



Sifiso opened the back door of the office area connected to the orphanage. “No one is here. It looks clear. Let us go.” He punched the fob. The lights of the dirty white mission van blinked as the doors unlocked.

“Hurry, Ms. Millender. We must get you to your hotel.” Yeboah opened her door.

Sliding into the seat of the nine-passenger van, she slammed the door shut. “You can call me Jocelyn.” Her hands shook as she grabbed the seat and pivoted, scanning the area. The alley looked like a parking lot/garbage dump. Scraggly chickens scratched among the debris in search of food.

“Hold on.” Sifiso cranked the van and put it in gear. “We need to cross the main street to take the backroads to your hotel.” He edged the van around the building. After checking for oncoming traffic, he pulled forward. Sirens wailed in the distance.

Jocelyn gasped, slapping her hand on her mouth when she saw people lying on the street, many writhing in pain, some bloody, others lying still—unmoving. “Will someone help them, Yeboah?”

“Yes, but for many, it is too late. Medical teams have been following the riots. Our hospitals are assisting the wounded.”

Taking two quick turns, Sifiso maneuvered them away from the ghastly scene, but not before it was stamped in her memory forever. Some things one never forgets.

“This country is in a desperate state.” Yeboah continued their conversation. “Your assistance with much-needed funds will relieve some of the stress fueling their rage.”

Veering to the right, Sifiso drove out of downtown toward the Hilton. “Yeboah has helped the orphans, provided wells to those whose water isn’t safe, and given food to the starving. The assistance has brought a measure of peace to Swazi.” He seemed in awe of Yeboah, his boss.

“Sifiso loves to talk about our work. But our hands are tied without friends like you. If there is hope for this country, we must work together. It is a small place—but a desperate country.”

As they traveled, she watched hard-working people selling their wares, mamas with loads on their heads and babies tied to their backs as they carried firewood. Street children seeking handouts pulled at her heart. Overwhelmed at the task ahead, she sent prayers heavenward.

“Your hotel is near. Sifiso and I should wait there until the sun sets so the streets will be safe. Could we begin our work, Jocelyn? We could meet at the restaurant. It will be empty at this hour.”

Sifiso turned onto a road that took them to the entrance of the stately hotel.

“That would be good. I’ll go to my room for a minute.” Her hands shook, upset about the atrocities she witnessed. “Would you order us some tea?” She reached for her bag and stepped out of the van when he stopped in front of the Hilton Garden Inn. “Thank you for the ride, Sifiso.”

He smiled. "I should be thanking you for your heart for Swazi."

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"You're what?" Ellie stood, sending her chair toppling backward. "You can't just decide to sneak into a war-torn third-world country and think you'll come back unscathed." She propped her hands on her hips and waited for an answer.

"But she's in serious trouble. I'm trained for scenarios like this, Ellie. I'm good at it. My new company is equipped to step into dangerous situations. I've got the time off, but I can't lie around reclining by the pool, knowing her life is in danger." He pushed his plate away. "I can help her. Do you want me to or not?" It was his turn to stand and stare.

A beat passed. She remained silent.

"I'll take that as a 'yes.' Thanks for dinner. I've got things to do." He started to leave the room but turned back. "Ellie, don't panic. You're not healed from your near-death experiences in Timbuktu. I'm not dealing with terrorists here. This is what I do."

"Will you be okay, Austin? Can you bring her home safe?"

"Yes, and yes. Don't let your bad experiences cause you to be fearful and afraid." He put his arm around her shoulders. "You have strong faith. Pray and believe. The Lord will hear you. I'll use wisdom and be careful. I promise."

A tear wet her cheek. She wiped it with her sleeve. "I'm going to hold you to that."

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Jocelyn put the riotous chaos on a shelf in her mind to deal with later. Surviving her narcissistic father had honed that talent. Excelling in high school provided a path to escape her

abusive situation. She would utilize those skills to ignore the danger happening around her so she could help the starving orphans of Swazi.

While pulling herself together, she changed into a sundress, a thin sweater, and clean shoes before going to the restaurant. Yeboah and Sifiso were seated by a window overlooking a lush garden. Fresh flowers adorned each table, and the sparkle of crystal stemware was displayed on linen tablecloths. Tropical plants swayed with a breeze, dancing to the sound of soft American music filling the area. Life appeared peaceful thanks to the uniformed guards standing like statues when she entered. What a contrast to the poverty she had seen at the beginning of this day.

The gentlemen stood when they saw her coming. “Is this okay, Jocelyn? We could work for an hour and then enjoy the buffet. Their chef is from South Africa. You will enjoy his touch of African spices.” Yeboah pulled out her chair.

Sifiso overturned her cup and poured tea into it.

“Thank you, Sifiso. It’s surprising to have such opulence in your country. I feel like I’m back in South Africa.” She offered a smile and opened her notebook.

“It is rare. There are only a few dining opportunities of this quality, but our king built them so he could dine in comfort when he travels.” His brow furrowed as he spoke.

Stirring sugar into her tea, Jocelyn looked at the plush garden beside the restaurant. “Are those monkeys?”

“Yes, they are Samango white-throated monkeys. And by the stream are a pair of Egyptian geese.” Sifiso watched with Jocelyn. “Those small birds with the red beak are Quelea sparrows.”

“His eye is on the sparrow,” Jocelyn recalled the words of a song from her grandmother’s church. *I know He watches me. I pray that’s true.*

“Would you care for some bread and butter?” Sifiso held it in her direction.

“No, but thanks. I’ll wait for dinner to be served.” She faced Yeboah. “I’m sorry I didn’t receive your email. I’m a flight attendant and was working a flight to Nairobi before traveling to South Africa.”

“Do not concern yourself with it now. I’m anxious concerning your safety. I pray the riots and unrest will calm down in the next few days, but we can work here at the hotel or in my office until we’re free to move about the country.” Yeboah took a sip of his tea.

“Please clear my schedule for a meeting after breakfast and for a meeting each afternoon for the days our guest is in Swazi, Sifiso. Provide transportation in the mission van to accommodate our guest.” He poured tea into his empty cup until the pot was empty, then gave Jocelyn his undivided attention. “Thank you for your heart for hurting people. Where would you like to begin?”

Jocelyn turned her notebook toward him. “Could we use this map as we discuss the places where wells are needed? I’ll mark them in red. Then, as we discuss the locations you’ve chosen for feeding programs, I’ll mark them in blue. It will give me a master list of needs I can appraise and pursue the funding needed. This critical information is why I visit the countries I write for before beginning the process. First-hand knowledge and fresh eyes on the needs help me convey this urgency to donors.”

“Good plan. I commend you for your diligence.” He paused as fresh tea was served before turning their conversation back to the list. “I will name them from most critical.” His passion for this poverty-stricken country came through in his words as he began presenting the pressing needs. “As I speak of clean water and feeding programs, sickness is rampant in Swazi. Children

lose their parents and become orphans every day because of the AIDS pandemic. They are never far from my thoughts.”

“The children are my primary focus as well, but all of these projects go hand in hand. This country needs help in every humanitarian area.” She paused for a moment before making the appropriate notations in her notebook, adding a list of twenty-seven places where safe drinking water wasn’t available. The bottle of water on their table looked like gold as tears clouded her vision. *How many sweet children are thirsty right now?*

“I knew the need was massive, Yeboah. These wells are critical to the survival of your people. After hearing you speak, it would be advantageous to get a team of grant writers working on this to rush the process.” She took a deep breath and blew it out.

Hearing conversations around them, she realized they weren’t alone. The restaurant had filled while she was taking in the urgency of the humanitarian assistance needed in Swazi. *Maybe I’ve bitten off more than I can chew.*

“Let’s visit the buffet before we continue our discussion.” She stood.

“Lunch was not on our agenda today, but eating would give me the energy to proceed.” Yeboah extended his hand, motioning for her to go before them in the serving line. His ebony skin glowed with perspiration due to the lack of air conditioning. He carried himself as a man of stature, deserving of respect. His eyes were kind as he offered a ready smile.

Showing honor, Sifiso gave preference to Yeboah at every opportunity.

“You have him on a pedestal, don’t you?” Jocelyn waited with Sifiso as a side of beef was being sliced for guests.

“It is possible. But I have watched him rescue so many during the two years I have worked as his assistant. I enjoy being in his shadow.”

“Watching you, I can see you’ve captured his heart for the hurting of Swazi.” She received her serving of beef and grilled vegetables.

When they were seated, Jocelyn offered a prayer of thanks for the food, for their safety, and for wisdom concerning the task at hand.

“Tell me about Emmy. She is an adorable child.” Jocelyn lightened their conversation.

“Yes, she is a ray of sunshine in a dark place,” Sifiso spoke first.

“Emmy’s parents died from AIDS. I heard her crying outside my office window. She was starving and afraid. I took her to one of our children’s homes, where she was assessed, cleaned up, and fed. With AIDS being prevalent, doctors test all the children, and we place them where they can receive the medical attention they need.” He took a sip of his tea.

“After a month, we cleared Emmy as healthy before moving her to Noah’s Boat. The healthy adoptable children live in the facility you visited today. Her story will have an adventurous ending.” Yeboah cut his meat into small pieces as he spoke.

“But thousands of others face a future of uncertainty.” She finished his thought.

“Yes. Some have happy endings. For some, it is too late.”

Sifiso offered Jocelyn some bread from the basket their waiter had placed on the table.

“But funding is the answer,” Yeboah spoke between bites. “I appreciate the work you do preparing grant applications. The flow of funds enables me to move forward with my dreams.”

“Your success is known among humanitarian venues. I pray my grant writing efforts supply all the funds you need. I want to make a difference.” She emptied her bottle of water and asked for a Coke, cold without ice.

They finished their meal in silence while the needs hung like a blinding fog surrounding Jocelyn’s heart. Her worldview

had been impacted—and they had only begun their meetings. No matter the danger—lives hung in the balance. And she had a job to do.