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Sam opened the window, winced, and pressed the weather button on his watch. Five beeps, a real scorcher, a high of more than forty on the way. The heat these days was even worse than the scientists of thirty years ago had predicted. International wrangles had failed to prevent a rapid rise in greenhouse gases. Modern mankind was less sensible than Galileo, Sam thought. It sufficed for him to be shown the instruments of torture. We have to endure it.

Normally Sam worked from home, interacting with colleagues through the screen in his study. But today he had to go into the office. The contract between his company, Southern Moonshine Minerals and the Mongolian Nanochip Corporation was to be signed at a lunch time ceremony and Sam, as head of his company’s legal department, had to be present. The negotiations had been tough, with the Mongolians storming out on more than one occasion. And Sam, as the permanent negotiator for SMM, had not been above throwing some carefully calculated tantrums himself. The quantity needed was not a problem. It could easily be extracted by the minerbots working thousands of metres below the surface. Achieving the purity of elements required by the Mongolians had been much more challenging for SMM. But the technical difficulties had been surmounted and the bargaining storms navigated. Today would be all smiles and toast the co-operation between “our great countries.”

Sam threw on a dressing gown, left the apartment, went down the lift, crossed the lobby and walked to his greenhouse. Given how erratic rainfall had become – long periods of drought interspersed with violent storms – the only reliable way to grow plants was to put them under glass, or more precisely under specially formulated Perspex, designed to withstand the roughest hailstorms and let in the most beneficial light. The old northern suburbs had transformed thorny veld into an urban forest during the twentieth century. The forest had in turn thinned out as exotic trees had succumbed to the harsher climate and gardens had become greenhouses. Many of the old mansions had been subdivided into flats with small greenhouses like Sam’s. However, some of the large properties had been kept intact. Sam had spent an enchanted afternoon once at the Kubla Khans’. The walls of their greenhouse went up for ever, lined by all manner of tropical trees and vines, and the orchid collection was legendary. Brightly coloured birds could be seen all over. To protect the guests, a



green and white porcelain pavilion had been built in the centre and provided a place where elegantly dressed guests could sip cocktails and converse.

Sam's raspberries had been good this year, and he picked a number for his breakfast. His asparagus and artichokes were coming on well. From peasant to peasant in three generations, he always thought. Sam's grandfather had farmed in Zululand. He had had no time for city life. But he managed to get Sam's father enough education to enable him to move to Joburg and carve out a modest living there. University had been tough for Sam. He remembered the long commutes in those rough anomic taxis which had long since vanished. He had studied before the insights of modern neuroscience made the lives of students much easier. Despite the obstacles, he had graduated well with a fascination for commercial law.

Eating his breakfast, Sam considered strategies for avoiding the yak pate which the Mongolians would certainly bring with them. They regarded it as Mongolia's signature contribution to global cuisine. Sam had been obliged to consume some while in Ulan Bator and it had made him violently ill. He settled on the story that his doctor had advised him to stick to a vegetarian diet. At least the vegetarian diet part was very nearly true. Meat prices meant that fifty grams of meat on high days and holidays was all that even the upper middle class people could afford. The chic way of eating it was to dip tiny pieces in one of a number of hot broths, roll it in couscous, interspersed with bites of choice vegetables. The Japanese had even invented a ceremony for it. Salt water fish had altogether disappeared from the global diet. The report of a comprehensive study of fish stocks in the world's oceans had been published eight years earlier. It was so alarming that a unanimous decision of the United Nations had banned salt water fishing for twenty years to allow stocks to regenerate – where they could.

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Sam put on his lightest white agbada with a purple stripe and sandals. Senatorial, suitable for an attendant lord, he walked the short distance to the light rail which would take him from Diepsloot to the company offices in Sandton. As usual, he didn't have long to wait. Running the metropolitan transit system was one of the few remaining functions of the old Johannesburg City Council. Most had been devolved to smaller regions, which competed with each other by offering different

combinations of publicly provided goods. This set off other forms of competition. Sam was fond of the annual cultural competition. At the last one, Diepsloot's performance in the praise song and Indian dancing was flawless, better than nearest rival's Orange Farm rap and Schubert songs. Sadly, Diepsloot's last item, the Hallelujah chorus, was sung with more enthusiasm than accuracy, ending a tone sharp and giving Orange Farm a narrow overall victory.

As the train approached the top of the Kyalami hill, Sam dropped two fifty rand coins into the drinks dispenser and pulled out a small bottle of water. A glint in the distance caught his eye. It came from the corrugated iron roofs of one of the East African settlements at the edge of Johannesburg. The twenties had been boom years for South Africa and domestic unemployment had dropped markedly. At the same time, population pressures in East Africa had become intolerable. Despite warnings, East African fertility had hardly declined in the second and third decades of the century. A series of severe droughts had swept large numbers into overcrowded cities and pervasive and persistent riots had followed with much loss of life. An African Union commission had recommended emigration as part of the solution to the problem. South Africa had agreed to accept a large annual quota of immigrants who lived in emergency settlements until they were ready to move into the wider

South African society. Some never would move and the settlements were slowly consolidating. East Africans were prepared to do jobs that South Africans no longer would, and were cheerful enough about it.

At least, thought Sam, South Africa had managed to get its illegal immigration under control. The key had been the miniaturization of drones to the size of small

birds and a radical reduction of cost. The government had cleared a strip of land ten kilometres wide along all its land borders and hundreds of thousands of drones carrying small anaesthetic darts patrolled it, ready to target any human sized animal. One prick and your GIS co-ordinates were transmitted to pick up vehicles. You later woke up in a deportation centre, awaiting transport home.

The train arrived at Sandton central and Sam took a tuk-tuk to the office, steeling himself for several hours of boredom. The Mongolians had done well out of their membership of the Greater Chinese Co-prosperity Sphere, but their manners and interests remained rustic. They had none of the subtle and charming Confucianism of China itself which, after surviving the cultural revolution and go-go industrialization, had blossomed in recent decades. You had to know your analects to deal with it, but if you did, the thrust and parry of polite interaction was a delight.

As it happened, the formalities were brief. The CEOs had agreed that neither would speak for more than fifteen minutes. After the memorandum was signed, the auditorium darkened for a fast-paced floor show which catered to all tastes. An excellent lunch followed, so Sam was in a good mood to work on the merger agreement with Western Horizon Minerals. The trick was to strike an agreement which would subtly enhance market power, without triggering nullification by the Competition Court. The work was complex, challenging and absorbing.

At seven o'clock, Sam closed up the company reports and his law books. He showered in the executive suite as preparation for a night in town. The Gautrain took him from Sandton to Park Station and, since the heat had abated, he walked down to Commissioner Street and the Two Ducks Club. It would have been dangerous, especially at night, when he was young, but town was much more agreeable these

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days. Johannesburg had been flush with public money during the booming twenties and it had decided to restore a part of the old city as a tourist attraction. Like Shanghai before it, it understood the value of nostalgia and had decided on a Jazz Age theme. In fact Johannesburg in the 1930s had been known internationally as an Art Deco city. A number of the old buildings still stood nearly a century later, though in need of a face lift and reorganization of their internal space. Some of the largest buildings had functioned solely as movie palaces, perhaps having their finest hour when screening 1950s spectaculars, such as Ben-Hur and Lawrence of Arabia – movies that Sam had watched many times. The Commissioner Street area had become a hive of chic shops and restaurants by day and a vibrant clubs by night.

Once the redevelopment had taken place, there had been a continuous exchange between Shanghai and Johannesburg. African jazz musicians were loved in Shanghai and many had been there. South Africans had come to love the bright, slick cabaret of the Chinese, and had even learnt to enjoy the quarter tone singing that went with it. Sam was a valued patron at the Two Ducks and he was ushered to a table near the stage. He had just enough time to unwind over a champagne cocktail before the show started. He waved to several friends and acquaintances across the room and sank back in his comfortable chair.

As usual, the show was good. The Two Ducks rotated numbers quickly from a seemingly infinite catalogue. The management had also understood that the edgy pleasures of Jazz Age night clubs came from being portals to the underworld. Al Capone, protection rackets and illegal booze had had their day. But a discrete word to a waiter would have had him ushered in to the presence of Madam Sin, ready to dispense happiness by the gram. Not tonight, he thought, I have other plans. The milder effect of inhaling the club's smoke would do.

The show ended. Sam finished his drink, paid and left. A tuk-tuk waiting for custom took him, several blocks to the south, his ultimate destination for the night. Outside, the Garden of Joy looked like what it had been: an office block which had seen better days. The inside was entirely different. There, one could enjoy a brandy and cigar in a well-stocked library, or swim in an indoor pool, or join a poker school, or listen to an African jazz band not snapped up by the Chinese, or play computer games not on the market or many other activities.

Sam chose to swim first. He was tall and lean and once he had the opportunity to learn to swim, he had been rapidly become a champion in his younger days. Now he warmed up with a few leisurely lengths, followed by some faster swimming. He heard a shout and realized that he was being challenged to a race. Within the first five seconds, he knew he was under pressure. A desperate spurt and he won by a head. Again the challenge came, and this time he lost. Best of three, and he lost again. He bowed his head in graceful acknowledgement of defeat, shook hands, and went to get dressed.

Sam entered the jazz lounge. Jazz had everything for him – the rhythmic complexity of African music, great melodies and harmonies and the always varying improvisations. Usually the players focused on a period or a great jazz artist for a session. Tonight was an Abdullah Ebrahim night, a style he particularly liked. About half an hour slid by before the lights went up.

A voice at his elbow. "Hello, Sam".

"Ah, you're here." Sam smiled. "There's cold champagne upstairs."