

Excerpt from 'Original skin'

I joined the thousands at Matthew Goniwe's funeral,
carrying burning flames of righteous indignation.
And on that day
I saw my first communist flag:
borne above the dust
by the army of the dispossessed.
And I felt so connected.
The flag was the sun rising in the east
like the dawn of a new day of justice and equality.
All our pain carried away on the wings of a freedom song.
What innocent hope, what sincerity.
our raised fists in the innocent air ringing with freedom songs.

Singa masoja ka Mandela
Singa masoja ka Mandela

Innocence until the police opened fire on the crowd, first with teargas
then with live ammunition, and the crowd surged towards
the cop car like a hungry beast and pulled a black policeman out
and quicker than you could say state of emergency,
threw a tyre over his neck,
doused him in petrol and set him on fire.
And we cheered because
here was our power, burning flame
destroying an agent of the dark conspiracy
that kept us chained to our shamed identity.
Sashisa impimpi, sashisa, sashisa!

This day branded me with a warning:
emotions, long bottled, breaking free
cause destruction. A cycle of pain
coming back to haunt us again.

One two, buckle my shoe,
pamphlets were the petrol bombs I threw
three, four, the prison doors
closed on our hoping fingers.

Lapho, lapho, lapho siya khona
Thina silinde lukufa kwethu

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The Butterfly – version one

He was the last. Truly the last.
Such yellowness was bitter and blinding
Like the sun's tear shattered on stone.
That was his true colour.
And how easily he climbed, and how high,
Certainly, climbing, he wanted
To kiss the last of my world.

I have been here seven weeks,
'Ghettoized'.
Who loved me have found me,
Daisies call to me,
And the branches also of the white chestnut in the yard.
But I haven't seen a butterfly here.
That last one was the last one.
There are no butterflies, here, in the ghetto.

"There is No Time" – Breyten Breytenbach

there is no time
time is man's skin
it cracks and crackles and shrinks
in life's passing-by
in the fire of being
telling the hours
then letting them be
in the ever reverberating
moment of silence

in the smoking dance
of the evening star and the midnight sun
in the curl of the leaf
in the dove's swiftly
graceful and fluttered

gesture of dying

there is no time
time is the shooting comet of recall
strewing heaven with the sparks
of stories no one will ever hear again

time's my love for you
the lizard movements
in your body that come and go
to fill the hollows
with the fire of telling
those many faces of departure

there is no time
just the pulse of the heart
as pain under eye-shells

just the emptied tell-skin
of this poem
splotched and measured
by cancer words of forgetting
like lizard shit

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Nothing but the truth

THANDO: You are not staying a little longer ... I mean to mourn?

MANDISA: My father died two weeks ago. I've done all the mourning
... I've got work to do now.

THANDO: My father would expect us to show some respect for at least a month as children. Elderly people mourn much longer. He won't allow me to go with you to Jo'burg.

MANDISA: Girl! 'He won't allow you'!

THANDO: Things are different here. This is not London. There are rules in this house. For as long as I am staying with him under his roof there are rules and they're his rules [laughing]. Would you like some tea?

She goes to the kitchen.

MANDISA [following her]: Yes, love some.

THANDO: You were telling me about yourself.

MANDISA: My mother works for Amnesty International and has done for donkey's years. She met my father in Lagos, Nigeria, where she was working at the Amnesty office. Love at first sight – as my father used to say. They both came to London and got married – I was born ...

THANDO: Any brothers and sisters?

MANDISA: Nope. I am the only child.

THANDO: I had a brother, Luvuyo, not from my mom though, but he died ... he was killed.

MANDISA: During the riots. Yes my daddy told me.

THANDO: Not riots. Student uprisings. My father was devastated.

Every morning for months his pillow would be soaked with tears.

Always hid his tears from me. Didn't want me to feel that he loved him more than me. I know he did. African men love their sons more than their daughters.

Animal Farm

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After that it did not seem strange when the next day the pigs who were supervising the work of the farm all carried whips in their trotters. It did not seem strange to learn that the pigs had bought themselves a wireless set, were arranging to install a telephone, and had taken out subscriptions to John Bull, TitBits, and the Daily Mirror. It did not seem strange when Napoleon was seen strolling in the farmhouse garden with a pipe in his mouth-no, not even when the pigs took Mr. Jones's clothes out of the wardrobes and put them on, Napoleon himself appearing in a black coat, ratcatcher breeches, and leather leggings, while his favourite sow appeared in the watered silk dress which Mrs. Jones had been used to wearing it on Sundays.

A week later, in the afternoon, a number of dogcarts drove up to the farm. A deputation of neighbouring farmers had been invited to make a tour of inspection. They were shown all over the farm, and expressed great admiration for everything they saw, especially the windmill. The animals were weeding the turnip field. They worked diligently, hardly raising their faces from the ground, and not knowing whether to be more frightened of the pigs or of the human visitors. That evening loud laughter and bursts of singing came from the farmhouse. And suddenly, at the sound of the mingled voices, the animals were stricken with curiosity. What could be happening there, now that for the first time animals and human beings were meeting in terms of equality? With one accord they began to creep as quietly as possible into the farmhouse garden. At the gate they paused, half frightened to go on but Clover led the way in. They tiptoed up to the house, and such animals as were tall enough peered in at the dining-room window. There, round the long table, sat half a dozen farmers and half a dozen of the more eminent pigs, Napoleon himself occupying the seat of honour at the head of the table.