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The man in the linen mask was motionless for the best part of a minute as he studied the milling crowd, hooded eyes flickering from face to face until settling on the lone figure in the far corner. The tall blonde man was on the wrong side of fifty but moved with the easy grace of a younger male and when he turned those light green eyes on a well turned ankle passing by, bestowing on its owner that familiar lazy smile, the lady more often than not would experience that fleeting unfamiliar mix of excitement tinged with just a hint of unease. A dangerous man, would be the first impulse, not the sort mother would have deemed suitable.

Yet ...

They would not have been wrong. He was wearing a light grey business suit, no necktie to go with the neatly pressed shirt, the dazzling white of the shirt contrasting with the deep golden tan of its wearer. Seated at one of the small cafeteria tables he was stirring a cappuccino as he idly scanned the headlines of a daily newspaper. Sitting with his back to the wall and facing the entrance and the man in the linen mask knew with an old certainty that the owner of that penetrating gaze would have carefully noted the details of every individual that had patronised that busy hospital cafeteria. And that the chosen seat wasn't a random act. Old habits die hard.

Harry Dance. And not looking a day older as when their paths had last crossed in that steamy shithole of an African jungle a lifetime ago. Harry who was returning his gaze now, a look of mild puzzlement creasing the corners of the eyes and marking them as those of a man who smiled often. Or spent too much time in the sun. Shifting his gaze the man in the mask studied the crowd. A pretty regular looking lot for a

busy hospital cafeteria at lunchtime to his reckoning. Some patients – one or two heavily bandaged not unlike himself – a few nurses, what looked like visitors buying small gifts before heading off to the wards and a noisy hyperactive gaggle of medical students jostling each other at the service counter. Slowly turning to scan the rest of the room he spotted no-one that would frown at his presence while carefully noting the position of the solitary surveillance camera set high in a corner and covering most of the room.

An all seeing eye recording everything except the magazine rack, just out of sight of the beady black lens he thought. Moving between the crowded tables now, painfully slowly and aware of the looks his pyjamas and dressing gown was eliciting he suppressed a grimace – that would hurt too much, what with the sutures still fresh and smarting even when opening his mouth for a sip of the ghastly protein drink they insisted he took. The nagging pain in his side from where they took the bone graft. Approaching Harry's table now and leaning heavily on the hospital issue walking stick, he lurched unsteadily brushing the newspaper from the table. As they both bent down to retrieve the fallen object Harry felt himself go quite cold as a voice from the past whispered "meet me at the magazine rack..."

It was the voice of a ghost and staring at the dark eyes behind the slits of that all covering swathe of bandages Harry could be forgiven for seeing a ghost. Carefully reclaiming his chair to finish his coffee Harry scanned the room and, seeing nothing new, nothing to set his nerves on edge, he stood up and strolled over to where the masked man was idly paging through a gossip magazine.

'Hello Mike,' he said softly, picking a periodical at random as he joined the other man with his back to the surveillance camera. 'It is Mike, isn't it?'

'For God's sake, Harry, keep your voice down!'

'The CCTV?' Harry said, 'someone watching you?'

Mike Louw, "Mad Mike," as Harry remembered him from their

shared past as mercenaries all those years ago, might have had his face altered (not much guesswork there, Harry thought, not with all that bandaging) but the voice was still the same.

‘I can’t talk now, I’m not supposed to leave my room. If they catch me here talking to you...’ There was something in the man’s voice, Harry thought, something he had never noticed before, not even in the heat of battle and the cards not falling their way. Fear? Could it be?

‘How did you know I’d be here?’ Harry asked as he absently scanned a photo article alleging that everyone in Hollywood slept with everyone else while dressing it up as news. Glancing at a bikini clad ageing star he wondered how much airbrushing had been needed to make the picture halfway presentable.

‘I happened to see you walking past my room earlier.’

Harry nodded. That would have been on the fourth floor, Selena up there now and being readied for the surgery. ‘What happened to your face?’ he asked. At a glance the rest of the man seemed reasonably intact, apart from a slight limp.

About to reply the man stiffened visibly as a young man, a male nurse judging by the uniform, brushed past to claim the table where Harry had been earlier. Harry noticed the whitening of the knuckles on the walking stick, the flicker on nervous eyes. ‘I need to talk to you,’ he whispered, the voice now so low Harry had to lean closer. ‘but not here, some place we can be alone.’

‘Your room?’

The masked man shook his head, the sudden movement bringing a flash of pain to his gaze, a hand involuntarily reaching up only to fall to his side. ‘No! I’m being watched. Savannah forbids me to meet anyone ...’

‘Savannah?!’ Harry couldn’t keep the incredulity from his voice, ‘You mean ...’

The other man shook his head impatiently, ‘Not the military operation from the bush war, this is different, I’ll tell you later.’ Turning stiffly he stared at the male nurse before lifting his gaze to scan the corridor

where a group of white coated medics had just strolled past. Harry replaced the magazine and made a show of glancing at his watch, 'The stairwell next to the elevator on your floor, in five minutes. There's no camera.' And with that Harry left, casually strolling away to head back to the fourth floor where Selena would hopefully have been returned to following her surgery.

No camera in the stairwell, Mike Louw reflected, it was somehow comforting to know that Harry Dance had made that observation almost as a matter of course. But then he had always been a careful man. Seconds later, having paid for the magazine, he headed for the elevators.

The man in the male nurse's uniform watched him depart, a frown furrowing his brow. After a moment's hesitation he rose and headed to a wall mounted phone dialling a number from memory. 'Hans? That patient in 405 ...'

There was a moment's delay as the guard manning the security room brought up the relevant data on a computer screen, a curt comment indicating they were on the same page. 'Yes, Louw, the one who had the plastic surgery, the man is supposed to stay in his room until they come for him to-morrow.'

'Get to the point.'

'Well, I just saw him down in the kiosk and he was speaking to a visitor, a man.' A note of urgency now in his voice as he sensed the security man's incipient stated indifference. 'It was the way they were talking, soft and not looking at each other, almost as if they're hiding something.'

There was a soft laugh over the line, 'Maybe they're faggots, setting up a contact.'

'Is that what you're going to tell the boss? When it turns out something's wrong, after the clear instructions he gave?'

The line was quiet for a few seconds, the nurse thinking the guard was scanning his screens, trying to pick up the whereabouts of the rogue patient. A moment later his voice, wary now, came back on the line. 'I'm not picking him up at present, hell knows where he's gone. I can't leave

here until Ben's back from his break, why don't you go up to his room and check if he's there and get back to me. Take a radio and keep contact. Meanwhile I'll run through the recorded tapes of the last hour and see if I can pick him out. Describe him, what was he wearing?'

With a suppressed oath the nurse tossed the dregs of his coffee carton in the provided trash can and headed for the foyer. Bloody bunch of lazy shits, he thought angrily; still, the director's instructions had been clear: this was one of the special project patients, to be kept away from others until the time came for his transfer to the farm.

The security controller found Harry midway through the previous hour's recorded CCTV footage. A clear shot, good lighting, taken from a camera mounted in a disguised central ceiling dome. After a moment's hesitation he reached for a phone and dialled a number from memory. 'Colonel? Hans here, I'm faxing over a picture of a man we've spotted chatting to our special patient. No details yet but I'm checking with the front desk.'

Standing on the wide veranda luxuriating in the welcome heat of the mid-morning sun, Colonel Jan Ehlers pocketed the cell phone before reluctantly turning to enter the cool darkness of the Halali Lodge's large lounge and head for his office at back. He had been watching the progress of a herd of African buffalo slowly coming into view over the neck of a distant hill and noted with satisfaction that the two tourist groups out on the regular morning safari tour would run into them --- always a thrill for the wide eyed seeker of the big African adventure.

Minutes later he was staring at the picture retrieved from the fax. The image was grainy but there was no mistaking who it was. 'Trouble,' he said softly. 'Big trouble...' Which left him with the daunting decision of what to do with Harry Dance.

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