The background of the cover is a photograph of a desert landscape. It shows a series of sand dunes with distinct, wavy ripples. A trail of footprints, cast in the sand, leads from the bottom left towards the top center of the image. The lighting is warm, suggesting a sunset or sunrise, with long shadows and a golden-orange hue.

# The Man from Nowhere

BERNARD SMITH

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*from Vanuatu*

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Bernard Smith



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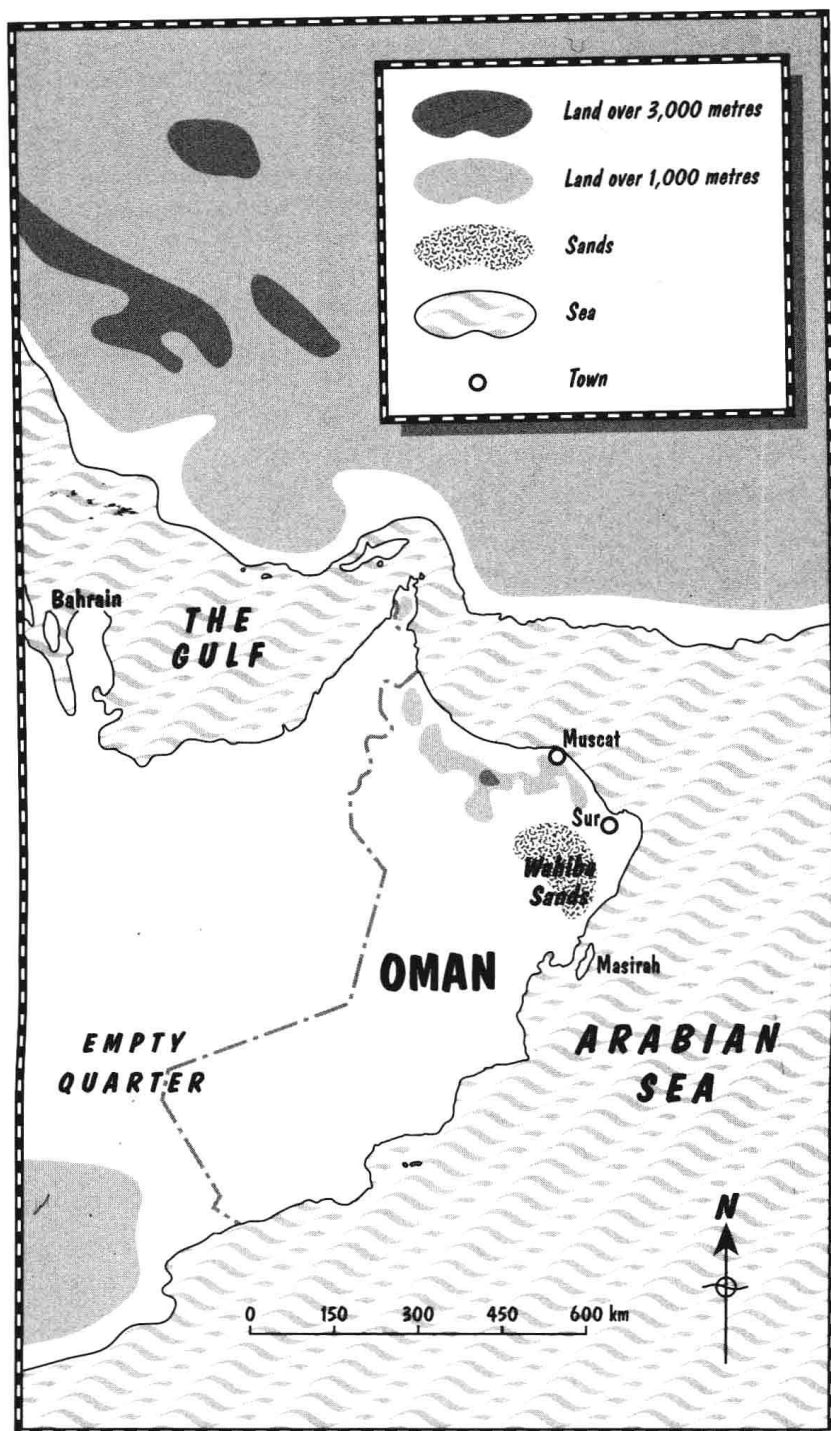
## Characters

**A pilot and his wife and son**

**Inspector Ibrahim**

**Nurse Imelda**

**Dr Singh**



# Chapter 1 Wahiba

Strong, from strong  
Carry - elevay

The Wahiba Sands – a soft sand desert in north east Oman. Two hundred kilometres from north to south; a hundred from east to west. Long dunes run north to south, long lines of sand, always changing, always moving in the wind.

On its west side, Wahiba is a long wall of red sand, fifty or sixty metres <sup>alto; elevado, fuerte (mento)</sup> high. It runs slowly down on to the empty <sup>empt!</sup> desert, which is the centre of Oman. Hard, <sup>stone!</sup> stony and flat <sup>vacia</sup> as a table, this desert is the eastern side of the great <sup>redness</sup> rub' al-khali, the Empty Quarter. <sup>stone - stoun - piedra</sup>

In the east, the dunes of sand run down on to long, empty beaches. Crabs and seabirds live there by day, and green turtles often come out of the sea to lay their eggs by night. After the beaches, there is only the <sup>deep</sup> blue-green water of the Arabian Sea for fifteen hundred kilometres to Gujarat in northern India. <sup>Profundo</sup>

The sands of Wahiba are empty and quiet. There is no sound. Nothing bigger than a <sup>lizard</sup> lizard can live in the great sea of soft, red-gold sand; nothing bigger than marram grass can grow there. You hear nothing but the blood in your ears, and the hot dry air going in and out of your mouth.

To walk in the soft sand is difficult. It pulls your feet as you walk. Your legs soon hurt and you get tired very quickly. To move at all is hard work.

And, of course, in the day the hot sun is always there.

The air is hot, the sand is hot. There is nowhere you can go away from the sun, no tree as far as you can see.

In the sky above the blue-green Indian Ocean, a small plane is coming from the east. Red and white, two engines, the only sound in the quiet sky.



## Chapter 2 *Red snow*

'Are you OK? Would you like some coffee?'

The man looked back and smiled.

'Good idea,' he said. 'I'm feeling all right, but coffee would be good.'

The woman came and sat in the seat next to the man. She had two cups of coffee in her hand.

'Where are we?' she asked, looking out at the clear blue sky outside the plane.

'Can you see that thin brown line where the sky meets the sea?' said the man. 'Well, that's the coast of Oman. We're going north now along the coast.'

'That's good,' said the woman, giving the man a cup. 'When do you think we'll get to Tehran?'

'How's Andy?' asked the man.

'He's fine. He's asleep on the back seat. We got up very early this morning. He was very tired.'

'Good,' said the man. 'I want to talk to you and I don't want Andy to hear.'

'Is there a problem?' asked the woman.

'Not really. I've just talked to our friend Parvis in Tehran on the radio. He says the weather in Tehran is terrible. It's not a good time to go there.'

'Oh dear, and I wanted to see it,' said the woman.

'We can go next year, when the weather's better,' said the man. 'I told Parvis we won't come this time. It's no good if the weather is wet and cold.'





‘What do we want to do then? Are we going straight home?’ asked the woman.

‘No,’ said the man. ‘We’re free until next Wednesday and we haven’t had a holiday together for a long time. I thought we could go to Bahrain tonight. We could see our friends Neil and Rosie there. Then I thought we could go to Paris for a few days. It’s Andy’s birthday on Saturday. We could go to EuroDisney in Paris with him.’

'Why not? Good idea,' said the woman. 'We won't tell Andy until we get there. It'll be a nice surprise for him.'

'OK. I'll call Bahrain on the radio and tell them we're coming. I talked to the people on Masirah a few minutes ago. We're OK to fly north along the coast. I'll radio Bahrain when I've had my coffee.'

The woman put her face <sup>against</sup> the plane window and half closed her eyes. There was nothing but clear blue sky and deep green-blue sea. Then she saw the thin line of sandy brown to the left.

'That's the coast of Oman, you say,' she said.

The man looked to the left. The brown sandy line of the desert coast of Oman was now quite clear.

'That's the Wahiba Sands,' he said. 'I don't think you've ever seen it. It's beautiful. It's a great soft sand desert. I was there about ten years ago when I worked in Oman.'

The man turned the plane to the west and took it slowly down.

'We're too high to see it well,' he said. 'I'll take us down to about three hundred metres. Then you can see the coast and the dunes.'

The plane flew low over the coast, a wide empty beach, a few small houses next to the sea. Then only the long gold lines of the dunes.

'Beautiful!' said the woman. 'You're right. So clean. So empty. I've never seen anything like it. But don't go too far. Turn round now.'

'OK,' said the man, and the small plane turned slowly in the hot clean air.

The woman put some more coffee into the man's cup. The man turned in his seat and took the cup.

Later he remembered seeing the cup full of coffee in his hand, brown and hot. Then everything began to happen very slowly.

First there was a light to his left – a quick, white light. And a noise, first a bang, then a loud noise that went on and on. *SIN Pahar*

Something hit his face, hard, on the left side between his left eye and his ear. Then, suddenly, he was half sitting and half lying on the floor of the plane. The noise was terrible. He could not think. He could not move.

The air in the plane was full of snow, white and flying about slowly in the air. Then the snow was red – red snow everywhere in the air. *pink = guineo, ipreso*

The woman looked slowly down at him. Her face and body were red with the thick snow. Her eyes and mouth were wide open but he could not hear anything.

‘That’s blood on her face,’ he thought. ‘Why is there blood on her face? And she is shouting at me, but I can’t hear what she is saying. I can’t hear anything over the terrible noise.’

There was another noise now, *Beep! Beep! Beep!* Like a car. He knew it meant danger of some kind, but he could not think. *extenso @ m. p. 10*

From the floor of the plane he looked up. The woman was flying the plane, her eyes and mouth wide open and her face red with blood. *what*

‘That’s wrong,’ he thought. ‘She doesn’t know how to fly a plane. She can’t do it.’

Then he was suddenly in the air. He felt his body fly up and hit something hard. Then everything was black.

## Chapter 3    *Crash*

Hot . . . red light . . . white light . . . close your eyes . . . it hurts. Headache, terrible headache . . . pain everywhere . . . a voice calling his name . . . again and again.



The man opened his eyes slowly. A boy's face . . . Andy. Hot sun on his face. White light and pain in his eyes.

'Where . . . what?' he said.

'Dad,' Andy said. 'Wake up. I need you.'

The man tried to move but his body was full of pain. He could not move his head. He moved his eyes and looked about slowly. All around there was red sand, soft red sand. Above his head was something long and red <sup>exact</sup> against the blue sky. Long and red. He knew what it was. The wing of the plane. This was all wrong. <sup>Soke el ala con la en contra de, en contra</sup>

'Your mother . . .' he said.

'She's all right,' said his son. 'She's hurt her foot, but it's not bad.'

The man looked at the <sup>win - ala</sup> wing of the plane above him. Now he knew why it was wrong. It was the top of the wing which was red. Below it was white. <sup>non - 11/11/1970</sup>

He moved to sit up. His head hurt like fire but he could see more. A wing against a clear blue sky. A window half under the soft red sand.

'What happened, Andy?' he asked. 'Do you know?'

The boy <sup>v = shake</sup> shook his head. <sup>Shak - temblar</sup>

'I was asleep in the back. Next thing I knew we were here in the sand. Lucky I had my seat belt on. The plane's upside down. The front is all broken and under the sand. <sup>A mam</sup> Mum and me <sup>he + varse</sup> pulled you out. We thought the plane could catch fire. But it's OK. Mum's lying here behind you. She's hurt her foot. I've got all the suitcases and the food and drinks out of the plane. They're over there under the wing.'

The man turned. The woman was sitting on the sand.

<sup>tiron</sup>  
<sup>Pull</sup> Pull <sup>tirar de</sup> <sup>ago</sup> ago <sup>12</sup> 12  
<sup>Pull</sup> Pull <sup>sacar</sup> sacar (con la mano, persona)  
<sup>A/retirar</sup> A/retirar (sacar)

Her face and clothes were thick with dry blood. Her teeth were very white as she smiled.

'I know it looks terrible,' she said quickly. 'But it's not my blood, and it's not yours. So don't be afraid. I think we hit some birds. One of them, maybe more, came through the plane window and there were blood and feathers everywhere. A big piece of the window hit you on the side of the head. You were unconscious for a time and I couldn't fly the plane. We came down in these sand dunes. We're all lucky to be alive.'

'What happened to your foot?' asked the man.

'I don't know. It's my ankle. I think it could be broken. It really hurts. I can't walk on it.'

'Is the radio still working, do you think?'

'Not a hope. The front of the plane is in pieces and under a metre of sand.'

The man looked at the watch on his wrist. It was still working all right.

'Two fifteen in the afternoon,' he said. 'The hottest time of the day. We must stay here out of the sun until the sun goes down a little. Let's see what food and water we have. We could be here for some time.'

\* \* \*

By four o'clock the sun was not so high in the sky and it was not so hot.

The man was feeling better. His head still hurt but he could move about. The woman's ankle hurt a lot and she could not move.

They had some drinks from the plane and some food,

cake and biscuits, but not enough even for two days in the hot dry air of the desert.

The man and his wife spoke quietly. They did not want the boy to hear.

'No-one knows we are here. I didn't radio Bahrain. No-one will start to look for us for three or four days,' said the man. 'And really, we have very little food and water.'

'We should stay with the plane,' said the woman. 'Make a fire, smoke. Someone will see us.'

'There is nothing here to make a fire with, no wood, nothing but sand. And there are no people anywhere near here, no roads, no villages. But we must be near the coast. I was turning back to the coast when we hit the birds. If I walk east, I must come to the sea in a few kilometres. There are people on the coast. I'll find someone who can help.'

'What if you get lost?' said the woman.

'I'll keep the sun on my back,' said the man. 'Then I must be going east towards the sea. I'll take one bottle of water. Keep the rest. Use it slowly and carefully. I'll be back in a day or two at the most.'

towards - para (direction) cor. refeto a  
para (para o mar)  
para (para o mar)

even -  
13/11

## Chapter 4    *The beach*

Now it is almost six o'clock. The sun, big and red, is going down over the long dunes of the Wahiba Sands. Something is moving in the great red-gold sea. There is a long line of footprints in the sand. A man is walking slowly, up the dunes and down the other side. He is not wearing a shirt. The sun is on his back, which is burnt red.





He cannot see, he cannot think. He is putting one foot in front of the other in his sleep. He does not know where he is or who he is. He only knows that he must keep moving. Keep putting one foot in front of the other. He must keep the sun on his back. Keep moving, or die.

Suddenly, he feels that the sand is different. It is harder, easier. His feet are suddenly light and free and he falls on his face. A strange feeling – like cold hands on his face and here and there on his hot, dry body. It is all too difficult to think about. He knows he has fallen and that he cannot get up again. He gives up at last and all thinking stops.

hard (ad, es est. \* duro, \* al agotador)  
easy (ad, es est. \* facil, \* tranquilo)

Along the eastern coast of Oman, where the Wahiba Sands meet the sea, there are a few, very few, very small villages. There, a few people live by fishing and keeping animals.

Near one of these villages a small boy was running along the low sand dunes next to the beach. He was looking for some of his father's goats, which had walked off in the afternoon. He wanted to find them and take them back to the village before the sun went down and it was dark.

ya Already the sun was behind the sand dunes. Their tops were a long gold line against the deep blue of the sky; their sides were changing from brown to purple. → disappeared

Suddenly, the boy saw something on the sand, half in the sea. He came nearer. It was a man, lying on his face in the wet sand where the small waves washed the beach. He was not wearing clothes like the people of the village. He was wearing trousers like the women wear, and no shirt. His shoulders, arms and back were all red and burnt.

The boy came closer. The man did not move at all. The waves v = capturar, coger (candela) hacer cosas con  
on dular (pelar) 16