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Over Coffee

I always assumed being alive had secrets that would eventually be revealed when you're older. My theory was confirmed when I turned twelve years old whilst my mind was preoccupied with arts and crafts at Sunday school. My cousin brother ran over to the church grounds, fighting the urge to faint from the cruel orange heat, to call me over so I returned home with him.

As an infant, I had a bad habit of daydreaming about my mother's death so as to prepare my reaction to give the impression of a mature individual, demure and poise. One of my cousins would come fetch me from my task and inform me that there are elders looking for me at home. I wouldn't suspect a thing. While entering at the front gate, I would notice a red cloth tied to the top of the black steel gate, marking the death of someone in my family.

The walk was silent. There was no topic of conversation powerful enough to break the heavy grasp of this silence. I picked up the pace, and my cousin brother plodded behind me. I needed to speed home to confirm my suspicions of the red cloth. My heart leapt forward and commanded the march home like an army general.

In my culture, it is believed that the eldest member of the family is expected to keep the truth about where we come from and where we should go. When they die, the truth is passed down to the remaining eldest. When they die, they pass down the truth to the remaining eldest. The ritual goes as follows; the eldest child drives their parents due to receive the truth to the outskirts of our village in Plumtree. The land is completely vegetated. Tall oak trees and Musasa trees surrounded by short pregnant shrubs. It is all a map. One must interpret nature's message to identify the ideal location to summon our ancestors in a ritual called The Awakening.

That is all we are allowed to know. However, it is rumoured that the message is different. What the men are told cannot be identified with the women and vice versa anymore. This caused a rift across the Kalanga people that can never be fixed unless each family bore a genderless child that would break tradition and go back to our ancestors to fix the broken line for communication. For years,

our ancestors didn't reveal the truth about our purpose. For decades, fathers lost their daughters. Women and men separated.

As a young girl, my mother lied about where my father was throughout my childhood. I was told he worked in South Africa and had occasionally requested that I send him a list of gifts to treat me with. With time, I started to trust that he had started another family in another country. This was until my neighbour and friend came to me discreetly to tell me that her grandmother had told her that her father died. In solidarity, she claimed she had news for me as well; that our fathers died around the same time hence why our friendship and us being neighbours was fate joining us to each other.

Naturally I believed my soulmate. My mother had lied. My father died when I was three years old. I wanted to watch her plan unfold. I waited for the day she had planned to tell me the truth.

There was no red cloth by the gate. I was caught between relief and disappointment. I had already seen myself as an orphan in the community waiting to receive groceries to help in my time of need.

When I was eighteen, I told my grandmother that I didn't consider myself a woman. That seemed too difficult for an eighty-year-old to understand. I was used to hearing that it was a new wave for our generation, a new way to be rebellious by claiming to be what cannot be. I was mortified, but I knew I had to tell her because we had been close, and my great grandmother had called to inform us that the ritual had to happen soon because she was nearing her death.

My grandmother had this puzzled look on her face. I mistook it for disappointment. I left with my mother that evening to go back to our house in the high-density areas as she lived in the suburbs. I knew I was in trouble, my gut danced evilly. But she hadn't told my mother in over two months about my confession. The absence of the red cloth made it apparent that the cat had been let out of the bag.

It was a long sweaty drive to the village. My mother's car roared approvingly to the accelerating car speed. Nobody had said anything to me at this point. From arts and crafts to driving close to six hours under the soaring sun. I felt I needed to explain. I would lie if I needed to and say it was a phase. I'm the gender assigned at birth.

No one gave me directions in the forest I was meant to find my great grandmother and grandmother in. I was told that I would know where to go. I would find them. I barely looked up to the empty blue sky as the rays sprinted to curse my eyes. The answer wasn't in the clouds. I looked for footprints on the ground but there was nothing to trail. I opened the leather bag I was gifted by my mother to help me find my way. An old flask of water and coffee seeds in a three-kilogram bag were the contents. All I had to do was throw the seeds in the air and walk *over coffee*. It was rumoured that they symbolise purity.

The truth was that I was the key to closing the rift or the divide in our people. I found my people to start the ritual of repairing the damage. My grandmother would be the first to break the curse and restore the rightful purpose assigned to our family, at last.