

Chapter 55 – Looking Ahead

On Monday morning, John drove to Kabrit Barracks to report to his friend Lieutenant Colonel David Chimbare. He found David sitting in his austere office behind a simple wooden desk. John didn't salute his superior officer as he wore civilian clothing. His footsteps drummed on the wooden strip flooring as he walked across to shake David's hand. His friend was delighted to see him.

'So, John, how was your spell in the Matabeleland bush?'

'I enjoyed it, and I had a loyal team once they got used to me. I can't say anything positive about the other members of the Fifth Brigade.'

'Well, as you requested, you're finished with them now.'

'Yes, thank you for that.'

'While you were in Matabeleland, did you have the chance to visit the Hwange National Park or Victoria Falls?'

'No, I was too busy for sightseeing.'

'So, you didn't see any wild animals then?'

'Yes, I saw lots of buck and hyenas.'

'But nothing dangerous like lions or leopards.'

'Hyenas are dangerous enough. Their bite force is almost double that of a lion. Man-eating lions aren't too keen on bones. When they kill a person, they often leave the head, hands, and feet. But hyenas can bite through buffalo bones with ease. If they kill someone, they don't leave a scrap behind. They're the master cleaners of the bush.'

'But they probably wouldn't attack you.'

'You're right. If I was walking in the bush, I'd rather come across a hyena than a lion because they are less likely to attack. But if they were hungry enough and determined to attack, I'd rather face a lion. At least the lion would kill you before it ate you. But a hyena would eat you while you were alive and resisting. Those creatures send a chill down my spine. Every night, we'd listen to their wooooo-uppps, cackles, and giggles.'

'Well, you're in civilisation now. I'm pleased to see you made it back unharmed.'

'Thank you.'

'Now, about your future. What would you like to do?'

'Please, not a desk job.'

'I guessed not.'

'I like the smell of fresh air with the breeze on my face.'

'There's a role coming up that might interest you. A small group comprising senior political and military figures is preparing a programme to maintain the stability of the government and the country. They believe enemies of the regime are waiting to pounce and destabilise the new Zimbabwe.'

'Who are these people preparing this programme?'

'I don't know who's involved in the group. They're secretive. I understand there are about six of them. The person who briefed me calls them the Select Committee. He also didn't know who's involved, as someone briefed him.'

'Can you trust the person who briefed you?'

‘Yes, in the same way you trust me, I trust him. That’s how the committee maintains its secrecy. If he and I don’t know who’s on the committee, we can’t betray them. If something goes wrong, they can always say it’s a wild rumour.’

‘The person who briefed him might know at least one person who’s on the committee. Someone on that committee must have originated the briefing.’

‘That’s true, but if there are problems, they’d blame someone in the briefing chain. It would be like a game of Chinese whispers. “The people in the briefing chain got it wrong.”’

‘Most times, they blame the last person in the chain. So, that would be you.’

‘Yes, I’m aware of that.’

‘You better be careful. Anyway, what is this role you think might interest me?’

‘The committee asked for the Fifth Brigade majors to recommend officers under their command who might be suitable for a special job.’

‘Why were only Fifth Brigade majors asked?’

‘The role requires someone hardened through a particular experience. Everyone knows of The Fifth Brigade’s brutality. Perhaps that’s why the committee felt it could provide the right person. I’m not suggesting you’re brutal, but you have the right credentials. And Major Kim recommended you for the position.’

‘Major Kim! But he was never happy with my performance. Why would he recommend me?’

‘It would be a credit to him if you got the role. Only existing commissioned officers can apply, and I understand Kim’s only other lieutenant absconded to Botswana with his NCOs.’

‘What does this role entail?’

‘Well, you’ve heard of the CIO, the Central Intelligence Organisation?’

‘Yes.’

‘With the intimidation and other tactics used by their operatives, the CIO has sullied its reputation in the public’s eyes. People fear them and are reluctant to cooperate. They view the CIO’s activities with suspicion, which makes it harder for the CIO to get the information they need to carry out many of their tasks. This is especially the case where the task requires secrecy. The committee wants to establish a unit whose existence is unknown to the public and can carry out top-secret operations in the national interest. They’re looking for a more subtle approach.’

‘What sort of top-secret operations are we talking about?’

‘It could mean dealing with people who work against the country’s interests. Dissidents, traitors, and the like.’

‘Dealing with people?’

‘Yes, bringing them to justice.’

‘Would that include assassinations?’

‘Perhaps, where it’s warranted. That’s why they’re looking at the Fifth Brigade for candidates. They believe a Fifth Brigade officer would have the strength and determination to do the job.’

‘I suppose so.’

‘What makes this role attractive is the independence it allows, the financial reward, and promotion to the rank of captain. I understand the unit would operate out of separate premises somewhere in the city. The officer in charge of the unit would receive a monthly cash

allowance to cover all expenses. That would include rent, salaries for the admin staff and operatives, and any other necessary costs. In addition, there'd also be a separate cash fee for each job, depending on its complexity. It's obvious the committee members don't want any paper records that are traceable back to them.'

'It sounds like quite a big job.'

'Yes, it's a responsible position with little or no direction from above. The successful candidate must find suitable premises and set up from scratch. I thought with your education and experience in the Fifth Brigade, you might be the ideal candidate.'

'Who would the role report to?'

'Well, it won't be me. All communications would be through the telephone. An anonymous senior officer, who'd act as the controller, would notify the unit commander of the jobs. If you accepted the position, you may never meet your controller.'

'Controller makes it sound like a spying operation.'

'Yes, it does.'

'And what will this unit be called?'

'I've heard nothing, so for now, let's call it *The Harare Hunt Club*. But it would hunt people, not wildlife.'

'Intriguing! OK, I'd be willing to consider it. I suppose if I don't like it, I can always resign. What uniform would I wear?'

'You'd wear civilian clothes. You couldn't have a uniform in a top-secret unit.'

'How many applicants are there?'

'A few, but with my recommendation supporting Major Kim's, I'm confident you'd get the role. So, can I put your name forward?'

'Yes.'

'Are you sure?'

'Yes.'

'Well, my friend, the truth is, I'm charged with appointing the successful candidate. Welcome to The Harare Hunt Club, Captain John.'