

PRO PATRIA

By

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1 INT. BEDROOM. NIGHT

A trail of smoke rises from a burning cigarette. At a small table a lamp burns, creating a small pool of light in the darkness of the bedroom. On the table is an ashtray, a whisky tumbler and a writing pad. JACK MILLER sits down at the table.

MILLER (V.O)

It is strange, the things you remember. 79217149BA. That serial number was first given to me when I turned 16, and it stayed with me through my army service. I guess I had no choice but to memorize it, and so it stuck. But as for how Jannie Vorster was killed, I couldn't tell you, even though I was there when he died.

Miller puts his pen down and pours a large amount of whisky into the tumbler, and swallows it in one sip.

2 EXT. SOUTHERN ANGOLA. DAY

Two soldiers, seen only as silhouettes appear over the horizon. They are MILLER and VORSTER.

MILLER (V.O)

June 17th, 1981. Our squad was on patrol in Southern Angola when we were ambushed by SWAPO forces, who opened up on us with machine guns, RPGs, the works. In the chaos Vorster and I were separated from our guys. We began the long trek back to base.

Miller and Vorster walk together through the bush, rifles held ready to fire. They glance from side to side, looking for any sign of the enemy.

MILLER

If we just keep heading south, we'll come right, I'm telling you.

VORSTER

I hope so, I don't know where the hell we are.

(CONTINUED)

MILLER

I can't believe our guys just bugged off while the two of us were still pinned down. When I see the sarge again, I'm going to knock his Dutchman head off.

VORSTER

Hey, what's this 'Dutchman' crap?

MILLER

I get nothing but abuse from you Afrikaans guys. 'Engelsman' this, 'Soutpiel' that.

The two stare angrily at each other, then walk on in silence for a few moments.

MILLER (CONT'D)

Fucking army.

3

INT. HUT. NIGHT.

Miller and Vorster sit inside a hut. Vorster is asleep, while Miller gazes out through a big hole in the wall of the hut, which is severely damaged. The sound of insects buzzes through the veld. Miller takes a pack of cigarettes out of his pocket and lights one. He looks at Vorster lying asleep. Suddenly, the sound of the insects disappear, and Miller looks back out into the veld. He stubs out the cigarette and looks anxiously for any sign of the enemy, but can see nothing in the darkness.

There is suddenly the sound of something walking through the grass. Miller continues to stare into darkness but can see nothing. He glances back at Vorster. The sounds get nearer, and Miller nudges Vorster who wakes up. He holds his index finger in front of his mouth, signaling to Vorster not to make any noise.

VORSTER

(whispers)

What is it?

MILLER

There's something out there.

The sounds of movement are gone. They stay silent for a few anxious moments, listening. But they hear nothing.

(CONTINUED)

VORSTER

It's gone. Maybe it was a lion or hyena or something.

MILLER

Could be. Shit, I almost had a heart attack.

Vorster lies down again, and Miller sits back against the wall. He lays his rifle down on his lap and sits more relaxed.

VORSTER

You feeling jumpy?

MILLER

I guess. I'm not really cut out to be a soldier, you know.

VORSTER

Ja, I know.

MILLER

It's that obvious is it?

Vorster chuckles.

VORSTER

Ja.

Miller stares coldly at Vorster for a few moments, then smiles as he sees the funny side.

MILLER

I don't care. I think this whole business is a crock of shit anyway. I bet that noise was a hyena. You hear that story in camp? Apparently a hyena killed someone in his sleep.

VORSTER

Ja, I heard about it.

MILLER

Imagine going to war and getting killed by a bloody hyena.

Vorster turns over onto his back. He has given up on trying to sleep.

(CONTINUED)

VORSTER
How much longer have you got?

MILLER
A year. You?

VORSTER
Three months.

MILLER
So you're an *ou man*.

VORSTER
Ja. But I'm thinking of staying in
the army.

Miller laughs.

MILLER
You're crazy.

VORSTER
Ag, you know. If I go home, what am
I going to do? Go work in my dad's
butchery? In the army I could make
something of myself. Become an
officer or something.

MILLER
No, I just can't wait to *klaar out*
and get on with life.

Vorster gets up.

VORSTER
Go on, *boet*, get some sleep. I'll
take watch.

Miller rolls over and goes to sleep. Vorster sits by the
broken wall, alert and on guard.

4 INT. BEDROOM. NIGHT

Miller is writing on the pad.

MILLER (V.O)
Jannie was a good soldier.
Committed, a bit idealistic
perhaps. I just never bought into
the idea that I was serving my
country. But to Jannie it was all
that mattered.

5

EXT. SOUTHERN ANGOLA. DAY

Miller and Vorster are walking through the bush. Vorster leads the way, he concentrates on scanning the area around them as he walks. Miller follows him, looking at the ground much of the time. They walk through a wooded area. The trees are splintered and fallen.

MILLER

Looks like it was a mortar attack.

VORSTER

Ja.

They walk on through the trees. Miller suddenly laughs.

VORSTER

What?

MILLER

No, I was just thinking of you as *Luitenant* Vorster. You know, shouting orders and marching around like an eager prick.

Vorster allows himself a wry smile.

VORSTER

If you were a bit more eager, Miller, you wouldn't be in so much kak all the time.

MILLER

The secret of army life, my good friend, is the art of 'gyppoing'. I don't mind taking a bit of kak from the officers as long as I get away with doing as little work as possible.

VORSTER

You're serving your country. Doesn't that mean anything to you?

MILLER

Bullshit, serving my country! Spending two years running around in the bush, going on stupid bloody patrols, can you honestly say we're serving any purpose?

(CONTINUED)

VORSTER

What about protecting our borders?

MILLER

We're not on our border - We're in fucking Angola! I mean the government won't even admit that we're here. This whole thing is just a system designed to keep the Afrikaners in power.

VORSTER

What difference does it make? We've got a job to do.

MILLER

Crap!

6 INT. BEDROOM. NIGHT

Miller tries to pour some whisky, but the bottle is empty. He slams the bottle down in anger. He picks up the pen, and tries to write. He only manages three words, and then scratches them out. The pad is covered in scratched out words. He tries to light a cigarette, but the lighter won't work. Frustrated, he throws it across the room. He picks up the pen again.

MILLER (V.O)

Ever since coming home I've been haunted by the vision of Jannie lying dead. I have nightmares, but I always wake up before he was killed. All I want is to remember what happened so that I can know whether it was my fault. Whether I failed to do my duty as a soldier. I think what I've realised is that it wasn't so much about serving my country. It was about serving my fellow soldiers.

7 EXT. SOUTHERN ANGOLA. DAY

Miller and Vorster look over the top of a small ridge at a stone building.

MILLER

I'm finished.

(CONTINUED)

VORSTER

It looks like an old Portuguese bunker. I'll signal to you when I've made sure its clear.

Vorster stealthily makes his way towards the building. Miller gazes blankly into the distance, not concentrating on what he should be doing. He takes out a cigarette, and is about to light it when shooting starts from within the house. The cigarette drops from his mouth as he grabs his rifle and runs towards the house.

Miller comes around the side of the house, and fires on two SWAPO soldiers as they run off into the bush. They return fire. Two rounds slam into the wall of the building. Miller crouches in the doorway and fends them off. He backs into the building and finds a dead SWAPO soldier, then sees Vorster lying on the floor, bleeding from a bullet wound in the throat.

MILLER

Vorster!

Vorster groans, then cries out in pain as Miller takes a bandage from his aid kit and tries to put pressure on the wound, but Vorster is dying.

VORSTER

I'm going to miss my sister's wedding.

MILLER

Shit, I'm sorry.

He coughs blood, and grabs Miller by the collar and pulls his head down.

VORSTER

There was nothing you could have done.

Vorster coughs again and dies.

8

INT. BEDROOM. NIGHT

Miller lies on his back, smoking a cigarette. He stares up at the ceiling.

MILLER (V.O)

"There was nothing you could have done." I don't know, I think I will always live with the feeling that

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MILLER (V.O) (cont'd)
it was somehow my fault. And how do
I even know if I can trust my
memory? Ernest Hemingway wrote: "In
modern war there is nothing sweet
nor fitting in your dying. You will
die like a dog for no good reason."
I suppose I should just be thankful
that I survived.

Miller finishes smoking the cigarette and stubs it out in an
ashtray.

9

EXT. SOUTHERN ANGOLA. DAY

Miller holds Vorster's dog tags. He looks at them for a few
moments, then puts them in his pocket and walks off.

He walks over the horizon and out of sight.