

After they made it into the house and lit a candle, they laid a map they had found on the small dinner table. The candle shined on the atlas of Africa as one of the quartet pulled out a pencil. Makena made a mark on the map with his pencil in Zimbabwe then spoke up “This is about where we are, but we cannot stay here. We need to decide where to go next and where we need to get to.”

With Makena was his wife, Nia, both of them were hyenas, and two other furs. There was a red panda named Jun, who had been in South Africa on a trip. It had been the first trip she had ever taken out of China. Finally, there was Bran. Bran was a wolf who was born and raised in South Africa, near Johannesburg.

“Well we can’t go to any of the Arab countries, eh? So we should avoid that region altogether. Which means we should head northwest,” he said as he traced a path with his finger, leading it to Morocco. “We should go here to Morocco, boet. We can easily make it to Spain after that.”

Makena and Nia both seemed very troubled with his suggestion. Jun stayed silent, since she didn’t know much of anything about the situation or the continent.

“What? What is wrong?” Bran asked the couple.

“The most direct way there is through the Congo,” Nia spoke up.

“We would not dare go through there if things were normal,” Makena added.

There were two different nations that were part of the Congo. Neither were well known for being politically stable. In fact, neither country was safe for most to journey through. It was a lawless land before everything had gone to shit and with what had been going on, imagination could only take hold. Very strange things were happening in the more civilized lands. What was happening in the uncivilized lands?

Bran gave an irritated sigh “We could go around but that would take much more time, eh! We don’t have time to fok about!” The Afrikaaner didn’t raise his voice but there was a great sense of urgency to it.

Makena and Nia looked at each other for a moment, as if trying to find a reason between them why they shouldn’t go that route. Both of them knew, however, that Bran was right. While they didn’t know exactly what, if anything was waiting in the Congo, they did know of plenty of other nasty things that lurked already. They needed to get out of Africa as quickly as possible. Finally they both looked to Bran and nodded their agreement.

Jun remained silent, however, prompting Bran to look at her and ask “Do you have anything you want to say or ask?”

He was right to the point but wasn’t trying to be harsh to the girl. She looked like she was barely out of high school or whatever the equivalent was in China. The safari pants and shirt she had bought for her trip were already worn out; the material had been really cheap, made for tourists who didn’t know better. As Bran’s eyes roamed over her clothing, Makena and Nia looked as well. Jun quickly covered her chest up as best she could, despite the fact that nothing was showing.

“We should get some supplies before we leave,” Nia spoke before either her husband or Bran could.

“Ja, we will do that,” the wolf replied, and then said to Jun “Nothing is exposed; just your clothes are worn out. You will need something much more durable, eh.”

Makena looked over the map again and traced his finger along a path “We should go this route. We will avoid going through most of the Congo but will still be on a direct path to Morocco.”

Bran, Nia and even Jun looked at the path he was tracing and all agreed. With that, they settled in and got some sleep, though Bran stayed up and kept watch for a couple of hours, followed by Nia, then Makena.

While Makena kept watch, he continuously looked over at Bran while he slept. He and Bran had been friends since childhood, but several years had gone by where he did not see or hear from him at all. Bran had gone to America and, from what he heard, got married and served in the military. Although the marriage was legitimate, it didn't end well. Bran had refused to go into details on his return but he was different. Makena didn't know if the circumstances surrounding his marriage, divorce, and resulting return to South Africa were what made him seem much different or if it was his military service which, although Bran again refused to elaborate on, might have involved service in some kind of special unit (They were just rumors).

Since he returned a few months before, everything about him had changed. His clothes were different and his mannerisms. The biggest one was just the way he looked at things. He seemed much more cautious, suspicious even. He even kept weapons (the legality of them was questionable), though there was no arguing they became very useful. Bran's choice of brandishing an AKM certainly helped, he said he'd be able to get ammo for it easily.

His friend, perhaps former friend, was a stranger to him. However, Makena could not deny that his military experience had actually saved them. He also couldn't deny that, even though it would have been easier for him to do so, Bran did not leave without him and his wife and he even took Jun with them, despite having no ties to her in any way. Hell none of them knew if the girl could speak anything other than Chinese, she hadn't said anything to either of them anyways, save her name. Was Bran a stranger? He was now. Was he still a good friend? Very much so. For that, Makena could not hold anything against him.

Fortunately for all of them, the night passed without incident. The first priority was to get the necessities: Food, clothing, a good vehicle, and other odds and ends that they would need for the journey.

“Listen, we do not leave until we have everything that we need, eh. That includes enough fuel to at least get through the Congo,” Bran spoke up.

“First we need a vehicle, boet,” Nia added, addressing Bran specifically.

“Ja, ja, we will get that.”

Makena spoke up next, asking “What kind of vehicle? That would be a good idea to decide.”

“Well obviously something we can all fit in,” Nia spoke again.

“What about truck?” they all turned to look at Jun who spoke with a heavy accent.

She blinked a moment and said “Truck can hold everything we need, can’t it?”

They all nodded, with Bran adding “Glad you decide to join in the conversation.”

After they got all the supplies they needed, including fuel and food, they looked for a truck or even an SUV, however unlikely it was they would find one. Bran also made sure to grab a pair of goggles. He didn’t flaunt this in front of the other three, not even Makena. Not to make a secret of it, but because he knew he would need them and that was all; they were a necessity that were simply there.

A truck was an easy find, and once again, Bran shocked them all by opening the driver’s side door and hotwiring it. It was an older model vehicle and it did take him a few minutes to find the correct wires and everything but he was able to get it started.

“Makena, either you or Nia drive. I will sit in the bed of the pick up so do drive carefully, eh.”

“Wait, Bran...how did you know how to do that?” his old friend asked him.

“It is the ignition switch for a vehicle, not brain surgery, eh.”

Bran pulled out the goggles he took and put them on. When the other three watched him questioningly, he answered “I am going to ride in the bed of the truck. That way I can respond if there’s any kind of trouble or some other kak. So drive carefully, eh?”

Nia nodded and got into the driver’s seat while Makena sat in the front passenger’s side and Jun took the backseat. Jun had the presence of mind to check the rear window to see if it could open at all, which it could.

“You open this or knock on roof if you need anything, yes?” she said to him.

The couple in the front seat looked back at him as he nodded and said “Ja, sounds good. Ready when you are.”

Bran carefully sat down, his back against the now closed window. Some of the excess supplies were in the back with him but they had put as much of it in the cab as they could fit. As the truck moved along the roads, Bran watched and looked around. The world had changed so much but much of it looked exactly the same. Only time would tell how difficult this new world really was.