

# Harare North

## An Excerpt

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You spend the morning sitting under the tree, but by about afternoon Shingi maybe relax or feel pity for me. He wave olive branch and start talking about where we is going to spend the night. I have been whipping them pounds out of Sekai and she have now decide to take few more weeks off in Zimbabwe. I don't want to go sleep at they house and spend time with Paul. Shingi don't want to go to his relatives and leave me alone in them streets.

'If I t..take you to m...my relatives they is not going to be happy,' he say. 'Maybe I s..stay with you for the night and then we s..see.'

I have also help him in the past when he don't have graft and his family have him on the ropes about money issues while he try to spin jazz number of having graft.

'You are kind man,' I say to him. We is back on talking terms. He don't want to take me to his relatives because they already propaganda against me, I know.

'Where are you from?' It's this man that have Karl Marx's beard. He sit cross legged and hunch over his left arm while the other hand stroke his beard. He have siphon part of his beard into his mouth and is chewing. Our eyes clash and me I look away.

Under the tree, sitting opposite me is three faces. Three faces and they two dogs. They sit silent on dwarf brick wall that border the lawn area, each wait for his turn to take swig from bokkle that is doing the rounds. Some few steps to they right is three dreadlocked Rasta faces, one of them try to cheer them up, hobbling around and singing and shaking them mangled dreads. Karl Marx's beard at the corner of dwarf wall, to the left of them three faces and they dogs. I don't want to answer questions from no one right now. He get the score without me saying one word.

Shingi come back to the tree with flyers for free concert called African Guitar Virtuosos or something at Southbank. Before he even sit down I tell him we should just start heading to Southbank because me I don't want staying here with this Karl Marx guy.

'Bada nepakati,' Shingi instruct me. With both hands me I hold the loaf that he buy from supermarket when he leave me alone under the tree. I pull and it tear in half. Shingi grin in nervous way and he look at them people around us. The bus is full and everyone on the bus point they eyes at us.

I apply myself on the bread. This feeling that I have not have in years now come over me; my senses get more fire. I clutch the half loaf between them arm and ribs and rip into it with them fingernails. The warmth of bread against my body, together with it the happiness of discover the freedom to tear down loaf of bread on London bus, send message of good will to my bones. I feel free.

Then out of the blue sky we get ourselves some fan: one small plump boy sitting with his mother leap to his feet with big eyes. He wear t-shirt written, 'Made Of Money'. Shingi have good talent at reading them people so he see quick that likkle boy Made Of Money is in grip of big hunger. He break small piece from his bread and stretch out in that good old uncle kind of way, and hand it to the likkle man. The horror look on the likkle boy's mother's face can kill a hippo. She look on but she is helpless. I can see that she want to stop she son from taking the bread but hold sheself back because she is frightened of the racialism thing. She remain on she seat, and only watch with sickly smile as she son hit the bread with more fire.

Southbank is crawling with them Africans in they colourful ethnic clothies, it make you feel like you is not African enough. Many of them is also all them lapsed Africans because they have live in Harare North from the time when it was okay to kill kings, queens and pigs. You can tell because they carry smiles like they have take over the palaces at last. We is only one wearing jeans. But this is make up for by fact that after the concert we have good cheerful smiles because of the one person who have had the sense not to lumber himself with them ethnic things, that's the original native from Kinshasa on stage.

The guitar men step onto the stage. Three of them. All of them is dressed in flashy African clothes except for him the Kinshasa boy. The other two guitarists is just lapsed Africans, but they is busy spinning clouds of jazz numbers that they is Tanzanian and Cameroonian and whatever they can think of. But the worst is him the one that want to be Cameroonian; he change his costume three times during the show. Three times, I count it. Even girls don't do that.

Cameroonian man twang away while his Tanzanian friend is busy ripping away them lines off his guitar. But the original native from Kinshasa – he is dressed in jacket and tie and is sitting on stage like lost school boy. Even when he was introduce at the start of the show he look like he have heaps of confusion on his face, you know like what it's like when the native has just hit Harare North.

Kinshasa boy wear black oversize jacket and them baggy grey trousers; you can tell these is clothes that he is suppose to have taken to dry cleaner but maybe somewhere in the township the original native decide that this is something that he can handle with box of Surf powder and bucket of water: they is puckered and getting all out of shape in that way that make them more African than them thousand cotton garments with blue lizards, green fish and ethnic patterns. This give us big cheer on them our face.

Shingi, he have big grin ripping through his face right up to them back teeth. The music crackle away like rhythm of them hooves of group of donkeys at full speed gallop. Shingi's attention is fix on Kinshasa boy, who is looking at them the other guitar men with mix of shyness and absent minded style that often hide native impatience. He tag along nowhere near his limit, while them other two is at full gallop.

Suddenly something snap inside his head and Kinshasa boy get off his stool. From the way the hairs on my back stand on they ends, you know that now something is in the air. He throw left leg forward in that playful way like he say, catch it if you can. But this is that style that is awkward by purpose, you know them those crazy 'I don't care' ape-style *ndombolo* moves. He step and sway. He peep. At you. Sometimes.

Kinshasa boy. He do sharp feint. He sway and step. Bobbing head. Phantom step; he almost shake. One jink, and it send the whole audience swaying the wrong way. Then it come, one deadly sideways leap of the eyebrow that kill all the xenophobia, hippopotomonstrosesquippedaliophobia and yugoslavia that exist in Harare North.

His trousers, they flap mad. Like some flag in middle of big storm. Now he cling to his guitar with more fire now and hit the crowd with heap of notes that come out of his guitar faster than speed of dog with ten legs.

'My friend, you, civilian person like you, if you is not careful you will drop small poo in your pants because of this pleasure,' me I tell the man sitting next to me with high wattage grin on his face.

Even them, the other guitarists is now just onlookers like us. And when Kinshasa native start to get down to stepping on the rhythm with some mental *ndombolo* footwork, whipping his own back with them hot riffs, too many truths that cannot be named crawl out of they holes and start crawling everywhere.

Me I nearly throw £50 onto the stage, but Shingi hold my hand.