



Someone was standing by his bed, a person completely unlike anyone Tendai had ever met. In the predawn light his features were unclear. He was simply a presence of darker blue than the sky behind him. But there was about him a scent of woody smoke and new leaves and the honey of far-off, unseen flowers. The presence pointed at Tendai and said, "You!"

The boy woke up at once. The first rays of dawn were sliding over the garden wall, and the window was empty. What a strange dream, thought Tendai. He pulled the sheet over his head as he tried to remember it better. The image faded away, leaving a strange sense that something important was about to happen. His ancestors must have felt this way before a big hunt.

Tendai imagined them lying on the warm earth of their huts, feeling it tremble with destiny. Their shields and spears lay ready by the door. Not like me, he thought. He snuggled into a soft bed in one of the finest mansions in Zimbabwe. Around the house were a large garden and a wall studded with searchlights and alarms. The automatic Doberman growled as it made a last tour of the lawn before retiring to its kennel.

Any tremble of destiny would have had to struggle through the concrete foundations of the house. It would have

had to work through inlaid wooden floors and thick carpets, to creep up the grand staircase to the second floor. Only a whisper could have found its way to his waiting ear.

Yet find him it did.

He heard the robot gardeners clipping the grass along a walk. Hoopoes called from jacaranda trees, but a microchip went on with a far better selection of birdsong. It was certainly beautiful, but Tendai felt a pang of regret at not being able to hear the real birds. The mynah—a living creature smuggled in by the Mellow—stirred in its cage. “*Mangwanani*,” it said. “Have you slept well?”

Kuda, Tendai’s little brother, sat up and answered, “I have done so if you have done so.”

The mynah paid no attention to this polite reply. “*Mangwanani! Mangwanani!*” it shrieked, rattling the door of its cage.

Kuda hopped out of bed and released the bird. It fluttered to a table and snapped up a crust of bread from last night’s supper. Tendai could hear the crumbs showering over his books. He pulled the covers more tightly around his ears to keep in the light, happy feeling of excitement.

A house robot purred as it went from door to door with tea. It entered and placed two steaming cups on the table. The mynah squawked as it was pushed aside. “Good morning,” said the robot. “It’s September second, 2194. The time is six-fifteen A.M. Breakfast is at seven. Be on time if you know what’s good for you.”

“Go away,” muttered Kuda as he blew on the hot tea.

“Anyone who oversleeps is a big fat booboo head,” retorted the robot as it glided out.

“Rita programmed it to say that,” Tendai said as he threw back the covers.

“I know. Well, are you going to ask him?” Kuda swung his short legs off the edge of his chair.

“I’m not promising anything.”

“You’re a wimp.”