

Three Poems · *Sue Standing*

TRANSLATIONS FROM COLONIAL SWAHILI

A bad piece. A long arrow. Empty baskets.
Thick baobab trees. A hard bone. Heavy misfortunes.

She has beautiful buttons and a long chain.
The large islands have tall palm-oil trees.
The fierce drunkard has dry lips and a rotten head.

That arrow is broken. The basket has fallen down.
The baobab tree has fallen. The old person is dead.
The large bone is broken. The little child is dead.

The tall coconut tree has fallen. The cook is dead.
That drunkard has fallen down. He has built a house there.
This canoe is split. The child is lost.

Which baobab tree? Which chair? Which child?
What sort of bone is this? Which islands are those?
What sort of overseer is a blind person?

I have drawn a line. That old man dreamed.
The sweet potatoes have gone bad. You have tied yourself.
I have pained myself. Two thorns have entered the hand.

You will call the writer. The beautiful moon has gone down.
These months are good, those are bad. You were born.
I boasted yesterday, today I am sorry.

The mason built a secret room. Their spears are long.
The fisherman's heart is light. The man's voice is audible.
The children became blind. The broken water jars.

These bananas are redder and sweeter than yours.
He is weak today. It is true. A shadow which is not passing.