FAULT LINES: Haiti, Two Years On

Joseph G. Ramsey

Faultlines

I.

The Earth has kept on traveling round the Sun

Since the day it shook and tore them down.

Down

Down

and Down

Everything fell:

Shacks and church pews smashed through sewers;

Palace collapsed – an empty shell.

Three hundred thousand (counted, fewer;

Thousands buried, never found).

The whole world ruptured; catacombs

Unleash the walled up winds of hell.

La Terre Tremble.

II.

Will we forget what that shaking ground

Revealed for all to see, who cared to look?

The way the streets filled up with bloated bodies;

The way the troops drove on, and let them cook?

The "Aid" delayed, as if for fear of zombies

rising from their rubble graves to run –

White eyes blazing bloody memories

of how white masters came and took by gun.

And yet, and yet, poor Haitians did not riot;
worked to pull each other from the ruins.
Carried those who died, and those who wouldn't for a while,
And those who lived.

Gave until they had no more to give.

(Meanwhile, "Security," guns in hand;
Guarding the gates that could no longer stand,
Protecting property of those in command.)

III.

A sudden eruption
of broken heart blisters
oozing, drying on Live TV
far flung news anchors aim for the ripe wound,
peeling it back, letting us see,
seek the perfect angle
to capture
that "inexplicable-horror-of-it-all,"
(just a dash of sugared hope thrown in for the folks at home)
that juicy spot where the latex glove meets the bandage
meets the hand
meets the ballot box
meets the sky
Where it hurts to look. Where it makes you cry.

(But never lets you find out *How*? or *Why*?)

From this fastened hook

America hangs
Prepared to unleash its charity thang
Solemn Celebrities claim center stage:
And all that sit are moved.
Millions shut their eyes in prayer
(secretly thankful that they're not there)
Yet ready to do what good people should:
for a minute, an hour, or even a week.

Never though letting the Haitians speak.

What do the people there have to say?
When they look at US what do they see?
Who will dare to take a peek today?

Caught in the sun, the pocked eye turns away.

How much can the blinded stand to see?

Band-aids slap where barricades should be.

IV.

Worldwide

They say there are a dozen cities
With at least a million people each
Lying, waiting, sleeping on a fault line;
(Slum-dweller flesh to feed the breach).

For each year, the Earth, it shivers
In the endless cold of space;

Quakes and quivers, like an ox whose skin must knock flies from its face.

The fault is not the moving Earth's

- We know that quakes will come, and even where -

At fault:

a world-wide class affliction

Razing mounds

of contradiction;

Bubbling boils that bust through skin,

Seeping hot pus, sweat and blood – and liquid gold

That trickles up to rulers' lips ice cold.

Parasites suck membranes thin:

Vulture claws cleave crater-trails,

Until what's precious flesh is drawn

In scabs and scars

to fit the scales;

(Heed the bankers' dark command:)

Plow the farmers off the land

Build estates on bone and sand.

Spill the poor in pavement cracks.

Stitch the workers into seams

For rulers' flowing cloaks

- Breaking their backs -

letting them choke

gasping for air -

stripping them down to their dreams, then bare.

The earth, we know, will quiver; the brittled surface, tear.

V.

This predator's plague has no plan for poor people, except for the juice to be squeezed from their veins to quench its viral thirst.

Markets pressure and hearts burst.

So long as endless profit reigns.

(The heads of state remain aloof:

Crisis = opportunity, after all

Helicopter blades

give the world a roof.

And there's plenty of sweat to catch,

as they fall.)

VI.

Outside Port au Prince:

Refugee Cities -

Rain soaked sheets

Flap on and on,
But only the bugs and bats can fly.

The people gathering, grasping Why.

Eyes peer out through fraying holes; Fingers point: jet-liners tearing the sky.

Aboard corporate jets:

Thirsting agents
Ties loosened,
Clinking drinks in hand,
Toast to the future they found behind,

Traveling home, to milder climes:

If they look down
through parting clouds –
see only some
dirty laundry lines.

(updated, Dec. 30, 2011)

Sun and Bone

In Camp Corail

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On the hot white plains
Of Camp Corail,
Between mountains and mountains
Where a railroad no longer runs
And trees no longer grow,
The state no longer dumps
the dead;
They dump the living there instead.
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Shards of skeletons are hidden beneath
Acres of crushed stone
Pressed flat as a leaf
so flat
it's like an army of bulldozers
has come
and gone in the night.

A sky-to-sky concrete plateau:

The stone mixed in with the bone below burning the feet and blinding the eyes of those who stand in the sun.

Even in shoes it hurts to walk;

But it's too hot to run.

*

It is not the earth that moved them here but those who said they came to "help" who deemed their old survivor camp —
on the edge of the crumbling city shelf
amidst the debris of the walls and streets
that had soaked up their cries of joy and pain,
where at least what torn ground still remained
to break their fall was ground they *knew* — "unfit."
That place not far from the parliament,
And the flattened factory where some had worked
This place they had squatted on, made their own
though it was nothing they could call a home
— this strip —
was, pronounced a "high risk zone."

According to experts
In human resettlement
The spot was at risk of being effected
By outbreaks: of "social unrest,"
communicable disease,
And perhaps fire.

And so
On advice of the foreign experts
the police
batons in hand
encouraged the people to leave
For their own good.

It would not do.

The former killing field Far from the city Would do nicely was thought to be more suitable,
a safer place to put them –
Though safer for whom
Was not entirely clear to the people
As they broiled, blinded by
the stone-and-bone reflected sun.

Trucks brought them there by the hundreds, Thousands. Brought them here, until Camp Corail was filled.

And so now

The white tents of those who still live mark the graves
of the numberless dead
never given a proper burial.

Dumped in the middle of the nowhere wastes

The living dead infuse this place.

The living haunted

by the ghosts below

The ghosts, by the living above —

They have been here for more than three months now.

They have been here for almost thirty years now.

Past and present knot and gnaw.

In the heat, buried dreams

Long sealed: thaw.

*

After the sun goes down

the ground cools enough to walk upon:

a child slips out of a tent

to dig with her bare hands

in the rocky sand. She picks her plot with a careful eye.

Drops to her knees and scratches to get her start

Breaking up the sun-sealed crypt of crust.

It gives, but not before it draws blood

From her fingernails. She licks the wound

And spits the dirt. And digs.

Down through the bleached, chalky rock

Digs: searching for moister dirt; she digs,

though the surface hurts her knuckles, digs

Looking for dirt that will hold together.

She finds,

hand by handful,

only still more rock pebbles

and more dry

dust; nothing

that sticks

nothing

that can be salvaged

for making

anything

not even the smallest

mud castle, or cake. Not even a good dirt ball.

She is about to give up, hands gray with dust

but keeps on just

a bit longer, just for the feel of it:

at least this deeper dirt is cool.

Perhaps at least-she has come so far now –

she will dig a hole big enough for her to

slip into. Like a womb. A tomb. A shelter. A place to soak up the cool.

Her own dirt pool.

Her means become her ends;

At the very least she will have a hole.

But then

this:

A knee and half-a-thigh deep, her eyes fix on

Something:

the hard frozen flower

of a human vertebrae (though she does not know what exactly it is):

A weathered star of scattered backbone.

She picks it up.

She can tell it is not stone.

– it does not fit in with the crater of dust.

It must be from somewhere else.

It must

- And, look, there is another.

Like splinters, shards of history working their way up to the surface almost as if the land had purpose:

The trace of some ancient species long gone

The fossil of one who refused to go along.

The child holds the curious talisman up, catching the moonlight In her palm's cup.

She does not know what it is, only how it feels, lighter, Different from the pebbles and stones she usually steals from this jagged ground. Bringing the bone, like a pick to her lips,

She rubs it against them, as if to strum some forgotten tune,

Some melody she has never been taught.

Sifting through names of extinct things.

Is it a piece of a dinosaur tooth?

As she touches her tongue to the very tip of her find She hears a shriek rip through the night:

A dozen rows of tent away:

the rusty teeth of the gnawing saw

Spit fresh blood on the white rock floor.

Held down by hands, a mother faints

from pain,

leaving another child alone, standing by the door.

Watching her in the lamp light.

One more landless peasant will walk no more

On her own two legs. The surgeon works quickly

While she is unconscious. *Back and forth*.

Echoes of hundreds of limbs that have come before. Feet and arms piled on the floor.

Back and forth.

(The gangrene started in her toe.

They should have caught it long ago.)

The canvas sides, the surgeon's mask

soak up her dreaming groans and gasps

As does the rock (and the bone) below.

Thank god these flapping walls; they could not talk –

Nor could the splattered stone: *No one will know.*

Just before morning, the mother wakes her invisible leg on fire, she quakes.

A strong patient, she has survived the worst. (Yet how is it that her foot still hurts?)

Summons up what courage she commands. Her hands are tied to the bed with bands;

Grinds her teeth to bring the rain;

– nothing but Motrin for such hot pain.

Makes fists out of her praying hands:

It's hard to believe they've not been cursed;
This blighted, blackened, branded land.
She wishes to God that the clouds would burst
And end this endless devil's plan –
Just wash them all away –
Since it seems there's no place left to stand.

How will she endure this endless test upon the searing desert sand? *The water well is half a mile away*.

Her son hears her waking cries, ducks in. Brings with him a paper fan.

*

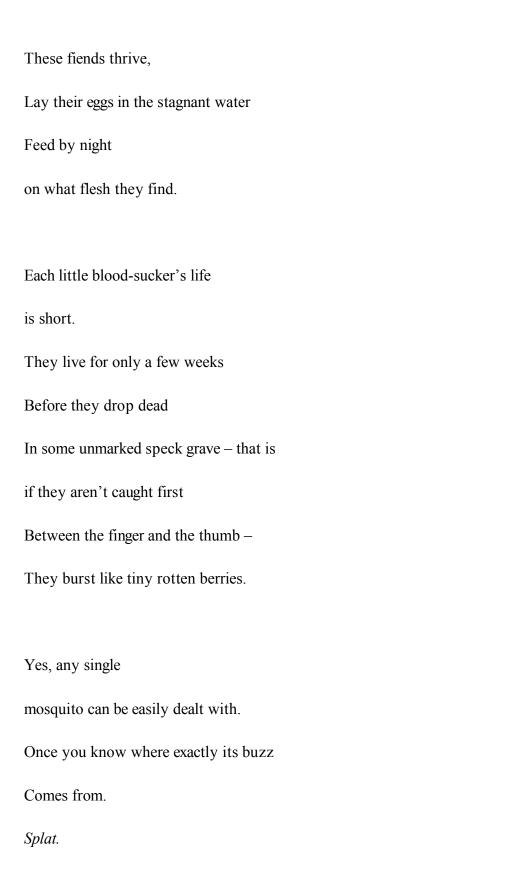
On the edge of Camp Corail

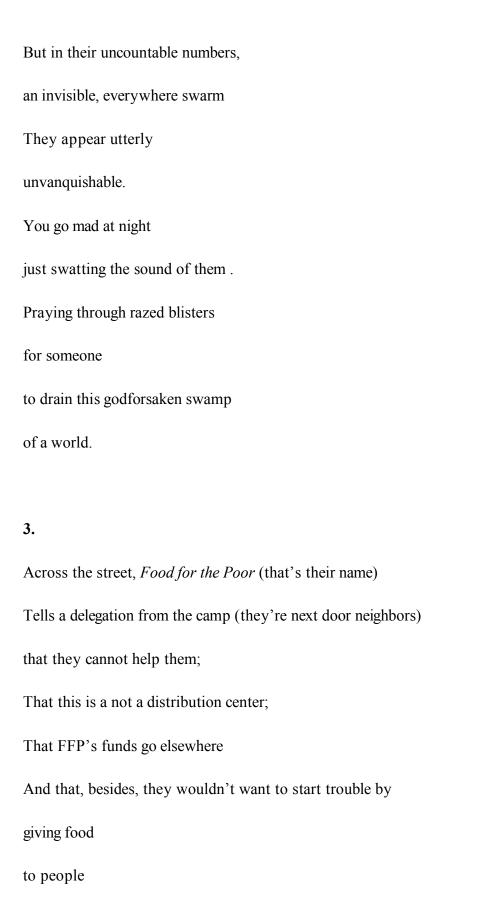
The girl with the newfound dinosaur tooth
Lies in her trench,
her ancient secret gripped

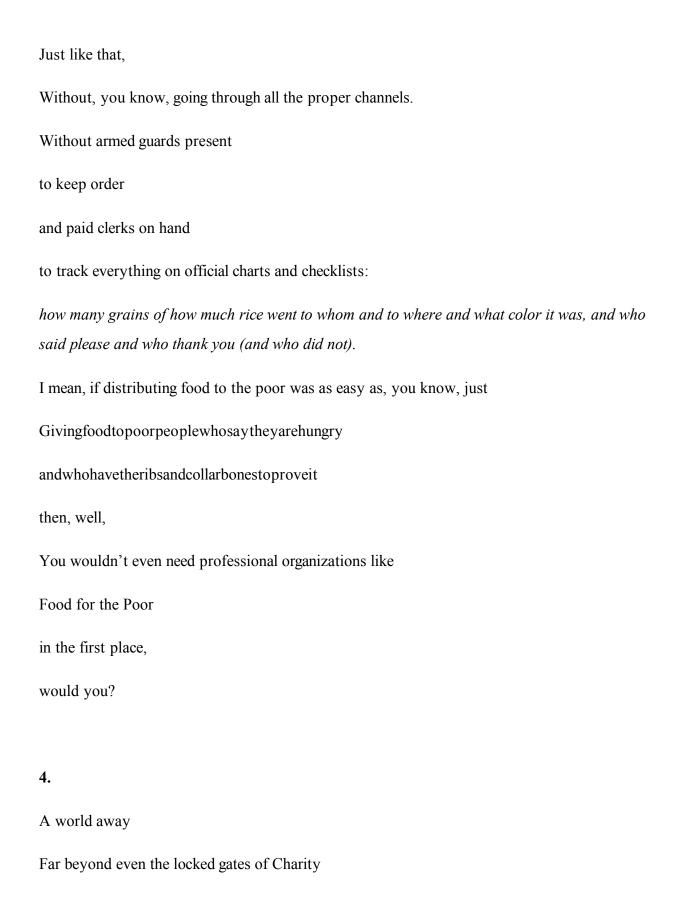
in a warrior hand. Between her fingers and her thumb, she turns the bone-shard into a gun; Yes, with it she'll shoot The rising sun. Before it boils them all. She tightens her lip closes one eye: Aims at the blood-rimmed base of the sky. It's worth a try. What is Needed Campside (based on true events) 1. In Haiti there is money to build walls not to house the poor but to block them from view;

to lay imported brick	
nigh and thick,	
not to protect	
the homeless	
from the hurricane,	
out to protect	
the rich man's twenty-acre	
estate	
from the sewage that flows	
downhill	
from the camp	
when it rains.	
And so now	
when it rains	
A human stew	
Bubbles backs from the base of the wall	
into the camp –	
deep enough to drown in	
A gathering cesspool	

for mosquitos
to breed
and cholera
to bloom.
2.
The construction project
Gives at least
a few men
– from another camp across town –
work:
hard, back-breaking work
for a few weeks
At almost three times the minimum wage:
A few dollars a day.
The wall they build gives
At least
the mosquitos
a home.







Elsewhere
Where "History" is made
A UN official
gets promoted
to stand behind a podium and
speak of "A risk of a pandemic" and
"A surge in infant mortality."
Earnest euphemism
Rolls off that juicy pink tongue;
(The fluent official gargles water
Before coming on stage
with another bottle of Aquafina at the podium
Just in case
the throat suddenly dries up;
It can get awfully hot up there,
Under all those bright lights,
With all the world watching.)
5.
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Meanwhile

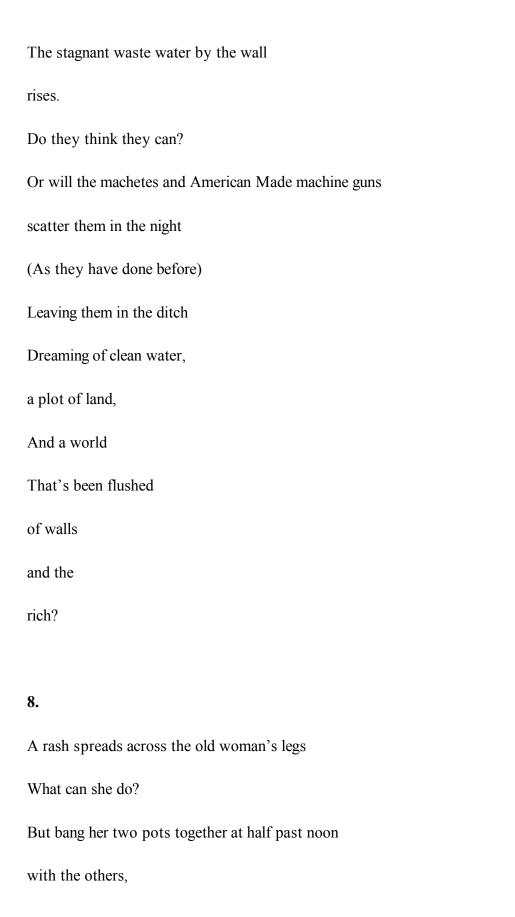
In the dark
cholera stretches it limbs across prison floors
From steel barred windows to crack-webbed walls
Where profane protests against the state
are smeared in feces
and blood.
Some walls still won't fall.
As others go up.
And more are planned.
*
Tons upon tons of construction materials
Sit piled at camp-side:
Metal beams like the stacked legs of starved giants,
Head-high mounds of sand and crushed granite, rubble
Fresh-shoveled and trucked
from the wreckage of Port-au-Prince.
(There's a fortune being made in the sale of rubble.)

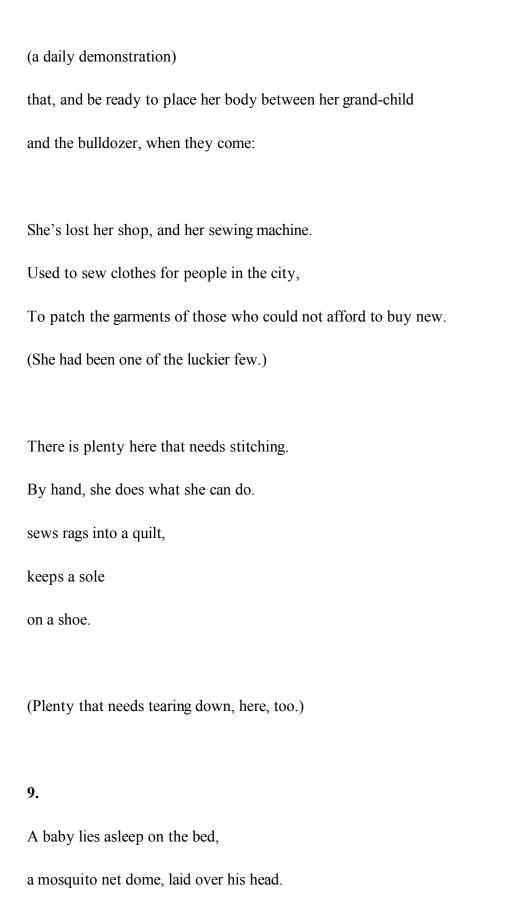
Monster machines sit idle. Watched over by armed guards.
And a handful of hired workers stand and smoke, idle too,
waiting to break ground, at the boss's order.
Their muscles itch for work.
There are building materials here
for a hundred homes, at least.
Only,
Not.
The squatters are to be
Evicted
from their road-side camp
By the rightful land owner
With the official stamp.
He wants to build a factory
He needs to build a factory
– there is capital for a factory –

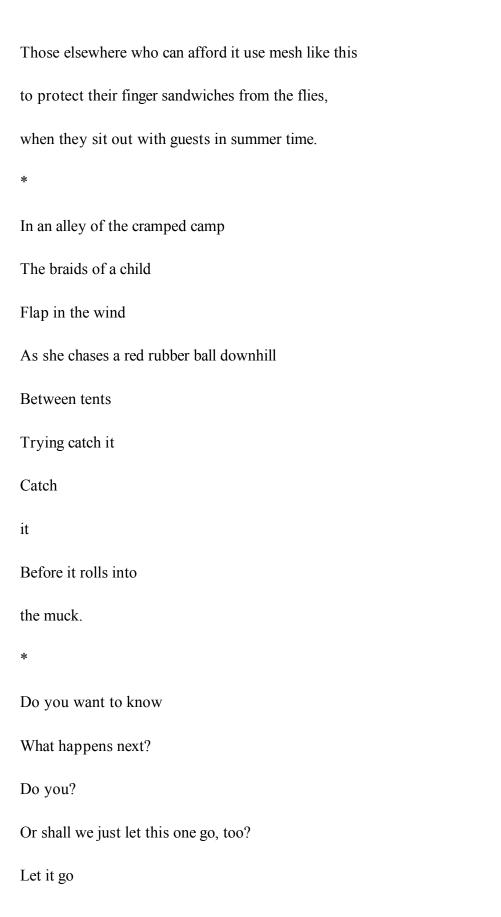
obligations to meet words to keep (The owners, too, imprisoned, by what they must build Though their jail-cells are air-conditioned, fine coats keep off the chill.) They've contracted a foreign company to produce: baseballs to be exported and sold to Sporting Goods stores who will sell them at a mark-up to the parents of little American boys and girls who have fields to play in and who can afford to lose things in streams and under fences and buy new ones. 6. Campside Hundreds of people contemplate Scraping up the will to struggle together, to keep their grip

on a cracked plot of ground that they never asked for
In the first place;
That was forced upon them:
A sun-baked tarp town
where they have been confined for more than a year now,
without schools or sanitation,
While the rulers make plans
That do not include them
Except as sources of
excrement
To be sealed off
Or else
as cheap labor
to be mixed
with the bricks
that wall people
in
and people
out.
· ·

The bulldozers rumble The manager shouts "If there's no trouble, if you all move out, Some of you may get the chance to sew baseballs. You like baseballs, don't you?" The new boss promises three dollars a day. A few will be hired—the rest flushed away. 7. Will the refuse of this system pick this city of sheets and boiling shade Of ghosts and newborns and grandparents and toys But no safe place to play and Of grime and sand and whispered songs And blanched rebel memories To make their stand?







Let it go
How much of this world are we willing to just
Let go?
How much humanity
Will we just let go
Let fall
away
Like some ball
slipping through
A child's open palm?
Or a kite forever swallowed by the sky?
*
Fresh watered flowers
and incense torches
line the owners' oblivious porches,
keeping off the bugs
masking some distant stench.
And a young girl has drowned in a rain-swollen trench.

10. There is money in Haiti To build with; it pours in; the rich hire poor people with it erect walls with it so they don't have to see the sludge That soils their green gardens. And this too: so the sorrow-sick souls gathered now by the edge of the camp-side mire still gripping pots and pans unearthing and wiping clear the braided face of the child Can't see them, the rich, sitting there in their place

out in the sun, doing what they do,

Enjoying the open air:

So well-dressed,

carefree
And so few.
*
Almost a million still homeless
in Haiti.
It's not for lack of brick or steel
nor engineers
Nor hands to build with.
Not for a lack of land.
Not for a lack of money.
Not for lack of a Master Plan.
What is it, I ask you,
that is lacking here?
What is it,
I ask,
that is needed?