

The Orange Boy

by Amantine B

Your first new politics of cruelty;
the precision. An insolent itch
explodes between tongue and
complexion to send body parts
flying. You forget, in that deadening
chaos it's not about the colour
of blood or the mixed race of spleen
liver or mangled rib cage, but about
a hair and its breadth.

You mime the walk of normal
bones walking ignoring the
shocking breathless shiver aching
to reek havoc. Light outside folds;
your brain freezes, constricts ready
to implode, your body suddenly
coming loose at all ends. You
acclimatise to days; normal green
library lawns days, when one line
of Jacaranda trees, stirs.

There was no time to ask his name,
no moment to smile and watch any
of his young pride stride off into a
future undressed of fear, so uncertain
of itself, it sprayed bullets through
the sunlit square. The orange boy
didn't stand a hope in hell.

Even now your body lunges up

and forward, you cower close to
edge of stairs and the scramble of
feet. The pop that cracked your
backbone, bled out his sanguine
young life beneath your dress.
A shrill scream and you catch the
sound of his name then; *'Tshepo'* . . .

and see his mother drop like a
ragdoll, in a ubiquitous tense, from
your corner of an average day.

In the soft blue of savage air your
eyes warp at the real congeal of
blood spilling, lives gashed. Life
doubling-up rams the stomach so
tight you convulse all that speechless
candour back out your mouth; a mouth
that forgets how to make a sound, but
for its guttural wretch.
Limpet or a bullet: Nothing 'escapable'
exists. You try and think beyond it,
only to find perforation.

All the capacious matter of life
compressed into the complexity of
death's arbitrary anatomy. Then it
lets you walk away, bruised but the
house of you scarred beyond
the eased repair of bandages
and fragile, as its unfurling
to infection.

Tshepo is a boy's name in Sesotho. It means Hope.

Tschepo was a young boy, nine or ten years old. He was selling oranges outside the city library to folks seated on benches lining the lawns, on their lunch break. His smile was irresistible. I bought two and as he walked away towards his mother, the air crackled with gunfire and everyone scattered. Suddenly rioters and armoured riot police swarmed everywhere. I lunged to pull him down and as we tumbled down against the concrete stairs leading to the library entrance, a policeman fired and the air close to me snapped. So did something in my soul.

I wrote this piece when I was invited to collaborate on a collection about love and family in a time of war, exile and alienation: Two poets exiled from two very different kinds of war.

