In 1971, A young American couple working in Kenya as teachers are recruited to spy undercover for the CIA. The couple will lead a double life of intrigue and deception with neighbors, friends, and visiting family during the Cold War.

{Code Names}
Betsy and Babe

by Linda Shields Allison

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BETSY AND BABE

AN AMERICAN COUPLE:
A TRUE-LIFE COLD WAR ADVENTURE

LINDA SHIELDS ALLISON

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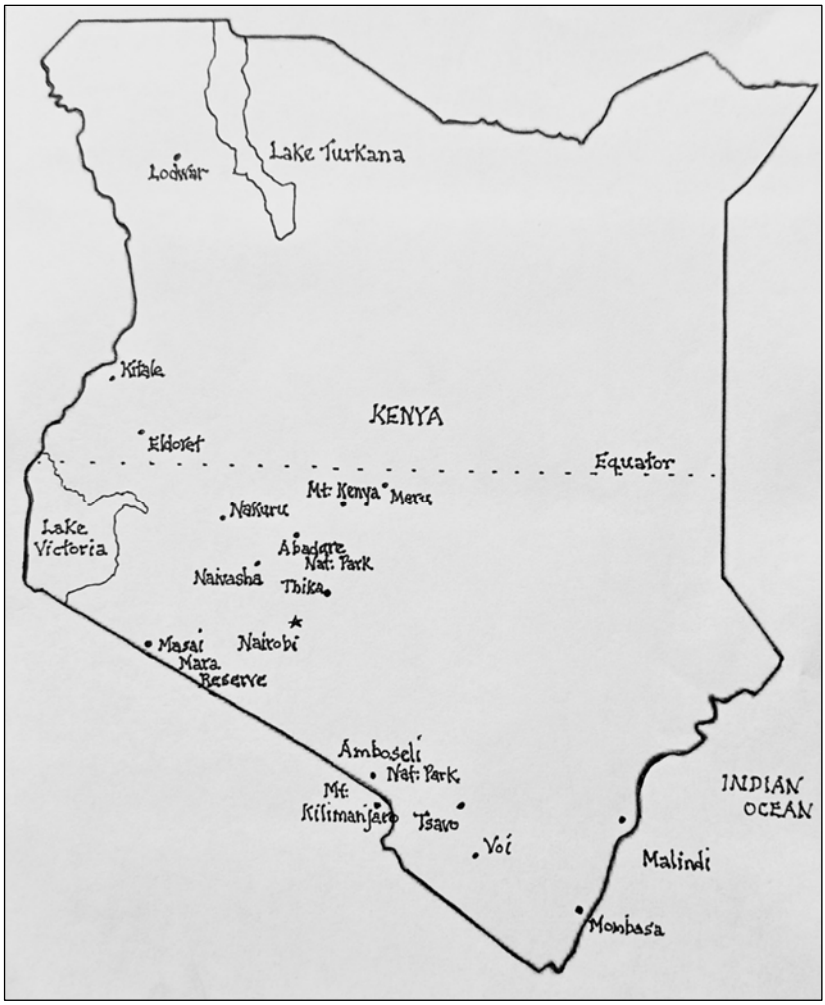
Lodwar
Lake Turkana
Kitale
KENYA
Eldoret
Equator
Mt. Kenya
Meru
Nakuru
Lake Victoria
Abadare Nat. Park
Naivasha
Thika
Masai Mara Reserve
Nairobi
Amboseli Nat. Park
Mt. Kilimanjaro
Tsavo
Voi
INDIAN OCEAN
Malindi
Mombasa

Prologue:
August 1971 ~ July 1976 – Nairobi, Kenya

I was twenty-five when we arrived in Kenya, and thirty-years-old when our family of five returned to California. I like to recall my time in Kenya as my *glory years*. I never looked better or felt more inspired. Living in the cosmopolitan city of Nairobi was incredible. I was a wife to my teacher husband, John, and the mother of two young girls, Shauna and Tara; our son Joshua would come three years later. Being in Kenya gave us the luxury to employ a houseboy, a gardener, and an ayah to help with the children—all for the ridiculous sum of one hundred dollars a month. This extra help afforded me the freedom to live an extraordinary and creative life—to meet remarkably adventurous people, who like us, had the courage to leave their comfortable lives and fly to Africa—a place some have labeled—*our darkest continent*. John was hired to teach at the American-run Nairobi International School. I worked part-time as a substitute teacher while raising our three children. What made our adventure even more astonishing was being recruited by the CIA to work undercover as spies for the American government under the code names: Betsy and Babe.

This all happened over fifty years ago. I'm in the twilight of my life now and wanted to write a few things down for my children, and perhaps others who were there with us, and maybe others who might just enjoy the adventure. The years of my life outside of Kenya seem all a bit muddled together into the sameness of everyday life. After Kenya, I loved my years

working as an elementary school teacher in Hemet, California, and I have fond memories of my students and the many friends my husband and I shared our lives with. But as I sit at my desk recollecting the past, the five years of my life in Africa are vividly imprinted in my mind.

I remember picnics on Ngong Hills and flying kites with the children over the Great Rift Valley. I see majestic elephants and giraffes silhouetted against the beautiful equatorial sunsets on the grasslands of Nairobi Game Park—I hear the roar of a lion in the distance while camping in Tsavo National Game Park—I recall the raspy growl of hippos rising out of the water at dusk at Mzima Springs—I marvel at the sight of vast herds of zebra and gazelle grazing on the Serengeti savanna—I smell the briny salt air carried across the eastern winds of the Indian Ocean on safari to Mombasa—I envision the joy of African women, with young mtotos strapped on their backs, singing as they pick coffee along the road leading into Nairobi International School—I imagine the joy of young African boys pushing little homemade cars made from scraps of wire—I recollect the dignity of lean Masai men resting on their spears while herding cattle near their bomas—I marvel at the sight of huge jacaranda trees blanketing the city with lavender confetti each October—I sigh at the whispering song of wind rustling through thorn trees before a storm—My heart pulses at the sound of ancient tribal drums beating in my soul.

I envision a land—hauntingly magnificent—a land that guards its secrets well.

Chapter 1:
July, 1971 — A Fight and a Flight

‘What are you talking about, John? Move to Kenya? Frankly, I’m so mad at you at the moment, I wouldn’t *move* across the street with you!’

John gently grabbed my arm to prevent me from walking away from him. ‘Please, Linda. Let me explain.’

We were standing outside my parents’ house in San Diego, where we had been living with our two young daughters for two years. In 1969, my parents had graciously offered us their house while they moved to Japan to fulfill a two-year federal government contract my father had procured as a fire captain at Atsugi Naval Airbase. Their kind gesture was the break we needed. All we had to do was take over their mortgage payment of fifty dollars a month. It was a very generous offer, and we gratefully accepted. With John finishing college and me caring for our two young daughters, our money situation was stretched.

In the spring of 1971, my father’s contract in Japan had ended. My parents, Bruce and Esther Shields, along with my younger siblings, Diane and Robert, returned home to San Diego. We had all been living together under one roof for several months while John finished his final weeks of graduate studies. John had been interviewing with various schools hoping to obtain a teaching job in the fall. Two families living under the same roof made the arrangement crowded and nerves were naturally on edge.

For the past two years, John had been working three part-time jobs while finishing his degree at San Diego State University. In 1962, John had signed to play professional baseball with the Dodger organization. As part of his signing bonus, his mother, Sue, had insisted that the organization would pay for his college education once his contract was over. It was a wise decision, and the $500 stipend sent each semester ensured that he remained in college. Even with the generous rental situation and the stipend, money had been tight. I held down a part-time job stocking sunglasses in small convenience stores, volunteered twice a week to teach physical education to seventh and eighth grade girls at Saint Patrick's School while raising our two daughters. Shauna would turn three in August and our baby girl, Tara, had turned one in June.

When John broached the idea of moving to Kenya, I looked at him in disbelief. I was angry. Lately, he had been away from the girls and me too much. 'You've been MIA for weeks! I know you've been working hard, and you're frustrated with our living situation, but it's been hard on me too. I have no car and two small babies to care for. It's been an adjustment for my parents as well after living in Japan for two years. I'm sure they'd like to have their home back.'

Upon graduating from San Diego State University in June 1970, we discussed completing John's post graduate work at California Western University to get his teaching degree. We knew attending a private university would be expensive, but the accelerated postgraduate program would allow John to begin teaching in the fall of 1971—a year earlier than the

graduate program at San Diego State University. We decided to roll the dice. It was a gamble that would change the course of our lives for many years.

> ***The nonprofit private university, known as Cal Western, is situated on a bluff overlooking the Pacific Ocean. The beautiful oceanfront campus in Point Loma is operated under the direction of William C. Rust. Rust's idea is to create a distinct global university under the title, United States International University (USIU). Rust's vision to install campuses worldwide is in development.***
>
> ***To support his global vision, Rust eventually sells the expensive Point Loma property to Nazarene University and purchases less expensive land north of San Diego near Scripps Ranch with campus operations continuing there in 1973.***
>
> ***In 1971, USIU is running three global campuses in London, Mexico City, and Nairobi. Today, the Nairobi campus is the only international campus still in operation and is known as United States International University Africa.***

'I know. I'm sorry, Linda. You know how much I love your parents, but two families living in the same house is a bit congested. You're right. I've been hiding out. But please, just

hear me out. This could be the break for which we've been hoping. Cal Western is offering *us* a job! Of all the students in the postgraduate program, they approached me. The teaching market here is saturated at the moment. We may not get another offer.'

I knew he was right. If John didn't secure a teaching position, we would be stuck without a job, a place to rent, and our gamble to attend the more expensive private school would become a disaster.

'But Kenya seems so far, and I know nothing about Africa. Would it be safe for our girls? Where would we live?' I suddenly had wild notions of us living with our girls in mud huts among lions and leopards.

'Let's at least discuss it, Linda.'

I softened toward him. I knew how hard he had been working, and my biased attitude was based on my own selfish frustrations. I could tell he was extremely excited about this opportunity. 'Tell me about their offer.'

'Cal Western is becoming part of United States International University, a global university with projected campuses all over the world. They have invited me to teach Physical Education at one of their international schools in Nairobi. They've hired mostly single teachers but approached me to run their physical education department and coach three sports. We would be the only family invited out to Kenya this year.'

'When would we have to leave?'

'Well, that's the thing. USIU has chartered a plane to London leaving in mid-August. I have to let them know right

away. If we accept, we'll have only four weeks to get our passports, visas, and the necessary inoculations to enter the country.'

The news blindsided me, but I promised myself to keep an open mind and at least hear him out. Finally, I said, 'Let's go inside the house and talk it over with Mom and Dad.'

John let out a sigh of relief and agreed. Having just returned from their two-year stint in Japan, I knew my parents would have helpful advice.

We walked into the house. My parents were sitting in the living room visiting with Mary Doris Hicks—a neighbor from the next street over. John discussed the university's job offer and Mary Doris got extremely excited.

'You know, National Geographic did a huge article on Kenya a while back. My husband, Larry, saves all those magazines. The article went on for pages and pages with beautiful photos—you know how National Geographic loves to do those in-depth features. I remember Nairobi as being a beautiful city. You guys should read it. I'll dash home and get it.' Mary Doris walked to the door and said, 'I'll be right back.'

My anxiety abated a little.

'What do you think, Mom?' I asked.

My mom looked at us and smiled. 'Our Japan experience was amazing, and…I might not be saying this if we hadn't lived out of the country for two years…but I think you should go.'

I was surprised at her quick response. 'You do?'

'I'll miss my granddaughters, but this is a great opportunity for you kids.'

'It's a wonderful chance to see another part of the world as a local resident and not just a tourist,' offered Dad. 'I agree with your mother.'

I looked over at John and sensed he was happy with the way things were going.

Dad continued, 'Shauna and Tara are so young; they'll go wherever you take them. When you visit a country as a tourist you see it from the eyes of a tourist. Living there, you'll have the opportunity to explore the country and learn the customs of the people. I know that living in Japan for two years gave us the time to explore the country in depth. We, of course will miss you, but I believe you definitely should go.'

We discussed the pros and cons of taking the job for the next thirty minutes. The one thing that stood out to me was my mother's words of wisdom when she said, 'If you decide to go, you should go with an open heart—with the thought that anytime you leave the United States—you're camping out.'

I laughed. 'What do you mean, Mom?' I was puzzled but knew my mother's Irish wit often had a humorous outlook on subjects.

'What I'm saying is try not to compare Africa to America. You might have situations where the electricity or the phones will go out. Things may not run as smoothly as they do here, but there'll be so many more blessings from your adventure that will last a lifetime.'

It turned out to be the best advice ever given to us, and I thought of it often over the course of our stay in Kenya.

Mary Doris and her husband returned with the article about Kenya. The *National Geographic* February 1969 spread

spanned fifty-six pages and rendered an in-depth portrait of the newly formed republic, which had won its independence from Great Britian in December of 1963. The photos of the animals in the wild were magnificent, but the article highlighted the newly formed republic, under the leadership of President Jomo Kenyatta, as a developing democracy. Kenya's healthy economy had attracted blue-chip companies like Colgate-Palmolive, Union Carbide, Firestone, and Dole with the United States investing $100 million in Kenya since 1962.

The National Geographic article was the reassurance I needed to understand that Nairobi was a vibrant cosmopolitan city. We signed on with the university and within four weeks we were on a charter plane out of LAX to London, where we would stay at another USIU campus for a week to get the necessary visas and work permits to begin our life in Kenya. The only international travel I had done was to venture fourteen miles south of San Diego across the border to Tijuana, Mexico, to go clubbing or have my hair done. The days before our departure passed in a whirlwind of activity getting the necessary inoculations and passports for travel.


Linda (Betsy) and John (Babe) passport photos ages 25 and 27—1971.

The day of our departure finally came. My head was spinning, wondering if I had forgotten anything as my father drove us north to LAX. Later, my mother wrote that she had found my Grandma Cassie's Rosary resting on a shelf in the refrigerator. Why I put it there, I will never know. It was a frenzied time. I laughed as I read her letter. Over the last weeks, I had wondered where the Rosary had gone, and was happy it had turned up.

As part of our contract, the university allowed us to ship via air one fifty-pound crate of personal goods to set up our house. I chose carefully, filling the container with kitchen items, pots and pans, towels, sheets, and eating utensils to supply our new dwelling. The single teachers did not choose as wisely and regretted having to purchase those items for their households.

John's Aunt Lucille worked for the Singer Sewing Company and suggested I buy a small sewing machine encased in a suitcase that was about the size of a woman's makeup case. It was very heavy. I lugged it on the plane pretending it to be nothing more than a carry-on toiletry case. That little Singer sewing machine paid for itself many times over. During our stay in Nairobi, I sewed all the girls' outfits. The majority of my clothes were fashioned with it—including a stylish two-piece bathing suit. I even made John a dress shirt and several pairs of shorts. I eventually had the little Singer shipped back home to San Diego.

It has been my only sewing machine for over fifty years. A few years ago, I took it into a Singer store to replace the band. The repairman told me, 'This little machine is the best product Singer ever made. It may be little but has the engine of a tractor. Hang on to it. They don't make them anymore.'

I smiled and nodded. He was so right.

* * * * *

On August 14, 1971, we landed at Gatwick Airport, which is thirty-five miles north of central London, in the wee hours of the morning. A small bus had been secured in Luton to transport us south through the streets of London and onward to USIU campus in Ashdown, England. The bus driver kept telling us how lucky we were to see London this way as the traffic would become very congested in a few hours. He enjoyed pointing out things of interest. He took us past Big Ben, Westminster Abbey, and Covent Garden. I felt like Eliza Doolittle watching colorful flowers being unloaded by vendors

and dustmen picking up trash. It was a wonderful way to see an awakening London for our first visit.

Because of our girls, we were given the entire back of the bus so they could stretch out on the long back seat and rest as we traveled to Ashdown. We covered them with our coats and the humming motion of the bus quickly lulled them to sleep.

It all seemed a bit surreal. Less than twenty-four hours before we had been sharing a home with my parents in San Diego. The reverential mood on the bus mirrored that of a church congregation. Along with the administrators and single teachers, we were all slightly in awe. John reached for my hand. No words were spoken. We looked at each other and smiled. My heart pumped with excitement, and I sensed John had similar feelings. We were at the starting block, ready to run the adventure of a lifetime.

From Luton, it took about two hours to reach Sussex, and the Ashdown Park campus, arriving at 7:30 AM. The countryside was lovely. The houses and farmland were so different from California. Green trees and colorful flowers grew in profusion. Herds of sheep and cattle grazed on the verdant grass of rolling hills. I knew we should have been tired, but the excitement of the moment masked any immediate need for sleep.

The Ashdown Park campus was something out of a fairytale.

The original estate circa 1693 comprised 3,563 acres, which included Pippingford Park, the Old Lodge, and the Army Training

Ground. Ashdown Park Mansion house was built in the 1800s. Located approximately thirty miles southeast of London in Sussex, the historic Ashdown Park estate was purchased by the Catholic Sisters of Notre Dame in 1919 as a suitable property for the purpose of training young novices. The Church of Our Lady and Saint Richard was built and consecrated in 1927. Over the years, several more buildings were added to the property. In 1971, the Chapel of Our Lady and Saint Richard is deconsecrated when Ashdown Park is sold to United States International University.

We were sequestered in a series of dorm rooms that were not in use. Before unpacking, we were invited to join a portion of the staff and students for breakfast in a large cafeteria.

The president of Nairobi International School, Doctor Hamilton, addressed the group, 'I suggest that we try to rest. Over the next week we will be busy procuring the necessary visas and work permits needed to reside in Kenya. I have booked us all on a bus tour of London later in the week. Any other free time might be used at your discretion to visit other areas near the city.'

We rested for most of the day. Later that afternoon, we bundled the girls in jackets and decided to stretch our legs. John and I were surprised at how cold and overcast it was. August in San Diego was always warm and sunny. The weather

in Sussex that August was drizzly and cold, resembling something we might experience in winter.

We wandered about the grounds as the girls ran about smelling flowers and pointing at a rabbit in the distance. Several of the buildings seemed incredibly old. Everything was lush and green and so different from the dry summer months of San Diego. I was amazed to see the names of Norte Dame nuns on tombstones in a cemetery on the grounds. I made a mental note to write to my mom about it.

Eventually, we were approached by one of the gardeners. 'Are you part of the American group going to Kenya?'

'Yes, we are,' John replied.

'You folks should explore the outer grounds. They are really quite beautiful,' he offered as he pointed off in the distance.

John remarked, 'I saw a wooded area coming in this morning and thought we might take our girls for a walk. Is this part of your campus?'

'Oh yes. In fact, Ashdown Forest in East Sussex was the original inspiration for A.A. Milne's children's stories about *Winnie-the-Pooh*. In the early 1920s, Milne had a country home in Ashdown, which became the setting for The Hundred Acre Wood in his books. Milne was inspired by walks he took with his son, Christopher Robin, in Ashdown Forest. In fact, the Pooh character is based on a stuffed toy Milne had bought for Cristopher in Harrods department store.'

'Our girls love *Winnie-the Pooh* books. I believe the Walt Disney Company recently acquired the franchise from the author's estate. We've seen several animated movies based on

the original books, and Pooh has joined Mickey and Minnie Mouse at Disneyland,' I offered.

The gardener looked down and gently kicked a stone which tumbled into a bush. 'Yeah, you Yanks sometimes have a way of hijacking a good thing. I guess money talks.'

We couldn't quite tell, but he seemed upset about Disney acquiring their national treasure, so John pointed and said, 'Over in that direction you said? Thanks for the tip.'

The gardener tipped his hat and shrugged his shoulders as we sheepishly headed off toward Ashdown Forest. The forest was lovely, and the girls delighted in seeing a deer in the mist drinking water from a pond.

The remainder of the week in England was spent going into London to procure visas. As a family, we enjoyed taking the train to the charming seashore town of Brighton. It was the first time I had ever seen rocks instead of sand lining the shore. I inwardly chuckled when I saw, in lieu of a hat, several older men wearing white handkerchiefs on their heads that had been knotted in all four corners to protect their heads from the sun. Our budget was tight, but John bought me an antique silver napkin ring in Brighton, which became the first of a lifelong collection of unusual antique napkin rings. On another day, we joined our group on a bus tour into London to visit The Tower of London, Westminster Abbey and other sites courtesy of Dr. Hamilton.

The week flew by and soon we were boarding a plane that would take us to Kenya.

Chapter 2:
1971 — Foreshadowing the Journey

As the plane banked for its final descent toward Nairobi's Embakasi Airport, I could see a large herd of dark-colored animals grazing on the dried yellow plains of the savanna, like tiny raisins scattered on a bed of oatmeal.

'What kind of animals are they, Mama?' asked our soon-to-be three-year-old daughter.

'I'm not sure, Shauna.'

A businessman from England in the next seat offered to help. 'Those look like they might be a herd of wildebeest to me.'

I smiled at the kind man and looked at my husband, John. I had pondered over the last weeks how we had ended up moving to Kenya. It had all happened so fast. Less than two months before we had been living in San Diego finishing John's postgraduate studies and preparing to begin his teaching career in San Diego. I glanced at our two young daughters and knew they were not old enough to understand that their lives had been torn from their grandparents and their extended family, but my mom was right. They seemed happy to be a part of it all. I never thought our paths would take us away from San Diego, but two events seemed to foreshadow where destiny might lead us.

John had enjoyed his post graduate work at Cal Western and loved his student teaching assignments. He came home

excited after teaching a geography class at Grossmont High School, shortly before my parents were due to come home from Japan.

'I love my student teaching assignments! One of my master teachers told me I'll make a great physical education teacher and coach because I can project my voice.'

I nodded but thought it was an odd criterion to base one's teaching ability on the volume of voice projection. I decided to keep the thought to myself because I could see how excited he was to be practicing the craft he had worked so hard to complete.

'I'm teaching a unit on East Africa in my geography class. The area is fascinating. I don't know why, but I'm really drawn to that part of the world. Wouldn't it be great to visit there one day?'

'That would be nice, honey,' I responded with as much enthusiasm as I could muster, as he continued to relate the exciting events of his day. I mumbled some encouraging words as I sat folding cloth diapers and feeling I had little to share about the less than stirring events of my day.

The second event occurred a few weeks later on a rare night out with several of my girlfriends. We had gone to an all-girls Catholic school and had remained close over the years. However, being married and raising two babies, I was starting to realize I had less in common with my single girlfriends who were working, attending college, and hot on the dating scene.

One day, I received a call from my dear high school friend, Kate McManus, inviting me to come and hang out with her and

three other friends from high school who were renting a house together in La Mesa.

'You have to come, Linda. We just finished final exams and we're celebrating with just a few friends at our place. Everyone misses you, so come,' implored Kate.

'I miss you girls too. I can't remember the last time I've done anything that didn't involve cooking or changing diapers I don't know, Kate. Money is tight with us at the moment, and I hate to ask John to watch the girls. He's been studying, student teaching, and working all these extra jobs while trying to graduate.'

'Ask him. We're planning to get together this Friday, and it's been ages since we've had a girls' night,' Kate said with unbridled enthusiasm.

John graciously agreed to watch our daughters so I could have a night out with the girls. I got directions and drove over to their rental house. It felt good to dress up and it was fun seeing everyone. However, I soon realized our lives had taken different directions. I had little in common with my single girlfriends. It's not that I was sad about the direction my life had taken. It simply was different. I decided to catch up with what was going on in their lives and make an early exit home to my family. An opportunity arose when a couple of the girls' boyfriends popped in for a visit to say hello.

"Are you sure you want to take off,' said Kate as she walked me outside to my car. 'The party is just getting started.' At that moment two handsome fellas got out of their car and walked over to where we stood.

Introductions were made. 'This is my friend, Nick Barkett, and my boyfriend, Sammy.'

With excitement Kate exclaimed, 'The three of us are planning a trip to Africa when school lets out this summer.'

'Africa?' I said thinking she might as well have said the moon. 'That's a long way to go.' It seemed so far from my world of reality. 'What part?' I asked. 'Africa is a big continent.'

'Oh, we don't know yet. Probably…somewhere in the north!' Kate offered as the boys nodded their heads in agreement.

'Wow. That should be amazing,' I fibbed.

As I drove home, I realized my life, as a wife and a mother, was far different from my single girlfriends, who had little no about children. I was a little jealous and a little bewildered as I thought about Kate, the boyfriend Sammy, and the friend Nick and their loosely planned venture to visit Africa. Yet another part of me was thinking they were out of their minds, because *somewhere* in Africa would be one of the last places on earth to which I would want to travel.

As we all weave the tapestry of our lives, I sense that events have a way of working out in the manner in which they are intended. I have often reflected on those two foreshadowing occasions. Perhaps I was being prepared for a grander scheme which I was meant to experience.

Three months later, I found *myself* flying into Kenya and reflecting om those the two curious events with my husband John and my friend Kate.

During our second year in Kenya, we received a beautiful wedding photo from Kate. The boyfriend, Sammy, had faded into oblivion. Kate and Nick's friendship blossomed into love, and they were married in 1972. They have been married for over fifty years, have three boys, and seven grandchildren. The trip to *somewhere* in Africa never materialized.

* * * * * *

We landed on the tarmac in Nairobi and descended the steps of the plane into the warm equatorial sun. Airport workers escorted us across the runway and into a small terminal. We were tired, and it took an eternity to collect our luggage and be processed to enter the country as residents with work visas.

Several teachers from Nairobi International School had come to escort Dr. Hamilton, his wife, Harriet, and about a dozen of us who would begin teaching at the elementary or secondary levels of the school we had come to call NIS. We were lucky to ride to the campus with a delightful American couple, Ramon and Pat Stade. Ramon was the principal of the school, and Pat worked in the office. They had two young boys. Pat became a lifeline to me and imparted wonderful information on everything a housewife needed to survive in Nairobi. Within days, she drove me into the city, showing me all the best shops to buy deli meats and green groceries. She treated me to my first ever curry at her favorite restaurant. I wasn't an immediate fan, but soon came to love the spicy delicacies that substituted for our missing Mexican cuisine.

We were given accommodations at the school's dorm until we could find a place to rent. Lots of the teachers stopped by to tell us, and sometimes *frighten* us, with tales of the local tribes harassing farms in an effort to win their independence just six years before.

> **Mau Mau warriors were a rebellious wing of the native population who sought political freedom and representation in Kenya's government from Britain. Many native Kenyans resented the annexation of most of the richest agricultural areas in Kenya. Beginning in the early nineteen hundreds, the British government eventually seized seven million square miles of fertile land. The British needed cheap labor to work the land, which the government acquired often through force or human necessity. The Mau Mau rebels did not possess much in the way of artillery and heavy weaponry so most of the attacks against Kenya loyalist and British colonialists were perpetrated at night in a gorilla-style fashion. The movement began in 1952 and continued to 1960. Eventually Kenya won its independence and became a republic in December 1963, electing Jomo Kenyatta as its first president.**

Chapter 3:
1971-1972 — The Drums of Thika

One might say we arrived in Kenya on a wing and a prayer—young, naive, and confident that things would work out *just fine*. Unfortunately, we were mistaken. We possessed a mere seven hundred dollars as the sum total of our funds for starting a new life in Africa. With this, we had to buy a used car and procure living accommodations. What were we thinking! Most of the single teachers banded together and rented places in a suburb of Nairobi called Westlands. It was near Nairobi International School and made for an easy commute. We searched the want ads in the *Daily Nation* and the *East African Standard* for houses to rent and used cars for sale.

We got lucky, or so we thought, and purchased an old green Volkswagen bus that had been put out to pasture by the East Africa Phone Company. It was in our price range, and we thought it would be perfect for going on safari. Unfortunately, it ended up being a poor investment. Something went wrong with it every other month.

As for housing, there was nothing to rent around the city of Nairobi in our price range, so we widened our search in the farming country outside the city. We found a Kikuyu man named Mr. Guthega who lived in an area northeast of Nairobi called Thika. Before Kenya's independence, Thika was settled as a farming community by white European colonials. Huge coffee plantations and other crops grew on large plots of land

and reflected what must have been genteel country living in British colonial Kenya. In 1971, the area consisted of a mixture of European expatriates, who chose to stay after Kenya's independence, and a new evolving upper-class group of Kenyans consisting mostly of the Kikuyu ethnic tribe.

Mr. Guthega owned a large coffee plantation and was a personal friend of Kenya's first and current president, Jomo Kenyatta. Besides coffee, he grew potatoes and other vegetables, raised chickens, cattle, and sheep, and ran a small efficient dairy. He lived with his wife and children in an attractive house near the entrance to his farm. We met him at his house, and he drove us to another section of his property where two other houses were situated. He offered to rent us a small stone guest cottage set apart from a large manor house, which he had recently rented to a Nigerian diplomat, his wife, and young daughter.

The little stone cottage was charming. It was a single story with a high-pitched roof and two small dormer windows in the attic, which gave it an English country feel. The cottage possessed two bedrooms, a small kitchen, equipped with a little refrigerator and stove, and a small round table and chairs in the dining area adjoining the kitchen. One small bathroom, and a decent-sized living area with a fireplace completed the layout of the cottage. It was sparsely furnished, but most of the places we had considered had been unfurnished. The front of the house had a large lawn with several mature shade trees. A beautiful bottle brush tree and an assortment of colorful flowers grew all around the cottage. To one side of the house was an area suitable for planting a good-sized vegetable

garden. The back section of the cottage had a cement patio permanently stained with the rich red soil of Kenya. A separate little stone house behind the kitchen had been built as living quarters for a house servant.

Off to the side of the servant's building was a large empty chicken coop. Mr. Guthega said, 'I will give you a few chickens if you take the house.' I wondered, *This area is away from the city, maybe he is having difficulty renting this property…or is there something else?*

I could see that John was excited about living in the country. John turned to Shauna and said, 'I can make you girls a swing from the branch of this big oak tree.'

Shauna jumped up and down and said, 'Oh yes, Daddy. Make us a swing.'

As we continued our tour of the area, I could hear the pleasant sound of water splashing in the distance. I asked Mr. Guthega about it.

'Let me give you an expanded tour of the property.' We walked down a sloping dirt road that led to a large stone house with manicured grounds. The sound of water grew louder.

'Located beyond these trees is the larger house that I have rented to a Nigerian diplomat and his family.' He pointed to a beautiful manor house surrounded by large trees. 'But come follow me. This area of my property is quite beautiful. It has a pretty waterfall. I will show it to you.'

We walked along a dirt road past the manor house, where a small creek flowed at the bottom of a slope. The area was lush with trees, shrubs, and flowers near the water's edge. A small waterfall danced off of rocks and fed into the little creek.

'This water is lazy at the moment, but it will grow when the rainy season comes.' Mr. Guthega beamed. 'It has been told to me that an early Tarzan movie from the thirties was once filmed here, but I am not sure if this is true.'

'The area is enchanting, and its jungle-feel seems as though it might have been a fine location to film a Tarzan movie,' I offered.

Walking back toward the guest cottage, Mr. Guthega pointed out an area of huts directly across the dirt road from the cottage. The African encampment held about fifteen small huts made from tree branches and packed together with fine red Kenya soil. The huts were covered with thatched roofs. The encampment housed the men, women and children who worked on Mr. Guthega's farm. Several small naked children played in the dirt. He walked us over and addressed his workers in Swahili. He pointed us out to them. When he was finished, he walked over to where we stood near the dirt road.

'This settlement is for my workers who help on my farm. I told them you might be renting the guest cottage. They will not give you trouble, so you should not worry about them.'

The cottage was in our price range, and we were on a deadline. NIS would soon be in session, and we had to vacate the dorm to make way for the influx of boarding students attending the college portion of the campus. We shook hands on the deal and agreed that we would move in on the following Saturday afternoon and would settle our first month's rent at that time. However, we had a problem.

After purchasing our Volkswagen bus, we didn't have enough money to rent the cottage. Later that afternoon, John

approached Dr. Hamilton at the school, and he graciously gave us an advance on our first paycheck. John was never one to worry about the tiny details in life. I was the worrier in our family. He always felt things would work out in the end. John was usually right.

The following Saturday afternoon, we vacated the dorm and made the thirty-minute drive to Thika and the little stone cottage. Our only belongings consisted of the items in our suitcases, a few groceries, and the fifty pounds of household supplies that had been shipped by air to the school. As arranged, Mr. Guthega met us at the cottage to give us our keys. A tall imposing African man stood next to him. His skin was the color of onyx, which seemed to shine in the daylight. The man had an imposing scar on the left side of his face. Mr. Guthega turned and introduced us to him.

'This man is named Francis. He will be your askari.'

We looked confused. Mr. Guthega explained. 'He is an askari—in Swahili askari means policeman or night watchman—Francis will look after you.' Francis wore a long black military-style woolen coat, which fell almost to his ankles. He was very tall and carried a flashlight and a large machete, which the Kenyans call a *panga*. I wondered how Francis had gotten his scar. At the time, I became a little unsettled about needing a watchman, but we grew to appreciate Francis in the months to come.

Often when we pulled into our driveway in the evening, we were surprised when Francis, who blended into the night so well, would step out of dark shadows and greet us with, '*Jambo memsahib. Jambo bwana. Hujambo?*' This greeting meant;

Hello and how do you do? After recovering from being startled, we would politely answer, '*Sijambo*, or *Habari sana*, Francis,' meaning; it is well with us. At this point Francis would invariably try to engage us in conversation. I believe Francis was very lonely as an askari and enjoyed passing the time with small talk to ease the solitude of his job.

We soon discovered that living in the country of Kenya was vastly different from living in a modern city like San Diego. In the city, even on a moonless night, we take ambient light for granted—the corner streetlamp, a lighted stop signal, the porch light from your neighbor's home, or the headlights from a nearby car. Living in the country, we had no close neighbors, and the manor house was fifty yards away and camouflaged by its surrounding trees. Moonless nights in Thika were as dark as a murky cave. The only sound might be the barking of a distant dog, or the growl of a feral cat.

After a busy day arranging our meager supplies in the cottage and making the beds, we had a light supper and settled in for the evening. Over the course of our time in Kenya, I came to enjoy being just one hundred miles south of the equator. It always got dark in or around 7:00 PM—give or take five minutes. This made for an adaptable schedule when raising young children. We bathed and put our girls down for the night at seven.

John and I settled ourselves in the lounge on the couch and armchair that had come with the house. We had been so busy arranging our things that we had not thought to gather wood to start a cozy fire in the brick fireplace. With no television or

radio and little to no outside light, we suddenly realized how alone we were in the country. We had not yet arranged to have our phone service connected. It became unnervingly quiet, so we decided to pass the time reading.

I looked up from my book and said, 'John, it just occurred to me that *no one* from the school knows where we are. I hope we haven't made a mistake renting a house so far out in the country. Our phone is not set up yet, and I just realized that we live in the middle of a coffee plantation in a house with no street name off a dirt road.'

'I know, Linda. I thought of that too. I'll admit living so far out in the country is not exactly ideal, but I'm sure it'll be fine. Try and focus on your book.' We continued to read for another thirty minutes.

Deathly silence once again enveloped the room like a cold fog, until suddenly, we heard the sound of a drum beating in the distance. I waited, thinking it would stop. The drum began as a solo instrument, but soon other drums joined in, and the sound intensified.

I looked over at my husband, who had stopped reading his book and was staring off in the distance toward the sound. 'John, what in the hell is that?'

'I don't know, but I'm not going outside to look. I hope Francis, is nearby.' I looked across the room at John and could tell he was even a bit shaken. Neither of us continued to read.

We had only been in Kenya for two weeks, and I immediately began to question why we had rented a house outside the city. We knew little about the customs and practices of the local people. When we first arrived, several teachers had

loved telling us stories about how the Mau Mau uprising had contributed to Kenya's independence a mere seven years before. At the time, it had made me a little annoyed believing they took delight in trying to scare us. These memories flooded my thoughts as we quietly sat in the cottage.

We continued to listen to the steady rhythm of drums in the distance. My mind vividly went to those Saturday afternoon black and white matinee features on television. The old B-rated movies that I had often watched with my best friend, Terry, when we were young.

You know, the ones with white hunters, like Clark Gable or Robert Mitchum, on a jungle safari in Africa. I shared my memories of these old movies with John and could see that his imagination was as heightened as mine.

'How did storylines usually end in these tales?'

'I remember the plots of these movies often ran along similar storylines—when the *native* drums stopped beating—the white men usually got into trouble.'

'That's not comforting, Linda!'

The noise indicated that more people had joined in and were now chanting to the rhythm of the drums.

'Oh, God,' I whispered, 'maybe that's why Mr. Guthega hired Francis to guard our cottage.'

John looked over at me and uttered, 'I'm sure it's fine,' in a voice that did nothing to alleviate my fear.

We continued to listen for another twenty minutes until John said, 'Oh, what the hell.' He looked at his watch and said, 'It's eight o'clock. There's nothing we can do. Let's just go to bed.'

It took us a long time to fall asleep, but finally we drifted off to the rhythm of drums beating steadily in the distance.

We awoke the next morning with our girls clamoring over the side of our bed. It was a clear sunny day and the only sound we heard was that of birds chirping in a bottlebrush tree outside our bedroom window. John leaned over and wryly said, 'We made it.'

'That's not funny.' But he was right. Things did look a lot brighter in the morning sun.

Later that morning, Mr. Guthega came by with a dozen eggs and two hens in a wooden crate.

'I came to see how you are settling in,' he said as we greeted him on the cement patio by the back door.

John casually mentioned, 'Yes, everything's fine. We were wondering though. Last night we heard the sound of drums beating in the distance. Any idea what that might be about?'

Mr. Guthega let out a belly laugh. 'Oh, I'm sorry if this may have concerned you. I should have remembered to tell you. Every Saturday night, my workers like to rejoice after working all week. They have a little *ngoma*…a celebration with drums and dancing. It is nothing. You should not worry about it. Francis, your askari, is here to watch over you.'

We both waved our hands in the air—brushing away his explanation as if it were an annoying fly.

'Of course, of course, that's exactly what we both thought,' said John.

We lived in that little stone cottage for one year and every Saturday night we looked at each other and smiled a little, as we listened to the drums of Thika beating in the distance.

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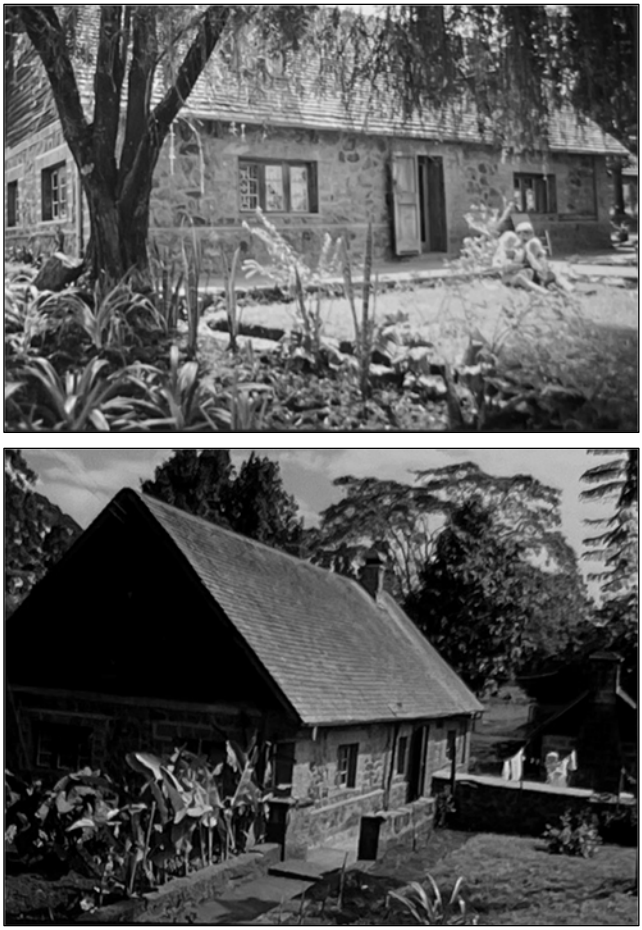

Front and rear views of our stone cottage in Thika

And so, our lives began in Kenya. We soon settled into country life. Mr. Guthega helped us hire a Kikuyu house-girl named Rose. True to his word, John built a swing for the girls and hung it from the large oak tree. Shortly after renting the cottage a kitten, the girls named Posie and a yellow labrador puppy the girls named Peaches, joined the chickens as part of our family. Peaches was a beautiful lab that had been given to us by one of the teachers at NIS. Peaches had been the unfortunate offspring of inbreeding, and the family felt, in good conscience, they couldn't sell her. She was a great dog and bore dozens of mixed-breed pups during our five-year stay in Kenya.

We had an unusual relationship with our indigenous neighbors. They kept to their traditions, and we followed ours. Other than waving from their village across the road, we rarely interacted. Our three-year-old daughter, Shauna, occasionally wandered over to hang out with the *mtotos*—the children of the workers. All was well, but from time to time, we noticed that things had a way of going missing. One day, I could not find Peaches' metal water bowl, which I kept near the back door on the patio.

I asked Rose if she had seen it. 'I saw this bowl yesterday, Memsahib, as I removed the washing from the clothesline in the afternoon. I do not know where it has gone to.'

I walked over to where Shauna was swinging on the tree swing. 'Shauna, have you seen the dog bowl? Rose said it was on the patio yesterday afternoon.'

Without saying a word, our three-year-old daughter jumped off the swing and took off running in the direction of

the Kikuyu village. I watched as she ran in and out of several of the huts. She eventually came darting across the road with the missing dog bowl in her hands.

'Where did you find it?'

'I looked until I found it underneath a bed in one of the little huts. There was an old lady sitting inside smoking a pipe, but she didn't say anything to me. I just grabbed it and ran home.'

'Did anyone else say anything or try to stop you?'

'No. The old lady in the little hut just looked at me.'

Later that evening, as I relayed the story to John, I said, 'Not only is our little girl brave, but I have a feeling she will always have a strong moral compass as to what is right and wrong.'

To this day, my daughter, Shauna, has lived her life with an embedded sense of what is right and what is wrong. It's an endearing trait that I knew she had even at three.

* * * * * *

The iron red soil on the Kenyan plateau around Nairobi is rich in nutrients. I often felt one could casually drop a seed in the ground and a beautiful, lush plant would burst forth. NIS had yet to pay us for our housing allowance and moving expenses. Money was extremely tight. We decided it would be wise to grow a *shamba*—a garden to help with expenses. Plus, John felt it would give me something to fill my time while he was at school. We tilled the rich red soil and planted a variety of vegetables—tomatoes, onions, potatoes, squash, carrots, green beans, peppers, pumpkins, and corn. It was a fairly large

garden, and we were pleased with our forward thinking. John was right. The garden helped fill my days living alone in the country, and I nurtured it as one might nurture a young child.

One evening after John returned from NIS, I announced that I thought one of our plants looked like it might be ready for harvesting. We walked out for an inspection and agreed that the zucchini squash was definitely ready for picking. I was excited and got out the only recipe book I had chosen to bring to Kenya, a *Better Homes and Garden Cookbook*, which I received as a wedding gift and was a *must have* for every young bride in America at that time. That evening, I scanned it looking for potential recipes.

The next morning, I waved John off to school, gathered my garden tools, and headed over to our *shamba* with my daughters, ready to reap the rewards of our labor. I stopped cold. Half the zucchini squash appeared to have vanished. At first, I wondered if it was my imagination harboring a more grandiose idea of my skill as a farmer. But the pattern of missing produce continued to plague us at various times of our harvests. A crop of tomatoes or peppers would ripen, but before we could reap its full benefits, half of our crop would turn up missing.

The only crop we were able to fully harvest was our stalks of corn. Kenyans know nothing of what we call sweet corn. They eat larger ears of corn, which we know as maize. In America, this variety of field corn is mostly used as feed for animals. This larger variety of maize is less sweet and a little tough. It was immensely popular with the locals. On visits into the city, I had seen local vendors roasting cobs of maize over

coals on street corners for sale. Grain from the maize was also used as a stiff porridge, called posho that was often paired with cabbage. Leftover porridge was also pressed into a snowball that workers would eat cold for lunch. I suspected our Kikuyu neighbors or Francis never pilfered the corn from our garden because they must have thought it had not yet reached maturity. Our bountiful crop of corn was our finest success.

* * * * * *

Living in the country was a challenge for me. I was incredibly lonely and missed my family. The Kikuyu girl Mr. Guthega had sent over to assist me with the duties of the house and help care for our girls was young and not much company for me. Rose was still in her teens, and we had little in common. I once congratulated her on speaking two languages—English and Swahili and the advantages it afforded.

She said, 'Yes Memsahib, but you also speak two languages.'

'What two languages do you think I speak, Rose?'

'You speak English and American.'

I choked back a laugh and said, 'Rose, in America, English is the official language.'

She looked confused so I tried to explain. 'Like Kenya, America was once a British colony, and we also won our independence and became a republic. Most people in America speak English because our forefathers were English.'

Rose said, 'Then we have much in common.'

Because I was lonely, I filled my days in the country sewing on my little Singer sewing machine, gardening, playing my guitar, cooking, baking bread and experimenting with all sorts of desserts. Years later, John told me that our year in Thika was one of the happiest times in his life.

When I asked him why, he told me, 'Every day, when I got home from teaching and coaching you greeted me with a Tusker beer from a frosty mug you kept chilled in the freezer. You often treated the family to a new recipe you had tried that day. You made homemade bread and delicious desserts. But mostly, I always knew that my family would be waiting to welcome me home in our little cottage.'

I laughed. 'That's because being so bored and lonely, I had to find something creative to fill my days. In order to stay active and creative, I made countless recipes from my *Better Homes and Garden Cookbook*.'

* * * * * *

In the course of my interactions with the indigenous people of Kenya, I came to understand they are extremely forthright. Most Americans and British will cover an awkward encounter with the nuance of a polite comment to mask what they *really* feel on a subject. That is not the case with an African, as I learned the hard way.

In Kenya, tropical fruits like pineapples, mangoes, papayas, and bananas were reasonably priced. Apples, pears, and grapes were imported items and much more expensive. I got it into my head that I wanted to make an apple pie for John's dinner. I knew it would be an extravagant and costly

dessert. All day, I fussed over the crust and made the filling just as I had seen my mother do. The pie filled the house with the sweet aroma of cinnamon as it baked, and I gazed at its beauty while it cooled by the open window on the kitchen counter. My joy continued with the array of compliments from my family around the dinner table. I was enormously proud, so after Rose and I cleaned the kitchen, I decided to send Rose off to her living quarters with a slice of the treasured treat.

The next day I waited for her to compliment me on the pie, but she went about her chores never mentioning it. When I could stand it no longer, I asked, 'Rose, how did you like my apple pie?'

She wrinkled her nose, shook her head, and said, 'I did not like this pie, Memsahib.'

I was crushed. 'Oh,' I said, trying not to look crestfallen. 'Why didn't you like the pie?'

Rose puckered her face in distaste. 'This pie was too sweet! I could not eat it!'

At first, I was irritated because the pie was expensive to make. I felt she had not appreciated my effort and generosity in sharing it with her. Later, when I thought more on the subject, I came to realize she had probably never eaten a sugary fruit pie and maybe she was expecting it to taste like the savory meat-filled pies so enjoyed by the English or East Indians. As I lay in bed that night, I sulked and thought *she could have lied and just pretended to like it.*

Over time, I came to learn that the nuanced perception a person in Western society will use to soften a situation is not

in the African's way of thinking. And in truth, the African way is healthier.

Like me, I think our askari, Francis, was very lonely. He loved to corner us for a chat when we drove home in the evening. John was much more gracious about talking with him than I was, as I hustled the girls in the house for bedtime. One night Francis knocked on our kitchen door. When I opened it, he was holding a live chicken under his arm.

He asked, 'Is bwana John at home, Memsahib?'

'Yes, Francis, wait here and I'll get him.' John walked out to the patio to talk to him. About thirty minutes later, he entered the house.

I asked him, 'What was that about?'

'Francis was so pleased to have gotten to know us, he wanted to give us a chicken. I put it in the coop with the other chickens. Francis says the chicken doesn't lay eggs but would make a fine dinner for us.'

I looked at John in horror. 'Are you going to kill the chicken?

John looked at me and shrugged. 'I don't know. My Aunt Lucille used to think nothing of ringing a chicken's neck on their farm. I'm not sure if I'll do it. Right now, it's in the chicken coop. We'll deal with it tomorrow.'

Months went by. We continued to feed the chickens with scraps from our garden and chicken feed. Every once in a while, Francis would ask us, 'Bwana, when are you going to cook the chicken?'

'Soon, Francis,' John offered. 'We are waiting for the right time.'

One morning we woke up to a completely empty chicken coop. All the chickens had gone missing in the night. We wondered if Francis had taken the chickens—because we obviously didn't appreciate having a fine chicken dinner, or they had gone the way of our vegetables to our Kikuyu neighbors across the road.

No one, especially us, was talking about the missing chickens. In truth, we were actually relieved. John was dreading the day he would have to wring the chicken's neck, and I was not looking forward to plucking the feathers. We did miss the eggs.

In 1971, A young American couple working in Kenya as teachers are recruited to spy undercover for the CIA. The couple will lead a double life of intrigue and deception with neighbors, friends, and visiting family during the Cold War.

{Code Names}
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