

The Door Poems

Hannah Sabatia

(i) and there he was

A door opens
and there he was

Standing about ten yards away
he called her to come out
she did not dare

The child saw him
afraid too

He went away
they locked the door
never saw him again

(ii) and he comes in with a mobile in his hand

A door opens
and he comes in with a mobile in his hand
unsure

The wife is inside with the child

There is a quarrel

He has no self-control
he slaps her on the face
slaps her till she passes out
slaps her till she passes out
like dark night the room turns
she sees stars like in the heavens

But when she rises up
he is crying as usual
swearing never again

Never again

Never again

But only for this moment

(iii) and she comes in running

A door opens
and she comes in running

A beautiful young girl panting for breath
afraid of what has happened
it was a tense moment

Hurry up and hide, that's all I could say
her masters were fighting
on this fateful evening
the sun had already gone down

She had gone to open the gate
he was drunk, forced her in the car
he forced her but the wife saw them

She was the house-help
loyal and friendly
she did all her chores

(iv) and we enter one by one

A door opens
and we enter one by one

We are searched head to toe
as one by one we enter

We must remember all the details
all the details we want to forget
young
old
we sit on the cold long benches
wait and wait

Come in here
go in there
sit by here
stand by here
do you understand

All we need is safety
but

Why did you lie?
threats
threats

All we speak is taped
taped and recorded
one by one

(v) and in comes the chef

A door opens
and in comes the chef

Another day of boiled eggs for breakfast
a year feels like a decade
the routine and monotony of the hostel
waiting
and
waiting
nobody knowing when decisions will come

A long day and nothing new
out in the endless fields
long barbed spiked wire at the edge

The morning sun a warm blanket

We take photographs of our long shadows
they are metres long

A long day, a long, long day

Memories of nothing

(vi) and suddenly, with great force,

A door opens
and suddenly, with great force

they come in twos and fours
with padded chests, chains, sledgehammers, handcuffs
*nikama jitu, hawajali, haja uondoke ...**
black uniforms, huge, faceless

She coils under the bed

Again under the sofa

In the cupboard

Then tries the shelves

But the baby cries uncontrollably

Nowhere to hide after all

**Swahili: "Like a giant, they don't care, as long as you get out..."*

(vii) and the boy comes in

A door opens
and the boy comes in

Panting, sweat runs down his face
he clings to his mother's dress
like he has met her for the first time

It's raining and cold

The mother calms him down
gives him a glass of warm milk

Slowly the boy speaks
all that his six years have seen

Excuse me can I play with you?
Excuse me can I play with you?
Excuse me...
can I ...
play
with
you?

No boy stops

School after school
the other bigger boys run after him
he is alone, doesn't recall their names
they all look alike, cool, flicking their fine hair off their faces

The boy fails to understand

Mum, what colour am I?

And there are other things he cannot say

Hannah Sabatia from Kenya wrote the sequence "The Door Poems" in Jeni's workshops. Hannah is a qualified nutritionist and a single parent who, since coming to Swansea seeking sanctuary, has played a full and vibrant role in voluntary organizations in the city. A natural leader and community builder, a gifted public speaker, she is vice-chair of Swansea City of Sanctuary, active in the Swansea Advocacy Forum for asylum seekers and refugees, has gained an NVQ in Community Development, is working towards a PGCE in Adult Education, teaches English as a volunteer to parents at Hafod Primary School, at the African Community Centre and the Minority Ethnic Women's Network and at drop-ins run by

the Cyrenians, and has made important contributions to the LEANA project (Local Education and Advice on Nutrition and Activity) run by Swansea Council for Voluntary Service.

Hannah hopes to be granted leave to remain and the right to work, in order to have a career in public health education in the UK.

At the time of writing, Hannah's asylum application has just been turned down at judicial review.