ELEPHANTS' GRAVEYARD

by

Karin McQuillan

Previous Titles
   Deadly Safari
   Elephants Graveyard
   The Cheetah Chase

Praise for Karin McQuillan’s African Mysteries
   Deadly Safari

Karin McQuillan has written a brilliant first novel. I read Deadly Safari through in a sitting and loved it. I can't wait for her next.

   --Robert B. Parker

"Everything everyone can want--suspense, real people as characters, and real, untamed Africa out there in the darkness."

   --Tony Hillerman

I like the setting and the sound of your writing. You obviously know what you're doing."

   --Elmore Leonard

One of the best mystery novels I have read in a long time. It has everything--good plotting with pace and action, high-quality writing, good characterization and
dialogue, and of course, the wonderful descriptions of wildlife. What more can I say? It is a page-turner to the end.

--Dorothy Simpson

I really loved Deadly Safari. It is absolutely remarkable for a first mystery novel. Karin McQuillan's obviously expert love of Africa and its animals gives it a special quality and an extra dimension of enjoyment.

--Patricia Moyes

With her first novel, Deadly Safari, Karin McQuillan establishes herself as an excellent writer with the expertise of a seasoned novelist... (Inspector Omondi) is charming, witty and sexy... (Jazz) is a fully realized and likeable woman... McQuillan uses the first-person narrative to excellent effect and one senses her genuine love, respect and admiration for the people, the land and the animals of Kenya... a most propitious debut.

--Washington Post

(Jazz) provides expert and enthusiastic leadership on the novel's thrilling wild animal hunts. Ms. McQuillan, a former Peace Corps volunteer, writes about Kenya with informed affection. So intense is the sensory detail on this safari that the scenes of hunting lions, charging rhinos and cavorting baboons linger long after.

--New York Times

"The jacket of Deadly Safari... contains so much fulsome praise from well-known writers that you know it can't possibly be that good. It is. McQuillan... keeps the suspense going for nearly 300 pages, teasing the reader into agreeing with safari company owner Jazz Jasper as she suspects each of her clients in turn... hard to put down... you will be halfway to booking your own safari... before the spell wears off."

--UPI

Fast, well-plotted and fun to read... The most unusual and best of these books is Karin McQuillan's first book, Deadly Safari. McQuillan... has created an attractive young woman... and a smooth black policeman... The plot is clever, but more important, McQuillan's affinity for (Kenya is) memorable and vivid... Don't miss this first trip!

--St. Louis Post-Dispatch

This is truly a debut novel-- and a great one. All the elements are perfect-- plot, characterization, dialogue, but even more inventive is the author's captivating technique with her setting... (Jazz) is real, she's ambitious, and above all, she's extremely likable.
In her first novel, McQuillan develops an ingenious variation on the classic English country-house murder....McQuillan's thorough homework in the genre works to good effect, as crisp pacing and plausible plotting mix comfortably with evocative descriptions of the Kenyan wilds. A quite effective surprise ending provides the right finishing note in what is, all in all, an auspicious debut.

--Mystery News

Among the better first novels . . . a nice twist on the English country-house style of whodunit. McQuillan's familiarity with modern Africa gives the novel a well-realized setting and a cast of interesting characters, major and minor . . . the author's love of Africa and concern for its wildlife will provide entertainment that's both colorful as well as thought-provoking.

--Booklist

Reading the quotes from praising authors regarding Ms. McQuillan’s first novel is like paging through a list of who's who in the mystery genre. . . . I haven't heard a discouraging word about this book. I was skeptical. It couldn't be THAT good, could it? Well, it IS that good! Try as I might to remain aloof, I was quickly drawn into the sensuous and exciting world of Jazz Jasper. The Kenyan wilderness comes alive...the characters engaging and the plot well developed...you (won't) be able to figure out whodunit.

--Rocky Mountain News

Transcending the genre...Deadly Safari, Karin McQuillan's paean to the wilds.

--Over My Dead Body

Well worth reading...satisfying conclusion...(McQuillan) knows what she is talking about.

--San Francisco Chronicle

McQuillan's evident love for the African countryside, animals and people set this...mystery apart, as does a sensitively handled love affair. Her fine eye for detail and a deft touch with characterization promise much for the future.

--Boston Globe

Here's a change from the misty moors or the mean streets-a mystery set in Africa's Kenyan wilderness. And a pleasant change it is, too...Ms. McQuillan even works in some timely messages about saving the animals and environment without being
heavy-handed....dialogue is brisk and real....a likable heroine...magnificent wildlife.

--The Atlanta Journal and Constitution

McQuillan has fashioned her intriguing plot in the richest of settings, and every page of this 293-page mystery is a delight. We are struck by the wildlife and lifestyle in Kenya, by the depth and honesty of the characters--particularly Jazz Jasper, the heroine, and by the well-crafted mystery itself.

--North Shore Magazine

A good, solid mystery that is fun to read. . . the Kenyan wilderness comes to life under her pen.

--Knoxville News Sentinel

Well-paced and thoughtful . . . Omondi's humor is winsome, beguiling . . . characterizations are singular and distinct...a first-rate mystery novel . . . the mystery genre is hers.

--Harvard Book Review

McQuillan has written a tight, classic closed-group murder mystery. The book's real strength, however, lies in the author's ability to convey her understanding of contemporary Kenya and apprehension over the mismanagement of and indifference to its irreplaceable wildlife.

--Drood Review of Mystery

Deadly Safari is bound to be a treat for anyone who gets a charge out of fantasizing about safaris, or might even be planning an actual one and would like to know what to expect or perhaps avoid. And, for those of us who have been to that part of the world and are eager to go back anytime, for real, or for a bit of make-believe.

--Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Writers

Karin McQuillan is a born writer. I loved the vivid descriptions--the Masai tribesman, the elephants, the drive through the animal-teeming dark. It's a privilege to be offered a prior glimpse of a book by a newcomer of such talent and originality. Her Deadly Safari is as full of promise as her vividly described African setting is of endangered life."

--Sheila Radley
**Deadly Safari** evokes Beryl Markham, Diane Fossey, Agatha Christie, yet stands on its own. No need to hunt for the right adjective. Karin McQuillan is terrific!  

--- *Kinky Friedman*

Karin McQuillan's first novel is a terrific read. I think most people approach a new writer hoping for either a good story or an interesting setting. It's rare that one book combines both as well as **Deadly Safari**.

--- *Jeremiah Healy*

Karin McQuillan's first novel is a terrific read. I think most people approach a new writer hoping for either a good story or an interesting setting. It's rare that one book combines both as well as **Deadly Safari**.

--- *Jeremiah Healy*

Karin McQuillan knows her Africa and brings it convincingly alive for the reader. **Deadly Safari** is chock-full of authoritative and extremely well-realized detail. By the time you finish it you can smell Africa.

--- *Aaron Elkins*

Jazz Jasper, Karin McQuillan's engaging protagonist, takes the readers--and an assortment of far-from-usual suspects--on a safari where the endangered species include more than the rhino. The pace is fast, the dialogue believable, the setting authentic, and the mystery first-rate.

--- *David Smith*

Lions take lordly credit for animal kills; in reality the much maligned hyenas often bring down the game only to lose it to the awesome cats. Karin McQuillan's **Deadly Safari** contains many such harsh truths. Readers will not only explore darkest Africa, they will plumb the darkness of the human soul. **Deadly Safari** is a perceptive, compelling mystery with an intelligent, sensitive heroine. First class.

--- *Carolyn Hart*

Praise for Elephants’ Graveyard
This is a book I couldn’t put down, a story I didn’t want to end.” THE BEST MYSTERY OF 1993.

--- *Clarion-Ledger*

A perceptive, realistic, dramatic mystery set in problematic present-day Kenya, this book is an excellent selection.

--- *Library Journal*

"McQuillan's cast comments intriguingly, and often amusingly, on African culture as she conjures evocative scenes of dusty bush heat, elephants, lions and the wilder urban life of Majengo, a treacherous, teeming slum...colorful setting, fascinating insights into daily life in Kenya. The story is fast-paced and Jasper is charming and self-reliant."
"Ambitious and captivating...a cleverly conceived murder. The author imbued her story not only with a depiction of living conditions but the soul and attitudes of another culture. The author's love of nature brings a special quality to her story. Her masterful handling of plot and characters is an added bonus."

--The San Francisco Chronicle

"No reader will be able to resist the storytelling magnificence of Elephants' Graveyard Karin McQuillan is a masterful writer, all the while enriching her complex plot with the insight and compassion of a caring soul."


--Mystery News

Impassioned defense of Kenyan wildlife from second-novelist McQuillan. Unforgettable depictions of elephant slaughter, baboon mating habits, etc. An intelligent, at times lyrical African adventure, told from a moderate feminist perspective.

--The Clarion-Ledger

Every once in a while a different kind of travel book comes along--a fictional mystery along with the beauty and ecology. The setting is Kenya--sensuous, beautiful, sometimes violent. Woven throughout the mystery is a love of the land, and as sense of the importance of conservation of endangered animals.

--Kirkus Reviews

Jasper is a highly likable and strong character who is sensitive to people and her surroundings. The author's love of Africa and its wild beauty shows through clearly. (McQuillan) never loses sight of the main point of fiction: to tell a good story and make you turn the pages. McQuillan is a compelling storyteller who will keep you guessing whodunit right to the end.

--The Weekender

Like (her heroine) Jazz Jasper, McQuillan is a persuasive spokesperson as well as a skillful guide for our armchair safari to the Elephants' Graveyard.

--Mostly Murder

The reader gets much information in an unobtrusive, entertaining way, for McQuillan has a fluid, readable writing style.

--Peace Corps Readers and Writers
Kenya is alive in all its rich variety, pulsating with vibrancy...McQuillan has a driving, convincing desire to save the elephants, a fast-paced carefully crafted mystery, and a love for Kenya that transcends everything else.

--North Shore Magazine

Praise for The Cheetah Chase

Delightful, action-packed books. McQuillan writes with passion and knowledge few authors achieve. . .McQuillan has been there, has seen the good, the bad and the ugly . . .Place Ms. McQuillan on your list of writers who can tell a story well. Whether your next safari is from a dust-covered Land Rover or from the dust cover of a book, pack “Deadly Safari,” “Elephants” Graveyard” and The Cheetah Chase” in your duffel. You won’t be disappointed.

--The Sierra Club

“Karin McQuillan has recently managed to carve a unique place for herself with mystery and wildlife lovers alike. . . . She could very well find The Cheetah Chase sprinting away as one of the year’s best crime novels.”

-- The Poisoned Pen

Their plane goes down in the bush, plunging them in an enthralling series of adventures......As usual, Jazz makes a blundering but appealing detective whose investigation is wrapped, like Godiva chocolate, around a sumptuous tour of sub-Saharan Kenya.

-- Kirkus Reviews

Jazz Jasper, McQuillan’s spunky, outspoken heroine...teams up with her old buddy, Inspector Omondi, to investigate. But it’s only after a series of harrowing confrontations ...that Jazz untangles the bizarre and unnerving motive for Nick’s murder. McQuillan’s writing projects a satisfying vitality and charm...This book will appeal to a wide audience.

-- Booklist

Colorful and tense mystery that comes to a smashing and totally unexpected conclusion.”

--Murder Ad Lib

An absolutely smashing first chapter. And things get better from there....The Cheetah Chase is a deeply felt and impassioned novel...a novel of powerful themes
and topical issues, a novel that will last in the reader’s memory. But it is also an entertaining, a marvelous story with a wonderfully appealing heroine.”

-- Jackson Clarion-Ledger

(McQuillan has a) unique descriptive ability to plant the reader square in the middle of Africa, whether in lush jungles, or arid desert, with a sense of excitement. There were places I almost ducked, thinking I was next to be hit by a booby-trapped spear...Jazz’s friend and policeman, Omondi...Here’s a relationship that is refreshing and works...Ms. McQuillan has done it again. She combines her skill as a writer, her sincere love of Africa, and her concern for endangered animals to produce a thought-provoking suspenseful mystery.

-- Mystery News

McQuillan’s third novel in the Jazz Jasper series is the most richly textured, most complex of these fine novels set in Africa. From this tapestry of crises and adventures Karin McQuillan has woven a tale as passionate and as complicated as the African subcontinent itself, totally connected to the spectacular land and wildlife. Five cats.” (scale 1-5)

-- Murder Under Cover

The Cheetah Chase is full of atmospheric tension, giving the reader a taste of a wild and exotic land. Threaded throughout is a feeling of danger from all directions: the natural threats from the wilds, and the danger of modern civilization swallowing up what’s left of nature itself...A fast-paced, suspenseful novel.

-- Mostly Murder

In her third appearance, spirited Jazz Jasper, American owner of a safari company in Kenya and occasional PI...finds herself in the treacherous worlds of illegal poachers, large-scale land developers and the wealthy who think nothing of keeping a cheetah cub as a pet or wearing its fur. Such physical dangers as a plane crash, an attack by Saudi bodyguards and another by lions are all part of a day’s work for the resourceful and courageous Jazz...Haunting scenes of a paradise on the verge of destruction will likely move all readers, animal-rights supporters or not.” -- Publishers Weekly
This book is a work of fiction. Any references to historical events, real people, or real places are used fictitiously. Other names, characters, places and events are products of the author’s imagination, and any resemblance to actual events or places or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Copyright © 2015 by Karin McQuillan
All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce this book or portions thereof in any form whatsoever.

To John

I dedicate this book to my beloved husband, John, my best friend and companion on all of life’s adventures

Chapter 1

Dead bodies don't last long out in the African bush. There's nowhere to hide under that big, clear sky.

A tawny eagle rose from a road kill with a raucous cry as I turned off the two-lane national highway onto the dirt track that led to Emmet Laird's camp. "Elephants, here we come!" Inspector Omondi slapped his elegant, dark hands together. We exchanged grins.
"Watch it," I called out, as the Rover lurched into a deep pothole and up over a series of cement-hard ruts.
Omondi braced himself against the dashboard. "A large, cold Tusker would not be amiss, either."

"All your wishes will be granted," I told him. My hair brushed the ceiling as the car bounced me up and down. "Emmet has a kerosene refrigerator, a stock of beer, and an elephant family that stays near his camp--thanks to the poachers."

Poaching had gotten so bad in Kenya that desperate elephants were hanging around tourist lodges and scientists' camps, where they were relatively safer.

Omondi shook his head. "Our world has gotten too small for comfort. The Soviets sell the Somalis AK47s to fight their civil war, and now when a Somali guerrilla wants money, he sneaks into Kenya and zap, zap, zap. Soon they will kill all our elephants."

"Let’s not talk about it, I can't stand it," I said vehemently.

"It is a great tragedy."

"It's a nightmare." I stared at the golden plains stretching before me, fighting the steering wheel as we bucked over the ruts and ridges that pass for a Kenyan road. "And they're killing the whole safari business, too. Tourists don't want to fly 12,000 miles to see more dead elephants than live ones." I'd booked several good tours lately, only to have more bad publicity lead to cancellations. If my business went belly up, I wouldn't be able to stay in Africa.

"Enough of serious things," Omondi cleared the air with a wave of his hand.

"Right. Today is for enjoying ourselves in the world's last remnant of Eden."

Fleshy baobab trees dotted the landscape like fat men waving their arms. I brushed away my gloomy thoughts. I had a tour booked for next week, which would stave off my creditors for a while. Omondi had finished a drawn-out domestic murder case and decided to give himself the day off. For both of us, driving down on a weekday gave this outing the added sweetness of stolen pleasure, and I was going to savor every drop.

We passed a giraffe nibbling the top of a struggling thorn tree, and a few Tommie's gazelles, but it was nearing the end of the dry season and the big herds were further south. A long, bumpy hour later, we sighted the camp's parking area at the top of a rise. A flat-topped acacia sheltered the boxy silhouettes of two Land Rovers. I could already feel a cool beer washing the dust from my throat.

"Emmet has other visitors," Omondi said.

"It's probably Mikki Darrow. You know, my friend who studies elephants."

"Ah. A special friend of Emmet's?"

I took my eyes from the rutted tracks to shoot a glance at Omondi. "No fair! How could you guess?"

"Your voice." Omondi laughed with pleasure at his own prowess.
"It's a closely guarded secret." After a moment I added, "Mikki's been trying to decide whether to leave her husband."

"Jazz, Jazz--this is the real reason you invited me for a drive today, is it not?" He held his hands to his chest. "You think I am a witch doctor to mend broken hearts."

I glanced over again and our eyes met with a little jolt of memory. I turned back to the road with a smile. "Well, it worked for me and Striker."

Some people think I overreacted to my divorce. Changing husbands these days is supposed to be as easy as flipping to a new TV channel. I've never cared for TV. I prefer real life, even though real wounds bleed. When my husband walked out on me, my whole life felt broken. So I bolted. I picked a fantasy out of my childhood and ran for it. No half-measures: I changed continents and careers--from Dr. Jasper, art historian, to owner and tour guide of Jazz Jasper Safaris. Then I spent my first two years in Kenya circling warily around Dan Striker, calling my fear independence. It was only this past winter that Striker and I became lovers, thanks to Omondi thawing out my frozen fear of men.

"Surely you're not suggesting I use the same medicine on Mikki that I did on you?" Omondi gave a deep laugh. "I don't pass out my magic that freely. Besides, it sounds like she's doing fine on her own."

I pulled in next to the other Rovers. One was Emmet's, with Save the Elephants blazoned on the door. The other car looked almost new under its coating of red laterite dust. A gun rack held a single rifle--definitely not Mikki's car. Neither she nor Emmet carried a gun. They preferred to rely on their knowledge of animal behavior to keep out of sticky situations.

We got out of the car and found we were on the crest of the rise. "Whooee!" Omondi flung his arms out to embrace the landscape. Emmet's hilltop held a surprise: it looked down on a permanent waterhole. There was a commotion of elephants down below, rumbling and milling about in a cloud of dust. Beyond them a group of zebras hesitated, giving the elephants plenty of room. Catching the excitement, one of the zebras kicked up its hind legs and then stretched its neck forward in a toothy bray. An Egyptian Goose ignored the mammals and squawked into a splash landing with a flash of white and rust. A young elephant charged two jackals who were darting this way and that like dusty wraiths.

"Extraordinary!" Omondi flashed a delighted smile, teeth gleaming in contrast with his dark skin. "Listen to them talking!"

To our left was a picnic table Emmet Laird had set up under a feathery acacia, so that even during meal times he could watch his beloved elephants coming in to drink and bathe. A single plate sat on the table with the congealed remains of bacon and eggs. Several flies were having a feast. I glanced towards the scattering of tents in assorted sizes for sleeping, eating, bathing and other functions. Where was Emmet? Or his visitors? People usually don't go animal watching on foot in the African bush, especially near a waterhole.
Omondi stared at the elephants below. "What's going on? Look at that big bull flapping his ears and kicking dirt up. Doesn't he look angry?"

"Animal observation is like police work," I said. "Rule number one: Don't jump to conclusions."

"But look at the way he's thrusting his tusks into the ground."

"It's not a "he". Bulls live by themselves. The biggest elephant is the mother, and this whole herd is her family." One of the elephants waved a ripped-off acacia branch in her trunk, and was lost from view as she pushed her way into the crowd. Despite my Rule Number One, I assumed she was going to eat it, and paid no attention.

"Grown daughters and grandchildren, but no males?"

"Exactly. Once the males become teenagers they're too rambunctious and aggressive and are ejected from the herd. Emmet knows this whole family by name, has watched many of them grow up."

"I wonder if they have a name for him."

The voice spoke from behind me and I whipped round. "Alicia!"

"In the flesh." She walked to my side, eyes drawn by the spectacle at the water hole. "Those elephants are making such a racket, we didn't hear you drive up."

I tried not to look surprised. Emmet's wife, Alicia Laird, never came to camp. I knew from Mikki that Alicia and Emmet didn't spend much time together--and yet there she stood, life-size, as big as Texas and a voice to match. She wore a sundress in an expensive fabric swirling with lions and tigers that suited both her coloring and personality. A heavy gold chain lay against the soft skin of her cleavage, now blotchy with dust. I wondered if my friend Mikki knew Alicia was here.

"They probably call him Uncle Deep Pockets." She drew her red painted lips into a smirk and two pretty dimples appeared. Every now and then I'd wonder how Emmet could ever have married her, especially his third time around, but those thoughts never came up in Alicia's actual presence. Alicia had the pull of a gravitational force. "I swear, he'd spend his last dime on those baggy-pants monsters." She put a hand up to her mouth like a semaphore. "Greg! Come say hello to Jazz Jasper."

Alicia's current male escort, Greg Garner, emerged from the awning of the large dining/sitting tent.

"No note," he said to Alicia. He looked at her with the doting expression of a man who's been getting great sex. Greg was barely thirty, at least five years younger than Alicia and half Emmet's age, a big burly man tall enough to tower over Alicia, with a snub nose and shock of blond hair that made him look even younger. If I remembered correctly, he was the chief loan officer for WorldCorp Bank. His milieu was the club golf course and bar, rather than the bush. So this was her Other Man. Why in the world would Alicia bring him here? The camp was Emmet's special place, a hideaway from Alicia and her party crowd.
"Let me introduce you to my friend," I said. "Alicia Laird—Inspector Omondi of the Nairobi police, and this is Greg Garner."

At the word "inspector" their smiles became painfully brittle. Were they afraid Omondi would whip out handcuffs and cart them off for speeding, or perhaps for adultery?

Alicia recovered herself and shook Omondi's long, elegant hand. "You're the detective who helped out with those killings on Jazz's first safari tour, aren't you?" She turned to Greg. "You know Jazz started her very own safari company, Greg. Isn't that enterprising? And on the very first tour there was this terrible--"

"I wanted to show the Inspector elephants," I cut in. An old friend had been murdered on that trip. It was painful to remember, and I certainly didn't want Alicia building me up into some kind of a heroine.

Omondi shook her hand energetically. "Delighted to make your acquaintance, Mrs. Laird. I have been looking forward to this visit for a long time. Jazz tells me your husband is one of the great men of Kenya, protecting our living national treasure. Yes, these elephants are necessary for a developing country like ours to raise its biggest cash crop: tourist dollars." Omondi chuckled at his own joke.

He turned to Greg. "Mr. Garner, I hope you aren't getting too much heat today. The sun strikes." He patted his spongy hair. "You need a helmet like mine." Omondi looked towards the tents. "And where is Mr. Laird?"

"I'm not sure where Emmet is, and that's the truth. Alicia glanced towards Greg. "I haven't seen him since, oh, since Monday. I can't imagine what he's thinking of, with all the work for the party."

"Maybe he's out hunting for dinner," Greg joked.

"Don't let Emmet hear you say that, he'd have a fit." Alicia put her hand on his biceps and Greg looked pleased. "He won't even allow a gun here. That's why I never come with him." That and the fact nature bored her to death. "Imagine, all these wild animals around, and poachers getting more brazen every day, and not even a pistol. I wouldn't go for a Sunday drive without my rifle."

Next she'd be telling us her Daddy taught her how to shoot.

Greg rocked on his heels. "So, Inspector, you're playing tour guide to the tour guide? You from around here?"

Omondi shook his head. "No, my family comes from north of Nairobi, tea country. The British killed off all the game there before the war, when I was only a wish in my Mother's heart. Oooh, they loved to hunt, those white settlers. Now it is all farms, no more empty land. I, myself, prefer city life. It is Jazz's idea to show me the animals. She thinks it's a scandal that most Kenyan's don't have a car to visit their own national parks." He showed his empty palms. "It is ironic, is it not?"

"Of all the inconsiderate things, to take off like this and leave me with a party for 500 people Saturday night." Alicia stared at the white-gold grass
shimmering in the afternoon heat as if 500 people might materialize on the spot. "It's the last Save the Elephants fundraiser I'll organize for him."

I was no one to talk--I avoided doing volunteer work for Emmet, myself--but I knew Mikki and Emmet had been working their tails off to make this fundraiser a success, without any help from Alicia other than letting Emmet use their house. Today, Alicia seemed to be playing "my husband neglects me" for all it was worth. Surely she could think of more amusing games for Greg.

Omondi returned to the crest of the hill to watch the antics at the waterhole. "They're starting to quiet down a bit."

"Oh, those elephants!" Alicia said.

Several of the larger elephants fell still and the dust around them began to settle. They stood in a cluster with trunks hanging down, not moving towards the water. It was odd.

"I think I can recognize some of them." I pointed. "We call the biggest elephant Broken Tusk, for obvious reasons. She's the matriarch. She was shot by poachers once--you can see the scar on her shoulder--and can sometimes be cranky around people. The one next to her, see how one ear is notched at the top, that's one of the middle daughters, Blanche. She just had her first baby last rainy season." My view was blocked by a wall of wrinkled grey skin, like a tumble of granite boulders. "The baby may be hiding under her belly."

Omondi was studying the elephants closely. "Look on the ground in the center of their circle. They've kicked up a big pile of dirt."

I pulled a pair of binoculars from my car and focused on the ground. My chest tightened. "They've buried a pile of branches." When an elephant dies, I explained, its family covers it as best they can, and hang around for hours, days sometimes, keeping the scavengers off. "I hope that doesn't mean Blanche lost her baby." I loved that little elephant, with its soft, floppy ears and miniature trunk that only reached to its knees.

"What kills baby elephants?" Greg asked.

"Not much." I tried to focus on the branches, but it was hard to see between the elephants' legs. "Of course, if the mother is shot and the baby gets separated from the rest of the family, it can easily be killed by lions. But Blanche is right there."

"So we are watching a funeral," Omondi said quietly.

"The closest any animal comes to it. It's obvious how much they love one another." I handed the glasses to Omondi.

"Hey, remember Tarzan and the elephants' graveyard? Is this it?" Greg took on a puppy-like excitement.

"That's just an old tale, silly." Alicia slapped his arm. "Like the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow." She puckered her lips into a teasing smile. "A place where old elephants go to die and you can pick up a fortune in tusks right off the ground. Wouldn't that be nice?"

"The legend probably started because you don't see many elephant skeletons lying around," I said. "Old elephants will go to a nice, private place..."
when they feel their death approaching--back in the days when they lived to old age."

"Nowadays, all Kenya is the elephants' graveyard," Omondi agreed sadly. He raised the binoculars, studied the dark mound on the ground, then slowly scanned the surrounding area. Suddenly his body stiffened and he spoke in an urgent voice. "There's a canvas shoe near the water's edge."

I grabbed a second pair of binoculars from the picnic table. Omondi directed me where to look. There was a blue and silver running shoe lying on its side.

"People are terrible, throwing trash everywhere--" Alicia said. "Let's get down there." I wouldn't let myself think what it might mean. I ran for the car and started the engine. The others sprinted after me.

It was too dangerous to go on foot outside the safety of camp or village unless you were armed with a Maasai spear or a gun. Wherever farms abutted the wilderness people were often mauled by lions or gored by cranky Cape buffalo. A waterhole--where animals congregated and lions waited in ambush--was the most dangerous place of all.

That shoe might have been thrown from a car. It might. Emmet wore blue and silver running shoes.

"Hold on a second." Alicia raced to Greg's Rover, pulled her rifle off its rack, and fired into the air. I flinched at the sound, and the animals below stampeded. Alicia scrambled into the car, and I hurled us over the top of the rise and straight down the slope towards the center of the herd. One adolescent male took a few threatening steps towards us, saw that all the adult females were running flat out, tails raised in alarm, and took off after them.

We approached the pile of sticks. A foot in a white crew sock poked out from below. Alicia screamed piercingly, on and on. She sounded like an animal being tortured. Greg leaped from the car and began throwing branches aside. Omondi and I joined him. The branches were heavy, some requiring two people to shift. The ends were splintered and oozing sap where they had been torn from a living tree. Thorns and branches kept catching on one another in a tangled mess, and it seemed to take forever to pull them loose. There was a smear of dried blood under our feet, a boiling of flies and a putrid smell.

A moment later, we looked down on Emmet Laird. His still body created a deadly silence in the middle of all the noise. His white shirt was soaked with blood. A bullet had smashed a jagged crater where his heart used to beat.

Chapter 2

"If everyone will please get back in the car." Omondi crouched next to Emmet's body. I turned away, unable to watch the blanket of flies crawling over the wound, but I couldn't get away from their sound, that awful buzzing. The stench from Emmet's body mingled with the smells of elephant shit and pools of
urine that dotted the hard-packed ground. I moved to the other side of the Rover, breathing shallowly, trying not to be sick, and slipped behind the wheel. Even as part of me was praying, Please, God, let this not be true, I heard my voice, sounding dead and far away, ask Omondi if I should radio the police.

"Yes. Ask for Sergeant Kakombe. He's on duty today."

I called in and gave detailed instructions on how to find Emmet's camp. The sun came in through the open roof hatch and fell in a burning patch on my back. I could feel sweat trickling between my shoulder blades. It would be at least a few hours before the forensic specialists could get here. Alicia climbed into the seat behind me. A shadow passed over me, then another, bird swift. Two vultures fell from the sky. They tipped their wings from side to side to hasten their descent, greedy to share in the possible spoils.

Greg hovered over Omondi's shoulder. Everything seemed far away, except my stomach, which was trying to crawl up my throat.

A giraffe rounded the slope with its calm, rocking gait. The pattern of its skin, rust blotches on a tan background, stood out clearly in the strong light. The giraffe stopped and stared.

"There's a tarp in the car we can use to carry him." Greg's voice brought me back.

The vultures sidled closer.

"Please, if you would get in the car. Mrs. Laird needs your help more than I do. The less we disturb the area, the better." Omondi moved along in a crouch as he studied the ground. Near the water the earth was churned into lumpy, semi-liquid, rich smelling goo, but where we were the dry ground had been pounded and polished by animals' feet until it was hard as stone. Omondi circled round slowly. The giraffe realized there was a man loose, grew alarmed, and loped off.

"No tire tracks but ours. Mr. Laird's body was not dumped here." Omondi went back to stand over the body. "From the amount of blood on the ground, I would guess this is the very spot he was killed."

"He wouldn't have walked here," I called from the car. "Emmet was too knowledgeable to do such a dangerous thing."

No, he'd never walk here of his own free will, but he could have been forced--with a rifle focused on him from the camp above. Told to stop and turn around, and then shot through the heart. I felt a pain in my own chest. Why was it the best people, the people the world needed most, who were always killed? Who would champion the elephants now? Who would love them with Emmet's courage and energy? I didn't let myself think of Mikki, or I'd break down completely.

Did Emmet recognize his killer, I wondered? Was it an employee, doing a day's work, hired to kill a man as a change from killing elephants? I looked at Alicia, who was leaning her head against the seat in front of her, eyes closed. The thought it might be a domestic murder flitted through my mind, unwelcome as the buzzing of the flies. Alicia had just become the richest widow in Nairobi.

A call came in on the radio. It was Sergeant Kakombe. All the police cars were in the shop for repairs.
"Or being used for personal business." Omondi clicked his tongue with annoyance.

"No cars?" Greg's voice rose with disbelief.

Alicia raised her head. "Just last week some poor bastard called the police station to report that a band of thieves were smashing through his front door with machetes. You know what the police said? Come to the station and pick up some officers, we have no cars tonight. No cars." A mirthless laugh exploded from her throat like a cork under pressure. The laugh grew, doubled her over, rose louder and shriller. Greg grabbed her to his chest and the laugh turned abruptly to sobs. "No cars," she wept.

A black shadow moved over us with a whoosh from a six-foot wing-span. The marabou stork alighted on one of the branches we'd tossed aside and clacked its massive bill at Omondi, as if telling him to get a move on. The stork had the naked head of all scavengers. Its skin looked like diseased meat, ugly enough without the huge fleshy wattle that hung down from its neck, swinging and bulging as it sidled towards Emmet. When Omondi ignored it, the bird reached out and pulled at Emmet's hand.

Greg and I yelled. Alicia tried to pull away from Greg's chest and see, but he wouldn't let go of her. Omondi lunged, waving his arms, and the bird took a few hurried steps out of range.

Omondi turned to us. "I am very sorry, Mrs. Laird, that you are being subjected to this. Normally, I would leave the body untouched until the forensic team gets here, but that is clearly impossible." He paused. None of us volunteered for the job of spending the night with the body and shooing away carrion eaters. "Mr. Garner, your idea was a good one. If you would be so kind to help me with the tarp."

I helped the two men bundle Emmet into the car. Why should a dead body feel so much heavier than a live one? We brought Emmet's body back up the hill, left it in the back of the Rover, and at Omondi's suggestion, regrouped around the picnic table.

Alicia hugged herself with crossed arms. She looked almost as bloodless as Emmet. Omondi made her sit down with her head between her knees. The whole time she kept saying, "I'm all right. I'm fine." When she did lift her head, she was still pale but not that scary green color. "What possessed him to go down there?" she whispered.

"Did an animal get him?" Greg asked. "I didn't see claw marks, but I wasn't looking too closely."

I could see Greg in the club lounge, surrounded by other well-fed businessmen, making a long, dramatic story of it. The punch line would be how stupid Emmet was to get killed. I wanted to howl. Emmet dead? In the two years I'd gotten to know him, as Mikki's friend, Emmet had become special to me--not exactly a friend, more like a valued comrade in arms, plucky and optimistic. I could almost hear him whistling Gershwin tunes as he laid the evening campfire.
"Alicia, you're still white as a ghost. Let me pour you a whisky," Greg said. "I'll have one, too. Anyone else? I even have ice and soda." Omondi and I opted for soda water. Greg went to his car and came back with an ice chest, a hamper of booze and glasses.

I looked down at the waterhole. A jackal was sniffing the ground where Emmet's body had rested. "If the elephants hadn't buried him," I said, "there wouldn't be a trace left by now. Emmet would have simply disappeared."

Omondi looked around the camp. "The abandoned car would have looked suspicious." He eyes rested on Greg and Alicia. "Unless the killers meant to come back and get rid of it later."

"What are you suggesting?" Greg took a step forward as if to intimidate Omondi with his physical weight.

"Nothing." Omondi met Greg's gaze with his usual mildness. "I always raise a lot of questions. What implication did you draw, Mr. Garner?"

"You said you spoke with Striker this morning?" Alicia didn't look at me as she asked the question. "Did he tell you Emmet was upset about something he'd discovered?"

I took the cool glass of soda from Greg's large hand. "Striker didn't say anything." Dan Striker, my boyfriend, had a maddening habit of being close-lipped about his work in progress, whether it was a straightforward piece of nature writing or investigative journalism. It was one of the marks left by his many years as a loner.

"What's this?" Omondi's brown eyes settled on Alicia with a look I recognized, a look of professional concentration, like a basketball star measuring the distance to the net and the disposition of the opposing team. The police station might not have any cars, but I was glad Omondi was on my side. "Discovered what?" He prompted her.

Alicia frowned into her glass. "I have no idea. He and Striker were thick as thieves lately. You'll have to get a hold of him." She fished out an ice cube with her tongue and sucked on it.

"They've been investigating the ivory trade," I told him. "It's probably about that, if Striker's involved. As you can understand, he doesn't advertise the fact. It was Striker who uncovered that processing plant run by those Hua brothers from Hong Kong, across the border in that "free enterprise zone" in Somalia."

Omondi nodded. "Yes, I remember. Free enterprise--stealing Kenya's natural resources. So Striker was behind that."

I drank the rest of my soda. "He funneled the information to Emmet, who made sure it got into the papers and that the right people made a fuss about it."

"When you are as rich as Mr. Laird, you have many powerful friends--and powerful enemies," Omondi said.

"It's an open secret that the Hua brothers moved their ivory center to the United Arab Emirates--the Emirs don't give a damn about elephants, or Kenya. Striker figures there's a way-station inside Kenya, linking up to a sea route along the Mombasa coast, but so far no one's been able to trace it." I poured
myself more water and added a lump of ice. "If or how Emmet was helping Striker recently, I don't know." I refrained from adding it was Mikki who told me as much as I did know.

No one spoke. I heard a hunting eagle cry far overhead. It was a lonely, piercing call.

"Goddamn his stupid obsession with these Goddamn elephants." Alicia swallowed her drink convulsively and slammed the glass down on the table. "You should have seen Emmet the past few weeks--an overgrown teenager playing cops and robbers. Flying here, flying there. Getting himself all worked up about elephants going extinct. I kept telling him grownups play golf." She gave a bitter laugh. "And now some two-bit poacher found him alone out here and shot him like a dog."

"Mrs. Laird, I know you have suffered a terrible shock and loss, and you are eager to go home. I am impatient to contact my team and get on the trail of the killers. Jazz can tell you, when it comes to murder, I am a man in a hurry." Omondi put his palms together, finger tips under his chin. "I will save most of my questions for later, but for now, I must ask you to tell me exactly what transpired this afternoon: what time did you arrive, what did you see, where did you go in the camp, what did you touch."

"I don't remember all that, I couldn't possibly tell you." Alicia held her glass out to Greg. "Be a doll and pour me another whiskey, would you?"

Omondi sat next to her. "I will help you remember, Mrs. Laird. Now, what time did you arrive in camp?"

Alicia looked at her watch. "Oh, I don't know. Just a few minutes before you did."

"That can't be right," I said. "We would have been eating your dust the whole drive up."

Alicia gave me a sharp glance. "Maybe ten, twenty, minutes before, then. Not long." She took the proffered glass from Greg.

"Please bear with me, this will help us save time later." Omondi got up. "Without touching anything at all, show me what you did when you arrived at camp."

"I really don't see the point of this." Alicia's make-up was smudged by her tears, softening the emphatic eyebrows and red mouth she'd drawn on her face. "Greg, I'm ready to go home."

Omondi nodded graciously. "Yes, I understand the workings of the police can seem pointless and even brutal. We'll get this over as quickly as possible. Mr. Garner, would you like to go first?"

Greg walked towards his car, and for a moment I thought he was going to defy Omondi, but he turned and headed back towards us at a deliberate pace. "We got out. Called. I came over to the picnic table and looked down at the waterhole. He walked in front of the table and looked down the hill, like everyone does when they arrive. "The elephants were milling around, kicking up a lot of dust, making that weird rumble like the worst case of indigestion you ever
heard. Alicia looked in the sleeping tent, and I walked into the big tent over there. He went over to the dining tent. "I figured there might be a note or something on the table saying where he'd taken off to."

"He was expecting you?" Omondi asked.

"No, we came down on the spur of the moment." Greg slipped his hands in his pockets. "Anyway, there was no note. There was a mess of papers on the dining table. I didn't touch a thing. When I turned around, you'd arrived."

It didn't sound like that would take ten minutes to me, but Alicia corroborated Greg's description. She added that she'd noticed a small plane flying north soon after they left the national highway.

"Did you notice what kind of plane? Anything about it?"

"Are you kidding?" Alicia raised her stenciled brows.

"No one went to the kitchen or touched anything there?" The two of them shook their heads in unison. "Thank you, very much. I won't keep you any longer. You understand, there will have to be an autopsy, but let me know your funeral arrangements and we will release the body directly to the funeral parlor." Omondi looked at the large gold watch on his thin wrist. "I am afraid I will need to disturb you again with further questions."

End of this sample Kindle book.