

Chapter One — Serendipity

You might think I'm just a stupid old sheep with nothing better to offer than a tasty portion of myself, like lamb chops or roast leg of lamb on high days and holidays! Some people think that sheep are all the same, with no individuality or personality, or even feelings; that we are mindless creatures, acting on instinct alone, undeserving of any respect. Even robots are respected for their intelligence more than we are, and soon, I've heard it say, robots may even have feelings too!

But what if I told you that I played a part in changing the world? What if I told you the world will become a much, much kinder place thanks, in a small way, to me? You'd probably think "yeah, yeah" and roll your eyes in disbelief and disdain.

Truth is I don't need you to believe me, nor to tell me how marvellous I am. You see, I'm proud of myself and when you feel truly proud of what you have achieved, and that you've done something worth doing with your life, you don't need anyone else's respect. You've got your own self-respect! It doesn't get better than that! But let me start at the beginning.

In the far-distant fog of my memory, I am lying next to the still body of my mother. I want her to stand up so that I can nudge her udder with my head and drink her delicious warm milk.

I hear my own pitiful newborn bleats, urging her *stand up, stand up*. I want to feel the caress of her tongue — like yesterday, as she welcomed me into the world. I want to feel my tail waggle, all of its own accord, as I drink, like yesterday.

I want to prance up onto her lovely fat body like lambs like to do. But she lies still and cold, and all I can hear is the swish of fast cars going by. Then I feel heavy drops of water on me. Soon, it's not drops but rain pouring down, drenching my soft wool. I start to shiver. I bleat and bleat until I grow weak. I nestle as closely as I can to her body.



In the distant fog of my memory, I feel warm breath on my face. I am prodded into consciousness. I see a huge nose right

up close, making short sniffing noises. Fear ripples through me and I try to call out, but all I hear is *sniff, sniff, sniff, sniff*.



Then I am being rubbed roughly and vigorously. I am being shaken awake, and a rubbery teat is thrust into my mouth at a most uncomfortable angle. “Come on, come on”, a voice says as warm milk is squirted onto my tongue. “Come on! You can do it!”

Well, the rest is history, as the saying goes! I became part of a family in which diversity is the name of the game. Each of us landed up in this family, snatched away from dire circumstances by sheer good fortune, and Thuli is mother to us all.

If it hadn't been for the terrifying big nose of Thuli's canine companion, Jessie, I would not have found such luck.

After all the sniffing of me that day, Jessie had raced back to the farmhouse. With barking and body language, she'd led Thuli to my rescue.

When I was little, I stayed in the farmhouse with Thuli. But when I was strong enough to enjoy the sunshine and fresh air, I was transferred at night to the barn with its bales of sweet-smelling straw and the soothing sound of deep-sleep snores. It was there that I met the other members of the family and heard the most amazing stories of luck and serendipity.

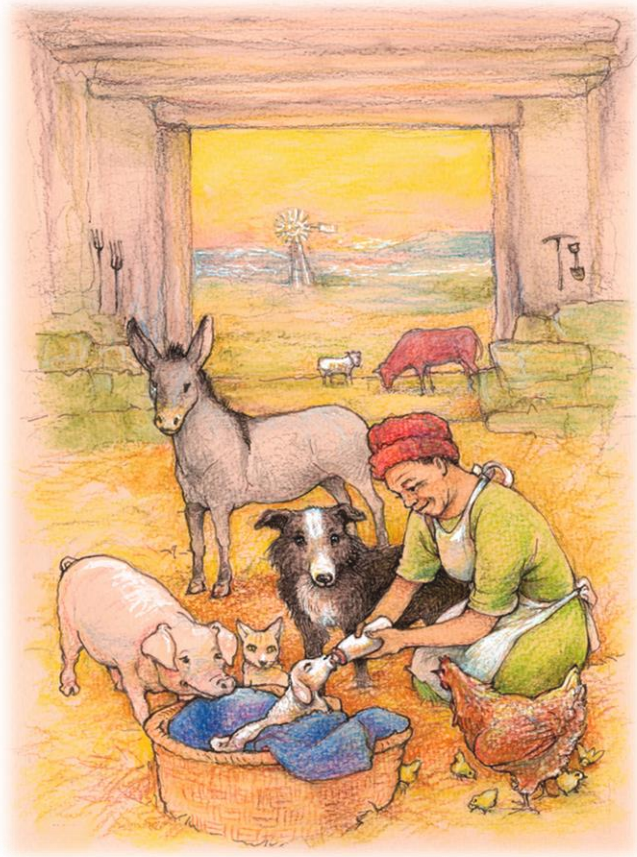
Sweet-pea, for example, is a beautiful hen, nice and plump and adorned in brown feathers with a comb and wattles of red. But when she first arrived, she told us, there hadn't been a single feather on her ravaged, emaciated, goose-pimpled body. Somehow the transport crate she was packed in, had fallen off a truck carrying hundreds of hens just like herself, along the highway. The crate had burst open as it crashed onto the tarmac and the force of the impact had flung her over a fence right into the safety of Thuli's sanctuary. She had spent all her life in a tiny cage as an egg-layer, she said, and had no idea how to put one foot in front of the other.

She had used her wings as oars, dragging her body away from the noise of traffic, until she found herself on the grass outside Thuli's kitchen.

"That's why I believe in miracles," she clucked in happiness.



Thuli's recipe for healing is quite simple and very effective: Love, extra love, warm bedding, fresh water, good food, healthy pasture, sunshine, shelter, and love. We are one family on the sanctuary, each of us bound to the other in the kinship of life.



I soon learned that Thuli is like Mother Earth to everyone, not only animals, although it is mostly animals who need her because they experience the harshness of being born non-human in a world where humans have put themselves in charge — and, unfortunately, we do not speak human language, so much of what we try to say is disregarded as mindless noises. I often see children from the village wandering up the gravel path, sometimes singly, sometimes in groups. Jessie and the other dogs alert Thuli with wagging, welcoming tails, as the children knock softly on the kitchen door with their small knuckles.



“Please, Teacher Thuli, will you read us a story?” they ask politely. Thuli’s response is always the same. “What a good idea,” she says. “Go choose a book in the library.”

Thuli's 'library' is a book-case packed with the books she once read to her own children.

