram her?" Werner shouted.

"I can bloody well try! Get your men away from the bow."

Von Moelkte strained the last vestiges of power from the steam engine. The deck shivered from the vibration of the overstressed engine. The barge stood broadside to the cutter, its engine stopped by the first hit from the cannon. The machine gun continued to rake the deck, fortunately its aim erratic. Suddenly, the water below the barge's stern swirled violently as the propeller thrust the boat forward, the helmsman desperately trying to bring the barge to starboard.

Werner never understood how Jurgen had managed it, but somehow the cannon had been reloaded under intense fire from the barge. Now it roared again. Fired at point-blank range, the shell tore into the innards of the barge and exploded, opening the hull below the waterline enabling Werner to see daylight, the hull literally bored through. The barge immediately began to list.

However, the cannon was not going to fire another shot; the enormous recoil had torn it from its mountings, and the howitzer, still attached to its gun platform, was now lying on the deck, the temporary deck plates ripped

from the boat's structure. Miraculously, Jurgen had escaped injury and was sitting spread-eagled on the deck where he had been tossed. The trooper who had helped man the gun had not been so lucky. The cannon had struck him full force as its pedestal toppled, pinning him to the deck. Louis was nowhere to be seen.

The barge was now no more than a splintered wreck, but unbelievably it still floated. Von Moelkte continued to steer the cutter towards it, rapidly closing the remaining distance. Doing nearly ten knots, the cutter's bow ploughed into the barge, nearly cutting the weakened vessel in half. The barge's stern started sinking, and those members of the crew still alive jumped overboard and desperately swam towards the shore about 200 yards away. Jurgen's troopers opened fire with their rifles, spouts of water erupting around the swimmers.

"Cease fire! Damn you, I said cease fire!" an agitated Jurgen shouted.

"Let them kill the bastards!" Von Moelkte yelled loudly from the stern.

Jurgen swung round to look at the old man who lifted himself from the deck, his pipe still clenched in his teeth. The tugboat's engine had stopped, the boiler loudly hissing steam. The two stokers lay crumpled on the deck, not moving.

"Cease fire!" Jurgen yelled again and then shouted furiously at von Moelkte, "we don't shoot unarmed men swimming in the water."

"They're fuckin' gunrunners! You must shoot them!"

"Sorry, I can't."

The old mariner shook his head in disbelief. "What kind of fuckin' soldiers are you?"

He stomped off to join Werner, who had moved to the bow to inspect the damage. It would take a while to extract the cutter's bow from the barge's hull which now held them trapped.

Louis reappeared. Werner watched as the swimmers reached the shore. Only six men; he thought that perhaps one of them was a woman. He also thought he recognised the huge bulk of dos Santos as the enemy thrashed their way through the reeds and climbed the dune. The troopers on the tugboat opened fire again but they were out of range. Soon dos Santos and his men disappeared over the crest of the dune.

They could do little. Half of Jurgen's troop was down, all struck by machine-gun fire. The tugboat's deck was a scene of carnage, the deck slippery with the blood pooling on the deck planks in places. Eight men had lost their lives and five more were wounded.

"Can we get underway again?" Werner asked the sea captain.

"I think so," he said. "Damage seems to be superficial, but I must do an inspection."

"Please do it immediately. Where's Louis?"

"Over here!"

Werner heard a shout and turned towards its source.

Louis stood on the forward deck of the Dutch barge. He beckoned Werner to join him. The bow of the cutter was still stuck in the hull of the barge. With little difficulty, he hauled himself up onto the forward deck of the sailing barge. If the cutter was in a bad way, the barge was worse. The cannon had wreaked havoc, and dead and wounded Blacks covered the decks above the water on the sinking bow section of the barge. There was also as dead White. Werner was amazed to see three cases of rifles, the same cases he thought he had seen in dos Santos's storehouse, still lashed to the deck. There had to be more.

"Are you all right?" Werner asked Louis.

"Cristo, I don't know how we survived that," Louis said. "That Maxim was a surprise. Where on earth did they get that?"

“Probably part of a consignment originally intended for the Boers,” Werner said. “Some enterprising Portuguese official in Mozambique probably sold it with the rifles.”

“Rest assured; I will get to the bottom of this. Some Portuguese officials don’t know what awaits them,” Louis said, shaking his head, his jaw clenched.

Werner paused and looked at the cases. “Where are the rest of the cases?”

Louis turned his thumb downwards. “At the bottom of the lagoon.”

“Well, that’s good. They’ll be useless in a few days, even if wrapped in grease. The water will see to that.”

“What are we going to do with these cases?” Louis asked.

“Let them sink with the bow when we back off from the cutter . We can’t transfer them, they’re too heavy.”

Louis nodded in agreement.

“Kapitän, can you get our boat off the barge?” Werner shouted.

“Get aboard, I’ll do it now,” the old mariner replied.

“What about the wounded?” Louis exclaimed, pointing at the wounded men on the barge.

Jurgen stood on the foredeck of the cutter, looking at the two men; he understood Louis’ concern, even though he did not understand his words. He said nothing; he just shook his head. None misunderstood the intentions.

The two men were shocked but clambered back aboard the cutter. Von Moelkte selected a lever that projected from the deck, pulled it back, and then opened a steam-valve. Initially, nothing happened, the steam engine churning the water round the boat; but then, with a cracking and grinding of timbers, the bow of the cutter broke free from the barge. No longer buoyed by the cutter, the barge slowly began to sink. The lagoon was quite shallow, and although the two sections of the barge now lay on the mud, the top of its mast

still protruded above the surface. Debris floated around the wreck, slowly drifting on the ebb tide towards the breakers that demarcated the lagoon's sea entrance.

Louis stared at Werner. "What's wrong?" he asked defensively.

Werner just shrugged his shoulders, deciding to say nothing, although he could hardly control his anger. The bastard, dos Santos, had gotten away again.

Jurgen ordered the captain to take the boat ashore. The sooner he contacted the small German force near Walvis Bay, the sooner his wounded would receive medical attention.

"Where the hell are the Hereros?" a worried Werner asked.

"Pray God they don't arrive now. That'll just finish us off," Jurgen replied, just as concerned.

"Somebody has to be in the vicinity to receive the arms shipment," Werner said. Somewhere out there in the sand and dunes lurked a rebel detachment, awaiting the arrival of the barge.

Jurgen asked: "Any suggestions?"

CHAPTER 18

Speaking to Werner in Portuguese, Louis volunteered to take a few men and establish a lookout post on the crest of the highest dune. Jurgen considered this an excellent idea. Armed with sufficient water and some cans of food, they slowly climbed to the top of the nearest high dune. Louis had been correct, they could see for a good few miles in all directions. Peering through his binoculars, he thought he could see the encampment of the Schutztruppe detachment on the borders of the Walvis Bay enclave to the north. He also caught a glimpse of the runner they had sent out, who seemed to be making good time through the dunes.

He had to admire dos Santos's planning. The Germans had not considered Sandwich Bay as an ideal location through which to smuggle contraband cargo. The sand dunes barred all wagons; the soft sand and steep inclines created a formidable barrier. He could only imagine that the Hereros would arrive with pack animals, breaking open the crated rifles and distributing the rifles on packhorses. A sense of foreboding haunted him. He knew the Hereros were not far away. Why they had not yet appeared was inexplicable – something was about to happen.

He swung round to look out to sea and recoiled with shock. About mile off the mouth of the lagoon, a warship lay at anchor! The Imperial German ensign fluttered on the stern. His binoculars swept the vessel from stern to bow. He saw the guns on her fore and aft decks and the three tall funnels emitting smoke. From her size he thought the warship to be a frigate. He trained the glasses on the bow of the ship and could just make out the name: SS *Leipzig*. He was astounded. Where had the ship come from? Major

Zietzmann had told them that the imperial navy had no ships in this area. As he watched, three large boats were being lowered. From their size he thought one of these had to be a cutter, smoke already pouring from the small funnel on its stern. He made a quick decision. Speaking in Ovambo, Louis told one of the men to stay while the other accompanied him. Using long strides, they half slid, half ran down the steep side of the dune.

He saw Werner turn and notice him and the Askari descending the dune in long strides. He pointed out to sea and then made a wave-like motion with his hand, moving it horizontally from right to left, indicating a ship sailing on the water. He again followed this with an arm pointed out to sea. Werner was at first bewildered, but then caught on. He started to climb the dune.

They met a few hundred feet up the seaward slope of the dune. Werner stopped and looked out to sea. The boats were now in the water and were already en route to the lagoon entrance; two boats were towed by the cutter, the funnel belching smoke, the boats fully laden with naval troops, their rifles clearly visible.

“Donnerwetter! Where on earth did they come from?” Werner exclaimed.

Louis stared at him. Werner quickly repeated himself in Portuguese.

“I thought you said your navy had no warships in this part of the world?” Louis said.

“Well, that’s what Zietzmann said. It appears he was wrong.”

“Thank God,” an elated Louis replied. “These chaps are just in time. I was getting extremely worried; the Hereros have to be around here somewhere.”

Both men watched the cutter navigate the turbulent and dangerous entrance to the lagoon. The two trailing boats had put out oars and used them to assist the cutter through the breaking waves and stop the boats from broaching. The sailors knew what they were doing; other than a good soaking, they passed through the surf without incident. Nothing unusual for navy boys, Werner

thought.

The bows of three boats ground into the shallows of the lagoon; the troops immediately leapt into the water and came ashore, led by a uniformed officer complete with cocked hat and sword. He clicked his heels and saluted Jurgen.

"Leutnant Dorfling of the SS *Leipzig*," he announced stiffly. "Fregattenkapitän Schneider sends his compliments and asks whether you require any assistance."

"Assistance?" an astonished Jurgen replied. "My God sir, you come at a most fortunate moment. I have wounded who need urgent medical attention."

Quickly, the men loaded the wounded onto the naval cutter, to be taken to the frigate and to return to do another trip. Jurgen took the opportunity to fill in the naval lieutenant.

"Lieutnant, I'm concerned that the Hereros could soon be upon us. The rifles lie at the bottom of the lagoon, but they do not know this and no doubt think dos Santos awaits them. They must be well on their way here to collect them," Jurgen concluded.

By agreement, the naval lieutenant dispatched the bulk of his men to the top of the dunes where Louis' lone Askari still maintained a lookout. Two groups of four men were sent along both sides of the lagoon shore to take up station about a half-mile from where the boats were beached, to protect the causeway.

By evening, no enemy force had made an appearance. The cutter had returned with blankets and provisions. An encroaching fog bank had left the Fregattenkapitän no option but to take his ship out to sea; it was no longer visible. None thought it likely that the Hereros would arrive or attack at night. Nonetheless, Jurgen considered it prudent to post sentries around the camp, and a lookout was continued from the top of the dunes. The men slept in their blankets on the beach.

CHAPTER 19

Werner awoke. His eyelids were heavy with small droplets of dew. A thick grey blanket of mist hung over the mirror-smooth surface of the lagoon, restricting vision to no more than 100 yards. Unable to see the crest of the dunes, he threw back his blankets and shook out his boots to rid them of any scorpions. Being an officer, he endeavoured always to present a picture of neatness and decorum, and automatically hitched up his jodhpurs and pulled down his tunic. However, on closer inspection he decided not to bother; it was pointless. His uniform, no longer blue grey, was blackened from the cannon's cordite flashes and the cutter's coal dust. His tailor-made tunic had been torn in several places, and his left knee poked through a hole in his jodhpurs. His hands and face were dark with grime and blood. At the water's edge, he scooped up handfuls of water to wash. The water was brackish, but it certainly could be drunk. He expected seawater and was amazed that fresh water could push its way through this colossal barrier of dunes and then seep into the lagoon.

"Morning," he heard someone say. "You look bloody awful."

He turned to see who it was.

Jurgen stood behind him, his hands on his hips, looking down at him.

Werner laughed. Jurgen had obviously washed his face, but now it was in stark contrast to the rest of him.

"If only Dorothea could see you now!" Jurgen joked, his eyes crinkled as he flashed Werner a friendly smile.

"Don't start that crap," Werner replied. "I've already had enough from Louis. He just won't leave me in peace."

“Hmmm, touchy this morning,” Jurgen muttered.

Werner ignored him.

“Come on, let’s see what our navy guys have for us to eat,” Jurgen said and then called the two batmen, Philippe and Paulo, who were busy lighting a fire using some driftwood they’d collected.

“Paulo, wake that Portuguese captain of yours.” Jurgen turned to Werner. “Christ! Just look at him! That bloody Portuguese can sleep anywhere.”

Jurgen was right. Louis looked more like a beggar than an officer – his face still sported black smears, his uniform was filthy and torn, his hands were dirty, and a foot that stuck out from below the grey blanket revealed a large toe poking out of a hole in his thick socks.

The three officers did their best to clean themselves. The two batmen, Paulo and Philippe, brought basins of slightly brackish water from the lagoon, and with soap garnered from others they lathered themselves and then had the servants pour buckets of water over them.

A sailor on board the frigate’s cutter was handing out sandwiches of rye bread with smoked sausage, and they joined the queue of men waiting to be served. The sailors had put together a few makeshift benches. The naval lieutenant and von Moelkte occupied one of these, drinking their coffee. Werner and Jurgen joined them.

“Fine morning, yes?” the old sea dog said, the ever-present pipe in his mouth. He too was a picture of soot and grime. Clearly, he had not attempted to clean himself up. “The Lieutenant tells me that they will help me get the cutter out to sea. That old tub rolls like a bitch. She was never designed for the open sea, but after her performance in the lagoon, well, she deserves a little loving care and should return to Swakopmund.”

“I concur,” Werner said. “She certainly did give a good account of herself.”

“Well, it seems we have to wait; the frigate will not appear before noon –

she'll wait until the mist lifts. Any news from our runner?" Jurgen asked.

Before anyone could reply, a sailor sprinted up to the officers.

"Sir, a detachment of cavalry approach from the north along the beach; they are Schutztruppe."

"Thank you. Come, gentlemen, let's meet our reinforcements," Jurgen said, clearly pleased at the news.

About 60 horsemen approached, mostly Schutztruppe with a few Askaris. Werner soon realised that the horses had not been properly watered for a while. If the captain had proposed to make a spectacular entrance, the horses stole the show as they strained against their reins to get to the fresh water. The captain relented, giving his horse its head, and soon the animals were lined up along the shore, drinking their fill.

"I have seen no sign of the Hereros," the captain said, saluting Jurgen smartly, "although an intelligence report mentioned a large force of mounted Hereros who broke through the Khomas Hochland and descended the plateau in the region of the Naukluft."

Werner looked quizzically at Jurgen.

Jurgen responded: "The Naukluft? Well, that's a canyon cut through the mountains as the river makes its way to the sea. The river then disappears into the desert, about 90 miles from Sandwich Bay."

"We think it is this band that proposed to intercept the rifle shipment," the captain explained.

Werner wondered how long dos Santos and his surviving crew would last. The group had little or no water, no food, and certainly were not equipped to undertake any trip into the desert. However, they had been unable to mount any pursuit, and dos Santos had now disappeared.

Suddenly there was shouting from the lookouts at the top of the dune. Jurgen waved to the newly arrived captain and the naval lieutenant, and with

Werner, they quickly climbed to see what had attracted their attention. From where the sea had broken through the sandbar, the lagoon lay parallel to the coast, ridges of sand 20ft or so high separating it from the sea. The lagoon was less than a mile wide at its widest. On the opposite side, it was hemmed in by the sand dunes, their steep slopes virtually disappearing straight into the water, leaving only a narrow causeway. The lagoon was a long body of water, it no more than a fathom or two deep but at least 10-15 miles long, separated from the sea by this narrow strip of beach.

Facing south, Jurgen trained his binoculars on the strip of land. The large column of horsemen approaching was immediately identified as Hereros.

“Where the hell did they come from? They’ve had to come from inland another way; they couldn’t come through these dunes from that direction,” Jurgen exclaimed.

“Well, it doesn’t matter now, they’re here,” the Schutztruppe captain retorted resignedly. “It will be difficult for them to mount any sort of attack. The dunes are too steep. This is like Thermopylae – a small band of men could hold out against all-comers. The causeway is too narrow.”

“They have seen us!” the naval lieutenant shouted.

The column had reined their horses in, and some were dismounting, their rifles in hand, giving their riderless horses over to be led to the rear. A few ineffectual shots rang out, but the troops were still hopelessly out of range of the Hereros’ rifles.

Werner still had his binoculars glued to his eyes.

“Christ!” he said, not lowering his binoculars, “I think I can see that bastard dos Santos.”

Louis had also arrived and moved in next to Werner.

Taking the glasses, he peered through them.

“The bastard!” Louis spat in Portuguese. “It’s him all right. And would you

believe it, he has his bloody woman with him. The man's insane, bringing his woman with him from Huambo! Who brings a woman on a trip like this? She probably was on the barge with him – we just didn't see her. The bastard should be dead!"

The Hereros began to dig mounds into the sand, taking shelter behind these as the troops advanced along the causeway towards them.

"This is going to be a stand-off. We're going to sit here all day, exchanging fire and getting nowhere. Is there no way around them?" Werner asked.

"No, the dunes are too steep for the horses, and if we try it on foot, they'll pick us off like targets as in shooting gallery," Jurgen replied.

"I've an idea," the naval lieutenant said with a sly grin on his face. "I suggest we engage them with return rifle fire. I'll also put a few men with rifles in the cutter and have them approach from the west. Meanwhile, we signal the *Leipzig* to open fire with her turret guns." He pointed to the top of the dune. "We can act as an observation post from up there, directing fire. Those are 3-inch and 5.5-inch shells – that'll scare the shit out of them."

"And how do you propose to signal the *Leipzig*?" Jurgen asked.

"Look." The naval lieutenant pointed to the top of the dune. The officers could just see a sailor standing, legs apart, with a small flag in each hand.

"That's navy semaphore!" Werner blurted out. He had not thought of using this ingenious method of communication

"Sounds good to me," Jurgen smiled. "When's the *Leipzig* due back in?"

The lieutenant shrugged his shoulders, spreading his hands.

"So, meanwhile what should we do, just fire at each other?"

"I suppose so."

The Hereros and the troops were now returning desultory fire, both the naval and Schutztruppe troops having dug in behind their own heaps of sand. The distance between the two was about 400 yards, close enough to ensure

that all kept their heads down.

The officers returned to the boats near the shore. Another sailor with a flag in each hand was jerking his arms at intervals, communicating with the top of the dune.

“They have detected the *Leipzig* steaming towards us,” the naval lieutenant volunteered, watching the man at the top of the dune. “She’s seen the Hereros and is now turning broadside to the shore.”

“Get her to fire a shot at them.”

A flurry of signals followed, and few minutes later there was a low whistle as a shell arched over the lagoon and embedded itself deep in the sand along the ridge of dunes and exploded, throwing a mass of sand and dust high into the sky. Immediately the horizon turned pink. The shallow lagoon and its mudflats was a source of food and home to thousands of seafowl, pelicans and other seabirds, but mainly flamingos. Another flurry of signals followed, but this shell was at least 300 yards off-target. It erupted in the lagoon far from the concentration of Hereros on the shoreline, an enormous fountain of water and mud bursting into the sky. The last of the flamingos took to the sky. Although short, it was clear that the second shell fell too near for comfort and there much consternation amongst the Hereros. Again, they heard the incoming whistle. This time the shell drove itself into the mud at the water’s edge, just yards from the enemy prone behind their defence embankments. Its explosion flung sand, men and equipment in all directions. These were armour-piercing shells which penetrated deep into the mud before exploding, with spectacular results.

Jurgen was still in command of all Schutztruppe forces, outranking the officer who commanded the reinforcement force. They galloped the mounted troopers down the causeway, past those still prone on the ground, and charged into the scattered enemy, shooting and slashing at those desperately

trying to flee along the causeway. Louis had found a horse among the reinforcements and had joined the impromptu charge. Those Hereros whose horses had not bolted remounted and fled from the charging troopers. The German troopers did not follow, certain they would ride into a deadly barrage of rifle fire. Those Hereros still on foot scrambled for their lives, some frantically climbing the steep incline of the dunes and disappearing over the top, others running into the shallow waters of the lagoon. Again the forward turret of the *Leipzig* belched flame and smoke from beyond the lagoon shore. The shells exploded amongst the fleeing Hereros, giving them further impetus to flee the skirmish. When the enemy had all disappeared, the troopers broke off the attack and returned.

Louis was grinning as he met Werner and Philippe, still flushed with the excitement of the battle and their victory.

“Merda! It was good to be on the winning side again,” he said in Portuguese as Philippe grabbed his horse’s reins and he dismounted, a bloodied sabre in his hand. “We must have dispatched at least 50 of them, and the ship’s cannons killed still more.”

“Did you see dos Santos?” Werner asked. Louis shook his head.

“Damn, the bastard’s got away again! Are we never going to catch him?”

Louis grabbed him by the arm. “We will, I just know we will. He’s on the run now – a worried man. He knows he’s a target, and knows we are not about to give up. I wouldn’t want to be in his shoes.”

“Christ! And he has that woman of his with him, or so it seems. That definitely complicates matters.”

“Don’t you worry about that,” Louis declared a mischievous smile on his face. “Leave her to me; anyway, from what I’ve seen you don’t know how to handle women.”

Werner glared at him for a moment and then smiled. Nobody would have

ever guessed that his friend was a senior officer in the Portuguese colonial forces. He resembled a filthy vagrant, his uniform hardly noticeable. His chin and cheeks wore a few days of stubble; he was filthy; his face and hands scratched and covered with dried scabs; his shirt and trousers torn; and his boots in places scuffed to raw leather.

Werner chuckled, imaging a picture of Louis as he now was, making a romantic approach. “Fuck you,” he said smiling and walked off.

Louis’s loud laugh rang out behind him.

CHAPTER 20

Jurgen decided that the officer commanding the reinforcements should remain behind with a few men to attend to the less wounded and return to Swakopmund on the cutter. Jurgen, Werner and Louis would mount a pursuit, taking those horses that no longer had riders.

For three days, they urged their horses on and were now on the outskirts of the desert where it met the escarpment. Here the mounted column swung north; the precipices, steep slopes and gullies of the steep gradient that rose to the top of the plateau 2000-ft above them dominated their view. On the western horizon they could still vaguely distinguish the start of the dune-sea from which they had emerged.

They had departed Sandwich Bay with a troop of nearly 40 men. The three officers believed that the gunrunner would try to make for Angola and must travel north to avoid contact with civilian militia or troops. The route they had chosen was desolate and uninhabited. If they were seen, those who saw them would present no threat. By the time they could alert the towns with garrisons and military outposts many miles away, dos Santos would be long gone.

Crossing the sea of sand had been a gruelling ordeal for Werner’s group. The wind blew relentlessly, never seeming to abate. They struggled through the desert in a near continual dust storm with bandannas tied over their mouths and noses. Knowing the desert, the men had made certain they carried enough water, but Werner was alarmed to see how much water horse and man required in these conditions. They barely made it to the first natural well at the foot of the escarpment.

The scouts inspected the ashes of the recent campfires around the water hole. They guessed that dos Santos and his men could be no more than a day ahead, his group estimated to be near 100 strong.

Their small group was exhausted. Jurgen decided to call a halt and rest up for a day, confident that dos Santos would soon have to do the same and would not get too far ahead.

Some enterprising karakul farmer who had long since deserted this region had erected a windmill in a slight depression. Driven by the wind, its spinning metal vanes glinting in the sunlight, the windmill still pumped a steady trickle of water into an excavation dug into the ground which served as a reservoir. This was the only water for miles and it attracted game and fowl of every description. Desert quail, their warble ringing across the desert floor, swooped down to the water in the thousands, as did black-necked ringed doves. Scores of guinea fowl dashed out of the scrub to quell their thirst, ever alert to danger. Herds of gemsbok lingered nearby, their long straight horns and black and white faces unmistakable. These desert oryx did not need to drink water. They acquired the moisture they need from the roots and bulbs they graze on, but would still visit a nearby waterhole if water was available. The springbok herds also numbered in the thousands; Werner estimated one herd to be more than 10,000 strong. He marvelled at nature’s ability to provide for such numbers in this wild, sun-scorched region. The evenings were cool, becoming near freezing in the early morning. Once the sun rose, the temperature rapidly rose again. By then, it was already blistering hot. Any exposed skin soon burned an angry red, and a hat was essential if heatstroke was to be avoided.

The long shallow depression brought the underground water table nearer to the surface. The close proximity of water, although underground, sustained a band of vegetation almost a kilometre long, composed mostly of thorn bush

and trees with dry desert grass in between. The men dismounted and hobbled their horses, all seeking shade under the umbrella of the larger trees. The scene was dwarfed by the sheer immensity of the plateau to the east, its rockface towering thousands of feet above the campsite.

Werner collapsed on the bare ground, lying back on the sand, his arms pillowing his head, his campaign hat over his face.

It was tacitly accepted that Jurgen, who had spent a few years in the colony, would know how to out-think the enemy and anticipate their moves. He joined Werner on the ground.

“As you can see, dos Santos now runs north towards Angola,” Jurgen said. “He has to avoid the Schutztruppe. Between us here and where I imagine he probably is now, there is a strong troop presence. Most of the conflict is still in this northern region.”

He paused for a moment.

“I think dos Santos will split his men, sending them north and northwest to draw attention away from him. He must realise we are after him. Of course, we don’t know how many men he will keep with him, but I think he’ll keep his group small, no more than 20-30. That’ll enable him to move faster. If I were him, I’d probably choose a route passing west of Usakos, going on to Omaruru, which I would detour round on the west side, then Outjo, and finally into Ovamboland. I’d cross the border where we last encountered his wagons. But it’s the rainy season now; he’ll only be able to cross the river where it is fordable. There are only a few places where you can do that.”

Werner pushed his hat back to reply. “Makes sense. Should we reduce the size of our detachment to pursue him, and take additional horses so we can increase our pace?”

“Sounds good. Once we’re near to Usakos, I’ll send most men to the garrison in town, but will retain only a small number, the best of them.

However, we'll keep all the horses. Those troops going to Usakos will have to march the last few miles."

Werner dozed off, to be awakened by Jurgen laughing loudly.

"Just look at that! Your Portuguese friend has the right idea."

Louis had stripped off his clothing. His body was pale in the harsh sun except for his face, neck, and hands; they tanned to a dark bronze. Ignoring the stares and chuckles of the black Askaris, he waded until waist-deep into the muddy reservoir, ignoring the green algae floating on its surface.

Somebody shouted from the shade: "Watch out that catfish doesn't take that worm of yours for bait!"

Loud guffaws followed from the assembled Blacks, who found humour in the simplest of things. Louis turned his back on the whistles and catcalls.

"Fuckin' Portuguese wop," Werner murmured. "Serves the bastard right. The idiot thinks he's God's gift to women and says I don't know what to do with them."

"What's that comment all about?" Jurgen asked.

"You don't want to know."

"Well, from what I see out there," Jurgen chuckled, "he seems to be quite formidable. He just might have a point!"

"Christ, another fuckin' idiot," Werner said, heaving himself up from the ground, leaving Jurgen sniggering behind him.

*

As they had anticipated, dos Santos' group broke up and scattered; they were unable to establish which splinter group contained dos Santos. The groups had not split off at the same time but broke away one group at as time at 30-mile intervals. The number of troops in the Schutztruppe contingent was too small; they could not follow each splinter group.

To continue the pursuit was pointless without knowing where dos Santos

was. Jurgen and his men rode north until nearly 40 miles west of Omaruru, a town located on the narrow-gauge railroad that ran north to Tsumeb, the same rail line on which they had previously travelled south when accompanying the wounded to Windhuk.

Now, convinced that dos Santos would attempt to cross the northern border into Angola, they decided to break off pursuit and head for Omaruru. From there they could contact Major Zietzmann. Not all had been in vain; the Hereros had not taken delivery of the consignment of rifles smuggled in through Sandwich Bay, and these now lay at the bottom of the lagoon. At least, the major had to be pleased about that.

In Omaruru, they found billet with the local military garrison, which numbered a few hundred men. Cables were immediately sent to Windhuk, advising Zietzmann of the latest developments. While they awaited further orders, Werner persuaded the local quartermaster to part with an officer's uniform. It was not a perfect fit but still made him presentable. Louis spent a few hours in the small village and returned in new clothes from head to foot, quite the gentleman. A shave and trimmed hair had helped the transformation.

Notwithstanding their backgrounds and colour, over the weeks the bond between Werner and Philippe had developed into an extraordinary friendship, a unique situation in this fiercely segregated country. Werner had a deep respect for Philippe, in particular, for his dedication to his duties; no matter how menial the task, he willingly did it. His loyalty never wavered and his unflinching bravery was exceptional. He was awed by Philippe's bush skills. The black man found his way with ease through this still unexplored country that was not even properly mapped. He possessed an uncanny ability to track man or beast and to find water in the desert in places that he had never visited before.

Similarly, it was clear to Werner that any disdain that Philippe may have occasionally displayed when told to do this or that, or when his advice was ignored, had long since been forgotten. He realised that he had finally won Philippe's respect and this was not because he happened to be a European and a soldier. Werner had never ignored the black man's advice, but had always carefully listened. If forced not to heed the man's advice, he would endeavour to give reasons for his decisions. Werner always ensured that he displayed compassion and an acceptable degree of fairness. When they rode into a kraal, he showed proper deference to the local headman and would not summarily assume authority; he did nothing without permission and was always grateful for any help the locals rendered. He accepted that they were of different cultures and were men of different taste, but where possible, Werner always shared whatever special prize he may find, be this food or liquor. But what was of more importance was that Philippe and he trusted each other. He believed that this was what had saved their lives at times.

Werner and Louis sat down to lunch in the officers' mess, Louis resplendent in his new clothes and Werner in a new Schutztruppe uniform, his epaulettes displaying his new captain's rank.

"Werner, in town this morning I found a small trading store belonging to a Portuguese family which has lived here for some years," Louis began. "You can't imagine how surprised I was, to find Portuguese settlers in this town – at least somebody I could speak to! And I've just recalled something that is bothering me. The storekeeper said that I was the second Portuguese person who had come into his shop during the last week. He said he never sees any Portuguese. I wonder whether this could be dos Santos."

Werner's fork hovered over his plate. "Did you ask him any questions? Like, was he alone or did he give a name or say where the man was from?"

"Quite frankly, at the time, I was so busy I didn't think of it," Louis replied.

Werner suddenly shoved his chair back. “Come on, let’s go.”

“Cristo, I haven’t even eaten!”

“Let’s go to that shop!” Werner said, his mounting excitement evident.

They trotted their horses through the dusty streets and dismounted in front of the trading store. Being past midday, it was now closed. Everything closed for lunch in the colony. A pathway connected the store to the back of the house next door. The two men walked down a cobbled path, flanked on both sides with flowers of all description and in full bloom. Somebody was an ardent gardener, Werner thought. Probably the wife. On their knock, the door immediately opened.

Werner stood back, hoping his uniform and rank were not intimidating.

They doffed their hats “Good day. An ill-timed intrusion, I know,” Louis apologised, “but my friend here has a few important questions. We are assisting the German authorities on behalf of the Portuguese government on a matter of the utmost importance.”

The trader did not ask them in but merely stood in the door, his expression neutral.

“When I visited your shop earlier, you mentioned I was your second visit from a Portuguese person recently,” Louis began.

“Yes, Senhor?” the trader replied, his face now apprehensive.

“Can you describe this man?”

“Certainly, I won’t easily forget him. He was exceptionally big, tanned by the sun. He had recently hurt himself – I remember his arm was bandaged and he had scratches on his face.” With his arms outstretched, the trader indicated a huge gut. “He had an enormous stomach.”

Louis looked at Werner, who asked: “Was he alone?”

“No, he had a woman with him. A mulatto. Very beautiful,” the trader said, his hands indicating a curvaceous body.

“Did he say anything else?”

“Well, being Portuguese, obviously we talked. He said he was hoping to start a trading business here. He asked me many questions. He said he had injured himself falling from his horse. Cristo! He was so big; it must have been a hard fall.” The trader smiled at his own joke. “He said he was going north.”

“Did he say how he was travelling?”

“No, I assumed by train.”

“Did the woman say anything?” Louis asked.

“No, she seemed afraid of him. My wife tried to speak to her while she bought a few things, but she said very little.”

The officers realised that man had little more to add. “Thank you very much, Senhor, you’ve been a great help. We apologise for disturbing your lunch.”

“Is everything all right?”

“Don’t worry, it’s fine, you’ve been a great help,” Louis repeated.

Lifting their hats, they said good-bye and left, leaving a somewhat bewildered trader on the porch.

“It’s him, I just know it,” Werner blurted out once they were out of earshot.

“I agree. Do you think he is going north by train?”

“I don’t know. Let’s go to the station.”

The stationmaster and his staff had taken off for lunch, as no train was expected before five that afternoon. On the platform they found a hawker who sold beer. He said the officials would be back at three. They asked the vendor if he could recall a fat Portuguese man who may have bought a few bottles of beer from him while waiting for the previous train going north. The vendor merely stared at him, shaking his head. Still, Werner was convinced that dos Santos must have boarded the train. With little else to do, they

bought a few beers and then sat on a bench in the shade of the platform canopy, drinking them as they waited for the stationmaster.

Promptly at three, the stationmaster arrived. He recalled the Portuguese gentleman, who had had difficulty making himself understood, and also remembered that the man mentioned that he wanted to return to Angola and that had bought two tickets on the northbound train to Tsumeb for that purpose.

They rode back to the barracks and sought out Jurgen.

“We’ve got to get on this evening’s train,” Werner said. “There is no time for cables. The commander has to allow us use of the phone so we can immediately contact Major Zietzmann.”

Initially, the garrison commander was reluctant as the phone was a new installation available for use by district commanders alone, but eventually relented. After an endless delay, they got Zietzmann on the line. The connection was faint.

“We need your permission to board a train to Tsumeb with the troops,” Werner shouted after updating the major on the latest developments.

“Of course,” agreed Zietzmann. “I will telegraph orders to the garrison commander at Tsumeb and Ondongua. He will ensure that you are provided with everything required to mount a pursuit operation.”

Within an hour, the cable had arrived from Windhuk, ordering their immediate departure by train to Tsumeb. The men scrambled, mobilising rapidly. Men and horses were already on the platform when the northbound train arrived that evening. The local garrison commander had supplied fresh horses and new riding tack, weapons, food and first aid supplies for the nine of them – the three white men, Philippe, Paulo, and four of the Askaris who had accompanied them from Sandwich Bay.

No one knew how many men had accompanied dos Santos. The bookings

clerk recalled that others had also bought tickets for the train and space for horses on boxcars on that day, but he could not recall how many. However, he did mention that he was surprised that Blacks had bought space for animals on the train, as Blacks did not often own horses and never used the train to transport them.

"Well, we don't quite know how many, but it seems we are up against at least ten of them," Jurgen commented as they boarded the train.

"Don't worry," Werner said, "this time we are going to make sure we get this bastard – dead or alive. I have no compunction whatsoever if it comes to killing him, even if in cold blood."

His desire for revenge was overpowering.

"What do you think dos Santos is planning to do from Tsumeb?" he asked Louis in Portuguese. "What route will he take to Angola?"

"The eastern and central part of the border is too dangerous for him," Louis replied. "He'll go west: probably first to Ondongua and then to the mission. Everybody around here knows about the mission station. Anyway, that's the way I would go."

"Philippe?" Werner asked, keen to hear what his friend had to say.

"The Capitano is right. He must make for the mission if he intends to go west," the black man murmured.

"Can we catch him?"

"No, I don't think so; he's got a head start. He'll get to the mission before us," Louis said resignedly.

Werner found himself thinking of Dorothea and their brief but intensely passionate moment on the train when he had been so aware of her. He knew he wanted to see her again, and it seemed fate wanted them to be together. He was concerned for Dorothea and the others at the mission. He knew that dos Santos and his companions were ruthless and would think nothing of harming

those at the mission.

CHAPTER 21

The train arrived in Tsumeb in the early morning. Dos Santos had indeed been there and left. His group of black riders had drawn some attention but aroused no suspicions, even though they had bought supplies and additional horses. The Kunahama uprising in Angola was a concern to the inhabitants of northern SudwestAfrika, as many believed this could spark a similar revolt amongst the Ovambo tribe. Under the circumstances, dos Santos's departure with an escort was not unusual in view of the situation in the two countries. Clearly, the man required protection, as did his wares.

Major Graf zu Dohner's reception was cool and his attitude abrupt and condescending. Once again, Major Zietzmann had chosen to mount a pursuit operation in his district without requesting his assistance. He felt slighted and annoyed, but he had no choice but to accept the situation. After all, Zietzmann's authority came directly from the Military High Command of the colony. His previous complaints had been ignored and he was not about to make a fool of himself again.

They saddled up and left before daybreak the next morning.

Following dos Santos' tracks, they saw he had chosen to bypass Ondongua. He purposely avoided the main trail that headed westward and towards the Finnish mission, cutting a new route through the bush. Jurgen had guessed that this was what the gunrunner would do and hoped this would slow him down; he and his men had often before been forced to hack a virgin path through the bush and knew how difficult and time-consuming this was.

They pushed their horses hard, hoping to make the mission before sunset.

They halted about a mile from the mission, thirsty and exhausted. The sun

had sunk below the horizon and darkness was rapidly approaching.

Jurgen called the men together. “I think we should send Philippe forward to see what’s going on. Agreed?”

“Yes, good idea,” Werner replied. “He should blend in and won’t raise any suspicions, that is if dos Santos is even there.”

Louis seemed to follow the gist of the conversation. “He’s there, of that I’m sure. This is the last water. I remember this from when we brought you through on the travois.”

Philippe quickly removed his clothing and produced a gobas, a soft-leather loincloth of two squares of soft leather worn by all male Ovambos. Both squares hung from a leather thong around his waist, one covering his pelvis and groin and the other his buttocks and upper thighs. When he added a leather-braided necklace, he was transformed; he now appeared no different from other local Ovambo males they had seen.

Philippe handed Werner his rifle. “Please, look after this for me,” he said. “Ovambos don’t have rifles.” He produced a spear with a flourish, his face breaking into a huge grin flashing white teeth. “In the dark, this is better.”

The African danced from foot to foot, tossing the spear from hand to hand.

“Where the hell did you get that from?” Werner asked.

Philippe’s face changed to an expression of mock remorse. “I was forced to borrow it from one of those men in the last village we passed through.”

“He bloody stole it! The bastard’s enjoying this! Christ! I wouldn’t want to run into him on a dark night!” Jurgen blurted incredulously. “He’s going out there on his own and thinks it’s fun. Christ, he doesn’t seem to understand he could get killed!”

CHAPTER 22

Following the wagon tracks and not attempting to conceal himself, Philippe jogged towards the mission in the receding twilight. He hoped that no one would ask who he was. A few of mission residents knew him and particularly, two women; he would need to proceed with caution and not blatantly reveal himself. He needed to avoid being recognised or being greeted by an acquaintance, drawing attention to himself. He definitely needed to avoid women whom he had promised he would return.

As he neared the settlement, he slowed to a walk and then strode boldly into the compound but kept to the dark away from the fires. Several people were still about, the women busy around their cooking pots which hung on tripods over fires outside their huts, their men seated on small benches smoking and talking, and the children playing in the dust within the light of the fires. He closely examined the people, trying to recognise any of dos Santos's group. He ignored those dressed similarly to him; dos Santos's men would be properly clothed. He saw no one in the village that appeared suspicious.

A large fire was burning near the corral, surrounded by several people with cooking pots, also hanging from tripods. As he neared he saw they were dressed in civilian clothes. They certainly were not locals; this could only be dos Santos and his men. He melted into the background, into the deepest shadows where the firelight would not illuminate him.

Philippe carefully scrutinised each one. Although he expected to find dos Santos, when he actually did spot him he involuntarily drew in his breath with an audible hiss. The man was seated on a large log, using his fingers to pick food from a plate on his lap. To his left sat the same woman he had seen

at the trading store in Huambo. Assuming that all his men were here, the gunrunner's small group totalled ten men, plus dos Santos and the woman. Their horses were corralled in a small makeshift boma nearby. He guessed that the boma had to contain 20 or more horses. With that many spare horses, it was evident the man planned to travel fast – very fast. Werner and his men would find it difficult to keep up; they did not have that many spare mounts.

The men in the group were speaking amongst themselves, and Philippe could clearly understand the Herero dialect they spoke. Above the murmur of their voices, he suddenly heard dos Santos. The man's voice was loud and demanding, and as Philippe listened intently it became more strident. He carefully looked towards the fire and saw the silhouette of the large man standing over his mulatto woman, waving his arms and shouting. They were speaking in Portuguese. Suddenly, the gunrunner lifted his hand and slapped the woman across the mouth. She fell to the ground. Dos Santos towered over her, silent, glaring at her as if he dared her to either speak or rise.

Philippe did not know what to make of the altercation. Was this an exception or a common occurrence? With Portuguese colonists, you never knew: their interaction with one another was often volatile and sometimes quite explosive.

Slowly he backtracked, slinking from the group towards the mission building where he silently entered the dark courtyard, careful to remain in the shadows and hugging the building walls. Light filtered through the curtains of a few rooms. He peered through a window, the curtains of which had not been properly drawn, and saw the missionaries standing behind their chairs which surrounded a large rectangular dining table over which hung two large paraffin lanterns. The bright light illuminated the room where the occupants were about to start dinner, each standing behind a chair.

"Was machst DU denn hier?"

He froze at the sound of the female voice behind him. He had his back to the junction of the veranda and the building wall and slowly turned round. She stood in the shadow of the porch where there was little light, he not able to see her clearly. Slowly, she moved forward until she stood against the porch railing where she was in the last light of the day. He knew it was the woman doctor who attended to his master when last here.

“I recognise you,” she said. “You are Lieutenant von Dewitz’s servant, aren’t you?”

He nodded and then raised a finger to his lips.

Her voice was barely more than a whisper: “What are you doing here? Is he also here?”

Again, he nodded his head. She looked round the forecourt as if she expected to see Werner. Before she could say anything further, he pointed towards the east, a finger still at his lips. He then slowly backed off until he disappeared into the dark.

CHAPTER 23

Dorothea was bewildered, unable to grasp the necessity for secrecy and stealth or why the black man had so hastily left. She could still picture the Lieutenant, his slightly aquiline nose, his strong hands, and the light-brown hair on his arms and chest which had shimmered in the light when she first saw him on the examination table. He had looked dreadful, still racked by fever, clearly dehydrated, his face a sickly pallor.

The black man had indicated that the Lieutenant was nearby; why had they not approached the mission? And why was his servant suddenly wearing only a loincloth?

“Dokter!” The pastor impatiently called her to dinner. As she entered the dining room, she saw that all the others were standing behind their chairs, patiently waiting so that they could say grace. The pastor gave her a reproachful look, and she apologised.

“What delayed you?” he pastor asked. “Is anything wrong? I see you didn’t attend the evening prayers.”

“No, no, nothing’s wrong – I was just delayed. I’m sorry.” she replied but realised that she must appear flustered.

It was amazing what news of this man could do to her. She kept finding her thoughts drifting off to focus on him. Lately, he had become an important part of her life; she found herself longing to see him again, to feel his touch. At night in bed, whenever she thought of him it was as if some fire deep in her innards had ignited; her physical need for him was becoming overpowering. The feeling was exhilarating, but also frightening. Suddenly now, he was back!

She couldn’t wait for supper to finish. She wanted to go outdoors and find out what was happening.

CHAPTER 24

The three men listened attentively to Philippe's report on the camp.

"We can't attack the camp – innocent people could get killed," Werner argued, concerned for the missionaries' safety but primarily that of Dorothea. "There's only one thing to do. We have to ambush dos Santos when they leave for the border."

Louis slapped his thigh and turned away in disgust.

"What's wrong?" Werner demanded.

"The man will get away. I know him! But we've no alternative; if we cannot attack tonight, then we must do so at least by tomorrow morning. We'll have to scout around the mission and set ourselves up on the other side, at least a few miles away from the mission," he replied. Werner realised his friend was concerned at the delay.

Werner translated for Jurgen.

"He's right, Werner; we've to get ahead of them tonight," Jurgen said.

"It'll take us until tomorrow morning to get into position. We'll get no sleep."

Jurgen shrugged his shoulders. "Can't be helped. Okay, I've decided. Let's go," he said, getting to his feet. Werner laughed, looking at the Portuguese captain. He then turned to Jurgen. "The bastard wants to get this over with just because he wants to get home."

Jurgen nodded. "I don't blame the Capitano – I want to go home as well."

With Philippe and a scout leading the way, they led their horses through the bush, keeping well away from the mission, not wanting any sound, in particular a neigh from the horses, to alert dos Santos and his men. They

knew the enemy must be nervous as they were still deep in German territory. They were bound to have placed sentries around their camp.

The first signs of dawn were visible when they stumbled on the trail leading west which dos Santos and his men would need to travel to cross the border into Angola. This area was an extension of the semi-desert that dissected much of southern Africa, a floodplain that was completely flat. Amazingly, there were no rocks at all, only sand. During the summer season, the run-off from the rains would accumulate in the vast shallow Etosha Pan, a massive shallow lake for most of the year, and in the dry-season a white, windblown dustbowl but home to hundreds of thousands of African wild animals of every description. The surrounding bush, while not impenetrable, was dense, with large camel-thorn trees every 50-60 yards, and smaller mopani trees and brush in between. Jurgen ordered the men to take up ambush positions on both sides of the trail, using whatever bush, trees and ant heaps they could find as cover.

Jurgen expected dos Santos to have scouts reconnoitring ahead of his group, primarily to avoid accidentally running into a military patrol. He proposed that they intercept these lookouts and eliminate them, hopefully, without raising any alarm. Philippe was to remain dressed as a local in his loincloth. All he had to do was draw the attention of the scout, enabling the Askaris to approach stealthily from where they were hidden and silence them. Usually, scouts moved a good half-mile in front of a mounted troop, and it would take dos Santos a short while before he caught up, by which time Jurgen’s men would have returned to their ambush positions. A simple plan, Werner thought, though risky.

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Philippe ran on ahead so that he could approach from the west, as if he were walking towards the mission. He concentrated on coordinating his approach

so that he would meet the scouts where his comrades were already hidden in the bush. Timing was crucial.

Although the sun was still to appear, the early dawn light already suffused the surrounding bush. Philippe saw the first scout emerge on the trail in the distance, his horse approaching at a slow trot. He broke from the bush where he had been hiding and walked leisurely down the wagon tracks. No other scout could be seen. The scout had a rifle in one hand, its butt resting on his boot in the stirrup, the barrel pointing skywards. As was the custom, Philippe raised his hand in greeting and followed this with a few words of Ovambo. The scout reined in. Philippe kept walking as if he would pass the scout on his left.

“Stop!” the scout shouted, lowering his rifle and pointing it casually at Philippe who immediately stopped and waited for the man on horseback to speak.

“What were you doing in the bush? Why were you hiding?” the man demanded in Ovambo.

“I wasn’t hiding. I was having a shit. What’s it to you?” Philippe replied with an obvious show of indignation, hoping to imply he had every right to be there and not be questioned.

“Are there any others with you?”

“No, I don’t take a shit where there are others,” Philippe said cheekily pretending that the rifle did not scare him, with every right to be here.

Suddenly, another black rider burst from the bush.

“What’s going on? I heard voices,” he asked. The first rider explained, pointing at Philippe. The new arrival visibly relaxed, seeing no danger in a single individual.

“Where have you just come from?” he asked.

Philippe pointed vaguely towards the northwest.

“Have you seen any German soldiers?”

Philippe did not immediately reply, pretending to give the matter serious thought. He saw two of his black comrades emerge from the bush behind the two riders. They had stripped to the waist and were clutching short stabbing spears. They slowly crept up behind the two mounted scouts. Philippe continued to distract the riders.

“What are you doing here with rifles?” he asked belligerently. “You are not supposed to have rifles.”

The second rider laughed loudly. “Who are you to ask?” he demanded, pointing the barrel of his rifle at Philippe’s chest.

The two Askaris had crept up close to the horses. One gave a signal. They spurted forward, covering the last five yards in an instant, lashing both horses on the flanks with the their spears. Surprised, the horses leapt forward, catching off-guard their riders who were trying to turn round in their saddles. As the first horse bore down on him, Philippe lunged upwards with his stabbing spear, the forward motion of the horse driving the spear into the man’s chest below his ribcage, the metal tip penetrating his lungs and heart. There followed a shrill death cry as the rider toppled from his saddle, the now rider-less horse bolting westwards along the trail.

A shot rang out. The Askari grabbed the other horseman by his clothing and dragged him from the saddle just as the horse lunged forward. Somehow, the rider managed to fire his rifle. He fell to the ground with a loud thump. Immediately, the Askaris plunged their spears into the man’s chest.

The sound of the shot was sure to travel a considerable distance and would alert dos Santos.

Philippe and his two accomplices melted back into the bush. Werner and his men remained hidden, hoping that it would be thought that the two black horsemen had been killed by locals. They didn’t have long to wait.

Dos Santos' men rapidly approached, their horses trailing a cloud of red dust. They reigned in at the sight of their fallen comrades. Clearly alarmed, they quickly formed a circle to cover all sides, staring into the dense bush.

"Fire!" Jurgen shouted. All heard it.

At near point-blank range, the fusillade of shots found their targets. Men dropped from their saddles and horses reared up. It all ended in seconds. Those who struggled to their feet were stabbed to death with the short spears. No quarter was given: the eyes of the Askaris were wide with a killing madness. Werner had yet to get used to the madness that seemed to overcome the Blacks when on a killing spree.

"Cristo!" Werner exclaimed loudly.

The dead men represented about half dos Santos's force. Dos Santos and his woman were not amongst them. They must have remained behind, awaiting the return of the recon group. What would he now do.?

"He won't attack. He doesn't know our strength," Werner said, reading Jurgen's mind.

"I know. I think we should attack immediately while we still have him off balance and in the open," Jurgen said.

All remained silent.

"Okay, that's my decision." Jurgen spun round and shouted at the men: "Everybody mount up, we're going after them, right now."

They ran to their horses and swung into the saddles, checked their weapons and galloped back east along the trail towards dos Santos. Stealth was no longer important.

They had ridden no further than half a mile down the trail when a shot rang out and a bullet hit an Askari high in the shoulder. The men reined in and dropped from their horses, desperately looking for cover. Fortunately, the Askari only had a flesh wound and was still mobile, holding his shoulder

while blood flowed from between his fingers. Dos Santos's men had taken up a defensive position along the track, but an untimely errant shot from a nervous adversary had destroyed their element of surprise.

"I can see men on horses returning to the mission," Louis said to Werner in a subdued voice. "What's going on?"

"Did you see dos Santos?" Werner asked.

"No, but I definitely saw a woman," Louis replied. "It has to be that Maria woman of his; maybe he was in front and I couldn't see him."

"How many?"

"Three or four, I think. That means they've left some men between the mission and us. If we go back, we'll have to fight our way through. Cristo, what a cock-up!" Louis groaned.

"We have to go after him," Werner insisted.

Jurgen spun round to face Werner, his voice rising. "And how do you propose we deal with this rearguard unit he's left?"

"Without dos Santos to lead them and with us back in German uniform on German territory – what would you do if you were they?" Werner asked.

"Run and avoid a fight."

"Exactly," Werner replied. "They know we don't give a shit about them and that we're after their boss. They're no longer interested in his fight, especially if they think they're not going to see him again."

Jurgen remained silent, contemplating their predicament.

"Well, Jurgen, what are we going to do?" Werner asked impatiently.

"We are going to give them the opportunity to leave peacefully," Jurgen replied.

"You're crazy!" Werner riposted.

Jurgen ignored him. He took a white shirt from Philippe and ordered an Askari conversant in Herero to accompany him. They rode forward about 100

yards, Jurgen waving the shirt. He then stopped and waited. About a minute later, a rider emerged from the bush, also waving a white cloth. The three riders slowly advanced on one another until they were a few metres apart. They spoke for a few minutes, and then Jurgen and the guerrilla wheeled their horses round and returned to their groups.

"Well?" Werner demanded.

"We gave them free passage, provided they leave immediately for Angola and never return. They accepted."

Werner's surprise registered on his face. "You're going to let them go? And dos Santos?"

"They refused to answer any questions. They're terrified of dos Santos."

Werner had no idea what dos Santos would do once he got back to the mission. He knew there would be no negotiating with the man. He was anxious for Dorothea's safety; he knew the gunrunner was ruthless.

Jurgen turned to Philippe. "You're going to have to pretend to be an Ovambo again. Go and find out what's going on at the mission. Just be careful; don't get too near."

Philippe returned in the early evening, by which time the three white men were sure something dire had befallen their friend.

"Where the hell have you been all this time?" Werner berated him.

Philippe looked at his master disdainfully, not accustomed to being spoken to in this manner.

"I was being very careful," he said. "I don't want to die. That man dos Santos is there. He has the nurses and the white doctor on the veranda. He has guns pointed at the women. The rest of his men – I saw three in total – are guarding the mission perimeter. I'm sure that if we try anything, he'll kill the women."

All were silent while they contemplated what they should next do.

“Philippe, make sure the rest of the men have their uniforms on again. We’re going back to the mission,” Jurgen finally said. He then addressed his companions. “We’re going back, and we’ll decide what to do when we get there. And Werner, please don’t try any heroics. Okay?”

Werner nodded. He remained silent. The gunrunner had to be outsmarted, but now he was holding Dorothea hostage. He could hardly contain his rage. The man knew that by holding the women hostage, they would not dare mount an attack. Werner knew that dos Santos would not leave the guarding of the women to his men: the hostages represented his ace card – his ticket to Angola.

“Werner, you know we’re going to have to let him go; we don’t have a choice. He’s got us by the bolas,” Louis said quietly, as if aware of what thoughts raced through his friend’s mind. “Let him go to Angola; once there, he’ll let the women go. Why should he hold them? He does not believe the German army will follow.”

“For God’s sake, Louis! I have to free her!” Werner replied in an anguished voice.

“I know and I understand your feelings, my friend, but let’s do this intelligently. Let’s talk about it. I hate the bastard as much as you do. And you know I would never allow him to harm those women. But we need to be realistic.”

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They lay prone in the dust, resting on their elbows behind a large fallen tree trunk and staring intently at the collection of buildings that was the mission. Jurgen had the binoculars glued to his eyes as he slowly swept the mission from left to right, identifying dos Santos’s perimeter guards who had not attempted to hide themselves. Through a gap in the buildings he could see into the forecourt. There was no mistaking do Santos. He was seated with

another of his men on the veranda, their guns trained on the missionaries lined up on benches opposite them. Dorothea sat next to the pastor.

The group of Schutztruppe marines led by Jurgen had arrived at the outskirts of the mission some time ago, but crawling to get nearer without detection had taken a while. This was a stalemate situation – they dare not open fire and the enemy knew it.

Suddenly dos Santos stepped down from the porch, pushing Dorothea and the pastor in front of him, a pistol at their backs.

“Can you hear me?” he shouted in Portuguese while he walked towards the gap in the buildings. He stopped in the expanse of open ground outside the small complex, making sure his two hostages stood in front of him, shielding him from any trigger-happy soldier.

Jurgen lifted a hand. “For God’s sake, don’t shoot.”

The gunrunner shouted again.

“He wants to talk,” Werner spat, translating for Jurgen.

“One of us should go forward,” Jurgen said. “I doubt whether he knows you are in the group. He probably believes he was intercepted by a normal German patrol at Sandwich Bay, which then called for reinforcements. It hasn’t even crossed his mind that you and Louis are involved here. Let me go forward and speak to him.”

“You don’t understand Portuguese,” Werner replied.

“One of my men knows the language, enough to make him understood. I’ll take him.”

Unarmed, Jurgen slowly approached the man standing in the dust, the woman in front of him.

Werner watched through his binoculars. He noticed that dos Santos’s arm was still heavily bandaged. At least the bastard hasn’t gotten away unscathed, he thought. The huge man looked haggard; the long journey through the

desert on horseback had taken its toll, but evidently, he was still nowhere near capitulating.

Dorothea looked at Jurgen, terrified but showing a brave face. “Are you all right?” he asked her in German.

Dos Santos shouted something in Portuguese.

Jurgen raised his hands palms out, indicating that he did not understand.

Jurgen’s eyes never left dos Santos; he watched intently as the gunrunner spoke to the Askari at his side, who translated for him.

“He says that if you let him ride on, he will take only the women with him, who he will release once inside Angola. He will allow one of your Askaris to ride with him; the man must be unarmed, and he will leave the women in his care to lead them back to the border,” the Askari said.

Jurgen realised that he had no choice but to agree. If he did not, it could lead to a gunfight with the women caught in the middle. He was terrified that dos Santos would shoot them as he had threatened to do. He’d have to agree – dos Santos controlled all the options. He nodded. The gunrunner would be allowed to leave before daybreak. The troops would keep their distance.

Throughout the night, the truce was maintained. As the first sign of dawn appeared on the horizon, dos Santos and his men rode out as Werner and the others watched from a distance, powerless to stop him. During the night Werner had finally persuaded Jurgen to let the troops cross the unmarked border into Angola, if only for a few miles. Once dos Santos was a few miles ahead, they mounted up and followed. It was only late the next day that the gunrunner crossed into Angola.

Surprisingly, dos Santos had kept his word and left the women encamped under a huge baobab tree, a few miles within Angolan territory. He had added a surprise – he had abandoned Maria and left her along with the Finnish nurses and Dorothea. The men rode into the camp and found the four women

seated around a campfire with the Askari who had accompanied dos Santos seated on the ground nearby.

CHAPTER 25

Dorothea's eyes were round as she watched Werner ride in. She had not expected to see him here. Shakily, she slowly climbed to her feet as he dismounted and approached her.

"Are you all right?" he asked, taking her hand as if he could not resist having some physical contact with her. She ached for him to take her in his arms.

"I'm okay," she replied, holding onto his hand.

Relief slowly replaced Maria's initial shock. She had not fared well. Her face was swollen, her lower lip cut; her clothes were torn and dirty and her hair stiff and thick with dirt. It was obvious she had been beaten. Louis spoke to her in Portuguese, trying to comfort her. Tears of relief streamed down her cheeks.

Werner watched and loudly vowed. "I swear I'll deal with that gunrunner, no matter what it takes."

It pleased Dorothea when she heard that it was decided that they would stay the night at the camp, giving the women a chance to rest before returning to the mission. To pursue dos Santos was out of the question: this was Kunahama territory; the country was embroiled in civil war; and their force was too small to deal with any attack. Fortunately, the Kunahamas seldom ventured so far south.

At first light, they returned to the border, riding slowly and resting frequently as Maria was in pain from the beatings she had taken and the other women were saddle-sore, unaccustomed to riding long distances on horseback.

Dorothea stayed close to the officers and overheard them discussing their next moves. Jurgen was adamant that once they arrived at the mission and the women were in safe hands again, the trio should head back to Windhuk. Any incursion into Angola was out of the question. This was Portuguese sovereign territory, which had to be respected. A German military incursion in force was impossible.

"What I don't understand," said Werner, "is your attitude, Louis, – or rather your government's attitude – towards dos Santos. I've known you for a while now. You have long harboured suspicions, serious suspicions I gather, that dos Santos is masterminding a gunrunning operation. You already believed so before we met. Why the hell didn't you people do something about it?"

Louis did not reply but merely stared straight ahead.

"What's going on?" Jurgen asked, curious about the terse interchange. Werner translated. "I agree with Werner. Come on, Louis; tell us what's going on. Christ, man! We've been through a lot together. At least tell us. Your government should have nabbed him long ago."

Having listened to the translation, Louis closed his eyes and lifted his hands as if in surrender. "Okay," he sighed. "Yes, a few others and I have known for a while. Unfortunately, my government is corrupt. Or rather, the local provincial government is. And dos Santos enjoys protection from people high up – powerful people. Do you recall meeting Senhor de Mello?" he asked Werner.

"Yes, wasn't he the local judge for the Benguela Province? I met him at that dinner we had the first day I arrived in Benguela."

"That's right. Well, unfortunately he'll ensure that no action is taken against dos Santos. The judge is politically powerful; he's related to the country's governor-general in Luanda – Cristo, he's the governor's brother-in-law!" he blurted, as if to give his statement weight.

Werner listened to the translation. “Now, isn’t that fuckin’ convenient!” he spat.

“Every time we’ve brought some evidence before him and have wanted to arrest the man,” Louis explained, “our efforts have been brushed aside with the comment we have insufficient proof and that we are responding to unfounded rumours.”

“What’s he saying?” Jurgen asked again.

“He’s saying some political bastard is protecting dos Santos.”

“Christ! These dagos are all corrupt,” Jurgen replied exasperatedly.

“Shhhh! Christ! Don’t let him hear that,” Werner retorted, not wanting to offend Louis.

“Hell, he can’t understand me. Anyway, he’s different. He’s a damn good soldier. I would trust him with my life,” Jurgen replied.

“I’m sure he would be glad to hear you say that,” Werner answered, unable to disguise his sarcasm. He regarded his friendship with this Portuguese officer as something special; their trust and reliance had been forged in battle.

“Well, you don’t have to tell him,” Jurgen said, swinging his horse round and riding back to the women a short distance behind them.

“I’m pretty sure dos Santos doesn’t know that we – that is you and I – were involved in the attack on his boat and the pursuit through your country,” Louis continued. “You’ve been in uniform most time and are not distinguishable from the rest of the German military. I believe you could return to Benguela in your original role – the manufacturing representative.”

“I couldn’t get away with that,” Werner said. “Anyway, what happened to me when we were attacked? How did I get out of there alive? Weren’t we all supposed to have been killed by the Kunahamas? He’ll wonder how we managed to survive.”

“Easy. You and I escaped with our servants,” Louis said. “We returned to

Angola together. The more I think about it, the better it sounds. Yes! That's what we should do; we should return together to Benguela, saying we survived the Kunahama attack on the Kunene and fled to SudwestAfrika, returning to Angola by sea. It may be our only chance to get at dos Santos. Really, I think he couldn't give a damn about you or me. He knows I suspect him but realises I can do little without the authority and backing of de Mello."

They chewed awhile on Louis' proposal. Werner was the first to agree.

"It sounds fair to me. If we are wrong, we'll soon find out. Only he will be a lot more wary of you. He may have recognised you, although, as you say, we have always been at a fair distance from him, and then, when near, you were such a mess, your mother wouldn't have recognised you!" Werner said and laughed.

Louis chuckled. "You could be right. Then it's back to Angola by sea as soon as we've returned the women. Am I right?"

Werner nodded.

This saddened Dorothea. She was to lose him again.

CHAPTER 26

Werner stayed close to Dorothea on the ride back, ready to console her after her harrowing experience at the hands of dos Santos. She had withstood the ordeal rather well, showing she was a woman of unusual inner strength and resolve. They avoided any discussion of dos Santos or Werner's plans, instead discussing her life in Germany and her return to SudwestAfrika. He now realised where she had found the courage to study medicine, a profession that was still male dominated and still unkind to women attempting to enter its specialty. He gathered that her father had supported her choice of profession and, in fact, had encouraged it, he being a doctor himself and considered the best surgeon in the country. Clearly, the Eggers family was well-known. A few months ago, all she aspired to was to be a doctor. This had changed, not that she proposed to give up the medical profession, but Werner seemed to have become the centre of her life. Initially, she had seen this as a passing phase, but this was not so, the feeling persisted and, in fact, was now an obsession. Her need for this man seemed to know no bounds.

Werner's father had been a member of the German High Command until his recent retirement. Their family was privileged; they were elitists, rubbing shoulders with the German aristocracy. It would not be true to say that his childhood had been unhappy, but it had been strict; he was raised with a clear distinction between work and play and what was considered done or not done. His parents demanded, as a matter of course, that their sons produce the best standards at school and similarly at military college. In return, they ensured that their children lacked for nothing that was in reach of their

ability, and both young men were accepted as members of the German upper class and in the officer corps. Initially others found Werner to be withdrawn. It was only when he saw someone as a friend that he'd partially emerge from his shell. Dorothea seemed to have the unique ability to loosen those strings that held him so close to this rigid, dogmatic military outlook on life.

They realised that this was no longer a casual acquaintance, but in the brief period they were together, the opportunity never arose to take it further. He desperately wanted to be alone with her, to hold her in his arms and tell her of his feelings towards her. But there was never was an opportunity to be alone; others always seemed to be nearby. For most of the return journey, they rode side by side, slowly succumbing to each other's subtle overtures, the conversations easy and innocuous; but they aware of the flirtatious innuendos.

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For Werner, the ride back with the women had been too quick, and he was torn between wanting to stay or following an already impatient Jurgen back to Windhuk where he knew their presence was demanded. There had not been time to find a place they could be alone. Within hours after their arrival at the Finnish mission, they decided to carry on to Ondongua where they could contact Windhuk.

Maria's presence had created a dilemma. Jurgen finally decided she should accompany them to Windhuk where other arrangements would be made.

In Ondongua they immediately contacted Major Zietzmann who ordered them to Windhuk with all haste. The train journey had been tiring and uneventful, with Werner keeping to himself and leaving it to Louis to take care of Maria, she recovering from the events of the last few days.

CHAPTER 27

The next available ship, which would dock at Lobito and Luanda, would arrive in Swakopmund in four days' time. Major Zietzmann arranged for Werner and Louis to leave by train for the coast a day before.

The authorities had no use for Maria. However, they did not consider it wise to return her to Benguela. At Louis's request, they decided that she should continue with them by ship to Luanda, the capital of the Portuguese colony, where there was little likelihood of her encountering any of dos Santos's acquaintances. Initially she would spend a few weeks with a close aunt who, she said, would be pleased to have her visit for a while. Hopefully by then dos Santos would be either dead or behind bars: retribution was swift for those involved in gun trafficking. The Portuguese dealt as ruthlessly as the Germans with gunrunners – it was either a firing squad or the gallows.

The general idea was to keep their return to Angola low-key. Louis believed that Maria should keep out of the limelight for a while to ensure that dos Santos never learned that she had returned. He was bound to have contacts in Luanda. At first, Maria flatly refused any offer of financial assistance, saying indignantly that she was capable of looking after herself, but then she realised that she would need clothing and other essentials – she had brought little with her.

Maria's spirits were high; she was a caged bird suddenly freed. Unable to speak any language other than Portuguese and some local Angolan Black dialect, she remained close to Werner and Louis. Although still with a few faint bruises from the beatings dos Santos had inflicted, the fear that previously haunted her eyes was gone and her face would split into a smile at

the slightest provocation. From the ample funds Werner had at his disposal, and at Major Zietzmann's insistence, Maria bought a wardrobe of clothes for her trip to Luanda. Major Zietzmann could not disguise his initial dismay when she glided into his office, dressed in the latest fashion from Europe. She was transformed, a smouldering beauty not to be ignored.

"My God, Captain, she is magnificent," the major said, raising his eyebrows, knowing she could not understand German. "Tell her I would be honoured to have the three of you join me as guests for dinner at the Kaiserkrone Hotel this evening. It's Friday; they serve a wonderful meal with excellent beer and wine. There's even dancing."

For a fleeting moment, Werner wondered what Frau Zietzmann would say, should she ever hear of this. The major, accompanied by a woman as beautiful as Maria, would not go unnoticed. The fact that she was a mulatto would just add to the intrigue.

"Fear not, Captain. I'm not married," Zietzmann said, reading Werner's mind.

Caught off-guard, Werner merely smiled. He then translated, omitting the bit regarding the major's marital status. Maria graciously accepted, clearly excited at the prospect of being entertained by these three personable men.

Punctually at eight, they arrived in the foyer of the hotel. The furnishings were opulent, as was the choice of colours, an abundance of red drapes and silk-lined walls, they woven with elaborate designs. The sofas and lounge chairs were upholstered in buttoned red leather, enhancing the atmosphere of luxury. Large chandeliers lit the foyer and through the large double doors, these now folded and retracted into the wall, they could see the guests seated at the tables that surrounded the dance floor. A string quartet on a raised dais played soft music. Nobody danced; it was considered still too early. Werner looked around. The elite of the colony was gathered here.

Major Zietzmann, resplendent in officer's full-dress uniform, had unobtrusively assumed the role of escort to Maria. He presented his arm to her and they entered the dining room, the two junior officers following. Recognising the major, the maitre d' rushed from behind his desk to meet and welcome them, his hands submissively clasped in front of him. A hush descended on the diners as he led them to their table. The two officers weren't quite sure whether it was because of her astounding beauty or that she was coloured, or a combination of both. Her light-brown skin was in definite contrast to that of the rest of the women present who avoided the sun and who, if outdoors, were never without an umbrella.

As they threaded their way through the tables, the major nodded his head in greeting at a few other diners whom he knew. Maria received many an appraising and appreciative glance. She glowed, and the top of her breasts, revealed by the low and wide neckline of her deep-red evening gown, jiggled provocatively with each step. There was no mistaking the mischievous spark in the major's eyes. If it had been his intention to draw attention to himself, he had certainly achieved that. The men could not ignore Maria, nor could their escorts who appeared disconcerted with the attention this strange woman was receiving.

"Major, if I may say, you've created quite a stir here," Werner ventured. "We are receiving more than the usual furtive looks. Would you ascribe this to Maria?"

"Most certainly, this bunch of stuffed shirts occasionally need to be reminded that there is more to life than the aristocracy, money and overplaying the role of gentlemen. They carry this charade to the extreme; what they need is a wilder and more wanton approach that jerks them back to reality. Something like this awakens that primordial spirit that lurks in all of us. Just look at them; this good lady certainly has most thinking with their

peckers. Good female company is not easy to come by in the colonies. Let the bastards eat their hearts out."

Werner laughed, enjoying the major's unexpected candour. "What did he say?" Maria asked.

"Well, he said you are absolutely beautiful and that the rest of the men seem to think so as well. Wait until they start dancing. You won't be short of partners."

She giggled, thoroughly enjoying the attention.

The cuisine was typically German, the choices restricted to pork and beef. There was Eisbein, gammon steaks, sauerbraten and schnitzels, all served with potatoes or spätzle, sauerkraut and an assortment of vegetables. The major took his time, carefully studying the wine list, finally choosing a beaujolais imported from France, no doubt for appearance's sake. Christ, Werner thought, most local colonialists would not know Beaujolais from a Burgundy! The heavy German food was not quite Louis and Maria's fare; nevertheless, they seemed to enjoy the meal.

During dinner, the major purposely ignored the war, steering the conversation to Germany and in particular, Berlin, the city that was his home. He talked about what a beautiful and joyous place it was – the heart of Europe. He expounded on the bustle, the sidewalk cafés and coffee shops, the energy of the incredible industrial transformation the country experienced, and the euphoria that accompanied these economic changes. He would pause after every few sentences to allow Werner to translate. Maria appeared captivated. Werner was not sure whether this was merely put on for the major's benefit or whether she truly was enthralled. Even so, the magic worked and the major was clearly smitten with this beautiful mulatto woman. The many furtive glances she received from other male diners verified that he was not alone.

The first couples had already taken to the floor. When the music ended and the Kapellmeister announced the next dance, the major did not hesitate. He rose from his chair and approached her, bowing from the hip, his intentions obvious. She rose, presenting her hand to him, and he led her on the floor. She stepped into his arms, her left hand resting lightly on his shoulder, her face tucked in between his chin and shoulder, not quite touching. The major was an adept dancer: as a cadet officer, he had dedicated himself to the compulsory dancing lessons that were part of the Offiziersschule curriculum. This now paid dividends. To the tune of a popular Viennese waltz, they glided across the floor, the major clearly enjoying the nearness and scent of the beautiful woman he held in his arms.

Louis said little. He did not have to understand German to know what was going on. “God, I hope he doesn’t ravish her on the dance floor,” he whispered to Werner. “Does he have to stare at those bobbing tits all the time?”

“Don’t be stupid,” Werner hissed. “The major’s a gentleman, and don’t you worry – none here speak Portuguese.”

“Where the hell did you get that from? Major or no major, it should be clear to you that our good Major Zietzmann is enthralled with this woman, and she’s playing him,” Louis retorted.

“That’s what’s wrong with you Mediterranean types: you’re always thinking with your dicks!” Werner heatedly replied.

Louis guffawed. “You ramrod German types, what do you know about women and love? From what I’ve seen, you probably would do yourself a favour if you did the same; the German Fraulein Dokter will not wait forever for you. Of course, you do realise that this woman here has eyes only for you, yet you don’t respond. My friend, the lady doctor is far away; opportunity beckons right here.”

“Don’t start with me!” Werner said scowling, and then looked away, clearly exacerbated.

“Really, I have to say this: you’re such an idiot. Maria only sees you – she’s not interested in the major. But you’re too late, my friend; if you make a move now, the major will strip you of all rank!” Louis laughed a smug expression on his face.

Well, let the major have his fun, Werner reflected. Why should he try to intercede? He had Dorothea – or rather he wished he had. Hell, he had nothing!

The major and Maria returned to the table. She was clearly enjoying herself, flushed with excitement, a dazzling smile on her face. Already a junior officer was approaching their table, no doubt intending to ask her for the next dance.

She did not hesitate, addressing Werner in Portuguese: “Joachim, please dance with me.”

The major realised what she had said and added his support. “Yes, Captain, dance with the lady before she is overwhelmed by the rest of the officers here,” he insisted.

He had no choice, lest he look like a complete idiot. He rose, bowed to her. She smiled and she took his proffered hand. The music was a popular tango it now doing the circuit in Europe. Maria beamed; she said she loved to tango.

She danced superbly, and was aware of his thigh brushing hers as they emulated the exaggerated long steps the tango required.

“Are you sad you don’t have the lady doctor with you tonight?” she teased.

“No, she is nothing to me,” he lied.

“I don’t believe you – something is happening between you two.”

“Unfortunately, there is a war on. Some things are best left forgotten.”

“Well, I’d like to help you forget. I owe you so much. If you had not come

along, I would still be with that brute. You saved me."

"I never saved you."

"Of course you did – you forced him to abandon me. If you had not pursued him, that would not have happened. Let's not argue," she pleaded.

For a while they were silent as they danced across the floor. "Will you escort me back to our lodgings tonight?" she asked.

Werner hesitated. "I think the good major already has that intention."

"I know, but he is not my type. I think I'll develop a terrible headache and insist that you take me home."

This damn woman was creating a predicament. He dared not cause affront to the major. Let's not do anything that seems obvious, he thought; just act naturally. We cannot be confrontational.

She had no lack of admirers and danced with several officers bold enough to approach the major's table. Louis also danced with her, the couple never silent, prattling in Portuguese, giggling and laughing. Werner was uneasy; he hoped he was not the subject of discussion. Recalling Louis's preoccupation with his love life or lack thereof, he could not reject the notion out of hand.

Her performance was superb. They returned to the table, and within minutes her demeanour changed. As another officer approached the table, she let the man understand that she was not well and was about to leave. The major could not disguise his disappointment but insisted that he personally escort her home.

"Tell the major that I'm not well," she instructed Werner. "He does not speak Portuguese – better you escort me back so that if I need help, I can at least converse with you. Tell him I thoroughly enjoyed his company and look forward to seeing him again."

Somewhat reluctantly, the major conceded to her wish, ordering Werner to escort her to her lodgings. "Should her condition worsen, do not hesitate to

seek medical attention and you are to immediately inform me," he told Werner.

Werner and Maria took their leave and walked out of the hotel. They were greeted by a cool evening breeze, a relief after the warm dining room. The terminus for the horse-drawn tramway was directly opposite the hotel, the last tram patiently waiting to depart.

"Let's take the tram," Maria said. "It'll be fun. It stops at our hotel anyway." She gave his arm a squeeze.

The skirts of her gown rustled loudly in the quiet confines of the tram. Besides them, a few of the hotel workers who's late shift had just ended also boarded the tram. They seemed surprised to see a couple in full evening dress also on the tram with ordinary workers.

As the bells of the Lutheran Church of Christ struck eleven, the tram got under way. The carriage was not lit; the only light was from the street lamps and the odd shop window that slowly flitted by. Maria sidled closer to Werner and placed her hand on his thigh. He drew back slightly, acutely aware of her touch and fragrance.

"My God, Captain, don't be so pompous; you need to relax," she whispered.

"I'm fine."

"You're not! You're like an adolescent on his first date," she teased, her fingers resting warmly on his inner thigh. She removed her hand when the conductor approached but promptly replaced it once the man returned to his post on the boarding platform.

He felt a buzz of anticipation, an apprehension of things to come. His senses were heightened. As Zietzmann had said, he was reacting to some primeval instinct hidden deep within the recesses of his mind. Christ, he thought, this woman has no inhibitions. Yes, she clearly was a lady. No

doubt, she was the product of a good Catholic upbringing, educated by nuns, well mannered and endowed with the airs one expects of a former debutante. However, it seemed she had discarded all attempts at pretence – she knew she was in charge and subtly manipulated the situation.

They alighted from the tram opposite the Thuringerhof Hotel where Major Zietzmann had billeted them. The hotel was one of the watering holes of the town, and although it was now late, many patrons, primarily Schutztruppe officers and their women, were still in the lounge. The doors were wide open to allow the small orchestra to be heard. To cater for the conscripts and subalterns, a separate large bar's entrance led directly out on the pavement. Here the atmosphere was less refined and more raucous: the floor was strewn with sawdust and the men were lined up along a long bar with a wide counter, most now inebriated. No self-respecting officer would venture into such a bar.

Werner and Maria walked through the foyer to reception, her arm entwined in his. Even when approaching the concierge, she did not remove her arm. If he read anything into their intimacy, he was too circumspect to reveal anything.

"A drink?" she asked.

"Because of your feigned illness, better not go into in the lounge," he replied.

"In my room then," she said firmly, ordering from a passing waiter.

Her room had a small entrance foyer that led into a larger lounge-cum-bedroom; it was furnished with a couch, two armchairs and a small coffee table. The sleeping area consisted of a large carved wardrobe with mirrored doors and two large beds with ornate wooden headboards tucked up against the opposite wall. The thick red velvet curtains were drawn across the open windows and the noises from the street below barely audible through the

drapes.

A discreet knock on the door heralded the waiter. He placed a bottle of wine and two glasses on the table and surreptitiously pocketed the tip Werner held out to him.

The bottle had already been opened. He poured wine into two glasses.

Werner raised his glass to her. “Prosit,” he said.

She whispered in response and took a sip of her wine, her large green eyes studying him over the rim of her glass. Faintly, he could hear the music below. It was a popular Viennese waltz. She placed her glass on the coffee table and stepped closer to him.

“Why is it that you always reject me when you know how I feel about you?”

“I’m not rejecting you,” he said. “It’s only that I’m not ready for a relationship at the moment.”

“I never intended that we have a relationship, as you put it, but only a … how should I put it … a dalliance, if you like? I know I excite you. Is it the doctor that you want?”

“I really don’t want anybody.”

“But surely you must have needs?”

He laughed. This woman was direct. “Yes. I do have needs.”

“Well, kiss me then,” she said, smiling and moulding her body to his.

He could feel her breasts pressed against his chest. A quiver of excitement coursed through him. He could not deny the physical attraction she had awakened. He pulled her close, his hands sliding down her body, cupping her firm buttocks, drawing her up against him so that his hardness pressed against her.

“Oh yes,” she whispered in response.

He nuzzled her neck and then slid his lips down, his tongue probing her

cleavage, his chin pressing aside the neckline of her dress to reveal her white breast and erect nipple. He took the nipple into his mouth and rolled it with his tongue. She moaned softly.

She turned in his arms, her back facing him. “Undo me.”

He slipped loose the buttons at the back of her evening gown and let it slide off her shoulders. She turned to face him again, revealing her magnificent breasts buoyed only by her corset. She unbuttoned his tunic, tugging it off his shoulders. His collarless linen shirt followed. She stepped out of her gown as he pulled the last stays out of her corset, this parting and falling to the floor.

Soon they were naked.

They collapsed on the bed, their bodies entwined. Slowly, he slid his mouth over her, repeatedly tasting her skin, licking her body and kissing her. His fingers found the warmth between her thighs. He touched her, she lifting her pelvis.

“Please, please – now!” she pleaded.

He thrust into her.

CHAPTER 28

When the SS *Usambara*, still shrouded in mist, dropped anchor in Lobito Bay during the early morning, most passengers were still asleep. Werner, Louis, Philippe and Paulo were the only people who disembarked. Maria had confined herself to her cabin lest she be recognised.

The town did not seem to have changed at all. However, they soon realised that it contained a significant military presence, and the atmosphere amongst the inhabitants was no longer as relaxed as you would expect to find in a colonial town in the Tropics. The men sensed a new underlying tension. The death of so many at the hands of the Kunahamas had shrouded the town in a pall of mourning and sorrow. Bands of bandits still roamed the banks of the Kunene River, and many had fled the countryside for the safety of those towns where garrisons were stationed, their presence providing a degree of safety. Most knew that the new military command, swelled with new troops from Luanda, was preparing to wreak vengeance on the Kunahamas. Similar to the Germans in SudwestAfrika, the Portuguese would wage a war of near genocide on the Kunehamas.

Louis immediately took a carriage for home. The officers had agreed to meet soon after Louis had reported to whoever was in command. The two men and their servants would resolutely stick to their story that they had fled the battle on the Kunene River and crossed into SudwestAfrika, with Werner desperately requiring medical attention. Louis would make no mention of any involvement with the gunrunners or voice any suspicions about dos Santos.

Louis’s arrival stunned his family. His wife had remained convinced that he had survived the massacres in the south of the country despite there never

being any confirmation, although the survivors who had escaped the carnage had already made their way back to safety without him. They also had no knowledge of what may have happened to him. She rushed into his arms, tears of joy streaming down her face. His six-year-old daughter could only hug his leg, shouting: “Pai, Pai!”

Werner’s carriage drew up outside his hotel where he alighted; Philippe lowered the step for him.

He swept into the reception area, displaying what he thought was the right attitude to be expected from an important customer.

Madame Rodrigues was overjoyed to see Werner and Philippe again.

“Madre de Deus!” she exclaimed. “You’re back ... you survived! Thank God.” She smiled: “I kept your room and your things. Somehow, I knew you would be back. How is Captain de Sousa?”

“He’s fine,” Werner replied. “We both disembarked this morning. He immediately went home to his wife. He was worried that she thought him dead.”

“Senhor de Almeida, we were so worried for you and the captain and, of course, for everybody else. It has been terrible. So many died, so many husbands and sons lost.” She covered her mouth with her hand, close to tears. “Oh, before I forget, a cable arrived for you a few days ago.”

She rummaged in the desk and handed it to him.

He stepped back from the reception desk and ripped open the sealed envelope. He extracted a yellow sheet of paper:

ORDER FOR 270 RIFLES COMBINED WITH SHIPMENT FROM STEYR WAFFENFABRIK STOP CONSIGNMENT LOADED SS TANGANYIKA ESTIMATED TO DOCK LOBITO 5 APRIL STOP DOCUMENTS ACCOMPANY SHIPMENT

KRAUSE

MAUSER WAFFENFABRIK OBENDORF AN NECKAR

So, the next shipment was on its way. All that was now needed was a plan to rope in de Mello, the supposedly crooked Juiz for the Benguela Province, and dos Santos and their merry men. Dos Santos must have paid handsomely for the shipment lying at the bottom of the lagoon at Sandwich Bay. Hopefully, it was an irrecoverable loss, not only the rifles but also his standing with the Hereros. Werner assumed that dos Santos was already back in Huambo. He must have realised that the German military had executed the prisoners taken when they overran his wagons. They were hanged at Tsumeb after a short trial that was no more than a sham. The Germans did not even wait for the wounded to recover. What would his next move be?

As the sun sank below the horizon, Werner strolled into the lounge for the usual aperitivo that accompanied every sunset. Louis, his young wife on his arm, gave him a warm smile. Bowing from the waist, Werner took her hand in his and kissed it. Louis was dressed in a brand-new uniform, certainly more impressive than its predecessor was, his rank of major now prominently displayed. At least Major Zietzmann had been true to his word.

“Senhor de Almeida, I hope you don’t mind if I address you as Joachim?”

“Of course not,” Werner replied, “and I will call you Louis. After all, we owe each other our lives.”

They laughed.

Louis’s wife interceded. “You may call me Rosetta,” she said, stepping forward and kissing Werner on the cheek. “Joachim, I personally want to thank you for saving my husband. His coming back was like a miracle from God. Thank you.”

A barefoot African in a white smock and knee-length black pants with a red sash across his chest served their drinks.

“I see you’re a major now,” Werner remarked.

“Oh, yes. What a surprise! This morning I reported to the local commanding officer, Colonel de Oliviera. He gave me the good news about my new rank. I even received a letter of commendation from General Cadiz in Luanda. All I need now is a medal,” Louis said good-humouredly.

“Damn right you should get one,” Werner said. “You saved my life! What about this man, Colonel de Oliviera?”

“I know him well. He is from Luanda and is experienced in dealing with the Blacks. He arrived here a week ago with 500 troops. Apparently, or so he tells me, the revolt is a direct result of the dissatisfaction among the Blacks with the forced labour system that the government introduced a few years ago. Confidentially, if I were a Black, I would do the same; it’s an inhumane system – nothing short of damn slavery. De Oliviera is a good fellow, certainly no friend of you-know-who. Of course, the conflict in German SudwestAfrika south of us acts as a catalyst, our Blacks believing they can do the same.”

Rosetta interceded: “Enough talk of war. Joachim, I have a question. A successful man like you, yet Louis tells me you’re not married. That’s a surprise,” she chuckled. Then she added: “Please, I don’t mean to be rude, just curious.”

“Well, I’ve never really met the right woman,” Werner replied, improvising a smile to indicate that he did not mind the question at all.

He realised that Louis had not told his wife who he really was or what the two of them eventually hoped to accomplish.

“He says you are a good businessman and have already received an enormous order from dos Santos in Huambo. I know a few women who would like to meet you. I could arrange some introductions … Benguela is a lonely place,” Rosetta said softly, a mischievous smile on her face.

Louis stepped back from his wife. Now looking intently at Werner, he

shook his head, mouthing a distinct “No!”

“It wouldn’t be fair; I’m staying a few weeks and will be away for most time. But thank you anyway,” Werner apologised. Louis nodded his head in approval.

“Well, should you ever feel lonely, let me or Louis know.”

CHAPTER 29

The two officers met for lunch the next day at a popular restaurant. They sat on the bougainvillea-enclosed porch, hidden from prying eyes. Once they had eaten, they ordered coffee. Louis lit up a cigar. He threw the spent match into the ashtray, drew on the cigar, and then blew a thick cloud of fragrant smoke towards the beams of the ceiling.

“Well, my friend, what now?” he asked, contemplating the smoke that wafted beneath the ceiling.

Werner told him about the cable he received.

“Watch what happens. Dos Santos will clear the consignment here in Lobito and ensure that you are paid before he even attempts to move it. He’ll want no questions asked; the goods must belong to him. Then he’ll send everything to Huambo except the rifles – these he’ll leave here,” Louis stated.

“Why leave the guns here?” Werner asked.

“Because this will enable him to consign them to Namibe by sea or wagon at his leisure. We’d never know when, and once there the rifles will disappear.”

“So you’re saying we are going to have to deal with him in Namibe?”

“Yes. Only this time we’ll have the Portuguese government behind us. De Mello must realise he’s playing with fire if he tries to protect him. Anyway, that’s my theory.”

“Cristo! Why can’t your people simply arrest him?” Werner snapped. “You have enough proof. I would even be prepared to be a witness. Indirectly, he and de Mello and whoever else involved are responsible for the deaths of hundreds of others, particularly German soldiers.”

“There’s actually more to it than you know,” Louis said. “I wasn’t allowed to tell you before. But now that your country and ours are talking with one another, albeit confidentially, General Cadiz has said I can fully disclose all we know to you.” He paused, exhaling smoke as he puffed on his cigar. “It’s not only the gunrunning … its diamonds. This is what de Mello and dos Santos are really after. Moreover, they are backed by a few of other high-ups in our corrupt colonial government. Never forget, blood’s thicker than water and this certainly applies here. We believe that de Mello and possibly the Governor-General are caught up in this. But we have a problem. De Mello has somehow managed to get Colonel de Oliviera replaced by one of his cronies, a Colonel Batista. Believe me, he’s a real arsehole and as crooked as they come. He’ll arrive in the next day or two. De Oliviera has been ordered back to Luanda under some stupid pretext; of course, this is all the Governor-General’s doing. I learned of it this morning. So did Colonel de Oliviera. The man’s livid.”

“That’s not good. But what’s this about diamonds?” Werner asked. “This is the first I’ve heard of this.”

“Government geologists made a discovery near Caconda in the Huambo region, not far from the Kunene River – slap-bang in Kunahama territory. Some local Blacks tried to barter some stones for goods. Of course, this created some excitement and the stones were traced back to the Caconda region. Well, you can imagine the response. I am told that the source of the diamonds is a unique, narrow kimberlite pipe, the one end of which protruded nearly vertically a foot or so out the ground, the rest under the surface and therefore, the excavations. They say the pipe is peppered with diamonds. One of the old aristocratic families has an enormous ranch in the area. The exact extent of it is not known and, as is most of the country, it has never been properly surveyed. That’s not unusual; most of Angola has still to be

surveyed. The mine is located on this huge ranch. Guess what? De Mello wants the rights to it and so does his brother-in-law, the Governor."

"Well, that certainly makes things difficult. God, with the Governor and a provincial judge involved it won't be easy stopping them – they are the law!" Werner exclaimed.

"You'd better believe it when I tell you that I'm sure that a claim has already been registered. However, the Governor and de Mello would have to proceed with caution – you know, abuse of position and all that. If either of them steps in, well, I'm sure other aristocrats are going to ask questions. All will want a slice of the action. That's probably why de Mello and his crowd are keeping the area inaccessible by using the Kunahamas; they believe they can keep this all to themselves, with the Kunahamas doing the spadework and protecting their interests. However, of course, the Kunehamas want some sort of payment or other compensation: that's where the rifles come in. That's why so few know of its existence."

"How do you know all this?"

"We have somebody on the inside in the provincial government. I can't tell you more."

Werner shook his head and then ran his fingers through his hair. This was getting a deal more complicated, he thought. He beckoned the waiter for a fresh coffee.

"So, now what?" Werner asked. "My only concerns are the guns. I've got to stop that."

"But this all goes hand in hand." Louis leaned forward in his chair, anxious to emphasise the salient point. "We're going to finish this off in one go. First, we tackle dos Santos and his guns, and then de Mello. Many of those loyal to de Mello were killed in the massacre. This has been a serious blow to his organisation. To exploit the diamonds, they have to keep the Kunahamas

happy. That's why your consignment is critical; they have to keep supplying weapons to the Kunahamas and Hereros. In reality, both tribes are one, merely divided by a white man's border. If we catch them red-handed passing these weapons to the rebels and if we get somebody to talk, or get them to provide proof of de Mello's involvement, then we would have them beaten. Just remember, he needs the Kunahamas to get the rifles to your country. There's no love lost between de Mello and the Blacks; this is purely business. If this goes wrong, then de Mello and his merry men will revert to being the enemy again and the Kunehama will not allow him access to the mine."

"Trust the Portuguese to complicate things," Werner sighed, unable to hide his frustrations.

"Don't worry, this will work out. Just go about being the businessman you're supposed to be. Go out there and sell. I'll tell you what I next propose soon enough. Pity Maria isn't here; at least you could meanwhile have some fun," Louis said mischievously, his mouth drawn in a smirk.

"Fuck off!"

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For two weeks Werner went about his business, pretending to be a successful agent for various manufacturers, calling on shops and trading stores in the town. Surprisingly, his goods found great appeal: his prices were fair and the sales he garnered lucrative. He placed many orders with his principals in Europe. Rifles were purchased but the quantities were small, these intended for over-the-counter sales. The only large order was from the Boer Protection Society, the local militia. They ordered 30 Mauser K88s.

Werner and Louis had considered it prudent not to see each other too often. Colonel Batista, the new commanding officer, had arrived by ship a few days after they met for lunch, accompanied by his own staff officers. Colonel de Oliviera departed for Luanda on the same ship, with his own staff officers in

tow.

One evening as Werner descended the stairs, Madame Rodrigues, as ever in a low-cut blouse which exposed her voluptuous bosom, came round from behind the reception desk and caught his arm, steering him towards the lounge.

“Senhor, I must introduce you to one of the latest important new arrivals in the district,” she exclaimed.

Werner immediately recognised dos Santos. The huge man, dressed in a black suit, his shoes highly polished, stood with his back to him speaking to de Mello and a Portuguese colonel dressed in full uniform. Louis, also in uniform, was among them. Each with a drink in their hand, the four men were in conversation. Madame Rodrigues waited demurely next to the colonel for him to acknowledge her presence.

“Colonel,” she finally said, “I would like to introduce you to Senhor de Almeida.”

As the men shook hands, de Mello recognised Werner. “We have met before,” he said.

“And we too have previously met. How are you, Senhor de Almeida?” dos Santos said loudly, taking Werner’s hand.

“In fact, very well. It’s good to meet my most important client again – truly a pleasant surprise. What brings you to Benguela? And Maria, is she here?”

The colonel said nothing but merely watched the interaction. It seemed dos Santos was pleased to see Werner. Clearly, he did not associate him with what had transpired during the past few weeks.

Werner was aware of the colonel quietly appraising him. He was not a man to be trifled with; there was nothing soft or compassionate about him. Smart in his blue colonial officer’s uniform hung with gold braid, the colonel struck an imposing figure – tall with dark hair faintly streaked with grey. His eyes

were dark and pitiless. His features were hard, these accentuated by a thin moustache and black eyebrows. This man expected to be obeyed without question. A glance at Louis confirmed that his demeanour spoke for itself. His friend realised he was lower rank and that he was a subordinate.

"Senhor de Almeida, I've already heard about you." The colonel indicated dos Santos with a wave of his hand. "I hope you are doing fair business in this town."

"Colonel, I cannot complain. However, if I could venture farther into the hinterland, I certainly would be able to do better."

The colonel's piercing black eyes scrutinised Werner carefully before he replied. "Out of the question. It's still far too dangerous. But I'll keep your request in mind."

"You enquired about Maria," dos Santos interrupted. "I had to leave her in Huambo. She's still recovering from a bout of malaria, and with the war situation I felt it safer to leave her there, protected by my people and the locals who are well disposed towards us."

De Mello congratulated Werner and Louis on their escape from the battle with the Kunahamas and briefly enquired about Werner's health after his bout with malaria and his recuperation at the Finnish mission.

Clearly, this man was well informed, Werner thought as he turned to dos Santos. "As you say, I too was ill. Right after fleeing the battle, I came down with malaria. With the passage north cut off by the Kunahamas, Major de Sousa took me south to the Finnish missionaries. Fortunately, my cavalherico knows the place. I think if he had not done so, I would not have survived."

"The major is a resourceful man. Well, I need to speak to you soon – it's business. Can we meet tomorrow after breakfast?" dos Santos asked.

"But, of course."

"Then, until tomorrow. Please excuse us, we're about to start a business

dinner.”

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The next morning, Werner rose early and sat down to breakfast when the dining room opened. He was the only diner. He asked that his final cup of coffee be served in the lounge, where he awaited dos Santos’s arrival.

He gazed out to sea. A drab grey light hung over the sky, as it usually does in the early morning along the African west coast where the cold Benguela Current still influences the climate. It would not clear until mid-morning.

Heavy footsteps announced the approach of another guest. Werner turned and saw dos Santos enter the lounge. He was dressed in beige jodhpurs, his legs encased in highly polished, dark brown riding boots that reached to his knees. Encased in a taut white linen shirt, his belly hung over a wide brown belt which had a holster attached, the butt of a firearm visible.

They exchanged morning pleasantries as dos Santos sat at Werner’s table.

“I take it that our business arrangements proceed smoothly?” dos Santos enquired.

“Oh yes,” Werner said. “I’ve received a cable from Germany – the consignment is on the water aboard the SS *Tanganyika*, docking in Lobito on April 5th.”

“Good, good. Has our barter arrangement proceeded well?”

“Yes, the bank has finalised everything. When the consignment arrives, it is yours. My principals were extremely happy with the deal.”

“I should think so. They will profit handsomely on the sale of all those goods in Europe,” dos Santos commented.

“There’s merely the small formality of signing a few papers confirming your ownership. As requested, the business of customs clearance is yours to deal with,” Werner murmured.

“Wonderful. Of course I’ve arranged everything,” dos Santos smugly

replied, pleased that no hitches had been encountered.

I'm damned sure you have, the young officer thought. No doubt, with de Mello's intervention and assistance, certain formalities would be overlooked. He was appalled at the thought that if he and Louis did not devise a plan, they, and he in particular, would be directly responsible for providing Germany's enemies with 500 brand-new rifles.

"I'm looking to buy another consignment of rifles and other items," dos Santos added.

Werner unconsciously raised his eyebrows. The gall of this fellow! The man must be insane. A second consignment of that size must surely be suspicious. Somebody was bound to take note.

Werner hesitated and then said: "Well, I don't know. I wonder whether my principals will entertain another barter deal. It is far too cumbersome, with them being in Germany. It would have to be cash or bank draft, I would think."

"I don't have cash," dos Santos said, "but I have something as near or better if you would care to see. However, I must insist on your confidentiality. Can you do that?"

Werner knew that it had to be diamonds that he proposed to offer. Now he was intrigued. What the hell was this renegade up to? He found it difficult to believe that this commanchero – an appropriate description, he thought – had no inkling that he was talking with the man hell-bent on engineering his demise.

"A business deal is always a deal," Werner told dos Santos. "If you require my confidence, rest assured I'll say nothing. Of course, I would have to involve my principals, but—"

"Naturally," dos Santos interrupted. He removed a rather small black leather pouch from his pocket. He undid the knot and then slowly poured part

of the contents into the palm of his other hand. There was no mistaking the flash and faint sparkle of the clean translucent pebbles as they poured from the pouch.

Werner gasped, “My God! Are those diamonds?”

Dos Santos hissed: “Shhhh – quiet! Yes!” He poured a few stones into Werner’s palm. “Here, look at them.”

“Where did you get them?” Werner enquired softly.

“No matter. The question is: would you accept them in payment? You must realise that when your principals dispose of them in Europe, they will make huge profits.”

Werner pretended to show the degree of excitement to be expected from somebody suddenly confronted with a bag of diamonds.

“I do,” he said. “I’m sure we can come to a business arrangement. What are you looking for?”

Dos Santos removed a sheet of folded paper from his shirt pocket and handed it to Werner. He held his hand for the diamonds and then poured them back into the pouch, which he returned to his pocket.

“That is my list,” dos Santos said. “Read it some other time. I must be on my way. Remember, not a word.” He left the lounge, leaving Werner stunned at this sudden turn of events. The gun traffickers already had the diamonds – this confirmed the rumour that the mine was rich, not a myth, and that it was already in production. No wonder de Mello and his associates were prepared to take these risks – it was all for money. The mine would set them up for life. With this type of fortune at stake, the gunrunners would go to extremes to protect their operation. He and Louis would have to proceed with extreme caution. Was it possible that they already were watched?

CHAPTER 30

Werner made his way to the rear of the hotel, walking around the outside of the building and entering the premises through the rear gate. There he sent a worker to find his cavalherico. Soon Philippe approached from the outside rooms, built along the perimeter of the property.

“Philippe,” Werner said, handing the man a folded sheet of paper. “I need you to find Paulo and get him to urgently deliver this note to his master. Please, be sure that nobody else sees it. Paulo must wait for a reply and you must bring this back to me today. Louis will understand the urgency.”

“This could be difficult,” Philippe said. “Paulo is at the garrison and we are not allowed to enter.”

“I know. You’ll have to change your clothes, something shabby and worn, so that you look similar to the other locals. Just be careful.”

Philippe nodded and trudged back to his quarters.

*

It was late afternoon before Philippe returned. Werner barely recognised his cavalherico; barefoot, dressed in ragged trousers and faded shirt, he looked similar to any other black local. He had found an old sweat-stained campaign hat, and he wore this jauntily on his head, the shadow cast by its wide brim hiding his features.

Werner took the note Philippe proffered. “Any problems?” he asked.

“They were inside the fort,” he said. “I was not allowed to enter. I asked for Paulo, saying I was family and that I had important news to give him. One of the black troopers at the gate knew him and fetched him. I gave him the letter, but I had to wait a long time before he came back with your answer. I

got this letter a short while ago."

"Thank you," Werner said.

Werner waited until he was alone before he opened the note. It read: 'TEN THIS EVENING AT MADAME MANCHATA'S.'

He had never heard of the place. He returned to the hotel and sought out Madame Rodrigues. "This Madame Manchata's, do you know where it is?" he asked.

Her eyes grew round and her hand covered her open mouth.

"Really, Senhor de Almeida! This is embarrassing. Men of your standing should not frequent such an establishment. It is best that one ignores its existence. It is a house of ill-repute!"

Bloody idiot, Werner thought, trust Louis to decide on a meeting place like this! "Quite so," he said, "but where is it?" What on earth was Louis up to? Surely, there were better places to meet.

Reluctantly, Madame Rodrigues gave him directions. From the tilt of her nose, he realised that her esteem of him had diminished.

Werner found a carriage and gave the driver the address. The place was on the fringe of the town, an imposing one-storey building with a long first-floor porch which stretched the width of the building. Several carriages stood in the street, the drivers smoking and talking with each other. Light music drifted into the street, interspersed with laughter and other sounds of joviality.

Werner strode up the entrance steps; an attendant greeted him politely and opened the door for him. He entered a large foyer stuffed with strategically placed settees and armchairs. It was immediately evident that this was a whorehouse.

"I see you are surprised," he heard behind him. He spun round to find Louis, dressed in civilian clothes, laughing at him.

"You're mad – why meet here? There must surely other places where we

could've met?" Werner asked. "I had to ask the woman at the hotel for directions. She nearly fainted when I asked where this place was. Cristo, she now thinks I'm some sort of sex maniac. To crown it all, I had to be insistent when she did not immediately tell me where I'd find it."

Louis doubled up with laughter. Werner did not share the joke.

"Please, my friend, this was not intended to embarrass you. This is truly the safest place to meet. You'll never find de Mello and his crowd here. If they were in need of the services this place renders, they would have the women delivered. People of their standing are too private. I am sure that our enemies will never know we met here. And anyway, this is the best whorehouse in southern Angola."

"That does not impress me at all," Werner said.

"Come, let's find a corner in the lounge," Louis said, confidently walking ahead.

"You've been here before?" Werner asked incredulously.

"Yes, actually the grande dame of this establishment is a far distant relative of mine – an aunt, I think."

They found themselves a quiet corner and ordered drinks from a roving waitress whose attire could not have been more revealing. She displayed a good portion of her ample bosom, dressed in some sort of corset with a short skirt, revealing net stockings secured by black suspenders and tucked into laced-up ankle-high boots. Her face, although pretty, was over painted, the bright red lips a harsh smear on her mouth, the eyes hidden behind black kohl. A small tiara perched atop her upswept black hair. She winked as she asked whether they required anything else. Werner frowned at the insinuation contained in her query.

"No," said Louis, grinning. "Not at the moment. My friend here may partake a bit later."

Werner snorted in anger and disgust, which reduced Louis to raucous laughter.

The young and obviously apprentice cocotte brought their drinks.

Werner told Louis precisely what had happened between him and dos Santos that morning.

“God, another 500 rifles. These would only be used against us. We cannot let that happen,” Werner said.

“I know,” Louis replied, “but we have to play along. We thought they still had to mine the diamonds. You’re telling me they already have access to the diamonds from Caconda. Now they can finance anything they like – buy and bribe anybody. However, with Colonel Batista in command, things are difficult. I cannot do whatever I wish. I will have to rely on you.”

Louis finished the last of his drink, signalling the young woman for another.

Werner waited until she was out of earshot before he spoke. “Listen, assuming I go along with this, I’ve absolutely no idea of the value of an uncut diamond. I wouldn’t know a rough diamond from a piece of glass. I can’t shop these around. How do I know that whatever diamonds he gives me will represent fair value for my consignment? Anyway, at it is, this is a no-go situation. This will have to have Zietzmann’s okay. God, they’ll shoot me! I’ve got—”

“Cristo, stop worrying, we’ll work this out. Perhaps, yes, Batista is planning a campaign and he wants me to command it,” Louis said, thinking furiously.

“How’s that going to help me?” Werner demanded.

“This campaign takes the railroad up as far as the British have built it so far; I think that’s about 40 or 50 miles from here. Then we ride south, actually quite close to Caconda – a small detour would take us right there. I could see what’s going on.”

“Will dos Santos be riding with us?”

“No, this is purely a military operation; he’s staying, probably waiting for the shipment you have arranged from Germany.”

“Well, that doesn’t help. What the hell are we going to do?” Werner asked with barely concealed irritation. For a while both remained silent, each deep in thought. Louis suddenly clicked his tongue and raised his hand, his index finger pointing upwards, his face lit with inspiration.

“I have an idea, but I’ve got to borrow Philippe, your cavalherico. We use him and Paulo disguised as locals – they speak the language fluently. They can reconnoitre Caconda for us and find out what’s going on. They should be able to do that within two weeks. Meanwhile, I’ll plan my campaign and you await your shipment. Dos Santos will take the guns to Namibe; he won’t try the Sandwich Bay stunt again. He’ll probably go south and smuggle them across the border. You’d better think of a way to stop him.”

“I and who else?” Werner asked incredulously.

“I’ll speak to a fellow I know in the Boer militia. We’ll try to get 20 men together. I don’t think dos Santos would have more than that in his own group. You can track them south until they cross the border. If he uses a Kunahama escort, they won’t cross into German territory.”

He pondered Louis’s proposal. It seemed the best plan so far. God, it was the only plan so far! Probably the best plan under the circumstances, he thought gloomily.

“I’ll get a Boer to contact you. His name is Reynecke. He’ll recruit the men. You may have to help with some financing, but you have money, so that shouldn’t be a problem. I should be leaving in about four days’ time. We’ll meet here two days from now at the same time.”

Werner agreed. He didn’t have a better idea.

The men finished their drinks; Louis rose from his armchair and turned to Werner.

“I have to be going; Rosetta’s waiting for me at home. But you can stay and have some fun,” he said, a lecherous grin on his face.

“Louis, I’m warning you: leave my private life out of this,” Werner said with unconcealed contempt, his eyes flashing.

His friend laughed loudly at his own attempt at humour. Werner did not find it amusing at all.

CHAPTER 31

It took Philippe and Paulo four days to prepare for their scouting trip to the mine near Caconda. It was not a matter of simply riding out on horseback. They first had to procure the horses they would need. Kunahama tribesmen did not own horses that are groomed daily; their horses are never stabled. Although, their horses may appear to be ragged hags with dull and patchy coats, they actually are sturdy and spirited. Well-groomed animals would be an immediate giveaway.

There was only one way to acquire such horses: buy them. Eventually, they found two suitable horses and purchased them complete with saddles and tack. The tack was old, having been patched and repaired so many times that the leather had long lost its shine. In fact, everything should have been discarded long ago and replaced with new riding equipment.

Louis had a brilliant idea: the two men would masquerade as close family members of a well-known Kunahama called Kavela, a sub chief who, unknown to his people, was sympathetically disposed towards the Portuguese military. To ensure he remained so and a vital source of intelligence, the military made certain that he was continuously remunerated – not necessarily with money, but rather with concessions and above average prices for the goods and produce he bartered or sold. The two men were not going to meet this man but would merely use his name.

When they left Benguela on horseback, Philippe and Paulo looked the part – young warriors in loincloths and their feet bare, complete with spear and shield and sisal sacks of provisions slung over the backs of their horses. They had no rifles, but each man carried a revolver hidden in their sisal sacks.

They rode east, following the railroad the British were constructing, until they reached a siding at the small village of Norton de Mato where they turned south, now taking a direct line to Caconda. The deeper they penetrated the hinterland, the more dangerous the situation became; Caconda was close to the Kunene River and close to the centre of Kunahama territory. They soon encountered mounted patrols, all armed with Mauser rifles. However, their story that they were on their way home to Kavela at Matala was accepted by the rebels without incident.

The men pushed their horses, covering 140 miles in four days by starting each day before sunrise and stopping when the last light faded. It was now the rainy season. Every afternoon was greeted by an enormous cumulus cloud build-up followed by the violent thunderstorms heralding torrential rain, a frightening rumble and crack of thunder, wind, lightning and water.

Still miles from Caconda, they hobbled their horses in a concealed depression in the hills and proceeded on foot. They did not know if the mine was guarded, and if so were there merely a few sentries posted, or whether they would they encounter roving armed horsemen.

Having left the trail, they scouted around, looking for the mine all day, moving from cover to cover with the utmost caution. They encountered nothing except animals. Just before the first signs of sunset, a loud boom was followed by a tremor beneath their bare feet as a shock wave passed beneath them. They looked at each other in fear, not sure what this signified. They had never been near mine workings before. However, the incident was not lost on them; they realised they were close and proceeded with caution, melting into the dense bush, carefully picking their way forward.

They smelled the first sentry before they saw him. Through heavily intertwined branches, they spotted a black man smoking a pipe, his rifle on the ground next to him. Slowly they backed off until they had put a good

hundred yards between them and the lookout.

“Should we kill him or skirt around him?” Paulo asked mundanely. He regarded the taking of a life as nothing unusual.

“Killing him may raise an alarm,” Philippe said. “We’ll go round; the bush is so thick we could pass within spitting distance and he would not know. Anyway, he’s bored – he’s not even keeping proper watch. Did you see where his rifle was?”

It had started to rain again, the thunder a low rumble in the distance.

The men crept forward and passed within a few yards of the lookout, now covered by a slicker, which he had hung over his head like a pyramid and only his face visible.

After another 100 yards, they came to the fringe of a large clearing where all the bushes had been removed and the ground cleared to about halfway up a hillock. In one spot against the hill the ground had been excavated to a considerable depth, revealing a deep and large depression. Surrounding this, various pieces of machinery and crusher equipment were visible. Heavy rain still fell, sending all the workers scurrying for shelter. Several hastily erected huts were visible, which surrounded the cleared area. These were no more than thatched roofs of grass and leaves supported on long poles, with a large overhang; there no walls. The two men could clearly see the labourers huddled under the largest for shelter. There was another hut which stood apart from the others; this was smaller but better constructed. All it seemed to contain was a long, flat table. Around the table stood three white men, closely examining whatever was on the table, moving and spreading the contents of the table with their flat hands. Nearby a corral had been erected in which a few horses stood with their backs facing the driving rain.

Water poured down the cleared slopes of the hillock, forming rivulets of dirty brown water which made its way to the valley below.

“If it keeps raining like this, we won’t be able to cross the rivers,” Philippe said to his companion.

“I know.”

“What do you think we should do?”

“I think we stay here for the night and watch again tomorrow when it’s not raining.”

The men retraced their steps until they were well back from the sentry. They erected a makeshift shelter from branches and large leaves and sat under it, eating jerky and biscuits. Afterwards, they rolled themselves in their blankets and slept heavily.

The next day, they again approached the clearing but came closer to the hut in which the white men worked. The mine was a hive of activity; large rocks were being removed from the depression, the remnants from the dynamite blasting they had heard. These were fed through a steam-driven roller mill, and the crushed stone was passed through a series of tubular sieves which rotated, sorting the broken rock into various sizes. Labourers carried buckets of this sorted gravel to the large hut.

“What are they doing with that gravel?” Paulo asked. “Look, there come two of them with another bucket.”

Two labourers approached the large hut, stumbling as they struggled to carry the heavy bucket. They entered the hut and poured the wet contents on the end of the table, where the white men then flattened the heap over the table’s surface, using pieces of wood.

It slowly dawned on the hidden men that they were looking for the diamonds in the gravel.

Sometime during the morning, the men in the hut stopped working and congregated around the only other item in the room, a strongbox that stood on a short, sturdy table. One of them men opened the strongbox and extracted

a few pouches. These were put in a saddlebag and handed it to one of the men.

“The man’s taking the diamonds. Where’s he going?” Philippe whispered.

“That well-used trail going towards Huambo, I’m sure that’s where he’ll be heading, back to dos Santos’s place,” Paulo replied.

“Okay, let’s follow him.”

Hastily retracing their steps, they crept past the sentry and, when at a safe distance, jogged rapidly to where their horses grazed.

Mounting, they rode off in a northeast direction to intersect the trail. At the track, they reined in and dismounted, crouching down to study the many hoof indentations in the mud.

“Three of them. They’re in front of us, but not by much,” Philippe said.

Paulo agreed.

“We have to take the diamonds from them,” Philippe said, his voice resolute, smacking the palm of his hand with a fist as if to emphasise his statement.

“That’s not what we were told to do!” Paulo said.

“I know, but nobody knew that we would get this close to the diamonds.”

“Well, how do you think we should do this?” Paulo asked, his face reflecting his concern, unable to ignore his sudden sense of foreboding. He wondered whether his master would approve.

“We’ll wait until they camp for the night. They know they’re in Kunahama territory and feel safe. Huh, we’ll get them! We sneak up, kill all three and take the diamonds. It’ll be easy, they’ll be asleep. Others will think the Kunahamas killed them, having mistaken them for other degregados.”

“You’re sure they will think that?”

Philippe shrugged his shoulders nonchalantly. “It will work. Anyway, what does it matter what they think? We’ll be long gone.”

They followed the trail, ensuring that they did not accidentally get too close to the three men and reveal themselves. When the last of the day's light disappeared, Philippe called a halt and they led their horses off the track. Again, rain poured down; visibility was no more than a few yards. Under the canopy of a large tree which gave some shelter against the drenching rain they dismounted and hobbled their mounts. They wrapped their blankets over their bare shoulders in an attempt to ward off the chill brought on by the rain.

As usual, by midnight the storm clouds had disappeared and the half-moon and stars were again visible. They resumed their pursuit, slowly leading their horses in the darkness along the trail, the mud deadening all sounds. After a short while they could see the first flicker of a campfire far in the distance.

"That must be them," Philippe whispered, reining his horse in. "Before anything else, we need to get the horses on the other side of them so that if we have to flee at least we'll be riding away in the right direction. We don't want to have to backtrack if things go wrong."

Paulo agreed. They detoured into the bush to skirt around the camp, keeping a fair distance away from it. Once off the trail, the virgin bush and trees hampered their progress and thorns scratched and hooked, often drawing blood. It was now too dark to see any obstructions, and they only became aware of these when they stumbled into them. About a mile north of the camp they again turned towards the trail, soon finding it. They tethered their horses a short distance from the track under a large tree. It was tall with a large canopy, recognisable enough in the poor moonlight should they have to find it quickly.

They discarded their shields, and armed with spears and revolvers they stealthily slunk back towards the camp sand dropped to the ground on the very edge of the area illuminated by the fire, carefully studying their surroundings. As was expected, they soon saw a sentry. He was sitting on a

fallen log, his blanket wrapped around his shoulders, his rifle resting on its butt between his legs, the muzzle pointing skywards. He stared into the fire, seemingly oblivious of his surroundings.

The trio's horses were tethered a short distance from the camp. Philippe pointed to the horses and then himself and Paulo, indicating that they go over there. Paulo understood. They cautiously made their way to the horses; Philippe took cover in a large bush that was in a direct line with the camp and the horses. He slowly pushed himself backwards into its leaves. He extracted a length of piano wire from a pouch tied to a leather belt around his waist. The wire had two small hand-carved wooden handles at each end.

Philippe nodded at Paulo, who moved slowly towards the horses, not to spook them but to get them to appear to be disturbed. There was some unease and agitation; the horses' heads came up and a hoof stomped on the ground. The guard's head swivelled round to look at the slight disturbance as he realised the horses were jittery. He threw the blanket from his shoulder. Philippe heard the slide of the rifle's bolt action as the guard worked a cartridge into the breech. The guard dropped to a crouch, looking towards the horses, his rifle at the ready. He then slowly walked forward. Paulo had moved away from the horses and waited just within the surrounding bush. The man approached slowly, looking from side to side. Philippe held a handle in each hand, the steel wire forming a loop: he could faintly see the glint of the wire in the moonlight. He let the man pass until he was about a yard ahead of Philippe's concealed position. Philippe then silently stepped out and swung the looped piano wire over the man's head, immediately pulling the handles in opposite directions and drawing the steel noose tight, the thin steel wire cutting into the man's windpipe. The panic-stricken man desperately tried to get his fingers under the garrotte as he gagged but hardly making a sound, his eyes bulging from their sockets and his mouth open as he

tried to scream. Philippe held him in that position until the man's feet stopped drumming on the ground in his final death throes. His death was silent. The jugular vein severed by the piano wire spurted blood on Paulo's upper body, the wetness glistening in the weak moonlight. They left the guard where he fell.

Philippe and Paulo crept stealthily towards the fire and the two men still sleeping on the ground. The horses had settled down again, no longer agitated. All at once, they leapt forward and plunged their spears into their victims. The air was suddenly rent by blood-curdling screams, then abruptly cut off. All was still again. Philippe rummaged quickly through their saddlebags but found no pouches. He then proceeded to go through their pockets. The concerned expression on his face changed to a triumphant smile of glee as he held up three blood-drenched pouches.

They doused the campfire using mud and sand. Paulo unhitched the dead men's horses, shooing them so the animals galloped into the bush. Leaving the bodies where they lay and taking nothing else, the two assailants retraced their steps to their own horses and rode off down the trail, wanting to put as much distance as possible between them and the camp before sunrise.

As the first hint of dawn touched the horizon, they guided their horses off the trail into the virgin bush towards Chongoroi, a small village located on the road from Sa Da Bandeira, south of Benguela. The farther west they rode the less likelihood of there was of riding into a Kunahama patrol. Unless the trio's deaths were discovered soon and word sent out to be on the lookout, there seemed little reason for any Kunahamas to treat them differently than they had done before.

As Philippe had expected, their track west brought them to the Catumbela River. It was now a raging torrent of muddied brown water, sweeping the accumulated debris of a year or more before it. This river flowed northwest,

finally reaching the sea at Lobito Bay. Crossing the river was out of the question, and there was no way round; they would have to wait for it to subside.

Paulo washed the blood from his torso before scrubbing the pouches containing the diamonds. The drawstrings remained tied. Philippe then placed them in a leather bag he wore, which was attached to a homemade wide rawhide belt knotted around his midriff.

Waiting for the river to subside, they travelled along the shore, moving well away from the water to blend into dense bush that thronged the riverbanks. Of course they could not be sure when the water level would fall. The rain would have to hold off for a few days for this to happen. However, rainfall tended to be periodic but was at its worst during the full moon. It was now a new moon phase. With a bit of luck, they'd soon be able to cross.

For a long while Philippe stared at the river. He turned to his companion. "I've just thought of something." He paused and then continued: "Often the water in the river never quite makes the journey to the sea; but disappears into the sand before then. However, this is a flood and will still be so when the water gets to the sea at Lobito Bay. However, I should warn you that there's a mighty big waterfall between here and the sea."

"In that case, let's stick with the horses," Paulo said, chewing on a piece of jerky. "We'll cross the river where we can and keep close to it for a while. But we need to get further west towards the sea to avoid running into any Kunahama patrols."

Philippe agreed. They mounted their horses and set off, following the river to the sea. Two days later they skirted the outskirts of Chongoroi, the last real stronghold the Kunahamas had established on the western side of their influence. Colonists had not settled the area and the civil war had hardly touched it. Nonetheless, the two still proceeded with caution, avoiding any

human habitat. The last 50 miles to Benguela took them across the coastal plain where the going was easier and they made good time.

CHAPTER 32

Every morning after breakfast, Werner would unobtrusively stroll to the rear of the hotel. This morning the grooms were busy brushing down a dust-covered animal which he recognised as his servant's horse.

"Good morning, Mestre. Are you looking for Philippe?" the groom asked.

"Yes, is he back?"

The groom nodded and pointed to the room Philippe shared with a few others. "He came late last night; I think he's still asleep. He brought another man with him."

Werner opened the door to the room. After the stark sunlight outside, he was for a moment nearly blind and waited for his eyes to adjust to the gloom of the interior. An assortment of clothing hung from pegs driven into the wall. The room was empty except for the two sleeping occupants. He walked over to Philippe and shook his shoulder.

"I need to talk to you," Werner said.

He waited while the black man emerged from sleep. Philippe was still not fully rested, and his features were drawn. Werner's nostrils stung with the pungent smell of rancid sweat: Philippe must have collapsed into bed the previous night, too tired to wash.

"Give me a little while; I have Paulo with me," Philippe replied, indicating the man lying next to him.

"God, you both need a wash. Take your time and then saddle up. I'll meet you in front of the hotel. We'll ride out together and find somewhere private so that we can talk." He smiled, looking down at them. "I'm glad to see you safely back here," he added, the conviction evident in his voice.

A short time later, Werner rode out of town with the two cavalhericos making up the rear as was considered proper. Once far enough out, they left the main road and trotted along a side trail until Werner reined in under a large acacia tree.

“This should be good enough.”

Wordlessly, Philippe extracted the three pouches of uncut diamonds from his trouser pockets and handed them over. Werner looked quizzically at the two Africans. They were again dressed in civilian clothes.

“What’s this?” he asked.

They grinned.

“Open them,” said Paulo.

Werner felt the pouch with his fingers and then, opening the drawstring, poured part of the contents into the palm of his hand.

“Cristo! These are diamonds!” he cried.

“There’s more – the other two also have diamonds in them,” Philippe said.

“My God, it’s a fortune! What did you do to get these?” Werner demanded.

Patiently the two recounted what they had seen and how, when they realised that the men proposed to courier the diamonds to wherever, they had decided that it would be possible to intercept them. They emphasised that there had been only three men, which made it easy especially when it became evident that the miners had not taken proper precautions to protect the parcel.

Werner was aghast. “You killed them? How could you do that? You didn’t even know who these men were!”

“They were the enemy,” Philippe replied. “They were rebels working with the Kunahamas and dos Santos. We heard the mine labourers talking – they talked about dos Santos; he’s their Mestre and he pays them. If they had known we were there, they would have killed us. We did the right thing. Without the diamonds, how are they going to buy rifles?”

There was nothing complicated about their logic, Werner thought.

“Of course, you know that you’ve caused them much trouble. The loss of the diamonds is going to have many people trying to find out who killed these men. But you say nobody saw you?” Werner asked again.

“No. Nobody saw us at the mine, and there was nobody around when we took the diamonds,” Philippe assured him.

“I’ll take the diamonds and speak to Major de Sousa. I’m certain that he will work out some sort of compensation for you – these diamonds are worth a great deal. Of course, they actually belong to the Portuguese government. Please do not talk to anybody about this. Do you understand?”

They nodded in agreement.

“Paulo, go back to Major de Sousa. Tell him I must meet him tonight at ten o’clock at the place we always meet. He’ll know where. Tell him it’s very important.”

Werner was horrified by what these men had done. Of course it had been tacitly understood that if they ran into any resistance or felt threatened they would kill, but not resort to cold-blooded murder. Ultimately, it came down to a matter of kill or be killed. Had they really had any option? He conceded they had a point: they would rather kill for the diamonds than allow them to be used to acquire weapons – every colonist and soldier in the country would agree that these two men had shown unquestionable loyalty and courage. However, Werner doubted that when they decided to kill the men this was not based on altruistic reasons.

“Are you all right? Is there anything you need?” Werner enquired.

“No, we have everything.”

He mounted up and rode off, leaving them to make their own way back to town.

As was arranged, Werner met with Louis at Madame Manchata’s. When he

produced the first pouch of diamonds, Louis was dumbstruck. However, when a minute later he produced the additional two pouches, the man was astounded.

Louis hefted the three pouches in his hand as Werner briefly filled him in on all the details.

“Do you know what I’m thinking?” Louis asked.

“No,” replied Werner, looking up. Then it slowly dawned on him. “You’re not serious?”

“Who’s to know? We keep two pouches, share part of it with our two men after we have converted them to cash, and we’re set for life! At least, nearly. Maybe we should include Jurgen?”

“That’s stealing!”

“Stealing? From whom? The rebels? I don’t think so,” Louis said, leaning forward persuasively. “The Portuguese government doesn’t even know about these. Once we hand the remaining pouch over, we’ll never get another chance; the government will have confirmation of the mine and the riches it contains and they will be all over that place. You’d need to be invisible to get in.”

“Hang on, okay? I need to think about this. I realise what you’re getting at, but it’s still stealing. But not bad stealing, is that what you mean?”

“Well, something like that. Although the diamonds do play a part, the guns play the bigger role. The government can have the mine – sell it or do what they wish with it – but we keep two of the pouches.”

Werner reserved his opinion. He needed first to think about this. “What are we going to do with the diamonds right now?”

“Well, don’t give them to me,” Louis said, holding the pouches out towards Werner. “I’m a Portuguese government employee, duty bound to hand them over, but if I don’t have them—”

“What am I supposed to do with them?” Werner retorted, reluctantly taking the pouches back from Louis.

“Hide them.”

“Okay, I’ll think of something.”

The two men ordered additional drinks and continued to discuss the diamonds and their next step. It was mutually agreed that for now the best tactic was to wait: let dos Santos make the next move. Meanwhile, Louis would try to contact Colonel de Oliviera without raising suspicion.

*

Around midnight, an exhausted Werner prepared to leave.

“What, not taking part in any fun here?” Louis nonchalantly enquired. “I told you, this is the best bordello around.”

Werner gave him the usual two words as a farewell greeting. Louis again thought it was hilarious.

“You know,” he said, believing he had the last word, “it can’t be all work and no play!”

Werner ignored him.

CHAPTER 33

The next day, Werner called on the local branch of the Banco Nacionale Ultramarino to request a safe deposit box. He slipped two of the diamond pouches together with a wad of documentation he had accumulated into a large document folder the bank supplied. This he then placed in the box. This raised no suspicions; Werner's business dealing accounted for a large amount of documentation, and it was considered normal that he wished to place them in safekeeping.

Two days later, when Werner entered the hotel's dining room, de Mello, dos Santos, and Colonel Batista sat at a table in the corner, deep in discussion. They saw Werner enter but other than acknowledging his greeting, they ignored him. He purposely chose a table that enabled him to keep an eye on them, without making it obvious. They appeared to be in a serious debate, and at one stage, de Mello tried to subdue a heated exchange between dos Santos and the colonel. Werner was convinced the fate of the diamonds had finally reached them. With the fortune involved, there were bound to be recriminations. Somebody was about to take the blame!

Madame Rodrigues entered the dining room and came over to Werner with a rustle of skirts. "Good evening, Senhor de Almeida. May I sit?" she asked.

"Please," he said, gesturing to the only other chair at the table.

She sat, making herself comfortable. "I wish to apologise. The other day when you asked, it was none of my—" she stammered.

"Please, think nothing of it," he interrupted her, knowing where the conversation was leading.

"But, I should—"

“Senhora, please. I would truly appreciate it if we did not discuss the matter. I implore you, let us keep it between it ourselves,” Werner emphatically requested.

His attitude was not lost on her.

“I’m sorry, Senhor. Be sure, nothing further will be said.”

“Thank you.”

The woman left. A short while later, the assistant manager approached Werner’s table and handed him a wine list.

“Madame Rodrigues insists that you accept a wine of your choice. It’s on the house.” A peace offering, Werner thought. The good woman was concerned that she had offended him. Maybe she’s just curious, he thought. He had been to Madame Manchata’s three times in a short space of time, and this woman knew everybody’s movements and she probably knew where he’d gone. He wondered what she thought of him; no doubt, she imagined him to be a man with an unusual sexual appetite. He was amused but also embarrassed; he would have to make damn sure Louis did not hear about this; he would manipulate it in an attempt at fun at Werner’s expense. Damn that de Sousa again!

Whatever the subject of the heated discussion at the table in the corner, it seemed it was not resolved. Suddenly, dos Santos rose and threw his napkin down next to his untouched food. He rose from the table and stormed out of the dining room, ignoring Werner as he passed, his face a caricature of fury. The first cracks in the ceiling, Werner thought: discord amongst the thieves. How wonderful.

*

Werner and Louis met again at the same hour at Madame Manchata’s. The frequency of their visits was now raising a few eyebrows, especially from the women working there. Who were these men who visited regularly but never

touched them or showed any interest? Every time they approached the pair, they were politely shooed away. Some even suggested they were men of a different sort, but then, why come here?

"Listen Louis, coming here is not good. I've already got the hotelier worrying about me, and now these women are beginning to look at us askance," Werner said.

His friend chuckled softly, finding Werner's remark amusing.

"Just think how much you could surprise them if you let your hair down and stopped being such a pain in the arse!" Louis said. "Actually, for the sake of appearances, that might not be a bad idea. Some of them probably think you've been coming here trying to build up courage to take one of them. That's it; they think you are a virgin, or worse still, you know …" He smirked at his latest piece of logic.

"Just leave it alone, will you!" Werner snapped, close to losing his temper. "God, I think you suffer from some sort of sexual perversion."

Louis thought this hilarious. He laughed so loud that others turned to look. Realising, however, that he'd overstepped the mark, he sat down and sipped his drink as he waited for his friend to calm down.

"I'm leaving for Luanda," Louis finally said, taking Werner by surprise. "I've told Colonel Batista a blatant lie about my need to go there, blaming family problems. I requested a 14-day furlough. Rosetta and my daughter will be going with me. I've booked passage on a coastal schooner. Of course, I'm actually going to see Colonel de Oliviera and his superiors. I'll hand them the last remaining pouch of diamonds and report on what has happened so far. I'm sure Batista knows – the mood today at headquarters was extremely tense; the man even threw a tantrum for no reason. But I'm sure it was because the diamonds."

"Meanwhile, what do you think I should do?" Werner enquired.

“Just relax, make a few sales. Wait for the rifle shipment from Germany. I should be back from Luanda by then, hopefully with a plan of action. I take it our treasure is safe?”

“Yes, it is.” Werner told him where he had deposited the diamonds.

There followed about 30 seconds of silence. Werner then looked up at his friend and said: “Listen, Louis, I’d rather we kept the remaining pouch of diamonds from the Portuguese authorities or military for that matter. Better we hand them to Zietzmann and let him decide what to do with them. That’ll stop you being asked any embarrassing questions. What do you think?”

Louis raised his eyebrows, the implication of what Werner had said dawning on him. “Of course! Cristo, I don’t want any Portuguese officer asking me anything about diamonds. Then we’re agreed: we’ll hand them to your Major Zietzmann.”

They finished their drinks.

“Werner, I’ve have to go,” Louis said, “but I will contact you the moment I’m back. Now, don’t get upset, but on a more serious note, take one of these women – you don’t have to do a damn thing but at least let the others think you’re no different than they and that you are here for sexual gratification. Just pay … do nothing if that’s how you feel. These women don’t talk outside the bedroom. At least then everybody will think it normal; you here for the same reasons they’re here. After all, you’re single; nobody will think your visit to a bordello is suspicious. Remember, this is Portugal, not Germany. This is the best meeting place, let’s not change. I spoke to my aunt – she knows who you are. She’ll arrange anything you want. And, if you wondering, Rosetta knows I’m here and knows my aunt would never let me stray.”

Louis left. Werner realised his friend was right: pretence was all-important. At least he would have an excellent excuse for being here, and de Mello and

his band of cutthroats would not consider it strange were they to hear of it. He might as well act the part. God, he thought, what one had to do for Volk und Vaterland! He wondered how Zietzmann would react to that in his report, especially if it were at the Kaiser's cost!

He returned to the hotel well after three in the morning, to find the hotel doors locked. He had to ring the bell several times before the night porter shuffled into view, grasping a large key with which he grouchily opened up. No doubt in the morning Madame Rodrigues would be told of his late-night escapades, this adding to his already dubious reputation.

In fact, after Louis's departure, the rest of his evening at Madame Manchata's had been pleasant. Louis's aunt had introduced him to what she thought was her best girl, or so she said. A recent acquisition from Portugal, she had added. Oh, she certainly was beautiful, but too young and still childish. What was pleasant was that she had not yet cultivated that inevitable hard façade, the hallmark of the trade. The three of them drank two bottles of champagne, which the aunt ordered at some horrendous price. They chatted, the young woman not offering her services and Werner not asking. This did not perturb the grande dame, probably because Louis had told her what to expect. Not so Madame Rodrigues, who seemed overly concerned about his regular evenings of debauchery.

CHAPTER 34

The SS *Tanganyika* docked at Lobito on April 5. Werner stood on the small quayside with dos Santos as the barge approached; it was filled with crates and cargo.

“Those 44 crates, that’s all yours,” Werner said.

Dos Santos nodded. The custom officers stood to one side, also waiting for the barge. Werner had no idea what the procedures were that related to the import of firearms. He was not particularly concerned: he had already been paid and the proceeds of the barter shipped to Germany. If the import of the firearms encountered a problem with customs, then that was the buyer’s quandary, not his.

Louis had returned two days earlier from his 14-day sojourn in Luanda with his family, where he had consulted with General Cadiz and Colonel de Oliviera. Both senior officers had initially considered it imperative that the arms shipment be confiscated on its arrival in Lobito, but on reflection decided it a pointless exercise if done when the crates came ashore. They believed de Mello would intervene with the customs officers, confiscating the shipment which would then later just be released to dos Santos again, the confiscation no more than a charade. Corruption was rife in government circles and de Mello’s tentacles were everywhere in southern Angola.

After consultation with German Intelligence, it was decided to step back, let the gunrunners clear the firearms, and not intercept them before they crossed the borders of SudwestAfrika. Only then would the authorities strike. The apprehension – or death, for that matter – of Portuguese nationals would not create an international incident as they would have been caught on German

soil with the incriminating evidence. It would be impossible for any Portuguese authority to intervene with such overwhelming evidence. Of course, this would not take care of de Mello or his protector, but General Cadiz believed that this would resolve itself. Precisely how, he never indicated.

The customs officers had taken possession of all the documentation, and as the derricks swung the crates ashore, they were carefully inspected. The crate numbers were compared with those on the manifest and a few cases were opened and the contents inspected.

Werner had difficulty hiding his surprise and annoyance. The customs officers blatantly overlooked the crates containing the rifles. There were 22 crates of rifles, but not one was opened.

Werner had no doubt that de Mello had a hand in this total disregard of proper custom procedures. The officers were not only in his employ but also in his pocket. He fumed, but there was little he could do other than pretend to be unobservant. Rather, he pretended to be happy that all formalities were completed without a hitch.

Dos Santos had arranged for four wagons on the quayside to load the cargo. All the rifle crates were loaded into two of these wagons. Finally, the wagon train was ready to depart.

Dos Santos turned to Werner and held out his hand. “Senhor de Almeida, it has been a pleasure doing business with you. I hope we will do a great deal more. It seems we have the makings of a mutually beneficial business relationship. You will recall my discussion regarding further shipments, and I hope you have given my proposal serious thought. Please consider my order as confirmed. In fact, if you produce a cable from your principals confirming shipment, when and where loaded, what ship and date of departure, I will consider this sufficient to effect payment.”

Werner shook the man’s hand, ensuring an expression of pleasure on his face at receiving this latest order. He had obviously established his credentials, and dos Santos was not wary of him at all.

“Excellent!” Dos Santos said. “I’ll place the order and when I have the confirmation, I’ll be in touch.”

Dos Santos took the reins of his horse and swung into the saddle, a signal to his men who rapidly mounted behind him. He raised an arm up high and then let it fall in an easterly direction. The wagons lurched forward, his men taking up position on the sides of the wagon train. The gunrunner turned, waving farewell. Reluctantly Werner returned the greeting.

Philippe held Werner’s horse in check as he prepared to mount. There was no ignoring the dejected expression on his cavalherico’s face.

“Are we going to stop him, Mestre?”

“Yes, but not here. In SudwestAfrika.”

This seemed to placate the African. He nodded his head, satisfied for the moment that something would be done.

CHAPTER 35

Werner sat in the compartment, fully clothed, at four o'clock in the morning, swaying from side to side with the motion of the train as it chugged through the bush, still 50 miles from Tsumeb. Jurgen was asleep, sprawled on the opposite bunk.

Louis had, on his own initiative and accompanied by Paulo and Philippe, set out to find dos Santos. They left Benguela and intended to visit Huambo to establish whether he'd gone there or whether he was already en route south with the guns he proposed selling to the Ovahereros. All Colonel Batista, his commanding officer, knew was that it was some family crisis, but Rosetta de Sousa and their daughter could also not be found; it was assumed that she was with her husband and therefore was not likely to be suspicious. Now Louis was somewhere in southern Angola looking for dos Santos.

Werner thought Louis's unilateral action foolhardy. What chance had two men against who knew how many? Dangerous, he thought, not wanting to dwell on the possible outcome. Meanwhile, the two pouches containing the diamonds which he had retrieved from the bank made him uncomfortable.

From Benguela, he had sent a deliberately vague cable to Major Zietzmann, informing him that he would report to Windhuk shortly. The major issued instructions for him to be given immediate access to a phone, and from the garrison commander's office in Swakopmund.

After disembarking in Swakopmund from the ship that brought him from Benguela, he immediately proceeded to the local military headquarters. He had waited patiently for an hour while they placed the call. Major Zietzmann was not happy and insisted that he be briefed on the latest developments, but

knew this was impossible over the phone as it was an open line, and insisted that Werner leave for Windhuk on that evening's train. Informed of the urgency of the matter, the garrison commander personally assisted Werner to the station.

In Windhuk, Werner briefed Zietzmann and Jurgen. In detail, he recounted how they had acquired the diamonds, although he spoke of only one pouch.

"Where are the diamonds?" asked the major.

With a self-satisfied smile, Werner handed over a pouch.

"Of course, you realise that these are actually the property of the Portuguese government," he said, "but because of the affiliations between Colonel Batista, de Mello and the Hereros, Major de Sousa and I decided that they be given to you, sir."

The major undid the drawstring and poured the contents of the pouch onto the blotter on his desk.

"Lieber Gott!" Jurgen said with a sharp intake of breath. Though uncut, the stones were large and could fetch a handsome price. Maybe even a small fortune.

"This is what my Askari took off the men they killed. As I said, dos Santos had offered to pay me in diamonds for the next shipment he ordered. At the time I had to make a decision, I said I would accept. Just think about it, I had no alternative but to agree. That was when we believed the existence of the mine still to be a rumour and before we sent the Askaris to investigate."

"Herr Hauptmann, you were correct to do so," the major replied. "He would never have understood your reluctance to accept diamonds in payment. No sane man would do that. Think of the profit made on the resale of those diamonds in Europe. You would've jeopardised the whole mission."

Zietzmann carefully retrieved the stones and returned them to the pouch.

"I'll issue you a receipt which you can give Major de Sousa when you see

him. At least he will be able to tell his superiors the stones are in safe hands. I don't need an incident with the Portuguese!"

The major then turned to Jurgen. "Herr Rittmeister, you need to intercept dos Santos as he crosses the border. I've ordered your troop increased to 80 mounted men, all veterans – no new recruits. Never are those rifles and ammunition to find their way to the Hereros. By the time you get there, dos Santos may have already crossed the border. If so, you will mount a pursuit and this time stop at nothing to apprehend him. Do whatever is necessary."

He paused and then looked off into the distance.

"In fact, off the record, it would be far better if no arrests are made, if you know what I mean."

"Major, the Kunene is in full flood owing to the heavy rains in southern Angola," Werner said. "It is impossible to cross with loaded wagons. Moreover, if dos Santos is heading for the Kaokoveld, then he must cross just above the Raucana Falls. With the river swollen, that's the only place his wagons can ford. We need to get there as soon as possible."

"You will leave on the next train north," Major Zietzmann said. "I've managed to pry a Maxim and crew out of a fellow officer and friend of mine. Those damn things are like hen's teeth. These machine guns have only recently been issued to the Schutztruppe."

"What about Major Graf zu Dohner at Ondongua?" Werner asked. "He's bound to interfere. When we last saw him, his nose was seriously out of joint – all this action in his area, and he and his men sidelined."

The major withdrew a cigar from an ornate box on his desk and proceeded to cut and light it.

"God, the man's an idiot, but unfortunately, he's an aristocrat and a duke to boot, even if he's some Junker family's black sheep – probably got the gamekeeper's daughter pregnant; these family scandals usually involve a

woman. Just ignore him. If he resorts to his customary difficult attitude, tell him you are following my orders. I'll sort something out with the general. Incidentally, our commanding general doesn't think too highly of our dear Graf either."

The latest developments galvanised Major Zietzmann into immediate action. Their departure from Windhuk back to the northern border of the country was particularly rapid.

CHAPTER 36

The terrain was impossible. To try to approach any nearer to the camp would expose them. Louis and Paulo lay on the bare gravel of the desert, looking down towards the camp which dos Santos had pitched in a light indentation. They saw two wagons and the out-spanned oxen corralled in a makeshift boma. Bales of hay lay strewn on the ground, which the oxen and hobbled horses fed on.

Louis turned to Paulo. “If we don’t get our horses to water soon, we’ll have a problem,” he whispered.

“Capitano is right. The river is a day’s ride. Dos Santos will get there tomorrow night or the day after.”

“Do you think they know they are followed?”

“Never, we’ve kept too far back. I think he is going to cross the river above the Ruacana Falls; that’s the only place near where it is shallow. But he’ll have to wait; the river’s in flood, we’ve had too much rain.”

Louis was concerned. Their plan hinged on several ifs, and should any number of these occur, dos Santos would dispose of the weapons and with that would go their proof. The man had to be stopped.

He briefly thought of his friend. Werner had returned to SudwestAfrika and, as requested had, on arriving in Swakopmund, probably contacted Major Zietzmann and relayed the latest developments. All were convinced that dos Santos would cross the border with the weapons, but precisely where was anybody’s guess. Werner’s task was to persuade the major to send an armed detachment from Ondongua westwards across the floodplain and through the northern sector of the Etosha Pan to intercept Dos Santos as he crossed the

Kunene where it formed the boundary between the two countries. No one had any idea what arrangements dos Santos may have made with the Hereros. He could trek southwards, passing through the eastern fringes of the Kaokoveld, and meet with the recipients of the rifles on the fringes of the Namib Desert. The rest of northern SudwestAfrika was a no-go zone: there were a number of military outposts who were bound to detect him.

Originally, Louis's group had consisted of three, but Philippe had left them two days ago, heading for the Finnish Mission. Werner had said that once they were reasonably certain what dos Santos's intentions were, they should cable Major Zietzmann. Louis had drafted a cable in Portuguese using Werner's pseudonym for Philippe to hand to Dr Eggers. She could arrange to have it sent from the telegraph office at Ondongua. While it was a calculated guess, Louis cabled that he thought dos Santos was making for the north-eastern fringes of the Kaokoveld.

"Maybe we should skirt round them and make for the river and let them catch up with us. At least we will have grazing and water for the horses," Louis said.

Paulo shook his head.

"Mestre, we can't do that. They send men out to hunt for food. They can take any direction and so discover our tracks. Best we stay behind them."

"Mmm, maybe you're right," Louis reluctantly conceded.

The horses were a good mile back. They unsaddled them and prepared to bed down for the night. After a mundane meal of jerky and biscuits washed down with water from their water bottles they slid into their bedrolls, leaving the horses tethered to their saddles on the ground. They used them as pillows, hoping the horses' movements would deter any snakes coming near. The area was infested with puff adders and horned desert vipers; at night, they were drawn to body heat and without proper precaution, you could find a reptilian

companion sharing your bedroll!

CHAPTER 37

Dos Santos sat on a folding camp chair, staring into the recently lighted campfire, smoking a cheroot, a small tumbler of Portuguese brandy in his hand as he waited for his servant to prepare supper. The last of the day's light was rapidly disappearing, the evening star, Venus, already perceptible on the western horizon. They would soon cross the border into German territory, but there remained a formidable obstacle: the Kunene River.

The Kunehamas' insurrection had come as a shock to all. The loss of more than 300 souls, which included 114 white men, had galvanised the Portuguese government into action. They immediately reinforced the colonial forces and resurrected all civilian militia forces, ready to launch a retaliatory action against the Kunahamas. For the first time, the military employed horse-drawn artillery. They moved into the Huambo province, using the partially completed British railway line that had rapidly penetrated the interior from Lobito to Katanga, to provide logistical support.

The Portuguese military advanced in force and dealt ruthlessly with any resistance they encountered. The revolt collapsed, with the military setting up garrisons as they advanced. The rebels, many of whom who had been contract labourers forced to work on ranches and plantations, deserted the Kunehama forces and returned to their places of employment, pretending to have been no more than fugitives from terror who had fled to save their lives and had hidden in the bush, trying to avoid the conflict.

Those who continued to oppose the government forces were systematically driven south, no match for the superior forces that now confronted them. Portuguese retribution was merciless: they assailed tribal strongholds with

shells and cavalry charges, massacring the inhabitants.

To avoid the Portuguese patrols, dos Santos had been forced westwards into the desert wastelands that hugged the coastal region of southern Angola, an endless plain with little vegetation and water.

“Mestre?”

He looked up. One of his scouts was standing a respectful distance away, requesting permission to approach. Dos Santos beckoned him near.

The man, a tall and powerful Kunehama, was traditionally dressed except for the rifle in his hand and the bandolier of ammunition over his shoulder. He also wore a sweat-stained campaign hat which most would have long discarded, it was so holed and torn.

“What is it, Don Alphonso?”

Dos Santos addressed the man by his ‘Santu’, the first name the missionaries gave all Blacks they baptised, names which were usually of Portuguese origin. There was method in this; it was a step in ensuring the colony retained a strong Portuguese flavour. The ‘Don’ prefix was a sign of respect, but dos Santos seldom used it. However, Alphonso was special, virtually irreplaceable.

“We are followed.”

“Who can follow us in this desert? It’s so flat, surely we would see them,” dos Santos said with a dismissive wave of a hand.

“It is only two men, Mestre.”

“How do you know this?”

“I was sent to shoot a gemsbok for the pot. I wounded the animal and had to track it on foot. It had run north back along the trail we came along. I crossed the spoor of their horses. I followed them and eventually saw them in the distance. They were following our wagon tracks. If I had been on horseback, they would have seen me.”

“Could you see them well?”

“Not too good, but I saw one white and one black.”

Dos Santos was dismayed. That the party that shadowed them included a white man was ominous. He had at first thought that none could follow them; he had taken extraordinary precautions to avoid the usual routes and kept to uninhabited territory.

“Are you sure about this?” he asked.

“Yes, Mestre. Why would two men without wagons be this close to us in the desert, but avoid our camp?”

A valid observation. He could not argue.

“You’re right. Thank you, Don Alphonso, I’ll think about this.”

He called for his lieutenant, a deputy he had appointed years ago – a degregado, a tough, sullen brute, a man without conscience who had barely escaped the gallows in Portugal for heinous crimes. Anything that required force and brutality was his specialty. Alvarez was large, but not given to any fat, his torso powerful, all well-honed muscle; he was squat with a full black beard and piercing black eyes.

“Alphonso tells me we are followed by two men. One is white.”

“What can two men do to us? We are 21,” Alvarez responded, shrugging his shoulders with indifference.

That answer was too simplistic. Something was going on, dos Santos thought suspiciously.

“I don’t think they want to attack us. I believe they just want to know where we are going. I’m sure it’s the rifles they follow. How far still to the river?” Dos Santos said.

“About 20 miles.”

“Well, we should be there by the day after tomorrow, if not tomorrow night.”

“Yes,” the deputy replied. “But I don’t think we will be able to cross. The river is still in flood.”

“I don’t like this. Why follow us unless they know what we are carrying and what we are trying to do? I don’t want anything to jeopardise this. Remember Sandwich Bay. I’m not about to take anything for granted,” dos Santos growled, his mind already analysing his choices and deciding on what action would be appropriate.

“No, we must do something – within the next day or two. Let’s talk tomorrow. You have to go after them.”

CHAPTER 38

Alvarez lay on the ground with the tracker beside him. Behind them lay another three African men. It was three in the morning, and a quarter-moon provided just enough light to make out the outline of the horizon. A hundred yards from them they could see the horses of those two who followed their wagon train. The horses were unsaddled and hobbled, their riders asleep. No fire burned.

Dos Santos's instructions had been explicit: kill them and bury their clothing and saddles. Take the horses. Leave the bodies to the lions and hyenas. In this remote region, it was unlikely that any trace would ever be found.

The tracker who lay next to Alvarez tugged at his shirtsleeve. "They know something's wrong; probably the horses gave us away. What do you want to do?" the black man asked, his voice barely audible.

"We have to go after them. That's what the boss wants."

He signalled those behind him, lifting a finger to indicate one man, then swept his arm in an arc to his left. Repeating this, he swept his arm to the right. Two men crawled out from the group of three, one moving left, the other right in a flanking movement around the campsite. Alvarez ordered the tracker to remain behind.

It was no more than a minute later that they heard a scream, shocking in the stillness of the night.

The need for stealth evaporated. Confident they outnumbered their prey, Alvarez and his men charged forward into the camp.

CHAPTER 39

Paulo suddenly awoke. He had no idea what had woken him. The horses were restless. Was there a predator in the vicinity; had the horses picked up the scent? He was uneasy. If it were a lion, the horses would be panicky; it had to be something else. He leaned over and shook Louis.

“Major, quiet! Something is wrong,” he hissed.

Louis was immediately alert. “What is it?” he whispered.

“I don’t know, but it’s not a lion … something else,” Paulo replied, rising from his makeshift bed, his rifle already in his hand, a spear in the other. So did Louis. They assumed crouched positions and stared into the dark carefully inspecting the area around the campsite for anything that appeared suspicious.

“Something is out there. I think it is men, not animals, otherwise the horses would be a lot more restless,” Paulo said. Seconds later, he urgently whispered. “Get down on the ground – quickly now! Crawl away from the camp.”

Louis dropped to the ground and quickly leopard-crawled after Paulo into the scrub.

Paulo had taken up position behind a desert saltbush, a dense collection of thick vertical stalks growing to about shoulder height, his short stabbing spear in one hand, his rifle in the other. Louis crouched behind another similar bush. They did not have long to wait before a man approached, running low to the ground and a machete in his hand. Paulo let him pass and then quietly emerged from behind the bush, grabbed the man by the chin and drove the spear into his body, thrusting it upwards below the ribcage. He had

his hand pressed hard over the victim's mouth, but the dying man's scream still pierced the night. The Black then convulsed, arching his back as his life slipped away.

Everyone seemed to be screaming. Louis raised his rifle and fired. One of the men fell to the ground. The others swung round towards the rifle flash, no more than ten yards away. Before Louis could reload, his assailant was upon him. He swung the butt of the rifle at the black man, catching his neck and flinging him sideways to the ground, but not before the man's spear caught him below the shoulder. The downward thrust raked across his ribcage, cutting a burning a path to his navel. He had dropped his rifle and before the man could scramble to his feet again, he drew his revolver and shot the man in the face. The man fell back on the ground.

Paulo saw the white man storm forward, his revolver in his hand. The man had seen Paulo a few yards away and brought his revolver up to fire. Paulo drew his arm back to throw his spear. At point-blank range the man fired. The bullet slammed into Paulo's shoulder, the spear dropping from his lifeless hand, and he fell to the ground. The man rushed forward, his revolver pointing at Paulo's head, the man's eyes wild and a fierce grin on his face. Paulo was powerless and waited for the shot that would kill him. Suddenly a shot rang out and the man's head exploded. Paulo turned to see Louis, his arm still outstretched holding a revolver. He also immediately saw the large stain of blood on his master's shirt. Paulo slowly rose to his feet. They swung round to check if any of their assailants were to be seen. They waited silently, and then heard the sounds of someone crashing through the scrub as he fled the skirmish.

"He must be the last," Louis gasped between deep breaths, jerking his head towards the fleeing man. He held his arm across his body, trying to stem the blood seeping through his shirt. Paulo was battling to stand, bleeding freely.

“Major, we must ride. Dos Santos will come with others,” Paulo said, trying to roll up his bedroll with one arm.

“Here, let me help you.”

Louis rolled up the bedrolls, and with difficulty they saddled both hobbled horses. He handed the reins of Paulo’s horse to him and then boosted him in the saddle; they both groaned with pain and the exertion. They rode travelling east, trying to put as much distance between dos Santos and them before sunrise. Without light, it would be impossible to follow their tracks; dos Santos would have to wait until daybreak. From the blood trails, dos Santos would realise that they were wounded. Would he follow?

Although sore and uncomfortable, Louis was not too concerned about his injury. Yes, he had lost some blood, but nothing like Paulo. His servant’s wound was bad, and the blood pumped slowly but continuously from the bullet hole. He didn’t know whether it had hit bone. They needed to stop, but first they had to lose dos Santos. Paulo realised this, and hung grimly onto his saddle with his good arm, swaying from side to side.

Only once the first morning light bathed the landscape did Louis stop. They halted on a shallow knoll which enabled him to see a few miles. He saw no one behind them. Paulo’s shirt and trousers were saturated with blood; his face was grey and drawn.

“Don’t worry, I’m going to do something about this,” Louis said as he helped Paulo dismount. He tore up a shirt and made two plugs, inserting one in the entrance hole of the wound and the other in the jagged exit hole. He wrapped Paulo’s chest and shoulder tightly with the rest of the shirt, hoping it would help stem the blood flow. It would stop the bleeding if they did not have to ride, Louis thought. Fortunately, the bullet had exited his body without seeming to have struck bone.

He then attended to his own wound. The wound was superficial but ugly,

the cut about a quarter of an inch deep, the skin peeled open, exposing his ribs and stomach muscles. Similar to Paulo, he wrapped his torso tightly with torn clothing. Both required medical attention and the only place he knew of was the Finnish mission which he thought to be at least 100miles away, at best a three-day ride but with them both wounded probably longer. He also knew that the moment they started riding again, Paulo's wound would again seep blood.

Paulo lay on the ground, his eyes closed. Louis lifted his head and trickled water into his mouth.

"I don't think we are being followed. I'm going to let you rest as long as I can. However, as soon as it gets too hot, we have to ride. We need to find water and medical attention; the only place is the Finnish mission station."

"As soon as you get to the river, you must make a travois," Paulo whispered.

"Cristo! I wouldn't know how to do that, but I'll try."

Paulo managed a weak smile and closed his eyes.

*

By midmorning, Louis had no alternative but to hoist Paulo into the saddle and force him to ride. It was now too hot; they had to find to water. The plugs were working and seemed to have stemmed the loss of blood, but now it would start bleeding again. Paulo hovered close to unconsciousness, occasionally slipping into delirium, but still hanging onto the saddle with sheer determination.

Late that afternoon, they made it to the river. Louis helped his cavalherico slip from the saddle and made him comfortable under a large tree. He saw that Paulo had again lost blood. He shot a duiker – a small buck often found near water – and skinned it, roasting the meat over a fire. He tried to feed some to Paulo, but his friend ate little. Using Paulo's machete, Louis sought

out suitable saplings, cutting and trimming them to build a travois. The task was arduous and difficult. Finally, it was done. He dubiously inspected his creation. The question was whether it would last.

The next morning before dawn, he strapped Paulo to the travois and set out for the mission. He followed the course of the river, hoping to find a place to cross the still raging torrent.

CHAPTER 40

Dos Santos glared at the wide-eyed Black who had ridden into camp, almost gibbering with fear, with a garbled story that his comrades had been killed and Alvarez shot in the head. The gunrunner lost control. He cuffed the black man about the head, knocking him to his knees.

“You useless piece of shit! Why did you run? You should’ve stayed and fought back!” he shouted, kicking the man as he raised his arms to protect himself from the vicious blows. The other Blacks looked on morosely, too afraid to intervene.

Dos Santos was in a quandary. He realised he should pursue those who had followed him, but if the men were wounded, it was unlikely that they would now come after him. He was loath to leave the wagons or send more of his men after them. Finally, he decided to press on: it was better not to go after the two, but rather finalise the weapons deal with the Hereros as soon as possible.

Dos Santos’s wagon train resumed its journey south, with the men now alert, he surrounded the moving wagons with scouts who were to sound a warning should they encounter approaching horsemen. They finally reached the river at a point a few miles upstream of the Ruacana Falls, the mist and spray observable in the distance. Where the wagons now stood, the river was usually at its shallowest and once the river subsided, the horses and wagons would be able to cross. The Blacks reckoned it would be two days before they could cross and that only if it did not rain again.

Dos Santos seethed with impatience, knowing that he needed to conclude the deal with the Hereros before any pursuers found him. What further

incensed him was that he did not know who his pursuers were. Surely not the Germans; he was still in Angola! De Mello and Colonel Batista should have seen to it that this did not happen. He dared not be caught while still in possession of the rifles. And whoever it was, they were well organised. The loss of his first consignment in Angola, then the Sandwich Bay ambush, and now he was again being chased! Add to that the loss of a fortune in gemstones. He could not help feeling he was losing control of the situation.

"Jorge!" he shouted for his new assistant. "I want an armed perimeter guard right round this camp with shifts of four hours on and four hours off. Don't let anybody near. Is that understood?"

"Yes, Mestre," the man replied fearfully.

CHAPTER 41

It took two full days for the water to subside. The crossing was still dangerous, but Louis could wait no longer: Paulo's condition was critical and he had to get him to a doctor. He found a dugout canoe drawn up on the riverbank. It was dried and cracked and had not been used for a long time, but still would float. He laid Paulo in the canoe, tying the bow with a length of rope to the saddle-pommel of Paulo's horse. He thought the river now shallow enough to allow him to walk across, but the strength of the current concerned him. Knowing his horse would follow, he led Paulo's horse into deeper water, the dugout trailing behind, and the current pulling it downstream of him and the horse.

They were halfway across the river when suddenly the horse had to swim, the current carrying them downstream. Doggedly, the horse swam towards the opposite bank with him alongside hanging on the pommel, kicking his legs in an attempt to help the animal. At last, he felt the horse's hooves find the bottom of the riverbed again. They soon scrambled up the riverbank, the canoe grounding behind him.

Louis was relieved. Paulo hovered in a state of semi-consciousness, not aware of what was happening round him. Using his own horse, Louis returned to the opposite bank to retrieve the travois and the rest of their gear. He had to coax and help Paulo out of the canoe and on the travois again; this exhausted him and he was close to fainting. Another hour passed before he could ride again. The water had soaked his wound and the strain had reopened it, soaking his shirt with fresh blood.

Near to collapse and hardly aware of his surroundings, Louis rode into the

forecourt of the mission just before midday of the following day, having ridden most of the night during which he was forced to skirt round a pride of lions, finally having to fire shots to scare them off.

The nurses immediately carried Paulo into the small hospital. Dr Eggers emerged from the mission hospital building and was taken aback to see Louis in the remnants of an Angolan officer's uniform. She looked round for Werner and then led Louis into a room with an examination couch and a solitary chair. The racks on the wall were lined with medicine bottles. She sat him down and removed his shirt, and then cut away his makeshift bandages. At the sight of the now festering wound, she screwed up her nose and led him to the table.

"Where's Werner?" she asked.

He did not understand but understood the word 'Werner' and realised she was enquiring about his friend's whereabouts. He made like a train with his one arm and said: "Windhuk."

Then with his finger, he pointed to the ground, indicating that his friend would be coming here.

She smiled, clearly happy at what Louis had indicated. She gave him a sedative and left him to sleep.

CHAPTER 42

Werner and Jurgen were on their way back to the mission from Windhuk.

Around eight in the morning, the train pulled into Tsumeb. In Windhuk, two additional boxcars and a passenger coach had been added to the train to accommodate the additional men and their horses. The Maxim machine gun was mounted on a small wagon drawn by two horses.

It took an hour before the column departed. Jurgen was hoping to reach Ondongua no later than noon the next day.

It was early autumn, the late afternoons still greeted by a rapid build-up of darkening cumulus clouds, then lightning and thunder followed by the short but heavy deluge so typical of an African thunderstorm. Fortunately, the ground was damp with no dust or standing pools of water, and the column made excellent progress. The troopers were all veterans who knew what to do and what was expected of them.

An unusually amicable Graf zu Dohner welcomed them in Ondongua. The two officers realised that there must have been an exchange of messages between the good duke and Windhuk – no doubt the work of Zietzmann. The duke had seen to it that tents were erected for their anticipated arrival. He also ordered his Askaris to tend their horses on their arrival, and for the officers he lay on the best dinner: cold beers and wine from the Rhine, venison steaks and apple strudel with cream to finish. The excellent meal was wasted on Werner. He was impatient, unable to wait for the morning, desperate to be on his way again as he found his thoughts alternating between dos Santos and Dorothea.

They arrived at the Finnish mission at Olukonda in the late afternoon. As

they rode into the forecourt, he saw Dorothea smiling and waving to him. They dismounted and formally shook hands with Pastor Haiddenon.

“You certainly are busy men,” the missionary said to the two officers. “I never expected to see you so soon again. You will be surprised to learn that I have your Portuguese officer friend and his servant in my hospital.”

“In your hospital, Louis!” Werner asked, unable to conceal his relief but also his concern. “How is he?”

Dorothea had taken his hand, standing close and looking up at him, this her first public display of affection.

“He will be fine,” she smiled. “He has a long gash from his shoulder to his stomach, a flesh wound; ugly, but I’ve sutured and cleaned it. His servant, I think his name is Paulo. Well … he’s not so good. He has a gunshot wound to the shoulder; no bones broken, but an infection has set in. He’s running a high fever, but we are watching him round the clock. These Blacks are resilient and he is particularly strong. I’ve seen worse and they have survived. I’m hopeful.”

She still held his hand, and Werner smiled at her.

“Can I speak to them?” he asked.

“No, they’re sleeping, but you should be able to speak to Louis tomorrow morning.”

The oil lamps in the dining hall made the room uncomfortably warm, and when all had eaten, the group retired to the veranda where a cool breeze from the west offered some relief. The evening star hung low on the horizon of a cloudless sky, the last light of the day no more than a grey smudge on the horizon. Werner stood at the veranda rail, Dorothea leaning against him. He sensed how thrilled she was at his nearness.

“So you’re leaving tomorrow again?”

“Yes, once I’ve been able to speak to Louis. I need to catch him early in the

morning. We want to be on our way by sun-up."

"You're still after dos Santos, aren't you?" she asked, taking hold of his arm.

He did not reply but held her tightly as she nuzzled her head up against his arm.

*

Werner was up and dressed by five the next morning. Philippe had woken him with a steaming cup of black coffee to fight off the early-morning chill which had descended on their camp pitched on the outskirts of the mission. Before it was light, he and Jurgen strode to the hospital section where Dorothea greeted them. She gave Werner a quick peck on the cheek, causing Jurgen to lift his eyebrows in surprise.

"He's awake," she said.

Louis lay on the hospital bed, his chest bare. Dorothea was an ardent supporter of the new belief that air was necessary if wounds were to heal rapidly. His scar, the sutures clearly visible, was yellow from the iodine that had been painted on it.

"God, I'm glad you're safe. What happened?" Werner asked.

Louis told them the story as Werner translated for an attentive Jurgen.

"Where is he now?" Jurgen asked.

Louis gave them a position on the river where he thought dos Santos would ford with his wagons.

"You may be a bit late. He might have crossed yesterday or will do so today."

"Scheisse!" Jurgen exclaimed when Werner translated. "We have to get going. If he meets with the Hereros before we get there, we're going to have a serious fight on our hands."

Louis shook his head. "No, my friend, don't fret. With these rains, dos

Santos won’t get any wagons across the Kunene; it’s in full flood. If he tries to cross the river farther east to avoid this, he’ll be walking through the Etosha floodplain. It’s also impassable, and then he runs the danger of encountering the Schutztruppe patrols based at the fort at Namutoni. That’ll be just as dangerous. They’d probably intercept him. I think the only route he can take is southwest through the Kaokoveld, and to do that he must cross the river. Wherever he may be with his wagons, he’ll have to lie up for a few weeks. Hell, it could be a month or more, who knows. In the summer, especially late summer, the Kunene River’s flow is unpredictable,” Louis replied after Werner had translated.

Werner realised that the man was right. “Okay, I accept what you’re saying.”

“So do I, Jurgen finally murmured, but still unhappy that there were no other alternatives.

“Have you told him about …?” Louis asked after Jurgen left.

Werner understood the question and shook his head. “I will,” he said.

They went next door to check on Paulo, but he was still asleep, still sedated and with his upper torso and shoulder bandaged.

As they left the room, Dorothea pulled Werner back and placed her lips on his, pressing her body to him. He took her into his arms and passionately returned her kiss.

“Be careful. Please come back, I need you,” she whispered, and then she broke away and fled down the passage.

*

Louis was right. The area had had more rain than in most years. All the rivers were in full flood and the floodplain under a foot of water forcing many locals to abandon their kraals and leave the area with their families and livestock. Fortunately, the mission remained unaffected. It took nearly two

weeks before the waters started to subside.

Louis and Paulo made a rapid recovery and a week after Werner's arrival at the mission, the officers returned to Windhuk with their servants in tow. Louis and Paulo were to remain at the mission until fully recovered.

CHAPTER 43

Soon after their arrival in Windhuk, the two officers met in Major Zietzmann's office in the administration building.

"Coffee, gentlemen?"

The coffee served, the major lit a cigar and leaned back in his chair.

"Well, my friends, we still have a good deal to do. We need to tackle Mello and Colonel Batista. I believe this will prove to be something entirely different, requiring all your cunning and guile. They are powerful and dangerous men."

"Major, my first question is; do I dare go back to Angola? Do they not know who I really am?" Werner asked.

Before the major could speak, Jurgen broke in.

"I doubt it," Jurgen said. "Dos Santos is unaware that you are a German officer and believes you to be the Portuguese representative you've been masquerading as. Now your friend Louis at the mission, well, he's a different matter entirely. He deserted his command. Believe me, Colonel Batista will be dying to get his hands on him for that infringement alone, never mind the rest!"

"Look, don't concern yourselves yet. I'll contact General Diaz and explain this new predicament. Let's hear what he suggests. Meanwhile, it is well that Louis and his batman remain at the mission while recuperating" Major Zietzmann said, and then looked at Werner, a cynical smile starting on his face. "And you, Mr de Almeida, remember: only we know that you are a German officer; you must prepare to return to Benguela on the next ship,"

"Where do I tell them I've been?"

“I doubt whether de Mello or Batista will even enquire. They have little interest in you, and they certainly will not be approaching you for weapons. However, they are involved with the Kunahamas and Hereros, and that is a matter of concern. I’m sure you can think of something acceptable to account for your absence.”

“Well, I suppose so,” Werner hesitantly replied.

*

A week later, Major Zietzmann told them that he had contacted General Diaz and that Louis was to return directly to Luanda. Werner, again masquerading as Senhor de Almeida, was to board ship to Lobito and continue his role as a representative, and wait for Louis to return. Briefly put, the major said, General Diaz would advise Colonel Batista that Louis had been working for the general on a clandestine operation and that he had been urgently recalled to Luanda, with strict instructions not to divulge his movements to anyone.

*

Werner and Jurgen met for dinner at the Thuringerhof Hotel to discuss what to do with their ill-gotten gains.

“I think the diamonds should be left in the bank for safekeeping,” said Jurgen.

Werner shook his head. “No point in that,” he said. “The stones need to be disposed of – and soon. Once they’re converted to cash, it’s highly unlikely we could be incriminated at all.”

Both had a few ideas of what should happen with the diamonds, but finally it was decided that Jurgen would take them to Germany when he returned in a month’s time. He could visit the diamond merchants in Antwerp with a few samples to gauge their worth, and if their disposal was a relatively simple exercise, then he would do so, depositing the funds in a joint account, he

providing the bank with affidavits from Werner and Louis for that purpose. All understood that this would take a while.

Werner and Philippe boarded the Portuguese steamer the SS *Beira* at Swakopmund. Two days later, they disembarked at Lobito and proceeded directly to Benguela.

Werner was glad to be back in Benguela. It being autumn, the weather was pleasant, and the recent rains had saturated the ground, preventing the wind from raising dust. He rode down the main thoroughfare in his open carriage, Philippe trotting alongside as was proper, the duo a picture of affluence.

He swept into the reception area of the hotel, amused at the startled reception from Madame Rodrigues at his sudden appearance.

“Madre de Deus! Senhor de Almeida!” she said loudly, her hands fluttering over her ample cleavage. “Where have you been? We have been so concerned. Your luggage is still in your room.” Then realising what she had just said, she quickly added: “Of course, you paid for the room well in advance and all is safe, but we’ve all been worried about your well-being.”

“Senhora, business I’m afraid. Urgent business required my presence in Luanda. Regrettably I could not tell you of my departure, but now I’m back.” He smiled beguilingly at her.

“I’m glad – you are our most important guest!”

“Did anybody enquire as to my absence?” he enquired.

“No, no. It was just I that was so concerned,” she said, her voice now subdued.

Was he to read something into her remark or was this mere concern? Did the good woman have designs on him? On the other hand, perhaps his sojourns to Madame Manchata had given her the wrong impression? She insisted on accompanying him to his room, Philippe in tow, lugging the additional luggage up the stairs.

“As you see, everything is as neat and tidy as you left it,” she beamed.

“Thank you.”

“Will you be coming back late tonight? I need to know so I can make arrangements with the porter.”

Inquisitive woman, he thought. “No.”

He waited until she had left, and then spoke quietly to Philippe. “Nothing is going to happen for a while. Would you not like to go home for a week or so?”

Philippe shook his head. “I’ve no home; the army is my home, and I must stay here and serve you.”

His servant’s forthright response of loyalty took an emotional hold on him and for a few seconds he could not speak.

“Thank you, Philippe. I will not forget that. All right, I’ve told you what’s happening to the diamonds. Once the money arrives, you’ll be a rich man. You will get your share when we finally get to Windhuk to stay.”

The black man flashed his teeth.

“Then I’ll buy cattle and find a good woman and start a new life in SudwestAfrika. Maybe you and I can buy a ranch … a big, big ranch. I’ll work for you. Maybe also father a dozen sons!”

He spoke shyly, displaying that hint of embarrassment all Africans seemed to show when discussing anything that remotely implied sexual activity. Werner clenched his teeth, still fighting his emotions. He felt like a father to this man.

“Philippe, my friend, that’s a good idea.”

CHAPTER 44

The prediction that the Kunene River could remain in full flood had been right; the river took three weeks to subside. Dos Santos had remain ensconced near the river in a camp no more than a mile from the riverbanks amongst the trees of the gallery forest of a small tributary. The local bush telegraph – the passing of information from mouth to mouth – kept the Schutztruppe's black scouts well informed. Dos Santos was not about to return to Huambo; he was waiting until the river subsided.

On hearing this news, Major Zietzmann sent a large detachment of mounted marines northward towards the Ruacana Falls with Jurgen von Brandt in command, accompanied by Werner.

*

From many miles away, the Ruacana Falls revealed its position, the mist rising into the sky, the inevitable rainbow visible and the roar of the falls faintly audible. Louis had said that dos Santos would cross above the falls. Although no longer in the floodplain that drained into the Etosha Pan, the ground was still flat and featureless. The only trees were those in the gallery forests which hugged the riverbanks. A scout appeared, reining in next to Jurgen, and spoke rapidly.

"He says dos Santos is gone," Jurgen translated for Werner. "The scout says he left yesterday."

Werner swore.

The column broke into a canter as they neared the riverbank and burst into a clearing amongst the trees. It was dos Santos' deserted campsite, with sand-doused campfires and wagon tracks clearly visible.

“How many were they?” Werner asked.

“No more than Louis told us,” Jurgen replied. “At least it appears they have not yet met with the Hereros, which may be a godsend. Let’s water the horses and be on our way; with these tracks, he’s going to be easy to follow. It appears he’s moving in a southwest direction. My God, that’s rough terrain out there. You don’t want to get lost there.”

Jurgen asked Philippe if he had understood and whether he agreed that dos Santos was heading in the direction he had indicated.

“That’s a very bad place,” Philippe said, “there’s little water and lots of wild animals. The wind blows so strong that it blows small stones before it. This happens nearly every afternoon. Many people have been lost there and never found again.” Philippe shook his head. “A bad place,” he repeated.

“Well, we’ve no choice; we have to follow,” Jurgen said, making it clear that he did not want to discuss the option again.

It was stiflingly hot and most soldiers had stripped off their blue-grey tunics and were now clad only in a singlet. The scouts were far ahead, at least five miles farther on, not in uniform but all dressed as locals so that should they encounter any Hereros they might bluff them long enough before realising, hopefully too late, who they really were. Should they encounter any large group they were to avoid contact.

The further southwest they rode, the more rugged the terrain became. The floodplain gave way to scattered rocky outcrops composed of layered flat stone. These layers of rock strata jutted out of the sides of the outcrops and were a source of shade whenever they stopped. Arroyos separated the hills, the dry riverbeds lined with sparse vegetation.

From the terrain through which they now rode it was clear that dos Santos’s wagons had to be finding it difficult. Philippe had told Werner that the Ruacana Falls demarcated the beginning of the coastal plain, where the

ground dropped sharply as the river's strong flow forces a passage through the plateau to the coastal plain. This was 30 miles behind them to the northeast. There was little doubt that dos Santos was making for the coastal plain, believing it unlikely that he would run into a German patrol in this desolate region – but first he had to cross the mountainous region.

They saw animals of every description: lion, desert elephant, rhino, leopard and cheetah, and the scavenging jackal and hyena. White men had not yet hunted this region: it was still an animal paradise; here the animals were not shy, only curious.

As the sun sank, the western sky was a golden streak across the horizon. As the last light waned, the scouts returned to the column which had halted in a deep arroyo to camp for the night. Already the wind had risen; it had a tinge of dampness to it, this moisture from the sea where it had originated. The deep riverbed afforded some protection, but still it howled, driving sand before it, making conditions unpleasant and all were irritable.

Werner and Jurgen sat in two folding camp chairs around a small fire, shielded by an expanse of brush along the arroyo bank. Philippe approached and squatted within a yard or two of the men. Jurgen passed him a water bottle. Philippe drank long, screwed the cap back, and only spoke once Jurgen had taken the bottle.

"They have found him; he is only a few miles ahead. He's still alone; there are no Hereros. The wagons move slowly and with difficulty. I'm waiting for Joseph. He scouted far ahead and more towards the southeast to look for the Hereros. He knows this area well. We believe they are near."

Both men agreed: the Hereros had to be near; dos Santos could not travel much farther with the wagons, the terrain now nearly impenetrable.

Leading his horse, Joseph entered the camp well after nine. Philippe rose from where he was seated to greet him, and both men were soon in deep

conversation. They finally approached the officers.

“He’s found the Hereros; they are camped at least ten miles from here. There are more than 50 men on horses, all armed. They also have fresh horses with them,” Philippe said, lowering his head. Then out of character, he added a warning, this without being prompted: “It is a large force. They are careful; they have made only a small fire. We need to be careful.”

The two men looked at each. Werner grimaced, leaving all decisions to Jurgen.

“Well, they will meet with dos Santos tomorrow,” Jurgen said. “There’s not much we can do now. It’s too dark and there is no moon. The terrain is too dangerous to make an attempt at an attack at night.”

“Be sure, the Hereros will be in the saddle at first light and will be with him before we can attack,” Werner countered. “We don’t want to be badly positioned when the Hereros attack; we need to choose a spot.”

Jurgen frowned. He did not agree. He wanted to begin the attack at first light and deal dos Santos a crushing blow before the Hereros arrived.

“Mestre, he is camped in the mouth of a small gorge through which he must pass. This will be easy to defend. He is sure to put sentries on the hills,” Philippe interjected, humbly bowing and looking away, clearly contrite for being so bold as to interrupt.

Jurgen spoke adamantly. “We attack at dawn. The Maxim must be placed on an elevated position so it can cover us should the Hereros attack. I want everyone mounted and ready to ride by first light.”

The word spread. The troops checked their kit before turning in. There would be no time in the morning.

*

The soldiers broke camp, ready to depart at the first sign of daybreak and began to move out while it was still dark. At the first touch of dawn, the troop

broke into a canter; Jurgen wanted them to be on dos Santos before he and his men realised what was happening.

This was not to be. Dos Santos's sentries alerted their camp to the approaching column when they were still a mile or two away, the sentries immediately firing shots into the air, their pre-arranged signal of approaching danger.

Jurgen soon realised that dos Santos had foreseen the possibility of such an attack and had prepared to deal with it. He had the wagons drawn across the mouth of the gorge as an additional precaution, and had his men take cover behind them, their horses and other animals deeper in the gorge where they were protected from gunfire.

*

Jurgen was not about to attempt to overwhelm dos Santos with a charge on horseback, his men riding into a curtain of rifle fire. He halted the troops ordering them to dismount and take up positions on the ridges that overlooked the river. They took up position on the skyline, so affording them a view of the campsite below. However, the enemy perceived this movement. The soldiers were backlit by the early dawn and immediately opened fire. If the Hereros were approaching, they would hear that dos Santos was under attack.

"We have to know what those bastards are going to do. Get Philippe and one other to skirt the camp and find a lookout position, so we can be warned when the Hereros approach," Jurgen said.

Werner called a sergeant over and sent him off to find Philippe.

Sporadic gunfire continued. The range was excessive, at least 500 yards, but still the occasional shot rang out.

"God, an outright charge against their camp will be too costly," Jurgen said. "Dos Santos knows that; he'll just sit and wait for the Hereros to arrive. We

have to think of something else. We can't cross the ridge and approach in the open; they'll massacre us. Order the men to stop shooting – except our snipers, they're only to shoot if something moves. Let's pin him down. I want to first see what the Hereros are going to do."

Philippe soon returned.

"The Hereros have already entered the gorge and will meet with dos Santos any moment now. They've left a rearguard. There must be about 100 of them. Also, I saw there are a few pools of water at the end of the river." Philippe said breathing heavily.

Jurgen swung round to face Werner.

"Christ! With water, they can stay in there as long as they like."

"I'm wondering what's going to happen now," Werner said. "He's actually delivered the rifles; all he has to do is hand them over. I mean, he's not going to move further into SudwestAfrika. He has done what he came here for and, no doubt, wants to head back to Angola. The deal is done. What do you think?"

"You could be right. Once delivered, he can abandon the wagons and ride. We'll have to go after the Hereros to get the rifles; that's not his problem anymore."

"Well, my orders are explicit. We are to apprehend dos Santos, and that's what I'm going to do if he makes a break for it," Werner said, his voice fierce, his facial expression hard and determined. "I'm going to hunt the bastard down."

"Listen, Werner, we can't split the troop – there're just too many Hereros. We have to stop the rifles first and then only hunt him down – we can't do both if they decide to split. We don't have enough men."

"I have to—"

"Enough!" Jurgen shouted, interrupting him. "The rifles first, that's an

order!”

Seething, hardly able to control his anger, Werner rose and started walking away towards the ridge which would give him a view of the camp. He had no choice: Zietzmann had placed Jurgen in command.

“Hauptmann von Dewitz!” Jurgen shouted. “Get back here immediately!”

Werner stopped in midstride, in two minds whether to obey or not.

“You heard me, Werner, let me not repeat myself,” Jurgen said menacingly, noticing Werner’s attitude.

Werner did an about-face and returned to face Jurgen, snapping to attention in front of the officer and stiffly saluting Jurgen.

Jurgen did not return the salute. Stone-faced, he stared at Werner.

“Get off that damned high horse, that’s not necessary! Calm down. I promise, you’ll get your shot at dos Santos one way or another, but we cannot break up the troop. Right now, the rifles are the most important item. The Hereros cannot be allowed to receive them. You and I have to cooperate and remain unified. Is that understood?”

“Jawohl, Herr Rittmeister!” Werner said with exaggerated officiousness, loudly clicking his heels and giving Jurgen another parade ground salute, unable to suppress his sarcasm.

Jurgen looked at him with a slight condescending smile on his face; Werner’s display of sarcasm and insubordination was not lost on him. He then spoke quietly, intent on having the last word.

“Herr Hauptmann, just fuck off.”

Werner did not consider it prudent to respond. His anger slowly evaporated. His friend was right: stopping the guns was imperative; but he was not about to apologise.

“Okay, now that you are thinking clearly, this is what we’re going to do. I want you to take about 30 men, all mounted, and prepare a cavalry charge.

You'll have to move to the other side of the gorge. I'll take command of the rest and with Feldwebel Wirtz and his Maxim gun crew, we'll start to harass those behind the wagons."

"What do you think they will then do?'

"I don't know. I don't think the machine gun will flush them, but I'm hoping the Hereros will at least split, some of them coming up the gorge to support dos Santos, making any charge through the gorge on their rear easy if it is not heavily defended."

*

To avoid a downward trajectory, which made the machine gun difficult to aim and operate, Feldwebel Wirtz insisted that the crew manhandle the Maxim down close to the riverbed, where they positioned the gun behind a small buttress of rocks. This turned out to be a dangerous task. Dos Santos, seeing the gun and realising what the Schutztruppe intended, ordered his men to concentrate rifle fire on the gun crew. The bullets ricocheted off the rocks, forcing the crew to take cover behind the buttresses. The Schutztruppe on the ridges retaliated, laying down a fusillade of covering fire. Finally, the crew had the Maxim in position and returned fire; it chattered, walking the shots towards the wagons. The weapon was heavy and unwieldy, firing in short bursts with the bullets leaving a trail of spurting sand and flying rock fragments.

Philippe had left his companion on a high point overlooking the southern entrance to the gorge. If the Hereros moved to enter the gorge, he was to signal by waving his arms, being visible against the skyline.

Werner had proceeded to a point about a half-mile from the rear entrance of the gorge, but encountered resistance. The Hereros had left a few men to keep watch over the horses and keep a lookout for any sneak attacks. Leaving three or four men to provide covering fire, Werner's men forced their

reluctant horses down the steep slope towards the bottom of the gorge. Here they dismounted and approached the enemy, walking their horses along the riverbed. The nervous Herero rearguard opened fire, but they were still out of effective range. Those Schutztruppe left above them on the slope now opened fire; this was Werner's signal to attack. Werner's troops remounted and charged with drawn sabres, supported by gunfire from those still above on the ridge. The air was filled with bloodcurdling screams and shouts of the cavalrymen, all magnified in the confines of the ravine. Werner led the charge with pistol drawn.

The combination of volleys from the troops above combined with the chilling sight of a group of screaming horsemen charging the arroyo with sabres flashing was a test for any opposing force's resolve. Confusion broke out in the Hereros' ranks, many abandoning their horses as they panicked. The Herero is a brave fighter and never shirks from combat; they returned bullet for bullet. But cold steel is a different matter: they fear hand-to-hand combat and always avoid it. They fled back through the gorge towards dos Santos and their main troop who, hopefully, were still stationed at the rear entrance.

The German forces now had the enemy trapped.

Werner halted the charge and with the Hereros now trapped within the gorge, he called his men from on the ridges to join him below, leaving only a token force. With Werner leading, they walked their horses forward towards the lip of the gorge, expecting to encounter rifle fire at any moment. Sporadic shots greeted them. They dismounted and took cover. He took stock of his situation; he had lost four men – two killed and two wounded; two men had accompanied the wounded to the rear, further depleting his strength. The Hereros had established a half-moon defence across the gorge, hidden behind rocky ridges and boulders; it was almost impossible to flush them out. If he

ordered another charge, his troops would be mown down by gunfire. His troops now also took up a defensive position, similarly protected from any assault. This had become a stalemate.

Leaving his troop under the command of a Feldwebel, Werner returned to Jurgen and reported his current situation.

“Well, at least we have them bunched up and I believe we now have the advantage, but if they are smart and start a combined charge towards the rear, I doubt your men will hold out. We need to give you additional support. Let’s look at our choices.”

Werner was only interested in two objectives: capture the rifle and dos Santos, dead or alive.

“Correct me if I’m wrong,” Werner said, “but we are here primarily to stop the rifles and get dos Santos; it’s not our intention to take on the Herero force at this stage. I mean, we’re outnumbered. Am I right?”

Jurgen nodded.

“If we attack from your end, by that I mean the wagon-end with a near full force, they would have to retreat into the gorge, abandoning the wagons and the rifles. At least we would have accomplished part of our objective. Do you agree?”

“You’re right, but dos Santos could also retreat with the Hereros. But wait, I’ve just thought of something. He’s not going to stay with them for long. He’ll want to get back across the border. He won’t want to stay here; it’s too dangerous. There’s safety for him in Angola; if caught here, he’d be hanged,” Jurgen said thoughtfully.

“Right. So?”

The two officers stood in the shade of a large rock overhang. Jurgen withdrew a tin from his tunic pocket and offered Werner a cheroot.

Jurgen stared into the distance at the entrance to the gorge. Without turning

round, he spoke. “You know what he’s going to do? I think he’ll break open the crates and distribute the weapons and ammunition amongst his men. At least that way they’ll get most of them out. We have to attack soon! If that enables dos Santos to escape, well, that’s too bad. At least we’ll have captured the wagons, the rifles and ammunition.”

This did not suit Werner; he wanted dos Santos.

Jurgen read his mind. He laid a hand on Werner’s shoulder and sighed in resignation.

“Okay, if he gets away, I’ll give you a good portion of my men. Then you can pursue him while I’ll take care of the rifles. What do you say?”

Werner smiled. “Okay.” He realised this was all he could hope for and knew Jurgen was doing this for him.

“All right, let’s do it!” Jurgen agreed.

Jurgen called his sergeants together and outlined his plan. They recalled all the men from the other end of the gorge, leaving an escape route for the Hereros, hoping they would use it once a full attack on the wagons started.

CHAPTER 45

Although now reinforced by a number of Hereros who had come through the gorge, the defence perimeter created by dos Santos could only take a limited number of men, the others having to remain in the rear as reserves. An onslaught from above and both ends of the gorge, supported by concentrated machine-gun fire, would be more than he could resist for long unless they took shelter within the gorge. The only alternative was retreat and regroup. They had broken open the crates and started passing the rifles through to the rear, but Jurgen's snipers had picked off those attempting to hand rifles down the line. Dos Santos abandoned the plan and ordered the wagons to retreat into the gorge where they would be safe from rifle and machine-gun fire. A costly decision although necessary. He lost both men and animals in the process to Schutztruppe fire.

The gunfire intensified, the Schutztruppe sending volley after volley at the gorge entrance. Dos Santos realised that a full attack could be imminent but felt confident that this could be repelled, the combined strength of his men and the Hereros a fair match against the enemy now that they were concentrated in the entrance to the gorge.

Word arrived from the scouts that the enemy was emerging from the gorge's upper end and that the Schutztruppe had withdrawn all forces from there. This galvanised the Hereros into action, realising that an escape route had opened, and whether ordered to do so or not the rebels slowly withdrew from their defence positions, first in ones and twos and then in groups.

Dos Santos seethed. He was losing too many men. He realised the Schutztruppe on the ridges had to be seeing what was happening. Surely, a

charge on his wagons was imminent. He also saw that his own men were terrified; they were staring at him waiting for his orders.

“Leave the wagons and rifles. Run towards the end of the gorge and find horses. We leave with the Hereros,” He shouted.

His men needed no second invitation. They deserted their defensive position en masse, surprised to note that the Schutztruppe did not fire on them. Within a few minutes, the entrance to the gorge was deserted except for the dead and wounded.

CHAPTER 46

Jurgen ordered that no attack be made on them: to engage in a fight in the open would be too dangerous, as the enemy was numerically stronger; and trying to engage them in the gorge would be no better than a stand-off.

“Rather allow them to escape to fight another day, provided we have possession of the rifles and ammunition,” he explained.

The Schutztruppe soon overran the wagons. Most rifles were accounted for, as the enemy had managed to salvage only a few. The Maxim had wreaked havoc; the wagons were badly shot up, the timbers shattered and riddled with holes. It was doubtful whether they would make Ondongua without being repaired.

The Hereros did not flee but took up position on the other side of the gorge, placing men on the ridges from where they could engage any approaching force from a distance. They knew that in the open they were numerically stronger. Neither force dared move troops through the gorge.

On Jurgen’s orders, the spare horses taken from the Hereros were hitched to the laden wagons. The troops driving the wagons were ordered to retrace their steps to near the border, and then go on to Ondongua via the mission. The main troop of Schutztruppe was to shadow the wagons and ensure that the Hereros did not carry out any sneak attacks.

Only when they were out of danger did Jurgen split the force, retaining 20 men to escort the wagons while the rest, together with the Maxim machine gun and its crew, were placed under Werner’s command to continue the conflict with dos Santos and his motley band of Kunahamas and Hereros.

CHAPTER 47

Akai, the leader of the primary Herero troop, sat under the stunted thorn tree on the banks of the dry river, cautiously watching a seething dos Santos, sitting opposite him. Things had not gone well at all. The Germans had the rifles. The question was who would pay. Akai studied the fat man, his evaluation of dos Santos appearing nonchalant as he sucked on the broken-off pipe stem of his pipe. He would occasionally blow a large cloud of evil-smelling tobacco smoke from the side of his mouth. He despised the Whites, especially this fat pig opposite him; he only sold rifles to the Hereros for the money, and nothing else. Akai knew him for what he was: a cruel, insensitive man who pillaged, murdered and sent other black men into slavery. Unfortunately, the Hereros needed him: he the source of rifles, ammunition, and explosives. This was the only reason he showed the man any respect.

“We should not have abandoned the wagons!” dos Santos said with savage irritation.

“I know, but was else was there to do?” Akai calmly replied, hoping the white man would behave; he would not allow him to speak down to him.

Dos Santos realised he’d better be circumspect and hold his tongue; the Hereros could kill him and his men right there, and no one would ever know what had happened.

“Those rifles are lost – we’ll never get them back. You must go back to Angola and arrange another shipment,” Akai said.

“I know, but there is something wrong somewhere. The Germans seem to know every time we cross the border. Even when we go by sea, they are waiting for us. I’m even having problems in Angola. There, our assets being

stolen and we do not yet know by whom. There's a leak somewhere."

"It's that woman of yours," Akai said. "When I was in Huambo, I saw she was not happy to be with you." The Herero wondered why any woman would want to spend time with this man – he was grotesque.

"She's gone!" Dos Santos did not want to go into detail. He looked at the black man sitting calmly opposite him: the man's thin face; the black frost of his tightly curled hair touched with grey; his clothes loose on his frame; the hardship of perpetual conflict; and the lack of proper food etched in his thin face. Still his eyes burned with a stern resolve and fire. Dos Santos knew this man was not to be crossed.

"Just as well," Akai sighed, rising and replacing the battered khaki officer's cap he wore, his only sign of rank. "I will now leave with my men, and you take your men and head back to the river. You let me know in the usual way. I'll be ready for the next shipment, with your payment."

Akai knew that they could never win the war, but Hannu Zeraua, their chief, was right: to give in to the Germans was to give in to slavery. He thought back to the status his family had enjoyed before the Germans came, when peace reigned and all were happy, their wealth reflected in their vast herds of cattle. No, he thought, he'd rather die fighting. This land belonged to his people.

The Germans had come with their ships and their trains; they built towns, tore up the land, and built farms. They never asked for land, they just took it. He could still see the disbelief and fear in the eyes of the farmers they had beaten and hacked to death at the start of the insurrection; they had never thought those they had treated so abominably would rise up against them. Did they really think we would just let them go on treating us as they did? Even the Portuguese: they were just as bad, sometimes even worse.

CHAPTER 48

Dos Santos watched the tall African walk to his horse. Clearly, the man knew that dos Santos was watching him. A young black boy, who could not have been more than 14 or 15, held the horse's reins.

"My youngest son, Jaakko," Akai turned and said proudly, placing his hand on the boy's shoulder.

Dos Santos nodded, forcing a smile. The boy meant nothing to him. He was more concerned with his own thoughts, trying not to reveal that he was plagued by stomach cramps brought on by the many recent disasters. The loss of money was the most serious: he was accountable to his joint shareholders. The mere thought of de Mello and Batista made him cringe and clench his teeth in frustration. Then there were the results of this latest escapade gone wrong, and the consequences he was yet to face. He knew the Germans would now pursue him relentlessly. He needed to be extremely careful.

His scouts had confirmed that the Germans had left, retracing the wagon trail back to the river. He knew they would turn eastwards once the terrain improved, leaving the way clear for him to make an escape. He would delay his departure until he knew they were a good distance from the trail he would take north. Only then would be safe for him to leave.

CHAPTER 49

Werner thought the machine gun would be of little support as it was difficult to move from position to position. Dos Santos's men were all on horseback; they would be out of range in seconds. He did not think dos Santos was fool enough to follow the shortest route to the border. The river would soon further subside and he would then able to cross at a variety of points. Which would the man choose? Werner thought the best route would be across the floodplain that fed the Etosha Pan, as the terrain was considerably easier. Still, he strung scouts out across the approach to the river over a wide area, stationed at least 20 miles from the river at intervals of a few miles. He instructed them to merely observe and report, but ensure that they were not seen.

They waited for four days before a scout stationed on the eastern side reported that dos Santos was on the move. Werner recalled all his scouts, and they moved off towards the river. Philippe thought it likely that dos Santos was ride towards a ford on the border where the Kunene River suddenly turns northwards into Angola; this would be one of the first fords to become passable as the river subsided. Not having much start on the gunrunners, Werner hastily placed his men in a defensive half-moon circle around the access to the ford. Meanwhile, he established that the river had subsided as he had expected but was still dangerous, although men on horseback could cross. He chose a clearing at the ford to place the machine gun, which would permit a wide arc of fire.

CHAPTER 50

As dos Santos approached the river, he sent two men ahead to reconnoitre the ford. He halted his column but did not allow anyone to dismount. He was not discarding the possibility that the Germans could try to ambush him; they knew he had to cross somewhere.

The two scouts discovered Werner's fresh tracks. Stealthily approaching, blending in with the bush, it did not take them long to spot a soldier in blue-grey. They cautiously backed off to report to dos Santos. They had no idea what the strength was, but knew a reception awaited any who was fool enough to approach the river here.

The Germans never saw the scouts.

CHAPTER 51

Werner fumed with impatience. His scouts had spotted dos Santos and his troop approaching, but what had happened? Where were they? He called his cavalry sergeants and scouts together.

“Something’s gone wrong,” he said. “I’m sure they’ve spotted us.”

“Mestre, it must have been the horses,” Philippe said. “They will have found the spoor; they are particularly careful. Maybe they’ll cross elsewhere on the river – maybe more west.”

Werner beckoned to a sergeant who stood close by.

“Feldwebel Arends, take ten men and ride west. If you find them, avoid engaging them. I’m sure they’ll probably find you first. They know we are here,” he said grimly, and then turned to the others. “I want the rest of you men to maintain a state of readiness. At the first sounds of gunfire, we’re going to their assistance. All troops are to stand by their horses, ready to mount at an instant’s notice. Feldwebel Wirtz can take ten men and protect the machine gun here.”

Arends rode off with his men, maintaining a well drawn-out single file, ensuring they were not bunched up should they be ambushed. The only sounds were those of the horses.

CHAPTER 52

Dos Santos's men were visibly tense; they could no longer surprise the enemy, they knew they had been spotted.

As dos Santos approached the river, he swung west, following its course but keeping about a mile away. They soon came on a tributary flowing towards the river, now a mere trickle. It had gouged a donga in the flat terrain, about 20ft deep, with near vertical sides. He ordered his men across the donga to take a position along the bank of the stream, well hidden behind whatever was available. He was convinced the Germans were following and would approach from the east. They would have to cross the donga to get to him.

*

Feldwebel Arends was not a newcomer to the colony. Years back, he had already shed that ruddy, burned complexion associated with all military men arriving in the colonies for the first time and making their acquaintance with the harsh African sun. His skin had taken on a light mahogany hue, as if it were leather. He boasted an Imperial waxed moustache, not too ostentatious, and prominent crow's feet in the corner of his eyes from squinting into the sun, the folds radiating white streaks if he lifted his eyebrows. The hair visible below his campaign hat was peppered with speckles of grey. There was no doubt that he was a veteran of many campaigns. He knew the bush, and he knew his adversary. Once they hid, it was near impossible to see them before they saw you, and knowing this, he had his most trusted Askari, Moses, ride by his side. Moses was a Damara with amazing eyesight and a deep knowledge of the bush.

"Oubaas, das ist gefährlich! " the scout said quietly, reigning in his horse.

The sergeant stopped. If his scout said it was dangerous, he knew he had to listen. “What do you see?” he asked.

“I don’t see anything. But I can feel something,” murmured the scout.

The man’s uncanny intuition had proved itself before. It was a good time to heed it. The sergeant signalled for his troop to dismount, leaving the horses in the care of the youngest.

The noon sun was blistering hot and the contrast between shadow and sunlight severe, making it difficult to distinguish any shape in the deep shadows of the stunted trees and bushes. The men took shelter deep in the shadows, rifles at the ready. Through the foliage, they could vaguely make out the depression before them, which the scout said was a small river. The scout indicated with a raised hand that the sergeant should hold his position, and slowly crawled forward. He removed his Askari hat and held it in his hand; he had left his tunic with the sergeant. His upper body was bare. About 100 yards from the stream, he raised his hat on a stick just above the bush line, moving it slowly from side to side. A shot rang out. The bullet showered him with leaves and twigs and he immediately hugged the ground.

Werner heard the distinct echo of the shot as it rolled over the plain and immediately ordered his men to mount. They soon covered the distance to the soldier tending the sergeant’s horses. Here, all dismounted and cautiously made their way forward until they found the sergeant and his men hidden in the bush. The sergeant and scout quickly briefed Werner on the current situation.

“Can dos Santos cross the river near here?” Werner asked.

“Yes, we are directly opposite it. If you go directly north from here, you’ll find it.”

“I’m sure that’s where he intends to cross. Sergeant, send some men around them and block off their route to the south so he won’t be able to fall back. I

want to persuade him to go north towards the river. I'm going to advance on him, leaving the north open and allow him to get close to the ford."

"Mestre, he'll escape!" Philippe said with surprise.

"No, he won't. Send a scout to lead Feldwebel Schwiegers and his Maxim to this ford."

The black man smiled in understanding.

Werner knew it would take the machine-gun crew a few hours to get their weapon in position. Meanwhile, he made the men wait, silently cursing the inactivity, not understanding why their captain did not launch an attack. They knew the enemy was just across the dry streambed.

*

It was well after five in the afternoon that he ordered the attack, moving the men forward to the river. The moment the gunrunners noticed movement in the bush, they opened fire, with volley upon volley pinning the troopers down. The troopers returned fire, but neither side did any damage, as all was well hidden. Certain that the machine-gun and his detachment were in position by now, Werner ordered the men to advance until they had taken a position along the banks of the stream and could clearly see the opposite side of the donga.

He listened to the exchange of fire, pondering the next step. Suddenly his face lit up, and he smiled at the sergeant.

"Sergeant, have you noticed we've the wind at our backs? Have the men tie some kindling together to make a few torches and set the bush alight on the opposite side, even if they have to go slightly south to avoid the gunfire. Let's see what the bastard does when he sees a bushfire racing towards him. Maybe we can roast his bloody hide!"

*

Smoke soon begun to spiral from the opposite bank as the fire quickly took

hold, fanned by the wind. Suddenly, with a roar, it blossomed into a wide swath of flame, clouds of black-grey smoke billowing into the air, the wind driving the fire line before it.

They could not see the gunrunners because of the smoke, but the fire moved steadily in a westerly direction; the only escape route open to dos Santos was north, towards the river.

CHAPTER 53

Dos Santos wavered. For some inexplicable reason, the Germans had not blocked the route north. He couldn't go west, the Schutztruppe had placed men there; he would have to continuously retreat before the bushfire to avoid being engulfed. Any escape route south would lead them further into German territory. It had to be north, it was the only choice.

He ordered the men to mount. They galloped north, knowing the Germans would soon be in pursuit. What bothered him was what awaited them at the river. Surely, the Schutztruppe had sent a detachment to cover that escape route. Did they have sufficient men to do that? They had broken their force up into three contingents, and he knew about where each had taken up position. There could not be that many men at the river.

Still, he sent a few scouts ahead, while his main troop slowed. As the scouts broke through into the clearing, the Maxim opened up, the bullets raking the horses and scouts. Horses collapsed, their riders tumbling like limp sacks from their saddles.

CHAPTER 54

“Dummkopf!” Feldwebel Wirtz shouted, leaning over and cuffing the errant gunner behind the Maxim machine-gun across the head, knocking the man’s campaign hat off. “Idiot, I told you to wait! Now they know we have a machine gun here.”

Dos Santos had heard the bark of the machine gun and quickly called a halt. “Split up!” he shouted. “Towards the river! Skirt the gun! Keep out of range! When you get to the bank, go back along the water’s edge to the ford. The machine gun won’t be able to cover both flanks. As soon as you can, cross the river!”

Feldwebel Wirtz realised his predicament. He could only keep the one side under fire; he chose the east so to ensure he kept his escape route open. The other troops concentrated their fire on the west, where the fordable portion of the river was wide and there was a stretch of rapids where the water flowed rapidly over many ledges of stone that formed the bedrock.

Suddenly, from the south, Werner and his men galloped into the clearing. In seconds, he realised what was happening. Dos Santos and his men were in the river, waist deep in the water and slowly picking their way across the stones and boulders over which the river raged, using their horses to shield themselves. Accurate rifle fire had taken its toll; already he had lost a few men and horses.

As Werner watched, dos Santos’s horse collapsed, struck by a bullet. The river immediately began to pull it downstream. Dos Santos lost his grip, and the water immediately swept him off his feet. Werner raced along the riverbank, watching as dos Santos struggled in the river, trying desperately to

swim to the opposite bank. Already the strong current carried him into deep water. Dos Santos realised that he would not be able to cross; his only choice was to stay in the centre and hope he could outpace the horsemen on the bank who tried to keep abreast of him, but whose passage was often obstructed by the dense riverside bush. Ahead, the river made a sharp turn to the right, and the current was drawing him to the left, close to the southern bank, which rose about 15ft from the water's edge.

Werner raced ahead. As his horse skidded to a halt at the edge, he flung himself from the saddle just as dos Santos swept past below him in the river, no more than 25ft away. He sprinted the few yards to the edge and dived in, swimming strongly towards the gunrunner, both men now being carried downstream. He was determined to get his man.

As he approached the gunrunner, dos Santos turned to face him, a knife in his hand. Werner dived deep into the murky water, swimming underwater beneath dos Santos's kicking feet, to grab his legs and pull him under. He was forced to let go before dos Santos could stab him. Both men broke the surface, and while dos Santos still coughed and spluttered, Werner lunged forward and grabbed the hand that held the knife. Dos Santos's huge fist caught the side of Werner's face, nearly knocking him out, but somehow he managed to keep a grip on the man's wrist. He opened his eyes to see dos Santos's startled look of recognition.

The man was incredibly strong. Werner quickly realised he would not be able to overpower him. With his free hand, he struggled to draw his revolver from its holster, but before it could clear leather, dos Santos pushed him under, sitting on him, desperately trying to drown him. Werner had the man's wrist in a vice-like grip but knew he could not hold on for much longer – he had to get air. He let the automatic slip from his grip, his lungs screaming for relief. He fought to break away and get to the surface. His world was

changing; he was in a dark tunnel, and could see a circle of light receding at the other end. He still had dos Santos's wrist in a near death-grip, but he was no longer conscious of it. As if in a dream, he became aware that the gunrunner's hold on him had slackened, and that the knife had fallen from dos Santos' grasp. In blind panic, Werner kicked, driving his body upwards, his mouth open, sucking in huge gasps of air as his head broke the surface. As he retched, he looked dazedly at his opponent, amazed to see him unconscious, his head lolling in the water, his dark curls plastered to his forehead. Werner couldn't understand it. Then he saw Philippe a few feet away in the water. The bastard was grinning, his teeth flashing white. "My God, you were just in time," Werner gasped. "I didn't know you could swim."

"Mestre, there's a lot you don't know about me."

Once he'd gotten his breath back, the two men propped dos Santos up between them, keeping his mouth and nose above the water, letting the current take them along the riverbank.

"Mestre, we had better get out of the water – there are small waterfalls close by."

"I hear you. There's another turn in the river ahead. The men must throw us a rope," Werner replied, waving his hand at the men ashore keeping pace with them.

Philippe caught the rope thrown and tied it to dos Santos's midriff; the men on the bank then hauled them into shallow water.

Dos Santos was slowly coming around, gagging and spluttering.

"What did you hit him with? God, he's nearly dead!" Werner said.

"I had a knopkierie, but I lost it in the river."

"A knopkierie? What's that?"

"A wooden club, made from a small tree trunk with the root still attached at

one end. The root is whittled away until it looks like a ball." He paused for a moment. "You did want him alive, didn't you?"

"I suppose so, but if he had died it wouldn't have mattered," Werner replied.

"What about the rest of his men?" a sergeant asked.

"There can't be many of them; your men picked off a few in the water. Let them go; without him they're nothing. You're probably wasting your time chasing them; they've long disappeared or crossed the river."

Dos Santos started to remonstrate with him loudly in Portuguese.

"You won't see the month out, you crook!" he sputtered. "Either my men or the Hereros will kill you for taking those diamonds!"

Werner swung on him, his expression reflecting absolute surprise and curiosity.

"What diamonds? I know you wanted to pay me in diamonds, but I never took any diamonds. But I'm now curious; from where are you getting them? I'm sure the Portuguese government would like to know too."

Dos Santos knew he had made a mistake and clammed up, realising that it was possible Werner did not know about the mine. He shrugged his shoulders and looked away, remaining silent, implying that he had no more to say.

Werner continued: "It doesn't matter. You won't be selling guns again. They'll hang you and I'll watch you swing, you bastard! And I'll catch the rest of your too."

"It all makes sense now," dos Santos said. "It's you and Major de Sousa, isn't it?" His eyes suddenly widened. "Merda! It's that fuckin' bitch. She showed you the guns! Maria, that whore!"

Werner ignored him, calling for four men to tie dos Santos hand and foot. "And if he tries to escape, shoot him," he said.

CHAPTER 55

Werner's column arrived at the Finnish mission in the late afternoon, just as the sun was about to dip behind the horizon, casting long shadows across a quadrangle already in shade. The mission was a mass of soldiers, all the different detachments having arrived almost at the same time. They had pitched camp just a short way from the buildings, near the corrals. Their campfires already burned.

He dismounted to see a grinning Jurgen walking towards him. His friend put his arm round his shoulder.

"Well done, Werner, you have him at last. I knew you could do it!"

"No, not I, Herr Rittmeister. And don't forget Philippe. He should get a medal!" Werner replied with emphasis. "Anyway, without your help, we would never have gotten him. Watch out, he's like an eel. We'll have to watch him carefully until we hand him over. We have to find somewhere to keep him for the night."

"Don't worry, I found just the place," Jurgen replied. "When I heard he was captured, I started to look. The good pastor, reluctantly I may add, has volunteered his creamery. It has only one door and thick walls to keep the room cool. He won't get out of there."

"Well, put three men around it – good men." Werner insisted.

"Don't worry, I have it in hand. Incidentally, the pastor has again invited the officers to dine with him and his staff. I took the liberty of saying you would be delighted, as I know Dorothea will be there."

"What a good friend you are," Werner replied facetiously.

Jurgen laughed. "Paulo is out of danger, but it will be awhile before he can

leave the hospital. Louis is making excellent progress. He already can walk, but the stitches have still to be removed. Your Portuguese friend is waiting to congratulate you!”

*

Dorothea was not immediately available; she was involved with a complicated childbirth demanding her attention at the nearby maternity clinic, or so Louis told him. Louis grinned from his bed, naked to the waist, his stitches proudly displayed. As they shook hands, Werner told Louis about dos Santos.

“Listen, compadre, he knows of your involvement with me and has sworn to get us. Not that I’m worried; he’ll swing, and soon. However, if word gets to de Mello and Batista, Benguela could become dangerous. He accused me of stealing his diamonds. I feigned ignorance and questioned him. He quickly shut up. I didn’t let on that we knew where the mine was.”

“What’s this all about?” Jurgen asked.

“Listen, you had better tell our friend here the whole story; I wouldn’t want him to think we are hiding something from him,” Louis laughed. “He’s one of us!”

Carefully watching Jurgen for a reaction, Werner explained that there actually were three pouches of diamonds and that he had only handed in one to the Portuguese military and that he and Jurgen had decided to split the other two among the three of them and the two black servants.

“Werner, tell him that nobody knows about the two pouches of diamonds – nobody!” Louis insisted.

Werner did so.

Jurgen kept them in suspense, his expression indifferent as they anxiously waited to see how he would react. If he complained, they would have to fabricate some excuse and belatedly hand the diamonds over to Major

Zietzmann.

Finally, Jurgen looked up, staring first at Werner then Louis.

“I think that’s a bloody good idea!” he said, his cackle of gratification reverberating through the small room.

“You bastard,” Werner said, relieved.

The tension broken, all shook hands, sealing their agreement. “Where are the pouches?” Jurgen asked.

“I’ve got them hidden,” Werner replied. “We’ll have to do something with them in Windhuk. Okay, back to Louis’s problem: what are we going to do with him? If we send him back to Angola, we could be sending him to his death. Colonel Batista will be waiting for him. God knows what he has already learned.”

“Let’s wait until he recovers fully. We’ll let Zietzmann decide; remember, he said he’d discuss Louis’ predicament with Diaz. No doubt, he’ll contact General Diaz in Luanda. Let’s wait.”

“Christ! Not here in the middle of nowhere, I hope,” Werner complained.

“No, no. When they can travel, both Louis and Paulo are to leave for Windhuk. I’ll get Zietzmann to arrange it.”

Werner translated all for Louis, who nodded in agreement.

As they walked back to their tents, they passed a windmill which continually pumped water, keeping the reservoir filled. Neither Werner nor Jurgen had bathed for days, so grabbing the opportunity, they stripped off their uniforms and plunged into the round brick reservoir. Jurgen produced a piece of soap and they lathered themselves richly.

“Christ, I hope this doesn’t supply the drinking water,” Werner suddenly said.

“Who cares? Soap never killed anyone,” Jurgen replied, chuckling before he immersed himself completely to wash off the soapsuds.

“Are you mad? How dare you swim in here? And all this soap? People have to drink this water! Get out immediately!” Pastor Haiddenon’s red face stared at them over the rim, almost apoplectic. He was furious.

The men hesitated – they had no clothes on.

“Get out! Get out!” the pastor shouted.

Well, if that is what he wants, then that’s what we’ll do, Werner thought and climbed out of the reservoir. Then only did the pastor notice they were naked.

“Mein Gott! You haven’t even got any clothes on!” the shocked pastor shouted.

Dorothea had just arrived back. The commotion drew her and the nurses to the porch that led off the dining room. And, when Werner had climbed the brick steps and emerged from the water in all his naked glory, there was a distinct ooh and several loud giggles. Only then did he look up to see the women staring at him. Jurgen was right behind, chuckling loudly; he covered his privates with his spread hands, finding the whole incident hilarious, especially when he saw the pastor avert his eyes and look away. The man looked as if he was about to cry. The women, their hands covering their mouths, quickly turned away and retreated into the building, but not before all had seen the amusement on their faces.

“If anybody says anything about swinging …” Werner muttered.

That was too much for Jurgen; he collapsed with his back against the reservoir, sliding down the side into a sitting position, bent over with laughter. Those of the troops who had seen the performance joined in until it all were laughing except the good pastor who was still in shock, his mouth hanging open.

Philippe handed each of them a large linen towel. He looked at Werner’s nakedness and rolled his eyes exaggeratedly, screeching with laughter. The

pastor walked away, mumbling under his breath, words like ‘unbelievable’, ‘disgusting’, ‘no common decency’ and ‘disgrace to the German officer corps’ clearly audible.

“God, what a mess,” Werner said to Jurgen. “I haven’t said hello yet, and here she sees me with my dick swinging, and never mind, her nurses as well. Christ! This is embarrassing.”

“Actually, you’re lucky,” Jurgen replied. “The water was warm. Can you imagine what she would’ve seen had the water been cold?” He collapsed with laughter again.

“Why don’t you just fuck off?” Werner retorted, realising that there was nothing he could do. What was done, was done.

Cleaned up and neat, the two officers arrived at the mission’s dining room. The mission staff already stood behind their chairs, waiting for them. He looked at Dorothea; she looked up fleetingly at him, and he caught his breath. Was she crying? She had tears in her eyes. No, she was laughing quietly, as were all the other women.

The pastor rapped the table to get their attention.

“Enough! I insist that you all behave. That was an unfortunate incident and will be forgotten,” he said pompously. “Do I need to remind you that this is a religious mission? You are all to behave like dignified people before I begin grace.”

A hush descended on the table as they were all suitably chastised.

CHAPTER 56

It was wonderful to sit at a proper table and have a well-prepared meal again. The conversation centred round the capture of the gunrunner, as all wished to know how this had been accomplished. The pastor gave strict instructions that none of the staff was to approach the creamery; the prisoner was an army matter. The pastor slowly regained his composure and eventually managed to smile occasionally.

“What do you propose to do with the man?” the pastor asked.

“He will hang,” Jurgen said matter-of-factly before Werner could reply, adding that gunrunning carried the death penalty.

The pastor blanched. The women were appalled. Werner kicked his friend under the table.

A long silence ensued.

“So, Herr Hauptmann, for how long will we have the pleasure of your company?” the pastor finally asked Werner.

“We’ll leave in the morning for Ondongua,” he replied.

Nobody asked any further questions about the prisoner; all were aware that the troopers would take dos Santos with them.

*

After dinner, they congregated on the veranda, the men lighting cigars which the pastor had generously offered. Werner stood at the railing looking out into night smoking a cheroot and blowing smoke into the light breeze. Dorothea stood next to him, furtively holding his hand.

“I suppose you have to go.” Dorothea’s face showed disappointment, even though she tried to hide it. She was hoping he would stay a few days.

“I’m afraid so. We have to get this man into proper custody before something goes wrong. There’re still Hereros out there somewhere. Although, I don’t think they would come running to rescue him.”

“When will I see you again?” she asked.

“I don’t know.” He squeezed her hand. “But I’m happy to be here with you again,” he whispered.

She stepped closer until she could feel him against her side.

Werner looked around. Jurgen was talking with the nurses in German. Louis had joined them on the veranda, dressed in a gown, still bent double. He had finally settled down on a bench, he and the pastor conversing in broken Portuguese or Spanish, Werner wasn’t sure which, but they seemed to understand each other.

“Let’s get away from here,” he said.

She nodded. They walked to the end of the landing, expecting someone to ask where they were going. None did.

Once around the corner, she led the way to her clinic, it in a separate cluster of buildings. She produced a key and opened the examination room, pulling him in and closing the door. He stood there, expecting her to light a lamp; she did not. Instead, she turned, stepped towards him, and put her arms around his neck, drawing his face down and placing her open lips on his. They kissed passionately, their tongues probing, his hands grabbing her bottom, drawing her to him. She moulded her body to his and felt his arousal. Her breathing became audible and her breasts pressed against his chest as he felt her give herself to him, he wanting to take her there and then, all caution forgotten. He opened the top buttons of her blouse and then let his lips slide down her cleavage.

“Mein lieber Gott!” she whispered in his ear.

He undid the rest, stripping her blouse off. Her eyes were closed, her head

thrown back. He undid the cords of her corset and removed it, exposing the fullness of her breasts. He kissed them, taking a nipple into his mouth; it was hard and erect. She moaned.

She fumbled to undo his tunic, tugging at it to remove it, and then kissed the scars and welts on his upper body. He could no longer contain himself. He swept her into his arms, carrying her to the large examination couch. He slid his hand under her skirt, her wetness amplifying his arousal. Urgently, he pulled off her skirt and underwear, and then shed the rest of his own clothing. They lay on the couch, their bodies entwined, exploring each other, lost in ecstasy. Finally, he entered her.

Afterwards, she lay next to him, her head on his chest, her fingers running through the curls of hair on his chest.

“We can’t sleep here. We have to go, they’ll wonder what happened,” she said.

“I know.”

Reluctantly they slipped off the couch and dressed, touching repeatedly, as if they needed reassurances.

The illicit half-hour had felt just minutes. Sheepishly, they left the clinic, strolling to the corrals as if they were still taking a walk. The others were still on the porch. They walked round the complex then leisurely approached the porch to join in the discussions. Nobody said anything about their absence.

CHAPTER 57

Werner woke with a start. Somebody was vigorously shaking his shoulder.

“Christ! Stop that! What the hell’s going on?” he asked irritably, rising up on an elbow.

Jurgen stood over him. “Dos Santos is gone,” he said.

“God, Jurgen, this is no time for jokes,” Werner retorted throwing the sheets off, barely able to contain his anger. He looked at Jurgen. The man’s face was ashen. It had to be true. This was unbelievable!

“I’m sorry, my friend, I joke not,” Jurgen said. “Truly, the man’s gone, leaving three dead, our men. It seems his people infiltrated the mission, probably while we were dining or sleeping, or doing who knows what. This is a bloody disaster!”

Werner groaned from deep in his soul. Nothing could be worse. “When did this happen?” he asked.

“It seems about midnight.”

“For heaven’s sake, the man’s got a six-hour start on us!” Werner cried, throwing his blanket off and swinging his feet to the ground.

“Werner, it’s pointless. He’d be across the border by now or damn close to it. I can’t send a pursuit column after him. If my men cross the border, they’ll court-martial me.”

Werner realised that his friend was right. Such an operation would have to be sanctioned by the high command.

Philippe appeared with a cup of coffee, placing it on a folding table. He then poured water from a jug into an enamelled basin. Werner merely rinsed his face and decided to dispense with shaving for the moment. He quickly

dressed and, with Jurgen and their servants in tow, made for the creamery.

The scene he found at the creamery told it all. The bodies of three troopers lay sprawled on the ground which was stained dark brown with their blood which had seeped into the soil. Their throats had been slit – deep, blood-encrusted, gaping wounds. A gruesome sight. The powerful hasp and staples on the stout wooden door had been forcibly wrenched from the wood, the locks still dangling from the hasps.

“How the hell did they get past the perimeter guards?” Werner asked.

“They killed another two of my Askaris as well,” Jurgen said dejectedly. “Four guards were assigned to guard the perimeter, one for each side of the compass. I hate to admit it, but I never thought that Dos Santos’s men would try anything like this. These were probably Kunahamas; they’re the only ones who could have pulled this off.”

“Where do you think he’ll head?”

Jurgen shrugged and shook his head. “Who knows? Angola is a huge country. Your guess is as good as mine.”

“I must go after him.”

“No, I forbid that!” Jurgen spat. “I’m still in command here. That’s an order, best you listen!”

Werner realised that it was futile to argue. Dos Santos was gone – but at least the gunrunning ring was broken. It would take dos Santos months before he could again resurrect the operation, as it would take that long to acquire more weapons. That was if he ever did. Finally, Werner had accepted the fact that dos Santos had escaped and that it was useless to set out in pursuit.

*

Jurgen was adamant that they continue to Windhuk. They left the mission and arrived at Ondongua without incident.

Major Graf zu Dohner, on hearing of the gunrunner’s escape, gloated that

had he and his men handled the operation, this would not have happened. When invited to join him for a drink and dinner, the officers politely declined.

"What a fuckin' peacock!" Jurgen spat in disgust once they'd stepped outside and out of earshot.

CHAPTER 58

Once back in Windhuk, they had to endure a lengthy debriefing. Zietzmann was cold and furious. Louis and Paulo had accompanied them from the mission, both men recovering well from their wounds.

The escape had destroyed more than a year's work of planning and subterfuge which had started well before Werner's arrival in the colony.

"Well," Zietzmann eventually snarled, "we've no choice but to continue on relentlessly! You and Louis are to return to Benguela post haste. In the event of you running into any problems with your superiors," he said to Louis via Werner, "I'll stand by you. In fact, I've already been in contact with Diaz."

CHAPTER 59

Louis rode through the imposing gates of the Benguela garrison with Paulo trotting beside him. The guards who manned the gates snapped a smart salute which he nonchalantly returned. This was General Diaz's idea: arrive with aplomb – he believed this would put Colonel Batista on the back foot.

Batista had been briefed but had not been given details of those activities the general had supposedly required Louis to attend to, nor why the cloak-and-dagger mantle was necessary. The general had even apologised for the surreptitious manner in which he had availed himself of Louis' services. Apparently, this had appeased Batista.

Louis was quickly ushered through to Batista's office. This was no military office: the room was far too elegant, dominated by an exquisite, leather-topped, ornate desk with matching chairs. A bookcase on one side contained row on row of books, while a sideboard took up the expanse of the other wall. A large silver tray contained various crystal decanters filled with an assortment of spirit. Alongside was another tray, heavy with crystal glasses and tumblers. A large portrait of Carlos I, king of Portugal, looked down from the whitewashed wall.

The colonel did not bother to return Louis's formal salute. "At ease, Major. Take a chair."

Louis sat, his feathered cap balanced on his lap.

"Your latest behaviour was certainly not conducive to a good inter-officer relationship," the colonel said. "You must realise you are under my command, irrespective of what General Diaz now tells me. As I sit here, I cannot but question your loyalty." The colonel's tone clearly indicated who

the superior officer was.

“Colonel, I must apologise,” Louis said, “but this operation was already under way before your arrival. No disrespect was intended, but the general was adamant that I disclose nothing, and when recalled to Luanda, the only choice was to take a leave of absence without permission. I assume the general has cleared this with you?”

“I understand, but I want an assurance from you that there will be no reoccurrence of such insubordination. Absence without permission I will not tolerate. It seems the general has more than a passing interest in you, would you not say?”

The bastard’s fishing, Louis thought. He chose to ignore the remark. “Colonel, be assured this will not be repeated.”

“Then the matter is closed.”

The colonel opened the single file on his desk.

“I have a rather distressing matter here which I would like you to investigate. Three men were murdered on the trail from Huambo to Caconda. At first, it was thought to be the Kunahamas, but we have since established that this was not so. The men were gruesomely murdered, but nothing appears to have been taken. Of course, if this was a racial attack or robbery, it is out of character. They would have stolen everything, they always do.”

Louis was uncomfortable; he hoped the colonel could not read anything in his behaviour.

The colonel slid the file over his desk. “Here, study the file. If you have any questions, take them up with Lieutenant Marques. He is in charge of the investigations. He has been ordered to hand this to you. I need you to find not only the perpetrators, but also the reason for the murders.”

Louis stood, snapping a salute as he about-turned. Once outside, he breathed a quiet sigh of relief. Inside his own office, he asked Paulo for

coffee and sat to study the contents of the file. The lieutenant appeared to have investigated the crime thoroughly. The names of the three men were recorded, with a note that two were degregados who had arrived in the colony three years ago on the same ship. It also mentioned that the men had last been seen together two days before, in Caconda. Investigations could not establish precisely what their business was in the town. The lieutenant incorrectly assumed that they were returning to Benguela after supporting the army with its retaliations against the Kunahamas. No mention was made of a mine in the Caconda vicinity, or that they were possibly employed in the area. The closing remark only mentioned that on their arrival in Benguela from Portugal, they had been employed by Antonio dos Santos, a prominent trader in the Huambo district.

Louis went to look for Lieutenant Marques, a young man the colonel had mentioned. He soon found him in an office her shared with another lieutenant. A sign on the door read ‘Criminal Investigations’. “Lieutenant, why were you given this attack to investigate?” Louis asked. The question surprised the lieutenant.

“Well, at first I thought it was an attack directly related to the rebellion and therefore an army matter, but I soon realised that this had other motives, as nothing had been stolen. The rebels would have ransacked the men’s belongings, but nothing was touched. I put this to the colonel, telling him that I thought this a matter for the Guardia. Strangely, he thought not. He ordered me to continue my investigations.”

“Interesting. What are your feelings about this, in strictest confidence, of course?” Louis enquired, raising a questioning eyebrow.

“Well, vendettas such as these take a while to develop and word gets round. There appears to have been nothing like that. I actually visited the site and combed it with the help of sergeant who arrived at the scene before the

bodies were removed. They were overwhelmed while they slept. Something must have been taken from them. Why else kill them? One of my Askaris heard a rumour about a mine were it is thought they worked, but we drew a blank there."

"Thank you, Lieutenant; you've been very helpful."

*

Louis needed to know the mine's exact location, so he approached Paulo.

"Paulo, can you take me back to where you found the mine?" he asked.

"I think so. But we must not go in uniform," the man warned.

Louis got the most detailed map of Angola he could find. Many areas were still to be properly surveyed; there were many blank areas on the map with no detail. He placed the map on the desk and turned it until he had aligned it to the compass and then he showed Paulo where they stood in relation to Benguela and asked him to point out in which direction Caconda lay. A futile exercise; Paulo could not equate the map with his real surroundings.

They would have to go to the area in person. Louis arranged for the trip, saying that he wished to inspect the murder site, a normal request in the light of the investigations.

Having little else to do, Werner asked to accompany Louis in the search for Caconda. They decided they would meet on the trail, so no suspicions would be aroused. They would travel as transport men, each owning a wagon loaded with general goods that they intended to sell in Caconda. Paulo and Philippe would accompany them, assisted by two additional oxen men.

Three weeks later, they entered Caconda. By now, both men sported unkempt beards, their clothes were dirty and everything was coated with dust. The black men wore only their loincloths, their feet shod in rawhide sandals. No one had washed since leaving town, and all now carried that pungent odour of stale sweat that's guaranteed to keep anyone with a degree of

refinement at more than arm’s length.

Caconda was typical of a frontier town, consisting of one wide, dusty main street sandwiched between a few hastily erected mud-brick buildings, sheds and huts. Large acacia trees grew between the buildings and along the road. The place was crowded with Africans, most of them refugees from the civil war, looking to the local militia garrison to protect them. Only a few Whites were visible. Several wagons and carriages plied the streets, as did a number of horsemen, but for the most part, the inhabitants were on foot, congregating around the large trading stores. The town could boast no hotel, although the two cantinas did a good trade. One of these, the Red Hornet, belonged to a close relative of the Grande Madame of Manchata’s, the brothel in Benguela. This was how Louis put it to Werner, of course, with a lecherous grin. Any mention of a brothel invariably brought Louis’s sleazy side to the fore. Louis had persuaded the grande madame to give him a letter of introduction – no more than a note – merely stating that she would be happy if the owner, her brother, would assist his nephew in any way possible.

The two men walked into the cantina, dust billowing from them as they stomped their feet and beat their hats against their high boots. The barman turned round as they took up position at the bar. He was a big man with hands like hams and forearms nearly the size of an ordinary man’s thighs. A white grubby apron was tied round his waist.

“Bom, gentlemen. What’ll it be?” he asked.

“A large jug of beer, the largest you’ve got!” Werner said.

The barman guffawed. “You two men could never finish my largest jug,” he said jovially, laughing at his own joke.

“All right, enough beer for two thirsty men and for our four servants outside; they’ve worked hard.”

“A kind gesture, sir. They’ll appreciate it.”

With astounding alacrity, a large jug appeared with two glass beer mugs. Werner poured, immediately downing half the glass. The beer was surprisingly cold and refreshing.

“Do you know where I can find Senhor Sardinha?” Louis asked the barman.

“That’s me,” the man said, pointing a finger as thick as a sausage at his chest. “And why are you looking for me?”

Louis pulled the note from his pocket and slid it across the counter. The barman’s face broke into a smile as he read it.

“Heh, heh! So you are my nephew!”

The man stretched his hand over the bar and both men vigorously shook hands. Werner winced at the strength of his grip.

“Well, do you see my sister often?” he asked.

Louis didn’t know what to say. “Yes, we meet at her place often,” he eventually replied.

“You only meet there?” the barman exclaimed, his eyes round with surprise. “I think you’d more than just meet there; she has the most beautiful women working for her. I wish …” He stopped and looked around to make sure he could not be overheard, “… I wish we had few of them here!”

Louis just smiled.

“Okay, what can I do for you?”

“We need somewhere to park our wagons and feed our oxen. We need to buy fodder for the animals and food for ourselves.”

“You can do all that at the back, where I live with my wife. The grounds are big, there are corrals and water, and I have two huts you can use. The fee is reasonable; your meals you can take here. I’ll arrange for fodder to be brought by the local hostler.” The barman mumbled some figure in escudos that he thought to be a fair fee.

Louis paid and leaned closer. “I have many questions,” he said, “but I don’t

need others to know I'm asking, if you know what I mean. My aunt said that I could rely on you to be discreet."

"For my nephew and my sister, of course. My sister lent me the money to start this cantina."

"Maybe we could sit after supper. We'd like to buy you a drink or two."

So it was arranged.

*

While the two officers were ensconced within the cool interior of the cantina, Sardinha the innkeeper ensured that their servants were fed. Philippe, Paulo and the two black wagon drivers were given heaped plates with large pieces of meat and cooked maize, smothered in rich gravy. This they washed down with two large jugs of beer, the envy of the other not-so-fortunate servants in the yard who were not served such generous meals.

Philippe and Paulo then left and mingled with the crowds, trying to get a feel for the place, what the latest gossip was, where people worked and what the chances were of making money. They returned that evening at six and reported to Werner and Louis.

They had hit pay dirt. They had heard many murmurs of a mine and of diamonds.

"Can you take us there tomorrow?" Louis asked.

"Yes, but we must leave in the afternoon and move up to the mine in the dark so we can look at it from the edge of the bush when the sun rises. Then we will not move again until its dark. Otherwise we may be seen," Philippe cautioned.

That evening they finished a bottle of the best scotch whiskey with Senhor Sardinha, compliments of Werner.

"So, do you know Antonio dos Santos?" asked Louis.

"Yes, he's been here a few times. He's the biggest trader in Huambo,"

Sardinha replied.

"Do you know what he does here?"

"I don't know, but usually he visits Don Pereira, who owns the biggest plantation and ranch in this area. The Pereiras are wealthy."

The barman lit a cigar taken from Louis.

"Do you know his hacienda?" asked Werner.

"I do."

From a tube, Louis unrolled a map, the same map that he had shown Paulo at the fort. "Can you show me where this hacienda is?" Louis asked.

That Senhor Sardinha was not acquainted with maps was soon obvious, but once Louis had taken him through it, pointing out certain features, rivers, towns and mountains, he then pointed in a north-westerly direction. He then followed this by drawing an imaginary north-westerly line from Caconda on the map. "The plantation is about 25 kilometres from the town," he said poking a finger on the chart in about that position.

"Have you heard talk of any mines around here?" Werner enquired.

The man shook his head. "No, not around Caconda," he said.

They thanked him and bade him good night, and then left the cantina.

*

"Nobody is going to start a mine without first registering their claim," Louis said. "But first, we have to establish the exact location of the mine. Hopefully, we'll be able to do that tomorrow. Without that, the deeds office in Luanda will reveal nothing. And I have this feeling that Don Pereira has something to do with this. Maybe the mine is on his land."

"Well, Louis, if the rumour is already going round that a diamond mine exists, Batista and de Mello are not going to keep their secret for long," Werner said.

"After we return from the mine, we should take a wagon and travel to the

ranch, masquerading as general dealers selling our wares," Werner suggested.

"That's okay by me."

*

The mine was easy enough to locate. Fortunately, the area around Caconda had recently been surveyed, and this was expressed topographically on the map, it was easy to pinpoint the location of the mine with a degree of accuracy. Although, the mine had recently lost three men, this had not influenced the mine's activity, and the black miners were still blasting and hauling ore and the Whites sorting through the gravel. However, the mine's security had been beefed up and there were now several armed men evident.

*

The four men left Caconda in the early morning, their ox-wagon trekking slowly along the road to Pereira's plantation. Senhor Sardinha had given them specific directions. Late that afternoon, they arrived at the entrance to the plantation, an elaborate archway with 'Hunter's Rest' carved in Portuguese into the large Angolan teak beams supported by two pillars. The surrounding bush was densely carpeted with luxuriant grass – excellent cattle country. But clearly, it was sisal that accounted for the farm's main source of income. The fields stretched as far as the eye could see. Wild rubber trees had been tapped, and small containers hung against these tree trunks, the bark slashed to resemble a fish's vertebra, guiding the white latex sap into the buckets.

They spent the night just within the farm's entrance, one of them standing watch on rotation. There were said to be lion, leopard and hyena in the area. Early the next morning they made the eight-mile journey to the hacienda, stopping along the way to show their wares to the workers they passed in the fields and plantations. There were hardly any purchases, as most workers had no money.

Well before they arrived at the hacienda, three riders approached from that direction. They were dressed in white blouses and shiny leather breeches, belts with ornate silver buckles, the long riding boots they wore polished to a bright shimmer, their black flat-topped hats casting shadows over their faces. They reined in their magnificent horses alongside the wagon. Werner signalled the oxen-team leaders to halt the animals.

“Bom dia, Senhors. What brings you here?” one of the three asked, clearly the leader. By his attire and attitude, Louis recognised him as one of a dying breed: the last of the followers of the Portuguese monarchy, an aristocrat, who believed the world was theirs by God-given right.

“We are general dealers trying to sell our wares,” Louis replied.

“You speak educated Portuguese. How is that?” the leader asked, trying to control his horse which skittered from side to side.

Werner was impressed by Louis’s quick response to what initially seemed a difficult question.

Louis smiled in modest recognition of the compliment. “My mother’s doing. She was from an educated family and insisted that I learn to read and write and speak our language properly.”

“She did right. Again, what brings you here?”

“This area is not part of the Kunahama territory; it is not as dangerous as we were told. Before the Kunahama uprising, we had a general dealership. Unfortunately, this failed, the revolt driving our clients away. We are now trying to salvage the business.”

This seemed to appease the horseman. “The revolt has affected us all,” he said. “I’m Ricardo Pereira, the son of Don Hernando Pereira, who owns this hacienda. Maybe we will buy some of your goods. You’re welcome; it’s only a mile or two to the house.”

The three men rode ahead, conversing loudly and laughing as they rode

three abreast. The trail circled a kopje, and suddenly the hacienda came into view. A sprawling cluster of white adobe buildings situated on the slopes of a hillock. All the roofs were tiled, their ochre colour shimmering in the sunlight. The buildings were surrounded by low, whitewashed walls and tall trees providing abundant cool shade; they were clearly very old. As they entered the outer walls of the hacienda, the young Pereira directed them to the corrals that adjoined it.

"Senhors, you can outspan there!" the young man shouted. "I'm sure my father will be round shortly." He waved his hat good-bye as he galloped off.

"They don't strike me as the type to get involved with gunrunners," Werner said.

"Not gunrunners," Louis said, "but maybe diamonds. What do you think? Remember, friend, we are now also involved in diamonds." He slapped Werner on the back and dodged the small cloud of dust that erupted. "God, you need a wash!" he added humorously.

"You should be glad you can't see yourself!" Werner retorted.

The two men left the outspanning of the animals to their servants, pulled off their shirts, and headed for a long trough containing fresh water pumped from a windmill.

"Werner, what you don't know is that the loss of Brazil as a colony cost the Portuguese aristocrats dearly," Louis said as they sat in the shade of the trees, waiting for Don Pereira to arrive. "The aristocrats had invested fortunes in the colony. Those who decided to stay with Portugal and pulled out of Brazil lost millions. I think the Pereiras were victims. To maintain this lifestyle takes money. I'm not sure they've got it."

Werner swept his arm from left to right. "You've got to be kidding," he said. "Just look around you. There's money here, all right."

"I think it's an illusion. Wait and see." He looked up. "Here comes the don

himself.”

Two men approached, one following discreetly behind the other. Don Pereira flicked a riding crop against his shiny black boots as he walked towards them. It was evident that this man was a cut above the rest: his bearing alone showed that he had been born to this station and all others were mere peons. He sported a silver-grey goatee which matched his hair, this tied back with a thin black ribbon into a ponytail; not a hair was out of place. He wore black trousers with an exaggerated high waist, similar to a Spanish flamenco dancer, tucked into calf-high boots. His shirt was collarless, of snow-white cotton, the plain neckline half-closed with a drawstring.

The figure behind him was also a white man, obviously a manager or overseer, with nothing ostentatious about his dress. Both were unarmed.

Werner mentally reeled, almost unable to contain his shock. He recognised the second man – he had been at dos Santos’s trading store. The livid scar from his left ear to his mouth was a trademark not easily overlooked. The man carefully looked them over, making no comment and not greeting them. He gave no indication that he recognised them, but Werner felt uncomfortable; the man concerned him.

“Bom dia, Senhors!” Pereira called out. “What brings you to my home?”

The don stood in front of them, not offering his hand in greeting, just flicking the riding crop against his boot.

Werner repeated the same story they had given his son.

“Well, you are welcome to persuade my workers to consider your wares, although I doubt you’ll be successful. Caconda is not far away, and they visit the town regularly.”

“Thank you, Don Pereira. Your hacienda is impressive,” Louis said, turning to admire the buildings on the hillock.

The aristocrat ignored the comment. His attitude said that as simple peons

lucky enough to have become traders, their judgement was of no interest to him.

“Senhors, I must insist that you stay in sight of the hacienda and not move around my property. I have pickets out protecting the property because of the rebellion. They would not hesitate to shoot if they spotted strangers.”

He glanced at Philippe and Paulo as if to emphasise the warning.

“Of course, we’ll adhere to your request. Thank you again, you are kind to allow us to trade here. Perhaps you would like to look—” Louis replied.

“Personally, I’ve no interest in your goods.”

Don Pereira turned round and retraced his steps, his overseer in tow; they conversed in low tones.

Louis waited until they were out of earshot. “That damn mine is on his property,” he said. “It can’t be more than a few miles away. He doesn’t want us stumbling on it.”

“Of course, the mining rights may not be registered in his name. You know how these things work – anybody can lodge a mining claim. That’s how it is done in Germany.” Werner said.

“It’s the same in Portugal and the rest of the world. You realise now why we need to go to Luanda?”

The following day the men were kept busy by a steady stream of customers to whom they presented their wares and, who surprisingly, did buy a fair number of items.

The day after, they returned to Caconda.

That evening they shared another expensive bottle of whiskey with Sardinha while he served his customers – a boisterous lot of traders, wagon-men and artisans. Blacks were not allowed in the establishment

As the last of the customers left, Sardinha joined the two men at the table. He sat and poured himself a generous shot of whiskey.

“You’re my nephew,” he began, “and I don’t know what you’re up to or what you’ve done, but there have been a few people in here enquiring about you and your friend. I never said you were family. I just said that you were passing through and we started talking. That’s normal in a cantina, isn’t it?” He paused. He raised his eyebrows. “So tell me, what’s going on?”

“I thought something like this would happen. Who are these people that enquired?” Louis asked.

“I suppose friends and employees of Don Pereira,” he shrugged noncommittally.

“Did any have a distinct scar on the left side of his face?”

“One fellow, a pretty morose character, had a scar exactly what you’ve described. Do you know him?”

“Do you?” Werner stonewalled.

“No.”

“What do you know about this man Pereira?” Louis asked his uncle.

“Look, there’s no doubt he’s a gentleman, well-mannered and caring. He looks after his people – both Blacks and Whites, though when need be, he can be tough. Firm but fair, you know what I mean.”

Louis wondered how a man of Don Pereira’s calibre could be mixed up with someone like dos Santos.

“Well, never mind,” he said. “We’ve seen what we’ve wanted. We’ll be returning to Benguela tomorrow.”

Sardinha looked at them.

“Just be careful. These are dangerous times. Just a short while ago, three men were brutally murdered on the trail between here and Benguela.”

Neither Louis nor Werner commented.

CHAPTER 60

They left Caconda early the next morning. Louis was concerned for their safety, convinced that their arrival at Don Pereira's plantation had tipped their hand. He feared that Don Pereira knew that they were not there to sell only general goods!

"Be vigilant," Louis said. "I have a bad feeling."

He was not wrong. Just before sunset, Philippe rode forward from the rear. "Mestre, a group of men are coming from Caconda."

The two officers turned, looking back along the trail. About a half-mile behind, six men approached at a canter. Werner could make out two Whites and four Blacks. Paulo and Louis held their rifles upright at the ready, butts resting on their stirrups. The horsemen pulled up alongside in a cloud of dust as Louis halted the wagons. The entire group carried weapons, the Blacks with rifles not in their rifle boots but lying across the front of their saddles, the White men with their holster flaps undone, the butts of their revolvers visible. This was ominous. The leader's livid scar was unmistakable.

"Bom dia," Morreira snarled, looking at Louis intently. "I recognised you. At first, I could not remember where, but then it came to me. You're an army officer. You had a friend with you. I think he is a representative for an overseas company, no? You arrived at Huambo and visited my employer, dos Santos. What's an army officer doing pretending to be a general trader?"

All weapons were trained on the four men.

"If I'm a Portuguese officer," Louis began, "which is correct, then I don't need to give you an explanation. Knowing who I am should be explanation enough for you."

Werner couldn’t believe his ears. Why was Louis telling them this?

Morreira casually lifted his rifle and fired a shot in front of Werner’s horse. It reared and he had his hands full fighting to stop it from bolting. Louis laid his hand on his revolver and the other men in Morreira’s group raised their rifles. The atmosphere was taut with tension.

“Senhor,” Morreira said, “my men could kill all four of you now and nobody would ever know who did it. In fact, they probably wouldn’t even try to discover who did it. They would think it was the Kunahamas.”

“Just as the 300 murdered awhile back?” Louis retorted.

“What do you know about that? Those men worked for us. They were my friends!” Morreira shouted. Then realising he had said too much, his attitude hardened.

“I’m Major de Sousa of the Portuguese Colonial Forces under the direct command of Colonel Batista, based in Benguela Province. Incidentally,” Louis added sarcastically, “I’ve been ordered to investigate the death of your friends. I thought it a good idea to arrive here incognito. Actually, an excellent idea. It appears I was right! What is your name?”

Louis was now on the offensive, and Morreira quite taken back by the change in events.

“Senhor, your name,” Louis insisted loudly, his voice sharp.

“Eduardo Morreira,” the man replied reluctantly.

“And you say these three men were in your or your boss’s employ? Who might that be? Quickly now, Senhor Morreira, I don’t take to threats kindly.”

“They worked for Senhor dos Santos,” Morreira said sullenly.

“And where is Senhor dos Santos now? Is he in Caconda? If so, please immediately take me to him.”

Morreira lifted his shoulders in a gesture of resignation. “I’m sorry, Major, he is not here, and neither is he in Huambo. We are concerned. He is

overdue."

"Overdue! How come? Where did he go? Have you not seen him lately?"

Were they about to get an idea of dos Santos's whereabouts? Nothing had been heard of the man since his escape.

"South, Major, with a group of men. They went hunting."

Louis pretended to be surprised, an incredulous expression crossing his face. "Hunting, with a war on? Really, that's strange indeed. Brave men, I would say."

Morreira remained stone-faced. He'd already said too much.

"While we're at it, what were the 300 men doing in Caconda for dos Santos? What business does dos Santos have here?" Louis demanded.

"I don't know. Senhor dos Santos does not tell me his business."

"Pity, the murders were was an unpleasant business, as I'm sure you have heard. I may have to issue a warrant for your arrest and have you interrogated in Benguela."

Morreira paled. Portuguese interrogation methods were extremely unpleasant and certainly were to be avoided. Accidental death while in custody was not uncommon in Angola.

"Please, Major, I truly know no more than I've already told you," he muttered.

"Well, we'll see about that. I will now resume my journey. I hope you will not harass us further. Good day, Senhor."

Werner took the cue, shouting to the oxen men to get the wagons in motion. He was thunderstruck by the turn of events. The unadulterated gall Louis had displayed in the face of the threat these men portrayed was masterful. Morreira's attitude had changed; he now on the defensive and probably wishing he had never ridden out here.

Accompanied by cries and the crack of whips, the oxen bellowed as the

wagons began to roll, leaving the group of horsemen standing in the dust. Werner looked and Louis and winked.

“I’m not sure they recognised me. I hope not. However, a truly excellent performance, maestro,” Werner said, impressed with the manner in which Louis had handled Moreira.

Louis merely smiled.

“I believe there’s much consternation in the enemy’s camp. De Mello and Batista must find themselves in a difficult position without dos Santos to run their show. We’re probably forcing them out into the open. Indeed, very dangerous. I only wish I knew where that bastard dos Santos is hiding while he waits for the dust to settle.” Werner said.

“Well, we just have to continue piling on the pressure,” Louis added. “I believe you should go to Luanda. I know a reputable firm of lawyers who can assist you. Well, actually, I don’t know them; they come recommended by Colonel de Oliveira. They can look after the deeds office search and establish who holds the mining rights. Also, it will give you an opportunity to meet with General Diaz. He said that he would like to meet you.”

“Why don’t you go?”

“No. What pretext could I use? Batista would not let me go unless the general intervened. I don’t think it wise.”

CHAPTER 61

At the hotel in Benguela, the concierge handed Werner a note from Judge de Mello who requested that on his return he join him for an aperitivo. Werner looked at the note; it was dated the same day. It was impressive, written in longhand on excellent paper, bearing the province's judicial seal. Judge de Mello must think I'm still in town, he thought. A good thing, but no doubt in due time the judge will learn that I was seen in the company of de Sousa, disguised as general merchants. What questions would arise? And how would this affect his friend, Louis?

Werner attended to the few items of business he still had, then promptly at six that evening he entered the lounge.

Now that autumn approached, the evenings were cool enough to require warm clothing. The moment the sun disappeared behind the sea, the temperature plummeted and the hotel staff had lowered the canvas awnings that surrounded the oversized balcony bordering the lounge and dining room.

With difficulty, he maintained a disinterested expression as he took in the scene. De Mello had already arrived. Aperitivo in hand, he stood in the centre of the lounge, immaculately dressed, bracketed by Colonel Batista and Louis, both in full uniform. He approached the trio with the slightest of smiles on his face, the portrayal of relaxed composure.

"Senhor de Almeida, good evening," de Mello said. "So good of you to come. I see you got my note. Of course, you know the major; I believe he was a captain when you last saw him. And this is Colonel Batista, commander-in-chief of the province's military forces."

They greeted one another.

“The colonel and I have been introduced previously,” Werner remarked. The waiter brought Werner his aperitivo, and the four men made small talk.

“We are about to have dinner. Will you join us?” de Mello asked.

Werner accepted, although he wondered why de Mello suddenly wanted to socialise. He was sure neither de Mello nor Batista had yet received a report from Don Pereira about the events in Caconda. Louis’s demeanour gave no hint.

The dinner proceeded without incident, as they discussed the rebellion and other generalities. The Portuguese were waging attack after successful attack of retribution against the Kunahamas, and there now only small pockets of resistance left, most far in the hinterland towards the east.

Finally, all the crockery had been removed. The waiters served coffee with the customary liqueurs, and the men went through the ritual of lighting cigars.

De Mello sucked in smoke and exhaled slowly towards the ceiling, leaning backwards in his chair appearing to be absorbed.

“Senhor de Almeida,” he suddenly said, “have you seen Senhor dos Santos, or have you heard from him lately? I seem to remember the two of you doing business together.”

Was this a trick question? Werner thought.

Somebody kicked his shin under the table; it was a damn hard kick from Louis. Werner glanced at him but could read nothing in his expression. He too was absorbed with his cigar.

“It’s funny you should mention it; I’ve heard nothing from him for a while. I presume he must be away or in Huambo,” Werner responded, hoping his attitude of indifference would have the desired effect and that it was what Louis would want him to say.

“Did you conclude any deals with him?” the colonel enquired nonchalantly.

“Gentlemen, please, it would be improper for me to divulge my dealings with the man unless, of course, you could give me good reason to do so,” Werner replied, smiling.

De Mello leaned forward in his chair, propping an elbow on the table, intently studying the cigar in his hand. Werner thought that surely something was afoot and wondered what would come next. The juiz did not seem to be short on surprises.

“Senhor, this is important, and as the local juiz, I believe you would not compromise your ethics by doing so. We are concerned for dos Santos’s safety.” De Mello said quietly.

Surely de Mello and his consorts had to know that the Schutztruppe had captured dos Santos, but that he was on the loose again. Again, he received another painful kick from under the table from Louis as he opened his mouth to speak.

He must have winced, because de Mello looked at him with concern. “Are you all right, Senhor de Almeida?”

“I’m fine,” he hastily replied, “just a muscle spasm.” He smiled and looked at Louis. That damn Portuguese wop, he thought, resolving to return the kick to a more sensitive area.

He delayed his reply, going through a momentary pantomime of rubbing his leg while he contemplated his reply. De Mello looked on expectantly.

“Well, now that you put it that way, we did conclude a satisfactory deal, and are now negotiating a second. I’ve placed the orders for the goods and await proof of shipment. Not for a moment do I doubt that there’s a problem with payment. It’s been a pleasure doing business with Senhor dos Santos,” he bluffed convincingly. “And I expect payment when I produce proof of shipment, not before. I expect to receive these documents soon. May I ask what your concern is?”

There was a moment's silence as the judge and the colonel looked at each other. The colonel then gave de Mello an almost unperceivable nod.

"You realise this is sensitive. Please, you must excuse me, but I must insist that you maintain our confidence in this respect. Have we your word as a gentleman on this?" de Mello asked, his voice now lowered. There was no longer a trace of his usual arrogance.

"Of course, your Lordship."

"The colonel and I had entrusted him with items of considerable value, which unfortunately seem to have disappeared. When I say considerable, I should actually say, immense. You can imagine our concern. Now, it seems he too has disappeared. The 300 murdered on the Huambo-Caconda trail … well, that may somehow also be related to dos Santos's disappearance."

"I'm sorry to hear that. I know of the murder, as the colonel has no doubt informed you," Werner said.

"This last shipment," de Mello continued, "did he give you any indication how he proposed to pay for it?"

Werner went through the pretence of being uncomfortable, squirming in his chair, looking around, and appearing to be embarrassed at having to do something against his better judgement.

"Come, come, Senhor, this is important," de Mello insisted.

"Okay, yes, he did."

"And …?" Batista asked, clearly unable to contain his impatience. "How was he going to pay you?"

"If you must know, Colonel," Werner responded with an appropriate amount of unease, "in diamonds. Uncut diamonds, in fact."

There was a moment's silence.

"Did you not wonder where he would have acquired these?" the colonel asked.

“Why should I? There are many diamond mines in southern Africa; they could have come from anywhere.”

The two men looked at each other again. Werner would have given his eye teeth to know what was going on between them, and what their thoughts were.

“Merda, the bastard!” the colonel exclaimed.

“Shhh, calm down!” the juiz said.

“Gentlemen, please tell me what this is all about? Maybe I can assist,” Werner said with feigned sympathy.

De Mello sighed loudly and knocked back a generous tot of liqueur.

“I’m afraid our Senhor dos Santos has absconded with something not his. I believe you won’t be doing business with him again. In fact, I doubt we’ll ever see him again.”

Oh, I’ll find him, Werner thought to himself.

“What about the shipment of rifles on the water?” Werner said. “They are due here soon. Who’s going to pay for them?” He allowed an expression of concern to descend over his face.

Louis now thought it time for him to join the charade.

“What shipment of rifles? How many?” he demanded, staring intently at Werner.

“About 500.”

Louis swung on the judge. “What did I tell you? The man should have been arrested, but your people always said there never was enough evidence. Now he’s gone – and with your money. Or the diamonds.”

“Major, don’t concern yourself. It’s our problem; we only wanted to know if you knew of his whereabouts,” de Mello wearily replied, clearly an unhappy man.

“When is this shipment due?” Batista asked.

“In about two weeks,” Werner replied.

“Leave it with me, we’ll think of something.”

The judge rose.

“Will you excuse us? The colonel and I have a lot to discuss.” He then looked at Louis. “Major, please be the host and keep Senhor de Almeida company. Thank you.” He then seemed to remember something and turned to Werner. “Did you ever meet that woman of his – that mulatto, Maria?”

“Why, yes, I have.”

“I understand that she has also left.”

“I wouldn’t know about that.”

“Well, it may be that if we establish her whereabouts, we may find him,” de Mello said thoughtfully.

Werner stared at Louis, dumbfounded. He turned away to ensure they could not be overheard as he watched the two men leave.

“Cristo! What next? If I didn’t know I had the backing of the Portuguese and German governments, I’d be running for my life!” Louis chuckled.

“It’s a fuckin’ pantomime,” said Werner.

“God, what about Maria? They’re going after her.”

“You’ll have to warn her once you get to Luanda; she’ll have to disappear again. God, with dos Santos on the loose Lord knows what could happen,” Louis muttered, not entirely pleased.

“Christ! What game is dos Santos playing? I can’t believe that de Mello doesn’t know of his capture and escape. Surely de Mello would be the first to hear from him,” Louis mused.

Werner had no idea what forces de Mello could call on to trace Maria’ whereabouts, but was sure they were considerable. He was a judge and related to the most powerful figure in Luanda.

CHAPTER 62

In the 17th century, the Portuguese had chosen the natural bay that now contained the harbour of Luanda as the ideal spot for their first European settlement on the southwestern coast of Africa. It ranked amongst the most beautiful natural harbours in the world, Werner thought.

He stood on the deck of the Portuguese steamer as it slowly entered the protection of the bay, and surveyed the city sprawled along its shoreline. A spit of land, never more than a mile wide, branched out from the coast, creating a U with one arm parallel to the coastline penetrating far into the sea. This created a large sweeping bay that is protected from the southern Atlantic Ocean by this long narrow peninsula. Not too far from the Equator, but well into the Tropics, Luanda had all the makings of a paradise. Except for the harbour and its quayside and the few fishing jetties clustered together within the bay, a pristine, near-white beach circles the bay, the edges of this half-moon thronged by hundreds of palm trees. A coastal road, parallel to the beach with no structures whatsoever, runs between beach and road. On the opposite side of the road, two- and three-storey buildings, no doubt the residences of the elite and near-elite, had been constructed, excellent examples of typical Portuguese architecture.

From the beach the ground rises gradually, with the buildings behind the first row high enough to afford those living on the top floors a panoramic view. The harbour bustled with activity: many ships – steam and sail – were moored alongside the quay, and large cranes and ships' derricks were busy loading and unloading cargo.

This was not a new colony. Unlike SudwestAfrika, the Portuguese have

been here for hundreds of years. When the Portuguese abolished the slave trade, they opened their harbours to all, and entrepreneurs flooded into the colonies. Brazil still needed slaves, but this had now become a covert operation, the Angolan authorities ensuring that this trade remained low-key so not to alert Europe and particularly Great Britain who considered slavery a heinous crime and would strongly protest. Although Portugal maintained that the rumours were untrue and that the trade had been eradicated, it was estimated that since the Portuguese had arrived in Angola in the 17th century, over a million slaves had been transported from this paradise to Brazil. The trickle of human cargo that still secretly left the country was now shipped from lesser ports.

Werner had boarded the ship at Lobito. It was flying the Portuguese flag, en route from the Far East to Europe, having rounded the Cape of Good Hope. They had entered the harbour on a mirrored sea, the SS *Delgoa* barely making headway, the sun blindingly reflected off the still waters. Werner leaned against the railing, taking in the exquisite panoramic view before him. He heard a shout from a hailer on the bridge. It was followed by a loud rattle as the anchor was dropped.

Soon a tug appeared, pulling a string of barges behind it. He was but one of several passengers who waited to disembark; some were sightseers on their way to Portugal from other colonies; others, like him, were visiting for a while. During the voyage, he had kept to his stateroom, trying to be inconspicuous, appearing only to take his meals in the saloon, seated at a table on his own.

He walked down the gangplank, Philippe behind him with his luggage. It was uncommon for the intelligentsia to have their servants accompany them, and he seemed to fit that category well. He showed their papers to the customs officer on the quayside, who gave them a perfunctory glance and

waved them through.

Neither of them knew their way around the city. They hired a carriage and driver, undertaking to use solely his services for a fortnight against a fixed fee. The rate quoted was reasonable, and Werner was assured that the driver knew the city well. Unfortunately, the man spoke little Portuguese. Neither Werner nor Philippe could speak or understand the local dialect. The driver, with much arm-waving and loud conversation, managed to suggest that Werner try the Royal Beach Hotel; apparently, it was frequented by most of the elite in Luanda.

Werner took a suite for a week and arranged for Philippe to be accommodated in the black staff quarters at the rear of the building. The city was booming, and with many families and businessmen in town from Portugal, the hotel was almost full. Similar to Rio de Janeiro, the city came alive at night. The sea along this coastline teemed with fish and crustaceans which, accompanied by the finest Portuguese wine, drew couples to the many restaurants and nightlife which in Luanda invariably started late and ended in the early hours of the morning.

Finding a map of the city was not easy. Finally, the hotel concierge parted with his, at a ridiculous price. However, it was an exceptionally good map, showing both the old city near the port and the new part, the ‘cidade alta’. The old city, the ‘baixa’, was quaint, with narrow streets, old colonial buildings, whitewashed churches and palms growing everywhere. The old-style architecture leant graciousness to the city.

Louis had given Werner various addresses and notes, which he diligently studied and pinpointed on a map, and committed these to memory. The carriage driver’s name was Josiah, but communication was difficult. He spoke no Portuguese and only a language from the north which Philippe did not understand. He was a member of the Ndongo tribe who had held out

against the Portuguese for centuries until their king was eventually beheaded by the colonists. The Ndongo, a proud and defiant people, had never accepted Portuguese rule, and were not prepared to trade their language, culture and customs for another. Philippe could only grasp the occasional word and barely make himself understood. Philippe was more adept.

“Tell the man that if he does his job well, he will be rewarded with a handsome tip,” said Werner.

Josiah finally understood, he beaming from ear to ear.

The next morning, they set out to track Maria down. They set off after breakfast, Philippe sitting atop with the driver. The carriage was similar to a surrey but larger, with a black canvas canopy to shield the passengers from the rain and sun and two horses up front.

The city was pristine, with hordes of workers employed to keep it clean. The wheels rumbled over the cobblestones as the horses trotted past the hawkers thronging the streets, selling every conceivable item: clothing and hats, fruit and vegetables, brooms, exquisite wooden carvings, cooked corn on the cob and various other local delicacies.

Suddenly, the carriage stopped. Having studied his map carefully before their departure, Werner realised that they were still a good distance from their destination.

“What’s happening? Why have we stopped?” he asked Philippe.

The two Blacks chattered back and forth, trying to overcome their inability to understand each other.

Finally, Philippe turned round, looking bewildered. “I think he is trying to tell me there is another carriage following behind us from the hotel. He’s adamant that we are followed. He says that when we stopped, it turned away into a side street,” he said.

God, Werner thought, that can’t be possible. Who could have expected him

here? They had been careful with their preparations; nobody had had any idea he was about to depart for Luanda from Benguela.

“Okay, Philippe. Let’s carry on but keep a good lookout without it being too obvious. I need to think about this.”

The carriage resumed its journey, but it wasn’t long before they stopped again. “Mestre, he’s right. We’re being followed.”

“All right, carry on slowly.”

Somehow, they needed to outsmart their pursuer.

Ahead was a local market in a small square. The crush of the many people crossing from one part to another was forcing the carriages to slow or stop.

He leant forward and tapped Philippe on the shoulder.

“I’m going to jump off here. You continue and let Josiah lead them around the town for a while. With the canopy up, they can’t see if I’m in the carriage. I’ll make sure they don’t notice me jumping off. I’ll see you back at the hotel later.”

“Yes, Mestre.”

The carriage passed through the middle of the market, slowing down because of the number of pedestrians. The following carriage was similarly held up, and by the time it had broken through the throng of people, they had widened the gap.

Right in front of them was an intersection.

“Make a right turn here,” he quickly instructed Philippe.

The carriage turned right into the lesser street and disappeared around the corner of the building. For a few moments it was out of sight, and Werner, valise in hand, jumped out, ducking and running towards the crowd, disappearing into its midst. From behind a stall, he watched the other carriage approach, and when it drew abreast, he studied the occupants.

Two men sat in the carriage. There was no mistaking the pockmarked face

of Pox, the man he had seen at dos Santos's settlement, also known as Pedro Roche. Werner was shocked. How did they get to Luanda so quickly, and how did they know that he would be here? And why were they after him? What seemed obvious was that de Mello had sent them to find Maria. And since last seeing de Mello and Batista, they had somehow associated him with Maria and dos Santos's whereabouts. Why else would they be tailing him? He was mystified.

Werner flagged down a passing carriage that plied the streets looking for fares; he gave the driver the street name, omitting the number. Fortunately, the African driver spoke Portuguese. The carriage dropped him off at the entrance to Rua da Gama. He waited until it had disappeared before he proceeded to walk the length of the street, unobtrusively checking the street numbers.

He found No 54 but walked on past it. It was a two-storey building typical of the others alongside it, with a large entrance between two pillars supporting a portico. This area was predominantly middle-class, far from the hustle and bustle of the city centre, on the outer edge of the baixa, the old city. A brass plate that adorned the side of the entrance gave one name only, this in large black letters: Williams. This surprised Werner; an English name in a Portuguese colonial city? Of course, he knew Maria was of mixed blood, but he knew nothing about her background at all. Somewhere in her ancestry, there must have been a union between African and European. It could have been European or Indian, maybe from Goa, he thought, the small Portuguese colony in India, but whoever the European, his name must have been Williams.

It was still early, so he decided to observe the building for a while, to see who came and went. A short distance up the street, he saw a shop with a few tables and chairs on the pavement and an awning to protect the customers

from the hot afternoon sun. Besides selling basic daily necessities to the locals, notices displayed on the sidewalk proclaimed it also served wine, coffee and snacks. He walked over and chose a table that gave him a view of No 54, Rua da Gama. He ordered coffee from the elderly storekeeper whose wife brought it to the table. The coffee was excellent, probably from Brazil, he thought.

It being still morning, the little shop was not particularly busy, with only the odd customer entering. No 54 revealed no activity.

About an hour later, he saw two women emerge from the building and turn to walk away from him. He recognised Maria and was again struck by the unique beauty of mulatto women. He still could vividly recollect the evening they had spent together, and felt a fleeting moment of intense anticipation but immediately thrust this from his mind.

He quickly rose, dropping a few coins on the table to cover the cost of his coffee, and proceeded to follow the pair at a fair distance. The two women were in no hurry, strolling slowly towards to the local shopping area and market, each with a basket in hand, no doubt on their way to make their daily purchases.

As they meandered through the shops and markets stalls, he repeatedly checked behind him. Neither he nor they were being followed. He had successfully lost his tail. No doubt, they'd be waiting for him at the hotel again.

About an hour later, after the women had stopped in a small sidewalk café, they parted, and Maria slowly retraced her steps to the house, carrying the heavy basket with her purchases. Werner quickened his pace until he was abreast of her. Without turning his head and looking at her, he spoke.

"Excuse me, Senhora; may I help you with your basket?"

She purposely ignored him, staring straight ahead. No doubt, he thought,

she thinks she's being accosted.

"Maria, let me help you."

She stopped walking and turned an incredulous expression on her face, her eyes wide with surprise.

"Madre de Deus," she whispered. "It's you!"

He took the basket from her. "Just keep walking. How have you been?" he asked.

"Very well, but lonely. My, my, am I glad to see you! I've been so worried about you, because I know dos Santos; he'll want to kill you."

She invited him into the house. He protested, thinking it not proper.

"Of course, you can come in," she said. "I've nothing to hide, neither have you! I've told my aunt everything; I had to so she could fully understand my situation. She'll be pleased to meet you. She won't be back until later this afternoon. She had another appointment."

He reluctantly agreed.

They entered the tastefully furnished house. Bookcases and paintings adorned the walls; heavy curtains bordered the windows, the sunlight streaming through the drawn net curtains. The large living room contained a few tropical indoor potted plants. Clearly, this was a well-to-do middle class home.

"What does your uncle do?" Werner asked, helping Maria remove her jacket.

"Oh, he's some government bureaucrat, something in municipal services, I think. That's surely very boring, I guess."

"I suppose it is."

She had taken the basket from him, and he followed her into the kitchen, where she packed her groceries away, some into the pantry and some out on the back porch in a large cool-room. He watched her, aware of her

exceptional beauty. Aware that he was looking at her, she walked over and pressed her body to his, her lips nearly touching his. She looked up into his eyes.

"I missed you so much. I've never forgotten that you saved me," she whispered, and then she pressed her lips to his.

He felt himself overwhelmed and immediately aroused. He could smell her, and the pressure of her pelvis against his was intoxicating. He kissed the hint of her soft silky breasts where they protruded slightly from her bodice.

Then he stopped.

"We must not, Maria. There are serious matters afoot."

"That can wait," she said, trying to pull his head to hers.

"No, it can't; dos Santos's people are looking for you."

She jerked her head back, her soft expression replaced by shock and fear. "Why are they after me? Does he want me back?"

"No, it's a long story. Sit, I need to tell you what has happened."

He left nothing out. The news of dos Santos's capture and escape shocked her, though she hated and despised him. When Werner mentioned the diamonds, she said she had heard that they were involved in mining but knew no more than that. She had met de Mello on a few occasions. She had the impression he was the kingpin; most were in awe of him, and it seemed he issued all directives. She knew nothing of dos Santos' financial arrangements, but had heard Colonel Batista's name mentioned. In fact, his name had been mentioned a few times. Yes, she knew Don Pereira, and his wife, a wonderful, refined woman.

"I spent some time at their hacienda as a guest," she said. "Daily the men staying there would ride off, only returning in the evening, dusty and dirty: dos Santos, that ugly fellow Morreira, Don Pereira and de Mello. But I do not know what they have been doing. That degradado Morreira frightens me; he

is dos Santos' hatchet man, a robber and a murderer." She shuddered. She had no idea how he had avoided the gallows, but he had been transported from Portugal to Angola a few years back. "An evil man," she said and shuddered.

"Why do they think I know where dos Santos would be? Why were they not told that the German military had captured him?" she asked.

He realised that she did not know of dos Santos's escape. If she did not know of his escape, she could be of no use to de Mello and could not lead the judge to dos Santos.

"Maria, I'm just a junior officer, I do as I'm told!" he laughed. "I'm not sure, but I suppose it is because the investigation still continues, with the Germans and the Portuguese wanting to apprehend de Mello and Batista. Now Pereira is involved, and to that you have to add the diamonds."

"What am I to do?" she asked nervously.

"You have to move again," Werner said. "I think your aunt should leave as well. We'll help you find accommodation, but no family this time. Rather rent lodgings from total strangers, using aliases. I'll be seeing General Diaz, and we'll help with money. You need to hide for a while."

"God, I want to be free," she wailed in anguish. Werner wondered how long her past relationship with dos Santos would continue to plague her. Once again, her life was turned upside down.

Werner promised to call the day after at five. Meanwhile, Maria would discuss his visit with her aunt. Reluctantly, she let him go.

Finding another cab, he eventually got back to the hotel in time for dinner. He found Philippe waiting for him outside the entrance. "Where's the carriage?" he asked.

"I sent the driver home. Those two men followed us around for quite awhile until they discovered you were gone. When they rode past, I saw the same

man who had stopped us on the road from Caconda. He tried to look away," Philippe said.

"I know. I also saw him."

"I'm sure they are watching the hotel."

"They must be. Philippe, listen. I don't want Josiah our cab driver to pick us up here. You must stop him before he gets here tomorrow morning. I'll meet you at the Catholic cathedral we passed in the old city. I'll leave the hotel using the back entrance, well before it is light. I'll see you there. Okay?"

"I understand, Mestre."

The concierge handed him his keys and a message. It was from General Diaz, advising a meeting was confirmed for eleven the next morning.

Werner bought a newspaper. Bold headlines announced that Portugal tottered on the brink of bankruptcy, and that King Carlos I's throne was under threat. There were rumours of him abdicating. Portugal had never recovered from the loss of Brazil as a colony, and the continual near civil war situations in the colonies had taken a heavy toll on the treasury. Emerging nationalism, fuelled by discontent, threatened the existing government. Many thought that the Governor-General of the colony would be recalled to Portugal. This could negatively affect de Mello's plan, he being a protégé of the Governor-General.

The meeting with General Diaz should be interesting, he thought.

CHAPTER 63

Werner rose quite late and immediately dressed, his meeting with General Diaz foremost in mind. Everyone in Luanda knows the fort, known as the Fort of Sao Miguel of Loanda and housing the country's top military command, an imposing fortress built on the end of the peninsula that forms the bay. It overlooks the bay, the walls high and built to withstand attack from any direction.

He was fortunate to soon find a carriage that whisked him off to the fort, a journey that took him round the bay. At the guarded entrance, the general's aide signed Werner in and escorted him to the general's offices. The fort's outer and inner walls were enormously thick and whitewashed, built to withstand any naval barrage from ships in the bay. The interior of the fort was cool and hardly affected by the outside temperature. They met in a large hall, its centre taken up by a long table surrounded by a number of chairs; the décor was opulent, the walls covered in light-green material with gilded edges. Large portraits stood guard around the room: past and present kings, governors, and military officers who had served in the colony over the years.

The general looked splendid in his uniform, much adorned with medals and insignia. Werner estimated him to be in his 50s, with a distinguished grey trimmed beard and moustache, and his rotund shape denoting the life he led, clearly a victim of good living. He wore a stern face, as was expected from all senior officers, but this did not belie the twinkle in his eye. He indicated that Werner should to take a seat and asked that his aide arrange for coffee to be served.

"I'm somewhat confused," the general said, laughing. "I don't know

whether I should address you as Hauptmann von Dewitz or Senhor de Almeida. But whatever, espionage is stupid but essential in these times. Anyway, I'm certainly glad to make your acquaintance."

"General, my Portuguese name, de Almeida, is probably preferable at the moment," Werner said, smiling.

"Quite so. I must tell you that I've been exchanging cables with your military commanders, who, incidentally, speak highly of you. I'm impressed."

"Thank you, General."

"Of course, from the newspapers you must realise that our country is in a state of political flux, not that this should influence the military; we serve whoever is in power. However, it may assist help us in disposing of …" He hesitated for a second, merely mouthing the words 'the Governor-General', "… those in charge and, in particular, our good Judge de Mello. I believe his protector has no more than a few days left in this colony and probably will return to Portugal in disgrace. I don't think we need worry about him. Already now, he is virtually without power and not able to help his friend. You will excuse the riddles, won't you?"

"Of course, General. I need to tell you that I've already encountered two of their sidekicks here in Luanda. In fact, I was followed yesterday."

"I'm not surprised; that consortium has its tentacles everywhere. What they have done is no less than treason, but proving it is another matter. Do you require any help dealing with them?"

"No, I've given them the slip; I should manage."

"Good. I would not want them to think that we know what is going on, not yet anyway. However, I thought it prudent that you have some protection. I've a letter here for you that you need only to produce. It is signed and sealed by me and will immediately avail you of whatever assistance you may

require from the military. Rest assured – no one would dare ignore it. Also, should the police get involved they will realise you are working for me," the general added, sliding the letter across the table.

"Thank you, General."

"Ah, yes. So you have a map for me, don't you?" the general asked.

Werner produced the tube and passed it across.

The general bent over the table and studied the rolled open map. He then pointed to the section of the map that revealed the Caconda area.

"I see you have marked the mine on the map, and I see that it has been notarised. That's very good; that certainly lends it a degree of authenticity. I can tell you it has been established and confirmed that the mine is on Don Pereira's ranch, as was surmised. His property, his ranch, is enormous, certainly the largest in the south. However, the records reveal that the mining rights are not held by him, but instead by our friend de Mello. Don Pereira, we know, is not a willing partner. De Mello has some financial hold over him. Here comes the tricky part. For us to attain those rights, de Mello must either voluntarily relinquish his rights thereto, or he must be charged criminally. Alternatively, should he lose his life in the course of committing a crime, his heirs would forfeit their right to the mining claim. We are dealing here with the worst of the worst. I need not tell you what would best suit us."

"General, what exactly is it that you wish me to do?" Werner asked.

"Hauptmann von Dewitz – I will use your military title now that we are discussing military matters – in conjunction with your General von Leutwein, commander-in-chief of the imperial German forces in your colony, and Major Zietzmann, as well as our Colonel de Oliviera and Major de Sousa, it was agreed that this should be a civilian operation headed by you, but secretly supported by us. The military is not to be openly involved. If this goes wrong, we will turn a blind eye and deny any knowledge. This is an undercover

operation, with no one being able to point a finger at either country's military establishment. Politically, it would be too sensitive. Remember, whatever happens to de Mello must be the result of a crime he has committed, supported by absolute proof. Remember too, for all intents and purposes whether legal or not, you are currently a Portuguese civilian; you have papers to prove that, although I shan't ask where you obtained them."

The general laughed as he leaned back in his chair, studying Werner intently.

"No doubt, my friend Zietzmann's work!" he continued. "Don Pereira realises that the degree of his present involvement could lead to his imprisonment and to the disgrace of his family. This concerns him. We need you to approach him, get him on your side, and wrench control of the mine from de Mello and Colonel Batista. At the right moment, we will strip the colonel of his command. However, let me repeat what I said: we don't want to see de Mello in front of a court. We believe think his connections would get him acquitted. He would manipulate the trial and walk free, still as powerful as he is now."

"Who will assist help me?" Werner asked, not quite believing what he was hearing. It sounded like a suicide mission.

"We will transfer Colonel de Oliviera back to Benguela, but make him subordinate to Colonel Batista, until we are ready to dispense with Batista, at which time de Oliveira will step into the breach. He and Major de Sousa will assist you. You must appreciate; it is essential that the military retain a low profile now things remain politically volatile. Please, I don't expect you to respond now. You are here for a few days; think about it, and we will meet again in three days when Colonel de Oliviera will also join us. Just remember, if you assist us, it must be voluntary."

*

Werner left the fort with his mind in turmoil. They actually wanted him to get rid of – kill, murder or whatever – de Mello. Although it had never been said aloud, it certainly clearly was insinuated. Did this have the blessing of the German high command? This was insane! This whole thing could blow up in his face. Nobody knew what was going to happen in Portugal – the country was still a powder keg. He couldn't even discuss it with Louis; he was out here on his own. The general had left him in no doubt that Morreira and his cronies were his problem. The letter ensured that no matter what happened, he was indemnified, if that's what you wanted to call it. God! To crown it all, he and Louis had stolen the diamonds! What a cock-up! He had to stop them. If he didn't, they would come after him. He wondered how Jurgen was making out.

Dos Santos's name had not even been mentioned, but as far as Werner was concerned, dos Santos was the arch-villain, and he still had a score to settle with him. He had a niggling feeling that dos Santos just had to be at or near the mine – that would be the best place to hide. For dos Santos to return to Huambo would have served no purpose.

*

At the designated time, Werner arrived at the Williams' residence in Rua da Gama. Maria greeted him at the door. She seemed to have recovered from the gloomy mood she was in when he left her. She introduced him to her aunt, a European woman approaching 50. She was an attractive woman, elegantly dressed, slim and petite, her hair perfect, leaving no doubt as to her status. She was pleased to meet him, thanking him for saving her niece from that vile man, dos Santos.

"I'm sure that this despicable man will come to a horrible end. I have no compassion for him," she said fiercely. "I understand your concerns, certainly with the likes of those thugs, and we have already made arrangements to

move. You need not bother. Not even my husband will know our whereabouts. But we will need some financial assistance."

Werner readily agreed, compliments of the Imperial German government. He made sure she knew that she was not taking it from him. Tomorrow they would lock up the house, leaving the impression that she and her niece had gone to visit her sister in Ambriz, about 60 miles north of Luanda. In fact, they would not be leaving Luanda at all. They had found a secluded house which they'd rented on a weekly basis.

Werner wanted to leave and return to the hotel, but Maria was insistent that he take her to dinner, and her aunt leant her support.

"You need to go out; you've been cooped up for too long. Go, go!" the aunt said, smiling.

Werner finally relented but then waited impatiently for half an hour while Maria changed and made herself ready for the outing.

Finally, stepping outside, they soon found a carriage. She gave directions to an address in the picturesque old city. The clatter of hooves and the swaying of the carriage and the sight of this exquisite woman opposite him soon had a mellowing effect. He was uncomfortably aware of an inner stirring as he mentally recalled their last passionate encounter.

"Surely you have a string of suitors here?" Werner asked as they swayed along in the carriage.

"I don't need any." Her beautiful green eyes never left him, and he could find no appropriate response. This was the affect this woman had on him.

He knew he was physically attracted to her. He never knew whether he only imagined it or whether it was really so, but she seemed to be aware that he desired her, and he felt her mentally taunting him, it as if she was saying 'I'm here, what's taking you so long?'

They chose a secluded restaurant along the bay road, removed from the

normal crowds; this restaurant in the baixa catered to the local residents. It was open to the night air but roofed with tiles, and with all the food grilled on open fires. The ambience was unique; it seemed everybody knew everybody else, all knew each other by their first names. Maria was completely at home and he saw that Maria was relaxed, not wearing her finery and jewellery, but clad only in a long skirt and white cotton blouse with a low neckline, revealing the curve of her magnificent breasts. Her every movement and gesture caused them to quiver and his eyes were invariably drawn to them. Her every movement and gesture caused them to quiver enticingly.

They ate crayfish tails grilled over an open fire, perfectly spiced and accompanied by a garlic sauce only the Portuguese knew how to prepare, filled with pieces of squid, mussel, shrimp and tuna. It was one of those meals not easily forgotten. The dessert was something local; he knew it contained coconut and some liqueur – a truly great end to a scrumptious meal.

They both drank more than they should have, finishing three bottles of Langouste wine brought to the table in a primitive ice bucket beaded with condensation pearls. Clearly, she was besotted with him, not hiding her feelings of affection, not caring whether others saw this or not. During the meal, she occasionally rubbed her foot against his leg. He wanted to tell her to stop, but his reserve had crumbled. His arousal and his emotions drove him to settle the bill early, impatient to see what would develop. He left an extravagant tip.

Werner assisted helped Maria into a four-wheel surrey with the canopy up. He followed her aboard, and they disappeared into the darkness of its interior.

He started to give the driver instructions to her house, but she interrupted.

“The Royal Beach Hotel,” she said firmly. He didn’t argue.

She snuggled up to him, laying her hand on his leg.

“You over-tipped,” she said, chuckling. “For a moment, I thought the waiter would kiss you.”

“Maybe I did, but it was one of the finest meals I’ve ever had.” He bent down and kissed the nape of her neck. She lifted her head, and his lips met hers for a long and passionate kiss as he slid his hand into her bodice, cupping her breast. Her erect nipple was hard against the palm of his hand.

The carriage came to an abrupt stop, the horses neighing. He looked up but could not distinguish much as the street was too dark.

“What’s wrong?” he shouted to the driver.

“Mestre, there’s another carriage drawn across the road.”

Werner was instantly alert. “Get down, quickly!” he whispered urgently to Maria, pushing her off the seat onto the floor so she crouched behind the forward panel of the surrey.

Slowly, Werner stood up and leaned forward to see past round the seated driver. Another carriage blocked the route, apparently having emerged from a small side street. It was now drawn across the road; there no driver. He sensed a feeling of foreboding, the hair on the nape of his neck prickling. This wasn’t any accident. As he watched, two men emerged from behind the wagon. They did not conceal the weapons in their hands, which he saw in the feeble light of the carriage’s storm lamps. One of the men looked familiar. They stopped next to Werner’s carriage, aiming their revolvers at Werner and Maria.

“Senhor de Almeida, you and Maria please get off and get into this our carriage – quickly now!” the taller of the two ordered.

It was then that Werner recognised him. It was Pedro Roche, the smallpox victim known amongst them as Pox. The degradado waggled the revolver at them and then again repeated what he’d said, his voice taking on a more menacing tone.

There was nothing to do but obey. Werner helped Maria to her feet. They then climbed from the surrey to the street. He was amazed at her composure. Surely she had to be terrified, but if she was, she did not reveal it; she was a picture of disdainful composure.

“Search him,” Pox said to the other man, who approached Werner and gave him a thorough search.

“Senhor, the man has no weapons,” the man said.

Werner held continued to hold Maria’s hand. “What’s the meaning of this?” he demanded, putting on a show of indignation.

Both men laughed. “Merda! Don’t play fuckin’ games,” Pox said. “I can’t wait to shoot you. Get into the fuckin’ carriage.” He pointed to the carriage that was drawn across the street.

Werner and Maria sat on the rear seat next to each other, with Pox on the opposite seat facing them. The revolver was still in his hand, resting on his lap. The second man climbed onto the driver’s seat and the carriage lurched forward and turned right down the road, towards the harbour. Pox’s accomplice had knocked their other driver unconscious with a vicious blow to the head. They left him sprawled in the street.

Werner’s mind was blank, overcome by the shock of the sudden attack. He silently berated himself for not having a weapon with him. Oh, he had thought of it, but never expected to be attacked in Luanda – the place swarmed with police who were known for their thoroughness. Slowly, he started to assess their situation, aware of the danger they were in. He knew this was an execution squad; they would take them somewhere isolated, try and wring the whereabouts of dos Santos out of Maria, and then unceremoniously murder the two of them. Without a weapon, what was he going to do? Maria sat quietly next to him, taking the sudden turn of events better than he had imagined, somewhat stupefied but not panicked.

Was it going to end like this? He watched Pedro Roche; the degregado was vigilant, hardly taking his eyes off him, the revolver always pointed in his direction. Occasionally, when the carriage passed through a badly lit area, the interior of the carriage would be cast into near darkness, but their upper torsos remained silhouetted against the night sky and the faint running lights of the carriage. He knew that any untoward movement would draw an immediate response from Pox.

He felt Maria pinch his thigh. He moved his hand from his lap to take her hand, thinking she wanted needed comforting. As his hand closed over hers, he felt something metal. At first, he did not realise what it was. Slowly, he took it from her; it was a pair of scissors! Not an ordinary pair, but those used for cutting and trimming hair – long and pointed. Where had she found them and what was he going to do with it?

As the carriage neared the harbour, it turned north. He recalled from the map he had that this led to the remains of an old fort, now a monument, built by the Portuguese to protect the bay. A half- moon shone in the night sky, the sea breeze bringing some broken cloud with it that intermittently blocked out the moonlight. It was then particularly dark. They passed some sporadic traffic on the road, but there was no way he could draw attention to their plight. They left the built-up area, and the road now meandered parallel to the beach above the high-water mark. He could hear the small waves and the occasional palm rustling in the wind, accompanied by the sound of the horses' hooves and the creak of the carriage. The carriage turned off the road and ploughed a few yards through the soft beach sand but soon stopped. There were no lights, only the moon occasionally disappearing behind the clouds.

Pox opened the door and climbed down, standing on the sand facing them. "Get out!"

Werner looked fleetingly up at the driver as the moon broke through a passing cloud. He was holding the horses in check, the reins in both his hands. Werner quickly got to his feet, not wanting Maria to alight before him. He clasped the scissors in his hand, the extended end of it hidden up his sleeve. As he stepped down from the carriage's single step to the ground, he pretended to stumble in Pox's direction. The smallpox-scarred man stepped slightly back in order to avoid Werner, and for a moment lifted the barrel of the revolver. Werner lunged forward, pushing him backwards. Pox swung the gun barrel down and fired. Werner felt a tug at his shoulder. He ignored it, his mind resolute. As his body collided with Pox, he brought up his arm and drove the scissors into the side of the man's face with all his strength. The point penetrated the temple just in front of the ear, the thin bone collapsing as the scissors were forced into the man's brain. He went down as if pole-axed, brain-dead before he hit the ground, though his heart still beat, gushing blood from the wound over Werner's hand, wrist and arm.

The driver dropped the reins and scrambled to extract his revolver from his belt. At the same instant, the horses moved forward. Maria did not hesitate. She leaned forward, put her arm around the driver's neck and jerked him off balance. As he fell backwards against her, she viciously bit his face.

Werner scrabbled on all fours in the sand, desperately looking for Pedro Roche's gun. Meanwhile, the driver managed to draw his revolver and was twisting round to shoot Maria behind him. Werner's fingers finally closed over the revolver, and he did what was quickest: he simply jabbed the barrel against the man's hip and pulled the trigger. The revolver bucked in his hand, the shot rang out, and the man screamed, dropping his revolver and grabbing his hip. Werner dragged him from the moving carriage. Maria took hold of the reins and hauled the horses to a stop, applying the brake.

Werner looked at his arm; it was covered in blood. He did not know

whether it was his blood or Pedro Roche's. He felt no pain.

The driver lay on the beach, rolling from side to side moaning, and blood oozing from the bullet hole in his leg.

"I think the thigh bone is shattered," Werner said. "What are we going to do with him?"

"Kill him!" Maria spat.

"For God's sake, I can't kill him in cold blood!" he exclaimed.

"Listen, my love, you have to, for our sake. You've already killed one. If you don't, they'll keep on coming after me! I'll never be safe. God! Just do it!"

He pulled her close to him. "I can't do that," he whispered, looking at her.

There was blood around her mouth from the man she had bitten. He pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and gave it to her, indicating she should wipe her face. He then bent down to look at the wounded man, who was now quiet. He had lost copious amounts of blood, and Werner saw the dark stain in the moonlight as it seeped into the sand.

"I think he's losing blood from his femoral artery; he's already lost consciousness," Werner said.

Maria looked at the man. Even in the weak moonlight, she could see how pale he was. "There's nothing we can do for him," she said. "All right, if you can't kill him, just leave him. He'll never survive. Let's not stay and watch him die."

"Let's take the wagon," Werner said. "We can abandon it in town. There's blood on the driver's seat, be careful where you sit." He looked at her in amazement. "Where did you get the scissors from?"

"I had them in my bag from this morning – I always take my own scissors when I go to have my hair trimmed. I prefer they use my own."

"Well, thank God for that."

They drove the carriage back into town and abandoned it in a side street, quickly walking away towards the main thoroughfares and the still-teeming city. They got into a roaming carriage and Werner instructed the driver to head for his hotel.

“I’m not going to allow you to return home,” he said. “Your aunt can look after the move. Don’t worry, I’ll send Philippe in the early morning to let her know where you are. Tomorrow afternoon, you can go directly to your new residence.”

“It’s fine,” Maria said. “She won’t worry if I don’t return tonight.”

Werner suddenly realised that the woman had planned not to return home for the evening. Clearly, she had expected to spend the night with him.

Werner had the taxi drop them off a block away from the hotel. Carefully scrutinising their surroundings and people still about, they walked slowly to the hotel. He decided that they should walk around to the back of the building into the delivery yard. Various other entrances led to the kitchens. There even was a small doorway to the back of the reception area. They remained in the shadows, not wanting others to see the blood on his clothing.

Once in his room, he removed his jacket and shirt, relieved to see there was no mark on him. The bullet had passed through his jacket’s shoulder padding, fortunately missing him. The blood on him was not his own.

“You know, we are not safe even here. They followed me. Thank God, you’re not hurt,” he said.

“No, I’m not, and neither are you. We were lucky. First I’m going to have a drink, and then a bath,” she said, treating his comments with some finality, as if she no longer wished to discuss their harrowing experience.

He poured them each a cognac, which they quickly drank. Both had another.

“Now that I’m relaxed, I’ll take that bath,” she said. “You have the most

beautiful bathroom. Goodness, hot water out of a tap and a nice large tub! She exclaimed, “I haven’t used one of those for a long time.” She started to remove her clothing, making out as if he were not present, leisurely removing each garment. His breath caught as her corset was discarded and he saw the jut of her breasts. This was followed by her knickers, and as she bent to lay them on the bed, he glimpsed her sex before she sauntered off to the bathroom, swinging her hips provocatively.

He waited for her, drinking yet another cognac. He breathed deeply, wondering why she was spending so long in the bath. She emerged from the bathroom wrapped in a towel, which she whipped off before sliding into his bed.

Werner disappeared into the bathroom, where in record time he stripped off his clothes, bathed and returned to the bedroom with a towel wrapped around his waist. As he got near the bed, she grabbed hold of the towel and jerked pulled it off him.

“Well?” she said, arching her eyebrows questioningly. “What are you waiting for? Get in.” She whipped the sheet back, making room for him.

Acutely aware that she could see how obviously aroused he was, he slid into the bed next to her. She turned towards him, and slowly ran her lips down his chest and stomach. She took him in her hand, and fondled him smiling provocatively as he gasped at her touch, then in one smooth movement, she straddled him and guided him into her.

Their lovemaking was raw and violent; it was as if they were driven mercilessly to attain the unattainable, without control over their wanton needs. It was something that could not be delayed; it had to be dealt with here and now. This woman had no inhibitions; hers breasts bobbed to her movements, her neck and head arching back. Suddenly, she shuddered and emitted a low moan, and then collapsed forward onto his chest.

Several minutes later, she slid off him. She looked at him lying next to her, he still slightly out of breath, his chest rising and falling and the perspiration on his forehead glistening in the moonlight that streamed in through the open French doors that led to the balcony.

“Once you return to Benguela, will I ever see you again?” she asked, kicking the sheet off the bed, wanting the breeze that drifted into the room to cool them.

He stared up at the ceiling. “I must be the most confused man in Angola. I never planned any of this. It just happened.”

“Is it all just sex?” she asked.

“Oh, it’s a lot more than that. I have deep feelings for you,” he replied.

It was true, he did have feelings for her, but he also knew he was not in love with her, nor did he have that all-consuming infatuation that is supposed to qualify love. But undeniably, she awakened the most wanton feeling of lust in him. Actually, he didn’t believe he was in love with Dorothea either, but knew both were special to him. Maria was different from Dorothea; she seemed able to make him live and love for the moment and the rest be damned. Their attraction and their need for each other was as if there was no tomorrow. In contrast, Dorothea was the type of woman he would want to spend the rest of his life with, where everything had its proper place and life a planned affair.

His breathing settled, and slowly he recovered. His thoughts returned to the world around him.

He sighed. First, he had to see this job through to its conclusion. Events over the last few months had profoundly affected his life; it wasn’t a job anymore, it had become more of a quest. Yes, the Kunahama rebellion in Angola had been quelled; the Kunahamas paying a heavy price for their insurrection against the Portuguese Crown. The Portuguese had no qualms

when it came to mass executions and other reprisals. However, the war in SudwestAfrika still raged – German soldiers still died, killed by rifles supplied by Portuguese gunrunners like de Mello and dos Santos. The Portuguese and Germans expected him to carry on this charade until those responsible had been eliminated. It seemed he no longer had control of his own destiny. He felt as if he was merely a mere passenger with little say as to how it would all end. Once it was over, maybe then he could regain some perspective and be able to make the right decisions.

"I'm a mestiço," Maria added. "Does that bother you? I know that in your country any association with a mestiço is taboo." She ran her fingers through the hair on his chest.

"That's true," he said. There was no ignoring that fact. Associating with a mestiço or having an affair was one thing, marrying one was another: he would quietly but definitely be ostracised. "Look, let's not even think about that, let me first deal with dos Santos's friends."

CHAPTER 64

The meeting with General Diaz and Colonel de Oliviera was very much a repetition of the previous one: he was assured that he had the full support of the Portuguese military for this clandestine mission. Werner took the opportunity of mentioning what had occurred and that he'd had no option choice but to kill two of dos Santos's men. He remained as vague as he could and made no mention of Maria, but provided the approximate location where this had happened. Both officers listened intently and were appalled that dos Santos's tentacles seemed to have no bounds, and that he was so well organised in the capital. They undertook to discreetly inform the city's chief of police and inform him that this was a military matter. It was a well-known fact that the military had the upper hand in terms of control in the Portuguese colonies.

He was introduced to a Senhor da Silva, a prominent lawyer appointed by the Portuguese military, and told that the registration of the mining claim was flawed; it should have been registered in Don Pereira's name. Of course, this was merely an invented ploy. The lawyer gave Werner a very official-looking letter, adorned with numerous stamps and seals, which Werner was to use to persuade Pereira to turn against stand up to de Mello, with Werner's support. Out of gratitude for his support, the government would then re-register the claim, with the proviso that Don Pereira personally retain at least a 40 percent equity in his personal capacity. They believed that this would be sufficient to persuade him to side with them. Naturally, he would also be exonerated from any wrongdoing.

If he had any sense whatsoever, Werner thought, Don Pereira would jump

at the offer; a continued association with de Mello, whether willing or unwilling, could only lead to his family's downfall. There was no other choice.

After da Silva had departed, the general relaxed, lighting a cigar.

"Senhor de Almeida," the general said, dropping a burned match into a huge large brass ashtray, "as you can see, we also have plans to rid ourselves of these renegades, in particular my judicial friend, de Mello; and if we find dos Santos, whom I've since learnt escaped from German custody, we'll also deal with him. However, rumour has it that it is he is the first man on your revenge agenda, if I may say so." The general's eyes twinkled for a moment.

Christ, where did he find that out? Werner wondered.

"To that end I must ask that you proceed with all haste to Caconda and make contact with Pereira," the general said. "Sail to Benguela on the first available steamer and then ride on to Caconda. Of course, you know my request carries your commanding officer's approval."

Werner realised that this was tantamount to an order.

The general continued: "I need you to convince Don Pereira of our good intentions. The letter should do the trick. I don't want the military to have too high a profile at the moment considering the current unusual political interaction, what with our beloved governor under suspicion," he said sarcastically; it obvious that the governor was no friend of his.

"Of course I understand, General," Werner replied.

"Good man. Well then, let me not delay you. Take care."

Werner shook hands and then came to attention, then swung round and left.

*

Two days later, Werner departed Luanda on board a coastal steamer. On his last day in the city, he met Maria for lunch and promised that although he was on his way to Benguela, he would keep in touch with her. She smiled

sadly at him, her sadness telling him that she knew that at this stage, there were so many ifs and buts in both their lives, any such promises were meaningless.

CHAPTER 65

Werner's second entrance to Caconda was very different from his first. He and Philippe rode into town on horseback. He was now the successful businessman and member of the bourgeoisie, an agent for various European manufacturers, dressed in clothes that reflected his standing. Philippe, his cavalherico, was attired dressed in a white shirt, grey trousers and riding boots; he also wore a new hat, now his prized possession. Both were armed with new rifles. They were accompanied by another Black, actually an army scout in disguise, named Pedro. He did not enjoy quite the same status as Philippe, but his presence leant further support to the overall image that 'here rode a rich man'. Louis had insisted that the man accompany them; he spoke Portuguese fluently as well as being an excellent soldier. Werner had decided against using a wagon, choosing rather to use packhorses; this would enable them to travel faster.

They made straight for the Red Hornet cantina. Werner strode loudly over the planked floor towards the bar, seeing Senhor Sardinha behind it, polishing glasses.

The portly barman looked up, at first not recognising Werner. Then his face lighted up in surprise.

"My goodness, just look at you. What a transformation!" Sardinha said, stretching his hand over the counter in greeting, obviously glad to see Werner. "You look like a successful businessman! Where's that nephew of mine?"

Werner shook the proffered hand. "He had to stay behind."

Louis's uncle immediately arranged for their accommodation at the rear of

his business, although Werner was now invited to stay in the main house. His two cavalhericos led the horses to the back and unpacked the animals while Werner remained in the bar.

“Are you going to be all right on your own? You’re dealing with difficult people around here,” the barman asked with concern.

“Certainly, there’s nothing to worry about.”

Without being asked, Sardinha pushed a large glass of beer towards Werner.

They chatted quietly. Werner was hoping to notice rumours that would add to his information, but the bartender assured him that all was quiet.

“I need a favour,” Werner finally said, looking around the cantina to check if anybody was in earshot. He lowered his voice as Sardinha passed him another glass of beer.

“Could you get a message to Don Pereira, asking that he meet me here? It’s probably safer than at his hacienda. He’s going to think this presumptuous of me, but just let say I have a proposition he may find very beneficial. Tell him that it also may assist him in re-establishing his true independent status and enable him to end his ties with de Mello. Remember the name, de Mello; it’s important. When he hears that name in this context, he will realise what I’m getting at. Can you do it?”

Sardinha looked at him sardonically. “I know who de Mello is. Do you think that it will work?”

“Of course. I’m certain it will. You don’t know the whole story.”

“None of my business, but I’ll tell you what; as a favour, I’ll personally deliver the message first thing in the morning.”

“Incidentally, I have an important letter to hand to him from a lawyer, Senhor da Silva in Luanda: he specialises in property deeds and mining claims,” Werner added. He slid the letter across to the bar counter. “For

God’s sake don’t lose it!”

Sardinha took the letter. “I’ll leave during the early hours of the morning,” he said.

*

When Sardinha returned from Don Pereira’s ranch, he met with Werner who was who was impatient to hear what had been said.

“You don’t mind if I call you Joachim, do you?” Sardinha asked.

“It’s fine with me. I’ve so many names,” Werner laughed.

“Well, Joachim, initially he was extremely uncommunicative and very wary, actually belligerent, not prepared to meet you, saying his business was of no concern of yours. Of course, he had no idea who you were, and when I told him that you had been in town a few weeks ago, incognito so to speak, that just made matters worse. I got the impression that he was afraid, although I wouldn’t know why.”

“I do,” Werner interjected.

“Anyway, I then handed him the letter. He didn’t read it in front of me, but walked out onto the porch and stood there a long while before he returned. When he came back in, he was a little more relaxed and said that provided he could bring his son Ricardo, and also provided this was done in the strictest confidence, he would meet you Friday morning at ten, here at my house.”

“Thank you, that’s all I want,” Werner responded. “Did he say anything else?”

“No, he’s too wary. I left immediately thereafter.”

*

Werner thought that Don Pereira would prefer to be as inconspicuous as possible, but this was did not seem so. He and his son rode into Caconda on two magnificent horses, strutting down the main street dressed as would be expected from members of the aristocracy. Well, so much for that, he

thought. Everyone knows they're in town; there goes the subterfuge.

Werner met them in the cantina. Father and son could not to hide their surprise when they recognised him as the same man who had been on their land selling general goods some weeks ago.

"I demand to know what's going on here. I remember you. Where's your friend?" the rancher demanded, clearly unhappy at the thought that this trader knew about his dealings with de Mello.

"Please, Don Pereira, all in good time," Werner said. "Let's find somewhere private to sit down and I will tell you all. Senhor Sardinha has offered us the use of his house so that we may discuss matters in private."

Don Pereira instructed Ricardo to remain in the cantina and the rancher followed Sardinha and Werner to the house, where they were led into a sitting room. A huge large carpet, roughly woven from some sort of coarse sisal-like fibre, covered the floor. African paintings and carvings adorned the walls. A large oil-lit chandelier hung from the ceiling.

A servant immediately appeared with refreshments. Sardinha indicated that all should sit.

"Please, you can speak openly. Nobody will overhear you," he said, and then left the room, closing the door behind him.

Don Pereira stared at Werner seated opposite him. "It's de Almeida, isn't it? Well, Senhor de Almeida, I think you have much explaining to do," the rancher said.

"Quite true. Before I say more, please understand that it is General Diaz, commander in chief of all Angolan colonial forces, who requested that I contact and speak to you. I'm about to give you some important information, which, should you disclose to anyone, could result in your arrest and prosecution."

"Let me be the judge of that," Don Pereira said. "I don't understand why

I’m being approached by you in an official capacity. Is this secret meeting really necessary?”

“Please, they insisted that I speak to you privately. Actually, I’m an officer of the Imperial German Colonial Forces and seconded to the Intelligence Division under command of Major Zietzmann. A close rapport exists between General Diaz and Major Zietzmann. I’m further authorised to tell you that dos Santos has been arrested and is sure to be hanged,” Werner said, using the blatant lie in the hopes it would get the rancher on their side. “Gunrunning, as you probably well know, carries the death sentence.”

There was no mistaking the affect this had on the rancher. He blanched, the colour draining from his face.

“This cannot be true!”

“Believe me, it is true. He will be tried by a military court. The arrest and proceedings are still a secret; in fact, you’re privileged to know this. The diamonds from the mine you share with them are being used to buy weapons, which are sold to the Hereros and probably the Kunahamas. General Diaz said I should tell you that this is high treason.”

Don Pereira collected himself, remaining silent as he took his cup and drank some coffee. “Let’s say I understand the severity of the problem. What do you want from me?”

“I want you to contact de Mello—”

Werner was interrupted by the rancher: “What do you know about de Mello?” he demanded.

“Enough to know that he is implicated in this and the gunrunning, and that he is your partner, be this willingly or unwillingly on your part,” Werner said quietly.

This information appeared to astound Don Pereira. “But he is related to the Governor-General,” the rancher retorted with growing frustration.

“We are aware of this. Again confidentially, the Governor-General is about to be recalled to Portugal. We are all aware that Portugal is currently in political turmoil. Some fear that an attempt may be made on the king’s life. In fact, I think we both know that the Portuguese monarchy’s days are numbered. I believe that within the next few years Portugal will be a republic.”

“That’s treason!” the rancher spat. Clearly, he was a supporter of the monarchy.

“It may be, but I’m not a Portuguese national, so it’s merely my opinion,” Werner said, smiling. “Anyway, as I was saying, please contact de Mello and ask him to visit you concerning the mine. Tell him that you’ve established that there is a serious problem, or anything similar, that will bring him running. It’s imperative that he come here.”

“Why not go to Benguela?”

“No, it has got to be here; there’s good reason for it. I doubt whether he can find the support here that would be readily available in Benguela. Unless he arrives with a mounted column, which I doubt he can raise, he’ll be a lot more vulnerable here.”

He was not about to disclose that Louis was camped ten miles out of town with a small troop of 20 men, awaiting word from Werner.

“He’ll resist with force any attempt to take the mine from him. The man’s dangerous, I know!” Don Pereira said.

“Well, he may have been dangerous, but he no longer has any support. The claim will be re-registered to a bona fide mining group, with you as a partner. If you wish, you can sell your share to the group. They would probably pay you a fair price. This would release you from the clutches of de Mello and his consorts, and absolve you from prosecution with your reputation intact. Is that not attractive?”

“I have a question. Why am I negotiating with you when you are not even a proper representative of the Angolan government?”

Werner shrugged his shoulders, a slight smile playing round his lips. “Let’s just say that your government does not want to publicly seen to be involved. As you know, these are difficult times, what with different political factions vying for position.”

Don Pereira rose from the table. “I need to discuss this with Ricardo. We’ll be back in an hour.”

“I suggest you let your son read the letter from the lawyer in Luanda, and then tell him the whole story. I’m sure he’ll find it very interesting,” Werner said.

Don Pereira looked at him, not saying a word.

*

Don Pereira and Ricardo returned about an hour later and told Werner that they would ask de Mello to come directly to the ranch. The don also extended an invitation to Werner to accompany him to his hacienda, as he wanted him nearby when he confronted de Mello.

“De Mello will not arrive alone,” he warned. “He will have mounted men escorting him. Don’t forget the war with the Kunahamas is not yet over. You should prepare yourself for such an eventuality.”

“Do you have a flagpole?” Werner asked.

“Yes, but why?”

“Please fly the Portuguese national flag for the next few days.”

“Why should I do that?” the perplexed rancher asked.

“I have good reason, but let’s just say you do this as a show sign of loyalty to the government and king,” Werner replied.

*

Werner had no idea when de Mello would arrive, if at all, or how many

men would accompany him. He was sure that dos Santos had to be here, but his name was never mentioned. Don Pereira remained withdrawn and secretive: and his intentions were still a mystery, probably wanting to keep his options open.

Pedro, the additional cavalherico supplied by Louis, came in handy, acting as a messenger between Louis and himself.

Their arrival at the hacienda was a subdued affair. Don Pereira introduced Werner to his wife, Donna Rosa, a refined, aristocratic woman whose dark hair streaked with grey belied the fact that she ran the household with an iron hand.

There was little to remind him that he was in the middle of the wilderness. The hacienda was sumptuously furnished. All the windows were encased with wooden shutters and heavy drapes, and several paintings adorned the whitewashed walls. Heavy oak and teak tables and chairs occupied the huge dining and reception room, all upholstered in the finest suede leather. Similarly, covered cushions were scattered on the benches, and the slate floors were polished to a high gloss and covered with colourful rugs.

Over the next few days, Werner grew to respect Don and Donna Pereira and their children. He saw that they treated their employees fairly, always polite and never taking anything for granted, speaking civilly to them, in marked contrast to most colonists who treated the Blacks like slaves. Their servants responded accordingly; they were devoted to their employers and fiercely loyal.

Although he continued to treat Werner with a degree of reserve and caution, Don Pereira was the perfect host. The aristocrat would disappear every morning until well after midday, never giving any indication as to where he had been when he returned. As promised, every morning at dawn, the Portuguese national flag was raised. Don Pereira never again mentioned de

Mello, and all Werner could hope was that the man would arrive, but precisely when remained a mystery.

Days passed, and still Werner received no indication that de Mello would arrive. Then on the tenth day, as they gathered on the large veranda to greet the short tropical twilight with a drink, Don Pereira drew him aside.

“I’ve just heard that our Governor-General has been recalled to Portugal. I have this news from an impeccable source. Apparently, his successor has already been appointed. Meanwhile, an acting Governor-General will be appointed. Colonel Batista has also been relieved of his command, to be replaced by a Colonel de Oliveira, but I would be surprised if you did not already know this. Normally, these changes are accompanied by much fanfare and ceremony to express thanks for services rendered, but it certainly was not the case in this instance. I must say, in the light of what I’ve just told you, I have hopes that we may solve this amicably with de Mello.”

“Well, Don Pereira, it is evident that change is afoot in the highest echelons of colonial government here in Angola. Have you any news about de Mello?”

“Yes, I have. He should be here in two days. He detoured to Huambo. He has ten men with him who joined him at Huambo. Several are previous followers of dos Santos. There are rumours that dos Santos was captured by the Germans in SudwestAfrika, but has escaped. I believe de Mello now realises that an investigation is under way that may have a profound effect on his future. Maybe he knows that the only option open to him is to either fight to the death or surrender. But remember, he is a proud man.”

That evening, Werner drafted a long note to Louis, informing him of all that Don Pereira had said. He sent Pedro to deliver it. He had noted Don Pereira’s concerns regarding the size of de Mello’s entourage and requested that Louis bring his force nearer to the hacienda.

Two days later, Werner walked into the dining room for breakfast and was

immediately aware of a change in the usual morning ambience; there was now a distinct atmosphere of anticipation. A look at Don Pereira at the head of the table left him in no doubt that today was to be different.

“Morning, Senhor de Almeida. De Mello will arrive sometime today. Be sure, he will be armed. I suggest you do something to ensure your own safety.”

“A last favour, Don Pereira,” Werner said. “Please do not fly the flag today.”

Pereira stared at Werner with his piercing grey eyes, saying nothing. Then he nodded his head.

After breakfast, Werner returned to his room. From his window, he could see the flagpole; no flag flew.

He put a small derringer – a two-barrel pistol little bigger than his hand – into the pocket of his light summer jacket. Into a scabbard sewn to the inside of his riding boot, he slid a flat dagger. Around his waist, he strapped a belt with his German revolver in a closed holster. This would not be considered unusual, as most riders wore weapons. He chose to spend the morning on the veranda, as this gave him a view of the approach to the hacienda. Similarly, Don Pereira never rode off but confined himself to the ranch house.

An hour and a half later, a servant called out: “Riders approach.”

Werner rose from his chair and walked forward to the edge of the veranda, watching as a group of 11 riders appeared round the last bend of the track and cantered up to the hacienda. They dismounted, tying their horses’ reins to the hitching pole. De Mello led them.

Don Pereira and his son Ricardo stood next to Werner at the top of the stairs.

“Bom dia, your Lordship,” Don Pereira called out. “Please send your men to the back of the house, where my servants will attend to their needs. You

may join us on the veranda."

De Mello did not return the greeting. He hesitated for a moment, staring at the rancher and Werner, unable to disguise his malice. He then nodded to his men, who walked round to the kitchen at the rear. De Mello and Jorge climbed the stairs.

De Mello pointed at Werner angrily. "What's this porco doing here? I should have my men kill him right now."

"If it would have served any purpose, I would have already done so," Don Pereira replied. "However, I don't believe this would be a good idea. He is here at the request of the military and the new military commander of the Benguela Province. Things have changed dramatically, as I am sure you already know. I don't want my family stripped of its title and possessions. I could be charged with treason."

"That's absurd – it won't happen," de Mello said.

"Gentlemen, I suggest we sit and discuss this," Werner said.

"Who are you to discuss things with me or tell me what to do?" de Mello spat. "You are powerless. I understand you are a German. What authority do you have? I'm the Juiz; I could have you arrested!"

"Senhor de Mello, I doubt you would find anybody prepared to carry out that instruction," Werner retorted. "Listen, let's sit down and discuss this."

De Mello stalked to the bench and sat down, Jorge joining him. Werner and the others took seats directly opposite. Don Pereira called for refreshments.

"Well?" de Mello said impatiently.

"I want you to surrender your rights to the mineral claim you have on this ranch," Werner said, straight-faced. "Although the claim is registered in Don Pereira's name, there are certain obligations registered in your favour. I need you to renounce these."

"Huh! That's preposterous. And what do you propose to do with these

rights?”

“I don’t propose to do anything with them. They will be sold by the government of Portugal to a mining consortium, and Don Pereira here will have 40 percent registered in his name.”

“And if I don’t agree?” de Mello sneered.

“You don’t have a choice. No matter what, the military will relentlessly hound you. You no longer have the backing of your brother-law; he is powerless, as you no doubt, already know.”

“And you, Don Pereira, what do you say to all this?” de Mello asked.

The rancher’s features hardened, his eyes no more than slits. He banged the low table between them with the lower part of his fist, causing the glasses to jump.

“Listen to me, you crooked little judge,” Don Pereira snapped. “When this is all over, you’ll be in jail and I will retain 40 percent of my claim – that’s more than I have now! At the moment, the claim is registered in my name, but as Senhor de Almeida says, this it is meaningless. I’ve never had any say in the proceeds from these diamonds. You bastard, you made sure of this, but now the government will cancel the claim and re-issue it. At least this way I will have something enforceable by law, and I’ll be exonerated from prosecution. Don’t forget, we have been mining for a while without disclosure to the government, paying no taxes and smuggling diamonds: these are serious offences. Guess who was responsible for that! Then there’s that fat friend of yours, dos Santos. I understand that he ran off with a fortune in diamonds and you’ve done nothing to get them back. What did he use the stones for?”

Werner saw the judge visibly pale. The rancher took a drink from his glass, giving a now dismayed de Mello time to digest what had just been said.

Don Pereira continued: “Now hear this! I also know that these diamonds

were to be used to buy illegal weapons, making you, me and Batista parties to a capital crime!"

He looked at de Mello sternly, every inch the aggrieved aristocrat.

De Mello gave a dismissive wave of his hand. "Don't believe everything you hear. What you heard is wrong. Dos Santos never took the stones; they were taken by others. In fact, dos Santos was captured by the Germans but escaped. Dos Santos told us that himself, and I believe him."

"Where is he?" Werner demanded.

De Mello laughed. "You'll never get him, you German porco; but fear not, he'll get you. Remember, this is not Germany. You can thank God he is not with us. I wish he was; he'd have killed you." He snapped his fingers to indicate how quick the death at dos Santos's hand would have been, and then rose from his chair, followed by his right-hand man. "I'm on my way to the mine, Don Pereira, and I expect you to follow. If this man … this impostor … whatever," de Mello said, pointing at Werner, "makes any move against me, my men will be forced to retaliate."

De Mello descended the stairs and called for his men, who appeared at a run from around the building. Don Pereira remained at the top of the stairs.

"Senhor de Mello, I've come to a decision," Don Pereira said. "I'm staying. I'm not about to go against the king and government, and I want you and your men off my land. I will give you five minutes."

De Mello laughed and said something to Jorge, who pulled out his revolver. Almost simultaneously, Don Pereira produced a gun, which he must have been hiding. Jorge fired. The bullet hit Don Pereira in the side; the impact spun him round before he collapsed to the floor. For a shocked moment, no one moved, and then Ricardo sprang forward and drew his weapon.

Another shot followed, a warning shot. Jorge waved his revolver, motioning to the others to hold their fire. "Don't do it!" he shouted. "We'll

kill you all."

Everyone froze. Werner grabbed Ricardo by his arm and held him, waiting until de Mello's riders had wheeled their horses and galloped off. They did not get more than a few hundred yards when a column of mounted cavalry broke from the surrounding bush and galloped towards them, Louis in the lead.

Donna Rosa and her son bent over the prone Don Pereira.

"How bad is he?" Werner asked.

"He's shot in the side," she said, shouting to the servants to bring bandages and hot water. Werner watched as they carried him into the house. He turned when a clatter of hoof beats announced the arrival of de Sousa and his men.

The two officers greeted each other. "What a mess this is turning out to be," Werner said. "We must to go after them. Dos Santos is here. I'm now sure of that. De Mello virtually said so. " He quickly filled Louis in on what had happened during the last few minutes, all the while urging him to go after de Mello.

"I saw there was no flag flying today," Louis said, "and had my men at the ready, but it all happened so quickly. We then heard the shooting. I'm sorry – I thought you may be in trouble. The decision to intervene was mine to make, or had you forgotten?"

"He arrived here with a fuckin' army and then started shooting," Werner replied irritably, "but he knows he can't beat us. De Mello knows it's over for him in this country. He's probably planning to disappear somewhere. They don't appear to have moved any diamonds since they lost that last lot to Philippe and Paulo. Can you imagine how many they must have in the strongbox now? I'm sure that's what he's after at the mine."

Werner spun on his heel.

"If we go after him with the army, we change the colour of this whole

operation," he said. "That's precisely what General Diaz and his command wanted to avoid. You know how adamant he was that the Portuguese government and military are not to be seen to be part of this, so that when it breaks, it will seem that de Mello and his minions were the only ones involved. Otherwise, they could have done everything without me. Diaz wants de Mello to be his own worst enemy, to wreak his own destruction. That's what he wants! But now we have dos Santos as well, although we've not seen him. I just know he's at the mine."

"Okay, let's follow them – but do nothing," Louis said. "Let's see what they do. Remember, I'm here just to back you, even if I am a government military officer who is not supposed to intervene. Christo, it's ridiculous, isn't it," he added shaking his head in despair.

CHAPTER 66

De Mello swore. They had seen the army arrive as they climbed the nearby hills, and their intervention changed everything; the cavalry emerging from the bushes had stunned him. The army would now be there, hot on his heels, always ready to intervene. They had made a huge tactical mistake. Shooting Don Pereira in front of a host of witnesses lent a different colour to this fiasco. He realised he should have stayed in Benguela. If he retaliated at all, this would become a criminal matter and directly implicate him. Jorge pulled the gun and shot Don Pereira. That was bad enough, and made him an accomplice.

He had to leave the colony and go elsewhere – Goa or Macau or even Brazil – but he needed the diamonds. He knew the strongbox at the mine contained a fortune; the contents would enable him to establish himself elsewhere and live a life of luxury. The problem was the men. Were they to know the size of the fortune locked in the strongbox, could he still rely on their loyalty? He doubted this – most were degradados, criminals with little loyalty. Dos Santos surely knew what a fortune the strongbox contained. He decided he'd use him to engineer an escape and pay him off when leaving the country. The man was strong as an ox and unafraid, the right companion to have in these times.

"Don de Mello," Jorge said, unable to hide his concern, "the men are worried. We don't want to fight the army. Even if we crush this group, there will only be more of them – we can never beat the whole army! We'll be imprisoned or die. What can we do?"

They weren't his men; they were not loyal to him. Dos Santos had been

their master and they probably did not know that he was still alive, although they probably had heard the rumours of his escape. Also, the recent war with the Kunahamas had brought with it the speedy death by hanging of any gunrunners, even those who were only suspected of this heinous crime. Dos Santos's men were probably now all classified as gunrunners.

"Let them go," de Mello said resignedly. He knew his assistant was right. Let every one of them run and disappear. He would take the diamonds and flee with dos Santos and Jorge. "Let them go," he repeated, "but you stay with me. I'll see to it that you are looked after. I will leave Angola, but you can come with me. You know, we will have more than enough to go anywhere and start anew," he said, but was not about to tell the man that he'd ditch him on leaving the country. The man was a damn renegade, a degregado!

De Mello spoke to the men for a few minutes. The riders weren't happy. Finally, the Juiz withdrew a wad of banknotes from an inner pocket and handed it to one of the men to distribute. This soon stopped the altercation that threatened. The men eagerly took the money and split, disappearing into the bush in twos and threes.

De Mello and Jorge continued on to the mine.

CHAPTER 67

Both Werner and Louis led as they followed de Mello with their men galloping behind. Suddenly, both Philippe and Paulo shouted that they stop. Werner turned round to see Philippe gesticulating and pointing at the ground while they circled their horses.

“Mestre, they stopped here and then split in various directions. It seems two of them turned round and are heading back,” Philippe said.

“Why didn’t we see them?” Louis asked.

Philippe shrugged his shoulders. “Maybe they left the trail so as not to be seen.”

“Go back, why?” Louis asked.

“Cristo!” Werner shouted. “Of course – it’s the bloody mine they’ve gone to. I’ll stake my life on it.”

“You sure?” Louis asked.

“Damn right I am, they’re after the diamonds – that can be the only reason. One of them has to be de Mello,” Werner replied.

CHAPTER 68

When Louis realised that most of de Mello's men had fled and that the judge was alone except for one other horseman, he reined his men in.

"Paulo! Bring my clothes," he shouted at his batman.

"What the hell are you doing?" Werner asked.

"I'm becoming a civilian," Louis said. "I'm coming with you, and I will be witness to everything that happens without involving the military. The rest of the men will wait here."

Werner tried to argue with him, but he was emphatic.

Philippe interrupted them. "Mestre, horsemen come," he said.

Two horsemen appeared, and as they came closer, Werner recognised Ricardo Pereira. "What are you doing here?" he asked. "You should be with your father."

"My father is okay," he said. "The bullet missed his lungs. My mother says he'll be fine. He ordered me to join you and help you fight de Mello who my father believes he will take the diamonds at the mine and disappear. I've brought my most trusted servant, Armando, with me. Believe me, he knows how to fight." Ricardo indicated the large black man who straddled a horse bareback. He wore only a loincloth, homemade leather sandals, and a leather shoulder-wrap.

"I know – your father's probably right. He must be making his way to the mine. Okay, let's go," Werner replied.

Louis had stripped off his tunic and campaign hat, replacing them with a white shirt and ordinary hat. Paulo stripped off the rudimentary military uniform he wore and was now only clothed in a loincloth and a rough fur

jacket which he'd draped over his shoulders, tying it in place with a leather cord.

Louis looked at Werner. "This is now your operation," he said. "We'll do as you say."

The six men rode off in pursuit of de Mello.

CHAPTER 69

De Mello and Jorge rode into the mine, passing the workers still excavating the side of the hill. The kimberlite pipe was now fully exposed, and he knew the yield was still incredibly rich. They dismounted alongside the sorting hut and entered, seeing the long tables strewn with washed gravel, the sorters there – three men to a side – scrutinising the wet gravel with trained eyes for the faint glint of a diamond. In the dark shadows in the background of the hut, a big brawny man sat hunkered down on a stool with a shotgun across his lap; he had a black soiled felt hat on his head, making his features beneath it unrecognisable in the shadows. Clearly, he was here to guard the strongbox and ensure that none made an attempt to steal the diamonds.

"Tell them to take a break," de Mello told the supervisor at the table. "You remain."

The supervisor barked an order. The workers were in awe of de Mello and rapidly departed the sorting hut, just leaving the three men. The armed guard never moved.

On de Mello's instructions, the supervisor opened the strongbox.

As the locking lever of the large strongbox clanked open, the guard in the shadows rose, still holding the shotgun, and moved forward into the light, which revealed his features. It was dos Santos. He and De Mello's eyes gleamed when they saw that the strongbox contained nearly a dozen pouches, the accumulation of the last few weeks' production. He gave two pouches to the supervisor.

"Pay off the workers from the cash in the strongbox. That should make them all happy," he said. "Whatever is left you can pay to them as bonuses to

whoever you want. You stay here at the mine, but send the workers home. Pass the contents of those pouches onto your most trusted men. They are to stay. I believe we may be in for a fight." He turned to dos Santos. "Antonio, you take command of the men."

Elated at this windfall, the supervisor assured him of their support.

De Mello gave the confused supervisor and dos Santos no reasons for these instructions but merely said that matters would be sorted out in a few days. He no longer really cared, knowing that he was never going to return.

"Get out of here," he then snarled at the supervisor. When alone, except for the guard, he pulled his money-belt from around his waist and stuffed the remaining pouches into its pockets and buckled it tightly around his waist beneath his clothes.

He then walked to the other end of the hut where he stood watching the perimeter of the mine. He felt a tap on his shoulder and turned to find dos Santos standing just behind him with the shotgun at the ready

"Behind us," Dos Santos said. De Mello turned. On the opposite side of the clearing, six riders stood lined up abreast. He recognised all of them, and they all had rifles.

"Get the workers off the mine; all of them – now!" he barked at dos Santos.

The steam whistle blew, at first bewildering the workers who were still in the mine packing their belongings. The six riders waited patiently, watching for well over an hour until the last of the workers had left. The communal huts were now empty, as the workers had left nothing other than makeshift straw pallets they slept on. Neither de Mello nor his small group attempted to leave; they remained in the sorting hut.

CHAPTER 70

Werner could see weapons being distributed – rifles, shotguns and revolvers. Then they upended tables and other equipment, clearly intending to use them as shields and barricades to ward off any attack.

“Why are we waiting?” Louis asked.

“I’m not going to take on the miners,” Werner said. “They’re innocent people just trying to make a living. De Mello is not going to make a run for it. Those that are loyal to him are going to stand and fight.”

“Did you see that fat bastard, dos Santos?” Louis said.

“How could I miss him?” Werner asked. “Remember, he’s mine.”

“Cristo, they have the high ground, giving them an advantage. We’ll be cut down before we can cross this open space. Moreover, don’t forget, we dare not initiate an attack; we’re supposed to be the good guys. The general said they must be the wrongdoers. We are only to defend ourselves. How do you propose to get them to start the fight?” Louis said.

Werner had no idea how to force de Mello and his band to attack. “What if I let him know we’ve got his diamonds?” he said to Louis.

“Merda! That would be dangerous,” Louis replied. “If we lose this fight, we could go to prison or could even face a murder charge.”

“What about them shooting Don Pereira?” Werner asked.

“De Mello didn’t do the shooting, so what do you think will happen? His lieutenant takes the blame and he goes free.”

“There were too many witnesses. There’s Don Pereira’s family, the three servants on the porch, and I’m sure that if things were to go wrong for de Mello, his men would turn witness to save themselves from the noose. Don’t

forget, we are now pursuing them for the cold-blooded shooting of Don Pereira," Werner retorted.

"Yes, I see what you mean. That should be more than enough proof," Louis conceded.

Mid-afternoon approached. Werner looked up at the sky. A few clouds were visible.

"We'll wait for nightfall; it will be easier to approach the hut. Maybe it will rain. What do you think?" Werner said.

They all agreed.

As Werner had predicted, the cloud mass continued to expand, and by early evening, a black thunderstorm threatened. The first jagged flashes of lightning stabbed across the sky, followed by loud crashes of thunder. The first drops soon increased in intensity, until a typical late summer deluge blanketed the mine.

"Let's go," Werner said.

The heavy rain gave them some cover, but still, crossing the open area in front of the sorting huts would be difficult. The defenders would see them once they were within 50 yards of the huts. No lamps had been lit and the huts were in darkness.

Werner ordered Armando and Ricardo to flank the huts from one side, while Philippe and Paulo did the same from the opposite side. Louis and Werner approached from the front. The back of the huts was impossible terrain – steeply sloped with loose gravel. They could see only two small buildings behind the hut, which Louis said looked like privies. Once those on the flank were in position, they were to open fire, hopefully, drawing the defenders' fire.

The two officers waited, the rain slowly easing until it was just a steady downpour, the area before them occasionally lit by a lightning flash.

Suddenly, two gunshots rang out. They came from the main hut, indicating that they had been seen. Immediately, Werner's men returned fire. Those in the hut followed with a fusillade of fire, their muzzle flashes clearly visible. But their shots were wild.

"We better take cover," Werner said.

The two men sank to the ground and crawled forward, cradling their rifles in their arms. The storm had drifted off, the lightning and thunder more distant. Werner prayed that a rogue flash would not illuminate them at a crucial moment as they lay on their bellies. From both flanks now, they heard the sound of gunfire being exchanged.

"I'm going to try and shoot at those gunfire flashes from the hut," Louis said.

The two men were about three yards apart and had seen every muzzle flash that emanated from the huts.

"Okay, but once you fire, let's roll a few more yards apart. They'll return fire for sure," Werner replied.

Lying on his stomach, his elbows propped on the ground, Louis looked down the barrel, watching for the right moment. He soon pinpointed the source of a few flash and took careful aim at where he thought it to be. He waited, the rifle rock-steady. From the same spot in the hut, there was another flash. He pulled the trigger, and the rifle slammed into his shoulder. He immediately rolled away from Werner as a sharp, piercing cry split the night. Bullets threw up spurts of mud around where they had been. The air reverberated to the deep boom of a shotgun, the heavy pellets slamming into the ground near Werner.

"Fuck! That's buckshot!" Werner exclaimed. "Did you hear that cry? I think you hit somebody."

To their left were long tubes, about three feet in diameter, made of metal

mesh, each end resting on a stand. The miners used them to sift the gravel, separating the smaller stones into various sizes. The tubes were rotated as the gravel was shovelled into one end, and it would slowly travel to the lower end where the mesh separated the gravel by size.

The two men slowly crawled to the tubes. They fired no further shots, not wanting to give their position away. Still ten yards from the sifters, the night sky was suddenly lit by a large brilliant lightning flash. It was immediately followed by both rifle and shotgun fire, all directed at the two men prone on the ground. Both now wildly returned fire.

“Run!” Louis shouted, simultaneously climbing to his feet and running the last few yards to the row of sifters where he dropped to the ground behind the heaped mounds of stone and sand. Werner was right on his heels.

“Louis! Are you okay?” Werner hissed.

“Yes, what is it?”

“This is a bloody stand-off. We’ve got have to charge that hut.”

“We can’t do that, they’ll just pick us off. They’ve got shotguns, remember?” Louis retorted, his disbelief at Werner’s suggestion evident in his voice.

“But if Paulo and Philippe give us continuous covering fire, maybe we can skirt round the hut and get to that steep slope behind it. There’s a small rock brick building, which we can use as cover. We could hide behind it.”

Werner shouted instructions in German to Philippe, certain that de Mello could not speak the language.

Again, the two black men opened fire, soon followed by the other pair, laying down a barrage of withering crossfire, keeping the men in the hut pinned down behind whatever shelter they could find.

The two officers sprinted for the brick building, expecting to be picked off at any moment. The building was not much bigger than an outhouse, but at

least it afforded good cover. The men in the huts had seen the two run, but could only manage a few wild shots. The two officers took cover behind the building.

Louis looked at the stout door of the building; it was bolted and locked with a big padlock.

“Werner,” Louis panted, “this isn’t a shithouse, it’s the dynamite store – I’m sure of it. Look, that’s why it’s locked.”

“Shoot it off.”

“Are you mad? We’ll blow ourselves us and everybody else to kingdom come.”

“Better than stuck behind this building, and being shot at by de Mello. Here, let me do it. I’ll be careful.”

Werner removed his revolver from its holster and proceeded to shoot at the wood that secured the hasp and staple, sending wood fragments flying in all directions. He made sure he was shooting upwards and not into the store. This drew fire from the hut as they realised what the two men were doing. Forced to hunker down for cover, Louis lay on his back and kicked at the door with both feet. With a loud crack, the wood splintered as the hasp was torn from the door. The room was small, only about 12ft by 6ft. In the dark, they could just make out the wooden boxes packed against the walls.

Louis felt with his hands along the top of the boxes, finding one that had been opened, its lid just resting loose on the top. He stuck his hand in and withdrew a handful of dynamite sticks.

“Dynamite!” he said triumphantly.

“Yeah, but where are the fuse and detonator caps?”

“Give me a chance. I’ll find them.”

Outside, the gunfire continued as Philippe and the others kept those in the hut pinned down behind cover; even so, they continued to pepper the brick

building, the shots ricocheting off into the night.

After a few minutes, Louis found the fuses and caps. He then prepared a few sticks, inserting the detonators and then adding a short fuse to each. They were ready for use. He made them with very short fuses, Werner noticed.

Louis held a stick out to Werner, the fuse end pointed at him. “Light it,” he said.

“Don’t you think those fuses could be a little longer?” Werner asked apprehensively.

“Stop worrying, they’re fine; the idea is not to hang on to it once it’s lit!”

“I take it that’s the opinion of a dynamite expert,” Werner said dubiously, pulling a box of matches from his trousers and striking a match; the sulphurous light briefly illuminated their near surroundings. The fuse took with a hiss and splutter, a small yellow flame spurting from its end.

“For Christ sake, throw the damn thing!” Werner shouted.

Louis never hesitated. He threw it as hard as he could in the direction of the hut. It landed a few yards short, and both men dropped to the ground.

There was followed an enormous flash and a deafening boom. The pressure wave washed over them, small stones rattling down on the hut.

“I couldn’t throw the damn thing far enough,” Louis said; “one stick is just too light. Listen.Tie two of the sticks together. That should make it heavy enough to throw.”

“God! A double charge?”

“Christo! Just fuckin’ do it,” Louis ordered.

Werner was dubious – would they be far enough away when they it exploded? He tore off a piece of his shirt and tied two sticks of dynamite together.

The dynamite had clearly panicked de Mello’s men who now concentrated their fire on the brick building, the bullets striking the wall and whistling off

in all directions.

Again, a match flared, and as the men in the hut must have seen it they realised what was about to happen. They now concentrated even more fire on the building.

Louis threw the makeshift dynamite bomb and this time was rewarded with a clatter as the stick hit the wooden floor of the hut and skittered forward towards the centre. He turned to Werner, grinning, his white teeth flashing. The next moment he cannoned into Werner, both men sprawling on the ground.

The explosion was so intense, they felt the ground shake under them; simultaneously, the rock-built store was bombarded by rocks, large ones this time. Both men covered their heads with their arms. Werner looked up, ears ringing and fighting for breath. A fire had started in the partially demolished sorting hut, the interior chaotic with broken sorting tables and collapsed rafters. The fallen roof thatch rapidly fed the blaze, and within seconds, it had become a raging fire, the flames crackling and roaring as more kindling took hold. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Paulo and Philippe charging the hut, their spears in their hands and their arms drawn back for a killing thrust.

“Don’t kill them!” Werner shouted.

They did not hear him or did not want to; they were so caught up in the excitement and the adrenalin rush. In the firelight, he saw one of the defenders stagger to his feet, his shotgun in his hand. Too late; Philippe was upon him. The man had no chance; the spear took him in the chest. The man’s back arched as his death shriek pierced the night.

“Stop, stop!” Werner shouted, rushing forward.

He tried to enter the hut. The fire was now burning fiercely.

“Where are the others?” Louis asked.

“Major, they’re dead,” Paulo said, pointing at two bodies on the floor.

“God, they took the brunt of the explosion,” Werner said. A man’s leg was blown off. Another mangled body laid a little farther away, the man’s eyes staring unblinking at the dark sky: a bullet had entered his neck. Both had bled profusely.

It was clear that De Mello and Jorge had fled. There was also no sign of dos Santos.

“Philippe, make for the corral. They’ll be after their horses. They need them to escape. Hurry!” Werner shouted.

Philippe, Paulo and Pedro ran off in the direction of the corral; Don Pereira’s son joined Louis and Werner. All stood in the open and watched the raging inferno devour the hut, illuminating the whole area around them. The fire was out of control. It would have to be left to burn itself out.

The fire illuminated the whole area around them.

“How many are still missing?” Werner asked.

“I think I just saw three – de Mello, Jorge and I don’t know who the other one is. The rest are dead or wounded, unable to flee.”

Werner knew that the unknown third man had to be dos Santos.

“Louis, you stay here, I’m going to find Philippe and Paulo,” he snapped. He then walked quickly to the corral where he found the two men. There was no sign of any horses.

“They’ve gone?” Werner asked.

“Yes, they went north,” Philippe said, “maybe towards Huambo. They’ve also shoo-ed the remaining horses away. It’ll take a while before we can round them up.”

CHAPTER 71

The rain had stopped and the tracks left by de Mello's group were well defined in the mud, easy to follow. Werner had to wait as it was still too dark to follow the trail: sunrise was two hours away. The sky, however, had cleared and the last of the clouds disappeared.

Some of the mineworkers had returned. They were concerned that they were no longer employed and now without pay. Ricardo Pereira, who stood in for his father, assured the men that once it was decided that the mine would be started up again, they would be considered for re-employment.

Werner was only after de Mello and dos Santos, and if his assistant Jorge were to disappear, he would not pursue him. The shooting of Don Pereira was a police matter. They would pursue Jorge and arrest him for attempted murder. However, if the man continued to fight, he would be pursued. Werner was insistent that he and Philippe would ride after the two men, while Louis and his men would stay and help the Pereira family should the need arise.

"No, you can't chase them alone," Louis said. "Let me at least give you a few men of my men."

"You know, Louis, this is really my fight," Werner said. "My country sent me after these men. De Mello and dos Santos are the kingpins behind the gunrunners – I need to deal with them. Jorge knows the game's up. He's not going to stay with de Mello. He'll take what he can get and run. After all, he's a degregado. But, perhaps I can get a lead on de Mello and dos Santos. So let Philippe and I go."

"Cristo, you sound like some idiot who's trying to champion a stupid

cause," Louis replied sullenly.

"Maybe I am, but let me be. Listen to what your superiors said. Stay out of it. If the expected change does not occur in your colony, then you cannot be implicated. At least Philippe and I can cross the border to our own country, where we will be safe. You'd have to face the music, and I don't think they'd show you any mercy."

"Go if you must, but you're insane if you think I'd let you go alone. Portuguese orders or not, this is also my fight," Louis said resolutely and spun round, beckoning to Paulo to follow him.

*

Philippe picked the best horses and scrounged provisions from the others to last a few days. Both men with their servants wanted to be ready to leave at the first signs of dawn.

By the time the first signs of grey appeared on the horizon, Philippe had already saddled the animals. As Werner stuck his foot in the stirrup, Louis approached with Ricardo Pereira and another man.

"Werner, we need to take Ricardo with us. He insists, and as it was his father they shot, he has a right. This is Michael Duarte. He is attached to the local policia and he is the man in charge of this area. The Pereiras reported the shooting to the policia who now wish to arrest de Mello and that deputy of his. Of course, with dos Santos now with them, he is also included. If you refuse to allow them to accompany you, they'll set off on their own," Louis said.

"They'll slow me."

"No, we won't," Ricardo Pereira interjected. "We'll do as you say. You can lead." The young man looked quizzically at the police officer, who nodded his head agreeing.

"Werner, that's not a bad idea. If de Mello resists and we kill him in a

gunfight, we at least will have a witness. The police will say they were resisting arrest. Nobody can come after us," Louis said.

"Okay, you're right; we just may need a witness. Let's ride," Werner said, agreeing because it was easier.

The dawn rapidly lit the surrounding bush as the six men followed de Mello's trail, keeping the horses at a steady canter. The trail led north towards Huambo, or so it seemed.

CHAPTER 71

Werner's group made good time, keeping up with de Mello until he entered the stream. This delayed them; at first they did not know whether he had gone upstream or downstream. It took some intense and careful examination before Philippe indicated downstream with a wave of his hand. De Mello's horses were shod, and Philippe had seen the marks on the rocks from the horses'steel shoes. The diversions delayed them, but eventually they found where de Mello's group had left the river and turned north, going farther into the highlands. Already the sun hung low over the horizon.

"Philippe, find the highest spot you can for us to spend the night. Maybe de Mello will be fool enough to light a fire and we will see it," Werner said.

"Mestre, dos Santos grew up in this country," the black man replied. "He knows the bush; he'll not make any stupid mistakes."

They stopped in the shelter of an overhanging bluff near the summit of a large hill. Werner immediately climbed to the top with Philippe. It was already dark, a full moon rising on the eastern horizon. Werner used his binoculars to inspect the surrounding bush. There were no fires.

"Mestre, it is a full moon and there are no clouds," Philippe said. "We will be able to follow the trail, although it will be slow, but we can cover a good few miles. In these hills, there are only certain ways you can travel. Both are easy to follow once you've found their trail

"Okay, let's eat something, and then we'll be on our way again."

In the morning as they came over a rise, they saw a few fires in the valley below. A wide river was just visible in the bottom of the valley, the moonlight reflecting off the flowing water.

“Careful, Mestre, that’s a Kunahama village,” Philippe cautioned. He dismounted and indicated to the others that they should do the same. He then took all the reins and asked Duarte to lead the horses back so they would not give their position away.

The village was quiet, the fires allowed to burn low. Werner could see only two sentries; they were not looking for attackers but instead for wild predators after their cattle.

“Do you think de Mello is here?” Werner asked.

“I don’t know. He does not know the Kunahamas, and they don’t know him. To stop here would have been too dangerous, but with dos Santos with him, it’s possible they will have been given shelter here. Who knows? But I’m sure he is nearby; they need to rest.”

“We also need to rest, at least until daybreak.”

They skirted around the village and found a suitable spot a few miles away where they stopped to rest up.

CHAPTER 72

De Mello and the two men had headed into the highlands. Once in the highlands, he would try to lose his pursuers in the rugged and twisted rocky ravines. He would not rest until he thought they had managed to throw off their followers. Now in the foothills of the highlands, they forced the horses into a stream and followed its course for a mile or two. The going was difficult but they urged their horses on, leaving the stream at intervals of 50 yards and then backtracking to the where they had emerged from the water. It was hoped that this would mislead their followers, if only for a short while.

Not all was lost; after all, he had the diamonds. Joachim de Almeida was an unknown entity – the man certainly wasn't what he pretended to be. Clearly he was Portuguese, but if he'd been planted by the Portuguese government, his brother-in-law, the Governor-General, would have known it. The military was also involved, but what baffled him was that they had stood back, not taking part, although they seemed to condone the action. This bewildered him.

The moment the sky began to lighten, dos Santos awoke. The three men saddled up and mounted their horses. They were exhausted and had hardly slept, knowing that they were probably being relentlessly pursued. During the night, they had nearly stumbled into the village. It was only at the last moment that they became aware of the fires. They immediately backtracked, and then detoured around the area. Dos Santos was adamant that they should avoid the Kunahamas.

De Mello's horse was uneasy. He turned round and looked at the other horses. They too were skittish.

“The horses are scared of something,” dos Santos whispered, drawing his rifle from its saddle scabbard.

They reined the animals in.

These were the foothills of the mountains, the ground already rugged and hilly. This was not lion country – they prefer the flat plains.

“Senhor,” the deputy whispered, “I’m sure it’s a leopard.”

The trail they were on was cut into the side of a hill. To skirt round the animal would be difficult as the ground became almost impassable. De Mello carefully inspected the length of the slope and the buttresses that overlooked their trail.

“Merda, I see it. It is a leopard. We are too near. It will attack.”

The horses were now agitated, neighing frantically, and the riders fighting to keep them under control. Dos Santos aimed at the animal with the rifle, not wanting to pull the trigger, as the shot would be heard for miles; but if it attacked, he would have no choice.

“Senhor, don’t shoot!” Jorge hissed loudly.

His warning was too late; the leopard was already crouching, about to launch itself at them and the panicked horses. Using the rifle, Dos Santos managed to draw a bead on the cat’s body and pulled the trigger. The shot rang out, the bullet hitting the leopard behind the shoulder blade – a heart shot. The slug exploded in the body cavity, and the heart and lungs shattered to a pulp. The leopard somersaulted backwards, falling to the ground and lying still.

The echo of the shot rolled through the hills.

CHAPTER 73

All six men halted abruptly, looking at Werner. “It’s him,” he said. “Why did he shoot?”

“Mestre, it could be anything,” Philippe replied. “Lions, leopards, even Kunahamas. This is wild country, there are also buffalo and elephants. Few people live or travel here.”

“Let’s go!” Werner dug his spurs into his horse’s flanks, and it moved forward towards the gunshot. He had a good idea of the direction and knew it could be no more than a mile or so away, but higher in the mountains. He crested a hill and saw before him a flat area amongst the hills. Three horses were running along a rough trail on the opposite mountainside.

“There they are!” he shouted.

A shot rang out, and then another. The two fugitives had opened fire the moment they saw their pursuers. Duarte immediately returned fire and the three men turned hastily, resuming their way along the mountainside trail, looking for cover. Soon they disappeared behind the curve of the mountain.

“Come on!” Werner shouted. “Let’s catch them before they get away.”

The six still had to cross the valley to get to the other side. Fortunately, the going was easy through the small depression between the hills. Finally, they looked into a large flat valley below and saw a small settlement with a few adobe-like buildings and quite an extensive corral with several holding pens.

“That must be Capira,” Duarte said. “There’s a trading store there but I’m sure it’s deserted. It belongs to a white Portuguese living with a black woman. He had a few men working for him and kept a small herd of cattle. He used to trade with the local inhabitants. They all seem to have fled – you

know, the war."

As he spoke, they saw the three horsemen enter the settlement, leading their horses into a small corral that adjoined the partially derelict building.

"They're going to make a stand. They know they wouldn't stand a chance if caught in the open," Philippe said.

The horsemen soon realised that marauding rebels had already ransacked the settlement, probably at the beginning of the civil war. Most of it was burned to the ground, but the main building still stood intact, although the hinges were torn off the main door and the broken window shutters hung askew. Seconds later, a shot echoed off the hills, the bullet passing between the men looking down on the settlement. They had been seen. They immediately sought cover.

"Where are the locals?" Werner asked.

"They're probably hiding in the bush. They know the Portuguese soldiers will soon come. Maybe they've been and gone. Be sure, we're being watched, but they won't attack," Philippe said.

"Okay, off your horses," Werner said. "We have to get near the building they're in. Louis, Philippe and I will come in from the left side; Ricardo, Paulo and Duarte from the right."

The terrain was hilly, but the bush was not dense, and the occasional bare rock buttresses and patches of broken shale on the slopes did not provide good cover. Every time the fugitives in the building saw a movement, they would fire; each shot came close, their aim excellent.

"Mestre, we are going to have to give each other covering fire. We're too close now. We can't all move forward; in the open they'll definitely wound or kill one of us," Philippe said.

Werner agreed. He took up position behind a large rock and nodded to the others, firing off shot after shot at the two windows and door of the building

as fast as he could until the rifle's magazine was empty. Philippe had scurried forward in a low crouch and was now about 50 yards ahead of him, lying on his stomach and peering around the trunk of a large tree. As Philippe laid down covering fire, Werner and Louis crouched low, trying to present the smallest of possible target as they ran forward and flung themselves behind the next large tree. Fortunately, it had a sizeable girth, being an old baobab tree.

"Rather crowded behind this tree, isn't it. God, Werner, when did you last wash?" Louis said, trying a bit of humour on his comrades.

Philippe sniggered, appreciating the humour. Werner smiled.

They were now about 200 yards from the building. Whoever was shooting at them was a crack shot, with bullet after bullet hitting the tree at knee height.

"Cristo! This is dangerous. If we show ourselves, we'll definitely be shot. How are the others doing?" Werner asked.

"Mestre, they're in the same position as we are, but they're at least behind some rocks."

A few more shots rang out, spitting splinters out of the tree.

"God, we have to do something. We can't lie here all day!" Louis exclaimed.

"Mestre, I've got something here." Philippe opened his rawhide satchel and withdrew four double-sticks of dynamite.

"Where the fuck did you get those?" Werner asked.

The black man grinned. "Paulo gave them to me. He got them from the major here, who took them from de Mello's mining camp."

Werner was overjoyed. He saw that the sticks had already been primed with a detonator and short fuse. This was a windfall.

"Both you boys are going to get a medal for this, I'll make sure!" he

laughed. “There’s a problem; we’ll never get near enough to throw the sticks. They’ll pick us off.”

He could hear shots being exchanged between the building and the other three men. They were about 200 yards away and just as far away from the building as he was. They too were forced to take cover.

“De Mello!” Werner shouted, but there was no reply. Again, he shouted, but this time was replied with an angry shot.

Werner did not doubt that they could overrun de Mello and his men, but he knew they would take a casualty or two, and that he was not prepared to accept. Again, he carefully surveyed the area between him and the building. The terrain around the settlement was flat, all scrub removed, the ground covered with grass at knee height, still green from the recent rains. A few large trees, their trunks thick enough to provide cover for one or two men dotted the area.

“It’s not midday yet; we can’t lie here all day in the sun. What are we going to do?”

“Mestre, he won’t leave,” Philippe replied. “He has water and shelter. He’s brought his horses into the building.”

Werner lay on his stomach, peering from behind the tree trunk, the Mauser K88 against his shoulder. He aimed at the open front doorway and squeezed off a shot. But what did he hit? Nothing. Louis did the same.

“With this moon he’ll be gone as soon as it’s dark! What are we going to do? Just shooting into the building will do nothing for us,” Werner said assertively. All knew that to throw the dynamite required one of them to step out into the open, even if only for a second or two. At this range, it was too dangerous.

“Mestre, do you see those broken corrals?” Philippe said. “Well, when the sun sets, the cattle will return, even if there’s nobody looking after them.

They have been doing that since they were born; every day they leave and every day, as night falls, they come back. It's habit. We can use them as cover."

Werner knew Philippe was right. "Okay, let's fall back the same way we got here. Let Ricardo and the policeman give us covering fire."

After much waving, the three others understood. A half-hour later, all six had fallen back to where their horses were, well out of range.

Werner outlined Philippe's idea, and the others agreed. They did not know how many cattle were left, although they had seen a few. Werner fretted, impatient to end this; it worked on his mind. He hoped de Mello would make a break for it, but he remained holed up in the building. They took turns pumping shots at the door and windows. If de Mello had any sense, he would attempt to disappear under cover of darkness.

Hours had passed and the sun now hung over the western horizon.

"Let's move and find ourselves a cattle trail still in use that leads to and from the corrals," Werner said.

They skirted around, keeping a good distance between them and the building, and soon discovered a trail worn nearly a half-a-foot deep into the ground. No more than a yard wide, the cattle trails avoided any obstacle, never running straight, meandering around the smallest bush and stone, but invariably leading to the corrals. The hollow trails were filled with a fine talcum-like dust kept soft by the constant passage of the cattle.

It did not take long for the first cattle to appear. They seemed to come from nowhere, casting long shadows and plodding along, the cows with their calves in tow, all raising clouds of enveloping dust in the late afternoon sunlight.

The four men rode their horses amongst the cattle, hanging from their saddles, holding on their saddle pommels, their bodies lower than the top of

the horses. Those in the house would find it difficult to see them against the sun, particularly with the dust raised by the cattle. This would work, but only up to a point, certainly no nearer than 100 yards or so when the defenders would realise that there were horses amongst the cattle. They hung low beside their horses, shielded from view, their animals keeping pace with the cattle. No wind blew and the dust just hung in the air.

The powdered dust nearly suffocated Werner, even with a bandanna over his nose. The exertion of hanging onto the saddle pommel made him perspire, and the dust stuck to his face. He waited for a shot; surely de Mello would realise what they were planning. He was surprised that he had managed to reach the corral, about 100 yards on the other side of the building.

At the entrance to the corral, Werner dropped to the ground, pulling his rifle from its boot. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw the others do the same. Keeping the cattle between him and the building, he ran for the cover of a long watering trough. He couldn't believe it – they still had not been seen. The trough was long, fed with water from a corrugated iron reservoir, a windmill pumping water to keep it filled. Little wind blew; the windmill's vanes were stationary.

Soon, all six men crouched behind the trough, the thirsty cattle avoiding them, drinking from the other side, their haunches facing the building, some bellowing at the men and their intrusion.

Around the building were odd items which could provide some cover if they were to advance. A derelict wagon stood askew, its one wheel collapsed; there was also an outdoor brick oven close to the kitchen. The stout kitchen door was closed. If it were barricaded, it would require a serious effort to open it; Werner sure that by now it was barred from within. There were three windows at the rear of the building; all the shutters were closed.

Werner turned to Louis and Ricardo. "We need covering fire," he said.

“Philippe and I will make a dash for the building. We’ll probably take cover behind that oven first. You make sure nobody steps out and tries to shoot us, okay?” He then looked at Duarte and Paulo. “Be ready to also help with covering fire.”

Louis looked at Ricardo. He worked the bolt action and slid a cartridge into the chamber. The young man got the message and nodded his head. “Okay.”

“Start shooting,” Werner said.

The two men opened fire. Werner and Philippe dashed across the open ground towards the house. Shots rang out, the bullets buzzing past their heads, but the shooters’ aim was erratic as they were taking fire themselves. They ran past the brick oven and made straight for the main building, where they flattened themselves against the wall, trying to regain their breath. Meanwhile, the other two maintained a steady fire on the windows.

Werner discarded his rifle; with his automatic in hand, he flattened himself against the wall.

Only the tops of the hills were illuminated, the sun having slipped below the horizon. The evening approached rapidly. The two men were now about 15 yards from the kitchen door. Werner pulled two sticks of dynamite from his pocket.

“Philippe, I want you to light one stick, and once I’ve thrown it, immediately light another and hand it to me.”

The black man looked at Werner, not quite happy at what he was to do, but he nodded his understanding. Werner held out the first stick; Philippe struck a match and lit the fuse. Werner immediately threw the double-stick of dynamite. It came to rest on the sill of the kitchen door. The two men threw themselves to the ground. The shock of the explosion was far worse than Werner had expected, and he was lifted off the ground by the pressure wave, his ears ringing as dust and dirt flew all in all directions. The next thing he

knew, another dynamite stick was thrust at him, the spluttering fuse barely visible in the billowing thick dust.

“Lieber Gott!” he shrieked in panic as he envisioned the sticks blowing up in his hand.

For a second, he had forgotten his instructions to Philippe. In panic, he grabbed the stick and ran to what was left of the kitchen door, tossing the stick through the opening into the interior. He barely made it back to put the wall between him and the building when the dynamite exploded. As the dust dissipated, any indications that there had once been doors and windows here was gone; these were blasted off their hinges and lying shattered in the yard. Only jagged openings remained. Anybody in the confines of the building had to be concussed or dead!

All six men stormed into the interior and spread, each firing off a shot or two. The room was a jumble of broken furniture, tables, chairs and a cast-iron stove which lay toppled on its side, its chimney-pipe pulled from the roof. Racking had been blown off the walls, the contents – broken porcelain and glass jars – now strewn across the floor. The top of the roof had been blown off and parts of the crossbeams had collapsed on the kitchen floor. Except for the now bellowing cattle, there was no other sound. Slowly, Werner moved forward, expecting a shot to ring out at any moment. Ricardo followed his example, approaching the doorway from the other side. They flattened themselves against the wall, creeping forward, guns at the ready. At a nod from Werner, they stormed through the opening. There was no return fire. This room too was a shambles. There was no sign of de Mello, dos Santos or Rocha. The next room revealed the same.

“They’ve somehow escaped!” Werner shouted.

They rushed out of the building into the fading light. The horses were still in a small corral directly alongside the building, and fortunately had been

shielded from the explosions. They were wild and agitated, the result of the massive explosion. If de Mello and his men had escaped, they had to be on foot.

"Mestre, they've split," Philippe said.

"How do you know that?"

"I saw one of the men. De Mello and dos Santos were not with him."

Werner marvelled at the man's eyesight. How could he see in this light? "Which way were they heading?"

"They were heading for the high ground."

"And dos Santos?"

"I don't know."

"Merda!" Werner exclaimed, disgusted.

"Wait! I see him. And another." Philippe pointed towards the hills. It took a moment before Werner also saw him, scrabbling up the sides.

"Why didn't they take the horses?" Ricardo asked.

"They didn't have time. After the first explosion, they realised we would be inside the building within moments. The horses were corralled and probably going crazy because of the explosions. We would have been on to them before they could mount up." Werner paused for a moment.

"On foot, out here? That's crazy," Ricardo gasped.

"Philippe, take some water; go after the other man. Paulo, go with him. Louis, you stay here with Ricardo."

"I'm going with you." Louis was insistent.

"No. I need you here in case they try to backtrack. I'm thinking that surely they'll want to return for the horses. Don't worry about de Mello; I'll track him. Just keep the pressure on unless you are sure you can capture them without getting hurt. You two wait here until we call for you."

"Cristo man, De Mello's probably got dos Santos with him."

“I know, but I’ve got Philippe. Anyway, we’re not about to try a frontal attack on them.”

Philippe and Werner refilled their water bottles from the water trough in the yard. Philippe slunk off into the rapidly encompassing darkness, Werner after him. The evening star was already visible above the horizon.

Werner knew that the fugitives would not be able to travel far; they would probably find a large tree to spend the night in, jammed into a comfortable position amongst the branches to keep out of reach of wild animals. He decided to follow de Mello at first light. Clearly, Philippe and he would eventually also have to find a tree in which to spend the night.

CHAPTER 74

Werner awoke with a start, but he immediately realised where he was. He clambered down from the tree to find Philippe preparing to move out.

The sky was still grey, the ground covered by the slightest hint of dew. In the lowest parts of the valleys, a thin blanket of mist covered the ground. Werner made for the spot where de Mello had last been observed. He had learnt a good deal from Philippe about tracking, and sure enough, they soon found the tracks of de Mello and dos Santos where they had scrambled up the slope, slipping in places. By now, the first rays of the sun began to appear, and the face of the nearby mountains was bathed in yellow light.

He followed their spoor for an hour. The man was making no effort to hide his tracks. He was moving northeast; this could only mean that he was heading to Huambo, dos Santos' base. He wondered who now managed the Huambo complex and on whose behalf. Did those managing dos Santos's base have knowledge of his whereabouts?

A range of steep hills loomed ahead, which appeared impassable on horseback. However, a ravine-like gap led through the range and he realised that both men were heading for it.

By midday, both parties had climbed high into the gap. Werner and Philippe had to use their hands to scale the steep rock face. He lost sight of de Mello and was only able to see dos Santos who was well above him. If dos Santos tried to move sideways, deviating from his route, Werner would see him soon enough against the rock faces on either side. The going was tough, the sun hot, and he took frequent sips from his water bottle.

"Mestre, I know which way de Mello went. They've split," Philippe

suddenly said.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, he's moved away to the left. He's already quite far away," Philippe replied, breathing hard from the exertion of the climb.

"Okay, go after him, but be careful – the man's dangerous."

He was negotiating a difficult piece, a deep flute cut into the rocks by the watercourse flowing down over eons, and he required hands and feet to climb to the summit 200ft above.

Suddenly, he heard the crash of rock on rock above him. As he looked up, a large boulder tumbled towards him; it breaking loose other rocks as it fell, starting a small avalanche of stone and debris. He did the only thing he could. He climbed another few feet, the rocks tumbling past, and flung himself into the vertical crevice of the flute where it was wider, his body barely fitting, holding himself in position by spreading his legs and arms and wedging himself inside the chimney. The avalanche hurtled passed him with inches to spare, wayward chips and stones hitting him in the face. The further down the side it travelled, the more rock it tore loose from the mountain until it became nearly a full-scale rockslide. Had he not squeezed himself into the flute, the slide would have taken him with it.

All was suddenly quiet again. Obviously, dos Santos had started the rockslide, probably by dislodging a big rock. Did he know Werner had survived? He decided to wait his adversary out. Surely, he would climb down to see if a body lay at the foot of the face.

Werner cautiously unslung his rifle strap from across his shoulder and placed the weapon on a small ledge that jutted out from the rock face. The crevice did not afford much shelter. Still partially in the sun, he was hot and perspiring, the air not circulating in the confined space. For 15 minutes, nothing happened. By now, he was drenched in perspiration. He constantly

had to wipe an arm across his forehead to stop the sweat getting into his eyes. Suddenly a small rock tumbled past him, bouncing down the slope. He remained hidden, not knowing whether this was merely a remnant of the previous rockslide or whether someone had dislodged it when descending the slope. A minute or so later, another stone rolled down. Dos Santos must be above him, slowly making his way down.

Before long, he could hear the slight sound of movement as somebody slowly climbed down the rock face. Werner knew that whoever it was would soon be able to see the crevice.

Werner moved and dislodged a rock. It clattered loudly down the slope. All movement above him ceased; the only sound was the faint rustle of the refreshing breeze that had sprang up. Had the man heard something? He waited; nothing stirred.

Suddenly, something flashed passed the opening in the crevice. Werner inched forward. It came into view again, swinging from the opposite side. Dos Santos was dangling from a rope, his feet clamped above a large knot he had tied to give himself support and stop him sliding down the rope. He hung on the rope with one hand and held a revolver in the other. His face was cruel and triumphant as he swung from left to right, lining the revolver up and pulling the trigger as he passed directly opposite the flute. In that brief second as the man flashed past, Werner saw the revolver buck in his hand. The bullet struck him in the shoulder, the shock of the impact leaving him numb as he frantically fought to retain his position between the rocks with one arm and both feet spread, his back hard up against the inside of the pipe to stop himself from sliding down. His other arm was now useless.

Again, dos Santos swung passed, but this time Werner was expecting him and the next shot. It ricocheted off the rocks, barely missing him, but a rock shard struck him in the face, leaving a gash from which blood now trickled.

His mind worked frantically. His rifle! He jammed his feet firmly against one side of the rock with his back against the other and slowly reached with his good arm. He grabbed the rifle by the stock, cocked it under his arm, and flicked off the safety catch. Thank God, he had loaded it when he had begun the pursuit; there was already a cartridge in the chamber. He managed to level it and waited for dos Santos.

This time when he appeared, Werner was ready for him. In that split second, Werner saw every detail: the trimmed beard, the dirty dustcoat, the abraded and scratched black boots, and the silver revolver in his hand. Werner saw dos Santos's sudden shock at the sight of the rifle levelled at him, just before he pulled the trigger. The rifle boomed in the confined space of the chimney, the recoil too much for Werner to absorb with the one hand. It fell from his fingers, clattering as it tumbled down the rocks slope below.

The bullet hit dos Santos in the left side, the sheer force of the impact tearing the man's hands from the rope. He fell, not making a sound as he bounced off an outcrop and dropped 10ft to lie inert and broken at the bottom of the slope.

Werner's situation was precarious. He was at the limit of his endurance, no longer able to stop himself from sliding down the chimney. He hung desperately onto consciousness, fighting off the blackness that threatened to overcome him. He inched himself painfully down the chute, ledge by small ledge, his legs shaking from the exertion, expecting to slip any moment. The sweat poured from him, his underclothes sodden.

The moment his feet touched the bottom of the chute, he crumpled to the ground. Blood still poured from his shoulder wound. He couldn't move his arm. His automatic was lying nearby; he picked it up and stuck it into its holster. His water bottle was somehow still looped over his shoulder; he removed the cap and swallowed the cool water gratefully.

He tore a few strips off his shirt and tried to fashion them into plugs to stem the flow of blood from his shoulder. This was only partially successful and blood still oozed from the wound. Any movement aggravated it.

He knew he had to stay where he was. If he moved into the open and then collapsed, wild animals would get him. He drew back as far as he could into the crevice. If anything were to try to get to him, it would have to come in from the front. He drank the last of his water. Whether it was from shock or loss of blood, he could not throw off the dizzy feeling that overcame him, and fought to stay awake, but eventually drifted off.

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He came to with a start. Through the gap in the granite rocks, he could see a sprinkling of stars in the darkness beyond. Something definitely had awakened him: other than the faint chirr of nearby insects, he heard nothing, but he smelt it, a mixture of unwashed fur and carrion, like a dirty dog. He stared through the slit in the rock. He could clearly see the sky beyond, it illuminated by the full moon, which shone like a lamp in the night. Whatever was out there was very quiet.

Then there was a low growl, a staccato sound, each syllable separate, each ‘grr … grr’ distinct, followed by a low cough. He caught a fleeting glance of movement against the light, but it was enough for him to recognise the leopard. His hair rose on his neck. If stalked by a leopard, you probably have the most dangerous animal in the world after you. At night, it is the most treacherous of all animals; you are not likely to see it before it is upon you. Fear gripped him; this was a relentless and fearless killer. He knew the smell of his blood had attracted the animal. Why had it not gone for dos Santos?

It suddenly appeared in the slit, swiping inward with its paw, the extended claws missing his face by an inch, but still raking across his chest. The moment he saw the animal, Werner pulled the trigger, the revolver’s

discharge deafening in the confined space. The animal disappeared, and all he heard was a tumultuous growling and snapping. He had no idea whether he had hit it – everything had happened so quickly. This sudden movement had opened his wound, and the blood dripped slowly down his arm.

Within minutes, the leopard appeared outside the crevice again, emitting a low growl with an occasional short cough as it paced up and down. It seemed it contemplated its next move. One-handed as he was, Werner was no match against its speed and brute strength.

For a few minutes, it prowled around outside the crevice. Then, in a split second, it exploded through the narrow entrance. But unable to get through, it was now stuck in the crevice. Its stench was overpowering, its claws extended, and its jaws open as it tried to reach him. All the while, it lashed at him with its front claws, ripping his coat and skin again. Werner gagged at its foul breath and fired wildly. The shot missed, and he desperately tried to bring the gun to bear again. He saw the animal's silhouette, clear against the moonlight, and screamed in fear and pulled the trigger again. This time the bullet struck, driving the animal snarling and biting backwards. The animal fell to the ground, trying to bite its side where the bullet had penetrated. Slowly, movement subsided. Then, with what seemed an eternity, it dropped its head and lay still.

Werner's coat and shirt had been ripped to shreds and he had deep lacerations on his arm and chest, which now bled profusely. With difficulty, he tore additional strips from his tattered shirt and wound them round his arm. He was utterly exhausted and in shock, all resistance driven from him. Collapsing against the bare rockface behind him, he lay still.

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Slowly he emerged from the fog of unconsciousness, imagining that somebody was calling him.

“Mestre!” he heard.

“Mestre!” There it was again, now louder.

He knew he had to wake, and clawing his way upwards from some deep abyss, he forced himself to open his eyes. The first signs of dawn filtered through the gap.

“Mestre!” he heard again.

“Here, here!” he croaked, and he tried to force himself to his feet. Eventually he stood, swaying, the good arm outstretched, supporting himself against the wall. He stepped forward towards the opening and tried to emerge into the daylight. It was too narrow. He’d have to work himself up a good few feet where the gap was wider.

He could see the low-lying fog covered valley below, the sun peeking over the distant horizon. Philippe was climbing the slope and now was near where he was. He was still clad in his loincloth, the fur from some animal wrapped around his shoulders to ward off the early-morning chill. When the black man saw him, his face split into a wide grin of relief. “Thank God. Oh you beautiful black bastard, am I glad to see you!” Werner quietly breathed.

CHAPTER 75

Philippe immediately realised that he'd have to lift Werner. He started climbing the chimney from the outside and then finally lowered himself into the gap. Once alongside Werner, he carefully assessed the extent of his master's injuries. He put his arms round him and pulled him to an upright position.

"Mestre, I'm going to try and lift you but please try and help, if you can," Philippe said. "You then must squeeze through the gap."

Werner nodded and steadied himself against the chimney's rock wall. Philippe saw that he shook from the exertion.

Philippe made a stirrup with his joined hands and Werner placed his foot therein. Drawing on all his strength, Philippe hoisted the wounded officer through the wider top gap of the crevice. At first, Werner grappled to find purchase but then fell through, sliding down the angled rockface and collapsing on the ground on the outside. Werner lay next to the dead leopard but did not appear to notice it. Within moments, Philippe had joined him, standing over him. Philippe tried to make Werner as comfortable as he could; he gave him water and covered him with the piece of fur from his shoulders.

"Mestre, I found dos Santos down below, so I knew you were up here somewhere. He's lucky the lions didn't get him."

"He lives?" Werner asked, his voice a rasp.

"He does, but he cannot move. I think he has many broken bones, but otherwise, he is not too badly hurt. The bullet wound won't kill him," the servant said nonchalantly.

Then from the bag hanging next to his side, the man extracted a blood-

smeared money belt. “This was de Mello’s,” he said. He opened the pockets and produced a few pouches with leather drawstrings. Each fitted comfortably in his hand.

“There are seven of them.”

Werner stared at his saviour in shock. A fortune of diamonds lay in their hands. “What happened?” Werner finally asked Philippe.

The black man grinned, his teeth flashing white as he told him how he had relentlessly tracked de Mello through the night. The man, for all his tailor-made attire – the hand stitched boots and coiffured hair – was no newcomer to Angola. Although this was not the way Philippe put it, but he pantomimed the movements of a strutting dandy. Philippe said that de Mello knew the bush well and knew that he had to keep moving. Sometimes he lost the trail but always managed to find it again. In the early morning, the judge finally stopped to rest beside a small stream fed by a spring bubbling from a crevice in the mountainside, the water cold and clear. Philippe waited until the man had slaked his thirst and had fallen asleep, curled up in a nook in the rocks. Then silently, he crept up on him. All this was told with much wild gesticulating, ever-changing facial expressions and round eyes to convey the excitement, fear and horror.

“When he woke and saw me sitting there, he was afraid. I did not say anything, but sat there quite still, watching him. I wanted to see the fear in his face. Suddenly, he reached under the blanket for his revolver. I grabbed his wrist, and with him looking into my eyes, I stuck my knife into his throat.”

Philippe produced the knife: it was an evil weapon – a long, grooved bayonet taken from one of the dead Portuguese soldiers.

“While he was dying, choking with the blood pouring from his neck, I told him this was the end, that he would never see his wife and children or ever see the sun rise again.” Werner felt a cold shiver pass through him as he

pictured the gruesome sight.

"What about Jorge? Did you kill him too?" Werner asked.

"No, but I could go after him if you want."

"Don't worry about that. Anyway, he has a good head start already. With dos Santos captured and wounded and de Mello dead, what would be the point? The man will disappear, never to be seen or heard of again. It's not worth it."

Werner knew that if he sent Philippe after Jorge, the man would die. Philippe would eventually track him down and kill him. He wouldn't let anything stop him. Werner could picture the ghastly scene: these people were not to be trifled with. The law of the wild still prevailed; here in the colonies, they did not value life as the European world did. They could be insanely cruel, but that was their way of life.

Philippe inspected Werner's wounds. Satisfied that he was not in immediate danger, he gave him his water bottle and handed him his revolver.

"Mestre, stay here. Use that gun if you have to. I'll soon be back."

Werner grabbed the standing black man by the bare leg. "Listen, Philippe, dos Santos must not be allowed to die, do you understand? That's very important to me. I want to take him back to Windhuk," Werner insisted in an intense voice.

Philippe looked surprised. "Are you sure? We're in Angola, you can't do that!"

"I will, and I'm sure Major de Sousa will help me."

Philippe smiled knowingly. "Yes, I'm sure he will."

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Philippe returned with Ricardo and the constable; they made two travois to take Werner and dos Santos back to Don Pereira's hacienda. Dos Santos was barely conscious and was delirious, mumbling in Portuguese under his

breath. With the horses pulling the travois, it took the whole day with Louis and Paulo to reach the hacienda. They arrived in the late evening.

CHAPTER 76

Notwithstanding the late hour, Donna Pereira was soon a bustle, having called her servants from their beds, issuing orders and preparing rooms for the injured. This included dos Santos. Louis was taking no chances, ensuring that the man was always guarded by two of his own men who sat in the same room. Donna Perreira and an elderly black female servant attended to Werner and dos Santos. They knew what they were doing and slowly nursed the two men back to a state of health that put them out of danger and reduced the chances of an infection. The bone in Werner's shoulder was broken but not shattered, so they bound it as tight as possible and kept him quiet to stop any movement.

By the third day, Werner began to wonder where Philippe was. He kept asking Louis where the man was. The Portuguese officer was reluctant to reply and avoided his friend's eyes. He moved from foot to foot and looked round the room, uncomfortable.

Eventually, Werner could no longer take Louis's mumblings and evasion. "Where the fuck is he?" he demanded.

Louis sighed. He knew what was about to happen.

"He's gone to the Finnish mission to fetch the woman doctor, Dorothea, your friend," he finally admitted, glad to have that off his chest.

"Are you insane? You can't bring her here!" Werner sat up in bed then grimaced as pain shot up his arm and shoulder, his alarm evident. "You're bringing her through Kunahama territory. She's a woman. She will be in danger!"

"Well, that will be her decision," Louis countered matter-of-factly.

“Merda, still I should have been consulted.”

“I know, but Philippe insisted, and I eventually agreed. We were concerned for you. Your shoulder is broken. It needs to be properly set,” Louis heatedly replied.

“Cristo, Louis! If anything happens to her—”

“She’ll be fine with Philippe. He has Paulo with him. You couldn’t find better men!”

“It’s more than 100 miles from here!”

“Not quite, but near enough. Besides, I sent a small cavalry detachment to escort them from the border to here. The civil uprising is nearly over; I don’t believe we have anything to fear, except what may happen to you. Your health is still in danger; you need the best attention.”

“What about dos Santos?” Werner asked.

Louis gave a slight shrug. “He says nothing and stares at the ceiling.”

CHAPTER 77

They waited six days for Philippe to return with Dorothea and a nurse, both victims of an uncomfortable ride, albeit in a well-sprung carriage. They had loaded the carriage with everything they thought they might require.

Dorothea's only concern was Werner; she didn't bother with a meal or a wash on arrival but made straight for the room where he and Don Pereira lay. At first, she ignored Don Pereira, concentrating on Werner. Only once she was convinced that he was out of danger did she check on the other man.

Although uncomfortable and not able to move his upper body, Werner had only a trace of infection, which occasionally spiked his temperature. When she arrived, it was normal, but none would have been surprised to see the mercury rise as she fussed over him, holding his hands, she like a mother hen around him. To all, it was obvious that here was a woman deeply in love with her patient.

The two women proposed to open Werner's wound and inspect the damaged bone. They prepared a separate room, scrubbing it with carbolic soap from top to bottom. They scoured the table selected to be the operating table with soap and pumice stone until it looked like the deck of a king's yacht. Sheets were boiled and windows sealed.

All were barred from the room.

"If there are any germs still around, they've long left!" Louis told a nervous Werner.

Finally, they were ready, and after Werner himself had been thoroughly scrubbed, he was brought into the prepared room and placed on the table. Dorothea administered an anaesthetic and once Werner lost consciousness,

removed all bandages, tut-tutting behind her mask as she exposed the wound. The jagged edges of the wound were still red with infection, and a clear liquid with a trace of blood seeped through. Only once the wound was stabilised and the infection under control would she be able to properly set his shoulder and cocoon his upper body in plaster of Paris, leaving holes for his skin and the entrance and exit wounds to breathe so that they could rapidly heal. He would need a month or more to recuperate.

Dorothea also attended to Don Pereira and was happy to note that his good wife knew her way around wounds and medicines. There was little additional that she could do for him; his condition was improving rapidly and he was already able to shuffle around the hacienda but looking comical, cocooned as he was.

Dos Santos's side wound was superficial, but his fall had broken a leg, arm and several ribs. Louis had described the man's injuries well. "When a side of beef like that drops from such a height, something has to break. It should have been his fuckin' head. I don't know why you didn't kill him right there and then!"

Louis returned to Benguela, taking his cavalherico and most of his troops with him, promising to send word of what had occurred during the period that they had been away.

Werner's bouts of fever finally disappeared. Dorothea seldom leaving his side, and in the evenings she would stay until late, talking and holding his hand; sometimes she affectionately kissed him. She told him that she was loath to leave, but now that he was recuperating, she needed to return to the Finnish mission. She had other patients who required her attention.

*

Dorothea soon left, again escorted by Philippe and a few troops Louis had left on the ranch. She bade Werner a tearful farewell, extracting a promise

that he would call on the Finnish mission, even if he still had to masquerade as Senhor Joachim de Almeida, a member of the Portuguese bourgeois who spoke fluent German and English. General Diaz and Major Zietzmann, in particular, had no wish that it become general knowledge that a German officer was masquerading as a Portuguese entrepreneur.

Werner insisted that dos Santos accompany them. He wanted the man moved to SudwestAfrika before he was mobile again. Like this, he did not pose a danger. With some reluctance Louis provided an escort while Philippe was sent ahead with a message for Major Graf zu Dohner, the garrison commander of Ondongua, to proceed with extreme haste to the border to escort the prisoner, first to the mission and then to Ondongua.

Werner could now move around, although his elbow pointed upwards above the horizontal and his whole arm and upper body was encompassed in a shell of rigid plaster of Paris. Every day he would go for a short walk, exploring the immediate surrounds of the hacienda, taking in its beauty and history. The ranch had been in the Pereira family from the middle of the 18th century. They raised thoroughbred Arab horses that were famous throughout the colony. Large tracts of land were given over to the cultivation of sisal, taking over where previously raw rubber used to be extracted from wild rubber trees. They were ardently passionate about their heritage and practised a culture maintained by the Portuguese aristocrats for hundreds of years, truly a breed on their own, reluctant to afford newcomers entry.

A few weeks later, a military despatch rider arrived on horseback and delivered a sealed envelope addressed to Werner. He was ordered to wait for his reply.

Werner sat down in a corner of the veranda and opened the letter; it was from Louis. Werner laughed at the salutation, the sarcastic bastard! Truly, they were good friends.

‘My dear friend Senhor Joachim de Almeida,

Although you are a German officer and a very good one at that, to me you will always be Portuguese and probably one of the finest men I will ever know. The same goes for your cavalherico, not that I’m forgetting my batman. Always remember our friendship; my house, wherever it may be, will always be open to you.

Matters developed rapidly in your absence. The Governor-General was recalled by the king, no reason given, but it was implied that he was to take up another important position, which we know probably will never occur. Already a new juiz has been appointed for the Benguela district, and made public knowledge with the information that de Mello had associated with a group of renegados and that in a pursuit operation, had been killed, and so also the renegados. This information was released by the chief of police in Luanda, supported by the acting Governor-General of the colony and with the country’s Chief Justice in attendance. Initially it created quite a furore, many questions being asked, but the Chief Justice deemed it too sensitive to permit release of all information. However, this is now old hat, nobody even asks anymore.

Yours truly, I might add, has been promoted again, this time to colonel, surely the fastest promotion in Portuguese military history. To add to this, Colonel Louis Antonio de Sousa is now the Chief Commanding Officer for all southern Angola.

I should also add that from remarks made by Colonel de Oliveira, you could be in for a few surprises on your return to SudwestAfrika.

All dos Santos’s assets have been forfeited to the state, it being known that he was captured by the Germans with irrefutable proof of his involvement in gunrunning, the weapons having been found in his possession on German

territory.

The despatch rider who carried this letter to you has also delivered a letter to Don Pereira from the Minister of Land and Mineral Rights in Luanda. As promised, Don Pereira now legally holds 40 percent of the mine, the rest forfeited to the state. However, the government is currently negotiating with a few companies about the remaining 60 percent. Our aristocratic friend and his son should be comfortable with the outcome; it is as we promised.

I received a cable from Jurgen (had a problem getting it translated, knowing what I thought it contained, not wanting just anybody to read it!). Belgium, he said, was fabulous, beautiful people and extremely accommodating. There is certain correspondence on its way to you, which will explain all. He says we should all be very happy people for a very long, long time! Does that tell you something?

My wife and I, after hearing from Jurgen, have decided that I should resign my commission and emigrate to SudwestAfrika. Jurgen has suggested we, that's all of us, take up ranching. He made a guarantee to me that you Germans would accept this poor Portuguese officer with open arms. While they may not be landowners, Paulo and Philippe should join us as cattle-owners, we looking after their interests. The idea is we help one another as we've done in the past. I thought this a brilliant idea; you need to think about this.'

Werner mulled over this for a few minutes and decided that it truly was an excellent idea. In SudwestAfrika the past proceedings in Angola were of no concern to the German government. Their newfound wealth, since this was not acquired in SudwestAfrika, would raise no suspicions. Besides, the bulk of the funds would be held in overseas accounts. He continued to read:

‘Of course, Senhorita Maria Williams contacted me, immediately wanting to know your whereabouts. She got hold of me through General Diaz. I never said where you were, but said you were in hospital recuperating from a gunshot wound, and that you were in excellent hands. Believe me; she knew precisely whose hands those were! The new juiz also assured her that anything rightfully hers at Huambo would be returned to her. She did mention that she proposed to cross the border into SudwestAfrika when the Portuguese government proclaimed southern Angola safe. I think you ought to give that piece of news some thought!

By the way, I did mention to Maria that Major Zietzmann had enquired about her and that should she go to SudwestAfrika, and that looking up the brave major may be a good idea. He’s besotted with her. I think she could be happy with the man. Besides, the major doesn’t give a damn about protocol, and he would have the most beautiful woman in Windhuk on his arm!’

God! Werner thought, Maria and Zietzmann together – that could solve a few problems!

‘My family and I wish you a speedy recovery and we look forward to seeing you shortly in Benguela.

Your friend,

Colonel Louis Antonio de Sousa.’

Never mind ranching in SudwestAfrika, the best thing he could do was to return to Germany until everything had settled down, Werner thought. But before he could do that, he had to remember that there was still a war on. Now that the gunrunning ring had been broken, he probably would be ordered back to Windhuk, hopefully still reporting to Major Zietzmann.

Surely, they would still have use for his linguistic abilities. He did not feel ready for a permanent relationship with any woman. Actually, he needed to get away from Maria and Dorothea for a while. Too much had happened in a short space of time. He needed to find his feet again. He had no wish to settle down soon. He felt at peace with himself for the first time in months. Somehow, he felt he had avenged his brother's death.

He requested pen and paper from Donna Pereira and began to write one of the most difficult letters of his life. He addressed the letter to Maria, telling her that she should remember that war still waged in SudwestAfrika, and that he was an officer in the German army. He said he wished to devote himself to his career as an army officer, see the war through, and then only make decisions about his future.

He wrote: *'I will always fondly remember you and the moments we had together, but you must understand that I cannot make any commitments.'*

He then wrote a short letter to Louis, telling him that he agreed in principle to his plans, that he would see him in Benguela, and that he proposed to return to SudwestAfrika by ship.

Donna Pereira had promised to carry out Dorothea's instructions to the letter, and Werner had to endure the plaster cast for the full six weeks before she removed it. Even then, his shoulder was still stiff, although the wound had healed completely. He remained on the hacienda for another three weeks thereafter, enjoying the break and regularly exercising his shoulder and arm.

CHAPTER 78

It was ten in the morning when with a screeching of steel on steel the train halted next to the platform of the Windhuk Bahnhof. Werner had advised no one of his arrival but had left Louis in Benguela with promises that they would get together once Louis's family arrived in SudwestAfrika. Followed by a black porter, Werner stepped off the train on the platform and casually looked round.

Two Schutztruppe marines approached him, one a Feldwebel that he remembered. They came to attention in front of him and saluted. He was in civilian clothes and was taken aback at this unusual show of military respect.

"Herr Major, Major Zietzmann's compliments," the sergeant said. "He wishes that you call on him as soon as possible. We have already reserved a suite for you at the Thuringerhof Hotel. We have also kitted you out with two uniforms and other clothing which you'll find in the hotel. Gefreiter Lehmann here has been assigned to you as your batman. Major Zietzmann suggests that you call on his office tomorrow morning at nine."

"Herr Feldwebel, I do appreciate the gesture, and I'm sure Gefreiter Lehmann would make an excellent batman, but frankly, considering what we've been through, I would prefer my Askari be my batman. But thank you, even so."

The sergeant smiled. "As you wish, Herr Major." The veteran seemed to appreciate Werner's stance on the matter.

Werner was astounded. He had not expected this reception and certainly not to be addressed as 'Major'. This had to be Zietzmann's doing; it was unusual – only aristocrats who had the Kaiser's ear could hope to have their sons

promoted to such a high rank at a young age.

*

A sergeant led Werner into Zietzmann's office, the major rising from behind his desk and smartly saluting Werner, who was surprised at the warm welcome smile on the major's face. He then saw Jurgen, who had also risen and saluted Werner. Werner did not miss the silver woven braid with a star affixed, which now adorned Zietzmann's shoulders, signifying his new rank of OberstLeutnant and those of Jurgen proclaiming him a major. The three men enthusiastically shook hands, glad to see each other again.

"Good God, I'm really in exalted company now," Werner mischievously announced with a grin.

"I know it's damn early, but I believe this calls for celebratory schnapps." Zietzmann's eyes wrinkled as he added: "Who knows anyway, maybe you didn't brush your teeth this morning. This'll kill any germs." He poured three cognacs from a decanter into liqueur glasses on a sideboard.

Again, Zietzmann smiled, and then raised his glass at the portrait of Kaiser Wilhelm II which adorned one wall of his office. Werner and Jurgen followed suit. "The Kaiser," they simultaneously said and threw the fiery liquid into the back of their throats.

The men made small talk, discussing their experiences, and in particular their part in the destruction of the Angolan gunrunning syndicate. The appointment of a new Governor-General in Angola and a new military commander in the south had done much to ensure a more cordial relationship between the two colonies. It was unlikely that any gunrunning would be able to resume, certainly not on any large scale for a while. The Portuguese military's reprisal against the defeated Kunahamas had been cruel and ruthless; any attempt at resuming gunrunning could only lead to death for those who dared. The gunrunners had caused the Portuguese government

acute embarrassment.

The two officers were preparing to leave when Zietzmann gave them each an envelope.

“Regrettably gentlemen, the envelope contains orders that you present yourselves tomorrow morning at the designated time at the Windhuk prison. I will also be there.”

Neither Werner nor Jurgen asked the reason: they immediately knew.

Zietzmann told them that dos Santos had revealed nothing under military cross-examination, remaining sullen and uncooperative to the end. The court-martial was a long, drawn-out affair and was held behind closed doors; not even the press were aware of any proceedings. This had been at the behest of the Portuguese military, who did not wish to sour German-Portuguese relations. No civilians were permitted.

Everyone had known that the death sentence was inevitable, but it still was a sobering moment when the colonel of the court-martial had made the pronouncement. Dos Santos was to be taken to the gallows at the Windhuk Prison and hanged by the neck until dead. Dos Santos had stared straight ahead, his face expressionless.

*

Reluctantly Werner and Jurgen, dressed in full uniform, arrived at the prison early the next morning. They had no desire to witness an execution but being the arresting officers, they had been ordered to be present. The prison resembled a fort, an imposing building built of blocks of grey granite, its centre dominated by a manned watchtower. Werner and Jurgen reported to the prison’s commanding officer, a major who clearly was close to retirement. His pince-nez was perched on his rather bulbous nose, and his red cheeks displayed a maze of red capillaries; this was dominated by an enormous grey twirled moustache, the ends pointing upwards at his watery

bloodshot eyes. The atmosphere was subdued.

They declined the offered coffee. Ten minutes before six, they followed the commander into the hall, where they met with the members of the court panel who had passed sentence; they were also obliged to witness the execution. Lieutenant-colonel Zietzmann was with them. The prison commander led them up a flight of stairs to the execution chamber, a large bare room with an extraordinarily high ceiling. A stout wooden floor supported on beams jutted out from the walls about 20ft off the ground.

Punctually at six, another door opened and a priest entered, followed by dos Santos, his hands bound behind his back. The man had a slight limp; he had not fully recovered from his injuries. His eyes blazed with blistering hatred as he recognised Werner, and if he was afraid, he did not reveal it.

The priest prayed continuously in Portuguese. A soldier led dos Santos by the arm to the gallows' trapdoor, two painted footprints on the boards indicating where the condemned man's feet were to be positioned. Quickly, the soldier produced a wooden board with three straps with buckles, one at each end and a third in the middle. This was strapped to the back of dos Santos's legs, a strap around the ankles, another around his knees, and the third around his waist.

A black hood was placed over dos Santos's head, the hangman ignoring his instinctive protestations. Immediately, the noose followed, quickly dropped around his neck; the slack in the rope was taken up by a large loop tied with thin cotton. The loop hung directly over the prisoner's head. The first shafts of the dawn's sunlight pierced the gloom of the chamber through narrow slits in the wall, casting long beams of slanted at an angle revealing the dust particles in the air.

The commander, speaking in German, read the charge and sentence. There was no sound from dos Santos. The officer stood back and nodded. The

soldier standing next to the trapdoor jerked a lever back, and the spring-loaded trapdoors split in the middle with a bang. Dos Santos dropped like a stone, the rope jerking tight with a loud twang, motes of dust released from the rope swirling in the light that now began to flood the chamber. Trussed as it was, the body could not convulse, the legs only twitching slightly for a few seconds, the body then swaying inertly at the end of the rope.

Although he had mentally prepared himself, the execution still shocked Werner to the core. Yes, he hated the man and felt no compassion for him, but still he felt ill. He stood, rigid with shock, his face as white as a sheet, not saying a word as he stared at the rope swaying like a pendulum in front of him. A barbarous way to die.

CHAPTER 79

The next day, Jurgen left to join his men, who were billeted in the nearby town of Okahandja. This left Werner alone. Zietzmann had insisted that he take a few days to settle down before he reported for duty again.

At eight thirty in the morning, he descended the stairs from the first floor of the hotel and crossed the foyer towards the dining room, where breakfast was served. Suddenly, he was forced to reel back as a soft body careened into him and arms were flung round his neck. In shock, he stared into the blue sparkling eyes and delighted smile of Dorothea, moments before her lips met his in a passionate kiss. Over her shoulder, he saw the shocked faces of the other hotel guests seated in the dining room, the sliding doors wide open. Her scandalous behaviour drew many stares: such a display of passion in public was not done!

Werner's arms closed around her, and he lost himself in the feel of her soft mouth. My God, feeling her body so close against him made him realise how much he had missed her. And, of course, how much he did love her. His planned resolve to approach his future cautiously evaporated as he held her tightly.

Any future without her at his side would be no future at all.

She withdrew from his embrace and still smiling, pointed to the hotel entrance, which led out onto the sidewalk. He looked to see Philippe standing there dressed in new grey trousers, white shirt and a new felt hat, his feet shod in brand new gleaming riding boots. His teeth flashed white as he waved enthusiastically at Werner.

Werner realised that they too were inseparable.

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AUTHOR'S NOTES

Although this is a work of fiction, it is set against the background of the civil war that waged in the German southwestern African colony of SudwestAfrika during the period 1904 to 1908. A mass uprising of the indigenous people led by the dominant Ovahereros took on the colonists who were supported by Imperial German marines known as the Schutztruppe.

As opposed the Imperial German colony of Tanganyika, little if any use was made of Askaris in SudwestAfrika. However, in Tanganyika they were recruited from the local Black tribes, subjected to a rigorous military training program, and used to support the white colonial forces.

I have taken the liberty of using military trained Askaris in my story, which takes place in SudwestAfrika whereas in reality they may not have been used in that colony at all other than as scouts. The Germans in Tanganyika used Askaris on a large scale during the conflict with the British forces. They were excellent soldiers.