

# WILSON'S BONES

by  
Robert Marvich

Robert Marvich asserts the moral right  
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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Robert Marvich was born in Chicago in 1945, and attended Lake Forest College and the University of Michigan, where he was awarded a Ph.D.; although he seldom mentions it. He has worked as a boatbuilder in many of the countries he has sailed to around the world, but doesn't advertise that fact, either; since he usually works illegally. He lives on his sailboat, and prefers cruising in the tropics, but is frequently kept on the move by immigration officials. This book was written in South Africa, and is his second novel.

## ARQUIPÉLAGO DAS QUERIMBAS

Murray woke up with his face in the sand. A few drops of water fell from the bushes, rolled slowly across his back, and he remembered that it had been raining heavily when he crawled underneath them, to wait for the sunrise. Morning twilight had passed, and the sky glowed a pale grey. The rain had stopped.

A wave broke thunderously onto the reef, sending a tremor through the sand, and the shock went right through him, as he realized why he was sprawled on the beach, rather than curled up comfortably in his bunk. On his sailboat.

He suddenly dreaded the scene awaiting him. Seeing *Mavis* broken on the rocks. The surf was still heavy, by the sound of it, and after spending half the night pounding on the reef, he knew she wouldn't be a pretty sight. His hair was wet, and thickly matted with the coarse, coral sand, and when he cradled his face in his hands, the grains trickled slowly through his fingers.

Something cold nudged against his ear. He turned his head, and squinted cautiously, shielding his eyes against the sand, and saw Wilson's muzzle; and, then, the huge pincers of the coconut crab which he was holding in his mouth.

*Wake up. Breakfast.*

Wilson dutifully placed the crab on the sand, right in front of him. He stood watch over it, for a moment - making sure that his powerful jaws had delivered the fatal, crunching blow, and that it wasn't going to run off and escape - then began wagging his tail, quite pleased with himself.

*Good dog.*

Food was about the last thing on Murray's mind, but he felt obliged to observe the proper protocol, and cracked off one of the smaller claws and held it out for his dog. Wilson was probably hungry, he realized, since he'd forgotten to feed him last night, during the height of the storm, when the eye of the cyclone came ashore. He reached over and rubbed his ears, then broke off the meaty pincer claw, and handed that to him, as well.

Wilson accepted it hesitantly.

*The big one? For me...?*

Murray pushed himself up, and felt a stab of pain in his wrist as he put his weight on it. He gingerly made a fist, a few times, and decided

it was nothing to worry about, only a sprain. He felt stiff all over, and the arm was rather swollen, but the injuries weren't too bad, considering. Just a few cuts on his leg, and abrasions on his shoulder from the coral. Several bruises. The cuts were still sticky, and too encrusted with sand to assess their depth, but there wasn't all that much blood.

The receding tide had left *Mavis* resting surprisingly upright, leaning over to starboard only ten degrees or so, with her broken keel wedged tightly between some coral boulders. The splintered stub of the mast remained standing, sticking up forlornly through the deck. Several broken sections of the wooden spar were resting on the reef alongside the hull, bound up in the tangled maze of rope and rigging wire draped over the rail.

The image of the kerosene lamp glowing reassuringly inside the cabin was still vivid in his memory. It was his last glimpse of the boat, before the wave swept him from the cockpit, into the surf; and the extent of the transformation - the suddenness, and irreversibility of it - was difficult to accept.

It was like death. *Mavis* had died. Her ribs were crushed, and her belly torn open...she lay as stiffly on the rocks as an animal sprawled on the pavement after being run over by a truck.

Murray walked past the wreckage, and waded into the edge of the surf, and splashed some water over his legs to wash off the blood; then squatted down, and scooped some over his head to rinse the sand from his hair.

He realized how lucky he'd been to make it ashore with only a sprained wrist, and a few minor cuts, when he looked along the reef. The flat coral shelf was exposed, now, at low tide, and he guessed that the state of the tide had probably saved his life. He'd come right over the top of the sharp rocks along the outer edge. The same rocks that gored his boat.

The tapered hardwood plank that formed the trailing edge of the rudder had been sheared off, exposing the bronze bolts that had once fastened the planks together, and he was able to use the protruding metal rods as footholds to climb up onto the deck. The cabin trunk and the decking were largely intact, except for a shattered section amidships, where the side deck had been crushed against the coral. Her heavy ballast keel had kept her upright after she grounded on the reef, and the lower sections of the hull had taken most of the punishment. He sat

down on the threshold of the hatch, and soberly surveyed the damage down below.

Murray had often felt that *Mavis* was alive, in a way. The creaking of her timbers at sea reminded him of old bones. Her warm, varnished woodwork seemed to breathe. Everything inside her was functional, and designed to perform well, while in motion.

She had been eviscerated. Or, even worse. Her entrails hadn't been removed, but minced together, instead. Cabinetwork had been wrenched loose, tumbled around, and ripped apart; and, while many of the dismembered parts were still recognizable, they were often in the wrong place. There was no trace of life left inside her, at all.

The romance was gone. The cabin resembled a vandalized washing machine, filled with sludge.

Most of the water had drained out with the falling tide, through the gaping holes opened in the planking when the boat was driven onto the rocks. The repeated impacts against the coral had dislodged the galley cabinets, and spilled out the dried food, which agitated with all the books, when the hull filled with water and sloshed around in the surf.

His books had largely disintegrated, along with all the charts, and left a sticky, cellulose pulp clinging to almost every surface as the water receded. The sodden residue covering the radio was blended with rolled oats, and macaroni; while that lower down the hull had congealed around clumps of clothing, and was speckled with dried beans.

The kerosene stove had come adrift, and was resting half-submerged in the middle of the cabin, surrounded by softened chunks of Wilson's dry dog food, floating amid the paper pulp like diarrhoea in a toilet bowl. Most of the sewerage had settled on top of the bunk, in the turn of the bilge.

Wilson was unscathed, but whining his irritation at being left on the beach. He pawed at the planking, occasionally, and stuck his nose through some of the interesting new holes in the hull, smelling his food.

Murray had ample warning of the approaching cyclone - from the initial, dramatic streaks of cirrus cloud that gradually enveloped the whole sky, and the long swells which began arriving in the morning - but there was little he could do about it. He was caught out in the narrowest part of the Mozambique Channel, sailing close inshore to avoid the main body of the strong Mozambique current, and there was precious little room to manoeuvre.

Perhaps, he delayed the decision too long, but taking to sea in the teeth of a tropical storm was not something he would undertake lightly. He considered his options for just a few hours, and, when he attempted to cross the current to gain some offing, the southerly wind had already strengthened, directly opposing the current and the increasing swell, and the seas were horrendous. It was soon blowing a gale.

The old girl was in pretty good nick, but her planked teak decking always leaked a bit in heavy weather - *Mavis* had just celebrated her sixtieth birthday - and the sharp-faced seas brought a lot of green water aboard. The bilge pump had the capacity to keep up, but Murray doubted his ability to do so, after a couple of the crests knocked her right over, and he had to pump almost continuously.

The seas continued to build, and when he remembered that the current would be even stronger as he approached Cabo Delgado, the headland which lies just south of the Tanzanian border, he thought better of it, and headed back inshore to seek shelter behind one of the islands off the Mozambiquan coast.

It definitely seemed the better option, after he was safely anchored in smooth water behind the reef. He was even able to get a decent night's sleep, after Wilson realized he wasn't going to be allowed a run on the beach, and stopped whining.

A series of heavy squalls swept through the anchorage just after dawn. Even though he had anchored over two hundred meters offshore, the leaves torn from the trees on the island began to whistle past, as the wind steadily increased. Wilson kept barking, and snapping at the flying leaves, and Murray had to shut him down below.

Although tropical cyclones generally curve away from the equator, the path taken by an individual cyclone is impossible to predict, and since this was an unusual, out-of-season storm, Murray knew it could go anywhere. The wind direction remained constant all afternoon, indicating that it was following a straight path, and heading right toward him.

He decided to set all his anchors. The wind was too strong to risk inflating the dinghy, so he had to swim them out, one at a time. After trussing the anchor and its accompanying chain into a bundle, he buoyed the lot with a cluster of empty water jugs and a few fenders, then towed it into position offshore, before cutting the lashings.

The leaves stung when they struck his skin, and when he returned to the cabin to dry off, he was covered with angry, red welts.

The wind held steady at fifty knots, or so, maybe a little more in the gusts, but after sunset it started to swing around to the north, and conditions deteriorated rapidly. The howling of the wind through the rigging became a high-pitched wail, and surf began to break on the reef behind his boat, now anchored off a lee shore, with no possibility of escape. The islands to the north provided some protection for awhile, but as the wind continued to back further, it eventually came directly through the slot between them, and the islands funnelled the seas into his anchorage.

His array of anchors held securely, but the strain was enormous. The waves occasionally slammed into the bow, and the heavy nylon lines stretched ominously. He began to worry about them chafing through, and cut an old pair of overalls into strips, and wedged himself next to the anchor roller to wrap the lines with the canvas, while holding a flashlight in his teeth.

Although he was no longer assailed by the leaves, the torrential rain became even more punishing, and the pressure of the wind on his chest made it difficult to breathe; and he was forced to retreat to the shelter of the cockpit.

A dim light on the mast illuminated the deck, and a small circle of water around the boat; but, beyond that, he could see nothing, not even the waves crashing onto the reef.

He could do nothing further, either - except listen - as the fury astern increased, and grew steadily closer. He was losing ground, either from the anchors dragging imperceptibly across the sand, or the waves breaking in progressively deeper water.

Murray checked belowdecks, and debated fitting out his dog with a life vest, but decided he'd probably fare better without the hindrance. Wilson was a Labrador retriever, and quite at home in the surf.

He must have accepted it, then. That Mavis was lost; and that it was only a matter of time. He had packed a waterproof valise with valuables, and wedged it securely into a cubbyhole next to the ladder, where he could grab it quickly if it became necessary to abandon ship. His passport, and ship's papers. Some cash.

It was still there. He pulled it out, and undid the flap, wondering what else he had selected to put inside.

The valise was half full of water. He held the flap loosely closed, and carefully drained it off, then tipped the contents out onto the deck. He kept his currency rolled up, sealed inside a few spice jars, and the money was still dry. What little there was of it.

His important papers were soaked. He frequently had to carry his passport and documentation papers in the dinghy, and routinely stowed them in a small ziploc bag, but even that had taken on some water. He carefully peeled apart the pages in the passport. The signature had sagged illegibly, but the photo was recognizable, although missing an ear, which had transferred to the facing page. The rest was largely readable. The pages in his address book were very thin, and fell apart in his fingers. He'd lose some of his friends. Those listed in ink, anyway. He set it aside, hoping to recover the ones in pencil.

He would also lose some work. The photographs in his portfolio were hopelessly glued together. He had worked on some classic sailing yachts over the years, and as the photos steadily accumulated, the album had become an attractive resumé. There were on-the-water shots of boats flying sails he had stitched together, and close-ups highlighting traditional fittings he'd made. All lost, now.

It amused him that he'd endeavored to preserve this aspect of his history, under the circumstances. His work history.

Fortunately, he'd had enough sense to include some more tangible securities, in the form of a few chocolate bars; and he peeled off a strip of the sodden wrapping, and broke off a chunk.

Murray couldn't remember how long he'd kept watch in the cockpit, or how many times he had renewed the chafing gear, before the bow was thrown off alarmingly by one of the waves, and he felt the recoil from one of the lines parting. He rushed up to check, crawling on his hands and knees, and discovered one of the anchor lines dangling limply into the water, having broken somewhere below the surface. That left him with only three.

The boat sheered around in the gusts, however, so they didn't share the load equally, and the strain was often taken by a single anchor.

He had just regained the safety of the cockpit, when the boat suffered an even more violent blow, which probably severed another line, and allowed the boat to turn sideways to the seas - must have - because, when the massive wall of water suddenly appeared in the circle of light a few moments later, it loomed up hugely along the whole length of the boat. From the side.

He recalled the amazing acceleration, following the impact, and how he had gasped - fortunately, gulping down one last, big breath - before being engulfed by the huge wave, and forcibly submerged in total darkness. A tranquil, quiet darkness.



That was his first thought. How peaceful it seemed underwater, despite the cyclone raging on the surface. How black. Then, he thought of *Mavis*. Abandoned, now, and surely lost.

A period of panic followed, when he realized he didn't know which way to swim to reach air, and was unable to see any bubbles, even in front of his face. Then, he remembered the cork float on the lanyard of his knife, and instantly clasped his hands to the pockets of his shorts - afraid he might have lost it - but felt the round cork through the cloth. It showed him the way to the surface, and as he kicked for it, he remembered Wilson.

He frantically searched for him when he reached the surface, and called out repeatedly, but found no trace. The mast light should have been visible, even in the blinding rain, but even that had vanished. He had regained enough night vision to see the crests of the incoming waves, and their movement allowed him to orient himself. He swam to the breakers, and after four or five punishingly unsuccessful attempts, he caught a wave, and was able to body surf almost all the way to the beach.

Wilson was sitting there waiting for him, when he staggered out of the surf, and came bounding up, playfully. With a stick in his mouth.

Murray had forgotten the name of the island, where he now found himself marooned; and since the chart had dissolved, it had to remain anonymous. He might have found it embarrassing, if the radio had survived, but the possibility of anyone having a marine radio on this remote stretch of coast was almost nil, anyway.

He knew where he was, though, despite the lack of the name. The mainland was only ten miles away, and the intervening water was well-protected - it already appeared smooth, now that the cyclone had passed - so taking the dinghy across to one of the villages wouldn't pose a problem.

It was incredible how radically circumstances could change in only a couple of hours, Murray thought, gazing across at the low, pale hills on the coast. A narrow ribbon of sunlight was reflecting off the mist, forming a few wedges of rainbow over one of the smaller, inshore islands. The clouds offshore were lifting.

If only he could have held on...just for a few, short hours.

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"It's completely ruined. The whole set. Just...ruined." Margaret sighed, holding the antique rose-coloured teapot in one hand, and the

spout in the other. "Oh, Em...it was over sixty years old," she added sadly, setting the delicate porcelain pieces on the table, close to tears.

Emily glanced out the broken window, which had already been covered with a sheet of clear plastic, and saw the offending tree limb resting on the lawn. The cyclone had uprooted several small trees, and stripped away most of the thatch from the tourist rondavels, but the lodge appeared unscathed, apart from the kitchen window. And the china shelf inside it.

She picked up the spout, and examined it. It was a clean break. "I have a tube of super glue over at the lab," she offered brightly.

Margaret rolled her eyes. "It's a *teapot!*"

Emily carefully aligned the pieces, and swivelled the assembly to assess the fit. She smiled. Not a chip missing.

"I can't serve tea in a *glued* pot, Emily! It's, well...oh, I don't really expect you to understand. Being an American, and all."

She followed Margaret's eyes as they shifted sardonically to the tea tray, with its two lilac-patterned teacups, waiting on their saucers for the tea in the matching teapot to steep. The covered sugar bowl, milk pitcher, crocheted tea caddie...a lovely, flowered set. And, segregated as far away as possible, off in one corner, the screw-top glass jar of raw honey. For Emily's tea.

It was during one of these afternoon teas when Emily had announced her decision to boycott sugar. She had just finished reading an article in the *Journal of Tropical Ecology*, about the soil degradation caused by the monoculture of cane farming, and was elaborating the details to Margaret, while she poured the tea.

"The damage this causes is appalling," Emily claimed, picking up the sugar bowl.

Margaret eyed the jar of honey which Emily had brought to the table, and felt appalled, herself. She visualized a swarm of bees regurgitating into her fine-tipped tea, and blanched. "Sugar's just another plantation crop, isn't it? Like my tea. Or your...gourmet coffee?"

"Oh, this is much worse," Emily replied, thoroughly absorbed in her outrage, and remonstrating with the bowl. "It's almost like strip mining. There's virtually no humus left."

Margaret routinely poured, and stirred in the sugar and milk for both of them, but after cracking the lid and cautiously sniffing the raw honey, she feigned nausea, and slid across the jar, along with the spoon.

They were well into their fifth jar of honey, and Margaret still winced, every time Emily stirred it into her tea. She occasionally felt

inspired to seek revenge, and left a cake on the counter...some warm macaroons out to cool...but Emily wasn't an ideologue. She cheerfully ate everything.

It wasn't until...when? Somewhere near the middle of the third jar? The lemon cake, covered with icing sugar, anyway. Margaret finally figured it out, watching Emily licking powdered sugar from her fingers, while a spot of it clung to the tip of her nose. Emily actually disliked tea. She had obviously abandoned her sugar boycott, but continued to bring the dreadful honey. To mask the taste.

Margaret had considered offering to make her coffee, instead, but she didn't have one of those coffee plungers, and Emily disparaged instant. She refused to make the thick mud that Emily brewed for herself - simply adding the boiling water to the ground coffee, and blowing on the froth to sink the grit to the bottom of the cup. Besides, she had come to enjoy the subtle humour in their honey ritual.

Emily was a lot like Miles. Her husband. Bloody scientists. They could be as pious as priests, one minute, and as devious as children, the next.

"Any cyclone damage at your place?" Margaret asked. Emily had set up a small laboratory near the beach, so she could be close to her turtles. It was just a little shed, really.

"A bit. A few of my journals got wet."

"Shame..."

"Nothing much. Considering."

"No harm done, then. As long as nothing's really...broken." Margaret sighed, idly swivelling the spout in a circle, with her finger.

"The way the wind was blowing, I was worried I'd lose the whole roof. Wasn't that something?"

"Umm. You see our thatch?"

Emily nodded sympathetically. "Can you fix it in time?"

The romantic, African ambience of the guest cabins had been spoiled, somewhat, by the exposure of the galvanized sheet-metal roofing underneath the thatch; and with the facade largely stripped away - some spiky clumps of the grass thatching were still caught up in the fencing mesh draped over the roof - they looked like squat grain silos. And some German ornithologists were booked to arrive at the weekend.

"Rather tacky, aren't they?" Margaret stared dejectedly out the window at the row of cabins fronting the beach, then looked over at Emily and grinned. "How much glue do you have?"

The property had been in Miles' family for over a hundred years, and his father had been born there. It had been used exclusively as a hunting lodge, and achieved a degree of success in its early years, attracting amateur hunters from all over the world. Miles had several boxes of framed, sepia photographs of the rich and famous, posing next to a variety of dead animals in front of the lodge. Wearing bowler hats. Holding parasols.

Margaret could still recall the enchantment on Miles' face when he showed her all the memorabilia, and reminisced about his childhood on the game reserve. How they had been the happiest times in his life. Which wasn't saying much, Margaret thought, since he had left to attend a private school in South Africa when he was twelve years old.

Or, perhaps, it spoke volumes, about the kind of life he'd led after that. Including, of course, the entirety of their marriage.

Emily was the only permanent resident at the lodge, and Margaret really enjoyed her company. The resident scientist at the marine biology research station regularly stayed there, and the monthly rent check from Emily's research grant helped pay the bills.

Although a few groups of tourists had begun to arrive, in response to the glossy, new advertisements, it would take a while longer to re-establish the game lodge as a tourist destination, after several decades of civil war in the country.

"Where's Miles?" Emily asked.

"Over at the squatter camp. The new shacks near the river were washed away. The flooding's pretty bad." Margaret noticed the alarm on Emily's face, and quickly added, "They made it safely to higher ground."

Emily immediately knew what that meant. The only higher ground was on game reserve property, and they must have broken through the fence, again.

The squatter camp had once been nothing more than a couple of curio stalls, which appeared sporadically outside the gate of the game reserve, during the dry season. Once all the landmines were laid, the sparse traffic on the road ceased altogether, and the entrance was closed with razor wire; but a few farmers continued to visit the site, to trade with the soldiers garrisoned at the lodge.

Vast areas of subsistence farmland had been abandoned during the course of the civil war, and the mines continued to prevent the people from returning to the land, fully three years after the inception of

the ceasefire. Less than ten percent of the arable land was under cultivation.

Rural Mozambique had been salted with millions of mines. There were established conventions regarding their deployment - maps were to be kept, locations and quantities recorded - but during the year Emily had been working in Mozambique, she had yet to meet a soldier who could read a map, let alone draw one, and there weren't any pencils or paper, anyway.

So the minefields were located largely by trial...and error. Some returning refugees would *try* to plant some crops, and make the *error* of stepping on one.

The refinements in the means of modern warfare had done little to raise the level of sophistication of the men who waged it. They persisted in poisoning the soil.

As the flow of commercial goods into the interior was gradually choked off by military roadblocks, and the ever growing number of minefields, the black market trade across the fence assumed added importance, and several substantial shacks were erected on the site. These increased in number, and permanence, as the commerce expanded beyond locally-produced foodstuffs and government-issue clothing.

Although there was the occasional robbery or killing, and the razing of a few huts, this was generally attributed to revenge for shady business practices, and not to attacks by the insurgents, who were rumoured to use the outlet themselves. Clearly, the trade involved something more lucrative than bars of soap, or entrenching tools. Some accounts mentioned ivory. Ammunition.

The burgeoning trading centre came to be seen as a sanctuary, since it remained relatively free of the coercion and forced conscriptions carried out by the armed factions roaming the countryside; and with the opening of a brothel, the assured presence of the soldiers offered a measure of security. A few refugee families took up residence along the fence, and began clearing sites in the surrounding forest to plant small gardens.

Now, the community held close to two hundred people.

"Miles has half a dozen people from the camp out gathering thatch," Margaret said. "We don't need all that much. It doesn't have to be very thick. You think they'll notice?"

"What? That it's thin?"

"No, green. You know...it's supposed to look brown."

Emily smiled. "Probably not."

Margaret helped herself to another cup of the tea, and the two of them sat quietly, looking out the window. Margaret suddenly craned her neck, noticing some movement in her garden.

"Bloody zebras!"

She jumped up from the table, then, reached back and grabbed the broken teapot, before sprinting for the door.

Two zebras were idly grazing on the lawn, and a third was foraging in the flower bed. Their heads shot up, startled, as Margaret came skidding out onto the patio deck. She hurled the teapot at them. They jumped, and retreated a few paces, then stopped and watched her.

"Piss off!"

Margaret charged across the lawn, waving her arms, pretending to chase them. The zebras bolted, and ran down the footpath, before disappearing into the bush.

She was smiling when she returned to the table. "Bloody beasts. Miles swears they were wild when he bought them at the auction." She laughed. "No wonder they were so cheap."

"I might be able to get some lion pheromones." Emily suggested.

Margaret frowned severely.

"Scent. You know...lion scent," Emily corrected herself, in compliance with their agreement. "It would keep them away from the house. They'd still look wild in the bush."

"You think?"

"I'm sure they would."

"It doesn't look right. You know what I mean? If they're not wild?"

Emily smiled, and nodded. "You should get a few vervet monkeys. They always look naturally wild, and they'd probably colonize the mango tree, and harass the zebras. The tourists would love it. The natural interaction of two wild species in the..."

"Emily...?" Margaret sighed.

"What?"

"Do you have any idea what a whole tree full of monkeys can do to the inside of a kitchen?"

"Oh..." Emily glanced around the lovely room. The antique oak bread cabinet, glass-fronted china cupboard, delicate hanging ferns, and fruit baskets...shelves full of biscuits. Frosted chocolate cake.

Margaret started giggling.

Emily stuck out her tongue. "Peh! I never claimed to be an expert on primates! I'm a herpetologist!"

The track from the lodge to the research station was muddy, following the cyclone, and Emily regretted her decision to take her bicycle. At slower speeds, the sticky, reddish mud accumulated on the brake shoes, and the forks.

Usually, she enjoyed cycling quietly through the bush, feeling the wind in her face, and listening to the birds and the frogs...unless, of course, the natural sounds were drowned out by the loud slurping of the wretched mud, sucking against the tires.

She dismounted when she passed through one of the muddier sections, and looked around for a stick to scrape some of it off.

Her research grant from the UN had provided her with a Land Rover, but she seldom used it, since she was terrified of driving over a landmine. She had worked out the odds. The bike had half as many tires, which immediately halved the risk, multiplied by the fact that they were only one-eighth as wide. A factor of sixteen. It was hard to ignore, statistically.

On the other hand, the robust undercarriage of the Rover would provide some protection against the anti-personnel mines. Those were even harder to ignore, emotionally. She suddenly felt exposed.

The International Committee of the Red Cross had several crews under contract, clearing the mines, and the coordinator of one of their crews stayed at the lodge, occasionally. He was an expatriate South African, who had spent his years of compulsory military service depositing thousands of landmines in African soil, and had now dedicated himself to withdrawing them, with interest. His name was Frikkie.

He usually arrived when several of his diggers had lost some limbs, or the last of his vehicles had been disabled by the landmines, and he had to suspend operations until fresh ones could be shipped in. The trucks, not the diggers. There was an abundance of local talent willing to risk an arm or a leg. Jobs were hard to find.

Frikkie's landmine stories tended to linger in her memory.

The injuries they caused were horrific - severe shrapnel mutilation of the legs and genitalia - but their perpetual, lurking presence was even more terrifying. The way they hid passively, almost benignly in their burrows - not to choose some prey and then attack, like a crocodile or a shark - but simply to wait, with an inhuman patience. Everywhere. And nowhere.

It always seemed as if it would be entirely her own fault if she happened to bother one, when she knew they simply wanted to be left alone, like sleeping bees.

She couldn't find any sticks. They were like the mines. You wouldn't find one right underfoot, where you knew it was safe. They were always somewhere else. Where it wasn't.

She reached inside the pocket of her shorts, and pulled out the porcelain spout. Why not? The delicately tapered end was perfectly shaped for the task. She squatted down and started scraping off the worst of the mud.

The body of the teapot was safely packed away in her rucksack. When she had followed its arc through the air, and watched it bounce on the lawn, it appeared to land softly in the middle of the petunias, so she had pocketed the spout, just in case. She checked on the condition of the pot, before she left. Found it resting on a cushion of leaves. Not a crack.

She wondered if the general store in Mocimboa da Praia would have any rose-colored coffee mugs. Maybe. She'd invite Margaret over for coffee, sometime.

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Murray wedged the wrecking bar under the flange of the bronze portlight, and tried levering it up, but the bolts refused to yield, and he only succeeded in crushing the surrounding wood trim. He picked up the hand sledgehammer, but couldn't bring himself to raise it, and threw down the tools in disgust. Ripping *Mavis* apart to salvage her bronze fittings seemed scarcely different than forcing open a dead friend's mouth to pry out her gold bridgework.

He'd already stripped her. Recovered the possessions worth saving, and carted them back to the little camp he'd set up underneath the trees. Taken off all her sails, and the rope. Brass light fixtures. Bronze pumps. He had even unfastened the hinges, and removed all of her louvered teak doors.

Everything else would require violence. Bolt heads smoothly hidden under varnished teak plugs. Bronze fastenings undisturbed for sixty years, and held solid by swollen timbers, or peened and frozen threads.

He just couldn't do it to her.



He walked back to the camp, and started a small fire to make some coffee. The level ground in back of the beach was shaded by a few large baobab trees, and was free of the scrub - only a sparse covering of tall grass - and provided a comfortable, secluded campsite. He had considered setting up his kerosene stove, at one point, but decided that the added convenience would only encourage him to delay rowing across the bay, to the mainland.

His sprained wrist provided an expedient excuse for the first few days, but he'd been camped on the island for almost a week. He knew he couldn't put it off much longer, unless it rained. The water tank on the boat was situated above the keel, in an area that had been severely damaged, and it had ruptured, leaving him with only fruit juice, and his emergency water rations.

Well...no. There were coconuts. He wouldn't suffer from thirst. He had salvaged plenty of food. Canned hams. Baked beans and corned beef. Maybe ten pounds of rice. The oranges smelled faintly of kerosene, but they were fine after he peeled them.

The island was uninhabited, apparently due to the absence of fresh water, although he'd seen several fisherman landing a sailing canoe at the other end of the island, near the grove of coconut palms. They had built a fire, and spent the night, but left first thing in the morning.

The wild, thick undergrowth covering the coral surface was almost impenetrable, and he hadn't found any footpaths through it. He had explored the coastal fringe, and noticed machete marks on the trees near a collapsed, crude hut, as well as the charcoal left by several campfires; so he imagined someone would visit this end of the island, eventually, and discover his presence.

Of course, it wasn't as if he were trying to hide. The smoke from his cooking fire would be visible a long way off, and the wreckage of his boat was still wedged conspicuously on the reef.

As long as *Mavis* remained stranded, he felt bound to her, somehow. He couldn't simply row away, and leave her to the scavengers. Wilson would probably do the same for him. Keep a vigil next to the corpse of his master.

Since *Mavis* was an antique wooden boat, she needed constant care to keep her healthy, and Murray had often felt like her servant. When he wasn't actually working on her, he was usually busy earning some money, in order to buy the supplies he needed to do the work. The responsibility was as unceasing as geriatric care, since his boat remained perennially helpless, never able to take care of itself.

He couldn't count the number of times he had adjusted his life to accommodate the demands of his boat. Declining offers to spend a weekend with friends when he couldn't find anyone he trusted to look after her. Visiting a harbor he had no desire to see, because they had a proper boat lift that could haul her out with the gentleness she insisted upon. Or having to bypass a port where he would have liked to stop, because the anchorage had been usurped by a marina, and the torturous approach to the docks wasn't practicable for a sailboat without an engine.

He remembered other times, though. How *Mavis* routinely looked after herself, at sea, when he was asleep. Several days, once, when he was too sick with ciguatera poisoning to even crawl out of his bunk. And how she'd often gotten him out of tight spots, with the reliable power of her sails, or the forgiving nature of her full-length lead keel, which absorbed the punishment for his occasional lapses in seamanship when navigating around coral reefs.

It would take more time to come to grips with the other aspects of the relationship. How she had provided him with a home for fifteen years. Carried him to places as close to paradise as he was ever likely to see. He couldn't dwell on that. The loss.

No. He'd focus on the possibilities. Now, he was free.

Well, not quite.

He located the kerosene tank buried underneath the sails, in one of the piles of gear stacked around the camp, and walked back to the boat. After splashing several litres over the ribs and the splintered cabinetwork, he poured some across the deck, and dumped the rest down the hatches. Then ignited it through one of the holes in the hull.

Wilson came charging down the beach, when thick black smoke began billowing out through the openings in the deck.

*Fire!*

He started barking at the smoke, and pacing frantically. Then, latched onto the pocket flap of Murray's shorts with his teeth, and tried to drag him toward the water.

*Bad! Do something!*

Murray fended him off, and sat down on one of the coral boulders to keep his final watch over *Mavis*. Wilson eventually stopped pacing, and laid down on the beach, next to the empty kerosene tank.

*Why? We've always painted it, before.*

Murray was accustomed to living alone, and bearing his own burdens, but the funereal nature of the occasion seemed to call for the support of a family. Or close friends, at least.

He had lost his family, long ago, in the aftermath of the war in Vietnam. He had refused to go. Refused to be imprisoned for his stance, as well. Lived in Canada, for awhile. Counselling fellow casualties of the war. Murray regarded himself as a war hero, but his family obviously held a much more conservative view about the nature of heroism.

He seldom thought of it, anymore. Even though he had suffered greatly, at the time, the scars had faded. His war wounds were superficial, really, since they hadn't penetrated to the core of his humanity, unlike the trauma experienced by the soldiers who had volunteered - nobly, they thought - and only realized afterwards how they'd been manipulated, and lied to. Dishonored. Murray hadn't expected any parades.

He could have gone home, after the amnesty, and healed the rift, but there seemed little point. Both his parents had died while he was in exile, and he really had nothing to say to his aunts, uncles, and cousins.

Murray realized that he'd lost much more than just a boat. Or a home. His whole identity was going up in smoke. What was a curator without a museum? Or a nurse without a patient? Without his boat, he was basically a bum, camped out on a beach.

His skills were obsolete, more or less. Finely-tapered wire rigging splices and handworked sails. Tight, smooth seams of caulking, and intricate, decorative rope work. Patternmaking. Lofting. All the sailor's arts. The boatbuilder's. They either weren't valued anymore, or they were performed by computer-controlled machines.

He had acquired the skills by default, really. Out of sheer necessity. Once he had fallen in love with *Mavis*, and spent every cent he had to buy her, he couldn't afford to hire anyone to do the work, and had to learn how to do everything himself. It wasn't exactly career training.

Nevertheless, he had gradually assumed the identity of a seafarer, defined by how he lived, whether he liked it, or not. He even looked the part, with his salty beard, and the red bandanna he often wore, as an easily-stowed, low windage hat.

It was ironic, in a way. Rejecting the constraints of a career was one of the reasons why he'd bought the boat, in the first place.

Murray had followed a prescribed career track, once. He had been trained, like everyone else, with the expectation that he would turn out useful.

For years, the government had faithfully awarded him scholarships, so he could train to be an engineer. The National Defense Education Act, they called it. So it came as a shock when they suddenly changed their mind, and notified him that he would be more useful serving as a soldier in Vietnam. It caused a sharp disjuncture in his life.

He had noticed the protests on campus, in opposition to the war, but seldom gave them a second thought, except to wonder how the student demonstrators managed to keep up with their studies, and whether they were putting scholarships at risk. His own course load was so demanding that particular semester that he never had the time to read even a single newspaper.

He was resentful, at first, simply because he was being forced to do something against his will. He wanted to be an engineer, not a soldier. His chosen course of study had been devalued.

Then, he began to feel guilty, for having completely ignored the ethical issues relating to the war, until he was given a personal stake in it. Plus, there was the ignorance, itself. He knew nothing about politics, or history, or literature. Had never read Marx or Kant. Never considered the truly important questions.

For the first time in his life, he was forced to make a serious moral choice, and he was totally unprepared for it. All those years of schooling...they hadn't prepared him to think. Not really. They had merely prepared him to perform.

Wilson sauntered over when the pyre was fully ablaze, and laid his head dolefully on Murray's lap, sensing the solemnity of the occasion.

*Poor Murray.*

The high quality of the craftsmanship that had gone into building his boat adhered tenaciously to it, even as it began to disintegrate. The copper-fastened planks held their shape, as the flames began licking through the widening gaps between them, and engulfed the decking and the cabin. The well-seasoned timbers in her topsides burned with a blue flame, shading to green below the waterline, where the wood was impregnated with copper salts.

The deck eventually collapsed into the interior, when the bulkheads were consumed, but her heavy sawn frames, and the stout timbers in her backbone remained standing, even as burning embers from the planks began to fall away. Soon, only a bare, boat-shaped

skeleton was left, which gradually subsided into the glowing mound of coals.

"Well, Wilson, what do you want to do, now?"

*Chase a stick!*

Wilson's ears pricked, and he jumped back a step and crouched down expectantly on his haunches, waiting for a signal.

*Go for a swim? Explore?*

He whined impatiently.

*Come on! What?*

"Yeah...that's what I figured. I don't have a clue, either."

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"Look, Margaret," Emily said, pointing offshore. "Smoke."

A thin column of black smoke was rising from one of the islands on the outer reef, drifting off to leeward, and forming a small smudge of cloud.

Margaret set her book on the table - face down, so she wouldn't lose her page - and shaded her eyes. "Seems to be coming from Ihla Fanduzi," she said.

"Looks like a big fire."

"Odd."

The foliage on the islands would still be green, from the recent rain. It was too early in the season for brush fires.

"Must be fishermen." Emily frowned. Fires were supposedly prohibited on the islands included in the nature preserve. Not that any of the fishermen paid any notice.

"You going out there tomorrow?" Margaret asked.

"Maybe. If it's not too windy." Probably not, she thought. She hadn't really planned to motor out that far. The petrol was too dear. She just wanted to check a few of the island beaches, closer inshore, for any sign of the upcoming turtle season. Any day, now, she'd find her first clutch of eggs.

The turtle population in the archipelago had been decimated during the years of the civil war. The refugees crowding into the coastal areas had neither the tools nor the expertise to build boats, or even catch fish, but found the turtles easy prey, and their eggs were there for the taking. During the last three seasons, no turtles had come ashore on any of the mainland beaches, at all.

The government offered to withdraw their troops from the game reserve during the initial ceasefire negotiations, as the first phase of an overall demilitarization of environmentally sensitive areas. It was a politically astute move, since it attracted immediate support from donor countries in the West; and a rapid realignment was essential, since their former communist benefactors had not only cut them adrift, but had even become competitors in the scramble for scarce aid funds from the same sources.

These proposals were soon followed by the announcement of an ambitious privatization scheme, to encourage the development of an ecological tourism industry, and several offshore islands were declared wildlife preserves. The establishment of a marine biology research facility was included as part of the package.

The camp was never mentioned during the course of the negotiations, and Miles and Margaret were unaware of its existence, until they arrived at the lodge, and found all the people living outside the fence. At first, Margaret had referred to it as a 'refugee' camp, but that implied the existence of a 'refuge'. A transitional place, which offered some organized assistance, and protection.

But it soon became clear that the government had no intention of assisting the 'squatters', or making any attempt to resettle them. Official policy was to deny them access to any aid, whatsoever, on the assumption that they would be forced to move away, following the cessation of the black market trade.

The squatter camp was an embarrassment. It was situated adjacent to an ecologically sensitive estuary, inside an area coloured bright yellow on the official government map of the proposed marine sanctuary, which had already been distributed to donor organizations. It was hardly suitable for agriculture, in any case; being swampy, for the most part, and prone to flooding in the wet season.

The possible development of a tourist industry in the area acted as a magnet, however, and encouraged the squatters to stay on, despite the absence of any design to accommodate them. When Miles hired some of the men to help clean up the lodge, and repair the damage inflicted by the soldiers, their reason for optimism was confirmed. There would be jobs, here.

Emily employed a few of the residents, herself. She had intended to hire only one assistant - just João, a man who occasionally worked for Miles - but he arrived with two wives, and a total of eight children; plus all their belongings, which included two goats, and some guinea fowl.

She hadn't been expecting anyone to move in. Before she was able to mount an effective protest, the children formed a cute, little queue, and proceeded to thank her, individually, for hiring their father and giving them a nicer place to live. The last child handed her a carved coconut shell, filled with freshly-roasted cashew nuts. They were still warm.

João's first wife, Patience, then presented her with a bundle of sugarcane; while his second wife, Prudence, followed timidly behind, holding out a freshly-plucked guinea fowl.

Emily hardly knew what to say, since there truly wasn't a place for them - only the tool shed, which she planned to use for her laboratory - but they started right in, gathering thatch, harvesting sapling poles, and clearing a site near the turtle pond to build themselves a house.

She had inherited the rearing pond from the previous tenants, whose research funding had been cut off, following several financial 'irregularities'. They had abandoned thirteen loggerhead turtles, which were now almost one year old. The project had been ill-advised from the start, in Emily's opinion, and had only succeeded in turning turtles into pets. She released two males, as a trial, but they had refused to leave the area. They basked on the drying sand flats and moped around the nearby beaches, until they fell prey to poachers.

She wanted to ferry the remainder offshore, and release them at one of the more remote islands in the preserve, but the statutes obliged her to seek the permission of the Mozambiquan government. She was still waiting. Meanwhile, she fed them with fish meal pellets that she paid for out of her own pocket.

With the new turtle season almost at hand, she would soon be too busy to care for the orphaned turtles, herself. Her own research involved a DNA analysis of the local breeding population, which required frequent trips to the offshore islands to collect eggs, and long hours in the laboratory, cataloguing the samples, and extracting the genetic material. So she hired João.

He hated physical labor, as it turned out. His wives did all the work. Patience explained that he had once been a rich man, owning more than twenty head of cattle, but the soldiers had taken everything. He still brooded over the loss, and reminisced about his animals, and found little solace working for wages. He took the goats for walks, instead.

But Emily never regretted her decision to hire him, or his family.

The spartan research station gradually became a lovely, rural African home. Theirs, of course. She was treated like an honored guest, whenever she went to work. There might be a jar full of wildflowers waiting for her, next to her microscope, or some sweet, honey cakes on the tray with her coffee.

Mostly, though, she loved listening to their stories. Patience had to translate for her, at first. João spoke some English, but his lilting intonation made it difficult for her to understand him, until she gained some proficiency in Swahili.

It was her conversations with João that gradually led her to the conclusion that her efforts to protect the turtles were destined to fail.

The people living around the sanctuary would continue to poach turtles. It was ludicrous to expect them not to. They didn't have enough to eat.

Initially, she thought the law would safeguard the turtles. The legislation which created the offshore wildlife preserves had included statutes specifically protecting them, and their nests, as well as a schedule of stiff penalties for violations; but there were no provisions in place to enforce them. No patrol boats, or game wardens. No educational programs, at all. The Mozambiquan government simply couldn't afford them.

The Mozambiquan Navy was almost non-existent. The nearest naval station was located at Beira, over five hundred miles south. The local authorities didn't even own a boat, and leased an old cabin cruiser that belonged to the provincial police commissioner, Colonel Mendes.

Emily had approached the Colonel, whose jurisdiction included the island preserves, and persuaded him to submit proposals to several donor agencies, to fund the acquisition of an offshore patrol craft. Even irregular patrols in an outboard runabout would dissuade casual poachers, she thought.

Colonel Mendes was more ambitious, and requested no less than three high-speed, twin-engine boats, with a three-man crew for each, fully supported by shoreside personnel. He also wanted a helicopter. It was the bare minimum, he insisted. He couldn't ask his police force to take on any new responsibilities, without adequate resources.

They didn't get the grant.

João advised her to lobby the local fishermen, who resented the restrictions imposed on the fishery. They had seen nothing from the development of a tourist industry, other than an increase in the number of chartered seaplanes, which landed in the protected zone, with the rich,



European guests who stayed at the lodge. As an industry, tourism seemed as exploitative as the jute and sisal plantations. The tourist preserve had usurped their most productive fishing areas, for the entertainment of the Europeans, and created very few jobs.

Emily asked Margaret if she would buy more local fish, to serve at the lodge, and she agreed; but pointed out that the guests seldom ordered any seafood, except for crayfish, or prawns.

There was little else she could do. The mire of socio-economic problems threatening the turtle population had to be addressed by the politicians, or the economists. She had no expertise in any of that. Really. What did she know? She was barely qualified to call herself a herpetologist.

When she applied for the research grant, she never really expected to get it. She had switched majors so many times, she thought the selection committee might hold it against her. You were supposed to specialize, after all.

Her degree in estuarian ecology had some relevance, but the rest simply looked suspicious. She had faithfully followed the instructions on the application forms, and included an exhaustive list of her scientific publications, which seemed a blunder, afterwards, since no self-respecting herpetologist would ever admit to authoring an article on ground squirrel fur.

Many of the applicants would have had more extensive field experience, she thought, or worked with sea turtles, at least.

Although her academic credentials were impeccable, her thesis advisor was a terrestrial herpetologist. A snake man. He had published an article on painted river turtles, in one of the more obscure journals, but she was convinced the grant would be awarded to a student of a more highly renowned turtle specialist. He probably pulled a few strings to get it for her.

He was desperate to get rid of her, she knew. It was just too awkward, having her around, after his wife found out about their short-lived affair. He immediately broke it off, but her continued presence in the lab was torture for him. He had been raised a strict Catholic, he told her, and had a long-standing problem, dealing with guilt.

Emily still couldn't believe that she had chosen to work for him. It made no sense. She didn't even like snakes.

He was a real charmer, though. Said all the right things. It was a fiction, of course. All of it. He never had the slightest intention of divorcing his wife.

She was hardly the cold bitch he'd made her out to be, either. When it all collapsed, it was the wife who had helped her through it. She learned that she was only the latest pearl, added onto his long string of graduate students.

He had been so pathetically inept at concealing the affair, that he must have wanted his wife to uncover every sordid, little secret. She routinely kept the books, for his research grants, and expense accounts, and would have seen all the credit card receipts. The motel rooms they shared on field trips, and the itemized hotel billing from the research conference. The room-service breakfasts for two.

Emily never did learn how many people had applied for the turtle grant. Perhaps, there weren't all that many. Her friends thought she was insane, after all, and couldn't understand why anyone would willingly trade a lovely, little cottage on Cape Cod, for the war ravaged squalor of Mozambique.

It was simple, really. She had taken a long, hard look at where she was - on the globe - and reached around and touched her finger to the other side. It was exactly where she wanted to go. As far away as she could get.

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The layer of sand covering the coral surface was too thin to allow Murray to bury everything as inconspicuously as he would have liked, but there seemed little incentive for a casual visitor to venture into the thorny scrub. He had packed a duffel bag with clothes and provisions - plus a few of his more valuable possessions, like the sextant and binoculars. Then, a sailbag with enough equipment to set up a new camp, in case he failed to find a village before nightfall. He had to leave space in the dinghy to row properly, as well as room for Wilson, and had to leave the rest of his gear behind.

He smoothed out the tarpaulin, and weighed down the edge with the portlights and some heavy bronze bolts - he hadn't been able to resist plucking them from the ashes on the reef - and began untying the lines he'd used to pull back the bushes. The cache was barely visible, after he swept away the footprints, and restored a semblance of naturalness to the area around the campsite.

Wilson was sitting patiently on the beach, right next to the dinghy. He was anticipating an adventure - having watched it being inflated - and when he saw Murray shouldering the duffel, he jumped up enthusiastically, and started tugging on one of the rope handholds on the boat, dragging it toward the water.

Murray would have liked to rig a small sail, but couldn't think of a straightforward way to fit the old rubber dinghy with a mast and a rudder, and the unwieldy boat wouldn't sail worth a shit, anyway. Of course, it didn't row all that well, either - its only real virtues being that it was easy to stow, and light enough to pick up, and carry ashore over some rocks, or fringing coral. He settled into a relaxed, even stroke, expecting to row at least four hours before reaching the mainland.

Wilson took up his favorite spot, with his paws draped over the bow tube, and began wagging his tail, thumping it against the duffel bag under the thwart, as if encouraging a faster stroke on the oars. His excitement soon waned, when no apparent landfall presented itself, and he contented himself with resting his head between his paws, and watching for fish.

When Murray first noticed the white band along the horizon, back toward the camp, he thought it was a line of heavy surf, breaking on the reefs between the outer islands. It seemed odd, though, since the wind was so light. There hadn't been any appreciable swell since the cyclone.

Rollers?

They were a common feature in the Atlantic Ocean - remarkably large swells which occur periodically with no apparent local cause, often during periods of calm, settled weather - but he couldn't recall any mention of dangerous rollers in the tropical waters off East Africa, or the relatively sheltered Mozambique Channel.

He continued to watch it, while maintaining his steady stroke on the oars, and soon realized that the wall of white water was actually moving. Moving rapidly closer, bearing down on them. He shipped the oars, and stood up for a better look.

It was physically impossible to propagate a wave that size across such shallow water. He had passed over some coral formations that were only three or four meters deep, with a smooth sand bottom surrounding them, and the wave appeared to be at least that high. A crest like that would simply curl up, crash, and dissipate upon reaching such shoals.

Yet, there it was. He felt a moment of panic, until he realized that no real harm would come to them, even if the dinghy were swamped by

the wave, and overturned. Unless he lost the duffel bag. Or the oars. He wedged the duffel further forward, and considered lashing the oars under the thwart.

The wave had a fascinating, unnatural aspect to it. Almost as if it were an artistic rendering of a breaking sea. Impressionistic, maybe. Pointillist.

He watched with wonder as it advanced, then slowly, miraculously parted, just as it was about to overtake the dinghy.

Wilson leaped up unexpectedly, suddenly excited, and almost knocked him into the water. He started barking furiously, turning in circles, and jumping in the air like a puppy. Then, completely lost it, and fell comically overboard when the wave engulfed them - a tempest of white feathers, flapping wings - as countless thousands of snowy egrets flew gracefully, swiftly past.

The flock rapidly closed ranks after clearing the dinghy, and erased any evidence of the encounter from the receding wave, leaving behind only the lightest flurry of feathers, which settled softly into the dinghy, like snowflakes.

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Emily noticed the turtle as she was approaching the island, although she thought it was an outcrop of coral rock, at first. She was hoping to make a brief inspection of at least fifteen potential nesting beaches, and might not have stopped, if she hadn't seen the pair of tracks leading down into the water. Her joy at confirming the beginning of the turtle season was soon replaced with anguish, when she landed the dinghy on the beach, and realized that the rock was actually a turtle, stranded helplessly on her back, just above the high water mark.

The turtle lay motionless as she walked up to it - dead, she thought - but began feebly moving its flippers when she reached down and touched it.

"Easy girl." Emily ran her hand over its shell, and was reminded of a rock, once more. A hot rock, baking in the late morning sun. She considered going back to the lodge for help, but the round trip would take at least three hours. It was too long. The sky was cloudless, and the midday sun would be lethal.

Emily worried that the turtle might already be in shock, and put aside the dilemma of how to turn it over, in favor of arranging some shade cover. Water, first. She should cool it off, quickly.

She could find nothing better in the dinghy than her egg containers - shallow, plastic trays - and, in her haste to hurry back with the water, she spilled half of it onto the sand. She poured what remained over the turtle, and made several more trips before she had thoroughly doused it.

The bushes were low, and sparse, and she searched in vain along the edge of the tangled undergrowth for any broad-leafed foliage. There were no palms, and the fallen casuarina branches had lost most of their needles, and were virtually useless. She decided to use her T-shirt. She stripped it off, and ripped apart one of the seams, so she could open it up, and cover more of the turtle.

She knelt down, and pulled up on the edge of the shell, but the turtle was a good-sized loggerhead - four hundred pounds, at least - and she couldn't budge it. The shell still felt warm, and she went back for more water.

She had few tools to work with. Just the small gardening trowel she carried, for excavating the eggs. Some thin rope and the dinghy anchor. Flimsy aluminum oars.

The trowel had sharp edges, and she hacked off a few gnarled branches, and embedded them in the sand to provide a few anchor points, then sawed off some short pieces of the rope against the coral, and stretched out the shirt above the turtle to serve as an awning. The white cloth provided adequate shade, and, if she kept it moist, the air circulating underneath it would stay cool.

The turtle cautiously extended its head, and appeared to examine her. She looked so sad. So helpless. Emily marvelled at their history of evolutionary success, given the obviously fatal design flaw. It must not happen to them very often, if the inability to right themselves was insignificant, in evolutionary terms. In the absence of human predators, anyway.

They were terribly clumsy on land, though. The pair of turtle tracks converged on the same spot on the beach, and she thought this turtle might have actually tripped over its companion. The surrounding sand was very uneven, and the shell was resting next to a depression. There were no human footprints, at any rate, so she assumed it had been an accident.

An accident of birth, in part. The males never returned to the land, after hatching, so this fate was reserved solely for the females. It seemed really unfair.

She wedged the handles of the oars under the shell, and tried levering it over with all her strength, but the aluminum tubes bent. They were emergency oars, supposedly. In case the motor quit. Bloody useless.

The island was almost a mile long, and she felt certain she could find something useful on it. Hundreds of people had fled to the safety of these offshore islands during the height of the civil war, and erected crude shelters. Only a few fishermen visited them, now, but there would still be some abandoned poles, or stout wood planks. Even driftwood. She soaked the shade cloth, and set off down the beach, prepared to explore the length of the island.

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Murray hadn't allowed for the strong tidal streams setting through the islands, and their presence continued to elude him, until he realized that the unusual coral formation he was admiring was the same one he'd noticed a few minutes earlier, and that he was actually going backwards. He quickened his pace on the oars, while watching the coral on the seabed to monitor his progress, and soon accepted the hopelessness of trying to make any appreciable headway against the current.

They were abeam a small island, and the beach appeared accessible, so he altered course for it, angling across the tidal current. They would only have to wait a few hours for the stream to slacken, he imagined, and the trees on the islet would provide some shade while they ate lunch.

Wilson devoured his corned beef in a few seconds, then spent five minutes meticulously licking the film of fat from the tin, before falling fast asleep. Murray resisted the urge to curl up in the shade, himself, knowing that he should climb the tallest casuarina tree, and scan the shore on the mainland.

He lashed the binoculars to the waistband of his shorts, then tied his ankles together, loosely, with a sweatshirt. The lower section of the casuarina was devoid of branches, so he scaled it as he would a coconut palm, using the strip of cloth between his feet to grip the trunk, and pulling himself up, with short, hopping steps.

The profusion of small branches made it impossible to climb very high, and would block his view, in any case, so he stopped as soon as he found a decent toehold.

He saw some smoke rising above the forest near a small clearing, well inland, but couldn't find any evidence of a village. No houses, or

roads. The adjacent shoreline consisted largely of mangroves, offering little, but a wide expanse of beach to the north looked promising, as a place where fisherman would choose to launch their boats. Although it appeared deserted, he was too far away to distinguish anything as inconspicuous as a thatched shelter against the dense background of forest. Any dwellings would be back in the shade of trees, he thought, and out of sight. He'd give it a try.

As he lowered the glasses, some movement out on the water caught the corner of his eye. He turned his head and saw it immediately. A small, white launch, drifting across the bay on the wind. There was no one in the boat - nothing in it, at all, that he could see - just a small outboard, tilted clear of the water off the stern. The sea breeze had freshened over the last few hours, and he looked back to windward, along the likely track that had been taken by the boat. It led directly to the next island, about two miles away.

The currents through the channels were unpredictable, though, and strong. The dinghy could have come from anywhere along the coast. Adrift for days, possibly.

He couldn't believe his luck. The launch was drifting toward some drying rocks, just off the island. Murray hurriedly descended the tree, hoping to intercept the boat before it ran aground. The rocks were partially submerged, now, at high tide, and the choppy seas raised by the wind were breaking heavily on them. He stowed the duffel, and whistled for Wilson.

He was sleeping in the shade of the bushes, and opened his eyes, but didn't move.

*What?*

"Let's go."

Wilson slowly uncurled himself, and took a few steps down the beach, then stopped, and leisurely stretched his forepaws. Then, his haunches. Yawned.

"Come on!"

He calmly ambled over, and stepped right into the dinghy where it rested on the sand, and laid down, forcing Murray to lift the weight of his dog as well as the bow of the boat, in order to launch it.

The motorboat had *Arquipélago das Querimbas Lodge* painted on the side, and appeared to be in perfect condition. The engine looked new. He reached aboard, and shook the petrol tank. It was nearly full.

Almost twenty litres. He saw a spiral notebook and a folded nautical chart, stowed in a plastic tray, but nothing else. He climbed aboard.

He lowered the motor, and gave it a try. It started on the second pull. Brilliant. He motored until they were well clear of the rocks, while towing Wilson astern, then shut off the engine. Wilson seemed keen to join him, and Murray held onto the gunwale, while he jumped aboard.

The cover of the notebook bore the title, *Turtle Project*, printed in felt pen, but there were no entries inside, just a series of page dividers with Portuguese place names, a few of which Murray recognized as islands in the chain. He was curious to learn the name of the island where he'd lost his boat, and examined the chart. Ihla Fanduzi. Otherwise, the chart was unmarked, and provided no clues.

Wilson had discovered a set of plastic containers under the thwart, and was thoroughly absorbed in trying to open one. Murray took it from him, and prised off the cover. There was a sandwich inside, and a few freshly-peeled carrots. An egg salad sandwich. On homemade bread. The lettuce was still crisp.

He opened the smaller one. A large piece of chocolate cake. With beautiful, dark chocolate icing. He resisted an almost overwhelming urge to eat it, and hurriedly pushed the cover back in place. The last container was a thermos. Ice water.

He considered the implications for a moment. The boat had obviously been drifting for mere *hours*, not days. The picnic lunch was hardly what he'd expect of an African. Not a rural Mozambiquan, anyway. Although they'd surely love the chocolate cake, he felt certain that he was searching for a fellow expatriate. A European. It made the situation seem more urgent. The thought bothered him, since he knew it shouldn't really matter, but it did, somehow.

It was the napkins. That was it. The neatly-folded, pastel yellow napkins next to sandwich seemed conspicuously out of place in the midst of such wildness. Like their owner, perhaps.

He grabbed his binoculars from the duffel, and stood up on the aft thwart, bracing his leg against the motor, and carefully scanned the surface of the water, sector by sector. Up to the horizon, then down again. He found nothing.

He started the engine, and headed up into the wind, hoping to retrace the path travelled by the boat. The current would continue carrying someone who had fallen overboard, possibly off the track, so he studied the chart, but found no arrows indicating the direction of the



tidal streams, nor any data concerning their strength. The survey was an old one, and incomplete.

The current had set him offshore when he was rowing in the adjacent channel, and it seemed likely that the direction would be the same, here. The tide hadn't turned, yet. He altered his course slightly, to pass offshore of the island ahead, and set aside the chart, so he could concentrate on keeping a careful lookout.

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Emily never wore a watch, so she didn't know how long it had taken her to drag the heavy planks. She had stopped to rest every five minutes, or so, so it was probably an hour and half. Maybe a little less. It didn't really matter. Her boat must have blown away shortly after she left, since it was already out of sight when she got back.

The tide had certainly risen a lot. Her anchor was still sticking out of the sand, precisely where she'd set it, but the line was floating limply out to sea, since she'd forgotten to retie it to the bow of the boat, after cutting the pieces off the end to erect the shelter.

She was desperately thirsty, but her drinking water had departed with the boat. She'd finally gotten over her panic, and her tears, but her terror of sharks and crocodiles wouldn't go away. She'd have to swim for the mainland in the morning. Four miles.

Shit. She was going to die.

Margaret wouldn't realize she was missing. Not until afternoon tea, tomorrow.

It could take several days before anyone found her. She had taken the only engine-powered boat at the lodge, so any search would have to be undertaken with canoes. Then, too, they would never begin looking for her this far down the coast.

Emily had left slightly before dawn, when the sea was glassy smooth. She had motored fifteen miles due south, since she wouldn't be able to go that direction later on, once the sea breeze had freshened, and raised an unpleasantly choppy sea. The wind was often strong by midday, and it invariably came from the south during the months of the southwest monsoon.

She cursed herself for being so foolish. So unprepared. She couldn't even build a signal fire.

At least the turtle seemed to be feeling a little better. The breeze had set in, and the steady flow of air underneath the moistened shade

cloth had finally cooled it down. It had recovered some strength, and slowly tilted its head when Emily stroked its shell. She saw that the turtle's tears had also dried up - a sign of dehydration, in this instance - and she scooped some water from the tray, and let it dribble off her palm onto the turtle's beak.

Emily knew that she should get started, attempting to right it, but she was dreading the prospect of watching it swim away, leaving her all alone.

It happened so suddenly. She was down on her knees, digging away the sand underneath one side of the turtle, so she could get a plank underneath, when she heard a dog barking. She lifted her head, and saw her boat approaching the island.

She couldn't quite believe it, at first. Then, she leaped up and sprinted down to the water's edge, frantically waving her arms.

Murray almost dropped the binoculars overboard, when she turned sideways and gave him a profile of her breasts, and he realized he was actually watching a woman. She was jumping up and down on the beach, wearing nothing but a pair of khaki shorts, and a baseball hat.

She waded a few steps into the water, and stood there, waiting. Wild-looking. She was tall, and thin, and moved like a woman, but she had the small, pointed breasts of a teenage girl. He couldn't take his eyes off her.

He killed the engine, and allowed the momentum of the boat to carry them the final few meters to the beach.

"You lose a boat, by any chance?"

Emily was speechless. Who was he? And where could he have possibly come from? Out of the blue. Literally.

She lightly grasped the gunwale as it glided up to her, then let it slide through her fingers, as the boat continued moving and edged into the sand, and stopped, with the two of them facing each other. She felt her eyes filling with tears, and threw her arms around him, and held on.

"I was so scared," she said, finally.

Murray was totally unprepared for the intensity of the emotion he felt, being unsure of where to put his hands, at first, then, returning her embrace, and holding her tightly. "Hey. It's okay." He gently eased her away, and added reassuringly, "I rescued your chocolate cake."

She smiled deliciously. "Thank you."

He peeled off his T-shirt, and held it out. "You're a little sunburned."

Emily was puzzled, but accepted the shirt. Then, noticed his eyes shift down over her.

"Oh, my God..." she gasped. She hastily covered herself, and spun around, then retreated a few steps, and pulled the shirt over her head. She held her arms tightly folded across her breasts, and couldn't bring herself to face him. "I'm so embarrassed. I can't even imagine what you must be thinking."

Murray hardly knew where to start. "Well...I think you've probably had a really bad day."

She closed her eyes. "It's been awful."

"Maybe you'll feel better after lunch."

She turned her head, and smiled. Then, shifted her feet, and stood looking intently at him. "What are you doing here? I mean...how could you...?"

"I lost a boat, too. Last week. On Ihla Fanduzi."

She recalled the smoke she'd seen, yesterday. Then, the cyclone. "Oh, no..."

"I waited a week. No one brought it back." Murray shrugged.

She averted her eyes, out to sea, towards the outer islands, as she struggled to take it all in. When she looked back, she just said, "I'm Emily."

"Murray. And this is..." He started to point toward the bow, then looked around for Wilson, who had leaped out as soon as they arrived, and gone to inspect the turtle. "Wilson," he said, pointing up the beach.

"I really need some help, Murray," she pleaded.

Wilson was crouched down, tentatively sniffing at the edges of the turtle when they walked up. He was surprisingly subdued, Murray thought, and probably a little awed by it. Wilson backed away cautiously, then straightened up and sauntered over to Emily - rubbing up against her leg, endearing himself - but he kept watch on the turtle.

The midday tide had turned, and the water was beginning to retreat down the beach, having marked its advance on the sand with a scalloped line of twigs, small leaves, shell fragments and foam. It was not as high as the one the night before, and had missed reaching the turtle by several meters.

Sea turtles routinely came ashore to nest at high water, after dark. After excavating a large pit, and a smaller, deeper egg chamber, they would deposit their eggs, and laboriously haul themselves back down the beach, regaining the safety of the sea before sunrise.

Emily was worried about stress, and thought they should try to right it as soon as possible, even though it might not move off the beach until later that night, after the sand had cooled. It was stressful for them simply coming ashore, and she suspected that being upside down would bother them a whole lot more. They were unaccustomed to supporting their own weight, and found it difficult to breathe on land.

"I'll split my lunch with you," she offered, seductively.

"Does that include the, uh...cake?"

She nodded.

"Deal." Murray split his share of the sandwich with Wilson, who ate it with relish. The fresh bread was a treat, but he spit out the lettuce onto the sand.

They turned the turtle easily, working together. Murray weighed only a hundred and eighty pounds, or so, but he was fit, and was able to tilt the shell, in increments, while Emily wedged the planks underneath. Loggerheads have relatively thin plates overlaying their carapace - Emily compared it to a thick coat of varnish over a leather football helmet - and they proceeded cautiously, packing sand under the shell as they went, to avoid damaging the surface.

Murray seemed reluctant to talk about his encounter with the cyclone, but when Emily continued to press him for details, he opened up, and the whole story flooded out. He apologized a few times for talking incessantly, and she just smiled.

"I think she'll make it, Murray."

"Hope so. She's beautiful, isn't she?"

Wilson had occupied himself gathering firewood, and had accumulated a nice pile near the turtle. Emily had grown increasingly amused by it. She laughed, when he returned with a particularly large piece. "How did you ever teach him to do that?"

"He knows I appreciate it."

"Still."

"Well, he doesn't do it all that often." Murray wondered if she could guess what Wilson had in mind. He didn't think so. It was too simple. He grinned, rather mischievously, and gazed at her. "He has a plan, you know. A reason."

She accepted the challenge. He thought she would. She had a wonderfully expressive face, and he could follow her progress, observing it. She furrowed her brow, occasionally, concentrating. Shook her head, rejecting a theory. Wrinkled her nose, discounting another. He didn't interrupt.

She looked up, and smiled. "Wilson is helping us cook the turtle."

Murray laughed, and nodded.

Wilson had deposited another piece of driftwood onto his heap, and was standing next to it, panting shallowly, and watching the turtle.

"That's *awful*, Murray!"

"Why? He loves turtle meat."

She glared at him indignantly. "You mean you've actually fed him...Murray, do you really...?"

"Have turtle blood on my hands?" She continued to stare at him severely, obliging him to explain. "We've visited quite a few tropical islands, and the islanders traditionally hunt turtles. Or, used to, anyway. When they were plentiful. Still, they catch the odd one, now and then. Usually when they're out fishing, with nets. I remember one villager who spent a week repairing his net, and dismissed all the damage as a trivial price to pay, for such a fine prize.

"You won't find any electricity in most of the places where you'll find turtles. So when they caught one, there would be a feast, to eat all of it before it spoiled. Wilson usually got a few bites. A Fijian fisherman gave him a shell, once. He'd done a decent job of scraping out the meat, but there was plenty left to gnaw on, clinging to the shell. The layer of greasy fat kept him occupied for hours. He ate himself sick, as I recall.

"Surely, you can't expect Wilson to abstain from eating turtle meat. He's a predator. I imagine he'd eat us, if he were hungry enough."

"Wilson's going to be disappointed," Emily said.

"I won't let him down. Watching him collect all that firewood made me feel guilty. After salvaging the provisions on the boat...oh, I don't know. I just haven't been in the mood to go fishing. He's been living on canned ham and beef stew. Corned beef. I'll catch him a few fish for dinner."

"Now? You're going fishing?"

"Thought I might. Yeah. How about you? Are you going to head straight across?"

She turned quickly, searching for her boat, and brought up her hands, almost clasping them to her breasts, but caught herself, and covered her mouth, instead. She'd completely forgotten about it. "I'm not stranded here, anymore. Am I?"

"Isn't someone...expecting you?"

"Not 'til tomorrow. Margaret. It's her boat. That's where I'm staying. The lodge."

"I'm thinking I'll camp here, for the night. It's too late to row across to the mainland, anyway."

"Where were you headed? You know...before all this." She motioned toward the boat with one hand, and then the turtle, with the other.

"I don't know, Emily." Murray shrugged, and shook his head, hating the futility of it. "The mainland."

"We should talk about that."

"I'd appreciate it." Murray was hoping she could give him directions, at least.

"We could discuss it over dinner. Think you could catch an extra fish? For me? Maybe I'll stay, too."

"Sure. That's great."

"You wouldn't mind the company?"

"Course not." He smiled encouragingly. "Why don't you come fishing?"

"I'd better wait here. I can't just go off and leave my turtle, can I? At the mercy of predators?"

Murray unpacked his gear, so she could set up camp, if she felt like it, or make herself a cup of coffee. Emily watched, in astonishment, as all his carefully-packed equipment emerged from the sail bag. A squat, plastic bottle full of fishing gear. A waterproof tool pouch, and hand-bearing compass. Stainless steel wire, and reinforced tape. Medical kit.

She gathered up the plastic tarp, then shifted it uneasily when the tent-like shirt that Murray lent her rubbed across her chest. "You wouldn't happen to have any sunburn lotion, by any chance?"

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"The rice is done," Emily decided, replacing the lid, and shifting the pot off to the side, onto one of the rocks banking the campfire. The sunset was fading rapidly, after the last traces of pink had vanished from the clouds over the mainland. The moon had already brightened, and whitened the light on the sand.

"Great." Murray had stapled the fish onto some green branches, with short pieces of wire, and he rearranged them over the fire to utilize the vacated space.

Wilson had forgotten about the turtle, Emily noticed, and was staring wistfully at the sizzling fish, drooling a little. "They smell delicious. What's this one, again? With the blue spots?"

"Coral trout."

"It's almost too beautiful to eat." Murray glanced over at her, with some dismay, and she added, "I'll manage. I'm a predator, too, you know."

Emily hadn't found any plates packed inside the duffel - only the covered pot, which she used for the rice - so she had scrubbed the surface of one of her planks with some beach sand, and they used it as both a platter and a table, and ate with their fingers. Wilson stood at the end.

They were both ravenously hungry, and barely talked during the meal, but shared their delight constantly - passing each other bites of fish, laughing and sighing together, with the pleasure of it. Murray made them some coffee.

It was his turn to ask for help. He couldn't set up a new camp, delay it for yet another week.

"Do you have a telephone at the lodge?"

"There aren't any phones, here. Anywhere. We have a radio, but the only calls we ever make are to the UN headquarters in Dar es Salaam. Or the tour agency in Zanzibar. Who do you want to talk to?"

"Immigration, I guess. Or the police. I'm getting nervous about being in the country illegally."

Emily grimaced, and looked worriedly at him. "Colonel Mendes...?" She went on to explain that Colonel Mendes was the head of the provincial police, and handled all the customs and immigration matters at the administrative offices in the town, Mocímboa da Praia. The port had been without electricity for several weeks, and their radio was broken, anyway.

"I guess I'll have to go over there, then."

"You don't want to do that."

"Why?"

"Believe me. Lots of reasons."

"Well, tell me a few, at least."

"Okay. First reason. You don't have a visa. Colonel Mendes will fine you for that. Can't say how much. He'll try to guess how much you can afford. We have a friend who works for the UN, occasionally, delivering emergency medical supplies along the coast. His name is Doc. He sailed down from Dar es Salaam with some antibiotics a few months ago, when there was a cholera scare in town. His visa had expired. Just three days. The Colonel fined him five hundred dollars. Of course, he knew the UN would pay. He wouldn't fine you that much."

"But I never intended to stop..."

Emily held up her hand. "Second reason. The pages in your passport are mildewed, and all stuck together. That's another fine. My passport had a small tear in the cover, and he fined me fifty dollars. You don't have a yellow fever inoculation certificate, either." The Colonel had apologized profusely, and refunded her the money when she returned as head of the research station, but Emily didn't want to complicate matters, and didn't mention it.

"But, surely, losing my boat in a cyclone explains..."

"The law doesn't mention any exemptions for cyclones. Third reason. Your dog. You have imported exotic livestock into the country without the proper permits, and flouted the quarantine restrictions. Wilson will be impounded, and chained up in the yard in the old Portuguese prison. Held for ransom, more or less.

"Then, there's the import duty. In addition to the medicines, Doc brought a consignment of donated condoms for the UN-sponsored health clinic, but Colonel Mendes refused to allow them ashore, unless the duty was paid. He couldn't find a listing for condoms, so he charged the rate for sporting goods. Boxing gloves."

Murray wasn't familiar with the expression.

"That's what they call them, here." She grinned, recalling the receipt. "Doc showed me the invoice. Twenty-five thousand boxing gloves.

"You've imported dutiable goods into the country, Murray. Your rubber dinghy, for a start, plus most of the gear you buried on the beach, I'd imagine. Now, you can either pay the customs duty, or post a bond. Since you don't have an airplane ticket out of the country, you'll have put up a bond for yourself, as well. Enough to cover the cost of a ticket back to the States."

"I have hardly any money," Murray sighed.

"I know. You said that. So, Colonel Mendes will confiscate everything you own, in lieu of the bond, and payment of all the fines. Then, he'll deny you a visa, since you don't have any funds to support yourself, and take you up to the border on the Ruvuma river, and drop you on the Tanzanian side. Alone. The prison guards haven't been paid for months. They can't afford meat. They'll eat your dog."

"But...how could they...?"

"Predators, Murray."

"I can't believe this..." Murray had been hoping that the authorities would actually offer to *help* him. Assist in recovering his gear from the island. Arrange storage for him, or something, until he was able to sell it.



Many people believed that anything borne in by the sea was automatically classified as salvage, and freely available to whoever cared to claim it. He had heard a few stories of shipwrecked sailors who had their boats stripped, and all their belongings looted by a frenzied mob of scavengers, while they stood by helplessly, powerless to stop it.

Murray wasn't sure what he'd do, really. But Wilson...he'd kill to defend Wilson. Wouldn't bother him, a bit. But these weren't looters Emily was talking about. It was the *police*.

Emily thought she might have overstated her case, when she saw the glare of hatred on his face, and quickly amended her scenario.

"Well...maybe he'd spare Wilson. He knows Americans are sentimental about dogs. He wouldn't risk doing anything that might win you some sympathy, if there were any inquiries.

"He'll probably fabricate a case against you for smuggling, instead. Claim you'd buried drugs on Ihla Fanduzi. He could easily produce witnesses, and evidence. A few bales of marijuana. It's the only cash crop still cultivated in the bush, and the growers have to sell it to Colonel Mendes, since he owns the boat that delivers it to Mombasa. The same boat that will take you up the river.

"Despite his flaws, the Colonel is a polite, gracious man. He'd be genuinely hurt if you took offense, considering that he had treated you so leniently, under the circumstances, and simply deported you, when he had the option of letting you rot in prison for smuggling drugs. He brings flowering plants. For Margaret's garden."

Murray looked distraught, and stared at the embers of the campfire, saying nothing.

"Look. Why don't you come back with me to the lodge? You can stay in my lab. The Colonel never visits the research station." It was just a tool shed, really, but they could fix it up. Together.

"But, that won't help..."

"I'll contact Doc. He has some kind of quasi-official job on Zanzibar. Procurement liaison...something, or other. You'll like him, I'm sure. And his friend, Claire. They arrived in Zanzibar a couple years ago aboard a little, wooden sailboat, and decided to stay, and build a bigger one. Right there, near the old dhow harbor. Doc's very resourceful. Maybe we can smuggle you up there." She smiled encouragingly, and leaned over and rubbed Wilson's ears. "Both of you. Trust me."

Murray brightened, finally, and reached out his hand. "Thanks."

"You saved my life. It's the least I can do."

Emily couldn't sleep. It was odd, she thought. The sand seemed so soft when you walked across it, but she felt as if she were lying on brick.

She couldn't lie on her stomach, as she was accustomed to doing, because of her sunburn; and the localized pressure on her pelvis was really distracting. She shimmied her hips, to form a depression in the sand underneath the ground cover, and the crinkling of the plastic sheet reminded her that she really missed having a cloth one.

She heard something briefly scrape across the sand. Twice. She ceased her tossing, and listened carefully. Heard it a third time. The sea breeze had died away, and she could hear just the faintest rustle from the casuarina trees behind the camp. The island lacked most of the night noises of her room at the lodge. The moths beating against the screen, and mosquitoes whizzing away from the smoking coil. Birds calling from the swamp. Crickets. It was quiet enough to hear the shell fragments sliding down the sand, in the wash from the retreating swells.

Then it scraped again. An abrasive, rasping sound, like something being dragged along the beach. Someone launching a boat.

She sat up quickly. The moonlight shone brightly on the sand, but the water was black. The white paint on her launch showed up clearly. The tide had risen, and the boats were afloat, anchored quietly at the edge of the beach. Safe.

She checked her turtle. The trees had allowed her to erect Murray's tarp only a few meters away from it. It hadn't moved.

Or had it? Tilted?

The first glistening white eggs dropped into the nest, reflecting the moonlight, and Emily realized that she had been listening to her turtle - digging - and she scrambled out from underneath the shelter, desperate to watch.

She had been too embarrassed to tell Murray that she'd never seen a sea turtle in the wild, before. She had examined numerous specimens, of course, and even dissected a large green turtle. But after listening to all of his exciting stories - swimming and diving the reefs in company with turtles, sailing alongside them, even sharing a piece of raw liver with the fisherman who caught one - she felt like a fraud.

She became enchanted, craving a different kind of knowledge of the turtles than she had sought before. One without institutions. Something freer, and more natural than a scientific *discipline*.

Who was she kidding? She was enchanted, all right, and craving something, but it didn't have anything to do with turtles. It was Murray. She thought he would kiss her goodnight. Hoped so. But he hadn't made even the slightest move.

As she watched the turtle depositing her eggs in the nest, Emily was seized by the feeling that she was witnessing a very private, intimate moment. Not the moment of birth. That would happen later. There was something powerfully sexual in it. The turtle pushed purposely with each release, impregnating the sand with spurts of opalescent, rather sticky...seeds.

Emily was rocking slowly back and forth herself, with her hands clasped tightly between her legs, and she suddenly felt dizzy. Beads of sweat had formed on her brow, and she wiped them off on her sleeve. She wondered if she might be getting sick, or something. She'd had a stressful day, too. Like her turtle.

She had just spent too much time in the sun. That was it. Her baseball cap wasn't enough. She needed a hat. A nice, wide-brimmed straw hat.

The beeping of an electronic alarm startled her, and she sat bolt upright. Murray's wrist watch. She puzzled over what could have led him to set it, but only for a moment, when she realized he had planned to be awake before high water, so he could help out if the turtle was too weak to get off the beach without assistance. The water was lapping within a few metres of the nest. She smiled.

"How's she doing?" he called.

"Laying her eggs, Murray. She's a real trooper."

Just like you, he thought. He wondered if she had slept, at all. A dull, red glow under the ashes of their fire caught his eye. "I feel like another coffee. Interested?"

"Sure. But come look. She's starting to cover up her nest."

Wilson wandered over to join them, yawning, and still half asleep, but he perked up when he peered down into the nest.

*Wow. It makes eggs. No wonder we didn't eat it.*

Each stroke of the turtle's flippers carried a great deal of sand, but it seemed like an accident when any of it managed to find its way into the nest. "Clumsy, isn't she?" Emily observed, keeping her voice to a whisper.

One shovelful missed completely, and sprayed across their legs, and Murray couldn't help laughing. He quickly controlled himself, and whispered back. "This could take forever."

"But she's hurrying, Murray. To fill it up before the tide goes out."

Emily thought every living species had its very own time. Its own way of seeing the world. It was metabolic, most likely. Relatively fast for a bird. Slower for a turtle. Of course, humans imagine their time is the true one. So a turtle is said to move in slow motion. But it wouldn't seem so to a tortoise, would it? The wings of a hummingbird wouldn't be a mere blur to another bird, would they?

There was no way of knowing, for certain. Each species was isolated in its own time.

She recalled her fascination, watching a time lapse film of people walking through a central city park, and suddenly seeing it - the pedestrians behaved exactly like ants. The camera must have been situated very high - atop a tall building, perhaps - and provided an aerial view of the whole park, and the surrounding streets.

She could see it all. The purposeful, linear movement, scurrying along networks of seemingly invisible trails. The brief, occasional meeting of heads - an exchange of information - then, carrying on. Flowing resolutely around obstacles. Hurrying in and out of subway nests.

The distortion of time had altered the reality. She would see the scene far differently, strolling pleasantly through the park. Feeling casual, and carefree. Independent.

If turtles could fly, they would observe the frenetic, ant-like version, she thought. But not as a distortion. Or trickery. But as it really was. In turtle-time.

The usual, grand pronouncements she heard about the nature of time were so species-arrogant. The cosmologists were the worst. They even claimed to know what time might be like for a species as unfathomable as a star. The physicists were simply naive, like children, playing with their equations. Their numbers. As if they had the slightest idea of *what* they were actually measuring. Or how *relative* it really was.

Human-time is reckoned by clocks. Everybody sees the same numerals on the clock. They can agree on what 'time' it is - on the *numbers*. But agreeing on the numbers disguises the fact that there is no way of knowing if others perceive *time* in the same way. It is really no

different than assuming everyone sees the same color, when they look at a yellow light, simply because the wavelength of the light can be measured, and agreed upon. There can be nothing more than a collective faith. A fiction, really.

Even within a given species, there would obviously be variations. The human-time discrepancies were so great, and caused so many misunderstandings, that it wasn't surprising that communication *between* species was almost impossible.

There were all the regional human-time differences, to start with. African time isn't worth money, for instance, like American time. It is free, so it doesn't really matter how the Africans spend it. Sitting under a tree, all day, or taking the cows for a leisurely walk. It's all the same, really. Plus the climatic variations. Tropical time is relatively even throughout the year, whereas temperate zone time varies markedly. Similar to the metabolism of a squirrel. A frantic period of accumulation, followed by one of relative hibernation.

Of course, central heating has radically distorted temperate human-time. The frantic period continues throughout the year, now. And the accumulating, of course.

Air conditioning has had a negligible impact on tropical time - being less widely available - so the time differences have been exacerbated. Temperate people see tropical people as moving in slow motion, now. Lazy. They don't regard themselves as hibernating creatures, anymore. Can't. Saving up to pay the fuel bills keeps them busy year round.

It had taken months for her to adjust her own clock to African time, having travelled across so many time zones to get to Mozambique, and undergone so radical a climatic change. Even before she arrived, she often had the feeling that the people around her functioned in slow motion, so the Africans seemed like turtles, on tranquilizers.

She had grown to like it, though. She didn't cover quite as much ground, but saw more. Talked more slowly, and had learned how to listen. Accomplished less, but never seemed to worry about it, at all.

The tide was slightly higher than the night before, but stopped well short of inundating the nest. The turtle had chosen the best possible location. Far enough up the beach to prevent the eggs from becoming waterlogged, but not too close to the trees, whose roots would hamper the digging. The nest would receive full sunlight, warming the eggs incubating underneath the sand.

"Think we should help her out?" Murray whispered.

"Well...we really shouldn't..." Interfere? Emily couldn't get the word out of her mouth, it seemed so absurd. She was hardly the disinterested observer, anymore. She smiled happily. "Why not?"

The turtle soon lifted its head and began to move, slowly pulling itself toward the water. As some compensation for its ordeal, it didn't have far to travel. It started to swim away, but soon stopped, and held its head underwater. Appeared to tread water. Murray waded out, well past his knees, and gave it a gentle push. When he stepped back, he stumbled slightly. "What the hell...?"

Emily watched with alarm, as he fell awkwardly, and splashed into the water, in panic. "Murray!" she cried out, fearing the worst.

A shark attack.

He flailed at the water with his hands, frantically trying to propel himself backwards. Then, regained his feet, as well as his composure, and started to laugh. "It's another bloody turtle!"

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Emily still couldn't sleep. Her shorts were constantly cutting into her crotch, and Murray's shirt felt as harsh as a burlap sack against her sunburn. She routinely slept in the nude.

She tried lying on her back, but couldn't get comfortable, not without a pillow. She was loathe to do anything even remotely immodest, after her exhibition that afternoon, but she desperately needed some sleep. She slipped off her shorts, and the shirt, and neatly rolled them into a little cylindrical pillow, then turned her back toward Murray and covered herself with the loose edge of the ground cover, as best she could.

The crackle of movement on the plastic tarp roused her, when she had almost found sleep. Murray was restless, too, it seemed. She heard him shift his position, a few times. Move a little closer.

He brushed against her - accidentally, she thought - but his touch lingered, in the small of her back. Just the lightest caress. His fingertips, she thought. She trembled with excitement, as he moved them down, gently stroking her. His body pressed softly against her back, and she felt the prickle of his beard on the back of her neck. Then, the moist touch of his lips behind her ear.

"Oh, Murray," she whispered. "Don't stop." She reached behind her, to grasp his hand, while turning to face him.

Wilson started wagging his tail, when she closed her fingers around it, and easily pulled it free. He nuzzled up against her chest as she rolled over.

*Wow. Warm. Like Mom.*

Emily nearly screamed when his cold nose brushed one of her nipples. She pressed her hands tightly to her mouth, terrified of waking Murray, and flopped down on her back, and closed her eyes. She felt so utterly humiliated. *A dog.*

Emily wondered if Margaret had ever read Freud. Might have. Margaret was very well read.

Murray woke at first light, as usual. His sleeping habits were well-established, after years of living on a boat with minimal electrics. It was often too hot in the tropics to light the kerosene lamps, at night, and the odor was rather unpleasant, first thing in the morning. Plus the added expense of the fuel. The sunlight was free, and more reliable.

He lay quietly for awhile, watching Emily sleep, then sat up, and gazed at her. She was sprawled on her back, and her threadbare cotton briefs hid very little. The warmth had gone out of the sand, and her skin looked cold. Wilson was snuggled up against her, and she had her arm around him, as if seeking his warmth, and was cradling his head to the side of her breast. More like a lover, than a child.

He wondered how old she was. About thirty, he guessed. It was hard to tell. She had the physical attributes of a woman whose upper body would always look youthfully thin, perhaps carrying some weight in her hips, if at all. She seemed remarkably unconscious of how beautiful she was. Or the effect she had on him.

Why did he have to meet her, now? When his life was in shreds? He couldn't get seriously involved with anyone. Not now. And it would get serious. With her.

## BONES

"You actually went up and hugged him? Half-naked?" Margaret asked, immensely amused.

Emily's face was still flushed with excitement, after relating all the intimate details of her adventure. She nodded. "His name is Murray."

Margaret was thrilled. She had always thought of Emily as rather...well, asexual. Being a scientist, and all. But wild, savage lust? It was a wonderful revelation. "Is the dog cute, too?"

Emily blushed, once more. "Come on. I didn't know it was the dog. I thought Murray was kissing my neck."

Margaret expressed her dismay over Emily's decision to spirit him away in the tool shed, thinking it rather tacky, but agreed that it might be wise for him to keep a low profile, until they came up with a plan. Emily had rummaged through the attic, and found a small bedside table, and a kerosene lamp. They had already loaded one of the unused beds into the Rover. "It's getting late. We should radio Dar es Salaam."

"What for?"

"You said you were going to call Doc."

"Oh, I will." Emily smiled. "Eventually."

The shed was small, and after the addition of the bed, there was barely enough room on the floor for the rug. Wilson promptly curled up on it, and went to sleep. He was a much bigger dog, indoors.

Emily had to jump over him, to reach the window. She had planned to measure the opening for an insect screen, as well as curtains, but she had forgotten to bring a tape measure. It was already getting dark. She closed the louvered shutter, and lit a mosquito coil.

Murray was standing in the doorway, watching her.

"You'll probably find more mosquitoes here, than you're used to. Margaret buys the coils, by the case."

She stepped over the dog, again, and hopped up on the bed. It was the only place to sit. Murray remained by the door, leaning against the jamb. He seemed pensive, and slightly ill at ease.

She smiled, and patted the pillows, which she had propped up against the wall. "Come on! Aren't you going to try out the bed?"

Murray held back. Emily was smiling so mischievously, and she looked so excited...so attractive...he was actually afraid to get in bed with



her. He turned away. "How long do you suppose I'll have to hide, in here?" he asked.

"You won't have to hide! Honestly..."

She didn't know what to make of his suddenly sour mood. When she drove up with the furniture, half an hour earlier, he was happily telling stories, and laughing with João.

"What if that Colonel shows up?" he asked.

"Colonel Mendes hardly ever visits the lodge. He never comes up here. Not even once, in the whole year I've been here."

Murray continued to stare at the floor.

"We'll set up an alarm system. How about that? The diesel engine on his old cabin cruiser doesn't even have a muffler. It's so noisy, you can hear it coming, for miles. Everyone will listen for it. Miles and Margaret have already agreed to help."

"Oh, dammit. I don't know, Emily. I'm not really worried about that."

"What, then? Tell me."

"I don't think I can." Murray walked over, and sat down on the edge of the bed. He briefly put his hand over her knee, and stroked her gently with his thumb. "I'm sorry. It feels cosy in here, thanks to you."

She latched onto his arm. "Can't you tell me what's bothering you?"

"It's hard to put into words. Ever since my parents died..." He paused, and rubbed the bridge of his nose, then sat quietly for a moment, staring at the undulating ribbon of smoke rising from the mosquito coil. When he resumed, he spoke very softly. "For years, I've lived free. Freer than most people could possibly imagine. It's so confusing, after living such an independent life, suddenly finding myself having to depend on people."

Like *me*, for instance, Emily thought.

"Do you know what I lost, along with my boat, that I miss the most? Not the home, or any of the possessions. I miss the horizon. I'm not sure if I can explain it, to you. Maybe. It would be easier, if you were a sailor.

"When I had my boat, I could look out across the ocean, at the open horizon, and find real comfort in it, knowing that I was always free to sail beyond it. That I could move on, with no strings attached, as soon as I hauled the anchor aboard. Can't you see? I'm feeling trapped, Emily."

Emily was still clinging onto his arm, and decided it was a bad idea, under the circumstances, and gave it a firm squeeze, before

releasing it. "I want you trust me, Murray. But I'm afraid I have trapped you, somewhat."

"How...?"

"Well...I promised Margaret I'd bring you back to the lodge, tonight, for a steak dinner."

Wilson suddenly stood up, and yawned noisily, before nuzzling halfway onto the bed, between them. He looked up, sleepily.

*Someone mention dinner?*

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Murray wiped the last trace of chocolate frosting from his plate, with his finger. It was the same recipe as the icing on the cake in Emily's lunch. Had some coffee in it, he thought. Maybe, a little cinnamon.

"There's heaps more cake, Murray. Can I get you another piece?" Margaret asked.

"Thanks, Margaret, but I'm stuffed." He felt slightly embarrassed at being caught with a finger full of frosting, and quickly licked it clean, before folding his hands on his lap. "That was a great meal."

Miles had pumped him, all night, and heard a vivid account of the shipwreck, and innumerable sailing stories. He wasn't finished.

"Now, tell me if I got this straight. You've been sailing for more than fifteen years, without a steady job?"

"Right."

"And you work only two months, in a year?"

"Well, no. I worked close to four months in Sydney, once, making sails, but saved enough to last over a year and a half. I averaged about two months a year, I guess, but it always felt like more than that. I couldn't begin to count the number of times I've packed and unpacked my treadle sewing machine. I've had a few decent vacations, though."

"I'll bet. What? Like six months?"

"Oh, longer than that. Some places, there's just no work, at all."

Margaret began clearing the table. "Would you like some coffee, Murray? Or tea?"

"A coffee would taste great."

"Probably not," Emily commented. "It's just instant."

\*\*\*

Emily decided to arrange a job for Murray, doing maintenance work on the old lodge. There were scores of projects, but she decided on the gutters. Murray would enjoy working with copper, she thought.

Miles was extremely hard to please, though, and had never allowed hired help to do anything other than clean or paint, or undertake the most superficial, basic repairs.

He was intent upon preserving the historic aspect of the building, and planned to do the skilled work, himself. He had purchased all the right tools, but was invariably disappointed with his own craftsmanship, and seldom used them.

Emily knew he was sensitive about it, and broached the subject indirectly.

“You know those bent-up metal gutters, stacked behind the garden shed?” she asked.

Miles nodded suspiciously.

“They’ve been there for ages, looks like. Can I use a few of them?”

He answered her sharply, shocked that she would even consider such a thing. “Well, I think not. Those are the original, copper gutters from the lodge.”

“Oh. Rats.” She pretended to pout.

Margaret had mentioned the gutters, a few times, and how she’d been after Miles to re-install them, so she could collect rainwater for washing clothes and watering her garden. The bore water was tolerable, but it had a high mineral content. The rainwater would be softer, and wouldn’t salinate the soil around her roses.

The soldiers had stripped all the copper from the building, years before, with the intention of selling it for scrap.

“Do you need some sheet metal, or what?”

“No, it’s okay. Really. I’ve just been trying to think of something to keep Murray occupied. I was going to ask him to make me a few hinges.”

Miles seemed dubious.

“Didn’t I tell you? Murray’s an expert coppersmith.”

“No. You didn’t.”

“He can make almost anything. Kerosene lamps. Tea kettles. He even made the copper pipe on his boat.” She noticed the scepticism return to Miles’s face, as soon as she added the final embellishment, and quickly realized her mistake. No one would bother making their own pipe. “It was...an odd-sized pipe. For his bilge.”

Miles started rubbing his chin. “Interesting. Would be hard to find work, you’d think. He’s really done that, huh? Worked as a coppersmith?”

“Oh, all the time. Although he prefers working on really old things. Antiques, mainly.”

Murray started repairing the gutters the next day.

Miles thought the work would take at least three weeks, but Murray figured on about half that. He had to fabricate new brackets, and a few connecting pieces, for the downspouts, but most of the original parts would be reusable, after some soldering.

He had been reluctant to accept the job, at first - he doubted that he would have the time to finish it properly, before he was forced to flee to Zanzibar - but Miles was so dismissive about the chances of his being caught, that he had almost stopped worrying about it.

Even so, the longer he stayed in the country illegally, the worse it would look to the authorities, if he were eventually apprehended. He wondered if Emily had finally managed to get through to Doc.

Emily heard the rattling of the sheet metal when she returned to the lodge, for lunch. Murray had been working steadily, all day. He had set up a few sawhorses on the lawn, and was hammering the metal sections back into shape. His back was turned.

She took a slight detour, until her approach was hidden by the trunk of the mango tree, and crept up to within ten yards of him, without being seen. She peeked out from behind the tree, relishing the opportunity to watch him work.

He was in a buoyant mood, and kept whistling to himself.

One of the copper sections was badly twisted, and kept flopping around, complicating his attempts to straighten it. He cursed, a few times. He eventually tilted it high in the air, and clamped onto the lower end, using the soles of his feet as a vise, while reaching up and tweaking the top into shape with his arms. His bronzed skin was beaded with sweat, and glistened in the sun.

Emily wondered why she'd never paid much attention to musculature, before.

Her sunburn began to itch, where she was clinging to the tree. She shifted her position, and thoughtlessly scraped her tender, and now erect nipples against the bark. She winced, and almost cried out. The prickling was unbearable, and she ducked out of sight behind the tree.

She pinched the front of the shirt, and gingerly worked it in and out, like a bellows, to circulate some air. She peeked inside.

Damn. They were going to peel, for sure.

The itching was terrible, but too tender to scratch. She leaned back and rested her head on the trunk, while holding out the shirt, and waited for the swelling to subside.

She purposely crunched a dead branch, after taking a few sideways steps from the mango tree. Murray turned, and smiled at her.

“Hi!” she called. “How’s it going?”

“Great.” He glanced at his gutters. “Incredible, huh? I bet there’s not many buildings left, with solid copper gutters. They’re in pretty good shape, don’t you think?”

She grinned. “Terrific shape, if you ask me.”

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“So, how’s Murray getting along, in his little shed?” Margaret asked.

Emily shrugged her shoulders. “I don’t know. All right, I guess.” She had barely touched her dinner.

Murray had decided to take his regular meals with João and his family, rather than imposing himself on Margaret, all the time. They had come to some arrangement, apparently. Building a fishing dinghy together, or some such thing.

Emily had somehow orchestrated things so they’d hardly ever see each other, sleeping at opposite ends of the preserve, at night, then switching ends to work during the day.

“I like his dog. Wilson’s really cute.” Margaret said.

“He’s huge, isn’t he?”

Margaret grinned. “Still, I can’t quite see the attraction, Em. Size isn’t everything. Murray’s definitely the sexier of the two.”

“Margaret!”

Emily had definitely made a big mistake, asking her about Freud, and then discussing the dog, in the same conversation. Margaret hadn’t even taken her seriously. She thought Freud was a fake, and was suspicious of anyone who sought significance in dreams, thinking that they must be suffering from a serious absence of meaning, when they were awake.

Emily sighed. “Well, Wilson likes to play with me, at least. Murray’s certainly not interested.”

Margaret tried to be supportive. “You can’t say that. Not yet. You haven’t really tried anything.”

“What do you mean? ‘*Tried* anything?’”

“Look at it this way. You’ve been simmering, ever since you met Murray on the beach. Right? I mean, you’ve told me as much. So, I’ve been watching. And it’s obvious. Whenever the two of you come close to each other, there’s almost a puff of steam. It’s time to bring things to a boil, isn’t it?”

“But...how?”

“Well, there’s only one way, isn’t there? You’ll have to generate some heat.”

“Heat...?”

“Of course. Kindle some passion, Em! Just try something. If that doesn’t work, try something else.”

Emily couldn’t think of a thing. She suspected that she was somewhat deficient, when it came to ‘heat’. She smiled encouragingly. “Any suggestions?”

“How about doing something with your hair?”

“What’s wrong with my hair?”

“It’s a mess.”

“But I love my hair! It’s so...silky!”

“Oh, the hair is silky, all right, but, then again, so is a terrier’s.” Margaret lifted off Emily’s baseball cap by the brim, and held up a hand mirror in front of her. “See for yourself.”

It was rather dishevelled, she had to admit. She took out the pins holding it up, and the long, fine hair cascaded down over her shoulders. She had never really styled it. Just cut off the split ends. It parted naturally down the middle.

“But I’ve always worn it like this.”

“It’s boring.”

“You think...?”

“Umm. Let’s see.” Margaret separated a thick strand off to each side, and pulled them together, around in back. “What if we leave these long, and tie them, like so. Then, cut the rest short. Maybe comb it like this...”

“How short?”

Margaret measured off about six inches, and clamped a lock between her forefingers.

Emily gulped.

\*\*\*

Murray had finished hanging the gutters on the seaward eave of the lodge, and was fastening the elbow onto the downspout when someone called, from the ground. He looked down, and saw Margaret.

“Sorry to bother you, Murray, but something’s come up. I think you’d better climb down.”

“Okay. One second.” He couldn’t leave the heavy copper elbow dangling from only one screw.

“Is your dog fond of flowers?” she asked.

"Well...not that I've noticed. No." Murray couldn't recall Wilson ever showing the slightest interest in flowers. They made him sneeze, he thought. He finished dismantling the downspout, and set the copper section on the roof before starting down the ladder. "Why do you ask?"

"He's been snuffling around the flower bed, all morning."

"Really?"

"Now, he's digging up the petunias..."

"Oh, shit!" Murray jumped to the ground from the third rung, and sprinted around the lodge.

Wilson had big paws, and the dirt was flying across the lawn.

"Hey! Stop it!"

Wilson paused, and briefly turned his head.

*Bones! Can't stop now.*

Then, Wilson resumed digging, at an even more furious pace. Murray waded right into the shower of dirt, and grabbed him by the scruff of the neck, but he struggled to continue digging, even as Murray dragged him clear of the hole.

*So close! Let me go!*

"Damn it, Wilson! What's gotten into you?"

The unusually harsh edge to Murray's voice finally penetrated his excitement, and Wilson froze. Murray released him in disgust. He ignored his sorrowful, abject apology, and pushed him away. "Go on. Piss off."

Wilson seldom embarrassed him like this. He was a free-spirited dog, though, and accustomed to exploring wild places. It could cause problems, now that they were living ashore.

He had little regard for the sanctity of lawns. Or landscaping. Murray had even encouraged the digging, when Wilson chased after ghost crabs on the beach, and excavated huge craters in the sand in vain attempts to find them, after they had disappeared into their burrows. Besides being fun to watch, it was good exercise for him. Tired him out a bit, before the dinghy trip back to the boat.

Murray laughed. He'd probably gone a bit feral, himself. He wouldn't have even noticed, if the same thing were happening to his dog.

He knelt down and replanted the flowers that were only slightly mauled, then raked the shredded ones into the hole, and hid them underneath the dirt. After smoothing everything out, the damage wasn't all that noticeable.

Wilson had gone off to sulk, and was lying in the shade underneath the patio, with his head resting on his paws. Murray walked up and pointed his finger at him.

"Now, you stay away from those flowers!"

Wilson dolefully lifted his eyes, then sniffed, and turned his head away.

*Leave me alone.*

\*\*\*

Murray met Emily on the footpath, in the morning, as they were each walking to work. He could only manage a thin smile.

"You're up awfully early," she said. She had left the lodge early, herself, thinking she'd find Murray still asleep in her lab. She was dying to watch him wake up, and her backlog of DNA samples gave her every excuse to go right on in, and start working.

"You haven't seen Wilson, have you?" he asked.

"No..."

"Damn. He was gone this morning, when I woke up. He never gets up before I do. You know what he's like."

"I wouldn't worry. There aren't any predators around large enough to bother Wilson."

Murray hadn't even thought of that. "I'm not worried, exactly. Seems odd, though." He wondered why Emily had raised the hood on her sweatshirt. That seemed peculiar, too. The morning air was a little damp, but it wasn't chilly, at all. He tugged on the hem of hood, close to her cheek. "Are you cold?"

"Hair's wet."

"You free for dinner, tonight? Patience is making calamari. I made a couple of squid jigs for João, last night. They caught a whole bucketful."

"Hey! That's great!" Emily smiled. "Is this our first date?"

Wilson must have been digging for hours. He had excavated a hole which was deep enough to hide in. Mounds of fresh dirt surrounded the flower bed, and more was coming over the top. As Murray ran across the lawn, Wilson began backing out of the hole, straining his haunches, and struggling to get a purchase on the loosened, sandy soil.

Murray realized he'd have to teach him a lesson, this time. Hit him.

Wilson stumbled backwards, and skidded down the dirt, while dragging something behind him, and levering it out of the hole. Murray



reached out to grab him, but came up short, nearly falling over, himself, when Wilson scrambled out of the way, as an elephant tusk tipped over the edge and tumbled onto the grass.

Murray forgot his intention to censure him, and reached down and scratched his head, while they stood together looking at it. Wilson was covered with dirt, and panting hard.

*Wow. What a nice bone.*

Wilson would be disappointed, he thought. He could chew up rib bones, as easily as dog biscuits, but would find the ivory a lot harder to sink his teeth into. Murray wondered how much it was worth. Quite a lot, he guessed.

The trench was as deep as a bathtub, and roughly the same shape. Murray leaned over and peered into it, and froze. "Oh, Jesus...."

A sheet of heavy black plastic lined the bottom. Wilson had torn his way through it, and exposed the neatly stacked tusks underneath. Ten tusks, or more, were visible through the jagged hole, but Murray didn't count them, since his gaze was riveted on what lay half-buried in the sand, off to one side, on top of the plastic. Staring up at him. A human skull, interred above the cache of ivory.

He lured Wilson away from the scene, by dragging the tusk over to the mango tree, preferring that his dog gnawed contentedly on the ivory - rather than the skull - while he went back to the lodge to find Miles and Margaret.

"Stay here, Wilson. Guard the bone."

"Shouldn't we notify the authorities?" Murray asked. Not that he was all that anxious to meet them, though, under the circumstances. But they couldn't continue staring silently at the skull forever.

Margaret frowned. "Colonel Mendes...? You know what he'd do, Murray? He'd sell these tusks, for himself. He might not feel comfortable with our knowing about it, either."

"Couldn't you contact someone in the Ministry?"

"Well...I guess. But they'd surely notify the Colonel. Then, he'd have to give them a cut of the profits. That would really piss him off."

"Indeed. I'm not keen on involving him, at all." Miles had discovered a bullet hole in the forehead of the skull, and was standing in the pit, nervously tapping his palm with a whisk broom. A brief excavation around the skull had unearthed a trail of vertebrae, leading away from it, so there was presumably a skeleton down there, as well.

"Can't we just bury it all, again?" Margaret suggested.

"And wait for whoever made that bullet hole to pay us a visit? I don't fancy that." Miles knelt down to resume his excavations.

Margaret shielded her eyes, and looked away when Miles began carefully shaking the sand from the skull, and sifting it through his fingers. She wished he'd stop playing the sleuth. Bloody scientists. They couldn't leave anything in peace.

There had been a sadly neglected vegetable garden planted over the man when they first arrived at the lodge. Just a small pumpkin patch, and some stunted, withered cornstalks. The soil had been recently turned, but was bone dry, so she had assumed it had been abandoned shortly after the seeds were sown. Seemed a perfect place for a flower bed. Already cultivated.

She was appalled that her flowers had been fertilized by this...person. She'd planted her dahlia bulbs rather deep, as well, and the roots would have gone right into...him, and her fingers would have been only inches away from...oh, it was horrid.

"Nine millimetre," Miles announced, holding the bullet up into the light. "Certainly has mushroomed. Interesting, when you consider how smooth an entry hole..."

"Miles...?" Margaret interrupted. "Please. Leave the poor man's head alone."

Miles felt wounded, until he realized how distraught Margaret must be. She obviously wasn't thinking clearly. They wouldn't be sure of the sex of the skeleton until he'd examined the pelvis. "I know it's rather grisly, darling, but we have to ascertain the facts."

"If someone wanted to reclaim the ivory, they'd simply come for it, wouldn't they?" Murray reasoned. "Whether it was actually there, or not? They would have no way of knowing if it had been disturbed."

"Of course," Miles agreed immediately. "In the absence of any evidence to the contrary, they would assume the ivory was where they left it."

"So let's cover it up, then." Margaret pushed a clod of dirt into the hole with her toe.

"No, darling, don't you see? We should advertise the fact that the ivory is gone. If we provided them with indisputable evidence that it had been removed, they'd have no reason to bother us."

"Except to torture us to find out what we'd done with it."

"Well, as melodramatic as it might seem, I suppose we can't discount that possibility," Miles conceded. "But the people who buried

the ivory would be keeping watch over their cache. We can't disguise the fact that it's been tampered with, can we? I mean, look at it. Our canine backhoe has obviously unearthed their bones."

"So what do you propose?"

"We remove the ivory, and leave the empty hole in the ground."

"Right in the middle of my garden? A bloody *hole*?"

"Well...we could turn it into a pond. How about that? Put in some water hyacinth and a few turtles. Maybe, plant flowers around it. It might look really nice."

"What do we do with the tusks?"

"Why, we sell them, of course." Miles smiled broadly.

Margaret glared at him, and replied vehemently, "We certainly will *not*!"

"Please, darling, there's no reason to get angry. Why not sell it? Seems the most logical way to dispose of it."

"What has bloody *logic* got to do with it? What you're suggesting is horrible!"

"You make it sound as if I'm proposing to poach elephants. The horrible part has already happened. Not much point in getting emotional about it, now. They're already dead."

"I am *not* getting emotional! It's an obscene and sleazy business. If we'd discovered pornography stashed under that plastic, would you want to peddle that, as well? Would you? Would that be *logical*?"

"Pornography...?" Miles scratched his head. "I can't see the connection..."

"Hey, come on," Murray interjected, sensing that this could easily escalate into a real argument, and feeling responsible, since his dog had stirred it up. "For the time being, we can just bury them on the beach, below the high water mark. There's almost no surf. The tusks won't wash loose. After the tide smooths out the sand, no one would ever find it. Well...except for Wilson."

Margaret smiled.

They agreed. It was a sensible plan.

The exhumation had been completed by the time Emily arrived for afternoon tea. They had decided to leave the skeleton buried underneath the pond, and Margaret apologized for being unable to show it to her, since they'd already smoothed out the hole, and lined it with plastic.

"He was wearing army boots," Margaret said. "Miles packed all the legs bones inside, and buried them below his pelvis. He's a lot shorter, now."

Initially, the hole looked uncomfortably close to one intended to receive a coffin, and Margaret had convinced them to remove a little more soil, to make it elliptical-shaped. She was beginning to visualize the pond as looking rather attractive, surrounded by daffodils, she thought, with a layer of smooth, round, river bed stones covering the bottom.

She considered asking Emily's advice about the most efficient way to arrange a water aerator, but decided that it might seem untimely, following the story about the boots, and the man barely settled in his new grave.

Margaret realized she was being remiss in not commenting on Emily's hair. She looked at it from several angles. "I love how you've worked in the braids. Turn around so I can see the back."

Emily spun around. She had braided a long, thin strand on either side, and tied them in back with a blue velvet ribbon.

"How many tusks were there?" Emily asked, as they walked together down to the beach.

"More than fifty. Miles kept a precise tally, of course. You should have seen him. First, he numbered each one with a felt marker, and measured them with callipers. Then, he went through them again, with João holding one end of the tape measure. He recorded all of it in a little notebook. Poor man just can't help himself. What with his training, and all." Margaret loved sharing these insights with her, choosing to overlook the fact that Emily was a highly trained scientist, herself.

The ivory was stacked on the beach, and Wilson was sitting protectively, rather precariously on the pile, watching Miles and Murray dig the trench. He made a move to stand up as Emily approached, but his back paws slipped down into the gaps between the tusks, leaving him splayed out comically on top of them, wagging his tail. She went up and rubbed his ears. "Hi Wilson. You find all these bones?"

*Yeah. I'm rich.*

Murray stood up, and leaned on his shovel. The wet sand was heavy digging, and he had tied his T-shirt around his forehead to keep the sweat from running into his eyes. The tide had turned, and water had begun to seep into the trench. It was nearly ready. "Come to lend a hand?" he asked, smiling fondly.

"Oh, Murray. All these tusks..." The poachers had been indiscriminate, and even taken some very young males.

"Makes you think, doesn't it?"

"Umm. Sad thoughts." The warmth of Murray's smile kept the sadness at a distance, though. Kept her safe. He'd noticed her hair. Liked it. "What can I do to help?"

Miles laid out short lengths of rope at intervals along the trench, and they began placing the ivory, overlapping the tusks, and interlocking them, whenever possible, to help stabilize the cache. The ropes would secure them into a long, immovable bundle.

Wilson paced continually, back and forth, following after each tusk, as it was removed from the stack, and lowered into the trench.

*Hey! Enough already.*

When only one small tusk remained, Wilson abandoned his pacing and sat down resolutely right on top of it, and Emily had to pry it out from underneath him. She started to drag it behind her across the sand, but Wilson got a firm grip on the end with his teeth, and wouldn't let go.

*No! Mine!*

"Wilson! Stop it."

Emily tugged on it playfully, and laughed. "Can't Wilson keep this one?"

Margaret quickly agreed. She couldn't imagine a more fitting end for the tusks, than being chewed up by a dog. "Oh, let him have it, Murray. They're Wilson's bones, after all."

Emily tried pulling a little harder, but Wilson growled, and dug his paws deeper into the sand, and easily held his ground.

"Well...there's a better chance he'd leave the buried bones alone, if we leave him one to chew on," Murray conceded. "It'll keep him occupied for awhile, that's for sure."

Miles grimaced, thinking them incredibly foolish, in proposing to leave the evidence above ground, but he sensed that the consensus would favour the dog, and decided not to voice his opposition. He took out his pen, and pocket notebook. "All right," he sighed. "What number is it, Emily?"

"It's...uh...sixty-one." She glanced over at Margaret, and they both smiled.

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Wilson could barely carry the bone. He could balance it cross-wise in his mouth, but the ends stuck out pretty far, and continually snagged the bushes, which lined the narrow footpath back to the research station. Even though it was a juvenile tusk, it must have weighed close

to twenty pounds, and Wilson struggled to control it, whenever it caught on a branch.

"He's panting really hard, Murray," Emily cautioned.

Emily brewed the coffee in the rose-colored pot, and served it on one of her egg trays. Her white enameled mugs matched the plastic perfectly.

"Remember when Miles recommended selling the ivory?" Murray asked. "Margaret said the suggestion was obscene. She compared it to peddling pornography. You think she's right?"

"I don't know. Kind of." Emily remembered the chain saw marks she found on the base of the tusks. It was a graphic reminder of the sleaziness of the trade.

"She said it with such conviction that I started feeling guilty. Greedy, I guess. When I realized what Wilson had hauled out of the ground, I wondered how much it was worth. When we stood together, looking at the tusk, we saw exactly the same thing. Buried treasure."

"And you're feeling guilty about that?"

"Well...yeah, but not exactly that. Not guilty about *what* I thought, but for what I *didn't*."

"That's asking a lot of yourself, Murray. Feeling guilty for not remembering something."

"Isn't that what Margaret was saying, though? That you should remember the mutilated elephants? Something obscene moves you to feel shame, doesn't it? If you don't feel that - if guilt or shame never becomes an issue - the obscenity simply disappears."

"But it's unpleasant feeling guilty, all the time. I wouldn't relish remembering slaughterhouses and feedlots every time I chewed a piece of meat. Or feeling ashamed when I put on my leather sandals." Emily paused for moment, and idly stirred her coffee. "Or put a spoonful of sugar in my coffee."

"Sugar...?"

"Sugarcane farming is obscene. It degrades the soil."

Murray smiled. She'd put in two scoops. "You're feeling guilty?"

"Of course. And it's all your fault. You made me think about it." She pretended to pout.

"Sorry."

"Peh! You are not!"

"What if Wilson had discovered wood planks stacked under the plastic, instead of the ivory?" Emily asked. "Some tropical hardwoods, let's say. Taken from a rainforest. Would it be obscene to sell that?"

"Depends."

"On what?"

"What it's used for. If a furniture maker built a beautiful hand-crafted chair, or a boatbuilder fashioned a handsome tiller from it, that wouldn't bother me."

"A wood carving?"

"Sure. In the hands of an artist."

"Oh, I see." Emily nodded her head, and smiled sardonically. "An *artist*."

"Well...yeah. What's wrong with that?" Murray replied, defensively.

"So the planks shouldn't be used for floorboards, then? In one of the villager's houses?"

Murray sighed. The durable hardwoods would make fine flooring, but it seemed so wasteful, so extravagant. What else could they use, though? The trees grew on their land. "Well, I guess they have a right to use them to live."

"Even for firewood?"

"No. Not for that."

Emily recalled the vast expanse of mangrove stumps near the camp, and the deforested tract paralleling the fence. "What if there's no other fuel to cook with?"

Murray couldn't answer that one, and wondered if she could. "What if there's no food to cook, either, except sea turtles? Or their eggs?"

"That's not fair! You can't compare the turtles with planks of *wood*!"

"The wood comes from magnificent trees, remember."

"It's not the same, at all!"

Murray gave her a moment to calm down. Her face was flushed.

"It really doesn't matter, does it? Whichever species you fancy? The turtles or the trees. Or even the elephants. You can try to declare them holy, but they'll lose out to people, in the end, if it comes down to a choice between the two."

"Well, maybe it's time we turned it around. Change the rules so that the life of a sea turtle has as much value as that of a child."

"You're serious?"

"Why not? The rules are already changing, but no one is willing to acknowledge the fact. It has to happen, sooner or later. It's the same for any species. As the population density of a community increases, the

value of the individual diminishes. The sacrifice of a single termite is trivial compared to the survival of the nest."

Murray grew silent, sensing that any further discussion about the turtles would push Emily past cynicism, into despair.

Wilson suddenly distracted both of them, when he smacked his bone against the door jamb, while trying to manoeuvre it into the shed.

"Hey! You can't bring that in here!" Murray yelled.

Wilson froze, with the tusk in an awkward position, wedged across the doorway. He whined.

*Help! I'm stuck!*

Murray pointed his finger at the door. "Out!"

Emily stretched out her foot, and pivoted one end of the tusk, until it cleared the jamb. She smiled. "Okay. There you go."

"Now, what were we talking about?" she asked.

Murray casually lifted the lid on the sugar bowl, and spun it around. "Guilt, wasn't it? I thought we were talking about guilt."

"Oh, right. You were feeling guilty." Emily snatched the sugar, and cheerfully took a spoonful for another coffee. "Not me. I'm innocent."

"What's wrong with feeling guilty?"

Emily gave a little laugh, then stuck out her tongue at him.

Murray tried to explain. "Okay. For the most part, you just live. You paint a fence, for instance. You don't necessarily feel guilty about the noxious waste generated during the manufacture of the resins, or the damage caused by the strip mining, to obtain the pigments. You simply paint the fence, and it looks nice when you're finished. Cheerful, let's say.

"Guilt, on the other hand, doesn't feel too good. So you evade it. It's a natural response. But the guilt can serve as a valuable reminder, can't it? By calling your attention to the damage, so you can limit the extent of it?"

"I suppose it comes down to how you view the world. Most people seem compelled to make their mark on it. Leave something behind. Something more meaningful than their very own pile of rubbish, and the marble monument marking their grave.

"I guess I'd prefer to leave no trace. I remember sitting on the back of my boat, running before the tradewind seas, and watching my wake. The widening ripples, and the flecks of foam. The wake from even a small sailboat remains visible for a surprising distance, when the seas are regular, and the water is smooth. Sometimes, it seemed as if the



evidence of my passage stretched behind me for miles. But it was always apparent that the sea would soon erase even the slightest trace, and leave a clean blue slate for the next sailor to wander across.

"It always felt special, whenever I beached the dinghy on a remote island, and found no footprints. It doesn't happen very often, so I was usually surprised. The scene never looked the same when I returned, and looked around before rowing back to the boat. My footprints had spoiled it, somehow. Sullied the solitude for those who might explore the island after me. I'd feel guilty."

"So what did you do, then? Brush away the footprints?" Emily enjoyed the sailing stories. Wanted all the details.

"Are you serious?"

"Well...you said you felt guilty."

"I did." She continued to look at him, smiling enigmatically. "Come on. Footprints are hardly comparable to spray-painting your name on the rocks, or something."

"So, what's the point, then? If you didn't do anything?"

"The 'point'?"

"Of the guilt. Why bother to have it, at all?"

"Like I said, as a reminder. Or a *call*. A call to *think*. To think about the way you live. I routinely walk below the high tide mark, now. Most of my footprints disappear in just a few hours.

"We're all guilty. We degrade the environment, simply staying alive. There's nothing to be done about the piles of rubbish. But the guilt can help us keep them small."

## ZANZIBAR

Doc had just mixed a batch of epoxy glue, when someone knocked on the locked door of the boatshop. "We're closed!" he called out. It was almost midnight, and the knocking seemed unusually insistent.

"Hello? Can ya help me? I'm lookin' for Doc."

He immediately recognized the Aussie accent. Although Doc hadn't met him, yet, it had to be the skipper from the prawn trawler. The Australian-registered trawler had arrived in Zanzibar fifteen days ago, having been granted permission to fish in Tanzanian waters, but had only been out fishing two days.

Doc had been expecting him. He unlocked the door. "G'day. I'm Doc."

"Sorry to bother ya, mate. Name's Clive." He offered his hand. "I got me some real problems, Doc. Could ya spare me a few minutes, d'ya reckon?"

"No worries. Come on in."

Problems? Of course he had problems. It was impossible to do business in Zanzibar, without lots of problems. Doc felt guilty, having waited for him to encounter a few of them firsthand, before offering his services, but patients don't really appreciate the services of a good doctor until they get sick, do they?

Doc had made several brief visits to Customs House earlier in the week, to collect his imported parcels - bronze wood screws, a few boxes of sanding belts, the smoked salmon and pistachio nuts from Claire - and he had seen Clive in the building on every occasion. Waiting in the queues. Sifting through sheaves of documents. Staring vacantly off into space. Each time he looked a little worse. The heavy dose of bureaucracy had finally made him ill.

Doc routinely avoided entering any building which was staffed by people wearing uniforms. They were invariably hazardous to your health. Take a public hospital. If you spent any length of time inside one, you were virtually assured of getting sick.

Especially in Africa.

So, when Doc first explored the possibility of setting up shop, and building his new sailboat in Zanzibar, he stayed outside the system, whenever possible. Met the necessary officials under the shade trees at the Dar es Salaam Yacht Club. Or beneath the awning on the charter

boat. The appointments had dragged on for months, but Customs House posed no threat to him, now. He had acquired diplomatic immunity.

Now, he even had some influential friends inside the building. Most notably, Chief Customs Inspector Patricio Mwizi. In fact, it was Patricio who first brought Clive's plight to his attention.

Clive hesitated in the doorway, and seemed surprised as he surveyed the inside of the boatshop. He glanced back at the polished bronze plaque affixed to the door.

**ZANZIBAR  
DHOW MASTERS ASSOCIATION  
BOATBUILDING SCHOOL**

Established 1996  
With a Joint Development Grant  
from the  
GOVERNMENTS OF AUSTRALIA  
AND NEW ZEALAND

"I reckoned ya was building dhows, in here."

The dhows in Tanzania were built right on the beach, and the frames hewn from heavy, naturally-bent timbers, with hand tools. That's why they were dhows. Doc smiled. "Not enough room."

"You're the skipper of the charter boat, eh? The catamaran? I seen ya in the harbour, a few times."

Doc remembered waving to him. He nodded. "We had a couple charters, last week. I've been pretty busy."

"Ya live in here, eh?" Clive observed, turning around in a circle.

"Yeah. I kinda like it." The old, wooden building had previously been used for sorting cloves, and half the roof was covered with greenish glass. Their sailboat took up half of the available floor space, and the rest was occupied by a full complement of professional woodworking machinery, and their spacious kitchen, under the glass. Claire's hanging plants took the industrial edge off the place.

"Your plants look real nice."

The kitchen was partitioned off by a row of potted marijuana plants, which had matured into a bushy hedge, over two metres high. The intense, wide-spectrum light from the metal halide bulb made an excellent work lamp, and his epoxy was waiting on the workbench

underneath it. Doc hated wasting glue, and let Clive help himself to a cup of coffee, while he carried on gluing up his hatch.

Clive came right to the point. "I've been told ya might be able to help me, Doc. They won't sell me any fuel."

"Don't you have a permit?"

He sadly shook his head.

"Ouch."

"I got permits coming out me ears. Took me ten months to get 'em all. Now, Customs tells me I need a separate permit to buy fuel. Bloody hell. How do they expect me to fish?"

"They don't really care whether you fish, or not, Clive." Doc briefly focused his attention on the skylight hatch, assembling the glued pieces around the coaming, and sliding the corner joints neatly into place. "Hand me that bar clamp, would you, mate?"

Clive set down his coffee, and helped him position the clamp. "I'm desperate, Doc. If I don't find some fuel in twenty-four hours, I'll lose my refrigeration. And over a hundred kilos of prawns."

Doc was taken aback by the anguish in his voice, and looked up, stunned. Clive was genuinely *hurt*. He had actually trusted them. Truly believed that the officials were trying to help him.

There might still be a few friendly firemen, somewhere, or a likeable neighborhood milkman. Doc had no idea. He'd been cruising the African coast, and the islands in the Indian Ocean for a long time. But expecting natural, decent human feelings from anyone wearing a *uniform* could easily get you killed, in Africa.

"Come on, Clive. Don't take it so personally. Look. I can have a drum of diesel fuel delivered to your boat, first thing in the morning. Okay? Relax, will you? We'll figure something out."

A ribbon of glue had oozed out all around the perimeter of the hatch, and Doc began carefully cleaning away the excess with small putty knife.

"Oh, man. That's great news, Doc."

A hundred kilos? In only two abbreviated days of exploratory fishing? Once Clive had a chance to study the seabed, and identify the most promising sand banks - especially those where he was assured that his trawl wouldn't foul any scattered coral heads - he would deploy all three nets. Tow them at night, under his lights. It was even better than Doc thought.

There were two other prawn trawlers working the shallow, sandy shelf off the coast of Tanzania, but both were rusted-out, useless hulks,

and more often than not, tied up in port with mechanical problems. Clive's modern, Aussie trawler would scoop up prawns with the efficiency of a bulldozer, over fishing grounds that had only been nibbled at with worn out shovels.

"Fishing's good here, is it?"

"Beaut." Clive noticed him reaching for a bottle of thinners, and slid it across the workbench. "That's why I came out here."

"If you think diesel fuel is hard to get, you should try finding some of this epoxy glue." Doc had finished with the hatch, and began gluing a few teak strips into a partially finished grating, to use up the squeeze. "Customs wasn't too helpful, I take it?"

"Helpful? They're the bloody problem. I've been over there every day this week. I fill out the forms, and stand in the queue. An hour later, they hand them back. Direct me to another queue. In the end, I had to hire one of them to translate for me. All the forms are printed in Swahili. This afternoon they told me the permit will take at least two more weeks."

"Did they happen to mention the, uh...fuel allotment?"

Clive stared blankly.

"That permit only entitles you to purchase fuel, Clive. You won't actually be allowed to buy any. Not until you secure a fuel allotment from the Transport Ministry. There's a quota system, you see."

"Oh, bloody hell..."

"All the fuel has already been allocated, though, so they won't be much help. Most of the allotments are held by a handful of shipping agents. You'll have to negotiate with one of them."

"Negotiate...?"

He nodded. "You still won't get any fuel, though. Not until the transfer is approved by the Ministry. Since your trawler has a foreign registry, they'll need authorization from Home Affairs. I think they'd recommend a modest transfer. Give you enough fuel to fish a few days a month, anyway. For appearances sake."

"So. I'll have to bribe some people. Is that what you're saying?"

Doc grimaced, and threw up his hands. "Whoa! Don't even consider it. Most of the officials are owed six month's salary, at least. You start doling out money - they'll form an awfully long queue."

Doc had liked Clive immediately. He had the taciturn manner of a lifelong fisherman, and probably disdained having to go ashore, at all, preferring his life on the water, where the only garrulous company is the relatively undemanding one of quarrelling seagulls. He walked with an

awkward, rocking gait, as if he felt vaguely disoriented because the floor wasn't rolling under his feet. Doc led him over to the kitchen table, and put on the kettle to make some fresh coffee.

His package from Claire was resting on the table. He had already opened one of the jars of nuts, but not her letter. It was still inside the carton. He had deferred reading it, knowing he wouldn't get any work done on the boat, once he started thinking about her. Claire wrote wonderful letters. They always took his mind off work.

"Some pistachio nuts?" he offered.

"No, mate. Thanks."

"Smoked salmon?" Doc pulled out a long strip of the hard-smoked king salmon. The cotton string used to hang it in the smokehouse was still knotted around the end.

"Crikey! Lookit that, will ya!"

He handed him a sharp filleting knife, just in case he was tempted to eat the whole piece. "My partner is back in the States, uh...visiting her folks. She sends me a package, every week. Treats."

Claire had been deported, actually. Doc decided not to mention it, since it wasn't an appropriate occasion to discuss the details. He didn't want Clive to get a false, first impression of lovely, little Claire. She was hardly an 'undesirable' alien.

Clive cut a few slices off the salmon strip, paring them almost as thin as sashimi, and handed back the knife. Doc's marijuana plants were rapidly encroaching on the dining area, sagging under the added weight of the resin-encrusted colas, and one brushed against Clive's cheek when he leaned back in the seat.

"I've been meaning to prune those back, a bit."

"No worries, mate. I love the smell."

Doc liked him even more. "Yeah?"

"Truly."

He returned the knife. "Here. You're getting resin all over your face. Cut off a few to take home."

Doc resisted the urge to smoke some, knowing that he would ache to curl up with Claire's letter, and quickly lose interest in Clive's problems. He asked a crucial question. "Where do you plan to market your prawns?"

"Well...Japan. We'll vacuum-seal the larger ones in gift packs, and ship them air freight. I reckon we'll freeze some in bricks..."

Bingo. Doc interrupted, barely able to disguise his glee. The Japanese Consul was central to his plan. "That's what I figured. How's the price, lately?"

"Brilliant." Clive signalled upwards, with his thumb.

"Look. Let me give you my interpretation of the situation. It might give you some idea of how things work, here."

"Aw right."

"You have a public relations problem, Clive. The locals simply don't appreciate the capabilities of your boat. Or the potential benefits.

"They probably regard your venture something like this. You will be burning a good deal of their limited supply of imported fuel to exploit one of their food resources, which they can't possibly afford to eat, themselves. Then, shipping the food overseas on a foreign-owned airline, to earn hard currency that you will deposit in a foreign-owned bank. There's not really a lot in it for them, or their families, is there?"

"Why did the Tanzanian government encourage me to fish here, then?"

"Politics. The development of a prawn fishery is simply a sign of good faith. It demonstrates that the country is prepared to export all of its natural resources in order to pay off its debt. The country survives on foreign aid, Clive. Not prawns."

"I'm heavily into debt, myself, Doc. I've got boat payments to meet. I can't survive on just a few days a month. I have to start fishing."

"What do you intend to do with all the bottomfish you'll take in the trawls?" Most prawn trawlers simply disposed of the ancillary species over the side. An odd assortment of all sizes of fish, skates, jellyfish...the accidental catch wasn't readily marketable. In Australia.

"The crew usually eats some. I hadn't planned on keeping all the rubbish fish, if that's what you're getting at."

"You should consider it, Clive. None of it would go to waste, believe me. Some folks on the mainland even eat barnacles and limpets."

"I had no idea..."

"Those fish would provide a livelihood for twenty local people, at least. You'll need...what? Three extra hands? You could use the help to disentangle the skates and sharks from the...nets..." Doc paused, noticing that Clive had stopped listening, and was staring forlornly at the floor.

"Christ, Doc. Barnacles?"

"You have excess freezer capacity, don't you?"

"Heaps."

"That's what I mean, Clive. You don't realize the potential of your assets, either. The refrigeration system on your boat is the only reliable one on the whole island. Dependability is virtually unknown, here.

Remember last week? The power went out for thirty-six hours. You could live with a few sides of beef, or a case of ducks in your freezer, couldn't you? Some crayfish, maybe?"

"Sure. No worries."

"Several Cabinet Ministers have substantial interests in the new tourist hotels. They'll appreciate the insurance, and see the wisdom in keeping not only your freezers, but your whole operation running smoothly."

"D'ya know these people, Doc?"

"Sure. I give them some advice, now and then. On foreign aid matters."

"I'm not looking for charity, mate. How should I put this? D'ya reckon I could, uh...hire ya?"

"No, Clive. Can't accept a job. No work permit." He grinned. "I have an idea, though. Maybe you can help me."

"Name it."

"I might need some prawns, on a regular basis. You'll get an excellent return on them, but not necessarily in cash. The fuel, to start with."

"You can trade my prawns for diesel fuel?"

"Well...it's a little more complicated than that."

He could hardly tell Clive that he had spent the last two weeks coveting his prawns, and devising the scheme. It might appear predatory, on the surface, and he couldn't go deeply enough into the details to convince him that it wasn't. Not yet. Not until he put some prawns on the dinner tables of the diplomatic community, over in Dar es Salaam.

"It's not my business to pry, Doc...but my engines burn a lot of fuel, eh?"

"I mentioned shipping agents?"

"Yeah...?"

"Well...I'm one of them." Doc endeavored to keep his alliances as complicated and murky as possible, well aware that allegiances routinely got people killed, in Africa, so he wasn't surprised when Clive continued to stare at him, looking totally confused. "The charter yacht belongs to the French Ambassador, Clive. He has delivery contracts with the United Nations. The Red Cross. I can buy fuel anywhere."

"So...you have some of those fuel lots...whatever?"

"Well, sort of. There's a slight hitch, though. I can't sell you any fuel, either."



Doc went on to explain that the UN wasn't in the business of selling fuel - they preferred giving it away - but that he might be able to arrange something.

Clive seemed to feel a little better, anyway, and Doc promised to stop by the trawler for a consultation, after he'd had an opportunity to properly study the case. A follow-up house call, so to speak.

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Doc had to get Clive focused on fishing, again, and finding a few drums of fuel waiting on the wharf would get his morning off to a good start. It was approaching midnight, and it seemed silly to walk all the way across Old Town to make the arrangements, when one phone call would do it.

But Doc hated telephones.

The new, cellular ones were really insidious. The absence of wires could easily fool you. Make you forget that you were well and truly plugged into the system. The grid. The little toy phones were almost cute, and the advertising was so seductive. They peddled the things as if they were selling you *freedom*.

It wasn't a mere marketing ploy, either. The deception was actually incorporated into the design, so that the necessity of a connection was concealed. Take all the electrical appliances. They always hide the plug, don't they? Coiled up in the back, out of sight? And how about the cars with the fuel caps buried behind the license plates? The disguise was so effective, it even fooled the gas station attendants.

Doc knew better. Being connected to *any* grid invariably led to serious complications, and further entanglements, in countless other grids. Suburban streets and freeway interchanges, utility bills and junk mail...tax brackets...you name it. Put enough grids together, and what have you got? A *cage*.

Of course, Doc wasn't personally hooked up to the grid, himself. The French Ambassador was well-connected, however. He also paid the bill.

Doc made the call.

"Ali? Sorry to wake you up."

"No problem, boss."

"We're about to make an investment in some prawn futures."

"Allah, you beauty! Yes!"

Doc waited for Ali to stop celebrating the launch of his new career as a bottomfish broker, and gave him instructions.

"Six hundred litres should do it. Use the charter boat credit card. And make sure the drums are clean, okay? No rust." The French ambassador wouldn't begrudge him the few litres, and they might need to use the UN credit card, later.

"Paying full price for it?"

"Oh. Is Albert working tonight?"

"Yes, boss."

He thought it over. A web of corruption covered the distribution of virtually everything brought into the country by the donor agencies. Doc tried to avoid entangling himself in it, whenever possible, but the fuel depot was particularly well-wrapped.

Although the price of the fuel was regulated, the flow was not. There were no meters on the pumps. In fact, there weren't any pumps, at all. Just an old valve on the tank. A rather recalcitrant, somewhat leaky...valve.

For a small gratuity, Albert would gladly collect the spilled fuel and put it on the truck, instead of letting it drip into the Transport Minister's personal trough. The official spillage rate was set at fifteen percent, but Albert occasionally spilled a good deal more. He was approaching retirement, and lethargic with worry over it, and his reflexes...well, they just weren't what they used to be.

Doc would have to negotiate with the Minister, eventually. The corruption was as institutionalized as a religion - a cargo cult, of sorts - and he couldn't risk violating its strictures, and being cast out. His alliance with the UN was respected as a holy one, and thus granted tolerance, but he couldn't extend any privileges to an infidel, such as Clive. His fuel bill would be huge, and a regular tithe would be expected.

Later. Albert appreciated the value of discretion. He had twenty-four granddaughters to look after.

"You have enough condoms to take care of Albert?"

"You kidding, boss?"

Doc had forgotten. They stored the last shipment over at Ali's place. "Right. Okay, Ali. Might just as well make it eight hundred litres, then. And give Albert my regards."

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Doc wondered what he was getting himself into. He simply wanted to finish building his new sailboat, so he and Claire could head out

cruising, again. Zanzibar had seemed like the perfect spot to build it. They could live cheaply, and put all of their resources into the boat. The local timbers were ideal for boatbuilding, and the climate was lovely, and not just for curing epoxy glue, either.

But, if everything fell into place, as he anticipated, he would become one of the wealthiest men in East Africa. Temporarily, at least. Doc wasn't sure how much ransom he'd need. The condoms were for Claire, after all.

People were remarkably slow to recognize new priorities. New values. The most precious, sought-after commodity on the continent of Africa was no longer the gold in South Africa, or the copper in Zambia and Zaire. Not even the oil in Nigeria, or the diamonds in Namibia. No. It was condoms.

And whoever controlled the supply of condoms controlled Africa.

Food was a scarce commodity in sub-Saharan Africa, of course, but the international community regularly donated vast quantities of that. You seldom saw anybody actually giving it away, but, at least you could purchase the donated food, in almost every shop. Of course, very few Africans could afford the tinned, USDA chickens, or the plastic sacks of 'not-for-resale' UN/FAO rice. They continued to grow their own crops.

But they couldn't grow condoms.

The relative worth of the various commodities was reflected in official government policies. The military dictators in Africa don't bother feeding their troops. Once equipped with arms and ammunition, the soldiers could always steal the food they needed. No problem.

Guns weren't a problem, either. Vast quantities of weaponry had accumulated on the continent during the Cold War, and the guns continued to flow in, as the donor countries dumped their unwanted surplus, at well below cost, simply to keep their faltering armaments industries functioning.

The problem, of course, was AIDS. Although the soldiers could still pillage, they could no longer rape with impunity, as they had in the past. As the HIV infection rate continued to skyrocket, and emaciated, pneumonia-ridden AIDS victims began roaming the streets, the soldiers could see they were seriously at risk. The generals were forced to issue them condoms, in order to maintain discipline, and ensure their continued loyalty.

So the military seized control of the condom trade. Unfortunately, Claire hadn't figured this out before she decided to enter the trade, herself. She was only trying to help, bless her heart.

Once Doc secured the funding for the boatbuilding school, they were obliged to come up with a few students. He wasn't all that keen to have apprentices working on his boat, or ruining his brand new woodworking tools, and Claire suggested holding women's literacy classes, instead. The grant stipulations merely mentioned 'students'. Didn't matter what kind.

Claire taught them, herself. Only a few of the Dhow Master's wives attended, at first. Then, some women from the fish cooperative. Soon, the boatshop was overflowing with enraged women, discussing feminist issues, two nights a week.

One of these issues was the price of condoms. Very few shops stocked genuine, factory-sealed, imported ones, since no one could afford to buy them. There was nothing cheaper in the public markets. A few street vendors hawked recycled ones, occasionally, but they either sold out within minutes, or were arrested by the military police. They often sold ordinary party balloons, anyway.

The soldiers invariably had condoms, but seldom gave any away, not without asking some special favors in return. They usually drove a hard bargain.

"I need some condoms," Claire told him. "All you can get."

She envisioned setting up a Women's Center, and distributing them, for free. Claire thought it was the necessary, first step, toward empowering her students. Doc thought it was a step in the right direction, as well - toward recovering the use of his boatshop, those two nights a week.

Condoms proved hard to find. Strict regulations had been imposed on their importation, and the bulk of the donated condoms went directly to the Home Affairs Ministry. The net was tightly drawn.

Doc checked with the contacts he'd cultivated in Dar es Salaam, and learned that a few French medical charities were being allowed to distribute some, independently. The French Ambassador thought he might be able to arrange something, and asked Doc to meet him at the Dar es Salaam yacht club. His name was Laurent.

“Well, what do think, Doc? An ideal charter yacht, no?” Laurent was keen to have Doc to skipper his catamaran. It hadn’t moved off its mooring, for months, and the bottom was badly fouled with weed.

“Out of Zanzibar, huh?”

“Naturally. Can you imagine anyone wanting to charter it, here? In this cesspool?”

The roadstead off the yacht club was actually rather nice, Doc thought, and quite clean, unlike like the harbor in the city, itself. Laurent’s downtown office window overlooked a mud flat, which was littered with the rusting hulks of derelict freighters, slowly sinking into the fetid, black ooze. Even though the Zanzibar Channel was only twenty miles wide, Laurent always felt like he was leaving Africa, whenever he crossed it. It gave him hope.

“It’s a beautiful boat, Laurent. You’d do real well, in Zanzibar, but, I don’t know if I can spare the time. I’m really busy, right now.”

Doc was in a poor negotiating position, though. He had to cut a deal, quickly. His marijuana seedlings were rapidly out-growing their pots, and he couldn’t continue hiding them from all those women, much longer.

Fortunately, Laurent was fully prepared to make a generous offer. France had recently experienced a rash of violent, domestic disturbances involving African immigrants, and the government had substantially increased the amount of contraceptive aid available to the continent, with the hope of keeping the numbers down, in the future.

There were already adequate supplies in the region, and Doc sailed the catamaran over to the French military depot on Mayotte, to pick them up. The big cat was fast, and the three tons of condoms barely slowed her down.

Laurent leased a small building near the dhow harbor, to serve as the charter office, and Claire set up shop, in the back. They called it the Dhow Master’s Women’s Center. It functioned smoothly, for awhile, and Claire’s foray into the condom trade might have passed unnoticed, if she had confined her operations to Zanzibar, where the officials were accustomed to doing business, and behaved accordingly. The corruption had evolved, and become sophisticated, like insider trading. A regular tithe was all that was required.

But Claire began shipping her condoms all along the coast, at the request of some women in the Center, who were desperate to get the condoms to their daughters on the mainland, where less sophisticated, African rules still applied.

Doc felt like an idiot, for having allowed it to happen, since he should have known better. The condom cartels were tribal, all right, but

the rules weren't peculiar to Africa. The organized gangs were simply protecting their turf, where they controlled the distribution of the condoms as if they were packets of crack cocaine. And along came Claire, happily handing out boxes of free ones. Bloody hell.

The military police raided the Center, and arrested her, on a charge of distributing sexually explicit material to children, which meant: having allowed persons under the age of twenty-one to read the instructions printed on the condom package.

She was deported before Doc could even bring her a toothbrush.

The Home Affairs Minister - Tiny Abdullah - had signed the arrest warrant, personally. He was a politically ambitious man, and controlled the most powerful condom cartel in the country, with the close cooperation of the military, and Doc had nothing to offer him, other than the quarter million condoms still stacked in the boatshop. He doubted that it would be enough to get the deportation order rescinded.

Claire would never agree to it, anyway. Tiny Abdullah was not one of her favorite people.

It had been Minister Abdullah who stood up in Parliament and denounced the United States of America, and the CIA, for bringing the scourge of AIDS to the African continent. The virus had been developed by the Americans, he claimed, as a biological weapon, and released by agents of the CIA, as part of a conspiracy to exterminate indigenous Africans, and seize their mineral wealth.

His tirade didn't stop, at that, and he lashed out at Western decadence, which was infecting Africa as aggressively as the AIDS virus. Sexually-suggestive films, and obscene music, which were corrupting African youth; and feminism and homosexuality, which were poisoning traditional African culture; and the plague of birth control, which was another biological weapon in their genocidal plot.

The USAID suspended their condom shipments, shortly thereafter - in response to the misappropriation of the donations by the military, and the pervasive corruption - but Tiny Abdullah had preempted their announcement with allegations of his own, and succeeded in deflecting the accusations of profiteering levelled against him. The Americans were widely condemned.

The price of black market condoms soared, afterwards, increasing almost fifty percent, which pleased Tiny Abdullah, no end. His distribution network was struggling to handle the volume, such as it was. The last thing he needed was a glut in the market.

Doc dreaded the prospect of having to finish the boat, all by himself, and sail it singlehanded to another country, before he could be with Claire, again. He knew that she would never forgive him, if he bought her back by agreeing to supply Tiny Abdullah with condoms, so he had to find another way.

He'd send a note to Tiny Abdullah in the morning, and offer the freezer space. Tiny owned a rather nice Chinese restaurant, called the Spice Palace. He'd lost all his ice cream during the power failure. The token gesture of goodwill would be unexpected, as well as baffling, and would surely arouse his curiosity.

It was start, anyway.

## Sausalito / Sunday

Hi Doc!

Boat business, first. I have been to every chandlery in the Bay Area, and none of them stock bronze bilge pumps. One salesman told me that no one makes them, anymore. He told me the plastic pumps are much better. They won't rust, he said. There was one on display, mounted on piece of plywood, and he encouraged me to try it.

The handle snapped off, just like you said. I had to pull pretty hard, though. They wanted me to pay for it, but when I questioned whether they would have refunded my money, if had it broken during a storm at sea, they just asked me to leave. Can't we make a pump?

I haven't had any better luck with the windlass. I found a few manual ones, but they were ornamental, really. Just shiny, chrome-plated toys. Couldn't we install a small generator, to run an industrial electric one?

The Thiokol rubber sealant is in the mail.

I've finally found a boat to live on, in exchange for some varnish work. The marina is not supposed to allow liveaboards, but the manager said it shouldn't be a problem, as long as I don't hang up any laundry. I doubt I'll spend much time on the boat, anyway. It's really infested with cockroaches.

There's an espresso cafe, just a block from the yacht basin, and I usually spend my mornings, there. [I'm sitting inside it, now, writing to you.] If I time it just right - after the morning rush, but before business has slacked off sufficiently to give them a chance to clean up - I can count on getting a table with an abandoned newspaper. [They cost a dollar, now!]

I keep wishing you were here, at odd little moments during the day, when I know you'd be amused. Or amazed. It's been...what? Ten years, almost, since you've been back? I'm sure you'd notice some changes.

For instance, you can buy bagels everywhere, but it's hard to find a decent donut. I keep hoping to find a chocolate-frosted donut in the display case, but it won't happen. Their menu is printed in Italian, and the pastries are French. [Except for the bagels.]

The fascination with everything foreign only extends to consumables, though. The rest of the world rarely gets a mention, in the newspaper. There's never any news from Africa. The coffee and cocoa are fine, but they prefer that the Africans keep their bad news, at home.

Fences are fashionable, again. Seems as though all the new houses are being built behind walls, in fenced-off, fortress-like communities. They're even



talking about building an electric fence, across the whole length of the Mexican border. The angry debate about the voltage is the hottest topic on the chat shows, apparently. Those advocating a lethal setting have probably gained the upper hand, after a series of eye-catching TV spots. You'd be amused by the warm reception accorded one of their South African consultants, who expounded on the urgent need for effective influx control. [I never knew there was an electric fence along the border between South Africa and Mozambique.]

I feel like an exile, and a stranger, here. I miss you so much.

Claire

## PRAWN FUTURES

The styrofoam ice chest was an unusual item to be carrying into the Japanese consulate, so Doc wasn't surprised when two serious-looking security guards abruptly confronted him as he approached the Consul's waiting room. He nodded politely, though not too deeply, and offered up the cooler for inspection, calmly placing it at their feet, in the manner of delivering a gift.

The men shifted their stance - not relaxing, exactly, but no longer set to pounce on him, anyway - and formally returned his bow. One of them bent down to examine the chest. Doc had arranged all the prawns in a pleasing spiral, around a large block of ice - a large crayfish covered the ice, as colorfully as a floral centerpiece - and the sober-faced guards lost their composure for a moment, gazing hungrily into the cooler, and talking animatedly in Japanese.

"I was hoping to have a few words with Consul Moriuchi," Doc said.

The Consul was gracious, ebullient.

"Exquisite. Words fail me," he said, admiring the arrangement. His secretary had prepared them, herself, and set the cherrywood tray on the table. The delicate, pale green china was lovely.

"I baked them, just as you suggested," she said, seeking Doc's approval. "One minute. On low."

Doc picked up the plate, and tested a piece. Then bowed his head politely. "They're perfect."

Drying freshly-harvested marijuana was the only task microwave ovens were good for, he thought, other than defrosting a lasagne. The prawns needed to thaw much more gently. "My apologies for not bringing fresh prawns, Mori."

"Please, Doc. You embarrass me with your kindness. Is your boatbuilding going well?"

"The interior is almost finished. You should come over soon." Doc had mulled enough from one of the large buds to roll a joint, and asked Mori's approval, before adding a light mix of tobacco.

Mori was rubbing some between his fingers, and smiling broadly. He nodded. "It's rather sticky, isn't it?" The local smoke was insipid, he felt, and not really to his liking.

Doc noticed a collage of newspaper clippings which Mori had recently framed, and mounted on the wall behind his desk. One

photograph showed a dhow under construction, on the beach, with Mori posing in the foreground, shaking hands with one of the carpenters. Another had captured a newly-launched dhow, under full sail, with the crew assembled along the bulwark, waving little Japanese flags. Doc wished that he could read the copy, to learn how Mori had embellished the press releases.

Consul Moriuchi had been having a string of bad luck, when Doc first met him. The politicians back in Tokyo kept assigning him foreign aid funds, but the onus of dispensing it weighed heavily on him. Nothing was working. The machinery on various development projects seldom remained functional for more than a few weeks. Truck tires and batteries disappeared, and bulldozers simply went missing. Donated school and hospital supplies were being sold on street corners.

Mori needed projects to fund, which wouldn't prove embarrassing, in the end, like most of the aid schemes in Africa. Whenever Doc helped him find a safe way to spend the money, Mori was positively grateful.

Doc warned him about the potentially embarrassing situation, with regard to the incidental catch taken aboard the trawler.

"That's what he intends to do?" Mori asked. "Throw it overboard?"

"It's standard practice in the industry, Mori."

"Damn."

"Sure. It will make you look ruthless. Even though it's an Australian boat, you'll take the rap for it, since all the prawns are going to Japan."

"Do see any way to, well...turn it around?"

"Maybe. We should act fast, though. The Transport Minister could use his lock on the fuel supply to gain control over those fish. He could easily force some of the local fishermen out of business, by using the refrigeration on the boat to manipulate a glut in the market."

The Consul eyed him skeptically. "He could manage that? The man's a common thug."

"The potential catch is enormous, Mori. You've seen all those small dhows crowding alongside the wharf to sell the meagre catch they take with their hand nets. They'll blame the prawn fishery when the price collapses."

"I see. And that means blaming Japan."

"Exactly. But if we secure access to all that seafood, and distribute it with some ingenuity...we'll earn a lot of goodwill, instead."

"You could arrange it?"

Doc appreciated his directness. "I think so, Mori. The skipper just wants to catch some prawns."

"What do you need?"

"Not much. A portable ice plant for the boat, and some fuel."

"That's it?"

"I reckon. But the fuel bill might be, um...high."

"Do you know how much fuel we provided for the clean-up campaign in the city last month?" Mori asked, suddenly agitated. "Two hundred thousand litres! And it's gone. I counted only three trucks. Three trucks! The filth is thicker than ever. Does the city look any cleaner?"

"Not really," Doc admitted. Any open space was a potential depository, and most held heaps of rotting garbage.

Mori rubbed his eyes, and sighed. "If these people had the income to buy newspapers, or canned goods - hell, anything packaged, at all - the place would disappear under its own rubbish. We funded a study. They collect only three percent of the waste. Three percent! The garbage trucks never stop here. We have to dig holes!

"Home Affairs issued the figures last week. The population of the city increased by eight percent last year. Eight percent! Can you believe it!"

Doc decided not to mention the condoms. Mori had been badly burned by the condom cartels, who had diverted his donations to military campaigns throughout Africa. They had first surfaced in Liberia, in the pockets of ten year-old, child-soldiers; then, in Somalia, where the Americans found the wrappers littering the bench seats of the technicals; and finally, in Rwanda, where escaping Hutu militiamen had used them to bribe the soldiers at the Zairean border. The publicity back home had embarrassed him deeply.

The Japanese shipments had been suspended, but Mori was sitting on twenty tons, at least.

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The Australian Ambassador probably had the coldest beer in Africa. Emu Bitter. From Perth. Doc thought it would crystallize if he scratched the inside of the can. Basil handed him an insulating, polyurethane foam collar to slip around it, and keep it cold. The emu decal on the collar matched the label on the can.

"You know, Doc, I can't remember the last time I had a good feed of prawns."

Basil had placed the frozen brick in a shallow pan of warm water, and resumed his efforts to pry loose the prawns. He broke another one. "Damn."

"Might have to let them sit a bit, mate."

"Yeah. I reckon." Basil shook the water off his hands, and wiped them on his T-shirt. "How about a game of darts?"

"Well, it's only a rumor, Basil. Still...if the fishermen do actually blockade the harbor with their dhows..." Doc clucked, and shook his head. "It will make you look like predators. You know. The prawn fishery in Australia is in trouble, so your boats come out here, and deplete the fishery in Tanzania."

"I see your point, Doc. It's a worry." Basil preferred to keep a low profile.

"Sure. The tourist ferry uses that wharf."

Basil scowled. "Who's behind it, Doc? Is somebody stirring things up?"

"Well...it's hard to say."

Of course, it was hard to say. Doc could hardly tell him that it was *Claire*, could he? The militancy of her women's group had not faltered, but firmed, following her deportation, and several protests had been mounted over the closure of the Center. Their anger over the high price condoms had spilled over, and led to complaints about the low price they received for their fish.

Basil went to check on the prawns, and returned with a couple cans of even colder beer. "You know, our prawn catch should recover, with proper management."

"Well, maybe so, but there's no management, here. None at all. That's precisely the problem. The local fishermen see those huge nets, and winches...you can't really blame them for worrying. They don't understand any of the gear. They probably think Clive will scoop up everything."

"That's the skipper? Clive?"

"Yeah."

Basil vaguely remembered receiving a letter requesting assistance in obtaining a prawn fishing permit, but he loathed dealing with the Home Affairs Ministry, and hadn't even answered the enquiry. He couldn't recall the name. From Brisbane, though. "Where's he from?"

"Brisbane."

"Damn."

Doc snapped open his beer, and peeked inside, checking for ice. "Do you keep these in a freezer, or what?"

Basil took the opportunity to expound on the merits of his Australian-made, gas/electric refrigeration system, which assured him of properly cold beer, independent of the city's erratic electric system.

Doc listened patiently, but broke in when Basil started talking about the fridge in his caravan, back home. "You know, mate, you've given me a brilliant idea. What if we supplied the fishermen with ice...?"

Doc went away with a firm commitment for a shore-based ice plant, and at least partial funding for the facility to house it. The new Dhow Masters Center.

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The UN headquarters was a labyrinth, and Doc wandered through the old, colonial-era building for ten minutes before he found the right UNESCO office. The wide, high-ceiling corridors had been partitioned off into desk-sized cubicles, and filled with computers. The wires emerging from the electronic equipment had been fastened to the walls with duct tape, and led overhead to the ceiling fans, where they were all wired together, into the grid. Doc started to sweat.

"I haven't seen shrimp this big since I was a little kid." Henry picked up one of the large prawns, and admired it. "Meaty little devils, aren't they?"

Henry was keen to learn how to sail, and seldom missed an opportunity to visit Zanzibar, and go out on Laurent's cat. The UN chartered it regularly, and with Henry's broad portfolio as Regional Director of UNESCO - covering educational, scientific, and cultural concerns - he was usually able to make a connection, and book a spot.

He had grown up in Louisiana. "Have you ever cruised through the Gulf of Mexico, Doc?"

"Yeah, but I never spent much time there. Passed right through it, really, on the way to the Canal."

Henry smiled, enviously. "Damn. That's right. I forgot you've been through the Panama Canal. How many times, was it? Three?"

"Just twice."

Henry shook his head. "One of these days..." His secretary entered the office unannounced, and Henry hurriedly closed the box of prawns, and hid it under a file folder. She set a sheaf of papers on the desk, and left.

“So, what can I do for you, Doc? The Australian Ambassador called with...what? Renovating a building, or something?”

“Yeah. Before I forget, though - we’re sailing the cat to the Comores next month, for a conference. Why don’t you come along for the ride? Should be exciting sailing, crossing the channel.”

Henry immediately began riffling through his schedule file. “What’s the conference?”

“UN Development Bank, as I recall.”

“God, I’d love to go.” He flipped the little cards even faster. Then, scratched his head. “I’ll have to get back to you, on that.”

“No worries. Just wanted to let you know.” Doc dreaded the prospect of spending several days on the boat with him, in close quarters, but Henry was a workaholic. He wouldn’t show.

“So, what’s up?”

“Well, I’m trying to find out if the old, fish market building in the dhow harbor qualifies for cultural restoration.” The ancient buildings on the island were crumbling, and UNESCO had offered matching funds, if the government would agree to renovate them. Nothing had been done. Tanzania couldn’t afford five percent of the cost, let alone fifty.

“I’ll have to check.” Basil pulled out one of his thick, loose-leaf files.

Doc pointed out the property, on the map.

“Should do. The main building is *circa* 1790. I’d have to confirm it, of course.”

“Naturally.”

“Do you know who owns it?” Henry asked.

“Tiny Abdullah.” Henry knew the Home Affairs Minister, so Doc didn’t have to elaborate. He stood up to leave. “Thanks, Henry. Hope you enjoy the prawns.”

“Hey, hold your horses, Doc. I can’t very well send you back to the island without some rubbers for the little lady, now can I?”

Doc considered telling him that the ‘little lady’ was languishing in exile, but he just didn’t feel up to it. He didn’t want to refuse Henry’s generous offer, though, since the condoms would pay for the trip, as well as the prawns, so he smiled appreciatively, and waited for him to fill out the requisition forms.

The dispensing window at the central UN warehouse was the one place in the building which Doc knew how to find. Even if he got lost in the crowd, he could spot those who were intent on reaching the

warehouse, since they moved with a greater sense of purpose, like bees swarming to honey.

Doc handed his forms to the clerk, and sat down to wait.

It was approaching closing time, when the counter attendant finally appeared with his condoms. She was a new employee, he thought, and strikingly pretty. Well...striking, anyway. She had spiky, blonde hair, with some longer strands at the back gathered into a thin ponytail, and dyed a deep, azure blue. A row of little gold rings graced the margin of one ear.

There was something wonderfully feline about her, something in the way she moved, that really reminded him of Claire. He couldn't take his eyes off her.

She manoeuvred the heavily-loaded handtruck through the swinging doors, handling it deftly, and deposited the chest-high stack of condoms behind the counter. She returned his stare. Her eye shadow matched her blue hair.

Doc grimaced, when he took proper notice the cartons. "Oh, hell. Don't you have any plain ones?" he asked.

She seemed unconcerned. "They're all plain. We don't stock the novelty ones anymore." She unwrapped a piece of bubble gum, and popped it into her mouth. Grape, it looked like.

She was an unwilling employee, Doc guessed, and profoundly bored. Pressured into taking a summer job at the UN by her expatriate parents, perhaps, who were too preoccupied with their careers at some embassy or other to keep tabs on her, and were hoping that the responsibility of a steady job might sort her out.

Too late, Doc decided.

She pursed her lips, and pushed out a thick bubble with her tongue. The gum looked rather pale, and pinkish, next to her dark purple lipstick.

"But, look! These are 'flesh' tone!" Doc complained. He'd unwittingly taken several cases of 'flesh'-tone gloves to Mozambique, and ended up having to discount the whole shipment. The Mozambiquans hadn't objected to the color, particularly, but the racial insensitivity implicit in the labelling provided a perfect excuse to press for concessions.

"So?" She blew another bubble.

"They're *pink!*"

Doc waited patiently, hoping for a glimmer of comprehension, but none was forthcoming. They stared at each other.

"Well? You think I'm a mind reader, or what?" She crossed her arms under her breasts, and continued chewing her gum. Her nipples



were prominent, and plainly visible under her soft cotton jersey, and Doc noticed a small circle pressed against one. He puzzled over it.

“Nipple ring,” she volunteered, having observed him eying her breasts. She reached up and wiggled it with her finger. “It’s so cool.”

Doc blushed.

A playful smile spread across her face. She licked her upper lip, and glanced at the invoice. “Doc. Okay, Doc. Let’s have us a little peek, shall we?” She reached down, and lifted the hem of her shirt.

Doc sensed imminent panic. “Hey, wait...”

She withdrew a spring-loaded stiletto knife from a hidden sheath, inside her jeans, and released the blade in one, swift, practiced movement. Then, sliced open the top carton, removed a foil-wrapped condom, and ripped apart the packet between her teeth.

“Yep. They’re pink, all right.”

She unrolled the condom over her thumb, and looked at it from several angles, then shook it out and draped it over her forearm to assess it, as one would a scarf.

“They simply won’t do, will they?” she said.

Doc suddenly felt old, in his inability to understand her. Her bright blue hair, and body piercings were disconcerting, and he was mystified whether she was mocking him, or flirting. She seemed remarkably nonchalant about her sexuality.

“Tell you what, Doc.” She nodded in the direction of the warehouse, then leaned her elbows on the counter and whispered. “Let’s cruise the stacks. You never know. Might be some nice, black, African ones lurking around back there. I’m not supposed to...well, you know. But what the fuck...everyone else split. What d’ya say, Doc? Just you...and me.” She licked her upper lip, again.

Doc sighed. “Couldn’t you just check to see if there’s some plain?”

“Aww...don’t you want to come...inside? With me?” She struck a provocative pose, and pretended to pout.

Doc slowly shook his head.

“Okay. Suit yourself.” She wheeled the hand truck through a tight three-point turn, and used it as a battering ram to open the swinging doors. She paused in the doorway, and looked back over her shoulder. “I would have let you try one out, you know.”

Doc felt even older.

Henry’s secretary came running up as Doc was loading the condoms, at the curb.

“I’m so glad I caught you,” she huffed. “There was a message waiting here, for you. Came over the radio, last week.” She handed him a slip of pink paper. One of those stick-on notes.

The UN dispatcher had taken the call. Doc read the transcription. *‘Shipwrecked sailor. Has no boxing gloves. Can you arrange export? Call Querimbas Lodge. Emily.’*

“This it?”

She nodded. “I remember the caller said not to worry. That she’d get the message through to you, eventually.”

Hi Claire,

I'm headed home on the ferry, sitting on a stack of condoms on the aft deck. The sun is nestling into the hills, astern, which means it will be dark outside, by the time I get home, and even darker inside the boatshop.

I was just recalling your glee, the very first time I found some condoms for your women's group, and brought them home on the ferry...how you danced and laughed, and how much I loved seeing you like that.

Sadly, nothing awaits me tonight, except a cold bunk.

Why are we doing this? We could be sailing our new boat, by now. Cruising into some tropical cove, surrounded by lush rainforest. Maybe, anchored in a lovely atoll lagoon. Don't you miss the fish? The seabirds? We loved living like that, didn't we? Isn't it enough, anymore?

I spent the day delivering prawns to diplomats, and got more for them than I had hoped. Mori has agreed to pay the rent on a new office for Dhow Masters. You know the derelict fish-market building? In the dhow harbor? [Ali wants to manage the market stalls and sell the fish, and we'll have perfect premises for Dhow Masters, in the office building in the back.]

The building qualifies for a grant, under a UNESCO program to encourage the preservation of historic architecture. And guess what? Tiny Abdullah owns that property! He bought the fish market with the intention of levelling it, and putting up a tourist hotel, but the building was subsequently registered with the UN, as a World Heritage site, and it's now protected. [Done behind his back, apparently. Tiny has some enemies in Parliament.]

So, he's stuck with it, you see. No one would buy the property, now. Tiny can't demolish the building, or substantially alter the look of it, either. An historically accurate restoration will run close to \$2M, I'm told. UNESCO only pays half, so Tiny can't even consider renovating the property, unless he can come up with \$1M. As it happens, I've arranged the matching money. I don't see how Tiny can refuse. In addition to the restoration money, he'll receive an inflated monthly rental income, from a property which is uninhabitable, as it stands.

Mori is prepared to resume Japanese condom shipments, on the condition that Dhow Masters is granted exclusive distribution rights. We're talking major-league gloves, here. Fifty to sixty tons per year. Tiny and his Home Affairs Ministry will come under enormous pressure to grant us the license. The government has committed itself to an election, by the end of the year, and the natives are restless. Folks want the free condoms.

The Japanese condoms will impact the market. I have no idea how much. Tiny will surely demand a regular cut, as compensation - in addition to the restoration money - but we have the advantage, I reckon. Tiny has clout, but our gloves have hard currency behind them.

I had a narrow escape, today, from the UN building. There's something sinister about that place. The strangeness seems to surround you, as soon as you walk in the door. The people working there are not normal.

You remember Henry, from UNESCO? Flabby wife, Hilda? Slightly hysterical? Sailed with us, a few times? Well, Henry wrote me up for a few cases of gloves, and I went to the warehouse to collect them, as usual. But this bewitching, incredibly sexy cat-woman was working the counter...I'd never seen her before. She had liquid blue eyes, and stunning blue hair. She really reminded me of you, actually. An erotic pirate, complete with a gold ring through one of her nipples.

She tried to seduce me, Claire. But I didn't succumb. And you know how weak I am. [It was a close thing, I'll admit.]

Seems like I hardly have a spare moment to work on the boat. I have to come right back to the city again, tomorrow, for a meeting with UNESCO's legal counsel, concerning the grant. Some covenants and restrictions have to be added onto the title deed, apparently. I'll fax you the documents.

We should hear something by the end of next week. They should have all the contracts prepared, by then. Barring a miracle, expect to have Tiny Abdullah as your new landlord when you come back.

Sorry about the length of the shopping list. Seems foolish to air freight the water hose, don't you think? Couldn't you carry it on the plane, as personal baggage? [Assuming Tiny approves your visa, of course. He still refuses to take my calls.]

Doc

San Anselmo/Friday

Dear Doc,

Of course I miss the sailing life. You must know that. I think about it every day, especially since I've had to give up swimming in the harbor. [The water causes the slightest scratch to turn septic, and it's so cold it gives me headaches.] There is a fitness club nearby, with an indoor swimming pool, but the temporary membership fee is outrageously expensive.

You should see this place. The juice bar serves twelve varieties of orange juice. They have these motorized treadmills, all aligned, facing a wall of television sets. Every machine was in use when I walked in. Twenty people sporting headbands and headsets, striding side by side...going nowhere...watching soap operas.

I was so embarrassed. I couldn't stop laughing.

But they looked so silly, and it was just lovely outside - a gloriously sunny morning, after an entire week of dreary fog, and rain - and a perfect day for enjoying a walk. The people on those machines seemed so alienated. So out of touch with wildness...with anything natural. It's almost enough to make me lose hope.

Yet, I realize that I'm the odd one out. The exile. It is kind of scary, coming to grips with the enormity of my estrangement. I simply don't fit in, here. I guess I never did.

The condom business did get a bit out of hand, I'll admit. Maybe, I got a bit bored, and went looking for a fight. I don't know. The boatbuilding is far more rewarding and challenging for you - creatively - than it is for me. For the most part, I just paint. Or push sandpaper.

I'm not complaining.

But you're right. It isn't enough.

I value altruism. Dhow Masters has helped a lot of women, Doc. I feel good about that.

Now, about this blue-haired pirate girl...I fail to see how she could possibly remind you of me! I have green eyes. And red hair. Remember? And regarding this nipple of hers...how do you happen to know that the ring through it was a gold one? It's a really colorful story, Doc, but a little fanciful, if you ask me.

The nihilist bimbo appears to be only half my age, however, so I suppose I should feel flattered, and grateful for the comparison. You're a lecherous reprobate, Doc, but I love you, all the same. I've been in exile barely three months, but it feels like ages.

Can't you find any reinforced, rubber hose, over there? How am I going to carry long lengths like that? On the plane?

How is your stash of pistachio nuts holding out?

I miss you,  
Claire

I've just started reading through the UNESCO contracts. Wait for my fax before you sign anything.

## SMALL WARS

Frikkie felt naked without his metal detector. He had grown so accustomed to carrying it that his hands habitually moved in a rhythmic, sweeping motion in front of him when he walked. It looked rather odd, and when he caught himself doing it, he shoved his hands in his pockets.

He walked very slowly, and Emily stopped and waited for him to catch up.

"Right there," she pointed out. "At the edge of the thicket."

Frikkie scanned along the treeline. "Just the one?"

Emily nodded. "The explosion lifted the zebra a few feet in the air, Frikkie. It was awful."

Wilson had chased the zebra across the clearing, but was thankfully a safe distance behind when it entered the thicket, and set off the mine.

"I'll have a look in the morning. They would have swept the perimeter of the trees. It's an obvious spot. Might be they just missed one."

The small grove of panga-panga trees stood at the top of a slight rise, and offered good concealment. Anyone hiding in the thicket would have an unobstructed view of the lodge and the grassland sloping down to the beach. Frikkie turned his head toward Murray. "Could you lend me a hand, tomorrow?"

Emily gasped. "No!"

"I'll need some help," Frikkie insisted.

Murray looked back and forth between the two of them. "I'm willing..."

Emily quickly interrupted. "Forget it! You don't know a *thing* about digging landmines." She clenched her fists, and glared at him.

Murray couldn't dispute her statement, but the vehemence behind it bothered him. "What if..."

"Please!" Emily snapped, abruptly throwing up her hand, silencing him. "Just stay out of this."

"I'll take care of the digging, Emily. Murray can carry the tools," Frikkie explained. "I have one of those new bomb disposal suits in the Rover. He'll be indestructible."

"No!" Emily pounded her fist against her leg, and confronted Frikkie. "Absolutely not."

They stood staring at each other, only inches apart.

"No worries, Frikkie," Murray said, conspicuously avoiding Emily's eyes as she wheeled around to face him. "I'd be glad to give you a hand."

The morning land breeze was slight, and a low haze lingered over the hills. It would be a hot day. Even though the sun had barely cleared the tops of the trees, Murray had already started to sweat, inside the thick body armor.

"Well, what do you think?" Frikkie asked.

Emily stepped back, and appraised the fit. "He looks like a papaya." The suit was high-visibility yellow, finely-quilted. The kevlar padding was much thicker around his legs, and completely overlapped his boots, giving him greater girth close to the ground. "Can he still move?"

"Of course. It's ergonomically designed." Frikkie picked up the headset from his metal detector, and spoke into the microphone. "Walk around, Murray. See how it feels."

Murray took a few steps, and mumbled something unintelligible. A padded balaclava-type hood was draped over the helmet, and it muffled his words.

Frikkie reached around behind him, and flicked a switch on the backpack. "Talk to me."

"I won't win many races." The heavy, oversized steel plates bolted onto the soles of the boots made it difficult for him to lift his feet, and the bulky pants pushed his legs apart, forcing him to shuffle around bowlegged.

"But he can't see anything," Emily said. The faceplate on his helmet had fogged up. The morning air was still cool on the coast, and condensed his breath.

"There's a fan." Frikkie took Murray by the shoulder and manhandled him around, until he could reach the switch on the backpack. A little vent fan on the helmet began whirring. Frikkie switched it off. "I don't want to run down the battery. We'll need the fan, later on, when it gets hot."

Murray fumbled with the faceplate, and managed to raise the visor. He pulled uncomfortably on the collar of the flak jacket, to circulate some air underneath. "Aren't you going to wear a suit?"

Frikkie grinned, and shook his head. With his flowered shirt, khaki shorts, and tattered pair of light canvas shoes, he looked as if he was about to go fishing.

"Why not?" Murray asked, somewhat in protest.



"I sweat." Frikkie thought the thick protective clothing was actually dangerous. The discomfort was too distracting. He couldn't concentrate with sweat constantly running into his eyes.

They stopped at an intersection, where a footpath branched off toward the thicket. Frikkie made a few adjustments to the harness holding his metal detector, and plugged in the coiled connector from his headset. He lifted it from his neck, and spoke into the microphone. "Murray? You ready?" he asked, suddenly serious, and professional.

Murray nodded.

"Talk to me." Frikkie ordered.

Emily heard a response, but couldn't make out his words. She noticed streaks of sweat on his face. "He looks awfully hot, Frikkie."

"You want the fan turned on?"

Murray shook his head.

Frikkie frowned, and glared at him. "*Talk to me!*"

"I'm fine." Murray's voice was metallic.

They completed a series of equipment checks. The contents of the tool pouches, and spools of wire and colored nylon flagging. Detonators. Emily felt excluded, unable to hear half of what was being said. "Can I listen in on the spare radio?" she interjected.

Frikkie turned to face her. "No. In fact, why don't you clear out. We're almost ready."

"But...I thought I'd stay here, and..."

"What? *Watch?*"

"Well, can't I..." She hesitated, seeing the petulance on Frikkie's face, as if he were suffering the unreasonable demands of a child.

"No. No way. The last thing we need is an audience."

Emily bit her lip, sensing the futility of a protest. Also, she knew he was right.

He had carefully explained the procedure. Before the controlled detonation of a landmine, she would hear a siren. If she heard an explosion, without the preliminary warning, she would try to contact them by radio, before summoning the emergency evacuation helicopter at the ICRC medical facility in Dar es Salaam. Under no circumstances was she to go running out into the middle of a minefield.

Murray lifted his visor, and smiled. "Could you look after Wilson?"

"Okay."

"He's probably asleep under the porch."

They swept a wide swathe through the elephant grass. The footpath was ill-defined, and Frikkie decided to mark it, so that they were assured of a safe exit, in the event of an instrument malfunction. He showed Murray how to rig one of the reels of bright orange nylon tape, so that it payed out automatically from a holder attached to his belt. He would stake it down at every turn, and at regular intervals as they advanced.

"Remember, stay within toe's reach of the tape," he cautioned. "If I see you straying outside the arc of the detector, for any reason, we abort. Is that clear?"

Murray was impressed. When they first met, Frikkie had seemed painfully shy, and deferential, but with a metal detector in his hands, he was almost arrogant. There was no questioning his leadership.

They had approached to within ten yards of the tree line when Frikkie abruptly stopped in his tracks. The alarm from the metal detector was relayed, so Murray heard it simultaneously, but his response to the electronic beeping was much slower - not instinctive, like Frikkie's - and he awkwardly jarred into his back.

"Damn it!" Frikkie maintained his balance, and held his position, with his feet braced far apart.

"Sorry. These heavy boots..."

"Quiet!"

Murray froze, duly chastened, having compounded his clumsiness by breaking radio silence, following the positive signal. Frikkie had stressed the importance of it.

He needed to hear the signal clearly. In addition to pinpointing the precise location of an object, the sensitivity of the instrument usually provided a good indication of its shape, and mass. Frikkie claimed that he could identify a landmine - even its country of origin - merely by hearing the acoustic signature from the detector. Murray was rather skeptical, but as Emily rightly pointed out, he didn't know a thing about landmines.

"Relax. I don't think it's hot. Less than ten percent chance," Frikkie declared, after thoroughly scanning the ground in front of them, and even the surrounding clumps of grass. "Pass me the narrow trowel."

He extended his hand, behind his back, and Murray pressed the handle into his open palm.

Frikkie knelt down, and calmly set to work. He suddenly seemed to be in a talkative mood. "You know anything about archaeology?" he asked.

"Not a lot." Murray really had nothing to do, other than stand still, and listen.

"I've been thinking about giving it a try. Maybe, going back to school. I think I'd be good at it. I've got the patience for it. This job resembles an archaeological dig, sometimes.

"I mean, my diggers have to treat *every* positive as if it were potentially lethal. You know. Regulations. Makes sense, I guess. But, shit...sometimes I have to spend an entire day watching them excavate nothing but cartridge cases, and rusty steel cans. Some of the stuff we've hauled out of the ground..."

"This sapper we came up against in Angola - he was something else. Planted his mines next to auto parts, bits and pieces of plumbing...any metal scraps he could lay his hands on. You'd spend hours fretting over all this metallic rubbish, until you were convinced you were wasting your time on a garbage dump, and you'd get careless. Then, hidden right in the middle, there'd be a mine. I lost three diggers to that bastard.

"He almost got me, once. He'd used pieces of a bombed out truck. I knew it was him. I mean, who else would bother burying pieces of a truck fender, in a war zone? There's not much incentive for keeping the countryside neat and tidy, after twenty years of civil war.

"Anyway, by the time I picked up the signature from the landmine, I was frustrated. Impatient, I guess. The signal seemed too strong, but I didn't take proper notice, and told my digger to hurry up, and get it out, so we could break for lunch. It was a stacked mine. A booby trap. That cagey little sapper had planted two mines, one on top of the other, so when my digger lifted the one on the surface...well, he was kneeling right over it. Almost blew him in half. I just took some shrapnel in my leg."

Murray glanced at Frikkie's legs. There was a hollow spot on one calf, where a piece of the muscle was missing, and a nasty, long scar ran all the way from the knee down to his ankle. The surgeon hadn't been too neat and tidy, either.

"You know what they did? Put in a stainless steel plate. Magnetic. Type 440. I couldn't fucking believe it. The doctor got all huffy when I yelled at him to take it out. Told me I should be grateful I hadn't lost the leg. I mean, shit...I was lucky just to be *alive*, never mind the leg, but they had no right to fix it so I could never work again."

"He took it out?"

"Yeah. A week later. Put in a custom made, laminated plastic one. Carbon fiber." Frikkie stood up, and turned around. He held out something. A small, flat metal case. "Here. Souvenir."

Murray turned it over in his hand. It was badly tarnished, and still crusted with dirt, but the clasp worked. "Looks like a cigarette case."

"Sterling silver, I'd wager. Probably dropped by a great white hunter."

It took them at least an hour to reach the shade of the trees. Their constant, careful probing, and meticulous excavating had unearthed a handful of empty AK-47 cartridge sleeves, a brass belt buckle, a broken machete blade, and a few corroded coins. Murray was dripping sweat. The instrument beeped yet again.

"Well, we got a hot one, here," Frikkie announced, suddenly, edging his metal detector around the gnarled branches at the base of the bushes. "Chinese-made, I reckon. Ninety percent."

Murray held his breath.

"Hand me the long probe." Frikkie pushed aside a few thick branches, and wriggled his way further into the undergrowth.

"Why would they plant one back in there?" Murray asked. "There's no way anyone could ever step on it."

"Probably weren't any bushes here, then. Some of these minefields were laid twenty years ago."

They searched for yet another hour, and found two more of the heavy, older model Chinese mines, before deciding to call it a day. Frikkie didn't attempt to remove them. The pressure plates were too tightly entwined with roots. They retraced their steps, all the way back to the main path, before Frikkie would allow Murray to strip off his bomb disposal gear.

"I can see why you refuse to wear these suits. Jesus...." He flopped down onto the grass, under a rosewood tree, and poured a full, litre bottle of water over his head.

Frikkie grinned. He sat down, as well, and began stripping the insulation off the detonator wire. The thin, double-stranded wire disappeared into the elephant grass, leading back toward the mines.

"Are those mines still live, do you think?" Murray asked.

"Good bet. Should be a couple hot ones, at least. Their viability would only be down to, well...say, eighty percent each. What's that come to? For two out of three?"

Murray wasn't a gambler. Couldn't figure the odds. Didn't even try.

Frikkie glanced over at the thicket, then shrugged his shoulders. "There's always a few duds, but the Chinese make pretty reliable fireworks. Cheap, too. Those cost less than a buck, apiece."

Frikkie loosened the terminals on the generator, and twisted the bared wires around the posts. Then, began cranking the handle. The loud wail of a siren pierced through the rainforest. A few birds took flight.

"Want a pair of ear plugs?" He tossed over a small cardboard box.

"Think we'll need them?"

"Might."

He waited until Murray finished fumbling with the little foam plugs, then pushed the plunger.

The explosions were simultaneous. A loud, sharp snap. The shrapnel severed branches from the trees, as cleanly as the swift slice of a machete, taken from the ground up. The limbs fell softly into a cushioning cloud of leaves, rising from the shredded bushes. There was no smoke. Only a little dirt.

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"G'day, Margaret. What's up? Over."

"Doc! How lovely! Been months since we've heard from you."

"Yeah. Been a while. Over."

"I keep hoping I'll wake up one morning, and see your new boat laying at anchor off the lodge. You promised you'd take me sailing. Remember?"

Doc couldn't remember anything of the sort. Margaret was hardly an outdoorsy sort. Not unless she could stay under a big umbrella, or something. "Yeah, well...I'm working on it. I'd love to chat, Margaret, but I'm borrowing the radio at UNESCO. Over."

"Shame. Are you still with...oh, what's her name? Claire? Or is that...over?"

Doc sighed. The sarcasm came through loud and clear. The pair of them hadn't exactly hit it off when Margaret spent a weekend in Zanzibar, scouting tour agents. "Claire's just fine, Margaret."

"Well, never mind. I can't wait to see you. When are you coming down?"

Beats me, Doc thought. He took a deep breath. "Is Emily there, by any chance? She left a message for me to call. Over."

"Bye. I'll hand it...over."

"Hi, Doc! Emily. Thanks for calling. Over."

"I got your message. What's this about a shipwrecked sailor? Over."

"His name is Murray. He lost his boat in the cyclone. On the reef on Ihla Fanduzi. Over."

"What cyclone? Over."

"We only had the one." She wondered how Doc could have missed it. He didn't respond. "Over?"

"Never heard a word about it. We haven't even had a drop of rain, up here. Over."

"Can we please stop saying 'over'? Over."

She related the details of Murray's plight, interspersed with a brief account of her rescue.

"I know, Doc. It was really dumb to let the boat drift out to sea. But he saved my life. Bringing him back here seemed like the right thing to do. You know what Mendes is like."

"Truly." Doc slouched back comfortably in Henry's office chair, rather enjoying the romantic, little twist. Emily was obviously smitten. He grinned. "So, what do you want me to do, exactly?"

"I made a list." She ran through it. A permanent Tanzanian visa, to start with. Then, a job, and a place to stay. An import permit for the dog. Plus a few additional, small items.

"Come on, Emily. A dog collar? Where am I going to find a *dog collar*?"

"Well, if it's too much trouble, I guess we can just use an old piece of rope..."

Doc sighed. "Does he have any money?"

"Not a lot. He salvaged some really valuable gear from his boat, though. Antique, brass lamps. Bilge pumps. Lots of old, bronze...stuff."

Doc sat up alertly, at the mention of the word 'bronze'.

"It was a classic, wooden boat, Doc. Over sixty years old. Murray said the anchor winch weighs over a hundred pounds. It's solid bronze, too. You wouldn't need something like that for your new boat, would you?"

Doc swallowed hard, well aware that a solid bronze anchor windlass could easily trigger the onset of a salvage frenzy. Despite having witnessed the horror of it, Doc knew he wasn't immune. He'd already begun to salivate. He took a few deep breaths before pressing the microphone lever. "Well. Yeah. Might, actually."

Casual enough, he thought, with immense relief. Having regained his composure, he shifted his focus to devising a plan.

The visa wouldn't pose a problem. A half-case of condoms would arrange that. Mendes really scared him, though. Doc couldn't risk crossing paths with him, not without the protective umbrella of some

donor organization. And he didn't have a valid visa, himself, at the moment. He'd figure out something. "Look. It might take a few days to organize this. Let me call you back as soon as I can. Okay?"

"Sure. Is there anything I can do?"

"I'll need some photos."

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Frikkie liked to wind down with a few brandies after work. Margaret mixed herself a gin and tonic, and brought a full bottle of brandy and a bucket of ice to the patio table. She didn't have any Coke, but Frikkie was used to doing without. He was in a talkative mood.

Margaret had already heard most of his stories, though, and found them rather depressing. They were invariably about landmines. Frikkie never talked about anything else. She was pleased to see a fresh pair of ears coming up the footpath.

Murray had accepted the invitation for dinner.

"I'm telling you, Murray." Frikkie spoke animatedly. "The similarities are uncanny. The South African experience in the war in Angola was even more definitive than the American one in Vietnam."

Murray remembered the controversy about the Cuban troops, but other than that, almost nothing. Angola seldom made the news. "How so?" he asked.

"Both conflicts altered the consciousness of a whole generation of young people. Public dissent was more difficult in South Africa. People who protested openly were prosecuted for treason. But as the war dragged on, both victory and treason lost their meaning.

"I grew up in South West, what they call Namibia, now. I was a year shy of starting high school when the first contingent of Cubans landed in Angola, and by the end of the school year, there were something like twenty thousand. Everyone was worried. The border was only a two-hour drive from our farm. So, I was still a student during the height of the fighting, when large numbers of South African troops were directly engaging the Cubans.

"Images from Vietnam and Cambodia were still fresh in my memory when I started my compulsory military service, and Angola seemed like the same movie. Films are always released later, here, and with a lot less fanfare, than in the rest of the world.

"The Army assigned me to a counter insurgency unit in South West, close to home. I grew up with a dirt bike, and knew all the roads, so that's the job they gave me. Riding a motorcycle. Every morning, I'd

inspect the culverts, and check the bridges for explosives. Ride through river beds. It was a waste of petrol, for the most part.

“Landmines were a popular weapon with the PLAN. The People’s Liberation Army of Namibia. They smuggled them across the Angolan border, on foot. Black politicians who spoke out against communism, or supported the *Boere* would have a landmine planted in their driveway, or an anti-personnel mine buried on the path their kids took when they walked to school. The unpaved tracks through the bush were declared unsafe, because of the PLAN mines, and we concentrated our efforts on keeping open the one tarred road.

“There were hundreds of potholes, and broken sections where the insurgents could conceal the charges. Sometimes, I would spot their spoor in the bush - some disturbed sand by the side the road - but it often turned out to be a trap. You know. They’d make it look as if they had tunnelled under the blacktop, jussy to lure us onto the verge, where they’d planted anti-personnel mines.

“Whenever I came across something suspicious, I’d radio an alert to the diggers, who were never far behind, in an armoured personnel carrier. Those guys made such a big impression on me. They had their very own Eland.”

“What’s that?” Murray asked.

“An armoured car. Only theirs was equipped with an air-conditioner and a fridge, set up to run off bottled-gas. They even had external stereo speakers, so they could listen to music while they were outside, lifting mines. They were heavily into the blues. I don’t know where they got the tapes. They must have smuggled them in. You couldn’t buy black music like that over the counter in South Africa. Not the raw, bluesy stuff they had. Musicians like Nat King Cole, maybe. Or Harry Belafonte, in an Asian shop.

“They often turned up the volume, just to irritate the Afrikaner officers. Their own command was based in Durban, so they really didn’t have to answer to anyone. They played it to the hilt. Man, we had some great parties.”

“There was an opening in the unit, following an accident, and I officially joined them as a digger. They taught me all the tricks. Like, if you needed to take a piss, you wouldn’t wander off to do it in private, behind a bush. You pissed on the road.

“It was incredible...how hard it was, getting used to that. There were some strong social rules in South Africa, about how whites were expected to behave. I’ll never forget how my Ma would yell at me, out the back window. ‘Ag, Frikkie!’ she’d shout. ‘Use the outhouse! Only animals and kaffirs piss in the dirt!’”



“Jesus...”

“The first time I crossed the border into Angola, I was so thrilled. I’d never travelled outside South Africa before. One couldn’t, really. Not on a South African passport. I hadn’t even bothered to apply for one. There wasn’t any point.”

“I don’t suppose you needed a passport to get into Angola,” Murray observed.

Frikkie chuckled. “Nah. Just my metal detector. One of our counter-insurgency units discovered several tonnes of Bulgarian-made landmines, when they raided a suspected PLAN arms cache, about twenty kilometres into southern Angola. Usually, they detonated the Eastern bloc munitions on the spot, but the haul included some impressive mobile artillery pieces. They decided to truck the lot of it back across the border into South West, and call a press conference. So they ferried me up there in a helicopter to sweep the road, and supervise the loading of the landmines.

“I suppose it was inevitable, that having captured all those mines, the army would eventually decide to deploy them. They organized a training school, and assigned me the task of teaching UNITA sappers how to lay mines.”

“They’d come down from Angola?”

Frikkie nodded. “There were some incentives. Like a subsidised shopping trip into Windhoek, where they could buy a few luxuries, which were unobtainable in Angola. You know...because of the civil war. Music cassettes, and plastic kitchenware. Tinned pilchards. The trainee who earned the highest rating was awarded a portable stereo, and a few qualified for digital watches. Any recruit who completed the course was paid a hundred rand.

“After the graduation ceremony, they’d queue for the bus like a troop of school kids, heading home after a football camp, or something. Each one would have his parchment diploma, and prizes, and all these overloaded shopping bags gathered around his feet. A complimentary ten kilo sack of maize meal. A couple cases of Bulgarian landmines. It was festive.”

“Jesus...”

Frikkie poured another brandy for both of them, before continuing.

“Trouble was, half the recruits disappeared well before graduation. They slipped away into the desert in the middle of the night, or simply melted into the crowd during the shopping spree into Windhoek.

“Those Angolan kids had seen enough of civil war. They didn’t want to go back. A few resorted to leaping from the windows of the moving bus, as it approached the Angolan border. Like me, they’d never

seen another country before, and South Africa must have seemed like paradise. I could see it in their faces, the way they gawked around the shopping mall. Especially, inside that video arcade.

“They would have made their way up to the Reef, I suppose, and tried for a job in one of the gold mines; or simply blended into the Portuguese-speaking, Mozambiquan community, in Jo’burg.

“After one group of graduates actually hijacked a bus, and fled into Northern Transvaal, the Army stopped bringing the recruits into South West. They sent me across the border, instead, to conduct the training sessions at UNITA base camps deep inside Angola.

“They’d fly me in with my tools, and the instruction kit I put together - exploded drawings of the most common makes of mines, and cross sections of half a dozen real ones, which I sawed in half with a hacksaw, and mounted on a piece of plywood. Usually, they’d have a good selection of landmines waiting on site, ready to go.

“But, after a few of these covert missions inside Angola, I began to wonder...you know...what I was doing.”

Frikkie downed his brandy, and poured another.

“I remember one trip, in particular. One of our squads had unwittingly entered a minefield, at night, during a raid on a suspected PLAN training camp. They had taken some serious casualties. I flew in with the medics, at first light.

“Several wounded had spent the night in the middle of the minefield, rather than risk detonating any more mines and I swept a path, so the medics could get them out. They needed all the available space in the helicopter to evacuate the wounded, so I got left behind, with the armoured unit.

“We made our way back to the border, over the bush tracks. We were drinking beer, I recall, and a couple guys in the squad wanted to take a piss, and when we stopped, I climbed up top, to stretch out a bit. I saw this old woman, in the field. Well, maybe she wasn’t so old...it was hard to tell. I had finally begun to take notice of them - you know, all the people who were missing limbs - and she had lost both legs. I watched her, while she weeded her maize.

“She had this wide, wooden board, mounted on two wheels. Shopping trolley wheels, looked like. She could balance herself on top, and propel it like a skateboard, only using her hands. But the ground was soft at one end of her garden plot, and the wheels bogged down. I expected her to give up, but she dismounted and continued the weeding, slithering on her stumps and dragging her torso through the mud, down the last few rows of maize.”

“She was all alone? Out working in the field, like that?”

Frikkie nodded. "I suppose she had no choice. Either tend the crops, or starve to death."

Margaret tapped on the kitchen window. "Murray?" she asked, through the glass. "How would you like your steak?"

"I'm not sure about the final tally, Frikkie," Emily said. "Miles wrote it down, though. How many tusks were there, again?" She looked to the head of the table.

Miles had stopped eating, and sat frozen in his seat, staring at a fork full of yams. He slowly lowered the fork onto his plate, then neatly folded his napkin. He spoke calmly. "I wish you had consulted me, before breaching our security."

"Oh. I didn't think..."

He broke in. "Of course, you didn't *think*! That's precisely the problem around, here. No one takes the time to think things through. You cannot go around telling everyone our private business, Emily. We allowed you to see that ivory in the strictest confidence."

Emily glanced at Murray.

He shrugged.

She returned Miles icy stare. Then, stuck out her tongue. "Peh!"

Margaret had ventured a look inside Miles little notebook. "We buried eighty-four tusks, Frikkie. They belong to the dog. They're Wilson's bones."

Frikkie shook his head. "A slaughter on that scale must have been sanctioned by the military. Just like Angola. Did I ever tell you that story?"

Margaret decided to fix herself another gin.

"After the Cubans pulled out, the international community lost interest in Angola, and the conflict became a protracted, all-African affair. South Africa couldn't continue absorbing the costs of the war, and pressured UNITA to find some additional sources of funding. Savimbi lobbied the Americans, but their military weren't about to involve themselves in another, hopeless civil war. They decided to harvest the elephants in southern Angola, and sell the ivory."

Murray nodded, granting Frikkie his point about the similarities to Vietnam. "The ivory couldn't have contributed all that much, could it?"

"Probably not. But we're talking about a low budget war. And a lot of ivory. South Africa supplied the armoured vehicles, and UNITA troops did the slaughtering. Used machine guns, for the most part. They towed a trailer equipped with a portable propane fridge, to salvage the better cuts of meat. Once they'd harvested a full load of tusks, they

would rendezvous with a South African Army truck at the border, and make the transfer. They stored them in the same bunker where we kept our landmines. Really stunk up the place.”

“What did they do, then?” Murray asked.

Frikkie laughed. “They installed an exhaust fan. Bloody idiots. Lived in the tropics all their lives, and didn’t have enough sense to wash off the blood, and scrape away the clingy bits of meat, before the rot...”

Emily gagged, and spit out a bite-sized piece of steak. “Frikkie, one of these days, I swear...”

Miles tried to clarify the question. “I think what Murray meant to ask was - how did the Army go about selling it?”

“Oh. Right. Well, it took some detective work to figure it out. When that first crop of tusks got a bit ripe, I went into the office to complain about the smell, and tried to find out who was responsible. The only thing they could tell me was that Pretoria had requisitioned the storage space.

“I chatted up the truck drivers, and had a chance to see what they were bringing to the border, in exchange for the tusks. It wasn’t just arms and ammunition, but some expensive, civilian stuff. Cases of brandy, and chocolates. Smoked salmon. They weren’t clamoring for condoms, back then.

“After four or five loads of tusks had accumulated inside the warehouse, a flat-bed truck would show up, carrying an empty shipping container. They hauled them clear across the country, to the container terminal in Durban harbour. I’m not sure who the ultimate buyers were, but the ivory was shipped to Zanzibar. I was curious, so I sneaked a look at the manifest.”

“Can you remember any names?” Miles asked.

Frikkie shook his head. “It was so long ago, it seems like a previous life. Wouldn’t be much help, even if I could remember. The name would have been fictitious, like the cargo declaration.”

“Do you recall what that said?”

“Sure. Kitchen equipment. For some restaurant, in Zanzibar.”

“We might try asking Doc,” Emily suggested.

“Ask Doc...*what?*” Margaret asked, suddenly suspicious. She hadn’t been paying very close attention to the story.

Miles turned to her, and spoke quietly. “How one goes about selling a load of ivory, darling.”

“Oh, bloody hell...” Margaret plucked the napkin from her lap, and threw it down angrily, as she got up, and left the table.

Miles called after her. “Be reasonable, darling. We should explore our options before we make a decision, now, shouldn’t we?”

Margaret started up the staircase, without looking back.  
“Can’t we discuss it, at least? Margaret...?”  
A bedroom door slammed, upstairs.

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A brief appraisal in front of a mirror had been enough to convince Murray that he needed a proper haircut. He’d look feral in his visa photograph, without one.

“Come on. Hold still,” Emily chided.

Murray briefly stopped fidgeting, atop the tree stump where she had set him down with a towel wrapped around his neck.

“I hate this.”

“We’re almost finished with the worst of it.” She pinched a lock of hair tightly between her fingers, to take the pull of the comb while she dealt with one of the few remaining knots. “How long since you’ve been to a barber?”

He shrugged. “I don’t know. Fifteen years. I told you. I always cut it myself.”

Emily smiled, recalling her playful refusal to lend him her sharp scissors. His own were buried on the island, so it left him no choice. She stepped back to assess if she was cutting the hair evenly. “You know, we might want to trim your beard, too.”

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Emily brought the polaroids when she cycled back to the lodge for afternoon tea.

Margaret was busy in the kitchen. She wiped her hands on her apron, and leafed through the photos. “Quite a makeover. Murray almost looks respectable.”

“Sexy with the short hair, isn’t he?”

“You think?” Margaret glanced at the photos, again, and picked one out. She smiled merrily, and held it up. “I imagine you’d love this one, then.” It was a cute close-up which Emily had taken of Wilson, snuggled up against his tusk, asleep.

Emily blushed. “Come on. Cut it out. I don’t mean the *dog*.”

The kitchen table was covered with meat. Emily wondered where they were going to sit.

“The Belgian birdwatchers are flying in a day early,” Margaret complained. “I have been so busy. Miles spent the whole day in the swamp, so I had to butcher the bloody pig, myself.”

The bush barbecue was part of the package. Margaret was preparing the salads to go with the meat. “João offered to help out with the dinner tonight. Now that his English has improved, he could cope with the guests. You wouldn’t mind?”

Emily chuckled. “Hardly.”

“I wouldn’t ask him to do anything strenuous. It’s just that Miles is so bloody useless.”

“What’s he doing in the swamp?”

Margaret gave a little laugh. “Blowing his bird whistles. He’s worried himself sick that the scarlet ibis might go walkabout.”

They carried their tea out onto the patio. A large table had already been arranged for the dinner party, with an immaculately pressed tablecloth, and a vase of freshly cut flowers, from the garden. Emily was struck by the silver champagne bucket. “No wonder Miles is worried. They’re obviously expecting to see some birds.”

Emily headed down to the dock when she heard the whine of the approaching seaplane, and found João waiting for her in the launch. The plane made a wide sweep over the offshore islands, then circled back for a pass along the beach, before turning into the wind, and levelling out for a landing. There was only a light chop in the bay.

They motored out and picked up the mooring, and waited to meet the seaplane as it taxied toward the dock. Emily manoeuvred the launch alongside, and João tossed the mooring line to the pilot.

“Nice landing, Eddie!” she shouted.

He made fast the line, then stood up and made a cutting motion across his neck.

Emily grabbed hold of the wing strut, and steadied the boat before switching off the outboard. “Aren’t you going to warp up to the dock?” The tourists usually disembarked onto the pontoon.

Eddie grinned. “A bit windy, eh? I reckon she’s fine, right here.”

The passenger door suddenly swung open, startling her. She clenched the strut so hard, her knuckles turned white.

“Colonel Mendes! What...a surprise.”

The Colonel was in full dress uniform, impeccable as ever. His goatee was razor sharp. He bowed politely. “Oh, the surprise is mine, Emily, I assure you. I had forgotten how delightful you are.”

Emily desperately tried to read the expression on his face, then noticed her own, reflected back at her from the polished surface of his mirrored sunglasses. When she focused on the reflected image, his intimidating presence seemed to fall away. She tilted her head, and smiled at herself, as if she were posing in front of a bathroom mirror. She suddenly felt giddy. “You’re looking pretty sharp, yourself, Colonel.”

The Colonel naturally assumed command of the boat. The two Belgian couples seemed quite taken with him, and readily acquiesced to his authority, dutifully removing their dress shoes, taking their assigned positions, and donning life preservers for the short cruise ashore. The floorboards were slightly wet, and the men peeled off their socks.

The launch was overcrowded, even without the luggage, and provided Emily with a perfect excuse to stay behind, so she could talk to Eddie, and find out what was going on. She shoved on the gunwale, and sent the jovial party on their way, with the Colonel at the helm. João was wedged in the bow, facing aft, with his knees drawn up, and his lap full of shoes.

Eddie seemed relieved to be fully in command of his seaplane, again. He shrugged his shoulders, making it clear that Mendes had left him no choice in the matter. “He wanted to go for an airplane ride.”

“You landed at Mocímboa?”

“Yeah. I had to drop off a radio...at Government House...” Eddie stopped talking, while he searched behind the instrument console, and pulled out a concealed, manila envelop. After he handed it to her, he pointed out a cardboard box behind the seat. “The Colonel noticed the condoms, I’m afraid.”

“It shouldn’t matter, Eddie. Thanks.” She puzzled over the official, Commonwealth of Australia seal on the envelop, until she remembered that Doc wasn’t the sort of person who would go to a store, and actually *buy* envelopes. She wondered if Eddie knew what was in it. No harm in asking, she decided.

“Did Doc mention anything to you about our little...problem?”

“Yeah,” Eddie sighed. “More than I want to know, believe me. I just can’t risk it, Emily.”

“What? I had no intention of involving you, at all, Eddie!” She had always assumed that Doc would sail down in the big catamaran, like before.

“Hey, it’s cool. Doc didn’t press me.”

Margaret had told her all about Eddie's predicament. How he was without a country. And had no passport, either. Not a valid one, anyway. Just an ancient, Rhodesian Government travel document.

Eddie had served as a fighter pilot in the Rhodesian Air Force, throughout the protracted bush wars, and the succeeding Government of Zimbabwe had refused him citizenship. They didn't have the option of deporting him, since there was no country to send him to, although they expropriated his farm, and denied him a license to pilot an aircraft. He lost everything he owned, eventually.

He decided to emigrate to South Africa - the apartheid government was accepting virtually anyone with white skin, at the time - and managed to obtain South African citizenship for his two sons. Eddie wasn't eligible, himself, since he had fought in a foreign war.

But he was able to resume flying, throughout sub-Saharan Africa, on the strength of his new, South African pilot's license. Potential employers were more concerned with competence, than political correctness, and the document was widely respected. In Africa, there are always job openings for pilots who can tolerate a few bullets sharing their air space.

Mozambique was awash with bullets, as well as business opportunities. The government controlled only the coastal strip; and, with virtually all the roads into the interior closed by minefields, and continual attacks by the insurgents, the only effective mode of transport was through the air, or by sea. So Eddie leased a seaplane. And went to work.

He quickly accumulated the capital for the down payment on his own airplane, and continued to do well, until the cease-fire ruined the job market.

The skies cleared for the competition, but became rather murky, and even more hazardous for Eddie. There were no longer any bullets to contend with, but he found himself facing a barrage of bribes, which he was forced to pay in order to stay in business. He was illegal, and all the officials knew it.

He found some free-lance work in the Lakes region, flying into Rwanda and Burundi, but the corpses floating in the water made landing the seaplane a grisly business, even for someone as hardened as Eddie. The leading edges of the pontoons were sharp, and usually sliced right through the bloated bodies, but after he impaled a pregnant woman, who was bobbing particularly high in the water, he had to give it up.



Jobs were scarce on the coast. Donor organizations had ceased providing the Mozambiquan government with direct funding for transport, in response to the corruption, and began hiring their own pilots. Pilots with legitimate passports, who could pass a rigorous medical examination.

Eddie was pushing sixty. It was out of the question.

He was facing foreclosure, and desperate enough to consider delivering consignments of condoms. Every bulletin board had postings of the job offers. The pilots shunned them like the plague.

Condoms were the most hazardous cargo on the continent. The difficulties went well beyond the usual seizures by corrupt Customs agents, and encounters with armed hijackers. People were desperate. Aircraft were being mobbed and looted, even before they taxied off the runway, especially in Uganda and Zaire, where the AIDS infection rate was soaring. One plane had been battered to pieces by a busload of school kids, wielding cricket bats.

Eddie couldn't really blame the kids. Priests and politicians, television and football stars - the role models were generous with their advice, and constantly lavished them with lectures about safe sex, but they were unfailingly stingy when it came time to hand out the boxing gloves.

Well, maybe a pack of three, once every few months. No wonder the kids were so fractious. How many times could they be expected to wash them?

When Eddie saw a recent posting, offering a contract to a seaplane pilot willing to deliver condoms along the coast - no questions asked - he called the number in Zanzibar. Doc answered the phone.

Eddie accepted the job, expecting to fly only a few loads of the condoms, and then get out, as soon as he had earned enough to meet his seaplane payments. Of course, he hadn't counted on flying for someone as cunning as Claire.

She convinced him to carry out some stunts he wouldn't have tried when he was twenty years old. He must have flown twenty sorties, landing his seaplane in three-foot seas in exposed bays, or muddy, crocodile infested tributaries of the Ruvuma river.

Doc had obtained the permits that Eddie needed to fly tourist charters out of Tanzania. Eddie was grateful, but he wasn't indebted, either.

"I didn't know you were friends with Doc." Eddie said.

“He’s been down here, a few times. I don’t know him all that well, really.”

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Emily helped João carry the luggage up to the lodge, carrying her condoms awkwardly underneath one arm, and gripping a suitcase in each hand. The Belgians didn’t travel light.

They were seated around one of the patio tables, having a cocktail with the Colonel. His back was toward her, and she hastened her step, hoping to pass unnoticed into the lodge, and slip out the side door, and alert Murray. But one of the tourists motioned to her.

“Miss? Leave my camera cases over here, please.”

Colonel Mendes spun around. “Emily!” He immediately rose from his chair, and rushed over to relieve her of the heavy aluminum suitcases. “Please. Allow me.”

He escorted her over to the table, and apologized profusely to the guests for his lapse in protocol. “You see, Emily is a distinguished guest here, herself. She is the chief scientist at our Marine Institute.”

The Belgian rose from his chair, and nodded respectfully. He graciously offered her his seat. “Would you care to join us?”

Emily listened to their birdwatching stories, feeling somewhat self-conscious, with the case of condoms resting on her lap. She sipped her champagne, saying little, and the conversation soon languished. Their infatuation with the Colonel had clearly begun to wane, and many of their anecdotes awkwardly excluded him.

“I don’t know how they can get away with it, Emily,” one of the women said. “The airport restroom was filthy. I mean, they didn’t even have toilet paper!”

“You wouldn’t believe the flies!” the other woman added, with disgust.

“Emily’s research is devoted to our fascinating sea turtles,” Mendes announced, abruptly. “Perhaps, she can tell us about it.”

“Well, the turtle season has hardly begun...,” Emily hedged, instantly alerted to the risk of stimulating any curiosity in her turtles. Murray would be working at the turtle ponds, and the tourists might actually ask to see them.

She needn’t have worried. The Belgians weren’t interested. In fact, they hardly seemed to care about *animals*, at all. They were collectors.

Their excursion to photograph the scarlet ibis was little more than a shopping trip. Like a visit to a brokerage, to acquire a rare and extravagantly expensive postage stamp, which they fancied in a catalogue. It required only a minimal investment of their time, and a large expenditure of their money.

They discussed their plans for their next expedition - a voyage to the islands south of Patagonia, to photograph penguins - and paid no attention as Miles gathered up their camera equipment to load it into the Land Rover. The news that the ibis was nesting contentedly in the estuary came as no surprise, since they had already paid for it.

They weren't excited about taking the wildlife photographs, or accumulating rare bird sightings, like most other birdwatchers - their passion lay in collecting exotic adventures. The ibis was simply an excuse. The thrill came from successfully tracking down the most rare, the most inaccessible experience. The photographs would be their proof.

Emily couldn't think of anything particularly wrong with that, and wondered why she nonetheless found it so distasteful.

João arrived with a tray of hors d'oeuvres. None of the tourists appeared to recognize him, after his switch to a red bow tie, and matching cummerbund. "Would you care for another prawn cocktail, Colonel?"

"Can't you see the lady has *nothing*." Colonel Mendes glared menacingly at him, and extended his hand toward the empty plate in front of Emily.

João looked terrified, and she gave him an encouraging smile. "A cup of tea would be nice, João. Thanks."

Margaret made a breezy entrance, delivering Emily's tea. She had included a tiny, flowered pot on the tray, which was filled with honey, and matched the teacup perfectly.

Emily laughed, when she saw it.

Margaret gave her a welcoming embrace, as she set the tea tray on the table. "The dog's loose," she whispered. "Under the mango."

Then, she circled the table, lavishing her attention on the guests. "How are we doing, here? Anyone ready for another drink?"

Emily stole a glance in the direction of the mango tree, needing to reassure herself that it was, in fact, hidden from view, on the other side of the lodge. She had to act fast. The Rover was parked close to the tree, and the guests would surely see Wilson when the expedition departed, to visit the swamp. Mendes would ask questions.

“Excuse me. I won’t be but a moment,” she announced, to the group, while pushing back her chair.

She whispered to the woman next to her. “It never fails. Champagne just goes right through me...” As the woman giggled, Emily casually rose from the table, and strolled into the lodge.

Then, she tore through the kitchen, and vaulted out the side door, and sprinted for the mango tree. Wilson was sound asleep, with his paws draped possessively over his elephant tusk. She shook him, hard. “Wilson! Wake up!”

He lifted his head.

*Why?*

“Get up, Wilson!” She pulled on his ears, until he yelped.

*Hey! That hurts!*

She grabbed hold of his muzzle, as he struggled to his feet. “Bad dog! Shush!”

*Me? Bad dog...?*

She frantically tried to think of a safe place to put him. Mendes always visited the garden, so the garden shed wouldn’t do. The guest cabins were occupied, and the boat shed was right at the foot of the dock, where Mendes was scheduled to meet his launch.

Her own room? She looked at the main lodge, trying to visualize the route, through the living room, and up the open staircase. Past the bathrooms. It seemed too risky. Then she noticed the crawl space, under the porch.

Wilson liked the porch.

She couldn’t think of anywhere else. She hoped the dog would obey her command to stay, as well he did Murray’s. The ivory looked rather conspicuous lying on the grass, and she picked up one end of the tusk, and dragged it behind the bushes, out of sight.

“Come on, boy.” She started toward the porch, but the dog didn’t budge. “Wilson!”

He sat down, and stared forlornly at the bushes.

*Bad dog? No bone...?*

She ran back, and got down on her knees, and pleaded with him. “Please, Wilson. There’s a bad man, here. We have to hide.”

He wouldn’t move. She tried scratching his ears. “Good dog, Wilson. Want to play under the nice porch?”

*Good dog! That’s better.*

Wilson wagged his tail, then bounded over to bushes, and looked back at her over his shoulder, expectantly.

*Bone...?*

She quickly retrieved the tusk, and ran with it. Wilson trotted alongside. She heaved it into the crawl space, and the dog disappeared, chasing after it. She kneeled down, and pointed her finger at him. “*Stay, Wilson. I mean it. You stay, there.*”

He barked, just once.

*No worries.*

The guests were rising from their seats when she returned. She smiled merrily at Margaret. “Are you off to see the ibis?”

“Not quite. Miles wants João to vacuum the Rover, first,” Margaret replied, resignedly. “Meanwhile, we’re going for a tour of the garden. Want to come?”

The Colonel was an avid gardener, and took delight in pointing out all the exotic varieties of orchids for the guests. They walked as a group through the aisles of blooms. Margaret’s dahlias made a big impression.

“Everything is so lush, here,” one of the women enthused. “And your little pond is just lovely!”

The landscaping looked rather new, but the spiral arrangement of river stones had turned out well. The water lilies had kept their blossoms, and the river turtles seemed quite at home. João had been feeding them.

“Are those some of your sea turtles, Colonel?” she continued. “The ones you...mentioned? Colonel...?”

When the Colonel didn’t answer, Emily glanced over at him. His eyes were riveted on the pond, and his lip was trembling. She continued to watch him.

“No...they can’t be...” he stammered.

The woman waited, fully expecting the Colonel to launch into a tour-guide monologue about turtles, just as he had with the orchids. But he continued staring idiotically at the pond.

Emily felt a professional responsibility to say something, as the resident herpetologist. Colonel Mendes knew nothing about reptiles.

“These are a fresh water species - riparian spotted turtles - from the riverine estuary,” she explained. “Sea turtles are much larger. Mature females can weigh up to five hundred kilograms. The ones nesting on the offshore islands are mostly green turtles, *Chelonia mydas*. We see an occasional *Caretta*. That’s the, ah...loggerhead.”

The woman rubbed her chin. “Oh, my. They certainly are big, aren’t...?”

Colonel Mendes abruptly cut her off. "This pond was added quite recently. Isn't that so, Margaret?"

"Why, yes. That's true," Margaret replied. "The landscaping isn't quite finished, actually."

"I was very surprised to see it. And saddened. The dahlias growing here were exquisite. May I ask what prompted you to dig them up?"

The Colonel's odd behavior had already aroused Emily's suspicion, and the edge of hostility in his voice confirmed it. She felt certain. Colonel Mendes knew about the cache of poached ivory.

She cast a worried look at Margaret, praying that she had somehow picked up the clues, as well, and would respond warily. It seemed unlikely. She was too miffed at the Colonel for having the temerity to criticise her garden.

"Frankly, Colonel, I don't care..." she began.

Emily interrupted, brashly. "It was just the oddest thing! We woke up in the morning, and here was this huge hole, right in the middle of the garden. Honestly. The flowers had been trampled. Dirt was scattered everywhere.

"I found scores of paw prints. Hyenas. Well, that's what I thought, at the time...of course, they might have been left by wild dogs. The tracks look much the same, and I'm not an expert on mammals...or anything. Only a herpetologist..." She smiled. "You're forced to specialize, you know. Studying the sciences."

Emily knew she was on the verge of blithering, but had left herself no choice, after committing herself to the story about the dogs, before she had invented a plausible ending. She couldn't very well have them unearthing elephant tusks. Wild dogs might cart off fresh bones, perhaps, but not the ivory.

Then, it came to her. She spoke succinctly.

"It was undoubtedly the bone meal. That was it, you see. The reason they were digging? They smelled the bone meal. Margaret uses a lot of it to fertilize her flowers. Don't you, Margaret?"

Margaret was too taken aback to say anything.

"There would be some residual dried blood, I should think. Mixed in, with the meal. Needless to say, we've stopped using animal-based fertilizers."

"What a charming story!" the Belgian woman exclaimed. "Your pond was dug by wild hyenas!"

“Almost unbelievable, isn’t it?” Emily glanced at Colonel Mendes, and smiled. He seemed morose, and said nothing.

Miles came walking toward the garden, to gather the guests for their excursion into the swamp. Emily declined an invitation to join them, and the Belgians fell into line, and trooped off toward the Land Rover, with the Colonel in tow.

Margaret stayed behind, to barbecue the boar. She started giggling, as soon as the doors of the Rover slammed shut. “Hyenas...?”

“Mendes knows about the bones,” said Emily, excitedly.

“You think?”

“Of course! He was literally trembling.”

Margaret looked dubious. “He’s always been a bit strange. Maybe he was just surprised, at finding a pond in the garden.”

“I can’t believe you didn’t notice. He was nearly apoplectic with *rage*, Margaret!”

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The Belgians dressed for dinner. They inaugurated their celebration rather formally, with a champagne toast to the scarlet ibis, but grew increasingly festive with every newly-opened bottle. The men removed their suitcoats, then loosened their ties, and by the time they pulled out their cameras, to use up their last few frames of film, they were appallingly drunk.

One of the wives prised a rib bone from the carcass of the barbecued boar, and began gnawing off the meat.

They mimicked the posture of hunters, while holding their binoculars and telescopic lenses; and Miles took the group photos. Emily donned her safari jacket, and joined them in a few poses, to add some local color.

“Take a couple with everyone gathered around the Colonel,” Margaret implored.

Colonel Mendes had slumped into his chair, at the head of the table. He brusquely waved the suggestion aside, and, in the process, swept his champagne glass off the table. It shattered on the wooden patio deck. He morosely uncorked the Napoleon brandy, and drank some, straight from the bottle. His mood hadn’t improved.

“Sounds like your boat’s coming, Colonel,” Margaret said, listening to the unmistakable thump of a diesel engine, echoing through the trees. He mumbled something unintelligible.

She ripped a piece of aluminum foil from the platter holding the remains of the roast boar, and began piling scraps of meat on it, for him to take along, for his crew.

The Colonel rose unsteadily to his feet. “You owe me...money,” he muttered.

Margaret didn’t understand him. “Pardon me?”

He came closer, and spit. “The departure tax! You must pay me!”

The Colonel had imposed the tax, on every visitor to the lodge. Twenty American dollars, in cash. Miles kept the accounts, and delivered the envelop every month, when they made the trip to town, for supplies.

“You want it...right *now*?”

A cold, contorted smile came over his face, as he glared at her. He almost shouted. “You’ll never get away with it! You can’t escape me!” He grasped the back of a chair, to steady himself, then lost his balance and fell heavily into it.

Miles hurried over. “Anything wrong, darling?”

Margaret made light of the outburst, given the bottle of brandy the Colonel had consumed, on top of the bubbly. “Nothing to worry about, really. Could you look after the Belgians? Try getting them off to bed, before they pass out on the lawn.” She went into the lodge, to get Colonel Mendes his cash.

The Colonel shoved the bills in his pocket, apparently mollified by the money, and staggered off to meet his boat, without another word.

He forgot to take his meat. “Can I have some of this?” Emily asked, peeking inside the foil package, and nibbling a small piece.

Margaret wondered how Emily could possibly find room for any more meat. Then she noticed the condoms, resting on the chair. Of course. Murray. He had missed the special barbeque dinner.

“Sure. Here.” Margaret slipped a bottle of champagne from the case, and placed it alongside the meat. She reached over, and patted the case of condoms. “Might as well do this properly.”

Emily plucked up the bottle, and returned it directly to the crate. “Come on. This is serious,” she emphasized, pointedly showing her the envelop from Doc, before packing it away in her rucksack, along with the meat.



“Just trying to help.” Margaret grinned. “Seriously. You’ve only got a couple days left to do it, if you know what I mean.”

Emily had to walk past the porch, in order to fetch her bike. Wilson cautiously edged out his paws, and whined.

*Bad dog...? No dinner?*

Poor Wilson! He had stayed put, even while they were barbequing all that meat. Smelling it, for hours. She kneeled down, and stuck her head under the porch.

“Good dog, Wilson! Have I got a treat for you, in here!” She patted the rucksack, then reached in and scratched his ears.

Wilson licked her fingers.

*Oh, nice! Pork fat.*

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Doc had put together an impressive package. The visa was stamped directly onto a page cut from a genuine American passport, so that Murray could simply glue in the entire page. A pair of entry and exit stamps from Zanzibar were affixed to the other side, making it appear as if Murray had already been there.

“It doesn’t match very well,” Murray said, holding it next to the watermarked pages in his own passport.

“Can’t we moisten it, a little?” Emily suggested.

“Yeah, I guess. It looks official, enough.”

Murray thought the job that Doc had arranged for him sounded a little strange. “Counting fish? What kind of job is that? Counting fish?”

Emily glanced again at Doc’s note. “Well, that’s what he says. *Going out on a prawn trawler, to count fish.*” She discovered a UNESCO identification card at the bottom of the envelop, one identical to her own. “Look! You’re working for the same people as me.”

Murray examined it, and seemed pleased. “Fisheries Conservation Officer. Not bad. Kinda suits me, huh?” Doc had included a sheet of self-adhesive laminating plastic, to make the ID look official, once they attached the photo.

Emily skimmed through some of the documents. She read a few pages, then gasped, suddenly, and slapped the envelop down onto the table. “Oh, this really pisses me off. You’re making more money than I am! It’s not fair!”

Doc had already dispatched the dhow. It would pick up Murray on Ihla Fanduzi - at noon, the morning after next - and sail back north along the Tanzanian coast. The permanent visa would be legal, anywhere in Tanzanian waters, but not in Mozambique.

So Mendes was still a threat. Murray had to get safely aboard the dhow, without being seen; and, then, sail out through the break in the barrier reef, and into the open ocean, without being intercepted.

"You could still stay here, you know. Until Doc can arrange a transit visa for Mozambique," Emily hedged.

"Doc said it might take a month!"

"So?"

"After what happened tonight, it seems pretty risky, staying here. Mendes might show up again, anytime."

Emily knew he was right, but she had hoped to spend three or four more days with him, at least. She had to say it. "I'm really going to miss you."

Murray reached out, and gave her hand a squeeze. She moistened her lips, and leaned forward, hoping that he would take the hint, but he never even looked, and just dropped her hand.

"Wilson has become really attached to you," he said, tenderly.

The dog lifted his muzzle from his dinner bowl, and turned around.

*Hey! Great dinner!*

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"Have you seen Murray?" Emily asked.

Margaret rolled onto her side on the chaise lounge, and shifted her sunglasses down her nose. She lightly shook her head.

"I've searched everywhere."

"Well, it's not as if there's really anywhere to *go*. He'll turn up."

"But he promised we'd have lunch together." Emily frowned. She didn't know where else to look.

"I saw the dog, a while back. On the beach."

Emily had already scanned the shoreline, several times, and searched for footprints in the sand, but it wouldn't hurt to look again.

"Where's Miles? Maybe Murray's with him."

Margaret sighed. "He decided to drive up to Lindi, for the game auction. He won't be back until tomorrow."

Emily was surprised. Lindi was across the border, in Tanzania, and a six-hour trip, at least. Over dusty, pot-holed roads. The entire

stretch within Mozambique was still littered with the burned-out, twisted wreckage of scores of vehicles.

It wasn't all that safe, either. Soldiers had been demobilized, from both sides, with virtually no chance of finding work. Some had kept their weapons, and were resorting to banditry, to earn a living.

"He's thinking about buying a giraffe," Margaret said.

Emily was even more surprised. Miles hadn't said a word about it.

Margaret read the confusion on her face, and felt obliged to explain. "We had a little tiff."

"Oh. So that's it."

"I could just strangle him. The Belgians wanted to see the squatter camp before they left, so Miles took them on a guided tour. He drove them around in the Rover, with the air conditioning turned on, and stopped, every so often, so they could roll down the windows, and poke out their fancy video cameras.

"It's just so sordid...videotaping the misery of those poor people. Miles says it's *interesting*. You know...that some of their shacks are made from old, rusted-out oil drums.

"I suppose it is rather ingenious - how they manage to unroll the metal, and batter it flat, and all - but that doesn't give him the right to turn that squalor into a tourist attraction. Have you been over there, lately?"

Emily shook her head.

"You start to think that it can't possibly get any worse...but, then it does. The two families that arrived last month have started raiding gardens, to feed their kids. There's going to be trouble. I can feel it."

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Emily found Wilson crouching close to the water's edge, intently tracking a great blue heron, as it waded slowly through the shallows, searching for sea snakes. She whistled.

Wilson pricked his ears, and straightened up, as he relaxed his stance. The heron took flight. He barked, and charged into the water, but aborted the chase as soon as his chest got wet. Then, turned and galloped up the beach.

*See that? Almost got him!*

She side-stepped his playful attempt to plant his wet, sandy paws on her clean shirt, and wrestled with him until he calmed down. He circled around behind her, picked up a piece of driftwood, and gingerly dropped it at her feet. Then, looked up, hopefully.

*Want to play?*

She obliged, and hurled it toward the water. The flat, smooth stick soared on the wind, and landed well down the beach. Wilson sped off after it, giving chase even before the stick left her hand.

*Hey! Not bad. For a girl.*

After retrieving half a dozen more, Wilson still appeared eager, but he didn't seem too disappointed when she left the stick lying on the sand.

"Where's Murray, Wilson? Can you find Murray?"

*Of course.*

He barked once, but didn't move, at all, and just continued looking at her, panting. Emily picked up the piece of driftwood, and tapped it against the palm of her hand.

"Okay, Wilson. Let's pretend this is Murray." She jabbed the stick into the sand, so that it stood on end. Wilson lowered his head, and stared at it.

"Murray goes."

She mimicked walking, hopping the stick in little steps across the sand. Then, pushed it in edgewise, at arm's length, so that it was buried under the sand.

"Oh, no! Murray gone!"

She clasped her hands in front of her, and turned her head, this way and that, trying to appear worried. Then, covered her face, and pretended to sob.

"Poor Emily. Can't find Murray."

She peeked through her fingers. Wilson was gazing quizzically at her, with his head cocked. She bent down, brimming with hope, and rubbed his ears.

"I bet you can find him, can't you, Wilson? Come on boy! Let's fetch Murray!"

Wilson barked, and jumped up. He promptly dug out the driftwood, and laid it on the sand in front of her. Wagged his tail.

*Let's bring the stick!*

Emily shook her head, and kicked it away in frustration.

*Hey. No worries. I'll carry it!*

Wilson snatched it up, and trotted off. He soon glanced back over his shoulder, and stopped, realizing that she hadn't followed. He circled back, and crouched down on his forepaws, before making another short run along the beach. Then, stopped again. Waited.

*Come on!*

Emily balked when they reached the mangroves at the end of the beach, terrified at the prospect of entering the swamp. Wilson carried on, swimming across the shallow creek, and climbing a steep, vine-covered bank on the opposite side.

Miles had warned her away from the mouth of the creek. Told her he'd seen crocodiles, sunning themselves on the very same bank where Wilson stood waiting for her.

She took a deep breath, and waded cautiously into the muddy water. The black silt oozed through her toes. After watching Wilson, she was anticipating a swim across, but the water in the creek barely covered her knees. She bent down, and slapped the surface with the palms of her hands. "Go away! I'm warning you!" she yelled, in the direction of the swamp. She slapped the water, again. "I mean it! I'm a herpetologist!"

Wilson led her out of the mangroves, into open grassland. An undulating line of low, barren sand dunes paralleled the coast, stretching for miles. Murray was sitting on the summit of the nearest dune, with his knees tightly drawn up, staring out to sea.

"Good dog!" Emily kneeled down, and hugged him. Several strands of saliva dribbled off the edge of the stick. She made a move to walk up the sand dune, but Wilson stepped in front of her, and dropped the stick. The sand stuck to it. She wasn't keen to pick it up. "Later, Wilson. Okay?"

Wilson sprawled out on the sand, obviously declining to accompany her further. He lifted his eyes ruefully.

*You'll be sorry. He's in a rotten mood.*

Murray acknowledged her arrival with a brief glance, and a thin smile, before resuming his watch over the bay. She sat next to him on the sand.

"Lovely view," she said, after awhile. "I can't believe I've never hiked these dunes."

Murray didn't respond.

She counted twelve offshore islands, and a few indistinct green patches shimmered on the horizon. "Isn't that Ihla Fanduzi? Way out?"

"Uh-huh."

The steady monsoon winds had sculpted the sand into waves, as regular as those on the sea, and formed a thin crust over the surface, which crumbled and cracked into flakes around her toes. There were no other footprints. Even Murray's had already been erased by the wind. In

other circumstances, she would have enjoyed sitting in the quiet solitude of the dunes, but, now, the stillness felt oppressive, and she had to endure it, as a sullen silence.

Her frustration finally got the best of her. "So you've just been sitting here? All morning?" Although she had no intention of doing so, her question hung in the air as a rebuke.

"Guess I wanted to be alone."

"Oh. I see."

"I've been alone for months, sometimes. On my boat. I like it." He kept his eyes fixed on the horizon. "The solitary life suits me."

Emily decided that she had better leave, before she was reduced to tears.

Murray reached out and took her by the arm as she stood up. "Please. Don't go." He held onto her hand. "I'm sorry."

She sat back down, a little closer, and waited.

"I've been thinking about the time I spent camped out on Ihla Fanduzi. Some images from that week are vividly clear - the wreckage inside the cabin, the fire engulfing the hull, even the colored flames coming off the burning paint - but they seem like fragments of a dream.

"Before I poured the kerosene over her, I looked around on deck to see if there was anything left to salvage. The anchor chain caught my eye. I hadn't even bothered to untangle any of it, since I couldn't possibly retrieve it. The storm anchors were still shackled on - submerged offshore, somewhere - and they were just too heavy to lift from the inflatable.

"The sight of that chain disappearing into the water made it seem so final. So clear. The boat was dead. There was nothing more I could do. It was chained to that reef. Forever. Yet, it was equally obvious that my connection to the boat had been severed. Once I lit the fire, I had a completely clean slate. I felt incredibly free.

"But, now...I just feel numb." Murray ran his hands through his hair, before covering his face, and rubbing his eyes.

Emily sat quietly, trying to think of something to say. But Murray didn't give her the chance.

"I read this book, a while back. About modern art, and an artist named Kasimir Malevich. He thought that he'd captured the essence of artistic freedom. Its ultimate expression. He even tried to start a movement, based around it. Called it supremacism. Know what it was? The white square. A totally blank canvas. With even the tiniest brush

stroke - the freedom was ruined. You had to leave the canvas empty, in order to remain free.

"That's exactly how my life seems to me, now. A white square."

"But your life isn't a blank, Murray!" Emily protested. "There's wonderful things in it."

"Seems pretty bleak to me."

"All the experiences you've had, the beautiful places you've sailed through...you must have some lovely memories."

Murray slowly shook his head. "But that's finished. Don't you see?"

Emily instantly realized her mistake in dredging up the past. Murray had laid it to rest, out on the reef. He needed to focus on the future. "Okay. Say the slate has been wiped clean. That just makes some room, doesn't it? For new experiences? Besides, it's not as if you've lost everything. Wilson's still in the picture. How about him?" And how about *me*, she thought.

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"Face it, Emily," Margaret insisted. "You'll have to make the first move. Tonight."

"You think?"

"Seems like it to me. You'll have to seduce him."

"But...I can't! I've never...oh, I just can't!"

Margaret smiled. "Nothing to it. Just takes a little planning, is all. Come on. Let's rummage through the arsenal, and find you something stunning to wear."

Emily ran her fingertips inside the bodice of the sheer, lace negligee. "The cloth's awfully...thin."

"It's supposed to be thin."

"Yeah. I suppose. But there's a difference between looking sexy, and looking, well..."

"What?"

"Cheap."

Margaret rolled her eyes. "Please! It's pure silk satin. From Harrod's!"

Margaret handed her a small bottle. "And remember. It's *perfume*."

Emily hesitated. It was terribly expensive, she imagined. Margaret was unfailingly generous, but she was sensitive about her lovely,

imported treasures; and the perfume would be impossible to replace, in Africa.

The cut crystal bottle was so tiny, though. Maybe it was just a sample. They sometimes packaged fragrances like that, didn't they? So you could try a little bit, first? To see if you liked it?

She examined the bottle. *Wild Abandon*. Paris. "Maybe this isn't such a good idea."

"Why not?"

"I don't know. Murray might not like it."

"*Liking* has nothing to do with it. You know those sex attractants you're always talking about? Those pheromones, or whatever? The animals don't spread them around because they love the smell, do they? They use them because they *work*."

"But human pheromones are very complex!" Emily lifted the perfume bottle. "This is just another...scent."

"Hardly. Grilling bacon, fresh basil, lilacs...those are scents. But, *this*," Margaret emphasized, jabbing her finger at the perfume, "This is an extremely effective sexual attractant. Trust me."

"Oh. I always thought perfume was supposed to make you smell nice."

"*Nice*? Are you kidding? We're trying to incite *lust*, here. 'Nice' doesn't even enter into it."

Emily spent another hour having second thoughts, by which time she had waited too long to take her shower. The water was cold. The dinner dishes had used up some of the hot water - the solar-heated tank held only thirty gallons, or so - and Miles and Margaret had drained the rest. She towelled off quickly.

The negligee slithered down over her skin. Emily always wore cotton, and the silk felt surprising slippery. The mirror was lightly fogged, and she wiped at it with the towel. She assessed the negligee from several angles, trying to give it the benefit of the doubt.

But she was just too skinny for it. She could count her ribs through the silk, and the sheer fabric accentuated the pointiness of her tits. Made them look hard. And she was too pale. The swathe of white, sun-starved skin across her thighs really stood out, and made her hips look even broader.

She wasn't motivated to clean off the condensation, when the glass misted over, again. She didn't need to consult a mirror to know she wasn't seductive. Or, voluptuous. The lingerie couldn't alter the fact. It only made her look, well...silly. The muted, warm light from the kerosene lamp would be a blessing.



She pulled on her clothes over the negligee, and slipped the perfume bottle into her pocket, determined to go through with it. She set off down the track, striding purposefully, once her eyes had adjusted to the moonlight.

Murray was already asleep, the tool shed completely dark. She stopped short of the door, and pulled off her sandals, then fumbled clumsily with the buttons on her shirt, suddenly nervous. The land breeze had freshened, and felt cold on her skin, as it passed freely through the fine lace. She dropped her khaki shorts onto the pile, then retrieved them, and fished out the perfume.

The bottle held far more than she had imagined, and when she poured it into her palm, the perfume formed a little puddle. She daubed some behind her ears, and along the sides of her neck. Then, reached underneath the nightgown, and rubbed some over her breasts. The breeze lifted the negligee, funnelling up the intense fragrance, and she gagged. She instinctively covered her mouth with her hand, which was unfortunate, since it was still wet with perfume.

"Oh, damn." She'd used far too much.

She groped for her shirt, then sat down with it on the grass. She tried alternately spitting on the sleeve, and using it to wipe her face, but it soon became clear that she was just smearing the scent all over herself. Every pore reeked of *Wild Abandon*. It just wouldn't do.

She tiptoed past the shed, treading as softly as possible across the dry branches littering the ground. A few cracked, anyway, alarmingly loud.

João had built a crude shower next to the water tank - just a small, circular enclosure of lashed-together sisal stalks - and she ducked inside, and found a scrap of bar soap. The shower was too close to the shed to risk using it, so she followed the footpath down to the beach, feeling her way with her foot.

She slipped off the negligee, taking care to lift the straps with just her little fingers. The water felt warm. She waded out a few strides, and sat down in the surf, and started scrubbing.

The perfume had penetrated her skin. She couldn't get rid of it. The bar soap was virtually useless, in seawater, scarcely better than a lump of candle wax, and she dejectedly threw it away. She laid flat on her back in the wash of the waves, and wondered how long she'd have to wait before the shifting, sliding motion of the sand abraded away the odor.

She rubbed the sandy slurry between her fingers. It reminded her of kitchen cleanser. A heavy-duty scouring powder. Just what she needed.

Too bad she didn't have a towel.

She was shivering by the time she opened the door to the shed. The hinges creaked. "Murray?" she called, softly. "Murray? It's me."

She could barely make out his sleeping form, and thought she saw him stir slightly, before being startled by a sudden movement on the floor, next to the bed.

A low growl.

She took the full force of Wilson's leap, and stumbled backwards. The quilted rug slid easily on the worn hardwood floor, and it flew out from underneath her feet. Her head struck the door sill. The room went black.

*Emily!* Wilson circled around, and bent over her. *Oh, no. Bad. Bad dog.*

He started whining, and bent down to lick her face, but the smell of the perfume brought him up short. His nose twitched.

*Flowers?*

Murray was roused by Emily's fall, but awoke to the sound of Wilson's insistent whining. He searched for the flashlight. "Wilson? What is it?"

*Ah-choo!*

He played the dim torch light across the room, and saw Wilson backing away from a supine figure on the floor. Murray recognized her at once. He could hardly believe it. She'd taken off her clothes, again.

"Emily? What are you doing?"

He was too groggy to make clear sense of it, but suddenly realized that something was very wrong. Wilson never whimpered like that. He hurriedly stumbled out of bed.

"Emily?" He shook her gently, but she didn't move. Her skin felt cold. She was all wet!

The light was barely bright enough to see her, let alone reveal what had happened. He tapped the torch against his palm, but the light dimmed further. He cursed himself, recalling his reluctance to ask Margaret for another set of fresh batteries. He tossed it aside, and lit the kerosene lamp, before carrying her over to his bed.

Wilson followed on his heels, and sat down unhappily alongside the bunk, sniffing and pawing at his muzzle.

*Ah-choo!*

She moaned softly, when Murray lifted her head to slide the pillow underneath. He felt a huge lump behind her ear, through her wet hair. As he leaned closer, to examine it, the cloud of perfume enveloped him, with immediate, toxic effect. The scent was incredibly potent, and Murray had no immunity.

He started to sweat. Then, he lost control over his hand. It strayed from the back of her head, and moved lightly across her neck. Stroked her cheek. He trembled, every time he touched her skin.

Droplets of water had collected on the tips of her hair, and one fell, and rolled slowly down her cheek. He caught it with the tip of his tongue. It tasted salty. He lifted the wet strands of hair from her face, and combed them neatly behind her ear. The irresistible scent drew him closer, and he kissed her neck.

One of her nipples was poking through a hole in the loosely woven, lace negligee, like a fish ensnared in the mesh of a gill net. He reached down, and teased it lightly with his fingertip. The nipple rose, and forced its way further through the net, but was unable to escape, as the threads slowly tightened, and squeezed a crease into it. He bent down, and moistened it with his tongue, then pinched a few strands of the lace between his teeth, and tugged. The nipple popped back inside.

Murray slid his hand underneath the negligee, to retrieve it.

Just as Wilson jumped up, and planted his big front paws on the bed. He whined mournfully.

*What a bad dog. Poor Emily!*

Murray came to his senses. "Oh, Jesus...."

He pressed his hand against his crotch, and clamped his legs together. The negligee had bunched up around her midriff, leaving her exposed, and he hurriedly tried pulling down on the hem, but without much success. He covered her with the sheet, and hopped off the bed, and staggered to the door.

He leaned his head outside, holding onto the door jamb for support, and gasped for air, as desperately as if he'd been poisoned. Emily's clothes were arranged in a neat little pile outside the door. She had even folded her khaki shorts.

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"I don't think it's anything to worry about," Miles announced. "Probably just a mild concussion."

"Shouldn't we take her back to the lodge?" Margaret asked.

"We really shouldn't move her, darling." Miles turned to address Murray. "Her hair was wet, you said?"

"Yeah."

"Was it fresh water?"

"No. Salt." Murray wondered if Miles still doubted his story. He had seemed suspicious, at first. "Why do you ask?"

"Well, there's one thing that puzzles me. Her breasts are covered with tiny abrasions. They've almost been rubbed raw. I don't know how it happened, but I think she's been swimming in the surf. There's sand between her toes."

Margaret glared at him. "You undressed her? How could you!"

"I merely examined her, darling." Miles sighed, and took off his glasses, and wiped them with the tail of his pyjamas. "It appears that she borrowed one of your skimpy lace nighties. It wasn't necessary to undress her."

"But, you pulled apart her toes! You...cad!"

Murray grew irritated, listening to the two of them continue their bickering, and felt increasingly ashamed that he had meekly left the room, and allowed Miles to inspect every inch of her. He cursed himself, and his warped sense of decorum. Emily's intentions were pretty clear.

"Dammit! Stop! Both of you!" he demanded, finally.

They drew back, as if struck.

"Go home! Just...go back to the lodge, and get some sleep," he insisted. "I'll stay with her, until morning. Patience will be awake, by then. She can take over, when I have to leave."

Miles nodded his head. "I gave her an injection of Valium. She should rest quietly."

## NEGOTIATIONS

Tiny Abdullah weighed three hundred pounds. A considerable portion of that bulk resided in his hands, Doc discovered. He felt himself falling forward, as Tiny held on, following their handshake, but allowed his arm to go limp.

“So. We meet at last,” Tiny said.

“I’m sure you have many demands on your time, Minister.” Doc had desperately sought a meeting, after Claire got herself deported, but Tiny hadn’t returned any of his calls.

“Please. Call me Tiny. I appreciate your coming. Especially on such short notice,” he said.

“No worries. Maybe I can finally get a straight answer. I haven’t had much luck dealing with your real estate agent. The man is a nightmare to deal with, Tiny.”

He smiled. “You’re very direct, Doc. I spoke with him, early this morning. He said you’d stopped by his office, yet again. Would you mind telling me what this is all about?”

“It’s not a secret, or anything. I asked about leasing some space in one of your buildings in the dhow harbor. The old fish market.”

Tiny drummed his fingers on the desk. “Go on.”

“Well, like I told him. I’m planning to make some ice. Sell a few fish. But he refused to believe me.”

Tiny sniggered. “I don’t believe you, either. The building is in ruins. You can’t possibly use it.”

Doc shrugged. “I’m willing to undertake repairs.”

“What kind of repairs?”

“Well, we’d obviously need a new roof. I envision starting on that, straight away.”

Tiny was growing impatient, and drummed his fingers on his desk, again. “How much are you willing to invest in this...new roof?”

“Heaps, I reckon. Especially those elaborate archways, and tiny mosaic tiles...” Doc whistled softly, to himself. “I hadn’t even considered that. Matching the glazes on those ancient ceramic tiles is going to be expensive, isn’t it?”

Tiny stared at him across the desktop, with his mouth open.

Doc shrugged, and continued. “Oh, what the hell. It’s not our money. Thing is, Tiny, the renovation of the main market building will take six months, at least, but I can’t possibly wait that long to move in. I tried to explain the urgency of the situation to your agent, but the man

couldn't grasp it. Seems to me, I could take possession of the warehouse, right away."

The newer, stone building adjoining the fish market was in usable condition, and currently being used for storage, but it held only a few bales of jute coffee sacks.

"That's a fair-sized building, Doc. What are you planning to move in there? Your boatshop?"

"Well, there's my ice-making plant, to start with. It's scheduled to arrive at the end of the month, and I can't very well leave it sitting outside, on the quay..." Doc paused, for effect. "Plus, I've got to find room for all these condoms..."

Tiny's eyes widened.

"You'd have a better feel for this kind of volume, than I would, Tiny. What d'ya reckon? How much storage space would I need? For twenty-five tons of Japanese condoms, say?"

Doc unfolded the letter from Mori, and laid it open on the desk.

From the desk of  
KENJI MORIUCHI

Minister Abdullah,

I write this note to you, privately, to inform you that the Government of Japan wishes to resume humanitarian shipments of condoms to Tanzania. This decision will be communicated to the press, shortly.

As you are aware, many accusations have been made concerning the theft and misappropriation of previous shipments of Japanese condoms - not only by myself, but by members of Parliament, as well as the press. I have no desire to place fresh salt into old wounds. Rather, I offer my apologies for my ill-considered, and intemperate remarks regarding your character.

Nevertheless, the Government of Japan remains convinced that the security mechanisms at your Ministry are wholly inadequate. Consequently, we have engaged the services of a non-profit, charitable corporation - Dhow Masters Women's Health Clinic - to coordinate the distribution of our condoms in Tanzania, pending licensing approval by your Ministry. Please be advised that the Government of Japan is fully prepared to use its considerable resources, and influence, to secure prompt approval of this license.

I wish to avoid placing you in a politically awkward position. To that end, I have asked Doc to convey this note to you, and to initiate a frank discussion, well in advance of any announcement to the press. It is my sincere hope that you succeed in discovering a common purpose, and reaching an acceptable compromise, before this delicate matter is accorded widespread publicity.

K. Moriuchi  
Consul

“So. The little Jap wants us to have a frank discussion...” Tiny crumpled the note into a tight ball. “All right, then. I’ll be frank. I am very, very upset about this.”

“I’m sorry to hear that.” Doc wasn’t, really. But Tiny didn’t look all that upset, either.

“Don’t get me wrong, Doc. We can reach an accommodation about the condoms. I can see common ground, there. Probably somewhere around fifteen percent. No...it’s that racist, Japanese prick. Is he really a friend of yours?”

“Well...we move in different circles...” Doc hedged.

“Remember the grand opening of my restaurant, last year? I called, and invited him, and you know what he said? Said he didn’t dine with ‘baboons’. Or, maybe it was ‘buffoons’. Who knows. You can’t understand him, the funny way he talks. Either way, the man disrespected me. And he keeps on doing it, *all the time!*” Tiny hurled the balled-up memo through the open window.

“Mori did apologize, though. It wouldn’t have been easy for him.”

“Oh, hell. As long as he stays out from underfoot. He’s like one of those yipping, miniaturized dogs. Those skinny-legged ones, with the bugged-out eyes.”

“A Chihuahua...?”

“Yeah. Just like that.”

While Doc enumerated the possibilities inherent in the UNESCO offer, Tiny resumed tapping his fingers on his desk, almost as if he were operating a calculator, adding up the potential profits that might accrue from the proposed joint venture. His tone became increasingly conciliatory.

“I hope there’s no hard feelings, Doc. You know. About your woman.” Tiny unfolded his hands, as if it went without saying. But he said it, anyway. “She was really hurting my business.”

Doc sighed. “Yeah. I know.”

“Those were my markets. Damn woman! Flaunting her feminism, and spreading her condoms all over the place. Admit it, Doc. She was insatiable.”

“I want her back.”

Tiny grimaced. “Get yourself another woman! That one’s nothing but trouble.”

“Come on, Tiny,” Doc pleaded. “You know how it is...with women. You get attached to them...”

Tiny swivelled around in his massive chair, and gazed thoughtfully out the window at one of his dutiful, young wives, who was hand-



laundering clothes, in the shallow end of swimming pool. He nodded his head.

“That’s my third wife. Lovely, isn’t she?”

Tiny Abdullah’s house had once served as the residence of the East German ambassador, and was equipped with every modern convenience, but Tiny never allowed his wives to use the washing machine. Regularly hand-washing clothes was therapeutic for African women, he thought.

He had aligned himself politically with the Pan-Africanists, and maintained a traditional, African household, even at his modern residence, in the city. He had hidden the European-styled, brick bungalow behind a facade of thatched sticks, and created an African kraal, in effect, where his wives tended a token maize garden, kept chickens, and cooked the family meals over a charcoal fire, outside, on the ground.

The political sands were still shifting, but Tiny was gambling on a resurgence of Islamic influence in the region. The diplomacy of the Americans and Europeans was focused elsewhere, as evidenced by their lack of resolve in addressing the banditry in Somalia, and the genocide in Rwanda. Tiny’s anti-American rhetoric in Parliament had won him a loyal following among Islamic fundamentalists, and African traditionalists.

“You should take yourself an African wife, Doc. A woman who has been brought up in the traditional way, and taught how to behave properly.”

“I’m rather fond of Claire, Tiny.”

“But what makes you think you can control her any better, this time?”

Tiny was joking, Doc surmised, but he couldn’t tell, for sure, since his head was turned. “Control *Claire*? Are you serious?”

Tiny wheeled his chair around, and faced him. He lifted one of his large fingers. “All right, Doc. I’ll allow her back into the country. Under one condition.”

“Which is?”

“You get her circumcised, first.”

Hi Claire!

Good news. Tiny Abdullah has agreed to rescind your deportation order, as soon as all the papers are signed. That includes your signature, on the document nominating him to the Board of Directors of Dhow Masters, so mail it back, soon as you can.

It still might be awhile, though. Mori can't award us the contract for the condoms, until we have security on the premises, and lockable storage space for a minimum of five tons.

Interestingly enough, Tiny has offered to compromise, and allow you to fly back immediately, although at some cost. Specifically: he is asking for a gesture of respect, from you, which would demonstrate your willingness to accede to his authority, in the future. [He feels you acted rather disrespectfully toward him, in the past. A valid complaint, you'd have to admit.]

He will issue you a visa straight away, if you'll agree to have yourself circumcised, before you come back. [Worked wonders on his third wife, apparently. She had been moody, and meddlesome, before. The procedure causes some discomfort, apparently, but Tiny insists that it is considerably less traumatic than continual beatings, in the end.]

But it's an unreasonable demand, don't you think? I mean...we could have you done, right here, and it would cost us just a few shillings! With any luck, we'd find a sangoma who'd do it for the price of the razor blade. It's bound to set us back a bundle, in the States. I'm not sure if we can afford it.

Would be nice to have you back, though. Couldn't you take on a second varnishing job?

Doc

Golden Gate Park / Monday

Darling Doc,

Ha. Ha. I can envision several gestures I'd gladly make towards Tiny Abdullah, but none of them entail spreading my legs. Shit. It's degrading enough, just being demoted. Whose idea was it to make me the secretary of this supposed 'historical society'? [If you think I'm going to take this seriously, and start typing up your phony press releases for Mori, you can just forget it.]

I sure hope this crazy scheme works, oh crafty one. I couldn't face my friends at the Women's Center, if we end up handing Dhow Masters over to Minister Abdullah, of all people. They'd be devastated, after working so hard.

The UNESCO documents seem unexceptional. The project shouldn't be a hard sell, either. I can almost imagine Tiny spraining his wrist, in his haste to sign up for the grant money. He might balk at signing over the fish market to the non-profit. Just lay it out plain. The property is virtually worthless without renovation, brings in no income whatsoever, and all the while he's paying taxes on it. Contrast that to the compensation he'll receive if he agrees to the joint venture. First, there's his salary as CEO of the non-profit. Then, his 12% fee for managing the redevelopment, and acting the general contractor for the restoration. [And we both know that's only the beginning. He'll surely extract kickbacks from all the subs.]

The concessionaire's contract is a real plum. [I shudder to think of all the junk food, and the rubbish he'll sell as souvenirs.]

Whatever happens, I don't want Dhow Masters taking the fall. So take care to distance us from this Fish Market Historical Society. As well as your chum Tiny.

I miss our little garden. How is your hemp hedge? Have the girls blessed you with a second crop of buds?

Claire

“What’s this mean, here?” Tiny asked. “A ‘convertible’ grant? What’s that?”

“Well, the money we’re getting from UNESCO is a grant - free money, really - but, if we violate any of these conditions...,” Doc paused, and ran his finger down the page, over the paragraphs of fine print. “The grant *converts* to a loan.”

“A *loan*...?” Tiny drew back in his chair, and drummed his fingers on the desk.

“Right. And all the money which UNESCO invested in the redevelopment would immediately become repayable, in full. They’re simply protecting their investment, Tiny. No one is going to hand out two million dollars with no strings attached.”

“Pay it back? All that money...?”

Doc smiled. “Not much chance of that. The conversion feature is a formality, for the most part. But we might as well read through the conditions, eh?”

Tiny dismissed the standard clauses with a wave of his hand - prohibitions covering everything from neon signs to religious discrimination - but he balked at a typed-in section, which restricted future use of the renovated building to historically documented purposes.

“No worries, there,” Doc said, discounting it. “The place has always been a public fish market. We can flog all the fish we want.”

“So you’ve said. But, what if some other, more rewarding opportunities arise, in the future? Think about it. That market building will become a major tourist attraction, once its completely restored.”

“You can’t convert it into a casino, Tiny.”

“What about a seafood restaurant? Upstairs?”

Tiny had taken the precaution of hiring an historian, and the academic had unearthed several accounts, which proved that the ancient building had housed various other businesses, in addition to the public fish market. European spice buyers and captains of sailing ships found overnight lodging in the small rooms off the mezzanine; and visiting slave traders had dined on the balcony, overlooking the harbor. Activities which were essentially the same as accommodating tourists, Tiny reasoned.

“They come over on a ferry, don’t they? Buy a small souvenir bag of cloves?”

He hadn’t ruled out the possibility of expanding, and developing the site into a full-service hotel, but was inclined to heed the advice of his

second wife, who predicted that the bedroom suites would smell too fishy. It would be unromantic, she thought.

Doc shrugged. "Seems all right, to me. I reckon some enterprising fisherman would have marketed smoked fish, at one time or another. Some fast-food seafood. Ready-to-eat."

Tiny laughed aloud, at an entry on the next page of the contract. He was briefly overcome with mirth, and wiped his eyes with one of the large, flowing folds of his caftan. "Can you tell if a fish has been caught in a machine-made gill net, Doc? Just by looking at it?"

"I haven't a clue," Doc admitted.

"Well, you'd better learn, because they don't want you selling any." He shook his head. "What is this 'CITES', anyway?"

"It's an acronym," Doc said. "The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species."

## TANZANIAN COAST

Murray waited on the beach on Ihla Fanduzi, and saw the dhow on the horizon shortly after noon, making slow progress tacking into the steady monsoon winds. It took another three hours before it skirted the edge of the reef, and dropped sail in the lee of Ihla Fanduzi, in very shallow water.

The crew broke out half a dozen long, wooden poles, and began poling the heavy boat toward the beach. Murray counted ten men on deck.

He expected them to drop anchor, but they sent two lads over the side, instead, with long sisal ropes, which they swam ashore and made fast to the trees. The crew took out the slack, and continued hauling her forward, until there was barely a foot of water left under her keel. She settled back securely on the mooring lines, with her bow facing into the steady southwest wind.

One of the men climbed onto the forward bulwark, and waved. "You're Murray? Yes?"

Murray nodded.

He lowered himself into the water, and waded ashore, stopping a few strides short of the beach, and eyeing Wilson, suspiciously. "Dog bite, boss?"

Murray grinned. "Not unless I tell him to."

He held out his hand. "My name's Ali, boss. At your service."

They soon had a line of men wading through the shallows, balancing the gear from the cache on their heads, and muscling it aboard the dhow. Ali fretted over the bronze anchor windlass - fearful of scratching the patina, or even getting it wet - and entrusted four men to move it, as gently as a piano.

Murray packed up his sextant, and all his tools, and ferried them out in the inflatable. He brought Wilson aboard, with the last load from the cache. He thought they would promptly set sail, but Ali insisted on sending some men to scour the reef, and recover the bronze screws from the planking.

A few men calmly uncoiled their fishing lines, and dropped them off the stern. Wilson wandered over, and sat next to them, hoping to endear himself. Another man lit a fire in a little charcoal stove, and put on the kettle, for tea.

Murray grew increasingly anxious, alternately pacing the deck, and scanning the surface of the bay, searching for the black exhaust smoke from the Colonel's launch.

The crew returned from the reef with several buckets of bronze fasteners, but Ali sent them back ashore. They began harvesting long fronds of beach grass.

"What the hell is going on?" Murray complained. "Mendes might show up! We have to get offshore!"

"No worries, boss. His boat small, small. Bounce right off, no problem."

"He has *guns*, Ali."

"Nothing big, boss." Ali pounded his fist against the hardwood planking on the bulwark, and smiled confidently. "Hull very thick. Bullets bounce off, too. No problem."

Murray glared at him.

"Ten minutes, boss." Ali pointed toward the beach. "See? Men coming, now."

The dhow had no cabin, although a area near the stern had been covered with woven matting to provide some shade. Ali lifted one corner of the mat. "Captain? Ready for going, now."

Murray was surprised to see a man crawl out from underneath it, awakened from an afternoon nap, apparently. He was a dignified-looking old salt, with a short, white beard that accentuated the dark wrinkles on his face. He rubbed his eyes. One of the lads brought him a cup of tea.

"Captain Jonas is a *dhow master*," Ali announced. From his tone, it was obvious that he had a great deal of respect for the man.

Or, possibly, reverence for his position. Murray couldn't tell which.

The crew used the long grass to stop the sail, gathering up the heavy canvas, and lashing it to the long, luff spar. It was nearly sixty feet long - the trunk of a thin casuarina tree - and almost equal to the length of the boat. All hands pitched in to hoist it, and the enormous, furled sail. There was no sheave at the masthead, just a well-worn hole, bored through the stout, wooden mast. The rope squealed, overcoming the friction.

Captain Jonas ordered the bow lines cast off, allowing the dhow to naturally turn her beam to the wind, and drift slowly toward deeper water. A few men took up the long poles, and got her turned a little further, until she was headed downwind.

A sharp pull on the downhaul snapped the grass lashings, and freed the sail. The heavy canvas billowed out and came taut on its sisal lines, and the dhow surged ahead, toward the open sea. Shreds of grass drifted down over the aft deck, and settled into the water astern, and floated off in their wake.

Murray noticed the influence of the ocean swell, as soon as they cleared the reef. The dhow seemed to come to life, rolling a few times on the longer waves, and then settling into a more rhythmic, flowing motion. Her wooden frames began to creak. A few dolphins jumped alongside, and darted back and forth across the bow.

He felt exhilarated, taking that first, delicious bite into the open ocean, even though there was a bitter aftertaste to it, this time. He couldn't help remembering that he had sailed past the very same reef, seeking shelter from the cyclone. He had resumed his journey, from exactly the same place where it had stopped.

He looked back at Ihla Fanduzi. It seemed surprisingly insubstantial. Rather scruffy, and unappealing, really. Just one more anonymous coral island, where he had dropped anchor for a few days.

Of course, he couldn't forget the name of this one. Burial sites were commemorated, weren't they? Remembered? It seemed so absurd. He didn't have the slightest idea where either of his parents were buried. Whether there was a memorial, or not. Or what the inscriptions might say. He knew he'd never return, merely to visit graves, and hadn't even bothered to ask.

He wondered if he would ever return to Ihla Fanduzi. Walk the reef, perhaps. Visit the lead keel. It would be a lasting memorial. No one would attempt to salvage it. Not here. Not four tons of solid, cast lead.

Captain Jonas collared one of the younger lads, and handed him a battered, but sturdy plastic bucket. The boy began bailing, repeatedly dropping the bucket into a well by the stern post, hauling it up on a long rope lanyard, and dumping the water over the side.

The dhow leaked rather a lot, Murray saw. The bucket kept coming up full. Another crew pitched in, with a second bucket.

Wilson happily cruised around on deck, checking out all the interesting new smells. He hung his head over the bulwark, occasionally, and watched the water flowing past the hull. Looking for dolphins, Murray thought.



Ali walked up. "Sorry, boss. Forgetting give you this thing. From Doc." He held out a crumpled paper bag.

Murray unrolled it, and looked inside. "How in hell...? Doc sent a dog collar?"

Ali nodded. "Emily, she really liking one, for the dog. My uncle, he making this," Ali explained, fingering the collar, and smiling proudly.

Murray examined the finely-tooled leather, and hand-wrought brass buckle. "Thank him for me, Ali. It's beautiful."

"You wanting some shoes, maybe?"

Wilson was slightly unbalanced by the motion, finding himself unexpectedly at sea once again, and kept his feet splayed, and his claws out, to avoid skidding on the planked deck. Murray called him over.

He tried to buckle on the collar.

*Hey! What is this?*

"Hold still, dammit! Sit!"

Trust Emily to think of everything. Wilson would have to be kept on a short leash, in Zanzibar. Damn, feral dog. Doc had gotten it right, somehow. The buckle bar fit perfectly, into the middle hole.

"Okay. Off you go."

*Go...? Hey, wait. You mean...I actually have to wear this thing?*

The dhow was performing surprisingly well, for such a heavy, crudely-built boat. Murray made his way forward, curious to look down at the prow, and see how cleanly it was entering the waves.

The crew had gathered astern, where a pot of rice was simmering over the charcoal fire, so he had the foredeck all to himself. Several skeins of sisal rope were stowed in a long, shallow well, abaft the stem, and he spread them out to form a cushion, and laid down.

The emotional confusion of the last few hours had taken his mind off Emily, but now thoughts of her flooded back. He wondered if she still had a headache. It was an awfully big lump.

She would have read his note, by now. He closed his eyes, and tried to imagine the expression on her face, as she read it. He fell asleep, thinking about her.

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"Maybe you should take a couple more aspirin," Margaret suggested.

Emily flopped down into her chair, and began massaging her temples, while Margaret poured a second cup of tea.

“Oh, my headache went away hours ago. Now, I’m just dysfunctional. Miles must have injected me with enough Valium to put down a water buffalo.”

“Water buffalo weren’t listed.” Margaret grinned, and slid over the jar of honey. “He used the dosage recommended for an adult baboon. They’re about the right size, aren’t they?”

Emily sighed. “How would I know? I’m a herpetol...oh, God! He didn’t use that enormous dart gun on me?”

Margaret shook her head. “Don’t be silly. Miles has been dying to get his hands inside your pants.”

“Margaret!”

“The injection was only an excuse to rub a little alcohol on your ass.”

“Stop it! That’s not funny!”

“Want to read the note Murray left me?” Emily asked. She slid it across the table.

Margaret giggled as she read it.

“Well? Come on! What do you think?”

“Seems a little spineless, if you ask me.” Margaret carefully refolded the note, and patted it flat on the table. “But promising, nonetheless.”

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Dear Emily,

I can’t find Wilson’s bone, anywhere. When you come across it, stow it away for him, will you? We’ll be back for it, I promise.

I sat up all night, watching you sleep, and feeling like a fool. I’ve been confused, and wallowing in it. I’m sorry that I made you resort to such a drastic stunt.

Morning twilight has brightened the horizon offshore. I have to leave. I’ll write soon.

Fondly,  
Murray

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It was dark when Murray awoke. He saw the faint loom of a city - a Tanzanian city, he imagined - and decided he'd have a look at the chart. He fetched his flashlight from the duffel, having forgotten that the batteries were flat.

"Ali? Can I borrow your flashlight?"

"Sorry, boss. No light."

"How do you read your chart, at night?"

"Not needing chart..."

"You know where we are?"

"Sure, boss. Tanzania...? That way." He pointed in the direction of the glow, on the horizon. "No worries for getting lost, boss. Our Dhow Master, he's knowing every rock."

Captain Jonas seemed determined to refresh his memory, however, by visiting every one of them again. He closed the coast, after sunrise, and approached to within a few cables of the fringing reef. Large, rounded rocks marked the seaward edge, several of which were substantial enough to be called islets, and supported a few bushes, or stunted trees, which had sprouted from cracks in the rock. They skirted a few, incredibly close.

The rocks looked indistinguishable, to Murray, but Captain Jonas knew exactly which one he was looking for, and turned the helm sharply after passing it, and brought the dhow through a narrow passage through the reef, into a small basin. Several fishing dhows were beached next to a grove of coconut palms, at the head of the cove.

One of the lads dove over the side with a bight of the anchor rope, and looped it over a dead, mushroom-shaped coral rock. An underwater bollard.

Several of Ali's relatives lived in the village. They owned the local store. His cousins paddled out, and picked up a consignment of packaged foodstuffs, and two bales of charitable, second-hand clothing, which Ali bought at auction, in Dar es Salaam. He accompanied them ashore to have tea with his uncle, and get reimbursed for the goods.

The cook relit the charcoal fire, and began heating the water for a large pot of maize porridge. Captain Jonas sent a few lads ashore, to gather fresh, grass lashings, then laid down under the woven matting and went to sleep. Wilson followed suit.

This particular run to Zanzibar wasn't going to be an express service, Murray realized.

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The trading dhows followed long-established routes through the myriad inshore channels, which allowed them to stay in smoother, sheltered waters, where the leaks through the caulking slowed to a more manageable level.

Captain Jonas followed the trend of the coast around a headland, and brought the dhow into a spacious, sheltered bay. Murray wished he had a chart. The crew broke out the long poles, once again, and began poling for the town. Several smaller dhows were pulled up on the beach.

They would spend the night.

Murray walked into the town, hoping to find a bakery, or, failing that, at least some fruit for sale. A few children tagged along. The path opened out into a wide, straight thoroughfare of sun-baked mud, obviously intended to accommodate vehicle traffic, but bearing only a few bicycle tire marks, and lots of footprints.

The place had fallen on hard times. The harbor had once been a port of entry, and the ruins of a wharf jutted out of the water, near a row of crumbling cement pillars, which was all that remained of the Customs warehouse.

The town looked dried up, and shrivelled, as if the last vestige of prosperity had vanished, along with the harbor facility. There were no trees, or shrubbery. No color, at all. Just two rows of dusty, desolate, cement buildings, paralleling the road.

It was impossible to tell where the dirt road ended, and the individual properties began. Even the floors inside the houses consisted of smoothly swept, hardened, reddish mud. The dwellings almost appeared abandoned - had no doors or window coverings, and virtually no possessions were visible inside them - but smiling children emerged from almost every one, as Murray walked past. More followed along.

Two women were sitting on a wood plank in front of one hut, with a handful of tomatoes and green beans for sale, spread out atop a colorful scarf, on the ground.

Murray came upon what appeared to be a store, distinguished solely by its substantial wood-planked door and raised window shutter. He looked inside. The shelves covering the walls were completely barren, and the entire inventory was arranged on a small table, inside the open window. Four large bars of soap, two partial packs of cigarettes and a few boxes of matches, and a cracked glass jar containing several dozen plastic-wrapped pieces of hard candy.

He passed several more women selling the small, misshapen tomatoes, but found no fruit on offer. There was no market, apparently.

There was a cafe at the end of the street. Several men were seated inside, gathered around two wobbly-looking tables, drinking tea. They scrutinized him. Said nothing.

There was no need for a menu, as everything was laid out inside a glass-fronted display case. A bowl of cooked rice, some smoked fish, and a lovely-looking plate of golden-crusteD, homemade bread, cut into small wedges. The proprietor was leaning up against the case, smiling broadly. He had no teeth.

"You liking something?"

"Do you have any more bread?" Murray asked. There were only four or five bite-sized pieces on the plate. "A whole one?"

"Can bake for you. No problem." He casually pointed over his shoulder toward the kitchen, visible through the window, on the ground out in back. A covered aluminum pot was spitting steam, over a small wood fire. The blackened, square metal tin resting alongside was probably the oven.

"Great." Murray wondered if he had enough flour.

The man held up a huge baking pan. "You needing two, maybe? Three?" He wanted to communicate further, something beyond his command of English, apparently, and turned away from Murray and spoke rapidly in Swahili to one of his customers. The man smiled, and pushed aside his empty teacup, then rose from the table and walked the few steps to the display case.

"Welcome," he said, with a broad smile. "The baking will take a few hours. Will that be all right?" He spoke perfect English.

Murray shook his hand. "Sure. No problem."

He introduced himself as the school teacher. He seemed an inquisitive, gregarious sort, and Murray wasn't surprised when the man invited him back to his home for tea, to pass the time while the bread was in the oven. The community would seldom entertain foreign visitors of any description, so Murray knew he was a prize, of sorts. A rarity. Someone from somewhere else.

They passed the school on the way, and stopped.

About the best that anyone could say about the building was that it had a decent roof. The doorway had been rectangular, once, but huge chunks of the cement had fallen away, leaving the ragged sort of opening you might see in a building undergoing demolition. The school was self-destructing, however.

A scrap of plywood had been painted flat black and fastened to one wall, to serve as a chalkboard. It had become infected with dry rot, and the lower edge was crumbling away, forming a mound of digested wood powder along the base of the wall. The residue of several lessons had accumulated on the usable portion of the board, superimposed over one another, amid a dusty smear of chalk.

Sapling poles had been set into the hardened dirt floor, and supported a row of roughly-hewn wood planks, as bench seating. There were five planks, in all, and room for thirty, perhaps thirty-five pupils. It was a Tuesday, mid-morning, and Murray wondered why none of the kids were in school. There had been at least fifty school-age children tagging along behind him, at one point.

"I have eight students, at the moment," he said, in response to Murray's query. "Few families can afford the school fees."

"You mean for books, pencils...things like that?"

"There is a small, yearly examination fee, but the bulk of the cost is for my salary."

"Isn't this a public school?"

"Of course. Anyone may enrol. But I must charge them something, you see. Otherwise, I would receive no stipend, at all. And every child in the village would come to school. I cannot possibly teach so many."

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Zanzibar looked far more prosperous than any of the cities Murray had seen along the coast. The buildings fronting the roadstead were dazzlingly white, and appeared pristine, at first; but on closer approach, he could see that the paint was peeling, and the masonry crumbling, on many of the historic buildings.

They lost the wind about a half mile short of the entrance to the dhow harbor, after rounding the point, and sailing under the lee of the town. The crew unshipped all the long poles, and, using them as oars, they managed to keep the boat moving slowly through the water.

A long, cement wharf occupied one bank of the entrance, and a huge container ship was tied up alongside, being unloaded by a mobile crane. Murray was struck by the anachronism, as they rowed with their bark-covered sapling poles, bringing the archaic dhow into an ancient city, right through the shadow cast by the towering, steel hull of the modern ship.

He was alarmed to see several small fishing boats, lying dead in the water, in the middle of the narrow entrance channel. Murray knew it would be impossible to stop the massive dhow, by rowing with the thin poles.

It soon became apparent how the traffic separation scheme functioned. The smaller dhows scattered in panic, desperately seeking the safety of shallower water, where the larger craft would run aground, first. Boats continued to flee before them, until they came up hard against the mud, at the head of the harbor basin.

Ali engaged the services of a small fishing canoe, as a water taxi, and escorted Murray over to Government House, leaving the crew the task of warping the dhow into a vacant berth, between the boats already moored to the quay.

Murray routinely noticed the local dogs, in the places he visited around the world, and the few mongrels he had come upon in Africa were the skinniest, sorriest-looking critters he had ever seen. Wilson was a noticeably large dog, in any venue, but he really stood out, here.

People gawked at him, and everyone approaching on the sidewalk stopped, and stepped into the street. Murray had worried about how Wilson would respond to the constraint of the leash, but he trotted along happily, wagging his tail, and didn't accost anyone. Murray felt relieved.

Then, they encountered a street seller, tending a huge mound of dried sardines, heaped up atop a tarp, on the pavement. Wilson saw the fish, first.

*Wow! Look at that! A whole hill of fish!*

The leash flew from his hands, as Wilson bolted. He launched himself onto the pile, and began rolling around in the fish. The sardine seller started screaming. She soon attracted a crowd.

Wilson had only swallowed a few, but that was hardly the point. Ali slipped the distraught woman a handful of condoms, and managed to smooth it over.

The entry formalities required only a few minutes, in each office. Patricio Mwizi had cleared the cargo through Customs, in advance, and handed Murray several copies of the manifest. Murray produced his pen, expecting to fill out forms, but he pointed out that Doc had already signed for the shipment, on behalf of the Dhow Masters school.

Murray gulped, when he read Doc's brief description of the cargo. *'Boatbuilding supplies. Donated salvage.'* The form bore a bold rubber stamp. *DUTY FREE.*

The Immigration officer was cordial, and merely glanced through Murray's passport to find the first available page for the entry stamp. Wilson's quarantine certificate was waiting for them in the Health Inspector's office.

"That's it?" Murray asked.

"All finish, boss." Ali smiled.

The shortest route to Doc's boatshop passed through the busiest, most crowded part of Old Town, and Ali proposed hiring a taxi. Murray balked, hating the idea of being chauffeured around, like a well heeled-tourist.

"We don't have any Tanzanian shillings, Ali."

"Taxi liking condoms. No problem."

"Aw, man..."

Ali was staring at Wilson. "Plenty shops, boss. They selling fish..."

Jazz music was playing inside the boatshop, turned up loud. Murray saw no one inside. He was irresistibly drawn to the wooden sailboat under construction in the middle of the shop, and went directly over, for a closer look, while Ali wandered around, searching for Doc.

"Boss...?" he called, although too timidly to be heard above the music.

An electric power tool started up, inside the boat. The hull muffled the sound, slightly, but it was still loud enough to drown out the music. A platform of staging planks encircled the boat, like scaffolding, and Ali pointed toward a ladder. They climbed up.

"I really feel for ya, mate. Truly," Doc said, sadly shaking his head. He had been running his router, and was completely covered with paper-thin flakes of teakwood. They kept falling in front of his face. He closed his eyes, and vigorously brushed his hair. "It's a terrible thing. Losing a boat."

"Yeah. It was pretty dramatic."

Doc swept the wood chips off the settee, so they could sit at the saloon table. The table wasn't quite finished, and the inlaid, compass rose in the center was missing a few diamond-shaped pieces. "Emily told me what happened. I reckon I would have done the same. That channel isn't navigable in a bad blow."

"Well, maybe..." Murray realized that he'd spent more than a month, trying to second guess himself. Doc was the first sailor he had talked to, since the cyclone.

"It was bad luck, mate," Doc suggested. "The holding ground behind those reefs isn't the best. That coarse, coral sand is just too light.



I dragged anchor there, once. Close to the lodge. The anchor dug in, and seemed to hold, just fine, until the seabreeze picked up.”

Ali rapped tentatively on the hull. “Coffee ready, boss.”

“Are you looking for a job?” Doc asked.

Murray was confused. “I thought I already had a job. Counting fish.”

“Oh, that.” Doc chuckled. “No, that’s just something I had to arrange, before I could get you a visa. Ali can count the fish. He’s selling them, after all.”

“But...I’m flat broke, Doc,” Murray stammered. “I thought...”

Doc interrupted. “Wait, you don’t understand. You can collect the salary. You just don’t have to count the fish. What kind of job is that, for someone with your skills? Counting fish? Come on.”

Murray continued to look confused, so Doc went over the figures, and explained the various deductions. Ali was allocated a small cut of the salary, so he could hire an accountant, and Clive would be reimbursed for the prawns shipped over to the UNESCO office, for parties, and so on. Doc would incur a few expenses. Murray would still receive the bulk of the salary. Almost seventy percent.

“But what is the Fisheries Conservation Officer supposed to *do*, exactly?” Murray was accustomed to earning his wages, with hard work.

“I’m sure you’ll think of something. First, give Ali a chance to count some fish. You’ll need some data on the fishery, won’t you?”

Murray seemed unconvinced.

“S’truth. The data is piling up real fast,” Doc reassured him. “The trawler brought back almost four tons of fish, last week.”

Doc smiled encouragingly. “For the time being, why don’t you come to work for me?”

“Doing what?”

“Did you notice the big catamaran, anchored in the roadstead?”

Murray nodded.

“How would you like to take over as her charter skipper? I’ve been driving it, but I’d much rather work on my boat.”

Murray didn’t appear anxious to commit himself.

“The job’s not stressful, or anything. The boat only goes out five, maybe, six days a month. Sailing charters, for the most part.”

Doc explained the diplomatic nature of the clientele, and assured Murray that he wouldn’t have to deal with seasick tourists. The politicians puked, like everyone else, but loathed doing it in public, and seldom caused a scene.

Murray nodded, again. Either agreeing to take the job, or willing to think it over. Doc couldn't tell which.

Doc seldom had visitors at the boatshop who were as knowledgeable as Murray, and he gave him the full tour. Murray wasn't a talkative sort, ordinarily, but he dearly loved talking about boats. They discussed some of Doc's designs in intricate detail.

"This is brilliant, the way you've arranged this," Murray commented, trying out the swivel chair, at the chart table. "You can brace your foot, here, and still have both hands free..."

"Truck's here, boss," Ali shouted.

"I had them bring all your gear," Doc explained. "You can store it in the shop, until you figure out what to do with it."

Murray felt relieved. The salvaged gear from *Mavis* comprised everything he owned, really, but it was beginning to feel like a burden. He needed to be free of it, yet, he felt a responsibility to find everything a proper home.

"You know, I've got a beautiful, gimbaled lamp that would fit perfectly, right here."

Doc assessed the location, over the saloon table. "Yeah? Ya reckon?"

"You should look through my stuff, Doc. *Mavis* had solid, reliable gear. Not the dishonest crap they put on all those mass-produced plastic boats, nowadays."

"Emily happened to mention...what was that? An old, anchor windlass...?"

Murray nodded. "Wait 'til you see it. All the castings are phosphor bronze. Built in 1932."

Doc restrained himself. "First things first, eh? You must be starving. How about some tucker?"

Doc laid out a small feast. Garlic prawns, curried crayfish, fruit salad, fresh bread.

They had more prawns than they could eat. Doc peeled one, and tossed it high in the air. Wilson intently followed its arc, and carefully backed into position, surprisingly light on his feet for such an enormous dog. He rose up slightly on his hind feet as he caught it. His sixth in a row.

*Yes! Going for seven!*

"Oh, he's good, isn't he?" Doc said.

Friday, Zanzibar

Dear Emily,

So much has happened. Doc has given me a job, doing yacht charters. I have a white, captain's uniform. With epaulets, no less.

It is an enormous catamaran, and must be the same one he sailed down to Mozambique. I moved aboard, a few days ago. It feels like a luxurious, floating flat, rather than a boat, but at least I'm back on the water, again.

The main saloon is too plush to consider letting Wilson loose inside. [Imagine what he would do to a zebraskin rug, and white, leather upholstery.] It was rather musty, belowdecks, with no one living aboard, and the cabin still stinks a bit, from all the marijuana which Doc has been drying in the microwave oven.

I cashed my first paycheck, from UNESCO, but I have nothing to do. Ali counts the fish, and gives me a tally. I suppose I'll write some reports, eventually, but I have the feeling that no one will ever read them.

They took a Green turtle in the trawl, yesterday. Ali thinks it might have been struck by the heavy, steel doors that drag along the seabed. It was dead when they hauled it aboard.

Doc made a few phone calls, and an attaché from the French Embassy came over on the afternoon ferry, and escorted the iced turtle back to Dar es Salaam. [They had to borrow a forklift from the container terminal, to load it aboard the return ferry.]

It would be on the menu, by now. [The French Ambassador owns several restaurants, in the south of France.]

Tell Miles that Doc will make a few discrete inquiries, and try to obtain a price for the ivory, but beyond that, he'd rather not get involved. He says dealing with people who trade illicit body parts tends to make him a little nervous. You can sell virtually anything, here, apparently. Tiger paws, rhino horn, penises of all sorts. Doc appears to share your opinion about the sleaziness of the trade.

I might be able to see you soon. The UN Development Bank has asked to charter the yacht, for a week-long conference in the Comores. I could stop on the way down. Doc has already applied for the permits, at the Mozambiquan Embassy. I'll let you know as soon as I hear anything definite.

Wilson really loves his collar.

Murray

## SUTURES

Margaret was working in the garden, when she heard the government launch, steaming close offshore. It throttled back, slowing for a stop at the lodge, apparently.

She usually walked down to the dock to meet an arriving boat, but resented the intrusion, and decided to continue mulching her roses. If the Colonel wanted something, he knew where to find her.

He came striding up the path a few minutes later, wearing his pistol belt and camouflage fatigues, and leading a phalanx of armed soldiers. He issued a few orders, and waited until his men were deployed around the lodge, before mounting the steps onto the patio, and banging on the door of the lodge.

Then, he stepped back, and stiffened his posture. Smoothed out his uniform. Adjusted his beret.

Margaret watched from the garden, rather amused, and waited until he made a move to knock on the door, a second time. "Yoo hoo! Over here!" she shouted, waving to him over the roses.

"I have given my men an order to search the grounds of the game reserve," the Colonel informed her. "The Ministry has requested an accounting of all those listed as missing in action, during the civil war. Some soldiers were buried, here. I intend to find them."

Colonel Mendes slapped his swagger stick smartly against his palm.

Margaret was unimpressed. "How?"

It was a question the Colonel hadn't expected. "What do you mean?"

"I mean, *how* to you propose to find them? There are no marked graves, here, that I'm aware of."

The Colonel glanced over his shoulder, as two soldiers arrived, each carrying an armload of long-handled shovels. They dropped them noisily on the lawn. "We have various...intelligence reports. You needn't concern yourself."

Mendes took up a command position, in the shade of the mango tree, while his soldiers started digging. Under the porch, and among the dahlias. Around the pond. His subordinates stopped by his lawn chair, occasionally, to deliver progress reports, and receive their instructions.

Margaret brought him a lemonade.

His sergeant came running up, short of breath. His face was animated. "Someone has been digging, Colonel. We found three holes, back in those trees. There's loose dirt, all around them." He pointed toward the grove of panga-panga trees.

The Colonel shot a glance at Margaret. He rose from his chair, and snapped his swagger stick against his high-topped leather boot. "Call in the work detail from the garden. Step to it." He struck out confidently toward the thicket.

"No, Colonel," Margaret pleaded. "Wait...!"

Emily was peddling toward the lodge for afternoon tea, when the landmine exploded, frighteningly close. She braked to a panic stop, and dove for cover, into the tall, elephant grass. Her bike rolled on, and crashed into a tree.

She heard several screams, and then loud shouting, coming from the direction of the thicket. She cautiously parted the grass, and saw the soldiers, staggering around near the trees.

She instantly recalled Frikkie's admonition about running blindly into a minefield, and hesitated only a moment, before turning her back on the wounded men, and sprinting for the lodge, to summon help.

The soldier who struck the mine with his shovel had been killed instantly. Margaret found a sturdy, plastic trash bag for the sergeant, who volunteered to return to the thicket, and retrieve his body parts.

Several men were truly bloodied, but had sustained only superficial, shrapnel wounds. Miles took the opportunity to practice his sutures, and discovered that it was much easier to do a tidy job of it, without the fur.

A piece of shrapnel had grazed the Colonel's scalp, but the wound didn't require stitches. He was badly shaken, somewhat deafened by the blast, and sat meekly while Emily wrapped a gauze bandage around his head.

The sergeant decided against calling for an emergency evacuation, after learning that he needed authorization from the Ministry before the helicopter could be dispatched from Tanzania. He hadn't the slightest idea of how to obtain it, and Colonel was too dazed to offer any advice.

Miles had given him a shot of Valium. "You must keep him quiet," he told the sergeant. "Understand?"

"Yes, boss."

"We wouldn't want him to go into shock."

"No, boss."

"Okay. Off you go, then."

“Shame about your friend,” Margaret added, looking down at the trash bag.

“Yes, missus.”

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Emily found one of the soldier’s shovels lying on the footpath, when she walked back to retrieve her bicycle. Prudence had an old, heavily-rusted spade, which she used in the garden, but she would appreciate the strong, longer-handled shovel, Emily thought. It was a good one, too. There was still some paint on the blade.

She decided to take it, and was searching for some vines to tie it to the frame of her bike, when she saw a second, abandoned shovel, half-hidden by the tall grass. Its wooden handle looked even nicer - new, almost - with shiny, factory varnish.

An AK-47 rifle was resting on top of it.

\*\*\*

The explosion barely rattled the windows at the lodge, and Emily slept right through it. She was awakened by the commotion in the kitchen, afterwards, but rolled over and went right back to sleep, after groggily checking the time, and deciding that Margaret was having another bout of insomnia. It was four o’clock, and pitch dark.

The slamming of a car door roused her, again, at five-thirty, and she tossed around, uncomfortably, unable to explain why anyone would be out in the Rover, well before dawn. She heard an insistent, male voice, downstairs. Miles, she thought. Perhaps the two of them were having another tiff.

She heard a woman, crying.

The sobbing became almost unbearable, and Emily pulled her pillow over her head, hoping to block it out, hating the anguish she heard in it. Then, she realized it wasn’t Margaret’s voice.

Emily found Margaret sitting rigidly at the foot of the staircase, with her hands clamped around a mug of tea. The keening was coming from the kitchen.

“There’s been a landmine accident at the camp,” Margaret explained. “A six year old boy’s been killed.”

“Oh, no...”

“We couldn’t stop the bleeding. He lost...” Margaret leaned her head back against the banister, and stared at the beams on the ceiling. “It was his leg, you see.”

The bundle seemed so tiny. Emily didn’t recognize the man who lifted it up, and cradled it in his arms. Miles helped support the distraught, bereaved woman, as she followed the sombre procession out the door. He had blood all over his shirt.

Emily approached him when he had finished conferring with the men from the camp, who were gathered outside, on the patio. “Do you know what happened? Margaret said it was a landmine accident.”

“Well, the boy stepped on a mine, that much is clear. But it wasn’t an accident.”

The boy was stealing vegetables, Miles thought. Several residents of the camp had planted small gardens on game reserve property, and regularly accessed them through a hole in the boundary fence. There were plots of cabbages and tomatoes. Some millet. Thievery had become a threat, and someone had planted an anti-personnel mine on the footpath, just inside the fence.

Emily recalled what Margaret had said, about the recent arrivals at the squatter camp having no land suitable for cultivating gardens.

“How can you make sense of it?” Miles lamented. “Whoever laid the mine killed that boy for a few, lousy cabbages. They exterminated him. Like a garden pest.” Miles slapped his open palm down onto the table so hard, it frightened her. “Gotcha!”

“How would they have gotten hold of an anti-personnel mine, do you think?” she asked.

“They’re everywhere! It’s common knowledge inside the camp, apparently. Even the chicken coop is mined. João says they’re planted around the perimeter, like a security fence.”

“You believe that?”

Even as she asked the question, Emily realized it was probably true. There were army veterans in the camp, and many of them had worked for Frikkie, and would know how to handle the mines. They could have been stockpiling them, for years.

Miles sighed. “After tonight, I’d believe anything. There’s no law, here. Not anymore. The squatters know it. I tried to reassure them there would be an official investigation into the boy’s death, but they looked at me as if I was a bloody idiot. Not one of them believed me. Not

for a minute. They know Colonel Mendes won't go anywhere near that camp."

"Shouldn't we call him, though?"

Miles removed his glasses, and massaged the bridge of his nose. His eyes were puffy, and bloodshot. "Of course. We'll have to report the killing to the police."



Dear Murray,

I was worried I'd never hear from you, again. You know...after the perfume. I was just delighted when Eddie brought your letter.

I have thrown myself into my work, to the point of staying late at the lab, well into the night, sometimes, and missing dinner at the lodge. If I could arrange a hot shower, I would probably move in.

Even though I haven't compiled all the data, it seems clear that the number of turtles nesting on the islands will be down sharply, compared to last year. Might be as much as eight percent. I suppose your rotten trawler is partly to blame. It made me so mad!

The Herpetological Society has asked me to contribute to a study of sea turtle migration patterns, and sent down half a dozen waterproof radio beacons. I camped offshore last night, and attached one to the shell of a young Chelonia, while she was filling her egg chamber. She didn't seem to mind, at all. [I tied up my boat properly, this time!]

Miles and Margaret have been quarrelling more than ever, and the mood at the lodge is tense. In large part, it is simply a reflection of the increased tension at the squatter camp. I presume Eddie has already told you about the boy who was killed in the landmine trap.

There was another terrifying incident, a few days ago. One of the shacks was set ablaze, in the middle of the night. Several more children would surely have died, if the hut had been built with a thatched roof; but, luckily it was sheet metal, and they escaped with only a few burns.

The community has split into factions, and one group has dismantled their shacks, and moved them onto game reserve property. Miles has offered to supply them with building materials, if they stop felling the rosewood trees. Margaret is furious.

Of course, I'd love to see you. Maybe you can take me for a sail in your new boat! I'll try my best to keep my clothes on, I promise.

Love,  
Emily

## CORRESPONDENCE

“You’re blocking the flag, Mori. Move in a little closer,” Doc requested. He practically had to beg, before Clive would agree to raising a Japanese flag, alongside his Aussie one, and Doc wanted to be sure it made the frame.

Ali had recruited a few kids for the photo session, from among the crowd of street urchins who regularly met the incoming, fish-laden trawler. The kids were charmingly photogenic in their oversized, Mitsubishi T-shirts; and since Ali had been careful to select only the skinniest ones, they had the added virtue of appearing suitably emaciated. Mori and the kids were holding a basket of freshly-caught fish.

“Tilt the basket down, a bit.” Doc asked. “Perfect. Hold it.” The kids smiled constantly, so no reminder was required, and Mori was so stoned he couldn’t help himself.

Mori downloaded the images to his notebook computer, so they could view the results. The shots of the ice-making plant looked rather industrial, Doc thought, but Mori seemed pleased.

“Some of these tropical reef fish hold their color, nicely, don’t they?” Mori observed, scrolling through the scenes of the fish-sorting operation. “What are those exquisite, vivid blue ones?”

“Wrasse.”

“They look delicious.”

Doc shook his head. “They’re like fish-flavored leather, actually.” Ali had found suitable markets for the entire catch, however, even the wrasse.

Mori picked through the bag of fresh, jumbo prawns which Clive had set aside, especially for him. He took out one of the larger ones, and eyed it hungrily. “The fishing’s going well, isn’t it?”

Before leaving the harbor, they walked through the fish market, so Mori could photograph the future home of Dhow Masters. The historically authentic restoration would not be completed for months, but the shore-based ice plant was already producing ice inside the adjoining stone building, which was scheduled to house the Women’s Clinic. The structure had never been condemned, unlike the main market building, where workmen were busy removing the collapsed sections of the roof.

Ali had already opened the market for business, despite the construction headaches, and fish were being sold from temporary stalls

outside the building. Scores of shoppers were milling around the mounds of ice.

An official announcement had been posted on the facade of the building, extolling the redevelopment. The glossy photograph at the top bore the smiling face of Tiny Abdullah. His name was also emblazoned across the side of a shipping container, which he had parked at one of the market.

“You must take the utmost care, dealing with Minister Abdullah,” Mori cautioned. “The man is dangerous.”

Head Office  
Tiny Abdullah Construction  
Prime Contractor  
  
Future Home  
of  
Tiny's Fish Market Grille

Mori wanted a few photos of the Australian ice-making plant, since Japan was footing the bill for the fuel.

Doc led him on brief tour.

“We’ll put the retail sales counter, over there,” Doc said, pointing out an area which had already been partitioned off from the warehouse. One of Ali’s cousins was painting the wall. “It’s the best location to attract foot traffic from the fish market. Wholesale orders will be handled in back. There’s a double door that opens directly onto the quay.”

The distribution would be considerably less chaotic, this time. Eddie had finally convinced him of the wisdom of selling the donated condoms, rather than giving them away for free. Africans had too much time on their hands, Eddie reasoned, and too little money in their pockets. Without the disincentive of a monetary charge of some sort, virtually *everyone* would show up.

Mori asked to see the vault.

Several workmen were positioning a heavy steel door, inside an opening in the new, concrete wall. The walls were thick, and reinforced with lengths of recycled pipe. Inspector Mwizi had begun work on the security alarm system, and was installing wiring inside the vault.

“It should hold twelve, maybe fifteen tons,” Doc said. “Depends on the packaging.”

“The cartons are quite uniform, I’m sure.”

“Yeah? Well, I haven’t seen one, yet.”

Mori smiled, and bowed slightly. "Smoking some marijuana might improve your mood, my friend."

It did, usually. Sometimes, not. After they shared a smoke back at the boatshop, Doc was still a little depressed.

"I just hate it when I'm not getting any work done on the boat, Mori. You know, I've seen boats that were fifteen years in the building, or more, and they never even saw the open sea. They attach themselves, or something. Like mussels. The longer you drag out the work, the harder it gets, prying them out of the shed."

"But you're almost ready to launch the boat! I can't believe how much lovely woodwork you've finished. You've worked very hard since Claire left."

Doc sighed. "Working takes my mind off how much I miss her."

"Ah...yes. Claire. Have you made the arrangements with Minister Abdullah?"

"I reckon. He's already agreed to let her come back. But he won't sign the order until his share of the condoms are in the vault, and his concessionaire license is approved by UNESCO."

"I spoke with the American Ambassador about the redevelopment. He was rather upset," Mori related.

"He called you?"

Mori nodded. "The Americans will be funding the restoration work, and resent the fact that Tiny stands to profit handsomely from it. His seafood restaurant should do well in that venue, overlooking the harbor. They have been at odds with Minister Abdullah, for...oh, it must be more than a year, now. Ever since he accused them of deliberately spreading the AIDS virus. You should expect a call from Ambassador Jones. He wants to meet with you, to express his concerns."

"Great. Just what I need." Doc sighed. "Another 'fun' meeting to look forward to. I can hardly wait."

"Doc...? Would you say that I'm a racist?" Mori asked, changing the subject.

"Of course." Doc replied, without the slightest hesitation. He had mulled up one his largest buds for Mori, and there was more than enough left to roll another smoke. He reached for the plate.

"My...is it as obvious as that?"

"No. You hide it very well." Doc neatly trimmed the ends of the joint, and lit it before passing it to Mori.

Mori inhaled deeply. "I dislike causing offense. But let me ask you. Do you not find the features of African women rather, well...unattractive?"

"It's hard to generalize, Mori. I like all kinds of women."

"But there are predominant racial characteristics, are there not? Some prefer the rose. Others the lilac. Certain traits naturally attract or repel me. I cannot choose which. Call it genetic. Instinctual. Whatever you like."

"Okay. Let me guess. You prefer petite, small-breasted women. With no body hair."

Mori laughed. "I am not so rigid as that, my friend. But I could never love a woman with kinky, pubic-like hair on her head. I find it unpleasant. Don't you believe there's a connection? Between sexual repulsion, and racism?"

"Beauty. And the beast. That it?"

"Precisely."

"Well, if there is a connection, it can be overcome."

"*How?* How can it be overcome? By *reason?*" Mori shook his head. "In most people, reason sleeps. And as we know, the sleep of reason produces monsters."

Dear Emily,

This conflict at the squatter camp has me really worried. Eddie thinks the place is headed for anarchy. He says the scenario has played continually, throughout Africa, and always with the same ending. The authorities become so corrupt they lose legitimacy; and, then, so inept they lose control. Armed factions form, in the vacuum, and fight over the scraps.

I will try to find a decent single sideband radio for the lodge, so you can contact us here, directly. Eddie can bring it down. Meanwhile, you should take precautions. If you do nothing more than hide a canoe and a paddle, at least you'll be able to escape to the safety of the islands.

Looks like I'll be sailing over to the Comores. Doc retrieved my passport from the Mozambiquan Embassy, this morning, complete with the newly-stamped visa, and entry endorsement for the yacht. I'm supposed to clear in at the first available port of entry, which happens to be Mocímboa da Praia, so it seems likely that I'll meet the infamous Colonel Mendes, after all!

Thought you might enjoy reading a copy of the conference program. Check out the photo of the yacht, on page 12. Recognize the guy in the white uniform? Not bad, huh? Doc seems pleased to have me filling in for him. [He has an unusual, allergic reaction to uniforms, apparently, even white linen.]

The Prime Minister of the Comores will be aboard for the ocean tour of the Moheli wildlife preserve, which takes place on Saturday. [See the schedule, on page 3.] I have to get the boat over to Moheli in time for the reception, on Friday night.

Why don't you come with me? We could make an overnight passage across the channel, on Thursday, and sail back Sunday night, after the UN staff party. It should be perfect sailing. The wind will be right on the beam.

Wilson's not coming. I'll have you all to myself.

Murray

Dear Murray,

Of course, I'll come sailing! I can hardly wait!

I can meet you in Mocímboa, if you like. Miles had planned to make the run for supplies, anyway. He can give me a lift.

Miles has asked several times about the ivory. He's getting anxious, wondering if Doc has heard anything. He received a letter from Frikkie, with these newspaper clippings. There is a 'Truth and Reconciliation Commission' holding public hearings in South Africa, concerning crimes committed by the apartheid regime, and most of the details have come out. Frikkie says that the ivory was shipped to a 'Tiny' Abdullah. The name means nothing to me, but it might to Doc. Miles says he is a member of the Tanzanian Parliament.

I read the conference synopsis, and found the eco-tourism babble infuriating, as you can well imagine. A beachfront, tourist hotel? Those are turtle beaches! You start to wonder if these people have fallen prey to their own propaganda, and envision tourists lounging under beach umbrellas, sipping Margaritas, watching turtles nesting.

It is outrageous that the UN Development Bank has agreed to fund this project. I'm worried that I might lose my temper, in front of all the distinguished guests. Will I really get to meet the Prime Minister? That's a worry, as well. I don't have a thing to wear!

Eddie is exaggerating the threat posed by the squatter camp. The community obviously has some serious problems, but those people have already endured twenty years of civil war, Murray! They simply want to be left in peace, and raise their families.

The factions have started talking to one another, at least. Miles is negotiating with one group, who have threatened to cut another stand of trees and clear the land for new gardens, unless he provides them with an antelope. Needless to say, slaughtering game animals would set a bad precedent. He has offered to supply some maize meal, but they are holding out for the meat.

All my love,  
Emily

Hi Claire,

Tiny Abdullah is an ivory smuggler! I have the proof right in front of me. There's several newspaper articles from South Africa, describing a covert operation which was carried out during the Angolan civil war. Seems the South African Army organized the wholesale slaughter of Angolan elephants, and sold the ivory to raise money for the rebels. The tusks were shipped to Zanzibar, labelled as restaurant equipment, and then forwarded to China.

I also have a copy of an invoice signed by Tiny, himself. I asked Patricio Mwizi to examine the archives in Customs House, and he found three shipments which he believes originated in South Africa, even though the paperwork lists fraudulent ports of origin, in Angola. He made photocopies, for me. The consignments were addressed to the Clove Palace, Tiny's first restaurant. Foreign exchange controls were very strict, at that time, and Patricio thinks that he might have entered the ivory trade primarily to earn some hard currency. [For imported liquor and foodstuffs. Or a fridge.]

Interesting, eh? Maybe I'll put all the documents in a plain brown envelop, and post it to Ambassador Jones. The Americans would relish getting their hands on anything that might discredit Tiny, after the way he's demonized them.

Still no word from Home Affairs about your visa.

We haven't had any sailing charters, so Murray has been working full-time on our boat. Some real progress, at last. The painting jobs are accumulating, awaiting your return.

His dog chewed up both of your badger hair brushes. Better bring replacements.

Doc



Doc put a little more pressure on the socket wrench, and watched the bedding compound ooze out from underneath the flange of the windlass. It soon squeezed out, all around. "That's got it, mate. Starboard aft, next."

"Just a minute," Murray replied.

Doc heard him shifting around belowdecks, trying to get into position to hold the wrench on the next nut. The chain pipes were already in place, and he had little room in which to manoeuvre.

The bronze anchor windlass was truly a classic, and Doc was thrilled. It enhanced the appearance of the whole foredeck, in the same way that a beautiful piece of antique furniture finished off a lovely room.

"Ready. Tighten away."

Murray offered to help with the messy job of cleaning up the thiokol rubber sealant. The bolts and backing plates were completely smeared with it, down below.

"Nah. I can do that. If you still feel like working, why don't you carry on with the mainsail?"

Murray had set up his treadle sewing machine on the floor of the boatshop, and already made good progress on the sails. He'd been stitching feverishly, all morning.

"Brilliant. I'll make us some coffee, first."

Doc had found a home for most of the bronze gear that Murray had salvaged from *Mavis*. Stanchions, and deck cleats. Sheet winches. The bulk of the portlights. He had already installed most of it, even though they'd yet to agree on a price. Murray was trying to make up his mind if he wanted to buy Doc's old sailboat, *Exile*.

Doc had built that boat, as well, and sailed it single-handed for years, before he joined forces with Claire. It was resting in a cradle, behind the shop. The varnished Douglas fir mast was stored inside, suspended from the rafters.

The thiokol sealant was virtually impossible to remove, once it had cured appreciably, so Doc had to persevere, and finish cleaning up. Murray carried the coffee up the scaffolding.

"Didn't you find *Exile* rather crowded, with both you and Claire living aboard?"

"Well...it did feel small, sometimes. Especially when the weather was rotten, and forced us to keep the washboard in, and both hatches dogged down. But the bunk is pretty big."

From their vantage point high above the boatshop floor, Murray could look through the green glass skylight, and see the boat, outside. “Could you design a decent solid dodger, that wouldn’t ruin her lines?”

“Maybe. I’d worry about the windage, though.”

Murray was more worried about Wilson. There wouldn’t be much room for him down below, with Emily aboard. “If I take some measurements, and make a couple of rough sketches, could you try drawing up something?”

“Sure. No worries.”

Doc was keen to sell him the boat, to put it mildly. He had offered Murray a not-so-generous cash settlement for the bronze gear, and a somewhat more attractive package, which included condoms and prawn futures. But his best offer, by far, involved drastically lowering the price of *Exile*. The boat had been built to a very high standard, and was still in fine shape.

“You know, Doc, I think that losing *Mavis* was one of the best things that’s ever happened to me.”

Doc found the statement rather unsettling. He imagined that losing a boat on a reef would be similar to the sudden, violent death of a friend. Hardly one of life’s ‘best things’. To his way of thinking, that list included items like pistachios, fresh mangoes, marijuana...sunrise. Claire, of course. “Uhh...how so?”

“Well, I’d been granted a completely fresh start. Not many people are afforded that opportunity, and it forced me to examine my life. I had to *choose* what I was to become. It came to me almost like a revelation. I was free to live where I wanted. Do what I pleased. The horizon had never seemed so open. I’ve lived in so many different places and climates that I was never really concerned about the ‘*where*’. But the question of the ‘*what*’ remains. Of what there is in the world that’s really worth doing.”

Murray paused, and gave a little laugh. “I’ve certainly given it a lot of thought, since. I still sit up late at night, sometimes, staring at the reflections of the moonlight on the water, wondering about it. I wanted to be a farmer, once. Raise berries, maybe. Or cherries. But I know that I’ll never own any land. I don’t have the temperament to be an angel. Or the talent to be an artist. So it’s looking more and more as if I’ll just keep on sailing. I can’t think of any better way to live, really. Or anything more important to do, than simply doing as little damage as possible.”

Doc nodded in agreement. “Ain’t it the truth.”

Dear Emily,

Of course, you can meet the Comorian Prime Minister, as well as the French Finance Minister, the Vice President of the Seychelles...all the eminent guests. Doc was hoping you might agree to serve them drinks, actually.

You wouldn't mind, would you? Working as a hostess? Can't you borrow something to wear from Margaret? I mean, besides the skimpy, silk lace? You look fantastic in that, and incredibly attractive, but, you know...the Comores is an Islamic country. [Of course, you'd never know it, from all the champagne that Ali has been loading aboard the yacht.]

I'm thrilled you're coming. I often close my eyes and relive every detail of that last, enchanting night with you. How I watched the shadows flickering across your body, in the kerosene light. And how I kissed you. More than once. You were so beautiful. [And, sadly, so comatose.]

They weren't shared moments. I stole them, I suppose. But I don't feel like a thief.

I can't believe I left.

Fondly,  
Murray

Dear Murray,

Just a brief note, to let you know that the single sideband radio is working. Miles strung the antenna from one of the tallest panga-panga trees, and that has made all the difference. I called the satellite tracking center on Diego Garcia, which is monitoring the movements of the turtles, and our signal was 'loud and clear'. [One of my girls has already logged 1200 miles!]

The situation at the squatter community has taken another worrisome turn. It appears that some of the residents are armed. We heard several bursts from an assault rifle, earlier this week. Miles drove over to the camp, but couldn't find anyone who would even admit to hearing the gunfire. There was no sign of trouble.

João came across a small pile of spent AK-47 cartridge cases, the next day. Miles searched the area, and discovered a pool of dried blood, and, then, a line of drops leading away from it, in the direction of the camp. He tried to follow the trail, but lost it in the deep grass.

One of our zebras is missing. We fear the worst.

Love,  
Emily

## **A BUILDING BEST AVOIDED**

“You can’t bring these frozen fish, in here,” the Marine said, examining the styrofoam cooler. “This is the American Embassy.”

“But...they’re prawns...”

“Same difference. I don’t make the rules, buddy.” He pointed out the prohibition taped inside the bulletproof glass. No Food or Drink Allowed.

There was a whole collection of the vinyl-lettered signs, all of which struck Doc as being distinctly un-African. No Smoking. No Soliciting. No Shirt. No Shoes. No Service.

Everything inside the waiting room looked as if it had been ordered straight out of a Sears catalog, from the chrome-plated, naugahyde chairs and pastel formica counters, to the photographs of Arizona hanging on the walls. He could have mistaken it for a tacky hotel lobby in America, if it weren’t for the much more familiar sign, hand-written in Swahili on a recycled scrap of cardboard. Hapana Kazi. No Work.

“I have an appointment to see the Ambassador,” Doc told the guard.

The Marine nodded.

“Come on. This is silly,” Doc pleaded. “I’m not going to eat them, or throw the shells on the carpet, or anything.”

He remained impassive.

Doc realized that the guard would never bend the rules. “Could you at least tuck the cooler behind the counter, for me?”

“Well...okay. But I’ll have to scan it through the metal detector.”

“No worries.”

Ambassador Jones was blunt. “I want to make this perfectly clear, Doc. Although I intend to honor our financial commitment to UNESCO, I vehemently opposed their decision to award you this grant for the fish market restoration. If I could rescind the offer, believe me, I would.” The Americans were scheduled to contribute over a million dollars.

“I’m sorry to hear that,” Doc said. “The architecture of that building is quite remarkable, and well worth...”

He interrupted. “My objections have nothing to do with the worthiness of the project, itself.”

“What, then?”

“I don’t like you.”

Doc wondered what he’d done to deserve this. “But...we’ve never even met.”

He waved his arm dismissively. "You can tell a great deal about a person by the company they keep. Like that shadowy woman you were cohabiting with."

Shadowy? Claire? "What about her?"

"She was kicked out of the country, was she not? On morals charges?"

"Well, yeah. But..."

"And there's your new business partner. As far as I'm concerned, any American who willingly associates with a despicable hate-monger like Minister Abdullah should have their citizenship revoked."

So that was it. Tiny.

The Ambassador lifted the thick, manila folder on his desk. "I've also read your file."

File? "What file...?"

"You're ungrateful, Doc, and that rankles me. You just don't appreciate what America did for you. There's the education you wasted, for one thing. You could have made a real contribution. But, no. You'd rather sail in circles around the world." The Ambassador waved his arm in the air, for added emphasis. He became increasingly agitated as he leafed through the dossier. "Hah! Says here you haven't even filed an income tax return for fifteen years! And yet, here you are, building yourself a luxurious new yacht. Would you mind telling me how anyone can afford to do that, without working? Without an *income*?"

Doc grinned. "I eat a lot of fish."

The Ambassador glared icily at him. "Let me tell you something, mister. From now on, I'll be watching every move you make."

"But...*why*? I haven't done anything wrong!" Doc protested.

"Yeah? How about that stunt with the sea turtle? That was illegal, pal. Those animals are protected."

"Turtle...? What turtle?"

He huffed. "Spare me. Half of the passengers on the ferry watched you drive the forklift aboard, carrying that sea turtle carcass, for christ sakes."

"That animal died in an accident! Come on! I'd never hurt a sea turtle!"

"I'm not going to argue with you. Just mark my words. You repeat that performance in the public fish market, and I'll arrest your ass! Your management contract with UNESCO requires strict compliance with those international conventions. You sell so much as a single contraband clam, or an endangered species of snail, and I'll come down on you like a ton of bricks. You got that, wise guy?"

## COMOROS

The catamaran was anchored in the middle of the river, near the ruins of Mocímboa wharf. The Colonel's launch was tied up, as usual, along the only usable section, where the cement platform had sagged ominously, but not yet collapsed into the river. A few dhows had been beached, and braced up with stilts, embedded in the drying mud.

"We'd better see if Murray's still aboard," Emily shouted, over the noise of the motor. Miles nodded, and held his course in mid-stream.

The seawall of the old, waterfront town was an extension of the Portuguese prison, whose ramparts had largely crumbled away. The flying buttresses supporting the seawall had settled into the soft riverbed, and allowed the wall to tilt toward the water. The whole town was slowly sliding down the slope, behind it.

The modern, fiberglass yacht seemed strikingly out of place - with its immaculate gloss, and crisp, clean lines - when viewed against the drab, oddly-skewed buildings fronting the river.

Ali heard them approaching, and hung a few cushioning fenders from the lifelines in welcome. He called out, "You are Emily? Yes?"

Emily smiled, and craned her neck, looking for Murray, and, in her excitement, she forgot to grab hold. The tidal current was strong in the river mouth, and quickly swept them past the fenders.

"Emily! Bloody hell." Miles gunned the motor, and circled around for another pass.

"Is Murray aboard?" she called.

Ali pointed toward shore. "No, missus. Murray going town."

They continued ashore. Miles motored toward the wharf, preferring to climb the broken concrete, rather than trying to wade through the sticky, black mud.

"We'll raft up to the Colonel's boat," he yelled.

Emily braced herself in the bow, with the mooring line in hand, and as soon as Miles manoeuvred alongside, she vaulted over the gunwale onto the aft deck of the old cabin cruiser. And found herself looking down the barrel of an AK-47 rifle.

There were a pair of them, leaning up against the bulwark. Fortunately, the young soldiers to whom they belonged were sound asleep under the pilothouse awning. She carefully eased aside the guns, which were blocking her way to the mooring cleat, on the deck. One of the soldiers stirred.

“Sorry to bother you,” she said, while hitching the line onto the cleat. “We’ll only be a minute.”

The soldiers scrambled to their feet, and looked around nervously. One slowly approached her, and pointed sheepishly at the guns. Emily recognized him, and smiled pleasantly.

“Please, missus,” he pleaded.

She realized he was desperate to retrieve his rifle. “Oh. Sorry.” She handed him both weapons. “Here you go.”

“Thank you, missus.”

The Colonel had sent the soldiers to guard his boat, the previous evening, but had forgotten to send anyone to relieve them. There had been some trouble, apparently. Miles pressed them for details, but they really didn’t know what had happened. They heard some gunfire during the night. And an explosion.

One of the soldiers agreed to accompany them on the short walk to Government House.

Emily could feel the tension. There were very few people on the streets, and only a single fruit stall had opened for business in the public market. Most of the shops were shuttered.

A roadblock had been set up on the street leading to Government House. Two jeeps were parked in the middle of the road. The soldiers had stretched some plastic sheeting between the vehicles, to act as a sun shade, and were sitting underneath it, leaning against the tires. One was heating some water over a smoky, wood fire. The sergeant recognized Miles, and allowed them to pass.

The entrance to the building had been barricaded with sandbags. A small group of people were milling around outside, and a few were sitting on the steps, underneath the barrel of a heavy machine gun. No civilians were being allowed in.

Their escort promised to get a message through to Colonel Mendes, and pushed his way through the crowd, and disappeared into the building. Miles approached a few people, but no one knew what had happened; or, if they did, they were unwilling to talk about it.

They sat down to wait.

Murray was waiting, as well, in the hallway by the Customs office, and saw Emily through the window. He hurried outside.

“Some soldiers were caught looting the central warehouse,” Murray explained. “A policeman spotted them, loading cases into an army truck,

and alerted Colonel Mendes. There was an exchange of gunfire, apparently, and the soldiers fled into one of the barracks. The truck was set alight.

“Colonel Mendes claims he put down the rebellion, himself. The soldiers refused to surrender, until they were granted amnesty, and the Colonel agreed to meet with them, to discuss their grievances. When they opened the door, he tossed in a couple grenades.”

“What were they stealing?” Emily asked. The gleam in her eye was inappropriate, given the seriousness of the incident, but she couldn’t help herself. Murray seemed so happy to see her. Every time their eyes met, they lingered a little longer.

“Cases of canned chickens. And condoms.” Murray brushed against her, and ran his fingers lightly across her arm. “Let me take your passport, and I’ll get you signed onto the boat. Then, I’ll pry Henry away from the Colonel, and we can leave.”

Emily unzipped her pack, and searched for her passport. “Who’s Henry?”

“He’s with the UN. Doc offered him a ride over to the conference.”

“What branch?”

“Henry’s the Regional Director of UNESCO, for Africa. He’s your boss.”

“No! But I don’t have a thing..” She rummaged through the rucksack, then made a fist, and pounded it against her leg. “I can’t meet my boss dressed like a cocktail waitress!”

He grinned, and snatched the passport from her hand, then turned, and bounded up the steps, two at a time. “Back in a flash!”

“Murray...!”

\*\*\*

“You’ve got to hand it to that Colonel Mendes,” Henry said. “He knows how to get things done. Africa could use a few more stalwart men like him.”

“He fined you a hundred and fifty dollars, Henry,” Murray reminded him.

“Oh, that.” Henry had forgotten to bring his yellow fever inoculation certificate. He shrugged it off. “Like the Colonel said, leadership is a sacred trust. If he permitted me to flout the law, merely because I hold an influential position, what kind of example would that set for the common people? Really. It would foster disrespect for authority, that’s what. We’d soon have anarchy.”



The tension in the town had eased, and market area was showing signs of life, as more businesses reopened, and shoppers ventured out onto the streets.

“Well, what did the Colonel have to say about the anarchy last night?” Miles asked.

“The man truly poured his heart out. It’s such a tragedy. He simply doesn’t have the resources he needs.”

“Oh, right...,” Emily mumbled, under her breath. “Like the helicopter gunship.”

“Beg pardon?” Henry asked.

Emily coughed, and cleared her throat. “It’s, uh...improper. Such hardship.”

“Oh, I couldn’t agree more,” Henry replied. “He can barely afford to feed his troops. There’s very little I can do to help. Maybe, though. Just maybe. I might be able to find him some condoms.”

Ali motored ashore in the inflatable, and picked them up at the wharf.

“It was good to see you again, Miles,” Murray said.

Miles held up the envelop from Doc. It contained the quotation for the ivory. “Thanks for this,” he said.

Murray still hadn’t decided what he was going to do, although he imagined that Miles would press him for a commitment, when he returned from the Comores. The quote was valid for only thirty days, but it hardly mattered. The ivory would be worth a great deal of money, whenever they chose to sell it.

Henry pulled him aside, while Emily was down below, stowing her gear. “Who’s the chick?”

“She’s a good friend, Henry. Part of the crew.”

“Damn, she sure is a sexy little thing. You sailors really got it made, you know that? I’ll bet you have a honey like that waiting in every port.”

Murray sighed. “Let’s get the boat ready, okay?”

Henry was driving him crazy. He had brought along a full complement of high-tech, sailing clothing, all of it brand new, and Murray watched while he pulled on his expensive, elkhide sailing gloves, before weighing anchor. The river bottom consisted of sticky, black mud; and the chain would surely be covered with it.

“Why don’t you strip off the mainsail cover, instead,” Murray suggested. “Ali and I can handle the anchor.”

“But, I don’t mind pulling in the chain...”

Henry had scant experience sailing offshore, but he had a penchant for taking command. After he had continually questioned decisions, on the frustrating, windward leg of their passage from Zanzibar to Mozambique, Murray made it abundantly clear that he was the captain, and had the prerogative of issuing orders.

“Just do it, Henry.”

Emily was sitting on the cabin top, waiting. She was still holding her rucksack, and had stayed below barely long enough to have a look around.

“Murray? I went to the aft cabin, like you said, but someone’s clothes are already stowed in there.”

“That’s my stuff.”

“Oh...”

“I thought we’d share.”

They stood smiling at each other. Emily looked away, first, when she felt herself beginning to blush. “Well, that’s all settled, then. Terrific.” She shouldered her pack, and ducked down the hatch.

The river mouth was wide enough to manoeuvre the boat under full sail, so there was no need to start the engine. They hoisted the mainsail, and ghosted downriver, until they cleared the tall trees lining the bank, and the sails saw the full force of the monsoon wind. They sped toward the open sea.

As soon as they crossed the bar, the muddy, brown water brightened to a pale turquoise blue. The horizon opened up, through the myriad channels between the offshore islands. Murray stood alertly at the helm, intent on keeping a close watch for any uncharted coral, until they cleared the outer reef. Then, he could turn it over to Henry, and go below. With Emily.

She hugged him, and held on.

The Mozambique current constantly runs south, off this stretch of coast, and even in fine, settled weather, the southerly monsoon winds push against it, and often raise a steep sea. The narrow, swiftly-moving hulls of the catamaran sent up a continuous spray, and they were soon soaked.

But, it wasn’t unpleasant. More like sitting under a misty, cool shower, on a hot, sunny, summer day.

Emily marvelled at the motion. The huge waves came directly from the side, and first lifted one hull, and then the next, in rapid succession. She felt each whip-like movement in the pit of her stomach, as well as

the acceleration, when the wave passed, and the cat slipped sideways down the face of the swell. It happened over and over...and she started to feel a bit dizzy.

Henry had donned his waterproof suit - suspended, bib pants, and hooded parka, as well as high-topped, rubber boots, with non-skid soles - in anticipation of taking over the helm. He was yellow, from head to toe. It reminded Emily of Frikkie's bomb disposal suit, except the sailing outfit lacked padding, and was a purer yellow, like a banana.

"Ready, Henry?" Murray asked.

"Almost." He was making some final adjustments to the velcro closures on the cuffs.

Emily hadn't budged from her seat in the cockpit, since they first encountered the rolling seas in the channel, and when she tried to stand up, her legs turned to rubber. One of the larger swells passed underneath, and she felt the pressure on her feet, like the floor of an elevator pushing up against her. Her knees began to wobble.

Then, she suddenly felt like she was falling, when the boat dropped off the back of the wave, and she flopped back down, and dug her fingernails into the cushion. Her body was so confused by the motion that it was refusing to function, and she felt as though she hardly had the strength to move.

Murray smiled.

She abandoned her attempt to walk across the wet deck, and crawled, instead.

She felt infinitely better, as soon as she descended the ladder, into the cabin. The swaying motion might have been accentuated when she was on deck, because of its height above the water. The cabin floor felt like firmer ground. Her queasiness passed.

The settee next to the companionway was stacked with cases of champagne, and party snacks for the weekend guests. Imported pretzels and tortilla chips. Marinated asparagus spears and button mushrooms. Dill pickles. She had been too nervous to eat a full breakfast, and only managed a single slice of dry toast. Surprisingly, she still wasn't hungry, but thought she should eat something, since her stomach felt sour. She could taste bile.

She stuck her head back outside. The islands had almost dissolved into the sea, leaving only a few green puddles on the horizon, astern.

"Murray? Can I open one of the jars of artichoke hearts?"

“Sure. Open anything you want. There’s barbecued chicken in the fridge, or, if you’d rather have a sandwich, there’s an Italian salami hanging over the galley sink.”

The cat was hard on her helm in a fresh breeze, with the large headsail set, and Murray decided to shorten sail before Henry stood his watch. Henry had never sailed out of sight of land before, and the lumpy, confused seas had clearly made him nervous. He was dressing for the ultimate storm.

Murray was hoping to be left alone for awhile, and thought Henry would be less likely to panic, if the boat were steering easily. He went below to get the smaller sail.

It was his first moment alone with her. She was standing at the galley counter, spreading mayonnaise on her sandwich, and her back was turned. He came up behind her, and reached around and slipped his hands under her shirt. She stiffened, and clamped her elbows to her sides, but not before his hands found her breasts.

“Murray!” She gasped.

She arched her back, and tried to push away from the counter, but he pinned her against it. He playfully bit her neck. “You’re even more beautiful than I remember.”

She spun to face him, and they kissed, but Emily broke it off when it became too passionate, fearful that Murray might taste the sourness in her mouth.

“I’m so nervous,” she said. He still had one hand underneath the front of her shirt, and she grabbed it through the cloth.

“Your boss thinks you’re really sexy.”

“Oh, *great*. You didn’t tell him...”

“About your day job?” He grinned. “No.”

He looked over her shoulder at what she had been building on the counter. “What kind of weird sandwich is that, anyway?”

She glanced down at it, and smiled. “Smoked oysters...with artichoke hearts?”

She brushed her teeth, with unusual thoroughness, and waited for Murray in their cabin. It was extravagantly luxurious. The wall coverings were fabric - a delicate, handwoven silk - and the narrow aisles of teak flooring on either side of the bunk were set off by a thick, oriental carpet, in the center of the room.

She unpacked Margaret’s negligee, and laid it open on the bed, trying to decide. Why not? She slipped out of her damp clothes.

The mattress was comfortable and cushioned the rapid, pitching motion of the boat, but the surging of the water was surprisingly noisy, inside the small, enclosed space. She felt slightly claustrophobic, as if she were submerged inside a pipe. She was breathing too rapidly, she realized, and closed her eyes, and tried to relax.

Murray laughed when he entered the cabin, and saw what she was wearing. The sexy lingerie suddenly seemed ridiculous, and she reached to slip it off, but he took hold of her arms.

“Hey, don’t be in such a hurry this time. I want to savor this.”

“Terrific.” She smiled, and laid her head back, and allowed him to undress her. He explored her gently, almost reverently. The jarring motion returned, as the weight of his body pressed down on her. She felt it more forcefully, with every passing wave. Her stomach churned.

He entered her.

“Oh, God,” she moaned. “Murray...”

He thrust deeply inside her, just as the boat fell off a wave.

She cried out. “Oh Murray! Please...I think I’m going to be sick.”

“What...?”

She shoved him to one side, and rolled off the bed, onto the plush, Persian carpet. Saliva was flowing freely in her mouth, and when she swallowed, some of it tried to come back up. She crawled around, frantically searching for her shirt, but realized she didn’t have time, and bolted out of the cabin.

She flung open the hatch, and burst out onto the deck, right in front of Henry. His parka was cinched up tightly around his face, but she saw his eyes bulging, through the little hole in the hood. Modesty was impossible, under the circumstances. She didn’t even try to cover herself, since she needed the use of all four limbs in a desperate attempt to cross the slippery deck, and reach the rail, before losing her lunch.

Murray emerged a few moments later, clutching the ends of a towel, wrapped around his waist. Emily was splayed out across the side deck, with her head draped over the rail, and her hands clamped onto the lifeline stanchions. A wave slapped noisily against the hull, sending up a solid sheet of water, which splashed down across her back, and sluiced between her legs.

“Dammit, Henry! Fall off!” Henry was thoroughly absorbed, watching her, and had allowed the boat to head up into the wind. The spray was heavy.

Murray knelt alongside her, and covered her torso with the towel, as best he could. She was clinging to the deck in her misery, like a half-

drowned cat. He tried to pry her fingers from the stanchions, so he could take her below.

She moaned, and shook her head violently. Drops of water flew from her hair. "Not...finished."

"You'll feel better, once the oysters..."

She heaved, and retched again. And again. Then spit. "I'm dying, Murray."

\*\*\*

When Emily awoke the boat lay still all around her. Soft light was coming in through the portlight, and she propped herself up, and saw a baobab tree, surprisingly close. They were off a beach.

"Murray?" She prodded him gently, in the back. "I think we've dropped anchor."

He groaned, and rolled over onto his stomach. "Right," he muttered. "Anchored." He'd dropped it himself, an hour earlier.

She snuggled against him, and kissed his neck. He didn't respond. "Murray...? Come on," she pleaded, draping her leg over him.

"What...?" he mumbled.

"You know *what!* Wake up! I feel great, now!"

\*\*\*

Henry lay awake in his cabin, with his pillow pulled down over his ears. As in most multi-hulls, the catamaran was lightly built, to save weight, and the intensity of Emily's passion readily penetrated the thin walls. His envy had grown intense enough to cause pain.

It was due to an enlarged prostate, the doctor had told him, which caused some discomfort whenever he held an erection too long.

He kept visualizing Emily...with her lean, taut body...the way the muscles in her thighs contracted, and quivered with spasms, when she retched...and how she lifted her ass in the air, to allow the little, triangular puddle of seawater to drain off, in between her legs. Damn, it was erotic, watching her puke.

Then, he pictured Hilda - his wife - and the wide, soft, folds of fat she'd been growing beneath her bosom. Water retention, she always said. It was a common problem among expatriates, apparently. Unavoidable, really, considering the tropical torpor.

Henry couldn't continue enduring the sounds of Emily's pleasure, and abandoned his bunk, and went up on deck.

He was stunned by what he saw on the beach. The sand was rutted with a series of machine-made tracks, running straight from the water's edge up to the undergrowth at the base of the trees. The marks left by a small bulldozer, or a backhoe with knobbly, ribbed tires. Whatever. It had been dragging something heavy, which had scraped along the beach.

The sand in front of the bushes showed signs of having been freshly dug, being heaped up, in places, and randomly thrown about, in obvious contrast to the smoothly washed surface left by the receding tide. He couldn't have escaped hearing the machinery, so the excavations must have been finished before they arrived, and anchored. There were at least twenty tracks running down the beach.

Henry felt a surge of indignation as he visualized the valuable, donated machinery parked under the trees, still covered with salty sand, and simply left to rust. He scanned along the curving line of foliage, looking for treadmarks, or a break in the bushes where the machinery might have been driven off the beach, but he couldn't find the spot. He'd go ashore and find it. Take down the serial numbers. Maybe they could trace them.

The Comorian government would hear about this.

Doc's hired captain, too. Murray had boasted about the island being totally unspoiled, and uninhabited. The jewel of the nature preserve, he called it.

"Morning, Henry." Murray leaned out the hatch, and held out a steaming mug. "Coffee?"

"Have a look at our so-called, deserted beach!" Henry implored, disparagingly.

Murray sighed, and carried his own coffee on deck, reminding himself to be patient, and grateful for the fact that Henry had only signed on for the outward leg, would soon be flying back to Dar. He took one look at the beach, and immediately turned around, and called below. "Hey, Em? Come and see this, will ya?"

Emily craned her neck, standing on the steps of the ladder, and smiled happily. She could easily imagine that she was on her honeymoon. The anchorage was as romantic a spot as she could have hoped for, and the baobab trees behind the beach were magical. "I'd say it was loggerheads, judging by the flipper marks," she said.

"You'd fancy a nice turtle egg omelette, wouldn't you, Henry?" Murray asked.

"Turtles...?" Henry gulped.

"Hey! Hold on!" Emily cried, hurrying up the last few rungs. "We can't dig up their eggs!"

"We won't have to. The turtles have already dug them up for us. See all the eggs? In front of the bushes? Look how close together the tracks are. There's far too many turtles using this little stretch of beach. They must have come ashore and dug their nests where other turtles had already laid their eggs."

"I don't know..." Emily was famished, but thought she'd prefer the guinea fowl eggs, which she remembered seeing in the fridge.

"The eggs won't survive, lying on the sand in this heat. Besides, the birds will eat them. Or the rats. There's bound to be plenty of cracked ones. We can use those. If it'll make you feel better, we can bury the loose eggs further up the beach, under the bushes."

"They must be very large...turtles," Henry said quietly.

"They're not small."

\*\*\*

Emily adored the party dress which she had borrowed from Margaret, but it was rather low-cut for tending bar, and every time she leaned for the ice cubes, she had to press her palm against the bodice, to prevent Henry from looking down her front. All of the men at the bar were eyeing her, but he was being remarkably persistent.

Murray had donned his dress white captain's uniform, but wasn't really expected to do anything, other than look competent.

She motioned him over. "Could you take over for a minute?"

He seemed reluctant. "What for?"

"This dress isn't working. I'll have to change."

"What's wrong with it?"

"This." She bent at the waist, facing his direction, and showed him what the other men kept trying to see. Murray whistled under his breath.

She donned a T-shirt, underneath the dress, but decided it looked ridiculous, and abandoned the outfit entirely. She changed into her khaki shirt and shorts. Considering how outrageously the drunks behaved as the party progressed, it proved to be a wise decision.

It took several hours to clean up the boat, in the morning. Emily was outraged. She had almost finished hosing the food scraps off the deck, when she found a couple of spent condoms, hanging from the forward netting. They had been tossed out the portlight window.

"How could anyone do that? It's so awful!"



Murray thought she was overreacting. “Those Comorian girls weren’t exactly innocent...”

“That’s not what I mean! The creeps intended to throw their condoms in the water! They’d look just like squid, to a hungry turtle!”

“Yeah. Guess they would...”

“Diplomats. Peh! I’d like to see a few of them try to choke down something as disgusting as that.”

## ANARCHY

Margaret had adjusted the angle of her chaise lounge, so that it faced out to sea, and she caught sight of the sails when the catamaran was several miles offshore. She glanced over the top of her book, occasionally, monitoring their approach. The tide was fully out - one of the lowest spring tides - and the banks had dried to their maximum extent. The exposed sand cays gleamed - an almost unnatural white - as arresting to the eye as the freshly bared skin of the tourists, reflecting the tropical sun.

Margaret headed down to the beach, after she saw the anchor go over the side. The low tide had apparently dissuaded Murray from attempting to reach the dock, and he had dropped it a fair distance offshore, in the roadstead.

She loathed listening to the outboard motor, and hauled the small fibreglass dinghy from the boat shed, dragged it behind her down to the water's edge, and began rowing out to pick up Emily, as promised.

Emily lobbied for a slight change of plans. "Please, Murray? Stay with me? Just for tonight?"

Murray smiled, and stroked her hair. They had already agreed. "Come on. I promised Doc I'd have the boat back. We have a charter, Wednesday night."

"But...when will I see you again? I've seen the sort of parties you..." Emily bit her lip. "What if...you..."

Murray silenced her with a kiss. They embraced, and neither one of them noticed Margaret's arrival.

Emily ran her hands underneath Murray's shirt, and pressed passionately against him. "Please..." she pleaded. "Before you leave..."

"Would you rather I came back in a bit?" Margaret inquired cheerfully.

Emily shrieked.

Margaret didn't mention anything about what had happened at the lodge, until they were safely ashore. "Someone stole João's goats," she said.

"Oh, no! That's *awful*! He loved those animals!"

"He heard them bleating during the night, and ran outside, but one of the thieves was waiting by the door, and hit him across the knee with a shovel. They made off with the goats, while he was down."

"Is he all right?"

Margaret nodded. "Bruised, is all. But there's something else. They forced open the lock on your laboratory shed. I don't think very much is missing, but Prudence found some of your T-shirts scattered on the ground, in the morning. They must have dropped them when they ran."

"Oh, God! My microscope...?" Emily angrily clenched her fists.

"Hey! Calm down! The place is a mess, but they didn't touch your specimens. They were probably looking for money. Or guns."

Emily gasped. Her AK-47! The last thing they needed was more weapons in circulation. She didn't want to alarm Margaret, and kicked at the sand, a few times, in frustration. She stared out to sea, for a moment.

Then sank to her knees on the beach, and started to cry.

"Hey? Are you okay?" Margaret put her hand on Emily's shoulder, and gave it a tentative squeeze. "I...I thought that your trip was...you know. Successful."

"It was *terrific*, Margaret. But, look..." Emily lifted her arm, limply, pointing toward the anchorage. "He's *leaving!*"

\*\*\*

The purpose of the padlock had been to indicate privacy, rather than providing real security, and the thieves had easily gained entry by prying loose the small screws holding the hasp. They hadn't disturbed her microscope, or any of her slides, but had emptied all the boxes - her scientific journals, magazine articles, personal letters - and dumped everything on the floor. Prudence had laundered the clothes she'd found outside, and piled them neatly on the bed, but had left the journals and notebooks for Emily to sort out, herself.

Even though Emily had been working long hours at the laboratory, she kept most of her personal belongings in her room at the lodge, and quickly ascertained what was missing from the shed. Nothing of real value, really. Just a few shirts, the rose-colored teapot, and a small, glass honey jar filled with virtually worthless coins. The AK-47 rifle was still stowed safely under the mattress.

She couldn't refasten the hasp in the original holes, without longer screws, so she passed a loop of heavy wire through a pair of termite holes in the frame, and snapped the padlock onto that, instead. It would look secure enough, to the casual visitor.

She had just closed it, when a man came from behind, and startled her.

“Missus? I am needing a job,” he said.

He spoke politely, but something about him frightened her. He was a stocky, muscular man, and holding a machete, although there was nothing unusual about that. Even Margaret carried one, when she was out in the bush. His shirt was dirty, though - an old army shirt, she thought, with the sleeves and insignia ripped off - and African men who were seriously seeking work invariably dressed nicely, even when applying for menial labor jobs.

No one had asked her for a job, for months. Hopeful job-seekers had visited the laboratory almost daily, after she hired João, but since she routinely turned them away, word had finally gotten around, and they had stopped coming. He must have arrived in the area recently.

She smiled sympathetically. “I’m very sorry. I don’t need anyone.”

“No job?”

“I’m sorry. No.”

His gaze lingered on Prudence’s lush vegetable garden. “Children hungry, missus.”

Emily always hated hearing it. You never really knew, of course. If they were telling the truth. Not that it mattered, really. Even if his children weren’t hungry, there were plenty others who were. She threw up her arms in frustration.

“Honestly! I can’t give...”

She stopped in midsentence, as two boys pushed aside some large leaves, and emerged from the bush. The one in front was wearing her stolen T-shirt, yet it was the second, younger child who left her speechless. He had a shotgun.

He was a small child, no more than ten years old. He was holding the heavy gun by the barrel, with both hands, after pulling it free of the foliage. He lowered the butt, and dragged it behind him through the dirt. A crude, hand-sewn bandolier was draped across his chest, studded with the large, red shells.

The man cuffed him on the head, and pulled the muddied weapon from his hands, and passed it to the older boy. Then, he swung back his arm - the child cringed, expecting another blow - but the man merely grabbed his shirt. He hauled him in front of Emily.

“The boy is hungry, missus.”

Emily decided she’d better give them something. There was a candy bar, in her rucksack. She reached for it.

The older boy cocked the gun.

She froze, with her hand pointed at her pack. She slowly turned her head, and spoke to him. “I have some chocolate.”

The two children possessed the cold, probing eyes of predators, Emily thought; but as she watched them dividing up the chocolate bar, their excited faces made them look like little boys, again.

“You keeping turtles, missus?” the man asked.

She nodded.

“They having plenty food?”

“Well...I feed them.”

Miles had done her the favor of picking up the fish meal pellets while he was in Mocimboa. He'd stacked them by the door of the shed. The older boy decided to have a closer look, thinking that the sacks might contain rice, or mealie meal.

“You thinking that right, missus? Turtles having food, but not children?”

Emily couldn't contain her anger. “You want some turtle food? Bring back João's goats! You do that, and I'll let you have as much as you can carry.”

The man laughed.

“Baba!” the boy shouted. He was wrestling with something behind the bags of fish meal pellets. Something heavy. “Look!”

He held up Wilson's bone.

The shouting alerted João, who came running toward the shed, followed by several of his kids. Emily held out her hand, cautioning him, but he saw the shotgun being raised, and stopped.

The thieves helped themselves to as many vegetables as they could pack in Emily's rucksack, and left. The man carried off the tusk, balanced over his shoulder.

\*\*\*

“It couldn't possibly be the same gun that killed the zebra, Emily. We heard bursts, remember? And found nine millimetre shell casings.”

Emily took a deep breath. “Of course, Miles. I must not be thinking clearly.” She wondered if she might be getting sick. Something she picked up in the Comoros, perhaps.

Or maybe she just needed some sleep.

That was it.

\*\*\*

Emily heard a vehicle shifting into low gear, coming up the track. The engine sounded too rough to be Miles' Rover, although she had no idea who else it could be. No one had ever driven to the research station, before. She walked outside the laboratory.

A military jeep lurched up the hill. Colonel Mendes was at the wheel. He brought it to a stop, alongside her, and said something, but the jeep had no muffler, and she couldn't hear until he switched off the engine. He held up her rucksack.

"I believe this belongs to you," he said.

"Oh, thank you, Colonel!" she exclaimed happily. She had owned the pack, for years, and was fond of it. "Where did you find it?"

He hopped out, and motioned her to follow him, to the rear of the jeep. As she approached, he threw back a tarpaulin. "We caught this man trying to sell it."

The thief was wedged into the wheel well. He was trussed up, with his knees bent, and his ankles tied to his hands, behind his back. Mendes grabbed him roughly by the hair, and twisted his head around so he faced her. He moaned feebly.

Emily gasped. His beard was matted with dried blood, and his face was swollen, and hideously distorted, from the beating he'd received. He stank of urine. She felt nauseous, and turned away.

"You needn't bother to identify him. He has already confessed to stealing your pack. However, I was hoping that you might be able to identify this..." The Colonel reached down into the well, beside the man, and lifted out a small elephant tusk.

Mendes was watching her closely, and Emily tried desperately to conceal her panic. He had used his brutality to good effect, and succeeded in surprising her. She thought she might have already betrayed herself.

"Where did you get this?" he demanded. He took a step toward her, and held the tusk right in front of her face.

"Well, I...found it. In the garden. Some animals must have dragged it from the bush."

The Colonel sneered. "Your pond-digging hyenas, I suppose."

"I didn't see them. But look for yourself..." She pointed at the base of the tusk. "Those are teeth marks, aren't they?"

Wilson had gnawed on the ivory relentlessly, with minimal impact, but he had made steady progress on the spongier nasal bone which the poachers left attached to the base. Colonel Mendes seemed rather puzzled by it, but only for a moment.

“You’re lying,” he said, angrily. He threw down the tusk, in disgust.

Emily considered the consequences of telling him the truth, and surrendering the ivory. Murray was safe. Miles and Margaret were at odds over selling it, anyway. Mendes was unlikely to seek reprisal against them, merely for lying.

But she loathed the thought of letting him have it. It wasn’t her decision to make, in any case.

“There’s really nothing I can tell you, Colonel.”

“You are not a stupid woman, Emily. Unlike this man...” Mendes braced one foot on the back rail of the jeep, and heaved on the rope binding the man’s limbs. He screamed horribly.

“No! Please!” Emily cried. “You’re hurting him!”

Colonel Mendes rolled the man’s shoulders over the spare tire, then stepped back, and allowed him to fall heavily to the ground.

“Of course I’m hurting him. He deserves his punishment. Do you know why?” The Colonel turned his gaze from the captive at his feet, and glared at her. “He tried to sell something that belongs to *me*. Do you understand?”

Emily said nothing.

Colonel Mendes pulled out his pistol. “Perhaps, this will make it clear to you. I hope so. It will sadden me greatly, if you make the same mistake.” He lowered the gun, and fired two rounds into the man’s head, in rapid succession.

Emily screamed, and sank to her knees. Her legs were spattered with blood.

Colonel Mendes left the man lying on the ground, and climbed into the jeep. He manoeuvred it around in a tight circle, grinding the gears, several times, and revving the engine, until it was finally facing down the track. He accelerated past her, then slammed on the brakes.

He threw the jeep into reverse, and backed up to where she was kneeling on the grass. Then got out, and went to reclaim his tusk. Emily paid no attention, and continued to stare at the executed man. She couldn’t stop shaking.

He came and stood over her.

“A word of advice. Don’t concern yourself with this vermin. The man was a parasite. Be concerned for your own safety.”

She refused to meet his eyes. He slid the tusk under her chin, and levered it up, forcing her to face him.

“Do you understand?” he asked her again.

“You bastard,” she hissed. She instantly regretted provoking him, when she saw his hand move toward his pistol. She stared at the ground, and tried not to move.

But Mendes laughed.

“Such venom! It is unbecoming, Emily. In such a beautiful woman.”

He ran the tip of the tusk down her neck, and hooked it behind the top button of her khaki shirt. The button snapped off, as he forced the tusk inside, and slid it down between her breasts. The ivory felt cold, and slippery against her skin. She started shivering.

“You are very free-spirited, Emily. Like a wild horse. But wild horses can be broken.” She offered no resistance, as he worked the tusk back and forth over her breasts, but desperately grabbed hold of the tip, with both hands, when he tried to slip it inside the waistband of her shorts.

Mendes laughed again.

“All right. I can wait. Three days. Meanwhile, I believe this ivory belongs to me.” He levered back the end, ripping the rest of the buttons from her shirt. She gasped, but was unable to cover herself, as Mendes leaned his weight on the tusk, and pinned her hands in her lap. He leered down at her. Then he jerked away the tusk, and tossed it in the passenger seat of his jeep.

“In three days, I will ask you again where you found this ivory.” He settled himself behind the wheel. “If you lie to me, we will resume this session, where we left off. And I promise, Emily. I will break you.”

\*\*\*

“Jesus, Emily. Calm down, will you? Over.” She was nearly hysterical, and Murray could barely understand her. The distorted voice of the single sideband radio was always hard to decipher, even under the best of circumstances.

“How can I calm down? I feel his eyes on me, and start shaking, all over again.”

“You’re certain the man’s dead? Over.”

“Of course, he’s dead! Mendes ran over his body with the jeep!”

“Well, that’s it, then. We’ve got to get you out. Over.”

“I won’t run out on my turtles!”

“But Mendes is out of control. You’ve just witnessed what he’s capable of. Over.”



"I've got a gun, too."

"You've got *what*?"

"A gun. An AK-47, with three extra clips. I can't believe it! It never even occurred to me. I can shoot the son of a bitch!"

Emily seemed somewhat out of control, herself. Murray doubted if he would be able to get through to her. The radio was located at the main lodge, he recalled. "Can I speak with Miles, for a minute?"

"He went to help João. We have to bury the body. It's hot, today."

"How about Margaret? Is she there?"

"She's sulking. In her room."

Murray cursed to himself. "Please, Emily. Tell me what you want me to do."

"I don't know. I'm sorry." She started crying. "I just wanted to hear your voice."

"All right. That does it. I'm coming down there. I'll have to call you back, after I clear it with Doc."

\*\*\*

Murray suggested sailing the catamaran down to Mozambique, to rescue Emily. "The round trip should only take four days, Doc. I can stay close inshore, and use the engine on the way down."

Doc was sprawled on the cabin floor, with his head and shoulders inside the sink cabinet, attempting to fasten the supply hose onto the galley water pump. The antique, bronze one, off *Mavis*.

He wriggled out, holding a hose clamp, and tested several sockets on the worm screw, until he found one that fit. "What if she's not prepared to leave?" he asked, before folding himself back under the sink.

Murray knelt down, and spoke into the opening. "I could stay another day, couldn't I? And help her pack her things? I'll make sure the yacht is back in time for the charter." Doc was groping blindly for the second hose clamp, which he'd left lying on the floor, and Murray pushed it over with his foot.

"Oh, forget about the bloody charter," Doc scoffed. "What I mean is, what are you going to do if she flatly refuses to abandon her turtles?" Emily was as obstinate as Claire, he thought. He couldn't imagine what would cause her to quit her project, short of being deported. Or shot.

The sink drain was still unconnected, and Doc placed an empty paint pail underneath, before trying out the pump. It worked with a

lever action, and had a long, graceful spout, like a pump you might find in an old, farm kitchen. He worked the handle a few times.

“Sure is a beautiful pump.”

“Aren’t you going to polish it?” Murray queried.

“Nah. Bronze likes to turn green. Why fight it?” Doc shrugged. Then, he turned serious. “Why the fight with Mendes, anyway? Can’t you just give him the ivory?”

“I suppose. Emily is dead set against it. Remember what you said about Claire, not wanting to give condoms to Tiny Abdullah?”

Doc laughed. “Stubborn, eh?”

Murray nodded. “Margaret, too. She’s morally opposed to selling it. Miles could really use the cash, though. The lodge isn’t doing all that well.”

Doc knew that Murray was counting on some money from the ivory, as well. Hopefully, enough to cover the balance of what he owed on *Exile*, after figuring in his wages, and the gear he’d traded.

“We have to get Emily out of there, Doc. Mendes might lose it completely. I stayed in Mocimboa for...what? Three hours, maybe? But it was long enough to see that he’s losing control of the place.”

“You reckon...?”

“His soldiers weren’t what you’d call ‘well-fed’. I don’t know. When you see military policemen with no socks, and their toes poking out through huge holes in their shoes, it points to something.”

Doc thought for a moment. If Mendes was in trouble, it might give him some leverage. “This might be important. Try to remember. Did you hear any complaints from the soldiers?”

“Most of them tried to beg cigarettes. I don’t think they’ve been paid, for a long time.”

“Did any of them specifically mention condoms?”

“Sure. That’s what was stolen from the warehouse. Remember? That burned-up, army truck I told you about? It was full of condoms.”

“Bingo.”

They’d both have to travel to Mozambique. Doc would have to handle the negotiations with Mendes. Murray could sail the cat.

“I don’t see that Mendes has left us much choice,” Doc reasoned. “However we play this, we’ll have to enter the ivory trade. We might as well try for the best deal possible, eh? I’ll have to see Tiny Abdullah, first. If he’s interested, I’ll fly down and try to make the deal with Mendes.”

“Here’s what I want you to do. Borrow the truck from Ali, and pick up a drum of aircraft fuel. Take it up to Eddie's seaplane base. Be as diplomatic as you can, but drag him down to the plane if you have to...”

## THE IVORY TRADE

Eddie circled above the lodge, before making a wide sweep offshore and bringing the seaplane in for landing. Miles heard the engine, motored out to meet them at the mooring buoy. Eddie decided to stay aboard the plane, and take a nap, while Doc went ashore for the conference.

“Where’s Emily?” Doc asked. “She should be in on this.”

“She would have heard Eddie’s approach,” Margaret said. “She’ll be along, soon.”

“Mendes hasn’t been back, I take it?”

Margaret shook her head. Some movement outside caught her eye. “Here comes Emily, now.”

Doc glanced out the kitchen window and caught a glimpse of Emily sprinting across a small clearing, near the garden. She moved stealthily from one clump of elephant grass to the next, in a low crouch, and vanished from sight into some taller grass.

“What the hell...?” Doc wondered aloud. “What is she doing out there?”

Margaret sighed. “Being evasive. Emily’s been practically invisible, the last couple of days.”

Emily reappeared, after a minute or so, when she scrambled out from behind the rose bushes. She dashed across the lawn, and reached the door to the lodge before Doc could cross the kitchen to open it for her. She seemed remarkably cheerful.

“Hi Doc!” she said.

Her clothes looked slept in, but the deep creases around her eyes more accurately betrayed a serious lack of sleep. She paused in the doorway and carefully scanned the grounds, before slipping inside, and latching the door behind her. Doc was somewhat at a loss for words.

“Nice rifle, Emily,” he offered, finally.

Emily grinned. “Thanks.”

The AK-47 was slung across her back, and she slipped it off, and leaned it against the antique umbrella stand, next to the door. “Margaret gets upset if I carry it around inside the lodge.”

They gathered around the dining room table.

“I’d like to thank you again for flying down, Doc,” Miles said. “We appreciate it.”

“Hey. No worries. Thank Eddie.”

“Is he flying you to Mocímboa?” Margaret asked.

“Yeah. Then, we’ll come back here and spend the night, if that’s all right.”

“Of course! There’s always a bed waiting here for you, Doc.” Margaret rubbed her toes along his ankle, under the table. “You know that!”

“Really. Feel free, Doc,” Miles added. “Help yourself to anything,”

“Anything, at all.” Margaret stole a sideways glance at him, and lightly licked her lip.

Doc sighed. “Oh...great. That’s just great...”

“Who do you reckon would take over the administration of Mocímboa, if Mendes was suddenly taken out of the picture?” Doc asked.

“Sergeant Major Ngozi, I should think,” Miles replied. “He is second in command.”

“And what’s he like?”

“Not a bad sort. A bit slow.”

“Isn’t there any local leadership, here, apart from the military? Hasn’t Mendes ever had any credible political opposition?”

“Well, the only effective voice that I’m aware of is Juliana Flores. She published a newspaper in Mocímboa, until Mendes had her arrested.”

“But she’s been a virtual recluse, since she was released from prison...” Margaret added, looking quizzically at Doc. “What are you getting at, anyway?”

“Well, if my plan succeeds, there might be somewhat of a power vacuum, here. I honestly don’t know what to expect, Margaret, and it bothers me. I reckon you folks have enough instability to deal with, as it is.”

“And this plan is...?” Margaret prompted.

“To have Colonel Mendes arrested for smuggling. Or, theft. I’m not sure, yet.”

“Oh, terrific!” Emily enthused.

“Okay. Here’s the deal,” Doc said. He unzipped his duffel bag, and dumped a dozen thick bundles of currency onto the table. “I found a buyer for Wilson’s bones.”

“What?” Margaret exclaimed. “I thought we agreed to surrender the ivory to Colonel Mendes!”

“Oh, we are. Sort of.”

Miles thumbed through a wad of Tanzanian shillings. He coughed, and cleared his throat. “Forgive me, Doc. But this comes as a bit of a

surprise. I was under the impression that you wanted nothing to do with the ivory, whatsoever.”

“Believe me, I don’t. But we can’t very well surrender all this money to Mendes, now can we? And since this opportunity presented itself...,” Doc gestured his helplessness. “I just couldn’t resist.”

“Colonel Mendes is desperate. Everything points to it. The Mozambiquan government is essentially bankrupt. These remote, underpopulated northern provinces must seem inconsequential to the politicians down south, in Maputo. So they’ve simply stopped sending their scarce resources up here.

“My guess is that Mendes ran out of money to pay his troops, months ago. Even worse, it now appears that he’s exhausted his supply of condoms. He’ll never hold onto power, without them. His men will mutiny.”

“I’m inclined to agree with you, Doc, but won’t his desperation make him even more likely to act on his threats?” Miles asked.

“We’re worried,” Margaret added. “When Mendes assaulted Emily, he threatened to return in three days. That’s tomorrow.”

“I’m ready for him, Margaret,” Emily declared, confidently. “I practiced again this morning, and fired off half a clip, calibrating the sight. Honestly. I’m an excellent shot.”

After a rather awkward silence, Doc reached over and patted her gently on the arm. He addressed Margaret. “Remember why you left that hole in your garden, and turned it into a pond? You wanted to let everyone know that the ivory had been removed, am I right?”

Margaret nodded.

“You were obviously successful, in that, but you also succeeded in created a *mystery*. And, now, Colonel Mendes can’t resist trying to solve it. Especially since there’s a fine prize on offer.

“I think I can convince him that I’ve already sold the ivory. His real problems have nothing to do with you. Once I offer him a generous cut of the proceeds, he’ll back off, and concentrate on the situation in Mocímboa.”

Emily and Margaret both spoke at once, interrupting him, and voicing their opposition to any agreement that would reward the Colonel.

Doc had to silence them. “Hey! Look, it’s getting late. Let’s wait, and see what happens at this meeting.” He slid back his chair, and stood up from the table. “I have to go. Eddie’s probably worried, as hell. He says he can’t take off from Mocímboa creek after dark.”

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“You surprise me, Doc.” Colonel Mendes smiled, and leaned back in his office chair. “I would have thought the ivory trade was somewhat out of your league. Last time we met, you were peddling a few boxing gloves, for charity.”

“Well, I’ve never been all that attracted to body parts, personally. I’m arranging the ivory shipment as a favor for a friend, Colonel.” Doc took Tiny Abdullah’s business card from his wallet, and slid it across the desk. The Colonel glanced at it, and nonchalantly tossed it back, but Doc had noticed his eyes widen.

“So, what makes you think I have ivory for sale?”

“Oh, I don’t. Well, except for the one, stolen tusk, I suppose, but that’s too chewed up to interest my client, anyway. I already have all the ivory I need.”

Mendes glared at him.

“Actually, Colonel, the sole purpose of my visit is to request your courtesy, in allowing me to export some ivory to Zanzibar.”

“Courtesy? You want my *courtesy*?” the Colonel exploded. “That ivory belongs to *me*!”

“No. Really...?” Doc acted confused.

“I’m warning you!” he snarled. “Don’t play games with me!”

“Please,” Doc held up his hands, and gestured calm. “I didn’t come all the way from Zanzibar just to play games, I assure you. I’m here to buy ivory. Minister Abdullah merely suggested that I pay you a visit, out of respect for your position. He assumes that you will show him the same courtesy, when you try to do business in Tanzania.”

“What possible business would I have in Tanzania?”

“Well...I don’t presume to advise you about your business affairs, Colonel, but I sincerely doubt you’ll find the condoms you need, anywhere else.”

Mendes scoffed. “What would you know, about what I need?”

“Tiny Abdullah told me.”

“Told you what?”

“That your warehouse has been stripped bare. And that your entire inventory of boxing gloves burned up inside one of your own trucks. It’s going to get pretty sticky, when your soldiers use up the last of their condoms, Colonel. You’ll have a real mess on your hands, I should think.”

Doc grinned.

Colonel Mendes had lost his sense of humor, and sat glumly, staring at his desk.

Doc elaborated. “Tiny Abdullah is an astute businessman, Colonel. He constantly monitors the condom markets, for any sign of volatility, and when the price of condoms in Mocímboa da Praia quadrupled overnight he wanted to know why. A detailed account of the mutiny was on his desk the very next day.”

Mendes shifted uncomfortably. “It was hardly a mutiny. Just a small, criminal element...”

Doc gave a little laugh. “I loved the part where the elite police detachment threw down their rifles, and searched around frantically for some water, so they could cool down the charred cans of USDA chickens, and have a decent dinner. There were some rather ugly scuffles over them, apparently.”

Colonel Mendes sat slumped in his chair, with his eyes downcast. Doc handed him Henry’s letter.



# UNESCO

Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization  
of the  
**UNITED NATIONS**  
Office of the Regional Director  
Africa

Dear Colonel Mendes,

I wish to convey my deepest regrets that our organization will be unable to supply you with prophylactics, as I had hoped. As you are no doubt aware, the diversion of donated condoms for military purposes has been a cause for concern, among our member nations, and none of those I contacted were willing to provision the Mozambiquan Army.

The UN must give priority to its own peacekeeping forces. It is a sad commentary on our times, but these young soldiers have increasingly become targets, themselves. Most are facing a highly-organized sex industry, and innocent-looking, child prostitutes for the very first time. Many have fallen. My heart goes out to them.

The bulk of our condom resources have already been allocated to a major resupply effort. The UN looks after its own.

Several major donors have chosen to distribute their supplies through various women's groups, and community-based health clinics. They seem enthralled with the idea of placing boxing gloves in the delicate hands of women. It distresses me, but there is nothing I can do to stop the practice. Like yourself, I am merely a humble civil servant.

You should consider asking Doc's advice, about how to organize a lady's auxiliary. His Dhow Masters Women's Center has been awarded some very substantial contracts.

Regards,  
Henry H.

“Idiot,” Colonel Mendes muttered. He tore the letter in half, and threw the pieces on the floor, then stared out his grimy window at the machine gun emplacement across the street. “I assume you’re prepared to make me an offer?”

“Sure. I could do that.” Doc felt generous. He pulled the pistachio nuts from his rucksack, and took a handful, before setting the open jar on the desk. “Here. Have some nuts.”

With five tons already in storage at Dhow Masters, Doc could afford to be generous with the condoms, as well. Besides, it wasn’t as if the Colonel would actually be able to keep them, or anything. He offered a ton and a half, which was more than Mendes could have hoped for, under the circumstances, and the Colonel accepted the figure without bothering to bargain.

“How soon can I have them?” Mendes asked.

“I’ll arrange the export permit as soon as I get back. You can pick them up anytime, after that.”

“Pick them up...? In Zanzibar?”

“Well, of course. You weren’t really expecting free delivery, were you?”

“But what guarantee do I have? Once the ivory is removed from my jurisdiction?”

“Your condoms will be waiting, like I said.” Doc screwed the lid on his jar of pistachio nuts, and made ready to leave. “In case you’ve forgotten, this meeting was about courtesy. We already control the ivory, and the condoms. You possess nothing, really. Only the leverage you had when I walked in. Can you give me *your* guarantee, that you won’t use it?”

Mendes was completely confused.

“Your *boot*, Colonel. On the neck of my friends?”

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“Do me a favor, will ya, Eddie?” Doc asked. “If I even hint about getting involved in another wild scheme like this, remind me about Colonel Mendes.”

Eddie grinned. “He’s one cold-eyed kaffir, I’ll grant you that.” He levelled the seaplane, after making a wide, banking turn out of the estuary, and put her on course for the short trip back to the lodge. “He’s coming for the condoms, I take it?”

“Yeah. Can you believe it? I just invited the sociopath to pay me a visit...” Doc stared out the window, at the panoramic view of the

archipelago. The myriad shades of blue surrounding the outer islands had taken on a purple hue, from the first light of the sunset. The sea was smooth. "I think I'll lock myself in the boatshop."

"You'd better radio Murray," Eddie reminded him. He needed to know that it was safe to come ahead. Doc used the seaplane's single-sideband to make the call.

The catamaran was already fuelled, and loaded.

"Ali should be here in about half an hour. We'll shove off, then," Murray said. "There's one thing you should know. We were over at Dhow Masters this morning, picking up the condoms you wanted, and a bicycle messenger from the Home Affairs Ministry dropped off this official-looking envelop. It's addressed to Claire. Envelop says it's from Tiny Abdullah. Over."

"Have you got it with you?"

"Roger. Over."

"Rip it open, mate."

"Okay. Hold on...there's two documents. The first is a Permanent Residency Visa, exactly like mine...it's Claire's. Then, there's a letter addressed to her...and signed by Tiny. Want me to read it? Over"

"Just tell me what it says, more or less."

"All right. Let's see...it appears to be the conditions of Claire's probation. As a convicted sex offender...she has to be tested for all these sexually transmitted diseases...and report to Home Affairs, once a week. Then, there's a list of prohibitions. Can't associate with known prostitutes..." Murray started laughing. "She's prohibited from dressing 'provocatively'! Can they really enforce this? Over."

"I guess it's Tiny's idea of a joke. Okay, mate. Have a safe trip, eh?"

"Wait! How's Emily? Is she feeling any better?"

"She's, uh...pretty cheerful, actually."

\*\*\*

"Why didn't you tell me Murray was coming?" Emily cried, thumping the butt of her AK-47 against the floor.

She seemed more excited, than angry, Doc thought. "I wasn't sure, myself, until after the meeting. Mendes is still suspicious, but I don't think he'll interfere. He needs the condoms."

"It would be a serious mistake to trust him," Emily cautioned.

"No worries, there. Believe me."

They would take the precaution of loading the tusks under the cover of darkness. If Murray arrived before nightfall, he would heave-to, and hold position offshore.

Doc gave Emily a handheld VHF. "The battery's fully charged, but I wouldn't switch it on until, say...nine o'clock. You can leave it on all night, so long as you don't transmit. Just wait for Murray's call."

"But why do I need it? Am I supposed to tell him something?"

"Well, if Mendes decides to station some troops here, I'm hoping you'll be able to warn him off."

"Oh. Right."

"Murray mentioned that you had some satellite radio beacons, for your turtle migration project. Do you have any left?"

Emily nodded. "Three."

"Could you bring one down to the boat, and make sure that Murray knows how to work it, before he leaves with the tusks?"

"All right. I'll put one in my rucksack. But what do you..." Emily eyed him suspiciously. She tightened her grip on the assault rifle. "Hey! Wait a minute. I'm not being left behind, Doc. No way."

They had to open the cache at the lowest state of the tide, when most of the water had drained from the beach. It would prove impossible to remove the tusks, if the sand formed a slurry, and kept filling the hole while they were trying to dig.

"I reckon we should pull them out, tonight. Just after midnight," Doc proposed, examining the tide tables. "It's either that, or noon tomorrow."

Darkness seemed preferable. The incoming tide would erase the evidence of the excavation, well before sunrise. The ivory could be hidden ashore, during the day, and be ready to load when Murray arrived the following night.

"The tusks will fit in the boatshed, if we take out the spare dinghy," Miles suggested. "It would simplify the loading. We can bring the catamaran alongside the dock. There's enough water, except for an hour or so, either side of low tide."

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They took Miles' suggestion one step further, and used the spare dinghy to ferry the tusks directly from the cache to the boatshed, thus eliminating the laborious process of lugging them across the sand, one at a time.

Emily hadn't been able to stop pacing, all evening, so they assigned her the job of walking the pram back and forth, through the shallows. She was reluctant, at first - fearful that her AK-47 would get wet - but the incoming surf was nothing more than ripples, and she was able to tow the loaded dinghy through water that barely covered her ankles.

They had sufficient moonlight to work on the beach, and finished emptying the cache shortly before the moon set, at one in the morning.

After taking a quick shower to rinse off the salt, and sand, Margaret made some tea. They sat around the dining room table, once more. Emily soon became anxious, and wrapped a towel around her wet hair, before going outside to patrol the grounds. Miles wandered off to fix himself a sandwich. Eddie was asleep, snoring on the couch.

"There's something special I'd love to give you before you leave, Doc. A little present." Margaret smiled playfully.

"Yeah?"

She nodded. "Umm. But I can't give it to you right now. Not here."

"Oh..."

"You'd make good use of it, I'm sure." She cocked her head, and coyly bit her lip.

"Come on, Margaret. Quit teasing."

"Okay. Tell you what. I'll unwrap it, so you can have a peek." Margaret immediately stood up, and undid the belt on her robe. She lifted one foot onto the edge of Doc's chair, and ran her hand slowly along the inside of her thigh. Then, twirled a curl of pubic hair around her finger. "It's not new, or anything, but it's still presentable, don't you think?"

Doc couldn't resist staring at what she was doing with her finger. He had a definite weakness for women with red hair. Claire's was much darker. Auburn, actually.

"Anybody want a piece of toast?" Miles shouted, from the kitchen.

"How sweet..." Margaret giggled. She stood back, and demurely folded her robe around herself, before resuming her place at the table. She smiled and sipped her tea. "I could drop it by your room, later, if you like?"

Doc sighed. Claire would kill him. And what about Miles? "Aw...Margaret. It's a loveable little present, but I...can't. Claire's deportation order has been rescinded. She'll be flying back in a few days."

"So? I'm a model of discretion." She reached across the table, and touched her finger lightly to his lips.

Her scent was all over it.

“Aw, come on. Don’t.”

Margaret threw up her hands, in a gesture of surrender. “No harm in asking, I hope?”

“Course not. I’m flattered.”

“Next time, then.”

“Margaret!”

She laughed. “Oh, all right. Do you want a piece of toast, or not?”

\*\*\*

Wilson couldn’t contain his excitement, and dribbled some urine on the deck. He stuck his head through the lifelines.

*Oh! Emily! Oh!*

She caught the spring line from Ali, and slipped the eye over the cleat. The catamaran edged slowly toward the dock as the line came taut. The boat had rather high freeboard, and she had to reach up in order to rub Wilson’s ears. “Good dog, Wilson!”

*I missed you Mom!*

Ali tossed down another mooring line, before jumping off and joining her on the dock to help secure the boat. The wind was light, and they had no difficulty in controlling the boat. Wilson trotted along the deck, matching her stride, as she went forward, and tied off the bow.

*Like my new collar?*

When she turned around, Murray was standing at the rail, smiling down at her.

“Oh, Murray...!”

She grabbed hold of one of the stanchions, and leaped. Her foot fell short of the rail, and she hung precariously from the lifelines, for a moment, but Murray managed to haul her aboard. She held him desperately, and the barrel of her AK-47 pressed against his cheek as they embraced. It felt cold. He gently freed an arm, and eased the gun aside.

“Is this thing loaded?”

She nodded her head against his neck.

Murray stroked her hair. “I’ve been so worried. Will you come back with me to Zanzibar? At least for awhile?”

She nodded again.

They immediately began loading the ivory. Wilson was beside himself.

*All these bones. Mine must be here, somewhere.*

As the tusks disappeared belowdecks, the condoms began coming up. Doc had sent twenty-five cases, which would temporarily ease the tension in town, and strengthen the negotiating position of the lodge. The going rate for an AK-47 was only a case and a half. Miles would post a reward notice in the camp.

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“Murray! Listen!” Emily implored. “I hear the Colonel’s launch.”

They looked worriedly at each other. It was unmistakable. The distinctive thump of the unmuffled diesel engine was coming out of the darkness, dead astern.

Murray briefly studied the chart, then switched off all the electric lights, including the navigation lights. “I’m going to close the coast, and see if he follows us.”

Emily eased herself out of the way, as Murray moved assuredly around the cockpit, trimming the sails. She wondered how he managed to distinguish one rope from the next, in the dark. He quickly had the catamaran settled on her new course.

The cat moved soundlessly through the water, except for the soft hiss of her wake. With all her lights extinguished, and no moonlight to reflect off her sails, she would be almost impossible to see.

“They must be a mile behind us, wouldn’t you say?”

“More,” Emily was convinced. “That motor’s really loud.”

They sat silently in the cockpit, and listened.

The incessant thumping was following them.

“Does he have radar on the boat?” Murray asked.

“I’m not sure. I’ve never been aboard, really. Walked across the deck, a few times...”

“But you’ve often seen it, haven’t you? Tied up at the lodge? Try to remember. Is there a dome mounted on the cabin top? Or, atop a short mast?”

Emily tried to visualize it. The paint was peeling, she recalled. A light blue paint, with a brighter blue underneath. A pilothouse window was cracked. There was a mast, too, with a whip antenna, and some dangling, disconnected wires...but she couldn’t remember a radar dome. She shook her head. “I’m drawing a blank,” she said.

Murray held his course, toward the beach. “I’ll take her in as close as I can. The land breeze should be stronger inshore. We’ll pick up some speed.”

Emily was ready with the binoculars, at first light, and confirmed that it was, in fact, the Colonel's launch, about a mile astern. There was a radar dome, she saw, inconspicuously mounted on the pilothouse roof. She was searching for the Colonel, himself, when the stream of black exhaust smoke noticeably thickened.

"I think they're planning to overtake us. Couldn't we start our engines?"

The catamaran was fitted with twin, single-cylinder diesel engines, one in each hull. They were useful for manoeuvring, and motoring in and out of harbors, but had little power. Murray started both motors, anyway. The extra two knots or so would buy them some time.

But not much. The launch was still closing steadily.

"We can't outrun them, Emily. Not unless we get some wind."

The wind on the coast was often light, just after dawn. It was unlikely to freshen until mid-morning, when the sun had warmed the land, and the sea breeze set in. Another three hours, at least. Mendes would overtake them, long before that.

"Don't you think there's a chance we could be over-reacting?" Murray suggested. "Mendes might simply be following us. His intentions aren't that clear."

Emily scoffed. "Peh! They're pretty damn clear, to me. You and Ali? You two, he'll simply shoot, and toss overboard. But, for me...I'm afraid he has something much more sadistic in mind, for me."

Murray's face filled with anguish. "I thought...didn't Doc make a deal...?"

"I guess Mendes thinks he can make a better one."

Ali stuck his head out of the cabin, having been awakened by the sound of the engines. He seemed puzzled.

"We've got trouble," Murray told him. He motioned with his thumb, over his shoulder.

Ali had glibly dismissed the threat posed by the Colonel, when they sailed together aboard Captain Jonas' massive dhow. Now, though, he offered no such assurance, as he had considerably less confidence in the lightly-built, fibreglass catamaran.

"Any ideas?" Murray asked.

"How fast is coming, this one?"

Murray glanced back. "He'll catch us in about half an hour."

Ali whistled, softly.



He took the wheel, so Murray could examine the chart. They were approaching a cluster of islands, which marked the northern end of the Querimbas archipelago. Of the many, torturous channels leading through them, only one was wide, and deep enough to be considered a safe passage. Murray studied the other possible routes in the hope of turning the catamaran's shallow draught into an advantage.

"Ali? Have you ever sailed through here?" Murray showed him the passage, on the chart. Ali couldn't make sense of it, on the map, until Murray pointed to the opening, itself, between two small islands on the horizon.

"No, boss. Never going that way."

The channel was shallow, and very narrow where it passed between the islands, and was marked as 'foul ground' on the chart, with myriad tiny crosses denoting the coral heads. But the least depth shown was one meter. Most of the soundings were two, two and a half.

It would be risky. The survey was fifty years out of date. And coral was alive. It grew.

The Colonel was narrowing the gap. Murray decided to take the cat straight through, without slackening her speed, and lay a trap, across the narrowest part of the channel.

They had a coil of inexpensive, three-strand polypropylene rope aboard, which Laurent kept as a spare warp for the anchor. It was lousy cordage, in Murray's opinion - stiff and awkward to handle, and too slippery to hold a knot - but one of its worst attributes might prove an asset under the circumstances. The stuff floated.

He'd seen several propellers horribly fouled with it.

The rope stretched when it was wound around a rapidly spinning propeller shaft, and the strands tended to fuse together and form a tenacious mass, as hard as a golf ball. It took considerable patience with a sharp knife to cut it all away. Especially underwater, holding your breath.

He asked Ali to ready the rope, and some scuba diving weights, to anchor the ends. "There should be a couple of weight-belts mixed in with the snorkelling gear. And cut the rope in half. We'll lay down a pair."

Emily heard a popping noise, behind them. Several bullets skipped across the water, as she turned to look. Two soldiers were standing in the bow of the launch, and one was pointing a rifle.

"Stay down!" she cried.

She scrambled out of the cockpit, and ducked belowdecks, and returned with her AK-47.

Murray grimaced. "Jesus..."

She crawled past him, all the way to the stern, and stretched out on top of the bridge deck. A pair of small propane tanks were mounted against the guard rail, and she used one as a steady rest for the rifle. She scanned the launch with the binoculars, once more, but couldn't spot the Colonel. He'd be behind the helm, she guessed. She squeezed off a shot.

The soldiers dropped down onto the deck. She fired a second round, and the middle pilothouse window shattered. The very window she was aiming at. She rejoiced.

"Hey! Terrific! I hit it!"

The launch veered off course, but recovered quickly. Emily checked through the binoculars, and saw Mendes peering out from inside the pilothouse, his face framed by the broken glass. It was the first time she had seen him...since.

She fired off a short burst. Some chips of blue-painted wood flew up from pilothouse trim. She corrected her aim, and let loose the rest of the clip. Another window exploded, and the launch swerved sharply, digging in her chine, and losing way. Emily gasped, suddenly concerned that she may have actually killed him.

The Colonel regained control, however, and resumed the chase, but he had fallen back appreciably. Out of range, she thought. She dropped the empty clip overboard, and snapped in a full one.

Wilson was barking furiously, belowdecks. He had managed to sleep through the commotion - not to mention the noise, and harsh vibration from the engines - but the gunshots had riled him.

*Hey! Bad! That hurts my ears!*

The passage was well sheltered from the wind, and the water was smooth. Too smooth. The sunlight was reflecting off the surface as if it were a sheet of glass. Murray couldn't see the coral heads on the bottom, until he was practically on top of them.

The shallow-draught hulls were an advantage, to be sure, but Murray was accustomed to sailing monohulls, like *Mavis*, and he hadn't fully appreciated the complications that arose from having two possible collisions to consider, every time he took an evasive action. He straddled a couple, craggy rocks that would have torn the cat wide open.

He noticed a few rocks, awash, which appreciably narrowed the channel ahead. "Stand by the weights!" he called.

Emily and Ali had already taken up their positions at the stern. Murray waited until the rocks were abeam.

“Now!”

Emily spun the lead weight on a short length of the rope, and hurled it as far as she could, off to starboard, while Ali was doing the same, to port. The bight of rope elongated, as it dropped off the stern. Murray steered away from the rocks, and angled toward the other side of the channel.

“Again!”

The second set of diving weights splashed into the water. He glanced back briefly, and saw the pair of orange ropes floating on the surface.

“Watch where you’re going!” Emily chided.

But they had already passed safely through. The old lighthouse on Cabo Delgado had appeared on the horizon, a few miles ahead. They would gradually gain the open sea as they approached it, and left the lee of the islands. Emily could already feel the beginning of the ocean swell, in the pit of her stomach.

The Colonel throttled back sharply upon entering the shoals, and managed to avoid running over the rope. But the obstruction had forced him to stop. His soldiers leaned over the side as far as they dared, but were unable to pick up the rope without a boathook. None of them took the initiative to dive into the water and retrieve it, so the Colonel was forced to leave the helm, and throw one of them over the side. His advantage had been lost.

The catamaran was a far better boat in open sea, and the launch was unable to make up the ground it had lost, as it began to yaw, and wallow in the increasing southerly swell. The wind had freshened slightly.

“He’ll never catch us, now,” Murray said. He felt confident enough to reach down and switch off the engines. Emily whooped, and hugged Ali. They all started laughing.

Wilson came backing out the companionway, dragging a tusk behind him, and growling.

*Hey! Somebody? Give me a hand?*

\*\*\*

The passengers arriving at Dar es Salaam airport disembarked a considerable distance from the terminal, but Doc spotted Claire straight away. She was the only one carrying bilge pump hose.

He felt a pang of guilt, as she struggled down the narrow ramp, with the awkward, rubbery lengths draped around her neck, and a gallon can of polyurethane paint clamped under each arm. The springy, wire-wound hose flopped around, and bounced on the steps. She almost tripped when one caught underfoot. But Claire had the balance of a cat.

Doc met her at the diplomatic gate. She was smiling radiantly. She'd bought herself a new, wide-brimmed straw hat.

"Here's your hose, you cheapskate." She dumped it at his feet.

He glanced down at it, wondering if she'd brought all the sizes he'd asked for. "You look lovely," he said.

Claire laughed. "Me? Or, the hose?"

"Both."

Claire had a pale complexion - befitting her red hair - and she had lost most of her tropical, African tan in the few months she'd spent in San Francisco. She looked like a first-time tourist, and as soon as they emerged from the terminal, the money changers descended on her, hawking their shillings. Her fluency in Swahili stopped them in their tracks.

They passed a small boy, squatting on the sidewalk, next to a small charcoal barbecue. He was squeezing lime juice over a row of white corn, while spinning the ears over the coals. Some of the kernels had already blackened, and the juice sizzled. Claire simply had to have one. Doc bought a pair.

Their arms were too full - to eat while they walked - so Claire put the paint on the pavement, and they sat down on top of the cans, and took in the scene. The sidewalk tailor, seated at his treadle sewing machine, converting woven plastic rice bags into well-appointed, double-breasted sportcoats. The bus belching blue smoke, and rocking from side to side, as its wheels jarred through the potholes. The orange sellers, and the peels in the street. The flies. The shimmering heat.

"Usually, when I'd tell people that I had been living in Africa, they were curious, and would ask me what it was like. How the people lived. But how can you begin to describe this?"

"Truly." Doc finished his mealie, and tossed the cob in the gutter. Claire gasped. She covered her mouth, and stared at it. Then laughed gaily.

She took hold of his arm. "Remember the day we arrived here, on the boat? How I carried those orange peels in my hand for over an hour, hoping to find a rubbish bin?"

"You were awfully green, then." Doc grinned, recalling how she stubbornly refused to drop them, and add to the litter on the street. How

her palm had been stained a bright orange, by the time she finally gave in, and hid them behind a bush.

“S’ttruth. I’m an old hand, now.” She threw hers a little further, into one of the potholes. “Oh, how I missed this place! It’s good to be home.”

“Yeah?”

Claire nodded. “America’s so ugly.”

Doc was dying to show Claire all the progress he’d made on the boat, and dragged her toward the ladder as soon as they entered the boatshop. “Wait ‘til you see our bronze windlass,” he said.

Claire hesitated, realizing that Doc intended to give her the full tour. She had something else in mind. “Hold on. I think I’ll change into something more comfortable, first.”

Doc was devastated.

Claire made light of it. “Oh, come on! I’ll just be a minute.”

“Sure. Fine.” He continued on, and climbed aboard the boat, and sat down on the anchor windlass to wait for her. They had seldom been separated, and Claire’s three months in exile had created an uncomfortable gap between them. He didn’t know how to bridge it. Didn’t even know how deep it was. How much they had failed to share. He found that he was in no mood to sit still, and wandered down below.

He heard her stride across the scaffolding, and then the thud of her bare feet, landing on deck. She made a lovely, gymnastic entrance, sliding smoothly down the ladder. She had donned her bib overalls - the paint-encrusted, canvas overalls which she always wore, when she was working on the boat. She was wearing nothing underneath.

She prowled around, running her fingers over the recently-oiled cabinetwork, unscrewing the dogs on one of the portlights, working the lever on the bronze galley pump, smiling constantly. Doc had spent hours sanding, and cleaning up, chasing all the wood dust. It looked a picture. She seemed enchanted.

“Looks like we’ve got a lot of catching up to do, you and me,” she said. She jumped onto the bunk, and bounced on the new mattress, trying it out. A nipple peeked out from behind the bib. “Now, what was it that you were in such a hurry to show me? The anchor winch, was it?”

“Well...”

“Or, was it the plumbing...?” She rolled over onto her side, and propped herself up on one arm. One of her straps had come unbuckled, and the bib flopped down. She smiled saucily.

“Well, what d’ya reckon, Doc?” She mimicked an Australian accent, teasing him. “What d’ya reckon we oughta do, first? Mate?”

Bingo.

\*\*\*

“Satellite Tracking. Lewis speaking. Over.”

“Hi Lewis! It’s Emily, in Mozambique. Did you hear from one of my girls, this morning? Over.” They had long since rounded Cabo Delgado, and crossed the border into Tanzania, but Lewis had no way of knowing that.

“Morning, Emily. Figured it was one of your turtles. We logged a call at 09h30, from transmitter MOZ-13. Is that the critter? Over.”

“That’s her. How’s her signal? Over.”

“Loud and clear. She’s looking real good. Do you want her coordinates? Over.”

“Well...let’s wait. I just released her yesterday. But what’s your best guess, Lewis? Think she’ll head south, like the last two? Over.”

“She’s already moved north, looks like. I have her just off the mouth of the Ruvuma river. Over.”

“What? No way! She couldn’t be all the way up there! That’s almost fifty miles!” Emily put some convincing emotion into the response, and Murray mimed applause.

“Okay. Hold on. I’ll check the tape.”

Lewis confirmed the position, and suggested they wait for the next scheduled transmission before jumping to any conclusions. If the GPS had malfunctioned, it would be evident soon enough.

Murray smiled. “Our GPS seems to be all right.” He rapped a knuckle against the bezel. The digital display remained unchanged.

“Why are you beating on it, then?”

“Oh...” He withdrew his hand. “Habit, I guess.”

Emily puzzled over that.

“I didn’t have electronics like this, on *Mavis*,” Murray said. “But she did have a beautiful brass barometer. The needle would stick, sometimes, so I’d tap the glass, and watch which way it moved.”

“Couldn’t you oil it?”

“No! Are you kidding? Oil would just gum up the works. It was a great design feature, actually. That barometer spoke to me.”

To optimize battery life, the backpack transmitted for only ten seconds duration, at intervals which were timed to coincide with the overhead passage of a monitoring satellite. Emily waited until she was certain that Lewis had received another update, before calling him again.

“MOZ-13 is really motoring, Emily,” he said. We have her moving north-northwest, averaging eight knots, over the last four hours. Over.”

“But sea turtles can’t swim that fast, Lewis! Not for hours on end, like that.”

As he reeled off the coordinates, Emily compared them to the GPS display on the catamaran’s console. The backpack was spot on.

Lewis continued. “I asked the satellite to query your girl’s on-board computer, during the last flyover, but the only system to respond was the GPS relay. Is she wearing a send-only unit? Over.”

“Affirmative.”

“Well...she’s on her own, then. I don’t know what else to tell you, Emily. Maybe she’s riding an unusually strong current. Over.”

“I’m really worried, Lewis. I can’t explain it, but I feel certain that she’s in danger. What if she’s been captured?”

Lewis didn’t want to speculate.

Emily had been receiving regular position reports on the three turtles which she had fitted with backpacks, during her offshore trips. Lewis had already compiled the data, and read out the coordinates, while Emily recorded them in her notebook.

She kept a small map, neatly folded inside the notebook, and plotted the new positions. She showed it to Murray. “One of my turtles appears to headed straight for Antarctica.”

The turtle started swimming due south, immediately after its release, and hadn’t stopped. It was now five hundred miles south of the Cape of Good Hope, and still going strong.

“I didn’t know that sea turtles liked such cold water,” Murray commented.

“They don’t. It’s such unusual behavior, I could easily get an article published, if I could only come up with a plausible explanation.”

Murray grinned. “The reason’s pretty obvious, if you ask me.”

Emily bristled. “Oh. Is that so?”

“Sure. She’s too embarrassed to face her friends, now that you’ve saddled her with one of these things.” Murray held up the backpack. “How could she hope to find a mate, with a contraption like this glued on her back? It would really get in the way, wouldn’t it?”

“Well...now that you mention it...”

“Your MOZ-10 is suicidally depressed, would be my guess.”

“Murray! That’s awful!”

Emily sulked awhile, but she couldn't sustain it. The sailing was glorious, and she felt exhilarated, having finally left Colonel Mendes in her wake. Even so, she decided to ask the question.

"You think my experiments are silly, don't you?"

Murray hedged. "I didn't say that."

"But that's what you think."

"Come on. I think the migration phenomena are fascinating. Not only the sea turtles. There's the salmon. And albatross..."

"That's not what I asked."

Murray smiled, apologetically. "Okay. Not 'silly', though. That's not fair. But why have scientists stopped asking the important questions? Take the migrations. Isn't the most intriguing question: why our own species is no longer able to find its way home, while these birds, fish and reptiles still know their way around, quite well? I mean, really...look at all this crap." Murray waved his hand at the navigation console. "Without our technology, we're lost.

"Isn't it possible that the animals truly 'know' where they are? There is a kind of elegance to it, don't you think? The splendor of the simple?"

Emily turned the backpack over in her hands, wondering why everyone talked to her about 'scientists', as if she weren't one, herself.

Murray continued. "Scientific thought has turned the world into a picture. Think about how it might have started out. A rough, charcoal sketch, perhaps - a naive rendering of an animal, on the wall of a cave. The aboriginal scientists who filled in the details and added the colors would have been in the picture, themselves. Their natural studies were carried out from within its margins, since they were still a part of nature.

"But, in order to study the picture, now, you have to remove yourself, and assess it from a distance. Not from *within* nature, but by standing *over* it. Objectively. Like a spectator.

"Wilson would be in the big picture somewhere, asleep under a tree, or chasing a seagull. Or even gnawing on a bone, like he's doing now. There's all sorts of interesting things you could learn, just by observing Wilson."

Wilson tensed his ears, and looked up inquisitively.

*What?*

"Scientists have largely lost interest in those kind of observations, though. They became bored with merely looking at their picture, once everything had been studied, and already given a name. Armed with technology, scientists have become more *aggressive*. They've cut everything open, to have a look inside. Developed microscopes to enlarge



the details. More sophisticated scalpels to dissect the innards. They are no longer observing nature. They are studying their own picture.”

“But, what’s the difference?” Emily asked.

“Think of the mood. Imagine this picture spread out across a cold, laboratory bench, or clamped to a stainless steel surgical table - with all these technicians hovering over it, aligning their instruments, attaching wires, inserting optical fibers. Probes, of all sorts. The facts they could extract from Wilson would fill a library. The problem, though, is what happens to *Wilson*? He gets cut to bits.”

Wilson cocked his head, and started wagging his tail. He whined.

*Come on. What?*

“And the bits are getting smaller and smaller, all the time. They've even divided the *quarks*, apparently. How did they do it, though? With *violence*. With increasingly powerful technology, capable of producing ever more violent collisions, to pry out the secrets. Nothing has been spared. The aggressiveness of technology has laid bare almost everything.

“With a machine, it is a relatively simple matter to expose its inner workings, and then precisely reassemble it. It's a helluva lot harder to resurrect something alive, once it has been dissected. It can never be quite the same, afterwards. The operation always leaves a scar. Something's lost.”

Emily huffed. “You're being silly. The only thing lost is ignorance.”

Murray slowly shook his head. “Imagine that it’s something you *love*, strapped to that bench. Then, visualize it being stripped naked under the glare of the lights, and violated in every way imaginable. All of it being recorded, monitored, analyzed...you tell me. What’s been lost?”

Emily smiled. “All right. Innocence, then.”

“How about *romance*?”

She leaned her head against him. “I’m all for it.”

The catamaran continued to pick up speed, as the sea breeze freshened further. Murray considered reefing the huge mainsail, but decided to leave it full and press on, to put even more distance between themselves, and Colonel Mendes.

The wind had shifted slightly onshore, after blowing offshore throughout the night, so they were now running rather precariously, by the lee. The mainsail was presenting an awkward angle to the wind, and it was only a matter of time before he’d gybe it accidentally. He couldn’t continue to ignore it.

“Emily? We’ll have to gybe. I’ll need you to steer.”

“No! Are you kidding? I don’t know how steer a boat like this!”

“Don’t be silly! It’s no different than driving your Rover. Come on. Take the wheel.”

Emily really wanted to try, so she didn’t protest further. She immediately dismissed Murray’s comparison to driving a car. The catamaran was much too wide to bear any resemblance to a vehicle, and the bows were so far forward of the helm that she could barely see the thin rope netting strung between the two hulls. She felt as if she were steering a tennis court.

“Head inshore, a bit more. The last thing I want is for us to gybe while I’m sorting all this out...” The ropes within reach of the helm had found their way underfoot, and lay in a knotted heap at the bottom of the cockpit well.

She steered ever so slightly toward the land. The wheel moved smoothly. “What does it mean? To ‘gybe’?” she asked.

Murray paused, frustrated with his efforts to untangle the preventer line. “Well, if the wind crosses behind the leech, and fills the sail on the wrong...”

Emily giggled. “A ‘leech’? What’s that?”

“That’s the...uh...oh, hell. Just aim for that flat-topped hill over there. All right?”

“Terrific.” Emily realized that she wasn’t the slightest bit seasick.

Satellite Tracking noted the increase in velocity, when they plotted the next position update from MOZ-13. Emily had succeeded in planting the suggestion that the turtle had been captured; and when Lewis tried to make sense of the turtle’s unnaturally swift movements, he was drawn to that same conclusion, thinking it were his very own.

“I’d say she’s been taken aboard a very fast boat. It seems like the only plausible explanation. MOZ-13 couldn’t be making a steady fourteen knots through the water. Not on her own. Over.”

“Any indication where they’re taking her?”

“Zanzibar, I’d say. Or Dar es Salaam. Over.”

“Oh, Lewis...I feel so...violated,” Emily sniffed. She had never been able to cry on cue, but the sniffing sounded convincing enough.

“I’m really sorry, Emily. I wish there were something more I could do. But...it looks bad, doesn’t it? MOZ-13 has been out of the water an awfully long time. Over.”

“I know, I know...but, can’t we do *anything*? Her murderers shouldn’t get away with this! Not when it would be so easy to track them down! That backpack will keep broadcasting for more than a month.”

“Why do you suppose they haven’t jettisoned it? Over.”

“Well, it’s epoxied to the shell, for one thing. And the components are valuable. The lithium-ion batteries alone are worth several hundred dollars.”

“Look...let me make a few calls. Maybe I can convince someone at UNESCO to follow up on this. Over.”

“Turtle poachers deserve to *die*, Lewis.”

The radio remained silent for a moment. “You’re distraught, Emily. Try to get some rest. Okay? I’ll see what I can do. Over and out.”

SATELLITE FACSIMILE TRANSMISSION

*"Keeping an eye on things..."*

## **OZONE WHOLE**

Scientific Satellite Tracking Center  
Diego Garcia

Fisheries Conservation Officer  
UNESCO/Zanzibar

We have confirmation of a probable CITES violation in your jurisdiction. A loggerhead sea turtle has been taken from the coastal waters off Mozambique, and transported to Zanzibar by sea.

The turtle was fitted with a position-indicating radio beacon [PIRB], in conjunction with a UNESCO-sponsored conservation project. This beacon remains operational. Satellite tracking has confirmed the following coordinates: 6°09.24'S, 39°11.58'E.

Consult PIRB technical data sheet for transmission times and frequencies. Transmitter is encoded MOZ-13.

Can you help? There is a possibility that this sea turtle is still alive.

Lewis Rinaker  
Tracking Control

Copies to:

Embassy of the United States of America  
Dar es Salaam

Reuters/Africa  
Dar es Salaam

World Wildlife Fund  
Nairobi

## ENDANGERED SPECIES

Tiny Abdullah came to collect the ivory, himself. His men shrouded the companionway with some large plastic tarps, and roped off part of the quay in preparation for loading the tusks into the back of a panel truck. A couple kids wandered over and loitered curiously outside the ropes. One of Tiny's bodyguards chased them away.

As soon as the tusks were off-loaded, Murray moved the catamaran off the quay, and took her out to the mooring, in the roadstead.

"You can't buy ivory of this quality, anymore. Not at any price," Tiny said. "My associates will be pleased. I am in your debt, Doc."

"I reckon I owed you this one, Tiny. You know. For Claire."

He laughed. "You place an awfully high value on that woman! She didn't cost me all that much, with her condoms. Just a fraction of what I stand to make from this ivory."

Doc grinned. "Well, I know for a fact that she's pleased about being able to pay you back."

"Really? She's remorseful?"

"Well...I wouldn't put it quite like that. No."

Container cargo was loaded in Zanzibar only once or twice per month, which meant that Tiny had to store the ivory for several weeks, at least, until the ocean freight could be arranged. He had moved a second shipping container inside the contractor's fence at the fish market, adjacent to the one he was using for his office. He was already paying for security on the site, anyway.

His men backed the panel truck hard against the door, and began stacking the tusks inside.

\*\*\*

The miniature VHF radio was so light that Doc had forgotten he was carrying it, and he jumped when he heard Emily's voice coming out of his pocket.

"He's here. Mendes has just rounded the point," she reported. "I repeat, Mendes has rounded the point." Emily reached down and released the safety on her AK-47, without taking her eyes off the Colonel's boat.

The launch briefly held the course for the harbor entrance, then headed directly for the catamaran. Emily grabbed Murray's arm.

He covered her hand, and squeezed it. "Don't worry. Mendes won't try anything. Not here."

Murray swung open the companionway door, stepped on deck, and casually stood in full view as the launch passed slowly astern. The Colonel stared at him through one of the broken pilothouse windows. Murray waved.

"What are you *doing*?" Emily whispered, worriedly peeking out the door.

"Just being neighborly." Murray turned around, and stuck his head inside. He smiled. "We live here, now. Remember?"

Emily was astonished by his casual use of the plural, 'we'. She stammered, unable to find the right words. Or, any words at all, for that matter. In the end, she just blushed.

Doc's voice came over the VHF. "Yo! Murray?"

Emily offered the portable, but the cat's radio was within reach of the companionway, and Murray picked up that microphone, instead.

"You got another fax from Ambassador Jones," Doc related. "He wants to know if you can mark the Mozambiquan boat, so that the Marines can quickly pinpoint it from the air, and take them by surprise. What d'ya reckon? Any ideas?"

Murray thought for a moment. "Inspector Mwizi is going aboard her for the Customs check, isn't he? Couldn't he order them to leave their quarantine flag flying? Over." The 'Q' flag was bright yellow, and would be easy to spot.

Bingo.

\*\*\*

Colonel Mendes was far less imposing in his civilian clothes. He wasn't wearing socks, and his slacks were much too short, leaving his bony ankles exposed. His chest had deflated, and now appeared sunken, underneath his shiny coffee-colored shirt.

His facial features were birdlike - deeply set eyes, with bushy brows and a thin, aquiline nose - and he had always reminded Doc of a bird of prey. His habitual strutting and posturing had almost seemed appropriate when he was in uniform, given all the colored ribbons and adornments on his military coat. He still had a predatory look about him, albeit a much shabbier one. Perhaps closer to a crow, than an eagle.

He had a nasty-looking gash on his forehead.

“Looks like you had a rough trip, Colonel,” Doc offered, solicitously.

Mendes scowled.

Claire was sitting cross-legged on the floor, putting the finishing touches on the new sign for the Women’s Health Center. She looked up, with a paintbrush clamped between her teeth.

“Oh, shame! You’ve been hurt!”

“Please. Don’t concern yourself,” Mendes insisted. “It is only a small cut, despite the blood. We broke a pane of glass, nothing more.”

Claire went to fetch the medical kit.

“I have come here for my gloves,” Mendes declared, ominously.

Doc had to laugh. “No kidding? And here I thought you’d come up for the *cloves*.” The malevolent expression which came over the Colonel’s face reminded him that the man was exceedingly dangerous. “Oh, come on! Don’t get all huffy. Your gloves are here, just like I promised.”

“A ton and a half?”

“Right. First, do me a favor, and let Claire look after your cut. She’s all excited. You’re the Health Center’s first patient.” Doc heard the buzzer on his cell phone. “Excuse me a minute, Colonel.”

“Doc? This is Henry. Over at UNESCO.”

Doc hadn’t spoken with him since the trip. “G’day, Henry! How’d you like the Comoros?”

Of course, Henry hadn’t called to chat. “Listen. I just got off the phone with the American Ambassador, and the man is hopping mad. He says he’s going to have you arrested.”

Doc left Colonel Mendes in Claire’s care, and walked out of earshot. “No kidding....”

The line fell silent for a moment. “That’s all you have to say? ‘No kidding?’ What’s going on over there, buddy? You aren’t really selling sea turtle meat at that fish market, are you?”

“Of course not, Henry!”

“Well, he’s sure convinced you are. Either you, or Tiny Abdullah. A UNESCO turtle has gone missing, in Mozambique, and the Ambassador wanted confirmation that our organization was sponsoring a sea turtle research project down there. I told him we were. You know the one? Near Querimbas Lodge?”

“Sure. It must be one of Emily’s turtles.”

“Emily...?”

“She’s the resident herpetologist down there. Lovely lady.”

Henry felt himself stiffen. “This Emily...is she athletic-looking, with light brown hair? And freckles? Tall, and willowy?”

Whoops. Doc had forgotten about Emily's stint as a cocktail waitress. "I, uh...wouldn't know about any of that, Henry. Emily's, well...a scientist."

Henry tried to put her out of his mind. "There's something else. That Fisheries Officer - the one who goes out on the prawn trawler - have you seen him lately? He's involved in the investigation, somehow."

"I see him every day, Henry. He works out of my office."

"Really...? Well...when you see him, ask him to call me, will you? What's his name, again?"

"Murray."

Henry began to wonder.

Doc continued. "So. Is Ambassador Jones planning to come over and arrest me, personally?"

"No. He's calling in the Marines. Seems there's a helicopter strike force just offshore, on a Naval vessel steaming toward the Persian Gulf."

Claire ushered the freshly-bandaged Colonel over to the vault. The main door stood open, and Ali was standing guard in front of the inner security gate, wearing a uniform he'd borrowed from Inspector Mwizi. He squinted coldly at the Colonel, trying his best to appear menacing. The condoms were visible through the heavy steel grille. The cases were stacked almost to the ceiling.

Claire went behind the wholesale desk to fetch the Colonel's paperwork. She lifted a stack of forms onto the counter.

"I have arranged everything in the proper order, for you." She pulled two documents off the top. "This is your export permit, and attached to the back of that...the cargo manifest. I would take both of these to Customs House, first. Next, there's the application for your special fuel allotment. That's for the Transport Ministry. While you're over there, you might just as well pick up your de-ratting certificate..."

Mendes interrupted. "There is no need for this."

"Oh, forgive me!" Claire gasped. "Doc told me, but I completely forgot! You're a Customs agent, yourself, aren't you? How silly of me, presuming to give *you* instructions!" She smiled meekly, and pushed the stack in his direction.

Mendes stared morosely at the forms.

"You'll breeze right through them, I'm sure."

He grabbed the papers off the counter, and roughly rolled them up. "I will attend to the formalities, later. Meanwhile, I would like my sergeant to begin loading the condoms. Can we open this door, and..."



Claire emphatically shook her head. “Oh, no. No, I’m sorry, Colonel, but we can’t possibly release the shipment, without the paperwork. Tanzanian Customs is quite strict about that.”

Mendes bristled. “Doc...!” He spun around angrily, ready for a confrontation, but Doc was nowhere in sight.

“Is there a problem?” Claire asked pleasantly.

“Tell Doc...I’ll be back.” He stalked off, clenching the paperwork in his fist.

“I’d be more careful with those, Colonel!” Claire called after him. “Customs gets touchy when the forms are crumpled like that!”

Doc inched out from behind the one of the tarpaulins, which they had hung from the rafters to keep down the construction dust. “Is he gone...?”

Claire had kept watch at the door. “Yep. He walked straight across the harbor, and didn’t look back.”

“All right. We’d better get out of here. Ali!” Doc shouted.

“Boss...?”

“Close the vault! We’re taking the rest of the day off.”

Customs Inspector Patricio Mwizi gave the Colonel’s paperwork his personal attention. “Well, I think we are just about finished here, Mr. Mendes. May I ask how you will be paying for this?”

“Paying? Paying for *what?*”

“It’s all itemized, here. Harbor fees. Insurance. Wharfage. And since the condoms are bound for Mozambique, there’s the export duty, of course.”

“All right! All right!” Mendes fumed. “How much?”

He spun around the invoice so that the Colonel could check the tariffs. “Comes to six thousand, three hundred and twelve dollars. American.”

Mendes’ lip began to twitch. “There has been a mistake.”

“Oh...? Let me see.” Inspector Mwizi retrieved the invoice, and carefully went over the figures. He shook his head. “No. The sum is correct. Considering the high value of the cargo, it seems quite reasonable.”

“But certain...arrangements...have been made.”

“Inspector Mwizi thoughtfully rubbed his chin. “Could you be more specific?”

The Colonel was reluctant to say anything further, suddenly fearful of entrapping himself.

“I cannot do my job properly if you insist on withholding information, Mr. Mendes.” Patricio leaned his elbows on the counter. “Please. Be candid with me. You were honestly expecting to pay much less, I can see that. Are you a member of some charitable organization? Could that be it?”

Mendes smiled. “Yes. That’s it, exactly.”

“Well, fine!” Inspector Mwizi produced several more forms, and carefully positioned innumerable, well-used sheets of carbon paper inside, before passing them on to the Colonel. “Now, while you’re busy with these, perhaps I’ll run upstairs and make a photocopy of your charitable exemption certificate. You have the documents with you, I assume?”

Mendes abandoned the paperwork on the counter, and returned to the boat to get his pistol.

His sergeant mistakenly assumed that the weapon was meant for him. His voice quavered. “Forgive me, Colonel, but they are selling me no fuel.”

The attendants at the fuel dock had asked to see his fuel allotment, and since he had nothing to show them, they hadn’t even allowed the boat to tie up alongside. His hand trembled, as he returned the American currency which the Colonel had entrusted to him.

“Idiot!” Mendes ripped the money from his hand.

The diesel tank aboard the launch was almost empty after the long run from Mocímboa. They couldn’t leave Zanzibar, without refuelling. He was trapped.

Colonel Mendes was still holding his pistol when the loud thumping of the helicopter rotor blades overwhelmed his senses. The helicopter passed directly overhead, and hovered over the bow of the launch. The noise was intense, so oppressive he was unable to think clearly, and when he ran out onto the aft deck, he was waving his arm, as well as the gun, wildly in the air.

The door gunner didn’t like the looks of it, and briefly opened fire. Splinters from the pilothouse decking filled the air. Colonel Mendes dove down onto the deck, and crawled toward the rail, and huddled next to the heavy bulwark. The thick timbers offered no protection against an attack directed from above. There was none to be had.

Mendes saw several coils of rope drop from the helicopter, and trail down onto the foredeck of the launch. A group of commandos emerged, a second later, and slid in unison the ropes. They fired their projectiles

through the cabin windows from a position about ten feet above the deck.

The Colonel slipped over the side, as the barrage of stun grenades exploded belowdecks. He swam to the nearest dhow, and briefly hid behind the transom. Twenty dhows of various sizes were crowded up against the quay, tied stern-to. He began working his way down the line, swimming and pulling himself hand-over-hand from one mooring line to the next.

He came to some slippery stone stairs, which were half-hidden by one of the large dhows. The slime made it impossible to stand on them, so he crawled out of the water on his hands and knees, and flopped down on the first dry step. Then, he took off his shirt and calmly pretended to wash it.

A police car turned onto the harbor road, with its siren wailing, and the officers spotted him. And paid no notice whatsoever.

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“The Mozambiquan boat is dirty, Mr. Ambassador. We have recovered the turtle PIRB, and a cache of automatic weapons. There doesn’t seem to be any turtle shell aboard, but we have found some ivory.”

“Well done, Major,” Ambassador Jones said. “How much ivory?”

“So far, only one tusk, sir.”

“Any cooperation from the crew?”

“Yes, sir. One of them won’t shut up. He’s begging us to take him to America. Says he wants to defect. He claims to be a sergeant in the Mozambiquan Army. Says his commanding officer had boasted about a big business deal that was supposed to go down here, with that Tiny Abdullah character.”

“And the fish market?”

“We’re encountering some resistance, sir.”

Most of the kiosks at the fish market were staffed by the women, and when it became evident that their Center was about to be raided by soldiers, once again, they rallied and rushed inside to defend it. Many had small children with them.

“Thieves!” one of the fishermen’s wives yelled. The women linked arms, and sat down shoulder-to-shoulder in front of the condom vault, blocking the door.

The Marines wondered what was going on.

A small boy picked up a small piece of cement from the construction rubble, and hurled it in their direction. It landed harmlessly at their feet. "We'll never let you have them!" he shouted.

The commandos were wearing face paint - grotesque, snarling masks, which were intended to make them look fearsome - and they felt incredibly foolish, being faced down by a group of heckling women. A young girl pointed her finger at the funny faces, and started giggling. The taunting spread.

The Marine lieutenant decided to ignore the steel-doored vault, for the time being, and ordered one of his men to stand guard over it, while the squad searched the rest of the premises. They looked inside the ice machine, emptied bins filled with fish, and checked every one of the market stalls, but they didn't really know what they were searching for. None of them had ever seen turtle meat before.

But they recognized the elephant tusks right away.

Doc grimaced when he heard the gunfire coming from the direction of the dhow harbor. He had counted on making it safely aboard the catamaran, and sailing out to one of the offshore sand cays before the soldiers arrived.

"Who can they be shooting at?" Claire asked, worriedly.

Doc knew what she was thinking. "Hey! Don't! The Marines wouldn't open fire on unarmed women!"

"What, then?"

Doc sighed. "How would I know? Maybe Mendes took a shot at them. Come on."

They skirted the harbor by following a maze of alleyways and side streets, which led through the warehouse district. They rejoined the main road close to the beach, which fronted the touristed part of Old Town. Murray was sitting on one of the rust-streaked, ornamental iron benches that lined the promenade seawall. He rushed over to meet them.

The inflatable was floating at the base of the wall, tied to the ruins of some steps. Murray described the assault on the Colonel's boat, as they hurried down to it.

"Did they get Mendes?" Doc asked, hopefully.

"Not sure. The Marines gathered all the Mozambiquans on deck, while they searched the boat, but they led them back inside, in handcuffs, once they had the launch tied up to the quay. There were four men. I didn't see the Colonel."

Murray started the outboard motor, which effectively preempted any further questions.

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Colonel Mendes continued to sit on the stairs, as the second, and then a third helicopter landed near the Dhow Masters warehouse. His light polyester shirt had dried quickly. The police had cordoned off the quay, close to his launch, and he climbed the steps, and mingled with the crowd that had gathered behind the barricade.

Several Marines were guarding his boat. Mendes suddenly felt indignant. He'd done nothing to warrant this injustice. He hadn't even broken the law. There was no reason why he couldn't reclaim his boat. Then, he saw a Tanzanian official emerge from the cabin, accompanied by a Marine officer. They were carrying his elephant tusk - the one that he had used to threaten Emily.

He recognized the official. It was Customs Inspector Mwizi. The ivory had given him sufficient cause to seize the boat. The Colonel would have gladly done the same, in Mocímboa. So his launch was forfeit. He knew immediately what he had to do. He instinctively reached down and touched his pistol, which was reassuringly tucked inside his trousers.

He'd steal a boat.

Not just any boat. Certainly not one of the antiquated sailing dhows alongside the quay. No. He needed a fast boat. One with an engine.

He'd steal Doc's catamaran.

\*\*\*

"You want to bring the dinghy aboard? Or tow it out to the cay?" Murray asked.

Doc wasn't feeling too energetic. "Well..." He glanced timidly toward Claire. She scowled. "Ah. Better not, mate. Last time we did that, the wind caught the dinghy, and flipped it over. We lost our oars, and..."

"Our *third* set," Claire injected.

"I promised I'd never tow it again."

"It's bad luck," Claire added. "Something rotten always happens."

The catamaran was equipped with decent davits, but Murray had knotted a hammock between them, and it seemed like too much trouble to take it down. Doc unfastened the outboard motor, instead. The inflatable dinghy weighed less than thirty kilos, without it, and they easily pulled it aboard, and stowed it forward of the cabin, atop the netting.

The mooring was further from shore than it appeared, and the Colonel stopped short of the boat, and treaded water for a moment, to catch his breath. He made his final approach underwater, and surfaced next to one of the long hulls, without being seen.

He was alarmed by the height of the deck above the water. He couldn't reach the stanchions, or the cleats. There were two glass portlights installed in the hull, with metal flanges, and he barely managed to grip one with his fingernails and rest his legs for a moment. He knew they had at least one automatic weapon on the boat. He had to slip silently aboard, without losing the advantage of surprise. But he had to find a better spot.

He paddled quietly to the stern, hoping to find a foothold on top of the rudder blade. But the boat had inboard, spade rudders. There was nothing to step on, and nothing to hold onto. Nothing, at all. He tried to clamp his hands around the narrowest part of the stern, so he could rest, but the glossy, fiberglass hull was too slick, and he lost his grip with every passing wave. A slight current was setting into the roadstead, and each time his fingers slipped loose, he had to swim a few strokes to return to the boat.

He reached for the netting which was strung between the hulls, but it was high above the water, and he couldn't even come close. He decided to try the bow.

A dog began whining.

*Who are you?*

Wilson was standing on deck, peering down at him, leaning curiously over the rail. The Colonel continued swimming slowly against the current, trying to avoid any sudden movements. The dog walked along the deck, keeping pace with him. He whined, again.

*Where are you going?*

The bridge deck which connected the hulls was solid, and Mendes felt relieved when he swam underneath it, and left the whining dog behind. But Wilson was waiting for him at the forward end of the cabin, where there was another expanse of netting. This time, Wilson barked.

*Hah! Found you!*

“Wilson! Cut it out!” Murray yelled.

“What's he on about?” Doc asked.

“Probably some brine shrimp, feeding on the hull. It's that crackly, crunchy sound they make. He barks at it, sometimes.”

“We might as well cast off the mooring, eh? The current will carry us out, while we're stripping off the sail covers.”

“Right. I’ll get it.”

Mendes heard Murray’s footsteps approaching, and allowed the current to carry him back out of sight, underneath the bridge deck. Several molded beams were supporting the deck, running fore and aft, and the Colonel was able reach up, and hold onto them, as long as he continually kicked his feet.

Wilson laid down on deck, and rested his muzzle on the rail. He started wagging his tail.

*I see you down there!*

As the Colonel struggled to hold his position, he noticed an end of rope, sticking through the forward netting. It was the painter from the overturned dinghy, stowed above. If he could pull down enough rope, and make a loop in the end for his foot, he’d have a way aboard.

Murray dropped the catamaran’s mooring lines into the water, and the boat began to drift slowly away from the buoy.

Mendes waited until the footsteps retreated. Then, swam up to the loose rope. As he started pulling it through the net, Wilson clamped onto the middle of it.

*Hey! You can’t have that!*

Mendes had no leverage, and couldn’t pull it free. He didn’t have enough rope. The dog began to growl.

“It might be a good idea to motor out of the way of this dhow,” Claire suggested, pointing in the direction of the channel.

Doc was half-buried under the mainsail, and peeked out from underneath the folds of sailcloth. The fully-loaded dhow was making for the harbor, and still under sail. The catamaran had a fragile skin, compared to the dhows. “Reckon so. Would you mind?”

“Course not!” Claire happily fired up the starboard engine. She was thrilled to be out on the water again. She often helmed the cat. Doc hated steering.

The Colonel felt the added pressure on his weary arms, and realized that he was now being towed through the water. The damned dog still wouldn’t let go. He lacked the strength to pull himself up the rope, hand over hand. He desperately needed a foothold.

He decided to use his shirt. He managed to rip open the front, and wriggle an arm free, while holding on with only one hand. It took all his strength. The boat was slowly picking up speed.

But not fast enough for Claire.

“She sure seems sluggish, Doc. It the bottom fouled, or what?” She reached down, and started the port engine, as well.

The rope was quite close to the port hull, and the growing bow wave repeatedly submerged the Colonel’s face. He succeeded in knotting one sleeve onto the rope, and groped for the second armhole with his foot. As soon as he put some weight on it, the cloth ripped. The dog growled again.

He’d have to shoot it.

The Colonel removed one hand from the rope, to reach for his gun, but desperately grabbed hold with both hands, again, when he felt it slipping through his fingers.

Some water was forced up his nostrils. He swallowed several mouthfuls.

The bitter end of the rope brushed against his cheek. He sank his teeth into it, which allowed him to release one hand long enough to pull out the pistol. He held it awkwardly, gripping it against the rope, and aimed at the dog. The curl of water off the bow made it hard to see.

Wilson saw the gun, and instantly released the rope. He barked furiously.

*No! Bad noise!*

Mendes fell back, and submerged, as the line momentarily went slack. The remainder of the rope payed out rapidly through the net. It came taut abruptly, forcefully jerking around his head, and accelerating him rapidly through the water. The rope ripped from his teeth, and he lost his grip. His momentum carried him well beneath the surface.

“Doc? Did you feel that?” Claire asked. There was a note of alarm in her voice.

“No. What?” he asked.

“I think we hit something.”

“But it’s clear sailing, through here. The water’s at least...”

“No, not that. I mean...with the *prop.*”

Doc quickly scanned the surface astern, for any floating debris. “I don’t see anything...” The water in the roadstead was rather turbid, with mud from the harbor. A reddish...sort of mud.

“Well...it didn’t feel hard. Not like a log, or anything like that. Maybe it was just a big jellyfish.”

“No worries, then.”

Claire shrugged. “Guess not.”



Wilson came trotting past the cockpit, and stood at the stern, looking down at the water, wagging his tail.

*Where'd he go?*

Murray was readying the headsail sheets, and a bight of the rope flopped down onto the deck, next to the dog. Wilson trapped it with his paw. When Murray tried to pull it away, he sunk his teeth into it. Then growled and tugged, and shook his head.

“Will you *stop*, already!” Murray yelled.

Wilson spit out the rope.

“Poor Wilson. Stuck out here, all day,” Emily lamented, reaching over and rubbing his chastened ears. “No one ever comes out to play with you, do they?”

“Hey! Come on. He has to learn that he can't play tug-of-war with this expensive, braided line. Look at the teeth marks...yecch! He's slobbered all over it.” Murray wiped his hand on his shorts. He flicked the rope toward the dog. “Go on. Piss off!”

Wilson fled up to the foredeck, and laid down dejectedly, next to the dinghy. The painter was trailing back in the water. Something interesting was tied onto the end. Swishing back and forth.

*I've caught a fish!*

The Colonel's shirt was somewhat of a disappointment. So Wilson shredded it.

“You're sure it's his?” asked Emily.

Claire had gotten a close look at it, tending his cut. “Oh, that's his shirt, all right. See here?” She pointed out the bloodstains on the collar. “His face got bloodied when you shot out his windows.”

Murray found strips of the torn fabric all over the foredeck, but the sleeve was still attached to the dinghy painter.

“Does Wilson know how to tie a clove hitch?” Claire asked.

Doc groaned.

Claire blushed slightly. “Well, it's not impossible, or anything! He's a pretty talented dog.”

## **PUBLIC RELATIONS**

Ambassador Jones arrived in the American Embassy's private helicopter to conduct the news conference. He brought along his portable podium. To simplify matters, he also ferried in a few representatives of the international press. They landed directly on the quay.

His aide gathered the journalists aside, and shunted them off for a photo opportunity aboard the seized Mozambiquan launch. The Marine Major ushered over a couple of civilians.

"Mr. Ambassador, I'd like you to meet our Tanzanian Government liaison. Customs Inspector Patricio Mwizi."

The Ambassador smiled diplomatically, and extended his hand. "We appreciate the close cooperation, Inspector. And you, sir...?"

"Name's Murray. UNESCO. Fisheries Conservation."

"Oh, right. We spoke earlier. Good piece of work, tracking down that transmitter beacon. Sorry we couldn't come up with that sea turtle for you."

Murray nodded. "From what we've learned, I'd say it was a false alarm, sir. Probably a simple case of glue failure. The epoxy adhesive on the base of that transmitter hadn't cured properly. The PIRB fell off, and was snagged accidentally, is my guess. It was found impaled on the head of a heavy screw, which had worked loose from the planking on that Mozambiquan boat."

"The sea turtle might still be alive, then?"

"I'd say so, yes."

"Well, that's marvellous! We'll have a slightly happier ending for our journalist friends. No turtle meat was found, I take it?"

"Oh, no. No chance of that. We monitor the fish market closely, sir. We've yet to issue a single citation."

The Ambassador turned to Inspector Mwizi. "And you examined the Dhow Masters vault, personally, is that right, Inspector?"

"Yes. It is a bonded warehouse, so I am having constant access. Let me say that I am never seeing even the slightest hint of mischief. Not at Dhow Masters."

"And this ivory smuggling business? They're not implicated in that?"

Patricio emphatically shook his head. "Dhow Masters would never be doing such a horrible thing. They are a beacon of hope in the darkening skies over Africa, Mr. Ambassador. The people of Zanzibar hold them in the highest regard."

He was laying it on a little thick, Murray thought.

Ambassador Jones enlisted the aid of a few Tanzanian soldiers to carry the video cameras and sound equipment inside the contractor's fence. They rearranged the ivory to good effect, by leaning an array of large tusks artistically against the shipping container, and used the display as a backdrop for the podium. He chose the camera angle so that the scene included the sign on the adjacent container, which bore the smiling face of Tiny Abdullah. Since the videotape would form part of his political obituary, the big glossy photo seemed fitting, somehow.

Tiny had cultivated a loyal constituency, but their allegiance would be sorely tested by some of charges Ambassador Jones intended to level at the Minister. He would accuse him of poaching the wealth of Africa, and selling it off to a few Asian traders. The Asian connection was irrelevant, of course, but it would anger the Pan-Africanists, who often decried the wealth and disproportionate influence of the Asian business community.

Then, he would inform everyone of the revelations that had recently surfaced in South Africa, concerning Tiny's close cooperation with the former apartheid regime. His complicity in the transshipment of the Angolan ivory had not yet been widely reported.

He would further suggest that Tiny had financed his first restaurant with the profits from those smuggling ventures, and that he was doing so, again. The allegations were plausible. Everyone who viewed the videotape would make the connection, between all that illicit ivory, and the advertisement promoting the future home of Tiny's Seafood Grille.

He checked the camera, and adjusted the focus on the podium, to see whether the lettering on the sign would still be legible, in the background. Claire walked right into his field of view, and smiled for the camera.

"Hi!" she said, waving gaily.

"And who might you be?" the Ambassador asked, standing up behind the camera.

"I'm Claire. From the Women's Center. I'm a little early, I realize, but I wasn't sure if there would be a rehearsal, or not."

Ambassador Jones was speechless.

Claire smiled daintily. "Where do you want me?"

"Excuse me, but would you mind telling me what you're here for?"

"Why...the news conference, of course. I have several important documents to release to the press." She held up a stack of stapled papers.

“Let me see those.” He reached for one.

Claire drew back, and eyed him suspiciously. “I thought you were just the cameraman?”

“No. I’m not.”

Claire smiled, and handed him a copy. “Just teasing.”

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# UNESCO

Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization  
of the  
**UNITED NATIONS**  
Office of the Regional Director  
Africa

Executive Secretary  
Fish Market Historical Society  
Zanzibar

Dear Madam,

I have today instructed our legal department to initiate foreclosure proceedings against you, and claim the fish market property, formerly owned by Tiny Abdullah. Your failure to live up to your contractual obligations has left us no choice.

As anchor tenant of the property, Dhow Masters Women's Center has agreed to take over the management of the fish market restoration project, effective immediately.

UNESCO has every intention of recovering its funds, including the substantial cash withdrawal, which appears to have been used to purchase the illicit ivory. To this end, we have taken steps to freeze the assets of Mr. Abdullah, most notably those of Tiny Abdullah Construction, and the Spice Palace Restaurant. On the strength of our submissions, criminal charges of embezzlement and fraud have been laid against the Minister, by the Tanzanian Justice Department.

Please be advised that any office supplies or chattels, which were obtained with UNESCO funding, are to be surrendered forthwith to Mr. Patricio Mwizi, the new contractor for the redevelopment.

Henry H.

## LAUNCH DAY

"I've never seen him this nervous before," Emily confided.

"Doc somehow equates launching a new sailboat with childbirth," Claire explained. "Notice how he keeps pacing?"

The crane operator had refused to allow anyone to remain aboard, while the boat was being lowered into the water, so Doc was reduced to joining the crowd of spectators. He had nothing to do, except fret, and walk back and forth along the edge of the quay. The crane lifted the boat from the back of the truck, and began swinging it out over the water.

Emily was in a sunny mood.

"You seem pretty relaxed," Claire observed.

Emily had refused to relax her guard, when nothing further was found of Colonel Mendes, and had slept with her assault rifle for the better part of two weeks.

She had also become almost inseparable from Wilson. They went everywhere together. She played tug-of-war with him every day, using the shredded sleeve of Colonel Mendes' shirt; and was convinced that Wilson would attack the Colonel's arm, itself, if it happened to arrive in the flesh.

"I don't know...it's just so much fun, living out on the water. Every morning these squid gather around our anchor chain...I caught some for breakfast. Murray has this cute, little lure. It's like a shrimp, with feathers.

"We were lingering over breakfast, just rocking back and forth on the hammock with our coffee, when the ferry arrived with its load of tourists. Five or six of them were crowded along the rail, on the upper deck, taking photographs of us. Can you imagine! We're actually a tourist attraction!"

She had received word from Margaret that Colonel Mendes hadn't surfaced there, either. There had been a coup, of sorts. Sergeant Major Ngozi had consolidated his command, following an infusion of fifteen cases of condoms, which had filtered down through the ranks. The soldiers whom Mendes had imprisoned following the collapse of the short-lived rebellion had been granted amnesty.

Miles had launched his 'gloves-for-guns' program, and had already accepted two AK-47 rifles and a homemade shotgun, in trade. Margaret was hoping that Doc could spare them a few more cases, since the prophylaxis was working so well. Emily thought she could fit twenty

boxes on the seaplane, if she held a few in her lap. They didn't weigh all that much.

João was tending the turtles.

As the boat began its descent, Doc got a closer look at the nylon lifting straps. They were stained a muddy, dirt brown, and badly frayed. And under considerable strain.

Murray walked over, to keep him company. "How do you think she'll float?" he asked.

"She's a little stern heavy, I reckon. The chain locker's still empty. That's close to three hundred kilos."

"The name came out great."

Claire had painted it on the transom. *Evasion*.

Mori lit the fuse to a long sheet of firecrackers, just as the hull touched the water.

Wilson started howling.

Doc almost fainted.

Clive sounded a long blast on the trawler's air horn, and a cheer went up from the crowd gathered along the seawall. The women from the Center had turned out in force, and began ululating, and dancing on the quay. The straps went slack.

"I'm glad I stayed for the launching," Emily said. "This is terrific."

"When are you going back?" Claire asked.

"In the morning. Eddie said he wanted to get an early start."

"Wouldn't count on it. The Australian Ambassador brought over five cases of Emu Bitter, and a stack of videotapes of the Rugby World Cup. Eddie loves his rugby." That he was also fond of beer went without saying.

Henry had taken command of the inflatable, and met the boat as it was lowered into the water. He began securing the dinghy amidships, so they would have use of the outboard motor if the need arose. *Evasion* had no engine. They would raft up to the prawn trawler, for the night. The aroma of steaming prawns wafted over.

Emily smiled. "I might party a little, myself."

Doc walked past, thinking that he'd help Clive cook the crayfish. Claire stopped him.

"Aren't you going aboard?" she asked.

"What for?"

"Come on! Aren't you even going to check for leaks?"

Doc looked hurt. "Leaks...? Are you serious?"



“Well, we should, I think. Just to be on the safe side. I really can’t remember if I closed the valves, or not, after I finished cleaning up underneath the sink...”

“Oh, shit...!” Doc turned and sprinted for the ladder on the harbor retaining wall, and launched himself over the side.

“What’s wrong?” Emily asked, rather alarmed. “Is it sinking?”

Claire laughed gaily. “No. No. It’s just...you know how Doc gets so cocky, sometimes? I mean...you’d think he’d at least check the bilge, wouldn’t you? To make sure we weren’t taking on any water?” She laughed, again. “He loves surprises, so I hid a present in the bilge. Next to the raw water strainer.”

“Something from San Francisco?”

Claire shook her head. “I baked him a cheesecake. He already got his big present from the States. I brought it back with me on the plane.”

Emily wondered why he hadn’t mentioned it.

“Bilge pump hose,” Claire explained.

Claire heard an American accent, piercing through the crowd. She followed it, and made eye contact with a brush-haired, U.S. Marine. He was coming directly toward her.

“Pardon me, m’am. Would you be Claire?”

She nodded.

“Ambassador Jones sends his regards, m’am. I have a few parcels for you in the jeep. Would you like them brought to your boat?”

“Well...depends on what it is. What, uh...?”

“Two of the packages are wrapped, m’am, so I’m not real sure, but one of ‘em looks a whole lot like a bottle of champagne. Then, there’s an elephant tusk.”

Ambassador Jones had returned the ivory seized from the Colonel’s launch, so that it could be included in the museum collection. The other package was a large bundle of nautical charts, which he had requisitioned from the U.S. Navy.

Doc couldn’t resist opening the charts.

“Hey, Murray...? Check this one out. Anchorages in the Nicobar Islands...” He spread it out atop the saloon table, and they quickly located several promising-looking, landlocked harbors.

“I thought they actively discouraged visits by cruising yachts,” Murray said.

“Nah. It’s opened up, now. I’d love to see the place. You know...before the tourists ruin it.”

“Yeah. True enough.” The coverage was largely of the Indian Ocean Basin. Murray noticed a chart of Chagos Archipelago, with an inset of Diego Garcia atoll, where Lewis was monitoring the movements of Emily’s turtles. He held it up.

“Can I borrow this one? To show Emily?” he asked.

“Oh, just take it. I already have that one.” Doc had hundreds of charts. He recalled that Murray had lost his entire library. “Actually, why don’t you take these? There’s only a few in here that I...uh...won’t let you have.” Doc pulled out a Mergui Archipelago, and a Harbors on the Coast of Burma.

“Hey! That’s great!” Murray looked proudly at his first new chart. “You know, Chagos might be a good, first trip for Emily. As long as we time the monsoon just right, and ride it across through the Seychelles - should be a milk run.”

“Be perfect, I reckon.”

“Cruise through the Maldives, maybe.”

“Well, here you go, then.” Doc passed him several Maldivian Islands.

“Help!” Emily called.

Claire was closest to the hatch. She stuck out her head, and saw Emily struggling at the rail of the trawler, trying to hold Wilson in her arms. She summoned Murray.

“This isn’t working up here,” Emily panted, straining under the weight of the dog. “You’ll have to take him aboard.”

“What’s wrong?”

“It’s the prawns. He’s been drooling...” The trawler deck was five feet above *Evasion*, and Emily had to lower him into Murray’s arms. She came aboard, herself, and into his arms, as well.

Wilson soon found his tusk, began wildly wagging his tail.

*Oh! Oh, joy! My bone!*

“Aw, Murray! The damn dog is pissing all over the deck...”