

Sweetest Wine

Mother's Year
Aprons on wagons
Scents are heard
Flowers are not far

Joe Congo

If only it were possible to place a vineyard on the palm of her hand. If her morning tea cup would always take on a drop of cucumber softness. To present her a package of dew wrapped in wine. Flatten all horizons to lengthen her shortening vision. Assemble a choir of widows to filter the word that the year be made possible. Life, in only its lines and walks of joy be hers for only a year. And then all deafeningly rise to say, »We have been waiting for this year».

Come along then, we and her, to seek a fireplace around which all shall sit and listen to her tales as of old. To a place where the sun is generous to bask her wrinkles in democratic love. Where amidst a duelling duet of artillery sounds she will talk to the year and each day listen. There make wedding bells once again to ring her finger with a warpath lit with candles. The August winds blowing a little stronger unroll a passage for perspiring cannons.

She says she had a dream. It was an early dawn on the first day of harvesting. Women in an assorted colour of dresses were delicately spread over the fields. Work had already begun and the piles of maize were growing. They worked.



Continued to work cleaning the stocks to take in the load. The sun had not yet risen. By the hectare and acre the fields were being cleared. Still the sun had not yet risen. Even the birds had not yet left the warmth of their nests. The dawn remained unmoving, quite and distant. Sunrise was not coming. The east was refusing the parting opening to the sun.

The early morning breeze had settled to a waiting silence, a silence faulty and frightening. Everyone was straightening to take in this wonder. »Habe!« breaking the silence, »Helang!« hands on hips, »Tyhini!« joined another. No, the sun was not rising into the clear sky above. A stubborn ointment of light was all that stared back from the horizon. »The sun has given us the harvest. What did we give of ourselves in turn?« Everyone had turned to stare at this old woman with such a strange run of logic. »The sun has become the property of the dawn. The sun is angry«, and after a thoughtful pause. »Let us work, it is still dawn.« And like the ninth cyclone they descended upon the fields stretching entertainingly with riches and riches of maize.

The month is August. Winter is melting into a sleeping laze. Spring unbottles itself into the opening vacancy. A time when the sun steers the equator nearer south, nearer home. Unhurried warmth is anointing the land. A tornado contest of galloping winds descends as if to cut still deeper this great seasonal divide. A livewire buried for some time is returning to life. Nine days into this month we are invited to a dinner familiarly prepared. On the ninth dreamless night again invited to travel pendulummed to the dream of home becoming a necklace to be donned once again. This is her moment to relate the day — How it all began. Our wholesome hour to talk of the trophy that once was ours. To draw closer her earlobes in the whisper of a letter as we begin: »Dear Mother...«

With her the bloodknot begins. Mother nurtures life, waters it as a seedling, sees it grow, flourish, flower, wither and die. But with that death she never dies. She is the pencilled face that knows and understands that:



**»Death is conquerable
It has to suffer defeat several times
Before it can conquer once«**

And tears be a death conquered let them fall like rain awakening the greeneries. Let tears flow as the unhidden value of her sorrow. And when her month of August comes we shall turn her eyes towards the winds to dry. Let her tears flow and flow in rivulets of how to die.

It is said that the passage of time crucifies events and makes them memories. What we know is that tears do dry with time. At least events are recorded but tears are never preserved. It is tears falling on drying tears that never dry. To her we give a handkerchief, only bigger and still dry. Each teardrop that falls is for us another line added to unwritten memoirs. We raise glasses of the sweetest and reddest wine — to her tears. Still a drizzle, yes. Yet to pour. Ngama-nxeba nenyembezi. Malibongwe.!