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Arsonists' Minutes of Glory: School Burning

I remember when ...
every Monday, without fail,
in primary, come rain or shine
we walked to school barefooted
our toes dew bitten or heels mud caked
lugging firewood twice my size—
fuel for cooking our meals—
with grace and diligence,
but never once did we complain!

I remember when ...
monthly, without fail,
we took maize and beans to school
from which our lunch was made—
a succotash meal loaded with weevils and sand
that repulsed and riled my sensibilities;
it tamed our pangs of hunger
as we sought our mind's food
too precious than silver or gold,
but never once did we complain!

I remember when ...
every Friday, without fail,
we hauled cow dung to school
squatted and smeared our classrooms
and squirmed at the mushiness of dung
and its chillness between our fingers
as we curved patterns on all floors
and stayed out all day long
as we waited for them to dry
making some of us loathe school,
but never once did we complain!

I remember when ...
daily, without fail,
we cut grass and trimmed school hedges
swept and cleaned our latrines—
whose pungent smell made me gag
as a sea of maggots claimed its ownership—

to ensure as anything assured can be
 they fit modest utility standards
 unaware these vexations built character,
 but never once did we complain!

I remember when ...
 occasionally, naughty pupils
 as mischievous as he goats
 wiped their asses on toilet walls
 or sprayed floors with their diarrhea
 as if blind and couldn't aim in the hole
 and the teacher on duty, without our regard,
 enforced the law and forced our cleaning;
 we tip-toed over it, to keep clean our bare feet
 curling-up our lips to cover our noses
 hopeful we would keep the stench away
 as giant blue flies buzzed over it nonstop
 like buzzards on a carcass or bees on nectar,
 but never once did we complain!

I remember when ...
 being young was a joyous affair
 when any tomfoolery wasn't tolerated
 when adults, kin or not, justly punished us
 lest they spare the rod and spoil the child!
 when Nature and all its glory and gore
 was all there was for our being
 from which the promise of youth was made!
 no electronic gadgets to cloud our minds
 or disconnect us from being truly alive,
 but never once did we complain!

I remember when ...
 the winds of change, twister like, passed
 savagely sweeping everything in its path;
 goodness fell to the wayside as if built on sand
 and we, unknowingly, reneged on ourselves
 and each, allowing the fog of individualism
 to plant its fat feet in our hearts
 and clouded our minds with gook
 forever blinding our eyes from one truth:
 of our duty to each other and ourselves
 fruitful food that molded and grounded us,
 yet, now meant nothing, useless as saltless ash

I remember when ...
 as though it were yesterday
 my yesteryears of high school
 burnt on my mind like tattoos
 curved on my flesh, seething in my now
 like waves of an angry sea
 of how we hauled bucket loads of water,
 broom in hand, scrubbed latrines till they sparkled
 brushed bathroom floors until they glistened
 against dimmed dormitory lights
 and never thought anything of it
 that these chores paled to our fruits of study,
 but never once did we complain!

I remember when ...
 as though it were yesterday—
 one high school day—
 when the sun glistened
 like dew on an early Morn
 and as arsonists' hands
 nearly derailed our study
 striking matches to buildings and cane!
 plumes of smoke oozed
 from shuttered windows
 like water from a busted dam
 and spiraled up into empty space
 and vanished like the students' dreams
 differed in the wake of the mayhem

I remember now ...
 as the sadness of that time come back
 flames like meteor lights erupted
 and wind fanned, crackled like firecrackers
 birthing gigantic pandemonium
 and forced our expulsion
 summoned GSU men's batons,
 without mercy, lacerated our flesh
 a painful penalty to the innocent
 but for the guilty, meant minutes of glory
 than the bread that bred the riot

Yet, today, at this dark hour ...
 my memories of youth, with time,
 like flickering light on a flint, have faded,
 but my heart still bleeds my sadness
 as I watch students with dismay

trigger happy strike matches to their dorms
 claiming the filthiness of their latrines
 as just cause for their mayhem
 as though they were handicapped
 unable to scrub clean their own filth
 their hands too clean to be tarnished
 unaware time lost now is forever

I remember then ...
 today, at this dark hour,
 flickering tongues of flames
 leaping room-to-room lick rooftops
 hissing and dancing in an unforgiving wind
 reduce school buildings to ashes and rubble
 as onlookers, muted and shell-shocked, watch
 the arsonists' hands reap havoc on society
 while *they* gloat seeing the fruits of their labor
 knowing no firetrucks exit to douse the inferno
 unaware when the dust settles
 and life returns to normalcy
 they will, for their sins, pay due penalty
 and justice will, impartially, be exacted
 for the guilty and innocent shall in blood pay

I remember when ...
 as though it were yesterday
 when Mama told me:
 Child ... when bulls fight
 the grass suffers!
 today, arsonists have exacted their rage
 and revenge; oblivious innocent minds
 have recoiled upon themselves
 some having paid in blood and life
 making me wonder: what now?

Yet, I wonder if ...
 the arsonists' calamitous hands,
 aren't a far cry to long borne injustice,
 of administrators turning a blind eye
 to the students' pleas for change?
 I remember when ...