

1 > Hard Beginnings

Boy was born in a shack village. That year the summer sun was in a merciless mood. It beat down relentlessly, heating the flat, corrugated iron roofs of the shacks with such intensity that, from a distance, the air above them shimmered. Down the embankment where goats nibbled and dusty children played was a highway where shiny cars sped past in a rush to reach somewhere.

In that shack village, Boy and his mother belonged to no-one and no-one belonged to them. As he grew, he trotted after her, in and out between the shacks, shadowing her in her endless quest to keep them alive. Sometimes it was just the smell on the tossed-away wrapping of someone's meagre meal that sustained them. On occasion, their noses led them to the fresh blood of slaughtered chickens, congealing in the dust. Then his mother would bare her teeth and snarl at other dogs who came close. Made wretched by hunger and parasites and the blood-sucking flies that fed on the tips of her ears, she would fight for survival.

Perhaps trees had grown there once, but not any more. Even the weeds that emerged from the earth in Spring, swiftly returned to dust. In the cracks of shade which they managed to find between the shacks, Boy licked the saliva that dripped from his mother's tongue as she panted away

the hours. In the evenings, if anyone had been watching, they might have seen the mother dog with her sucked-out teats, sitting perfectly still in the gathering darkness.



As the moon climbed its way into the sky, they might have cast their eyes aside rather than see her wretched, wasted body. Perhaps someone once glimpsed the quiet resignation in her face and wondered if she drew her strength from dim ancestral memories that flitted through her sub-conscious. And, all the while, her scrawny pup tugged at her ears with his sharp puppy teeth and scrambled over her bony back, willing her to play.

Then one late afternoon, when Boy was almost three months old, everything changed. As darkness fell, a sudden wind whipped up the dust, the debris and the litter that lay all around. It blew grit into his eyes and

sparks from the evening cooking fires swirled through the air like fire-flies.

A sense of dreadful unease came over him. His mother stood up, her tail between her legs, her body hunched in fear. She whined and lifted her nose, smelling the air. People began to shout and scream. They gathered their babies and cooking pots and dragged along frightened, wailing children. Another dog heaved desperately to break the short rope that tied him to a peg in the ground. Then Boy saw the flames – huge, orange flames reaching up into the sky, burning the shacks and everything else that lay in their path. He couldn't see his mother. She was lost behind the avalanche of running legs.



Smoke choked him. Terror gripped his heart. He raced down the embankment as fast as his puppy legs would carry him.

He hurtled along the side of the highway where the cars sped past with their great eyes alight. For how long he ran, who could tell?

Then a sudden flash lit up the world around him and a mighty sjambok cracked in the sky above. Heavy drops of rain pelted him like stones.

When he reached the bridge that stretched across the highway, he stopped running, safe from the pelting stones and the sjambok overhead. His heart beat in his ears and his lungs felt ready to burst. His legs buckled beneath him and exhaustion came to his rescue.

He curled into a ball – right there, under the bridge, just a metre or so from the black tyres that sped by, and he slept. Anyone seeing him would have thought he was just a dead dog.



At first light, Boy dodged the cars and crossed to where the grass was tall and yellow. He looked back — long moments — searching for the familiar form of his mother. The smell of wet ash hung heavily in the air. Then he turned for the grassland and was soon lost from sight.

It was a small grey hare that
taught him how to run as fast
as the wind.

2 > Adventures of a Brave Heart

A muffled scratching noise caught Boy's attention. He stood rigid. Tantalized. Yes, again he heard a muffled scraping noise, a noise that put every nerve in his body on high alert. He inched forward sniffing the earth; listening intently. A vibration from beneath the ground tingled up his leg. Rasp, rasp, rasp. Just near his nose, a small pile of soft earth was forming. The heap grew bigger, heaving as though it were alive, pushing up from below, fine soil slipping down its sides.

Locked within Boy was an ancient memory, his instinct. Now it took control. He pounced on the heaving mound of soil, madly digging with his front paws, excitedly searching for its essence. But excitement turned to shock and agony. An unbearable pain seared through his nose.

