

Chenjerai Hove

Nights With Ghosts - A Child's Letter from the Rubble

(written after Operation Murambatsvina, the operation in which the Zimbabwe government destroyed 700 000 houses)

dear samueri, my friend,
i will never see you again;
maybe i will.
but i shall not know
until father finds us a a new address.
addresses!
we have none anymore.
we are of no address.

now that i have written this letter,
where do i post it to?
shall i say,
samueri,
care of the next rubble
harare?

or shall i say,
samueri,
care of all the filth,
salisbury?

our little street,
you remember?
the one without broken glass,
the one where we urinated freely
behind the small market
and our mothers called us names
with the sweet voices of mothers?
our little street,
with chickens that belonged to no one
in particular,
is no longer there:

i don't know your address,
you don't know my address.
samueri,
i am standing on a broken brick,
the only survivor
of our home.
what are you standing on,
samueri?

you see, samueri,

we don't have guns
or spears
or arrows,
or sticks.
tell me,
samueri,
why police,
they bring guns
hammers
anger
blood in their eyes
to destroy our only home?

even teacher mutawu,
he also has no address.
i saw out school
in the fire.
i saw our teacher crying,
carried away by police
with guns and anger.

i will continue writing this letter,
samueri
till i know
your address
teacher mutawu's address
my father's work address
my little sister's address
my little dog's address
my mother's address
everyone's address,

care of spca
care of filth department
care of order
care of caledonia camp,
care of tribal trust land
care of the river bank!
care of coackroach camp1
care of maggots
care of crime and grime
care of state house!

samueri,
tell teacher mutawu,
i want to learn to write
so i can erase memories
of our home
in the rubble.

tell teacher mutawu,

we will meet
when i have grown a beard
and drive a car
like the police car
like the soldiers with guns.

samueri,
i send you only
a broken brick
before they break it again
for the second time
the third time
the fourth time.

a broken brick
a broken heart
a broken father
a broken mother.

samueri,
stay strong.
samueri,
beware of falling bricks
and guns.

Chirikure Chirikure

Salt

Asking for salt doesn't mean I am poor
Borrowing salt doesn't mean I am broke
Our salt ran out unexpectedly
Our salt got finished unexpectedly

If the tuck-shop was still there
The kids could have gone to buy some
Now the tuck-shop is no longer there
It was destroyed by the tsunami

The *sadza* is ready
The relish is ready
The family is waiting
But salt is not there

Don't think that I am mad
You and I know who is mad
Don't think that I can't plan
We know who the poor planner is

Please help me with salt
Even a teaspoon measure will do
Please, it's not my fault
Our land has been gripped by evil spirits

Let's cry with hope

We know where we came from
We had some good times
We also had some sad moments

We know where we are today
Happy moments are rare
Sadness is right on our backs

We know where we want to be
Let happy moments multiply
Let sadness be a thing of the past

We should definitely mourn
But let us cry with hope
Tomorrow we shall celebrate

Dambudzo Marechera

Oracle of the Povo

Her vision`s scrubland
Of out-of-work heroes
Who yesterday a country won
And today poverty tasted

And some of the hills hurried their thirst
And others to arson and blasphemy
Waving down tourists and buses
Unleashing havoc no tongue can tell –
Her vision`s Droughtstricken acres
Of lean harried squatters
And fat pompous armed overlords
Touching to torch the makeshift shelters
Heading to magistrate and village court
The most vulnerable and hungry of citizens –
Her vision`s Drought Relief graintrucks
Vanished into thin air between departure point
And expectant destination –
In despair, she is found in beerhalls

And shebeens, by the roadside
And in brothels: selling the last
Bits and pieces of her soured vision.

Rats for Sale

You want to buy what?
A rat,
A rat with a conscience.
A rat with a permanent conscience?
That`s the general idea.
Well I have several you can choose from.
This one just ate Grenada,
Ripped it to bits and shat it out
American Girl cleansing lotion.
It`s already started to nibble and salivate at a dainty
Piece of Nicaraguan cheese.
But it`s (wink, nudge) really aiming BIG now in Berlin
London, Amsterdam, Paris
Aiming at Natasha`s tits in Moscow –
Show me another.
Okay. Now, this one is the sly type.
It eats colonialism
So that it can shit in pure malice on its own.
I tried to buy it in Kenya
I tried to buy it in Malawi
I tried to buy it right here
But you know where I got the bastard?
Having dinner with the ghosts of
Malan, Verwoerd, Vorster, and Botha.
Show me the others.
Well this one was involved in the Aquino affair
That one befriended the Shah and introduced him to
That other one called the Ayatollah.
That short clerical one and that fat grey old lady...

In Jail the Only Telephone Is the Washbasin Hole: Blow and We`ll Hear!

Write the poem not from classroom lectures
But from the barricade`s shrieking defiance
From the mortuary`s brightly frozen monocle
From day`s gunburst to night`s screaming human torch
From bleeding teeth that informed to underground
Perception of black fire

Write the poem not from the rhyme & reason of England
Nor the Israeli chant that stutters bullets against
Palestinians
Nor (for fuck`s sake) from the negritude that negroed us
Write the poem, the song, the anthem, from what within
You
Fused goals with guns & created citizens instead of slaves

Do not scream quitly
We want to hear, to know
And forge the breastplate a poet needs against THEM!