

HOPE IS OUR ONLY WING

Rutendo Tavengerwei

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*For my lovely parents, Simbarashe and Jenifer Tavengerwei.
Thank you among so many other things for introducing me
to the world of writing and story-telling.*



Dear Reader,

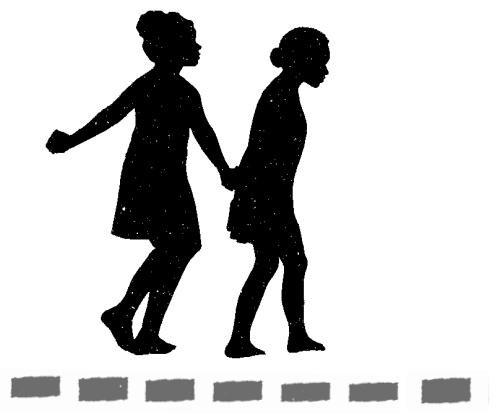
As a child, I used to listen in fascination while my grandfather told stories. I would marvel at his expression and passion. And then when I went to bed my parents would take turns telling me bedtime stories. The journeys I went on in my imagination were beautiful, but what I loved most about these stories were the messages behind them.

So when I wrote 'Hope' I wanted to tell a story with a message. A story that doesn't underplay how hard life can be, but also doesn't underestimate how hope can inspire the will to go on. Most of all, I wanted to share a story about my home, Zimbabwe.

I grew up knowing that Zimbabwe was the bread basket of Africa and it broke my heart when so many things changed. But the part that is rarely told is this: even though it was a time when people could have easily been broken, the resilience I witnessed was astounding. I saw a hope that I pray will remain alive and usher us to better times.

This is a book inspired by what really happened. A story about a place I love. I hope that as you read it you'll get angry, you'll laugh, you'll be shocked and perhaps even cry at times. But I hope you remember through all that emotion that hope is our only wing!

Rutendo Tavengerwei



PART ONE

JANUARY 2008





1



SHAMISO'S HEART BROKE into a shudder of beats. She could hear the jazzy trails of the *mbira* spiralling in the air. Her father would have loved that sound. She glanced at her mother, who stood next to her, fanning her sweaty neck. She seemed preoccupied. The music played on, painful and familiar.

When Shamiso was eight, her father had insisted that she learn how to play. The metal pellets had bruised the tips of her fingers as she plunked on them. A series of confused notes bumping into a glorious discord. The frustration had been too much for an eight-year-old, made worse by the fact that none of the other kids at school understood quite what the instrument was.

Shamiso listened as the voice of the *mbira* rose

proudly. Whoever was playing knew what they were doing. She could hear the underlying tone of a hum that flowed well with the song. And in that magnificent noise floated all the memories and feelings she was trying to ignore.

Her mother hovered by her side, trying to figure out where they should go. Shamiso felt numb, staring down at her shiny new shoes and listening to the music that disturbed the air.

‘Shamiso . . .’ Her mother hesitated. ‘Are you all right?’

‘I told you before,’ Shamiso muttered, biting her breath, ‘I don’t want to be at boarding school. Especially here!’

She watched her mother wipe her damp neck as though she had not heard her. Her blouse clung to her skin, moist from the sweat.

‘There’s no time to cry,’ her mother said softly. ‘Wipe your tears, *mwanangu*. You’ll be fine.’ She nodded at the administration block in front of them.

Shamiso saw the exhaustion on her mother’s face as they picked up the luggage and headed for the

administration block. They sat in the waiting room and looked around. The young man behind the reception desk seemed caught up in a tsunami of phone calls. The walls were lined with pictures of alumni at different events across the years. Shamiso could hear snatches of conversation from two men standing by the door.

‘. . . yes, but by staying away . . . we . . . are only punishing the children,’ one of the men said rather slowly. Shamiso kept her head down, concentrating on the tracks of the *mbira*.


‘You are beginning to sound like that journalist . . .’ the other man commented.

Shamiso raised her head. She guessed the men were teachers, but she could barely hear what they were saying. She leaned in.

‘Of course . . . we . . . we have to be smart about this,’ the first man continued, his voice rising in volume.

A bubble of anger formed in Shamiso’s throat. She tried to keep calm. Her ears picked up the music, which was slowly forming into a song. She wondered whether she would ever have been able to play like that.

The notes poked at her brain. Her father had called



it the sound of home, the stolen guitar of nature. She closed her eyes. Memories sat vividly in her mind. His fingers dancing around on the little pellet strings, his lips pursed, the music swirling. She held her breath, scared that if she breathed out too soon she would lose him.

A sudden voice jolted her back to the present. ‘Aww, first day at school, is it?’

Shamiso opened her eyes and wiped them with the back of her hand. A girl stood in front of her, holding a pile of books. Her curly hair was tied back tightly into a bun. She seemed to be headed for the staffroom.

‘Newcomer or first form?’ the girl asked.

‘I’m new . . .’ Shamiso mumbled.

‘Would you look at that! We have ourselves a Brit,’ the girl declared.

Shamiso gritted her teeth. The door to the staffroom suddenly opened. The cartoon on the door warned her that it was out of bounds. A teacher stood in the entrance, blocking the view as though the staffroom was some sacred destination that students were not meant to see. All Shamiso could hear was laughter as

the teacher beckoned the girl inside.

‘Well, don’t worry, Your Majesty, it will definitely get worse. The queen doesn’t come here for tea, I’m afraid,’ the girl said in her best imitation of what she thought was an English accent before following the teacher inside.

Shamiso fought the urge to call after her. She had hardly been in this country long and she was already certain she did not like it at all.