

Misscha and the Dark Shaman

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Chapter 2

Relaxed and in a quiet tempo, she sips her water. Her eyes flicker open for just a moment, reflecting her placid face on the restless water; large green eyes, with deep black pupils. The widest part of her delicate face is covered with jet-black hair, morphing to a dull white in the centre of her nose; the rippling water showing a hint of white hair from her chin and chest.

From above her, the soft ticking sound of a cuckoo's clock can be heard, telling that the morning is almost over. On the floor at the other side of the kitchen against the outer wall, is her sleeping basket. It nestles snugly in front of a stove and is always warm and comfortable. The route that Misscha walks most during a day is from basket to food bowl.

The kitchen is like the rest of the farm highly neglected. The decaying wallpaper hangs partly off the wall and is covered with yellow and brown spots.

Near the stove against the same wall is a heavy oak oblong kitchen table. The longer side flush against the wall.

At the side by the stove sits an old woman of perhaps 85 years. She is the only one left in this old house. In front of her on the table is a collection of medicines, two tubes of ointment and some make-up. She has already taken her daily dose of medicines, smeared the ointment on her brittle old legs and just started with putting on her make-up. The old woman wears her long grey hair, which is normally left to hang down to her shoulders, up in a loose bun on her head. Light blue eyes on her brown wrinkled face still have the bright and lucid sparkle from her youth. Despite her age, she is still clear of mind.

The sound of the mailbox is heard through the kitchen door, followed by a dull bump. Misscha looks up expectantly and dives through the cat-flap in the kitchen door. She runs through the hall and the long hallway and skids to a halt on the morning newspaper; a couple of letters flying asunder as she tumbles through them. With her little mouth she takes the letters one after the other between her teeth, pushing each one against the wall to get a better grip, and scampers back to the kitchen. Her oversized belly swaying from left to right as she does so. At points, it even touches the floor. With a little extra effort, she is able to push the bundle of mail through the cat hatch. Once back in the kitchen, she hops up via the nearest chair, stuttering to rest in front of the old woman's face.

The woman looks up and smiles. Her eyes are sparkling when she sees the playful behaviour of her cat. Softly she pets Misscha on her head and tickles her gently behind her ears.

Misscha drops the mail from her mouth, scattering pills and makeup while she does so.

The woman picks up the mail and squints at the words on the uppermost envelope.

'Hmm,' she thinks, 'now where did I leave my glasses?'

As if touched by this thought, Misscha searches the kitchen, the kitchen table, the cast iron sink and finally looks into the living room. There, in the far distance, she spots the glasses on the little table near the comfy chair next to the stove.

She opts for a long leap from the table and lands deftly on the small table. There, she carefully hooks her little head under the cord and returns more calmly with the glasses to the kitchen table. Happy, she hops back into the old woman's lap.

The old woman pets her head in appreciation. 'My Goodness! How did you get so smart? You must be the smartest animal I have ever met in my life,' she whispers with a smile to Misscha.

Carefully, she takes the cord from Misscha's neck, puts the glasses on her own nose and starts reading the mail at a relaxed pace. Misscha follows every movement the Woman makes and understands that for the next couple of minutes the Woman will be focusing her attention on these letters, and decides on a short walk.

Calmly, this time, she walks to the kitchen door and leaves through the flap. In the hall she stops for a moment and wonders: what to do now? Shall I go on a short walk between the sweet smelling flowers and the high grass, or shall I take a stroll up to the attic? Up there, it smells so heavenly among the old boxes, and I'm sure to find a spot already warmed by the sun.

She decides on the latter, and follows the left side of the wall to the attic stairs. The old woman hasn't been this way for many years; her weak legs no longer able. Near the entrance to the attic is a large wooden trunk. The lid is closed, but through the gaps, she can see books of all different sizes and colours. On top of the chest, is a bundle of magazines and on top of them, a bundle of photo albums.

She turns left and reaches the large open space under the roof of the old farm. The atmosphere in the old attic is magical. Old furniture lies strewn across the floor, broken chairs with their legs in the air as if haven given up on life. Near the walls are a couple of old boxes, some of them half opened, other firmly closed. Everything is covered with layers of dust and pieces of wood fallen from the decrepit roof. The lone sunbeam, which enters through the attic window, makes the flowing dust visible, and the warmth from the sun on the wooden roof fills the attic with a sweet musky smell.

Surefootedly, Misscha walks to the spot, which basks in the warm hazy sunshine. Stretching and turning a few times, she finds her chosen spot and lays down; her front legs crossed half over her face. She falls asleep.

She opens her eyes, or maybe not. It is an experience she doesn't really know how to interpret. When she looks around, she sees that the attic has changed into a wide landscape. She cannot discern a horizon. This surrounding seems to know no borders, stretching on and on in every direction.

The trees, the flowers, the high grass... they seem to radiate a brightness Misscha didn't notice before. There are no shadows, and when she looks up to the bright blue sky to search for the position of the sun, she is not able to find him.

Misscha tentatively takes a couple of steps towards a bright yellow flower with curving petals. The petals seem to grow spirally inwards in ever decreasing circles, until they vanish into obscurity in the centre. When Misscha looks at the other flowers and plants nearby, she sees the same thing in one form or another.

There is no wind. No leaves are moving on the trees, and the grass between her legs is deathly still. Misscha puts her nose in the air and takes a deep breath. She becomes aware of a sweet smell that comes from the yellow flower. Like the colours around her, this smell is intense; a far cry from the subtle scents she is used to.

Then suddenly she hears a vague scream. She points her ears to find the direction from the sound and spots a little figure moving towards her at a fast pace. It appears to be growing in size and Misscha senses that this person is in danger and running to her for help. A shadow appears behind the person and before Misscha understands what is going on and is able to get a better look at this creature, it smothers the figure in darkness. Within a second, both are gone.

Misscha opens her eyes, again, but this time she finds herself back on the old familiar attic. Her heart is still pounding in her chest, and she needs a short moment to process the experience. From downstairs sounds the ringing of the telephone. She sluggishly realises this is what woke her.

With a quick jump she gets to her feet, runs out of the attic and down the stairs.

When Misscha arrives in the living room downstairs, she sees the Woman sitting by the telephone with the receiver in her hand. Her face looks sad and Misscha feels that she just heard some bad news.

The woman puts the receiver down.

'My dear Misscha,' the old woman tells her softly when she sees Misscha looking at her.

'I only have one son, but again he decided not to come today.'

With a deep sigh she gets slowly on her feet and walks back to the kitchen, one step at the time, clearly with pain. Her posture is crooked and her head points a little to the ground. Her bowed back betrays the stories of her life, and the heavy physical work it entailed.

"No time today. Sorry. Something came up," the woman is mumbling in herself while walking to the kitchen sink.

'It seems that these days, there is always something 'coming up'. It must have been three weeks ago that I saw him last. My only child cannot find even a little time for a short visit. Who knows, how much time I still have left in this life?'

She puts the little amount of dirty dishes and cups in the sink, adds a little bit of detergent and fills the sink with warm water.

Misscha feels the sadness from the old woman, and moves closely around her legs, mewing sympathetically. She lies down at her left side, and waits until she is finished her work. She remembers from previous occasions that after the dishes, there always follows a short walk outside; one of her most favourite moments of the day.

Some thirty minutes later, when the sun is already high in the sky, they leave the house. The big impressive trees along the long kitchen wall are now casting their shadows over walls and windows.

For the largest part of the day, the house is overshadowed by these high trees, which obscures much of the sunlight. The daylight inside the house is dull and thus necessary to keep lights on for much of the day.

Misscha and the old woman are walking to the side of the house, where the small garden merges into the larger part on the front side of the house. The garden is large but neglected. For many months, nobody has tended it. Everywhere is peppered with weeds, and the garden itself is covered with brown leaf.

'Look Misscha,' the old woman explains to her with a soft voice, 'such a nice garden, so many beautiful colors, but if nobody takes care of it, it becomes a mess all too soon. My lovely son is 'too busy' today. I would do it myself, but for my legs and back. Every part of my body is old and useless'

Misscha listens to the words, but doesn't really understand them. But as always, little pictures in her mind are forming as she listens and, together with the feelings she gets, has a good impression of what the Woman is saying.

While the old woman walks deeper into the garden and admires the colours from the different flowers in the sunlight, Misscha goes her own way. She takes a walk along the walls and experiences the many different smells which are coming from the house. A mix of wet earth, a weak and soft basement odour, and mouldy stones above the dense earth... From under the reed roof, a soft sound is heard from the newly hatched birds, calling for food.

Misscha sneaks through the high grass. There are little insects everywhere, making all kinds of noises. From behind a thicket of grass, she looks quizzically at the crickets on the other side, the mosquitos above the puddle from last night's rain, restless butterflies over her head and bees on the sweet smelling flowers.

In the back of the garden she pauses for a moment near a hollow tree trunk. This is one of her favorite's spots to doze away in, especially in the summer when the sun has warmed the dry wood and the odor from mould wood is spread in and around the trunk.

She feels how the warmth of the day is making her slow and sleepy and decides to take a short break, so she crawls through the low hole from the trunk, makes herself comfortable. She quickly falls asleep.

When Misscha enters the house again a few hours later, the sun is almost gone and it's starting to get colder. While passing the kitchen, she takes some bites of meat from her food tray and walks further into the living room. There, the old woman sits already in her comfy chair near the stove, and watches the six o'clock news on TV.

The living room is long and the ceiling low, as is customary on most 19th century farms. The ceiling shows many cracks and little rips. The carpet is threadbare in many places and shows light yellow spots; the legacy of generations of dogs who lived here over the years. Some of these spots are tucked away under chairs and little tables.

When Misscha sees how the old woman takes off her shoes and starts to massage her feet, she runs to the kitchen, takes a slipper in her little mouth and runs back to the living room. For a second time she runs to the kitchen, takes the other slipper and drops it next to the first one on the floor.

'My dear Misscha,' the woman mumbles, and cuddles her behind her ears. Misscha loves it, starts to snore softly and then stretches herself out on the floor by the chair next to the warm stove.

When she awakes a couple of hours later, she sees that the Woman already changed her daily clothes for her white nightdress and is preparing the table in the kitchen for breakfast next morning.

Ten minutes later, she walks into the living room with a glass of water in her hands.

'Come, Misscha,' she says. 'Time for bed'

She opens the living room door and turns the light switch. The room is enveloped with a sudden darkness, as she walks to her bedroom. The moment the woman is in bed, Misscha snuggles up next to her feet. After a few moments she falls into a deep sleep.

She opens her eyes, and finds herself back again at that strange but in every way intense surrounding. Similar to her last visit here, the colours and odours are covering her deeply and again she cannot remember a time that she experiences this ever before. Many hours went by in her life at the farm since she was here for the last time, but in this world, time seems to have come to a halt. No longer or shorter shadows are giving her any clue as to the time.

Then, the memory of the dark shadow returns to her in full strength and she feels her senses sharpening and her muscles tensing; ready to react if necessary. Quickly, she looks around and sees to her delight that she is alone, although the surrounding is not the same as it was earlier today. On her right is a bright green forest, starting far behind her and stretching endlessly into the distance.

Slowly she walks forwards, all the time on her guard, listening for a hint of danger, her nose in the air. The forest border is sharply marked and abruptly changes from soft green grass into a strong contrasting dark forest.

When she leaves the grass and takes a step between the trees, she feels a stark change in the atmosphere. The trees on both sides and in front of her, are somehow adding to the feeling of unease. They feel more hostile, more intrusive than those, which she knows in her own world. Carefully she takes another step forwards and at that moment something quickly moves away from her. It was only a flickering moment, but she could feel the evil from this nameless creature. Her little heart is pounding faster in her chest. She turns around and runs back as fast as she can to the soft grass. The moment she feels the warm grass under her feet, sleep is closing her eyes, and no time seems to pass before she opens them again.

She finds herself back in the bedroom of the Woman, at the feet end of the bed. Restless and agitated, she gets up and looks around (surveys) the room. The sun is shining through the chink in the curtains and it seems to be later in the day than she had thought. When she looks at the bed, she sees that the old woman is still asleep, something that surprises her. Normally around this hour she is already eating her breakfast in the kitchen. Misscha jumps from the bed and leaves the bedroom.

Via the hall, she walks to the backdoor and goes outside via the cat hatch. A fresh morning breeze caresses her face and she feels much better. The strange dream from last night is disappearing fast from her mind. She decides to take a short walk before going back inside for her morning food.

Via the small side of the house and the large garden at the front, she arrives at the sand path that stretches itself into both directions. The path is small and just wide enough to give space for a single small car. Misscha looks along the path; both sides are lush meadowland with cows, some horses and hedges, as well as entrances for other farms and fences.

Relaxed, Misscha crosses the sand path, but just before she reaches the other end, she hears the sound of a car to her left. When she looks up, she sees it closing fast. Instinctively, she springs out of the way. The car comes to a screeching halt on the spot she left a second before. The car window opens. Excited voices are coming from the car; cursing from two men and crying from the children. A plastic garbage bag is unceremoniously pushed out of the window, falling a few meters further into the ditch alongside the path. The window closes again and the car speeds off once more. The chatter of voices fades into nothing. Silence.

Misscha walks curiously to the border of the ditch and looks at the bag. Surprised she shakes her little head. What a strange creature's people can be, she thinks. Sometimes so sensitive and sweet, but at the same time they don't seem to have any regard for nature; destroying it without a second thought.

She turns around to get back to the kitchen when she suddenly hears soft sad noises, coming from the bag. Closer inspection reveals a squirming movement within. She understands, and with a single high jump, she reaches the bag, takes it firmly between her teeth and pulls it back to the border of the ditch.