

# **Bangehlesi**

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## **Torment**

He was limping

I assumed he was a beggar

He greeted me with a smile

I sensed no harm from him

he frowned and balanced himself

on a walking stick

he told me that I am cursed

a black spirit invaded my soul

a witch stole my mother's underwear

from the washing line

buried it next to a river

to torment her spirit.

## **BANGEHLELI**

*for my late grandfather*

After all the mythological words of zombies, in a dark village, I went out to fetch a bucket. I was taught to trust no one and to rely on these words, “Ndiyakubona” (I can see you). Village dwellers scared me. No one turned on the radio at midnight. Every frequency carried the witches’ hums. I spent hours starrng at your black and white framed photograph on the wall, looking at your smile that was so full of life. Your hairy eyebrows, bald head and grey rough beard in your dark facial skin. They told me that I resembled you. My heart skipped a beat and moved faster, hard like the knock of a police officer on a suspect’s door. My blood circulated in the rails of a Gautrain in my veins and arteries. Before the red sun rose from the East, I had already inhaled the smoke of wet woods, walked without shoes on dew. Poverty blinded me. A strong fog and the noise of a million dogs barked, mistook an aloe tree for a wailing man. Red soil, birds sang beautifully. My grandfather’s rondavel was made of mud and a thatched roof, the natural smell of bush, cow dung and dry animal skin. The smell of homemade mageu reminded me of him. I saw his bag that was made of a black goat skin. Inside there was a long pipe, “Umbhekaphesheya”, and a collection of circumcision blades. Behind the door there was a long black coat hanging on a nail. It smelled of a “traditional braai” (Umbengo). I wished I knew how my grandfather’s voice sounded. I went to the rain boots that he wore when he was herding his livestock just to be close to him.



## **Black Rain Boots**

I visited my granny in the village. One Sunday evening I passed a soccer field and approached a cemetery. I heard a soft voice speaking. People were coming from behind. I looked around me and so no one, only the voice of trees and the wailing cross of a lonesome tomb. I walked in the soft, red and clay-like soil. A strong wind blew and my sight was blurred. The black rain boots spoke a distant and yet familiar language. I turned around and ran.

## **Burdened**

I suffer from a mental disorder  
of telling unsugared coated truths

I was diagnosed by an insane society  
a needle in the hay

my thoughts are trapped in an asylum  
I hate to be here.

## **Sundays**

I miss our Sundays  
of listening  
to Abdullah Ibrahim  
of reading wine labels  
and drinking freely

I miss giving you a foot-massage  
of playing with water guns  
and our pillow-fights.

## **Ghost lady from Harare**

I knew that she was mine  
when she responded  
with a smile, “Moro”

but she disappeared  
in the blink of an eye  
she was nowhere to be found

I drank whiskey on the rocks  
to get drunk constantly  
I asked for her  
and was told she had died in Harare.

## **Forgiveness**

I cannot be cross  
with the dead  
I heard you loved me  
though you never spoke  
one kind word to me.

## Spirits

A dark tall shadow lurked  
outside the room window  
animal-like  
outside in the yard  
there was a razor wire  
and an electric fence

a pitbull in human form -

lights went off  
pots flew around the house  
I heard a million footsteps  
on the roof

I shook in the dark  
burnt imphepho  
mixed with red chilies  
to wade off the evil spirits

there were noises at the front door  
I opened the curtains slowly  
and saw a group of short grandfathers  
with long grey beard

their burning eyes  
red like fire.

## **Ghost lullabies**

Blue like the priests  
of the Zion Christian Church  
in our work suits  
we held the bull down  
to the dusty ground  
by the horns  
with dry dung

a freshly stoned silver spear  
with a brown handle  
was thrust into the beast  
its blood is spilt

there were strong ululations  
from the women  
like the sounds of  
ghost lullabies.

## **My Grandfather**

He welcomes the lost souls and the despairing men  
wounded hearts that bleed unstoppable  
a shepherd to those who have lost  
the battles of life

he teaches me the lessons of life -  
be humble in your hardships  
love all people  
always do good  
harm no one.

## **Bush stories**

we cover ourselves with white clay  
to derail the witches

a fellow dream of an old lady  
rolling bandage around his wound  
the next morning his manhood was swollen

he could not pee  
or remain erect.

## **Old grannies' houses**

On days of beetroot, home-made bread with raisins, jam and mageu, my grandmother woke us at 5am to watch the colorful sun dancing like my drunken uncle on Fridays. innocent children's smiles were etched on our faces, beautiful like the Christmas suns. we knocked from door to door and asked for sweets and biscuits. we skipped the houses of the old grannies. we feared that they were witches. we did not know the truth - that we were running away from their kindness.

## **In Limpopo**

Blood flows like a river  
in channel and streams  
in my arteries

walking barefoot in red soil  
looking for  
an oasis

blue sky  
brittle veld  
dark skin  
sweating through the pores

blurred eye  
dry nose  
lazy eye  
of the burning sky.

## **My Lotto numbers**

A poster in town

an advertisement:

“Dr. Okoro the Nigerian herbalist”

*I bring back lost lovers*

*Enlarge and strengthen your manhood*

*I have a magic ring and lotto numbers*

he charged me ten thousand rands

I handed him fake notes

I quit my job

burnt my shack

waited for my numbers

on the tv screen.

## Oilikwane

I woke up with a sore throat  
a clumsy lower jaw  
a stinking mouth  
and a severe headache

I went to the mirror  
saw my cheek and neck  
swollen

a voice asked me to go to the bush alone  
and find a hole to shout these words:

*“qilikwane qilikwane*

*phuma kum. Yiya kwabaneenkomo”*

## **Tall like a camel**

Her smile is beautiful like the parrot  
in the early hours of the morning

her body is like a pregnant elephant

caramel skin like melting snow  
on the tongue of the child

I will consult a voodoo man to soften  
her stone heart to a boiled potato.

## Stolen cremora leaks

Behind the roughly built shelter of tools  
at night we crossed our fingers for botsotso battery  
so as not to die  
while watching Van Damme  
on a black & white television

*“abakhwetha”*

grandfather farted ‘booo’  
*what was that?*  
a motorbike just passed quickly

the stolen cremora leaked down the legs  
from the pockets to the ankles  
left my feet white

sucked used tea-bags  
licked beef-stock covers  
dough was no longer knead on my presents  
for I asked for the taste till it was finished.

## **To Inathi**

In shadow of sadness  
the flood of my tears flows  
like a silent waterfall  
grief lives in my eyes  
my soul is paralyzed

I wanted to hold your hand till  
I memorize your fingerprints  
you visit me often in my dreams  
but still my heart bleeds.

## **The mermaids of Moria**

They sell their soul for instant wealth  
followers of Barnabas  
they camouflage themselves behind Christ  
baptize one another in the scary river in Moria  
they are instructed to cut all the hair in their bodies  
place everything in an envelope to offer as tithes  
they are advised not to cry  
or run away when they see the big yellow snake -

to be licked by the frightful snake  
to be cooked in a pot  
and to swim in the pool of alligators.

## This house

I remember this house  
it was dusty pink  
with red stairs and windowsills

a garden with peach trees  
and sweet-potatoes  
it had goats and sheep's kraal  
the cattle kraal had a rock-like tortoise  
to increase the livestock

at night we stole the raw green  
and sour peaches

today there are cracks on the walls  
spiderwebs in the corners of the ceiling  
the house is a shelter to goats in rainy days  
the burnt furniture brings pain to my heart.

## **Zion dam**

Evening jogs in winter  
sky blue and grey  
the moon orange  
in the horizon

a new born baby cries painfully  
floats on the surface of the dam

a child moved to the deep end  
the baby cry is heard no more  
the child disappeared

I drowned under the water  
and sang traditional songs  
to the devil.

## Tom-toes

Fight broke by stepping on each other's shadows  
early winter morning competing by exhaling carbon  
dioxide pretending to be cigarette smoke.

Pee on top of his pee, he cries loud and bitter that his  
mother will grow a third breast. He walks to the loo in fear  
of Tom-Toes that jumps off the roof ceiling to strangle you  
to death.

We slept with a lucky bean beneath our tongues and  
cross-fingers not to be asked to recite a math recitation  
in class, knead dough without salt, shape it into teddy-bear  
put a marble inside, place it on top of the pole so it can turn  
to a *tikoloshe* and ask it things our absent fathers failed to provide.

## A hobo in Congo

Sarcastic remarks, tribal wars  
black on black violence, radical rebels turn  
virgins into whores.

Hutu and Tutsi fights over white-collar  
Jobs, deep hatred written in their red-eyes  
like Ndebele starring at a Shona during ethnic wars.

Empty village, hungry dogs and children  
brothel owned by a mother and her daughters  
no middle class, if you rich you rich, if you poor  
you poor.

Archaic caused by rebels, weapons provided by  
France, Brazil and India, aim to loot East Congo  
natural resources provoked by a corrupt government.

A poor man consulted a Portuguese *sangoma* from  
Mozambique who was known for giving wealth powers  
he was charged 10 cows, he stole them from a nearby farm

He was asked to bring a white rich man hair, it was mixed with  
*muti* after 10 days, the white man was poor a hobo from Congo  
was filthy rich.

## cursed

Going to Cubano lounge on your body expense trying to impress Facebook friends you never met. Caption reads “the lavish life” on pictures you took with an iPhone of a man who neglected his children, who refused to pay maintenance, poor children. Under Peruvian weave no brain but mud dirty thinking, planning to parasite the next victim. ” I don’t date broke ass niggas” type of girl, fails to maintain her standards, claims to be first class but can’t afford herself. infect herself with virus because she wants to be seen in a GTI passenger seat, that is owned by a nigga who still pays the installment with a loan, and it has no insurance, how useless? How sad?

## Hemp Moments

Crushed, rolled and ignite the blunt  
listening to Doobie Gray songs with a  
doobie on my left hand.

Felt drifted away while listening to “drift away”  
It was like I’m inside a boat while I was sitting still  
on my grandma’s dining room home-made sofa.

Felt like I can solve world problems, felt like a president  
elected by Guptas to capture the country, I felt important  
at the same time, I was in a book exhibition panel in New  
York interviewed by all the famous writers.

I mistake blue roof for a swimming pool, reality and dream  
at once fused together, I was squeezed, tied in a trunk, feed  
with junk, never, never again smoke a skunk.

## **Ticket**

We passed sorrow street I saw a sad widow  
in misery road, vendor-stands selling poverty  
crime and diseases

I left the city of pain bought myself  
a ticket I left hope and faith behind  
for another place