

KIDNAPPED ON SAFARI - CHAPTER 3

Mamba Kisiwa na Simu ya Dharura—Crocodile Island and an Emergency Call

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The emergency call came in at breakfast. They could hear Wolfie's shortwave radio belting out his call sign, repeatedly declaring, "Come in 5Z4WD, most urgent call for Pero Baltazar." Pero got up and made his way to Wolfie's office, asking Amal, their waiter, to get Wolfie. "*Kwenda kupata bwana Wolfgang haraka, tafadhali*, Amal." (Go get boss Wolfgang quickly, please, Amal.)

Pero knew better than to touch Wolfgang's sole means of communication with the outside world. Besides, Wolfgang had once allowed him to use the radio transmitter set, commonly called an RT set, to reach out to Pero's old contacts at the CIA and State Department in Washington. Pero had been a runner for them, collecting papers and making note of fellow passengers at airports when asked, fortunately infrequently—nothing dangerous, nothing remotely exciting. Then two events had caused Pero to get deeper into the world of anti-terrorism than he ever wanted. Unable to cope alone those two times, he had involved his friends, including Heep, Mary, Susanna, and, of course, Mbuno, who were once again on location with him, this time along the shore of Lake Rudolf. Pero desperately hoped this emergency call had nothing to do with his old Washington contacts.

He had quit after the Berlin package incident, after he had nearly died, mainly because he had married for the second time in his life as soon as he had left the hospital and recovered. Susanna was a brilliant sound engineer, as devoted to Pero as he was to her. The name of Pero's first wife, Addiena, who had died in the Lockerbie disaster, was tattooed on the underside of his right forearm. He used to sleep with it across his heart so he would not

forget her after she perished. Her tragic death was the reason he had offered his minor services to the CIA in the first place, wanting to do something to thwart terrorism. It was heartwarming for Pero that his new wife, Susanna, now insisted she drift off to sleep lying to his right, making him put out his arm for her to use Addiena's name as a pillow. "She loved you and you, her. It is how I can remember her, thank her, for teaching you how to love, you *dummer Mann*."

Susanna's native German expression of "dumb man" had been a scolding term for him originally deployed during the Berlin dangers, which was when she had revealed she cared for Pero deeply. Since then, it had become a term of endearment between them, their bond cemented by past events.

Adrenaline pumping because of the radio call, Pero weaved his way past tightly packed breakfast tables, careful not to allow his large, six-foot frame to disturb fellow guests. He heard Amal calling out to Wolfgang. By the time Pero got to the radio office, he could hear Wolfgang replying, "I am coming, I am coming." The RT set was almost a living thing to Wolfgang, and Pero was used to hearing the man talk to it as a father would his child. Pero, waiting at the door, opened it for Wolfgang, who entered, sat, and flicked the on switch all in one practiced movement. He keyed the mike, gave his call sign 5Z4WD in answer, and said, "What is the message?"

The voice faded suddenly, coming in faintly, and Wolfgang gently turned the tuning dial. "Okay, Nairobi, I read you now, the sun's up here so this may break up." A woman's voice came on the radio, asked if Baltazar was available, and Wolfie told her he was present and standing by.

"Message from Flamingo Tours, for Pero Baltazar, urgent, Mwana Wambuno, on safari, Moyowosi Game Reserve, missing for over ten hours. Safari clients being flown back to Nairobi. No trace of Ube. Over." Ube was

the nickname of Mbuno's nephew, Mwana Wambuno. Pero immediately knew Mbuno would take the news of his favorite nephew hard.

Pero asked, "Wolfie, may I speak directly to her?" Wolfgang nodded and indicated the mike button. "Pero here, who's that? Sheila Ndelle? Over." Sheila, the backbone of Flamingo Tours, was also the sister of the UN security police chief and totally reliable.

"*Ndiyo*, over." Yes, came the reply.

"Hi Sheila, give me all the details you have, and also, where's Tone? Over." Anthony Bowman was the owner of Flamingo Tours, known to everyone over the decades as simply Tone. An ex-white hunter, Tone ran the best safari outfitters anywhere—expedition tents, private toilets, dinner with white table linens, client's wishes always fulfilled.

"Hi Pero, Mr. Anthony is down at the Tanzanian Embassy trying to find out more information, if there is any known terrorist or poaching problems in the area. There wasn't any when we sent the clients there. All we know is that Ube took three clients out on a walking safari yesterday morning, camera clients"—by which she meant not hunters—"and they took leopard images in the tall grass, a kill of a bushbuck, treeing the carcass, you know the drill." Pero did. Leopard was one of Africa's big five—lion, leopard, rhino, elephant, and cape buffalo. Originally a hunting list, these animals still presented a challenge for the lens hunter. "On the plane's HF radio, briefly, the clients have reported that suddenly as they were heading back to camp, Ube told our two bearers to make the clients crawl back to the Land Rover and fly back to Nairobi without stopping or talking to anyone. They said Ube told them to do this quietly if they valued their lives. They did as they were told. They have no idea what Ube did or where he went." Sheila paused. "But, Pero, they said they heard a shot. Over."

Pero's producer instincts kicked in. "You say the clients are en route for Wilson Airport? Over." Wilson Airport was on the western side of Nairobi and the jumping off small airport for most safaris and the Flying Doctor air services. Wolfgang glanced at Pero, clearly wondering why Pero should be interested in the clients since he knew Ube's disappearance would be of paramount importance to Mbuno and, therefore, presumably to Pero.

Sheila's tone also had an edge. "Yes, yes, they are inbound but had to wait for Tanzanian air traffic control for permission to depart. We had a plane waiting, in case, for medical reasons on the client's instructions. They will be back in about two hours. But it is Ube we are worried about, and we need to tell Mbuno. Over."

Pero nodded. "Agreed, I'll take care of that. But Sheila, listen to me, please, I need you to go immediately to the airport, see Sheryl at Mara Airways, arrange for a Cessna 414 for us here immediately, plane and pilots—note, I said pilots—on loan, indefinite period. Over." Sheila gave her confirmation. "Good, then call the Langata police station and ask for Sergeant Gibson Nabana. He's the one I shot during that terrorist attack two years ago, remember? Over." Sheila laughed and said she remembered it well. It had made the front page of the *Daily Standard* paper. At the time Pero had needed to gain control of a difficult confusion of authority at Wilson Airport and had only slightly wounded the sergeant. They subsequently became good allies and, since then, drinking buddies. "Okay, Sheila, tell Gibson to stop your clients and confiscate every piece of camera equipment they have. Tell him that I will be in Nairobi as soon as possible. Look, we need to review every shot to see if those camera-happy clients caught anything that can help us figure out what has happened to Ube. Once Mbuno and I see what is there, or not, we will reboard the Mara Cessna and proceed to . . . where was the landing strip? Remember that Sheryl at Mara

Airways will need to have that information while you are at Wilson Airport, okay? Over.”

Sheila understood the flight would have to leave Kenya and land in Tanzania, an everyday occurrence as long as the paperwork was filled in properly with Customs and Excise on both sides of the border. “The Moyowosi Airport we used for the clients was actually at Mgwesi at the southwestern end of the Lake Nyagamoma, and then there is a three-hour slow drive into the game reserve. Should I lay on transport? Our drivers are still there, packing up the tents. I have not given them instruction to drive back to base. Over.”

“Yes, Sheila, hold your people in place, reestablish the camp, but move it at least a mile or more away. We’ll use it, and we’ll pay the fare. And one more thing, your clients will get back to Wilson before we do, so you have to make sure to tell them, before they land, that if Ube had reason to get your clients out secretly, whatever his reasons were, it is serious and if they value their lives they will not, I repeat, *not* talk with anyone. And keep them at the airport. Over.” Sheila said she understood and signed off.

Wolfgang looked over at Pero and simply said, “I guess you’ll be leaving then. The pool is full; I was thinking about draining it, but you might as well use it before you go while you wait for transport.” It was as friendly a gesture Pero had ever heard the owner of the Oasis make.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Peter Riva is the author of *Kidnapped on Safari*. He has spent many months over thirty years traveling throughout Africa and Europe. Much of this time was spent with the legendary guides for East African hunters and adventurers. He created a TV series in 1995 called *Wild Things* for Paramount. Passing on the fables, true tales, and insider knowledge of these last reserves of true wildlife is his passion. Nonetheless, his job for over forty years has been working as a literary agent. In his spare time, Riva writes science fiction and African adventure books, including the previous two titles

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