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opening extract from

The Elephant's Tale

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published by

Orion Publishing Co

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The first time Martine saw the car, she was high up on the escarpment at Sawubona Wildlife Reserve tucking into a campfire breakfast. She didn't take much notice of it then because Tendai, the Zulu game warden, distracted her by saying something to make her laugh, and because she was too busy savouring the smoky-sweet taste of her bacon and fried banana roll, and also because the car – a black saloon with blacked-out windows – turned around before it reached the distant house and drove away, so she just thought it was someone lost.

It wasn't until the following day, when the black car

came again while she was tending to the sanctuary animals, that she remembered the strange, slow circuit it had made, as if it was in a funeral procession. This time she had no choice but to pay attention to it, because it glided up to the runs housing Sawubona's injured and orphaned animals as if it had a right to be there. The rear door opened and a tall, bald man wearing an expensive navy suit and a watch that could have been hand-crafted from a gold ingot stepped out. He looked around as if he owned the place.

'Can I help you?' she asked, trying not to show how annoyed she was that he and his big car had frightened the sick animals. She was prepared to bet that he wouldn't dream of driving into a human hospital and disturbing the patients, but a lot of people didn't feel that animals deserved the same consideration.

'Oh, I think I've seen all I need to see,' he said. But he continued to stand there, a pleased smile playing around his lips. He reached into his pocket for a lighter and a fat cigar, and began puffing away as if he had all the time in the world.

'We're not open for safaris on a Sunday,' Martine told him. 'You'll have to make an appointment and come back during the week.'

'I'm not here for a safari,' said the man. 'I'm here to see Gwyn Thomas. And who might you be?'

Martine smothered a sigh. She had three very hungry caracals to feed and an antelope wound to dress and she wasn't in the mood for small talk. Added to which, her grandmother had given her all the usual lectures about

not speaking to strangers, although she hadn't said anything about what to do if a stranger who'd come to Sawubona on official business started plying her with questions. 'I'm Martine Allen,' she said reluctantly. 'If you want to see my grandmother, she's at the house.'

'Allen?' he repeated. 'How long have you lived here, young Martine? You don't sound South African. Where are you from?'

Martine was getting desperate. She wished Tendai or Ben, her best friend in the world apart from Jemmy, her white giraffe, would show up and rescue her, but Tendai had gone into Storm Crossing to buy supplies for the reserve, and Ben was at the Waterfront in Cape Town seeing off his mum and dad. They were leaving on a Mediterranean cruise. She wanted to tell the bald man that her name and where she came from was none of his business, but she was afraid to be rude to him in case he was an important customer.

'A year,' she replied. 'I've been at Sawubona for nearly a year.' She could have added, *Ever since my mum and dad died in a fire at our home in Hampshire, England, last New Year's Eve,* but she didn't because she was not in the habit of sharing her private information with nosy strangers. Instead she asked: 'Is my grandmother expecting you? I can show you to the house.'

'A year is a good long time,' remarked the man. 'Long enough to become attached to a place.'

Then he said something that sent chills through Martine. He said: 'Shame.'

Just like that. Just one word: 'Shame.'

He said it in a way that made Martine want to rush home and take a shower she was so creeped out, even though he had in fact been perfectly polite and kept his distance throughout. His only crime had been polluting Sawubona's wildlife hospital with his cigar.

Before Martine could come up with a response, he continued briskly: 'Right then, I think it's time I had a word with your grandmother. Don't trouble yourself, I know the way.'

He climbed back into his shiny black car and was chauffeured away, leaving the sickly smell of cigar smoke and that one weighted word hanging in the air.

'Shame.'