

At the Graveside of Henry Wilson (1891-1955)

Wilson, old black sheep
we share this bond
I, the fellow '*murungu*' who righted
the cracked plastic vase
toppled amid the granite chips
that mound your bones

I, the stranger who brought a single
plastic rose (mud-spattered)
borrowed from the once hidden
grave, now clematis-curled
amid the grassy African corner—
the grave over which your 'coloured'
grandchildren come to kneel

Squinting in the Capricorn glare
I fully grasp what drew you
half a century ago
from the Calvinist drear of Aberdeen
to the plump arms of a bush-wife
in Southern Rhodesia
twenty-three years your junior

One of your daughters, Wilson,
this morning recalled
that you were "fascinated with nature"
that you would drop biscuits
on termite mounds just to watch
the crumbs carried off

I wish you could know, old black sheep,
that in hollowing a place
for your fallen vase
I dislodged a nest of scorpions
from which one female, bulged with eggs
shiny-black and with pincers throbbing
stood her ground

Wilson, old comrade—
rest well that you are not alone

(Fort Victoria Cemetery, Masvingo, Zimbabwe, December 26, 1987)

