

Togara Muzanenhamo

West Mashonaland / East Mashonaland

Dearest Sanaa,

It's amazing how quiet this house is without you. As I settled into my chair I began to notice just how surprisingly polished and crisp the silence is, the sting of loneliness ringing everywhere like tinnitus. Before you were born, I'd grown used to being alone in this house, I'd grown used to its strange creaks and noises, the haunting winds travelling under the gaps of doors – in fact the solitude and silence became vital to the way of life I had fallen into, a way of life burdened with its various restrictions and obligations. And all through those years when I sat here and listened to this house breathe – I had never listened to my own breaths nor considered that other breaths could again fill the house with conversation and laughter, with the noises of life.

Before I stepped into the house and sat here, I phoned your mother – said I was home safe – asked to speak to you, but you were asleep. Come to think of it – this last day here on the farm was quite full: Lionel's mid-morning party, the walk to the pens where the sheep, goats and cows all came in at once for an afternoon drink, the drive to the dam in search of the boundary's beacon that seems to have disappeared beneath the waters. And then the long drive out to your mother's place – that white bungalow up in the hills, the eaves forever ringing with wind chimes. I could see the fatigue on your face during dinner, and way before I got up – you had already sensed I was leaving.

The journey back to the farm was a difficult one.¹ I am coming to dislike having to tackle the busy highways, there's always an incident of some sort along the road. This evening it was something to do with an overloaded flatbed truck and a tiny saloon. I chose not to look too closely, but couldn't ignore the glass and bricks everywhere. But it isn't really the physical drive that's becoming difficult – it's more the feeling of having to go away, it's more the act of creating a distance that leaves me heavy with something almost as dark as grief.

As I drove, I came to think about how we live – us as a family. Apart from it not being the most conventional way of living – half here, half there – it made me think over what becomes home; it particularly made me think of what you think is home – if home is a place for you, or if home is a feeling that surrounds you. This thought especially troubled me this evening when I kissed you and your mother goodbye and jumped into the car. As I drove down the slope, away from the house, I could still see you clawing at the air, crying. It was a difficult thing to lock the gate and drive down into the valley – in my rear view I could still see you and your mother standing in the jamb of the door. From the verandah, beside the dining room – you must have seen the car slip into the darkness that leads to the narrow rural road, the road that eventually snakes out to the highway. All through the drive – the image of you tearing away at your mother's shoulder stuck with me, and sits heavily with me now. Several times I wanted to stop, return – perhaps spend the night, leave tomorrow morning... But I couldn't, it can't be that way for now – I had to drive back here, to these flat farm fields, to this empty house that I've known as home for most of my life, as long as your mother has known Traveller's Joy as home.²

So when I stepped into the house, after phoning your mother, I decided to sit here and write to you. Initially I wanted to sit down and explain the distances and separations that define our relationship. I wanted to describe in detail how heavy I feel when having to leave you behind. But as I sat here I realised that perhaps what I was searching for was simply a way of being close to you, the intimacy of speaking to you in my head. I'm not sure when you'll get to read this, but I hope by the time you do – all our distances will be erased, and by then – as you read this now – we'd have found one rooted place, a place where we'll all be together, a place we simply call home.

All the hugs and kisses, Dad.³

Dear St Saviour,

It's amazing how quiet I'd house & without you. As I settled into my chair I began to notice just how surprisingly peaceful and empty the silence is, the story of loneliness ringing everywhere like a faint star. Before you were born, I'd never used to being alone in I'd house, I'd grown used to its strange smells and noises, the haunting sounds travelling under the gaps of doors - in fact, the solitude and silence became vital to being of life I'd fallen into, a way of life burdened with its various restrictions and obligations. And all through these years when I sat here and listened to I'd house breathe - I had never listened to my own

¹The farm in question is situated in Lancaster Park, West Mashonaland, Zimbabwe.

²'Traveller's Joy' is the name of the house in East Mashonaland where Togara's partner and child live.

³Togara Muzanhenhamo was born in Lusaka, Zambia, to Zimbabwean parents. He was raised on his family's farm thirty miles south of Harare, and educated in Paris and The Hague. He has worked as a journalist, screenplay editor and copywriter. His poems have appeared in journals in Africa, Europe and the U.S. His two collections of poems, *Spirit Brides* and *Gumiguru*, are published by Carcanet Press. Togara Muzanhenhamo divides his time between West Mashonaland and East Mashonaland, and between farming and poetry.