POEMS FROM *THE GIRL WHO THEN FEARED TO SLEEP*
by Angifi Dladla

Deep South, 2001

EXPOSURE

i heard the back door open.
like a wheelbarrow,
i raised my head
and leaned on my elbows.

someone was inside . . .
the voodoo and the electronic
securities must be in deep sleep
with dogs and neighbourhood watch!

feet and hands paddled,
towing the long body
right into our bedroom
three meters above the floor level.

my stepfather? no, it can't be . . . !
he never knew where i was,
and never cared even before
he died to leave me in peace.

hovering silently in front of the wardrobe
like an alien craft, he turned
his grey head the way a fowl does:
"please, maboi," he cried,

tears drowning that hairy face,
"forgive me, forgive me maboi."
never had i wronged this man,
nor held him grudges.

seemed he caught my thoughts
as he thanked me, and
glided out backwards
like an ocean creature, relieved.

i shivered and rolled myself
with my snoring wife.

when i told her in the morning,
she gawked at me and chuckled:

“poets are dreamers . . .”

THE STUBBORN DEATH
(to the grandchildren of this youth)

when you hear your grandfather
scream and plead for death,
do know he hears the unheard —
the screaming flames;
the groaning smoke.
do know he feels the unfelt —
his dancing self
around screams and groans.
do know he sees the unseen —
the wriggling bodies
with bellies distending
into gargantuan black bubbles
which just erupt.
do know he smells the unsmelt —
the charcoal of faeces
protruding like stumpy tails.
do know he was a match-
stick, he was!

IMPRESSION

off i flinched,
drained
dizzy and dazed.
behind; outsize
black wound
in the earth
where the tyre has nailed him.
human gravy in the sun . . .

SO TURNED A TAXI

so turned a taxi
into a lightning-bird
warming up,
but whirled in volumed flames
for failing to fly.

we would later encounter
an unidentified object;
fused iron and bones.

TOMORROW

tomorrow, i'll rubbish someone's airspace.
no one will intercept me, tomorrow
i'll get out, out to the . . . worlds
of true gods. there
i'll tell about hunger
in africa, asia, europe, america
and all the islands while someone dumps
tons of tons of fresh food into the vomiting ocean.
i'll tell about the total ban of relevant medication
and technologies to the slums, shacks and the hovels.
i'll tell about people owning more than one palace
while small men live or die in the parks, pavements and holes.
i'll tell about effrontery to the aged
while their epic harvests are in the palaces and granaries.
i'll tell about the jolly fat fellows who barter
our crosses for their show once every four or five years.
i'll tell about war on butchery
while flesh steams on tables.
i'll tell about the real funder
of fires and saws on forests.
i'll tell about the real funder
of lies, germs and genocides.
i'll tell about the real funder
of buriers of souls of great teachers.
i'll tell about the real funder
of lies, germs and genocides.
"oh gods!" i'll cry, "disarm the son of man
before his fear explodes; remind him
of who he really is." tomorrow
i'll fly out of my . . . body.

ROTTING

i don't know what missis says today.
can she say something,
today?

i remember her
no-nonsense "i don't-want-flies;
i'm-not-rotting . . ."

with her perfumed fan
always in the mirror
she used to sweep them balletically
away or let me detain them
in the dungeons of my dark hand, or
let me shower them with lethal vapour.

but today in the dust — large
large green flies

in her nostrils like warplanes
on a ghastly mission,
buzz and buzz and buzz . . .

i don't know what flies say to us.
do they say something,
to us?

AN INTRUDER
(for Illinge High, 9 August 1979)

i didn't see him, i was on duty;
he saw me, he was on duty

swifter than a whirlwind
he greeted me with balls
of fists and yellow of teeth.

i can't say how far, a paper in the storm i was.
i can't imagine such storm, at dreamspeed it went.
i couldn't feel the blows, too fast they were.

boys stormed at him;
the yellow, vacant laughter —
that i saw!

"don't kill him, he's a loony!"
yapped the girls.

i recovered;
i felt the blows:
mad, sharp and hot.

"he's insane, meneer,"
mourned the headmaster
in a tone of oozing laughter.

out i limped,
full of revenge
and shrapnels . . .

THE GIRL WHO THEN FEARED TO SLEEP
(for my daughter)

doctors and nurses told her.
she was dying,
the girl who then feared to sleep.
doctors and nurses warned us.
we must fetch the dying,
the girl who then feared to sleep.

she did not fear the sunset,
she did not fear the sunrise,
she did not fear the disease that plundered her,
she did not fear the complications that maddened her,
she did not fear the pains that twisted her —
sleep was what she feared.

we wondered what images exploded in that head.

when sleep stalked towards her,
my girl, dazed, became a spirit dolphin
shooting herself up, recklessly
and rattled her exoskeleton to all the rooms
and made the blackest coffee
and let the cacophony of rattles, bleats, hi-fi and tv sets flare.

we wondered what images exploded in that skull.
we tried to help and purchased help. no, she feared.

when sleep finally ambushed her,
she would talk, groan and chew something
probably scaring off the claws of sleep.
on discovering she had slid into sleep,
my girl, taller than usual, would perform the ritual —
rattling up and down the rooms.

we wondered what images exploded.
we tried to help and purchased help. no, she feared.

one morning in spring,
she was all hope and health.
and all day long
she exuded life and joy
till the sun bled beauty.
then, alone, she heard the steps.

she saw death.

she had no words,
but rattles,
she was all rattles
and jerks!

AS YOU DEMAND

as you demand this life of mine,
i give these eyes of mine to yours
to glare at you in all your life.
this cry i give, for sure will be
liquid curses within your ears.

this blood i offer will congeal
in your heels and form a pair of hearts
to pump red voices as you walk.

THE BUILDING, THE WEAPON AND THE WAY

the building you occupy, belonged to the enemy;
that's where he wrote tragedies and farces for our people.
his thought forms have formed you into his twin.

the weapon you inherited, carries his impressions.
like a dog used to sodomy, always it will
drive you to inhuman action.

the way you are, is the way he was
growing blindly without shame;
ignoring the rumbling under his feet.

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she was all hope and health.
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