Rondarvels by Estela Radwanska

Freedom
: a novel set in Uganda

Sheila M Stenning-Bennett

Cambridge Writers
www.cambridgewriters.net
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Chapter One

The road seemed endless, full of corrugations and potholes. Every passing vehicle threw up murram, showering them with orange dust. Mary had covered her head with a kerchief tied at the nape of her neck to keep it out of her hair, leaving a mark around her forehead. It got up her nose and left her lips dry and cracked.

Contending with the pain in her abdomen she thought this was something she could well have done without as the Land Rover jolted along. Jeremy sat passively beside her, talking little, trying to avoid the potholes, at the same time keeping up a reasonable speed to get her to the hospital as quickly as possible.

The tension between them was palpable. It was suddenly broken at one point when he came to life at the sight of a pack of wild dogs emerging from the bush at the side of the road. Their ears pointed forward looking as surprised as Jeremy.

'Look, look, wild dogs,' he said, 'about twenty of them wanting to cross the road.'

Normally she would have been as excited as him, but in her misery she glanced away, worried he wasn't taking enough care about the driving.

Finally, nearer the town, the going was easier on the tarmac surface but the pain persisted.

'I am sure I'm going to lose it,' she said. 'I think I'm still bleeding.'

Jeremy looked at her and said, 'We'll soon be there.'

At the hospital the old familiar smell came back. Even when she had worked for a short period as a nutritionist in a London hospital, she had never really liked the mixture of excessive hygiene and what it was trying to cover up. She was quickly ushered into a bed in a single room and Sister came to take notes while Jeremy stood there shuffling from one foot to the other.

'Why don't you sit down,' said Sister. 'You must be tired after that long journey. I'll arrange some tea for you.'

To Mary she said, 'When did you have your last period, dear?'

Mary glanced at Jeremy. She thought, I could actually tell her exactly when I conceived, as the scene flashed through her mind.

It had been a dreadful row. She had tackled him after finding the letter from Anthea. It transpired Jeremy had been into Kenya to see the Settler's daughter when he should have been out on safari doing his fieldwork. Mary had been enraged by his deception, shouting at him, 'How dare you do this to me!'

Shoving her on the bed he said, 'I tell you it is all over with Anthea.'

This baby had certainly not been conceived in joy but all the same she was now fearful of losing it.

Sister continued taking her history while Jeremy now sat looking down at his feet. Mary became emotional and tearful so sister went off to get a sedative. While she was gone, Mary said, 'What will you do now?'

'I'll wait for the doctor and then go off and spend the night at Makerere. I know one or two people in the agricultural department at the University. Don't worry about me.'

By the time he arrived next day, Mary had miscarried. She felt ill, distraught, and had no idea how Jeremy felt while he sat silently beside her. Not that she minded much for she felt too weak to talk. After a while she said, 'Why don't you ask Sister how long I am likely to be in. It might be worth your going back to the Boma and then coming to collect me later.'

Returning he said, 'About ten days they say to keep an eye on you, and you may need a D and C, so I'll go tomorrow. I've got several meetings with chiefs. They don't always turn up, but I really feel that having organised them I should try to do so myself. So, if it's alright with you then I'll be off.'

Hoping he would not go and leave her, she said, 'I see. Well you had better go,' thinking to herself, he is doing the white man's stuff, 'can't let the side down.' Wondering also if he loved her at all, just when she most needed him, but saying, 'I'll expect I'll sleep a lot.' as he prepared to take his leave.

He didn't give her the cuddle she hoped for and didn't even turn to wave as he went out of the door. She lay on the bed limp and drained and quietly cried.

Sometime later Sister came in. She seemed such a kindly lady, caring and efficient as she enquired of Mary how she felt.

Mary lied and said, 'I am feeling a little better, thank you Sister.'

But Sister didn't appear to be in a great hurry to move on, so Mary

said, ‘Do you have many wives coming in from up-country, Sister?’

‘Yes indeed. But if possible we like to get them here well ahead of their delivery date. Some come from even farther afield, but not so many rushed in with your unfortunate experience.’

Mary gulped, sensing Sister wanted to have a chat about it. But still feeling weak she didn’t want to talk about herself, even though she wondered what the baby would have been, a boy or a girl. So to divert the conversation she quickly said. ‘Why are there two hospitals here, one for whites and one for blacks?’

Sister looked startled for a moment as though she had not quite heard right. ‘Well because there are. We separate them automatically,’ at the same time looking at Mary as though it was the sort of question that should not be asked.

‘And what about African women having babies?’

‘Well Mrs Bradshaw, they usually manage out in the bush and the educated ones, or those with complications, will go to Mulago. Or there is Mengo, of course, the missionary hospital.’

‘I see. Ne’er the twain shall meet.’

‘I should think not,’ said sister, almost huffily.

‘Well one day maybe,’ said Mary.

Sister was obviously distressed by the thought and said, ‘That will be a very long way into the future,’ and turned on her heel and left.

The days passed slowly and when sister came again to see her she was excessively polite, a little cool and this time did not stop to chat. Mary felt sorry that she had upset this good lady. After all, she knew from her own up-country station that the white fraternity did not want to look too far into the future.

Anyway, in two days Jeremy was due to come to collect her and now she was quite ready to go. She woke in the morning feeling nervous at his coming, wondering how they were going to handle this new situation while at the same time longing to see him.

Thinking she had better make herself presentable, she had a bath, washed her long hair and put on the newly washed pretty nightdress and dressing gown she had arrived in, till such time she could put on clothes he was bringing for her.

She went out to the balcony where there was more air and stood looking out onto a neat lawn. Gazing at the flowerbeds, she felt suddenly immensely homesick for Scotland and family.

After lunch, her anticipation for Jeremy's arrival grew as he had said that he would make a really early start. Time passed and she was gripped by anxiety. Where had he got to? What sort of a game was he playing now? Then remembering how unpredictable he could be, she slipped back into the bed and pulled the sheet over her head, falling eventually into a troubled half sleep.

She was awakened by someone nudging her. Emerging bleary eyed from beneath the sheet she saw Jeremy standing there looking down at her somewhat sheepishly. Bending down to give her a peck, he said, 'Sorry I'm late. I'll explain.'

Chapter Two

Sitting alone in his shorts, open necked shirt and sandals Jeremy Bradshaw was savouring this last moment he could read the out-of-date *Sunday Telegraph* over his breakfast. Beneath the table stretched the ridgeback bitch across his feet. He kicked it off gently muttering, 'I suppose you'll be pleased to see her back.'

He needed to get going or he would be late picking Mary up from the hospital. He didn't relish the thought. His thoughts were jumbled. Once he had known she was pregnant he realized his fieldwork would be interrupted. This was not the time to start a family. Now she had miscarried they were back to square one. He supposed he should feel guilt when what he was feeling was a tinge of regret tempered by relief.

He noticed the wind was getting up as he stood staring out of the window. Anyway it was time to go. Maybe it would rain and lay the dust and release some of the tension.

The thought of taking to the road made him think of Anthea, and the road leading all the way into Kenya. He wanted to write and tell her what had happened but he had promised Mary he wouldn't do so.

Jolted from his reverie by Moses coming into the room, he was surprised by the brown envelope he was trying to give him, 'For you Bwana,' he said, 'From the Commissioner's office.'

It was an invitation to a meeting at 10 a.m. to meet the new Assistant District Commissioner. They must have thought about me last minute he thought. As a University Researcher in Agronomy he was not staff, and outside the official Government structure. Although he knew his research to be of great interest to them and he depended on their goodwill to carry it out, but apart from meetings with the Vet and Agricultural officers it dovetailed little with others on the Boma.

He was on the point of writing a refusal when he changed his mind. It might look churlish not to turn up. Of late the place had been abuzz with rumour. All that was talked about in the Club was the coming of Africanization and the realisation that some would be redundant. Now here was the start. Much to some peoples consternation the new man was black, one of the first of the bright young Africans to be appointed. He wrote a swift reply and said to Moses, 'Give this to the messenger,

and I won't be going to Kampala till later. I'll need an early lunch.'

Moses looked a little puzzled and said, 'Ndio Bwana. You want lunch I go market. Money for market.'

Jeremy handed him 50 shillingis and said tersely, 'And mind you bring back the change.'

As he went out of the door Moses said, 'When Memsahib come back?'

'Tomorrow, she'll be back tomorrow.' You're another one who'll be pleased to see her back he thought.

He looked again at the note and noticed the new ADC's name was Freddie Kalahandra. His first name that of the Kabaka of Buganda. Well at least his last name didn't make him sound like a Muganda. That was a blessing. Most other tribes disliked the upstart Baganda and even the whites went along with it, disparaging them for throwing their weight around.

As they came out from the meeting Jeremy joined Kalahandra and walked with him back to the office.

'Your research project sounds interesting,' said the ADC after quizzing him as to what he was doing,

'You're certainly in the right area for that. Actually I've got some cattle myself, keep them on the home shamba and my younger brother takes care of them.'

'Where's that?' asked Jeremy.

'Down near the Tanganika border. A bit out of your orbit, but I can take you down sometime if you like and you can tell me what you think of the grass,' with a laugh.

'That would be fine,' said Jeremy.

'Where did you do your degree?' asked Kalahandra.

'At Glasgow, and my Ph.D. That's where I met my wife as well.'

'That's funny. As a matter of fact I went to a good Scottish one myself. Edinburgh.' he said with pride, 'Geography, and nearly married a Scottish girl to boot, but in the end we thought better of it.'

Jeremy gave him a piercing look and then said, 'Well you'll meet my bonnie lass shortly, I now have to go and collect her from Nakasero hospital.'

'Has she been ill?' asked Kalahandra.

'Yes womanly things.'

Kalahandra frowned and said, 'Oh I am sorry. Is she alright?'

‘I think so, apart from being shaken up. That journey to Kampala doesn’t do anyone any good.’

‘Poor girl,’ said Kalahandra, looking concerned.

The Vet Hugh Dickenson caught them up and asked after Mary.

‘Actually I’m just off to collect her,’ said Jeremy.

‘Right give her my love and I’ll see you tomorrow then.’

Turning to Kalahandra he said, ‘Would you like to play squash sometime?’

Jeremy wanted to hang about but left them making their arrangements for the game and hurrying home had a quick bite before setting off.

On the way he mulled over the meeting and thought he had detected a certain wariness though superficially it had all seemed friendly enough. Everyone was being particularly polite to Kalahandra who appeared relaxed. He thought he could like him.

Thick black clouds were building in the sky threatening rain. More threatening were the cattle owning nomads having a last crack at firing the bush before the rains arrived. Dangerously near the road, the flames billowed out smoke and sparks.

At the moment Jeremy was against this practice but was also prepared to believe that by the time he had finished his research he might well have revised his opinion. They undoubtedly got some fresh new succulent growth of grass out of it.

Apart from the smell of burning he was enjoying the ride by himself. Moses had asked to come with him, ‘I’ve got a brother in Kampala,’ he said.

‘Same mother, same father?’ asked Jeremy, having learnt by now that any far flung cousin or relative was termed brother. Anyway he didn’t want him along. He was intent on just a bit of space in which to think.

Trundling along he thought again of Anthea, the first time he had met her at that conference in Cambridge. Only to discover she was a vet in Kenya. It was instant attraction, and by the end of the conference he was sharing her bed.

He had cleverly managed to keep it from Mary until she stumbled on their love letters. He had pondered for some time as to which one to continue with and then the baby had thrown him back on Mary. He had written to Anthea as he had promised Mary he would do, to end it, so now he must try somehow to get back on track with Mary. Yet again he was feeling unsure.

Round a bend a lorry appeared. It was driving in the middle of the road, throwing up dust around it. Jeremy slammed on the brakes and swerved to the left while the lorry shuddered to a halt. With the dust still swirling around Jeremy came to a standstill half in a culvert, astonished he had managed to miss the lorry. Two Africans came over to him as he was getting out of the car, shouting at them for not keeping to their own side of the road. The driver apologised and said they would help him get the car back onto the road. Severely shaken Jeremy went on his way with the knowledge that he could have been killed.

When darkness fell he needed to concentrate even more on his driving and arriving at the hospital he felt dirty, sweaty and drained. Going straight to Mary's ward he found her huddled under the bedclothes, hidden with the sheet over her head. He nudged her and she woke, looking startled at his standing there. She was flushed and her eyes all swollen as though she had been crying; her face all puckered up and her red hair lying loose and dank on the pillow. He bent down to kiss her.

'Sorry I'm so late,' he said, 'I couldn't get here before. I had an important meeting to go to on the Boma.'

'Why was it so important?' she asked and he could tell by the way she said it that she thought that she was more important.

'Anyway I was worried about you. You know how many accidents there are along that road. I thought something horrible may have happened.'

'Yes well that was another thing. I had a brush with a lorry.'

'Oh my goodness.' She sat up in alarm, 'Was it serious? Are you alright?'

'Just a little shaken. I could do with a wash.'

'Go and ask Sister. I'm sure she will let you.'

'I won't bother just now. I don't think we can set out now anyway, so I think you had better stay here while I go off to Makerere for a bed and I can get cleaned up there and get something to eat.'

She looked crestfallen that he was going to leave so soon.

'I'll come for you early in the morning,' he said, 'And I really will come this time.'

Chapter Three

Mary was up ready and dressed for Jeremy to collect her. As he came into the room she managed a smile as he said, 'There you are. I said I would be here promptly for you,' and bent down to pick up her case.

'Hold on a minute,' she said. 'Sister wants to see you.'

'Oh, what about?'

'I really don't know. She popped her head round the door and said make sure your husband sees me before you leave.'

Reluctantly he said, 'I suppose I'd better do it then.'

He left her sitting on the edge of the bed, and as he walked down the corridor wondered why he had been summoned. He didn't want to see Sister. He wanted to get back to the Boma to catch up on his work.

Sister said, 'Ah Mr Bradshaw I just wanted a word with you about your wife. You realize she has been very shaken up by the miscarriage and was upset that we couldn't sex the baby.'

'Oh' said Jeremy. It then crossed his mind that in his confusion over everything he had not even thought about what sex it might be.

'Um, why couldn't you sex the baby?'

'It was rather a mess. Possibly a bad implantation.'

He was struck dumb and couldn't think what to say. Then thinking he had better say something other than thank you for telling me, he said, 'Has anything special been prescribed for her?'

'No, just rest for a couple of weeks and a few pleasurable things to lift her out of her depression.'

'Thank you Sister,' and he made as swift an exit as seemed polite.

When back in the room with Mary she asked, 'What did she say?'

'Nothing very much, only that you are to take things easy for a while.'

'I see, well that's what I've been doing here.'

'Well, a bit longer she means. Come on let's go.'

In the Land Rover she shifted about in the seat, not able to get comfortable as they bounced over potholes and rode the corrugations, moaning quietly to herself.

Stopping the car he said, 'I'm sorry, I didn't think to bring a pillow,'

and pulling out her suitcase, opened it up to find some soft clothing to stuff down her back.

He tried to make conversation with her, 'The Russians have just sent up a Sputnik.'

But apart from saying she thought it deplorable to waste so much money she seemed not over-interested in what was going on in the outside world. She just sat all hunched up in the seat looking desperately tired and unhappy.

He felt defeated.

Arriving at the house she was greeted by Moses with a sad smile and his sorrow that there would be no baby. Jeremy could see that this touched her and that the boy had made a big effort for the evening meal, cooking tilapia, knowing that Mary liked the local fish.

Jeremy said, 'Amazing isn't it to think he couldn't cook a thing when he first came.'

He knew Mary had spent a lot of time training up this lad who was pretty raw when he first arrived. Deciding that the one Jeremy had previously employed had better go, she had been quite firm about it.

'He steals things and is sloppy about the house, and resents me,' she said.

She had discovered from other wives on the Boma who had arrived later than their husbands that they too suffered the problem, when servants found working for a memsahib was somewhat different to working for the bwana, when they had been able to get away with things.

Nevertheless, it was one aspect of having his wife here that Jeremy actually appreciated. It was a lot easier having her in charge of the domestic side and there was no doubt that the meals were more palatable.

He shooed her off to bed saying, 'Now you know what Sister said: plenty of rest. And it's been a hard day.'

She didn't argue and slipped off to the bedroom while he sat feeling relieved to have a few moments to himself again.

The dog nuzzled his knee and he scratched it behind its ears while contemplating their new situation. He started thinking of Anthea again, wishing he could get her out of his head. Perhaps it was sex he was needing. He would pen her a letter. No, better not. He would wait until Mary as over the miscarriage and take it from there. After all, he

had promised her he would not get in touch again. But still it was tempting.

There was a knock at the open door and Hugh Dickenson called out, 'Howdy.'

This was not a moment he really wanted to see the Vet or anybody else for that matter but he said, 'Come in.'

'You're back later than we thought,' said Hugh. 'I came over earlier to see how Mary is.'

Who does he mean by 'we' thought Jeremy. 'Well I got to Kampala late because, if you remember, I stayed for the meeting with Kalahandra. Then I got caught in an accident.'

'Oh. Going or coming? Was Mary with you? Are you both alright?'

'Going. Not too serious. A lorry shoved me over into a ditch, but they stopped to help me out. Made me even later to fetch to her so I stayed over at Makerere and we set off this morning.'

Hugh looked most concerned.

'How is she then?'

At which moment Mary appeared in the living room doorway.

They both looked up in surprise.

'I thought you had gone to bed.' said Jeremy.

'I couldn't sleep, and then I heard voices and wondered who was here.'

She was staring at Hugh.

'I came over to see how you are,' he said. 'How was the journey?'

'Not the best.'

He reached her before Jeremy as she began to wobble. The colour had drained from her face. Catching her in his arms he laid her gently on the settee.

'You must have had a rough time,' he said.

Barely whispering she said, 'It wasn't very pleasant.'

Jeremy stared at them both and said, 'Nasty things miscarriages. Then laughed, 'But I suppose you only know about cows Hugh.'

Chapter Four

Next day the March rains broke. Through most of the morning the black and green sky brooded threateningly, punctuated with sharp forks of lightening while the thunder rolled round the heavens with ever increasing menace. Mary had heard many tales of tropical storms and now she was experiencing a mega one. Then immense relief as the sky opened up with sheets of hard-hitting rain.

The dog yelped as he lay alongside the bed trying periodically to climb on to it. She calmed him down, fondling and talking to him. The contact brought comfort to her.

The air, which had been so stifling, now cleared a little but it was still oppressive and she found herself crying once more, setting the dog whimpering and licking her hand. Once more she was lying in a pool of perspiration.

During the night she had been up twice to change her nightdress and instead of waking Jeremy to tell him the sheet needed changing she crept into the spare bedroom. It had quite confused Moses when he brought the early morning freshly pressed orange juice, to find her not in the big bed and she motioned to him to take it through, intending to creep stealthily back beside Jeremy. She found him already awake and eyeing her blearily said, 'What are you doing paddling around so early?'

While sitting up in the bed drinking the juice he said, 'I'm meant to be about 30 miles away today. It was arranged with the pastor lists some time ago. Do you think you will be alright if I keep to the arrangement?'

'Of course. Go ahead.'

He looked at her pale face, 'You look awful. Will you really be alright?'

'Do I? Well I'll take it really easy today. Angela Fairbanks has a coffee morning so I can pass up that invitation thank goodness. She's planning this great farewell for Mike and Sandra Todd in the club next Saturday; says it should be something special as they've done four tours here.'

'Well perhaps John could take a look at you at the same time.'

‘Don’t be silly. How could he haul me out of a coffee party? Anyway he’ll be at the hospital. I don’t need to see him; I’ll be perfectly alright soon.’

‘As you wish. So you’ll stay in today?’

‘Yes, I’m still whacked after that journey.’

Midmorning he returned to the house and said he was going to do some work in his office, as Joseph his interpreter had not turned up.

‘Expect he’s afraid of a thunder storm,’ he said acidly.

While standing in the middle of the bedroom floor to change out of his wet clothes a puddle formed at his feet.

Later she asked Moses if his quarters had flooded.

‘Yes memsahib. The roof leaked again and water came over the step.’

‘Again. Oh dear. Alright we’ll get it fixed this time.’

When she told Jeremy over lunch he said, ‘You had better deal with that. I haven’t time to deal with such things.’

She was about to remonstrate that the rains were now set in and it could flood again then held back aware that he was still bad tempered about Joseph. All the same she thought, it was his province. Finally Joseph turned up and she could hear Jeremy tearing strips off him.

During the afternoon the sky cleared and brilliant sunshine came through. Walking in the garden she marvelled at the bougainvilleas and oleanders washed of dust, and the wet smell of the earth revived her. Her spirits lifted and over a cup of tea Jeremy said,

‘If you are feeling up to it, Hugh has invited us over for a drink this evening. What do you think?’

‘I think I could cope with a sundowner.’

‘Good. I’ll do some writing up and then we’ll potter over.’

Still sitting over her tea after he had gone back into his office she thought of the warm welcome Hugh had given them when they first arrived, though she knew it was because his work overlapped with Jeremy’s. Really Hugh was a good egg, one of her favourite people.

Unlike Angela Fairbank who was so full of airs and graces and who gave the impression she would like to be first lady of the Boma. But being the doctor’s wife it made her second. Mary felt wariness when in Angela’s presence and wondered if it had anything to do with her being a scientist. Well Angela had been a nurse, so why did she have to have such a chip on her shoulder. Anyway coffee parties were such a bore.

There were better ways of using one's time than indulging in so much idle gossip. On the other hand she was always the last to know what was going on around the place.

In the event it was nearer seven by the time they set off for Hugh's place and so they took the Land Rover. Jeremy thought she shouldn't walk that far and seemed quite solicitous about her well-being.

As the sun dipped, a few fruit bats began to emerge and crickets serenaded. Hugh's houseboy ushered them through to his starkly furnished bachelor's sitting room and there to her surprise were the Fairbanks. Her first thought was to wonder why Hugh had invited them, her next that it was a little embarrassing that she had that morning declined Angela's invitation, and here she was, out in the evening. Anyway, she had washed her hair and looped it up and put on a decent dress thank goodness so she felt confident enough to face them.

John shook hands with her and said, 'Nice to have you back Mary. How are you feeling?'

'Not too bad thank you,' she lied. 'Better still in a few days no doubt,' forcing a smile.

Sitting in one of Hughes uncomfortable public works department chairs, which lacked extra cushions, to Angela she said, 'I'm sorry I missed the coffee morning. How did it go?'

Not even saying she was sorry not to see her there Angela launched into telling them blow-by-blow of all the arrangements for the Todd's farewell with no small detail spared as to how difficult it was to arrange a large special party so far upcountry.

'But I'm sure you'll come up with the goods,' said Hugh, 'You know you always do and we do appreciate what you ladies do for us on these occasions.'

Why is he buttering her up thought Mary, and then he said, 'Oh by the way are we going to invite the new ADC Freddie Kalahandra? I played squash with him yesterday. Such a pleasant fellow.'

'What!' Angela almost exploded, 'He's black.'

'Yes of course he is,' said Hugh. 'We know that.'

'Then why are you asking why he's coming?' asked John, 'You know the club is for whites only.'

'Well it is at the moment, but surely it will have to change with Africanization?'

‘Well Africanization is hardly with us yet is it,’ Angela remonstrated ‘And I see no point in letting in Africans when its meant to be a European club.’

‘Hasn’t the new ADC replaced a European?’ ventured Mary, ‘Which should give him some rights if that is what his work is.’

Angela looked daggers at her, ‘Whose side are you on?’

‘I’m not on anybody’s side. Just trying to make a rational judgement.’

Jeremy entered the argument and sardonically said, ‘Well I suppose he does wear shoes and a tie for that matter and what’s more he’s been to a British University, so presumably he can use a knife and fork as well.’

‘Oh really!’ said Angela.

‘I don’t think you are questioning that are you darling?’ soothed her husband. ‘It’s just the fact that he’s black that worries you.’

‘That’s right.’ She smiled limply back at him, ‘It’s the fact that the club is for whites.’

‘That’s so,’ said Jeremy, ‘And I hear Costa our Lebanese didn’t get in.’

‘That’s because he’s a rogue and not one of us.’ Angela was actually laughing as she said it.

‘Can you imagine him cavorting down at the club?’

‘Might add a bit of colour,’ said Hugh, ‘Sorry didn’t mean that as a pun,’ he added, catching Mary’s eye.

And for the first time since losing the baby she found herself laughing, almost hysterically.

‘Was it really that funny?’ asked Jeremy while others sat silent with Angela frowning at her husband.

‘I really don’t think it is necessary to invite the fellow,’ commented John.

‘Well I wondered if we should ask George Frazer’s opinion and I hoped you might brook the subject to him John,’ suggested Hugh.

‘Me? I don’t know about that. Why me?’

‘As a senior person on the Boma of course.’

‘Oh I see. Um.’

‘No,’ said Angela.

Mary had to bite her tongue to stop herself saying, ‘he’s not asking you.’

‘Hold on a minute darling. This does have to have some consideration. Yes alright, I’ll talk to George and get his view. I take it it would then have to go before the committee to get their approval if George thinks it’s on.’

‘That wouldn’t be difficult since you’re the chairman John.’

‘Quite so.’

‘Well whatever next,’ muttered Angela, still very irked.

‘Times are changing presumably,’ said Jeremy.

‘Could I ask that this is not done before Saturday so that we can have just this one party for the Todd’s as ourselves,’ said Angela.

‘Well old Mike is very fond of Africans, he won’t mind, neither will Sandra since she’s been teaching their kids for the last four years,’ Hugh persisted.

‘That’s hardly the same as socializing is it?’

She was now even more agitated.

John said, ‘Just leave it to me darling. And I think we should be off. I ought to look in at the hospital again. Take care Mary and we’ll see you again soon.’

With that they left. Hugh said, ‘Phew. That was more difficult than I thought. I’m in a bit of a cleft stick really as I mentioned it to Freddie after we played squash while we were having a beer back at his place.

‘No point in hanging around over these issues is there,’ remarked Jeremy.

Mary looked at him and said, ‘Did you know this was coming up?’

‘Yes, Hugh said he wanted some backing.’

Smiling broadly at Hugh she said, ‘You’re wily. I can’t wait to see what happens.’

Chapter Five

Jeremy was in a better mood next day and took Mary down to the duikers to do some shopping. It was her birthday and she wanted to buy some material to make a dress.

In the street they met Freddie Kalahandra. Jeremy introduced her, then left them talking saying he needed to find some oil for the Land Rover.

The sun, already overhead was striking the pavement with intense heat. Freddie suggested they move into the shade under a nearby acacia tree and she leaned gratefully against the trunk. They talked easily together, mostly about Scotland.

'I had a great time in Edinburgh,' he said, 'where I had a landlady who was always ribbing me for not getting married to my girl friend. So I said I could hardly do that, I'm a foreigner and black.'

'Yes Jeremy told me you had a local girl.'

'Aye my landlady was always pushing it, saying 'go on, lots of girls marry foreigners, why they even marry Englishmen.'

Mary laughed, 'That's right, just like me.'

'So how are you liking it here, in the depths of Africa?'

There was a lull before she answered, 'Well I like it when I can get out into the countryside, into the real bush to see the real Africa and how people live, and I'm bowled over by some of the beautiful terrain. It's just that, well to be frank, I don't like being in this small township.'

He looked at her intently, 'You seem to be the opposite of the other European ladies around here. I get the impression they think the Boma is already bush.'

Puckering up her face she said, 'Well it's neither one thing or the other really is it?'

Freddie said, 'Well I don't agree. I think it's a nice little place and I think I'm going to enjoy my first posting.'

'Do you really not mind having a European over-master then?'

He looked astonished at her question. 'Not at all. We have to learn how to administer before we take up the reigns.'

'Oh well, you're unusual. I understand most Africans who aspire to

greater things can't get rid of us fast enough.'

'Yes, there are some. Those who want to rush it. But there are also tensions among ourselves we need to iron out.'

She knew immediately he meant tribal conflict and said, 'No, you don't want those big bad Baganda on your backs, do you?'

'No, certainly not that,' he laughed.

Mary was growing more and more impressed by the minute with this man. He seemed mature and clear-sighted and she was thinking it would augur well if there were a few more around like him.

'Anyway I hear you had to be rushed off to hospital in a hurry. I was sorry to hear about your problem,' he commiserated.

It touched a nerve in her and tears welled up. 'I'm pretty devastated,' she said. 'You see I'm twenty-eight years old today and I was looking forward to the child.

He hesitated for a few seconds, then said, 'Aye.' and put his hand on her arm. 'There's still time. Twenty-eight is not so old, but I can hardly say happy birthday can I? Are you doing anything special then?'

'No. I think I'll just rest up and have a good read.'

'I've plenty of books if you run short of reading material,' he offered.

'Thanks. I might need to borrow some sometime. I devour them at a rate of knots out here since there's not much else to do for pleasure.'

Out of the corner of her eye, just at the moment Freddie put his hand on her arm, she saw George Frazer, senior D.C. pass in his car looking straight across at them.

Freddie said, 'There goes the boss. I had better get back to the office.'

At which point Jeremy returned with his can of oil. He was fuming. 'Bloody Asians. They just tried to diddle me over the price,' he said.

Freddie laughed, 'You have to be on your mettle when dealing with them, they try to do everybody down.' With which he left, saying to Mary, 'Don't forget then, if you want any books.'

'What's all that about?' asked Jeremy as they got into the car.

'He's offered us reading material. A really nice man isn't he?'

But Jeremy was still irked about the oil and crashed the gears in his haste to get home. While Mary quietly wondered if Frazer, having seen Freddie commiserating with her had blown his chances of joining the club.

Chapter Six

When he was not on safari George Frazer went home for lunch, much to the annoyance of his wife, Winifred, as he was invariably late from pressure of work.

He left his office and crossed the golf course to the largest house on the Boma which was attractively surrounded by acacia trees and trailing russet-coloured bougainvillea.

Winifred was something of an artist and when the trees were in full bloom of their yellow majesty she got out her paints and continually remarked to her husband how lucky they were to have inherited such a beautiful garden with this wonderful display of nature right on their doorstep.

She was a solid Scot just like George but he was more terse and oblivious to such things. She knew him to be a workaholic, not over popular, as he put pressure on others, liking things well run, not tolerating sloppiness, whereas Winifred's contact with the rest of the Boma rested on charity work. As first lady she felt encumbered to do her bit, her present mission being the Red Cross.

Occasionally, George would surprise everybody by turning up at the club in his kilt, guiding members onto the floor to Highland dance. This endeared him to Mary who knew the dances well, and if she happened to be in the club that night they would lead them.

Such occasions turned out to be the Queen's birthday, or his own. But whereas everybody knew the Queen's age, no one knew the Frazers'. All that was known was that he had met Winifred while both were at university in Edinburgh and the childless couple were somewhere around fifty years in age.

Today however, George screamed into the drive in the Land Rover. He had spent the morning in an outlying area where the chiefs were having trouble collecting in the poll tax: a head tax on each adult, which most tried to avoid or could not muster.

Returning first to the office to check on the morning's activities he had encountered Fairbanks who was also on his way home for lunch, making a detour to catch Frazer.

'Ah George, are you free a moment? I would like a word with you,

if it's convenient.'

George was about to say it wasn't, as he was extremely hungry and Winifred wouldn't be any too pleased if he was much later for lunch, when curiosity overcame him.

'Well, I am a bit pushed. What is it?'

They leaned on Fairbanks' Peugeot 504 while he broached the subject of Freddie Kalahandra and the sticky question of his joining the club.

'Oh,' said Frazer, 'Oh yes. Um well, it had occurred to me this might crop up. Didn't think he would ask to join to tell you the truth. Good fellow, not pushy in that sort of way.'

It didn't come from him directly,' said Fairbanks, 'It's actually cropped up because a couple of junior members want to play tennis and squash with him.'

'Well if it's only that they can just ask the tennis committee, they have their own membership committee. By Jove! Simple.'

Fairbanks shifted his weight to the other foot. He was a big good-looking man, now looking distinctly uncomfortable.

'I had realized that George. No. They mean full membership. The big farewell to the Todd's is coming up and Angela is quite keen that we have this particular party without him. She's arranging it all you remember. That is of course at the moment,' he ended rather lamely.

Frazer bridled. He liked John well enough but Angela he didn't, and he suspected John was under her thumb. And he knew full well that Winifred, who was definitely top draw, was cautious of Angela's pretentiousness.

Anyway, who did she think she was, apart from being the medical officer's wife? They had been talking it seemed about his newly appointed officer who he knew to be a good chap. But, alas he was black, and Frazer could see in a flash it was causing consternation among the less liberal. Well, too bad, they would have to get used to it, as there was more to come.

He would have a word with dependable Winifred. She might know how to get round this one.

Pulling himself up to his full 5' 5" he said, 'Alright John, I've got to go now. I'll get back to you on this. Meet me for a drink in the Club this evening, we can find a corner and discuss it then.'

'Why don't you bring Winifred over for a sundowner at our place, we can discuss it there in private?' suggested Fairbanks.

The thought crossed Frazer's mind that it would be much more private without Angela.

'No thanks. I've got various things to do this evening. Behind with a report but I can spare half an hour at the club before dinner.'

'Thanks' said Fairbanks, and just as he was about to enter his car, 'By the way I hear he plays cricket.'

'Yes I know,' said Frazer.

Apologising to Winifred for being late yet again he went through to wash, and returning seated himself at his usual end of the dining table. Winifred, seated at the other end rang her little brass bell to summon the steward to bring the food through.

'You look worried dear,' she said. 'Have you had a trying morning?'

'Well, no more than usual. I had to go out to that Gombalola where the chief is very inefficient. But that's nothing new I suppose. No, truth is, we've got a tricky little decision to make about young Kalahandra.'

'Really, what is that about then?'

She got up and shut the door leading through to the kitchen. It didn't do for the servants to hear everything, official or unofficial.

'John Fairbanks has been asked to broach the subject of membership of the club for him.'

'Well now that is interesting' said Winifred with a smile. 'Has anybody thought to ask Freddie if he actually wants to join?'

Her husband gave her one of his quizzical looks which really meant, 'you're very clever Winifred.'

'Now there's a thought' he said, 'so, which way round are we going to do this?'

'Has he asked about it or made any noises in that direction? I would have thought he might feel a bit out of it.'

'I don't know about that. I think you've forgotten my dear that he went to the same prestigious university as you and me, he's used to mixing with whites.'

'Yes of course, how silly of me.'

They both ate in silence for a while. George was ravenous; he couldn't get his first course down fast enough. Then he said, 'We are going to have to get used to this sort of thing as there will be more of them coming into the service and I suppose it would be stupid if they in their turn outnumbered us and formed social gatherings of their own,

and then decided to keep us out.'

'Well it won't happen in our time George as you know very well, but we ought to try and get it right from the beginning, so I'm in favour of him joining. We should really be magnanimous about this.'

Was this her Catholicism coming out, wondered George?

'Fine,' he said, 'I thought you would say that. Those are my feelings too.'

They ate some more in silence and Winifred rang for the servant to bring the pudding. He came in his long white gown with a wide red cummerbund at the waist and glided noiselessly back to the kitchen again with the cleared dishes.

George suddenly burst out laughing, 'Oh my God,' he said, 'I've just realized the Boma play football in two weeks time against the locals. Now which side will Kalahandra play in?'

'We'll have to wait and see. Yours I expect,' said Winifred.

'Then there's the canoe race at the channel in a couple of months time.'

'That's a bit different. You shouldn't worry about that one so much because its government employees against natives, and they won't necessarily be from our own Boma.'

'True, true. By the way I'm meeting Fairbanks in the club for a drink to give him my answer. He invited us both over to his place, but I turned it down because Angela, in her usual way, is trying to fix things. She's adamant Kalahandra is not allowed to join till after the Todd's leaving party.'

'That's a bit ironic, said Winifred with a scowl, 'when you consider the Todd's are some of the most pro African around the place.'

'Yes, that's what I thought. Anyway, I hope I didn't deprive you of her company,' he added sardonically.

She smiled. 'Not at all. I prefer to stay at home.'

Returning from meeting Fairbanks George dropped back into the office and found Kalahandra still working. He had also been out all day and was busy writing up. George was most impressed and after a few minutes chat on official business it seemed the opportune moment to broach the awkward question.

'We would be very glad to have you as a member of the club if you would care to join us. I could vote you in.'

The look of surprise on the ADC's face told him this was most

unexpected. He looked down and shuffled some papers, then looked back at his senior.

'I'm not sure that I want to join,' he said.

Frazer took this as shyness.

'As I said, I could vote you in,' he repeated.

'Thanks. I'll think about it, but probably not. I only want to play tennis occasionally and Hugh Dickenson tells me he thinks I can do that anyway.'

'Yes, that's so. Oh well, please yourself.' He felt a bit deflated. 'Goodnight then.'

At the door he turned and said, 'Perhaps you'd like to join us in a game of cricket sometime?'

'Yes, thanks. I would enjoy that.'

Chapter Seven

Out in one of the isolated rest houses to the West, Hugh Dickenson and Jeremy were sharing the evening meal. It had been prepared by Hugh's cook and tasted terrible. Hugh apologised.

Jeremy said, 'Yes, I discovered having a wife around does make a difference. The boy I had before Mary arrived was pretty awful and she promptly changed him.'

'Well, common enough,' said Hugh, 'different ball game with the memsahib in charge.'

'Not a case of too many cooks but too many masters, eh?' Jeremy quipped.

'Something like that,' said Hugh. 'Well, this one can't cook when we're in, let alone on safari, when he seems to go completely to pieces. Haven't you noticed I rarely ask people for dinner? It's usually only for drinks. That's because it is always a risk laying on a meal. There are a few people I don't mind asking who can laugh it off, but since the only place on the Boma to eat out is the occasional thrash at the club, I don't get to eat with others very much.'

'Why don't you sack him?' queried Jeremy.

'I can't do that, he is honest and attached to me, and he's otherwise very willing. And of course, he has an interest in cattle, owning a few head of his own back on his own shamba.'

'Here we are discussing the servants just like the women,' laughed Jeremy, 'Mary says it seems to be the only topic of conversation, that's why she doesn't go to coffee parties.'

Hugh said, 'I can imagine she has not much time for that sort of thing. She told me the other day, she is getting more and more interested in her nutritional survey and African customs. And she seems quite interested in politics too.'

'Yes, I know about that. I told her she had better keep out of such things in these awkward times. I don't want her to put a foot in it and rock the boat with my research work. The chiefs don't always co-operate as it is. They probably think it has something to do with taxes.'

'Yes, I have that same problem too when it comes to cattle, they think I am secretly counting them.'

‘She likes to come out to do her survey,’ continued Jeremy ‘but I must say it’s been easier since the miscarriage and I can get around faster when I’m alone and not having to share Joseph with her to translate. He seems to like what she is doing as she gets right in there with the families and it fascinates him.’

Hugh didn’t say anything for a while. He was thinking what a selfish bastard Jeremy was for not wanting to share the interpreter. And it was grossly unfair, for there he was with that lovely wife and not treating her as he should. Of late he had been finding his thoughts straying more and more to her. In fact ever since the night she had collapsed and he had to carry her to the settee. Her tall slim figure topped by that crown of pure copper floated into his thoughts before he fell asleep at night and during the waking hours he always hoped to see her.

Even Freddie had said to him, ‘What a lovely open person that Mary is, I think I am going to like her,’ with a smirk.

And Hugh had replied, ‘I thought you always liked blondes.’

He was jerked out of his reverie by Jeremy saying, ‘I’ve heard in the old days you and I would be sitting here in our evening suits old boy. None of this casual stuff, dressed in our pyjamas ready to go to bed.’

Hugh chuckled, ‘What a thought, shouldn’t think so in this day and age, although old George is such a pompous devil he may still do so. Conjures up a lovely picture, doesn’t it, dining by tilly lamp with the sausage flies and mosquitoes buzzing around and the bats peeing overhead.’

‘Maybe he brings his gramophone too,’ said Jeremy.

‘And gets his servant to turn the handle,’ laughed Hugh.

They had drunk a lot of beer and continued drinking after their meal while discussing the day’s work. Hugh had overseen the inoculation of a great many cattle in the Gombolola that day with his two veterinary assistants, and he knew they were also drinking the locally brewed beer in some nearby hut. But he still wasn’t sure he had covered all the cattle and tomorrow he would have to check, which meant he wouldn’t get back to HQ in time to do his report.

Jeremy had already finished his soil samples and intended moving off next day to further pastures with only Joseph for company.

Hugh was about to climb onto his safari cot when an idea occurred to him.

‘I’m eating with old Costa on Thursday night. Would you and Mary like to come along too?’

‘Is it polite to just turn up with you like that?’

‘Why not? So long as I tell him I’m bringing a couple more. The more the merrier with him; he doesn’t stand on ceremony. Nick Parsons will be there too. He likes to eat with Costa because he turns out such wonderful Levantine grub.’

‘I should think Nick likes to keep an eye on him to see what he is up to,’ said Jeremy. ‘He told me the other day, he thought Costa was hiding gold nuggets behind his number plates when he comes through from the Congo.’

‘Really, what an idea! Wouldn’t put it past him though.’

‘He is a wily old devil. Still, I can’t help liking him. He is one of the true eccentrics around the place, but Mary is a bit wary of him, she says she is waiting for the day when he pinches her bottom.’

Hugh laughed ‘I think she might be disappointed; she’s a bit too pale and thin for him. He likes them black and buxom.’

‘Yes so I gather. Well no accounting for taste. I suppose you know about his living in lover who up and left?’ said Hugh.

‘Well, not entirely. I know most people on the Boma don’t approve of him because she was black.’

‘Yes, he captured her one day when he was out supervising some road building. Her father demanded her back, or a hefty bride price, neither of which he came up with. Some say he did offer marriage but he didn’t get round to it. So she left him in a fit of pique and went off to Kampala. Anyway while she was with him she produced two sons and left them with him.’

‘I knew there was one nusu child,’ said Jeremy, ‘but I didn’t know there were two.’

‘Probably several more scattered around the countryside,’ said Hugh, ‘but these two he does recognize and provide for.’

‘I don’t know if Mary knows all about this,’ said Jeremy. ‘She’s never mentioned it. Only said just after we arrived that this little wiry grey haired man of indeterminate age and nationality had called. He stood on the doorstep and refused to come in and with a big smile had said, “You visit me. I cook you good meal. Yes?” But we haven’t yet taken up the invitation.’

‘So you’ll come then?’ asked Hugh

‘OK, I’ll tell Mary when I get back.’

Now why did I do that Hugh asked himself as he got onto his camp bed, knowing full well it was because it was a chance to see Mary again. He must hold himself in check. After all, the girl was married, although none too happily he had noticed.

He could hear bats up in the thatch and the smell of their pee pervaded the dingy room. He mentioned it to Jeremy, but he had already fallen off to sleep through an alcoholic haze.

Driving back into the Boma on a Thursday, he felt incredibly tired from negotiating unsurfaced wet country roads, many potholed, some no more than narrow winding tracks between the down like hills, and he nearly fell asleep at the wheel. Then he was on a long straight run through the plain and passing the isolated shambas with their little plantain groves until he finally came to the glorious red canna covered roundabout in the middle of the town. The exuberant colour of the flowers almost hurt his eyes. Well a bath, a drink and some of Costa’s tales would soon revive him. And he would see Mary again.

Chapter Eight

Stretching out on his bed Hugh had fallen asleep and was the last to arrive at Costa's house situated on a hill outside the Boma. Built mostly of wood with a large veranda it stood in a ramshackle garden and was finished with homemade furniture and anything he had been able to lay his hands on when people left the Boma and sold off bits and pieces.

Not only the Bradshaw's but Nick Parsons had already arrived followed by Jack Hendry the Education Officer and his girl friend Hilary Johnson who worked in development, of whom Costa said wryly 'She teach natives dry clothes on line, better on bushes.'

Embarrassed that the Bradshaw's had turned up as unexpected guests, Hugh said, 'I'm sorry Costa, I invited these two, I hope you don't mind?'

'OK, OK, plenty food, plenty bananas,' which raised a laugh.

Mary said, 'It's bananas all round tonight then.'

'You may be lucky,' he said, giving her a wicked wink.

Hugh saw her blush, while conscious that Hendry and Hilary were exchanging glances and giggling. Hugh thought he should maybe have warned Mary of Costa's innuendos which everyone expected and at the same time wondered if she was a prude. Well there would undoubtedly be more crude humour during the evening.

Jack asked after Costa's two sons.

'I didn't know you had two children,' said Mary, having heard only of one eleven year old fostered by the Todd's.

'Where is Theresa nowadays?' Jack asked.

'In Kampala. She left me,' said Costa by way of explanation to the Bradshaw's.

'Oh,' said Mary, 'and left the children too?'

'Yes.'

'You probably treated her badly,' said Nick.

'No no, treat good'

'And she left?' said Mary incredulous.

She had noted the woman's touch on entering the place, with brightly coloured cushions scattered about and straw mats on the floor.

‘So what’s she doing in Kampala?’ persisted Nick.

‘Don’t know, maybe prostitute,’ Costa said with a shrug.

Hugh noticed the look of horror on Mary’s face. She looked shocked.

‘You mean she left her children to become a prostitute; surely not,’ she said.

‘Maybe, maybe. Finish. She gone,’ said Costa, waving it away with a hand.

‘I was actually asking after your kids,’ said Jack, ‘when can I get a word in edgeways.

‘My big boy in catholic boarding school in England. He learn well.’

‘Good,’ said Jack, ‘I thought he might do well there,’ since he had a hand in the arrangement. ‘So how about Simon?’

Costa looked genuinely perturbed, ‘He big worry.’

‘Why?’ asked Hilary. Though they all knew the youngest was fostered by the Todd’s who were about to leave for their new posting.

Jack looked over the top of his horn rimmed glasses and said ‘Yes what are you going to do with that lad Costa? The Todds move on in two weeks time. I am concerned about the child; he is bright you know.’

‘I hope he go with Todds,’ said Costa ‘but say no, too difficult, new country.’

‘You can hardly expect them to take him,’ said Hilary ‘he wouldn’t fit in Malaya very well.’

‘That’s right,’ said Jack ‘and he is coming up to secondary school soon.’

‘Can’t you send him off with his brother?’ suggested Nick.

‘No money, no money, big problem.’

Costa looked even more worried, which was not normally one of his traits. ‘I want keep him in Africa with me.’

‘Don’t you ever go home?’ asked Jeremy.

Costa looked shocked. ‘Home? No. Home here. Maybe he go to grandmother or uncle in Beirut.’

Hugh wanted to ask if they minded about this half-cast child, but it seemed they were in contact with the other one. He guessed they were peasant or trading stock.

Suddenly everyone was surprised when Mary said, ‘I could have him for a while if you like.’

‘What!’ Jeremy turned to her giving her a thunderous look as much as

to say, ‘Are you out of your mind.’

With everyone looking at her unbelievingly, Hugh was conscious of the fact that Jeremy was about to explode.

Jack Hendry said, ‘How long are you here for then Mary?’

Perceiving she had caused consternation, she said, ‘Jeremy’s research runs for two years and we have done six months so far,’ biting her lower lip.

‘Oh well, the young fellow would just about have settled in, when you have to up and go again.’

Jeremy said, ‘That’s right,’ and turning to her again said, ‘I don’t think you’ve really thought it through, have you?’

Hugh thought, she’s still distressed at losing the baby and wants something to love. Pity for her consumed him while at the same time he realised she was a fool to make such a rash offer. He saw that Costa, having got over his surprise was looking at her intently but remaining silent, summing up the tension between Jeremy and his wife.

Jeremy stood up looking furious and said, ‘Come on, I think we ought to go home.’

‘Whatever for?’ said Nick, ‘we haven’t eaten yet.’

‘Eat in one hour,’ said Costa ‘Take time cook.

‘I think Mary is tired,’ insisted Jeremy, and turning to her, ‘Early bed, eh?’

Tears were now flowing down her face as she fled the room. Hugh had a strong urge to follow her. He ached to hold her and tell her they knew she meant well. He hoped fervently that Jeremy was not going to lambaste her.

Still looking fit to kill, Jeremy said, ‘Well, good night all, see you some other time.’

Costa said, ‘OK, OK,’ but did not get up to see them out.

After they had gone, Nick said, ‘An emotional lady with a good heart.’

‘I would like my boy with her, cannot be,’ said Costa.

‘She’s just had a miscarriage,’ said Hilary.

‘Yes, that’s right, I think she is feeling pretty down,’ said Hugh.

‘I’ve only met him once or twice in the course of my work,’ said Hilary. ‘Seems he can be a bit awkward.’

‘I don’t really know them at all,’ said Jack. ‘They rarely come to the club, I don’t think they socialise much.’

‘Well, she certainly seems unhappy,’ observed Hilary.

Hugh wanted to agree, but thought it more circumspect to stay silent, knowing rumours always started flying when a bachelor attached himself to a couple and was beginning to know which one out of these two he would like to be attached to.

‘I don’t know what you are going to do about your kid, Costa’ said Jack, ‘he deserves some education.’

‘We think about it,’ said Costa. ‘Now we drink and eat’

‘Good idea,’ said Nick, ‘then we can play rummy afterwards.’

‘You beat me. You always beat me,’ laughed Costa at the policeman. That’s why you want play too much.’

Chapter Nine

The morning dawned bright and clear, which pleased Angela Fairbanks as she looked at the few feathery clouds hanging in the intense blue sky. She decided there and then that she would hold her coffee party in the garden, so that they could see her bed of roses in bloom.

She was hugging herself that she had managed to persuade Winifred Frazer to come along this morning. This was a very unusual occurrence, as Angela knew full well that Winifred divorced herself from Boma coffee parties in order not to get involved in gossip. Though she gave one a year herself, specifically to raise money for her charity the Red Cross, on which occasion the tone was raised a little.

As Angela glided around the house thinking of how to broach the subject for which she had gathered her guests together, she dwelt on each and why she had chosen them.

First Winifred, for whom Angela was glad that she did not call herself Winnie, for it certainly did not quite have the same ring. She had been approached because she was the wife of Frazer, the big white chief.

While dwelling on the significance of names, her mind wandered off onto Freddie Kalahandra again. Why didn't the man call himself Frederick for heaven sake, for presumably that was his name. It would add a little finesse, especially as it seemed he was bent on joining the ranks of such as themselves. It was certainly going to take quite a bit of getting used to, this business of Africanisation. Still one shouldn't worry too much, it was not all going to happen yet.

Bringing herself back to preparing for the coffee party, she gave the houseboy orders to carry the furniture into the garden and telling him precisely where to place it, when to her annoyance he had the insolence to tell her it would rain shortly.

The sky was indeed beginning to change to a strange green colour, but she ignored his warning and he continued to carry out her orders.

Back inside she took one of her prettiest plates and arranged the special biscuits she had managed to purchase in Kampala. Busy laying them delicately in a pattern she slowly realised the kitchen was

beginning to darken. Hearing a role of thunder she looked out of the window and saw a huge black cloud and sharp forked lightning. As the threatening cloud rolled in closer, Marcus the houseboy appeared in the doorway in some agitation, 'Memsahib' he said with some urgency.

She couldn't bring herself to say 'you were right,' instead, cursing the unpredictability of the early wet season she shouted at him to bring everything back in again.

Furious that her little plan had gone awry, she took her temper out on him.

'Hurry up, can't you see it's coming any minute.'

'I know Memsahib,' he muttered quietly and seemed to her to be deliberately slow about the process. All was safely in however by the time the deluge came.

It was now 10.30am and the guests should have arrived, but she guessed they would wait until the worst of the storm was over. There was no telling how long it would last, although the rumblings were now like drum beats tailing off into the distance. She didn't know what she hated most, the arid dry season when she seemed forever thirsty from the eternal dust blowing about, or the frightening tropical storms.

Just as the rain stopped, Winifred arrived in the doorway, followed closely by Hilary Johnson who said she could only take half an hour out as she really had to get off to one of the nearby Gombolas, this being a working morning for her.

Angela said, 'It is good of you to come, much appreciated Hilary.'

Next to arrive was Melanie Penshurst, the bank manager's wife, and late, on foot, Jennifer Patterson from the African Boys Secondary School.

'You walked here all the way from the school?' said Angela incredulously.

'Yes, why not, it's beautifully clear and fresh after the rain and I got a wonderful view of the Mountains of the Moon before I set off. You can see them well from my house when it isn't hazy, one of the things I treasure. I am sorry though, I suppose I should have brought the car as I am late I see.'

Winifred looked at her with interest. 'You are quite right. We don't walk nearly enough here, we just get in our cars and zoom off all the time. Goodness knows what the Africans think when we can't walk half a mile.'

‘Well I am not worried what they think,’ said Angela ‘Have some coffee, Jennifer,’ and handed her the cup while Melanie and Hilary exchanged glances.

‘I thought the party for the Todds’ farewell went swimmingly Angela,’ said Winifred. ‘You did a wonderful job there, one of our best.’

‘Yes, I enjoyed it immensely,’ said Melanie.

‘And everyone turned up for a change,’ said Hilary ‘fairly rare for the leper colony to turn up in force, but then Mike and Sandra were so popular.’

At the mention of leper colony, Melanie said, ‘I think it’s unfair to call Jennifer and her colleagues the leper colony.’

Smiling wryly, Jennifer said, ‘That’s alright, we don’t mind. We are, after all, here to advance Africans in education which doesn’t leave us with much time to visit the club or do as much socialising as some I could mention, naming no names.’

‘Yes we know all about education for them,’ said Angela and was about to say, ‘Look what we’ve got now, this chap Kalahandra,’ but bit her tongue, realising Winifred wouldn’t approve.

‘Well Sandra is a teacher. I guess everyone felt loyal to her, even though she was primary level,’ said Jennifer. ‘They will be sorely missed.’

‘Yes, I am really sorry they have gone,’ said Winifred.

‘I bet you don’t feel like that about everyone,’ said Hilary.

‘You’re being cheeky,’ said Winifred with a smile.

‘Anyway,’ Hilary went on ‘when is this country going to get free primary schooling all round, they shouldn’t have to pay school fees. It exasperates me. I’ll never get development under way till it happens. I already go into the schools; in fact I am going into one this afternoon. Occasionally it makes a bit of a dent.’

‘You’re getting too weighty,’ said Angela, who could see the morning slipping by without discussing the reason she had invited them. ‘Anyway we did manage to get through the party before the decision was made about Kalahandra joining the Club.’

‘Oh didn’t you know, Angela, George offered him membership, but Freddie turned it down.’

‘Offered him membership?’ she sounded almost irate. What a nerve she thought, going over our heads like that.

‘And he turned it down,’ said Melanie, raising her eyebrows.

‘Bully for him,’ said Hilary, ‘who would want to join a bunch like us. Probably felt that he didn’t have anything in common with us.’

‘As a matter of fact, he is a very nice cultivated man. He has been to a good Scottish University,’ said Winifred, rising to his defence.

‘Was it yours?’ asked Jennifer.

‘Yes, as a matter of fact, it was.’

‘I was at the other place, Glasgow,’ said Jennifer.

‘Were you, I didn’t know that,’ said Winifred.

‘Yes, I read geography. That’s where I met Neil, he was reading English.’

Oh hell, thought Angela, here we go again. This was something that pierced her armour, because although she had gone to an exceedingly good public school, of which she made much, not having done well enough to go on to University, she had become a nurse. It all seemed rather unfair, as she would have liked that. Then again, she may not have met John. And then again, she might not have landed in this damn country.

She saw her moment to grab their attention. ‘Ah, Neil, yes. Actually Jennifer, I have a little plan afoot which could concern Neil.’

‘Really, what’s that?’

‘Well, as someone from the English department, I thought he was capable of putting on a play or some sort of entertainment for us.’

‘Oh, what’s this for then, charity do for the Red Cross?’ smiling at Winifred.

‘No no, not charity, just fun for us. Something to do to cheer things along.’

‘It’s a nice idea, but I doubt Neil would want to get involved. He is heavily committed to the school and English is so important if his students are going to make their way.’

‘I can imagine he is a very conscientious teacher,’ said Winifred.

‘He is indeed. He gives all his energy to it. I would be delighted Angela, if he would agree, but I know it is useless asking him. For instance, at the moment he is up in arms because he discovered that Aziz had some pencils and crayons come into his duiker. So he bought some and paid a shilling for ten, and then sent the boys down to also buy some, and told the geography department as well. So a number of boys went down and that rogue Aziz charged them a shilling for five.

Neil was so furious he stumped off down to raise Cain and both departments sent all the boys back to return them. So Aziz had to climb down and reimburse the boys.'

'The Asians are real devils on that score,' said Hilary. 'I don't know why they charge Africans more than Muzungus. It ought to be the other way round since we have more money than them.'

'Sucking up,' said Jennifer.

'No wonder they are not much liked,' said Melanie.

'But they do work harder than most of us,' said Winifred, 'You wouldn't catch a European, and certainly not an African, sitting up beyond midnight doing their accounts.'

'Quite,' said Angela, who much preferred them to Africans, but only just. 'Anyway, could we get back to my idea again,' realising she was about to lose Hilary. 'What's the consensus? Do we want to do anything? And if so what, and who is going to be in charge?'

'You're indefatigable,' said Winifred.

Angela smiled across at her. 'Not really, it's just so boring for some of us around here, if we don't do something.'

'How about a review,' suggested Melanie. 'I might persuade Harold to put it on, he's done quite a lot of amateur dramatics.'

'Is that so,' said Winifred in surprise, 'but then you are fairly new, and I obviously have not caught up with you yet.'

'You might not have done anyway. Harold hides his lights under a bushel, but he is really very good.'

'We can take your word for it then,' laughed Hilary.

'I assure you he would put on a good show, but he would need everyone's co-operation. He can't stand tantrums and certainly won't have truck with prim donnas,' looking purposefully at Angela.

'Fair enough. If it is handed over to someone it's their pigeon,' she said.

'This is getting interesting just as I ought to be off,' said Hilary.

'Hang on a minute. Let decide what it's to be. Do you think a play or what?' asked Angela.

'I wonder how much talent there is around the place,' said Jennifer. 'I know there is a certain amount at school, but a play, I don't know. Light or heavy? A bit risky. Perhaps a review as Melanie suggests.'

'Great idea,' said Winifred.

They all looked at her.

‘You really think so,’ said Angela.

‘Yes, why not? Let’s put it on with a meal at the Club. You could organise that side of it Angela since you are so good at it.’

‘Well um, yes if you think so.’

‘Now we’ve got to scout round to find some people to take part. I know Jack will, he likes that sort of thing,’ said Hilary.

‘I can imagine,’ said Jennifer. ‘Pity old Toddy has left, he had a great voice.’

‘For that matter, so has John,’ said Angela.

‘Ah, it’s all coming out now,’ said Hilary, ‘but sorry folks I must be off, I am a working girl you know. Are you going to have another meeting, Angela? If so, could you make it on a weekend? I don’t want it to get around that I take time out.’

‘It really was good of you to come, Hilary. Thanks. We’ll tell you more anon.’

‘I ought to be off too. I want to get down to the Duiker now that I’ve come this far. It will probably rain again this afternoon,’ said Jennifer.

Angela said, ‘Right, well perhaps we should leave it there for today, and mull it over.’

‘Don’t see me out, Angela. Bye everybody, see you again soon then,’ and Hilary was gone.

As soon as she had left, Melanie said, ‘I hear Jack has put in for the Todds house on Millionaire’s row.’

‘Well, there is not much hope that he will get it,’ said Angela. ‘After all he isn’t married and those are married quarters. Well I mean, yes actually he is married; I mean he is not married to Hilary. Oh dear, why do people move their partners around so?’

Melanie let a little smile play round her pretty mouth. ‘I hope no one is going to snaffle my Harold while we are here,’ she said, as it was common knowledge that Jack’s wife had gone off with the previous bank manager.

‘Not till after the do,’ said Winifred dryly, rising to leave.

Left with just Melanie, Angela said. ‘And I really can’t think why that new ADC Kalahandra has been given such a good house.’

‘It’s because he is admin, my dear,’ said Melanie, also taking her leave.

As Angela saw her out she was thinking of Kalahandra. It’s enough to make you spit she thought. Anyway, the morning had gone well and

she would soon shine in her own little sphere once more.

Chapter Ten

It was Tuesday, and Mary was astonished when Jeremy said, 'Let's go down to the club for a drink.'

She had spent the day up at the mission, about two miles away on the other side of the Boma and was feeling exceedingly tired.

It was her one commitment of the week, not in any way of being a Christian as she barely regarded herself as one. It had come about when she went up to the church one day in curiosity and there had met Constance, a comely wife of one of the minor chiefs.

Constance had said, 'Would you be interested in running some classes for us?'

'What sort of classes?'

'Tell us about food and things like that,' said Constance, 'well, anything you like as it would help some of us with our English,' she suggested.

Flattered by being asked, Mary agreed, and it was now the one day in the week she looked forward to, though it cost her patience and energy.

At first she had prevaricated about holding the talks at the mission as she felt it labelled her and she did not like labels, especially false ones, but Constance was adamant as the women were familiar with the meeting place.

'Besides,' said Constance 'we can keep the same day as the embroidery class as a lot of the women have to walk a long way, and there isn't anywhere else to meet anyway.'

So she had capitulated, though a wicked thought crossed her mind that the clubhouse would be a good place, knowing that at the same time it was well out of bounds. That morning she had tackled nursing sick children at home, especially measles from which many children died or were left disabled. Not being a nurse, she had needed to do a lot of homework and had even gone to see the newly arrived nurse, Veronica, to check her facts.

Over the previous week she had talked to the women on her own subject and having been out with Hugh on safari several times she had gleaned information on their own diets. She had said to Veronica, 'I'll swap anything useful with you if you like,' but she need not have

worried as Veronica had proved helpful.

When Hilary had heard about it she was pleased saying, 'All grist to the mill my dear, integrated development.'

Mary was beginning to realise that some of the women on the Boma could co-operate, though she had heard that Angela had been thoroughly snooty about it and was reported to have said, 'Oh, yes I am a nurse, but I wouldn't waste my breath on them.'

So that the women could keep to their traditional mealtimes, she started the classes at midday knowing that they would have had their main meal. She talked for an hour then broke to have her own sandwiches while they mulled over their lesson and asked questions. She sat on into the afternoon chatting while the women set about their embroidery, and found she was picking up some of their language when they lapsed from English.

Occasionally she wandered around the mission grounds and talked to the missionaries who were translating the bible into the local dialect and once strayed into the carpentry shed to discover they produced little stools, wooden cradles for babies and low tables for eating off.

She saw an off cut and said to the African in charge, 'Can I have that, please?'

'What for?' he asked.

'It would make a nice chopping board.'

'Why yes, of course, let me smooth off the edges for you,' and handed it to her with a huge smile. She went home happy that day.

Not so on another day. She went into the church and sat down in the stillness. Soon she found herself crying as she pondered her wrecked marriage. Jeremy never kissed her these days, didn't even touch her. Ever since she had made her rash offer to take on Costa's kid, after which he had lambasted her cruelly for acting so stupidly, she felt discarded.

Now here he was suggesting they go down to the club together. A complete surprise since he never suggested they do anything together, which was why she had taken up Hugh's offer to accompany him out on his safaris.

Well she had better comply, though she was feeling bloody minded enough about it to say No.

'Alright, I'll just change, about ten minutes.'

'Don't bother, you are alright as you are.'

She climbed into the Land Rover wondering what was the hurry. On the way he stopped to pick up the post.

She said, 'Anything for me?' and rustled through the pile on the seat between them, there was a letter from her mother and another she noticed with her heart giving a bump, addressed to him, with a Kenyan stamp on it. She turned it over and saw the address on the back and realised it was from Anthea Gilchrist. So, he was still in touch with her.

She looked at him enquiringly but he turned away without a word. Climbing out of the car she was still thinking of Anthea, the settler's daughter from Eldoret who had been on the boat coming out and had been oblivious to the fact that Jeremy already knew her when he introduced her.

Then on the way up they had stopped off for the night at the hotel in the town and Jeremy had said, 'Anthea has invited me to see the farm.'

'I would love to see a settler's farm,' she said.

'Well I think you should stay here and rest' and off he had gone, returning very late. She had felt bitter at being left out but still not sure why he had been so keen to go alone.

Then about a month later he had gone to Kampala to see someone at the University, saying he would only be away one night, but that evening he had phoned the Boma and a message was brought to her to say he would be away two more days. In the event it was three, and on return he had confessed he had been to see Anthea again.

'How can you do this to me,' she said. 'This is totally unfair. I'm new here and have no one to talk with.'

'You don't need to worry,' he had assured her. 'She has said she wants nothing more than to be friends. I won't be seeing her again.'

That had been the night she had conceived. Now she had no baby and it seemed they still wrote to each other.

By this time they were inside the club. She tried to control her emotions and appear affable as first Jack greeted her and then George Frazer, wondering all the while if she could stand the idle chitchat. The golf addicts were there as usual propping up the bar, showing off to each other how many holes they had made that evening.

George however took her over to a table in a corner and settled with their drinks he said, 'I hear you are doing a good job at the mission, Mary, some really useful work.'

She could have reached across and kissed him. It lifted her spirits to

know that someone appreciated her.

‘I don’t know about useful, I actually enjoy meeting with the women. They are a great bunch and so keen to learn.’

‘Yes, they missed out, haven’t had much chance of education.’

They lapsed into a friendly silence and then Mary said, ‘Can you help me on something, George? We’ve been invited to the palace for dinner. Is it very formal, do I need to dress up?’

‘No, not too much. It is fairly relaxed. You’ll get on alright. His Excellency has heard about you as you seem to have a way with the Africans.’

She felt a moment of panic. Was he referring to that time when he has passed Freddie Kalahandra commiserating with her in the street over her miscarriage, when he had laid his hand on her arm.

He was gazing at her with no seemingly hidden meaning so she took it as a compliment.

‘Well, I like them, but I am completely confused what is going on politically.’

‘You don’t want to know all about that, do you?’

‘Yes I do, I find it very fascinating.’

He took a swig of his beer. ‘I thought you were a nutritionist, not a politician,’ he laughed.

‘There is no law against nutritionists being interested in politics is there?’

‘No of course not. I just find it odd that a young girl like you should have such a fascination.’

‘Well as I go around the bush and see these people I can’t get my mind round the possibility of them ever governing themselves. Although I do feel it’s their right,’ she added hastily.

He held her eyes for a moment and said, ‘Don’t get too deeply into it my dear, it will be a long time yet, well after you return to England.’

‘I suppose so, but it’s riveting all the same, the way some are jostling for power. The problem is, are they all good men? With this new Democratic party which has just been formed and the Kabaka of Baganda wanting to be top dog. Where does that leave the other three rulers? I feel I ought to know more about it before we go off to this dinner.’

‘Yes that is a sticky one, but I wouldn’t touch on it up there, Mary. Not wise at this time of transition. We just have to wait to see if they

ever obtain democracy.'

There was loud laughter coming from the bar and Jeremy was beckoning her over. She sat on, feeling stubborn, abruptly remembering her earlier annoyance about the letter. I'm damned if I am going over to him, she thought, but George said, 'It seems you are wanted up at the bar.'

She stood up and said, 'Thanks George, I appreciated our chat.'

'Not at all. Hope you'll enjoy the dinner, don't expect they'll give you matoke.'

Moving off she said, 'Oh, I don't mind steamed bananas with a nice groundnut sauce.'

Quite a little crowd were gathered around the bar.

Jeremy said, 'We're dreaming up a review, and Harold is co-ordinating it.'

'That's right, it's fallen to me. Can you sing Mary?'

'No, but I can dance.'

'Good, what is your speciality then, tap, ballet?'

'High kicking,' she said, causing them to laugh, although they didn't see the pun as she really meant she would like to kick Jeremy, and noticed he hadn't joined in the mirth.

'How about a can-can then?'

'Supply me with a chorus line and I'll see what I can do.'

'No seriously Mary, do you want to join in, a song and dance act or something.'

'I'll think about it. Sounds like it might be fun.'

Harold looked chuffed. 'This thing's growing apace,' he said. 'Looks more promising every minute. What an enthusiastic bunch, so anyone seriously interested is invited to meet in my house on Sunday evening around 8.30pm.'

Some were promising, others demurring.

Jeremy appeared to be getting drunk. She said, 'I think we should go and get supper, we can't keep Moses hanging about for ever.'

He clapped Harold on the shoulder, 'I'll think about it old chap.'

'Come on then,' said Mary, thinking to herself that he was going to have more than that to think about.

Chapter Eleven

The rains had set in, giving Hilary Johnson and Jack Hendry an excuse to go out on safari together carefully arranging to dovetail Jack's visits to schools with Hilary's efforts to get more development under way. This fooled no one when they came up with explanations; Hilary might get stuck in the black cotton soil or bogged down in roads that were impassable after a deluge, for it was full knowledge that she had at her disposal both an African driver and one of her own office staff.

Word buzzed around that Jack was trying for divorce. It was two years since his wife went off with the bank manager and Hilary's name, now permanently linked to his, made them more or less acceptable as a couple at dinner parties.

Alas, the divorce courts moved slowly and the new forestry officer to replace Todd arrived on the Boma with a wife in tow, thus scuppering Jack's hopes of securing the vacant house on Millionaires Row.

The new man, Phillip Hurton, was married to a petite Irish woman called Kathleen who was causing a stir in that she was a writer, putting some of the Boma women on guard lest she write about them. Nevertheless to those who showed interest she willingly lent her first novel, which sent a certain secret bitchiness reverberating as to its merits. Mary borrowed it, enjoyed reading it, and told Kathleen so. And at last, she thought, here was someone with whom she might strike up a friendship.

Hugh also, in spite of the heavy rain, had to get out on safari to inspect cattle suspected of having the dreaded rinderpest. He asked Mary if she would like to accompany him again.

'You might like to follow up your nutritional survey,' he said, 'while I look at the cattle.' She did not need second asking. Ever keen to get out into the bush and with Jeremy still keeping her at arm's length, she gladly accepted.

The rains suddenly ceased as they neared their first destination, and stopping off at a sidetrack, Hugh sent his assistant Anosi down the path to tell the farmer he would be coming to examine his cattle.

They sat in silence looking out of the car window. The sky had turned azure blue, highlighting the lush heavily fissured hills rolling off into the distance like waves. Dotted around in isolation were thatched rondarvels surrounded by banana plantations.

Hugh said, 'I find it strange that here they don't form themselves into villages.'

Mary heaved a big sigh, 'That's what I like about it. It's so rural. God, I love this country, it's just so beautiful.'

Hugh caught her profile. So are you, he thought.

'You can see why Churchill called it the pearl of Africa, can't you,' he said.

'Indeed I can. I don't know how I am going to bring myself to leave it, to return home.'

Alarmed he said, 'You're not thinking of taking off yet, are you? Jeremy hasn't finished his research yet.'

'No I don't think so. I am really not sure yet if I'll leave before him. I've just not decided. Anyway, I think I could make this my home.'

He looked at her sympathetically 'Well that can't be, unfortunately. Settlers are not allowed here, it being a Protectorate, not a Colony. But you knew that already.'

'Don't talk to me about settlers,' she said almost angrily.

Catching her change of mood, he was about to ask why when Anosi returned.

'You are invited to eat with the farmer,' he said, 'They have been waiting for you,' and looking at Mary with one of those big grins that always pleased her so, 'and you too memsahib.'

Hugh said, 'What do you think, Mary?

'Please come Bwana,' said his assistant. 'Today they found some very small mushrooms and they want to share them.'

'I don't normally do this,' said Hugh.

'Oh come on, we can't disappoint them. To hell with protocol.'

'Alright you win.'

She gathered up some fruit that they brought and followed Anosi down the track.

The farmer's wife had brought out low wooden stools and placed them where the sun felt warm, in the middle of which stood a much bigger stool. Mary pleased the farmer by greeting him in the local

dialect and he invited her to sit on one of the stools. His wife appeared carrying a large shiny tin pan filled with matoke, the green bananas still wrapped in the leaves it had been steamed in. Another container was filled with the sauce made from the tiny mushrooms, like minute toadstools. Hugh whispered to Mary he thought they might be poisonous.

'Don't be silly. They've been eating these for years,' she told him.

He was somewhat perplexed when neither spoons or forks was forthcoming, and she said, 'We are meant to wash our hands,' going over to a bucket of water.

Returning to her stool she set about eating the meal with her fingers. Hugh looked at her in astonishment.

'Go on, get on with it, before it gets cold,' she said and then laughed as he clumsily took up some of the banana and tried to take up the sauce as well, trying to copy what she was doing.

It all ran through his fingers.

'Watch them,' she said, turning to the farmer and his wife who were getting it to their mouths without spillage. After a while he got the hang of it, but Mary had finished her bowlful first. She smiled and told the farmer's wife it was very good and Hugh acknowledged it too.

'It's the first time I have eaten matokes,' he said.

'This is a very balanced diet,' said Mary.

'Well, you should know I suppose. Do you know I really enjoyed that.'

She could see that he was beginning to relax after doing something novel.

'Well it's a meal that hopeless cook of yours should be able to do.'

'I don't know about that. Musungues are not meant to go native, you know. Anyway, I had better go off and do the nasty bit now and take a look at their small herd to see if it's healthy or not.'

While he was away, Mary walked around the shamba noticing that they grew millet as well. Hugh returning said, 'I don't think they've got rinderpest but I am getting Anosi to take blood.'

Back in the Land Rover he said, 'That was interesting, did you enjoy it?'

She said, 'Of course I did. I think we should have as much contact as possible with these people, after all as you say, it's their country.'

‘You’re a breath of fresh air around the place,’ he said, patting her on the knee.

Mary felt a sudden glow. She couldn’t remember when she last felt so thrilled at someone’s touch.

They had turned away from the hills and it was now not as lush. The land flattened out onto to plain and there were even fewer shambas to be seen. The next stop was a nomads camp. The cattle-keeping people camped about half a mile off the road where they had enclosed their kraal with a rough thorn fence.

Children ran out to meet them and some tried to take Mary’s hand.

‘These kids don’t seem particularly shy,’ she said.

‘No this group is quite near the catholic white father’s mission. They see more white people than those further north.’

‘So they are Catholics like you,’ she said in some wonderment. ‘Do you see the white fathers too?’

‘Sometimes I go to have a word with them, when I am this way, but not today.’

‘You mean because I am with you. They wouldn’t approve?’

‘You mean they don’t mind some of these people having two wives.’ ‘I don’t think they would be bothered. They are quite broad minded.’

‘Well, they don’t approve too much of that.’

The elders were emerging from the kraal as they approached.

Mary said, ‘These people seem quite different physically from the farmer we just left, much taller and they’ve got straight nose and such solemn faces.’

‘Yes, they’re different stock,’ said Hugh.

Anosi explained to the elders that the veterinary officer would like to see the cattle, as there might be rinderpest in the area. A look of panic crossed their faces.

Hugh said, ‘Have you any sick cattle at present?’ They looked at each other then back at him shaking their heads. He told Anosi to ask them if they had sold any recently or passed any over in marriage payments or as gifts. ‘No’ they said, they had been camped in this one place for three months and no betrothals had taken place.

‘Smells like it,’ said Mary looking at the big heap of dung in the middle of the kraal.

‘They bury their dead in that manure,’ said Hugh.

‘Don’t be funny.’

‘Honestly, they do.’

She burst out laughing, thinking he was teasing.

‘Don’t laugh at the moment,’ he said ‘They’ll think we are laughing at them and they are worried about the thought of rinderpest. It is a serious business.’

‘Oh, sorry.’

Anosi asked them where the cattle were grazing. ‘They’re about two miles away,’ he said.

‘Go and look at them and take blood,’ Hugh ordered, ‘We need to do it while we are here.’

Anosi explained to the elders what he was about to do and was accompanied to the grazing ground by one of the younger members.

In the meantime they were invited to enter one of the kraals, but Hugh declined when Mary said she wasn’t sure she wanted to go in.

‘What I need is a cup of tea,’ she said.

‘Well you may get one, but it’s doubtful, anyway remember we’ve got the thermoses back in the Rover so let’s go and wait there.’

The sun was right overhead now and the thought of some shade appealed more than the dung filled kraal. She could see a few women moving about inside. They looked strange - as fat as the men were thin and covered in layers and layers of skirts and tops, quite differently dressed to her ladies at the mission. Some even wore a trilby hat. Half of her was dying to go in and speak to them but with Anosi gone off to the cattle who was going to interpret for her.

‘Let’s go for the tea then,’ she said.

Hugh gave the men a curt farewell and they set off back to the car.

Turning away she said, ‘You weren’t very friendly to them.’

‘I have a lot of trouble with these nomads,’ he said, ‘they are the ones who move the diseases around more than the sedentary people who don’t have so many cattle anyway.’

‘I see. I am learning a lot today.’

Sitting in the Rover with their thermos cups of tea, Hugh suddenly said, ‘Mary what did you mean back there at that other homestead when you seemed very annoyed and said, ‘Don’t talk to me about settlers.’

She looked at him sharply and said, ‘Oh forget it.’

‘It looks like a subject that gets up your nose,’ he said.

‘Yes it does at the moment.’

‘You mean you would like to settle here, is that it?’

‘No, no nothing like that.’

‘What then?’

She hesitated. Then found herself telling him. All of it. Blurting it out in a great torrent. All that had gone on before she became pregnant, and discovering Jeremy was still in contact with Anthea although he had said that it was all over.

He sat looking amazed, periodically taking sips of tea, as though what he was hearing about Jeremy could hardly be true. Though he had suspected that he was treating her badly not realising what a prize he had got. What a stupid man to do that to her and just as they had arrived in a new country. At the same time it made him feel less guilty about his own feelings.

He put his arm around her and she collapsed in tears on his shoulder.

‘I am sorry you’re having such a bad time,’ he said and kissed her on the crown of her head.

She sat up straight and said, ‘I am sorry, Hugh, what an ass I am. I guess I’ve been pent up for several months now.’

He took her hand, ‘You must be aware how fond I am of you. Just let me help you. I would like to do that.’

‘That’s good of you but I must sort this out myself. Sometimes I feel it would be better if I returned home and then again I am learning so much about Africa I don’t think I could bear to leave at the moment.’

‘No you mustn’t leave Mary. I need you even if Jeremy doesn’t,’ and he pulled her across and kissed her on the mouth.

At first she was astonished and then the warmth of it overtook her and she leaned into his sweaty shirt while they kissed passionately.

He stopped abruptly. ‘My God, Anosi will be back in a minute,’ he said.

They were just about composed by the time Anosi appeared carrying the phials of blood.

‘We have to be careful,’ said Hugh. ‘We are not likely to be looked on as a couple like Jack and Hilary since Jeremy is around, and you know how the Boma just loves gossip.’

‘Oh I am so sorry, Hugh, so very sorry. I should not have told you.’

‘I am glad you did,’ he said starting up the car.

Mary was silent; surprised by the thought that entered her head. It was a thought of regret that she was at this time married to Jeremy.

Chapter Twelve

The sun was streaming in through the window, straight onto the bed. Not the limpid sun of early morning, but hard bright sunshine already giving off heat.

Jeremy, lying on his back stirred and opened his eyes. He noticed the curtains had been opened and the early morning orange juice was on the locker beside him. Moses must have been in already. Did he open the curtains? He didn't normally; just slipped in and out quietly with the juice with barely an audible, 'Jambo Bwana, memsahib.'

And where was Mary?

As he slowly surfaced, he recollected that the evening before down at the Club she had ignored him most of the time and taken it upon herself to hobnob with Frazer, which was most unlike her to go for the top. Every time he had looked at them they seemed utterly engrossed in their conversation, but then Hugh hadn't been there or he would possibly have taken over.

She had insisted on driving back accusing him of drinking too much. Well yes, he had drunk quite a bit but he certainly wasn't drunk. Then on reaching the house her seething temper had exploded.

'You are still in contact with that women and you said you had finished it all,' she shot at him, barely containing her anger, looking fit to strike him. He was astonished by her ferocity, and covered in guilt said, 'Well I did write to her, I confess. I am sorry. I know I said I wouldn't, but here, you can read her letter if you like. She has told me to call it off; she only wishes to be friends.'

'Well that is not good enough, even being friends, after all I've been through. I don't think you have an inkling of what it meant to me to loose the baby. I am so fed up, I am thinking of going home,' and she burst into tears.

He was moved to reach out to her, to even at that moment to actually have sex with her, then remembered it would be a replica of what happened last time, and turning towards the bedroom, marched off saying, 'We'll discuss this in the morning.'

She'd said, 'Yes go to bed. I don't want to talk to you anyway, or see your damned letter.'

He must have fallen asleep quite quickly. Now in the hard light of day he realised her pillow was missing. Getting up to pee and slosh his face in cold water, he went through to the living room and saw that two chairs were put together and the pillow and a couple of cushions arranged on them.

Moses appeared from the kitchen. 'Memsahib had breakfast and say she go to mission. She took the car.' he said.

'Oh all right. Well I'll have my breakfast then.'

'Ndio Bwana,' and Moses disappeared back to the kitchen.

So she's gone off to the mission. Buggered off out of his way. Was this her proper day up there? He couldn't remember. Maybe in future he should pay attention to what she said and did. He supposed he had neglected her. Anyway, she hadn't gone off with Hugh on one of his forays. Damn. Now he remembered. This was the day he meant to go off to take some samples from one of the lake areas, and she had taken the Land Rover.

Over breakfast he could see that if he communicated with her a bit more she would have known he was going off for the day. In fact, he could have suggested she went along with him. But then up to now he still had Anthea on his mind so he wasn't so keen for Mary to come along. Well, he would just scrub round it today. That meant working in the house and Joseph hanging around as well.

A good walk would do him good. He would set Joseph to collate some of the fieldwork and then walk into town. He ought to see Phillip Horton the new forestry chap to find out if he intended to continue the work started by old Toddy of limiting grazing in the sparsely treed areas or if he had other ideas. But he wasn't in the mood for real work this morning.

Then an idea struck him. He knew Mary had been harping on about the Asian silversmith Patel who made jewellery and that she really wanted some. That was it; he would go and choose something as a peace offering.

Telling Moses that he would be back for lunch and then settling Joseph, to whom he made clear that he expected him to finish the work he was set, he put on his battered bush hat and sunglasses and strode along the unmade road passing the few roadside African dwellings. He couldn't help noticing how they contrasted with the substantial housing for the Europeans up at the Boma. He didn't much like the grey

concrete angular dwellings with corrugated roofs. Gone were the rustic looking thatched one-room rondavels, these had two rooms but were still minute compared to the space taken up by the Muzungus, with barely a blade of grass to alleviate the boring sameness. Occasionally a bit of straggling bougainvillaea gave a cheery note, but mostly they had bare yards except for a few chicken scraping about and various cheap metal bowls left lying around.

He was greeted as he walked along, but he didn't get the cheery Jambos that were offered when Mary was with him. He didn't find the women very attractive anyway; they tended to run to fat and had little dress sense when they got into western style dresses. Most wore skirts down to their ankles and carried babies on their backs. Only occasionally did a young nubile one turn his head. Other children ran about barefooted and he thought some looked as though they should be in school, but no doubt the fees couldn't be found and they were useful looking after the smaller children.

He suddenly thought it must be Mary's influence that he was now noticing such things. Funny how she had tuned into Africa. He couldn't understand it; she seemed so very Scottish at home. He reckoned she would happily settle here for good, or maybe she was taking it all in as she knew she had limited time.

Limited time. His thoughts went again to Anthea, the settler's daughter. Did she have limited time? What would happen when Kenya got its independence? The settlers were already feeling unsettled, even though it was obvious Tanganyika and Uganda would go first.

It would be crucial for her; she had been born into it, not so Mary. But somehow Africa had got into her. He thought that only happened to the old hands who were reluctant to return to old Blighty, who always said, 'it gets into the blood.'

Well he didn't think it would get into his, though he did hope to get some good research out of it to put him further up the ladder.

Finally he arrived at the Duikers and was told that Patel had his workshop at the back of one of them. He was fascinated to find the man squatting on a stool working at fashioning the pieces with small instruments, holding the metal to heat over a flame to solder it. Patel stopped work to serve him. He looked over some of the necklaces, bracelets and earrings and chose a pair of drop earrings, knowing that

Mary had pierced ears. Although he did not like patronising Asians he was pleased when he got a good price after some haggling and had to acknowledge that there was a certain unfinished charm about Patel's work, so he ordered a necklace to be made for her as well.

While he was choosing a design Patel's brother, one of the bigger Duiker owners, came in and said he was wanting to invite a few people to a feast as the Aga Khan was shortly to visit the place, and although there was to be an official ceremony for the Ismailis the Hindus wanted to celebrate too.

'I thought to ask you Mr Bradshaw and your pretty wife,' he said.

Jeremy was quite taken by surprise, first by the invitation and secondly by the allusion to his pretty wife. It must be that head of hair that gets them all, he thought.

'Well um, thank you. We, um. Yes, I am sure my wife would like to come,' he said.

'The fifteenth of next month then,' said Patel the jeweller. 'We will have ours the day before. The women will make very good food.'

'I am sure, we like curries,' said Jeremy.

'Not just curries, all sorts of hot food,' said Patel. 'You will like, I assure you.'

'Well, thank you very much.' He gathered up the earrings and said that he would collect the necklace the following week.

Outside on the walkway, he thought, good God, fancy the Asians being so bold as to invite us to a meal. I must find out what this visit of the Aga Khan is all about. Turning the corner, he met Costa. He hadn't seen him since flouncing out of his house when Mary had offered to be foster mother to his kid. Costa looked uncertain whether to stop and Jeremy felt embarrassed.

He said, 'Morning Costa, do you think it will rain today?'

'Maybe. It soon ease off.'

'I am sorry about the other night, Costa, missing your meal. Mary has not been too well lately.'

'She good lady your Mary.'

'I know. I just bought these for her,' he produced the earrings.

'Very nice, she like,' said Costa approvingly.

Jeremy was about to ask him if he knew anything about the Aga Khan, then realised that he probably wouldn't, so said instead, 'Well, see you then, cheerio.'

‘Good bye,’ said Costa rather formally for him.

Walking on Jeremy wondered what Costa had done about his kid, but he could hardly ask him, since that was the reason for the sudden departure from his house. Well, at least they had spoken, but the awkwardness of the situation made his intense annoyance of that evening come flooding back and he thought again that there were things about Mary that caused him not to see eye to eye with her. She was far too forward and independent for his liking. Really he should have married a quieter girl who might have doted on him a bit more. He liked admiration.

Not that Mary criticised him or his work, though she had accused him of being lazy, but then that was because she had such a lot of energy herself, though she seemed to have lost some of it lately. Perhaps she was not really over the miscarriage. His renewed animosity toward her from meeting up with Costa – when he wondered for a moment why he had bought the earrings, and should he send them to Anthea instead – for a moment dissolved into pity and because not wanting a child during his fieldwork it had obliterated his understanding of her feelings. With a shock he realised that indeed they had not even discussed it. He shied away from her, partly because half his mind was still on Anthea and partly because he did not want to risk another pregnancy. He would try and make peace with her. The earrings might help.

The walk and the fresh air was beginning to make him feel better and he felt he could do with a cup of coffee, but this godforsaken place did not run to a cafe, so he set off back to the house thinking to give Horton a miss when he bumped into Angela Fairbanks She greeted him enthusiastically.

‘I believe we are all dining with His Excellency on Thursday,’ she beamed at him.

‘Are you going too then?’

‘Yes, we just had an invite. I have always wanted to see inside the Palace,’ she said.

You would, he thought to himself.

‘It could be an interesting evening,’ he said. By the way, Angela, do you know anything about the Aga Khan coming? Who is this man? What’s he coming for?’

She said, ‘Gosh, this sun is getting hot, I am just on my way home, would you like to come back for a coffee as I want to talk to someone

about the revue, because something has cropped up.'

'Just what the doctor ordered,' he said, 'but I haven't any transport.'

'That's alright, I've got the Peugeot, hop in.'

Tongues will wag if I am spotted riding with Angela, he thought, but he was now thinking about the cup of coffee and taking a diagonal from her house was actually less far to walk back than from the duikers.

Sitting in the car he was suddenly overcome by tiredness. Angela did most of the talking, still going on about being so thrilled about the invite to the Palace. He was tempted to say, I thought you didn't like Africans, but then he supposed it didn't apply here, after all these were Royals of sorts, not like humble Freddie Kalahandra who was trying to make his way in the world.

At the house she called for coffee to be brought and decided they had better sit inside as the heat was becoming intense. The wet season was meant to be coming to an end but some days the atmosphere built up and culminated in sporadic storms, taking people unawares.

Jeremy, hoping to get his bit in about the Aga Khan before she launched into whatever was going wrong with the revue said, 'Tell me then who is the Aga Khan and why should he be visiting such a godforsaken place as this.'

'Don't you know,' she said in her usual manner of putting people down. 'He is the head of the Ismaili community, that sect who are Islamic but owe their allegiance to him as the head of their church. No, not church, you know, mosque or whatever.'

'There can't be many of them,' said Jeremy.

'No I wouldn't have thought so either, but they are the ones, I suppose you could say, who are public spirited as they do look after their poor, I believe, and they run that little school here and a bigger one in Kampala as they are keen on education. In fact, they even educate girls would you believe it.'

'Well that makes a change for the Asians,' said Jeremy in some surprise. 'What else do they do?'

'They weight the Aga Khan in gold and then give it all to him and he redistributes it to those not so well off and to help start up businesses.'

'Good Lord, what a mad idea.'

'Well useful, I suppose, but a bit hard for the small communities like those up country. Don't know how they will manage here, and Winifred was saying there is going to be a big reception which we will

all be invited to, so that will make a hole in their pockets.'

'Really,' laughed Jeremy, 'this place is beginning to hum, what with dinner at the Palace, the visit of the Aga Khan and the revue we are doing.' He thought he better not tell her about the private party they had just been invited to just in case she and John didn't get an invite.

'Ah yes, the revue, that is what I wanted to talk to you about. Did you know Harold has been whisked away to Kampala with a suspected appendicitis? Went in early this morning. John could have operated, I guess if it had been a dire emergency but he thought he should go into Nakasero in case he needs admitting for any length of time.'

'Poor old Harold, he seemed alright at the club last night.'

'Yes we are not spreading it around yet, since John is not absolutely sure at the moment that it is appendicitis. However, really I was thinking we ought to have a CO or deputy producer for the show, so how about you Jeremy? Are you fit and well at present?'

He was struck dumb for a moment. Weren't they really outside the Boma and its politics and almost everything else? He sat there silently not knowing what to say. She looked at him and said, 'So, will you do it? After all he may be alright and come back to get on with it. But we really ought to be getting some rehearsals going.'

Was it wise to do things with Angela, he thought? Such a bossy bitch. Though as far as Harold was concerned he reckoned he could get along with him OK, and now that he might be hospitalised where would they meet? As if reading his thoughts, Angela said, 'You could all meet here, you know.'

'I think,' he said with emphasis 'that if I do it folks are going to have to come to our place, assuming of course Mary agrees.'

'Oh I see,' Angela looked as if she was having second thoughts and said, 'Well that's up to you if you do it.'

'Thanks, in that case I'll do it.'

'Good.' She was looking relieved, 'So we'll meet at yours then on Sunday. Same time? I think Harold said 8 pm.'

'That's fine. We'll lay on some booze and coffee.'

'I am most grateful,' she said almost elegantly considering he knew she had been trumped on the meeting place, 'Any more coffee?'

She offered to run him back, but he decided to walk even though the sun had reached its zenith. He wanted to think, not listen to more gossip from Angela. He crossed the golf course and headed off back,

passing patches of maize and joined the road to his house. Mary had not arrived back and he put his head into the room he had turned into an office to see if Joseph had completed his allotted work, but he had left a note to say that he had got off to eat.

He called Moses and said that he would have lunch if it was ready. Nearly, he was told. Sitting down he craved a cold beer but they had no fridge in the house so he helped himself to some of Mary's homemade lime juice topping it up with water from the filter. My, it was good. She did have her good points.

He would now have to tell her about the revue and that they would be hosting it, and the invitation to eat with the Asians. He knew she would not mind the latter, but was not too sure what she would think about the revue. Oh well, it was done now. He could not renege, in fact, he was flattered to be asked so she had to go along with it.

As he had left Angela she had said, 'Tell Mary Aziz has got some new materials in and some patterns too.' But one thing he was not going to tell Mary was that the Fairbanks were going to be dining at the Palace too, as she might be bloody minded enough not to go. And he wanted to give her the earrings for the occasion.

Chapter Thirteen

Sitting on the veranda in their house on Millionaire's Row, Philip and Kathleen Horton were enjoying a sundowner. He was telling her about the new posting and how it was different from Ghana, their previous one.

'The Africans from here are quite different from the ones on the West Coast,' he was informing her, 'not quite as lively, a bit more sombre. Good chaps though, but I am having to take a different approach.'

Kathleen always felt flattered that her husband discussed his work with her. She knew that not many husbands did this, preferring to discuss such things with the other colonials while propping up the bar at the club.

She wondered for a moment how those who were isolated made out, those who were posted to outlying districts without white neighbours with whom to talk things over. It had never happened to her but on reflection she realised she would actually enjoy it. There would be lots more time to get her head down to get on with some writing.

Here on the Boma she was irked to discover she was expected to join in social and sporting events which did not suit her in the least. It was not that she was really antisocial, just that it impinged on her writing time. She knew that most of the women considered her offhand, not that she cared very much what they thought, she was not there to court appraisal and anyway being Irish she knew jolly well they made snide remarks about that too.

All the same, she went along to support Philip down at the club. When anyone new was appointed to the Boma, a sort of official/unofficial welcoming party was announced. Nothing in the way of food laid on, just that word went round that the newcomers were now well ensconced and that anyone wishing to say Hello to them could meet that evening.

That was when she first met Mary Bradshaw. Over their conversation, out of earshot of others, Kathleen gleaned that Mary also was not enamoured of coffee mornings or some of the silly gatherings. In fact she had let it out that she had not even wanted to go down to the

club that particular evening but her husband Jeremy had dragooned her into it.

There was an immediate rapport and Mary said, 'I've been wondering what we could do round here to make life more stimulating. How can we instigate a little culture into this place? I was wondering about play-reading for instance or something like that. 'What do you think, Kathleen?'

'That's a super idea,' Kathleen responded. 'We used to do that in Ghana and I've even got one or two sets of plays here with me.'

Mary said, 'That's fantastic,' and they set about planning it.

'We'll have the first one at our place then,' said Mary. 'How about 7.30 next Sunday? What shall we read?'

'How about the new Osborne play, 'Look back in Anger,' suggested Kathleen. 'I think it's very good. It would give people something to think about.'

'Oh that's tremendous. Yes, let's do that one; I am dying to know what it's about.'

'So what shall we do about readers,' said Kathleen 'as I hardly know many people yet.'

'Shall we meet tomorrow to think about it,' said Mary.

'Good idea, we can't really do it here now.' said Kathleen 'so come over tomorrow in the morning.'

Next day they prepared a list of readers, most of whom turned out to be teachers at the secondary school.

'When Philip returned home he asked: 'what have you been doing today?' helping himself to a sundowner.

'Me? Well I've had Mary around in a high old funk. She's had a blazing row with Jeremy.'

'Has she now? I've been wanting to have a blazing row with him over a few things too. He is a bit too big for his boots. These academics can't lord it over us. Their research may be important but we're here on the ground.'

'Oh dear, what's he done now?'

'Well I suppose it's not that important really. It's just that it's hot and he rubs me up the wrong way. Never mind, you were about to tell me about Mary.'

'Yes she was fit to burst. It seems Angela Fairbanks has asked Jeremy to take on the review and he'd invited the cast round for a

rehearsal on Sunday evening at their place. Fortunately Mary and I had fixed on play reading for the following Sunday. Nevertheless she was upset because Jeremy says that every Sunday evening will now be practice time and wasn't willing to give way to her for the play readings, so we had to rethink ours. She suggested Saturday evenings but I said that's the evening that people are dining together a lot, or go down to the club to booze, so we finally fixed on Fridays and will now meet here if that's alright with you.'

'Yes, why not. Poor Mary, I can see she wouldn't win that one. Yes I think she has a tough time with that man of hers.'

Philip looked at her closely. 'Did you know she goes off on safari with Hugh Dickenson a lot?'

'Yes of course I know. At first she used to tell me all about it - what an interesting time she has when she is out with him - but lately she has been more quiet about it. I don't know why.'

'Strange, Jeremy doesn't take her out with him,' said Philip.

'I asked her why she didn't go with him and she said he always put her off, didn't seem to want her along.'

'He is a funny chap,' observed Philip 'Well he'd better watch it. I've seen Hugh looking very fondly at her.'

'I don't think she is having an affair, she's not that sort really,' said Kathleen feeling she should defend her friend.

She was about to call the boy to bring dinner when Jeremy appeared on the veranda. 'Sorry to drop in like this but I was passing and I wanted to apologise to you Kathleen for messing up the play reading evenings. I know Mary is hopping mad but I gather you are now fixed on Fridays.

Kathleen shot a look at her husband as much as to say, hope he didn't overhear our conversation. She was so taken aback, she merely said, 'Hmm, well yes that's right. We'll do it on Fridays now.' What she really wanted to add was, I trust that suits you, but bit her tongue since he had seen fit to come and apologise.

'And we will be meeting here,' she added.

Jeremy looked surprised, 'Oh well, if you like.'

'Have a drink now you're here' invited Philip.

'No, very kind, but I ought to get back, better not irritate Mary further by being late for dinner. There was one other thing I wanted to suggest to you though. Mary is keen to go down to the Rwanda border to see

the gorillas. She said it would be nice if you two came along as well.'

Neither replied, too astonished to answer.

'Well?' said Jeremy.

'What do you think then darling?' Philip asked, still looking at her with an air of surprise on his face.

'Could we think on it a bit? It's a nice idea. When were you thinking of going exactly?' asked Kathleen.

'When the review is over, we might need to get of here in a hell of a hurry if it's a flop,' he said laughing.

'I'll have a look at my safari commitments,' said Philip.

'OK, well I'll tell Mary that you are mulling it over. I must be off now and sorry once more about the cock-up over the practice and the play-reading. Suddenly everything seems to be happening all at once round here.'

'Well what do you think of all that then?' asked Philip, after he had left.

'At least he had the grace to apologise,' said Kathleen, 'but as to the gorillas, I don't know. Actually I would very much like to go. It's just that you don't like him all that much, do you? You might not enjoy it.'

'Of course I am more than happy to go along with Mary,' he said with a grin.

'He is so unpredictable,' said Kathleen. 'Look at that just now, who would have thought he would actually apologise like that.'

'I suppose I can always say that I have a last minute assignment or something and you could go along with them.'

'Oh come on Love, that's not fair.'

'No I know it's not. Anyway, I rather want to see the gorillas too. Apart from the animals, it is supposed to be quite different country down there.'

'I find the thought quite exciting,' said Kathleen. 'Anyway I'll talk to Mary about it. Seems it was her idea anyway.'

Chapter Fourteen

They waited for the rains to cease before setting out. The countryside was fresh green and the acacias in bloom. The laterite road was throwing up a bit of dust but nothing of what it would be doing as the as the dry season advanced.

They decided to take two Land Rovers and to stay over three nights at a hotel on the Rwandan border. As soon as Hugh heard of the expedition he wanted to come too. Mary was sceptical but in the end relented even though she was nervous as to whether Jeremy or anyone else realised that she was becoming emotionally involved with Hugh.

Jack Hendry and Hilary had initially been keen to join the expedition and then for some unexplained reason had changed their minds. Kathleen said that she could fill the two places with a couple of girls she had been to college with who were now working in Kampala. Helen's job was as secretary in the public prosecutor's office and Rosie worked hard as a nursing sister at the large Mulago African Hospital.

An early start was obligatory said Philip, who was now all keenness, 'Crack of dawn while it's all fresh, best time of day,' he enthused.

Standing by the two cars there was some hesitation as to who was to travel in each. Initially Mary was pleased about the other two young women from outside the Boma joining the expedition thinking they might distract Hugh's attention from herself, then suddenly she said, 'Let Rosie and Helen go with you Kathleen and Hugh can travel with us, then we can stop after two or three hours driving for some refreshment and maybe swap over. How is that?'

'Excellent idea,' said Hugh smiling broadly, which made her wonder if it was such a good idea after all. Anyway, the girls were Kathleen's friends, so perhaps it was alright, though she had noticed Philip looking at Kathleen with raised eyebrows.

The sun was still low behind them as they travelled southwest and made good time with hardly a car or lorry in sight. At first they did not say much. Hugh had his binoculars out bird watching while Jeremy drove along humming a little tune to himself. Mary sat in the middle. Just before they set off, Jeremy was organising the rendezvous with Philip. Hugh had turned to Mary and whispered: 'Relax you're all

tensed up like a taught violin string, because I want you to enjoy it.'

She gave him a thin smile, 'I'll try,' she said, 'but it is not easy.'

Now she was sitting next to him her emotions were all mixed up, especially since Jeremy was making overtures to her again. He had given her the earrings and told her how beautiful she looked when she put them on. Oddly she had not felt pleased with the offering or the compliment, just thanked him coolly, not even offering a kiss.

Sitting between them now she realised this was because Hugh had stepped in to fill the void. She knew she had a deep emotional need which was only partially filled with her intense interest in Africa. Since the day he had swept her up with that passionate kiss, her mind had been filled far more with him. However, she was married to Jeremy and knew Hugh to be a Catholic and therefore it was sinful for him.

She kept thinking to herself I must throw this off. What does the future hold for me? All sorts of frantic thoughts passed through her mind as to how this growing thing might be resolved.

They bowled along in the sunlit morning. A few children straggled along on their way to school waving to them cheerfully. Really the world ought to be good today and this had been her idea anyway, but still nervous tension gripped her.

Hugh nudged her with his elbow. She turned and smiled at him and then wondered if Jeremy could see them in the driving mirror, feeling there was also tension between the two men. Jeremy was particularly playing at being happy, whistling or singing and trying to get them to join in, making Hugh seem perverse when he refused.

As they came upon a herdsman driving his cows along, Hugh said, 'That's a fine looking herd, they've done well during the rains.'

'Yes plenty of sweet grass for them,' said Jeremy.

Hugh stuck his head out of the window and greeted the young man, who was very tall and wearing a cloth tied toga fashion revealing his long legs ending in homemade hide sandals. Over his shoulder he was carrying a stick with a small calabash of water on the end. The youth looked surprised to be greeted in his native tongue and answered with a broad grin, raising his hand in salute as Jeremy edged the car past the cattle.

The long horns of the cattle clashed together and Mary said, 'they are amazing those horns. I wonder if any of them ever get gored?'

‘I don’t think so, never heard so,’ said Hugh, ‘in fact, they make up poetry about them.’

‘Do they? What a funny lot, making poetry about cow’s horns,’ said Jeremy.

‘Not at all. Why shouldn’t they? They talk about the beautiful curves of this one or that one.’

‘Like we do about women,’ quipped Jeremy while Hugh exchanged a glance with Mary.

‘Well, I suppose so. But I gather they think their cattle more lovely than women.’

‘Never account for taste,’ said Mary and they all laughed.

It broke some of the tension. She really must try and enjoy this time out of the Boma. It was such a relief to get out into more of the African bush.

Meeting with the others beside a lake, they took out thermoses of coffee and some of Kathleen’s homemade shortbread and spread themselves out on the grass verge.

‘Delicious biscuits,’ said Philip.

‘You ought to know by now that I am not much of a housewife but I can cook and bake,’ she bantered with him. Mary sat looking at them, envying their intimacy.

Jeremy said, ‘Mary is not a bad cook either.’

Ye gods she thought, he really is making an effort now that it may all be too late. She didn’t even bother to acknowledge the comment.

They sat on a while or stood stretching their legs with the conversation mostly on cooking with the two from Kampala joining in, confessing to eating out a good deal in town though the choice was limited.

‘I don’t have to tell you what hospital food is like,’ said Rosie ‘no different here to what it is at home.’

‘Yes it always amazes me how people can muck up perfectly good ingredients,’ said Mary.

‘And it’s not all that balanced either,’ said Rosie ‘but then for our patients it doesn’t really change, because their relatives bring in matoki with a sauce and if they are well enough they go out onto the lawns to share it with them.’

‘What a novel idea,’ said Kathleen.

‘Oh I approve heartily of that,’ said Mary, ‘so it’s not served out

properly in wards like at home then.'

Jeremy queried, 'I'm not sure that I approve.'

Mary turned to Hugh and gave him a look as much as to say, he wouldn't would he.

They were on their way again, Helen now riding with Hugh and Jeremy and Mary in Philip's car with Kathleen driving. In a way it was a relief to be with her friends and Rosie. She could feel the tension drop from her, but still a part of her longed to sit by Hugh while Jeremy so irritated her with what she felt to be false overtures, she was more than glad to be relieved of his company.

Now the countryside had changed dramatically from rolling to higher hills, some in long folds, and farther on they became rounded at the tops with a profusion of small lakes among the well-treed areas.

'This was probably volcanic sometime,' said Philip, 'and still is where we're going.'

Suddenly Kathleen said, 'Hold on a minute there's something strange up in the tree top on the left, monkeys I think, black and white.' They pulled up. 'Yes, there, can you see them, a couple of them leaping about. Very well marked.'

'My goodness those are Colobus!' said Philip 'They're not very often seen; they're hunted for that strange black and white coat.'

'I've seen some of those skins in the Indian dukas,' said Mary. 'They fetch a big price.'

'Can't think why people want them,' said Rosie. 'They must look really silly wearing them.'

'Rarity value,' said Mary.

The others pulled up behind them. 'What are you looking at?' asked Jeremy, getting out of the passenger seat.

'Colobus monkeys,' said Philip, 'but you may have missed them; they pushed off when they saw us.'

'Shame you missed them,' said Mary, 'we could have done with your binoculars,' she said to Hugh.

'Oh heck,' he said. 'I would have liked to see one of those.'

'Well keep your eyes peeled, there is quite a lot of forest yet and there may be more about,' Philip informed them.

Passing on they reached less forested areas and shambas with matoki groves. Now the huts were more densely packed together. Stopping for their lunch under the shade of an acacia tree, Helen said, 'There seem

to be many more people in this area,' as a number passed and greeted them.

Hugh said, 'Yes, this is one of the most densely populated areas in this bit of Africa. They still keep cattle and it's good mixed farming. Fortunately they don't get elephants coming through to trample their crops.

'Isn't this where they are highly competitive in the education system?' said Mary.

'Are they? How do you know that,' asked Kathleen.

'Well, you may remember, Hilary and Jack were coming with us originally and Jack told me all about it when we were discussing the area. He sometimes gets down this way to take a look at them.

'That's right,' said Hugh. 'The white fathers got in here early on so there are a number of Catholic schools too.'

'I am glad we came; this is all so interesting and refreshing. Maybe I can work it into a book sometime,' said Kathleen.

'Better start making notes then,' replied Philip.

As they journeyed on, people were less on the ground again and nearing the border, Mary could see what Philip had meant about volcanic country. A range of five mountains stretched out between the borders of the two countries. And one, Philip told them, called Sabina, was destined to blow its top in the near future.

Rosie said, 'Hope it won't blow while we are here.'

Mary for her part silently wondered how many humans might blow their top.

Chapter Fifteen

Arriving at the hotel, some of them were surprised to find the compound full of African thatched rondarvels and work in progress on thatching a new one to be erected. The workmen greeted them cheerfully as they stood watching. Rosie stood with her hands on her hips being critical.

'Why don't they do it a little more elaborately,' she said, 'and finish it off properly with designs like the thatchers at home. It makes me cry when I think of all those beautiful rooflines with proper ridging I left behind in the Cotswolds. Why don't they do something like that here?'

Philip laughed at her. 'Really Rosie, why should you expect things like that? They would rather change the roofing every few years, what with insects and things, and anyway, they might want to move their shamba. Things are not as permanent here.'

Helen said, 'Do you know how much it costs to thatch a roof in England? They couldn't afford that here.'

'I think you are talking about it aesthetically, aren't you?' said Jeremy, turning to Rosie, who giving him a grateful smile said, 'Well yes.'

'Are you disappointed that we've come to such a rustic place as this?' asked Kathleen. 'I'm sorry Rosie. I should have warned you that this up country hotel is famous for its simplicity. Appeals to me though, I must say.'

'It's a border hotel as well,' said Hugh.

Rosie was about to say she was not disappointed when the owner, Wolf Weimer, appeared from the main entrance and came towards them. He was short, of fairly sparse frame and with a receding hairline.

In a thickly accented English he said, 'Ah, you are here, was it a reasonable journey?'

Jeremy said, 'Yes, fine thank you, nice to get up into the hills.'

The sun was lowering and Hugh reached into his luggage for a sweater. They all stood expectantly, but the owner just carried on standing there, staring at them, then suddenly he said, 'Well no doubt you would like a drink,' and lead them into the main building which was mostly wood and bamboo with a tin roof. Windows ran all the

way round and wherever they sat there was a glorious view of the mountains and rolling land out at the back.

Kathleen said, 'I am going to enjoy this, such a treat to go on safari.'

To Mary's astonishment Hugh turned to Jeremy and said, 'Feel like a climb tomorrow?'

She said, 'Haven't we come to see the gorillas, I thought we were all going up together to see them.'

'No, I mean the big mountain,' said Hugh, 'and how about you Philip, are you on for a shin-up there tomorrow?'

'Really, don't you think we should sort about the gorillas first,' Mary persisted.

Weimer had bellowed to a servant to bring drinks and joined them as Mary began to get steamed up about arrangements.

'You're being bossy,' said Jeremy 'Anyway I don't think we can trug up to them just like that.'

'If you are talking about the gorillas, which I assume you have come to see, then I make the arrangements,' said the proprietor with some force.

An ominous silence fell as he handed the drinks around, and sitting down with them he said, 'You see it is very important that they are not disturbed too much. Many people want to go to see them so I have to ration. You may only go up with my trackers and then not more than four of you at the same time.'

They sat mesmerised. It was obvious they were on his territory and he was very much in charge here.

Hugh said, 'I see, so it's controlled.'

'That's right. These beasts are breeding and anyway only my trackers know how to find them properly. It is better you are lead. It won't cost you much and you are more likely to see them with my men. There will be one leading, looking for clues and one bringing up the rear. That is if you want to go of course. Or perhaps you want to cross into Rwanda?'

Another stunned silence then Philip said, 'Where are they located exactly as it is heavily forested up the mountains I see.'

'Well they move about from day to day, they aren't static, but they don't make big forays daily, just move on a bit to find more succulent bamboo to eat. At present they are on the saddle. Over there.' he said getting up and pointing out of the window.

They all got up to look in the direction of where they would be going and then one by one slowly sat down again. No one talked.

After a bit Hugh said, 'Right. Who is first up there then? Who is going to have the first excitement?'

Weimer looked at them all with a sort of amused smile on his face. Before they had time to answer he said, 'You, you and you,' pointing to Kathleen, Rosie and Helen.

'We three girls all by ourselves?' said Kathleen in some panic, 'Why can't we have one of the men with us?'

This seemed to amuse him even further. 'You are not afraid of these big black beasts, are you?'

The three said nothing for a few seconds, then Kathleen said turning to her husband, 'You would like to escort us up, wouldn't you darling?'

'I was just about to offer,' said Jeremy.

'Well, as a matter of fact I really want to climb the big one with you tomorrow, Hugh,' said Jeremy, 'So yes, that makes four Mr Weimer, if that is alright with you.'

'If you want,' he said. 'I thought the ladies might like the excitement by themselves.'

'No thank you,' said Rosie and then to Philip, 'Thanks, you saved our bacon.'

'Right I'll get a message to my trackers, 8am start. Now I'll get the keys to your rooms.' and off he went.

When he was out of earshot Helen said, 'Rooms? He means huts.'

'Bloody bossy German,' said Mary.

'I don't think so,' said Helen, 'more like German Jew and he must make a little packet out of all the visits to the gorillas.'

'How do you know?' said Hugh, 'maybe he gives it all to the trackers.'

At which point Weimer reappeared and tossed the keys down on the table.

'Take your pick,' he said, 'the places are all the same. Dinner will be at 8pm if my cook can get it together. There is a small bar if you wish to drink.' And he disappeared off again.

'I think this chap might be a bit eccentric,' said Philip as they picked up their keys and gathered their luggage to make for the rondavels.

The sun was fast disappearing behind the mountains and quiet descended as the blue changed to inky blue. In a few minutes it would

be dark, no twilight period and the mountains looked forbidding. They hurried through the gardens surrounding the huts and moved inside.

The rooms were simply laid out, clean and comfortable with brightly patterned bedcovers, chairs and basins with jugs of water on stands. A generator was starting up over at the main building to give it light while two boys moved quickly to the rondavels to hand in tilly lamps.

It should have been romantic. But not so for Hugh. He had watched Mary disappear into the adjacent hut with Jeremy and inside his hut he sat on the bed and experienced a desperate longing for her. He had been comforted while she had ridden in the Land Rover with him, her leg warm against his. The thrill had almost made his speech incoherent and now she was in the next hut and would be sharing the bed with Jeremy. The thought was almost unbearable. It had been a mistake to come.

Washing in the cold water he thought, hell I need another drink. Better not make it too many though if I am going to make the ascent tomorrow. His urge to get up the mountain was even more intense now. He had got to make something positive out of this weekend otherwise what would he talk about in the club when he got back. Oh yes, the gorillas of course, though he understood they were not always seen when people were after them.

The next morning dawned misty, and looking out he saw the afforested folds of the hills receding into the distance. It was certainly different down here, more closed in, almost claustrophobic. Walking across to the main building for breakfast, he wondered how long Weimer had been here and what had brought him. It seemed there wasn't a Mrs or Frau Weimer. It must be pretty lonely for a chap, as there was only the hotel and a petrol station this side of the border, along with a police patrol. No other white faces for miles around, apart from the traffic passing between the two Countries.

He was the first to arrive for breakfast. Weimer appeared and wished him good morning. There were only seven places laid, so they were the only guests he noted.

'What do you want to do today?' asked the proprietor.

'I want to climb Mahavira.'

'Hard work you'll find. Anyway better than Sabrina, she is due to belch again soon.'

'How long will it take me?'

‘Nearly all day. As I said the going is rough. Do you want sandwiches to take for your lunch?’

‘That’s a splendid idea. And I think one of the others might come too.’

Pity it can’t be Mary he thought, but since she had told him that Jeremy had taken her once over some lower hills and the steepness nearly polished her off, it would be a bit silly.

Kathleen was the next to arrive, followed closely by Rosie and Helen. They were all in a state of high agitation, anticipating their adventure ahead of them. Philip was excited too, more at the prospect of clambering around in the mountainous vegetation than for seeing the animals it seemed. Jeremy was the last to arrive with Mary. Neither of them looked very happy. Mary looked particularly morose, and it suddenly occurred to Hugh, that if Jeremy climbed with him it would leave Mary on her own, so perhaps he had better not go after all.

Then Jeremy said, ‘Are we all set then Hugh, for clambering up the mountain?’

‘Oh so you want to go?’

‘Yes I am ready when you are.’

‘How about you Mary? Do you think Weimer would stretch a point and let you go up with the others.’

‘I wouldn’t even ask him,’ she said. ‘You go ahead. I’ll walk around and talk to whoever is friendly and I brought a good book to read.’

Kathleen said, ‘Oh dear, of course this business of only four leaves you on your own.’

‘She could come instead of Philip,’ said Helen.

‘No no, I want him along’ said Kathleen laying her hand on his arm.

‘Yes I do think you should have a man along, never know with the nigs,’ said Philip.

‘What do you mean nigs? They are Africans,’ said Mary sharply.

‘You can hardly go around using that word anymore,’ said Hugh backing her up.

Rosie said, ‘We seem to be getting away from the point, which is that this unfortunate arrangement leaves Mary on her own.’

‘It’s OK, honestly it is. I don’t mind. I can do with a bit of time on my own and it is all new down here anyway.’

‘Well just as long as you are happy about it,’ said Hugh, and Jeremy

gave him a funny look.

‘We had better be off,’ he said and rose from the table.

‘Take care of the girls,’ he said to Philip, ‘and see you all later.’ And Hugh noted he left without so much as a glance at his wife.

Chapter Sixteen

With the others gone, and now left on her own, Mary felt bereft, hurt that it had worked out that way. To think that the women had gone up to the gorillas without her. She was sure that one more person could not have made all that difference.

Loitering around the main building, taking more time over her breakfast since she had not to gird herself into action like the rest of them, she could hear Wolf Weimer talking in the kitchen to the servants and was about to go over to her hut when he suddenly appeared. He just looked at her and then disappeared back to the kitchen again. Perhaps he had not expected to find her there; anyway it was obvious he did not want to talk to her.

What should she do now? The sun was up but it was still cool. Perhaps a walk before the temperature rose too high. Going into the hut she collected a book on Ugandan wild flowers and set off up a path. There were not many shambas in the immediate vicinity of the hotel, only quarters for those who worked there, but over in the distance she could see more huts huddled in closer proximity.

Hardly anyone was around. A woman passed her on the path carrying a bundle of wood on her head and a very young boy was herding some goats. She could see as she cast a practised eye around that this was not such a big matoke growing area. There were far less banana plantations, the cultivated areas mostly covered with millet. She had heard they made a very strong beer from it as well as making a sort of porridge. Which reminded her that she must try and buy some of the beautifully woven millet baskets while she was down here. Not that she would put porridge in them. They would probably end up as wastepaper baskets when she got back home.

Raising her binoculars she scanned the mountains hoping to see the retreating backs of those going up the saddle, or Hugh and Jeremy shinning up the big one. But there was no sign of any of them through the thick foliage.

Now as she walked along she realised what really irked her. It was the thought of Jeremy and Hugh acting like buddies and going up the mountain together, and neither of them had asked her if she wanted to

go with them. She would obviously have said no, but it was just the fact that neither had offered, and now she would be stuck with the two of them on the morrow. Why had it all worked out wrong?

Still seething with Jeremy who had been obnoxious to her the evening before, intimating that he really wanted to take Philip's place and go up with the girls, and making it quite plain that to go up with Hugh and herself the next day was going to be bloody boring, it had taken her a long time to get to sleep, wishing she was in the next hut with Hugh.

What a muddle it all was, she thought, still gazing up at the mountains. They made her think of Scotland. It had been such a long time since she had seen big ones like these and again, as when leaving the hospital in Kampala after her miscarriage, she was overcome with homesickness. Maybe she should go home, maybe that was the answer.

Enveloped in her misery she followed the path when she was brought up sharply by a snake wriggling across ahead of her. It was one of those thin black ones the name of which she could not recall. As she stepped over the pattern it made in the dry earth she gave an involuntary shudder. She had better keep her mind on of what she was doing, where she was putting her feet.

By this time she was nearing the cluster of huts from where she had seen smoke rising. Tempted at first to greet the inhabitants she was overcome by shyness and decided not to venture on to their territory and turned back.

There was a further path going off at another tangent but not knowing where it led she kept to the same one, stopping periodically to pick flowers. The prettiest ones were in the scrubby surroundings but the snake had so unsettled her that she did not reach in for them.

Back at the hotel she collected a book and found a seat in the garden under some dappled shade and settled down for a good read. There was no sign of the proprietor and at lunchtime she called for some lunch and sat in splendid isolation eating it before going off to the hut for a siesta.

She woke to hear familiar voices and realised she had slept longer than she had intended. The sun was past its zenith and she tumbled off the bed and splashed her face with cold water. Going outside she was surprised to find the air still hot, compared to the coolness inside the

hut. Philip, Kathleen, Helen and Rosie were standing laughing with the proprietor and one of the trackers. Kathleen saw Mary and called her over. As she approached she could tell they were exhilarated, obviously having had a great day.

Kathleen said, 'You'll love it up there tomorrow, Mary. They really are a tremendous sight. We only saw the male but my, was he a big brute. He stood there pounding his chest. I wish I was going up there again.'

Philip said, 'We found them quite quickly really. These guys know all the signs,' inclining his head toward the tracker.

The tracker stood there looking pleased that it had been a success, showing his very white teeth in a broad smile.

'He was the silverback,' he said.

'You were lucky,' said Weimer, 'not everyone sees them. Sometimes they have gone over to the Rwanda side.'

'So what do they look like then?' Mary asked.

Rose said, 'Big black bodies and short legs. It was terrifying looking at his eyes when he was chest beating and sort of growling.'

'Why do they do that?' Helen asked.

'He is defending his family,' said Weimer. 'He is giving them time to get away while standing his ground.'

'This group is small,' said the tracker. 'Only four of them.'

'I hope you have our luck,' said Rosie to Mary. 'It was fantastic.'

'It certainly was,' echoed Helen still wide eyed with excitement.

'Would you like tea,' said Weimer.

They all agreed that was a splendid idea, except Philip who wanted a long cool beer. Looking dishevelled and exhausted they collapsed into wicker chairs and waited for their tea.

Mary sat and observed them feeling envious that they had experienced this great adventure together. Weimer said that there would be plenty of hot water for their ablutions that evening and left.

'Well did you make friends with him while we were away?' asked Kathleen.

'No, hardly saw him.'

'I've got a feeling he is not much interested in women,' said Philip.

'What do you mean?' asked Helen.

'You know, I don't have to spell it out, do I?'

They all looked at him with interest.

‘You mean,’ started Rosie.

‘Yes maybe,’ said Philip.

Mary laughed, ‘Well he certainly did not go out of his way to accommodate me today.’

‘And a lovely girl like you,’ said Kathleen. ‘So what have you done with yourself?’

‘Not a lot, had a walk, saw a snake.’

‘Snake, oh no,’ said Helen. ‘I hope that there are not too many of those about.’

‘Better look in the thatch before you get into bed tonight,’ said Philip. ‘You never know.’

‘I wouldn’t worry about it too much,’ said Kathleen seeing her alarm, ‘they usually scarper at the sight of humans. It is when you corner and step on one they strike.’

‘I am glad I live in Kampala,’ Rosie said.

‘They have them there too sometimes,’ said Philip.

‘Why don’t you shut up,’ said Mary. ‘You are frightening the poor girl. Anyway, then I read my book and had a sleep, I feel quite rested.’

‘Well you’ll have a great day tomorrow and two men to go up with you what’s more,’ said Kathleen, giving her a big wink.

Mary had a sneaking feeling that Kathleen knew what was going on between Hugh and herself.

‘Well I am really looking forward to seeing the gorillas,’ she emphasized.

Later Jeremy and Hugh arrived back even more exhausted than the others. They went straight to the bar for beers. By this time some of the others had changed and were back there too.

As they related their expedition up the mountain it was clear that it had been a challenge, very hard going through the undergrowth at times.

‘I think I’ve probably got some good photos,’ said Jeremy.

‘I don’t think you would have enjoyed it much,’ said Hugh to Mary. ‘It was quite tough.’

‘Well, I wasn’t given the opportunity to find out, was I?’ she said with some pique.

‘Oh come on you wouldn’t have made it,’ said Jeremy.

‘What she means is, we didn’t ask her,’ said Hugh.

‘Quite so, there wasn’t any point,’ and brushing the matter aside,

Jeremy went to wash and change for dinner.

'I am sorry,' said Hugh.

'No matter I wouldn't have come, it was just the principle.'

'I'd better go and change too.'

Hugh joined her on the walk to the rondarvels. He took her arm. 'Really Mary I am truly sorry we treated you so badly and I am glad we are going together up to the gorillas.'

She turned toward him and could tell that he wanted to kiss her. 'I'll see you at dinner in a few minutes,' she said and slipped into the hut to be faced by Jeremy and a stony silence.

Chapter Sixteen

The three of them set off with the tracker for the saddle. The tracker led, Jeremy next, then Mary followed by Hugh. The tracker told them the second tracker would join them on the ascent.

At first the path was fairly open, but as it got steeper so the vegetation closed in on them and they could only see ahead of themselves. They were asked not to talk. They left the path and as they started to scramble through thick bamboo, they needed to concentrate. At this point the second tracker joined them and made Mary jump. He was so black that she laughingly told Hugh later that for a split second she thought that he was a gorilla.

They ploughed up the hillside while the trackers looked for clues. Finally they found some droppings and then an area that had been bashed down and made into a rudimentary nest. That is where the gorillas had spent the night the tracker told them, so they must be somewhere within the vicinity. Finally the lead tracker stopped abruptly. 'There they are! Quickly,' he said.

But the big male had seen him first and stood beating his chest and letting out a mind-blowing noise, halfway between a grunt and a scream.

Mary froze to the spot and grabbed Hugh's hand as he came up behind her. Jeremy had seen the animal and he, along with the tracker, was urging them on saying, 'Hurry up you two or he will be gone.'

Recovering from the shock, Mary sprinted forward, but the tracker said, 'Too late, bend down and look through the bottom of that bush.'

She obeyed, Hugh following suit, to be rewarded by the sight of the gorilla's rear retreating after his family.

She stood there almost in tears, wailing, 'Oh I missed it, I missed it.'

Meanwhile Jeremy was ecstatic, pumping the tracker's hand up and down saying, 'What a sight. Thank you. Thank you very much.'

But the tracker looked mystified, disappointed that Mary and Hugh had been so near and yet managed to miss it.

'Well, I can always say I've seen a gorilla's hairy legs,' said Hugh.

'I am sorry,' said Mary. 'If I hadn't been so terrified by that sound it uttered, you would have seen it too.'

‘We are going now,’ said the tracker, taking them by surprise. ‘If you want to walk down following the waterlines it’s over there.’

‘Will we run into more gorillas?’ asked Hugh.

‘No they’ve gone that way,’ he said.

‘We might get lost,’ said Mary.

‘No you won’t get lost, you follow the water,’ he insisted. ‘Go over there it is very near.’ And off he went with the second tracker.

They scrambled through more bamboo and sure enough reached the stream running down the hillside. The going was easier now and they were walking along, each submerged in their own thoughts when Mary, with a shriek of pain, collapsed onto the ground. She had put her foot down a hole.

‘What on earth?’ said Jeremy, but Hugh had already rushed and was beside her to help. He stood her up and told her to lean on him and try to walk, but the pain was excruciating and she sat down again. It was obvious she had torn a ligament when her ankle began to rapidly swell.

‘Heck,’ said Jeremy. ‘How are we going to get back. Are you sure you can’t walk?’

Hugh said, ‘Give me your cravat.’

‘Whatever for?’

‘Because it’s the only thing we have to bind up her foot.’

Jeremy reluctantly handed it over. Hugh put it into the icy mountain stream before tying up her foot. Mary yelped with the shock of the wet material and tears welled into her eyes.

Hugh said, ‘Try to bear it, it is the best thing.’

Jeremy laughed, ‘Good thing we have a vet with us.’

She sat a while to get her breath back and Hugh told Jeremy to find a stout stick.

While Jeremy was searching, Hugh bent down and whispered: ‘Be brave love, we’ll get you down soon.’ She squeezed his hand and said, ‘Thank God you’re here.’

Jeremy returned with a stave and with help from them both, she got to her feet. Making several stops for her to rest, the progress back down the hillside was painfully slow.

At the bottom Hugh said that he would go off to collect the Land Rover to ferry her back the rest of the way.

Left with Jeremy, Mary said, ‘This will put me out of action for a while.’

‘Well hopefully you have not cracked any bones,’ he said.

‘I suppose I would have been brought down on a litter if that had been the case.’

Back at the hotel they encountered Philip and Kathleen sitting in the shade reading.

‘What have got here then, a wounded soldier,’ asked Philip.

‘Mary, what happened?’ asked Kathleen with alarm.

‘I sprained my ankle.’

‘And we didn’t even get a good look at the gorillas,’ said Hugh.

‘Well I did,’ said Jeremy with glee.

Kathleen gave Mary a hug, ‘I am sorry, what double bad luck.’

Sitting down in a chair at last, Mary did not know whether to laugh or cry.

Chapter Eighteen

Mary found the cat and mouse game that Jeremy seemed to enjoy playing, of blowing hot and cold, too confusing. Yet in spite of it, she felt she should still remain with him. Her efforts to avoid Hugh even went as far as not going to the club. Apart from meeting up with Kathleen it left her somewhat isolated. On the occasions she did meet up with Hugh, which was inevitable in such a small place he looked anguished and she longed for his company again. Such times were harder when Jeremy turned away from her saying he had work to do or was preoccupied with something going on down at the club.

It came as a bolt from the blue then when Jeremy announced with great solemnity at breakfast one morning that he intended to go out and camp with the nomads to look at a short grass area to see how the nomads were using it in the dry season. It was important to look at their grazing habits he said.

'Would you like to come too,' he offered.

It was so unexpected she had difficulty believing her ears. 'I would love to,' she said, realising she could use the opportunity to do some work of her own. 'I could also do some stuff on their diets,' she said animatedly.

His reaction almost caused her to say, 'oh forget it I'll stay here.'

'I don't want you monopolising Joseph, I am going to need him all the time to do my translating, so he won't have time to do any for you.'

Swallowing her pride, she said, 'Don't worry, they probably don't have much more than milk anyway. I don't think they're great matoke or meat eaters.'

'You're probably right. So can we be organised by Monday? I have already sent a message ahead to say we are coming. By the way, it's about a three hour drive so we'll start at 7am.'

'I'll get down to the duikers and the market right away,' she said.

As she entered the market that strange pungent smell she always encountered in African markets hit her. There was not a lot on offer and it was not very organised, mostly people sitting around on the ground with their wares displayed on bits of cloth in front of them. A few had small stalls and since few people were about most of the

stallholders were standing around gossiping.

Europeans rarely went to this place so Mary's visit was something of a novelty. The vendors called out to her, 'Memsahib you want limes? Memsahib you want fish?' Over by the meat - lumps of tough sheep or goat, or bits of cow chopped into weird shapes laid out on concrete slabs - the clouds of flies buzzed noisily and settled on the meat. Seeing them she was glad she had come early before the sun got higher which would increase the number of flies as well as the smell.

She found some eggs and then went over to the fruit area. She liked this bit best, for the pawpaw, bananas, limes and oranges lent a bit of colour. She bought some along with sweet potatoes and yams. Thinking this was her last purchase, she was about to leave when she ran into a man carrying a couple of scrawny chickens.

'Memsahib, you want chicken?' he asked holding the creatures with their legs tied together up near her face. Well they were an idea because she had not bought any meat out of deference to the nomads knowing they hated to kill animals to eat. After all, the cows multiplied for wealth and were particularly useful for paying bride price. And she had passed the fish as it would obviously go off in the heat.

She haggled the price with him enjoying the moment she brought it down to what she was prepared to pay. The haggling was one of the reasons other European wives said they did not like the open market, but Mary relished a good haggle and knew Africans did too. They more or less thought you were a fool if you did not.

She paid and got him to put the birds, still alive, into the back of the Land Rover where they annoyed her with their squawking as she drove back into town. She thought about wringing their necks, but the aim was to keep them alive till it was time to eat them.

In the Asian kept duiker everything was more neatly arranged and the prices fixed. She managed to find some Kenyan cheddar type cheese, lentils, rice and potatoes and some tinned fish. She also bought some curry powder to liven up an egg dish. The Asian wife serving her looked down her nose at this and Mary could imagine the wife thinking, these lazy white women buying it already made up, when they should really combine the spices into much subtler blends themselves.

Through with the shopping she was about to get into the car when she changed her mind and went into the store kept by Aziz who gave her a cheery, 'Jambo memsahib,' and tried to interest her in a new

assignment of paper patterns that had just come up from Kampala.

'I don't want any of those today,' she said. 'I want some really hard wearing kaki coloured cotton material for you to make up some trousers for me, that is if you can have them ready by Sunday.'

'Memsahib, of course, for you I could have them ready today.'

'Well I've just remembered that the ones I want copied are back at the house, so I'll have to bring them down.'

'Alright this evening will do.'

She winced slightly as he told her what it would cost for the making of them, for normally she would have run them up herself. But with getting the safari ready there was not time, and anyway why should she not spoil herself occasionally and why should not Jeremy fork out for them, for he had no idea how frugal she was, and she could always plead they were still very cheap by UK standards.

When she returned to the house, Jeremy was ranting on about Joseph, who was making it felt he was not keen to go off into the nomads camp, even though he came from that same stock himself. But he had grown soft after being at the school in the town and then working as a clerk before being taken on by Jeremy as an assistant and translator.

As for Moses, who came from the agriculturalists, he was even more reluctant since they always felt inferior. His excuse was that it was so hard to make meals in the bush.

Ignoring their bloody mindedness she set about filling the chopbox, trying to jolly everyone along, saying this was adventure, not just a day in the field but a proper camp with a tent. Normally Jeremy's safaris had been taken in rest houses, especially in the wet season, but now it was dry. He warned them the temperature could be up to 90 degrees or more and the nights would be hot too. He said she should take plenty of water, and she made plenty of orange and lime juice for refreshing drinks. All was ready for an early start next morning.

In her new trousers and her hair tied up in a pretty kerchief to keep out the murram dust, she was up early and standing impatiently by the Land Rover ready to go. Jeremy was losing patience for there was no sign of Joseph. Moses had helped pack the car and stood looking morose.

'Where is the fool? I have a good mind to go without him,' Jeremy was saying.

‘Well we could I suppose,’ said Mary, and then realised she had made a mistake to say it.

‘I need him to interpret, don’t I?’ Jeremy snapped.

‘You could use Moses,’ she suggested.

‘Don’t be daft. I would have thought even you would know that they would be unlikely to give information to him.’

‘Oh sorry. I suppose not.’

Finally at nearly 8 o’clock, Joseph appeared carrying a bundle. He said he had overslept.

‘Buy him an alarm clock,’ Mary quipped.

‘Why don’t you shut up,’ Jeremy said.

By now his temper was even more frayed and she knew he was likely to take it out on her, so she did indeed shut up, not venturing to speak again until they stopped on the journey to drink coffee from the thermoses. Mary was hating the tension. It is all so different when I am out with Hugh, she thought.

They were parked well off the road, on a narrow track which led deeper into the bush, and the atmosphere between them persisted as they quietly drank their coffee. Joseph had started to wander off into the bush and disturbed an animal. He stood rigid as right ahead on the brow of a hillock, stood a large animal, some four feet tall, rich brown in colour with magnificent lyre shaped ridged horns atop an elongated face.

‘It’s an antelope,’ yelled Mary as with what sounded like a snort it turned and galloped off.

They asked Joseph when he returned from his pee what sort it was, but he did not seem to know and neither did Moses.

‘We’ll ask Hugh when we get back,’ said Jeremy.

Yes thought Mary, if he was here, he would know right away.

Moving off, they now kept their eyes scanning the bush hoping to see more wild life when they spotted a young man dressed in shirt and trousers and what looked like a sheet knotted over one shoulder. He was wearing a trilby hat at a rakish angle and smoking a very long-stemmed pipe.

‘This will be our guide,’ said Joseph, as they pulled up alongside him.

With the greetings over, the young man led them off the road along a narrow track going at snail’s pace. The track soon petered out to

become nothing more than a path and finally no path at all, making the Land Rover jump and jerk as it bumped along, sometimes getting caught up in stumps and brushed and scratched by branches of bushes and trees.

Finally the guide stopped and said, they should leave the car at that point and walk the rest of the way. As they started to unpack, some young lads mysteriously appeared to help them carry the loads.

Walking into the camp which was not far, Mary was feeling apprehensive and the time she had gone to the kraal with Hugh came to her, when she had said she would rather return to the car than enter the kraal. The time he had kissed her passionately, when she had poured out her woes to him. The thought made her feel quite weak. Now here she was about to sleep by one. What am I doing here, she thought.

Chapter Nineteen

The Elders emerged from the dwellings to greet them. They wore togas knotted over shoulders but were hatless and none of them in fact appeared very old as they stood making greetings. Joseph explained to them that the guests had brought a tent to sleep in which seemed to bother them till one of them invited Jeremy to pitch it adjacent to his own beehive shaped hut. Joseph said he thought it was a good idea, safer that way.

With a frown on her face Mary stood looking at the heap of dung.

She said, 'Is anyone buried in that?'

'What are you talking about?' asked Jeremy 'What a silly thing to say.'

'No it's not. Hugh told me they bury their dead in it.'

'That's right,' said Joseph, 'but I'm not sure if I can ask that question.'

'You could ask if they've had any recent death or are they all well and healthy just now,' suggested Jeremy, recovering from this strange piece of information.

Joseph did as asked and was told nobody had died of late, their last death being in the kraal they vacated five months ago where they had left behind a buried child.

'Why can't we pitch the tent outside the kraal,' said Mary.

'Because there are lions about,' said Joseph. 'I am certainly going to be on the inside.'

'Lions? Good God, is this lion country?'

'Yes it is,' said Jeremy, 'so we should be on the inside too, and we don't want to upset them either.'

'OK,' said Mary, 'but I bet it's smelly.'

'You mostly smell cows,' said Joseph who was actually smiling, 'and that's a nice smell.'

Poor Moses was totally nonplussed by all this till Joseph said, 'You'll sleep in a hut with me.'

As they erected the tent on the allocated place it attracted an audience, but they did not look overly impressed.

One said, 'It doesn't look very watertight.'

‘That’s why we come to see you in the dry season,’ said Joseph. He did not add that they were really there to see how far they had to go for grazing now that the dry season was advanced and the grass was sparse.

Women were pottering around the kraal in leather sandals. Most of them were heavily built, but they appeared even larger by wearing layers and layers of underskirts with brightly coloured sleeveless overdresses with a piece of loose cloth draped from their heads, and when up close while greeting them, Mary concluded they did not wash very often.

Totally naked small children ran about in the enclosure, their snotty noses festooned with flies. Keeping well away from the newcomers, they stopped occasionally to stare and then ran about squealing again.

‘They seem to be only small children here,’ said Mary to Joseph.

‘Ah well, the older ones are out doing the herding,’ he told her.

The sun was now sinking and with it the temperature lowered and restored by some tea and a rest, Mary’s interest was renewed by the sight of the cattle returning. Shifting some of the branches to make a wider opening, the herders drove them into the large circular space. The air was filled with soft lowing as cows greeted calves and was soon followed by soft hissing as milk entered wooden vessels. Amid a lot of shouting the herdboys were soon tucking into a meal of gruel and milk.

With the milking over, Jeremy managed to get the Elders’ attention and extracted a promise from them to go with the herders next day to the grazing grounds.

After a cold supper scrambled together by Moses, Mary got onto her camp bed and tried to read by torchlight. She found it hard to concentrate, disturbed by the sound the of cattle horns. ‘Do you think they might come and trample inside the tent?’ she asked Jeremy.

‘Don’t be daft; they wouldn’t have put us here if that would happen. Why don’t you go off to sleep?’

She could soon detect that he had fallen asleep, but it still eluded her and she did not settle till well into the night of what seemed a very short period, being awakened by the noise of people in the kraal and restless cattle milling around. Jeremy woke too, just in time to hear the deep roar of a lion.

‘Good heavens, this is lion country and that’s a bit close,’ said Mary.

It roared again and the men outside started to shout and move around. Jeremy got up to investigate while Mary stayed shivering in

her bed.

He returned to say that the lion had tried to jump the kraal fence.

'Do you think it will try again?' she asked.

'I've no idea. I would think the men's activities will have put it off.'

'I don't like this,' she said 'I think I would rather sleep in the Land Rover.'

'What! Over there by yourself?'

Then she remembered it was parked quite a way off.

'No, perhaps not,' she said.

This might be exciting stuff but half of her wished she had not come, and it was the end of sleep for the night.

Rising at dawn she emerged from the tent to find the women milking again. Some children were already running around looking bleary eyed and a few were whingeing. They must have been kept awake by the lion too, she thought.

Soon the herd boys were sorting out the cattle to go off to the grazing and a gap was opened in the fence to let them through.

Breakfast finished, Jeremy set off with Joseph to join them, leaving Mary and Moses in camp. Not quite knowing what to do with herself, she thought of going for a wander in the bush and maybe take some photographs, but really there was not anything very scenic in this scrubby landscape to take; a few umbrella shaped thorny acacia trees and succulent euphorbias standing out green against the dun coloured countryside. The dry season was taking its toll leaving mostly dust everywhere and not much to feast the eyes on. All so different from the rolling green hills and matoke stands which she so much loved.

Anyway she might meet a lion. So staying in the perimeter of the kraal she took some photos of the children and the calves. The women seemed shy of her and she was limited in speaking to them as she knew so little of their language, so the rest of the morning she sat down and read her book.

Jeremy returned for a late lunch and seemed very satisfied with his research but complained of not feeling well, he had a splitting headache he said and looked flushed. The sun was certainly hot but he thought it was more than that. Mary sat him down to take his temperature and was surprised when it registered 101 degrees.

'You had better lie down and take some aspirin and drink plenty. Here, have some of my lemon juice.'

He lay on the bed and immediately fell asleep, waking just before sundown. Again Mary took his temperature and it was now 103 degrees. Immersing a cloth in water she laid it across his forehead.

'That's better,' he said, 'but I don't want any supper.'

Joseph came into the hut looking worried. 'Everyone in the kraal is perturbed by this turn of events,' he said.

The next morning, Jeremy's temperature had shot up to 105 degrees. Mary was aghast. They had not been disturbed by lions again, but she had not slept due to worrying about the sudden illness, and now a rash was appearing all over Jeremy. Having absolutely no idea what it was, she said, 'We must get out of here, back to base as soon as possible.'

Jeremy moaned and turned away from her, saying he was in no fit state to drive so if they left now she would have to do it. Anyway why could they not stay in camp till he was better, he asked?

Joseph had been talking to the Elders and it transpired they were not keen he should stay there.

He whispered to Mary, 'They are afraid he may die.'

Alarmed by the fact that they wanted to be rid of them as quickly as possible, Mary's mind was made up.

'No argument,' she said, 'I am driving you back so that we can get John to look you over as soon as possible.'

Jeremy turned on his side away from her moaning. 'Oh no, I'll be better soon, if you just leave me alone.'

'Well too bad, we are moving out.'

Joseph took her over to the Elders to confer on the best way to do it. They said there was a quicker way out than the way they had entered, which would join up with a track leading onto the main road.

Moses started to pack up camp with amazing speed and even Joseph weighed in, forgetting that he was really a white-collar worker.

With some trepidation Mary went to fetch the vehicle wondering if she could make it through the rough bush. The men set to chopping trees and bushes ahead of her so that she could get the car nearer to the camp. The going was so slow she began to despair of getting help for Jeremy in time. The car now packed, it fell to organising some comfort for him at which point he gave up complaining after Joseph told him the Elders wished them to leave as soon as possible.

Mary by this time needed her full concentration on driving the vehicle out. They still went ahead of her to clear a wider track. It was

a shorter route but still unbearably slow before reaching a wider track. She could now get into third gear though it jerked and rocked and caused Jeremy to complain again.

'Won't be long now,' she said, having no idea how far it was.

Then finally she saw the open road and although she had never liked driving on corrugated murram, compared with the struggle through the bush she knew she could speed up.

Joseph, though still worried, actually cheered up saying 'This is better' while Jeremy closed his eyes and looked as though he might be sliding off into a coma. Mary let him drift off.

Arriving at the house she roused him to get him into bed, then totally exhausted, mucky with sweat and covered in orange dust she made haste to fetch John Fairbanks.

He made a quick diagnosis and astonished Jeremy by telling him he had tick fever. He turned to Mary and smiling broadly said, 'It's as well you brought him back. You're the hero of the day.'

'I need a cup of tea,' she said.

Chapter Twenty

To be on the club committee was definitely a bit of one-upmanship and something Jeremy hankered after, but being outside the Boma he was never asked. Membership had been granted to him on arrival by Hugh's proposal. As to Mary, or any of the other wives for that matter, she was only admitted as his guest, and since she was not quite as keen on the comradeship of the expats as he, it did not greatly worry her, even though the principle of the crass male attitude annoyed her.

Her visits to the place were even less these days, exceptions being the occasions when there was Scottish dancing, which she lead with George Fraser, to her own and his delight.

Jeremy, now confined to bed with fever, no longer had his ears to the ground, which irked him, and Mary only heard gossip when in the town. Hugh brought news though on his visits, but Jeremy guessed they were more to see Mary than himself.

He knew he had arrived one day as he could hear Hugh talking to Mary outside in the garden. In a moment of paranoia it crossed his mind that they might actually wish him dead, though in all honesty it was difficult to fault Mary just at present. She was caring for him well, but whether for love or duty he could not quite discern. It had only recently dawned on him, now that he was convalescing, that had she not been able to drive the four-wheel vehicle, his exit from the camp might have been a different story. No wonder John Fairbanks admired her so for doing it. Yet another admirer for her he thought, even winning over the conservative element. So why could he not bring himself to admire her too? If only he could forget Anthea, though she was there in his mind less frequently these days.

Hugh came into the bedroom and sat down. 'How are you getting along then? Mary says you're making great strides.'

'I guess she is right. I am certainly feeling better, thanks to her.'

Did he see Hugh wince? He certainly did not say anything for a minute or two.

'Tell me the news then.'

Hugh seemed to come out of some sort of reverie.

'News? Do we have any around here? I guess you are mostly the

news.'

'Oh come on. Surely something must have happened around the boma. Who has fallen out with whom? Or run away with old George?'

'Now who would do a thing like that,' said Hugh, 'it would break poor Winifred's heart.'

They were both laughing at the joke when Mary came in.

'What's the joke?' she asked.

'Jeremy is curious to know if George Fraser has run off with anybody.'

'Are you crazy? It would be more interesting if his wee Scottish wife ran off.'

'Now that would really upset the apple cart.' said Hugh.

'I think you are both pretty wicked to even contemplate it,' said Mary 'after all they must be the most stable thing around this place.'

'Ah, you never know, you never know,' said Jeremy.

'There is a bit of gossip,' said Hugh, 'and that is that old Costa is having trouble with his ex Mugandan mistress.'

'You mean Theresa?' said Mary.

'Yes. Apparently now that Frank has gone off to school in England, she is trying to get Simon to live with her in Kampala.'

'Oh,' said Mary, 'so what will happen to the child then?'

She found them both staring at her and the fateful evening she had offered to foster him came flooding back. All of a year ago just after her miscarriage, when she had fled the room in tears while they were waiting for Costa to finish cooking the meal.

'I suppose it would be sensible if he went to his mother, now she is willing to have him,' she said.

Hugh said, 'You don't seem to understand. His mother is a prostitute.'

'You're sure?'

'Yes it's common knowledge.'

'Well I didn't know that before.'

'I expect she went on the game after old Costa was finished with her,' said Jeremy, 'after all he had already ruined her.'

'He's not a very savoury character, but I can't help liking him. Lends a bit of spice to the place, but he should have played it fair by the girl. Apparently her father chased him up and said he should marry her, not that Costa took any notice of that.'

‘It’s really unfair on the kids,’ said Mary. ‘All the same, Simon should be allowed to go to his mother, I expect she loves him even if she has to go on the game to earn a living.’

‘Will the boy go to the bad?’ asked Hugh.

‘I don’t see that necessarily follows. The main thing is that these kids get clothed and fed and hopefully get a bit of affection on the way.’

‘Personally I don’t think Costa will let him go,’ said Jeremy.

Mary thought a moment, then said, ‘At least there will be more nu-su, nu-su children in Kampala. You know, half and halves. He won’t stand out quite like a sore thumb as he does here, poor kid.’

Hugh seemed to contemplate this for a while and said thoughtfully: ‘I wonder how many there are. A number of European and African crosses, but I bet there are not many European Asian ones.’

‘And what about African Asians?’ asked Jeremy.

‘Since we don’t know this all seems to be hypothetical, so what’s the point of surmising?’ said Mary ‘what we do know is that we’ve got just one here who might be better off in Kampala with his mum.’

‘You better keep out of all this,’ said Jeremy.

Hugh rose to her defence immediately, ‘She is entitled to her own opinion.’

‘Yes of course she is, but I mean not to meddle in this affair.’

‘Well thank you for nothing. And who said I was going to,’ at which she flounced back to the living room.

Hugh said accusingly, ‘You were a bit hard on her, weren’t you?’

‘Well it’s because she gets so emotional. Anyway, I had hoped you were going to tell me what went on at the meeting in the club last night.’

‘I suppose you want to know about the boat race then, since you are meant to be one of the crew?’

‘I am still hoping I will be. John seems to think I should be better by then.’

Hugh said, ‘I have never seen so many people keen to get wet, quite a number have volunteered already.’

Jeremy laughed at this, ‘We won’t get wet, just a little sprayed may be.’

‘You haven’t seen one of these dos,’ said Hugh, ‘water flies all over the place, but as far as I know, there has never been a capsized canoe

even though it is all pretty rough. Don't forget the Africans have been paddling these dugouts for years. It's not like the Oxford and Cambridge boat race you know. It's get in and go, and stop the thing from rocking. The school are sending some teachers for a start.'

'So who is keen to go then? You mean the leper colony wants to show the flag?'

Seems so. Then there is John, George and Freddie.'

'Freddie? He is going to look funny sitting among a crew of musungus. What are the locals to think of that?'

'He's had a think about it and talked to George who said, 'Well you're boma side my good fellow,' so boma side he is.'

'This is going to be a real laugh,' said Jeremy.

'OK and then there is Penshurst from the bank and Philip Forestry, Nick Police and Jack Hendry. Oh yes, and something really hilarious, apparently Hilary wants to row in a boat with Jack.'

'What? She can't do that, she's a woman.'

'So she's been told. Very firmly. I gather she was egged on by Maureen, the cheeky thing.'

'Well she is Irish, what else do you expect. Does she want to paddle her own canoe as well?'

'No, just did for devilment, I think.'

'And then there is you and me,' said Jeremy.

'Do you think you'll really be well enough by then?'

'I intend to be well enough. Wouldn't miss this for the world. Sounds a great day out.'

'Yes it is, you'll see.'

Chapter Twenty-one

It was that time of year, after the little rains when the days were drier and hot but not overbearingly so, when the boat race took place. It was a fixture in the yearly calendar, providing enough individuals could be persuaded or coerced into taking part. It always caused a certain mixture of anxiety and exalted excitement.

Nearer the day, the boma wives began to prepare food for the picnic, filling hampers and charging the men to bring plenty of booze from the club. Not that many needed reminding. Even boma children were given a day off school and were piled with dogs and hampers into cars to set off for the Queen Elizabeth National Park.

There was no problem about boats, as the dugout canoes were laid on at the Kasinga Channel by the fishermen and it was their treat to barbecue some of their fish.

Finally, with the addition of four white catholic fathers the boma could muster crews for half a dozen boats. There was no preliminary practice and it was assumed easy enough to propel a dugout along, even at speed. But those who had raced in previous years kept quiet about it, smiling at the newcomers' devil-may-care attitude.

Mary, Jeremy and Hugh rode to the destination together, bantering their way along the dusty corrugated road into the Park where things were looking fresher. Trees and bushes shining again from recent rains while animals munched away at the fodder.

Warthogs snuffled around on their stumpy legs, tails erect, looking for roots, occasionally blinking at the dust from the convoys sweeping their way. They grunted and skedaddled off.

'Did you see that one kneeling down,' said Hugh. 'He was digging with his tusks.'

'No. Missed that,' said Mary, 'and aren't they ugly, you can see why people don't keep them as pets.'

Jeremy laughed and said, 'And what about those buffaloes. Aren't they just as ugly?'

Hugh said, 'Yes I hate buffalos, they always look so bad tempered and ferocious with those horns meeting in the middle, and the single older ones are dangerous if they loose their places in the hierarchy.

Give me cows any day, or a bull or two for that matter.'

'So are the elephants dangerous?' asked Mary, 'as there is a herd of them over there. I hope they won't cross our path.'

'Don't forget if they do, they have right of way,' warned Hugh.

'I know that,' said Jeremy irritably, just as they did decide to cross, causing him to break swiftly. They sat mesmerised by the great beasts, six, with two young ones.

Jeremy shut the engine off.

'Might be wiser to keep it running,' said Hugh, 'in case we have to back up.'

'I always thought you were meant to stand stock still,' said Mary, 'and hope that they won't put a foot through the roof or bonnet, or even turn us over.'

'We are in a solid enough car: this isn't a beetle,' said Hugh. 'Anyway we've allowed them over and given them plenty of space, so just relax.'

'It's alright for you, you've seen them many times,' said Jeremy.

'Yes but I always respect all wild creatures.'

'Good thinking,' said Mary, still marvelling at the sight of the small herd.

As they neared the channel they saw a few bushbuck, pretty reddish brown smallish animals marked with light stripes.

'I want to see a rhino,' said Jeremy.

'Ah, the three-toed ungulates,' said Hugh.

'What?' asked Mary.

'The three-toed ungulates,' he repeated.

'I thought you were going to start a ditty,' she said.

'No I am talking about the rhino. But you won't see any here, I'm afraid. The place for them is Murchison Falls.'

'Oh shame. I was really looking forward to seeing one of those.'

'And no zebra here either.'

'Well I'm quite happy with those elephants we've just seen,' said Mary, 'especially those little ones.'

Near the water they saw hippopotamus.

'Now there is a truly ugly creature for you,' said Hugh.

'I trust there won't be too many of those in the water where we're racing,' said Jeremy. 'I don't fancy being upturned by one of those.'

'They probably won't be in the channel,' said Hugh. 'That's where

the fishermen congregate. By the way, did I tell you what happened when I was given the telling station in the park on the voting day?'

'No. What happened?' asked Mary eagerly.

'It was dark by the time I got in the car to return and I had left the windows open. Low and behold on the other side stood a hippo. He put his rear to the window and farted. I can't tell you how awful that was, it nearly made me pass out and I had to endure the smell all the way home.'

The others rocked with laughter, 'Yes it's funny in retrospect but it wasn't at the time.'

'Poor you,' said Mary, 'nearly asphyxiated by a hippo.

Others were arriving and parking their cars in a pretty haphazard fashion. They could see the canoes were dragged up ready for them while a few Africans were out on the water just paddling around and enjoying themselves. Further along were a number of African boys swimming naked. As they came out of the water their black skins shone like wet marble. They frolicked around on the shore and then went in to splash around again.

'Dear little things, next to nature,' said Mary.

'Yes, they are having a great lark,' said Hugh. 'Wish we could do it like that.'

'You're not very modest are you,' said Mary.

'I'll strip off if you do,' said Jeremy.

'Oh no, don't. You'll shame the side,' Mary cried.

'Don't be daft! As though we would do a thing like that. It would end our careers right here on the Kasinga Channel,' Hugh laughed.

'Pity,' said Jeremy. 'It really appeals to me.'

Mary began to look in the back of the car for the picnic.

'Can't see any shade to sit under,' she said.

'Well we could join the others or sit on the shady side of the Land Rover,' suggested Jeremy.

'I think we ought to join the others,' said Hugh. 'Didn't you bring your hat?'

'Yes it's here somewhere. OK, let's go over.'

The two men lugged the beer and the hamper and the dog immediately went into the water to swim. He came out and shook himself all over them. They tried to put him away and he went back in to repeat the exercise.

‘Now come here and sit down or you won’t get your bone,’ said Mary.

They joined on the end next to Neil and Jennifer Patterson from the school. Everyone seemed in high spirits, downing lots of beer. Kathleen came over to sit next to Mary.

‘A bit of real excitement at last,’ she said.

Hugh ribbed her, ‘Bet you would like to be in one of the canoes?’

‘To be sure,’ she said. ‘Can’t think why the women can’t have a go.’

‘This is male territory,’ said Jeremy. ‘Maybe if the African women did it you’d have a chance.’

‘Mother Mary. When will the suffragettes reach Africa?’ she said.

It was time for the race and becoming obvious that the men were well tanked up on beer. The Africans meanwhile had been drinking several calabashes of native woragi. With plenty of noise and bravado they got into the boats and pushed out to the middle.

‘They’re off!’ shouted Maureen. ‘Oh look, they’re getting very wet but the Africans are going really smoothly.’

‘Bet they win,’ said Mary.

They did of course, except for one boma boat, in which Freddie was crewing. It came in second. When the men returned, Jennifer asked, ‘Do you think he is embarrassed or proud?’

‘Don’t know, he is in a bit of an ambiguous position,’ said Mary. ‘I sometimes wonder how he copes with it.’

‘Shouldn’t worry yourself,’ said Hugh. ‘These people know he is not a bare-footed bedraggled village chief. They give him respect.’

‘No I meant being with the white fraternity.’

‘Expect he likes it,’ said Neil, ‘he uses authority.’

‘He is chatting to the fishermen now,’ said Jennifer.

‘Probably asking them if they paid their poll tax,’ laughed Hugh. ‘At least this lot don’t have to go off to the Bagandan coffee plantations as migrant workers to earn it.’

‘You mean they earn a decent enough living catching fish?’ asked Maureen.

‘I should think so, they look healthy enough and those kids are just bursting with energy.’

‘Aren’t they just,’ said Jennifer. ‘I wish some of our kids at the school had that much.’

Jeremy was looking bored and said, ‘Why do we always have to talk

politics even on a day out.'

'Can't you really even, just once in a while, immerse yourself in the local scene?' said Mary.

He looked quite shocked at her outburst while the Pattersons exchanged glances.

'Look,' said Maureen, 'the fishermen are frizzling some fish, shall I go and see if it's ready?'

'I'll come with you,' said Hugh.

On the way over, Maureen said, 'I don't think Jeremy is really quite well yet.'

'Well he shouldn't have come then.'

She had never heard him so unsympathetic, 'and after all it was hardly politics we were discussing. Not the heavy stuff anyway.'

'I can see where your sympathy lies,' she told him.

'Well you're her friend, so where does yours? You must confess Jeremy is a pain at times.'

'Yes I agree, but I am fond of him in a funny sort of way, he's a sort of challenge.'

'It seems that's what Mary must find him, since she puts up with him,' he said huffily.

'You be careful, Hugh,' Maureen warned him. 'It does notice you know, you're caring for her so much.'

'Well, you would notice because we are all friends.'

'Others too,' she warned, and they were by the rudimentary cooking arrangements of the fishermen. The smell was delicious and Maureen held out a plate to be given some by a smiling, almost naked cook.

Returning to the group she said, 'Get up you lazy lot and get your own. I am only sharing this with Hugh.'

'Are you now?' said Mary. 'Alright, we'll get our own. Come on then before it all goes. Others have got the idea now and can't you see there is a rush on.'

Thinking that maybe Maureen was right, that Jeremy was not well and tired out, Hugh offered to drive the journey back, during which hardly a word passed between the three of them.

Chapter Twenty-two

‘It was actually going to happen,’ said Hugh. ‘Desai is giving a party would you believe it, and one week before the Aga Khan is due up here. Now I call that a bit cheeky. By the way has he invited you?’ he asked Kalahandra who was sitting with him drinking gin.

The ADC was gazing at him with a rather silly half smile on his face. ‘You barmy, or something?’ he finally said, just as Hugh was thinking that it maybe had not been a very tactful question.

‘No way! I may be in the honoured position of serving her majesties Colonial Government right now, which I suppose gives me a slightly exalted status above Desai, but as far as he’s concerned, I’m still black and he’s not quite so black, and so no, he’s not invited me.’

‘Oh.’ Hugh scrutinized him to see if there was any malice, disappointment or just plain acceptance. He thought he detected the latter, and said, ‘Funny old world, isn’t it?’

‘It is for some,’ said Freddie, ‘but we might get it sorted out one day.’

‘I must say you’re pretty phlegmatic.’

‘Me? No I am not. I just don’t see the point in getting steamed up about these little social niceties. Anyway I am invited to the big do and maybe Desai is not, since he is not one of them. Either way, I would rather stay at home and read a good book. At present I am busy writing long letters to Monique every day. I am trying to persuade her it is time she left Rwanda to join me here, but I guess I’ll have to marry her first.’

‘So we might have a wedding, eh?’

Freddie did not say anything to this, then to Hugh’s surprise said, ‘Well I guess I will make it before you do if you will persist in chatting up married women.’

Hugh was shocked ‘What do you mean?’

‘You know what I mean. Do you think it’s a secret around the boma? Everybody can see you’re dippy about the girl. Mind you, I don’t blame you. She’s OK, it’s just a pity she is not single, then you could have her.’

Hugh suddenly felt his world might soon collapse. Already Mary seemed to be edging away from him, but he could see she was still unhappy with Jeremy, and now apparently everyone was talking about it. It was a big dilemma, especially as he could see she would so beautifully fit in with his life out here.

'You've hit the nail on the head,' he said. 'It's my cross to bear, I guess, and so the boma is having a jolly time at my expense, is it? Well, thanks for telling me.'

'What are you going to do about it then?'

'I don't see I can do anything really. First of all, she seems intend on making a go of her marriage however much Jeremy leads her a dance, and believe me, he does lead her a dance.'

'Yes I can believe that. I've noticed he is all charm to others but not so nice to her.'

'So you've twigged it. Odd really,' said Hugh screwing up his face. 'I knew a bloke once who was obnoxious to the world at large and yet his wife adored him, said he was the kindest man going.'

'As you said, funny old world,' observed Freddie.

In the mellow atmosphere of his own house, drinking gin with his sympathetic African friend, Hugh found himself sharing his troubles further.

'You see another stumbling block is the fact that I am a Catholic, and a practicing Catholic at that. I even thought of going into a monastery just before University, or at least the priesthood. So even if Mary did divorce Jeremy, could I actually marry her and still hang on to my religion? Divorce is so damn difficult anyway, mental cruelty is about the only thing you can do it on apart from adultery of course, and I don't think Mary would bring cruelty against Jeremy.'

'Well,' said Freddie, 'how about the adultery bit?' giving Hugh a smug smile.

That. Hm. Very tricky. Much as I long to have her in bed that would really put the cat among the pigeons as far as my religion goes.'

Darkness was falling and the chirruping of the crickets penetrated the room.

Then Freddie said, 'Mary the temptress, eh, the second Eve.'

Hugh laughed 'You're damn right there.'

'So how about it then? You know most Africans wouldn't give it a second thought. They get on with it.'

‘You’re urging me to commit sin?’

‘Well if you lust after her that much, why not?’

‘It’s not lust, it’s love. I suppose that is why I can’t do it to her, apart from the Catholicism. But I would marry her like a shot if she could get a dispensation from the Pope.’

‘How can she do that then?’

‘Well she says that Jeremy has had nothing to do with her sexually since she lost the baby.’

‘Good god! Where is he getting it then?’

‘Search me. Guess like most of us singles around here, he is celibate.’

‘But he is not single, he is married,’ said Freddie somewhat perplexed.

‘He had a girl up in Kenya, but Mary is under the illusion he has given her up.’

‘Do you think he hasn’t then?’

‘Well he is always terribly keen to collect the post before her.’

‘Long way to go for nooky,’ said Freddie laughing.

‘Well I don’t really care where he goes. It gives me a nice warm feeling that he is not having Mary. On the other hand she must wonder what it’s all about.’

Observing that Freddie had downed his second gin he said, ‘Have another?’

‘Why not?’

Hugh turned on the light, poured the drink and another for himself. Meanwhile Freddie was looking around the room, very like his own, a bachelor’s establishment, no pretty cushions to soften, or pictures on the wall, just the statutory public works furniture like most other officials on the boma had in their houses.

Hugh handed him the gin and sat down again.

‘I don’t think you should worry about being a Catholic,’ said Freddie, ‘just pursue the girl and get her, she’s worth it.’

Hugh stared at him awhile and then said, ‘You’ve no idea how much I’ve thought about it. I’ve thought long and hard.’

‘All this business about dispensation from the Pope,’ said Freddie, ‘I’m sure Catholic Africans wouldn’t think of that. Why, out in the countryside the holy fathers tolerate all sorts of things. They just say to a man ‘you really should get rid of that second wife, you know,’

underneath it all life goes on much as usual, some of them invoking the ancestors as well.'

'Ah, well it's different in Europe. You see we've had Catholicism for many centuries and the Vatican has had time to get it all down to a fine art. By comparison Christianity is so new in Africa.'

'Well I am supposed to be a protestant,' said Freddie,' and I guess that came even later. But I don't pretend to be a good one. I just want to live my life half decently. As to really believing? Well I sort of do, I suppose.'

'You're going to have a church wedding?' asked Hugh.

'Oh yes. Monique will want all that.'

'Lucky man,' said Hugh.

They continued to sip their gins, now a bit tipsy. In the conviviality of the moment, Hugh suddenly let out a big laugh.

'What's so funny?' asked Freddie.

'I was just thinking, here we are having this intimate conversation, you black, me white, you Protestant, me Catholic.'

'Yea, well why not?' said Freddy, 'it's time the world took a turn for the better.'

Getting up and stretching he said, 'I'm damned hungry, haven't eaten yet. Don't suppose your boy has cooked enough for two, do you?'

'Oh god, sorry I kept you. No he usually cooks frugally, but I can see.'

'Don't worry. Mine has done something and I expect he's still hanging about cursing me for being late.'

He made for the door and Hugh went with him. Crossing the veranda, Freddie turned and said, 'Sorry I can't solve your problem. My advice is, go for the girl. Every time,' and he vanished into the blackness.

Chapter Twenty-three

Jeremy was sure that his impatience and bad temper was legion among the Asians which left him thunderstruck when Desai invited them to his pre Aga Khan's party. Not trusting the man an inch, he wondered if he was being in some way singled out. Even more to his surprise was Mary's reaction, for she, who normally seemed to embrace the human race, had been going around muttering that since the Asian duikas were now selling British made hoes they were putting local smiths out of business.

When she was told of the Desai invitation she grasped it eagerly saying, 'Oh yes, come on let's go. It will be authentic food. Besides I want to see inside an Asian house, to see how differently they live. It would be really interesting.'

He was totally phased. It had been all so unexpected on both counts.

Not being keen on the idea however, he said, 'You're insatiable. I can't think why you bother with all these locals. Boring lot if you ask me.'

'So what would you have me do otherwise, go to endless coffee parties?'

He looked piqued and said, 'Alright, I expect the gin will flow, so OK let's go.'

The evening in question was hot and sticky. 'I wouldn't wear anything too revealing,' Jeremy advised. 'You know how these women wrap themselves up.'

'Who are you telling? Anyway I bet you get excited about that bit of flesh they reveal between those cute little tops and their waistline.'

He looked at her in astonishment. 'How do you know that?'

'Well it's a bit like when Victorians showed an ankle, isn't it, which used to get men all steamed up.'

'Sometimes you amaze me Mary,' and he crossed the room to kiss her, but she dodged him saying, 'I am just going to look through my vast wardrobe to see if I have anything suitable to wear then,' and disappeared into the bedroom to change.

She emerged in a pretty lime green short-sleeved dress which set off

her hair, and wore her usual thonged Indian sandals. In her ears she wore the locally made earrings Jeremy had given her when he tried one of his sporadic efforts to get near her again.

Seeing them he remembered he had nearly sent them to Anthea, which made him think about her again, and he wondered if lurking in Mary's mind was the thought that he still corresponded with her.

It was not far to Desai's house. He lived in the commercial bit, on the same side of the town as themselves. Darkness was nearly on them and a few fruit bats were winging the air as they clambered into the Land Rover. Outside Desai's place they were pleased to see a number of other vehicles and a little thrill ran through Mary as she recognised Hugh's Land Rover.

They entered a passageway that opened onto several smallish rooms. The pungent smell of spice cooking assailed them as they were ushered into a windowless internal room. It contained two heavily brocaded sofas at right angles and a clumsy looking armchair covered in cushions with larger Indian patterned ones scattered on the floor, which was covered with a paisley patterned carpet. The lighting was harsh from a shadeless bulb hanging from the ceiling.

On the walls were many photos of family and a largish-framed picture of a strange half human, half animal, creature with an elephants face, heavily adorned with jewels and sitting among flowers. Mary had never seen such a strange picture and was mesmerised almost to the point of forgetting to greet the other guests, who were Jack Hendry with Hilary, the Pattersons from the school and Hugh.

'I invited Mr and Mrs Penshurst too,' said Desai, 'but said sorry can't come.'

Jeremy and Hugh exchanged glances. Penshurst was the bank manager.

Desai had just dispensed drinks when his brother appeared carrying a couple of gin bottles and a number of beers.

'My wife, she busy cooking,' said Desai smiling, 'most beautiful meal for you, very special.'

'Are we celebrating something?' asked Hilary.

'Yes, my son who was at school here has just been admitted to Makerere College. He wants be doctor. Mr Patterson knows.'

'One of our star pupils,' said Neil, 'we are very pleased about it.'

'A doctor?' said Mary, 'that will take him a long time.'

‘Yes, and costs much money,’ laughed Desai, at which point Sanjei appeared in the doorway.

‘Come in, come in,’ said his father, ‘Mr Patterson is here.’

‘The boy looked shy but smiled at everyone while they said ‘congratulations,’ ‘well done,’ and ‘good luck.’

‘Are you looking forward to going off to the big city?’ asked Hugh.

‘I am a bit nervous,’ Sanjei confessed.

‘Not as nervous as if you were going to England,’ said his father. ‘Kampala is only just up the road.’

‘Did you think you were going to England?’ asked Jack.

‘Yes, I really wanted to go to one of the big hospitals in London,’ said Sanjei.

‘It was discussed,’ said Neil.

‘We could manage that,’ said his father, ‘and his mother wanted him near.’

The boy bent his head and played with his long fingers.

Mary said, ‘I can smell your mother is cooking some curry, it does smell good.’

‘Not only my mother, my sister and aunt as well.’

A lady, slightly overweight, dressed in a gorgeous sari of deep metallic blue bordered in pink came to the edge of the room.

‘My wife Rashmi,’ said Desai.

They said ‘Good Evening,’ ‘pleased to meet you’ or ‘Hello’ while she put her hands together like the picture of Durer’s praying hands and bent slightly at the waist. Turning to her husband she said something in Urdu and he replied in English, ‘Yes bring it in.’

A young girl, dressed western style in skirt and blouse came in with a plate of samosas and handed them around.

‘Is this your sister?’ Mary asked Sanjei.

He replied it was and the girl smiled shyly at her.

Mary was thinking it was just as well the food was being produced. It was already 9.30pm and Jeremy was on his third gin. She did not want him getting drunk and aggressive at this party.

The samosas were delicious. Jennifer Patterson said, ‘I would love to know how to make these.’

Desai laughed ‘You can take a lesson with my wife, she expert cook.’

‘I can tell,’ said Jennifer, ‘Are you serious? Do you think I can ask her to come to my house at the school one day?’

‘Of course,’ he replied.

Sanjei said, ‘You ought to ask my aunt, she is an even better cook.

His father glared at him, ‘your mother is best cook, he said firmly.

There was a lull before the next course. Mary asked Sanjei what the picture on the wall represented.

‘Yes I’ve been wondering about that too,’ said Hilary.

‘That’s Ganesh, one of our gods.’

‘Is he the one special to your family then?’

‘One of them. He is the god of wisdom who brings success. We pray to him when we do exams.’

‘Well he certainly answered your prayers,’ said Neil and they all laughed.

Another lady in an equally stunning sari of deep green with an orange trim now appeared. Sanjei’s aunt was bearing a table with folding legs and a round brass tray. She set it up in the middle of the room ready for Sanjei’s mother and sister, who carried in bowls of rice and dishes of spicy meat, vegetables, dahl and chapattis. Handing each guest a bowl, they said, ‘Please help yourselves.’

Hugh was the first to rise, ‘I wish I could find a cook who could cook a decent curry,’ he said.

‘Well you can’t have my wife,’ quipped Desai.

Nobody talked much as they ate. Sanjei’s sister Premlata joined them and got up periodically to urge them all to second helpings, but the two older women did not appear again all evening. When they had finished she cleared away and shortly afterwards came in and sat down. Desai and his brother were now downing beers at quite a rate and offering the same to everyone else and Mary, finding the curry fiery drank more beer than usual.

The talk turned to school and the percentages of boys at the school reaching university. Neil said slightly more Indians made it since they started school at a younger age, so they got onto the next stage earlier than the Africans.

‘Some of the local boys are actually young men in their early twenties at the school. It is a different ball game teaching here.’

Premlata was attending the Asian school and said she would miss her brother.

Hugh suddenly said, ‘I ought to be going, I’ve got to get up for mass in the morning.’

Mary gave him a baleful look. They had been sitting next to each other on the floor but had hardly exchanged a word with each other all evening. Jeremy was on the settee opposite and spent much of the time looking across at them.

‘So soon?’ she said, ‘Can’t you miss it for once?’

‘No. I’ve got to start the week right.’

Jack said, ‘If I can move after this big meal, we ought to be off too,’ which set them all in motion and everyone rose to leave together.

There was still no sign of the two older women and all seemed quiet in the background. Desai saw them out and on the doorstep Mary said, ‘I would like to thank your wife for that marvellous meal.’

‘Yes, yes I’ll tell her,’ he said.

Outside by their cars, Hugh said, ‘Amazing isn’t it, the way they keep their women in the background.’

Mary said, ‘I wonder if the daughter will tolerate it when she is grown up?’

‘She probably won’t have much choice,’ said Jack. And they all drove off under the sultry starlit sky, sweating gently from the unusual food.

Chapter Twenty-four

‘I was quite overawed,’ said Kathleen, sitting on her veranda talking to Jeremy and Hugh, ‘when he shook hands with me.’

‘Nice man,’ said Hugh.

‘Did any sort of holy anything flow through to you when he did it?’ asked Mary.

‘Funny you should ask that, because as a matter of fact there was something. I am sure I can’t put it into words though.’

‘It’s just because you’re Irish,’ said Jeremy, ‘you believe anything.’

‘Don’t be so disparaging. If she says she felt something, then she did feel something,’ Mary rebuked him.

‘He is a holy man after all,’ said Hugh, ‘even if he is not one of ours.’

Philip came through carrying a tray of sundowners. Like Mary, Kathleen had given the houseboy Sunday off.

‘Who’s a holy man?’ he asked, dispensing the beers and gin and tonics.

‘We’re just discussing the reception for the Aga Khan last Friday,’ said Kathleen.

‘And’ said Jeremy, ‘she is trying to kid us she felt a thrill when he shook hands with her, except she thinks it was a little bit special because he is linked into Allah.’

‘You didn’t tell me,’ said Philip.

‘No I didn’t tell anyone. I didn’t want to sound silly. It’s just that Mary asked me outright.’

‘Did you shake his hand too?’ Philip asked Mary, handing her iced lime juice.

‘No he passed me by. So, I am jealous and I could do with a little holy flow.’

‘You could join my church,’ said Hugh, ‘the priests spent all their time shaking hands; they are very adept at it.’

Jeremy looked sharply from Hugh to Mary while Kathleen winked at Philip.

‘I might think about it.’ She smiled at him and swiftly changed the subject by saying, ‘This lime is really refreshing, Philip.’

They had gathered together to plan another trip out into the bush, but Philip's mind, having missed half the conversation, was still on the reception.

'I think the best bit is this extraordinary thing they have of weighing him so that they then have to cough up enough silver to equal it,' he said.

'Oh but he doesn't keep it,' said Hugh. 'It gets redistributed to any Ismaili family who may be in dire distress.'

'Is that so?' said Kathleen. 'Well now, it seems they've got their own welfare state going.'

'Yes, that's the idea,' continued Hugh, 'their little nest egg kept for them when they fall on hard times. After all he hardly needs it himself; he is already very rich and has one of the best string of racehorses in the world to boot, not to mention his hobnobbing with royalty and Hollywood.'

'Quite a canny man,' observed Kathleen.

'Do other Asians have any sort of thing like that?' asked Philip.

'I don't think so, certainly not the Hindus, it's every man for himself with them, but I may be wrong. Other Muslims give alms on Fridays of course, it's only the Ismaili sect that has this particular practice. He also recommends they should settle down in whichever country they find themselves.'

'Gosh you're well informed,' said Mary.

'Comes of being a bachelor,' chafed Kathleen. 'Got lots of time to find these things out.'

'No not at all. You read don't you? Though maybe you read different stuff.'

'You also talk to people,' said Mary, 'you're not toffee-nosed like some people around here. I think you should have been an anthropologist, not a vet.'

'That's just a fashionable thing right now,' said Jeremy, 'he is much more useful being a vet.'

'Well thanks a lot.'

'I must say Freddie seemed to enjoy the party,' said Philip.

'Yes, he is a good egg, fits in anywhere,' said Hugh.

'Maybe it was a political move to invite him,' said Mary, 'if the Aga

Khan says his people should settle wherever they are.'

'Don't be stupid Mary. You see everything as political,' Jeremy admonished her, 'he was there because he is part of admin.'

'Well that's political, isn't it?' said Hugh, leaping to her defence as usual.

Kathleen said, 'Oh come on you lot, I am not in the mood for politics tonight. Let's get down to thinking about our trip.'

'Yes let's do that,' said Philip. 'I am dying to get off station again.'

He rose to hand the salted peanuts round, 'Any ideas?'

'Yes I have an idea,' said Mary. 'How about Karamoja?'

They all stared or blinked at her in surprise.

'Karamoja, bloody long way,' said Hugh,' we won't get there in a day, more like three.'

'Well,' Mary challenged him.

'It's not the easiest place to get into,' said Philip, 'do you really want to go to that wild place?'

'Yes I've a real hankering.'

'It's a romantic idea' put in Kathleen. 'I've always wanted to go to see those real nomads.'

'We've got real nomads here,' said Hugh.

'No no, these are hardly nomads,' she insisted. 'These settle down for three months at a time. I mean, not like those up in the north corner who steal each others cattle and walk around naked.'

They all laughed.

'Ah, you want to see big black naked men,' her husband ribbed her.

'Yes I do. Big black ones carrying spears and their penises hanging out.' Mary fell about laughing.

'Now we know,' said Philip to the two men, 'what it is that they really want.'

Hugh, who was sitting next to Mary gave her push and said, 'Now then.'

Recovering she said, 'Well, we know that you all like looking at those nubile young things with their tops bare. So what!'

Jeremy looked on, silent, seemingly mesmerised by it all.

'Come on,' said Kathleen, 'it's a great idea.

'Yes we know you're keen, and why,' said Philip, 'but as Hugh says, it is a bloody long way.'

'It would be such a change from here, and we've been to the border

one way so why don't we go to the border the other way? It's all so lush round here. I just fancy a bit of arid,' said Mary.

'Well it is certainly arid,' said Hugh, 'that's why they have to shift their cattle around so much, and there is great game and bird life too. I've been wanting to go myself for some time but I still think it's too far and it's an awful road system. You've picked out one of the wildest parts of the country, Mary.'

'Well it if it is going to be impossible where else?' she asked.

Philip made a couple of suggestions. 'We could go up into the Sudanese border, but that's about as far as Karamoja, or even down to Tanzania. Then there is that place somewhere in the middle of the river kept by some mad English woman. Goodness knows how she gets her provisions in.'

'By boat I expect,' said Mary.

With the fast falling African darkness, Kathleen said, 'Let's move inside.'

They carried on drinking, throwing ideas around, arguing about the merits.

'I feel deflated,' said Mary. 'I had really set my heart on Karamoja.'

'Well too bad,' said Jeremy. 'You'll have to go on your own if you want to go there.'

'Don't be so unkind,' said Kathleen. 'We can all dream.'

'Expect you're hungry,' said Hugh.

'I am hungry too,' said Philip. 'Can you rustle something up?' he asked Kathleen.

'Oh heck. I thought this might happen.'

'We'll go home,' said Mary.

'No no I'll find something. It won't be very substantial, bread and cheese and tomato salad.'

'Sounds great,' said Hugh.

'Yes, I know you bachelors,' she shot at him as she went through to the kitchen.

They continued to drink through the evening and had still not arrived at a decision by midnight.

'We ought to go home,' said Jeremy.

'This is your fault,' said Hugh to Mary, 'you shouldn't have mentioned Karamoja. Now none of us are satisfied with anything else.'

Chapter Twenty-five

'Well,' said Kathleen after Jeremy, Mary and Hugh had left, 'that was a fizzle, really disappointing. I am in desperate need to get away for a while.'

'No more so than me,' said Philip, 'somewhere where it is not work, so if Karamoja is off what are we going to do?'

'It could hardly be to the East or North unless we took a week or ten days over it. If the roads were better it would make a difference.'

'Yes, yes; I know. What I am asking now is where can we go instead? If those three can't make up their minds I think we should go off somewhere by ourselves.'

Philip raised himself wearily from his chair and said, 'Do you think we can postpone this till the morning? I am dead tired and I want to go to bed.'

'I am sorry,' she said. 'Of course you are, you only just got back from safari. We'll talk about it in the morning.'

Over breakfast Philip said, 'I suppose you know that Toro have invited us over for a duck shoot and cricket match in two weeks time, so why don't we call that our break. They are going to host us and put on a do in the club as well. A long weekend they said.'

Kathleen gave him a baleful look, 'I don't exactly think that traipsing off with the rest of the boma is exactly getting away,' she said.

'No? Well I suppose in one sense it is not. On the other hand, it's a change of scenery. Supposed to be lovely up there by the Mountains of the Moon.'

'So,' she sighed, 'we are going to be sitting around watching you guys bat a ball and then what happens to the women while you're duck shooting?'

'You talk to the hosts. Go off and climb the mountains if you like' he laughed.

'Don't be silly, those are supposed to be some of the most dangerous climbs in Africa.'

'Well just a suggestion,' he laughed again.

'Are you really telling me Philip, that you want to go and play cricket?'

‘Yes I am. Apparently they’ve got a jolly good side in Fort Portal.’

‘Isn’t that the place where that Stuart school put the African boys into kilts?’ Kathleen suddenly perked up at such a ludicrous idea.

‘That’s right. Very proud of their Stuart tartan it seems.’

‘Maybe we’ll see some,’ brightening at the idea.

‘So now you think we’ll go then,’ Philip ventured.

‘Why not, we’ll meet a few new faces. Break the monotony of this place. I’ll go and see Mary later this morning to see if they want to come too.’

Mary wasn’t at home; she was up at the Mission said Moses. Kathleen had never visited the place. Being a Catholic she hadn’t really had much to do with the Evangelicals who lived outside the boma in a separate enclave. All she really knew was that they were busy translating the bible into the local language, and taking a good long time about it, Mary had told her. But then she supposed that was not an easy task if you were going to get it right.

Driving onto their compound she found a church, a small school, half a dozen houses for white and black staff and a largish building with banging emanating from it. Not knowing where to find Mary she walked into it to find a woodworking room where a number of people were constructing pieces of furniture. The white person in charge who she did not recognise looked up in surprise at her entry and came toward her.

‘Can I help?’ he asked.

‘I am sorry to interrupt your work,’ she said, ‘but I am looking for Mary Bradshaw.’

‘Ah, our good friend Mary,’ he smiled, ‘she is helping some of the women over in the far corner - over there,’ pointing to another rectangular building.

‘Are you a friend of hers from the boma?’ he asked.

‘Yes, that’s right, I am Kathleen.’

‘Perhaps you would like to help us too, then?’ he said with a little laugh.

He made her feel embarrassed, ‘Um, um, I am a Catholic,’ she blurted.

‘Oh,’ he said, staring at her for a very long time.

‘Never mind,’ he said, ‘you’ll find friend Mary over there,’ and retreated back to his work.

Feeling as though she was an alien, Kathleen made for the building and found Mary sitting on the floor with about fifteen women around her. Some were nursing babies, one or two giving the breast. Mary jumped up, delighted to see her while the women looked at her curiously. Mary introduced her and she was surprised how many greeted her in English.

'What brings you? asked Mary.

'Just a bit of news, nothing urgent,' she said. 'Drop into my place on your way home.'

'Alright, I am pretty well through for this morning anyway.'

'What are you all doing then?'

'We're discussing the issue of breast versus bottle feeding,' said Mary. 'Too many of the mothers use dried milk and don't sterilise the bottles and teats properly and then the babes become ill and some die. These ladies,' she said, gesturing round the circle, 'are leaders to go back home and put the case to others for breast feeding.'

'My you do work hard,' said Kathleen very impressed.

'She is a good lady,' said one of the mothers nearby.

'Not really. I like talking to you anyway,' which raised a smile from some of them.

'So shall we finish for today then?'

They all said 'yes' and 'thank you' and 'goodbye' and Mary set off with Kathleen.

Walking to their cars she said, 'What's the news then?'

'I'll tell you back home, race you there.'

In the house they sat downing ice-cold fruit juice while Kathleen told her they had decided to take up the Fort Portal offer of the cricket playing and duck-shooting weekend, and to treat it as an outing since they had not been able to agree last night.

'So why don't you come along too?' she said.

Mary didn't answer immediately and then said, 'I am not too sure. Another jaunt out with the boma. Oh I suppose it's alright, but Hugh will certainly want to play cricket and perhaps Jeremy too, and I feel these days people are always watching us.'

'Yes people do talk, but you'll just have to ride it out till you leave, won't you?'

'I suppose so. It's not long now anyway. That's why it would have been nice for the five of us just to go along somewhere together before

we're off.'

'I know, I know,' Kathleen commiserated, 'but there we are. It's obvious Philip is dying to play cricket so I guess I might as well go too, so please come with me. We can have a good laugh together, and anyway, I want to see those funny African boys in Scottish kilts at that school up there. That should intrigue you too.'

'Alright then, I'll see if I can persuade Jeremy too. Don't suppose Hugh needs any egging on.'

'Well not if you're there,' Kathleen grinned.

'Oh, I don't know about that, you know how keen he is on his work and he told me once that the Trypanosomiasis control is at Tororo.'

'What's that exactly,' asked Kathleen.

'You know, sleeping sickness.'

'I hope we haven't got any of that around here,' said Kathleen looking a little alarmed.

'You'll have to ask Hugh that, as far as cattle are concerned anyway,' said Mary, brushing it aside.

Everyone finished work early on Friday so that they could be on their way. Mary, Jeremy, Kathleen and Philip rode together, while Hugh took his Land Rover with all his cricket gear and some of the guns.

'It looks better that way,' he whispered to Mary.

They rode in convoy, stopping at points along the way for refreshments. At the next stop, Hugh failed to turn up and Mary began to fret.

'What can have happened to him?' she said to Kathleen, 'I hope he is not caught in an accident.'

They were still hanging about waiting for them when the Pattersons from the school pulled up beside them.

'Seen anything of Hugh Dickinson,' asked Philip.

'Yes, he is a few miles back. Got a puncture and was changing his wheel. We stopped to ask him if he wanted some help, but cursing and blinding he seemed to be just about through.'

'Thank goodness for that,' said Jeremy, 'he's got all the gear on board.'

'Trust you to think of the gear and not him,' Mary spat at him.

'We'll get on then,' said Philip getting into the car. 'Come on you're not going to wait for him, are you?' he said to Mary who seemed to be

hesitating.

'No no, let's move on,' but she was frowning.

As they converged on the club, they were treated to drinks and allocated hosts, mostly their opposite numbers, but since Mary and Jeremy had no opposite numbers, the station nurse offered hospitality. She was a kindly middle-aged spinster lady called Joyce. It seemed she made the offer having heard that Mary was a nutritionist.

Over supper it obviously irked Jeremy that he was not the centre of attention as Joyce was so interested in the sort of work that Mary was doing at the Mission and her observations out in the field. The two women said they did not want to go back to the club that evening so he went off alone, leaving them deep in conversation.

The Fort Portal boma was larger than their own with more personnel and Jeremy found himself talking to the agricultural officer and his wife for much of the evening. Most of the visitors appeared to be taking an early night thought Jeremy, after a day's work and a long ride when Hugh appeared with the vet. Talk centred on the composition of the cricket teams when Hugh said, 'We had some difficulties getting a side together. We nearly had to resort to persuading Freddie Kalahandra who was not keen to come.

'Who is he then?' asked James Brown the agricultural man.

'Our new African ADC,' said Hugh, 'a really good chap.'

'Does he belong to the club?' asked his opposite number in some surprise.

Jeremy said, 'Well he was offered membership by Frazer, but he turned us down.'

'Tricky sort of situation,' remarked Brown.

'Suppose things will have to change on that score,' said the vet. 'We haven't had to face that one yet.'

'You will, in due course,' Hugh told him.

But nobody was smiling and it was obvious no one wanted to contemplate such a thing on this wonderful get-together weekend and the subject was quickly changed.

The hosts had laid on a large meal in the club for the following evening and there was to be dancing to records. Spirits were high; the duck shooters had potted a very few birds but had nevertheless had a good day out with the guns and the home team had won the cricket match. The women had met up at various coffee parties and admired

the gardens of those who managed to grow roses as well as the more tropical exotic plants.

Now with the music pumping out the latest in rock and roll - Bill Hayley rock around the clock and Chuck Berry favourites, people were on the floor trying to jive. After Mary had tried to instil a bit more rhythm into Jeremy, she was asked for the next dance by a tall Australian who was teaching at the school. To her delight, and his, they pounded out the beat, swinging out, turning and twisting and thoroughly enjoying themselves. Neither Jeremy or Hugh got a look in, the Aussie monopolising her for the evening. Jeremy shrugged and got on the floor with others, but Hugh was clearly disturbed. Mary smiled at him periodically, even gave him a wink as she joined the Aussie yet again. By two am there were not many left and her partner was reluctant to let her go.

Jeremy approached and said that it was about time he took his wife back to their host's house, she having left at midnight. Mary had not been drinking alcohol but she was on an all time high, throwing up her arms and saying, 'This is the most wonderful night I had in Africa, I feel truly liberated.' At which the Aussie gave her a hug and a kiss and said, 'See you some more.'

Hugh was heard to say under his breath, 'No you won't.'

While Kathleen in total astonishment said, 'I had no idea you liked dancing so much, Mary.'

'It's the greatest thing,' Mary said, almost drunk with happiness.

'Come on,' Jeremy pulled at her arm, 'you've had enough for one night.'

Philip gave her a good night kiss and told her, 'You're the rock and roll queen of Fort Portal, how's that for fame!'

Chapter Twenty-six

The night was hot and oppressive, but not sticky enough to make one sweat. Better that it should thought Angela as she tossed and turned trying to sleep. A good sweat might ease her, both her mind and her body. It infuriated her that John lay heavily asleep beside her for he was the cause for her unease.

The day had been good until he came home. Her coffee party successful and a spell tinkering in the garden along with the shamba boy had been very satisfying. Shamba was her favourite; he was always willing to please, unlike the other two who were always so moody. She was thinking of sending the houseboy on his way, but then replacing servants was such a haphazard business. It did not matter how many credentials they presented, one was never sure if they were borrowed from others for the interview. She had wanted to inherit the Todd's boy when they left, but Jennifer Henderson had got in ahead of her. Anyway she liked Shamba so much that she agreed to pay his brothers' school fees.

Then John turned up after an emergency operation at the hospital and she was giving him sympathy over a sundowner on the terrace when he dropped the bombshell. 'I hope you will agree to this darling,' he said getting up to kiss her, 'but I was called to see Mary Bradshaw this afternoon and she is in rather a bad way.'

'Oh, really why?'

'She has gone down with something mysterious, I have not diagnosed her yet. She is running a high temperature and got fluey symptoms, but somehow I can't think what it is. I am really very worried about her and of course I can't admit her to the hospital, and I don't want to send her off into Kampala either as she is really ill poor girl.'

'Oh, so what are you thinking of doing with her then?'

'I offered to bring her here into our spare bedroom so that I can monitor her.'

'You what? You might have asked me first.'

'Yes, I know darling, but you know I am responsible for everyone on this boma and I couldn't think what else to do.'

‘Goodness! Well I am not sure I want the responsibility John and she may be ill but you know. . .’ but she did not finish the sentence because he said, ‘Oh come on Angela! For heavens sake, you’ve been a nurse; have a bit of fellow feeling. I know she gets up your nose with all her lovey dovey of Africans, but she may have a point. Things are moving on and apart from the fact that she doesn’t seem to have any racial feelings, she does have a genuine interest in what goes on outside the boma.’

‘Maybe. But that’s her affair. You seem to have a sudden interest in what she does, I think.’

‘Don’t be stupid, Angela. I really am stumped as what to do about her and as they live off boma and I wasn’t sure that Jeremy was going to look after her properly, especially as he has his professor coming out to see him. It seems the man was to be in Kampala to give a paper at Makerere and Jeremy invited him up here. Mary was in quite a state about it all so I found myself saying I would bring her here, tomorrow.’

‘Really John it’s a bit steep.’

‘She wasn’t too keen to agree, but she is so under the weather she did not put up too much resistance and in the end seemed almost grateful that someone would be taking care of her. She is rather depressed into the bargain, so please be nice to her and try to make her comfortable. Remember, she is my patient. I’ll bring her along about ten o’clock.’

‘So it’s fait accompli. Alright John, I’ll try to be kind to her, especially as Jeremy helped me out of a hole over the review, but I am not going to find it easy.’

‘Well if that’s the way you want to look at it, but he is not the patient.’

She could not remember when John had been so adamant. Over dinner she was pretty cool, inwardly seething that he had done this to her, but at the same time realising he had no other option, except to leave Mary in that outlandish place they rented from one of the African chiefs, and if anything happened to her she could see it would reflect badly on him.

During the night, sleep eluded her as all sorts of things ran through her mind. For the first time it occurred to her that she was in fact a bit jealous of Mary, who seemed to have so many talents in all sorts of directions. That dance for instance she had done at the review, a lovely

little Charleston number with Kathleen, the pair of them enjoying themselves so hugely, and she must have backed up Jeremy with all the rehearsals so that the thing had gone off so smoothly with lots of congratulations all round.

At the end Jeremy had been very sweet and had handed the accolade to her for having thought up the thing in the first place, which had caused George Fraser to actually cross the floor of the club to give her a big kiss. (He had turned up in his kilt to sing in a rather good baritone 'On ye bonny bonny banks of Loch Lomond').

Mary had then set up the play readings and had quite clearly left them out.

However, what really stuck in her gullet was the night of the dinner up at the palace. Besides the four of them there had been Freddie Kalahandra, that young upstart as she always thought of him, even though Winifred Fraser had been at pains to point out that he had been bright enough to have gone to a good British University, and then her chagrin to find that he was seated beside her at the meal and low and behold, Mary on his other side. While she had found it difficult to converse with him, Mary was chatting away as though she had known him all her life.

At one point the conversation had got around to the use of local native herbal medicines and Western scientific drugs and methods. Mary and John had a good ding-dong across the table about that, with Mary stating her case on nutrition and health as well. This had really interested the ruler and his regal lady. She heard afterwards that Mary had been asked to teach the lady more English.

Another African, the native judge was also there. Angela had to admit he was extraordinarily handsome with his very straight aquiline nose. Immensely tall, he carried his height with great demeanour. He seemed to be very interested in Mary though, could not seem to take his eyes off her, especially when Mary started to ask about the sacred drums.

'I would very much like to see the clan drums if that is possible,' she had asked.

The ruler and judge exchanged glances. There was a silence. She saw Jeremy glowering at Mary as though she had put both feet in, and then surprisingly the ruler had said, 'They are rarely seen by anybody, they are kept out of sight, but I will think about it.'

Mary had answered graciously and smiled quite naturally at him.

Kalahandra had said, 'My goodness, you're privileged. Even I have not seen them, and they are never seen by women.'

After which the judge had eyed her up even more closely.

Tossing around in the bed in her discomfort she felt completely fed-up with this up country station. It was true John had a lot of responsibility being the only doctor for miles around, but surely it was time he was on the move, destined for bigger things. Their next one must be Kampala, she could not bear the thought of another up country posting, and it was beginning to dawn on her that their days were numbered, so how much longer had they got left in the colonial service, what with the Africans wanting more power to themselves. How she hated politics, and she bet it would be some years before they could get an African doctor to work in such a god-forsaken place. They always wanted to stay in the civilised centre she mused.

She had been lying naked under the sheet. John half woke and flung his arm across her and then woke completely. He started to fondle her, obviously wanting to make love, but she could not respond and turned her back on him. He did not persist and before long he was asleep again while she lay feeling mean, until she finally fell asleep just before dawn.

Chapter Twenty-seven

Mary swung her legs over the side of her bed, stood up and nearly fainted. Sitting down on the edge of it she broke into a sweat and felt she was about to vomit. Her head was hurting abominably and she realised all was not well. Trying to stand again in order to get to the bathroom her progress was impeded by aching limbs. Creeping back to bed she flopped onto the pillows and let out a groan.

Jeremy stirred beside her and as soon as he was awake enough she told him how awful she felt.

'I really think I am quite ill,' she said.

He sat up and looked at her, 'I am not surprised you're all flushed,' he said.

'Maybe I've got a temperature,' she said.

'Well, take it then.'

'Could you find the thermometer? I think it's in the bathroom. I might faint if I try to get up again.'

As he put it in her mouth he looked quite concerned. 'What do you think is the matter?' he asked.

'Don't talk to me while I have the thing in my mouth,' she mumbled.

It registered 103 degrees.

'Oh no wonder I feel awful,' she moaned.

'I am going to get John as soon as we've had breakfast,' he told her.

'No breakfast, thank you, and don't bother John, he's got enough to do. It's probably flu, but I would like you to call up to the mission and tell them that I won't be coming today. It's my day up there.'

'Well that's not important Mary. None of your do-gooding today. You must stay in bed and I shall still call John because you do look awful.'

'Thanks very much. I feel awful too.'

When he had gone to his breakfast she lay there wondering when he had last been so solicitous.

Mid-morning, John appeared. He examined her and said he was mystified. Maybe she was right, maybe it was a sort of flu.

'So long as it's not polio, that's the one thing I really wouldn't like.'

‘Mm, I am worried about leaving you here,’ he said, ‘I can’t take you into the hospital because as you know it’s for Africans only. I think the best bet is to take you back to my house.’

‘Your house! Oh I couldn’t do that. It wouldn’t be fair on Angela.’

‘She is not the doctor. I am the doctor around here. I make the decisions.’

‘Jeremy and Moses can look after me.’

‘Moses can make you lots of nice orange or lime drinks, but I don’t think Jeremy will be an ideal nurse.’

Did she detect a spot of sarcasm there?

‘Anyway, stay where you are. I’ll come back tea time and take a rain check on you.’

He patted her on the hand and said, ‘See you later then. Be a good girl and stay in bed.’

She tried to read during the day but kept falling asleep. Moses appeared periodically with her drinks and apart from going to the mission, Jeremy stayed around the house, even though he had intended to do some work down in the boma office with Freddie.

John came back as he had said and found her fever even higher, and said that he was going to arrange for her to go next morning into one of their spare rooms at his house.

‘I don’t really want to come,’ Mary said.

‘Now then Mary you know Angela was a nurse. She doesn’t have to do anything physically for you if you don’t want, but I need to keep a weather eye on you, since you are mystifying me.’

By this time she was feeling so ill, she didn’t have the energy to argue.

Next day she got out of bed to pack but soon got back in again. Jeremy said John was going to collect her in his Peugeot, as she could stretch out on the back seat and be more comfortable than in the Land Rover.

At the Fairbanks house, Angela came to the car to help her in.

John said, ‘I’ve got to get back to the hospital now; I’ve got a clinic in half an hour. Lots of fluids for her and aspirin every four hours. I took blood from her yesterday but I don’t think it’s malaria,’ he said to Angela. ‘Don’t run away,’ he shot to Mary as he went through the door.

Angela said, ‘I’ll leave you to rest after your journey then. I’ve put some magazines on the side table. They’re all a bit out of date, but

good for a bit of light reading,' and she left too.

Mary looked around the room she'd been given. It was their guest room, very sparsely furnished but Angela had managed to find some pretty flowered material at Aziz's duka for the curtains.

She lay there with mixed feelings. Glad someone was in control of her but also embarrassed to be in Angela's establishment, knowing that they were not the best of friends. She had told Angela she would not want any lunch as she was well plied with lots of wonderful icy cold drinks. As the day wore on she began to relax a bit. After all there was not anything she could do about her plight except wait and see what might be her diagnosis.

Angela popped in periodically but did not disturb her when she saw she was in a half sleep state. Then Jeremy came in the late afternoon and Angela invited him to stay for supper, so he went off to finish some work saying he would return about seven, and later to her surprise, Hugh turned up.

Angela ushered him in, and he hovered by her bedside looking very distraught.

'What are you doing here,' asked Mary rather foolishly.

'News travels quickly around this place, you should know that. Actually I met Jeremy just now down by the dukas and he told me how worried he is about you.'

'Now you have two of them worrying about you,' said Angela, and left the room.

'You had better not kiss me,' Mary said. 'I might have some really lethal disease, although I think it is flu.'

'Did you know you are going a sort of yellow colour?' he asked.

'No. Am I?'

'Yes,' peering closely at her, 'and your eyes are yellow too, the whites that is.'

'Trust you to notice anything first. Suppose it's because you are a vet.'

'Well yes, except . . .'

'Except I am not a cow, or a sheep or a goat.' Her sense of humour surfacing for the first time in days.

'Never said you were,' he smiled at her, 'but you are not a very pretty colour, it clashes with your hair.'

John had come home and entered the room.

‘Oh hello,’ he said to Hugh curtly and to her, ‘How is the patient then?’

‘I think I am about the same,’ she said, ‘although Hugh says I am changing colour.’

‘By jove you’re right,’ he said to Hugh, ‘she’s jaundiced. Have you had a pee lately,’ he asked her.

‘Not lately because I am sweating so.’

‘Well, do you think you could do one now, and don’t flush the pan.’

They helped her to the toilet and she looked into the pan to find her urine looking like turgid tea. Back in bed she said, ‘Well there you are, green pee for you.’

John returned to her bedside, ‘I reckon I’ve got what it is, you have a dose of hepatitis.’

‘Oh lord, how long will it last then?’

‘A few weeks. Anyway, you’re here now so you’d better stay, because it can make you feel very ill.’

‘I know that already,’ she said, ‘I am certainly not feeling my usual energetic self.’

‘It means no alcohol for you for at least six months,’ said Hugh.

‘Who is the doctor round here,’ laughed John, ‘yes I am afraid he’s right, no alcohol or you’ll damage your liver.’

‘Well what a prospect,’ she said, ‘anyway at least it’s not polio.’

‘I could tell that worried you,’ said John. ‘Oh well I had better go and break the news to Angela.’

‘If she wants to send me home, I’ll understand.’

‘I am not letting you go for a few days,’ he said firmly and left the room.

‘Poor old you,’ said Hugh, ‘I am sorry.’

‘Well could be worse, I suppose,’ and she tried to smile.

He took her hand. Angela walked in with Jeremy, ‘So you’ve been diagnosed,’ he said.

‘Yes, hepatitis would you believe it.’

‘I had better be off,’ said Hugh. ‘See you tomorrow,’ relinquishing her hand.

‘John wants you to stay here for a few more days,’ said Angela.

‘I am sorry,’ said Mary, ‘is this going to be a burden?’

‘Now you’re here already and quite ill so you had better stay put.’

‘It’s really good of you Angela,’ said Jeremy, and gave her a sudden

kiss. She left, looking a shade embarrassed.

'This really is awkward,' said Mary, 'you know she really doesn't like me.'

John called Jeremy through for a sundowner and said that he was sorry Mary was going to live without those for a while.

Over the next few days she began to improve. Not many people visited, only Hugh daily and Jeremy twice a day. Maureen popped in one day and surveyed her from the doorway, bringing flowers and goodies to eat.

'Shame we can't crack some champagne when you're better,' she teased.

Angela spent quite a long time sitting and chatting to her and then when Mary felt able she got her up and on to the terrace, where again they chatted. It soon began to dawn on Mary that Angela was very unhappy and needed someone to talk to. It all started when Angela said, 'Hugh is very deeply in love with you, isn't he?'

'Is it that obvious?'

'Yes it is, poor chap. What are you going to do about it?

'That I really don't know. I am after all married to Jeremy.''

'But he doesn't love you quite so much,' observed Angela.

Recovering her surprise but ignoring the remark Mary said, 'There really is nothing I can do about it, after all Hugh is a practicing catholic.'

'Oh the troubles of the world,' said Angela, 'and here I am with a really good marriage. I can't see us coming unstuck, but I am desperate to get out of this bloody country. You've no idea how much I miss the children.' She looked on the verge of tears.

'But you would send them to boarding school even if you were at home, wouldn't you,' observed Mary.

'Yes of course, but I would be on hand, and able to go to sports days, prize-givings and all that sort of thing. It would be so much better for them.'

'I can see that it's a dilemma for families,' said Mary, 'the question must always be, do you go with your husband or stay behind with the kids.'

'You're lucky,' said Angela, 'in not having any.'

Then at Mary's look of despair she said, 'Oh Mary I am so sorry, I quite forgot. That must have been awful for you.'

Mary could not believe she was seeing this other side of Angela. What had happened to make all this difference? She could still detect the arch snob in her, but underneath was she really the superior confident person she had always imagined her.

'You know we are due for a move,' Angela informed her.

'No I didn't know. Well since you are not over fond of this place, you must be looking forward to it.'

'Only if it's going to be Kampala. I don't think I could possibly stand another upcountry station, but John says it's possibly going to be Gulu or Arua right up in the north.'

'Well maybe you have not much longer to run anyway, with Africanisation to the forefront.'

Mary thought this would mollify Angela, but no, it seemed to get her even more steamed up.

'That's no comfort. I don't think the country is anyway near ready for that,' she said tersely.

'Well ready or not, it's coming,' Mary said. 'After all it's inevitable.'

'Yes yes, I know. And John says so too, although he is really worried that there are not enough African doctors to go round yet. You know they hate working up country, don't you.'

'No I didn't know. Well a bit like you,' said Mary laughing and to her relief Angela joined in.

'It's. . . it's, I don't really know how to put it,' Angela went on 'the deprivation, I suppose.'

'Deprivation, what do you mean?'

'Well, take meat for instance. The only sort you can get locally is that awful stuff down in the market where I really hate going. It's so tough, it is inedible.'

'Yes it is,' Mary brightened, 'Don't you know how to tenderise it?'

'You can't,' Angela persisted.

'Yes, you can, rub it with pawpaw, wrap it in a muslin to keep the flies off and hang it up over night.'

'Doesn't it go off?'

'It might be a bit smelly next day, but then you can wash it in vinegar.'

'That's extraordinary, I would never have thought of that.'

'I must confess,' said Mary, 'that it didn't come within the orbit of my nutritional training.'

‘No I bet it didn’t,’ and again they were laughing together.

‘Will you write to me?’ said Angela, now very serious, ‘if we leave first. Or the other way around. We really must keep in touch.’

Mary smiled, ‘Of course, Angela, and thank you so much for looking after me so well.’

Chapter Twenty-two

From the time Mary told Moses that they were going back to England for good, he went into a decline, moving morosely around the house, rarely smiling, rarely talking. Then one morning he said, 'Memsab, I want take you my home shamba. My brother wish give small party. He thank you.'

Mystified she said, 'To thank us? What for?'

'Because money I earn go him. He be teacher now.'

She was shocked, 'Goodness me, are you telling me Moses, that you've not been able to keep the money you've earned for yourself?'

'No. Money went brother, he better at school. So I pay.'

'But that's not fair,' she expostulated.

Joseph, who could hear this conversation going on through the open door, appeared and said, 'Memsab, it is quite common in this Country that one member pays for another's education if the parents can't afford it.'

'Oh I see, I didn't know that. All the same, it's a bit hard on Moses.'

'If you go to the party, you will see he's a hero,' he said, disappearing again to return to his work, while Moses stood smiling rather foolishly.

The day dawned for what Joseph kept referring to as 'this special occasion' and parking the car on a narrow track they followed the path to the thatched rondarvel sitting among plenty of matoke trees. As soon as the family heard their approach, they appeared on the path to greet them; Moses father, mother, married brother with wife and three children, with his brother William, the now fully-fledged teacher.

He was dressed smartly in long trousers and a white open neck shirt in contrast with father and brother-in-law, who were both wearing the traditional long white kansu topped by dark jackets. The two women were prettily dressed in long patterned square necked dresses with puffed sleeves, a design introduced by early missionaries. Shyness seemed to have overcome his mother as she shook hands with Mary while William oozed with confidence.

The day being bright and sunny was a good omen for the party, for by virtue of its size it had to take place outside, stools being placed in both

the shade and the sun. Mary was ushered to sit on one under a large floppy banana leaf and Moses was given orders to immediately dispense beer.

'I am glad it's not waragi,' said Jeremy causing a laugh, at which Joseph said, 'They wouldn't offer that to Europeans at such a special occasion.'

'No,' said William, 'we drink beer anyway.'

Mary was tempted to say, 'keeping up with the Jones's' but thought better of it. Anyway they might not get the joke.

She tried to engage the children who stood around looking quizzically at the strangers, and then they left to go off and play until the food was ready. The conversation did not flow very easily till Mary told the parents what a good houseboy Moses had become, while he sat there with his usual big grin and being his more amiable self.

'Why don't you take him to England then?' said William.

So surprised was she by this suggestion, that she turned to Jeremy and with great presence of mind he said, 'We would need to be very rich to do that, and how would Moses cope with the very cold winters that happen in England.' This caused a lengthy discussion about snow, what it was, and what it looked like and more to the point, what it felt like.

After which William said, 'Never mind, my parents would miss him too much. He is the one who will probably return to the shamba to look after them in their old age.'

At which Mary thought, poor Moses he always seems to get the thin end.

It was time to eat. His mother rose to bring the food with the help of her daughter-in-law. It was the usual fair of steamed matoke with a good groundnut sauce. From the big bowl it was served into smaller ones and they all ate with their fingers. At first Jeremy was being as clumsy as Hugh had been the day he and Mary had eaten with another family. It brought it back to her again in a rush, that fateful day when she had blurted out her unhappiness and the memory of his passionate kiss. She had never been kissed quite like that at any one time, but maybe the thrill had been the fact that it was illicit. The very thought of it almost stopped her eating and she knew she must persevere as this was, as Joseph said, such a special occasion. All the same she did not feel like instructing Jeremy on the best way of getting the sloppy

groundnut sauce to his mouth without dropping it all down his shirt front, and she busied herself trying to finish her own portion.

Nobody spoke during the meal, except Moses who was keen to know if they liked his mother's cooking.

'Very good,' said Mary, 'the best I've had.'

'I've not had matoke before,' confessed Jeremy, 'but I am enjoying it especially the sauce,' as he mopped up some he had dropped.

'Have some more,' said his father, and all except Mary, had second helpings.

Much to their surprise the meal was finished with very thin coffee. They grew a few trees as a cash crop and kept a few beans back for themselves. It tasted atrocious and Mary could not think how they made it, she thought they had not roasted the beans properly.

Now came the big moment. Time for speeches, which all took twice as long as some had to be interpreted by Joseph. First there was the story of William's struggle to make it through school for lack of money, and then the teacher training college and how proud they all felt of him for bringing such honour to the family.

Then the moment for Moses, who was singled out by their father for having so honourably helped his brother instead of drinking away his wages. Mary felt proud of him while all this was being said and glancing at Jeremy she could see he too had been touched by the boy's sacrifice and they both clapped heartily at the end of it all.

Through all this formality the father had remained serious, not a smile touched his lips whereas their mother sat wreathed in smiles while fidgeting with a handkerchief in her lap and occasionally dabbing her eyes with it.

It was rounded off with a photo call. Jeremy brought out his camera and they formed themselves into a rigidly posed group; parents sitting in front with the others lined up behind all with stern faces just like a Victorian studio photograph. Mary tried to make them smile, but Joseph whispered to her that it was too serious a moment for this special occasion and so she gave up. Then there was change and change about, including Moses pressing the shutter so that both Bradshaws could be seen to be with them. Both managing not to smile.

Back at their own shamba they were surprised to find Hugh waiting outside their house.

'This is the second time I have been along today,' he said. 'I've got

some amazing news to tell you.' And they were hardly out of the car before he burst out with it.

'I have just been posted to Entebbe,' he said.

'Good lord, do you mean immediately?' said Mary.

'No, no; after I return from leave, I think, unless they drag me there before.'

'Were you expecting to be moved?' asked Jeremy.

'No I wasn't, and especially to HQ. Of course it is a leg up, but I thought I would be here for ages yet.'

'Well I'm blowed. Congratulations then,' said Jeremy extending his hand.

'Better come in and have a drink,' said Mary.

With drink in hand he said, 'Trouble is, I don't think I want to go. I like it up here in this rural backwater. I am settled in and it suits me very well.'

'Oh go on,' said Mary, 'a change would be good for you as well as going up the ladder, of course.'

'But I am not keen about the ladder. I just want to get on with the job in hand, on the ground so to speak. It's not as if I am in admin.'

'Just as well you're not,' said Jeremy, 'as far as I can see they are the first to go. The younger ones certainly won't have much time to get further in their career. In fact, I'm surprised the brighter of them bother to join the service these days. They must know that it will all end soon.'

'Ah well, a bit of adventure before they settle down in dear old Blighty, I expect,' mused Hugh.

'It seems to be general musical chairs at the moment' said Mary, 'Did I tell you I met Jack Hendry down at the duiker yesterday and he told me he has just been posted to Guru, and he is going to marry Hillary now he has got his divorce through so she will be going with him.'

Hugh looked at her and said, 'I guess we all expected that. They make a good couple.' Mary averted her gaze.

Jeremy said, 'Well no one will be replacing us.'

'No, you're not replaceable,' said Hugh looking straight at Mary again.

'When are you due for leave precisely?' asked Jeremy.

'In two months time.'

‘We’ll see you in England then,’ said Mary.

‘Yes we must visit each other,’ said Hugh, ‘anyway I ought to go and do some stuff in the office right now. It’s just that I wanted you to be the first to know.’

‘You’ll get used to the idea,’ said Mary when he departed.

It was party time all round. A joint affair at the club for Jack and Hillary, the Penshursts from the bank who were not leaving but were going on leave and the Bradshaws thrown in for good measure.

‘I hope you don’t mind,’ said Angela. ‘Because you are not actually Boma but members of the Club anyway.’

‘Oh all very jolly,’ said Mary. ‘The more the merrier,’ wishing she could avoid it altogether. Then she had a sudden thought. ‘Angela do you think we could take some records down and do some Scottish dancing?’ If she was leaving the place and Africa forever she might as well make a fling of it. Dancing was such a release.

Angela was doubtful, at first then said, ‘I’ll ask Frazer, see what he thinks.’

‘He’s bound to say yes, he’s my partner, you knew we lead.’

‘Alright then, I’ll organise it before the meal and we’ll eat late. I’m doing a curry as I know you like that.’

‘Wonderful. Oh it’s not going to be so bad after all.’

They had just danced the Gay Gordons and were sitting out to get their breath back.

Mary said, ‘I’m sorry I never got to see the sacred drums.’

‘No, women are not meant to set eyes on those things. Even I’ve not seen them,’ said George.

‘What will happen to the four rulers then, come Uhuru?’

‘The British have given a promise that the four Kingdoms will be acknowledged, and since the Uganda National Congress Party have won the elections it should be alright.’

‘But I was under the impression,’ said Mary ‘that when the Kabaka of Buganda got back from exile in 1955 he was intent on being top dog.’

‘Well you know the Baganda, that’s where they all want to be,’ he laughed.

‘You are having some trouble with the chiefs aren’t you?’ she went on.

‘Now Mary,’ looking her squarely in the eye, ‘these thorny questions

I try to deal with by ignoring them.'

'Ah typically British,' she laughed, but she realised it was her cue to stop.

'So,' she said, 'it's goodbye Millionaires' Row, the Far Side and Tin Pan Alley, but a sad goodbye to this wonderful countryside. I shall miss the women at the mission and you as my dancing partner.'

He took her hand and kissed it. 'I am going to miss you too,' he said.

She felt that half the room had seen and blushed to the roots of her hair.

Driving back to the house she said, 'Well at least I won't have to listen to those golf scores anymore.'

The last party came out of the blue. Jack Hendry had conveyed a message to the Bradshaws while at the boma thrash. It appeared that Costa was very keen to especially say goodbye to Mary, but was uncertain that Jeremy would want to accept since they had not been to eat with him after the unfortunate occasion when Jeremy had berated her and whisked her away in a hurry.

Jeremy said well they had not been asked again.

'Well I am inviting you now on his behalf, as instructed,' said Jack. 'So what shall I tell the old fellow?'

'Oh come on,' said Mary, 'why not. We are nearly out of here and I do want to sample his excellent cooking.'

As it turned out there was only Jack and Hillary, with Hugh and themselves sitting in Costa's ramshackle bungalow and the evening proceeded on a sombre note. Trying to needle Costa to liven things up a bit Hugh said, 'Why don't you invite Freddie Kalahandra to your dos?'

'What! You crazy. Me and admin don't tackle.'

'Not because he is black by any chance, is it?' asked Jack.

'You cheeky man,' was all Costa retorted.

By now Costa had more or less settled his children, but was reluctant to talk about them. And no-one had the temerity to mention Theresa who all knew was away in Kampala earning a precarious living on the streets.

He was more interested in telling them about a flare up at the cotton ginneries, most of which were operated by Asians using African labour, and the African labour force had revolted.

'Right now the Agriculture and Cooperative Offices are trying to calm it down,' he said.

‘There will be plenty of that sort of thing arising as we get nearer Uhuru,’ said Hugh.

‘Yes what’s come across to me,’ said Jeremy, ‘is that there is no love lost between them. The middle men are likely to be pushed out, you can see it coming, can’t you?’

Jack chipped in, ‘Beats me how you manage, Costa, with your bits of business here and there.’

‘Me,’ he grinned, ‘am beautiful white man.’

It was the only wry moment of the evening.

Chapter Twenty-nine

Mary sat with her elbows on the kitchen table, head in hand. Two letters lay open before her which she had already read. Picking up one to read again she put it down in favour of the other. It was from Hugh, addressed to them both. The third they had received from him since they have come to Cambridge six weeks earlier, always meticulously addressed to Dr and Mrs Bradshaw.

This one was different however, for it was to tell them of his leave dates and inviting them to stay with him at his parents' home in Yorkshire. His parents would like to meet them, he said, as they had heard so much of their friendship.

Mary was not at all sure how she felt about this. She for her part had already invited him to Cambridge and quite expected him to come, but he had not yet agreed and now here was this invitation out of the blue. Well she would have to wait and see what Jeremy thought about it. There was even a sort of joke in the letter to lure Jeremy, saying he might like to come and inspect the grass his father's sheep munched every day.

She then read the second letter again. This too had some surprising news in it. Kathleen had written regularly since Mary's return to England as they both missed each other, and now the big news was that Kathleen was pregnant, expecting a baby at last. Mary knew they had tried for a very long time and had more or less given up hope, so she felt particularly pleased for Kathleen and at the same time jealous. It brought back the intense loss of her own miscarriage. However, embedded in the letter was the usual message, Hugh sends his love and talks of you incessantly.

She got up from the table to do the washing up and looked out of the window onto the cold January day. It had snowed overnight. The carpet of white lay picturesquely along branches of bare trees as well as covering ground and rooftops. She had forgotten how beautiful snow could be and reached for her paints.

Their return to England had been on a dull drizzly day, and on touching down at Heathrow she had felt numbed by the weather, numbed at leaving Africa, numbed at leaving Hugh and most of all

wondering why she was making this journey with Jeremy. Although he seemed to take it for granted that she was there.

Then after a few days of thin October sunshine, she had caught the colour of the changing leaves on the trees. And despite of the blousy bright colours of the flora of Uganda, she could not think of anything of such intense copper and she even rode her bicycle out to a beauty spot called Wandlebury which was covered in beech trees all laden with variations of this glorious colour, using up a whole role of her film to capture it. It was at this point she resolved to take up painting and found a local evening class. She would have preferred a daytime one but the Dunn Nutrition Unit was interested in her bits of research in Uganda and now she was busy writing this up and there was just a chance she might land a job there.

Jeremy was busy writing up too. He mostly went into the department but took up the spare bedroom littering the floor with his papers, which always caused a row when a parent or friend wanted to visit. He seemed to like the idea when told of going up to Yorkshire in spite of it being winter.

Mary wrote to Hugh thanking him for the invitation and pointing out they had no transport so could he give them some idea how to get to his parents from the station. A prompt reply told them he would drive down to Cambridge to collect them and not to worry if it was snowing as he was used to driving in inclement weather, having been raised in the north.

Mary waited for his arrival in some trepidation. How were they going to feel about each other after this gap? And she would have to tell him that she had looked at Catholicism and found it not to her taste. There were just too many things she could not take on board. In fact, all this foray into 'the true religion' as Hugh insisted on calling it made her wonder if she was indeed a Christian at all. The more she got out her paints to paint nature the more she veered away from religion. She did not however impart this to Jeremy and she imagined he would not be interested. Their relationship was such now that their conversations revolved more or less around work.

The day dawned for Hugh's arrival. With great care Mary made preparations for the evening meal and Jeremy even brought home a good wine to accompany it.

Hugh drew up outside their bottom floor flat in an old MG and Mary

rushed out to meet him. They stood looking at each other for a few seconds and then fell into a long loving hug. Jeremy appeared in the doorway and said, 'Good to see you Hugh, but you haven't brought us any of that African sunshine.'

'Don't you appreciate varied seasons,' Hugh chafed.

'Like the car,' said Jeremy looking at it admiringly, 'can't hire that sort of thing, can you?' running his hand lovingly over it.

'No, belongs to the family. Usually sits in the garage, so I thought I would give it a run.'

They all moved inside and Mary showed him to the spare bedroom which was very small. Hovering in the doorway she said, 'It's been specially tidied up for you, it is usually scattered with Jeremy's papers.'

'Thank you, it looks very nice' he said.

Over dinner they caught up on boma news and who was now stationed where and doing what.

'The Fairbanks just have a posting to Kampala,' he said.

'Oh my, that will please Angela,' said Mary. 'She was terrified they would have another posting up country.'

'What she doesn't realise though,' Hugh said, 'is that she is going to be more in the thick of things as far as Africanisation goes. The Baganda are really going for it now. Pinstripe suits are the fashion of the day for those wanting to get ahead. Although there are one or two still in their Kanzus to make the point you can be educated and still dress native.'

'I think it's stupid to ape Europeans,' said Mary 'but a Kanzu always looks to me like a white nightdress, it isn't the most attractive wear for a man. Boring really. Pity they don't dress more like West Africans.'

'But those look like embroidered pyjamas,' laughed Jeremy.

Hugh was to stay only three days and then they would set off for the North. The snow was near slush in the South but as they drove farther and farther north it thickened and in Yorkshire the snowplough had been out. It did not seem to perturb Hugh.

As they drove into the County he said, 'The parents are really looking forward to meeting you and talking Africa. In fact father would talk nothing else if you let him. He'll love you, Mary since I told him how much you were into it all, teaching up at the Mission and so on.'

'Oh the Mission. I've been thinking of that quite a bit since I've been

back.'

'Have you?' said Jeremy 'Not thinking of joining them, are you?' he quipped with a hearty laugh.

But just then Hugh turned off the road into a tree lined driveway and said, 'Here we are,' and suddenly a large red bricked mansion loomed out of the white.

'Is this your home?' Mary asked in some surprise.

'Yes, it's called Maplestead Hall, but it is only a farmhouse really,' said Hugh.

'Mighty big farmhouse,' said Jeremy, who was also taken aback by its size. But since the parklands and gardens were covered in snow it was difficult to judge how large the grounds were.

'Was it inherited, or did your parents buy it?' asked Mary.

'Oh Dad inherited it.'

'Lucky man,' said Jeremy, 'so will it be yours one day?'

'Possibly,' said Hugh, 'if I want it.'

Mary looked from the house to Hugh and back again. She could not quite believe this. He had never given an inkling of his background, except that she knew his parents had been in Kenya at the time of Mau Mau.

His parents stood in the doorway to greet them and a servant came to lift their cases out.

'It's alright Mandy, I'll deal with those. You go and make us some tea.'

As they entered the hall they were confronted by a sweeping staircase with large oil portraits and heads of various African buck attached to the walls, and juxtaposed, over a large open fireplace hung a huge crucifix. Mary stared at the hanging Jesus and then back to Hugh. He met her gaze then introduced his parents.

His mother said, 'Tea first then darling, or would your friends like to go to their room,' smiling at Mary.

'Tea?' asked Hugh.'Yes let's have tea.'

Really Hugh had certainly been reticent about his background. Such an unassuming person, she really had not twigged it at all. Then Mandy appeared and said in a Yorkshire accent, 'Tea is served me lady.'

At which Hugh's mother said, 'Oh bring it through Mandy, it is much warmer here.'

‘As you wish, me lady,’ and duly brought it into the drawing room.

Mary wondered if she was hearing right. It seemed that Hugh’s parents were titled to be addressed like that.

The drawing room was cosy with an open fire, and as they drank the tea she warmed to his parents who seemed fairly ordinary people. They discussed the journey up and the weather forecast, which said there was, even more snow on the way. Mary thought well one could be holed up in a far worse place than this although it seemed quite isolated.

Over dinner the conversation inevitably was on Africa. Hugh’s father was adamant he could not live under African rule. Hugh on the other hand said he did not mind the idea one bit so long as they did not make a hash of it.

‘But I feel optimistic about Uganda,’ he said, ‘as a Protectorate it is not going to have such a rocky passage as Rhodesia.’

‘That may be so but with all those kings, what are they going to do with the four of them and the Kabaka wanting to be top dog?’ said his father.

‘Well it’s all in the melting pot at present,’ said Hugh.

‘I think the British need to sort this out as soon as possible,’ his father went on, ‘did you get involved with the local politics,’ he asked Jeremy.

‘No I didn’t, but Mary would have liked to. She is quite a political animal, and I was a bit worried she might ruin my fieldwork.’

‘Oh come on,’ said Hugh jumping to her defence, ‘she wasn’t that involved.’

‘No, just that she would have liked to have been.’

‘It was only that I liked to know what makes a place tick,’ Mary said.

‘We kept well out of such things, it was all social in my day,’ said Lady Dickinson.

‘Yes you had all that wonderful entertaining to do,’ her husband smiled at her.

‘A different world,’ she said letting out a little sigh.

‘But you’re happy to be back in dear old Blighty,’ Hugh chafed his mother.

‘It’s certainly more serene,’ she admitted.

‘Well Kenya wasn’t very nice in your days, was it?’ ventured Jeremy.

‘No, anything but. However, we survived, although some of our friends did not. It was the dreadful Mau Mau time.’

‘I am sorry,’ he said.

Next day the sun shone. It lit up the land with a clean sweep over the pastures and a walk was suggested. Hugh’s father decided to take Jeremy off to see his special Jacob sheep and Hugh with his mother and Mary set off for a brisk walk, when suddenly Lady Dickinson remembered she had to make some phone calls about a New Year Catholic bazaar she had to open, which left Hugh and Mary walking alone.

At first they set off in silence, Mary feeling quite overpowered by the vastness of the terrain enfolded in whiteness. The strange shapes of hills covered with icing, so different from the flatlands of Cambridgeshire. They protruded up in the sharp blue sky, not like Fenland where the sky came down to meet the ground.

Then Hugh said, ‘You’re looking lovely, even in that funny hat.’

‘It’s a very nice warm hat,’ she retorted, ‘and anyway I don’t feel very lovely.’

He said, ‘Why is that?’

‘Life is a bit bleak.’

‘I wish it could be different for us,’ he said, then ‘what were you about to say about missionaries when we arrived home?’

‘Oh that. Yes well I’ve been having second thoughts about them. Quite frankly I am a bit confused. Half of me admires them for what they are doing and the other half says they have no business being there and interrupting other people’s way of living. It’s really impertinent to push Christianity on them when they’ve done without quite well for years.’

Hugh appeared somewhat stunned by this and said, ‘I see. Well I think it is healthy to question things. But think what it brought. Hospitals, schools, all sorts of things to benefit them. In fact, civilised them.’

‘Don’t know about that,’ she argued, ‘they probably thought they were civilised in their own manner before we arrived.’

Hugh was silent again, and then stopped and turned to face her saying, ‘Well as I see it, once they made contact with the whites, they got to go forward, there is no going back.’

‘Now that’s assuming our superiority Hugh.’

‘Yes of course, because they now have to come into the 20th century. Anyway you contributed. You were up at the mission doing your bit.’

‘Yes I know. Now I wonder if I was doing the right thing.’

‘You shouldn’t have doubts.’

He took her hand and they walked on.

She said, ‘I do have doubts. I think some of it comes from looking at Catholicism as you suggested and now I have doubts all round.’

‘Really. Well tell me,’ he squeezed her hand.

It was awful. She started to cry. ‘Oh Hugh there is no way I can take it on board. I am just a very watered down Christian. Even if I am one at all.’

He stopped and looked at her again. ‘Don’t get all worked up about it,’ he said, ‘take it easy. It’s just that it’s good to have something to hang on to and I thought I could help.’

‘Well I am sorry Hugh but you can’t convert me.’

‘May be,’ he said, ‘there is some other salvation for you.’

‘Well it’s not exactly looming over the horizon.’

‘We must be patient,’ he said.

A gust of wind blew some snow off the dry stone wall they were following.

‘Perhaps we ought to be getting back,’ he said. ‘Are you cold?’

‘No not really, but I would like to walk a bit faster to get the circulation going.’

‘And work up an appetite for lunch as well,’ he laughed.

Chapter Thirty

The snow in Cambridge melted to reveal the swards in College courts, and down the avenues to the Backs the snowdrops and aconites poked their heads tenderly towards the weak February sun. But still the raw easterly wind swept across from Siberia, and ice on the brooks where skaters had made sport through January had not quite melted away.

Jeremy worked hard over the winter months, intent on getting his fieldwork written up as soon as possible. He was angling for a fellowship in one of the colleges but not holding out much hope as the competition for such posts was fierce. As much as he enjoyed fieldwork, as he was a researcher by nature, he knew it was doubtful he would get yet more post doctoral money to continue. So his thoughts had turned to looking elsewhere when over the grapevine he heard a post would be coming up shortly at Makerere College back in Uganda.

The thought of returning bothered him neither one way nor the other he kept telling himself. If he could not find a niche within the Cambridge ivory tower then it did not make much difference where it was to be, and he could not afford to hang about much longer as money was getting short.

He was more concerned about his marriage, putting off discussion about it with Mary. He seriously thought she might have left him by now what with the affair with Anthea and one thing and another he could see it had sent her into the arms of Hugh, as far as he knew, but not into his bed as yet. Well, what the hell! He was at this moment having a nice little fling with a delicious brunette in the department, which cheered things along no end, and he was pretty sure Mary did not have an inkling.

She was far too caught up in her new job at the Dunn Nutrition Unit and her painting classes. She seemed to dash from one to the other and then home to cook a meal, by which time she was exhausted and went to bed. He did however detect there were days when she seemed depressed and others when she was elated, and he wondered if on those days she had received a secret letter from Hugh.

But since their visit north to Hugh's parents he was pretty sure the

relationship would not amount to much after all. He could see that Hugh's Catholicism got in the way, and nice as his parents were, he doubted that they would accept a divorcee for a daughter in law, though he had to admit they seemed to be quite captivated by her.

The spring unfolded, and the backs of Colleges were now smothered in gold and blues as first crocuses and later daffodils spread their glory. People were walking with lighter step, shedding their heavy winter clothing. Jeremy now yearned to belong, but still nothing transpired even though his head of department was backing him for entrance into one of the temples of learning, and now the advert for the Makerere post was being advertised.

He broached it with Mary one Sunday morning while they were having a pub lunch out in one of the villages. Kathleen was home on leave to have her baby and had motored up from Hampshire to see them. Philip was to take leave a couple of weeks before the birth date but Kathleen, being already thirty years old did not want to leave things that long. And she was dying to see Mary.

They sat in the old world pub where a fire was burning. Kathleen looked around at the tankards hanging above the bar and up at the beams and the horse brasses and said, 'This is what I miss out there. It's just not the same going down to the Club is it?'

'Not quite,' said Jeremy, 'ain't got the atmosphere.'

'On the other hand, we would be sitting outside all nice and warm,' said Mary.

'I get terribly torn,' Kathleen confessed.

Mary agreed saying, 'I think it's the seasons I miss most, and since I've been painting I've realised how gentle it all is by comparison with all those overblown blossoms and so on.'

'Would you go back?' Kathleen suddenly asked.

'Oh I don't know. I don't suppose it will happen anyway.'

'Funny you should ask that,' said Jeremy, 'a post has just come up at Makerere would you believe it. I could apply for it.'

Mary stared at him 'Oh! You didn't tell me anything about it.'

'Well, I've hardly had a chance. It's only just been advertised.'

'What's it for then?' asked Kathleen.

'A lectureship.'

'Really. So will you apply for it?'

'Don't know. I was really rather hoping for something here, but I

can't hold out for ever.'

'How would you feel about that?' Kathleen asked Mary.

'Goodness, I don't know. I really don't know. I've just got stuck into my job for one thing. However, Africa again! I must admit I would be happy to go back again, I suppose.'

'Well you've got friends there. You know Angela is now in Kampala; she would be right on your doorstep.'

'Yes I know. Funny isn't it that she and I are such friends now. She writes regularly you know. I am still really grateful to her that she took me in and nursed me through my hepatitis.'

'Oh she is alright really,' said Kathleen, 'just one of life's arch snobs. That's all.'

'Yes that side of her does get up my nose,' admitted Mary.

'You two are the limit,' said Jeremy, 'actually I think she is very nice.'

'Well you would,' said Kathleen, 'anyway she is happy in Kampala, thinks she's reached civilisation at last. Well, as much as she'll find in that bit of Africa.'

'I wonder what it is really like living there,' mused Jeremy.

'Pretty different in being up country, without a doubt,' said Mary 'especially now Uhuru is such a hot potato.'

'Mmm,' he said, 'but I guess it won't make all that difference to being an academic.'

'That's possibly so,' agreed Kathleen, 'on the other hand, one's whole lifestyle could change I suppose. Angela says Kampala is a bed of intrigue and it's best to keep out of politics.'

'You'd find that difficult, wouldn't you,' Jeremy accused Mary.

She went on the defensive, 'I expect I could keep my nose clean.'

'So what do you think you would do?' Kathleen asked him.

'I really don't quite know what to do,' he confessed.

'Well when is the last date you have to have the application in by?'

'April 30th.'

'Then why don't you apply?' she urged, 'And if you get it you can go, especially if nothing else has cropped up by then.'

'That's an idea, I suppose.'

'Yes, go on. These things are always in the lap of the gods,' she said with a mischievous smile.

Mary said nothing. He noticed she did not add her weight to this, so

where did that leave her? But he did not press the subject. After all, he realised they just played it along day by day.

Chapter Thirty-one

As the plane descended over Lake Victoria, the sheet of water the size of Ireland glistened in the sharp sunlight. Mary looked down and saw minute fishing boats, which grew larger as the plane lost height. Then she could make out houses built near the lake and could distinguish the well-proportioned ones lived in by the Colonial servants, for Entebbe was the headquarters for some. Other large buildings looked as though they might be offices and then farther off were the smaller houses of the Africans sitting in their own little islands of matoke groves.

She was glued to the window, hardly believing that she was back. A thrill seized her as she surveyed it all, for this was the first intimation that she was glad to be back.

Leaving Cambridge had been a wrench, chiefly from leaving her interesting job and she had begun to get into the rhythm of the seasons again, capturing them on her outdoor painting expeditions. But she knew as soon as she stepped out of the plane it would be unbearably hot and humid. Never mind, it was worth it, just to be here and no doubt she would get acclimatised quite quickly again as she regarded herself adaptable.

Then bump bump, they were down. As she stepped onto the tarmac it was a shock from the heat reflecting off it and she was stunned for a few minutes. The airport was tiny and as she crossed to the buildings with Jeremy she could see Angela waving frantically. It was good of her to come and collect them she thought and a little ironical that Angela might have even missed a coffee morning to do so.

She was less sure about Hugh, who after all now lived and worked in Entebbe, whether he would be there to meet them. As it turned out he was not.

Angela gave her a hug and a kiss and said immediately: 'Hugh sends his apologies and hopes to see you soon, but he had to go off urgently to some rinderpest scare somewhere or other.'

'Oh thanks,' said Mary feeling a wave of disappointment. Oh well duty called no doubt; after all he had always been conscientious.

They gathered up their luggage and piled it into Angela's large Peugeot and set off for the big city. Although it was familiar to her, Mary saw it all with freshness. The tribe was different here for a start and the Baganda were bent on building ugly concrete rectangular houses along the roadside, with here or there a mud hut of two. The road was surfaced so the fifteen miles into Kampala were quickly covered.

'Would you like to go straight to your allotted house or come to me for some lunch first? I've got some laid on if you would like that,' said Angela.

Mary looked at Jeremy. Would he want to go to the University department immediately? Before she could ask him he was saying, 'Lovely idea, lunch with you Angela, of course.'

'Good, expect you could do with a wash and brush up anyway. I hate that journey, don't you?'

'Actually it was not too bad,' said Jeremy, 'not many kids on the plane this time.'

'You're not very tolerant,' remarked Mary.

'Well I do like to kip on long journeys if possible.'

'Very sensible,' agreed Angela.

'I hear you are really enjoying Kampala,' said Mary.

'Oh yes, so different to up country. Lots of things going on. I am sure you'll love it too.'

'Well I am really a country girl,' laughed Mary.

'You'll soon get into the swing of things,' said Jeremy, 'but for God's sake keep out of politics.'

'Yes, it is all very sensitive just now,' Angela backed him, 'just try and enjoy yourself while there are plenty of whites still here, that's what I am doing. Of course for John it's different, working now at that huge hospital, but even he treads warily I can tell you.'

As they reached the town, it all seemed very busy. Sikhs were driving big lorries, Africans and Asians as well as whites dashing down the streets; some in unlikely jalopies, honking horns, letting everyone know they had got a car. Angela drove cautiously and turned up into Kololo hill. They climbed almost to the top and then into a concealed driveway.

'This is it,' she said proudly. 'We managed to get one of the best.'

'You would,' laughed Mary, and silently thought Angela had not

changed a bit.

It was nice though, to step out of the car onto a well-manicured lawn, pretty with marigolds edging it. Russet coloured bougainvillea hung off the house in garlands like Christmas chain decorations, and Mary realised this was indeed one of her favourite flowers.

The house was immense by the standard of the one the Fairbanks had occupied on the Boma and Mary said, 'My it's a palace.'

'You can come and live with me if they give you a rabbit hutch at Makerere,' offered Angela.

'I hope it's going to be more than a rabbit hutch,' said Jeremy.

'Well they are all pretty standard on Makerere hill,' said Angela, shrugging her shoulders and pulling a face.

'Well I expect we'll survive whatever it is,' said Mary.

Angela called the boy to bring lunch through as soon as it was ready and then plied them with a gin each.

'Welcome back,' she said raising her glass. 'I am really pleased you're here.'

Chapter Thirty-two

The dog's head lay on his knees, and he stroked it gently while he ruminated. Of course, he had only agreed to take it on because its very existence would remind him of Mary. Not that he needed reminding, for she was constantly in his mind. But then allowing her to persuade him to look after the ridgeback had been because he thought she would be in England while he was here in Uganda. And dogs got passed around, or put down, when people finally left, or were looked after by others on a temporary basis while they were on leave.

In this case he had expected to keep the dog simply because it had belonged to her, and now here she was, physically back in the country. So, he guessed she would want it back. Pity really, he was very attached to it, and it had settled in well with his own Labradors.

The question now was when to face her. In a way the rinderpest scare had been a bit of a godsend. It meant he had not to joyously greet them both at the airport. Angela had stepped into the breach very nicely, even if she had ragged him about it. She had more insight than he had originally credited her with.

Now he really must go over to Makerere and greet them both. Being a Friday evening it seemed to be a good time. He had given them nearly a week to settle in and so he would invite them down for Sunday lunch. Since he had gone up in the world his boy who he had brought from the boma, had not settled here among the more belligerent Baganda, and wished to return to his tribal area. Now his new one could actually cook. He had to admit it was a relief as life now was a shade more sophisticated. What was more he was enjoying it. That had come as a surprise. But then he did still get out into the bundu quite frequently. He made sure he was not entirely office bound.

He managed to get off before dark and knew his way onto Makerere Hill perfectly well as he was in touch with a number of people at the University, and Mary had 'phoned his office to tell him which plot they were on. He found it a third of the way up the hill, quite near the mosque. It was one of the standard type bungalows set in a garden not too closely enclosed by others. Steps ran up to the front door and as he drove into their driveway he could see Mary sitting on them in the last

bit of day light.

She rose to meet him. They hugged, and then as she stood back he looked at her accusingly and said, 'You cut your hair off.'

'Not all of it,' she laughed 'Why? Don't you like it?'

Hugh frowned slightly and said, 'I'm not sure. You know I always thought your topknot your crowning glory.'

'Well I needed a change,' she said, 'a new me.'

'Well are you a new you? Have I come to greet a different person?'

'That's for you to decide.' She took his hand and said, 'Come on in. Jeremy is just taking a bath and I was watching the fruit bats. You just missed them. They come out of the trees down there in the valley every night at this time, and fly straight over my head. They are an amazing sight.'

'Those are the yellow haired fruit bat, *Eidolon helvum*, they look a bit fierce but they do only eat fruit and are quite harmless,' he informed her.

'Trust you to know,' she poked him in the ribs, 'anyway I'm pleased to know they won't descend to eat me.'

Inside the house she had already made it homely by going down to the CMS bookshop and buying some pictures for the walls and scattering some cushions around. The three piece suite she had bought off the previous owners, and as Hugh said how nice it looked, she said she hoped to add a Persian carpet when the trader next came up from the coast.

'That's if I can winkle the money out of Jeremy.'

Hugh took this to mean that they were now getting on better together, so made no comment. She offered him a drink and said, 'We were actually going down to the City bar this evening for a meal. Do you want to come, or what are you up to?'

Before he could answer Jeremy appeared. 'Ah, thought I heard a familiar voice,' he said. They shook hands. Mary pushed a beer into his hand and they all sat down.

'So how are things?' asked Hugh. 'Are you pleased to be back in this steamy country?'

'Steamy in more ways than one, it seems,' said Jeremy. 'They seemed to have caught up a bit more around here and things are moving toward Uhuru at quite a pace.'

'Well isn't that what you are educating them for?'

‘Well obviously the attitude will be different here. Stands to reason,’ observed Jeremy.

‘I should think so,’ said Mary.

‘So how are you playing your part?’ Hugh asked her.

She was about to reply when Jeremy said, ‘By keeping her mouth shut.’

‘Oh come on,’ she said rising to the bait, ‘I am not going to be pushed around like this.’ Turning to Hugh she said, ‘Well I may get a job at the Dunn Nutrition Unit. Or I may go out on some children’s clinics with a neighbour just to see what goes on, or I might help the Red Cross, but I am definitely not going to align myself with any missionary organisation. The split is even bigger here than up country. All politics it seems run along those lines as far as I can see.’

‘You’ve caught on fast,’ said Hugh.

‘Well anyway, there is no need to fall over blackwards,’ said Jeremy.

They all laughed. ‘Best to keep a sense of humour as things may very well reach a frustrating pitch,’ said Hugh.

Mary rose. ‘Let’s go and eat,’ she said.

‘Yes, why don’t we try the new Chinese restaurant, ‘I am told it’s very good,’ Hugh suggested.

‘Chinese restaurant? Whatever next,’ said Jeremy.

‘Oh they get in anywhere,’ Mary quipped as they passed out of the door.

Chapter Thirty-three

In the event, it was nearly three weeks before they went down to Entebbe for lunch, Hugh having returned the dog to Mary and then gone off on safari. She noticed he had done it with a certain amount of reluctance and had nearly told him he could keep it, but Angela said she would be a fool for not having it back as there was so much thieving and it was wise to keep one. She had not one herself, although she was now thinking about it as they had been burgled twice since living in Kampala.

'We had our suspicions about the houseboy,' she said, 'but he was so alarmed that we had been broken into that we now think him innocent.'

Also, on Angela's advice Mary took on a housegirl instead of a boy and then discovered that half the hill employed girls ('girls' actually being grown women, mothers or grandmothers with children running around the servants quarters round the back). Her girl was Beth, who turned out to be a good find, spoke good English, was an excellent worker and could cook, so it left Mary free to do other things.

Apart from shopping, walking the dog and swimming each evening in the superb pool at the top of the hill, she was somewhat at a loose end until her neighbour, a doctor, suggested she go out with her to some children's clinics in the surrounding country districts. On her first visit Mary was amazed at how ill these darling little African children could be. Skinny bendy legs topped by protruding bellies and listless eyes, they gazed at her pathetically and she had difficulty in controlling her anger that they should be like this. She thought of the mothers up at the mission where she worked before, none of whom had children as bad as this.

Rosemary her doctor friend said, 'You see, the Baganda when they have a new baby leave the two year old to fend for themselves, putting the bowl with the motoke on the ground for it to eat from, but the child has not learned the knack of scooping up the groundnut sauce or fish sauce with it, even if there is any, and so the child is short of protein.'

'Madness,' said Mary, 'why can't they see.'

'That's what these clinics are for,' said Rosemary, 'but maybe you would like to come out with me to some of the Gombalolas and do a bit

of teaching and examining. I could certainly do with your help.'

'What does it involve then?'

Rosemary told her, 'We all go along to a gathering of women and teach them simple things like the fact they should give their children, who after all have a long way to walk to the school, sometimes up to ten miles, some breakfast before they go. It's no point the children waiting till the midday break to eat, as they have used up energy getting there and then can't take on board what they are meant to be learning, and as the parents have to pay school fees, even in primary their money is being wasted. Then we also teach them how to nurse the children at home, as so many of them get measles and it's a particularly virulent strain here and many die, especially these scraps we are looking at now. Several go blind or deaf or end up with some sort of complication, so what I've done is to institute a very elementary exam under the auspices of the Red Cross, and the women really try hard to pass it as they get a certificate afterwards which they love to wave under their husbands noses, and we tell them not to sell the dried milk for beer.'

'Dried milk?' said Mary in some surprise, 'I thought they all had the breast.'

'Oh not here. I'm afraid some of them are trying to ape western ways and use bottles, and that causes even more problems as they don't sterilise them properly.'

Mary said, 'I didn't have trouble like this with my classes at the mission.'

'No? Well that was up country,' Rosemary postulated, 'and the longer they stay away from some of our half-baked ideas the better.'

'It makes me quite nervous,' said Mary, 'how do we ever know when we are doing the right thing?'

'Good question. The thing is to have confidence in yourself. Anyway, do you want to do it?'

'I'll think about it. Unpaid I suppose.'

'Oh completely voluntarily,' said Rosemary laughing, 'What did you expect!'

When she told Jeremy over supper he seemed quite pleased, even relieved, she would be out with an interest of her own. When she asked him how things were going in his department he said, 'So so. The students overall aren't quite as bright as those around Cambridge, but most seem keen to get down to work.'

‘So do schoolboys,’ she said, ‘I’ve seen them doing their homework under the street lamps. I suppose some of their houses must still lack electricity.’

‘Yes, even those in the village at the bottom of the hill I should think.’

‘Incredible isn’t it?’ she said, ‘here we are, in a University town and still not entirely switched on.’

‘Now don’t you go taking it up with the Kabaka,’ he ribbed her.

‘As if I would.’

‘I wouldn’t put it past you.’

‘Well since I don’t know him personally I don’t see it happening.’

Jeremy actually laughed at her.

The day arrived for the Entebbe visit. Hugh said if it were not too hot they would picnic by the lake. They had drinks at his house, which was much too large for a bachelor and looked very bare, apart from a few photos including one of his parents outside their Yorkshire home.

Mary picked it up and said, ‘That’s a nice one of your parents.’

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘I am fond of that one, it is particularly good of mother.’

She put it back on the shelf and smiled at him. Jeremy sat awkwardly sipping his drink.

They piled the food and more drink into his car and drove off for the shore and found a secluded spot under a tree where they laid out a cloth and the food. He had brought a chicken and avocado salad and lots of fruit. They were well into it when an estate car drew up close by. Four adults and a pile of children spilled out of it. The Asians encamped with a primus stove and started to cook highly spiced food and then turned on their radio, blaring out Asian music. ‘Bloody Asians,’ said Hugh, ‘they do this every Sunday. I had hoped we had picked a place where we wouldn’t be bothered.’

‘Yes it is annoying,’ said Mary.

Jeremy got up and walked over to them and said, ‘Would you mind turning the volume down, or even off, since we got here first and would like a bit of peace and quiet.’

The adults looked quite startled and said something to each other in Hindi but one of them reached out and turned it down although it was still audible.

When he returned Hugh said, ‘Well done Jeremy, you have more

nerve than me.'

'Well, damn cheek invading our Sunday calm, don't see why we should put up with it.'

'Would you have told them if they had been Africans?' asked Mary.

'Quite probably. It's a matter of manners. Why do you ask?'

'I was just curious. It seems to me that as we are creeping up to Uhuru Europeans are getting a little more diffident.'

Hugh said, 'Jeremy is right; it's a matter of manners. Asians are always pushy anyway. We'll go back to the house when we have finished eating, it's quieter there.'

'I brought my swimmers. I was thinking of going for a dip,' said Mary.

'I wouldn't if I were you,' said Hugh. 'They've discovered Bilharzia in the lake.'

'Bilharzia? Oh heck, I was really looking forward to a swim.'

'I'll hose you down in the garden, if you want.'

'Well, thanks, but hardly the same is it?'

Chapter Thirty-four

Life at the University on the Hill was different to that on other hills. In fact it soon began to dawn on Mary that each of the seven hills of Kampala seemed to have a life of its own; on one was the commercial side, on the other, the admin, on another the Namirembe Cathedral, and yet another the Mission Hospital. Although the inhabitants of Makerere mixed to a certain extent with those from the other hills it was almost turned in on itself, intent on educating the young Africans and Asians, and hence regarded by the racial conscious of the other communities as nigger lovers.

So it was sometimes with relief that Mary met up with Angela and heard what was going on in the medical world or the town generally, although she still refused to go to her coffee parties. Usually they met in the CMS bookshop over a cup of coffee and then went round the Dukas searching for good material for sewing bees. Angela one day told her, 'Would you believe it, Nakasera hospital will not much longer be for whites only. Everyone has to use the massive new Mulago, which is being built for Uhuru. Our present to the Ugandan Nation.'

'It must be costing a bomb,' said Mary not wanting to get embroiled in a racial argument about the demise of Nakasero.

'Bloody millions I should think, although John says they badly need a new one, but he doesn't see that they are going to need headphones for piped music and all that nonsense. In fact he is a bit worried that things will become too streamlined and frighten the poor patients who are already scared of being in it. He only hopes the relatives are being allowed to visit with their bowls of matoke and they are able to go out and sit on the grass to eat it as they do now.'

'I didn't realise John was so flexible,' said Mary in surprise.

'Oh, he learnt a thing or two working up-country, you know. Anyway what's new on the Hill?'

Mary thought for a few minutes before replying then burst out 'Angela I am finding it very difficult to settle in. It's just so different to up-country. I feel very restless. I don't know if it is being in close proximity to Hugh again, although we don't see nearly as much of him now, or quite what it is. In some ways I wish I hadn't come back.

Some days I feel really depressed.'

Angela looked at her and was silent thinking Mary was going to continue. When she did not she said,' I am sorry you are feeling like this. Mind you I get depressed too, but in my case it's being so far away from the children, but obviously in your case it's different. Have you thought of trying for a baby again,' she suddenly asked.

'A baby? Yes, I would like that, but we don't get down to sex very often, in fact hardly at all, so I suppose you could say I am frustrated.'

'Oh dear,' Angela patted her arm, 'and what about Hugh?'

'He is just too damn pious, which is a pity as I've got to the stage where I think I might.'

'Why not hop into bed with him? But be careful, there is plenty of bed hopping around here. But perhaps it's better to go for a job, maybe the Dunn Nutrition Unit or some such.'

'Well I am already going out on the clinics, though that is only one day a week and Rosemary relies on me now I think. Shall I tell you something, that is if you will promise not to tell a word to anyone.'

'But of course, I can keep a secret, what is it then?'

'The other day when I was out with her we were just having a break when she said to me would you like to adopt, and I wondered what she was getting at. I thought at first she was meaning support one of the little sprogs we attend to as there are a couple of motherless ones. But no, she went on when I said, 'well it depends,' and then, would you believe it, she said 'I am trying to find a home for some coloured twins.' I was pretty astonished, and then I said, 'Why are you asking me?' and she said, 'Well I noticed you don't seem to have any hang-ups about race and I can see you would have good motherly qualities,' so I was even more astonished, but I ignored that and asked her where the twins were and why they needed adopting. She told me that they are the children of a white missionary teacher and an African who also works at the Mission. The woman is married and already has two children, so she went away to give birth and her husband apparently wants her back but refuses to take on the babes.'

Angela was open mouthed and said, 'Golly. Which Mission?'

'Ah, Rosemary refused to tell me when I asked her that.'

'So what are you going to do, would you really be prepared to take them on?'

'I told Rosemary that I have to think about it and of course ask

Jeremy.'

'So have you?'

'Yes, I managed to sit him down to discuss it and he was absolutely adamant, in fact he was quite nasty. I think he couldn't believe his ears. I think it brought back the time I offered to foster Costa's kid, but this is obviously more serious, taking on a couple of coloured kids for life. He came down on me like a ton of bricks and said 'no' immediately. Didn't even think to ask me what I thought, so I said 'and supposing I would like to have them?'

'You can't really mean that,' he said, 'sometimes I think you are a bit crazy.'

Mary's eyes were filled with tears and she sat silently weeping.

Angela said, 'Would you like another cup of coffee?'

'Please.' While Angela was arranging it, she blew her nose and took control of herself. With a fresh cup of coffee in front of her, she continued, 'So I took the opportunity to tell him this was hardly a marriage to bring two unwanted babes into, black, white, kaki or any other colour at which he got up and said that he had some more work to do at the department.'

'We've been pretty cool with each other ever since.'

'You mean even cooler than usual,' Angela observed.

'Well it certainly brought everything to a head, and I had a good think and wondered about going back to the UK and leaving him here to get on with it.'

'Oh please don't do that,' said Angela, 'stay a bit and see how things pan out. I would miss you so.'

The next time she met up with Angela, Mary was more cheerful. 'Something has happened,' she told her. 'I don't know how it will work out but Jeremy was talking to an anthropologist who's been kicking around the Hill for a couple of years who's name is Andrew Smart and he's roped Jeremy in to give some lectures to the American Peace Corps who come over to their bit of do-gooding. Well this Andrew chap has been asked by the Ugandan council of women to find a European to go on the sub-committee of the Asian committee as they apparently want one white and one African to join them and, would you believe it, Jeremy suggested me, said he thought I would be good at it.'

'That husband of yours, he lands you in some things I must say. Did he ask you before submitting you?'

‘No he didn’t, but I am actually quite chuffed about it and I know the African they’ve asked, she is called Joyce, a very nice person.’

‘Rather you than me. I don’t think I could tolerate a bunch of Asian women. Which reminds me, there was such a funny letter in the Argos the other day. I always read the letter page just for a good laugh, and there has been an exchange about who is best at sex out of the three races, and this Asian woman wrote in saying they were of course, it all being due to those spices they put in their food.’

They both laughed, and Mary said that she never thought of reading the letters but now she would.

‘Anyway why is there a sub-committee especially for them.’

‘Because it seems that they are seriously worried at being left behind educationally and otherwise while the African women forge ahead.’

‘Interesting,’ said Angela.

Chapter Thirty-five

Perched on the hill, Makerere College was a riot of colour. The bougainvillea cascaded over fences, the cacias were blooming and the garden boys were out tending the plots of the houses belonging to the British lecturers, with here and there a number of Americans on sabbatical or exchange, and a handful of Asians.

As he walked up to his department, Jeremy mused that he could count on his hand the number of Africans and Asians on the staff. One African he had met from the art department, he liked enormously. Mary had just bought a couple of his pictures of African scenes which now graced the walls of their house. He judged it a good move.

He then fell to thinking about Noni. She was not on the staff, she was starting some research and he was to supervise her. She was certainly bright, and although not as handsome as some of the young nubile female students around the campus, there was something about her with her high chiselled cheekbones and statuesque figure, and she exuded sex, though he could not quite divine why. It intrigued him and he found he was thinking about her a lot.

She had turned up at the Red Cross Ball, still wearing a kerchief tied backwards round her head, which he found odd. In fact, he had never seen her without it. Maybe she did not have much hair underneath. Well, he might find out one day. It made her different to most of the other girls who straightened their hair and then coiffed it again, or just went around bareheaded, leaving their hair curly.

He had danced with her at the ball and found she moved easily. While he twirled her around he asked her about various Africans there. She knew a few prominent people but seemed to be a little reluctant to expound on them. It seemed though that she knew their doctor, a tall kindly man from the north, but frowned and clamped up when Jeremy asked her if she had known him long. It was also somewhat obvious that the doctor did not acknowledge her.

They had been dancing near Eustace who was partnering Mary. They seemed to be getting on like a house on fire and he overheard Mary say: ‘Oh no Eustace, you must not go into politics. We need you. We need good doctors like you. After all, look what happens to

politicians, they only last five minutes or become nasty tyrants.'

Eustace had laughed and said, 'Yes I guess you are right. I was only thinking of the power.' And they had both laughed heartily together. Noni's frown had grown deeper:

'Silly man,' she said. At which point the music ended and he had escorted her back in silence to her table, where she did not introduce him to the two men she was with. All very intriguing, he thought as he arrived at the department.

And here she was, just going up the stairs ahead of him. She was wearing a short dress today whereas she was usually in her sarong like skirt, and she had on pretty sandals. It made him notice her legs as she preceded him. He opened the door of his room and ushered her in as she said she wanted to talk to him about some of her work, which she did not quite understand.

'That's what I am here for, to help you.' He found himself almost over solicitous. She beamed at him; her small even white teeth making those thick lips look very inviting.

They went over her work and when they had finished she stood up. He got up and moved around to her side. She stood there looking up at him, her black eyes glistening.

'I am in a bit of a quandary,' she said, 'if I am going to complete my project properly I am going to need to go out into the field.'

'That's right,' he agreed.

'I can't drive,' she blurted out.

'Oh, I see. Um. . . well now. I could take you, or better still, I could give you some driving lessons.'

'Or both,' she laughed, still looking up at him invitingly.

'Splendid idea,' he said and bent and kissed her on the lips.

'We'll make a date,' he said.

* * * *

Mary had thoroughly enjoyed the ball. After all, dancing was her great enjoyment and she loved to dance with Africans who had fantastic rhythm, and they seemed to like to dance with her, entering into the pleasure she conveyed.

'Who is that girl that Jeremy was dancing with?' she had asked. Eustace seemed to suddenly be off hand.

‘I’ll tell you some other time,’ he said.

She sat down next to Kathleen. ‘You are having a good time,’ she observed, ‘reminds me of that cricket weekend we had at Fort Portal when you danced the night away.

‘Yes that was a night and a half,’ Mary said.

‘No Africans there though,’ said Kathleen. ‘It was a different scene here altogether.’

‘Yes, it’s good, isn’t it? But you may find things have shifted on a bit out west when you get back there.’

The Hortens had just returned from leave and had stayed over for the ball at Mary’s invitation, who had asked Beth to stay on duty to care for the baby. Kathleen had seemed fairly relaxed about it, but they had left the ball before the end as she felt they should relieve Beth, although Mary knew Kathleen to be a bit anxious after flying in only the day before.

The next morning she was sitting with Kathleen in the shadiest spot of the garden drinking coffee when Hyacinth, the Jamaican wife of Eustace, suddenly appeared. Somewhat surprised to see her Mary fetched another chair and asked Beth to bring more coffee.

After a certain amount of talk about the ball the night before, what a success it had been and so on, Hyacinth said, ‘I’ve come to warn you about something Mary. You apparently asked Eustace last night who the person was that Jeremy was dancing with. Well, her name is Noni, and you don’t seem to realise she is one of Jeremy’s research students.’

‘Oh, so why didn’t he introduce her to me then?’

‘He is one of those who like to keep things separate, I expect.’ Hyacinth said with meaning, ‘Anyway, let me give you a little history about her, because she is dangerous. She is already putting it around town that she has got the sexiest supervisor on the hill.’

‘Good lord,’ said Mary in astonishment.

‘Well, how about Jeremy being up to his old tricks again,’ put in Kathleen.

Mary was annoyed and snapped at Kathleen, ‘Oh shut up for a moment.’

Hyacinth looked from one to the other and continued, ‘You see she was engaged to Eustace before he went to Canada for his training, but he broke it off just before he left because he realised she was a little tart. Well then he met me as I was working at the hospital and we

married there, but I am certain she is trying to do us damage and possibly trying to break us up. I don't trust her an inch, and neither should you, she has no morals whatsoever that one.'

That old deflated feeling hit Mary again. They sat silent while Mary and Kathleen digested this bit of news. Then Kathleen said, 'I think it's very good of you to come and give my friend a warning.

Not that it would deter Jeremy, I don't suppose,' Hyacinth said derisively, 'I must say I was a bit hesitant about telling you Mary, but Eustace thought I should, but I don't want you to tell Jeremy what I have told you. It's just between ourselves.'

'Thank you for coming,' said Mary. 'I don't know how I am going to play this though.'

'Just try to keep cool and keep your eyes open and watch events,' advised Kathleen.

'We can't do much else with that one,' said Hyacinth, getting up to take her leave.

Chapter Thirty-six

All bounce these days, Jeremy walked in and out of the house barely noticing Mary. He spent as little time as possible sitting at the table for meals and was always off to the department, or so he said. In the evenings he was off again, saying he had spent time in committees and therefore had students to see.

Mary was totally aware that he was still giving Noni driving lessons, but had given up arguing about it. Sometimes they were invited out to dinner, where they kept up pretence of being a pleasantly married couple.

It was to Angela Mary turned. She even found she was going to her coffee parties for a little diversion. One morning after the other guests had left, Mary said, 'I've got a problem, Angela. We've been invited to dine in one of the Halls and I am worried Noni may be there. After all, she is the last person I want to see, as it would thoroughly ruin the evening. On the other hand, it looks rude not to turn up, and I don't have a row with the students.'

'Why don't you just ask Jeremy outright,' suggested Angela.

'I don't know if I can bring myself to do that.'

'Well, it's the only way to find out.'

The day dawned for the dinner and Mary was still on tenterhooks, still in half-a-mind not to go, though Jeremy was under the illusion that she would be joining him. She walked around the house, not dressed for the occasion up to the time for departure.

Jeremy emerged from the bedroom already dressed, to find she was not changed and said, 'What are you playing at Mary? Are you intending to come or not? For heaven's sake we'll be late.'

'I'm. . . Oh I don't know.'

'What's the matter with you?'

'It's. . . well I am not feeling up to it.'

'You mean you're not feeling well? Why didn't you say earlier, then I could have made excuses for you, as it is you've left it a bit late.'

'Oh all right, I'll change my dress, I won't take a minute.'

He looked angry, 'Well for heavens sake hurry up.'

She did not stop to wash, just grabbed a reasonable looking dress

from the wardrobe and joined him in the car. Neither said anything as she sat beside him, feeling the old nervous tension again and thinking I should have done as Angela suggested and asked him outright if that damned girl is going to be there.

They arrived at the Hall just as everyone was processing in and she found herself searching every African female face, and when seated looking up the line of tables. As far as she could make out Noni was not there so she began to relax.

Her neighbour was a very well built young man who introduced himself with an American accent as Joe. She was a bit nonplussed, as she had taken him to be a Ugandan.

'Have you been living in the States?' she asked.

'I sure have Ma'am. I was born there.'

'So what are you doing here?'

'I am with the Peace Corps.'

'The Peace Corps. That's interesting. I can't think why, but I thought it was made up entirely of white Americans.'

He seemed to find that amusing, much to her relief for as soon as she had uttered it she felt embarrassed.

'There are one or two of us otherwise,' he said.

'Have you come to look for your roots?' she asked.

He did not answer for a while, and then said, 'You are the first person who has actually asked me that. I suppose in joining there was an element of taking a look at Africa, though my forebears were from the west side.'

'Do you know where?' she asked.

'Yea, Nigeria.'

'So have you met the twelve Nigerians who have come here on exchange?'

'Yea, some are dining in here tonight.'

'Easy to spot,' she said, 'with their different costumes. I met some of them. They seem a very jolly lot.'

'Yea, they are a lively bunch,' said Joe, 'quite different to the Ugandans.'

She went on to ask him if he was working in or near Kampala, and he said that he had just asked for a transfer from where he had been working down in the bush in Tanganyika.

'Why do you want a transfer, didn't you like it down there?'

‘No Ma’am, I certainly didn’t. Do you know, you couldn’t even buy a toothbrush down there,’ he said.

She burst out laughing, ‘Oh you really are an American.’

He laughed too, ‘Too right I am ma’am. I sure am an American.’

She did not say it but she thought his African adventure had apparently sorted out his identity.

They were having such a good time together that she only became aware of Jeremy sitting beside her when he scowled at her while she and Joe were laughing uproariously. It seemed he had been trying to introduce her to the student on his other side, who had in fact invited them. Then she discovered he was from the tribe where Jeremy had done his fieldwork and that he too was going to be an agronomist. Finding it difficult to talk across Jeremy, she left them to talk grasses and turned back to Joe. He had to talk to his host on his other side but turned to her as often as possible. He had nice manners and she began to feel pleased she had come to the dinner. Joe was intelligent and did not appear to have hang-ups, except for his not finding life congenial in the village he had just left.

When she asked him about the poor of his own country he openly contrasted life of poor blacks in America with the indigenous poor of the bits of Africa he had encountered, the latter of whom he thought were marginally better off as there were not so many very rich here to make such a yawning gap.

‘How about the politicians making it then?’ she asked.

He grimaced, ‘Oh them. Yeah ma’am, same everywhere.’

She was sorry when the dinner ended, then as they left the Hall she spied Noni, who sidled over and beamed at Jeremy, totally ignoring her. ‘Nice meal wasn’t it,’ she said.

‘Yes the food was OK,’ he said.

She passed on saying, ‘See you then.’

Mary had the distinct feeling that there was something going on between them. As they approached the house she said, ‘Are you having an affair with that girl?’

He was silent a moment and then said, ‘Maybe.’

‘What do you mean, maybe? Yes or no?’

He pulled up in the drive and said, ‘You had better get out. I have to go and do some work.’

She opened the door of the car, ‘Work?’ she said derisively.

He backed the car out saying, ‘That’s what I said.’

She went into the bedroom and collecting up her things settled in the spare bedroom, feeling a sense of deja vu.

Chapter Thirty-seven

The quiet Sunday morning was steeped in harsh sunshine, the air crisp and dry. Mary however sat alone on the sofa perspiring in a swelter of anxiety. She had turned up the volume on the record player where the treble voice of a boy was singing Benjamin Britten's St Nicholas. The poignancy added to her distress. She had suffered moments of desperation before, but now she felt overwhelmed and began to cry.

Hugh arrived at the door and called out the familiar Swahili greeting 'Hodi,' but not being heard over the music he walked in. Mary took little notice of him and carried on crying. He stood looking at her, then taking her hand said, 'What is it Mary?'

She continued to sob even more and could hardly get any words out, so he turned the volume down and sat beside her cuddling her. Slowly recovering she said, 'Jeremy is a right bastard.'

'Oh what has he done now?'

'He has gone off this morning to give Noni a driving lesson.'

'Oh, who is Noni?'

'She is one of his research students, comes from up country somewhere.'

'Is that so dreadful?'

'Well, yes. You see. . . oh dear, I am supposed not to tell anyone, but a few days ago Eustace's wife Hyacinth came to warn me about her, seems the girl is always out to get men in bed. She was once engaged to Eustace, but realising she was a bit of a tart, he called it off. Hyacinth says she is a real little trouble maker.'

'So now you think she is after Jeremy.'

'Well he doesn't really have to go and give her lessons, does he? I mean, she could get someone else to help her. When he said he was off with her this morning, I tried to have it out with him without implicating Hyacinth, as I had promised her I wouldn't let on that she had told me. But he was determined, said Noni needed to get on with it so that she could go out on fieldwork. Must say I've never known him so open about his affairs before.'

'Who says it's an affair,' said Hugh after a moment's thought.

‘Maybe he’s on the level, though I must say he’s going to get himself talked about driving around with a black student in the car. It doesn’t take long for gossip.’

‘I know. The trouble is, I don’t trust him. After all, I have plenty of reason not to. Oh, I am so sick of it all. I think I will really go home this time.’

Hugh looked utterly shocked. He sat looking at her then said, ‘What you need is a change, I think.’

Looking pleadingly at him she said, ‘Can I come out with you on safari like I used to.’

Now he looked worried and said, ‘I would like that Mary, but I am working for HQ now and I am not sure it would be wise.’

She flounced off the settee angrily, ‘I see I’m set aside all round now.’

He got up and took her by the hand to pull her to sit down again, ‘Now listen my dear, we’ve got to get things sorted out.’

‘Sorted out! I never know where I am with you either. I mean, will you ever want to marry me, I would like to know?’

This time he stood up and walked round the room, ‘You know I love you. I just wish you were not married already,’ he said.

‘Well I suppose I could get unmarried.’

‘Well there is Jeremy, isn’t there. I think in spite of all his philandering he still has regard for you.’

‘Funny way he has of showing it then,’ she said bitterly.

‘Well men are strange animals.’

‘You can say that again. It strikes me you actually find it convenient to be in love with a married woman.’

‘That’s very hard,’ he said, ‘You don’t seem to understand.’

‘Well you might see it from my point of view,’ she insisted. ‘Would you have married me had I been single? What with your titled parents and one thing and another.’

He stopped pacing and stood in front of her frowning, ‘Oh Mary. Why should you think that?’

‘Well it’s a fact isn’t it? You don’t know what a surprise it was for me when we went up to stay with your parents. I couldn’t believe you hadn’t given me some hint before that.’

‘Actually that’s not important to me, you should know that by now. What is more important is that we are an old and devout Catholic

family and for me to marry a divorcee would be an anathema to them. And even had you been single, since you are not Catholic yourself it would have been awkward, but not impossible, I suppose.'

'So you mean my lowly birth would not have been important, just my faith or lack of it in their eyes.'

'Really Mary, do we need to go on in this vein?'

She laughed sardonically, 'You said we have to get sorted out, so I am trying to do that. Can't you see I am trying to find out where I stand? I am beginning to feel I want to bail out from everything.'

He looked alarmed again, 'Perhaps we should sit down and talk it out with Jeremy,' he said.

Before she could answer, Jeremy walked in. He looked glowing.

'Hello, you're here too,' he said affably.

'Good morning Jeremy,' Hugh said coolly. 'I came to see you with a little plan I hatched.'

'Yes. Well let me have a cold drink first. Do you want one too? It's boiling hot outside.'

'No thanks.'

'You know where to find it,' said Mary, not rising to do the honours.

While Jeremy was at the fridge collecting his beer Hugh whispered, 'Don't be too surprised at my suggestion in a minute. Just look as though we've been discussing it.'

Agog at what he might be about to say, she was mightily surprised when he said that he had thought of going to the Murchison Park for a long weekend and would they like to come too and maybe Kathleen and Philip as well.

She was amazed, for she thought he was about to launch into the tangle of their lives. What is he up to, he is devious, not wanting to commit himself, he is avoiding the issue. She was beginning even to doubt him as well, she wondered what Jeremy was thinking of their friendship. He must know about our love. Is it convenient for him to tolerate it or is he flattered that someone loves his wife? For a moment she felt disillusioned with Hugh, even though she admired him on the one hand for knowing so much about wildlife, but annoyingly that he always seemed to know everything.

Jeremy sat gulping his cold beer, and said he thought it was a great idea and seemed genuinely enthusiastic which again made her realise how unpredictable he was too.

‘I always wanted to go to that Park, it’s supposed to be so different to the Queen Elizabeth’s,’ said Jeremy.

‘Lots more elephants,’ said Hugh, ‘and we may even see a rhino or two.’

Mary said, ‘I doubt very much that Kathleen and Philip can come, having so recently returned from leave and with the new baby as well. And I’ve just had a letter from Kath in which she said she’s got involved with looking after the Tutsi refugees who have come over from Burundi.’

‘Goodness are they still there?’ asked Jeremy.

‘Yes it is not safe for them to go back yet,’ said Hugh. ‘Fortunately those who managed to bring cattle out didn’t bring any terrible diseases with them.’

‘Well it’s a pity that they can’t come.’

‘So what do you think then? Do you want to go?’

‘I guess I could take a long weekend out, though I’ve a lot on in the department at the moment,’ said Jeremy.

Hugh glanced at Mary as she said, ‘Is that so?’ heavy with sarcasm.

‘Got a date in mind then?’ asked Jeremy.

‘How about two weekends ahead… to give us time to book into the lodge?’

‘Fine. Let us know as soon as you’ve fixed it up.’

The following Sunday Jeremy was off again with Noni for her lesson he said. Mary prevaricated saying she wanted the car to go down to Entebbe to sort out with Hugh what they needed for the safari, but she was overridden by Jeremy saying ‘phone him and he’ll come up here to discuss it with you,’ before leaping in the car and taking off.

Hugh decided they would take his Land Rover because the going in the Park would be rough and it was a tougher vehicle if they should come upon elephants.

He called to pick them up to drive north. Mary was excited at the thought of seeing some totally different terrain once they were out of the lush forest and water covered areas of the Baganda. The tribes on the way up changed from the Bantu to the tall northern Nilotic peoples.

Arriving in the Park they were delighted to see so many animals. A little bush duiker dived off into the bushes and they saw about a dozen long-limbed pata monkeys on the ground.

‘Easy to spot them,’ said Hugh, ‘with their funny white sided

whiskers and underparts.'

'And elephants everywhere.' They had to stop to let a herd cross the path and were stunned into silence at the sight of the big majestic animals.

Mary said, 'Do they ever get poached for their ivory?'

'A little goes on,' said Hugh, 'but they are well wardened with rangers everywhere.'

'I hope you are right,' said Jeremy, 'it must be a big temptation for the local tribes to make money.'

'Don't worry, they'll still be here in a hundred years time, these great big beasts,' said Hugh confidently.

Driving on, Mary said, 'This is going to be some weekend,' just as a large male elephant just came trumpeting towards them with ears flapping forward. They raced for the lodge, where the warden said they were having trouble with this particular rogue elephant who came frequently around the buildings, and he warned them not to try to feed it with bananas.

The place was spartan but the food tolerable, and the next morning they booked on a boat to take them up the Nile to the Murchison falls. The boat was open-sided with a sunroof and chugged along at a leisurely pace. They watched elephants coming down to drink and spotted baboons in the bush, then suddenly Hugh gripped Mary by the arm and said excitedly: 'Look on that bank, quickly, or you'll miss it!'

There in full view was a crocodile with a huge snake snapped in his jaws.

Mary shuddered, 'What an extraordinary sight,' she said.

'Nature red in tooth and claw,' laughed Hugh.

Jeremy had missed it; he had been looking out on the other side of the boat and was very annoyed when they told him.

Nearing the falls, the boat stopped close up to the cascading water, which sent spray over them. It was a truly breathtaking sight, all that power dropping over the edge playing with the light and making rainbows.

Mary did not sleep well. The strain of being near Hugh and putting up with Jeremy was getting to her.

They decided next day to go to the northern part of the Park to see if they could see giraffe, as it was rumoured there were some two hundred in the area. Mary wanted to opt out and stay in the lodge to read her

book but Hugh lent heavily on her to come. When the search drew a blank she felt deflated. Then a herd of kob appeared and another animal stood sentinel on an ant hill.

'That's a Jackson Hartebeest,' said Hugh.

Glad to know what it was, Mary nonetheless felt annoyance again that he always knew. He is always showing off, she thought.

Jeremy then observed, 'I just realised, there are no zebra.'

'No you won't find those here,' said Hugh, 'you need to go to Kenya for those.'

'Really?' said Mary. At the mention of Kenya it made her think again of Jeremy's affair with Anthea and she wondered vaguely if they were still corresponding. Lying in bed at the lodge that night, she also wondered for how much longer she could go on by just having treats such as this.

Heading out of the Park, Jeremy said, 'I wonder if we will meet that rogue elephant again.'

'That cheeky devil,' said Hugh, 'I wouldn't like to meet him on the ground,' and turning to Jeremy said with relish, 'No, he might make mincemeat of you.'

Chapter Thirty-eight

It was here: Independence at last. Abote had pulled it off. Everywhere happy faces: in the streets, on the Hill, in the offices and in the servants' quarters. Except for some anxious ones among the Asian community, even though the Indian Association rejoiced and sent warmest greetings at the achievement of Independence by non-violent means, and they prayed the Almighty would send down blessings.

While the President of the Merchants' Chamber, Mr Garmukl Singh, also said, 'The leaders have the Country's future in their hands. The commercial community have great faith and confidence and are determined to play their part in the development and prosperity of the Country, but it has to face various problems.'

Mary gave thought to her Asian female friends on the committee and wondered how they would make out. In fact would the Uganda Council of Women have any influence at all?

A number of expats were also not so thrilled about the idea of freedom for the Country.

All the same, people were partying and the Bradshaw's had been invited to a number of them on the Hill, as well as the Kabaka's garden party and the official evening ceremony at the town stadium.

Mary was not well, very low psychologically since discovering Jeremy was up to his old tricks and suspecting him of spending time with Noni.

The day before the Kabaka's party she challenged him about the affair. He was seldom in for proper meals these days, which made catering haphazard, and she was sure by now the servants were gossiping. She could not think why this embarrassed her but somehow it did.

Stopping him on the way out again she said, 'Jeremy we cannot go on like this, I am acting as your housekeeper, not your wife. There seems to be little point for me to be here anymore. You don't eat regularly, you dash in and out, taking a bath and changing your clothes and seldom have very much to say to me. Dashing off again to your office, as you keep saying, whereas I am sure you're spending your time with Noni, since I am aware there isn't any teaching going on at the

moment.'

He sat down and looking sheepish said, 'Would you like to go home for a while?'

So, astonished, she sat down too. What did he mean?

'I . . What do you mean, "for a while?"'

'Well you don't seem very happy, so I thought maybe you would like to go back to Scotland.'

She felt dismissed and said, 'If I go, I'll go off for good. Is that what you want? So that you can carry on your affair with me out of the way?'

He frowned, 'Not exactly.'

'Are you then saying you like to have me here doing the housekeeping to make life easier for you?'

'Oh Mary, I really don't know.'

She was exasperated. 'Perhaps it's reached a stage where you need to think what you do want, as I am thoroughly fed up with this marriage, and you are virtually pushing me into thinking of divorce.'

She started to cry and he got up and abruptly left. What was the use, she thought. Why do I strive to keep this thing together especially as there are no children to consider? Would it have been different had she not miscarried their child?

Sitting there pondering in her misery, she remembered Hyacinth's visit. How right she had been about that girl. She was dangerous. Then again, why should Noni win?

Jeremy had left the car in the driveway and walked to the office, to wherever he was going. Seeing it there her first inclination was to drive down to Entebbe to see Hugh, but he might not be pleased at being disturbed at his work, and her next impulse was to make the long drive up country to see Maureen who she would most like to talk this through with. Well, Angela would be the next best thing because she desperately needed to talk to someone.

Angela was in a tizz about her drinks party she was giving that evening, in her usual state of wanting perfection, and as Mary arrived she remembered they, of course, had been invited too.

'Hello,' said Angela giving her a kiss. 'I thought I was seeing you this evening and here you are now. I am a bit busy as you can see but it is good to see you.'

Mary stood on the steps and burst into tears.

Angela looked alarmed and said, ‘What on earth is the matter, what has upset you so?’ looking anxiously at Mary’s miserable face.

‘Oh Angela I am sorry. I can see you’re trying to get your party underway, I’ll come back tomorrow.’

‘No you won’t. Tomorrow is even worse than today, things are going on all over the place as you know. Come in and tell me what is the matter?’

Mary collapsed into a chair and poured out her venom about Jeremy and his wretched affair.

‘I know,’ said Angela, ‘people are beginning to talk and you look so ill of late.’

‘Are they? Oh damn, I suppose it’s town gossip then.’

‘Well if he will ride about the place with a black girl so prominently beside him, people are bound to surmise.’

‘Don’t they realise that she is his research student?’

‘Now come on Mary, don’t be so naive.’

‘Do you know he’s just suggested I go home for a while?’

‘What! What a bloody cheek. You mean so he can have his hot little affair and then receive you graciously back again. Come off it. I imagine if you go home it will be for good and that’s the end of your marriage. That’s what I would do. I would be so incensed about the whole thing.’ And getting up and putting her arm around Mary she said, ‘Though of course it goes without saying that I don’t want you to leave,’ which made Mary cry some more.

She said, ‘Angela what am I going to do?’

‘Does Hugh know what’s going on?’

‘I’ve no idea. He hasn’t alluded to it, though I did say recently that Jeremy spends a lot of time on this particular research student.’

‘He must have guessed something is going on,’ said Angela, ‘if only that you are not your usual self of late. I think you should tell him. It’s about time he woke up too.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Well we all know he pretends to be dippy about you, but he doesn’t exactly make a move.’

‘That’s because I am married and he is a Catholic.’

‘Oh come on, if he really cared he could forget that.’

‘Are you suggesting I have an out and out affair with him then?’

‘You know that. I’ve suggested it to you before.’

‘Yes I know, but it only complicates things and we’ve both been hesitant.’

‘Maybe go home then, and think things through away from them both. Absence makes the heart grow fonder, to use an old cliché.’

‘I don’t think it will make Jeremy’s grow fonder.’

‘Well there you are then; there is half your answer.’

In the early evening Jeremy returned. He ignored Mary as he passed through to the bedroom. On his return to the sitting room she asked him if he intended going to Angela’s party and since he looked as though he was already changed then she had better get ready too, she said.

He flopped down on the settee and facing her said, ‘No I won’t be going to Angela’s party. I am going to another, but you go if you want to.’

‘Have I an invite to this new one?’ she asked. ‘Where is it?’

‘It’s some friends of Noni’s. We are celebrating, as I’ve told her I would like to marry her.’

Chapter Thirty-nine

She stood in the garden to watch the firework display. The multicoloured patterns spilled into the African night with joyful abandon. Looking up at the sky she could see beyond them into the ink blue and the competing stars. This was meant to be the culmination of the hopes and dreams of Independence. She could hear the crowd applauding and felt very lonely. Was it fair, she thought, that things had come to this? That she should at this moment, at this historic time, be standing here all by herself?

She thought of the upcountry Boma where Maureen would be celebrating with a small band of Europeans, and she was sure it would be a much more enjoyable occasion than the razzmatazz going on in the capital.

It was partly her own fault that she was here alone, no thanks to Jeremy who was obviously hobnobbing with the coterie of Africans in his new role as Noni's intended. Angela had said 'come over and join with us,' but she did not feel up to talking to people and making merry.

What was going on down in Entebbe she wondered? Hugh had said he intended staying down there by the lake as he thought it would be marginally quieter than the big time in Kampala. Though he had not mentioned she should join him either, assuming that she would be with Jeremy, not yet having heard of the drama that was going on.

It was nearing midnight and suddenly there was a hush. She guessed that someone was making a speech. Probably Abote, and she gave a wry smile as she recalled a law that had been passed that it was an offence to throw tomatoes at him or the person would be imprisoned for life. But what was the Kabaka thinking of all this, having failed to get Federal status for the Baganda? And that poor Minister who had been arrested because he had said 'You cannot govern without some principles.' How was it all going to settle she wondered? And she had heard that the white female mayor, Mrs Sabon, was to give a message about friendship and understanding to go forward together in peace and goodwill.

Mary knew there were a number of expats who were not too happy about the new Government and heard later that Mrs Sabon had been

astute when saying there were problems and difficulties lying ahead and it would not be easy.

Then dead on midnight she could hear the National Anthem being played and thought they must be lowering the Union Jack, for it was followed by the crowd bursting into a roar of approval. A few minutes silence followed and then another roar, this time for the raising of the new Ugandan Flag of black, yellow and red horizontal stripes, the emblem being a zebra shield with the sun and drum on it, backed by crossed spears supported by an impala and a crested crane. Then she could hear them singing the anthem written by George Kakoma with Mr Wingard of Makerere -

'Oh Uganda! The people praise thee
We lay our future in thy hand
United. Free;
For Liberty
Together we'll always stand.'

Then another roar that sounded as though it would never end. When it did, there was a flood of rhythmic drumming and more fireworks to light up the sky.

Mary's emotions fluctuated between a small tug at the heart on hearing the British Anthem and a little pulse of joy that Uganda had achieved freedom.

Loving the African nights when the smell of the frangipani still lingered on the air Mary quite often went into the garden and looked up at the southern cross, but standing here under the umbrella tree she was beginning to feel chilled and so crept back to bed.

But sleep eluded her. She began to wonder if she would ever sleep again as she contemplated what move she should make next in her life, though it was beginning to dawn on her that Angela's suggestion was right. She should now get out of here, away from the humiliation of it all, though strangely she did not feel sadness at leaving the Country as she had when leaving the Boma a couple of years ago. It might be a wee bit more sophisticated here and the backbiting just as bad, but on the whole, upcountry was far preferable. Still, being interested in politics she was disappointed to leave now that it had reached this stage. Part of her wanted to see how it would pan out. Near dawn she fell asleep knowing that Jeremy would not return and resolving to make contact with Hugh next day.

Hugh said on the phone that he intended to come up and see them anyway and arrived at the house midmorning, just as Jeremy sailed in looking tired but happy. Hugh was astonished to see Mary looking so wan and winced at her curt good morning to Jeremy.

In response he said, 'Ah good morning everybody. My, that was some party last night. I must say Africans know how to party.'

Hugh said, 'Yes, no doubt you were at the big one. I went to a smaller one down by the lake. Very enjoyable though. Did you enjoy it all too, Mary?'

'No not at all,' was her fierce reply and turning hastily on her heel went off to the kitchen to make coffee as she had given Beth the day off.

Returning with the tray she set it down and looking at Hugh said, 'We have news for you, Hugh, haven't we Jeremy.'

Hugh looked from one to the other as Jeremy sat silent.

'Well are you going to tell him, or am I?' she said angrily.

'Tell him what?'

'What you told me two days ago.'

'Oh that. Yes, well, I've decided I want a divorce as I'm intending to marry Noni,' he said abruptly, while glowering at Mary.

Hugh looked at them unbelievingly, then sizing Jeremy up said, 'Do you really have to marry that girl?'

'No I suppose not, but I want to anyway. And she could be pregnant, though we are not quite sure yet.'

Mary was handing out the coffee and spilled some as she sank into a chair.

'Oh no,' she said, 'not that, that's so unfair.'

'Unfair?' said Jeremy, 'that's got nothing to do with it.'

'Be a bit sensitive,' said Hugh, 'I expect you would have liked babies too, wouldn't you Mary?'

'Of course I would. I really can't get over this.'

Turning to Jeremy, Hugh admonished him, 'You know what this means, don't you Jeremy? With the new law, it means you are going to have to take out Ugandan citizenship and live here, unless you wish to cart her off to merry England.'

'That's alright, I am happy to do that. We've various options open to us. I could possibly go and work in Ghana or some such place. Nothing is fixed.'

‘You may not find it easy you know,’ Hugh continued. ‘I think you’re mad. How can you do this to Mary? And what about the sanctity of marriage?’

Jeremy jumped up at this and said, ‘I’m going for a kip,’ taking himself off to the bedroom.

Left together Hugh said, ‘What a terrible shock. Are you alright, Mary? I can see you are very angry and not surprisingly.’

‘I don’t know what I am. I think I’ll kill her if she’s pregnant.’

Hugh looked alarmed, ‘You need to get out of this house,’ he said. ‘Come on, go and pack a few things and come and stay a couple of days with me so that we can have a good talk. You look whacked out.’

‘You mean stay in your house? Won’t people gossip if you have a female staying with you?’

‘I don’t care if they do. Come on, it’s Uhuru time, people are doing their own thing.’

‘I need to leave a note for Beth,’ she said. ‘She’ll wonder what has happened, but she can’t read so perhaps I ought to leave it for Jeremy and he can tell her.’

‘If you want to. Come on, let’s get out of here.’

Mary did a quick pack and he helped her into his Land Rover. They spoke very little on the way down; she was still overawed by Jeremy’s revelation that he could have fathered a child with that demon girl.

Chapter Forty

After lunch, which she could hardly bring herself to eat, Mary immediately fell asleep on the spare room bed while Hugh went over to his office. As the late afternoon cooled, they took a stroll along the lake shore. The sun was setting over the water, casting a glow adding to the air of rejoicing, marred only by the lake flies bothering them. They were greeted affably by the Africans, some of whom were still drumming and dancing, the women wiggling their hips, doing a sort of samba.

Back at the house, where Hugh's boy was still absent at the merrymaking, Mary concocted a curry from what she could find in the 'fridge and they sat down to eat. She was still tired and barely talking, trying to throw off the despair of the last few days.

After dinner Hugh said, 'Leave the dishes, the boy can deal with all that tomorrow.' He put on some Mozart and they snuggled up cosily together on the settee, quietly listening to the music and Mary began to relax.

Kissing her he said, 'I've been wanting to cuddle up to you for a long time,' continuing to kiss her longingly while they became more and more entwined in a passionate embrace. Taking his hand from fondling her breasts he stood up and pulled her to her feet and led her by the hand to his bedroom to make love but in spite of oscillating between passion and gentleness he could not achieve an erection. Confused and worried that it might be her fault, Mary said, 'Let's have a sleep and maybe try again later.'

While they lay in each other's arms Hugh was restless, tossing and turning, preventing her from sleeping. She lay imagining Jeremy with Noni, and thinking how long it had been since she had sex. She was wondering what the matter was with her that Jeremy had wanted her so little since her miscarriage.

Well into the night she finally fell asleep and waking late was surprised to find Hugh already up and dressed.

'Hello, how about some breakfast?' he said.

With the houseboy hovering in the background their conversation was somewhat stilted at first, then Mary said, 'Did you sleep at all last

night? You were very restless.'

'Was I? I'm sorry. Did it keep you awake?

'A bit, but mostly I was lying there feeling sort of guilty in a way. I don't know why, after all Jeremy is the one in the wrong, not me.'

'The trouble is,' Hugh said, 'You are still married, and that bothers me and it makes me feel guilty too.'

'Well it shouldn't do since I'm about to be divorced.'

'I know, I know. Maybe we should have waited till after you are through with it,' which made Mary feel even more unwanted.

Hugh said, 'I just don't like feeling adulterous and I know divorce can only be obtained by adultery or mental cruelty.'

'Well you could say I've had the latter,' she said bitterly. Anyway what makes you think Jeremy is going to divorce me, it's actually the other way round. I'm going to divorce him for his liaison with Noni.'

'But he could turn the tables on us and accuse us,' he said, looking somewhat anxious.

'Well would it matter?' she said.

He was silent awhile and then said, 'Oh it's so messy.'

She was astonished and feeling emotionally exhausted said, 'I don't think we can resolve this just now, perhaps I should return to Makerere.' And making a sort of lame excuse, 'Beth will be worried and wondering what has happened to me, especially if Jeremy ignores my note.'

He looked relieved. 'Alright I've got some work to do anyway this morning, so I'll send you back with the driver,' which sent her spirits plummeting even further, thinking at least he could have run me back.

At the house she was surprised to see the car in the drive but no sign of Jeremy. Beth said the Bwana had gone off early and had told her he would not be back for lunch. Wandering around, she could not make out if Jeremy had slept there alone as Beth had clearly made the bed and tidied up.

Going into the spare room where her clothes were, she grabbed a suitcase and started packing, gripped by a sudden, deep desire to return home as soon as possible. In a panic she was thinking I need to get away from all this, back to dear cold old Scotland where I can think more clearly.

What a blessing the car was there. Driving downtown she discovered most duikas and businesses were still shut and she again

panicked lest the airline office was closed too. To her immense relief it was open, and though obviously worn out with partying, those in attendance were affable and found her a flight for two days time.

Jeremy had still not returned when she got back to the house and later in the day she phoned Hugh to tell him of her plans.

'I think it's best,' she said, 'to put some distance between us all so that I can get things into perspective.'

She could tell by his voice that it was not what he expected.

'I'm going to miss you terribly,' he said and then dropped his own little bombshell. 'I think its time I joined a Catholic community.'

'What! Are you serious Hugh? You mean you are going to be a monk? For heavens sake, you mean you love Jesus more than me?'

He ignored that and said, 'Yes it has actually been on my mind for some time, especially as, you know, with the difficulty of you being married.'

'But we've been over all this,' she said.

'I know, but you must understand, it's still difficult for me.'

She was silent, thinking so this is why he isn't married at thirty-six. Did he in fact ever want to be married? Into her mind flashed the sight of voluptuous middle-aged Buganda ladies, some of whom initiated young men into the rituals of sex, rather like the French with their aunties. That's what he needed.

'Are you still there?' he asked. 'Yes, yes, I'm here still, but I'm off on Thursday.'

'I'll come and collect you then.'

'That would be nice,' she said, 'since Jeremy may fail to see me off.'

Some time later Jeremy appeared briefly. She told him of her arrangements to leave and all he replied was, 'Yes, alright. It's better that way.'

At the airport her farewell from Hugh was strained, although she acted cheerfully, ragging him that she would never speak to him again if he ever became a missionary.

'Remember,' she said 'that after Speke discovered the source of the Nile at Jinja it set in motion all those missionaries arriving, all vying for black souls and here's the place still split with religious affiliations, let alone tribal, so you see what I mean.'

Now here she was, up in the air away from both Jeremy and Hugh, seething with them both, and away from the country and people she

loved. She felt nervous for their freedom just as she did her own, yet there was a certain excitement about going into the unknown. Anyway, as far as she was concerned she was now away back to her own tribe, doing her own tribal dance.

Sheila Stenning-Bennett

… in her own words

21st September 1927 - 20th September 2007

From a small girl Sheila Stenning-Bennett always wanted to be a nurse. After training she worked in Britain, Nigeria and Uganda. In Uganda she taught African women to nurse sick children at home and examined them for the certificate awarded by the Red Cross. Her other voluntary work was to go out on the mobile clinic run for children.

After the early death of her husband, she took the certificate in Social Anthropology at Lucy Cavendish College in order to sort out her late husband's many notes left from two field studies.

She raised her two small sons as a single mother and remarried after eight years of widowhood. Subsequently she divorced as it wasn't such a good idea!

In the early 1980's she qualified to be a Blue Badge Guide for Cambridge and East Anglia. This was a much loved job, being a bit of a prima donna. Later, after herself being diagnosed with cancer, she supported others with the disease. She clearly gave a great deal of herself to many others throughout her life.

She was a long time member of Cambridge Writers and chaired it a couple of times. Her memoir, *Fulani Women,* set in Nigeria, and *An Egg in the Hand,* her eco-thriller about stealing eagle eggs, are complete and are also available through www.lulu.com. Copies have been lodged in appropriate libraries and archives.

Her articles have been published in the following:-

The Canberra Times

The Cambridgeshire, Norfolk and Suffolk Journals

The Lady

Cambridge University Centre Piece

Cambridge Pride Magazine

The Cambridge Insider

The Friends Quarterly (a Quaker publication)

Chesterton Local History Group Journal

Society of Cambridge Tourist Guides Newsletter (which she started)

She updated the Heritage Guides for Cambridge and has also given talks to various history societies.

Sheila Stenning-Bennett – a tribute

On 20th September 2007, just one day short of her eightieth birthday, Sheila passed away peacefully in her sleep at the Arthur Rank Hospice. She had not so much lost her long, always understated, battle against cancer as bowed graciously to the inevitable. Although a feisty and opinionated lady, Sheila was in all things gracious, albeit with a wicked chuckle. She exuded interest in everyone and everything and this was echoed in her writings, prose and poetry, published and unpublished, that ranged from Africa to local history and many areas between. At Cambridge Writers we appreciated her gentle, humorous and insightful contributions to our meetings: General, Poetry, Long and Short Prose; she attended all. In the course of many years she also organised outings for the group, helped with the poetry competition, served on the committee and could always be relied upon to charm others into doing their bit to help. It is clear from the nearly 200 people who attended her funeral that she was loved by innumerable people whose lives she had touched and we certainly miss her greatly.

Helen Culnane chair of Cambridge Writers

Acknowledgements

The cover photo is from Sheila's collection of photographic slides and is of Ankole people from Uganda.

Joy Vousden and Jane Wilson-Howarth of Cambridge Writers briefly checked through the text of this book.

Jeff and Richard Stenning, Sheila's sons, kindly gave permission to publish this novel through www.lulu.com.

Sheila Stenning-Bennett with her family in Uganda. Sheila is holding baby Jeff; Derrick Stenning has Richard on his lap.