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Shirley not only brings Africa to life but immerses you in a world of both beauty and peril. A gripping story about justice, truth, and the cost of standing up for what you believe in.

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This book, *Escape From Timbuktu*, is incredible! Keep it up, Shirley Gould. I lived the experience as if I was there myself. I loved your theme, God is faithful in any circumstance.

— KAREN TANKERSLEY—MOBILE, ALABAMA

Great read! I can't wait for the third book in the series. Awesome author.

— JUDI SHANNON, AVID BOOKWORM FROM SMYRNA, TENNESSEE

Finished *The Sahar of Zanzibar* and *Escape From Timbuktu*. 5 STARS

— DANA ASHLEY—BOOKING AGENT, *THE ASHLEY AGENCY*

I recommend both *The Sahar of Zanzibar* and *Escape from Timbuktu*. I can't wait for *Sunset over Swaziland* to be released.

— DELORES SIMON, CAREER MISSIONARY

I love both of Shirley's novels. I read the first one nonstop! The second book took me two days because I had to go to work. I can't wait for the next novel.

— JANA MEEKS, PASTOR IN HOUSTON,
TEXAS

SUNSET *over* SWAZILAND

THE AFRICAN SKIES SERIES

SHIRLEY GOULD



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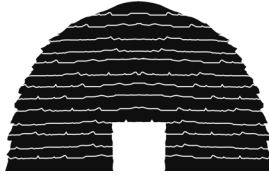
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To J.R.

*Your memory lives on in
every novel I pen.*

*Our adventures provide a wealth of
ideas, our love affair makes romance
easy to write, and you—being a valiant warrior
have defined the word 'hero' for me.*



Squalor. Filth. Stench. Jocelyn envisioned parasites attaching themselves to her Jessica Simpson flats as she dodged dog excrement, or was that human? Trudging through the loathsome slum, she struggled to keep her lunch down.

“Walk four blocks. You will be at the orphanage.” The driver yelled as he spun away. *What a time to shut down all transportation in Swaziland.*

Moving quickly through the pungent-smelling sludge, she picked up her pace, spooked by a sense of being watched. With the hair standing up on the back of her neck and her stomach clenched in fear, she hurried between the dilapidated shanties these people called homes. Sucking in a breath, she picked up speed when footsteps sounded behind her. She ran the last block. At twenty-six, she wasn't ready to die yet.

Relief washed over her as she turned a corner and spied the sign, ‘Noah’s Boat’ swinging in the afternoon breeze. She’d made it! Bent at the waist with her hands on her knees, she squelched her fear, knowing a stalker wouldn’t step into the open and reveal his dastardly intentions.

She straightened her power suit in an attempt to resemble a savvy businesswoman. After taking a deep breath, she focused on this opportunity to make a difference for the struggling people of Swaziland. Proving her worth would erase the scars of her past.

The area surrounding the orphanage was busy, almost chaotic. The bumpy streets were bustling with vehicles, donkeys pulling carts, scrawny dogs, and people on old bikes. A butcher killed a goat to hang it in his shop window. Jocelyn stared at the gory sight until an old lorry back-fired, jolting her attention from the bloody animal to a crippled beggar seated too close to the road with his arm extended for handouts.

The noonday sun sent beads of perspiration down her back. A breeze cooled her neck when she lifted her hair. Thankfully, it blew away the stench created when she scraped her shoes against the weeds along the cracked sidewalk. Gathering herself, she took a deep breath and stepped forward. The sound of laughing children brought a smile as she entered the facility.

“Can I help you?” A lovely young Swazi woman wearing a suit made of bright African print hurried to greet Jocelyn. Her hair was captured in a tight bun at the base of her neck. “I’m Mary.” She shook Jocelyn’s hand.

“Glad to meet you, Mary. I’m Jocelyn Cate Millender. Rev. Teferi Yeboah is expecting me. I’m here to write grants for financial assistance for the work he’s doing in Swazi.”

She motioned for Jocelyn to take a seat in what resembled a waiting area. “He is in his office. I will let him know you have arrived.” She motioned for the children to sit. “Quiet children. We have a guest.”

A young South African man in jeans and a hoodie with short black hair and a close-cut beard opened a door and approached Jocelyn. His contagious smile and humble demeanor shined as he outstretched his hand. “We are so glad

you have arrived safely. I am Sifiso Basters, Yeboah's assistant. I've been working with him at this facility for two years."

Standing, she shook his hand. "I'm relieved to be here. The unrest in Swazi is quite scary."

"Our country is struggling to survive. As the riots continue, our humanitarian work is much more needed." He gave Mary some papers.

"I've done my research, but could you tell me more about Swazi from your perspective?"

"Sure, Swazi is a landlocked nation with an unfavorable climate and low agricultural productivity. The country is one of the poorest in the world. Unemployment is going up as our standard of living declines. With disease and crime rampant, we are a needy country and appreciate anything you can do to help us change." He paused. "I will see if he is ready for your meeting." He stepped into Yeboah's office.

An adorable little girl with the cutest afro quietly approached. She looked to be about five years old and wore a dress two sizes too big. The child shook her hand. "I'm Emmy. I live here. I have my own bed."

"It's nice to meet you, Emmy. My name is Jocelyn Cate, and I'm glad you have a nice place to live." She smiled at the little girl.

Emmy slid into the chair beside her and swung her legs. Her mismatched flip-flops caught Jocelyn's eye. "Nice shoes."

"See, I have two shoes." She held her feet out to show them off. "Yeboah said I'm getting a new dress soon and new shoes too." She started swinging her feet again. "Yeboah means 'helping others.' Did you know that?"

"That's good. You needed someone to help you." Jocelyn loved the sparkle in the child's deep brown eyes.

The sweet girl slid her hand into Jocelyn's and gave her a snaggle-toothed smile.

Taking a selfie, she took a pic of the adorable girl who'd

captured her heart in a matter of minutes. Her desire to help the orphans grew as she held a small brown hand with dirt under her fingernails.

Sifiso approached them. “Yeboah will see you now.”

“Thanks,” Jocelyn stood. “Bye, Emmy. I’ll talk to you later.”

“Bye, nice lady.” Emmy ran to play with her friends.

When Jocelyn entered the office of Rev. Teferi Yeboah, the respected director of Children’s Services stood to greet her with his brow furrowed but smiled when he met her eyes. He wore a short-sleeved white shirt with embroidery down the front, a style popular among African businessmen in these hot, humid climates. Yeboah motioned for her to take a seat in one of two plastic chairs, not unlike the ones used on patios in the States. Sifiso stood tall at attention to Yeboah’s right.

Placing her bag on the concrete floor, Jocelyn got comfortable. “I’m glad to finally meet you. I’ve heard so much about the work you’ve done for orphans in Swaziland. Your stellar reputation proceeds you, sir.”

“Thank you for your kind words, Ms. Millender. It is good to have you here. But your arrival is evidence you didn’t receive my emails. I sent missives to request we reschedule your visit to Noah’s Boat until a later time. Civil unrest in Swazi has made your presence very dangerous for you.” He got comfortable in his worn leather chair behind his weathered wooden desk.

“The declarations made by our king within the last hour have made it impossible for you to leave. All transportation is frozen for the foreseeable future. No flights in or out and the borders are heavily guarded. Let us proceed with caution until things quiet down. What hotel have you chosen?”

“The Hilton Garden Inn on Mhlambanyatsi Road. After checking in, a cab brought me here. I hadn’t heard about the uprisings until I boarded my taxi.” She paused, remembering her frightful sojourn through the slum. “I’ll be cautious and keep a low profile until this madness passes. Is it safe for you to

move about the country? Could you come to my hotel? I need to gather info for the grants.” After traveling so far, she didn’t want to leave until her research was complete.

“Yes, I have a vehicle. The orphanage vans, police cars, and government vehicles will be permitted on the roads. We can meet during dinner.” He stood. “If you don’t mind waiting, I will finish this government report, then we can depart. Welcome to Swazi—”

The crash of windows breaking brought their meeting to a screeching halt. Screaming orphans had Sifiso rushing toward their cries. Angry shouts, glass shattering as rocks hit another window, ignited screams from frightened children. Gunfire added terror to the pandemonium.

“Get down!” Yeboah hurried toward the door. “Sifiso, get the children under the tables!”

Jocelyn’s plastic chair hit the wall as she dropped to the floor, hunkering down between Yeboah’s desk and the block wall behind it. Shots rang out. People yelled. A man shouted in a language she didn’t understand. Sirens pierced the air, causing the mayhem to escalate. Jocelyn held her breath. It was chaos, and she was trapped.

Jerking her cell from her bag, she dialed home. It took a moment for the call to go through. “Come on, come on.” On the fourth ring, the phone beeped as the answering machine connected. Her patience was wearing thin when the message finally ended.

“Ellie, it’s me, Jocelyn. I’m in trouble. It’s a war zone here, and all transportation out of the country is shut off. I’m staying at the Hilton in Mbabane.” The tat-tat of a machine gun interrupted her. “I’ll lie low until these attacks pass. Please pray! I don’t scare easily, but I’m terrified. I love you and Olivia—” She ended the call before she broke down. The sound of the door banging against the wall caused her to jump.

“Ms. Millender, stay down. It will pass soon. The children are safe. Now we wait.”

Keeping low, Yeboah grabbed his cell phone off his desk and made his way out of the office. Speaking in Zulu, he made a call. Sounds of hammers hitting wood filled the facility as they boarded the broken front window.

“Ms. Millender, it is safe now. The riot moved past us. We can get you to your hotel. Sifiso and I will be able to return later under the cover of darkness.”

“Are the children okay?” She slapped her hands together, ridding them of dirt.

“Yes, Mary is helping a child who was wounded when the glass shattered. Sifiso and my staff have boarded the broken windows.” He grabbed a set of keys out of the top drawer. “I am sorry you’re caught in this turmoil.”

Her legs trembled as she dusted her clothes. And to think she wore her power suit for this meeting. Holding on to the desk, feeling weak as water, she took a shaky breath and blew it out slowly. “Okay, if you’re sure it’s safe.”

“Using the back roads, we can stay out of the riots. Grab your bag. Let us hurry before they return.”

“I trust you, Yeboah.” She shouldered the strap of her satchel and followed the men to the van. Maybe it’s time to pray

...

“Ellie, I’m here. Thanks for letting me crash for a few days.” Austin dropped his duffle on the gleaming hardwood floor in the foyer, his messenger bag on the duffle, and tossed his keys onto the bar in the gourmet kitchen. His sister’s condo in Kingwood, Texas had high ceilings and amazing light fixtures. “I love your place, Sis.” When she didn’t answer he knew he was alone. He eyed some applications to rent the condo stacked

on the bar. When Ellie got married, Jocelyn would need someone to help with expenses. He moved the stack of forms aside as his phone beeped with a message. He pulled it out and listened to his voicemail.

Ellie.

“I’ll be there in ten. I stopped to grab dinner.”

While waiting on his sister, Austin relaxed on the white leather couch in the living room. A stone fireplace was a stunning focal point of the space and large photos of African scenes graced another wall. Comfortable in his favorite jeans and T-shirt, he reached for the remote, kicked off his Nikes, and thumbed through channels. It was good to relax after making major life changes. Leaving the military and starting his own business had required endless meetings and mounds of paperwork. Building a new life for himself would be challenging but exciting.

When a beep sounded from the office adjacent to the kitchen, he followed the sound, finding the light flashing on the answering machine on Ellie’s desk. Curiosity got the better of him, and he pushed PLAY.

“Ellie, it’s me, Jocelyn. I’m in trouble. It’s a war zone here, and all transportation out of the country has been shut off. I’m staying at the Hilton Inn here in Mbabane.” The raucous sound of a machine gun sent a surge through Austin. He waited—and heard screams. Jocelyn spoke again, “I’ll stay at my hotel and lie low until these attacks pass. Please pray! I don’t scare easily but I’m terrified. I love you and Olivia—.” Her call ended. Austin paced the floor, massaging the back of his neck.

Ellie barged through the front door, still in her flight attendant uniform carrying bags of takeout. “Honey, I’m home!” She laughed. “I’ve always wanted to say that.” After putting the food on the counter, she turned. “What’s wrong? You look like you’ve seen a ghost.”

“Well—Ellie, I listened to your message.”

With her hands perched on her hips, she glared at him. “Austin—that’s like reading my diary when we were kids.”

“It’s Jocelyn, and you need to hear this.” He punched the button and rubbed the back of his neck as it played.

“What can I do?” Ellie sucked in a breath and grabbed his arm. “She’s in trouble.”

“Where is she? What country?”

“It used to be called Swaziland, but the name was changed a few years ago to Eswatini. But she calls it Swazi.”

He popped his knuckles, a nervous habit. “That’s not good. Don’t you ladies listen to the news?” Austin began to pace the kitchen.

“And when would we watch the news? We’re flight attendants, not couch potatoes.” She stood frozen, staring at their food.

He put a gentle hand on her arm. “Forget about the food for now. Change into some sweats, get out of that uniform. I’ve got this. I’m going to make a call.” After pressing a number on his phone, he strode into the living room and perched on the edge of the sofa. “Sir, yes, sir. This is Austin Bendale. Thank you for taking my call, Commander Eaves. I have a question for you off the record. What do you know about Swaziland? I have a friend there who could be in danger.” Austin listened to a lengthy briefing from his former Commanding Officer.

“Thank you for being candid. I appreciate your time.” He ended the call.

“It’s bad, isn’t it?” Ellie waited at the door wearing sweatpants and a tank top, her blonde hair in a ponytail. She wiped her hands on a kitchen towel.

“Well, it’s not good.” He stood. “Let’s eat, then we can talk.” He followed his sister to the dining room. “Why is she in Swazi? What’s she doing there?”

“Humanitarian work. She writes grants and acquires funding for projects in third-world countries.” Ellie’s hand

shook as she displayed their meal. “Austin, I’m scared for her.” She took a seat at the table and began serving her brother. “This project was for orphans, wells and safe drinking water, and feeding programs.”

Taking in a breath, he blew it out in a huff. “The uprising has gotten out of hand. The oppressed people demanded the leader, the reigning king, to resign. But he refused to release his power. He’s one of the wealthiest men on the continent, and his people are starving—dying while he lives in luxury. It’s the worst time to be in Swaziland.”

“What did your friend say?” She poured sweet tea into both their glasses but didn’t pick up her fork. She’d lost her appetite.

“My contact confirmed the danger Jocelyn’s in. She must get out as soon as she can. But if planes are grounded and transportation is shut down, she’s trapped.” He took a sip of his tea. “Tell me more about her. Does she have a family?”

“Me and Olivia, we’re her family. Her home life was abusive, miserable, and still giving her nightmares. Jocelyn lived in fear until she escaped their grasp by earning an academic scholarship to the University of Houston. She’s beautiful, yet mysterious. Brave one minute, vulnerable the next. And I love her.” She reached for Austin’s hand. “Bow your head. If you’re going to take off and save her, you’ve got to eat something first. But I’m praying because you’re going to need some miracles.”

As Ellie prayed—Austin made a plan. Eat. Check a map. Book a flight. Rescue the damsel in distress. But first, say some prayers of his own. He was going to need them.