



madiba

we must accept
 you will walk
 stop
 sit a bit
 and then
 you will lie down
 you will take a deep breath
 a relief
 and say
 oliver how are you
 you will
 we must accept
 and oliver I can see him
 with his pondo marks
 and a bright warm smile and laughter
 he will hug you
 he will say
 welcome nelson
 and you both will take a walk
 as he introduces you
 or reminds you
 this is dube
 this is mamphosho remember
 kate
 walter will come just now
 he is in council
 with thabo and zuma on earth
 i can hear you both
 break into laughter
 he holding your hand to cross
 you must cross over to become an
 ancestor
 you will look back at us
 and you will wonder
 when will we learn
 that everything comes to pass
 but you madiba will be light kilometers
 away
 and
 although still near us

The poem “Madiba” imagines the afterlife as a gathering of old friends reunited. It is a celebration of the unique human qualities of the giants of our liberation movement – the warmth and laughter as well as the integrity and dignity which we so much value. The positive images remain, keeping these heroes and heroines alive in our memories to sustain us in the face of our own challenges.

By Wally Mongane Serote

we will not hear what you and fischer
talk about
what you and dadoo talk about
and when you ask shaka
with your husky voice and guttural
laughter
how are you
and all of you will break into this
laughter
which signals the joy in your beings
you will be amused by what you all left
behind
us
flesh and blood
brain and spirit
still struggling to make sense about all
of this
and you
then
will be in communion with hundreds
and millions
and billions of freedom fighters
generations upon generations of them
we hope
you will then remember
do ancestors have memory
you will remember
that we mean it when we say
freedom
peace
we mean so because there is no other
you all of you died so
so many different types of death
mini
singing to the gallows
sizobadubulangembaibai
and fisher the chess man
with that most beautiful smile of his
and those starry eyes which were like
windows into his soul
agrees for cancer to take him away
and kotane
allows stroke to wrench his life away
how come I only remember you all
in smiles
and eyes filled with laughter
and facial expressions filled with joy
oh
it is because your senses

your sight
your touch
your sense of smell
your sense of taste
and your sense of hearing
all of these things madiba
exude from deep down your spirituality
you all men and women of sacrifice
must we remember you like that
all I know
is that you will walk
you will stop
and then you will lie down a little
you will take a deep breath
a relief from this earth
you will have passed on
into communion
i do not know if dadoo still needs his
pipe
to smoke
does he
does tambo need his spectacles and his
pondo marks
does mamposho still need her blue-
black beauty spot on her cheek
does Shope still need his hard rough
palms which were like hard stone
all of you had such clean facial
expressions
all of you had such quite whispering
eyes
perhaps that is what we must remember
about you
you fighters for freedom
you who spoke with amplified voices
that the world heard
you who strode the world and straddled
it with great familiarity
you who starred into the distant
horizon
whose speech looked like a wink
and you focused in attention
because you knew that the sun rises
you knew that the sun sets
the moon rises and sets
because nothing is for ever
even the birds as you know
and that is why they migrate
they hop

they perch on distant trees
they glide above clouds
they ride different breezes
and they know even different billows
of the seas
even ants know this
that is why they gather food all the time
they disappear a little
and they come back again
when the heat of the sun talks to
different types of life
madiba
you and others disappeared for 27
years
you came back
do you remember how tambo left with
his stern face
and elias disappeared like a snowflake
so did omgog
and you also watched mhlaba and
mqayi leave
often I wondered what you thought
as one by one your peers left
you used to look watchful and at times
starry eyed
and one day
like the good soldier you are you
handed over the baton
and now you have walked off the
screen
and now and then your shadow
appears
i is tall this shadow too tall
it elongates along the earth
and it walks like the second arm of the
clock
i
i smile at times
as I imitate your dignity and integrity
as I rehearse your wisdom in my head
we must accept
you will walk
stop
you will sit down a bit
and then you will lie down and sigh
it is ok tata ■

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