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CamCat Publishing, LLC
Brentwood, Tennessee 37027
camcatpublishing.com

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

Paperback ISBN 9780744300970
Large-Print Paperback ISBN 9780744300260
eBook ISBN 9780744300291

Library of Congress Control Number: 2020935432

Cover design by Mimi Bark

5 3 1 2 4

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ONE

THE SHADOW of the ancient biplane danced and fluttered over Salisbury Plain. Etched sharp by the bright May sunshine, the SE5a ran on toward the village, growing larger as it descended in a graceful turn toward the grass landing strip. The young pilot scanned the ground from the open cockpit. He watched the racing shadow flick across thatched roofs and rambling gardens, touching the village graveyard with a passing shroud and moving swiftly on. On a bench beside the tombstones, he could see, quite clearly, the upturned face of a tiny seated figure. The figure waved. Beneath his goggles, the pilot grinned and raised a gloved hand to return the salute before concentrating once more on his approach and landing. It would not do to bend it; this was the only one left. The very last genuine SE5a in the whole damn world, outside of a museum.

He lined up the blunt engine cowling with the runway markers and moved the throttle quadrant until the roar of the Hispano-Suiza engine subsided to a gentle burble. The nose of the SE5a sank into a long, gliding approach and the ground rose up to meet it. Now, a steady pull on the cord-bound ring of the joystick, and the rate of descent eased. He shifted his gaze to the

side as the long cowling rose to cut his forward vision, and watched the blades of grass racing by beneath the trailing edges of the lower wings.

The noise of the wind in the wires died away, the stick was back in his belly, and he felt a small jar through the airframe as the tail skid touched fractionally before the main wheels. There were no brakes. The SE5a bumped along gently for fifty yards and rolled to a halt. He gave it a small burst of throttle, turned, and taxied slowly toward the hangar.

"She's fine," he told the waiting mechanic. "Just fine." He gave the side of the cockpit an affectionate pat and walked away slowly with real regret. They did not make them like that anymore, and it was a pity. That was the end of true flying for a month, until they let him take the old warplane up again on the next public-display day. Tomorrow he would be back in the draftless efficiency of a Boeing 747, hauling tourists and businessmen on the long flight to New York. It was a living, but that was all.

The pilot left his helmet on, the goggles pushed up on his forehead, as he wandered through the ice-cream-licking crowds to the 1946 MG sports car that was his second love. Truth to tell, he rather enjoyed the Red Baron image. He caught the admiring glances of several attractive girls and flicked the silk scarf back around his neck. Then, clambering into the vestigial cockpit of the MG, he nudged it into life and set off down the hill. There was one more thing he wanted to do before he left Upavon that day.

THE OLD MAN had been dreaming. It was a familiar dream, and he savored it with a smile as he dozed on the green bench beside the upright sentinels of the grave markers. The graves

around him were mostly of airmen—relics of the days long ago when Upavon had been an operational airfield in two world wars. Perhaps, he often thought, that was the reason the dream came most vividly when he sat on this bench. He had not slept long—only closing his eyes when the SE5a sank behind the trees on the ridge across the valley—but the dream had carried him back more than sixty years, to the days of his youth and a muddy field close to the Allied lines on the western front.

It was 1917, a fine September morning, and the noise of the guns in the distance was almost drowned out by birdsong. Outside the makeshift hangars in a field on the outskirts of Flez, a line of SE5a's had just returned from dawn patrol. Mechanics fussed around them as a truck deposited the trio of replacement pilots outside the tent that served as squadron headquarters.

The war was at its height and not going well. The French army had mutinied, and in the mud and devastation of the Ypres Salient, more than a half million men were dying in the bitter struggle for a place called Passchendaele.

None of it seemed to matter as he stood there in his high-buttoned tunic with shining Royal Flying Corps wings on the left breast. Seven months before, he had been an engineering student at Cape Town University who had never even seen an airplane. Now he was an operational fighter pilot.

"Hey, Shorty!" The reverie within a dream was interrupted. A young man in a leather flying jacket was calling to him from the flight line. "Do you think you can fly one of these things? I reckon you won't see out of the cockpit."

The newcomer rummaged in the top of his kit bag and produced a pair of leather-covered cushions, brandishing them at the other pilot. "No problem," he shouted back. Jibes about his lack of height had once upset him, but now he had ceased to care. If God had meant him to grow taller than five foot two,

God would doubtless have done something about it. God had made him a fighter pilot. That was what mattered.

The dream skipped in time, and now he was in the air, screaming down out of the sun at full throttle toward the unsuspecting Rumpler two-seater that was climbing for height far below him. Too late, the enemy pilot realized his danger and began to turn away. But the twin Vickers machine guns were cocked and ready, and he saw the German observer crumple as he poured the first burst into the rear cockpit.

A wild cavorting in the sky, two more bursts, and the Rumpler was falling like a bird with a broken wing. He saw it crash into a field beside the silver thread of the river Somme and burst into flames.

The old man stirred awake. His cheeks were wet for the thought of the men he had killed. So many men. Fifty-four victories, they said, but those were only the kills that could be confirmed. And all in those thirteen savage months before the Armistice brought the madness to a close. So many men. So many widows.

He opened his eyes slowly, feeling cheated. The dream had ended before its usual climax: the scene he cherished most, where he stood in the long room at Buckingham Palace, and the bearded, long-dead king pinned the medals on his chest.

The Victoria Cross, the Distinguished Service Order, the Military Cross and the Distinguished Flying Cross. More medals than any South African had ever won. Medals to mark his achievement as the fifth-ranking ace in the whole of the Allied air force. Medals he had not seen for years, tucked away in a secret drawer in the back of his writing bureau.

The voice that woke him had a familiar inflection. It startled him.

"Sir, forgive me, but I've been wanting to meet you for months."

The voice was out of his boyhood—the flat nasal drawl of the highveld. But its owner . . . *Dear God*, thought the old man, *I must have died in my sleep, or else I am dreaming still. The flying helmet, the goggles, the silk scarf and leather jacket . . . it's Harry van der Merwe, my old wingman from Eighty-Four Squadron.*

But van der Merwe was dead, long dead. He had flown out to meet Baron Manfred von Richthofen's circus in the cold light of dawn and had never returned. The old man closed his eyes again and opened them slowly. The apparition was still there.

He struggled stiffly to his feet. Age had diminished him further, and he stood no taller than the pilot's chest.

"Who . . . who are you?" There was no sign of a South African accent in his own voice. That had long since gone.

"Sir, my name is John Kruger. I'm the pilot of that SE5a you waved to a short time ago. I've seen you here, on the same spot, every time I fly over. You always wave, and I always wave back. I thought it was time we got acquainted. I was just curious, I guess," he added lamely. A wary look, almost hostile, had come into the old man's eyes.

"You're not English," the old man challenged.

"No, sir. As a matter of fact I come from South Africa."

"Go away," the old man said. "Leave me alone. I'm English, damn you. This is my country. We don't want any bloody Boers over here. Be off with you." He raised his stick. The pilot stepped back quickly.

"But sir, I only thought, because you seemed so interested in the plane—"

"Young man, I have no interest in aeroplanes, and I have never waved to one in my life. I come here sometimes for peace and quiet. That is all." He gestured toward the gravestones beside the graveled path. "I want to be left in peace with my friends."

Kruger's eyes followed the movement, taking in the neat rows of uniform headstones and the well-kept lawn. Suddenly he froze. "That's odd," he said. "This grave over here. I've never been to this cemetery, but I could swear that I've seen that name before." He shook his head in puzzlement and moved closer to one stone standing in the center of a row of three. The old man remained perfectly still, save for the pulse of a swollen vein beating in his temple.

Kruger read the headstone aloud. "Flight Lieutenant Andrew Weatherby Beauchamp-Proctor VC, DSO, MC, DFC. Killed at Upavon, June 21, 1921." Beneath the inscription was a replica of the Victoria Cross, and the inscription "For Valour."

He straightened up, his voice excited. "But I know this guy. At least, I know of him. He was the local hero back in my hometown, Mafeking. When we were at school we all learned about Andrew Proctor and the way he won the VC. Why, he used to fly SE5a's, too. Perhaps that's why I got mixed up in this business. But . . . " Kruger paused, his brow furrowed. "He can't be buried here. I mean, he's buried back home in Mafeking. I know he is. I've seen the grave. I . . . I don't understand."

He turned to look at the old man, but found he was talking to himself. Through the gates of the cemetery, fifty yards away, the small black figure of the man was hurrying away down the hill, coat flapping, as though the devil himself were in pursuit.

Kruger stood by the grave of Andrew Beauchamp-Proctor for several minutes, deep in thought. "Queer," he murmured. "Very queer. Whoever heard of a man being buried in two places at once?"

He walked slowly back to his car and drove away along the winding Wiltshire lanes.

TWO

THE INCIDENT NIGGLED at the back of John Kruger's mind throughout the long transatlantic flight. His main duties as first officer were to handle the radio communications and monitor the performance of the captain. Since the 747 was on autopilot for most of the flight, and few people wanted to talk to them in mid-ocean, he had plenty of time for thought.

What had he said to frighten the old man off like that? Could he possibly have been mistaken about the duplicate grave? One thing was certain: he could never go back to Mafeking to check it out. Kruger had severed his connection with South Africa forever. If he set one foot on the tarmac at Jan Smuts Airport, his next stop would be the interrogation center in John Vorster Square, Johannesburg. The hard men of BOSS, the South African secret police force, which had changed its name, but not its nature, to the Department of National Security, had copious files on John Kruger. It had been seven years since he had vaulted the border in an aging Piper Aztec while they snapped at his heels, but Kruger was under no illusion that the immigration officers would not still have his name high on their list of wanted men.

Kruger had packed a great deal into his thirty-five years. His father, an Afrikaner academic with liberal tendencies, had joined up to fight with the British army during the Second World War. He had met Kruger's mother, an Englishwoman, while waiting for embarkation to Normandy, and John had been born in the spring of 1945. He never knew his mother; she died shortly after he was born. But she had given him one priceless asset: the right to a British passport. In the years that followed, as he grew up in the sleepy town of Mafeking and went on to study at the University of Witwatersrand, he began to realize how important that might become.

Even in Mafeking, where nothing much had happened since the Boer War, young John had been acutely conscious of the conflict that had split South African society since the election victory of the National Party in 1948. His father had seen to that. A quiet but rabid Anglophile, headmaster of the local school, Hannes Kruger had conducted a personal campaign against apartheid. Young blacks, excluded from his classroom by the new laws, were welcome at his home in the evenings. They came under cover of darkness for private tuition behind closed shutters.

It could not last. There were visits from police officers and stern warnings, and the would-be students melted away into educational limbo. After that, John Kruger had grown up in an atmosphere smoldering with frustration and rebellion. His own feelings had been ignited by the radical atmosphere at Witwatersrand in the early 1960s. He returned to Mafeking with a degree in engineering and a hot determination to succeed where his father had failed.

John Kruger had looked around at the conventional protest movements and rejected them with some scorn. They were so many bladders of wind, farting uselessly against the thunderstorm of white bigotry. He was looking for action. He looked

toward the border of newly independent Botswana, only a few miles away, and an idea began to form. He remembered a schoolboy ambition to be a pilot, and he put the two things together. From that moment, when he cycled down to the local airfield and signed on as a pupil, there was no keener student of flying than John Kruger.

For months, he worked at anything that would give him the money to pay for lessons. He dug ditches, sold gasoline, mended cars, and painted houses. And every weekend saw him airborne in a decrepit Tiger Moth, listening to instructions bellowed down the voice tube in guttural Afrikaans.

Luckily, because his flying instructor was rarely better than half sober, John Kruger turned out to be a natural pilot. He went solo after eight hours, got his private license in the minimum time allowed, and progressed rapidly to a twin-engine rating and a commercial license.

His father backed him all the way, fully approving his motives. When the old man died, just before John's twenty-fourth birthday, there was just enough money to buy an aircraft of his own. At last, he could really do something.

Kruger chose his airplane with care. He finally settled on a Piper Aztec, old but sound, with a good carrying capacity and the ability to use rough landing strips without falling to pieces. For the sort of work he had in mind, that was going to be important. He set about constructing a double life, ostensibly working hard to establish an air-taxi business from Mafeking, but also renewing contacts with some of his old friends from the university.

It took time for trust to build, but after three months came the first cautious approach. The Asian who came to his door late at night was nervous and sweating. Would he fly a passenger across the border, no questions asked? Kruger would, and did, scudding low over the veld to avoid radar detection.

He recognized his passenger from press photographs as a prominent member of the African National Congress, wanted by the police for alleged subversion and sabotage. But he asked no questions. When they landed on a dirt strip illuminated by car headlights, the man thanked him with a word and walked away into the darkness. Kruger, his blood charged with adrenaline, got back to base without any problems. For the next few days he waited for the police to knock on his door, but they never came.

It had been a good time, Kruger reflected, relaxing with closed eyes as the jumbo jet swallowed the miles across the Atlantic. He missed the excitement, the pitting of wits against the authorities. Over the ensuing four years he had helped a lot of men to escape, often flying deep into the bushveld and landing in impossible conditions. Sometimes he brought back cargo from Botswana: heavy wooden boxes, the contents of which were never mentioned but were all too obvious.

And then it had all come to an end, as he had known it must. Staff at the airfield were being questioned about his movements by men who had BOSS written all over them. Kruger did not hesitate. His plans had been made long before. With full tanks, the Aztec could just reach Lusaka, the capital of Zambia, in one hop. He filed a flight plan for Pretoria, took off, and headed north without a backward glance.

Twenty-four hours later, minus one confiscated clapped-out airplane, he was on the British Caledonian flight to London.

Strange, he reflected, that he should come across Beauchamp-Proctor again. Had it not been for his father's recounting of the fighter pilot's exploits, he might never have had the urge to fly. His whole life might have taken a different course. He felt a curious affinity with the long-dead little man. In their different ways they had both flown down the ragged edge that separates life from death, and for both, the thrills had

ended. That he, John Kruger, was still alive, was almost irrelevant. He rarely felt alive these days, save on those rare occasions when he was allowed to fly the SE5a from Upavon. He had not thought about it before the incident in the cemetery, but now he felt his destiny was strongly linked with that legend from the past. Fate had somehow engineered that he should fly Beauchamp-Proctor's old machine, or one exactly like it, from Beauchamp-Proctor's old airfield. He had been orbiting the same patch of sky from which the hero of Mafeking had fallen and died. It was the oddest of coincidences.

Like many airmen, Kruger was superstitious. Was there some meaning to it all? *Somehow*, he thought, *I must find out what lies behind the mystery of that second grave. There's a story there, somewhere.*

ALBERT MARTIN HAD STOPPED to catch his breath, his thin chest heaving, as soon as he rounded the corner of the lane leading to the churchyard. His mind was in a turmoil. All these years he had been left in peace, and now it had begun again. It was as though a Fokker had suddenly appeared on his tail out of a clear blue sky, and he felt the long-forgotten tingle in his spine as he waited for the vicious patter of machine-gun bullets.

But the instant reflex that would once have sent him flicking upward in an Immelmann turn to outwit his opponent was no longer there. He was eighty-five years old, and he needed time to think. Walking more slowly now, with frequent glances over his shoulder to see if he was being followed, Albert made his way to the Dog and Duck.

The pub was dark and genuinely old. Adz-marks scored the crude oak beams, and the strips of ceiling between were brown with generations of tobacco smoke. There were no concessions

to the tourist trade: no jukebox and no fruit machines. The Dog and Duck was for the locals, who propped up the worn bar or warmed their backsides in front of the wide fireplace every night of the year. Strangers were served with courtesy but seldom stayed long. Something about the atmosphere in the Dog and Duck made them feel out of place—as though they had walked into the 21 Club without a dinner jacket.

Landlord Fred Hatchett looked up from his ritual polishing of glasses and reached for a battered pewter tankard. "'Noon, Albert. The usual?"

Albert Martin shook his head. "Scotch please, Fred. A large one."

The landlord, surprised, almost dropped the glass he was holding in his left hand. For twenty years, ever since Fred had inherited the public house from an uncle who'd died of cirrhosis, old Albert had been coming in every day for a pint of bitter. Sometimes two. Very occasionally, three. But never whiskey.

"You feeling all right, Albert?" he asked solicitously. "The old woman been playing you up, has she?"

Albert took the proffered Scotch and drank it down in a single gulp. The liquor burned its way down his throat and hit the pit of his stomach with a minor explosion. "Nothing like that," he said. "Just had a bit of a shock, that's all." He lifted himself onto a stool and rested his head on his hands.

"You don't look so good to me. Would you like me to call the doctor?"

"No, I'll be fine in a minute. Just give me another one, will you?" He fumbled in his pocket for the money.

"Have this one on the house." Fred punched the optic three times and pulled himself a modest half of bitter. There were no other customers in the bar; most of the village was up on the hill, watching the air display. "Want to tell me what it's all about?"

Albert shook his head dumbly. It wasn't that he didn't trust

Fred, but a secret kept for more than a half century would not come out that readily. He had never told anyone, not even the woman who had once shared his bed and still kept his house. To blurt it out now would be to betray himself. He sipped the whiskey more slowly this time, and a half-remembered glow began to spread upward from his toes. The tots of rum he'd taken to keep the cold at bay in the chill air above the German trenches had made him feel like this.

"It's a long story, Fred," he said. "Too long. I guess you could say a goose just walked on my grave." He began to giggle, a thin, old man's cackle of laughter. The landlord joined in nervously. "That's very good: a goose walked on my grave! Only it wasn't a goose, Fred. It was a great big hairy Boer, and I think he wants to kill me."

Fred Hatchett sighed. The poor old bugger had gone gaga at long last. Senile, poor sod. It happened to all of them in the end. A lifetime of dealing with drunks had taught him the wisdom of ignoring wild talk. He polished away furiously and made small noises of concern.

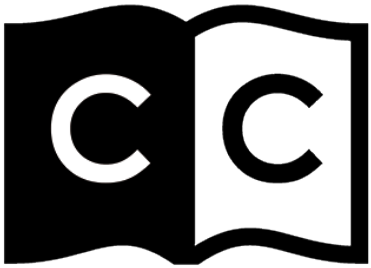
Albert Martin looked owlishly around the bar, blinking to regain focus. It was still empty. He leaned forward, dropping his voice to a conspiratorial whisper. "Do you know who I am, Fred? I mean, do you know who I really am?"

"Of course I know who you are, you silly old sod. You're Albert Martin, and you live up the hill at Willow Cottage with Mrs. Ada Martin. Except," Fred added slyly, "that some wagging tongues say you're a wicked old man, and she isn't really your wife at all—just your fancy woman."

Albert expressed no resentment at this slur on his moral character. "'s right," he said, his words beginning to melt into each other like multiflavored ice cream. "Never did marry old Ada, and 's none of your business why not. It's none of their business neither." He embraced the rest of the village with a

sweep of his arm. "But you don't know who I am. None of you know who I am. So thashallright." He pushed the empty glass forward. "I wannanother drink."

"Come on, Albert. You've had enough." The landlord moved quickly around the bar, just in time to catch the frail little body as it slipped gently from the stool. He carried it easily over to one of the low oak settles and laid it down, taking off his coat and folding it under the gray head for a pillow. He shook his head sadly. Well, it was nearly closing time. He could lie there and sleep it off for the afternoon. Fred went back to polishing the glasses. He wondered what the old man had been raving about: something about graves and Boers and killing, and being someone else. Nothing that made any sense. Perhaps it would be a kindness to pop up to Ada when he locked the door, and tell her what had happened. Yes, he decided. He would do that.



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DON'T GO UP WITHOUT A PARACHUTE

John Kruger is a commercial pilot long on the run from Afrikaner nationalists for smuggling black activists out of apartheid-era South Africa. As a flyer of old collectible planes, he now wants nothing more than to enjoy his hobby, party, and play the field.

Then John discovers that World War I hero and flying ace Andrew Beauchamp-Proctor seems to be buried in two places 6,000 miles apart. Out of a sense of duty toward the man who inspired him to become a pilot, John begins a search for the truth. Records claim that, while practicing for an air display, Andrew lost control of his SE5A and lost his life—or did he? And who is the mysterious old man who waves to Kruger as he flies overhead, only to demand to be left in peace when they meet on the ground?

John and his latest girlfriend set off on a journey to uncover Andrew's real whereabouts, but Andrew's secrets aren't the only ones threatening to be unearthed. As John's own past catches up to him, the pair unwittingly lands in the crosshairs of a racist South African group with a sinister plot—forcing them to fight for their lives and for justice.

CamCat Books

COVER DESIGN: MIMI BARK

Fiction/Suspense $14.99 USD

ISBN 978-0-7443-0097-0

51499

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