

# The case of the twins

S.E.K. MQHAYI



*Twin, son of Cause-to-rejoice, has come to the Great Place of the King, Hintsá, to complain that his twin brother, They-are-two, is usurping his place as heir. They-are-two replies, first dismissing the claim and later, when Twin stays silent, volunteering that they had changed round their positions when boys but that this was a childish thing. Twin, asked if this is the basis of his claim, says it was merely a confirmation of his seniority at birth.*

*The midwives who delivered them then reveal that, though They-are-two was born first, the hand of Twin had appeared from the mother the day before, and a finger-tip was amputated whereby Twin was recognised at birth. The wise and ancient Khulile is sent for from Nqabara to give the court his view of Twin's claim . . .*

## VII

### THE EXPERIENCE OF THE DOYEN

AT THIS STAGE THE COURT directed itself to the greyhead of Nqabara, Khulile, saying, "So then, son of Majeke, here is the enigma for which we fetched you from Nqabara. You too are now already here, you see, hear, you no longer hear from being told by us. This court did not lightly think of you; and this case is the first of its kind in this generation: Therefore, we

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had no precedent, no ground on which to stand our feet, for a matter becomes a matter by being likened unto another, as you yourself know. There it is then!"

After this there was silence for a moment. Having stood up Khulile did like this:

"Lords, and all you nation!" — as soon as Khulile said so the men hurriedly removed the pipes from their mouths, and there was silence. He proceeded and said, "I do not know the cause that made the court think of me. Yes, my father Majeke, unravelled a knot for this his home in the time of Phalo, but then things were good before the land was vitiated.

"What do I know? Who am I? This matter of the boys of my child, Cause-to-Rejoice, I shall not be able to resolve completely although I am an elder. This thing that is twins is two people born on the same day. Now in this Xhosa's home the resolving of these people born on the same sun is by looking to the one who appeared first.

"That has become a tradition although no one ever formalised it; that the one who appeared first becomes the elder has taken on the appearance of a law. However, having seen in these two small days in which I still blink my eyes, this thing is contradicted and is effectively contradicted in the case of certain twins. This kind of people, twins, among humanity, is a kind that is born percipient at the very birth; its mind is more acute than that of the rest of humanity, as for instance a twin will foretell an event before it has happened; and, indeed the event takes place. So that from this being so of these people there has been no discussion about them, such as the one I see today.

"Another characteristic of these people is surpassing co-ordination of will, a thing, moreover, that makes it impossible for even their father or the law to enter between them. And that in turn has led to a situation where there is no person who cares to enter the matters of twins — for they are one person.

"You, today have asked me to resolve the matter of people who are of this description; perhaps you imagine that the elders have a greater knowledge of twins than you have. NkosiyaMntu is a twin, a younger twin; but the eldership was received by him, he received the eldership

The first six chapters of this Xhosa classic, translated by Collingwood August, were published in the January and March 1966 issues. The story concludes here.

in the presence of his elder brother Smallrock, who had traded it for a leg-o'-beef. The elders who have gone before us judged that NkosiyaMntu should receive the eldership as he had traded for it; and the elders made their decision on precedent.

"I submit this word then, my lords, and I conclude. The first-born is authorised to administer the home because he has the experience of having appeared before the other children of his home; he knows certain people better than the others, he has heard grave matters discussed that the others have not heard. Where then is the eldership of the one twin over the other seeing they were born on the same day?

"Is it not actions that cause eldership, as for instance any first-born who isolates himself from his brothers parts with his eldership when he becomes a child by his actions? I leave the matter vaguely like that then, my lords, so that you may find for yourselves the thing you are looking for."

Saying this, Khulile sat down. For some time there was silence until Smalldoor stood up to say, "So says, so says, you heroes, the greyhead of Nqabara. Let there not be an awkward silence, let there be some response, let the matter be decided today; many other matters have been suspended because of this case." Ndlombose said the only thing the court had been wanting was a tale; here then is the tale, it is complete. Various other councillors stood up and asked certain questions from Khulile, who answered the questions calmly with the help of Makhunzi, the son of his younger brother.

And the senior councillors were then seen coming together and biting one another's ears — *Bhu-u-u-u*. And from their conclave could be heard intermittently the mentioning of cattle that had left going to where nobody knew, the daughters of Cause-to-rejoice, the amputated finger, the circumcision spear, the *nkzwili*, certain actions, and NkosiyaMntu.

The rest of the people seemed to be wrangling over the question: "Could it be today is the day of handing over the eldership to the twin who appeared afterwards?" And the answer would be: "Indeed no! Twinship still occupies its place. This court does not reverse Smalldoor's decision."

## VIII.

## THE VERDICT

AT THIS STAGE the court directed some young men to recall the owners of the case, who arrived without delay. When they arrived they did not sit at the same places as they had sat before\*. And the sun was greatly piercing the earth in the adult day. Some men were perspiring profusely, and had removed their blankets from the shoulders. They were all looking down, and there was none who spoke.

There were also some women here at the Great Place, they were sitting next to the kraal of the calves, and they did not raise their voices in loud speech. There was no wind, the day was calm and silent

The sparrows were sparrowing on the plains,

The crickets were clicking twixt the rocks.

On this day then the son of Khawuta, Hintsá, stood up, a majestic king, with a clear brow, whose receding hair left a sharp widow's peak. He is a man considerably above the common stature, he is hirsute though not coarsely so, he has a clear voice when he speaks, but it is not loud, it is not soft. He was not a man given to much speech, or to trivial conversation: but what a king for respect and deference from his councillors!

He was a dark man, with white teeth, with an eye like lightning, so that one might expect the appearance of flames when he was annoyed. He had strong arms, beautiful legs. They say, those who were with him, he was a man who on state occasions presided over the people with great dignity; but seeing him at home, you would be puzzled.

The-e-e-n! That majestic figure stood (still very much a young man at the time) and directed himself to Twin, the Complainant, doing like this, "Listen, then, son of Cause-to-Rejoice. It is now some days that my lords here left their homes because of you, for you came to ask for help in examining a complicated affair, which at the time belonged to your home, but which affair ends today belonging to the whole nation. We have been examining this affair for many days. The affair began with Smalldoor, your headman. Smalldoor said his word, which has not been contradicted even by this court. Yea, though this court has been to Nqabara even, it has not ridden over the word of Smalldoor.

"They say then the people of your home, who are this court, 'Proceed and go home, and look after that calf which you had

already been looking after, and keep that family of Cause-to-Rejoice which you had already been keeping, and come and report at your home here anything that you see is not right'."

Twin stood up praising and went to kiss the foot of the King and when he came back he squatted on a different spot. And it was then the King was turning round to They-are-two, saying to him, "You have heard, elder son of Cause-to-Rejoice. You have heard the gettings-up and sittings-down of this court because of the two of you; you have heard the word that your brother has been made to hold by this court. Go home then, and help your younger brother to keep the family of your home, and the property, and everything. Even at the Great Place here we should see the two of you together. You should obey him and listen to his words."

When the King had ceased directing these words, he threw himself down and covered himself with his kaross of the mountain leopard. They-are-Two stood up with his paternal uncle and they went to occupy a different spot.

At one moment Phekesa, one of They-are-Two's paternal uncles appeared to be wanting to know whether today at Phalo's the elder twin was being changed into the younger. Story answered, "There is no such thing that has been done." Becoming heated, Phekesa asked saying, "But then how have I heard?" Story said, "You have heard properly, for the talk is clear."

The complaining party was then seen taking its sticks to go home, and the defending party did so as well.

The women next to the kraal of the calves were heard, some were persecuting with their tongues, others were dancing with joy; the men were seen each taking to his riding animal, and he who did not have a riding animal took to his stick to think of going home. The smokers were seen setting their pipes alight, some standing, some still squatting, and yet some kneeling and lighting their pipes from those of their friends. And concerning the judgement, some were mumbling, finding fault, and seeing many errors. But the majority did not forget a case that had proceeded with decorum and justice and that had been spoken well, in which all aspects had been examined, and the judgement given with great skill.

In the midst of all that confusion Dumisani, the son of Zolile, the poet of the Great Place was heard saying:

"Hoyina! Hoyina!! Hoyina!!!

Go home ye nations, the case is finished  
Go home ye peoples, the thing that was  
spoken is finished.

So says Zanzolo.

So says the child of Gcaleka,

The small dugs of the old cow,

Should they sleep on the way, know ye  
it is disaster.

So says the bull they exclaim has gored  
before it has gored;

What will they ever say the day it goes?



HINTSA

For it will gore with that of the rhinoceros  
as I see!

Listen, nations, that we may give you the  
wealth of the heart,

Listen, nations, that we may tell you a  
tale:

In the days of old, the day appeared the  
mountains,

One person was put to rule other people.  
And it was said that person was the  
person of the blood,

It was said that person was the calf of the  
nation,

It was said that person should be obeyed  
by humanity;

And he would obey Qamata;

From whence would come the laws  
and rules,

Which if he breaches there would be  
calamity,

There would be confusion and insanity  
of people

There would be a head-over-heels mad-  
ness of the earth.

The disgruntled have never died out,  
The dissatisfied are being born today.

They are filling the stomachs, they  
arise tall as staves.

They cannot help themselves, they are  
created into that thing;

While we put things right, they try to  
help;

Should we hand over to them, the nation  
would all die.

Easily I say so, for they too know this.

The impetuous have already been im-  
petuous

They said the bull is today at Nqabara.  
This home of Xhosa I have today given  
up;

I have given it up for baffling even those  
of the manure.

What will it be with the immigrants?

The son of Phalo has spoken,

He has spoken, They-look-at-the-eye-  
brows-and-say-he-'s-angry,

The bull they say has gored before it  
has gored.

The wound today is small, it is the wound  
of Smalldoor.

Go home nations the case of the twins is  
finished.

Go home, the father of Rarabe has at  
last answered.

*Ncincilili !!!*"

\* it is not the custom to occupy the same place  
as before

## EPILOGUE

AS HE WAS SAYING SO, this man of the Mpehles, there was silence, for he was not a man whose voice was often heard. Today he raised emotions as never before, for the hearts were soft, and the result was as if war had been proclaimed. Men wept as soon as he spoke. As he went on the women allowed the pots to burn; among the men none moved; he who had been smoking crushed the stem of the pipe; there were some who stood naked, without knowing it; there were some who when they tried to wear their blankets pulled them too tightly, and were surprised when the blankets came apart at the seams, the panels flying in all directions.

They said, those who know this man, today he has not done anything, for he soon stopped; they said had he carried on, people would have been injured on such a day. Indeed, as they said so, people had already injured one another; for this poet is a giant, is tall, is used to the Great Place—he has grown up in it. In the left hand he is carrying two spears, he holds a small black staff in the right — he is full of action, when he waves his sharps, an on-looker lets go with his stick at the person standing next to him.

One woman, the wife of Contradict, a Zangwa, had been holding a burnt piece of wood ready to light her pipe, she let go with it under the bodice of the wife of Endeavour-ye; on turning round, Endeavour-ye's wife stood with her tooth on her aggressor's cheek. It happened that among the men matters were not straight; and the dogs fought and pushed the son of Ntsema, a Qadi, under the ends of the branches forming the cattle kraal, and they had bitten him severely; on all sides trouble had to be put down.

Phaki, a young Vundle, who not completely sane and who used to be present at the Great Place and at other places on social occasions, took all this confusion as rejoicing. He hurriedly covered himself in

his untanned calfskin and fell head-first into the fire. But his calfskin had fallen down to his knees, tying them together and making it impossible for him to rise quickly. And that was another matter — getting him out of the fire; and because the fire was great it happened that he would never again be called by his name and answer; his end came on the night of that day.

Ndlombose also appeared to be getting excited. When the poet mentioned the impetuous ones, he knew that he meant Bhukwana, his younger brother. He was heard asking Bhukwana whether he is listening now that he is becoming a subject of poetry and adding, "Do you understand now that this name of Langeni will be associated with an event by the whole nation?" However, the councillors spoke to Ndlombose and he calmed down.

Nophaka was another lady who was not complete in her mind, and also not given speech. This lady used to be present at the Great Place and used to be called Phaki's wife as a way of teasing her. And she greatly loved Phaki, but Phaki himself used to want to stab people for this, saying that he did not want a dumb wife. This lady, when her partner got injured, cried as one bereaved, and would not be consoled. She blamed the poet saying it was he who had pushed the child of the people into the fire. And that became another case!

Mfithi, an old man of the Kwayis, who lived at the Great Place, could no longer see with the eyes, and his ears were substantially blunt, hearing this hullabaloo very dimly, concluded that the world had died, the Place had been sacked by the enemy, and that he himself was about to be burnt alive inside his hut. He was seen coming out of the hut as fast as his legs were able to carry him. He had hardly got anywhere when he raised high his hands and his voice and was heard shouting, "The thorns! Nation of the Nation! I, your very dog, am under your feet!" His daughter, Boniwe, quickly went to comfort him and he tottered into the hut again.

It happened that the boys below the Great Place were also breaking one another. One urchin, Njeza, says that his father can

also declaim, he usually declaims when he praises them, his children, at home. Meeting said, "You are lying, boy, how does your father know how to say?" Njeza was still answering, "I am not lying, boy," when Ndaba was already entering the matter by hitting Njeza with a stick of the *mnono* tree at the same time saying, "I do not like this, that is a lying boy." And the other boys took up the matter and divided up into sides. Soon the sticks were heard on one another below the Great Place. A young man Gonyela, the son of Nyaba, hurried to destroy this nonsense; but he had forgotten the disused grain pits just below the Great Place. He found himself falling with one leg into a pit; the boys, when they saw this, said, "Serve you right, that is the work of the ancestors!"

However hard he tried to get up, Gonyela kept on falling to the bottom. At last some people came to help him out and they found that he had fractured his leg — on the thigh. He was immediately carried to the home of Gxavu, an expert at setting bones; in a few days the young man was healed. In later days he was wont to say he wished something could happen to boys. At the same time he would not leave the poet innocent, saying he does not know what things these are that always seem to have full stomachs which make them talk more than is necessary; twins also he blamed, saying he did not know what things these were that were forever taking one another to the law, so that finally he got injured like this.

It was always that confusion then, when the son of Zolile, Dumisani, spoke. When the poet had finished, he said *ncincilili*, and went to sit down. The men then began to disperse to their homes; on the way they went reviewing this case.

Till the present day in the land of the Xhosas, the elder twin is he who appears first; it is an unusual circumstance that can change this. Yea, however, there are some — and I do not know what causes them to say this — who go about saying the judgement said that the twin who appears first is the younger, the elder is the one who appears last. Those who say so are not saying the truth.

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