

MAN  
ON THE  
**RUN**

VOLUME VI  FOR RICHER OR POORER

BARON ALEXANDER DESCHAUER



# CHAPTER ONE

## THE GAMBLER

“You!”

Julia turned her head, trying to see who was so rude and so loud. She was surprised to see a large man with blonde hair walking towards her. All heads at the table followed him.

“Me?”

“Yes, you. Don’t move.”

Thoughts of a poisonous spider on her shoulder flashed through her mind. Then she decided it was a trick by the casino on an unsuspecting guest, so she played along and froze where she stood.

“I need you to stand next to me.” The man put his arm around her waist, urging her to join him at the table. More heads turned to watch the spectacle and smiles were on all the faces.

“Sorry?”



“I can’t explain now. Just come here.”

She allowed him to guide her to the head of the roulette table.

“Let it all ride again, same numbers. Twenty-nine and the neighbours.” The man had apparently forgotten about her once she was standing next to him.

The croupier spun the wheel. “No more bets,” he said.

The ball bounced and landed on twenty-five. The crowd applauded. The croupier eliminated all of the chips from the felt table top except those on number twenty-five or its borders. The man had bet everything spread over numbers twenty-five to thirty-three. He lost on the other numbers but won thirty-five times the amount placed on number twenty-five.

“See? You bring me luck.” He picked up a handful of chips and put them in Julia’s hand. “For you.”

“What? This is crazy. I’m not lucky. I just lost all of my money.”

“You’re lucky for me and that’s all that matters.” He took his entire pile of chips and pushed them towards the croupier. “Everything again on twenty-nine and the neighbours.”

A crowd began to form. The croupier turned to a tuxedoed man with an earpiece who had come to ask



him something. The man nodded and the croupier took the chips and placed them evenly across the numbers.

“Don’t you want to call it a day?” Julia asked. She realised that each pink chip was worth a thousand rand. Each stack looked to be at least twenty high.

The man ignored her and watched as the croupier spun the wheel. This time it was number thirty. Cheers roared and the crowd grew larger. No one else bet as they watched with fascination at the amount of money being wagered. By now, several security staff and the pit boss were standing next to the croupier.

The man’s face became purple with excitement. Julia could feel herself strangely drawn to the excitement without knowing why. It was insane. The crowds pushed against her and her body was crushed against his. He didn’t seem to notice at first but then put his arm around her waist. She let him. *Nothing and no one would deny this man what he wanted tonight*, she thought. *Not even luck.*

“Everything on twenty-nine,” he said.

The whispers whipped through the crowd and they began to cheer and chant, drinks spilling on each other. Julia could only see the whites of their teeth and eyes. Everything else blurred in a suntanned cocktail of gambling fever.



The man returned his hands to grip the edge of the roulette table, Julia forgotten again. She could see the veins on his neck clearly as though he had done heavy lifting. She saw white spittle at the corner of his mouth.

“I’ll need to confirm with the house, sir,” the croupier said.

“Fuck the house. I’m here to play. Either take the bet or give me my money and I’ll go elsewhere.”

The crowd cheered louder. He had become their champion.

The croupier looked at the pit boss, who nodded. The man pushed all of his chips towards the croupier, who changed them to purple chips with pink centres, each one worth twenty-five thousand rand. When the mechanics of counting and exchanging chips were over, there was a stack of thirty-two purple chips with pink centres on number twenty-nine.

He spun the wheel and all eyes watched it turn, the white ball whirling in the opposite direction. As soon as the croupier spun the wheel and flicked the ball, the man reached over and moved the stack to number thirteen. It was highly irregular and the pit boss involuntarily lunged forward.

“No further bets,” the croupier said, glancing at the pit boss.



The wheel slowed and the ball began to bounce off the ridges. The cheering stopped as people craned their necks to see where it landed. Julia's mouth had gone dry at the sheer magnitude of the bet and recklessness of the man. As the ball did its final dance on the moving numbers, she was pushed hard by a Chinese man beside himself with tension. She heard rather than saw the result. Number thirteen. The crowd went crazy. The man collapsed under congratulations and the pit boss removed the croupier from the table. Random members of the crowd hugged the man and he hugged them back. Women kissed him lustily. It took several minutes for the excitement to die down enough for him to turn and see the pit boss next to him.

"Congratulations, Mr. Smit," he said, shaking his hand. "I didn't think this table had a limit; you just proved us wrong again." He picked up a black cloth and laid it over the table. "Mr. Kerzner has extended his personal congratulations and would like you to take the penthouse villa as your personal residence for as long as you like."

"Tell Sol thanks. If you can have my things moved there, I'll be having a few friends join me to celebrate." The man threw the pit boss a purple and pink chip. To Julia, he picked up a handful of the same chips and put them in her hands. "For you, my lady luck. Thank you."



Julia was too stunned to say anything other than take the chips. The whole process was too surreal. “What’s your name?”

“Matthijs. Yours?”

“Julia. Nice to meet you.” She had to shout about the crowd.

“Have you had dinner?”

“Not yet.”

“Then join me. I just need to cash these in and then we can go and see how we can spend it.” He was matter of fact about the win, almost oblivious to the fact he now had enough money to live ten lifetimes in luxury. He almost seemed deflated, as if the whole high of winning was a disappointment.

“I just need to find my friends and let them know where I’m going.”

“Have them join us. I have a feeling we’re going to have one hell of a party.” He had regained his energy, the shadow of disappointment gone, and was preparing to spend his riches.

She went to the craps table to find Jane and Stewart gambling their allotted sums. “How’s it going?”

“Stew’s just won but I think we’re down over half. What’s all the commotion about? Were you near enough to see?”

“Apparently, I am the winner’s lady luck,” she said.



Stewart was in his own world, trying to play the odds the way he had read in his travel book.

“What?”

“I know, it’s crazy. He is like a force of nature.” Her face was flush. “And he’s cute.”

“Cute?”

“In a madman kind of way. He grabbed me and put me next to him. There’s no other way I can say it. Then he bet everything he had and in three rolls of the wheel, he broke the table. There’s a black cloth over it like it’s dead.”

Jane laughed, the free alcohol flushing her more than her burn. “Then what are you doing here?”

“He’s invited us back to his place. He wants you both to come.” Julia felt herself tingle at the excitement. This was a gap year for them before they started university. Julia had been accepted at Oxford, to her parents’ delight. Jane was going to Bristol, as was Stewart. They had saved enough for three months before they would need to work. South Africa was their destination of choice because their money would go the furthest. Apartheid was finally over, and Mandela had just become president.

“Cute, rich, and old?”

“Cute, rich, young, and generous. Look what he gave me.” She showed the handful of chips. “I don’t





know what each of the colours are worth, but the purple with pink centres are each worth twenty-five thousand rand.”

Stewart stopped playing and turned to Julia. “Let me see.” He had just lost his final stake and had nothing left to play with. They found a clearing away from the crowds and she pulled out the handfuls of chips.

“He gave me handful of the expensive ones and another of the less expensive ones.”

Stewart and Jane looked in stunned silence at their travelling companion’s haul. “You truly are lady luck,” he said. “I think you have over half a million rand in your hands. That’s like a hundred and fifty THOUSAND pounds sterling!”

“Jules, you’re rich!” Jane couldn’t contain herself. She was jiggling her whole body in a little dance and began to giggle.

“They say the worst thing that can happen to a person is to win the first time they gamble,” Stewart said. “Although, I wouldn’t mind having your misfortune!”

“Let’s go,” Jane said. “What are we waiting for?”

“Do you think I should keep the chips or give them back to him?”

“Don’t talk nonsense. This is the best thing that has happened to you. To us.” Jane began to feel foolish as



soon as she said it. They were Julia's chips, not hers. Definitely not theirs.

"Absolutely," Julia said, suddenly conscious not to create a rift with her friends. "All for one, one for all. I think this means we don't have to find work before uni."

Jane hugged Julia and Stewart joined in reluctantly. The group dynamic had shifted radically and he was trying to understand its consequences.

"You must be Julia's friends," Matt Smit said, appearing next to Julia. "I couldn't help notice the three of you together and I didn't want to lose the most important person of the night." He smiled at Julia and moved close to her. She willed him to put his arm around her and he obliged.

"Guys, this is the person I was talking about. Matt, this is Jane, my best friend from Roedean. And this is Stewart, her boyfriend. Everyone, this is Matt."

"Nice to meet you both. I tried cashing in my chips but apparently, they don't have enough cash and had to issue me with a cheque instead. It'll take some time before they are ready."

The two friends were lost for words and just smiled knowingly, as if it had happened to them on numerous occasions.

"They did give me some cash and I'm a believer that it's worthless unless spent. So, if you don't have



any other plans, let's see what trouble we can get up to." He started walking, Julia now fixed to his side. The others followed.

Matt seemed to know everyone in the casino, smiling and accepting handshakes or pats on his back from wait staff, pit bosses, fellow gamblers, and total strangers. If he hadn't known them before, they all knew him now. He was all anyone could talk about. He glided across the floor from the high stakes tables through the great hallways that connected the casino to the high-end shops, restaurants, and hotels.

"What's your favourite colour?"

"Excuse me?" Julia wasn't sure if he was talking to her or some stranger.

"Your favourite colour. Blue, black, purple?"

"Red. Why?"

"I'll show you." He changed course into a jewellery shop attended by three immaculately dressed young women in black, a ridiculously handsome young man in a similar black suit, and an older man Matt seemed to know.

"Matthijs my boy, I hear you've been lucky today."

"I can't complain."

"How can I be of service to you and your friends?"

"I am looking for a coloured stone, red, to match the beauty and luck of this fine woman."



Julia blushed. This was over the top, bordering on farcical. If it hadn't just happened, she wouldn't believe it.

"I have just what you're looking for. A Burmese ruby, finest quality, set in an exquisite bed of diamonds."

"It needs to be just red. Her favourite colour is red, not white or sparkly nonsense."

The man nodded and smiled. "Then I can offer you something even more spectacular, but it is a bit pricey."

"Did I say anything about price?"

"I'll bring it out and see if you like it."

"I'm not the one who needs to like it. Julia must love it."

She stood like a statue waiting to be adorned. Jane and Stewart shuffled like third wheels.

"And you two, what would you like?"

"Nothing, sir. We're fine, thank you."

"Don't sir me. We're not in the army and you're not serving me breakfast. It's Matt and I am going to buy you something. Here. This looks good for you, Stewart. It is Stewart, yes?" He motioned to one of women to bring him a Rolex watch. "Try it on. For you, Jane, I think something a little more elegant. How about a diamond bracelet?" He motioned to another woman to retrieve a string of two-carat diamonds for Jane to try on. "There, that looks spectacular. What do you think?"



They were speechless. “This is too much. We don’t know you and you don’t need to give this to us.”

“I agree. I don’t need to give any of this to you. But I want to. You brought Julia into my life and she just won me a fortune. What’s a few trinkets between friends?”

Jane stole a glance at Stewart. He made an almost imperceptible shrug in agreement and Jane kissed Matt on the cheek. “Thank you, Matt. It’s most kind.”

“Thank you, Matt,” Stewart said, giving him a firm and appreciative handshake.

The older gentleman returned and placed a necklace on the black velvet in front of Matt. It was a simple gold chain with a thirty-two carat ruby. “I hope that this is simple enough for you, Matthijs?”

“I think it is perfect. What do you think, Julia?”

“I’m speechless. I have never seen anything more beautiful in my life.”

“Then it’s yours.”

“I can’t accept this. I don’t know you from Adam. I’m not that kind of girl.”

“You can and you will and you are, whatever that means. You won me a lot of money and I pay my debts.” He picked up the necklace and she turned, holding up her hair to allow him to put it on her. He touched her shoulders and turned her like a doll until she was facing him. “Beautiful.”



“Thank you.” She leaned in and kissed him on the cheek.

“I hope you are okay with me signing for these? I haven’t cashed out yet. Just adjust with the house, if that’s okay?”

“Certainly, sir,” the man said with gravity. “Enjoy your evening.”

The whole detour took fewer than thirty minutes and Matt was walking again, Julia next to him and the other two a step behind. Two men began to tail them a few paces back.

Stewart cautiously tapped Matt’s shoulder and leaned in. “Don’t look, but I think there are some men following us. I saw them in the reflection of the windows a while back and they are still there.”

“Just security, compliments of the casino,” Matt said. “They protect their winners.”

“Why?”

“Because they know that gamblers gamble and the more we do, the greater the odds the house will win its money back.”

“Is that why you do what you do?” Julia asked.

“What’s that?”

“Make a few massive bets rather than lots of smaller ones?”



Matt stopped walking and turned to her. “Either you are a natural gambler or you have been reading statistics. That’s exactly why, and that’s why I value luck when I see it. Everything in life comes down to a bit of luck. We can do the right things, say the right words, and wear the right clothes, but the difference between the herd and the winner is usually luck—of one form or another.”

“But why everything on one number?”

“Because I wanted the croupier to know where to throw the ball.”

“What? It’s rigged?”

“No. Not at all. But a good croupier can spin a ball in a way that it lands on a certain part of the wheel. Thirteen is directly opposite twenty-nine and I knew they would do anything to get the ball to stop on the other side of the wheel. That’s why I moved the chips at the last moment. From my thinking, I just reduced my odds significantly down to one in three or four.”

“I couldn’t believe they allowed that.”

“Each house has its own rules. Usually there are no more bets after the ball has gone around the wheel twice. I moved it as soon as the ball was thrown.”

“But it was still a big gamble.”



“That’s why I needed luck. I needed you.” He hadn’t taken his arm off her since she let him put it on. She moved closer to him, letting his body brush hers.

The four walked in silence, enjoying the moment. Everything seemed possible.

“We’re here, just to our right. Best steak you’ll have in the world. I hope none of you are vegetarians.”

“Not tonight, we’re not,” said Stewart. His left wrist felt the weight of the yellow gold and he couldn’t help swivelling his forearm to catch glimpses of his gift.

The meal was absorbed rather than eaten. It wasn’t until desert when something occurred to Julia.

“Are you here alone?”

Matt had taken a large piece of pie into his mouth and needed to finish chewing before replying. “I virtually live here. Everyone here is my friend.”

“But you’re here with us instead of them.” Julia regretted it the moment it left her mouth.

“Yes, exactly. They will be at the party later and at the clubs when we go there, but they weren’t standing next to me when I needed them at the table, and they won’t be there to pick me up when the money’s gone.”

“Gone? Why would you ever lose so much money?”

“I won’t lose it. I’ll spend it. And I’ll enjoy every penny. It’s my philosophy of life. I don’t want to waste a minute or regret anything.” Matt paused to drink some





wine. “Take you, for example. I only realised you were my lady luck after my third spin with you at the table. I wasn’t winning before you came and you were the only thing that had changed. That’s why I couldn’t let you leave. Once I had you next to me, I let luck do its thing and here we are.”

“Sounds superstitious.”

“It is and I am. Just try to get me out of my bed on Friday the thirteenth.”

They laughed together. He was a whirlwind of energy and they were spectators. He would say something and they would smile. If it was vaguely funny, they would all laugh. When it came time to leave, he paid the bill and they all said thanks. He made sure to push a large bill into the head waiter’s hand as it was shaken.

“Next stop, the penthouse.”

This was greeted by a general murmur of ascent by the nineteen year olds. Julia had drifted back to walk next to Jane, leaving Matt and Stewart to talk.

“So, what do you think?” Julia ducked a little into a conspiratorial whisper.

“I think he can’t be real,” Jane said, her head shaking. “But he certainly is generous. I wonder what he’ll want in return.” She smiled slyly at her friend.

“He could have hired a hooker if that’s what he wanted. I think he’s genuine and even a little shy.”



“Shy? He’s about as shy as a raging elephant.”

“Yeah, but right now he’s flying high. I saw a glimmer of something earlier though. I can’t put my finger on it, but there’s more to him. I think it’s all an act. It’s part of who he would like to be or what he needs to do. I think he acts like this because he’s expected to.

“Sounds like you’ve given this some thought.”

“I have to. This whole thing is bonkers otherwise. Who in his right mind gives a total stranger a fortune in chips and an insane piece of jewellery?”

“I do like my bracelet,” Jane said as she lifted it for Julia to admire.

“And this ruby is something out of an Arabian tale. A ruby? It’s so big it looks fake. No one wears something like this.” She looked behind her, suddenly conscious of how much money it was worth. She saw the two suited men behind her and felt better. *Not such a crazy idea after all*, she thought.

“So what are you going to do?”

Julia thought about it. She felt as though she was walking three inches above the ground. “I’m single, decent looking, and I’ll do what feels right at the time.”

“You’re gorgeous and you know it. Almost as good looking as me.” Jane turned her head and looked sideways at Julia with a playful smile. They linked arms and allowed their hair to flow down their backs.



“Did you just giggle?”

“I thought it was you.”

“I know it was you.”

“It was, but you did too.”

“I did. I can’t believe how happy I am. This is crazy!”

Julia skipped ahead and linked her arm in Matt’s. Stewart took the hint and dropped back to Jane. They had reached the lift to take them to their villa on the rooftop. A uniformed man opened and closed the doors as they passed. At the lift, another uniformed man pressed the outside button and yet another sat inside the lift to press the button for their floor. He stood when he was told they were going to the penthouse.

“Have a lovely evening, sir. Ladies.” He nodded to them in turn.

“This is for you, young man.” Matt stuffed a large note into his uniformed pocket. “Make sure my guests are treated well. There should be a fair number arriving over the next few hours.” He had also tipped every uniformed employee along the way. When they were alone again, he explained. “That’s the only reason I need cash in this place. Everything else I just sign for.”

The foyer of the penthouse was decorated in a mock Louis XIV style. It felt both luxurious and ridiculous, like a playground for adults. There wasn’t an employee



at the door and Matt needed to use his key card. He gave a copy to each of them.

“Welcome to our new home,” he proclaimed as he grandly opened the door and they took in the best Sun City had to offer.

“This is unbelievable. How many rooms?”

“I don’t know. Check it out.”

“Did you look outside? It’s got its own pool.”

“And hot tub.”

“And kitchen.”

“And its own home cinema.”

“I think I’m moving in,” Stewart said. “Jane, what do you think?”

“I agree. This is where I want to spend the rest of my gap year.”

“Gap year?” Matt asked.

“It’s the year between high school and university,” Julia said, trying to be nonchalant about their youth.

Matt paused. “Wait a moment. How old are you?”

“We’re all nineteen. How old are you?”

“Twenty-five in November.”

“Which day?”

“The twenty-ninth.”

“Hence the twenty-nine and neighbours routine. Nice touch.”

“And you’re a Sagittarius,” said Jane.



“Okay, you’re all legal and I’d like a drink. The bar should be stocked.”

Stewart had already discovered it. “What would you like?”

“Coke please.”

“Nothing else?”

“No thanks. But don’t let me stop you. Please have whatever you want. There should be champagne, beer, hard stuff, whatever.”

Stewart poured the cola into a glass with ice and handed it to Matt.

“Pick your rooms. I’m taking the master suite. I need to shower and put my head down for a few minutes. Make yourself at home and order whatever you want.” He went to his room and closed the door.

“Was that weirder than all the weird shit that has happened prior to this?” Jane tried to break the silence.

“I told you he was shy. I’m taking the room next to his. Wait. What about our stuff? I didn’t even think this through. We’ll have to go back to the apartment.”

“It’ll be okay,” Stewart said. “I can pop over with a taxi and grab it.”

“But my stuff is everywhere. I don’t want your hands over all my things.” Julia was genuinely pouting.

“Don’t worry about it. I can go with Stewart and get enough things for a couple of nights. If things work



out, we can move the rest over later. Let's take this one step at a time."

"You're the best. This is why I allow you to say you're better looking than me," Julia smiled and then ran away from the water Jane sprayed at her.

"No," said Stewart in a whisper. "We don't know this guy from Jack the Ripper. I'll pop back and pick up our things. Julia, you'll have to suffer me touching your things. Jane, stay here and keep yourselves safe. I'll be back as soon as I can."

When the door clicked shut behind him, Jane smiled conspiratorially at Julia. "I think I'll grab a drink and retire to my room. Holler if you need me, although I have a sneaking suspicion that you'll forget me pretty quickly."

Julia could feel the back of her neck warm. "I don't know what you're talking about." She smiled, her face now as red as her neck.

"Just be careful with him. Stew's right; we really don't have a clue who he is."

"Love you too." Julia kissed her softly on her cheek and watched as her friend took a glass of orange juice with her to her room. Jane blew her a kiss before the door closed and all was quiet again.

Alone, Julia began exploring the villa. She looked out at the pool and slid the door open. Walking along



the edge, she took off her shoes and socks and dipped her toe in the water. A little cool but, once inside, it would feel great. There was a mini bar set back from the edge of the pool and a sunken hot tub near the edge of the roof. The floor was a ridged wood of a type she didn't recognise. There were potted palm trees and other greenery strategically placed to provide total privacy, though no one overlooked their space. *I wonder what people get up to here, she thought. Or how much this costs. Probably celebrities and Arab sheiks and other international playboys with their women and drugs.* Her mind was reeling with scenarios.

She stepped back inside, still barefooted. The floor was carpeted around the entertainment centre but tiled everywhere else. The ceiling was high and held a massive chandelier. Initially, it seemed out of place with all of the modern conveniences, but it fit in purely by its decadence. There were six rooms and a massive bathroom for guests. She popped her head inside each of the five unoccupied rooms and saw that each one had slight variations. Mirrors on the ceiling in one, mirrors on the wall cabinets in all of them. All with en suite bathrooms. Luxurious. *I can get used to a life like this, she thought. A lot better than cleaning toilets and serving food for the next nine months until Oxford.*



She closed each door quietly and walked to the one where Matt was sleeping. She brushed her hair with her hand and did her best to straighten her clothes. She was about to knock but then withdrew her hand. She reached for the doorknob but also stopped, her hand resting on it but not turning. *He's shy*, she thought. *And what the hell am I thinking? I'm not one of those girls.* She took a deep breath and stepped back. She forced herself to walk into another room and closed the door. *What's happening to me? This isn't me. It's only money. It's only jewellery. It doesn't mean I need to do anything.* Her inner voice was a mixture of her mother, her priest, and her friends, but she knew it wasn't the money or the luxuries. *It's the sadness in his eyes, his shyness when he needn't be, and his audacious generosity.*

She leaned against the door for a moment longer and then resolved to act. *Be more like him. Live for the moment. Be impulsive. Don't be a stick in the mud.* She opened her door and went to the bar near the sliding door on the other side of the room. *At least I'll have an excuse if he kicks me out.* She grabbed a coke and poured it into a glass as Stewart had and took a glass of champagne for herself. She started walking across the expanse of the room, a glass in each hand, head erect and picturing herself as someone who does this type of thing all the time. She glanced at Jane's closed door but kept going.





When she reached his door, she had to put down one of the drinks. As she was standing up and reaching for the handle, she heard a knock. It wasn't her and it didn't sound like it came from inside his room. Then again, a knock and a ring of the doorbell. She shook her head, laughing at herself, and went to open the front door.

"Hello, we're here for Matt's party." A man followed by thirteen other women and men just walked inside. "Is he here?" He didn't ask who she was or why she was there. He was looking all around, including the ceiling corners.

"He's just having a quick nap."

"Only Matt could take a nap after a day like this! Tell him Norman is here and that I brought some friends." He nodded to the scantily clad women and some red-faced men who were already at the bar, helping themselves to drinks.

"I will." She walked to Matt's room with a real reason to knock.

"I heard them. I'll be right out," he said. His voice was foggy as if he had really been sleeping.

"Okay," Julia said. "I brought you a Coke if you want."

The door opened and he was in a bathrobe with bare feet. "Thanks, you are a doll." He kissed her on the cheek. She could feel the warmth of his skin and

could tell he shaved, the faint smell of the shaving cream lingered on her cheek. He took the drink. “I was thinking of taking a swim. Are you up for it?”

“I don’t have a costume.”

Norman saw Matt emerge and had come over. “Don’t worry, darling. There’s only one rule in Matt’s pool—the men must keep their bathing costumes on.” He had his arm low on her waist and he smelled of alcohol. He must have thought it was funny because he laughed hysterically at his own joke. Matt smiled.

“Don’t worry. I’ll get them to send up a costume for you. Or you can. Let them know your size and they’ll bring a selection.”

“Thanks.” She grabbed her champagne glass and watched as Matt was pulled into the centre of the room and crowded by his new friends.

The noise increased when one of the new people discovered the sound system. Music erupted and talking turned to shouting. One of the skinny guys with a funny hat designated himself DJ for the night and was moving his head in time to the beat.

“Who’s the new girl?” Norman asked when sufficiently far from Julia.

“My good luck charm.”

“English?”

“Yaw, and young. Nineteen.”



“You devil. I wish I had your luck.”

“Is the rest of the gang coming?”

“Tony, Clive, and Ray should be arriving shortly.”

“And their wives?”

“With yours in Joburg.”

“Is Ma here?”

“Also in Joburg. She’ll come when she can.” Norman took a swig and put his arm around Matt. “She’d like you to visit her. You haven’t seen her in months and she gets worried. You know how she is.”

“Yah, yah. Maybe now I’ve made a few bob I can clear some debts and show my face.”

“There are a lot of people waiting to be paid.”

“I know.” He paused. “What about Maish? Has he said anything?” Matt’s voice waivered but he gathered some courage. “They know I’m good for it. If they want to make the juice they charge for their money, they need to share the risk too. Fuck it; it’s only money.”

“Brother, I love you, but you’re fucking crazy. Cheers. Let’s enjoy today. Tomorrow will take care of itself, yaw?” He gave him a loose hug and led him towards the pool. “Can I take one of the rooms?”

“What do I look like? They gave me a second villa for you and the rest of the gang. Get yourself settled.” He took another set of key cards from his robe’s pocket and handed them to Norman.



“You’re something else,” he said, smiling. He grabbed a girl on his way to his new villa.

Matt shook his head and smiled. *Things never change*, he thought.

More people arrived and it started to feel like a party. A few people jumped into the pool and soon every corner was full of people holding glasses of champagne and eating canapes, which appeared magically along with fruit and other snacks compliments of the house.

Stewart returned from his errand and looked wide-eyed at the crowd.

“Whoa. How long was I gone?”

“I know! This place is turning into a zoo,” said Julia.

“Here’s your stuff. I think I grabbed everything.”

“Thanks. Did you get my swimming costume?”

“Yep, it was flung over the TV in your room.”

“Ha! Sorry about that. I appreciate you going to get everything.”

“No problem. Are you sure you want to stay here?”

“Are you kidding? Where else are we going to find a party like this?”

“What about your chips? Did you cash them in?”

“Not yet. There’s a safe in my room. They’re in there.”

“Don’t leave it too long. Considering how this guy spends money, he may need them back.”



“Then he can have them. I’m still not comfortable with all this.”

“And the necklace?”

Julia ran her finger along the chain and felt the stone between her fingers. “I’m keeping this no matter what.”

“Then pop that into the safe before you put too much of that bubbly down your throat. I’m not sure about some of these characters.”

“Let’s worry about that later. Jane is in her room, waiting for you. I’m going for a swim.” She took her things, went to her room, and locked the door. When she opened it again, she had the same styled robe as Matt’s with her costume underneath.

“Take it off!” said a voice over the sound system. She looked over and saw the skinny DJ moving to the music and smiling from ear to ear with his eyebrows raised. He was pointing to her robe.

Smiling at him, she pointed towards the pool and shrugged. He shrugged back good naturedly and carried on dancing by himself. She walked through the sliding doors and found Matt already in the water.

“Come in, it’s perfect.” His face was round and open. He had a broad chest covered with blonde hair like a carpet. He was smiling and holding his drink in one hand and bouncing slightly.



Julia looked for her friends and saw them arriving in their robes. They looked equally ridiculous. She took hers off and saw both the men and women turn their heads discretely to check her out. She wore a sky blue bikini and wasn't afraid of what they would say. She knew she was a knockout and picked her costume to highlight that. She saw Matt double take out of the corner of her eye. She moved slowly and delicately, claiming a chair next to the pool for her robe. The crowd slowly allowed her to pass as she walked to the pool's steps. As she put her foot in the water, she knew her life would never be the same again.