

“Live in such a way that even if given another opportunity to live your life all over again, you would still choose to live it exactly the same way that you are living your life now.”

William B. Girao, *Enjoy Life: The Message of Ecclesiastes*



PROLOGUE



Kalbarri Skywalk – iStock Photos

January 2025, in the Lyons Den, Lucky Bay, Kalbarri in the mid-west of Western Australia

EVERYONE HAS A STORY to tell as their life rolls on,” says my best friend, Willie Mack. “You can’t deny it.”

He’s the smart one. He’s Scottish. Been in Australia for six years and still talking like he’s just arrived. “Never mind my accent,” he tells me. “Australia’s rubbed off on me in other ways.”

It has too.

It’s like he’s one of us.

That’s why I consider him my twin. My bruh.

My twin? You wouldn’t think so.

We couldn’t look more different. Me with my brown skin and black hair, him with his ginger hair and those orange freckles all over him, the blotchy kind that don’t leave much room for the skin. He’s stockier than me at five six, with an interesting face. Green eyes with a dreamy look to them until he fires up with a joke or a pun or he’s taking the piss, then they light up like you wouldn’t believe and it cracks you up to look at him with his lopsided grin and a single dimple sliced into his left cheek. A snub nose and ginger eyebrows

complete the picture. Put him in a kilt with a set of bagpipes and he'd look the part as a backup piper in AC/DC for Bon Scott singing *It's a Long Way to the Top*.

We started off calling him Bluey at first, but he preferred Willie Mack. More class, he said, and it stuck.

He's fifteen, like me. We both just turned—me on 1 January, 2025, him on the eleventh, exactly a week ago.

So we're both Alpha gen, along with the other two billion Alphas. Already the greatest number of the same generation on earth ever.

Alpha says it all, I reckon.

We're two Alpha males, sitting at the Hexagonal Table right now, in the Lyons Den, our shack, hidden among the dunes at Lucky Bay.

“You're in God's own country,” my dad's always telling us. “And don't you two forget it”.

Except Willie Mack's an atheist, or so he informed me last year.

“Why an atheist?” I asked him at the time.

“God knows,” he replied with a tilt of his head and a lift of his right eyebrow. “He's kept us guessing once too often, maybe. He starts off turning on the lights, then keeps us in the dark ever since.”

Me? I'm not too sure. Maybe it pays to be wary.

So anyway, back to our conversation.

“If we've all got a story to tell about our lives, is it fact or fiction?” I ask him.

“Fact, unless you're lying to yourself. I figure it's because we live in a world where things are happening all the time. Nothing endures. We're changing every moment. You, me and all the other nine billion people crowding this little blue dot of a planet—which is definitely flat, by the way.”

“Flat?”

“Yep. All the way round.”

When I snort out a laugh, “If you don’t believe me, start walking it,” he says. “If you keep going it’ll be flat all the way, until you get back to where you started from.”

I recognise his way of foxing with words with a weird logic to them, so I take a deep breath and know it’s seaweed season. Great piles of it washed up in a brown knee-deep row at the high-tide mark along the beach, the fresh salty stink of it reaching us. It’s full of sand midgies that bite. We’ve both got itchy lumps on our calves from last night’s fishing. The lamplight attracted them until we switched it off. We caught some juvenile and jumbo Tailor and a decent sized Bluebone. The Tailor we threw back to live on after the adrenalin rush of the fight, and we enjoyed a monster fried fillet of the best fish in the world each for dinner, with more in the fridge for tonight. With the skin on. Charred and crispy on the barbecue. No blue bones—I used the pliers. Yum.

“Everyone has a part to play in their story.” Willie Mack goes on. “Everyone has a role. No one misses out on aiming for a goal. Doesn’t matter how insignificant or important. From choofing on a vape to running a marathon, say, or a gazillion other things.”

“What about someone with a lousy memory? Someone with brain damage who’s forgotten who they are?”

“Them too, the poor buggers, because nothing happens to them all the time, even though they may not know it. We act out our roles from one second to the next according to what happened the moment before, to keep our story going as the plot thickens. And it’s the roles we remember playing that tell us who we are. Our selves. We could be four plus four heroes. Could be enemies or antagonists. Or one of the chat, one of the spectators.”

“Okay, I hear you. But what if there’s a change of scene? Like, I’m one person at school and someone else at home?”

“Sure, when the circumstances change, so does the story,

but it's still an ongoing narrative. Just a human being doing something different. But you know you've changed because you're doing things differently. The voice in your head reminds you."

"The voice? You hear voices?"

"It's a metaphor, bruh. Not a voice as such, but a voice*over*. A storyteller spinning your yarns as things happen so you can make sense of yourself. Not a fixed self. Not a sky-pilot sitting inside your skull, some ghostly permanent you telling you what to do or how to feel."

"You're losing me, Willie Mack. Now I don't have a self? I'm getting confused."

"No dramas, Summer. So am I. That's our storytellers spinning the yarn of the two of us right here, right now, in the Lyons Den, wondering what the hell I'm yapping on about, who the hell we are and what the hell life is all about."

"So, what comes next?"

"Who bloody knows? Johnny Elliott?"

I can't stop laughing.

Bloody nose. Johnny Elliott.

Almost fall off my chair.

Almost wet my pants.

But a second later I get to thinking about what he said regarding our stories, and I remember the day they found the sixth Alpha Bruh of the Hexagonal Table, dead, on the rocks beside the Murchison River, 100 metres below the Kalbarri Skywalk. The shock and rush of grief tear me apart, and it's like I'm being stabbed in the chest again and again.

That was a fortnight ago, on 4 January, in between our birthdays.

Naked, they said.

Naked? No way. Not Moses Buzzacott. Not our "Mozzie". The youngest of us, because his birthday is on the 28 December, twelve months after me and Willie Mack. He's

always the last to come swimming in the nick because his *kuca*, his nuts, have only just descended and he hasn't grown many of his pubic feathers yet.

It's not his fault, but add to that his Christian name, Moses—his dead Italian mother was a Catholic and all her nine kids have biblical names—and he's vulnerable to bullying.

In spite of that, or maybe because of it, he has to be the best boxer I've ever seen. Orthodox, brave, flash-quick and elusive, we never saw him lose a fight, often against kids way bigger than him.

We miss him something terrible—and now we're five.

Was he pushed? Or did he jump?

Either way, we must find out the truth, to get the stories of our lives straight.

Chapter 1



Apache Chief Geronimo, taken by Warren Mack Oliver, 1907

January 2025, in Geraldton, in the mid-west of Western Australia

CALL ME SUMA.

That's Suma, pronounced "Sooma", but some years ago—never mind how long precisely—someone gave me the nickname "Summer".

The first time they came up with it I was wild. A girl's name. I hated it, but I was a shy and quiet kid then, new to Geraldton, and couldn't do anything about it. I gritted my teeth and bore it.

So it stuck.

Things are different now. I'm not the skinny little runt they pushed around in Primary school. No sir. I'm fifteen-years-old, and built, with so many hairs sprouting under both my armpits I've lost count. Not to mention my legs and other places.

"Summer?" I said the other day when Johnny Elliott called me that. "*Summer?* That's a girl's name. You call me Summer one more time and you'll have me to deal with."

"Hey, Summer," Johnny Elliott laughed, then added in a high-pitched zesty voice, "must be because you're so *hot*, girl."

Having little or no hesitation in my mind, and nothing in particular to hold me back, I clocked him one, broke his nose and had him visiting the watery part of the world when he burst into tears.

That put things nicely in perspective.

But the next day I got to thinking about it.

Summer. Hot. Hot as hell.

Hellish hot, in fact. Especially here in Geraldton, in the mid-west of Western Australia where we're from.

It suddenly sounded manly to me.

Manly, like the whaler Queequeg in *Moby Dick*, the harpooner with the tatts and brown skin, like mine. We're studying him this year at school, in old man "Twiga" Gammie's English class. He's a cranky, sarcastic old teacher we secretly have a lot of time and respect for, because he's old school and keeps us under his thumb. In his classes you can hear a pin drop. He walks with crutches strapped to his arms because he was paralysed from the hips down with polio when he was a kid. He looks like a giraffe when you watch him walk side-on, with his long forelegs leaving his back legs behind. That's why we christened him "Twiga". He migrated here from Kenya in the 1960's and twiga's the Swahili word for giraffe. He joined the school two years ago.

My school? That's the George Grey College in Geraldton.

And not only Queequeg—Suma also refers to the Apache Indians in Mexico and the USA. That's why my dad chose it. Think of Geronimo. Or Cochise and Sitting Bull. Even Victorio. All great names and courageous leaders. I like to think I'm following in their footsteps, even if I have a fair way to go. At least I have their roadmap.

So I've recently come to like the name Summer and no longer mind, long as everyone acknowledges I'm a bloke. Even if they don't, well, that's okay too. Because I know for sure.

So does Charlotte Marks. Green-eyed, strawberry-blond Charlie M with her fringe, the Nhanda-Irish sis with freckles across her nose who's turned fourteen. I've seen the way you look at me. Stirs me up. I'm not gunna lie, I reckon we're thirsty for each other. One of these days I'll get round to talking to you.

Oh, I forgot to mention—my full name's Suma Dartson. Dartson. Weird, hey? Bet you haven't heard it before.

I googled it and found it's the 4,649,889th most common surname in the world. According to Wikipedia they all live in the USA. Yanks. They claim to be the best at everything so they've even stolen my surname. Bugger that. How come Google didn't know about us Dartsons up around Shark Bay? Forty-five of us at the last count, when we got together at Grandma Milly's funeral service in Denham three months ago. Eighty, actually, when you add our close relatives, the Curries, in with us. Five Malgana Yamaji families descended from four brothers and a sister still living. The wise ones we all respect. Don't step out of line, my cousin brothers and sisters. That's us—the Dartsons and the Curries. We're all related.

It was Willie Mac—the brightest one in English Lit among us bruhs by far—who pointed out some time back my name spelled “Nostradamus” back to front.

“You know Nostradamus?” he asked.

“No, I don’t.”

“He was a Frenchman who predicted the future four hundred years ago. Hitler and the destruction of Germany. The assassination of the Kennedy brothers. The twin towers. Trump and his yellow toupee making a comeback. Even the apocalypse and the end of us all.”

“Sounds interesting. I'll google him.”

“He might surprise you.”

“Could be he had second sight, like some of my Malgana mob. Always reading each other’s minds.”

“You too?”

“Sometimes. Mum says I’ve had the gift since I was a little kid.”

“You’re telepathic?”

“So she says.”

Then he grinned. “I knew it.”

“You knew it?”

“Yep. Something told me you would be.”

The coming apocalypse and the end of us all? I thought. Now that’s a worry, when you think about it.

And we do, us Alpha Bruhs of the Hexagonal Table.

We think about it.

Often.

Because it’s an elephant.

An elephant, you ask?

Yep. Cat-, dog- and elephant-, they’re our three degrees of catastrophe in rising order. If one of us is in the shit and needs help, he can tell the rest of us how urgent it is with a single word. “It’s a cat-,” and we take our time. “It’s a dog-” and we get there soon as we can. “It’s an elephant-” and we’re up and sprinting out the door to help.

We have a code of conduct too, would you believe? And a national anthem.

You want the code? *The only rule you never break is the rule that says you can break every rule in the book if it helps you reach your goals. Loyalty. Honesty. Wisdom.*

That might sound like a load of crap to you, but think about it. You’ve only got to look around. We don’t want to get to twenty-nine and feel so lonely, disconnected and purposeless that our lives and everything we’ve ever done seem meaningless. When we’ve lost our culture and our self-respect. When we don’t know who we are and wonder what

the hell being a man really means as we sink another Bourbon neat, or drag on a cone before sucking up a line through a rolled up ten, if we've got one. Or, worse still, attach the rope to a beam or the hose to the exhaust pipe with the engine running.

We're Alpha gens and we're starting our journey to manhood young is all.

Our national anthem is Prince's song *1999*. That was Willie Mack's idea, too. He thought of it after finding out that Prince wrote the lyrics after seeing a documentary about Nostradamus prophesying the end of the universe as we know it.

If we're all gunna die, let's have a great time going.

We sing a mixture of the verses whenever we feel like it. It's a bonding thing. Especially when we're accompanying the blaring Bluetooth stereo in bruh "Tiny" Jameson's Jeep Wrangler when he's driving us up to Lucky Bay in the early dawn on the weekend with the roof off.

With the wind blasting through your hair and singing your guts out at a hundred k's an hour, we're already partying, like it's 1999, no questions asked. That's when you know you're *alive*, and you're sharing the thrill of it with your five mates.

There's nothing like it.

No sir!

Chapter 2

AS FOR MY TELEPATHIC gift, well, I have these strange dreams—you could call them nightmares—and when I tell Mum about them, it turns out they predict the *past*, not the future.

Maybe that's because my name spells Nostradamus back to front. I get things *manda* about. *Manda*—that's Malgana for backside—so arse about, if you prefer it in Australian. Forgive me if I use the occasional Malgana word while telling you my story. I've already used *kuca*, as you know. I'm a proud Malgana Yamaji boy and I'm picking up the vocab and need the practice. Trust me, I'll always translate it for you

So, dreams.

It sounds strange, but it's true.

I have these dreams and when Mum or Dad interprets them, they're about something that's already happened that I didn't know about.

You want an example?

Here's a simple one.

Short and sweet.

Last November, I'm being chased by these faceless zombies like I'm in a horror movie straight out of Netflix. Half a dozen of them, armed with pointed sticks. And I mean really pointed, sharpened and charred black in the bushfire raging round us. They're trying to poke my eyeballs out so I can no longer see. To lose my second sight. I run like hell through the flames and wake up screaming, my heart rattling in my chest at a million beats a minute and sweating like a pig—which they do, by the way, just less than us.

When I tell Dad about it, he surprises me. He's talkative for once. That's unusual for him. He usually gives me the silent treatment.

“Oh, that’s easy, Sonny,” he says. He calls me Sonny, preferring it to Suma, even though he chose the name. “That’s got to be Olly Brierley up on Tamala Station the other day. Fire went through the paddocks a month ago and he was fixing up the fencing to keep the feral goats and emus out. When he tautened the barbed wire in one section, he overdid the tension and it snapped. Sprang back and caught him in his right eye. He’s still in Carnarvon Hospital last I heard. He’ll never see through it again. He’ll probably wear an eyepatch like Sammy Davis Junior next time we see him in the Waterfront Hotel, and we’ll never hear the end of it.”

Here’s a better one. I clearly remember it because it recurred several times in November 2020, when I was ten.

It gave me what my Great Grandad Wally called the “screaming meemies” when he was still alive. Or so my dad told me when he used the phrase once.

“Don’t *do* that, Meg,” he shouted at my four-year-old sister when she picked her nose and was considering eating it. “You’re giving me the screaming meemies!”

I warned her later when we were alone that if she kept doing it she’d pull her brains out one day, and that got her attention.

Anyway.

“The screaming meemies?” I asked him. “I haven’t heard that one before”

“You know your Great Grandad Wally was in the trenches at Amiens for a time during World War I? Well, he ducked for cover when those German artillery shells came screaming overhead. *Meeeemie*. That’s the sound they made. Thankfully none of them had his name on it.”

Anyway, forget about the screaming meemies if it bothers you.

Let’s put it this way.

I'm scared shitless. Which means the opposite, when you come to think about it. Check your underpants next time if you don't believe me.

Because my dream is about snakes.

The really poisonous kind.

With fangs like hypodermics, dripping yellow venom if you get too close.

I know it's yellow because I dream in colour.

Full blown, like colour's my thing.

And in the dreams that really matter I'm not running for my life from zombies with pointed sticks, or getting lost and panicked in some unknown city, or flying across some green landscape I've never seen before, avoiding the power lines when I come in to land.

No.

I'm *there*.

I'm taking part.

Sometimes I have an active speaking part. Other times I'm an observer. Sometimes both. I never know which it's gunna be until the reel starts running.

In this dream I'm on some tropical island in the Atlantic centuries ago. Not sure where it is or when. Off Africa, I guess, because the natives are black, except for one who's mixed blood and brown, like me.

It starts off I'm in the local hospital, carrying the leather bag for some bloke I vaguely already know. From some other dream, maybe? Another life? I'm not sure.

Turns out he's the surgeon aboard a three masted sailing ship he points out, anchored in the bay. So I hold his bag open as the local pharmacist fills it with the medical supplies the surgeon needs. Weird stuff. Some I remember because Mum has them in her pantry. Cinnamon and caraway seeds for heartburn and indigestion. A handful of shrivelled roots of Ipecac to make you vomit if you've overdosed. A sack of dried cinchona bark you crush up and make a drink for malaria.

And then the pharmacist alarms me.

He reaches into the back of his cabinet and takes out two corked test tubes containing small amounts of a pale-yellow liquid.

“Would you have any use for one of these? It’s Gabon viper venom,” he says.

I watch the surgeon holding it up to the light. “Interesting. What do you use it for?”

“We add it to strengthen some potions we use for leprosy and smallpox. This is spare.”

The surgeon shakes his head “I don’t think we’ll need it.”

Before the pharmacist can replace them in the cabinet, I reach across and snatch one. I turn it this way and that, then give it a good shake.

The liquid moves like golden mercury.

“Where do you get it from?” I ask.

“We have a snake pit here. The Angolares who looks after it is a sorcerer. He’s been bitten so many times he’s immune.” He looks me up and down, from my bare feet to the top of my head. “I can show you if you like,” he says, as I hand him back the tube.

So we walk through the town. I remember shady mango trees packed with orange ripening fruit and dark green maize and sugar cane plantations beneath the palm trees rising up the mountain slopes that disappear into rain clouds to our right. The simple, single storey houses with one front door, a step, and a window either side, all painted in different pastel colours, like a kid’s drawing.

Different pastel colours. I like that.

And a French flag hanging on a pole. Red, white and blue if there was a wind, but there’s not. It’s too early in the day.

When we reach the snake pit, the snake whisperer is already hard at it. He isn’t wearing shoes. His bare feet are sticking out from cowhide protectors stretching from his ankle to his knee.

He's standing among the snakes in a circular pit, twenty metres across and a metre deep.

It's full of writhing and sleeping snakes of different types. There must be a hundred of them.

I don't recognise any. No Dugites. No King Browns or Gwardar. No Death Adders. But the pharmacist has mentioned the Gabon viper.

That must be the snake he has coiled around his forearm.

It's the length of my arm, the ribs of its thick body shifting and gliding beneath the glistening skin as if it's trying to free itself from the Angolares's grip behind its head. The scales on its back are patterned in brown and purple pentagons, while the belly is pale gold. It has two blue-green horns on its broad skull and a bony ridge across its gleaming eyes.

It looks both beautiful and evil.

Like it's thinking *Come closer, human. I can't wait to sink my fangs into you.*

The Angolares holds the monster's mouth open against the lip of a test tube while he teases out the fangs. I'm shocked by their curving length and thinness—if I told you three centimetres you wouldn't believe me, but I wouldn't be exaggerating. They're encased in a silky white skin webbing he pushes back into its jaw with a bronze rod; and as he massages its head with his thumb the yellow venom squirts down the glass.

Then he corks it.

Watching, I feel as if I'm being hypnotised, marvelling at the slow-motion care with which he holds the tube and works the rod with the fingers of his left hand, as if he's practised using chopsticks.

He gently places the snake back on the dirt floor, stroking it before wandering across to us almost carelessly to give the pharmacist the tube.

Before I can stop him, he reaches up and without a word he grabs me by the armpits. He lifts me high into the pit, stretching out so that I have a metre or two to walk back to the wall,

Then he climbs out himself and watches my reaction with the others.

I stand paralysed.

I have never felt so terrified.

Then a rush of adrenalin burns through my chest and I'm on the verge of passing out as I take one faltering step forward and feel the cold body of a viper crack beneath the sole of my right foot. I look down as the snake rears back like a powerful spring and strikes at my calf, its mouth gaping.

I wake screaming before the bite and Mum rushes in to see what's woken me.

I'm sweating again and shaking like a penguin in a blizzard as she hugs me.

Like I said, I was ten years old.

We told Dad a fortnight later, when he returned from Denham after a Snapper fishing trip. We were at breakfast. He was making toast. He listened, thought about it for a moment and then slowly nodded without a comment, as was his way.

It didn't pay to push him.

Then he said at last, "That can only mean two things, Sonny. You're walking in the footsteps of Geronimo, so you have to watch your step. You have to be careful. Be precise and aware. On the ball. All the time. Those Diamond Rattlesnakes in your path are out to do you harm before you become a teenager and then a man."

He turned back to the toaster to retrieve his slices, then sat and spread the honey. Concentrating, by the looks. Grim and silent as usual. Not glancing up, before he took a bite. And then another. And a third.

“That’s only one,” I dared to break the silence at last, the only sound the crunching as he chewed his toast. “What’s the other?”

“The other what?”

“You said my dream has two meanings.”

“Oh, right. Yes. That. Well. Your Uncle “Storky” Heron out on Murchison House Station the other night. He took his torch and went up to the freezer in the shearing shed to get a leg of lamb. When he lifted the lid, he felt something hit his ankle as he reached in. Didn’t think too much about it till he got to the door and looked down. There was this two metre Dugite with its fangs caught in his West Coast Eagles footy socks. It was angry as, according to him.”

“That’s it?”

“That’s it. Just as well he had his socks rolled down and thick right where it bit, he reckons.”

He took another bite, and I could see his mind wandering off. Back to Shark Bay and pulling in another Snapper trap, most probably.

“So, what did he do?”

He looked up sharply as he swallowed. “What do you think he did? He hit it with the leg of lamb, you drongo. Just as well it was frozen.”

And that was that.

I’d predicted the past, and the past event had happened a week ago. My prophetic dreams were pointless.

Drongo.

That’s me.

I’m the middle kid, with my younger sister Meg still at home. She’s four and picks her nose, as I’ve mentioned. It’s my older brother Billy, five years older than me, whose shit doesn’t stink according to Dad. Straight A’s and studying Law at the WA Uni. Me, I’m a C grade student and I’m okay with that. If I earn a B it’s the occasional miracle. Except for art. Art’s an A most of the time.

“Art?” Dad said once, checking my report. “What’s the point, Sonny? What are we wasting good money on you for? You’ll end up painting boomerangs for the tourists or designing patterns for the materials used in some flea-bitten dressmaker’s shop at best. Art’s for dreamers in my book.”

Dreamers.

Exactly!

So I almost made a decision not to tell anyone about them in future.

Until my Uncle, Lennard Currie, the one outstanding success in our family with glass sculptures he has created all over the world—including the famous glass cenotaph in Fremantle dedicated to the twenty thousand blackfellas who died on our behalf during the invasion—told me to keep a diary and show him, when he visited us a few days after I had the snake dream.

He’s one of our Malgana Yamaji men of High Degree. He’s over seventy years old now. With a full mop of white hair and eyebrows to match, he has these startling eyes. One’s a brilliant blue, the other brown. I’ve known him all my life so I don’t notice them, but I can imagine if you met him for the first time you’d get a shock. He thinks it’s a throwback, proving he’s related to a blue-eyed Dutch sailor who survived a shipwreck three centuries ago in the north-west. He’s six foot three and still straight as a piece of four by two, provided you don’t notice his developing pot.

You don’t mess with him and he’ll treat you the way you want to be treated as a kid—with mutual respect, without being patronised.

Step out of line though, different story.

His partner, Aunty Alicia, is a Mexican twenty years younger than him. She’s a linguist working at the Yamaji Language Centre keeping all our languages alive. I visit her at the Centre sometimes when she’s up from Perth, but that

isn't often these days. She's part Tarahumaran Indian and she's the one told Dad about the Suma Apaches. Her tribe used to be at war with them centuries ago in the mountains in north-west Mexico, she says.

So I suppose I owe her my name.

Thanks Aunty Alicia.

"Your dreams could have a deeper meaning, Suma," Uncle Lennard said. "Could be the ancestors communicating with you. I don't just think it's possible. I'm sure of it." He placed a hand on my shoulder and squeezed. I can still feel it to this day if I try hard enough and it's comforting. "That three-masted ship out in the bay. You never know, it could be survivors of the *Zuytdorp* wreck communicating with you, and you could be another Carl Jung, dreaming of blood all over Germany and the Western Front a year before the First World War."

I wondered about the way he looked at me that day, like he knew something about me I didn't and was keeping it to himself, but I took him at his word.

And Carl Jung dreaming of blood? I haven't got round to googling him yet. You can give Google a go too, if you're not sure.

Uncle Lennard has researched the shipwreck of the *Zuytdorp* on the cliffs north of Kalbarri, after all. He's even written a novel about it, but couldn't get it published in the 1990's. He says thirty rejection slips was all it took for him to stick it in a bottom drawer, and it hasn't seen the light of day since then. I must get him to let me read it when I'm older if he doesn't mind.

"Take my advice," he told me that day. "Record your dreams for me, and read *Carpet Of Silver* if there's a copy in the school library. It came out in 1996, the same year I got the 30th rejection slip for my novel. That'll give you a good idea what I'm talking about. It'll give you all the facts about the

Zuytdorp shipwreck and it's an easy read." Then he chuckled. "Easier than mine, by all accounts."

Before he turned away he asked me, "Have you got a mobile phone, Suma?"

"Yes, I do. An Apple iPhone 12. Mum bought me one last month when they came out, so we could keep in touch when I'm at school in the boarding house."

"So have I. Feel free to call me and we can talk about your latest dream at any time, if you want to get it off your chest."

We swapped numbers and I felt privileged.

So while I still told Mum about my dreams, I've also recorded them ever since. I'm about to fill my second exercise book and I'll get round to showing them to Uncle Lennard when I'm good and ready.

One of these fine days.

He knows about them anyway, because we've spoken on the phone.

With him I'm certain it wouldn't have been in one ear and out the other, like Dad.