

A serene sunset scene over a calm body of water. The sky is a mix of deep blue, orange, and pink, with soft clouds catching the light. In the foreground, several dead, skeletal trees stand in the water, their dark silhouettes reflected in the still surface. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

# Dumísani's Gift


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Oh, what a tangled web we weave when first we practice to believe.

*Laurence J. Peter (1919 - 1988)*

# 1

The lightning bolt shot through the thunderous silver-streaked skies, seeking Dumisani's outstretched hands. As he fell headfirst into the rain-soaked mud, the blinding white flash coursed into and throughout his body, leaving its burning calling card seared into his lower arm. Zola ran from her spot beneath the *gandelo*, the sacred tree just outside Dumisani's hut and fell to her knees beside him in the wet darkness. Cradling his head in her arms, she stared in anxious anticipation at his closed eyes. She took a sharp breath as he struggled to open them. He stared beyond her into the uncompromising heavens, his lips moving as if to speak. Zola put her head closer to his mouth. 'They are coming' he whispered. 'They're bringing their gifts. Umkulukulu is ready.' 'Then we'll prepare,' Zola answered firmly. 'But first we need to tend to you.'



Megan's car sat motionless in the backed-up London rush-hour traffic. She'd switched off the engine in quiet protest of the dreary life she'd come to lead, a life matching the grey corner of her mind that harboured her yearning for home. She was a typical South African runaway; full of vociferous remonstrance for the New South African politics, and exceptionally critical of the unbridled crime that haunted its suburbs. For Megan, London was utopia by comparison, yet home called her, its evocative voice twisting at her heart-strings, forcing her to question her allegiance to any other country.

Looking down at the pile of manuscripts on the passenger seat, she sighed at the prospect of the evening ahead. Same old. There'd be a perfunctory glance at the news while she sipped at cheap wine, and then a tiresome wade through mostly third-rate scripts written by incompetent would-be authors. Megan reached over and fished out of the stack a large blue envelope. She'd already stolen a glimpse at this one before leaving the office. She ran her fingers over the name of the sender. *Nomusa Nyathi*. A fellow South African. Megan had only read the first chapter, but there held the promise that her evening wouldn't be a total waste of reading time. A loud horn behind her pulled her attention back to the road. The traffic was finally moving again.



For the first time in forty years, Hennie couldn't get out of bed. Listless, he listened to the cockerel crow, a sound that had called him from sleep for as long as he could remember. The workers would be in full swing by now, fully immersed in farm activity. Though the farm was well managed and his workers fully trained, Hennie's absence would be noted. Besides the farmhands, everyone in the region knew what was going on, and far from the usual kick that local gossip gave the Nelspruit inhabitants; it was talk that filled every district farmer with dread. Hennie was facing a land claim.

Hennie's depression was sourced in a mental conflict that had produced his internal impasse. This land had rich history, shared both by the claimants and by his own family. He knew exactly how his ancestors had come to own the land and something in his soul knew that reparations were going to be made in spite of his protests. The odds of keeping the territory his great-grandfather had farmed was pretty low, and with the small chance that his lawyers had asserted he might have in disputing the claim, Hennie was no longer certain it was the route he ought to take. The alternative, however, had frightening implications. Money was not the object here though the price the Land Affairs Department were asking to pay for this section of the farm was way below its real value. Hennie's concerns lay elsewhere. Hennie's family had been in this region since the 1800's and had settled in and farmed large expanses of the area. There had been Blacks occupying and working various parts of the land that over the generations the Van Rensburgs had slowly claimed for themselves. More recently in the 1960's Hennie's father had successfully removed the remaining Black families from the vast property on which he had built his homestead. The Van Rensburg empire was complete and now it was being challenged. Not only would the more recent land taken by Hennie's ancestors be questioned, but the validity of their ownership of the region would be probed.

The Van Rensburgs were proud of their farming history and both Hennie's up-bringing and initiation into agriculture were founded on motivational stories of adversity, perseverance and sheer hard toil. The men of the family were entrusted with the legacy of their ancestors and expected to greatly expand with every generation. And Hennie had taken his level of responsibility to unexpected heights, contributing abundantly to the South African agricultural economy. Hennie had even passed these ingrained family values to his own three sons. He and his sons were governed by the ghosts of their past. They existed through time together keeping their genetic line and their principles intact. It was not so much the land

he objected to handing over. It was not a steady income that he was afraid to give up. For Hennie, his loss would be far beyond all these things. He would have to relinquish his heritage, his values and his identity in a long ancestral tradition. In effect, his ancestral history would be erased.

The cockerel continued to crow through the empty space in his heart. Hennie wiped a tear from his eye.



Desmond grinned at the large pile of goods in front of him. He'd make a lot of money on this lot. His mother walked through the front room of the house and glanced at the electronics and jewellery.

'You'd better get rid of that today,' she said coldly. Her eyes were steel, her large mouth pulled in a sneer. She was a large coloured woman one would think twice about messing with.

Desmond bristled. 'What do you think I'm going to do? Leave it for the cops to find? You think I'm mad or something?' His mother pursed her lips and gave him a look that could kill. She turned on her heels and left without a word. She'd *better* get out of here, or else. Desmond clenched his jaw in anger. She'd spoil it now. The bitch. She always did that. Why couldn't she be proud of him? He brought in money, didn't he? She wasn't so pious when the goods turned into currency and he handed some hard cash over. This was *his* craft. He was arguably the best armed robber in the Cape Flats. It wasn't as if he killed the people he robbed. He just scared them up a little, waving his gun around. He couldn't even claim to be menacing. Not that he was above killing. He couldn't say he wouldn't commit murder if he wasn't in danger, but violence wasn't his thing. He left that to the people who accompanied him on the jobs. Desmond wasn't into roughing people up. He was usually the good guy on the job, the one the victims looked to for some sort of compassion. But he never really had a say in what happened to them. To be honest, even *he* was scared of some of the characters he worked with. In the end, he couldn't take responsibility if the house-owners they barged in on got their heads blown off by his colleagues. No, Desmond was the good guy. He knew how to work the locks, open secure sliding doors and remove window bars from their concrete frames. He'd learned about security equipment and how to by-pass even that. Desmond was good at what he did. He wasn't a gangster or anything. Well, not *really*. He was just *hired* by gang members.

Yes, he could get a stack of money for this stash. They'd just worked a huge house with security cameras and all. Desmond was proud of this job. They'd had bets as to whether Desmond could do this job without being killed. It'd been one long adrenaline rush from start to finish. From getting the plan of the house and all the security arrangements to the actual heist itself, had been better than a heroin high. And now, here he was with all this loot and a fantastic spending spree ahead of him.

A grubby-looking box in the pile of goods caught Desmond's eye. He hadn't taken this from the house. It was kind of non-descript, not anything he could sell or even keep for that matter. It must have been swiped by one of the others. Perhaps there was jewellery in it. He leaned forward and wrestled it from underneath the packaging of a state-of-the-art home theatre system. That's how neat the whole job was. He and his buddies had found all the original packaging and packed everything efficiently. Just so cool and unhurried. They'd get more money this way. Top dollar. He slid the large box out. It was about three feet long and one foot across, and there was a padlock on it. He didn't get it. What was this doing here? He could only imagine one of the others thought something valuable must be in there, hence the padlock. Desmond fumbled in his pocket for a hairgrip. He pried it around in the lock until he felt a familiar click. The bolt snapped open and he pulled it from the metal clasp. A musty smell rose from the inside of the box as he opened it. Fine tissue covered the contents and as he removed it, white linen became visible. Desmond was intrigued. He pulled at the linen, but it seemed the contents were holding it down. They were folded inside. Putting both hands into the box, he tugged at the white sheet and allowed whatever was in there to roll as he pulled. There was so much linen, he had to stand as the contents spilled out. Desmond stared down at yellow-brown aged bones. A cracked skull sat at the centre of the messy array of skeletal remains. Well then. This was no jewellery box after all.

Desmond was perplexed.



Ajay switched the TV off in frustration. Fuming, Mona threw her coffee mug at the screen, brown fluid flying onto the plush cream carpet as it narrowly missed and hit the wall instead. The framed painting hanging above the TV fell from its hook, and crashed to the floor. Ajay screamed at Mona. 'What the hell do you think you're doing! Look at the place! As if things aren't bad enough as it is!'

'The bastards! I'll kill them myself!'

'Just calm down, Mona. You're not helping things by shouting. Calm down!'

Ajay couldn't deal with Mona's tantrums. He'd had enough of everything, including her. If he didn't get out of here soon, he'd ... well, he didn't know what he'd do.

Mona tried to calm herself. It wasn't something she did well in a crisis. 'After everything, Ajay, ... you know, you just don't see things from my , no, *our* perspective. Me and the kids. It wasn't just you out there on your mission, we were out there too, only we were on our own. We had to live without you, wondering when you'd be flown home in a coffin, if we were ever to be afforded such a luxury. But we did it for the Struggle, for South Africa. My kids did without a father because you had a whole nation you wanted to take care of. But now this! I can't handle it Ajay! What are we to do?'

Ajay was the pragmatic one. He'd had to be exactly that in the Struggle for liberation during the apartheid years. 'There's nothing to do except make a choice, Mona. I go to court and stand for Themba, or I make a big public declaration of my loss of confidence in his innocence. Either way, I'm up for criticism once again. They'll drag up the past and the same questions will be asked all over again.'

'How can you, of all people, be defending yourself against condemnation? After the sacrifices you made for these same people who are accusing you!'

'See it from their point of view, won't you? Get some perspective. In my role as a government minister, I am good friends with two high profile people, Themba and Musi, who are charged with involvement in some serious bribery and money-laundering offences. I speak up for them, not imagining that people who were willing to lay down their lives in the Struggle would get involved in such things. When Musi goes to jail due to overwhelming evidence that even *I* have to consider, I can't really wonder why my own reputation is sullied. It doesn't look good that I defended the name of what clearly looks like two big league crooks. You can't expect much sympathy from the public, or anyone else for that matter Mona.'

'I want some respect, that's what,' Mona said bitterly. 'I want respect and recognition for who we were. We weren't just anybody. You deserve more. You played a vital role in the liberation of this country.'

Ajay spoke quietly. 'I want recognition too. I don't know why, but it has always eluded me. Just when it comes, it slips away. I wanted my rewards too, but I would never have resorted to stealing them. Now, my name is mud. I can't get a job, and have to work overseas talking about the Struggle, Madiba and *other* big contributors. What I did for the country, no-one in the South African government seems to care. Everyone's jockeying for the best positions. It's all about what people can get for *themselves*. Recognition and the rewards that go with it don't mean much to people in this government.'

Mona was greatly aggravated. 'And now you're summoned to court *again* to speak in Themba's defence because you did so before. He's been up to more of his tricks, and his defence team have the nerve to call on you. It's as if they *want* to remind the public, and anyone else who might give you a job, that you're *still* implicated, by association, in this scandal from all those years ago. How can you clear your name, when there's nothing to clear except the stench of someone else's shit?'

'I don't know Mona. No-one's doing this on purpose. It's just how things are. There are some things out there I need answers to. When Themba went up on those bribery charges, he somehow got off, even though all the evidence was against him. Later, he got into an even higher position even though he went up against separate rape charges. Who knows what, if *anything*, he was actually guilty of. The thing is this, he's okay. He's ridden through it all. I, on the other hand, can't wash the stink from my body. I'm not wanted here. And I can't seem to clear my name. There's something beyond all of this. Something in the ethers at work. *That's* what I need to get to the bottom of.'

Mona said nothing to her husband of thirty-eight years. She just stared. He'd been a staunch ANC activist, a *communist* even, when it had been fashionable to be so. Communists didn't believe in God or anything *ethereal*. Those non-religious ideas had stuck as everything else went by the wayside. Mona heaved a heavy sigh. Things must be bad if he was talking like this.



Baba thumped his cane onto the shiny concrete floor of his small living room. Sekai came running in.

'What is it Baba? Where are your glasses? Don't try to get up!'

Baba shouted. 'Tear it up! What did I tell you before! Don't bring me any correspondence from him!'

'But Baba...'

'But nothing! Nothing, you hear me?'

'Baba.' Sekai spoke up now. She wasn't about to let this opportunity pass her by. 'Baba, you *know* there are children. Two of them. They are kin. The Ancestors will not be pleased that you turn away our blood.'

Baba was trying to get up. His eyes nearly popped out of his head as he strained to push himself forwards and upwards.

Sekai rushed at him. 'Baba! Sit now!'

He slumped back in the armchair. 'You! Who do you think you are?'

'I'm your daughter and he is my brother, and his children are my children. I went to the Sangoma. It's out of your hands now Baba! He must come home to re-establish his link in our ancestral chain.'

'He broke the chain, not I. He broke it when he took this woman!'

'Baba, the Sangoma says you must visit him now. He wants to release the venom from your body. You must re-establish the link.'

'He has poisoned our blood with her White blood. Those children are demons from a different culture. To bring them here is an insult. They have contaminated our bloodline.'

'You are wrong, Baba. It's time now. First, I am taking you to the Sangoma. You need to heal. Prepare yourself to leave tomorrow. We have a long journey ahead.'

## 2

They peered into the box, their eyes sozzled with booze. This was party night, and they were going big on celebrations. 'Your chicks are getting skinnier Des!' Raymond crumpled over, his joke too funny for his own good. The five other men all whooped and cheered, raising their beer bottles in the air. 'To skinny old women!' shouted one of them, and the rest broke into dance as someone turned the music up.

Desmond was troubled. He had to return this skeleton to the place it had come from, yet he didn't fully understand *why*, only that it had better be done. And it had to be done quickly, too. None of this lot knew who'd put the box amongst the stash they'd stolen from the big house. Only Raymond had said he'd seen it amongst the goods, but hadn't thought anything of it. He'd just placed the box along with Desmond's share of stuff, thinking *he* knew what it was all about. His mother had almost had a hernia at the sight of it and had called on Auntie Darla, the old woman from the end of the street to whom a number of people in the Coloured community went for *muti*, the traditional herbal medicine used by the Blacks. She was also a seer who dealt in all sorts of stuff that Desmond on one hand regarded as hocus pocus, yet on the other, was too frightened to challenge. Auntie Darla had been horrified to see the contents of the box in the kitchen of his mother's house.

'Where'd you get *this*?' The old Coloured lady had looked aghast. Rather dramatically, she'd stepped back, her hands on her chest, and had taken a huge breath.

Desmond had been mystified by her reaction. 'I found it on the beach at the weekend. The box was lying by the bins with the padlock on. I thought someone had lost their jewellery box or something. Thought I'd won the lottery. But I found this shit instead.'

Auntie Darla had shot him a look of fury. 'Hey! Watch how you talk in front of this skeleton. The owner of these bones is here, in the room, as we speak!'

Desmond looked over at his mother in exasperation.

'Have some respect!' Auntie Darla had hissed, 'this is old, really, really old. I don't know how it got onto that beach,' she looked at Desmond suspiciously, 'but you've got to take it back to its original resting place. Whoever removed it from there, and whomever's hands it has found itself in will have experienced the wrath of the Ancestors. When our Ancestors die, we do not remove them from their graves. We never disturb their place of rest. But try telling *that* to people who insist on digging around in the past.'

Desmond scratched his head. He looked at his mother as he spoke. 'I don't know where it came from. Maybe I'll take it back to that beach.'

'You'll do nothing of the sort,' Auntie Darla snapped. Desmond's mother raised her eyes at him. She wasn't going to say a word against the old lady who held a fierce reputation.

Auntie Darla pointed at Desmond. 'The Ancestors are looking at you right now. They'll expect you to take it back. If you don't, they'll find a way to do you in. They probably did in the last owner. Probably *that's* why you found it abandoned.'

Desmond thought about the burglary. The owner of the house must have had a tough time having all his stuff stolen. Could Auntie Darla be right? 'How can you know all that? How do you know they're looking at me?'

'I just do. It's in *your* hands right now, and I don't care how it got there,' Auntie Darla shot him a sideways glance, 'but it's your responsibility. You'll be the next to get done in, like it or not.'

'I don't know where to take it.' Desmond had started to get a bit unnerved by the whole thing.

'You must have some idea. Was there anything else in the box?'

'Just some papers.' Desmond rummaged amongst the linen folds. 'They're here somewhere.' He found them and pushed them into Auntie Darla's face. 'Here, you have a look.'

'I can't read properly. It's my eyesight.'

Desmond put the papers on the kitchen table and pored over them. There was some information about the bones, and something about a heritage site in Johannesburg. There was a name and signature; it looked like the owner of the house might have been one of those big museum kahunas. Now that he looked back on it, the fancy house *had* looked like a museum. There'd been a ton of arty-looking items Desmond and the others were clueless what to do with. They'd just left it all there, and had taken only stuff they could shift.

'It was found in the nineteen forties. It belongs in a museum. Should I take it there?'

Auntie Darla looked down at the papers. 'No. They don't belong in the museum, otherwise they'd be there now, instead of here, on the run.' Desmond shot his mother another glance. This old lady was barking mad.

Auntie Darla touched the box. 'They're waiting to go home. Where does it say they were found?'

'The Sterkfontein Caves, it says here. Found in the forties and placed in the museum along with other stuff that was discovered. That's a long time to be on the run.'



'You'll find they've only just escaped the clutches of the museum. Something is happening with the owner of these bones, and its Ancestors. They want the bones back where they belong. You better take it back.'

'To Johannesburg? I've never left Cape Town. Not ever.'

'Well now's your chance for adventure. If you don't, the same thing might happen to you the last time you didn't listen to me.' The old lady gave him a dark look. Desmond didn't *want* to remember the time that she'd warned of the spell an old girlfriend had put on him. This young woman had felt scorned when he'd taken another girlfriend on the sly, and had vowed to put him away somewhere that would keep him from cheating. She'd gone to a witchdoctor, who'd used some strange methods to ensure she got what she wanted. Aunty Darla had found all this out because the scorned girlfriend had come to *her* for help and being a friend of Desmond's mother, she'd sent the woman packing. But in the end Desmond had dismissed what Aunty Darla had told him. He'd never really had respect for all this hocus pocus his mother dabbled in and just put it all down to sheer traditional Black nonsense. When he found himself in prison for a burglary he didn't actually commit, Aunty Darla had visited him and said *I told you so*. To this day he bore the scars of that prison term, and vowed he'd never return to such a place. He'd rather die. And now, he'd beware his mother's warning that just because we don't believe, doesn't mean it can't be true.

The deafening music brought Desmond back to the present. The boys were really having fun now. He swigged his beer. Tomorrow was another day and he'd sort everything out then. He wasn't going to let a bag of old bones spoil his celebrations. He got up and with a thrust of his hips, hip hop style, he joined the party.

### 3

Megan watched the door of her office. It was almost that time. She'd looked forward to this meeting all week; she loved to meet other South Africans, though there were hardly any Blacks that she came across in London. While a lot of ex-pat Whites congregated in various multi-cultural social circles, Megan had found herself in company that held an unspoken Whites-only policy. Why this was, she was inclined to put it down to ingrained ideas and the habits of an old South African lifetime. In coming to England, nothing had really changed for Megan; London or any other part of the country for that matter, had failed to impart to her its cosmopolitan outlook. Leaving South Africa in 1994 as it welcomed in the New Dispensation, she'd managed to escape with all her prejudices intact.

Fourteen years later, Megan still had not settled in her new home. She couldn't really be called an ex-pat, since her British Ancestral line afforded her citizenship in the UK. She was an ex-pat in her heart, though, and the yearning for South Africa, the country of her birth, had always pervaded everything she did. These last two years had been especially hard on her. The yearning had become stronger and she'd found solace in anything of a South African nature. She followed the news from home with satellite TV, newspapers and magazines, and she'd spent inordinate amounts of money on foods and domestic products bought on various websites that sported the *Proudly South African* logo. Her experience of the New South Africa had been limited to short visits over the years and she'd relied on the accounts of those who remained to inform her of its progress. Those who reported everyday life, did not, to Megan's view, give positive reviews, yet something urged her on, a deep primal feeling that was sourced far beyond the tales of crime, corruption and reverse racism. It was a drive that compelled her to make the journey home. Megan was in a stalemate; her heart demanded that she return to South Africa, and her head instructed her against such a ridiculous idea. She was pulled both ways and for two years now, dark feelings of depression had permeated her daily life.

Nomusa Nyathi had written an interesting manuscript; its subject matter was rather left of field for this publishing house, but Megan was sure of her own influence. It was part of her job, after all, to find new lucrative markets, and the whole New Age thing was a sure bet. Not that Nomusa's topic could *really* be called New Age, but covering the area of African spirituality, it would certainly interest that crowd. For Megan, the manuscript had opened something up within her. In her life in South Africa, she'd never been exposed to African Spirituality. It was something that one only heard about through the domestic help; the Black ladies who cleaned the houses, or the Black workers who tended the gardens. The stories were rich in drama, mayhem and black magic, tales that many Whites put down to wild imagination and gullibility. Megan had tended towards the same views though like most people who sniffed at this strange reality, she had no experience whatsoever that supported them. Reading Nomusa's book had made her question her beliefs, and moreover, they made her question *herself*. Something inside resonated with what she had read and she was driven by some strange impulse that was deeper than mere interest.



A loud knock on the door was followed by a head full of black braids. 'May I come in?' Nomusa stayed behind the door with just her head visible. She was smiling from ear to ear.

'You may,' Megan smiled. Nomusa was tall and slim, unlike the average Black South African woman who was smaller and considerably rounder. Megan was a little disappointed. She'd hoped for a small fat homely person to walk through the door, someone who reminded her of the domestic comforts of home. To have a business meeting with a Black South African was a first for Megan. In South Africa, her relationships with Blacks had been distant, tainted by an air of superiority. Now, Megan's paradigm was shifting rapidly. The manuscript was written by a person of depth, intelligence and insight. Megan was forced into a different perspective. She beckoned Nomusa to a seat in front of a small round table near the window. 'Thanks for coming.'

'You're South African?' Nomusa looked pleasantly surprised.

'Yes. But that's not why you're here,' Megan laughed, 'it's a great manuscript.'

Nomusa looked momentarily startled. She stood back and examined Megan. Putting her hands to her mouth, clearly shocked, she gasped, 'I can't believe it! This can't be right! But it is true!'

'What's true?' Megan was a little taken aback by Nomusa's gestures.

'You're the one I've been dreaming of. I just didn't know it would happen this way.'

'You dreamt of me?'

'I dreamt of you. I've been dreaming for a long time now. We've been waiting for you. It's my job to find you. But *you* found *me*!'

Megan was intrigued and didn't say a word. After reading Nomusa's manuscript, she wasn't new to the concept of dream messages. She sat down, and Nomusa sat opposite her.

'Have you been sick? Everything wrong in your life?' Nomusa studied Megan carefully and answered the question herself. 'Yes, I see you are sick now. Your heart is broken, and your soul is empty. You are lost, far from home.'

Megan began to cry. There was nothing she could do to stop the dammed up tears that had begged escape for the last two years. Nomusa reached into her bag for tissues. She handed Megan a small packet.

'Don't worry, Megan,' Nomusa murmured softly. 'Your journey is over. We've found you now, and I'm taking you home.'



Nomusa sat on the balcony of her London flat and looked out at the darkening grey sky. It was cold, and Nomusa huddled into her thick wool coat. She'd found the lost girl, and was ecstatic to be going home. She'd searched for the last six months, but now realised that what Dumisani had said was right. Searching was not required. When the time was right, the Ancestors made their move. He'd told her that they influence our movements and they orchestrate the major events of our lives. We never have to exert huge effort to make things happen. Events that are meant to take place happen anyway, and we simply act out our role in the drama. Events always have an impact on us, no matter how insignificant the effect might be, and that was the point of the Ancestors' intervention in these matters. This whole affair had been a valuable lesson for Nomusa. She'd come to London on the guidance that this was where she'd find Megan, but she'd engaged in search, supposition and assumption. She'd been frustrated at every turn, and finally, on Dumisani's advice, had settled down to write her book. She needed to surrender to the Ancestors, he'd counselled, and then, as if the point wanted to be made really clear, Megan had found Nomusa.

Dumisani had been right about Megan. She had an inexplicable longing for home that defied the multitudinous, *logical* reasons that she had for staying in London. But Dumisani had explained it all to Nomusa.

'The mind is a storehouse within the soul,' he'd explained. 'It is a storehouse of ideas that we have absorbed through our human experience. It is through these ideas that we experience the events of our lives. The *quality* of that experience will depend on what ideas live in the mind.'

Dumisani had explained that the mind tended to govern us because we are often not aware of the ideas that we live with. We are simply conditioned to think a certain way, and we do not question the things we believe in. That was why we so strongly believed in the concept of *logic*; logic was the law that decreed that the mind's contents were real and true and *right*. Yet there was something deeper, a place beyond the mind that also had influence in our lives. This was a place in the soul that was a meeting point for all our Ancestors. It was a place of sharing, a place through which their influence could be felt in our lives. Responding to those deeper impulses defied logic, for the mind adamantly tells us there is nothing beyond itself. Megan, it appeared, was feeling an impulse that was beyond her mind; her Ancestors were calling from this place in her soul. They were calling her because they were leading her to a place of joy, an emotion she had not experienced in some time. To feel this joy, she had work to do; she had to perform a task that was part of her destiny.

For Nomusa, these words of Dumisani's were profound teachings that she had yet to absorb and integrate into her way of thinking. Even as an African woman, she struggled to imagine that some of her less logical thoughts came from an invisible collective soul, and that her Ancestors in some way played a role in everything that happened in her life. Dumisani had explained to her that in those moments when she felt a sudden impulse to do something, it came from a part of her that had access to something more profound than the programmed mind. Nomusa considered herself a thinker, and so, she observed, did most other people she knew. It was hard for her to ever believe that in many instances, human motivation to make a decision and act on it came out of a deep inner guidance beyond the self.

In finding Megan, Nomusa had answered some Ancestral call. Though through the mind they were separated by race and colour, they were at the deepest level of the soul connected to each other. Where it would all lead, Nomusa had yet to find out. She got up and straightened out her coat. She felt exhausted by the excitement of the day. She'd sleep early; tomorrow was another day.

## 4

'Why don't you ask your Ancestors for help?' Hennie was startled by the voice. It was Oom Stompie, the Black farmhand who'd worked the place since Hennie's grandfather's days. He stood leaning against his tall walking stick, one he'd fashioned out of Stinkwood, a tree he'd felled himself in the woodlands of the area. Oom Stompie, born of this land, bore an Ancestral link to the people who'd been driven off the very property Hennie was heartsore to give up. Some of his Ancestors had stayed and worked for the Van Rensburgs and through the generations, the families had nurtured a bond of familiarity with the land. In more recent times, Oom Stompie, through his understanding of the earth, his uncanny relationship with the weather, and his ability to maintain harmonious relations between Black and White workers, had earned himself the unprecedented deferential respect of the Whites who ran the place.

'You know it's not what we do Oom,' Hennie replied. 'It's against our religion to worship dead people.'

'We don't worship dead people,' the old man said pointedly. 'We honour our Ancestors.'

'But even if I *were* inclined that way, I wouldn't know *how* to ask them for help.' Hennie felt miserable. He leaned against the fence that stopped the cows from going out onto the dirt road.

'You just ask. They're right here with you,' Oom Stompie moved slowly over to the fence. His body was old and weathered. His labouring days were over, and he served as the local oracle on community affairs.

'Your Ancestors are part of your soul. Your very blood ties you all together. They're not dead. They are people like you who have moved on to another place, yet they stay connected to you. If you have no respect for them, you become lonely people. It's why you Whites are lonely and struggling. You have no-one to help you because you do not know they are always present and so do not consult them on everyday life.'

'I dread to think what they'd say to someone who was about to lose their legacy.'

'You have no idea what they might say. How do you know whether you giving up the land might be exactly what they want?'

Hennie frowned at Oom Stompie. 'Why would they want such a thing? That sounds ridiculous, Oom. We've owned this land since the eighteen hundreds.'

'It's happening, though, isn't it? The land is coming back to the people from whom it was taken? If it is happening like this, then the Ancestors have something to do with it.'

'I told you Oom. I'm with the Dutch Reformed Church. My Ancestors are with God. They'd never agree to such a thing. You know, with all due respect, my church doesn't believe the Black man is equal to the Whites. We only had to remove that teaching because of the New Dispensation. Perhaps your Ancestors aren't with God for that reason? Is that why they are running around in the Netherworlds?'

Oom Stompie moved his stick into his other hand before replying. 'To think that God has anything to do with our ideas of superiority or inferiority, is a primitive idea. The White people of South Africa aren't the first to think this way. They aren't the first people to imagine that another nation is inferior and therefore think it is okay to take what isn't theirs. It has happened throughout history. It has happened in our own Black history, too. We engaged in tribal warfare where we slaughtered each other and took one another's land. Zulu history is rich with these stories. The point is, we are all the same. We are all like the crops on the land. We have to complete a circle. With us Blacks, we began our circle by raiding land and killing people. Then the circle ended with the same thing happening to us. You Whites raided our land and killed our people. Now you have completed your circle. The Blacks today are now ending it for you. But this time, it doesn't have to be through violence. You need to recognise what is happening and play your role.'

Hennie looked suspiciously at Oom Stompie. 'Well,' he said slowly, 'since we're talking like this, suppose this Ancestor thing *was* true. If you Blacks once stole the land, and then we Whites stole it from you, *now* who does it belong to?'

'It doesn't belong to anyone. No-one *owns* anything. This is not an argument about land, but it is a struggle inside of you and me together. It is a struggle to stop the separation. It is a struggle to stop each of our races thinking we are superior to each other. We Blacks think the White man is inferior because of his ideas about Blacks. Yet we also feel we are better than Blacks from different ethnic groups and different countries. What is important is not the land, but what we learn from our struggle with it.'

Hennie was quiet for a time. Oom Stompie stood still, staring out at the *koppie*, the large rocky hill that shaded the cows' grazing ground. The two men, surrounded by the ghosts of the past, watched the cows in silence until peace descended on them both, and the sun sank beyond the *koppie*.



Oom Stompie sat alone in his room that night. Dumisani had told him it would all come to this. The circle was closing and change was upon them all. *How* it would all change, Oom Stompie could only guess. Dumisani was secretive about

exactly what would take place. Oom Stompie, he'd said, would have his role to play. He didn't have to prepare himself in any special way; he simply had to wait, and act as each event unfolded into the story that was to play out here on this land. And this story, Dumisani had said, was the piece of a jigsaw in a bigger picture. The Ancestors would guide Oom Stompie. All he had to do was speak from his heart, and they would have their voice.



## 5

Dumisani watched the couple from the old wooden bench under the *gandelo*. Tumelo and Lerato opened the gate and cautiously entered the *veld*, the vast expanse of open land that led from their rickety rows of tin huts. Crickets pierced the sultry evening silence and black eagles circled the rocky hills in the distance readying themselves for their nightly sojourn. These two kids were obeisant, respectful. This sort of thing just wasn't obvious in today's youngsters, and Dumisani's heart felt lighter. There was hope yet. The boy carried a question and the girl a whole list of requests. The couple reached a cluster of trees amongst which there sat a circle of old mossy stones. The boy placed a sack of maize down in the centre and the girl took out of her pocket a large plastic pouch filled with pungent tobacco. Sitting on some rocks, the couple arranged the offerings on the dry earth and then paused for prayer. The boy spoke softly with eyes closed as the girl held her hands in her lap. Shortly afterwards, they got up to leave. The sun was sinking over the horizon and the light would soon be gone. They'd better hurry. They had work to do.



Tumelo stared into the fire, while Lerato and the others chanted in unison. The flames spat out their heat as they reached high into the heavens and out towards Tumelo. The chanting grew louder and the rhythm of the drumming increased. The flames danced with joy, reaching out to Tumelo to join them in a frenzied dance of abandon. He was theirs now, letting go of his world, using their doorway to the higher realms of existence. Beads of sweat formed on Tumelo's forehead and above his mouth. He searched into the flames for his guide, the heat searing his lungs as she became clear. The Fire Spirit reached out to him, the rhythm of the drumming moving him slowly out, beyond his body, beyond the chanting, into the world of the Great Ones.

Lerato watched Tumelo's body. He was with them now...she danced back and forth from side to side, chanting as she and the drummers held the pathway for Tumelo's journey. She must be strong. The drummers must be strong. This was an important passage through which Tumelo must journey and return with ease. He had been called by the Great Ancestors; there was great change about to occur and all of them were in preparation for this. The people Umkulukulu had chosen were making their way across the country to Tumelo, yet only few were yet aware of what was happening or what their purpose was in this whole affair. Tumelo had been called to be a Sangoma while only a young boy, and after a long journey of learning and working, he was confident in this current task that Umkulukulu had said was his destiny to fulfil. He had to wait until these people arrived, and once they did, Tumelo had to prepare them for the changes ahead. Lerato wondered how it would all play out. There were not only Blacks who were coming. There were Whites too, and people of the other cultures.

Lerato danced the rhythm of the pathway. This was *her* calling; *she* prepared the pathway to the Ancestors. She allowed herself abandon to the drumming, pumping up the power, making the road easier for Tumelo. She'd do well. Umkulukulu expected no less of her.



The queue wound back past the unshapely tin shacks and the visitors sat on an array of old wooden cartons and tins of all shapes and sizes. The sun beat down mercilessly on the *veld* beyond and reflected sharply off the metal roofing, blinding anyone whose eyes met the unforgiving rays. Baba took cover under the large floppy leather hat that Sekai had given him for this occasion. He sipped at a bottle of water, well warmed by the heat of the day. After a three-hour wait, they'd almost reached the *Ndumba*, the sacred hut that housed the Ancestors and through which the *Sangoma*, the local traditional healer, worked his magic. People disappeared into the hut carrying offerings in return for the *Sangoma's* services. They emerged looking hopeful, and clutching *muti*, different assortments of herbs or bottles of strange-coloured medications. Baba wasn't happy about this visit. Anyone would think the sickness belonged to him, when in fact it was Siphos who had brought the disease to the family. Baba had only agreed to come here, because Sekai had said the *Sangoma* had called for him. One didn't ignore a call from the *Sangoma*, at least not if you knew what was good for you. But Baba would set him right. When the healer knew the real story, as opposed to Sekai's romantic slant on the whole thing, he'd see sense and put paid to the whole fiasco. Maybe Baba would receive some *muti* to put an end to things.

Baba looked up at Sekai. She was pulling at his arm to stand up. The *Sangoma* was ready to see them.



Tumelo watched as the old man hobbled into the *Ndumba* helped by his daughter. He took a sharp breath. It was him, the man the Ancestors had called into his dreams. Tumelo had suspected he would be the one when Sekai had visited him a short time ago. Tumelo studied Baba as he struggled to position himself on an old box lined with a nailed in cushion. Normally, Tumelo liked them on the floor, but most of these old ones would never get up again. Once she'd got Baba in place, Sekai left the *Ndumba*. She was thankful someone else was in charge of her father for this job.

Tumelo wasn't happy with what he saw. He was in darkness, this old man, he was full of poisonous venom, and it didn't look like it would be an easy job to get rid of it. Baba's eyes were skew. Both protruded and appeared to look in different directions. The lenses were covered in cataracts and he wore thick gasses that struggled to stay perched on his fat, rather flat nose. Tumelo foraged amongst an assortment of glass jars and canisters. He pulled out a bunch of dry herbs tied up with string and lit it with a match. Once the flame had caught, he blew it out and left the herb bundle smouldering. Tumelo got to his knees and moved the bundle over the front of the old man. Without a word, he waved the smoking herbs around Baba's body, pausing over his head and drawing it down his back area. Then, Tumelo rose and moved around the *Ndumba*, chanting as he did so, smudging the hut with the incense from the bundle and opening the space for the Ancestors to speak their wisdom.

'Baba' Tumelo spoke in a low tone. 'It is time to bring your kin to the circle. They are waiting for you to claim them and we await the circle to be closed.'

'I only have Sekai. She is my only kin. The rest are dead. Three died because of The Curse'. Baba referred to the AIDS virus. Like most of the Blacks, he was too superstitious to call it by its real name.

'There is another. His children carry a gift.'

'A curse more like.'

'You WILL listen!' Tumelo's voice was charged with fury. This old man was arrogant.

'You will NOT say a word! You will have respect for the Ancestors, for they speak through me!'

Baba sat, silenced by this outburst. Tumelo sat quietly for a moment before resuming in a low voice.

'You will bring your kin to the circle. It is your job to make peace with all the conflicting elements of your self. By doing this, you will make peace with your family. The Ancestors demand this of you. Until you relent on this matter, you will be visited by your own darkness. When this happens, you take this *muti*.' Tumelo handed Baba, who didn't utter a word, an assortment of different coloured leaves and dried aromatic wood bark.

'Steep it all in boiling water and sip it when the dreams come. It will help.'

Tumelo watched the old man leave and heaved a sigh of relief. The Ancestral prophecies were coming to life. Tumelo felt a thrill of excitement. Something great was happening and he was pleased to play his role. Yes, he was playing his role and he must do it well. The prophecies depended on it.



Dumisani stood before Tumelo in the *Ndumba*. It was important the boy understood what was happening and exactly what he was to do. There was no point the kid just being open, enthusiastic and respectful. Those things were important prerequisites for this calling, but he also had to understand and *work* with the prophecies. A lot of other *Sangomas* in these parts and around the country didn't really have the ears to listen to the Ancestors. They were too busy with their own agendas to be concerned with the Greater Plan for their people. These charlatans did their own thing, and were mostly in cahoots with those Ancestors who were lost and wanting, devious and manipulating. Like attracted like, it seemed, for no true *Sangoma* associated with any spirit other than those Ancestors who only had their people's best interests at heart.

Tumelo sat with closed eyes as Dumisani spoke.

'All of the people you are dreaming of are gathering now. As you know, they will find their way to you. You have been told that not all will understand the call and some will imagine they are here for another reason. You must be strong in this regard. Some will resist you and try to sabotage this work. It is your job to make them see what you see. I will help you with this. Now, I am preparing for the Ceremony of the Ancestors, a delegation that will comprise our own Black people, the Dutch, the English, the Indians and the Malays. You and your people will make preparations for this. Prepare the land. Soon we will have visitors. This is a special occasion. Nothing must go wrong. We work in the interests of Umkulukulu. Always remember that.'

Tumelo opened his eyes and threw more herbs on the small fire in the centre of the *Ndumba*. He breathed in the heady smoke as it billowed out from the flames, holding it in his lungs before exhaling slowly. His head felt light and his body heavy. Tumelo closed his eyes once more. There was important work to do and he understood he'd better listen carefully. There was much at stake.





## 6

The tents looked grand in the *veld* just beyond the pretty rows of white-washed thatch-roofed huts. The English delegation was the first to arrive and Elspeth fussed as she organised mattresses and blankets to be positioned comfortably on the uneven floor. She looked out from her tent in the direction of the huts. Dumisani was nowhere to be seen. His people were busying themselves, probably preparing for the evening meal ahead. Elspeth peered over to the north of the *veld*, way beyond the fence that marked its borders. The *Ndumba* stood close by the shabby tin dwellings and next to it, she saw a young man and woman surrounded by sacks. It was probably the maize; they'd have tobacco amongst that lot too. *They'd* certainly prepare well for the Ceremony of the Ancestors. There was something special about Dumisani's chosen people. They honoured the past, and they understood the role the Ancestors played in their lives. The ordinary people who visited the healer also had respect, if only scant understanding of everything the Ancestors stood for. There was smoke billowing from the centre of a semi-circle of homes and it snaked off west as the wind caught it and carried it to the grey-skied heavens. Black clouds threatened and Elspeth could smell rain on the breeze.

Charlie was with the delegation; he was completing a circle, and she formed part of his resolution. This was her fourth visit and each time the visit had concluded, Elspeth had felt lighter, more ready for her ultimate journey. When this final voyage would actually happen there was just no way to know. One could only do the work that was asked of them, and then one waited. Sometimes there were moments when the wait felt unbearable and the ultimate journey nothing but an impossible dream. But then a call would come, there'd be work to do and somehow it seemed real again.

Charlie emerged from the tent. She looked at her son carefully. He looked like a young boy, but then the memories had taken him way back to his youth. He stretched out his arms and chest, releasing all the tensions of the journey they'd made from across the water. He reminded her of a cat. He smiled at his mother.

'Is she anywhere to be seen?'

'Not yet. But we must wait, anyhow. It's not our place to go charging in there. We have to be received. It's customary.' Charlie looked out at the thatched huts within the *veld*. Elspeth noted how his eyes searched the place, nostalgia haunting the depths, and clouds of longing momentarily drifting across their surface. He was looking for *her*. Yes, he was ready for this stage of his journey. He'd found the place inside, the corner of his soul that needed resolution.

'You think she'll remember it all?' Charlie turned to his mother.

'She remembers everything. It's why we're here. We all have to set it right.'



Thandi hid in the trees and peered through the underbrush at Charlie. It wasn't time to see him yet, though she was impatient. Dumisani had spoken, and there was no way she'd go against his word. He'd told her the time had to be right, everything had to be synchronised, otherwise there would be mental confusion. Charlie looked the same. But then again, he would. Thandi looked the same too. She was glad of that. She wanted everything to go back to how it was, but then again, could it? Should it? How old had she and Charlie been? Back then, Thandi hadn't had any real record of when she was born, but she and Charlie had seemed more or less the same age. They'd been young, barely out of school, and life had seemed much simpler then.

She'd first set eyes on him down by the river, some few hundred meters from the sugar plantation where her mother worked in the kitchen of the main house. She keenly remembered the sultry day, the wetness of the hot Natal air always a comforting balm on her soul. While she collected water, cool in the shade of the trees and reeds, Charlie had been hiding back in the trees watching as she worked. As she'd hoisted the bucket neatly onto her head and had started walking up the dirt path back towards the house, he'd stepped out, frightening her half to death. The bucket had tipped on her head and as she stepped back to steady herself, the water poured down the front of her head and chest. She'd let out a loud wail, and Charlie had jumped to her aid, full of apologies. He grabbed the fallen pale and with stricken face had fumbled in his shirt for a handkerchief. He tried to wipe her face while she rubbed her eyes. She'd looked a comical sight with her wet wiry hair flopping over her forehead into her face, and eyes madly blinking away the water. Charlie had stopped and looked at her. He hadn't been able to help himself. He started laughing so hard, Thandi could only look on in astonishment. Before long, she'd joined him in his mirth, and for the rest of the day they'd walked and talked, and in the innocence of youth, the first fires of passion began opening up their hearts.

Nothing had been the same after Charlie had left. He'd torn her heart from her chest and had left it in shreds at her feet. She hadn't been able to function for a long while, but eventually, time had played its role in her slow recovery. She couldn't say she had healed; rather, an emotional scab had formed over her heart and in time a scar had taken its place. And often was her habit of running imaginary fingers over the place in her chest that held a shrine to the one she could never stop loving.

She looked at him now, as he talked to his mother in the *veld*. He looked good. No. He looked *wonderful*. Thandi gave Charlie one last longing look then made her way back to her hut.



Charlie was apprehensive. It had been a long time and he knew why they were all here, yet something inside held him back. He looked over at his mother as she went about her business in and out of the tents, talking to different members of the delegation. It had been her. *She'd* held him back way back then. He felt a stab of resentment in his chest. There was a noise in the rushes just behind where he was sitting. It was Dumisani.

'Oh!' Charlie jumped to his feet in respectful obeisance. 'I'm so sorry, I didn't see you there.'

'Sit, Charlie,' Dumisani beckoned at a formation of rocks near them. 'Let's talk. It seems that you blame your mother for what happened between you and Thandi?'

Charlie gave Dumisani a quizzical look, then looked guiltily in his mother's direction. 'There's something I still feel that maybe I should not. I know I have to take responsibility for my actions but I was a young boy in the charge of my parents. What was I to do? Run away? Run away to what? I've been over it a thousand times and I don't know what the answer is.'

Elspeth had sent her son from the plantation the moment she realised what was going on between him and the kitchen hand's daughter. Not that she'd initially paid much attention to the dilly-dallying that boys like her son had got into with some of the local Black girls; after all, his father had told her that these sorts of things were part of the mischief of growing up; it was the boys' initiation into adulthood. To sleep with the White English girls would be disrespectful; liaising with the Dutch girls could be awkward since relationships with the Dutch were a cross-cultural nightmare considering their common history. Not that these Anglo-Dutch relationships hadn't occurred; they had, but they were frowned upon as unlikely partnerships. English and Black intercultural marriages were out of the question. There had been a few partnerships to this effect, but to the local White community, they were looked upon in poor regard. It just was not done, especially as far as Charlie's mother was concerned. To Elspeth, way back then, Black and White partnerships were a travesty of God. And when she'd heard her son utter the word *love*, in relation to the Black servant girl, Elspeth had immediately made arrangements to have him shipped out of South Africa and back to England.

'What did you learn from this experience of losing Thandi?' Dumisani asked.

Charlie gave Dumisani an ironic stare. 'What it is to have my heart broken. What it is to have others act from their own agendas and not care what it is you feel. What it is to have the love that consumes you dismissed as a mistake because of race and colour. We were just two people in love, nothing more or nothing less, and we were made to look like we'd committed a crime.'

Dumisani paused for a moment then asked, 'Because of how you felt, how would you react now if your own child were to come to you with a similar predicament?'

'It's obvious, isn't it,' Charlie stated, 'I'd find a way to work through the prejudices that may be abound. And I definitely would not work for my own selfish ends.'

Dumisani continued with his line of questioning. 'And try to think back. Who were you before you fell for Thandi? Did you have Black friends on the plantation?'

Charlie looked at Dumisani. 'No. It wasn't done. The White boys stuck together and the Blacks kept to themselves. The Black boys of our own age were mostly workers on the plantation.'

'So you had your prejudices?' Dumisani asked kindly.

'I suppose, yes. But I never really thought about it in that way.'

'Which is dangerous, don't you think? To have damaging prejudices you are not aware of? What other harmful ways of thinking do we human beings have that we just don't realise are there? Is it the right thing to just go about our lives acting in a certain way, assuming the way in which we live to be the right one and not realise what impact we have on others?'

Charlie pondered Dumisani's words. 'When you look at it that way, you are quite right of course.'

Dumisani looked over at Elspeth. 'So your parents gave you a gift then? They opened your awareness to your prejudices? So much so, that you could never again entertain such ideas?'

'Yes, I could never be that boy again. I have different ideas about things now.'

'Which was, perhaps, the purpose of that situation that you found yourself in? Your ideas were so ingrained, you didn't question them. What you saw around you in the way of attitudes and behaviours from other White people were just a way of life. The Blacks you saw working the fields, or those working in different forms of slave labour, you didn't relate to on a human level. You didn't mix with them because an ingrained idea said it wasn't right, it was abnormal in some way.'

'Yes,' Charlie continued, 'and falling in love with Thandi connected me to them. My heart opened up and I saw only people after that. I saw through different eyes. I saw our prejudices and terrible injustices. I experienced my own prejudices first-hand. The pain I felt was the pain that those prejudices resulted in. It was turned on me and now I'm different.'

Dumisani got up to leave. 'As human beings, we have to be *aware* of the ideas that govern the mind. It is a hard thing to do, to know who we really are. To us, life is just a series of events in which we play our role. We forget that we can change how we think when we see that our ideas impact negatively on ourselves and on others. It takes difficult situations in which we suffer to really come face to face and dismantle damaging ideas. It is life that gives us this gift.'

Charlie rose from his rocky seat to stand with Dumisani. 'Thank you for that wisdom, Dumisani, I think I've resolved the issue I had with my mother.'

'That is the true meaning of forgiveness Charlie,' Dumisani said. 'It is not about trying to forget that people have hurt you, or even condoning something terrible that happened. Forgiveness is about understanding why you were involved in that situation in the first place. It is about recognising what you had to learn and it is about dismantling ideas that were harmful to you and others. Bad situations are how we learn. Knowing this is taking full responsibility for who you are and what you went through.'

Charlie walked Dumisani to the thatched huts, then he turned back in the direction of the English delegation. He took one last glance backwards. She wasn't to be seen. He felt a familiar warmth in his heart. He'd see the woman who had once been the love of his life, soon. He could hardly wait.

# 7

Ajay cradled the gun, careful not to trigger a blast. He sat in the driver's seat of the car, parked under an old willow that wept into the peaceful muddy lake. The last thing he needed was an injury he wouldn't die from. A pile of newspapers lay strewn around the passenger seat. The past had reared its ugly head again, the tabloids having a field day with his reputation. Themba, Ajay's one time good friend, and fellow government minister, was up on yet more charges of bribery and corruption and now that Ajay had chosen not to get involved in attempting to clear his old friend's name a second time, the press had re-hashed news about the allegations made against Ajay almost eight years before. These past allegations of bribery had been groundless and sourced in vengeance. Themba's enemies were determined to prosecute him and anyone who spoke up for him had been subjected to a smear campaign that law officials fancied would influence public opinion and hopefully sway the judges too. Eight years ago, the verdict had gone in Themba's favour, but Ajay had come out of the scandal a suspect in a national drama that followed him wherever he went.

And now it was all back. Not that the effect of the allegations had ever really gone away; for one, Ajay couldn't get a significant government post, but the *sting* had faded with time. For Ajay, the persisting agony lay in the lies spoken against him. The public no longer saw a war hero, but associated him with the greedy opportunists who were now in charge of the country. Ajay was not new to suffering. He'd had his fair share of unspeakable pain, but in those days of the Struggle, during that horrendous period of incarceration and torture, he'd accepted it as a necessary rite of passage towards freedom. Driven by an inner force that raised him above all bodily agony, Ajay had only grown stronger in his resolve to achieve his ends. His determination like steel, he'd been equipped with vital internal ammunition the enemy could never seize.

These days, though, he experienced another kind of pain far worse than anything physical he'd had to endure. It was the pain of disintegration, the emotional torture that comes from losing the sense of self. Everything he'd stood for was up for question, all that he held dear, meaningless. He'd played an important role in the struggle for liberation, one that had placed his name alongside other significant South African war veterans. He and many others had shared a vision for the New South Africa, one that was steeped in communist values of sharing and equality for all. What he witnessed now was far from the ideals he'd held as a militant cadre. The very people he'd fought to liberate were out for themselves, taking up government posts more for the large salaries and lucrative deals they found themselves exposed to, than for any altruistic ideals. There were a number of ministers and people in lower positions who took bribes and were often involved in corrupt activities. Nepotism won out over merit, and everywhere he looked, Ajay found egotistical behaviour. The Black middle and upper classes were increasing rapidly, and all seemed too eager to leave behind without a backward glance the issues of grasping poverty that diseased their country. Once, to Ajay, everything had made sense, a spade was a spade, what you saw was what you got. Now, all the lines blurred; it seemed that hidden agendas drove every human activity and all that was visible was only an illusion of the onlooker. Nothing appeared real anymore and Ajay was out to sea, a ship without a rudder, a victim at the mercy of inexplicable storms.

His wife Mona didn't understand him. Her rage was focussed in the physical; she demanded recognition on many levels for their contributions, a fight she was not winning. Not only was she fighting for the two of them, but for all those who fought in the Struggle, those cadres who gave their lives for their ideals. They'd both watched as a new generation emerged in the New South Africa, one that had no clue about the Struggle, one that was bored by any mention of the past. They looked on helplessly as ANC youths mouthed off their angry politics, denigrating any racial group that was not Black. Was this what a racially diverse underground Struggle had produced? A race of ignorant South Africans who'd seized power without respect for the past or for the people who'd laid the New South Africa's foundations? He'd watched as both he and Mona's efforts came to nothing, and slowly he'd sunk into a depression that he could not shake off. She saw it all so simply. She merely had to fight to get what they both deserved. And keep fighting she did, though all she emerged with was more bruising, more hostility and a face on which her bitter story was etched. Her former beauty was marred by her acrimony; her sharp and tinny voice the mirror of her cynicism. Ajay was well aware that to her, he was weak, compromising, *not* the man that she'd married. He certainly was no longer the war-hero she'd been so proud of. He knew she wanted that man back, but something was happening inside of him that told him the war hero was dead.

A knock on the car window jolted Ajay from his train of thought. He looked out at the thin, wretched-looking man, who Ajay quickly assessed wasn't going to hijack him. The Cape Coloured man, distinguishable by his accent, was probably only in his late thirties, but looked far older in his shabby clothes and dirty under-nourished skin. He was looking at Ajay's gun. Leaving it on his lap, just in case, Ajay wound down the window. The man, keeping his eye on the gun, spoke. 'You okay man?'

'Fine. What's up? What do you want?' Ajay eyed the guy suspiciously. He hoped he didn't want money. He didn't have anything but credit cards on him.

'Just checking. What's that for?' He pointed to the gun.

'That's my business. *What* are you checking?'

'This is where they all come. To blow their heads off. You gonna blow your head off?'

Ajay was appalled. 'What's it to you? Why don't you leave me alone?' He started winding up the window in anger. Some other inexplicable emotion came over him. He'd been rumbled. Someone had got into his head. He was grossly uncomfortable with that.

'Listen man, just wait a moment.' The man had a grubby hand practically jammed in the remaining crack of the window. Ajay wound it down a little. The guy stuck his face down so Ajay would hear him. He smelt of stale cigarettes and alcohol. 'Just let it all fall apart man. That's the best thing to do. Don't hang on to all the old shit that wants to go. There's no point trying to hold on and keep it all going.'

'I'm not trying to hold on. I'm trying to end it.' Ajay fingered the gun.

'You can never end it. It just goes on and on.'

'What do you mean?'

'You die, but its still with you.'

'When you die, you're dead. It's finished.'

'You really believe that? You look like a Hindu or something.'

'I'm nothing.'

'Everybody's something, even if they pretend to themselves they're not.'

'I was a soldier for this country. I was a major player during the Struggle. You probably don't even recognise me, that's how bad it is, and even if you did know my face, it would be for the wrong reasons. I gave my life and nobody cares.'

The man waved his hand at Ajay. His fingernails were lined with black grime. 'You're nothing now, you were nothing then. What happened was, in the past, you didn't feel good about who you were so you put on a mask to cover up how you really felt, and the mask also served to hide those feelings from others. Yours was a *warrior* mask, I suppose.'

Ajay raised his eye-brows. 'Are you a psychiatrist or something?'

The man scratched his nose and stared at Ajay. 'You mean you'll only listen if I wear that mask for you? You fought for something, and it looks like you got it. And now it's past. That's what this is about. That's why you want to end your life. You don't know how to move on and be something else. If you remove the mask that you were and are still insisting on wearing, you're just left with yourself.'

'Now I know,' Ajay muttered. 'You *are* some sort of psychologist. If you're so knowledgeable, what are you doing out here, looking and talking like a hobo?'

'The masks get too heavy after a while. Sometimes you just want to let them fall. Look at us.' He pointed to two other hobos sitting on some crates under a nearby tree. 'We thought we were something once. We were so, so full of ourselves. Now we know that we were trying to be something we were not. We were wearing masks to cover up what we were really feeling. But life can be cruel to be kind. There comes a time when it strips everything away so you can see who you are inside. That's what's happened to us. We lost everything through difficult circumstances. Now we're looking at who we really are underneath all the pretending. It's not a good experience.' The man gave Ajay a sympathetic nod. 'There's nothing we can do once life strips the masks away. *Nothing* man. It hurts, but when they're gone, you feel free. You want to blow your brains out because you can't stand the feeling of who you really are inside.'

Ajay shook his head. 'Thanks a lot for nothing.'

'If you stop trying to grasp at the falling mask, you might make a discovery.'

'And what's that exactly?'

'That underneath the bad feelings, is someone you like. Hey listen man, I've been where you are; perhaps I still am there to an extent. Just let it all go. Then you'll see. You'll be so much happier.'

Hours later, Ajay put the gun in the glove compartment and turned on the car engine. He looked over at the men under the tree. They mirrored how he felt. They were outsiders, their lives in tatters. And he was deeply troubled by the man's words. He was wearing a mask? He wore his past identity like a badge? He wanted to grasp his former VIP status because he hated what was really inside? He tried to reject those ideas, but found they boomeranged back at him, needing acknowledgement. The man was dead right about one thing. Ajay did believe in *something*, but he didn't know what. Maybe it was time he went to talk to someone. Listening to this hobo had opened up something in him. Perhaps talking wouldn't be a bad thing. Who he would talk to, he had no clue. He'd simply have to wait and see what happened.

Megan had long become unaccustomed to all the locking and unlocking she had to do now she was back in Johannesburg. She bolted up the security gate to her house and quickly got into Nomusa's car. Nomusa was taking her to see Tumelo, the young *Sangoma* she often worked alongside. Megan was skittish. Being back home meant one wasn't safe anymore, and the mere sight of a Black man on the street made her break out into a cold sweat.

'What's wrong with you?' Nomusa was irritated. She knew the answer to the question, but wanted to broach the subject that had been pressing ever since they'd arrived back in the country.

'Nothing. I'm just getting used to being back home, that's all. In London, I didn't have to look over my shoulder every five minutes.'

'You don't have to here. Not every Black man's a criminal.' Nomusa stared straight ahead at the road.

'I don't have to look over my shoulder? Are you kidding? We've one of the highest crime rates in the world.'

'Only a tiny percentage of the Black population is responsible for the crime in this country. Pretty violent crime, I know, compared to most other countries, but what percentage does that leave you with Megan? You've got to get some perspective, and stop living through your fear.'

'I can't help it,' Megan murmured. 'It's what you hear about every time you have a conversation with someone.'

Nomusa looked momentarily at Megan. 'It's what *you* keep hearing about. It's like you're obsessed with crime or something. You're afraid of hijacks, street attacks, burglaries, rape. You've only been back in the country a short while, and it's all already happened to you.'

Megan screwed up her nose as she frowned. 'What do you mean? Nothing's happened to me. Not yet, anyway. Touch wood. Hey, there's no lucky wood in the car.' Megan touched her head with her hand. 'That'll have to do.' She smiled at Nomusa who didn't turn her eyes from the road.

'It's all already happened in your head,' Nomusa said, 'you're constantly attacking yourself with these thoughts. Who needs people to hurt you?'

Megan bit her lip. Nomusa had a point. Megan did nothing but obsess about the violence. Every time they met, her friends and acquaintances would entertain each other with nasty stories that gave Megan nightmares and made her wonder why she had followed Nomusa home.

'You only ever get what's coming to you. Nothing that happens is ever random.' Nomusa wondered how Megan would respond to *that*.

'Oh yeah? And who decides my fate?' Megan looked pointedly at Nomusa.

'God...the Ancestors. You. We're all connected. Our fate is intertwined.'

'Sorry Nomusa, it sounds like bullshit to me. You've got some pretty nasty Ancestors if they can inflict this crime on us. And besides, it wasn't always like this. The Ancestors must have mood swings or something.'

'You mean there wasn't crime here before apartheid ended?'

'Well, not really. In the townships maybe, but the old pass laws meant the criminal element couldn't work their magic so easily. They were arrested if they walked the streets without their ID passes. Not that that law didn't contravene their human rights. I'm just saying it was safer back then.'

'Safe for whom? A small minority of White people? Think, Megan, where was the crime then? You shouldn't have to be told that the crime was a billion times worse in those days, and that only *now* we've seen phenomenal improvement. The inhumanity from White people was hidden before, was dressed up in a lawful and religious system. It *far* exceeded the crime we see today. Now it's simply robberies and killings, and we're *all* exposed to it. Before, the legalized crime ate away at the soul of human beings in this country. They were crimes against *God*.'

Megan was shamed into silence. When she did speak again, she did so in a small voice. 'I see what you're getting at. The apartheid system was the greatest crime against humanity.'

Nomusa changed gear as she stopped at a set of traffic lights. 'Whoever the criminals were then, and are now, there's Divine order in things. So you might as well stop pissing yourself every time you go out. You're bringing unnecessary stress on yourself.'

'But I'm not sure I believe in Divine order, Nomusa. I lean towards the idea that things happen randomly.'

'Oh really? Then how do you think I found you? Were my dreams random? Was it co-incidence you read my manuscript? Why did you follow me back home when you were so safe in London if this is all bullshit?'

'I don't know.' Megan sighed deeply. 'I don't know, Nomusa. I'm confused. I just know that it was right to meet you, right to come home. I don't know about dreams or Ancestors. I'm following your lead on that one.'

'You knew it was right, because you felt, and feel *now*, something deep down, like a primal instinct. This feeling drives you to act in a certain way; it allows you to trust me against your better judgement. That's the work of your Ancestors. They work at another level of your soul, on another dimension of experience. They're joined to you by the same bloodlines. What happens with them happens with you and vice versa. They didn't die; they just left this world and their

physical bodies. When you're not in the habit of listening to your Ancestors, you imagine that only *you* are in control, and that's why your life is full of painful misjudgements and mistakes.'

'Why would they allow us to go through painful experiences, then?'

'To release something. To release an idea that may be hurting you. Pain cleanses us, and it cleanses them. It's not always bad. They bring good things too.'

Megan looked out of the window as they bumped along a dirt road. The tar had ended and it looked to Megan as if they were heading straight for a large rocky *koppie*. Anticipation gripped her. They had reached their destination.



Dumisani watched from under the *gandelo* as Tumelo welcomed the pair into the *Ndumba*. He'd let them talk a while before visiting the hut himself. He looked over at the tents and watched as the English delegation talked and sipped tea, made on the communal fire in the *veld*. Everything was going smoothly so far. The prophecies were unfolding nicely. Let's hope it continued this way. Dumisani just had to work to make sure any problems were ironed out. According to Tumelo, and from what Dumisani knew himself, the old man Baba posed a problem. But Dumisani would see to that issue. He'd make sure the old fellow came right if was the last thing he did. Only it probably *wouldn't* be the last thing he did just yet. Dumisani suspected there was a lot more to be done before he took the ultimate journey. He sighed quietly. The ultimate journey. He looked forward to *that*.



The rasping noise of Tumelo's rattle split through Megan's whole being, the sound bringing up the bile in her stomach and causing her to heave into the earthenware pot the *Sangoma* had provided her. The spirit of the sacred plant that Tumelo had fed her reached inside her soul with its tentacle-like fingers, grasping at the demons that lay hidden in her mind. Fiendish images rose up from her depths to confront her, evil thoughts taunted her, refusing to be banished at her command. Terror welled up from inner places Megan never knew existed. Invisible doorways opened and slithering snakes of long-forgotten awareness slid into her vulnerable, imploring mind. Nomusa's intermittent singing soothed her, but panic rose each time Tumelo's voice belted out its staccato tones, the strange melodies scratching at her insides cleansing the poison from her soul. The vomiting was endless and Megan cried for release from the incessant chanting that brought every wave of sickness. Her pleas only met with more chanting, singing, rattling. The more she pleaded the louder, and faster it became. It was a waking nightmare whose only moments of solace came with Nomusa's honeyed tones.

Tumelo was quieter now, the rattle softer, and Nomusa sang for longer intervals, bringing a strange and beautiful peace that Megan's wanted to live in for all of time. She felt clean, alive, and physically exhausted. Tumelo had stopped singing and was calling her name.

'Megan. It's time to hear your calling. The Ancestors have spoken and our story must be told. Sit up.'

Nomusa helped Megan to an upright position.

'You are the storyteller of the dream.' Tumelo's voice was low, almost unrecognisable. 'This is your destiny, the reason for your birth. You must tell the story of our people, of those who live beyond us, those whose destiny is interlocked with ours. We have forgotten our Ancestral people; we have forgotten who we are. Without our Ancestors, this nation is lost. Without them, each one of us is plunged into loneliness and misery. We all belong together, this nation of many races, and all of our Ancestors beg that we make reparation to each other and lay our souls to rest. We have spilt each other's blood and tortured each other's bodies. We have learnt through our hardship the lessons the Ancestors inflicted upon us. Our nation has begun the healing process, but without the Ancestors we cannot go further. We need them to guide us into abundant times, into the fields of plenty that all of us have now earned. Without them, we go the ways of the people of other nations, and find that we still have nothing. The Ancestors must be allowed to re-enter our hearts and minds so that we and they can be whole again.'

Tumelo fell silent for a moment before carrying on.

'You must tell the story of our Ancestors. It waits to be told, waits for you to carry their message into the hearts of our people. Many are being called to this work, yet many are afraid of the old customs. For these people, our traditional values go against the values of people of other nations. Yet we do not have to choose between their values and ours. We can make our lives far better by bringing our values back. We can only gain greater gifts as we allow ourselves to be guided along the correct pathways.'

Megan felt an opening in her heart, a sensation that made her clutch at her chest and look to Tumelo with joy. Something stirred deep inside her as the story moved like a phantom in her soul. She'd always known this moment would come. She would carry the gift of the Ancestors to their very own people. It was what she was born to do, and she would tell the story as they wished it to be told.

Dumisani looked on. He was pleased.





## 9

Baba sat with the old *Sangoma*. He'd come for a second opinion. He didn't trust the kid that Sekai had taken him to, and worse, he'd given Baba some lousy advice. He wasn't about to listen to some young upstart who'd been to the White schools tell him what to do with his errant family. This old guy in front of him made more sense. He looked like the real deal. Baba was appalled at the way things were going these days. There was no longer any respect for the elders in the community. Why, he'd heard stories that youngsters were taking the top jobs in the city and telling the older generation who worked under them what to do. This type of thing was an *abhorrence* in Black society. There *had* to be respect from the younger generation for the older; it had always been the way. Yet the politics of the New South Africa was raping the country of these deep-rooted traditions. The young ones didn't know anything, they had no wisdom. And to add insult to injury, women were even taking over. Some held top jobs in government, let alone the ordinary workplace. And in these jobs, they were even telling *men* what to do. They weren't just guiding the younger people, but the older ones too. In the old African communities, the young always deferred to the old, and the women were careful in how they presented their opinions. They didn't usurp the position of men. But now everything was different. The kids of today went to White schools, got their heads filled up with nonsense, then they went into the workplace and became like the stone-hearted White man. These young Black kids were no longer interested in old people. They hardly gave them the time of day. The White schools were teaching them a different way. And what could be worse than a young *Sangoma*? What could *he* know? Where was the sense in getting some young boy guiding the community, most of whom were older than him anyway? Nothing made sense anymore. The old man in front of Baba now, he was ancient. He'd been around long enough to know what he was talking about. And he *listened* to Baba. This *Sangoma* asked *him* what he wanted. He didn't throw out orders, telling him what the Ancestors wanted. He asked and then he delivered. Just the way Baba expected things to go.

Baba had told this *Sangoma* about Tumelo, and they'd agreed there was something up. Perhaps some black magic was afoot and Baba would have to do something about it. Baba had had to fork out a lot of money to this old chap, but it had been well worth it. He'd done a dance ceremony that had nearly given Baba a heart attack, it was so eerie, but the guy had summoned all sorts of strange people who made him speak in tongues, and he'd called upon some demons that Baba couldn't see and that the old witchdoctor had said he'd actually managed to put in jars. After the ceremony, the *Sangoma* had explained what was going on.

'There is a war on. My people are telling me this.' The old *Sangoma* choked out his words. 'There are many who are paving the way for change in this country, many who are doing as your son has done. And there are forces who want to fight to stop them.'

Baba shook his fist at the old *Sangoma*. 'No! The White man has had his day. He brought his poison to our country and now it must be purged from our system!'

The old *Sangoma* croaked on, 'Our people are turning away from the old ways, taking the path of the White man. And there are heroes like you, Baba, fighting for their old traditions, fighting to eliminate every foreign influence in the country. Baba, you have started something, and I am *proud* to help you with your mission.'

Baba lifted a haughty chin. He liked being told he was a warrior. 'Tell me, what is it that you can do to help me?'

'It's already happening, Baba. I have spoken to my people. They feel like you. They died at the hands of the White man, they died imprisoned by his system. They have no love for the New South Africa with all its racial mixes. Africa is for Africans, they say. They want their people to claim it back. I have sent out demons who stir up trouble. They creep into the minds of the African people and make them question their loyalties. They will make the people of this country see sense.'

Baba looked confused. 'Will they get to everyone?'

The old *Sangoma* shook his head. 'Not everyone. Just those who have questions in their heads, and those who belong to this new wave of change.'

'I don't understand,' Baba complained, 'This change has been happening for a long time. It's not new.'

'I'm talking about the group of people that this change is affecting right now. The Ancestors work with different groups of people to achieve different things. There is a large group of people at this moment, involved in the changes you are worried about. The Ancestors are helping them.'

'Oh,' Baba wondered, 'But aren't yours and my Ancestors helping us? How does that work?'

'The people I talk to don't want the changes. They are angry and bitter. Yes they are our Ancestors, but they don't mix with those other lot. If we call on them, they'll help us scare the others off.'

Baba was happy. He was the hero in a war and he liked that very much. Baba knew this *Sangoma* understood what he wanted and was going to deliver. Right now, Baba had only one thing in mind. He wanted those grandchildren of his out of his life forever.



Oom Stompie sat bolt upright, fleeing from the dreams that had haunted him since he was a boy. In it, an old man supported by a walking stick appeared at the end of the dirt track that led out of the location and out towards town. He stood in the Sun, its rays blinding Stompie as he moved slowly towards the boy. Always, Stompie found himself rooted to the spot, paralyzed with fear, waiting in terror as the sky suddenly darkened with the encroaching man. As the old fellow, whose staring eyes glittered menacingly, reached Stompie, there appeared out of nowhere two dark creatures who were so small they only reached the old man's waist. They were fearsome-looking monkey-like creatures whom Stompie was unable to look upon for fear of his life. Stompie usually woke up at this point, sweating and afraid. This time though, the old man spoke as he approached Stompie, wagging an ancient leathery finger.

'You! You will not turn from your work! You are caretaker of this land! It is time to take it back and avenge our Ancestors for the humiliation visited upon them. You! You will make them pay for what they did!'

Sitting up in his bed now, less afraid than questioning, Stompie waited for the dream to reveal its meaning to him. He'd searched for answers a thousand times over the years, but now, with the old man's words, things were becoming clear. It was to do with the land claim story that the Van Rensburg family were facing. Only *now* it made sense. But what did this old man in the dream want from Stompie? Stompie was worried. He suspected what was required of him, yet it went against everything that Dumisani had spoken to him about.

Oom Stompie searched his heart. How did he *really* feel about this land claim story? Could he really be so objective as he was when he spoke to Hennie Van Rensburg? It was always the same with Oom Stompie. When people sought his counsel, and he reached inside for wisdom, the words of Dumisani poured out of him. They just came from someplace pure and Oom believed with his whole heart they were true. Oom Stompie had grown up with these White people of Dutch origin. He knew how they thought and what was in their hearts. These were people who were powerless to their beliefs; they never questioned them, not even when these ideas contradicted God's laws and led to inhuman acts. The people that Oom had been raised with didn't know how to question. It would only be dramatic circumstances that would make them see that their beliefs were meaningless, that they were only ideas formed by man and not truths on which the bedrock of humanity was formed. Yes, Oom Stompie *had* to be objective. Dumisani had said that Oom had to think and speak from the soul. It was the only place where truth resided. Hennie Van Rensburg and his kind lived their lives through the mind. They believed in their ideas and all their actions rose from these shallow waters. They were suffering now, these White people of Hennie's ilk. They still held onto their old ideas while the world around them was changing radically. They still believed they were a race apart from others. Oom Stompie knew though, that when he took Hennie's hand and journeyed with him to the centre of the soul, they would find that they had never been separate at all. The sense of separation was only ever a trick of the mind.

Oom Stompie had to be careful. The nightmare of his childhood had come to him now, a warning of the ideas that were planted in his mind. Vengeance of the past lived inside of Oom Stompie. It was a vengeance that lived inside of *many* and that originated out of the deep emotions evoked throughout South Africa's history. These same people who had stolen the land from Oom Stompie's Ancestors had headed out from the Cape in the 1800's and had left a trail of slavery, land claim, dispossession and death. Oom Stompie's people had passed the stories down from generation to generation, South Africa's cultural history ingrained from birth. The Dutch had massacred and displaced Oom Stompie's Khoikhoi, Xhosa and Zulu brothers, had brought disease, apartheid laws and segregated living. They'd alienated the Malays, Indians and Coloureds; these people slaves to only one end, to build a world of comfort in which only the Whites could benefit. It was easy to be angry, easy to blame. In terms of humanity, what the Dutch of old had brought to the land, no-one could be proud of. They'd even left the Cape in those days, because they were disillusioned with the English colonialists for banning slavery and suggesting that people of all colours were equal.

But Dumisani had cautioned against this dangerous emotion. Vengeance meant that each one of us did not take responsibility for the ideas that hid like criminals in our minds. All of us at one time or another had raided and pillaged. And all of us at different times had been called to account for everything we'd done. Our Ancestors, those whom when they were living had passed on old ideas of our grandeur, were now creating circumstances in which our ideas are to be challenged. For some the circumstances would involve violence and death, since that was the only way they could learn. The violence would not alter the end result that was designed by the Ancestors. It would simply be the way that those who clung to their beliefs believed they would have to go. For others who followed the direction of the Ancestors, the changes would be smoother.

Yes, Oom Stompie had to be very careful indeed. Inside him lay the potential for blame and recrimination when in fact all that had happened to his people, they had inflicted upon others in different ways. Dumisani had warned that Oom Stompie and others would have to listen beyond the mind to the voices of the Ancestors. They wanted the people of South Africa to confront their one collective nature, and heal together.



# 10

Desmond clutched at the bag that held the box and reached into his back pocket for his wallet. He didn't have credit cards. Only cash. These Whites looked down on him. He could tell. They were all looking at him funny. This fat chick must have known he didn't carry cards, yet she asked anyway.

'You don't have to pay now,' the receptionist said, looking at him closely. 'You just have to sign in. We'll bill you as you leave.'

Desmond looked around him at the small hotel. It was grand, too good for his kind. He tried to imagine his friends here, but just couldn't get the picture in his head. They'd trash the place up most likely. Get drunk and make a brawl. They certainly wouldn't cough up the money when they left. Knowing them, they'd disappear out of one of the back windows and take the furniture with them. He'd promised himself that if he had to make the journey all the way from Cape Town he'd damn well stay somewhere decent. He'd never done this before, never stayed anywhere this *larny*. He hoped he was dressed right. Desmond looked around at the other guests; some were checking in, others leaving to go someplace. They looked like they belonged here. He watched as some of these people caught his eye. What cloud passed over their faces? Did they know he did bad things for money? Desmond looked down. It was best not to make eye contact. He was certain his eyes revealed who he was inside. He had the box of bones tucked away nicely in the large holdall. No-one would guess what was in it. He couldn't let on since it was a valuable cultural item. A stolen one, what's more. Well here he was, in a nice hotel on the edge of the Cradle of Humankind, haven for the tourists. He'd just have to figure out by himself how he was going to bury the stuff without anyone noticing.

A voice behind him caught his attention. 'Your bags sir?' A small wiry Black man in a smart black and white get-up grinned up at him. Desmond looked in his direction and threw him the heavy bag. Yes, he smirked, the guy ought to be polite. He ought to know his place. At least there were *some* people here he was better than. Desmond looked around at the other Blacks, some who were guests and others who simply went about their work. He puffed himself up, immediately feeling better. *Ag*, it wasn't so bad after all. He followed the little guy to his room.



Sipho called the boys from the garden of the hotel. Jeanette was in their room, getting ready for dinner. Sipho watched the boys as they ran towards him, his heart-bursting pride tinged with sadness at the thought that *anyone*, let alone his father, could reject them. But this was the price he'd paid to marry the love of his life. He had never really understood what other people saw, though being South African he knew he ought to. For Sipho, he hadn't married a White woman. He'd married Jeanette. The people of his own race had disapproved of him, seeing only a Black and White together, never going beyond the surface to the deep meaning of sacred relationship. And his own father had disowned him, claiming that Sipho had somehow contaminated his line.

Now, though, it seemed that something had changed; what exactly, Sipho still had to find out. He'd received word from Sekai that his father had wanted to see him. While he'd said he also wanted an audience with the boys, Sekai had warned Sipho to hold back. Baba wasn't right in the head, was all she'd said. He'd better take the reunion in small steps, just until their father got his act together. Whatever was going on in his head, he'd work through it, and Sekai felt it best they took this thing slowly.

Jeanette appeared in the doorway of the hotel, radiant. No-one would have guessed she was dubious about this whole affair. She'd only gone along with it for him, for Sipho. He knew she secretly believed his father to be a cantankerous old fool that should be kept away from her children, but she also knew what it meant to Sipho, how he needed to make right with his father before the man died of old age. Jeanette called to the boys who had wandered off again. They all went in for dinner.



At first, Desmond wanted to bat them away like flies. They were a couple of pests that needed exterminating. Their parents didn't seem to mind them bugging the other guests, though if he looked at it honestly, these two kids were only interested in him. Desmond couldn't see what the attraction was, but here they were chattering away as if they'd all been friends for years.

'Are you from here?' one of them asked. 'What's your name?'

'I'm here on business from Cape Town. All my friends call me Des. My mom calls me Desmond, but I hate that. '

'I hate it when my mom calls me Ezekiel.' The kid's hair hung in brown and blonde spirals, around an oval bronzed face.

'What do they call you then?' Desmond decided he might as well make conversation, pests or not. He felt odd sitting at the table alone. It was like he was a loser or something, what with no friends or family or anything.

'Storm.'

'Storm? What the...?' He'd better not swear. These were kids after all. The other one, a trifle smaller and darker-skinned, but otherwise identical to the older brother, offered his opinion.

'We should just be called by our proper names. We get them for a reason; their meaning is connected to what we do in our lives, and we shouldn't change them.'

Desmond raised his eye-brows. Was this kid a prophet or something?

'My name's Adam. I like it.'

'Well good for you. What are you guys doing here in this place? Where're your parents?'

'Over there.' Storm pointed to a table near the sliding windows. 'They talk a lot. We're going to visit our grandfather. He hates us.'

Desmond's eyes were fixed on the parents. She was White. He looked at the kids. They were Coloured, like him, poor swines. What were their miserable parents thinking, inflicting this on them? Didn't they know Coloureds had no identity, that they didn't fit anywhere in this God-forsaken country? Desmond whistled softly.

'You're grandfather hates you?'

'Yup, because we spoiled his blood.' Storm scratched his nose.

'So why are you visiting him then?'

The boy shrugged. 'Dad says we have to forgive him because he's going to die soon.'

'Whatever,' Desmond, said, slinking back in his chair. 'I wouldn't give him the time of day.'

The mother was walking over to the table. Desmond sat up straight.

'I hope the boys aren't bothering you.' Jeanette smiled. 'Our table is just over there in the corner. Please won't you join us?' She looked at the empty plate on Desmond's table. 'We've finished dinner too. But we're up for some drinks. There's a bar we can order from.'

Desmond felt good; he had someone to sit with. The company would do nicely, even if they *were* an odd couple.



Dumisani looked across the valley over at the caves. They weren't easily accessible, yet they were visited often by people not from these parts. Dumisani and his people kept watch as they came hiking through the long grasses, these visitors oblivious of the traditions of the people who roamed these lands. None showed respect. None left tobacco or maize or any offering whatsoever. They trampled the earth, with scant reverence for the spirits who dwelt amongst the rocks and trees and who inhabited the caves. Surely, wherever they were from, they had respect for their Ancestors? Didn't they honour the tradition of taking care of those who'd walked the earth before them? They came to look at rocks that held the record of the life that went before. They removed the bodies of the sleeping ones and disturbed the slumber of the soul. Yet none looked beyond the rocks at the spirits to whom this place was home. None asked for hospitality from the invisible wanderers of these lands.

The place had been disturbed a long time now, and Dumisani felt the restlessness ripple through his soul. He couldn't take the ultimate journey until amends were made and the spirit of his people was laid to rest. A lot of the work was done now, but one important thing still remained. Dumisani turned to the east and inhaled on the breeze. It wouldn't be long now. Soon everyone would be gathered, and the prophesy realised. Dumisani smiled. He was confident everything would go to plan.

# 11

The atmosphere could be cut like a knife. The Blacks spoke amongst themselves in hushed tones while the Whites moved amid them uneasily, shouting orders that were flat and lifeless. Hennie was on the phone. He didn't have any information for the police; he hadn't got wind of anything before the incident had taken place. Not that his Blacks would have spilt the beans to him anyway, no matter how harmonious their working relationships were. They had an uncanny way of sticking together, no matter what crime one of their own had committed. It was a product of the apartheid years. They stuck together, sorted out community issues amongst themselves; they didn't expect justice from White people. History had ingrained that fear in them.

He'd been to see his cousin Frikkie Oosterhuizen and his family. Naturally they were deeply shaken by the incident that had taken place in the early hours of the morning. A large gang of thugs had stormed the place, some drunk, some perfectly sober; they'd demanded the Oosterhuizens leave the farm. They'd waved guns around, sometimes firing shots in the air, claiming the land as their own and declaring they were taking matters into their own hands. Land Affairs didn't have a clue, they'd said. And besides, what else could they expect from a bunch of would-be Whites sucking up to the local farmers? These thugs had roughed up the men folk somewhat, but hadn't caused any real damage. As it turned out, the visit was largely intended as a threat. They were coming to claim, and if the Oosterhuizens wanted to argue about it, well, they had a few other visits to look forward to.

Hennie put the phone down and foraged in the drawer for his address book. He made a few calls and then went to the dresser in his bedroom to get his hand gun. Tucking it in his belt, he left the house. He had a meeting to attend. These upstart Blacks should know better than to mess with the *Boers*. The White farmers had a reputation for defending their own. And defend themselves they would. Hennie would make sure of that.



'We'll hunt them down and make an example.' Hennie addressed the crowd of Afrikaaner farmers who had squeezed into Frikkie's living room.

'What, we gonna hang them? These aren't the good old days, unfortunately. We'll be arrested.' Frikkie looked worried. Hennie bit his lip. 'We've got to do something. I can't see the law protecting us somehow. Where were they last night when Frikkie was staring down the barrels of their many guns? Someone will die before anything significant gets done.'

'They've declared war, that's what,' another farmer piped up. 'Hennie's right, we can't sit and wait for them to threaten the lot of us.'

'There's more of them than us. I'd worry about that if I were you.' Someone spoke from the back of the room. 'And besides, do we want to die unnecessarily? Because I'm telling you now, if we go down this route, some of us *will* die. You know how the Blacks feel about the land claims. They'll kill to get what they want, and they know for sure we'll come after them. They'll expect it and what's more, they'll be prepared. They don't trust the law and they'll take matters into their own hands. Even if most of the trouble-makers do get arrested eventually, which is highly unlikely, we can still end up with fatalities. We'll be arrested too. This thing should be nipped in the bud. We should be looking for another solution.'

Hennie raised his eyes and threw up his hands. He wasn't convinced. 'Well then. Any ideas, anybody?'

There was hushed silence for a moment while the men deliberated. No-one wanted a war. Yet something had to be done, and *quickly* too. This was a fire that had to be put out before it spread any further. Frikkie spoke up.

'Why don't we consult Oom Stompie?'

Everyone nodded and murmured in agreement. Yes. Oom Stompie was a good solution. He'd help them sort this out.



'I already explained that this issue is not about land. It lies deeper than that. This trouble that we are facing is forcing us to look at who we are, what we've done to each other and make reparations in the heart. We must try to look past seeing it as a land issue.' Oom Stompie faced a huge crowd of farmers. Some, he suspected, were not even from the region. They were relatives of the locals, come to hear what Oom Stompie had to say. The subject of land claim went right to the depths of their being, stirring up powerful sentiments that these down-to-earth people were unable to put into words. Some of them stood, a lot sat on the low walls of Hennie's tractor yard, and others were perched on top of the machines that lay idle while the farmers tended to their uncertainties.

'Tell that to the thugs who want to grab Frikkie's farm.' The farmer, a local, stood resolute, his arms crossed. 'We're not interested in these spooky things you're talking about. Let's talk about things we can see in front of us and let's talk about actions we can take without causing a war.'

'I agree,' another man piped up. 'I don't know what Oom's talking about. And besides, we belong to the Dutch Reformed Church. This Ancestor thing is forbidden to us. It's a sin. We don't disturb the dead. They're with God, or the Devil. They don't wander about the streets causing trouble. We can trust those Black thugs to do that.'

Oom Stompie deliberated. Before he could speak, another farmer spoke up. 'Listen, what Oom is saying makes sense to me, even if I'm not so sure how it will help us with our predicament. I go to church, but I understand the whole Ancestor story. My Blacks on the farm have spoken about it to me for a long time now. We are farmers. We know how everything connects. I mean, when we have a dry period, and we all pray for rain, doesn't it come? Didn't we learn that from the Blacks? I know my workers do their Ancestor thing, and things happen. I've seen it. It's not spooky at all. It seems natural. It makes sense when Oom says there are things we must lay to rest with their Ancestors and ours, but I still can't see how he suggests it will happen.'

Another farmer pondered. 'I suppose it's like prayers, like asking God to intervene, and He does so through asking us to make certain actions that Oom is talking about.'

'Why are we talking like this?' Someone at the back was incensed. 'It's madness. I forbid my Blacks to worship Ancestors on the farm. It's downright evil!'

Oom Stompie stepped in. 'Be careful what you term evil! None of us worship Ancestors. We honour them! Please get it into your heads that there is a difference!' Oom Stompie was angry now. 'Most of us go to church. There is no conflict at all. For us, God is the Great Ancestor. You may see your Ancestors as angels in God's heavens. It doesn't matter what picture you make. What matters is that you realise that the past actions of your Ancestors are affecting you *now*. Just try and tell me that this is not true. All of our Ancestors exist in God's many lands. The Ancestors work with us to resolve what they did and what we do now. They are part of us because we are joined to each other by blood ties. All of our actions affect each other. The past and the present are the same. We must put an end to this cycle now.'

'Well, I want to say something, and it may offend Oom, but I have to be frank.' A stocky man walked to the front to address the crowd.

'I don't believe my Ancestors did anything wrong. They came to this continent and moved people from the land who had no real business being here. We were farmers, *real* farmers. Blacks are not like us, they are inferior. That's what was written in our Bible before it was removed to please the New South African politics. This integration thing was forced on us and for me, it's a sinful process. We were not supposed to mix, and to suggest that we must make some sort of amends is not right. And as far as I'm concerned, the land I work belongs to me. I will kill to defend it.'

The crowd went quiet momentarily, then a low murmur rippled throughout. Oom Stompie addressed the man who had just spoken.

'There are many who feel the same as you; there are Black people who want the White man removed from this country. They feel the White man has done nothing but take what is not theirs, and therefore holds inferior values, attitudes and beliefs. For them, vengeance is the only way, and inevitably, all of you will meet up with each other. It is the way of God, or what we call Umkulukulu. He brings together those who hold vengeance in their hearts and allows it to play out. Your beliefs about Blacks are only beliefs, they are not truths. You will learn this, but first you must take the journey through vengeance. It is not my place to talk you out of this.'

The man looked at the crowd. 'I for one, will not stand and listen to this any longer. If there is anyone else who wants to join me, I'm up for finding a real solution to this problem. I won't put up with a bunch of marauding Blacks coming to take land they don't even know how to look after.'

People started to get up to leave. The others who remained, stayed quiet while the men shuffled out of the yard and got into their pick-up trucks. There were only a few men left.

'What now?' someone asked.

'I'll explain to you the Ceremony of the Ancestors. It will help you understand what it is we have to do.'

Oom Stompie sat down on a crate and started to speak.



Fanie looked over at the others who were roasting *boerewors*, traditional Afrikaaner sausage, over a fire. Some of the members of the other delegations had joined the Dutch group for the evening meal, and some sat about talking amongst themselves while others helped prepare the rest of the food. The carts were still loaded with the seed they had brought with them; no-one had figured out yet where to store it. Fanie walked over to one of the carts. Seeds; he'd always been fascinated by these tiny specimens, amazed by the potential for life that he held in his hands. Often he indulged his habit

of sitting with the seeds, sifting them through his hands and feeling the magnificent promise of God. He'd appreciated every phase of farming, the preparation of the soil, the process of planting, the appearance and nurturing of the new shoots, the bursts of growth into maturity, and then the joy of the harvest. For Fanie, every sack of seed held the potential for magic, for life, for joy.

Fanie hoisted himself up into the cart. Opening one of the sacks, he put a hand inside and felt the coarse grain brush his skin. He'd completed a long voyage of discovery in which he'd explored the fertile ground of his own mind. God, he'd long realised, had given him birth into life with an open mind, a mind that had started out free of thought and ideas. Into that fertile soil ideas had been planted, seeds that became the structure of the life he'd lived. The world was like a storehouse of seeds; it contained countless sacks of ideas that defined the people who planted, nurtured and harvested them. God, Fanie had discovered, saw human life in the way a farmer views his land. Plant it, and it will grow. Harvest what you sow. And God looked on while we chose the seed, planted, nurtured and harvested it. Sometimes the harvest was good, sometimes it was poor. Like many other farmers he knew, Fanie had often put down to God's will, whatever came out of the land. But through his journey, Fanie had learned differently. Those seeds that now rushed through his fingers held the quality of his thoughts. Whatever was in his mind as he tilled the land and sowed his seeds, was reflected in the quality of the crops he harvested. Whatever ideas were planted and nurtured in his mind, were reflected in the life he lived. God looked on, allowing us to choose our seeds, and to choose our ideas. Whatever harvest was reaped was down to us. God's wish was only that we chose carefully, taking heed of everyone around us.

Fanie had reflected on his life. He'd journeyed through every idea, waded through the illusions of grandeur that had caused him to nurture each and every one. Ideas, he now understood, were only illusions that gave him a reason to live. Fanie had learned that, as God's children, we could choose any idea and it would be just a structure in which to live our life, a shelter through the cycle of life. Ideas gave us a way to know ourselves, communicate with each other and complete a cycle of human experience. Fanie was a *Boer*, a Dutch farmer who'd been close to the land. He'd been proud of his tribal roots, believing himself and his people to be superior to others. He'd demonstrated this in his attitudes, in his behaviours. He'd justified atrocious actions against others by deferring to his superiority. Fanie had believed in the sacredness of his ideas. They had been real, solid, and to Fanie, sanctified by God. As a farmer, Fanie knew never to grow seeds in the same soil lest the crops he grew became weak and lifeless. Yet he continued to sow the same seeds of his ideas in his own mind, and in the generations that followed him. Now, he witnessed the harvest of his long-held ideas. His people, in the New South Africa, were now weak and lifeless, folks who clung to old beliefs while drowning in a sea of new ideas, new customs and blossoming new relationships.

Fanie had endured the agonizing war on his beliefs, the inevitable consequence of holding on when everything in his life was urging him to let go. In entering the battlefield, he'd suffered the glory of defeat. Once, he'd called upon God to release him from his suffering, and God had called back to him urging him to release the ideas that had caused him pain. Now he sat here, his hands clutching his precious seeds. They were seeds of hope; they held the promise of fresh new life. His people would live again; they'd merge with others, allowing new ideas to give them new perspective. This, Fanie had decided, he would do with his seeds. He'd plant new ideas that, in turn, would also have their season.



The four men respectfully entered the *Ndumba*. Tumelo sat silent as they positioned themselves on the floor. He lit a herb bundle and smudged the place before anyone was allowed to speak.

A large man with a heavy labourer's body spoke softly. 'We've travelled a long way from Mpumalanga. We were told to come to you, that you could help us.'

'We are claiming the land of our forefathers,' another joined in. 'We are putting things right. We want back what is ours.'

Tumelo studied the four. 'What do you want from me?'

They looked at each other. The third man answered. 'We were told that the Ancestors would help us with this, and that in this regard, they are working through you.'

Tumelo was curious. 'Who told you this?'

'Oom Stompie,' the labourer replied. 'He said you are his brother's grandson, and that we should come to you.'

The fire crackled as Tumelo threw his herbs onto the fire. He inhaled the fragrant smoke and chanted, the four men sitting prayerful and expectant. They were giddy, the fumes filling their lungs, making their heads light and spirit buoyant. 'The prophecy of the forefathers is upon us,' Tumelo began, 'the injustices of the past are held up to be judged, and the hearts of the transgressors poised in readiness for cleansing. Injustice is not only considered in terms of what we do to



one another, but what we do to ourselves and all of us will be brought to judgement in this manner. The land issues are being taken care of. All things related are being taken care of. It is not for you to act in this regard. ‘

The four men looked confused. They shouldn't act? The Ancestors were taking care of things? How could that be? ‘You will return,’ Tumelo answered. ‘You will return for the Ceremony of the Ancestors, and during this ritual, everything will be revealed.’

The men looked pleased. This was something concrete. They'd return and see what the Ancestors had in store.



## 12

Ajay frowned. The museum had just called. They'd somehow found out about the *Peace Pipe*, that object he'd fashioned out of wood whilst in prison during the Struggle. They wanted to feature it along with other items that he and the others had all made and used in prison. He went to the cabinet and took it out. He wasn't sure about parting with it. It was an item of tremendous nostalgic value, and its therapeutic qualities even now, were second to none.

They'd smoked it during the most difficult moments when one or the other of them had faltered in their resolve to see their part of the mission through. It was a symbol of hope, of a deep-rooted peace that they believed their actions would bring to the country. These days, Ajay smoked it to quell the storm that often raged within him. Something in the feel of the wood and its evocative association with the past calmed him. He gained perspective, a deep stirring within, and a surreal sense of peace. The pipe and its tobacco had a mystical quality that Ajay was loathe to give up. Yet, in some ways it belonged to the people, for it had played its own role in preparing the soldiers who smoked it, for peace and reconciliation. It would be hard to let it go. In fact, it would be an idea to go to the museum first and check it out. Yes. He'd do that straight away.



Nomusa looked at her watch. He'd be here at any moment. All the exhibits were carefully wrapped in special tissue paper, ready to be put away. She'd have to do an inventory first, then a write-up on each piece. Then, there were the brochures to prepare and a photo-shoot of all the entries. There was much to do yet, but she couldn't start until tomorrow. She needed the pipe to complete the collection, and if she was lucky, it would be here soon. She looked at the assembly of covered items she'd put together. This was a different project she'd been assigned, not her normal area of work. It was interesting, meaningful. She heard footfalls in the corridor.

Ajay walked in without knocking. Nomusa couldn't believe her eyes.



She'd looked shocked to see him, as if he was an apparition.

'Ajay Singh'. He put out his hand. 'Are you alright?'

'I know you,' Nomusa said, staring at him.

'Well I hope so. You intend to take my precious pipe from me.' He smiled.

'No, I don't mean in that way. Of course I read about you in my colleague's notes. I'm just helping her out with this project. I only work here part-time.'

Ajay was irritated. She didn't know who he was beyond the notes she'd read?

She added, 'I dreamt about you. And now you're here.'

'You dreamed of me?' Ajay was taken aback. Was this girl a little strange?

'I'm a Sangoma. We dream of people who are important to Ancestral prophecy.'

'Oh.' Ajay didn't know what to say. She really was strange.

'You have a dark cloud that follows you. I see it in the dreams of you. It's a cloud so black it keeps out all the light. No-one can see who you are.'

'And why is that? Why is this cloud following me?' Ajay was curious.

'It is your own darkness. You have no recognition of yourself. Until you see your own reflection, others cannot see you.'

Ajay had a sense of *deja vu*. Hadn't the hobo in the park said something similar?

'So you're a witchdoctor?' Ajay squinted at her. He didn't actually know what a witchdoctor was.

'I'm a Sangoma, a traditional healer. I work with the Ancestors.'

'Who are they, and what have they to do with your dreams?'

'They are my family, your family, they are the people that walked the land before us. They are calling you to recognise yourself, to stop asking others to do what you refuse to do yourself.'

'What do I need to recognise? I don't understand.'

'You need to acknowledge who you are beyond all your pretensions about yourself. You first have to see that the way in which you see yourself is governed by painful thoughts. Secondly, you need to examine these thoughts, realise they are not true and let go of them. When you drop painful ideas, the pain goes away.'

'You've lost me,' Ajay said. He peered at Nomusa.

Nomusa leaned towards him. 'What is your misery? Tell me why you are so unhappy, and I'll tell you the painful thoughts that you have about yourself.' Nomusa beckoned to two chairs near a wall-to-wall illuminated cabinet full of artefacts. Ajay walked over to them and sat down. He was suddenly and inexplicably awash with misery and he felt an impulsive need to offload his unhappiness on this girl. He went into lengthy detail, describing his teenage years, his role in the Struggle and the unpleasant events that followed the official political turnaround in 1994. He gave a vivid account about the subsequent breakdown in his marriage to Mona. When he'd finished, Nomusa took a long breath and exhaled slowly.

'You've a long way to go in understanding yourself,' she started, 'but you have to start somewhere. The first thing you should try to take in is that you are in this situation for a reason. Nothing happens randomly. Are you a Hindu?'

Ajay shrugged. 'I was brought up in the religion. But I'm not one now.'

'Well then, as a former Hindu, you should be familiar with this line of thinking'. Ajay nodded at Nomusa.

'The second premise upon which you start understanding yourself, is that you realise that you are not alone with this problem. It runs deep and belongs to others besides you. You inherited your ways of thinking, and therefore you have inherited your problems. All of our problems arise from our ideas about ourselves and from our ideas about others.'

Ajay frowned. 'What do you mean when you say I am not alone with my problems?'

'You, and me and everyone else, are all connected to our Ancestors, those people who went before us and who passed on their ideas to us. Remember that as we grow up, our parents, our community, our school, our religion and our social circle all have an effect on how we respond to life. Everything we learn is passed down through the generations, and often we do not question any of it.' Nomusa stopped for a moment to let Ajay absorb what she was saying.

'Your Ancestors,' she went on, 'continue to affect the way that you think. They are still connected to you through the soul, and so they see what effect their ideas have on you. Those same ideas still have an effect on them, and they are in a place that allows them to resolve their problems by identifying the ideas that cause them.'

Ajay stopped Nomusa, holding out his palm to her. 'Please let me ask a question before you go on. You're losing me. I need an example of how my way of thinking is harming me. As far as I'm concerned, it's other people who have brought harm to me. I'm the victim here, not the perpetrator of the crimes against me.'

Nomusa shifted her position in her chair. 'You believe that you are inferior to the White man.'

Ajay jumped out of his seat. 'What? How on earth can you say such a thing? From the age of sixteen I was working with different political groups to change the system for non-Whites because I believed in our equality!' He glared at Nomusa. 'Didn't you hear that?' he repeated angrily, 'I believed that we are all equal, Black, White and any other colour you care to mention!'

'Please sit down,' Nomusa said quietly. 'You need to hear what I have to say. If you don't want to take it in, then that will be your choice. But I want to try to open your eyes to something. Please. Just hear me out.'

Ajay sat down and breathed deeply. He leaned back in his chair and gave Nomusa a wary nod to continue.

'In a hidden place, in the corner of your mind, lies a belief in your own inferiority. *You* believe this about *yourself*. This belief creates an emotional reaction within you. You experience this reaction as a feeling inside that you do not like. Try, for example, to imagine the feelings of guilt that you've had in the past when you've hurt someone's feelings. That guilt feels bad, and we recognise it as guilt because we recognise what we have done to the other person. Now imagine that there is an idea hidden away somewhere that tells you that you are inferior to others. This time you don't recognise the idea that causes a bad feeling, because it doesn't belong to you. It belongs to your Ancestors. Their own experiences put it there.'

Ajay pondered this a moment. 'Are you saying that we inherit certain ideas?'

'Yes. We also inherit the *feelings* that go with them. A lot of the time, we do not recognise the idea, but do have emotions that we do not understand the source of. Our genes hold many ideas that belonged to our Ancestors. That is why our parents identify character traits in us at an early age, before we've had any real experience to form our personalities. They'll say things like, *she's assertive like her grandmother*, or *he's aggressive like his uncle*.'

'So you're saying that the mind is kind of already formed,' Ajay muttered to himself.

Nomusa continued. 'So when we have an idea that hides in us, we find that we have feelings that we don't always understand. You were driven by this bad feeling inside you, by the idea of inferiority. You worked hard to take this feeling away. You worked for different political groups and gave all your energy to the Struggle for liberation. What the non-Whites of this country were feeling, you shared. All of us had an idea of our own inferiority, given to us by the experiences of our Ancestors.'

'So,' Ajay, interrupted, 'these ideas of inferiority were fed to our Ancestors by the White man, right?'

'Well, of course' Nomusa answered. 'What we experience impacts us. If another more physically powerful group of people enslave us and tell us that we are nothing, and after a time the entire political system supports it, eventually we begin to believe it. It's commonly called brain-washing.'

'So if I've worked for freedom, and South Africa has now changed, why do you imagine I still have that belief hidden away somewhere?'

'It's obvious that it's still there because you still need recognition for what you did in the past. You still need to be seen as the war hero. To be seen this way makes the feelings of inferiority feel less painful. Constant recognition is like a form of addictive medication. With formal recognition from the government and the people of this country, you get a prominent government post, you have a say in the way the country is governed. You get to parade around with your masks on, those masks that hide how you really feel from others and from yourself. When things go wrong, as it did when your friend went up on bribery charges, you want people to look past the slur on your character and see who you were before.'

Ajay shrugged. 'So my need for recognition has been somewhat unhealthy, considering it in the light of what you have said.'

'The need for recognition is only unhealthy when you let it *govern* how you feel about yourself and your life. Ask yourself the question, Ajay. Does your need for recognition govern how you feel?' Nomusa looked at him, her eyebrows raised. He didn't answer. It was obvious how he felt.

'So I wear the war-hero mask,' Ajay finally said. He thought back on the things the hobo in the park had said. 'Underneath it are feelings of unworthiness that never should have belonged to me in the first place. Where do I go from here?'

'Those ideas do belong to you now, though they were put there by your Ancestors. *You* are responsible for removing them, just as your Ancestors were responsible for creating the circumstances that helped you to confront them. Your life was designed to help you deal with these beliefs. Your Ancestors are working with you as we speak.' Nomusa held out her hand. 'Give me the pipe.'

Ajay obediently opened up the small briefcase he'd brought with him. He took out the box in which the pipe was enclosed for safekeeping. Nomusa opened it carefully.

'This does not belong here.' She ran her fingers over the wood, then closed her eyes. 'Do not leave it here. In this pipe is part of you. It holds your spirit and the gift that you have for this country. You must bring it with you. I'm going to take you to see someone. The visit will change your life.'



Tumelo chanted and inhaled the scent of the herbs. He listened as Dumisani spoke.

'Nomusa has found the Indian man. You must work with him to release his burden, for it is heavy. His grip on his past is so powerful, he cannot see the future and he cannot experience the present. It is vital he confronts his own demons and lets them go with God. We need his gift. Without it, the prophecy cannot be complete. We cannot take from him what he cannot give to himself. The gift will come to us when he is free of the past. Work with him. The Indian delegation will arrive tomorrow. I will come soon with more information.'

Later, Tumelo looked out of the door of the *Ndumba*. Lerato busied herself with preparations. The delegations were arriving. The atmosphere in the *veld* was electric. Walking through it, one came out with hairs on the back of the neck. They must take care and make sure everything was in order. Food, tobacco, personalised offerings of love. And Tumelo must prepare everyone who came to him. It wasn't easy, but he knew one thing for sure. He was blessed to do this work.



Mahendra felt a strange calm as the huts came into view. They were waiting, welcoming. In the distance he saw the form of Dumisani standing amongst the villagers. Mahendra's heart was glad. It had been a long expedition, and he hoped with everything in him that this was the end of the road. He wanted so badly to take the ultimate journey, for he was tired of travelling, tired of the voyage he had taken through his soul. His people followed, each with their heart full of hope for this mission.

Mahendra wondered about the war hero. He knew the man was battling the demons, but that the work was nearly done. The guilt had disappeared and Mahendra's heart felt free. Guilt, he had long realised, was a chain to the past, a shackle he had placed on himself, a punishment that no-one but he himself could induce. Mahendra's life had been filled with beliefs he had worshipped, ideas he thought were real and true. Only this journey had shown him that nothing anyone believed was real. It was all just the game of God, the game of Umkulukulu. When Mahendra had seen the illusion, he had descended into a deep abyss of shame and guilt. He'd hurt many with his attitudes and behaviours and he'd left behind him a legacy of loneliness, separation and hate. Umkulukulu had called to him, explaining that there was only one thing required, and that was that he recognise the illusion. The Great Ancestor had said that punishment was not

necessary, and that his guilt was a pointless flogging of a past self. Umkulukulu didn't punish, for the idea that God punished was just another belief. Umkulukulu loved, and love meant that we recognised everything as a game.

Mahendra could never have arrived here today, had he held on to that guilt. He would have taken a detour, made the journey longer and harder as the guilt tried to free itself from his grip.

The war hero would come, and Mahendra would do right by him. Only then could they both be free.



# 13

Perched on a rock at the edge of the *veld*, Mafana chewed on a piece of *biltong*, the dried beef he'd always been so fond of. He held it up to the Sun. Some things must not change. Please Umkulukulu, let not the *biltong* disappear into the annals of history. He chuckled to himself as Thulani approached him.

'What's so funny?' His son sat down next to him.

'Just thinking about the stupid things we're afraid of.' Mafana held up the biltong.

'You're afraid of biltong? Mafana, the Great Warrior? Now that's something for the history books!'

'I'm contemplating change, that biltong might one day be a thing of the past. But who cares, right? As much as it is loved, the presence of biltong does not define us. It's passing will not define us.'

Thulani reached into his waist pouch and took out a piece of the dried delicacy. 'That's right. As much as we love biltong, when it passes into history, we will have other new things.' He looked at Mafana. 'Why did it take us so long to work that out? Why is change such a big issue with us human beings?'

Mafana was serious now. 'Because we worship ideas. To worship something, is to give it supreme importance. By worshipping an idea, we make it real in our mind.'

'So by worshipping the idea that I cannot do without this biltong, I refuse to let it disappear into history?'

'Which would only be a problem if you *needed* to let it go, let's say if there was a shortage of animals in the region or something. It's not a terrible thing to uphold an idea, but it damages us when circumstances change and the idea has no place. It is then that we need to let it go and embrace something new.'

Thulani thought for a moment. 'What ideas did we Africans worship, father? What new ideas, what change do we need to embrace?'

'Well, we could first have a look at our very own history. We were all happy here, in our chiefdoms, living out our lives. Then there were those of us who worshipped the idea of power over others.'

'When you speak like this, the warrior Shaka comes to mind.' Thulani raised his eyes at his father.

'He is just one instance, but there were those who went before him and others who followed. The others may not have had quite the same impact as Shaka, but the idea was the same. He worshipped the idea of power over others, and he passed it on to those around him.'

'How do you think the idea was implanted in him?'

'I don't know for sure; perhaps because he was constantly bullied as a young boy wherever his mother took him. Perhaps it was because his father put him and his mother out and both had to seek refuge with her family clan. It could be that because he felt powerless as a child in these circumstances that he decided that power over others was an answer to his problems. Who knows? But the idea was implanted somehow and he worshipped it in the same way as many others did. When he joined Dingiswayo's regiments, the army of his mother's clan, he built up his physical power and his fighting skills, this idea of power driving him in a big way. You see we need ideas to motivate us; for Shaka, this idea helped him feel better about himself because he improved his lot with a strong physique, and his physical feats won him the admiration of others. It is only when those ideas begin to *dominate* us that we get into trouble.'

Thulani whistled under his breath. 'And boy, was that man *ever* dominated by that idea.'

Thulani, like so many others had been in awe of Shaka's power. The young warrior had used his reputation in Dingiswayo's army to take over his father's small Zulu kingdom after he died, assassinating his successor brother in the process. He then went on to increase his principality by attacking and assimilating all the chiefdoms in the area. Later, Shaka turned on Dingiswayo and allowed the enemy to kill him, while Shaka himself took over the leadership and further conquered the neighbouring chiefdoms, adding to his growing power. Leading a cruel and brutal regime, eventually Shaka ruled the whole area of Natal, assimilating many other clans under the Zulu banner.

Thulani pondered the idea of power over others. 'So what brought about change, father?'

Mafana paused before he answered. 'Another conquering force. The Dutch did the same to the Zulus as the Zulus had done to the different clans. Change sometimes happens in two phases. The first phase brings about hardship, the kind that makes us confront our own ideas. When other people treat us the way we've been treating others, then we experience the full, all-round impact of our own ideas. Then the circle of that change process closes as we dismantle an idea. We then go on to embrace other ideas, those more beneficial to the people we are to become. And it is only ever time to get rid of an idea when it hurts us or others. We Blacks belonged to many clans with our own leaders. We each had our own cultures, our own ways of living and doing things. But we were forcibly assimilated into other people's ways, the ways of many people like Shaka. Did you know that when his mother died, the people living under his regime were cruelly executed if they didn't grieve in the way he wanted them to? This is just one small example of the atrocities that

Shaka meted out on his own people. The idea of power over others had completed its circle and the Dutch, with their own form of brutality, came to help us begin the confrontation with that belief.'

'Yes,' Thulani ventured, 'thanks to them, we now know how destructive a belief it was.'

'As much as many of us know this, there are still a lot more who will continue to uphold it. This idea can only die when we as individuals give it up. As we embrace ideas of peaceful and willing integration, so we move on to better ways of living.'

'Yet,' added Thulani, 'we can only integrate peacefully, if we drop the idea that our individual cultural beliefs are superior.'

'We've a long way to go,' Mafana said, looking over at the Dutch delegation, 'but the process has started.'

'Do you think our own people in the New South Africa can embrace change?' Thulani looked at his father.

'Only when they can take responsibility for their own past,' Mafana replied. He stretched out his arms. 'But now, many grieve the injustices that befell them through the White people.'

'Yes,' Thulani continued, 'and grieving is important because it speaks to people about how they feel. The Whites inflicted terrible things on us, but through the remembering process, we must also remember our own past. Can all of us, Black and White, learn from our own ideas? Can we move on together?'

Thulani looked pensive.

'Come now, since we're talking about change and embracing the new,' Mafana puffed out his chest, 'let's just get a good look at ourselves in our African animal skins. Aren't we just grand? And wouldn't we be just as grand in that woman's clothes over there?' They looked over at a woman with the English delegation. She wore a long skirt and white ruffled blouse. Thulani broke into a laugh.

'I wouldn't go that far! You're not getting me started on the ultimate journey in a woman's dress!'

'Ha!' Mafana chirped, 'it might be the price you have to pay! You might have to let go of those pretensions of the body!'

Mafana and Thulani looked over at the Dutch lot. 'It really is the end of the road, isn't it father? I mean it has to be, right?'

Thulani kept his eyes on the Dutch.

'That's up to us. We've a lot of ground to cover with the Dutch people. We must accept their gift.'

'I wonder how they'll give it.'

Mafana's eyes misted over. 'Does it matter? If they offer it, then we accept. Change must come, and it starts with us. Our people are struggling, and it's our doing. We are all responsible for the passing on of destructive ideas. We must let everything that is old and hurtful, pass away. We must pass on new and wonderful ideas. Only then will we all be free.'

The lady in the long skirt waded through the grass to the two men. 'Can I offer you some English tea?' she smiled. Mafana jumped up. 'We'd be happy to accept,' he laughed, 'and may tea endure through all of time, especially if there is such a thing as eternity!'



Baba felt terrible. He hadn't slept in three nights, he'd suffered night-terrors followed by nausea, vomiting and stomach cramps, and nothing that useless witchdoctor gave him helped. Baba was too old for this kind of thing. There were black things that stomped about his room scaring him half to death, and grey shadow-like clouds that hovered above him, sucking at his breath. He couldn't move when this was happening; he was paralysed by fear, unable to call out to Sekai.

Sekai appeared in the doorway of his bedroom holding a glass of brown-looking liquid. 'You'd better drink this,' she said tersely. 'Tumelo told you to take it. He warned you of the dreams.'

'I'm not taking his stuff,' Baba spat. 'He's up to something. He probably wants to poison me.'

'Well, you're not doing so well with the witchdoctor's medicine are you? And besides, I don't know what you've been up to with him. That man doesn't work with good entities.'

'He knows what he's doing.'

'Then what's all this about?'

'I'm just sick, that's all. Your cooking's not up to scratch.'

'I don't hear anyone else complaining. Now just take it. It might at least stop the dreams. You can't go on like this Baba. You'll die from the rigours on the body. You're an old man.'

'Give it to me. I'll not want to be ill for long. Siphos going to be here soon.'

'Careful. You almost sound pleased.'

'Pleased? I'll be pleased to give him a piece of my mind.'

'I think he knows your mind, Baba. The whole neighbourhood is well familiar with it. You ought to try something different for a change.'

'Just give me the stuff. Enough of your talk.'

Baba drank the liquid down. Sekai left him to face the night alone.



Dumisani sat at the edge of Baba's bed. He looked down at the fevered man, sweat pouring off him as he thrashed about in his bed unable to catch his breath. Dumisani put his hands out to the grey swirling mass that hovered over Baba's chest and let out a loud bellow. The entity disappeared instantly and Dumisani knelt beside the sleeping Baba. 'These demons belong to you, Baba. They are of your making. Only you can banish them completely. You will be sick until you see the demons for what they are. Go to their lair and see who you are. Only then can you ask them to leave you.'

Baba stirred. He opened up his eyes and peered through heavy lids at Dumisani. 'Help me,' he groaned with all his remaining strength.

'Life is not what you think, Baba. It is a series of illusions that have no importance save that we learn about our own nature. Umkulukulu, God, has suggested we confront our illusions in exactly this way. He has advised our Ancestors in these matters, he has counselled those wiser ones who are able to understand that only we human beings are responsible for the pain that we feel. The body in which you find your spirit housed is of no significance. Can't you see that Umkulukulu has no regard for what we think of as our precious, important lives? Don't our lives often end without consideration for our own sense of self-importance? We are in these bodies to learn something, to confront something. Beyond those lessons, the body is of no consequence.'

Baba's eyes were closed now. He had no energy but to listen.

'All of us have identity, but it is only a mask that we use to play a game. The game is life and in that game Umkulukulu asks us to see who we are, and why we are here in the body. Those of us in the body carry many heartaches and sorrows, even if we do not recognise them as so. We suffer many agonies because we believe so many things that are not real. *You* believe in your African nature. It is only a mask. It is only a game. Every nationality that people in the body wears is only a mask. Umkulukulu has suggested this game. When we believe in our own importance, life brings us face to face with our own beliefs. Our Ancestors, on Umkulukulu's advice, have set it up this way. Your son is part of Umkulukulu's game. Siphon has brought change to your line. But you suffer, believing in the body, believing that nationality is real and important. Umkulukulu asks that you face this challenge so that you one day let go of your pain. Your pain is real because of your resistance to the understanding that we are all the same. You must ponder this in your darkness. Umkulukulu insists that you wage war with your beliefs, for through Umkulukulu's way, we always win.'

Baba had slumped back into unconsciousness. Dumisani blew gently in his ears. 'Go there,' he whispered. 'Go to the battlefield and be defeated through the wisdom of Umkulukulu. It is the only way. It is what will free you.'



# 14

There were a lot of caves on the reserve, and Desmond was confused. Where, exactly, was he to bury the bones? He'd had a good nose around, feigning interest in history to the two know-alls who'd had the good grace to bring him here, but at the end of the visit, he was none the wiser as to what he should do. He knew he'd have to come back on his own at some point, but to which spot exactly? They'd been out all day. The Cradle of Humankind wasn't exactly the small tourist spot Desmond had imagined. According to Siphso, it stretched over hundreds of kilometres and this area was just part of it. Desmond had reluctantly learned that the remains of the first humans were found in this place and that they'd been here for about two to three million years. Siphso had chirped on about stone-age, iron-age and more modern people, and had gone on about the thousands of fossils that had shown human evolution over the past three and a half million years. He'd said the fossils were important because they showed how our human ancestors lived, what they ate and what animals and plants existed with them. Desmond couldn't have cared less about people who'd been dead that long, and why anyone else cared, he really couldn't fathom. As far as he was concerned, the good thing was, these places weren't besieged by visitors all day every day. Although there was clearly excavation going on, the place was also not over-run by over-eager archaeologists. Today, the place had been deserted. If he chose the right time, he'd be able to bury the bones without being spotted. Did it matter which area he picked? He'd better check those documents in the box again, see if there was a specific location although he *had* read the whole thing a couple of times and there didn't seem to be any mention of a particular cave. He knew he was in the correct region; the papers indicated *that* much at least. Desmond thought about Auntie Darla and her predictions about curses. He'd better figure it out quickly. He was bored with sight-seeing and didn't want to be stuck with the Perfect Family for long. He wanted to get home and get on with his life. Jeanette was way ahead in the distance, walking to the car with Siphso in tow trying to keep the boys moving in the same direction. The kids were about as interested as Desmond was, but at least they didn't have to fake it. They were lucky enough to get to kick a ball outside the caves while the adults looked around.

'Come on Desmond!' Jeanette called out chirpily as she disappeared into the driver's seat. 'Let's get something to eat before we all fade away!'

Everyone piled into the car, and as Desmond was about to jump in, he looked back at the distant caves. He blinked. There was a man standing by the entrance to a larger cavern. He was wearing something resembling animal skins. He just stood there, and if Desmond wasn't mistaken, he was looking in their direction. Desmond rubbed his eyes. When he opened them again, the man was gone.

Desmond was troubled. He was quiet on the bumpy ride back to the hotel, unable to identify the strange things that he felt. By the time the car stopped and he'd recovered a sense of reality, Desmond knew one thing for sure. He wasn't to take the bones back to the cave. They ought to be buried in the ground, nearby, where they wouldn't be disturbed again.



Dumisani watched the car as it snaked its way along the winding dirt road back to the tar road. The boy had found the place. That was good, but it wasn't time for him to bring the bones back. He had work to do yet. Desmond himself didn't know it, but he was fractured, two parts of himself separated by a divided mind. It was a common-place thing, Dumisani knew, and Desmond and his people were in touch with it only through the wall of frustration and anger that arose from the division. Desmond's mind had trapped him in an identity he felt out of touch with; one that when it sought its roots, found a fork in the road that was frightening and disheartening. Desmond was Coloured, and that was all he was aware of. His Ancestors were of mixed race, people who were divided by colour and ethnic group, two peoples who believed that one was superior to another. These different people had left in their wake, generations to come who were without claim; the Whites couldn't call them White, and the Blacks did not recognise them as Black. They carried within them the pain of rejection and a sense of displacement that manifested in a quiet rage that existed within the soul of the Coloureds. For people like Desmond, Black and White ghosts of the past lurked in the shadows of the mind; watching silently, leaving them orphaned and lost.

Dumisani was happy that the bones would soon be replaced, but the boy had still to confront his own demons. Things had gone to plan and he was in the right place at the right time. Dumisani had to wait. Events would unfold just as they were meant to, and the Ceremony of the Ancestors would help with the rest.



Fanie nodded at the new group of people who were putting up a makeshift shelter. They were quiet as they went about their work, occasionally looking at him as he walked around them admiring their handiwork.

'It's interesting to see the different temporary homes being erected in the veld,' he called to a Khoikhoi woman who was placing large leaves over saplings that served as roofing slats. She smiled shyly, nodded and went back to her work. The woman was bare-breasted and wore silver trinkets around her neck. Tied around her waist was a short length of bright-coloured fabric. The men were similarly scantily clad, though they didn't seem so fond of jewellery. Fanie looked at his own people's dwellings. They'd come with their large wagons which served all living purposes. The English and the Indians used tents. As he drew his eyes over the vast veld, the landscape was a curious colourful assortment of diverse lodgings. Fanie felt warm inside. They were here together, and some invisible energy was building between all of them. There was an air of curiosity, of anticipation and happy acceptance of that which was to come.

Fanie walked back to the spot on which his own people camped. Ten of his men talked quietly amongst themselves whilst occasionally looking up over at the huts. As Fanie approached one of them called out to him. 'Have you seen them?' The men had stopped talking and studied him anxiously.

Fanie addressed them all. 'I didn't get to see the children, but I spoke to Dumisani. Everything is in order. They are preparing to see you, but the time to do that has not yet arrived. There are things still not in place.'

The men looked at each other. A restless expectancy lived in their eyes. Another of them spoke. 'When did they arrive?' 'They've been arriving every day. As they get here, Dumisani comes to meet with the children. He puts them in a special dwelling place with his own people; their mothers stay with them.'

'It's been a long time,' a third man muttered. 'I can barely wait. This emptiness has haunted me throughout. I never knew till now quite how much this feeling influenced my life.'

'That's the trouble,' Fanie answered. 'As human beings, we think we know who we are, but we don't. We live with ourselves without really knowing why we think or feel a certain way towards things. We live without awareness. It is because we are born with our bloodlines carrying the imprint of our Ancestors. They had many experiences that we know nothing about, yet the spirit of those events course through our veins.'

The third man stared up at Fanie. 'Is that why the Ancestors stay around us?'

'They don't hang around us like ghosts,' Fanie said. 'They are *part* of us. We share the same soul. The soul is *collective*. Since we are born in succession of each other, we leave the imprints of very profoundly experienced events, especially those that have not been resolved. Those we have followed through birth, or those who follow us, feel it in the body and in life.'

'Can you explain further, Fanie?' One of the men moved within earshot to sit under a tree.

'When an Ancestor lives his life a certain way, and it affects the lives of others in a very positive or very negative way, it leaves a sort of imprint in the genetic lines of the body. When new generations are born, they feel the effects of these events without realising it.'

'Give us an example,' another man said.

'Imagine you were born with a certain fear. Let's say you hate the sight of guns and ammunition to the extent you actually go to great lengths to avoid them. Perhaps you even detest violence to the point you avoid any kind of confrontation. Maybe when faced with all of these things you experience a deep sense of fear in your body. Yet you have no event you can refer to in your life that caused these feelings. These are typical examples of Ancestral imprints. In a case like this, you will find that one or more of your Ancestors were involved in some traumatic event that involved guns, ammunition and violent confrontation; most probably an event that was not resolved, an event in which they perhaps died.'

There was a hushed quiet when Fanie stopped speaking, the men were contemplating their own feelings. Eventually, one of them spoke in a quiet voice.

'There have been those that have succeeded me, who have felt lost and rejected. Within this group sitting here, we have all felt something in common; that a part of us has been missing. We filled that emptiness with lies. These lies included the idea that our children of mixed race didn't matter, that they were not really ours because they had blood that belonged to what we termed an inferior race. We refused to claim those children because they looked different to us, and we let them know they were not acknowledged because of their Black blood.'

'And now' continued another man, 'we realise that when we reject those who belong to us, we reject a part of ourselves. If you look at yourself in the mirror and say *no* to yourself, a part of you dies. When we rejected our children, we injured our very own souls, for all of us belong together. The women who birthed our children belonged to us too; they became our family and an indisputable part of the Ancestral line. To try and erase that history is to try and erase the self. We feel pain when a limb is removed. We feel its absence. It is how we all have felt in rejecting our children and the mothers who were part of our family line.'

The men were nodding. Some sighed. Fanie sat down amongst them and warmed his hands by the fire. It was getting dark now and the summer evening was a little colder than usual. He stole another glance in the direction of Dumisani's dwelling place. He had the children there, safe and sound. Fanie looked at his men. They would be whole again soon. The Ceremony of the Ancestors would see to that.



Megan and Nomusa sat on the gnarled wooden bench under the *gandelo*, the sacred tree whose manifold leafy branches shaded the entrance to the *Ndumba*. A welcome wind brought relief from the sweltering heat of the day and the two women watched as whimsical clouds chased each other across the vast African sky. Megan looked out past the fence onto the *veld*, wondering about the events that Nomusa and Tumelo had prophesied would come to pass. The things these two talked about were new and strange and to Megan's mind scarcely believable, yet there was a contradictory *feeling* within her that somehow bound her to it all. Nomusa had told her to expect this dichotomy of logical thought versus deeper instinct. It was the mind fighting for its ideas, desperate that they not be confronted or eliminated. Megan's head often pounded as her ideas conflicted with what she felt inside. Her mind, with its westernised ideas, worked endlessly to alienate her from her inner world, with doubt and suspicion as its lethal weapon. Megan turned to Nomusa, who lounged against the tree, arms spread allowing the wind to cool the damp crevices of her upper body.

'How did you make the choice to become a Sangoma, Nomusa?'

Nomusa kept her eyes closed. 'I didn't make the choice. My Ancestors called me. It was their decision that I be the one they speak through for certain life events.'

'How do you know they called you?'

'I dreamed of them a number of times. In my dreams, they appeared to me in a large group around my bed. An old man spoke to me, saying that I had to go into training and that my life from now on belonged to them.' Nomusa lifted her arms for extra ventilation.

Megan's brow creased in a frown. 'So how did you feel about that? I wouldn't like someone telling me that my life was not my own.'

Nomusa smiled. 'I didn't like the idea at all. I'm educated, I work part-time at the museum remember! My parents sent me to the best schools that they could afford and I attended university. I just couldn't relate to this Ancestral stuff. For me it was old African folklore that was best left to the old folks. I supposed all this traditional stuff would all fade with time, as South Africa moved with the rhythm of the western world.'

Megan was intrigued. 'So what changed your mind?'

'The *ukuthwasa* changed my mind. I damn well nearly died. It's a series of illnesses that occur when you refuse to answer the calling. I was horribly ill for about two years. The moment I surrendered to my destiny, the illnesses subsided.'

Megan was aghast. 'You were punished for not answering your call? That's just terrible. How can they force someone to do this work?'

Nomusa opened her eyes and sat up to face Megan. 'Nobody was punishing me. I was trying to go against my own destiny, trying to fit into the world in a way that I was not born to do. When I reached the time that I was to study as a Sangoma, I of course resisted the whole thing. I became lost to who I really was and my body responded with sickness because in effect I started dying. When you no longer have a purpose, you start dying. You see Megan, I was *born* to do what I do. It is my purpose. If I try to move away from it, I will surely die. My Ancestors and I have many ideas that we are confronting as South Africans. We have work to do in improving ourselves as human beings. I am part of a healing plan that my Ancestors have in store. People like me and Tumelo are chosen even before we are born. The Ancestors know we are coming. They write our destinies for us.'

Megan took a deep breath. 'Where did you study?'

'Here, in this *Ndumba*, and in many other locations. At the time, there were others in training. It's how I met Tumelo. Tumelo was a different case altogether. He was really very young when he got the calling, he was a child. It was a long period of training, about six years in total. There's so much to learn and in doing so, you have to *unlearn* many things. The educated mind is a dangerous thing.'

'How so?' Megan stared intently at Nomusa.

'The kind of education that we receive from the formal institutions of the world is nothing more than a programming of ideas. All so-called educated ideas are lined up to create what we call facts and from these facts we establish what we come to worship as logic. When you actually analyse and break everything down, all these facts come into question. We find time and time again that the things educated people tell us are true, are found to be false some time down the line. That goes for most things we know to be true today.'

Megan was perplexed. 'But what does that have to do with what you learn as a Sangoma?'

'The world of healing requires that we do not use the mind, since ideas are false and they get in the way. As human beings we need to heal on many different levels. We need to heal the way we think, the way we live in the world, the way we take care of ourselves, the way in which we conduct relationships. The list goes on and on. The ideas that we live with through the mind are the disease, they are not the answer to any of these problems. We heal through the soul, through getting people back in touch with their instincts and inner resources.'

'It sounds a bit like you want us to go back to being cave men or animals or something. Don't our minds distinguish us from those forms of life?'

'The ideas that constitute the mind are what make us worse than animals. Look at the world today. What are we taught? To look out for ourselves, to compete with each other, to steal from each other. We go to war for gold, for oil, for land. We rape and pillage and justify it. Most of the world lives in poverty, while a few lavish at the top. We hold ideas that make us accept this imbalance. All of us are educated into trying to reach the top of the pile of human waste against all odds. As human beings we are greedy, always wanting more than we have and doing anything to get it. We find reasons to be superior to others and take what they have. And all this because of the ideas we are fed.'

Megan shifted on the bench. 'Yes, I suppose you're right, but how do we move away from thinking with the mind?'

Nomusa got up to stretch her legs. 'We will always think, but we must learn to do so through the heart, which is the seat of the soul. The moment we process a logical thought, we are lost again. Whatever decisions or actions we take, we must feel what the heart says in answer to a certain situation. That is how we work as Sangomas. While some healing techniques are standardised, they are only a guide to the Sangoma. A real healer works at the deepest level of the human soul, and there are no textbook healing methods to refer to. The Sangoma journeys into the mind for the disease, and into the soul for the healing. Each of us require different things, different forms of healing. No two prescriptions can ever be the same. A real healer rarely performs the same healing twice.'

Nomusa walked a distance to the fence that divided the location from the *veld*. Megan followed her. They stood looking out at the vast expanse of land.

'A true Sangoma,' Nomusa continued, 'cannot operate from the mind. The mind is a jailhouse that prevents a person from moving freely. When Sangomas free themselves from the confines of the mind, their spirit is free to journey everywhere. When we stop living in the mind, we experience the vastness of the soul and the vastness of life. We see our connection to everyone and everything in our universe. The Sangoma travels to the soul of all things and seeks healing from the deepest sources of life.'

Megan sighed. 'All of my doubts are there because my mind holds ideas that close the door to the soul. My world is small because of the ideas that trap me there.'

Nomusa looked at Megan. 'So let the ideas go. As they argue with what we are doing here, challenge them. Tell them they are not real, so you won't entertain them. Then ask your heart what is real. If you become very still and quiet down the chatter of the mind, you'll always feel the answer.'



Elspeth spotted the two women standing by the fence in the distance. Her heart fluttered and she had to steady herself. Only one of them had seen her. Elspeth could tell she'd been seen by the way the Black girl peered at her as the two women talked. Seeing them together moved Elspeth beyond anything she'd experienced in her long journey. Something deep inside moved around; it felt like a mini earthquake in her soul. Tears sprung to her eyes as she remembered the emptiness she'd carried around with her for so long. She hadn't understood the deep depression that sometimes haunted her as she moved through her life. She'd just accepted it as a woman's malady, a gloom that the physicians had told her she just had to lie through on the dark days when it overpowered her. Mahendra, the rather helpful man from the Indian delegation, approached her.

'Are you okay ma'am? You look a bit shaken. Seeing ghosts?'

'Something like that,' Elspeth replied softly.

'Undoing the past is a hell of a thing,' Mahendra said, looking in the direction of the women. 'It's hard when everything you knew to be true, everything you identified with, suddenly isn't real anymore.'

'A person feels like they're dying when they're asked to give up their beliefs,' Elspeth said, 'yet that death signals a rebirth at the same time. I'm glad I've reached this point of rebirth. It's been a long time coming. I feel ashamed when I look back.'

'Shame? Are you guilty still about the person you once were?' Mahendra wore a look of concern.

'I can't help feeling bad about my past actions when I see the effect they've had on others.'

'Are you saying that you think that the things you did in the past shouldn't have happened?'

'I suppose I am,' Elspeth replied. 'I wish they hadn't happened. I wish I hadn't thought in such a way.'

'But you *did* think that way. It's a pointless waste of time wishing anything else. You were born into a long Ancestral line of thinking. The ideas that you had were passed on to you from those that walked the earth before. The thing is, you're here now. You must have learned on your journey that the life you led was designed in such a way that you were forced to confront those beliefs.'

'Yes, my son Charlie fell in love with Thandi and that event caused all my fears and prejudices to be brought to the surface. Previous to the two of them falling in love, I wasn't aware that I was so judgemental and controlling. On the

plantation and amongst the English community in Natal, I was considered a liberal in my thinking. I got along with all the different cultures that lived amongst us. I was proud of my reputation.'

'But then Charlie forced you to see that this idea of yourself wasn't real. It was only a mask that covered up what was really hidden in your mind.' Mahendra steered Elspeth to some rock seating under a grouping of small shady trees. 'You see, Mahendra went on, 'we all have our role. In our lifetimes, there are those of us who play the victim, those of us who play the aggressor, and those of us who play a myriad of other roles that make up the drama of our existence. Whatever roles we play, they are set up so that we confront who we are. You and everyone else in your life are connected through the soul, and together we engage in certain dramas so that the mind can be freed of its damaging ideas.'

Elspeth studied Mahendra. 'So you are saying that because Charlie and Thandi fell in love, I was forced by circumstances to act out my hidden feelings of superiority? I had to do it because how else could I see it was there? I wasn't honest enough or didn't have the awareness of who I was previous to that.'

'You've got it right,' Mahendra continued, 'but you didn't see who you were when you acted out. You just indulged your prejudices and sense of superiority and played out your role in the drama.'

Elspeth thought about it for a moment before adding, 'And in not comprehending my mistakes at the time, I forced others around me to confront the ideas that were hurtful to other human beings. Charlie and Thandi became different people after I did what I did. I suppose that if I hadn't expressed my beliefs I wouldn't have helped others to learn.'

'Over time, you also have been forced to confront those beliefs yourself. Your own turn to change came in its own time. You have more positive ways of thinking now, am I right?' Mahendra smiled at Elspeth.

'You are right,' she smiled back. Elspeth still had questions for Mahendra. 'So are you saying that there are no victims?' 'It certainly *appears* that there are victims, and we definitely *feel* like victims. The whole point is that we *do* feel the pain at the deepest level. There's no other way that we get to give up our beliefs. For some reason, we human beings cling to our ideas, no matter how damaging they might be. We mistakenly believe that without them we would die. It takes great pain before we give them up.'

'That's certainly a weight of guilt off my shoulders. I played a role, people healed, and then I went on to my own healing. It's as simple as that.'

Mahendra looked closely at Elspeth. 'I learned that guilt is a wasted emotion. We just have to understand that we are all interconnected and play a role in helping ourselves and each other. When we see that, the healing process is complete.'

'Well, thank you Mahendra,' Elspeth declared, 'thank you for playing your role in my own healing.'

## 16

A number of shots rang out amidst a mad commotion in which two of the Whites hit the ground. It was hard to see who'd been maimed since someone had cut the electricity supply in and around the main house. Hennie and his men had camped out at Frikkie's farm, many of them hidden in the trees on the dirt track that led to his homestead, yet somehow the Blacks had crept through its boundaries, determined to get into the house to extinguish the floodlights. So far, there were at least five Blacks lying writhing on the ground after Hennie's men had ambushed and laid into them with wooden clubs and the butts of their guns, but they were coming in at all entry points and Hennie's men hadn't been able to stop them all. Other Blacks had received gunshot wounds, but had been dragged off by their fellow men into the bush, disappearing from the battle scene. Both sides carried a wealth of ammunition and after about an hour of skirmish, there were still other Blacks running around looking for the Whites who'd retreated into the underbrush, lying in wait for those who dared venture through.

It was all out war, and it had been declared by the Blacks who laid claim to Frikkie's land. Hennie regarded Frikkie's land as his own since a large tract of the region belonged to the same family. It seemed obvious that once Hennie and Frikkie's land claims were settled, more Blacks would come to make their demands and soon there'd be nothing left, the rest of Hennie's family without a home or a continuing heritage. The police had ferreted out the perpetrators of the first assault on Frikkie's farm and had made some arrests amid threats from the claimants that they would send others to do their dirty work. Frikkie's farm, they said, would be taken over whether they were arrested or not. Land Affairs had sent in a representative to try to resolve the matter, but the Blacks weren't having any of it. It had taken Land Affairs so long to process the claims that the Blacks believed was an open and shut case, they no longer had any faith in the justice system of the country. Justice, they said, would be meted out in their own way.

Hennie and his men had heard the threats loud and clear and had called their group to action. They'd sent the women to stay with their families on neighbouring farms, and had camped out every night for a week at Frikkie's place, waiting for the Blacks to invade. Hennie and his men were certain they would come because the police had warned Frikkie to be on alert. The police had also warned Hennie's men though, that should there be vigilante action, more arrests would be made. While a police car had patrolled the area the first night of the arrests, they'd only watched the place during the day since then, and so Hennie and his men had set about their business of camping out during the nights that followed.

The Blacks had made their raid a week later, just as Hennie and his men were wondering if the threats had indeed been empty. Now, with the place in darkness, the commotion was subsiding. No-one was willing to take unnecessary risks. The Whites stayed hidden in the bush, while the Blacks retreated through the neighbouring *veld* beyond the homestead. After a while everything was quiet, except for the men who lay on the ground. Slowly, the Whites came out of their hiding places and went furtively to inspect the damage. There were five Black men on the ground. Three were unconscious, while two were clearly in agony. They'd been beaten and kicked almost to death. One White man shouted at the others who were inspecting the Black men. He was kneeling over the two Whites who'd fallen during the gun battle. They all rushed over. A few of the men lit up torches to get a good look at the men on the ground. It was Frikkie and Hennie. Frikkie was dead. Hennie was barely conscious. Shouts rang out into the night and an ambulance was called. When one hadn't arrived within the hour, they'd bundled Hennie into a pick-up truck and had driven him to the nearest hospital. It had been a long arduous night.



Fanie was disturbed. He looked across at the Dutch group in front of him, to those who would be concerned with this case. Dumisani had just informed him about what was going on with Hennie and his men. One of the Whites was dead and two of the Blacks had just died in hospital from their wounds. Many others were hurt. Fanie had asked Dumisani what they could do about the conflict.

'There is nothing that is to be done,' Dumisani had answered. 'This drama must play out. The people involved on both sides need to take this journey since right now, they believe conflict is the only way to resolve this issue. This is only the beginning for them in a process of confronting their damaging beliefs.'

The men and women who now sat before Fanie searched his face. 'What do you require from us, Fanie?' one of the men asked. 'Tell us and we'll do our best to oblige.'

Fanie told them what Dumisani had told him. 'You see, we cannot do anything about their issue. As bad as it is, they have to complete a cycle of learning. We have all been through the same cycle, which is why we are here today. But

Dumisani has also said that we can do something that will make the process easier for them, and that is we look at what we need to resolve in ourselves.'

'Yes,' a young woman offered, 'by us finding a point of resolution we affect their internal dynamic.'

'How do you mean?' asked a man standing close to Fanie.

'Remember,' the woman said, looking around at the men and women who sat with her, 'we are all connected at a soul level. What we do affects them, and vice versa. What we've heard about Hennie and his men has reached our ears because it tells us that at the deepest level where we are all connected, we too share their problem.'

'I don't see how,' the man said back. 'Haven't we taken this long journey so that we no longer think like Hennie and his kind?'

'Of course,' the woman replied. 'But don't forget, they think like they do because they have never, until now, had occasion to confront their beliefs. We are part of them, and we have to own the fact that we and people like us, passed on those beliefs to them. There *is* something we need to resolve, though I'm not sure how we will do it.'

Fanie scratched his chin and looked across the veld. His eyes fell on Mafana and his people way in the distance. The wind carried their laughter across the vast expanse of land on which many people were now camped. Something gripped Fanie.

'I think I have it,' he said, and he smiled at the group.



Mafana watched as the Dutch group approached his people; they walked with a solemn purpose. They were carrying something in sacks. As they reached the area of his encampment, Mafana called out to them.

'Welcome!' He gave a huge grin. 'You're just in time for a spit braai! The meat is almost ready, and we've got plenty of pap on the go. Got someone to do us a rich gravy too, so you've just arrived at South Africa's favourite restaurant!' Mafana's good humour relaxed the Dutch group. They smiled as they took in the odours of the meat turning on the spit, and inhaled the vivid aroma of the thick gravy made from its rich juices. They watched in hungry delight as women stirred butter into the thick white maize that was cooked to the consistency of potato mash.

'Come and sit,' Mafana offered. People from the African delegation jumped up to make room for their unexpected guests. 'It looks like you have things to talk about. Let's have an *indaba*, a meeting, before we start on the food, shall we?'

The two groups took a while before they settled down to talk. They sat amongst each other, huddled up. Fanie started talking.

'I'm sure Dumisani has informed you of the very recent trouble that has taken place in Mpumalanga,' Fanie looked at Mafana.

'Yes,' Mafana answered. 'It is of great concern to us. Previous to dinner preparations we had just been discussing our role in this drama.'

'Which is why we are here with you now, Mafana,' Fanie replied. 'I believe we need to resolve this together.'

'We're listening,' Mafana said, looking at the faces of his own people.

'This conflict with Hennie and his men exists though time. It is *our* conflict.' Fanie waved his hand across the mixed group of Dutch and African people. 'We wish to own our role in the situation and we wish that you hear us out.'

Mafana nodded.

'The same land that is being fought over now,' Fanie continued, 'belonged to a lot of you African people sitting here now, and it belonged to your Ancestors, too. My people came to this continent in search of a home and settled on your land. We drove you out and we believed that you had no rights to the land because you were somehow inferior. We took everything you had and left you with a legacy of slavery and hard living for generations to come.' Fanie paused before continuing.

'Not that we have not already resolved this part of the issue. We would not be here in this place with the other delegations if that were not the case. We already acknowledge the foolish nature of those beliefs that we held. We are far beyond those now, as we know that you are. What we want to do today is offer something as a way forward. It is the gift of the Dutch delegation to the African delegation.'

Fanie looked around at two of the men who brought forward two large sacks.

'In these sacks are the seeds that represent new energy, new life, new ideas. We were farmers, as were you, and new growth is what we understand. These seeds represent who we are now as a group.' Fanie looked around at his own people. 'We have come to love others of different races in the same way we love our own. This way of thinking is the fruit of a long and hard journey. God took us onto the battlefield where we confronted our own ugliness and it was a painful thing indeed. We weeded our minds of old, fruitless ideas and sowed again in new soil. These seeds that we offer you are seeds of love, of togetherness, of finding new paths that benefit all of us.'



The two men placed the seeds in front of Mafana.

'We ask,' Fanie continued, 'that you accept them as a symbol of our movement along the journey of life, of our mutual evolution through time. When these seeds come to fruition, you will ingest us as part of you. Our souls will meet across the divide that the past has created within us.'

Mafana and his people were quiet for a moment. Then Mafana put his arm around Fanie and began singing softly. The rest of Mafana's people followed in chorus as they embraced the Dutch who sat amongst them. Mafana and his people had accepted Fanie's gift. After many centuries, the souls of these two groups of people discovered in this moment that they'd never been separated at all. This was the last stage of this long journey. They'd found each other again.



Megan's back hurt. Sitting on the floor of the *Ndumba* was definitely not comfortable, so she shifted to the crate with the grubby cushion nailed into it. Ajay watched her with amusement. He sat cross-legged, sometimes shifting so that he was seated on his heels. Laughing, he'd said his Hindu worshipping days at the temple as a child had tempered his legs. They could bend in any direction. Megan thought his legs were so long and wiry, one could make a knot out of them. Tumelo started speaking and the others went quiet. Megan picked up her writing materials and switched on her Dictaphone. She was here to record the meeting as part of the book that it was her destiny to write. The box containing Ajay's Peace Pipe lay on the earthen floor besides Tumelo. He picked it up carefully.

'This,' he said slowly, 'will only be of value to our Ancestral work if Ajay shifts his awareness from his present state of perception. This Peace Pipe contains his Spirit, but it cannot be shared at our ceremony until he thinks in harmony with our Ancestors. At this moment, there is still much work to be done.' He placed the pipe back down beside him and paused for a while, allowing silence to rest between all those in the hut.

'You must realise one important thing before we begin,' Tumelo said as he sat opposite Megan and Ajay, 'and that is, the world only exists in the way that it appears in our minds. There is no one true reality. There is only a world that we see and experience through our ideas.'

Tumelo threw his herbs on the small fire and aromatic smoke filled the air making Ajay and Megan light-headed, yet remarkably clear and focused. Nomusa sat apart from these two, close to Tumelo. Tumelo's mind filled with the words of Dumisani.

'Your own judgement of a person standing before you reflects the ideas that exist in your mind. If you analyse your thoughts and are very honest with yourself, you will find that what you think about others, is actually what you think of yourself at a very deep, sometimes unconscious level. When you analyse your own behaviours, you'll find that you *are* indeed what you think of that other person, albeit in a different way. If, for example, you have a tendency to believe that people who engage in doing good deeds have ulterior motives, you will find that if you search yourself, *you* have a propensity towards doing things for personal gain. You can only think about others, what you are capable of yourself. The same goes for any situation you find yourself in. The judgements that you have about the situation can only come about through the ideas that lie obvious, or hidden, in your mind but they are not necessarily true, even though you may feel absolutely sure about them. Remember that all of your thoughts come about because of the way in which *you* think.' Tumelo paused before going on. 'The way to change our experience of the world is to change our ideas, but that is a hard thing to do for human beings because we arrogantly believe that our ideas are right and real and true.'

Tumelo sat quietly for a while. The fire crackled as Nomusa began singing softly while occasionally throwing small wood sticks to keep it burning. It was her job to keep the fire burning, the herbs smouldering, and to help create the space for Ajay's awareness to expand. Smoke rose gently through the ventilation chimney and crept furtively around the guests as they pondered Tumelo's words. He looked up at Ajay.

'Tell us the story of your heritage,' Tumelo said, 'for to know your Ancestors is to know who *you* are. They gave you your perception of the world. It is your job to identify your ideas and your task to finally admit that the way you interpret the world is completely subjective. What you see is not necessarily there. It is up to you to alter your experience by changing the nature of your ideas.'

Ajay cleared his throat and looked to the ceiling, wondering where to start. 'I am Indian predominantly,' he began slowly, 'but on occasion through the generations, we married with the Cape Malays. On both sides, my family came to South Africa as slaves. Not long after Jan van Riebeck set up a Dutch settlement in the Cape in the 1600's my people were taken as slaves from India to do the domestic work and to perform the hard labour on the farms. A number of Indians actually arrived here as free people, but were sold into slavery by the Dutch when they arrived.' Ajay looked up at Tumelo who nodded for him to continue.

'The other branch of my family are originally from Indonesia. Today, they are what we now call the Cape Malays, or to others they're called Cape Muslims. These were the first people to introduce Islam to South Africa. The first Indonesian arrivals were transported by the Dutch East India Company, and a lot of these slaves were political dissidents and Muslim religious leaders who'd been arrested by the Dutch for opposing their colonialism in Indonesia. I often wonder if this is where my political genes came from.' Ajay smiled. 'I've done some recent research on these slaves and contrary to popular belief, the number of the Indian slaves more or less matched those who came from Indonesia. And further, the Indians and Indonesians were not treated any better than the Blacks. All of us were treated with equally harsh cruelty by the Whites.'

Tumelo studied Ajay closely. 'You are fixated on this country's history of slavery. This is the source of your own pain. You've done research recently? Why?'

Ajay shrugged. 'I'm interested in the past. I'm interested in where I've come from.'

'How does it make you feel when you look back on such difficulties?'

'I feel angry, I suppose.'

'You feel angry even now, even since things have changed for the better?' Tumelo leaned forward, his eyes questioning. 'I don't know if things in South Africa haven't just shifted on the surface. It seems things are really just the same as they were, except the players have taken on different roles. Sometimes I wonder if the Whites still don't see themselves as superior. I see domestic workers and gardeners still being treated like slaves, and if you go to the more rural areas, you'd imagine apartheid still to be in existence sixteen years later. I see it everywhere I go. The Blacks in prominent positions act like White people and behave in a superior way to their own less fortunate people. I see that Blacks are too eager to lose their own identity to that of the Whites. The Coloureds still have no identity, the Blacks playing the racist card with them. The Coloureds can never be Black enough, just as in the bitter past they were not White enough for acceptance. The Indians are only interested in making money; the New Dispensation has just opened up the playing field for their greed. I see most government people as self-interested and ready to milk the system at every opportunity. I just can't see that we have a fair system going on. I see the crime rates as having risen because of this. It doesn't seem to be what we fought for.'

'You are still fighting?' Tumelo asked.

'I'm disappointed, is how you could put it,' Ajay answered.

'It looks to me as if you are still stuck in the past,' Tumelo countered. 'For you, everything is the same way as when you started out during the Struggle. The war is still in you. You see the same pictures because you still think the same way. Your original ideas remain with you, no matter what you have been through. If the original ideas are there, it stands that you will see the same story in any picture that is presented to you.'

'I see the same pictures,' Ajay retorted, 'because that's exactly what is happening.'

'Ah,' Tumelo said putting up his hand, 'this is where I stop you and ask that you think about what you are saying. I request that you attempt to take on a different perspective.'

'Try me,' Ajay said, adjusting his position on the floor.

Tumelo resumed his silence. It was important that Ajay allow his mind to quieten down. Like any human being, he was too eager to defend his ideas. The hut was quiet for a long while, as Nomusa kept the fire going and spread the herbs.

'Think about what I am saying,' Tumelo finally ventured. 'The way you see the world is an illusion, created by your ideas.'

'I'm just seeing what's there,' Ajay countered.

'You believe in the idea of superiority versus inferiority,' Tumelo insisted. 'It is still ingrained in you that you are on the losing side of this polarity, that somehow you are inferior. This idea is part of the lens through which you see the world. You also have strong emotions that go with the idea and they help to influence what you see. The ideas of the mind create a very powerful force. In order to sustain themselves they pull your awareness to events that will reinforce their existence.'

'How so?' Ajay focussed on Tumelo.

'Your mind will seek to reinforce its ideas. It will, therefore, only see things that validate an idea. Let me give you an example; because the hidden sense of inferiority governs you, *that* is where your focus will be. The mind is forced to interpret everything it sees as mirroring its ideas in some way. Whenever you witness an interaction between Black and White people, for instance, you will only ever experience it in a racist framework. You will judge the interaction as being a good one or a bad one in precisely these terms. Because you have a hidden feeling of inferiority, your mind will seek to see it in any interaction. It may present itself in other situations too. It could be that someone makes a joke with you about your level of intelligence being rather low and you become offended. Perhaps others come to see you as an overly sensitive person because of incidences like this.' Tumelo stopped talking for a moment to allow Ajay to digest his words.

'At this moment,' Tumelo continued, 'you are unable to see any interaction between Black and White for what it might *really* be. It could be, and it would be right off your radar, that an interaction could have some other dynamic entirely; something else that you can't imagine could be going on between these people. And you can't imagine what else an interaction could be because you do not possess the idea to see it for what it really is.'

Ajay didn't know how to counter. He was trying to absorb what Tumelo was saying.

'When you don't let go of an idea,' Tumelo continued, 'you will repeat the past over and over because it is those *ideas* that create the same circumstances.'

Ajay frowned. 'So our ideas help create our experience.'

'Yes. There are situations that take place every day in life; how you interpret the events will depend on the ideas that exist in your mind. For example, I once had a lady who came here and whose adult son died in a car accident. She was convinced that he brought about the accident because he was not enamoured by life and that he deliberately placed himself in harm's way by drinking large quantities of alcohol. Her husband on the other hand believed that their son was simply irresponsible and that the young man never believed he could get hurt in a drink driving incident. The couple, you see, have very different belief systems. The woman believes that life is hard, that only a few really survive to make a good living, and as a result, throughout her life has harboured suicidal thoughts. She saw her son's death through her own belief framework. Her husband has very rigid viewpoints in terms of what is responsible or irresponsible behaviour. He interpreted his son's death in this regard. What the truth is, no-one can know, because the young man is not here to tell us the truth of what was in his mind. Yet each of his parents can spend hours pointing to the evidence of why they are both right. Their minds will only rest on the things that validate their ideas.'

Ajay thought back to a documentary that he'd watched with his family on TV. It was an interesting topic, covering the subject of reincarnation. A lapsed Hindu, Ajay was interested in how one group of people were going to prove the validity of the belief system, while another intended to invalidate it. Ultimately, both sides had presented enormous evidence to prove their cases right. Both sides won in their respective arguments for and against reincarnation. What Tumelo was saying was right. Depending on what we believed, the mind would find ways to keep that belief system alive. It seemed to be an unconscious mechanism with which human beings were not in touch.

Ajay looked up at Tumelo. 'How do we then go about identifying and changing our ideas? It seems that unless we become aware of them, they own us. They govern how we see and experience things in this world.'

'You are right. Unless we identify our ideas, we are slaves to them. The way forward is to examine our judgements of people and situations. It is a natural thing for us to pass judgement on others, and when we do so, we are able to see the contents of our minds. But we must always remember that those judgements that we pass may not be real because we can only ever see the world through our own ideas. Every evaluation of every person or situation is an evaluation of the self.'

This session had been a testing one; one that challenged all of Ajay's thinking processes. He had a lot to think about. He leaned forward and picked up the Peace Pipe. He wondered when others would be ready to receive his gift.

Sipho stood in the doorway to Baba's room, looking in at his ailing father. His younger son Adam stood by his side, clutching his arm. Storm stood back in the hallway, his eyes narrowed and suspicious. 'Is he dying, Daddy?' Adam asked. Baba stirred from his slumber, lifting an arm. Siphos looked down at Adam. 'Go quickly,' he whispered. 'Get Aunt Sekai.'

Adam disappeared and found himself in the small kitchen. His mother Jeanette sat at a round ceramic table with Desmond, while Sekai fussed over some pots on the stove.

'Aunt Sekai, grandfather has woken. My dad says you should come.'

Sekai rinsed off her hands quickly and dried them on her apron. Jeanette looked at Desmond and raised her eyes as if to ask *what now?*

Sekai looked at her father. 'Baba? Can I get you anything?' She peered down at him and looked at Siphos for a moment. 'Baba, Siphos here. You were expecting him?'

Baba lifted his arm again. His eyes opened as wide as he could get them. They were swollen and bulging, a frightful sight as they seeped water from their outer edges. Baba spoke.

'Where is he?' he croaked. 'Bring him here.'

Siphos walked to the edge of the bed, indicating to Adam and Storm that they stay right where they were in the doorway. Baba looked up at his son. 'So you came to see your *real* kin at last. You stayed away a long time.'

'You wouldn't see me,' Siphos reminded him gently.

'Because you broke the chain in our heritage!' Baba snapped.

'No, Baba, *you* tried to break it. Only it can't be broken, no matter how you might think otherwise.'

Baba tried to lift his head. His bulging eyes blazed. 'How dare you come here with your impudence! You poison our family line and then blame me?'

'My wife and children are not poison Baba. They are gifts to our heritage. It is your *mind* that contains the poison. You'd better tell me why you called me here because I didn't come here for this, and I won't listen to your insults against my family.'

Baba slumped back in his pillow, silenced. His eyes moved around in different directions. To Siphos he looked manic.

'This country,' Baba wheezed, 'must be for the Africans. It was taken by the White people once and they ruled over us all. Now, we have back what is ours. We must do what we can to keep our African nature, keep ourselves pure. You, and people who do the same as you, are ruining us. The Coloured people of this country are half-breeds who don't belong with us. In the past they were treated better than us by the Whites, and they thought themselves better than us. And now, you have children who are the same.'

'Is this what you called me here for Baba?' Siphos was incensed. Adam appeared at his side from the doorway.

'Grandfather,' Adam said now. 'I don't believe I am better than you,' he came closer to the bed, studying the old man closely. He was really very ugly. Baba's eyes rolled.

'I belong in this country.' Adam continued, 'I have White and Black blood. My mother taught me that I am special because of this. I have Ancestors on both sides. I am lucky, and so are you.'

Baba looked up at Siphos as if to suggest he ought to do something about his son's insolence. Siphos just looked at his young son proudly.

'My father is African and my mother is English. They haven't spoiled your blood. They've made it stronger in me and Storm.'

Baba hurled himself onto his side. He summoned up his strength. 'Sekai! Get these people out of here!'

Standing behind Siphos, Sekai stepped forward. 'No Baba. You called them here to insult them? No, I will not ask them to leave. This is their home. You will listen to their story too. You have no choice.' With that, Sekai left the room, pushing past Storm who was now standing in the doorway. He came to the bedside slowly, his mouth trying to form the words he wanted to speak.

'You're a hateful old man,' he spat. 'Why don't you die with your poison? I can see its killing you. Die, die now.'

Baba gasped at the older boy. Siphos rushed to grab Storm's arm. Storm stared at his father defiantly.

'Why do you listen to this stupid old man? He insults us.' Storm's eyes were brimming with tears.

'No,' Adam said quietly. 'We must make him see he is wrong. He must not die like this. He must die knowing the truth that we are part of him. It's important.'

'Why should he know? It's enough we know.' Storm glared at his younger brother.

'Because he's our grandfather,' Adam replied. 'He'll be an Ancestor when he's dead, and he'll have to help us. How can he help us if he hates us? He'll be in another place altogether, helping people who don't want Whites and Blacks to be happy together.'

'I'm not going to die yet!' Baba sputtered.

'Where'd you get all this stuff from?' Siphó asked his son, totally ignoring Baba.

'I had some dreams about it.' Adam said nonchalantly. 'I told mom about the dreams.'

'What dreams? When did you tell her?' Siphó was accustomed to his son's psychic nature, but he'd never heard the topic of Ancestors brought up by him before.

Adam looked at Baba who was staring fiercely at him.

'I dreamt that a man came to me and spoke in my ear. He said grandfather wished we were dead because he couldn't understand that having White people in his family was a gift.'

'It's no gift!' Baba coughed and spluttered as his yell caught in his throat.

Storm leaned over the old man. 'You're a curse, you ugly idiot.' Siphó rolled up his eyes and shook his head.

'Stop, Storm,' Adam said to his brother. 'We have to help.'

'I hate him,' Storm retreated back to the doorway, his face alight with anger. Siphó glared at him.

'Go on, Adam,' Siphó said, still staring at Storm.

'The man said that when the blood of people in South Africa mixed, it meant that our souls were joining up again. We were not going to be alone any more. The man said that in the whole world, when we stay only in our races, then we are lonely because we always think we are better than each other. When we mix, then we are kind of together. That's what the man said. I told mom about it, and we talked about it for a bit.'

'What did mom say about it all?' Siphó wondered why he hadn't been told this.

'She said perhaps it was just a dream because I was worried about visiting grandfather.'

That made sense to Siphó. Jeanette was too practical to really entertain all of Adam's psychic mutterings.

'But dad, the man in my dreams has visited me a lot. I saw him by the caves.' Adam looked over at his brother. 'I told Storm about it.'

Storm shrugged at his father. 'That's what he said,' Storm said sulkily. 'I didn't see anyone.'

Storm, Siphó knew, always defended his brother. He would never speak against him in matters such as this. He believed Adam when he talked about the invisible people that he saw. This type of thing had been going on since Adam was able to talk. Storm had an unspoken respect for Adam's psychic wanderings, a respect that Jeanette and Siphó were yet to develop. Baba grunted and Adam went closer to him. The young boy thought the old man smelled funny.

'Coloured people are closer to God, because it means that the Black and White souls are coming together. You are lucky to have us grandfather.'

Baba said nothing. He was tired, and it didn't look like these people were going away. He closed his eyes. He couldn't cope with anymore. The kid didn't stop talking, and it didn't look like their father had spent much time teaching either child manners. He'd sort it out when he woke up again. He huddled into his pillow. They'd better get the hint and make out of here.



In the kitchen, Sekai was talking to Jeanette and Desmond.

'I don't want you to go,' she said, looking at Jeanette. 'Why don't you stay overnight? I've got some mattresses out the back and we can put them on the kitchen floor. You and Siphó can have my bed. I'll sleep here with the boys and Desmond. Please.'

Desmond groaned inwardly. How was it that he hadn't just got *stuck* with the Perfect Family, but was now *glued* to this unlikely lot? He wanted to get back to the hotel where he was comfortable. And what's more, he wanted to dump the damn bones and be off back to Cape Town where he belonged.

'Well it *is* getting late,' Jeanette said slowly, 'and it's really dark on the roads. It's not safe if you think about it. Some of the roads on the way here had signs up saying they were popular hijack points. I would prefer to stay. You wouldn't mind, would you Desmond? It would be good for Siphó and his father.'

Desmond could hardly argue. They'd taken him out the whole week sightseeing. He'd found himself embroiled with this family who must have thought him a charity case, what with him being on his own. He hadn't had an opportunity to go back to the caves because he didn't have transport. And he couldn't hire a car because he didn't have a license. He could drive, but he'd never taken a driving test, and like most things he did, he was usually on the roads illegally. It wouldn't look good if he complained about staying with Sekai, and he might need a lift back to the *Cradle of Humankind* to bury the bones. He was angling to get them to take him back. He'd made a few hints that he'd like to take another look and they'd seemed only too pleased to oblige. There was one thing in the way, though. Only the Lord knew how he was going to hide the skeleton if they did take him back.

'It's fine with me,' he said in as cheery a voice as he could muster. He hoped the curse of the mysterious skeleton hadn't set in. Aunt Darla would love that.

'Good, well then that's settled, Sekai said happily. She scuttled off to fetch the mattresses.



'So what do you feel about being Coloured, Desmond?,' Jeanette asked him. They were all staring at him across the table. Sekai, Siphon, the boys and Jeanette. Siphon had come into the kitchen with the boys in tow complaining about the old man. Adam, apparently, had done his prophet thing. Desmond didn't know what to do with the kid. He always had something dreadfully sensible to say and Desmond sometimes felt like an idiot around him. With Jeanette's question and with them all staring at him like this, he felt like a cornered animal. He shrugged.

'I don't know man,' he said. 'I'm just Coloured. What can I say?'

'But you must have some cultural paradigms bulldozed into your head. You know, your family and friends have an issue with being Coloured, right?'

Jesus. Jeanette just didn't know how to speak in English a lot of the time. Desmond wondered what they wanted from him.

'Well, we don't fit in anywhere,' he tried. 'We're not Black, we're not White. We just don't fit, that's all. We feel like a messed up race. It goes back a long way, I suppose.'

'There, you see!' Jeanette actually looked pleased with what Desmond had just said. 'That's the Coloured position in South African society.'

She looked at Adam. 'Coloureds in this country had it hard when it came to their identity. In the Cape, the Dutch had relationships with the Khoisan people and created what was called the Griqua Coloureds. In Natal, the British and Zulu people came together and created another mix of Coloureds. The Griquas far outnumbered the others.'

Jeanette turned to face Siphon. 'The Coloured people themselves did not necessarily identify with these labels; some called themselves *Black* or *Khoisan* or just plain *South African*. In the past it was the imperial and apartheid governments that categorized them as Coloured in order to maintain divisions between people and maintain a society focussed on race. In any case, other ethnic groups also saw them as a group apart. For some reason, the Natal Coloureds, or those that had English heritage, were treated far better than the Griqua, and as a result many Griqua began to call themselves Coloureds during the apartheid era. There were certain advantages in becoming classified as Coloured. For example, Coloureds did not have to carry a pass, which was introduced in order to limit the movements of Black people. Because of this new way to identify, a large percentage of the Coloureds who were largely Griqua, have now lost touch with their Khoisan heritage.'

'Which explains their sense of displacement,' Siphon finished. 'The Blacks also saw them as taking a superior position.'

'Exactly,' Jeanette agreed. 'Would you know if you had Griqua heritage Desmond?'

'I think we do,' Desmond answered, 'but I don't know anything about it. We don't talk about such things. I think my grandmother mentioned Griquas a few times when we were growing up, but she died when I was quite young and that was the end of it.'

Desmond wished they'd change the subject. He didn't want to be the centre of attention. He didn't know much about history and it made him feel stupid not to know a lot about his own culture. He only knew about the gangs he vainly tried to steer clear of on Mitchell's Plain. These gangster Coloureds tried to create a rather grisly sense of family, they'd certainly created a strange violent cultural heritage, but a person didn't live long amongst them. They weren't anything to be proud of.

'I can see why your father is hurt,' Jeanette said to Siphon. 'But the past is the past. Everyone did what they had to do to survive. I like what Adam had to say about Coloureds. A fusion of souls, or something like that.' She smiled at her son.

'But the Coloureds have to learn to see it that way. You can't see yourself as a lost race, Desmond,' Siphon argued. 'You have to bring back a pride in your heritage. On both sides, that is. You have to acknowledge it.'

Desmond looked at the two young boys. They seemed alright, without any hang-ups. From what Siphon had reported, the boys had received a good education in who they were. They were proud of their Ancestors. They didn't obsess about the bad things, but focussed instead on what was good. Desmond couldn't help thinking about it. He had at least two of South Africa's racial groups running through his blood. He didn't know much about them. He'd been brought up in the Cape Flats, forced to focus on making a living. Mostly his family and his fellow residents lived hand to mouth, which was why he was an armed robber. It paid more handsomely than labouring. Suddenly, Desmond felt low. He was an *armed robber*. Sitting amongst these people who had so much to say for themselves, he felt ashamed. It was the first time he'd felt this way. And here they were, telling him to be proud of who he was. Well, what they didn't know was how far he had to go on *that* score. Something in Desmond was linking his life with his disowned heritage. If he really found out who he

was and honoured it, would it make a difference to how he felt about himself? Would he find some pride that would stop him from stealing? Desmond was disturbed by his own thoughts. Something was shifting inside and it felt uncomfortable. He looked at the boys again and saw a purity he yearned for. Maybe, he thought. Maybe he could change something in his life. Desmond sighed. Maybe, maybe, maybe.





# 19

For a moment, the world was silent and white; Hennie was enveloped in a soft cloud-like cocoon in which there was no sound or visual imagery. He floated in the quiet emptiness before suddenly feeling the sensation of hurtling at top speed through a dark tunnel towards a golden light. As he began to slow down, he saw in the luminous glow a number of figures waiting. Eventually Hennie came to a standstill at the perimeter of an indescribable golden radiance that permeated the space in which he stood, and he felt a strange calm and an incredible joy that he'd never before experienced. Figures moved out of the light and surrounded him. He knew these people, yet did not recognise their faces. Hennie was transfixed by the brilliance of everything around him and watched as the figures moved in slow motion. In the light, amongst figures of multi-coloured light waves, he saw Frikkie. In an instant, Hennie knew. Frikkie had passed over and now belonged on the other side. Hennie felt no sadness, only an absolute ecstatic knowing that Frikkie had come home. But what had happened to *him*, to Hennie?

The people around him were moving more normally to Hennie's eye now, and their forms were becoming clearer. In fact, the brilliance of the light was fading and Hennie found himself standing in a *veld* with many other people. For a moment, he was light-headed. He was back in the world, yet not quite of it. His body felt light, almost unreal and the people that surrounded him radiated a faint aura of opaque light that validated the fact that this place was not quite located in reality as *he* knew it. He looked around. A man stepped forward and held out his hand.

'Welcome Hennie. My name is Fanie.' Hennie took his hand, and Fanie held it as he spoke. 'Hennie, I want you to meet some people. You are here because you have some choices to make.'

Hennie stared at the man in front of him. 'Don't I know you?' he asked. 'Where am I?' Hennie's eyes scouted the place. It had a familiarity about it, though he knew for sure he hadn't been here before. It was the people. He was familiar with them. There were people of all races here, and there were dwellings of different types. It resembled a camping site with lots of makeshift homes. Although not every eye was on him, Hennie somehow knew his presence was held by all who stood in this *veld*.

'You are in a different time and space, Hennie' Fanie smiled, 'You have been involved in an unfortunate shooting incident, but your body will recover. In physical human terms, you are unconscious, but this experience that you find yourself in is no dream. It is very real. You will return to your body very soon, but first there are some things that you must hear. You've entered here through the portal of your soul. We are those to whom your soul is connected. We are your Ancestors.' Fanie took Hennie's arm and led him through the crowd of people to a man who was seated within a circle of low-lying rocks.

'Meet Dumisani,' Fanie said waving his arm in the Black man's direction. Hennie looked down at the regal figure and instantly felt a serene wisdom emanate from him. It felt to Hennie that the supreme knowledge of the entire Universe pulsed in waves from this man's body and Hennie wanted to bask in his presence and soak up the wisdom of all understanding.

'Hello Hennie,' Dumisani smiled. Hennie sat opposite this man without being asked to do so. He wanted...no, he *needed* to be in his presence.

'Hennie,' Dumisani started, 'you are here because you have a dilemma to resolve. There is a storm raging inside of you, and this is because you are caught in a struggle between the mind and the soul. In your life, change has presented itself to you, and you resist it because you believe you are protecting the interests of your Ancestors.'

Hennie knew that this man was talking about the land claim issue.

'I don't know what else to do,' Hennie said meekly. In this man's presence, his problems seemed so far away and meaningless.

'It is hard for you,' Dumisani said. 'It is hard because you are paying for the transgressions of your forefathers.'

Hennie looked down at the ground. 'Why is it that I must pay? I didn't steal the land. I inherited it. It doesn't seem fair that I lose my home and my heritage.'

'You and your Ancestors are connected, Hennie,' Dumisani explained. 'They passed on their ideas to you, and so your Ancestors live in you, and you in them. Within you is every idea that they held. In your sense of heritage, which is a very powerful one, you hold them in high esteem; you honour the struggle they undertook, a struggle that involved behaviours that hurt others. In so doing, you inherit the collective personality. By holding on to these ideas, you hold yourself and your Ancestors accountable to their past actions.'

'I was brought up a certain way,' Hennie complained, 'I have my beliefs. It is just who I am. I don't know how to be any other way.' In spite of what he was saying, Hennie's mind held a certain clarity just by being in Dumisani's presence. It was clear to him, sitting in this *veld*, that he was neither superior nor inferior to anyone. In fact here, the concept just did not seem to exist, and what's more, he felt an indescribable connection to everyone here in this strange place.

'I don't want to hold anyone accountable for anything,' Hennie continued, 'I just want to keep my home and honour my heritage.'

'You must understand something,' Dumisani explained. 'Your land, your home, your heritage are all symbols of the past and symbols of the present. They are symbolic of the way that you think now, and the way your Ancestors thought. The New South Africa cannot exist on the foundations of these symbols. New symbols of hope must be built, hope for all who live in this country.'

'So where does that leave me and my kind?' Hennie asked.

'It leaves you with the decision to change how you think. If you give up your land,' Dumisani explained, 'and move on to another location without changing your ideas, you will always be in a position where the past will haunt you. Giving up the land is not an answer to the problem. That may or may not happen, depending on the decision of other role-players in this drama. What is at stake here is the shifting of ideas that hurt both others and yourself.'

Hennie remembered the words of Oom Stompie, who'd said himself that the land was not the issue. Hennie hadn't really been convinced.

'By *not* changing your ideas, the past will always repeat itself,' Dumisani continued. 'It will not manifest in the same way because you may no longer have land that can be claimed, but you will find yourself caught up with others like yourself who lament the loss of what you will term *the good old days*, and who feel lost and displaced in the present. For those who currently experience these feelings, they never really live and they certainly do not contribute to the dynamic changes that can set the country free. Instead, they hold it back, for they are also part of the energy that moves this country forward. There is no-one that does *not* have an influence in this country. Whether we possess negative or positive attitudes, whether we contribute or not, we *all* have an influence. This is why it is important that we work consistently towards a common goal.'

'I don't know how to change my ideas,' Hennie protested. 'I believe in God. I have a religion that has told me I am superior to Blacks, and in so doing it has suggested that what we as Afrikaaners did was not entirely wrong. How do I go against those fundamental teachings?'

'How are you feeling here, amongst us?' Dumisani indicated to the multi-racial crowd that sat around listening to Dumisani's teachings. He looked at Hennie for an answer.

'Everything feels different here. I don't feel the same way as before. I *know* I am not superior, and I feel as if I am with my family, and yet we are all of different cultures,' Hennie was looking around him. 'But what happens when I'm back with my own people again, people who have the same ideas as me? Will I revert back to that way of thinking? Will the effects of this experience leave me? And where does that leave my relationship with God?'

'Firstly,' Dumisani answered, 'change is not easy so don't expect it to be because you will only disappoint yourself. Change is a process, it is not an event. What you feel here today is a result of being with a large group of your Ancestors who have taken an incredible healing journey. Everybody here has been where you are now in your mind. Everyone here has healed that old way of thinking. You feel this healing because you are amongst us. Going back to your life, you will still possess your old ideas. What will be different is that you will have gained a new perspective just by being here.'

Dumisani took a deep breath, then continued. 'Acknowledging that our ideas need to be discarded leaves us feeling a bit lost because we've identified with them for so long. But if you work at it by looking for the evidence around you that your ideas are not real, you will more comfortably replace them with more empowering ones. But you have to *want* to do it; you have to want to *look* for the evidence, which will always be there for you to find.'

Hennie frowned. 'It seems so obvious in this moment that no-one is superior to another. But how come God has declared otherwise?'

'And that is my second point,' Dumisani stated firmly. 'Where you find ambiguity, where you see conflict of ideas, you find human conditioning. You will never find God there and He will be offended to find you have accredited hurtful ideas to Him. You only have to look at those people you think you are superior to, to see you are wrong. If you look for inferiority, you will find it, for the mind can interpret things in any way that it wants. But if you look for equality, you will find that too. The mind will find any evidence it needs to support an idea. It just needs to be in worship of an idea to do that.' Dumisani paused. He looked searchingly at Hennie.

'God has been exploited by human beings ever since time began,' Dumisani continued. 'It is the sin of the human race to deliberately bring God down to our level of inhumane belief. To imagine that God has made any creature to be superior to another is a man-made idea. This concept is not one of love and is therefore not one of God's.'

Dumisani leaned towards Hennie. 'We have brought you here today to give you this wisdom. It gives you the gift of choice. Your Ancestors believed at one time that they were superior and that God sanctioned their inhumane way of thinking. It is not just the way of your Ancestors, but the way of all human beings. My Ancestors shared the same problem at one time, and some still carry the burden of such damaging ideas. Now, many of them have changed. They have been on a sacred journey through which many of their ideas have been challenged. Those who brought about a shift in their ideas are here with us today. It is in their interests, as it is in yours, that you challenge your own ideas.'

Although your Ancestors have brought about a shift in the way that they think, they are still accountable to the past through you because they passed on your ideas to you. You need to hear their story.’  
Hennie felt a hand on his shoulder. It was Fanie. He’d come to share his story with Hennie.



Fanie sat in the circle with Hennie and Dumisani. ‘Hennie, I understand your quandary,’ Fanie said sympathetically. ‘I was you once. We are of the same blood.’ He reached forward and touched Hennie’s arm. ‘You are a simple farmer. You care about the land. You love nature. Exploring the ideas of the mind is new to you. It is new territory that until now has been unexplored.’

Hennie’s heart was glad for he felt only love coming from the people around him. Whatever words they spoke of his own people, there was no recrimination; they only made factual statements of how they saw things to be.

‘I was a simple Trek Boer. I lived my life governed by my cultural values and by my religion. I was a good, honest person, who came from a stock of honest, hard-working people. We Boers are partially responsible for setting up the foundations of the infra-structure of South Africa as we know it today. We were pious, God-fearing people yet we owned slaves. When I was very young, I had a hand in trading the people who came from India.’ He held out his hand in the direction of a group of Indian people who sat a short distance away. ‘Those one-time slaves are some of the very people who sit amongst us today.’

Fanie continued. ‘It just seemed real to me that I was superior to others because that is what I was taught, and therefore, that is what I believed was real. I saw inferiority all around me because I was not looking for anything else. It was only the English colonialists in the Cape, who when they abolished slavery, placed the question of whether it was right or wrong, in our minds. Of course at the time, we saw the English colonialists in a negative light, which is why we began the Great Trek northwards. In my time, I killed Khoisan, warred with Xhosas and Zulus, all under the banner of superiority and entitlement, and worse still, under the sanctity of *God*. It just did not occur to me that my ideas were wrong, until I started my own holy pilgrimage. You see, I want to live in God’s kingdom. This is the ultimate journey that I wish to take. God’s kingdom is one without harmful ideas, and in this moment, I cannot take this journey. I still have to help my descendants erase some damaging ideas that I passed on to them. God does not judge me. He simply will not allow me entry until I ditch my ideas, and I can only do that completely through you. It is important to know that God has nothing to do with our transgressions against each other, which is why we often see he does not intervene in our business.’

Fanie paused for a moment.

‘The land claim problem has come to you now Hennie because it is time to explore the ideas of your mind. When ideas are not explored, they govern you and you are at their mercy. A damaging idea, even though directed at someone else, will always impact you in one way or another, at one time or another. I appeal to you to look at your problem and see the ideas that have caused it. In order to change them, look for evidence against them.’

Fanie went quiet. The crowd was quiet. All gave Hennie the space to absorb the wisdom he was being given. The sky was azure and occasionally a bird would fly overhead. The sun was high in the sky, yet Hennie did not feel its heat. Instead, he felt a warmth that emanated from somewhere within in. He loved being in this place. He was home with these people and he never wanted to leave.

Dumisani, who had sat silently with his eyes closed throughout the conversation, reached over and touched Hennie’s knees.

‘You now have a choice, Hennie,’ he said. ‘When you open your eyes to your world again, you will have an alternative view. You can choose the old way of thinking, or you can move into a new way. It will not always be easy for you, for history has shown that change is not an easy thing. But we have spoken to you, and we will let you go, knowing we have had our say. We will always be connected to you, no matter what choice you make.’

With that, the blue sky began to glow a golden hue that dazzled Hennie’s eyes. He felt the light-headedness return, and the people around him, including Fanie and Dumisani, began to dissolve in the radiance. The *veld* disappeared and he once again found himself in the soft cloud-like cocoon. He heard voices through the white haze. It was his wife and children. They were calling out to him. Hennie opened his eyes. He was in a hospital bed.

Charlie watched in awe as Thandi moved towards him. He stood alongside his mother and a small group from the English delegation. Looking at her, he could see that after all this time, she looked the same; she carried her chiselled facial beauty and tall body like a princess. Her head held high, and chin upturned slightly to one side, he remembered her haughty air of indifference and slightly condescending gaze. Not many in her own community had liked her; they'd known she consorted with a White boy and had dubbed her *The Black English Madam*. Many a time as they'd lain together hidden in the trees by the river, she'd cried with frustration at the way her own people had snubbed her. They believed she was full of pride with her affair with the plantation boss's son, and that she was headed for an almighty fall. Charlie hadn't known what to advise her. He knew they'd transgressed the social barriers with their love, but could never envision how it would all end up. They'd spoken idly of marriage and England, but in their youth and ignorance, their plans had no substance and were not founded on reality.

As she approached, Charlie detected a difference in Thandi. Something within her was brighter; there was an aura of joy that had replaced the deep melancholy he'd been so familiar with. Charlie could see the journey she'd taken had changed everything. Her eyes sparkled as she reached him, and her wide lips parted in a bright smile. She was flanked by Dumisani and a young girl of about ten years of age.

'Charlie,' Thandi murmured as she took both of his hands. 'Charlie, you're here at last.' She simply stood and stared into his face, absorbing every detail. Charlie was unable to speak as tears coursed down his cheeks. Thandi reached into a pocket in her long skirt and pulled out a handkerchief. She wiped his face and they both laughed. Dumisani looked on and smiled. Elspeth was moved to tears and dabbed gently at her eyes with her sleeve. Thandi threw her arms around Charlie's neck and hugged him, still laughing. She then turned to Elspeth and put her hands out to hers. Their fingers entwined as they searched each other's eyes.

'It's finally over,' Thandi said quietly. 'But there is one last thing.' She turned to face Charlie. 'I want you to meet Lindiwe.' Thandi took the hand of the little girl who'd accompanied her and Dumisani. 'This is your daughter.'



Sitting by the fireside with Lindiwe on one side of him and Thandi on the other, Charlie was whole. The emptiness he'd carried for so long, both in his lifetime and on this magnificent journey of self-discovery, was now filled. He hadn't known about Lindiwe. His mother hadn't informed him, and Thandi hadn't been able to get word to him in England. Yet he'd felt her presence in the vast Universe through the emptiness in his soul. He'd conceived a part of himself that had not been acknowledged, and he'd dragged this unknowing along with him on every step of his journey. Charlie turned to Dumisani and asked him how this could be.

'Human beings are not aware of who they really are,' Dumisani started. 'They believe that their consciousness is limited to the human body.'

'Well, it certainly feels that way,' Thandi argued. 'I never thought I was anything other than Thandi, who was confined to my body and my mind.'

'It feels that way because, generally, human beings do not use any facility other than their physical senses,' Dumisani explained. 'Just because our vaster senses are not in use, does not mean they are not there.'

'Can you explain what you mean by these vaster senses?' Charlie asked.

'Let's take a typical family, such as yourself, Thandi and Lindiwe,' Dumisani said, looking at Charlie. 'The three of you each have an individual consciousness and personality that each of you call your own. The thing is that, even though they appear to be individual because they are located in three bodies, they are not separate. They are interconnected. You are all bonded to each other through a marriage of souls.'

'But aren't all human beings connected in this way?' Elspeth ventured.

'We are,' Dumisani answered, 'and when we come into contact with each other, there is always an exchange of energy that is meaningful, even if we are not aware of it. But when it comes to close families, the connection is even stronger since we also share a genetic lineage. When one member of the family experiences any event, other members are affected to different degrees. The effects are felt in extremely subtle ways, but if you become observant, you will see these interconnections. Perhaps an adult daughter is in an especially difficult conflict with a friend. Other family members may feel the effects in the form of mild bodily illnesses or perhaps they'll experience some form of conflict in their own lives.'

Thandi had a question for Dumisani. 'But what if the families aren't close? Perhaps the daughter goes to live in another country and brings up her own family there. Will the events of her life still affect her other family members?'

'It depends on how close the family remain even with the distance. In truth, no matter what the intentions of the family are to maintain its relationship, what you will find is that the emotional ties break over time and the closeness diminishes. When this happens, the energetic influence on each other also diminishes.'

'So,' Charlie asked, 'what is happening with regard to a situation like mine and Lindiwe's? We were not close because we didn't even know each other. I didn't know of her existence, yet I have felt her absence without understanding it in that way.'

'You didn't know of her existence, but she is still part of you. Most of us know who our family members are and so they are acknowledged at the deepest part of ourselves. Even if we are not close in an emotional sense, the fact remains that each of us are acknowledged. When we are *not* acknowledged, either purposefully or as in your case because we do not know about a child, it creates a kind of a dark shadow in our collective consciousness. That dark shadow will always cry out for acknowledgement because it is a natural part of the collective order, and if it is not recognized, it will create chaos within the system.'

'What do you mean by chaos?' Elspeth asked.

'Sickness, in the form of depression, is one manifestation of a cry for recognition. Charlie may have suffered varying degrees of depression, or even other illnesses that appeared to have no real diagnosis.'

Charlie reflected on his own life and the bouts of depression and emptiness that he had encountered. In the early days when he was first made to leave South Africa, he had put it all down to his feelings about Thandi, never knowing that there was a child that existed between them. Later on in his life, he had found happiness in other places; he'd found love again with an English woman and had fathered three children. Charlie had gone on to build his own business in England and as he'd progressed into old age, the sorrow of losing Thandi had faded into the past along with his youth. Yet he'd carried the dark shadow in his soul; it haunted his life, the edges of every happy moment with his family sullied by a quiet darkness he'd come to accept as part of his personality. When he died, this dark shadow had passed into the afterlife with him. It became the focus of his spiritual journey, the long passage through the territory of unresolved pain. Now he was here, in this desperately wanting area of his soul, confronting the dark shadow itself. And with the light cast upon it, the shadow had turned out to be something as beautiful as Lindiwe.

'And so it is for everything that lays unacknowledged within the collective family system,' Dumisani explained. 'That which we pretend to ourselves does not exist, will always cry out for recognition. Many families have secrets that they harbour, keeping them hidden in the vast warehouses of the soul. But these secrets find their way to the light, for it is the way of the soul to turn out all its contents when the pain of hiding becomes too heavy. The collective soul of all South Africans is crying out for us to recognise all the secrets that we've hidden, all the lies we've told ourselves about our identity. We are being called upon to bring light into the darkness of our soul. Many of us are pretending to be who we are not; we are refusing to recognise the blood that courses through our veins. The time for true freedom from the past is now. Now is the time to tell ourselves the truth.'

The party sat together until the early hours of the morning. It was the light and joy of truth and recognition that kept them from sleep. For all of them, something profound had been resolved. They'd come together, the divide of the lies they'd told themselves, dissolving under the scrutinising eyes of the seekers of the truth. This part of the journey was complete, and each of them had miraculously healed the scars they had carried for far too long.

## 21

The scream held in his throat, unable to escape. The grey plasma hovered right over his face, drawing at his breath and keeping his muscles locked so he couldn't move. The thing sucked at Baba's face, pulling at him, until he felt his whole body convulse. Terrified by a strange movement within him, he tried vainly to shift his legs. All at once, Baba realised it wasn't *something* within him that was in motion, but it was *him* that was being sucked from his body; he was being pulled out by this entity that hung in the air and covered his face. Suddenly, Baba found himself standing next to his body, in the company of grey beings that looked like carelessly shaped clay forms. They had no facial features that he could make out; all Baba was aware of was the crippling fear that he felt in their presence. He was overwhelmed by a disorienting spinning sensation as they closed in on him and, when his head cleared, he was in a dark cave-like structure that smelt of damp and rotting old leaves. He couldn't see a thing, but was acutely aware of tunnels and potholes, all connecting up in a bizarre maze of corridors and cavities that led back to each other. Baba felt the presence of these grey beings but couldn't see them. Not knowing what to do, he began moving through a small space that he sensed was a black dripping tunnel. His fear propelled him forward as he groped along the walls, slipped in the dampness and brushed his arms against moist forms that he was too terrified to try to comprehend. He moved with speed in one moment, and then slowed to a haltingly measured pace in another. His mind was wild with fear; his thoughts were jumbled, and his heart beat in his throat, obstructing his breath. He was afraid to put out his hands for fear of what they may encounter. He was too petrified to move, yet even more horrified by the thought of staying still. Baba was going crazy; he squeezed his large frame through small cavities, whose slimy walls permitted him entrance, and ran through enormous corridors whose sickening sounds provided the backdrop for his terror. He didn't know where he was going, yet somewhere in his madness, he knew all roads led back to the beginning. The nausea rose within him, weakening his body and bringing him to his knees. He heaved onto the cold muddy floor, the stench of his own vomit rising to attack his senses and send him into another round of retching. As the sickness subsided, he became aware of the presence of people around him. It was *them*. He gagged, but didn't throw up this time. He felt his spine crawl, as if someone was running an icy finger straight up it. There were whispers, sounds which made him cringe with fear. They were talking about *him*. There were louder whispers now. Was someone trying to talk?



Tumelo stood in the small room looking at Baba lying on the bed. Sekai and Siphon, in their panic at being unable to rouse Baba, had called on the healer. But Baba couldn't be brought round, no matter what the *Sangoma* tried to do. Sekai had suggested they take Baba to the hospital; he was barely breathing and his eyes were lifeless. Tumelo had advised against this, saying there was no time left. Baba had been taken by the grey entities, Tumelo knew that much. They'd taken Baba off to their world, which was a place for those paralysed by their fear and hate. It wasn't unusual, he said, for human beings to be attacked by these entities. They came in different forms when we carried inordinate amounts of fear. The fear, Tumelo said, was the doorway that offered them entrance into our consciousness. Our fear connected us to them; we attracted their energy through the thoughts that we harboured. Often, in the space between sleeping and wakefulness, we encounter dark beings who paralyze us and render us unable to scream or make any other sound. The experience is characterized by intense fear that only subsides once we awake suddenly or because someone beside us recognises our distress and rouses us from that state of consciousness. Tumelo had been aware of Baba's predicament, and knew that his fear and hatred were so intense that he'd been drawn by these beings into their world. Baba's weakness, he explained, was his inability to reason through his feelings. He was not willing to listen to anyone or let any new idea replace the ones he held onto so dearly. His hate consumed him, and his hate was fuelled by his fear of life. Tumelo had known where this was headed; Dumisani had warned him that this was what happened with people like Baba. The world he now inhabited was a world where he could indulge his hatred, but coming face to face with one's own darkness was, at first, a terrifying experience. It was only when his mind finally stopped fighting and *surrendered* to that world and all of its ideas, that Baba would stop being afraid. Then, he would become part of it and he would be trapped there for what would seem like forever.

There was no time at all for hospital visits, Tumelo had declared. Baba would be dead soon, his life-force drained from his body and the cord that connected his life to this world, severed.. He would be part of that dark world forever, unless something were done to bring him back. It would be difficult, but they had to try. Tumelo called on Lerato. They set about their work.



The family sat against the walls of the room, as the drumming started. Tumelo had told Siphos and Jeanette that it was important that the entire family were present. The two boys sat between their parents, and Desmond sat near the door, watching in quiet anticipation. Sekai sat on a crate near to the bed. She was in fear for her father and prayed fervently. The rhythmic drumming was slow at first. They were opening up the pathway into the netherworlds that Tumelo's consciousness would follow. Lerato began chanting words unintelligible to the others. She followed the drum-beats, building the invisible road with the sounds that poured from her body, preparing Tumelo's brainwaves to get in phase with the cosmic elements that would guide him through to Baba's world.

Tumelo stood at the edge of a vast wilderness, calling out for Baba. He focussed his mind on the face of the old man and called his name over and over. He began moving, the landscape around him shifting and changing in a kaleidoscope of shapes and colours. Strange beings looked in on him as he moved through this vista of new and strange realities, and his emotions rose and fell as he absorbed the weird and wonderful array of cosmic diversity. In the distance, Tumelo saw the face of Dumisani come into view. As the face of the great sage melded into the panoramic brilliance, Tumelo appeared to slow down. He came to a stop in front of Dumisani, whose body was now in full view and surrounded by a radiant halo of light.

'This is as far as you go, Tumelo,' Dumisani said. The colours of the landscape continued to move in swirling spirals of colour and form behind him.

'This task is not yours to perform.' Dumisani turned to one side and waved his hand. The spectacular colours of the horizon vanished, and into view appeared a rocky mountain formation into the sides of which many caves were dotted. The ecstatic feelings that had accompanied the colourful journey that Tumelo had just encountered had disappeared, and replacing them was a cold sick feeling in the pit of his stomach. The air felt cold and damp and there was a disconcerting putrid smell that hung in the air.

'It is your job to guide them, but the debt belongs to the family,' Dumisani explained. 'You are unable to move into this territory, for you did not create the problem. You must place the task of retrieving the soul of Baba into his grandchild's hands. It is the plan of the Ancestors. Go back and prepare Adam to join me on this journey.'

Tumelo closed his eyes and rested his consciousness on the drumming. It was distant. He kept his mind on it. It was his pathway back into his body. Without it, he would be lost and wandering the cosmos without purpose. His focus was intense as the drumming grew louder. Lerato's chanting made his body tingle, he was moving back into his physical form. He was getting heavier and heavier. Finally, with the drumming at its loudest and Lerato's singing at its greatest intensity, he opened his eyes.



Dumisani held onto Adam's hand as they faced the entrance to the caves. The young boy kept his awareness on the drumming which was fading into the background. He knew that in order to get home, he would have to listen out for the sound, *wherever* he found himself. The family were waiting; all of them were focused on him, creating a safe vortex for his return, and the chanting would not stop until Adam was safely back in his body. The man looked down at the boy.

'I can't go in here with you,' Dumisani said to Adam. 'It is your job to persuade your grandfather to return to his body.'

'Will he be able to do that?' Adam asked, 'If these beings pulled him from his body, how can he return by himself?'

'He can only return if you can get him to begin the process of accepting you and your family.'

'But he hates us,' Adam argued.

'He hates you because he thinks a certain way,' Dumisani explained. 'If you are able to make him think differently, the hate will disappear.'

'Then what is it I need to say to him?' Adam was worried.

'It will come to you,' Dumisani answered. 'All of the wisdom of the Ancestors lies within us. You just need to tap into that great knowledge. You know you were born to do this, don't you?'

'Yes,' Adam said. 'I feel something for my grandfather. I know it's important to try and help him.'

'You must try, Adam. But if you do not succeed, you will be safe. You do not belong in this place, though you have a connection to it through your grandfather. You are too different in the mind for the beings to suck you in. It is important you know that because then you will have no fear of harm. They do, however, have the power to persuade your grandfather. His ideas have weakened him to this extent. They will fear you more than you them; your ideas will bring this place down, so they will not desire to keep you here. They need people like your grandfather to keep their world of hateful ideas alive. They believe that their ideas give them life, you see. They do not understand that they have a soul and that it gives them eternal life with or without their ideas.'

'What will happen if grandfather stays here?'

'It will be as if a part of your own soul is trapped here, for your grandfather is part of you. There will *always* be rescue attempts. It is how the Ancestors work. We spend eternities trying to undo our wrongdoing. It is not only in life that we try to resolve our issues, but in the afterlife too.'

'Well, I'm glad that grandfather will be helped, even if I fail,' Adam said. He looked over at the cave. 'Should I go now?'

'Dumisani smiled down at him. 'I think you should,' he replied.



Baba realised that these entities were not talking. They emitted eerie sounds from their clay-like forms that sounded like whispers; as much as his disturbed mind tried, he couldn't conceive of the type of communication they were using, but in some inexplicable way, he just *knew* what they were saying. They were *welcoming* him to this place. Baba's heart froze in his chest. He was being welcomed? His fear rose to his throat again and he fought for breath. He didn't want to be welcome. He wanted to leave. He needed to wake up in his bed, but they were shaking their heads. They didn't *literally* shake their heads, but Baba knew they were responding to his thoughts in exactly this way. No, he couldn't go home, they seemed to be saying. He was born for this place. *This* was home. The cold of the damp corridor clung to Baba's skin and he tried to rub at his arms. He couldn't stay here. *No*, they were saying, he *had* to stay. It was where he wanted to be. Didn't he know that? He was one of them. It was people like Baba who kept the world the way it was. They kept things in place. They didn't allow change. They were the keepers of tradition. If it wasn't for people like Baba, things would be changing all the time, and the world would be unrecognisable. Baba only had to look around him at his new home. Nothing ever changed. Hadn't he just spent *forever* running through the maze of tunnels only to find himself back where he'd started?

Baba got up from the floor and made for a small cavity in the rock wall. He hadn't seen this one before. It was completely black in this place, yet he could see with some faculty he didn't know he had. In the pitch dark, he just knew what was there. If he went through this cave entrance, he might find his way home. He couldn't stay here with these fiendish beings. He *wasn't* one of them. Baba scabbled through the cavity, brushing up against some slippery foliage. At one end was a tunnel that was so small he had to squeeze through with his arms pinned to his sides. He prayed keenly, hoping that God would answer his prayers and open up a pathway home. As he pushed his way through more cavities and tunnels, he finally ended up in a large cavern. Dropping to the floor with exhaustion, he became aware once more of the presence of the clay-like beings. The whispering was more intense. There seemed to be more of them than before. The atmosphere was cloying, as if someone had turned up the heat in a wet room that had no ventilation. Amongst the strange whispering, Baba suddenly heard a voice.

It was the voice of a child. It was calling his name. Baba sat up, his heart beating in his chest. Who was calling? The whispering now had a different feel to it. Baba knew the entities were no longer focussed on him, but on this voice. They were perturbed. This didn't happen often; in fact it hardly happened at all, Baba deduced. The voice kept calling his name, but Baba could see no-one. The voice was kind of distant, yet not. It was trying to locate Baba, but wasn't succeeding. The whispering grew more intense. They'd turned their attention back to Baba. He belonged here, they were reminding him. This was home. Soon, he would stop struggling, for he would leave his body behind once and for all. The voice kept calling, and Baba's ears pricked up to it. The entities kept whispering at him. He would get what he wanted being here. This was a place where there was no change. The voice was getting closer. It kept calling for Baba. Baba's heart soared each time he heard it over the whispering, yet there were times that the whispered cajoling kept his attention from the voice. This was Baba's new home. From this place they entered the consciousness of those who thought like them. People who were afraid of change ended up here. It was from this place that they could influence others; many influenced their relatives from here. South Africa could be just as Baba wanted it to be. He could be an active soldier that rejected change.

The voice was distant now. It seemed to be losing him. Baba felt a wave of distress. He focussed on the voice and as he did so it grew louder. He wanted it to find him, yet if he listened to the whispering, it faded into the background. He tuned out the whispering and kept his ears on the voice. He strained as the whispering was becoming more authoritative. The voice was getting closer. He kept his mind on it until the voice was so loud, Baba knew it was in the room. It had found him.

Baba blinked a few times; for the first time since he'd got here, there was light in the darkness, but only enough to illuminate the young boy. Baba recognised his grandson immediately. His grandson was speaking.



'Baba...grandfather,' the boy called. 'I've come to fetch you.' The boy stood upon a rock to the far end of the cavern. The whispering, which had stopped for a moment, started up again in full force. The entities were reminding Baba of his convictions. He had a role to play, one that was important to all of them.

'You haven't time grandfather,' Adam called. 'You are losing your life. Once your life cord breaks, you will be stuck here until someone rescues you. And you might be here for something that feels like an eternity.'

Break the cord, they were telling Baba. They were persuading him to break ties with a family that rejected his ideas and brought change to his line of descendants.

'There's nothing to be afraid of, grandfather. We are all just people like you. We love you, and that is what is important. Love is important. Family is important, no matter what colour they all are.'

Baba's stomach was churning. He was becoming light-headed. The smell of this place was so bad and the endless tunnels that led no-where made him queasy. What the entities were saying made some sense. He could do something here.

'Do what, grandfather?' Adam asked. 'Change will take place in South Africa and in your family whether you want it to or not. Don't be fooled by this place. It has no influence in the world. The people who took you just *think* it has.'

The whispering took on a sense of urgency. Of course they had influence here. They visited people in their sleep and they whispered things to them. They took people like Baba from their bodies and they came here to stay for eternity.

'The people these entities talk to, already have old musty ideas. They are just talking to people who think the same. From here, nobody is influenced. This is just a place in your soul, grandfather,' Adam was saying. 'You just go round and round in circles, running through tunnels, going through the caves, but you always end up in the same place. This is the place where your ideas live. You can't change anything outside of yourself. Can't you smell it? It is old and mouldy; it is a place inside of you where old ways of thinking live.'

It was a *good* way of thinking, the whispering suggested. One didn't have to be afraid of the unknown here.

'But the unknown brings freshness,' Adam countered. 'Not this horrible smell. That's how you need to think about it. Do you feel good being here, grandfather? Is this what you really want to be?'

Baba looked around him. The entities said things that he liked, but being amongst them, he was afraid. He didn't like the endless corridors that led nowhere. Running through them and ending up where he started gave him a sense of frustration. Isn't that what his old ideas did to him? Did they lead him round and round in circles like the boy said? He didn't like the feel of this place. Was this really a place in his soul? Was this what he was like on the inside? Is this why he always felt bad and angry? Did his ideas lead nowhere? Was this what this young boy was saying to him?

'If we don't change, grandfather, we become like mouldy old bread. Everything in the world is *meant* to change. We are not supposed to stay the same all the time. In our family, we now have White people and Black people. Now all our traditions will change, but it won't be for the worse. It will just be fresh and new. South Africa is becoming fresh and new as we change our ideas and as the cultures all mix with each other.'

Baba felt a strange sensation in his solar plexus, as if something was moving. The whispering was urgent. The entities were telling him to stay. The cord was about to sever. He would be here forever, bringing great influence to the world.

'Don't die and come here, grandfather,' Adam pleaded. 'You will be lost for what will seem like forever. We need you. When it is your right time to die, we need you to become one of our guiding Ancestors. You will never be that if you stay here. You can decide now to come home with me.'

Baba held on to his stomach, panicked. No he couldn't stay. But could he go home? Could he change the way that he thought?

'We can just live together and love each other, grandfather. Then you will change slowly because you will see that it is not dangerous to change. You will see what a strong family we are because of the changes.'

Baba stood up and held out his hand to Adam. The whispering was intense, but Baba focused on the boy. Adam moved towards him and took his hand.

'Listen very carefully grandfather,' Adam said. 'Listen and you'll hear the drumming.'

Baba strained as he held onto Adam's hand. There was a faint rhythmic beat that sounded like drums.

'Focus on it, and soon, as it gets louder, you will hear chanting from a woman. By keeping our focus, we will get home.'

Baba held on tight to his grandson. The drumming became more distinct, and in moments, he heard the chanting. Baba kept his focus, and before he knew it, he found himself back in his bed.

The company was seated. The respectful quiet murmurings of the crowd of people who had assembled together for the Ceremony of the Ancestors belied their excited anticipation of the events that lay ahead. Above them, in the black heavenly depths, the celestial river flashed its lustrous jewels and the moon showed off its majesty amidst its glittering array of dazzling acquaintances. A soft breeze cooled the company, and the vast *veld* in which they sat lay quiet and waiting for the merging of the two elements.

The food was prepared and waiting; one set of pots and pans designated to the Ancestors, another to the present company. Tobacco sat pungent in two open sacks near the food. An owl hooted in the distance and glittery-eyed night-creatures watched the crowd from far-away treetops. A group of men and women, Tumelo's *Sangomas*, assembled near the fire, looking on at the large crowd of people. All wore a goat's gallbladder tied at the back of the head, and hung at various parts of the body were an assortment of goat's horns and bead containers filled with herbs and medicines. Each held in their hands a cow-tail whisk, the tool they used when dancing and placing medicines in the fire. Tumelo had not yet emerged from the *Ndumba*. Lerato arranged the seating for the drummers and walked around and between the visitors, making sure there were enough empty crates and tins that were to serve as seating for the Ancestors. She prepared the herbs, which lay in various piles near the fire. She took a herb bundle from the floor and poked it into the flames. It glowed as it caught fire, and Lerato beat the flames out on the earthen floor. She walked around the crowd, who were now hushed and silent, and smoked the bundle around their bodies. She hummed a haunting tune as she did so and every so often reached into the air with her other hand, uttering a prayer.

Tumelo finally appeared at the door of the *Ndumba*. He looked toward the *veld*, where his company were waiting. His *Sangomas* were slowly and quietly circling the crowd of people, performing a silent ritual that helped create a sacred protective space against other-worldly opportunistic entities. Beyond the company of Tumelo's people, across the reaches of the physical dimension, sat Dumisani's delegations. He saw them with his sacred eye; they watched the preparations with quiet anticipation and with gratitude for the respect that the ceremony offered their spiritual endeavours.

Dumisani appeared before him. He stood beneath the *gandelo*, that sacred tree at which Tumelo had performed many ceremonies and through which he'd communed with various Ancestors. Dumisani was grand in his ceremonial regalia. He wore a flat leopard-skin hat that sat neatly perched upon his head, and from which arose a magnificent eagle feather. From his shoulders to his thighs hung a loose-fitting leopard-skin smock and wrapped around his waist was a long linen skirt that draped to his ankles. Owl-feathers decorated his strong arms and legs and beads adorned his hair in long strands that fell to his shoulders. Dumisani smiled at Tumelo and held out his hand. Tumelo took it and walked with the great sage to the *veld*.

Lerato began the proceedings with a song. The fire spat out starry golden red sparks and crackled contentedly in the quiet night. Her honeyed tones reached across the void and drew across the veil that separated this group and their Ancestors. She coaxed the Ancestral presence with her love song, drawing them into palpable cosmic union with their descendents. The night air flickered as barely visible electrical currents charged the air and slowly ascended the spinal columns of the visitors. As her song drew to a close, the drum beats began slowly and Tumelo's *Sangomas* began their circular journey around the large fire. Tumelo threw bunches of herbs onto the fire and chanted as he did so. Lerato joined him as he uttered the haunting rhythmic mantras and, with the cadenced drumbeats accompanying their evocative sounds, the rest of the company drifted off into a passive meditative state.

The aroma of the herbs and the rhythmic sounds closed the vast cosmic space that existed between Ancestor and descendent. The Ancestral delegations moved in closer to the people around the fire and began to feel the density of their energetic fields. They entered into the intense vortex and immediately felt the recognition of their presence as the members of the company around the fire experienced tingling in their spines. The Ancestors moved amongst their people, seeking out those with whom they would resolve old Ancestral issues. As they found them, they took their place on the crates which, to the descendents, represented an intense gratitude for the very close proximity of their Ancestors.

Tumelo raised himself from his seat as his people danced and the drumbeats broke down the divides in the souls of all who'd come together in this union. The music began its slow descent into a low metrical beat along which Tumelo was able to speak on behalf of Dumisani who stood before him across an invisible barrier.

'I am Dumisani,' Tumelo began slowly, 'and I welcome you to the Ceremony of the Ancestors. We have here tonight the different delegations of Ancestral peoples who represent the diversity of our great country, those Ancestors whose resolutions are connected to those issues that you are each here to resolve.' Dumisani turned to address Tumelo's company.

'Our ignorance and fear has led to the creation of a gaping wound in the collective soul of all South Africans,' Dumisani paused for a moment before continuing. 'Tonight, we are taking responsibility for our own role in the sickness that we have created. Later, in their own time, and with the help of the Ancestors, others will take their own position in this country's healing.'

The crowd was quiet. Each felt the presence of the invisible people that sat amongst them, and when Tumelo spoke, they heard the voice of another, the great sage, Dumisani. Tonight, the rules of the world in which these visitors had inhabited had changed. Here, their old ideas of reality had no place. Here, inter-dimensional experiences were commonplace for those who had been born with the call and for others who had witnessed the crossing of cosmic borders by those who brought wisdom into a dull and wanting world.

'Tonight,' Dumisani continued, 'is the beginning of a new chapter for all of you sitting here. Together, Ancestors and descendants will heal their family wounds, and in so doing, will heal part of the collective wound of South Africa. This is important work and must, in time, be undertaken by all who belong to the long genetic line of South Africans. We are a special nation who has begun its healing on many more surface levels, but when the wounds run as deep as ours, it is right that we reach into our history to perform the healing rituals. In Africa, we honour our Ancestors and the work that they do. They are our historical roots, and it is only through tapping into the wisdom that they have gained in their own spiritual journeys, that we reach the source of our problems.' Dumisani paused as his eyes searched the crowds.

'We must have immense respect for the journey that our Ancestors have taken. It is a journey that was started in the body, in human form, and one which then intensified after they passed on into the Ancestral worlds. Many of our Ancestors who are not here tonight, are still journeying and rediscovering their true nature. They will find their way to this place when they have healed the many ideas that hold them to the place where they currently exist. Those Ancestors who do this work with us tonight have passed through many fires to be here. They are with us to share that healing, for we are all connected. What happens within them, affects us at a deep level. Healing the wounds at this level will ensure authentic healing without any chance of old past hurts being brought back into the present. It is only then that we can move forward as a nation.'

Dumisani became silent. The drums beat to the rhythm that held Dumisani's presence. The dancers moved slowly and quietly around the multitude of Ancestors and descendants who thronged the *veld*. The great sage scanned his audience, holding their collective gaze and transmitting his wisdom through his eyes. They sat, awestruck, stunned to silence by the magic of the night and the energy that pulsated from the sage.

'Now,' Dumisani commanded, 'we begin.' He took a long cane from the floor and leaned on it as he slowly searched for the first people to perform the healing ritual.

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The *Sangoma* was beckoning him. All those people around the fire were now looking at him, and he could even feel the eyes and quiet expectation of those invisible people who sat amongst them all. From the start of these proceedings, Desmond had been horribly nervous that he wasn't going to be able to deliver what everybody needed in this strange situation. He couldn't quite imagine what it was that he had to contribute. He still marvelled inwardly that he was actually sitting in this place. These bizarre circumstances beat anything that Aunty Darla had ever cooked up in her outlandish world. In fact, if he really thought about it, Aunty Darla would be the only one to believe him if he ever got up the nerve to repeat half of the stuff that had been going on here.

He really hadn't known what he'd got himself into when he'd done that robbery. Those bones had sent him on a roller-coaster ride that had changed everything. Just a little over a week ago, he'd been a relatively happy Coloured guy living on the Cape Flats. Life was simple there. You got up in the morning, went about your day, whatever *that* entailed, and went to sleep at night. There was nothing too complicated about it, and you certainly didn't *analyse* things. In Desmond's world, when things went wrong, it was because you didn't plan right or you just got unlucky. There wasn't much more to it than that. But here, in this strange world in which he'd found himself embroiled, life as Desmond knew it was turned on its head.

A part of Desmond longed for home, yet it was the simplicity that he sought, rather than the familiarity of his own people. Desmond was beginning to question his life; he was now feeling emotions he'd never encountered before. It was as if these feelings had always been just below the surface and that there had been an invisible barrier between his mind and emotions. Coming to this part of the world and meeting these people had opened something up in him. Some fearful part of his mind insisted that things go back to what they been before he came here because he'd known who he was then. Now, Desmond didn't have a clue as to his identity. He felt different, but he didn't fully recognise what was changing.

The *Sangoma* fellow had scared the living daylight out of him. Desmond had just about coped with the whole affair of the cantankerous old grandfather going unconscious; he'd dealt with the ordeal of everyone banging drums, singing at the tops of their voices and dancing about like lunatics. He'd even accepted it when the little prophet boy had got involved and had gone off into a creepy trance-like state. He was delighted even, when the bizarre events took a turn for the better. It seemed that all these strange things had some purpose after all. What he hadn't reckoned on, was the *Sangoma* turning around to him and talking about the bones.

Everyone had stared at him in astonishment when Tumelo had declared to Desmond that the skeleton that he had in his keeping had to be returned to the grounds in which it was found, *soon*. No-one had been more astounded than Desmond when the *Sangoma* had suggested that he knew all along that Desmond had come up to Johannesburg with the express purpose of returning them to their rightful place. As far as Desmond knew, it was just something he had done just in case he ended up on the wrong end of one of Aunty Darla's curses. Now, it seemed, Desmond was a puppet on a string that was controlled by the *Ancestors*. It was just as well, when Desmond really thought about it. Lord only knew what would have happened had he *not* listened to Aunty Darla. And to make matters seem even more sinister, it appeared that the *Ancestors* had orchestrated the whole meeting with Siphos and the family. As far as Tumelo was concerned, none of this had happened by accident. There were no coincidences. Desmond was part of a cosmic jigsaw that involved putting right some things that had gone wrong in the past. Desmond still couldn't figure out why the *Ancestors* would want to have anything to do with someone who was practically a gangster. Not that he'd mentioned this query to anyone. They still didn't know what he really did for a living, though Desmond decided he wouldn't put it past the *Sangoma* to have found out everything there was to know about his life.

One thing really was clear to Desmond these days. Strange and unfamiliar though it all was, there were realities that existed among seemingly ordinary people that couldn't be explained. It was only when one found oneself mixed up in it all that one became a believer. Desmond knew that no-one but Aunty Darla, and perhaps his mother to some extent, would actually believe him. Why should anyone else? Even *he* hadn't given much attention to such things until now. He'd been superstitious, maybe, but that was all. Now he held a new respect for such realities even if he couldn't fathom their depths.

According to the *Sangoma*, it wasn't quite time yet for the skeleton to be replaced, and it was important that Desmond understood what was happening when he performed this task. First, though, Desmond had some things to sort out in his own mind. Tumelo said he would assist him with this, and in so doing, all of them, including Baba, had to attend the

Ceremony of the Ancestors. The Ancestors were coming together to sort things out, and it was important that Desmond was present.

Desmond rubbed his temples and looked up at the *Sangoma* who waited patiently. It was all too much to take in, yet he was swept away on the tide that had come in when he hadn't been looking. He was in too deep to try and get out now. Yet, when he really thought about it, Desmond wasn't so sure anymore that he really *wanted* to escape. He was in for the long haul, and even if he didn't understand what was happening, he'd go along with it all. Yes, something was changing, and Desmond knew deep in his heart, it could only be for the better.



It had been an emotional reunion. The children, and their mothers of the Khoisan delegation, sat amongst the Dutch men who had claimed them as their own. They were closed together within in a circle, locking in their collective energy field as the wound of the past healed itself. They had spent much time talking animatedly of the spiritual journey that they'd taken through the many dimensions of the cosmos, and of the myriad manifestations of pain that had been healed. Now, quiet and respectful at this blessed ceremony, they had come together to share their reconnection in the chain of their South African heritage. They were family, acknowledging one another. The fractured collective soul, injured by lack of acknowledgement, was restoring itself back to health. The old ideas had disintegrated and the truth of reality recognized by all who sat in the circle.

This mixed race delegation was seated in close proximity with Desmond, and Baba's family, their energies firmly bound across the invisible barrier that lay between them. They looked on with keen expectancy as Desmond took his place beside Dumisani. Dumisani began to speak.

'South Africans today have a surface perception of themselves; they fail to look beyond the external façade and see into the depths of their soul. By searching this deep, we find many things, many lost aspects of the self that unbeknownst to us, cry out for recognition. When we refuse to look and therefore fail to recognise what is there, we suffer many emotional pains, the source of which we are ignorant.' Dumisani put his arm around Desmond's shoulder. Desmond felt a pulsing of energy that moved inexplicable things within him.

'Desmond is of a people who very often fail to look into the deepest corners of their soul. And who can blame them? The people of today were born with these unrecognised conditions; they inherited them from their Ancestors. If they had the mind and the courage to search within themselves, they would find a well of great hurt that is in need of recognition. Their pain is great and the symptoms of this pain masked by different levels of frustration and anger. In severe cases, violence and reckless living manifest themselves in whole communities. Desmond's people came from the Africans and the Whites, and in this painful part of their soul, were shunned by both sides. The Coloureds had no place to go. Many chose the better of two evils in a very difficult society that constituted apartheid South Africa, and elected to forget their Black heritage. Some chose to shun their White heritage. In most cases, however, neither Black nor White accepted them as part of their society. They became a race unto their own, lost in their rejection, this pain forming the basis upon which they confronted their lives.'

Dumisani looked into the crowd of people. He waved a beckoning arm at the Dutch and Khoisan delegation. Both adults and children rose and made their way to the front where Dumisani stood with Desmond. Dumisani took Desmond's shoulders and placed him at a distance to him. He then instructed the Dutch and Khoisan Ancestors to encircle him. Desmond felt a powerful energy pulse up his spine and he experienced a force field that held him firmly within its centre. Desmond hung his head, eyes closed. Thoughts seem to leave him; he was lost instead in a sea of feelings and emotions that stirred up in his soul like huge tsunamis.

'Desmond's Ancestors, who form this circle around him today, have completed their own circle. Each has journeyed through their own pain of denial. The Khoisan women were unrecognised by the men who sired their children. Some of these same women denied any involvement with White men and so broke the chain of self-recognition. Recognition persisted, but only emerged through suspicion and speculation that was tinged with secrets, shame, rejection and lies. The children of these mixed unions felt lost and disowned; they carried the burden of loss and deeply buried mysteries. The secrets that we carry around with us, lie embedded in the soul, and they yearn for recognition, calling through painful feelings and emotions that eventually become the sicknesses that we find difficult to heal.'

The Dutch and Khoisan delegation linked arms and began to move slowly in the circle, in a clockwise motion around Desmond. He felt the storm within whip up to even greater intensity and he began to sob uncontrollably. He had lost all power over his thoughts; he rode the wave of emotions without resistance as they broke on the shores of his

incomprehension. His chest heaved violently as it tried to manage the upsurge of ancient hurts that left his body on tides of tears and incoherent breathy exhalations. He fell to the ground on his knees as his body convulsed with pain. He held his hands to his face as the tears began to subside and the contractions in his chest reduced in intensity. The circle of Ancestors began to sing a gentle song that soothed every corner of Desmond's soul. The pain was gone and Desmond had come back to himself. He opened his eyes and looked up slowly. The Ancestors had finished their song, and broke the circle so that Dumisani could reach out to Desmond. The sage helped Desmond to his feet.

'It's time, now,' Dumisani declared, 'for Desmond to recognise his heritage.'

Someone in Tumelo's company got up from their place at a far end of the *veld*. It was a woman. She was small and lean, with fair skin and wiry hair cropped close to her head. Her skin was pulled back on her face over large protruding cheekbones. Her large lips smiled, the creases in her cheeks reaching small oval eyes. She made her way to the front and stood before Desmond.

'I have Khoisan blood,' she said. 'There aren't many of us left, but the stories are sent down to those of us that still remain. I recognise you. In you, I acknowledge the children of our people that the White man gave us. I have found the secret hidden in myself through this ceremony and with your help, I wish to confront it.' Desmond looked at the woman and then put out his hands for her to hold. He recognised *her* too.

A man who had been sitting near the front of the crowd stood. He was White, tall and heavysset, with strong facial features.

'I called myself an Afrikaans man before I came here today,' he affirmed, 'and yet I have Black heritage. Only tonight did I realise the extent of the shame that I have carried about my mixed heritage. And why was that? It was down to the ideas that my own people carried. The Black blood that runs through my veins has been a shadowy secret that my family have been afraid to own up to. We all have been in deep denial about this issue. In this denial, myself, and other members of my family, have demonstrated an exaggerated rejection of Black people. We wanted to be seen in our community as being real White supremacists. I now realise that when we reject something or someone with such ferocity, it is because we are refusing to acknowledge that same something in ourselves. We are afraid of what lies within, so we reject its reflection in our lives. Tonight I understand why I carry deep feelings that I don't really understand. I only know that at the deepest level I have been unhappy. I drink a lot of alcohol and engage in many other vices that help me to forget my pain, and yet if you look at my life, I have no obvious sorrows that I need to escape from. Tonight I recognise my heritage. I raise the secret to the surface and confront the true story of my ancestry. I am truly a South African.'

The man stepped towards Desmond and the Khoisan woman. 'I'd like you to recognise me as your family,' he declared. He put his hand towards Desmond, who shook it. The woman grasped his arm.

Dumisani addressed the crowd.

'Secrets hurt us,' he stated, 'and South Africans harbour many illusions about who they are. We are not a nation of many separate races. We are a nation linked by blood. We are all of mixed race, and we share the same Ancestors. When we find the courage to confront our ideas, and reach inside ourselves, we will unearth the secrets of who we really are. As this occurs, so we can share a pride in our sense of unity and oneness. We are a unique people. We need to come together in that knowingness.'

The crowd was quiet. Dumisani indicated to those who stood before him, to take their seats. Both Dumisani's delegations and Tumelo's company, moved into the throng of people. They sat together, their souls at peace and watched as Dumisani beckoned the next people for healing.

Sitting here amongst the crowd, Hennie knew Fanie was present. He could feel him and the others in close proximity; it didn't seem so long ago he was in this very location, only then, he'd been with *them*, on the other side of the veil. Waking up to find himself back in his physical body had been a puzzling experience; on one hand he desperately wanted to be back with the Ancestors. He longed for the peaceful nature of their company. It was uncomplicated and free of any personal and collective judgment. On the other hand, he knew he couldn't stay there. He had to earn his place in their company. He still carried the heavy baggage of divisive ideas and in their world there was no room for such dense and complicated thinking. These people had taken a long and intensive spiritual journey. Their energy was finer, they had resolved much, and Hennie was only now beginning his long voyage of awareness. He knew his place; it was here amid all those who, like himself, held onto old and damaging ideas. It was important that he confront who he was, it was essential he deal with the changes that had to take place within him.

Hennie shifted in his wheelchair. Oom Stompie had brought him here, much to the chagrin of Hennie's wife. She'd appreciated what she'd termed Hennie's *near-death* experience, but had not bought into the sentiments he'd brought back from it. She'd argued vehemently with him, implying that his injury had traumatized him to the extent that he was now afraid of further repercussions with the land claim story. Fortunately, Hennie had only received a minor wound to the shoulder. It had rendered him unconscious, and, as it happened, accessible to those on the other side of the veil who had a message to impart to him. He certainly did not feel threatened any longer. He felt more resigned in going with whatever transpired.

Explaining this to the other farmers was a near impossible task. They'd come to the hospital looking for direction in their war over the land, and had found reticence in Hennie instead. He hadn't had an answer for them. He had no idea where they were all to go from here. He'd made a weak attempt at explaining his experience with the Ancestors, but the story had been met with a small degree of sympathy and a much greater level of contempt. They'd accused him of betraying the memory of Frikkie, who'd died in his own struggle to fend off the claimants of his land. They hadn't been able to understand the turnaround in Hennie's attitude.

If he were perfectly honest, Hennie also didn't fully understand what was happening. He remembered and understood only too well the things that Dumisani and Fanie had spoken to him about. Being back in body, though, was another story. Hennie was severely conflicted. It was exactly as he had feared would be the case. In Hennie's small world, Blacks were still Blacks. He didn't know how to look at them as being on a level with him and his people. He still looked around and saw the world through the same lens. Yet some voice beneath these strong ideas that governed his mind spoke of another opinion. He knew this was the voice of reason, the voice of his Ancestors. The conditioning he'd received had been powerful. His church had done a good job on his psyche, brainwashing him from a young age in ideas of superiority. His social environment had reinforced these ideas. He'd remained closeted with his people in a narrow world in which there was no other question of his superior nature. If he was to do as Fanie had advised, which was to question the evidence of his ideas, he'd have to shift location and move into a world where different ideas existed. Only in this way could he become familiar with other ways of thinking.

Hennie was here tonight at the Ceremony of the Ancestors because he didn't know what else to do. He'd longed for the closeness of his Ancestors again, and when Oom Stompie had told him he'd been summoned, Hennie had immediately made the appropriate arrangements despite his weak disposition. What he would resolve here he couldn't imagine, but something drove him to listen to the voices beneath the conditioning from which he was finding it so hard to extricate himself.

Dumisani was speaking. He was pointing his cane in Hennie's direction. It was time for him to find out why he was here.



'These seeds,' Dumisani said to Hennie, 'cannot be planted in the soil of your current state of mind.'

Hennie held a handful of the grain that Fanie had presented to him. A few days before this occasion, Dumisani had given Oom Stompie the task of bringing the seeds for sanctification in a special ceremony performed by Tumelo and Lerato.

'Blessings from your Ancestors lie at the core of each seed,' Dumisani continued. 'They have been gifted to you from the collective heart of your Dutch Ancestors and that of Oom Stompie's Ancestors. As you know, they have taken a long and arduous spiritual journey in which the old soil of their minds was turned and nourished in order for them to be able to

accept new, liberating ideas. These seeds contain the wisdom gained through that voyage of discovery. In this moment, however, you are here to learn how to prepare the soil for new growth and an entirely new perspective.'

Though Tumelo stood before him, Hennie recognised the voice and mystical aura of Dumisani. Sitting in close proximity to the sage, Hennie felt the pain from his wounds leave his body. He was energised and focussed, ready to accept the gift of wisdom that Dumisani imparted.

'It is important that all of us in this sacred company understand that *nothing* that we believe is true. Truth cannot be defined through form, or through words which shape the worldly definitions and rules that we live by. God is the only truth, and this truth has no resemblance to our *ideas* about this divine reality. God lies at the source of who we are beyond the physical form, but God is not an entity that dictates our ideas. Every belief that exists in this world is man-made, and these ideas that we hold form the structure of who we are as human beings. Each of us are animated with, and motivated by, the ideas that have been passed onto us through the generations. We are not able to function without ideas, for in their absence we are empty shells that have no impetus for life. Life as we experience it is a playground in which we dance like puppets to the tune of our ideas; these beliefs are illusory constructs that afford us our human experience, but they are not *real* or *true*.'

Hennie absorbed Dumisani's words. In his presence, Hennie was acutely aware that the sage's words were only a vessel upon which the formless and immeasurable wisdom of God was imparted. The words themselves were limited and wanting, for such was the nature and wisdom of human beings. Hennie understood that through an openness of heart, the mind, with its resistant ideas, could be by-passed. He only had to be present and open, soaking up the energy that Dumisani radiated, for understanding to overcome his senses.

Dumisani looked searchingly at his large audience. 'So how do we challenge the ideas that we have? How do all of you here in Tumelo's company replace the old ways of thinking with something new?' Dumisani walked a little way through the crowds as he spoke, his commanding voice carried by the soft breeze.

'Conflict is where we begin,' he continued, 'and by conflict I mean that you and your neighbour have different views on things. Conflict tells us that there are different ways of living life, different ways for people to be in a relationship. Conflict does not tell us that other ways of thinking are *wrong*; it *does* demonstrate to us, however, that different ways of thinking have different outcomes. There are outcomes that bring happiness and contentment to people, and outcomes that bring pain. There is no right or wrong in how we think, but there are *consequences* in the way that we experience life. It is painful consequences that lead us to question whether we ought to hold on to our established way of thinking.'

Dumisani paused to appreciate the sparkling night sky. He closed his eyes for a moment and breathed in the cool night air.

'When we encounter conflict of ideas, it is our first reaction to judge the other person's views as being wrong. This is because we are so identified with the ideas that we live by. To us, our views are real, true and right because we've always held them. Clutching our ideas in this manner causes division in our relationships with others because we have a rigid stand. We refuse to respect another way of being in the world, and we end up rejecting people who hold different views. While some ideas may produce negative outcomes, as we have witnessed in our experience in South Africa, they are still just viewpoints that have as little authentic meaning as your own. Rejecting those with different ideas isolates both them and us, and for those who may benefit from a *change* of ideas, this becomes a remote option because isolation prevents exposure to different possibilities.'

Hennie's mind was drawn back into his own experience within his community. Many, who held views like his own, lived isolated from the mainstream of South Africa on their farms and in close-knit communities within which there was no racial integration. South Africa had changed radically, yet this change was not often reflected in the small villages and towns that dotted the rural landscape of the country. In a number of these small communities, there are still reports of apartheid rules remaining in effect. Certain establishments maintain separate entrances for Blacks and Whites, the Whites continuing to take comfort in superior conditions and in receiving exclusive treatment by the staff within such places. Black workers are still being treated in an inferior manner on the farms and in other work institutions, the Whites largely unaffected by the political and social shifts that have taken place all over the country. Hennie had a number of friends who had sold their farms and moved location, deliberately seeking out these small communities of people who held onto the old ways of thinking and behaving. Change was not an option in such cases because as Dumisani had indicated, these people had no exposure to any other ideas. The country had undergone radical change, yet they'd had no experience of it. They rarely visited the major cities, and when they did, had too few meaningful interactions for any new ideas to take hold. Hennie understood that for change to take place within himself, he would have to change location, for he was prey to old conditioning. He needed to witness a new paradigm, to experience Blacks in an entirely



different context. In effect, he had to do what Fanie had suggested, and search out evidence that contradicted his damaging ideas.

'So, again,' Dumisani was saying, 'we ask how we can challenge our ideas. Part of our own shift in consciousness requires that we do not judge another viewpoint as *wrong*, and so reject others. We accept that there are viewpoints that create a certain reality of experience. If we do not like our experience, then we have to challenge the ideas that create it. By not rejecting those who live with ideas that negatively impact others, our own lives become a living example for those who may in time embrace positive change.'

Dumisani stood behind Hennie and placed his hands on his shoulders. Hennie felt faint currents of electricity course through his body.

'Hennie,' Dumisani said, 'like all of you sitting here tonight, needs to challenge his ideas. He is already aware that he needs to expose himself to new experiences in which his ideas are revealed to be the illusion that they truly are. But there is more for him to do. There will be many times that he will argue that his own ideas are right, and you in this audience will do exactly the same thing. These are the times that he, and all of you, must make a direct challenge. When you find yourself in opposition to another viewpoint, you must bring the idea that grips you to the forefront of your mind and lay it open to scrutiny. You ask yourself how real it is and attempt to see it for what it is; which is just a portion of a lens through which you have chosen to view your life.'

Hennie understood. When he plucked the idea, *Blacks are inferior*, from his mind, and questioned its validity, he saw the answer; no, this was *not* a fundamental truth. It was just a simple thought. This idea was nothing more than a few words strung together. These words, this idea, had no substance. Ideas, therefore, are ghostly apparitions that we have come to believe are real. Hennie knew that if he took every idea that existed in the vast reservoir of his mind and subjected it to this same scrutiny, then all would be exposed as an illusion of reality. It was foolish, then, to fight for the rightness of any idea. The time to change an idea was when it was damaging to others and disturbed the peace of the soul.

'We all exist in this world for one reason only,' Dumisani explained, 'and that is to challenge the ideas that have caused pain to both our Ancestors and ourselves. Everybody in this life is born manifest in the body within a certain portion of a collective soul. We are each responsible for the ideas which lurk in the subconscious mind. They shape our destiny, for the path of our lives is designed in such a way that we confront these beliefs. The people who are our family, the friends we meet and the situations we find ourselves in, all hold up a mirror to reflect the content of our minds. We are not victim to our beliefs, but *harbourers* of them. If we turf them out, they have no way of returning of their own accord, for they are illusions only. For an idea to exist, we have to accept it and live through it. Ideas can appear to own us when we do not take cognisance of them. It is each person's responsibility to wake up and become aware of one's thinking processes. It must be remembered that every hardship and every joyful encounter in life holds a challenge to the mind. We are all on a learning journey, whether it appears that way or not.'

Dumisani beckoned to Oom Stompie, who joined the sage and Hennie.

'These two men are separate in body, they have different skin colours,' he said. 'Their destiny is entwined. They share a life journey, for they are members of the same collective soul. They appear before us as two individuals, yet in reality they are one and the same person. Here in this life, they are living separately, enacting a drama that helps them to confront their belief in the concept of superiority versus inferiority. They are both here to learn that the belief owns them, and that when they confront its illusory nature, it will no longer govern their lives. It will simply vanish into the cosmic elements from which it was fashioned. When their bodies die, and they journey back to their source, they will become one again, free of something that was never real in the first place.'

As Hennie was wheeled back into the crowd by Oom Stompie, Hennie visualised the words that Dumisani had spoken. He imaged his own soul moving through the cosmos, looking for the peace of the unmanifest God. He saw himself unable to rest because he carried so much baggage. This baggage when one looked closely was a massive network of thoughts that constantly engaged in noisy chatter and electrical activity. He saw his soul, tired and weary of the load, scheming to unburden itself of this baggage. He watched as the thoughts divided into portions and around each group, multiple human bodies came into manifestation. There, he saw himself and Oom Stompie, he saw his Ancestors and in the assembly of people were descendants yet to be born. Life, Hennie saw, was an offloading exercise. There was nothing more to it than that. He suddenly felt foolish for having identified so strongly with his ideas; Hennie was finally coming apart.

He took his place among the audience He silently thanked Dumisani for his gift.

Baba was distinctly uncomfortable. He couldn't sit still on the fold-up chair that Sekai had provided for this occasion; instead he fidgeted and fussed. He sat in close proximity to his daughter, while Siphon, who had brought Jeanette and the two boys, sat at a distance to Baba. Baba had wanted to avoid Adam in particular. The young boy had pulled him out of that God-forsaken place in which he'd found himself, but Baba hadn't made up his mind what to make of the whole thing. While one part of him wanted to explore what had happened, another shut the door firmly on the strange event. His body ached, his legs itched, his head throbbed. It was as if some obscure entity was running in all directions inside his body, seeking refuge in the different parts of himself. But it wouldn't settle. He'd been listening all night to the wise man up front, yet was hardly able to take in everything he was saying. Baba had felt peculiar from the moment the man came up to start talking. He knew the body belonged to Tumelo, but the voice, demeanour and energy belonged to the same man from his dreams. It was the fellow who'd tried to coax him into thinking differently. He wasn't phased by this ceremony with one man speaking through the body of another; after all, the old *Sangoma* that he'd visited engaged in all sorts of strange activities which made this event look very ordinary indeed. No, it was the extraordinary sensations he was feeling that set him on edge. He sat in a *veld* full of people he could see, yet he was aware of those he couldn't. He was cognisant of an energy field that held him in place; he was enclosed in some sort of electrical grid that was doing something odd to his body. Baba was slightly nauseous. He felt ill at ease with the crowd who were a large ensemble of mixed race people. Yet the man up front was saying things that Baba felt was moving his thoughts around. Baba couldn't tell himself he was actually thinking anything. It was as if his brain had unleashed a whole lot of stuff and now it was running riot throughout his body.

Dumisani was pointing at him and saying something. Baba was stuck in his chair, unable to manoeuvre his rigid body. The sage simply held up a palm towards Baba and began chanting softly. Baba felt something lift. His body suddenly felt lighter and he leapt out of his chair with the agility he remembered from his youth. He took his place at the front.

'Baba's mind is attempting to release his ideas,' he said to the crowd, 'but he's clinging to them with all his might. He's in a battle with inevitability.'

Baba was seated on a box next to Dumisani. His stiffness, aches and pains were returning.

'This often happens to us human beings. We are challenged to think differently and while perhaps one half of us embraces change, the other half yearns to stay comfortable in the ways with which we have become familiar. Such is the problem with Baba. His Ancestors are getting through to him, yet he is afraid of what the changes will bring.'

Baba knew the ideas which sought escape, were trapped in his body. This was what was causing the discomfort and pain.

'Speak to us, Baba' Dumisani urged. 'Look at this crowd and tell us what makes you afraid.'

Baba was tongue-tied. His eyes sought out Sekai and Siphon. The sight of them made him feel safe. He looked up at Dumisani, unable to put a voice to his fears.

'Your Ancestors are here,' Dumisani said, 'they are here with you. Let them speak through you, and to you.'

Mafana, his son Thulani, and a group of men, women and children who belonged to their delegation, moved to surround Baba. Baba was engulfed in a wave of energy that overwhelmed his senses. It provided a lightness and clarity that had not been his in a long time. He felt an expansion in his head that started at the base of his skull. His awareness seemed to spread out beyond his body and within seconds he didn't feel like himself at all. He felt as if he were part of something far greater, and he seemed to know things that he hadn't known before. In his mind's eye he saw Mafana and Thulani and their people, *his* people. He knew they'd been there all along, but that only now did he possess a faculty which lent him the ability to see beyond what was normal to him. It came upon him that he needed to speak.

'I have been so very afraid of change,' he started, 'because somewhere in my mind I believed that change brings death. It seemed to me that by giving up the ideas that were part of my heritage, I would lose a part of myself. As I see things in this very moment, I realise how wrong I have been to harbour this fear.'

The crowd had grown in Baba's eyes. He now saw the Ancestors, who like the others, were listening in earnest to what he had to say.

'In this body, I am an African man, and I have carried that identity with pride. I understand now, that *identity* is only a manifestation of an idea. It is one that separates different aspects of the soul. We are all wearing different skins because we have beliefs that separate us; it is the beliefs themselves that originally created the manifest form of different racial

groups. As we have just heard, when we lose our bodies, we are one and the same. We have one soul. If we dissolved the idea of separation, if we allowed ourselves to absorb each other's ideas, we would not be with different skin colours.'

Baba searched the space in the crowd where his family were seated. His eyes fell on Adam and Storm.

'I have two grandchildren who have mixed blood. Now, my family line has added to it the blood of White people. It is just the beginning of a new wave of change for South Africans. Once, we were severely divided people. When our blood had mixed in the past, we were afraid, and we shunned those of mixed Black and White race, for we didn't understand the significance of such events. Now it is time we *all* understand. Through the coming together of *all* the different races in this country, we begin to share our ideas; we reject those that hurt us and find common viewpoints that evolve with us. Eventually, over time, we become one race of people with a common skin colour. When we reach this state of human evolution in this country, it will reflect the inner truth of our one collective soul. At the soul level we are one and the same people; at the human level, this too becomes the mirrored reality. It is a spiritual gift to move along this path; it frees us and after we die, we are able to experience the profound joy of meeting in the soul as a healed entity.'

Baba had barely stopped talking as Adam bounded his way through the crowd to his grandfather. The young boy threw his arms around the old man's neck.

'I knew it would get better for you, grandfather,' Adam said. He buried his face in Baba's chest. Baba was dizzy. The faces of his Ancestors were fading quickly, and he felt a tingling at the base of his neck. He looked at his grandchild. Something in his heart fluttered. Baba's Ancestors had spoken through him, giving him the gift of truth. The pains in his body were gone, and Baba knew they wouldn't be back. Storm appeared at Adam's side. He smiled slowly and with his younger brother, helped his grandfather to his feet.

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Mahendra watched earnestly as Ajay made his way to Dumisani's side. It had been an eerie and difficult experience for Mahendra observing his descendant acting out the ideas that he had passed down to him, and that he himself had long since discarded. Mahendra was relieved the journey had come to an end for Ajay. He had reached a crucial point of resolution and from tonight, his long-held rigid ideas would unravel quickly.

In Ajay, Mahendra perceived the manifold shadows of the Ancestors waiting for release from the grip of his mind. Mahendra witnessed his own boyhood lurk around Ajay's heart. Ajay had never known Mahendra, for the gulf of time between them was too wide, but the imprint of Mahendra's experience coursed through Ajay's blood.

Mahendra's last memory of childhood was on a beach in his hometown in India. He'd only been four or five years old when the men came with huge fishnets and had ensnared him and the other boys while they played in the sand. At first, the boys had thought it was a game and there'd been much laughter and wrangling in their attempts to extricate themselves. But then came the blows of the canes and the terrified screams, as the life they had known had ended. Mahendra had found himself on a boat headed for the Cape, amid a desperate throng of Indian men, women and children. They were crammed into unsanitary stinking crates and were left for days with barely any food or water. Once in Cape Town, they were bartered and sold at various slave markets organised by Dutch farmers who wanted free labour to work their land. The Dutch refused to name these prisoners as *slaves* since the English colonialists did not approve of such conditions. Instead, they called them *bonded workers*, though the truth lay in the slaves' non-payment and their inability to break out of their circumstances. Mahendra was sent from one Dutch home to the next as he grew up, finally ending up working the farms. By the time he'd reached adulthood, he'd been imprisoned and tortured three times on charges of attempting to escape. During his last term in prison, he'd befriended a Dutch political prisoner who'd been exiled to the Cape from Dutch-colonised Indonesia. His political ideology had intrigued Mahendra, and the two of them had engaged in much intensive discourse that had enlightened Mahendra's mind.

After leaving prison, he'd managed to escape a fourth time and this time he succeeded in getting out of the Cape. Mahendra took with him to Port Natal a history of slavery, a profound hatred for White people and deep-seated feelings of vengeance. He formed an underground political group that mostly vented amongst each other the working conditions of non-Whites, while expressing their feelings in the most diplomatic terms to the English colonialists. He'd had to be careful how he portrayed himself, and his political team had no formal recognition, name or influence. What Mahendra *had* done, however, was satiate his hateful feelings with the furtive acts of the murder of two White men out on their drunken exploits. Police had not been at all suspicious of the circumstances of these deaths, as the Dutch men had a reputation for hard drinking. They'd simply put the deaths down to intoxicated brawling that had got out of hand.

Mahendra had married, and had passed on his feelings of hatred and contempt for the White man to his children. They, in turn, had gone on to join various socio-political groups and, very much later, members of the following generations had been instrumental in assisting with the underground Struggle that had culminated in the New Dispensation. In Ajay, Mahendra's vengeful feelings translated into a need to bring about reform, and ancient contempt was tempered by hope, a long-held vision of a new South Africa and social interaction with people of different cultures.

Mahendra stood up as Dumisani beckoned him. It was time for him to speak to this man who had done so much for the freedom of this country. It was time to help him let go of the past, release inferiority and see with new eyes. It was time for Ajay to recognise the changes that the country had gone through and time for him to stop entertaining the ghosts of Mahendra's past. Yes, Mahendra thought as he made his way to Ajay's side. It was time.



Mahendra's voice was deep and resonant. As the Indian and Malay delegation surrounded Ajay, Mahendra spoke through Tumelo.

'You are my family,' he said to Ajay, 'you have carried the burden of my experiences, and you have held up the torch of peace so that the majority of the people of this country might be free from the chains of oppression. Yet while you have fought for peace, and helped win it for others, you have failed to ditch your own chains. You hang on to them, keeping yourself prisoner, subjecting yourself over and over to the indignities that were once meted out by your oppressors.' Mahendra touched Ajay's head gently.

'I suffered great hardship through the tyrants of our time, and in that suffering, I was confronted with the hate that my own Ancestors had passed on to me. My violent and vengeful heart was not *created* by those who enslaved me. They instead, through their own brutal regime, helped me to confront what was hidden in my soul. My aggressors were part of my own soul family, each of us playing out a role that would help every one of us to meet head-on the poison that prevented us from living in joy. For you see, this world is not a joyful place when human beings come together. It is fraught with human suffering to one degree or another. All human experience is a state of mind, and in this world, there is only one frequency band of thinking that arises from the type of ideas that we hold. This world is a place of suffering, for we human beings have a propensity towards clutching ideas that hurt us. To experience true joy, we must ditch the ideas that we currently live through. Every last one of us is here in this world to do exactly that, for every last one of us experiences discomfort in one form or another. Joyful living belongs to another dimensional experience, and to gain access to that life, we must release the ideas that hold us in painful experience.'

Ajay listened carefully as Mahendra spoke. Something profound had changed within him in these last few weeks and tonight he felt a great weight lifting from his shoulders. Through his talks with Tumelo and Nomusa, he was learning how much he'd held on to his ideas, and how they shaped his experience of the world. Ajay had blamed the external world for his own suffering and pain. It was now slowly dawning on him that everything, every experience, had its place in the grand scheme of things. All the people that we came across in one lifetime, were related to us at a deep level of the soul. We were joined together by common ideas and through our interactions with each other, we somehow confronted and released ideas that were painful to us. No-one was to blame for our pain, Ajay had realised. Other people simply helped us to confront the darkness in the soul. Those who inflicted suffering on us were also confronting the horrors of their own mind. Before we can release any idea, we have to acknowledge its presence. An aggressor is simply in the first stages of healing. Each one of us has engaged in action that has caused other people pain. Through these events, it becomes obvious who we are and what we need to deal with at a deep level. Ajay wondered if it were ever possible to gain joyful experience in this world, in this particular dimensional experience. Mahendra answered the question.

'To gain access to other more joyful dimensions, we do not necessarily have to die. We sometimes need only shift our current view of the world and the people in it. South Africa has the potential to experience great joy, for the people of this country have, through the generations, confronted much ugliness. Yet still, there are many who hold on to blame, recrimination and regret. They are still in the throes of their own spiritual journey and cannot be hurried along. It is the way of the pathway of the soul. In this world, we can only behold the *potential* for joy; we cannot *fully* experience joy while we exist in this collective part of the soul.'

Mahendra paused a while before continuing.

'Often though, and in my case in particular, one *does* die to this world with all our ideas intact. It must be remembered that our experience in this world is just a temporary destination in our long spiritual journey. *Beyond* this world, the pathway continues. We do not instantly journey to higher places since we possess too much baggage for that to be possible. Instead, we continue on a spiritual journey that helps us to confront everything that lies within. Shedding damaging ideas renders the mind finer in frequency, and so we gain access to finer places in the soul.'

Ajay was starting to understand what life is about. It certainly is not a beginning or an end. The circumstances we are born into contain the elements that help us along the way. The people that we meet, the situations we find ourselves in all offer the opportunity for internal healing. Sometimes we are here to *release* ideas; sometimes we are just here to confront what is hidden in the soul. But this world, this life, is but one stop along the way. So much was making sense to Ajay now. There was nothing in this world that was solid and real; everything about it was tainted by impermanence. Every aspect of life had its cycle. Relationships, situations; they all had a beginning and an end. The significance that we attach to all these things belonged in the realms of the conditioned mind. The journey we are on, Ajay realised, is the most crucial part of life. The pain that we feel when things end offers the gift of our personal healing.

Mahendra had his hands on Ajay's shoulders.

'You entered into this life to release the inferiority that has haunted our collective soul. In this journey, you have taken my hate, my contempt and my militancy, and transformed it into something positive. You worked with other political groups and helped organise the underground Struggle. You were fighting for us, your Ancestors. We all needed you to work in association with your oppressors to dissolve the poison that is ours collectively. Through you, and through people like you, this country is free. In doing this for your Ancestors, and for the South African people, you have also helped those who injured us confront the darkness in their own souls. The journey is for all of us. We were born together in this time for good reason. Both aggressor and victim are one and the same people. Now, though, you need to finally release the demon of inferiority. It is an illusory ghost that haunts your mind. This is your time to do something about it.'

Ajay looked at the people in the crowd. It was time for him to speak.



Public speaking was not new to Ajay. He had been a leader during the Struggle, and leaders put themselves in a position to guide others. Ajay felt a responsibility to this crowd. They were brothers and sisters in his soul. They were all here together on the same mission to cleanse the same corner of their minds. He needed to clear things up in his own mind, and in so doing, help heal something in them. This was what tonight was about. The Ceremony of the Ancestors was helping each person here to let go of their ideas and release the past. Each person who was up front with Dumisani healed something and through their healing, healed those in the audience. Ajay started to speak.

'I've come a long way to this point in my evolution,' he started. He stared distractedly at the crowd, pondering every word before he spoke.

'Right now, I am engaging in an arduous re-education of the mind. I am learning to think differently, and that entails examining my ideas and scrutinizing the way in which I have viewed my life. It has not been an easy task for me to let go of certain ways of thinking, for I have been so identified with my ideas. I believed that without them, I would no longer exist. Yet I am finding that instead of self-annihilation, I am gaining something far greater. Without the burden of victimhood, I am finding meaning and purpose in all things. Tonight, through other people's journeys, I have made sense of God's role; that is, God has no hand in our suffering. God, it appears, belongs in that realm of existence where no idea is in conflict with another. God's realm is a state of mind that we have yet to attain. I've gained what I feel to be an expansion in consciousness. No longer am I confined to the narrow walls which were made up of my restricting beliefs. In seeing every person as a brother-in-arms in my spiritual war against my damaging beliefs, I am able to let go of bitterness and my suffocating need for recognition.'

Ajay became silent while he searched his soul for the right expression.

'I know now that my role in the Struggle for liberation in this country was driven by an Ancestral call to heal our collective sense of inferiority. I see very clearly that inferiority does not exist. It is a phantom that, when entertained, creates a state of mind and therefore a particular state of experience. I no longer recognise it, and so also release the behaviours that validate it. I am now learning to see *without* the idea of inferiority and the view is one of beauty and grace. I find that when I look upon a White man without that damaging idea, I begin to see something else other than a person who is wicked and evil. In fact, I begin to see many other things. I see his gift to me. I see a link between us in the soul. On a surface level, I see a man with his own cultural values. I see diversity in the way he sees life and engages with it. In an ordinary social setting, I see a good honest man who is also flawed because, like me, he harbours damaging ideas that in this age have come around to haunt him. In short, I am able to look at him in his full costume. Not only do I see and engage with his negative aspects, but I see the beauty he brings to those he has no conflict with. Every soul is beautiful. Even the most evil man brings a measure of beauty onto this journey with him. I constantly remind myself that I must not characterize a man by his flaws. I must learn to see the whole package. This gives me perspective, for I too am flawed and need the world to see the whole of me and not focus on that which in time will be released.'

The crowd was quiet in its contemplation. The collective soul was undergoing transformation, and ripples of energy were barely discernable as this adjustment took place. Ajay fell quiet for a time too. As he searched his mind, the reality of his situation infiltrated the magic of this hour. He had yet to go home, sort out his life and modify the manner in which he had been living it. Everything had changed, and these changes would be reflected in the way that he did things. He would have to deal with his wife Mona, who would definitely not roll with the changes. Ajay had long since been aware that committing to change brings its own form of pain. The old life that we led disintegrates before our eyes, and for a time, we are left bereft and in a type of no-mans-land before the new life springs into being. We enter into a period of mourning and reflection before we are finally able to lay the remains of the old life to rest. Ajay and Mona had built a life that was spent in trying to get recognition for their war-time efforts. Mona still fought her battle and would do so until some revelation came to her as it had come to Ajay. Ajay, on the other hand, had given up the Struggle that until now had remained in his soul. For him, it was over and the rest of his life would be spent in finding the next stage of his destiny. There would be new mountains to climb and new ideas to challenge, for this was the destiny of every human being who existed within these dimensions of the world.

Ajay reached into the belt of his trousers. Tucked in there was the box that held the Peace Pipe. He took it out and held it up to the audience.

'This is my gift to you and the people of South Africa. For me, it symbolises peace, and I fashioned it while I was imprisoned during the Struggle. Before this night, I was not able to share it, for I had not yet found any real peace in my own heart. I had to complete the journey that was the purpose of my life before I could give it to you. My colleagues and I would smoke this pipe when times were at their worst and we felt weakened by the great fight for freedom. We experienced many dark nights when all hope was lost, when we lost sight of our goals and a bleak and empty future mocked us. We'd pass the pipe around and smoke it in quiet reflection. It was a moment in which a temporary sense of peace descended on us, and this peace became the strength on which we drew to keep us going. Though we are scarcely aware of it, this peace exists at the very heart of each human being. Peace is what each one of us is always striving towards. Peace, I now realise, is the abode of God; peace is the state of mind where no ideas conflict. We can never feel peace for extended periods because our ideas are always clamouring for attention, they are always shouting to be heard and to be validated. They are always in conflict with another, and so the din is too great for peace to be realised.'

Mahendra had collected a large bowl of tobacco and had placed it before Ajay who stuffed some of it into the pipe before continuing.

'The people who were influential in the Struggle for liberation were of mixed race. We came from every different racial group that made up this country. Each of us held different values, different ideas and different outlooks. We represented *you*, the people of South Africa. In our unity during this difficult time, we experienced a sense of peace amongst each other, for we were striving for the same ideal. We shared a common idea that we all should view each other with equal status. Being thrown together in this journey, we were momentarily forced to suspend ideas that conflicted, and focus on those that were common and that would propel us towards our goals. Those were the moments of peace. I share this pipe with you now because I have released my hold on my ideas. I offer them up for scrutiny and as I identify them, I am willing to let go of any that hurt you or myself. This, for me, opens up the road towards ultimate peace. I have a long way to travel on it, but the journey has begun. I recognise my mind to be full of ideas that need discarding, and I am waiting with eagerness for the next stage of my journey. With new awareness and no fear of letting go, I already have a sense of peace in my heart.'

Ajay lit the pipe, and drew deeply of it..

'I recognise now, that South Africa has changed for the better. Now I am able to see the rewards of the labours of those who engaged in the Struggle. I finally acknowledge my own contributions. Before tonight, I saw only through my old ideas. I still viewed my world as being fraught with the negativity of the past. I could not appreciate the changes that had taken place in the New Dispensation. I was looking for recognition from others for my own contribution, yet couldn't value it myself. When I look now, I see what I helped to achieve. Freedom has created positive interaction amongst all races, a blossoming integration and movement towards unity. There are equal opportunities for those who had been at great disadvantage and in this move, South Africa has journeyed out of its diseased past. We have not yet reached our ultimate destination, and still we live amongst those who wrestle with the changes, but as a nation, we are moving in the right direction. This country has shown positive change and it is the first time I am seeing it. It lifts my heart to release the old ways of thinking, for it clouded my view and sullied my heart.'

Ajay drew again from the pipe, then passed it to the person sitting nearest him in the audience. It was time to share the pipe with everyone.

'My gift to you,' he smiled.

Nomusa glanced at Megan, then over at Elspeth, who sat further back in the crowd with Charlie and Thandi amongst the English delegation. The two White women had a similar look about them. Both sported the type of pale skin that didn't take too well to the Sun, their close-set green eyes contrasting against fine blonde hair. Both women's shoulders were slightly rounded, as if protecting their narrow chests. Thandi's only resemblance to Nomusa was her height, yet Nomusa knew the true likeness between them lay beyond the physical body.

The turn-out for this event had surprised Nomusa. She hadn't expected to see so many people present. The vast *veld* was teeming with individuals who'd come from far across the country, all of them called to fulfil this important aspect of their destiny. The Ancestral presence was also astounding. For a long time now, Nomusa had been prepared for this Ceremony of the Ancestors and was well aware of its great significance, yet hadn't envisaged what she witnessed now with this audience. Tonight, in the company of this crowd, Nomusa was experiencing the vastness of her self. No longer was she confined to what she'd come to know as her own body and mind, but she'd crossed the mental boundaries of all those who were present. She was expanded. Only now did she understand what had only been *academic* to her in the past; that all people were interconnected, they were one and the same entity. Tonight, Dumisani was imparting his gift of wisdom to so many different people, and each individual's personal healing was affecting the internal dynamics of everyone else in the audience. The group of people here tonight shared a collective pattern of thinking that was ready for release, and for them, it could only be done in this way, together.

Thandi and Charlie's daughter Lindiwe was inching her way to the front. She was carrying something in her up-turned hand. As she reached Dumisani, he pointed to a copper cauldron which had been placed on the floor in front of Megan and Nomusa. Lindiwe knelt down and placed two small objects in the pot. She smiled up at Nomusa, who positioned the lid on the cauldron. Dumisani came forward, standing between Nomusa and Megan. He waved his hands over the pot, while chanting in a low voice. The audience was silent, and Dumisani's voice, as soft as it was, rose out into the starry night, and softly descended upon the crowd like fairy dust. As Dumisani finished, he looked down at the young girl who stood to one side of Nomusa. She was ready to speak.



Lindiwe was confident.

'I am the child of Charlie and Thandi.' She looked around at the audience, and then turned to the two women. 'I too have undertaken a long spiritual journey, and return to this childhood self to resolve the issues of my past. In this body, lies much symbolism, for I am the child of two people who were once separated by ignorance and fear, and who came together to resolve this issue after a spiritual sojourn into the depths of their souls. I am a link that joins two races of people in blood.'

Lindiwe stood between Nomusa and Megan and touched each of the women on the shoulder.

'I am the link between the two of you. My father's line ends with Megan's generation and my mother and father's with Nomusa's. The two of you are in effect, sisters, and you have been brought together for a very meaningful purpose.'

The two women looked at each other. This was not news to Nomusa. Megan smiled broadly.



She was related to Nomusa! Megan was surprised, though she knew she had little reason to wonder at the revelation. Megan was undergoing transformation. There'd been so many mystifying things happening lately that she was beginning to accept new realities that at one time she would have deemed utterly ridiculous. It seemed perfectly acceptable that the Ancestors would have reached across time and space and brought together two women who would otherwise have known nothing about each other.

Megan couldn't see the child Lindiwe, but was very cognisant of her presence. It was a strange manner of perception that she held tonight. Megan's eyes beheld nothing, yet her inner senses transmitted everything to her. She didn't need to see to know what this child looked like, and even though it was Tumelo speaking on behalf of Lindiwe, she heard the little girl very clearly.



The girl had put something in the pot. Nomusa appeared to see everything with great clarity, but when Megan had glanced into the cauldron, there'd been nothing there. Lindiwe was hovering over the closed pot, now, ready to open it again.

'I have a gift for you,' she said as she pulled the lid from the cauldron. Megan gasped. Where there'd appeared to be nothing, now there were two rings. They'd appeared out of nowhere. Or at least that was how it seemed to Megan. Lindiwe lifted the rings from the cauldron. 'These items belonged to my father and mother. They exchanged them during the period that they were together. Both of them had kept the rings long after they were separated. They want you both to wear them, since your relationship symbolises their resolution and subsequent evolution. After tonight, they will each go their own way, into finer territories of the soul. The rings will assist your own journey, especially during the course of your writing.'

Lindiwe took Megan's hand and placed one of the rings on her finger. The girl did the same for Nomusa.

'My family have found each other again, and it has brought greater levels of peace to us. This peace will also be felt in each one of you, replacing for both of you the inherited emotional discomfort of my absence in my father's life. Though you never knew it, the issue of my father not knowing about me, impacted both of you profoundly. Megan always felt an emptiness and need to get back to South Africa, though she could never fathom why. Something in her was requesting to be filled, and through my reunion with my father, this has now happened. The same thing occurred with Nomusa. Her need to find Megan was baffling to her and when she came across her in London, something inexplicable happened. She felt as if she'd come home to something, though she never had the words to explain her feelings.'

Lindiwe held the hands of both women.

'It is time that the two of you discover each other at a deep soul level. In fulfilling your joint destiny in the recording of this Ancestral story, the barriers between you will dissolve.'



Dumisani nodded at Nomusa, who began to address the crowd.

'Every person that we encounter in this world is on a journey. Each lifespan is no more than a route along a pathway towards the kingdom of Umkulukulu, God. Umkulukulu's world can only be accessed through the achievement of a certain state of mind, and as we have learned here tonight, and in the course of our own journeys, Umkulukulu requires that we possess ideas that have no conflict with another. Such a state of mind is almost unimaginable as we sit here, our heads cluttered by our ideas. Most of us in this gathering have a long voyage ahead before we accomplish such a feat, but we are on the right path, and tonight we are letting go of many ideas that hurt us.'

Nomusa stole a glance at Megan before continuing. She smiled at her English sister.

'The book that my sister and I are required to write, forms part of the journey of all who are to read it. Through the words that we choose and the story that we tell, it is our duty to insert into the consciousness of others the need for an examination of the mind. It is an important lesson to learn that our experience arises because of our state of mind. This state of mind is not only a personal thing. It is a collective. *This* is a crucial point. The places we are compelled to live out our lives comprise social networks of people, and these people share a collective mind. No matter what your opinion is of the country you live in, or the people you live amongst, their ideas belong to you. You may be in opposition to what goes on around you and protest at what you see, but in those protestations you will have the opportunity to see who you are. Whenever we fight *for* something in our communities, we are fighting *against* something in ourselves. Often though, we only focus on those who are the perpetrators of evil, and we fail to look at what their actions bring to the surface in ourselves. We are a collective; what we are doing, we are doing *to* each other, and *for* each other. We need to deal with those who perpetrate evil, and we need to deal with ourselves. We are on this journey together, and it is important that we begin to think in this collective way.'

Nomusa paused for a few moments. She was a *Sangoma*, and she understood the importance of her healing role. Her words had to be chosen very carefully, for they were the tools that had leverage in removing old damaging ideas from the collective mind of this group.

'We Black South Africans have always had a propensity towards collective thinking. It is evident in our culture; the way that we live and conduct our relationships reflect a communal mindset. Western culture is different. People of the western world, and they are not necessarily only White people, operate on a much more individual level. When you examine the two viewpoints, you will find very different ways of living in the world, though on the surface of things, we do *appear* to be similar. These two world views are indicative of the purpose of the journey we are on. All of us are here to resolve something, but we are doing it in different social contexts. In South Africa, we have a predominantly collective

mindset. Whether we are Black, Indian, Coloured, White, or even if we belong to other minorities, because we share a collective mind, we all have a predisposition towards this way of thinking.'

Nomusa shifted in her seat. The audience was captivated; she was reaching into the shared soul and moving the hearts of these people.

'South Africa is changing for the better. In business, we are moving into international markets, and as a result, we are connecting more and more with western ways of thinking. It is a natural thing that our thinking is affected, for it is the way of change, and it is also a necessary part of our human journey. Westernised thinking clearly holds some value in the process of our evolution, otherwise we would not be journeying along this route. But also, there are some African values that it is important we retain, for it is these principles that will be instrumental in our healing.'

Nomusa reached over and touched Megan's arm.

'The book that Megan and I will write is part of the process of persuading South Africans to hold on to our communal values. In that collective thinking, we take responsibility for the ideas that lie within the collective soul. We also deal with our history as a collective issue, and move forward as a community. We still have many social issues that need addressing. We continue to struggle with race issues, we battle crime, and great poverty is matched with a virus that is killing our people at an alarming rate. These are all challenges that reach into the depths of the soul, and to heal them, we have to travel to the recesses of the mind where our ideas hide. So much of our pain has been passed on by our Ancestors, and we are here to deal with those issues *together*, as part of our own healing.'

The night was getting cooler. Further away the flutter of bat's wings could be heard in the trees and bull frogs croaked in the distance. Nomusa rubbed at her bare arms.

'Many of us have no contact with our Ancestors. Nights like tonight are rare because we have little connection with the family who walked before us. Many of our South African people speak to Ancestors only when they want something for themselves. They ask the Ancestors to intercede in matters that we should not even be entertaining. In this country, we are superstitious, and many of us call upon our Sangomas to get involved in evil-doing so that we can achieve our ends. We call upon demonic entities to harm others, and there are even times that some people get our Sangomas to perform rituals and use muti to kill people. In engaging in such activities, we are rooting ourselves to one point in our journey. We are not moving forward towards the world of Umkulukulu where we will be supremely happy. In relating in such ways to our Ancestors, we also do not give *them* the opportunities to move along their spiritual pathways. Instead, we engage them in trifling things, keeping them trapped in the same place as us. Not all of our Ancestors have evolved beyond the lessons of this lifetime. When we engage them in trivia, they stay in the netherworlds close to this realm, refusing to move along. Remember that we are responsible to them too. There are times when they too need our help.'

Nomusa sighed. The way in which South Africans related to their Ancestors was change she was desperate to see. This was a responsibility that was tasked to her and she could only hope that transformation would take place soon.

'When we focus upon our growth in the way that we are all here to do tonight, our more evolved Ancestors come forward to help us. All of us are linked to those Ancestors who are at the same level as us, and to those who are far wiser. The requests that we make of them, and their response to us, distinguishes between these different Ancestors. Those who have your best interests at heart will not answer your petty requests and will certainly not engage in harmful activities. The Sangomas that you visit can also be distinguished by the way in which they work. The true Sangomas of South Africa are healers who take care of your physical, psychological and spiritual needs. They do not participate with denizens of the dark worlds to accomplish their tasks. Unfortunately, poverty has influenced many of our Sangomas and they manipulate people of our communities through fear. Much of their magic is based on lies and illusion. Ignorant people are too afraid to challenge them.'

It was time for Nomusa to make her final request. Tonight, many people had come for healing, and Dumisani had facilitated much transformation. Soon, dawn would break and it would be time for Dumisani to take his leave.

'I ask that after tonight, each of you return to your life and give much thought to who you are as an individual and who you are as part of the collective. I request that you begin to see with your sacred eye, with that perception that is seated in the soul. See every interaction as an opportunity to discover what lies hidden in these depths. After every exchange, ask yourself what aspect of yourself you are confronting, or what idea you need to release. Understand that every person you come into contact with is connected to you at a soul level, and that together you are in the process of healing. As much as it is our duty to deal with our own internal problems, so it is our responsibility to help others confront themselves. Where justice is required, make sure it is meted out through the correct authorities. My last request is that if you make use of our Sangomas, choose with wisdom. Let your spiritual growth be the determinant of your choice of healer. In this country are many truly wise people, but you must find them amidst the charlatans of our time.'

Nomusa grasped Megan's hand. Megan smiled back at her.

'My sister and I will write our book on behalf of the Ancestors. We are joined together in this task. It is I who channels the wisdom of our Ancestors, and she who will craft the words and story so that all of our South African people relate to the knowledge that is passed on to them. We offer this book for our own personal healing, and to contribute to the healing of the collective soul of this country.'

The stars were beginning to fade as dawn slowly broke. Dumisani stepped forward. There was one more task to perform before Dumisani could begin the ultimate journey. He looked to Desmond. Desmond glanced down at the box which lay in his lap. The bones were ready for their final slumber.

Desmond stood before the ten foot deep hole in the ground. It had been difficult to see it in the dark, and the opening was bordered by large rocks to protect people from falling into it. A few men from Tumelo's company removed the rocks, rolling them into the nearby trees. Tumelo's Sangomas danced around the fire a short distance away, and the drummers picked up their rhythm and volume. Lerato sang, her evocative melody reaching into the psyche of the audience, etching out the story of the night and opening inner doorways to new perspectives.

Dumisani watched as the men worked. The Sun was inching its way onto the horizon. A new day was beginning and Dumisani's heart was full. He'd performed this ceremony for the last time; in a long journey through the annals of time, he'd finally reached the ultimate gateway, and Umkulukulu, God, was welcoming him through.

He looked at the people in the crowd. He remembered a time thousands of years ago when he'd sat in an audience just like this, in this very place. Then, he'd wondered if it were ever possible to find the world of Umkulukulu. He'd searched high and low for God, looking in all the wrong places, adopting ideas about the divine entity that had resulted in him being held in worlds just as dense and complicated as this. There'd been times when Dumisani had doubted that God even existed because every idea that he'd had about Him had been challenged through numerous experiences. And yet Dumisani, like so many others, had fought to keep his ideas intact, even when life had shown him they were hollow, illusory, meaningless. Dumisani had taken endless dead-end roads before he'd finally discarded his *ideas* about God, and had realised that He was always present *beneath* them all.

Dumisani had cried out to God during his endless journeys through different forms of life. He wanted God to help him, rescue him from his misery, end the search by showing Dumisani His face. But it had never happened, for God cannot penetrate our world of ideas without our help. God had spoken only once to Dumisani, once when he'd experienced a moment when all his ideas were suspended. God had declared then, that to reach Him, all one had to do was give up everything, give up all conflicting ideas. Dumisani had barely understood this, but had taken his journey with that wisdom held in his heart. He'd experienced much pain and heartache and in time, he'd learned to extricate himself from the *tyranny* of human thinking processes.

This ceremony had been the last task of this current lifetime. He'd traced his line and had offered the gift of his wisdom to his descendents. He'd watched as they resolved their issues and moved on to new and liberating experiences. And now his work was done.

He looked down as Desmond arranged the skeletal remains on some fresh linen and folded them neatly into the fabric. Tumelo attached some thin rope to both ends of the bundle so that they might be lowered into the deep hole without too much effort. These bones had been discovered more than fifty years ago, right at the time that Dumisani had been called to take this final road back into the world in which he had left his own genetic imprints. He'd watched as the archaeologists had discovered his remains, in the place he had lived long ago with his human family. It had been a strange sensation, one of unrest; he'd felt things move in his soul, and he'd known then that his skeleton could only go back to rest once he had resolved this last conflict in his soul.

Tumelo and Desmond lowered the bundle carefully as Lerato's song rang out and joined the birds in their joyful chatter. The drumming slowed and became softer as the bundle reached the floor. Tumelo and Desmond let go of the ropes and they fell into the opening. Tumelo straightened up and addressed the crowd.

'And so we close this Ceremony of the Ancestors, bearing Dumisani's gift in our hearts. This Great Ancestor has given us much and now, all we can do is carry this legacy forward and *intend* to walk the path that he has taken. He has completed the circle of his existence and he now lets go of all form and joins the world of Umkulukulu, God. We thank you Dumisani for your gift.'

A bright light appeared from the sky, seeking Dumisani. As it enveloped him, he felt his form dissolve and every idea he had once clung to disappeared into their rightful insignificance. Umkulukulu had welcomed him home.