

Batsirai CHIGAMA

Poems

lover

There is a new language in your mouth
Growing on the palate of your crude tongue
Smooth, snazzy and sexy
A young thing like twenty one
has wrapped sweetness around your tongue
I like it, someone has tamed you
I know for sure it wasn't me.

changamire*

There were things familiar, brisk,
nonchalant conversations, neon fabrics
of this place that once was home.
He used to sit under the bougainvillea
behind my mother's kitchen for his afternoon tea,
suit and tie clad knitting earthly stories of
when he was a boy and I not yet born.
Chitoto was the famous one who thought himself
a great fighter, he would begin
among other anecdotes to whoever cared to listen
knobkerrie resting on his lap taking the space I
should have sat. I have returned home,
the bougainvillea is gone
It's pink petals unfolding invasive memory
Familiar words roll off my tongue smoothly now
No one will ever lisp-mimic me like he used to
Meaning departs, fails to connect.
Shimmering blue, yellow ties spin before my eyes, yet
I don't remember how the tobacco from his pipe smelt;
my grandfather...he loved his afternoon tea...
that is all I remember.

**changamire is Shona for sir*

*"fter Livingstone Exhibition, Poetry Stanza Festival, Scotland, 2013
Gather The Children, Ntombekhaya Poetry, 2018*

three pots and a pan

I want to return home
to my three pots and a pan
my rickety bed and chair

I miss the spider hanging in the kitchen
long dead and harmless
a reminder, many things may come to pass
but not you and me.

Home is you my love
your warm smile and touch
the way your arms wrap around me
like I am your whole world

Fiercely dissolving us into one
I want to return home and swim
in the ocean of your embraces.

remembering

I want to meet you again, now,
in old age
touch the wrinkles on your body
to unfold from life's ridges
the kindness and gentleness your eyes
carried when we were young
and stupid, to let each other go
the way we did. I never stopped
needing you.

for forgetting to breathe while alive

My sister is refusing to be buried
The undertaker has been trying for hours
to move the coffin from her house
The coffin swells at every attempt.
I warned her all the time, she would die
of bitterness one day, try I said,
try to breathe once in a while
let the anger go, try not to keep score.

In death her sadness wraps the mourners in a trance
they sing and dance like this is an offering
to appease her lifetime of sadness. Kurara hope rugare*
they sing, all night, beat the drum
as if to beat the sadness out of her dead body.

I used to tell her to breathe;
she has only remembered now
She sucks in all the mourners' breaths
making the coffin swell
every time the undertaker
reaches for the door.

*Kurara hope rugare loosely translated in English would mean 'sleep is a luxury'

Cyphers, Ireland, 2019

to mothers learning to breathe and failing

(It's not your fault)

Our great grandfathers forgot

To teach our grandfathers

To teach our fathers to give

Our mothers room to breathe.

democracy

You love to wave him about
like a magic wand
to make all evil disappear instantly.

Remember son
He is a senile, ancient one
Who uses human bones
for a walking stick

Women and the Global Imagination, *Prairie Schooner*, 2014
Gather The Children, Ntombekhaya Poetry, 2018

bullets of perseverance

Even in the breath of our mother's prayers
we are not safe
these are warriors who fight
to keep their church uniforms untainted
they tell us to stay, until
they get a call from the police,
"I'm sorry ma, your daughter was shot dead
with bullets of perseverance last night."

Gather The Children, Ntombekhaya Poetry, 2018

of days uncertain

There will be days uncertain
like the wind blows from
holes in the earth you can't see
Days that feel like the spirits are in turmoil
when the cloud carries the face
of your late grandmother, you are torn,
not knowing whether you too have ascended.

The sun doesn't always shine muzukuru*
it gathers its warmth in shallow ponds
and freezes sometimes, so harvest.
Harvest it when it comes
for days like this when Yakutsk visits
and sits uninvited in your lounge
takes a toothpick to the last vestige of warmth
and swallows.

There will be days too certain
let them wear you like a crown
Days filled with yellow butterflies
and things transient but bright
Dance. Dance without care,
dance until the chickens come home
to dance with you, until every bone in you aches
of good vibe and cheer, dance.

Days like this may be rare
frame them, in heart-sized molecules
patch these together with meticulous care
stitch out every breathing hole
keep the silos tight
for there will be days uncertain...

**muzukuru is Shona for grandchild*

Gather The Children, Ntombekhaya Poetry, 2018

suicide demons

She has packed her bounty
gorgeous and gracious mind
into her pretty luggage
to take journeys into herself, in her room
behind her sun crinkled curtains
Like the pathway that leads to her homestead
she has forgotten me, forgotten other many things
like how to comb her hair, her sister tells me.
She says she wants to heal. To breathe.
I am here, patiently waiting, watching
the pathway to her homestead, hoping,
for the day she will appear, praying
she will remember me and the many other things
she is forcing herself to forget
like how to breathe.

snake world junction

a happy bright shimmery Sunday afternoon
is not a day and time to die
Such perfect weather cannot be for death
such is the kind of weather for dancing
for endless love and happy-ever-after-promises
such a sweet-lies-happy-canoodling-weather –
nothing harmful
like a white Amarak slicing a man in half
to a thing worthless, tattered.
This is no way to die
incoherent, staggering to meet the creator.
How will you argue your case?

corporate dad

On the day a man brought cows to my people
Another strange man wore a father's costume
Grey, stern and fit to be a corporate dad.
I undressed him with my eyes
lifted the costume and bestowed it on my mother.
She was the only father I had ever known.

Gather The Children, 2018

epitaph

Almost a father to us
and husband to our mother.
A man who drowned himself
in “Scuds”* of sorrow
burnt his lungs till he choked
himself out of life.

** Scud is opaque beer packed in scud-shaped containers*

Poetry International Website, 2014
Gather The Children, Ntombekhaya Poetry, 2018
