

Endings

Last night, I dreamt
of returning to Zimbabwe.
Busses were running,
women were selling
tomatoes and I kept telling
Mavhundutsie he couldn't
be beating me in darts,
he was dead. And when
his wife brought me tea,
I refused because she, too,
was dead. Where was Dolly
Parton and the six-six mute?
Where were the overweight
ladies of the night? I remember
one monsoonish evening,
coming upon a shop that sold
soap and dried fish. The owner
offered me a blanket and corner
until the rains died down.
He brought out orange drink
and chunks of bread. *The ground
is wet*, he said. And I agreed.
Too wet, he continued. I agreed
again but didn't understand
what he meant until he dragged
a long, wooden box into the room.
My brother. And then again,
the ground is too wet.
And because I used to believe
it was the escalating hardships
that elevated us towards the sacred,
that the struggle, alone, validated
a voice, for a long time I thought
the story ended there – moving off
the blanket to lie on the cold floor,
wresting, rapturously, to sleep.
But the truth is I also woke up
the next morning and walked home.
And when I arrived, Maxwell
needed help with his homework
and Chikasha reminded me that
someone has to chop more wood.
And someone has to weed the field.

**Nisha Questions my Need
for a Dehydrator**

In Africa, they called dried meat *biltong* –
thin cords of salted sinew that hung

from clotheslines. Not that I'm worried about
a lack of refrigeration or drought

but I love dried foods for their intense
concentration, their pockets of nuance,

like a poem that's realized its tensions.
Today, I received a letter from Edwin –

Muchabaiwa's dead. Marwizi is sick.
And here I am, concerned with domestic

pleasures. Nisha, I need this machine.
Sitting, watching distant and withering dreams

quietly implode...*find some way to revel,*
it reminds me, *in the reduced and shriveled.*

Moving On

Every six months or so, Edwin writes me a letter, lets me know who's passed on and the latest cost of bread. This time it's Benson, his younger brother Lovewell and sixty-thousand dollars. *I am next to nothing for money*, he writes, *and still*

without work. But Brother, the Pentecostal Church has arrived. They're teaching us the right way to pray. It's biblical – the disconnects and catalogues, destruction juxtaposed next to the austere and casual. Procrastination is the thief of time,

Edwin writes, *and it has been high time since you wrote back. Brother, are you still alive? If so, send money for goats as well as for beer – the bill of burial rites. Too often these days, I think of my past as a currency – rubbery chicken necks*

and children named Godknows, boys who die next to you on busses – I spend all my time distancing myself, plundering my past for sibylline truths and forget it's still alive. Edwin's waiting for me to write him back. He needs help paying for Lovewell's

funeral. *Back home, Edwin, all is well. Here is twenty dollars. I'll send more next Letter – it sounds so easy to write. But time wastes us, William Matthews writes, and time saves us and buys us. All we can do is steal back from what squanders us, swirl the past*

into the present, learn to trespass even as we go light. Our rituals grow rote, otherwise, prescribed and stale, the mere expectations of what comes next. It's dawn. I've stolen away. It's time to let go and hold on, it's time to write

back. *Please*, Edwin writes, *we need help. Lovewell
and Benson have passed away. I am next...*
Angels, thieves of time, prepare to wrestle.