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**Wilbur Smith** is a global phenomenon: a distinguished author with a large and established readership built up over fifty-five years of writing, with sales of over 130 million novels worldwide.

Born in Central Africa in 1933, Wilbur became a full-time writer in 1964 following the success of *When the Lion Feeds*, and has since published over forty global bestsellers, including the Courtney Series, the Ballantyne Series, the Egyptian Series, the Hector Cross Series and many successful standalone novels, all meticulously researched on his numerous expeditions worldwide. His books have now been translated into twenty-six languages.

The establishment of the Wilbur & Niso Smith Foundation in 2015 cemented Wilbur's passion for empowering writers, promoting literacy and advancing adventure writing as a genre. The foundation's flagship program is the Wilbur Smith Adventure Writing Prize.

For all the latest information on Wilbur, visit: [www.wilbur-smithbooks.com](http://www.wilbur-smithbooks.com) or [facebook.com/WilburSmith](https://facebook.com/WilburSmith).

**David Churchill** is the author of *The Leopards of Normandy*, the critically acclaimed trilogy of novels about the life and times of William the Conqueror. He was also the co-author on previous Wilbur Smith titles, *War Cry* and *Courtney's War*.

*Also by Wilbur Smith*

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WILBUR  
SMITH

WITH  
DAVID CHURCHILL

LEGACY OF  
WAR

ZAFFRE

This is a work of fiction. Names, places, events and incidents are either the products of the authors' imaginations or used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

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*I dedicate this book to my wife, Niso.  
From the day we first met she has been a constant and powerful  
inspiration to me, urging me on when I falter and cheering me  
when I succeed. I truly do not know what I would do if she were  
not by my side. I hope and pray that day never comes. I love and  
adore you, my best girl, words cannot express how much.*





## KENYA, JUNE 1951

In the flickering, smoky light cast by torches of burning brushwood, Kungu Kabaya looked past the slaughtered goat lying in the middle of the abandoned missionary chapel towards the men, women and children watching in fearful expectancy.

There were around sixty of them, members of the Kikuyu tribe and 'squatters', as the white farmers called their black labourers. For no matter how hard a squatter worked; no matter how long he, or his father, or even grandfather had lived on the farm; no matter how skilfully he had built the hut in which he and his family lived: he only stayed on the farm with the farmer's blessing and could be expelled at any moment, with no right of appeal.

Kabaya cast his eye towards a separate group of around twenty squatters, men and women alike, who had been selected to take part in tonight's ceremony, and he nodded to the one at the head of the line. He was thin and gangly, no more than eighteen years old. With a young man's reckless bravado he had volunteered to be the first to take the oath. But as the gravity of his decision weighed upon him, his courage was giving way to anxiety and trepidation.

Kabaya approached him and put a fatherly arm upon his shoulder.

'There's nothing to fear,' he said, speaking quietly so that only the youngster could hear him. 'You can do this. Show them all that you are a man.'

The five men Kabaya had brought with him to the ceremony glanced at one another and gave nods or smiles of recognition as they watched the young man straighten his back and hold his head up high, his confidence restored. They had all served with Kabaya in the King's African Rifles, a British colonial

regiment, during World War Two, campaigning in Ethiopia against Mussolini's Italian armies and then in Burma against the Japanese. They had watched as he had been promoted from private to company sergeant major within five years. And for each of them there had been times when Kabaya had found the words to keep them going in times of hardship, or given them courage when the fighting was most fierce.

When they came home to East Africa to discover that their military service had earned them neither human rights, nor decent jobs, Kabaya and his men had turned to crime. Their gang was one of many that emerged in the teeming shanty towns that had sprung up around the Kenyan capital, Nairobi, but it swiftly became the most powerful. The gangsters had become rebels and still they followed Kabaya. Whether a soldier, a criminal or a terrorist, their boss had a genius for leadership.

Kabaya stepped back to leave the young man alone in the middle of the floor. As he did, his second in command, Wilson Gitiri, sat beside the goat, placing the wickedly sharp, long-bladed panga knife with which he – like all of Kabaya's men – was armed, on the floor by his right hand.

Kabaya was a tall, handsome, charismatic man. He was highly intelligent, confident in his ability to win people over by reason and charm as well as fear. Wilson Gitiri was malevolence personified. He was shorter in stature than his commander, but he was as barrel-chested as a bull. His face was criss-crossed with thick welts of scar tissue. His eyes were permanently narrowed, forever searching for possible threat. His hair was plaited into tight braids that were gathered in a ridge that ran from the back to the front of his scalp like a soldier's forage cap. His presence in the chapel was an act of intimidation.

An earthenware jug, a battered tin cup and a length of rope had been placed by the head of the goat. Gitiri poured a small measure of thick, dark, viscous liquid from the jug into the cup, before replacing both vessels in their original position.

Minutes earlier, Gitiri had removed one of the goat's legs with a single blow from his panga. He had skinned the severed limb, cut the muscles away from the bone and diced the uncooked flesh into twenty cubes, which he piled in a wooden serving bowl. This, too, sat on the floor beside the animal's body.

Kabaya glanced at Gitiri to ensure he was prepared.

Gitiri nodded.

Kabaya said, 'Repeat these words after me . . . I speak the truth and vow before God, and before this movement of unity . . .'

'I speak the truth and vow before God, and before this movement of unity,' came the response, like a parishioner following his pastor's lead.

The oath-taking began as Kabaya spoke and the young man repeated the next lines:

*That I shall go forward to fight for the land,  
The lands of Kirinyaga that we cultivated.  
The lands which were taken by the Europeans  
And if I fail to do this  
May this oath kill me . . .*

Gitiri stood, holding the tin cup in one hand and the wooden serving bowl in the other. He held out the bowl. Kabaya took a piece of raw, bloody meat and offered it to the young man, saying, 'May this meat kill me . . .'

The young man, whose eyes kept darting towards Gitiri as if he dared not leave him out of his sight, hesitated. Kabaya glared at him, his eyes fiercer, more demanding this time. The young man took the meat, repeated, 'May this meat kill me,' and put it in his mouth. He chewed twice, grimaced, then downed it in one swallow.

Gitiri held out the cup. Kabaya took it from him and said, 'May this blood kill me . . .'

The young man repeated the words and drank a sip of blood from the tin cup.

The other Kikuyu tribespeople in the hall looked on in awed, horrified fascination as two separate strands in their culture were woven into a single binding cord.

Solemn blood-oaths had long been central to Kikuyu life, though in the past they had been restricted to elders rising to the highest councils of the tribe. Within the past seventy years they had been converted to Christianity and were familiar with the rite of Holy Communion: the blood of Christ and the flesh of Christ, expressed in wine and wafer. This was a darker, deeper, more African communion. It spoke to the very core of their being and everyone, from the youngest child to the most snowy-haired grandparent, knew that any oath taken under such circumstances was a sacred, unbreakable vow.

Kabaya intoned the last lines of the oath, and the young man repeated after him . . .

*I swear I will not let the white men rule our land forever . . .*

*I swear that I will fight to the death to free our lands . . .*

*I swear that I will die rather than betray this movement to the  
Europeans . . .*

*So help me God.*

Kabaya dismissed the young man, who walked back towards the main mass of his people. A knot of other youngsters grinned at him and applauded their friend. But he did not share their joy. He had looked into Kabaya's eyes and understood that the words he had sworn were deadly serious. He would only live as long as he obeyed them.

One after another, the chosen squatters took the oath, some with enthusiasm but most because they were too terrified to refuse. There were only five men and women left to be sworn in when Kabaya pointed to a man in late middle age and said, 'You next. What is your name?'

'Joseph Rumruti,' the man said.

He was not a tall man, nor strongly built. He had thin, bony limbs and a small pot belly. His scalp was almost bald and his

beard was mostly grey. When he said his name he did so diffidently, as if he were apologising for his very existence.

'I am his wife, Mary Rumruti,' the woman next to him said. Like her husband, she seemed meek and submissive.

Kabaya chuckled. 'Mary and Joseph, eh? Is your boy Jesus here tonight?'

The men on either side laughed at their leader's wit.

'No, sir, we have no son,' said Joseph. 'The Lord did not see fit to bless us with children.'

'Huh,' Kabaya grunted. 'So, Joseph . . . Mary . . . it is time for you to swear the solemn oath. Repeat after me—'

'No.' Joseph spoke as quietly as before.

A tense, fearful silence descended upon the hall.

'Did I hear you say "No"?' Kabaya asked.

'That is correct,' Joseph replied. 'I cannot take your oath for I have already made a pledge, in church, in the sight of God, that I will have nothing to do with you and your renegades, or any other men like you.'

'Woman,' Kabaya said, looking towards Mary. 'Tell your man to swear the oath. Tell him to do this, or I will make him swear.'

Mary shook her head. 'I cannot do that. I have taken the same pledge.'

Kabaya stepped up close to Joseph, towering over him, his veneer of civility falling away to reveal the iron-hearted warrior within. His broad shoulders seemed to swell beneath his khaki shirt, his fists clenched like the heads of two blacksmith's hammers. Kabaya's eyes glowered beneath his beetling brow.

'Swear the oath,' he said, speaking as quietly as Joseph had done, but with a chilling undercurrent of menace.

Joseph could not look Kabaya in the eye. His head was bowed, his body trembling with fear.

'No,' he repeated. 'I cannot break my word to God.'

'You are not the first person to defy me,' Kabaya said. 'They all swore the oath in the end, and you will too.'

'I will not.'

The tension in the hall tightened still further. One man shouted, 'Take the oath, Joseph! For God's sake, take it!'

'Listen to your friend,' Kabaya said. 'Heed his words.'

Only those closest to Joseph could hear him say, 'I will not.'

Kabaya heard.

'I have had enough of this foolishness,' he said. 'I will make you swear.'

To Gitiri he said, 'The rope.'

Gitiri walked to where the dead goat lay. He put down the cup and bowl. He picked up the rope. Each movement was slow, deliberate, almost as if they too were solemn components of the oathing ceremony.

He faced Kabaya and tied the rope into a noose with about two feet of its length protruding from the knot.

Kabaya nodded.

Gitiri put the noose over Joseph's head. He tightened it until it was snug against Joseph's throat, then he stepped behind Joseph, holding the end of the rope.

'One last chance,' Kabaya said. 'Will you swear?'

Joseph shook his head.

Kabaya said to Mary. 'Take the oath and I will spare you.'

Mary stood taller, squared her shoulders, looked up at Kabaya and, to his face, declared, 'No.'

Kabaya gave a shake of his head and shrugged, as if he did not want to take the next step but had been left with no choice. He nodded at Gitiri.

Gitiri closed the noose more tightly against Joseph's neck. Gitiri's expression betrayed no emotion.

Joseph was struggling to breathe.

'Look at me,' said Mary, and he obediently turned his eyes towards her.

'This can stop now,' Kabaya said. 'You can go free. Just swear.'

Joseph did not respond.

Again Gitiri pulled the noose, slowly constricting Joseph's throat, completing the task in tiny fractions.

Kabaya looked over to the rest of his men, picked out three of them with his finger and nodded in Mary's direction. They took up station around her, brandishing their machetes.

The two remaining men, the ones armed with rifles, raised their guns at the crowd, which recoiled, pressing closely to the mission walls.

'If you will not save yourself, save her,' Kabaya said to Joseph.

'Don't!' Mary cried. She started intoning the words of the 23rd Psalm. "'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil . . .'"

There was a murmur from the crowd, a rumble that formed the word, 'Amen.'

'You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head—'

Kabaya lost his patience. 'Do it,' he ordered.

The soldiers obeyed their commanding officer. Gitiri gave a brutal tug on the rope, tightening the noose so violently that it smashed through Joseph's larynx and crushed his windpipe.

As his body collapsed, Mary screamed. The other three men hacked at her with their machetes, slicing into the arms she raised in a futile attempt to protect herself, and butchering her body. Within seconds she was lying dead beside her husband and her blood was bathing them both.

Kabaya looked at the corpses with indifference. He glanced at the final three oath-takers. They were huddled together, their arms wrapped around one another's bodies.

'Take the oath,' Kabaya said.

In desperate voices that cried out to be believed, they did what they were told.

## LONDON

**B**efore we go any further, I'd like to propose a toast,' said Saffron Courtney Meerbach, raising her glass of champagne. 'To Gubbins . . . who brought us all together, and without whom none of us would be here today.'

'To Gubbins!' chorused the other five men and women seated around the table in the small French bistro.

They had met there at her invitation as a nod to days gone by. The restaurant was an old haunt for them all. It was off Baker Street in central London, a stone's throw from the headquarters of the Special Operations Executive, the wartime intelligence agency in which all but one of them had served. Brigadier Colin Gubbins was their commanding officer.

'By God, he was scary though, wasn't he?' Leo Marks, a small man with a puckish smile added. 'I still have nightmares about the first time he fixed those eyes of his on me. Classicists among us will recall the basilisk, the mythical Greek snake that could kill with a single glance. Well, dear old Gubbins made the basilisk seem like the Sugar Plum Fairy.'

Of all the people at the table, only one had joined in the toast out of politeness, rather than enthusiasm. He was tall, with the chiselled features, tousled dark-blond hair and perfect tan of a Hollywood star. But there was a slight hollowness to his cheeks and, occasionally, a haunted look to his cool, grey eyes that spoke of a man who had seen and experienced horrors beyond any normal human imagination. He was not the only one around the table of whom that was true.

'Tell me, my darling,' Gerhard Meerbach said in a light German accent, as he reached across the table and took his wife's hand. 'I understand how Gubbins links you all together. But how do I owe my presence here to him?' Gerhard gave a wry shrug of the shoulders. 'I was on the other side.'



‘Because, dearest,’ Saffron replied, ‘it was Gubbins who packed me off to the North German plain in late April ’45, to try and find our missing agents, including Peter . . .’

Peter Churchill gave a modest nod of his bespectacled head as Saffron continued, ‘Had I not been there, I should never have followed the trail of the high-value prisoners that the SS were hoping to trade for favours with the Allies all the way to . . .’

She was about to say ‘Dachau’, but stopped herself. She didn’t want that hellish nightmare intruding on their gathering.

Instead she said, ‘All the way across Germany and into the Italian Tyrol, where . . . where I found you, my darling . . . and thought I’d arrived too late . . .’

The sudden, vivid memory of Gerhard’s skeletal, feverish wreck of a body lying on what seemed to be his deathbed took Saffron unawares. She could not speak for the lump in her throat and had to blink back the tears before she could mutter, ‘Sorry,’ to the rest of the table. She pulled herself together, took a deep breath and with a forced briskness added, ‘But I hadn’t . . . and everything was all right, after all.’

Silence fell across the table. They all had their own bitter memories and understood how shallow the emotions of war were buried, how the pain could creep up on one at any moment.

Peter Churchill knew what a decent English gentleman should do at such a moment: lighten the mood.

‘I say, Saffron,’ he piped up. ‘It seems to me that you’re hogging the limelight in the matter of the Gubbins–Meerbach connection. After all, if I hadn’t been stuck in the same concentration camp as Gerhard, we wouldn’t have been on the same grim charabanc ride across the mountains. Thus I wouldn’t have been able to keep him more or less alive . . .’ He glanced towards Gerhard. ‘You were in the most terrible state, old boy, we thought you were a goner for sure . . . And I only happened to be on the bus thanks to Baker Street’s determination to keep sending me into Occupied France until I finally got caught. Ergo, the Law of Gubbins applies to me too.’

‘Then I agree, I must also thank Brigadier Gibbins,’ Gerhard said. ‘And I thank you, Peter, from the bottom of my heart. I would have died without you.’

‘Think nothing of it, old boy. Anyone in my shoes would have tried to help. Inhuman not to.’

Gerhard nodded thoughtfully. He frowned as he collected his thoughts and the others gave him time, knowing that there was something on his mind. Then he said, ‘Here we are, talking about the war. I can’t help but think of the terrible things I saw . . . You know I was imprisoned, but before that I spent three years on the Russian Front. I was at Stalingrad, almost to the very end. I saw what was done to the Jews – the firing squads, the gas vans. All my closest friends were killed.’

‘Sometimes I feel cursed by fate to have had to endure so much horror, so much suffering and death. But then I tell myself, no, I am blessed, truly blessed, for I have experienced a miracle. I stumbled to the edge of the grave, but I did not fall in. I lived.’

Gerhard looked at the others, knowing that they had suffered as much, or more than him, and that they shared his feelings in a way most ordinary people could never do. He went on, ‘And when I awoke from the sleep of death, the first thing I saw was an angel . . . Saffron, my true love.’

‘I would like to propose a toast. And I have been wondering what we should be drinking to . . . Good fortune, maybe – or love, or friendship, or peace – but what I would like to toast is what we all share . . .’ He raised his glass. ‘To life, the greatest blessing of all.’

They drank again and then their food was served. Up to this point, Peter Churchill’s wife Odette, a slender, dark-eyed brunette had been happy to listen while the others talked. Now she spoke in a French accent.

‘I am sure you will understand, Gerhard, that it was not easy for me, the thought of having lunch with a German . . .’

‘Of course,’ Gerhard replied.

‘But then Saffron wrote to me and I learned how you two had met before the war and fallen in love, and Peter told me that you had both been at Sachsenhausen at the same time. I realised that you had been a victim of the SS, just like me. Now we have met and, well, I can understand why Saffron fell in love with you.’

‘*Merci beaucoup, madame,*’ said Gerhard, with a nod of the head.

Odette gave a quick, sparkling smile before composing her features and replying with equal formality, ‘*Je vous en prie, monsieur . . .* But there is one thing of which I am curious. Did you ask Saffron’s father for permission to marry his daughter? I would very much like to know how he reacted when he heard his daughter was marrying a German.’

Gerhard grinned. ‘Good question! And I am not just any German. My family and Saffron’s have a certain . . . ah . . . history . . .’

‘My father killed his,’ said Saffron, in such a casual way that no one was sure how to respond.

That process was made all the more tricky when Gerhard remarked, in an equally offhand tone, ‘It is only fair to say that my father had been trying to kill her mother, who was at that time, his mistress.’ He paused for a beat and then added, ‘Though she was actually in love with Mr Courtney.’

‘Well, that’s Africa for you,’ said Saffron casually, while the others were trying to work out who had been killing, or loving, whom.

‘My dear, this is too fascinating, and one day you must tell me the whole family history,’ said Odette. ‘But for now I would like your husband to answer my question.’

‘And I shall,’ Gerhard assured her. ‘As you know, I was very ill when Saffron found me. It took me several months in a Swiss sanatorium to recover, although even then, I was still weak. All that time, Saffy was at my side. Anyway, when I was finally well enough to travel to Kenya, which the doctors agreed was the perfect place for me to complete my cure and regain my

full strength . . .’ He paused and glanced around the table. ‘It’s paradise, you know, a Garden of Eden. And Saffron’s home, the Lusima Estate . . . *ach*, I don’t have the words to describe how beautiful it is. So, I still haven’t answered your question, *madame* . . .’

‘Indeed not,’ said her husband, ‘but I’m greatly enjoying your failure to do so. *Garçon!* Another two bottles of wine, if you don’t mind.’

‘We took the train to Genoa,’ Gerhard went on. ‘From there we sailed to Alexandria, where we boarded another vessel that took us through the Suez Canal and down the coast of East Africa to Mombasa. Saffy’s father Leon and her stepmother Harriet—’

‘Who is the loveliest stepmother any woman could hope to have,’ Saffron interjected.

‘. . . were waiting on the quayside to meet us. Leon took us to lunch and of course he hadn’t seen his daughter in years—’

‘Four, to be precise.’

‘. . . so I sat there for most of the meal while they caught up with each other’s news.’

‘I dare say you were quite relieved not to be the topic of conversation yourself,’ Churchill observed.

‘Absolutely . . . Then, after the puddings had been eaten, Harriet stood and said, “I think it is time for us girls to go and powder our noses.” I had no idea what she meant by that. But they walked away and I realised they were going to the ladies’ room . . . and I was alone with Saffron’s father . . .’

Leon Courtney assessed the tall, thin, war-ravaged thirty-five-year-old man sitting opposite him as thoroughly as he might any other investment his family was going to make.

*Not bad, so far, he thought to himself. Impeccable manners, respectful to me, charming to Harriet, plainly dotes on Saffy. Top marks, too, for letting us get on with it and not trying to make himself the centre of the conversation. Not a show-off. Nothing like his bloody father. Now let's see what he's made of. . .*

'Would you like a glass of brandy with your coffee?' Leon asked.

Gerhard gave a half-smile. 'I'm not sure my doctor would approve.'

'Nonsense. Nothing like brandy to buck a man up.'

Gerhard looked at Leon, eye to eye, letting him know that there was a strong, confident character behind that ailing façade. He gave a wry dry chuckle.

'On second thoughts, yes, thank you, I will have a brandy. I suspect that I may need it.'

'Good man.'

Two coffees were served, accompanied by the brandies, both doubles. Leon knew, but Gerhard did not, that there was a pleasant garden at the back of the hotel at which they were dining, where one could sit in the shade and be waited on hand and foot. Harriet was under strict instructions to take Saffron outside and remain there until further notice.

'I'll send a boy to fetch you when we're done,' Leon had said.

'Go easy on the poor man,' Harriet had warned him. 'He's not well and Saffron adores him. If you make an enemy of him, you'll be making an enemy of her too.'

Leon had grunted at that, but he loved his daughter very deeply and had learned to trust and respect her. She would not have chosen this man, let alone waited all war for him, unless he deserved it. Still, Leon wanted to see for himself what his prospective son-in-law was made of.

He let Gerhard savour his first sip of brandy and said, 'So, you want to marry my daughter, eh?'

'Yes, sir,' Gerhard said, no pleading or ingratiating in his voice, a straightforward statement of fact.

'You know that I will kill you if you ever harm a hair on her head.'

Gerhard surprised Leon. He gave another one of his gently amused smiles and replied, 'If I ever harmed Saffron, you would not need to kill me. She would already have done it herself.'

Leon could not help himself. He laughed. 'Well said! Of course she would. But could you defend yourself against her, eh?'

Gerhard shrugged. 'At the moment, no, I could not defend myself against a small child. But when I am well again and have my full strength, I am not a bully, Mr Courtney – not like my father – but I am not a weakling either, and . . .' He paused, grimaced, thought for a second and said, 'I flew my first combat mission over Poland at dawn on 1 September 1939, the first morning of the war. I was on active duty continuously from then until my arrest in September 1944. Looking back, let me tell you what I can truly be proud of. I always did my best to care for the men under my command. I was awarded some of the highest medals for gallantry that my country has to offer. And finally, the most important thing . . . All those medals were stripped from me, along with my rank, when I stood in a Berlin courtroom and refused to save myself from prison by swearing my loyalty to that murderous lunatic Adolf Hitler.'

'I tell you this, Mr Courtney, so you appreciate I am not a weak man, either physically or morally. We both know that Saffron will never, ever let a man dominate her. But also she could never love a man who let her dominate him. And she does love me. So we are equal.'

*Yes, you are,* Leon thought. *My girl has truly met her match. That's why she didn't let go of him. She knew she'd never find another.*

'I dare say you've thought a bit about this moment,' he said. 'Asking for my daughter's hand in marriage – wondering how I'd take it, eh?'

Gerhard smiled. 'A bit, yes . . .'

Leon grinned. 'Me too. I had a long list of questions for you. Don't think there's any need for them now.'

'Thank you, sir.'

Leon's expression grew serious. 'A lot of people here in Kenya lost family, men they loved. Some may give you the benefit of the doubt, but most won't. It won't be easy. Not for you, not for anyone . . .'

'I imagine not.'

'But Saffron loves you with all her heart, I have no doubt of that.' Leon gave a knowing chuckle. 'That's the only way we Courtneys do anything – flat-out, way over the limit.'

'I knew that from the moment we met,' said Gerhard. 'When Saffy came flying off the Cresta Run and landed in the snow at my feet.'

'Ha! That's my girl! And now I also have no doubt that you love her too – and that you're nothing whatever like your father.'

'That's true, for sure. I have spent my entire life trying to be nothing like my father.'

'Then I would be delighted, and proud to welcome you into our family, Gerhard. I ask no more than, love my girl and make her happy. As long as you do that, you will have my friendship, my support and my help if ever you need it. And if you don't . . .'

Leon let the words hang in the air for a moment, then summoned a waiter.

'Be a good chap and send a message to Mrs Courtney. She's in the garden with my daughter. Tell them that it's safe to return to the table.'

‘**W**e stopped off in Nairobi to get our marriage licence and we had the service a few days later in the chapel at Lusima,’ said Saffron.

‘The choir were workers from the estate,’ Gerhard said. ‘I thought the choirs in Bavaria were good, but my God, those African voices . . . It sounded like angels singing.’

‘Of course, that was when my darling husband discovered that he actually had two fathers-in-law, not one—’

‘Oh, but that’s too much, even for you, darling!’ laughed the sixth member of the party, Brigadier Gubbins’ former secretary Margaret Jackson.

‘No, it’s true,’ Gerhard assured her. ‘Lusima is huge, more than one hundred thousand acres.’

‘Much more,’ Saffron murmured.

‘About one tenth of it is farmland, and all the workers come from the Kikuyu tribe. But the rest of the land is kept wild and the people who live there are Maasai, who roam across the country, herding cattle. Saffron and I have built our own home there, by a watering hole where the animals come to drink. We called it Cresta Lodge, after the Cresta Run in St Moritz, where we first met.’

As he spoke, Gerhard could see the others being seduced, as he had been, by the idea of the private African kingdom where Saffron had been born and raised, a world away from the grey, foggy, bomb-scarred streets of post-war London.

‘While the lodge was being built, we lived with Leon and Harriet, but I was managing the project, so I often camped at the site,’ he said. ‘One morning I woke up before dawn, which is one of the very best times for seeing game, so I decided to go for a walk. It was quite chilly, because Cresta Lodge lies at an altitude of around seven thousand feet and the nights are cold at that height. The air was still and clear, and the loudest noise was the buzzing and chirping of insects around me.’



‘There are some low hills behind the house, and I was heading towards them when I saw a big, dark shape moving behind the top of the rise ahead of me. It still wasn’t quite light, so I stopped to look more closely and I realised it was an elephant, a great bull, coming over the brow towards me. More shapes appeared, another bull and then the females and young, all in a line. A couple of the babies were holding their mothers’ tails with their trunks as they trotted along behind them.

‘I remember being struck by how gentle and loving the mothers were to their children, and how serenely the herd moved across the landscape. But at the same time, there was a kind of equal, but opposite impression that these were the mightiest and potentially deadliest creatures I had ever seen. They were like huge, grey, living tanks, trampling everything in their path. I stood absolutely still as they walked past me, no more than thirty yards away, partly because I didn’t want anything to disturb this magical sight, but also because I thought, “I don’t want to get that big bull angry!”’

The story was heard in silence and greeted with appreciative smiles and laughter. ‘Encore!’ Leo Marks called out.

Gerhard grinned. ‘If you insist . . . Some nights, I would drive home after the building work stopped, because, well, as great as it was to camp out under the stars, it wasn’t as great as being with Saffron. There are two or three main tracks that cross the estate. They aren’t tarmac, or anything like that, but the earth is packed hard, so you can drive at a decent speed. One night I was coming up to a corner that goes around a grove of trees, so you can’t see around the other side. You’d think that’s not a problem. I mean, there are no other cars on the road. So I went around the corner at quite a speed because I was in a hurry to get home and, right in the middle of the track, was a female rhino with her young. She took one look at me and went away up the road with her kid at her heels. Let me tell you, the great big, leathery, fat backside of a female rhino running away from you is not a pretty sight. But it is a

lot more attractive than the sight of the same rhino from the front, charging in your direction.'

Gerhard paused and added, 'Another time I drove into a pride of lions who were having an orgy that reminded me of a few Berlin clubs I knew, back in the wild days before the Nazis. But that is a long story and not suitable for a respectable restaurant in broad daylight.'

'Tell us about the native population,' said Peter Churchill. 'One sees rather disturbing stories about Kenya in the press these days. You know, those rebels—'

'The Mau Mau,' Saffron said.

'That's the bunch. Do you get any trouble from them where you are?'

'Not yet, thank heaven,' said Saffron. 'The Mau Mau belong to the Kikuyu tribe. The Kikuyu are farmers and we have quite a few living and working on the part of the estate that's given over to farmland and plantations. But out in the wild, where Gerhard and I live, the people are Maasai, cattle herders, and they aren't involved in Mau Mau at all.'

'The chief of the Maasai on the Lusima estate is an extraordinary man,' Gerhard said. 'He's called Manyoro. Many years ago, when Leon was a young army officer, Manyoro was his sergeant. Leon saved his life.'

'Manyoro was injured in a fight with a rebel tribe called the Nandi,' Saffron explained. 'My father carried him on his back for days to get him to the sacred mountain, Lonsonyo, where his mother lived, so she could treat Manyoro's wounds. She was a healer, she had amazing powers, I've experienced them myself. Ever since then, Manyoro and my father have considered themselves to be brothers.'

'But surely a white man can't be that close to a black man, not in a place like Kenya,' Marks said. 'From what I can gather, the place is stuffed with bloody idiots who think Negroes are one step removed from monkeys.'

'It is, and they do,' Saffron agreed. 'But as you say, they're bloody idiots.'

‘Trust me, Leo, Manyoro is a second father to Saffron,’ Gerhard said.

‘Poor Gerdi.’ Saffron leaned over and gave her man a consoling pat on the back. ‘He thought he’d survived the third degree after he’d got past Daddy Courtney. Little did he know he was in for another talking-to from Manyoro.’

‘He made it as plain as Leon Courtney had done – if I hurt Saffron in any way, he would be my mortal enemy.’

‘He was only like that because he loves me so much. Once I’d assured him that I knew I’d found the right man, he gave Gerhard a huge hug, and started giving me a lecture instead.’

Gerhard grinned. ‘You should have heard him. He was telling Saffy that she had to give me many, many children—’

‘I’ve managed two so far, one of each, and that feels like quite enough.’

‘What are they called?’ Margaret asked.

‘Alexander, who’s four, and Nichola, who’s two. But we always call them Zander and Kika because that’s how they say their names.’

‘Did you bring them with you to England?’

Saffron’s face fell as she gave a shake of the head. ‘No. We thought about it, of course. But it’s much better for the children to be at home with their grandparents and their nanny, surrounded by people who love them. They’d have been miserable traipsing around Europe with us, too young to understand what was going on or where they were.’ She smiled wistfully. ‘I got a letter from Harriet this morning. She wrote about how happy Zander and Kika are and what fun they’re having, being spoilt rotten by everyone. She was only trying to reassure me, but of course it made me weep buckets.’

‘I think you’re doing the right thing,’ Margaret said, patting Saffron’s hand. She looked at Gerhard. ‘I’m so sorry I interrupted your story.’

‘Don’t worry,’ Gerhard said. ‘I was only going to pass on the final command that Manyoro gave Saffy. He said that when she grows older, it will be her solemn duty to find new young wives

for me and make sure that they behave and produce even more offspring.'

'I say, that's the spirit!' Churchill exclaimed.

'Pah!' Odette snorted, in true Gallic style, rolling her eyes at the idea. She smiled and said, 'Look, everyone, here comes Pierre!'

The others looked towards the kitchen, from which the chef and proprietor Pierre Duforge was emerging, wiping the sweat from his forehead as he came towards them.

'*Ah, mes amis,*' Pierre said as he reached the table. 'It has been too long since I saw you all. And Odette . . .' He paused and swallowed hard. 'It is an honour, truly, to serve you again at my table. I saw your film, the one with Anna Neagle playing your part, and my dear wife, she had to stop me from standing up in the cinema and shouting, "I know the real Odette!"'

Odette smiled. 'Thank you, Pierre. It's a pleasure for me also to be back here once again.'

As a fellow SOE veteran, Saffron knew the story of Odette Sansom, as she had been called back then: her exploits as an undercover agent in Occupied France; her capture by the Gestapo; the torture she had suffered, and her appalling mistreatment in Ravensbruck concentration camp. But having spent the post-war years in Kenya, she had no concept of how famous Odette had become.

'I want to pay you my sincere respects,' Pierre continued. 'And to offer my most profound sympathy for what you had to endure. The things those filthy Boches did to you . . . they're no better than savages.'

He sensed a sudden air of silent embarrassment descend upon the table and stammered, 'D-d-did I say something wrong?'

Gerhard smiled reassuringly. 'No, Pierre . . . it is just that I am a filthy Boche. But you are right. Some Germans were bloody savages and they did things that shame me to the depths of my soul. But most of us are not like that. We are no better or worse than anyone else.'

'Look at it this way,' said Leo Marks. 'I'm a Jew and I'm breaking bread with him.'

‘I do not wish to offend anyone. Please, I insist, let me give you this meal, as the Americans say, “on the house”.’

‘Thank you, Pierre, that’s very kind,’ said Odette. ‘And don’t worry. You meant well. All that matters is the war is over. Now we can live in peace.’

Saffron took Gerhard’s hand and looked into his eyes. They had been reunited for six years, but it still felt like a miracle to have him by her side.

‘Amen to that,’ she said.

Pierre Duforge regarded himself as a man of discretion. But he was also a businessman, and in the current state of the austerity-ravaged British economy it was not easy to keep a restaurant afloat. The lack of decent food for his customers only made matters worse. Whenever Pierre went home to France, the market stalls were laden down with vegetables, fruits, meats, cheeses and all manner of breads and pastries. Why, he asked himself in profound bemusement, did the British still choose to starve themselves?

As he walked away from the table, his conscience fought with his need to make money. He knew customer confidentiality was an important part of his trade, but these were desperate times; cunning and opportunism were needed to survive. Finally he told himself, *This is just a little thing. It will cause no harm to anyone. And I did give them a meal for free.* Making sure no one was watching him, he ducked into his office and dialled the number of a regular customer, who happened to be a reporter on the *Evening Standard*, one of London’s two main local newspapers.

‘Come quickly!’ he whispered. ‘Odette herself is here with a table of her old comrades. And my waiter heard one of them saying she had just come from Buckingham Palace.’

The reporter had a word with his picture editor. They agreed that this was a story that might interest Londoners on their way home from work. And so, when Saffron, Gerhard, Odette and the others emerged from the bistro they were met

with the dazzling burst of a camera flash, and a quick-fire series of questions from the reporter.

Odette took the intrusion in her stride, having become accustomed to being a public figure. Gerhard was baffled and a little uneasy at the questioning. It brought back memories of previous interrogations that he would rather have kept buried. But Saffron laughed it off.

‘It reminds me of being a deb, back in the thirties. I was forever being photographed at parties with young men who were supposedly about to marry me.’

Gerhard looked at her with a raised eyebrow.

‘Oh, don’t worry. None of them were remotely interesting. They were either hopelessly shy or ragingly oversexed. You know, wandering hands and all that. Believe me, darling, you were a complete revelation.’

She lowered her voice so that no one else could overhear.

‘You always knew exactly what to do with your hands.’

Kabaya had made sure that the bodies of Joseph and Mary were buried on the night they died. He was back in Nairobi by the time dawn broke the following morning. But for the next several days, he brooded.

The squatters had been warned that anyone who said a word of what had happened to the authorities, be it their farm boss or the police, would be punished in ways that would make the deaths they had witnessed seem merciful. Even so, there was a danger someone might find it impossible to keep their mouth shut. If they talked, the buried bodies might be discovered.

Something had to be done. Ten days after the killings, Kabaya and his men returned to the farm, late at night. He commanded the squatters who had sworn the oath to demonstrate their loyalty to the cause by rounding up every squatter on the property, including women, children and old folk who had not been at the oathing ceremony. They were ordered to bring digging implements.

The assembled squatters were marched to the spot where their two friends' remains were buried. Kabaya set them to work exhuming the bodies. In the light of flickering torches made from bundled twigs, every man, woman and child was made to remove at least some of the earth, so that none could later deny that they had taken part.

The weather had been hot, with periods of blazing sunshine interspersed with torrential downpours. The bodies had been decomposing fast. The sight and smell of the two corpses was enough to turn the strongest stomach. People were retching, holding their hands to their mouths and noses, or vomiting on the ground beneath their feet. A handful fainted and collapsed unconscious, looking like dead bodies themselves.

Kabaya wanted the bodies destroyed. He lined the squatters up. One after another, they had to step up to the place where the exhumed, putrefying bodies lay.

One of Kabaya's men handed each a machete. They were ordered to hack off a piece of the body in front of them: a toe, a fingertip, an ear, a slice of fat and skin, or a chunk of jellified meat. Next, they were told to pick up the stinking, festering morsel that they had carved and press it to their mouths, like some Devil's communion wafer.

'Break your vow of silence and your flesh will be corrupted like that,' Kabaya told the squatters.

The fragments of Joseph's and Mary's desecrated bodies were gathered up and taken to a nearby patch of woodland, where they were scattered as carrion for animals, birds and insects. Within a few days, there was no trace of Kabaya's victims to be found. Without bodies to prove death there could be no case against him. He could rest easy.

The squatters had no doubt that Kabaya would not hesitate to kill and torture again. No one told the full story of what had happened to anyone who might report it to the police. But human beings cannot help but talk among themselves. Stories spread, even if no more than vague, nightmarish rumours.

For many months there had been talk in the native and colonist populations about bizarre ceremonials at which terrible oaths were sworn. These were embroidered with further tales, often magnified and distorted in the telling, of ritual killings and cannibalism.

The men responsible for these terrible things called themselves *muhimu*, 'the important ones'.

But the white settlers had a different name for the rebels. They called them the Mau Mau.

Saffron and Gerhard mingled in the crowds of people thronging the courtyard in front of the Wilkins Building at University College London. The flights of stone steps that rose towards the classical portico, the ten mighty columns that stood guard over the entrance and the dome that rose behind them, were as encrusted with soot and grime as every other building in London. But nothing could diminish the imposing splendour



of the institution. Nor could the strain of living in a country still suffering rationing and austerity, six years after a war it was supposed to have won, dim the joy on the faces of the families gathered there.

This was graduation day for the university's medical students, the moment when proud parents could boast that their child had qualified as a doctor. As the medics poured out of the building in their doctoral gowns and tasselled velvet caps, clutching their diplomas and scanning the courtyard for their families, Saffron kept her eyes peeled for one particular student.

'At least he'll be easy to spot,' Gerhard remarked.

The majority of the newly qualified medics were white. A small number were Asian. But those of African or Caribbean descent could be counted on the fingers of one hand.

'There he is!' Saffron cried, catching sight of a bespectacled young man, with the tall, slender physique and dark brown-black skin characteristic of the Nilotic tribes of East Africa. 'Benjamin!' she shouted, frantically waving her hand.

Gerhard looked on with an amused smile. It was rare to see Saffron acting with such girlish enthusiasm. But then, he reflected, Benjamin was Manyoro's son. Leon Courtney had paid for him to study in London. And though she was several years older than him, without a drop of blood in common, Saffron felt as strongly as any older sister would do on their younger brother's big day.

Benjamin saw them and his face lit up with a broad grin as he waved back. But something distracted him. He held up a hand to say, 'Hang on,' before dashing away down the steps.

'Hmm . . . there's someone more important than you,' Gerhard said.

Saffron smiled. 'I can't wait to meet her.'

Five minutes later they discovered what the fuss was about.

'Goodness, she's ravishing,' Saffron declared.

'She certainly is,' Gerhard agreed, as an ebony vision in a yellow silk sundress walked towards them with the feline grace of a prowling leopard, her head raised with the regal carriage of a princess. Gerhard felt that she might at any moment raise one

of her white-gloved hands to flick a dismissive wave at the pale-faced Britons who gawped, open-mouthed, as she strolled by.

She seemed to Gerhard's eye like an African version of Botticelli's Venus. She had a high forehead, with tumbling black curls, rather than golden locks; perfectly arched eyebrows, but with deep brown eyes, rather than pale ones; the nose as fine, but the lips fuller and more sensuous.

Gerhard had lived with fifteen years of ceaseless Nazi propaganda about the superiority of the Aryan race. One look at this woman proved what ludicrous nonsense that was.

Saffron met Benjamin with an exuberant hug.

'Benji! I'm so proud of you!'

Gerhard could see the shocked looks on the faces around them. People were not used to respectable white women throwing their arms around black men.

'Saffron, may I introduce my fiancée, Wangari Ndiri,' Benjamin said, with manners as impeccable as his command of English.

'I'm so pleased to meet you, Saffron,' Wangari said as Saffron gave her a welcoming kiss on the cheek. 'Benjamin always speaks very highly of you and your family.'

'Well, we couldn't think more highly of him,' Saffron replied.

Gerhard contented himself with a firm handshake for Benjamin and a lighter one for Wangari.

'So,' he said, 'would you care to join us for a picnic? I certainly hope so.' He picked up a large wicker picnic hamper. 'I would hate to think I had been carrying this around for nothing.'

'That's very kind of you,' Benjamin replied. 'But I'm not sure—'

'Oh, do,' said Saffron. 'I've so been looking forward to catching up with you.'

'We'd be delighted,' said Wangari, taking charge of the couple's social arrangements.

Saffron beamed. 'Wonderful! I thought we could set up camp on Primrose Hill. We'll catch a cab and be there in no time.' She took Wangari's arm in hers as they walked out of the UCL gates and onto Gower Street and said, 'Now, you must tell me all about yourself. Manyoro didn't mention a word about you.'

‘Perhaps he thought it best to be discreet. You see, my father is Chief Ndiri.’

‘The Kikuyu leader?’ Saffron asked, with surprise.

‘Yes.’

‘Oh, that explains it.’

‘Why’s that?’ Gerhard asked.

‘Different tribes, darling. For the son of a Maasai chief to marry the daughter of a Kikuyu is like, ah . . .’

‘The son of a German industrial dynasty marrying the daughter of a wealthy British landowner?’

‘Just like that,’ Saffron agreed, ‘only worse.’

‘It’s ridiculous,’ Benjamin snapped. ‘In this day and age we shouldn’t be bound by outdated notions of tribalism. Wangari and I are Kenyans and we are Africans. National self-determination and continental unity – that’s where our future lies.’

‘I wish you the best of luck,’ Gerhard said. ‘We’re still trying to get rid of tribal rivalries in Europe after two thousand years of supposed civilisation.’ His face brightened. ‘Aha! A taxi!’

Gerhard hailed the passing black cab. The two ladies sat on the passenger seat, with the men facing them on the jump seats. Saffron continued her gentle interrogation of Wangari and discovered that she too had recently graduated, receiving a First Class degree in Law from the London School of Economics. She and Benjamin had met at a public meeting at the LSE organised by left-wing students and academics under the banner, *End the Empire Now*. Speeches had been given by Indians and Africans involved in the fight against colonialism, and various Labour and Communist politicians who supported them.

‘A friend of mine knew Benjamin and invited him to come along,’ Wangari said.

‘We started talking, and discovered we were both Kenyan, and that we shared a similar vision for our nation,’ Benjamin added.

‘At the end of the day, we went to a pub nearby and of course the conversation was all about the need for independence and social change,’ Wangari smiled. ‘So we fell in love over Marxism and warm beer.’

‘How romantic!’ Saffron remarked, with irony.

The taxi driver dropped them off at the foot of Primrose Hill, across the road from London Zoo. As they walked through the park that, come rain or shine, war or peace, provided some of the finest views of the city, Benjamin spoke in a voice that was all too often silenced in Kenya: that of the educated, articulate African, making the moral and political case for his freedom.

‘Your father is a good man and my father loves him very much. But the fact remains that your father owns the land and mine does not. Yours has a vote and mine does not. Yours belongs to the one race that rules all the other races, and mine does not. So long as those things are true, then Kenya will be a land of injustice and oppression. And we cannot tolerate that.’

‘Can’t you see, Saffron, that Benjamin and I have a duty to our people?’ Wangari’s voice was gentle, but her resolve was clear. ‘It is because we have been given so much, and are so privileged, that we have to give back to those who are not so lucky. We have to use our talents to make their lives better.’

Gerhard nodded appreciatively. ‘Well said. I felt the same way when I was your age. I wanted to use my family’s money and industrial power to make life better for the poor. That never happened – or not yet, anyway. But your ideals are noble, and I applaud them.’

‘Thank you.’ Benjamin sounded pleased, but also surprised. ‘My ambition is to dedicate my life to the fight to end colonialism and create a new, free Africa.’

‘And I will stand beside you, my love,’ said Wangari.

Saffron looked at the two of them: so proud, so gifted and so much in love. Yet her mind was filled with trepidation.

‘Will you make me one promise, Benjamin?’ she asked. ‘Tell me that you won’t make this a war between our people. I couldn’t bear to think of you as my enemy. It would break my heart.’

‘And mine too,’ he replied. ‘But if your people are not willing to talk – if they refuse to be reasonable or fair – what else can we do but fight?’

‘We can be friends,’ said Gerhard. ‘It is a beautiful day. The grass is green, the view is magnificent, the women are beautiful and charming. Let the future take care of itself. For now we have climbed far enough up the hill, and I have carried this hamper so long my arm is about to drop off.’

‘You should have carried it the African way, on your head,’ Wangari said. ‘Much easier.’

‘Now she tells me!’

They stopped and all talk of politics ceased as they looked down from the top of Primrose Hill and saw the view across the skyline of London. The dome of St Paul’s was visible, and Big Ben too.

Saffron opened the hamper and produced a tartan picnic blanket on which she laid plates, knives and forks. Next came four crystal wineglasses, followed by a bottle of champagne, wrapped in a damp cloth to keep it cool. Gerhard popped the cork, poured them each a glass and they drank to Benjamin’s success, and Wangari’s too.

Saffron then made Benjamin’s and Wangari’s eyes widen in amazement, as she opened a series of greaseproof paper packages to reveal piled slices of smoked salmon and roast beef, fresh tomatoes, a crusty loaf of home-baked wholemeal bread, half a dozen large brown hard-boiled eggs and a punnet of strawberries.

‘How did you get hold of food like this?’ Wangari asked. ‘The food in England is terrible and the rationing . . . ugh!’

‘I have English and Scottish cousins who live on large farms. I rang them a couple of days ago and said I needed emergency supplies, and they sent them on the overnight trains.’

‘How long are you over here?’ Wangari asked.

‘We’re only in England for a couple more days,’ Saffron said, ‘and then we’re moving to Germany.’

‘I have family business that needs attending to,’ Gerhard said. ‘And I fear that, unlike this delightful occasion, it will be no picnic.’