

## Chapter 28 – Suspicion

John was conscious of the suspicious looks Takunda gave him whenever they crossed paths. Perhaps news of Maita's late-night visit had somehow reached his ears. Privacy wasn't easy in a camp with so many inhabitants. After that first occasion, she'd not visited him again.

While Takunda appeared hostile, Simba seemed amused at his friend's demeanour. From Maita's manner, no one would know she'd even met John. Perhaps Takunda was jealous about some casual remark she'd made about him.

Since his arrival, John had not encountered Gunslinger again, and Clarence had presented no problems. But things changed the morning the deputy commander sent a message for John to report to David's tent without delay.

John hurried across the open clearing to the large tent, which accommodated David's office and sleeping quarters. Clarence waited by the tent door, and David sat at his desk.

'Come in, Ingwe,' said the commander. 'We have received word that Comrade Kutuyisa's men have found Comrade Gondo's body by the river. You may have camped there. There are signs of a burnt-out cooking fire. It's at the point where the trail from Kutuyisa's camp arrives at the river.'

'Yes, Sir, that sounds like the spot we stopped for the night. Perhaps it was the fire that gave away our position to the Skuzapo.'

'You said you were separated when you ran into the forest to escape the attack?'

'Yes, Sir.'

'Whenever we leave a camp, we always remove any sign we were there. The burnt-out fire seems to confirm your story you left in a hurry.'

'Yes, Sir.'

'So you didn't return to your camp after that?'

'No, Sir. I just picked up my backpack and ran. I thought Gondo might have gone ahead of me when we got separated. That's why I came on alone. Perhaps he returned to look for me, or to pick up his backpack, but the Skuzapo were waiting.'

'Hmm! Perhaps. But he wasn't shot. He was stabbed in the throat, and there was no sign of his knife, his AK, or his backpack. OK, Ingwe, that's all for now.'

'Thank you, Sir.'

After John left David's tent, Clarence said, 'Do you believe him?'

'Yes, I've got no reason to disbelieve him.'

'But what if he's a Skuzapo or informer?'

'I don't think he's a spy. If he was, why does he remain? He's had plenty of time to get whatever information he needed, but he's shown no signs of wanting to leave the camp.'

'We should set him a test to prove his loyalty.'

'What sort of test?'

'An active operation where he can show the comrades he's one of us. Sometimes, Gondo even got new recruits to prove themselves.'

'No, Ingwe must stay here. If he's an informer, sending him on a mission will give him the opportunity to escape. And he's not yet completed his training.'

'Ingwe learns fast and is as capable as many older recruits.'

‘No, we’ll keep him here and watch him, but I don’t think we need to worry.’

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Gondo was a popular occasional trainer of new recruits in the camp, and news of his fate spread fast. Simba and Katunda were concerned. Gondo was the group leader who recruited them and encouraged them to prove their loyalty by mutilating Aneni. After much discussion about what they should do, they agreed to inform Clarence about their concerns.

‘Well, what do you boys want?’

Most times, Simba took the lead, but on this occasion, Takunda did the talking.

‘It’s about Ingwe, Sir. We think he’s a sellout.’

‘Is this about Maita? I’ve heard talk she admires him, but I’m not interested in your personal squabbles and jealousies.’

Takunda was surprised his issue with John had reached the ears of the camp’s deputy commander. ‘It’s not about Maita, Sir.’

Clarence smirked. ‘Not too much around the camp escapes my attention.’

‘No, Sir. It’s about how Gondo recruited us, and something you should know about Ingwe.’

Takunda related the details about what happened at the village in Buhera, and how Aneni was John’s lifelong love. He also told of John living with his mother in a white judge’s home and how the judge sent him to school in England.

‘So you see, Sir, we don’t accept he doesn’t know what happened to Aneni, and we suspect he came here to find us to avenge her. Gondo may have told him what happened in the village. That would explain why Ingwe killed him. He pretends to be friends with us, but we can tell he has changed.’

‘I’m sure Gondo wouldn’t have told anybody about his missions, but leave this matter with me, and I will deal with it. Keep quiet about your suspicions. Don’t talk to anyone about them, not even Comrade David. He has a soft spot for Ingwe.’

‘Yes, Sir.’

Takunda and Simba tried to sneak away, melting into the camp’s hive of activity. They were unaware John saw them enter Clarence’s office and leave half an hour later. Now it was his turn to consider what he should do, following the news of Gondo’s death and the visit of Takunda and Simba to the deputy commander. He doubted Clarence would have ordered them to his office. They were just two of several recruits Gondo had brought to the camp. The suspicion between John and his former friends would only grow from hereon.

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John noticed both David and Clarence seemed more present than before the news of Gondo’s death. Were they watching him? Clarence seldom spoke to him, and he felt uneasy with the deputy commander hovering about him at the political orientation meetings. Meanwhile, David was quite chatty, and often spoke to him at the end of the morning runs or after training sessions. Bit by bit, a rapport developed between them.

In late November, the rains came. With this, also came news that following discussions with Henry Kissinger and John Vorster, the Rhodesian prime minister, Ian Smith, announced on television his government’s acceptance of majority rule.

Any celebrations in the camp were subdued because only a day earlier, the Rhodesian forces attacked the main ZANLA camp at Chimoio. Later, the Rhodesian government

announced Operation Dingo had killed at least twelve hundred terrorists, but ZANLA claimed hundreds of the dead were civilians. Chimoio was ZANLA's headquarters in Mozambique, and not too far from Camp David. The guerrillas were nervous.

It was an early lesson for John to watch the sky. The Rhodesian helicopters and planes terrified the guerrillas. Though larger than Kutuyisa's, this wasn't a major guerrilla camp, and the occupants believed it lay undiscovered. But the sound of an engine would send them scattering in all directions. It would be pure luck if any overflying Rhodesian helicopters discovered the well camouflaged green tents sheltered under the trees.

John noted most male recruits passed through training and soon moved on to active operations, while he, Simba, and Takunda remained in camp. He was unaware Clarence held back Simba and Takunda for his own purposes, while David had ordered Clarence to keep him in camp following the discovery of Gondo's body.

Camp routine proved boring for John, and the training was becoming repetitive. The early morning runs were the highlight of his day, and with the rains, the slippery track became more challenging. The runners often slipped and fell, and everyone finished the run, mud-splattered and wet.

Four months passed, and John knew every inch of the run. At one point, the winding track led the runners to a hairpin bend by the river's edge. The dense undergrowth narrowed the track here, and the runners needed to be extra careful negotiating the muddy and slippery hairpin.

At the end of his run each day, John watched the remaining runners coming into camp. He memorised the order they arrived, and the minutes between each. This was useful information, but insufficient for his purposes. So one morning, he stopped at the hairpin and hid in the dense undergrowth to watch a few of the slower runners pass.

Water droplets from the leaves trickled down the back of his neck, and he was conscious of the smell of rotting leaves on the forest floor. When he'd seen enough, he raced through the forest, taking a shortcut to return to his usual running position in the field. Branches stung his face as he ran, and he bruised his shins against fallen limbs. Showers of raindrops sprayed him as he brushed past the foliage. Through the trees he glimpsed the runners who usually preceded him, and he slipped back into the run, a discreet distance behind them.

John repeated this for several days until he was sure of everyone's placing amongst the slower runners. On most days, two runners trailed him by a minute and a half, and Takunda followed a minute later. About two minutes after Takunda passed, another two runners ran by.

The race to regain his usual finishing position was tough. Not only was he running through virgin bush, but he also needed to rejoin the run unseen by any of the others. As he got used to it, running through the shortcut got easier, and then quite comfortable.

The trainers never cancelled the morning runs, irrespective of the weather. On Christmas Eve, the rain pelted down, and the runners set off with their clothes already soaked. The heavy rain limited their visibility to a few feet.

As usual, the faster runners raced off, and John soon fell into his normal position in the middle of the field. He found running in the rain exhilarating, with the heavy cold drops pounding his skin. At the hairpin, he stopped and slipped into the undergrowth. A minute later, two young men passed, running close together.

One more minute, right on time, Takunda appeared. As he ran past, John stuck out a thick fallen branch he noticed on the ground a few days earlier. Takunda sprawled on the track before going over the edge of the steep slope. John looked down to see the bewildered Takunda struggling to stand. Takunda saw him and called out, 'Ingwe, give me a hand. I think I've twisted my ankle.'

John scrambled down the slope and walked over to him. Takunda propped himself up on one elbow. Just then, two more runners passed, and John ducked. It was probably unnecessary in the blinding rain.

Takunda held his arm out for John to help him. John stood, staring at the stricken man, who was getting impatient with his tardiness. 'Well, what are you waiting for?'