

SHORT STORY

Goblins and miracles...

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BOOM!! Debris were flying in all directions. Limbs were scattered all over. Indeed, the sight was the modern day Akel Dama with intestines gushed out, semi-digested human waste liberally but haphazardly broadcast around the maligned house which, in a split second, resembled a desolate home, an eerie ghost compound... only too fresh and mysterious to ignore.

The police were all over the place, ambulance sirens blaring, with all and sundry

trying to make sense of the terror blast. Everyone was trying to convince themselves that it was neither a very bad dream nor a hyperbolic Science Fiction Western movie. Two mangy dogs about eight hundred metres away were oblivious of our plight and they were interlocked in their lustful romance. The rest of their fellow crowded mongrels were helping themselves to some human limbs all over the place. A number of street urchins were having some fun too as they were chasing this particularly thin “puppy” that was pulling a dead woman’s thigh across the road. As they drew closer to the “puppy”, they were amazed to realise that it was a grown starved male dog that had pursued the group of dogs to try its luck on the bitch. It was only unfortunate that when tragedy struck, it was the one closest to the site, yet lucky enough to survive the blast. All along, the dog had maintained a safe distance from the other ferocious males that could sink their dangerous fangs into its withered skin. Now it was taking advantage of its vicinity to suddenly available “Christmas” meal of a human thigh, and it did not wish to share it with anyone, dog or urchin alike.

The street children gave up their chase and returned to the scene of terror-stricken and petrified mob. Most of the fearful people maintained their mouths agape out of sheer shock. The rest of the deceased’s neighbours looked prematurely old. They all wore troubled looks of people caught relieving themselves. The urchins were not at all concerned about the cause of the blast, the dead people or the mating dogs. They were just paying attention to their rumbling bellies, nagging them to scavenge for food among the rubble. They waited impatiently in anticipation for anything edible or saleable.

No news anchor was required to warn pregnant women against watching this theatre of the absurd, nor to caution people of a nervous disposition to desist from casting a glance at the bizarre scene. The situation itself was self-negating. Even the bravest Neanderthal would not withstand the situation. No one doubted that even a professional witch or a veteran wizard habitually used to consuming human steak at different levels of decomposition would flinch and swoon in the current circumstances.

In a matter of about ten minutes, the whole neighbourhood was peopled by individuals from different walks of life ranging from professionals, journalists, vendors, robbers, pick-pockets, medics, nurses, police officers, politicians and general riff-raffs. Some came in S-class Mercedes Benz cars, others in public transport and some on foot. Needless to say, one could tell that there were some who lived in posh suburbs, in mansions and yet others were hobos of no fixed abode. BUT one thing had “united” them – the horror crush in *Chitungwiza*. Mirthlessly funny enough, by the time the anti-riot police dispersed the curious albeit frightened crowd, at least five individuals were fidgeting and complaining that they had already been pick-pocketed. One woman complained of a missing cellular phone from her handbag, a middle-aged man could not locate his fat wallet in his trouser pocket – money, particulars all gone. A wealthy-looking, pot-

bellied man wearing cross-belts and dark glasses could not find his laptop from his BMW X5. This alarm of thieves already plundering coincided with the anti-riot police's dismissal of the mob. About half a dozen youths wearing caps and cowboy hats were the most obedient to quickly vacate the place as had been instructed by the officials.

However, before the crowd had dispersed, there had been as many tales as there were people. What perplexed most of us who were part of the horrified crowd was that the most voluble among these narrators had been the last to arrive at the scene. I had the privilege to stand close to one of them – a dread-locked lad whose faded and partially torn jeans were testimony that he had not been employed of late. His teeth were coated with nicotine. He had a coal-black complexion, the type who would most likely be marked absent if they happened to attend a night school. The man was sure that the lodger at this house was an African Apostolic prophet-cum-witch doctor who had been trying to manufacture home-made lightning now that the rain season is beginning. Unfortunately, the target was apparently more powerful since he comes from *Honde Valley* where the whole art (or is it science?) of lightning making originated. So the lightning boomeranged into this present tragedy. In suppressed giggles, he also added that perchance it was a matter of a silly mistake by this careless youthful *sangoma* who pressed the 'play' button instead of the 'send' button.

Another version came from a white-bearded, bald-headed, self-styled herbalist who was sure that this was a case of a goblin. According to him, a goblin cannot be destroyed as easily as the newly deceased prophet-cum-witch doctor had intended. The deadly mysterious creature usually executes instant vengeance before it leaves – just like this one. Instead of giving it a wife to screw or human blood to drink once every year (preferably blood of one's relative) how can the owner try to send it away through some kind of talisman? So the whole idea is to teach everyone a memorable lesson before it leaves. He added, with an all-knowing attitude, that this particularly massively destructive goblin is called a *Sandawana*, popular for amassing wealth within a very short space of time, yet its demands notoriously escalate with the passing of each day. When he attributed the 1945 mass-bombardment of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to the destructive works of a *Sandawana*, I knew what I was dealing with and I moved to the nearest group. Here, a bespectacled seemingly educated woman, with an oversupply of buttocks and extravagant jewellery was "scientifically" unravelling the cause of the blast.

The big mama was intimating that when red mercury (which is usually used by many *sangomas* for luck) is subjected to very high temperatures (as was the case), its molecules begin to move. As the temperature is raised, the molecules increase their speed also and they begin to collide, creating intense pressure that is potentially explosive. If the mercury is in a tin, say a twenty litre container (as in the case of a steaming clay pot here), the explosion is one big blast resembling a detonated missile. I was beginning to swallow this bait hook, line and sinker when

one gentleman in a grey suit inquired about the circumstances that led to the “survival” of the mysterious clay pot. What material is resistant enough to withstand the blast that reduced ten whole houses to rubble? She blushed before she began to mumble and fumble for a “scientific” explanation. She had not said anything of substance before my ear had caught a frenzied discussion about five yards away.

The voice of the narrator was reaching a crescendo as he described the miracles that are taking place at the City Sports Centre through what he called the prophet of the moment. By the time I arrived at this reluctant and doubting group, the speaker’s emotions seemed to have run riot, his voice reaching fever pitch. I was particularly impressed by his facial expression that dramatically vacillated and oscillated between frowns and smiles. The man seemed to have been involved in a fatal accident before. One would be reminded of Christ’s parable of a man on a journey from Jerusalem to Jericho who fell among thieves, was atrociously mugged and left for dead. It seems this current narrator is a survivor of a similar monstrosity. There was no trace of his front “line,” both lower and upper teeth were scarce. A giggling clownish lady standing next to me whispered in my ear, “Poor lad, someone planted a bomb in his *sadza* which detonated into his mouth and the result is this dental devastation.” I burst into a thunderous guffaw, to everyone’s surprise.

Unperturbed by my misplaced laughter, the narrator related how the new prophet was openly declaring money to his congregation and purses were filled up pronto. One man in the crowd shouted obscenities at the so-called prophet who was using a similar goblin to manufacture fake money. Oblivious of the impromptu interjection, the narrator-orator also intimated how gold dust rained onto their heads the other week after the man of God’s vivid description of the golden streets in heaven, especially when he declared that as it is in heaven, let it be on earth. Everyone began to shake their heads in protest. It seemed everyone was convinced that we were living in the end times, dominated by outrageously blasphemous false prophets and anti-Christ. As if to answer to their doubts, the animated and seemingly inspired speaker expressed his wonder at a pessimistic generation that attributes every miracle to the devil; as if God had forgotten to perform miracles; as if Jesus had lost the virtue to multiply two fish and five loaves to feed five thousand; as if Jesus could not pick a coin out of a fish that Peter fished; as if He was only joking when he promised believers that, in fact, greater works than those he did were His followers going to perform. Some silence was maintained as the man pointed a trembling finger at the little crowd surrounding him.

It seems the miracle-working Spirit had fully possessed him now. With a more robust voice of the arch-angel announcing Armageddon, he narrated how an obese man came to seek help from the prophet concerning his weight. When the man of God quizzed the man about his exact intend, the latter shyly replied that he

wanted to lose weight. The prophet was quick to interrogate him for details such as how much weight he wanted to lose, after how much time and so forth. Since the man weighed about ninety two kilograms, he wanted to lose seventeen kilograms over a period of a month. The man of God expressed his wonder at such a meagre faith. If that is done in a month, it ceases to be a miracle because anyone can lose that weight through dieting and a lot of exercise. Having said that, the prophet stretched his hand and shouted, “LOSE WEIGHT RIGHT NOW IN THE MIGHTY NAME OF JESUS!” Suddenly, the man fell flat on the floor under the power of the Holy Spirit. When he tried to stand up about ten minutes later, everyone was shocked to the core, himself included, to notice that his now over-sized clothes were threatening to fall off his thin body. He had to bore another hole onto his waist belt, far towards the iron knob to tighten his trousers which now looked like a scare-crow in a deserted field....

“Disperse, I say. This is now a high security area until further notice. Respect this place like the state house, otherwise you risk losing your dignity or your manhood, or even your head. Stop your superstition and go your separate ways to your houses of poverty. If the so-called miracle prophet of yours is worth his salt, let him come to unravel this catastrophic enigma...not to waste people’s time lying and stealing their tithes! Disperse, or we resort to tear gas...”

There was a stampede at this last threat. The blasphemous police officer behaved a little worse than a bull dog newly fed on a meal of mustard and marijuana. Reasoning was the last thing he cared to do. Since he was pre-historically muscular, gigantic and generally hideous, no one dared spend another second at this fateful scene, the place of terror and horror.