

UMHLANGA ROCKS

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sunny place for shady people



A Novel by: Bryan Britton

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This work is dedicated to the memory of Mr Nelson Mandela, Nobel Peace Prize Winner, whose lifetime of endeavour and empathy for his fellow man must continue to inspire.

This is the author's first attempt at a work of fiction. He leaves the world of fact with great reluctance and so the backdrop to the story is mainly factual.

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Direct quotations have been lifted from the Fourth Pillar upon whom South Africans are forced to rely in order to maintain their faltering democracy. In doing this he has often not acknowledged individual pieces but rather recognized the works of members of the Fourth Pillar as a collective. The author is massively grateful for their combined effort in preventing South Africa becoming yet another failed state on the African Continent.

Many of the players in this book are real but yet others have had their names changed to protect their innocence.

The conclusions, assumptions, assertions and story line are of the author's making and anyone offended or disapproving is offered a sincere apology.

It is the author's intention only to amuse and inform whilst advertising the amazing place on the eastern shores of South Africa known as Umhlanga Rocks and the inland travel opportunities of the South African province of KwaZulu Natal.

- Bryan Britton May 2014

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Chapter 1 The Place

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The Colonel blustered into the ‘Sizzling Steak’ with an exasperated ‘good morning all’ to nobody in particular. The drunk in the corner, a remnant of the chaotic night before, raised his crimson eyes to the blare of the cricket on television and then slumped once more into Neverland. ‘These English players are the worst in the world’ the Colonel pointed out to Brian, the disinterested Zulu barman polishing glasses. ‘They can’t even field – useless bloody lot really. In my day you had famous professionals, not these sissies’ The weary-eyed barmen agreed, nodding over a smile that admitted to his total ignorance of the silly game of cricket.

The sun was climbing ever higher into the cloudless South African sky and the morning was promising to turn into a balmy, humid afternoon. Slowly, the regular crowd shuffled in with baggage from the night before and first rounds were ordered. Soon seconds followed and, as if someone had waved a magic wand, the mists in the minds of the revellers began to lift. Chuckles were heard, and then giggles from the girls which became guffaws and later gales of laughter and by the time the noon cannon went off and the Boeing had flown over, the party in the Umhlanga Rocks Village was back in full swing.

The Colonel was the first to agitate.

‘Rosy, darling’ he asked ‘where would you like to eat today?’

Rosy, in deep discussion with Kendall, simply ignored him. It was far too early to even think about such gastronomic triviality.

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Kendall was a beautiful and fascinating lady with wide indigo eyes, curvy body, flashing smile and sweeping black hair that fell across part of her flawless face. She had mesmerised many a keen, unsuspecting and panting young man in her time. As if God had not endowed her with

enough goodies, He had thrown in a caring nature and loads of smarts. She was a budding creative author, dynamic mom, gorgeous friend, astute bookkeeper and she beguiled all in a charming and humble way.

‘Would you like to lunch at Larry’s Linguini or perhaps Pedro’s Cantina or maybe you would prefer sushi at Tung Thaid’ the Colonel persisted.

‘Kendall you come too, I’ll pay’.

She declined graciously. He was getting agitated, hungry and pissed off as his watch crept closer to two o’clock. No one took any notice as this was a daily occurrence.

In the nineties the Colonel had excelled as a trader in London and was lucky to retire very early in life. Only he knew what was being traded and he was very good at it. He had been persuaded to change from being a Sterling millionaire to being a Rand multi-millionaire when seeing the natural beauty of the KwaZulu Natal Coast. He had moved into the Village of Umhlanga Rocks some fifteen years

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before. He had been fascinated by the place and remembered researching all about the area at the time.

The North Coast of Durban, South Africa, which included the Umhlanga Rocks area, probably owed its origin to the shortage of cotton which was one of the results of the American Civil War in the mid-19th Century. In those days The Natal Cotton Company had bought large areas of the bush countryside for 20 cents an acre and the German immigrant owners had attempted to create a cotton industry in the current area of New Germany.

The venture was a complete disaster and the land reverted to the Government of the day.

Following this failure John Moreland introduced British immigrants to the area where they were allocated farms to grow cotton. As this also failed Moreland turned to the more suitable sugar cane crop and formed the Natal Sugar Company at Compensation just North of Verulam.

This was followed by the floatation of Natal Sugar Estates by Sir Marshal Campbell in 1895 when he sold 2,000 acres of his sugar lands for the formation the township Kwamashu.

His son William was instrumental in founding Umhlanga Rocks as a quiet holiday resort for the sugar mill workers and their friends. He built a cottage called Oyster Lodge on the present site of the Oyster Box Hotel. An artesian well was sunk at the site presently in the park opposite Malindi and soon other wood and iron cottages sprang up.

The first hotel followed in 1923 and the Victoria Hotel was an immediate success. Built by Marcus

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McCausland, it was graced in those early days by, amongst others, the famous Irish Dramatist George Bernhard Shaw.

The hotel later changed its name to the Umhlanga Rocks Hotel and progress continued with the 1931 development of Wave Crest which is the present day Umhlanga Sands and the Durban View Hotel which is today the Malindi.

As recently as 1960 Umhlanga Rocks was a small, secluded enclave providing shelter to monkeys, loeries and snakes.

‘Not much has changed’ mused the Colonel as he considered the shady people of the sunny village.

‘By God, Rosy’ blustered the Colonel surfacing from his day-dream. ‘Look at the time, I’m bloody starving – see you at the ‘Pickled Pork Chop’ – and in the blink of an eye he was gone.

Rosy continued her discussion with Kendall.

Whilst impatiently waiting for Rosy at his table in the Pickled Pork Chop, the Colonel started recalling the rest of his research notes from all those years ago.

Many bridges had been built and replaced when destroyed by floods. The most famous was the Queen’s Bridge, which was opened in 1894. The bridge did not last long as it washed away without trace only three years later.

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The lighthouse was built in 1952 because of the numerous times that ships mistook, to their extreme cost, the Umgeni River Mouth for the Durban Harbour.

The South African Railways and Harbours had sold a large tract of land to the then owners of the Oyster Box Hotel. They later sought permission to build a lighthouse on this land. The Oyster Box refused to give up any of the land and so the SAR&H was forced to build the lighthouse on the beach. The lighthouse was built in a staggering twenty four hours to prevent the structure from cracking.

Since that time Umhlanga Rocks has been a continuing story of progress, proliferation and pulchritude.

As Rosy entered the Pickled Pork Chop the Colonel blurted ‘Rosy, where the hell have you been? I have, in the meantime, nearly starved to death’

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‘What do you feel like to eat?’ demanded the Colonel.

Rosy pulled a face, rolled her eyes heavenwards and muttered ‘you order for me dear’

Any further antagonism was avoided by the arrival, quite co-incidentally, of the Mayor and Mayoress of Umhlanga Rocks. This elegant couple of friends were the pinnacle of good manners, good humour and chic fashion. No one dared misbehave in their company and the Colonel and Rosy sheepishly sheathed their daggers for another day.

The Mayor was a demure, smiling darling who had not a bad word to say about anyone and her informal election to the nominal position of Mayor



was considered mere formality by the villagers.

Her clothes were chic, jewellery expensive, her demeanour friendly and as Mayor she was a whole bunch of fun. Her friend,

the Mayoress, was equally well liked by the locals and was well respected for her bravery in undertaking lone ventures into the wild South African bush-veld. When on official duty she changed her hunting gear for the most elegant and becoming outfits. These dignitaries commanded much respect as they smilingly carried out their mayoral duties.

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‘Will you be joining us for lunch, your honours?’ intoned the Colonel expectantly.

‘Not today thank you very much Colonel. We are here merely to arrange for an upcoming luncheon for the Ladies Club’ said the affable mayor of Umhlanga Rocks.

When the mayoral party had departed the Colonel puffed ‘Ladies Club indeed. More like a nest of vipers, if you ask me’.

‘Rosy have we ordered yet. It’s getting late’.



‘My good man, may we see the menu? Tell me, have you any specials today? What was that thing that I ordered last time? May I have another Tom Collins? Oh! and bring some more ice’

‘Rosy have you decided what to eat yet, it’s getting really late. How is your drink darling? Are you alright? Hurry, for I must leave soon’.

Rumour mongers in the Village insisted that the Colonel had once known Lewis Carroll.

Umhlanga Rocks is a growing sub-tropical village washed by the warm Indian Ocean on the East Coast of South Africa. The weather throughout the year is sublime with cool summer rains interposed with scorching days, blue skies, subtle waves and balmy nights. The vegetation is lush, pretty, very

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colourful and green throughout the year giving this wonderful place an air reminiscent of paradise.



Umhlanga Rocks is called the gateway to South Africa and it is perfectly positioned for any leg of a foreign visitor's South African adventure. It's just a ten-minute drive on the N2 (southbound) from King Shaka Airport and is situated on the northern beaches of KwaZulu-Natal, 16 kilometres from the centre of Durban. From Umhlanga it's also an easy three-hour drive north along the superb N2 toll road to the many and varied Zulu Kingdom Game Reserves, or still further north to Swaziland and Mozambique. Alternatively, you can go south on the N2 to Port Shepstone and the holiday resort of Margate and then onto the Wild Coast, or continue



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all of the way to the Cape Garden Route and ultimately on to Cape Town. For those who want to explore the mountains, head inland on the N3 to the world heritage site of Ukhahlamba Drakensberg Mountain Park and then onwards to Johannesburg, Mpumalanga and the fabulous Kruger National Park.

There are two distinct populations in Umhlanga. Visitors from inland South Africa, other African countries and the rest of the world - and then you have the locals.

The locals are a fascinating lot. They are made up mainly of the Rand Lords, who own all of the commercial property in the Village and the Rand Barons, who converted their modest overseas fortunes into the ailing local currency, at staggering exchange multiples, to now enjoy the luxury life.



Included in this latter group is many a successful local entrepreneur now enjoying the fruits of the sale of his or her lucrative past business venture. Others are up-country retirees who, having spent a miserly lifetime bringing up families and investing

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wisely, now seek some sort of rest and pay-back in their declining years. Ladies left wealthy by the death of their long suffering husbands abound and others, left wealthy by smart lawyers in divorce proceedings, now seek younger company as reparation.

And then you have the chancers who are drawn to the bohemian sub-tropical lifestyle but cannot really afford it.

Bohemia is historically a country of Central Europe occupying the western two thirds of the old Czech Lands. This is now the Czech Republic with its capital in Prague. It once, long ago, spawned a lifestyle of marginalized artists, writers, journalists, musicians and actors who all enjoyed living an unconventional lifestyle amongst like-minded people. Free love, frugality and voluntary poverty were the cornerstones.

The movement spread to nineteenth century Paris and Mark Twain, Lord Byron, Percy Shelley, Oscar Wilde, Henry Miller and F. Scott Fitzgerald all drew inspiration for their now famous literary works from this bohemian crucible of inspiration.



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Henry Murger also dipped into this crucible. In writing the book ‘La Boheme’, later made into an



opera by Puccini and still later into a movie by Baz Luhrman, Murger popularised the bohemian lifestyle in Paris that ultimately earned two academy awards for the movie ‘Moulin Rouge’.

With its plethora of busy pavement cafés, wine bars, coffee shops, informal restaurants, holiday resorts, swanky new hotels, busy pubs, energetic nightclubs, and exclusive fine-wining and dining venues, Umhlanga Rocks was likely also born out of the crucible of the bohemian genre, all of this depicted so well and so vividly in ‘Moulin Rouge’.

The modern, brightly lit, promenade along the Umhlanga Rocks beach front, with its fabulous



beaches, water sports, surfing and boating, welds the South African seaside and the Umhlanga Village into a nineteenth century bohemian Paris.

Serious business and commerce is passé and has been banished to the nearby suburbs of Umhlanga Ridge and La Lucia some three kilometres away.

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**Gambling, shopping and things to do on rainy days
have also been relegated to Sibaya down the road a
piece and to nearby Gateway.**

The Village is reserved solely for ‘La Boheme’.

Sunny Place for Shady People **(Teddy Bears Picnic)**

**If you go down to the village today
You’re sure in for a big surprise
If you go down to the village today
You’d better go in disguise.**

**For everyone that’s usually there
Will gather there for certain, because
Today as usual is just another drinking day.**

**Everyone who is faulty or shady
Is sure of a drink today
There are lotsof marvellous things to eat
And people playing the games that people play.**

**Seated on bar stools and pub benches
They’ll hide & seek as long as they please
‘Cause that’s the way the faulty ones spend their day.**

**If you go down to the village today
You’d better not go alone
It’s lovely down in the village today
But in Ambush Alley you will fall prey.**

**Drinking time for the faulty people
They are all having a lovely time today
Watch them, catch them unawares
And see them go about their shady affairs.**

**See them gaily fall about
They love to drink & eat & shout
They never have any care.**

**At pub closing time
They will stagger back home –
Wherever home might be that night**

Kendall

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Chapter 2 The Tribes.

In any society it is natural for the inhabitants to seek out the company of others who enjoy the same language, religious principles, cultural habits and outlook on life. The tribes of the Village were no different. Newcomers to the Village gravitated to the tribe that best suited their own interests, persona, aspirations and natures.

Rosy belonged to just such a grouping. She was definitely of the glass half full variety and saw the good in everything and everybody. She laughed and giggled her way through each day. It was infectious. Whilst in her company it was impossible to be sad, even if you had that morning cut yourself severely whilst shaving. Her tribe included the vivacious Kendall, the irrepressible Norma and the colourful Thandi.



Norma was friendly, bubbly and very sexy. Estranged from her husband, she impatiently waited for word from the courts which would once more free her to be able to express her wonderful extravert temperament. That temperament had been suppressed through too many years of boring marriage. She was euro-centric, beautiful, cosmopolitan, fiery and fun.

Thandi was an exceptionally well off and well groomed French-speaking lady from West Africa. She too was chic and cosmopolitan and shuttled to

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