

Wednesday 24 February
2.49 p.m.

Dewald hears car tyres crunching on the gravel drive outside the house, and he rushes to the front door, Vumba on his heels. But it's not Imelda's little VW; it's a police patrol van, and he can see Detective Cupido in the driver's seat. She's early.

She notices Dewald glance at his watch, and winds down the driver's window to call out, 'Things were slow at the station.'

Dewald nods. Good, he thinks. Let's get this search going.

Cupido hasn't told him there's going to be a search, but he assumes that now that the missing-person paperwork has been completed, the actual search will begin. And, he thinks, of course Detective Cupido would want to start with their home – it's where he last saw his wife, after all.

'That dog friendly?' Cupido asks, nodding her head towards Vumba, who's circling the vehicle on loping legs, sniffing the wheels.

'Ja,' Dewald replies. 'Not a mean bone in her body. She only looks like she might eat you.'

Cupido doesn't seem completely convinced, and Dewald understands that: before Vumba, he wasn't that keen on dogs either.

Vumba had been the pet of a colleague at the quarry, raised with the kids and much loved by her family. The guy's youngest, a toddler, had drowned in a bucket of recycled water placed in the bathroom for use to flush the toilet. It was an unthinkable tragedy, ghastly collateral damage of the water shortage, and it had shattered the family. The guy's wife had left him and taken their other two kids, and he'd eventually sold their family home and moved into a flat. Dewald had volunteered to look after Vumba for a while, until the guy got himself sorted out, and a

while has turned into almost a year now, and the guy, who is still in the flat and doesn't look like he's going to get himself sorted out any time soon, has stopped asking how the dog is doing.

As it happens, she's doing just fine. She's an incredibly chilled animal, and although her size, wolf-like demeanour and jet-black pelt give her the appearance of an attack-dog, nothing could be further from the truth. Her endearingly mismatched ears, one ever erect, the other permanently flopped over, are a clue to her real personality, which is both fiercely intelligent and protective, and ridiculously laid back.

She'd taken to Dewald immediately, and apparently accepted him as her new owner without a backward glance at her previous life. She's happy with him and Imelda as long as they feed her and pay some attention to her occasionally. While they're both at work, she's content to snooze away the hours inside, and she seems equally happy on her walks with Dewald, which he takes her on whenever he can find time. She seems to just have the most amazing trust that everything will always turn out fine in the end, and Dewald often finds himself looking at her with admiration but also something approaching envy. He certainly could do with a big dose of that trust right now.

Dewald watches Captain Cupido stride over to him, studiously ignoring Vumba, who's sniffing searchingly around her ankles. Now that she isn't sitting behind a counter, Dewald notices that the police officer is short and squat, with squarish hands – they make her look strong and capable. He likes the confidence in her walk, too – he has a feeling that if anyone can find his wife, it's this woman.

She shakes his hand firmly and gestures with her chin at the open front door. 'Should we go inside?'

They take a seat in the breakfast nook, which puts them in uncomfortably close quarters. It's fine when Imelda is sitting

practically in his lap but Dewald isn't sure how to deal with having the detective's frank gaze so close to his.

Vumba pushes her long black nose between them, for which Dewald is grateful. He offers her a hand to lick, to keep her there.

'Okay, so,' Detective Cupido begins. 'Your wife disappeared on Monday evening. You didn't report her missing until today.'

'Ja, and I told you why,' Dewald says, wishing he didn't sound so defensive.

'Ja,' Cupido says, pushing herself back in the chair, then turning and stretching her legs out in front of her before crossing them at the ankle. The kitchen is so small that, short as she is, her boots are now more or less in the middle of the room. 'But how do I know you didn't kill her, Mr Uys?'

The suggestion floors Dewald. '*What?*' he says.

'Well, it looks suspicious,' Captain Cupido replies, casually linking her hands behind her head. 'You say you and your wife are like this' – she briefly holds up her right hand, entwining her pointer and middle finger – 'but somehow you don't even notice she's gone for two days and two nights?'

'But I explained that,' Dewald says, feeling anger working its way up from somewhere in his stomach area towards his jaw. 'I was working. We often don't see each other for—'

'Ja, but still,' Cupido cuts him off. 'You see how it looks, hey?'

Dewald stares at the detective, defensive, furious and appalled, as she continues.

'I've spoken to Mr Roberts at the municipality – a real charmer, that one.' She rolls her eyes. 'He told me the same thing he told you, that Mrs Uys had signed in and signed out at what seemed like normal times. What he couldn't tell me was that he'd seen her himself with his very own eyes.'

Dewald is working at tamping down the anger. He doesn't