

KBP-7

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

MIDDLE CLASS BLUES

c/o American Express Travel Services
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Mr. Peter Bird Martin
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Dear Peter,

Our middle class collegiate boy in his all-wool dark blue blazer has been asked to join a birthday party at the last minute. For whom the party is being given he is not exactly sure. But he and the thoughtful friend who invited him have arrived at the restaurant before the main party.

The restaurant is passable, but it is inside one of the town's three bordering-on-rundown hotels. They decide to wait in his car until the rest of them arrive.

They are having a lively conversation on the topic of conflict resolution when directly in front of the car a man grabs a woman roughly by the arm. The conversation inside stops and they frown. The tall fellow wearing a silk shirt is talking to the well dressed woman, but he is still holding her arm and she is struggling to get free.

"That always bothers me," the American says to his South African friend.

Inside of the car returns to the conversation until the woman outside is suddenly on the ground and the man is punching her fiercely in the face.

"That, I cannot watch," the American says as he climbs quickly out of his car and runs to the woman. He has to get down onto the sidewalk to grab the man from behind.

But now the scene changes. This is no longer abstract discussion in the padded enclosure, this is "white-boy" in "bogy-man" land. The blacks hanging around the entrance of the hotel look at him like he might as well have stepped out of a space ship as that VW. (Fool, what you gettin' into there?) And nobody does anything for a minute or two while Jack the Giant Killer (dreamer that he is) charges into battle for the black woman's honour. Or at least her face.

They are gathering in the distance to watch. (Don't get too close to this. Anybody dumb enough to jump into this kind of mess might be bad news for us all.) Down on the deck the boy in blue has the man in the silk shirt partially under

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control, but the guy is like an octopus. He is all over this woman. (Boy-in-Blue has got the neck and punching arm, but Silk Shirt is making a comeback with a grab for the woman's hair. Boy-in-Blue pauses, but he's now got a leg over. Silk Shirt makes a last-ditch effort with a yank on the woman's head, but Boy-in-Blue is definitely now in control. Yes, ladies and gentlemen, from here on the ground it is clearly Boy-in-Blue on points in the first round.)

Suddenly, a pair of terrified eyes peer up at him in the dark. Who are you, he thinks for a moment before realizing it is the woman he has been trying to free. Almost as stupidly he thinks well, what does she want now? She is still looking at him with those wide, pleading eyes when things finally click. "Run!" he shouts at her loud enough for everybody on the whole block to hear. The volume alone could propel her away from him. Whatever it is, the words or their delivery send her running swiftly down the sidewalk. Things can appear two-dimensional in the night, and the sight of that awkward, constrained motion women running in skirt and high heels have, creates an image not unlike a bird flapping its wings.

But the woman is now out of sight, and all he has in hand is some wretched, writhing fellow who knows the police are on the way.

The American pulls the assailant to his feet, lets him go for a moment, and then takes hold of one arm. (He has just remembered the men out at the hospital with knife wounds in their backs. "He my neighbor. Why he do this to me?") He smells

alcohol on the man's breath so he takes hold of him from behind again. The American has control, but now that they are standing the fact that the man he is holding is much taller than he becomes apparent. So, like some kind of mutant four-legged clothes rack they waltz around in front of the crowd.

A short white man walks up to them with his hands in his pockets. He is English. "I would have never gotten involved in this," he says as if he is talking to someone in his living room. He seems unaware of the struggle the American is now involved in trying to keep the bigger man from overpowering him. "Yeah, well, I did get involved."

"I can see that." He starts walking away and then turns and adds, "we'll have some beers and talk sometime."

The policeman who steps up when the tan pick-up arrives is uniformed and white. He says "you can let go of him now." The American tells what happened, and while the white sergeant is taking this all in a short, young black fellow sidles up to the American and whispers, "the guy you stopped from beating the woman..."

"Yes?"

"He's a policeman."

The American sighs. The white sergeant's hands are hooked in his Sam Browne belt, and he is rocking on his heels.

"Is the woman still around?" the sergeant asks.

"No, officer. I told her to run once I had gotten her free."

"In that case there's nothing we can charge him for," he says looking down at the ground. "But we will take him to the

station."

The sergeant motions towards the tall, black man and says, "Come on Khabosele"(pronounced Cob-o-selly) the relief showing through more than the false sternness he has been wearing since he arrived.

But the American, or perhaps more correctly, his middle class values throw them all for a loop. "Is that guy really a policeman?" he demands.

The white police sergeant looks genuinely ashamed. It does not take much to figure out this is one of his own men. "Yes, he is."

"Now that's just great. I mean that's really great," the American says while the inner voice is chiming in with equal force, boy are you stepping in it now. "And you say you can't charge him with anything because the woman isn't here right now?"

"Uh, that's correct, Sir," the sergeant answers in a barely audible voice. (The warning lights are blinking madly inside the American's head, but M.C. Values are at the controls.)

"Then what's his name? And what's your name also?" he hands them his notebook. (And now M.C.V.'s are cruising along blithely on the soft, downy turf of the outraged fool.)

While the policeman, whose name is Sergeant Vorster, is writing down their names, the American turns to Khabosele. "You should be ashamed of yourself, you a policeman." He continues, oblivious of the crowd of blacks and whites watching him. "How do you ever expect the whites to respect black people if we don't respect ourselves? You should lose your job for this." Khabosele starts to cry.

This throws the American and his M.C.V.'s off balance. Tears of shame do not fit into the spectrum of expected responses. For a moment, he looks dumbfounded.

Then Khabosele points a finger at him, looks him in the eye and calmly says, "I will kill you."

Oh well, back to reality, thinks the American. Sergeant Vorster calls out sharply, "Khabosele!" but Khabosele once again points his finger, puts on the evil eye, and says "I will kill you." (So, what else is new.)

The American turns to the short black fellow--not much more than a teenager, really--and asks him, "did you hear that?" The fellow nods and the American turns to Sergeant Vorster. "You've got something to charge him with now."

Sergeant Vorster resignedly takes Khabosele by the arm and says to the American, "would you please meet us at the station?" The American nods and asks the young fellow, whose name is Lucky, if he would come with him to the station.

Lucky has already been playing a role in this incident. The American had not noticed him but Lucky had been speaking to him in the middle of his diatribe at Khabosele. "It's okay, man, take it easy," Lucky had been saying for reasons different than what the American thought, and for which he had ignored him.

Once in the car Lucky says "that what you said about respect, I really agree with you, man. You know, that's the American way, That's what we've got to get our people to understand, that thing about respect."

"I guess that's what it comes down to."

"Uh, uhu." Lucky nods and points, "turn left, the station is right here."

The Bophuthatswana police charge office is a large room divided by a long, wide, wooden counter. When Lucky and the American enter there are three uniformed black policemen in front of the counter, and two blacks behind the counter not in uniform. There is one young black with his hands cuffed behind his back. Sergeant Vorster is on the telephone. Khabosele is pacing around the charge office looking alternately distraught and angry.

Lucky and the American stand at the counter, and while they are waiting, Khabosele walks up to the counter next to them. The American edges away from Khabosele, and Lucky has no expression on his face now. Sergeant Vorster hangs up the telephone and without saying anything walks out of the office. Two black men walk into the office wearing sport coats. They stand to one side of the room and watch Lucky and the American. Khabosele walks to the American again and softly asks, "how are you, man? Did you hurt yourself?"

"Well, actually, I think I hurt my back," he says, relaxing and turning to point to the injury when—

Wham! The lights go out for a second and then come back on, but like flashguns. The American stumbles backward holding his face and blinking his eyes. He fumbles with his bent glasses and touches at the side of his head. There's a numb feeling, the sound is muted. His lips feel fat, and when he puts his hand to his mouth it comes away bloody.

(Oh Baby, what a sucker you are, whizzes through his mind. You weren't born yesterday my boy, you arrived this morning. In disbelief he wonders how he could have left himself so open... ..but talking about wide open—Khabosele is standing there with his arms at his sides, looking all sorts of self satisfied—and the American starts calculating. However, something about the fact that Khabosele is still standing there by himself, something about the stillness in the room brings him out of his inner-thoughts.)

He looks around the room at the half dozen or so black policemen looking at him and he suddenly shouts, "will somebody restrain that man? Will you put him in a room or something? Nobody moves for a few moments, and then the uniformed officers return to their writing.

Lucky takes him by the arm and soothingly says, "it's okay man. Take it easy, don't worry about it." But the American is becoming furious as he begins to understand what is happening.

He looks directly at one of the uniformed officers and asks, "are you a police officer?" The officer answers "yes," looking straight at him. "Then will you restrain this man, put handcuffs on him, do anything?" The black officer looks back at him blankly and says nothing.

He speaks to one of the men in sport coats standing beside Khabosele. "Are you a police officer?" The man answers, "yes."

"This man attacked a woman tonight and has just struck me," (the language becomes very proper), "will you handcuff him, or just hold him?" The black policeman looks back at him and says nothing. The American turns to one of the other uniformed officers and asks him, "are you a police officer?" (He's going through the motions now.)

"Yes"

"Want to do something so this guy can't hit me a again?" The blank look and no reply. He repeats this with every one of the policemen in the room and gets the same response.

"Say buddy, will you at least get me some ice, or a cool drink (soda), or even just some water for my face?" The police officer ignores him.

Lucky tries to console him, but when Khabosele walks out of the charge office, the American is incredulous. He is also now worried about Lucky and himself. So, he starts shouting at the stone-faced policemen. He storms around the room, one hand to his face, the other pointing and waving as he demands to know what is going on. (It is a little bit of audacity, flavoured with a dash of hysteria.)

A white man wearing rumpled blue jeans and sweater walks into the charge office. "What is going on here?" he demands, looking at Lucky and the American.

"Are you a police officer?" he asks, and when the man identifies himself as Lieutenant Lewis, the American sighs. "It's damn good to meet somebody in authority," he says as he sticks out his right hand. (The durapress Ivy League greeting: Damn fine to meet you—where'd you say you went to school?) He also wipes his eyes with his left hand. (Very non-Ivy tears of frustration, anger, pain—take your pick.)

Inside of Lieutenant Lewis's office the mood changes drastically. His office is spacious and has two chairs in front of the large desk. The American asks for some water and Lieutenant Lewis pours him a glassful from the desktop decanter. The lieutenant is reassuring in his tone of voice, and polite when he asks Lucky and the American to please sit down. They tell him what happened and he then excuses himself to get the sergeant. "He will take down your statement," he says before leaving the room.

Lucky leans over to the American and says quietly, "just after that guy Khabosele hit you he told everybody in the room 'you didn't see anything!'"

"How do you know that?"

"He said it in Tswana," Lucky says. "I speak Tswana."

"Oh."

"They also called me a sell-out for being with you."

When the lieutenant returns the American tells them of the new addition to the story. The lieutenant appears alarmed, but it looks like it takes a bit of effort.

"I will look into the matter. And, what is the name of this fellow?"

The American feels his pocket for the notebook, then remembers he might have left it in his car. Lucky volunteers to go and get it. When the lieutenant and the American are alone the South African opens up a bit.

"This problem with the blacks is nothing new," he begins

"And in some ways you can't even blame them. They're brought up to say I don't know. You can go and look for a fellow's mother or father, you ask him where they are and he will say he doesn't know. It's something that is very hard to get them to unlearn."

"I can see that," says the American, nodding his head sympathetically as he dabs a tissue at his mouth. "And does this problem occur with black policemen in the Republic too?" The lieutenant nods. "Unfortunately, yes."

Lucky returns to say he couldn't find the notebook in the car. The sergeant has just walked in, and at the announcement that the notebook—the one he had written his and Kgabosele's names in—was missing there is genuine concern all around.

"The only other place it could have been was the charge office," the American says.

"Didn't you have it in your hand when we were at the counter?" asks Lucky.

"I think so, I'm not sure."

"What did this note book look like?" asks the lieutenant. Sergeant Vorster, Lucky, and the American all describe it at once, and the lieutenant gets up to leave the room. He asks Lucky to come with him while the sergeant takes the statement.

On one page of handwritten comments, Sergeant Vorster describes the entire evening's events. Large handwriting. The American asks, "Is this the final statement? You didn't even say anything about the behaviour of the other police in the station."

"There will be another more complete statement when the investigation is done."

"And what about the rest of this. It's very incomplete, I mean there aren't any details."

"It's enough for right now," says the sergeant. "Now, if you'll just sign right here."

"Only with the understanding that this is not a complete statement."

"Yes, that's alright."

The lieutenant returns with Lucky and says that none of the officers in the charge office know anything about a notebook.

"What a surprise," says the American.

The two police officers say nothing. The statement is finished, it's time to go.

Before he stands up, the American asks Lieutenant Lewis, "can you keep this Kgabosele for the night? I mean, if he thinks he's going to lose his job now, he might get some crazy ideas."

The lieutenant says, "I will keep him here for the night."

"Thanks."

III

The lieutenant, Sergeant Vorster, Lucky and the American

are walking towards the charge office and they suddenly hear a woman's voice, very loud and very demanding in the charge office. Once there they see a short, attractive Indian woman and an equally short white man wearing glasses and a worried expression.

"This is an outrage! I want to know where this man is! What has been done to him?" and catching sight of the American she says "Oh my goodness! What happened to your mouth?"

"It's okay, Nellie," he says.

"It's not okay," she says firmly, looking at him closely and then turning to the lieutenant. "What has happened to this man? This is an absolute outrage. I am the assistant State prosecutor for the Supreme Court, and I demand some answers."

The black policemen have got their blank looks on again, and both the lieutenant and the sergeant are one step away from rolling their eyes in exasperation.

The assistant State prosecutor for the Supreme Court's outrage is just a tiny bit late. Now, as she paces the office, shouting at the expressionless black faces, and not allowing the white officers a word in edgewise, things are slipping back to where they started from. The American tries to interrupt her, and failing he turns to Sergeant Vorster. "Where's the toilet? I'd like to clean up a bit." The sergeant leads the way. Nellie calls out, "Where are you taking him?"

"It's okay Nellie. Just going to the bathroom for a minute."

When he returns to the charge office Nellie asks him, "have you found your notebook yet?" He shakes his head and she vehemently warns the policemen. "If you have the gentleman's notebook I want it returned immediately."

The black policemen were elsewhere from the start, but now the two white officers are withdrawing behind their impermeable official facades. They are not even listening to her now, and when she asks them for the names of the policemen who were on duty this evening, they give her straight "officialese."

"Any complaints about the handling of this case will have to be made in writing to the commander of the police," says the lieutenant. "And you know I can't give you the names of the officers on duty, Miss Cassim (Pronounced Ka-seem). (That's it. Case closed for now Miss Assistant State Prosecutor for the Supreme Court. Go fly a kite, Doll.)"

Lucky, the American, Nellie and the fellow with glasses and worried expression walk out together. As soon as they are out in the street Lucky says urgently, "that guy, Kgabosele, he's back at the hotel, in the bar." When Lucky went to look for the notebook he had run back to the hotel to tell the others, primarily Nellie, what was happening. There, he had seen Kgabosele.

"The bar in the restaurant where they're eating?" the American asks Lucky, nodding at the others.

Lucky nods.

"Well, I'll be—" the American says turning to go back into the station.

"No, don't go back right away," Lucky says quickly. "They'll know it was me who told you."

"Okay, we'll drive around to the hotel and I'll wait in the car. I have to go to the hospital to have this form filled out anyway, but I want to know if this guy is out free."

"One of us will come out and nod if Kgabosele is still there."

"If he is I'm going back and tell the lieutenant. He promised to keep him the night."

They drive around the block to the hotel, the others get out, and in a moment the fellow with the glasses etc. comes back out and nods with gravity.

The American drives back around the block, parks in front of the police station, and marches past the puzzled looking black holding an automatic rifle.

"I thought you said you were going to keep Kgabosele for the night," he says loudly. Lieutenant Lewis is seated, with the telephone in hand, Sergeant Vorster is standing next to him. The lieutenant says defensively, "I cannot legally lock him up for the night."

The American is once again incredulous. "You told me that you would keep him for the night. Do you deny saying that?" The lieutenant puts his hand over the phone. (That's right, spineless. Hold the phone and figure out some new lame excuse.)

"I do not deny saying that I would keep him," says Lieutenant Lewis. "but this is only a case of simple assault and I cannot lock him up for that."

"I don't believe this," the American shakes his head. "The guy beat up a woman, threatened to kill me, hit me in a police station, and you tell me you can't lock him up."

The sergeant speaks up. "Unless he has a lethal weapon in his hand at the time of the threat it doesn't count."

"What was he beating the woman with?" the American asks.

The sergeant says nothing, and the lieutenant motions them to wait until he can finish his phone conversation.

In the time the lieutenant remains on the phone, the American thinks about the situation he is in. He realizes he is not in the most favourable position at the moment.

The lieutenant hangs up the phone and takes a deep breath—but the American is smiling warmly at him.

"Say, listen," he says in a chummy tone. "Why don't you come on up here to the counter where we can talk without shouting at one another. How about it?"

Sergeant Vorster and Lieutenant Lewis look at each other and then walk slowly up to the wooden partition. The American leans towards them as if to sell them some porno pictures.

"Look fella's. Put yourself in my position. I'm in a foreign country, right? I just try and help somebody out, like any nice guy would—you would do the same, wouldn't you?"

They both nod.

"Okay, then. When I get to the police station, the one place where I can count on getting help, on everything being under control—you know what I mean?"

They nod understandingly, as if he's talking about someplace else.

"And what happens? Well, you know what happened. So I'm extremely concerned and not just a little bit worried, you understand."

They are with him now. If he did not know better he would swear the sergeant is about to say something sympathetic (it's just terrible what goes on these days).

But they are both quiet sympathizers and the American continues. "So, like, uh, the fact is, I'd sleep a lot better knowing this guy is with you for the night—just to cool off a bit, you understand."

The lieutenant speaks. "I can't legally keep him locked up for the night." (Back to square one.) "But if you want to go back to the hotel I promise you that he will not be there." (One step forward.)

"I have to go to the hospital to get this form filled out anyway."

"Can you give me half an hour?" asks the lieutenant.

"Easy. I'll go to the hospital first."

"Then you can return to the hotel and your friends."

"And you'll keep Kgabosele here for the night, then?"

"I can't say that legally—"

"Between us, as gentlemen. A gentlemen's agreement."

"As something within the police department I will be handling this—"

"I know," the American winks and extends his hand. "But I'll be all right then?"

The lieutenant of the Mafikeng, Bophuthatswana recently Mafeking, South Africa police force shakes his hand, followed by the sergeant.

"Thanks fella's," he waves, and as he goes out the door he asks—as if they're jes' gon' go fishin' is all—and I'll drop this by in the morning. Eight o'clock?"

"That'll be fine."

"G'night, boys."

At Bophelong (pron: bop-a-long) Hospital the sisters (nurses) in the casualty (emergency) ward recognize him immediately. They should. He has been doing a story on the hospital and he has been there every day for the last two weeks.

"Coming to work tonight, doctor?" asks one of the older ones who refuses to believe he is not a doctor.

"No," he is a bit embarrassed. "I've got to see one of the doctors for a minute." He looks at the half dozen people sitting forlornly on one of the benches in the hallway. He pretends to look for someone in particular until the sister continues down the hall.

A large woman, but who carries herself lightly as one who has been large for a long time, walks out of the emergency room. "Oh hello, Sir. Why have you come here so late this evening?"

"Hello Sister Maitha," he returns her smile. "I—"

"What has happened to your mouth?" she interrupts him.

"Somebody hit me, so I've come to get the police form filled out."

"Shame," says Sister Maitha, looking at it very carefully for a moment. Satisfied it is not a mortal wound, she then ignores it as would any nurse in any hospital in the world.

An hour passes before it is his turn, and Sister Maitha and he spend it talking about the hospital. It is a pleasant off-the-record conversation (without the notebook, she relaxes),

and they are laughing about something she has said when a young sister calls him in to see the doctor.

It is one of the Russian Jews from Israel. Dr. Kamanowich is a tall stocky woman. She fits the American stereotype of the hearty peasant woman; a booming voice and incredibly thick accent.

"vat are you do-ink here?" She is known to hate working late, and it is almost eleven.

"This man has come—" begins the shy, skinny sister before she is interrupted by Dr. Kamanowich. "I know who he iss. He iss dee journaleest." Then looking suspiciously at the form in his hand.

"vat iss dis?"

"It's just a little police form—"

"No, no, no! I don't fill out forms at night." (They are no longer friends.)

He sits down quickly in front of her and puts the form on the padded examination table. He pulls out his pen and says "it'll only take a minute." She has her arms crossed. The skinny sister looks at both of them apprehensively, then tries to say something. They both ignore her. "Somebody hit me, but they didn't really hurt me so you've got to say that yes indeed somebody did hit me tonight." She has still got her arms crossed.

He pulls the form in front of him and says, "look, I'll fill it out myself and you can just sign it, okay?" He looks up at the sister who is young and obviously new. "And you can just watch me here to make sure I put everything down correctly."

"But the doctor is supposed to fill out the form," she says unsurely.

"The doctor is filling out the form. I'm just doing the writing for her. You'll make sure I don't write anything she doesn't say. Okay?"

Before the sister can say anything more he starts in on the questions. "I'm a male, right?" Dr. Kamanowich nods seriously. He writes that down quickly and then looks up at the sister. "Okay?" he asks. She also nods seriously.

He continues down the list of questions until they get to the injuries themselves. Then he points at his face and asks, "where's the injury?" Dr. Kamanowich says, "lacerations of lover and upper lip." The sister looks at him curiously, and he explains, "I don't want to put words in her mouth." She continues to stare. "The doctor must describe the injuries in her own words," he says. She nods.

"And the back," he says. "You'll have to excuse me," he apologizes to the young sister. He unbuckles his pants and lets them down enough for the doctor to see if there is anything there. "I just know it hurts a bit."

"Abrasion and bruise of dee lover back."

"That's it," he says quickly, buckling his pants and handing her his pen. "Do you know where to sign?" The sister points to where it must be signed by the doctor. "Thanks Doctor Kamanowich. See you tomorrow morning at rounds." She smiles now. The doctor at the doctor's office; bye, bye. Wanna lollipop?

He returns to town and the hotel. He does not want to test the lieutenant's word, but he knows the others are waiting for him to return. Fortunately, they are just leaving as he drives up. They had given up on waiting for him at the hotel.

They surround him. Touch him, squeeze him, feel him where he hurts. The short fellow with glasses turns out to be American too. He has kept quiet until now. He is some kind of consultant.

"I'm really proud of what you did," he says solemnly. "As a fellow American I want you to know I'm proud of you." (Americans always know just what to say at such moments.) "Do you want some dinner? We saved you some. It's chicken, and it's really quite good." (What goes on in some people's minds? wonders the American, looking at another American, who is looking at an American looking at himself.)

IV

The following day is a blur of encouraging official encounters. At the supreme court offices Miss Cassim is in her element. These are her stomping grounds.

"I've told the attorney general about this and he is going to think about whether or not we should bring suit against the government."

"Wow," the American says under his breath. "But I found my notebook in my car. Miss Cassim just says with a smile, "oh, good."

The commissioner of Police, Brigadier Masilo is a fatherly looking man in his mid-forties. He is also very overweight, but it doesn't seem to effect his authority. Also, he is black. Lieutenant Lewis is dressed in his class A's. He looks extremely uncomfortable answering the brigadier's questions on the incident of the previous evening. Miss Cassim also pulls out her trump card during the meeting; Lucky had later been warned by the policemen in the charge office not to testify against Kgabosele. Lieutenant Lewis looks like he wants to disappear through the floor. Brigadier Masilo asks if the boy was threatened, and when Lieutenant Lewis stops short of shrugging his shoulders, the brigadier promises a full investigation.

"One thing," says the American. "Should the UNIBO student be mugged by unknown assailants, have a car accident, or be harrassed by the police—uniformed or plain clothed, I won't let the issue drop."

"Shall we arrange for a guard for him?" the brigadier asks with concern, directing the question at all of them.

"That's up to you," says the American, looking at the lieutenant.

"I don't think that will be necessary," the lieutenant says in exhasperation. He has just realized his credibility is very low at the moment.

Before they leave, Miss Cassim instructs the lieutenant to take a copy of the American's own type-written statement. It was the statement needed in writing before a complaint could be lodged. "It's signed," she says. "So that will now

be his official statement."

Miss Cassim and the American drive to the Control Commissioner's office. That is Bophuthatswana's ombudsman. On the way she tells him, "the sergeant was wrong about not being able to charge him if the woman wasn't there. You witnessed a crime, that's enough. What would he have said if you saw a murder and the body had been thrown into a river?"

Also, that's a load of nonsense about a man having to have a lethal weapon in his hands for a threat on your life to be taken seriously. He could strangle you, couldn't he? He could use his bare hands!"

"I guess so," the American says tiredly.

"And the lieutenant saying he couldn't legally lock him up after two assaults is pure rubbish."

The assistant control commissioner is the first one to talk to people with a complaint. He turns out to be one of the fellows with whom the American runs on Tuesday evenings. They are both officially Molopo Greyhounds.

"I didn't know you worked here," says the American.

"Yes," Mr. Christie answers kindly. "And I'm sorry to hear about your difficulties."

"It happens."

Mr. Christie nods.

In every different office the American has gone this morning he has been offered a cup of coffee or tea. He is about to burst.

"Say, could I use your bathroom before we get started?" he asks.

"Sure, down the hall, first door on the left," Mr. Christie says before adding with a smile, "just going to spit out a few loose teeth, eh?"

It is one night later, and the American is taking a bath. He tries to console himself that he used to go home from karate work-outs more banged up than this. But it does not work. It hurts more when you can't dish out a little in return.

It is four a.m., two nights later. There is a loud bang outside of his window, and the American is out of his bed, onto the floor, and across the room in seconds. Within a moment he is able to see—even by just the moonlight—that the windows are intact. The room is as it should be. He stands up, embarrassed, wondering whether a car backfired or the neighbor's dog knocked the trash can over. He quickly looks around the rest of the house—shivering in his underwear—and then climbs back into bed. His housemates are still asleep. This is ridiculous, he thinks to himself.

It is one week later and the American is driving to Johannesburg. A half an hour after leaving Bophuthatswana he is on the main road to the city, and he notices a small panel van parked on the opposite side of the road. As he drives past it the driver of the van stares at him intently.

Austral Locks "All Home & Business Security Needs" is painted on the sides of the shiny, new vehicle. (Must be a new store, thinks the American, and the driver lost. It does not register then, that he is driving a stretch of two hundred kilometers of farmland.)

An hour later, after a short stop for petrol, the American is driving on a completely deserted stretch of the one road to Johannesburg. Coming over a rise he sees a car parked by the side of the road, and as he drives by he recognizes the Austral Locks van. Austral Locks pulls out behind the American and follows him for an hour. When the traffic begins to increase, he passes and races away into the distance.

A month later the American returns to Mafikeng. There is one letter from the control commissioner's office. It is dated from the day after the incident, and informs him that an investigation is being undertaken into the attitude of the police that evening. However, one week after the incident Brigadier Masilo has died unexpectedly after a short illness. From that date there has been no further word from either the prosecutor's office nor the police department.

After being back in Mafikeng for a week, the American is shopping in town. He is opening the door of his car when a vehicle drives by and there is a sudden, loud bang. He turns around quickly, startled, and sees the camouflage police truck driving away. He looks for the tell-tale bits of paper in the air, little boys giggling, anything to suggest a simple firecracker. He sniffs the air, and catches the unmistakable smell of gunpowder.

He wants to shout at them, he wants to follow them and throw stones, he wants to do something. So he sits in his car, counts to ten, and thinks. Well, I suppose a blank is just that, nothing really.

Sincerely,



Kendal B. Price

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