

.....Kids...*on the Edge*.....

THE ADVENTURES OF CALLUM AND CASPER

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END

1.

The Incubator

Callum and Casper were the most unpleasant brothers, growing up in a neighbourhood lacking basic facilities. Adults attempted desperately to shield their children from the influence of these ten and twelve year olds. When it came to mischief, they were masters. The boys were bound by a common vision for delinquency and a certain disdain for authority.

Callum and Casper were devoted to fun and driven by a twenty-four hour adrenaline pump. They were thrill seekers with an insatiable appetite for fights or anything that risked serious injury. As a result, they deliberately taunted adults and tormented their peers.

The boys effortlessly outran their adult pursuers and out-fought their nearest rivals. They attacked their rivals with a relentless intensity and telepathically knew when to disengage a stronger enemy.

Callum and Casper had no moral goalkeepers. If an elderly person said, "Don't" they simply looked at each other and giggled. To them, "Don't" was a mandate to do the opposite.

People often wondered why the boys behaved so badly when their parents were well-respected members of the community. It was certainly not genetic.

The boys woke up every morning, their minds overflowing with mischief, knowing that their parents would only be back in the evening. In their pursuit of adventure, there were no rules, no boundaries and no ceiling. Everything was possible and everything was permissible. They were like sheep without a shepherd.

Callum and Casper were very close brothers yet distinctly different in so many ways. Callum was handsome. He had well defined cheekbones with deep dimples that punctuated his cheeks. His nose was perfectly symmetrical. His lips were thick and appeared moist and edible. His eyes shone bright and sparked potential. A head shaped like a loaf of bread rested on his broad shoulders.

Callum had a habit of twisting his trousers so that the zip was always at an angle. His trousers were short of the full length and showed off brightly coloured socks - either red or yellow. He walked with a little spring in his step.

This ten year old was not the emotional type. His mom used to say the midwife smacked him twice before he cried. He had a firm jaw line and there was a quiet determination about him.

The boy had a streak of competitiveness. He competed in mathematics. He competed in football. He competed in table tennis and sometimes, when the boys were in the park, he wanted to find out whose wee would travel furthest.

Callum did extremely well at school. His class teacher remarked about the boy's ability to keep a focused thought in spite of the many distractions he faced in his social life. Another teacher openly praised him for a remarkable aptitude in arithmetic.

Casper on the other side was bony and attractive. His teeth were large and milky white. He smiled often and made a good first impression. Humor was his key. People felt at ease with him and that was his trump card. It was his access code to their lives and pockets.

Casper's shoulders curved inwards and his chest was abnormally large due to years of chronic asthma. For some children, it could have been a confidence killer. This was not the case with Casper. He turned his shirt collars upwards and it made him look like a little movie star from the 'Hood'. Some children began to dress like him and others even wanted to have a humped chest like his.

Casper had a talent for persuading others. He could talk a dog out of a bone full of meat. He craved attention; it was like a drug to him. Neighbourhood children often gathered around him and this seemed to trigger sinister things in him. He talked them into fights and sometimes into theft.

Casper hated school. He was the source of disturbance in class. At times he put drawing pins on the teacher's chair. As a result he sometimes got punished for things he didn't do. Anything criminal fitted his profile. If there was no one to blame for a crime then he got the credit for it. He was always at the headmaster's office and that didn't bother him a bit.

Arithmetic to him was legalised terrorism and algebra was *the* suicide bomber.

Casper was hot tempered. Those around him felt the moist of his palms on their cheeks very often. It was instinctive. Callum, on the other hand, was soft spoken but was determined to outdo his brother in anything and had plenty to prove.

Callum and Casper wore identical clothes bought from their favorite downtown shop called Baloos. Baloos had an "Everything for Sale" sign posted from January to January. Their mum bought them brown, heat resistant shorts with elastic strings that ran around their waist and knotted at the front. These shorts lasted for ages and the boys passionately hated them. They nicknamed the shorts, "Eternity".

Very often, they argued and, when they fought, it took the services of the whole clan to separate them. Their mum, Melissa would shout, "Help! Help! Stop it! Stop it! Break it up boys!" as volleys of flying kicks and tiny fists were exchanged at an alarming pace.

The Family: What Makes A Family Strong?

Casper and Callum were born into a God fearing family of six children and two loving parents. They had three elderly brothers and three elderly sisters.

Their dad, Abraham was the cornerstone of the family. He was a quiet man but with a temper that was overlaid with discipline. He loved his children dearly and spent most of his money educating them. Most of his major decisions in life were inspired by the love of his children.

Abraham was successful. He worked hard and rose to the top of a big municipality. His wife, Melissa was responsible for all the discipline in the family. She believed that if you spare the rod, you will spoil the child. She had managed to keep the other children well disciplined. However, Callum and Casper were something else. She had exhausted all her parenting skills. She often wondered where she might have erred. The boys were simply out of control. Melissa had gotten to a place where she turned a blind eye to their misdemeanors.

They played music very loud, turning their home into a miniature night club. They fought often. They stole money from their parents. They teased their sisters. At times they ate everything in the house. Melissa dreaded coming home at the end of the day. She would find the lounge upside down, the kitchen in a mess with milk on the floor, sugar on the table and water on the floor.

Their older cousin, Jack taught them about girls. They had seen him kiss and fondle a teenage girl. The boys were left feeling funny and eager to do the same.

The Neighborhood: Is This The Right Preparation For Life?

Phelan was a downtown suburb lying just outside the city centre. It had run down houses that urgently needed renovation. The houses looked similar, the black corrugated roofs, the white tops and red rows of red brick at the bottom.

The streets appeared overpopulated with stray dogs and children in tattered clothes running after footballs made of carrier bags. There were more bicycles than cars. The few cars that were there comprised mostly of private mini taxis. The drivers appeared rude, occasionally shouting at pedestrians and blurring their horns. From an aerial view Phelan looked like organised chaos.

There was one shopping centre servicing the whole neighbourhood. The boys visited the centre every Friday. Their main interest was to see the regular fights that took place in the evening.

They enjoyed seeing their role model, Mylos, fighting. Mylos and his gang hated strangers. Since everyone knew each other, strangers were easily noticed and attacked.

Mylos could not make it as a professional boxer. But he had learnt a few skills like bobbing and weaving and then punching in combinations. He was a real show off and attracted a lot of attention to himself. He had a well sculpted upper body with rippling muscles that scared most people within a five mile radius.

The gang spent Friday mornings at the gym and then in the evening they went to the centre and there, they hunted strangers like a pack of wolves. Strangers were attacked with brutal ferocity and sometimes even bystanders joined in the assaults. They were assaulted simply for being strangers.

One day the boys witnessed a stranger who tried to escape the clutches of Mylos. The stranger struggled for his dear life and his trousers split into two, revealing white, wire gauze-like underwear. The boys burst out laughing and sang, 'I see Mr. White having holes.' They left the shopping centre, thoroughly satisfied; with slight limp gait and collars turned up.

Callum and Casper became one with the neighbourhood. They were born in Phelan. They loved their neighbourhood. The boys assimilated everything that was bad with their neighbourhood including the chaos and violence. They could tell from experience who was rich or poor and who was a thief or a conman just by looking at someone.

The boys recognized thieves through being fidgety and anxious. Always lurking, peeping and turning their heads to the left or right with their wares tightly held in their hands. Their eyes were all over the place. Casper always thought they were on the lookout for law enforcement agents.

Callum noticed that conmen were good-looking and charming. They dressed as if they owned the bank.

Both boys secretly admired the men in dark glasses who drove cars with tinted windows. These cars were driven slowly and stopped now and again to exchange parcels with pedestrians. The boys often wondered what the parcels were.

The boys' dad once met a young man who was selling designer belts. The young man asked him to have a look at his wares. Abraham duly accepted just as a mark of respect for the young man. He looked through these belts without any intention of buying. He then handed the belts back to the young man. The young man told Abraham, "Since you have already touched these belts, you ought to pay a handling fee of ten dollars," and he actually meant it. Abraham got really mad and rolled up his sleeves, ghetto style, and the young man knew what he was about to receive. "I am sorry dad. I was just taking a chance." With those words, the young man simply walked away to another unsuspecting victim. This was Phelan. The boys were proud of their father. He was ready to fight.

Casper once noticed a big, unemployed man, who always carried the same worn out newspaper, board a bus. This man boarded the bus especially during paydays. When he dropped off the bus, everyone in the bus complained of having lost some money. Eventually he was nicknamed, "Two-fingers". With his two fingers hidden behind an old newspaper, he would fleece his victims without mercy. Then, a whole face covered in beard lit up with a sense of accomplishment.

Two-fingers' luck ran out. He was caught red-handed one payday and it nearly cost his life. His victims pounced on him with venom in their hearts. They kicked and punched and he fell to the ground. One man picked up a huge brick and Two-Fingers, eyes wide open with fear, pleaded for his life. His pleas fell on deaf ears, the man ferociously struck Two-fingers on the head. Two-fingers saw his life disappearing fast at the hands of the mob. The elderly screamed. Those who had no fear of the law shouted from a distance, "Kill him." The boys joined in with the mob, "Kill him". Casper, his adrenaline rushing up and down his little frame kicked

Two-fingers in the head. Callum chickened out but shouted, "Kill him," from a distance. Two-fingers miraculously survived.

This was street justice, served cold. The police was seen as the enemy. No one went to the police, both the victims and the perpetrators chose to keep quiet. In the crime scene, the police were met with dumb mouths and blind eyes. Witnesses had a very short life span.

Debra

One quiet Sunday morning the boys' neighbour was found dead, lying face down in a trench. He had been gambling throughout the dark night and was stabbed to death by a woman called Debra.

Debra was a mean, tough looking woman who had survived Ian Smith's oppressive regime by sheer iron will. Her eyes were bright and alert but there was also something strange in them, something that warned you to be mindful of your own boundary.

Debra had been shunned and frowned upon all her life. She never got used to it. In her heart, she never belonged down there with the masses. She just found herself at the bottom of the ladder. Her mind was always up there, with the best. Debra was determined to get up there, where she felt she belonged, at all costs and with whatever means possible.

She developed an unquenchable appetite for attention. Debra painted her dark, expressionless face with bright colours and wore a blonde coloured wig. Her dresses were ridiculously short. She vigorously swayed her tiny hips to the far left and then to the far right and one wondered how she kept in a straight line. Debra would then turn her head towards the male folk and wink but there were no takers. Instead, the males responded with a loud "Mxxh".

There was something male about Debra. In spite of the hip swaying, when she walked her steps were firm, more akin to soldiers than females.

She sold everything from houses to chipolata sausages. She forced open doors for herself and with a load of unfulfilled dreams, started illegal gambling and a door of hope opened, only just.

Debra had been tired of being a victim. She made up her mind to fight back, and, in the process, she trampled everything that stood between her and her dreams including the boys' neighbour that fateful night.

The boys respected her though. Debra was strong. She had loads of testosterone. She had this muscle that was hard, the sort that is earned from manual labour. Her make-up covered a face punctuated with scars and acne.

One spring day, the boy witnessed Debra systematically take Mylos apart with calculated savagery. Mylos was kicked in the groin, punched in the nose and had his eyes punched with pin point accuracy. He fell down. As he got up, Debra connected with a right hook followed by an uppercut. She grabbed Mylos by the collar and, like a ram, head butted him on the nose. Mylos was bleeding profusely from the mouth and nose. His trousers was wet in the groin area. He looked like an old man.

Though Mylos tried to put up a fight, it was by far a one-sided event. He was outmatched in every area. Every time he got hit, he looked at her hands. He felt as though she was hitting him with small bricks. In the end Mylos slowly backed away in the direction of his house. Debra encouraged him by stamping her feet together and Mylos took off with amazing speed.

The savagery of the attack haunted the boys for a long time. They always thought Mylos was invincible until he crossed Debra's path.

2.

The Thrill of Danger

Callum and Casper barricaded the road that led to town with stones. Their intention was for the motorists to use the side road which was over flooded with water. When the motorists were in difficulty, Callum and Casper then emerged from the shadows with jibes and taunts.

One middle-aged man easily read their plot when he saw the boys lurking in the shadows and decided to take action. This man was bald, pot-bellied and obese. His shoulders were small and rotund and his bosom was unusually wide and curved for a man. He was wearing a bottle green and white floral shirt that clung tightly around his waist. His black trousers appeared small. The fat man was wearing white new trainers.

The man got out of his car with incredible ease and charged like a crazed rhino. He was fast, astonishingly fast for his weight and age. This was a new breed adult the boys had not come across. He caught the two boys off guard but they reacted with lightning speed as they sprinted towards the mountains, away from civilization.

On their right side was a deep and disused open cast mine. On their left was a thick forest. It suddenly occurred to the boys that this fat man could kill them and dump them in the woods. The sudden thought, fired by their childhood imagination, began to take root. This was a quiet and remote place for children to be playing unsupervised, let alone in a fight of wills with an adult blinded by anger.

The distance between the fat man and the boys decreased as the fat man accelerated his speed. The only sound was that of tiny feet pattering down the wet road followed by the heavy thuds of the fat man.

After some intense running, the boys began to tire. The fat man was cursing and muttering words that they had never heard beforehand, evil words at that. "Bamba khanda lika nyoko," shouted the fat man in his native language. This was open hostility from an adult, reasoned Casper inwardly. This man was abnormal, Callum considered silently. Probably a middle age dropout thought Casper. "You dirty scoundrels," screamed the fat man in between gasps of air. Casper was now sure that sometime past, in his life, this man had done many, many bad things to good children. Callum, on the other hand wished their father could pop up from somewhere in the bushes and protect him from this raging monster. Untold fear gripped the boys; someone could seriously get hurt, they anguished.

They were running for over ten minutes and the fat man was closing in. Callum's face appeared flustered. His mouth was wide open and his lips were very dry. His nose was flaring up and down unevenly. Callum began to cry. He looked awkward. Casper was having difficulty breathing. He was wheezing very loudly and could have done with an asthma pump. His vision was slightly getting out of focus. The fat man kept the pressure. Each profane word he spoke tore at the boys' hearts like a surgeon's knife.

Then, all of a sudden, the fat man stopped running. He put his hands around his waist and muttered, 'you little bastards, consider this your lucky day. I wanted to panel beat your little faces. Your mama was not going to recognise you today!' He turned around and walked back to his car.

Had he persevered just a little longer, he would have caught Casper in particular. Casper was knackered and running on empty. Only a tremendous will to survive kept him going. His breathing had become excessively laboured. Casper had long been contemplating giving up. What stopped him though was that this fat man

didn't seem to have a heart. If it was there, it probably was a tumour, thought Casper.

Panting like hunting dogs and holding their small hips, Casper muttered between laboured breaths, "That was a close shave, mhuna". They called each other mhuna and no one really knew what that meant. "I will never ever do this again mhuna," Callum replied.

The boys rested near a bridge, welcoming a gentle breeze that blew against their sweaty faces.

Aunt Dorcas

On their way home, the boys met a cyclist who had over-decorated his bicycle with mindless creativity. It was full of red emblems, stickers and British flags that protruded from different angles. This man loved his bicycle. It was undoubtedly his Ferrari. Callum and Casper glanced at each other and nodded their heads simultaneously. "Brother, you have a beauty--fool bicycle," commented Casper with undisguised cynicism and with a face-splitting grin spread across his face. "Thanks boys," responded the unsuspecting brother. When he was about ten meters away, Callum remarked, "Surely an old man like you ought to grow up." The 'brother' made a U-turn before Callum could even finish the sentence. The boys burst into fits of laughter. Casper broke wind as he sprinted. It was show time once again.

This time the boys had the advantage of township geography. They ran between houses and sometimes through them. Some folk, who left their front doors open, caught glimpses of two white t-shirts flashing past them and out through the back door. Callum and Casper knew which houses to avoid, especially the ones with dogs and those whose owners behaved as dogs. The cyclist could only use the streets that ran parallel to the houses.

The boys dashed to their Aunt's house like a pair of crazed athletes. Aunt Dorcas's house was their sanctuary. She was watering her well looked after garden when she saw two familiar faces scampering past her and into her house. Their final destination was the space beneath her double sized bed. After a brief altercation, Callum slid under the bed followed by Casper. The boys overheard their Auntie telling the cyclist, "I am telling you my son, I didn't see the two boys you are talking about." After a brief but intense argument the cyclist slowly cycled away, knowing in his heart that his abusers were holed up in that house.

Aunt Dorcas was always on their side. She loved these boys unconditionally. The boys knew it and she did not hide her affections. She defended her nephews as a buffalo defends her young; with zeal and tenacity. She kept their secrets and the boys loved her the more. Aunt Dorcas would look at her nephews and smiled showing off her missing incisor tooth, which made her look gorgeous.

She was a kind and cheerful woman. Aunt Dorcas was a good cook. Her house had an aroma of Indian food and she was quite generous with her nicely cooked food. Anyone who visited her house left with a carrier bag full of food.

Granny Boo

The boys continued navigating life through adventures. There was an old woman who lived nearby. This woman used to drink quite often and she staggered past the boys' home on a regular basis. The boys accused her of breaking wind and gave her a horrible nickname. They called her "Granny Boo". Every time she passed by the boys' home, they ran ahead of her, climbed a tall tree, and then shouted, "Granny Boo," on top of their voices. This infuriated the old drunken woman. She picked up stones and threw them at the boys with all her might. She often missed and the momentum of the throw took her to the ground. She would get up, dust herself and then mutter obscenities before heading home. The boys responded by jumping down from the tree, imitating their TV hero, Tarzan. "Heee yak Granny Boo, Boo." They loved every minute of this. They followed "Granny

Boo” to her house, shouting obscenities and taunting her. The old lady would turn back and attempt to run after them. Whenever she tripped and fell the boys would mock her. “Boo Boo,” they shouted. No one intervened.

The Future Today

Callum craved for the day when he would show off his pubic hair to the other boys. Casper was already showing traces of maturity. Callum was desperate for maturity at the age of ten and not even nature could deny him. The older boys told him that in order for him to have pubic hair, he had to use an onion-like plant called *isagenama*.

All he had to do, they said, was to peel it and then rub it onto the pubic area. An elderly friend gave him this onion-like plant as a gift. Callum kept this plant but was scared to use it himself. He wanted a fall guy, in case the experiment back-fired.

Callum saw Charlie, a seven-year-old boy who also had a taste for dangerous encounters, on his way to the club. He was young, good-looking and extremely vulnerable. He was nicknamed ‘Donkey,’ for his daring but often silly escapades. Callum shared the good news that was in his black carrier bag. Callum was not conditioned to take a no for an answer and so he lied about the credibility of the plant. The boy could have sold sand to an Arab. Charlie appeared bemused and eager to try the ‘mini miracle’ that Callum was carrying.

The boys did not waste time as they headed to a secluded place behind the nearby secondary school. Charlie had a ravenous desire for maturity and as a result, he rubbed this onion like plant on his pubic area with a reckless ferocity. Callum had to stop him or else there was going to be nothing left for him. Within minutes, Charlie was screaming and writhing in agony. He was waving his hands in the air. “Oh my God! Somebody help me! Mummy!!” screamed Charlie. Callum lost his nerve and bolted. He had never seen someone in so much pain.

The following day, instead of pubic hair, Charlie had numerous king-size blisters. His parents went wild with rage. Callum never used the plant himself. Whenever the boys met Charlie, they burst out laughing, calling him *Mr. Isagenama*.

Sipho

The boys teamed up with a boy who lived near their school. Sipho was something from outer space. He was frequently out of his skull. He took an old leather football and stuffed it with concrete. He would then place it in a strategic place in front of him and challenge passers by to shoot past him and score. One unsuspecting elderly man took the bait, hook line and sinker. The man took off his shoe in order to belt the "ball". Everyone was giggling and suppressing volumes of laughter. This man moved backwards so as to gather momentum. "Oh yes, they didn't call me *Thunder* for no reason," he muttered. He charged towards the ball with a point to prove. When he got to the ball the boys were no longer in the vicinity. The man, eager to show off his strength, kicked the "ball" with all his might. A small crunching sound was overheard. The man screamed in pain. "Oh no! Oh no! I broke my toe! OH no, somebody help, I broke my toe." The boys were gone, only the sound of their giggles were heard, disappearing into the horizon. Only Sipho could mastermind such a daring operation.

There was a new maths teacher in school. He looked like a rugby player and commanded immediate respect, just by his looks. This was the type Sipho enjoyed pulling pranks on. As the teacher was writing on the black board, Sipho placed four drawing pins on his chair.

Everyone in class began to giggle. There was genuine fear in the hearts of some. Firstly, someone could get expelled. Secondly, this new teacher could lose it and cause serious damage. Thirdly, there was a heavy penalty for snitching. Sipho was feared by everyone. He was feared even by the older boys. There was a rumour that he beat his mother very often. Something got broken early in his life. The boys hated him but pretended to like him. All his friends, including Callum and

Casper were his puppets. He bullied everyone around him. He was boss and what he said got done. He made the rules and they were to be followed. Only a fool fought Siphon. Fighting him was suicide. He would continue tormenting his victims well after the fight. Like a hunter, he would stalk his victims and sometimes lay ambushes and beat them until they knelt before him. That was not even a guarantee that the beatings would stop.

The new teacher, once he had finished writing on the board, turned around and slumped on the chair. The expression on his face displayed what was happening in his body. He twisted his lips in agony and cried, "Ouch! Ouch! Ouch!" as he removed the drawing pins from his backside. The whole class fell into a deathly silence. Only Siphon giggled, looking at the new teacher with defiance as if saying "it's me and what are you going to do about it mate?"

Siphon got expelled after a thorough investigation by the school principal. There was a sigh of relief for teachers and students alike. Callum and Casper changed routes on their way to school so that they did not pass by his house. They preferred the route that had dangerous dogs.

Boarding School

Callum passed his exams well and went to study in a boarding school. He was eleven years old. One evening, when they were studying during prep-time, he got bored and wondered how he could turn the evening into fun. He knew that he was not the only one bored with evening studies.

A Mr. Siam supervised evening studies. He was short and vicious. Rumours were that when he administered corporal punishment, he would say to the student, "Suppose I was Gary Player and you were a golf ball, I would swing my club and swing and hit the ball." It is said he would smash a broomstick on your backside. Then he would continue and say, "Suppose that did not satisfy Gary Player, he would tell you to bend down again" and proceed with another blow on your

backside. Such was the rumour about the man that every student feared him before they even saw him.

This boring evening, Callum was not aware that Mr. Siam was patrolling in the shadows with a perfect view of what was happening in the brightly lit classrooms.

Callum stood up calmly and went to the front of the class. He took off his trousers and began gyrating like Michael Jackson. Most students welcomed this distraction, except for those with purpose. "Hooray! Hooray!" The class hooligans shouted, egging him on.

Mr. Siam stood near the window and called him. "Callum!" The boy panicked because he was half-naked. He had thrown his trousers to the "crowd", simulating an imaginary Michael Jackson responding to applause. Mr. Siam immediately summoned the boy to the headmaster's office together with other hooligans in the class. Callum and his lot were to be the first to substantiate the rumours about Mr. Siam.

Siam asked one of the naughty boys, Augustine, to bend over and touch the bottom of the chair. Callum burst out with laughter when he saw Augustine's backside quiver. "That makes it six for you Callum," muttered Siam with a wide grin spread across his bullet-shaped face. The teacher was a sadist. He caned Callum until the boy's buttocks became numb.

In spite of the naughtiness and usual mischief, Callum passed his examinations well. His dad was the source of motivation. Every time he brought his results home, he would see an uncharacteristic smile flash across his dad's face. "Since you have done well in your studies, what do you want for a gift son?" Callum always asked for money without any hesitation.

There was a streak of competitiveness about Callum, especially when it came to education. He competed with his friends and usually came top. At the beginning of the term, Callum usually asked for the syllabus for the term. He did this to

study ahead of other students. He found it spiritually uplifting when he was a step ahead of others.

Callum had another trick up his sleeve. He knew that he wasted a lot of time having fun. He compensated by making sure that he absorbed as much information as possible during school hours. He asked many questions in order to try and understand things faster.

The Taxi Driver

When Casper was ten years of age, he flagged down a taxi that was heading to a suburb north of the city that was renowned for witchcraft. The taxi driver signaled to him that he was full and there was no space. Casper responded with a four-letter expletive. The taxi driver quickly parked his taxi on the side of the road and called out, "Hurry son, there is space just for one person." Just before Casper got in the taxi, the taxi driver grabbed him by the arm and gave him an ear-shattering slap. Everyone in the taxi laughed and the driver drove off muttering something about respect. Casper was left standing alone and confused. He felt like a very tall fool. He stood there, wondering what time of day it was. When his hand ran over the side of his face where the taxi driver's open palm had landed, he felt as though furrows had been dug along his face.

On The Run

At the end of the street there was a pack of dogs that tormented the boys on the way to school and back. There was a fence around this house but the dogs had dug a hole under the fence. The boys approached this house with extreme fear and caution. Their aim was to cover some distance past part of the house and then bolt like lightning on reaching the hole in the fence. The dogs sped to the opening once they spotted the boys. Once the dogs were out of the fence, the chase was on. The boys sped like mad men.

This was a frightening experience for the boys. It happened twice a day and five times a week. Though the dogs would return to their house after a quick dash, there was no margin for error. Everything had to be timed to perfection.

Callum developed a perpetual fear of dogs. Any time there was a dog near him, whether it was on a leash or not, he would freeze, heart pounding in his chest, fighting the urge to run.

The Fete

The most awaited event in Phelan was the Trade Fair. It was a business and a family event at the same time. The hooligan element thrived on such occasions. It was an opportunity for a quick dollar or a moment of fame for the attention seekers. Every one dressed in their Sunday best. The atmosphere was a replica of any carnival. This was Callum and Casper's version of Disneyland.

Casper was tired. He had been on a roller-coaster, swings and everything a ten year old would want to play with. He sat just outside a lavish hotel. His cousin Jack joined him. "Do you see the girl seated opposite us?" he asked Casper. "Yes I can." "I dare you to go there and ask her for a date."

Casper smiled as he was walking towards the stranger. He sat near her. "Hi," Casper broke the silence. The girl stared at him. Casper's hands began to sweat. His tongue stuck to the upper palate. His mouth felt dry. This was his first encounter with a girl.

"My name..." Casper didn't finish the introduction. She screamed at the top of her voice, "Get lost, you stupid boy!" Casper sure felt stupid. He didn't know what to do. His cousin burst out laughing. He felt embarrassed. Everyone was looking at him.

3.

An Encounter with Alcohol

Callum and Casper had a grandfather who adored them. Gramps, as they called him, sat at the back of the house, enjoying the early morning sunshine. On his side was a mug full of beer. The boys made their way to Gramps and sat near the mug of beer.

“Once upon a time there lived Kalulu, the hare and Shumba, the lion,” Gramps began in a soft voice. “There was famine in the land and every one was hungry. Kalulu said to Shumba, “uncle Shum let’s play a game. Put me in this big pot and turn the heat on. If I say to you, “uncle it’s now hot, take me out.” Please do as I say. Then it will be your turn to go into this pot. So if you say to me, “nephew Kalu take me out of this pot, it’s now hot, I will take you out immediately.” Shumba agreed. Kalu got in the pot first. After a few minutes he said, “Uncle Shum it’s now hot, take me out of this pot. Uncle Shumba immediately took him out of the pot. Then it was uncle Shumba’s turn to go into the pot. Kalu closed the pot tightly, sat on the lid and turned the heat to full. After a few minutes uncle Shumba said, “Nephew Kalu take me out of the pot, it is now hot in here.” There was no reply. Uncle Shumba started panicking. “Nephew please take me out of this pot. It is now boiling in here.” Kalu smiled and replied, “well get cooked, you stupid animal.” The lion roared and roared until his roar became a whimper. Finally he died. Kalu had a fantastic meal that day. Well boys what can you learn from this story?”

“Well Gramps, I think we ought not to trust anyone,” exclaimed Callum. “Excellent. Clever boy,” replied Gramps. “I think we should honour our word and be truthful like uncle Shum, although he became mincemeat,” giggled Casper

because he thought Shumba was simple. He would never have fallen for that one, he reasoned. "Now grandson, that is wisdom," paused Gramps. "We should honour our word even if it's costly. Kalulu didn't honour his word, did he? Never allow your life to be at the mercy of others, if you can." Gramps concluded as he picked up his mug. He took two big gulps and put down the mug. Casper slowly picked up the mug, half expecting to be told off. He drank beer as if he was drinking water and then handed it to Callum. Callum finished off what was left.

Gramps played blind. After a while, the boys stood up, staggered and left Gramps. He smiled after them, shook his head and hollered for a refill.

In the front yard, the boys staggered, just like their neighbour who got drunk without limits. The boys enjoyed the attention. They loved the feeling of drowsiness.

One Christmas they decided that they were going to try out the beer for themselves, graduating from the sips Gramps turned a blind eye to. They went to a bottle store and asked an elderly tramp to buy some alcohol for them. This man obliged and brought back five pints of beer. They offered him one and he thanked the boys from the bottom of his heart, his alcohol torn lips breaking into a smile and revealing a row of toothless, pink gums.

The boys sat at the back of the bottle store and brazenly drank alcohol. After drinking a pint each, Callum began to imitate Michael Jackson's Moon Walk dance. Casper joined in the fun. Drinking alcohol in public was common practice in Phelan. What the boys were doing was just cultural. Their school was near the beer garden. They saw their teachers drinking there most of the time.

Callum mischievously addressed his brother as "Mr. Conrad" and spoke with a fake lisp as the alcohol was taking effect, "Mister... eh Conrad, do you think we will have a bumper harvest this year?" Casper responded in kind, "Yeah Mister Oswald. I think we will have sufficient money to pay the children's fees this year." At that, the boys giggled uncontrollably, slowly getting drunk.

Callum fell over twice on their way home. Other children saw them falling over. They began to follow them. One elderly woman saw the possibility of these youngsters being run over by a car. She took hold of both their hands and escorted them home.

“Oh thank you very much for looking after my boys,” remarked the boys’ mom. She was visibly embarrassed. What would the church folk say? What would the neighbours say? She did not know where to hide. Mrs. Melissa Isaacs needed a vacation as far away from earth as possible.

The boys were rolling on the ground in their back yard and then the vomiting began. It was no longer fun. The earth was spinning round and round. “Help!!” Screamed their mother. “Somebody help me. Help. Callum is dying.” Callum was passing out quickly. “Don’t worry mom I ema okay,” Callum barely managed to say a few words. Casper burst out laughing. Their dad came with a bucket full of ice water and emptied it on the boys. He wasn’t laughing and judging by the looks on his face, their butts were going to regret drinking.

4.

An Encounter with Drugs

The first time Callum's dad met Matt, he felt an incredible unease. Matt had blood-shot eyes and his lips were grey from years of tobacco and pot smoking. He had a baby face that was covered in scars, a baby hoodlum I guess.

There was a rumour that Matt had been expelled from another school. He quickly made friends, handpicked by instinct.

During tea break, Matt summoned Callum to the school grounds by a slight head flick and Callum was to discover why his dad disliked Matt.

Matt was with two of his other mates and they were smoking something that stank. Callum asked them what they were smoking and Matt replied, "A spliff." He added, "Do you want to try some? It's good for your mental health you know". He continued with a wry smile on his face, "Dis is de forbidden fruit that Adam and da Eve smoked. It is banned because de politicians, razclat don't want us to think like dem. It is a wise man's cigarette, you know." Callum did not need any more sales pitches, he grabbed the 'spliff' and dragged a long puff. Matt advised, 'Retain some of the smoke, baby face'. Callum obliged and had about six puffs before anything untoward happened.

Everything changed before Callum: his friends seemed far away and they spoke in echoes. His thoughts drifted into another world of bright colours. He kept muttering, 'Who am I?' to which Matt replied, almost in an inaudible whisper, 'Monkey man'. Matt and his mates burst out with laughter. Callum became paranoid. Why were they all looking at him with such sadistic eyes? Suddenly, his thoughts were interrupted by the shrill sound of the school bell ringing, signalling

the end of tea break. Callum was still holding the 'spliff' in his hand. Everyone started running for class and Callum joined them, with the spliff.

He got in the classroom, with the spliff still smouldering in his right hand. "Throw that stuff away, baby face. You'll get us in trouble," warned Matt in a tense voice. Callum was high, very high. His eyes were red and blank. His lips were white. He turned back and ran to the place where they were smoking the spliff and threw it down there! Everyone was in stitches. "Why did he not stub it outside the classroom?" his friends enquired in between short bursts of laughter.

At this time, all the other students were in class and learning. The History teacher was a strict disciplinarian who hated noise including the sound of squeaking chairs. Matt glanced over his shoulder and saw Callum's eyes; he was amazed by the redness of his eyes. Callum's eyes would surely give them away, thought Matt.

Meanwhile Callum stared at the teacher, who was writing on the board. Callum heard voices. He said, "Matt, Matt I hear a lady with a squeaky voice saying, "Me don't wanna laugh." Matt suppressed a heavy laughter that was bubbling inside of him. Callum imitated the voice, "Me don't wanna laugh." Matt could not hold himself any longer; he burst out with laughter as if a bottle of champagne had been opened. The history teacher dropped his chalk, turned around and caught Callum wiping away a smile off his face. He sent them for detention. But then this was not an unusual occurrence for the boys.

Callum fell in with the wrong crowd. He really didn't like the drugs that much. They made him paranoid but he did not want to disappoint his new friend so he kept smoking.

Casper on the other hand had a nasty experience with drugs and never touched them again. He had a "Wholipa" spliff to himself and nearly went mad. He stood near the window of his bedroom, staring at the flowers outside his home. Then all of a sudden, out-of-the blue, he spun around and yelled "Mum". He later

explained to Callum that he thought he had stopped breathing. Callum found that very funny. Casper did not. He quit drugs.

5.

An Encounter with Bullies

Archie

A low self-esteemed bully lived near the boys' home. He looked miserable most of the time except when he was dishing out pain to younger boys. Casper met him most of the time when he was sent to the shops.

Archie was tall, bow-legged and loud mouthed. He was dishonest and very cruel. He had a piano-like backside and his short arms just hung around his sides. Archie looked like a pregnant penguin and seemed aware of it. He hardly bathed and most boys teased, in his absence of course, that he had some "little Philistines" hiding behind his ears.

Archie was around fifteen years of age. He did unspeakable things to small boys. One day he leapt into the air and then quickly pulled Casper's head towards his backside and farted loud on his forehead. Casper went mad. He charged at Archie like a bull. Archie pretended to run but then quickly lifted his leg and suspended it in mid-air for a second. Casper rammed against Archie's underfoot at full speed. The bully chuckled mercilessly at Casper. Casper, blinded by rage, picked two stones and let them fly with an intensity that almost satisfied his need to get even. The first stone missed Archie's head by a few inches. "Lucky bully," hissed Casper. The second stone however found its target, at the side of Archie's head. He fell down with a loud thud followed by a small sound, like that of a kettle releasing steam. Blood trickled across his face.

It was lights out for Archie. The sound was good news to the little boys that had witnessed a moment of madness. Casper still wanted a piece of Archie until an

elderly man intervened. An ambulance was called and the bully was taken to hospital. Casper disappeared through the alleys, half-satisfied with what he had just done. Some day he will grow up too, jump and open the bully's mouth and..., fantasised Casper.

A few weeks passed after the incident. Casper was always extra cautious when he got to the shops. He knew what Archie was capable of doing. Casper hated being the hunted. The shopping centre was a hunting ground and Archie was a predator. This had to change.

Casper caught a glimpse of Archie from quite a distance. He immediately picked up a broken bottle. He wasn't going to be a prey. 'Don't do it'. He ignored the small voice within that sounded like his father's voice. Like a lion, he stalked Archie, hiding behind people when the need arose. "Casper, what are you doing with a broken bottle." The boy froze. This was his father's voice. "I was going to throw it in the bin", lied Casper with confidence. He regretted the missed opportunity.

Shereni

Callum and Casper had an uncle whom Callum feared. He feared this man with every fibre of his being. Shereni was always drunk. He always stunk of alcohol or rusted iron and sometimes both. Every time he visited the boys' home, Callum vanished into his parents' bedroom. His brothers and sisters thought it was fun, so they told Shereni where Callum was hiding and he would go after him.

Callum knew that there was something wrong with the man. Shereni used to haul him out under the bed with violent force. He enjoyed seeing Callum fearful. He then tossed the frightened boy sky high before putting him down. Callum ran out of breath in between the juggles. Shereni did not care. Callum observed through the corner of his eye that this man was grinning. Shereni then planted a wet, alcohol drenched kiss on Callum's cheek. The boy shuddered but pretended that

all was well. He saw into Shereni's soul and shivered. Everyone was smiling except Callum.

This man traumatized Callum. Callum was happy when his dad told Shereni not to visit them, especially when he had had something to drink. Shereni was hardly listening. All he did was laugh, a cold laugh. Rumor had it that he once broke police handcuffs and attacked a dozen police officers who scattered in different directions, each to the safety of their wives. A dozen! Callum believed the story.

One day Shereni slapped Callum on the back of his head. Callum felt as though a ton of bricks had descended on his head. Shereni looked at the frightened boy and said, "What are you going to do about it little schemer?" Callum kept quiet. Years later, Shereni was detained under the mental health laws. He was diagnosed with schizophrenia.

Trevor

Trevor was another bully who lived near Casper and Callum. He was short and strong. Trevor's eight-year-old frame was wrapped in pure muscle. No one fought Trevor. His muscles spoke and fought on his behalf. Something got broken early in his life. He was extremely vicious. His life sped from one calamity to another. It toughened him to the point of heartlessness.

Trevor was extravagantly talented in all sports. He was the best in high jump, hundred meters, two hundred metres, long jump, boxing, football and table tennis. He did everything in style. In high jump, he somersaulted over the bar in a way that made Callum not only envious but also scared.

The mere thought of Trevor gave him cold feet. There was something in Trevor that scared him. He couldn't spot it, but it was real. Trevor slapped Callum wherever they met. Callum had accepted the continual humiliation for a season.

Then one day at school, Callum stood up to Trevor. The fight back had begun. Trevor, full of arrogance, barked, "I will see you at One o'clock sharp at the Arena."

The 'Arena' was a valley behind the school grounds. It was a place where arguments were settled with fists. Callum was scared to death and hardly learnt anything that morning. His packed lunch tasted like sand.

News soon spread throughout the school about the upcoming fight. Callum wanted to chicken out but he knew it was too late. The impending fight had gained so much publicity, it had to happen. Callum tried to get hold of Casper but it was too late. Casper had already gone home, ducking the last lesson before lunch.

The bell rang for lunch and Callum lost control of himself. He was shaking from head to toe and speaking incoherently. His mouth was dry and his lips white with fear. He felt like using the toilet but circumstances wouldn't allow him. This was the first fight he was going to fight alone without his brother.

The arena was already full of about twenty spectators. When Callum made his entrance, his many friends shouted his name with approval. "Fearless Cal" they shouted. Trevor was already in the centre of the ring, fists hanging down by his side.

Callum's adrenaline kicked in at the sight of Trevor. With his eyes closed, he charged like a bull and lashed out violently. He screamed. He kicked. Trevor did not have a chance. He tried to fight back but Callum was all over him. Trevor had been taken by surprise. He fell down and Callum camped on his chest and pounded him at a furious pace. Trevor screamed in pain and all the spectators disappeared. Only Matt remained watching and enjoying the fight. The school caretaker heard the screams and came to Trevor's rescue. "Stop it boys!" He separated the boys. Trevor was covered in dust and his lips were swollen. Callum was breathing heavily and wanted some more. Trevor, with his tail in between his

legs headed for home. He had utter respect for Callum from that day. Whenever he met Callum, he called him "Cousy".

Callum's sister, Cathy, enrolled him for karate lessons. She had grown weary of Callum's pleas. Callum showed off his newly acquired skills in public. Boys in his class took turns to give him piggy back rides to and from school. Anyone who dared challenge this self-acquired privilege would witness a Bruce Lee-like offensive. Callum was proud of ~~himse~~himself.

6.

Unknown Borders

Callum and Casper's parents decided that Rhodesia was not good for the boys. Their father arranged for them to go to Botswana because of the liberation war in Rhodesia. At the station, their father held their hands in prayer. "Father God," he started, "I have been looking after these two boys of mine. Now I commit them into your hands. Look after them for me until we meet again. In Jesus' name, Amen." Callum and Casper felt goose bumps all over their bodies as their father prayed. With those words, they plunged blindly into the dangerous adult world.

In the train, Callum's mind was completely absorbed. He thought about his parents. He thought about his friends. He thought about life in general and for the first time, he thought about the future. What would become of him? Again he felt a tinge of fear. A fear of the unknown. He was going for thirteen now. His life had been carefree. He realised then that the parental shelter in which he had thrived in for so long had abruptly come to an end. He recalled how he had been pampered with the best things life could offer a child. The only struggle he knew was having a bath.

Next on Callum's thought list, was his dad. His dad had almost given up on them. He had become quieter. Maybe the boys had split the rock that had made him a once formidable disciplinarian. Callum remembered how they would come home around two in the morning, drunk as sailors and his dad would only respond by saying, "Good evening boys. Your dinner is in the warmer." Then he would disappear into his bedroom. Callum's mom had gone overseas to study at the time. Casper and Callum would then exchange dispirited glances. They wanted to change for their father's sake but there was just too much fun lying around.

Callum soon realised how he had taken everything for granted. Again he felt a small tug of fear. What was to become of him? He thought about an orphan called Petros. Petros was soft-spoken and gentle. A humble aroma of green soap hung about him most of the time.

Petros was very thin. His lower lip bled from some vitamin deficiency. He did not have black school shoes. He only wore brown shoes, whose soles were completely worn out, making standing still a difficult task. Petros never wore a proper uniform. His khaki shirt was shredded at the collar and the shorts were double stitched at the back with different types of material. He faced terrible hardships in his young life.

The weather never forgave Petros. The rain pounded him to and from school. The blistering winter winds filtered through his tattered clothing and chilled his bone marrow. His young but seasoned body was exposed without mercy around the waist and around his elbows. He had goose bumps all over his body. Sometimes he had frostbite on his fingers. Sometimes he had flu. Sometimes he coughed non-stop, annoying some of his classmates.

No one cared. His eyes were full of pain. Life was extremely hard for him. Petros went into the boys' toilet, entered the little cubicle and shut the door behind him. He lifted his frail arms to the air and closed his eyes. Tears flowed down his cheeks and he prayed. He did this as often as he felt sad or depressed.

A few boys were having a laugh outside the cubicle. For a minute Petros wished he could swap his life with them. He longed to be a child, not having to scarp for a living at his age. But then his comfort was his mother's life. She trusted God and He didn't disappoint her. Petros had related to Callum her mother's last words. "Son I am so sad to leave you in this world. Some mother somewhere is leaving behind an inheritance worth a fortune for their child. It would be good if I had that. But what I leave you, will not only last your lifetime but it will last you an eternity. I leave you with Jesus. He has been our Provider and Comforter. But you must believe that He is with you. He is only alive to those people who believe in

Him. Son, with Jesus, as your pilot, dry bones live, prison gates open. Something in David was bigger than the giant Goliath”.

At the time, Callum was half listening to what Petros was talking about. But on the journey to Botswana, those words put on flesh.

Petros persevered through a life that appeared crumbling at every turn. He was very focused for a twelve year old. When his father was alive, he mentioned the word pilot. It struck a burning desire in him. “Dad what is a pilot?” Asked Petros with an untold eagerness to the meaning. “A pilot is a person who flies airplanes.” “I am going to be a pilot,” said Petros with ultimate confidence.

During summer holidays, other children went home but Petros remained at school, working in the garden in order to earn his school fees.

Callum remembered telling her sister about Petros. They sold sweets and gave all their proceeds to Petros. Sometimes it was twenty pence and sometimes thirty pence. Then, one cloudy day, Petros did not come to school. That was the last they saw of him. Callum agonized.

Casper interrupted Callum’s thoughts, “Don’t think too much, man.” At twelve and fourteen years respectively, the boys ventured into the adult world, not by their own choice but through circumstances beyond their control.

The Future

Callum’s thoughts turned on his future. He had wanted to be a bus driver when he grew up. The bus was the next big thing in Phelan after sliced bread. He wanted to drive a bus and give his friends and the girls he fancied a free ride. That is what the bus drivers did. Then on off days, the people would ply him with alcohol and the women would be all over him like a swarm of bees, imagined Callum.

Callum was to regret ever dreaming of being a bus driver when he was at boarding school. The other students laughed until he felt humiliated. Even the teacher joined in the laughter. He wondered what the joke was. The high school he went to had students from middle class. Callum assumed they were outright snobs. He became the butt-end of jokes, something he was unaccustomed to. "Vava vroom!" They teased. This had made him very violent. He learnt to bite his lower lip in a bid to control his rage. The rules were strict in this school. The boundaries could not be negotiated. Many students had been expelled for very petty crimes according to Callum.

Casper and Callum had been educated and taught by the world. The world had been their church all their lives. Their dreams centred on what they saw in Phelan. They loved the pleasures of the world: money, sex, drugs, alcohol, lying, fighting and everything that money could buy.

It was Casper's turn to consider life, not by choice but venturing into the unknown. Casper remembered the sermons that he had heard earlier when he was around ten years. He remembered being taught about the vanity of life. Yes the vanity of life. "All this pleasure," the preacher had said, "is like a fleeting wind. It will soon pass away." Casper closed his eyes and prayed. He always felt better when he prayed. He remembered how God had intervened in his early years with chronic asthma. He gave thanks to God for healing him. Something always shifted in his chest whenever he mentioned the name of Jesus. There was something about the name of Jesus. He could not tell Callum for fear of being laughed at and ridiculed. But, he said to himself, there is something about the name of Jesus.

Casper wanted to be a preacher. But the folk in Phelan would laugh at him. He was sure of that: a preacher? The mere thought of it made him cringe. He would be the joke of the century especially because his behaviour was well known to all. Maybe in Botswana they would accept him as a preacher, one day. His hometown was full of ridicule for the man of God.

Callum soon found a scholarship and went to study in the United Kingdom. This was a dream come true. He was in an isolated part of England called Reigate.

Callum arrived in England with high expectations and some of them were unfounded. First he thought it possible that people back home in Phelan could watch him on television. He therefore swaggered to meet his program advisor.

Reigate was refreshingly new for Callum. The streets were clean and the houses appeared close to one another. Callum immediately noted the differences. In Phelan, he drank alcohol outside bottle stores although it was illegal. One had to be alert whilst drinking. In Reigate no one was drinking alcohol around street corners. Where were the drinking joints?

Finally, he saw a black man after hours of seeing whites only. This was England. "Hi," bellowed Callum with a deep southern African accent. He was sixteen now.

This man looked at him with amazement and said nothing. After three such encounters, he made up his mind; when in Rome do what the Romans do. In spite of how much he looked physically or how he dressed, no one really paid attention to him. No one was worried whether he was good, bad, holy or handsome.

As days and weeks passed Callum began to feel very lonely. Weekends were long and boring. What kind of a place was this? He went to college in the morning and when it was dark he returned to his digs only to find his landlady had cooked potatoes once more. Callum was never a whiner but he found himself thinking "cold, dark, lonely, and potatoes!!"

After some two months, Callum began a frantic search for a girlfriend. Meantime he drowned himself with different brands of alcohol from Guinness to bitter lager. It was difficult to make friends, so he took up gambling.

Callum felt very lonely. The weather wasn't helping either. It was gloomy and raining most of the time. At times he felt suicidal, especially when he got home from college. The more he studied, the lonelier he became.

Alcohol and fruit machines were his way of escape over weekends. Even in the pub people appeared unfriendly. He went to the local night club when the pub closed. He still struggled to find someone to talk to.

Then he met a not so good looking English girl by the name of Chauntelle. She was short and squat. Chauntelle was red haired and freckled. Her hooked nose was a distinct land mark in an otherwise chubby face.

Callum asked for a dance and she quickly put her purse on the table and obliged. Even Callum thought she was not good looking. Chauntelle had just been left by boyfriend number four for the same reason, ugliness. She offered what no one had so far, friendship and for that, Callum was very grateful. They danced together that night, completely lost in each other's embrace.

Chauntelle knew she was not pretty. She had decided to try someone different. Callum was different. He was black and with an afro hairstyle that made him look visible. Callum showed large white teeth when he smiled. That's what caught Chauntelle's attention; those lovely white teeth in a black background. She liked the contrast.

Chauntelle knew that what she was getting herself into was intolerable, not only to her close friends but also to those she knew from afar.

That night finished off well for them. Callum accompanied her right to her door step although she felt that her neighbours were looking through their windows.

Callum was doing very well in his studies. Whilst he could solve quadratic equations and calculus, he struggled to power on a computer.

In his first year at college Callum used to kneel by his bedside and pray before going to sleep. Now he was in second year and had read a lot about Karl Marx, he

had slowly stopped praying. Callum began to challenge his own Christian beliefs. In debates he was often quoted saying, 'religion was opium for the oppressed.'

Callum had forgotten the prayers he had been taught by his parents. He had forgotten Sunday school. In fact many had thought his getting a scholarship was miraculous considering his behaviour. Some students talked about their culture and traditions and Callum even thought that was funnier.

Callum was an avid reader. He read literature, psychology, philosophy, politics, self-help books and poetry. He believed that everything begins with you and ends with you. Whenever he stood to speak, everyone went silent, listening to his well-chosen words and his way of thinking.

One day Callum had an altercation with a girl from Haiti who was nick-named 'The Witch'. She was angry with Callum. She smiled in spite of her anger. She looked Callum straight in the eye and said, 'Surely today, you shall know me spiritually.' Callum laughed nervously. He had never heard threats of that nature.

When Callum got home from college, he had a very heated argument with his landlord. The landlord started throwing his belongings onto the street. 'Go and report to whomever. This is my house and you are out, right now.'

Callum wandered the streets of Reigate. He tried to get hold of Chauntelle but failed because Chauntelle's father would not give her the phone.

The only other house he knew was Dora's house, the girl from Haiti who was dubbed 'The Witch.' He had no other option. He made his way to Dora's house.

'Dora, I'm really sorry about today. Please I need accommodation for at least a night. My landlord has just kicked me out.' Dora stared hard at him for what looked like an eternity to Callum. She nodded her head and opened her door.

The moment Callum walked in that house, he felt a strange presence. Dora said, 'Follow me,' and went upstairs. She opened a door of what appeared to be a guestroom. She let him in and said, 'Feel at home. I will get you a blanket.'

She went downstairs and brought an old, black blanket. Dora did not make eye contact this time. She said, 'Life is very funny, very funny indeed.' With those words she closed the door. Callum felt strange and for no reason his hair was on edge. He slowly slid in between two black sheets. Callum wondered why the colour theme in this room was black. There were two calabash pots placed above the fire place. Callum fought the urge to check what was inside.

Directly in front of the bed was a ladder that led to the loft. Callum refused to think about the loft and its contents. When he took a quick look around the room, his heart started racing. There were lots of charms and animal hair around some artifacts. Right above his head was a black hat and beads hanging on the wall.

Callum thought about the weather outside. If it wasn't freezing outside, he would have gone to the station for the night.

A knock at the door startled him. 'Yes,' answered Callum rather timidly. 'Switch off the light', a male voice commanded him. His heart missed a bit. Who was that, he asked himself, not expecting an answer. Callum switched off the lights. His heart was pounding so hard that he thought it could be heard from downstairs.

Callum found it impossible to sleep. His mind was active and his heart pounding hard against his chest. Then he slowly dosed into a very deep sleep. It felt unnatural and he desperately tried to awaken himself.

Callum woke up in the early hours of the morning, his clothes drenched in sweat and his face covered in dried salt. He was dehydrated.

Callum quickly dressed up and went downstairs, straight into the kitchen. He found Dora drinking tea.

'Dora thanks for the accommodation. I have to run now, bye.' Without turning her head to look at Callum, Dora coolly replied, 'The wicked have no rest.'

She asked, "Why are you in a hurry to die?" Then we heard an Ambulance siren. She further said, "You can hear lives are being saved. Why are you in a hurry to go to a place you don't know of?" Those words changed my perspective to life. Having studied sciences and evolution in particular, I had always imagined that death is the end of everything. However, I was not so sure anymore. What if there is life after death? What if there is God? This equation became even more complex. The very thought of hell scared me.

I passed my exams and went to live in Doncaster. I could not commit suicide but I could get myself killed, I reasoned. I embarked on a self-destroying mission. I spent most of the time in the gymnasium and the results were evident. I also joined a ju-jitsu class. Deep down I figured I was tough: karate and now ju-jitsu. In a way I was. I remember one time fighting with bouncers and coming out without a scratch! The combo-martial arts were working, or so I thought until someone burst that bubble. It was a drunk like me. We bumped against each other near a bar called Nags Head. This man just turned around and gave me belting. Just like that. The following morning I encouraged myself.

I then went to live in London and had a friend whose name was Larry. He was Jamaican. We met at the wrong time. He was at the peak of his violent life and I was on the brink of suicide.

We drank Special Brew and smoked a lot of marijuana. Once we got drunk, everything was possible. I nicknamed Larry, "One-time specialist". He punched once and it was more than enough. He had a knockout blow in either hand. It made him a formidable ally. We went together to Blues Parties: joints with loud reggae music and darkly lit rooms. This was the eighties. We used to do battle with skinheads. If you were black and clever and you saw a bunch of skinheads, you would turn around and run for your life. If you didn't run then you would know sooner whether heaven or hell were real.

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One day we walked into a pub that was frequented by skinheads. They all looked at us at the same time. Once we were in Larry said, "African Man don't run". He was a mind reader! Four skinheads stood up. Larry grabbed a chair, smashed it on his knee and gave me a chair leg. He then shouted in Patwa, "Any man move me gim leaks!" They all stood still. We slowly retreated to the door, with me leading the way, by at least two yards. "Don't run man," insisted Larry against my conventional wisdom. The two feet gap reassured me. They would get Larry first.

My legs had never let me down, from Phelandaba. It was a close shave. Fighting became a hobby amid other self-destroying hobbies. Life was plain dark. I enjoyed blackouts. I would get so drunk that I could hardly remember what happened the previous night. I remember I would stand outside the pub and look up to heaven and shout, "Come night!" Night: is the time when the baddies come out of their closets. One night a college friend invited me to his hometown in Devon. I argued with his hometown mates. It was snowing and they abandoned me in the Pub: drunk, penniless and alone, miles from home. The barman felt pity for me and drove me home.

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Cal and CAS

The Exit Door

Callum had a nagging fear that kept tugged in his heart for a long time. He feared losing his parents. As a child, he had seen a family that was once prosperous lose a father. This family slowly descended into poverty and alcoholism. They soon lost the family business they had inherited from the old man. The workers eventually bought them out. This family became desolate and desperate. People looked at them and shook their heads, "Surely, riches have wings."

In the train, Callum's mind was at work. He thought about his parents, his friends and about life in general. His life had been without a captain. He remembered how he had been pampered with the best things life could offer a child. The only struggle he knew was his homework. He remotely wondered what would become of him.

Next on Callum's thought list, was his dad. His dad looked as if he had almost given up on them. He had become quieter and softer over the years. May be they had split the rock that had made their dad a once formidable disciplinarian. Callum recalled how they would come home around two in the morning drunk as sailors and his dad would just say, "Good evening boys. Your dinner is in the warmer." Then he would disappear into his bedroom. Casper and Callum would then exchange dispirited glances. They wanted to change for their father's sake but there was just too much fun lying around.

Callum soon realised how he had taken everything for granted. He felt a small tug of fear. What was to become of him?—Casper interrupted Callum's thoughts, "Don't think too much mhuna." At sixteen and eighteen

years respectively, the boys ventured into the adult world, not by their own choice but through circumstances beyond their control.

The wicked have no rest

THE BAD SEED

The bad seed

There was a man who was supposedly my uncle. I feared this man with every fibre of my being. He was loud, reckless and always drunk. He was a strong mechanic with hands as tough as steel. He was always stinking of petrol, grease and rusted iron. Every time he visited home, I would dart, petrified, and hid under my parents' bed. My brothers thought it was fun, so they would tell him where I was hiding and he would come after me. He was schizophrenic. I knew as a child of two years that he was not right. He would haul me out under the bed with violent determination. He enjoyed seeing fear in me. He would then juggle me sky high several times before putting me down. I would run out of breath and, through the corner of my eye, would observe that he wasn't concerned. He would then place a wet, alcohol drenched kiss on my cheek. Everyone would be smiling except me.

This man traumatized me. I was happy when my Father asked him not come when he was drunk. He was not even listening. All he did was laugh, and unnaturally at that. Rumor had it that he once broke police handcuffs and attacked a dozen police officers who scattered in different directions, each to the safety of their wives. A dozen!

One day he slapped me on the back of my head. I felt as though a ton of bricks descended on my back. Fear turned into terror. He probably planted the seed of fear that was to torment me later in life.

We had a ruthless teacher called Thodlana. He would write a problem on the board and then would sit in front of the class and make himself comfortable, like a native chief. The class would be quiet you could hear the flowerpots on the windowsills growing. He beat us with an electric cord and everyone feared him. He ignited my mind to excellence through the power of fear.

One day he made a ruling; no one was to go home until all the sums correct. This was a torment for both Vee and I. However, even more for my brother because he did not like school and that is putting it mildly. My brother calmly stood up and dashed for the door with an amazing athleticism that would have surprised even the legend, Carl Lewis. "Prefects, don't let him go.

Catch him," shouted Thodlana menacingly at my brother. Vee was gone. We just saw specks dust and flashes of brown uniform disappearing around the bend. Those boys were not a match for Vee. They soon returned, empty-handed and defeat spread across their immature faces.

On the run

It appeared I was on the run for most of my childhood. At the end of the street, there was a pack of dogs that tormented me to and from school. There was a fence around this house but the dogs had dug a hole under the fence towards the side of the house that ran alongside our house. I approached this house with care, literally tip toeing. My aim was to cover some distance past this house and then bolt like lightning past the rest of the house. Once these dogs saw me, they would also take off towards the small opening under the fence. By the time they got out, I would be gone. What a frightening exercise! There was no room for error. My timing had to be perfect. Explain your feelings.

The problem with ghettos, other than drugs and other social ills, is restricted possibilities. You hardly see abundance. People are always scratching for a living and hustling for bread. The conversation is about

drugs, who got killed over the weekend, bread and prices. You grow up with a survivalist mentality. Our neighbourhood had four big houses in one exclusive cluster.

Business people owned these houses. Coincidentally they owned nightclubs and supermarkets.

We also had a renowned politician in the area, Joshua Nkomo. He was our local hero. They called him "Umdala". This literally means the "elderly one". It was somewhat funny to me since it was the elderly people who called him the "elderly one". He must be very old, I reasoned. My dreams naturally bordered on politics, business and crime. I also dreamt about being a bus driver. The bus was the next big thing. I wanted to drive a bus and give my friends and the girls a free ride.

The Folly of Youth

When I was thirteen years of age, I flagged down a taxi that was heading to Pumula, a suburb north of the city that was renowned for witchcraft. The taxi driver signaled to me that he was full and there was no space. I responded with a four-letter expletive. He slowly parked his taxi and called out to me, "Son there is space just for one person. Hurry!" Just before, I got in the car, he grabbed me by the arm and gave me an ear-shattering slap. Everyone in the taxi laughed and he drove off muttering something about respect. I felt like a fool. I stood there, confused and wondering what time of day it was. When I ran my hand over the side of my face where his open palm had landed, I felt grooves. I just prayed that his fingerprints were not imprinted for life on my cheek. Evil man!

My cousin, Sekani once asked me if I knew how to propose love to a girl. "Of course I do," was my immediate answer. We were seated outside his home, on the veranda. A girl by the name of Monica passed by. She was my age.

My cousin who was older than me, said, "Time to show your skills". He shouted, "Monica! Come here, Fanele wants to talk to you." He immediately

hid behind the front door, within an earshot of our impending conversation.

“Hie Fanele. What did you want to talk to me about?” I was sweating and my palms were wet and my tongue stuck to the palate. My mouth felt dry.

This was my first encounter with a girl. I thought about Isaac Hayes popular song, I STAND ACCUSED. So I said to Monica, “Sit down and make yourself comfortable. How long have we known each other? About..” Before I could finish Isaac Hayes lines she screamed and shouted, “Futseki wena Fanele. Don’t be stupid.” Futseki actually means, get lost.

My cousin emerged from his hiding place bursting with laughter. I felt embarrassed, very embarrassed. Monica had not fallen for my favourite lines.

Fletcher High School

Every Saturday we had an inspection at Fletcher High School, a boarding school that resembled a hotel. We were expected to wash and iron our bed linen and clothes. We would then stand erect next to our beds, then the Deputy Headmaster would inspect our beds, suitcases and lockers. That particular weekend I hadn’t done my laundry and I had only one clean sheet. I used it as an under sheet, top sheet and as a pillow case. It was a work of art that should have fooled most people. The bearded Deputy Headmaster was not fooled; he unrolled the sheet and slapped me so hard, I fell over the bed. All the other students suppressed giggles.

One time I wrote a letter to my father and girlfriend at the same time. I mistakenly put the letter to my father into my girlfriend’s envelope and vice-versa. You can imagine the embarrassment.

Our Disneyland

The most awaited event in our hometown was the Trade Fair. It was a family event. However, the hooligan element thrived on such occasions. It

was also an opportunity for a quick dollar or a moment of fame for them. Everyone was in their Sunday best. The atmosphere was a replica of any carnival. This was our version of Disneyland. I was taking a stroll on one of the roads leading to the ice cream vendor when I saw a squabble nearby. A former school girlfriend was being assaulted by a thickset man of about twenty something years old. He was trained in martial arts as evidenced by the roundhouse kicks and ferocious punches he served this girl with. When she saw me, she spun around and screamed, "Help Mba, help!" She was running towards me and her attacker was hot on her wheels. I remembered the old African Proverb, Kibo kagwala akulasililo (Cowards have lesser funerals in their homes). I took off like a Boeing 747 with the woman screaming behind me. Her screams were slowly smothered by the noise of the turbulent wind on my ears as I accelerated towards safety.

Mzilikazi

Chapter 4

The Warrior

Have you realised that when you have a serious problem on your hands, it is difficult to hide it. Well I had serious problems in my thirties. At the time, I was undergoing crisis times. I had a terrible migraine headache, nightmares and near accidents. My life was on the threshold of an impending doom, I could sense it. I was living under a dark cloud of fear. I remember asking a certain Christian friend, called Stan, whom I was studying with, "Do you believe in witchcraft?"

I was even embarrassed asking such a question. How could a scientist like me be so dumb as to ask about witchcraft? Of course, it was silly. Deep down I was not sure though. "Yes, there is witchcraft." I found a true friend.

I mentioned the difficulties I had encountered to a sister named Tami who was studying medicine. She immediately called me to a quiet room in this Guesthouse. She started praying.

All I remember is that there was something different about this prayer. I felt goose bumps and there appeared to be more light in this room. She then asked me to go to church with her. She came knocking on my door. I kept quiet. She knocked and I still did not respond.

Then Stan invited me to Church. Now the last recollection of church was when I was a child. I quit because it was boring. Very boring. He encouraged me that things are a bit different in his church. There was an evangelist from America who was performing miracles. I needed miracles.

The service

I came to the service full of doubt and pregnant with problems. I figured get your healing and get out. The place was a deserted cinema. It did not look like Church. The congregation was not the one I remembered back then when I was a child. There were young people and most of them were lifting their hands to heaven, worshipping. The atmosphere was electric. The music was similar to what I was listening to but the words were full of "God this, Lord that". I felt goose bumps all around my body, but then the air conditioning was on. The Pastor stood up to take an offering. I nearly laughed. This is what Christians are good for, I thought, free rides. The Pastor said something about ten percent of your salary. Wow! I could not believe what I was hearing, ten percent of what? How could he do that to these gullible people? These "victims" were shouting innocently "Amen! Amen!" I just thought mate I cannot be easily duped out of my hard-earned cash.

The evangelist was introduced and he started dishing out the scriptures. Honestly, I cannot remember any of them. Then he said, "I can feel the Holy Spirit. Thank you for your presence Lord." Again, I felt goose bumps all

over my body. Was this a coincidence? I looked at the air conditioner. Were they manipulating the air conditioning? You just never know.

The evangelist was something that I had not seen in the pulpit for a longtime. He would jump, lift his hands to heaven and then shout, "Praise the Lord!" The congregation would echo, "Praise the Lord!" I also joined the second time around and said, "Praise the Lord," with a smile.

The evangelist was praying for a fragile Indian girl who appeared bound in a wheel chair for ages. Her legs were hairy and abnormally thin. Then with authority and confidence, the evangelist shouted, "In the name of Jesus I say get up from that chair!" This girl immediately got up from the chair. Now I saw this with my own eyes. I had observed this girl and concluded that she was really wheel chair bound. I am very observant. This was the real deal. All skepticism escaped from my heart.

I now looked at the evangelist with different eyes. This was a man of God. No one could do these things without God. He then called people to the front to pray for them. He said something about all of us having "sinned and fallen short of God's expectations" and that we needed "forgiveness through the shed blood of Jesus Christ". Then all of a sudden, he pointed in my direction and said, "There is a young man over there. This is your last chance. You have been narrowly escaping death. The enemy is coming for you tonight and you know it. Make peace with the Lord." Man, this person was reading my biography from the pulpit.

I was debating whether to go forward for a prayer or not. There were two distinct voices. One voice was small, peaceful and prompting. It was pleading with me. It seemed to say, "Mba this is your last chance. Take it son." Even something in Stan's eyes was urging me to go to the pulpit. Then there was the second voice. It was forceful, arrogant and mocking. This voice seemed to say, "Don't be stupid, man. People will laugh at you. You do not belong to this lot.

This lot has been poisoned."

After what looked like an audible argument, I stood up and went to the altar. The congregation clapped their hands and I did not know why. The evangelist prayed for us. These were the sinners. The ones who did not have a relationship with Jesus Christ. He said something like, "Say this after me; Father I ask you to forgive my sins. I thank you Jesus for what you did for me in the Calvary." I said it and felt much better. "What is this Calvary?" I pondered. What did Jesus do in the Calvary? The words stuck like glue. "Thank you for what you did for us in the Calvary."

That night I was to return to my guesthouse where I lived. Now things had been so bad that I had to burn every night something like incense. I was told it chases away evil spirits. However, that night was different. Somehow, I knew that I must not burn that incense. I tried prayer, single-handed. It was a mammoth task. After thirty years of prodigal living, I was bankrupt of prayers. I just remembered the words "Our Father". I struggled, "What are the words that follow after Our Father?" Then I remembered the words, "Thank you Jesus for what you did for us in the Cavalry." I said this statement ten times. I figured that for this statement to work effectively, I must stand in front of the statue of Jesus hanging on the cross. So I went downstairs and recited the words, looking directly at the statue of Jesus. Surely he has heard my prayers now, I thought. I went back to sleep and just as I was dozing I heard an unnatural, massive and guttural laughter that sent a chill down my spine. I awoke, sweating and scared. I recited the words, "Thank you Jesus for what you did for me in the Cavalry", twenty times with more fervency and vigour.

I went back to sleep. Then I had a dream that inspired me. I dreamt right in the middle of a jungle similar to the Congo Forest. There were huge, scary animals that were chasing me. When they were about to catch me, I would turn around, lantern torch in hand, and say to them, "In the name of Jesus, go!" These tormenters fled at the mention of Jesus. I pursued them, calling out the name of Jesus and they fled.

A new dawn

I awoke, with the full knowledge that Jesus is the Son of God. No one could persuade me otherwise. It was personal. He had met me in my hour of need. The following day I went to church, this time unaccompanied and bold. My other friends thought that I was going through a phase and would recover and join the same bandwagon that hurried aimlessly to different nightclubs.

I kept on going to church but I still smoked and drank too much alcohol. I remember one day I was so drunk I had to take my friends back to where they lived. On returning, driving became very difficult. I would temporarily black out. When I next opened my eyes, the car was in the other lane still at the same speed. Even in my drunken state, I could tell that this was dangerous. I opened the driver's window and called out, "Jesus please get me home." I still remembered the power behind that name. I got home, got out of the car, opened the front door and blacked out. What a God! He heard the prayer of a drunk like me.

I continued mixing church with girls, alcohol and parties. Every night I prayed without fail. My prayers had improved. I could pray for a minute without being stuck. Then one day I felt that the Lord had said that I must let go of alcohol and cigarettes. I did not have any problem letting go of alcohol. I had a problem with cigarettes. I threw a packet of cigarettes not far from where I lived. It was in the afternoon. Then in the evening, I started sweating and my thinking was not straight. I drove to the place where I had discarded them. I found them lying in the grass after a frantic search. I smoked one cigarette. I coughed until my eyes nearly popped out of the sockets. "Sorry Lord", I apologized, thinking God wanted to kill me.

I also felt the Lord saying I must let my girlfriend go. I think He called it fornication. I told my girlfriend. She was not impressed. We spent some time searching the scriptures for fornication without success. I decided to be obedient and left this girl. After a week, I began to feel the side effects of a life without a girlfriend. I was thirty-four years and the Lord was teaching me to be a virgin. After two weeks, I decided that I did not hear

the Lord clearly. After all, I was a newborn baby in Christ. I telephoned my girlfriend from work and made an early appointment. I was just going to sneak out and come back. The moment I put down the phone, my boss barged in, furious and in an uncompromising mood. He wanted chemical results from something he had mandated me to do three weeks ago. The first thing I thought was to forge results. I went to a hidden place, inside the plant, behind a filtration tank. I sat down, pen in hand and paper on my lap. Before I could write anything, my boss's friend appeared from nowhere." What are you doing here?" I smiled sheepishly at him. I had no reason to be there at all.

I knew why I was facing this dilemma. Without the results, I knew my boss would give me the sack. I was not his favourite in any case. I went to the toilet and shut the door. I put the pen down and raised my hands towards heaven and prayed, "Father forgive me for disobeying you." I had a vision, whilst my eyes were closed of a big, very big muscular arm that was like light. I went downstairs, intending to tell the boss the truth. Before I could say a thing he said, "Sorry Fanele I was just being nasty to you. Forget about the results."

I had an immediate revelation. God is all-powerful. If He wanted to spoil your day, he could within seconds and no one would know. I recalled, in the Bible, how the earth opened up and swallowed the rebellious sons of Korah. They went straight to hell in their sheepskins. God cannot be mocked! It took a heartfelt sorry for Him to revert my impending disaster.

I immediately telephoned my girlfriend and told her that I had found the scripture about fornication. We stayed apart and I made sure.

Eating the Fat of the Land

After the first tithe, I received a promotion and became a product manager. I believed God and His Word in Malachi 3:10 where God asks us to put Him to test. I put Him to test and received my first promotion in life.

I boasted about faith, God, about Jesus. I even thought I could write a book about life in the fast lane of faith.

I attended a crusade that was conducted by a notable prophet. That night we were told that the prophet would not be addressing us. Someone from his team was to minister to us. I was disappointed. I left for my car in the middle of a sermon. I could not get my car started, so I went back to the service, thinking that may be God wanted me to hear something from Him.

Indeed that was true. I received a prophecy that was to strengthen me in the years to come.

Three months later, a prophet from Germany came and gave me exactly the same prophecy. I knew this was God. So how was God going to make me a mighty man? Was it possible that I could rise to be the CEO of this massive organisation? However, my dreams were bigger than that.

1. Boundaries:

Did Callum and Casper have enough boundaries? What could mom and dad have done differ

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