

Alice Days

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When my fellow poet was alive

The sewers run freely in Alice, today,
and there is a green ooze in the streets;
the gutters are full, overflowing into yards.
We walk home: teachers of Keats, and of Armah.

“This town has an Elizabethan smell,”
you note, universalizing the stench.
I smile at human kind, and invoke nose-gays
—though my bones remember the plague.

The shit runs into a gully.
Upstream is that pastoral spot of trees,
the paradise flycatcher’s nest,
and the spring, always, always organically wet;

downstream, muck debouches into the Tyume.
The older local writing is more mindful
of Tyume-side—where the Fort Hare campus
was first rooted in the slower times of hope,

when the river ran unspoiled, and rare birds
were seen—than now, when security fences
cut students off from the grassy banks
and the paths that led to where the nurses trained.

Today filth runs the streets, into the Tyume,
like a dream turned sour. We carefully step
over the last foul stream, on our way up home,
where at last we drink a beer in the soft dusk

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in falling African light—magic time—
musing whether we will ever live to trace
the earthly forms of those diligent, upright
and caring shades: the beautiful ones, unborn.