

HARARE VOICES & BEYOND

ANDREW CHATORA



REVIEWS FOR
HARARE VOICES AND BEYOND

Daring. *Harare Voices and Beyond* is full of intrigue and brutality. An unflinching portrait of broken families and a broken society.

—**Paida Chiwara**

In this his third novel, fire brand Zimbabwean novelist, Andrew Chatora, demonstrates that every man understands the complexity of his crime and the subsequently unsuitable punishment. This is a rare story about loss and strife in post independent Zimbabwe.

This is a detective story with no detectives. It is more like Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* and Ngugi wa Thiongo's *A Grain of Wheat* in that the guilty is always in your midst, helping you solve the crime but making sure the criminal is not easily found. In the end you appreciate both the crime and the cause of the crime. You see that the criminal is an ordinary man who is driven over the precipice by irreparable generational loss. This is a deft work of art.

—**Memory Chirere**, University of Zimbabwe

Chatora expertly deals with unresolved trauma, psychosis, identity politics, citizenship, and nationhood issues through the portrait of both white and black Zimbabweans' lived culture.

—**Malvern Mukudu**, Writer & Journalist, Rhodes University, South Africa

A powerhouse writer who brings dynamic conversations to the table.

—**This is Africa.**

Harare Voices and Beyond takes us on a journey through the dark recesses of the human psyche.

—**Sue Quainton**, Bicester, United Kingdom

Told through multiple perspectives of young adults and grownups, *Harare Voices and Beyond* offers a masterful exploration of what happens when family bonds become frayed, society fails its citizenry coupled with a hegemonic class bent on primitive accumulation at the expense of its citizens. It is a poignant read which poses difficult questions.

—**Naomi Wheeler**, United Kingdom

Harare Voices and Beyond demonstrates successfully how the lack of employment opportunities and previous traumas can mentally push victims of the illicit drug industry over the edge. *Harare Voices* also provides a fresh view of the effects of Zimbabwe's Land Reform Programme.

—**Stan Onai Mushava**, Writer, Poet

A Worthy Contribution to Post-Colonial Literature

Harare Voices and Beyond offers a nuanced examination of race relations and the land reform programme in a post independent African nation Zimbabwe which becomes microcosmic and a wider metaphor of other African nations yet to deal with this contentious issue.

The land question continues to hog many African countries, South Africa being the latest to join the fray and for a black author to tackle such an issue and bring it under the literary gaze is nigh remarkable.

This could be the first book of its kind by a black Zimbabwean author to deal with this contested terrain. Equally pertinent sub strands come to the fore in the narrative like Harare's burgeoning crystal meth rampage and its devastating impact on Zimbabwean youth and adults. These are important questions the author feels deeply about as a schoolteacher that they ought to be rightly critiqued and interrogated for the greater good of posterity. Through this book, Chatora brokers uncharted territory in post-colonial literature and it stands to make a worthwhile contribution to this great tradition.

—**Gift Mheta**, Writer, Durban University of Technology, South Africa

Harare Voices and Beyond



by

Andrew Chatora

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To my father: John Chatora

A great man, a fierce ally, and most constant friend.

Rest in perpetual peace.

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Chapter 1

This is it for me and Mother. Are we going to die? Could there be any other way? There is the murder case of my brother Julian, who is Mother's youngest son gone rogue. Whatever happens, our defense lawyer Jonathan has done a brilliant job, eloquently pleading our case before High Court judge, Justice Chatikobo.

"Your honour, this was an act of self-defense gone wrong on the part of my clients Doris and Rhys. Both plead culpable homicide in the face of extreme provocation. They have both shown exceeding remorse for this mishap which will haunt and traumatize them all their lives.

"As we speak, my clients have experienced delirium and hallucinations, an upshot of this excruciating ordeal for them. Doris now has longstanding insomnia, as her medical records submitted to court confirm; she is now on chronic restorative medication. It is my submission to this court that it considers all the extenuating circumstances facing my clients and pardons them, for they are not murderers but are law-abiding citizens goaded into a tricky scenario, through no fault of their own.

"Prior to this, they do not have criminal records, not one, not two, none on their records. Blameless stain! No blemish! So, they deserve a second chance; we all deserve a second chance in life."

Jonathan had persuasively argued and took a respectful bow as he resumed his seat in the packed courtroom and both Mum and I gave him a thumbs up with our eyes.

"Excellent delivery Jonathan," I mumbled under my breath, as if afraid the judge would hear me.

"May the court rise as the judge leaves to prepare his determination," boomed the usher's sonorous voice as we all complied with his instruction.

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That had been a few days ago, last Friday to be precise. I looked at Mother's haggard, emaciated, expressionless face and felt for her. She had gone downhill within the last eight months and had shrivelled into a wilted leaf, reduced to a pitiful shadow of her former self. Her face was now etched with perpetual pain; deep furrowed lines of misery, worry and unhappiness now creased her brow. My mind flickered to the ebullient, effervescent Doris of yester-year that I had been used to. *Where had she gone, that vivacious, upbeat woman who had a ready smile for everyone, a big heart and larger than life personality?* I have the cheek to ask, as if I don't know the genesis of her ordeal. Blame it on Julian. But he is no longer here to state his case, is he? Perhaps, I should give him the benefit of the doubt to state his side of the story, but just. Perhaps, that is for another day.

"Time to go back to court Rhys," the prison officer's gruff voice jolted me out of my reverie. I scrambled to put on my creased khaki prison garb, grabbed water from an old scrappy metal mug on my cell window and shuffled out as Warren the prison officer unlocked my clanging metal cell doors and leg irons. The noise grated on me each time the heavy steel doors were opened with that hollow annoying noise which went on and on as if to remind me of my captivity status. I felt it; I was a caged animal and it hurt my self-esteem, yet this my newfound status.

"Your mother is already in the prison van waiting for you," Warren said. "Better hurry up." I shuffled awkwardly along the dreary, dingy, urine-stenched D section corridor of Chikurubhi Maximum Prison, slowly navigating my way towards the exit under the hawkish eyes of the other four burly prison officers who had joined us to first escort other prisoners to Harare Magistrates Court. Then high-profile cases like mine and Mother's would be dealt with at the corner Samora Machel/Second street ensconced colonial-looking high court building. I must admit it still looked regal in the decrepit disintegrating Harare infrastructure.

The Harare jacaranda trees were a vivid show of purple adding to the aesthetic ambience of the streets. Although decrepit Harare buildings made a mockery of its former epithet status as "Sunshine City," the blooming jacarandas still gave the city some much needed color.

"Morning Mum," I exchanged greetings with Doris as I sat opposite her in the green prison van. She could only grunt and give me a curt nod for an

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acknowledgment greeting. I wasn't surprised by this new change on Mum. Somehow the past eight months' trial and incarceration, first at Harare Remand prison and later at Chikurubhi, had sapped her energy. The once voluble woman cut a sorry figure as she increasingly became morose, reticent and laconic.

"Cheer up Mum, I know it's difficult; whatever happens today, we will get some closure on this case which has dragged on for so long," I remarked as I flashed her a radiant smile trying to be upbeat. Inwardly my stomach was churning and constricting at the uncertainty of what lay ahead. Today was judgement day from Justice Chatikobo, following several gruelling weeks of intense sparring between our defense lawyers and the prosecution, with the tetchy exchanges that had, at times, become ugly and heated. Moreso our cross-examinations had been brutal and adversarial, but we had emerged unscathed, at least those were Jonathan's reassuring words to us, "Both you and Doris have done very well throughout court proceedings, believe me." Jonathan had consistently allayed our misgivings in his periodic debriefs to us.

That morning, as if to exacerbate our jarred, frayed nerves, the prison van took exceedingly long to navigate the traffic on the treacherous pothole plagued roads of Harare. Because the van itself was like our jail, we couldn't hardly see what happened outside, as it's boarded up by tiny, barbed windows at each top end. All we occupants could feel was the constant discomfort and being jolted off our seats each time the vehicle hit a pothole or crater, with the attendant pain traveling up the bum. Being handcuffed when this happened didn't make things any easier. I caution you, don't ever be in my position.

Once at the Harare high court, we had a moment to consult with Jonathan just before the expected 11:00am verdict delivery time.

"Now here are the likely scenarios which are bound to happen today," Jonathan said quietly in the private courtroom legal chambers where lawyers would confer with their clients.

"In the event of a guilty verdict, my learned colleagues and I will have recourse to studying the judgement so we can expeditiously lodge an appeal to the Supreme Court.

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“Should you both be acquitted, which I am hoping will be the case, then I will quickly proceed to Chikurubhi to collect you both. Are we clear?” His eyes bored into both of us as he spoke.

“Crystal clear, Jonathan, and what does the time frame for an appeal look like, between a guilty verdict and you putting this in?” I asked, the despondency in my voice perhaps a tad too obvious. This was a far cry from my trying earlier to be upbeat with Doris in the prison van.

“We should get our papers lodged and filed within a two-week period at the latest, though I am still holding out hope for a propitious outcome,” Jonathan said.

“We do as well Jonathan, and in case things go the other way, please accept our utmost gratitude from the profoundest depths of our hearts, for what you’ve done for my son Rhys and I,” Doris butted in. She appeared to have found her voice in the end, much to my surprise.

“No worries, Doris, you don’t need to even say it,” remarked Jonathan with a modest peremptory wave of the hand. “Rhys and you have been through a lot these past eight months; you deserve a respite in the form of a favourable outcome. There’s the court usher beckoning to us. It may well be the die is cast. Let me hear whether judgement delivery is ready.”

“Judgement has been moved forward to 2:30pm this afternoon,” remarked the court usher, peering at us over his horn-rimmed glasses that he adjusted each time he spoke, much to my annoyance.

“How’s that?” asked Jonathan, palpably annoyed at this unforeseen delay.

“No reasons have been offered, but this is Zimbabwe you know, where the wheels of justice turn excruciatingly slow,” the usher said in low tones. The last statement came in a conspiratorial way to us, as if he was on our side and afraid to be overheard.

“For crying out loud, my clients have suffered long enough for all these months to have their day of reckoning just pushed from pillar to post, just like that,” remarked a visibly dejected and vexed Jonathan.

“Well, we just have to wait, don’t we?” said Doris. So we did wait with bated breath, for our judgement hour, which was more long drawn out than

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first stated. It was not until 3:45pm in the afternoon, a further delay of an hour and a quarter, when Justice Chatikobo took his seat, with us standing to acknowledge him.

Then he commenced speaking, as the court room descended into ominous silence. Our trial had received national and global headlines, some I can clearly recall, as they are permanently seared in my psyche: *“Murder most foul committed in posh Harare’s Borrowdale Suburbs. A white Zimbabwean family, Rhys and his mother Doris, bludgeoned their sibling Julian Williams, Rhys’s brother, after which they buried his body in their garden, in a grisly murder which has shook the opulent, leafy, affluent community...”* jumped to my memory. There were other snippets of some of these newspaper headlines and the furore surrounding our highly publicized trial in this southern African nation, where we the white community were a reclusive minority who tended to stay in the background.

“And so, judgement will be reserved indefinitely, as I need more time to study the prosecution and defense’s closing arguments...” Justice Chatikobo’s droning voice roused me from my late afternoon reverie.

“Judgement reserved indefinitely?” I was confused by these events unfolding before me. I glanced at Jonathan, who looked pissed off by Justice Chatikobo’s terse address made just before he brusquely left the bench and the courtroom.

That had been it, a dramatic end to a long-drawn-out day in which Doris and I had woken up looking forward, however difficult, to a day we hoped would have given us the much-needed closure to a gruelling several months which had sapped our energies and resilience to live. But Justice Chatikobo had other ideas, a judgement reserved verdict. Even Jonathan, the best legal brains in Zimbabwe, had not seen this coming. He commiserated with us thereafter. Trying to reassure us, he said, “Well, I am extremely annoyed at this whole judgement reserved thing, Rhys. I am absolutely fuming on your behalf. I am sorry and feel for both of you.”

“So, what does this mean to Doris and me? So many questions,” I quibbled sarcastically. “Excuse me Jonathan, but where do we go from here? How indefinite is indefinite a non-judgement?” I threw back the questions at Jonathan as if it had been his fault.

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“Well, I wish I knew,” he said. “I can only say, and here, I hate to say it, but can only repeat the usher’s words, ‘this is Zimbabwe’ where the rule of the jungle prevails, *donga watonga*; rule as you please, anarchy reigning supreme. Justice is up for sale to the highest bidder. You know what, forgive my rambling. Reserved judgement is bullshit stuff! We are at the mercy of this kakistocracy system now, and just have to wait until Chatikobo is ready with a judgement. Goodness knows whenever that will be.”

“What about bail? Is there any chance all this circus can rumble on while we’re out on bail?”

Jonathan replied, “Not a chance, I’m afraid, especially as it’s a murder case. Besides, the high media interest in your case does you a disservice. So, as much as it pains me to utter these words, you are likely to stay in Chikurubhi prison, in limbo, without having a definitive end in sight. It could be weeks; it could be months we are talking of here, but hopefully not. Look, I’m fed up with all these antics. What this country needs are judicial grit, rigour and independence.

“Reserved judgements have become the recent “in” thing, an abuse of power instrument at the disposal of this banana republic judiciary. I don’t like them; no one likes them who’s been on their receiving end. But that’s the way it is, I’m afraid. I’m sorry to you both once again. Will keep you in the loop on how things progress. This is Zimbabwe.” Jonathan was clearly deflated, and I felt for him as he left with a dejected air, his creased, scruffy tweed suit underscoring a defeated man. Even his limp became more pronounced as he hobbled off.

We trudged out of the high court buildings and made that short walk back into the prison van belly, our leg irons clanging against the high court’s pavement. I felt a dark, thick cloud of despondency descend on me, amid the teeming journalists and clicks of their cameras taking shots of both Doris and me and under the barrage of their ceaseless interview requests, “Mr. Williams, I’m from *The Zimbabwe Times*. Would you like to say a few words to this adjournment of your verdict today?”

“Do you think there is rule of law in Zimbabwe given your nearly nine months ordeal in Chikurubhi prison, and now this?”

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“Would you say you are being persecuted because you are white?” rang another question amongst a litany of ceaseless questions thrown at us by these vultures.

“No comment,” I quietly mumbled to them, my head lowered as I shuffled toward the prison van. *Golly, these fuckers, why can't they leave me alone?* I reflected as I negotiated the dodgy steps into the prison van. I missed a step and was roughly propped up by the butt of an AK 47 and the rough grimy hands of one of the prison wardens.

Chapter 2

How time drags on in Chikurubhi, I reflected within myself one morning as I sat in the prison canteen for my measly breakfast. It had been close to two months since Justice Chatikobo had delivered what I called his “no-show” judgement to us. No show, because nothing happened to us, either by way of giving us back our freedom had we been acquitted or availing us some certainty in the case of a conviction. In effect, nothing of the sort had happened. Here I was, still wallowing in Chikurubhi prison, with ceaseless anxiety daily gnawing on me, not knowing how my future would pan out with Mother. Good old Doris, she wasn’t taking this incarceration well; she’d been perennially in and out of the prison infirmary.

“My heart is failing Rhys; I can feel it in my bones. My blood pressure has shot through the roof, the prison doctor says. I’m not the same person anymore,” she would often remonstrate with me. I did my utmost to allay her fears and anxieties, though inwardly I believed something was not quite right with Doris anymore. Her cheeks had become sunken and sallow. Looking at her now somehow reminded me of a hideous scarecrow. It was a pitiful and harrowing sight to me witnessing the woman I loved dearly as my mother in a gradual descent and wilting, withering away like a deprived flower in a desert. Within those months in Chikurubhi, she had lost considerable weight. Frailty, thy name is an austere maximum prison.

“I’m sure you’ll be fine Mum. Granted, a prison is not exactly an ideal dwelling place for anyone, let alone the aged and infirm as in your case, but we can only hope this is a temporary setback, our being here.” She didn’t sound convinced or placated. I saw the haunting fear of prison life, cold, palpable fear of an uncertain future staring back at me with those dilated, wizened eyes. As I often did when conversation became awkward like this, I tactfully changed the subject. Inwardly, I did feel for my mother and the physical downward spiral for a woman who had given in so much, given

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her all to her country and family, yet had been so disproportionately rewarded.

Doris's life had been a lifetime of service, from way back in Mazowe, with her brainchild Mazowe Poly Clinic, which served the rural community of Mazowe and Christonbank well. But had she been rewarded, let alone acknowledged for her disinterested, selfless service? I am not sure of this. A lifetime of service, if there was an apt accolade, then this pretty much typified my mother's life during those years.

Every now and then my mind kept flickering to Julian, my kid brother Julian. What had made him snap and set Doris's bed on fire? Why had it come to this? What had become of our close-knit family of yesteryear? These and a host of other questions constantly flooded my psyche most evenings when I laid on my narrow Chikurubhi bunk bed and stared at the grimy ceiling, where reams of rainwater scars had built up on the decrepit surface. Perhaps, what made it more jarring, and unsettling was that it hadn't been Julian's first attempt at arson.

Something weird had come upon Julian in recent years, yet equally, Julian's descent into hell hadn't been unseen either. The signs had been too palpable to miss.

"Your brother is up to no good. He won't talk to me. Have a quiet word," mother constantly admonished me. "It's a silent cry for help. He will be our bane if we don't reach out," Doris would bang on, referring to Julian's increasingly erratic, eccentric behaviour.

As I kept jabbing my fork into my hardboiled egg, I felt it; someone was staring at me within the prison canteen. Then I saw her staring at me, just as I had felt it. That feeling had lingered, even though I'd been wrapped up in my innermost trance and it was overpowering. Someone was ogling me big time over the prison cafeteria table, across the wide sitting area on the other extreme end.

So much for Governor Warren and his much-touted prison reforms. An expatriate white American brought in to sort out the mess at Chikurubhi and other correctional prisons within the country, Governor Warren certainly had a chip on his shoulder as he stood at the cusp of change with his rallying call being, *"Prison reforms, put the prisoner at the heart of rehabilitation*

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not punishment. We aim to reform the individual when they eventually leave prison walls.” That was it, things had changed rapidly in some respects at Chikurubhi with Warden Warren’s prison reforms in which he advocated for men and women inmates to intermingle. That was how it came to be; we now mingled with female inmates as on this fateful morning.

“They are doing it in America, why can’t we do it also here?” Governor Warren would often advance this as his *raison d’être*, as if America were the moral standard bearer for things in life.

“Pleased to meet you.” I remarked as I ambled toward her and stretched out my hand to her. “I’m Rhys Williams, I’m in for murder,” I said, deliberately dropping in the last bit if only so I could gauge her reaction.

“In for murder as well, Marina Thompson,” she remarked, flashing me a ravishingly dazzling smile which rather disarmed me. I had been expecting instant rejection, given the nature of my crime.

“You’re also in for murder Marina? Is this some flip-it-back-at-him joke?” I asked her incredulously as I sat across the table staring at her full length.

“Far from it. You heard me correctly, Rhys. Interested in my story? Be my guest then. I have nothing to hide anymore do I, given my committal here. Besides, what else can we do here in these granite walls of Chikurubhi?”

“Go on then sunshine,” I playfully teased her back, taken in by her outright candour and charm. I mean, it’s not every day that you come across a fellow inmate so blasé about their past misdeeds. Not only that, but one willing to share them with you. I must admit, I found that bit of Marina immersive and certainly magnetic.

“Well, here’s the deal, Rhys,” she resumed speaking, a naughty smile curling her luscious olive lips.

“What deal again? You change so fast. Isn’t it you who just said a minute ago, you’re an attention-seeker willing to share your story?” I politely retorted. She gave back my playful banter in equal measure. *She must be enjoying this*, I thought to myself.

“Well, Rhys, there must be a trade-off of some sort. I am not just going to tell you every tiny-winy bit of my life without you sharing yours in

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reciprocation. It's only fair we get to know each other in these four walls of mighty Chikurubhi. Besides, it would be boring to hear just my side of mishaps I've been through. So I say, you put your cards on the table, I do likewise. Do we have a deal, Mister Prim and Proper?" she remarked, a wicked glint in her almond blue eyes.

"Yes, we do have a deal, Marina," I shot back gleefully, now very much up for taking on her challenge which I found strangely, sexually alluring. *For fuck's sake, I've stayed far too long in the belly of these walls, my sexual guns are misfiring*, I mused to myself, feeling the stirrings of my manhood in my loins signalling an erection. *Behave yourself, will you?* Another counter voice politely whispered in my ear.

"Bravo!" she almost shouted, drawing glances from other inmates in the prison cafeteria. And that was how it started between us, the enigmatic Marina and me. That ravishing mixed-race girl who stood out from all within Chikurubhi prison, if not because of her exquisite looks, then for her super-posh twang British accent, certainly made you look at her each time she opened her mouth to speak. I can't say I wasn't elated to be in such exclusive company. I certainly felt chuffed, and judging by their lecherous, covetous glances at us, I know I detected envy from the other male prisoners each time they saw us together within the prison compound. Why wouldn't they be, given Marina's captivating physical beauty, radiance, and presence? Marina would light any environ she happened to grace. Tall, voluptuous with pointed nipples, these physical attributes were further accentuated by a ravishing smile and intelligent conversation which were certainly the hallmarks of this mixed-race British lassie. Many atimes, Marina carried herself with a seductive, hip swinging strut across the prison compound, much to the delight of the lascivious male eyes drooling on her frame. There was little doubt I found Marina's sexual allure and captivation magnetic and irresistible, thus I started looking forward to our usual dalliances, if not within the prison compound, then the communal library.

Chapter 3

Meeting Rhys

I warmed up to Rhys early on during my settling down days at Chikurubhi prison. It would not be an exaggeration to say I liked Rhys instantly upon setting my eyes on him. In fact, I had been staking him out for a couple of weeks, especially at mealtimes, when I would gaze at him relentlessly across the wide dining room. Much to my dejection, all the while he would not even bother looking toward my way. As weeks went by with no breakthrough, the frustration to my perving him with no tangible rewards was beginning to grate on me. *Gosh, it's like I don't even exist*, I would often remark to myself as I pleased myself in the serene darkness of my prison bunk bed most evenings. My long fingers stroking the inner crevices between my supple thighs, this was a treat I had taken to as a coping mechanism in the dull, Chikurubhi fortress. In a weird way, part of me regarded his standoffish behavior as a welcome challenge which I found sexually alluring, especially in the throes of the evenings when I took the fantasy trip of his cock slipping in and out of me, and let my fingers finish the job as I squirted my juices on the prison bed. And then it happened, just like that, boom!

One morning, the legend that was Rhys confidently sauntered to my table, and I playfully feigned nonchalance at seeing him; I wanted to play it coy with him even though I was inwardly elated at seeing him.

There was something about Rhys which reminded me of someone back home in England, perhaps a familiar face at Blanchett's Goodhope? Rhys was an interesting man who exuded a smooth, magnetic charm. He had that uncanny aloofness which set him apart from the other prisoners and I found this magnetic. *What goes on behind those dark glasses? Who is this seeming*

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loner of a man who hardly mingles with the others? This is a prison for heaven's sake. Do you have to be that stuck up? All these were key questions coursing through my mind each time I glanced at Rhys within the prison compound. Above all, he exuded a certain aura of unmitigated confidence and invincibility, attributes very much at variance with our mice-like captivity status in Chikurubhi. Whatever it was that made him tick, I was determined to get to know this fella at close quarters and unravel his mystery and enigmatic facade.

For the uninitiated, there is something unique about me. I've always been one for wanting a bit of a challenge. And I found Rhys' distant persona alluring. I found talking to him immersive and enthralling, like I had known him for ages. We felt so much at ease as we chatted nonchalantly within the prison grounds. I was enchanted with this white Zimbabwean fella who never seemed to run out of amusing stories and anecdotes. I found myself hanging on to his every word. We could go on talking non-stop, regaling in unmitigated laughter and gaiety at Rhys' anecdotes, stories, and mirth. At times the prison guards would interrupt. "You two behave yourself, don't forget you're in a gaol for heaven's sake," they would remonstrate with us, wringing their hands.

That was how I bonded with Rhys. Why couldn't we, given the numerous ways our lives were intertwined? We were more like twins in many respects, as Rhys's own intimate life shone a light on mine, and we bounced light off each other like that. Each morning in the prison yard at Chikurubhi we could mingle and exchange notes on the roads we have trod, Rhys on his travails in Zimbabwe, I on my England misadventures, and how they inadvertently jettisoned me into beautiful Zimbabwe, now my adopted home for the past few years.

Initially the prison guards had made a deafening huha and brouhaha about us interacting, but they eventually relented and left us be, though with some grudging recriminations.

"Whatever you two get up to, no handholding and touching. You're not at a dating center. This is Chikurubhi for Pete's sake," barked Steve, one of the guards well known for his excessive sadism and meanness. One of the legendary stories which ran throughout the prison compound was how, at one point, Steve had to be restrained by fellow prison officers; in fact, the

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story goes that it took four of them to contain him after he got involved in a nasty brawl with one of the notorious D section prisoners, which earned him a broken nose and a crooked Y shaped scar on his face. For that misdemeanour, Steve had escaped with a warning from the prison board authorities, but if anything, that did not seem to have deterred and detracted him from his brutal callousness, crass character and interactions with prisoners.

“We hear you loud and clear, Steve, and we assure you nothing of the sort will happen,” Rhys would remark nonchalantly. I think with the passing of time the prison establishment came to accept we were two good friends who meant no harm, so they grudgingly acquiesced and left us to our own devices. The prison library was another safe haven for us, for Rhys and I shared a deep affinity for everything literature. During our usual pass time, we would be lost, engrossed in the voluminous Penguin classics of literary luminaries of yesteryear, such as Dickens, Daniel Defoe, and George Eliot, among others.

“I come from a strong literary background,” Rhys would proudly gush at me. “My dad Jim was way, way ahead of his times than most of his mates in terms of literary appreciation, and it is on me that he bequeathed his love for reading. Do you know he was churning out poetry pieces back in the days at our Mazowe farm? Unbelievable stuff in that Pops was such an unassuming intellectual. A man of mixed talents, bookish and yet a farmer of note, all in one.

“Reading though was never my kid brother Julian’s forte and he made no attempt to hide his disdain for this, ‘Not for me Rhys. Besides reading is boring, that’s for you dull boffins!’

“Dull boffins, ever heard of such a thing? Talk of an oxymoron coming from someone professing to loathe reading.” Such was the strength and testament of the camaraderie between Rhys and me as we shared up-close moments of intimacy and interaction during our sojourn at the country’s leading infamous gaol, Chikurubhi, both awaiting the inevitable hangman’s noose.

