

LITTLE DUDU

(for Mthandeni)

Njabulo S Ndebele

I

Dudu slid off a cheek of God,
And was born into the world.

II

Little Dudu was the beggar's wish-bone;
Men, demented, would moan,
Turning upon him for redemption:
(O newly born coffin!)
Withered hands, mourning their own deaths.
Would grope for the feel of his body
Until a thorn of conscience burst ...
Until a thorn of conscience burst the bubble

III

Little Dudu lay on his belly
On the dome of a hippo's mouth;
A small speck on the dome,
He lay and wept:
'Where am I?'
On the dome of a hippo's mouth.
'Where am I?'
On the dome of a hippo's mouth.

IV

When the roots of his mind
Began to bore through his head
Into the sunshine,
Into the winds,
He began to stir,
Little Dudu began to stir,
And, disturbed, the brittle hippo began to move.

V

Dudu plays...
Dudu chases butterflies...
Dudu traps birds...
Dudu traps moles...
He spies his body during hide-and-peek...
Dudu throws dice
Dudu sees his own blood in town...
Now Dudu is at school.

VI

Who lost the shade of the breast
 Under the breast,
When the breast sidled away
To seek for gloomier pastures:
For rustier waters to suck? For Pastures?
Who lost the breast?
Who lost the shade of the breast
 Under the breast,
When the breast flirted away
To seek for another Dudu?
It was he Dudu:
And the hippo began to feel his weight
And opened its mouth;
Dudu slid off the dome of the hippo,
And fell into the mire,
The hippo turned on him.

VII

Now, exposed to the grin of heat,
Big Dudu falls in love,
And lo, in the grin of heat,
An embryo swells gradually like a wicked smile
'No! he cries;
'No, no!' she cries.
He makes her drink ink;
But 'Yes, yes!' in its first wails,
The embryo unfurls its newness.

VIII

But in the child is the beginning,
In the child
Is the beginning of an awareness of a cycle,
A cycle that has no mouth
Opening with laughter:
(O play; O butterflies; O moles; O birds...
O my own blood!
O my own blood flowing over the roots of my desires.)
A cycle of mouths that only moan and groan,
That only grin by force of cruelty,
Cruelty that shuts the mind
To the discernment of all goodness.

IX

O!
(And Dudu throws the child into the dust-bin.
It dies in the fumes of its own bright soul)
The child...

X

And the hippo's mouth snapped.
Dudu is behind bars of teeth.
Dudu will never be Dudu again.
He will never again play with the whisk of God
No: Not youth rotten in
The darkness of wicked minds:
No. Not helpless youth...

His soul, occasionally,
Would leap out of the bars,
And fly with the birds,
Then it would come back,
To wait for another 'occasionally',
But the birds wait – always.

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