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CHAPTER 1—MONKEY’S WEDDING

Southern Rhodesia, a British Protectorate
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The jackal tugged on the body it had uncovered behind the beer hall, its jaws locked around a bloody, dirt-encrusted forearm. A short distance away, a hyena lowered its head and edged forward.

The jackal stopped, eyed the hyena and howled a warning.

Two miles away on the Bradley sisal plantation, Elizabeth McKenzie, on her knees beside a muddy flowerbed, heard the howl and stopped digging. The only sound was the rustle of the sword-like leaves of the surrounding fields of sisal plants. Then the jackal howled again. She gave a shiver and glanced toward the house, taking comfort from the light in the kitchen, where their houseboy, Nelson, was already at work.

Nudging her long tangled hair away from her face with the back of one dirty hand, she gripped the business end of a wooden spoon with the other and dragged it down the length of the

flowerbed. She sat back and eyed the results, then tore open the packet of sweet pea seeds she'd slipped from her mother's gardening box and sprinkled them down the rut. A strip of chicken wire she'd molded to cover them and protect them from the chickens lay nearby.

She was still in her pajamas, although she was wearing a jersey against the early morning chill of the cold season. She had slipped from the house before anyone else was up. She rarely slept past dawn, afraid she might miss something. Even though there was never anything to miss. Still, these days there was another reason to get out of the house. Her mother was going to have a baby and it was making her more and more high-strung by the minute. And she still had two months to go. Elizabeth planned on surprising her by planting the sweet peas, her favorite flower.

Pookie, Elizabeth's pet bantam chicken, appeared from behind an overturned wheelbarrow a few yards away, pecking at the ground. A runt, Pookie had never grown all her feathers, except for those on her legs, which made it look like she was wearing little flared brown skirts. Pookie stopped mid-peck, eyed the sweet pea seeds then shot toward the flowerbed like a shuttlecock whacked across a badminton net.

"No!" Elizabeth jammed the protective cover over the seeds.

Pookie stared down through the wire for a moment, then shifted and took a stab at the seed packet. It crackled and she jumped, feather skirts quivering. Elizabeth laughed and stroked Pookie's moth-eaten head and back. The bird held still for a moment and then, clucking nervously, pecked her way back toward the chicken coop.

Elizabeth sighed. She wished Pookie would allow a nice tight hug now and then, like a puppy would. In fact, she wished Pookie was a puppy. But every time she asked, her mother said no. Well, at least there was the baby coming. She couldn't wait to play with him. And a him it would be. It had to be. Her mother couldn't take another girl.

Angry voices burst from the house, and her stomach clenched. Her parents were arguing again. The back door burst open and her father, Mac, flew down the steps and hurried toward their Ford that looked like a black bathtub turned upside down.

She scrambled to her feet. "Daddy!" The slamming of the screen door drowned out her voice.

She watched helplessly as her father reversed down the rut of a driveway, swung left, and, in a cloud of red dust, tore down the dirt road toward the sisal curing sheds. Why was he headed to work on his day off? What about the breakfast they were supposed to share?

"*Missi.*"

Elizabeth turned. "Turu!"

Houseboy Nelson's son, Tururu, stood yawning and stretching in the doorway of the *kiya*—servant's quarters—he shared with his father, his cast off shorts and shirt wrinkled with sleep.

"Shh!" He lifted his chin in the direction of the house. That's right, Nelson might hear them and make Tururu help him in the kitchen.

"I thought you'd already gone to your grandmother's," she whispered. Every Saturday he apprenticed with his witchdoctor grandmother. "So can you play, then?"

He shook his head. "Grandmother is waiting."

She tried to hide her disappointment. It wasn't a good idea to let the servants think you cared. It made them expect things and lose respect for you. Or so her mother always said.

"Will Karari be there?"

"Karari *godobori.*"

"But I thought you were going to be the next big witchdoctor?"

He gave a sharp shake of his head.

“Well, how am I supposed to know, what with all these lessons you’re taking? Anyway, you really shouldn’t be seen with him. My dad says he’s a troublemaker. Especially not now with this whole Federation fuss going on.” Britain’s law uniting Southern Rhodesia and its two neighboring countries was about to go into effect. The blacks hadn’t been given a vote, and a lot of them were upset over it.

He gave a half shrug.

“Everybody thinks you’re all going to riot, you know.”

She hoped he’d protest, tell her they would never do such a thing. Instead, he turned his head at the sound of a voice inside the *kiya*. His mother, Dakarai. This was one of the weekends she visited from their village, a couple of miles to the east near the beer hall. He disappeared for a moment.

The screen door squealed, and Nelson emerged from the house. He pulled a *stompie*, a blackened hand-rolled cigarette stub, from his top pocket and started down the back steps. Tururu charged from the *kiya* and headed for the lane at the back of the yard. Elizabeth ducked behind the wheelbarrow and peered through a hole at Nelson. She didn’t like him. He was nasty and always whacking Tururu behind the head for nothing.

Nelson stopped, stuck the *stompie* into his mouth, and, with a quick flick of a match against the bottom of his shoe, lit the end and inhaled.

“*Picannin dona*,” he called through a stream of smoke.

Elizabeth stayed put.

Rocking on his heels, Nelson blew smoke rings in the air. The damp cold of the ground seeped into Elizabeth’s bones and she shivered.

Enough of this. Pretending he wasn't there, she strolled back toward the sweet pea bed.

"Eh, *picannin dona*, I call you."

"What do you want?" she called over her shoulder.

He didn't answer. She glanced back.

Nelson was staring up at a hawk eagle making lazy circles in the sky, its familiar black and white under-feathers a sharp contrast against the blue. She glanced around the yard for Pookie. She'd already lost one pet chicken to one of these birds. There was no sign of the bantam. In the coop, she hoped.

Nelson's gaze shifted to the overgrown patch at the bottom of the yard.

"What are you looking at?" she asked, following his gaze.

He stared blankly at her for a moment. "Where is *Medem's* spoon?"

She shrugged.

He glared at her. "*Medem's* spoon."

Elizabeth hesitated just long enough to let him know he couldn't boss her around, retrieved the spoon, and strolled back toward him. Nelson took one last draw of his *stompie*, pinched the lit end between thumb and forefinger, stuffed the remains into his pocket, and held out his hand.

Elizabeth gave a small shudder. Even though she'd been told Africans didn't feel pain like whites did, she just knew putting out a cigarette like that had to hurt. Holding out the spoon like she was in a relay race, she let him take it from her as she marched past.

He frowned at its muddy state. "*Medem* not like this."

"She doesn't mind, so there." She skipped up the steps into the house.

Sounds of retching greeted her. Her mother, Annie, was at it again. Remembering she was still in her pajamas, she hurried toward her bedroom.

Her mother emerged from the bathroom, wiping her face with a wet washcloth. "Hold on right there. What have I told you about running around outside half naked?"

Elizabeth made a show of looking down at herself. "Half naked?"

"Don't you get cheeky with me, Missi. I've told you before, it doesn't take much to arouse these *kaffirs*. And with what's been happening, well, I don't want to even think about it."

Elizabeth opened her mouth to argue but then closed it again.

"It's just that I worry about you," her mother continued, her voice quivering. "Girls are so vulnerable in this world, especially at your ---"

"I planted sweet peas for you."

Her mother blew her nose on the washcloth. "That's nice."

Elizabeth sighed. So much for her big surprise. "Well, I'd better go get dressed then."

"Wait a minute." Reaching out her mother lifted a lock of Elizabeth's hair. "When was the last time you brushed this bird's nest? I mean really got stuck in, not just waved the brush over it.

"Yesterday."

"I don't believe it. Get in there." She nodded toward the master bedroom. "It's time for a thorough combing."

Elizabeth groaned. "I can do it, myself, honestly."

"Not another word. Sit."

Elizabeth slumped onto the padded kidney-shaped stool in front of her mother's dressing table and scowled into the mirror. Her mother lifted a handful of Elizabeth's long tawny hair and began to tug a comb through it.

"Ow!"

"I should just cut it all off right now like a boy's, and be done with the aggravation."

Gritting her teeth, Elizabeth hunched over. After the first few knots were combed through, it didn't hurt that much. A couple of times, her mother stopped, and with a wince, pressed a hand against her belly. The baby. Her eyes strayed to her mother's stomach. To think an entire human being was lying in there, growing fingers and toes and elbows and knees and a heart and everything. And it got there because her parents had done 'it.' She colored at the thought.

Her mother stopped combing. "What on earth's the matter with you?"

Elizabeth felt her face blaze anew. "Um, nothing."

"You're not getting sick are you?"

"*Medem.*" Nelson stood behind them, holding a tea tray.

Her mother gave a start and swung around. "We'll take our tea in the kitchen, thank you Nelson."

"Yes, *Medem.*" He turned and left the room.

"See what I mean?" her mother said in a low voice. "He didn't even knock. Besides, he knows I don't like him in here before I'm dressed. I'm telling you, they're getting bolder by the minute."

"He's always nasty to Turu, you know."

"That's different. Hand me the brush."

Bending to the task, her mother brushed Elizabeth's hair until it gleamed and then plaited a thick single tress down her back.

"I wish you wouldn't make it so tight." Elizabeth clasped her head between both hands. "I can hardly see where I'm going when you're done."

"Nonsense." Her mother weaved a yellow ribbon into the last few inches. "I want you to keep it braided from now on, you've got some nasty split ends. I'll trim them next week. Oh, and before I forget, you need to try on that blue dress so I can finish it. I want you to wear it when Mr. Coetzee comes on Monday."

"No lessons on Monday." Elizabeth rubbed her temples where the hair stretched her skin. "It's Federation Day, remember?"

"Wear it on Wednesday, then. The point is I want you to start dressing like a young lady."

"I don't want to get all dressed up just for Mr. Coetzee. He doesn't care what I'm wearing."

"With boarding school coming up, you need to get into the habit of wearing something other than shorts and a blouse."

Boarding school. That whole nightmare. She slipped off the stool and started for the door, but then stopped. "Why did Daddy go to work today? He told me he didn't have to."

Her mother didn't look up from combing hair from the brush. "He wanted to check on a machine that's been acting up."

"But what about driving Mrs. B. to the station—"

“Oh, I’m sure he’ll be back in time for that,” her mother said, a note of bitterness in her voice. She looked up and their eyes met in the mirror. “Listen, Bitty, when your little brother is born, you can help me change his diaper and bathe him. All right?”

Elizabeth grinned and nodded.

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Shoveling a spoonful of porridge into her mouth, Elizabeth watched an ant carry a grain of sugar across the gingham-patterned oilcloth covering the old wooden kitchen table Mrs. Bradley gave them when she got her new Formica one. Nelson stood at the sink, scouring a pot.

“Nelson, why do they call them Matabele ants?”

He didn’t answer.

“Bwana Coetzee says that a long time ago, Chief Lobengula brought his people up here from South Africa. That’s how the Matabele tribe got here, you know, and actually the Shona too. “She grinned. “Anyway, why do you think they call them Matabele ants and not Shona ants?”

He kept working on the pot.

Nelson had no sense of humor at all. “Well?”

“Nelson not Matabele.”

“What’s that got to do with it?”

He turned and glared at her. “Finish porridge.”

“I’m almost finished, can’t you see?”

He poured milk into a glass, ambled over, and thumped it on the table in front of her. Milk splashed onto the oilcloth.

“That’s very disrespectful. I’m going to tell Madam!”

Whipping the dishtowel from his shoulder, he mopped the milk away with a hard swipe, all the while glaring at her.

“That cloth is only for drying dishes,” she said. “Honestly.”

Making a sharp dismissive clicking sound with his tongue, Nelson flicked the towel back over his shoulder and headed toward the back door.

Elizabeth drained her milk. The kitchen cabinet's top compartment was open. It was usually locked to keep Elizabeth from swiping guests-only Ladyfinger biscuits, and also to prevent Nelson from helping himself to cigarettes and sugar. With a glance toward her mother's bedroom, she hopped onto the cabinet's wooden ledge and removed two biscuits. Stuffing them into her shorts' pocket, she jumped down.

“What *picannin dona* doing?” Propped against the doorjamb, Nelson looked her up and down, a smirk on his face.

Elizabeth gave a start. “Nothing.”

He snorted.

Elizabeth turned and strolled toward her bedroom, but her heart was pounding. Her mom was right; they were getting bolder.

CHAPTER 2

Tururu followed his grandmother, Anesu, Shona high priestess, to the great God Zane's shrine in the ancient ruins of their people. Dogged by his usual nervousness at what they had to do, he lugged a basket filled with brushwood, dried herbs, and a small leather pouch containing powder. Red dust motes danced in the early morning sunlight pouring through the crumbling walls. This was where Anesu cast her spell to rid the valley of the whites, the same magic her people used in ancient times to chase away their enemies.

She'd started the ritual right after bwana Bradley arrived, five years earlier. He stood for all the years when their land hadn't been restored to them, even as they patiently waited. Tururu didn't mind getting rid of the whites—well, except for Missi Elizabeth. But he had something else to worry about lately. Amai Vedu Africa, the Great Mother, had come to Anesu in a vision and told her Tururu was to become *n'anga*, a maker of spells and healer to his people.

“B-but I am Tururu,” he'd said when Anesu told him. His nickname wasn't “mouse” for nothing. How could someone who wasn't very brave, who sometimes stammered, be *n'anga*? He was much better suited to making toys out of wire scraps.

“Amai Vedu knows all,” she'd said, but she looked worried as well.

Well, at least he was not to become *godobori*. That took courage and cleverness. Karari had been chosen for that task. He had the makings of a powerful *godobori*, Grandmother said, clever in so many ways, cunning and incorruptible by the whites—an almost worthy successor to her. Despite his temper.

Anesu stopped and lifted her chin like an antelope sniffing the air for predators. Her right eye shimmered, the one that had been clouded over since birth. She was gazing into the spirit world. “There *is* a dead body on the veld,” she whispered.

Tururu felt a twinge of alarm. Dead bodies showed up now and then on the veld, some victim of a drunken fight or someone with a grudge. But this one felt different. Even he could feel that.

Anesu twisted her head this way and that as if to re-focus. Tururu drew closer in case she breathed a name, for she wouldn't remember it later. Instead, she stopped and reached for her magic amulet, a small green soapstone bird usually worn around her neck.

“*Nadira* back at the hut,” Tururu said. This is what he did best, kept track of Grandmother's possessions. She could be absent-minded sometimes.

She frowned and stared off into the distance. And then as if coming to, she turned to him. “What are you waiting for?”

Tururu hurried through the entrance to the inner chamber and the circle of rocks in the center, dropped to his knees and began stacking the kindling. Gathering up her great skirts, Anesu eased down onto her knees with a grunt. She closed her eyes and sat still as a rock, then lifted her chin and uttered an incantation.

The air vibrated.

Opening her eyes, she jabbed her forefinger toward the firewood. It crackled and burst into blue-tinged flames with hearts of brilliant orange. *Ngozi*. Fire beings from the center of the earth, children of Gurutu, Goddess of the Underworld. Tururu turned away from their mesmerizing brilliance.

It took a great *godobori* like Grandmother to call up and order about these fire spirits. For the weak or less experienced, the *ngozi* were the ones who took control. These beings kept the fire in front of Grandmother's hut burning, day and night, providing heat for cooking and keeping her hut warm on cold winter nights. She also used their power in some of her magic ceremonies.

Anesu reached for her magic pouch, withdrew a handful of black speckled powder and threw it on the blaze. The *ngozi* flared for a moment in a show of blue brilliance, but then murmuring and hissing, they settled back down again. In a voice as strong and deep as thunder, Anesu spoke.

“Oh, great Gurutu, on this your day, Anesu comes to ask for your help to rid our land of the white jackals.”

She clapped her hands three times and uttered a stream of incantations. Sneaking a glance at the fire, Tururu wished he'd paid more attention to the meaning of the ancient words. As Anesu spoke, the fire began to die, but not without a hiss and a luminous flare here and there as the *ngozi* fought to remain. Soon, all that was left was an unnatural glow in the center of the circle.

Anesu let out a deep throaty hum. The earth vibrated around them as if to join in. Dirt showered down from the ancient walls. The Goddess had heard her.

Anesu sat back with chin lifted and arms outstretched toward the heavens for a couple of moments before struggling to her feet.

Tururu gathered everything and replaced it in the basket. Now they had to hurry across the veld before the *tokoloshi*, those mischievous elemental dwellers of the underworld, rose from beneath the earth, drawn by the strong magic. These small creatures could create terrible destruction, gouging out eyes, raping women, and biting off sleeping people's toes. This is why everyone raised their bed with three feet of bricks. Anesu wasn't afraid of them, but they were always after Tururu.

Tururu let his grandmother lead the way again. He hadn't gone ten yards beyond the temple entrance before a hairy claw reached up through the earth and tried to grab his foot. He shrieked and jumped back.

Anesu whirled around and jabbed a stiffened finger toward it. Sparks flew from her finger, and the apparition curled up like a strip of bacon on a hot pan and disappeared back into the ground.

Tururu charged up beside her, almost tripping them both. "Aiyee."

"Come come, Tururu," Anesu said. "What have I told you about being strong inside? *Tokoloshi* smell fear. Did you do the protection work I taught you?"

"Uh---"

She clucked her tongue and continued walking. "Anesu will not always be here to protect you."

"Yes, G-grandmother." He stayed as close to her as possible and glanced around for the small creatures.

“Amai Vedu has chosen you to be *n'anga*, and she does not choose poorly. You have the power in your heart, but you must believe in yourself. And if you do not use the power in your heart, it will be hard. Very hard. You could become a bad *n'anga*. But Tururu is not a bad boy.”

“Tururu shall have *ngozi* eternal fire, like Grandmother.”

“Yes, yes. But first you must learn how to control the *ngozi*.”

“Father say---”

Anesu stopped and turned to face him, her eyes hard. “That I have eternal fire because I serve *ngozi*?”

“Uh . . .” He bit his lip. What possessed him to bring up his father? Why couldn't he keep his thoughts to himself?

“What does your father say?”

“Um, he s-say *tokoloshi*---”

“That *tokoloshi* is husband to Anesu?”

He studied his toes.

She clucked her tongue and took off at a fast clip for such a large woman. Tururu charged after her.

“What a stupid, stupid man,” she continued. “How could Dakarai have chosen such a fool? The only thing Nelson has done well is father you.”

She stopped as if she'd run into a wall and cocked her head. Tururu almost ran into her. “We have to go, quickly,” she said.

In the next moment she had him by the hand and was muttering an incantation. He knew what was coming and clutched the basket to his chest.

It was like being pulled through water and flying at the same time. It always made his ears pop and his insides swoop up into his mouth. And then he was standing inside the cool depths of Anesu's hut. Just like that. It never failed to surprise him how that happened. No landing. Just standing there on the hard-packed dirt floor, his hand still in Anesu's, and his head spinning a little.

He glanced around, wondering what had alerted her.

Karari! The man stood beside Anesu's trunk. Her magic soapstone bird dangled from his fingers, its milky eye glowing. How did he get past the protective magic ring around Anesu's hut?

Karari's head snapped up and he dropped the box. It hit the dirt floor with a dull thud.

"You would dare touch *nadira!*" Anesu snatched the amulet from his fingers with one hand and struck him across the face with the back of the other.

Karari spun around with the force of the blow and stumbled sideways. Tururu saw temper flare in his eyes, but then he seemed to compose himself. He drew himself up and turned to face Anesu. "It is time for my own amulet."

Tururu gaped. How could he be so bold? He glanced at his grandmother, expecting to see her lift her finger and blast him through the wall. Instead, she simply leveled a hard gaze at him.

Karari cleared his throat. "Anesu has no right to keep from me from what is mine. I've earned it."

"You've earned nothing yet."

The muscles in Karari's jaw tightened. He jabbed an accusing finger at Tururu. "You gave *him* an amulet. A stupid beginner. For six years I have done what you tell me. I have learned everything there is to learn."

Tururu shrank back at the venom in Karari's eyes. Some kind of dark cloud was forming around him.

"You are not him." Anesu, too, was wary of Karari. She must be seeing this darkness, too. "You were not chosen by Amai Vedu like Tururu---"

"I am the chosen one. It is my time. Your old woman magic did not stop the Federation. My plan will at least show the whites that we will not take this lying down."

"Killing only brings more killing."

"The killing is here already. And it is our people who are dying."

"It is not Amai Vedu's way."

"It is not *your* way. It is time for change, and I am the one to lead the way. The people will follow me. Praise me. Remember me."

"You care nothing for our people. You only want power for yourself."

"Your time is over!" Karari kicked Anesu's pouch across the floor. Tururu rushed to retrieve it.

"Leave it," Karari cried. "Leave her. Come with me, and you will taste the life we are meant to live as rulers. I will teach you what you need to know."

Tururu turned to his grandmother. Why didn't she just teach him a lesson with her magic?

"Karari!" Anesu said sharply.

He turned to face her, challenge in his eyes.

"Do not be lured by dark magic," she said, speaking very carefully, the way she did to him when he was about to make a mistake in a spell. "Do not let pride or lust for power lead you down a path from which there is no return. You will regret it."

He snorted and turned.

Her hand shot out and she grabbed him by the ear as she would an unruly child and yanked him toward the door. "You need to be taught a lesson."

He tried to wriggle free. "I am no longer a child. You cannot treat me this way."

But she was bigger than he was and had a grip of steel. Twisting his ear, she led him outside, next to the eternal fire burning in the half moon clearing in front of the hut. Karari stumbled along beside her, his face contorted with pain. Tururu followed, afraid of what might come but unable to not watch. The last time Grandmother did this was shortly after she took Karari on as an apprentice. Thrusting Karari toward the well beside the hut, Anesu pointed to a basin lying nearby.

"Fill that with water and bring it back here."

Finding his feet, Karari glared at her. "What for?"

"To get another chance. To learn humility. To learn what it truly means to be *godobori*."

Conflicted feelings played across Karari's face. The dark cloud around him began to lift, but then hovered above him, rising and falling with each breath he took. Then he strolled toward the well, pretending to be unconcerned. Anesu watched him. And Turu understood why she didn't attack earlier. She seemed to be willing him to combat the darkness following him.

Smirking, Karari lowered the bucket into the well, filled the basin then returned to stand in front of her, water slopping over the edges of the basin.

"Tururu," she called, even though he was right behind her. Her eyes were pinned on Karari. "Bring the ceremony stool."

Tururu ran into the hut. What was Grandmother going to do? He hoped it didn't involve him in any way. He found the stool; an intricately carved piece of teak that reached his

midsection. Grunting under its weight, he staggered outside and set it in front of Anesu and stepped back.

“Sit,” she said.

Tururu turned toward Karari.

“You, Tururu,” she said.

So he was to be part of this . . . whatever it was. Tururu backed away.

Anesu glared at him.

With his insides doing flip-flops, he stood on tiptoe and slowly slid his bottom onto the stool. He hunched forward, trying to make himself as small as possible.

Anesu pointed an imposing finger at Karari. “Wash Tururu’s feet.”

Tururu shrank down even further. Karari gaped at her. And then with a cry of rage, he swung the basin around and hurled it at Tururu, hitting him in the head.

Tururu toppled sideways off the stool. Before he hit the ground, he was already scrambling to his feet. He had to get out of the way. Any minute now, Grandmother would be sending Karari to the ancestors.

But Anesu just stood there looking at Karari. Chest heaving, he glared back, the darkness settling over him like a blanket.

From the corner of his eye, Tururu saw the flames in the eternal fire swell, heard the familiar whispering and hissing of the *ngozi*. They were responding to Karari’s fury, drawn to it. Grandmother’s eyes flickered, but she kept them on Karari. It was almost as if she didn’t notice the disturbance in the *ngozi*.

Karari turned slowly to stare wide-eyed at the mounting blaze and took a step forward. Small blue-tipped flames danced up toward him, murmuring as they did. Like a sleepwalker, he lifted his arm.

Quivering, the *ngozi* rose in a luminous column and hung in front of him.

He gaped like a small child seeing fire for the first time and swayed from side to side. The fiery stream crackled and swayed in rhythm with him. He closed his eyes. His body tensed, tight as a hide drum, vibrating with some kind of power that made it look as if he might explode. The darkness around him swelled and expanded, until it rose into the air like black smoke from an oil-infused fire. The *ngozi* hummed and grew in size, becoming as tall as Karari himself, taking his shape.

Anesu lifted her arm. "No, Karari!"

Karari opened his eyes. They glowed with an eerie black light. Drawing his hand back, he jabbed his forefinger at her.

With a whoosh and a hiss, the *ngozi* streamed toward Anesu's outstretched hand and enveloped it in a bright blue blaze.

She shrieked and staggered back. Tururu charged toward her, trying to remember the magic word to douse fire. Still screeching, Anesu clutched her forearm and spun this way and that. A chorus of jackals and wild dogs yipped and howled in response to her cry.

Tururu chased her around, trying to remember the magic word.

Anesu collapsed onto her knees, clutching her forearm.

"G-g . . . *gasana!*" Tururu cried. "That's it!" He yelled the magic word over and over again, doubling over with the effort.

Anesu continued to shriek.

Water. His shirt; it was still wet from the basin. Still shouting the magic word, he ripped it off and threw it over Grandmother's hand.

She screamed even louder and flung it off.

Flapping his hands at his mistake, he tried to think of what else he could do.

A blue light sparked over Anesu's hand. With what seemed like superhuman effort, she lifted her head and closed her eyes. The only thing that moved were her lips with a gasped incantation. The blue light over her hand dimmed, and then like molten gold, the *ngozi* poured back into the fire pit with a hiss.

Karari stood on the other side of the fire, the darkness gone from him, his eyes no longer glowing with that dark eerie light. He looked as shocked and frightened as Tururu.

He began moving toward her. "I--"

"Do not speak!" Still clasping her forearm, she struggled to her feet. Her body shook with the effort. She lifted pain-filled eyes to him.

"I curse you!" Her chest heaved with effort it took to speak. "You will never know another moment's peace. Your soul will burn forever in the other world as my hand does now in this one. The ancestors curse you. The Goddess Gurutu will send her creatures to plague you." She swayed back and forth. "From this day on, you are no longer a disciple of Amai Vedu Africa, nor my apprentice. You are done."

"But I-I didn't mean . . ." Karari dropped to his knees, face twisted with remorse. "Please. Forgive me."

Anesu straightened with effort. Her words were slow and halting. "You made your choice. Go from this place."

Karari slowly rose to his feet and stared at her. He seemed uncertain, but then as if prompted from something inside, he took a deep breath. His expression hardened.

“I will go. But only because I no longer need you. Nothing will happen to me because I am young and strong. Not old and weak like you.”

The fire rose again. Within moments it had increased tenfold. Karari glanced from the fire to Anesu and then back again. Uncertainty played across his face. Tiny blue figures burst up and out, like spray from a fountain in a strong wind, landing every which way outside the fire pit.

Tururu jumped back. He'd never seen this kind of thing happen before. The *ngozi* were out of control. “Grandmother!”

But she didn't seem to hear him. She just stood there like a rag doll, panting, as if it took everything to stay upright. He grabbed her good arm. She swayed toward him, eyes glazed with pain.

Tururu jabbed his finger toward the fire. “*Ngozi!*”

Anesu jerked upright. “*Amai Vedu!*”

Keeping an eye on the flames, she pleaded with the mother to give her strength. And then she stopped, as if hearing some private sound and uttered a series of invocations. The *ngozi* hung in the air for a moment. Then, crackling and spitting embers, they shrank back down again.

Chest heaving, Anesu took a shaky breath and sank to her knees.

Tururu ran to her side.

Karari stood on the other side of the fire watching her, like he was didn't know whether to go or stay. He looked down at his hands. “Anesu, I . . . please.”

If Anesu heard him, she gave no indication. Instead she held her forearm. And then as if losing some inner battle, she lifted her gaze and stared at Karari with undisguised hatred. This time instead of calling on Amai Vedu, she screeched at him like an injured animal.

“Get away from me,” she cried. “I promise you this, you will suffer. Mark my words the *ngozi* will soon claim you. You wait and see.”

For a moment Karari looked like he might crumple to his knees, but then a shadow flitted across his face and he straightened. Planting his feet, he stood firm, fists clenched at his sides. He glanced down at the fire, then looked up at Anesu, his mouth twisted in a sneer.

“You are the one who is suffering. You are the one the *ngozi* will claim. I have wasted enough time. We will meet again.” He spun on his heel and headed for the open veld.

Anesu seemed to deflate. “Oh, Amai Vedu,” she whispered. “I have failed. Protect all of us in the times that are to come.” She turned to Tururu. “Come. Help me to my hut.”

Shooting a glance at Karari's retreating back, Tururu hefted her up and guided her toward her hut. She was drenched with sweat. He could feel the heat from her hand. It glowed with an eerie blue light. He blew on the charred crippled mass.

“Thank you, Sabata,” she said, “but save your breath. This pain is not only in my hand, but deep inside my bones. And in my heart.”

Sabata. He almost stopped dead in his tracks. She'd used his sacred Shona name. Chosen one. That could only mean one thing.

As if sensing his thoughts, she glanced at him, biting her lip against spasms of pain that made her shudder. “Yes, Sabata, you are to be the next *godobori*.”

He stopped and twisted around. “B-but, I am Tururu!”

“It is your destiny, my son. Now, help Anesu inside.”

CHAPTER 3

Elizabeth followed her father out to the Ford, slid onto the front seat, and slammed the door behind her.

“So why’s Mom want me to go with you to Mrs. B.’s? It’s so boring there.”

“It’s ‘Mrs. Bradley.’ Don’t be disrespectful.” He started the car and then sat staring through the windscreen.

“Will Andre and them be there?”

The three Bradley boys. The bane of her life. She’d so wanted to be friends with them in the beginning, especially Clive, the youngest, who taught her to bite her nails that first day. But then he started teasing and threatening her like the other two. Everything was a target for them. She always made sure Pookie was safely back in the coop when they came around. She’d seen how they’d teased their poor dog, now long missing. The time fifteen-year-old Andre teased her about her mother’s pregnancy before Elizabeth even knew about it. Using words like “knocked up” and “preggers,” he’d elbowed his two brothers like he’d just told a really funny joke. When Elizabeth’s face blazed crimson with a combination of embarrassment and surprise, he laughed and made rude sounds. She should’ve kicked him in the shin, but she just wanted to cry.

“They went to Gwelo with Mr. Bradley.” Her father backed down the driveway and swerved onto the washboard dirt road leading to the Bradley house.

“Good.”

“You must tell me if they ever get funny with you. The Bradleys aren't going to do anything about them—boys will boys and it's only the *kaffirs* that they're bothering and all that, but I will, I promise you that.”

“I'm not afraid of them.”

“That's good. But you just tell your old dad if they ever do anything you don't like, you hear?”

She nodded and leaned her head against his shoulder. They bumped along the narrow road in a cloud of red dust. The sun perched over the water tower where the road joined the main highway to Gwelo.

Twenty minutes earlier, her father had hurried in from work, dressed in his good white shirt and smart khaki trousers, and was about to leave to drive Mrs. Emily Bradley to the train station when her mother asked him to take Elizabeth along. This was done in that stiff, not really talking tone her parents usually used after an argument. Jaw tight, he gazed at his wife for a moment then, turning on his heel, gestured for Elizabeth to follow him. Luckily, she looked presentable, her clothes clean, her hair still tightly plaited. Even though she didn't like Mrs. Bradley, Elizabeth was pleased to be going along. It was always fun being with her dad. And maybe this time she'd actually see inside the Bradley house. She'd only been to the back door a couple of times when her dad had business with Mr. Bradley.

Mrs. Bradley was going to Salisbury to visit friends and to shop. More than half a day's journey away, Salisbury had everything big cities had to offer: garages selling the latest motor

cars, blocks of shops filled with fashion, and then there was the big swank five-story Meikles hotel with its elegant lounge. This time, Mrs. Bradley was off to a party at the Salisbury Cricket Club to celebrate Federation with friends. Mr. Bradley didn't go to these things. His trips were usually just to Gwelo, a small town seventy miles away with a large general store where he bought supplies every three months for the five families who lived in the thirty square miles of the valley. He wasn't one for swank parties. He preferred the celebration the McKenzies held on supply day.

Elizabeth sneaked a glance at her father. He didn't seem as irritated about having to drive Mrs. Bradley as he usually was. He said she gave herself airs.

In the distance, lightning split the sky. A rainstorm. Oh, no, she shouldn't have soaked the ground; her sweet pea seeds would be drowned.

"When will we be back home?" she said.

He didn't answer. He appeared lost in thought.

She lifted her head from his shoulder and nudged him. "What's wrong?"

He gave a start. "Sorry. Daddy was just thinking about a little problem at work. Nothing you need worry about."

"Karari?"

He gave her a sharp look then realization dawned on his face. "Aah, little pitchers have big ears."

"Honestly! Why do you always have to say that?"

"You've been eavesdropping again, haven't you?"

"I can't help it if people say things out loud sometimes and I sometimes hear it. Besides, Turu told me Karari's been chosen to be a big witchdoctor."

“Well, at least he'll have one job.”

“What happened?”

“I sacked him. He went and did it this time, trying to stir things up again. He's just making needless trouble for everybody.”

“Are they going to riot like they did in Nyanga?”

“Where on earth did you get that from?”

“Mr. Campbell and Mom were talking about it when he delivered the dry ice.”

“You don't eavesdrop, eh?”

“They were talking really loud, Dad.”

“Uh huh. Anyway, for one thing, Nyanga's on the other side of the country. And for another that was hardly a riot, just a handful of drunken *kaffirs* getting stropopy. The problem is the bloody fools just don't understand Federation's for their own good. There are laws in place to protect their interests. But like the children they are, they expect to jump right into government and start running the country. But enough politics talk. No more eavesdropping and no more questions about all that nonsense. Just understand that Daddy would never let anything happen to his pearl of great price, do you hear me?”

He slid his arm over her shoulders and drew her close. She snuggled back against him.

The familiar rock outcropping and blue gum trees in front of the Bradley house slid into view. She wished her family had a nice, swank place like this. Perhaps then her mother wouldn't always harp on her father to return to South Africa. But Grandpa hadn't been in the right place at the right time like Mr. Bradley's father had back in the thirties, when the government gave him and a group of other white settlers a bunch of land.

Her tutor, Mr. Coetzee said the land was better off in the hands of the whites. They were smarter than the *kaffirs*. They could do more with it. Mr. Coetzee also said that if the Southern Rhodesian government hadn't taken the land, then some other government would have, and then the *kaffirs* would have been a lot worse off.

Her father swung into the Bradley's driveway—two brick lanes split by a column of neatly mowed grass—and followed it around to the front of a thatched, rambling brick house. Red-hot poker blooms spiked up from a brick flowerbed to the right of the house, while cannalilies, dahlias, daisies, gladioli, and other brightly colored flowers spilled out of beds running along a neatly trimmed eight-foot high hibiscus hedge.

They pulled up beside the front door. Squinting in the rearview mirror, her father ran his fingers through his wavy auburn hair and smoothed his moustache toward the corners of his mouth with thumb and forefinger.

"Be back in a jiffy." He headed for the front door. Wiping his feet on the sisal mat, he knocked, considered his feet, then knocked again. A couple of moments later, a small bullet-headed black man opened the door. The contrast between his black skin and spotless white uniform was startling.

"*Medem* says to come in."

"Tell Madam I'll wait, thank you, Chipo."

"Yes, bwana." He seemed uncertain for a moment whether or not to close the door, but then, leaving it open, retreated into the house.

Her father turned and winked at Elizabeth.

"Why don't you come in?" A smiling Mrs. Bradley appeared in the doorway clad in a pink dressing gown, loosely belted at the waist. She held a glass of Scotch in each hand, one half

empty. Shoving the full glass into her father's hand, she took a sip from the other and peered up at him, blue eyes sparkling.

"I-I thought I was late." Her father stared down at the drink for a moment then gestured over his shoulder. "Uh, besides, I've got Elizabeth in the car."

The sparkle in Mrs. Bradley's eyes disappeared. Dabbing at her top lip with her pinky, she tightened her dressing gown and frowned in Elizabeth's direction.

Elizabeth shrank down against the seat, feeling as if she'd somehow made a mistake in coming, even though it wasn't her doing.

"Annie wasn't feeling well," her father continued. "I hope you don't mind."

"Well, I suppose it couldn't be helped." Mrs. Bradley's smile snapped back in place. She raised her glass and clinked it against her father's. "Cheers!"

He hesitated and glanced back at Elizabeth. She gave him a questioning look. He looked away.

"Come now! If you're not going to be civilized and come in, the least you can do is toast Federation with me."

He took a sip and gasped. "Whoa!"

"Oh, honestly, I've seen you down your share of doubles before."

He shuddered. "Not this early in the morning."

Elizabeth straightened in her seat, feeling the urge to tell Mrs. Bradley to stop pestering her father to drink her stupid drink.

"And here I thought you were a spur-of-the-moment sort of bloke."

"Sometimes."

"That's the spirit!" She clinked his glass again and downed the rest of her drink.

Her father hesitated then emptied his glass. He shuddered again and she laughed. Taking the glass from him, she spun on her heel and headed back into the house. "Be back in a moment."

Wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, her father glanced back at Elizabeth. That'll be the day, he mouthed. She managed a grin. What had changed to make Mrs. Bradley so friendly all of a sudden? She never used to be. Her father lit a cigarette, and smoked and paced up and down the front step, glancing at his watch every now and then until Chip appeared, lugging a trunk and hatbox. Her father helped him load them into the back. Mrs. Bradley finally appeared wearing white gloves, a black and white halter-neck dress, and her usual backless shoes that sounded like a machine gun on the cement floor.

Her father opened the passenger side door and inclined his head toward the back. "Come on now, Elizabeth, hop over, there's a good girl."

Elizabeth took her time clambering over the seat, aware Mrs. Bradley was glaring at her. She finally made it over and fell back against the back seat cushion, as if exhausted. Her father frowned at her.

Mrs. Bradley slid in and her father closed the door. "Elizabeth, where are your manners? Say hello to Mrs. Bradley."

"Hello, Mrs. Bradley."

"Hello, Elizabeth," Mrs. Bradley said without turning around. That's the one thing Elizabeth appreciated about her. She never pretended to like children, not even her own.

Her father got in and started the car. Shifting across the seat until she was inches from him, Mrs. Bradley pulled the rearview mirror toward her and angled in. "I've got something in my eye."

“Do you want to go back into the house?” her father asked.

She probed for a moment more. “Got it!” Dabbing at the corner of her eye with a handkerchief, she settled back against the seat. Elizabeth frowned. That was where her mother usually sat.

Her father repositioned the rearview mirror and with an uneasy glance at Mrs. Bradley, he reversed down the driveway. They headed toward the train station. Elizabeth glared at the back of Mrs. Bradley's head and tried to catch her father's eye in the rearview mirror, to share a joke at her expense. He stared straight ahead.

“Lloyd was quite impressed with that little tactic of yours,” Mrs. Bradley said, laying her head back against the seat. “Making that *kaffir*, what's his name, that boss boy, that was a clever move.”

“Mfuni. Actually it wasn't a tactic. He's a damned good worker—or should I say, *was*. He's missing, that's why I was late. I hope something hasn't happened to him. I'm afraid the promotion could make the troublemakers, Karari especially, target him.”

“Cigarette?”

“Please.”

Mrs. Bradley removed two cigarettes from her silver cigarette case and stuck them both in her mouth. Her father reached into his pocket for his lighter and handed it to her. Mrs. Bradley lit the cigarettes and handed him one.

Blowing smoke, she stared down at the lighter. “This is rather nice.”

He took the cigarette. “I thought I'd lost it.”

She flipped it over and began to read. “To my dearest husband, with all my love, your lady Annabel.” She handed it back to him. “Impressive.”

Elizabeth glared at Mrs. Bradley's profile. She didn't look impressed.

"A wedding present." Her father slipped the lighter back into his pocket and took a drag on his cigarette.

Mrs. Bradley leaned playfully against him. "She's a very lucky woman."

"I'm a very lucky man."

Elizabeth slid forward and, resting her chin on her forearms, stuck her nose between the two of them. And that's where she stayed until they reached the train station.

CHAPTER 4

Tururu watched his grandmother thrash about on her mattress, her face twisted in pain. The sweet cloying scent of burnt flesh hung over her like a shroud.

He didn't know what else he could do. He'd just applied a second poultice to her injured hand—a slimy gray concoction that made him retch. Had he got it right this time? In a moment of clarity, she'd told him about the dried coddia leaves he needed to add for ngozi burns. After a desperate search amongst her many jars of herbs and powders, he'd finally found what looked to be the right one, and quickly mixed a new batch.

Sinking down beside her, Tururu willed the *muti* to work. She looked so helpless without her *douk*. He'd never seen her bare head before. Was she going to die?

Grandmother stopped tossing and her face relaxed into a peaceful sleep. The poultice was working.

Tururu gave a sigh and sat back on his heels. He glanced through the hut's arched doorway into the blinding mid-morning glare outside. Flies buzzed around the doorway, kept away by one of Grandmother's spells.

He thought about what Grandmother said earlier, how she wanted to set the *ngozi* on Karari to destroy him. When Tururu asked why she hadn't, she told him she'd sworn an oath to Amai Vedu to work for the good of all her people, even Karari. She also told him that Karari had come into his own too early, growing more powerful than she had realized. And now he had aroused the *ngozi* before he knew how to control them. He could use their power for what he wanted, but they would slowly take him over, and in the end would consume him in their fight to become human.

Despite himself, Tururu missed Karari. Even though the twenty-year old and his big plans of getting back at the whites had come between him and his friend Mfuni, Karari had been a hero to him, an elder brother. Sometimes he even helped Tururu with his own potions. And now Karari was gone and Mfuni was gone, and he, Tururu, was to be *godobori*.

It was all too much.

But he must be brave. Grandmother said that when Amai Vedu saved him that hot October day two years earlier, it was not so he could be *n'anga*, as she had thought. It was because he was to be *godobori*.

Tururu remembered. It had been peanut harvesting time. He was alone, checking the field behind the Bradley house for leftover peanuts, like he did after every harvest. Pickings were usually slim—what the workers didn't find, the birds did. He had just unearthed a nice big fat peanut when, out the corner of his eye, he saw the three Bradley brothers heading toward him across the field.

He shoved the peanut into his pocket and slid a glance toward the water tower and the open veld. He could make a run for it, but they'd catch him for sure, and he'd probably get a

beating. Over the years, other than getting pelted with rocks a couple of times, he'd managed to stay out of their way. All he could do was hope that they would soon tire of making sport of him.

But he had a sinking feeling this time would be different. He could tell by bwana Andre's purposeful stride and the way bwana Clive kept his head down. Bwana Ian trailed behind them, letting loose with his slingshot every few minutes. Rocks whizzed close to his head, making soft thuds in the dirt around him.

Tururu ignored the rocks and silently begged Amai Vedu to protect him. As the boys drew closer, Tururu could see that Clive carried an enamel bowl in his hands. He seemed to be hanging back. Andre prodded him forward.

"Hey, *kaffir!*" Andre called.

Tururu turned, pretending to be surprised. "Bwana?"

When the boys were just a few feet away, Clive suddenly veered to the right. Andre grabbed him by his shirt and shoved him toward Tururu. Clive usually went along with Andre, the leader of the three. If he was afraid of what was happening, it must be bad.

"We've got some *lekker sadza* for you." Grinning, Andre shoved Clive's reluctant hands with the bowl under Tururu's nose.

Crispy bits of pork crackling floated enticingly in a pool of grease atop a small mountain of cooked cornmeal. Tururu stared at the *sadza* and took a step back. What was in there? Dog shit? Bwana shit? Bits of glass?

Andre grabbed the bowl from Clive and jammed it into Tururu's chest. Grease slopped onto the front of his shirt. "Eat it. All of it. Now!"

Tururu knew as soon as he took his first mouthful that something was wrong. There was a bitter taste that made the back of his tongue tingle. He worked his jaw, holding the *sadza* in his mouth. He eyed the open veld.

Andre grabbed him by the back of the neck in a vicious grip. "Swallow *kaffir*! That's perfectly good *sadza*, you ungrateful sod. You're going to finish every last bit, hey? Or I will sit on your chest and stuff it all down your bleddy throat and you will choke and vomit and make a big bleddy mess all over yourself. Do you want that, hey?"

Calling on Amai Vedu again, he swallowed.

"There's a good *kaffir*," Andre said. "Now finish it."

Tururu dutifully shoveled down the *sadza*, grease dripping down his chin. Ian drew closer, looking eager, a hyena slinking in for a kill. Clive looked away.

Bwana Bradley's voice boomed from the edge of the field. "Hey, you lot! Get your arses back here, right now!"

"Coming!" Andre snatched the almost empty bowl from Tururu's hands. "Sorry *kaffir*, we've got to run. We'll see you around. Or not." Ian giggled and the three of them took off, Clive leading the pack. Laughing, Andre and Ian threw glances back at Tururu as they ran toward the house.

Tururu was halfway across the peanut field when the pain in his stomach began. Clutching himself, he doubled over. Without warning, his bowels opened and he let loose a stream of diarrhea. In the distance, he could hear the boys hooting and cackling. Maybe he could make it to the water tower, where he could wash himself under the tap.

But then the pain grew worse as if Andre had his stomach gripped in his fist, and was twisting it into a tight ball. He had to get to Grandmother's hut. Ignoring his soiled shorts, he

stumbled across the uneven field. But before he could go any further, his body convulsed, the world spun, and he fell face down in the dirt. The cloying root-like odor of peanut and fresh soil filled his nostrils.

He curled up into a ball of agony. The world disappeared from view, and all he could hear was his heart thumping in his ears, like a ceremonial drum.

And then as if in a dream, he could see himself emerging from his mother's womb as she squatted on the veld to give birth to him behind a bush. Time shifted, and in quick succession he was trying to find Grandmother's disappearing hut. From far off he could hear a voice talking to him. He strained to hear.

"It is time, Sabata! You must hurry or you will die."

The images faded, but something arose within him, a power he'd never felt before. He knew what he had to do. His spirit rose from his body, weightless and free. He looked down at his motionless form below, eyelids pinched shut. He sensed Amai Vedu's spirits willing him on. Reaching down into his body, he scooped out what appeared to be a small mass of red pinpricks and flung them skyward. He watched them flicker in the air then disappear.

What seemed ages later, he was sucked back into his body, gasping for air. It felt as if a rasp was being forced through the entire length of his intestines, yanking them inside out. There was a metal taste in his mouth. He struggled to his knees and vomited, great gasping spasms until it felt as if the sides of his stomach were rubbing against each other.

Wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, he struggled to his feet, and in fits and starts, staggered toward the water tower and the tap beneath it. He drank until he thought his stomach would burst. He lay there for as long as he dared, then lurched toward the safety of his grandmother's hut.

One glance was all it took. She knew what had happened and quickly mixed him a potion. She told him later that he'd been fed a large dose of what the whites called "opening medicine," which caused the diarrhea. But there had also been a small dose of *ubuthi* added, some kind of poison she didn't recognize.

"You passed Amai Vedu's test." She tied a pouch around his neck containing the most essential of her special powders, along with the sacred amulet she had prepared for him. Each time he used his magic, part of it would stay in his amulet and add to its power, so its power would grow with his.

Now, a weak voice murmured, "Sabata."

He kneeled beside her. "What is it, Grandmother?"

"I will be all right, now. You must go."

"But---"

"Go, I tell you. I do not want to give your father any excuse to keep you away. Besides, Grandmother must sleep."

He rose slowly and turned to go.

"Sabata," she said in a stronger voice. "Do not worry. You will be a worthy successor."

Tururu wanted to believe her, but he still had so much to learn.

CHAPTER 5

Elizabeth slipped her hand into her father's as they stood watching the passenger train chug away from the single platform station. Mrs. Bradley was the only one to board, joining passengers from Northern Rhodesia and other parts of Southern Rhodesia, most of them headed for the beaches of South Africa. Two days earlier her father had been down at the station with his workers loading sisal onto a cargo train bound for processing in South Africa, where it would be turned into rope.

"Well, that's that then, hey?" her father said, turning to go.

She grinned up at him. "Race you to the car."

As if galvanized by a starter's pistol, they both started running toward the Ford parked in the shade thirty yards away on the other side of the long corrugated storage building. A mass of dark clouds had gathered overhead. She reached the car first.

"You don't have to let me win, you know," she said, not meaning it.

Bending over to catch his breath, he glanced up and grinned. "It's the least a father can do."

"Honestly?"

He glanced around as if somebody might hear what he was about to say. "I gave it my all."

Pleased at this admission, she piled into the car beside him. There was a growl of thunder and the heavens opened. Her father started the car and switched on the windscreen wipers.

"Oh, no," she said. "My poor sweet pea seeds."

"Oh, they'll be all right. It's probably not even raining at home."

"Hurry, all right?"

He glanced at his watch. "Oh, you'd better believe it."

They drove in a comfortable silence through the pounding rain for a few minutes. And then the storm was over.

"Dad, did you ever wish I'd been a boy?"

He gave her a sharp look. "Never. Why?"

"Well, I've heard Mom tell people she'd always wanted a boy."

"Well, that's just because she has a girl. Now she wants a matched set."

She nodded, but she knew better.

Reaching over, he gave her a one-armed squeeze and a quick kiss on the side of her head before turning into their driveway. He hurried toward the house, while Elizabeth headed for her sweet pea bed. The crackling strains of the BBC announcer on the radio drifted from the house: ". . . the thirty-three year old New Zealander, along with his companion, Tenzing Norgay, were honored today at the Adventurers Club in London for their conquest of Mount Everest. In other

news, after the signing of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, those present had this to say: The Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland will be good for all concerned. The few dissenters in London and Central Africa are troublemakers who do not represent the views of the vast majority. Most black Africans clearly recognize the benefits of closer association, indeed the Federation . . .” Static drowned out the rest. Elizabeth reached the flowerbed. Her father was right, it had hardly rained here.

Before the big rains came, she would have to cover the sweet peas with the mohohoboho tree's spade-like leaves—the ones she used to use in the old days to cover her fairy village. She glanced toward the servant's quarters hoping Tururu had returned early from his grandmother's. But there was no sign of him.

Her stomach growled. Teatime. When they'd left, her mother had been telling Nelson to make scones. She skipped to the house and up the steps.

“—with liquor on your breath..”

Elizabeth froze. Her mother's raised voice coming from the bedroom.

“I had one drink for God's sake. You know how it is. I was just being polite.”

“Yes, I know how it is, all right. Just like you were being polite at the party a couple of Sundays ago.”

“I told you. *She* kissed me. You know how she gets after a couple of drinks. I couldn't help it---”

“Is that when she asked you to drive her to the station?”

“What do you mean?”

“So she *was* the one who asked you then?”

“I told you, I do what Bradley tells me to do. I can't be rude to her, she's the boss's wife, for God's sake.”

The snap of a lighter, and then her mother said very quietly, “You don't want this baby, do you?”

“What?”

“Admit it. It's one more thing to tie you down.”

“Tie me down?” he cried. “Do you think I left University and a good safe paying job in Northern Rhodesia because I wanted to be free? Do you think I lived with your bloody parents for two years because I wanted to be free? Oh, honestly Annie, you're being ridiculous. And unfair. Of course I want this baby, just as much as you do. But frankly I'm worried about you after all you went through with Elizabeth. You're the most important person in the world to me--”

“Oh, spare me.”

A door slammed and there was silence.

Elizabeth plopped into a chair. She hated when her parents fought. Why was her mother so unreasonable? She was always in a bad mood or crying. The worst of it all, though, was that Elizabeth's name always came up when they spoke about the coming baby, like she'd been bad.

Her father entered the kitchen, lighting a cigarette. He took a drag, and, blowing out smoke, stared down at the inscription on his lighter before dropping it into his shirt pocket. He glanced up and saw Elizabeth. His face brightened.

“There's my girl! How are the sweet peas coming along?”

Suddenly she was angry with him. “I just planted them.”

“You were worried about them drowning.”

She shrugged. "They're all right."

He leaned back against the sideboard and gave her a fond look. "Remember how you were always worrying about that fairy village of yours?"

"Good grief, Dad, that was ages ago when I was a little child."

He grinned. "I liked the idea that we were supporting fairies."

"I'm too old for that."

"You're never too old to believe in magic. I still do, you know."

She rolled her eyes.

"I do, really. Magic happens when you believe with all your heart and mind, and trust that something is possible. It takes imagination. And courage." He gave her a crooked grin.

"You've got all that, my little pearl of great price. Your fairies were magnificent."

He walked over and kissed her on the forehead. "I've got to head back to work, see you in a couple of hours."

#

After tea Elizabeth headed for her bedroom, where she lay on her back on the cool cement floor. The tin roof creaked as the sun beat down on it. In minutes she was asleep. She was awoken by the murmurs of her parents' voices coming from the lounge. She stared up at the ceiling. Not another argument, please. She listened. No, they were talking normally. Yawning and stretching, she rose and headed for the lounge. She peeked around the door. Her mother sat on her husband's lap, his arm around her. Giving a sigh of relief, Elizabeth strode into the room.

"There's my girl," her father said. "Finish your homework?"

"Uh, huh."

"Hungry? Want something to eat?"

"No, thank you, I had a couple of scones and jam."

"Come, sit by us."

Elizabeth perched on the arm of the chair.

"Whose girl are you?" he asked, hugging her close.

"Daddy's," she said, in the usual little game they played. "Can I have sixpence to go and buy some sweets?"

He shifted around in order to reach into his pocket.

"*May* I," her mother said. "And no, you may not. You haven't had your lunch yet."

"I ate already, I just told you."

"That wasn't a proper lunch. Anyway, I don't want you wandering all over creation by yourself. Right now Van Zyl's shop is too far away for my liking."

"Turu'll go with me." Elizabeth nudged her father. "We'll come right back, I promise."

"Oh certainly," her mother said. "I'm just going to let you go off across kingdom come alone with a *kaffir* with all the trouble we're having."

"He's Turu," Elizabeth said. "He's my friend."

"He is *not* your friend, and don't let me ever hear you saying that in public, do you hear me?"

"He's a good boy. You said so yourself."

"I said no such thing."

"You did too."

"Don't be cheeky with me. Anyway, he's getting too old for you to be playing with him anymore." She turned to her father. "I thought you were going to be using him more in the fields."

“It’s Saturday. He works for me two days a week. That’s enough for now. Come on, let them go. What fun does she have but the occasional sweet down at van Zyl’s?” He reached into his pocket for the money.

“We’ll be back in a jiffy, you’ll see, Mom” Elizabeth said, adding to her father, “Turu, too?”

Taking out a half a crown and a shilling, he handed them to Elizabeth. “There you are.”

Elizabeth stood. “Thanks!”

Hoisting herself up with one hand on the arm of the chair, the other hand on her stomach, her mother got to her feet. “Do what you like, I don't care.”

“Annie, please, stay,” her father said.

She eased back down onto his lap.

“Well, I’d better be off, then,” Elizabeth said, giving them each a quick peck on the cheek.

“You know, seeing as how you’re going, you might as well get me a bottle of milk,” her mother said. “Doc Mellows says I should be drinking more fresh milk, instead of the powdered. Though it galls me to pay that crook’s exorbitant prices.”

Her father dug back in his pocket. “Think about the poor *kaffirs* who have to pay those prices all the time, unless they have good employers like us who give rations.” He handed Elizabeth another half a crown.

Her mother frowned down at Elizabeth’s feet. “Where are your shoes?”

“I can't find them,” Elizabeth said automatically, heading for the door.

“You're asking for sandworms again.”

“Yes, Mom.”

“Shoes!” her mother cried as Elizabeth skipped down the hallway.

She almost tripped over Nelson on all fours applying a thick waxy swirl of red polish on the concrete floor: preparations for Sunday's braai, when Mr. Bradley returned from Gwelo with next month's supplies.

“Is Turu back yet?”

Sitting back on his heels, Nelson glared at her.

“Come on Nelson, just tell me, you don't always have to act like that.”

“No!” He jerked his head toward the door for her to get out of his way.

She sauntered toward the door.

Making tch-tch sounds, he continued smearing polish on the floor.

Skipping down the back steps, Elizabeth glanced toward the blue gum trees for signs of Tururu. He was late. Elizabeth's old diapers, washed and bleached in preparation for the baby, flapped on the wash line. She headed for her swing, hanging from a thick branch on the avocado tree. Halfway up the tree, scraps of wood signaled the beginning of their fort. She slipped onto the swing, gave a shove and pumped as hard as she could until the ropes buckled.

Something white flashed at the bottom of the yard and she stopped pumping. One of the chickens? No, they were either in the coop or on the other side of the garage where they liked to forage this time of day. Tururu? She peered toward the blue gums. No sign of him. Besides, he didn't have any white clothes.

The back of her neck prickled. Who could it be? A marauding rebel from Nyanga? She started to pump her legs again, keeping them in the air every time the swing dropped back down, away from imaginary hands that might reach out from the earth to grab her. The screen door

squealed and her father emerged from the house carrying a locked metal toolbox. Nelson followed with a broom and a bowl of cooked corn meal.

Relief flooded her, for some reason. "Dad!"

"Hey little girl."

He flashed her a grin and headed toward the fortified storeroom behind Nelson's quarters where the bulk goods for the five families in the valley were stored. Mr. van Zyl, a bachelor, didn't share in the arrangement, what with his business of selling to everyone else. The arrangement had been set up by Mr. Bradley's father, when he and his family lived in what was now their house. This was before he built the Bradley's current house.

"When you're finished, will you please come over here by me 'til Turu comes back?" she called.

Her father dropped the toolbox onto the scarred wooden table outside the larder, drowning out her words.

"Dad?"

But he had already unlocked the larder door, and he and Nelson disappeared into its depths. She could hear them shifting around the big tin drums holding flour, corn meal, and sugar while Nelson swept and her father collected the saucers of corn meal and strychnine he'd set out for the rats. A short while later, he emerged from the larder followed by Nelson, who had four dead rats dangling from his fist. Not looking where he was going, Nelson tripped over her father's heels. He stumbled and almost dropped the saucers he was carrying.

"Dammit, man. What the hell's the matter with you today?"

Mumbling apologies, Nelson glanced toward the bottom of the yard, then hurried toward the rubbish bin at the side of the garage. Her father unlocked the toolbox and removed a brown

paper packet tied with string. Strychnine. He always kept it under lock and key, like it was the crown jewels or something. Placing it on the table, he headed back into the larder.

Elizabeth kept swinging, trying to touch the leaves with her toes. Trying to see what was down at the bottom of the yard. She felt safe now that her father was close by.

“What the hell?” her father cried.

At the top of an upswing, Elizabeth glanced down to see her father staring up at the sky. She turned in time to see an eagle hawk soaring into the air with something clutched in its claws. Struggling to slow the swing's momentum, she jumped off and ran toward her father. Nelson ran from the larder.

“What happened?” she cried.

Her father gave her a blank stare then looked back up at the sky. “I don't believe it. That bloody bird just stole the poison.”

“Maybe it thought the packet was something to eat.”

“I wish I could've caught that on camera.”

“Nelson!” her mother called from the house.

Staring open-mouthed up the sky, Nelson seemed to come to and hurried toward the house.

“Hey, Annie, come out here for a moment,” her father called. “You won't believe this.”

“Can't, I'm right in the middle of something.”

“I'd like a pet like that,” Elizabeth said.

“Don't you go getting any ideas, my girl.” Her father looked around, as if unsure what to do next. “No giving chase, you hear me?”

Elizabeth didn't answer, too busy wondering where the bird might have gone.

Tururu appeared from the behind the blue gum trees.

Finally. "Where've you been?" she cried.

He shrugged and headed toward them.

"Listen," her father said, turning back to lock the larder. "I've got to get over to Doc Mellows for your mother's pills, and then I'm going back to the sheds for a couple of hours. Remember, what I told you, hey?"

Without waiting for an answer he strode toward the house.

Elizabeth ran to Tururu and held up the coins her dad had given her. "Guess what?"

"Fun Sails?"

"Van Zyl's, is that all you have to say?" She frowned. "What's the matter with you?"

"*Picannin dona!*" Nelson appeared from the house and waddled toward them, holding out a shilling. He seemed calmer than he had earlier. "Sugar."

"Say please."

"*Checha.*"

"Don't you dare tell me to hurry." Elizabeth snatched the coin from his fingers. "I'll come back when I'm good and ready."

He glared at her. "*Medem say.*"

She nudged Tururu and turned to go.

Nelson grabbed Tururu's elbow. "You must stay."

"He *has* to go with me." Elizabeth took Tururu's other arm. "My dad said so."

Nelson held on for a moment, glaring at Elizabeth, but then released Tururu's elbow. Glancing around, he leaned close to Tururu and said something Elizabeth couldn't quite understand. Something about the beer hall.

Tururu stared at him, clearly alarmed.

“Come on, Turu,” Elizabeth said, pulling him away. “Let’s go.”

CHAPTER 6

Tururu followed Elizabeth toward the blue gum trees at the bottom of the yard, brooding. His father's warning to stay away from the beer hall had triggered the dark feeling that had been plaguing him since the night before. Was it a dream he couldn't remember? Or had this whole business with Karari just unnerved him? And what did father mean about meddling?

"Hey," Elizabeth said. "I'm talking to you."

He stopped. She had asked him something, and he had not even noticed it.

"What was that about the beer hall?"

He shrugged and kept walking, wishing she would be quiet for a moment so he could sort through this feeling of his.

"Come on, just tell me."

He shrugged again.

"You're in a funny old mood, aren't you?"

He nodded.

"I know what, let's drive your car over there."

Without waiting for an answer, she turned and headed toward the side of the garage where Tururu kept his toy wire car. This was a passion of his, fashioning scraps of wire, anything from coat hangers to lengths of de-barbed fence wire, into shoebox-sized skeletal shapes of cars. To “drive” the contraptions, he twisted two thick wires into a column that came to his waist, topped by a “steering wheel.” He was also working on a motorbike he’d once seen in a picture. If he had his way, he’d make things out of wire all day long.

Tururu hurried after her. She always managed to twist his car out of shape to where it wouldn’t roll properly, and then he had to spend hours re-adjusting it. Rushing past her, he removed the two lengths of corrugated tin covering his hiding space in a crevice between the chicken coop and the garage, then carefully removed the car. It was shaped as much like the McKenzie’s Ford as he could make it. Bwana had congratulated him on his skill and started saving bits of wire for him. Elizabeth stopped him as he was about to replace the two lengths of tin.

“Wait a minute, what’s that?” She pointed at his latest creation at the back of the hiding place, a small, half-finished bubble-roofed car.

“For *bebe*.” He slipped the tin into place and turned to go.

She gave him a friendly shove. “You never made *me* my own car.”

He continued walking, guiding the car in front of him. “Missi not bwana.”

“You just don’t like how I drive that’s it, isn’t it?”

He steered the car back toward the path without answering her. The wire wheels glided effortlessly over the ground.

“Can I drive?” she called.

He stopped and stepped to one side. “Please Missi, do not push down.”

She took the steering wheel with both hands. "I know, I know." She inched the car over the uneven ground, stopping every few seconds to ease it over a rough spot. It took them an age to get to the opening between the blue gum trees. Tururu trailed behind, eyes narrowed.

"See?" she said turning to grin at him. "I'm getting the hang of---" She stamped her foot. Even from where Tururu stood he knew what had happened. He sighed and went to check the damage.

"I was being very gentle. You saw that. Why's it do that to me? Every time."

Clucking his tongue, Tururu bent down and made a couple of adjustments to the wire frame. "All the time, Tururu show Missi---"

"I did *not* push hard," she cried. "You saw me, you saw how soft I pushed."

"Like so." He straightened, lightly grasped the steering wheel and with two fingers, guided the car along.

"Oh, why don't you just drive, otherwise we're never going to get there."

Tururu shrugged but felt relieved, since he thought the same thing. He led the way, guiding the car past the last orderly row of sisal plants. The air vibrated with the thrum of crickets. They walked in a comfortable silence and turned onto the path toward van Zyl's shop.

Almost right away, it felt as if Jasu, God of the Sun, had turned his face toward them. The deep green of the sisal turned to hard scrubby grass the color of a lion's haunch. The smell of rain hung in the air. On the distant horizon in front of them, the huge baobab tree beside bwana van Zyl's shop looked like a fat stalk with tiny twigs branching upward. Acacia and other thorn trees dotted the veld. Three hundred yards away, five eland buck appeared out of nowhere and floated on a heat wave past the jagged outline of their people's ruins.