

ADITA



I vow to thee, under African stars.

At the end of the Flower Road, where tall ancient trees stand sentinel over all living things, we await the rising of the sun. Stars fading slowly, horizon burning.

To dream beyond ourselves; imagine without limit.

Beyond dreamtime, we walk towards the waking moments.

Beyond the grass, beyond the rainbow birds at the watering pool, the Fynbos, the forest, the mountains and the warm ocean. To pick a star as our guide, a beacon for our hearts' desire as we strive towards all that can be and could be and should be for the world surrounding us. In this place of all places, to feel at one not with nation, tribe or creed but with the breathing cosmos.

The landscape is peppered with purple Angelface and Spurflower, interspersed with yellow Gazania and Grewia which delights the eye and nourishes the birds with succulent fruits.

In the cool morning air, I reach for Odikinyi's rough hand. We gaze upon the sunrise, blazing yellow upon pink and mauve in the treetops beneath which the elephant herd rouses. Across bushveld and savannah, the great miscellany of animals with whom we share this land - Zebra, impala, wildebeest, blesbok and eland nervously twitch, ever watchful for predators. The humans in this place are no different. Every waking moment devoted to a hopeful vigil for a rare marvellous glimpse. It is Paradise with teeth, and the occasional serpent waiting to trap the unwary.

Hands tightly clasped, hearts beating loudly in the chirping silence, together we repeat our vows as wife and husband in our shedding – casting off our careless thoughts and even more careless old ways – each day to seek out new ways to live within our world, dedicating ourselves to peace, happiness and freedom. Sunrise - when we are free for a short while from the need to dedicate ourselves to others.

Odikinyi -he who was named for early morning birth and Adita – she who belongs to the sun – are rooted in this place - a magical, unknowable source of great strength, determination, and empowerment.

Our vows to Mother Africa, the Land, our forefathers and the animals who were first upon the land and who sustain us.

“We pledge to the land, air and water and all living things which draw life from it. Give us strength and wisdom for another day, another year and for all lifetimes to come.”

We are farmers, rearing experiences and memories which will be cherished for generations to come. Inside the Lodge, a romantic, secluded haven for the wealthy, buried deep in the indigenous vegetation at the top of a deep wooded valley, the guests are just stirring. If only they could feel the Land as we do, breathe it as we do, hear it as we do, love it as we do then they might truly understand what Paradise in this place truly means.

One embrace, one shared smile, one touch upon the cheek and then we part.

Another day, another Rand.

The flower wheel turns.

Divided we stand – a call to arms.

Where the tall ancient trees stand sentinel over all living things, buried deep in the unyielding vegetation at the head of a deep wooded valley, the protected animals are just stirring from sleep. Zebra, blesbok, human and eland nervously twitch, ever watchful for predators. It is Paradise with teeth, and many serpents at the door.

Outside the Reserve, where Ranger patrols do not venture, smoke rises over towns, villages, kraal and farm as fighting intensifies. People fight to be vaccinated; people fight not to be vaccinated. Friend turns upon friend; family turns its back on family. Painted Ladies, broken on the wheel. The wounds on both sides are as deep as the ravines through which the river cuts incisively towards the Southern ocean. Sharing becomes thieving. Immovable in their positions, unshakeable in the rightness of their beliefs, one side talks of salvation; the other talks of venom in the blood.

Adita waits expectantly for the rising of the sun.

Dreaming beyond herself.

Beyond dreamtime, faltering steps are taken towards the waking moments and the dangers they bring.

Over the neat grass, beyond the rainbow birds at the watering pool, the Fynbos, forest and mountains the horizon burns. The fading stars are beacons for her heart's desire as she strives towards all that can be, could be and should be for the world. In this place, to feel at one not with nation, tribe or creed but with the breathing cosmos.

In the cool air the sky blazes yellow on pink behind the treetops, beneath which the elephant herd rouses. She clasps her husband's hand tightly. Nervous. From today, their side is chosen. To remain working in this place they must accept the protection which is offered. A simple injection perhaps, like those she accepted willingly as a child, but a decision now to stand on one side of a deep chasm which no bridge will ever traverse. Her family stands upon the other side.

Wounds are festering, not healing.

For Adita, division is coded in DNA. Black v white. Education v ignorance. Love v hate. Trust v suspicion. Truth v lies. Adita has known this throughout her nineteen years. Rainbow nation for some; just a

day- to-day struggle for the girl. To stay alive she must work. To work she must take the medicine as demanded.

Hands tightly clasped, hearts beating loudly in the chirping silence, they prepare to cast off old ways, embrace the new darkness which surrounds. Adita – she who belongs to the sun - was born here, among strangers, but they cannot feel the Land as she does, breathe it as she does, hear it as she does, love it as she does. From this place, Adita's Paradise, comes a magical, unknowable source of strength, determination, and empowerment.

Today, as brother fights sister, the romantic, secluded haven for the wealthy is a velvet prison for them all.

One embrace, one shared smile, one touch upon the cheek and then they part.

Another day, another Rand.

Hope over Death.

United we fall – green shoots in the ravaged lands.

Where the tall ancient trees once stood sentinel over all living things, only ashes remain.

Zebra, blesbok and eland no longer nervously twitch, ever watchful for predators.

Predator and prey are gone, consumed by hate and blood and fire.

Paradise bared its teeth, and the serpents entered with only darkness in their hearts.

Across the grassland stinging smoke drifts and in ravaged forests fire smoulders. Fighting has stopped. There is no-one left alive with heart to fight. Death has not taken sides. Those who did choose sides were united only in their fall. All shattered on the wheel, no mercy shown.

Adita lives, if it can be called living. Crawling like a reptile she emerges from her charred cocoon into the sooty light. It might be day, it might be night. She cannot tell.

The butterfly, broken on the wheel, is reborn.

Odikinyi fell to the bloodlust which rolled over the land protecting Adita to his end. She would not look for that which could never be found. Venom killed; flame destroyed.

No birdsong, no birds. The high flying and the swift evaded the blistering sparks, perhaps never to return. In the un-natural silence only the discordant crack of incinerating wood and splurt of hot resin disturbed.

The festering wounds become scars; on the land and on her body. Her clothes seared from her flesh before they could meld to her smooth skin. Blisters on her hands agonising as she grasped hot ebony to rise painfully onto her bare, red-raw feet. Out of the trees, her faltering steps guide her to the hill where once the Lodge stood but where there can be nothing. What could have survived the tide of hate that engulfed them?

She longs to see the stars again, to reconnect. The hot air burns her throat, she craves water, but there is none. Denied to her by evaporation or black ash poison. If this is to be the end of her days, it will also be a merciful end to pain.

Hell, not heaven.

Torment, not bliss.

Paradise no more, but somehow, magically, still that unknowable source of strength, determination, and empowerment. The land lives within her, breathes with her – but sounds and smells different. The silence of the grave and the sour scent of decay and destruction.

But she loves it still.

Hope over Death.

She stumbles on, almost misses it.

The heart and soul of Mother Africa which neither fire nor hate can destroy. A symbol, small but significant. Resilient, tough, hardy, irrepressible, adaptable, durable. Nourished by fire in a cycle of senescence and rejuvenation. She pauses, bends down and places a hand protectively over the tiny green shoot, a parasol against the falling ash; an umbrella against the acidic rain.

Fynbos.

Her spirits soar, imagining a distant animal call through the smoke.

New Africa sprouting from the ashes.

Tears splash the back of her hand.

Green shoots in the ravaged land.