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USHABA

Jordan Ngubane



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DEDICATION

TO

Bernice Marie Wardell,

whose commitment to Africa
made this effort possible.

*The plot, the characters, and the dialogue
are fictitious; together they constitute the
imagery of action, the stuff of an experi-
enced world here re-experienced.*

USHABA:

THE CHALLENGE
OF BLOOD RIVER

Isigemeleme sehle mhla kuzalw'uShaka!

Siguqe, isithole sak' oLangeni
Kwadum' izulu, ilanga latholoza.
Umhlaba uthuthumele
Kwaqhekek' amathun' emindeni,
Kumagebe kwagqamuk' amalangabi,
Kwabhenguz' izivunguvungu.
Ubuhanguhangu bushis' amahlungu,
La kusuk' uKhahlamba,
Kwaye kwahanguk' Amachibi Ezindlovu!
Nanamuhla indaba basayizeka kwaNgoni!

Athe eseqana amalangabi
IBhunu laqwal' uluNdi,
Ladilikela kithi kwaZulu Sihlangu.
IBhunu belingathwali maphand' emkhonto;
Beletshath' induk' embi, itsakamlilo.
Ushaba lusuke lapho ke,
Kungqwamana iklwa nesibhamu.
INcome ibheje yagelez' igazi;
Izidumbu zazintaba.

Kazi yintombi yakoBani
Eyozala oyocima lol' ubhememe,
Avimbe izikhukhula zalol' ushaba!

Earth had never seen what happened
When the Langeni daughter knelt
And Shaka was born!

The heavens so thundered, the sun was scared;
The earth so trembled, violent winds and billowing flames
From the gaping graves of ancestral clan-founders
Gushed to scorch the green hillsides
From where uluNdi (Drakensberg Mountains) first took form.
And northward the fires raged
And set the Great Lakes of the Elephants on fire.
To this day, the Angoni stand in witness!

The flames still leapt, one on another,
 When the Boer crossed uluNdi
 To challenge Zulu, the Armed.
 The Boer carried no bundle of spears;
 The lethal fire-stick he bore.
 Ushaba, the continuing calamity, began
 When the spear clashed with the gun.
 Crimson floods hurtled down the Ncome (Blood River)
 As corpses piled into mountains.

Whose daughter will give birth to the man
 Who will extinguish the flames
 And stop the floodwaters of this ushaba?

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U S H A B A

Foreword

In the literatures of Europe and the Americas it is unusual for an author to commence a work of fiction with a lengthy introduction. The departure is dictated by the subject of the present narrative, the setting of the story, and inadequate white understanding of the African experience—all of which call for some explanation.

Black and white in South Africa are caught in an ugly conflict of minds. The ideal of fulfillment which the Africans translate into experience clashes with the philosophy by which the whites give meaning to reality. Race and colour are merely the vehicles for the collision at the level of fundamentals; they are not in themselves the causes of conflict.

The preoccupation with race has produced elements of tragedy which cannot be described adequately, in so far as the African is concerned, in literary forms developed in the English language. The polemical essay and the novel have their limitations. The English novel, whether employed by an African or a European, distorts the African way of perceiving reality and limits his freedom and style of describing it. While learned dissertations on race have their use, they tend to reduce the blacks and the whites involved in the race quarrel to emotional ciphers.

Translations of works written in African languages present difficulties which destroy much of their message. A valued friend some time ago urged me to translate into English my own Zulu novel, *Uvalo Lwezinhlonzi* (His Frowns Struck Terror), published in South Africa in 1957. I realised, after working on the first few pages, that the organization of images and situations and their transposition from one cultural milieu to another called for explanations which threatened to reduce the translation to a massive paraphrase of little value to non-Zulu readers of the English text.

Culture conflict stood in the way. The tradition developed by the ancient Greeks, Romans and Hebrews, which the whites in South Africa upheld, regards the human being as a creature while the *Buntu* evaluation of the person, on which the African experience is founded and which inspires most Sub-Saharan cultures, recognises him as a living ideal in the process of becoming.

The ideological conflict assumes interesting forms at the racial level. If the African insists on the validity of his perceptions of reality or of his perspectives, he often runs the risk of being laughed out of circulation in the literary world of the whites or of having his bona fides denied. Creating in new forms or in those rooted in his culture, his patterns of expression and the understructure of his very cultural self may all be misunderstood or even found "incomprehensible." African understandings of the truth are often rejected for stylistic or other so-called aesthetic reasons while black observations are dismissed as propaganda, exaggerations or worse.

This is done, and has long been done, not only by the white supremacists but also by many of those whites who regard themselves either as liberals or as sympathisers with the cause of the black people. Where the advocate of apartheid uses race to establish white supremacy, the white liberal sets out to entrench cultural supremacy. The effect is a peculiar white consensus on the inferiorisation of the African.

At the literary level, the African revolution seeks to smash this consensus. It addresses itself as much to the geopolitical and socio-economic aspects of white domination as to the purely cultural. The African insists on the legitimacy of his ways of doing things and of his manner of thinking about them. He recognises the white men's right to adhere to their culture but insists on the recognition of his right to adhere to perspectives which are uniquely his and to develop vehicles for his thought which may revitalise his culture.

In my search for a satisfying vehicle through which I could tell at least part of the tragic story behind the vicious power-struggle between the African and the Afrikaner in my country, I eventually turned to the patterns of story-telling which my missionary teachers had condemned and rejected as heathen and barbaric. In the pages which follow I have adapted the *umlando* form of narrative as used by the ancient Zulus when they talked to themselves about themselves. *Umlando* was a vehicle for developing the collective wisdom or strength of the family, the clan or the nation; it is the form of narrative the Zulus employed to translate into action the principles that *inkosi yinkosi ngabantu* and that *injobo ithungelwa ebandla*. (The king rules by the grace of the people, and that the collective wisdom of the citizens leads to the truth.)

I have chosen the Zulu involvement in the crisis of "colour" in South Africa because I understand the Zulu experience best; I was born into it and it has made me what I am.

The *umlando* genre, which the Zulus developed over thousands of years, as their poetry shows, is essentially a story of ideas in action. (There is evidence that the vehicle had a place of its own in Sotho, Xhosa and most Sub-Saharan poetry produced before the advent of the white invader.) It regards the idea as the pivotal link between the human being and his performance. The genre is unique in that it concentrates on the peculiar, almost intangible relationship between the

person as a living ideal and the way he operates; it views him as having a composite personality; he is an incarnate spirit-form, a citizen of the community of the "dead," the living and the unborn, a performing self and the achieving spirit-form which creates destiny, all rolled into one. He expresses himself in ways so subtle, sometimes, it is often impossible for most whites to comprehend what he is doing.

The narrator or *umlandi* is a witness of history. As a rule, his authority rests on the fact that he was present at the critical moment when history took a new turn. His audience expects him to *land* (narrate) what he knows and to do that according to rules cherished down the centuries. But *umlandi* must be confused with neither the European historian nor reporter. Where the historian and the reporter are supposedly objective and concern themselves with bare facts and where the historian seeks to deal with events and their causes and effects, the *umlandi* is creatively subjective. He deals with idea-forms, the subjective moulds in which events are first cast. These vehicles for the translation of motivating urges and feelings into action or objects are believed to have one remarkable quality: they congeal into transposable images. In *ukushaya umoklo* (focusing cosmic power), the Zulu woman churned up the female force of procreation and cast it into an idea-form to create the situation she desired. The poet uses the corresponding elemental power to vest the person with the eternity of mountains or the king with the power of lightning. His heroes and villains, like his planets, animals and plants are congelations of idea-forms. What the whites regard as witchcraft is the simple skill of manipulating cosmic forces.

In *Izibongo* or *Eulogia*, in which the traditional poet built poetic monuments to achievement, the Zulu artist clothed known fact in imagery. In the following stanza from *Izibongo zikaShaka*, which is sometimes attributed to Nomxamama and sometimes to Magolwane kaMkatini Jiyana, the idea-form (the king's majesty) is transposed or made to congeal into an armed buffalo:

Inyathi ejame ngomkhonto phezu koMzimvubu
AmaMpondo esaba ukuyehlela.
Nani boFaku,nani boGambushe, ningamhlabi!
Nothi ningamhlaba,
Koba senihlabe uPhunga, nahlaba uMageba!

(Poised on Mzimvubu river's banks,
The spear-wielding buffalo hurled challenges.
Frightened, the Mpondo dared not descend on him.
"Be ye warned, ye Fakus and ye Gambushes too,
Do not take up arms against him,
For, should you take them,
You will have stabbed Phunga himself and Mageba!")

The present is not an essay on the appreciation of Zulu poetry, but it might contribute to the understanding of *umlando* to describe briefly the poet's basic techniques. First, he has cast the stanza in the classical, five-part *Bunono* form. The word *ubunono* describes the procedure for the creation or doing of something in ways which accord best with the demands of neatness or which express a feeling for beauty or exhibit a pleasing regard for method or the rules. The person who is careful about his appearance or dresses neatly is known as *inono*. At the same time the Zulu people speak of *incwadi ebhalwe ngobunono*, a letter or book (in olden times a bead pattern) which pleases because it is written or composed beautifully or methodically or according to the rules. We refer to cultured or principled or decent behaviour or clean living as *ukuziphatha ngobunono*.

The poet employs the breath-bar as the mechanism by which to align his ideas or images or even to express the beauty or power of sound. The breath-bar is the period of exhalation into which the poet crowds a given number of syllables. A breath-bar might be a single sound extended over the length of the exhalation; it can also be a cluster of syllables or words. Most of the time, it is a sentence.

As a rule, each stanza has five parts which correspond to the five principles of becoming. The principles are symbolised by the five fingers of the hand and are regarded as vital idea-forms. We Africans like to touch each other or our children or those we love or like. In doing this we transmit to each other the cosmic power locked in the person or the vitality the idea-forms convey.

In the stanza under discussion, the poet states his theme in the first line, develops it in the second and reaches the catastatic moment in the third. He adduces the argument for the climax in the fourth line and concludes his message in the fifth. In stating his theme, the poet alludes to an historical fact: Shaka's invasion of the land of the Mpondo. Because *umlando* is a story of ideas, it is a convenient vehicle for political themes. To be a work of art, however, it must be based on historical truth. The development of the theme is clothed in images which are aligned to convey the subjective meaning in the poet's mind. These images could be decoded by every Zulu educated in the culture of the poet's times.

The skill of the poet thus lies not only in the quality of his ideas and the power of his language, but also in his choice of images and in how he aligns and crowds them into each breath-bar. It lies, also, in the cadences he creates by harmonising the tonal indices or pitches which govern the meaning of the Zulu vowel.

The poet acts in a timeless continuum. He transposes his images and symbols from the present to the past or the future in such a way that to the initiated his message can have an eternally valid meaning. Mpondo and Zulu ancestors are treated as though they are living persons. He is bound to do this or is freed to do it by the logic of

continuity which issues from his view of the cosmic order and to which we shall come shortly. The ancient poet is not unique in concerning himself so much with the eternal. The builders of Egypt's pyramids, like the Rozwi Mambo architects of Zimbabwe, it has been said, built for eternity. The Zulu court poet spoke to the ages.

To appreciate the poet's concern with the eternal and, therefore, to appreciate *umlando*, the reader has to have some familiarity with the poet's *weltanschauung*. Without it, the non-Zulu reader in cultures based on the Graeco-Romano-Hebraic evaluation of the person might sooner or later find himself despairing of understanding *umlando*. He might then find himself agreeing with the well-known Afrikaner authority on *Zulu Izibongo* who, after years of study, finally dismissed them as the ramblings of an undisciplined mind. What the Afrikaner was not trained to understand was the composite personality and why and how the Zulu poet moves action freely from the present to the past and the future with what looks like a total disregard for the time-unity. In his culture, which is rooted in the Graeco-Romano-Hebraic tradition and has a bias for analysis, the concept of timelessness made no sense and whatever made no sense to the white man was invalid. *This closed mind is one of the basic causes of conflict between the African and the Afrikaner.*

To the Zulu, timelessness makes a lot of sense. The poet concerns himself with what he regards as the essence of things; he insists that it is this first cause which must be understood in order to attain clarity on its individualisations. Where the historian or scientist arrives at the truth by analysis, by compartmentalising reality and trying to understand it through the study of its isolated "constituents," the creator of *umlando* uses what we shall, for lack of a better word, call *synalysis*. He regards all things as totals of totals. Nothing exists of itself, by itself and for itself. All things are clusters of subtler substances or forms of spirit-energy; each of them can be understood only where there is clarity on their essence. All things "begin" in this essence and exist in it as idea-forms or clusters of vibrations.

In the present adaptation from *umlando*, a Zulu vehicle has been "reconditioned" to convey into the English milieu ideas conceived in a Zulu framework. Incidents which took place mainly in South Africa have been arranged in a particular sequence to provide the historical basis for the story. The plot, the characters and the dialogue are fictitious; they together constitute the "imagery" in which the author clothes his story.

As *umlandi*, I have been involved all my life in responding to the challenge of being human in the *ushaba* (the continuing provocation or the proliferation of crises) which is steadily moving black and white in South Africa to or of the ugliest bloodbaths in human history. Because ideas determine social action, *umlando* deals directly and realistically with their effects on the person in every department of life;

in politics, culture, the economy, etc. In the present narrative *umlandi* concentrates on a limited area of South African life: the interplay of "racial" ideas.

The reader who follows events in South Africa will almost readily recognise many of the incidents on which the present story is founded. A South African prime minister was assassinated in mysterious circumstances after the Sharpeville shootings. A white nun was murdered and mutilated in Port Elizabeth in conditions the government has not wanted to see explained to this day. A white opponent of apartheid was executed for placing a bomb which exploded in the Johannesburg railway station and led to the death of a white woman. A well-known Johannesburg lawyer was visited by the security police at about two in the morning. The police found documents which indicated that he had received large sums of money from Ghana to finance the purchase of guns for guerrilla activity in South Africa. Instead of arresting him, the police took his word that he would present himself at the charge office when the courts opened for business. By sunrise, he was in Swaziland. Police involvement in sexual relations across the colour line is a continuing scandal in South Africa, while the disloyalty of some black police is a fact of South African life. An African policeman warned me of the ban the government had issued against me and gave me information which set me on the road to exile.

I mention these incidents because it is not inconceivable that people who are not familiar with conditions in South Africa might regard the story in the pages which follow as bizarre and, possibly, exaggerated. I would understand this. Many good men and women, many decent people and many law-abiding citizens of Free World countries regarded the stories of Hitler's atrocities against the Jews as bizarre exaggerations, until disaster overtook the world. Events are moving to another explosion. The collapse of the Portuguese dictatorship and the emergence of India as a nuclear power gives an altogether new complexion to the race problem in Southern Africa. The one is bringing the borders of Free Africa to South Africa's boundaries while the other places the nuclear bomb in the hands of a non-white power which is involved directly in South Africa's crisis of colour. South Africa has a permanently settled Indian community of about 700,000. In this setting the government in Pretoria gradually loses the initiative to set the pace of events. This creates the atmosphere in which the gun will increasingly become a political argument.

The bizarre character of white policy in South Africa is stressed by the contradictions in apartheid which constitute the reality into which the African is born, in which every moment of his life is affected by them and in which he finally dies. What, for example, would be more bizarre than to make it a crime for an African, in his own Africa, to be a child of his parents or to want to respond to the challenge of being human? What could be more tragic than the frustra-

tion of life's purpose for a whole race? At this level apartheid cuts wounds in the being of the African which are too deep to be comprehended fully even by the most committed white liberal or Coloured or Asian. The walls which separate the races are such that even with the best will in the world, the most committed white or Coloured or Asian opponent of apartheid identifies himself vicariously with the African in the labour-breeding paddocks known as the urban locations and the rural reserves.

In these conditions the white writer cannot help seeing the effects of the South African tragedy on the African from white perspectives and, in interpreting the African experience, to filter it through white perceptions of reality. He concentrates on specifics like segregation, the Pass Laws or influx control and tends to ignore the universals which interplay in the crisis of colour; universals like evaluations of the person and ideals of nationhood. The problem here is not one of integrating the African in the white man's society; black and white are caught in a complicated clash of conflicting ideals of fulfilment. The refusal to accept this definition of the race problem goes a long way to explain the fact that the United Nations Organisation has, for about a quarter of a century now, been going round in circles without producing a solution.

Enough has been said about the structure of *umlando* to warrant a brief reference to its use as a vehicle for ideas during one of the most exciting periods in Zulu history. As a genre, *umlando* was developed in response to the demands of crisis situations in Zulu history and was meant for a given type of audience. It was used extensively in the conditions created by the revolution which Shaka the Great led. In this upheaval Shaka set whole communities moving violently to a new destiny in Africa south of the equator. In his view, the ideal of rising to "heavens beyond the reach of spirit-forms" was a compelling challenge; it drove him to create the society in which the person would be enabled and seen to make the best possible use of his life, and, in that way, realise the promise and the glory of being human.

Zulu citizenship, Shaka insisted, had nothing to do with race, colour, blood, status or antecedents; it involved commitment to a particular ideal of nationhood. He demanded that this commitment should transcend every other loyalty.

The reward for total surrender was membership in a responsible society in which it was not a crime for a person to be the child of his parents. The great Mdlaka, for example, was a rehabilitated cannibal who rose from this situation of humiliation to become chief of staff of the Zulu armed forces. Shaka made it clear to those who objected to Mdlaka's appointment that merit and mind-quality were the basic qualifications for Zulu citizenship. Shaka married iron to discipline and set large parts of Southern Africa on fire in the bid to translate his ideal into reality. Almost without warning the Shakan revolution thrust the

for a relevant concept of nationhood. In it the Zulus speak to themselves about themselves; they tell each other who they are, what life means to them and what they live for. They tell each other that they have been around from the dawn of antiquity, when stones cried if pinched (*amatshe esancinza akhale*). They have been around, as they are, for a purpose; they are here to create the society in which the person shall be seen and enabled to make the best possible use of his life in the light of his abilities. The eighteenth-century Court Poet to Zenzangakhona described the aspiration in these terms:

Masiphoth' intamb' ende
Menzi ka Jama,
Siy'emazulwini
Lapho nezithutha zingey' ukufika;
Zobasakhwele,
Zephuk'amazwanyana!

(A cord of destiny let us weave,
O Menzi, scion of Jama,
That
To Heavens beyond the reach of spirit-forms
We may climb.
So long must the cord be,
The spirit-forms themselves will break their tiny toes,
If they dare to climb.)

Shaka the Great set out to translate the aspiration into action. He founded the Zulu nation on the poet's injunction. His ideal was a state and a society in which the person would be enabled and seen to face successfully the challenge and realise the promise and the glory, of being human. He developed the revolutionary concept of the nation-state and used it as a vehicle for translating his ideal into meaningful deeds and reorganised the army to give permanence to his ideal. If the whites say anything about Shaka the Great, it is to tell Zulu children that he was a bloodthirsty tyrant. When the young Zulus grow older and read the history of revolutions in Europe, they realise that revolution is bloody wherever the oppressors of their fellowmen refuse to adapt to the demands of change. The hearts of the Zulus bleed when they see their children taught the lies about their ancestors and their place in the community of nations. That is what defeat means, each father passes the word to his son.

The world holds its breath as black and white move to the moment of confrontation. The Afrikaners mobilise white racial, political, economic and military resources to crush probable African revolts. This is what they have always done in the three hundred years they have been in South Africa. After defeat on the battlefield, the Africans

changed their strategies and concentrated on building up their brain-power as the weapon to use against the white man's gun and material power. Each side moves slowly to its chosen position in the confrontation. It moves, however, in such a way that there can be no going back; there is little or no room in this ancient quarrel for mistakes. As a result events move slowly; nobody knows where and how the Africans will strike when they start walking barefooted against the Afrikaner, as they say. Some whites in Europe and America still talk about non-violence, to which the Africans answer that modern arms have no fears for them; that no amount of radar can monitor activity in the fortresses of the mind.

Events suddenly take a new turn on the December 16 holiday when this story begins. For different, although equally historical reasons, the Africans and the Afrikaners regard the Day of the Covenant as the most important holiday in South Africa. On this day, each side takes up emotional arms and fights the Battle of Blood River all over again. The Zulus and the Afrikaners emotionally dig up the bones of their dead and crack each other's political skulls with them. They hurl defiance at each other, bombard each other with the humiliations and glories of the past, gloat on each other's defeats and bare to the winds the painful wounds which they cut into each other and stoke history's accumulated hatreds.

On these occasions both sides put aside the master-servant relationship and treat each other as real human beings who can be very dangerous to each other. No compliments are paid in these exchanges, except obliquely in the forms of bitter denunciations and mutual insults. The Afrikaners in particular and to a lesser extent the Africans, transport themselves emotionally to December 16, 1838, when the Boer ancestors of the Afrikaners crushed King Dingane's army at the Battle of Ncome (Blood River). The Afrikaners vowed then that on every December 16 they would go on their knees in thanksgiving for the victory over the Zulus. They subsequently named the holiday the Day of the Covenant and erected the Voortrekker Memorial outside Pretoria to keep alive the memory of their ancestors.

Although they had the guns, to which the Zulus did not have access, the Boers did not break the spirit of the Africans; they did not destroy the African people's will to rise to "heavens beyond the reach of spirit-forms" in their quest for a satisfying destiny. About forty years later, the Zulus were locked in armed conflict with the British Empire. Once more, the white man's guns crushed the Zulu army. About a generation later Bambada led an armed protest against taxation by a government in which his people had no say. Four thousand Zulus perished in the rebellion. But not even these disasters, following so closely upon each other in less than three-quarters of a century, killed the Africans' yearning for a satisfying destiny. In 1912, Pixley ka Isaka Seme, a Zulu barrister from the Inanda mission station near Durban,

If, on the white side, the liberals and most English-speaking people think him an ogre, his views and the brutal candour with which he states them makes him the terror of all moderates in his community and the idol of Afrikaner youth. All these factors go beyond making de Haas one of the most significant leaders of Afrikanerdom or a likely prime minister; they give him the dimensions of a phenomenon in the hierarchy of Afrikaner nationalism.

The prime minister accepts the basic assumptions behind de Haas's programme but rejects his forestry minister's strategy because it extends the area of the Afrikaner's isolation in the world. Forebodings of catastrophe crowd into van Warmelo's mind when he contemplates the tide of African nationalism rolling southward to subvert the authority of the white man. His excoriation of the white powers for granting independence to the black child-race has steadily been falling on deaf ears in London, Paris, Brussels and The Hague. In spite of the instability of the first decade of independence investor delegations continue to flock to the free states of Africa, where the main attractions are the surfeit of cheap labour, the proximity to Europe and America, the low taxation on profits and, above all, the fact that Africa has metal, oil and other mineral resources which have barely been touched. The exploitation of these resources could make Africa the continent of the future. With the exception of the Soviet Union, the industrial countries are about to deplete their supplies of the resources which abound in Africa. Besides, there always is the irritating presence of kaffer delegations in international assemblies where they use their voting power to support their brothers in South Africa.

These prospects raise the danger of Afrikaner isolation on a number of vital planes. Isolation might harm the country's economy at different levels. The coming depletion of gold necessitates the development of the country's productive potential and the cultivation of foreign markets. South Africa cannot look to Europe and America for the volume of trade which would keep her economy viable; the Western nations manufacture almost everything they need in so far as South Africa is concerned.

She cannot turn to Asia because Japan, China and distance stand in the way. South America offers limited markets for South African manufacturers, partly because Brazil and Argentina are likely to supply most South American markets in the twenty-first century. Africa remains the main region to which South African manufacturers can seriously turn their eyes. Besides, every African capital is within a day's flight from Johannesburg. But the Free Africans are hostile to the Afrikaner's attitude to the black people in South Africa and are not likely to start the stampede for goods manufactured in that country. All these dangers call for a policy of caution in dealing with the Free Africans and for conciliatory attitudes to the Western countries. But it is precisely at this point that de Haas gives the prime minister no end of

sleepless nights. His aggressive racism combines with his penchant for opening his wide mouth on the wrong subject, at the wrong time and in the wrong way, to stand the premier's entire foreign policy on its head.

The head of the government cannot do much about this problem; he is the prisoner of his position. The heroic mould in which Afrikaner politics is cast limits his power to discipline a phenomenon like Willem Adriaan de Haas.

Piet du Toit van der Merwe, the prime minister's son-in-law, enters the picture at this point. He is a genius at reconciling the angularities which preserve the distance between the prime minister and his minister of forestry and which can split Afrikanerdom and bring its government crashing to the ground. Piet's job, which gives him tremendous influence in his community, involves no real conflicts of loyalty; apart from having a good head on his shoulders, he functions as a two-way conduit. His father-in-law uses him for negotiating with de Haas as freely as the latter employs him as a conduit between himself and the prime minister. Afrikanerdom acclaims this role and proclaims Piet a paragon of Afrikaner manhood.

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Zandile Makaye is employed as a cook and a housemaid in the van der Merwe household. Marietjie has packed parcels of delicacies into an *ilala* (a species of palm) basket she bought on her recent visit to the land of the Zulus. These include strips of mouth-watering *biltong*. These are pieces of salted, pickled and dried buffalo meat which are eaten either as they are or in vegetable stews. The prime minister loves to eat them in their dry form. They are cut into thin shavings and chewed as snacks or appetisers. Some people say there is no better accompaniment to beer. Piet shot the buffalo during the culling season in the Hluhluwe Game Reserve and had the meat cured and railed to his house. Marietjie, ever thoughtful, bought a long-necked Tonga decanter and had it filled with palm wine and sealed for her father. These vessels are made of burnt clay and are marvels of beauty. The Tonga, who live in northern Zululand and southern Mozambique, etch delicate patterns on the outside of the decanters to make it a pleasure to drink from them. A kind, sensitive and generous people, the Tonga fill the vessels with the palm wine and regard it as a privilege to present these to visitors. The prime minister cultivated the taste for palm wine in his younger years, when he was Native Commissioner for Natal's northern Ngwavuma district.

Zandile has walked through the back door to the front gate near where the prime minister's car stands and is packing the provisions into the boot of the car when the prime minister emerges from the front door, surrounded by the members of Marietjie's family. An