

mosadi waku



The partially true story of a love affair

David Matthews

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in which the fabulous is stirred into the factual to produce a prosaic broth, thickened by biographies and spiced with an African travelogue

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Mosadi Waku revision 1.1 was released on 3/12/2024 and contains minor alterations to replace the earlier version of 21/06/2022. It remains under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.

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For **Lettah Ramadimetja Nkadameng** who left too soon.

In 500 years I will look for you again and maybe then we can make a better story.

Author's notes

I remember once reading that everyone has at least one novel in them. Although I cannot remember whose opinion this was, I assume it was that of a writer, or at least someone that was immersed in literature in some other way. Nevertheless, I strongly disagree with this and believe myself to be living proof that it is not so.

For reasons that I cannot now fathom, the idea that I should one day write a book first occurred to me as a young adult. It really is now beyond me what thoughts I had at that time which I believed were worth sharing. Michael Bradley (deceased author of the Cronos Complex) would have pointed to the human inclination to treat time as a territory to be occupied. I think it's probably a very bad idea to try and do that, but I agree with Bradley, that is anyway what we do.

Mosadi waku is actually my third attempt to complete an extended piece of writing and although I am very happy to have done so, it is not a novel, since despite some embroidering of the truth and some outright fantasy, its core is based on events that actually happened. It is my hope though that despite this, it is an interesting story and that I have told it in a way that makes it enjoyable to read.

I would like to thank Ian Kendall of Melbourne, Australia for the information about the change of street names in Bulawayo and for replying to my request for information so quickly.

Regarding the former Rhodesia, I wish to acknowledge that I was strongly influenced by Dean McClelland's article at the thecasualobserver.co.za. I'd also like to say that the relevant part of my story to this is definitely fictitious and I hope that he would not find what I have written misleading or offensive. This was certainly not my intention. All I can say is that what he wrote not only helped my own writing, but also made me think quite hard about my own beliefs and how I had arrived at them.

I don't believe I am guilty of misrepresenting South Africa. When it was no longer possible to escape the edict of the Home Affairs Department that I must leave the country, I was fighting the woman I name as Modiba in the Maintenance Courts without the help of legal advice. In an attempt to try and prevent the case being removed from the roll because I could no longer appear in Court, I sought the advice of the Legal Aid office at Ga-Rankuwa. I explained the situation, that Modiba had full control over the money I had brought from the UK and in all seriousness, I was told something that I already suspected. This was that with that sort of money she would be able to bribe her way out of anything.

I would say though that I believe South Africa is far from the only country where bribery is endemic. I'd also say that if the former President, Jacob Zuma, is indeed guilty of all the financial crimes he has been accused of (and as yet there is no certainty of that), I would still regard him as an angel compared to any of the recent British Prime Ministers. Unlike for instance, Tony Blair, who sold off the services of the British military and was a major cause of a million or so deaths not to mention unaccountable misery, Jacob Zuma may have been involved in serious financial wrong doing which may have held back the progress of people in his own country, people that twice voted for him. The Iraqis never voted for Mr Blair.

In summary, I believe what I've said about South Africa is not misleading, but before you conclude from what I said, that this country is not a good place, you might want to take a more careful look around you nearer to home.

David Matthews 2019

I'm adding to my explanatory notes, being prompted to do so because I decided to let go of this oeuvre by giving it a web page and making it freely available under a Creative Commons License. Several attempts to find a publisher failed yet a friend, with literary leanings who I thank, persuaded me that it was enjoyable to read and not without merit. I'm happy to make no financial gain out of my scribbles as they almost wrote themselves and the bit of effort I put into it was actually good fun.

To deter the possibility of bounty hunters, I had better state that I have paid my debt to the South African State. I handed myself in and was arrested at Johannesburg airport as I guessed I would not be allowed to pass passport control with a passport lacking both an exit stamp from Zimbabwe and an entry stamp into South Africa. I confessed to being an illegal foreigner guilty of the offence of contravening Section 49(1)(a) of the Immigration Act 13 of 2002 read with sections 1, 10, 25 and 26 of the Immigration Amendment Act 13 of 2011. I was fined R10,000 by the Ekurhuleni North District Court, Case No: D2872/2019, Ref No: 50004182806. If you really must, I can let you have sight of the paperwork.

I've no mind to explain how this came to be as despite it being extremely eventful and at times dramatically interesting, it mostly was not nice. I thank the people who helped me slip out of the township and also the man who made some effort to deliver the information that I really needed, to understand how untenable my situation had become. To him I would also say it is only the very worst sort of fool who shoots the messenger that has bad news to give and also that I made the best effort I could to ensure my beautiful Jack Russell terrier, who never had any mind to bite him, did not end up being eaten by a Chinaman. You all know who you are.

I will though say a little about my incarceration in a Court holding cell for 8 days, firstly that I was lucky indeed to avoid a spell in real prison which would have been seriously unpleasant. I was also lucky to share this cell with a handful of mostly charming and interesting criminals, most of whom had committed the same offence as myself. I can't remember names and anyway we habitually referred to ourselves by nationality. There were the Morocco, two brothers. The eldest who was intermittently depressed was a worry to both myself and Congo (of more below). Their problem was the unavailability of direct flights that would allow them the freedom of deportation. I hope they got out.

Uganda had nothing good to say for President Ramaphosa who he believed to be a white man at heart, despite his African exterior. Uganda explained how he was something of a hero back home due to his ability to travel in and out of South Africa as it suited. This elevated status had recently led to him taking a third wife who had pleaded with him to accept her. Nor was this status unearned; although he now could not countenance the thought of an overland journey he had once used a route that included a 25km hike through territory where lions might be encountered. You may form the opinion that I've exhausted the passing without a passport meme in my Mosadi Waku, but I really have not. Both he and Ghana fully expected to come and go without either proper papers or hindrance at Johannesburg airport.

And Congo, Congo! Why have you never initiated the email contact as we agreed? This excellent fellow with both the French and English that enabled the Morocco to take full part in our socializing, was actually locked up with us despite having really done no wrong. He was married to a South African woman with whom he had children and ran a building business in the Cape. He was not overly enthusiastic about the prospects for his family in South Africa and so had never applied for the permanent residential status to which he was entitled. The incident of a lost and latter relocated passport had interfered with the tedious to extreme South African bureaucracy to such an extent that it had become impossible for him to receive a renewal of his temporary status and no covering explanatory letter from any official whatsoever could stand in its place.

Despite having paid the R10,000 as required, he had been left in the lurch by the solicitor (a little more on these cockroaches below) who he had also tasked with the purchasing of his flight out, without which he would remain incarcerated indefinitely. He was planning to instigate a riot, which I feared would go very badly wrong and I was glad when I helped steer him from this course.

His problem was that he had no money to hand to persuade our guards to allow him the use of a phone for a limited period, which would enable him to contact his wife who would then set in motion the various moves required to result in his freedom. I was happy to give him the money he needed; it's amazing what difference even a small amount of this intrinsically worthless stuff can make on occasions.

An interesting aside is that it so happened I returned to the UK just in time for the WHO's recent push to install itself as a beachhead for world governance. As a good number of us know, this has had the side effect of stimulating the social life and I met a man I might otherwise never have met who like myself had many African stories from his experience of working there. One was the hair raising encounter with an army of children equipped with firearms. In my idealized future I introduce this new friend to Congo, who just may have been one of those children. It goes to show that you should never write off a young person however far off the rails they may appear to be. Who can foresee everything the future may make possible?

And from this I'm reminded of the evening when there was a debate about how the white man was continuing to loot Africa which I brought to a screeching conclusion with some unrealized prescience of my own. Since it was conducted in English and was too fast moving to allow time for a French translation, the Moroccans were excluded and I was the only white man listening in. And indeed even listening in started to become rather uncomfortable. But I mustered small courage and stunned the other participants with a single contribution to the effect that it was not the white man per se who was their problem, but an infinitesimally small fraction of the 1% of humanity. I agreed with the general opinion in so far as that they as Africans had long been at the sharp end, but the time was coming when white Europeans such as myself were to our detriment, going to be levelled down to meet them!

A couple of other people deserve a mention; firstly the police official who inducted me into the Court system. He was visibly thrilled by the information that I had lived for a few years in the township that he was familiar with and where some relatives of his were also residents. It seemed a bit inappropriate, but certainly not unpleasantly so.

Then there is Maredi Owen Mahlomotja, who despite being an advocate of the High Court is of low, even base moral character. I have already described the problem one of his colleagues caused for Congo and I think it likely I would have had a similar problem if the official mentioned above had not exclaimed several days after I had paid the fine, "*why are you still here?*" and promised he would sort out the problem and that I was not to forget him. I have not done so and thank him now, although I never gave him the tip he may have been hoping for.

The thing is, South African Bureaucracy has no concept of being user friendly for anyone and certainly not for people who fall foul of the law and this despite the widely praised constitution that gives rights (and even on paper as you are incarcerated!) even to people who should not be within its boundaries. You may have funds available in a bank account to pay a fine, but there seems to be no arrangement in place for you to access the money and hand it over.

So on top of the not inconsiderable sum I paid to Mr Mahlomotja for the service of having a quiet word with the Magistrate and also purchasing a ticket for me to fly out, my card was also charged

for the expenses incurred by a couple of nights out on the town. “*You do trust me?*” he demanded when I handed over my debit card and pin. No wena, even at that point I did not, but what can you do?

David Matthews 2022

Chapter 1

The journey of a thousand miles begins with two steps

with thanks to Lao Tzu

October 10th 2018

It's 9am, I leave our house and shut the yard gate with the padlock on the outside. I have a long wait by the shebeen for a taxi to Pretoria; I am worried as I've never left South Africa before. I get off the taxi at Paul Kruger and walk across town to Bosman. It's about mid day, so I've got a long wait before the coach leaves.

I have already bought the ticket so there is not much to do other than sit and wait. The boss of the coach company, I call him Small Bus, is there and we get talking - he asks me if this is my first time in Zimbabwe and why I am going there. I tell him that I am going to meet my husband there as he cannot come to South Africa. I go to the shops to buy some food for the journey. It's 5pm when we set off, I'm sitting in the coach still worrying.

It's 10:20 pm when I leave my children's house. My second son has offered to give me a lift to the station, but I decide the 20 minute walk will be good to calm my nerves. I've chosen to get the last train to Manchester airport rather than the first train the next morning as if I do that I'll just lie awake worrying until three and then worry some more that I'm going to be late for the flight.

October 11th 2018

I reach the airport just after midnight. The weather has been surprisingly mild and the walk to Terminal 3 is pleasant. I've four hours until I can even check in and I suspect this wait will not be so nice. It's not and I don't manage to get any sleep.

It's about 1:00am when we reach the border; I've managed to sleep on the bus, but I have to get out now and show my passport. I'm thinking about what might happen when we come back and wondering how that will work. I watch carefully, it's very busy with people going this way and that and I am thinking that what Small Bus has promised me can work.

The flight is on time and reaches Schiphol, where I have a four and a half hour wait, at 8:20am. I'm very glad that I stocked up on travel food before I left and that I thought to take some of it in hand luggage.

We arrive in Bulawayo at about 9.00am. I've not mentioned that I've been travelling with a neighbour who is Zimbabwean. We all thought it was very funny when this woman said I that I was *humbowdy*. I think in her not very good English she means humble, but my husband says *humbowdy* is a very good word to describe me and he would like to congratulate her for this. My companion takes me to a hair saloon run by two of her young relatives, who she says will look after me. I want to start looking for a hotel, but these girls just want me to take them somewhere they can eat.

At 12:55pm I catch the KLM Nairobi flight. This company does not compare too well with its competitors that I've used in the past. The meals are less generous and they do not offer wine, which helps me sleep on a flight. There is not even any provision to charge my phone on which I'm likely to be quite dependent. Since I have a window seat though, I can use my solar charger and this perplexes the flight attendants who point out that I can block the sun with the pull down blind. When I explain I am charging my phone they are mightily impressed; I'm surprised by this, surely in Holland they are aware of this technology?

It's 6:00pm and I'm really fed up. I've tried to find a hotel, but the places where I've asked have been very expensive. These girls are not helping me. They say they don't want me to spend my money at these places and I can just stay at their place, but they are making me spend lots of money for them. I am buying food and drinks in cafés that I am sure they can not normally afford; I have given them a lot of money for petrol and to make an evening meal. Also it is not nice here, I must sleep in a corridor and I have to go through a bedroom for the toilet where one of these girls sleeps with her husband. They are using me; I cannot bring my husband here or wait too long for him. If he does not come soon I must go back to South Africa.

On time the flight reaches Jomo Kenyatta at 9:50pm. Here I have a nine and a half hour wait, so plenty of time to get the boarding pass for the last leg of the journey, find out where I need to be and try and get a bit of sleep. The airport staff are helpful although it is not always easy to understand their English. I get the boarding passes - there is to be a change at Lusaka - which is somewhat of a relief. I know that there is no real reason for this, but the experience at Manchester airport a few weeks ago when I was refused a boarding pass for Johannesburg is fresh in my mind. I have deliberately chosen to end the flights at Harare rather than Bulawayo, to avoid a transit through Johannesburg, which I suspect might also be refused.

The lady at the desk warns me I must check departure gates around 4:00am tomorrow, which is just as well since I now try and settle down in part of the airport that the flight board suggests will be correct for the onward flight and this turns out to be not so. I've had to do a baggage reclaim, so I've access to plenty of packed food. After a bit of searching I find facilities to charge my laptop as well as my phone - they have UK style power sockets here! I've brought the laptop because I want to teach Mma how to use email while we're together, so that SMS will not be our only option for communicating in future. I lie down on a dirty bit of carpet and manage to get a few hours sleep.

October 12th 2018

I'm awake at 3:00am and I see from the board that I must move to a different part of the airport. Boarding only starts at 6:00am and that's when I have my one and only moment of panic, albeit a very brief moment. As I check in, the boarding pass to Lusaka I was issued with last night is rejected. But there is no problem it is just a change of plan and there will now be just a fuel stop at Lusaka and no need to change plane, My boarding passes are replaced with a single pass straight through to Harare and again everything is on time and the flight takes off at 7:15am. There's a half hour wait at Lusaka International at 9:05am; it's rather like a train stopping at a station, with quite a lot of people getting off and new passengers joining us.

It's about 6:00am; I've had hardly any sleep, but it's time to make a start. There is nothing to eat here so we just wash and then the girls take me out again to a café to eat and drink tea. I can see this is mostly for their benefit and I am spending much more money on them than on myself. The one bit of real help I get now comes from a business next door to their hair saloon which seems to have no customers at all. The man, their business neighbour, suggests a place to try for reasonably priced accommodation and the girls do at least drive me there. The owner of this place also has another place which she says will suit me better as it is nearer to town. I am taken to Harbor Lodge, 24a Julian Moyo St. The staff here are very nice and the price is much more reasonable than the places I tried yesterday which also give you food, wifi and what what. They say I can choose a room, but the one I like, the biggest, leaks when it rains; it does not matter since there are other nice clean rooms. I pay for one night in my own money, lie down and sleep.

GOVERNMENT OF ZIMBABWE DEPARTMENT OF IMMIGRATION RGM INT AIRPORT-VISA RECEIPT	
Payee	MATTHEWS - DAVID
Passport No	556901355
Nationality	UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT NORTHERN IRELAND
Receipt No	112737
Receipt Date	12-10-2018
Visa Type	SINGLE ENTRY VISA
Visa Number	MGV014468
Currency	US Dollar
Amount	55.00
Officer	Osmond Sademera
Expiry Date	11/11/18 12:00 AM
Transport Details	KQ706
Print Date	12-Oct-2018
Print Time	10:59:13
Payment Type	Cash
*** Enjoy your stay in Zimbabwe ***	

I arrive at Harare International at 11:00am; there is no problem with immigration, which just wants to take US\$55 and they issue me with a 30 day visa in return for this. It seems that there is no possibility of a longer stay, but at least now I am starting to think confidently that this trip will work out and we will actually meet.

The next step for me is to get downtown which is 20km away and the information desk confirms that I will need to take a taxi. This is as I feared and the staggering price for this short ride is US\$25, but I've had warning from the Internet of this also. The driver is a likeable, helpful chap though. I tell him of my plan, which is a train journey to Bulawayo; he is not sure that this train still runs and assures me that there definitely will be coach services that leave today although I could not find any on the Internet. He checks for me at the station before we part company and there will indeed be a train at 8:00pm.

I know it's going to be a slow last leg of the journey, but I've told Mma that this is the most likely way I will arrive and I don't want to

confuse things if I don't have to. The not very good plan B is to write chalk messages outside a business near the station that is marked on Open Street Map and that really is not a secure way to meet in a city that is strange to us both.

It is a long procedure to book a ticket! The first person I speak to thinks there are no available first class tickets, which means no sleeping compartment is available. I hand over a very reasonable US\$10 for this long journey, but then a more senior railway employee joins us and insists that there is first class, so I will be able to lie rather than sit for just an extra US\$2 - again, this is a bargain and I hand over another US\$10 note. These are friendly, helpful and by instinct honest people, but I sense there is some reluctance to return the US\$8 I am owed, even though I see it stacked on the counter. I latter realize I am making a mistake in always offering US money which is both scarce and highly prized over their own currency, South African rand and everything else that on occasions some businesses will agree to trade in. Places like this will accept card payment and US dollars should be conserved for where this is not possible.

The senior employee helpfully agrees they can store the heavier of my two bags until departure and says they have to go out to find my change. This I do eventually receive, but I don't think any excursion to fetch it has occurred.

I know from the Internet that the first class accommodation consists of a double compartment and there are suggestions that if you risk this form of travel (I do not believe there is any greater risk than exists on any train journey) you should pay twice to have a compartment to yourself. As it turns out I get a compartment to myself anyway and I suspect two other travellers have been doubled up, as that will explain why I was originally told no first class are available.

NATIONAL RAILWAYS OF ZIMBABWE CODE No. 83-32-6232
PASSENGER TICKET : STATION ISSUE
ISSUED SUBJECT TO THE PUBLISHED LAWS, BYE LAWS AND REGULATIONS OF THE RAILWAY OR RAILWAYS OVER WHOSE LINES THIS TICKET IS AVAILABLE.

DATE OF TRAVEL DAY: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15
MONTH: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

* ONE JOURNEY
SINGLE OR RETURN / ADULT OR CHILD

TO ZONE No. 37 FROM ZONE No. 14
VIA No. DCI

TICKET EXPIRES One Way

*CLASS: 1 2 3 4
† GROUP TRAVEL ONLY No. OF PASS: One
AMOUNT: 12-00

*DELETE THE INAPPLICABLE
ELMALITHO/0812/7

CONCESSION: TYPE No.
TICKET EXCESSED & REASON SI 1780279

THIS TICKET IS ISSUED IN LIEU OF A MACHINE TICKET AND DOES NOT REQUIRE TO BE MACHINE IMPRESSED.
OUTWARD JOURNEY MUST BE COMMENCED ON DATE INDICATED HEREON. RETURN JOURNEY MUST BE COMPLETED WITHIN SIX CALENDAR MONTHS OF DATE INDICATED.

Still these girls will not leave me in peace. At 5:00pm they are here at Julian Moyo Street saying I must have food; they really mean that they want me to keep buying for them. I just need a pepsi which helps with my diabetes when the sugar is low, but I also have to pay so they can eat chips. I am worried about the money, but my husband is coming tomorrow so it will be ok.

I make my way back to the station at 7:00pm; this journey is going really smoothly and I do not want to blow it by missing the train, so there is a good hour to spare. I've had an interesting half day exploring central Harare, which is quite compact. There is a nice park and you can get drinking water there; later in the day the police would not let me back in to rest as the whole park has to be empty due to some important people being in the vicinity. I've noticed a couple of differences between this city and South Africa; for one thing it feels orderly and safe, unlike even Pretoria, let alone Johannesburg. I'm surprised and pleased at how little attention is paid to me, an obvious stranger and possibly the only white man in town.

The other thing is how dowdily dressed the people are. The women in particular are modestly attired in clothes that look functional rather than flattering. There is an almost complete lack of the elaborate hair styles prevalent in South Africa. Also not one single person is carrying an umbrella as a parasol; it seems they do not mind at all that the sun is going to turn their skin very dark. Or

maybe it is that there are no umbrellas available to purchase in the shops.

I did intend to eat in a cheap working persons type of café where I saw the price of a plate of food is US\$2 and that they also serve tea, but I leave it too late and it has closed by the time I'm ready for a meal and an interesting cultural experience. Instead I go to a dull looking franchise outlet that does not serve tea; the chicken is not great and it's three times the price compared to my first choice. I am relieved to see that my debit card is accepted as I've started to worry that I did not bring enough US dollars. I've noticed one huge queue at an ATM, so it looks like there is at least some truth in what I've been reading, that there are cash shortages in this country. There are also no street lights when the night comes.

I get a very friendly greeting from a different railway employee who has been told to expect me to come for my bag. He says I can sit in the 1st class waiting room, but this is a dingy rather scruffy room and it is still a pleasant temperature outside. He tells me that the train master will assist me when the train arrives. It's dark on the platform and these days I do not see very well, but I notice a woman moving her bag to make room for me on a platform bench, so I sit next to her. We chat a bit - I tell her I am going to Bulawayo to meet my wife and she confirms that she has been in Harare to visit relatives. I get a bit restless and decide to explore the station even though it is very dark; I do need to pass water and I guess there must be toilets. I do something I would never do in South Africa or the UK, which is to just leave my bags by the bench where I've been sitting.

I do find the toilets which are unlit yet still obviously pretty disgusting, but after that I get confused about where I've been sitting - there are many other benches. I see a bag, but not my new friend and it is not my bag anyway. The people on this bench point that I must go further up the platform and I do eventually get reunited with my bag. It seems that everyone knows there is an idiot white man catching the train with them this evening. The woman laughs and says if you leave your bag you will find it is gone when you come back. I tell her of my impression that the people in Harare are honest and helpful and she does not disagree. When the train comes in we part for good, as I do not see her again.



There is still 20 minutes before the departure time and I'm not sure where I'm supposed to be, so I just sit on a random unoccupied seat. The train master comes to collect me and we struggle back down the packed carriages to 1st class, where I am directed to my allocated berth. The compartment looks like it was last cleaned in colonial times, but I don't care; it looks comfortable enough and I'm pretty certain I will get the sleep I now really need. I notice that the lock does work (a big issue in the Internet accounts of Zimbabwe train journeys), but I feel that I'm in no danger from fellow travellers and the train master will be available if I do need any help. The train sets off sharp at 8:00pm; I stay awake long enough to receive a tatty sponge mattress which fits on top of the bench seat, but not long enough for the sheet and blanket. I vaguely hear people knocking, but I am already half gone to the world and it's not so cold anyway.

October 13th 2018

I'm up early to wash and leave for the station because I want to be there when my husband arrives. At 5:30am when I'm ready to set off the hotel is still locked up and I have to get the young man who acts as overnight security to let me out. I'm lucky to meet someone on the street who is going in the same general direction as the station. After we part ways I keep asking for directions and I'm at the station around 6:30am. The place is empty, there is no sign of any train.

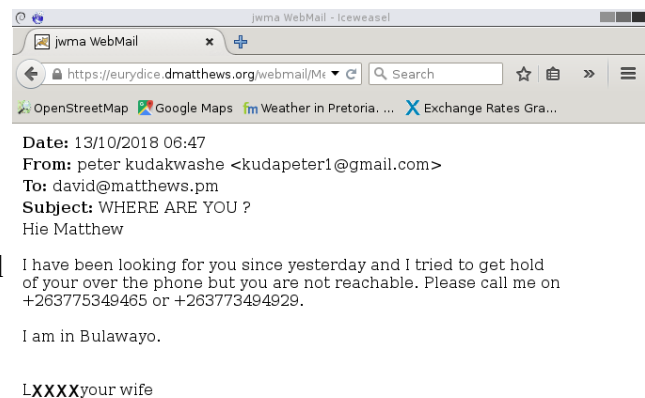
I have a great night's sleep and don't wake until just before 6:00am, so I'm feeling pretty good until the GPS on my phone shows me we are only around half way to Bulawayo. Shortly after, the train stops and the train master tells me this is Gweru, but I already know this. There is no way the train will be in Bulawayo anything like 7:00am, I'm not sure - did I misread the Internet timetable or is it just incorrect, or maybe the train has been even slower than expected. Now I'm worried; will Mma understand what has happened, come to that has she actually made it to Bulawayo? I have no doubt about her intentions to be there as I know she is as desperate for this meeting to happen as am I, but we have been out of touch for two days. My phone had no network in Kenya, but here I am connected; what is an attempt to make a call from here on my UK SIM going to do to the credit that I did remember to add before I left? In any case, as I understand, Mma's South African SIM will not work in Zimbabwe so if she has any network connection it will be because she has got hold of a local SIM and I don't know what number she will have.

It's 7:15am and I'm panicking, there is no train so how is my husband coming? I remember he wrote something about making a chalk message if we have a problem near the office of Mbira Tours, which he said is near the station; maybe he is going to arrive with this company. This office is not easy to find and it is locked up, but there is a phone number. I have put an Econet SIM in my phone

so I call and the man is very, very helpful. When I tell him I am expecting my husband he says to wait and he will come to the office and check. There is nothing; his company is not bringing my husband, but he tells me that the Harare train is not expected until 12:30pm.

Then it's those girls again. They have been to Harbor Lodge, found me gone and are now checking on me by phone. I tell them that I am at the station and that the train will be coming later. They come and collect me to buy their breakfast again.

I cannot sit and eat and drink and I see there are travel agents and an Internet café nearby. The lady in the travel agent tells me my husband is not on the Bulawayo flight from Johannesburg and the man in the Internet café says he can send an email for me, but how will we know if my husband has seen it? I must do something; I cannot wait like this, but must do something, anything to find out where is my husband.



He has warned me that our phones may not work or that calls will be very expensive and he does not know the number of my Econet SIM. I call his UK number; it rings but does not connect. I try again a few minutes later, but the same again. I try one more time around 10:00am.

The train is chugging along slow, slow, slow. The scenery is interesting, mostly quite thick bush, but occasionally I see human habitation, mostly round, thatched huts, but sometimes groups of bigger dwellings. At one of these we stop, even though there is no station. The local people come out to sell food to the people on the train, but I have not yet exhausted the supplies I brought with me. I would really be enjoying this journey except for the doubts nagging away at me - will Mma understand the train is late? Is she even in Bulawayo? I cannot make the train go faster, so now there is nothing left of my journey to worry about, I start to worry about hers. I am well used to travel in foreign countries where I cannot even speak the language, but she has never been further from Pretoria than Durban.

Then at about 9:30am, there are two calls to my phone in quick succession. They do not connect properly, but they are from the same number and it looks like it is a local number. I think, I hope ... this must be Mma trying to contact me from Bulawayo station. Then around 10:00am, another call and it is Mma!! I explain I am on the train, but that it is late, we will see each other soon. Now I can relax. I get two SMS messages warning me of low credit and telling me how I can get an advance; I guess that roaming charges have drained the credit, but I am so happy about that call and having heard her voice.

Suddenly after these long 3 months, joy has returned to my life. The girls say they must wear white clothes for a demonstration they are going to later today and I let them take me to a big street market where many people are selling second hand clothes. It is a bit like the market in

Johannesburg, but here there are no benches and the clothes are just piled onto blankets on the ground. Time is passing and there is no way I will not be at the station to greet my husband when the train comes. I insist with these girls; they have picked me up although I didn't ask them to so now they must take me to the station straight away. They complain a bit that there is still plenty of time, but I say we must go to the station now now.

There is a train coming in! I see a long line of trucks behind the engine, but it is 12:30pm, the right time for my husband's train. Then I see there are carriages at the back, I don't want to wait any longer, I want to see my husband. I go onto the platform and I am almost running.

It's a long train; after the diesel engine there is 50 meters of trucks, then only a few carriages and the 1st class is near the end. I'm onto the platform and walking fast, ahead of all the other passengers so I don't see anyone else. I know Mma is here somewhere at the station, so I just keep walking down the platform towards the engine.

There is my husband! Now I am running. I see three people coming towards me, two young women and another woman in front of them. Is that Mma? Yes! And she is smiling and looking fine, I have been so worried about her, but I can tell at a glance that she is well. There are arms wrapped tight around me and I am holding her body although I am not sure where I end and she begins.

Chapter 2

Memories of Bulawayo 1

Weep like a woman for what you could not defend as a man

the mother of Muhammad XII

I was born and raised near Oxford, I was British by birth. Despite that I have now lived much of my life in Johannesburg and eventually naturalised (for the second time), I consider myself to be neither British nor South African; I am Rhodesian and will remain so for the rest of my days. I first came to Rhodesia in 1941; although I was 27 years old, prior to this time it had been decided that my civilian work must take priority over conscription. I had studied as an economist and already had an important role in the banking establishment. It's true that to some extent family connections had played a role in my preferment, but I was and always remained a highly capable person in what was my chosen career. So much so that despite twice hitting what British businesswomen have described as a glass ceiling (I made a point of keeping abreast of the changes in societies worldwide as that was an important part of my work) I came close to the very top of my profession. But of course I am neither Afrikaner nor African and in South Africa promotion has always hinged on racial background. I am now retired from all that and I am digressing from my real story, which starts when I was accepted as a trainee pilot and under the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan was sent to the air station at Heany, Rhodesia. From here it was a short step to Bulawayo, which is where I met my wife to be.

At the end of hostilities I returned to Bulawayo and we were married. Mary was of old British Rhodesian stock and could trace ancestry back both to a member of the pioneer column of the British South Africa Company that had bamboozled the Portuguese and also to men that had fought in both of the Matabele wars. I would be doing my country as well as myself an injustice to leave the impression that I relied on Mary to get my start in Bulawayo. Rhodesia was simply not like that. Certainly my marriage to her helped by introducing me into society, but there was no old boy network, upper, middle or any other class. You earned your position by your own abilities and by hard work. And furthermore, the bank manager, as I eventually became, was valued no higher than the teacher, the man who helped administer the mine, the man that ran the shop where you bought food and for that matter his assistants. We all played our part in making Rhodesia what it was.

The closest I can get to an explanation is to say that there was what I've seen elsewhere described as a *can do* attitude. I think the pioneering spirit that had led men to take on bush land a considerable distance from Bulawayo and to live in make shift accommodation whilst toiling for years to turn it into a farm had carried over into other walks of life. But there was not really any consciousness of such an attitude, rather it was just taken for granted that if you decided to do something, whether it be open a shop, mine, or factory or purchase a house or farm, you would work damn hard and it would be a success. During the period of time that I'm talking about, certainly in Bulawayo and Rhodesia, but I think elsewhere in the world to some extent, banking was not the predatory exercise it has become. I was immensely proud of the success stories I'd helped to finance and I could literally count on one hand requests for capital loans that I had reluctantly refused.

It was not all work and no play; in Bulawayo we had cinema, theatre, art gallery and concert hall, library, tennis, golf, swimming, football, cricket and rugby facilities that we citizens were proud to support. The wide streets were lined with trees in front of well maintained attractive buildings and there was no crime to speak of. Tourists and business visitors were catered for with excellent hotels and restaurants and bars where we Bulawayeans could expect to hear first hand the news from afar. Rhodesia could have served as a reference model for a successful country and Bulawayo was the epitome of ideal city life. We exported food to other African countries and also manufactured items as well as raw materials. The Rhodesian dollar was sound money, a match for the US dollar, UK pound and any other European currency. What we needed or wanted to import, such as petrol and sea food, we could comfortably pay for.

But of course I've not mentioned the elephant in the room. I've been talking about that small proportion of the Rhodesian population of which I was part and of the conveniences we created for ourselves. By head count, we were a proportion that never amounted to more than 8%. There were no discriminatory laws such as those enacted in South Africa, but none of us considered that as much importance should be placed on the needs of the African population as on ours. We white Rhodesians just wanted to live in our way and we saw no reason why the Africans should not continue to live in theirs. While we certainly needed their manpower for many of our projects we saw this as a two way street from which exchange they would also benefit.

Like all the wealthier white families we had a black domestic servant. Grace, as we knew her, was an excellent employee who travelled in from the township six days a week. Initially as a solution to her own childcare problems, she would often bring her two children with her and Mary started to teach them some English. This grew into a backyard school which was attended on some days by as many as 25 African children, who otherwise would have had no formal education. This came to be a serious endeavour for Mary, so much so that she persuaded a couple of her friends to help out; all such contributions were on a voluntary basis. The parents of the scholars were all women in similar situations to Grace, working as domestic help for our neighbours and so our home became one of the very few places in Bulawayo where there was a mingling of the races not conducted entirely on a master and servant basis.

It is as a result of these social interactions which Mary discussed with me, that I started to have concerns for our future. There had always been instances where an African man would become aggrieved at some perceived unfairness, either at work or because of lack of opportunity. Occasionally it had become necessary for short prison sentences to be meted out. Over a period of years, such incidents were becoming both more common and more serious. I'm thinking now what I heard by way of Mary and Grace about the situation in the outlying townships close to Bulawayo, of how attitudes to us whites was changing, but there were also increasingly problems in the more distant rural areas reported on the evening television news.

The communist terrorists (CT as we came to refer to them) had established bases over the borders and their incursions were increasingly causing problems. Typically they avoided confrontations with our army; rather they would threaten African villages that they considered too friendly to the farming communities, thus indirectly causing unrest. There were some truly shocking stories of their actions, actions taken against their own people. They would arbitrarily accuse a man of spying, of reporting on their activities and whereabouts, then torture and murder him. The whole

village would be made to watch as his body was dismembered and cooked in boiling water and his widow forced to be the first to sample the gruesome meal they had prepared. By cowering their own people in this and similar ways, large areas where the African villages and our rural communities had once peacefully coexisted, came to require permanent army patrols.

Military service for young men became compulsory; there was a period of training for school leavers followed by actual postings around the country. Trouble was no longer limited to the border areas. I was never called up as my work was considered to be too important, but after Smith declared independence most men below retirement age were required to serve. For several years there were six week on six week off rotations, but when there were particularly serious security exacerbations, the periods of service became longer. Mary was forced to shut her school by government decree, but as with all our women, she also had to stand in for the conscripts and she was drafted into the police force. At the time I thought the enforced closure of the backyard schools was a serious mistake, but I later realized our situation, as I will explain, had always been utterly hopeless.

And this hopelessness was such, despite the fact that in war time, as it now was, we Rhodesians were just as well organized and successful as we were as civilians at peace. All three of our boys served and all reported that there was no single encounter with the CT in which our patrols did not inflict far heavier casualties than they suffered. We did take a steady drip of losses though, bitter foretastes of the disaster that was to come indeed was the loss of a husband or a son. Mary and I lost our eldest in this way. Despite the personal tragedies that we all either experienced first hand or knew of friends and colleagues who had suffered them and despite the demographics (we were after all fighting to prevent majority government taking power) and despite the destructive effect that war has on society (there was a sharp increase in incidents of marital infidelity), we would have held out had it not been for the sanctions.

At first my forebodings aside, although both large parts of our own population and most foreign governments were against us, these sanctions did not in practice trouble us. International efforts to bring us to our knees were thwarted by the support of the South African government. But this was a single pipeline, a vital conduit for essentials such as petrol and military hardware and a route out for our surplus production; it was an obvious target.

It was only many years later that I came to understand the big picture, it appears to me that we white Rhodesians were entirely circled by a single man, albeit a man that was the emissary of a powerful international cabal. Consider that at home our enemies were two fold – ZIPRA, trained, armed and supported by the Russians and ZANU, likewise, but by the Chinese. Remember that Kissinger had opened up channels of communication with these countries to the west. For Nixon or for the Rockefellers? Which of these introductions was the really important one? And add to this, what I came to learn, that Vorster had been threatened more than once by Kissinger and not only told that the white government in South Africa would not last long, but that its remaining time would be considerably shorter if it did not stop the sanction busting and allow Rhodesia to fall. The power of international money has become the main power in this world, a power that no individual government can stand against.

I did not know all of this when I decided we must leave, but I knew enough to understand the inevitable. There was no point putting the lives of our remaining sons at further risk, or come to that

our own lives. I had connections in the Johannesburg Stock Exchange, we packed what we could take on the train south and left. Before we did so we made the house over to Grace as we never thought to return.

But I have returned, I've come to find if I can some peace with the past, I guess it is that widely discussed thing that people of today call closure that I'm looking for. How is it that this beautiful town we people built for ourselves could simply be taken from us and then neglected by another people who are unable to maintain it and do not really appreciate it. Most of the trees lining the streets have gone; the houses and commercial buildings were constructed to a high standard, but there is an air of tattiness now. Most of the businesses that flourished here have failed although I saw that one brave entrepreneur has started to manufacture and sell motorcycles. I wish them success, but how can they succeed amidst the financial chaos here. The Zimbabwean dollar has already crashed once due to hyperinflation and it is obvious that even the African people do not trust the new dollar bond which is supposed to be at parity with the US dollar.

When we whites finally folded not long after my family left, there was a race to the bottom, won of course by Mugabe who became known for his hatred of white people. If I had the chance I would like to ask this dotard how he thought he had saved his people from the white man, when he caused his Zimbabwe to slip over its neck the ultimate noose – the US dollar of the Federal Reserve. Did he really think his Zimbabwe, without the agriculture and manufacturing surplus we whites produced, could earn sufficient amounts of this currency from the people that come to see the Victoria Falls? Sufficient amounts of this currency to enable Rhodesians, now Zimbabweans, to conduct the simple everyday transactions that we all need to perform? There is plenty of evidence today in Bulawayo that it can not do that.

Yet the people seem happy enough; perhaps they no longer know any different way. I walk across town to the Centenary Park. It's as I expect, a beautiful ornate and neatly maintained public space gone to seed; the band stand and shelter have tiles missing from the roof and the benches have been arranged in them in such a way that suggests people come to these structures at night to sleep. The areas of colourful flowers beds are full of weeds or gone, although somewhat to my surprise the fountain is still working. I see a white man, which in itself is now unusual, with an African woman. Of course there were occasionally these liaisons, usually they did not last long and when they failed we were all glad that we no longer had to pretend we had not noticed them. I would not have given this pair much thought except for a strange occurrence later the same day.

I finally summon the courage I need to cut back to town, to do the single thing that I need to do; I'm heading for my old home, 24a Abercorn Street. Of course this street no longer exists, or at least not by this name. How apt for my street to be renamed from that of the chairman of the British South Africa Company to a trade union rabble rouser, jail bird and later CT terrorist leader. But I remember how this man was horribly assassinated and that there was shocking brutality on both sides.

I see that my former home is now a rather down market hotel. I'm actually staying at the Holiday Inn, but on impulse I go in and ask for a room. The staff are very pleasant, a young man and woman; I don't make myself known, but I have absolute certainty these are Grace's grandchildren. I ask about the room at the back, which I shared with Mary, but it's occupied. The front room was our living room, but apparently the roof leaks; I point out that there is no sign of rain and I'm just

staying a single night. I have to walk back to town to fetch my passport to seal the arrangement. As I return there is that same couple from the park and they're the ones in my old bedroom. The woman smiles and greets me in excellent Afrikaans, I think she must have noticed me in the park. I also think that she must be a South African and I've no idea what she, or they come to that, are doing here. The man is an unobservant fellow and obviously fails to make the same connection that his companion has made.

That night I sleep so well; my wife appears to me, which has never happened before since she passed and I can tell she at least is at peace. She wants me to know, to understand for my own benefit, that what happened to us although out of the ordinary, has happened so many times before in different places to different people and that having to bury a child and being uprooted are just two of the many outrages that we human people may have to experience. As I had foreseen correctly, there was nothing we could have done to make things other than from what they were and our fate was cast in a way we could not hope to influence. Although her health quite quickly deteriorated after we left, there was no reason to think I was to blame. There were still some happy times and I had made the right decision for us all to leave when we did. She did wish that she could have let go the past and Rhodesia with it, but she had been unable to do that before her time ended. Apart from the son we lost I still have our four children and their families and indeed they have been an immense consolation to me. Without them there has been only work.

Chapter 3

A nightmare

In the whole world there is no place where living beings do not have to suffer

Hui Hai, The Great Pearl

There is an old family photograph of a 1963 holiday and added notes confirm that I was 11 years and 5 months old. I was what was known as a late developer and the onset of puberty was still years away. All of us - dad, mum, four brothers, sister and cat - have travelled by train to Cornwall from London for the annual family holiday, for the third year in a row, although at least one brother and the cat are too recent for one of these earlier trips.

I should admit the obvious at this point that at best, the whole of this chapter has only tenuous connections with the real story. It is a short chapter though and despite that the events here are maybe 50 years distant from the main ones, there was a time when it seemed to me that some sort of short circuit in time's progression had caused an unlikely join, as I will later explain.

For the second year running we are staying in the holiday bungalow on the Jolly's farm, which has in more recent years made way for a development of new dwellings above Porthtowan known as Jolly's Lane. Dad was a Cornish man by birth, but his family had survived difficult circumstances by moving to the big city when he was a young boy.

I remember, I remember – odd details come back to me as I write this – Mr Jolly was a builder and I suspect that even in the 60's not much actual agriculture went on here. I speculate that to have his family immortalised in a street name, he must have been an influential person on the local council. He certainly appeared to be very busy as we saw very little of him. Our mum, although she fulfilled the stay_at_home_bring_up_the_children role as she had always wanted, never cared so much for the kitchen side of things and has handed down no recipes to me. So part of the deal my parents had struck was that as well as accommodation, Mrs Jolly would supply us with an evening meal. I believe from now faint memories they were hearty Cornish fare, well received by us. I think it was a long hot summer; August weather in Cornwall does not always favour the holiday maker, but I think we'd been lucky this year. In any case we were definitely not a beach only family and would not have been deterred by a day or two of cloud and rain. Rather we would have set off for a long walk on the cliff top paths.

It was a spacious bungalow and unlike at home, where at this time I shared a bedroom with a brother, I had a room to myself. We were near the end of the three week holiday when I was struck by the night terror. It would have been better to have woken up screaming, but I was not that sort of child. My instinctive reaction to challenging events of any significance was to take the world into myself.

If there had ever been such things, all empathy, mercy, goodness, kindness and humanity were at an end. I did not know who or what I was, but I experienced an onslaught that I cannot characterize any more than I could bear, save that across the whole world there was no place to hide from it. I saw only one thing that was amenable to any better description and it was hardly a display fit for a

young boy; a creature with the genitals of an adult man and the full breasts of a woman. This creature was the object of savage, brutal cruelty; maybe we were one and the same. But in the world of both this and that, no extreme either good or bad can exist for long alone without its opposite, which of itself it calls into being. Although I could not see her, I knew just briefly, that there was also the consolation, the caress, of a kind and loving woman.

When we returned to London I spent a day or so pretending to be upset that the holiday had ended, although I had never been more glad to be home, far from the gruesome stage. I felt that the experience I'd had must be kept secret. Years later I became an avid reader of the writings of C G Jung, from which I gained some understanding that dreams might contain content sourced from somewhere beyond the merely personal. Even as a boy, I had loved the Greek myths and I took up a fairly serious study of them, but I have never found anything there about the hermaphrodite that really satisfies me.

Chapter 4

Memories of Bulawayo 2

*Bankers lend money to foreign countries and when they cannot repay
the President sends Marines to get it*

Major General Smedley Butler

So wrapped up were we in ourselves and our own tragedy that we hardly scratched the surface of this pleasant colonial town. I later found out that Mzilikazi, the renegade Zulu who had founded the Ndebele tribe and set up shop at present day Wonderboom north of Pretoria also had ties to this area. Indeed it seems the site of Bulawayo was first inhabited by one of his sons and Mzilikazi himself is buried at a nearby location. This all went uninvestigated and historic locations remained unvisited and this despite my fascination with stories of people that had moved many hundreds of miles on foot, despite obviously having a predilection for a static base.

We were together, but we had very different agendas in mind; in my case I'd given up pretty much any hope that we would soon be able to resume our life together. My own plans were to spend the next few summers walking around the UK, living as cheaply as possible so that I could afford to send Mma enough money to prevent her life descending into a struggle. I think as far as she was concerned that had happened already and she was focused on finding a way out of the struggle.

By the winters I would have scrapped together enough money to finance a meeting such as this one – in effect an annual southern hemisphere summer holiday together. For the rest of the UK winter I'd have to impose myself on one of my children (all now young adults) and eventually when living like a fair weather tramp became too onerous for an old man, I'd be at the top of the council housing list in my adopted home town. At such time, maybe 5 years hence, perhaps there would be a way to smuggle Mma into the UK. Or just maybe I'd be allowed back into South Africa, although having read online the experiences of people in a similar situation, there was no guarantee that the Home Affairs Department would allow me to pass their borders even when their imposed five years ban was up. The flopped attempt I'd recently made might even have demoted me from an Undesirable to a Prohibited person and in practise there is no way to win an argument with a South African apparatchik in Johannesburg whilst you are stuck, prevented from boarding the flight you have booked, at Manchester airport.

As it turned out, despite the plan of a 30 or even 90 day sojourn, we spent only just over a week in Bulawayo. I don't even easily remember when it was during this time that Mma first shared her thoughts with me, or that part of them that she thought appropriate to lower me gently into. But of course – the first day together we would have rested and also Mma needed to finally shake off the two young ladies who probably hoped that my arrival meant an even more reliable supply of trips for tea, chips and the purchase of a copious supply of meat for the evening meals - it will have been the second day, October 14th.

For context, it is well known that Zimbabweans flood into South Africa illegally and amidst various

other of our plans, discarded or yet to be actioned, was the thought of locating the right person to help us do this. It turned out that Mma had actually stumbled on that person; when she had told the coach operator that the purpose of her visit to Zimbabwe was to meet her husband who was not allowed into South Africa, he had insisted she take his phone number. Now according to Mma, for R1500 one of the drivers would leave the coach with me for us to together swim across the Limpopo and on the far bank wait for the coach to pick us up again.

Although this idea had immediate and massive attraction it was thoroughly at odds with my current mental prison. On the failed attempt to fly straight back to Johannesburg with a slightly different name and entirely different passport number, I'd had everything with me necessary to resume my South African life. This time I'd come prepared and actually not too well prepared as would shortly become evident, for an extended Zimbabwean holiday. Swimming the Limpopo with an experienced guide presumably meant that the crocodile problem was dealt with in some way; Mma also mentioned that she'd been told the river was no more than neck deep and one could mostly simply wade. In pitching her idea this way, Mma clearly did not know what a fine strong swimmer I am; she even volunteered that she would join me, which I rejected out of hand. How clever of her not to push too hard; for in favour of her plan was the excitement of adventure, not just seeing the river Limpopo, but actually swimming across it in the very place where the elephant had got its nose extended. What a story for ones grandchildren! Against it – well I'd not come prepared, either in mentality or with material goods and I'd had no time to weigh up pros and cons; maybe it was something we could do in future after another trip to Zimbabwe. But I would think about it.

I really liked Bulawayo; the central district is larger than Harare and laid out in a grid pattern of attractive very wide streets. In contrast to the style-challenged of Harare, high fashion was king and queen with the people here. I guessed that South African television could be received in Bulawayo and that would explain the importance of looking good. Mma was able to partly confirm this as the now absent from her life young ladies had mentioned South African TV reception. What was confusing was that with the fashionable ephemera, elaborately coiffed hair styles, plentiful new looking cars and the café lifestyle that continued into the darkness unlit by the non functioning street lights, where did the money come from? Certainly there was not any to be had at ATMs the whole week we were there. On some days we thought we detected the start of panic buying which had been reported in the UK news outlets, with bread absent from the shops and even bottled beer rationed - hard times indeed - but the generally relaxed atmosphere never soured, or not so that we could detect any rise in tension. Possible incipient food crises seemed to resolve themselves within a couple of days.

One lady Mma got chatting to told her that their continued existence resulted from the grace of God, for if the dependence on money was not illusionary, all the people of Bulawayo would long since have passed into the hereafter. It was not only the supply of money that was unpredictable; while Mma was enjoying this conversation, I had been typing a long email to my family in an internet café, only for power supply to fail city wide just as I went to click the send button.

Mma did not share my opinion of Bulawayo; she was outraged by the high price of food and the

low value placed on her South African rand. On one occasion she was offered a single banana for R20, a sum which would purchase fifteen bananas at home. At times she appeared to detest this city, while I found it to be pleasant, preferable to and also much safer than those cities of her native land that we both knew and all this despite the peculiar economic pressures that there were here. I told her I had now forever given up all plans to take her to the UK, for if next door Zimbabwe was too foreign for her, what chance for the UK? Mma is a confirmed parasol carrier, one South African habit that seemed not to have caught on here and I teased her that it was her red umbrella, rather than her white husband that made us stick out like a pair of mismatched sore thumbs. As in Harare though, I detected very little unwarranted attention from the polite local people and none at all that was seriously unpleasant.

But what were we to do with ourselves, could we just stay here hiding away? As I pointed out, we did not just need each other; in common with all people we needed something to do, some purpose, even if that was merely to scratch around growing vegetables on our own piece of land. One idea I never voiced was that we should travel north, since seeing the Victoria Falls would make for a memorable experience, a time that we had spent together and would never forget. I realized though that Mma did not travel well and compounded with this she had a low sugar episode which I found at first disconcerting and once I realized what it was, pretty scary. Mma's diabetes is generally well controlled, but can readily be tripped by stress.

What we actually did was to spend a lot of time in Centenary Park, just sitting in the bandstand or lying on the grass in the shade of trees near the fountain. I remember trying to explain why a street trader might reasonably want R20 for a single banana. By reasonably, I meant there might be some rational apart from that of simply fleecing a foreigner. I offered the example of a hunter who had killed a large animal whose flesh would not keep long and a farmer whose maize was not yet ready for harvest and how they could contract with each other to mutual benefit using tokens of valuable metal. And from there how it would become a specialized role in their society to weigh and store the valuable metal (rare and so shiny!) and how exchange of surplus meat for maize would be easier if done via notes confirming the ownership of this metal rather than the actual metal itself. And how this depended on there being confidence that these notes could be passed on and it being generally accepted that their worth (although clearly not intrinsic, for however hungry we might become we would never eat the notes or the metal itself come to that) did amount to their proclaimed value. Unfortunately acquiring this confidence would lead to the possibility, no certainty, of a confidence trick as the storage of metal specialists would inevitably succumb to the temptation of lending at interest notes confirming ownership of metal that they did not even have. And why anyway should the metal and notes that could hastily be rewritten if accidentally damaged have advantage over the meat that would quickly rot and the maize that would be at risk from rats?

I think I made a good case – maybe there was no way that a banana seller in Zimbabwe could pass on a few South African rand coins at any advantage to himself and maybe although he could do something useful with a R20 note it might require a long walk to a certain particular trader and a longer argument to get from him something in exchange.



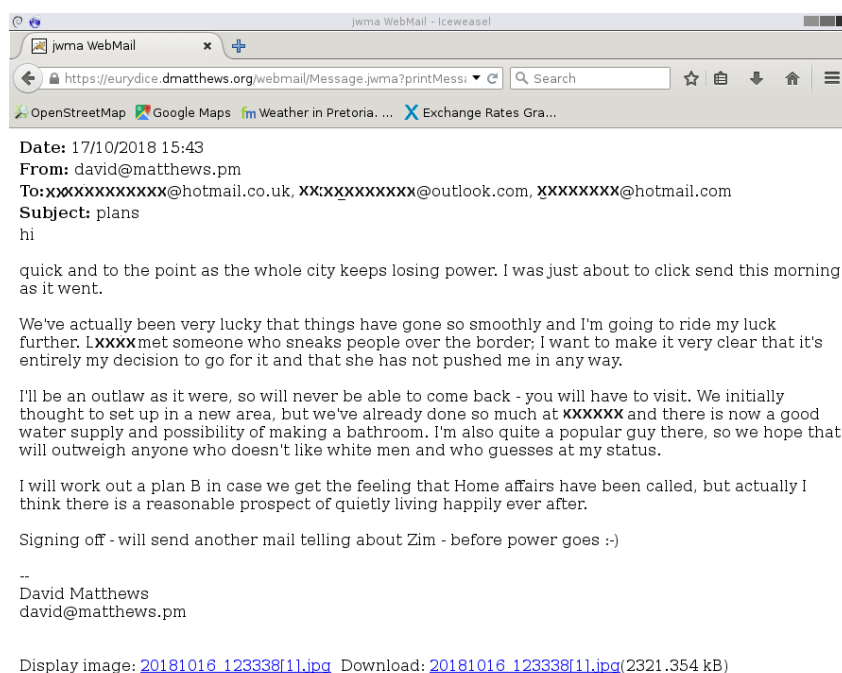
I had a very good example of what happened when the confidence in notes was lost. In recent times the Zimbabwean dollar had become valueless and abandoned, although the government was now trying to reintroduce it as a note of equal value to a US dollar. I had found an old Zimbabwean dollar note of large value simply lying on a busy pavement. It is true that it was no longer *legal currency*

(the metal storers had long since bought sufficient influence to have this pronounced when it suited them), but that only a foreign tourist saw any value in it at all, and that merely as a souvenir, seemed to speak volumes. Even so, I failed to impress Mma; she said that never in her life had a banana cost R20 and let her go home. She idly pointed to a guy who had passed us and said he was a white man. Apart from myself there seemed to be very few white people in Bulawayo and the man looked very dark skinned to me, I would have taken him to be an Indian.

The problem of money was for us not simply one of philosophy or economic theory. There seemed to be two separate economies in Bulawayo – cash if you had it meant you could buy bananas in the street, eat relatively cheaply in dives that had no banking facilities and stay in reasonably priced rooms. Otherwise you could swipe for everything either with a bank card or with ecocash, which seemed to be a local electronic currency. This second option was expensive for us, but judging by the general air of “we’re doing OK despite having no money” it may be that the local people could amass a stash of ecocash without undue duress.

We too late realized how well the cash economy could have been played to our advantage. I continually paid out my US dollars as if they were the equivalent to Zimbabwean dollars, whereas that was only a theoretical concept that the modern metal storers, aka bankers, had tried to foist on the citizens who had no confidence in it being so. Had we been more streetwise, I think we could have got an exchange value of one to two, three or even four. In short, our supply of US dollars became alarmingly low and I abruptly decided I would swim that river.

So this decision took just two days in the making since this email was sent the following day. The worry about money holding out was not the only reason for it. Did I really want to go back to the UK and endure the journey to Bulawayo again in a few months time and maybe then find the possibility Mma had chanced on might not still be available? Were we going to spend another two weeks doing very little apart from sitting together in the park? However sweet that seemed in some ways, we could not postpone in this way another long, painful parting. And does not fortune favour the brave and should one not look a gift horse in the mouth?



The decision led to the introduction of another topic for discussion. Would one of the coach drivers really swim with me, or when the time came, would I be told to go jump in and wait on the other side? I had no doubt about my ability to swim the river, but no awareness of crocodile habits or experience that could allow me to make unaided a sensible safety assessment. Mma was in no doubt that indeed one driver would swim with me and in response I firmly decided I would not swim without that assurance, but would be prepared to rely on it. Mma called the number she had been given and was told that they were currently in Johannesburg; they would be making another Bulawayo trip the following Saturday and that we would be collected for the return journey. So it was agreed, but that did not end discussion of the reality of an accompanied swim, rather it remained a major topic for the next few days.

There were though other things to talk about. Mma has what I would describe to be a low estimation of the capabilities of African people, despite being one herself. I'm sure that at least in part this is due to an apartheid induced inferiority complex and at times I half-heartedly try and shake it from her. Maybe I am really defending my own left leaning liberalism that I uncritically imbibed in early adult life. So for instance she has several times remarked that South Africa was better off when white men were in charge and if only this could again come about. I tell her that indeed it should happen in let's say 100 years hence and happen as a result of the importance placed on skin colour having faded to insignificance and a pale skinned person having been elected on real merit.

She also thought that the problems in Bulawayo, the lack of cash availability, long queues for petrol and threats to food and power supply were entirely the fault of Mr Mugabe's African government. In this of course, probably without realizing, she was espousing a commonly held view and I did not

try and argue against it. Although she does not have a good understanding of the history of architecture, of building techniques or the history of Bulawayo, she was adamant that 24a Jason Moyo Street, where we stayed, had been built by white men and its slightly shabby state was down to the inability of the African owners to maintain it. Indeed I have no doubt it was built by people of British descent, in common with much of old Bulawayo and where there had been a contribution from Afrikaner people, this was obvious from the Dutch style gables.

But we were not in any disagreement about the young people who ran the place, a delightful brother and sister. They were friendly, helpful, keen to make us feel welcomed and we felt them to be very honest such that our own property, even a laptop computer, was safe with them when we went out. I guessed, I think correctly that they were children of the owners. If they lacked the necessary skills to repair the hot water system, they could not be faulted in the daily cleaning routine to which they both contributed. We purchased a kettle, mainly so that we could drink tea, to which we are both addicted; I was astonished that it came with a UK square pin plug and that we needed to use the Southern Africa adaptor I had brought with me. Mma thought the Zimbabwean tea inferior to the brand we buy in South Africa and I told her that was nonsense.

Chapter 5

Mistakes in three parts

Experience is simply the name we give to our mistakes

Oscar Wilde

Part 1

I've never been much of a diarist, but I once wrote an electronic diary as a learning exercise in computer programming. Having done that, I have felt occasionally obliged to use it to ensure it actually works as intended and this is how I know that a certain phase of my life began on 18th August 2012. By this time, I do realise that ideally I should have resolved those emotional issues that particularly afflict the young and generally settled into a sedate contentment. However looking back over several years of chaos, I have to accept that I failed badly to reach that goal of late middle age.

Instead, after first making contact on an internet dating site, then continuing with a discussion via email, I met Modiba in person on that fatal date after a long drive across England the previous day. Reading the diary entry now is a chastising experience, although it is true as I wrote that *we took to each other straight away*.

Modiba, a South African, had by her own account been living and working illegally in the UK for about 5 years. I believed I detected a couple of fairly serious mistakes she had recently made. The first was that she had paid a large amount of money to a Nigerian pastor to straighten out her situation in the UK and that he was now difficult to contact as he was travelling. The second was that she was about to change her work from caring duties in an old peoples home to similar employment arranged by agencies in private homes.

I don't think the first mistake requires any further elucidation from me and since, as I later found out, in South Africa the general perception of Nigerians is pretty much the same as it is in the UK, it is a surprising mistake for her to have made. The second mistake was an easier trap to fall into, but I had already known another woman who had done similar work so I anticipated the experience Modiba would have pretty accurately.

The problem was that even if the work was less physically demanding than in a care home, it would be an emotional sink. Alone with no colleagues for spells of two or three weeks 24/7, with an old person who had been abandoned by their family. And if the agency was struggling to find someone to relieve you that period would be extended on an ad hoc basis. You would still need to continue paying rent for a room you would return to for brief periods for the purpose of retaining sanity.

Now I don't want to give the impression that Modiba was particularly error prone and I am certainly in no position to point a finger at anyone in that respect, but it's necessary for the full understanding of my story to recount a third mistake of hers that she entrusted me with knowledge of. This is that she had confessed her illegal status to another man she had been involved with and

he had used that information to control her in a rather appalling way. Apparently this man was in a circle of retired gentlemen who spent all their days together in various public houses drinking themselves into oblivion. So now he would order her to meet him immediately at the chosen location of the day or he was going to contact the police and have her deported. I don't think this is quite what Mrs May had in mind when she was Home Secretary, but it could be said to be a hostile environment nevertheless. In order to extricate herself, Modiba had found it necessary to move from one town to another. Perhaps it is in her favour that this is one mistake, as will be seen, that Modiba very definitely learnt from.

And from this meeting there quickly flowed a series of events that could easily be considered to be mistakes of my own making. Firstly I invited her to spend her recovery periods in my home, thereby making it unnecessary for her to maintain a rented room.

Then realising that my assessment of her mistake number one was correct, Modiba took counsel from a friend that had once been in a similar situation to herself. On the advice of this person we then travelled to London to take further counsel from an actually qualified solicitor who for roughly a third of what the possibly qualified pastor (although probably not) had charged, would safeguard Modiba's situation in the UK. The strategy had a strong dependency on me though. Modiba must stop working and voluntarily leave the UK; I must travel to South Africa and we must marry there. Other than that there was just a form or two to complete which the solicitor would take care of.

Stopping her work was I think a blessed relief for her as I'd been largely correct about that; I would have to pay for everything, but I was already pretty much doing that anyway so I wouldn't notice a big difference. In fact the most striking thing I learnt at the consultation was that Modiba was actually 10 years older than I'd been led to believe, but it's a mistake to believe everything you read on a dating site. Anyway, I'd get a holiday in South Africa, which is how I gained that rare privilege for a white person, to abide awhile in an African township.

I can't say that the holiday was the best I'd ever had; Modiba's mother had been ill and she passed away shortly after my arrival, in retrospect I see that was not a good omen. We had just managed to squeeze in the wedding, an equivalent to a UK Registry Office affair, except that there was a R5,000 bribe to be paid to jump the queue. Just as well we'd squeezed it in as it was shortly after I entertained my first doubts about our relationship. In the hospital, an admittedly distraught Modiba, blanked me in preference for some consolation from a nephew. After the death there had to be a week of lying in state before the burial and Modiba had to live, eat and sleep in the allocated room for this, which just so happened to feature a water closet.

I suppose a nice piece of material could have been used to conceal this sanitary ware, but I talked myself into the job of building a timber framed partition wall to enclose and conceal it, which possibility had not occurred to anyone else, maybe because no one else wanted to fund such a project. The project was a definite success though and undoubtedly Modiba's relatives looked at me afterwards with new respect.

With that job done, I decided I wanted to be off on the holiday I'd come for, but it was deemed unsafe for me to do that alone; actually it was deemed unsafe for me to do anything alone apart from stay within the family yard. Alexandra township is certainly a place not without dangers, but I'd already started to kick hard against limitations to my freedom. I did though acquiesced to a trip

accompanied by Modiba's son, which actually was quite pleasant. Certainly more pleasant than the interminable hanging around I was expected to full back into when we returned. I admit to being pretty pissed off on the day of the funeral, which I refused to attend and instead spent a day of contrasts, exploring first the poorest part of Alexandra township, the area of shacks by the river that are in danger of sudden flooding and then Sandton, which although just within walking distance, is the richest area of Johannesburg, South Africa and probably all the rest of Africa too.

With the funeral and all the *after tears* drinking of alcohol that must follow done, I was ready to suggest Modiba should after all remain in South Africa, but she begged and pleaded a little and we went on holiday together, which was again quite pleasant. Quite pleasant except for the terrifying 20 minutes following the hire of a car. I've always thought that driving a car, like swimming or riding a bicycle are things once learnt that we never forget. I was mistaken in that and despite having no South African license I took over the wheel for the rest of the trip.

There was a more interesting mistake already in the making; Modiba's family had in various ways been deprived of ownership or control (or both) of the Alexandra property and also not one but two farms located in areas north of Pretoria. These problems were presented to me as being solvable if there was sufficient finance to pay for some legal work. I'm a long time vegetable grower and once even kept a heifer, pigs, geese and ducks on a two acre field in Wales. The thought of having several acres to grow and reap was very enticing. I'd already contributed some money to the recovery efforts which were half-heartedly under way and I saw both a chance to make a difference and also where an exciting future lay. So I would return to South Africa rather than Modiba to the UK.

I was not even deterred too much by the last night celebration at the local shebeen, when a guy called Moses (more of him later) thoroughly embarrassed me with a ridiculous farewell speech. It was not a good evening, with Modiba snapping from a common refrain of hers:-

I love you for certain sentimental reasons

to drunken nastiness in 30 seconds flat when I said I was tired and wanted to leave. She did not want to leave, yet it seems we had to leave together to avoid displeasing the ancestors of the shebeen owners, or some such.

So back I went to the UK and back I came to South Africa; but I had mistakenly failed to sort things out properly and was unable to transfer large sums of money to my new home country, where by the way, I now had temporary permission to reside with my spouse.

So we both went back to the UK, this time to do it right and to sell my house. That can take rather longer than you expect and it did. So much so that Modiba decided she must return before me as the anniversary of her mother's death was upcoming. I was quietly not too impressed; had it not been for me she would have had no chance to come back to the UK after returning home when her mother actually died. I'd gone to considerable expense, effort and marriage to make this possible for her, but six months of legality in the UK was enough as far as she was concerned. The death and burial of a parent in African culture, indeed does require that the oldest daughter be there to officiate, but surely not the anniversary as well. What a lame excuse.

At the same time as Modiba planned to leave, possibly coincidentally, but not necessarily so, a friend of hers was also returning home. At the last minute she discovered the shipping of her

furniture had not been paid for. In accordance with Modiba's guidance, which was that shipping furniture would be too expensive and that we could start from scratch in South Africa, I had sold off a good deal of my furniture at fire sale prices. But I was arm twisted into loaning the equivalent of R9,000 to this friend.

I suspected that money would never be repaid, but shortly after I was told it had been. Despite that Modiba should therefore have had plenty of money for the several months before I was able to rejoin her, I complied with several requests for more money to be sent. When I returned, her son's house had an additional floor built on. I later found out that the loaned money had not been repaid and since the deal had been conducted mainly in Zulu, with brief interpolations in English for my benefit, there probably had never been a suggestion other than to me, that it would be. So I think I also unwittingly made financial contributions to property improvements in Alexandra beyond that toilet cubicle.

But I race ahead; since we were going to focus first on one of the farms north of Pretoria, we (with money from the sale of my UK house) purchased a fairly swanky property in a suburb that put us in good striking distance. By swanky, I mean actually two houses in a large yard with a large swimming pool, palm trees, electric security fence and private borehole.

Part 2

We were in disgusting rental accommodation to be near the chosen purchase area for house hunting purpose when we had our first really serious disagreement. I don't actually remember what it was about or what triggered it, but I do remember that the UK money for the house purchase described above had reached Modiba's bank account a couple of days before and I don't think that was an unconnected factor. I also remember her packing bags with an intention to abandon me in a country still strange and in a town I was even less familiar with. Quite honestly I was shocked and a little frightened and not to put too fine a point on it I grovelled a little to turn her around.

We'd already given notice on the filthy cockroach infested flat by the time we'd found the place of her dreams, so we were back in Alexandra waiting for the agreed sale to complete when I realized that any hope of reclaiming the farm was both an absurd mistake as well as an interesting one. This farm had been illegally divided up and *sold off* (the title deeds forbade this) piecemeal by a relative; there were probably around 150 adults living there, mostly in tin shacks. I belatedly learned that although a considerable sum of money had been paid to serve legal notice on these people, some of them had refused to accept the papers. So at best when the year was up (in South African law rural squatters are allowed a year before they can become subject to the dictates of a Court), we'd be able to evict the nice people, but not the troublesome ones. Also the fact that a Court hearing was part of the process (more expense) had been concealed from me; and what would a Court make of the situation where a cousin of the owner had duped people into buying land and once they'd paid, eviction proceedings commence against them by the owner?

As I became more familiar with my new country of residence, I also realized that any attempt to move the squatters (owners?) off, or even back from the main part of the farm would lead to extreme violence not necessarily stopping short of a death or two. The fact of the matter was that many were probably desperately poor, would have nowhere else to take their tin shacks and no means of doing that even if there were other options. There would thus be no alternative other than

a fight to the death and let me emphasize that such situations are far from unheard of. I was pretty unimpressed that although Modiba had knocked back all my ideas about moving there straight away instead of settling on a suburban idyll as too dangerous, she was happily intending to install two young cousins there as a beachhead. I also realized that if I became the only white man in this area and had disturbed the peace of the local residents as we were actually planning to do, it's likely my time on earth would have become dramatically shortened. I contrasted her fears about me strolling on my own around Alexandra where I had never harmed a fly with her determination we press ahead on the farm and in the process creating some justification for me becoming a marked man. I also read that the farm's locality was the illegal gun capital of the Pretoria area.

So I was no longer the knight in shining armour and the next big row was not so far off, not soon after we'd moved into our new home in fact. I told her she could go if she wanted to. On the next occasion she actually did go back to Alexandra, but on returning sooner than expected, said she thought it wrong she should bring me to South Africa only to leave me. As things stood my right to live in South Africa, which definitely had some things going for it such as sunshine, depended on me living with her and I now had serious doubts that would happen long term.

Looking back a few years I can say with the benefit of hindsight that it's a mistake to buy property to live in a foreign country if you do not have permanent residential rights. If it's true that making mistakes is one way we learn, how clever of me to buy a second property in the same area and thus ensure an additional learning experience for myself! I should explain my mistaken reasoning for doing this. With there being no farm reclamation project now, Modiba needed another outlet for her energies. She fancied opening a fast food outlet; I believed, and in this I was not mistaken, that as well as having no business experience she had no aptitude either. But a relative of hers ran pretty successfully, a shebeen in the yard at Alexandra so maybe, just maybe Modiba and her son could do the same. In buying this property for business purposes, maybe I could also buy peace and at least avoid becoming a failed franchisee.

I soon realized that Modiba and Son were going to expect a further large input of funds to purchase industrial kitchen and security equipment and that this partnership was definitely one of those ships that would never sail. They had no idea of market research – it was left to me to discover that there had been a *sports pub* five minutes walk away in a better location, adjacent to the local station, which had closed down. There was also a hugely successful shebeen with far more suitable premises on the high street about 10 minutes walk away, which was likely the reason the competition had failed. They were also involved in discussions with local officials about rezoning the property for business use, which I'm pretty sure would have involved a large bribe, that I was not privy to. Simple questions of mine, such as how the rezoning would affect property rates and how difficult would it be to rezone back to a domestic property when the intrepid two became tired of a business that made no money, were ignored. I'll not try and describe the scene that ensued from me withdrawing support.

But no matter, Modiba would turn her hand to being a landlady, despite the stories we'd heard about that; anyone who said you'd never make any money was an idiot. On the strength of her projected profits (she had a rental income in mind that was above that advertised by rental companies for comparable properties), I agreed to the purchase of a second hand vehicle that would be suitable for use to help the necessary renovation project we'd embarked on. Whilst I was heavily occupied for a

period of two months putting up 40 meters of metal palisade fencing to make the place remotely secure, she took advantage of this preoccupation of mine and bought herself a new saloon car. It was a *fait accompli*, but she must have felt a trace of guilt; immediately on proudly driving it into the yard, she made a phone call to have it registered in joint names. To do this she needed me to spell out my middle name, which really presents no phonetic difficulty. I later discovered it was one of those phone calls with nobody on the other end as it's not possible in South Africa for a car to be registered in joint names.

My final straw was shortly to follow. After the first two tenancies had ended quickly in financial loss and eviction - and actually we were very fortunate indeed to have got rid of these tenants as quickly as we did - I was subjected to a finger pointing harangue some minutes long to the effect I was undermining her confidence. Unfortunately my attempts to limit the money she was losing had that unwanted side effect. I had a startling realization that the Modiba that figures in part 1 of this chapter bore no resemblance to the part 2 Modiba. Indeed since she had told me about a several month stint in a theatrical production in her younger days and must have received some stage training, I decided that Modiba part 1 was a pretty skilful piece of acting tailored to my prejudices.

I had a brief flirtation with another woman; even though it was never very serious and that we remained fully clothed I was quite conscious of how deadly an insult Modiba would take this to be. But I no longer cared so much although I did try to derail her divorce case by calling for family mediation, an African tradition she made much of, but did not want for herself. I succeeded in getting a brother of hers involved and we both verbally assented to his demands - that I apologise and stop all contact with the other woman and she withdraw her divorce case. It only had a delaying effect though as the next day she told me she would not cancel her case although she was not going full speed ahead with it at the present time.

There was a period of mostly calm of about a year, mostly calm that is after Modiba finally concluded she was not able to rent out property at a profit. Her business had lost a lot of money yet it could have been very much worse as South African law loads the game against the property owner. It had been a highly unpleasant several months and not just for her as each time a tenant became unmanageable my help was required, even though we had agreed that my responsibility ended with property maintenance. We slept in separate rooms, which was certainly a relief to me and mostly kept out of each others hair.

I returned to the UK to visit my family; before I went, with some nonsense story about wanting to keep a small child who was expected to visit with his parents out of her bedroom, she enlisted my help in obtaining a key for the lock. So I was not too surprised when the storm broke on my return. I was asked to move out of the house that had been paid for, furnished and equipped by selling my UK property, as she found eating and sleeping under the same roof as me stressful. The accommodation she had in mind for me was the *business premises*, now empty and also unfurnished, premises that she had declined to move to (I'd suggested selling the place we were living in as we could have recouped the money that had been spent) as it was not safe enough. So although it was not safe enough for her, together with me and her son's family, it was fine for me on my own.

I declined as I saw her plan, that I move out and when my residence permit next needed to be renewed she would refuse to support me. So an advocate was brought in on her side, to oversee the

divorce matter – paid for, and here's another mistake I had made, with money from the UK which was all in bank accounts in her name. Because I had refused to move out, a few weeks later she brought some relatives from Alexandra to move me out, by breaking down my bedroom door, which in imitation of her I'd started to lock. They dumped that part of my personal possessions that she did not want to keep herself in the yard of the business premises. Since that part of my personal possessions that she did want to keep included my passport, there was a full night of conflict which the police became involved in. I was briefly arrested for trying to run from the police, but they accepted that I had not realized who they were and was actually trying to run to the police station. They did recover my passport, but I had little option but to accept the deal they brokered, which was that prior to divorce we would remain in the separate premises as they did not want to be bothered by our squabbles again. Actually, to get away from her was a big relief, despite having to spend a South African summer without a fridge, flirting with food poisoning.

Part 3

What I have yet to mention, is that she'd also brought a Domestic Violence case against me; that is about one week before committing the one real act of domestic violence herself as described above, she had accused me on Court papers of abusing her. Although it did not form part of her case, she also accused me of abusing her two granddaughters, who I had never been alone with. She was making a massive mistake by just assuming she would win this case and would thus *sort me*; she was so over confident that she cancelled my access to the bank account a few days before the final hearing.

In front of an African magistrate I, a white foreigner, successfully defended myself against the lies her African advocate had drafted for her. The fact that I could open proceedings with proof of her financial abuse just two days before meant that she could not now hide behind the advocate and his prepared lies. She had to try and respond herself, mouth dry, voice high and squeaky as she realized she'd been caught out. This persuaded the magistrate to not wing the hearing as I suspect he was intending to do. Rather, he suspended it for an hour so that he had a chance to actually read the voluminous paperwork. He focused on the fact that although she was accusing me of emotional abuse and wanted me locked out of what had been our shared home, she wanted free access to the business property, although she no longer had any conceivable business there apart from making my life intolerable. The magistrate described her as a trouble maker and dismissed her case.

It was a massive moral victory for me as much as it was a huge mistake by her to fail to appreciate the potential fall out from lying in Court. Even if they cannot face up to it as fact, in their hearts, the most ardent of her family support somewhere in themselves must know how unlikely it is these days that a woman seeking South African Court protection from a man will fail to be granted such and what a disgrace it is to falsely accuses a man of abuse.

But it was a pyrrhic victory, for she had learned well from another much earlier mistake, that mistake I described as her third mistake back in part 1 of this deplorable chapter. Again paying the same advocate to draught an affidavit, she informed the Home Affairs Department that I was no longer living with her, that there was no longer a spousal relationship and thus I was in breach of my residence permit.

There now enters into this woeful tale the one person, Thabo Mahlangu, Immigration Officer based at Head Office Gauteng, whose real identity I make no attempt to hide. A thoroughly nasty, deceitful, lying, little bully. Apart from those personal qualities, I'm pretty sure that since reception at the busy Home Affairs Office in Pretoria knew as much about my case as I did, they had arranged for a sizeable bribe to be taken from Modiba of which he would have been the main recipient. It's the only way that confidential information about my new partner, her address, cell phone and ID details including photograph could have ended up in Modiba's hands. If this epic diatribe ever reaches the attention of the great powers of this world and it results in him losing his job or being hung, drawn and quartered, I shall be well satisfied.

I was arrested after meeting him at a police station as he demanded, in a way that visibly shocked the attending police officer. I endured a journey with him and his side kick to central Pretoria during which I was threatened and denigrated. I was advised by an immigration advocate that the forms he served on me were as incorrect as his behaviour had been inappropriate. Despite this advice I chose to accept the documents as served and the confiscation of my passport and appeal against the order to leave South Africa in my own way. The appeal was supported by ... yes by my new partner and it's time to introduce her to lighten the gloom somewhat.

This lady, who I have referred to already as Mma was endowed with excellent timing. She had been employed as domestic help in a yard opposite the one I'd shared with Modiba. Her employers often kept her waiting outside a locked gate and many times I'd walked past and even surreptitiously admired her; I may even have greeted her once or twice. I think I'd decided it was best I didn't look too closely at her and maybe she'd decided the same. She later told me that she'd found what she understood to be my situation confusing, in that she thought that Modiba must be a maid (as domestic servants are known) like herself. She didn't understand why it was always Modiba, rather than myself driving the car.

So it was that with these mistaken ideas in her mind and with me roughly three weeks into my new solitary life, that we passed each other in the street, as we had done many times before. This time though she gave me a lovely smile and as I looked back to check who it was, she was also looking back, and when I looked back again, she was also looking back. So I ran back and said something or other and she smiled again and said thank you.

Next time we chanced on each other I invited her to go for a drink. She then learned from the local grapevine that her understanding of Modiba's role in my life was mistaken and she'd also been warned that this was one very violent woman, which certainly was no mistake. So at the appointed time to meet, she was actually in two minds and I had to persuade her by suggesting we go to the chosen establishment separately to reduce the chance of being seen together. She told me that she too was in the process of divorce, at her own instigation, after fleeing from a violent husband. She very quickly decided we were *made for each other* or at least that is what she said. I showed her around my still new home and we exchanged phone numbers.

So this relationship commenced with two divorce cases and a Domestic Violence case as backdrop. At first I didn't take it too seriously, but my enjoyment of her company crept up on me unnoticed. Also my only other companion, Hattie a female Jack Russell terrier, loved her. Shortly after it started and this was just before Christmas when a peak in violent crime results from an increased desperation for cash, I made the mistake of using a quiet footpath by the railway and was mugged

by three thugs at knife point. Later on there was also my immigration case to contend with and later still, when I started maintenance court case proceedings, my file was *lost* after a bribe was taken from Modiba by the office staff.

When Mma got her divorce I moved in with her, intending to regularly travel back to the suburb to keep an eye on the business premises, but in my absence it was broken into, vandalized and lots of my personal possessions stolen. So when one of Mma's neighbours took against us and tried very hard to have the local community make us leave, and if you lose the goodwill of an African community no other force will help you, we actually had no where else to go. I also suffered a detached retina and within a few days, as if targeted by a thief in the night as an optician described it, lost the sight of one eye. Apart from accidents which had generally been caused by carelessness, this was the first significant health issue of my adult life. And partly following from this, but also from more gross carelessness, I nearly and very painfully lost my right thumb as the result of a welding accident.

One day it dawned on me that I was living out in real life that childhood nightmare. I also knew that if I had never made each and everyone of my most stupid mistakes - buying the second property, allowing the UK money to be transferred to Modiba's bank accounts – Mma and I never would have met, let alone have had the chance to get to know each other.

It was the immigration problem and the lies of Thabo Mahlangu that finished us. He arm twisted me into withdrawing my appeal and told us there was no bar to me returning on a 90 day tourist visa once I left. In fact the South African spousal residential permit system is a gold diggers charter. Once the permit was cancelled by him, the day before I left voluntarily, it was deemed that I had overstayed dating back to my last entry into South Africa and this earned me a 5 year ban.

Chapter 6

Passing without a passport 1

The Highgate Lifebuoy option

When I was a young London boy, dad used to walk across Parliament Hill Fields to Highgate ponds every morning before he went to work. He would often feed the ducks in the first pond, the pond from where unseen, the River Fleet departs underground to the Thames. The leftover bread he had sliced up into cubes the night before was a much appreciated treat, especially in the winter months, at which time of the year he would occasionally have to break the ice in the next pond, the men's swimming pond, to have his morning swim.

From this dear reader, it will be no surprise when I say that we were a family of confident swimmers. I believe I had completed my first 100 yards when I was seven. I think that brother 1, who is a couple of years younger learned shortly after me and if this is not some trick of the memory, brother 2, who gives me a little over 4 years, could do a pretty decent dog paddle before he could even walk.

We youngsters did not at this time match our dad's all weather approach to swimming, but brother 1 and myself, and later brother 2 as well, would join him in the summer months, particularly on the weekends. I think we were something of a novelty act, us young boys in a man's domain and I believed we were pretty popular there. It was not long before we were taught to row by Mr Creed, the pond's superintendent and at quiet times, when it was unlikely that anyone would contrive to drown themselves, brother 1 and myself were even allowed to take out the boat on our own.



Front to back – myself, brother 1, brother 2, Mr Creed and dad on the swimming ponds jetty.

Another regular swimmer wanted to teach us to box, but I don't think any one of us was much of a pugilist. I, however in particular, was a strong and stylish swimmer and I reckon the resident swimming club was mostly very pleased to have four new fee paying members, although it turned out that our popularity was not quite universal.

The Highgate Lifebuoys swimming club had at this time an annual program of races - 50 yards, quarter mile, freestyle, backstroke, juniors only, handicaps, fully clothed and so on. The fully clothed handicapped race was a particularly fun event; to improve our chances we would cut a big hole in the bottom of our socks to stop these ballooning full of water and slowing us. It was the job of one of the clubs officials, Mr Cape, to have all participants start at times staggered to match their

individual prowess. So if he did his calculations perfectly, the race would end in a dead heat with everyone touching home at the same time. Of course this is a handicappers aim that is never achieved and certainly not by Mr Cape.

I remember him on more than one of his big days, that is to say a Sunday on which the scheduled race was a handicap, telling me and brother 1 not to wait for him, but that was not something that either of us had any intention of doing. It so happened that Mr Cape's first name was Andrew and that someone with a nose for the humorous side of life had come up with the nickname Andi Cap. Brother 1 and I, being well brought up young boys, would never address an adult by even their first name, let alone a nickname, but in private we did speculate together on a chicken and egg type conundrum. Had Mr Cape acquired his position at the club as handicapper merely because of his name rather than for any particular aptitude for this role? Seemingly however if you did beat your handicap as the saying went, this would be noted and your starting time delayed in the next handicap event.

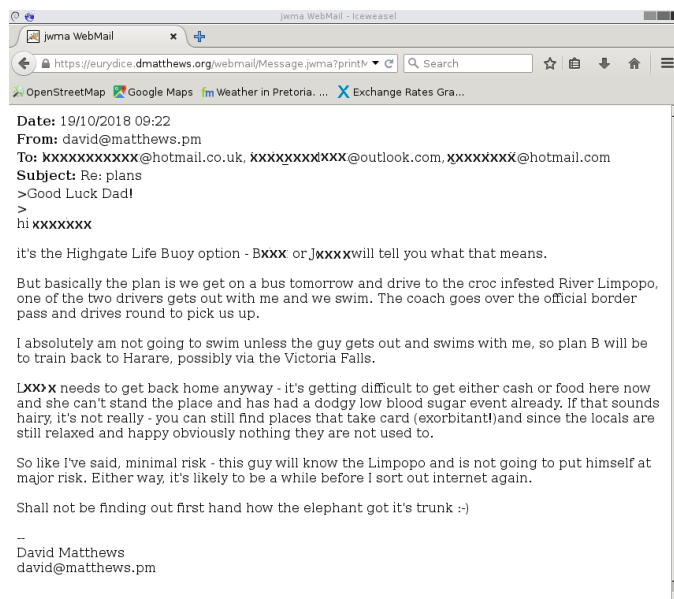
The rather unstreamlined middle aged handicapper was not the only person I, as a skinny 9 year old, could leave trailing in the water. The junior membership was not very strong at the time and brother 1 and I were pushed to enter the boys 100 yard freestyle to allow the race to be run. No one expected that I would pip the third competitor, a strapping 16 year old, to the finish boom despite sticking with my favoured breast stroke. What a little horror I was! I remember, gasping for breath, asking him who he thought had won, knowing full well that it was me. Fame and acclaim were not the only reward for this victory, there was also a real silver trophy onto which my name was to be engraved and which would remain in my possession until the next year when the race would be run again.

There followed over the next couple of years a string of victories far less hard won, yet all rewarded with silver trophies. In most cases I just had to fend off brother 1, whose real and not inconsiderable talents were as a musician rather than a swimmer. I think I would have been 12 years old when I next faced real competition in a junior event. As I recall there were two or three new members and one had an untidy, but fairly effective crawl, that might well push me to my limits if I stuck with breast stroke. As with all races that did not end at the home jetty - this was the 100 yards to a far edge of the pond - Mr Creed and his boat were requisitioned to transport the clubs adjudicator to a good view of the finish boom. On this occasion the adjudicator was Mr Cape.

The main threat and I were neck and neck for 40 yards or so, but at this point his face in the water style let him down, not in terms of speed, but rather in direction. He veered off course at an angle of 45 degrees or so. Now assured of another famous victory I relaxed and cruised to the finish boom ahead of the field, but this time there was a twist as Mr Cape seemingly had a better eye for distance than for handicap times. He decided that the face in the water crawler had completed 100 yards before me, which may indeed have been so and the fact that he was some 40 yards off course when I touched the finish boom first was not relevant to an unexpected and glorious victory.

I was traumatized by what was a double blow; I was no longer an undisputed champion, but yet harder to bear was the realization that someone clearly did not like me and I had no idea why that was so. The Highgate Lifebuoys club was affiliated to a national swimming association, by whose

rules it was bound and whose rules had clearly been breached. I have no doubt that if dad had decided to dig in his heels, at the very least the race would have been re run or even Mr Cape's decision overturned. There were plenty of mutterings in support of both outcomes, but dad decided, not without my agreement, to simply walk away in disgust.



But dear reader I have sorely digressed again! This time simply to make the point that I am a competent swimmer; it must be that there is something I have long wanted to get off my chest! So after a quick introduction to Small Bus' trusty co-driver, Rasta, I'm going to skip ahead.

The coach turns off the A6 about 5km short of Beitbridge and we bump along a dirt track for 20 minutes or so. Then I catch my first sight of the Limpopo river and shortly after that we stop. Rasta Bus gives me a *ready man?* sort of look and together with

Small and Mma, we get off the bus. I bring my day bag as I have set ideas about keeping clothes dry, as I will shortly explain and I voice my concern about being seen on the other side with soaking wet clothes. Small Bus laughs at this and jingles some coins in a pocket as the solution to such an eventuality. I'm pretty nervous; it's not just my concerns about breaking across a border illegally, there is also the minor detail of the crocodiles in the river. However I'm pretty relieved that there clearly is no intention that I swim on my own. Mma hugs and reassures me, she and Small get back into the coach and Rasta and I watch it do a clumsy turn on the narrow track; Rasta is clearly in no hurry.

Now he leads the way; the river is a 10 minute hike through the bush at this point. When we reach it, the banks are low on both sides, with sizeable beaches at the waters edge. Rasta says this is not a good place to swim as it's just about the best area for crocodiles to hang out. The river has a sluggish flow from our right to left and Rudyard Kipling had it just right, green and greasy are fair descriptions of the banks. The trees lining the river are not large, but taller than the bush we've been walking through and in places there are patches of quite deep, foul smelling mud. We keep walking against the rivers flow, mostly keeping it in sight and I'm a bit jumpy about being so close to crocodile territory. Rasta tells me he has done this trip many times so I decide to accept that he knows what he's doing.

We arrive at a spot marked by a large rock, defaced by a number of carved initials and dates. The banks are steep here as they have been for the last 15 minutes of our trek and they are about two meters high on both sides of the river. This has narrowed a little to about 20 meters wide, roughly the same as the distance to the turn boom for the 50 yards freestyle race on Highgate pond. The river is also following a lazy meander at this point and the rock is just about exactly at the bottom of it's U shape which gives us a good view of it both up and downstream. There are no beaches. Rasta sits done.

He takes out a pouch from his shirt pocket and rolls up a cigarette with herbal cannabis which he then spices up by heating a block of dark brown hashish with a match and crumbling it generously into the mix. It looks like a pretty potent remedy. He grins at me and says his religion requires that he smokes dagga at least once every day; this has to be a special day in the Rastafarian calendar as it becomes his first smoke of three. I remember that he did not touch the goat meat when we'd stopped for food after leaving Bulawayo, eating only sadza as the Zimbabweans call their maize meal, so it would seem he is a vegetarian and thus probably a fairly serious Rastafarian. He says between inhalations that to hunt a crocodile it is necessary to become like a crocodile. I suggest that rather than hunting a crocodile we should be pretty satisfied to avoid getting eaten by one, but Rasta insists we are hunting and says that like a crocodile, we must be very patient. I decide that since a suitable hunting technique may well resemble the strategy required to avoid becoming crocodile food, I should not quibble any further. I've developed a sneaking regard for Rasta's bush craft and confidence in an area where crocodiles are not the only peril. There are likely to be venomous snakes and although the big cats have all been fenced in reserves, I believe there is still the possibility of a brush with a hyena. This is not an appropriate time to be giving voice to a shopping list of possible dangers though and our conversation ebbs away into a watchful silence

We sit still on the rock side by side for a considerable period; there is something hypnotic about scanning the river's slow progress, so slow that at times I'm not even convinced that the flow is towards the east.. Naturally I'm looking for crocodiles; the nearest I get to seeing one is when a large log floats by; it takes the best part of 15 minutes to depart my field of vision after I first spot it and that's without it once getting snagged on the bank.

I think I hear a vehicle on the far side, but it doesn't come into view, I look enquiringly at Rasta who has a beatific smile on his face.

Soon man, soon

he says. Then I see Small on the far side. Rasta waves and then points first to the area directly below us at the bottom of the rock and then to a spot, also on our side of the river a little downstream. I now see that Small is carrying a rifle; he fires several shots at each area Rasta has identified and two decent size crocodiles leap into action and disappear briskly in a downstream direction. I have a sudden vision of Small as a bandit - he has a bullet belt slung over his left shoulder and another belt around his trousers dripping with knives and pistols. He is wearing a Mexican sombrero, but I can't make out at this distance whether or not he has grown a Zapata moustache since we last saw him. I recall from my hippie days the concept of a contact high, but of course my reverie might be nothing so intangible. Maybe my transformation from agitation into serenity is the result of inhaling the fumes Rasta has been breathing out.

Now man, now

Rasta jumps into the river. I sensibly give up on my plan to pack my clothes into the bag and hold it above the water as I swim side stroke. I don't even take off my sandals. Even though I must be 30 years older than Rasta if I'm a day, I have not the slightest doubt that with my breast stroke I could soundly beat him in a swimming race of any length provided it's not being adjudicated by Mr Cape. But this is not that kind of race and I just make sure I stay as close to him as I can with out getting my face rearranged by his ungainly kicking.

We drag ourselves up the far bank gripping the tree roots and tufts of greenery and getting thoroughly fouled by the stinking greasy mud. Small, who has no bullet belt, pistol belt or sombrero and is as clean shaven as when we last saw him earlier in the day, welcomes me to South Africa. He does in true life have a hunting rifle. We walk the short distance to where the coach is waiting for us. Mma says that she did not know that Small had a gun. I say not to worry, but I refuse the dry clothes she has unpacked for me, since Rasta clearly has no intention of changing. A bucket of clean water has been made available for us and we do make a bit of an effort to wipe the worst of it off our trousers and since it is still a warm day, we are more or less dry before the coach resumes the journey.

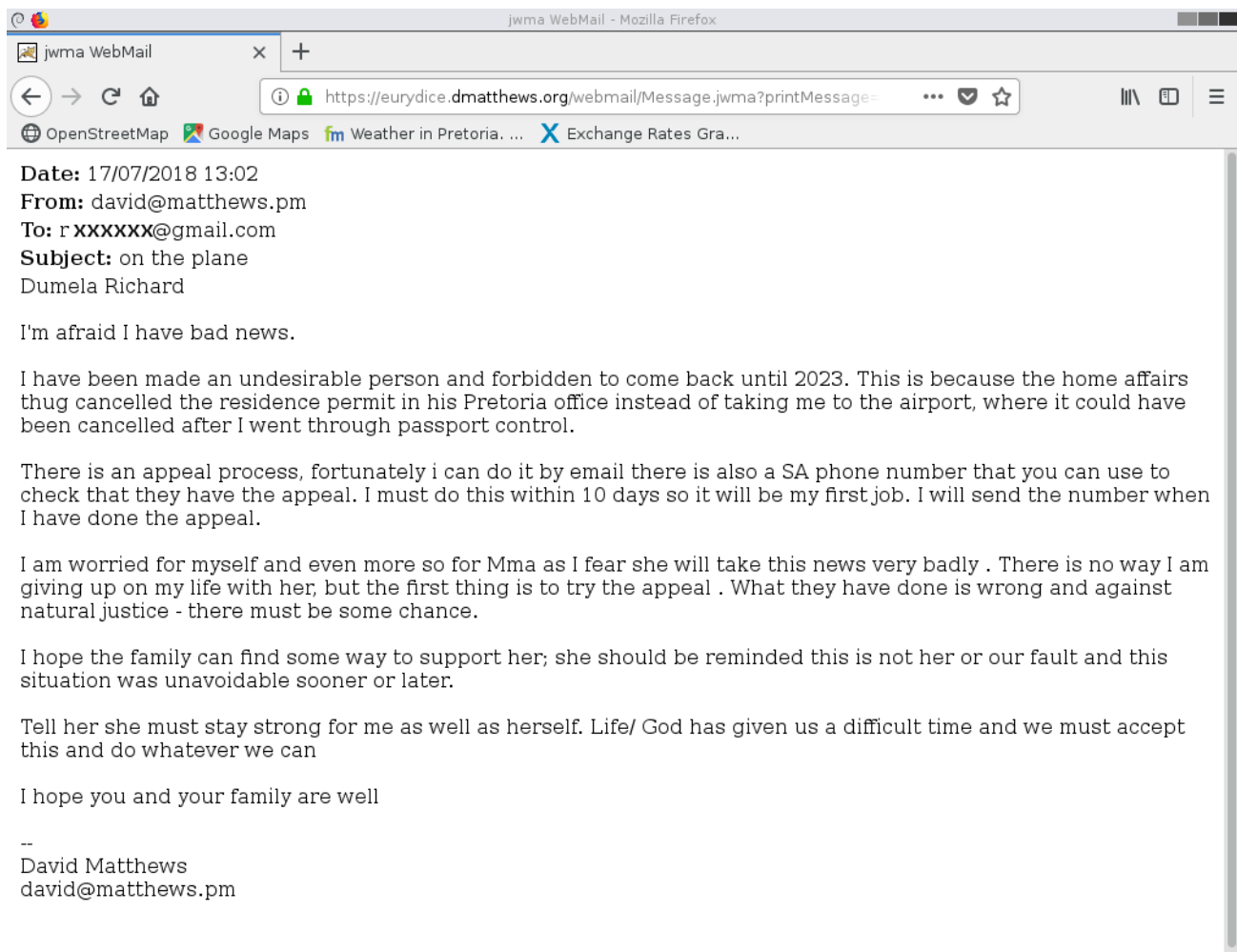
Chapter 7

88 Days

*Your absence has gone through me like thread through a needle,
Everything I do is stitched with its color*

William Stanley Merwin

Mma helped me with my bag on the taxi to town and so we said goodbye at Pretoria station. It was not a big emotional parting as we both expected a separation of only a few weeks, but it did not feel good. At the passport check at Johannesburg airport, as I went to board the plane, the real implication of having a passport with a cancelled temporary residence permit was made clear. Although it had been cancelled only the day before, it was deemed that I had overstayed by a period dating back to my last entry into the country, well over a year ago. I was issued with documentation stating that I was undesirable person and was barred from returning for 5 years.



I sent that email to a relative of Mma's, because Mma herself, although adept enough with a phone and SMS messages, had not got to grips with email. I did not realise that this relative (and he was

not alone) would decide against any involvement in our troubles. Being able to communicate complicated plans by SMS only was not easy.

My first thoughts were obviously that we must try the appeals procedure as at the time I did not realize that its sole purpose is to calm the frenzy at the airport of people that have business, family or some other South African based commitment and have just been told as they temporarily depart the country that they will not be returning when they thought they would. Whilst it is probably generally quite fit for such purpose, it takes no consideration of a South African citizen left behind that has any sort of stake in such a commitment:-

From: +27xxxxxxxxx
Date: Wed, 25 Jul 2018 13:39:16 +0100

Love totally no answer but the phone is wringing I think I must go there tomorrow morning is it by Oliver Tambour.

From: +27xxxxxxxxx
Date: Wed, 25 Jul 2018 10:31:53 +0100

Pa I. Will keep on trying three times not answering the phone

From: +27xxxxxxxxx
Date: Fri, 27 Jul 2018 07:31:09 +0100

Morning love I can't eat or sleep you have to come back is difficult. with out you

From: +27xxxxxxxxx
Date: Tue, 31 Jul 2018 06:58:37 +0100

Morning pa it's so difficult to live without you I think we can just. Wait for a while then I will come there because here I. Sit hole night by TV I. Can't get. In that bed without you

Before I realized that the appeals procedure was a sham, another early thought was to explore whether it was possible to lubricate it with some bribery. It mostly just took the receipt of a not too gloomy SMS message from Mma in the morning for me to maintain a fairly positive frame of mind.

To: +27xxxxxxxxx
Date: Thu, 2 Aug 2018 09:07:49 +0100

ma thank you u can pay whatever they want i will send more money when you need it. thank you for the sms u send every morning, they cheer me up a bit. i love you i do not try to say how much in sms

But even in the early days when there still seemed to be some cause for optimism, it really was a struggle (HA is Home Affairs):-

From: +27xxxxxxxxx
Date: Fri, 3 Aug 2018 07:04:42 +0100

Morning love it's getting harder papa we used to be together every day we will see on Monday I hope you come back next week

To: +27xxxxxxxxx
Date: Fri, 3 Aug 2018 07:22:47 +0100

i am looking after cats and fishes while kids are on holiday also i said i would be at brians birthday on 15th. if HA say ok plse wait happily for a couple of weeks

To: +27xxxxxxxxx
Date: Sat, 4 Aug 2018 23:20:08 +0000

ma just want you to know that if we are not together nothing is right. here i am cooking horrible food for myself & i do not know what to do

From: +27xxxxxxxxx
Date: Sat, 4 Aug 2018 23:26:41 +0000

Papa we are made for ethother love you

And that was just about it – we were made for each other, but had been forced to separate and I had no real idea what to do about it. I was just flitting between one unpromising scheme and another.

Even with the help of an influential neighbour who had some contacts at Home Affairs, an attempt at bribery was a drawn out, emotionally debilitating and eventually an expensive waste of time. It yielded only a scrappy typed letter, not even on headed paper and not even signed and dated. I had to tell Mma it was nothing, of no use at all. The stress involved in obtaining even this resulted in Mma's sugar levels falling out of control; she collapsed in the street one day and had to be rushed to hospital. It was lucky that she was accompanied at the time by Johannah, a relative of hers (much more of her later).

I spent some time investigating rental accommodation in my adopted home town and also in a nearby city, but I could now hardly afford this even as a single person and was relying on my children to accommodate me on a sitting room floor. It seemed that UK regulations would allow Mma to visit for up to 6 months, but making all the necessary arrangements via SMS would be next to impossible. The thought of meeting up in Botswana occurred to me and Mma duly got herself a passport. Then I realized that all flights from the UK to Botswana transit through Johannesburg and I doubted even this would be allowed.

I discovered just a single helpful resource, an internet site where there was discussion by people in a similar predicament to me. From here I learnt that there had been a fairly recent policy change in South Africa; there had been a system of fines for people deemed to have overstayed, but it had been decided that these did not represent a stiff enough deterrent and had been replaced by the introduction of *undesirable status*. So when Mma was advised by one unhelpful Home Affairs official to travel to Johannesburg to pay a fine, I was at least able to warn her not to bother.

One fellow victim of this new policy, a Motswana (a native of Botswana), reported he was not allowed back to South Africa even after the completion of his supposed period of exclusion. Another person said that his flight out had been delayed by several hours, resulting in him leaving just after midnight rather than the day before and that this overstay of 15 minutes had earned him a ban of one year. Although it did not relate quite so neatly to my own case of undesirability, the real horror story that I came upon revealed an astonishing callousness and total lack of concern for real people. A retired European couple had a married son that had emigrated to South Africa and they

planned the holiday of a lifetime. This was to be a cruise to Cape Town, a stay in an expensive Johannesburg hotel and time with their foreign based family before flying home. The problem was that on an earlier visit one of their passports had not had an exit stamp applied to it to confirm that the entry visa had been complied with. It is very very difficult to conjure up any explanation for this other than it being a mistake of omission by South African staff at Johannesburg airport. No matter though, the rules are the rules and one person, the wife I believe, was in breach of them. Thus the couple were barred from entering South Africa at Cape Town so could not take up their hotel booking or use the flight home they had paid for and would not of course be enjoying the family time they had looked forward to. I'm not clear how they did manage to return home, but it was apparently by a very expensive alternative route.

There was another person using the site I'd discovered who wondered whether getting a passport without his middle name would do the trick; I can now say fairly confidently that it would not as I did decide to try this myself. I bought a sober grey business suit, grew a beard and had my hair cut shorter. I officially and legally dropped my middle name and got a replacement passport with a different number. Mma was so happy that I was aiming to be back in time for her birthday and I had to repeatedly urged emotional caution as I did not share her confidence. Indeed, it seems that it is a simple matter for the South African authorities to obtain details of earlier passports held by a UK national. The check in desk at Manchester airport was unable to print a boarding pass and a phone call to Johannesburg resulted in the emphatic message that I was not welcome in their country and I certainly knew why that was.

So the idea of meeting in Zimbabwe was decided on as a final act of desperation. At the time the UK press was full of alarming stories about political unrest, food shortages and the lack of availability of money, not to mention cholera and malaria. I later found out that the Bulawayo area was not malarial and also in the favour of Zimbabwe for a reunion was the fact that if you fly to Harare from the UK, you do not have to transit through South Africa.

Chapter 8

Memories of Bulawayo 3

Life is... a woman's prerogative

SweetKittyCat5

Even though I thought I was prepared for anything, I was on edge. Mma had been in repeated contact with the coach people. Yes they were coming tomorrow ... yes they were in Bulawayo, but they were tired and the return trip was going to be on Sunday ... yes we are going today be ready to leave at 9am. So that seemed like there was one uncertainty out of the way, which meant that the now low level of my holdings of US currency was no longer a problem. Even if I'd get no satisfactory answer to confirm that someone would be swimming with me, the pleasant if basic accommodation we'd enjoyed had been paid for up until 10am. I could insist Mma got on the coach and return home as there was no alternative than that she do so.

After just a week and all the trouble we had gone to that would be a pretty flat ending against the 30 or even 90 days we'd thought to enjoy, but what do you actually do when you have that sort of time on your hands? Left to myself, I'd certainly want to see the Victoria Falls, and that could be done by another epic train journey which, if I was alone, I would thoroughly enjoy. Spending time with another person in different to usual circumstances is a good way to be surprised by that person; not to put too fine a point on it I could see that Mma was not good travel companion material.

Actually what Mma really needed right now was a soft drink to ensure the sugar levels were kept under control. I'd remembered a couple of places where such an item could be had for a fairly hefty deduction via swipe rather than hard currency. The weather had changed; it was overcast and cool, the sort of weather that makes the Africans take to their overcoats and wool hats, but for me, ideal weather for a brisk 30 minute walk. The sort of weather that might even persuade me to put on a loose cardigan that I did not really need, just to stop the incredulous stares I'd get whilst comfortable in shirt sleeves. But today everything was packed ready to go and Mma was worried about missing the coach. So I limited myself to the 5 minute walk up Jason Moyo Street to the area where street vendors would sell you a couple of bananas at a reasonable price, a reasonable price that is, so long as you proffered payment in their preferred currency.

Around 10 am there was still no sign; the delightful young hotel woman on duty that morning insisted we come back and wait inside. Another phone call went to voice mail, but the call was quickly returned; yes they were coming, just be patient as they had other people to pick up from around Bulawayo. And by the way, where exactly were we? I shared my bemusement that they seemed doubtful about finding their way to the junction of Jason Moyo St and 1st Avenue and the reception lady agreed with me that it was not impressive.

After a further period of agitation sitting in the reception area, the concerns about missing the coach were relegated to second behind my concerns about Mma's diabetes. I gleaned from the phone calls that the keeping_in_touch_despite_the_delays meant that we were valuable customers and would

eventually be collected. This was clearly *African time* in action and if necessary they could wait as we had done.

As I again walked up Jason Moyo Street I was wondering whether this would be the last time I did so. It would be this way that I walked again on route to the station if I left Bulawayo for either the Victoria Falls or Harare. It seemed however it would be neither, as when I returned the arrival of the coach was now imminent.

I have said that I thought I was prepared, but one thing you can never prepare for is a woman's prerogative, which firstly on this occasion exposed Small Bus to be almost as unprepared as was I.

Mma, you did not tell me your husband is a white man!

And that was just the first of it. However Small possessed better powers of recovery than myself and although he had certainly flinched for a few seconds he quickly reverted to what I soon learnt to be his normal ebullient self. He turned to me and with a circular gesture of his arms asserted that the world was for everyone, not just for Cyril Ramaphosa, President of South Africa.

I think a fair bit of context is now necessary. In the UK and Europe, where women have gained an equality with men, or at least a sort of equality, they really should no longer have such a thing as a prerogative. Things are very different in rural Africa, from where Mma hails. For instance, a man must buy his wife - or wives if that he can both afford and desires. Traditionally a fairly generic sort of wife would cost ten cows, but now days not so many men keep a herd of cattle so metal tokens or (much more likely) promissory notes must be resorted to. Naturally enough, a young woman of outstanding beauty or a refined lady from a family of high calibre would attract a higher price.

Let's be clear that I place no value judgement on what I'm saying about the African customary marriage as against the UK version, which let's also be honest, has not proved to be wildly successful in recent times. Since Mma's parents had long passed, it was by her brother that I was required to pay as lobolo (bride price or dowry), a reasonable R20,000. As a European with my own set of inherited prejudices I was not best impressed that a brother as opposed to a parent would expect payment, but in African society, living together is frowned on and the customary marriage is of much greater importance than a church do or a Home Affairs affair. I consented because once she'd divorced her previous husband, Mma wanted to be my wife.

I'll mention as a side issue, that although promissory notes are acceptable these days instead of cows, electronic payment definitely is not as there must be an occasion, with family and neighbours in attendance, of food and drink. How the hell they manage in cash strapped Bulawayo I have no idea. In our case the wad of promissory notes resulted in some pretty unseemly squabbling with demands of the brother for a share being made alike by sisters, nieces and children. I did wonder just how traditional this marriage was as there seemed to be no strongly established guidelines in place for a second marriage after a divorce.

As an attentive reader, you dear reader, will have noticed that although, Mma as an African woman, had first to divorce before taking another spouse, I was under no such constraint. As a further side issue, although it is possible for both partners, together with family members as witnesses, to present themselves to Home Affairs and obtain a certificate, a customary marriage in South Africa can not acquire any legal status if either partner is already entangled in matrimony as was I.

So an African woman has a prerogative, because society affords her only a subservient position; I've actually heard a TV evangelist preaching that a woman must subjugate herself to a man that subjugates himself to God. I must stress again that although this is very definitely against my own instincts, I try quite hard not to assume that my prejudices are superior to the African world view.

Anyway, an African woman's prerogative gives her a flexible relationship with truth. Despite that in recent times the swimming of the crocodile infested Limpopo river had been exhaustively discussed, even to the point that swimming as such would mostly be unnecessary since you could touch the bottom, when I demanded that she pushed with Small the delicate point of whether the swim would really be accompanied, Mma responded that there would be no swimming.

Chapter 9

Passing without a passport 2

The prophet and the crocodile

When I first moved to South Africa, I lived for several months in Alexandra Township, an almost entirely African only area of Johannesburg. The more or less uniformity of skin colour belied a rich mix. In tribal terms there had been a Zulu influx into this largely Pedi population, encouraged by the Apartheid government to combat what they had rightly seen as (to them) the ANC menace. This had resulted in huge spasms of carnage and violence, but had of course failed in its ultimate purpose.

Since the democratic era there were other nationals from Nigeria, Malawi, Mozambique, Lesotho and of course Zimbabwe; particularly in the case of the latter, many of these incomers were not strictly speaking entitled to be there, or for that matter in South Africa at all.

I was in a shebeen one evening talking to Moses, who was otherwise known as Nelson, since he sported a Mandela hair cut rather than the more common shaved head style favoured by many African men. Moses was the local unpaid social worker, who spent his days ensuring HIV positive people got their drugs and trying to find a source of maize meal for those with empty bellies. Because of his voluntary work, which took him all over Alexandra, he certainly was an excellent source of local knowledge.

We were, due to my limitations, conversing in English, but there was a background buzz of what I took to be Northern Sotho, the native tongue of the Pedi people. Two guys who were not regulars entered and Moses mentioned that they were Zimbabweans, and since they were native Shona speakers, which few South Africans know, all conversation would now switch to the lingua franca, happily from my point of view as a linguistic duffer, being English.

He was correct and quickly the whole shebeen was overcome by curiosity, wanting to know how these guys from distant parts had landed in Alexandra. By their own account they had crossed the Limpopo river on the backs of crocodiles. This rather stunning information was not dismissed out of hand and a lively debate followed, one side proposing that their legs were probably being pulled, whilst a number of fellow customers thought that such a feat was a possibility. I now know that in all likelihood, what these men said was indeed true.

Some five kilometres short of Beitbridge, the coach stopped at the junction with a dirt track. Small Bus explained to me that it was not safe for the coach to take this route so close to the border as it would likely attract unwanted attention from the authorities. From here on I would be led on foot by Rasta Bus to our helper. Mma got out of the coach with me; we hugged and she told me not to worry and since there was no way Small Bus was going to be paid unless I crossed the river in one piece, there was nothing to fear.

It was a 15 minute hike along the track, followed by a further trudge through the bush which

brought us to a clearing about the size of a football pitch. It was a lively spot; there were several traditional round buildings with thatched roofs, attractively painted in the shade of orange I'd seen before on route. Goats and chickens abounded and I also saw a cow and a couple of pigs; there were roughly fenced patches of young maize plants and the local spinach, actually a brassica, which I believe is simply taken into cultivation from the wild as is. The human population was a good deal yet more interesting. There were small people and school aged children sufficient in number to fill a classroom and a number of women that I never succeeded in counting. I'd guess that they ranged in age from mid twenties to early fifties; Rasta Bus grinned and warned me to watch my step as all of these women were married and indeed married to the one man on whose help my future rested. This man was seated outside one of the rondavels in front of a fire with his back to us. For the first time, Rasta referred to this man as the prophet and said that was how I should address him.

I'm not sure how the prophet sensed our approach, the women and small children seemed to take little interest in us and the older kids mostly had their faces buried in smart phones; I could not detect how he picked up any clue from their behaviour. As he rose, I saw that he was a large man, tall, broad and with a huge belly. He was scantily clad in animal skins draped around his shoulders and wrapped around, below his stomach, possibly because covering that would be a substantial challenge. Rasta Bus stepped ahead of me and perceptibly bowing his head, made a gesture of deference with hands brought together at finger tips.

After an initial exchange in what I took to be either Ndebele or Shona, there was a loud outburst of laughter from the prophet who gestured to me in greeting and in excellent English told me he had known I was coming and had been preparing for several days. Now this was indeed odd; I am open to the possibility that some people with unusual capabilities are able to step out of sequential time, but I had only decided for certain I was up for this adventure earlier the same day. I had also noticed both Small and Rasta Bus making frantic attempts and seemingly failing to contact someone by phone; I guessed now that they had the cell numbers of some of this man's brood. He made reference to his attire and pointedly told me that there did actually exist in Zimbabwe trousers that were large enough for him and that indeed they were several pairs in his possession. I was no little embarrassed at seemingly having been caught out and I felt my face flush red. The prophet further explained that his current dress was required for a successful attempt to elicit the help of the ancestors, without which we merely mortal could achieve very little.

The prophet fetched two crudely fashioned jugs from one of the rondavels and standing in front of me, threw the liquid one contained at my face and chest. He told me to turn around and then with the second jug, soaked my back. With a home made implement rather like a garden rake he dragged the hot embers of the fire into a circle and indicated I should sit in the middle. I followed his instructions; the earth was warm from the fire, but not uncomfortably so. The prophet went back to the same rondavel, this time bringing back with him an armful of rank herbaceous material; walking around me in an anti clockwise direction on the outside of the fire, he arranged this composting mess on top of the ring of fire which caused it to produce a dense acrid choking smoke.

I sat there for an interminable time; because of the smoke and because it was starting to go dark, I couldn't easily see beyond the fire. Suddenly the prophet appeared in front of me, stepping over the smoking material. He told me to stand and said it was time to go. It was with some concern that I realized that Rasta was no longer here and it seemed to me that at just this moment the prophet

again read my mind.

He is waiting on the other side for you; you must cross the river and he will take you back to the coach.

With a deft movement the prophet bent down pushed a small piece of still glowing charcoal into a pipe which he put to his lips and inhaled deeply the fumes from some mixture that had just been ignited. He exhaled the smoke into my face and as he did so it seemed as if I was stepping outside of myself. I don't know why, but I suddenly seemed to be taller; I looked down and saw myself lying on the ground. The prophet said I must not look down or look back but must now follow him and do exactly as he indicated. I struggled to put the conundrum from my mind, that I was both lying on the ground and walking away from my body at one and the same time. Nothing further was said but I somehow understood that I was being instructed and that one of these instructions was that I was not to trouble myself with what I thought to be impossible contradictions.

At the Limpopo bank there was a huge crocodile, lying on it's belly facing the far side of the river. I was mulling on the absurdity that on one side was Zimbabwe and on the other South Africa and that different dispensations existed in the affairs of humans, divided by this water. On one side the dispensation permitted me to be present for a total of 30 days, on the other I was persona non grata. Then I realized I must concentrate and halt this runaway train of thought; I was being instructed to stand on the crocodile's left side, halfway between it's front and rear legs. The prophet was standing directly in front of this dinosaur and although no sound passed from his lips, I knew he and the reptile were striking a deal. This crocodile was the local dominant male and there was no other crocodile in this locality that would mess with me while I was under its protection; yes, I was to be ferried across the river by an alpha male crocodile.

The prophet gestured with his hand that I was to sit astride the crocodile; this gesture, a visual indication, was the first time since we had left the fire that I understood how the instructions were reaching my consciousness. The crocodile crawled into the river, swam across and lay belly down on the far bank; only my sandals and trousers below the knee were wet as my shirt had long since dried. Ahead of us the bank was quite steep, about two metres high. The moon was rising above it, outlining the figure of Rasta Bus.

Man, get off that bad boy before it changes its mind.

I climbed the slippery bank and though I was grateful for his extended arm as I reached the top, I expressed my annoyance that he had left me without warning. He replied that I had never been in danger, but that if I had known I'd be on my own I'd never have gone for it and that I would not now be in South Africa where I wanted to be. He grabbed me, turned me around and pointed down to where I had landed. There was a very large diameter neatly sawn log about the same length as the crocodile. I could tell by my footprints that it was exactly where the crocodile had come to rest. Of the beast itself, there was no sign. I had a moment of inner turmoil; although I realized with relief that the hours of uncertainty had solidified into a successful outcome, I was somehow gliding through some truly bizarre happenings.

On this side of the river it was only a ten minute walk to the road where the coach was waiting and

this exercise had the effect of bringing me properly back to my body and to the world we all know. As we walked Rasta told me that he had once followed exactly the same route as me into South Africa several times. I asked him how on this occasion he had materialized on the South African side of the river, but he seemed either unwilling or even unable to answer. Yet I felt a sense of kinship with this young African man, who despite our otherwise disparate lives, had shared a part in this unearthly experience with me. He did add that now Small Bus had obtained documentation for him, such adventure as I had enjoyed was neither necessary for him any more or even possible. Although the documentation was of doubtful provenance, it was adequate to pass muster with both the Zimbabwean and South African authorities; because of this the ancestors would be annoyed and uncooperative if they were aroused when there was no real need for their help.

I do miss crossing that way though, give me a croc over the police any day.

There were several more questions I would like to have asked, but they have all gone unanswered. Somehow, although my mind was clear like a transparent crystal, I could not coherently place these doubting thoughts onto my tongue. And then there were Small Bus and Mma, waiting for us by the coach. Small, with a large grin on his face which seemed to say *you see, you see*, slapped me on the back and did the knuckles together greeting with Rasta. Mma hugged me and said something to the effect that we were back together in South Africa. We all got into the coach and were off.

Chapter 10

Journey through Zimbabwe

Bulawayo to the border

Yoh! This stupid woman! You are supposedly a Christian; are you not supposed to refrain from deception, daughter of Satan? Do you still not realize there is nothing I would not do if it gave any hope for me to again spend my days with you? I would never allow you to accompany me into danger unless by doing so you tipped the odds in favour of us both. Why must you stain the world with such unnecessary lies that really serve no good purpose at all?

As I attempted to digest Mma's bombshell, my bags were being hastily loaded and padlocked into the trailer that the coach was towing so I had little option other than to get on board. I sat down in a daze next to Mma. It seemed that despite our long wait, the coach had not yet fully acquired all the customers booked in for the trip. I thought that I now knew central Bulawayo quite well, but as we lurched around the wide avenues I was soon confused. There was a fuel stop, actually a diesel stop, which was indeed fortunate as this, in contrast to petrol seemed to be available without queuing, at least at some petrol stations. A halt or two for fast food, and stops for taking on board more people and confusingly, others getting off almost as if this was a local Bulawayo taxi service. Then there were other stops as well, the purpose of which I failed to comprehend. In my head, I got off the coach several times, but in reality I remained glued to the seat, mentally paralysed by the unexpected turn of events and by the logistics of my bag being locked in the trailer..

Finally I decided that some sort of action was unavoidable and I actually did get off, intending to discuss with Small Bus exactly what was planned. Whatever it was, he had already extracted US \$50 from me via Mma and since there was to be no heroic swim, what problems were there to be in place of the crocodiles? But it's all hazy now and I can remember nothing more than the confident assurance from Rasta Bus that there was no need to worry and that everything would be fine. Rasta was a young guy, I'd guess early 30s, and in one of those hard to define, subtle interpersonal exchanges, he had a positive effect on me. Eventually the coach trundled out of Bulawayo; I can't now remember much that I can say of the outskirts, but as we passed them by I saw nothing to shake me from my view that this was a fine town.

There was a frosty silence between myself and Mma which did not pass for many a mile. There had been a conversation we'd had earlier in the week which I've yet to mention. I remember reading long ago the opinions of people who had enjoyed long and happy marital relationships and what they had done to make that possible. The opinion that had stuck in my memory was that *you should never let the sun go down on an argument*. We had agreed on the soundness of this premise and had recognized that we could both do much better in this respect and had resolved to try to do so. I knew that despite feeling that I was the aggrieved party it was going to be left to me on this occasion to break the ice. It was not merely the advancing of the afternoon towards evening that led me to do this; although I was not quite sure what we were heading into I was of the firm opinion that it was best approached without there being any discord between us.

As well as cementing in my mind my favourable impressions of Bulawayo, the coach journey, that

was done at a steady pace that I felt to be compatible with safety (not something I would say about all public transport experiences in South Africa), has left me with some positive memories of Zimbabwe as a whole. Quite early on, although I did not appreciate it at the time, we must have passed close to the Matobo Hills, where both Mzilikazi, (who named them such for their bald rocky heads) and Cecil Rhodes lie at rest.

The scenery was often dramatic, with high ground at the horizon and a foreground of dense bush. Signs of human inhabitation were infrequent; there were the dirt roads turning off to both left and right and less commonly, actual sight of dwellings. These were generally the traditional grass thatched rondavels; commonly they were painted attractively ochre and they looked well in keeping with their natural surroundings. They also seemed to be well maintained – often it was apparent that the roofing had been recently renewed, since there was yet to be the rains that would blacken the straw coloured dried grass. I saw neither a single ill constructed tin shack dwelling, nor the strewn piles of disgusting rubbish that besmirch the parts of South Africa that I am familiar with.

The route did not take us through the low veld area that had been the bread basket of Southern Africa, but I did see some tilled fields, I imagine awaiting the hoped for summer rain. I could not avoid the thought that what a huge pity it was that some better solution could not have been reached for this beautiful country, some arrangement where the benefits had been spread more widely than the selfish interests of a despotic ruler and his tribal cronies.

Even though the atmosphere between Mma and myself had thawed, my mind was taught like a tuned string, its single note playing insistently with the uncertainties ahead that Rasta's encouragement could not entirely dispel. I'm not even sure if I remember individual events in the correct order. While on the move, I did eventually discuss my situation and the fact I could not show my passport with Small. I don't think he entirely understood the details of my case, but he seemed to be not in the slightest concerned by it. At one point we stopped for food. It was a wild west type of setting in the middle of nowhere, it could almost have been a film set. There were very roughly constructed structures for shade (and yes in this location corrugated sheets abounded), food outlets to meet various preferences. We shared a huge plate of greasy goats meat and sadza, which we could not even finish. In contrast with the very wide areas of emptiness surrounding, it was a busy setting with live goats wandering without care of a future slaughter amongst the parked cars and hungry people.

We passed through West Nicholson of which there is nothing much despite it being the main town on the route, one of the few places where the colonial name has been retained. Then the road and Southern Africa railway line entwined side by side with each other and ahead I was sure I caught sight of a train. And indeed I had done, it came into full view as we overtook it, road and rail conveniently running in a close parallel. I believe the diesel engine was pulling only trucks; maybe there was no longer need for a passenger service on this route.

Last of all there was the unpleasant shock of Beitbridge town itself, just before the border crossing. What a jarring contrast to the serene emptiness we had enjoyed for hours. There were long long queues for petrol, literally lines of motionless cars as far as could be seen. What a hopeless, desperate country, depending indeed on God's mercy for what it's politicians had failed so miserably to provide. Although the crunch was now almost upon me I was glad we stopped here only briefly.

Glad not just to face the inevitable, whatever that was and have it over and done with, but also to be gone from this rotten, ugly border town.

Chapter 11

Passing without a passport 3

Disorder at the border

Coleman Hawkins

At the Beitbridge immigration checkpoint I was instructed by Small Bus to simply stay seated on the coach. So while he, his drivers including Rasta and the twenty odd other passengers including Mma got off to report with passports to the authorities, I was left alone apart from the one other fellow non-documented person, a young Zimbabwean woman. At this point she was not much company as she was lying across the two seats on the right side of the coaches aisle two rows in front of me. I suspect that she was more than a little nervous about what the fates had in immediate store for her, as was I. Unlike her, I thought it best to follow Small's instructions to the letter, although I did deliberately lean forward, attempting to hide my face behind the coaches body at the edge of the window. One of my several concerns was that the fact that I am white made the Small Bus method of passing without a passport rather less likely to be successful and that on this occasion my racial background was not going to help my chances.

Because of this passive allotted role for me at Beitbridge, if things had gone entirely as Small planned and as I desperately hoped, I would of necessity fail to experience first hand the full brilliance of the Small business operation. Indeed what I report of it relies heavily on what Mma afterwards told me, but as will become clear, things did not quite run smoothly to plan. On the plus side I was a first hand witness to a touching collaboration between the South African police and the Zimbabwean army. Actually there were other indications of cross national cooperation hardly less impressive, such that if they could just be repeated elsewhere, likely world peace would break out the following day. Since English was used by an official on only a single interaction, I also rely on Mma to translate for me.

Small may well have identified the missing witness issue as an inherent strategic weakness, for what is the point of coming, seeing and conquering if there is no one to applaud your triumph? Maybe this is the reason he takes Mma under his wing and explains some background to his business. His mother is Zimbabwean and his father is South African, even more crucially a brother of his has a high up position on the Zimbabwean side of the checkpoint. He fast tracks Mma – no queuing for her because *she's with me* – reports that on this occasion there are two people still in the coach and hands over some of the US dollars I'd given him in Bulawayo. Of course, another possible reason is that he wants Mma to see that he does indeed incur expenses; his business is not an easy one and these factors justify his later demands for remuneration.

A Zimbabwean official shuffles around the outside of the coach and I notice behind him the huge green billboard. It features the face of a man, maybe twice life size, with hands cupped to create a loud speaker effect and the admonishment to *shout out against corruption*. The official makes no effort to actually enter the coach, although I at least am clearly visible even though it's starting to go

dark and equally clearly should have alighted to have had my passport checked. It may be that he has been sent out to count heads. Some twenty minutes later the legitimate majority (I'm not sure whether Small should be included as legitimate!) return together. I remark to Mma that the Zimbabwean side was always going to be the easiest. It's still light enough to see the waters of the Limpopo as we cross the bridge and I say that now I've seen this fabled river I never want to see it again. That is a wish that will be denied very shortly.

The distance from the Zimbabwean control centre to the South African barrier is not great, just a few minutes drive at most, but the woman controlling it is fed up with never being invited to the party. She somehow knows there is a white man on board this time Mr Small. Her justifiable outrage is that he comes here and pays off just the men, but today he must pay her also or she will simply refuse to open the barrier. Then things take a more worrying turn; when the coach halts to let off the righteous by the passport control office, two police officers enter the coach and ask to see Mma's passport. Next, when I fail to produce mine as they clearly anticipate, they ask Mma if I am her husband, retain her passport and refuse to let her disembark.

Rasta parks up the bus across the way and a police car swiftly arrives; we three, Mma, the illegal Zimbabwean lady and myself are ordered off the bus by the same officers we encountered minutes earlier. The Zimbabwean lady makes a slightly wrong move, causing some annoyance by refusing to bring out a bag as ordered, I smooth things over by explaining that the bag does not belong to anyone of us. I'm as ice cool as a cucumber now; it looks like the worst has happened and one of the few things I have faith in is that worrying about what happens next is always worse than the shit that actually does happen. I find it difficult to characterize the look on Rasta's face as the three of us are ordered into the back of the police car; maybe it is *shit man, this is going to be expensive*.

It's a bizarre thing and I have no real idea why, but since I crossed to the southern hemisphere, my formerly reasonable sense of direction is shot. So I don't realize that we are actually crossing back over the river and are thus dumped on the Zimbabwean side of the no_go_without_documentation area in the protection, or should that be custody, of a couple of soldiers. These are really excellent guys because when Mma has fumbled about putting her South African SIM back in her phone, only to find she has no credit, they call Small Bus for us and tell him that they have two ladies and a white man from his party. I'm so so happy because I don't realize that my worst fear has become reality – that I've been prevented from entering South Africa and I don't have the required amount of US dollars to get back into Zimbabwe, from where I must be to catch my return flight to the UK. It also fails to occur to me that maybe Small's best next move is to cut his losses and leave us here.

But all is good; after a twenty minute wait, quiet, but companionable, Small Bus, who is proud of his reputation for getting people to where they want to be, arrives on foot to collect us three. He does have to pay an additional bribe to the nice soldiers though. Then we have a ten minute walk back to South Africa; as we pass over the bridge Small remarks that the river is full of crocodiles. A fairly high ranking policeman is waiting, literally with his hand held out to take his share of the compensation. While waiting for this he lectures Mma, but in English and so for my benefit presumably, about the problems their country has with illegal immigrants and that this is her final warning not to do it again.

Still Small is not quite off the hook. At the checkpoint our two friendly police officers are waiting for us again. They herd us into a sentry hut as they need to search me and although they return her

passport they warn Mma it is a serious offence. They want to know if Mma passed through here with me before when she came the other way and in accordance with my last ditch plan Z, which is to say I've lost my passport, she says that is so. Mma tells them she is begging on her knees, but I'm pretty sure that rather than her plea for clemency, it's a donation from Small that smooths away the problem and the smile on her face puts her sincerity into question anyway. As the crisis resolves, I also smile and thank one of the officers in my very best vernacular. He says it's a good thing that Mma is teaching me Northern Sotho.

Mma still has to have her passport stamped, so I sit with the young Zimbabwean lady, with the crowds of other people waiting to cross the border. Probably this a typical warm Beitbridge evening, crowds, coaches, cars, chaos and chronically long delays. And then we're off into South Africa and after being immediately stopped by two police motorcyclists who need us to pay for their soft drinks, we are in the clear.

Chapter 12

On to Pretoria

*The right to create one hundred pounds
at the stroke of a pen is indeed a mighty privilege*

anon

Purely in terms of distance when the border is crossed, the journey from Bulawayo to Pretoria is not even at the half way mark. However dear reader, you will surely understand that on this particular trip, it did seem considerably more than half done. For one thing, night had fallen and the passing scenery could no longer be appreciated and remembered. Then there was the small matter of the interlude with the prophet and the crocodile, which outweighs in my memory very many kilometres on a coach at any time of day. Yet as I will recount, the South African leg of the trip was at least sporadically interesting.

There are two South African towns on the N1 (the south most leg of the Cape Town to Cairo road) close to the Zimbabwean border and I was quite anxious to clear them both. My thinking was that both these towns would have an unusually high percentage of illegal immigrants, even by South African standards and thus a coach journeying through the night would be a good shake down target for every impecunious policeman in this area. To hit the rocks at this late stage would simply be beyond unbearable. But Small was anxious to accompany us to an ATM, so we stopped at Beit Bridge (the two word South African version) for this main purpose.

Now I fully understood that bribing the many and various officials at the border had been a good deal more expensive than usual due to the mindset that these people share with southern African Africans at large. It goes something like this - white men have a great deal more money than us, therefore, you Mr Small, are charging a good amount more today than usual and therefore we Mr Small, are wanting a much bigger cut than is generally offered and today _we_ includes us ladies and other lower ranking police and officials who often fail to collect a single bean from you.

The basic fare for the ride, for a person with proper documentation, was R350 and Mma had been quoted R1,500 to bring her not_allowed_husband across the border. She had though neglected to mention the minor detail that her husband was a white man. Even so and even with all other considerations considered, the R4,500 that Small now requested seemed rather steep. I pointed out that he had already taken US \$50 from us in Bulawayo and that this was an excellent exchange rate equivalent to R600. Mma's debit card failed to deliver and we later found out that her South African bank had cancelled it due to unexpected transactions in Zimbabwe. It was therefore a very good thing for peace among men that I was able to use my own card. The ATM had a limit of R2,000, but this was simply circumvented by drawing twice and so we were able to present Small with wherewithal to the tune of R4,000. UK based readers may be interested to know that including transaction fees, the exchange rate at the time resulted in my UK based account being debited to the tune of £227.76.

Mma handed over the loot and Small counted it, the two of them standing face to face, with me

square on to them ready in case any disagreement needed to be resolved. There was none and a seemingly well satisfied Small insisted on marking this satisfaction by taking Mma to the nearby chicken take away outlet to buy us a meal. I went back to the coach and allowed Rasta to take a photograph of myself and the young Zimbabwean lady with her arm around my shoulder. I did fully share the fellow fugitive sentiment that I believe she was demonstrating, but I do so hope this photo never finds its way onto Facebook or any other of the social media platforms that are so loved by young African people. I still comfort myself with the memory of how I had doubted Rasta's judgement at every step as he led me along the banks of the Limpopo and what at the time, seemed like his absurdly unwise indulgence in religious sacraments on that rock and the bizarre charade of hunting crocodiles. Yet how wrong I had been and how right had been he.

It was rather touching to see that the legitimate of our fellow travellers had some empathy for the situation of us outlaws. A man seated behind me and Mma mentioned that he and his friends were relaxing with a little whiskey and would I like some. Indeed I would. We cleared Musina, the second and larger of the two border hugging towns without incident. Further down the road there were a couple of minor shake downs, but these were of the sort than may punctuate any journey on major South African roads. On one occasion we were stopped by police who accepted a very modest inducement to waive any further checks such as how roadworthy might the coach be. On another occasion we were followed into a garage by police who simply could not afford the price of the cold drinks they needed to help them concentrate on their work. By now we were far enough from the border for me to not be too perturbed by either of these incidents. The small bribes paid over were clearly business expenses not associated with Small's trafficking of illegals, but rather related to the avoidance of long unwanted delays. I was careful not to get out of the coach at the garage though as I thought it best the police not see a single white man in a coach of otherwise African passengers.

It may be that we turned onto a dirt road at Solomondale to reduce the risk of having to incur more of these outgoings, or maybe it was to avoid the more legitimate charges at the toll booths on the N1. We passed through Mma's ancestral town, Polokwane (formerly Petersburg), and even in the dark I could not help but notice the large number of accommodation businesses. By now I think that Mma and I were the only two awake, apart from Small and his two co-drivers; we were actively considering how we would cope with Pretoria at 4am which we estimated would be our arrival time. Not a good time to be wandering around with two large bags or waiting for the local taxi services to start running due to a high risk of unwanted discussions with any police who might chance on us.

As we passed through Hammanskraal, Small rather blotted his copy book with us. Two passengers alighted here and he took the opportunity to move down the coach and harangue Mma about his extra money. This created a quite unpleasant atmosphere, but Mma quietly told him he had already been paid. Although he was driving at the time, Rasta was clearly aware of what was transpiring behind him and he indicated to Small that he should leave us be and come back up to the front. By way of further explanation I should mention that Small had been drinking all day, in fact there had already been alcohol on his breath in Bulawayo. It may be that the demon drink had turned him nasty or maybe it was simply a considered tactic to extort a bit of extra money from us; I really can't be sure. I did wonder if he actually found his work stressful and maybe he needed the drink for the

necessary bravado at the border.

Earlier in the day Rasta had told Mma that he wanted to drop us at our gate, actually not something we wanted at all. Although it would have removed our concerns about a brush with the police, we wanted to maintain a degree of anonymity from anyone who knew my situation . We were also approaching Pretoria from a direction that would necessitate a considerable detour to our home, so Small's tantrum was only one factor of several that meant we would have to alight in central Pretoria. We decided if the worst came to the worst and we did have to deal with police attention, we would say we had just returned from a short break in Durban, which Mma knows quite well.

At Wonderboom Rasta asked us where we wanted to be and as we had already decided, we said that the central station would suit us fine. Even though a train journey from there would be far less convenient than the taxi operation that serves our district, it would be a safe haven from unwanted police interference.

Strangely, none of our pilots seemed sure about which route to take into town and I'd been away for 3 months and it was still pitch dark. So I was very grateful for the passenger that gave Rasta concise directions as we drove into central Pretoria and I thanked him as we disembarked at the station. By now Small was his more usual affable self and I could see that he, as much as I, wanted to part on good terms. Not only that, but he was clearly a man who takes pride in his work and I think he was pleased as we shook hands to hear me say that I could still hardly believe I was here and how good he was at his job.

As quickly as possible, we entered the safe haven that the station represented to us; first light was not so far off and we mingled seamlessly with the handful of night shift workers heading back to the townships. We were safe!

Chapter 13

Passing without a passport 4

Truth is marching in

Albert Ayler

Everyone has a plan until you punch them in the mouth

Mike Tyson

You dear reader so far suffered three conflicting accounts of how I successfully crossed from Zimbabwe into South Africa, despite being classed as an undesirable person in the second of these two fair lands. You may well think they are all three equally unlikely and with that I cannot disagree.

I have said in an ill advised moment that we (Mma and myself) were safe, but it is plain to see that I am not a reliable person, as unlike Matthew, Mark and Luke, my three accounts of admittedly very trivial happenings by comparison, are not synoptic in any way. It's probably quite evident by now that I'm a double fool at least, as any person who believes themselves to be safe is by definition a fool once over, since it is an unfortunate inevitability for all of us that the train will one day come off the rails and we mostly have no idea when that will be.

In defence of what I am now going to belatedly reveal, which really should have been told already, all I can say is that the experience of Mma exercising her woman's prerogative in the way that she did was such a shock that I temporarily developed an amnesia of something even more shocking.

From: +27xxxxxxxxx
Date: Wed, 22 Aug 2018 16:23:38 +0000

Mr Mathwees you have to come back for the sake of Lxxxxx she has been on drips from 12 she starts at taxi rank on the way to Pretoria north she think too much about you. We wil cary on to Pretoria north tomorrow I wil stay by her tonight from Johannah

o: +27xxxxxxxxx
Date: Wed, 22 Aug 2018 16:34:19 +0000

johanna i am doing my best-new pport without middle name i should have soon-i try come back for myself as well as my wife-thankyou for helping us & plse i need a copy of the letter-i have sent R6000 should arrive next week-i am sorry L is unwell seperation also horrible for me

This is that after I got back on the coach in Bulawayo, after the chat with Rasta that I did at least remember to mention, I saw for the first time that Johannah is also a passenger and has been sitting quietly, not making herself known (at least to me), on one of the back seats. She is completely out of context; she is a cousin, or some other relation to Mma who actually lives quite close to us in the township north of Pretoria, no more than 15 minutes walk away at my pace. What in the name of Mzilikazi, Cecil Rhodes and Robert Mugabe can she possibly be doing on a coach in Bulawayo?

Dear reader, I do realize that I've blown all credibility and you can see that in every respect I

deserve to be given a wide berth as I am not a genuine sort of person. But let me make one plea, which is that as I said in that SMS message to Johannah above, I was genuinely (at least just that once!) grateful for her help. Unlike all of Mma's other relatives who foolishly tried to say they had not received emails when I, being a greek, sorry geek, knew very well that they had, Johannah saw that indeed the thing that Mma and myself had between us was a serious business. It must be said in defence of those other relatives, that I actually believe they acted with the best of intentions, even though those intentions were badly misinformed, and that Johannah has a massive advantage over them as an intuitive wise woman whereas the rest of them are like myself, just ordinary fallible mortals.

Johannah, in common with many South African women is of enormous proportions. She is one of those women that as they get on a shared taxi, you wonder where the hell there is room for them to sit. They always make me think of a long time ago American football player called the Refrigerator. As far as I understood, his role in the team was to be brought on to the pitch when there was what our UK and South African rugby players call a scrum. You must understand that I have close to zero knowledge of American football and that my passing interest in it only came about because it was a distraction from the rampant success over too, too many years of the wrong North London football club in the English Premier League and every other soccer competition. So in the scrum, or whatever they call it, the Refrigerator could push like an elephant, or at least like two men. When his team came to the UK for an exhibition match they actually paid for two seats on the flights just for him, to ensure both for his comfort and that of the other passengers.

So I suppose Johannah may not have chosen the roomy back seats just to remain inconspicuous from me, but I later got the strong impression that Mma and maybe Rasta Bus as well, were in cahoots with her and she was indeed awaiting her moment. I'm rambling and I know it, but as will be revealed, that is exactly the point. That is if there every really is a single point and that rather, the world is a network of events connected not so much by a traceable chain of cause and effect, but rather by a web of meaning. I'm referring to the theory of synchronicity proposed by C G Jung and later referenced by a dashing and once prominent rock star. There is indeed a sting in this tail, sorry tale, which we will I promise come to shortly.

But first more of Johannah who is a formidable woman and not just because of her bulk. By day she runs a spaza shop. This is a South or at least southern African phenomenon, the nearest equivalent to it in the UK being the now close to extinction corner shop. She is generally open all day and a good part of the evening and the prices are not exactly the lowest in town. Her selling - I don't want to say *point*, but I have to - is that you don't have to walk as far as you would have to in a township to the nearest real supermarket. Also if you're pretty hard up at a particular, no dammit, instance in time, she will sell you a single cigarette and throw in a match which you can strike on the abrasive edge of the matchbox that she has glued to the side of the service window. If you ever find yourself lost in a township on a boiling hot day and you really need a cold soft drink straight from the refrigerator, even if you are not in the same locality as Johannah, there will be a similar spaza shop somewhere nearby.

There is more to Johannah than a spaza shop business lady though. She is also a trained traditional sangoma. A sangoma is rather like a spiritual healer cum herbalist with a good dash of magic, some what akin to our homoeopathy and Bach flower remedies thrown in. That's as near as I can get to it,

but that said, it absolutely fails to deliver proper justice. Unfortunately for her it's very difficult to obtain remunerative work in her real calling because every third African woman you meet and quite a few men too, are also traditional healers. This results in way too much competition, which is particularly galling as many of her rivals are either complete charlatans, have a predatory pricing policy or worse still have actually turned to the dark side in frustration at the lack of business prospects and will do unwitting patients more harm than good. In extreme cases there is little to choose between a disenchanted sangoma and a witch.

So that is Johannah and she's, much to my astonishment, going to be a fellow passenger on the coach ride, the coach ride home for her and Mma and for me, well I'm not quite sure and becoming less sure by the minute, despite the comfort I just derived from Rasta Bus. As is probably fairly obvious, I am definitely not a brave man and I'm pretty worried about the possibility of coming into conflict with properly appointed people in authority.

So picture me sitting on the bus; to explain it the Mike Tyson way, first Mma's display of her prerogative and now Johannah simply being so way out of place, it's as if I've just received a second punch in the mouth. The several occasions when I've shared a cup of tea with Johannah are running one after the other across my mind. On one occasion when she called around and Mma was out I actually brewed the tea myself and also turned on the television, very much against my own inclinations, at her insistence for a bit of background noise. It had all seemed pretty everyday normal. But this is different, it's in moments like this that unlikely as it seems, somewhere in the distance someone may actually have found a wine bottle with a message in it. I think this is exactly the moment she's been waiting for.

Mr Mathwees, we know this is a difficult day for you, so I've come prepared with a glass of wine prepared especially for you.

Small Bus has just climbed back into the coach and on hearing the word *wine* he turns around and displays considerable interest, only to receive a rebuff. Johannah growls the word *muti* at him and he most uncharacteristically cowers like a young naughty child for a moment. But a glass is thrust into my hand; yes Johannah's preparations include the type of glass tumbler I have strong preference for since even with my damaged right thumb it is comfortable to grip. I sip the wine; I haven't managed to glimpse the label, but it's good, not the seriously nasty sweet stuff that African South Africans inexplicably favour - inexplicably favour in their land of birth which boasts fine vineyards and vintages. It does have a rather strange after taste though, slightly bitter on the back of the tongue, but that is not to the forefront of the palate onto which burst gooseberry, cox orange pippin, granny smith and marmalade flavours with a hint of peanut butter and avocado. I have another glass because Johannah insists and my word, I don't know if it's illegal, but it certainly should be. What I wonder is the street value of this stuff in London or Johannesburg?

I think I've fallen asleep and am having very vivid dreams, but when I wake up I still seem to be having them. Now I actually am a very brave man, partly because I'm no longer on my way from Bulawayo to the border without a passport, but also because I'm a ferocious Spartan. If any two bit City State thinks they will close their gates on me, let them know I shall quickly be back from Laconia with numbers; about fifteen Spartiates should be plenty. We'll smash our way in and after a little rape and pillage and putting all the male citizens over the age of two and a half to the sword,

we will raze your shitty little city to the ground. It's not for nothing that I once lay every night for six months naked in a wet ditch and for a bit of light entertainment I occasionally kill an uppish helot with my bare hands. And Mr Asia Minor, do not think for one moment I'm going to confine myself to the Peloponnese if I fancy a night on the razzle in old Persepolis. What do you think you can do to keep me away?

Does anyone want to make anything of it – anything of the fact that in preference to my Spartan wife I lasciviously consort with this dark skinned slave? In case you must know, I paid for her myself with the 20,000 iron bars that I was not supposed to be hoarding anyway. She was on display in a market on Kriti, where the word was that she'd been snatched from a land still further from our civilized shores.

Then it would all dissolve and I'd wake up again, again on a coach, sometimes on it's way to Beitbridge and at other times to Pretoria. But there were other scenes like the Spartan interlude, when I woke up into alien situations and struggled to find my bearings. In each one there also figured rather prominently a woman whose skin was a dark brown colour and in some of these situations I behaved I'm afraid to say in a pretty reprehensible manner.

At the end of the journey, by which I mean the coach journey, I could tell that Small and Rasta were pretty pissed off because Johannah had insisted they drop us on the nearest tar road to our home, which took them at least fifteen kilometres out of their way. Then with bags just dumped by the roadside and barely concealed from thieves (good job it was still dark), Johannah and Mma, one either side, hauled me the 200 metres or so home with my feet dragging in the swamp. Once there I briefly mistook myself for Odysseus due to the frantic welcome I received from Argos, until Mma said she would fetch Hattie some water.

Now after a nice cup of tea I tried to quiz these two women as to what had really happened, but if trying to get at the truth from one real African woman is not bad enough, if there are two of them to back each other up, truth goes marching out of the window and that's if the front door is closed. The story I've been told features a lot of bribery; I suppose no one really gets hurt in that way, but it's pretty despicable nevertheless.

But some of what I was told really isn't possible. In the state I was in, unable to stand on my own feet, how could I have walked for ten minutes back over the Limpopo bridge? There is no way I could have intervened in an argument about payment between Mma and Small, who I suspect was never properly remunerated for his work. That would help to explain his annoyance at the detour and also why he and Rasta refused to help the ladies with either me or the other bag cases.

But the clincher is that even when Mma had her back turned whilst buying fried chicken pieces in an attempt to placate Small Bus (and I really do hope that is not all he received from us for his troubles) there is no way that Johannah would have allowed that drop dead gorgeous Zimbabwean girl to put her arm around me. She simply would not have dared and if you think I'm wrong, just show me the photo. In short, I think Johannah pulled the whole thing off with muti and in doing so diddled Small out of the R1500 he was expecting to make. If she has muti that can make me become a brave man even for five minutes, it must be possible to get a border official to look the other way for fifteen. By the way, muti is the African name for a magic potion.

Chapter 14

Mosadi waku

When the gods want to punish you they answer your prayers

Karen Blixen

On the television there is a gospel singer and you translate for me that she is singing of Jesus the son of God, who will help us pass where no one is able to pass. I know you believe that our adventures are direct evidence that this is the truth. So wena, how can I argue against what you believe, that there is a God in Heaven that loves us and will ensure that all our needs are satisfied however impossible that may seem?

But tell me this mosadi waku, why is it that this old greybeard that you revere, this almighty white man concealed by the clouds even though there are often no clouds above your country, put me in northern Europe and you in southern Africa? Why was it contrived by this immortal that I must wait until I was almost 65 before I could meet you. You know I have children and that there were other women before you. Are things as they should be right now at this very moment, do you want to say that we have some sort of divine approval for all this?

I hear you Africans preach about this God of love, but does not the book he inspired say he is to be feared? As with many Europeans, I had all faith educated out of me, yet I now doubt even this lack of faith. Since I see the possibility that it is you, that has of the two of us the better understanding of life, I did not bother to cancel my fully flexible return flight tickets. Had I done so that would be tantamount to a shocking lack of faith in our future as if I ever board a plane again that will surely be the end of us.

Mosadi waku, the Indians and Chinese believe there have been many lives before this one and that there will be many more after it. And have you forgotten that those African brothers and sisters of yours who never accepted the colonial religion would probably agree? In case this is the truth of the matter, you wena, must pray to your God that next time He puts us in the same part of His creation at about the same time.

After the time that we first met, when I started to miss you the minute you were gone, I promised I would give you 20 years of happiness. What has happened so far is not at all what I had in mind. But I remain steadfast; like you I have hope that we will be left alone by the great mundane powers, to be happy and untroubled by what we did, as we have not caused a single person any harm.

We will see what we can do.

Foot notes

On Northern Sotho

During 6 years in South Africa, largely in the company of Pedi people, I learned very little of their native language. I never doubted this was regrettable, but as I have admitted, I am a linguistic duffer. I do know that at least in its vocabulary it bears scant resemblance to Zulu, Ndebele, Xhosa and Venda (official South African languages all), but is very similar to Tswana and Southern (or Lesotho) Sotho. I suspect that most of these vernacular languages do share a similar common structure, but with that I may be doing an injustice to the linguistic brilliance very many Africans, both men and women, are capable of.

Mosadi Waku is literally *wife mine*, obviously better rendered as *my wife*. In chapter 14 I also make use of the Zulu *wena*; this is an interesting word which is not an easy fit to idiomatic English, although quite literally it simply means *you*. The peculiarity comes from its use solely in an emphatic (literally *you you did ...*) and accusatory sense, even if lightheartedly so. When mixed into a flow of English, as Africans often do, it really sounds quite impressive when preceded by a somewhat pregnant pause. *You ... wena, (did something that should not have been done)*.

Although Modiba is a Pedi, the reference to the Zulu language being used in chapter 5 is not a mistake. In common with many Africans, she is fluent in several of the tribal languages as well as English.

Chapter 1

Lao Tzu was a Taoist philosopher; the original saying is of course *The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step*.

A *shebeen* is pretty much the equivalent of an English pub, but probably with much inferior decor.

Paul Kruger and *Bosman* are major thoroughfares in central Pretoria. It is customary to drop the Afrikaans equivalent of street or road, but even for Africans, to stick with these traditional names rather than the post liberation politically correct renaming to struggle heroes and heroines.

Some of *Mma's* colloquialisms are retained. So *what what* could be taken to mean *stuff I don't really want and certainly don't want to pay for* and *now now* means just that, rather than *maybe some time later today or early tomorrow* as a single *now* might be taken to imply.

Chapter 2

The quotation that sets the scene for the chapter is reputed to have been uttered as a reprimand to the Prince by his mother during the Moors flight from Spain and in particular their beautiful Alhambra palace in Granada, to which they were never able to return. It has been acknowledged elsewhere that this is probably not true and merely an example of victor's history.

Smith was the Rhodesian leader who thumbed his nose at Wilson, the British Prime Minister, by declaring independence, thus unilaterally leaving the British Commonwealth. *Nixon*, a former President, the *Rockefellers* a business and banking dynasty and *Kissinger*, who seems to have been emissary for both, are all US based. *Vorster* was a South African President, *Mugabe* became the first President of Zimbabwe.

The *Matabele Wars* were bloody conflicts between native African people and the British South Africa Company, late C19th and early C20th. Matabele seems to be synonymous with Ndebele and they were the main protagonist on the African side, although they were joined by the Shona in the second fracas.

Chapter 3

Hui Hai was a Chinese Ch'an (or Zen as it became for the Japanese) master. He was named *The Great Pearl* by his teacher Ma Tsu, who in turn was a successor of the 6th Chinese Patriarch, Hui Neng .

C J Jung was a pioneer of the C20th addition to western medicine known as psychotherapy. He is noted for his lenient attitude towards all manner of mumbo jumbo including ch'an / zen. It is therefore puzzling that he enjoyed a highly successful career and was able to leave his wife adequately provided to bring up their five children, while he toured around Europe with his mistress.

Chapter 4

Major General Smedley Butler was a senior US Marine Corps officer who fought in nine asset grab wars for the US bankers and corporations late C19th/ early C20th, but publicly and forcefully expressed regret about his career at the end of it.

Chapter 5

Oscar Wilde was an Irish poet, playwright and novelist who just barely made it into C20th. He is also notable for falling foul of the English legal system due to a distaste for his sexuality.

Mrs May was a British Home Secretary and later Prime Minister who for public consumption at least, took a tough stance on illegal immigration with her *hostile environment* policy.

After tears is on the one hand a uniquely African excuse for a piss up, but on the other is decried by some commentators as being profoundly against African traditions.

A *sports pub* is merely a shebeen with a decent screen to watch televised sport, almost certainly without paying the license fee. By enlarge African men are fanatical football enthusiasts.

Chapter 6

There is an oblique reference to Kipling's story of an altercation with a crocodile on the banks of the Limpopo as an explanation for the origin of the elephants trunk.

Beitbridge is a Zimbabwean town at the major border post with South Africa. The town on the South African side of the Limpopo river at this point is Beit Bridge, the same name but split into two words.

Chapter 7

William Stanley Merwin was a prolific American poet who died at a good age in 2019. He received numerous honours for his writing, which made notable contributions to the anti-war movement of the 1960's. This (his writing) is said to be influenced by his long held interest in Buddhist philosophy and the environment, in particular the ecology of the Hawaiian island of Maui where he made his home.

Chapter 8

SweetKittyCat5 styles herself as a Tyrant of Words at (<https://deepundergroundpoetry.com/poets/SweetKittyCat5/>). As of 2024 she remains very active in the world of poetry.

Chapter 9

Nelson Mandela had a very varied career. First as a herds boy and minor African prince, later an Attorney at Law, then terrorist thug incarcerated by the apartheid regime for a large part of his life and finally father of the democratic nation of South Africa as its first President and political darling of the West, if not the whole world. Even after his death his perceived status is still shifting as there now exists a view that although African and other non-white people had attained some political freedom, nothing was done to affect the economic power structures. Countless numbers of the legitimate population remain in abject poverty and an opinion is emerging that Africans had a better life under apartheid than they do now under the ANC.

Chapter 10

Cecil Rhodes, for whom Rhodesia was named, was sent to southern Africa as a sickly child for health reasons. He recovered to a sufficient extent to allow a life of imperialism, political intrigue and big business machinations, but one that still ended early (he was 48) at the beginning of C20th.

Chapter 11

Coleman Hawkins, one of whose titles I appropriated to aptly summarize this chapter, was the first president of the tenor saxophone. This honorary award was bestowed on him by the singer Billie Holiday, but only after he had been removed from office by the second president, whose musical style was more to her taste.

Chapter 12

Despite searching high and low with various search engines and also posting queries on alt money sites, I cannot any longer find the quote that heads this chapter and so its author is lost to me. From vague memory I think it was a limited hangout type repentance of a high powered banking career. I haven't made this up myself, although I would be very happy to have done so and to have said

something that needs to be said. In true life I did once stumble upon it somewhere on the internet. Please contact me if you can help; I am almost certain that the second line at least is word for word correct.

Chapter 13

Albert Ayler was another tenor saxophone player. He was noted for the huge sound he was able to generate by using a very thick reed, which he employed to bring a range of shrieks and barks into an emotional musical idiom. In this way he has probably indirectly influenced many more saxophonists than those that actually know of his brief career.

Mike Tyson was world heavyweight boxing champion 1987 to 1990. It's less well known that he was also something of a philosopher as the knock out quotation I use goes to show.

The rock star alluded to had the stage name *Sting*; at least for a time he fell somewhat under the spell of *C G Jung*. One of the hit singles released by his band the Police, told of a situation amenable to improvement by *a bottle with a message in it* being found.

Laconia is the area of the Peloponnese (southern Greece) that includes Sparta. In its City State days *iron bars* (a useful rather than ornamental metal with real life value in a militarized society!) were used as currency. Citizens, the *Spartiates*, were not allowed to hoard them; the idea being to facilitate economic exchange, but to avoid the societal danger of creating a wealthy elite class. *Helots*, although fellow Greeks, were a slave underclass in this lamentable political system that also, of all things, gave equal rights to women!

Kriti is the island we know as Crete. *Persepolis* which is now an abandoned site, was the capital of Persia in Classical times. *Argos* was the dog that waited 20 years for the return of his master from the Trojan War, only then to immediately die. *Odysseus* was the Greek hero responsible for the successful Trojan Horse gambit. The long separation from both his faithful wife and dog resulted from the 10 year long siege of Troy and the many delays of his return journey home, not all of which were either justifiable or proper for a married man.

Chapter 14

Karen Blixen was a Danish Baroness and author, best remembered for her book "Out of Africa" and for having had a farm in Africa, at the foot of the Ngong Hills.