

Chapter 52 – A Solution?

Everyone got back into the vehicles. John drove Satan's vehicle, with Akashinga in the rear seat guarding Satan, and Sonny in the front passenger seat for extra security. Elijah and Samson followed in the old Land Rover. They drove to Winston's village, where the enthusiastic villagers gathered around them. But they drew back when they recognised the fearsome Satan. Sonny, the one who set fire to the hut containing Winston's parents and another older couple, compounded their concern.

John found Winston sitting outside his hut.

'My prisoner has wronged both you and me.'

Winston nodded. 'The villagers whisper you have brought Satan and his match here.'

'What match?'

'The thin one who set fire to my parents' house.'

'The thin one is my man now. He only did what Satan ordered.'

'That thin one is evil. He enjoyed burning my parents and laughed as they screamed.'

'How do you know it was he who set light to your parents' hut?'

'His voice is like a girl's. There is no mistake. It was him.'

'Now, he is loyal to me and will do you no harm.'

'He must burn in hell with Satan.'

'Well, not just yet.'

'Why have you brought these evil men to my village?'

'I need a secure place to keep Satan. The old sangoma's hut would be suitable.'

Winston's eyes widened. 'The sangoma said anyone who enters that hut will never leave it.'

'Yes. That's why it is most suitable for our purpose.'

'Must we keep him until he starves to death?'

'No, you must feed him until we can decide a suitable fate for him. We could starve him or shoot him, but that would be too easy.'

'We could burn him in the hut.'

'Perhaps, but let me think about it.'

Winston went into his hut and returned with a key. He led John, Satan, and his men to the old sangoma's abandoned hut and opened the solid wooden door with shaking hands. An overpowering musty smell escaped the hut, choking Winston.

'The sangoma's spirit will not approve of this.'

'Winston, his spirit may tell us how to deal with this evil man.'

Satan entered the hut with little fuss. He may have imagined he'd have no difficulty escaping its confines and appeared unconcerned. He'd not foreseen the pitch blackness of his high-walled prison until the heavy wooden door slammed shut behind him. Nor had he appreciated the extra thick walls the security conscious old sangoma had arranged for himself.

'Now listen carefully, Winston. Satan is a cunning man and will no doubt try to escape. A mat at the door's base will prevent daylight from entering the hut. After total darkness, the light will blind him when you open the door, and he won't be able to escape. Feed him only when the sun shines on the door, and be quiet when you approach the hut, so you don't warn

him you're about to open it. Be quick about it. He is a powerful man and will push past you if you're slow. And never try to feed him alone.'

'Sir, what are we going to do with Satan's vehicle?' said Sonny.

'Samson will drop us back at the camp. Elijah, wait with Satan's vehicle at the entrance to this road. Don't forget to remove the white cloth. When Samson returns, I want you two to drive to Plumtree and leave Satan's vehicle near the border post, then drive back to camp. Don't let anyone see you dumping the vehicle. Major Kim might think Satan and his men may have absconded over to Botswana.'

'But, Sir, what about Jackson Mpfu? Won't he tell Major Kim what happened?'

'That's a chance we must take. But something tells me, without Satan's protection, Jackson Mpfu won't return to Major Kim's camp. He's not the bravest of persons.'

The next afternoon, John paid a quick visit to the village to make sure everything was under control. He'd not yet come up with a suitable plan for Satan. Winston wanted to set fire to the hut, but John held him back. The tall hut was not a typical village hut and might not burn well.

'Winston, he might use the burning thatch to set fire to the door and make his escape.'

The thought caused Winston to think again. 'But we must do something soon. His presence in the hut is a shadow over the village. People fear Major Kim might come and rescue him.'

'Major Kim won't know he is here unless someone in the village betrays us.'

Back at camp in his tent, John struggled with what to do about Simba. He deserved the worst possible fate, and Winston was with him on that. Sonny brought him a mug of tea.

'Sir, have you read that book on your table?'

'I've had no time to read it, Sonny.'

'While you were in Harare, I read some of it.'

'Is it good?'

'It tells you how Shaka, the Zulu king, dealt with his most bitter enemies.'

'Oh, yes! How did he deal with them?'

'Do you know the story of Zwide's mother, Queen Ntombazi?'

'No, I don't.'

'Zwide, chief of the Ndwandwe clan, killed Dingiswayo, Shaka's mentor and ally. People credited much of Zwide's military success to Queen Ntombazi, who was a sangoma. After Shaka defeated Zwide's forces in battle, he claimed Zwide's mother was a witch and took his revenge on her.'

'So, what did he do?'

'Well, first, he...'

When Sonny finished his story, John shook his head. 'Winston was right, Sonny. You are evil. OK! I'll think about it.'

'You needn't worry, Sir. I can organise it.'

'No. First, I must talk to Winston.'

John couldn't get Sonny's story about Queen Ntombazi out of his mind. Simba was a monster and deserved no less a fate, but this was beyond what he'd imagined. Killing Gondo and Takunda was brutal enough, but Sonny's plan gnawed at his stomach. Simba was the

prime culprit in Aneni's mutilation and clearly also had plans for him. John's resolve twisted and turned one way and the other. With his mind feeling like a pinball machine, he decided to sleep on it.

In the morning, Sonny's plan was the first thing on John's mind. It felt like he'd dreamt about it all night. He'd get no peace until he decided what to do. Straight after breakfast, John jumped into his old Land Rover and drove to see Winston. He wondered what Winston would say. And what his own reaction might be to Winston's response. Either way, they'd need to make a hard decision.

In the village, John sat with Winston on the log and drank a mug of tea, talking about everything other than Sonny's plan. Finally, John broached the matter.

'Winston, we've both suffered because of Satan. He mutilated my fiancé and drove her to kill herself. Then he murdered your parents, your brother, and his entire family, aside from your nephew, Bundu. One of my men has suggested a way to deal with him.'

As John explained the idea, Winston's eyes widened, and his jaw dropped.

'It must be done. It is a fitting end for him. But how can we arrange it?'

'Don't worry, my man will arrange it.'

Two days later, John arrived at the village with Elijah, Samson, Sonny, and Akashinga in one of his platoon's trucks. They drove to the old sangoma's hut. Winston walked down to meet them. Satan, in his prison, must have heard them arrive and wondered what they were doing. The scuffle at the door when his meal arrived would have puzzled him. Before the door slammed shut, the blinding sunlight proved as effective a barrier as iron bars.

'Simba, we've brought you company,' John shouted through the door.

'Who? Is it Jackson Mpofo? Why doesn't he say something?'

'Just be grateful we've not cut out your tongue, so you at least can speak.'

'You've cut his tongue out?' The alarm in Simba's voice was clear. He hadn't imagined John would stoop to such brutality.

John didn't reply as he and his men returned to the truck.

He turned to Winston, who walked with them. 'No more meals. Let them go hungry for a while. I will come on Saturday as usual. We'll see how things are then.'

Later that evening, Major Kim paid a surprise visit to John's camp. He seldom visited on a weekday. John suspected it might be because of Satan's disappearance along with his entire team. If Kim knew of Satan's plot to abduct him, he'd be the obvious suspect for the disappearance.

John thought Major Kim viewed him with suspicion, but then, he always did. After a longer than usual stony glare at John, Kim broke the silence.

'You've heard about the Unity Accord signed between ZANU and ZAPU, Lieutenant Ziyambi?'

'Yes, Sir.'

'The Gukurahundi is ending. My orders are to wrap up operations in the area and return to base in Gweru. With luck, I'll soon be back in Pyongyang. You need to pack up and be ready to move out as soon as you receive your orders.'

'Yes, Sir.'

‘Your instructions are to hand in your uniform at the Fifth Brigade stores in Gweru and take a week’s leave. Then you must report to Lieutenant Colonel David Chimbare at Kabrit Barracks the following week. Do you understand?’

‘Yes, Sir.’

‘I’ll let you know the timing as soon as I hear anything. Well! Goodbye Lieutenant Ziyambi. You may not see me again. Make sure you leave this site in a tidy condition.’

‘Yes, Sir,’ John saluted. He knew Kim didn’t give a damn about him tidying the site, but just needed to bark one last command.

With that, Major Kim drove away without another word to John or his men.