# THE WAY OF THE ANCESTORS

By

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93,282 words

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Creative Portion of Thesis -- Section A

**Glossary**

*All words are in Zulu unless otherwise stated.*

**Amadlozi** (plural,) **iDlozi** (singular): Refers to lineal, foreign and collective ancestors. In this account, it also refers to an ecstatic state or trance, "having *A/madlozi*."

**Amathambo:** Throwing the bones is an indigenous-knowledge system used for diagnosis, and identifying: causation, prevention strategies, and steps for rectification to ultimately restore balance and harmony for the individual, and in their interrelationships. The bones include animal bones and other sacred items, many are obtained throughout the training process.

**Baba:** Father, a term often used by a healing apprentice towards his/her teacher.

**Badimo:** Setswana for ancestors

**Bakkie:** Afrikaans word for small truck

**Bheka:** Look

**Dagga:** wild marijuana

**Futha:** Steaming for ritual purposes

**Geza:** To wash

**Gobela:** The traditional healing teacher

**Hamba:** go

**Hawu/ouw:** A South African-ism to express shock or amazement

**Heyoka:** The clown or backwards people often associated with the thunder beings. Heyoka is associated with specific teachings and medicine in many Indigenous belief systems throughout the Americas.

**Indumba:** Sacred healing space for the ancestors

**Ingozi:** danger

**Impepho:** A sacred herb used to invoke or calm the ancestors

**Intwaso:** The healing student's sickness that manifests in a multitude of ways. The student finds wellness through the process of answering the calling to heal.

**Inyanga** (singular,) *izinyanga* (plural): Herbalist. A type of traditional South African healer.

**Inyongo**: Goat gall bladder, a powerful medicine worn by graduated *Izangoma.*

**Isangoma** (singular) *Izangoma* (plural): A type of traditional South African healer, a practitioner of Ngoma.

**Kaffir:** A racist term for a black South African.

**Khanga:** Traditional fabric worn by traditional healers

**Lobola:** A bride offering/s for the union of both families.

**A/makhosi:** King or chief, a term of respect used by specific traditional healers when referring to themselves and each other.

**Imbiza** (singular,) **izimbiza** (plural): A herbal preparation for drinking.

**Malume:** Uncle

**Mfiso/s, umgaco timfiso*:*** Medicine pouch filled necklaces worn only by the healing apprentice, or graduate.

**Moya:** Spirit

**Mpande:** Meaning root, refers to the closely bound group of healers that come from a common core understanding, treatment and training. Healers belonging to an *mpande* are seen to come from the same "root", and seen as *Izangoma* family.

**Muthi:** Traditional medicine mixture

**Ngaka ya ditaola:** Setswana for bone thrower or diviner

**Nkulunkulu:** The great, great one. Creator

**Pahla:** To pray or make offerings

**Panga:** A machete or large blade

**Pap:** A maize-based staple food, often prepared as a think or thick porridge

**Pantsula:** A style of dance which also incorporates style and identity, much like hip hop music and culture in the United States.

**Phansi:** Down

**Phalaza/o:** To vomit with a ritual emetic

**Sjambok:** A rubber whip

**Shebeens:** Local, often unlicensed bars that are hubs of activity predominantly in townships.

**Skinner:** gossip/gossiping

**Spaza:** South African slang for a local shop

**Takkies:** Running shoes

**Thokoza:** Praise, joyfulness, be happy, give thanks, or rejoice. The word is mainly used as a term of respect among or towards *Izangoma* in greeting, prayer, praise, or agreement. To a lesser degree, it also refers to specific ancestors a healer may work with or "have." This is particularly the case for some Swazi and Shangaani thokoza/takoza Izangoma.

**Thwasa** (singular) (u) thwasana (plural): The traditional healing apprentice.

**Tsotsi's:** Criminals or "thugs"

**Gogo** (singular) uGogo (plural): Grandmother/s. Also, a term many healers use when referring to one another.

**uButhakathi:** A creature which is said to inflict harm and illness. *Thakathi* is also commonly used to denote witchcraft, or ill-intent.

**uKufihlelwa:** Searching for hidden items with ancestral guidance.

**uKuthwasa/Ukuthwasana:** The apprenticeship process

**uKuphothula**: The healer's graduation

**uMhlungu:** white woman

**uMkhonto:** Spear

**uMqombothi:** Traditional beer

**Yebo:** Yes, or I am in agreement

**Vetkoek:** An Afrikaans word. A fried dumpling or donut

**Woza**: Come

**In Praise of the Ancestors**

...The ancestors have come to listen to our songs,

Overjoyed they shake their heads in ecstasy.

With us they celebrate their eternal life.

They climb the mountain with their children

To put the symbol of the ancient stone on its forehead.

we honour those who gave birth to us,

With them we watch the spectacle of the moving mists.

They have opened their sacred book to sing with us.

They are the mystery that envelops our dream.

They are the power that shall unite us.

They are the strange truth of the earth.

They came from the womb of the universe.

Restless they are, like a path of dreams.

Like a forest sheltering the neighbouring race of animals.

Yes, the deep eye of the universe is in our chest.

With it we stare at the centers of the sky.

We sing the anthems that celebrate their great eras,

For indeed life does not begin with us. - Mazisi Kunene

**Preface**

Weeks after Nelson Mandela's inauguration, I entered early post-Apartheid South African society; a period that hastily surfaced the complexities of hundreds of years of colonization. It was during an eight-month hitchhiking journey throughout areas of sub Saharan Africa that I became ill with both decipherable and enigmatic illnesses. What followed was years of debilitating illnesses and puzzling symptoms that no biomedical or natural health practitioner could 'fix.' In my distress I sought the guidance from a traditional South African healer, an *Isangoma*. In a 'throwing of the bones' divination session, she explained that my baffling and longstanding symptoms were the result of being called to heal. As an intergenerational gift from my grandmother, she contended, I would need to apprentice with her and become an *Isangoma* as to be healed.

I moved to her home in Soweto and followed apprenticeship protocol as to strengthen lineal and collective ancestral relationships, and to 'cleanse away' the healer's sickness, as well as to learn how to heal. Within a few years I was a practicing traditional healer, community development consultant, researcher and social justice advocate. I contributed to the development of legislation, worked in under-resourced governmental hospitals at the height of the HIV and AIDS epidemic, and developed and implemented community-based and national level programing in South Africa and Botswana.

What started out as personal journal entries during the traditional healing apprenticeship process and thereafter, slowly transformed into a multitude of narratives, about the relationship between trance, healing processes, and colonialism. *The Way of the Ancestors* is a chronicle of my experiences. Importantly, while writing this creative nonfiction book, I experienced intermittent trance states, and although not dramatically

performative, as is often the case with *Izangoma* trance processes, which often involves drumming, singing, dancing, and embodiment of ancestors or spirits; I experienced a subtler form of trance as distinct ancestors 'wrote through me' to 'speak on their own 'behalf's.' With each narrative, I fully sensed their descriptive stories, odours, scenes and sensations. These encounters permeated my life. I did not articulate these 'pictures' or feelings alongside their transmissions, as I was simply too preoccupied with recording their stories. At first, I was tempted to research names, dates and places, as well as to correct the spelling of local words and phrases, but I quickly found that my concerns interfered with this unique methodological co-authorship process. *The Way of the Ancestors* contains my personal narrative and the narratives of various ancestors, over many timeframes.

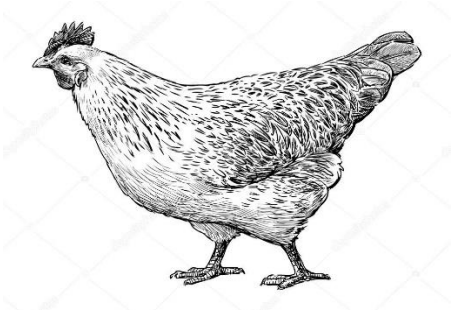
My personal story is largely chronological, but at certain points it does disregard the one-way flow of time. *The Way of the Ancestors* invites readers to perceive the world in a nonlinear fashion by circumventing Eurocentrically perceived boundaries and notions of time and space. My personal story is differentiated from the ancestral transmissions appearing in Lucinda Calligraphy font, and are not sequentially ordered but incorporated as part of the overall chapter theme.

Consent, confidentiality and anonymity were very important in the writing of this book. All names were changed, except in the case of Onica who gave verbal consent, or rather requested that her name be used. When changing names, I purposely choose first and last names that were in keeping with the cultural and linguistic background of the 'character'. This felt important to honouring people, their families and ancestry.

I also removed possible identifiers, specifically *Baba* and Dean, who could otherwise by located by their cultural backgrounds and places of healing.

*The Way of the Ancestors* is forty-one chapters with an epilogue and a glossary. It is organized into three parts, each of which invokes a colour associated with *Izangoma* ritual, medicines and practices. No colour is 'bad' or 'good'. In Western societies black *mnyama*, is frequently associated with negativity, but with the first part of the text, black represents the initial stage towards healing. I was also taught that the colour black in medicine and ritual can be absorptive, or protective and deflect ill intent. Part Two is governed by the colour red, *ibomvu*, which signifies the transformation towards wellness. It is the colour of in-between-ness. Part Three is keyed to the colour white, *mhlope,* as it represents the state of one who has been cleansed, purified, and returned to life with the sickness vocation successfully resolved. All three of these colours are associated with specific ancestors and aspects of *Izangoma*.

As a healer, social justice advocate, educator and student, I offer this text in a reflective and reconciliatory manner.



https://sp.depositphotos.com/47163013/stock-illustration-sketch-of-a-hen.html.

# PART ONE

## *Mnyama,* Black

### Chapter One – Carrying the Load

*"You are one of the truth tellers. You are called to write these words on behalf of the sea, the plants and the stars. Even the animals speak through you.*

*You are Isangoma; you never walk alone. You carry a heavy weight. Your beads are a sentiment. Your mfiso filled with medicine for talking the truth. Chew the plants to clear your words. Wash in the sea and waters to clear your path. Walk into the darkness, to the frightening places, not for self-injury, but to get that precious medicine.*

*Hold dear those you love and those that love you; this is what gives chiefs courage. Walk away from squabbles and small mindlessness; it poisons imagination and unity.*

*We brought you here to open your heart again; to frighten away fear like the lion does the hyena. The wild dogs are gone. Nothing will devour you; only what you allow to hurt you will slowly eat you up from the inside.*

*Carry your load and carry it freely; with gratitude and purpose, even when clarity is lacking. Messengers will be sent to dissuade you, smile, and offer compassion, but don't lose track. I am the old one; the one who has known you the longest. The one who catches the freshly born child, and the Southern Cross that guides the ships. I am the one who guides you, too, who shows you where to go but cannot ease the journey. It's not important now.*

*You must speak to the sea and listen to the forest. All of these living things tell stories. Stories you must hear clearly and repeat clearly. My children are born. Each bubble in the foam of the tide leaves its mark, has its purpose, and carries its weight. Each speck forms a huge wave which turns the sea and gives more life. You can never be lost or alone if you understand your humble place in the sea, not just in the world; that is too small. To be born even for a second is to fulfill, unify and uphold……"*

Ancestor's name unknown, December 20, 2013.

*"Let us be clear. These are our words, not yours. You deliver the water, we are the flow. Ha, in my time, the one's that brought the messages were*

*very special. Even just the everyday things. The traveler with the message was our "technology." A good one brought the correct message. The one that was given to him, and brought the story of how "the message" came to be and what happened on their journey. Ah this was our "news." That meant that the one to bring the messages had to be trustworthy, right from when they were a very small child. Speaking the truth, obedience and of course strong (strong willed, as the people say now.) Oh, to bring that message, in every weather, at any time. Sometimes they faced fighters from what is now called Mozambique, and later English soldier's. They never carried the message on paper. Our people didn't use paper for a long time. We didn't need it. Our thinking, and our hearts was the paper. You can record everything inside yourself. This is why your children and their children will remember everything, from you and your mother and her mother. You see? You cannot make the people ready for the message, no you cannot. But it is coming either way. You cannot un-hear the truth and pretend you don't know. Ah, everyone will remind you. Ha, me, I will remind you. We will do that for you. It is a gift. It is a gift to get the messages, and they are coming, for sure. So, welcome the one who brings them. Feed them, listen well and hear the story of all that happened. And. Listen to the message in the story too. One story, and one message has many things to tell.*

*I am going down by the water, passed the hill, there is someone waiting there for me. Ah, they are crying and need me to be there while they weep. I will clean them with the water from the river. Even though it is dirty now, I will bless it and clean it, then I will clean them. Maybe wash their ears so they can hear me well, and wash their eyes so they can see me well. Ah, sometimes you forget we are here…"* Ama J. June 22, 2016.

**Chapter Two - Miasmatic Deluges: Drowning in Initiation**

David and I sat in the dilapidated *bakkie* with *Izangoma* in the back. The chilly open air didn't deter the traditional healers from singing and shaking rattles the whole way to the water. I knew as I faced the final stage of *ku mu thwasisa*; the apprenticeship process to be one type of South African traditional healer, I was going to be irrevocably changed. Today was the last part in the life-threatening final initiation before I would no longer be a student or *thwasa,* but an initiated *Isangoma;* a healer, diviner, counsellor, herbalist, health practitioner, confidante, upholder of traditional knowledge, and vehicle for the ancestors and spirits.

The last few days were hard to remember sequentially; the thread between the mundane and spirit world had blurred. In what some define as trance or spirit possession, I had 'had the ancestors' who announced their presence, and began to *ukufihlelwa*, search for hidden items, or as *Baba* called it: 'find something smelling.'

I raced out of *Baba's* yard with Andile, a graduated *Inyanga* running alongside me until I came to a local *spaza,* where I retrieved the live male goat and coaxed him back to the yard. I drank from his pulsing throat and then slurped the blood, mixed with a special *muthi*

from a bowl to *phalaza,* vomiting up my nerves with the herbal concoction. I had called up and surrendered to the ancestors through drumming, dancing, singing, invocation of the ancestors, and learning healing methods.

Then *Baba* pulled a hand-woven basket along the side of the house while urging me on. I speedily crawled along on all fours, pecking at the peculiar mixture like a hungry chicken. With *Amadlozi* working through me, I recovered the hidden *inyongo,* beads, rolled up animal hide, and another crucial regalia pertinent to being *Isangoma.* It had been an exhausting few days.

As we drove along an unknown road, I knew we were still in Soweto but didn't recognize the sparse area. I had grown accustomed to the human density of the township and found myself feeling uneasy in unpopulated areas. I rolled the red and white beads over my wrists and fiddled with the single *mfiso* around my neck, pondering that today would be the last day I would wear only a double strand of beads around my ankles and wrists. I would no longer have to apply daily *ibomvu*, red oxide clay, from head to toe. Soon the cold water would wash away the dry clay that hadn't stained my skin enough to hide my pale flesh and blond hair, a further stark contrast to the other predominantly South African *Izangoma*.

My boyfriend David sat quietly while a dulled 5fm played on the radio. I wanted to touch his hand, to reach out and hug him. It had been over three months since I had had any physical contact with him or anyone for that matter. I saw him almost weekly when he visited Dlamini in Soweto on Friday's after work. He'd leave his long week behind in the northern white suburbs and head to the township in a rickety old Nissan Sentra to work on *Baba's* roof; part of the exchange for my apprenticeship.

Our visits were always under strict supervision; just one of the many rules a *thwasa* had to adhere to. We had relied on glimpses and hushed voices to convey desire, confusion, fear, and worry. Physical or sexual contact was absolutely prohibited throughout the training process, and the breaking of rules was known to have major spiritual and physical consequences.

Sitting quietly for the first time in days, I became aware of my body, thoughts, emotions, and momentary autonomy. Pangs of hunger from fasting over the last few days, feeling cold, as well as mounting insecurities about how I had 'performed', floated around my fuzzy being. I even began to think about going home to our smallholding near Fourways outside of Johannesburg, and then back to my family in Toronto.

It was so strange to imagine my 'normal' life. Somehow home had changed for me; it wasn't a tangible place, a building or country, it was my place with them, and them with me; the place of spirit and with the ancestors.[1]

I wasn't the same young nineteen-year-old girl who left Canada a few years earlier. I had been unlearning what I thought was universal knowledge, norms, beliefs, and values. This unlearning, and education into other ways of knowing and feeling, had been the greatest challenge of training as a traditional healer. The past few months had forced me to question and consider the limits of my mind, identity, cultural background, body, gender, class and personhood.

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[1] *Amathongo* are the recently departed spirits, but *Amadlozi* are ancestral spirits that have reached a "desired state of spiritual being" (Ngubane, 50, 142), and are responsible, disciplining and protective with jural powers over their descendants (Ngubane, 50-51.)

I felt safer sitting alongside David. He knew me; knew what I could handle. Our eight-month hitchhiking trip from South Africa to Kenya had allowed us time to really get to know each other.

If things went awry today, he could help. I believed this, despite his not knowing anything about traditional healing or medicine. After all, he was an English Afrikaner raised by a Jewish stepfather, Christian English mother, and a Setswana nanny, or 'his second mother.'[2] His exposure to The Township was limited to youthful excursions in search of inexpensive *dagga*, or, unlike many white South Africans, when he travelled alongside his mother to take factory staff home late into the night.

We parked at the crossroads and those that had simply come for the ride and were not healers weren't allowed to come to the river with us. We unloaded the *bakkie* and walked through the dry elephant grass, passing small heaps of garbage and the odd most likely used condom.

Despite the quiet surrounding veld, the river was a hub of activity. A few Apostlics emerged from the polluted water and then dressed in their white robes accessorizing with long green rope belts.

A few women, who collected water in large jugs, chatted, prolonging the small trek home. There were other *Izangoma* busy cleansing, praying, and making offerings to the slow flowing waterway in the sprawling overcrowded township.

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[2] Black mother 'surrogates' for whites throughout childhood and adolescence is widespread throughout South Africa, and indubitably highlights master discourses as a result of colonialization and Apartheid.

*Baba* made her way over to a small rock, her thick waist covered in a black, red and white traditional *khanga* bearing a guinea fowl motif. Before unpacking the big bag, she put two flailing chickens near a shaded rock, along with a small pile of mixed coloured candles.
I stared down at the desperate-for-renewal water that concealed human faeces, dangerous waste, and other forms of contagion, but I didn't worry about tangible concepts of pollution anymore. I had learned to hand over worries about physical safety, amoebas or 'germs.' I had come to learn two important things in my apprenticeship. Firstly, spirit was stronger than 'germs', and spiritual forms of pollution were far more dangerous than microbes. I knew spirit would take care of me as it always had, and if that failed, I had the privilege of access to antibiotics AND traditional medicine if need be.

David started setting up the video camera on the other side of the river. We had been given permission to film this part of the initiation, not so much for a keepsake, but to show my family the unimaginable journey I had been on for the past few months.
I was distracted by our neighbours who had just slaughtered a black chicken and were boiling water on a small fire by the river in preparation for *futha.* The older woman with mid-length greying dreadlocks and heavily white-beaded wrists covered her *thwasa* with worn blankets to steam with *muthi;* boiled river water and carefully selected chicken parts.
I used *other* ways of seeing and feeling to diagnose that the *thwasa* was cleansing and protecting herself against other jealous and sorcery. Combatting jealousy appeared to be an *Isangoma* past-time. Unemployment, poverty and various forms of structural violence apparent in early liberalized postcolonial South African spheres, enflamed social dynamics, especially issues of jealousy, envy and allegations of sorcery (Ngubane,44.)
"*Nomadlozi,* come *thwasa,*" beckoned one of the healers.

I hadn't noticed earlier, but the other *Izangoma* had been unusually quiet since we had arrived at the river. I had assumed that everyone was tired from the 24-hour drumming, dancing, and initiation rites. None of the *uGogo* had been familiar to me but was *Baba's* spirit brothers and sisters. I had grown trusting of them throughout the initiation process, despite some untimely and excessive drunkenness associated with intergenerational disparity.

One of the *uGogo* had come from another area of Soweto, two from Thokoza and Daveyton, and one all the way from Komatipoort, where we had gone to dig for *muthi* a few weeks prior. Andile, who had arrived during *mvuma kufa,* a ceremony that's part of the training and acceptance of the calling, had simply shown up and stayed. I had grown accustomed to South African notions of adoption, friends, family, neighbours, and community; many would visit and stay for indefinite periods of time especially if they were even more in need than their hosts.

Of course, there were expectations for long-term visitors, especially in an *Isangoma* household. Andile was particularly skilled at killing and cleaning chickens and goats. He was contented to slaughter, and even happier to eat. He had helped me tremendously the day before as the goat and I came face to face, eye to eye, and pulse to pulse; he called up *iDlozi* to help strengthen my spirit. His powerful howling "*Y-Y-O-O-I-I*" carried an apparent presence of the ancestors, which comforted me.

Today, even chatty youthful Andile was solemn. I was beginning to think that the 'worst' was not behind me. David smiled from across the tame river giving us thumbs up. "It's time, *pansi Mma,*" said the middle-aged healer motioning me towards the water.

He didn't speak any English but was fluent in Afrikaans as most South Africans were because of the Bantu education system; a substandard racist schooling system, born out of Apartheid, which systemically sought to create inferiority by making black South Africans a means of production rather than human beings (Nwadeyi, March 9, 2017.)

Despite *Baba*'s language lessons, which consisted of her yelling at me in her mother tongues (Zulu, and Xhosa), or talking extra slowly; my Zulu, which means God's people, had improved, minimally. I had also learned to rely on other forms of communication and seeing, feeling and knowing to guide me throughout the process. I knew that the ancestors had sent this *Makhosi* as an overseer during the initiation process. I was becoming accustomed to his firm but caring temperament. He had monitored the initiation process like a hawk over an expansive plain. His input and corrections weren't about being opinionated or contrary, but about enforcing cultural, spiritual and traditional processes. *Things should be done correctly, as they were in rural settings,* was his mantra as he didn't think much of the urban *ukuthwasa* process.

Ushering us forward, he didn't make eye contact or engage. I broke conduct and searched his face for reassurance. Holding out his calloused and medicine-stained hand, he led me down the rocky hill. *Baba* had slaughtered both chickens, and a small splattering of hot blood fell on the sun softening candles.

Waiting for one of the limp carcases to float by, I stepped into the water. Looking up, I locked eyes with the neighbouring *thwasa*; her flesh red from full-body steaming.

Panting, she quickly put her traditional apprentice 'uniform' on, consisting of a white t-shirt and *amabhayi,* red fabric tied as a skirt. Her thin short dreadlocks were accented by a small brass ring and a cowrie shell centred in the middle of her forehead. Unlike me, she

had a double *mfiso* necklace indicating that she had completed initiation. Her *Gobela* stared unblinkingly beneath the glaring sun at us.

David shouted out, “I’m ready to go.”

Gazing down at the wide river, I begged silently for the water and its inhabitants to be merciful in its cleansing and transference of spiritual knowledge and gifts. Suddenly I felt more trepidation about today’s rites than I had during the first part of the initiation. I had heard many stories that I now hoped were urban myths from healers and patients about the water spirits. How the spirits within the waters could communicate with the initiate or fully-fledged *Isangoma.* Many a healer had followed the sacred calls, submerging themselves deep within the waters, only to drown or disappear for months or even years, until one day they resurfaced from the bowels of the waterbed like a primordial fossilized conjurer bringing back powerful medicines and knowledge from virtual realms.

I stepped closer to the water’s edge and wondered if I would be plunged into one of Soweto’s largest rivers, only to later float to the top, bloated and dead. Or would I finally cleanse mysterious illnesses that had plagued me for years? I considered all the strange symptoms that had kept me bedridden and incapable of youthful partying, school or any other livelihood for years, due to being ‘called to heal.’

*Baba* gently pushed me forward bearing an “*ag shame*” expression; a local sentiment of deep empathy for another person or their circumstances. She looked less in control, less focused and prepared. She looked worried, too.

“It’s okay, *Nomadlozi,”* she said, comforting me with a trembling hand.

As my foot skimmed the water, my body began to shiver. I noticed the healers had formed a small triangle in the water; they were breathing quickly and hopping up and down. *Baba’s*

boyfriend Jabu was preparing himself by dunking repeatedly. He surfaced and let out a loud ancestral bellow.

I had spent the last few months wearing shoes occasionally; my feet and everything else had toughened, but I struggled to keep my footing now. As a *thwasa* I was expected to live as 'our ancestors had', and honouring them consisted of not wearing shoes, sleeping on the floor, always kneeling as to honour them, and not sitting in chairs or at tables. These were just some of the rules that had to be adhered to. Unsaid norms consisted of being comfortable with positive unseen forces spontaneously embodying me and others.

Today felt different, with even more malleability of boundaries. I hadn't called up the ancestors and they hadn't invaded my body and spirit with a relentless force that I was used to, now it was only a tremble. *Baba* faced me towards the growing late afternoon sun where I hoped to soak up its powers.

I hadn't noticed that I had been ushered into the cold, water. Someone grasped my neck and lifted me abruptly back into the miasmatic deluge. I closed my eyes tightly and the daylight-stained brown liquid imploded upon my face.

Briefly resurfacing, I caught the tiniest of breaths before my chest was pushed back down, making me swallow a big gulp of the profaned water. Coughing and choking, I attempted to jump up, but hands pushed me deeper into the river. I tried to release from their grasp, but when that failed I kicked; the healers were holding me too tightly. I tried to gasp for air. Drowning. I kicked harder this time and pushed my arms downwards managing to get to the surface where I yelled: "No, no, stop!"

As one of the other healers grabbed my arms, I backed away and shook my head simultaneously swallowing a mixture of fear, thickened water, and stomach acid. I slipped

and fell backwards, where a small-framed woman with indistinguishable force, grabbed me from under my shoulders and pulled me down. I could hear her talking, praying, and singing. The river. Bottomless. I kicked, rolling over onto my stomach and swam to the surface. Where was David?

"No *Baba,* no, no more!" I hollered, waking the dead. "I can't, I'm done. It's good, okay?" I pleaded.

With tear-filled eyes, she gently pushed my head down. This time I hunched over and positioned myself like a frog on the riverbed. I planned to quietly stay under, seemingly yielding, until I needed air, and then I would hop as high as possible to the surface to breathe. I wouldn't drown. I had outwitted the *Izangoma,* or so I thought! I crouched, panicked and trembling. I waited.

But before I could leap for air, I felt hands all over my body straightening me out. The healers started rolling me, at first slowly, like fish in batter. As my face hit the surface I caught a small breath. Resisting the rolling, I tried to stand, but now with greater dynamism, they pushed me down and rolled faster.

I could no longer decipher the air from the water, or up from down. It was no use; I had to surrender and hope I would breathe once more. Drowning. My pulse slowed and then seemed to quiet altogether. I could no longer hear muffled voices. The splashing stopped. My whole body numb. Sensibilities dimmed. My flesh no longer separated the warm liquids within and the cold bacteria-filled water outside. Buried comfortably in the river. Its small boulders my bones. The liquid my air, and the sand my flesh.

I no longer struggled to the surface. Home. Amphibious, and without dread, anxiety, confusion, or questioning. Emergence. Perceived boundaries between the weightless Transvaal air and the squishy sand vanished.

Before I could float away or sink deeper, I was lifted to the surface. Limp, like an unresponsive newborn entering a world full of indeterminacies.

Drifting in, beyond and through consciousness (Taussig, 26), the healers held me up; a pitiful offering to the sun.

Realizing I had been transported out of the womb, I gasped for air. I no longer had the river's umbilical cord to keep me sustained. I grasped for the linkage, not wanting to lose the blissful lingerings.

Jabu gently splashed water on my face and chest, helping me to integrate. I heard David rustling by the water's edge. He had been calling my name for quite some time.

My feet were grounded in the reddish sand. The coal-smoke infused air filled my expansive lungs. Ah, room to breathe.

I looked around. Vulnerable, as though I had been away for years. Present for what seemed like the first time, again. The healers were sweating, quivering, and splashing away their tears. The river's edge was no longer a hub of activity; everyone had left.

"Hey! Hey! Rebecca? Rebecca!?" David shouted with exasperation.

"Rebecca, are you okay; are you okay? Oh my God, you're okay, right?!" he asked.

"Yeah, no, no, I'm okay. It's fine David, I'm yeah, you know…" I said trailing off.

Lovingly grasping my wet head in his hands, he stared into my eyes: "You okay my love; are you *really* okay?"

"Yeah, I'm okay. I'm...I'm actually," I said, spacing out, "I'm good."

"Hey *Nomadlozi,* not working," said *Baba*, referring to the tape recorder, "nothing on here. Remember what we told you? The ancestors don't like these things" she explained referring to technology.

"They like it the old way," *Baba* said, adjusting her cotton *khanga,* fabric which had come to replace pelts and hides.

We slowly collected our things and made our way back to the *bakkie*. I looked back at the river and noticed a nearby cellphone tower posing as a tree.

"Hey *Nomadlozi*, you must never look back after you have done the work someplace. You must never! It's not lucky," she said.

But I didn't worry about tempting luck. I felt lucky enough to be living and breathing. I hadn't drowned. I had passed. I was *Isangoma.*

**Chapter Three – What the Dead Remember**

*"When I was a child I never wanted for anything. My mother kept me by her breast, or on her warm back, her heavy breath and strong pulse comforted me as she carried me through her work. I would sleep near the fire and awaken warm and without fear knowing that if she was gone, she would return with water to prepare my bath, or wash our few dishes.*

*There was only her and I; my grandmother stayed with us when I started to walk. My mother had the task of chasing after me and keeping me away from the old blind and miserable dog that always came to our door; she pitied her and shared scraps. Despite the old thing growling and threatening to bite, my mother watched over me, and even when I wasn't*

*in the hut, she knew where I was and what I was doing; she sensed my moves and whispers.*

*She also had to care for my grandmother, who had been a strong and capable woman, fighting off warriors, British soldiers, and anyone else threatening her home or livestock. No one got into her business; she was left alone.*

*The fable of her killing a white man spread for generations beyond her. She claimed that the man came to her in a zombie-way when she was collecting plants and other foods from the area. He started by enticing her, offering things like sour porridge to a beggar. He grabbed her by the arm, they wrestled and she struggled. By the stream she looked for a large rock; he pulled out his rifle and put a shot in the air quieting all around them. It was told that he moved closer, exposing his parts. Some say a creature had overtaken him, a creature known to make men crazy, especially warriors and soldiers. Some said he had fired the gun on himself in desperation at the loss of his dead wife, or because (this) bad spirit had taken over his mind.*

*But our family always knew grandmother had killed him. She somehow got the gun and found a way to use it. To this day, many, many decades later, everyone knows she is powerful.*

*Back then they knew not to anger her; they feared a curse or worse, that she had caused the white man to lose his mind. Many called her a witch, saying she fled to the mountains at night to talk with cackling baboons and tokoloshe.*

*The truth was, she went to the mountains at night, only at special times when the moon was a sliver, facing upward to collect a fungus which could be used on problems of the skin, open wounds, snake bites, and for many other uses.*

*My mother took no interest in learning about such things; she tended to me, the cattle, and selling her beaded bands to wealthy chiefs and women in nearby villages who were too busy, lazy, or didn't 'value culture enough to make them for their own children.'*

*Mother didn't know the medicines, but she knew how to pray. She had prayed even as a child, and often recited the funny words, making her sound like a young girl again. But mother was slow to follow the church. She had always been curious but cautious and was firm in her ways.*

*After my father died, while she was with me, she placed her hands [She says, referring to pregnancy] over her round belly and prayed to Jesus for the first time, asking that he bring her a healthy child and that she lives through to care for him.*

*She also asked for a male child, hoping he would help care for the cattle and protect her as time went on. She believed in the power of Christ once I was born. After all, Jesus had allowed both of us to live. But she always had a quiet doubt about Jesus, maybe because I was a girl child and not a boy, or maybe because she trusted nothing outside of our village.*

*I had the features of a girl, but I behaved like a boy. She struggled to accept this fact, and tried every method to control my wildness, even using a reed strap, frowned upon among our people, especially for children. I think it's because I was so much like her, long and hard like that reed that smacked against my legs on that rainy day. She also feared I would be hurt or killed because of my brave mouth.*

*This is why I believe she eventually sent me away to church schools; she blamed my cleverness for my unruly behaviour. My mother failed to consider that I was just as strong as her, and her mother and my grandmother. I could also fight off soldiers, care for cattle, pray, and collect medicine. I wouldn't always be understood by my people, but I would be respected and often feared"* Ama J. Oct 23, 2014.

*"I didn't travel as much as I saw. I wanted my body to experience new places, to see if the sun felt differently on my body from one place to the next, to touch cold white blankets of snow, and put my feet in another sea.*

*I only travelled when I closed my eyes; sometimes I would imagine I was somewhere new.*

*Of course, when I dreamed both in the day and night, I would be called. Then I would go and help an ailing baby or possessed person. Sometimes I would help with prayers, in the way of encouragement and answers. When I travelled in this way, there were no lines between people, countries, or seas.*

*I sometimes remember the book I read as a girl, Ali Baba and the thieves; I imagined I was on adventures, moving about dangerously in search of magic, and treasure, as well. I also liked to read about pirates. It was an Indian man who went to Bechuanaland and took other things back home; he gave me these books. I heard he died, trampled to death. I was surprised to learn that he spoke out against such things, but not surprised that he was educated. He always carried a book hidden somewhere on his body. He would give me the book to borrow, never leaving it with me permanently, as he feared I would be strapped for reading 'dangerous materials.'*

*I suspect now that he wanted me for a wife and was waiting until I was old enough to come and collect me. I think I would have gone with him back to his country. But this Ali Baba was my favourite book as a young girl. It was the first one I could read clearly, and I understood the story.*

*I wore my Bible out learning English. I liked the stories; my village was dull by comparison. The mistresses believed I loved the lord and that was why I read the Bible. They excused me of my poor conduct because I read the Bible so well. Ha, if you didn't see my face you would think I was just another white child! They blamed my behaviour on being an African; 'Certain things never come out in the wash,' they said chuckling.*

*My mother was right; I was clever. I read the Bible and hymn books to learn English. I wanted to understand what was said about me, my people, and life. I also hoped that the only nice mistress, who let me read anything when the other children had gone to sleep, would take me to England to visit the Queen and let me dip my feet in her ocean to see if it was different.*

*This mistress woke me with the scent of lavender soap every day. I wanted her to be my mother; especially after my mother passed, when I was twelve or thirteen, from the terrible disease sweeping through our country. No herbs could help it and no one could be sick with it long before dying. It was so bad that we had to change the way people were buried. It seemed more women than men died, too.*

*I also travelled when I didn't want to be there. In the school, or when a man lay on top of me before my menses begun, or when my child's father planted her seed. These things I don't like to talk about. It is what you*

*would call 'poor taste' for me; it goes against my culture, but also talking about bad things can bring them back. Those memories have a way of finding us again and again if we are not careful."* Ama J, June 29, 2011.

**Chapter Four – Bloodied Knees. A Baby in the 'Prayer Way'**

When we got back to *Baba's* in Dlamini, the place I had called home for the past few months, I felt a combination of jubilation and sheer exhaustion. My scraped and bloodied knees hurt from interminable kneeling. I was peaceful and happy to have finished the most important aspects of *ukuthwasa,* and was ready for *ukuphothula,* the going home ceremony. I was grateful not just to the ancestors for their guidance, care, and support, but for the efforts and acceptance of my *Baba* and fellow *Izangoma*.

When we were getting out of the car, friendly but normally aloof residents welcomed our arrival like we were Radebe, the famous footballer. We were ushered to the *indumba,* and I put on my regalia in the healing room and honoured the place of the ancestors. *Baba* straightened my muddied hair and placed my knobkerrie in one hand and wooden *umkhonto* spear in the other.

I called up *Amadlozi* but before I could enter the depths of spirit, *Baba* began dressing herself putting on her long-beaded wig, and *umgaco timfiso,* and beaded kilt. I had only seen her fully dressed in her ancestral attire once or twice.

"Yeah, *Nomadlozi.* You did it, *ney*? You see *thwasa*. You think you are done but NOW is the start. *Eish*, you know nothing *Nomadlozi,* nothing! You are a baby. Now you must learn the real things, hey?!" she said in her usual authoritarian voice.

"*Ah,* but you did good *Nomadlozi, ney*?"

"*Thokoza, Baba,*" I replied, in keeping with the strict norms a *thwasa* communicates with her teacher.

"*Ah, yebo,* you have a good *Baba Nomadlozi. Eish*, some *thwasana*, whew, they are beaten and work too hard!" she exclaimed.

"*Thokoza Baba,*" I replied, eyes respectfully averted.

"*Woza,* my child," she said looking majestic in her ancestral robes.

As we made our way to the front of the house, we rustled in our heavily-beaded skirts and skin-tight ankle rattles; *Baba's* made of pop can tops and mine of seedpods. We crossed through the small gate to the front yard where a crowd had gathered amidst a typical Gauteng winter sunset. Particles of dust and coal danced in the day's final pink hues.

Hordes of people coming to and from work filled the streets; domestic workers, security guards, cashiers, nurses, bus drivers and professionals returning from jobs in town or the predominantly white suburbs. It wasn't as busy as a Friday end-of-month when most got their wages, but folks were still in a rush to get somewhere. There were always a few unhurried residents chatting at the *spaza,* or youth milling about.

But today, commuters and residents were standing unmoved in front of *Baba's* house. The healers who had helped since the beginning of the initiation lined up. Healers, only recognizable through beaded wrists and necklaces that poked out from under their uniforms or plain clothes, grabbed a *khanga* and joined in.

"*Lo lo lo lo lo"* called out the crowd in sing-song approval.

*Baba* urged me forward, "*Woza, Mma.*"

Smiling, I replied loudly, "*Makhosi!"* cup-clapping my hands high in the air.

*"MAKHOSI*!" the growing crowd yelled with zeal.

A middle-aged man shouted across the crowd to his neighbour, "Yeah, you see, Patricia, watch out *ney*! *Madlozi* can choose anyone, a-n-y-o-n-e!" he said referring to her, ignoring the calling to heal.

"*Yebo,"* the woman replied.

"Don't run, ah *wena.* Maybe you *thwasa* with the *umlungu ney*!" he exclaimed, as a few chuckled at the idea of a local resident becoming a student to a white healer.

The training process, and lifelong commitment of service to the ancestors and the community isn't to be taken lightly. In fact, it isn't uncommon for people called to heal to avoid traditional healers, medicine, and ceremonies, and to 'run away.' Of course, the misfortune or illness that would befall, not only torments the person called to heal but also their families and even future generations.

There are also those who debunk the power of culture, healing, and traditional medicine despite using it. *Baba* would laugh and say: "Those ones, *ha*, they say: 'I don't believe in ancestors or the *Sangoma.'* Hey, those ones knock at the back door for help when the sun goes down! Everyone believes; some just say they don't," *Baba* said, alongside nodding healers.

Despite the barrage of Christian missionization and biomedical dominance in the West, traditional healers often outnumber medical doctors 100:1, with close to eighty percent of continental Africans using traditional healing and medicine for illness prevention, care and support, as well as for interrelationships (WHO, 2002). With a minimum of 200,000 traditional healers in South Africa alone, the utilization of traditional healers and medicine demonstrates obvious health-seeking behaviours, not in the absence of biomedicine but despite or, in addition to it. Cultural appropriateness, patient-centered approaches, the promotion of social stability and healthy interrelationships, along with support for psycho-social issues, accessibility and affordability, explain the crucial societal role of traditional healing and medicine (Kang'ethe, 1114 & UNAIDS, 10-11) in South Africa.

"Hey *moya moya moya moya,* hey *moya moya moya,*" we sang out in unison, and in keeping with Zulu *Isangoma* custom, danced in a uniform manner: stepping forward, gliding back, and then semi-kicking. Andile jumped forward and danced vigorously, kicking his youthful leg high into the air. The crowd cheered, always enthralled by Zulu-inspired traditional dancing.

We moved in time, and I subtly looked up to see *Baba* swelling with pride. She was thrilled that I had passed the arduous training and strenuous initiation. It wasn't just contentment to have facilitated the birth of another healer, which was both time consuming and full of tangible and ambiguous pressures and responsibilities; she had also continued to prove her skills as a *gobela* to her neophytes, family and community. This moment, like so many moments of communal, cultural and spiritual survival and revitalization, confirmed and continuously validated the power of the ancestors, traditional belief, values, and ideologies.

Every time a *thwasa* was healed and graduated, so ancestral power was ratified and strengthened.

The growing crowd cheered us on. I was overwhelmed with emotion. *Baba* pulled me forward from the line. Sipho and *Baba's* other son gathered around the drums and hit the hides with enthusiasm. My exhaustion fell away. My eyes filled with tears and the usual stirring in my gut, a sign of expressive forms of ancestral embodiment, emerged.

I was relieved that I had passed the final testing, and would return to my regular life. Even though I didn't know what my *new* life would look like, I knew I was a thread in a cord that passed through many realms.I had undergone a metamorphosis. This wasn't just an experience or story to add to my life's narrative. I had a responsibility to fulfil my duties as a healer, and, despite recognizing Otherness as the antithesis of *Izangoma* knowledge, practices and ethics; I was acutely aware of the direct wellbeing of all those in the community, and communities beyond these European-made borders.

I was reminded of this late at night after cooking, cleaning, and performing the expected rituals with emetics and washes, until I finally collapsed on the concrete *indumba* floor to sleep momentarily. I wondered, "How will I do the work? Do I know enough? Will I live in South Africa forever and be a healer? Will I need to move to Soweto? How will David handle knowing being a *thwasa* was just part of my journey as a healer? What about my parents? And am I qualified to represent traditional healing and medicine in any capacity?"

The small, eager crowd encouraged me on. Seeing *Baba* and all the glowing-with-gratification healers; I knew I would find my way. After all, this wasn't just *my* journey or

experience, in some small way I was part of a larger narrative of cultural and political significance (Wreford, 830.)

I recognized most of the faces in the crowd from day-to-day life. Thankfully the local police officer, who had threatened to come and give *lobola* for me to be his wife, seemed to have finally given up. Despite my disparaging efforts and blatant rejection of the odd flirtatious gent, ultimately it was David's male authority and frequent stink-eye that deterred potential suitors.

Over the weekend, a few local residents assured me that they would come to consult with me. *Baba* convincingly told me that I would be, "So busy with the job. Too many patients will come, *Nomadlozi*!" she exclaimed, causing more alarm than comfort for me.

Most *Izangoma* told me that the ancestors chose and called people to become *Izangoma* in spite of obvious race, ethnicity, culture or gender. For many patients at that time, however, my whiteness made me unique, not only because of the legacy of Apartheid which kept people apart, or the obvious socio-political and economic privileges I had but because healers that were different were seen to be powerful.[3] This included small people, the differently-abled, or anyone with blatant variance; excluded were people from the lesbian,

[3] My training as a healer occurred in 1997, just three years into South Africa's democratic governance. Although there were a few white *Izangoma* who had trained during Apartheid, and the anomalous white or Indian *twasa* often mentioned in post-ceremonial gossip; non-black *Izangoma* were extremely uncommon, so much so that this made local and national news at the time. With the advent of white, and even non-South African *Twasana* over the last two decades since Apartheid; greater paradoxical discourses have emerged concerning the relevance, potential for unification and the re-colonization of African culture (Wreford, 835.)

gay, bisexual, transgendered and/or queer community. Homophobia and transphobia remain rampant.

In my experience, it was viewed that those who were deemed different could be deficient in some areas, but stronger in others; as if the ancestors had marked them with greater spiritual and healing powers. My foreignness made me unique, in a positive way. This notion made me very uncomfortable, that of 'being special.' I was often seen to be powerful in some areas and deemed weak in others. It was assumed that I couldn't handle much, certainly not that of an African, let alone a South African woman. The assumption was true; there were times my physical feebleness was apparent, and my ability to cope with hardship and inner resiliency was insufficient. After all, I had no withstood systematic intergenerational oppression and all that comes with it.

Even while being Other-ed by my teacher, her family and the community, my privileges were glaring. My whiteness, limpid as the toilet paper that I used and wasted as I wished, and a luxury for *Baba's* family. Barefaced as my white settler skin that was no longer hidden under the clay oxide I wore daily to honour miscellaneous ancestors. Bright as the shame that I endeavoured to address through acts of encountering and efforts of redressing.

Suddenly, the struggles of the last few years hit me. I had been ill for so long prior to coming to *Baba'*s. Undiagnosed and misdiagnosed illnesses and constantly-changing symptoms had made me question my sanity. Coming to *thwasa* was a last resort. After all; you couldn't choose to be *Izangoma,* but had to be called, and that calling had to be verified by other *Izangoma* and of course, the ancestors. Now only a few months later I was well and had *kwelapha*, health, and a wellness that had been foreign to me for years. Bedridden

and incapable of a normal life, I had suffered from unknown symptoms and causation, not to mention a life filled with constant dissimilarities. I was relieved I had finally addressed the sickness associated with being called to heal.

I murmured under my breath, "It was worth it all." By "all", I meant living in a state of servitude, kneeling until my knees bled, scabbed and scarred, isolation from family and friends, cooking for *Baba's* family of fifteen on a single hot plate, waking throughout the night to *pahla,* and the regular use of emetics, enemas and washes (or what I thought of as whole-being-discomfort-methods.) Memories of the temporary suffering leading up to the initiation and the process itself flooded me. But I wanted to give an air of strength and capability and struggled to hold back tears.

Overwhelmed with exhaustion, I felt faint from no sleep, fasting and rigorous rituals and testings. I stopped dancing before submitting to *Amadlozi* or reciting the ancestral greeting. In a weak 'speech', I offered both my gratitude and comprehension of the magnitude of my 'job.' I committed to fulfilling the work and remaining accountable to my patients and the community; and most importantly, to always honour the ancestors. And then, I put my head in my hands and broke down in tears of elation, fatigue, and thankfulness.

"*Agh shame,*" muttered empathetic voices from the crowd.

As I stepped aside, a few of the healers patted me on the shoulder. A few last-ditch requests bellowed from the crowd: "*Gida yom'lungu, gida,* dance white woman, dance!*"*

Recognizing my exhaustion, *Baba* told me to go to the *indumba* to rest rather than appease the crowd with laboured dancing. I made my way back to the *indumba,* feeling increasingly

weighted down with the *mfisos* made up of various strands of beads and pouches filled with *muthi* and other medicines. I knelt and cup clapped, and then entered the healing room, as I had done multiple times a day for months.

Struggling to stand, I crawled over to the altar. I didn't light the plenitude of candles and barely noticed the beginning-to-decay goat head with its glazed stare. The cool drinks and emptying brandy bottles amidst the plates of cooked food, incense and other offerings made it hard to find the *impepho* and snuff.

As I lit the dried sacred herb used to invoke the ancestors and calm the minds of its user, I welcomed the sweet smoke which had become my spiritual air. I offered the tobacco snuff and prayed. This time I didn't feel desperate or anxious as I had countless times before. I didn't feel the need to plead, ask for help, or ask why I was having to *thwasa.* Or ask what was going to happen. I didn't ask because I knew whatever happened, I would be okay. I was okay. I simply needed to surrender to my ancestors and *Nkulunkulu,* Great Spirit.

Outside there were drunken voices of older men milling about looking to fill their empty containers with *umqombothi*, until learning that the traditional beer barrel was empty and left grumbling. I felt simultaneously detached from everything and completely present. This is how it was opening-up to recognizable and unrecognizable forces. I put my forehead on the cobra-polished floor, kissed it, and humbly prayed:

*"Thokozani Amadlozi,*

*Siyabonga Amadlozi*

*Thokozani* Dlamini, Rogerson, Woolsey, Bader, Paddock, Raaff, Smith and Berns," I said honouring *Baba's,* mine, and David's ancestors.

"Oh, you have such mercy on me. I am so grateful for how you have blessed me. Thank you for this medicine. You will continue to show me the way and to take care of me. I put my trust, faith and control in your hands. You are the great grandfathers and grandmothers. You know all that has come before and what tomorrow holds."

I let go of the fear and worry I had been carrying for years. It didn't matter. Spirit was working through me. All I had to do was listen and surrender, become-present.

**Chapter Five – The New Arrival: Talking to 'the Bones'**

*"When I arrived that day, I came out. This is when you are born again, into these ways. If the one guiding you, instructing you, doesn't know, ha, then you will be blocked forever. You will struggle too long. Until that other one comes and unties you.*

*You were okay. Even with things not right those days. The things went in order, and you had that plant you must eat that day [referring to being a student and eating inthwaso]. Things find their way, like with you and me.*

*You see how things are now? Yes, it's good. Those that don't have that plant, those things in order, ha, it's never right. They can be lost and their children lost and then more to come. Those ones must jump inside that tree; they must go in so far that they are one thing with that tree, mvusamvu.*

*This is one of the plants. There are four plants that were provided by the ancestors. If we only have these three, we are alright. I will tell you, but not the others. They use knowledge up and throw it aside like it is too small, for nothing. Those with me now [spirits], we pick those things. We stay near them. We remember how they helped us so much. We are so grateful to those living ones. They still keep us happy.*

*So when you use them, we are smiling. You remember us and we remember them. Do that. Then, we work with those plants and heal the people. When we do this way, it's the prayer way."* Ama J Sept 8, 2014.

My body was unrecognizable. I had gained weight since arriving at *Babas.* "Hey, a *thwasa* must be skinny, but you, *wena,* fat now!" she joked, pleased to see my health improving. When I arrived a few months prior, I hadn't been carried in near death like so many people resistant to the calling, but I had been very thin and sick, with no biomedical explanation. I lay on the hand-woven mat uncomfortable in the fresh goat hide that covered my chest and the *iziphandla* around my wrists, ankles, and calves. The grazes on my knees burned, but I was grateful for the discomfort. It was a pain with a purpose. I was internally and externally covered by the ancestors' blessings. Too tired to remove some of my *mfisos,* I slumped down in the corner contently listening to the sounds of Soweto--off the station *kwaito*, a neighbour washing his car sparingly with water.

When I awoke, *Baba* was standing over me, her round body covered with a guinea fowl *khanga* and her bosoms fuller than usual with NTSU snuff containers, tissue, and some

*Rands;* a place many *Izangoma* and South African women put their valuables. "Hey *wena,* you must get up now. You can sleep when you go home in a few days, *thwasa,*" she said, shaking her head disapprovingly and leaving the room.

Rubbing my eyes, I straightened my *mfisos,* and before tidying up the *indumba,* reapplied ash to the fresh goatskin. Twisting the bracelets to expedite the drying, I thought back to the day I first met *Baba*.

David and I had driven through Soweto, the heartbeat of the nation, searching for *Baba's* house in Dlamini. With a population of 1.3 million, Soweto is made up of thirty townships.[4] It was easy to get lost if you didn't know where you were going. We had taken Old Potch Road but found ourselves driving along tarred and potholed roads through the sprawling and varied areas of the township. Past Baragwanath Hospital and its adjacent taxi rank; it was through the helpfulness of Sowetans and the ancestors that we finally reached *Babas*.

I had met Patience, who would come to be known as *Baba,* a few weeks earlier when another healer, suspecting that the origins of my problems were a result of being called to heal, referred me to her. I would later learn that it was the ancestors who guided the student to the teacher through dreams or visions, but in the hasty pushing of my will, I followed a cautious recommendation. I've never been known for being patient.

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[4] With an unparalleled political history, from pivotal events like the Soweto Uprising of 1976 where hundreds of school children were killed for protesting Afrikaans as the language medium, to the socio-political home of Nobel Peace Prize Laureates Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu; Soweto is pivotal to the South African psyche, and holds decades of crucial individual and collective narratives.

I had been sick for years with unidentifiable and unknown conditions after hitchhiking from South Africa to Kenya with David. My health had improved only slightly after working the past few years with an Indigenous elder in Canada. But I was still too debilitated to study, work, or have a full life. I had also begun having strange dreams, visions, and sensations, and didn't know what was wrong with me. In my initial consultation with Patience, she told me that I would "have a great surprise" when I went for an operation in the next few days.

"*Madlozi* will give you a blessing. You will see," she said, pointing to me and then the sky.

*Baba* like other *Izangoma* used *Amathambo* to identify issues.

She sprinkled snuff over the bones and asked me to blow on them before throwing the objects made up of seemingly random things. This was the first time I had seen someone *Amathambo*, 'throw the bones'; a traditional knowledge system involving interpretation of the patterns, significance, and symbolism of sacred objects obtained throughout the training process and beyond. [5]

'The bones,' as they are frequently referred to, facilitate an in-depth, accurate and acceptable method for 'diagnosing' socio-cultural, economic and health concerns, ancestral issues and spiritual matters. As well as providing the required steps for rectification and restored balance.

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[5]Hammond-Tooke (2002) suggests that Nguni mediumistic divination, unlike other worldwide divination modalities, is less fixated on the technical aspects or material artefacts, but relies more on the practitioner as a conduit for the ancestors and spirit shades, who use "'psychic' (or paranormal) promptings" (278) to convey messages and reveal hidden truths.

"*Si ya vuma*, we agree," she said snapping her fingers and reading the positioning of the objects splayed out on the mat.

"Hey *Mma*, but you must *thwasa.* You see this here: *you* must train and 'do the job,' she said, pointing her beaded *knobkierie* to a small red and white beaded bone.

"Your ancestors are calling you. If you do not *thwasa*, you will have no life, *uyabona,* understand? Is a big problem!" she emphasized.

"*E-ee--y-ooiii,*" she grunted out loudly, flipping her long beaded *imiyeko* hair while stamping the *knobkierie* on the hide. Bending over, she collected all the objects in her hands before placing them in my hands. I held the coin, a bullet, a piece of turtle shell, a large blood-red bean, dice, an assortment of bones each with separate coloured beads on them, and four ivory tablets with small dots on them like dominos; trying not to let any fall out of the delicate pile.

She motioned for me to blow on them, "Once more."

"Talk to them *Ribbs*. Say surname and then..." she continued, motioning for me to throw them down.

I followed her instructions, unsure of how to 'talk to the bones'. "Rogerson, Rogerson, Rogerson," I incanted over and over while silently thinking of my Grandmother.

"Oh…kay *Ribbs*, okay. So....you must do this now. Now! Don't wait, *Mma. Madlozi* are calling you. Hey, every day you are sick. Sometimes new problems; sometimes old."

*Baba* went on to explain all of my physical symptoms, as well as my dreams and what they meant. She talked about how I felt, my inner thoughts and feelings, my family relationships, childhood events, descriptions of my parents, grandparents, and my elder in Toronto. She even described my house and my yard. She saw everything! She did this in a strange voice with ease and authority. It was as though she had crawled inside me and was revealing both precious and obvious discoveries. How could she know all of this? I wondered.

"You, *uMkhulu,* this comes from your *gogo;* this gift is from her, *Ribbs.* This is your calling from both your mother's and father's side," she said.

David leaned in and whispered, "*uMkhulu* means 'grandparent', but she's saying you are a big and strong healer. *Gogo* is grandmother. She's saying..."

"She's saying..." I interrupted, "that I have the gift of healing, and that I am meant to train as a *Sangoma,*" I said. "Wait, what?!" I exclaimed.

"Pretty much," David replied, raising his brow.

"*Yebo, yebo," Baba* confirmed, nodding her head.

"A *Sangoma?* "I asked, trying to let the information sink in. "Patience, are you sure?" I asked.

"*Yebo Mma*, is all here, you see, right there!" she said pointing to the objects which were beginning to have greater meaning for me.

## Chapter Six –Learning How Chickens *Should* Die, and Babies Should 'Drop'

*"Thwasa,"* hollered *Baba* from the house, "*Woza. Niyafuna ukudla?*"

"*Thokoza, Baba.* I'm coming and I want food," I said under my breath, rushing to the kitchen.

Today the roles were reversed; *Baba* had dished up for me. I felt honoured. I cup-clapped my hands and then placed my left hand on my right wrist to respectfully receive the food.

"Yeah, you must eat. I don't want David thinking I don't feed you," she said, laughing.

She wiped down the small table and cleared off remaining goat meat from the coal stove. It was hard to believe I had only arrived here a few months earlier. It was incredible to see time through spirit. *Baba* said things were moving quickly with my ancestors, and that that was why I was able to graduate in such a short time. She also informed me that once I returned from my trip to Canada, I would need to further my learning in medicine and healing work. Training was a big step in the process, but a step nonetheless. I sensed that *Izangoma* never stops learning and seeking knowledge.

I sat quietly on the floor eating my food. The phone rang and *Baba* asked Neo, her eldest son, who was calling. He simply shrugged and said, "Patience." I often forgot that *Baba* had a name and that she was more than my *gobela*. She chatted loudly on the phone and I thought back to when she told me that I would no longer refer to her as Patience or any other term such as Auntie or *Mma.* She was now my *gobela* teacher and would be referred to as *Baba*, father, while other *Izangoma* could be called *gogo* or *Makhosi.*

After the initial throwing of the bones, I had dreamed of being an *Isangoma.* It confirmed what *Baba* had told me. In spite of not seeing her in the dream, I assumed she was to be my teacher. Weeks later I arrived to *thwasa*.

A neighbour swept her front yard and stopped to help guide us to "*the Makhosi."* A twenty-something-year-old man opened the rickety gate and ushered us in behind a freshly-polished Golf. "I'm Emmanuel, Patience's eldest son," he said, confidently grasping David's hand with a local handshake.

He slipped away and tinkered under the bonnet of his Golf.

This was one of the only interactions I had with Emmanuel. He was in and out. His four-year-old daughter Pretty lived with *Baba*. He would bring groceries, do hand washing, or come home as a pit stop. My impression of him was that he was a hard-working single parent who took on the responsibility of the household, along with his slightly younger brother Neo.

We unloaded my unnecessary luggage, including Levi's that I would never wear, and creams, soaps, and toiletries that were overpriced and would remain, unopened. A large water filter that simply took up space in *Baba's* small kitchen was hauled in too.

When *Baba* stepped out of her humble four-room house, she wasn't recognizable as Patience but had transformed into a *Makhosi.* White clay oxide covered her face; she wore all of her *mfisos* and a leopard fur headband. She carried an air of authority, focus and purpose. She wasn't jovial or playful as she had been the first time I met her and in our

subsequent phone conversations. Her eyes, which I remembered as brown, looked like cloudy black glass. Beside her lay a scrawny white chicken with its legs tied.

She motioned me forward while Neo and David carried the huge bags into the house. *Baba* hurried over and covered my shoulders with a maroon-patterned fabric. I was familiar with the print because part of my purchase before entering apprenticeship was various fabrics, most of which contained the colours black, red, and white. Totem animals were central to most of them. Snakes, lions, roosters and crocodiles marked the *khangas*. On every corner of the fabric was a small image of Africa with the words *Nkosi* Africa; "God Bless Africa". I had also purchased a *knobkierie*, beads, candles and a host of other prerequisites.

I stood awkwardly near the crooked brick wall having no sense of what to expect. I had already begun new ways of learning, and asking endless questions was seen to be an obstacle to understanding and experiencing knowledge and teachings. Dean, my Cree elder in Toronto, had encouraged observation and practice for learning and understanding. But that didn't stop my overanalyzing Eurocentric thinking; it just kept my mouth shut, temporarily.

*Baba's* middle son, Sipho, entered the front yard with a worn household knife and lit the *impepho* and snuff to *umsinsi*, a small sacred tree in the front yard; a place I would pray at throughout the day and night.

*Baba* gently kneeled on the chicken and stretched out its neck, then…sliced. Blood flowed into a small bowl while she untied its legs allowing it to propel itself around the yard. I stepped back trying to hide my disgust and avoid the splattering of blood. In spite of having

to clean the odd chicken at the request of my grandmother, as well as hearing my father's stories about headless chickens running around the farm, I had grown up on pale, sterile, packaged meat served on a plate, featherless and dead, bought from Loblaws. I never gave any thought to the animal I was eating, the conditions it lived in before it died, or that I wasn't honouring its life sacrifice.

It took me a while to grasp my savagery in eating neatly packaged grocery-store burgers and chicken breasts, with no sense of living, dying or death. Slaughtering was unpleasant for me, even months after killing various chickens; but if I was going to eat it, surely, I should be able to kill it? We asked each animal for its life and prayed before killing them. And most importantly, nothing was wasted; all parts of its carcass were used for food and medicine. Also, for *Izangoma*, and most Nguni-based traditional practices[6], the process of dying and dead offered creatures, and their blood, as offerings, were bridges between the

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[6] Nguni refers to a collective group of peoples who are seen to have migrated thousands of years ago from northern areas of the continent to Southern Africa, breaking up into smaller groupings along the way to spread throughout various parts of Southern Africa. The Nguni includes but is not limited to the Swazi, Zulu, Ndebele and Xhosa. Origin history, as well as colonial efforts to easily categorize local people's, makes the defining of Nguni's, contentious. It is nonetheless clear that the Zulu Empire, as well as European contact, greatly influenced migratory patterns as well as socio-cultural practices and worldviews. My experiences of traditional healing and medicine practices in South Africa within Nguni "customs" are that there isn't a uniformity or very clear distinctions. Healing practices, medicinal materials, knowledge systems and linguistic influences have in fact created a dynamic cultural hybridity, which is deeply imbued with everything from Afrikaans terms and customs to Khoi and San cosmology, and even materials typically used in Hindu-based religious ceremonies.

profane and sacred, meant to improve contact between the living and the dead (Ngubane, 120.) It was the wound that took life to give life (Ngubane, 121)

"I am watching," *Baba* said. "I am watching the way the chicken dies; this will show me how your training will go," she said.

The flailing bird showed no signs of rest. *Baba* watched intently, studying its movements and the pattern of sprayed blood. The bird let out a final gasp; its small tongue thrust forward and a red bubble emerged from its sliced neck. Then stillness, followed by the occasional thrust.

"Grab that over there; that!" said *Baba* with frustration.

"This? This container?" I asked.

"*Woza, Ribbs,*" she said.

I carried the carcass around to the side of the house towards a small tap near the latrine.

"*Sipho, Sipho, woza la, Sipho*!" hollered *Baba* impatiently.

Sipho appeared in the doorway with a large pot of hot water.

I stumbled out of the way, tripping over barks and roots, on old maize bags drying in the sun.

*Baba* poured the scorching water over the chicken while Sipho flipped it over.

Ushering me forward, *Baba* said, "Clean it; take off the feathers."

"Oh, okay," I replied, clueless.

With each soft tug, I took out one or two feathers from the bird, while Sipho and *Baba* pulled out fistfuls. Taking her lead, I pulled out more feathers; after all, I wasn't going to hurt the bird. "*Owh, eeh,*" I said as the boiling water burned my hands.

*Baba* half smiled, urging me on with a nod. After completing the outer cleaning, she reached for a dull axe to open the carcass and then used her hands to open the breastbone. A wave of warm death emanated from the bird's body. The scent hit my nostrils, making me want to vomit.

She pulled out the insides and put the contents in a small metal dish beside her bare feet. She moved quickly, deciphering the liver and internal organs, looking for a small bean-sized pocket filled with green liquid. She put it in my clear view.
"Gall, this is gall. This is good medicine, especially for a *thwasa.* You and Sipho finish with the chicken," she said, before disappearing into a small gated room with chicken parts and a bowl full of blood.

"What are we going to do with it once we're done?" I asked Sipho.

"*Ha*, what you think, *Madame*?" He paused, and then, "Eat it!" he exclaimed.

—

I sat on the mat made of tightly rolled sweet packets and scooped up the salty chicken gravy with the warm *pap.* I was pleased to satiate my hunger. I hadn't eaten much due to fasting during initiation. I would be going back home to our small cottage on the farm in a few days and then flying back to visit family in Canada. I couldn't imagine being in Ontario, sitting in my father's living room, the walls covered in family photos and local

newspaper clippings. An article from the Barrie Examiner of me at seven-years-old reading a rejection letter from Princess Diana, requesting her attendance at my home for bangers and mash. My sister, in a local queer newspaper with her then girlfriend and beloved dog. And a more recent one of me in a local South African paper, sensationalizing my whiteness as *Isangoma*. Strewn throughout his small apartment, was 1930s and 40s memorabilia and early post-war-themed books. He glamorized the past, despite every story being that of bare existence…no winter boots, coal for Christmas, the Sears catalogue for toilet paper—with no indoor toilet! He was from a time when men wore hats, enthusiastic voices streamed across shaky radio waves into the full-being of enthralled listeners; when many children didn't finish middle school but worked to help feed families. And when lips were an instrument, for whistling the latest Tommy Dorsey, Artie Shaw, Bing Crosby and Glen Miller tunes, when "music had melody, goddamn it!"

How would I explain this process to my father, who remembered horses in downtown Toronto, and "*I*-talians" and "Polacks," as exotic foreigners? Or, my new 'watch,': a bone bracelet that identified the side of my parents that I had received my healing gifts from, or the spontaneous ecstatic states where direct lineal and foreign spirits took over my entirety, relaying pivotal messages? Surely this was beyond my father's comprehension.

A depression era baby, he started working at age eleven and was minimally educated. By sixteen he was doing construction work and putting in septic tanks with his older brother in Forest Hill, a wealthy area he didn't even bother to dream about living in. He paid for everything with cash. By twenty-five, he built his mother a house. Despite his working-poor background, with no role modelling around literacy; he was very well read. My

bedtime stories consisted of Shakespeare's sonnets and Aesop's fables. But, his explorations of the world were limited to the Bahamas, where he married my mother while working in construction thirty years earlier; that and cheap family holidays to unpopular and dubious destinations.

I tried to imagine his huge callused finger struggling to dial all of the numbers for South Africa, all the while cursing. Upon reaching me at *Baba's,* he'd bellow on a static line:

"Jesus Christ, Becky. You gotta' get outta' there. That Mugabe's nuts! There's gonna' be bloody civil war! And Sow-e-a-toe," he hollered, "You'll be killed!" he exclaimed.

"Yeah Dad, Mugabe's in Zimbabwe; that's another country in Southern Africa. Honestly, I'm alright. I'm with a good family who are watching out for me," I said, so irritated with his ignorance, that I negated his fatherly worry about my safety. I hadn't seen my family in almost two years; I missed them, even my father, despite his xenophobic tirades about 'goddam immigrants.' Where I'd remind him that our ancestors were also immigrant settlers on 'our home *on* native land.'

The graduation ceremony was over and everyone had gone home. After lunch, I collected my dirty *khangas* and took them to the back of the house to wash. I soaked *Baba's* blue blouse in cold water and Surf before scrubbing out goat blood stains. I scrubbed my worn *khangas,* but was unable to get the dirt out of the knee area. I waved at the neighbour who was drying her *takkies* in the yard. Like most homes in the area, *Baba* had one tap by the latrine. If you wanted hot water for dishes or bathing, you had to heat it up on the hot plate in the kitchen. Occasionally she had a ceremonial fire in the back.

The last few days had been quiet. It had died down a lot after graduation. There weren't many visitors. The meat had all been eaten; the candles were now hardened puddles on the ground, waiting to be used as floor polish. Even the neighbourhood, a constant hub of activity, was quieter, particularly on Monday.

Early in the morning (to be prepared for guests or patients,) young women undertook the four-step process of sweeping, washing, drying, polishing and shining the floors. *Baba* always complimented me on my ability to shine the floor until a blurred reflection appeared. *Skinner-ing* about neighbours, catching up on the show Generations, and hand washing laundry, was often accompanied by Rebecca Malope or another beloved gospel singer. The pace was different on Mondays; many had gone to work; some continued to sleep off hangovers from 'functions' or *shebeens*.

I had finished the floors in the *indumba,* cleaned out the fridge, and hurriedly done the washing, as I knew I could be called to 'do the job' at any time. *Baba* suddenly had an increase in patients after the graduation. We now threw the bones at least six times a day. She was happy with my *amathambo* abilities. Generally, the *thwasa* reads the bones first and then the *gobela* will confirm, correct or elaborate on the apprentice's efforts. But today, *Baba* didn't call me until she was done. She asked me to collect a washing tub and threw in a plethora of barks, roots, minerals, salts, and powders. After the boiled water had cooled, she told me to take the tub to her room and asked a young and very pregnant patient to lie on her bed. Handing me a facecloth, "Okay *thwasa*, you wash, *geza,"* she said, moving her hands in a circular motion.

"Just *geza, Baba*?" I asked.

"*Yebo*, like this," she said, demonstrating with a wipe over the woman's belly.

"Okay, no problem; *thokoza Baba,*" I said.

"*Ya*, you must get that baby to drop now. So, when you wash, get that baby dropped, *phansi ney?*" she said.

"Ah, dropped?" I asked bewildered.

"*Yebo*; so she can push it out now, now," she replied.

"Um, *Baba?"* I said, wanting to tell her that I didn't know how to "drop" a baby in preparation for birth.

"Yeah, there's another patient. *Geza, geza* and then when you done come back to the *indumbe thwasa,*" said Baba racing out.

I didn't want to embarrass her in front of her patient by telling her that I couldn't do what she had asked. I didn't know the first thing about pregnancy, labour, or "dropping the baby down." The woman nodded at me with certainty.

"Yeah, you good, *Nomadlozi?*" she said, giving me a thumbs up, followed by a "Sharp-sharp!"

"You okay?" I asked as she grimaced and rubbed her ribs.

"*Eish*, the baby is right here, right here. Ah *phansi Mma, ingane phansi,*" she said, wanting the baby to go down.

"Oh-kay," I said. "Here we go…"

I put the cloth into the russet-coloured water, wrung it out, careful not to drain all the medicine, and gently washed her large hard mound.

"*Lapa,*" she said, lightly pushing my hand onto her belly.

A limb stirred beneath my fingers and then I felt what must have been ahead. "Wow," I said, having never been this intimate with a fetus in the womb before.

"Oooh, ahh," she sighed, trying to reposition herself.

I kept washing, but this time I prayed. I asked the ancestors to keep the mother and baby safe; for health and a good labour. I talked to the baby, telling him that it was time to prepare for coming out and that his mother was waiting to meet him. I subtly convinced him to position himself deeper into her body.

I kept washing, and then threw the cloth into the medicine and placed my hands on her stomach. Closing my eyes, I relaxed and felt the ancestors working through. Transforming potentialities and healing discordant worlds. I could communicate with the unborn child. I could speak the language of immanence.

"*Mma,* he's going to *hamba phansi lapha,*" I said in broken Zulu.

"Oh-kay. Down now. *Goed,"* she replied in Afrikaans.

"It's boy; you right, *thwasa,*" she said sitting up.

"When are you due?" I asked.

"Hey?"

"*Fika,* when will the baby arrive?" I asked.

"Oh, just now," she replied.

*Baba* came back into the room, examined the woman, and asked her questions.

"*Yeah Nomadlozi,* you got the baby down *thwasa*. Is good," she said while checking the woman's lower uterus for an engaged head.

"I did?" I asked in amazement.

"Yeah, the ancestors help you come right," she said.

"Hey, maybe one-day *wena* take out a baby," *Baba* said.

"Lord, I hope not," I thought to myself, smiling and nodding at *Baba* and the patient.

Before the very pregnant woman left, *Baba* scooped out a generous portion of fat and medicine from an old film container and smeared the mix over the woman's tummy. She went back to the *indumba* where the woman gave her 50 Rand.

Later *Baba* explained that the woman told her she wanted to bring the baby back for a blessing and protection rites, but her husband was Christian and might not allow it. Despite this, the woman said she planned to return. When she left, I wondered if I would see her again; maybe the next time I would have the chance to hold the baby.

**Chapter Seven - Plants Ashes: Changing Times and 'Changed People"**

*"When my child was young, she had many problems with breathing. I would prepare the herbs and rub them on her chest trying to soothe the bad cough. When the herbs did not help, I rubbed the crocodile fat, mixed*

*with soil from the moss in the forest, and ash from the umsenge plant. Many times, these things did not work either. The poor child would cough and cough.*

*Cradling her, I sang songs and told stories that I made up. The singing helped and only I could do it, otherwise, the coughing turned into a bad fit and her eyes rolled back deep inside her head. I had even taken her to another healer, one that I didn't care for, but knew that she was good with witchcraft. She gave me herbs to burn, and I lifted the child over the smoke while repeating healing words. This did not help; it made it worse.*

*Of course, I spoke to the ancestors and offered the chicken, and then the goat, even a ram, but it was only better for a short time. Then it got worse and I believed she would die. She coughed so long that that she didn't have time to breathe or to eat. I even sent word for her father who was now with the army, a soldier helping the British. I explained to our young messenger that his only child was ill and might pass and, he should come to give his last words and provide the things for a guarded passage. He never came.*

*I had heard he had married a young woman who was one of our 'changed people.' She wore the petticoats that strapped and concealed her body and breasts like they were her birthing parts. Ah, no beads, no fresh fat to*

*nourish her skin, or shine for her people and ancestors; just plain and ugly clothing, scratching against her body and mind; taking away her memory and her children's memory. I was like my mother in this way; I did not like people forgetting our culture.*

*I too liked some of these foreign objects. Even though the shoes, which were also becoming very popular around here, looked nice, they were terribly uncomfortable. But who knew that shoes were only the beginning, and what else would walk into our lives."* Ama J, June 30, 2011.

*"I followed my daughter to the port to see my grandchild. The trip was too terrible. We were harassed the whole way.*

*Those times were desperate. The men had lost their way. Full of a desire that those horrible bottles brought. We knew they put medicine inside to make the men mad. When close enough or having those relations, the smell was like that burning from the train. Oh whew, many children bore everywhere, all over, at that time.*

*Anyway, we arrived to that place; it was small, not like today. There was no gold there, but there were many ships coming in and going out. Oh, it was so dirty. All the things on those ships were British, but those people*

*weren't. Many Muslim people and people from India and other countries near there. Those kwedonquoi [exact spelling unclear, seems to be a derogatory word for migrant workers, possibly of Asian ethnicity.]*

*I got nice clothes there. Oh, but it was not nice. Indeed, no good! Whew, women showing their bodies and going home with those men; up all night with those poison bottles. You see this was new to me, maybe for the country.*

*I had lived so long with those church people, I was like that then. Oh, even my clothes. I wore those horrible dresses with those wire waistcoats, even at home in the village, but I never went anywhere without my hat. Hey, it looked old and dirty, but I cared for it.*

*For this reason, many didn't like me; later I was chased away because the people thought I was telling the British soldiers about the land, and who had what. It wasn't true. I liked the church and the ladies and praying. They would visit to make sure I was still following the Lord each day.*

*Oh, but their men. I stayed away! I saw what those men came with. How things were changing; not just clothing. It wasn't like those hard times when I was young and lost my parents. People were dying everywhere from this terrible sickness. They went fast.*

*Oh, the ships, I had never seen before, and the women speaking strangely and showing their bodies. My child moved me quickly past everyone. Oh, that dress I wore…I believed I looked so nice, but now I laugh. I kept that dress for many years, but once I was Sangoma, I never wore it again. My ancestors wanted those beads, skins, and other clothes, the ones we made. They are very particular about what should be worn and what should be left.*

*In that place, I saw things starting to turn for our people. Not turning to become like the tasty porridge after some days. The children were reckless and the small ones running like in the village, but not free from danger.*

*'Why are we in this terrible place?' I asked my child.*

*'For Sandile,' she told me.*

*After that time, I didn't let that boy go there. He was too small; he didn't see other children. He was there with my daughter's friend who I could see was doing naughty things.*

*My child told me she went to jail three years later. I respected those people that were talking up, but that was not my way. My daughter left that place and went to work for Afrikaans. She was very far, and too long went by before she came home.*

*I cared for the boy who was my life. I never left him for a short while. He followed me like the singing bug in the dry season.*

*My child came home for a short time. She was very sick. She said nothing. I gave her the plants to stop the bleeding and other herbs for being sick. She thought she would die. She never said so, but she worried she was being punished by the ancestors. I was quiet. She had come only to me. I could see what had happened but we don't talk of those things. She didn't get the plants from the healer to clear out that baby. All the bleeding and sweating...she went to those charlatans I had heard of who steal money and clear out the insides in a terrible way.*

*My child stayed for some time. She would pray with me but just followed along. When I told her, we needed to pray for the ancestors, she used her small money to get all the things. That day she cried so much for help. She left better.*

*When she went, I watched her face, my grown child, tired and young, but looking too old. She smiled and I knew it was the last time I would see that, see her."* Ama J Feb 16, 2014.

**Chapter Eight –White (Workin'- Class) Settlers: Cadillacs, Crown Royale and Death Premonitions**

Heading towards Cookstown in my father's outdated Cadillac Coup de Ville, I closed my eyes and inhaled the warm Southern Ontario air. It was pleasant until we hit the highway and the broken window wouldn't go up. Dad's cars always looked good on the outside, but always had a major malfunction. This Caddie *only* had two passenger windows that wouldn't go up. Luckily there was still working heat and the air-conditioning was hit and miss.

Unbothered, my father yelled over the gusting air and blaring elevator music. It was no use trying to change him or the music; after all, his car was "his castle," cock-eyed or not.

He ignored the *iziphandla*, animal fur bracelets and *mfisos* around my neck, chatting about business deals. He stopped momentarily to comment on my weight and not being "skinny anymore," warning that I should avoid "getting fat like the Rogerson girls do."

My re-entry into North America was surreal. I had gone from *Baba's* to our cottage on a smallholding in semi-rural Fourways, onto a plane, and then to New York City to visit my sister for a few days.

Now, I was passing the Alliston outlet mall heading towards the cemetery, where most of my father's ancestors, since my family settled in Canada, are buried. The last few weeks had been a whirlwind. Once home, there was no way to translate the experience of living abroad, let alone my metamorphosis. I enjoyed New York City and seeing my older sister, but was glad to leave. I had been incredibly overwhelmed with the transition from a rather isolated and contrasting environment. Not to mention that a good part of me wasn't fully

present in the material world. I was used to a daily routine of cleaning the *indumba*, calling up spirits, helping with patients, praying and preparing herbs.

Back in North America, I was in one of the world's largest Metropolis'; even Brooklyn felt too big. Sitting beside someone on the subway, passerbyers on the street or shopkeepers, I could 'see' or find 'hidden things.' It was an overload of 'knowing.' In South Africa, I could approach someone and tell them what I saw, what the ancestors revealed. But in North America, it seemed impossible to approach strangers to convey messages from the ancestors. I feared I would be viewed as insane, as opposed to having the gift of sight and sanctified knowledge.

A woman darted past us; *she had womb problems and had miscarried countless times*. A young couple in love sitting on a bench; *he was sleeping with someone else*. These were common things to see, but I was more greatly disturbed by a tall, well-dressed man who had deadly deviancies. Crossing the street, I hoped some distance would protect me from what I knew; *his possible homicidal and perverse tendencies*.

Vulnerable and exposed; my senses and sensibilities were heightened. I felt like the spiral porcelain object found in the bones which revealed an open or closed path and heart. I was open; too open. I hadn't been taught the protective mechanisms to "shut off." But I was reminded that I had the most powerful medicine of all with me always; the ancestors.

Driving in Dad's oversized car, heading towards a place I had wanted to escape for so many years, I felt safe now. I was in a recognizable, familiar craziness. After spending the last few days ill-at-ease in the 'real' world, made up of SNL-spoof-like TV commercials, in

an amnesiac culture obsessed with consumption that purported to be rational; the compartmentalization of everything made engagement with spirit possible, but required greater effort. The disregard or repression of spirit, as well as the lack of time and space for acknowledging and celebrating the spectrum of human-lived experiences, made life seem dull and empty. I was beginning to feel separate from inner and outer worlds. South Africa wasn't exempt from societal dysfunctions; I had ceased romanticizing or exoticizing the nation, or region, for that matter. After our eight-month hitchhiking journey, of which we saw a small part of the expansive and extremely varied continent, I had come to accept during twelve-hour bus journeys, in urban hubs and truck stops, that I couldn't compartmentalize, or easily grasp injustices, politics, cultures or people. I did, however, become motivated to be an agent of change; what that meant and how it looked wasn't clear yet.

Being back in my 'normal life' made me wonder, *what now?* Could I really practice as a *Sangoma*? Had I really earned the right? What was I going to do with the socio-economic and racial privileges I had? And how could I navigate all of these "worlds in motion"? (Rutherford, 287.) I knew although I had 'graduated', as a healer, my learning wasn't complete.

In fact, it was required that I do an *ukuphothula*; going home ceremony. This would mean slaughtering a cow, further provision of food, alcohol, and various traditional items to initially set up my *indumba.* It would be expensive and wasn't without complications. My landlady on the smallholding where we rented would have no part in animal slaughtering,

*Izangoma*, loud drumming, or anything else. This would mean that we would need to move before conducting *ukuphothula*.

*Baba* waited for the ancestors to guide her as well as get clarity on what was appropriate. She decided that a delay was better than not doing things at all. I could go back to Canada to visit, but once back in South Africa, we would need to move to a new house and then prepare everything for a proper homecoming.

My father grabbed my hand and held it in his clenched fist; I noticed his ageing arm. He had more wrinkles, and he moved at a slower pace now. Nothing shows our parents fragility like when we move away. He chatted ad infinitum, happy to have me home, even if just for a few weeks. Despite us living half-way across the world, Dad was glad I had met David. He had 'passed the torch" on our wedding day, and felt that I would be okay. David would "take care of me."

David chuckled at the notion that I needed being taken care of.

Dad broke out of his rant about investments and "goddamn property taxes."

"Your Gram would be so proud," he said.

"Really?" I asked, surprised to hear him give praise to me directly and not through a random relative.

"When you were little, she used to tell me, 'You watch that girl; she's special. You'll see,'" he said.

"Huh. What do you think she meant?" I asked.

“Well with the gift, like her. She used to know when someone was gonna’ die. She’d say, ‘that person doesn’t have long, they got that Black Death all over em,’ and sure enough they’d be dead within a couple days,” he said.

“Really?” I said, surprised to hear new information about my grandmother’s gifts.

“She knew you were like her; had the ability. That’s why she spoiled ya’,” he said.

And by spoiling, he meant extending nurturing and caring; which she rarely gave to her own children.

We reached a small hill outside of Cookstown. “That’s where Aunt Bea’s farm was. I lived there for a couple years. Mom sent me there,” he explained, telling me how when Gram was young, they had to take a horse and buggy to Barrie with Buffalo robes and heated bricks to keep them warm. “There were still Indians living in this area then,” he said. “I s’ppose that’s where Gram learned all about herbs and things,” he said. “That’s what she said anyway. Oh, and Uncle Tarbush; he married a squaw,” my father said.

“Dad, it’s not ‘squaw’; that’s racist, it's indigenous, or at the very least, native,” I said as he stared out the window ignoring me.

Despite the polarity of our political, cultural and spiritual ideologies, which infuriated me to no end, there was an ease in bonding about our family’s past and ancestry. My father didn’t say it, but I sensed that my coming to the gifts, somehow validated him, our family, and the past; a place in which he often lived. *Izangoma* carries medicine to their families and communities, and it’s not uncommon that prior to the training process, the initiate, and their families experience incredible upheavals. Upon training, and fulfilling the work, not only

the healer, but their family members also benefit greatly from the strengthening of bonds with the ancestors.

“Did I ever tell you about the night that death almost took Gram away?” I asked.

“Death?” he questioned.

“Yeah, death,” I replied.

He suddenly stopped talking *at* me and asked: “What happened?”

“Well about 10 years ago, Gram awoke in the night calling, ‘Becky! Becky! Come here, I need you!’

‘What's wrong?’ I called back.

‘Come here Becky, hurry!’ she yelled.

‘Is everything okay Gram?’ I asked.

‘No, come here Becky,’ she said.

“You know how she had that pee pot beside her bed?” I asked my father.

“Oh yeah,” he laughed.

“I tripped over it trying to get to her. Luckily it was empty.”

‘What is it?’ I asked, trying to find her under a heap of blankets.

“She was quiet, so I asked if she was okay, but she didn’t reply.”

‘Should I call an ambulance? Gram! Should I call an ambulance?’ I asked in a loud unsteady voice.

‘No, no dear, don't call an ambulance; lay down here,’ she said.

“Dad, I hoped to God that that wasn't IT. You were in Toronto. It would have taken you at least an hour and a half to get up to her place…Dan and all the other neighbours weren’t around ‘cause it was the winter,” I said.

“Jesus, I often worried about you up there and if she died...ninety-eight. It could have happened anytime,” he said.

"Yeah, well it almost happened that night...” I said trailing off.

‘I had a dream,’ Gram continued.

‘Oh... a bad one?’ I asked.

‘No, well yes; it wasn`t really a dream’, she said. ‘They are coming; they want to come tonight,’ she said.

“I tried to figure out who she meant, Dad. I thought maybe she was having a stroke, like that day with Auntie D at the ice cream parlour,” I said.

‘It's not time. They can`t take me; not yet, not those *ones*’, said Gram.

“I tried to convince her everything was okay and that she should go back to sleep. But she said: ‘No, Becky you need to stay here the night. They won`t take me if you are here, they wouldn`t dare!’

Normally death didn't frighten me. From an early age, my father took me to funerals. Both Gram and he perused the obituaries to see who had died. My father showed empathy for those who had passed, whereas my grandmother anticipated an upcoming funeral as a social occasion. Death was inevitable and was seen to bring people together. If you were old and still had your hair, (thinness a bonus), death was normalized.

“I lay down beside her,” I continued, remembering her holding my small hand in her veiny cold clutch, whilst trying not to get stabbed by her long pointy nails that I had painted sea shell-pink earlier that day.

“Then I asked her, ‘Who is coming tonight, and what can I do?’"

‘Death, Becky. Death is trying to take me. But it can`t, not while you are here,’ she said.

I recalled her dilated pupils that hid her icy blue eyes, and the winter moon, shining a subtle glow behind tree branch shadows, dancing on the frosted window. Her creviced face was perplexed, and her toothless mouth like one large stretched wrinkle. She snored loudly while her teeth soaked in a water bleach concoction on the bedside table.

“That’s it; she went to sleep, did her usual throwing pillows off the bed, and sleep talking. She woke up bright and early to make poached eggs, fried smelts with burnt toast, and a pot of Red Rose tea. When I asked her about the night before, she just said: ‘I don't know what you mean; get the jam outta’ the fridge.’

“Huh?” my father said. “I hadn’t heard that story; you never told me about that.”

“I didn’t think you’d understand. I thought you’d think she was crazy,” I said.

“Well she was nuts, but that wasn’t ‘cause she was old. Jesus, she used to have séances in our living room, read teacups, and have prayer vigils; all kinds of crazy things when I was growing up,” he said.

I reminisced about her teaching me to read teacups, and palms, and collecting herbs from the nearby forest.

Gram was a second mother to me, she wasn`t a gentle, nurturing, cookie-baking type. Born in 1892, and having been reared alongside twelve siblings; she grew up in poverty with a minimal education and few prospects. She had had a hard life trying to make her way with a lovable, poor, alcoholic husband who coal mined, drove trucks and did piece work to support their five small children; two of which died before their third birthdays. Gram, was as my father put it: "From the school of hard knocks." She was tough on people; she had had to be as to survive.

When a farm cat had a litter of kittens, it was simply more mouths to feed, so into a bag and down the river they went. A trip to the doctor was unheard of, and food and education limited. Gram, like many women of her era, never had the chance to pursue possibilities, let alone dreams. In spite of her hardiness, she reserved a gentle and loving place for me in her heart. Some resented this relationship and had disdain for the tender words she spoke in my absence, but she saw something in me that I didn’t see in myself. She knew I had the ‘gifts’ like her.

“We’ll be there in 15 minutes. You wanna’ stop at the LCBO to get rye?” my father asked.

“Yeah, and I also need candied ginger,” I replied.

“Well, where the hell are we going to get that?” he asked.

“Zehrs?” I suggested.

After we found the rye, ginger, and flowers, he asked, “What’s it for?”

“Oh, the ancestors, Dad. I need to *pahla* to Gram and our other ancestors,” I said nonchalantly.

“Oh, alright then; where to, kid: the grave or the river?” he asked.

“The graveyard,” I replied.

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We arrived at the little cemetery nestled behind the small town. I opened the falling-off-the-hinges gate; the only dilapidated part of the well-kept property. Kneeling down before entering, I offered some snuff; I was telling the ancestors I was here. My father went forward and headed to my Grandmother’s grave, where he placed flowers beside her beautifully-engraved headstone.

After informing the ancestors that I was home and there to honour them, I walked through the cemetery, continuing to *pahla*. I told them all that had happened, and that I had followed their instructions and guidance. I thanked them for the gifts and assured them of my commitment to the healing work.

I took a large gulp of rye and spat it in four directions. My father crossed the street to talk to a peering neighbour who sat slumped in a chair, wearing an oxygen mask.

I wandered around barefoot, letting the soft damp grass cradle my feet. I weaved throughout the stones, amazed that some went as far back as the late 1600s. Dad sauntered back.

“That is one of our cousins sitting over there” he exclaimed.

“Oh, really?”

“Oh, you see over here; that’s Gram’s brother. He was a real bugger that one, drinkin’ and playin’ the fiddle,” he said.

Over the next few hours, we strolled around, enjoying the graveyard, for different reasons. For him, it was a trip down memory lane, and no doubt a place he would call home in the next decade. He talked about our immediate relatives who filled most of the cemetery, and we enjoyed the unusually mellow banter.

I was peaceful and serene, always aware of the ancestors wherever I went, but somehow, I felt closer to them in the graveyard. Their narratives and experiences were part of me; imprinted. My fibres contained their individual and collective memories. My experiences, conduct, willingness and efforts in healing, were also part of a continuum. This perpetuity grounded me in the perfectly-manicured grass. I felt enlarged against the tall headstones and tiny below the heavenly realms. Daylight hides stars.

“Still want to go to the river?” my father asked.

“For sure,” I said.

Following a final small prayer, I placed cooked food, coins, and other offerings on the grass, promising to return to make more extensive offerings. I prayed for protection, knowing that despite all my protective medicine, only the ancestors could truly deter harm.

We walked behind the local baseball diamond and into a small forest where I envisioned my grandfather and great uncles trapping small animals, kissing girls, and fishing along the water's edge. I felt a familiar stirring in my gut; the rise of *Amadlozi.* They didn't show me then that I would be back here one day with patients and my own *thwasana.*

**Chapter Nine - Grandmother Healers: First Kisses and Imagined Witches**

*"The first time I ever kissed a boy was in that forest. The whole area was full of trees back then. There were snakes and loads of deer. My brothers used to hunt in the winters. I never liked the taste of deer. I only had elk the once, and I liked that.*

*Your father used to say bad things about my father, but he had it all wrong. Even though there were thirteen of us, I was special to him, like you are to me, Becky. I wasn't his favourite. I used to fight with my sister Ina for his attention. He wasn't around a lot, so when he was, we'd all hound him; the boys showing off their fixed-up equipment.*

*Jim, your Uncle Jim, he was real clever. He was always makin' stuff, inventing things. He was real sharp. He only really liked the ladies when he got older.*

*My father, your great-grandfather, he had a son outta' wedlock. You know how I know this? I saw a photo one day with the name 'Charlie' scratched on the back. He had my father's eyes and the same strange stand as your grandfather.*

*He wasn't perfect. We were poor, and he sometimes got drunk. All the men got drunk then. They made their own liquor too. My mother never touched liquor. She hated it. She thought of it as poison. In fact, people would come begging by our door and she would give the drunks some food, and tell them she could help them stop drinking with God. I never bought into all that. I had drunks come to my door when I was carrying your father. I chased them away with a broom or whatever else I could find. No use for those drunks; drinking up their families' money.*

*When I met George, my father said he wasn`t good enough, and that I should wait; even if I was a spinster, I`d find a nice older man. But I needed to have kids. It's what we did. I gave up the dream of being a teacher when I married George. Back then we didn`t have love like you see in movies now. If someone liked us, that was enough.*

*George didn`t have much. His family lived out in Alberta, and many in the U.S. I wanted to get away from my mother, but not that far away. My mother had us work real hard. I never minded working hard, I always*

*liked hard work; it took my mind off worryin'. But I did her dirty work. Can`t tell you all about that now, Becky!*

*So, my father, he wasn`t always poor, he lost a lot playing cards. In the beginning, he won a lot, and then he was always losing. It wasn`t the liquor that was the real problem, it was those cards! One night he was back late; lost his wages at cards.*

*I didn`t know George yet. I musta' been about fourteen. I was skinny and funny looking, although I thought I was beautiful. What really kept the boys away was my fierce tongue. I was okay with that. Except for the doctor`s son. Remember you went to their house? You and your dad, years ago, and talked to the granddaughter? [She asks me.]*

*Well, the doctor`s son, he wasn`t too smart, or too handsome, or clever like his Dad, but that`s what I liked. He was kinda' hopeless, but gentle. So Daddy came home real mad. My mother ignored him most of the time; went about all her chores, working day and night, until she got sick and died, and the whole house started falling apart.*

*A lot of the kids were gone by then, but a few of us still tried to hold it together. The roof started to get water pourin' through, not just the usual*

*leaks. I had a young brother die at that time. I thought it was consumption, but the doctor said not.*

*Anyway, Daddy came home and they started fighting. He never hit my mother in the face, but he grabbed her tiny arms so tight that there were bruises until the next week's visitors came. She had a hard time mending clothes with those bruises. She didn`t talk much, but she was always prayin'. She only gave up on God once, for a short time.*

*There weren`t a lot of men due to the war; my father was around cause he had some kind of accident with a machine at work which injured his head. I think that`s why he kept playin' and losin' in cards. He stopped going to church. I think it was because he was embarrassed, and thought God gave up on him. He hated being poor. We weren`t allowed to talk about it in our family. We couldn`t complain. No one complained then. You had what you had and that was good enough!*

*Not like today, Becky, where you complain for no money for kid's camps. We didn`t have camps in my time, and if we did, it was for the prime minister`s children! Oh, I don`t like to talk about these things, but I see that you want to know. What`s the difference? I`m dead anyway!*

*So after that, with my daddy and mother, I went down to the river. I didn`t go there a lot. My brothers lived there, fishing, swimming, rubbing up against the girls down there. I didn`t like all that; I worked and helped my mother and hoped I would get married and get outta' Catawampus.*

*A lot of those young men had no prospects. There was only mining out west, and you had to get enough money to get out there, and even then, it didn`t mean you`d find work. It was also dangerous travelling out there because times were tough. Some men that went out there didn`t come back! So those that stayed, sat around fishing, some taking jams, clothes, and hides to Barrie to sell. It was hard then; it made The Depression look great!*

*So I went down there with a hymn book and another old book about recipes and homemaking. It was like the Reader`s Digest before that came along. I didn`t like church; I did everything to get out of going. I would even do extra chores. The minister over on Mary Street was queer, and the other two ministers at mother`s church, they were all hell-and-fire type; I didn`t like all that. May liked church to flirt with the boys. My brothers often came, even dirty and worn.*

*We didn`t have many dances then because it was hard to pull them together with no money. Sometimes Tarbush would give some money for the dance, but if there was any liquor, he ordered the police to shut it*

*down. Some of us didn`t go to the dances because our clothes and shoes were full of holes.*

*So, down by the river I looked through the hymn book. I liked the singing. That was the only way you could get me to church, was with the singing. Remember how much I liked music, Becky? [She asks me] I liked every kind of music. My brothers taught me the mouth harp, but I really wanted to learn the fiddle. But there were too many men fighting over fiddle playing in our family.*

*But even when we didn`t have a radio, we always had music. My daddy could really sing. He sometimes wrote his own sad songs. Singing was the only time he spoke about being poor. They were like country songs.*

*So I sat down eating some warm rolls my mother and I made that morning because Daddy hadn`t gone to play cards. So we had soap, flour, mother had thread, and some fabric pieces to make some clothes for the young children. She never had enough to buy a big piece so we all looked like patches. I was reading the book, hummin' to the hymns, and getting tips on whitening teacups. Then "The Fink," as we called him, came down and started pestering me.*

*'What are you doin', Addy? You are no church girl,' he laughed.*

*'Get outta' here Fink,' I said.*

*But the next thing you know, he was giving me a kiss, just by those trees when you walk into the forest there, Becky. You see where I'm pointin'? [She asks me]. He smelled like worms and muddy fish. But I closed my eyes and pretended he was the doctor's son; then it was pretty good. When we stopped pushing our mouths together, he jumped back.*

*'Addy likes kissin' in the forest like them loose girls,' he said.*

*'Oh, you really are a Fink. But there `s no way you `re gonna tell anyone about this, Fink,' I said, grabbing his arm and pinching the inside of his thigh real hard with my other hand.*

*'Owww. Jesus, Addy,' he howled, before running off.*

*I laughed. I had lots of brothers and knew the spot to keep them howlin', and then quiet.*

*You know, that poor boy drowned in that river. Further down there, but he drowned about three years later. Things started to get better with the economy, and there was lots of rain, too much rain; it ruined all the crops. He musta' been down there lookin' for a kiss, catching fish, or scaring toads. Anyway, the water just grabbed him and drowned him. His mother lost her marbles, and thought maybe he went to Toronto to find work, and*

*that he`d be back any day. Other days she thought other boys drowned him. Poor lady. Her only son drowned.*

*I knew that that wasn`t what happened, not because I read any of the stories in the papers or followed gossip in town, but because his ghost visited me sometimes. On really cold winter nights, I`d see him standing on the other side of the window. Or when it rained hard, he'd pass in the mist and I`d call out: "Go home, Fink. Go home now; leave Addy." And then he was gone.*

*Fink wasn`t the first ghost I saw. I`d seen them since I was sucking on a teat. Anyway, Becky, that`s where I had my first kiss; down in the forest with a drowned boy."* Adeline Rogerson, "Gram" my paternal grandmother, August 30, 2014.

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*"So, when we were forced to leave, I was a child. My mother, brother, and I left quietly and quickly.*

*When I fled with my children, we were chased. You see at that time, people talked too much and feared too much of witches. I was no witch, but they thought I was. We left so fast, the children's father couldn't find us when he returned from his job in the mountains, and beneath the earth finding*

*water for the country's government. I imagined he had died or was busy with another wife.*

*At my time we didn't marry under love. Love was for children; a spell that brought misfortune, when people were no longer thinking of their families or their ancestors and unity for us all.*

*He was a quiet man. Not mean, but with little tenderness. I knew he would travel soon after we married, and that in his two short visits, we would conceive children; otherwise, there would be alarm with his family, especially his mother, who watched over me like a worm for a hungry bird.*

*We shared love for our people, our culture. The private love your people carry into everything was for our children. You see, we didn't use the word 'love' for things. How could we love the mountains that were part of us, and that lived in our bones from our first breath? The same air we breathed? We didn't say: 'I love you, and this and that…'; instead we took time and care in things. This is how we showed our love.*

*After my daughter, when she was too young to prepare by the fire but too big to drink my milk, I began having those dreams of the woman travelling at night who helps move the breath [referring to the soul.] She haunted me in the day until I would scream out for her to go away from me and my children. I feared her and thought she was a witch.*

*The traditional healer in our village was not a good one. She couldn't see that I was a healer and being called. She said I was bewitched by my husband's wife, and that she was using Sotho medicine to craze me.*

*After three days, her medicine made me worse, and on the seventh day when we went to the cave, I tried to jump off the mountain, even though I wanted to keep breathing and caring for my family. I don't believe she trained. She said she had, in Mozambique and northern Bechuanaland but I believe now that it was a lie.*

*My dear cousin who died too young and who never properly married or had children took me to an Amagqirha [a healer]. He was the one who saw my problem, but he wasn't the one to show me to the light.*

*First, I would go through the church. I doubted the calling; I was afraid. I thought the church could remove bewitchment, but I was secretly scared that I was a witch, as my grandmother had been accused.*

*I met my mother [referring to her healing teacher] in a field when I came from cleaning my clothes. I was very busy with the church and helped the minister's wife. I didn't dare tell anyone that I didn't feel "saved." I went to the bush at strange times and talked to trees and insects.*

*When I saw her, I thought she wasn't alive. She appeared from nowhere and brought the wind with her. She wasn't old, she wasn't young; she wasn't dressed or naked. She had medicine around her neck. You know the one, Nomadlozi? [She asks] It was strong. Some said when lightning struck, it could never hit her. Others said the bones of children were around her neck. That's what some church people said.*

*After I saw her, I was sick. I asked the woman whose care I was under to find out if others were sick from the river water. No one was sick; not like this, not one person. Anything I ate came back out. I cried for two days without stopping.*

*The group prayed for me day and night, but nothing. I heard one lady whisper that the devil was winning. Then I saw that woman; that healer in my dreams. She asked me to come to her. She opened the gourds around her neck and wind and stars fell out until I could breathe once more. I asked to see her, but the minister came to see me himself to say it was not the Lord's will. 'The devil will call, but we don't open the door,' he said.*

*Now in your time, there are Izangoma ministers! But then, never! I awoke with the sun and had too much energy. I ran barely dressed to her place. I didn't know where to go, but my feet ran there. When I came, she was waiting. My medicine was mixed with fresh grains, ready for me to eat.*

*She didn't speak. She showed me to the floor where I ate all the bitter thick soup as though I had never touched food. Then she was busy burning medicine with the fire humming and being with the blessed [referring to ancestors and spiritual energies]. I lay on the floor, warm from the fire, and slept for many days.*

*When I woke up a child was tending to me. I threw off the hide and worried. I thought it was all from sleeping [referring to dreaming]. Then an older girl brought a cup of sweet medicine. I drank and drank until bringing it up, into the pot. The things that came out; too terrible!*

*For two months, I drank other medicine. Silently we went to collect roots. My head was covered in cloth to protect me from bewitchment. Those strange roots were cooked; some I ate fresh from the ground and then I bled. No pain but terrible things coming from me, like when a child is lost.*

*Then in the third cycle, she began telling me stories. She didn't finish or explain, and like all our elders, expected me to remember all these things. Then the drumming and travelling to communicate with the blessed ones from all over. You know we were seeing all those people from all over the world. This is why we were not strange when they came here, to this country. It was the healers that assured everyone. We knew all these people, their foods and smells. We had met their ancestors! Then after this,*

*we could host them, [referring to the trance process of foreign ancestors], and welcome them, once I was clean enough for this.*

*My mother [teacher] was my teacher for fifty years. She trained maybe one thousand people. She saved my life and showed me these ways. The ways that will live on long after we are gone."* Ama J. Jan 29, 2014.

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*"Then one day I found this girl child. She wasn't abandoned but left. Her family fled with the war. She sat there alone, too small. She had braided string around her neck from the reeds in the river; it was dirty, and she was wearing this. I heard stories of left children. At first, I worried she was left because she was a bad spirit who took the child's form, but she didn't want to attract us. She sat in a sad way.*

*I picked her up and gave her the dry chews (we call them in my language). When I looked up again it was gone. She was hungry but didn't ask.*

*You see, I was not from this place. The people were moving down to escape war. I was moving up. I went where the ancestors took me; up was their way. Eyes watched knowing I wasn't from this place. My skin, hair, and the large beads my people wear, this was unusual.*

*I am very educated in my language, in my people's ways. My mother's ancestors came from the place that was once forest but is now desert. Her long ago ancestors had water nearby. They danced all night to bring and keep themselves alive. They could balance the fire, the water, and the ground with their feet, head, and hands. My mother tried to forget those mysteries. They live in me, in my everyday remembering.*

*My father, our ancestors on that side, came from the north. They travelled right along to the coast far that way (eastern Africa-Mozambique area). They were fighters. They fled and fought and killed many more people to come. They didn't hate those who travelled here on boats, but when land was taken and the food and livestock poisoned, they did things to try to stop it.*

*My other grandmother was taken as a wife for a short time. She changed. Her body was covered and she talked to something other than our ancestors in a new voice. She did not marry. You marry only once. I did not marry the once, I waited. I moved around to hear the stories and follow the ancestors' movements.*

*I took that child left from war; she became mine until I passed. She was not ready to marry, but she was fine as I taught her about taking care of all the good things in life.*

*My very young grandchild is alive. She lives on the same land as you. She helps people but her mouth isn't sewn closed when she says the wrong words. She is in danger because of what she finds and what she tells. When she finds you, I will tell you everything.*

*My life was something from 1778-1801. I come from Namaqualand. My name is Ncquiri (Alaffa) Mashushane.* October 5, 2013.

**Chapter Ten – The Strong Woman's Song**

The large 'grandfathers', or rocks as I had once called them, were heating within the huge sacred fire. Dean would call us to 'sweat'when the grandfathers were ready. I was anxious to get in. I really needed to be in the womb-shaped lodge; purifying myself, praying for everyone, and feeling mother earth beneath, father sky above, and the four directions around and within.

It had been so long since I had been in a sweat lodge. I even longed for the final round when the conductor poured the last cupfuls of water over the hissing grandfathers, then the burn and its intensity hitting my flesh humbled me once more to the ground, where I kissed her. In my surrendering, I appreciated the bits of damp soil and cedar leaves, which gritted between my teeth.

Dean was still busy counselling and receiving tobacco and other offerings from the community. All the preparatory work was done. The large metal buckets filled with water were almost boiling by the fire. The cedar trees had been chopped, and the leaves finely

picked by the women to cover the lodge's ground; a soft fragrant carpet for our seated bodies, and the bodies of the ancestors.

The arbour had been swept and prepared for the feast after the purification ceremony. A few men were chopping wood for next week's sweat, while a few first-timers roamed about, either overly eager to help or in a spiritual haze with a pasted smile to 'psych themselves up for the heat.'

Dean emerged from his small dressing hut and pronounced: "We're goin' in. Ready yourselves!"

I jumped up and headed to the women's bunkie to put on the required full-length cotton gown, grabbed a few towels, and put on my flip-flops.

I returned to the fire where I stood to the side until the fire keeper brought around the smudge. I let the sweet burning cedar smoke clear my mind, body and spirit before taking a small handful of tobacco. I let it moisten in my hand and then focused my humble prayers before offering it to the fire. The women slowly shuffled towards the lodge, and once near the altar, touched the earth, sacred pipe, eagle staff, buffalo skull and our hearts.

Once in the lodge's doorway, we kissed the earth, and pronounced "All My Relations" or, "Mitakuye Oyasin." I nestled into my tight spot in the southern doorway, noticing that the lodge had been rebuilt after a heavy rainfall; its sturdy curved branches held up the encircling tarps and blankets. Some new tobacco flags had been put up too. But even with the fixing of the lodge, it still smelled of cedar, damp soil, sweet mildew, and the lingerings of countless previous sweats.

Sitting in a tranquil state, I stared at the empty pit in the centre of the lodge awaiting the bright red grandfathers. Dean sat in his usual spot in the western doorway. The fire keeper brought in the first four grandfathers, laying them gently in the four directions; everyone fell silent except for Dean's wife, who sprinkled each grandfather with powdered cedar and said: "*Boozhoo mishomis*." Greetings and welcome, grandfather.

Although there is a sequence, like with any cultural spiritual or religious practices, there are also variations across territories and regions. 'Sweats' do differ in facilitation, intensity, timeframes, and 'energy.' Essentially, participants receive what is needed at the time, individually and collectively. Whatever needs to be purified, is purified. The ceremonial procedures at Dean's camp reflected his Cree and Lakota medicine-training background. The preparation and process at 'the land', had become intrinsic, but one never knew how spirit would heal, help or interchange. After all, only *Wakan Tanka,* the Great Spirit, or Great Mystery, knew that.

I was distracted and didn't notice, until Jen, a long-time member of the community, pointed out that my toes were sticking out from under my gown. I was too focused on what I had dreamed and saw during Vision Quest[7] a week prior, to remember to fully cover up.

"I'm going to clean off the grandfathers; cover your mouths," Dean said, as he sprinkled water over the neatly-mounded grandfathers.

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[7] Vision Quests, or 'calling for a vision' exist throughout Turtle Island in various forms. Most common to them is isolation from others, abstaining from food and water for days, and steady engagement in prayer as a self-discovery journey that helps prepare a person for a significant life transition. Vision quests can 'mark' the change from childhood to adulthood, entrance into or out of an important relationship, or other life change. Vision quests and other ceremonial participations allows for a freeing "from colonized thinking and stunted aspirations" (Wesley-Esquimaux, 29.)

The lodge's flaps closed. The complete darkness gave me comfort. The red glow of the living grandfathers radiated in front of us. The eagle bone whistle blew, and then John began drumming and singing the opening song. The high-pitched melody reverberated throughout the lodge, calling out, high and low, within and around. In sync with the heartbeat, the drum awakened my weary body.

We only knew Dean poured water over the grandfathers when we heard a searing sound, like steak on a hot grill, and then the occasional splatter of warm water hitting our legs. The hot vapours and energies started working through me. Resistance was counter to healing, as I would simply be humbled into submission during the ceremony. 'Sweats' required a different kind of strength and endurance.

I felt John's presence across from me. It was hard to imagine that he and I hadn't been in the lodge before together. After all, he had been the one to help me on the healing journey; the one to bring me to the camp, to Dean, his elder. As he sang out, his voice trembled with the power and humility of the ancestors.

I thought back to that Thanksgiving family dinner five years previously, where he sat in his ribbon shirt across from my father who asked inappropriate questions over dry turkey. He didn't flinch despite the blatant and implicit biases and stereotyping, not because he didn't see, feel and live it every day, but because he combated ignorance with compassion, detachment, humour, and most importantly, the medicine and a focus on his art. My mother, an art consultant, had told me what a talented and cherished Anishinabek painter John was, but I didn't grasp the magnitude of his ability until I went to one of his gallery showings, where remedies emanated onto the canvasses, and into all in the vicinity. An

elixir, flowing to and from the people. It was a stark contrast to the uptight Yorkville gallery where I met him at his solo show.

“I’m going for a smoke; wanna come?” he asked then.

“Oh, okay; you sure you want to step out? Looks like a lot of people are arriving.”

“Yeah, let’s get outta here,” he said, dismissive of the scene.

Sitting on the curb, he inhaled his smoke; his second breath.

“John, I’ve been sick a long time. Remember I told you about David and me hitchhiking for almost a year through parts of Africa?”

He nodded, lighting a fresh cigarette with the wet squished butt.

“It started then, but now…I don’t know what’s wrong with me. I can’t get better. It was hard enough getting outta’ bed to come to your opening. I’m also having strange dreams. Like wings flapping; it’s so loud it wakes me up. Big wings like an eagle or hawk. I also dream a lot about the wolf, and sometimes snakes. They are attacking me, or I control them and they’re docile. It’s weird. I feel like I’m gonna’ be harmed. I don’t know. Seriously…macrobiotic, raw food, Ayurvedic, Traditional Chinese medicine; you name it man, I’ve tried everything!” I exclaimed.

“Not everything,” he said softly.

“I guess not everything, but pretty close. Doctor after doctor…different kinds of medicine. Nothing helps, or if it does, it’s for such a short time,” I said, exasperated.

“You haven’t tried everything,” he said, again this time more firmly.

Linda, the gallery owner, a-middle aged white woman with bleach-blond hair and bright coral lipstick, walked towards us, signalling for John to come back into the gallery.

He mouthed, “Yeah, yeah, I’m coming soon.”

“Oh, sorry. We better get back,” I said starting to stand up.

“No, no; they can wait. This is more important,” he said.

“Oh, okay,” I said, sitting down awkwardly.

We stared at a small bird pecking at a stale yellow hotdog bun; John lit another smoke, the butt from the previous smoke burned down in the gutter.

“You have gifts, abilities. They come from your grandparents,” he said in a clear, non-conversational tone. “You have work to do; healing work before you will be healed and heal others. This way of thinking, the way most people here,” he said, pointing to an older lady teetering past in designer heels, “it takes time to change. I’m from a place where we are taught this way from the beginning. You have to remember this, to find it out. It’s a big path, but it’s good. You’re going to get better once you’re following a good way, and doing the work,” he said.

Linda returned, her lips now a tight red line of frustration. “John, J-o-h-n,” she called out in a sing-song passive-aggressive tone.

He showed her he had just less than half a smoke left. Turning sharply, she slapped her hands against her expensive pantsuit before putting on a fake smile and going back to the

gallery to explain John's absence. He looked back at me with his signature impish grin, indicative of his strong *Heyoka* spirit.

"We should really get…" I started.

"Yeah, yeah, I will," he laughed. "So, little sister, I'm gonna' give you my elder's number. You call him and tell him I sent you. Get to see him, and get up to the camp for a 'sweat'. He'll help you out," he said, dragging on the butt before pulling up his black jeans, adjusting his braid, and strolling back to the gallery.

Staring down at the old TTC ticket with the name 'Dean' and a scribbled number on it, I wanted to race home to call him, but somehow, I didn't have the same desperation for help. I knew a big journey awaited me, a journey that had many paths, but all leading in the same direction.

When I got back to my mother's house in Chinatown, where David and I had been living the past few months, I put the number on the bedside table near a picture of Gram. John's words lingered. I was trying to figure out what he meant by "the path", "changing," "healing". I didn't understand the language of spirit yet.

I fell asleep, not as bothered by the persistent headaches, stomach cramping, and back pain that I had experienced, with no relief, for almost two years now. Biomedicine wasn't providing any answers or reasoning for my ongoing health issues. At my last doctor's appointment, I had been made to feel like a hypochondriac, and although a lot of the complementary medicine had helped, it was minimal and short-lived. I hadn't shared with

anyone that I was feeling depressed, lost, and hopeless, and that the dreams and visions I was having were starting to make me think I was crazy.

I closed my eyes, fighting back tears of isolation and unknowingness. John hadn't spoken in code, although it felt like it at the time; he knew I was only ready to hear so much, as my capacity for fully understanding was underdeveloped. I had a lot to unlearn first.

—

I lay down during the last round of the sweat and slipped a small piece of cedar into my mouth for strength and distraction; remembering that that had helped me during The Fast weeks before. I was especially emotional during this ceremony, having been welcomed as Dean's spirit daughter, and given an eagle feather with his colours at a pipe ceremony in his apartment the week before. I was pleased to be in one of the only places in Canada that felt like home; in ceremony.

When I came to the camp or spent time with Dean, I was learning about Turtle Island, its teachings and medicine. I hadn't come to Dean as a New Ager seeking spiritual enlightenment, or as a do-gooder, I needed to get well and hadn't known where to turn. John had introduced me not only to Dean, but the Red Road teachings, the Medicine Way, and to a spiritual life beyond my comprehension.

Like so many white Canadians I was ignorant about indigenous peoples. I had been brainwashed by oppressive settler ethos and narratives. But history had a way of rearing its head at every turn, through bodily presences (Simpson, 67.)

I hid my stereotyping and ignorance behind a flimsy political correctness that was shrouded in white guilt. I prided myself on being 'politicized', but it was more of teenage angst and a search for identity that drew me into the Army-Out-of-Oka March in Toronto in 1990, than resistance to the occupation of indigenous peoples and lands.

My unawareness was largely based on lack of exposure; I had grown up in the suburbs in Toronto with no visible media representation (or rather healthy media representation) of indigenous peoples. I was (mis)educated like many comparatively privileged children my age in primary and middle school with outdated and biased history books from self-proclaimed-conquerors. The images and texts conveyed 'extinct,' 'primitive' peoples, 'the noble savage,' or the 'drunken Indian,' and other racist misrepresentations. Nowhere in the black and white (man's) pages were stories of indigenous resistance, self-determination or how communities, despite genocide, and continued governmental efforts at annihilation, assimilation and acculturation, had survived, persisted, and revitalized their languages, traditions, communities and cultures. Instead, the books presented palatable glimpses of residential schools without really revealing the systems of abuse, or how I, my family, or settler colonizers were complicit in historical and contemporary systems of injustice and oppression. But my Eurocentric thinking hadn't been an accident; it was a strategic ingraining that was part of Canadian citizenship.

John continued singing both Ojibway and Lakota medicine songs, and everyone joined in. During the second and third round, the apparition I had received during the Vision Quest was clear again. I saw myself doing the healing work; I also saw others, jealous, and mixing medicine in a harmful manner. The answer to the question I had quietly

put before spirit: "Do I continue as a healer? Am I really a healer? And do I return to *Baba*?"

Spirit responded*: "Continue with the healing work. Follow the way you are meant to go. Do not return to Baba. It's not safe for you now. Others will come to show and guide you."*

Dean asked the fire keeper to hand in the strawberries, and he gave teachings about their significance before we ate a few.

I crawled out of the sweat and kissed the earth; *All my Relations.* We each hugged one another and then I found a wet cool patch of grass to lie on. Rotating in unison with the earth; the hot steam rose off my body and evaporated into the expansive sky. "*Hey ya, hey hi ya hi ya,"* I muttered under my heavy breath and racing heart.

After the post-sweat feast, and cleaning up and preparing to go home, I sat on an old lawn chair watching the fire turn from embers into ash. The mood was serene. Everyone carried a special kind of lightness that only comes after a sweat. John sat beside me chain-smoking, clearing his throat, and chuckling at the odd joke in the distance. I wanted to tell him about my vision. I wanted to ask him his advice about going back to South Africa, about returning to *Baba*. I knew he would tell me what I already knew, what I had come to learn. I looked over and smiled grateful to have an older brother like him. His hand drum rested against his leg, which would be amputated because of diabetes, in the coming years. The dwindling fire tightened the drum's hide for the next ceremony.

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*"Come down here. Yes! We are the clouds in the mountains by the caves. We sit here talking and being together. Together is how we see the people. In this way, we come together. We travel to the important places, together. Our hope is found in being together. Those that say they are lost; they just need to be together.*

*What is this together? It is how the earth drinks from the sun, how the moon dances with the stars and the trees bend to the wind's kiss. It is how the medicine always shows us where to find it: 'this one grows by the water and this one hides behind another.' The child to the breast. You call it nurturing. That's your understanding. Together, yes!*

*And also all the ancestors come together too. They see the people together and they rejoice because when they are together they are feasting, praying, asking, helping, giving, and putting things in a right way, not order as you understand it. The sand makes a beach and trees a forest. This is the beauty, the power, and the strength. You can't come together in the wrong way. If you are together, in the way your ancestors were, in the way you were shown, or the way that makes you feel full again; that missing place is no longer lost, then you are together.*

*This is so simple. An education for nothing! Living! Too easy. Imagine! The people have forgotten this. Thinking. Thinking, you were told, makes up*

*who you are. Thinking makes life. Thinking is not even dust on the bum of the fireball [referring to a comet] that blows through skies. So, when the people are separate, they are not; they are still together. Every time they eat, every time they pray or sleep—they are together. The sand is not divided from the sea.*

*[Begins a praise libation]*

*Oh, great universe you are everything and nothing.*

*Call up the Ancient Ones to walk again.*

*Let their steps be loud to the deaf and their towering size clear to the blind.*

*Let every broken body run to the place where the people meet once more.*

*Where nothing is forgotten and forgetting a dream.*

*I am yours and you are mine.*

*The tiny bug crawling inside the baobab tree; the tree of our ancestors.*

*Kiss the earth and cry out, 'All living!'*

*Tell the people about the people.*

*Call them to be together, to see and feel once more.*

*Those lost, those killed, those forgotten and those empty.*

*Call them!*

*Hear.*

*Listen and promise.*

*Ugodide ma la doda skganala [exact spelling is unclear]. The people are together, the medicine is ours!"* Ancestor's name unknown, March 20, 2014.

**Chapter Eleven –Spilled Manischewitz Wine and Chewed Chicken Bones**

I was happy to be back in South Africa, to be with David, and explaining my experiences of re-entry into North America. He could relate in many ways with feeling over-stimulated, caught in a culture of consumption, feeling at times disassociated from oneself as well as global realities. I had had the added layer of spiritual 'sensitivity.' David absorbed my every word about the sweat, envious that he couldn't have been there this time. But I reminded him that he had been spiritually present in our prayers with the medicine and the relatives.

The rains began slowly, but we knew that the weeks-on-end of heavy showers would soon flood the roads on the farm. The surrounding forest was already dense and increasingly untamable, inhabited by everything from jackals to a monitor lizard two-meters in length. Despite the creature's mound in full view, everyone circumvented its lair. The huge lizard was known to steal live fowl from the local chicken farm.

Whenever I slaughtered a chicken that I couldn't eat, because it was used for cleansing purposes, I popped the dead bird on the dirt hill for the lizard, often symbolic of specific ancestors. I never got too close, even though I didn't believe the local myths that monitor lizards could clutch a breastfeeding mother and nurse; I wasn't about to find out what the huge scaly reptile was capable of.

Our large rental cottage was one of three income-generating houses for the overseas farm owner. The property overlooked grassy and neglected tiered vegetable patches. It was so overgrown that David had once called me while I was at an *Izangoma* initiation to tell me that while taking a stroll through the decrepit farm, he stumbled across what he thought was an old tire, until it suddenly came to life and moving faster than a whip, the two-meter-long *rinkhals* missed David and our dog by centimeters. Suffice it to say, we didn't wander in the tall grassy areas on the farm anymore.

Other than the occasional spitting cobra, tiny scorpions in the tub, the odd black widow spider on the screen door, or the occasional drunken gun-slinging neighbour in a 'domestic' with his wife, the farm was quiet. We didn't worry about safety in spite of living near an informal settlement and having no security. Electric fencing, elaborate home alarms and big dogs were a norm in the suburbs. I attributed our security not only to the protection of the ancestors but also being an *Isangoma* helped keep *tsotsi's* away; at least at first.

I was thrown back into the practicalities of life as though I hadn't left.

Our small painting business required constant marketing and promotion, which had suffered while I was training as a healer.

After a few days of unpacking, laundry, and working, I started to feel bored and slightly lost. I was recovered, 100% healed, and capable of returning to my life; a life that had been on hold for many years because of *intwaso*. I had been unable to work properly, study, or even carry out daily activities because of ill health.

I was stronger now, in every sense of the word. I had wellbeing beyond my imagination. I was regularly overcome with *Amadlozi* and new-to-me ancestors continued to reveal themselves. Despite the strong presence of ancestors, I was left with the feeling of, "Now what? Do I find another *Baba?* Should I wait and dream about him or her as I was meant to do initially as to ensure I was with the right person?"

After moping around the house for a couple weeks, David asked: "What's wrong, my love?"

"I don't know what to do, David. Now what? I mean…I'm white, I'm Jewish, Canadian and a *Sangoma!"* I exclaimed.

"Now what? Now what?!" David bellowed, "What do you mean! It's easy. We haven't gone through ALL this for nothing. Sickness, time away to *thwasa*, trying to find the money to train, and me eating boiled rice so you can pay Patience and buy your *Sangoma* things. Look what you've been through, my angel. What we have been through, to get you to this point," he said passionately. "Now what? Well, now you set up your *indumba* and heal people. There is no doubt. You do 'the job'," he said.

"After all, won't your ancestors show you, help you, and guide you? Isn't that the way it works?" he asked rhetorically.

He was right. But feelings of doubt, insecurity and fear were overcoming my clarity. Yet David knew better. My Jewish, Afrikaans, and English South African husband working in IT, knew what I needed to do as *Isangoma*.

"But I don't have this, and I need that," I began.

"So, you'll get it. You can get whatever you need. You're a *Sangoma* and this is South Africa!" he bellowed.

"Yeah, you're right," I said sheepishly.

I would come to learn that David, although not an *Isangoma,* had insights, wisdom, and knowledge that would guide and support both of us. After all, it was our grandmothers, who we imagined, sipped tea with a shot of rye in it, and ate tiny pieces of chocolate, scheming about the crossing of our paths in the spirit world. How else could our meeting and falling in love in Israel years earlier be explained?

I had met David while visiting a kibbutz in the summer between grade twelve and thirteen, on one of the many communal settlements in Israel focused on farming and communal means of production. David had been on Ein Harod Meuchad for almost six months before my arrival. It was one of the oldest kibbutzim in Israel. We quickly connected and developed a rich friendship, and then a love affair that spans decades. At the end of the summer, David left the kibbutz, as he had intended to before meeting me. Arriving in London and preparing to travel 'the world,' he ceased his travels hoping to find me. Realizing he didn't have my phone number, he called Bell trying to locate a "Rebecca in Ontario."

Of course, having no luck, he flew back to South Africa hoping I might call. Collapsing into bed jetlagged and despondent, he was awakened by a phone call twenty-four hours later. I was calling to ask his mother where he was in the world, and how I could reach him.

"My darling," she said with a heavy South African accent. "He's right here. He's home. I'll wake him for you."

Our lengthy phone calls at all hours of the night, exorbitant phone bills, faxes, and hundreds of mailed letters with heartfelt mixed tapes, lasted for eight months before he earned enough money waiting tables to visit me in Toronto.

"I think we should start with shelves. I know the spare room is small, but it's a start. I can put some in and…" he said supportively.

"Sounds good David, thanks," I said giving him a hug.

But I was still riddled with doubt and fear. I knew that I wouldn't be the first healer to question being *Isangoma*. It wasn't uncommon for an initiated *thwasa* who had returned home to abandon their healing work. It was just one more reason why a good teacher was so essential; helping to keep the newly-fledged *Isangoma* on track. Some turned away from *Ngoma* ways towards the church; while many managed multi-faith beliefs and practices. I had met a young *Sangoma* living near *Baba* who had done well during *ukuthwasa*; she was a powerful healer, but upon returning home, her sacred items sat in a box in the corner.

Whether it was non-commitment or anxiety about 'doing the job,' many felt cured and hoped to return to a 'regular' life. Even more likely reasons for not 'doing the job,' were the obstacles and challenges of daily life and living in South Africa, a nation permeated

with systemic poverty. Many South Africans, traditional healers not exempt, were caught in cycles of poverty, trying to deal with regular funeral costs, unemployment, school fees, transport costs and general efforts at economic survival. Not to mention issues of addiction, violence in varied forms, stress and trauma-related illnesses, and HIV and AIDS. Many traditional healers worked at regular, often menial jobs, slipping into ancestral regalia after long underpaid and over-worked days, to begin helping patients.

While financially constrained, my situation wasn't remotely comparable to the vast majority of *Izangoma* in the country.

"Oh, by the way, my parents asked us over for *Shabbos* tonight. I said it was okay. They really miss you, and I couldn't hold them off anymore," David said.

"No, it's cool. I'm over my jet-lag and want to see them too," I replied.

"We'll leave around six then?"

"Sure," I replied, wondering what long-sleeved shirt I would wear to cover the *iziphandla.*

Most of the brown and white goat fur had fallen off; the leather bracelet was dry and starting to thin. It was common to see black South Africans with *iziphandla*, predominantly Zulu folks who made offerings to their ancestors. I wasn't embarrassed; I just wanted to try to convey normalcy to my in-laws, or at least to break them in slowly. Although they were open-minded, having their daughter-in-law train to be a 'witch doctor' was a large pill to swallow. Especially after the years I had spent mentoring under my father-in-law in Judaism.

But, they had always encouraged their children to follow their own paths, and I knew one thing unequivocally; they loved me unconditionally. They had cared for me physically, economically, and emotionally, just as good birth parents would have. They thought of me as their own child, and now I had to trust that they would accept me as *Izangoma* as well.

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We made our way up the driveway, and no matter the time of year, aromatic jasmine vines beautified the surrounding walls. We pulled in through the heavy wooden doors making me think back to the first day I arrived at David's house a decade earlier.

"That's Onica, my other mother," David said, pointing to the kitchen window.

He had told me all about her as well as his 'other sisters.' I had been surprised when I saw Mpho's picture on the kibbutz, a pretty young South African girl in a navy school uniform. He had explained that Onica was the maid, but thought of her as his other mother. Kagiso and Mpho were Onica's daughters who grew up alongside David and his biological sister Dana.

From behind the white barred glass then I could see a forty-something black woman with large rimmed glasses and a flower decorated headscarf; besides her another forty-something white woman with bushy dark hair and a receptive smile.

"My darling, you are here!" she had exclaimed in a boisterous South African accent.

Entering the large kitchen, we were greeted by a smorgasbord of dogs that jumped, barked and whined with enthusiasm. Evelyn, David's mother clapped, and shouted: "Bonnie, Sam…hey, out, out, *hamba*, go, *hamba.*"

"Come my darling," she said, holding out her arms for a welcoming and nervous embrace.

Stepping away from the sink, Onica dried her hands on her pink apron and motioned towards me.

"Hello, *Mma,*" she said softly, holding out her hand. Gently moving her hand away with my body, I stepped forward to hug her.

Today, before we could even get out of the car, Evelyn and Onica were clamouring to hug me. I was so grateful to be with my South African mothers. I was at home in their embraces.

"Come; Onica made your favourite," Evelyn said.

"Sticky pudding too, Ribbs," Onica inserted.

"Ah, you're the best. *Ta,*" I replied, walking into the quiet kitchen which was oozing with aromas.

"Where are the dogs?" I asked.

"*Ag* outside, Lawrence is feeding them," Onica said, referring to the gardener.

As quickly as everyone descended upon us, they were gone. David went to tell his sisters that I was back. Onica was putting washing in the tumble dryer, trying to slip in scenes from the Bold and the Beautiful, and making gravy for the roast chickens.

I started loading the dishwasher knowing dinner wouldn't be served for another two hours. Evelyn worked 24/7 at her bed and breakfast which was more like five-star hotel accommodation. She struggled to fit in eating and sleeping.

As I finished up in the kitchen, I thought back to when I had first arrived and insisted on doing my own dishes, laundry and cleaning. I was told: “Don’t worry, so-and-so can do that”. I soon realized that my self-reliance was an obvious socio-political stance. I had unknowingly upset the social fabrics of the white, albeit liberal, domains.

David had been gone awhile; I strolled out of the main house looking for him. Making my way to the pool house, I stepped over the huge splatter of hardedar poop covering the walkway. I had been so intrigued by the wild noisy birds when I had first arrived; now I thought of them as most South Africans did, a nuisance. I had also been overwhelmed by the property itself. It wasn’t what I had imagined in a pool house, with sliding glass doors overlooking a large glistening blue pool, encircled by ivy and luscious plants. Our bedroom view had been of pale pink roses, birds of paradise, and an unused trampoline. We had a kitchen, bathroom, and everything else we needed. The matured gardens and koi pond delighted the hungry local birds and animals. It was beautiful and opulent. David’s family weren’t even considered wealthy by *some* South African standards. Compared to people living in informal settlements they were rich, but next to some Hyde Park and Sandton homes with guards and palace-like gates, they were middle class.

After a late-night outing for frozen yoghurt at Hyde Park, David’s family would drive by nearby neighbourhoods ogling at the rich estates; including Nelson Mandela’s home in Houghton. However pleasantly fragranced the air was with gourmet food aromas, or how splendid the ‘wild’ gardens were, the denial of class, and the complicity that accompanies

white privilege, like *pap* with gravy, affects every nuance of life and living in South Africa.[8]

In my first few months in the 'Rainbow Nation', it was easy to compartmentalize most things. But my black-and-white North American thinking left no room for trying to grasp the grey matter that makes up people, places and things. Some things seemed clear-cut. For starters, human rights violations, insidious, cyclical, and structural inequalities, and the mistreatment of citizens: mothers, fathers, uncles, aunts, grandparents and children.

But there were moments when decisions were blurred for me. For example, my time in Soweto, however potentially 'dangerous,' and however limited my movements seemed, I was watched over and protected carefully by *Baba,* her family and the community. I felt safer in Dlamini than I did in the northern suburbs. I'm sure in large part my racial and socio-economic privilege played a role. No one wanted a dead visitor, or *thwasa,* let alone a dead white woman.

I also grappled with the notion of domestic workers. I had been raised to clean my own toilets, cut my own lawn and do my own laundry. There was no question that I had been born privileged simply based on geography, and race and class; I disagreed with hiring domestic workers as I felt it was counter to my anti-oppression values. It wasn't until I had both women and men knocking at my door pleading for work, to be paid anything for however long; "Please, Madame," I heard on a weekly basis, mainly from Zimbabwean

[8] I would come to learn that South Africa's class systems are tiered, complicated, and often definitive. For poor, South Africans-of-colour, racial and class Apartheid went hand in hand. Systemic underdevelopment of the oppressed majority continues within structured economic, political, legal and many sociocultural spheres (Bond 2004).

citizens who were fast becoming undefined refugees. Poverty, lack of education, HIV/AIDS, and unemployment were flesh-eating bedfellows. Surely hiring someone, paying them well, treating them with dignity, care and equality, in spite of being part of a racial, economic, and social hierarchy, was justifiable? It wasn't a solution for the whole system; in fact, I was part of the system of inequality. But wasn't steady and fair employment beneficial for Blossom, Mabel or Jabu's immediate survival?

"My darling," said Jonathan, David's stepfather who appeared in the doorway in one of his long-cared-for designer suits.

"I'm so pleased to see you, to have you back!" he exclaimed.

"Me too," I replied, leaning in for his usual face-cradling kiss on either cheek.

"How are you my darling?" he asked.

"I'm great. Shabbat Shalom!" I said.

"Shabbat Shalom to you too, my darling," he said.

"So how far are we from dinner?" he asked, putting down his briefcase.

"Oh, who knows? But I'm hungry and hope we eat soon," I said.

"From your lips to God's ears, my darling," Jonathan said laughingly, "I have a Tex bar in the cubby hole of my car if we get desperate enough."

"Ah, glad to see nothing changes around here," I retorted.

Onica came bustling into the kitchen, "Evening."

"Good evening, Onica. How are you this evening?" he asked civilly.

"*Agh,* just trying to get this gravy finished, and waiting for Evelyn. Everything's done," she said.

"I'll call her," he replied.

"Are Kagiso and Mpho coming?" I asked Onica. "What about you, *Mma*? Will you join us tonight?"

"*Agh* I want to. I missed you so much Ribbs, but I'm so tired. I've been cooking for the guests, and remember my cousin that you met back home…Lebo?" she asked, as I rattled my brain through the series of cousins I had met at her father's tomb unveiling in her village years before.

"No, *Mma,* sorry."

"Well her mother died, and we were cooking all night."

"Sorry to hear. Whew; you must be exhausted?" I asked.

She stirred the gravy slowly shifting her weight from leg to leg because her heel spur was bothering her again.

Mpho threw open the dining room door with vigour, just as she had the first day I met her. Plopping down, she grabbed a few paddipans from the warming plate. "Hey! How are you?" she asked with a northern suburbs drawl, before leaning over and giving me a tight hug.

"Good, Wow! Every time I see you, you're bigger; I mean older, a woman."

"Ah *youth,*" she replied laughingly, "you've only been in Soweto four months," she said, before getting up to dig in the liquor cabinet for sparkling grape juice for Kiddush.

For decades' colonial and Apartheid, systems created forced urban migration which tore away at family and community ties. It had become a necessity for domestic workers to leave their children with their mothers in rural areas just as Onica had with Kagiso. Kagiso came to Johannesburg as an older child who faced countless challenges around class, race and urban living. But unlike Kagiso, Onica had Mpho in Johannesburg while she was working for Evelyn. This was home for Mpho. This was her experience of the family; diverse and complicated. David's parents were her mother's bosses, but they were also her Auntie and Uncle. They gave her lifts, helped pay for her education, and celebrated every achievement and heartbreak with her.

The Shabbos table had the usual family raucous. Dana broke away from her artistic creations to join us in paint-splattered clothes. Kagiso told us entertaining stories about drama school, while Mpho did impressions of each family member. Evelyn revealed a story she had heard at the hairdressers which invoked empathy and judgment for the "poor lady." We all ate too much and laughed hard. Challah crumbs and chewed chicken bones made it a usual Friday night. David's family were unique, but also quintessentially South African. A family not just in origin or choice, but brought together by the socioeconomic, historical, and political realities of the country.

On Shabbos, when time stood still, even for a few hours, individual and collective categorizations blurred. I sat staring at the flickering candles and the wine stain spreading over the ironed tablecloth. I was quieter than usual, and I began thinking about *Baba's*

grandkids getting their weekends started; all sitting around watching Jam Alley on SABC 1 and then *vying* about the neighbourhood. I also thought about Dean and everyone from the camp, preparing for the sweat on Sunday.

Onica ate with us and slipped away during dessert to warm up by the space heater. Although winter was over, the nonstop rain made everyone cold in the evenings. I had been particularly cold this winter and imagined how *Baba's* family were managing to stay warm on desperate evenings huddled around a single hotplate; until finally the effort outweighed the benefits and everyone went to bed early.

After we ate, we popped into Onica's to thank her for dinner and chat with Kagiso and Mpho. Onica's house was smaller than the main and pool houses, with two bedrooms and a small lounge; it was still fairly new and nicely painted, unlike some of the deplorable 'mAIDS' houses' I had seen. All suburban homes had 'mAIDS', or the house for the 'girl.'

We chatted with Kagio about going to see Vusi Mahlasela at Kippies on the weekend. I was glad I would be getting out; although living it up had changed dramatically for me because I no longer drank alcohol. Each *idlozi* had its own set of requirements, likes and dislikes and adherence to taboos. Not only that but as a pipe holder, alcohol and drug use are prohibited. I also no longer liked crowds, really loud music, certain 'scenes' or places. Many things no longer agreed with my body, mind or spirit; or that of my ancestors. After all, they instructed me on where to live, who and how to help, even down to the minutia of driving routes and what canned fruit to buy. It wasn't that I no longer had free will or personal agency, it was more about surrendering to a larger power.

**Chapter Twelve –The Befallen, Intergenerational Trauma and Remembering *with* Ancestors**

*"I won't lie to you, I faced bad things. Being dragged to the mountains in Sotholand and being battered and thrust for too long [raped.] Oh I suffered, and the journey after. I learned Sotho an ugly way.*

*But those were the times. People forgot about those other battles; war is not only in one place. The area where I lived so long, never recovered. I had to help those people from these wars. Those that died, too much was taken. Oh, there was so much work to do to help them. Even then, they couldn't be cured. Many of those dead people, they left or I helped them.*

*When they came through me ["going into spirit]," I would get sick and suffer for days, especially in the beginning. Cleaning them, healing, saying those praises to help them to go. Some stayed; they liked my singing too much! Others just went. You have to do this work in a time after they have passed, or they stay and their pain and burdens fall onto those to come.*

*They come to make up the ancestors. They must be handled in a special way with very special plants. Each has its own words, not just any words. Some stay in the mountains, some in the sea, but they like to go near people because they still carry that fear. They race around in the forests but they are never still. Your people call them ghosts, thinking they are bad. Mostly*

*they are just scared and hurt. They don't know where to go back; no, they don't, and that's why they don't come in the Sangoma easily. They want comfort, not to taste being alive again. Some are desperate and call out, or steal the energy from people; then the people are tired.*

*If those people died in battle or were killed in fighting and never went home, the person and family can wander around trying to find each other in this place, even though their bodies have been eaten by the earth. Many people in the country you were inborn have this. Those spirits calling out through them. They have to be taken care of, given that care; that ceremony to bring in those ancestors. One by one to help those lost ones.*

*Then, the crops grow well and the water heals like it used to. At the rivers, especially where the sea and river meet, those ceremonies are good. Oh, people are collecting so many ancestors. Its good people are coming together, leaving small places, but each Ancestor must be remembered. If people come together, again and again, there is a large family; this is good. But the ancestors of each family, each person must be known, their name, where they come from and their children. Children are born not knowing where they come from. They must know all of their grandmothers' and grandfathers' names far back, then they can praise wherever their feet stand. People can remember; they can't forget. These things live in them.*

*They must open the door and say, 'I'm ready!', and wash and prepare, not just follow any curious thing. Then they wait.*

*I promise. You watch; each of those ancestors will come. They will wonder at first: 'Why do I like this fruit? Why do I need the fire? Why can't I go here or there?' They think it's because it's what they want or like. No, it's those living ancestors expressing themselves in every little way. They come, and when it's opened, it's more powerful.*

*But it's listening, watching, and following those things: the ancestors, and how to take care of things. Even for those that feel dumb. Now people have to listen too hard because they don't have those old people to tell you those stories all the time. Some here, some there. The people aren't together.*

*So, listen carefully, past your own breath. It has to be done. The ones that are listening, they understand these words. The others become those lost spirits. We may pray for those ones." Nomvusa Mmamaledi (or Namaledi) born or living in 1625. March 20, 2014.*

*"There was a time when everything fell too quiet. Then war. A battle that killed people. Even with the messages, people stayed. They were comfortable and didn't want to go, so they took the risk and stayed home.*

*The warriors were away collecting metals and healing water. Some hunters were there but they were no match for the dark swarm that came. Like black flies in a black cloud, they ate everything to death. The crows were too late to bring the message.*

*The message was that people would move forward, but our people never feared death. We prized courage." Ancestor's name unknown, Scandinavian/Norse descent, July 5, 2014.*

*"This day is the day not unlike the days before. We lived then ready to laugh or cry. We knew what the day might bring. Most of us found our way. We had the tools, the instruction and guidance to show us how and where to go. Even when lost, we knew there was a way. Even if my flesh didn't find my way out of the forests where I hunted as a young boy, my soul would; it was free either way.*

*I lost my father to war. It wasn't a war for his people, but a war for them [referring to colonizers.] My mother never talked of this. I don't know if it was because it hurt too much or because she loved him. She was quiet and kept to herself.*

*I only saw her come alive when we had the harvest festival. She would be busy for three days. I would stay at her sister's house or just roam around during that time.*

*Sometimes as children, we would sleep a lot; other times we were busy working. We collected what was needed, making things, helping, and then were chased away. We took care of ourselves under the guardianship of our communities. They were our families and our lives. We didn't have rules and lines like those people do now; silly rules and silly lines. Your borders, your computers, even your relationships…everyone is locked up and locked out.*

*We had so much energy, even the old ones. We didn't get tired. We had good air. The air fed us even when we were hungry; we could get nourishment from the air. We knew how to do that then.*

*Life was very serious, but we also had fun. We worried, but we didn't carry that worry around in our bodies or let it get stuck in our thinking. There was no time, too much to do, not because life was short, which it was, but because we had to survive. Survival was hard, but it was also a good life. We knew how to survive. We helped each other. We knew where to go and for what. We were interdependent; that's what you call it now.*

*My time was good because it wasn't like things for my mother. Her time was very hard. Changes, many many changes then; a time of war and fighting again. Her people moved from that land that they had been on for hundreds of years; they had to go to keep safe.*

*The time after me, the schools came, and people, bringing damnation. But my time was good. I was only one, from my mother. The others didn't get born or died shortly after. But I had so many brothers; I was never alone.*

*Your grandmother dreamed of me. She used to see me when she was a little girl, but she got scared. I showed her medicine; that's how she knew. I will show you too.*

*I know the medicine, not really good, but I know a few things. You listen to me and I will tell you. I will start telling you today. I will also show you where to go. You are the only one in the family listening; others heard, but they ignore it. I will show you, but then you carry the responsibility.*

*There will be those that you need to keep away, those that need help, and those that will help you. I'm going to show you these things. Take up your pipe and listen, dear girl." Elder known as "Great Grandfather", Jan 9, 2013, 11:50 a.m.*

*"There will be people that are for you and people that are not. When I was a child, I followed the ones who tried to get lost. I do not have too much more to tell you; so much and so little.*

*I am moving closer to the people now. I will awaken the powerful ones. We will rumble, telling the people to hear us, to see us; that we are back.*

*They [referring to the people and healers], must come to that place in our special stories. There they must dance for… [gives a symbol resembling the letter B] at sundown, all night, as we do. On the fourth day when the sun comes up, they must offer many things! Even the clothing, no alcohol, only the drink made from fruit and grain."* Ancestor's Name Unknown, of Khoi/San heritage, May 23, 2014.

**Chapter Thirteen – Mostly Cured**

That night I had a nightmare, or at least I thought it was a nightmare. Since I'd returned from my visit to Canada, I hadn't been sleeping well. I'd adhered to the ancestors who told me to light *impepho*, offer snuff, and pray morning and evening; yet it hadn't helped. The strange dreams had started when David and I hitchhiked for eight months throughout Sub Saharan Africa years previously. I believed that they began after a strange interaction I had had with an old woman on one of the many eighteen-hour bus rides.

At the time, we were only in the fourth hour of a journey through Zambia and were contented to have seats this time around. The crowded and outdated bus was busting at the seams with all the people, fowl, and *amaShangaan* luggage.

The driver didn't smell of liquor or drive at a breakneck speed, which made the ride relaxing. The odd child passed over our laps to other passengers, and if they weren't petrified, they sat astonished on my knee, listening to my excessive cooing. The passengers took care of babies and children on journeys.

Passengers seemed to only know who the mother was when the child began to whimper and was quickly returned to a mother's breast. David attempted to nap but deep potholed roads interrupted his slumber.

"Are we there?" he asked each time his head bobbed up.

"No," I replied a dozen times.

I noticed an old woman with traditional tattooing on her face sitting across from me. I looked up offering a subtle smile, but in keeping with tradition, averted my eyes respectfully. She didn't turn away or smile back. She stared at me, transfixed.

After a few hours, I commented to David who whispered something about her probably being a traditional healer. This wasn't the first time I had sensed indefinable powers or energies.

Along our journey, I had had a few strange interactions; including a middle-aged man walking by talking to himself on the streets of Nairobi. He stopped, grabbed my head and held it tightly in his hands, said something loudly in Swahili, and then let go before David

could intervene. I had been really shaken up, afterwards, not just by a seemingly mentally ill stranger grabbing me, but by the energy he transmitted.

The old woman's stare had a different kind of intensity. My physical space wasn't traversed but I felt vulnerable beneath her blue-eyed cloudy deep gaze.

She got off the bus. I looked over my shoulder through the broken window, where her eyes were waiting. She slowly drew her hand over her neck in a slicing motion. I shuddered. Was she prophesizing an impending death, or cursing me? Or was it a political act against white domination and foreigners?

David was nonchalant about the whole thing and told me not to make anything of it, but I often wondered from that day on if the strange dreams I had been having were a result of *ubuthakathi,* the use of traditional medicine for negative or harmful purposes.

The nightmares continued after the hitchhiking trip. I was always under threat from rabid dogs, elusive wolves, or snakes. During *ukuthwasa,* the dreams intensified. Embarrassed, I occasionally told *Baba* about the violent and disturbing sexual nature of my dreams; she always said they were a result of abstinence and needing more cleansing. I didn't talk further about them.

The vivid imaginings improved and transformed after training, but still inconsistently reappeared. I considered that they might be a response to the media's constant bombardment of violent stories in South Africa. It seemed this 'revealing' about what was 'really going on,' just perpetuated a kind of gloom in the national psyche. Yes, news needed to be reported, but endless streams of horror and human debauchery headlined on

almost every electrical pole. Child rapes, dismembered body parts found being used as 'medicine, grannies being shot to death in car hijacking's; the list went on with these not-so-new expressions of frustration and trauma. The endless complaints, mainly from whites about violence, by which they had often been mostly immune to during Apartheid, was permeating like sun-bruised cactus fruit sold by marginalized young men at the traffic lights. On top of dealing with too-close-for-comfort robberies, it was hard not to be vigilant due to real or imagined threats; after all, as anarchist Voltairine de Cleyre said: "the desperate act-desperately!"

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After waking from another disturbing sleep, I washed in medicine before seeing my early morning patient. I now had a few people; a thirty-something-year-old Afrikaans woman needing guidance for a rewarding and profitable career, an older Hindu shopkeeper who operated across from a squatter camp and wanted *muthi* to increase business; and a young Sotho woman whose ongoing health issues seemed symptomatic of the growing HIV/AIDS epidemic. I was running low on medicine and decided that I would go to Faraday later that day to restock. David didn't like when I went to Faraday and insisted on accompanying me.

*Doesn't he know that the Amadlozi will always protect me?* I thought.

After he tried to persuade me to go to Randburg mall to get what I needed, I said:

"I only go there if I absolutely have to. They barely have anything I need and they charge an arm and a leg for everything. At least I'm not heading into the bush to get things," I said seemingly compromising.

I enjoyed going to the *muthi* market. I often got headaches halfway through my visit, though. The medicine was strong, varied, and not everyone used it in a restorative way.

We made our way through Braamfontein to town. Many things had changed over two decades. Town was no longer as it was when David was a boy with few passbook-carrying black South Africans; it had been mainly whites, like his gloved grandmother who shopped at the Carlton Centre and had ice cream and waffles at Milky Lane on Pretoria Street on Saturday afternoons.

The streets occasionally erupted with frenzied stomping, synchronized chanting and brain clearing whistling; the remarkable and unstoppable ranks of people toyi-toying against the oppressive blanket of Apartheid, which had made life intolerable for South Africans of colour. Town, viewed by many negatively, had metamorphized into a vibrant, heavily populated, and typical African centre. Sandton City became the preferred shopping location for affluent South Africans, with its shops filled with 'better' items that were fashionable 'overseas.'

This eventually changed with urban planning and regenerative strategies, including arts initiatives, and both affordable and upscale city housing. One thing that never changed in town was how crisp the air was. Even in midday during summertime, it seemed the sun never penetrated between the large concrete buildings. The chill and dimness always reminded me of the not-so-distant legacy of institutionalized segregation.

The stalls in Faraday in Marshalltown stretched on for what felt like kilometres. Each stall looked much the same. Whether it was bottles filled with powdered herbs, raw barks,

freshly chopped bulbs, or drying indistinguishable animal parts; remedies for any ailments could be found.

I had first come to Faraday with *Baba* who had spent hours with another *Isangoma.* I suspected that she was getting medicine for herself. She had murmured something about other *Izangoma* being jealous of her and her *thwasa*. The healer, who was older than she, didn't respond as many did when they saw me, with shock and amazement at first, then giggling or laughing to see me behaving as a *thwasa.* At Faraday, traditional healers rarely stared at me, as they had grown accustomed to the unusual; there were also a growing number of white traditional healers in the country.

As I passed, we greeted each other: "*Thokoza Makhosi,*" I pronounced half-kneeling and cup clapping my hands.

"*Thokoza, Unjani*?" some would ask.

"*Ngikhona, wena unjani Gogo*?" I'm fine, how are you grandmother, I responded.

Most of the healers didn't engage easily unless a medicine was being purchased or a question asked. Occasionally journalists and tourists ventured into the market to investigate an 'African underworld.' As time went on, healers declined to have pictures taken and some began charging for snapshots as a result of finding their pictures in newspapers and books with less than flattering captions.

Faraday was particularly cold beside a taxi rank under the M1 highway. The healer's stalls were crammed along the sidewalk threatening to spill out onto the busy road. Their contents and style of placement differed, but all had their medicine neatly piled and drying

or powdered on old maize sacks and recycled materials. This was before the market moved to a more hospitable environment with its own building, separate stalls, a guard, and rent for stall keepers, all of which had made the market more palatable for tourists and locals alike. Faraday had been the perfect locale to get a chill or nurture stereotypes about African medicine as dark, dingy, secretive or superstitious.

I wandered around trying to find Sibongile. When I had visited the market with *Baba,* I noticed many healers seeking her help. I assumed that if she was sought by healers, she would be a good person to get *muthi* from.

I bought some *intolwane, isphepheto, ikhatazo, mfusamvu* and other standard loose *muthi* for *khota, futha, geza* and *phalaza*. Sibongile prepared an *intelezi* for *isiwasho* for me and my home.

David was growing inpatient sitting in the car when he felt *ingozi* nearby, but danger or not, the ancestral work couldn't be rushed. I also hadn't told him that I needed to go to Diagonal Street to get candles, beads, and other ancestral gear. Sibongile took her time, digging in the back of the old metal shipping container to find another animal fat or special oil to add to the mix. I was grateful for her time and consideration.

As she handed me the medicine, she recapped in Zulu, broken English, and Afrikaans the first time that she had met me. She began telling the nearby healers about seeing me kneel in my *thwasa* clothing, covered in red clay oxide, barefoot and all. The healers looked at me compassionately like I was a clumsy puppy; "*Ag shame*," they said in unison.

As she finished preparing my medicine I wandered around identifying the plants I knew. Training in the township made proper raw herb identification challenging. I wanted to know more.

"*Thokoza, dankie,*" I said to Sibongile as we exchanged Rands for medicine on the floor.

As I got in the passenger seat, David's frustration didn't overcome his politeness: "Did you get what you needed, love?" he asked.

I decided to go to Diagonal street another day. I had an early morning cleansing and had a lot to do to prepare for my patient. I stared out the window at the De Beers diamond-shaped building and the Market Theatre's cobblestone square, thinking back to the Saturday market that was there years early on Saturdays.

*"It's very important to clean out. It's your own job to clear away those things. We must give time in this way. Go out and talk to the plants, ask them: 'How should I handle you?' They will tell you and then take them home to prepare them. Then, once you cook them, then, you talk to them, little by little if you are sick, and more if you are stronger. These plants, they know how to clean themselves; they live stronger each day, or they die. Their blood must be pure.*

*People, ha, people now! Their blood is sick and weak. Most of the people, they are like this. This is why they have too many sicknesses. It's the weak*

*blood. So, what to do? Make it stronger. Feed it with those plants that already clean themselves. Every day they do this, and when the times change, they know how to go with this too. Cleaning away and making stronger. This is our medicine. So, simple, so easy. You know?!*

*Ha, even the people who know don't do this, must get everything working nicely. Then we are okay for the world. For all the things, we do. We can; it's no problem. Collect the wood, drive, and put the water here and there. Prepare all the things for the patients. Yeah, you have everything going, ready! Ha, that other one talked about being ready [she says referring to another ancestor]. Yes! We are this way. Always we are this way. Ready!*

*I don't like sweets, never. Not good for the blood. The meat is good, but not the one you eat now; agh, no taste, empty beasts. Those beasts should eat the same plants you do. It was like this. Yes, not everyone, but many. We shared our food. We knew what they eat and we do, too.*

*Ha, now! The food: you cannot eat that food you get. Oh, it looks so nice, but it's covered in the spray, the one like the spider sprays [referring to a poisonous substance]. This you cannot eat. No way! But this thing is on all the food. It doesn't come from even the earth that you stand on!*

*The beasts! They eat even worse. It's not food. Not for people or beasts. Then you eat this too from them. Ugh! Too terrible. I am sorry, this isn't*

*right. This is no good. Our food that had rotted was better than what you eat now. Even those who will never go hungry, eat these things.*

*These ones tending to the beasts; shame, they are working and seeing this. They can taste the changes in their mouths. They just do their best, that's all.*

*So, when you ask: 'Why is this one sick? Why is this hurting?' Ha, you must know the real truth. Those plants; you can drink them and eat them. Even with this spray, more deadly than the one from that insect (which cannot be seen, but kills anyone), that plant can clean itself, and it will clean you too. I promise you that!"* Ama J Sept 1, 2014.

**Chapter Fourteen – Digging for *Muthi:* Cold Orange Fanta and a Double Homicide**

As David and I drove back to the farm, I recalled my trip with *Baba* to Mpumalanga to dig for *muthi*. At the time, a small article had appeared in the Sowetan, then The Star, increasing some fascination along with more patients at *Babas.* We needed large amounts of medicine for the growing clinic. I had been thrilled when *Baba* told me we were going to Komatipoort to collect medicine. I wanted to understand the process of harvesting as well as meeting other *thwasana*. I had also heard how hard it was to train in rural areas. I had grown accustomed to the urban training process. I was grateful that I didn't have to collect water from great distances, gather and chop wood, or be confronted by dangerous snakes and animals in the bush. I did, however, deal with different threats in the form of *tsotis's,*

crime, pollution, noise, rubbish, urban poverty, violence and disparity; of course, my socio-economic trials were short lived.

I wanted the chance to experience a rural healing setting, both romanticizing and fearing the unfamiliarity. There were practical concerns as well; I had struggled so much with health problems since our lengthy hitchhiking trip, and I still carried tourist-type fears when travelling. I didn't feel immunized against danger or illness and was still trying to grasp the importance of ancestors and how they, along with specific potions, could protect me from harm of all kinds. I had thrown myself into an abyss of cosmological trust, hoping that even though I couldn't fully see, smell, and touch spirit, it was with me in every thought, feeling, and endeavour. It was in these indeterminacies, that a multitude of senses, beyond Western scientific notions of the nervous system, thickened and expanded. *Baba's* eldest son had given us a lift to the railway station in town where we headed under the large blue 'Welcome to Johannesburg Park Station' sign. Making our way through the station I was surprised at the lack of crowds. I supposed it was a weekday and in between commuter times and holidays.

I noticed a small kiosk with toasted cheese sandwiches, 'Russian's', samosas, and *slap* chips. A little girl leaned on the glass, reminding me of *Baba's* granddaughter Pretty. The one side of her hair stood straight up pre-braiding. Her mother chatted to the kiosk vendor while the child stared at me from behind her mother's *seshweshwe,* using the traditional skirt to hide her face. Occasionally she peeked out from behind the blue cotton, each time catching my eye, making me smile and chuckle.

"Pretty!" exclaimed her mother looking down at her.

She replied: "Mama *bheka*, look!"

Her mother turned to me "*Hawu!*" she said in disbelief.

"*Bheka* man," she said, poking the chubby kiosk keeper, distracting him from a fistful of v*etkoek.*

"*Yom'lungu*, can't be!" she exclaimed.

"*Eish mara,* Wow, but…" he replied.

I continued staring at Pretty and motioned for her to come over and greet me. She smiled softly and shook her head. Her mother and the kiosk man continued speaking in Xhosa about me.

"Is she a *thwasana*?" asked the woman.

"Can't be, but look she's wearing the beads, and the ochre on her body; look, lady," replied the *indoda*.

I looked over to see *Baba* chatting with a cleaner about where to catch the Komati Express; she motioned for me to quickly follow them.

"*Nomadlozi,* let's go. Why are you standing, *Mma? Let's* go! *Hamba thwasa,*" she said loudly.

"Hey, *Gogo!*" shouted out the kiosk man, "Is this your *thwasana*, this white woman?"

"*Yebo,*" *Baba* replied.

"*Nomadlozi*, *woza* man," she said, this time uninterested in the potential client.

—

The train ride was long. David and I had travelled upon many trains throughout the area. We were used to cooking, cleaning clothes, and keeping ourselves entertained on long train journeys. It felt unusual not having him with me.

The ride was quiet until a few young people greeted us. A middle-aged healer from Thembisa who had been staying at *Baba's* for the last few weeks jumped up with enthusiasm and began dancing along the slim path through the carriage. The whole train started clapping, singing, and cheering her on. Then *Baba* got up and with a furrowed brow stared down the train's occupants.

"*Yo, yo, yo,*" she declared seriously.

Her partner hit a small drum normally used by an Apostolic while a few others hit the worn train seats. *Baba* didn't go into trance. Instead, she puffed herself up as a big *Gobela*, bopped her shoulders to the music, and pointed at the onlookers; followed by clapping and laughing.

Everyone joined in. I was participating, but hoping to nap. No such luck. Waking at various times of the night for ritual emetics, washes, and to pray, had left me exhausted. *Baba* pushed me forward: "*Ha, gida thwasa, gida*!" she bellowed.

I began dancing. The drums and playfulness of the scene didn't invoke the ancestors; instead, I enjoyed the lightheartedness. The three dubious characters eyeballing me at the

onset of the trip were laughing and joining in. Before doing the electric slide, I busted out a few ole' school 80s moves, until eventually collapsing with laughter.

"*Eish* but *Mma*, you can dance ney?!" said the single brown-toothed *Isangoma* from Thembisa.

The dancing went on for another two hours with the healers as the observers watching some of the young people mock *Izangoma* going into spirit. Others were gumboot dancing, slapping their legs, and stomping their feet, swaying with the jarring train.

We arrived late at night and were ushered into the hut adjacent to the *indumba*, a proper thatched rondavale where *thwasana* were going into spirit preparing to greet us. It was beautiful to watch them dancing in the candlelight; their mid-length dreadlocks covered in *ibomvu* and bottle-can-top anklets, rattling with every step.

I was tired; we had been on the road since 4:30 a.m. and had been travelling for what felt like ten hours. Somehow the drums and singing stirred an *iDlozi*. It didn't matter that I couldn't see in the dark, or that I didn't know where I was. My home was with the ancestors. They were always present, embodied and working through me.

After the ancestors greeted everyone, the students went to the kitchen to get us food. We enjoyed run-aways, chicken feet stew and creamy pap until *Izangoma* went to talk and sleep in the main house. The *thwasana* slept cosily on mats on the *indumba* floor. I felt good being with other students, knowing they were going through what I was going through. I didn't know where I was or how long I would be there, but the smell of medicine, a vanishing fire, and a candle burning down made me feel at home.

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The next day, after a long trek into the bush, *Baba's* boyfriend said: "You see *Nomadlozi*, when you look out at the bushveld, there," he said pointing to the vast terrain, "there is medicine; it's all medicine. Ha, this is the *Sangoma's* chemist, right here, *sisi*."

"Wow, so true," I replied.

"Um hum, everything, you see, in the ground, on the trees, covering the bushes, is medicine. You just have to know," he said, pointing to his head while throwing the heavy bag filled with medicine over his shoulder.

I was mesmerized by the bush in a way I had never experienced before. I could 'smell' the usage of every plant, root and bark. I could see almost with x-ray vision, the blood that ran through the veins of each leaf. I watched as they surrendered to the heat, absorbing only what they needed. Each living thing was communicating through the earth, air and, imperceptible precipitation. The living medicine was magic; I was no alchemist. I was their disciple. My breathing was sloppy, and my movements clumsy. I wasn't a graceful hopping gazelle, or perfect in tune dung beetle, but somehow, I was still in sync with nature. I was distinctly aware of being a creature. How wrong my elementary school teachers had been teaching me that 'man' was at the top of the ecosystem.

"Yeah we teach you *Mma;* you learn everything and can be *sorted*. *Madlozi* will show you too. Me, I learn through my *Baba.* But, my *umkhulu*, hey, he was a powerful *inyanga, eish;* he learned only through dreams. Early he'd get up and get the *muthi,* come home and treat

the patients. They would be lined up around the house maybe two times; some lying down too sick to sit or stand," he explained.

We made our way down the hill, everyone at their own pace. My sweaty thighs stuck together as I carried the empty water containers and smaller tools through the pathless bushveld hoping not to meet any dangerous snakes. It was past midday and I had no more water in my body to sweat out. I daydreamed about a cold orange Fanta, but suspected a tepid drink of water or hot rooibos tea might be awaiting us. I was as thirsty as the dry bush around me. I was exhausted even though I hadn't worked half as hard as everyone else.

I had picked some *fembo* leaves from a large bush, carefully removing them to avoid encountering any unknown insects or green mambas. I had also used the *panga* for a short time to collect *ingwavuma*, but struggled to find the technique or a sensitive enough hand to cut the bark without killing or seriously damaging the tree. I had also insisted on using the shovel to dig for bulbs and roots but quickly learned that trying to prove myself as equally capable and strong, was a waste of time. I had to face the reality that I was rather wimpy compared to the much older *Izangoma* who possessed greater strength, technique, and endurance.

*Baba* and the healers had been very chatty; sharing their knowledge about the medicine. One of the other barriers was language. I watched and listened as much as I could to understand the use of each twig and branch and the ailments they cured, but I had become reliant on the transmission of knowledge through paper and pen and wished I had something with which to write. All the healers were happy despite being exhausted. Living

in ‘the location’ didn't allow for many treks for medicine; not only that but in town medicine was expensive, often old and not necessarily obtained from the best sources.

Sweat dripped into the small grazes and cuts on my ankles and toes, stinging with each step down the steep hill. Reaching the bottom, I noticed a small *spaza*. "*Gogo*, can we stop for a short time?" I asked, exhausted from the heat and nine hours of collecting *muthi*.

"*Yebo Mma*, but just a short time. We need to get back and prepare things," she replied, as perspiration fell from her brow onto the ground and were quickly absorbed into the thirsty earth.

I rummaged around in my bra to discover a five Rand bill. I worried that I’d get in trouble with *Baba* for buying a cool drink because of protocol, or even because everyone wasn't offered. But thirst made me take the risk.

"*Thokoza gogo,* want a Fanta?" I asked

"Sprite, *Mma,*" she replied without dispute.

I scurried into the shop, joyous to discover a small fridge filled with Sprite, Pine nut, Iron Brew, Coke, and Fanta, both orange and grape! The young shop attendant could barely take the sweat-soaked money or give me change. He knew what I was, and what I was doing there. I took my change, respectfully handed *Baba* her drink, and then knelt, in keeping with *thwasa* protocol, and chugged the neon sugar drink. After a huge belch, the shopkeeper and I said simultaneously, "M-a-k-h-o-s-i!" to show respect for the ancestors.

When we got back to *Baba’s* friends, we emptied the bags. We quickly washed all the medicine thoroughly because the water was only available for two hours per day. Then,

using a large iron cylinder with a thick iron rod and lots of elbow grease, we stomped the *muthi.* Once it was crushed we let the hot winter sundry the herbs, until once more we pulverized the plants. With a traditional basket, we strained the herbs and then continued the whole process. We did this until the medicine was powdered.

After a few days, the medicine was ready to be put into bags and bottles and equally distributed amongst the hardworking healers. Throughout the process, we helped *Baba's Isangoma* friend with throwing the bones for patients. It was helpful to have us there, especially for the bigger jobs.

One early evening we heard a sudden bang. I had lived in Johannesburg long enough to know it wasn't a car tire popping, but a gunshot.

Bang! Another one. It was loud and very close by, closer than I had ever heard a gunshot.

*Baba* and the other healers leaned out the door to find the same quiet rural scene with undisturbed chickens and no kafuffle. Stepping out, I slowly followed behind, and then opted to stay under an *umunga* tree beside the main house.

They walked up the dirt road to see what was happening and were gone for at least an hour. I sensed someone had died, maybe two people. I made another trip to the long-drop. I had had diarrhoea since I'd arrived. I'd given up trying to drink filtered water and just took what I could get. The result was a non-stop runny tummy. *Baba's* friend had given me an *imbiza* that had been working; working at getting out whatever was in my digestive tract. *Pansi, phezulu*, down and up to the loo all day!

"What happened?" I asked.

"*Ag* man, this guy shot his girlfriend and then shot himself," said *Baba's* boyfriend.

"Really? Just now?" I asked.

"Now now," said *Baba.*

"*Ukuphi*?" I asked.

"Just there, *Nomadlozi," Baba's* boyfriend said, pointing to the end of the property.

"Right there?" I asked in disbelief, as the healers ignored my questions and went into the *indumba* to finish their beading and their heated discussion about the latest Truth and Reconciliation Commission case being aired on SABC.

"*Thokoza Baba,*" I said, stepping into the *indumba.*

"Shouldn't we *pahla* for those people?" I asked.

She shrugged.

I took the snuff and *impepho* and went to the tree and prayed for the young dead couple. I sat for a while listening to the chatter and laughter pondering how the healers could be so detached from what had happened. After all, they had seen the young people's bodies, oozing with avoidably-spilt blood.

I went back into the *indumba* where it was clear that I was upset.

"*Ag* shame; you sad, *Ribbs*?" asked *Baba*.

"*Thokoza Baba*, *yebo, wena*?" I asked.

"Me? Hey, it's life. This is life for us. What can we do?" she said.

**Chapter Fifteen – Teach Them to Remember**

*"It wasn't long ago that our food was medicine. It nourished and fed us while also treating and preventing sickness. It wasn't simply that we followed a specific guide of instructions. Each culture varies, each geographic location differs, and we followed the food of our area. Our people learned what fruit, vegetables and plants they could eat. They didn't do this so much through trial and error as they did through being guided.*

*People could talk and listen to plants and animals, as well as all of earth's living things. Everyone, or most people, connected to the earth below their feet, the sky above the heads, and the sun or moon. This is why worship of earth was prevalent.*

*Eventually, this intuitive interaction became encompassed in culture, traditions, and society. There was never an early identification of 'I wonder why I can talk and hear plants and animals?' This ability was innate. It was as common as eating, sleeping and so on.*

*God was not a single entity, understood by strict laws, rules, and repercussions. God didn't have a single name, for a single almighty force. God was a force alive in everything, both positive and negative, life-giving, and death-causing. Interaction with God was made through the tangible:*

*earth, moon, water, trees, animals, etc. as well as the intangible, or unseen. One didn't need to see to believe because one knew, not because he or she was told to believe and comprehend, but because it was felt, lived, and experienced through both practical and ritualistic means.*

*The rituals and ceremonies were not just used as a way of making the mundane, supermundane, or to bring meaning to life and death. Rituals and ceremonies were performed and invoked at every turn, as a way of deepening a force within and without, a way to build strength. Therefore, people were not only prized for physical capabilities, but for maintaining an ongoing and strong connection with a cosmological force wherever possible. This connection was seen to empower and strengthen individuals, families, and communities, as well as the earth and force itself.*

*Both force and people nourished simultaneously. Food was not fuel. The act of collecting and preparing food was part of this communication. Getting food near the water, in the water, on the mountains, and so on, created a place and time for communication, so people could connect with the source of their food. The source ultimately connected to the force. These connections were so strong that people would share their knowledge and interactions, contributing to a tangible and intangible knowledge, a*

*knowledge which would reinforce the group. Our food was medicine; we understood the source and understood the connection of all things with the source.*

*This is how God, as you call it, was lived and celebrated every day. We didn't worry about many things that you do today. Many of these things didn't exist, and many things wouldn't have crossed our minds.*

*Death was a celebration. It meant a person's strength would be reinforced. They would return to the source, and their force strengthened in death. Sometimes we felt limited in our bodies but knew the limitlessness of our spirits. We didn't call it a spirit. We never dissected the idea of a body, mind, and spirit. These things were all extensions of the force. We knew their limitations and their power. We respected this. We knew that we were limitless. We didn't fear achievement or reach for success. We created grand celebrations, ruins, as you call them, as an extension of the force.*

*You see, we never saw ourselves as alone, as individuals, making our way in the world. The idea of this surely leads to isolation and death. One cannot survive alone. We are dependent on each other in every way. Why? Because we are part of a larger source which we cannot fathom. We cannot imagine borders; it is infinite. This is why we welcomed people*

*different to us into our communities; people of different nations, some from near, some from far. We didn't see a distinction; it was a chance to learn, to comprehend what they had learned from the cosmology and its source. Even in difficult times, times we got sick and died, times we were alone.*

*But we never felt alone, never, because we never detached ourselves from what you call God. Now people are polluting the sources; they don't understand the force which lives within. They have fallen asleep and awaken to forgetting everything, seeming to know nothing. But they aren't like children who have what you call an 'instinct'; they can't even communicate with sources. All senses have shut down. We aren't even asleep because when we sleep we dream. Many don't even dream anymore, don't imagine. Imagination is part of the force. It is through imagination borders and limits are crossed, and a true sense of energy, or knowledge, is attained.*

*Imagination doesn't live in the mind; remember there is no distinction. Maybe the making of this distinction is what has helped people forget! 'Teach them to remember', cry out the spirits of those who have been forgotten. The force hasn't gone anywhere, it hasn't changed, it just isn't strengthening people in the way that it should. People are not being fed or feeding it. Anything ignored can become erratic or piled up. Its strength,*

*power, and willingness are unchanged, but we have forgotten to access it. We no longer use the rituals to remind us. We have disregard for the sources."* Ancestor's name withheld, August 24, 2014.

*"It is the energy that will guard you. We didn't wonder: 'Who can we trust?' No, we had to survive and live together. We relied on each other, each sunrise and each sunset. In this way, we took care. They become a danger to themselves and each other. They are alone in a wilderness; they have not met before. This is how we are compromised; our very living at risk.*

*When I was a child, we swam together in the water every day after schooling. It cleaned us of the day and the known. I knew in that fast running water that I would be safe. Partly because a long life had been seen when I arrived. But more because my brothers were there to pull me down and lift me up when the current caught me by surprise, and I struggled. This wasn't that strange word, you call 'trust'. It was living together. Not helping, just living.*

*The people forget this. Forget that way to travel. When you wake up and when you walk out of your house. You can know you are living. You are travelling together. When those ones forget, show them, and when they are*

*too dangerous because even their parents forgot, take them to the unknown wilderness, where they can wander for answers."* "Great Grandfather's" teacher or elder, Sept 11, 2014.

*"These are things that we didn't see. We come through this way. You believe it is coming through your thinking [referring to spirit], but it isn't. You see the ancestors come through into the healer and even the people. It isn't for special people. It's for all the people. My people, we dance and we move. We don't stop; this keeps the ancestors in us all the time. That's good, keeping you busy. Your people go against those ancestors, and that busy is lost or 'crazy', as you call it. We keep busy with all the things, from here to there.*

*These powerful ones that I told you about, they come in special ways. They are strong and can't just come in. They are called. We praise them. Our people are busy and talking too. Our language is medicine made by those powerful ones. When we talk in that way, they like that we are alive.*

*Nothing goes. We aren't alone in this way. You are writing. You are putting these things down for me. You are like those words that carry things. You carry this. Our people don't just talk about these things. We know it, so we don't talk like this. I'm talking like this now because this is*

*the way <u>these</u> people understand! The words can fall away too. This is how we have to be direct in showing.*

*They can go to the place [land]; our place is best. There are places everywhere they can praise those powerful ones. It takes time; maybe even their children's children because everyone is sleeping. The cord is weak. On the seventh, you will make a small feast. Take those learning to the forest and to see the mountains too. Call all the powerful ones. Then share the food and eat there. Those powerful ones like to see the people eat. We always want the water and sometimes milk. It is our treat. Don't bake; those things hurt insides.*

*Play that drum and the people must dance outside. Then they feel they are alive. That dream is showing you, showing you how to go forward and how to get away. Call that lion for the other ancestor. He will come in you. Keep it close but still not too close. They can eat you! Believe me, we have lost people to those creatures. The lion, the whale, the small bug, and the vulture are special to us. I never saw the whale; my people dreamed of it. You saw the whale, now lion.*

*The snake is inside us. It sleeps until it jumps up, right across, and out of our head! Then we are alive. You need these things to feel alive and to get sickness out. That's how we do this.*

*You can't have my name yet. Our words are not just words, and names not just names. You don't understand. On the third day, you will use that burned medicine for the body. All the way down on your chest and back. I will show you tonight.*

*Some of those people there, they don't know. They hide and you can't see them. Many things are there but can't be seen. Not lost, not lost. Finding the way back. Powerful one told you: 'You are home now.' You remember?"*

Ancestor's name unknown. Female of Khoi/San heritage, October 12, 2014.

https://sp.depositphotos.com/search/sketch-of-goat.html?qview=47156489

# PART TWO

## *Ibomvu,* Red

### Chapter Sixteen – A Chance Meeting with a Pipe Smoking Nuclear Physicist in Calcutta

My practice was picking up, and although I sought guidance from a few elders, I didn't have a *gobela.* I had to once again put my trust, faith, and control in the hands of the ancestors. Increasingly I had very ill patients, young and old with similar symptoms: coughing, extreme fatigue, weight loss, aches and pains which seemed symptomatic of the endless flu, as well as diarrhoea, and most importantly, a slight hue in the eyes. It wasn't a yellowish or reddened eyeball that I would become accustomed to seeing in some People Living with HIV, it was more of a shadowy foreboding; a foreign illness with seemingly inert capabilities: AIDS.

I could see all of this in a person's gaze, as could many *Izangoma*, but I never told folks what I saw, I only suggested counselling and testing. In fact, training and facilitation of HIV pre-and post-test counselling were becoming increasingly essential as an *Isangoma.*

From the failed efforts of the musical Sarafina 2, with the advent of more public HIV/AIDS prevention campaigns such as Lovelife, and failed Virodene drug trials, HIV/AIDS were undoubtedly becoming a national crisis. With an increase in people seeking my services, I knew that if I was experiencing an influx of patients with HIV and AIDS-related symptoms, it had to be the same for the hundreds of thousands of traditional healers all over the country. My motivation towards greater social justice and action was unequivocal.

I wasn't directly impacted by the virus socio-economically or otherwise, I was white and privileged with the option to emigrate like so many white middle and upper-class residents. I didn't see South Africa as home in the sense that "this is where I live now" or, "we all come from Africa, so this is technically everyone's origin…", a racist notion which ultimately negates the experiences of those that have had to leave the continent or been forcibly removed from their ancestral lands. I had, however, in becoming *Isangoma*, found a spiritual birthplace, not to mention that this was the country in which I had become a woman, an adult. I had come to innately feel the ebbs and flows of the earth. I too was nourished and 'mercy-ed' by the penetrative sun. The connection and interchange (sometimes unavoidable), with the country`s trials and narratives, somehow allowed me to surpass my road rage, apathy, or hopelessness. I learned to breathe, see, hear, live and understand, to do *otherwise*. I had begun to understand the profound notions of *Ubuntu,* and in my awakened state of grasping human-ness, togetherness, I discovered a love that seemed impossible to have a place and its peoples. It was a love that didn't need to be proclaimed or shared; a love so profound that there was space for complaints, frustration, and bewilderment. Even the days I hated living in South Africa; when I went somewhere

else, I longed for those bad days. I felt the pull to give back even in some minuscule way, what the land, communities and ancestors had given to me. I also knew my calling involved social justice and an imminent contribution to the country's obvious challenges, which included: limited housing, a newly-adopted constitution, violence (structural as well), unemployment, land reforms, pending elections, and other critical social, economic, and political transformations.

With the reconstruction of South African legislation, traditional healers and medicine fell under a new spotlight and was finally establishing a rightful place in broader health discourses in the country. Traditional healers had embodied leadership roles in resisting colonial and Apartheid subjugation through their healing practices and more recently, through mobilization, and establishing relevant education, care and support initiatives. Now traditional healers, or traditional health practitioners, as they would soon be known, were called from all over the country to assist the government in developing a traditional health practitioner's bill.

After attending my first in a series of meetings, it was clear that traditional healers would no longer be treated as they had by colonial and Apartheid governments as obscure, evil, witches, and sorcerers who had faced legal implications if they "professed or pretended to use any supernatural power, witchcraft, sorcery, enchantment or conjuration." (The Witchcraft Suppression Act of 1957, 1). The budding interim council for the new bill sought (in cooperation with traditional healers) to provide regulation, control, registration, and relevant training related to traditional healing and medicine.

The hope for many healers, in the beginning, was that traditional healers would finally come to be known as the community knew them: trusted, worthy, acceptable, accessible, competent, and valued health practitioners, as well as upholders of cultural values, beliefs, and principles. Some however, disfavoured governmental regulation and saw the efforts as part of hierarchical power structures, a kind of laboratory of power to produce homogenous effects (Foucault, 200), where traditional healing and medicine would simply be a pawn for governmental deflections (as some felt was the case with the growing HIV/AIDS treatment issue).

Conferences, symposiums and greater efforts to improve cross-sectoral communication were burgeoning throughout the country. I had been assisting an organization whose focus was on HIV/AIDS education and training, predominantly in the mining industry. I facilitated workshops for mine management, who were predominantly older rural Afrikaans men. It seemed my whiteness, youth, and 'prettiness' opened a window in their minds to dispel myths about African ideologies, medicine, and healing. One man was particularly surprised to find out that followers of traditional South African healing and medicine believe in an omnipotent power.

Soon Eskom and other governmental, the private sector, and even medical establishments asked me to speak on the topic of traditional healing specifically related to HIV/AIDS. These dialogues were synonymous with varied interchanges happening throughout the country.

I joined traditional healing organizations, careful to avoid where possible, politicking and favouritism. My goal was to work co-relationally and to follow the ancestor's guidance in

being a small bridge. I was asked to conduct community-based research in Mpumalanga, to find out both mine workers and residents' reliance and usage of traditional healing and medicine. An unlikely pair, Shaka, a supervisor on the mines and traditional healer himself, and I, set out to do community-based research.

We travelled throughout marginalized black South African spheres, talking to farm workers, hostel dwellers, and sex workers. Me with my long blond hair, *mfisos* and *khanga* flowing in the dry winter wind; Shaka, an aptly-named, almost seven-foot tall balding Zulu man whose ankles hadn't seen a full pant leg since birth. Named after the prestigious king, his gentle but commanding voice and relaxed demeanour made him approachable.

He raced back to his place on weekends to consult with patients in between interviews; his attractive and likewise tall family greeted us as we headed into the *indumba.* Greeting the ancestors, we sat and waited for his wife to bring us tea. I stared at a four-foot long python skin stretched over the wall. Shaka nonchalantly explained how he captured and killed the serpent. I felt drawn to the snake. I explained how I had felt something was missing from my training, specifically with the water spirits, and how I wasn't sleeping, but feeling restless. He explained the process with the water spirits and how they were understood and addressed in Zulu, Xhosa, and Venda culture.

I admired Shaka. Not just for his bravery or commanding stature, but for navigating his life as an *Isangoma* and (albeit better-off) mine supervisor. We had a decent lunch in the cafeteria while management explained their comprehensive HIV/AIDS treatment, care and support programs. Their stories impressed me momentarily, making me almost forget the 125-year history of colonial extrapolation of people and resources; as well as the ongoing

socio-economic and land injustices that were essentially part of the industrial-mining-complex.

After long days interviewing with feeble attempts at report writing, I returned to a slow but steady healing practice. Despite exhaustion, I was becoming increasingly passionate about community work, social justice, and traditional healing. I was excited and humbled after a good friend of mine from the U.S. working with CUSO suggested I apply to the Canadian non-profit development organization and become a co-operant with a local organization.

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Within a few weeks, I was placed at The Palliative Medicine Institute with Selma Browde. Added to her long list of accomplishments, she had been affiliated with the Progressive Party and was a social justice advocate who pushed for electricity in Soweto and campaigned against unlawful urban evictions of people of colour during Apartheid. She also headed the oncology department at Wits University. These were just some of her contributions to the country, along with her equally passionate partner who was a judge.

In her 'retirement' she had founded the institute, and was passionate about extending the conventional concepts of palliative care to pan-palliative care; a multidisciplinary approach including patient`s stories or 'narrative medicine.' The institute established a palliative care team for local hospitals, as well as a training program for biomedical practitioners in palliative care protocols.

I sat in on palliative care training for medical practitioners and assisted in follow-up reviews of the programs in Chris Hani Baragwanath in Soweto, the third largest hospital in

the world. Working in public hospitals was eye-opening. I could see how Apartheid and other forms of systemic inequality had created meagre conditions. Selma`s work was ahead of its time. Focusing on care and support for the living and dying, while urging death with dignity, were her utmost goals.

One afternoon I received an email from an institute in India asking me to speak about traditional healing and HIV and AIDS in South Africa, as well as to receive a health services excellence award. I was pleased and humbled but knew a visit to India was impossible. Selma offered to sponsor me and thought it would be a good opportunity to speak about the institute and palliative care.

Two weeks later I was sitting in a three-star hotel in Calcutta staring out the window at a family who finally had a turn at the crowded water pump. I watched as the slim father pumped vigorously. I had used the murky and unknown particle-filled water a few hours earlier, all the while wondering if it was safe enough to wash in, let alone drink.

The conference was interesting, but not nearly as interesting as Calcutta itself. Fascinating was the overflowing markets, which I felt safe enough to roam around in by myself. I found each trip in the car to and from the conference both harrowing and rousing. Despite the bumper-car style driving, I trusted that the God or Goddess figure on the dashboard with its burning stick of incense would get us to our destination safely.

On Sundays, most things seemed to shut down long enough, for the streets, parks and any space big enough to fill with cricketers. Of course, the poverty was overwhelming,

especially encountering begging children or witnessing whole families, including babies and toddlers, sleeping on busy streets.

I was pleasantly surprised to see arts and culture everywhere I went; books of treasured Indian authors sold by local guys trying to make a buck, and small galleries full to the brim in the middle of the week. I had heard many youths complain about the constant veneration of Indian history and culture which left them wanting to know more about other areas of the world, rather than "living in the past."

I had been almost immediately 'adopted' by a local family who insisted on showing me the sights, along with overfeeding me in their home. They told me that visitors and guests should be cared for like Gods. After a hearty meal of fresh poppadum's, Bengali dishes, freshly squeezed pomegranate juice, and fragranced Sandesh, they were disappointed that I wouldn't check out of my hotel and stay with them for the rest of my visit.

After much persuasion, they hesitantly took me to the Kalighat Kali temple. We took our leather shoes off and walked barefoot to the temple; walking past stalls full of hibiscus flower necklaces and other offerings for the Goddess. Trying to deter me, the duo feared I would be afraid of the crowds, as well as the small goats being dragged to their deaths. Instead, I was amazed to see that the goats were slaughtered in the same way, and for almost the same purposes, as was done in South Africa.

I was quickly ushered, anti-clockwise, past the temple priests and employees to whom I handed a few hundred rupees, then past devotees towards the intense and awe-inspiring

Kali figure. I stood for less than a minute staring at the black mass embodying the divine mother and protector.

And we were hustled and bustled out again. It had been an engaging and discombobulating experience. Much of what my whole trip had been thus far.

The next few days at the conference I met people from all over the world. Tibetan monks, Afghan Sufis, Korean yogi students; all dedicated to traditional knowledge, medicine, and spirituality. I made a Bengali friend who was studying holistic medicine with an affiliated organization, and soon had a glimpse into the caste system when she wasn't permitted to attend certain social affairs.

In between panel discussions, I chatted with an older man who told me that he had worked as a nuclear physicist in South Africa. Between long hauls on his British-style pipe, he shared his fond personal and professional experiences.

"I don't know why I'm telling you this. It probably won't make any sense, but I dreamed over a year ago, about coming to India," I said.

"Oh really. How nice," he said politely.

"Yeah, I ah, dreamed that I was walking up this old cobblestone road and then got to this building. I can still see the sign so clearly. Then I walked in through a large wooden door," I continued, acutely aware of my Canadian accent.

"I was in an open space with many floors, white cloth with blue trimming hanging everywhere. Then I was floating above the roadway where Mother Teresa was standing and beside her an almost equally short woman, also a nun, but with large roundish glasses.

Anyway, no one likes to hear about other people's dreams. It's just that I awoke and told my husband 'Mother Teresa is going to pass,' and then a couple of days later she died," I said.

He pulled on the slightly curved pipe stem; smoke billowed above our heads.

"I just thought it was interesting to dream of that and now find myself here. Anyway, it was very nice talking with you," I said feeling overly chatty.

"Wait," he said touching my arm lightly.

"Can you come with me; can you come somewhere right now?" he asked.

"Now? Well, aren't we supposed to go to the next panel?" I asked uncomfortably.

"Yes, my dear, but this is very important. It's related to your dream. Come, I will bring my car around and take you," he said, motioning towards the door.

"Ah, what about another time?" I said, not sure about getting into a stranger's car.

"It's very important. Please come," he said.

Just then a young Egyptian woman I had befriended came by,

"Uh hi," I said too loudly.

"Hello."

"Aatifah, are you busy?" I asked.

"No just preparing for the talk."

“Ah, this nice man has offered to take me somewhere and well, I want to go but…” I said trying to whisper, “I don’t want to go alone if you know what I mean.”

“Please, you can come together. It’s fine, but let’s go now,” he asserted.

“Ah…” she said.

“Yeah, it should be fine; please will you come?” I asked

“Oh, okay,” she said hesitantly.

We hopped into his kombi and he drove like mad to a destination unknown to us.

Aatifah was quiet.

“Are you okay?” I asked.

“Yes, it’s Ramadan and I just get tired at this time of day. I was actually going to rest when you caught me,” she said.

“Oh sorry, really sorry. Thanks for coming,” I replied.

We didn’t drive for long. The pipe-smoking retired nuclear physicist parked poorly on the street, ignoring the honking cars. Jumping out, he rushed up a side street.

“Okay… this is interesting,” I said warily.

But with each step, I recognized the path. It was the same stone road I had seen in my dream. We walked only a few meters before getting to a set of large wooden doors with a sign above that read: “Missionaries of Charity, Mother House.”

“This is it! This is what I dreamed” I exclaimed.

“Yes, I know,” said the physicist.

**Chapter Seventeen – Question and Answer Period (with a Deceased) Mother Theresa**

“Come, come in,” he said, escorting me into a courtyard. I looked up and saw hundreds of lightly blue trimmed white clothes hanging from the multi-storied building.

“Wow, this is exactly what I dreamed; even the feeling,” I exclaimed.

“Yes, my dear. Now wait here I’ll be back shortly,” he said.

Aatifah found a quiet corner and sat down to rest. Fasting, and the midday heat was making her feel light-headed.

I wandered into a small room, there to discover Mother Teresa’s tomb.

“Wow,” I said while staring at the long marble crypt bearing the inscription: “Love one another as I have loved you,” followed by her name and lifespan dates.

The room was silent; even the heavily-trafficked road seemed distant.

On the walls hung humbly framed pictures of her, and at the front of the room, a medium-sized picture of Jesus with a burning heart.

I stood alongside the tomb and began to pray. We were of a different ilk but her commitment and service to the Catholic faith was overpowering. I suddenly felt light-headed, caught in the traveller’s dream. In an impasse, as a stretch of time that one moves around with a sense that the world is intensely present and enigmatic.

I took a chance and asked, 'Saint Teresa of Calcutta', about my *Sangoma* work.

"*My child, keep God in your heart*," she answered, clearly and unexpectedly.

Despite my absolute contempt for historic and current religious missionization, as well as strong criticism of Catholic and religious 'aid' in communities worldwide; I had deeply connected with Mother Teresa's spirit.

"Oh, you're here," said the smoke-traced physicist, interrupting my interlude with her.

"Yes," I said wiping away tears.

"Oh, so you found Mother."

"Yes, yes I did. Wow," I whispered.

"Wow indeed," he replied.

Suddenly, he pulled a nun from behind a doorway: "Is this her?"

"Hello sister," I said shrugging, "Who?"

"The sister from your dream?" he asked.

"No, no sorry," I said before they disappeared abruptly.

I wandered around in the courtyard enjoying the calming hymns while Aatifah nonchalantly napped in the corner.

He came back down the stairs with another nun.

"Her?" he asked.

“Hello, sister. How are you today?” I asked, embarrassed with the physicist’s abrasiveness.

“No, no. Sorry, it’s not her. You know, don’t even worry about it. Honestly, it’s okay. Just coming here has been amazing,” I said, mortified by our intrusiveness.

“Well, it can only be one other person. We’ll have to wait until she’s done with Sunday service. Maybe, just maybe, she’ll see us, but she’s leaving for Kenya tomorrow, so I don’t know,” he said.

“You spend a lot of time here?” I asked, curious how he could pull nuns from midair during Sunday services.

“Oh yes, Mother knew me a long time. I last saw her a week before she passed,” he said.

“Come,” he said, grabbing my arm and hauling me up the stairs.

On the verge of an asthma attack, he ordered: “Stand here, don’t move.”

“Okay, will do,” I replied.

Then, an older woman, a little taller than Mother Teresa, came through a worn door. She had round largish glasses.

“Oh, it’s her; it’s the nun from my dream,” I blurted out.

“Hello,” she said placidly.

“Hello,” I said, kneeling to touch her feet, a local sign of reverence.

“It is such an honour to meet you. Thank you so much,” I said.

“It’s fine,” she said kindly.

“Tell her,” said the pushy physicist.

“Yes, well I... I dreamed about Mother, and in the dream, I saw you,” I said, as I retold the dream in detail.

“Yes, these visions happen. Many people are brought here like this. Many coming to see Mother,” she said.

“Really?” I asked with surprise.

“Yes, and what she told you today; that is something she would say.”

“Really?” I asked again. *Now,* who was the diviner!

“Please, take this, my dear,” she said, giving me a typed note signed by Mother. It read: “The fruit of silence is prayer. The fruit of prayer is faith, the fruit of faith is love, the fruit of love is service, and the fruit of service is peace”. As well, she gave me what looked like a black Madonna pendant.

“Thank you so much, Sister. May you have a blessed trip,” I said.

She apologized for having to scoot away to pack her modest bag for Kenya.

Making our way down the shaky stairs, I said, “Thank you so much,” to the physicist.

“I knew it was Sister Nirmala, the superior general. We were very lucky to see her; that you got to talk to her and tell her about your dream. What a blessing!” he said.

“Yes, yes it was. The ancestors work in special ways. Imagine! They have people who have visions and make pilgrimages here. Maybe *Izangoma* and nuns aren’t so different after all,”

I said, amused by spirit's sense of humour, and constant reminders that there are no divisions or lines with spirit.

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*"My grandmother had many visitors. She was always busy tending to the fire. In one pot, oh she made delicacies. Even with small familiar things like our potatoes, her food was like from another place. Even the smell, it brought people floating like the wind to her small place.*

*I was always close by her leg, dry and old. She lived very long. She talked of those stories of people coming to our country. She remembered those stories from her grandmother too; all the details of the battles, each mark on the ships. Those that came here changed and some stayed.*

*Her great-grandfather was Portuguese. She said he was a fine man, but when he possessed me [referring to the process of trance], he was demanding and rude.*

*My grandmother not my mother, was my life. I believed that she knew everything or most things. Even when her sight was gone and everything vanished, she knew everywhere too well. She never came to see me when she moved [died], but I always felt her just there, nearby, by my side. Like I was by her when she cared for the fire, and I lived by the cooking pot."* Ama J, July 27, 2014.

*"You are home now. We waited for you. We had the celebration. The ceremony many moons ago, before you had memory. Before, we helped you remember. Do you feel us around you? The council is strong; we have been preparing you for this time. Building and clearing, strengthening and cleansing, coming closer in vision and warmth.*

*Don't forget to trust us. We have been with you since you were a molecule, budding in the universe of your mother's womb.*

*Find the words, our words, not from the dictionary but the ones that hang loosely off of your tongue and heart. The words and ideas will nourish you and others. Words that heal and form, filling your mouth with their soothing warmth. A sweet comforting medicine like that of your mother's milk.*

*Just open your ears to write down what is already said, what has been felt for many generations before you. You are a big fresh leaf, nourished by our knowledge that never ceases to grow. Its roots fed by the cool rainwater. You aren't ready if you save these words, horde them to yourself. Treating them as precious things you own, mined gold. They never belonged to you, they are for sharing.*

*You aren't called once in life. We are called to new things, to extensions of ourselves and universe; called to deepen our connection. Choice is minute. One way or the other, who we are, what we need to know and what we do with our hands and ideas happens. Instantaneously, what we choose are the tools we use; metal, flesh, prayer, or planting. You aren't the only one. Many others feel what they are made of and how to walk for this short time on the old earth.*

*Our emotions left idle can confuse us and redirect us, trick us into looking outside ourselves; we become distracted. Nature's stimulation, both simple and complex is revealing. Being bored, people now turn to distraction, hoping it will occupy and quieten an unmarked restlessness. But it never does, it just feeds that confusion, that insomnia.* Ancestor unknown. Sept. 1, 2014.

**Chapter Eighteen –Government AIDS Clinics, Bacon-Wrapped Scallops, a Glass of Merlot, and other Inequalities**

I entered the hospital doors feeling a winter chill from the drafty old building. Taking a deep breath, I prepared myself for the morning ahead. I weaved in and out of the chemist's line. It seemed to get longer each clinic day; some waiting hours just for vitamin B tablets. I assumed it was month's end and people had transport money to get to the hospital. It may have also been due to the cold weather.

While nothing near Canadian temperatures, South Africa was known to drop to zero, especially in the dry season. There were areas mainly outside of Gauteng, which got a few centimetres of snow every year. Homes were built to be cool, not to contain the warmth. Midday was beautiful though when the bright sun warmed the crisp air. But in the evenings, single pane windows couldn't keep out the Transvaal chill, and by dinnertime, I was hunched over a gas heater wondering: "Is my blood thinner, or am I simply a weather wimp now?"

The cold weather always made me think of *Baba's*, living in the *indumba* beneath a corrugated iron roof with a broken window leading onto the garage; and of the millions of people without sufficient resources coping with cold nights.

Making my way up the ramp, I entered the doors of the Helen Joseph HIV and AIDS clinic. It was already full, and the clinic hadn't officially opened for the day yet. People sat patiently on the long benches waiting to be weighed before seeing the nurse and then the doctor.

The line subsided later when many went into the support group in a nearby room. Helen Joseph was open a couple of days a week and alternated with a few other clinics in the Gauteng area. Between poverty and the winter, people were more susceptible to ailments like pneumonia, and other secondary infections. Under-resourced clinics fragilely provided their services to the growing masses. The clinic had gone from 263 patients in 1992 to 1,837 in 2002. Due to the progression of the epidemic, the medical wards were now full of People Living with HIV and AIDS, using 80-85% hospital bed occupancy (Roberts, 2).

I walked into the clinic area where patients greeted me, some vaguely familiar, others knew more intimately. It had been three months since I had moved from the Palliative Medicine Institute to another community-based organization. There was more to keep me busy as a CUSO co-operant with the expanding non-governmental organization (NGO.) I started off with the NGO by assisting the small income-generating beading initiative for women living with HIV and AIDS; then creating an organizational newsletter, along with packing food parcels for marginalized community members.

Having my own car came in handy when I needed to drive to and from the clinics with packed-to-the-brim food parcels. Whenever I got pulled over for speeding, I only received a scolding from the police and sometimes even had an inquiry about the clinic's hours and services. The NGO provided pre-and post-HIV test counselling, baby formula, gently used clothes, transport money and food parcels for Jo-burg Gen, Baragwanath and Helen Joseph hospitals. Like most community-based organizations, they were underfunded and ran mainly on the dedication of valued volunteers.

"*Makhosi!* Are you going to the group, or helping out here, *Mma*?" asked one of the volunteers.

"Uh, let me speak to Jan and find out what she wants," I replied.

Douglas nodded and waved a thinning young woman forward. She stepped onto the scale and he moved the metal cursor and marked her weight loss on the chart.

"Less?" she asked in Zulu.

"*A-a Mma,*" he replied.

“Only .5 k.g. since last.”

Gently holding her fragile forearm, Douglas assisted her back to her seat.

Oral thrush, diarrhoea, loss of appetite, and compromised nutrition were some of her increasing concerns.

Leaning in, I asked Doulas quietly, “How are you?”

“Okay, *Makhosi*. Just headaches,” he replied.

“From the ARV’s?” I inquired.

”*Yebo;* it’s been just over a month with the drugs."

“Okay, so the side effects might improve?”

“*Yebo, Mma,*” he replied.

Douglas looked well. He had gained weight since the last time I saw him, but he seemed puffier and his eyes bloodshot. Despite his own HIV status, he was fortunate enough to have access to medication through a clinical trial. It was a real challenge getting it for him, but he was resolute in finding and taking them.

He had been a volunteer at the clinic for some time; twice a week he was weighing, pre-and post-HIV test counselling and providing support and encouragement to patients. He was smart, an exceptional twenty-something-year-old man. Originally from Zimbabwe, he was unable to get work due to lack of education and worsening health. With no family and few friends in South Africa, he had to care for himself, physically, emotionally, and psychologically. Despite monthly moves from one dingy room to the next in Hillbrow, no

family to stay with, as well as coping with the virus himself, he managed to get to the clinic twice a week to provide encouragement and care to those worse off. He had a soft and compassionate nature but was also an activist who spoke out about being tested and about the importance of prevention.

Many men of his demography lived in denial, not wanting to deal with the reality of the virus; many not protecting themselves or their partners. HIV and AIDS still carried a tremendous stigma. It wasn't just AIDS denialism though; AIDS in South Africa was an embodiment of a complicated and unparalleled history. Poverty, unemployment, countless funerals, and chronic illnesses were ravaging communities; the legacy of colonization and Apartheid. It wasn't apathy. Life and living often meant hardship; "What can we do? This is life for us," as *Baba* had once said.

Douglas, like many activists, was a beacon of courage, strength and hope. In addition to poverty, lack of education, and being HIV positive, he had to deal with mounting xenophobia. Many South Africans resented the recent influx of Zimbabwean emigrants. Despite this, Douglas remained grateful for basic medication and the loving, caring team at the clinic.

"Hi, Jan!" I said enthusiastically.

"Oh, Hi Rebecca," she said, busily working on her out-dated computer.

"I, uh, I'm just, uh, there is…uh. I'm submitting a form for an award," she continued.

"Oh really, what kind of award?" I asked cheerily.

“It’s an international agency offering awards for excellence in care. If we get it, it could mean 50,000 Rand.”

“Wow, 50,000 Rand could come in useful around here...medication and…” I said, unnecessarily listing its potential uses.

“Oh no, we can’t use it for treatment; mainly for equipment and maybe home-based care. I mean, it isn`t millions, which is what we need but…, *yawh* there is another proposal I am working on which is much more than that. We won it a few years back. It wasn’t much then, but now it would be great,” said Jan.

Jan wasn`t just a nurse, she ran the clinic. She was the go-to-person for everything. I wondered if she had a home and if she ever slept there. I imagined her curled up sleeping in hardened bodily fluids on a decrepit hospital bed. She always looked tired. I never heard her laugh or smile, not because she was unhappy, but because she didn`t have time. She was on the frontlines.

We didn’t hear the patient standing in the doorway.

“*Mma, mma,* Sister Jan,” she called out.

Without turning, Jan waved the woman into the nurse’s station.

“Lindiwe, come, sit,” she said.

“*Dumela Mma,*” Lindiwe said greeting me.

“I don’t understand these tablets, Sister. How often must I take them?” she asked.

“Oh, two tablets, twice a day Lindi,” Jan replied.

“But I took this last time and I still have this rash and the headaches. I wanted something for the chest pain, too. Every day the cough is worse; at night, no sleep from coughing,” she said, holding her chest.

“Lindi, we can’t give you more pills until the tests come back. We need to know if it is pneumonia, TB, or the flu.”

“*Eish,* I am feeling worse,” said Lindiwe, crying and wiping her tears on her threadbare sleeve. Her youth was enveloped in a sick and ageing body, her pocked skin reddened with tears, and thinning hair neatly combed back into a micro ponytail. Jan reached out and put her hand on Lindiwe's arm; skin and bones.

“I know, Lindi,” she said.

“Now I have to get to Orange Farm to get my child. My mother can’t help care for him anymore because she must go to Orlando to care for my sister. I have no money to get back, and I am too sick to care for my child,” she said, taking a tissue from Jan.

“Is there someone there who can help?”

“*Agh* no, my brother stays there, but he can’t help. He is too busy at the taverns.”

“Okay,” Jan responded, slowly searching for a solution.

“If I go to Orange Farm I am too far from the clinic,” said Lindiwe hopelessly.

“If we give you enough taxi money there and back, can you sort something out?” Jan asked.

“I don’t know Sister. I just don’t know,” she said, lowering her head.

“These headaches, *eish,”* she said, holding her forehead in pain.

“I can get you some Panado for the headache. How about the taxi money to get to your child?” asked Jan.

“That clinic in Orange Farm is no good,” said Lindi.

“Listen, I will give you the name of a good doctor there. I will let them know you are coming and ask them to see how they can help. I know there is a good group that way who are helping HIV positive mothers. Come back today at four and I will give you the taxi money and the details. Okay, Lindi?” asked Jan.

“Okay *Mma, dankie,*" she replied.

Sister Jan not only fulfilled her nursing duties but also wrote proposals and organized whatever she could, to help whoever she could. If she couldn't rustle up taxi money or use the coin box, she gave from her own *handsak*. Jan seemed removed and thick-skinned, but she was extremely sensitive, compassionate, and committed.

When Lindiwe left after taking over-the-counter headache tablets, Jan said: "It’s hard to tell she's thirty weeks pregnant, hey?"

"Wow, I hadn’t noticed," I replied.

And so. the day began; Tuesday and Thursday clinic days.

"Oh, by the way, there were two women from Meadowlands here to see you, but they said they'd come back next week for counselling and *muthi,*" said Jan.

"Oh, okay. Was it important? Is there a way I can reach them?" I asked.

"No, they are here almost every week, these two sisters. They'll be back. You can help them then," she said.

Getting into my car, I thought of Lindiwe. I couldn't possibly understand the reality of her life—living with a CD4 count of seven, a very high viral load, and opportunistic infections. She had a child she could barely care for and another on the way. She was unemployed and too sick to work.

My life was a stark contrast to the lives of most South Africans. I lived in the northern suburbs, was relatively safe, and had a fridge full of food, a loving and non-violent partner, and a supportive family. On top of that, I got to enjoy fine dining and seeing a movie once a week at Rosebank or Hyde Park. We vacationed in Umhlanga Rocks and were willing to pay exorbitant prices for poorly made, imported clothes.

I lived in an upper echelon of society, which made me feel increasingly uncomfortable. Sometimes when David and I would go out for dinner with his family, I would recognize the waiter from the clinic. The rich seafood linguine and pricey merlot gave me indigestion even before I had started eating it. It was the same people that served the wealthy fine cuisine that ate *chuck* meat in the back kitchen; who often had their tips stolen by the owner, and always earned inadequate wages.

My time as a *thwasa* in Dlamini was only temporarily challenging. I was white, educated and Canadian, but knowing the struggles the waiter faced, prevented me from having an emotional removal that often comes with white privilege. An out-of-sight, out-of-mind mentality or justification: *At least the person has work*, was a common attitude.

I had woken up to my part in the stark contrasts of those that struggle to survive, and those that thrive from unequal access to education and resources. I was no longer in denial. I was not an observer, or ignorant of the white-saviour complex. I couldn't just shake my finger at others. I was complicit in the imbalances of equality.

I began placing 'my lifestyle' under scrutiny. Everything seemed excessive: two-ply toilet paper, filling a bath, wanting to earn more, and complaining about being too full. It was all hypocrisy wrapped in gratuitous liberties, like the bacon-wrapped fresh scallops I had as a starter, the night before.

Staring at our obliging waiter, his subservience being, the sign of a 'good worker, I became overly appreciative and polite, to the point of being patronizing. Another sure sign of white guilt. I couldn`t differentiate 'my normal' after working in the clinics. I was increasingly enraged by how little was being done to address the epidemic sweeping through the country. Jam Alley and other youth-centred shows continued focusing on fun and minutia. Not enough was being said, or done, in a country that had gone from HIV rates of 12.9% in 1999 to 19.9% in 2001, and growing (Annan, 2). The word 'genocide', was being used by some activists for the HIV/AIDS crisis.

"How can they air these oblivious radio shows and TV shows; it's like nothing`s happening! People are dying in the hundreds of thousands a year; all these young people. There`s only Lovelife campaigns and what seems like half-hearted attempts to convince

people to use condoms. Jesus, every day there`s a battle at the clinics, nevermind in people`s homes and families.

Remember the man I was telling you about, who started coming to the support groups and making big behavioural changes? He died last week. His wife, fourteen-year-old son and two-year-old daughter left behind, probably HIV positive too!" I harangued to David on date nights.

Sometimes I went home and slept for hours, other days I went into my *indumba* and cried and prayed, and then cried and prayed some more. Each day a growl against injustices grew into a roar. I walked around with constant nausea; a curdled taste in my mouth, along with a feeling of powerlessness. Where was the government? Where was the world? Or were marginalized people of colour just not important enough to save.[9]

After delivering food parcels, discussing much-needed resources and fundraising ideas, I left the overflowing clinic and headed over to Jo-burg Gen., an even more overcrowded and busy hospital.

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[9] In the early 1990s when South Africa's Themba Lethu clinic could only treat HIV/AIDS patients for opportunistic diseases, many would enter in wheelchairs and continue to do so until they died. South Africa has since increased the national programme which has led to more than one million patients in 2010 on treatment. It is the largest HIV treatment programme in the world (Brennan, Fox, Long, MacLeod, Majuba, MacPhail, Maskew, Sanne, and Westreich, 2012).

Most of my tasks consisted of creating a monthly newsletter, packing and delivering food parcels, and pre-and post-test HIV counselling; but the patients having caught wind of my being *Isangoma*, utilized my healing services too.

I'd sit in the support groups, provide culturally-appropriate counselling, and even *izimbiza* to patients. Some of the doctors showed disdain for my presence and practices, even those from varying African diasporas, but they nonetheless agreed to have me there. Some of the nurses, doctors and social workers sought my assistance, or at least respected traditional healing; those that didn't still understood that many patients valued traditional healing and medicine over biomedicine.

**Chapter Nineteen –Legacies of Prophecies**

*"When I was a child and even when the flows came, I also drank from those waters. In the cities; never to drink there. By our huts even near the cattle, not too near, it was okay. You know why? Not because we only knew good water, which we did; we also took care to keep that water good. Never did we use it for the toilet. Never did we put those things near that water.*

*Our cattle were clean too. We also gave them many herbs so that anywhere they put their poo was good. Good for the ground, good for our houses, good to use. Even that cattle poo was dried, then to drink with other herbs and weeds. Drunk for the fever and those unwanted things that make your stomach too big [referring to a type of giardia].*

*Is true what that man said in that ceremony there [referring to a First Nation's elder who gave a teaching in a sweat lodge about Europeans bringing over metals.] Those metals changed the way we talked to our growing food. Even how we talked and listened to one another. It changed every way, as you call: communication. It made certain ways easier like all people find now with these things [referring to technology].*

*Ha, going forward can just be going around and around. We liked the ease but were worried. Some were very scared of these new things. Ha, but nothing is new. Is ash new? It is the burned wood, and the wood is the trees, and the trees the seeds, born from the soil, that ash feeds. This is why our water was good.*

*Mining changed everything in South Africa. All those who should be left undisturbed, ancestors, awakened! Some carrying unburied bones and smelly smells. Ha, these smells should be left alone. These ancestors not to be awakened, but offered to sometimes; to keep them calm. Now, they are dancing a fire dance, who knows for what. Maybe some were those others from far away. Maybe those helping ones who were lost, or some said, fighting those things; fighting those changes that others wanted.*

*Then, then, the land smelled in another way. The water changed. At first, animals not drinking, dying from thirst, until after some time the young*

*ones only knew that strange water, and they drank it. But when they drank, they only grew more thirsty.*

*Then, it was the same for us. That water, we stayed away, went only to the other place, no matter how far. We walked for the good things we remembered. Then, all the waters tasted the same and no herbs could change that, until we no longer told our children of the good water, and they no longer remembered.*

*Too sad! How long? More than 500 years, this old but young story. Now, that water is going from no good to bad and very bad. People buying dirty water! Drinking so much to be well, but it is making them sick! Oh, it's no good. Ha, never mind the food, just the water. Blessing it isn't enough. Herbs help only so much. Even many of the herbs can't be cooked in that water. Before, the water with the herbs was good medicine together.*

*So, what then? The rainwater! It can be cleaned good with the coals; the pure ones, not too deep down in there. Even the one from the old big roots. When used, it is better; not very good, but good.*

*Ha, this technology you will find this, but tell them, we already know this. They were doing this in what is now called Zimbabwe for some time, 200 years ago; not long ago. You have that better water, for you and your*

*family. You use that to grow and boil your muthi. Oh, then the people can be helped!"* Ama J, August 23, 2014.

*"I want to tell you. I don't like writing, not only because I'm no good at it. I didn't hear in school, and then I left.*

*But you also know why? Because the people, they told me the ways through what you call stories. They weren't stories, they were truths. Just like what you are sharing now.*

*My daughter can say these words better, but she tells me that I must be the one to share. To share about the little bit, I know.*

*I was hungry a lot as a child. You see before the schools came. Wanobagwash [exact spelling unclear]; the times were already becoming too bad. This falling apart in the other way. This was no mistake. They pretended it was accidents but they were not.*

*Now I don't share too much about those times. I can share. I can share my whole life. All those things I saw. All those things I still see. You know why? Well, those times that almost killed all the people. It is pains so big and times so bad, that some of us can't share about it. Even those young ones*

*today, carrying it all around. We have good medicine for those young ones; just for this.*

*My family [referring to his clan and community], we did not talk of those bad times. If we did, we felt the spirit ubowesh [exact spelling unclear] might carry those times back. We knew that it was not bad luck; we don't believe in bad luck.*

*If the people do not follow the Great One's special rules, caring for everything—our home, our clothing, our food and all the animals-then that carrier ubowesh who carries water and growth will carry sickness. Not just here, but there, and there, and there. See how we are like this? [Links fingers together]. No separate reeds. The basket the women make, all the grasses [woven] together. The roots are joined too, live side by side and feed from the same dirt, sun, and water.*

*What you call water. We don't call it that. It's very special. Every name we have has a sound. It's not a word. It is how we honour that special thing. When we say it, we honour it. We hold it to us and we know how we are tied together. Words, words are now, they have no meaning, but they do.*

*Even when we think of those times, all those times when it seemed everything was lost, taken and gone. Sometimes so fast, other times slowly;*

*so we didn't know well at first. The 'words' as you call them, are honourings; they are big ones. If we only talk about the times, we bring ugobowash [exact spelling unclear] and carry more times. If we are honouring and saying those words and songs, we bring more honouring and more things we need. The food, the clothing, the animals; the way of honouring. The way we are born to know and carry on.*

*Some talking about the times, gives them a release, a way out. Because only we remember the times; not the ones who roam on the land but don't care for it or themselves. You already read books, watch it on your box, or listen to the old ones. We [I] don't share the times because it grows a pain that the way of honouring takes care of.*

*The answer is there, right in front of your eyes. The moon shining on your face. We don't forget. We can't. We won't do that. My daughter hears this, but she wants to write everything down. She tells us that all the words can be shared. Ugobowash isn't to be feared; she says that people are afraid. The times have left them afraid. They hide.*

*All sharing is good. My daughter is the messenger. She was born with this way. But the times we remember is not the same as what she remembers. We don't forget the times. When we have the way of honouring, we remember and take care of those times.*

*Be careful with not just what you do but what you say; words, they can bring all the abundance or times you don't want back."* Elder known as "Great Grandfather", Sept 22, 2014.

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*"So, there was this time you called dark ages. Your people are walking into this once more. It will be so much the same, but this time they have those things that complicate all matters [technology]. They will feel no escape, at first in themselves, struggling inside, wanting to get out. And then they will come to see the true trap that they are living in. This is real, this trap.*

*You dreamed last night of Malaysia, Nomadlozi. Remember? [She asks me], this dream shows something and will continue to show more. I love you and I am afraid for you, afraid for what you don't know, and what you will come to know. I wish I could talk to all the people. Not so I can live in that voice; so I can tell them and help them.*

*We do this sometimes. You go back, way back and find that all the people were told what was to come and how to be prepared. They were given those things [warnings]. Ha, in the Bible you can see it too much. Those things weren't to keep people scared of the holy one. It was man who did that! Those things were told to let the people know. Let them understand how to take care of things.*

*We don't just do these things [rituals] because we say: 'Okay, let us do this now.' We don't make these things as we go. No! You must understand this! Everything comes from someplace and everything goes someplace. This is how it is and how it will be all the time. This cannot change.*

*Some things when you are there [living], you can understand, but when it's time to come with us [to die] then you see more. But remember, we have limits too. This is why we work together with all things.*

*Do you understand this? One reading this [she addresses the reader], do you hear my words? This is important. When we do all these things [prayers and rituals] they are not separate from us, separate from our ancestors. No way. It is all together. This is the place we meet. Do you understand?*

*You must always have that place to meet. I don't mean the building or the book. I mean inside, right in here [she says pointing to her chest]. This place, the important place. If you don't have this then you are a leaf from a tree who does not remember the seed from which it grows. You can fall to the ground, afraid you will die, instead of knowing that you will plant or feed those other things.*

*So, which are you? The lost leaf afraid and waiting to die? Or will you remember and do the things you were born to do? The things you already know? Ha, you must not forget. Don't forget anything. You never know when you will need something you learned."* Ama J, May 22, 2015.

**Chapter Twenty – A Missing Donkey, An Almost Evaded Murder-Rap, Ghosts Bothering Children, and the Struggles of a Crack Addict: All in a Days Work!**

I had taken a few days off because of the flu. Going to work sick wasn't an option, as I could further compromise the immune system of the patients. I managed to get some rest but had also been busy with patients. The *Isangoma* never rests, was something *Baba* forgot to tell me. I would also come to learn that a healer can never turn away someone in need. My practice was growing, and true to many urban healers, I had patients of all ages, religious, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds.

Saturday, I had counselled, steamed and washed Rajeetha, a thirty-year-old mother of two. She was in financial and emotional crisis because of her husband's crack-cocaine addiction; something he had struggled with for over a decade. After pawning everything in the house for the second time, she was at a loss and was exhausted, broke, and feeling increasingly hopeless. I explained that it had taken "a long time for these issues to develop, and it would take some time for healing and recovery." Most patients understood this, but some just wanted love charms or a quick fix to change systemic problems. In addition, their youngest daughter was seeing spirits in the house, accompanied by constant tummy aches.

Devi, Rajeetha's husband, was open to counselling. I made use of the counselling program I had taken at UNISA, along with, and most importantly, the ancestors' guidance. Devi and I spent a number of sessions together unpacking his horribly abusive childhood. In addition to specific offerings needing to be made to a Hindu God, washing out the house with medicine, *futha*, *geza,* and *phalaza* for most of the family, I also referred them both to twelve-step programs.

*Izangoma* referrals are not uncommon. For example, if a healer sees cancer in the uterus, they may send the patient to a GP or specialist for testing, and further prognosis with a recommendation to return for herbal treatment. It also happens that a patient can be referred to another healer, often someone specializing in a particular area.

With many patients and healers, as was the case with Rajeetha's family, close professional and interpersonal ties had been formed. Some patients came just for the bones and didn't return; others fell under my care for a lengthier time.

I had heard many stories of families who had the same traditional healer for many generations. Patients had a way of falling into our hearts and minds. This was part of the reason I hadn't rested well over the weekend; a combination of worrying and praying for Rajeetha's family.

Every *Isangoma* I had trained under or worked with all agreed that they loved their patients; some more than others, but all collectively. No matter how hard or challenging the way of the healer is; there's a deep and unconditional love and reverence for the healing work. Therefore, the misuse of traditional medicine for harmful purposes is so

dishonourable. Wasn't it these same powerful forces that resurrected the ill and seemingly broken *thwasa?* That uplifted the burgeoning apprentice with ancestral powers and forces?

I had also spent some time in the week in Orange Farm, where a few practitioners ranging from naturopaths and chiropractors to traditional herbalists assisted patients at a South Asian faith-based clinic. I had never struggled too much with language barriers, what with my broken and minimal Zulu and my patient's English, we always made due. But I had had an older man for a consultation who spoke Sotho, Pedi, and Afrikaans; no Zulu or English.

It wasn't uncommon for people to speak Afrikaans fluently. Many older and particularly rural people spoke Afrikaans as a result of the Bantu education system.

The 'uncle', *malume* wandered into the tiny clinic room, his middle age masked behind worn clothes, poor eyesight, a slight limp, and a lifetime of poverty. He had come to see me about a missing donkey. He assumed it was his neighbour that had stolen it; if not: "*e ko kae*?" he asked, wondering where it was.

Having been doing *Ngoma* work for a few years now, nothing surprised me anymore about people. I never made assumptions; each person was unique and their lives and narratives complex. This was particularly apparent during *amathambo*. Each time I threw the bones, my perception and understanding of the world shifted to that of the patient's. Whether it was their ancestors coming through me, or spirit's way of being sure the message was conveyed correctly; the context, symbolism and metaphors were exclusive to them.

For example, I once did a reading for an architect and even without knowing his profession, the information was conveyed using design, drawing, and building analogies.

I had been exposed to the joys and disparities of life and living, but now and then I was still taken aback. A few older men, rather than describe a Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI), would show me; not an irregular interaction between healers and patients. But after the second time of seeing a bad case of gonorrhoea or genital warts, I kept a laminated photo sheet of the various infections on hand.

Also in consultations, I had taken for granted that a person was 'out of the closet.' I eventually learned subtle ways of addressing Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered (&Transsexual) and Queer issues, particularly in a country still rife with internalized and externalized homophobia.

The bones revealed that the *malume's* donkey had wandered off and died. Although the donkey old and known to meander, the *malume* was still surprised about what had happened. But the bigger concern for him was all the seemingly bad luck he had had for the past eleven years. Nothing seemed to be working out in his life. He had even gone to KwaZulu Natal to see a recommended and expensive *Isangoma*, who told him he had to *thwasa*. As a Zionist, a member of the African Independent Church, he had no intention of doing that. He felt uncomfortable enough even seeing traditional healers, but did so as he was at a loss. "Even prayer," he confessed, "wasn't working".

"You killed a man. Many years ago; maybe fifteen or seventeen," I told him.

Lifting his hands and shaking his head he replied, "Sorryyy?"

I tried to explain in my pathetic Zul-glish, hoping my hand gestures would help. I stared at the door hoping the local volun-told translator would arrive to help.

“Yes, is true,” he told me.

“This is the real problem, *malume*. You must *pahla* for that man and find his family,” I said.

He shared that a long time ago he had killed someone. It was unclear if it was politically motivated, a personal vendetta, or crime related.

We were suddenly interrupted by a knock at the door by a young man. I apologized for wasting his time and sent him away, assuming the man probably wouldn`t want this kind of information revealed to people in his community. Patients didn’t like anyone knowing their business. This was why so many people travelled to other cities or provinces to see healers.

*Malume* told me he didn’t know where the victim’s family were: “They gone, *Makhosi,*” he said, shrugging; “long time now,” he said grimacing from leg pain.

His worn uniform was indicative of a lifetime of hard labour; the physical complaints a result of impoverished drudgery. He didn’t ask for *muthi* for these longstanding conditions though. Moving away from the topic, he asked about the donkey once more. He seemed nonchalant about what had been revealed, as though the murder wasn’t enough cause to disrupt his life so extensively.

But this was a pressing matter, so I pushed a little further. Amends needed to be made, otherwise, he would have no peace, and obstacles would be endless.

He elaborated, mainly in Sotho, about his job and never moving up and how his co-workers saw him one way, when in fact he was another.

I explained that he would need to make *umqombothi*, slaughter a goat, and offer other things that would be both pleasing to the victim, and his family.

He slipped a 20 Rand note under the reed mat, thanked me traditionally, and left, never to return.

**Chapter Twenty-One –Healing the 'Un-Healable'**

Credo Mutwa once told me: "the healer is healed through healing." One of the greatest challenges for me while working in the clinics was being able to facilitate full healing for patients. Yes, there were many people living longer and healthier lives with HIV. We knew this was happening, and possible for hundreds of thousands of people, especially with proper nutrition, and efforts to address systemic poverty and other forms of oppression. Promoting these potentials was essential to destigmatizing HIV and AIDS as a death wish. Herbs, counselling and prayer made a huge difference for People Living with HIV and AIDS, but the reality was that there wasn't a cure.

After unloading food parcels into Jo-burg Gen. I grabbed a *toasted cheese* from the hospital's cafeteria; fast becoming a staple.

My head was already heavy and I was immediately tired. Temporary transference of conditions occurred when a patient`s illnesses and symptoms were temporarily energetically transmitted to the healer. In my practice, I always knew what was tormenting a patient before they arrived. I saw the issue beforehand and the bones confirmed and provided greater detail. It was only through a consultation, healing, or cleansing that I felt

normal again. If I awoke with a headache or another symptom, I knew it was my own, but if it came on suddenly in the day, I knew it was that of a patient.

The most intense time I experienced this was when a plumber came to repair my kitchen pipes, and as he worked, my knee began aching and swelling. I could barely walk.

I showed him my knee, explaining that I had no problems of this sort, but did he have this issue? He lifted his uniform pant leg to reveal a swollen knee that he complained, “Kept him up all night with pain.”

Working at the clinics made transference very challenging. I had some of the ‘effects’ that the patients were suffering with, but I couldn't heal them. I was limited by the sheer numbers of clients, along with my restricted role as *Isangoma* in the hospitals. So, for the year at the clinics, I grew accustomed to these feelings and cared for myself with *muthi* when I got home. After all, while inconvenient and uncomfortable, these temporary symptoms could be washed away with barks, roots and bulbs; but this was not the case for People Living with HIV and AIDS. The transference of symptoms was essential to increasing my empathy and compassion, as well as a palpable commitment to People Living with HIV/AIDS.

When I arrived upstairs, Bongi the NGO’s administrator was doing patient check-ins. Nomsa, one of the social workers, handed out *checkers* bags full of non-perishables. Despite the bursting bags of Ace mealie meal, Knorr soup packets, canned beans, and Glen tea, it was at best, enough non-perishables for one person for a week (excluding fruit, veggies and meat).

The office also carried some gently used baby clothes, baby formula for Prevention of Mother-to-Child-Transmission, and outdated lady's outfits.

I spent more time in the organization's office than in the clinic. I wasn't able to administer *izimbiza* and provide traditional healing based counselling at Jo-Burg Gen., not in the same way I was at Helen Joseph's HIV/AIDS clinic. Instead, I assisted where I could, counselled where appropriate - including some of the staff - and helped with whatever needed to be done.

No matter how many times I went to Jo-burg Gen. though, I still got lost. Rebuilt in 1983, the maize-like monstrous building was near impossible to navigate. I had heard rumours that it was structured the way it was to deter anti-Apartheid 'terrorists.'

I walked out of the lift and stepped into the clinic. I heard someone telling a patient: "Nomsa has just gone down to the clinic. She'll be back now-now."

"No, *Mma*. I'm here to see Rebecca," the woman said in Setswana.

Stepping into the doorway I greeted her: "*Dumela Mma, le kae Kgomotso*?" I asked, recognizing her.

"Alright," she answered in English.

"Can we talk?" she asked, looking around at the momentarily quiet room.

"Sure, come sit," I said, pointing to a chair.

"I'm going downstairs to give some papers to Dr Evian," said Nomsa.

Kgomotso fiddled with the tearing food parcel.

"I can get you another checkers?" I said, standing up.

"Is okay, *Makhosi*, she said, tearing up.

"So, how are you *Mma*?" I asked.

"Ah, okay."

"Yeah?"

"I applied for the grant from the government. So now just waiting," she told me.

I tried to hide my concern about the long wait that hundreds of thousands of other South Africans were experiencing. Not only that but how minimal the monthly grant might be.

"My husband going home today," she said.

"Oh, he was discharged?" I asked

"*A-a*, he's eating something, but *eish,* who knows," she said.

I had seen Kgomotso in and out of the clinic for the past few months. I first met her at our head office doing beadwork as part of an income-generating program for HIV positive women. I had only seen her husband briefly. He was very thin; lucky enough to have a job but too sick to work.

Kgomotso sat in her threadbare Ben and Jerry's t-shirt with an overly-repaired green skirt. Sadly, I always had a sense of CD4 counts and viral loads by looking at a patient. Kgomotso had swelling in her legs and arms, and a visible rash that she no longer tried to conceal with too much make-up.

"Hey, I only have this food parcel. It won't be enough for the week," she said.

"I know *Mma*, it's small. I can't give you more, so sorry. We need to keep them for other patients," I told her.

"My child is staying with me in Hillbrow. She has been too sick; runny tummy, everything."

"Oh, I'm sorry to hear that," I replied.

"Her husband; he's very sick *Mma.* They did *lobola* one year ago, everything *sharp, sharp*. His father has too much money. He has too much taxis, but this man, he is up and down spending for Black Label and dice," she said agitatedly. "*Makhosi,* I want to know, is my child sick because one of those women; are they using *ubuthakathi?* Hey, I hear they put the *muthi* in the underwear to keep that man. Is true?" she asked.

"*Mma*, I don't have my bones here to check everything," I said.

"*Mara,* we did everything right for *lobola*. Hey, things must be good for *badimo,*" she exclaimed, referring to the bride-offerings and ceremonies for the ancestors.

"Has she been tested?" I asked.

She shrugged. I suggested that her daughter and son-in-law come to the clinic for testing.

"The baby is coming end of next month."

"Oh, she's pregnant?" I asked.

"*A-a Mma.*"

"She should come for testing Kgomotso. If she's positive she will need some medication for when she goes into labour, in case she has HIV," I said.

"I told her to come with me, but she has no taxi money."

"As you know Kgomotso, if she is positive, then we can give her a food parcel and taxi money. She can get some help here," I said.

"She must come. I try, *Makhosi*. I try," she said, wiping her eyes and nose on a makeshift handkerchief.

"I want *imbiza*. We can't get those drugs. Hey, I don't like them anyway. My cousin is very sick from those things. *A-ah*, don't want. Can you give me *imbiza, Makhosi*?" she asked.

"We can talk about it," I said, wondering how best I might navigate the hospitals protocol. Maybe she could come to Helen Joseph or I could see her privately, I thought.

"Is okay for my husband too?" she asked.

"He must come and see me. I need to know what tablets he's taking first," I said.

She left, and before the steady stream of clients from the clinic arrived, I sat imagining her overcrowded apartment and the litany of issues she was dealing with. I felt powerless and equally angry at the endless 'cases', and intergenerational inequality.

Kgomotso returned the following week with her ready-to-give birth daughter and son-in-law. She convinced them to come and be tested. I talked to the project manager who agreed I could give her herbal medicine, as long as the hospital director didn't hear anything about it. Most of the nurses and doctors would probably be okay, but issues of liability could pose

a problem. The organization was already facing enough bureaucratic challenges, so she suggested I give medicine on my own time, outside of the clinic.

Kgomotso's daughter, no older than twenty, sat with her husband who smelt of last night's liquor; sadly, not an uncommon odour amongst unemployed and working-poor men.

Kgomotso's husband didn't come to the clinic; he was at home resting. He had apparently improved upon being discharged from the hospital, but now he was back in bed and "talking rubbish;" a sign of reduced intellectual functioning in the latter stages of AIDS. Notwithstanding the copious challenges the family faced, they maintained a warmth, resiliency and graciousness synonymous with most South Africans.

The next few months were a whirlwind. The clinic was packed beyond capacity, resources were meagre, to say the least, and exacerbating the situation, the president's controversial questioning around HIV causing AIDS created public controversy, greater resource strains on all levels, and most importantly, delayed efficient prevention, care and support for People Living with HIV and AIDS. Suffice it to say, most community workers were pissed. On the frontline of the epidemic and bearing witness to lives lost, friends, PEOPLE, not just statistics on a graph, made the detachment taught in biomedical and social work programs impossible. This was deeply personal. Most of the staff fought not just for the transformation of political will, or to preserve and maintain human rights, but to save themselves, their families, friends, community and country folk. Many of the hospital staff were beyond cranky and tired. It wasn't apathy, but a complete exhaustion. Hopelessness and despair were not words to throw around; they carried too much weight. Instead, the heavy air was stale with a palatable gloom.

The next day I arrived to find a protest, which had been loosely talked about a few days earlier, underway. The AIDS consortium, AIDS law Project, Treatment Action Campaign (TAC,) Community AIDS Response, along with other organizations, patients, community workers, staff, and trade unions, rallied in front of the infectious disease unit. Cardboard placards and TAC signs were sprinkled throughout the crowd. Delayed by some of the organizer's tardiness, the chanting and toy-toying hadn't begun yet. Heaving taxis drove by, honking in support. The air was filled with a mounting anticipation, tension, and readiness that comes before a protest.

A few prolific HIV/AIDS activists shouted: "We demand treatment! We demand care! We demand a government who will work to help the people of South Africa, who will work to change life for People living with HIV and AIDS!"

The crowd bellowed:

"*Lesisifo siyingozi kwabalalanayo*," this disease is dangerous to those who sleep with each other.

Even the most tired and ill were enlivened, faces blooming like acacia flowers, bright and buoyant this time of year.

A patient grabbed my arm, pulling me further into the crowd, while a volunteer, who was normally very reserved within the institutional setting, hollered out: *"Xa na ithi viva viva faka ikhondomu,"* (if you get an erection put on a condom).

It wasn't a huge horde, but there were a few hundred people. As the *sjamboks* and wooden spears emerged, so the toy-toying began. Protest singing and dancing wasn't playful,

entertaining or melodic. They were war cries. And with each hop, stamp, and the occasional traditional Zulu high kick, the ground trembled.

"*Senzeni na?"* the crowd cried, *"What have we done to deserve this treatment, except have HIV?!"* they exclaimed, in the adapted anti-Apartheid song.

Overwhelmed, I started crying. The songs were penetrative like the sticks piercing at the sky. The chanting and mass movement was clearing away my perceived pains and inconsequential worries. I felt a unity, not unlike *Amadlozi* coming in, but this didn't carry me into other places, it was grounding, forcing me inwards, to the pit of my human-ness.

Patients stared out the hospital windows, some coming outside in their loosely closed robes. I felt light-headed. Everything brightened and loudened and sped up.

Then it was quiet, and the moment fell still. My heart was pounding; sweat dripped over my eyes. I felt I was breathing in relief and breathing out resistance. Protests brought hope. I envisioned all the stories I had heard of *impi* Zulu warriors and their 'stealthy approaches.' Their legacy was alive now. The people of the South, people of the Sun; burning with a brightness and authority that was only shadowed by temporary storms.

We rallied around the hospital. I was humbled by all the blatantly sick People Living with HIV and AIDS (PLWHA) who bravely fought every day, who were also the voices for those too sick to march, and those who had already passed. I was embarrassed by my internal *kvetching* about feeling "too hot and too thirsty." I sang along timidly, starkly aware of my Canadian-ness, whiteness, and privilege. I was embarrassed by my nationhood

and the unequal benefits I reaped each day. My contribution was so meagre and ethically problematic.

My heady analysis of the situation was quickly interrupted by the ancestors, who gently reminded me that activism was part of the calling to heal. There were many ways to bring about change, to bring about healing, and this was a start.

The protest was just under two hours, long enough for the press to highlight the injustices around HIV/AIDS patient management, the lack of an appropriate clinical research centre, the hospital's blatant disinterest in the clinic, patient waitlists up to four months, insufficient medication, and staff shortages (to the degree that doctors worked volunteer hours.) Things were bad, bad enough for everyone to be affected.

It was a tumultuous time. Health Minister Manto Tshabalala-Msimang seemed to only promote garlic and beetroot as a nutritional measure for People Living with HIV and AIDS; with the vague support of traditional medicine. The government's resistance to anti-retroviral therapy, they claimed, was based on potential toxicity and costs of the HIV/AIDS medication. For many in the Global North, President Thabo Mbeki's stance on HIV not causing AIDS, seemed like another example of 'African ignorance' and 'poor African leadership'. For some South Africans, it seemed more about Mbeki's questionable and divergent scientific team. He was an outspoken critic of Africans being stereotyped as diseased, or AIDS discourse becoming a 'tool' for western political, cultural and economic agendas (Stephens,1-7). Mbeki's call for more political attention and resources directed towards poverty, and other immune deficiency diseases, not just AIDS, was lost in what was being coined 'AIDS denialism.' Many healers had no interest in pharmaceutical

measures for treating HIV and AIDS-associated illnesses; some felt that there was a place, and others were still forming their opinions.

I personally felt that biomedicine and traditional medicine could collaborate and that there was a place for anti-retroviral therapy for *some* people living with HIV and AIDS. I also recognized that the pharma-industrial-complex had its own agendas. Efforts to change legislation and develop a traditional healer's bill were in progress. I knew one thing for sure; there needed to be a great deal of support and resources behind traditional healing and medicine, as well as for community-based and non-governmental organizations, and other agencies and structures addressing the scourge of HIV and AIDS. As the debate went on, thousands of people were dying every day. As David's mother always said: "You have to stop the bleeding first!" It appeared that the government's sense of urgency was non-existent. Many community-based workers were extremely frustrated, angry, and disappointed. They wanted to support the ANC; support the government, but it was at times like these, it felt like more of the same. Just a new kind of marginality unfolding in the post-Apartheid processual. Bell hooks (1989) describes this in *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*:

> "Understanding marginality as position and place of resistance is crucial for oppressed, exploited, colonized people. If we only view the margin as sign marking the despair, a deep nihilism penetrates in a destructive way the very ground of our being. It is there in that space of collective despair that one's creativity, one's imagination is at risk, there that one's mind is fully colonized, there that the freedom one longs for as lost. Truly the mind that resists colonization struggles for freedom of expression. The struggle may not even begin with the colonizer; it may begin within one's segregated, colonized community and family. So, I want to note that I am not trying to romantically re-inscribe the notion of that space of marginality where the oppressed live apart from their oppressors as 'pure.' I want to say that these margins have been both sites of repression and sites of resistance (207,208.)

The protest wrapped up. Folks seemed happy with the turnout and hoped that the wave that they had created would have a ripple effect, large enough to inform change.

Erin, the NGO's project manager, put out endless fires, but also as a social worker, she counselled many patients. She updated me on some of the patients. It turned out that Kgomotso's daughter and son-in-law were also HIV positive. With the political ambiguity of anti-retroviral therapy in the country, providing Nevirapine for Kgomoto's daughter, (along with others), became a covert operation. For Erin, going against hospital administration, and quite possibly the law, seemed like a small price to pay for preventing HIV mother-to-child transmission.

Six weeks later Kgomoto's granddaughter was born; a healthy baby girl whose status was negative, but which couldn't be confirmed until later. Kgomotso seemed cheerful and optimistic, happy to welcome her first grandchild into the world.

I hadn't seen her for a few weeks and asked Bongi if she had.
"She was here last fortnight. *Shame*, after her husband's funeral, she came for help with transport money."

I stumbled against the wall saying a prayer for Kgomoto's family. Not just for the loss of her husband, but the losses yet to come.

**Chapter Twenty-Two – A Stream Can Wear a Mountain Down**

*"I am your mother. Long time now. When you pray, when you speak, say my full name: Nomvusa ama Laqiri /yamaquiri Amasecko Thansore [exact spelling unclear].*

*Give thanks for the healing one (the child born after another child has died.) Your grandmother, Addy, she loves you so much [referring to "Gram", my grandmother]. Every day she is around talking. She's proud. Sometimes, she gets so busy talking, she forgets to help. She always believes that you are fine.*

*One day, you will see me again and remember how you know me. We must be together forever. I love you and fight to keep you from suffering.*

*Oh, but I spoil you. I can't help it, you are my favourite. I'm going to bring you back one day, and then you will feel where I stood, and you will meet my family. They need your help too. They will know you are coming.*

*You know that area there? It is powerful. Even where that young man [referring to Mandela] comes from? I am not far from that place [100 km's or so]. Oh, that place, it's shaped this way, like an egg [oval]. Within that [300-400 km's], there is medicine and other things [gold & resources]. Too much that they don't know about. Pray those hungry ones never hear my words.*

*Before, the people in this area lived so long. Even the animals, if they weren't eaten first! That area has so many minerals. The plants and everything from there, whew; they lived too long and so strong. You could use a small bit, not like now using too much [medicine]. When it rained, we*

*would dance on these places on the ground that was very warm, hot! The rain and those things in the ground, in that place [minerals or metals], made these spots hot. We would dance on them and warm our feet. They made our bodies feel good too. Some mothers who had sick children would put them there for some time. Many people laughed at them, but I saw slow-to-walk children get up from that place and run around. Very sick children coughing this terrible sickness, then having clear breathing and chest from that spot.*

*If those people now, mquiri [exact spelling unclear], go to the spots, they can have healing too. The church in South Africa, they have a house on that place. Oh, that place is so strong. People leave there healed from Jesus. Yes, maybe him too, but it's that spot that is doing it!*

*When these grandmothers tell you about the earth, they do the praying for 'her,' as they say. It is for these places too. They are right because all these things in there, mixed with all those things [minerals and rain], they are good medicine. The best.*

*They don't know this now. Some of the children still do these things [stand on those spots]; those that do it often, they will be well. They will not know sickness."* Nomvusa, Oct 2, 2014.

*"Today is another important day. You see, our people don't use time how you do. You measure it. It's about what is going to happen and planning things that won't live and breathe. This is no good because you aren't in the least bit prepared. Inside, right in there, where your body grows, and where the prayers develop, too. You aren't prepared. Ha, this is thrown aside and the other things put first.*

*In my time, it was better in many ways for the Sangoma. We could go where we wanted, anytime, all over the area, no problem. Ha, no papers like the ones to follow [referring to passbooks under Apartheid]. I was free to talk to my ancestors ANYWHERE. To collect plants, to take the animal for helping people [hunting], too. It was good.*

*We worked too hard, many died young. They had lost the secrets to live so old, even forever. The ones before, they knew all these things. So, we were weak in some ways. Now, now! Ha, you need the ancestors. The people, even the ones helping, are too weak. Ha, lost! That's why we come.*

*We need to help you now. The Christians waiting for the second coming of Christ. All the people, all over; they had this understanding. The coming. The Zulus too. Oh the most, the Zulus. Not Christ, but the Mighty Ancestor: 'Will rise again in the hills of our people. Will take us from hungry and sick to warriors again, if not today, tomorrow. They are coming,' is the chant.*

*So yes, people know of this coming. Many aren't waiting; they forgot. Even the helpers, they forgot the other time when all the things were coming and going and flowing together. You see, the water coming from the trickle in the mountain doesn't just arrive. This water has its source, and it is carried by that mountain. It slowly makes a path. The mountain lets in that water. The mountain needs that water to invite all the living birds, small bugs, and even fish. The leaves of the trees bend to that water to show gratitude. The trees that grow, give thanks to the mountain and the water. None of these are separate. They are living. Living is to breathe or survive together. Alone, as you call it; no such thing. You cannot forget to live or breathe, survive together. It is in you as soon as the flow feeds the seed [referring to conception] and then forever. Even before that time.*

*Where does the flow come from? And the seed? We didn't ask those things because we remembered. We trusted we could never forget. These are just words, words on paper, but the little water in the mountains feed that mountain, and the mountain allows it. That is the message.*

*Study these things. That is learning. That is living. Not these other things you are doing. They fear living [referring to people nowadays]. Listen carefully. I will tell you, tell you the truth that must be told. Listen and you will hear it. How can I tell you, if you won't listen?"* Ama, J. Sept 4, 2014.

**Chapter Twenty-Three – Try Not to Go into Labour When Enraptured**

After a 50-minute car ride from Jozi to Pretoria, my back was sore and face flushed from the sun oozing through the windshield. The drive hadn't been too bad, with only one small accident along the way; a reckless taxi and a speeding 'Be My Wife' (BMW.) I had unfortunately become accustomed to driving fast as well; typical Jo-burg driving. Lately, I was more cautious, now that I was pregnant; I fully stopped at stop signs and didn't just pause at red traffic lights at night anymore.

Entering Pretoria, I enjoyed parting with fast-paced 'wild west' Jozi, even for an afternoon. Pretoria always seemed somehow quieter and more expansive. Leaving behind the smoggy city limits, new developments replaced the dry, flat and arid spaces between the two cities.

I looked for the Voortrekker monument built to commemorate the Afrikaaner's vow of 'liberation' against the English, and Zulu empires. Built in 1931, it was an imposing granite building that looked like a cross between a church and state building. I had never been inside. The highlight of the tour was said to be the cenotaph at the centre of the structure; on December sixteenth at noon, the sun would shine through an opening in the dome, said to symbolize: God's blessing on the lives and endeavours of the Voortrekkers (Mushonga,33.)

Passing UNISA University and heading into town, I made my way along Nelson Mandela Drive to the fountain circle, and into the bustling streets. I was struck by the tall Jacaranda trees that started flowering in mid-October. Each year they engulfed the capital city with

warm bright petals. It was an astounding sight, thousands of scraggly non-indigenous trees gracefully filling the sky with delicate purple flowers. The ground was blanketed to the horizon like a lavish violet cloud; its splendour and subtlety uncommon in bush veld flora.

Struggling to find a parking space, I managed to find a semi-legal spot near the event. It was the first of its kind: thousands of traditional healers together for a national traditional healer/medicine day. This particular event was held by a continent-wide healer organization.

I arrived as the festivities were underway. Now over eight months pregnant, I slowly made my way toward the stage area. Weighed down Putco buses carrying thousands of healers from near and distant places pulled up. Healers eagerly descended the metal stairs to the packed square.

As I walked by, healers greeted me. Those that knew me called out: "*Nomadlozi! Thokoza*!"

Healers that didn't know me still recognized my clothing as their own; a *khanga* with a large manned lion on the back and *umgaco tigcizo* on my wrists and ankles, and most identifiable, the red and white *mfisos* around my neck. The regalia showed that I had, in fact, graduated from healer training. Participants within the crowd either blatantly pointed to their friends and whispered, or called out with laughter. When they heard me greet them correctly, they almost always jumped back in astonishment, followed by an "*Ouw…thokoza Makhosi.*"

Moving slowly towards a small group near the stage, I recognized healers that I had worked with; all elders to me. They waved and urged me towards them. It was a reputable group who not only put this event together but worked within the government trying to better establish traditional healers and related programs. Most importantly, they were healers who had worked throughout the struggle, and had struggled throughout the struggle and had never given up fighting for the rights of all healers, their patients, and their communities. True custodians of the anti-Apartheid political and cultural ideology of *Amandla, Awethu*, "Power to the people".

I tried to find a semi-shaded area but to no avail. I sat beside the healers sprawled out on the grass and greeted them individually,

"*Thokozani makhosi*, *unjani gog*?" I said, asking how they were.

Then the organization's leader took to the microphone and addressed the crowd. The healers chimed in occasionally: "*Yebo,*" "*thokoza,*" or "that's right!"

The mid-day sun pelted down. Sweat streamed like tiny rivers underneath the healers' *umyeko,* black-braided wigs. Bold fabrics and glass beads glinted in the sun. The vivid red covered the historic square like fresh ox blood before it's mixed with dung for building a rural home. Healers mingled about in their finest ancestral clothing wearing heavily-beaded black and kilt skirts bearing intricate patterns and patriotic images of the new South African flag. Others stood in anticipation holding *ishobas*, or beaded *umkhontos*.

As more healers arrived they found their friends or *mpande* and settled in. No longer weary from "the job" or travel, they were enlivened by the ancestors and being together, along

with a readiness for an *idlozi* to occupy them. Many of the healers unenthusiastically chatted and took snuff. It wasn't just because they were wiser, wearier, or adapting to post-Apartheid settings; spaces still approached with caution. *Izangoma* were always interchanging with ancestors and spirits, as well as engaging with the nuanced complexities of the human experience.

Billowing *impepho* smoke filled the square before trailing off over the Palace of Justice, Old Capitol Theatre, and the Tudor and Old Council Chambers buildings. The structures built upon colonializing ideologies, systematized racism, and other perversions of power. In front of the buildings stood imposing statues of seemingly regal men, but on closer inspection, they were of Apartheid forefathers. Most notably, Paul Kruger, a key figure in the Boer resistance against the British during the second Boer war. Propped up by a cane, and beneath his top hat, he stared steely-eyed at the Boer soldier statues below. I recognized this gaze. Canada had similar effigies, which were all meant to glorify and romanticize white settler history and 'conquest'.

As the day wore on, many onlookers left the confines of their offices. The sheer volume of healers no doubt made it impossible for them to work; others joined out of sheer curiosity. Many healers chuckled that it was *Amadlozi* which called them from their desks to the square and to the drums. The onlookers were part of the old and new systems; some had worked for the previous government as well. They stood on the sidelines, many initially frustrated: "*Agh nooit*, how must I get home now? All *these* people!" Many, too enthralled by the healer's theatrics, ended up taking extended lunches.

The "new South Africa" brought with it frequent occasions and opportunities for engagement. Many seized and relished these chances, happy to part with the oppressive past. While others refused to cure their ignorance. There were those who exhibited complete conservatism in attire, culture and ideology, but upon exposure to the Other, changed their perspectives.

I had seen this while training mine managers. With combs in their bush socks and the common use of the racist term *kaffir,* their attitudes seemed somehow irreversible. But upon exposure and education, sometimes, their perceptions were permanently shifted. I would come to find this blatant racist or hierarchical attitude more truthful than many 'liberal' South Africans, who hid their sense of superiority behind politeness, and a good vocabulary, all the while underpaying and mistreating 'their staff.'

One of the organization's leaders stepped up to the tented podium to address the growing crowd about unification and the importance of traditional healers. Members scurried around trying to ensure agenda promptness. Once he finished, ten to twelve big drums began to hum *do-doom, doom, do-doom, doom*. Each strike on the cowhide carried a deep base that emanated like a supersonic heartbeat over the square.

In a large circle, healers dressed in ceremonial attire reflecting their ancestral linkages moved forward to the open grassed area. Shaking *nkonkhoni* whisks in the air, their ankles clad with rattles shook in time with the drums.

A small gaggle of healers convened, chatting quietly beside me. I caught my name and a sense of the discussion but was busy watching the younger energetic healers dancing.

Mesmerized, I looked at the statues in the background and reflected on the history of the square and the country. I imagined ANC comrades in the Rivonia Trial. Mandela dressed in his traditional Xhosa clothing as a message of cultural pride to the legal forces who alleged 221 acts of sabotage against the Apartheid system. It was in this very square that he'd said:

> "I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die*"* (Mandela, 1964.)

I pondered the contrasts and paradoxes that make up the country; its history embedded in the cobblestones of Church Square. How the AWB (Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging), a far-right movement that self-identified as suffering Boerevolk, and whose attire resembled that of the Third Reich, had rioted less than a decade earlier. The AWB had been one of the few groups wherein mediation and unification were impossible. They had used deadly tactics headed by the infamous and ridiculed Eugene Terrablanche against the ANC and other anti-Apartheid groups.

Today, the square was overtaken by cultural custodians and upholders of traditional and spiritual knowledge reclaiming their territories. It was a unique instance in a plethora of moments in newly post-Apartheid South Africa. It could easily fall within Thabo Mbeki's 'African renaissance,' a concept born out of prominent academic leaders, intellectuals, and activists. The 'renaissance' was meant to encourage social, economic and cultural renewal that, "links the past to the future and speaks to the interconnection between an empowering process of restoration and the consequences or the response to the acquisition of that newly restored power to create something new" (Mbeki, 1998.)

For many *Ngoma* practitioners, it was a revitalization of the teachings of the land and its people; a return to divine authority. The gathering wasn't a direct protest against oppression, not a historic trial, or a demand for human rights and self-determination; today was a time to celebrate tradition and the upholding of culture and the human spirit. The healers seemed unrestricted, answerable only to the ancestors through one unified and resounding "*Y-Y-O-O-I-I-E-E",* the distinctive *Isangoma* wail.

I was quickly pulled forward, I asked half joking, "Oh…I don't know if I can do this, not right now. What if I go into labour? Are any of you traditional birth attendants?"

"*Hamba Mma.* Go, don't *wurrreee*, there are so many of us. If you have the baby, we can bring it out," said a healer.

I stepped forward with uncertainty. Nolwazi, one of the event's organizers and a *Sangoma* that I always respected for her governmental traditional healing initiatives, pulled me back.

"*Nomadlozi,* I am not happy with this. You shouldn't be dancing. You must rest," she said, directing me away from the dancers until a gap-toothed healer took my other hand and yanked me forward.

Arguing about my participation, Nolwazi asked: "*Sharp*?" followed by thumbs up.

"Yeah, it's good *Makhosi*. I will take it easy," I assured her.

"You don't understand," Nolwazi said in English to gap-toothed: "She has a strong spirit this one," she added pointing to me. "Ah, you don't know," she reiterated, shaking her head.

The now on-looking crowd began to cheer, demanding I dance with the other healers,

"*Makhosi*, it's okay. I will go easy, *sisi,*" I said.

"Alright," she said, letting my hand go. I was swept into the circle.

I tried not to stamp and kept careful time with the other healers, moving around the growing circle. The drums intensified. The healers began singing, clapping, and shaking rattles more passionately now.

As the beat strengthened, an intense wave of nausea grew inside me, along with a burning in my lower stomach. I shifted around restlessly like a flu-stricken child with sore muscles. I was used to the initial discomforts that came with the active embodiment of an ancestor. A dry throat with a lump in it. An unquenchable thirst. Wanting to jump out of my flesh and run a long distance, or run inwards, deeper into these caves and crevices of infinite uncertainties. What does this *iDlozi* desire…water, alcohol, snuff, fruit, *imphepho*? I asked in the beginning, until letting the inconsequential deciphering go too. Hyper sensing now. What is and what is missing in my immediate environment? Acute sounds and illuminations. Ecstatic forms have budded up (Stewart, 48.) Smells. The bottom of a river? The drying fish by a lake where one of my *iDlozi*, or someone else's ancestor grew up? Light-bright, air-no wind, a tap running by a brick wall, a woman laughing in the distance.

The sun no longer hot and unbearable, its strong rays poured like warm Milo over my eyelids and through my veins. I let out a deep groaned, "*Yooooiii.*" The ancestors were present.

The gateway had opened. The daylight, along with less tangible energies, flowed in. The galloping beat fastened, carrying me deeper and further.

"*Hey moya moya moya moya,*" I sang.

Sweat ran down my cheeks onto my lip, I licked the salt, *ah* the sea. The process of ancestors and spirits manifesting in my physical and spiritual anatomy was a painful kind of bliss. My flesh tingling and numb. Earthed but also no longer bound by two legs; winged and unconstrained. I flattened the grass with my bare feet. Grass, feet, and space in between, no distinction. In-between-ness. A massive umbilical cord connecting all things. Affirming powerful interstellar realms. I was the ant, tiny but awe-inspiring, below my trampling feet. I was the dust on the grave of my ancestors. I breathed water and I breathed air. I breathed in unison with others. Carried into the infinite *somethingness*.

"Oohh," I sighed, relinquishing thoughts, feelings, ideas, and personhood. All my senses intensified, and then they faded. Only my body was present, but I could no longer feel it. I was floating in the cosmos, but not lost in space. I was part of the universe and could see and feel each atom.

A faint static interrupted my voyage. I opened my eyes to find Nolwazi clapping in front of my face. I couldn't hear her, only the faint drumbeat.

"*Gogo! Makhosi*, Hey, hey!" Nolwazi shouted, "*Gog*, hey, *wena,*" she said meeting my eyes.

Realizing that she wasn't succeeding in bringing me back, she followed protocol and ran her hard hands over my arms and then pulled each finger sharply. She did the same with my legs to bring me back, and out of a heightened flow state.

The drums quieted. Initially, I didn't feel her, until slowly I became aware of where I was. I could smell cigarette smoke in the distance, people chatting, and the scent of sweat mingling with *impepho*. Being 'back', even partially, was bewildering. Street air. Noticing

how the scene had changed in what felt like seconds, or minutes, but surely not hours? Thirsty and unusually energetic, just before a complete serenity and relaxation. Followed by tiredness, of the welcomed kind.

I waddled behind Nolwazi to a nearby chair. Some of the healers expressed disappointment at my early exit, while others from the circle and the neighbouring crowd, cheered satisfyingly. I had once again been accepted by my peers through co-performative ancestral embodiment processes.

I slugged back a cold Stoney ginger beer. Two hearts thumping, one in my chest, the other in my uterus. My baby shifted under my ribcage.

After posing for a photo with local healers, I prepared to go home, exhausted from the day. But before leaving, the healers gathered, lifted their left hands and publicly recited a solemn oath of ethics, unity, and professionalism, as traditional health practitioners.
The sun slowly shifted to the west, casting a shadow over Paul Kruger's statue. As the monumental day came to a close, healers collected their things and headed to the buses for long journeys home to their families, communities, and most importantly, awaiting patients. Their loaded *Shangaani* bags were full of coloured powders, candles, *umuthi,* fabrics, and beads. Church Square would once more be quiet; filled with government and business employees chatting over sandwiches.

Who could have imagined this scene ten years previously? It was an event that fulfilled elusive dreams and answered prayers for many who had gone before. My small involvement in the event further inspired and cemented my conviction to traditional knowledge systems. Reflecting on the day, I was grateful for the care, guidance and

blessings I received from the healing community, indicative of South African-ness and the '*Sangoma* way.'

The baby turned inside me, making my stomach feel as though I was on a mounting rollercoaster. I sighed, secretly hoping that there were no patients to help once I got home. I was tired. It was true what *Baba* had told me when I was an apprentice, "the healer never rests."

**Chapter Twenty-Four – Blood Thirsty Battles, Lost Souls and Colonial Reckonings**

*"You weren't ready for me to come. Now that you are a mother, a teacher, a healer - most importantly - it is time. All the changes our people talked about for so long - the winds changing; they change every 400 years this way. You don't feel ready; I can feel your fear and how you sometimes push me away, afraid of what I will tell you, afraid of what you will come to know. I work through you, talking, healing, and walking around.*

*I never drank. I stayed away from that liquor. I was the last for many generations to feel foul by its stench. Slowly people began losing their ways. Even those people you call settlers. They had their ways. They knew how high the eagle could fly, and medicine songs, food and plants for feast and healing. It was the elite who first got on those ships, but later it was the poorest. They wanted to see how they could survive.*

*When they saw that many could survive, they worked with all the other peoples and quickly came, pushing aside working together for their own*

*gain. They did this for their kings and queens, counts, and holders of their small lands.*

*Those simple people who followed the small folk into the woods, who prayed at rocks and mounds; they began to forget. They turned to what they were told to believe and understand. You see, they weren't fooled easily on the land of their ancestors, for on the land they knew everything; when the animals came, and went, how the winds talked, the sacred stories in sacred languages.*

*He [the elder's ancestor] was keeper of these things. He spoke the oldest language of the land. Much of it he kept secret and reserved this speech for his wife and the secret group he met with. It was assumed he was plotting against the crown, but he was not. He didn't care about the crown. He wanted to preserve the land and its people. He was a keeper among ten other keepers from the inlands far beyond the sea. It wasn't the people like you and I who are the keepers; he was a strong medicine man. My blood and water also comes from this. So, does yours.*

*The winds came to change. Bloodthirsty, lost souls who had lost too many battles, and fled so many wars; they didn't know where they came from. They had lost their names, stories and rings of connection to their land. They had nothing to lose.*

*This is dangerous. Those without anything to lose aren't afraid to steal or devour. They have an emptiness that can't be filled. They pretend to be curious and mildly hungry, but they are ravenous! They don't pick the remains of the dead, they descend upon flesh and spirit as it rests, walks, and talks.*

*We had very good medicine to protect against these people, these entities. But now these empty souls who are never full from feeding never quenched from thirst, never satisfied by lust or love; they no longer simply wander. They no longer threaten a few. They came here and fed and destroyed, but they also found a way to breed. They exist in the water we drink, the air we breathe, and the smoke we inhale. They exist, dead, but penetrate life and the living. They have even come to dwell in people and things that don't know who they are. They have grown in intelligence and strength. Once legends of the small hills, making an appearance through a madman or shadow over the hills, they now occupy too many souls, thoughts, and even how we talk to each other.*

*Why do I tell you this? Why now? Not only to confirm what people feel and what they know. I am telling you this because you are my child; you come from this line. You carry the medicine; you are also a keeper. Don't hide your face in fear or confusion, shame, or modesty. I am telling you because*

*you must know. There are medicines which clear us, which drive us back home to remembering. We can no longer be lost soldiers wandering the streams and forests, having forgotten why we fought and where we come from.*

*I told you a long time ago; teach them to remember. Do you remember this? Give this medicine to your patients, your students, to your family. Eat and wash in this medicine. It is the medicine of the people. It was lost to me. So I would vision it and slip that vision into food and water to heal the people. They never knew I was this healer. I kept quiet. Quiet like I did for you for so long.*

*Many aren't ready to know the truth. They are lost in illusions, or what is called today chemicals, stress and worry, illusions. But they aren't really sick. They have just forgotten. We are coded before we leave our mothers, not in the way people talk about. We are coded with the tools for living and with the ability to see how all things are connected. We are born with this.*

*You know how you see when you are in spirit? How you see everything alive? The patterns? The temperatures, movements, and colours? We can all see this. It is there for all of us to see. When the old people talk of all things being one, this is not an idea or concept.*

*When you meditate on the centre of the medicine wheel, you can no longer see the point. You travel through a tunnel into another tunnel and more and more to see and understand how it is all connected. We are born with this. We are told this over and over again and yet we don't hear it. We can't listen, we don't remember, we forget even though this IS us.*

*The house of the ancestors has many houses within it. You see me as one elder on your great grandfather's side? You see me sitting here, talking to you? You hear my voice? Yes, this is sometimes how I come. I talk to you or through you, but I have many voices. I am not tricking you, although I like to do that too!*

*I am watching, listening, and interchanging with you, small one, to see if you are listening, to know if you are ready. Get rid of what you no longer need. Your house and the house of the ancestors must be without clutter, without fear and worry, without the shadows you have been taught to accept and live with. Today they are gone! Today you reclaim what you are coded with.*

*Today open your eyes to the openness. Cast out the bottomless spirits which live off the scraps of life and living. Call us in, call us, as we call you; then we interchange, then we begin the work, my dear mother."* "Great Grandfather's" teacher or elder, Oct 29th, 2013, 8:50 p.m.

**Chapter Twenty-Five – The Meeting of a Misogynist Ancestor and My Baby Girl**

It was hard to believe that the day had finally come. Each step of the way, the ancestors had guided the process. In fact, I could take minimal credit; they had simply used me to fulfil the project. It had been a few months now since I had left the community-based HIV/AIDS organization. I hadn't planned on leaving, in spite of having some concerns in the clinic with being exposed to TB while pregnant. On top of feeling increasingly exasperated by the HIV/AIDS crisis, and starting to feel burn-out, I also felt that some of the organizational members were increasingly uncomfortable with traditional healing and medicine. When an international reproductive health agency contacted me about assisting with the development of a traditional health practitioner's reproductive health training program, I was thrilled. I had little to no experience developing training programs for healers, but the ancestors continually told me to: "Do it."

Patiently they instructed me through each step by reminding me that I had a good brain to use, along with a voice for communication, strong hands to pray with and to turn pages of informative books. In spite of my insecurities, they would make use of me, if I yielded.

We had spent the whole afternoon doing *Ngoma.* Singing, dancing, drumming, praying; submitting ourselves through *Amadlozi.* We had found the right place for the training. I had insisted that we be in the bush as it was a unique opportunity for many healers living in urban townships to get out of the city. It offered a retreat-type space and some geographic distance from patients, family, and community concerns. Although it meant time away from their clinics, the healers felt improving their skill set was equally as important.

Mainly healers facilitated the training sessions, covering issues from sexually transmitted infections, treatment and care, to traditional methods in reproductive health. Judgment and didactic Eurocentric teaching models were removed. We had spent months earlier trust building and recruiting healers. We had considered everything from appropriate food (no pork), to freedom in using the rather conservative-owned conference facility, liberally.

*Izangoma* took over, as we always did. Many guests and staff sought help before and after our training sessions. We started each day like young *thwasana,* playing the drums and invoking ancestors.

By the third day, those from differing healer's organizations or cultural backgrounds sat together with ease. A lightness and sense of humour, along with a willingness to share and learn from each other became the tone. It was a unique program, which was also made possible by innovators throughout the continent who had developed traditional healer training and collaborations, whose work I had spent hours perusing in the library.

I was getting bigger and slower by the day. My estimated due date was the last day of the training program. Between developing and implementing the program, and seeing patients after hours, there had barely been time to sleep. The training felt like another kind of baby. I was ready for maternity leave.

Making my way back from the bush training centre towards the dining room to rest before dinner, I felt feeble. I plugged along, pretending not to be breathless or exhausted. My "work hard attitude", born out of being raised by a working-class father, was often a hindrance. I fell to the ground on all fours. Three of the healers wandering alongside me

panicked. Fearing I was in labour, Nomsa ran to get Makwasa, an almost blind *gogo*, who didn't label herself a traditional birth attendant, but had delivered and cared for "too many babies" to count.

Crouching down, she asked: "*Nomadlozi,* baby coming?"

"No *gogo*, I think baby's okay," I answered with uncertainty.

Unconvinced, she stayed nearby waiting for the 'What next?' while chatting to the growing circle of healers. My body was sore. I felt as though I had been awoken from a 300-year-old sleep. My bones felt tired and old like the firmly embedded rocks digging into my knees.

"*Uh, oooh,*" I moaned, my thirsty mouth dry as the desert.

The healers helped me up and I hobbled, falling to the ground again.

"*Y-o-o-i-i,*" I bellowed from my gut, causing all the healers to kneel or bend down and cup-clap: "T-h-o-k-o-z-a!" they exclaimed, greeting the Ancestor.

I no longer felt the weight of my heavy uterus or my aching hips and water-retaining swollen feet. It wasn't the baby ready to be born; it was an *idlozi* coming through.

We made our way partially up the hill towards shade, until the old and grouchy male ancestor coming through me sat down and demanded *umqombothi*. Luckily, we had some left over from the opening ceremony a few days earlier.

"Um hum, um hum," he mumbled, approving of the smell of the traditional beer.

Spraying it in four directions, he gulped it down.

"Too long, sleeping…" he said, seeming reminiscent of Rumpelstiltskin.

The *idlozi* was so old that even he didn't count time. He shooed away any of the female *Izangoma,* preferring a male *Inyanga* to engage with him. Having only two men at the training, there was a pause until the younger one who had been observing from a short distance came forward.

"*Thokoza Ntate Mogolo,*" he said respectfully, greeting the old man in Sotho.

Then the old man whispered to him in English, broken Zulu, some Sotho words, and lots of hand gestures. The young man nodded and replied: "*Si ya vuma Mogolo.*"

He turned to face all the women and proclaimed: "…is good, they coming like this," he said, pointing to everyone. He spoke slowly and with authority and clarity about the importance of learning and helping the people; and how the patients needed help. He talked about the organization facilitating the training and what more they needed to do.

He stayed a little longer, grunting and groaning, trying to come to terms with being in a body after being "asleep" for so long. I knew he was leaving when I became more alert. My bones stopped aching and I felt the baby churning again.

"Hey, this old man - he hasn't come through before," I said to the healers afterwards.

"Yeah *Nomadlozi*, it happens that way. Even after so long, long since being a *thwasa,* they can still come," said *Makwasa.*

"But this one; he didn't like women! Only men! Even choose the young one to talk too. Maybe he's from around this place," I said, referring to the Magaliesburg area.

"He's too old; maybe that's why," said another healer in the group.

"Yeah, but he must talk to the older *ugogo*, not just the young one who's a man!" I said, challenging the ancestor's seemingly sexist attitude.

A few healers laughed, while others shook their heads in a 'What are you going to do?' motion.

"He…he chose me. Maybe he forgot I was a woman or forgot just who I am," I said. "Tell him who I am!" I said laughingly in an Afrikaans accent.

"Hey *gogo,* no mistake; is YOU, *wena* he wanted," said *Makwasa,* before going to sit quietly under a shaded tree to take snuff. No baby to deliver today.

—

A few days later I went into labour. My childbirth experience was a far cry from those of the women I had often observed labouring away in the hallways of Jo-burg Gen. With private medical aid, I had a multitude of birthing choices. The Linkwood Clinic offered extensive gynaecological and obstetric services, but also midwifery. In fact, the clinic was run by midwives.

I had planned an all-natural labour and birth but with a ten-and-a-half-pound baby, there had been complications. I attributed David's stealthy wrestler grandfather, and my drinking too much Horlicks throughout pregnancy, to my big and healthy baby girl.

After an emergency caesarean, I rested in a King-size bed overlooking a green golf course. I was brought fresh homemade meals and the midwives checked on me regularly. The only

similarity between my experience and millions of South African women of colour was the cultural practice of taking home the placenta for ritual burial underneath a sapling.

After a few days receiving the best midwifery and obstetric care in the country, I went home to 'learn' how to breastfeed, as well as simply hold and care for a baby, something I had never experienced from living in a male-centered culture. I had the luxury of maternity leave, being in a safe home, and having the economic means to care for myself and my child. I struggled with exhaustion, being covered in spit, poop, and other unidentifiable liquids; but this was typical. All that mattered was my beautiful daughter.

The days wore into weeks, and as I struggled to comfort a colicky baby, I felt the strain of not having my mother and sister in South Africa. David was working long hours, his sister was away for an indefinite period, and his mother was overwhelmed with a new business. I would be going back to work soon and needed to consider childcare. Despite my feelings towards employing mAIDS and nannies, I needed help.

The ancestors brought a kind, cheerful, and loving caregiver into our lives, Mavis. Despite my constant awareness of socioeconomic inequalities, I was beyond grateful for her presence. Mavis was glad to have a good paying job with a nice family; in spite of the distance from our home to where her sons lived. The youngest was just six and lived in Zimbabwe where Mavis's mother raised her grandchildren. I had heard countless times: "My *gogo* raised me, she was my mother," from many South Africans.

Mavis had been in Jo-burg a long time. She had come, like so many people do, looking for work. This had become normalized.

Maternity leave for many South African women was minimal. I couldn't even imagine, weeks after giving birth, having to go back to work, or risking the loss of work, despite improving labour laws. This 'norm' absolutely countered most South African traditional customs, whereby post-partum women rested and were taken care of. But in a neo-colonial South Africa, work for bare survival was often absolute.

The weekend threatened to become a blur, as it does when you have a young child. I spoke with my mentor, Ntate Koka, who asked us to visit him for a blessing for our daughter.

We arrived at his home in Midrand where we sipped tea in the living room. In all the time, I had spent with him, I hadn't been in his house. Our visits were always in the garage, his workspace. When he wasn't hunched over an outdated computer teasing out his latest philosophical compositions, he was chatting with hungry minds that arrived without invitation.

He and his wife weren't bothered by visitors. Occasionally Ntate's wife would bring in tea and biscuits to warm us up. *Gogo* was friendly and quiet. Ntate was happy with a house full of Afro-centric politically-minded people. Their home, known as the "house of exile" in the 70s, had always been a place for clandestine communications. In secret meetings involving the likes of Steve Biko, the Black Consciousness Movement was formed. I often wondered what life had been like for Ntate Koka's wife with a young family and a politicized husband who had lived in exile for fifteen years.

Sipping my rooibos, I stared at Ntate in his elaborately embroidered West African shirt as he talked passionately about *Ubuntu* and concepts of Afrikology. His greying eyes and

neatly combed white hair carried a kind of magic; an enchantment that only elders who live on the thread of spirit have. He was humble and his age had not dulled his revolutionary propensities. Ntate's breadth of academic knowledge and passion for continental and diasporic Africans was inspirational. His boundless energy and continual resiliency reminded me of the tortoise and the hare. His pace was no determinant in his arrival. On top of this, he embodied an ancestral knowledge which was apparent in his presence. He attributed his poor eyesight to an eye condition, but I could see *Amadlozi* working through him and infusing his speech. He once told me that the very saliva that swoosh's about in our mouths he described, was part of the first waters, and when we speak, pray, and conduct libation, those words are ensconced in water that connects us to the earth, ancestors, and the primordial waters.

Sometimes I sat watching him work; every now and again he would break away, sharing ideas in mid-concept. The more I asked, the more he taught. He never tired of filling people with knowledge.

As we sat politely on the couch, *Gogo* joined us. She held my cooing daughter exclaiming: "Big girl!"

"Before Ntate starts, I would also like to bless this child," she said.

"Oh please. Thank you so much, *Gogo,*" I said.

She then recited a lengthy prayer stemming from her Jehovah's Witness faith. My daughter sat on her knee happily taking in her warm eyes.

I thought back to the first time I had met Ntate at the Parliament of the World's Religions in Cape Town. He came to a talk I was giving on traditional South African healing and its commonalities with First Nations medicine in Canada. It was one of my first talks. It was simple, maybe even juvenile, but he sat in the crowd and listened attentively. At the end, he humbly built on my modest contributions. Then he took me under his wing.

He was so tolerant of me, even when I didn't mind my own business and chided him saying: "Too many sugary drinks with diabetes aren't good, Ntate." My concern was selfish; I wanted him around for a long time. He wasn't bothered; he saw me as a caring daughter.

With a little water, he blessed our baby while explaining the history of libation and the use of water for blessings in various places throughout the continent. He had conducted thousands of blessings for people, events, and communities for half a century.

"*Ah ha*, very good," said Ntate when learning of our child's name. "Her name means 'moon'. You see the woman is a Goddess. The Goddess of plenty and is connected with the moon. The moon is the place the woman goes every month. But you must pronounce her name correctly, and you must never use it in anger. No, this is a special name. You understand?" he asked.

"Now, we are not done," he said, explaining the origins of her name from three different areas and ethnicities throughout the continent.

We sat listening attentively, grateful for the education and thankful for his tender blessing.

As we finished, a visitor arrived and Ntate slipped away into the garage.

I watched him work determinedly, day and night on concepts of Afrikology which he said could provide social transformations. Essentially, he taught that the liberation of the mind and "shaking off that which has been clouding your mind" allowed for the seeing of truth and African genius. "We are Afrikans, we live in Afrika, but we know so little of Afrika because our Afrika concepts and so forth have never come into the curriculum of study when all the time we are born here in Afrika. We are children of the soil but we claim to be uprooted from our soil, and therefore we have foreign ideologies and foreign cultural aspects and so forth. Therefore, my view is looking at Afrika as the centre," (Khoza 2011.)

As a self-described Pan-Africanist, he formed the Black People's Convention and served as a chairperson for the Church's Justice and Peace Association; a move that created tension with the Catholic Church. He moved on to establish the Black Allied Workers Union.

His first capture under the Apartheid police for breaking house arrest and attending public meetings led him to be detained for eight months in solitary confinement. Despite this, he continued to work with students aligned with the Black Consciousness Movement.

He was forced into exile to Botswana after a warrant was issued for his arrest following participation in the 1976 Soweto Uprising. He continued to work with those in exile in Botswana and played an important role in the South African Youth Revolutionary Council until he returned fifteen years later to join The Azanian People's Organization, and then The Socialist Party of Azania (South African History Online, March 1, 2013.)

His later endeavours were focused on forming the Kara Institute, which developed into the Karaites Institute of Afrikology. The organization was dedicated to the study of Africa in its totality.

We left Ntate's house grateful that the ancestors had guided the naming of our daughter. We were doubly blessed months later when she was further honoured with the middle name Palesa, 'new flower', from Sanusi Vusamazulu Credo Mutwa.

## Chapter Twenty-Six – Botswana Bound

One day I received a call that threw me from my mommy cocoon. An organization was looking for a consultant to help develop a traditional healer program. The interviewers were in Jo-burg for only a few days and wanted to meet me immediately.

So, I ran out to get breast pads, put on a minimally-stained shirt, combed my hair for the first time in months, and headed to the Rosebank Hotel for the interview. I was surprised to meet a group of highly educated expats schmoozing over mimosas and an elaborate continental breakfast.

Oliver, the only Batswana present, told me how he had heard about the work I was doing and thought I would be a good fit. I was flattered, surprised, and a little wary. It turned out it was a private/public partnership launching a national HIV/AIDS strategy for Botswana. The job would entail developing a national traditional healer program with local

communities and governmental bodies. I would, of course, have to move to Botswana for a minimum of a year.

This could be a real chance to inform change at a policy level. Imagine what could be achieved with a national program for traditional healers?

My mind wandered as the ex-pats postulated, seeking to impress each other. My biggest concern was not being available for my daughter. I wanted the opportunity, but not at the expense of being an absent mother.

David and I talked it out. We packed up and moved to Botswana a few weeks later.

David was happy to leave his job. He managed to find some employment with the same company, but with fewer demands and fewer hours. So that he could also be available to take care of our daughter.

Gaborone was a far cry from Jo-burg. I liked that it was smaller and less polluted. I was glad that there was a movie theatre and the odd restaurant, not to mention a Woolworth's which appealed to my middle-class whiteness. We found a nice house to rent in Kgaleview and enjoyed the mixed bag of nearby houses. From elaborate estates, to smaller corrugated iron-roofed homes, it expressed an intermingling of classes. This was so counter to South Africa, where neighbourhoods and divisions of class were reminiscent of racial segregation.

Within a week, I had set up my *indumba.* I expected that I might be even busier in Botswana. After all, the *ngaka ya ditshotshwa,* herbalist*, ngaka ya ditaola,* herbalist-diviner, *ngaka ya di-dupang,* sucker and *moprofiti*, prophet, were highly revered and utilized nationwide.

I quickly learned that one distinction from South Africa was that in Botswana, *Izangoma* was less pervasive than the herbalists, predominantly men. I suspected that this could pose a problem with my new consultancy position.

After a few dreams, followed by inquiries of an older master healer with a quiet disposition, I found Masego, just ten minutes from my house.

I arrived at the compound sweating profusely. I was in a losing battle with sweat management. The heat may have been bearable for one hour a day. In Botswana, it was hot all the time. The desert sun brought temperatures from thirty-eight degrees in the late morning to forty-five middays. I was constantly (and surreptitiously) wiping my armpits and cleavage. When I wasn't busy trying to hide unattractive sweat pools, I was trying to hydrate an unquenchable thirst. I couldn't possibly imagine ever acclimatizing to Botswana's heat.

The temperatures explained the general pace of the country. Things happened, slowly and eventually. The temperature wasn't embraced, more like tolerated, and Batswana knew that resistance to the heat was futile. When I complained about how hot it was to every storekeeper who would listen, I always got the same non-responsive stare. After all, I was accustomed to endlessly complaining about the weather; it's a Canadian pastime! Between these one-sided conversations and my glaringly pale skin, (even when tanned), folks knew I wasn't from Botswana.

Masego wasn't surprised to have a white woman consulting with him. Of the one-hundred patients he helped a day, he was accustomed to people of all ages, and racial and cultural

backgrounds; but I was here for different reasons. I tried to circumvent the dried-herbs on the floor, stepping carefully towards the buckskin mat and a presumed bag of divining bones.

He offered me a homemade mini wooden bench to sit on, and I declined, preferring to sit on a reed mat on the floor. He stared in amazement after suddenly recognizing my beads and *khanga.* Our conversation was extremely limited as his English was nil and my Tswana nonexistent. I had found Tswana and Sotho particularly hard to pick up.

After about fifteen minutes of staring at each other, a middle-aged man dressed twenty years too young, stepped into the *indumba*, where he slipped his cheap sunglasses onto his head and removed his pointy patent leather shoes.

"*Dumela Rra,*" I said.

"Hi Ms., how are you?" he asked, in keeping with the preferred term over the colonial-imbued 'Madame.'

"*Re teng,*" I replied.

"I am here to see *Rra* Masego," I said.

He translated my simple words.

"He says 'Hello and welcome.'

"I am a *Sangoma* from South Africa" I explained.

He began translating, but stopped midway to exclaim, "*Ouw*!"

“He doesn’t understand,” said fancy shoes.

“I am a *Sangoma*, a healer, *ngaka ya ditaola.* I use *umuthi* and *amatambo,*” I said, motioning to the bones.

Fancy shoes blatantly scrutinized me. Trying to play it cool, he looked back at Masego who stared at me curiously. Just then a patient serendipitously peered through the door and asked for the bones. He tried to shoo her away but I suggested he let her in. Sitting on the wooden stool, she smiled and said: “Good day.”

“*Dumela Mma,*” I replied, in keeping with the custom of greeting another person as father, mother, sister, brother, uncle, etc.

Once Masego threw the bones, he spoke to the woman, telling her all that he saw. Fancy shoes leaned forward to translate.

“No, no, don’t tell me. I will tell you what I see once he’s done. If that’s okay?” I asked.

“Okay,” agreed Masego wondering how I would read *his* bones.

“No problem,” I said, “*Badimo* will show me.”

—

The next few months I went between my house, the organization’s head office, and Masego’s. My practice was growing thanks to Mavis’ accolades and was made up predominantly of nearby mAIDS and nannies.

"Hello *Mma,*” said Mavis as I walked through the door for my regular noon nursing and cuddle session with my daughter.

“Lesego was here again for you today. I told her to come back after your job," she said.

"*Dankie, Mma.* I'll nurse the baby and then get the *indumba* organized for when she comes,” I said.

"Oh-kay, she's still sleeping, though. *Eish,* it took long. I walked around for over an hour; finally, she slept," said Mavis, her sweat-soaked back to me.

"Shame *Mma,* you must have been too hot!" I exclaimed, watching Mavis wipe her brow over a sink full of dishes.

I assumed when we decided to move to Botswana that Mavis wouldn’t want to come. She moved with us, not out of desperation for work, but because it allowed her to be closer to her children in Plumtree. With mounting xenophobia, having a work permit made border crossings from Zimbabwe to South Africa smoother. On quieter days, she would tell me about Plumtree, a place I had never been while backpacking through Zimbabwe. She would talk about her older son, of whom she was so proud, and of her ageing mother caring for her young son since birth. Her husband visited occasionally on his way from Zimbabwe to eGoli, and came and went without joy or disappointment.

On particularly hot days, in between cooking, cleaning and patients, Mavis would tell me about those she had lost in the Gukurahundi genocide in Matabeleland in the early 1980s. She wouldn't say too much about it, but whenever Mugabe's name came up in discussion or on the radio, her friendly and chatty disposition changed to a quiet antagonism.

Later that day, Lesego arrived as she often did, unannounced. She sat and chatted with Mavis. Mavis was happy to have a “friend in need, not a friend indeed.” Someone had been

calling the police on illegal domestic workers. The calls were born out of the perception that “jobs are being taken away by Zimbabweans”. Although Mavis’ papers were in order, she proceeded with caution in all her local interactions. Not only that, but Mavis felt that there was “something wrong” with Lesego.

Lesego had begun visiting when Mavis wasn't home. I could see she wanted to consult with me but felt embarrassed. It had only taken me a short time to realize her concerns. It wasn't just her *pantsula* style, shortly cropped hair always covered with a cap or her indifference to traditional or distinctly feminine clothing; her deep voice and “masculine” gestures revealed more.

"*Woza Mma, woza,*" I said, calling her into the *indumba. "Sit sisi, phansi,"* I said motioning.

"So, ah, well," she said, fidgeting with her fingers.

"It's okay, we will *amathambo, Mma,"* I said, shaking the pouch of bones.

Piling all of the sacred objects into both hands and reaching forward, she blew on them. *"Thokozani Moeti badimo, woza badimo Moeti,*" I mumbled, invoking her ancestors.

"Your child has been sick; you must wash her with herbs from the mountain. Her blood is also weak. You must give her an *imbiza* to drink to strengthen her blood. She doesn't have a good appetite. She worries too much about her mother. Your brother drinks too much. He comes to get money from you and you give it to him because you're afraid he will beat you," I continued. "But we know that is not why you are here. You have another kind of problem. You have certain emotions and feelings, don't you?" I asked.

She looked away and nodded, afraid of what the bones might show. I proceeded delicately. "So these feelings; you think that there is something wrong with you, *neh*?" I asked.

"*A-a, Mma,*" she said, staring at the scattered objects.

"You want to get rid of this, this feeling that you want to love a woman? That you want to be with a woman," I said.

She began to cry.

"*A-a, Mma*, is true. Please, can you help?"

"How?" I asked.

"Can you give me *muthi* something to clear away the feelings and the things that come into my head?"

"*Mma*, there is no medicine," I said softly.

"*Eish*, I have been to so many *ngaka;* I can't count. The last one gave me tablets. They helped for only a short time. Then I was having the same feelings," she said, looking at me hopelessly.

"*Mma..."* I began.

"There must be *muthi* or tablets that can work, to change this problem, to help this sickness?" she pleaded.

"No *Mma,* there is no medicine. Those other *ngaka;* they were stealing your money. *Muthi,* tablets, nothing can get rid of this. It's not a sickness, *sisi."*

"No? How can this be? Other people lay with men, get married and have no problem. Even me, I had a boyfriend, just weeks back, but you know, he wanted to lay with me and I didn't want it. I had no feelings for him or sex. Why! What is wrong? Can't you give me something to make me want to be with a man?" she persisted.

"No, I can't. Your feelings for a woman are natural. It's okay. There's nothing wrong," I insisted.

"No, no, how can this be?" she cried vehemently, shaking her head.

"Why don't you think about what I've said, and we can talk more later," I suggested.

"I have *pula*; I can pay you to get the *muthi* if you don't have it. It's no problem," she begged.

"I don't want your money. I want to speak the truth. A truth you know. Think about it, *Mma,*" I consoled.

"*Eish, Mma,*" she said, and with that, she readjusted her cap and slipped out the door and past the gate, without saying goodbye to Mavis.

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Sitting in the cold austere boardroom I was grateful to see Boipelo the tea lady arriving with a tray of Rooibos and Eet-Some-More biscuits. It was one of the last times I saw her.

"*Ke a leboga, mma,*" I said while her slender hand slipped the tray onto the table.

I couldn't help but notice her worsening appearance; her dry and thinning hair neatly combed over, her sunken eyes, and the constant look of exhaustion plus the disappearance

of muscle mass. Despite the heat, she masked her skeletal frame with too many layers of clothing. She tried to cover her hacking cough, but I often found her winded, halfway up the long staircase.

She seemed to be more absent from work lately. I assumed that like all staff, Boipelo was given extensive medical aid coverage. After all, the purpose of the organization was to collaborate with private and public sectors to provide free HIV and AIDS prevention, diagnosis, counselling, treatment and care nationwide. But there was no way of knowing if she had been tested, let alone receiving care. As the weeks went on I asked about her.

“Oh, she went to go back to the village,” replied an older woman.

*Back to the village*. Home. The place it seemed people went to die.

Interrupting my thoughts, Robert asked: “So, how should we proceed?”

“Well, I suggest we do a knowledge, attitudes, practices and behavioural survey, and then we'll have a better idea," suggested Stewart.

“Yes, that is a good suggestion. Should we use the University again?” asked Robert.

“Well, I think our options are limited. So, I’ve been in touch with them,” replied Stewart, an overly confident, eager and hygienic consultant from the UK.

This was common dialogue around the boardroom table, a space with which I was becoming increasingly uncomfortable. The uneasiness was mutual. I was among a sea of mainly foreign white consultants. My lack of graduate and post-graduate degrees from Harvard, Oxford or Columbia, mixed with my focus on traditional African healers and HIV

and AIDS, were only part of the reason for a mutual discomfort. Although I was white and wore freshly-pressed suit jackets, enjoyed academic and pop culture references, I also wore freshly-slaughtered goat fur bracelets, had strange beads hanging from my neck and rear-view mirror, and was more engaged with 'tea ladies' than my peers.

I was different and it was obvious, and I had no interest in belonging. I wasn't one of them. I had worked too hard to break down my own facades and unlearn many Eurocentric beliefs and other fallacies about normality. My permanent residency in 'Africa,' made me seem purposeless and confused. In fact, for some, I had been here too long. On top of that, I didn't spend weekends team building on game reserves or proving that I was culturally literate by having temporary local friends and relationships. I wasn't swept up in an inner African adventure narrative, which made for titillating stories at elite dinner parties in the Global North.

I was, however, quickly learning that my enthusiasm for higher level development and policy implementation wasn't what it seemed. Aid, particularly connected to corporations, carried dubious imperialistic mandates. I tried to ignore the feeling of complicity by focusing on the changes that were possible. After all, Botswana had the potential to have one of the first national traditional health practitioner's programs in Africa. But, it had been in the same boardroom that Stephen Lewis, the esteemed Canadian diplomat and social justice advocate had asked, "How can you people live with yourselves working for these people?" he questioned, referring to the large pharmaceutical partner who was essentially paying our outlandish salaries.

There were a few local Batswana on staff, who were marginally respected for their language and cultural skills forced to provide informal 'cultural competency.' Their lived experiences and academic qualifications were muzzled by the bellowing foreign consultants. "White people know best' attitude was simply masked behind political and cultural politeness.

The meeting ended early, and we all returned to our closed offices, some to secretly vent concerns or quietly fulfil questionable objectives and outcomes.

Weeks passed before I saw Lesego again, until one day she reappeared. Mavis and I sat drinking tea in the yard overlooking the withering vegetable patch which was scorched from the heat. Mavis talked about how terrified she was of the limping rogue baboon that helped himself to all of the maize and abundant *morogo.* If you happened to interrupt him while he was snacking, he simply stared at you. Banging pots and pans shooed him away, momentarily.

"*Gogo, gogo,*" I heard someone calling.

"Is Lesego," said Mavis.

"Back here," I hollered.

*"Le kae* Lesego*?"* I said greeting her.

"I'll get out of your way ladies," I said.

*"No Mma,* I'm here to see you,*"* she said.

Lesego had dropped by a few times since throwing the bones. Each time I saw her, she stared at me as if to say: “I need to talk to you.” But when I came over to chat, she disappeared.

These odd interactions went on for weeks. She was afraid, not of me, but of what had been said. Now that someone had spoken her truth and said the words aloud, they were no longer feelings or ideas swirling around in her like a tempest. The *ngaka* and the ancestors had confirmed it; her desires for a woman would never be transformed; the use of magic could never induce a craving for men.

I ushered Lesego into the *indumba*.

"So, I want to know if you have medicine to help me with this problem *Mma*?" she asked.

"Medicine?" I asked.

"*Muthi* for my problem?"

"Lesego, *sisi,* I have no *muthi* for you. Not for this."

"Oh, okay, then what now?" she asked, arms folded tightly across her chest.

"Well, how do you feel about what we talked about?” I asked.

*“Eish Mma*, I don't feel happy. I think what you say is true, but I can't accept, *Mma.* I can't accept this," she said, shaking her head.

"You know, Lesego, I know many people like this, both men and women. I have friends, even family, who are this way," I said reassuringly.

"Is true?" she asked.

"*Yebo, Mma."*

"What do they do?" she asked.

"Well in my country it isn't illegal. It's legal and okay, so many people have relationships. Some get married, and some even have children," I said.

"*Eish* man, but how?" she asked." So, what can I do? How can I meet these other women?" she continued.

"I don't know *sisi,* I don't know. I just know you are okay; there is nothing wrong," I contended.

"Maybe you should visit Johannesburg. I know of an association for gays and lesbians there. Women like you, maybe you can get support?" I suggested, but Lesego felt Jozi was too far and dangerous, and she didn't have anyone to watch her daughter while she was gone.

"You sure no *muthi, gog?*" she asked once more.

"No *Mma*, don't waste your time and money. The only way is acceptance," I reaffirmed.

**Chapter Twenty-Seven – Institutionalized Homophobia, George W. Bush and the Eras Before the Vikings**

My time at the organizational office and Ministry of Health seemed more and more redundant. There was little to no cooperation, and I couldn't access traditional health practitioners through formal channels. I had come to learn that Oliver, the man who had

sought me for the position, hadn't done so at the request of the local community. I hadn't known this and had arrived with enthusiasm and a willingness that wasn't entirely welcomed. I assumed that many felt I was just another white consultant thrust upon them to tell them what their needs were, and how their problems should be solved.

I wouldn't say that traditional healing and medicine wasn't entirely patriarchal in Botswana, but women practitioners definitely seemed to be in the minority. Not to mention that to my knowledge, there was only one other white *Sangoma* in Botswana. I had also entered a very political sphere. With hundreds of millions of dollars coming into the country via private and public channels, it was safe to assume most structural aspects were shifting. There were hidden agendas and desired outcomes that were beyond my knowledge or access. There were those that supported traditional health practitioners and medicine; while others based on their personal faith choices were indifferent, dismissive, or offended by 'outdated practices.' In other words, I had unknowingly walked into an international imbroglio but was thought to be ignorant and paid too well to say or do anything about it.

Trust building, collaboration, and community-based focuses were challenging. Each meeting was uncomfortable, with a stifling tension filling the air. No matter how much I prayed or what medicine I used to open the way, nothing lifted the barriers. In one fell swoop, I had become "part of the foreign aristocratic labour force which seemed to be slowly overtaking social and economic spheres" (Mogalakwe 428) in Botswana. This had

been so counter to my work in South Africa that it made me increasingly disheartened. To appease my guilt, I provided free consultations, in spite of the necessity for an exchange.[10]

One morning the ancestors gave me strength and reminded me: "Where there is a will, there is a way." I started meeting with local organizations who expressed a willingness to work together. I even met with those who didn't. I wanted to secure a predecessor to represent traditional healing and community-based needs; basically, what should have been done from the start. I slowly learned about the long history between traditional health practitioners and the government, about the previous programs and mandates. I figured I would at least have the courage to change the things I could, for as long as I was there.

I worked steadily with a hardworking and dedicated government official to develop a national traditional health practitioner's proposal. It wasn't perfect. For starters, we didn't have a calculator or basic office supplies. There were resources; we just didn't really have access to them. It felt like traditional healing and medicine was reduced to 'cultural things', and shoved into a cupboard.

Then there was the issue of developing the proposal with insufficient traditional health practitioner input. It was deeply problematic, but I figured a decent proposal and allocated funds were better than no project at all. If we didn't proceed, the proposal and strategy would diminish without much concern.

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[10] It is essential that there is an offering for doing the healing work. It is believed that if there isn't an exchange, the ancestors will be angered or not effective aids 'in the work.' I always maintained a sliding scale and had also accepted chickens, animal hides, sewing of traditional regalia, herbal plants, drumming or even flowers as an exchange. Most importantly, a patient should never be turned away because of lack of resources.

George W. Bush visited the American Embassy; I was only one of two people who didn't go to meet him. A visit from Bill and Melinda Gates to the local hospitals, and highbrow luncheons with pharmaceutical, medical and private sector elites, left a bad taste in my mouth. Like the bitter taste of ARV tablets that are unpalatable, and change taste perception.

It wasn't long before Lesego visited again. This time she came with news that her boss was gay. She suspected this long before, but he confirmed this while drinking too many Campari and oranges one late afternoon in the garden. Lesego continued to inquire about her "problem," as though it was a condition.

Mavis started suspecting Lesego was a lesbian. "There's something wrong with that one. I don't like it. I won't let her sit in my place; maybe she wants to kiss me or something!" she said laughingly.

I maintained Lesego's confidentiality while trying to surreptitiously address Mavis' homophobia. Homosexuality was illegal in Botswana. Homophobia was literally institutionalized and culturally embedded. I had to tread lightly; I didn't want to see Lesego arrested, beaten, or becoming a victim of corrective rape; an act of violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, and queer individuals to 'correct' their sexual 'tendencies' (Moeti 2012).

A few weeks after the back and forth of "there is 'no cure' for being a lesbian, and "you are not sick or wrong", Lesego visited again, but this time with a bounce in her step.

"So, I met this woman; she's a professional. I think she likes me, but I don't know," Lesego revealed, both eager and puzzled.

"Oh, that's good. Do you like her?" I asked.

"*A-a, Mma,"* she replied with a shy smile.

"But, what do I do? I don't know how it is to be with a woman. What do I do?" she asked.

"Well, I can't tell you what to do; I don't know," I said, sharing a chuckle.

"But you will figure it out. If she has been with other women she will help you," I suggested.

“I don’t know. I want to… but I don’t know,” she said.

“Take your time. There’s no rush. Do what’s right for you,” I said.

The next time I saw Lesego she swaggered into the yard with a new confidence. Her head wasn’t hanging low, but she was trying to conceal her sheer delight. She sat chatting with Mavis as I took clothes down from the laundry line. Passing her I asked, "It all worked out, *Mma*?"

"*A-a Mma*, sharp!" she said, giving me two thumbs up in front of a wide grin.

I stood in the kitchen watching Lesego relax and chat with ease. The sun was starting to set. In its final celebration of the day, the pastel hues spread across the sky. Expansive and free; gently caressing us good night.

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*"And then we go dancing into the night. Calling and chasing the moon, wanting to dip our feet in her patterns and streams.*

*Do you remember when we called you? You were sitting in a field by the school. The bell went and you went far by the gate's edge. You wanted to cry, to say: 'Don't make me go in there. I don't belong there.' But you couldn't speak because they couldn't understand your language.*

*So, we told you: 'Go in there. Go, but only for a short time. They do not own any part of you. No one does. You are free; as free as these words. The time is coming for you, where you will teach and learn in our way, the way of the ancestors.*

*Stay close; we will be closer. Help those around you who don't hear us well; those that cover their ears and cry deafness. We cannot be something we are not for other people. Do you hear these words? Do you hear these things we say? We tell them so simply; they can be followed so simply, too.*

*Dancing is a good way to hear us. We like that listening too. Just as you are now. Not listening to every little thing that comes along. You call it thinking, but it's listening. You don't have to only catch the good ones [referring to thoughts]. We are clear. We are as clear as the lakes that surround you. The clear ones are the ones to listen to and follow.*

*You won't go into that school, and you don't have to hide any longer by the gate, hoping to be unseen. You can walk on that ground or trot as a wild horse in or out or anywhere!*

*Do you listen to this? Our only bindings are the ones that we tie together when we aren't listening."* Nenjihila, August 8, 2014.

*"The wolves lead. I ride and they pull. We are not from hell. Our people understand that there is dark and light and everything between and nearby. We aren't afraid. Fear is no good for us or for the people. We prize bravery. Courage changes everything.*

*We heed to the Goddess and she bends things for us. I am the one who delivers messages. I travel day and night. I do not need the meat, berries, or grains from the high fields. I eat fish in the caves by the wolf's home. I eat birds that others catch. I am bold.*

*This red stone you see around my neck; it lights the way and protects me from those creatures you call demons. These are real, not just children's stories. I am safe with this stone. I work with the crow; it helps to carry the message.*

*Do you know where the message comes from? I don't always know. The thunder beings give it to me, most of the time. The message goes to the king; it goes to the mountains first. The trees help me to carry the message; the birds too. The wolves keep away bears and snakes and those demons.*

*I need the Goddess, the wind, to help me travel. The visions the people have at night [referring to dreams] carry me too. Messages can be lost if the people don't see. My children are my wolves and the blessed little ones who show me eating. I don't rest. I weave all the communication, and in this way, I help bring it forward; otherwise, the people won't know.*

*In the beginning, the people moved little. They had everything there. This was before all the buildings and travel when the messages were not well listened to. There are those to listen to the messages [she gives a symbol which resembles KNAGT]. We spoke when we needed to. Quiet was valued. We were born with the stories of our people. Your youngest son will be a warrior, eldest will carry the messages, and middle, teach and lead.*

*I come before the Viking. Long before what is now Denmark. We were the people of the wind, the carriers. The breath taught us."* Ancestor's name unknown, of Scandinavian/Norse descent, July 3rd, 2014.

**Chapter Twenty-Eighty – A Lost (but retrievable) Love Story Between the People and the Plants**

I woke up early and headed over to Masego's. We didn't chat, as he was too busy with patients. He just pointed out the three men that would be taking me to collect medicine. They had been given careful instructions about what to get and where to get it from. As far as I knew, Masego hadn't apprenticed with an *inyanga*. He had been shown for many decades now, what medicine to use, and where to get it through *badimo*. It was clear that his ancestors hadn't led him astray; he had healed hundreds of thousands of people for many decades.

We headed out before sunrise as we needed to be early; it would get too hot to be digging for medicine in midday. After about two hours, I realized that Masego wasn't with us. I was alone in a car with three unknown men; one of which I had met once or twice at Masego's. Knowing this one was Masego's nephew gave me some comfort. He also knew a little English. The other two, who weren't all that chatty, made me a little more uncomfortable. Not only that, but I had no idea where we were going. I only knew that we were about two hours out of Gaborone. I had to rely on my ancestors to keep me safe.

As I drove, the men told me where to turn, or "keep going." The vulnerability reminded me of an experience David and I had while backpacking years earlier from Zimbabwe to Zambia.

We had just gotten off a bus after a twelve-hour bus ride that had been particularly rough, with us both having to stand most of the time. We found ourselves in the middle of nowhere. It was dry bushveld as far as the eye could see. We followed the instructions from the driver and made our way to a medium-sized house; both a police station and border. It was a rural cop shop, with a nice vegetable garden, and even some fresh growing *dagga*,

for “identification” purposes. The officer who greeted us wasn’t intimidating, or friendly, either.

“Passports,” he said, holding out his hand.

“Okay, no problem,” replied David, digging around in his fanny pack.

I wiped my brow and drank warm water from our canteen.

“Wait a sec; it’s got to be in here,” he said.

A few minutes later, after sprawling everything on the floor, we realized that we no longer had our passports. They were nowhere to be found. We had lost them (when I say ‘we,’ I mean me.) Discovering that our camera was gone too, we realized that we must have left some of our belongings in a *kombi* with a German couple with whom we had been travelling.

We couldn’t cross the border or go anywhere without our passports. We only hoped that we could still catch up with the Germans and find our things.

Suffice it to say, David was mad. We were hungry, tired, dirty, and worn out from the bus ride. The worst part was we would have to get back on the same bus (fingers crossed we might get a seat this time), and travel another twelve hours in the hopes that the Germans were still in Zimbabwe, and in fact, had our things.

With nowhere to go, the officer offered us a nice spot on a concrete floor in a small room which was, in fact, a cell. We managed to get some food and wander around just enough to discover that the police station was also a jail. The prisoners, along with their partners and

children, stayed there. The partners and children weren't implicated; it just made more sense having the family stay together. So, mainly wives went about their day cooking over fires. We lay down on the cold floor and tried to get a few hours of sleep before waking up at four a.m. to catch the bus.

Another officer woke us up and quickly ushered us out the door.

"Samuel will walk you to the bus," said the officer.

"Oh, that's no problem officer, I'm sure we can manage," I said.

"No, he will take you," he said. It wasn't an offer.

It turned out Samuel wasn't an officer but a "helper". I wondered if in fact, he was a prisoner. He started to walk out and I suddenly noticed a big FNL assault rifle slung over his shoulder. I nudged David.

"Its fine," he said, trying to sound reassuring.

Samuel didn't talk or respond to conversation, not even in his own language. As the police station fell behind us, so did all the light. It grew darker and darker.

"David!" I said, trying to whisper.

"How do we know this guy isn't just going to rob us and kill us? He's not a cop; so who is he?" I asked.

"No, that's not going to happen," he said.

Samuel shifted his gun.

“Jesus, I‘m really not feeling so sure about this,” I said.

“Me either, but I’m sure it’s fine,” David whispered.

We walked and walked, and walked some more. It grew so dark that we were unable to see our hands in front of our faces, and had absolutely no sense of direction, footing or distance. And still, it grew darker.

“David!” I’d call out, making sure he was beside me, although I could hear his heavy steps.

We grew more silent. It took complete concentration to put one foot in front of the other. It felt like we were walking in outer space.

Just then a very loud roar filled the air. It wasn’t like hearing a car tire pop, and wondering if it was a gunshot. No, it was a lion’s roar, and it was loud enough to rumble through the earth into our boots.

“Ah David, holy shit!” I said. “Is that a…a…” I stammered.

“*Yawh*, that’s a…a lion.”

Samuel confirmed that it was indeed a lion, and about four kilometres away. It turned out that we were walking through a game park, at night.

“So, how far are four kilometres again? That’s quite a bit, right?” I asked.

“Ah no, it’s really close; about two miles,” he said.

It was at that moment that we were overwhelmingly grateful for Samuel. Thank God for him and his assault rifle. I assumed his silence meant that he knew how to handle potential dangers; that or he was shit-scared too.

After another twenty minutes of walking, we finally saw small vehicle lights weaving in the distance. It was our bus and we were almost to it. Suffice it to say, we couldn't have been happier to get back to a twelve-hour bus ride, and hoped Samuel would make it back to the police station, as a "helper", but not as dinner for a hungry lioness.

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The trip to collect *muthi* wasn't comparable to walking through a game park at night with lions, but I did feel a tinge of panic heading into the bush with three male strangers. Now that I was a mother, I was even more invested in avoiding danger. Our first stop was to a small farm. The gents had been collecting medicine, (with the permission of the owner), for many years now. We spent hours digging in the hard, dry earth to pull up a few scrawny rhizomes to use for an upcoming trial for one of them.

We drove to an even more arid area. It was midday, and forty degrees and counting, but we couldn't stop now; we didn't want to lose our day hiding from the sun. As we walked, I admired the beauty of the desert scene. There wasn't a tree or twig as far as the eye could see. It was seemingly barren space.

Then the gents stopped at what looked like a few blades of grass and picked and shovelled away at a plant. About two-feet in, a large beige bulb poked through. Meticulously working around the bulb, careful not to slash its flesh, the youngest man dug around it, until finally

prying the mass out of the earth. It was amazing to consider that indigenous peoples had been using this plant since the beginning of time. The Bantu peoples had learned about the plants and food of the area from the Khoi and San peoples.

After some water and bread, we headed to a hilly area which offered more shade. I was glad to find a rock to sit on under a thorn bush. The younger men were showing signs of fatigue, so the older gent slowly came forward to dig. Sweat poured onto the ground, taunting the earth with hydration.

Carving beneath the tree, he finally retrieved a large and oddly-shaped root, the size of a small goat. A blood red sheen glistened through a small gash in the plant. “This must be for blood strengthening, as well as for women’s menses,” I thought. Up until then, I hadn’t asked the uses for the plants. The ancestors had been telling me all along the way how the medicine should be used. I wrote it down in a pocketbook and looked forward to comparing with Masego once we got back. I picked up the hefty roots and put them in old maize bags and helped lug them back to the car.

On the way, we stopped for cool drinks. The older gent who had laboured to retrieve the blood-coloured root bought a single Peter Stuyvesant and smoked it slowly. The young guy got a second wind and told me the names of the plants in Tswana. The quiet, tall man found a spot under a tree and took a nap. Digging for medicine was a workout.

Driving back with the air conditioning blasting, I felt embarrassed about my obvious initial nervousness. I was surprised to learn that my companions would be organizing transport for the following week to collect more medicine. With Masego’s busy practice, they needed

this amount of medicine regularly. As much as I understood this, I couldn't help but consider the issue of conservation. With the multi-billion Rand (per year) industry of traditional medicine in South Africa, I assumed Botswana had a large indigenous medicine commerce as well. Not only that, but with diminishing species in South Africa, many healers travelled to Botswana, Mozambique, and other neighbouring countries to get medicine. Sustainability and conservation, along with the farming of indigenous plants, were becoming imperative.

*"This is how it went. We had some medicine, right there, like that. Not too many, not like now with you healers, using everything! We had a few. Know why? Because we used the ones we were shown from our grandparents. They were not secret. Many people knew those ones. Then, then, we had a few that our teachers gave us. They showed us where to get them and how to get them, but only when we were finished with the training. We used the plants before that (we trained for a minimum of three years then!).*

*So we used them, but our parent [teacher] hid those places to get them. They only took us there when we were finished training. Even then, my parent, ha, she took me this way and that way to confuse me, so I didn't remember how to go there to get that medicine.*

*You know why she did this? Because I didn't understand the medicine well. I didn't respect it. You know, those plants also have ancestors. They carry ancestors. You can't just pick it and go; never. The plant won't work for you then. It won't work good.*

*Okay, so she [referring to her teacher] took me and I got lost. Then, I went myself later, without her. Ha, I got lost again. Three times like this. She knew I was going without her because she was seeing me [dreaming] being lost. I gave up.*

*Then, I went back home and complained to my ancestors about this terrible teacher, and asked why she wasn't helping me and was she jealous?*

*Then, that night I saw [dreamed] a place. When I awoke, I was in a hurry to go there, but they didn't show me everything, so I just walked around lost some more. Ha, they did this to me like my parent. How could I help the people, only with these one or two plants that everybody had and knew about?!*

*Then, my teacher came in a dream and explained about the plants having ancestors and that we use the plants our ancestors show us. You know why? Because long ago our ancestors and those plants, were one. When the great storms took them apart [separated them], they made an agreement*

*to always find one another. This is a love story between the people and the plants, Nomadlozi!*

*So then I understood, not just that this plant does this…or does that, and so on. No, that isn't knowing; knowing is understanding that agreement that was made before the moon was low.*

*Okay, so then when I sleep I ask the ancestors to forgive me for not understanding. Then I see when my eyes are closed [dreaming], and they take me to three plants. Imagine! In one night! They take me there and show me how to take them out. I take them out and they tell me how to prepare them. Not in the way healers do now…this one for swollen feet…or this for banging in the head…no, not like this. We don't do it this way. They tell me that when I check the bones or I see a patient, I can see the plant they need. The agreement with their ancestors will show this.*

*Let me say, these plants then, are also tied with the people and their name and where they come from, all the way up the line; from this one to this one. Way back to the ancestors, even to the beginning, when there was no beginning; understand? Each person, they are not separate from another person. If you see it in your way, how your people teach you, you must understand that each person comes from a group and that group from*

*another. There was not one man and one woman in the beginning. No, there was the group. The Fire Council.*

*Okay, so if that group goes back and back, there is a medicine for that group. That medicine is for the fire in them, the water in them, the air, the earth, the sky, and even for those ancestors who are in them. When they take that medicine, it corrects everything. You understand? It puts back everything. It helps right inside where all the things are made up [DNA]. Yes, it can help any sickness, any sickness at all. It must be the right plant. If they take the plant from the ones that were fighting long ago, ha, this plant will make them worse. You see, you cannot take another group's medicine. It's not meant for you.*

*Like the animal. You see it. Each animal eats from certain plants and food. They do not all eat the same thing. This is because that food and medicine are for them and their kind. Yes, it's the same for us standing ones too. The same!*

*So, when I woke up from this seeing [refers to dreaming], I was happy and prepared myself to go and get those plants. I wanted to run out the door to find them. I didn't care if I had to walk so far, my legs would fall off. I was running, even forgetting to make the porridge for the child.*

*Then when I put my foot out, ha, then I saw the plants; three plants, not big ones. Ha, they were in the front there. I had got them when I was sleeping. Ha, then I had those ones, the ones I needed so much to help the people. I prayed with those ones but I didn't use them. No, I was frightened. I knew now I couldn't just use the plants, only in the correct way.*

*So, I went to see my teacher. She was living very far now. Now you call the place Lesotho. Whew, it was far. I went there and she was happy. Now she took me to get the other plants. Those plants would help to awaken the ancestors in the plants I had. So, we went to get the plants. Ha, if I tell you the one we went to get, it was just behind where she was living before. Not far! She took me all that way around before, all day going this way and that. Ha, I was so lost. I didn't know if this was up or down. She did that to help me.*

*Now I had the plants from my ancestors and for the peoples' ancestors. You see the agreement was still living."* Ama J. Jan 13, 2015.

https://www.pinterest.com/pin/320318592218965500/

# PART THREE

## *Mhlophe,* White

## Chapter Twenty-Nine –Fireflies, Violence Against Children, and the Global North

The traditional healer proposal had reached the second stage in the three-stage approval process and it looked like Botswana was going to be the first African country to

have a national traditional healer program. I wasn't disappointed when my contract wasn't renewed. We had a new project leader that said she: "Valued my efforts", but thought our budget should be cut drastically. I suspected that her staunch religious beliefs had something to do with her decision. I had provided her with names of reputable local healers (who *should* have had my position, to begin with). She shoved the small list under a pile of what looked like discarded papers. I feared our efforts were in vain but knew that local healers would continue to take strides towards recognition and community betterment.

After countless conversations with David and throwing the bones, the ancestors instructed us to "go to Canada." I was concerned about leaving Southern Africa. There was still so much work to be done, but I had to trust that I would continue the healing work in another capacity; after all, wasn't it the ancestors who knew best?

My two-year-old flopped along on every huge snow mound, making our efforts to reach playgroup seemingly impossible. I was no longer used to putting on all the layers and kept adjusting my coat. The zipper kept scratching against my sunburned chest. It was hard to imagine that just three weeks earlier we had been in Jo-burg buying *muthi* and biltong before immigrating to Canada.

I was still emotional thinking about my last days in S.A; about running into Thabo at the Rosebank market. It was a typical serendipity that was indicative of the ancestor's presence. It had been at least ten years since I had seen him.

Even though he was older and taller now, Thabo was still recognizable. I first met him as a young boy at Twilight Children, a rehabilitation centre for street kids in the heart of

Hillbrow. I started volunteering at the centre shortly after arriving in Jozi. I had been so distraught by the number of street kids sniffing glue from old cool drink containers on *too* many corners, that I had decided to reach out to a local organization. Much to the dismay of David and his mom, I'd take a taxi from Randburg to Braamfontein, and then walk through Hillbrow, which hadn't been a middle-class residential area for some time. With increasingly run-down buildings and high crime rates, it was on a downward squalor trajectory (until urban improvement efforts made strides towards regeneration).

Twilight Children's location was accessible for the boys, particularly for those accessing the soup kitchen and for those living out of the residence. It seemed that the accessibility invited other issues, though. I met Thabo in the foyer as he was horsing around in rehearsal for a performance about street life, crime, escaping bad home environments, drugs, fighting, and rape.

William the coordinator, took me through the building while Thabo and a couple of the other boys laughed, popping in and out of the shared rooms. The disrepair of the building was obvious. A new roof was needed, urgently, along with a paint job inside and out, and then there were the various broken windows. William discussed the obvious need for a better building but assured me that a warm bed, basic meals, paid school fees and uniforms were a far cry from the streets.

In the months following I started an art program for self-expression and sharing of personal narratives. I often hung out with the boys while they played soccer. Slowly I heard some of their stories. Louie, then twelve, told me about leaving Thokoza Township because of the brutal warring among IFP and ANC supporters. He had lost two brothers to the political

battles. Samuel, only nine, talked about using a gun and implied that he had shot someone. As the months wore on I became attached to the younger boys, and in my enthusiasm, naiveté, and probably a good dose of the white-saviour-complex, I invited twenty boys over to David's parents' house for a pool party.

In spite of the obvious discomforts, everyone had a good time. Thabo fearlessly cannon-balled into the pool and danced the afternoon away to Arthur's "*Baas*, don't call me *kaffir,*" hit tune. As time went on I didn't go to Twilight as often. I was busting tables most nights at Questionmark in Melville, and then we went on our lengthy hitchhiking trip for eight months. The funny thing was, that in all the years I lived in Jo-burg, I never saw any Twilight kids. I was always relieved when I didn't see a familiar face begging by the traffic lights.

Thabo told me about his wife and daughter, and how he was selling curios but was working on creating his own business. Knowing that he hadn't gone back to the streets and that he had his own family not only gave me with the warm fuzzies but also with a distinctive South African hope. A hope-filled with faith, courage, resiliency, and conviction. It was a hope that despite how unyielding, seemingly broken or extinguishable something seemed, as Desmond Tutu said: "Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness, you see it wonderfully when you fly and the sky is overcast. Sometimes you forget that just beyond the clouds the sun is shining" (Solomon, March 4, 2010.)

I recognized hope when I was about six and a half, and my priorities were begging my parents for a puppy, and slipping my tongue in and out of the fresh gap in my teeth. I could no longer taste fleshy metal and had reaped the rewards in the form of a gum packet from

the tooth fairy. I spent time pondering what my favourite colours were. I had chosen my favourite song and my best friend (for now.) I didn't understand that my regular stomach-aches were a result of hiding abuse, or that in two years I would be raped by Uncle Bob, my father's best friend, just shy of 10-years-old. My biggest concern was how I could get a pink miniature poodle, and grow up to drive a convertible.

One summer night at Uncle Bob's cottage, when it was too late to swim, I stood transfixed in the sand staring at bright specks dancing in the sky. Were they fairies? I wondered, bewitched by their magic. I tried to catch one but missed every time. I wanted to run into the cottage and get a jar but feared the flickering light would be gone when I got back. Succumbing to their enchantment, I stilled myself so as not to frighten them away. I watched in awe as they floated around producing their own light. I tried to catch one but was too slow, and then the light was gone.

At bedtime, each night I begged my parents to let me go outside to look for the magical lights, but I never saw them again. Driving home from Gram's near Wasaga Beach Sunday nights, I searched the small bushes along the highway hoping to see them "just one more time". Maybe they would follow me home, weaving an uneven trail along the highway. In the end, I dozed off, but it was enough knowing that fireflies existed, and that I could meet them on the beach or in my dreams. After all, as Nelson Mandela (2012) said: "Hope is a powerful weapon, and no one power can deprive you of that" (85.)

After a busy morning, and hours of trying to get my toddler to nap, she finally slept. I had enrolled in a few university courses towards my Master's and used the afternoons to complete assignments. Patients trickled in, and I consulted with them in my living room.

Steaming, playing the drums, even secretly slaughtering chickens on the balcony in our High Park apartment; the work had to continue. I was happy to see my family again, and for them to spend time with their niece and granddaughter.

As the months wore on, 'Hope springs eternal', in weather and sentiment, faded fast. It didn't help that Torontonians seemed increasingly grouchy in the winter months. I looked around and wondered why everyone seemed so miserable. No talking, no eye contact, no offering of seats for pregnant women or the elderly. People appeared disconnected from themselves and each other. Even in conversations, people talked *at* me about minutia in a seemingly lonely manner. Almost no one was interested in my experiences, knowledge, or enthusiasm. It was as though my understandings were a kind of threat or insecurity enhancer. I was confused. How was it that so many of the South African homes I had been in, where at times people didn't even have salt, still maintained courtesy and caring? People that I deemed as having "real problems" with a combination of HIV/AIDS, poverty, unemployment and violence; issues that in many cases, couldn't be 'fixed' due to ongoing resource deficiencies and other variables, still displayed courtesy? Any taxi I had sat in, or long bus ride I had shared, people chatted and interacted. We had been offered (along with the other passengers) many a mealie, cucumber or another local snack while travelling through remote areas. In spite of major socioeconomic issues for some, people engaged with one another. There was a true sense of, 'I am because we are.'

But in Toronto, I felt alone. I felt restricted from 'going into spirit', even in spiritual spaces, or sharing the guidance of the ancestors with family, friends or strangers; a common practice among *Izangoma*.

"What am I doing here?" I asked in prayer each evening after lighting *impepho* and offering snuff inside my closet, a make-shift *indumba*.

I kept busy with school, being a Mom, and reaching out to others of a seemingly similar ilk. But many, in an effort to survive, had become like everybody else. There was also the culture of consumption that seemed to have a bigger and badder 'Supersize Me' hold on North Americans. South Africa had its share of consumerism. American-style capitalism was increasingly weaving itself into the socio-economic and cultural fabric of the country, particularly with what was considered *in*, or popular, in 'America.' In North America, "more is better" is a way of life.

Then there was spirituality. Canadians adopted a cerebral and individualized perspective but their spiritual practices seemed ungrounded and without accountability. Many of the spiritually-inclined people I met talked about spirituality from a cerebral and individualized perspective, but spiritual practices seemed ungrounded and without accountability. People seemed to be doing what they wanted, without following the guidelines and foundations of their teachings, knowledge, and practices. This was apparent in the neo-shamanism movement throughout the West.

*"I did not dance like those ones did. Inside, in here [pointing to the chest.] I can say yes, I danced, but not like them with their feet. I want to talk about the good things, every time. I mean every time. Do you know why, Nomadlozi? Because remembering good things, right at the time, well, it*

*makes good memories. We cannot allow ourselves only to see these harsh things. Those harsh things come and go, but those good things, they are forever.*

*I met a man before I was working with the people in this way. I passed him every day when I had that terrible job in those tight clothes. 'Good morning,' I said in my language. You know how we are, always speaking to each other, especially in the morning. You know why our people do this? So we are close to one another. This is how we prevent that fighting. Knowing one another. After, he said, 'Good day,' so quietly I didn't hear him. Then, I asked in our language, which is better to understand this: 'How is your day to be?'*

*'Hey,' he said, and then swore, 'that's how, as the days before.'*

*This man had many bad days. We knew him in the village as this. His name given to him by his parents, as I understood it, meant to be beautiful and strong, but after all these mornings like this, he came to be known as Uhlangamu (zi) [exact spelling unclear.] This was his life, and his miserable face which took to liquor.*

*These things weren't caused from bad things to have happened or from those wandering things [referring to tokoloshe] that steal some of a person's insides [soul.] Uh ah, it was from his own choice; his way to see all things.*

*His poor day only got worse. He never enjoyed the birth of his children or his children's children. And he was so miserable, he was no longer wanted to come for the blessings of his children's children. No one wanted to see him. He was in a big place with nothing and no one, all in this way because of how he wanted to see his life. He didn't get the morning greeting. It was instead, his time complain.*

*So, welcome this day. How is your day to be? Ha, you decide!"* Ama J, August 16, 2014.

**Chapter Thirty – The Perpetual Calling: Callings Within Callings**

*I'm in rural South Africa. There are three traditional huts lined up in front of an almost-dry river; it leads to open veld. A large mountain is in the background. It's winter, with only a few cows grazing nearby. A healer emerges from a hut and greets me; alongside her is a young woman in traditional Xhosa clothing. They talk to me about ancestral things. About a cave with ethereal fish, that only special Izangoma knows about.*

*I walk over the bridge looking back at them. A crocodile, dry and leathered from the sun, emerges from a small pool of water. A big snake moves beneath the dark water. I can smell the water.*

*Now I am close to the village again. I look up and find a small tree that's filled with hard yellow fruit beside the healer's indumba. They walk towards me until we join and go into*

*an elevator. We pahla, praying on our knees to the ancestors as the small lift carries us up and up.*

I awoke from the vivid dream pondering its meaning. I felt as though I had spent the night with the healer in that village. I felt home, in my dreams.

Over the next six months, I regularly dreamed of the same healer. Emerging from dream time, I continued to hear her stories. Eventually, she slipped into wakefulness. Nameless, she spoke simply and clearly. Her presence was so strong it felt as though I could reach out and touch her aged arm. She sat alongside me, patiently guiding me through my day. She'd tell me what medicine to use and where to find it; either in the bush or on one of the shelves in my *indumba*. She showed me who would be coming to see me, and what medicine to use for them. Sometimes, her "ailments" physically manifested in me, and I would limp around with temporary arthritis. I also had visions of her life and saw her collecting medicine, helping patients and tending to her family.

Occasionally I would awaken in the night hearing her drumming and singing songs, tunes unknown to me. She shared secret and sacred knowledge unknown to "even the most powerful healers." I felt honoured and puzzled by her presence. She lived alongside me, instructing me through visions, dreams, and simple day-to-day decisions. She eased the difficulty when it came time to reintegrate into North American society, reminding me that I wasn't alone. In spite of being Canadian (or rather a settler living on native land), I felt terribly misplaced. I had a Canadian passport, 'accent', and third generation genealogy; things that 'proved my longstanding Canadian-ness.' But my identity had radically shifted over the years. I had been forced to challenge inner and outer structures, limitations, and

boundaries. It had been a requirement as to recall, rediscover and grasp my gifts and purpose; to ultimately answer the calling to heal. With all of the obvious dissimilarities, the healer and I shared spirit and the culture of healing. She showed me how to maintain the gifts and do 'the job,' without succumbing to a culture of consumption, or spiritual amnesia that plagued mainstream homogenous culture.

One day I received a telephone call from Jozi. It was Claire, my dear friend and daughter's God-mother. Originally an American national, she had spent the better part of her life working as an international development consultant. From Bangladesh to Buenos Aires; she and her children were citizens of the world. Having spent over a decade in South Africa, her work and life were inextricably connected to South Africa, especially since adopting her daughter there. A midwife and healer in her own right, she, and I, discussed spirit and its presence in our latest shenanigans. For some reason, I felt compelled to tell her about my dreams and interchanges with the healer.

"That sounds like Wits rural facility," she said referring to the university's research centre near Kruger National Park.

"Really? Do you know this healer?" I asked.

"Well, it sounds like *Magogo,*" she said, telling me of a healer she knew in that area.

A few weeks later Claire phoned to tell me she had met with *Magogo* who asked that I visit her immediately.

After weeks of excursions appealing to a three-year-old, we packed up Evelyn's Alfa Romeo with homoeopathic medicine, clothes, health food, and anything else we might need for a Mount Everest expedition, and headed to Limpopo province to see *Magogo*.

We stopped in Dullstroom for lunch, where my toddler enjoyed a pony ride and befriended a barefooted Afrikaans kid who adopted her as a *sistertjie*. He helped her up and down the colossal slide to ensure that, "She mustn't slip."

The drive was pleasant and meditative. The aromatic scent of swelling bananas, mangos, litchis, and paw paws made it hard to imagine how such sweet fruit grew in the harsh bushveld.

Passing marula trees and Australian acacias, we arrived at Claire's oasis at dusk.

Viv, Claire's four-year-old, and my three-year-old played as though no time had passed. My daughter didn't know the stories of Viv's horrible years prior to being adopted, which made national news headlines. They were just two little girls with big personalities, a strong sense of identity, and all kinds of crazy ideas.

Over the next few days, we enjoyed being in the bush and didn't even mind cheeky baboons who tried to steal ripe avocados from the fruit bowl on the kitchen table. I enjoyed being in nature, especially after living in Toronto where a daddy-long-legs was considered wild. I didn't, however, miss poisonous snakes, black widow spiders, and *Parktown prawns*. I could live without those horrible crickets that were a cross between cockroaches, out-of-water crustaceans, and a creature from a sci-fi movie. On top of that, they sprayed a stinky odour when frightened.

We moved with care on the bush roads built for *bakkies* and not an Italian sports car. We learned this after hitting a few potholes and almost hitting the proverbial, deer in headlights.

I spent the next few days wandering around the facility. There was nothing like the bush. My initial impression of the veld was that it was dry, desolate, quiet and rough. But I had come to enjoy and appreciate its beauty and wonderment. The earth, dried by the piercing sun, camouflaged the smallest marvels. The dung beetle, a mammoth insect tirelessly rolling manure in a straight line, using moonlight patterns to orient itself, or, the astonishing water buffalo which seemed placid and meek, but was in fact very dangerous. Muddied buck prints and tall kudu horns peeked out from behind stinkhouts, and golden weavers' artistic creations filled the landscape. The veld and its ecology were enigmatic, with an equilibrium barely understood by humans.

*Magogo's* semi-rural home was located in Gazankulu, one of the ten previous Bantustans or homelands in South Africa. Her residence was now part of a white-owned Hoedspruit farm.

I noted the environment, and the houses were different from my dream. It wasn't quite as rural, and there was no river.

*Magogo* approached the front gate and welcomed us into her meticulously swept yard. She looked different from my dream; her features and disposition all unknown to me. She ushered us past the houses and red *stoep* into her *indumba.*

Sitting on the freshly-polished floor, her granddaughter Thembi, no older than eleven, awkwardly translated. *Magogo* curiously reviewed my red and white beads and surveyed my pale body decorated with the robes of the ancestors.

"Is she *Sangoma*? This woman, this white woman?" she asked.

"*Thokoza Makhosi*, I am Sangoma; *yebo* it's true," I replied.

Amazed, she let out a deep-bellied laugh. We talked for hours until *Magogo* 'fortuned' me. She told me I was *mkhulu* and that I didn't need more training. I was done. I was strong, powerful, and gifted. Her reassurance brought a smile to my face, not because I believed that I was "powerful," but because living away from South Africa for over a year had created not only geographic space but an inner distance too. I didn't have immediate elders to comfort, guide, and instruct me, except for *Gogo*, whose spirit had moved in! I sometimes found it hard to uphold spiritual practices in a mainstream society that didn't seem to value spirit. In spite of the various dramas that went on amongst healers, associations, and groups in South Africa, our place as healers in the world, and with the ancestors, was unquestionable.

With nothing more to say, we enjoyed liberally-spread Rama over thick hand-sliced white bread and sipped sugary rooibos tea from chipped metal cups. As the sun set, I sat outside of the *indumba* watching the dusty pink sun move behind a thick line of traditionally-built homes in the distance. Claire emerged and asked: "How did it go?"

"Well, I'm not sure. I like her, but…"

"What do you mean?" Claire asked, before making her away over to *Magogo* for clarification.

"I will throw something into the water and you must find it and bring it out," *Magogo* explained.

“Okay," I said with uncertainty, "what do we need?”

“A case of beer, 20 kg. of mealie meal, 500 Rands, and candles," she said.

On the drive back to Wits rural facility, I questioned my interaction with *Magogo*. It wasn't her abilities or guidance I was unsure of, but she certainly wasn't the *Gogo* who had been an appendage with me the last few months.

I hoped our day trip to a local game park would shake my confusion. Passing the mountain range, I could feel *Gogo.* I smelled her in the air, sensed her in the bushveld, and felt her in my bones.

“She’s here,” I told my mother-in-law. “We still need to find her. *Magogo* isn't the *Isangoma* I am looking for," I explained.

Claire needed to return to Johannesburg, but suggested I speak to a local friend who knew “everybody.” So in due course, I got in touch with Lucky, explaining that I was a white *Isangoma* who had visions of a local healer.

I called Douglas who told me he didn’t have time to help as he had a piece job, but he would put me in touch with Lucky, a helpful friend. I called Lucky and explained that I was a white *Sangoma* living in Canada and had visions of a local healer for the past few months that may be dead or alive, and who had been calling me to her.

He didn’t even flinch. The mingling of unseen and corporeal realities was matter-a-fact in South Africa. I told him the details of my dreams, visions, and senses regarding *Gogo.* He said he would do some research and get back to me.

Over the next few sleeps *Gogo* was quiet but her presence was stronger. She showed me that she was an older healer from a Shangaan and Xhosa background. She lived near the mountain by a dry river. The river once had crocodiles or was named after a crocodile. In addition, I saw her physical appearance, even the colour of the beads in her hair. I awoke in the night to the earthy and strong smell of muddied water; a mix of soil, mountain plants, cattle, and rainwater.

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*"Each day we call you. We call them. As the sun comes up, so our voices rise to pray, to call the people. You must call back. We have this way from the beginning. We never sleep. We are so close to you that at sunrise you can hear us. We call, you acknowledge us, and call back. Then, we talk.*

*We have what you call a 'conversation'. This conversation is the second most important one you can have. The first is when we are inside our mother growing in those waters; we converse with everything, and also nothing. We are listening and seeing what is to come for ourselves. Some children don't come; they aren't ready to see terrible things, so they choose another way, another conversation. I had this with one once. Growing, but then stopped.*

*Then we are born, and we watch for some time, still having those conversations, but differently. As we grow, especially for some, forgetting the ways, our voices wake them, and they go to the birthing sun. They see the glory and they hear again. Everything is clear.*

*Then they come back to remembering that conversation. Like us old ones. But even after some time, too long, we start again to share, like old friends who never forget how to talk.*

*Those runners in the morning, they must be still to hear and see that glory. Those waking children are the glory too. The healthy ones wake with the sunlight; it calls them to be alive again. You wake up tired and sore to see a new morning, cautious to be alive.*

*Wake early, prepare the food, and sit together having that conversation. You cannot have those good changes if you do not wake up if you stay away from the conversations.*

*I am taking you somewhere. My words, what I share. Are you coming? Does your heart agree? Can you follow how our people and their people's people, and so on, show you? Show those listening?*

*Can you feel yourself alive? In the small areas in and around? That isn't your thinking. This ring-a-round-the-rosy you do with things in your head*

*can hurt you. You are not crazy, now or ever; you must be busy with the ways all the time. Planting, preparing, and working the ways, always working the ways.*

*I can show you. Each one has another to show them. Start with waking up for the conversation. Every day we call for so long we have been doing this. We like it when you call back, and when we are in this conversation. It makes the glory brighter."* Ancestor's name unknown, August 6, 2014.

**Chapter Thirty-One –*Dungamanzi:* The One Who Stirs Waters**

Lucky, a twenty-something man with dreadlocks and a warm smile, introduced us to one of the three possible healers and homesteads that fit my description.

"Okay, it's just up here; *jiga* left, and at that tree, *jiga* right," he said.

Arriving at the first homestead, I noticed it didn't resemble my dream. From behind a collapsing roof came a young woman with half-braided hair. Her receding hairline was a telltale sign of too many extensions.

Lucky talked to her, explaining why we were there. She said in a shy voice that her aunt, the *Sangoma,* was working at the police station. She proceeded to give us directions.

“This isn’t the place,” I whispered to Evelyn and Lucky. After visiting two more *Izangoma* I felt dejected. Maybe I wasn’t meant to find her, or maybe she had passed.

The next morning, we headed out again in search of a spirit. Lucky asked me to be more specific about the healer and her homestead.

“Okay, okay, this one is right. I think…,” Lucky said.

We made our way to the main road, passed Shoprite, and out of town. I could feel the welling up inside me. A cleansing nausea filled my stomach, along with flutters in my chest and throat.

“The next place is it. We will find her there, you’re right, Lucky,” I said.

Turning off the main road, we followed a pebbled road towards the mountains. We parked in front of a modest house; an ageing Orlando Pirates mural juxtaposed the roaming cattle. I noticed three traditional huts in a row, and to the left, a small river.

“This is it!” I said.

Walking through the open gate, we found young and elderly patients waiting on a small *stoep* outside of the *indumba*. Three students were busy chopping medicine with a *panga*. The students disappeared quickly into another hut, in order to prepare themselves for visitors.

Lucky moved towards a young woman preparing what smelled like beef stew on an open fire. He reported that the *Isangoma* was at a funeral.

"We can wait; we have travelled so far," I said.

The young woman asked for my mother-in-law's cell phone, to call her auntie, to tell her we were there.

"She is coming," said Lucky. "She'll be back just now."

We sat staring at the quiet kraal around us until we heard drumming. The sound of Tsonga tree-trunk drums begun; my daughter moved closer to me, intrigued.

"They will go into spirit now, my love. Like how mommy does," I told her.

Evelyn sat comfortably beside me, ready for her potential role in the welcoming. She had observed family members train as healers and understood protocol. Evelyn, like many South Africans, was seemingly easily categorized as a white, upper-class liberal woman, but she was much more than that. She was fair, ethical, and open-minded, as well as a person of faith. Her family of origin and family of choice were made up of Jews, Christians, those who upheld traditional beliefs, Afrikaaners, and Motswana. Christmas, Shabbat, Yom Kippur, Easter and tomb unveilings, had become part and parcel of her family tradition; along with ancestral recognition. She sat on the edge of the step, hands respectfully folded in her lap.

Three *thwasana* emerged from the hut holding wooden *knobkieries*. One was wearing black fabric around her waist, and the other red. Both had two strands of white and red beads around their wrists and ankles, as well as a single *umfiso.* Trembling, with eyes half closed, they began singing. The song was unknown to me but I shook a rattle encouraging their *amadlozi.* Falling to their knees, they struggled forward and recited their ancestral greeting. The *thwasana* were letting us know who their teacher was, where they came from, where

they had trained, and their spirit names. Their spirit name was not only a symbol of being born a child of the ancestors, but it also connected them to their *mpande.*

"*Thokozani makhosi, mkhulu mkhulu,*" we replied, acknowledging the ancestor's presence.

The eldest *thwasa,* a woman about sixty, danced with power and readiness; it was clear she was close to her graduation time. Each time I saw a *thwasa,* my heart filled with pity. I had such compassion for them; the burden of the initial sickness, the desperation, and the hardship of being called, along with the training process, and the graduation. *Ag* shame, indeed!

I also knew that if they didn't practice their skills post-training, they would develop a different kind of illness. The *thwasa* had to do "the work", or they would struggle in new and more complex ways.

The dancing and drumming dissipated and the *thwasana* sat on the ground, stretching out the residual reverie. Everyone went back to what they were doing. The children returned to rolling a tire with a stick. The woman cooking returned to her neglected pot, and all three students went back to their daily tasks of preparing *muthi*, sweeping the yard, and tending to patients. The midday kraal was quiet again. The mundane had been interrupted by another kind of normalcy. Going into spirit created a shift in consciousness. It was a blissful suffering which suspended actuality; just for a short time.

"*Thwasana*!" I called to them. "*Woza la thwasa's,*" I said, as they dropped to their knees.

In keeping with custom, I put coins on the ground before speaking directly to them.

"*Thokoza Makhosi,*" they said.

"*Thokoza thwasana*; these coins come from Canada, they will bring you luck. You can use them in your divining bones. They will also help you to remember me. I want to tell you something."

"*Thokoza Makhosi,*" they replied.

"The job of the healer is a hard one. Being a *thwasa* is difficult, but it is only the beginning of your work. Sometimes you want to leave this place, forget about being a healer. You may find yourself crying all the time, too. This is the water spirits coming through you."

"*Thokoza Makhosi,*" they replied attentively, while Lucky continued translating.

"You mustn't give up this training. I also went through the pain you go through now. I am busy with patients now. I am well and without illness too. I am always of service; my life is good. I am never hungry, never without shelter. The ancestors will always take care of you too. They will only stop helping you if you are greedy, jealous, and harmful to others. You are an example to your community. Everywhere you go and whatever you do, this is your work, your life. Don't give up *thwasana.* Listen to your teacher, she will guide you. Don't worry about the outside world; focus on why you are here, then everything will go quickly for you. If I can do this, so can you. Okay?" I said.

"*Thokoza Makhosi,*" they replied, as the youngest *thwasa* cried.

After a few hours, Evelyn, my daughter and I, went for a walk. We passed the cattle kraal and the long-drop in the yard. We walked over a small bridge to a drying river. Making our way down a little hill, we saw a dozen women doing their washing. My three-year-old leapt

forward to see what they were doing, and then insisted on “helping.” We stood for a while, listening to the murmurs, and the occasional *hawu.*

On our way back my daughter squealed with delight at the loose chickens and small goats milling about. I noticed a *Sangoma* sitting on the *stoep* near sick patients. She wasn't the *Gogo* from my dreams, but I knew her.

I moved forward and greeted her in the traditional manner. Despite the funeral, she seemed happy to see us and ushered us into her *indumba;* a few of her graduated students were waiting there for us.

She and I sat across from each other. Lucky began to translate in Tsonga, explaining who we were and why we had come.

All of a sudden, the ancestors forcefully came through. A deep growl emerged from my gut, and my body began to shake. "*Hayibo,*" I yelled out, surrendering to the familiar strength and power of the ancestors. I clumsily wrapped the rattles around my ankles, until the youngest *thwasa* rushed to my aid, skillfully dressing my eruptive body.

The drums called me. I was gaining strength, and ran to the gate to greet the ancestors of the homestead, then returned to the drums and danced hard. I stomped my feet rhythmically until a flood of energy jolted through my bones.

Then...weightlessness. My heart beat in unison with the drum. There was no separation; I was one with the ancestors, they were present.

Suddenly stopping, I recited my ancestral greeting. Upon response from the *Izangoma,* I jumped to my feet and danced with greater fervour; my *ishoba* sweeping under my nose

allowing me to smell and to know beyond my usual capacity. I spoke using words and names unknown to me. It was *Gogo*.

“I am of this place, of these mountains; this is my home; I am your grandmother,” she said, pointing to the small crowd.

“I have come home,” she repeated.

Falling to my knees, I shook madly.

"Ahh, *auwww,*" I yelled, struggling to let her go, but she wanted to stay. Jumping to my feet, I raced into the hut again to remove all of my clothes.

“*Umundawu, umundawu,*” I shouted.

*Makhosi,* understanding the presence of a different ancestor, grabbed a set of clothes meant for a specific shade of ancestors, and assisted me in getting dressed. Putting on a black *njindi,* covering my head with a cowrie belt and different *umfisos,* I raced out of the hut.

Falling to my knees again, I began to move on all fours, I shook up and down to a different drumbeat. I stirred the imagined medicine pot in front of me and shook my upper body while turning to the four directions. The spirits were free. My movements grew larger and larger, becoming increasingly uncontrollable.

*I’m in water, dark black water, near the mountain. A muddy smell. The one from my dreams. The odour, that lived in my nostrils for days. Oh, I smell it. I long for it like a pig longs for mud on its dry skin.*

The *umundawu* drumbeat continued. Sitting cross-legged I felt water spirits inside me. I was both deep within cavernous cracks *and* floating above the water's surface. Sunlight gleamed through my head and down my body, numbing my legs, hands and fingers. I shook, and then thrust my legs out. They were gone.

Opening my eyes, I noticed a small crowd staring at me. One of the healers tied my hair back and offered me a cup of water. In the *indumba,* Lucky translated, explaining my vision to the *Sangoma.*

I gave every detail, even the hard-yellow fruit on the small tree, which she had in her yard. She nodded intently. I told her the secrets *Gogo* had conveyed earlier.

*Makhosi* replied softly, "This grandmother you speak of, she's my great grandmother who has come to you", validating the description I had given her. I explained her features, that she was Xhosa and Shangaani, and had lived near these mountains. The river had had a crocodile a few years ago, but it had to be removed.

We talked and laughed about *Gogo*; sharing our intimate experiences of her. Her name was *Dungamanz*i, the one who stirs waters.[11]

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*"You are the conduit. Do you understand? Bridging this and ours. It's nothing to be alarmed by, nor fear. It is the process, the process of all*

[11] I would come to learn many years later that Dungamanzi is known as one of the first Tsonga diviners who is associated with 'foreign' ancestors, those travelling from Mozambique. This famous healer trained hundreds of diviners and is purported to have contributed to specific healing practices widely (Leibhammer, 171-172.)

*aspects creative. But beyond this, it is a nucleus, a centre with various centres.*

*Do you remember me from your teenage years [he asks me]? I was ever present, both chuckling and encouraging. I was the one who called you to poetry, to Byron and Po, sonnets, and the wizardry of words. Present for some time. Letting you explore words, phrases, ideas, and the air of life. I was an admirer dabbling in the art of words, rather unsuccessfully I may add.*

*Was I contrived? At times. My sincerity didn't compensate for talent. Not talentless, just minimally skilled. This was sufficient for me to ramble along, newly blind in darkness. I trust you will update my analogies and proverbs?!*

*I had two children, daughters. The eldest was Mary MacGregor (y). She was an astute young lady. Smarter than I, while her younger sister, simply braver. I'm from York [or Yorkshire; exact area unclear] and lived most of my life there until meeting Sarah Avril Abraham Klein [full name unclear]. Her father was a Jew, but he made every effort to escape this fact. My wife carried affluence, only in means, while my family carried correct British lineage.*

*In spite of a meagre livelihood, working with accounts at Toppleton's [or Doppleton's; the exact store name is unclear], my remote and weak bloodline to a prominent Duchess, put me in proper standing with the Kleins. My wife Sara (she dropped the "h"), believed even her surname was a fabrication! We waltzed at Whalger's [or Walger's] and dined irregularly with the head office of policing affairs. To be certain, our banter over dinner did not cultivate a friendship or even a mutual advantage. We shared a love of Thompson [or Thomason].*

*But those were previous times; before my youngest passed at the tender age of six, and when I began to realize my literary efforts were nonsense. Even intervals of stupification induced by gin couldn't remove the sound of her lingering giggle, and constant peak followed by a "boo" through the door.*

*Now, only silent shadows float around promising to tumble the flimsy walls and delicate people. I no longer felt close. Close to an accuracy of feeling or thought. Close to a clarity which might imprint my name and specifics in a minuscule way upon literature. Only close to nothingness, a place beyond despair or misery. Gin carried me there, and with it, my Sara disappeared to Northern England, and beyond Britain until her letters and thoughts were too far to reach me.*

*Mary wrote shortly before I died, telling me of her groom to wed. I felt her freshness, her shadow-less clarity close to me, and the many dances to come, and young ones to keep. That was it; I passed on a cold and rainy early evening when even the rain decorates the dead in a conscientious manner.*

*The final writings were incomprehensible; ah, for the better. I come to you with a clearer voice. Time has passed as it always does, a fly caught in a room until it accidentally escapes through a window or a doorway. Time slips. It slips without us knowing. There is not time to mourn its passing even though this is the greatest loss of all. I come without a buoyant message, without authority or exclaiming the wonderment of the universe. I have learned a few tricks and reached a few aspirations. I do, however, come to tell you simply: write. Be a conduit of life's unknown aspects, one who speaks to and through us. You will not fumble as I did. This is not imagined for you.*

*I will remind you of these many things. I am a distant cousin who continually thinks of you and reaches out. As you play your "small part," as you call it, so do I. Write all words, stringing them or not, but be the conduit, and stay clear of gin!"* Ancestor's name unknown, paternal British Ancestor Sept 8, 2014.

**Chapter Thirty-Two – Ngihawukele Thonga Lami – Have Mercy on Me, Ancestors!**

*"It was dusk, that nice time when even the loudest children settle down. Now the area I grew up in was very quiet. It was a big place, and twice a year we had ceremonies for the boys, girls, and then the chiefs. You know our chiefs never really worked with the Apartheid government, not like the others did.*

*I have lived in a few places. I raised my child near the mountains. For part of my initiation, I went into those mountains. You know how you sometimes think about those caves with water? They had these too in the last village you were in. There are four, maybe five, of these places in South Africa. I found this place because a master Sangoma ancestor, my great-grandmother, took me there in my sleep. I wanted to wait for the heat weather before going. Also, I was scared. A Sangoma must not be afraid of anything. Our initiation takes that fear away.*

*I was a little afraid of this cave; that and the bad storms. I saw my brother killed this way. People come from all over, even the Swazi royal family, to get muthi from me to keep away that sky from striking [referring to lightning]. I had good medicine against those giant guns [cannons] too! That muthi I got near those caves. No one went there, just the occasional lost white one.*

*So, I saw that place, woke up, and went. I wasn't old, but I wasn't young too. I brought the knife because I knew many things lived there. It took a long time; almost the whole day. I had to walk through the bush, cutting my legs on rocks and thorn bushes.*

*Ah, but when I got there, it was like a scene from Baba and the Thieves [referring to her favourite book]. It had magic no Sangoma could create. The water was dark from the rocks. In school, I loved too much learning about rocks and all the minerals. This water, ha, it had too much in there. I was only permitted to take a little back home each time, to pray and rub on my sore legs.*

*At first, I couldn't get in there. It wasn't too deep, but far back. I also knew what my teacher told and showed me about these special ones in the waters. I wanted to dance on top of the water. I respected the ancestors too much! Even if no one was there, they were there.*

*I prayed and lit only one candle; the candle I made myself. The other ones are rubbish! The ancestors like what we make and collect for them. This is how they did things, making everything for the ancestors. This pleases them too much. As I was praying, she rose from the water. She was there coming from the water as clear as my word to you.*

*'I'm Nonhlanhla (Akie) Khumalo. The One who keeps the water safe,' she said.*

*You see, she was given the task by her ancestors, who were called by the water too, to be protector of the place and to watch what went into the water and what was taken. Maybe she had cried so many tears when she was here, that the ancestors knew she was good for this task. I don't know…too many things I don't understand.*

*I greeted her. She did not talk right to me. She heard me without listening to my words. She couldn't hear or see well because she was of the water. She could feel me coming even before I was here. She instructed me not to go right inside. I knew this was right because I would not come out.*

*When a Sangoma goes in, the ancestors believe it's because we want to fully pass into their places. If we don't want that, we shouldn't be going in there like that. Those that don't know and do these stupid things, they leave that place forever living in a cut [split] way; some here and some there.*

*The others think they are crazy. Then they need to thwasa to fix things, even though they weren't called, to begin with. These students are too stubborn and don't fully love the work; not like those who are born with*

*this from their grandparents. They dance strangely, too. Some Sangoma won't thwasa these ones. Ha, you must be a brave teacher, Nomadlozi!*

*Then, that water one [referring to the female spirit] was gone. I only saw her one more time in all those years. I knew to do my part and keep that place secret. That's our job too, protecting the ancestors' places. Even the ones for the other people [referring to other countries], because we all share ancestors.*

*One day people will study this even more. In Canada and other places, this will be important. All these stories that you write Nomadlozi, will give some important answers. Now, be with your family. They are small for a very short time."* Ama J. July 24, 2014.

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*Gogo* and I discussed *umundawu* ancestors, and the secret rituals I had foreseen, as well as the orations concerning the creation of humankind that surround us.

"Why has Dungamanzi come to me?" I asked, "Why a white woman from Canada being called here, being called by *your* ancestors, called to do this work?"

"Because you are an *mkhulu,* you have strong ancestors; from everyone. Strong ones," she said, reiterating the *Ngoma* belief around carrying or embodying lineal and collective ancestry and spirits.

*"Gogo*, I also need help. There is something wrong. Can you reveal this problem and help me with it?" I asked.

After throwing the bones, she confirmed that I needed to go to the water. Specific *umundawu* rituals had not been completed during my training. "Tomorrow we go to the water," she said.

It was her great-grandmother that had brought me here, brought me home. Dungamanzi. Her requests were simple, and didn't include a lot of money; this further confirmed that she was the right person.

Throughout the night, the scent of the water grew stronger. It was calling me, beckoning me into its currents until I drifted off to the sound of owls and other nocturnal birds. That night, for the first time in fifteen years of experiencing a reoccurring dream about failing high school, I passed with flying colours.

—

Thunderous drumming echoed from the back of the old white *bakkie.* The mountains grew closer. The same mountains I had dreamed of. Sitting in the open truck, my daughter and I bumped up and down as the strong wind tossed her curls about recklessly. Evelyn followed closely behind, with Lucky and another elder *Sangoma,* in her car.

*Makhosi* beat the drums and a healer called out: "*Gwey gwey gwey*." A white female chicken attempting to escape nestled between the beaded calves of the youngest healer. My daughter and I absorbed the songs, fresh morning air and the comfort that often comes with spirit. I was treated like any other *Sangoma* going to the water. They had seen my *idlozi* the

day before and were reassured of my calling to *Ngoma*. There was no way to pretend, particularly among other healers. You were either a healer or you weren't.

Passing humble homes, I noticed large rocks resting on tin roofs meant to keep them in place during the rainy season. Tears, not from the arid wind, filled my eyes. I was overcome with gratitude. It was these moments that made me forget the sometimes-burdensome aspect of the healing work.

I prayed silently, fighting streams of tears.

"What's wrong, Mama," asked my daughter.

"Nothing my baby, I'm crying for joy," I said.

Satisfied with the answer, she returned to listening to the healers singing and drumming. As we neared the mountain we stopped at a dip in the road and piled out. Each woman grabbed a heavy drum, carefully carrying it on her head down the hill.

The singing ceased as we made our way down the rocky path. We reached the bottom, there to find a small river, which was nearly dry. *Makhosi* unrolled a large reed mat in front of the small pool. All those who were not graduated as healers were asked to leave, including Evelyn and my daughter.

I sensed this was a special place. Firstly, water was scarce this time of year, and judging by the cow dung, it was a water source for local cattle. Most importantly it was the place of *Makhosi's* ancestors.

The youngest healer proceeded to take off my clothes, leaving only my undergarments on. She then wrapped a large piece of black fabric around my waist. *Makhosi* asked a graduated *thwasa* to sit on the mat facing the water with legs outstretched.

They beat the drums and we called up the ancestors. With a guttural growl, our bodies shook so hard that our bums lifted off the mat. I crawled into the cold, muddy water, making noises, not of my will. I washed quickly in the shallow water, making sure every inch was cleansed.

We went back to the mat where white material was draped over our shoulder until the water spirits called me back into the large puddle. Rushing in, the youngest healer grabbed my waist and sat me down. I shook uncontrollably as a blend of water, tears, snot and spit ran down my face.

A beheaded chicken flailed in the water, treading its last seconds of life. I felt the ancestor's beckoning me. I jumped up and crawled back inside. I heard them calling me deeper into the muddy clay. I threw myself in, ready to swim to the bottom, and beyond; to stay there, to swim and swim until I had reached their whispers and sacred songs.

This time the young healer grabbed me and tried to pull me out. She was worried about me. Although the waters were shallow, healers had been known to follow the water spirits and ancestors so deeply within the waters that they had been known to disappear for hours, days, months and even years.

Returning to the mat, I sat legs outstretched, shaking even more now. All I could see was the bottom of the dark water. I could smell the muddied earth and feel her cold liquid summoning me in.

I crawled back in and dunked myself under again and again. It was then that I saw her, the snake of the waters. I saw her standing tall in front of me with her large hood in full view. She was majestic and non-threatening. She was exhibiting her power and beauty and transferring ancestral medicine. I had received the medicine I needed. I sat calmly on the mat for more rituals to protect and strengthen my spirit and bond with the ancestors.

"Are you satisfied *Nomadlozi?"* asked Makhosi once we were done.

"*Yebo Makhosi, Thokozani,*" I replied, "I want to give thanks to you and your ancestors. I give thanks to Dungamanzi who has brought me here to this sacred place, her place, the place of your ancestors. I want to give thanks for the work that you and your students have done today. I know my life will be open now. I thank you for taking care of me, my child, and my mother as your own," I said.

She blessed me in Tsonga and also thanked Jesus.

As we made our way up the hill, I sang: Hey *ngihawukele thonga lami, hawukele thonga lami, thonga lami, hey thonga lami, hawukele,* and the other healers joined in. The song pleaded: "Ancestors hear us, have mercy on us."

Piling back into the bakkie, we made our way back to the kraal in a joyous mood. We stopped along the way to pick up farmhands who were hitching rides to the main road.

At *Makhosi's* we immediately made our way into the *indumba*. There was a larger number of people at her place now; word had spread that there was a white *Sangoma* and that she had danced the day before. Village kids stared through the rickety metal fence, while others entered the property and sat quietly in disbelief. Both the student who was at the river and I went into spirit. The spirits entered like a wave of calm; they were appeased and contented. I stirred the indistinguishable waters with my *ishoba*, and breathed deeply, feeling *Gogo*, Dungamanzi, in and around me.

*Makhosi* and I said goodbye a few days later. I was sad to go, but I imagined our time and work together was done. It was only the ancestors who knew that I would be back a few years later with my own *thwasa.*

**Chapter Thirty-Three – Our Children are Our Ancestors**

*"So, we have reached the time now. I have told you so little for so long. When things are good, I will come to visit [through trance] and I will be happy. If I come crying, then things are very bad.*

*I want to know you will take care of the children; mine, yours, and all of them. It is your job. Nomadlozi, you are the mother; you care for the children. They are the ancestors' too. Do you know this? You must understand this. They must understand this too.*

*You must feed your children good things all the time, and in your words, and in what you tell them. This is how they come to see themselves, in*

*everything you say and do. It's up to you. They do not have all the old ones right there showing them these things. Believe me, we come and we sit with them, when they cry and when they pray. We like that too much. It makes us cry with joy.*

*In my time, we cried for joy too much. Even a little joy, we cried. Those tears were feeding things, you understand? Feeding!*

*Cook food for your children, all of you, every day. Not that rubbish. Watch what you give them to see and hear, and do not complain when you do not like what YOU see and hear from them. You can be their angels or their monsters.*

*Children must be outside every day. It isn't just 'fresh air,' as you call it. They talk to all the living things. In the house, some of the things are a little bit dead. Outside, they hear all those small things and they talk to them in big ways. They call things to them and scream away other ones. You must make the world safe for children so they can play outside. Play outside; this is so crazy! I can't believe I am saying these things.*

*These simple things, we didn't even talk about, we didn't share anything about this. Why? Ha, we knew these things. We were born knowing. These poor young ones will be born not knowing these things. Look at you now;*

*you have almost forgotten. And yet, you are so unhappy. You are so busy with this nonsense, consumed, but you don't like it.*

*I wish I could take so many of these children to my place. I would collect those wild potatoes and put them in the fire, then prepare them with the porridge. The children would feel so strong, they would run all day. Not hungry just after a short time later, they would come home late, and still not ask for food. I would have it all ready, that small piece of meat, and then to sleep. No worries, stress, or anxiety, as you call it.*

*Ha, it is not those things. You know this. Those tablets and that thinking are going to make things worse for you. Do you know that? You don't believe me; you think I am a crazy old woman. I am not. I know how to take care. I took care of so many people. I took care of myself. I was fit and strong for so long. Now I am strong here because I cared for myself. You see me now!? I am not sick. My self [soul] isn't just moving this way and that way, so lost.*

*Ha, we have those ones. They are here near me, but I can't help them now. No, I cannot. The time is done for that. I am not able. I have limits too.*

*Oh, I love you so much. You do not know. When you cry from suffering, I laugh because you don't know how much help we are giving you. Ha, this isn't suffering. Suffering is when you will be eaten up and not come back;*

*when it's over. Suffering is those ones who kill themselves, sometimes even those ones who kill someone else. Oh that torture, it is too terrible that suffering.*

*I will bring you many presents. You won't know some of them are presents, or that they are from me, but they will be. You must take them, even if you don't see them as presents, even if you don't want them. If you don't take them, other things can be taken away. I help to protect you. The presents are good. Good for you and for us ancestors.*

*I won't tell you if I will come again, or if this is the last time I will talk in this way. Ha, but you know I like to talk! I must leave space for your words too.*

*I tell you, listen to me Nomadlozi, and you, you reading this: we are together. If you know this, if you know togetherness, you will not know suffering. You will not know what it is to be alone. You can forgive yourself. You must do this. You can't begin in a good way if you don't forgive yourself. You see, now you know. I am helping to tell you. So now you know.*

*If you walk away and say: 'That's rubbish, that's nonsense,' you will never know. You are choosing something, choosing something that will only make you sick and more tired. Everything in you is tired and you are not old!*

*You must wake up and prepare; be ready. Give yourself to your day, and follow a good way.*

*If you start with all the small things I am telling you, then you will see the bigger things for you. You can't see anything now.*

*Ha, watch your children. Watch the small bugs, listen to the birds, not to feel nice; watch, and listen, to learn. Then you know how to go [behave]. If you go this way, the way you are going well….I have told you. You know the presents. Are you starting to see them? There is one right now!*

*Don't worry. That's just keeping you away from the other things. The thing the people must know, they must know this too much. Care for the children as I have said. Really care for them in the 'old' way. Don't worry about what's on their feet. Feed them in all the good ways.*

*Who are the ancestors? Don't waste time asking. You must know… we love you. Even the sick ones, we love you. Love us too.*

*Remember us and we will never let you go. Don't ask how to do this. We have told you, told you too much of the simple things."* Ama J. March 21. 2015

**Chapter Thirty-Four – A Pipe Ceremony for my Dead Father in the Atrium of Barrie's Royal Victoria Regional Hospital**

My second child showed her strength and fierceness as soon as I went into labour. I was meant to be a panellist at the Toronto HIV/AIDS conference. I had worked the previous few months encouraging and supporting the participation of traditional African healers. A few organizations managed to get funded, and came to Toronto.

The night before the panel, one of the healers from Uganda, who was also a medical doctor, came to visit my home. The *indumba* was no longer a closet. We had moved and I managed to fix up a makeshift chicken coup in the backyard. It had become a decent space for the ancestors. I was weeks overdue and suffering in the humid heat, which felt more like January in Durban.

After praying in the *indumba*, the healer put his hands on my huge tummy and prayed silently.

A few hours later I went into labour. Despite the doctor's orders to have a C-section, I felt strongly that my baby would be born naturally. So, she and I worked together, and after four hours of pushing, she was born at nine healthy pounds. Suffice it to say, I didn't make it to the panel on traditional healing in spite of my help in its organization.

Our daughter was determined and caring, like her great-grandmothers, after whom she had been named.

One of the last times she saw my father, who lay in bed in the last stages of bone cancer, she offered him her pacifier for comfort.

He had complained about back pain months previously saying: "Maybe I've got goddamn cancer in my back!" We assumed he was being overly dramatic, as he often was. Although

he had been diagnosed just four months earlier, we suspected he had lived months, maybe years, with bone cancer, and had suffered quietly. He talked about euthanasia: “Just give me goddamn pills and be done with it! I don’t want to be one of those poor bastards in the end.”

But in one of our last conversations in his home, when I asked him about this, he couldn’t do it. Death was too palpable. He was set up in a nice room and receiving good care in the hospital. Every day I was grateful for this; hugely grateful. I had seen too many people dying in terrible conditions both in government hospitals and at home. I didn’t know what was worse; living without dignity or dying without dignity.

In my father’s case, he had a hard-working class life but his privileges still allowed for dignity and excellent care throughout the dying process. I hated to see him dying and dying of bone cancer, known to be one of the most painful cancers. He was becoming a shell. We sat vigil day, and night, waited, stroking his “full head a’ hair,” of which he was very proud.

Exhausted, and full of the mess of relationships, we waited for him to pass. Somehow childhood pain and anger slipped away long enough for me to grasp just how much I loved my father. We felt it was time, but he wasn’t letting go, not just because he loved all of us so much, but because his finances were in wreckage.

I knew this; I could hear his thoughts and feel his feelings. *Isangoma* connections had its advantages and disadvantages. Sensing that I needed to do a letting go ceremony, I inquired with the hospital social worker about the possibilities. My expectations were low. It was a

very white institution with limited patrons of diversity. As Jews, we *were* the diversity. She told me I could do the ceremony but couldn't use any smudge or smoke, for obvious reasons. As we sat vigil, she finally suggested that we leave: "You know… sometimes parents don't want to have their children see them die. They may want to protect them. Maybe if you leave for a little while…," she suggested.

We had been telling Dad in his last days few days that he could let go, that it was okay. But he was unresponsive. Finally, we whispered in his ear that we were leaving and would be back in a few hours; if he wanted to let go without us there, now was the time.

I picked up my daughter from the babysitter and brought her home for a long nap. I slept, something I hadn't done in weeks.

I awoke in a sweat. *He's gone!* The phone rang; it was the social worker telling me he had passed. She also said that I could still do the ceremony if I liked. I raced around trying to put together the materials and get to the hospital. Halfway there I realized that there was no rush; he was gone. I pulled over, cried and breathed, repeating out loud: *He's gone, he's gone*. But saying it didn't help me absorb the reality.

When I got to the hospital, his body was still motionless, but the deep crease in between his eyebrows was more relaxed. My mother and sister and I embraced one another. They had cared for him the most. I had a young family and simply couldn't do as much. They carried an exhaustion that takes years to recover from.

Dad's palliative care nurses covered his body and brought the bed into a foyer. It seemed that the social worker had managed to designate the huge hospital atrium just for us. "You

can smudge or use smoke, whatever. Not too much, but it's okay. I've arranged to have the fire detectors turned off during your ceremony," she said.

In between crying, I thanked her profusely. *Wow, how spirit moves mountains* and *helps to turn off fire alarms in hospitals*, I thought.

I smudged my father off and sprinkled medicine over his body. I took out my *Chanupa* and conducted a pipe ceremony. We prayed, cried, and watched the sacred smoke move through the sunlight. The nurses came back, covered his body with a sheet and started crying before taking his body away. The nurses hadn't been particularly attached to my father; but the funerary rites and rituals (much needed in palliative care units and hospitals in general), clearly touched them.

The next time I saw my father, he was ashes. We sprinkled his tiny indiscernible bones and dust in between tombstones. The same burial ground we wandered in, talking about our ancestors, on Sunday afternoons.

*"The young ones talk about how everything talks: the wind, the birdies, the clattering stones. But no, it isn't talking. It's listening. Listening is so good, there's a conversation.*

*When I was a boy, our elders told us to listen. Not because we didn't have anything to say, because when we were listening, so were they. This is how we have conversations. Now when you listen to that wind, as you are now,*

*and watching the eyes on the birch tree, you are listening. You're listening to me now as you put this down.*

*We don't communicate. That's just talking and wanting to talk. We do conversations when you are listening with these [ears], these [eyes], and these [throat and heart]. Then we are in conversation. The conversation is always going on. It can be many or a few. It's always going when we listen. We can join then if we listen hard (and that's how we dance too).*

*My brother was a dancer and he listened to the drum, his feet, and in here [heart], here [breath], he listened to all those [people] there, too. He was dancing before he went out there. Listening and carrying messages to those listening. Carrying the conversations, making em' listen.*

*That family, [referring to my great-grandfather and grandmother], didn't like Indians. Even though some, all the way back, and right through, (were) Indian! Scared to listen, that was a big one taken away. Listening to that conversation. When I was a baby, even cold or hungry, I remembered that. I still knew about listening.*

*I still remember my own cry and that old conversation when I sing those old songs of mine [reflects on painful memories]. It's not mine, but I won't let go of it! So that's why I say it's mine.*

*A lot of the plants we used are gone now. My grandmother and grandfather knew them all. Between those two, they could treat all of them [illnesses]. Close your eyes. Remember when you knew all the food and the plants? When your people were now, and you then? Time was smaller and special.*

*Close your eyes and put down that buzzing talking, yapping thing [cell phone], and remember what you know and where you've been and how you've been carried all this time. In the start, by the little bird, then the big one, then the black one [referring to the crow or magpie that helps carry the soul at death]."* "Great Grandfather's", teacher or elder, October 6, 2014.

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*"Let's be clear. I would not tell these plans [stories] if they weren't meant to be told. You are the small one among many to do this. We are together. Please hear this. Know this.*

*We are together now, not because of these things you make [technology]. That is an effort to drive us apart. We are together now in all the ways but here [points to the head]. This place is like the desert where many creatures roam. Some live; they move along. Some lose their babies to hungrier beasts. We are those beasts too. We feed them and go inside. We cannot roam around for nowhere. We move to be fed. We move to live. We move to*

*always reach somewhere new. In this way, there is no end. There is no end. We always move. It never stops and never begins.*

*Just because you don't always feel the air, does not mean the wind isn't blowing and you aren't breathing. Always it is there, in you and everywhere. Don't divide things. This is how you become separate inside when you split it up. Even the ones who study [scientists], they know this. It is one place, and no place at all. The people want freedom from what they call thinking and feelings. There is no such way. Your freedom is in the roaming, in being a living creature. Be the creature with other creatures. Eat and be eaten. Drink and be drunk by the wind. I am the one in all of you.*

*Remember, there is no 'you' and 'I.' There is no divide. I sit here with you and I don't sit at all. The place you want is already there and here. As the creature roams, so does the desert. In this way, there is no fear."* (The) Powerful One, June 2, 2015.

**Chapter Thirty-Five – *Rezar a los Santos*, Pray to the Saints**

David was offered work outside of the city. We were eager to embrace a more rural lifestyle and moved to Orillia, a town in Ontario. The summers felt like permanent cottage getaways. In the autumn, our yard, neighbourhood, and town exploded with colours that no artist could capture. Springtime was glorious with a plethora of wild birds and budding

plants. Winter had its own beauty, so I was told by skiers, hikers, and Orillians; but I hadn't managed to embrace the frigid temperatures and mountains of snow along every sidewalk. I tolerated the season and took advantage of neighbourly functions to ease the sense of isolation. Our new home north of Toronto made the drive challenging for patients, particularly in the winter. But those in need made the trek.

Before even opening the door, I saw Teresa through the glass. I immediately noticed the "black death" that my grandmother described before someone died. Teresa was sick; maybe too ill to be helped. With difficulty, she made her way down the stairs into the *indumba*. Halfway through her list of complaints, I stopped her daughter, who was translating, to say: "The bones will reveal what's wrong with your mother. Don't tell me anything further."

Before the sacred objects touched the mat, I could see what was wrong with Teresa. Four essential bones representing the mother, father, sister, and brother all lay face down; not a good sign. I told her what I saw.

She shivered, perpetually cold; another mystifying symptom. She was surprised to learn, counter to her obsessive fear: no one had cursed her. Depression, paranoia, negativity, fluctuating pains, exhaustion, and constant fear, to the point of phobias, were constant for her. Her family was at their wits' end. Although they loved her enormously, they found it hard to deal with her on a regular basis. Any psychologist would have diagnosed her with chronic depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and paranoia, as a result of surviving civil war in her country of origin.

Fleeing her homeland, where the conflict had cost over seventy thousand lives, she left as a refugee with her four young children to a nearby country in South America, only to face xenophobia and socio-economic disadvantages.

Moving to Canada a few years later, they encountered another flavour of racism, poverty, and xenophobia. Teresa and her husband were devoted Catholics who had worked as office cleaners for almost two decades. Her children had become successful musicians, academics, and professionals, and still strongly identified with Latin American revolutionary ideals, social justice, and movements of resistance.

Teresa cried and cried; her pain and suffering was overwhelming. Her family members were bewildered with her behaviour and saw her as increasingly difficult. Consulting with me was the last resort, not because of their religious beliefs; they were open-minded and deeply spiritual people who followed Christ's teachings; I was the last resort because they felt powerless and hopeless.

I didn't reveal my concern about being able to 'save' Teresa. I knew that there were people and situations that couldn't always be cured. It wasn't anyone's fault. Sometimes people's paths were destined. By the grace of the ancestors and Creator, it was a big job, and a lot of care was needed, but I was going to do my best to help her. I recommended that Teresa stay with me for a few days, perhaps up to a week, for in-patient care.

I decided to wait before revealing all I had seen in the bones. There were impending issues to take care of first. I felt that she and her family might not be ready to hear that she was a *baprofit*i, a faith healer.

She endured *phalaza, futha, geza*, counselling, and teachings; all healing methods unknown to her. We worked tirelessly with only a little resistance and the occasional pleading on her side: "Too hot. No, no, can't breathe." But it wasn't the even-handed steaming that seemed unbearable for her; the source of the discomfort, struggle, and fear was in the potentiality of healing.

I learned when I was a *thwasa* that it wasn't uncommon for those called to heal to have a multitude of conditions. Teresa was dealing with psychological pain and trauma which was worsened by a hidden spiritual entity. Many cases of psychosis, schizophrenia, and other biomedically-termed mental illnesses are often ancestral or spiritually related. I had been taught that some people are known to commit horrific acts, or to battle with addiction, severe compulsion, or a sense of insatiability, could be harbouring an entity, or in fact, be possessed. I observed this at various times throughout my practice. When working to eliminate or cure the problem, at some point a sense of opposition erupted. The patient innately wanted to heal, but forces needed to be addressed-- held up to the light; then, they could be overcome. After all, the bacterium fights to survive. Other times the obstacles weren't an organism, energy, or force, but the bare challenge of a person having to address inner beliefs, unhealthy thinking patterns, and skewed perspectives as a result of their experiences and traumas.

The issue for a *thwasa*–to-be, who may be carrying entities or forces that are alien, disruptive or negative, are often a result of the calling, and the student's sickness, *intwaso*. During the training process and necessary cleansing procedures, the *thwasa* masters healing techniques for cleansing and protection. Most importantly though, the apprentice

establishes and restores essential equilibriums with the ancestors and appropriate spiritual forces. When things are "in order" with the ancestors, they are shielded against harm, and wellbeing is restored.

Teresa's calling required her to work with the *Santos*, Saints. Ultimately, she needed to acknowledge specific Saints and follow appropriate customs and practices to strengthen communication and 'the interchange.' Integration would become essential for her immediate health but it would also guide her to her eventual work as a faith healer.

Teresa's biggest complaint was a stabbing pain in her side. She had had countless ultrasounds and examinations, but reports came back normal. A practical aspect of my care was evaluating her diet, exercise, and lifestyle, but I also suspected the pain was about something else. I prepared for working in the painful area.

I began a non-invasive, non-apparatus based, traditional surgical method. As I 'dug' into the painful area, she grew colder and pale. I lit *impepho* which calmed her. As my hands massaged the area, I moved deeper into the intangible organs to find something; an entity. It had been hiding within her for some time.

I tried to grab it, but it moved to other areas of her body. She wriggled around in discomfort. I followed it like a child trying to catch its own shadow. Was it from a tormented soul in her homeland? Was it put in her? Or did she 'catch it', as one type of pollution? The source of the entity was unknown. But it was clear that it wasn't a helper, a Saint, ancestor, or spiritual energy with good intentions; it was a spiritual bacterium that

only a healer could detect and remove. I used a few *umuthi* and a combination of waters to clear and cleanse it away.

As I removed it, she began sweating: “Oh it’s so cold,” she said, moments later complaining: “Oh, so hot now.”

I opened the window and quickly worked to eradicate the entity. I continued long after it was gone to ensure that it had been removed, and wasn’t hiding, as it had been for some time. She let out a deep breath. In spite of the warm and stuffy room, her body returned to a normal temperature.

“It’s gone, pain, gone!” she said astounded.

“Good. Whew, that one; it was hiding, hiding right in there,” I exclaimed.

“Yeah, whew,” she replied.

“Rest, and then come and wash in medicine, okay?” I asked.

“I try, but not tired. I’m hungry,” she said.

‘Wonderful!” I replied, helping her up.

It had been the first time she had eaten properly in days because the pain had diminished her appetite.

She ate, slept, washed, and then prayed.

She left four days later, feeling better and hopeful.

“Okay, see you. Thanks again,” said her daughter.

“See you soon. Don’t leave it. We started our work, but there is lots to do. Don’t wait,” I said warning her.

My experience of practicing in Canada was that most people only sought help when they were in absolute crisis, and often didn’t maintain prayers, rituals, and medicines on their own. Some would come back looking to repair again and again but didn’t reach a full recovery because of their minimal personal efforts. I could provide the medicine, but they had to use it. I could impart insight and knowledge from spirit, but they had to follow it. In a society rife with facades of both control and uniqueness, humility, surrendering, and reliance on a greater will or power than our own was often the biggest challenge for many. I often found that people from families, communities, or countries of origin that had strong beliefs and practices revolving around faith, along with a developed inner resiliency, were more capable of adhering to divine spiritual authority. Those removed from this way of thinking and being, often viewed spiritual guidance or interventions simply as suggestions, as in the way that smoothies and occasional yoga is good for you. It was only when things didn’t work out the way they wanted, again and again, that they became willing to ‘try’ something else. This process played out time and time again.

Teresa, although imbued with a strain of opposition to spirit, believed in Saints, Jesus, God and ancestors. Her prayers often manifested positive changes and wellbeing for its recipients. Eager to be rid of the varied symptoms which tormented her, her faith would be tested. Was she willing to follow through with all of the procedures that were needed to make permanent changes? Or, was the first layer of healing enough to keep her functioning, and in denial?

Maria, her daughter, not only interpreted for her mother but was a constant voice reminding her to take the necessary steps to healing. What Maria didn't realize was that she was also called to heal, but that would take years for her to fully accept, and it would be under drastic circumstances.

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*"This is the time. There is no other time. I see ancestors wherever I go. They tell me their lives, their secrets and their dreams. I live in between all spaces. Time is folded and hollow, like a folded and slightly rounded piece of paper. It moves and it's flexible. It is written on with the stars and particles that make up mass that float the clouds, that move the seas, that move thoughts through our heads sometimes like reckless trains.*

*We are not divided. Our mind is not our brain, is not our body, is not away from our spirit. Connected. The peanut butter you eat on toast, the sunlight pouring in through a window that accentuates smudge smoke. The air that freezes your nose hairs in the winter and warms your lips in the summer. As your children are from you, made up of the same cells, they are part of the force, threads in the cord, in the millions of cords.*

*Do you know that the universe is above, below, and around? That it is in you? You are made up of the same things that the universe is made of. You are the child, the elderly, the hungry dog, and the pillaged land. Lifeforce*

*races through every part of you. It is bigger than pain, than sorrow, and much bigger than fear. It consumes and obliterates with power, strength, and medicine. It cures all the things that you think make you sick, lonely, sad, angry, and afraid; always so afraid.*

*Those wondrous forests and tall mountains carry the same dew and frozen water that you carry in your whole body. Honour those waters. They are much more than birthing waters. The sacred soil where you search to find meaning is the same dirt beneath your nails. When you chew away worry, you eat that same dirt.*

*Food is small. It has meaning, but it isn't everything. When you eat, eat for energy, to sustain that force, not to deplete it. When you hammer away at that force with self-mutilation, shame, and self-loathing; you sicken yourself. You can't mend that. Call in the forces, within and without. The forces that are not divided. There is no good or bad, right or wrong.*

*You must follow guidelines to have peace while your feet walk on the land, but don't lose yourself in those guidelines. Do you understand? Do you understand that you are much more? Do you understand your existence is miraculous? That you are capable beyond your thinking? Lift those veils that you have taken and those veils that have been placed on you. Lift*

*them and see. See clearly for the first time. Let my small words be absorbed.*

*Start now. Start by seeing that sunlight, and feel it already burning inside you. Remember the connection. Don't think about it. Envision it. Don't try; trying is an effort to thwart your brain. Leave that for now. You will tell you what to do.*

*Understand? Your body knows you need water when you are thirsty, and you drink. You know you are thirsty for other things. You know this constant adherence to guidelines is exhausting. You are losing yourself in these guidelines. You know them so well that you don't need to think about them. You feel they are you.*

*This is who you are. You know how to cure your restlessness. Poisons are a way to hide away those truths. You feel you are undeserving. 'Who are you to have anything?' You wonder. This isn't about manifesting wealth or abundance. These things aren't important. Do you know why? You already have those things. A list of gratefulness is nice, but it isn't connecting.*

*So how will you connect? Unplug? And, if you do connect, how can you keep that awareness part of your living every day? How can you celebrate your life force? It doesn't matter where you go or what you do. Feel the*

*threads in you that also swirl in the universe. Step outside of the box, move back from the guidelines that have been set for you, that you now perpetuate. When you live in that force, feel your heart pumping and see the night each day; your awareness of your force will grow. Not the force, it is huge no matter what, but your awareness grows. This will uplift you. This will allow you freedom. This will take you to all the places you need to go and bring you back.*

*Do you understand? Don't answer the phone. Don't get up. Close this, and then close your eyes. Grow your awareness and let the forces of the universe go about its work. You are in that force; you are part of it. It is you. Feel that, know this, and understand your purpose."* Nenjihila, February 19, 2015.

**Chapter Thirty-Six –Birthing, Breastmilk and Body Memory: Navigating Canals and Surfacing's**

We welcomed our last born who was just short of ten pounds. His sisters immediately took on the roles of tiny mommies; tending to his every need. Although we owned a house, we were house poor, and really struggling to put food on the table. Over the next few months and years, things got worse. Like so many families in Ontario, I was left with the single option of work to cover daycare costs. David's company folded and he ended up working back in the city. His minimum two-hour commute one-way, in often harrowing conditions through snow storms on Highway 400, left him totally exhausted. I had some family help,

but the drive to visit us was too far. No sleep, financial strain, and solo parenting all week, made me contemplate and appreciate how much harder it was for other people, mainly single parents struggling to maintain lower-income households, who were often dealing with a plethora of other socio-economic issues. I was embarrassed to complain.

Evelyn visited from South Africa for a few weeks and helped in every way possible.

As the months wore on, in spite of being in love with our new son, and adoring our big girls, no sleep, the stress of trying to put food on the table, and the lack of ample support, made day-to-day living hard. I was becoming overwhelmed. I started experiencing what seemed to be panic attacks. This was new and frightening for me. I also started to identify post-partum depression symptoms. I maintained my role as a good mother but constantly beat up on myself for fear I was failing. My perfectionist attitude only further chipped away at my self-esteem. I prayed when I could, and used the medicine when I could, but I found myself increasingly doing battle with mood and survival issues. It had been eight months since I had had more than three- hours sleep in one night. Even when my son slept, I couldn't rest. It was as though my loving relationship with sleep was dead. I mourned the loss. My nerves were frayed in a way that only an insomnia-ridden mother of a newborn can understand.

I started worrying early in the day about the night ahead. "Will I sleep tonight? What can I do differently? What's wrong with me? I can't go on like this!" I thought, filled with exasperation.

It had taken some effort on our part, but our toddler began sleeping, only waking occasionally to nurse. “There was no excuse!” I thought. Insomnia, and my relationship to sleeplessness enhanced my anxiety and deepened my depression. I would secretly cry, convincing myself that “this too will pass.” But as the months wore on, it didn’t.

In one of my two-hour sleep intervals, I had a strange dream. I was roughly my toddler’s age and lying in my crib in the house near where I was born. There was a strange sexual encounter with a man I didn’t recognize. I could remember everything in the room, the temperature, the lighting, and even the glasses the man wore. I awoke, disturbed by the dream, but assumed it was just another one of those weird dreams, like the ones I had been having for as long as I could remember, even when I was a *thwasa*.

Later that evening, once David got home, I slipped into a hot bath. The warm liquid had become my daily medicine, calming and purifying me. It was all I needed to get through another day or night. But as I lay in the bath trying to accept my post-partum body, I struggled to let the water rescue me. I couldn’t relax and let it all go; the dream kept popping into my mind.

So I sat with it for a while and then my body responded. I wanted to throw up. Nausea intensified and I started to remember, but not in the way memory is seen to work. It was a body memory. It felt like someone was reliving an interminable dream to me, but I was experiencing every detail. I burst into tears and let the salty-snot-mix flow into the bath water. David knocked on the door asking if I was okay.

He came in and sat alongside the bath. I was so vulnerable and embarrassed. I tried to cover my milk-leaking nipples and stretch a facecloth over my flabby tummy. The sobs turned to wailing and then it didn't matter.

*I was that little child again. I was finally safe enough to tell*. I could see, touch, and smell every part of the abuse. Cognitively I knew it wasn't currently happening, but my body and emotions didn't. I was caught in a duality that wasn't part of the safe world of spirit. It was a hellish place reserved for survivors of sexual trauma, a place where I couldn't trust what I felt and doubted what I knew. I felt pulled in three different directions. My mind was deceiving me, my spirit felt both tormented and intact, and my body was stunned and hyperaware. I was in "fight-or-flight" mode.

"What's going on?" David asked, assuming I was coping with the usual feelings of being overwhelmed. I told him about the dream and explained that it wasn't a dream at all. It was a memory. A memory of sexual abuse, and that I was only weeks older than our pre-walking son when it started.

I didn't seek help immediately. I believed that I had the tools to help myself. How could I need help? Was I not the person who provided counselling, care and support, many times, for people dealing with this very issue? I was embarrassed and baffled, that at my age, I hadn't remembered. I continued to question if what I was thinking, feeling, and experiencing was true. I fluctuated between wanting to know more, know the whole truth, and wishing I didn't remember anything at all. What was worse, not knowing, or not remembering?

I found myself at a local rape crisis centre asking all the same questions I had heard countless victims ask me. The anxiety attacks worsened.

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We ended up moving closer to David's job so he could be more available to the family. He was beside himself with concern, rage, and compassion. As I started to get a "handle" on things, but it was as if a large wrecking ball had smashed the fragile house I had built to protect myself from the memories, the pain and the shame.

More dreams, more feelings, more body memories, but this time it was another perpetrator; a close family friend. I sought professional help with someone who specialized in sexual abuse and trauma, and who was open to my unusual processes. I relied on the medicine and ancestors for coping. My children were unknowingly my lifeline and kept me smiling and fighting to survive, to heal and thrive. I knew that if I didn't "do the work," my pain would not only indirectly affect them, but there would be further encoding of trauma. David and I explained that "Mommy had been hurt when she was little, and sometimes this made her sad and scared, but she was alright." They accepted this explanation, and I tried not to hate myself for feeling "less than."

As "it all came out," the pain was unbearable. Indescribable. "This is going to kill me. This hurts so, so much," I thought, understanding why some people attempted to medicate the pain away with addictive behaviours or committed suicide. I couldn't think clearly, rationally, or with any perspective when I was triggered. I was simply a little girl in a

prison. The empowered, strong, courageous, and confident woman, healer, mother, activist and partner had disappeared.

Insomnia grew worse. I feared someone would break into the house. I was hyper-vigilant, expecting an attack at any minute. My vulnerability was palpable. There were days when I felt like I was leaving the house naked. I didn't sleep. I clung to spirit. I clung with everything I had, so as not to slip away. I prayed and pleaded for strength and healing. I was angriest with myself. I felt betrayed, not just by the perpetrators, but with myself. How could I have hidden this for so long? Hidden it so deep that even I had forgotten?

But this was part of the sick relationship of abuse. Cognitively, I knew that I wasn't to blame, but that toddler and the eight-year-old girl inside of me felt different. When I experienced a body memory, I felt a complete despair with a hopelessness that took away hunger and left me exhausted. I was drowning in nothingness; a dark void with no air. I would cry inconsolably, choking. My breath suddenly gone, too burdened to breath. My heartbeat disappeared. "I am despair. Unworthy of those that love me," I thought.

Too depleted to get off the floor and drink a glass of water. Too weak to call for help; my arms too tired to grasp a supportive hand. Hell. This was hell. Alone with confusing images that didn't tie together, I jumped in and out of my crazy mind haphazardly. "Any minute I will need to call an ambulance. I'm losing my mind!" I thought.

I feared I would fall into an abyss of insanity. "This isn't fair. This isn't what I want." I thought, not knowing what to do, how to change, make it better, be better, and be stronger. I would keep the "episodes" at bay, until David was home and busy on bike rides or at the

park with the kids. I would not let them see me broken, I promised myself, in spite of them feeling and knowing I was in pain, sometimes even before I did.

I imagined my husband finding someone better than me. I forgot all those moments, days, weeks, months, years and experiences when I was a great mother, a functional person. I forgot my strength and abandoned self-compassion and self-acceptance. I was unknowingly re-victimizing myself. The dam that was my defence system could no longer hold back the flooding of trauma. I entered the stages of grieving and bargained with God, pleading and asking for help.

I sat and waited, waited for the pain and panic to subside. After a few hours of sobbing on the floor often in the fetal position, a force much greater than myself, had me sit up and forced me to drink water. “You are okay now,” it said.

After emerging from the trauma “can”, as I called it; I was exhausted from the work of remembering. I learned when it was “coming on,” so I could prepare myself and create a safe space with water, tissue, and traditional healing tools. I used everything in “my toolbox.” In order to be freed. I allowed myself to go to the brink of suffering. I was learning that by feeling my feelings, letting myself remember, and accepting what had happened, I was letting it go and lightening my load. I didn’t resist the pain. Instead, I was kind and loving and asked for support and love when I needed it, even when I felt unlovable, ashamed, and embarrassed. The ancestors led me to an open-minded professional. I went to sweat lodge ceremonies and peyote meetings. I prayed, washed in medicine, cried, and cried some more. My tears and grief-filled an ocean, but it didn’t wash me away. My expression of grief and sorrow was also medicine.

Slowly, I began to live again. I was able to distinguish between the past, the present, and my future. I was not my trauma. It was part of me, something I had to accept; places that seemed ugly and unlovable. I mothered the hurt child in me with compassion, care and non-judgment. Spirit guided the whole process. The truth had to be revealed; it always does. But along with the painful memories, were memories of the presence of spirit. In each and every recollection, I felt its presence in the form of an unseen embrace, as light, or as a voice. This comforted me, knowing that I was never alone, but it also caused me to ask: "How could you let this horrible suffering happen? Why didn't you stop it?"

The answer was clear: "I cannot stop all pain, but I am with you. I'm here".

In other words, suffering was part of life. Sometimes it could often be avoided and other times not. Either way, there would be some degree of suffering in the human experience. What was essential was that spirit always offered comfort, support, and healing, in one form or another. This, of course, doesn't mean tolerating violence, abuse or suffering. Abuse on any level is unacceptable! Prevention, safety, and justice should be sought wherever possible. My experience of acceptance was about accepting myself, accepting the seemingly broken places of myself. In fact, those "broken places" had been whole all along, because I am whole. As Van Gogh once said: "I am whole in spirit. I am the Holy Spirit" (The Writer's Almanac with Garrison Keillor. July 30, 2017.)

I was also reminded that our relationship with spirit isn't at our discretion; a myth we sometimes tell ourselves. It is pervasive. We need spirit, Creator, and the ancestors. Our survival depends on it.

I thought back to what Credo Mutwa once taught me: "Be the water lily growing in the soil, be nourished by the sludge; all the while, the flower emerges, beautiful and perfect, untouched by the muck from which it grows."

**Chapter Thirty-Seven –Pieces, Particles and Perpetuity**

*"Humans are the only thing in nature that do not let go. The golden weaver works tirelessly to make an adequate nest for his mate and offspring. If insufficient, judged only by the female, he must abandon the nest and begin laboriously collecting grasses and such for his new nest.*

*These efforts can go on many times until a suitable nest is built. But before that, the weaver must simply accept, that in spite of his labours, the nest must be abandoned. He accepts that this is his task and that only the female and her intrinsic survival skills will guide the best nest for baby birds.*

*Each particle of sand or bubble of the sea doesn't go against the force of movement. All things in nature trust their life force, accept their role, contribution, and unity in all things. This natural letting go creates an order or perpetual cycle.*

*We humans are seemingly different; we see our consciousness as cerebral. We see our success based on uniqueness, a separation from the norm, the regular, the plain. We see ourselves as striving, clinging from one rung to*

*the next towards a perceived top. We at times, go against our nature. If we see ourselves separate from everything, we are never part of anything.*

*Nature teaches us not just about our life force or God force innate in everything and all the time, it asks us to observe how to let go in order to survive and recreate necessary cycles for living.*

*The sea's tide is continuous. Small, smaller, and huge waves pull the salty blanket. Low tides, high tides, gentle waves folding over bubbles. These unassuming riptides and undercurrents reminding us of our smallness. Either way, it draws in and pulls back. It's aware and conscious simply through its force, through a greater earth and cosmological unity. It knows this through its existence, through what it does.*

*We are no different. We are no better or worse, stronger or weaker. The sea doesn't measure itself. Nature teaches us everything, how to care for ourselves, how to treat one another, and how to let go. When we are still, we can feel the rotation of the earth. When we are quiet and serene enough, we can see and feel this life-force in all things. The divide is lifted. We understand that the Orisha's are the saints, the ancestors, Jesus, the sea is God, the mother, Muhammad is the rocks, and the air is the water. The water lives in us.*

*Our experiences, memories, people, and places are infinite. The fear seeps out of our bodies. The thoughts become as noticeable as dust particles, and then we are letting go. Once the letting go happens, either through a crashing wave or subtle creeping tide, then we experience gratitude. It is a deep, profound gratitude which doesn't leave us questioning, worrying, or insecure. It leaves us with gratitude to breathe and live. It leaves us with a gratitude for all that was, is, and can be.*

*Acceptance. Acceptance is the gateway for transformation; a place between perceived divides, categorizations, and ideas. Acceptance is holy.*

*It is just before the golden weaver begins collecting more grass for another nest that the bird accepts. It is not a place of exasperation. It's about knowing we are unified. Things will be as they should, and we don't have to understand it. Once we recognize that there are no divides between living and dead, good and bad, we can accept what is.*

*This isn't to say we shouldn't take action against injustices, or say: 'Oh well, things happen.' When we understand our unity, life or God force in all things, then we come to a place of gratitude, humility, and contribution. We can help the other particles in the water to carry the wave. We do this by fully being present and observing how nature teaches us. It teaches us how to think, feel, see, and how to be. Technology can take us away from*

*this. It can simulate what being human is, but it's without a life force. It tries to generate without regenerating. It is constantly seeking to build higher, but not adequately, not for what is needed, and not part of a greater unity.*

*Nature's technology doesn't just pollinate, feed, and restore; it is succinct. Our technologies will cease. They are full of divides and attempted successes.*

*To move on, really move on, with and around, we need to observe nature. She shows and tells us how to heal. She patiently teaches us how to let go and accept."* Ancestor's name unknown, February 21, 2014.

*"So, that day you were born, I celebrated. The same as I did for my great, great grandbaby. I was never good with words. I lost sight only with my eyes. My hands grew stuck from all the fine work that I did- from when my children were young, until my grandchildren, from when my father and mother's land was lost- until I was taken.*

*I hid other children long after I fled from my first and cruel husband, but I couldn't hide. Some of the children did not look like my family. They looked as though they weren't my children at all. I told people when they asked that he had died, and my second husband was aboard a ship never to*

*return. I made a story about far-off places; India where I said he was. Some I told he was trapped and trying to find us. I told the children that he had a happy life but couldn't find us any longer.*

*There was no second husband, only men who came, lonely soldiers who came and didn't ask, just demanded time with the unmarried women. You see I was always on the border.*

*My great, great grandchild is praised for her stories. She tells the truth. She knows without concern. My grandmothers showed me this strength; all of them from the villages. They knew when to pray, what to eat, how it should be prepared, and how to take care of themselves and others. I felt warm under their breath and stayed close when I should have followed instructions.*

*Don't ask how you are my great grandchild! There are things you cannot understand when you eat, breathe, and have flesh. You see colours as separate, thoughts divided, and give oceans different names. It is all porridge from the same pot. Some fermenting, and that makes it sour, or instead, it can be the sweet grain that pregnant women eat. It is cooked alike and eaten, all eaten! The flame needs the wood and the water lights the way.*

*Our tools, the bones, show this and that, but they go together. We must see them all together. How they lay down before us, what they show; pieces in one picture."* Ancestor's name unknown, December 21, 2014.

**Chapter Thirty-Eight –Panic and Terror: The Feared Madness of Channeling Spirits**

Teresa was feeling well. We completed the necessary healing processes along with the initial graduation, the equivalent of *mvuma kufa*. She was still cautious about counselling people, and at times, more concerned with day-to-day living than following spiritual requirements. In wanting to maintain her well-being, she followed the instructions of the Saints and ancestors as best she could.

One of the directives was that she must complete the *El Camino de Santiago* pilgrimage in Spain. I saw that this would be the first of many. In spite of her distress of travelling alone, she went and returned altered from the experience, having had visions of *Santa Maria*.

Not long after Teresa came home, Maria, her daughter, started experiencing increased and intensified anxiety attacks. In addition to feeling shortness of breath and light-headedness, she had other distressing uncharacteristic symptoms.

One day in the midst of an 'attack,' Maria's voice changed and she fell into a strange state. She addressed each person in her family; they huddled around her in alarm. She gave each person insights, instructions, and guidance on what to do. She commanded the room with an authority unusual for her placid disposition.

Then suddenly, she returned to her pre-trance disposition, alarmed and confused about what had happened. Drinking what seemed like gallons of water, she cried and listened to each

person as they conveyed what had been said. Her parents oscillated between panic and prayer, but neither seemed to help the situation.

This went on for days. Maria slipped in and out of rational cognizance. She needed to drink, and wipe her face and arms with copious amounts of water. She was exhausted, but couldn't sleep. Her parents considered calling an ambulance for their deranged daughter but instead called me. I assured them that Maria's abnormal behaviour was in fact, a normal part of the process of being called to heal.

Her father considered calling the Priest - who was an open-minded Jesuit that I had met a few times - to "pray the rosary." But her father worried that the Priest might judge Maria, or worse, that he couldn't help her. The family's biggest fear, unspoken, was that Maria was going insane.

Maria arrived at the door, looking the same as she always did. Her hair was in a perfectly symmetrical bob, clipped at the top, and she was neatly and simply dressed. Her friendly tone and pleasant expression were absent.

"You see, I'm fine now. For now!" she said. Her mother and father helped her to a chair and asked for a tall glass of water for her.

"I need water, so much water. It's the only thing that helps," she said, chugging half the glass.

"The night it started…" she began, relaying every detail of the previous three days.

"What I understand is that this person coming through me… it's Carlos' grandfather," she said, as her exhausted parents stared at us in bewilderment.

Her family had plenty of opportunities to see me “go into spirit”. It didn’t frighten or alarm them, but it remained an odd and removed experience for them. I wasn’t their analytical daughter who had recently received her Doctorate in Anthropology from one of the best Universities in Toronto. How could it be that Maria was channelling spirits!? They questioned.

Maria said that she hoped the messages would stop coming through her. She saw that her ordeal really concerned Carlos, her husband who was of Mayan descent. Once he made offerings and became a healer in his ancestral traditions, things would go back to normal. I tried to explain to her that this may address part of the problem, but in fact, she was also called to heal, and that her life would be another kind of normal now.

Of course, Carlos felt a great deal of stress with the situation. Although he was indigenous, from rural Chiapas, he had little to no exposure to Mayan, non-religious spirituality. In fact, he was the most devout Catholic in the family. Being ‘to blame’ for his wife’s condition was distressing and scary, and he wanted to rectify the situation and restore his wife to sanity.

Maria didn’t move in with me, at first. The ancestors revealed through *Amathmabo,* and the spirits that were working through her, too, that she had to go to a specific area in Guatemala to train as a Mayan healer. She would also need to go to Chiapas to care for the ancestors and perform rites and rituals there, too. She didn’t see how this was possible. Where would she get the funds with her partner working at a factory job? She was still job hunting and had school debt.

This wasn't what she had planned for herself. It never is, and she found it hard to succumb to spirit's demands. I treated and assisted her with *intwaso* under the direction of the ancestors. But her training in another tradition was non-negotiable.

Within a few months, the spirits clearly worked directly through her, telling her what to do. She was guided to a specific place, and a teacher in the countryside, where she learned how to conduct fire ceremonies, and divine with the sacred beans (a divination method connected to specific energies and the Mayan calendar.)

Upon returning from her training, it was clear that her initiation was not yet complete due to the short duration of the trip, and possibly the skill set of her teacher. Spirit guided me to further assist by showing her healing techniques, how to work with patients, and enhancing her expertise. She worked alongside me helping with patients.

More spirits revealed themselves, not just from her husband's ancestry. She prayed just as I had, day and night, washed, steamed, and vomited with herbs, regularly. No sexual contact, food restrictions, and a host of other rules had to be adhered to. Her greatest battle was letting go of her mind; the constant worry about money, about Carlos, finding academic work, and lastly, how she would be perceived by her community in *doing* the work, instead of just studying it. She couldn't imagine being "out there," as a non-indigenous person.

I understood her concerns. I had struggled with the same issues. I tried to explain the concept of ancestor's, 'foreign' spirits and collective ancestors as a 'reason' for working with non-lineal ancestry. I also believed that as a result of 'the times' we are living in there

is urgency for healers to be awakened to their calling, but most importantly, there are things that only spirit understands.

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As the months wore on, her spirit strengthened. She realized that the 'anxiety attacks' were simply virtuous spirits coming through her. She learned that when 'the grandfather' ancestors came through, he wanted cigars. When the spirit of the Jaguar came through her, it wanted white wine or alcohol. Whereas the spirit of the wind demanded lavender. As she no longer resisted, spirit came through effortlessly, providing truths and clarity to all in its presence.

The anxiety attacks ceased. She helped handle spiritual possessions, break-downs and other heavy patient cases. She prepared boiling water for steaming and cleaned the *indumba* every day. She followed *thwasa* protocol. Along with this, came the tears, confusion, and fear. The death of perceived individual personhood and identity, and the facades of, what Rastafarians call 'Babylon', had to transpire for her metamorphosis into healer-dom. She had to let go of everything she had spent decades learning (and paying for). Her critical thinking, essential for academia, was now a hindrance. She also experienced emotional breakthroughs in her isolation, synonymous with being a healing apprentice. The surfacing and addressing of emotional pain was part of her transformation. She would have a spirit name and in many ways be born anew. Her life would no longer be based on her own wants, needs, and goals. She would consciously live within a divine authority. This moving into the life of a healer required an internalized revolution and a correspondence with cosmological energies as to restore and balance.

*"When I arrived that day, I came out. This is when you are born again, into these ways. If the one guiding you, instructing you, doesn't know, ha, then you will be blocked forever. You will struggle too long. Until that other one comes and unties you.*

*You were okay. Even with things not right those days. The things went in order, and you had that plant you must eat that day [referring to me being a student and graduation]. Things find their way, like with you and me. You see how things are now? Yes, it's good. Those that don't have that plant, those things in order, ha, it's never right. They can be lost and their children lost and then more to come.*

*Those ones must jump inside that tree; they must go in so far that they are one thing with that tree, mvusamvu. This is one of the plants. There are four plants that were provided by the ancestors. If we only have these three, we are alright. I will tell you, but not the others. They use knowledge up and throw it aside like it is too small, for nothing.*

*Those with me now [spirits], we pick those things. We stay near them. We remember how they helped us so much. We are so grateful to those living ones. They still keep us happy. So when you use them, we are smiling. You remember us and we remember them. Do that. Then, we work with those*

*plants and heal the people. When we do this way, it's the prayer way."* Ama J Sept 8, 2014.

**Chapter Thirty-Nine –Poisons of Our Making, Drinking Sea Water and Transmittal Energy with Wild Animals**

*"I want you to listen closely. You should have been listening nicely all along, but now listen too close. There are things that seem like bugs but they are made in buildings [labs]. They are working on these things to put in people. They have put them in people already, but soon they will put them in everyone. These things that look like bugs are made from metals and things that do not live and breathe. These bugs are controlled by something else, not the ancestors and the powerful ones. They are controlled by people who are hungry and never get full.*

*They start with this in buildings [labs], then they put the bugs in people; people who do not know. These people will be the people of this place [Africans]. Oh, these horrible bugs! They will make people sick in the mind. We will see them do these crazy things to one another.*

*Then people from far away will say that they are coming to help, but they will just have control over those people. These bugs and the other things*

*they make [technology], will own the people. I mean own them! Like they try to own land and have wars over this line and that line [countries]. Ha, they are going to own people.*

*But it won't be like long ago; you see the people won't know that they are owned. They will think they are free. They will have nice pictures in front of them that tells them that they are happy [screens]. They will almost forget that they aren't happy. They will almost forget that they have forgotten. These bugs will steal life. They will take what they need [information] from the people and then they will leave. Oh, those people will get so sick and then they will die, all the life taken from them, even the silly thinking taken. They will be breathing, but dead in every way. Oh so terrible.*

*They will fill up the buildings [hospitals] and just be there until they die. Oh, this is so terrible. The sickness that used to come so long ago; this is worse, it is so terrible.*

*But they [referring to these "bugs"] won't go into some people. The bugs can't go into some people. The people that have high metals [minerals] in their body, it can't go. Those ones now that have medicine [radiation for cancer treatment,] it can't go in there. The bug cannot read anything there. It just goes around in the body lost, and making the person have*

*strange feelings [affecting their nerves]. But if you have too much metal in your body, then you are sick too! This is no good. This medicine [radiation] is not good, too.*

*So, if you start now, start by taking some minerals, high ones every day, you can build yourself up. Do you hear me? This is not crazy talk. You people think that if something doesn't make sense it is not sensible. But look at your lives now. Ha, no sense anywhere! So listen to me. If you want to hear something, listen to this. Take those minerals and drink them, a little every day. Then you won't get that bug in you.*

*They want everyone to have that bug in them. This is the only way you won't get it. For the metals, you can stand in those places in South Africa, those places I told you about. You stand there every day, a little and a little. Then your body will have those things that don't allow the bugs to come inside. Do you understand?*

*I hope one day you do not say: 'Oh but what she said is true. Oh, I should have listened to those things.' I hope you listen now. If you wait, you will be too late. You must also learn how to drink sea water and how to prepare it so you can have it. You can start by drinking some small ones. Just one bit [a capful] every day. This is so good. It can clean anything out of your body. Seawater is the same as the water you lived in when you were in*

*your mother. If they look, they will find it is the same, only a little different. People forget to keep that sea water clean. They shouldn't travel in the sea too much and eat everything from it. The sea is the place we come from. We need to pray and to drink just a small bit from her. She's powerful! Even the mess that comes from the boat [petrol], ha, it cannot kill that sea. It changes it for some time but it cannot kill it. The water knows how to change itself, again and again, to keep going.*

*That water, do you know, it is breathing like you and I? It breathes. You don't understand. You are so lost in worry about nonsense. Ha, your payments, where to go, what to do. It doesn't matter. You must do these other things.*

*You must also prepare your children. They must start by not eating so much. Ah, those children over there, they are always eating. They only know to eat. They must make things and prepare things, but, how can they? You have to teach them. How can you teach them if you don't know? You are like the child but you don't hear your ancestors. Oh, what will happen to you, I wonder.*

*Are you listening? Are you listening nicely? I am not an old woman. You ask to be told. You ask to see. You ask to hear. Ha, so now I give that. I tell you. I show you. But do you want to know? This is what I wonder. I love*

*you either way. It is my way. It is my way to love you."* Ama J March 24, 2015.

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*"This is my last time that I will visit for a time. I will show you to the people that make up this story. They will find you, and you them. Together you can make some small things and put them in that place and talk to those ones there [make offerings to her and her ancestors].*

*I will never stop loving you. This is how we are [ancestors]. We never stop that loving, never! Remember you were told to have that talking back and forth to one another? How we like it that way? It grows the relations. Yes, I know you remember.*

*I remember when there was harm [she says, referring to when I was abused as a child]. I could not help you then. You see, we have our time; we come and we go. We have limits. I want to tell you that times ahead will be difficult once more. I can help this much [she says, showing the tip of her finger]. It will be enough, enough for you to help the other ones.*

*This is how it goes. It goes down and around. The ones who run from this will be lost all the time and then when they change over too. Everyone needs that help, everyone. So, everyone you meet, you must help them. Even those ones you don't want, or the job is too big, help them. They are*

*crying too much inside and can't get out of that place [an inner jail]. You must come back here [South Africa], for a time, not your whole life, for a time. You want to know why? Ha, I can't tell you that. But there is medicine you need inside, right in there. You can only get it here. It is old, this medicine; I mean this plant and tree are so old. You can't count back so far.*

*Your children will be fine. If we promise you this, then will you come? There are the animals to meet, too. You didn't meet them. Ah, Sangoma, we must meet those animals, not just take things from them, but meet them. These ones don't know this now. They don't know that you can meet those animals, look in their eyes, watch them from far away even if they are dangerous. Especially the one with the horns [Rhino]; you never get close to that one.*

*Some can be touched, some; only you feel them breathing in your chest, and feel them in your nose [smell]. This is very powerful. Do you understand? When you have this, this can be better than taking something from them because they are still breathing. They can give power to you. You ask them and they will give it [transmit energy].*

*Ha, people don't know. They wear these things with the picture [khanga: traditional clothes bearing animal motifs], but it is just nice to stare at. No strength in that.*

*So, the animals, they will come and you will find them. Then together there is the place again [balance]. Then you will give the children that food. That food we eat, the proper food! Maize now! Ew, it's rubbish for the insides!*

*Bring your family back. Your mother and your sister can come and go. It will be near those special caves. Oh, those caves; those ones [ancestors] will call you into those places so many nights. Ha, you won't sleep. You will walk there all the time and sleep there. There will be more stories in there, even stories about those dogs from where you are now [stories about wolves]. Everything, everything, it will be clear.*

*Make your own candles. You can start now and then carry on once there. You can stay in a place for a time. You don't need your name on it for it to be yours [ownership]. Ha, the chief there, he will let you stay and will give you land later on. He will want you back there. You will bring good things for the people around there. They need your help.*

*Remember what I said about helping anyone who needs that help? You will have a dog to protect you. It will give its life to do this against the*

*snake. Don't worry about these things. There are many snakes there but you can talk to them. I will show you how to talk to them. You can ask animals away, or call them to you. But if you do this, you mustn't kill them; no that isn't the thing to do.*

*This comes first, you understand? Not the job and the school for the children, and all the things you fill yourself up with [thinking]. This comes first. Your family knows this. Madlozi comes first. This is the way. They agree to this in being a family. They agree to this way. Do you understand?*

*Now, other ones [she says addressing readers], we shared these things. We bring you in even though you aren't Sangoma. Even those that are and haven't been reminded yet, we shared all these things. Some things that are too simple even to tell the fool, but you need to be remembered [reminded]. Those other things, we let you be in that conversation. Well, this is how you can learn. You can sit there and listen and watch to try to understand. That's how WE teach. You watch and listen and feel the things inside growing. You cannot do anything; get up and say: 'This change I am going to make.' No, you cannot do this, if you don't know what way you are going. You must know why you are going to that mountain, what medicine you are going for, and have a good idea of how to get up and down. Now if*

*it rains, then you have to wait because the path is washed away. You must guess when it is a good time. Like the times before when you went, what you saw, and what the old people told you. Then you go.*

*Ha, you find things on your way, maybe a medicine that you didn't come for, but it found you, maybe some dangers, and maybe a new way, up this way, and around that way. This is good. This is good to have this. You see? This is learning. But if you just climb and know nothing, then you are in trouble.*

*The other one [ancestor] told you about being prepared. Yes, it's true, be prepared always. Not with this silly thing your people use [technology]. That is not preparation. Preparing is be ready for what might come, knowing what to use and how, if you need to.*

*You must do this too, Nomadlozi. Put those dried plants aside and those other things in the jars, for next time [yearly harvesting]. These things you are taking in [reading] and trying to understand, you are sitting like when I was the young one near the fire by my grandmother. It was at that place I learned how to prepare the food and how to take care of things. Then when new things happened, I knew what to do because I had learned the other things from that place.*

*I am not yours. I can help if you ask, but you must find your own [ancestors and spirits, she says addressing readers.] It is your job. You must know who they are. When you know this, it will tell you so much about who you are. Why you eat this, why you want the forest or the river, and what time of day you are strong [energized]. Then you can find out where you are going.*

*First, you must know what you are going for. What medicine is on that mountain, and then you start talking to that mountain before you go, and you see things [dreaming]. Then on the trip, you will find everything there, and even more. But you are too lazy! These things [distractions] are killing you, killing you slowly. So slowly you don't know that you are drinking in the poison.*

*Do you understand? These stories are paths to help you find your own way. This woman [referring to the author] is just a small guide. She isn't too big, just one of the ones. You are one of the ones too. I want to tell you I love you. This love is bigger than what you know. It's in the breathing and in the water, in the tongue [words], and in the spirit.*

*When you come down from the mountain with those nice things and have thankfulness, then we will show you how to use them. You see, we will show*

*you so many things; we can't show you those things if you won't open your eyes. We are the mountains."* Ama J May 21, 2015.

**Chapter Forty– Nations Built on the Backs of Other Mothers**

It was surprisingly cold for the end of December. I was grateful that Dana had lent me a jersey. I had forgotten to pack them. I somehow forgot how chilly the rainy season could be in Gauteng. It had been pouring non-stop, not like the light Ontario rains, but Transvaal downpours. Most South Africans attributed the incessant rain to the loss of Mandela days earlier. Normally showers were viewed as a blessing, especially in the Highveld, but this weather held a different significance with the passing of Madiba. Onica nestled up in a blanket in her usual chair, exhausted at the end of her day. The newly-tiled floor looked nice but made the place much cooler.

We huddled around the space heater sipping rooibos with honey; Onica's favourite. It had been ages since we sat together like this. In my earlier years, we regularly had late morning tea, munched on toast with avo, and stared out the kitchen window at the fragrant jasmine vines.

"So, when did you come to Joburg from Makolokwe?" I asked.

"Um…,1964. I left Kipton for Johannesburg at twenty-three to look for a job. Studying wasn't possible at that time because of the costs, as well as Apartheid. It was my Aunt Gladys who asked me to come and help her out. I kept changing jobs as a domestic worker. Apartheid was so terrible at that time. Pass laws and application forms made work so difficult, Rebecca. Passbooks were an ID only for black people. Application forms went to

the employer to sign, then to the chief, and back to the offices, where they could deny it at any time. *Eish*, yearly renewals were so difficult," she recounted.

"How was it as a domestic worker?" I asked.

"Hey, no one was nice, except for the woman that I worked for in 1971. She was young and kind. She would buy me the same dresses as her. I remember once her husband went to Canada and bought me a scarf. I still have that *duk*. She was so angry that he didn't buy her the same one too. She told him, 'You know we wear the same things; why didn't you get me one too?'" Onica said laughingly.

"I was working for that lady while my cousin was on-leave having her baby. When my cousin came back, the lady told me: 'You mustn't leave. I want you to stay instead of her.' But I couldn't do that to my cousin. So, I left hoping I would find another job. I asked her to fill in the application forms so I could stay in Jo-burg, but she wouldn't. She wanted me to stay, so I had no forms.

I remember one day, over by Emmarentia, which the police targeted because it was by the police station in Parkview, I was waiting by the shops. A man I knew saw the police and yelled 'Run! Run!' *Eish,* did I run, Rebecca! I ran so fast," she said. "They didn't get me that day. I also remember going to my aunt's wedding. The police stopped us '*Yeah kaffirs*, you aren't going there anymore. Show us the dress!' they said, and then locked us up the whole night. We missed the wedding and had no way to call anyone to tell them. The next morning, they let us out 'Voetsek, voetsek!' they yelled at us. "You know what this means?" she asked.

"Fuck off?" I said.

"That's right."

"Even if you had the forms, you were harassed?" I asked incredulously.

"*Yebo*, even if you had forms you ran away. The police would stop you for nothing, just to harass us. Oh, it was terrible then. The police would pull your teeth and tongues with pliers. It was always bad, but it was part of life. As long as they didn't kill us, that's how we thought. Whew, life under Apartheid; we hoped things would come right. We hoped Mandela would help us. He was the one," she said, pointing to the T.V.

We sat staring silently at Mandela's historic memorial service. His granddaughter eulogized beside a fraudulent sign language interpreter.

"Oh, I was laughing the other night with Kagiso and Mpho about the queues. Oh, you can't believe it, Rebecca," she said chuckling, "when we went to get the pass or application forms, women and men queued separately. We had to take off our tops, bras and everything. You had to wear a skirt when you went there, if you were in a dress, then you would be walking around in brooks and no top! Then…," she said standing up, 'stand still, breathe hard,' she mock-barked in Afrikaans, 'oh don't breathe on me, and turn your head the other side'," she said, acting like a panting dog.

"Then the stethoscope; they were checking for TB. Oh, Rebecca, it was terrible. All the women standing in a line beside the men in another, side by side. Our titties hanging out," she said with laughter.

“Then those men doing that to us were being watched by their white supervisors. It was so belittling. Why did they have to do it like this? Okay, they had to check for TB, but like this?” she questioned, no longer amused.

“Then we had to pee in a cup. That was okay, but the stethoscope and naked tops! It was belittling.”

“I can’t even imagine,” I said, horrified and ashamed of my white privilege and unintended complicity.

“It was too terrible.”

Changing the subject, I asked when she had the girls?

“Kagiso was born in Baragwanath, but I had to leave her with my Mom in the village at three months. My employer at that time said it was okay to bring the baby, but my mother said: ‘You cannot take that baby with you; you will lose the job.’ So, I left her behind. It was too difficult, but that is what we had to do then.”

Mothers and fathers leaving their children to work for white families, and black women raising white women’s children, rarely seeing their own; just one part of the legacy of colonization and Apartheid which wore away at the fabric of family and society.

Wondering if things had changed for her once meeting David’s family, I asked about when she came to work for Evelyn.

“Then I found temp work with Evelyn in Malanshof. I met Kagiso’s father before that, though. He wasn’t my husband; he was never my husband. He was an ugly and abusive man, that’s all I am going to say. My time with him was too terrible, and wherever I moved,

he found me. There was nowhere to go, no way to get away," she said, staring into her half-empty teacup.

"You know Ribbs, God answers prayers," she said. "One day he just left when Mpho was twelve or so. Then my prayers were answered. He left everything - every little thing. Evelyn called for him to take his things but he didn't care. Then he got sick and was in the hospital. I went to see him before he died. All his family were there, his other girlfriends, wives, or whatever. No one recognized me, or they did but didn't' say anything. He was very sick. When everyone left, I went into his room. He looked terrible, very thin. You know what I did Ribbs?" she asked.

"I put my hand on his head for quite a while and I said: 'I forgive you.'"

"Wow", I said, tearing up.

"You know why, why I did that?" she asked.

Drawing upon my own experience with forgiveness, I conjectured that she forgave him for her own sake, so she could finally let him go.

"No," she replied, "it was not for me, because he knew what he did to me. He knew everything that happened. I wanted to forgive him so he could go, so he would be free," she said.

Was it love beyond the hate she felt for him? Was it her principles, which always seemed intact? Was she mature and wise in a way that was inconceivable for me? Had she been learning to forgive her whole life, and this was part of how she survived and how she found serenity? I wondered.

I sat silently studying her beautifully-ageing face. Her grace, acceptance, and compassion were evident in her voice and manner. The old picture that always resurfaced in the family, of her as a young girl in traditional Setswana clothes, came to mind. She had been such a beauty. She was even more beautiful now, but as an elder. Her faith had also strengthened over the years, which I attributed partly to having a minister for a son-in-law.

The memorial was wrapping up and I pondered what an incredible person Madiba was. I thought about his leadership, courage, and strength, and how these attributes were born largely out of where he was from; after all, he was *of* the people.

"How did you feel when Mandela was released? Were things changing?" I asked.

"Rebecca, we were excited; we were so excited, but we were also scared. I thought, 'There is no way they wouldn't do anything.' When he didn't arrive at the airport, we were sure they killed him! Then he landed in Lanseria and it was announced that he was okay. 'Oh, thank God', I thought. But then when he came out with his hand like this", she said raising her fist.

"I held my breath. I was sure he would be shot. *Yo*, he must put down his hand; they are going to kill him! But you know, things were changing slowly before that. The signs separating us were taken down. At that time, we only bought things through the window. Our money was okay, but we couldn't go into the shops. That changed. Then there were no more passbooks. Oh, but I remember that day, we were all home watching TV. I had knots in my stomach," she said as her face lit up.

Kagiso and Mpho shared her flawless skin and generous smile, but Onica's face told other stories.

"The day we voted was a special, special day. People black and white were in one queue. Ah, the love, Rebecca; the love that day. People were pinching themselves. Neighbours would make sandwiches and bring out cool drinks for the people. We thought, 'My God, this is a change, it's really happening.' We also knew things would take long. Everything is a mess in this country. *Tata* can't change everything. We knew it will take long to come right. Now my grandchildren have many changes. At that time, we didn't have water, roads, electricity. We were like things thrown in the bush. I remember hearing one white lady say: 'They must come and work for us and then leave.' But now things are different. Even things have changed with men; they are more civilized and educated now. People forget that things take time," she said.

"What would you have done if you could have done anything, *Gog,*" I asked, assuming domestic work was not her first choice.

"Hey, the only thing you could do then was be a teacher or a nurse. That was all black people could be. But it wasn't easy to study or do correspondence. The forms were a problem, and I was trying to work. I would have been a nurse but I don't like blood; oh I can't stand blood."

"*Gogo*, when are you going to retire?" I asked.

"*Eish,* I don't know, soon, Rebecca. I am so tired, so tired now," she said, adjusting her glasses.

The huge funeral was coming to an end. All the States people had eulogized and shaken hands.

"You know I arrived weeks after Madiba was inaugurated. I can remember that time; remember the feeling in this country. It was incredible. I can't believe I have known you for twenty years, On," I said.

"Oh, but I remember when you went to *thwasa*. Oh, it was too terrible. David told us you were going, but you didn't tell me," she said.

"Hum, I don't know why I didn't tell you; maybe because I was so sick and so desperate, or I thought you'd try to talk me out of it."

"Well, we went to visit you. *Eish*, it was terrible. You were barefoot, covered in the medicine and kneeling. *Agh* shame, I felt so sorry for you. When David and I drove home from Soweto that night, we were silent the whole car ride. We didn't say one word, Rebecca, not one. When I got home I cried. I cried so hard for you, and then I prayed," she said, as we both welled with tears.

"Oh," I reminisced, "when you used to send me food parcels on a Friday when David visited. I was so grateful. *Baba* wasn't happy about it, but pretended not to notice. It was so good. I felt like I was home. It helped me so much, you don't even know," I said, reaching for her hand.

"I made David take it. I was so worried about you eating. Oh but Rebecca when I saw you, poor *thwasa, eish,* I was so sorry for you," she said.

"But look how wonderful it turned out *Gog*. I am so grateful to the ancestors. My children, my family, and my life now!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, it did," she said. "It really did work out."

I hugged her goodnight feeling emotional and humbled from all she had shared. As I walked from her cottage to the main house, her words lingered with me. "Prayers are answered, Rebecca. Prayers are always answered."

**Chapter Forty-One – "One story and one message has many things to tell"**

*"Let us be clear. These are our words, not yours. You deliver the water, we are the flow. Ha, in my time, the ones that brought the messages were very special. Even just the everyday things. The traveller with the message was our "technology." A good one brought the correct message. The one that was given to him, and brought the story of how "the message" came to be and what happened on their journey. Ah, this was our "news." That meant that the one to bring the messages had to be trustworthy, right from when they were a very small child. Speaking the truth, obedience and of course strong (strong-willed, as the people say now.) Oh, to bring that message, in every weather, at any time. Sometimes they faced fighters from what is now called Mozambique, and later English soldiers. They never carried the message on paper. Our people didn't use paper for a long time. We didn't need it. Our thinking and our hearts was the paper. You can record*

*everything inside yourself. This is why your children and their children will remember everything, from you and your mother and her mother. You see? You cannot make the people ready for the message, no you cannot. But it is coming either way. You cannot un-hear the truth and pretend you don't know. Ah, everyone will remind you. Ha, me, I will remind you. We will do that for you. It is a gift. It is a gift to get the messages, and they are coming, for sure. So, welcome the one who brings them. Feed them, listen well and hear the story of all that happened. And. Listen to the message in the story too. One story and one message has many things to tell.*

*I am going not down by the water, passed the hill, there is someone waiting there for me. Ah, they are crying and need me to be there well they weep. I will clean them with the water from the river. Even though it is dirty now, I will bless it and clean it, then I will clean them. Maybe wash their ears so they can hear me well, and wash their eyes so they can see me well. Ah, sometimes you forget we are here…"* Ama J. June 22, 2016.

*"Ah, you cannot think this way. With this worry all the time. You must only know that which you know. If you allow yourself to become preoccupied with everything that happens, even over there, ah, you will suffer greatly. When those of us become ancestors, ah, we are more*

*powerful! Do you know this Nomadlozi? Yes, we are. We have the power to work alongside the turning of the world and what you call winds. Do you believe the people have prayed and worshipped the ancestors and all their faces since we began? Feel safe and taken care of? No, this is not it at all. The people were given visions, information, knowing's that they could feel and also touch. They relied on all of their senses. There are many more than those people know about. 17, there are 17 senses altogether. Not everyone can use all of these, but you will see. Your science will discover maybe 13 or 14. And they will think it is their "technology" that gave them this. No, never, but they believe so strong in "technology" that they believe it, and not themselves, not what they already know, what they feel. Ah, they forget that there were so many before them. They believe, they are them. Ah never. Shocking, so shocking, to see this with people now. They are just people, no longer The People. They belong to everyone and no one. Their medicine, dead pills. Dead! The living don't know they are living. They live like they are dead, but not dead enough to be with the ancestors. Ah, graves, they live in graves while they breathe through their mouths. Ah, can't believe, can't believe these things. If I see too long, I am so lost, so lost to wonder how? Why? Agh, oh, no, no, no. I want the life that I had for all of you now. To have things right. To feel right in your body. For your insides, ah yes, to feel smooth, free. To dream of all the magic of your*

*ancestors, and the ancestors, ancestors. For the ancestors are not the ancestors, and we are not yours or only theirs. Ah, we don't believe this. This isn't in our languages, none of them. Theirs, yours, mine. So, foolish. Ah, they must start by changing these things for the children. Change the language, and you change the people. Before, now, after. They must be changed to. These things do not tell you anything. Language must tell you everything, even the things you do not understand. You must be left wondering, trying to understand. This is how you grow. You grow when you are left with what you call in your words, puzzles. Like everything everywhere cannot give you everything, so too is the same with language, with knowing. You must wonder, must think. Must try to put it together with the things you see. 'Ah, sitting by this mountain and now the words my grandfather gave me at dawn, tell me this…' and so on. It must come back to you again and again. Language, words, knowing. Coming and sliding away for a short time, until you pick it up, find it again. It must sit in your hands like water from the stream, cold for a short time. Drink, drink while you can, because the rest falls through the fingers! Ah, yes, even if you collect more, it is not the same water as before, even though it comes from the same river. Changing, changing, all the time. Ancestors, ah, we don't change. We are permanent. The People, they knew this. That is why they kept coming to us for showings, tellings, knowings, as to*

*remember. Memory is only about remembering what you know. Yes, it is all there, Like that stream with clean water. It's for you to collect it and use it wisely. Don't waste. If you waste, you may not have more. The water knows when you waste it. When you discard. When it is time, you will know. You will know because you already know. Remembering when it is time. This is what we say. Not memory, that's another silly word. Remembering what you know. This happens when you collect those handfuls of water. Remember to, the river can be dry, yes this happens without the rains. Go to the source. Ah, what is this? You ask. But ah, you know. Remember, you know."* Ama J. February 24, 2017

**Epilogue - The Small Pine Forest just Beyond the Graveyard**

The town of Angus, Ontario, (now referred to by some locals as 'anus') is a military-base-town full of low-end chain stores, high teenage pregnancy rates, and the odd 'massage' parlour. Over and above the military, the only other transients were local visitors to the nearby Simcoe Museum; a space full of settler ghosts and their belongings, along with an abhorrent 'how-natives-lived' showpiece, *situating* Indigenous Peoples in the conquered and long-forgotten past. There wasn't room in the building, packed with settler artefacts, for any mention of living Indigenous Peoples or their ghosts.

On the outskirts of Angus, I entered the small cemetery as I had countless times. I preferred to visit my ancestors in the summertime when the grass was plush and fresh flowers adorned the headstones, but I was long overdue for a visit. I sheepishly offered my tobacco-snuff at the entrance and drudged through the snow while holding my *khanga*, emblazoned with a red, white and black lion, trying to keep it from flying away in the winter winds. Peace. Peace, always came upon me when I stepped onto the graveyard grounds. Here and in ceremony, I felt closest to home, to immanent forces.

'Home.' The last word my grandmother uttered in her last seconds of 98 years of living. I understood those words now. The ancestors often reminded me "*we* are your home. Home is with *us*, with spirit." I knew this. I understood this. I knew what I knew because I felt it. It was a magic beyond the pages of the Harry Potter series that I read nightly to my kids, or, part of the enchantment found fleetingly on nature hikes through non-mechanized spaces.

I made my way over to my grandmother's gravestone. Her aunt and uncle's name listed first with hers below. Beautifully engraved. A figure like Mother Mary draped over the dates looked down compassionately at the dead with an awe-inspiring power. I noticed footprints around the stone from wanderers coming to admire its worn beauty. My grandfather had no tombstone. They had been too poor to buy one for him when he died in the late 1930's near the end of The Depression. My father didn't have one either. Same reason. Different era.

I was embarrassed to arrive without my usual offerings of Crown Royale rye, candied ginger, and other goodies at my grandmother's request. I made my way over to my father's ashes lay. Every spring some of his charred bones would poke up through the emerging grass." for "scattered charred-bone-containing ashes, which poked through the emerging grass every spring.

The cemetery was laden with my grandmother's relatives dating as far back as the late 18th century. Stones won by time. Mostly children under five who had died of polio, or other childhood diseases--diseases now reserved for children in the Global South or Indigenous Peoples of what is now called Canada. But I was pulled in another direction. Today, I was called towards the small pine forest just beyond the graveyard.

At one time, the whole area had been covered in pine woodlands full of buck and other thriving wildlife, while the Nottawasaga River provided ample fish for the local inhabitants. But as the Haudenosaunee were systematically uprooted, dislocated, acculturated and almost annihilated.

Moving towards the forest I was instructed to stop by a tree, to offer tobacco and sit quietly. I listened to the voice, not distinguishing it from the collective ancestors. Waiting. Cold. *Be patient for other materializations.* Appearing. They always appeared, but in this area, they needed more time. They were tentative with me. They were not my lineal ancestors. At least I didn't think they were. They were the ones my ancestors had oppressed or ignored, the 'over there's'; shadows barely detected under the white gaze, and certainly, not considered part of the living or having lived.

A young warrior on a horse appeared first, in the middle of the timberland. Then, others lined up alongside him, mostly men, but some women too. I greeted them. I wasn't their blood relative, but I was hearing and seeing them and offering tobacco. I wasn't an Indigenous medicine person, and there weren't any nearby. *I would have to do*. I thought.

I recognized the horseman's clothing and style, having met a woman and her brother by the river many years before. She had been killed there in a battle, trampled to death by horses. It was crow that showed me her, who asked me to transition her homeward. A song came to me, or through me, a song only her people knew. I sang it. And she went, went home with crow guiding her way, leaving tiny ripples in the immemorial river.

I was honoured. I hadn't earned this privilege, or any of the privileges I had as part of my daily white, middle-class lived experiences. But I was the only one here, there, the only living person visiting, seeing, hearing, feeling and knowing.

"I'm here, I'm here," I said deeply aware of how complicated and problematic my *in-between-ness* was. But it was in these spaces, these spaces of recognition, where collective transformations and healing were possible.

Then, they turned and left. The conjured, hyper-visible, observing, observed, unseen, seeing, seen.

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