

Poetry

Caitlin Hildebrand-Turcik

“A Fence for the Wind”

Written in Botswana, Summer 2008

Community Health Nursing

my hands have broken
frozen in this heat
they have no electricity
no tools
not even rags to wash with

gray dust is turning everything to ash
the green gone in the leaves
our skin
white and black
is all the color
of under your tongue

mouthes are snapping
like venous fly traps
but empty
these flies are clinging
to our ankles, cheeks,
to inside our ears

they've licked clean the coke cans
swirling in the dirt
around our shins
rolling hills of beer cans, chibuku cartons, chips
all these non-foods
that somehow sustain them

and everywhere, like confetti
crinkling candy wrappers
from the women selling them
on the side of the road
for thebe, only thebe
for a whole day in the sun

Father comes up with that plan after
each other fails
Are they too sick to cook?

To ill to crochet?
Or too content sitting all day
watching the children run
somehow, some magical carousel
around them?

dust devils spinning, disturbing
the carefully combed yards, of dirt
they sweep each morning
backs bent
hunched over like the old women they'll never live
to become
Or are they too hungry?

Botswana takes such pride
in their ARVs
and yet
Where is the water
to swallow them?
The pap, the maize
to keep them down?

this sun dries everything
except for the tears
they never arrive
they have gone to where
anywhere
they still bring relief
Here there is no Pula
no pula
and no one remembers the prayers
to call it down
they know the Our Father though
in a language they don't even speak

we hold hands
making some kind of fence

to keep out the wild
to keep in the hope
a wild animal itself
always finding holes
to sneak out from
We must cling tightly

i saw a boy today
raised by a wolf
swooning, moaning in the sun
drool and porridge covering
his chest
wracked, mucous dried black
in his nose
he cannot open his eyes
But what is there to see?

only a mother who raises glasses
more than children
whose barred teeth
look like gaping windows
shut
keeping us
and everyone else
Out.

in this village
donkeys and wheelbarrows
(usually reserved for farms
but in this dead earth
not even cacti are growing)
these wheelbarrows are Trucking
water jugs
Thank God!
and on the side someone has painted
“We are fighting the wrong war”
here
The water is work
it does not quench your thirst, only creates it

i smack my lips
stomach clenching hungry
but what fraction of hours ago
have I eaten, less than they?
i dig

for a granola bar
in the bottom of my bag
and break it into four
peices
so we can go on, together

these angels
to be paid in another lifetime
these people
who walk and pray and clean and cook and wash
and cry
for the people who can not
any longer

she holds hers
minutes longer
than the rest of us
gazes at it
like it's Turkish Delight
and slowly licks her fingertips
for every last bit
of sugar

Glossary:

chibuku - a local alcohol, like beer
thebe- Botswana “cents”

pap- a local maize meal, like grits

Pula- the Botswana currency, money

pula- the Setswana (The local language) word for
rain

Turkish Delight - A food which casts a spell on you,
from C.S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia*



Caitlin Hildebrand-Turcik is a psychiatric nurse (BSN class of 2009), and an Adult/Older Adult Nurse Practitioner Student, class of 2011