

## House of Stone

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By Novuyo Rosa

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This Zimbabwean debut is not an easy book to describe. To call it clever or ambitious is to do it a disservice – it is both, but also more than that. It is definitely not faultless, but it is large enough and unusual enough to shrug off its defects and still leave the reader impressed. The opening section features a tenant, 24-year-old Zamani, who aspires to make his landlord his father and his landlady his mother – to make them love him more than they loved their missing son, Bukhosi. A simple enough conceit, but Novuyo Rosa Tshuma is a wily writer, perhaps as wily as her main character; for as soon as the reader thinks he or she has figured out the story's trajectory, the narrative takes an unexpected turn. Tshuma is incapable of writing a boring sentence: she inhabits her narration so totally that even the most absurd and silly actions become believable. The wordplay and absurdist plot lines act as comic relief, but the author never lets us forget the serious stuff even for a minute, and it is this balance that makes the book work. By the end she has managed to not only sum up Zimbabwean history, but also all of African colonial history: from devastating colonialism to the bitter wars of independence to the euphoria of self-rule and the disillusionment of the present. It is an extraordinary achievement for a first novel.