

Grave Consequences

"There you are. That's your grandfather's second wife's grave."

"It really is in the middle of nowhere."

"Yes, well off the beaten track. Very few humans ever pass this way. Your grandfather only visited it twice. Once when the hunter who stumbled across it had led him to it, and again when he supervised the erection of the iron railings. He'd really loved that woman but he wasn't one for the cult of the grave."

"And the stones?"

"Apparently they were placed there straight after the burial."

"I've only recently heard garbled snippets of the history. Please tell me the story as you know it."

"Well. Your grandad met Anelia when he was seventy. She was thirty years younger but he fell for her in a big way. A great friend of his, Dennis Langton, was a big game hunter who often used your granddad's place as a base. Dennis made a fortune from ivory, amongst other things."

"Anelia was writing a novel about the great white hunters of the era and Dennis was an endless source of hunting tales. She persuaded your granddad to let her go with Dennis on one of his protracted hunts. She wanted the book to be as realistic as possible and needed to experience what a hunter's life was like. The old man was reluctant, knowing the dangers involved. But caught between the fear of losing her and pleasing her, he reluctantly gave in to her pleading."

"A few days after they'd left on a hunt Dennis came back alone. He was in quite a state. He showed the old man bits of bloodstained clothing and told him that a lion had attacked Anelia at night. He'd shot it but it was too late to save Anelia."

"This was just before the second world war so Kenya was a pretty primitive place. He'd had his bearers dig a grave and placed the stones on it so that hyenas and other scavengers couldn't dig up the body."

"Dennis was apparently so devastated and deeply remorseful that he immediately headed back into the bush, alone. Your grandad didn't see or hear anything from, or about, Dennis for about a year."

"Then one day an itinerant hunter pitched up at your grandad's place, having been led there by a bloke who'd known Dennis's tracker. He had with him Dennis's .458 Holland & Holland double rifle. It was pretty rusted. He'd found it next to the grave, which he'd been led to by the man who brought him to your granddad's farmstead. One breech held a live round and the other a discharged one."

"Your granddad figured that Dennis was so cut up about the death that he'd gone straight back to the grave and shot himself."

"The old man came here with the hunter but they obviously found nothing. Hyenas and other scavengers would have accounted for every last edible bit of Dennis and it's likely that any bits of clothing or anything else that remained, would have been taken by passing natives."

"What an incredible story! You obviously know that when grandad died his body was taken back to the family home in Sussex."

"Yes."

"I've only recently heard of Anelia's grave, but I feel I owe it to her and to granddad to have the body exhumed and reburied with him in Sussex."

“That’s a noble thought. I don’t know how today’s black bureaucracy may react to that, but I’ll give you an introduction to the Interior Minister. I’m on very good terms with him.”

The voice on the phone sounded quite excited, “Yes, thanks, I’m fine, fantastic in fact. Everything has worked out perfectly.”

“Great, tell me.”

“As far as the government is concerned, there is no record of Anelia’s death and that, as the grave is on the farm owned by the family trust, I can go ahead with the exhumation. They have granted me a permit to transport her remains back to the UK. Your introduction really opened doors. Thank you.”

“I’m delighted to hear that. My Pleasure. What’s the next move?”

“I have found an undertaker who is prepared to carry out the exhumation and to prepare the remains for transporting them to the UK. He can do it next Friday. Will that suit you?”

“No problem. I look forward to meeting you again at the farmstead.”

“So what are your emotions as you watch the start of this exercise?”

“Mixed. Pretty mixed. I’m curious, sad, excited – all rolled into one.”

Soon the iron railings had been removed and work started on moving the stones aside.

Once the grave area was clear the digging commenced. They watched from chairs in the shade of the nearby bush.

Slowly the hole became deeper and deeper.

Eventually the undertaker walked over, “Gentlemen, I didn’t want to worry you before, but as we started digging, it looked to me as though the soil had never been disturbed. It doesn’t look like a grave. We are now eight feet down and there’s nothing. Someone pulled a fast something or other.”

That night, back at the farmstead, a perplexed grandson said, “I’m flabbergasted. What actually happened? Why? You mentioned that you had your own thoughts on what happened.”

“Yes. I’ve always had a sneaking suspicion that it was a staged killing followed by a staged suicide. Those two were desperately in love and your grandad was unbelievably litigious and he would have sued for alienation of affection and lord knows what else.”

The young man leaned back in his chair and an incredulous expression slowly morphed into a wry smile, “What a cunning plot . . .”