

# **Per Fine Ounce**

Peter Vollmer

© Peter Vollmer 2020

Peter Vollmer has asserted his rights under the Copyright, Design and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as the author of this work.

First published in 2020 by Lume Books.

## **Table of Contents**

**Original version of *Per Fine Ounce* by Geoffrey Jenkins**  
**Historical Background and Two-Page Extract of “missing” James**  
**Bond novel**

Glidrose Productions (now Ian Fleming Publications) planned for a series of James Bond novels to be published under the pseudonym of Robert Markham. Celebrated South African novelist and award-winning Sunday Times correspondent Geoffrey Jenkins was asked to write an original James Bond 007 novel by Glidrose in 1966, following on from *The Man with the Golden Gun*.

Ian Fleming wrote at the time, “Geoffrey Jenkins has the supreme gift of originality. *A Twist of Sand* is a literate, imaginative first novel in the tradition of high and original adventure.”

Jenkins and Fleming had talked about a diamond-smuggling storyline based in South Africa, which Jenkins later penned for Glidrose entitled *Per Fine Ounce*. Despite the promising Bond storyline and the fact that Jenkins was a best-selling thriller writer in the Fleming mould, along with being a friend and colleague of Fleming’s, Glidrose rejected Jenkins’ draft manuscript after Fleming passed away. Much speculation has ensued over the years about the reasons for this rejection, and why the manuscript was never published and seemingly “lost” by Glidrose.

However, it later emerged that the original manuscript for Jenkins’ *Per Fine Ounce* had not been lost, as extracts, in fact, remained in the possession of Geoffrey’s son, David, who then gave his consent for the following two pages to be published from the original *Per Fine Ounce* novel, and for Peter Vollmer’s version to be published, which shares the same title and is written in the same style, taking its lead from the original manuscript and endorsed by the Jenkins Estate.

The author, Peter Vollmer, has removed any references to the Bond characters to differentiate this version from the Ian Fleming Publications, and hopes this version will further encourage the Ian Fleming Foundation to publish the original version of *Per Fine Ounce* as written by Geoffrey Jenkins, or to give the Jenkins estate the right to do so for James Bond readers around the world to decide for themselves whether the original version of *Per Fine Ounce* merited publication nearly 50 years ago.



## **Author's Note**

The next two pages are original extracts (pgs. 86 & 87) from the “missing” James Bond 007 novel PER FINE OUNCE by Geoffrey Jenkins (printed with full permission from the Jenkins family estate).

159

"Expensive powder-puff-- ~~£137~~ millions," said M.

WASN'T BIG ENOUGH TO KILL THE POUND, IT

Bond argued on. "This gas cylinder business was bound to be discovered. I say it was meant to be discovered so that we would start a wild-choose chase after an agent who is probably sitting safely in this moment in Moscow. The trail will be so cold now that it will be impossible to follow up."

"Out with it, 007," snapped M. "What are you driving at?"

"The South African gold flights," answered Bond slowly.

"Someone is trying to make us take our eyes from ~~them~~."

TITAN

At Bond's words, Sir Benjamin glanced uneasily round the room as if he was afraid someone might overhear.

M gave a short, explosive bark. "The gold flights outside the ~~100~~ Section, 007. What you say is nonsense, in the light of what is being done to ensure its safe arrival."

"And what is that?"

M paused for a moment, glancing at the financier, then he said abruptly. "The Americans are in on it, of course. Information from the CIA, who is responsible for the coverage. The flight goes from Luanda in Angola via Las Palmas to London.

The South Africans will provide fighter escorts as far as Luanda. After that the Sheckletons will home in on a chain of American and British nuclear subs waiting at 1,000-mile intervals.

~~any interference~~ The flight will keep tight radio touch with the sub ahead and the sub behind. Any interference--" he shrugged.

"They're all carrying surface to air missiles. Latest."

"Finger-on-the-bit stuff," murmured Bond.

PANAGLOSS  
CIVIL  
NAMES  
DR.  
AGATE  
CLEAY

"Long-range United States fighters will escort them from the Ascension Island base," added Sir Benjamin. "Likewise both south and north of Les Palmas."

"There'll only be one leg over the sea between Luanda and Ascension where they will not have a fighter screen," added M. "No, 007. This bullion broker business is not related to the gold flight."

Bond "You said, Sir Benjamin, that it would take a tap on the chin to send sterling for the count. Would you consider the loss of the gold flight to be that tap?"

The colour drained from the financier's face. "Yes," he replied. "But God forbid that it should be so. Not only for England's sake, but the West's."

M was impatient. "The two things are unrelated, 007. Go and find out who put these damn things in the flags."

Bond stood up, looking down from across the desk into the old sailor's face. "I'm sorry, sir."

M put down his pipe. "Sorry about what, 007?" The voice was ominous.

"In just over two months this department won't exist," he said. M As he did so, he regretted the pain he saw in the face of the man whom he admired above anyone he knew. "You recalled me because the Treasury wanted help. Fair enough. But do you think that you'll get anything more than an appreciative minute for ~~what~~ today's discovery? Do you really think they'll revive your department because of a couple of piddling things like soda-water syphon cylinders?"

## Preface

I remain in awe of those who have control in fulfilling their aspirations — this usually from a young age and already evident during the senior school years. This is reflected by those who devoted time to their studies and made the necessary sacrifices to attain their goals with the resultant excellent marks and acceptance to a tertiary education. Looking back, my scholarly career progressed in uncontrolled fits and starts, peppered with moments of outright brilliance offset by many others that are so shameful, that at the thought, I still cringe today. I can now only nostalgically think of those golden moments, of which there were surely many, that I let slip through my fingers.

I started reading prolifically from an early age, losing myself in John Buchanan, Elleston Trevor, Wilbur Smith, Ian Fleming and a near endless list of others. Each subsequent book hinting to me that I too needed to write something. But as the years went by, and I led a life filled with career-building, sports, various hobbies, then boating, and flying, there was never a dull moment and seemingly not a minute to spare either. Eventually, now in my later years, the desire became overwhelming, and I sat down and finally put pen to paper and wrote a book, which is, in itself, an achievement I'm proud of. The idea and story that came from it I thought good, but I was truly not prepared for what came after the actual writing. Suffice it to say that since then, I've written a few more!

At the time, a number of people inspired me, but in particular, Ron Payne, a literary agent in the USA, a novelist, and past war and political correspondent who had seen it all. He inspired me to write this novel, although I never precisely followed the storyline he proposed. However, I have included certain aspects and names he did suggest. Sadly, Ron Payne passed on a few years ago, but I will forever remain indebted to him.

The story takes place during a time of great change in South Africa, and I have relied extensively thereon for the background to my novel — the story itself is a work of fiction, as are the characters. While an effort was made to keep the actual historical

timeline as accurate as possible, slight creative liberties were taken and all obvious inaccuracies are mine.

I wish to express my gratitude to my wife Elaine, who I would continuously interrupt with the questions *give me another word for* or *please buy*, or *please pay* — all related to writing and publishing a novel. To Jacqui Corn-Uys, my editor who literally worked wonders with my stilted dialogue and German-influenced grammar; to my agent, Tom Cull, whose persistence, patience, and belief in me are '*par extraordinaire*'; and to my friend, George Carter, who would read my first drafts and produce reams of pencil-filled notes of discovered errors and sometimes hilarious inaccuracies. There are many more and to all, I give my heartfelt thanks.

## Prologue

Shrouded in the utmost secrecy, the mission was planned to keep pace with the demarcation between night and day as it rushed its way westwards. The high-altitude spy plane was in a race with the rotation of the earth and would attempt to close in on its targets out of the darkness of the approaching night sky.

The aircraft had departed the U.S. Indian Ocean rapid deployment military base and climbed swiftly to seventy-five thousand feet, where it levelled off and accelerated to its cruising speed of Mach 1.6. It flew due west from the island of Diego Garcia, the largest of sixty small islands comprising the Chagos Archipelago, a thousand miles to the south of India.

It passed over the Seychelles, remaining well out over the Indian Ocean detouring north of the huge island of Madagascar. With Madagascar behind, it changed course southwest over the Mozambique Channel, where it descended to forty thousand feet to rendezvous and refuel.

Sitting in the tail of the TriStar, the fuel-boom operator stared intently into the night sky looking for the expected reconnaissance plane.

Suddenly, the operator's earphones crackled. "Boomer-2, Boomer-2, this is Shadow-1 approaching. We are a thousand feet behind you and fifty feet below your current altitude."

Against the black velvet of the night sky, the boom operator seated in the tail of the U.S. Air Force Lockheed TriStar K. Mk.1 tanker could not see the Blackbird as it slowly approached. The recon aircraft's matt fuselage and wings merged with the night sky, the still-secret matt black titanium, and carbon-fibre skin of the hypersonic SR71 designed to absorb most light and all radar waves, rendering it invisible against the dark backdrop. However, the hypersonic spy plane's proximity radarscope clearly revealed the tanker.

The operator jerked upright in his seat, immediately fully attentive, and began to flick various switches on his small instrument panel. Suddenly, a brilliant cone of light bored through the darkness from below the tanker's tail, illuminating the dark shape that approached. Still, the reconnaissance aircraft was difficult to see as it

closed to about a hundred and fifty feet, where it slowed to match the tanker's speed of almost 500 m.p.h. In the cold night air, now free of the usual daytime tropical turbulence, the two aircraft were vague shapes against the stars, seemingly stationary and joined by some invisible force.

With the slightest of movements of a small joystick, the operator guided the long refuelling boom into the refuelling slot above the recon aircraft's cockpit. He felt a slight shudder as the connection locked.

"Contact... coupling confirmed. Lights green — commence pumping," the Blackbird pilot said.

No small talk ensued. The black ops aircrews who flew the SR71 and U2 high-altitude reconnaissance aircraft never said more than was absolutely necessary. They were not inclined to friendly banter and were all business, cocooned in their airtight suits and full-face helmets. They appeared to live in a world of their own.

The operator was a skilled technician who knew his job. He activated the high-speed electric pumps and hundreds of gallons of jet fuel swiftly flowed through the boom into the large wing tanks of the recon aircraft, filling them in mere minutes as the spy plane kept meticulous station behind the air-tanker.

The moment the tanks were full, the boom operator disengaged and retracted the flying boom. Briefly, a vaporised cloud of fuel appeared, only to be instantly swept back over the spy plane's fuselage. A moment later, the Blackbird started to fall behind. When well clear of the tanker, the commander advanced the throttles of the two turbojet engines to full power, leaving a string of pale-blue transparent doughnut rings of fire strung out behind each engine as the afterburners were ignited. The aircraft's nose lifted towards the stars as it climbed, disappearing rapidly from view.

With Mozambique now in sight, it turned west towards the country and soon crossed the coastline, heading for the border with South Africa.

The spy plane chased the setting sun before it, slowly gaining on the day-night separation as the aircraft overtook the speed of the Earth's rotation. The plan was to penetrate South Africa just before the close of day, the aircraft approaching out of the fading darkness from the east, making both the plane and any possible contrail from the aircraft's engines difficult to detect.

The spy plane crossed Mozambique and entered South African airspace, heading towards the industrial complex of the Witwatersrand. Its mission was to photograph the nuclear research facility at Pelindaba, constructed among the foothills of the

Magaliesberg Mountains on the outskirts of Pretoria, the nation's capital. From there it would continue westwards towards Vastrap, an arid flat area measuring thousands of square miles on the fringes of the Kalahari Desert. The previous inhabitants had long been displaced, the area now a restricted military training site and weapons range where the South African government tested its latest weaponry far from prying eyes. It was also here that the CIA believed the South African Atomic Energy Board, together with the South African Defence Force, was sinking a vertical shaft deep into the desert to be used to carry out an underground atomic test blast. South Africa had yet to test-fire any nuclear armaments on land, something scientists considered essential before the development of these weapons could be deemed a success. British Intelligence had it that a test firing was due to be carried out with South Africa's secret partners, the Israelis, which of course both countries vehemently denied. Besides, the South African and Israeli governments were not signatories to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

US Intelligence had been informed by reliable sources that the Israelis and South Africans had cooperated in the development of a gun-type firing device required to detonate a weapons-grade uranium core. They had also learned that the South Africans proposed to arm Israeli Jericho-2 missiles with nuclear warheads. It was rumoured other bombs were also being designed, to be delivered by high-altitude English Electric Canberra bombers or Blackburn Buccaneers, along with others that would be fitted to the RSA-3 medium-range ballistic missiles developed in South Africa.

In recent years, the onslaught against the South African apartheid regime had gained momentum, and the country now faced threats on more than one front as it took on several enemies. These terrorist groups, or freedom fighters as they preferred to be called, were financed and armed by the Russians and Chinese. In the north, on the border of South West Africa (now Namibia) and Angola, Black guerrilla movements backed by Cuban Communist forces threatened to overrun the country.

With its apartheid policy, South Africa was a pariah nation, and Western countries faced the choice of which was the lesser evil — a nuclear-armed pro-Western South Africa, hated and ostracised by the world, or a country overrun by Black and Cuban forces who subscribed to Communist ideology. Neither idea was pleasant.

South Africa had built a sophisticated radar network, which monitored and controlled its northern borders and was supported by a ring of airfields on which

French Mirage F1 and IIIc interceptor aircraft stood ready to scramble at a moment's notice.

However, for some inexplicable reason, no interception had been ordered against the intruder that now streaked across the southern skies at sixty-thousand feet. The SR71 Blackbird's warning systems remained silent. Were the South African forces even aware of the high-altitude intruder? It did not seem so.

The plane flew over Pelindaba, its instruments registering the complex as a source of atomic radiation. It was generally known that the South Africans had two pilot nuclear reactors for research and *peaceful* use, but it was rumoured that the newly developed nuclear bombs were assembled and stored here. The Blackbird's high-definition cameras took hundreds of photographs, many in infrared. The aircraft then slightly adjusted its course for Vastrap, a new military base in the Kalahari Desert. It was here, far from civilisation, that high-resolution photographs would reveal that a mineshaft was being sunk, the workings surrounded by military vehicles and temporary buildings.

Finally, the aircraft turned south and within minutes was flying high over its ultimate target, a small town not yet revealed on any map. At their briefing, the crew had been told by the chief of the CIA's South Africa desk that this was a mining town in the middle of the Kalahari Desert. It was also said that the town had sprung up virtually overnight. Even from this altitude, a runway of unusual length was clearly discernible. Satellite surveillance had put its length at ten-thousand feet, sufficient to accommodate the biggest aircraft in the world. What purpose then could this possibly serve in a sparsely inhabited desert? It was now up to the CIA to decipher these photographs and come up with an answer to this question.

Its covert task now finished, the spy plane sped high over the Namib Desert towards the Atlantic Ocean, where it rendezvoused three times with U.S. refuelling tankers before it finally entered United States airspace.

Mission complete.

## Chapter One

It was a miserable morning. Low cloud rolled in from the west and cloaked the city of London in a drab ominous grey, streaked with dark bands, heralding rain. Cars drove with their lights on and pedestrians scurried along the pavements with their umbrellas handy, clearly expecting the deluge to start at any moment.

The black London cab drew up alongside the kerb. A tall man in his late thirties alighted, fished in his back pocket, and withdrew a folded clip of banknotes. He peeled off a few and thrust them at the driver. He looked slightly out of place among the other people on the street, many of whom were in black pinstripe suits, one or two still wearing bowler hats. He appeared more up to date — his Saville Row tailored suit was of modern cut with slim-fit trousers, though he did not wear the usual waistcoat. The collar of his light-blue shirt was buttoned down and his Gordonstoun Old Boy's tie swung free. A fawn mackintosh was draped over his forearm from which a dark umbrella also swung. He glanced down to check the shine on his expensive black slip-on moccasins. This was no city executive employed by a bank or firm of stockbrokers. Yes, perhaps the tie did reveal some loyalty to his past — but, in truth, a misconception as he only wore it because he liked its design. He wasn't tied to his past in any way; he was a modern man who saw little value in things old.

The cab had drawn up outside the fortress-like SIS building at 85 Albert Embankment in Vauxhall Cross, London. Its drab, slightly sooty appearance belied the building's importance as the headquarters of the SIS, more commonly known as MI6.

He entered through the main access area and approached the battery of arched stiles and x-ray boxes with his security access card in hand. All personnel and visitors, whether entering the complex from the underground parking or through the main entrance, had to endure this ritual; there were no exceptions.

A Regimental Sergeant-Major, one of the many army and civilian personnel in attendance approached him, smiled in recognition, and saluted smartly.

“Good morning, Commander,” he said.

“Good to see you again, Jim,” Peace said and grinned in return. “You know it should actually be Mr Peace. Goodness, we don’t want to remind eavesdroppers of my rank, do we? This is an intelligence establishment. VA would have a bloody fit!” It was obvious this was said in jest, though there was a hint of gravity in the man’s deep voice. “Bloody ridiculous, really, they probably all know who I am by now anyway.” He looked around as if the enemy could be seen in the passing crowd. Both men laughed.

The RSM and Peace had known each other for years and these short conversations, which usually took place after Peace was off on some clandestine mission, had become a ritual between the two of them. The RSM, a battle-hardened veteran, had participated in his own fair share of black ops and knew where Peace fitted within MI6. The young man also made sure he always exchanged a few words with the RSM.

“Well, in that case, tell me, Guv, how was the holiday?” the RSM asked. The same scene was repeated every time the Commander returned from a mission, with a few comments about his supposed sexual conquests before he entered the precincts.

The young man’s eyes flashed, the corners crinkling. “Smashing, as our chaps would put it. Jim, believe me — there’s nothing like those hot-blooded Brazilian women. My God, man, those tangas! But then again, I only looked — never had time to test the water.”

Peace stood six foot two inches tall, his sandy hair parted on one side, cut short back and sides and shaped by a West End barber. Piercing silver-grey eyes with laugh lines radiating from the corners were set in a chiselled face, his features revealing nothing soft, while under his suit his body was lean and muscled. When he laughed, he revealed a set of straight perfect teeth, with no indication he had recently undergone some major dental work paid for by the British Crown. Chipped teeth, smashed jaws, broken bones and the occasional bullet or knife wound were accepted injuries — merely an occupational hazard.

“How is our illustrious leader, Sir John, this morning?” Peace enquired.

The sergeant rolled his eyes in mock horror. “Awful, Guv, but that’s not unusual. I was told by Sir John’s office to speed up your arrival were I to see you. The Vice Admiral has some important bigwigs with him. I recognised the Governor of the bank, would you believe.”

The young man frowned.

“That’s ominous. Well, I best hurry. I’ll see you later.”

He passed through the security checkpoint, where he looked into the iris-recognition device and then had every personal item in his possession scanned. This done, he strode towards the bank of elevators.

Many might expect the Section Chief, in recognition of his exalted position, to be accommodated in an office near the top floor, overlooking the Thames. However, Vice Admiral Sir John Whitehead, generally referred to as VA when not in his presence, would have none of this. Instead, he and his staff were housed in a lower basement that never saw the light of day, but this was more than made up for by the fancy interior décor which made it appear like just another floor. Other than the absence of sunlight, there was no indication the walls were constructed from solid reinforced concrete, or that there were no apertures to accommodate windows, the lack of which was deftly concealed behind drapes, panelling and paintings. Air was circulated through ducts in the ceiling at a constant 20°C. The furnishings were modern and intended to create a relaxed atmosphere, further enhanced by the deep carpets and recessed lighting.

Peace continued to the end of the corridor. Along the way he passed through a general office and an open-plan area with a dozen or so desks separated by shoulder-high room dividers, giving the occupants at their desks a small degree of privacy — a layout cribbed from the Americans. He was greeted by those at the desks who noticed him.

Sir John preferred the confines of the basement which prevented any long-range eavesdropping with sophisticated acoustic equipment, while the sole entrance via the elevators and the emergency stairway made any unauthorised entry impossible. He had a phobia about security, being forever aware of the embarrassment that Burgess and other Soviet spies had heaped on the British Intelligence Services — a fact that had never been forgotten by their American allies.

Peace entered a door marked *Vice Admiral Sir John Whitehead*, and smiled at the middle-aged woman seated behind her desk.

“Geoffrey, what a pleasant surprise,” Jenny Damsby said with a smile. “Need I tell you that Sir John is not happy?” she added, her way of telling him that he was late.

“Really?” Peace replied, raising his eyebrows. He had long since immunised himself against his boss’s mood swings.

“Don’t let him hear you, he has — ”

This was interrupted by a loud crackle from the intercom on her desk.

“No chit-chat, please. Send him in immediately.”

Peace rolled his eyes, and she smiled at him, shrugging her shoulders.

“He’s inclined to eavesdrop, isn’t he?” Peace murmured.

Miss Damsby’s eyes widened in alarm and she brought her finger to her lips, emitting a faint *shhhh*. She was obviously terrified that Sir John could hear them.

Peace was well aware she knew of his private and professional exploits. MI6 was paranoid when it came to the lives and doings of its top operatives and staff. How many times had she not sent him a bottle of Glenfiddich, courtesy of Sir John, to some hospital where he was recuperating? Peace also knew that she realised he and the VA were forever at a game of one-upmanship to which neither would ever admit. On occasion, Peace would refer to the VA as a member of the Y-front brigade, emphasising that he himself wore skants.

“Bunch of bloody pansies, the Y-fronts,” he had once said. He was ex-SAS and would have been slighted were anyone to cast him in the same mould as those known as the *Cambridge Five*, who were Soviet spies and an embarrassment to the British Intelligence Services. Their legacy seemed destined to stay around, since the Soviets had even recently commemorated Kim Philby on a Soviet postage stamp!

Leaving his mackintosh and umbrella hanging from the hat rack in the corner, Peace opened the door and strode into Sir John’s office. Here he was surprised to see other occupants in the room seated around the small conference table.

“Come in, Peace. You’re late,” the Vice Admiral barked. “I’m sure you know the others, but let me introduce you just in case. There’s no need to stand on formality. Sit, we have serious matters to discuss.”

He’d received no welcoming smile, but he wasn’t surprised. VA, in his opinion, was an emotionless mental bully. How could he be late? He had just returned from holiday, after all.

It was 9:08 a.m. Hell, that wasn’t late! This was London!

Sir John went on with the introductions. Peace had immediately recognised the Governor of the Bank of England, Sir Ian Douglas; unmistakable with his straight combed-back white hair, and Thomas Fulton, the Exchequer’s assistant and right-hand man. *What the hell is going on?* This looked extremely serious.

Sir John studied Peace carefully. “Brazil seems to have agreed with you,” he finally remarked. “Well, you’ll probably be off to a land of sunshine soon again, but first I need to tell you a rather involved story. Listen carefully, Commander.”

Sir John nodded at the Governor and Sir Ian cleared his throat.

“Commander, for all intents and purposes, and certainly as far as the rest of the world is concerned, it appears that we have distanced ourselves from the South African government because of their abhorrent apartheid policy. Actually, this is no more than a façade. In reality, we are still close — the Communists remain a common enemy. The South Africans are the biggest gold producers in the world, the world’s largest supplier of strategic metals, and the most powerful country on the African continent. The Western world also needs them to protect the sea route around the tip of southern Africa. Need I say more?”

“You could say we still need each other for a good number of reasons,” the Exchequer’s man interposed, the only representative of the elected government present.

The Governor frowned at Fulton as he continued. “To the problem. A rather large bullion shipment en route to us from South Africa has been hijacked. In physical terms, this was eight tons of gold ingots. Unbelievable, isn’t it?”

When was gold ever expressed in terms of tons? Peace did a quick mental calculation: that was roughly £21,000,000 at the current gold price.

“How were the bullion containers hijacked?” he asked.

“Well, that’s the point. They arrived at their destination at London Heathrow, but when the containers were opened, they contained only lead bars. The containers were the original steel ones from the gold refinery in Germiston, South Africa. Of course, we’ve carried out an extensive investigation together with the Gold Branch of the South African Police. I should add that the Gold Branch is staffed by the very best the South African Police has to offer. Those chaps know what they’re doing, in particular a Mr Desmond Carruthers, a Colonel who held the rank of Chief Superintendent when he was with Scotland Yard. Sadly, he was made an offer he could not ignore by the South Africans a few years ago, if you know what I mean. Putting it bluntly, they stole him. However, his presence has ensured good cooperation. Fortunately, he still has some loyalty to the Crown,” the Governor said smugly.

Sir John intervened. “Of course, Peace, everything is still under wraps. The disappearance has not been leaked to anyone; neither Fleet Street nor any other

international news agencies have an inkling of what has happened. We want to keep it that way. The South African Gold Branch is playing the same game. A loss of this dimension would impact heavily on the mining sector of the stock market, here and in South Africa. This would not bode well. Also, no one has come forward to take responsibility.”

Sir Ian nodded in agreement before continuing.

“Naturally, we’re in constant communication with South Africa. To add to this, a number of other disturbing events have taken place during the last few months. An abnormally high number of gold shares on the Johannesburg and London Stock Exchange have changed hands. Whether this is merely business as usual has been impossible to establish. The current political situation in South Africa, as you can well imagine, has had a profound influence on South African shares quoted on both the London and Johannesburg Stock Exchanges.”

Sir Ian brought his cup to his lips and sipped. He continued, “There are simply too many front companies and investment houses involved. During the past year or so, the gold mines have been plagued by wildcat strikes and other unexplainable disruptions — explosions, mechanical breakdowns, a whole series of incidents; certainly a good many more than is usual. Nobody seems to know whether this is subtle sabotage by the underground Black Nationalist movements, or no more than a spate of unusual events. Some have even suggested that these disruptions have been instigated from within in order to manipulate the share price.” Sir Ian smiled. “I never trust stockbrokers. As you can imagine, this has driven the share prices down, with many shareholders disposing of their shares before they plunge further. There are always ready buyers in the wings — there still are, and they are holding the price artificially high as they take up these shares, otherwise, prices would have fallen appreciably more.”

“How much do you know about the gold industry?” VA asked Peace.

“Not much, I’m not interested in the stock market. I’ve never been a gambling man and buying shares is no more than gambling, is it not? I leave it to my brokers to do any investing; they know a lot more than I do.”

A look of disdain crossed the Vice Admiral’s face, clearly not happy with Peace’s reply. Sir John’s love for the tables was no secret among his staff.

Peace noticed VA’s expression. *He thinks I’m an insolent bastard trying to upstage or embarrass him.*

Sir John indicated to Sir Ian that he should continue.

“Well, let me tell you this — the bulk of the gold industry in South Africa is controlled by five large mining houses. The one that interests us is an Afrikaner group called Afrikaner Goudeiendomme — Gold Properties, if you want a translation. It’s chaired by Anton Van Rhyn. He’s a late arrival in the industry, but he’s amassed a colossal fortune in a relatively short period. He’s said to be brilliant, ruthless and an ardent Afrikaner nationalist. He was a firebrand when still young, a follower of the Afrikaner diehards who were sympathetic towards the Nazis and who took over the government from General Smuts in ’48. Like many other young Afrikaners, he joined the Afrikaner national youth movement a few years after Smuts’ downfall in 1948. He has two daughters, who were or are still both at Oxford. His elder daughter is Janet Van Rhyn and, like her father, is said to be ultra-right-wing. Apparently, she dislikes the Blacks intensely. She’s never married. She’s also on the board of Afrikaner Goudeiendomme. Her mother, Van Rhyn’s first wife, died of cancer and he remarried. He later wedded Lady Jocelyn Langton — ring a bell? She has a daughter, Margaret, whom Van Rhyn adopted; she’s now known as Margaret Langton-Van Rhyn.”

Peace arched his eyebrows. “Lady Jocelyn Langton? Yes, I do recall her — did she not, even before her husband’s death, openly consort with this Van Rhyn chap, causing a scandal? I hear she’s quite a bombshell, if you know what I mean?”

VA frowned at Peace’s description.

*The bastard thinks I’ve no subtlety whatsoever*, Peace thought, as Sir John made no effort to hide his disdain.

For a moment, Peace’s directness appeared to have also embarrassed Fulton.

“Oh well... yes, you could say that... you’re right. Anyway, she and Van Rhyn married three years ago. Her inherited fortune, combined with his, probably places them among those whose wealth borders on the astronomical. Need I say more?” Fulton said, and then continued, “We believe Van Rhyn is behind the manipulations of the gold shares, particularly as these relate to the five large mining houses. In this, he is supported by Lady Jocelyn. They’re both outspoken about our government and the manner in which we have mismanaged our African mining interests, allowing them to be nationalised with little compensation for the original shareholders. Naturally, they’re also most unhappy about the alacrity with which we’ve granted independence to our various colonies in Africa. If I were to wear an industrialist’s hat, I would have to concede that they may have a point. They have tremendous support

from right-wing quarters.” He shook his head in mock disbelief. “Believe me, there is no shortage of right-wing fanatics out there.”

Sir John, who had attentively leaned forward in his chair, sighed again and leaned back. All sat in silence, digesting the information.

“You’ve told me little of the gold hijack. Any idea how this was pulled off?” Peace asked. Sir Ian’s faint smile vanished and his face was serious again.

“Unbeknownst to many, Afrikaner Goudeiendomme holds a majority shareholding in the gold refining industry in South Africa. That would be Consortium Gold Refiners Limited. Most gold mined in the country passes through Consortium; they are the largest gold refiners in the world. This shipment was supposedly taken directly from their premises on the outskirts of Johannesburg, in proper bullion containers, to Jan Smuts Airport, a few miles away. However, we have no doubt that the gold never left the refinery. Clearly, this was an inside job, though at this stage, this remains speculation. Mr Van Rhyn is being obstructive and prefers to carry out his own internal investigation. I do not need to tell you that he is under tremendous pressure from the South African government. They’re not all diehard fanatics, and our friend is certainly not liked by the new enlightened supporters of President de Klerk. However, there’s a rumour, it really being nothing more than a whisper, and without any substantiation at all as of now.”

Sir John leaned forward in his chair and rested his elbows on the armrests, his hands clasped in front of him. He silently appraised Peace for a few seconds. Peace knew that another surprise was coming.

VA continued, “It is said that a subversive Afrikaner movement — ultra-right-wing of course, is behind this. The most tantalising piece of information is that Van Rhyn of Goudeiendomme is involved. Remember, this is just speculation but good to bear in mind.”

Peace remained silent but pursed his lips and continued to stare at VA whose expression now became particularly sombre as he said, “And now for the really bad news. Several of us believe the South Africans have their hands on a neutron bomb. A bloody enhanced radiation weapon, or ERW as it’s referred to. It’s not capable of the structural damage an ordinary nuclear bomb can inflict, although its explosive yield is still in the kiloton range. It’s the radiation release that’s the real killer — armour, dugouts, and so forth, aren’t able to protect the occupants. What it does is destroy life indiscriminately by intense radiation. It permeates through everything.”

He paused to light a cigarette.

“The Russians have done their utmost to hush things up, but we have reason to believe that a bomb has gone missing from their previous Strategic Rocket Forces, from a nuclear base in the Ukraine. It may well have found its way to South Africa. We know it’s not part of the South African nuclear arsenal, around which the strictest of security is maintained. As you know, their nuclear weapons are now in the process of being decommissioned. We think Van Rhyn has it, along with four missing South African nuclear bombs, all stashed in Copperton.” He tapped a photograph on the table as if to lend significance to his statement.

“Intelligence sources have revealed that South Africa never disclosed the correct number of bombs it had, but left all with the impression that those being decommissioned were the total number they possess. However, this was not so. Ultra-right factions in the highest echelons of the military spirited these away in some ingenious manner. The bombs simply disappeared. Well, can you imagine the embarrassment to the South African government? The disappearance of the four bombs is still a secret known to very few.”

Sir John added a few more aerial surveillance photographs to those on the table and pushed these across towards Peace.

“That’s Copperton.” He tapped one of the large prints with a fingernail. “Clearly, these photographs were taken by a high-flying aircraft.”

Peace was aware of the American reconnaissance flights over South Africa.

Sir John continued, “We believe this is Van Rhyn’s hideaway, but more of this later. We have little to substantiate this tale, though it definitely demands investigation. That’s where you come in.”

“What about the gold bullion theft and Van Rhyn?” Peace asked.

Sir John pulled a face as he pondered the question for a moment. “I don’t know... we still know too little, but keep your eyes open. If we hear more, you’ll be informed immediately. Rather concentrate on Copperton for now,” he replied.

Peace had the feeling that he’d soon be leaving on the sunny trip VA had alluded to.

## Chapter Two

“Peace, we’re giving you a new identity. You will be taking on the role of Lord Digby Brentwood.” The Vice Admiral spoke bluntly, indicating that the subject was not debatable.

Peace jerked his head up and stared at his boss.

“Lord Digby Brentwood! Good God, the man lost his marbles years ago! Nobody even knows what he looks like, he’s been hiding himself on his *estado* in Paraguay for so long. He’s a bloody raving fanatic. He never consorts with the coloured locals and only employs Whites on his plantations. What’s more, he gives support to extreme right-wing groups in this country! Hell, why would I want to take on his identity? He’s a bloody fascist! God, he probably has a few ex-Nazis in his employ — you know, the worst kind.”

“You’ve hit the nail on the head — I agree,” Sir John replied. “The whole point of you impersonating him is so you can infiltrate Van Rhyn and his organisation. Hopefully, they’ll see you as one of them; white supremacy and all that.”

*What the hell does that mean?* Peace wondered, astounded by this unexpected proposition. “What about the real Lord Digby? Won’t he have something to say?”

The Vice Admiral chuckled. “Strangely enough, the recluse officially left his massive rancho on a protracted world cruise, not to be seen or heard of for at least six months. He is, in fact, a guest of Her Majesty’s government, although somewhat reluctantly, I might add.”

Again, Peace found himself wondering what the hell *that* was supposed to mean.

“What about being recognised?”

Sir John *harrumphed*, and then smiled.

“Unlikely. Actually, the man vaguely resembles you. Maybe somewhat older, but he is a fitness fanatic and doesn’t look his age. He’s blond, but our chaps will sort out your looks. You needn’t resemble him closely; nobody but his most trusted servants know what he looks like, and you’ll not be going anywhere near South America. Years back, while in the army, the man had a horrendous accident requiring surgery. His appearance is now different, and few people have actually seen how different.

You won't be seeing his fascist cronies either; they'll remain no more than an association. You'll be in South Africa."

*Clearly the bugger's happy with the arrangements he's made!*

"Who the hell thought this lark up?" he asked, knowing it had to be a VA tactic. The remark certainly had the desired effect; it wiped the smile off the Vice Admiral's face. Peace grinned when he saw his boss flinch. The VA chose not to respond.

"Your first job is to make contact with Van Rhyn," said Fulton. "We can't prescribe how you should do this, but we believe you should target the daughters. Lord Digby is said to be a very wealthy man."

Sir John chuckled. "Peace, the expenditure revealed by your expense account over the years indicates that you were born to play the part. You should enjoy this. However, your supposed wealth alone won't attract these women. In fact, you'll have to be a little more ingenious. Also, Brentwood has, let's say, a penchant for loose women, which shouldn't be difficult for you to emulate."

*Bastard*, Peace thought, but ignored the sarcastic statement; this was not the time to get into a verbal wrangle with his boss. Inevitably, the man would pull rank.

"How am I to make this unexpected public appearance?"

"Lord Digby has maintained his Military and Naval Club membership in St. James'. He was once a captain in the Royal Fusiliers, and when in London still visits his club. It assures him a degree of seclusion, as club members and staff are very sensitive to their fellow members' needs, and loose talk about fellow members is not tolerated. That's where you will discreetly enter the public limelight. The club has reciprocal arrangements with the Rand Club in Johannesburg, apparently the haunt of most gold mine magnates in South Africa. It's extremely exclusive."

Sir John took a sip of his tea.

"South Africa is in a state of disarray, what with the wave of enlightenment this de Klerk fellow has brought with him. Unbanning the ANC, releasing Nelson Mandela, and with the majority of Whites voting overwhelmingly in favour of free and fair elections. Contrary to general belief, most everyday Afrikaners are peace-loving people. Yes, they're afraid of the Blacks, not as individuals, but of their numbers — *die swart gevaar*<sup>1</sup>." Sir John's attempt at an Afrikaans pronunciation was atrocious

---

<sup>1</sup> The black peril — an Afrikaans reference to the overwhelming number of Blacks in the country who are by far in the majority

---

even to the untrained ear. Luckily Peace had worked amongst these accents before. He permitted himself to smile, but listened intently.

“They believe they’ll eventually be overwhelmed by the sheer weight of numbers and will be side-lined. It’s the fanatics who need watching. That includes some of their politicians, those out-and-out supremacists, a few in the top brass in the military, a smattering of industrialists, and of course, our friend Van Rhyn.”

There was a pause.

“Here’s another shocker. We all know the South Africans have developed the bomb, as have the Israelis; in fact, this appears to have been a combined project. They’ve manufactured several of these, but no one knows how many. With the cauldron rapidly approaching a boil, we’re wondering to ourselves, as are the Americans, what’s going to happen to the bombs? Imagine if the fanatics got hold of these — they could hold the world to ransom! They’ve also developed chemical weapons; they’re even assisting Saddam Hussein in this field in order to ensure that South Africa’s oil imports from Iraq will never be embargoed.

“Intelligence has it, from what source I don’t know, that Van Rhyn has established his own secret base. He proposes to launch strikes at various key targets in the event of de Klerk handing over the government to Black majority rule. The man even had the audacity to state publicly that this will not happen in his lifetime. He’s even set up a private aircraft museum, and guess what — he has retired Air Force aircraft that are able to deliver nuclear bombs, all in flying condition and maintained at considerable expense. Can you imagine the man’s bargaining power if he has the bomb?

“Furthermore, their RSA-3 is an orbital missile capable of carrying an explosive to anywhere on this planet. Fortunately, we don’t believe they have the technology to manufacture a nuclear weapon light enough to be carried by this missile. But believe me, the South Africans do not lack ingenuity; they’ll overcome this problem soon enough!”

Peace was dumbstruck at hearing this information. With that kind of influence behind them, the fanatics could start a full-blown war. *Jesus, intercontinental missiles with nuclear warheads!*

Sir John’s features softened for a moment.

“Geoffrey, I’m sorry I can’t give you more, but we don’t know much more than what I’ve just told you. Also, we haven’t yet decided quite how you should proceed.

This information and the operation are highly confidential, and the more people we throw at it, the leakier it becomes.” He paused for a moment.

“You’re on a fact-finding mission, you’re not being sent to intervene. Have you got that? I’m not giving you backup at this stage. Well, not yet, but I’m working on something that could add to your cover. I’ve a female agent. She’ll help you blend in; you know what I mean. She knows the country well. In fact, she grew up there.”

“The last woman you sent got killed!” Peace exclaimed.

“I know. I’m afraid that’s one of the risks.” Sir John shrugged.

“I’ve a conscience, although you may not believe it,” Peace said, clearly unhappy with this arrangement.

VA ignored his comment.

“You are to use the usual *modus operandi* when approaching any of our embassies around the world, and you’ll be given immediate assistance. If suspicions are raised regarding your identity, we’ll see that you get help. We need to know what their grand plan is, Geoffrey.” He said this in a kinder tone now, but still with sufficient emphasis to make his intention clear.

Peace nodded. Sir John’s use of his first name was not lost on him. The old man was concerned. He just hoped this wasn’t going to turn out to be a suicide mission.

## Chapter Three

More than three weeks had passed since the meeting in Sir John's office.

Peace, in the guise of Lord Digby, had used the reciprocal arrangements between the Military and Naval Club in London and the Rand Club in Johannesburg to stay overnight at the exclusive Johannesburg club for two days, after which he moved into a small estate on the fringes of Johannesburg's northern suburbs. The grounds were huge, affording him absolute privacy. Little did anyone know, but it was actually a British Intelligence safe house.

By this time, he had become a familiar figure at the Club through frequenting it daily. As was expected within its hallowed walls, his arrival was without fanfare. However, word soon got around that he was on a fact-finding mission looking for investment opportunities and was particularly interested in the gold mining sector. The story was that he wanted a stake in the industry during this time of political turmoil when share prices were soundly depressed, as this would ensure him a handsome return. Furthermore, it was rumoured he believed that the Afrikaner would not simply allow the country to be handed to the Black majority without safeguards to ensure that the Whites remained the champions of industry and commerce for a long while to come.

Peace's chauffeured Mercedes 500SE drew up outside the porte-cochère entrance to the club in the heart of the business centre of the city; the imposing multi-storey building taking up a large portion of a Johannesburg city block. The doorman opened the car's rear door for him.

"Good day, Lord Digby," the doorman greeted him quietly. Peace nodded.

It was already seven in the evening, the summer sun close to setting and the city centre empty of traffic. The usual afternoon thunderstorm had come and gone, the streets were still wet and glistening in the fading light and the air smelling clean and fresh. Already the cordoned-off area of private parking in front of the Club was lined with cars, the chauffeurs congregating in small groups smoking and chatting, their owners already within, having their first evening drink.

Peace's pinstripe suit, black brogue shoes and snow-white shirt were enhanced by a silver-blue tie. He had dispensed with the waistcoat — these were not fashionable in South Africa, which pleased him immensely. He detested them.

The foyer was dominated by a huge carpeted staircase to the next floor, being wide enough to accommodate rush-hour traffic on the London Underground. He ascended the stairs.

Peace was pleased with himself. He had slipped into his new role easily, deftly handling the surprise at his sudden emergence into public life. He hoped to create the impression that although he may abhor the public and was a loner, he had no alternative but to visit the country in person, in order to establish first-hand what developments were taking place there if he were to make the investments he proposed. He needed to be accepted as a frequent visitor and his arrival not unexpected. Already, during previous visits to the club, he had been drawn into conversation by one or two of the members, clearly curious about him, his reputation as an ultra-right-winger preceding him. Since Van Rhyn visited the club when in the city to rub shoulders with his peers, the idea was to bump into him and be acknowledged as one of them.

Peace recognised the man immediately. Van Rhyn was sitting in a leather chair next to a large mahogany coffee table, a glass of what had to be very old Cape brandy next to him. He looked up and lowered the copy of the *Financial Mail* he was reading as Peace entered. This surprised Peace. The newspaper was definitely not right-wing but considered liberal. In the flesh, he appeared larger than in the photographs. He was tall; it was hard to tell when sitting, but he guessed at least six foot three, with a barrel chest that strained slightly against his pristine white, monogrammed shirt. His maroon silk tie was neatly knotted. His hair was dark with streaks of grey, cut short against his scalp and his ears were close against his head.

Peace took a chair at a coffee table no more than ten feet away from him. Van Rhyn glanced up briefly and then returned to his paper; he made no attempt at a greeting. Peace had an impression of eyes that were almost black and unfathomable. A thin moustache covered thin lips, and his narrow aristocratic face had high cheekbones atop a strong jaw.

A steward approached.

“Good evening, Lord Digby. A pleasure to see you again. Is there anything I can get you?”

Van Rhyn swung his head up and gave Peace an appraising look, a touch of amusement on his face.

“A single malt whisky with ice — Glenfiddich?” Peace asked the steward.

“I’ve got it, Lord Digby,” the steward replied, keen to please. Lord Digby’s tips were known to be more than generous.

“That’s fine. Thank you.”

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Van Rhyn looking at him.

“I’ve no intention of being presumptuous, but surely not *the* Lord Digby Brentwood?” Van Rhyn asked, his eyebrows lifted.

Peace smiled. “Unfortunately, the one and only. Please keep that between us.” Van Rhyn rose, his hand outstretched.

“Certainly, no word will pass my lips. I’m truly glad to meet you. I’m Anton Van Rhyn, chairman of Afrikaner Goudeiendomme. I had heard you were in town — you can imagine my surprise! It is said you shun publicity and the public. It is, therefore, indeed a pleasure to meet you in person, Lord Digby. From what the rumours say, it seems we share the same political sentiments.”

Peace withdrew his hand from the huge fist.

“Of course, and I have heard of you. Your country and its politics currently dominate the English tabloids. I’ve found your utterances on the proposed handing over of this marvellous country to the Blacks interesting. I must say, you express my views entirely.” Peace gave him a conspiratorial smile.

“I’m glad to hear that,” Van Rhyn replied, looking intently into Peace’s eyes as if seeking to read his thoughts. Seemingly satisfied, he continued. “There aren’t many who’d openly side with me. It seems we’re a dying breed. I believe some were born to lead and others to serve. As I recall, you said something similar in the past. Who would have ever believed that we’d succumb to the pressures of the world, with the British leading the charge for enlightenment? Would you care to join me?”

Peace took the proffered chair at Van Rhyn’s table. He was pleased with developments, never having thought he’d be able to meet his quarry so easily. *The man may be an Afrikaner, but his English is impeccable.* This was often the case where the sons of successful Afrikaners had been sent to English-speaking private schools. The Afrikaners were a resilient breed, staunch Calvinists with a clear distinction between right and wrong, and champions of industry. They were also very pragmatic and understood the benefits of an English-speaking education for their children.

“I’m honoured. Who could better advise me on investments related to the gold mining industry in South Africa?” Peace said, while thinking to himself, *thank God for Englishmen and their damn men’s clubs.* He briefly lifted his eyes to the ceiling — the good Lord certainly did work in mysterious ways. Hopefully, the same Lord would also look after him.

## Chapter Four

Over the next few weeks, Peace and Van Rhyn met on a few occasions. These all seemed to be chance meetings, and all confined to the Rand Club.

Peace was impatient and found the intervals between their meetings tiresome but doggedly endured them, hoping for at least some form of business friendship to blossom.

He soon realised that the Afrikaner appeared quite taken with this English aristocrat who seemed to despise the proletariat, be they whatever denomination, colour, or creed. The gold-mining magnate commented that he liked the fact that Digby maintained a low profile and shunned any publicity, almost going to extremes to avoid any notoriety. From the gist of their discussions, it was obvious to Peace that Van Rhyn thought Lord Digby could be an asset who may be able to open doors for him in the British capital among those whose fortunes relied on old money, and who shared his views on the African continent. Several of their conversations touched on those Englishmen, they of the upper echelons of finance, industry, and society, who had voiced their misgivings regarding recent events in colonial Africa.

A few weeks after their initial meeting, Van Rhyn extended an invitation to Peace and his partner to join him and his associates for a black-tie dinner at his home in Waterkloof, Pretoria. Peace accepted, but declined the invitation to bring a companion.

Peace's chauffeur-driven car stopped at the security gate in the upmarket suburb at exactly seven-thirty. The huge property was surrounded by a high wall which bore a seven-tier electric fence strung above it to deter any potential intruder. He was also not surprised to find two security guards manning the gates, dressed smartly in khaki uniforms, and obviously Afrikaners. They made no attempt to hide the holstered weapons on their hips. One approached the car with a clipboard in his hand. Peace glanced at the surveillance camera mounted on a pole facing the side of the car and realised that his photograph was being taken.

His name was checked against the list, and only when properly identified was he allowed entry. No doubt this would be run through some database to confirm his credentials. His chauffeur drove slowly along a well-maintained gravel road, which wound through large expanses of lush lawn, flowerbeds, and tall trees. The vehicle was finally halted in front of the house's main entrance, which was already surrounded by a

cluster of parked cars and limousines. A dozen steps led up to a large open veranda partially enclosed in glass which overlooked the front of the property. The manorial house, with its gables and oak-framed colonial Dutch windows, vaguely conformed to Cape Dutch architecture. White rose creepers and vines wound their way along the walls, latticed wooden arches that spread over pathways, as well as the many trellises.

As Peace stepped into the foyer, which was carpeted with a number of beautiful Kurdistan rugs, he noticed a large man approaching, dressed in a dinner jacket. Peace saw the radio earplug in the man's ear and the thin white plastic-coated cable that disappeared into his collar. He also didn't miss the slight bulge below the man's armpit. *Serious security.*

"Your name, sir?" the man inquired.

"Digby Brentwood." He purposely dispensed with his title.

"Please follow me."

The man whispered into a microphone hidden in his jacket's lapel and then led Peace through the main entrance into an arrival hall and finally into a vast lounge, which was already occupied by about two dozen other guests.

Peace did not expect to find so many others. The request that he wear black-tie had left him with the impression that this was to be an intimate dinner party, but he was surprised to see that it was more than that.

In a voice louder than the general level of conversation, the guard announced, "*Dames en Here*<sup>2</sup>, Lord Digby Brentwood."

Clearly, the guard had been briefed on his title. If this was intended to impress him, it did. This surely had to be the height of Afrikaner society in their mother city in South Africa.

At the mention of his name, a hush descended on the small crowd as all turned to look at him, curious about the man who was known to be a recluse. Clearly, as an ardent supporter of ultra-right-wing politics, his ideals were well known to these Afrikaners.

Peace soon picked out Van Rhyn, resplendent in his black-tie and dinner jacket. The huge Afrikaner broke from the couple he was standing next to, and with hand outstretched, approached Peace.

"Lord Digby, we are delighted that you were able to come. Please let me introduce you to a few of my friends and colleagues. There are a few dying to meet you... how

---

<sup>2</sup> Ladies and Gentlemen

should I put it — a member of the British aristocracy who believes in the Afrikaner ideology.” Again, he smiled. “Indeed, a rarity in these times.”

Peace returned the smile. “Just *Digby* will be fine, please, I must insist.”

“In that case, I’m Anton.”

Peace let his eyes sweep across the room. Most attendees seemed to be with a partner — whether male or female. No one struck him as being on their own like he was. Van Rhyn then slowly led Peace from couple to couple and introduced him. Two of the men he met were members of the Afrikaner Gouedeiendomme board. All were Afrikaans but greeted him politely in English.

Finally, they approached two women standing alone — obviously mother and daughter.

“My wife and daughter,” Van Rhyn said, unwittingly answering Peace’s surmise.

Lady Jocelyn was a statuesque blonde in a black evening dress; Peace knew her to be in her mid-forties. They shook hands, and she gave him the briefest of smiles. Van Rhyn then gestured to the beautiful woman he guessed to be in her early twenties, who stood next to the other woman. She was clad in a sculpted red evening dress, the low neckline revealing the swell of her breasts. Her blonde hair cascaded to her shoulders while slightly chubby cheekbones still revealed a hint of retreating adolescence. She appeared to be wearing only a touch of makeup, but her most striking feature was her dark-blue eyes.

“This is my daughter, Margaret Langton-Van Rhyn.”

Peace took her hand. The woman smiled, revealing dazzling white teeth. He guessed her to be Van Rhyn’s stepdaughter, the only child from Lady Jocelyn’s previous marriage who had been mentioned during his London briefing. She bore no resemblance to Van Rhyn whatsoever.

The stepdaughter took her time looking him over, and as the seconds passed, the look bordered on becoming rude.

“Lord Digby, please excuse my directness, but is there truth in the rumour that you support fascist groups in England? I would have thought it to be un-English, not to mention narrow-minded?” she asked abruptly, staring fixedly into his eyes.

This directness gave Peace an inkling into what he had heard about her — she was certainly her own person.

“Margaret, that’s uncalled for,” her mother hissed, clearly disappointed by her daughter’s opening remark.

Peace smiled coolly, but inwardly the woman's directness surprised him. From her speech and mannerisms, it was apparent that she had been the recipient of the best education England offered, and could probably trace her aristocratic roots back a good few hundred years. While no radiant beauty, her fortitude in speaking her own mind more than surpassed what one saw from the outside and certainly added to her mystique.

"It is true. I believe we have to ensure that a degree of discipline returns to the world. Current crime statistics are unacceptable, drugs pervade society, and wrongdoers generally get off too lightly. The peasants, workers, blue-collar labour, Blacks, whatever you wish to call them, should follow, not lead. A government run by workers is doomed to failure. You need only to look at the U.S.S.R."

He was surprised at how easily the words tripped off his tongue. Was this how the real Lord Digby would have replied?

Margaret stared at him, her eyes round. He did not miss the distaste in her expression. She pursed her lips into a thin line and looked away.

Lady Jocelyn decided to intervene. "You and my husband certainly appear to share the same sentiments," she said, clearly unconcerned by his reply and by her daughter's reaction. "My stepdaughter Janet is sure to find you interesting. She's an anglicised socialite who believes in White supremacy. In fact, I should warn you she conforms to a far-right political orientation and certainly disagrees with the changes that are happening in our country. I imagine that's not an oddity. Let's find her."

He was now alone with Lady Jocelyn, who led him by the hand, weaving through the couples, introducing him on the way to General Pieter Booyens, a member of the South African General Staff. This was a clear indication that Van Rhyn had friends in the right places. Peace did not doubt that there had to be many in the top echelons of the military that were reluctant to relinquish the enormous power they wielded. He also met more of the top brass in industry and mining on Jocelyn's tour.

Eventually, they reached a woman sitting on a stool at a Steinbach grand piano, who was tinkling softly on the keys.

"Janet, I've somebody here I'm sure you'll be pleased to meet. You share the same sentiments. You should get on well."

Lady Joyce turned to Peace. "Lord Digby, meet Janet Van Rhyn. She's a cum laude graduate from Oxford — and that with an Afrikaans accent, I may add. Rather amazing, isn't it?"

The woman lifted her face and turned her head to look at him. He found himself staring into a pair of dark, unfathomable eyes that reflected the light from the chandelier above the piano. Only after carefully appraising him did she offer her hand. Her fingers were elegantly long and cool to the touch.

“*Enchante*,” he said, bowing his head as he brought her fingers to his lips.

A slight smile played at the corners of her mouth. She rose from the piano stool. “British chivalry — how pleasant,” she murmured.

She was an astounding beauty. Her hair was black and shoulder-length; it shimmered in the light. The neck of her royal blue silk dress, although quite high, gaped fashionably, luring his eyes to her breasts. She was tall, surely six foot in her high-heeled shoes. The dress hugged her torso, accentuating her slim waist.

“I’ve placed you next to Janet at the table, seeing as you are both without partners.” Lady Joyce pouted, a slight frown of disapproval on her face. “What’s the matter with you? Good gracious, coming to a dinner party without escorts... Really?”

“It’s all a matter of finding the right one,” said Peace.

“I agree,” the young woman said.

They both laughed, and Lady Joyce, still clearly unhappy, shook her head and left them to get acquainted.

Having secured his usual whisky from a waiter and a vodka screwdriver for her, they made formal small talk while sitting on a sofa slightly apart from the rest of the crowd. She seemed to consider it taken as read that she should stay close to him. Was this Van Rhyn’s instruction, he wondered, but then dismissed this. She did not strike him as the type to take instructions from just anybody. This woman was strong-willed. He soon gathered that Janet was ultra-conservative, clearly believing Blacks to be inferior, and unappreciative of what the Whites had done for them.

“The Lancaster House peace agreement was no more than the British selling out the white Rhodesians, their own kith and kin, without a backward glance, knowing full well there could not be a peaceful transition. Your government knew that Mugabe could not be trusted, and what did you do when things went wrong? Nothing!” she said fiercely.

“Of course,” he agreed with suitable fervour, and added his own thoughts concerning the dangers of the new liberalism that was sweeping the world.

“My father mentioned you to me. He said that you’re looking to invest. I think he said you’re actually looking at mining?” she said.

“That’s right. I’m interested in buying gold shares — a substantial purchase. I believe that they’ll be the most stable of all in the event of unrest here or elsewhere. After all,

even before the great discoveries in the Americas and Southern Africa, it was revered for its value. That's reason enough to invest in gold. But not only that, the fluctuations of the share price, which are sure to come, will provide an opportunity for quick profits. In fact, the unease that will be generated once South Africa goes to its first so-called democratic general election must put upward pressure on gold shares. Everyone will seek to protect their wealth, fearing a civil war. No matter what prevails in your country, I believe we can be rest assured that gold will ultimately triumph. It would do well to buy now and sell later, or so I believe," Peace said.

"I can give you the names of a few mining houses whose shares are bound to be an excellent buy. My father's been buying large parcels of these, without being too obtrusive." She laid a hand on his arm. "Don't look so shocked. It's not insider trading, it's just that we all know each other so well, it's difficult to keep secrets. Come, it's time to sit down to dinner."

Peace was appalled. Clearly, Van Rhyn had no scruples. Insider trading going on within upper Afrikaner establishment circles! You needed friends in the right places to get away with that.

"You've had your fair share of political upheavals in Paraguay," Janet said to him as they took their seats.

The woman was clearly well-read and politically informed.

Peace was grateful for the time he'd spent reading up on Lord Digby's life. He mentioned that Paraguay had changed little even with a new president and thought his financial interests in the country were still secure.

"It'll take decades before the peasants get a real foothold in the government. I don't believe this will happen in my lifetime. No matter who governs, in Paraguay the elitists still rule and will do so for years to come," he said believing he needed to make some remark that related to his newly chosen home country.

A slight frown crossed her brow. "Unfortunately, we are unable to say the same. Our President de Klerk is hell-bent on changing the course of our future and has released Mandela and put the future of this government to a general vote. This will be disastrous for the Whites," she said solemnly.

"Lord Digby." A loud voice interrupted their conversation, and Peace turned to look at the speaker. It was General Booyens, to his left, who was leaning across his wife to address Peace.

"I heard your remarks concerning Paraguay. I must tell you the same applies here, no matter who is in government. Even if Nelson Mandela's party should represent the

government, we will, how should I say, control industry and finance for years to come. You will agree that if you control those sectors, you control the country. De Klerk cannot accomplish anything without us. We'll make certain it remains so for many years," the General said. "Don't underestimate the strength of the South African Armed Forces. And remember, it's a white military force. We'll ensure that it stays that way, no matter what. We have a few tricks of our own up our sleeves."

The man sounded so confident Peace wouldn't have been surprised had the General given him a conspiratorial wink. He did not doubt the man's words for a moment. He couldn't help thinking of the A-bomb. At their meeting at MI6, VA had briefly touched on American SR-71 reconnaissance flights. Within the last few weeks, the world press had made mention of what was termed *The Vela Incident* — a place in the South Indian Ocean from which a double flash had been detected by American satellites and was confirmed to be a nuclear explosion. South Africa had vehemently denied knowledge of this. Although this had occurred in years past, the world and in particular, the Americans and their press had regurgitated the incident time and again.

He gave a brief laugh. "General, thanks for that reassuring piece of information."

The General nodded, seemingly content with Peace's cheerful response.

He was amazed. These people, and specifically this woman, accepted him as an ultra-conservative. The groundwork had been laid. Janet had relaxed; she was no longer stiff and formal. He followed her lead, putting on the charm. They talked their way through the entrée and main course, both having their glasses repeatedly refilled with an excellent wine.

"Lord Digby, tell me, where are you staying?" she asked suddenly.

"Please, I must insist you call me Digby," he said. "Initially, I stayed at the Rand Club, but I needed more privacy, so I found myself a small but secluded place in the northern suburbs of Johannesburg."

"And do you live there on your own?" she asked.

That was direct!

"Yes, completely, except, of course, for the servants that came with the property."

He sipped nonchalantly at the excellent Nederburg Private Bin Cabernet Sauvignon wine and then asked, "Would you care to join me for dinner sometime? Of course, you must choose the restaurant, just so long as it's secluded. I don't know the city that well, and I'm no friend of crowds."

"I'd be delighted. I myself hate being noticed and avoid crowds, in particular the press," she replied.

\*

Later in the evening, he sought out Van Rhyn's stepdaughter, Margaret, and found her with the General's aide-de-camp, a young Army lieutenant. She appeared to be bored, making desultory conversation, and seemed relieved by his interruption. *Could the young lieutenant's company be that bad*, he thought?

"Ah, Margaret Langton-Van Rhyn is rather long, don't you think? But at last I have found you," Peace said, a smile on his face. "Forgive my use of your first name. I merely wish to apologise for the manner in which I voiced my sentiments on politics. I had no intention of offending you."

"Rest assured, Lord Digby, surrounded as I am by my sister, mother and stepfather and not to forget, the military top brass, your views could not shock me," she replied, returning the smile. "However, there is a difference. At least you appear to be apologetic about your beliefs." With that, she laughed again, the sternness disappearing from her face, her features softening.

The lieutenant had overheard the discussion, and it appeared to dawn on him that he'd suddenly become an intruder on a private discussion. He made a discreet withdrawal.

"Thank you for rescuing me from a truly dull evening. I had to listen enthralled as he lectured me on the invincibility of the South African Armed Forces. I hope you have no such similar intentions?" she asked.

*Once again, it was time to turn on the charm*, Peace thought.

He laughed. "No, you needn't fear. Other men's exploits don't interest me. I see you have the impression I would suppress the aspirations of lesser men in their quest for equality and freedom." He paused to take a sip of his whisky. "That's not true. What I do believe is that the populace should not be ruled by inadequate men placed in positions of power by no more than a scrawled X on a ballot paper just because they'd once been good bush warfare commanders. That doesn't make sense to me. To be qualified to assume a position of power requires, I believe, an educated background, evidence of entrepreneurship, and astute leadership qualities. Also, should it not also include a degree of breeding?" *Dammit, Peace*, he thought to himself, *you're really laying it on now!* He continued, "I don't believe that the successful rebel leaders who suddenly find themselves as presidents and cabinet ministers necessarily have the capacity for good governance. You need only look at Cuba and a few of the emerging African countries north of us." *Now, that was a mouthful.*

She looked at him appraisingly from under lowered eyebrows. "That was quite a dissertation. I accept that you've a point, but you don't have to come across like some

of these *verkrampes*<sup>3</sup> and power-mongers.” She looked pointedly at the others in the room.

“Let’s not argue about that right now — I hope you’ll one day find that I’m not what you think I am. I do have compassion for the human race,” he said quietly.

The guests were slowly taking their leave and Peace decided to follow.

“Delighted that you and my daughter got on so well,” Van Rhyn said as all made their farewells at the entrance.

*Presumably, he meant his eldest daughter*, Peace thought. Janet must have already said something to him. Again, he wondered whether the rapport between them was a result of her father’s urging.

“Ah, glad you mentioned that. It reminds me, I need to say goodbye to Janet.”

He found her alone on the porch with a drink in her hand. As he approached, she turned and smiled.

“There you are. I’ve already been reprimanded by the lady of the house for not taking care of you.”

“Not to worry, I found your sister.”

“*Hmmm*, that should have been interesting — is she not too *verkrampete* for you English?”

“It was — she’s certainly not you,” he remarked.

“No, she isn’t. Are you leaving? Will we see each other again?”

“I hope so. Well, until then. Good night.” And with that, he pecked her on the cheek.

Peace’s chauffeur-driven car left the Van Rhyn grounds just after midnight to commence the thirty-mile drive to his rented estate. The car had been hired to Lord Digby Brentwood through an international car rental business and the booking made from London. The same applied to the rental of the house. Peace had employed the chauffeur from an employment bureau providing temporary staff to overseas tourists and businessmen visiting the country. Martin, the chauffeur, was a Coloured. He wore a suit, not a uniform and cap, so as not to appear ostentatious. This suited Peace; he did not want to attract too much attention, though he was still aware that he needed to play the part of Lord Digby.

They had driven no more than fifteen minutes when Martin spoke quietly, in strongly accented English.

---

<sup>3</sup> An Afrikaner expression that refers to those who are considered politically ultra-right-wing — no mixed marriages, no shared politics and segregated housing, schools and public transport.

“Sir, I believe there is a car following us. I’ve noticed that it has been behind us for quite a while now,” he said, his eyes catching Peace’s in the rear-view mirror.

“Are you sure?” Peace turned to look out of the rear window. There was a car behind; he couldn’t make out the model.

“Yes, it’s been behind us since we left the Van Rhyn estate.”

At this time of the night? *The driver had to be right*, Peace thought. Was Van Rhyn checking on him or was he out to establish precisely where he lived?

“Speed up, but don’t make it too obvious.”

He felt the car accelerate, the distance between the two cars widening. They were on the turnpike heading in the general direction of his estate.

“Take the next off-ramp and pull into the first service station that has an overnight one-stop shop on the premises,” said Peace.

The car followed the slip road and pulled up at a service station with an all-night convenience store leading off the forecourt.

“Stop here.” Peace pulled a banknote from his money-clip. “Go in and buy anything you want, meanwhile I’ll watch,” he said, keeping an eye on the road. A car passed, travelling quite slowly, the occupants trying to look unobtrusively at the garage forecourt. It was the same car, a white Toyota Camry.

Damn! What to do now? He didn’t want to arouse suspicion, but he needed to ensure that he was not under continuous surveillance.

He watched as the car pulled up next to the curb about fifty yards beyond the driveway to the service station. He knew that they would have seen that the chauffeur was not in the driving seat, and would probably have assumed that the man was in the convenience shop. He had no doubt that the two men in the car were Van Rhyn’s henchmen. Nobody else would have had reason to put a tail on him. It was time he let them know that he did not take kindly to that.

He opened the door and climbed out on the street side of the car, knowing that he was being observed. He walked nonchalantly towards the Toyota, approaching it on the driver’s side. He knew that the tactic would cause some consternation in the car. As he was drawing abreast of the door, he noticed it was ajar. He reached into his jacket and withdrew a Smith and Wesson MXP 9mm automatic, a compact handgun, which nestled below his armpit in its suede leather holster, and then grabbed the door handle and jerked it open. Before the driver had a chance to react, Peace pressed the silencer on the end of the barrel hard against the man’s temple. The man froze.

“Tell your friend that if he moves, you’re dead!” Peace spat, applying a little more pressure to the man’s head. “You’ve been following me — what’s the interest?”

“We weren’t following you.”

Peace swiped the barrel of the automatic across the man’s skull. Blood immediately flowed. “Don’t insult my intelligence.”

The other occupant seemed about ready to make a move. “I wouldn’t if I were you. Put your hands on top of the dashboard and keep them there.”

“I swear we weren’t following you,” the man said in guttural English. He cringed, as if expecting to be struck again.

Out of the corner of his eye, Peace saw his chauffeur returning to his car.

“Give my compliments to your boss, whoever he may be, and tell him that I don’t like being followed. Understand?”

The man, evidently dazed, gave a barely perceptible nod.

Peace took two steps backwards. The silenced automatic coughed twice, the sound no louder than a dog’s bark. Air hissed out of the front roadside tyre and the vehicle settled closer to the ground. “That’ll keep you,” he added, and then carefully backed towards his car.

He climbed into the rear of the Mercedes, still keeping a sharp eye on the Camry. “Okay, Martin, just take us home, but at a sedate pace.”

The expression on Martin’s face said it all. He was obviously amazed at the sudden turn of events.

“I need you to listen carefully. I don’t want this repeated to any others — not your employer or colleagues. Not a word. Is that understood?”

“Sir, my employer expects me to be discreet. Absolute discretion is one of his mottos. I give you my word.”

“In that case, you’ll get a good bonus when I leave the country, so long as you realise that this is conditional.”

“But, sir, if they report the shooting, the police will investigate.”

“No, they won’t.”

“As you say, sir.”

Why had he been followed? What could have made them mistrust him? He didn’t understand it — surely no one knew his real identity.

He decided he would just let it be for a while.

## Chapter Five

The harsh treatment of the two in the Camry did not serve as a deterrent. Peace soon realised that his every movement was being observed. The moment his vehicle left the estate, a tail would materialise and follow, keeping a discreet distance.

He ran into Van Rhyn several times at the Rand Club, and they invariably sat together. They were often joined by other members — friends of the magnate who were also involved in the gold mining industry. In time, Lord Digby was accepted as one of them and listened, without objection, to their discussions about the movement of gold shares and their current volatility.

Guided by Van Rhyn, he had made substantial purchases of gold mining shares over the weeks, and the magnate's suggestions had noticeably increased the worth of his script holdings. Peace wondered what VA thought of this, the enemy adding profit to Her Majesty's coffers! *Rather amusing*, he thought. He might not be a gambling man, but this was not an opportunity to be ignored. He realised that this was illegal, no more than was insider trading, but who was to report them?

About a week or so after the dinner at the Van Rhyn estate, he phoned Janet. She sounded genuinely pleased to hear from him.

“What took you so long?” she teased. Her familiarity surprised him.

“I got caught up in a number of things,” he offered.

“So I gathered from my father. You've been following his advice on the stock market and making a substantial profit, it seems. I can excuse you for that.”

He asked her out to dinner, reiterating that she needed to choose the restaurant as she had better local knowledge.

“When do you propose we do this?”

“How about Friday?”

“Now, if I were a lady, I would have to decline and tell you that I wasn't free until sometime next week,” she replied, laughing. “But to be honest, Friday is fine. You can collect me at my father's Riverside home in northern Johannesburg round eight.” She gave him the address. “Casual dress will be fine. Don't bother with a tie.”

Peace replaced the phone, pleased with himself. The date was sooner than he'd hoped.

He left the Rand Club later than he expected that night, and it was eight-thirty when his car entered the estate's driveway. His house was in darkness. He recalled it was

Wednesday, the staff's day off. Well, it was going to have to be a light snack — that was the arrangement. He did his own thing in the kitchen on a Wednesday.

“Martin, that's it for today. I'll see you in the morning,” he said to the driver.

He watched the car's lights disappear down the driveway and climbed the few steps to the front door. As he stepped inside, his nose caught a fragrance he knew he had smelled before, but couldn't place it. Somebody — he was certain it was a woman — had been or was in the house. He was unarmed; carrying a weapon could have given his cover away. During the day he had visited a number of mining houses and with the prevalent tense political situation, many businesses had installed metal detectors.

He moved slowly towards a table in the corner of the foyer near the front door and quietly slid open the single drawer in its side. Out of habit, he ensured a weapon was always close by the front door when taking up a new residence. It was a form of insurance — you never know who could arrive at the door. He had also ensured the drawer would slide open and close silently when he had placed the Heckler and Koch automatic in it. He withdrew the weapon and silently slipped the safety catch off. There was only the faintest click.

Standing in the centre of the foyer, he waited as his eyes adjusted to the dark, fully alert for anybody trying to rush him from the shadows. He stood there for a full minute before moving towards the sitting room to his left. He could now vaguely make out the furniture and windows. The curtains were drawn, letting in no light. Fortunately, the house was carpeted wall to wall and he was able to move silently. He passed through the double door entrance and reached for the main light switch. He flicked it on and immediately the two chandeliers bathed the room in bright light.

Janet sat on the sofa, one leg crossed over the other, a glass of what he guessed to be vodka and orange juice in her hand. A black cocktail dress left little to the imagination, the plunging neckline affording him a generous view of a curve of her breast. The skirt was short and the hem rode high on her thighs, exposing long, crossed legs. From the toe of one dangled a black pointed stiletto. At the sight of the automatic pointing at her, she merely raised her eyebrows questioningly.

“My, my, a gun? I was hoping you'd be pleasantly surprised,” she said, with the faintest of smiles.

The barrel never wavered as he let his eyes roam slowly over her.

“How the hell did you get in? The place was locked,” he said, still staring at her. He slowly lowered the automatic.

“Your cook, or whatever she is, let me in. Are you sure she’s no more than a cook? Anyway, I persuaded her that I wished to surprise you. It took a while, but she finally agreed. Confidentially, she told me that you did not appear to like women, as you’ve never brought one home. I must say I found that rather difficult to believe. You didn’t strike me as being... you know.”

Peace saw she was finding it difficult not to laugh.

“God, I’m going to have to do something about security,” he said.

“Don’t be hard on her. Her intentions were good.”

“Okay, I won’t, but only because you’ve asked. What are you doing here?”

“Why are you still holding that damn thing? It makes me nervous. You can put it down. I’ll remove my clothes if you insist; you don’t need the gun to persuade me.” She smiled again, this time seductively. “To be honest, I couldn’t see the point of waiting until Friday, and I knew you’d finally agree. I’m known to be quite persuasive.”

He chuckled and placed the automatic on a nearby side table. “I may take you up on that offer, but I think we should eat first.”

“Oh, I’ve even thought of that. I remembered you’d said you’re fond of lobster, so I brought tails in mayonnaise, plus a salad and a chilled Riesling to go with it.” She indicated a large wicker picnic basket that rested on the floor next to the sofa. “Before you change, please open the wine.”

She handed him the corkscrew. He extracted the cork and poured the wine, then climbed the stairs to the master bedroom and quickly changed.

When he returned to the sitting room, she’d already found plates and cutlery and was dishing up the tails and salad. She handed him a plate to which she added a freshly buttered roll. The food was exquisite, and for a few minutes, neither of them spoke.

“Digby, you’re an enigma.” She hesitated for a moment. “No, that’s not quite right, let me put it differently... oh, by the way, you did say I should call you Digby, didn’t you?”

He nodded his head. “And you, woman, are unfathomable.”

“Unfathomable? That’s how it should be. Now, just imagine how I see it. You step into your own home with a gun in your hand. Were you expecting trouble?”

Again, he just shook his head. He was still wary. What was she up to?

“Men with guns intrigue me. It’s so masculine, and that gun is large, not a little peashooter like that British fellow we see in the movies,” she laughed, the ambiguity of her comments not lost on him. “Come, sit next to me. You know, the way you addressed me as woman, it conjures up something wanton.”

*Janet sounds triumphant — as if we are playing some sort of game and she is winning.*

He placed his wineglass on the coffee table and sat down next to her. Her scent drifted to him and a sideways glance allowed him a glimpse into the deep vee of her dress. He could clearly see her breast, not constrained by a bra, the areola visible, and the nipple just hidden. He drew in his breath involuntarily. A slight tingling sensation, that prelude to a sexual encounter, flowed through him.

“I’m watching you, you’re getting distracted,” she said, her voice throaty. She leaned towards him and he responded immediately, their tongues probing each other in a passionate kiss as she fell back, her head resting on the sofa’s armrest. He slid his hand into her neckline and pushed the material aside, lowering his head to take the erect nipple in his mouth. She moaned and arched her back, thrusting up at him. Her cocktail dress had ridden up, the hem now barely covering her. He let his hands drop between her thighs, immediately aware of the warmth that radiated from her even before his fingers slid into her.

“Oh my God,” she whispered.

Clothing crumpled to the floor. He ran his lips over her as she groped for him, her fingers finding his hardness.

“Please, my Lawd,” she mimicked a Cockney accent, “don’t dawdle.” She thrust her tongue in his ear and ran her nails down his back.

Suddenly she drew her head back.

“My God, what are all these scars? They look like bullet wounds.” She moved her hands over the skin of his chest.

“Sorry about them. I know they’re ugly. Occupational hazard, I’m afraid. I was in the army, the Royal Fusiliers. I did time in Malaya — had a bad experience there.”

She raised her pelvis to receive him and he entered her. Within minutes, they were bathed in sweat, her breath rasping in his ear as her hands clawed his back, evidently consumed by some urgent primal need, which seemed to flow from her as though she wanted it to devour him as well. It was not long before he rolled off her, drawing in deep gulps of air.

She too was breathing heavily, the magnificent swathe of hair covering part of her face. “My God,” she whispered, “you do that well.”

They said no more, but just lay there and he felt himself getting drowsy. *God*, he thought just seconds before they both fell asleep, *this woman has everything — wealth, power, brains, and a degree of rampant sexuality seldom encountered.*

Sometime during the night after a post-coitus drink and snack, they retired to the bedroom — the sofa not conducive to a good night's sleep for two.

\*

He awoke to the deep growl of a sports car's exhaust coming from the back of the house. It struck him that she must have hidden her car well. He had not noticed it when he returned the night before.

The bed was empty; she had deserted his lair. It crossed his mind that he had just bedded a fiercely independent woman with a mind of her own. Somehow, he also knew that she was deadly dangerous, like a cornered leopard. She was one who always had to be in control. He couldn't imagine life ever being boring in her company.

The cook and maid had already arrived. He carefully inspected his personal items, the cupboards in the dressing room, his briefcase, and desk drawers. He smiled to himself. His possessions had been meticulously examined and professionally replaced, exactly as they had been. Clearly, the Van Rhyns were taking no chances. They were still establishing his bona fides — they trusted no one and still wondered whether he was the person his public reputation made him out to be.

At around nine, the phone rang.

“Sorry about my sudden departure, but I'm not a morning person. However, I had a wonderful evening. We must do it again,” she said.

“When do you propose we do that?” he asked, realising that just the sound of her voice had aroused him.

“I'm sorry, but I'm going away with my father for a few days — a week or more actually, but I'll be in touch.”

“I take it our dinner date is off?”

“I'm afraid so. Business. My father's call.”

“Phone me on your return,” he replied casually, silently noting that she had not indicated where she was going.