

## Chapter 3

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At dinner Monday night, Senhora Esther asked about their trip to Carcavelos. Amanda described their experience on the trolley and her shock that a man seated behind them told them where to get off, which triggered disparaging remarks from the students about the secret police.

Senhora Esther said, “It’s worse than you think because this country has one of the highest illiteracy rates in Europe. Few of the intelligentsia speak English with any degree of fluency. I’m glad this was such an innocent contact with the DGS network, but don’t underestimate the importance of it. You’ll find the system is just as pervasive in Moçambique. In Lisbon, we generally figure out most of their routines. In the overseas provinces, it’s more complicated. While some DGS officers are supportive of the work on the mission stations, especially those with hospitals, part of their network is enmeshed in mission staff. Secret police often bring their families to the mission hospital rather than use the poorly equipped government clinics.” She paused and shook her head.

Then, looking directly at Amanda, she continued. “Remember there is no Bill of Rights here; people can be apprehended and tortured for confessions about trumped up crimes. The process is swift and the person who is taken by the police has to rely on others to get news to family and friends. The secret police use intimidation and threats more with foreigners, with the hope of scaring the individual so badly that he or she will automatically leave the country. Embassies and consulates intervene as soon as they are aware of the foreigner’s plight, however, it’s not always fast enough. One Episcopal priest was picked up at his rural mission station—

I'm not sure of the charge. They took him to the local jail and whipped him. By the time the British Consul arrived, the man had sustained serious injuries. You have to convince the police that whatever they believe about you is untrue. Despite absolute proof of false charges, too frequently new evidence is considered only after the senior official in charge of the case has extorted enough money to make it worth his while. Sometimes I thought they fabricated charges because their personal cash flow needed a boost." A fleeting shadow passed over her face. Everyone listened, spellbound.

"Thirty-five years ago, Dr. Young and I got married in Guinea-Bissau. The mission station was operated jointly by the Swiss Presbyterian Church and the Methodist Church in the States. The secret police system was non-existent then and the country was small. It was easy to observe the gradual changes in people we knew very well as they became pawns of the DGS. The need for a safe and secure boarding house is critical for everyone—students coming from the colonies as well as missionaries in transit. Those who work here have been carefully chosen, like Sr. Santos. He's our accountant and an essential member of the *lar*'s staff who has cultivated the appearance of someone who can be easily overlooked. This advantage allows him to develop astute insights about how the government functionaries work, knowledge that eases the convoluted visa application process for many students and missionaries."

As she glanced into the hallway something caught her attention and the tension in her face eased.

"You may joke about the secret police being simpletons like the Keystone cops. Sometimes their shenanigans are very entertaining, but never, never underestimate them." Beneath a fleeting smile, her face reflected deep sadness.

The security of the *lar* was taken for granted until a simple event like Amanda and Katerina's experience focused attention on the real world outside. Until now, Amanda had assumed that secret police networks existed only in communist regimes. She had never thought that a member nation of NATO and a U.S. ally could maintain such a pervasive, threatening organization that intruded into everyone's daily life. The realization that a specialized informer

had been assigned to follow Amanda and Katerina made the threat real.

When they returned to their room, Katerina said, “You know, I’ve lived most of my life in a police state. Now I understand why classmates in college thought I was paranoid. I hesitated to use the phone when I could see someone face to face. I was scared of the police and almost anyone in uniform.”

Amanda nodded and wrapped her arms around herself as she spoke. “I didn’t believe the warnings about secret police. If we hadn’t had the experience last Saturday, I’d still be hesitant to believe the warnings. I thought everyone was over-reacting. It feels like I’ve been stripped naked somehow. As an American there’s some protection, but being accosted on a trolley reveals the terrific scope and capability of DGS.”

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Thursday, as they returned from their language lessons, Senhor Santos was waiting for Katerina outside his office in the *lar*. He had a wide grin as he greeted them, “*Ah Menina Katerina tenho boas noticias para voce.*” (Miss Katerina, I have good news for you.) He motioned for her to follow him into the office and she passed her notebook to Amanda.

Without hearing Senhor Santos’s comments to Katerina, Amanda knew that Katerina’s visa for Moçambique had been granted. She would be ecstatic. Amanda was happy for both of them. From the time they had boarded the flight to Lisbon until now, Amanda had deliberately let Katerina have her way most of the time so that they could live together amiably. When Katerina returned with her news, Amanda’s smile was genuine.

“I have my visa. I’m so excited. I just want to get to work.”

“Congratulations, Katerina.” Amanda hugged her.

“Ha! I got my visa faster than the Greens. I wonder how they will feel about that? Oh, well. In two weeks I’ll be on my way.” She paced the room and listed all of the things she planned to do before flying to Moçambique. The first on her list was a shopping spree.

The next morning, Katerina tapped her foot while Amanda finished eating breakfast. Katerina reviewed her list of the shops she wanted to visit in the *Baixa*, Lisbon's main shopping district and then consulted with Senhora Esther while Amanda enjoyed the luxury of a second cup of coffee.

While they waited for the trolley, Katerina said, "I think I have it figured out. We'll get linens first and crystal last so we don't have to carry the heaviest things all day."

The first shop offered hand-embroidered cotton tablecloths with matching napkins. Amanda picked up a small black cloth with colorful designs. "Let me see that one," Katerina said. "Yes, I'll take it."

Surprised to be robbed of her choice, Amanda sorted through another stack of linens and made her selections more discreetly. The pattern of Katerina taking items from Amanda repeated itself in every store each time Amanda admired something.

By the time they got to the crystal shop, Amanda thought she had learned how to handle Katerina. However, the sparkling glasses with their finely etched designs enthralled her and she forgot. "Oh, Katerina, these glasses are beautiful." Amanda held a stemmed water glass with a rose design.

"How charming!" Katerina turned to the saleswoman and spoke rapidly in Portuguese. She smiled as the attendant whisked the glasses away and wrapped them in tissue paper. "I just bought all of them. They will be stunning with the rose tablecloth."

Amanda seethed. "Katerina, every item I admired today, you grabbed out of my hands and bought for yourself. Why can't you choose your own things?"

"Never mind, Amanda. You are going to be here much longer. You can take your time to find other things you like. I have only today."

Too angry to speak, Amanda realized that her limited Portuguese allowed her to understand most of what she heard, but rendered her incapable of making a response.

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Since Katerina had stopped her language lessons, Amanda crossed town three times a week to meet with Anna Silva.

Familiarity with the sights made Amanda turn her attention to the people who traveled with her on the tram or walked along the sidewalks. The dominant colors in everyone's clothes were black, brown or navy blue. The dark shades made the patched areas less obvious. Leather shoes showed signs of heavy wear revealing the color of the socks. Shoe soles were reinforced with newspaper over the holes.

Trudging up the hill to Anna's apartment one afternoon, another woman walked ahead of Amanda who slowed her pace and paused whenever the woman stopped. Suddenly, the woman sagged against the wall, coughed violently and spit bloody phlegm on the sidewalk. The wracking sound made Amanda wince. Helpless to offer any assistance, Amanda passed her unknown companion and observed her more closely.

Distorted with pain and the effort to take each breath, the woman's unwrinkled face told of a young person aging prematurely in her battle against illness.

Amanda was late for her language lesson by the time she rang the bell to Anna's second floor apartment. As soon as she took her seat at the round table in the living room, Amanda said, "Before we review the lesson today, would you tell me about the Portuguese health services?"

"*Mas, porque é que a Anna faz a pergunta?*" (But why do you ask this question?) True to the initial arrangement, Anna always responded in Portuguese; her velvet black hair brushed against her face when she nodded. She expected Amanda to at least try to express herself in the language and use English as a last resort. The system slowed the conversation considerably, but Amanda was surprised by how much she could understand.

Anna responded in Portuguese, "People generally don't go to doctors or to the hospital, but to a pharmacist. They explain their problems to him, and he suggests the medicine they need. This way, they avoid the expense of a doctor's bill."

"But do they really get the treatment they need? The woman drank some tonic or cough medicine. Even from a distance, it was clear that her illness was very advanced."

"*Querida* Amanda (dear Amanda), the woman probably has active tuberculosis. She goes to the pharmacist and he gives her

some pills. Maybe not the treatment for TB, because he needs her continued business to feed his family. Lots of simple diseases reach very advanced stages. I think we have complications that are seldom seen in your country because there people get prompt and appropriate treatment. Here, it's different. If you don't have the money, you don't get treated. A doctor is expensive. It's easier and less costly to tell the pharmacist your symptoms and follow his advice. If you could spend more time in the rural villages, you'd understand our critical needs. Sometimes young men go into the armed forces not to fight, but relieve the strain on their families."

As she returned to the *lar*, Amanda brooded about the woman with TB and her discussion with Anna. If Portugal was one of the poorest countries in Europe, the conditions in her former African colonies, now provinces, had to be much worse. She thought about *Cachimbo* hospital and what she could do to prepare herself for what she would encounter there. She needed to do more than study language.

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Katerina waved her passport and plane ticket and danced around the room. Despite Katerina's triumphant behavior, Amanda felt very comfortable staying behind. There was so much more that she wanted to learn before she arrived in *Cachimbo*.

"Oh, Amanda, I can't fit everything in my suitcases," Katerina said.

The Mission Board had expected them to pack everything they needed for three years in a shipment that would be sent once they arrived at *Cachimbo*. Their suitcases had been filled with essential items for an indefinite stay in Lisbon, so there was no space at all for Portuguese pottery or linen.

Amanda assisted Katerina in finding a solution, because in a few weeks or months she could face the same problem. The search for a durable suitcase was time consuming because few people used them. Locals packed large covered baskets or used cardboard boxes tied shut to hold their belongings whenever they visited relatives. It was common for them to hitch rides on trucks and pile their baskets around them. Wealthier town folk traveled by bus, but they used the same packing system.

Senhora Esther served a special farewell dinner for Katerina. The Greenes joined everyone at the *lar* and drove Katerina to the airport. The excursion was the same procedure as when Amanda and Katerina arrived, but in reverse. The children came too, determined to say good-bye to Katerina who rode with Sam on her lap. Amanda and the other students followed in a taxi with the new suitcase. Once Katerina headed for her gate, the others gathered on the observation deck to wave a last good-bye when Katerina climbed the stairway to the plane.

Amanda glanced at Trudy and Harry standing together. An inscrutable look passed between them. Harry put his arm around Trudy and pulled her to his side. Katerina had been in Lisbon a little more than two months and already had been given a residence visa for Moçambique.

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Amanda expected some kind of message from Jaime and hoped for a letter from Switzerland, but the preparation for Katerina's departure distracted her and she forgot to check for mail. On the first floor, a set of wooden cubbyholes next to the office served as mailboxes for everyone in the *lar*; one box per room. Students used the slots to leave messages for each other. On her return from the airport, a postcard caught her eye and she picked it up.

A picture of a charming chalet suggested Switzerland and on the reverse side, the handwritten message said, "Happy to be here. Niku." Amanda went to her room and read the card over and over again. Niku was safe—he had defied the Portuguese system. She wanted to share the good news—no, it would be better to wait. Still grinning with relief for Niku, Amanda stuck the postcard inside her Bible. When the right moment came, she would let the others know.

Weekly letters from Amanda's mother kept her up to date with family events. In turn, Amanda tried to describe most of her experiences in Portugal. She never wrote about the secret police because there was the probability that letters were censored or 'lost'. This week, she wrote about Katerina's problem finding a suitcase. Amanda also relayed the news that Senhor Santos expected her to get a visa for Moçambique in January.