

# Cry, the Beloved Country



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# 1



THERE IS A lovely road that runs from Ixopo into the hills. These hills are grass-covered and rolling, and they are lovely beyond any singing of it. The road climbs seven miles into them, to Carisbrooke; and from there, if there is no mist, you look down on one of the fairest valleys of Africa. About you there is grass and bracken and you may hear the forlorn crying of the titihoya, one of the birds of the veld. Below you is the valley of the Umzimkulu, on its journey from the Drakensberg to the sea; and beyond and behind the river, great hill after great hill; and beyond and behind them, the mountains of Ingeli and East Griqualand.

The grass is rich and matted, you cannot see the soil. It holds the rain and the mist, and they seep into the ground, feeding the streams in every kloof. It is well-tended, and not too many cattle feed upon it; not too many fires burn it, laying bare the soil. Stand unshod upon it, for the ground is holy, being even as it came from the Creator. Keep it, guard it, care for it, for it keeps men, guards men, cares for men. Destroy it and man is destroyed.

Where you stand the grass is rich and matted, you cannot see the soil. But the rich green hills break down. They fall to the valley below, and falling, change their nature. For they grow red and bare; they cannot hold the rain and mist, and the streams are dry in the kloofs. Too many cattle feed upon the grass, and

too many fires have burned it. Stand shod upon it, for it is coarse and sharp, and the stones cut under the feet. It is not kept, or guarded, or cared for, it no longer keeps men, guards men, cares for men. The titihoya does not cry here any more.

The great red hills stand desolate, and the earth has torn away like flesh. The lightning flashes over them, the clouds pour down upon them, the dead streams come to life, full of the red blood of the earth. Down in the valleys women scratch the soil that is left, and the maize hardly reaches the height of a man. They are valleys of old men and old women, of mothers and children. The men are away, the young men and the girls are away. The soil cannot keep them any more.

Sample

# 2



THE SMALL CHILD ran importantly to the wood-and-iron church with the letter in her hand. Next to the church was a house and she knocked timidly on the door. The Reverend Stephen Kumalo looked up from the table where he was writing, and he called, Come in.

The small child opened the door, carefully like one who is afraid to open carelessly the door of so important a house, and stepped timidly in.

— I bring a letter, umfundisi.

— A letter, eh? Where did you get it, my child?

— From the store, umfundisi. The white man asked me to bring it to you.

— That was good of you. Go well, small one.

But she did not go at once. She rubbed one bare foot against the other, she rubbed one finger along the edge of the umfundisi's table.

— Perhaps you might be hungry, small one.

— Not very hungry, umfundisi.

— Perhaps a little hungry.

— Yes, a little hungry, umfundisi.

— Go to the mother then. Perhaps she has some food.

— I thank you, umfundisi.

She walked delicately, as though her feet might do harm in so great a house, a house with tables and chairs, and a clock, and a plant in a pot, and many books, more even than the books at the school.

Kumalo looked at his letter. It was dirty, especially about the stamp. It had been in many hands, no doubt. It came from Johannesburg; now there in Johannesburg were many of his own people. His brother John, who was a carpenter, had gone there, and had a business of his own in Sophiatown, Johannesburg. His sister Gertrude, twenty-five years younger than he, and the child of his parents' age, had gone there with her small son to look for the husband who had never come back from the mines. His only child Absalom had gone there, to look for his aunt Gertrude, and he had never returned. And indeed many other relatives were there, though none so near as these. It was hard to say from whom this letter came, for it was so long since any of these had written, that one did not well remember their writing.

He turned the letter over, but there was nothing to show from whom it came. He was reluctant to open it, for once such a thing is opened, it cannot be shut again.

He called to his wife, has the child gone?

— She is eating, Stephen.

— Let her eat then. She brought a letter. Do you know anything about a letter?

— How should I know, Stephen?

— No, that I do not know. Look at it.

She took the letter and she felt it. But there was nothing in the touch of it to tell from whom it might be. She read out the address slowly and carefully—

Rev. Stephen Kumalo,  
St. Mark's Church.  
Ndotsheni.  
NATAL.

She mustered up her courage, and said, it is not from our son.

— No, he said. And he sighed. It is not from our son.

— Perhaps it concerns him, she said.

— Yes, he said. That may be so.

— It is not from Gertrude, she said.

— Perhaps it is my brother John.

— It is not from John, she said.

They were silent, and she said, How we desire such a letter, and when it comes, we fear to open it.

— Who is afraid, he said. Open it.

She opened it, slowly and carefully, for she did not open so many letters. She spread it out open, and read it slowly and carefully, so that he did not hear all that she said. Read it aloud, he said.

She read it aloud, reading as a Zulu who reads English.

The Mission House,  
Sophiatown,  
Johannesburg.

25/9/46.

My Dear Brother in Christ,

I have had the experience of meeting a young woman here in Johannesburg. Her name is Gertrude Kumalo, and I understand she is the sister of the Rev. Stephen Kumalo, St. Mark's Church, Ndotsheni. This young woman is very sick, and therefore I ask you to come quickly to Johannesburg. Come to the Rev. Theophilus Msimangu, the Mission House, Sophiatown, and there I shall give you some advices. I shall also find accommodation for you, where the expenditure will not be very serious.

I am, dear brother in Christ,

Yours faithfully,  
Theophilus Msimangu.

There were both silent till at long last she spoke.

— Well, my husband?

— Yes, what is it?

— This letter, Stephen. You have heard it now.

— Yes, I have heard it. It is not an easy letter.

— It is not an easy letter. What will you do?

— Has the child eaten?

She went to the kitchen and came back with the child.

— Have you eaten, my child?

— Yes, umfundisi.

— Then go well, my child. And thank you for bringing the letter. And will you take my thanks to the white man at the store?

— Yes, umfundisi.

— Then go well, my child.

— Stay well, umfundisi. Stay well, mother.

— Go well, my child.

So the child went delicately to the door, and shut it behind her gently, letting the handle turn slowly like one who fears to let it turn fast.

When the child was gone, she said to him, what will you do, Stephen?

— About what, my wife?

She said patiently to him, about this letter, Stephen?

He sighed. Bring me the St. Chad's money, he said.

She went out, and came back with a tin, of the kind in which they sell coffee or cocoa, and this she gave to him. He held it in his hand, studying it, as though there might be some answer in it, till at last she said, it must be done, Stephen.

— How can I use it? he said. This money was to send Absalom to St. Chad's.

— Absalom will never go now to St. Chad's.

— How can you say that? he said sharply. How can you say such a thing?

— He is in Johannesburg, she said wearily. When people go to Johannesburg, they do not come back.