
Opening Extract from...

Young Mandela

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YOUNG MANDELA

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PHOENIX

ONE

Shosholoza, Mandela!

Within hours of Nelson Mandela's arrest, on 5 August 1962, a white Jewish comrade, Wolfie Kodesh, was assigned the unenviable duty of breaking the news to Mandela's wife, Winnie. Kodesh was inclined to be overly cautious and excessively conspiratorial. He had spent five months sleeping rough on the Observatory golf course and in friends' back gardens to avoid arrest during the state of emergency after Sharpeville in 1960. Eventually, it had occurred to him to rent a 'safe apartment' under an assumed name and sleep there more comfortably instead.

Knowing Winnie was under regular, if not constant, surveillance by Special Branch, Kodesh had prevailed on Esther, a black woman colleague from the Johannesburg offices of the newspaper *New Age* who was in charge of food hampers, to walk ahead of him and make the first approach to Mrs Mandela at a nearby building where she was then working as a child welfare officer.

When Esther gave Kodesh the signal, the all-clear, he slipped into the entrance. Winnie came down to greet him. Kodesh had been out late the night before at meetings and must have looked scruffy, tired. The shock of Mandela's arrest and the sadness of the task made it difficult for him to speak.

Is it him? Winnie had asked.

Yes. Kodesh had thought then that he must do this quickly and had simply said, 'He's been caught at Howick. He's being brought up here, I don't know whether by plane or by car, but the police are bringing him up and he will appear today or tomorrow in the magistrates' court. You must prepare for it.'

Kodesh thought they probably exchanged a few more words, then said goodbye. He could not remember Winnie crying.

Memory can be an unreliable, inconvenient and sometimes contradictory witness to history. Kodesh is no longer around to ask – he gave this account some years ago in a series of unpublished interviews that are stored in an archive in Cape Town – but Winnie herself says that Kodesh had come, not to her place of work, but to her home, at 8115 Orlando

West. (Houses in the townships are commonly known by 'stand' or plot numbers, not street numbers.)

Kodesh had not known how to express himself, she said; he just looked at her and cried. She said, is he alive?

Yes.

Where did they arrest him?

Howick.

She had known immediately she saw Kodesh what he was about to tell her and feared Mandela must be dead. Her heart was beating so fast it would burst the chest. She couldn't have faced the world if he had been killed and says she would probably have done something stupid herself, something quite desperate.

An attempt to check the differing accounts from other sources revealed that Winnie had given a long series of interviews a quarter of a century ago, as the basis of a published memoir, in which she appeared to support Wolfie's account. She remembered being at work, at the offices of the Child Welfare Society, and was leaving to do fieldwork in Soweto. As she came out of the lift, she bumped into one of her husband's friends: this was Wolfie. 'He was white like a ghost, his hair was standing on end. I noticed he hadn't shaved and was wearing a dirty shirt and trousers as if he'd just jumped out of bed; you could see something drastic had happened.'

She could not remember how she got home and had only a vague recall of throwing her files in the back of the car and driving straight back to Orlando to be comforted by her sister. It was the collapse of a political dream, she told her interviewer, and the end of family life.

'Part of my soul went with him at that time.'

Mandela's arrest ended a period of seventeen months during which he had lived on the run, adopting disguises and an assumed identity to evade the police. His continued freedom had been a great embarrassment to the authorities as well as a thrilling adventure to many in the country's black community, who might have been even more excited had they known what he was really up to during those days: plotting a revolution and launching an underground army, Umkhonto we Sizwe – Spear of the Nation. Much of his activity in those months would remain a secret for years to come. Some important details now seem lost for ever.

In these early stages after his arrest, the police knew little of Mandela's role in the terrorist campaign that he had himself initiated. Instead, he was first charged with incitement, as a result of his public calls for a strike, a 'stay at home', the year before. It was illegal for all black workers in

'essential' services – domestic servants included – to withdraw their labour. He would later be charged with the additional offence of leaving the country without a passport.

Kodesh was at the Johannesburg magistrates' court for Mandela's appearance on 15 August. The imposing 1940s court building on Fox Street was just across the road from the former law offices of Mandela & Tambo at Chancellor House. Mandela had appeared before Johannesburg magistrates many times, representing clients who were commonly summonsed for petty infringements of the apartheid laws.

As a reporter for *New Age*, Kodesh was on the press bench in the well of the court and saw the seats around him filled with Special Branch detectives. There were police everywhere, with spectators overflowing on to the streets outside. A Free Mandela Committee had been hurriedly formed and Free Mandela slogans were appearing as graffiti all around the country. Kodesh could see the police were jumpy.

Just before the hearing was due to start, Winnie appeared with a suitcase, which she took up to a policeman standing in the dock. 'Can you take this change of clothing to Mandela?' Some time later the magistrate came in and took his seat. The hearing began, and the defendant was called for.

'Mandela!'

Kodesh was looking forward to seeing Comrade Nelson – they had formed a close bond during Mandela's months on the run – and hoped to give him a conspiratorial wink.

Kodesh had noticed Mandela many years ago, long before he ever knew him. He had seen this smart, tall, athletic, handsome figure walking down Plein Street in Johannesburg city centre, and had stopped to watch only because people were turning to look at Mandela as he passed.

No revolutionary ever went so well dressed as the young Nelson Mandela. Fewer still can have had their own tailor. Mandela was very particular about his appearance and favoured Khan's, the Jewish outfitter in central Johannesburg, just opposite the entrance to that bastion of white supremacy, the Rand Club.

George Bizos – a lifelong friend who had continued to call Mandela 'Nel' even when he was president of South Africa (though only after respectfully checking with him first) – had walked into Khan's one day in the 1950s and seen the white tailor on one knee with a tape measure, bent down before Mandela's immaculate frame, sizing up his inside leg.

This was an extraordinary spectacle in apartheid South Africa. Bizos could almost see the horror on the faces of the two white customers who

entered the shop, perhaps from the club across the road. Bizos imagined that whilst they would be shocked that Khan would make a suit for a black man, they would rationalise that he had done it for the money, rather than for any ideological reasons.

Growing up on the eastern Cape, Mandela had gone barefoot in casual or traditional dress, but he had adopted a formal style in his teenage years that became ever smarter as his life progressed. He had looked quite beautiful – as, indeed, had his young bride – at his marriage to Winnie in 1958, in a series of wedding photographs showing him in a dark suit with highly polished shoes, a flower in his buttonhole and brilliant-white gloves.

Up came Mandela, up the steps into the dock. Kodesh had never seen anything like it. The effect on the court was electrifying. Gone were the suit and tie and the shiny shoes. Mandela was wearing a traditional Thembu tribal costume, known as a *kaross*, made from the skins of jackals. He wore it at an angle across his chest so that one shoulder was bare. He had beads around his neck and around his legs.

Kodesh glanced at all those policemen. They had gone white – well, of course, they were white already, but the colour had drained from their faces – and their eyes were out on stalks at this magnificent figure of a man. To Kodesh he looked a wonderful picture of a 'Zulu warrior', though in fact Mandela is not Zulu but from the Thembu group of the Xhosa people. Winnie too is Xhosa, from Pondoland, and there she was in the public gallery, wearing a traditional beaded headdress and ankle-length skirt.

The court fell silent. There were no cries. Mandela did not look around but stared straight ahead at the magistrate. Kodesh was often in court and knew the form: the accused comes in, the magistrate nods and the prosecutor starts to speak. But now the magistrate just sat looking at the accused, caught, it seemed to Kodesh, in Mandela's challenging, transfixing glare, like a snake trapped by a mongoose.

According to Winnie, his costume had been her idea and Mandela knew nothing about it until he opened the suitcase and saw the contents. He had simply asked her to bring him something to wear in court. Of course, she said, as soon as he saw the *kaross* and the beads, he understood their meaning. She had deliberately avoided taking the things to the prison and had arrived late at the court to minimise the risk that they would be confiscated.

Winnie was angry: her husband had been arrested and the Boers were still trying to destroy their culture. To the Afrikaners they were kaffirs,

Bantus – nothing. 'I was fighting because I wanted to say, I am an African. This is my country, you're not going to oppress me in my own country.'

She had worn traditional dress once before to attend the Treason Trial in Pretoria as a spectator. They had refused to let her in, saying she was inciting the people. What? By being herself? By being an African? So now she was fixing them up good, letting her husband wear his *kaross* as a protest. She was so proud when he came into court.

The hearing was brief, a simple remand and adjournment. When it ended the mostly African crowd gathered together in the corridor and began singing the ANC anthem, 'Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika' – God Bless Africa. A report in *The Times* of London described how 'as the building echoed with lusty singing, magistrates and court staff came out to watch the procession'.

The crowd consisted of around 200 Africans and Indians, and twenty white men and women, all singing and raising their thumbs in the traditional ANC salute. They marched slowly out on to the street and stopped the traffic as they tried to head for an impromptu protest meeting on the steps of Johannesburg City Hall.

The police were determined to stop them and eventually persuaded the crowd to disperse without violence.

While Mandela went back to his cell in the Fort, the Free Mandela Committee were busy with a more covert campaign, to spring him from jail.

At Liliesleaf Farm, the group's underground headquarters up in the rural northern suburb of Rivonia where Mandela himself had stayed for several weeks, the escape committee spent long hours considering fantastic schemes. The white lawyers Joe Slovo and Harold Wolpe, who had access to Mandela as his defence advisers, were both involved, as were the ANC activist Joe Modise and the Indian Congress communist Ahmed Kathrada.

Kathrada remembered, when going with Slovo to see Mandela in jail, that Mandela was preoccupied with what the police might find at Rivonia.

Is it clean?

Before his arrest, he had left at the farm a considerable volume of incriminating papers, including a handwritten diary and many pages of his thoughts on communism and revolution. Now he wanted – and was given – reassurances that the material had been destroyed. In fact, it was all still there, a deliberate decision taken by some of his comrades to preserve the Mandela papers for posterity. Although a considerate gesture for the future biographer, it was one that so nearly got Mandela hanged.

Slovo and Co. wondered whether they could get a mask made for Mandela to wear, to exchange places with a prisoner going to court for a minor offence. Or perhaps he could switch robes with one of the group of traditionally dressed relatives who were visiting him from his family home in the eastern Cape. Could they bribe a court officer or prison official?

Eventually deciding a jailbreak was too difficult, they focused on the magistrates' court where Mandela was left alone in a cell during lunch breaks. Joe Modise, who was well connected across both the criminal and ordinary working communities of the townships, found an African policeman at the court who was willing to leave the cell door unlocked.

Through a second contact, an African interpreter, they obtained and copied into a modelling-clay mould the key from the cell area to the court. An engineer made up a key from this and it worked. They found an open, unguarded door leading from the court into a lane used for deliveries. This meant Mandela could be out and back in Rivonia in thirty minutes, but he was fast becoming famous and would be recognised instantly without a disguise. Some facial hair was needed.

As Slovo later described it, 'Over dinner at the Delmonica [possibly Delmonico's] restaurant in Commissioner Street, Cecil Williams, a party member and full-time theatre director, introduces me to a professional wigmaker with radical social attitudes. He agrees to make, free of charge, an Indian-looking wig, moustache and beard for a subject whose identity is never discussed.'

A fresh obstacle appeared in the shape of the wigmaker's daunting list of required measurements of Mandela's face and head. He was obviously a perfectionist. Slovo eventually obtained them during a succession of legal consultations with his client, Mandela himself doing the measuring, using lengths of white cotton that Slovo sellotaped into a notebook and gave to the wigmaker. The hairpiece was duly delivered. When Modise tried it out on the others to test its effectiveness, they didn't recognise him. It was handed on to a tailor, who sewed it into the shoulder padding of one of Mandela's jackets, which was delivered to him at the prison. They were only waiting now for the next hearing at the court.

Meanwhile, a second opportunity had arisen, with the chance to bribe the colonel in charge of the prison. According to Slovo, a fellow attorney first approached him, saying a client who was at the Fort on remand for fraud had asked him to pass on the message that the prison commander wanted to meet Slovo. As it was a highly unusual request, Slovo feared a trap, so he called the colonel from a public phone, only to be invited to

his home. The colonel was waiting on his stoep when Slovo arrived. 'I will be brief. I take it you people are interested in Mandela?'

The colonel, who was looking for early retirement to a farm, wanted £7000 to make the purchase, in exchange for Mandela. Still mistrustful, they decided just to wait and see what would happen with the colonel. Kathrada, meanwhile, was sent to Basutoland to pick up the £7000 bribe, in cash, in case it was needed in a hurry. The trial date was approaching and Mandela might be free soon anyway, walking out the door of the court in a wig.

In the Fort, Mandela had become friendly with an accused defrauder, the Indian businessman Moosa Dinath. They had started talking when Dinath began joining him on his daily exercises – Mandela's lifelong habit of jogging, running on the spot, push-ups and sit-ups. Dinath evidently had the colonel in his palm already, as he had numerous privileges. One night Mandela saw the colonel take Dinath away. The prisoner was released for the night and came back to prison in the morning. 'If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes,' said Mandela, 'I would not have believed it.'

There were those who counselled him against any attempt at escape, fearing it would give the authorities an excuse to shoot Mandela. Eventually, Mandela gave Slovo a note saying they should abandon the escape for the time being – it might be easier as well as more of a propaganda coup if he escaped, later, after his conviction. He added the postscript that the note should be destroyed after it had been read, but this document too was kept and later discovered by the police.

Slovo's memoir makes no mention of any note. He simply recalls turning up to see Mandela two days before his trial and being told he had just been moved – to Pretoria, an hour's drive away, where the trial was now to be held.

Slovo was confined to Johannesburg so could not now advise his client at the trial. Instead, Bob Hepple, a younger, less experienced advocate, the South African equivalent of a barrister, was assigned to take his place. Hepple, who was not yet thirty, was both an advocate and a communist activist, like Slovo. Unlike Slovo, he was increasingly uneasy at his dual role and the risks he was being asked to take.

However, Hepple was happy to be Mandela's adviser, and duly went along to the court at the Old Synagogue in Pretoria for the first day's hearing on 15 October 1962. As he approached the cell he saw his client changing into his African costume. Hepple had not known about this and was a bit shocked by the spectacle. With hindsight he could see he was reacting to it as a white person but he was worried that Mandela was

projecting the image of the noble savage, the stereotypical African with his drum and his leopard skin.

Why are you dressing like this? he wondered. Hepple knew of Mandela as a lawyer, a fully urbanised city boy. He'd never seen him in tribal dress and so far as he knew it wasn't the style of the ANC. Hepple's attitude echoed a wider concern among other white comrades, some of them among the ANC-aligned Congress of Democrats, who also disapproved of the traditional dress and complained that it smacked of 'tribalism'.

As Hepple later learned, during his hours of discussion with Mandela as they sat together during court sittings and adjournments, Mandela was newly keen to embrace a more Africanist image, for both political and personal reasons. The ANC had been wrong-footed and outmanoeuvred by a breakaway faction led by Robert Sobukwe, who had formed a new party, the Pan-Africanist Congress or PAC. It had been the PAC's protest that had provoked the shootings at Sharpeville in March 1960, galvanising world attention.

Shortly before his arrest Mandela had spent several months touring independent African countries, seeking support for an armed struggle, and himself undergoing military training. He had been dismayed to find that many of the senior figures among the independence movements in black Africa regarded the PAC as the true leaders of the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. They had a low opinion of the ANC's cosy relationship with whites, Indians and communists of any race.

Some leaders seemed to think Mandela was little more than a stooge of the white communists. Mandela had returned from his tour, dressed in fatigues, with a gun and 200 rounds of ammunition on his belt, determined to present a more exclusive, nationalist image to black Africa.

So on 15 October he marched into the Pretoria court for the first day of the trial, once again in full tribal regalia. The crowd in the courtroom rose at his entrance – a privilege normally reserved for the judge or magistrate, and not normally accorded to the accused. The people had waited more than an hour for the proceedings to start. There were over 200 Africans in the main area of the court, many of them also in traditional dress, while the whites were upstairs in the gallery.

Mandela complained at the sudden switch from Johannesburg and said there was a high level conspiracy to make it difficult for him to defend his trial. 'One of the rights of a black man is to have counsel of his own choosing, and he has the right to approach a court of law to maintain these rights.'

An observer from the British embassy later reported that Mandela

seemed tense and out of practice as a lawyer, also showing a tendency to stray off into politics, when he would be interrupted by the magistrate.

Mandela asked for a two-week adjournment and was grudgingly granted a week, which, as Viscount Dunrossil of the Foreign Office pointed out, was round one to Mandela and a minor tactical defeat for the government.

As the hearing ended, Mandela turned to the crowd and raised his fist. *Amandla!* They shouted back at him. He again clenched his fist. And again, ignoring calls for silence from court officials, the spectators cried, *Amandla!*

As they walked from the court, they began singing the ANC anthem while the police, using a megaphone, gave the crowd of singers five minutes to disperse.

Outside they were still gathered together and began singing a new praise-song:

Shosholoza, Mandela!
Advance, Mandela!

It seems likely that the authorities had moved the trial to Pretoria precisely to avoid the public displays of support and affection for Mandela that they had seen on a smaller scale in Johannesburg. They clearly regarded the tribal costume as inflammatory. A nervous young warder was dispatched by the Pretoria prison commander, Colonel Jacobs, to take it from him.

When Mandela refused to hand it over, the warder – 'a weak fellow', according to Mandela – began trembling and was practically begging, saying he would be sacked if he returned without it. The prisoner was sympathetic and told him to tell his commander that this was Mandela speaking, not the warder.

Then the colonel himself appeared and ordered Mandela to hand over his 'blanket'. Mandela once more refused, telling the colonel he had no jurisdiction over how Mandela dressed in court and adding that he would fight the case to the supreme court if they took the *kaross*. The colonel relented, but only on the understanding that Mandela would not wear the animal skin while travelling to and from the court, to prevent its inciting the other prisoners.

So when the trial finally restarted, a week later on 22 October 1962, Mandela again entered the dock as a proud African, fist clenched, turning to the African spectators, who returned the gesture with their own raised fists and their cries of *Amandla*.

Mandela had one more master stroke to play before the hearing proper began. He had drafted an application for the magistrate, Mr W.A. van Helsdingen, to recuse himself – to withdraw from the case – on the grounds that Mandela could not get a fair trial and was under no legal or moral obligation to obey laws made by a parliament in which he was not represented. Apartheid did not extend the right to vote to black people.

Mandela talked for over an hour. It was essentially a political speech, and a long one, at that, disguised as an application, a fact of which the magistrate was only too well aware, interrupting a number of times to ask Mandela to confine himself to his argument.

They were old colleagues, Mandela having appeared as an attorney before the magistrate a number of times in the past, and he was equally well known to the state prosecutor, Bosch. Ever courteous, Mandela had prefaced his speech by observing that he meant no criticism of the magistrate nor of the prosecutor personally. He did not doubt the magistrate's sense of fairness and justice.

'I might also mention that in the course of this application I am frequently going to refer to the white man and to white people. I want at once to make it clear that I am not a racialist and do not support racialism of any kind, because to me racialism is a barbaric thing, whether it comes from a black man or a white man.'

The magistrate replied that there was only one court here today, the white man's. 'Which court do you want to be tried in?'

Mandela's response was he had been very aware of injustices all his life and there was no equality before the law as far as black people were concerned.

> Why is it that in this courtroom I face a white magistrate, [am] confronted by a white prosecutor and [am] escorted into the dock by a white orderly? Can anybody honestly and seriously suggest that in this type of atmosphere the scales of justice are evenly balanced?
>
> Why is it that no African in the history of this country has ever had the honour of being tried by his own kith and kin, by his own flesh and blood?
>
> I will tell your worship why!

Mandela said that the purpose of the rigid colour bar was to enforce the policy of the country. He felt oppressed by the atmosphere of white domination in the courtroom.

> Somehow this atmosphere recalls to mind the inhuman injustice caused to my people outside the courtroom by this same white domination. It reminds

> me that I am voteless because there is a parliament in this country that is white controlled. I am without land because the white minority has taken a lion's share of my country and forced me to occupy poverty-stricken reserves . . . We are ravaged by starvation and disease because our country's wealth is not shared by all sections of the population.

It may be a tribute to Mandela's natural authority and decency, even from the dock, that the magistrate did not stop his speech but allowed him to continue even as he made the most overt criticisms of the very system the magistrate was there to represent and uphold.

'I hate racial discrimination most intensely and in all its manifestations. I have fought it all along my life. I fight it now, and will do so until the end of my days. Even although I now happen to be tried by one whose opinion I hold in high esteem, I detest most violently the set-up that surrounds me here.

'It makes me feel that I am a black man in a white man's court.'

The magistrate paused only briefly before rejecting Mandela's application so that the case could begin. It did not last more than a few days. The state called numerous witnesses – a sledgehammer to crack a nut, as Mandela was blatantly guilty of the two charges, had no real defence and no intention anyway of mounting a defence. Not that he told the court that, allowing them instead to think he was planning a lengthy rebuttal with an equal number of witnesses.

There were some opportunities for fun at the expense of state witnesses such as the private secretary to the prime minister, Dr Hendrik Verwoerd. Mandela had written to Verwoerd in March 1961, warning him that there would be a strike if he did not call a national convention of all races to write a new non-racial constitution. Verwoerd had never replied but had referred in parliament to the 'arrogant' letter he had received.

His secretary, Mr J. Barnard, had been called to the trial to prove the existence of the letter. This was a gift to Mandela. The poor man was literally shaking as he suffered on the stand under cross-examination, trying not to concede any ground but unable to avoid agreeing that Africans were denied rights. 'Some rights', as he put it. He refused to accept that it had been improper of the prime minister not to reply to the letter. 'Not in this case,' he said.

Louis Blom-Cooper, then a young lawyer for Amnesty, had travelled from the UK to attend the trial as an observer. Late on the second day he told Hepple he had seen the magistrate going off for lunch with two

Special Branch detectives, one of whom was a state witness, while the other had been assisting with the prosecution.

Hepple told Mandela, now you've really got grounds for asking the magistrate to recuse himself. Mandela was oddly reluctant to use the information, saying he was not basing his case on personal corruption but on politics. He finally decided to make the application but did not want to ambush the magistrate, so asked Hepple to go and warn him privately beforehand what was about to happen. The magistrate went red in the face and spluttered at Hepple that he had not discussed the case with the officers and they were merely escorting him for his protection.

As Hepple said, though not to the magistrate's face, he had been an idiot to do such a thing. Mandela duly made the application but again showed consideration for the magistrate's feelings, pointing out he had high regard for him as a person while adding, 'I am left with the substantial fear that justice is being administered in a secret manner.' The magistrate again refused to step down and the case continued.

The prosecution concluded the following day, after which the court clearly expected a full defence from Mandela. Instead, he said, my lord, I submit I am guilty of no crime. He would not be calling any witnesses. To his side he heard the prosecutor exclaim, Lord! Mandela planned to make another long speech instead, in closing his case.

Mandela described how his youthful imagination had been fired by tales of tribal warriors who lived 'in the good old days before the arrival of the white man' and said he would devote his life to the emancipation of his people. 'When my sentence is completed I will still be moved, as men are always moved, by their conscience. I will still be moved by my dislike of the race discrimination against my people when I come out from serving my sentence, to take up again, as best I can, the struggle for the removal of those injustices until they are finally abolished, once and for all.'

There was a crowd of 150 Africans in the court. When the magistrate adjourned to consider sentence, Mandela as he went down shouted *Amandla!* three times and each time the crowd responded, *Ngawethu!* 'Power shall be ours!'

Hepple said Mandela was always calm and never lost his authority or dignity. He always expected to receive the maximum sentence of three years for inciting the strike and two years for leaving the country illegally. Five years in total was exactly what he got. The magistrate claimed he had no doubt that Mandela was the leader and mastermind of the stay at home campaign and that he had acted in a way calculated to bring about tyranny and destruction. It was clear, he said, that Mandela's main object

was to overthrow the government by unlawful and undemocratic means.

The Times of London, in its report of the final day, described Mandela as 'a tall man wearing a jackal skin cloak' and said he repeatedly gave the clenched-fist salute of the banned African National Congress.

'There was a demonstration at the conclusion of the hearing, but no violence, as the crowd from inside singing Nkosi Sikelel'iAfrika (God Bless Africa) [sic] joined those outside. Women danced in the street and chanted. The police linked arms across the street, urging the crowd along, and the demonstration eventually petered out.'

Mandela still had the incriminating writings at Rivonia on his mind. Hepple has a vivid memory of being asked by him to pass along a message: 'Please tell them to destroy all my papers at Rivonia.' Hepple certainly gave the message, he thinks to Joe Slovo. 'But obviously it was never carried out.'

Early in the morning of the day that Mandela was due to make his closing speech, Hepple had been sitting with Mandela in his cell, updating him on events outside: in New York, where the UN had voted for sanctions against South Africa for the first time, and in Durban and Port Elizabeth, where there had been explosions – acts of sabotage in support of Mandela's case and the UN decision.

As they talked, there was a knock on the cell door. It was Prosecutor Bosch asking for a private word with Mandela, whom he knew.

Don't be crazy, said Hepple, you can't speak to him alone.

Mandela said, oh no, it's OK, if he wants to see me you just wait outside.

So Hepple stepped out, leaving the defendant and his prosecutor alone – a rare event in any court. When the prosecutor emerged after a few minutes, Hepple could immediately see that he had been crying. It was plain how emotional he was feeling.

Hepple went back into the cell and asked Mandela, what the hell's going on?

Mandela said, you won't believe this but he's just asked me to forgive him.

Hepple said, well, I hope you told him to bugger off.

Mandela said, no, no, I told him I knew he was just doing his job.

In fact, as Mandela later described it, the prosecutor had said that he had not wanted to come to court that day and for the first time in his career he despised what he was doing. It hurt him that he should be asking the court to send Mandela to prison.

The prosecutor had reached out, shaken Mandela's hand and, bizarrely, hoped everything would turn out well for him.