

# IN THE GOLD MINES

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*translated from the Zulu by*

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where the original 'Ezinkomponi' first appeared.*

Thunder away, machines of the mines,  
Thunder away from dawn till sunset;  
I will get up soon: do not pester me;  
Thunder away, machines. Heed not  
The groans of the black labourers  
Writhing with the pains of their bodily wounds,  
The air close and suffocating  
With the dirt and sweat of their bodies  
As they drain their hips till nothing is left.

Call aloud, old boy. It is far,  
It is far away where you were moulded,  
Where you roasted in the fire till you were strong;  
The coal remained; you were sent away,  
And we saw you cross the waters of the sea;  
You were borne overland by the engines of fire  
That puffed and glided to Goli here;  
You screamed one day, and all at once there appeared,  
There came rock-rabbits from all sides.

Those black rock-rabbits without tails  
You caught and stowed away in holes  
To own and milk as yielding cows.  
Whirl round and round, you wheels of iron;  
It was for us they brought you here;  
You were tied together against your will;  
To-day you thunder and strain unceasingly;  
See how some of your kind, now rusty and old,  
Have been cast away on the rubbish dumps.

As I pass along the road  
I turn around and watch,  
Wondering if you will ever give birth,  
Perchance increase. But no!  
Your brothers too go rusty  
Within the mine compounds;  
Their lungs go rusty and rusty,  
And they cough and they lie down and they die.  
But you irons, you never cough. I note and wonder why.

I have heard it said that in the hole  
There are tribes and tribes of the Black One;  
It is they who raise the great white mounds  
That astonish their black forebears.  
I have heard it said that on a certain day  
A siren shrieked, and a black field-mouse  
With mind all wrapped in darkness came;  
He was caught and changed into a mole,  
And he burrowed the earth and I saw the gold.

O yes, they burrowed, those burrowing moles,  
And the great white mounds appeared.  
Swelling from the ground and climbing and climbing  
Till to-day they top iSandlwana Mountain.  
I labour to the top, I wipe off the sweat,  
And from on high I see the piles  
Of fine white dust, fine dust arising  
From below my feet. I look around  
And I note that the piles block the earth around.

Thunder away, machines of the mines,  
Thunder loud and loud,  
Deafen with noise that we may not be heard  
Though we cry out aloud and groan  
As you eat away the joints of our bodies;  
Giggle and snigger, you old machines;  
It is well that you laugh and scorn our rage,  
For great is your power and fearful;  
You may do as you please: we succumb.

We agreed to leave our round-shaped huts,  
To be herded here like castrated males;  
We gave up our corn, *amasi* and milk,  
To live here on pap and porridge;  
All gone is our manhood: we are mere boys;  
We see that the world is upside down;  
We are woken at dawn, and we stand in a row;  
Where was it ever done to bury a man  
While he walks and sees with both his eyes?

Thunder away, machines of the mines,  
I am getting up, not chameleon-like,  
I will go beneath the earth,  
I will strike the rock with the boring rod;  
Even you above, though you hear not a sound,  
Will know that I strike with the white man's rod  
When you see the trucks coming laden high  
With the stones that are white and blue.

My brother too will come with me,  
The pick and the shovel on his shoulder,  
His heavy boots on his feet;  
He too will enter and follow me,  
Swallowed by the earth, we will burrow away;  
And if I should die right there beneath  
What matters it? Who am I at all?  
From dawn to dawn, O son of man;  
I see them stumble and tumble and die.

When I went beneath the earth,  
There were none of the giant mounds  
Whereat now I gaze and wonder;  
I carried my bundle to seek my home,  
But was hit in the face by cropless stalks,  
By empty huts and abandoned homes;  
I paused and scratched my head, puzzled;  
Where was my wife? My mothers-in-law?  
I was told they had gone to the white man,  
To the white man for whom I work.  
I shut my mouth and spoke not a word.

Thunder away, machines of the mines,  
 Though reaching me from far-away Dukathole<sup>1</sup>  
 (The—place—where—the—calf—goes—astray),  
 Your voices stab deep into my soul,  
 Tinkling and tinkling in my ears  
 Like the startling sound of a bell far away.  
 They bring to my mind the lofty homes,  
 The riches, and the rich ones whom I raised  
 To the beautiful house on high, while I stay here  
 Dripping, sweating, a lean dying ox.

Rumble softly, O machines;  
 Because the white man feels not for others,  
 Must you treat me as heartlessly too?  
 Thunder not so loud in the mines;  
 Be pleased to hear what we have to say  
 Lest we have nought to say for you  
 On that far-off day, that unknown day,  
 When it shall be said of you irons  
 That you are the slaves of us, black men.

Wait just a while, for feeble as I seem,  
 From these same little arms one day  
 There flew some fierce long-bladed spears  
 Which I hurled till the sun was darkened,  
 And the great Cow-elephant's<sup>2</sup> kingdom stirred  
 And Phewula's<sup>3</sup> children dwindled. I was robbed.  
 But still do I go on dreaming, son of Iron,  
 Dreaming that the land of my fathers' fathers  
 Comes back to the hands of the homeless Blacks.

To-day in the shadow of riches  
 I have nowhere to rest my body;  
 My fathers' fathers' land lies bare,  
 With no one to till it while I sit and stare;  
 What though I have the means to buy  
 And own once more my fathers' land,  
 I have no right to buy or own.  
 Look there, O Fathers above and below!  
 Can you not save me from such suffering?

<sup>1</sup> Germiston<sup>2</sup> Queen Victoria<sup>3</sup> Paul Kruger

They say deep down in the land of my fathers,  
In the land of spirits and spirits,  
You have powers that are not surpassed,  
That when you speak to the Great-Great-One,  
He does not regard the colour of the skin.  
My blood keeps falling on the ground,  
And cakes and clots in the burning sun.  
I toil and toil and pray to you,  
But no, you answer not a word.

Your land to-day and yesterday  
Is plundered by bands of robbers;  
It has fattened nations and nations,  
But I and the Black House of my fathers  
We have nothing, nothing.  
We come out of the hole and see the grass  
Fresh as the blue skies of heaven;  
We look around and call out aloud,  
Alas! You do not reply.

Thunder away, machines of the mines,  
My hands are throbbing with pain,  
My swollen feet are aching,  
But I cannot relieve the pain  
For the white man's cures call for money.  
Thunder away, but wake me not,  
Great things I have done for the whiteman chiefs,  
And now my soul weighs heavy on me.  
Rumble softly that I may sleep,  
Close my eyes and sleep on and on,  
Thinking no more of tomorrow and after,  
Sleep and wake up far away,  
Far away in the land of spirits and dreaming,  
Sleep and never wake again,  
But rest in the arms of my fathers' fathers  
Down in the fresh-green pastures of heaven.