

FAULT LINES: Haiti, Two Years On

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Faultlines

I.

The Earth has kept on traveling round the Sun

Since the day it shook and tore them down.

Down

Down

and Down

Everything fell:

Shacks and church pews smashed through sewers;

Palace collapsed – an empty shell.

Three hundred thousand (counted, fewer;

Thousands buried, never found).

The whole world ruptured; catacombs

Unleash the walled up winds of hell.

La Terre Tremble.

II.

Will we forget what that shaking ground

Revealed for all to see, who cared to look?

The way the streets filled up with bloated bodies;

The way the troops drove on, and let them cook?

The “Aid” delayed, as if for fear of zombies

rising from their rubble graves to run –

White eyes blazing bloody memories

of how white masters came and took by gun.

And yet, and yet, poor Haitians did not riot;
worked to pull each other from the ruins.
Carried those who died, and those who wouldn't
for a while,
And those who lived.

Gave until they had no more
to give.

*(Meanwhile, "Security," guns in hand;
Guarding the gates that could no longer stand,
Protecting property of those in command.)*

III.

A sudden eruption
of broken heart blisters
oozing, drying on Live TV
far flung news anchors aim for the ripe wound,
peeling it back, letting us see,
seek the perfect angle
to capture
that "inexplicable-horror-of-it-all,"
(just a dash of sugared hope thrown in for the folks at home)
that juicy spot where the latex glove meets the bandage
meets the hand
meets the ballot box
meets the sky
Where it hurts to look. Where it makes you cry.

(But never lets you find out *How?* or *Why?*)
From this fastened hook

America hangs
Prepared to unleash its charity thang
Solemn Celebrities claim center stage:
And all that sit are moved.
Millions shut their eyes in prayer
(secretly thankful that they're not there)
Yet ready to do what good people should:
for a minute, an hour, or even a week.

Never though letting the Haitians speak.

*What do the people there have to say?
When they look at US what do they see?
Who will dare to take a peek today?*

Caught in the sun, the pocked eye turns away.

How much can the blinded stand to see?

Band-aids slap where barricades should be.

IV.

Worldwide

They say there are a dozen cities
With at least a million people each
Lying, waiting, sleeping on a fault line;
(Slum-dweller flesh to feed the breach).

For each year, the Earth, it shivers
In the endless cold of space;

Quakes and quivers, like an ox
whose skin
must knock flies from its face.

The fault is not the moving Earth's
– We know that quakes will come, and even where –

At fault:

a world-wide class affliction
Razing mounds
of contradiction;
Bubbling boils that bust through skin,
Seeping hot pus, sweat and blood – and liquid gold
That trickles up to rulers' lips ice cold.
Parasites suck membranes thin:
Vulture claws cleave crater-trails,
Until what's precious flesh is drawn
In scabs and scars
to fit the scales;

(Heed the bankers' dark command:)

Plow the farmers off the land
Build estates on bone and sand.
Spill the poor in pavement cracks.
Stitch the workers into seams
For rulers' flowing cloaks
– Breaking their backs –
letting them choke
gasping for air –

stripping them down to their dreams,
then bare.

The earth, we know, will quiver;
the brittle surface, tear.

V.

This predator's plague has no plan
for poor people,
except for the juice
to be squeezed
from their veins
to quench its viral thirst.

Markets pressure
and hearts burst.

So long as endless profit reigns.

*(The heads of state remain aloof:
Crisis = opportunity, after all
Helicopter blades
give the world a roof.
And there's plenty of sweat to catch,
as they fall.)*

VI.

Outside Port au Prince:
Refugee Cities –
Rain soaked sheets

Flap on and on,
But only the bugs and bats can fly.

The people gathering, grasping
Why.

Eyes peer out through fraying holes;
Fingers point: jet-liners
tearing the sky.

Aboard corporate jets:
Thirsting agents
Ties loosened,
Clinking drinks in hand,
Toast to the future they found behind,
Traveling home,
to milder climes:

If they look down
 through parting clouds –
see only some
dirty laundry lines.

(updated, Dec. 30, 2011)

Sun and Bone

In Camp Corail

On the hot white plains
Of Camp Corail,
Between mountains and mountains
Where a railroad no longer runs
And trees no longer grow,
The state no longer dumps
the dead;
 They dump the living there instead.

Shards of skeletons are hidden beneath
Acres of crushed stone
Pressed flat as a leaf
 so flat
 it's like an army of bulldozers
 has come
 and gone in the night.

A sky-to-sky concrete plateau:
The stone mixed in with the bone below
burning the feet and blinding the eyes
of those who stand in the sun.
Even in shoes it hurts to walk;
 But it's too hot to run.

*

It is not the earth that moved them here
but those who said they came to “help”

who deemed their old survivor camp –
on the edge of the crumbling city shelf
amidst the debris of the walls and streets
that had soaked up their cries of joy and pain,
where at least what torn ground still remained
to break their fall was ground they *knew* – “unfit.”
That place not far from the parliament,
And the flattened factory where some had worked
This place they had squatted on, made their own
though it was nothing they could call a home
– this strip –
was, pronounced a “high risk zone.”

According to experts
In human resettlement
The spot was at risk of being effected
By outbreaks: of “social unrest,”
communicable disease,
And perhaps fire.

It would not do.

And so
On advice of the foreign experts
the police
batons in hand
encouraged the people to leave

For their own good.

The former killing field
Far from the city
Would do nicely

was thought to be more suitable,
a safer place to put them –
Though safer for whom
Was not entirely clear to the people
As they broiled, blinded by
the stone-and-bone reflected sun.

Trucks brought them there by the hundreds,
Thousands. Brought them here,
until Camp Corail was filled.

And so now
The white tents of those who still live
mark the graves
of the numberless dead
never given a proper burial.

Dumped in the middle of the nowhere wastes
The living dead infuse this place.
The living haunted
by the ghosts below
The ghosts, by the living above –
 They have been here for more than three months now.
 They have been here for almost thirty years now.

Past and present knot and gnaw.
In the heat, buried dreams
 Long sealed: thaw.

*

After the sun goes down
the ground cools enough to walk upon:
a child slips out of a tent
to dig with her bare hands
in the rocky sand. She picks her plot with a careful eye.
Drops to her knees and scratches to get her start
Breaking up the sun-sealed crypt of crust.
It gives, but not before it draws blood
From her fingernails. She licks the wound
And spits the dirt. And digs.

Down through the bleached, chalky rock
Digs: searching for moister dirt; *she digs*,
though the surface hurts her knuckles, *digs*

Looking for dirt that will hold together.
She finds,
hand by handful,
only still more rock pebbles and more dry
dust; nothing
that sticks
nothing
that can be salvaged
for making
anything
not even the smallest
mud castle, or cake. Not even a good dirt ball.

She is about to give up, hands gray with dust
but keeps on just
a bit longer, just for the feel of it:
at least this deeper dirt is cool.
Perhaps at least-she has come so far now –

she will dig a hole big enough for her to
slip into. Like a womb. A tomb. A shelter. A place to soak up the cool.
Her own dirt pool.

Her means become her ends;

At the very least she will have a hole.

But then

this:

A knee and half-a-thigh deep, her eyes fix on

Something:

the hard frozen flower

of a human vertebrae (though she does not know what exactly it is):

A weathered star of scattered backbone.

She picks it up.

She can tell it is not stone.

– it does not fit in with the crater of dust.

It must be from somewhere else.

It must.

– *And, look, there is another.*

Like splinters, shards of history

working their way up to the surface

almost as if the land had purpose:

The trace of some ancient species long gone

The fossil of one who refused to go along.

The child holds the curious talisman up, catching the moonlight

In her palm's cup.

She does not know what it is, only how it feels, lighter,

Different from the pebbles and stones she usually steals

from this jagged ground.

Bringing the bone, like a pick to her lips,
She rubs it against them, as if to strum some forgotten tune,
Some melody she has never been taught.

Sifting through names of extinct things.

Is it a piece of a dinosaur tooth?

As she touches her tongue to the very tip of her find
She hears a shriek rip through the night:

A dozen rows of tent away:

the rusty teeth of the gnawing saw
Spit fresh blood on the white rock floor.

Held down by hands, a mother faints

from pain,
leaving another child alone, standing by the door.
Watching her in the lamp light.

One more landless peasant will walk no more
On her own two legs. The surgeon works quickly
While she is unconscious. *Back and forth.*
Echoes of hundreds of limbs that have come before. Feet and arms piled on the floor.
Back and forth.

(The gangrene started in her toe.
They should have caught it long ago.)

The canvas sides, the surgeon's mask
soak up her dreaming groans and gasps
As does the rock (and the bone) below.
Thank god these flapping walls; they could not talk –

Nor could the splattered stone:
No one will know.

Just before morning, the mother wakes
her invisible leg on fire, she quakes.
A strong patient, she has survived the worst.
(Yet how is it that her foot still hurts?)
Summons up what courage she commands.
Her hands are tied to the bed with bands;
Grinds her teeth to bring the rain;
– nothing but Motrin for such hot pain.
Makes fists out of her praying hands:

*It's hard to believe they've not been cursed;
This blighted, blackened, branded land.
She wishes to God that the clouds would burst
And end this endless devil's plan –
Just wash them all away –
Since it seems there's no place left to stand.*

How will she endure this endless test
upon the searing desert sand? *The water well is half a mile away.*

Her son hears her waking cries, ducks in.
Brings with him a paper fan.

*

On the edge of Camp Corail
The girl with the newfound dinosaur tooth
Lies in her trench,
her ancient secret gripped

in a warrior hand.
Between her fingers and her thumb,
she turns the bone-shard into a gun;
Yes, with it she'll shoot
The rising sun.
Before it boils them all.

She tightens her lip
closes one eye:
Aims at the blood-rimmed
base of the sky.

It's worth a try.

What is Needed

Campside (based on true events)

1.

In Haiti

there is money to build

walls

not to house

the poor

but to block them

from view;

to lay imported brick

high and thick,

not to protect

the homeless

from the hurricane,

but to protect

the rich man's twenty-acre

estate

from the sewage that flows

downhill

from the camp

when it rains.

And so now

when it rains

A human stew

Bubbles backs from the base of the wall

into the camp –

deep enough to drown in

A gathering cesspool

for mosquitos

to breed

and cholera

to bloom.

2.

The construction project

Gives at least

a few men

– from another camp across town –

work:

hard, back-breaking work

for a few weeks

At almost three times the minimum wage:

A few dollars a day.

The wall they build gives

At least

the mosquitos

a home.

These fiends thrive,
Lay their eggs in the stagnant water
Feed by night
on what flesh they find.

Each little blood-sucker's life
is short.
They live for only a few weeks
Before they drop dead
In some unmarked speck grave – that is
if they aren't caught first
Between the finger and the thumb –
They burst like tiny rotten berries.

Yes, any single
mosquito can be easily dealt with.
Once you know where exactly its buzz
Comes from.
Splat.

But in their uncountable numbers,

an invisible, everywhere swarm

They appear utterly

unvanquishable.

You go mad at night

just swatting the sound of them .

Praying through razed blisters

for someone

to drain this godforsaken swamp

of a world.

3.

Across the street, *Food for the Poor* (that's their name)

Tells a delegation from the camp (they're next door neighbors)

that they cannot help them;

That this is a not a distribution center;

That FFP's funds go elsewhere

And that, besides, they wouldn't want to start trouble by

giving food

to people

Just like that,

Without, you know, going through all the proper channels.

Without armed guards present

to keep order

and paid clerks on hand

to track everything on official charts and checklists:

how many grains of how much rice went to whom and to where and what color it was, and who said please and who thank you (and who did not).

I mean, if distributing food to the poor was as easy as, you know, just

Giving food to poor people who say they are hungry

and who have the ribs and collar bones to prove it

then, well,

You wouldn't even need professional organizations like

Food for the Poor

in the first place,

would you?

4.

A world away

Far beyond even the locked gates of Charity

Elsewhere

Where “History” is made

A UN official

gets promoted

to stand behind a podium and

speak of “A risk of a pandemic” and

“A surge in infant mortality.”

Earnest euphemism

Rolls off that juicy pink tongue;

(The fluent official gargles water

Before coming on stage

with another bottle of Aquafina at the podium

Just in case

the throat suddenly dries up;

It can get awfully hot up there,

Under all those bright lights,

With all the world watching.)

5.

Meanwhile

In the dark

cholera stretches its limbs across prison floors

From steel barred windows to crack-webbed walls

Where profane protests against the state

are smeared in feces

and blood.

Some walls still won't fall.

As others go up.

And more are planned.

*

Tons upon tons of construction materials

Sit piled at camp-side:

Metal beams like the stacked legs of starved giants,

Head-high mounds of sand and crushed granite, rubble

Fresh-shoveled and trucked

from the wreckage of Port-au-Prince.

(There's a fortune being made in the sale of rubble.)

Monster machines sit idle. Watched over by armed guards.

And a handful of hired workers stand and smoke, idle too,

waiting to break ground, at the boss's order.

Their muscles itch for work.

There are building materials here

for a hundred homes, at least.

Only,

Not.

The squatters are to be

Evicted

from their road-side camp

By the rightful land owner

With the official stamp.

He wants to build a factory

He needs to build a factory

– there is capital for a factory –

obligations to meet

words to keep

(The owners, too, imprisoned, by what they must build

Though their jail-cells are air-conditioned,

fine coats keep off the chill.)

They've contracted a foreign company

to produce: baseballs

to be exported and sold to Sporting Goods stores

who will sell them at a mark-up

to the parents of little American boys and girls

who have fields to play in

and who can afford to lose things

in streams and under fences

and buy new ones.

6.

Campside

Hundreds of people contemplate

Scraping up the will

to struggle together, to keep their grip

on a cracked plot of ground that they never asked for

In the first place;

That was forced upon them:

A sun-baked tarp town

where they have been confined for more than a year now,

without schools or sanitation,

While the rulers make plans

That do not include them

Except as sources of

excrement

To be sealed off

Or else

as cheap labor

to be mixed

with the bricks

that wall people

in

and people

out.

*

The bulldozers rumble

The manager shouts

“If there’s no trouble, if you all move out,

Some of you may get the chance to sew baseballs.

You like baseballs, don’t you?”

The new boss promises three dollars a day.

A few will be hired—the rest flushed

away.

7.

Will the refuse of this system pick this city

of sheets and boiling shade

Of ghosts and newborns and grandparents

and toys

But no safe place to play and

Of grime and sand

and whispered songs

And blanched rebel memories

To make their stand?

The stagnant waste water by the wall

rises.

Do they think they can?

Or will the machetes and American Made machine guns

scatter them in the night

(As they have done before)

Leaving them in the ditch

Dreaming of clean water,

a plot of land,

And a world

That's been flushed

of walls

and the

rich?

8.

A rash spreads across the old woman's legs

What can she do?

But bang her two pots together at half past noon

with the others,

(a daily demonstration)

that, and be ready to place her body between her grand-child

and the bulldozer, when they come:

She's lost her shop, and her sewing machine.

Used to sew clothes for people in the city,

To patch the garments of those who could not afford to buy new.

(She had been one of the luckier few.)

There is plenty here that needs stitching.

By hand, she does what she can do.

sews rags into a quilt,

keeps a sole

on a shoe.

(Plenty that needs tearing down, here, too.)

9.

A baby lies asleep on the bed,

a mosquito net dome, laid over his head.

Those elsewhere who can afford it use mesh like this
to protect their finger sandwiches from the flies,
when they sit out with guests in summer time.

*

In an alley of the cramped camp

The braids of a child

Flap in the wind

As she chases a red rubber ball downhill

Between tents

Trying catch it

Catch

it

Before it rolls into

the muck.

*

Do you want to know

What happens next?

Do you?

Or shall we just let this one go, too?

Let it go

Let it go

How much of this world are we willing to just

Let go?

How much humanity

Will we just let go

Let fall

away

Like some ball

slipping through

A child's open palm?

Or a kite forever swallowed by the sky?

*

Fresh watered flowers

and incense torches

line the owners' oblivious porches,

keeping off the bugs

masking some distant stench.

And a young girl has drowned in a rain-swollen trench.

10.

There is money in Haiti

To build with; it pours in;

the rich hire poor people with it

erect walls with it

so they don't have to see

the sludge

That soils their green gardens.

And this too:

so the sorrow-sick souls gathered now

by the edge of the camp-side mire

still gripping pots and pans

unearthing and wiping clear the braided face of the child

Can't see them,

the rich,

sitting there in their place

out in the sun, doing what they do,

Enjoying the open air:

So well-dressed,

carefree

And so few.

*

Almost a million still homeless

in Haiti.

It's not for lack of brick or steel

nor engineers

Nor hands to build with.

Not for a lack of land.

Not for a lack of money.

Not for lack of a Master Plan.

What is it, I ask you,

that is lacking here?

What is it,

I ask,

that is needed?