THE MISSING AMERICAN

KWEI QUARTEY

Allison & Busby Limited
11 Wardour Mews
London W1F 8AN
allisonandbusby.com

First published in Great Britain by Allison & Busby in 2020.

Published by arrangement with Soho Press, New York,
with the assistance of Rights People, London

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from
the British Library.

First Edition

ISBN 978-0-7490-2507-6

Typeset in 11/16 pt Sabon LT Pro by
Allison & Busby Ltd.

The paper used for this Allison & Busby publication
has been produced from trees that have been legally sourced
from well-managed and credibly certified forests.

Printed and bound by
CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

CHAPTER ONE

4th January, Sekondi-Takoradi, Ghana

Lying flat with the stock of the long-range rifle pressed firmly against his shoulder, the assassin positioned himself on the gable roof of the UT Bank building off Shippers Council Road. His legs were stretched straight out in a V on either side of the roof's ridge. He would have preferred a flat surface, but the advantages of this location easily outweighed any drawbacks. From this angle, he had an unobstructed view of the road through the Zeiss scope.

He waited. When the moment arrived, he would place the pad of his right index finger on the trigger rather than the crease between the first and second joints. That could result in a sideways torque on squeezing the trigger. So too could wrapping the thumb around the buttstock. Leave the thumb on the stock pointing forward towards the end of the barrel – that was what he had learnt in his first days as an officer in the Ghana Police Service's SWAT Panther Unit. Now, two years later, he was one of the best marksmen among his peers. Unfortunately, GPS talk was cheap, and they never put their money where their mouth was. Only the sniper's freelance work, like this assignment, bought him the good life – a nice car, good clothes, new furniture. And women, of course.

* * *

Political rallies in Ghana are a serious business. There's blaring music, dancing troupes, and handkerchief-waving groups of women in matching outfits. Gangs of ferocious biker youths careen erratically through the streets, sometimes colliding with cars and each other, but these excitable young men, their bodies soused with adrenaline, leap right back up and keep riding.

So it was for Bernard Evans-Aidoo campaigning in the city of Sekondi-Takoradi against incumbent President Bannerman. Big, charismatic, and dressed flamboyantly in his signature red, black, white, and green – the colours of the National Democratic Congress party, the NDC. Evans-Aidoo stood out of the sunroof of his black Benz and waved to the thrilled crowds lining Shippers Council Road. A full brass band, rocking and high-stepping in rhythmic unison, preceded the slow-moving vehicle, and behind the car was a bunch of random kids and teenagers whirling and jumping up and down with unspecified exuberance. Every so often, the Benz paused and Evans-Aidoo got out with surprising agility to press palms with his fans. He saw the worshipping, idolising expression in their eyes as they stretched out their hands to be blessed by his touch.

It was the candidate's third stop for the day: Axim, Tarkwa, and now Sekondi-Takoradi. There had been the inevitable delays at the two prior rallies and Evans-Aidoo and the entourage were late. Even though they had started the parade before dusk, darkness had descended quickly around 6 p.m., as it always does at the equator. But that was no impediment. The campaign had a vehicle with a generator and bright lights that travelled at the head of the procession, sharply spotlighting the popular man who had set the youth on fire with his promises. He had pledged first, to sack every single corrupt official in the Bannerman government; second, to shunt away some of Ghana's petroleum and natural gas revenue into programmes that would benefit ordinary men and women, particularly the largely unemployed youth. It was a classic taking from the rich to give to the poor. These young people, so hungry for a livelihood, truly loved

Evans-Aidoo, and they had waited for him for hours in the ferocious sun. Now he was here, and he didn't disappoint as he put on this dazzling show. He was larger than life, physically and symbolically.

The cacophony from the cheering crowds, the band, and the noisy mobile generator prevented anyone from hearing a distinct gunshot. Evans-Aidoo's body dropped so suddenly from view that few people grasped that anything was wrong.

But inside the Benz, terror unfolded. Evans-Aidoo had collapsed like a sack of yams into the lap of his campaign manager, who let out a high-pitched scream as the minister's blood sprayed her and the tan leather seats. The bodyguard in the front scrambled into the back seat to shield his boss. The chauffeur craned to look behind. 'What happened? What happened?'

'*Drive forward!*' the bodyguard shouted. '*Drive!*'

The Benz shot forward and crossed the street's centre line. Tyres squealing, it skirted the generator vehicle and kept going. People at the roadside were screaming, but it was not jubilation any more. It was panic. Something bad had happened, but no one knew exactly what.

The manager in the Benz was shrieking, her head turned away from the sight of Evans-Aidoo limp and half wedged behind the passenger seat. The bodyguard tried to lift his boss's head, but it was slick with blood and brain matter and it slipped from his hands.

Hyperventilating and gripping the steering wheel like death itself, the chauffeur said, 'Where? Where?'

'Takoradi Hospital,' the bodyguard stammered. He was close to weeping. '*Hurry!*'

ONE DAY EARLIER

CHAPTER TWO

3rd January, Accra, Ghana

With darkened windows, sirens going, and small flags of Ghana flapping on their hoods, three shiny black SUVs raced along Independence Avenue. Ordinary mortals on the street knew the drill and pulled their vehicles to the side to give the VIP free passage.

In this case, the dignitary taking precedence over the plebes of Accra was the Inspector General of Police, James Akrofi, who was in the back seat of the middle vehicle. He didn't look up from his work as he made last-minute changes to the draft of his Ghana Police Service Report to the Blue-Ribbon Commission on the Eradication of Corruption in Ghana. It was a mouthful, but before President J. K. Bannerman had been elected to power almost four years ago by an overwhelming majority of Ghanaian voters, he had campaigned consistently on that one bedevilling issue: corruption. Tapping into a lurking sense among Ghana's citizens that the nation was slipping backward like a truck mired in muck, Bannerman had persuaded Ghanaians that corruption was standing in the way of every individual's development and prosperity. 'Ghana fails when corruption prevails', his albeit clumsy slogan, had caught on. Bannerman had promised the nation a new era of The Clean and

Enlightened Society. The people reached out to him with the fervour of a parched man in the Sahara yearning for an oasis.

To be honest, like the engine of an antique car, the anti-corruption machine had been slow to start. Now, as Bannerman's first term was ending and the political parties were revving up for the upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections at the end of the year, the president's track record had been spotty – some even said too little, too late. There was some truth to the characterisation that implementation was not Bannerman's strong suit and that he was more of an idealist than a pragmatist. Privately, Akrofi thought the truth was somewhere in the middle. The bottom line was that Bannerman was now vulnerable to one man: Bernard Evans-Aidoo.

The SUV convoy swept through the gates of Jubilee House and sped across the vast square towards the presidential palace, which was built in the shape of the golden stool of the *Asantehene*. The Office of the President was expecting Akrofi, so from the palace entrance to the final security door of President Bannerman's inner sanctum, passage was quick and all the checkpoints along the way essentially a formality. Everyone knew who the Inspector General of Police was: one of Bannerman's closest friends and advisors.

Mr President, sixty-three, had a stern but avuncular demeanour, his charcoal-ash hair suggesting wisdom. He strode forward, hand outstretched. 'James! *Ete sen?*'

'*Nyame adom*, J. K.,' Akrofi said, grasping the hand with a firm, enthusiastic grip. Their eyes met and held, a testament to the strong bond between them.

'Good to see you, good to see you,' Bannerman said. 'Come, let's sit down.'

Akrofi followed the president several metres across the crimson carpet with Ghana's coat of arms in the centre. They had a 360-degree view of Accra through the tinted, floor-to-ceiling bulletproof glass, the cost of which had no doubt contributed to the bloated $50 million

cost of the palace. But Akrofi didn't find that necessarily bad. In what country was it not fashionable to complain about the extravagant residences of the ruling class?

Out of respect, Akrofi waited for the leader of the nation to sit down before he did. 'How are dear Josephine and the children?' Bannerman asked, turning his body halfway towards his friend.

'Everybody is doing well, by His Grace, thank you,' Akrofi said. 'Josephine is in DC at the moment winning friends and influencing people, so to speak, and then she will be in England to see Kwame.'

Bannerman's expression softened. 'How is he doing these days?'

Akrofi lowered his gaze with a touch of sadness. 'You know. He has his good and bad days.'

'Yes, of course. I have faith that one day he will be well by God's grace.'

'Thank you, J. K. I appreciate your good wishes.'

'You are always welcome,' Bannerman said. 'So, let's see what you have for me.' Akrofi handed him the folder with the report and the president read it through once.

'Outstanding,' he said at length. 'This is simply first class and I like your four-part plan to eliminate corruption at the top. I think you've done a lot to change the culture of middle management and the junior officers, but now it's time to target the upper echelons.'

'You have my sincere word I will endeavour to do so,' Akrofi said. 'I admire what you are trying to do for the country.'

He and Bannerman had been in law school together, and high school and college before that. Akrofi had heavily supported his friend's presidential campaign and Bannerman had promised him the IGP post in return. One didn't rise to that position. It was a civilian appointment made entirely at the president's wishes.

Bannerman rose to place the documents on his rosewood desk imported from Italy, and then turned to the view from the south-west window. Accra's afternoon traffic was as clogged as bad plumbing. From here, one could just see the roof of the Ghana Police Service

headquarters. On the other side of the double-lane Ring Road East, several embassies nestled among the trees.

Akrofi came to stand beside the president.

'You and I are cut from the same cloth,' Bannerman said quietly. 'So, you understand how much I want this. Obviously, I can't abolish corruption completely, but I want Ghanaians to come to regard it in a different way – as a kind of cancer that has metastasised to all parts of society. Now it must be surgically removed everywhere it is found. Then things will begin to change.'

Akrofi nodded. 'I do understand.'

'We will drum anti-corruption into the Ghanaian psyche,' Bannerman said. 'Billboards, radio, TV, social media. I'll have rappers and football players endorse the plan. With their help, I'll create a new consciousness.' He looked at Akrofi. 'We are warriors against a worthy foe, but together, we can vanquish.'

'By "worthy foe" you mean corruption? Or Evans-Aidoo?'

'Corruption. Evans-Aidoo can't sustain his position in the polls. This business about him redistributing oil wealth to the citizens is nonsense. We are not Norway.'

'No country is – except Norway,' Akrofi said with a wry smile. 'I'm a little concerned about him though, because his followers believe him and there are more and more of them every day. It's all false hope, for sure, but the nature of people is that they cling to that.'

Akrofi waited for his friend to respond. Instead, Bannerman turned away with his head down and hands thrust deeply in his pockets. Akrofi had an awful foreboding that if Bernard Evans-Aidoo wasn't stopped, Bannerman's presidency would be over.