

I am the only male Brownie in existence!

The memories are hard to summon and most of mine are water through my fingers. But of this Brownie business I am certain. No six year old boy would have entertained such humiliation; not unless the partaking of roasted marshmallows with 20 six year old girls had been the only way to see his mother.

I had arrived so full of expectation on that first African day. Excited I was because excited is what I had been told I should be, at this going to school. I remember being six. You know important things such as whether you are six, or six and a half. I remember Mummy and Daddy taking me from room to room: this is your dormitory and this is your bed; this is where you will eat your meals; this is your classroom. And all the time the little niggles: where are **you** going to sleep; where are **you** going to eat?

Crying there was; not much as we walked but at night, that night, the next night, the third and into the fourth before the worst ones became inured, accepting; repeated every term.

This is Mr Prentice. You must call him Sir. And so to the car, where my mother and my father, my two pillars, said goodbye. You don't mean you're going to leave me here? My mother told me decades later that I had whispered but that's not how I remember it as I had looked out, uncomprehendingly, over the long grass hiding puff adders and Mau Mau.

Do my memories deceive me? Did I really care that then I had parents and now I had Sir? My mother cared. She did not become Brown Owl for me, not directly. She became Brown Owl for Mr Prentice. My father was too busy for Mr Prentice, keeping rhino out of the garden, building the coffee factory, instructing the teenage ayah whose job it had been, we discovered afterwards, to keep the rope with which we were to be hanged.