



# Cry Freedom

by JOHN BRILEY

# CHAPTER ONE

## The Beginning

Where the River Buffalo flows into the warm Indian Ocean, on the south-east coast of South Africa, lies the city of East London, with its wonderful climate, beautiful sandy beaches, clear sea, and evergreen trees. It is the home, too, of the Daily Dispatch, the respected newspaper which in November 1975 began a new battle with the South African Government.

Donald Woods, editor of the Daily Dispatch, sat at his desk looking at the stories for the front page of tomorrow's newspaper. There was a story on the government's refusal of a new appeal for the release of Nelson Mandela. There was also a story on the pardon for Richard Nixon by President Ford of the United States of America, which Woods had intended to use as the main story. But news had just come in of a police raid on the black township called Crossroads, in Cape Town, more than a thousand kilometres away on the south-west tip of South Africa. Woods moved the stories around on his desk. He would make the Crossroads story the main story, and move news of a Japanese factory in Durban to the back page.

'Boss!' Ken Robertson, one of the journalists on the Daily Dispatch, burst into the office and threw a bundle of photographs on to Woods' desk. He lit a cigarette and began to smoke as Woods looked through the photographs.

They were pictures of the police raid on Crossroads: a

woman holding a baby in her arms in front of her wrecked home; two policemen beating a boy; an old man sitting in an armchair, with broken walls around him; a policeman with a whip chasing a girl; a bulldozer smashing through a tiny kitchen.

Woods looked up at Ken in amazement. 'How did you get these?'

Ken smiled. 'I got them. Do we dare use them?'

Woods examined the pictures again. In Cape Town black workers could get work without work permits. Some of these workers brought their families with them, which was also against the law, and built a room for them out of wooden boxes or bits of tin. White employers benefited from the low wages the illegal workers accepted. However, from time to time, so that the town did not become permanent, the police came with whips and burning tear gas, forcing the men into police buses and moving them out of the city. Then the bulldozers came to tear apart the houses made of wooden boxes, and bits of tin.

Woods suddenly smiled. 'I'll print them,' he said. 'I'll even put your name underneath them.'

'Thanks!' Ken responded. 'If the police pick me up, your name will be the first on my lips!'

The law did not allow newspapers to print photographs of police beating black people, but if there were enough violent pictures the government sometimes let the matter drop in order to prevent the newspapers giving the public more information.

'Come on, tell me. How did you get these?' Woods demanded once more, staring at Ken through his glasses. His thick

grey hair made him look older than his forty-two years.

'The newspaper will have to pay my expenses, that's all I can say about it. Drinking is the hardest part of my job!' Ken picked up one of the photographs. It showed a wall, covered with large pictures of the serious, handsome face of a young black man, with the name BIKO underneath. 'What about Mr Biko?' Ken asked. 'Will you use his name?'

'Was Mr Biko meeting his supporters in Crossroads?'

'I think so. I was told that his name was everywhere.'

Woods sat back in his chair and took off his glasses for a moment. 'No. Leave him out of the story. I want to write about him and his Black Consciousness in an editorial.'

Ken nodded and left the room with the pictures. Woods turned back to his desk. Woods did not believe that black people should be allowed to vote. He accepted the laws that forced blacks and whites to live in separate areas. But he had been trained as a lawyer, and he did not like police brutality against black people. He would put one of Ken's pictures at the top in the centre of the front page.

Newspapers all over South Africa used Ken's pictures of the raid on Crossroads. Woods received lots of phone calls - threats from the police, unknown callers making threats on his life, occasional words of congratulations from editors of other newspapers. The editorial attacking Stephen Biko, however, won approval from everyone. Or so Woods thought.

Mamphela Ramphela marched confidently into the offices of the Daily Dispatch. She was dressed in jeans and a white shirt and she looked beautiful. When she came to the receptionist's desk, she

threw a newspaper down in front of Ann Hobart.

'I would like to know who's responsible for this,' she demanded.

Ann looked at the paper. It was folded to show Woods' editorial on Biko: BANTU STEPHEN BIKO - THE UGLY THREAT OF BLACK RACISM.

'Doctor Mamphela Ramphele,' she said, showing Ann her card. 'And I won't leave until he sees me.'

Ann hesitated. She was annoyed by this black woman who had so much confidence. But she picked up the phone. 'There's a Dr Ramphele wishing to speak to you, Mr Woods,' she said coldly.

Woods assumed that Dr Ramphele was an old man with some story to tell. 'Please send him in,' he answered.

Woods glanced up from his work as Ann opened the door and announced Dr Ramphele, and was amazed to see an angry young woman marching towards him.

Mamphela put the editorial on the desk in front of Woods. 'I've been reading this paper long enough to know that you're not one of the worst white journalists. So I'm surprised to think you would write such rubbish!'

Woods recovered from his surprise. 'Well, Dr Ramphele, I've written against white prejudice, and if you think I'm going to ignore black prejudice, then you're complaining to the wrong man!'

'Black prejudice!' Mamphela exploded in anger. 'That's not what Steve Biko believes in at all! Don't you find out the facts first,

before you print?'

'I think I do understand what Mr Biko believes in!' Woods began angrily.

'Well, you understand wrong!' Mamphela interrupted. 'And he can't come to you, since he is banned. If you want to find out the truth, you ought to go and see him!'

Woods looked at Mamphela in silence. She was beautiful, intelligent, and full of confidence. 'Where are you from?' he asked at last, the anger gone from his voice.

'From here. From South Africa.' Mamphela was still angry. 'I was one of two from my tribal area to be given a place at Natal Medical School. I am an example of your white concern for the black people of this land.'

Woods almost lost his temper. Then he sighed, sat back in his chair, and threw his pencil down on the desk. 'Well,' he said slowly, 'I'm glad we didn't waste our money.'

Mamphela smiled slightly, the humour dissolving her anger. She moved away from the desk and sat down, staring at Woods as if wondering what to say next. At last she spoke again. 'I know you're not a fool, Mr Woods, but you are uninformed. Steve Biko is one of the few people who can still save South Africa. He's in King William's Town - that's his banning area. You ought to see him.'

Woods thought that her quiet sincerity was as impressive as her previous anger.



## CHAPTER TWO

The road out of East London to the north gradually rises from the coast to grassy hills, and then descends again to the valley of the Buffalo River, about sixty kilometres from East London. Only whites live in King William's Town itself, of course. Woods, in his white Mercedes, drove through the black township, a few kilometres from the centre of the town, on his way to the address Dr Ramphela had given him. The houses were small and miserable, but the surrounding hills, covered with acacia trees, were beautiful.

Woods drove on, surprised that he was meeting a banned person at an address in the white town. He found the quiet, wide street with trees on both sides. The address was an old church, with small trees around it, and bits of broken fence. Woods parked across the street and stared at it for a moment. He noticed two security policemen under a tree not far away. They were obviously Biko's 'minders' and Woods smiled and waved at them. Biko needed watching, Woods believed, because he aimed to create separate black organizations, which Woods thought dangerous.

Woods got out of the car and walked across the street to the church door. He rang the rusty bell and immediately the door opened.

A young black woman, rather fat, greeted him with a warm smile. 'Mr Woods?'

'Yes. I'm here to see Steve Biko,' Woods said.

A little boy ran to her side, holding on to her skirt and

staring shyly at the white man. 'I'm Steve's wife, Ntsiki,' she said, and opened the door wide.

Woods was surprised. Ntsiki was warm and friendly, not the sort of person he expected. He stepped inside the church and received another surprise. Some men and women were painting the walls while others were putting up partitions. Some girls were sewing in one corner of the church; there was a library of old books and magazines in another area; two older men were making children's toys in a third area.

'We're trying to create a centre where black people can meet during the day; maybe learn something, get information about jobs,' Ntsiki said as they walked through the church. The little boy, still holding his mother's skirt, smiled at Woods.

'And who is this one?' Woods asked, smiling down at the boy.

'Oh, this is Nkosinathi. He's sometimes more trouble than his father,' Ntsiki said. She opened a side door, smiling again. 'He's waiting for you, Mr Woods.'

Woods stepped through the door, and the door shut immediately behind him. He looked around, but could see no one. He was in the church yard, untidy with long grass. There was a huge old tree in the centre whose long, green branches touched the ground, the sun shining through the leaves. There was silence, except for the wind blowing through the leaves of the tree.

Woods walked forwards, looking for someone. There was a small building at the other side of the yard, but there was no sign of anyone. Woods began to feel annoyed. Then something near the tree

caught his eye. A tall black figure was standing quite still, watching Woods.

'Biko? Are you Steve Biko?' Woods called out.

The person turned away, moving towards the small building. 'Come, follow me.'

Woods felt even more annoyed. He sighed and walked across the yard to the building. He looked through the open door and saw that it was a small office. The man stood in the shadows behind the desk and Woods could not see enough of the face to recognize whether the man was Biko or not. The man's large, dark eyes watched Woods in silence.

'May I come in?' Woods finally asked.

The person nodded.

Woods sighed again and stepped into the office. 'I don't have all day to play games, and I...'

'I would have met you in the church, but as you know I can be with only one person at a time. The System are just across the street.'

Now that they were face to face Woods could see that this man was Biko. He was young and handsome; his deep, dark eyes were alive and sensitive. Woods knew that 'System' was the word blacks used for any white authority - police, government, army - and that Biko was referring to the two security policemen in the street.

'Of course, you approve of my banning,' Biko went on.

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