

MY LULLABY IS FOR ALL BABIES

Mpho, you've been swelling. Losing your shape.
Losing it very fast. We heaved with uneasy joy.
We realised you would not, all the same, quench this
thin, small and wintry world.

Back home, teenagers
when a pair of LEE jeans is exhausted, thin and wintry
chop its knees with a blunt breadknife. They prolong
its lifespan. The beauty of some of the games
our townships play.

In American cars are long, sleek and stupid with our
times. The rich lurk behind their dark-tainted windowscreens.
it gives a dose of power, supreme power
to see and not be seen.
Safety of Hollywood agents is security of the guilty.

Mpho, do you realise how I avoided that root
in your stomach
developing in my womb? I planted it in you.
The man in you and the void guilt in me.
It is no transfer of the guilt of the rich. But only
the suspense of tragic achievements.
Not like a supersonic Jumbo Jet in the sky.
It puts the sun to bitter shame and negates nature.
But like a stubborn morsel in your stomach.
It resists when roughage peristalts past.
It builds a home there. With time, it burns
your inside like solid ulcer. You whimper, sob
and whine.

Black home, our mothers suckle white babies
on their sweaty black breasts. They grow tough
like mules. They play rugby for Springbok and
clip-clip our tickets at the frozen Glencoe Junction.
If you confuse the line, a heavy boot against your
stomach scatters your insides like soya beans.

Hitler, when he came to power, overseered the Olympic Games.
I'm told. He built broad highways and set trains
moving on schedule. But Berlin was torn asunder all the same.

In America across me in a night train under New York
almond-shaped scarlet nails of a whore tug on Hadley Chase.
I shift the ice-cold Coca-Cola can from my chilled hand.
But she does not wink her painted muppet eyes
which say:

“Come my honeybird, syphillis doesn't stick on you”.

Mpho, what shall we say when the root developing in you
begins to crawl out of its layette, through my legs,
into a tubful of tears? Itchy tears of those
we love and choose to die for. It is a crawl larger
than life. So who shall tell it
that our existence is thin, small and wintry?

Whom do we await to tell the whore? To tell her
who manufactured Hadley Chase, Coca-Cola and LEE jeans?
I know her comprehension is dull, deliberately, of course.
Then spit into her face. A sputum that sticks like
a famished cob-webbed spider desperate for life.

Back home, they say Robben Island gradually sinks into
the ocean because they want to build Pollsmoor Holiday Resort.
What will happen to its inhabitants? I don't know!
when Ceylon sank into the sea.



Mpho, what shall we say when it begins to count to a hundred? It shall go to the cobbled streets of our exile life. It shall pick up stones, throw them into the air and count years they take to come back.

We shall tell it, that even our children still have to position the frontline. We still have to die, to die just a little. It is noble. Tell it, I'm crude at such talk.

Klaus Maphepha