

Cooper Chimbonda

This story that I'll tell through verse
Is painful...that's because truth hurts.
It's half-fiction, this parable,
Half-autobiographical;
Here's tale - ten minutes, no longer -
Of boy called Cooper Chimbonda.

He wrote left-handed, a southpaw;
Favourite food: curry from Southall,
Favourite mood, happy, though huge face
Of his, now and then, wore screwface.
His skin was dark as Darth Vader's
Cloak: he looked like your narrator.
Both his parents were Ugandan:
But he had grown up in Camden,
Gone to boarding school near Windsor...
Nothing hindered Cooper's rise
In life; it was a thrilling ride
That took him on to pay homage
At Oxford, home of great knowledge;
For three years, he studied law there;
And, what's more, Cooper met Dawn there.

That's right; he'd an awesome girlfriend,
Dawn, who'd have crawled to the world's end
For him; sweet Dawn, who adored him,
Who supported him, who taught him
How to love. They were an item
For two years, and then Fate's python
Tightened its grip on his Adam's
Apple. Cooper couldn't fathom
What change he was undergoing:
For two decades, without knowing,
He'd been sitting on, suppressing
Precious secret: he'd been wrestling
With the essence of his true self:
And, as banks sequester huge wealth
Deep within their vaults, this student
Stowed away his secret, stashed it
Deep within his soul, and trapped it
Underneath a whole assortment
Of things he felt more important.
That was his decision;
Trapped it under his parents, religion,

Under hip-hop, under football:
Matter of fact, Cooper put all
Issues in his life before his
Happiness, and soon Dawn saw this:
Written clear on Cooper's face like
Moon will glisten on a late night:
Saw his shoulders take huge onus,
Sagged, downbeat, like he was homeless,
Couldn't bring herself to ask him,
Though, what silent torment grasped him
Since when she brought up this topic
His temper grew short as hobbits
And each piece of playful banter
That they shared ended in anger...
Till, one night, Cooper described it,
Talked of pain he felt inside, it
Made him writhe - it felt like acid
In his veins - what's more, it mattered
Not how much he tried to dilute
Pain with sleep. Through each dream's minute
Minute, each of sleep's split seconds
He could hear truth's sirens beckon,
Drawing him most urgently,
Unerringly, to war-torn shores
Whose reefs stabbed at him like drawn swords...
Then Cooper would wake up, sweating
In the arms of Dawn, regretting
His own birth. Scared for his future,
Fearing he'd forever lose her,
Cooper pressed head to Dawn's chest
And said what she'd already guessed.

Dawn listened: her eyes were wide and
Steady as ocean's horizon:
Cooper closed his eyes in comfort,
Each lid forming one calm sunset...
But when he woke, Dawn had vanished.
*Why, he thought, have I been punished
Twice?* He'd lost his future wife
And his soul was wracked with cancer
Whose symptom was hateful mantra
That rang through his head each time he
Listened to rap over grimy
Beats, to rage in ragga's lyrics:
Listened to the Holy Spirit's
Anger in Old Testament,

Who said his sort were pestilence...
FAGGOT was the single word
That his mind screamed, that had recurred
From the first time that he'd struggled
To accept these at first subtle
Then more prominent desires
For the same sex; quell these fires
He could not; they were relentless;
As, too, were their consequences...

Dawn? No sign of her, her clothes;
As soon as he'd passed out, she rose
From bed, dressed, left him a note.
I'll tell you now the words she wrote:

*As you can see, I've left your room;
I had to go. I'll see you soon.
Had to have some of my own space
So I've gone back to my own place.
Right now, you're confused and clueless
Wondering how you'll get through this -
You will, and this tip will help:
Avoid the pity of the self.
Don't sit there moping on couch, since
This is no black Brokeback Mountain;
Put down bow, don't play your heartstrings
Since you know well that the hard thing -
Hardest thing, in fact, you'll do
Is looking here and loving you.
As hard as men fight men with fists
Your mind must fight with Genesis,
Cooper, you'll face no worse rivals
Than those verses from the Bible
Telling you that you're not natural:
But to be gay is factual.
Deal with it. Speak soon. Love Dawn.
P.S. Here's cash for some new porn.*

Cooper read the note, and grinned;
Then he lost it, then he pinned
Head to pillow, stifling sobbing,
Sobbed so hard his sheets were rotting
With tear's mildew three days later;
Then he dried eyes, folded paper
Dawn had left him, and that summer
He went home to tell his mother

And his father, and his whole clan
Who he was; he told his old man
First, who'd died when he was just four;
And his dad showed no disgust for
His son's queerness, since his father
Had lived and died as a master
Of his own fate, in the civil
War. As Cooper kept a vigil
Over his dad's grave, he felt a
Sense of warmth, a sense of shelter,
Heard his dad's voice of approval:

*"Son, now our respect is mutual
Since you've proved that from this time forth
You will not move on a blind course
Through life, but with eyes wide open.
On earth, there's nothing more potent
Than the 20/20 eyesight
That comes when you've got your mind right."*

Cooper walked from father's grave
As a wave of calm now played
Across his brow. He headed home
Where he thought Mum would be alone
But she wasn't, since he'd stumbled
Upon her chat with two uncles
Of his, men who might just punch all
His teeth out were he to bleat out
That he was a homosexual.
Though he would be throwing petrol
On a bonfire of loathing
He still set off this explosion:
Opened door of lounge and walked in
Then told them. His uncles gawped in
Shock. Mum didn't understand it:
It was like he'd spoken Sanskrit.
It was foreign to her culture,
This thing; it felt as if sulphur
Had flooded her lungs, she clung
To one of her brothers, she clasped
Him by the forearm as she gasped.
Cooper had had some misgivings
About this. He had no siblings
So he'd just told her this lunchtime
"Hi Mum; I'm killing our bloodline;
There will be no more Chimbondas..."

Songs of woe swelled in her bosom
As she stood and slowly pushed him
To one side and walked upstairs
To start a stream of endless prayers.

That left Cooper and his uncles:
This was fight time: they were punctual:
Primed to strike he who'd defected
To the foe; but they respected
Home that belonged to their sister
So they fought not. But one whispered -
Huge as he was, softly, slowly,
Like breeze slipping down through oak trees:

"Boy, when you next show your face here
It's clear you won't be embraced here...
Now our sister's broken
By this lifestyle you have chosen:
There's the front door; it's still open -
Go, walk out. There's just one drawback:
As soon as you cross that doormat
That's it: you'll be frozen out fast -
Yes, an *outcast*." Cooper, humbled,
Turned away from this stern uncle,
Turned towards the door, towards
Another life: and then he paused
Since his *other* uncle had cried:
"Wait, Cooper! Do not go outside!
Two things: first, I've always liked you.
Also, I can't stereotype you
Since you don't *act* all that gay...
Please, Cooper, isn't there a way
That you can turn back to straightdom
And thus ease our consternation?"
His uncles then sang in chorus:
"Cooper, put the proof before us!
You're confused, that's what we argue...
So, tell us, just how *gay* are you?"

How gay? Cooper thought. *Good question:*
I can't give them the impression
That I loathe life in my gay skin:
Here's an end to that self-hating...
And so, no longer despondent,
Cooper Chimbonda responded:
"I'm so *gay* that in the middle

Of my ceiling, there's a little
Silver disco ball that glitters
And plays Bing Crosby's "*White Christmas*".
I am *so gay* that next Christmas
Since the Pope thinks gay's a sickness
I'll send him some packs of Beechams
To cure all his closet preachers.
I'm *so gay* that I can fart
"I Want to Break Free"'s first three bars;
I'm *so gay* - wait, I've not finished -
Popeye looks fit after spinach.
So *gay* that my DNA
Has four letters: YMCA...
Each strand of my double helix
Is stained with an Abba remix;
In fact, I am *so pink*, fellas
That I make *flamingos* jealous."

Cooper spun upon the axis
Of his heel - a move he'd practised -
Now he'd confirmed he was batty
They would try to beat his chassis
So he turned on afterburner
Sprinted through door, and then further,
Out of reach of these two figures,
Stopped, and then smelled burning bridges.

Cooper thought: "*I've come a long way...
Some might say I've gone the wrong way;
Some might I've lost my folks
But I don't care now I've got hope.*"

His shoulders soothed by the lukewarm
Sun, he went to find a new dawn.