

THE
GHOSTS
OF EDEN

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ANDREW J.H

SHARP

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THIS is a work of fiction. All characters depicted in this novel are fictitious and any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental. Institutions described are not a portrayal of past or present real-life institutions.

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1983

No man can know where he is going unless he knows exactly where he has been and exactly how he arrived at his present place.

MAYA ANGELOU

THE SHADOW OF the British Airways jet scythed over the rucked earth, making easy passage across the jagged desert terrain, never slowing for ravines, craggy outcrops or dried up rivers. Without a sound it ghosted landscapes of splintered rock, brecciated granite, bouldered river beds. It traced cities and waters and snows that elicit mystical resonances through time: Alexandria, the Valley of the Kings, Khartoum, the White Nile, the Mountains of the Moon.

In the first class cabin of the jet Michael Lacey controlled his breathing, trained his gaze on a speck on the aircraft cabin window and remembered a child. A child long dead. For years, recalling the child had been taboo but, as the hours passed in the confined space of the cabin, he hunted for an effective distraction. The more troubling the thought the greater the relief of his symptoms, as if his mind had room for only one ordeal at a time. He believed, until today, that he had banished his claustrophobia by holding fast to his staunch faith in the power of rational thought. Now he had his suspicions that its return had been triggered by an increasing proximity, as the aircraft travelled south, to the child's resting place; that it was not the tight tube in which he was trapped that was to blame for the sensation of an immovable weight on his chest, but the notion of the child, buried in his destination.

'Do you believe a native curse can kill?'

It took a few moments for Michael to register that the question was for him. The fleshy man in the adjacent seat was leaning across, his breath wheezy and musty with combusted tobacco.

Michael gave an almost imperceptible shake of his head.

'That's what I think,' said the man, his voice bursting with relief.

'It's a good thing I do, because they say if you believe it then it comes true.'

Michael felt a small but unyielding increase in the suffocating constriction around his torso, as if he was in the muscular coils of a fat serpent. A point would soon be reached when his ribcage would crumple and the valves of his gut would blow. Sweat patches spread out from under his arms.

'A native paid a witch doctor to put a curse on me, said I'd cut him up on a business deal. As I pointed out, it was only a verbal, nothing

on paper.'

The businessman shifted closer. His heat pressed against Michael like a wall. 'It's the guy's revenge. It's just below the surface, my friend. They're all the same: Sunday they're crooning to Jesus in church; Monday to Saturday they're consulting their God-awful mediums, their . . .' he paused to pant a little, 'revolting ghouls. They don't know which religion to settle on. Not like us; we got no time for that stuff.' He thrust himself closer, depleting the air of oxygen with his sucking inhalations. 'Not until our funerals, huh?'

Oh God. He was going to have to lunge for the exit door and yank the red handle. Ah, the sweet relief when he exploded out into the boundless air.

'D'you play golf?'

A swimming feeling came and went. Even when not fighting for breath, Michael found small-talk as appealing as mutually chewing gum. He held on, determined not to black out.

The man tried again, in an eager, you're-my-buddy voice, 'Any hobbies?'

The pressure was building to an agonising climax. Think. Hobbies? A martial art would have been immediately useful but no, he had no

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hobby. His job was his hobby, mistress, wife. He pursued excellence in his surgical practice as a holy man seeks the divine, felt a brotherhood with men who understood the incisive, rigorous life necessary to make some small betterment to the world.

The man could not be dissuaded; he started rolling about, trying to get something out of his pocket. 'you'll be interested to know I'm a member of the Magic Circle. Got a trick I can show you.'

Turning, Michael surprised himself by forcing out a few words, 'Look, I'm sorry. I have to work something out in my head. Can't talk at present.'

The man sank back, releasing a slug of belly air. 'I'm easy, friend. I'll show you later. you won't be disappointed; it's a classic.' With that he shut up.

Michael put his face to the window. The glass looked a foot thick as if he was locked in a bathysphere, but he tried to project himself

outside. His eye was drawn to the heated landscape below but his mind returned to paleoanthropology lectures at medical school, hunting out the subterranean – bones in the sands from a time of profound amnesia: *Homo habilis*, *Ardipithecus ramidus*, *Ardipithecus anamensis*; ancestors from deep time where no names of place and event exist because none could articulate a name. It seemed pitiful: each generation had to learn anew their own little world. But then came *Homo sapiens*. At this genesis, as was revealed to Michael when he was very young, God asked man to name the animals. After the naming of the animals, man gave names to the happenings of his life, creating a remembered history for his children. They became acquainted with the history of their tribe. Michael's run of thought ran into the ground. In the same African soil lay the bones of his recent forebears: his parents, his grandparents, his great-grandfather. Their bones lay amongst those ancient bones. He turned his attention to the aircraft's wing and studied the rivets.

In the periphery of his vision he became aware of a blue shadow. 'Excuse me, sir. I do hope you're comfortable. May I ask if you'd like a drink?'

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Michael threw a glance at the stewardess. Comfortable? As comfortable as Jonah in the whale. She was smiling at him, although her eyes betrayed a hint of concern: a can-I-help-in-any-other-way look.

He made himself smile back at her fleetingly. 'Could do with . . . a Bloody Mary . . .'

His voice died away in a deflated hiss, but he saw the suggested tension in her expression dissipate as if she was relieved to offer practical help – a balm for whatever troubled him, like a nurse administering a tonic from a drug trolley.

'Certainly, sir. Ice as well?'

'As well as what?'

She extended her smile and quashed an elevation of her pert stewardess eyebrows.

'Oh!yes.Thank you.'

'Sir, if there's anything else you'd like, any way I can help at any time,' that empathetic smile again, 'do use the call button. I'll be with

you straight away.'

Help? Is it true there's always one parachute on board? Is it true that one can get oneself sucked outside through the toilet bowl? She acted as if pouring his drink was a delight: a levity in her movements, a quick tilt of her head when she dropped in the Worcester sauce, her blonde ponytail whipping back and forth like the tail of an eager puppy, a happy giddiness about her. Michael guessed he had bought her inflated jollity with his first class ticket. She opened a drawer in her trolley and lifted out a petite silver tray. She arranged the Bloody Mary and its stick of skewered olives and red peppers, swung out his tray for him and placed his drink. She turned to the businessman but he was asleep, his head resting on the pillow of his double chin.

Picking up his glass and finding a minor relief in its chill on his finger tips, Michael turned his attention to the blue-black of the sky. They were nearing the equator, giant thunder clouds towered about him; an intimidating extra-terrestrial landscape of gravity-defying forms.

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'Ladies and gentlemen, will you please fasten your seatbelts. We're starting our descent.'

Whether because of the announcement, or the success of his mental strategies, the claustrophobia relaxed its hold to be replaced by a new but curiously delicious fear. Fear because of an apprehension of landings, but delicious because his fear was charged with the excitement and extravagance of dropping from the sky to an exotic place. He had asked for a window seat – for fresh air, he had told the rather easily amused Naomi at Heathrow. He sighed silently, recalling their parting words.

They were standing near the departure gate, facing each other, in those pre-departure moments which seem for lovers both not long enough and dragging.

'you OK, Michael?' she said, suddenly serious.

Her tall wispy body stiffened. She pursed her lips so that they drained of colour; a sign that he was about to be interrogated. She could be perspicacious, could Naomi, as fitted her occupation as a prosecution lawyer.

'Why? Do I look ill?'

'you seem, I don't know, distracted.' A faint vertical line appeared between her eyebrows. 'Sometimes I can't tell what you're thinking. Often, actually, you've been tense since you accepted the invitation.'

'Have I?'

'Like you don't want to go. you weren't like this for Miami or Chicago.'

'Really?'

He could not tell her why: she would want to probe, to dig it all up. Some things were best left unspoken, buried deep. It disturbed him, though, that she had detected unease. True, when the invitation came from the secretary of the Lake Regions Surgical Association to speak at their conference he had immediately written a polite refusal, aghast at the prospect of returning to Africa. But then he had torn up his letter, knowing that if he had successfully decoupled himself from the past then he must accept. The act of going back would confirm

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that an accident of birth and a run of bad luck – to be plain: being orphaned at twelve and murdering a best friend, all on the same day – need not haunt a man for the rest of his life; need not keep a hold over him. It was possible to resurrect oneself; to overcome. But that should be a private matter. Confession was for the religious.

Naomi was starting to look cross; the tuck in her forehead had deepened.

There was no honest answer that would not unearth old bones.

'I'd better go through – the gate's open.'

She did not move. 'Michael, it's not us is it – you know – you and me?' She searched his eyes.

He tried to smile, to reassure her, desperate not to hurt her, and was arrested by the pull of those vivid blue eyes he loved to look into when they made love, but were now willing something more from him. 'you and me? I don't . . .'

She interrupted him. 'I want to understand you, Michael. It's important we don't hide things from each other.' She had moved a little closer, an uncertain small step.

'Hide?'

She drew back and her face flushed; he was not sure whether out

of anger, or because she was going to cry. A sadness came over him; a resignation: all his relationships foundered eventually. He always put it down to his work-centred life, although others managed to combine an exacting career and a contented coupling. There seemed little pattern, or logic, to the timings of these break-ups – after all, he was the same person that he had been in the first flush of affection. It pained him.

He summoned a compromise. 'Naomi, I give in, you're very perceptive. you know I like things to be ordered and predictable. Well, they say Uganda's still chaotic – dangerous even – after what happened there. IdiAmin, President for Life, Conqueror of the British Empire and so on, fled a good four years ago, but there're still thugs off the leash with guns. I hate putting myself into situations I can't control. Makes me jumpy.'

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She looked amused, if a little incredulous. 'Oh Michael, that's so silly – not like you at all. It's just a conference. Everything'll go like clockwork.'

Now that he had shared a fear she appeared satisfied, her movements becoming fluid and light again and the crease melting away; so when they kissed goodbye he was surprised to find her lips unyielding.

The aircraft had pierced the cloud mantle. The land was a vivid rainyseason green, nothing pastel. An arterial network of blood-red tracks fed the voracious foliage. He reminded himself: just a conference. He risked a glance at his companion. The man had not moved since his abortive attempt at conversation, but what sparked Michael's professional interest was that the wet exhalations marking his less than welcome proximity had also ceased. He watched the man's chest, looking for a rise and a fall, wondering how long he could hold his breath and waiting for the hungry intake of air that would follow a period of sleep apnoea.

With a growing unease Michael leant across and said, 'Excuse me.' There was no response. He pressed a finger into the man's podgy hand and released it. The thready capillaries failed to refill. He slipped his fingers around the wrist to feel for a radial pulse. Not a flicker. The

ruddiness had drained from the man's face. His eyes were not completely closed – drying slits.

Then he remembered the man's last attempt at conversation and hastily withdrew his hand. Was this his magic trick? If so, it was impressive. Michael undid his seatbelt and turned towards his patient, noticing as he did so how his own breaths came more easily now that he had a pressing clinical problem to solve. He gently lifted an eyelid. The pupil was dilated, as if the essence of the man had left through its wide aperture. He pressed two fingers into the neck below the angle of the jaw. No carotid pulse.

I'll be damned, he thought, shaken; the man had quietly expired.

No fuss. And if a magic trick, whose? The sweat patches under his

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arms turned icy. Michael sat there for a moment taking control of himself and considering what to do. Stand up and shout for help? Stretch him out in the aisle and start resuscitation? He knew it would be futile. The man had been motionless for well over ten minutes. The pupils were fixed. He pressed the call button above his head. The stewardess sprung from behind the cabin curtain, all smiles, and tripped towards Michael. He could see she had been waiting for him to call, had rehearsed soothing words. She started to ask how she could help but Michael interrupted. 'Excuse me, this gentleman's dead.'

She looked from Michael to the man and back again. He met her eye but she seemed temporarily stumped, unable to decide between smiling warily at their practical joke or running down into economy to fetch a colleague. Her hand hovered, trembling, over the back of the seat.

'Very peacefully,' Michael added, to soften the shock, suddenly aware that his professional calm might appear inappropriate.

The stewardess shook the man's shoulder.

'Sir! Sir! We'll be landing soon.'

The man's arm dropped and hung dead in the aisle. The stewardess's hand went to her mouth. Michael saw he had to take charge.

'I'm a doctor, a surgeon. He must've had a massive heart attack.'

Massive heart attack always seemed a reassuring thing to say,

combining no-one-could-do-anything-about-it with must-have-gone-in-a-painless-instant. Other possibilities, such as *pulmonary embolism* or *cerebrovascular haemorrhage*, seemed less consoling, too coldly technical.

The stewardess straightened up uncertainly, then leant towards Michael, a quivering of her lips and cheeks threatening to fracture her finely set facial features, and whispered, 'Shouldn't we do something? Umm . . . confirm he's actually . . . this is my first time . . .'

A necessary familiarity with death enabling him to fast track past the surprise, coupled with a certain weariness at the emotional

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incontinence of others, prompted Michael to run an alternative script. What about making an announcement? One of the passengers has died of witchcraft. Please check your neighbour for signs of life in case it's not an isolated case.

But he said, 'It's OK. He's definitely gone. Just leave him as he is. Let your colleagues know, of course. I'm sure the captain will alert the authorities. No need to worry the other passengers.'

'I'll tell the captain.' She hesitated, looking at the dead man again.

'No rush. He's not going anywhere,' Michael said, and smiled faintly.

She shot him a censorious look, turned abruptly and disappeared through the curtain. He regretted his flippant remark – an empty-headed, and therefore uncharacteristic, *faux pas* – and put it down to the rush of euphoric relief at the easing of his claustrophobia.

Michael leant across and replaced the man's arm in his lap, now washed by a sense of unreality, and a little guilt that he had not engaged him in conversation. He hoped that the man had no one who loved him too much. There was peril in excessive love. He was relieved that he would not be breaking the news himself to a wife or a daughter. When it fell to him at work (in some hastily vacated side room with chairs that were too low to sit in with any decorum), he felt that a sluice gate retaining a torrent of tears was about to burst. That puzzled him: it was not as if he let himself get too emotionally involved. After all, he had many other patients to attend and it was expected of him that he kept a reasonable detachment, remained

composed.

He tidied the dead man's hands one over the other, creating some dignity. Something dark lay on the man's knee: a black feather, a cockerel's, he guessed, with a bronze sheen along its vanes, its barbs unbroken. The man's curse came to mind. But the feather must have been a prop in his trick; it had probably fallen out of his sleeve. He slipped the feather into his pocket as a small act of defiance against superstition.

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KAARO KARUNGI – THE BEAUTIFUL LAND

RIFT VALLEY

1958

Alas! This spear lies cold

O Aligo! O hunter!

This spear that I once trusted

Now lies cold

ACHOLI DANCE SONG

ONE

IN THE REGIONS of the Great Rift Valley, a thousand years and more before Europeans in stout khaki had found their fever-punctuated way into the interior, the illustrious Arab explorers and geographers (in robes of rippling silk, and of such fame as Abu Abdallah Muhammad bin Muhammad Abdallah) reported tales of Africa's Heart of Brightness: great foaming fountains lying between mountains whose snowy peaks were as luminescent as the moon. Those who looked on them were unable to look away and so, fixated, they stood there until they died. Beyond the mountains, reported the survivors, spread a limitless sea that evoked a deep yearning, a joy, an abandonment, so that men would throw themselves into the waters from the steep slopes.

Below the highest peak Am Kaam, King of Egypt, built a palace, and fashioned eighty-five statues of gleaming copper from whose mouths the waters of the Nile gushed, making their way by cataract, ravine, swamp, quicksand and flood down to thirsting Alexandria. In the deep forests of the region pygmy peoples lived all their lives amongst blades of light from the leaf-fragmented sun, while on the sunblasted and thorny plains warrior peoples lived by spear and ritual, their goats and children periodically devoured, even in the brightness of the day, by the hideous brute called Nundu which roamed where it pleased.

When darkness fell some men changed into beasts of prey. To ward off these terrors the priestesses of the female spirit Nyabingi beat their drums to gather the people from every direction out of their conical grass dwellings, to dance in unison and so create the sound of a ceaseless stamping of feet that became even louder than the pounding of the drums, and so to drive away the evil of the night. Such were the stories of the fear and darkness in the native's soul that the *Muzungu* children overheard.

The *Muzungu*, a tribe from far away, shocked the inhabitants of these parts into acquiescence, for they appeared as if they had been skinned – all raw and pink – and, what is more, the native children overheard that they had been known to feed on human flesh. The *Muzungu* mapped the valleys, hills and rivers; cut roads from outpost to

outpost; created gardened hill stations with fired-brick buildings set by rule and plumb line in a land that had never, in all the ages, seen a perfect perpendicular; and erected English church steeples with metal sheeting that glinted as signals of a new order under the equatorial sun.

In those days the Bahima, who roamed the rich grasslands of Kaaro Karungi, did not measure the passing of time by dates but by the passage of events. By the same paradigm the passage of each day was marked entirely by happenings, not clocks. In such a world a young boy like Stanley Katura had no need for haste, but there was a rhythm of duties, matching the requirements of that world, which he and his older brother, Zachye, adhered to from their earliest years. It was a rhythm they would have continued to keep until they died on the calf skin rugs in their dwelling, and were buried with a terrible but storm-short grief in the dung heap at the edge of the kraal, were it not for the timing of their births – occurring as they did in an age when the meaning of time itself changed for ever.

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Their day divided into fourteen occasions. First came *enkoko yashubirira*, when the cock had crowed – the cock that had been placed for this purpose on a shelf in the hut. This was shortly followed by *akashesheshe*, the arrival of a thin dawn light that washed the sky of its blackness. Then came in dependable succession *ente zakomoroka* – cattle go out of the kraal; *ente zazagira* – cattle stand outside the kraal in the open space; *ente zasetuka* – cattle move off to pasture; *abasetuzi bagaruka* – the herdsmen return; *abantu baza omu birago* – men go to their mats; *abeshezi baza aha maziba* – waterers go to the wells; *amasio gatsyoro* – herds run down to water; *amasio gakuka* – herds finish watering; *amasio gairira ebibanga byamaka* – herds come close to the vicinity of the kraals; *enyana zataha* – calves enter; *amasio gahaga* – herds are finished milking; and, at the end of the day, *abantu batarama* – when men visited each other; when neighbours would sit together under the darkened sky to tell in conversation and in formal recitation of the magnificence of their cattle and the greatness of the deeds of their ancestors.

At *ente zazagira* the hot beery breath of Bejuura Kagunga, chief

herdsman, and the cud-steamed exhalations of the cattle formed warm pockets through which Stanley and Zachye moved in the cool morning air as they prepared to leave the kraal for herding.

'Take them to Kwayana hill,' said Bejuura as he prodded Stanley hard with his staff. He swung the staff to point west. 'And don't disgrace your father again.'

Bejuura jutted his jaw towards Stanley and jabbed at him repeatedly. His left eye was set rigidly on the boy while his right eye, damaged at birth by the same malevolent spirit that gripped his mood, wandered and rolled uncontrollably in its socket. The incident Bejuura referred to involved Stanley, who was short-sighted, confusing a harmless jackal for a threatening hyena while tending his father's calves, taking fright, climbing a tree, the herd running off, so that a party of men had to be out all night in dangerous country rounding them up. The next day his father, Kaapa Katura, had told him the story of Runuza, the young warrior who had protected

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thirty cattle on his own against three famished lions in a hard drought. Stanley had heard his father recount the story before but still his father told it, and then dismissed him with no embroidering admonishment. Kaapa Katura spoke little but always in parable, as did all the elders of the clan.

The cattle guided the two boys out into the wide plain of red oat, star and lemon grasses, now aflame in the radiant light of the morning. The boys had no need to shout or curse, for the cattle were wise and knew their destination, the boys merely their guardians. The older boy was strong, and firm in his tread for one who was not yet a man. Stanley, following closely behind, had to lengthen his stride to step in the faint impression of his brother's footprints in the thin dust, his legs like slender saplings on which his knees formed bulbous tumours, his oversized head wobbling awkwardly on lean shoulders, out of rhythm with his gait.

'Keep moving, The One With The Blaze On Her Forehead,' Zachye coaxed.

'you're the laziest calf of the whole clan,' Stanley said, lightheartedly, and then added, 'I think She Who Lifts Up Her Horns Brown As The Enkurigo Tree is the toughest.'

This was the calf given to him when he cut his first teeth, for he cut his lower teeth before his upper and so, as was the custom, he had been placed ceremonially on the back of the calf and gifted her to nurture and cherish. He had heard of those ancient warrior-herders who had grieved three days for their deceased wife but five days at the death of their gifted cow.

Zachye shook his head and said, with the confidence of an older brother, 'She Whose Horns are Like Polished Reeds will be the strongest when she's fully grown.'

'But mine had The Strawberry One as a mother,' Stanley said.

A calf moored knowingly.

'If her mother had been She Whose Horns Are For No Mere Display, I might agree,' Zachye replied.

Stanley looked at his favourite and thought that her already

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magnificent horns, firm flanks and black, tufted tail were more than a match for Zachye's favourite, but he said, 'She's finer than any cow of the Abasita clan.'

Zachye spun his spear above his head so that it buzzed like a wasp.

'Today, I have two secrets to tell you.'

Stanley's heart skipped. The days when Zachye had secrets to tell were the best. Zachye had told him many hidden things: who killed old Rutaaba on his bed, where the diviner found his herbs, how to build a beehive, the colour of a white woman's nipples. Their mother often said, 'Zachye, you know too much for one who still drinks only blood and milk.'

Zachye spoke again. 'But one of those secrets is no little secret. It concerns my youngest brother.'

'your youngest brother?' Stanley asked, and then, after a few paces,

'Is that not me?'

'yes, of course. Who else? The ghost of the dead one?'

Stanley risked treading on a snake concealed in the grass beside the track in order to draw alongside Zachye. He did not understand. How was it possible for there to be a secret about himself? He knew everything about himself, unless it related to an occurrence of the night when a boy's spirit might fly elsewhere. He felt afraid.

'What is this secret?'

'I said that there were two. Which do you wish me to tell first?'

Stanley hesitated. 'Do not tell me any if it will make me frightened.'

Zachye said quietly, as if he spoke to himself, 'It is I who fears.'

'Do not tell me then.' Stanley dropped back behind Zachye again.

He had never heard Zachye say such a thing before.

The cattle spread out to graze on Kwayana Hill, a low hump on the plain, while the boys played beside a granite boulder, collecting twigs and dry grass to make a small bed of kindling in the overhang of the rock. Stanley took a leaf-wrapped package from his cowhide sling and peeled back the leaf layers to expose a blackened metal pot. He spat on his fingers before lifting out three small lumps of charcoal, and placed them in the hollowed centre of the kindling. He

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blew smoothly into the brittle wood. A thin stream of smoke curled up the side of the boulder between breaths; soon a faint red glow appeared. He held the kindling against the glow until it flared into a tiny flame that spread in a crackle of heat and light. Dizzy, he lay back and watched as Zachye added more twigs. Fire could be created from the laborious spinning of a fire stick, but far better to carry the fire concealed as a dusky spirit in the heart of the blackened wood; to entice out the flame with the persuasive ghost in their breath.

'I'll tell you something you don't know,' Zachye said, as he squatted by the fire. 'There's a clan that's kept fire alive in one coal since the days of their fathers' fathers.'

'How do they do that?' Stanley asked, wide-eyed.

'No one knows. It's a clan secret.'

'Is this one of those two secrets you have for me?'

Zachye smiled slowly. 'I'm ready now for one secret.'

Zachye motioned to Stanley to come near. Stanley understood; they could not risk the spirits in the boulder behind overhearing.

'The clan's medicine man takes the coal to a certain big rock at midday when the rock is too hot to touch. He places the coal on the rock. The hot spirit of the rock enters the coal. They say that when the spirit moves into the coal the rock turns cold – as cold as the springs in the forest.' Stanley shivered. 'And I'll tell you something else. If

anyone touches the rock after its spirit has gone into the coal, their blood runs like a cold stream.'

Stanley hugged his knees and leant a little towards his older brother, staying close, watching his fingers move amongst the flames, expertly turning the grass and wood to nurture the heat in the coal, as sure in this delicate task as he was in guiding a spear to its soft target.

Soon they turned to play, building a miniature kraal, breaking off thorns from an acacia to make a fence to enclose the huts. The stems of dry reeds served as walls while the roofs they thatched with grass. Zachye found a wafer-thin cowpat to carpet the floors and sweeten

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the air of the huts. They carefully smoothed the kraal's compound with the side of their palms. Zachye pinched an ant that was heading for his hut and flicked it away.

'Die cursed rat! you shall never enter the house of King Zachye.'

They leant back against the boulder, twisting grass and twigs into cow shapes and placing each in the stockade, until their wealth grew and they became the richest of the Bahima, and all the clans spoke highly of them and praised the splendour of their cattle.

Whilst they continued to play Zachye said, 'Now I'm going to tell you the other secret.' Stanley held his breath. 'Our father is sending you to school. He says you must have the *Muzungu's* Education.' Stanley stared at the model kraal. He tried, but failed, to picture how this other future would look constructed in grass, stick and stone. 'Why me?'

Zachye popped a little air through his lips as if to indicate it was a trifling question. 'Perhaps because you're the crafty one and were born in a waning moon, so you'll have luck.' He became busy, pushing his hut towards the centre of the kraal and placing a bull beside it.

Stanley sensed that Zachye regretted telling what he knew, but a pressing bafflement made him bold. 'I don't understand, you're the older brother.'

'Well, it's nothing,' Zachye replied forcefully, stabbing a finger through the bull. 'It's because you're puny so can't look after the cattle

on your own.'

The insult stung Stanley, not because it was not true but because Zachye had never spoken harshly to him before. He let the hand that held his model cow drop to his side and was about to turn away when Zachye said, less unkindly, 'you'll learn to read.'

Stanley had seen a book when he was a little younger. It belonged to Felice, a distant cousin who had visited the kraal with her father. Felice stood apart on the edge of the compound in her unsoiled skirt of a burnished blue and oh-so-white blouse, her face deep-lusted with oil, lips subtly sheened, eyebrows symmetrical arcs under a high

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forehead from which arose her shaped hair like a headpiece of their far ancestors from Nubia.

It was the first time Stanley had studied at close proximity what happened to a Bahima when they had the *Muzungu's* education.

Looking at Felice he became aware, but without shame, that he was naked apart from a scanty wrap of red barkcloth below his protruding belly. His skin was matt grey from ingrained dust, except for the shiny scars on his legs. Felice's ankles were like the buffed neck of the queen's best gourd. Flies settled frequently on Stanley's face but veered dizzily away from the scented Felice.

He, Zachye and all the other children blended naturally with the kraal and the land, just like the cattle; as if they were merely different shapes of the same stuff. The soil-impregnated soles of their feet joined them to the earth. Dust to dust.

Felice appeared to be made of something else; something synthesised by the supernatural, her parts generated from magical smeltings in the fires of distant and strange smiths.

Stanley had been too shy to speak, but Zachye asked, 'What is that?' pointing to the glossy object which Felice clasped to her waist.

Felice spoke with a coy confidence, like a woman much older than her years. 'It's a book called *David and Mary*. It tells a story.'

'How can it tell without a mouth? Show me how it speaks,' Zachye replied scornfully.

Felice lifted the object in front of her unnaturally pointy chest, peeled it apart and said, 'It tells of the courtship between a man and a woman in a big city.'

She started reading in a tongue that Stanley did not understand, but learnt later was the *Muzungu's* language. Her lips moved through absurd contortions, her voice becoming shrill.

'Let it speak in Runyankore,' Zachye said impatiently.

Felice hesitated, and then, peering intently at the page, spoke in Runyankore, pausing before words that she could not easily translate – and some she perhaps believed should remain reserved for the *Muzungu's* world – speaking those words in their language.

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'Mary left the . . . office at eleven o'clock. She waved goodbye to her friends and caught a taxi to the coffee shop. She was excited to see that the handsome young man in the smart suit was sitting at the same table on his own again. His sunglasses were next to his cup and saucer. He looked up and met her eye. She turned away, but not before she saw him beckoning to her to come over. Mary pretended she had not noticed and ordered a coffee with sugar, but without milk.'

Zachye interrupted again. 'Let it speak of cattle.'

Felice looked up, and although she did not look directly at Zachye her smile held a hint of condescension. This shocked Stanley but Zachye didn't seem to notice.

'Books do not speak of cattle,' Felice said.

Zachye pondered this. 'Then what are they for?'

'They tell stories from other lands where they have no cattle.' She closed the book. 'They want no cattle and they need no cattle.'

Zachye shrugged and lost interest. He turned away and walked out of the kraal shouting, 'Those people living far away are not Bahima.'

Stanley wanted Felice to read further, but she was looking down at her shoe-clad feet as if embarrassed that she had been discourteous.

Stanley agreed with her in silence but his curiosity soon got the better of him. 'Why did the woman not want to speak to the man?'

Felice continued to stare at her shoes.

On Kwayana hill, Stanley stopped playing. He threw the model of SheWho Lifts Up Her Horns Brown As The Enkurigo Tree into the fire, and watched the straw twist in an agony of heat and disappear.

'I'll be going away. I'll not be able to come with you to look after our cattle.'

Zachye was lining up all the cattle outside his own hut. 'I'll tell you what. Our cows won't know you any more, but you'll have a big car and you'll work for the *gavumenti*.you should be very happy.'

Stanley looked to the far hills that marked the edge of the only life he had needed.Through a thin watering of his eyes he saw a billow of dust moving along beneath the hills. He thought it might be from

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a vehicle making its way down the road that had been cut just a year before.Then, as he looked, the dust rose high into the air, becoming a pillar of cloud. It seemed to Stanley to signify some omen, but for what he could not tell. Zachye came beside him and stood silent, also staring at the dust.When Zachye spoke his voice sounded like that of an adult: solemn and fearful.

'I don't like it, Stanley – it foretells fire.'

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TWO

AFTER THE PILLAR of dust had dispersed in the heat haze Stanley and Zachye rested, lying on top of the rock in the inadequate shade of a stunted tree. Today they would not return to rest on their mats in the kraal at *abantu baza omu birago*, to avoid having to retrace their steps for *abeshezi baza aha maziba*, the occasion for taking the cattle to the watering places. Wispy clouds formed in the dry-season sky, tried to puff themselves up, failed and disappeared. The cattle stood motionless between occasional twitches of their flanks and flicks of their tails; futile spasms of will, trying to free themselves of the tireless flies. Stanley felt the hardness of the rock beneath and the passivity of the sky above. Even the ghosts of the dead, ever present in the wind, were still. His world was inert and had forever been. Until today.

He put his arms out and tried to grip the rock beneath with his fingertips, as if he could hang on to what he knew. He thought that the vulture hanging high above him, wings outstretched on a column of sultry air, had twisted its head to look at him.

He became desperate to speak to his brother. 'Zachye?'

'What?'

'What will happen at the school? How is the Education given?'

Zachye was silent. Eventually he said, 'How would I know?' and got up and walked away.

Zachye's ignorance disturbed Stanley. His brother had always known everything: how to treat sickness in the cattle, where to find good grazing, the ways of the hyena and the jackal, which snakes were poisonous, all the stories of the clan, how to captivate the other children with heroic recitations. Now he saw that the Education was so alien that even Zachye knew nothing of it. He could not think of anyone who lived nearby who had gone to school, for on the plain they were all late in taking the Education. The closest relatives at school were his cousins Felice and Kabutiiti, but they lived far away and had fathers who worked in the towns. How could a herdsman like his own father, who was still suffering from the effects of the rinderpest outbreak that had decimated the family's herd a generation ago, find enough shillings to pay the school fees?

Stanley saw that Zachye was standing watching the cattle, perfectly still, resting on his spear. He was looking intently at three of the youngest calves, as if memorising the details of their colouring, the form of their growing horns; as if gaining an understanding, by the calves' interest in him, of their intelligence. He heard Zachye murmuring their names. Later the calves would know their own names and would wait patiently to be called each morning for milking. Stanley fell back again, knocked down by the realisation that no one he had heard of had returned from the Education to tending cattle, drinking blood and milk, and living in a thatched dwelling on skins. They left forever for the town. They forgot the names of the cattle. It was unimaginable. He tried to picture himself pleading with his father to let him stay, leave him be. That was just as unthinkable. Soon he heard Zachye saying, 'Lift yourself, Stanley. Get moving, you dreamer.'

Stanley scattered the embers of the fire and the remains of the model kraal with his foot. He understood Zachye's haste for he could

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see that other cattle were already approaching the gully where the tepid waters from an underground spring formed pools that, in a good year, sustained herds of five hundred. Space was limited, and herders fought to secure drinking for their charges.

At Zachye's word the cattle needed no further encouragement to start out. As they neared the gully they quickened their pace so that Stanley had to trot to keep up. Zachye ran on ahead. Stanley heard a grunt behind him and something stung his ear. He turned to find a boy, about his age but broad in body and skull, flicking him with his switch. He recognised him as one of the Abaitenya clan, whose totem was a house burnt down and a yellow cow.

'Shift your cattle out of the way or you'll feel my spear,' the boy said with a snarl. Dried trails of spittle on his chin struck Stanley as particularly threatening.

Zachye was well ahead now with the leading cattle. The Abaitenya boy's cattle were already passing Stanley, pushing up against and overtaking his own cows: a disturbing mixing and dilution of his precious herd. The boy shoved him aside and lashed at She Who

Lifts Up Her Horns Brown As The Enkurigo Tree. Stanley attempted to grasp the switch but the boy was quick and kicked him in the thigh, overbalancing him. He fell heavily, bruising himself on the pot for charcoal that hung off his shoulder as the boy set himself on him. The hooves of the cattle thundered around them like drums, drowning the noise of the boy's fists pounding at his head and chest.

'youWho Is Puny, face the wrath ofThe OneWho Is A Breaker Of Bones,' panted the boy in a parody of the recitations of the tribe. Stanley tasted blood. Panic swelled in his gullet like stuckmeat. Spittle flew. He twisted and flailed his arms but the boy was strong, spitting words at him, one for each blow, 'When . . . ever . . . you . . . see . . .me,' more pounding about his head, 'and my cattle, step . . . out . . . of . . . my . . . way.'

Then out of the dust familiar feet appeared, the flaying fists were gone and the boy was crying out, face in the dirt. Zachye's foot

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pressed with firm precision against the boy's neck as he twisted his arm behind him.

'I Who Heap Up The Dead repulsed them at Kwayana with The OneWho Seeks No Help,' Zachye boomed.

Stanley loved Zachye for that recitation: even as he picked himself up he planned to expand the line into a full poem that evening and insist the younger boys learn it to ensure the mini-triumph lived on.

Zachye pulled the boy's arm back further, making him cry out.

Stanley found himself anxious that Zachye was going to dislocate the boy's shoulder. When Zachye became angry he could lose control of his actions; there had been the incident when he threw a spear at a group of boys who were leering at his cousin. Luck prevented the spear finding flesh.

'I'm not hurt. Let's leave,' Stanley said.

Zachye released the boy, after giving his shoulder one last pull, and said, 'Now go, fly eater! And if we see your pocked cattle take water first we'll drown you in the milk of a yellow cow.'

As the boy ran on ahead, his arm cradled, Stanley walked again with Zachye. Who would come to his aid at school? There might be hundreds of Abaitenya boys. His whole class might be Abaitenya.

When they caught up with their cows at the pools they found the boy frantically separating his bewildered cattle from theirs.

Thirst quenched, the cattle and brothers dawdled back to the kraal, leaving a frenzy of flies on fresh cowpats in the gully and parties of pale-cream butterflies sipping delicately from the hoof-print hollows. As they approached the kraal Stanley saw their father waiting on the track to inspect his cattle. Looking at his father standing tall, his kumzu of brightly coloured cloth in vertical bands of red ochre, black and green hanging in straight folds from his shoulders, Stanley knew he could no more ask his father to change his mind about sending him for the Education than he could ask the diviner to retract a revelation. He prepared himself to show respect, averting his eyes as they drew close. When they were within three cattle lengths the boys stopped and knelt. Their father asked them to rise, examined Stanley and said, 'I see

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the cattle are good but you are scuffed. you must give me explanation for this.'

'I was beaten by another boy coming to water,' Stanley said, still looking down.

'How was the matter finished?' his father asked.

'Zachye came and beat the boy.'

His father said, 'Zachye, continue with the cattle into the kraal. I wish to speak to Stanley.'

Zachye, head still bowed, obeyed. Kaapa Katura walked out along the track, Stanley following.

'That another boy struck you is no great matter. If it becomes your teacher, and you learn that it's our kinsmen that give you help, you have learnt well.' His father continued walking. 'In matters more serious we've had the council of the clans, or the King himself, who take into account the tradition of our ancestors. But now there are new ways. Disputes are taken to the courts in the town where a man who has no knowledge of our families and clans, and the ways of our fathers, makes judgement on the basis of books of rules from the British, or even the Baganda.' Their father had always been suspicious of their tribal neighbours the Baganda – agriculturalists with powerful kings. 'Then there are those who call themselves the Twice

Born. These people say that retribution is not for this life and that a man must turn the other cheek if he is struck.'

Stanley found his father hard to understand when he spoke in riddles and without regard to his young age but he listened carefully. His father stopped walking and turned to look out over the plain.

'I do not say these words to condemn the passing of our own courts. I tell you because I know that our clan will not go back to the old ways. Those who do not learn the new ways will grow old with bitterness. They will depart without peace.'

Stanley risked glancing up. His father looked out into the far distance as if watching for the arrival of someone; or perhaps for some portent. He spoke again. 'Many seasons ago our people walked here from the North. They left what they knew and travelled through dangerous lands

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until they found the place that gave them, and their cattle, comfort again.' He was gently nodding his head as if he had seen what he was looking for and it confirmed his expectations. 'We have to walk again. That is why I'm sending you to school. This is your walk.'

When Stanley had been told earlier that he was going to school, he had been shocked that he would no longer be able to tend the cattle with Zachye. Now his father had added immeasurably to the enormity of what was to come. His walk was to be of the same importance as that of those far ancestors. Would his greatgrandchildren tell of it in recitation around the fire? But where he was walking, would there still be fires in the evening and recitations under the night sky? His father's decision to give him preference over his older brother was in itself a break with tradition. The old customs were being trampled.

His father was waiting for him to speak. All Stanley could say was, 'What is Zachye to do?'

'I don't have the fees for both of you to go to school and I need Zachye to tend the cattle.' He spoke with finality. Stanley waited. 'You may return now.'

As he approached the kraal Stanley saw that Bejuura, who as head herdsman had responsibility for inspecting all the cattle on return in the evening, was flailing his spear about in front of Zachye. Zachye was listening in sullen silence to his agitated questions.

'you goat-minder, you should have returned at *abantu baza omu birago*. Did you sleep while the cattle wandered? Are you to join your crippled dog-brother in disgrace? Ah, here comes the little runt now.' Bejuura stabbed his spear into the ground to indicate where Stanley should stand to receive his admonition. Then he noticed the brothers' father walking back to the kraal. For a moment his wandering eye stopped revolving as if trying to focus on their father and judge his distance.

Then he said, 'Just go – both of you!'

As they hurried away, Stanley said, in a surprised voice, 'you didn't answer Bejuura.'

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'If I had answered Bejuura he would have struck me and then I would have struck him back. No! I would have driven my spear into his eye. The eye that can see us.'

Stanley nodded enthusiastically and said, 'He would have deserved it.' He always expressed agreement with Zachye, although he was nervous of violence, to defuse Zachye's anger and to be a good brother.

Zachye swung around on him. Stanley stepped back for he could see how the sinews in the arm that held Zachye's spear were tight and how his chest swelled.

'Are you stupid? Do you think I wouldn't do such a thing? And don't you know what calamity would come on us if I did? Listen to me, my innocent brother!' Stanley watched Zachye's arm. 'I'm going to tell you something you'd better believe. One day I'll kill a man. yes, I feel it. I won't be able to stop myself.' Zachye's sinews still strained. 'In our grandfather's days I would have brought great wealth to the clan. I would've raided and brought back cattle. Men would've made recitation about me. Now I can't let my spear leave my hand for fear of the *gyoogi*, in case they come and take me away, put me in a prison with hard walls.' Zachye turned away. 'I should have been born my great grandfather.'

Stanley could not think of anything to say that would not blow on the fire in Zachye's heart, for he himself would soon be joining the world of the *gyoogi*. He would soon be going to houses with hard walls,

the cattle would no longer determine the occasions of his day, he would be walking a new walk. But most of all he feared that he would no longer be able to protect Zachye from himself. Although he was small and not strong, Stanley found that he could cool Zachye's heart – smother flames that might light the very thatch of their dwellings. They saw their mother come out of the hut to fill the milk pots and Stanley was glad of a reason to walk on; he was thirsty and hungry, and he needed comfort. As he approached he thought with some pride that his mother resembled the milk pots in form. Her slender neck and narrow head emerged smoothly from a truly bulbous body,

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the whole, including her head, covered in a white robe, for it was the custom for those women still following the traditional ways to cover themselves from the men. Her proportions made moving around the kraal an effort; she appeared to propel herself by swaying, with difficulty, backwards and forward, as a pot might were it alive. All the girls in the clan, as soon as their bodies started to lengthen and a long time before their womanhood became apparent, were filled with milk and kept from expending energy by seclusion in their huts, forbidden all activity. By the time they had their first menstruation they had become softly plump Bahima beauties, and none more so than his mother who had been a highly desirable bride to Stanley's father, fetching a high bride price considering the relative poverty and low status of her family. If she had been of royal lineage she would have been carried on a pallet from place to place. The passage of many rains had not diminished her proportions and charm. Stanley considered her a fine dancer, sitting on the floor with the other women, her arms and head weaving a complex pattern while a mesmerising sound, between hissing and buzzing, came from her lips, evoking the cattle moving through tall grasses.

She filled the returning herdsmen's gourds in turn from the largest pot, which she rested on her forearm, skilfully directing the silky white ribbon into each gourd without spilling, her upper limbs as lithe and skilful as her lower limbs were squat and slow. A pipe hung limply from her mouth, the stem slotting comfortably into a permanent depression in her lower lip formed from years of pressure. Without removing her pipe she gave the boys the greeting to keep

harm away. 'How have you spent the day?'

Stanley waited for Zachye to answer with the reply to keep harm away: 'We've spent it well.'

'I've smoked the pots today. Eh! your milk will taste as good as the King's.' Nearby were the black traces of a fire of scented grasses, where she had smoked the pots.

Stanley and Zachye squatted on the floor of the compound with their backs against their family hut. The kraal smelt homely and sweet,

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of dried cow-dung and fermenting millet. They filled their stomachs with the scented milk.

As Stanley let the last drips fall on his tongue, panic bubbled up again like the hot spring of Kitagata. 'Will they give me milk at school?' he cried.

'Eh! So, your father has decided.' His mother was frowning. She sat down on a low wooden stool, enveloping it, and started vigorously rotating a milk gourd back and forth to make butter.

'you'll eat potatoes, bananas and sorghum. They're not so bad; I've tried them,' Zachye said. 'But you'll have to eat eggs. Those are bad,' he added, with hardly disguised pleasure.

Stanley felt nauseous; chicken eggs were an excrement.

'They clean themselves with water instead of clay or cow's urine,' his mother said, confirming how filthy were the practices of the outside world.

'But that will offend the spirits.' Stanley felt aghast at the thought of being thrown into a place where he was to be made to break every taboo.

His mother said, 'The spirits have some respect for a man with the Education, but never think that you can ignore them completely like the Twice Born. Remember how Nyabutyari died after failing to make offerings in the ghost huts.'

Nyabutyari was a clan member who had converted to Christianity. Still, Stanley found it curious when he was told that the white man, who did not leave offerings in ghost huts, or follow rituals as precautions against the spirits, was little troubled by the ghosts. He had heard it said that the white man's curious

appearance made the spirits leave them alone. Perhaps the cruelly thin lips, maize-yellow teeth, pinched nose, pallid eyes and limp hair were repellent to the spirits. Or maybe it was the *Muzungu's* sickly-sweet smell. Or could it be true what an old man had told him: that the *Muzungu* were themselves the embodied spirits of his own ancestors, the Bachwezi, who had been prophesied to return from the North?

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'But why aren't the *Muzungu* troubled by the spirits?' Stanley asked. 'The ghosts of our own dead have no business with them; but they have their own spirits. They're afraid of a spirit of the sun for they wear hats on their heads. Eh! I have heard that not to do so curses them with death. And they have their own taboos; such as a married woman may not lie with her husband's brother or his friends.'

Stanley burned with a desire to talk to his mother about the Education; she would likely give him some notion as to what to expect (he knew how she loved to talk, although just to the children and the other women, never to the men lest they beat her for her forward opinions). She knew everything about appeasing the spirits and how to avoid curses and spells whatever the circumstance. She despised the new ways but that did not mean she was not quick to see advantage where it might be gained.

She stopped her churning to rest.

'you'll learn the wisdom of the *Muzungu*, but their wisdom is for living in their own lands and in the towns amongst their own people. In other matters the *Muzungu* are not as wise as us. In the lands of our fathers the wisdom of our elders exceeds the wisdom of the *Muzungu*.'

She took her pipe from her mouth and put it down, as she always did if she was to tell a story. 'There was the burning of the skins before I was given by my father to your father. The British said that the skins the people wore were full of lice that caused itching and disease, and that these lice were contaminating the hospitals and schools that they were building. The skins must all be burnt and the people must wear cloth. The chiefs took counsel among themselves and asked the augurs what the ancestral spirits desired. It was agreed, although the people did not itch much, that the British were

scratching terribly and firmly believed that their suffering was due to the people wearing skins, and because cloth was not difficult to obtain, and skins were not of ceremonial importance, and the auguries were favourable, and this matter was of great concern to the British, the wisdom lay in agreeing to burn the skins. Eh, we're

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a shrewd people and our understanding is deep. We'll one day have herds that cross the horizon.'

She looked askance at Zachye. 'Zachye, what's the matter?' He was rubbing his little toe hard in the dirt.

'I have a jigger.'

'Let me get it out,' Stanley said, anxious to please Zachye. He ran into the hut to find the stick splinter kept for removing jiggers.

While Stanley was absent his mother looked sharply at Zachye.

'Are you going to let him? He cannot hold a steady hand.'

'Let him cause me further pain. It doesn't matter,' Zachye answered, and spat at an ant. He missed it. He smeared it with his heel.

'What troubles you?' his mother asked.

'My father has forgotten his eldest son. He's sending my young brother for the Education before me.'

'Eh! Don't you see that your father has trusted you with the wealth of our family? Hasn't he given you his own spear to defend our cattle? Aren't you the one to bring us an increase of our herd? So isn't your father favouring you over the younger boy?'

'My mother, I don't wish to leave our cattle. They are my brothers and my sisters but, even so, my father shouldn't be sending Stanley away. If there's merit in the *Muzungu's* Education he should've instructed his eldest son to go. If Stanley goes he'll become like one from a foreign tribe. He's like milk – he'll be easily soured. He'll come back and speak ill of us and look down on us like my cousins Felice and Kabutiiti.'

His mother sighed. 'When you go and live with fly eaters you eat flies.'

Stanley returned with the sharp stick. He knelt at Zachye's feet and lifted his brother's foot onto his lap. He could see the white swelling under Zachye's little toe, tense with eggs. He started picking at the

overlying skin. Zachye sat impassive, letting the weight of his leg rest on Stanley. Stanley drew blood but Zachye did not flinch.

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Stanley was filled with a hunger to hear old stories, stories he had heard before, to be certain that they had not changed; that the new walk could not change the old walks. 'Mother, please tell me again why I'm called Stanley.'

His mother never tired of repeating the tales of the clan and so she spoke without hesitation, rocking the churn back and forward in a rhythmic accompaniment to her words.

'your father's father lived in the days of a great king.' She did not speak his name for, like all the kings of the Bahima, his name had been erased from the language after his death. 'your father's father remembered the seasons before the coming of the *Muzungu*. At that time there came a certain *Muzungu*, the first white man to make passage through these lands, these very lands that you see when you look out from this very place.'

She pointed out from the kraal with her chin.

'That *Muzungu*'s name was Stanley. He was powerful for he had fought our enemy Kabarega and defeated him. The King sent Buchunku, a prince of the royal clan, to make blood brotherhood with this Stanley, for a brother cannot fight a brother. That *Muzungu*, the one whom they called Stanley, feared our spears and wished to make passage in peace. So he also wished to become a brother to our clans. In this way blood was mixed and from that time on, to this very day, the clans of the *Muzungu* do not fight with the clans of the Bahima and neither do the clans of the Bahima fight with the clans of the *Muzungu*. In this way your father gave you the name of Stanley to make remembrance of the mixing of our blood with the *Muzungu*.'

She stopped to bend her ear to the churn that she rotated and rocked in her supple hands, listening for the slap of the whey as it thinned.

'And your father remembers the passing of the *Muzungu* by his father's kraal when he was a small boy and thought them most strange, but wonderful. When your brother Musa and your sister died, he named you after a *Muzungu* because he believes the ghosts of the *Muzungu* will protect you.'

Stanley had not seen a white man. The kraal was far from a road and although Stanley, the first *Muzungu*, had walked through their lands, the *Muzungu* now stayed in their cars. Stanley wanted to meet a *Muzungu* and say to him, 'Greetings! I'm your blood brother.' He became excited to think that there might be *Muzungu* children at school.

His mother shook the butter from the churn into a wooden bowl. Stanley slid Zachye's foot off his lap. He had de-roofed the nest of jiggers and squeezed out the eggs. Blood trickled down the sole of Zachye's foot. 'I've done it,' Stanley said proudly, and looked up at Zachye hoping for an approving nod, but Zachye was looking crossly at his mother.

'Stanley will need shoes. He'll need cotton clothing. What are we going to do? Sell a calf? Diminish our herd for the sake of the youngest son? We'll reduce our wealth to be thanked by his pity? That's what'll happen. I know it.'

'Eh!' his mother agreed. 'He'll need more than the *Muzungu's* clothes – he'll need school fees and books.'

'Then let's sell his own calf, SheWho Lifts Up Her Horns Brown As The Enkurigo Tree. He'll not be in need of her where he's going.' With that Zachye picked up his spear and left, walking with no limp despite the pit in his toe. Stanley looked after him, still kneeling in the dirt. He felt alone – as if he was at school already.

He heard his mother say sharply, 'What are you sitting idle for? The herds are all entered. Go and do your duties.' And then to emphasise that nothing had changed in the lands of their fathers, she added, 'you'll soon have to wait to drink your milk until the herds are finished milking, in the same manner as the men.'

With that she got up and went to sit by the door of her hut, in readiness to receive each milker. They came to her and spoke the name of the cow they were to milk. She handed each man the pot belonging to that cow.

Stanley picked himself up and moved off through the milling cattle and men. Smoke from the small fires burning around the kraal drifted

into the dimming sky as if it was the smoke that darkened it. Soon the

milking commenced, with each milker shouting 'Shi!' and then the name of a cow. Each cow answered her call, jostling her way forward between the other cows, and stood still before the milkers to be relieved of her pressure. Stanley led each calf to stand in front of its mother as she was milked. In this way the mother's milk flowed rich and free. If a cow lowed for her calf then all the men shouted the name of their clan and their King, so the cow knew that she was not alone in her yearning but was one with the clan, and that the men stood with her, shoulder to shoulder. Before the udders of the cow were empty the calf was permitted to drink; then the teats were smeared with ash, and the men shouted 'Shi!' and the name of the next cow.

As Stanley led his calf to its mother he thought of how he would be forgetting her name, of how Zachye would become a stranger to him. It was too much to bear. He would rather meet a *Muzhwago* – one who went out at night to transform himself into a beast of prey – than be estranged from his brother. He made a vow on all his ancestors that he would find a way to make it impossible for his father to send him away.

That night he dreamt that his calf had fallen into an ant-bear hole and that he could not lift her out on his own. She was lowing pitifully. He called to Zachye for help, but as Zachye approached hairs sprung from his neck and he turned into a lion (as some men are said to do) and came at him. He woke just as he smelt the animal's fetid breath, hot on his face. He sought comfort in listening to his mother's soft snoring, and then turned to confirm that his brother slept peacefully by his side. But Zachye's bed was empty. Stanley's skin moved. His thoughts flew to the moon-shadowed plain beyond. Did his brother roam at night? Was he a *Muzhwago*? He lay thinking that it was going to be impossible to get back to sleep, but when the cock crowed for the second time he found Zachye beside him. He reeked of beer.