

Breakfast with Mugabe

Fraser Grace

Complete Draft 2011

including titles, text, glossary and Shona/English translation

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Characters

Andrew Peric - a white psychiatrist.

Robert Mugabe - President of Zimbabwe, 77

Grace Mugabe - his wife, half his age

Gabriel - a bodyguard/secret policeman

Time & Place

the action is set in the State House in Harare, in October 2001, in the months preceding the Presidential Elections which took place in spring 2002.

I leaned back against the masasa tree and lay still,
trying not to think about the House of Hunger
where the acids of gut-rot had eaten into the base
metal of my brains. The House has now become
my mind; and I do not like the way the roof is
rattling.

Dambudzo Marachera, *The House of Hunger*

one

A room in the Presidential Palace in Harare. Morning.

Double doors, ajar. A window. An overhead fan. A sofa.

Gabriel raises the blind at the window.

Peric waits, briefcase in hand.

Peric: I must be early.

Gabriel: Yessuh. You are very early.

Peric: Good. I heard the boss doesn't like to be kept waiting.

Andrew Peric.

Gabriel does not take the proffered hand.

Gabriel: Gabriel. Suh.

Grace appears in the doorway. She is dressed in smart, rich European woman's garb.

Grace: Doctor Peric?.

Peric: Ah – Mangwanani.

Grace: Mangwanani.

Peric: Marara sei?

Grace: Tarara mararawo.

Peric: Tarara.

Grace: You are a little early today, Chiremba.

Peric: Yes. I was just explaining to Gabriel here...

Grace: Please. There is no need to explain to Gabriel. Gabriel's job is to know everything. And to say nothing.

Peric smiles.

Grace: Have you had to travel far, Doctor Peric?

Peric: No I have an apartment near the hospital. I cut up through the gardens this morning, a lovely walk.

Grace: You know, I was saying to my husband, I must have met this Doctor Peric before.

Peric: Really, I think that's unlikely...

Grace: A dinner party somewhere, or something.

Peric: I would have remembered. The PU – the psychiatric unit – that's what you might call a full time job. Weekends, well, that's pretty full time too.

It's a pleasure to meet you at last, Mrs Mugabe.

Grace: Please. Call me Grace.

Peric: Grace. I brought a letter with me. From the President. This is the room we'll be meeting in is it?

Gabriel: Yessuh.

Grace: You know, you are quite famous in Harare. Everyone talks about a murungu doctor who has done so much for the black people. Shall we sit?

Thankyou Gabriel. I don't think Dr Peric is going to attack the President. I am satisfied he won't attack me.

Gabriel: I was told to wait with the Doctor, madam.

Grace: *I am telling you to go.*

Gabriel leaves. Grace changes gear.

Grace: I am relieved you are here, Chiremba.

Peric: I'm very pleased to be here.

Grace: The President is behaving very strangely just now. I have been asking him to get some help for so long I believe he has begun to hate me for it.

Peric: I'm sure that can't be true.

Grace: Perhaps you can give me some idea how you will treat the President, now you are here.

Peric: Until I meet the President, I can't say. It would not be appropriate to discuss a patient's treatment with members of his family. You can understand, I'm sure.

Grace: I am not 'members of the President's family' Dr Peric. You are speaking to the President's wife.

Peric: I can tell you broadly how I like to approach things. If that would help.

Beat.

Peric: Generally, I prefer to be guided by the patient. If the patient presents with symptoms of anxiety, I might begin by exploring those occasions that act as triggers to that anxiety, and so on. It really depends on the individual case.

Grace: Doctor Peric. I had hoped our relationship was not going to be a difficult one. I am beginning to feel disappointment.

You know I should not have sent Gabriel away. It is not often the CIO hear their President described as a 'case'.

Peric: I was talking generally, Mrs Mugabe. I'm sure you realize I didn't intend any disrespect.

Beat.

Grace: The President and I have been away in Asia this month, perhaps you have heard about it.

Peric: Yes, I'm sure I did...(read something...)

Grace: Thailand, Laos. Do you ever travel in Asia yourself, Doctor Peric?

Peric: No, no I don't get much time...

Grace: Vietnam, Korea, spectacular countries. So colourful, you cannot believe the people are real. While we were there I can tell you the President was like a boy, a young man of twenty years of age. Certainly, nobody would believe he is forty years older than me. The moment we are back, it is the same. My husband is the devil again.

Peric: I'm sorry to hear that.

Grace: I took the children to see the luggage on the carousel – you must see the world as a child, I always think. Robert got it into his head I am trying to escape. Bodyguards and police grab my children, suitcases grow wings, clothes are spilled

all over the ground. Mugabe is screaming. 'Save my wife. Don't let her escape! Ngozi, ngozi!'

Grace: Do you know how to treat that kind of anxiety?

Peric: It seems clear the President thinks I can.

Grace: I have not left State House for two weeks now, not even for shopping, not even to meet a friend. Robert forbids it. It will shock you to hear the President of Zimbabwe is frightened of his own shadow. Howling and shouting most of the night.

Do you know the meaning of ngozi?

Peric: Ngozi? That is an ancestor. A malevolent spirit. For a Chishona it would be quite terrifying...

Grace: A person who has died in bitterness, or violence. That is the anxiety pursuing my husband.

So. Now we set an extra place for ngozi, at the table. You can picture the scene. The place is set, food is served from the kitchen, all for a person no one can see but Robert. The way he stares at the empty chair, the way he pushes his food towards it – it can terrify even me. We are his prisoners.

And if a person does not appease ngozi, he will see you to the grave.

Pause.

Peric: The President hasn't turned to a traditional healer. I'm surprised. What about the Rain Goddess at Sengwa, or the Oracle? What do they say?

Grace: The spiritual leaders won't help Mugabe. The last time they helped Comrade Bob, they were betrayed.

Peric: Really?

Grace: It was not the soldiers who won the war of liberation, Dr Peric. It was the spirits. All those banners with Nehanda hovering over Robert's head. But, when the war was won, the Father of the Nation did not perform the rites – to thank the spirits, cleanse the country of the people's blood. Instead he tells the mediums to wait – 'the war is not over yet'. So they are very cross with him.

Peric: The President hasn't called in a psychiatrist either. I mean a shona psychiatrist, there are some...(very good psychiatrists at the hospital.).

Grace: VaShona do not train as psychiatrists. They know the power of the spirits. Those that do are doctors who cannot get any other kind of work.

Peric: I don't think that's entirely fair.

Grace: Mugabe has heard of your work. All Harare knows you are the best psychiatry can offer. And Robert insists on having the best.

When you are talking with my husband, you must tell him to let me go. And let me take the children. Will you do that, for me?

Beat.

Peric: Mrs Mugabe, I am here –

Grace: Please. The life of my children is what we are talking about. Not an interesting aspect of Chishona belief.

Peric: Mrs Mugabe, Grace, I am here, purely in a professional capacity...

Grace: And what in Zimbabwe do you think is pure?

Chiremba, I can be frank with you. I am a person of considerable wealth. Do you understand what I am saying?

Peric: Mrs Mugabe, the President has asked me here, I presume to help him manage an illness. The episode at the airport, that sounds significant...

Grace: Significant? Do you think so?

Beat.

Peric: This is not the first time something like this has happened.
Is it?

Is it the same this time? Worse?

Grace: Dr Peric. Look at me. Look at me!

What do you see?

Peric: What I see is...(an attractive, powerful woman).

Mrs Mugabe...

Grace: A woman. A healthy woman. There is no sickness in me. My children are strong, but we are pursued and made to fear for our lives. *Ngozi* is not 'illness'. *Ngozi* is an affliction. We are afflicted by the spirit of a dead person.

Peric: Yes. I see.

The President has asked for help this time. That is something we can both be hopeful about.

Grace: Hopeful? You think I can live on hope? My children are too frightened to eat.

Peric: Mrs Mugabe...

Grace: Don't Mrs Mugabe me. Persuade Mugabe to let us go, that is the task I have set for you.

Peric: Grace...

Grace: *(denying a child)* No. No!

Beat. Peric begins again, very softly, patiently.

Peric: I see dozens of patients, at the hospital, some of them with very specific psychiatric illness, outcomes are never predictable. How any patient might respond...(can't be predicted)

Grace: I am not concerned with your dozens! With your hundreds of madpeople milling around! The person you are here to treat is Mugabe, the President of your country. His family are turning to you.

Peric: And I am honoured...

Grace: *(emphatic)* Then do what you are told.

Or you will not be treating your patient for long.

Pause.

Peric: Obviously, if I am convinced it would benefit a patient to take a break, spend time by himself, I will recommend that. The important thing is that I see the patient, make a start. That's why I came here today. Far too early.

Grace: Good. That is good.

Can I offer you some juice?

Peric: No, thank you.

Grace fixes him one anyway. She is now very conversational.

Grace: You know, the first Mrs Mugabe was practically a saint.

Peric: I'm sorry?

Grace: My predecessor. Sally Heyfron-Mugabe. 'The woman of good works'.

The first time I came to State House I was the best secretary in Zimbabwe. Robert used to say, Grace Marufu, I swear you are worth two of Sally in bed, but if I marry you now, what will happen to the office?

Did you ever meet Sally Heyfron?

Peric: No, I never had that pleasure.

Grace: She was a clever person, like you. Cleverer than Bob, much more clever than me. But I had two of Robert's children by the time she was dead. I even had a husband of my own, and a child, but still it did not stop Robert marrying me the moment Sally was gone. Then I was not a secretary any more. A new life began.

Grace: You see. Generally, I can get what I need.

She has passed him the drink.

Noises off: the President is arriving.

Grace is back in public mode.

It is a pleasure to meet you, Doctor Peric. We are so glad you were able to come.

*Doors open, **Gabriel** steps in first, behind him **Mugabe**. **Peric** puts down his drink.*

Grace: Robert. This is Doctor Peric from the hospital. He has come to help us.

Pause, as Mugabe stares at Peric, awaiting a response.

Peric: Mangwanani, Mr President.

Mugabe gives an order to Gabriel.

Mugabe: Gabriel. Nditorerewo tayi.

Forgive me Doctor Peric, I prefer our staff to be coordinated. Perhaps you will choose a tie from those Gabriel will show you.

Peric: Mr President...

Mugabe: You have been offered some juice, I hope?

Grace: Yes Robert, he was offered juice.

Peric: Yes, thankyou...

Mr President, it's a pleasure to meet you.

Gabriel produces a rack of ties. An awkward moment.

Mugabe: Please, choose yourself a tie.

Peric: Mr President, I think it's important...

Gabriel: Sir.

Mugabe: Humour your elder, Doctor Peric. If you would be so kind.
The tie you are wearing is quite inappropriate.

Peric: I'm afraid the President may be under a misapprehension. If what the President requires from me is a therapeutic relationship, I cannot allow him to consider me in any sense

a member of his staff. Nor will I regard him in this context at least, my elder.

Beat.

Grace: Robert, I'm sure the doctor does not intend...

Mugabe: No no.

Forgive my wife Doctor Peric. We are not all familiar with your psychotherapeutic concepts. Transference and so forth. The doctor is concerned to preserve the purity of our relationship, my dear.

Mugabe: All the same, I hope you will agree, we should not abandon common courtesies.

Consider it a gift, from your President. Something to reward your work with Harare's people.

Please. Choose a tie.

Beat. Peric takes a tie.

Peric: Thankyou.

Mugabe: No need for thanks.